Denison University
Denison Digital Commons

Faculty Publications

2022

# The Religious Communication Approach and Political Behavior

Paul Djupe

Jacob R. Neiheisel

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/facultypubs

Advances in
Political Psychology

A Journal of the ISPP International Society of Political Psychology

*Advances in Political Psychology, Vol. 0, No. 0, 2022*
doi: 10.1111/pops.12848

# The Religious Communication Approach and Political Behavior

**Paul A. Djupe**
*Denison University*

**Jacob R. Neiheisel**
*SUNY Buffalo*

*The religious communication approach concerns the identification of causal explanations of political behavior through the explicit measurement of exposure to communication and the variable reception and adoption of the messages in a religious context. The approach requires more questions or different research designs than those on omnibus surveys, which focus on religious affiliation and religiosity. It is particularly amenable to experimentation, where exposure is manipulated by the researcher and adoption can be measured precisely. However, experimental research, such as about religious elite influence, often returns different results than those from observational research wherein histories between clergy and congregants may overwhelm the delicate mechanisms of persuasion. Research from congregations points toward credibility and salience as important conditions for religious influence, which help reconcile experimental and observational results. This review article covers how organizational forces shape communication strategies, especially concerning when and how politics and democratic norms are engaged by clergy. Contrary to simple survey evidence that Americans oppose politics in churches, this approach suggests that politics is an important piece of congregational affairs that attracts and retains people, though there are clearly conditions when it repels. In this way, the religious communication approach is essential to understanding religious engagement with politics.*

**KEY WORDS:** religious communication, religious influence, congregations, clergy, political behavior

The religious communication approach considers communication dynamics essential in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of religious organizations in American society. Taking organizations seriously helps us understand when clergy and congregations engage with politics, how they tend to engage with politics, as well as what their influence is likely to be on followers. That is, the religious communication approach includes a theory of religious influence. Drawing on cues from studies of public opinion and the experimental method, religious influence necessitates two things: People are *exposed* to cues that they can then *adopt* or not. Without exposure, it is unclear whether religion is having any influence at all or whether the patterns we see in the data are actually the result of some other unmeasured, but shared, feature (e.g., living in the community or partisanship). We cannot take adoption of those cues for granted; there are many reasons why followers may not adopt frames, arguments, or information



0162-895X © 2022 The Authors. *Political Psychology* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of International Society of Political Psychology.
Published by Wiley Periodicals, LLC., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ,
and PO Box 378 Carlton South, 3053 Victoria, Australia
This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

from clergy or other religious sources. Indeed, what constitutes "the faith" is not synonymous with "religious leader" (or the holy book) for many—a growing truism that becomes clearer with comparison (e.g., Ciftci et al., 2022; McAdams & Lance, 2013; Wald, 2019). Neither is religious influence reducible to a set of beliefs. Underneath religious labels lie considerable amounts of variation within religious families (traditions), within denominations, and within congregations. From this perspective, it is no surprise that religious bodies and their leadership often make decisions on the basis of organizational maintenance rather than, or in addition to, religious dictates.

From this simple construction follows a complicated, but important set of observations that have reshaped how we view the place of American religion in public life. It begins with a history of religion in public life that is seldom told in the culture wars era, which tends to focus on the mobilization of the Christian right.

## Development

It was not so long ago that religion was considered to be vertically integrated. It was presumed that adult religion was the result of long-term socialization that began in childhood and continued, more or less unabated, throughout the life cycle. Religiosity measures of belief and belonging correlated with social relations and demonstrated commitment to the teachings of the religious group (Glock & Stark, 1965). In this way, individual measures of religion were capturing a communal experience instantiating a set of beliefs and values from the divine. Researchers describe this as the ethnoreligious model of religion to reinforce the notion of segregated ethnic groups that have a shared religious background and membership. From this perspective, it was possible to talk about what "religion" wanted in public life from a set of straightforward measures of religious affiliation and commitment (i.e., religiosity).

Pioneering research within political science that was pitched at the intersection of religion and politics lifted much of the framework put forward by Glock and Stark (1965) and pointed it toward the analysis of political outcomes of general interest to those in the field. This work focused on three core aspects of religious belief: believing, belonging, and behaving (the "three Bs"). Taken together, measures of these elements of the religious experience were meant to capture what Kellstedt et al. (1996) called "the social embodiment of religion" in one agenda-defining work. It was brought forth in the context of a discipline that had, for some time, resisted the view that religion mattered politically—a perspective rooted in the idea that religion was often a mere stand-in for economic interests or status anxieties (see, e.g., Gusfield, 1963). Kellstedt and colleagues set out a series of measures that could be used to explain a host of different political outcomes, the chief virtues of which were that they (a) had been widely accepted in cognate fields and (b) could readily be incorporated into the primary survey instruments of the day. Once known as the religious commitment model, the three Bs approach to measuring religion within political science would go on to be one of the dominant, if not *the* dominant framework going forward (see, e.g., Layman, 2001).

Central to this framework was the conceptualization and measurement of denominational affiliation—a key aspect of religious "belonging" in this approach (Kellstedt et al., 1996; see also Kellstedt & Green, 1993). As Kellstedt and colleagues wrote, "scholars want to know as precisely as possible the religious context of individual attitudes and behaviors, both the kinds of religious communities to which citizens belong and the extent of that belonging" (1996, pp. 174–175). Measures of denominational affiliation were meant to capture the communal aspect

of religious belonging, but cracks in the edifice of this approach were evident from the very beginning.

The primary proponents of this measurement scheme were forced to distinguish between churches within a single overarching denominational structure that were attended primarily by African Americans in order to make use of this framework as a predictive tool. While doing so fits within the broader ethnoreligious model that underlies the three Bs, it also makes clear that measures of denominational affiliation alone are hardly sufficient to capture the local dynamics of religious belonging and practice. As Wilcox and Robinson (2007) note, denominations may have an "official" stance on matters of theology or social policy, but local congregations exhibit a great deal of variability even within the same denomination (see also Djupe & Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert, 1993; Guth et al., 1988; Jelen, 1992; Wald et al., 1988). Much of this variation exhibits a geographic component (e.g., Stump, 1986). Moreover, it is unclear exactly what measures of denominational affiliation are even capturing (Guth et al., 1988; Kellstedt & Green, 1993; see also Philpott, 2007). And although there have been some recent efforts to rehabilitate this approach by explicitly measuring religious adherents' knowledge of church teachings on certain key social issues (Schmidt, 2018), the fact remains that the three Bs approach—particularly with respect to religious belonging/affiliation—is but a gross proxy for the kinds of messages that the faithful are exposed to when they step into a house of worship or engage with other religious sources.

By the time this approach was coming online in the mid-1960s in sociology, the foundations had already crumbled, as careful studies of religious engagement in the politics of the 1960s showed. Campbell and Pettigrew (1959) had earlier demonstrated the tremendous pressures under which Christian clergy in the South worked in order to address civil rights. A decade on, further studies of clergy documented the sharp disagreement, declines in giving, and membership losses they faced in congregations from addressing civil rights, Vietnam, and other divisive issues in what Hadden (1969) referred to as "storms in the churches" (see also Quinley, 1974). Compton's careful review of the history of Protestant political engagement throughout the 20th century finds this period to be when religious authority collapsed, producing the "end of empathy" (2020). It is certainly when mainline Protestant witness to society began to decline rapidly from its World War II–era high. It is worth emphasizing that this is the period when religion largely lost its ability to influence attitudes and behaviors; instead, people would just leave when disagreement proved too onerous.

Within political science, a similar trajectory is in evidence, as early works focused on religious institutions as an important context that plays host to a variety of politically relevant channels of communication (Wald et al., 1988, 1990) that emerged at about the same time (if not somewhat prior to) the most prominent examples of research in the three Bs tradition within the discipline. Indeed, glimmers of what we term the "religious communication approach" to the role that religion plays in society writ large appeared in an early review piece as an equal partner in scholarly efforts to understand the nexus between religion and politics in the United States (Guth et al., 1988). In that review, the authors noted the difficulties inherent in connecting political attitudes (e.g., conservatism) with particular theological orientations, along with the limitations associated with using denominational affiliation as a proxy for religious group membership. As Guth et al. (1988) write in that review, "The local parish or congregational unit may be far more important to the individual than the denomination itself" (p. 382).

Ultimately, however, it would appear as though concerns about external validity and the ability to speak to issues that are traditionally more central to political science (e.g., electoral politics) came to predominate within the literature pitched at the intersection of religion and politics, and the

essential elements of what it meant to measure religion's impact on politics became closely identified with the three Bs (Kellstedt et al., 1996). We suspect that, apart from concerns over external validity, the popularity of the three Bs approach can be tied to the fact that it offered political scientists a tidy way to capture something closer to the mouth of the "funnel of causality" (Campbell et al., 1960), the influence of which could safely be assumed to be "pre-political." The search for an "unmoved mover" of political behavior—whether religion, morality (Haidt & Joseph, 2004), or genetics (Fowler & Dawes, 2008)—has consumed a great deal of scholarly attention of the discipline.

The problem with this tack is that religion is hardly "pre-political," as religious beliefs and religious behavior have been repeatedly demonstrated to be responsive to developments in the political arena (Campbell et al., 2020; Djupe, Neiheisel, & Sokhey, 2018; Margolis, 2018a; Patrikios, 2008). Moreover, religion in the United States has a long history of schism centered around *political* shifts.[1] Perhaps the most profound was over slavery, when major denominations—Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist—split into North and South factions. And they split at least a decade earlier than the political parties did, suggesting just how fragile such religious bodies are. It took well over a century to bring them back together, but the merger of a conservative Southern body with a more liberal Northern body was bound to leave some feeling uncomfortable, resulting in new splits to complement the mergers. Schisms have resulted from the promotion of civil rights, the ordination of women, and, especially, the recognition and acceptance of gay clergy, which is resulting in a forthcoming split of the United Methodist Church. With so much churn at the institutional level, it is no surprise that congregations and individuals often have complex religious histories that undermine much of any sense of vertical integration. As a result, there is considerable evidence that religious behavior varies within denominations across regions of the country. However, as Stump writes, much of the literature that focuses on denominational affiliation across the social sciences "has emphasized abstract theological distinctions at the expense of experiential, behavioral, and social variations among regional groups" (1986, p. 222).

Though there were studies of religious change before the Pew Report (e.g., Green & Guth, 1993; Sherkat, 2014; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995), the finding in 2008 that 44% of Americans had changed religious affiliations compared to what they reported at age 16 was a landmark (Banerjee, 2008). This measure of change (e.g., from one denominational grouping to another) vastly undercounts the amount of movement within American religious denominations. That is, suggesting that religion did not change for people if they remained within a denomination assumes that all congregations are the same (e.g., all Catholic parishes are fungible). At the time, few thought to ask about congregational switching, and appropriate measures were unavailable (though see Bromley, 1988). But if congregations within a denomination are not interchangeable, then the incredible amount of congregational switching out there could be politically consequential. Djupe, Neiheisel, and Sokhey (2018) report that about 15% of people are leaving their congregations every 3–6 months, which represents an enormous amount of churn in the religious economy.

This form of diversity is not even considering the diversity of organizational life within congregations, brought to light in studies of the small-group revolution in the 1990s (e.g., Wuthnow, 1988, 1993). Congregations often have a wide range of activities, committees, and formal groups that meet regularly with many of the same people over time. They are essential to satisfaction with the congregation itself. Indeed, the success of megachurches is often attributed to the blinding array of small groups that cater to a vast range of interests (Trueheart, 1996). They keep the big church small, meaning that the content discussed in

[1] See https://www.thearda.com/denoms/Families/trees/ for a visual display of the schisms and mergers in American religious family trees.

some small groups is, on purpose, not the same as what is discussed in others (see Neiheisel et al., 2009).

Put together, the portrait of congregational life that has emerged since the 1990s is not of vertical integration, but of splintering horizontalism. Religious organizations at all levels—umbrella organizations, denominations, congregations, and small groups—are largely fragile organizations that work hard to contain and entertain the diversity among members and create space for potential new members. They do this rhetorically through the agendas and arguments engaged, as we will see, in addition to organizational offerings. Many individuals are moving congregations for a variety of reasons, including personal choice and not just because they move homes, all of which increase market pressures on congregations to attract and retain attendees. Further, congregations are grappling with huge changes at levels above them (at least for denominational congregations), in congregational offerings around them (especially nondenominational congregations), and in the culture of shifting tastes and expectations across time that encapsulate them.

