Protestant Clergy and the Culture Wats: An Empirical Test of Hunter's Thesis

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Abstract

This study instead focuses on culture wars among religious elites—clergy—and tests three aspects of the culture wars thesis: (1) whether cultural wars exist at all among religious elites, (2) whether clergy attitudes are polarized on these issues, and (3) whether religious authority or religious affiliation is more salient in creating culture wars cleavages. Using data from a large random sample of Protestant clergy, we find a substantial amount of engagement in culture wars by all types of Protestant clergy. The amount of polarization is more attributable to views of religious authority (i.e., biblical inerrancy) than to religious tradition. Moreover, polarization among clergy is somewhat more evident on culture wars issues than on other social and political issues. These findings are generally supportive of the culture wars thesis and should help return examinations of culture wars back to where they were originally theorized to be waged: among elites.

Keywords

culture wars; clergy; social attitudes; political attitudes; polarization; elites

Introduction

James Davison Hunter's (1991) influential book, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, argues that American elites, including leaders of religious institutions, are reaching across old boundaries and forging new alliances. Rather than the old divisions along denominational lines, America's religious leaders are aligning on polar opposite sides of hot-button issues based on their relative orthodox or progressive approach to religious, social, and political issues.[1] Thus, conservative Catholics, evangelicals, Mormons, and orthodox Jews are more likely to ally with each other than with those from their own traditions who have more progressive leanings. The core issue, Hunter argues, is one's approach to authority. Those who rely on an absolute standard of truth, like the Bible or the Magisterium, tend to fall one on side of the cleavage, while those with a more relative approach tend to come down on the other. This restructuring of cultural divides has occurred as leaders vie for dominance over electoral and legislative politics, judicial appointments and rulings, educational policies, and cultural symbols. These "culture wars," as Hunter

[1]Certainly denominational identity and one's approach to authority are correlated. New groups are often formed as a result of such issues as was the case recently with the formation of the Anglican Church in North America and the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, to name just two examples. These splits reveal continued intradenominational heterogeneity on issues of authority, especially among mainline Protestant denominations. Denominational affiliation is often a marker of more than simple approach to authority or religious belief; it is often tied to ethnic heritage, preferred organizational structure, and more.

termed them, are fought over issues like abortion, the arts, education, the judiciary, pornography, and the family.

The popular conception of Hunter's culture wars thesis has been that of a cleavage in the opinions of average Americans on these issues.[2] Sociological scrutiny of this version of the culture wars thesis has led to sharp criticism. Most prominently, DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996) examine whether polarization in American public opinion actually occurred between the 1970s and 1990s. They find mostly shared views among Americans on supposedly contentious matters, except on the abortion issue which more closely approximates the culture wars thesis—and even that finding has been contested on methodological grounds (Mouw and Sobel 2001). If any polarization exists, it is among those who identify as either Democrat or Republican (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003), though even this reflects shifts in political party agendas rather than change in Americans' attitudes (Miller and Hoffmann 1999; Layman 2001). Similarly, a study of American evangelicals employing in-depth qualitative interviews suggests that the issues, public figures, and terms of the "culture wars" are unknown to rank-and-file evangelicals (Smith et. al 1997). Another study of two hundred Americans using in-depth qualitative interviews reports that the majority of middle class Americans share most opinions and are not engaged in the culture wars (Wolfe 1999). Utilizing multiple quantitative datasets, including opinion polling and election returns, political scientist Morris Fiorina and his colleagues (2005) find a muddled-middle on issue after issue. While Americans are divided, the divisions are close, with millions of average Americans in the middle, sharing some views from one side of the cleavage and some views from the other side.

These critiques of the culture wars thesis are interesting regarding the question of widespread American division, but they are tests of the popular conception of culture wars perpetuated by the media, not of Hunter's original scholarly thesis. Hunter writes:

> While ordinary people participate in the construction of their own private worlds, the development and articulation of the more elaborate systems of meaning, including the realm of public culture, falls almost always to the realm of elites. They are the ones who create the concepts, supply the language, and explicate the logic of public discussion. They are the ones who define and redefine the meaning of public symbols. *Public discourse*, then, *is largely a discourse of elites* (Hunter 1991:59; emphasis in original).

According to the culture wars thesis the primary combatants are not average Americans but rather elites, particularly knowledge workers who have some measure of control over the means of cultural production. Among other types of elites, public policy specialists, lobbyists, public interest lawyers, writers, activists, journalists, community organizers, and, significantly, clergy have resources that allow them to generate and modify cultural symbols. A scholarly consensus appears to have emerged that American *political elites* have indeed become more polarized even as the American public has not (Hunter and Wolfe 2006; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Fischer and Mattson 2009). Culture wars may or may not be an apt description of what is occurring around the country in America's religious institutions among America's *religious elites*: clergy. Clergy stand at the intersection of multiple institutions. Ministers, particularly in mainline Protestant traditions that privilege an "educated clergy," possess significant educational achievement and thus they broker intellectual content to their congregations. By definition they are religious leaders whose vocation requires deep involvement in the most important and intimate aspects of meaning and moral order in their parishioners' lives. These individuals may have more influence over

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[2]One critic suggests this stems from Hunter's use of public opinion data to support his arguments about elites (Evans 2003).

ordinary Americans than national media and political elites. It is this meso-level of the social world—clergy of local religious congregations—which this study examines.

There is a substantial literature on the role of clergy in politics (see Olson 2009 for a recent review), much of which is relevant to the culture wars thesis. Guth and his colleagues (1997), similar to Hunter (1991), argue that Protestant clergy develop social theologies from their orthodox or modernist perspectives, the former taking an individualist approach— merged with a "civic gospel" understanding wherein politics serves to maintain order and protect individuals, families and religion—that leads to a moral reform agenda, and the latter taking a communitarian approach with an emphasis on a social justice agenda. Thus, the most orthodox Protestant clergy are the most likely to publicly address what they perceive to be moral issues, namely culture wars issues like family issues, abortion, pornography, homosexuality, education issues, school prayer, and others. In contrast, the most modernist clergy are the most likely to address what they perceive to be social justice issues like poverty and the environment. Moreover, they find, relative orthodoxy is more influential than denomination, eschatology, or religious movement in determining clergy stance on most political and social issues examined (with the sole exceptions of environmental protection and tuition tax credits), including culture wars issues like abortion, prayer in schools, gay rights, abstinence-based sex education, and teaching creationism.

Although these findings are important for understanding religious elites' political and social attitudes, as well as their proclivity to get involved in culture wars by publicly addressing those issues, they are less helpful for understanding *polarization* among religious elites, a central tenet of the culture wars thesis. Following closely the approach of DiMaggio and colleagues' (1996), we identify and examine four dimensions of polarization: (a) consolidation, (b) dispersion, (c) bimodality, and (d) constraint. More thorough explanation of these dimensions and their measurement can be found in DiMaggio et al. (1996).

Consolidation refers to both between-group differences and within-group differences. When consolidation is most pronounced, differences between social groups (e.g., the orthodox versus the progressive) will be large and within-group variation will be small. Between-group difference is the dimension of polarization typically explored by researchers in the way of mean differences, or perhaps the proportion of a group taking an extreme position on an issue. Examples of this type of investigation among clergy are sparse, but one example is Johnson's (1998:285) polarization index, created by "summing the percentage differences between theological liberals and conservatives on the two extreme responses for each item." Johnson reports high polarization on many issues among Oregon clergy from four Protestant denominations, including culture wars issues like abortion, homosexuality, advertising condoms on television, the Equal Rights Amendment, and school prayer. Similarly, Smidt (2004) constructs scores based on responses to moral policy questions, social-welfare policy questions, party identification, and presidential vote and finds increasing disparity between evangelical and mainline clergy on all four, but especially social-welfare policy and party identification. On moral policy, the difference was only one point greater in 2001 than in 1989 on a scale ranging from −100 to 100, which suggests no change in polarization by religious tradition on culture wars issues during that time. Finally, though polarization and culture wars were not the focus of their study, Jelen and Lockett (2010) find that 42 percent of evangelical clergy strongly agree that creationism should be taught in public schools while 22 percent of mainline clergy strongly disagree.

Dispersion simply refers to how spread out the distribution of responses is. If a population is more polarized, there will be greater variance in responses to the survey. The variance measures the average distance on the scale of two randomly-selected respondents; thus, greater variance indicates greater dispersion and more polarization.

Bimodality measures the extent to which respondents fall into two separate categories on a measure. Bimodality is measured by kurtosis. A normally distributed variable has a kurtosis of zero. A variable on which there is a great deal of consensus will have a peaked distribution and a positive kurtosis. A variable on which there is polarization—settling into two camps—has a negative kurtosis. A perfectly bimodal distribution (with 50 percent in each group) will have a kurtosis of −2. Importantly, kurtosis by itself does not indicate polarization. It does not speak to the distance between responses (e.g., a variable with 50 percent of respondents agreeing and 50 percent strongly agreeing would have a kurtosis of −2). But when interpreted in combination with the variable's mean and variance it can be useful for identifying polarization.

Constraint refers to the correlation among variables within a particular domain and is typically measured with statistics such as the alpha coefficient of reliability or average inter-item correlations. It speaks to the amount of ideological cohesion among respondents (Converse 1964). Some have suggested that the moral-reform and social-justice agendas of clergy identified by Guth et al. (1997) and Smidt (2004)—among others—point to high levels of attitudinal constraint (Jelen 2009). This is likely the case, though those studies only hint at constraint and do not show the correlations of attitudes within individuals. In another study, religious elites were found to have high levels of constraint—on par with that of government elites (Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman 1991).