## Building a Theory of Religious Influence

It is easy to imagine that congregations are akin to army platoons, made stronger because of the voluntaristic nature of belonging. People attend because they want to and believe that they need to be there. Clear lines of authority and agreement exist on where to locate religious beliefs (a holy text). That many are neighborhood institutions reinforces the perceived tight-knit structure of congregations, with friend and kinship ties predominating. Many studies of clergy begin with this sort of assumption, justifying their study because they have a captive audience every week that chooses to be there (e.g., Djupe & Gilbert, 2003; Guth et al., 1997; Olson et al., 2005).

So it came as a surprise that once we gathered data from clergy and their congregations, we found that clergy had little to no influence (Djupe & Gilbert, 2009). Djupe and Gilbert gathered data from 60 congregations in two mainline Protestant denominations—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church—which tend to be more liberal and far less religiously orthodox than many. They remedied at least some of the problems of prior research, which had simply asked clergy what they talked about using language such as "abortion," "homosexuality," and "national defense." While that strategy captures some of the clergy's agenda, it is rather opaque just what argument frames they conveyed. Moreover, that previous research (e.g., Welch et al., 1993) used member perceptions of their clergy as a substitute for actual clergy political speech. It came as no surprise, then, that the dominant predictor of reported clergy speech that emerged was political interest, highlighting the inherent problem with perception measures.

Having measurements from both clergy and the congregations that they serve enabled Djupe and Gilbert to examine the degree of cue reception—could members accurately report what issues their clergy engaged? It turns out that congregation members are not paying terribly close attention to their clergy. Accurate reception was a blunt measure capturing whether their clergy *ever* mentioned the issue or not; even with that generous measure, accuracy rates were astoundingly low. For hot-button issues like abortion and national defense, members were effectively guessing with accuracy rates around 50%. For issues that were discussed near ubiquitously, such as hunger and poverty, rates of accurate reception were quite high (around 90%). Accurate perception grew systematically with cue availability, members' being accessible through worship attendance, and through political agreement with the clergy. That is, those who disagreed with clergy indicated

lower rates of communication on a particular issue, which is important because disagreement between the clergy and congregation was common in the study congregations. Interestingly, this would not be consistent with a projection effect, in which case congregant attitudes would project clergy positions and amounts; instead, disagreement led to underreporting in their study.

It might seem easy to dismiss this study because of the denominations—on balance, modernist and mostly not literalist (~20% of each are), educated, and older, which are correlates of independent thinking. But Greg Smith (2008) found essentially the same patterns—almost zero clergy influence—among Catholic priests and parishioners from a sample that was 10 years older (thus, from a slightly less secularized United States). It is important to emphasize how relatively easy this test is; it is simply looking for correlations between clergy attitudes and congregants' after taking into account other attributes of the individual and congregation. Thus, a failure to find them sends a powerful signal.

This is not to say there are no exceptions, but the pattern of the conditions under which we find clergy influence is telling about the shape of a more general theory. Using the Catholic data, Bjarnason and Welch (2004) found a link between the clergy's address of the death penalty and parishioner opinion. Fetzer (2001) documented a relationship between the Anabaptist opinion on pacifism and their clergy's attitude. And using the ELCA/Episcopal data, Djupe and Hunt (2009) found a linkage between clergy and congregants on their environmental attitudes. Though it is not local variation, Campbell et al. (2014) document in several ways how Mormons move to conform their views with the Latter-day Saints hierarchy when it takes a position.

If we shift to an experimental context, the findings differ, though they are no longer about the local clergyperson, of course. The concern here is not how religious attributes attach people to candidates, for which there is a considerable literature (for a comprehensive review of experimental work in religion and politics, see Djupe & Smith, 2019; on religious communication, see Djupe & Calfano, 2019; for the effects of religious cues, see Westfall & Russell, 2019; and on religious communication and persuasion, see Knoll & Bolin, 2019), but whether messages from religious elites shape the political outlooks of members (see also Khari Brown's work alone and with others that covers a variety of issues from this perspective; e.g., Brown et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2014). The most consistent evidence concerns immigration politics (see also Brown, 2010; Brown et al., 2017). Messages attributed to denominational leaders shown to self-described denominational members pushed attitudes in a pro-immigrant direction in several cases (Nteta & Wallsten, 2012; Wallsten & Nteta, 2016). Evangelicals also adopted more welcoming immigration attitudes when exposed to messages from the Evangelical Immigration Table—an evangelical organization active in the immigration debate—though reform opponents were demobilized by the treatment (Margolis, 2018a, 2018b). But there are other political choices. For instance, Boas and Smith (2015; see also Smith, 2019) find researcher-supplied messages from evangelical elites can shape Brazilian vote choice.

Most other research has found religious communication effects to be constrained in a variety of ways. A message to put more resources toward the fight against global warming was influential for evangelicals, but only among those with low salience for environmental issues (Djupe & Gwiasda, 2010). Not all positions are given credence—in one experiment, participants ignored the message from a pro–gay rights clergyperson and rated the credibility of that source as being quite low (Calfano & Djupe, 2015). Moreover, clergy efficacy may be limited by timing. A pair of studies reported by Djupe and Calfano (2018) found that a message from a credible elite drove down warmth felt by evangelicals toward Donald Trump in September, but a similar message the week before the election had no effect.

There are routes to persuasion that are effectively unconditional, in which persuasion varies by the credibility of the source on particular topics. After finding clergy had effectively zero direct effects on their congregants, several lines of research pursued alternate routes to influence that could evade the clearly significant barriers congregants erected to protect their political opinions. One route took inspiration from Rev. Rich Cizik's conversion experience at a climate change conference in 2002. At the time, Cizik was the government affairs director for the National Association of Evangelicals and was the driving force behind their landmark statement of priorities released in 2004 that, among other things, called for more action to combat climate change. He described his change of heart on environmental matters in a way that could be persuasive to evangelicals. As Djupe and Gwiasda described it (2010, p. 75): "Only after a thoughtful prayer with others and reading scripture did he have a 'conversion' on climate change so profound that he likened it to an 'altar call'." They describe this statement as providing a decision-making process, in which prayerful consideration is akin to the scientific method or legal analysis, and some may be more appealing to fervent religious believers than others. This is what they find, though, again—opinion change was limited to those who did not believe the issue particularly important. Follow-up work ratified that providing such a religious decision-making process boosts the source's credibility for the religious (Djupe & Calfano, 2009; see also Corda et al., 2019, for a related finding).

The other route focused on messages from clergy that would have unimpeachable credibility—religious values. That is, it is easy to dismiss explicitly political messages from clergy as beyond the scope of their authority, but religious values about how believers should carry out the faith are surely legitimately in their purview. Certain values are quite likely to have political consequences, and in this way clergy have routes to political influence through priming particular values.

Religion offers lots of "oughts," so there are many candidates to assess. Djupe and Calfano (2013a, 2013b, 2013c) focused on two sets that form the basis of the religious economy and the models that religious organizations present to the world (Stark & Finke, 2000): religious inclusion and exclusion. All religious groups must contend with questions about how to recruit new members (inclusion) and how to retain current ones (exclusion), both of which may be the subject of religious values. As they measured them, religious inclusion was composed of two statements, both introduced with "To be true to my faith": "it is important to 'love the stranger as yourself'" and "it is important to invite others to my house of worship even if it begins to change as a result." The exclusive values statements, with the same preface, read, "it is important to shop as much as possible at stores owned by other people of my faith" and "it is important to keep company with other people of my faith."

In a series of studies with national samples, randomly priming exclusion versus inclusion produced less supportive immigration attitudes (Djupe & Calfano, 2013a), less interpersonal and political trust (Hsiung & Djupe, 2019), more threat from the least liked groups and hence more intolerance (Djupe & Calfano, 2013b), and less cooperative foreign policy attitudes where the United States goes it alone (Djupe & Calfano, 2013c). They also found a linkage between clergy self-reported presentation of exclusive values and congregant political intolerance in a community sample (Djupe & Calfano, 2015). Therefore, values such as these represent good candidates to support the potential for clergy influence when primed near salient decisions, though that is no easy task.

At the same time, Brooke et al. (in press) find that exclusive attitudes are primed by simple attendance in Muslim countries in what they call "The Friday Effect." As they argue, "frequent attenders interviewed on Fridays (i.e., proximate to the weekly communal prayer)

were significantly more likely to express sectarian and anti-secular attitudes than their counterparts." The mechanism they suggest is likely to be political content from religious elites. This resonates with a community study in Colorado Springs, where exclusive values paired with political communication in church were more likely to be linked to political intolerance (Schaffer et al., 2015).

We do not have a good sense of why clergy adopt particular values, and it is important to understand whether their values are endogenous to their socioreligious context. Though they did not tackle values per se, Guth et al. (1997) point to the strong correlations between theological orthodoxy and worldviews about public affairs among clergy, suggesting their worldviews/values are independent and linked to long-term socialization. Two more recent pieces suggest the worldviews clergy impart come in reaction to their milieu. Smith (2016) found that simple inducements for Catholic priests in Brazil to think about religious competition through a question order experiment push them to offer social justice versus personal morality messages. And Djupe and Friesen (2018) find that clergy are more likely to give voice to individualizing moral foundations that urge respect for difference and diversity when clergy disagree with their congregation. That is, their values are marshaled to support and protect their own position.

Supportive work comes from an entirely different context. In their provocatively titled book, *Beyond Piety and Politics*, Ciftci et al. (2022) discuss the paucity of conceptualizing religion according to identity and religiosity. Comparison across states shows considerable variation in the politics of devout identifiers, undermining a sense of universality of religious belief effects. Instead, religious influence is contextual and relational, which demands a focus on the particular content of religious messages individuals are exposed to in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region among Muslims (see also Ciftci, 2022). Though far from American Protestantism, they find wide variation in religious value commitment that varies systematically by contextual factors (e.g., majority status in the country). In their words, "Every religious community … creates a relational influence that guides individuals' attitudes toward broader political and socioeconomic questions in direct and indirect ways" (2022, p. 11).

A similar perspective can be found in Avital Livny's work in *Trust and the Islamic Advantage* (2020). Much as is the case with the research by Ciftci and colleagues (2022) in *Beyond Piety*, Livny finds that religiosity among Muslims in Turkey does not foster participation in collective efforts, which suggests that there may be a great deal of the heterogeneity hiding in measures of religiosity. Instead, social trust within particular communities can establish enough trust to overcome low levels of generalized trust. In other words, religious influence is, at base, relational and extends out from there.

Of course, these religious values are not the only religious messages that can be primed to affect opinion and behavior (for a comprehensive review, see McClendon, 2019). For instance, priming religious beliefs encourages a reduction in "support for democracy" (i.e., political tolerance; Bloom & Arikan, 2012), religious beliefs promote anti-immigrant sentiment (Bloom et al., 2015), and a prosperity gospel–style belief in self-efficacy can be primed to induce political activity (McClendon & Riedl, 2015). These findings are part of a much larger category of religion priming that induces cooperation, honesty, and other pro-social outcomes, though also racial prejudice (Johnson et al., 2010), which is often thought to work through perceived surveillance (e.g., Shariff et al., 2016; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Priming religion does not just affect religious citizens but can affect the behavior of clergy as well (Calfano & Oldmixon, 2016; Smith, 2016).

The guiding question for any theory of religious influence is not just whether religious variables are correlated with an attitude or a behavior, but can a religious source *move* the opinion or behavior of an adherent? There is little evidence outside of experimental work that suggests that clergy can move the opinions of their congregants with direct political persuasion, but people do change their minds. Any persuasive effort in congregations must contend with who the congregant is in that space. That is, people develop what are akin to identities in religious spaces where their attitudes are consistent with being a good person. And with such an identity, people become protective of it and develop defenses against efforts to change it (e.g., Mason, 2018). In this way, the very fact that clergy have roughly the same audience over time actually works to their persuasive *disadvantage* given the history they have with their congregants—congregants have ample time to build their defenses against persuasive efforts from their clergy. This view is entirely consistent with a host of work on resistance to persuasion coming out of research on inoculation theory (McGuire, 1961).