Few studies, then, have examined the polarization of clergy in detail. Rather, the study of culture wars involvement and polarization among clergy is fragmented and, in many ways, incomplete. The aims of this study are thus straightforward. The first aim is simply to answer the question, "How many clergy frequently address culture wars issues?" In other words, we seek to assess to what extent clergy are actually active in the culture wars, or put another way, to what extent culture wars actually exist among these religious elites. Our approach here is similar to that of Guth et al. (1997), but we include it here to examine—using newer data from a wider range of clergy—whether culture wars issues pervade the public discourse of clergy. Our second aim is to test Hunter's hypothesis regarding the polarization of elites on culture wars issues. Do clergy take up strongly-held positions for or against certain culture wars issues? Are their attitudes dispersed and bimodal? Do they exhibit attitudinal constraint? Our third goal is to determine whether religious orthodoxy is more or less predictive of culture wars positions than religious tradition. Hunter's culture wars thesis, to reiterate, suggests orthodoxy should be the predominant factor influencing polarization. Throughout we also focus our attention on whether these processes are restricted to what is typically conceived of as culture wars issues, or whether they extend beyond those issues to stances on other social and political issues. We address and answer these questions using data from more than 7,000 evangelical and mainline Protestant clergy collected in 2001. The result is the most comprehensive assessment of the culture wars thesis among religious elites to date.

METHODS

Data

The Cooperative Clergy Survey was collected in 2001 to better understand the social and political engagement of American clergy. Survey questionnaires were mailed to random samples of clergy from 20 traditions (17 Protestant denominations, Catholic priests, Jewish rabbis, and Unitarian Universalists), as well as a sample of clergy belonging to the Willow Creek Association. Because the data only include appropriate measures for Protestant clergy—the only question on religious authority refers to the inerrancy of the Bible and not church teachings or the Torah—we restrict our data to Protestant clergy. Furthermore, because the Willow Creek Association spans denominations, we exclude these pastors from the analysis,

along with the two black Protestant denominations—the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the Church of God in Christ—because of their small sample sizes and their distinct social history. The remaining sample consists of clergy from nine evangelical denominations and six mainline denominations. The evangelical denominations represented are Assemblies of God, Christian Reformed Church, Church of Christ, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Nazarene, Presbyterian Church in America, Southern Baptist Convention, Mennonite, and Evangelical Free Church. The mainline denominations are American Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, and United Methodist Church. The total sample size, prior to listwise deletion of missing data, is 7,170. More information about the Cooperative Clergy Study is available in Smidt (2003).

Measures

Dependent Variables—The first set of dependent variables measures the frequency with which clergy publicly address certain contentious issues, both culture wars issues and other social and political issues. Respondents were asked, "If you have made your views known publicly in any way, how often have you addressed the following issues?" Response categories were never, seldom, often, and very often. For this study, we dichotomize these variables such that those reporting addressing issues often or very often are coded 1 and all others are coded 0.

The second set of dependent variables measures clergy's stance on certain social and political issues. These questions are all five-point Likert items wherein respondents could report that they strongly disagree, disagree, are not sure, agree, or strongly agree with a series of statements. The statements we analyze are included verbatim in Tables 2 and 3. Responses are coded 1–5 such that higher numbers represent more agreement with the statement. Certainly these measures are not perfect measures for understanding culture wars stances since they often incorporate political solutions to the issues that may introduce less agreement (e.g., a pastor could strongly agree that abortion is wrong but not strongly agree that a constitutional amendment is a proper legislative approach to the issue). Still, these measures are likely to be highly correlated with pure attitudinal measures, and we know of no available data on clergy that better tests these concepts.

Independent Variables

We include only two independent variables. The first is the religious tradition of the clergy, dichotomized into evangelical and mainline traditions as described above. (For the model-fit analysis in Table 6, denomination information is used to provide a stricter test of the orthodoxy-versus-tradition question.) The second is a measure of religious authority and is an item about belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. Respondents could strongly disagree, disagree, say they were not sure, agree, or strongly agree with the statement, "The Bible is the inerrant Word of God, both in matters of faith and in historic, geographical and other secular matters." This variable is dichotomized into those who agree and those who disagree with the Bible being inerrant (those who are "not sure" are not included in either group) except in Table 6, where it is a series of five dummy variables (with strongly disagree as the omitted reference group). Religious tradition and religious orthodoxy are used because we are interested in testing theoretically-derived hypotheses from Hunter's culture wars argument, not estimating full models predicting polarized positions. In ancillary analyses (see footnote 6), standard demographic controls are included. The results do not substantively alter the conclusions.[3]

Analytic Approach

We begin by assessing the extent to which clergy are engaged in culture wars issues by reporting the percent of clergy who frequently (i.e., often or very often) address these issues publically—as well as, for comparative purposes, other issues. Table 1 reports percentages for the full sample, and then for subgroups of clergy by religious tradition and beliefs about biblical inerrancy. We then examine polarization in clergy stances on culture wars issues. Tables 2 and 3 examine the percent of clergy who strongly disagree and strongly agree with each statement about culture wars issues (Table 2) and other social and political issues (Table 3). Again, we report these percentages overall, by religious tradition, and by beliefs about biblical inerrancy. These tables reveal the prevalence of extreme positions among clergy on culture wars and other issues (i.e., clergy *consolidation* and *bimodality* at the poles). In Table 4, we present additional data on the distribution of attitudes on these issues. We report the mean, variance, and kurtosis of each variable among the full sample of clergy and within their respective subgroups. These statistics illuminate the extent of *dispersion,* *bimodality,* and *consolidation* among clergy. Table 5 reports the alpha coefficient of reliability (calculated from polychoric correlations among variables) and the average interitem polychoric correlations among responses to all issues, culture wars issues, and other political and social issues. These statistics show the amount of *constraint* among clergy on these issues. Because these statistics are affected not only by the association among beliefs but also by the variance within populations (Barton and Parsons 1977), we do not make subgroup (e.g., orthodoxy vs. tradition) comparisons for these statistics. Finally, Table 6 tests which variable—religious tradition or religious orthodoxy—better predicts polarized stances on each of the issues. We do this by comparing the Bayesian Information Criterion approximation (BIC) from each model (see Raftery 1995). This statistic is useful for comparing two non-nested models. BIC is given by