Persuasion appears to be possible at times and through routes that evade those defenses. Religious organizations can engage new issues about which people do not have settled opinions. Human trafficking, for instance, was just such an issue that many religious organizations took up in the 2000s. But, primarily, religious organizations are reactive, which then means they are pushing against established attitudinal barriers. Though they may wish to be salient to congregant decision making, proximity to a decision point, such as an election, exponentially increases the difficulty of persuasion.

Perhaps the most promising route for religious influence is to stick to religion. Though people disagree profoundly about specific beliefs and values—this is one reason why there are hundreds of denominations in the United States—it is clearly in the purview of clergy to talk about them. Living consistent with those beliefs and values entails analogous thinking across life's decisions, which would loop in politics (Lewis et al., 2020). Following an inclusive path to grow the congregation analogizes to inclusive politics that welcomes the stranger, cooperates with others (including other nations), and tolerates diverse groups. There are many other relevant beliefs and values that are conveyed that have yet to be explored.

This does not mean that clergy's engaging with politics explicitly has no effect. To this point, we have been concerned with whether religion has the capacity to encourage people to have a change of heart. That capacity appears limited but is not nil. At the very least, clergy can help set the agendas of members, and bringing up issues is a way to jump-start social influence processes—after hearing a message, people may start talking to each other about the issue, which can help reinforce a community norm (Djupe & Gilbert, 2009). This begs the question: How much do clergy engage political issues?

## Religious Communication

In a country with an assumed "wall of separation between church and state," it is no surprise that one of the first avenues of inquiry was whether clergy were willing to breach that wall and engage the issues of the day.[2] Early studies did not reach sanguine conclusions. Pope's (1942) analysis of churches in a mill town in the South found religion a tool of the businesses that de facto controlled the town, and clergy unable and unwilling to speak out against powerful interests to address the manifest social ills afflicting Gastonia, NC. The

[2]This is a convenient frame, but there was almost no sense that the First Amendment was adopted to prevent religious actors from engaging in politics. Instead, it protected religious groups from government involvement to tamper with religious practices (free exercise) and from the government's adopting a particular set of religious beliefs and practices (establishment). The "wall of separation" phrase was penned by Jefferson in a letter to the Danbury Baptists in 1802.

ability of Southern clergy to address civil rights fared little better (Campbell & Pettigrew, 1959), with anti-civil rights sentiment all but preventing clergy from engaging the issue which would put their pulpits in peril. Over the next 10 years, sociologists found similar results in California, of all places (Stark et al., 1971), finding the "sounds of silence" (1971, p. 87). Those that did engage the war in Vietnam, civil rights, and other issues brought on "storms in the churches" (Hadden, 1969) that resulted in losses of donations and membership (Quinley, 1974). The result was a much-chastened clergy and entailed what Compton (2020) calls the "end of empathy."

However, the lure of politics would prove too powerful and when researchers began to systematically document the engagement of clergy with a wide range of political issues they not only found it (Guth et al., 1997), they found it *increasing* over time in all corners of American religion (e.g., Djupe & Gilbert, 2003; Guth, 1996). It has been surprising to also learn that the historic gap between modernist and traditionalist clergy has closed (or has nearly closed; Smidt, 2016)—traditionalist clergy had long eschewed engagement with the world to focus on otherworldly concerns, but mostly no longer.

This is not to say that all clergy are engaging all issues or even engaging issues relevant to their community. For instance, Djupe and Gilbert (2003) found no evidence that clergy talked about gambling more when there was a measure on the ballot in their state. Sokhey's (2007) investigation of clergy engagement with race relations in Cincinnati after riots in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood found a hyperlocal focus that dropped off quickly with geographic distance. We can find plenty of evidence of clergy engaging with their community (e.g., Djupe & Olson, 2007; Owens, 2007), but it appears that clergy need to have an interest in doing so, and such interest cannot be assumed from location or constituency need (see McRoberts, 2003). However, there is systematic evidence that clergy act as representatives of their congregation when they need it—when they are minorities locally (Djupe & Gilbert, 2003) or there is a deficit of leadership in the community (Olson, 2000). And they appear to adopt a representative orientation when called, regardless of their agreement with the congregation (Djupe et al., 2016).

Instead, the specifics of clergy political issue engagement appear to be driven largely by ideology. Multiple studies show modernist, more liberal clergy addressing issues including poverty, civil rights, and the environment (among others), whereas more conservative clergy addressed abortion, homosexuality, school prayer, and substance abuse (Djupe & Gilbert, 2003; Guth et al., 1997). If these issue clusters sound loosely as though they conform to broader political movements and party agendas, that is no surprise. These agenda foci are correlated with theological orientations, but the overlap with American political divisions is unmistakable.

That may be changing. For several years, in every national sample he can get his hands on, Djupe has been asking what issues respondents are hearing about from their clergy. In a recent book chapter (Djupe, 2021), it is surprising to see the low portions of respondents reporting hearing political issue speech, the lack of differentiation among white Christians, and the decline of issue engagement after the 2016 election. Figure 1 shows the proportions hearing a variety of issues. What once was nearly unanimous among mainline Protestant and Catholic clergy (poverty) was only heard by about a third, though it is the only issue increasing across this short time span for mainliners. Immigration was a salient issue in the election year and first year of the Trump administration and yet was heard by less than 20% of all three groups, including Catholics. Remember, as Trump called it, the "Muslim Ban"? Barely any attenders reported hearing about Islam in America, despite the uproar about religious freedom. At the same time, sizable portions, especially of evangelicals, reported hearing about

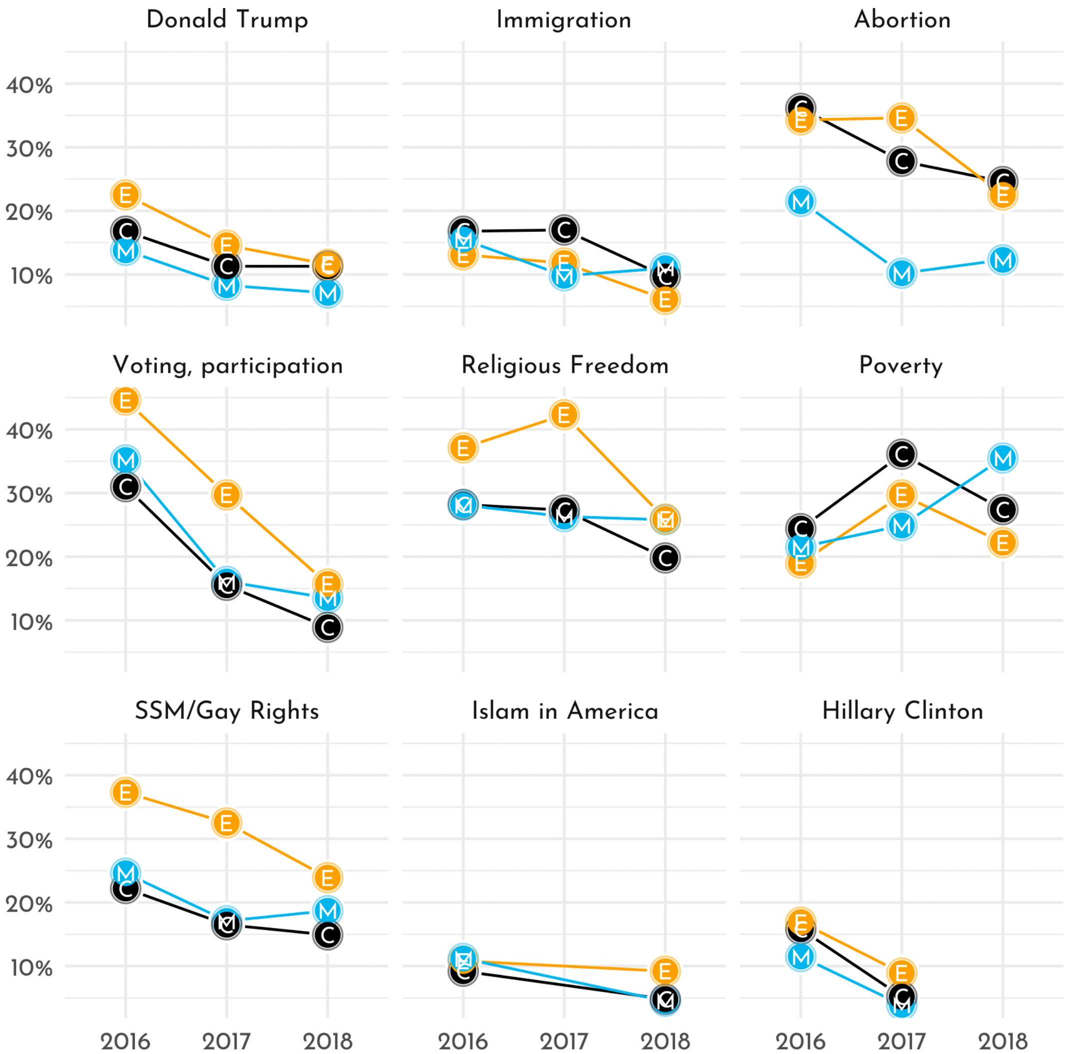


**Figure 1.** Perceived communication of clergy across three Christian traditions, 2016–2018. C, Catholics; E, evangelicals; M, mainline protestants.

"religious freedom," which suggests that issue concerned their own religious freedom being threatened and not that of religious minorities. From the perspective of such data, Djupe and Calfano (2018) argued that evangelicals were "on their own" in the 2016 elections—their clergy were not highly active in addressing Donald Trump or most of the hot-button issues active in that election (see also Martin, 2021). In this way, the high religious support for Donald Trump among white Christians may be the result of the absence of religious influence, as clergy largely sidestepped engagement in such highly emotional and partisan times.

That point is worth drawing out with a bit more data. This is not disputing that a high concentration of evangelicals voted for Trump, but it does suggest that evangelical churches and clergy were largely absent in the conversation about Trump and how he may represent their values. Two pieces of evidence help reinforce this conclusion. The first is the astounding Public Religion

Research Institute (PRRI) finding that evangelicals completely reversed themselves about the importance of personal morality for public figures from 2012 to 2016 (Kurtzleben, 2016). They were the most supportive of the notion that public officials who committed immoral personal acts could not be good public servants in 2012, and they became the *least* supportive of that notion by early in 2016 once Trump became the Republican nominee. It is hard to overestimate this signal—this was a core tenet of evangelicalism that appears to have been abandoned quickly at the behest of political expediency. It is hard to imagine that evangelical pastors felt the same (though it is worth polling to find out; see Guth & Smidt, 2019).

The second piece of evidence comes from experiments that Djupe and Calfano (2018) ran on white evangelicals just before the election. In September, evangelicals were modestly open to anti-Trump (though not pro-Clinton) arguments from a credible evangelical journalist (political scientist Napp Nazworth, who wrote an op-ed about the dangers of Trumpism), reducing their feeling thermometer for Trump even if they did not warm toward his opponent. They ran this style of experiment again just before the election, but evangelicals did not budge at all on any measure about Trump. That is, evangelicals were once open to information and arguments about Trump and his questionable ethics and immoralities, but that window closed as the election neared. That their support for him remained so high for so long seems to confirm that evangelical pastors were not addressing these topics almost at all or were doing so in such a way that effectively "released" the rank and file to do as they pleased with regard to the election through the use of "active passivism" in their public rhetoric (Martin, 2021).

Third, perceptions of clergy support for Trump are not simple reflections of citizen preferences. Figure 2 shows how perceptions of clergy support for Trump (among attenders) correlates with respondent support for Trump as well as the distributions of each variable. The relationship is positive ($r = .53$) but far from perfect. It is clear from the scatter that many

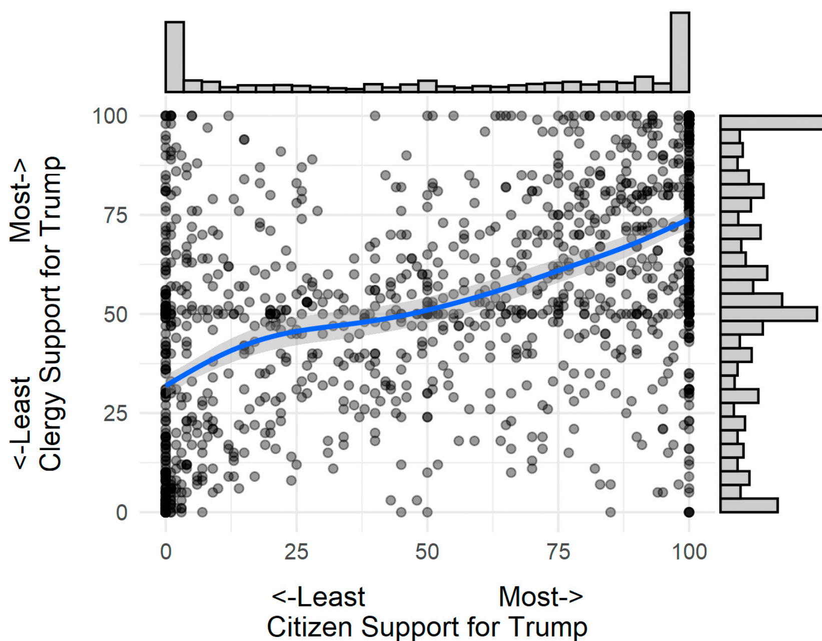


**Figure 2.** The relationship of respondent to perceived clergy support for Trump, October 2020.

people were attending a congregation where they did not see eye to eye with their religious leader, but in a particular way. The distributions show that while citizens were polarized over Trump, with spikes on both ends of the spectrum, that was not quite how clergy were viewed—many were seen as somewhere in the middle, though there are some modest spikes on both ends as well.

That clergy might avoid being seen as strongly partisan is no surprise given that politics in the church can cause people to leave. This is not a new finding—the literature discussed above about "storms in the churches" in the 1960s laid that out plainly. But the linkage was rediscovered and documented in great causal detail in this century, especially in the last few years (see, e.g., Margolis, 2018a). Much of this literature (e.g., Hout & Fischer, 2002; Putnam & Campbell, 2010) has argued that aggressive religiously conservative politics of the Christian right drove liberals and moderates out of religion. We have some doubts about simple versions of this causal narrative—mostly that it is missing several steps.

This literature has been missing important mechanisms, which serves to miss a considerable amount of the effect of politics on religion. A critical concept is salience. In order for people to reconsider their religious identity or affiliation, extreme politics from religious sources needs to be made salient and brought to the attention of regular voters. One set of examples that did this was the ballot measures in 2004 that prevented the expansion of gay rights (see Campbell & Monson, 2008). In some states, religious conservatives were active and visible, and the rate of the non-eligious rose at a higher rate in this period (Djupe, Neiheisel, & Conger, 2018). Where the Christian right was not visible and states were without such ballot measures, the nonreligious grew at a much slower rate.

Another way politics can be made salient is through communication in a congregation where it may be much harder to ignore. Djupe, Neiheisel, and Sokhey (2018) document that disagreement in the congregation affects all sides of the political spectrum, boosting the probability that an individual leaves the congregation, though it does not affect all members equally. Resonating with prior work (Djupe & Gilbert, 2008), those who are marginal members, who attend less often and are not involved in other activities in the congregation, are the most likely to weigh political disagreement as a reason to leave. This process of disaffiliation (i.e., leaving an organization) is different from other work that studies de-identification (i.e., dropping a religious identity), and the article documents that de-identification is a subsidiary process of disaffiliation—people leave organizations before they reevaluate their identity. Follow-up work documented that, as would be expected, disagreement over support for Trump drove people out of their congregations on both the left and right (Djupe et al., 2017).

The potential dangers of politicking in congregations have been found in a place where some least expect it—from clerics in mosques. In survey experiments of 12,000 Muslims conducted across 11 majority-Muslim countries, Williamson et al. (in press) find that "politicization undermines religious authority in the Middle East." This finding is particularly interesting given the proclivity of figures on the American right to argue that Islam is inherently political, perhaps not even a religion as much as a political ideology.

## Political Content of Clergy Communication

To this point, the literature has assumed that what clergy argue to their flocks matches their attitudes (e.g., Guth et al., 1997; Smith, 2008). That is, researchers assume that clergy who are pro-choice and report they have talked about abortion are conveying pro-choice stands. But is that true? There are good reasons to think not, which further muddies the possibility of religious influence.

There have been a few studies of the content of clergy communication beyond the extent of addressing politics as discussed above. Some studies are just beginning to tap the wealth of data in web-available sermons (e.g., Boussalis et al., 2021; Gilliland, 2021; Olson & Quezada, in press; Pew Forum, 2021), few have actually listened for political mentions in sermons in person (Brewer et al., 2003; McClendon & Riedl, 2021) or online (Martin, 2021; Olson and Quezada 2022), whereas others have used surveys of clergy and congregants to get a sense of the diversity of clergy's argument repertoire on particular issues (McClendon & Riedl, 2016).

Djupe and Neiheisel (2008) first collected arguments that were in play in the 2004 ballot measure campaigns to restrict gay rights—some religious, some not. They then surveyed clergy in Columbus, Ohio, about whether they agreed with each particular argument and whether they mentioned it in public discussion (i.e., not limited to the pulpit). We thus get measures of depth (i.e., how many arguments were addressed), but also breadth (i.e., the extent to which they only discussed arguments they agreed with). In what has become a constant across this literature, clergy average discussing one argument they disagree with for every four they agree with. There were substantial numbers who agreed with each argument presented (e.g., "Allowing same-sex partners to marry threatens the social fabric and traditional institutions" and "Not to allow same-sex partners to marry unjustly deprives these couples of many legal benefits.") and did not mention it, though it was most common to agree and mention. This pattern is repeated across several studies, including two about immigration (Djupe et al., 2015; Djupe & Calfano, 2012) in which clergy also mentioned one argument they disagreed with out of every five mentioned. In the immigration studies, the most commonly mentioned argument was an inclusive one that every person should be treated with dignity and respect, whereas the most common in the gay rights context was exclusive: "Allowing same-sex partners to marry violates Scripture." We would not treat these as fixed stances, though, and it is worth measuring what arguments were in play in American religion at a particular point in political time.

Exactly what this repeated pattern (20% of arguments mentioned were ones clergy disagreed with) means has been the subject of further study. It could mean that clergy bring up strawman arguments that are easy to knock down to reinforce their preferred position. But it is also possible that clergy compose their argument repertoire in order to reach different portions of their congregation. Congregations are often fairly diverse in their politics, and marginal losses of members can cost houses of worship dearly. To assess these possibilities, prior work has examined whether clergy speech content conforms to the diversity of the congregation and whether it correlates with the value placed on the diversity of ideas and inclusion.

Djupe and Neiheisel (2008) document that political disunity in the congregation is linked to a more diverse argument repertoire about LGBT issues from clergy. Disunity does not affect the volume of speech, which is driven almost entirely by the clergy's interest in the issue. Djupe and Calfano (2012) find something similar among Presbyterian Church (USA) clergy—greater similarity among congregants is linked to less diverse speech about immigration. Though these studies cannot rule out the possibility of strawman engagement of arguments they disagreed with, the pattern linking a greater range of arguments in clergy speech to diversity in the congregation does not seem consistent with the strawman hypothesis. Searching for a broader framework to understand these patterns in clergy speech led us to consider the deliberative potential of congregations.

### Deliberation in Houses of Worship?

Popular (and even scholarly) discussions surrounding the role that religious institutions play in debates over controversial moral and political issues often embody widespread assumptions

surrounding religion as a vertically-integrated set of forces. In this view, religious elites take a public stand on a matter of social or political import that is rooted in religious doctrine and that is, in turn, adopted by those who sit in the pews. To the extent that any discussion happens at all in such an environment, it is used to shore up support and mobilize the faithful for action. To be sure, there are houses of worship that would appear to fit this mold (Calfano & Neiheisel, 2009; McCrummen, 2021), but many clergy are acutely aware that there may be differences of opinion among the congregants that are likely to necessitate a more nuanced approach to certain issues (Cadge et al., 2012; Calfano, 2009; Neiheisel & Djupe, 2008; see also Djupe & Gilbert, 2002; Wilcox & Robinson, 2007).

While structural differences between faith traditions may provide some religious leaders with greater degrees of insularity from those to whom they minister (e.g., Catholic priests are assigned to their parishes by their bishops), localism abounds even in environments that would appear to be vertically-integrated. Holman and Shockley (2017), for instance, found that messages from "on high" from within the Catholic Church did not always find their way to the faithful, as varying levels of noncompliance from more local religious elites were in evidence. Moreover, Calfano (2009) finds that Catholic priests are subject to the same congregational forces as Djupe and Gilbert (2003) found with Protestants.

The "storms in the churches" taught many religious leaders a stark lesson that their jobs depend, at least in part, on the people in the pews (see also Glock & Stark, 1965). Previous research has shown that individual churches are more responsive to congregational and community pressures than they are to national church leadership (Wood & Zald, 1966; see also Holman & Shockley, 2017, though Calfano, 2009, and Calfano & Oldmixon, 2016, show that this can be manipulated), finding local congregations perhaps all too well attuned to local power structures (Pope, 1942). A healthy concern for organizational maintenance may keep religious leaders from relaying a clear message on controversial issues to their congregations. Even clergy who may feel reasonably secure that engaging in public witness over hot-button social or political matters is not going to threaten their job or split the congregation may have other reasons to broach such matters in more oblique terms (Martin, 2021). Particularly in congregations that broadcast their services via the internet, religious elites might exercise restraint given that the potential exists for their message to reach a more diverse audience.

One response that religious leaders can take when facing the prospect of division brought on by a controversial issue involves modeling the process of deliberation. Deliberation is a complex, diverse concept that generally involves discussion across lines of difference often guided by norms encouraging mutual respect and full participation (e.g., Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Clergy can engage the spirit of deliberation in several ways, such as by introducing congregants to multiple different arguments or frames (Djupe & Calfano, 2012; Djupe & Neiheisel, 2008); as discussed above, that is reasonably common, even though the presentation is ultimately lopsided for most. Other opportunities for authentic exchanges on such issues and exposure to differences in opinion can be found in church small groups or other gatherings of congregants that take place away from the sanctuary hall (Neiheisel et al., 2009). These encounters almost universally engage deliberative norms including mutual respect, full participation, and the presence of different points of view (see also Djupe & Olson, 2013), rather than a drive to instill particular points of view. The pattern suggests a desire to manage conflict and maintain the diversity of views in the congregation. However, some religious groups (e.g., evangelicals) are less likely to adopt deliberative norms and are less likely to host encounters to discuss political issues (Neiheisel et al., 2009). One reason why is that clergy who believe they have less power to influence their congregants are

more likely to host such deliberative encounters—evangelical clergy believe they have more efficacy.

Another response has witnessed clergy engaging in efforts to meet the (spiritual) needs of their congregants as a way of buying some measure of goodwill, which, in turn, may allow them to engage in the political realm (Djupe & Gilbert, 2008). Writing about clergy from two mainline Protestant denominations, Djupe and Gilbert note that "clergy are politically active in private as well as public ways, often expressing opinions that are not widely shared among church members. But the satisfactory provision of spiritual and other selective benefits to congregants acts as a considerable buffer, serving to insulate clergy somewhat from the effects of political opposition in the congregation" (2008, p. 57).

While congregational pressures can sometimes offer a considerable impediment to clergy public speech (and action) on matters of social or political import, pressures from the local community can also push some religious leaders in the other direction. That is, clergy often feel compelled to represent their congregations in public debates over issues that affect their flocks (Djupe & Gilbert, 2002). According to one study, 70% of clergy reported being contacted by a member of their congregation with a political concern. A sizable percentage of clergy also reported that many within their congregations considered them to be representatives connecting their church with elements of the government (Djupe et al., 2016). It is essential to note that clergy appear to take on this role regardless of their political agreement with their congregants.