$$\mathrm{BIC}'_k = -\chi^2_{k0} + p_k \log n,$$

where $-\chi^2_{k0}$ is the likelihood ratio test statistic for testing a null model (i.e., a model with no independent variables) against the model of interest, where p_k is the number of independent variables in the model of interest, and where n is the sample size. A smaller (more negative) value indicates better model fit. In comparing models, a BIC difference of 10 or higher is considered very strong support for the better-fitting model (Raftery 1995). Finally, it is important to note that DiMaggio and colleagues (1996) define polarization as both a state (i.e., the state of being polarized) and a process (i.e., the process of becoming more polarized). Both are important, but given our cross-sectional data we are only able to assess polarization as a state among Protestant clergy in America.

Results

Are Protestant clergy publicly participating in culture wars issues? Table 1 suggests the answer to this question is "yes," though clergy are more involved in some issues than others, and their involvement varies by their religious tradition and their beliefs about the Bible.

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[3]We also considered including political party affiliation as a third independent variable but ultimately decided, following Guth and colleagues (1997), that these affiliations are endogenous to religious orthodoxy. Moreover, party identification is often determined by one's stance on key issues like the ones we examine (e.g., people identify as Democrat because they believe the government should do more about social problems). Despite these issues, we compared the explanatory power of religious orthodoxy to that of political party affiliation. For 17 out of the 22 culture wars outcomes in Table 6, religious orthodoxy provided better model fit than did party affiliation. For non-culture wars issues, however, party affiliation was superior: 17 out of 20 of the outcomes were better explained by party affiliation. In models including both orthodoxy and party affiliation measures, both have independent influence on each of the attitudes examined as outcomes.

Overall, clergy are most likely to talk publicly about abortion. About half publicly address homosexuality and gender equality, and about one third address public education and school prayer. On abortion, evangelical clergy and biblical inerrantists far outpace their counterparts. They are also more likely to publicly address gay rights and homosexuality and school prayer, but the gaps here are less extreme. About one third of all types of clergy address public education and school choice.

Protestant clergy appear to be much more willing to take up culture wars issues—especially abortion, homosexuality, and gender equality—than they do other issues. Clergy are about as likely to talk publicly about environmental problems, health care, and Israel and the Middle East as they are educational culture wars issues like school choice and school prayer, with around a third of all clergy reporting publicly addressing these issues often or very often. Capital punishment is also addressed frequently by about 28 percent of all clergy in the sample, but other issues like national defense, gun laws, and immigration lag farther behind: One fifth or fewer of all clergy talk frequently about these contentious issues. Unlike with culture wars issues, evangelicals and inerrantists are much less likely than their counterparts to talk about the environment or health care. In sum, culture wars issues are more likely than others to pepper the public discourse of all types of clergy, though mainliners and modernists are also likely to talk often about the environment and health care.

We now turn directly to the issue of clergy polarization. Table 2 displays the percentage of clergy taking extreme positions on different culture wars issues highlighted in Hunter's (1991) original argument: issues of family, education, and religion's role in public life.[4] On many issues we see nontrivial minorities occupying both poles of the distribution. For example, 32 percent of clergy strongly agree that we need a constitutional amendment dealing with abortion while 16 percent strongly disagree with such a measure. With respect to gay rights, 22 percent strongly agree homosexuals should have the same rights and privileges as others and 15 percent strongly disagree. On teaching creationism, 29 percent strongly agree and 12 percent strongly disagree. Educational issues like focusing on public school improvement, providing vouchers, and school prayer all garner significant minorities at both extremes. There appears to be a great deal of consensus, however, on the issue of sex education programs being abstinence based.[5] Only 2 percent strongly disagree, compared to 41 percent who strongly agree. There also appears to be little extreme disagreement with statements about impediments to religious freedom and the government's efforts to protect America's religious heritage. Fewer than 10 percent of clergy fall on either extreme with respect to women's rights legislation and the perceived threat to civil liberties posed by people imposing their religion on others.