Competition from other religious institutions can similarly drive up the extent to which clergy provide space for politics within the church itself (Smith, 2016). A robust religious marketplace in which churchgoers move between houses of worship both within and across denominational lines creates the conditions under which churches have an incentive to offer opportunities to engage in political activities (Djupe & Neiheisel, 2019). We find still more evidence of pressures on the congregation that shape the particular mix of political information to which churchgoers are exposed on a regular basis. The local religious context, in turn, has been shown to shape a host of different outcomes that are recognizably political, including participation in electoral politics.

## Religion and Political Participation

Congregations have long been recognized as a critical organizational form promoting democratic involvement. Once referred to as maintaining "habits of the heart" by Alexis de Tocqueville (1840), modern thinkers have not dismissed the importance of norms about good behavior, but they have looked more extensively at the organizational metaphor for politics that congregations supply (e.g., Leege, 1988). Congregations are often like tiny societies composed of a mass (literally for Catholics), elites, and meso-level organizations that bring members together to run the congregation, help members learn about the faith and community norms, and cater to members' interests. As such, perhaps congregational involvement can "spill over" into the analogous political activity (Peterson, 1992).

Moreover, religious participation is open to everyone, rich and poor, though clearly some religious groups have exclusive rules about who joins, prohibiting LGBT members, for instance. But because religious groups most often are inclusive and welcome newcomers, a great range of people can gain the democratic benefits of religious participation. If true, this could help resolve traditional deficits linked to the maldistribution of education and income—two important sources of participatory interest and ability.

In this section, we will review the evidence about religious effects on political participation, highlighting the democratic dilemmas linked to both religion and democratic politics. These dilemmas place a particularly heavy burden on women and serve to weaken the case for religion as a democratic savior. Moreover, we push back against the notion of congregations as neutral generators of civic goods by underscoring the fact that congregations are social institutions and that the degree of salience of politics (the level of congregational engagement with politics) may control the application of congregation-gained skills to politics. Congregations are not de facto vending machines for which paying in involvement produces a standard civic return.

The pathways through which congregational involvement can attach to political activity are richer and more diverse than a simple tale about spillover and are worth examining in some detail. The basic structure of research on religion and political involvement has tended to follow the venerable civic voluntarism model (Verba et al., 1995)—citizens are more likely to participate when they are motivated, resourceful, and recruited.

The most discussed way in which congregational involvement may boost political activity is by subsidizing traditional resource deficits, such as education and income, by offering training in "civic skills"—the rudiments of organizational life, such as organizing, giving a speech, making arguments, and writing letters. It is religious involvement beyond worship that affords opportunities to develop these skills, which suggests a gap may arise between Protestants and Catholics since Protestants tend to have a more vibrant organizational life within the congregation (Verba et al., 1995). Using the same data as Verba and colleagues Djupe and Grant (2001) undercut the importance of congregational civic skills—once skills gained in secular contexts (e.g., work or some other organization) are accounted for, religious skills have no effect. Instead, they place greater weight on recruitment and encouragement of members to see the political consequences of their faith.

To help understand why religious skills might matter less, Djupe and Gilbert (2006) made a critical reconceptualization of civic skills as the exercise of leadership. Someone often selects who will run small groups and activities and that process is not likely to select at random. Congregations often depend on the quality of their activities to retain members, so they have an interest in choosing experienced leaders. And such members are likely to be more heavily resourced as well as part of the congregational majority. The democratic dilemmas are readily apparent, and Djupe and Gilbert (2006) find that those who are less like other members and who practice fewer skills outside of congregations are also less likely to practice skills/leadership in congregational small groups and activities. From this perspective, congregations are not likely to make up resource gaps.

Given the gender gap in resources that has been well documented over time, the dilemmas in the congregational selection process are much more likely to impact the skill acquisition of women. This is just what Djupe et al. (2007) find (see also Calhoun-Brown, 2010). Despite the fact that women participate in religious organizations at higher rates than men throughout a considerable portion of the world (Sullins, 2006), they are not practicing skills in congregations at higher rates than men, undercutting women's civic return on their religious investment. A follow-up piece (Friesen & Djupe, 2017) ratified that inequality in the United States and ascribed it to a particular Big Five personality trait: Conscientiousness. That is, the practice of civic skills was held down for highly conscientious women as their religious involvement levels increased. Conscientiousness entails drawing lines of responsibility as well as bounds around what is acceptable behavior. Friesen and Djupe suspect that women in religious contexts are encouraged, by and large, to define leadership out of their area of responsibility, which serves therefore to limit their political engagement.

As congregations grow larger, the same organizational pathways that supply opportunities for leadership also structure who is recruited to engage in activities beyond the congregation, some of them political. If those activities highlight the leadership potential of some members over others, they should further contribute to congregational biases in promoting civic engagement. Djupe and Gilbert (2009) find that congregation-based civic skills, not their religiosity, help members stand out and increase recruitment from fellow members. More clergy political speech does not appear to stimulate recruitment for the majority, but it does for those in the partisan minority. Partisan minority members stand out for recruitment when they have more civic skills gained outside the congregation, though these matter little for those in the majority. Together, these and other findings showcase how the social structure in a congregation powerfully shapes who is asked to participate in politics, which is itself a powerful driver of political activity.

There is only a tantalizing bit of work that pushes beyond to question the civic voluntarism framework, suggesting that religious organizations are endogenous to the community. Take Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's Protestant–Catholic finding (1995)—while the Catholic parishes are more hierarchical than Protestant congregations, this ignores the fact that parishes are defined as neighborhood institutions and have a host of Catholic small groups in the community that are attached to the parish, if not exactly inside it. See Moutselos (2020) for a fascinating application of this approach to the study of the political relevance of mosque attendance among Muslims in Western Europe. And this is the approach that Djupe and Neiheisel (2012) take with a rare multiracial sample embedded within congregations. While they ratify the power of forming and engaging congregational networks (see also McKenzie, 2004) with arguably the most well-specified model of religious effects on participation thus far, they also find many congregation-level variables insignificant for Latinos, which is highly suggestive that participatory patterns are arranged by the community and perhaps other higher levels of organization (Schwadel, 2005).

It is tempting to think of the factors that affect motivation to engage in politics as independent of the others (e.g., McKenzie, 2001). Some of the literature encourages this view, especially those adopting the vending machine model of civic skill production. But research from the Black Church makes us think otherwise, perhaps because the Marxist critique that religion is the opiate of the masses has dominated research in this community. Calhoun-Brown (1998) tackled it directly, asking whether different forms of religiosity might contribute to political engagement or separatism. She finds that otherworldliness does promote a more exclusive form of engagement that focuses on the Black community. But organizational religiosity does the opposite, promoting a direct engagement with politics, which appears to work through augmenting efficacy (Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Harris, 1994). We can find confirmation of that effect in Kenya, where McClendon and Riedl (2015) found experimental evidence that a prosperity gospel–style message boosted political efficacy and political activity.

It would be surprising if congregational political engagement did not matter, and considerable research suggests it does. Again, much of the initial work was done in the context of the Black Church (Brown, 2011; Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Harris, 1994), though often using a simple measure of whether the church held political meetings—those answering in the affirmative were called "political churches." The actual distribution of political engagement in congregations is not binary and exists on a gradient on multiple dimensions: from the clergy (Brown, 2011), in small groups and activities, and through the interests of members (Djupe & Gilbert, 2009). However, despite the paucity of the traditional binary political church measure, it appears that some political engagement in the congregation is necessary to promote political activity. As Djupe and Grant noted, "There is little direct, automatic connection of religious and political activities for religious adherents, though…[members] are mobilized

into the public sphere on a regular basis when religious adherents see or are made to see the connection" (2001, p. 303). Djupe and Gilbert (2009) confirmed this argument, finding that without participation in political adult education sessions, the civic voluntaristic components like recruitment and civic skills had no relationship with political activity. Interestingly, such adult education activity appears to attract a cross-section of congregants (Neiheisel et al., 2009), though it is less common in some religious traditions (i.e., evangelicalism) than others.

If an organizational connection to politics in congregations is important, then it pays to understand the dynamics of its development. Little work has dug into this question, and it has mostly focused on the religious tradition of congregations offering organized political activities such as voter registration, distributing voter guides, offering political discussion groups, and the like (e.g., Beyerlein & Chaves, 2003). Churches did not engage heavily in such activities in 1998, and religious traditions tended to offer different types—Catholics and Black Protestants tend to be the most political and offer activities that support movements and party organizations, respectively. White Protestants were lightly involved, though evangelicals were even less so than mainline Protestants. By 2018, political activity in congregations had surged, especially among more liberal congregations, with 56% of congregations engaging in at least one of the listed activities (Beyerlein & Chaves, 2020).

Using the same National Congregations Study data, Djupe and Neiheisel (2019) viewed congregations' decision to offer a political activity through the lens of religious economy theory. That is, engaging in political activity is not driven by political interests, but rather by organizational motives. Some members will wish for their congregation to engage in politics, but it is also a potentially dangerous move that is likely to alienate others, as we have discussed above. What Djupe and Neiheisel find is that congregations do offer political activities as yet another benefit, but only once a wide array of interests are engaged with activities. That is, they appear to be the last kind of group/activity offered, rather than the first. Moreover, engaging in politics is not a simple function of engaged people wanting more engagement. It is the diversity of the congregation's group offerings that eventually allows political activity. If political disagreement only seems to push marginal members out of congregations (Djupe, Neiheisel, & Sokhey, 2018), then it is wise to find activities for a wide array of members before allowing more explicit political engagement to take place.

## The Religious Communication Approach in Comparative Context

Early work that adopted what we term the "religious communication approach" focused on Christianity. However, that has been rapidly changing, showing that the approach's analytic utility is not limited to Protestantism, Christianity, or congregationalism. In fact, there is cause to believe that insights gleaned from this way of thinking about religious influence may be more portable to other faith traditions than those rooted in alternative approaches that highlight the primacy of attendance at religious services. As Verghese (2020) points out, the kinds of measures of religiosity that are typically employed in work pitched at the American intersection of religion and politics do not "travel" very well to religions that fall outside of the Abrahamic faith traditions (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism). For instance, "belief-centered" approaches to the study of religion do not appear to be widely applicable to Hindus. The same could also be said for the focus on attendance at religious services in the three Bs framework, as few respondents in Verghese's (2020) surveys rated going to temple as an important element of their faith (see also Chhibber & Sekhon, 2014).

According to Verghese (2020), measurement schemes that purport to capture the political relevance of religion with reference to religious beliefs and attendance at religious services also miss what he refers to as the "community-level norms that may govern religious groups and act as a way of maintaining boundaries" (p. 626). Even in Abrahamic faith traditions, such as Islam, symbolic elements of what it means to practice a particular religion (e.g., wearing a headscarf) have been shown to track with the political integration of adherents (Westfall et al., 2017; see also Butler & Tavits, 2017), showcasing the fact that the political relevance of religion extends far beyond the dimensions captured by the most commonly employed approach to measuring religion's impact on outcomes of social or political import. We would note, however, that cues are central to the religious communication approach. In application, cue-giving most often takes the form of messages from religious leaders and other religious elites in work within this tradition, but the religious communication approach, at root, focuses on institutional dynamics—to include the integration of religious interests throughout the broader community.

There is also experimental evidence suggesting that Hindus may be less responsive to religious cues than are Muslims in the Indian case (Chhibber & Sekhon, 2014), as political leaders who employed Muslim religious symbols were viewed with greater degrees of confidence among Muslims. For their part, Hindus were unaffected by appeals from political leaders who used Hindu religious cues. Shifting the focus to turnout netted similar results, as Muslims exhibited higher levels of turnout after being presented with a stimulus containing religious cues, whereas Hindus did not after receiving a similar treatment. But while religious cues may be effective at mobilizing Muslims when relayed by a (in this case, fictional) politician under controlled conditions, research conducted in other contexts would seem to indicate that mosques may not always play host to entreaties to participate in politics (Ndukwe, 2015), even as there is mounting evidence that mosque participation is positively associated with greater levels of political activity among Muslims (Chhibber & Sekhon, 2014; Dana et al., 2011; Jamal, 2005; Oskooii & Dana, 2017).