Hunter argues that culture wars cleavages are more a function of relative orthodoxy and less of religious tradition. The findings in Table 2 provide support for that argument. Although there is plenty of polarization by religious tradition, the between-group polarization is larger between the orthodox and modernists than it is between evangelicals and mainliners. Moreover, the within-group variance is larger among those in the same religious tradition than among those with the same approach to the Bible, especially when looking at mainline Protestants and modernists. There is a moderate amount of within-group variance among mainline Protestants that is not seen among the modernist group, presumably because the mainline traditions still house significant numbers of orthodox clergy. Evangelical traditions, on the other hand, track more closely with the orthodox group since few

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[4]Hunter highlighted other culture wars battlefields, like media and arts, but we do not have data available for those issues.
[5]Perhaps more polarization would be evident had clergy been queried about abstinence-*only* sex education and not abstinence-*based* sex education.

evangelical pastors reject biblical inerrancy. Hunter's argument about the orthodox versus the progressive garners significant support here.

Table 3 is similar to Table 2 but shows the percentage of clergy at each pole for non-culture wars issues. The most polarized issue here appears to be capital punishment, with 20 percent of clergy strongly opposing it and 24 percent strongly supporting it. Handgun ownership, national health care, and the Middle East peace process all have more than 10 percent of clergy at each pole. Many other issues, including government-sponsored social services, welfare laws, defense spending, and affirmative action, are not so polarized. Even environmental issues are not highly polarized by this measure.

In sum, Table 2 suggests relatively high levels of consolidation and bimodality among clergy and suggests polarization is more apt to occur between orthodox and progressive clergy than between evangelical and mainline clergy. There appears to be more polarization on culture wars issues than others, though issues like health care, gun ownership, and capital punishment also exhibit significant amounts of polarization (in Table 3).

Table 4 looks at dispersion (i.e., overall variance) on these issues, and is another way to look at consolidation (i.e., mean differences, within-group variance) and bimodality (i.e., kurtosis). The issues with the most dispersion are the abortion amendment and capital punishment. Other issues with relatively high dispersion include gay rights, the focus of education policy, vouchers, creationism, school prayer, handguns, and national health care. Most of the family- and education-oriented culture wars issues have high dispersion—with the exceptions of women's rights and abstinence-based education—but the religion-in-public-life issues are less dispersed. The distributions of most of the other social and political issues—the role of government, the environment, welfare reform, military spending, affirmative action, and Israel and the Middle East—are not as dispersed as the family and education culture wars issues. Table 4 also reveals a great deal of bimodality among these issues, particularly abortion, gay rights, approaches to education policy, and school vouchers among the culture wars issues, and the role of the federal government in solving social problems, handgun policy, national health insurance, and capital punishment among the other social and political issues.

The between-group mean differences in Table 4 suggest, as was suggested in Table 2, that clergy are more polarized by their orthodoxy than by their religious tradition. On all of the culture wars issues, the mean differences between those who agree and disagree the Bible is inerrant are larger than the mean differences between evangelical and mainline Protestants. The same is true for the other social and political issues. There is also evidence for more within-group consolidation among the orthodox and modernist groups than among evangelicals and mainliners. In general, the variance is lower and the kurtosis is higher in the orthodox-progressive samples than in the evangelical-mainline samples. This is especially evident among those who disagree the Bible is inerrant versus mainline Protestants. There is much more consensus among the former group than among the latter; indeed, the diversity of the mainline is one of the consistent themes of our findings.

Attitudinal constraint (Table 5) appears to be high among clergy. Even on a broad index of items such as those examined here, clergy exhibit relatively high levels of constraint with the average inter-item polychoric correlation measuring .46 for the full index of issues. These correlations are also high among the culture wars and non-culture wars sub-indexes. This suggests that clergy, like other elites, exhibit a high amount of attitude constraint.

Finally, Table 6 compares the Bayesian Information Criterion approximation (BIC) of two logit regression models predicting the two poles of each issue. We test whether religious tradition—measured by the respondents' denominational affiliation—or religious orthodoxy

provide better model fit for predicting polarized stances. The evidence is clear: Orthodoxy is a better predictor of polarized stances (at both poles) on culture wars issues than is religious tradition. The evidence for other social and political issues is a bit more mixed; orthodoxy trumps tradition on most issues, except for strong disagreements about the legitimacy of the federal government in solving social problems, increased military spending, national health insurance, and opposition to capital punishment, where tradition appears to play a more pivotal role. The mean difference in BIC by orthodoxy and tradition is much larger among the culture wars issues than among the other issues, further suggesting an especially strong association between religious orthodoxy and culture wars issues (vis-à-vis religious tradition).[6]

Conclusion

Using data from a large random sample of clergy from a number of Protestant denominations, we have tested several aspects of Hunter's (1991) culture wars thesis. Rather than study the attitudes and behaviors of the American public or those of political elites, we have examined the attitudes and behaviors of religious elites in local communities: the pastors of local congregations. First, our results indicate that Protestant clergy are often engaged in culture wars issues, though there is plenty of variation in which issues they are willing to take up. Nevertheless, clergy do appear to be engaged in culture wars in a public fashion, and more so than in other contentious issues with perhaps the exception of the environment, health care, and Israel, where their participation rivals less-often addressed culture wars issues like public education and school prayer.

Second, there does seem to be a significant amount of polarization on many culture wars issues among religious elites, particularly abortion, homosexuality, public education and school choice, creationism, and school prayer. Significant minorities (i.e., greater than 10 percent) occupy each pole on these measures, the variance of responses on these measures is relatively high, and the kurtosis is very low (approaching the lower bound of –2). Attitudinal constraint is also very high—a finding typical of studies of elites whose work with ideas and values make them more likely to familiarize themselves with these issues (Converse 1964; Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman 1991). Culture wars issues do seem more polarized than other social and political issues, though polarization is evident for issues like capital punishment, handgun policy, and national health care as well. Culture wars issues attract clergy resources because the issues concern radical debates about interrelated matters of authority, moral order, religion and knowledge—concerns of particular salience to religious leaders. Moreover, in the contemporary social context in which religion inhabits a significantly privatized sphere, clergy may demur from addressing "secular" topics that occupy attention in the public sphere, whereas culture wars issues sourced in meaning and moral order are perceived as appropriate domains of clergy concern. We acknowledge that there is subjectivity in assessing levels of polarization (i.e., the state of polarization), more so than in assessing trends (Fiorina and Abrams 2008). Although some may quibble with our interpretation, we believe this at the very least provides a baseline assessment of polarization and also likely reflects more polarization than among the mass public, where just 5–7 percent of the population is thought to inhabit each pole of the distribution on these types of issues (Hunter and Wolfe 2006).

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[6]Results from models with controls for age, gender, race, education, and marital status produced substantively similar results in almost all cases. The notable exceptions were for models predicting strong disagreement with the statement about the federal government's role in solving social problems, where the evidence for tradition's superiority is weak (a BIC difference of 1.59); and for the models predicting strong disagreement with opposition to the death penalty, where the orthodoxy variable emerges as more predictive with a BIC difference of 17.77.

Third, and finally, as Hunter argued, we find significant evidence that the cleavages in culture wars issues among clergy are more beholden to issues of religious authority—in the case of Protestants, biblical inerrancy—than they are to religious tradition. Both matter, but religious authority matters more. Consolidation at opposite extremes of the distribution is higher when the sample is split by orthodoxy than when split by religious tradition. Mean differences between groups are larger, and dispersion (i.e., variance) and bimodality (i.e., kurtosis) within groups tends to be lower. Orthodoxy is a better predictor of extreme positions on culture wars issues than is religious tradition. The driving factor here appears to be variation among mainline Protestants, many of whom are religiously orthodox and who are more likely to side with their orthodox colleagues than with their mainline ones. Culture wars issues are especially and fundamentally about differences in meaning and moral order that emerge from one's understanding of ultimate authority, not mere group identification (though that also matters) (Hunter 1991). This is especially relevant for clergy who often form their social attitudes based on their theological beliefs (Guth et al. 1997). Thus, we find general support for Hunter's argument among Protestant clergy.

There is much more empirical work to be done to explain the nature of culture wars in American society, among clergy and among other elites. We would benefit greatly from nationally-representative data sets that ask direct questions about culture wars attitudes among clergy, that measure issues of religious authority across a wider religious spectrum, and that is collected longitudinally. In lieu of such data, however, we have presented some evidence in support of three aspects of Hunter's culture wars thesis: (1) that they exist among Protestant clergy, (2) that Protestant clergy are, somewhat, though not completely, polarized in their attitudes on these matters, and (3) that Protestant clergy coalesce on different sides of culture wars issues based more on their view of religious authority than on their denominational affiliation. Additionally, this study should serve to encourage scholars to evaluate the culture wars thesis for what it is—a thesis about elite discourse—and not for what it is not—a thesis about the attitudes of average Americans. Future research might also analyze multilevel data from congregations (i.e., clergy and parishioners) to examine whether clergy's culture war involvement has an influence on the attitudes of the people in their congregations.

Acknowledgments

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Table 1

Percent of Protestant clergy who publicly address issues "often" or "very often" (column percentages)

	Overall (N=7170)	Evangelical Protestant (N=3905)	Mainline Protestant (N=3265)	Agree Bible is inerrant (N=4143)	Disagree Bible is inerrant (N=2527)
Culture Wars Issues					
Gender equality	49	35	66	35	73
Abortion	61	80	38	80	30
Gay rights, homosexuality	51	56	44	56	43
Public education and school choice	32	31	33	33	30
School prayer	34	37	30	41	22
Other Contentious Issues					
National defense	18	18	17	17	19
Capital punishment	28	28	29	26	32
Gun laws	20	16	25	15	28
Environmental problems	35	20	52	20	58
Health care	30	18	44	20	46
Immigration	14	10	19	10	21
Israel and the Middle East	34	33	36	34	35

Note: Ns vary slightly by issue due to minimal amounts of missing data.