More recent work by Westfall (2019), however, has complicated this overall picture to some extent, as she finds that mosque involvement does not appear to be associated with a host of different outcomes related to political participation. Instead, involvement in religious or social activities associated with the mosque apart from prayer appears to be a prime driver of participatory acts in the political sphere. This finding dovetails nicely with other work within the religious communication tradition (e.g., Djupe & Gilbert, 2009). Finally, work by Corda et al. (2019) finds that appeals for charitable contributions are more effective when leveled by a Muslim cleric relative to a control condition wherein such requests are being made by someone who is not a religious leader, but that an experimental condition that included a recitation of Qur'anic verses (coming from a cleric) netted still higher levels of giving, thereby suggesting that, at least for Muslims, cues delivered by religious elites are likely most efficacious when delivered alongside scriptural references.

The religious communication approach has also been turned toward an understanding of the dynamics of other Abrahamic faiths as well, as several studies of the kinds of social and political arguments publicly leveled by rabbis have emerged over the last couple of decades (Djupe & Sokhey, 2003a, 2003b; Freedman, 2019; Sokhey & Djupe, 2006). Work detailing the level of political activity in evidence within synagogues has generally found that they often specialize in offering access to non-electoral forms of political activity to their adherents, as has been found to be the case with other faith traditions (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2021). Indeed, many of the lessons that have emerged from the literature examining the Protestant case have been found to be remarkably portable to other faiths, with the prominent exceptions noted by Verghese (2020). Even in those cases, however, the religious communication approach is flexible enough to elucidate the power of religious cues offered outside of the

context of statements from religious leaders within the confines of a particular house of worship.

## Conclusion

What has been dubbed the religious communication approach is a way of thinking about religion that takes organizational life seriously. This may seem odd given what we just wrote. Many studies in this growing literature find little or highly conditional religious influence, with perhaps the most consistent associations between communication from religious elites and attitudinal change among the faithful coming when clergy and other religious leaders "stick to religion." Clergy do not generally appear to have the power of persuasion (i.e., changing people's minds) on political matters, congregation-gained skills are redundant to secular ones that signal leadership competence, clergy tailor their speech to the distribution of views in the congregation, and so on. But this is just the point. In order to understand religious presence in public life, we need to know how organizational imperatives tend to undermine the role of religion.

This is important, too, for what seems like an academic reason. Without understanding congregational life, which is the dominant place where religion is imparted and experienced, we almost cannot know that religion can have a causal role in people's lives. That is, we need to know what congregants have been exposed to in order to know with certainty what they adopt and why. Being concerned about causality may seem like so much academic hand-wringing. But consider the often told story about the 81% of evangelicals who voted for Trump in 2016 (and 2020 for that matter). There was a widespread assumption that evangelical churches were deeply implicated in the campaign, serving as platoons ready to be mobilized. And there were some; there are always some (Martin, 2021).

But the preponderance of the evidence suggests that they were not heavily involved and evangelical clergy were not spouting the party line. This is not to say that religion did not matter in these elections. Instead, it helps to clarify how little religious infrastructure was implicated in producing the observed patterns in political behavior. Or, put another way, making assumptions about religion from correlations between religious identities or religious behaviors and political outcomes is a highly suspect business unless we have data about religious communication to solidify the mechanism of influence.

We suspect, then, that the three Bs approach to gauging the political relevance of religion—measuring believing, behaving, and belonging, but often little else—is capturing more than just the influence of religion. Rather, given the degree to which houses of worship are often integrated into the broader communities that they serve, it seems likely that such a strategy necessarily conflates community norms with the goings-on inside the church itself (see Stump, 1986). Once mechanisms of influence are specified, as it is in work adopting the religious communication approach, nuance abounds. The robust relationships identified by other research paradigms therefore often appear to be at odds with the constellation of findings that have emerged from work that has adopted the religious communication approach. Although unsettling, it is worth pointing out that many mature areas of study have witnessed similar trajectories, as refinements in measurement and theoretical developments have often reduced the degree of association between variables witnessed in earlier studies (e.g., see work on voter turnout; Keele & Minozzi, 2013).

This is not to say that work within the three Bs tradition is without utility. The ethnoreligious framework from which it descends allows researchers to study the influence of religion

on political outcomes throughout historical eras that are more or less bereft of individual-level data (though see DeCanio, 2007), and puts work on religion into a broader conversation about political change and the relationship between group interests and the party system (e.g., Kleppner, 1970; Vandermeer, 1981). The three Bs approach also dovetails nicely with the diagnostic and predictive aspects of work on electoral politics, as we suspect that many of its main proponents intended (see Guth et al., 1988). From this vantage point, it makes sense to engage in the practice of “gapology” (Olson & Green, 2006) by documenting differences in the religious groups that make up the parties’ electoral coalitions and whether they are secondary to behavioral indicators (e.g., worship attendance or religious commitment). Its descriptive utility does not easily extend to causal utility, however.

Within what we call the “religious communication approach,” there are many different lines of research worth pursuing. For instance, we know very little about what policy arguments are available within American congregations attached to particular issues at any particular time. This may be changing as researchers begin to mine troves of publicly available worship content, for which the pandemic was a boon since so many congregations offered online content (see Djupe & Friesen, in press). Those data still need to be validated in terms of their representativeness of all congregations. But traditional surveys may be of great service in this regard, in part because they extend beyond worship services—clergy who are reticent to engage with politics from the pulpit may do so in other congregational contexts (Djupe & Gilbert, 2009), so survey data may present a more holistic portrait, if one marred by recall and other problems.

Mountains of evidence suggest that the religious landscape is changing radically with the collapse of the mainline, the dwindling attendance of Catholics, the shift within evangelicalism to non-denominational congregations, and of course the rise of the nones. More studies should grapple with the pressures exerted by the community, whether described in terms of religious economies or not, that may affect whether and how congregations engage with political and civic engagement (e.g., Djupe & Neiheisel, 2019).

We suspect that one of the more important ramifications of these changes to organizational religion is the decline of religious authority, which had thrived when boundaries between religious groups were robust—Catholics had to remain Catholics. But with a decline in those bounds, people began switching and religion began to restructure (Wuthnow, 1988; see also Compton, 2020). Many researchers talk about religious authority, but few have attempted to study it directly (see, e.g., Burge & Djupe, 2015, 2022; Campbell et al., 2014; McCauley, 2014; Williamson et al. in press). Authority should be consequential to the adoption process, but we have scant evidence, either observational or experimental, to assess that claim.

Much of the logic of this approach can be applied to meso-level organizations like interest groups (Hofrenning, 1995). We need more studies that examine the development of engagement with particular issues (Knutson, 2011), message development and limitations (Jelen, 2005), who they target with which message (see Wilson & Djupe, 2020), and with what effect (e.g., Djupe & Conger, 2012; Wallsten & Nteta, 2016). We know even less about reception and adoption of messages from religious interest groups than we do from congregations.

In closing, we feel compelled to note that the above-described religious communication approach, while a fairly radical departure from understandings of the nexus between religion and politics that are rooted in the ethnoreligious model, comports well with long-standing approaches to studying politics that have recognized that the messages members of the public

hear and internalize can (and do) shape their political behavior. Since at least the publication of Zaller's *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1992), political scientists have understood the process of opinion formation as one that involves both elite communication and a mass response. As a result, a great deal of attention has been paid over the last several decades to developing and refining techniques to pair detailed information on elite messaging with measures of mass exposure, as conditioned by features of both senders and receivers. This focus is most prominently on display in the context of work on political campaigns (e.g., Sides & Karch, 2008; Vavreck, 2009), but it is operative in research on the correlates of public opinion more generally. In many ways, the turn toward experimental work in the discipline has heralded a shift toward "taking communication seriously" now that it is possible to ensure exposure to campaign messages and other appeals. To the considerable credit of the early pioneers in this field, the focus on religious belonging implicitly placed communicative processes at the core of their endeavor, but it assumed a hierarchical messaging structure that existed only in the most idealized representations of the American religious ecosystem. Our charge as social scientists, however, is to describe the world as we encounter it, not in ways that are merely convenient given the particular tools at our disposal. It is for this reason that we see a bright future for an approach to the study of religion and politics that is more comfortable dealing with the vast variation in how religious communities engage with their values and political choices.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Paul A. Djupe, Data for Political Research, Denison University, 100 W. College St., Granville, OH 43023, USA. E-mail: pdjupe@gmail.com

## REFERENCES

Banerjee, N. (2008). *Americans change faiths at rising rate, report finds*. https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/25/us/25cnd-religion.html

Beyerlein, K., & Chaves, M. (2003). The political activities of religious congregations in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42*(2), 229–246.

Beyerlein, K., & Chaves, M. (2020). The political mobilization of America's congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 59*(4), 663–674.

Bjarnason, T., & Welch, M. R. (2004). Father knows best: Parishes, Priests, and American Catholic parishioners' attitudes toward capital punishment. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 43,* 103–118.

Bloom, P. B.-N., & Arikan, G. (2012). Priming religious belief and religious social behavior affects support for democracy. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 25*(3), 368–382.

Bloom, P. B.-N., Arikan, G., & Courtemanche, M. (2015). Religious social identity, religious belief, and anti-immigration sentiment. *American Political Science Review, 109*(2), 203–221.

Boas, T. C., & Smith, A. E. (2015). Religion and the Latin American voter. In R. E. Carlin, M. Singer, & E. Zechmeister (Eds.), *The Latin American voter* (pp. 99–121). University of Michigan Press.

Boussalis, C., Coan, T. G., & Holman, M. R. (2021). Political speech in religious sermons. *Politics and Religion, 14*(2), 241–268.

Brewer, M. D., Kersh, R., & Eric Petersen, R. (2003). Assessing conventional wisdom about religion and politics: A preliminary view from the pews. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42*(1), 125–136.

Bromley, D. G. (Ed.). (1988). *Falling from the faith: Causes and consequences of religious apostasy*. Sage.

Brooke, S., Chouhoud, Y., & Hoffman, M. (in press). The Friday effect: How communal religious practice heightens exclusionary attitudes. *British Journal of Political Science*. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000138

Brown, R. K. (2010). Religion, economic concerns, and African American immigration attitudes. *Review of Religious Research, 52*(2), 146–158.

Brown, R. K. (2011). Religion, political discourse, and activism among varying racial/ethnic groups in America. *Review for Religious Research, 53*(3), 301–322.

Brown, R. E., Brown, R. K., & Blase, A. W. (2013). Religion and military policy attitudes in America. *Review of Religious Research, 55*(4), 573–595.

Brown, R. K., Kaiser, A., Rush, L., & Brown, R. E. (2017). Immigrant-conscious congregations: Race, ethnicity, and the rejection of anti-immigrant frames. *Politics and Religion, 10*(4), 887–905.

Burge, R. P., & Djupe, P. A. (2015). Emergent Church practices in America: Inclusion and deliberation in American congregations. *Review of Religious Research, 57*(1), 1–23.

Burge, R. P., & Djupe, P. A. (2022). Religious authority in a democratic society: Clergy and citizen evidence from a new measure. *Politics & Religion, 15*(1), 169–196.

Butler, D. M., & Tavits, M. (2017). Does the Hijab increase representatives' perceptions of social distance? *Journal of Politics, 79*(2), 727–731.

Cadge, W., Girouard, J., Olson, L. R., & Lylerohr, M. (2012). Uncertainty in clergy's perspectives on homosexuality: A research note. *Review of Religious Research, 54*(3), 371–387.

Calfano, B. R. (2009). Choosing constituent cues: Reference group influence on clergy political speech. *Social Science Quarterly, 90*(1), 88–102.

Calfano, B. R., & Neiheisel, J. R. (2009). Forums for controversy: Understanding clergy-led deliberation among the faithful. *Journal of Church and State, 51*(4), 427–441.

Calfano, B. R., & Djupe, P. A. (2015). Going to extremes: The conditional response to proposed constitutional violations by religious elites. In P. A. Djupe (Ed.), *Religion and political tolerance in America: Advances in the state of the art* (pp. 200–210). Temple University Press.

Calfano, B. R., & Oldmixon, E. A. (2016). Remembering to ask the Boss: Priming and the dynamics of priest reliance on bishop cues. *Religions, 7*(3), 21.

Calhoun-Brown, A. (1996). African-American churches and political mobilization: The psychological impact of organizational resources. *Journal of Politics, 58,* 935–953.