Table 2

Percent of Protestant clergy taking extreme stance on culture wars issues (column percentages)

	Overall	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Agree Bible is inerrant	Disagree Bible is inerrant
"We need a constitutional amendment prohibiting all abortions unless to save the mother's life, or in case of rape or incest."					
Strongly agree	32	46	15	48	7
Strongly disagree	16	4	31	3	38
"Homosexuals should have all the same rights and privileges as other American citizens."					
Strongly agree	22	9	37	8	46
Strongly disagree	15	23	5	23	3
"We still need more legislation to protect women's rights."					
Strongly agree	8	2	15	2	19
Strongly disagree	9	13	3	13	2
"Education policy should focus on improving public schools rather than encouraging alternatives such as private and religious schools."					
Strongly agree	16	6	28	6	33
Strongly disagree	12	18	5	18	3
"Sex education programs included in the curricula of public high schools should be abstinence based."					
Strongly agree	41	55	25	58	17
Strongly disagree	2	1	3	1	4
"The government should provide vouchers to parents to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools."					
Strongly agree	14	21	6	20	5
Strongly disagree	13	5	22	5	27
"Scientific creationism should be taught in biology classes if the theory of evolution is."					
Strongly agree	29	42	13	44	6
Strongly disagree	12	3	22	2	28
"We need a constitutional amendment to permit prayer as a regular exercise in schools."					
Strongly agree	12	16	7	18	2
Strongly disagree	23	14	33	11	43
"Civil liberties in the U.S. are threatened by groups seeking to impose their religion."					
Strongly agree	6	3	9	3	11
Strongly disagree	9	12	6	13	4
"The government should take special steps to protect America's religious heritage."					
Strongly agree	14	19	8	21	4

	Overall	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Agree Bible is inerrant	Disagree Bible is inerrant
Strongly disagree	4	3	5	2	6
"Religious freedom in the U.S. is threatened by groups opposing religion."					
Strongly agree	21	29	11	31	6
Strongly disagree	3	1	6	1	7

Table 3

Percent of Protestant clergy taking extreme stance on other social and political issues (column percentages)

	Overall	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Agree Bible is inerrant	Disagree Bible is inerrant
"The federal government should do more to solve social problems such as unemployment, poverty, and poor housing."					
Strongly agree	17	9	27	9	32
Strongly disagree	6	10	2	10	2
"Government is providing too many services which should be left to private enterprise."					
Strongly agree	10	15	4	15	3
Strongly disagree	7	3	13	2	16
"More environmental protection is needed, even if it raises prices or costs jobs."					
Strongly agree	11	5	19	3	26
Strongly disagree	8	12	3	12	2
"Current welfare reform laws are too harsh and hurt children."					
Strongly agree	5	2	8	2	10
Strongly disagree	7	10	3	10	2
"The U.S. should spend more on the military and defense."					
Strongly agree	8	13	3	13	2
Strongly disagree	11	7	15	4	23
"Blacks and other minorities may need special government help to achieve an equal place in America."					
Strongly agree	6	3	10	3	12
Strongly disagree	8	12	3	12	2
"Public policy should discourage ownership and use of handguns."					
Strongly agree	16	8	26	6	34
Strongly disagree	17	25	8	25	7
"We need government-sponsored national health insurance so that everyone can get adequate medical care."					
Strongly agree	15	7	24	8	27
Strongly disagree	13	20	4	19	4
"A lasting peace in the Middle East will require Israel to make greater concessions to the Palestinians."					
Strongly agree	11	7	16	5	22
Strongly disagree	10	15	4	16	2
"I oppose capital punishment."					
Strongly agree	20	9	34	7	43

	Overall	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Agree Bible is inerrant	Disagree Bible is inerrant
Strongly disagree	24	38	7	37	5

Table 4

Mean, variance, and kurtosis of culture wars and other social and political issues

	Overall	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Agree Bible is inerrant	Disagree Bible is inerrant
	Mean/Var./Kurtosis	Mean/Var./Kurtosis	Mean/Var./Kurtosis	Mean/Var./Kurtosis	Mean/Var./Kurtosis
Culture Wars Issues					
Abortion amendment	3.40/2.17/−1.28	4.07/1.27/.54	2.61/2.09/−1.28	4.13/1.18/.87	2.24/1.70/−.66
Gay rights	3.27/1.89/−1.19	2.76/1.77/−1.29	3.87/1.36/−.07	2.73/1.72/−1.28	4.14/1.06/1.06
Women's rights	2.84/1.19/−.69	2.46/.88/−.16	3.30/1.18/−.88	2.44/.88/−.20	3.46/1.13/−.90
Public school-focused education policy	2.99/1.68/−1.21	2.49/1.29/−.55	3.59/1.49/−.95	2.52/1.33/−.62	3.77/1.38/−.67
Abstinence-based sex education	4.09/1.03/.79	4.43/.61/4.57	3.69/1.22/−.51	4.48/.56/5.35	3.52/1.22/−.69
School vouchers	3.12/1.57/−1.03	3.60/1.21/−.30	2.56/1.41/−.88	3.56/1.21/−.38	2.40/1.39/−.78
Creationism in schools	3.57/1.77/−.73	4.12/1.01/1.43	2.92/1.89/−1.31	4.21/.85/2.15	2.56/1.70/−1.24
School prayer amendment	2.62/1.72/−.98	2.92/1.71/−1.15	2.26/1.49/−.42	3.07/1.68/−1.19	1.86/.97/1.15
Civil liberties threatened by religion	2.84/1.20/−.93	2.62/1.08/−.65	3.10/1.22/−1.03	2.56/1.08/−.56	3.29/1.17/−.95
Protect America's religious heritage	3.37/1.15/−.77	3.59/1.09/−.52	3.10/1.09/−.78	3.69/1.03/−.26	2.87/.99/−.76
Religious freedom threatened	3.59/1.27/−.73	3.95/.94/.49	3.17/1.33/−1.16	4.04/.83/1.21	2.90/1.26/−1.17
Other Social and Political Issues					
Federal government as social problem-solver	3.29/1.46/−1.11	2.90/1.37/−1.03	3.75/1.19/−.57	2.89/1.36/−1.04	3.93/1.05/−.01
Government vs. private enterprise	3.13/1.30/−.98	3.55/1.03/−.35	2.62/2.15/−.75	3.59/.97/−.26	2.39/1.02/−.27
Environmental protection	3.07/1.33/−.97	2.64/1.13/−.63	3.59/1.09/−.52	2.59/1.03/−.58	3.84/.96/.06
Welfare reform laws	2.75/.96/−.38	2.47/.75/.23	3.08/1.01/−.71	2.44/.73/.32	3.22/1.02/−.78
Military spending	3.02/1.32/−.90	3.40/1.20/−.30	2.57/1.10/−.64	3.49/1.00/−.16	2.30/1.03/−.32
Affirmative action for minorities	2.98/1.18/−.96	2.65/1.10/−.85	3.37/1.00/−.61	2.62/1.06/−.79	3.52/.96/−.36
Handguns	2.95/1.87/−1.31	2.49/1.61/−.88	3.50/1.65/−.97	2.44/1.47/−.79	3.76/1.54/−.44
National health insurance	3.08/1.60/−1.06	2.64/1.47/−.92	3.59/1.26/−.58	2.66/1.47/−.90	3.74/1.18/−.23
Middle East peace	3.17/1.31/−.69	2.88/1.34/−.84	3.51/1.06/−.21	2.79/1.26/−.80	3.76/.91/.22
Capital punishment	2.78/2.15/−1.33	2.14/1.57/.05	3.55/1.76/−1.20	2.10/1.42/1.24	3.84/1.60/−.77

Note: All items range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 5

Alpha coefficients of reliability and average interitem polychoric correlations for indexes of issues

All issues	.95	.46
Culture wars issues	.90	.45
Other issues	.92	.54

Table 6

Strength of support for competing models (religious tradition versus religious orthodoxy) predicting strongly agree and strongly disagree with culture wars and other social and political issues, based on difference in Bayesian Information Criterion Approximation (BIC)

	Strongly agree		Strongly disagree	
	Model supported	Difference in BIC	Model supported	Difference in BIC
Culture Wars Issues				
Abortion amendment	Orthodoxy	624.06	Orthodoxy	750.20
Gay rights	Orthodoxy	796.51	Orthodoxy	244.88
Women's rights	Orthodoxy[a]	212.96[a]	Orthodoxy	127.96
Public school-focused education policy	Orthodoxy	258.87	Orthodoxy	18.12
Abstinence-based sex education	Orthodoxy	580.72	Orthodoxy	117.14
School vouchers	Orthodoxy	76.65	Orthodoxy	350.55
Creationism in schools	Orthodoxy	628.79	Orthodoxy	697.13
School prayer amendment	Orthodoxy	118.41	Orthodoxy	685.96
Civil liberties threatened by religion	Orthodoxy	227.58	Orthodoxy	175.16
Protect America's religious heritage	Orthodoxy	102.24	Orthodoxy	196.41
Religious freedom threatened	Orthodoxy	365.68	Orthodoxy	233.22
Mean BIC for orthodoxy models	−965.59		−701.33	
Mean BIC for tradition models	−602.64		−374.36	
Other Social and Political Issues				
Federal government as social problem-solver	Orthodoxy	177.07	Tradition	23.62
Government vs. private enterprise	Orthodoxy	66.58	Orthodoxy	310.88
Environmental protection	Orthodoxy	415.94	Orthodoxy	134.48
Welfare reform laws	Orthodoxy	226.01	Orthodoxy	99.06
Military spending	Orthodoxy	40.29	Tradition	226.60
Affirmative action for minorities	Orthodoxy[a]	176.26[a]	Orthodoxy	88.33
Handguns	Orthodoxy	396.48	Orthodoxy	40.86
National health insurance	Orthodoxy	130.17	Tradition	48.80
Middle East peace	Orthodoxy	289.59	Orthodoxy	36.25
Capital punishment	Orthodoxy	153.95	Tradition	50.20
Mean BIC for orthodoxy models	−652.85		−561.05	
Mean BIC for tradition models	−445.62		−524.99	

Notes: Religious tradition is a series of dummy variables measuring denominational affiliation. Religious orthodoxy is a series of dummy variables measuring belief about biblical inerrancy. Strength of support considered "very strong" (99 percent probability that model is superior) if difference in BIC is greater than 10 (Raftery 1995).

[a]Calculated without observations from one denomination because none of the respondents from that denomination strongly agreed with the statement.