Calhoun-Brown, A. (1998). While marching to Zion: Otherworldliness and racial empowerment in the Black community. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 37*(3), 427–439.

Calhoun-Brown, A. (2010). This far by faith? Religion, gender, and efficacy. In A. Wolfe & I. Katznelson (Eds.), *Religion and democracy in the United States: Danger or opportunity* (pp. 279–307). Russell Sage.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. University of Chicago Press.

Campbell, D. E., Green, J. C., & Monson, J. Q. (2014). *Seeking the promised land: Mormons and American politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, D. E., Layman, G. C., & Green, J. C. (2020). *Secular surge: A new fault line in American politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, D. E., & Monson, J. Q. (2008). The religion card: Gay marriage and the 2004 presidential election. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 72,* 399–419.

Campbell, E. Q., & Pettigrew, T. F. (1959). *Christians in racial crisis: A study of Littlerock's Ministry*. Public Affairs Press.

Chhibber, P., & Sekhon, J. S. (2014). *The asymmetric role of religious appeals in India*. Unpublished manuscript.

Ciftci, S. (2022). *Islam, justice and democracy*. Temple University Press.

Ciftci, S., Wuthrich, F. M., & Shamaileh, A. (2022). *Beyond piety and politics: Religion, social relations, and public preferences in the Middle East and North Africa*. Indiana University Press.

Compton, J. W. (2020). *The end of empathy: Why white protestants stopped loving their neighbor*. Oxford University Press.

Corda, L. N., Isaqzadeh, M., & Linardi, S. (2019). Clerics and scriptures: Experimentally disentangling the influence of religious authority in Afghanistan. *British Journal of Political Science, 49*(2), 401–419.

Dana, K., Barreto, M. A., & Oskooii, K. A. R. (2011). Mosques as American institutions: Mosque attendance, religiosity, and integration into the political system among American Muslims. *Religions, 2*(4), 504–524.

DeCanio, S. (2007). Religion and nineteenth-century voting behavior: A new look at some old data. *Journal of Politics, 69*(2), 339–350.

Djupe, P. A. (2021). Cues for the pews—Political messaging in American congregations and the decline of religious influence. In B. R. Calfano (Ed.), *Exploring the Public Effects of Religious Communication on Politics* (pp. 216–238). University of Michigan.

Djupe, P. A., Burge, R. P., & Calfano, B. R. (2016). The delegational pulpit? Clergy identifying as congregational political representatives. *Representations, 52*(1), 43–69.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2009). Justification not by faith alone: Clergy generating trust and certainty by revealing thought. *Politics & Religion, 2*(1), 1–30.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2012). The deliberative pulpit: The democratic norms and practices of the PCUSA. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 51*(1), 90–109.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2013a). *God talk: Experimenting with the religious causes of public opinion*. Temple University Press.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2013b). Religious value priming, threat, and political tolerance. *Political Research Quarterly, 66*(4), 767–779.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2013c). Divine intervention? The influence of religious values on support for U.S. interventionism. *Political Behavior, 35*(4), 643–663.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2015). The golden rule theory: The nature of clergy influence on congregational political tolerance. In P. A. Djupe (Ed.), *Religion and political tolerance in America: Advances in the state of the art* (pp. 34–50). Temple University Press.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2018). Evangelicals were on their own in the 2016 elections. In P. A. Djupe & R. L. Claassen (Eds.), *The evangelical crackup? The future of the evangelical-republican coalition* (pp. 15–31). Temple University Press.

Djupe, P. A., & Calfano, B. R. (2019). Communication dynamics in religion and political behavior. In P. A. Djupe, M. Rozell, & T. G. Jelen (Eds.), *Oxford encyclopedia of politics & religion* (pp. 209–224). Oxford University Press.

Djupe, P. A., & Conger, K. (2012). The population ecology of grassroots democracy: Christian right interest populations and citizen participation in the states. *Political Research Quarterly, 65*(4), 927–940.

Djupe, P. A., & Friesen, A. J. (2018). Moralizing to the choir: The moral foundations of American clergy. *Social Science Quarterly, 99*(2), 665–682.

Djupe, P. A., & Friesen, A. J. (Eds.). (in press). 'An epidemic on my people': Religion in the Age of COVID-19.

Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2002). The political voice of Clergy. *Journal of Politics, 64*(2), 596–609.

Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2003). *The prophetic pulpit: Clergy, churches, and communities in American politics*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2006). The resourceful believer: Generating civic skills in church. *Journal of Politics, 68*(1), 116–127.

Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2008). Politics and church: Byproduct or central mission? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 47*(1), 45–62.

Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2009). *The political influence of churches*. Cambridge University Press.

Djupe, P. A., & Grant, J. T. (2001). Religious institutions and political participation in America. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 40*(2), 303–314.

Djupe, P. A., & Gwiasda, G. W. (2010). Evangelizing the environment: Decision process effects in political persuasion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 49*(1), 73–86.

Djupe, P. A., & Hunt, P. K. (2009). Beyond the Lynn White thesis: Congregational effects on environmental concern. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 48*(4), 670–686.

Djupe, P. A., & Neiheisel, J. R. (2008). Clergy deliberation on gay rights and homosexuality. *Polity, 40*(4), 411–435.

Djupe, P. A., & Neiheisel, J. R. (2012). How religious communities affect political participation among latinos. *Social Science Quarterly, 93*(2), 333–355.

Djupe, P. A., & Neiheisel, J. R. (2019). Political mobilization in American congregations: A test of the religious economies perspective. *Politics & Religion, 12*(1), 123–152.

Djupe, P. A., Neiheisel, J. R., & Conger, K. H. (2018). Are the politics of the Christian right linked to state rates of the non-religious? The importance of salient controversy. *Political Research Quarterly, 71*(4), 910–922.

Djupe, P. A., Neiheisel, J. R., & Olson, L. R. (2015). Carriers of the creed: The effect of urging tolerance on persuasion. In P. A. Djupe (Ed.), *Religion and political tolerance in America: Advances in the state of the art* (pp. 183–199). Temple University Press.

Djupe, P. A., Neiheisel, J. R., & Sokhey, A. E. (2017). *How fights over Trump have led evangelicals to leave their churches*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/04/11/yes-many-voters-left-their-congregations-over-trump-so-what-else-is-new/

Djupe, P. A., Neiheisel, J. R., & Sokhey, A. E. (2018). Reconsidering the role of politics in leaving religion—The importance of affiliation. *American Journal of Political Science, 62*(1), 161–175.

Djupe, P. A., & Olson, L. R. (Eds.). (2007). *Religious interests in community conflict: Beyond the culture wars*. Baylor University Press.

Djupe, P. A., & Olson, L. R. (2013). Public deliberation about gay rights in religious contexts: commitment to deliberative norms and practice in ELCA congregations. *Journal of Public Deliberation, 9*(1) Article 1. https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.150

Djupe, P. A., & Smith, A. E. (2019). Experimentation in the study of religion and politics. In P. A. Djupe, M. Rozell, & T. G. Jelen (Eds.), *Oxford encyclopedia of politics & religion* (pp. 337–356). Oxford University Press.

Djupe, P. A., & Sokhey, A. E. (2003a). The mobilization of elite opinion: Rabbi perceptions of and responses to anti-semitism. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42*(3), 443–453.

Djupe, P. A., & Sokhey, A. E. (2003b). American rabbis in the 2000 elections. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42*(4), 563–576.

Djupe, P. A., Sokhey, A. E., & Gilbert, C. P. (2007). Present but not accounted for? Gender differences in civic resource acquisition. *American Journal of Political Science, 51*(4), 906–920.

Fetzer, J. S. (2001). Shaping pacifism: The role of the local anabaptist pastor. In S. E. S. Crawford & L. R. Olson (Eds.), *Christian clergy in American politics* (pp. 177–187). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Fowler, J. H., & Dawes, C. T. (2008). Two genes predict voter turnout. *Journal of Politics, 70*(3), 579–594.

Freedman, M. (2019). Fighting from the pulpit: Religious leaders and violent conflict in Israel. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 63*(10), 2262–2288.

Friesen, A. J., & Djupe, P. A. (2017). Conscientious women under the stained glass ceiling: The dispositional conditions of institutional treatment on civic engagement. *Politics & Gender, 13*(1), 57–80.

Gilbert, C. P. (1993). *The impact of churches on political behavior*. Greenwood Press.

Gilliland, C. C. (2021). *Clergy voices: How conflicts over race and sexuality in America are framed from the pulpit*. (PhD dissertation. UNC, Chapel Hill.

Glock, C. Y., & Stark, R. (1965). *Religion and society in tension*. Rand McNally & Company.

Green, J. C., & Guth, J. L. (1993). From lambs to sheep: Denominational change and political behavior. In D. C. Leege & L. A. Kellstedt (Eds.), *Rediscovering the religious factor in American politics* (pp. 100–120). M. E. Sharpe.

Gusfield, J. R. (1963). *Symbolic crusade: status politics and the American temperance movement*. University of Illinois Press.

Guth, J. L. (1996). The bully pulpit: Southern baptist clergy and political activism 1980–1992. In J. C. Green, J. L. Guth, C. E. Smidt, & L. A. Kellstedt (Eds.), *Religion and the culture wars: Dispatches from the front* (pp. 146–173). Rowman & Littlefield.

Guth, J. L., Green, J. C., Smidt, C. E., Kellstedt, L. A., & Poloma, M. (1997). *The bully pulpit: The politics of protestant clergy*. University of Kansas Press.

Guth, J. L., Jelen, T. G., Kellstedt, L. A., Smidt, C. E., & Wald, K. D. (1988). The politics of religion in America: Issues for investigation. *American Politics Quarterly, 16*(3), 357–397.

Guth, J. L., & Smidt, C. E. (2019). *Protestant clergy in the 2016 presidential election*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Austin TX.

Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (1996). *Democracy and disagreement*. Belknap.

Hadden, J. K. (1969). *The gathering storm in the churches*. Doubleday.

Haidt, J., & Joseph, C. (2004). Intuitive ethics: How innately prepared intuitions generate culturally variable virtues. *Daedalus, 133*(4), 55–66.

Harris, F. C. (1994). Something within: Religion as a mobilizer of African-American political activism. *Journal of Politics, 56*(1), 42–68.

Hofrenning, D. J. (1995). *In Washington but not of it: The prophetic politics of religious lobbyists*. Temple University Press.

Holman, M. R., & Shockley, K. (2017). Messages from above: Conflict and convergence of messages to the catholic voter from the catholic church hierarchy. *Politics and Religion, 10,* 840–861.

Hout, M., & Fischer, C. S. (2002). Why more Americans have no religious preference: Politics and generations. *American Sociological Review, 67*(2), 165–190.

Hsiung, B. O., & Djupe, P. A. (2019). Religion and the extension of trust. *Political Behavior, 41*(3), 609–631.

Jackson, J. S., Khari Brown, R., & Kaiser, A. (2014). Worship discourse and White race-based policy attitudes. *Review of Religious Research, 56*(2), 291–312.

Jamal, A. (2005). The political participation and engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque involvement and group consciousness. *American Politics Research, 33*(4), 521–544.

Jelen, T. G. (1992). Political Christianity: A contextual analysis. *American Journal of Political Science, 36,* 692–714.

Jelen, T. G. (2005). Political esperanto: Rhetorical resources and limitations of the Christian right in the United States. *Sociology of Religion, 66,* 303–321.

Johnson, M. K., Rowatt, W. C., & LaBouff, J. (2010). Priming Christian religious concepts increases racial prejudice. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 1*(2), 119–126.

Keele, L., & Minozzi, W. (2013). How much is Minnesota like Wisconsin? Assumptions and counterfactuals in causal inference with observational data. *Political Analysis, 21*(2), 193–216.

Kellstedt, L. A., & Green, J. C. (1993). Knowing god's many people: Denominational preference and political behavior. In D. C. Leege & L. A. Kellstedt (Eds.), *Rediscovering the religious factor in American politics* (pp. 53–71). M. E. Sharpe.

Kellstedt, L. A., Green, J. C., Guth, J. L., & Smidt, C. E. (1996). Grasping the essentials: The social embodiment of religion and political behavior. In J. C. Green, J. L. Guth, C. E. Smidt, & L. A. Kellstedt (Eds.), *Religion and the culture wars: Dispatches from the front* (pp. 174–192). Rowman & Littlefield.

Kleppner, P. (1970). *The cross of culture: A social analysis of midwestern politics, 1850–1900*. Free Press.

Knoll, B. R., & Bolin, C. J. (2019). Religious communication and persuasion. In P. A. Djupe, M. Rozell, & T. G. Jelen (Eds.), *Oxford encyclopedia of politics & religion* (pp. 1118–1138). Oxford University Press.

Knutson, K. E. (2011). Breaking the chains?: Constraint and the political rhetoric of religious interest groups. *Politics and Religion, 4*(2), 312–337.

Kotler-Berkowitz, L. (2021). Political activity in American synagogues. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion, 17,* 1–28.

Kurtzleben, D. (2016). *POLL: White evangelicals have warmed to politicians who commit 'immoral' acts*. https://www.npr.org/2016/10/23/498890836/poll-white-evangelicals-have-warmed-to-politicians-who-commit-immoral-acts

Layman, G. (2001). *The great divide: Religious and cultural conflict in american party politics*. Columbia University Press.

Leege, D. C. (1988). Catholics and the civic order: Parish participation, politics, and civic participation. *The Review of Politics, 50,* 704–737.

Lewis, A. R., Blake, W. D., Mockabee, S. T., & Friesen, A. (2020). American constitutional faith and the politics of hermeneutics. *Politics and Religion, 13*(1), 57–88.

Livny, A. (2020). *Trust and the Islamic advantage*. Cambridge University Press.

Margolis, M. F. (2018a). *From politics to the pews: How partisanship and the political environment shape religious identity*. University of Chicago Press.

Margolis, M. (2018b). How far does social group influence reach? Identities, elites, and immigration attitudes. *Journal of Politics, 80*(3), 772–785.

Martin, S. (2021). *Decoding the digital church: Evangelical storytelling and the election of Donald J. Trump*. University of Alabama Press.

Mason, L. (2018). *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press.

McAdams, E., & Lance, J. E. (2013). Religion's impact on the divergent political attitudes of evangelical protestants in the U.S. and Brazil. *Politics and Religion, 6*(3), 483–511.

McCauley, J. F. (2014). Pentecostalism as an informal political institution: Experimental evidence from Ghana. *Politics and Religion, 7*(4), 761–787.

McClendon, G. (2019). Religious communication and the effects of priming. In P. A. Djupe, M. Rozell, & T. G. Jelen (Eds.), *Oxford encyclopedia of politics & religion* (pp. 1139–1153). Oxford University Press.

McClendon, G., & Riedl, R. B. (2015). Religion as a stimulant of political participation: Experimental evidence from Nairobi, Kenya. *Journal of Politics, 77*(4), 1045–1057.

McClendon, G., & Riedl, R. B. (2016). Individualism and empowerment in pentecostal sermons: New evidence from Nairobi, Kenya. *African Affairs, 115*(458), 119–144.

McClendon, G., & Riedl, R. B. (2021). Using sermons to study religions' influence on political behavior. *Comparative Political Studies, 54*(5), 779–822.

McCrummen, S. (2021, July 11). Mercy Culture Church, An American Kingdom. *The Washington Post*.

McGuire, W. J. (1961). Resistance to persuasion conferred by active and passive prior refutation of the same and alternative counterarguments. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 63*(2), 326–332.

McKenzie, B. D. (2001). Self-selection, church attendance, and local civic participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 40*(3), 479–488.

McKenzie, B. D. (2004). Religious social networks, indirect mobilization, and African-American political participation. *Political Research Quarterly, 57*(4), 621–632.

McRoberts, O. M. (2003). *Streets of glory: Church and community in a black urban neighborhood*. University of Chicago Press.

Moutselos, M. (2020). Praying on Friday, voting on Sunday? Mosque attendance and voter turnout in three west european democracies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 46*(11), 2275–2292.

Ndukwe, T. C. (2015). The role of the Church and Mosque in the political mobilization of Black African immigrants in Finland at the municipal level. *Politics, Religion, & Ideology, 16*(4), 391–410.

Neiheisel, J. R., & Djupe, P. A. (2008). Intraorganizational constraints on churches' public witness. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 47*(3), 427–441.

Neiheisel, J. R., Djupe, P. A., & Sokhey, A. E. (2009). Veni, vidi, disseri: Churches and the promise of democratic deliberation. *American Politics Research, 37*(4), 614–643.

Nteta, T. M., & Wallsten, K. J. (2012). Preaching to the Choir? Religious leaders and American opinion on immigration reform. *Social Science Quarterly, 93*(4), 891–910.

Olson, L. R. (2000). *Filled with spirit and power: Protestant clergy in politics*. State University of New York Press.

Olson, L. R., Crawford, S. E. S., & Deckman, M. M. (2005). *Women with a mission: Religion, gender, and the politics of women clergy*. University of Alabama Press.

Olson, L. R., & Green, J. C. (2006). Introduction—'Gapology' and the presidential vote. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 39*(3), 443–446.

Olson, S. F., & Quezada, E. (in press). Political content in sermons and changes in the Trump era. In A. E. Sokhey & P. A. Djupe (Eds.), *Trump and the transformation of religion and politics*.

Oskooii, K. A. R., & Dana, K. (2017). Mosques in Great Britain: The impact of Mosque attendance on political behavior and civic engagement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44*(9), 1479–1505.

Owens, M. L. (2007). *God and government in the Ghetto: The politics of Church-State Collaboration in Black America*. University of Chicago Press.

Patrikios, S. (2008). American Republican religion? Disentangling the causal link between religion and politics in the US. *Political Behavior, 30,* 367–389.

Peterson, S. A. (1992). Church participation and political participation: The spillover effect. *American Politics Quarterly, 20,* 123–139.

Pew Forum. (2021). *Pastors often discussed election, pandemic and racism in fall of 2020*. https://www.pewforum.org/2021/07/08/pastors-often-discussed-election-pandemic-and-racism-in-fall-of-2020/

Philpott, D. (2007). Explaining the political ambivalence of religion. *American Political Science Review, 101*(3), 505–525.

Pope, L. (1942). *Millhands and preachers*. Yale University Press.

Putnam, R. D., & Campbell, D. E. (2010). *American Grace: How religion divides and Unites us*. Simon and Schuster.

Quinley, H. E. (1974). *The prophetic clergy: Social activism among protestant ministers*. Wiley.

Schaffer, J., Sokhey, A. E., & Djupe, P. A. (2015). The religious economy of political tolerance. In P. A. Djupe (Ed.), *Religion and political tolerance in America: Advances in the state of the art* (pp. 151–164). Temple University Press.

Schmidt, E. R. (2018). The influence of religious-political sophistication on U.S. public opinion. *Political Behavior, 40*(1), 21–53.

Schwadel, P. (2005). Individual, congregational, and denominational effects on church members' civic participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 44*(2), 159–171.

Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2007). God is watching you: Priming God concepts increases prosocial behavior in an anonymous economic game. *Psychological Science, 18*(9), 803–809.

Shariff, A. F., Willard, A. K., Andersen, T., & Norenzayan, A. (2016). Religious priming: A meta-analysis with a focus on prosociality. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 20*(1), 27–48.

Sherkat, D. E. (2014). *Changing faith: The dynamics and consequences of Americans' shifting religious identities*. NYU Press.

Sherkat, D. E., & Wilson, J. (1995). Preferences, constraints, and choices in religious markets: An examination of religious switching and apostasy. *Social Forces, 73*(3), 993–1026.

Sides, J., & Karch, A. (2008). Messages that mobilize? Issue publics and the content of campaign advertising. *Journal of Politics, 70*(2), 466–476.

Smidt, C. E. (2016). *Pastors and public life: The changing face of American protestant clergy*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, A. E. (2016). When clergy are threatened: Catholic and protestant leaders and political activism in Brazil. *Politics and Religion, 9*(3), 431–455.

Smith, A. E. (2019). *Religion and Brazilian democracy: Mobilizing the people of God*. Cambridge University Press.

Smith, G. A. (2008). *Politics in the Parish: The political influence of Catholic priests*. Georgetown University Press.

Sokhey, A. E. (2007). From riots to reconciliation: The religious interests involved in healing Cincinnati after racial unrest. In P. A. Djupe & L. R. Olson (Eds.), *Religious interests in community conflict: Beyond the culture wars* (pp. 197–228). Baylor University Press.

Sokhey, A. E., & Djupe, P. A. (2006). Rabbi engagement with the peace process in the Middle East. *Social Science Quarterly, 87*(4), 903–923.

Stark, R., & Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of faith: Explaining the human side of religion*. University of California Press.

Stark, R., Foster, B. D., Glock, C. Y., & Quinley, H. (1971). *Wayward Shepherds: Prejudice and the protestant clergy*. Harper and Row.

Stump, R. W. (1986). Regional variation in the determinants of religious participation. *Review of Religious Research, 27*(3), 208–225.

Sullins, D. P. (2006). Gender and religion: Deconstructing universality, constructing complexity. *American Journal of Sociology, 112*(3), 838–880.

de Tocqueville, A. (1994 [1840]). *Democracy in America*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Trueheart, C. (1996). Welcome to the next Church. *The Atlantic Monthly, 278*(2), 37–58.

Vandermeer, P. R. (1981). Religion, society, and politics: A classification of American religious groups. *Social Science History, 5,* 3–24.

Vavreck, L. (2009). *The message matters: The economy and presidential campaigns*. Princeton University Press.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.

Verghese, A. (2020). Taking other religions seriously: A comparative survey of hindus in India. *Politics & Religion, 13*(3), 604–638.

Wald, K. D. (2019). *The foundations of American Jewish liberalism*. Cambridge University Press.

Wald, K. D., Owen, D., & Hill, S. (1988). Churches as political communities. *American Political Science Review, 82,* 531–548.

Wald, K. D., Owen, D., & Hill, S. (1990). Political cohesion in churches. *Journal of Politics, 52*(1), 197–215.

Wallsten, K., & Nteta, T. M. (2016). For you were strangers in the land of Egypt: Clergy, religiosity, and public opinion toward immigration reform in the United States. *Politics & Religion, 9,* 566–604.

Welch, M. R., Leege, D. C., Wald, K. D., & Kellstedt, L. A. (1993). Are the sheep hearing the Shepherds? Cue perceptions, congregational responses, and political communication processes. In D. C. Leege & L. A. Kellstedt (Eds.), *Rediscovering the religious factor in American politics* (pp. 235–254). M. E. Sharpe.

Westfall, A. (2019). Mosque involvement and political engagement in the United States. *Politics and Religion, 12,* 678–709.

Westfall, A., & Russell, Ö. Ç. (2019). The political effects of religious cues. In P. A. Djupe, M. Rozell, & T. G. Jelen (Eds.), *Oxford encyclopedia of politics & religion* (pp. 922–944). Oxford University Press.

Westfall, A., Russell, Ö. Ç., Wellborne, B., & Tobin, S. (2017). Islamic headcovering and political engagement: The power of social networks. *Politics and Religion, 10*(1), 3–30.

Wilcox, C., & Robinson, C. (2007). Parties, prayers, and preachers: The evolving nature of political and religious mobilization. In J. M. Wilson (Ed.), *From pews to polling places: Faith and politics in the American religious Mosaic* (pp. 1–28). Georgetown University Press.

Williamson, S., Yildirim, A. K., Grewal, S., & Kuenkler, M. (in press). Preaching politics: How politicization undermines religious authority in the middle east. *British Journal of Political Science*.

Wilson, A. R., & Djupe, P. A. (2020). Communicating in good faith? Dynamics of the Christian right agenda. *Politics & Religion, 13*(2), 385–414.

Wood, J. R., & Zald, M. N. (1966). Aspects of racial integration in the methodist Church: Sources of resistance to organizational policy. *Social Forces, 45*(2), 255–265.

Wuthnow, R. (1988). *The restructuring of American religion*. Princeton University Press.

Wuthnow, R. (1993). *Sharing the journey: Support groups & the quest for a new community*. Free Press.

Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge University Press.