CIVIC CONGREGATIONS:
CONGREGATIONAL DYNAMICS AND INDIVIDUAL CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract

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Participation in U.S. civic life is influenced by individual religiosity, and many congregations are corporately active in their communities. Most explanations of the religion and civic life relationship focus on a sole level of analysis, but the cross level relationship between congregations and their members’ public participation is more pertinent to general sociological theory. Taking congregations and members as instances of stable collectives and active individuals, this dissertation addresses questions about the relation of social groups and members, and the connection between religion and public participation. I operationalize civic involvement from an action theory perspective and call for a more general understanding of civic engagement as collectively sustained, goal oriented, civic culture maintaining social action. Theorizing congregations as social networks embedded in pre-existing and emergent cultural environments, I use Hierarchical Non-Linear Modeling to test cross level hypotheses about independent congregational effects on individual voluntary association, community organizing, and evangelism. Findings demonstrate the presence of contextual effects, and support expectations about the role of congregational culture and social networks as influential of
individual action. Specifically, those attending congregations affiliated with Mainline Congregations are more likely to report voluntary association membership while those at Conservative Protestant congregations are more likely to report evangelism. A network approach to congregations proves useful, and those at congregations with dense networks are less likely to report standard forms of civic involvement, but more likely to report evangelism. If a congregation’s leader is active in the local community, then those who attend are also more active in civic affairs. Finally, congregational education heterogeneity decreases the odds of public participation, while race heterogeneity increases the odds of individual evangelism. The dissertation calls specifically for further consideration of the relationship between congregations and individual civic participation, and generally for common use of contextual modeling to adequately portray the role of religion in social life.
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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

Action is fundamentally social and embedded within a system of interaction. Images of the lone-gunman, the Good Samaritan, or the isolated and brilliant artist are common descriptions of the events and actors that make up social life, but sociology complicates our understanding of action by placing events and people within a web of relationships. For example, Howard Becker (1982) elegantly describes the social world of an artist who depends upon a number of relationships that make art possible. Art, if understood as the work of a gifted genius, is mystical. Art, from the viewpoint of a sociologist, is an occupation supported by a division of labor, and is dependent upon the cooperation of artists, patrons, audiences, and many others. The interaction of its constituent actors makes up the ‘art world,’ and art is what the art world defines as art.

Just as Becker describes art, individual action of any form can never be isolated from the social world in which it takes place. This radically social ontology makes clear that familiar distinctions such as agent and structure are purely analytical constructs devised to help clarify the complexity of social life. While they are primary tools of the sociological trade, the uncritical use of such distinctions risks the privilege of one element and the neglect of the other. This project proceeds from an initial assumption:
agents and collectives, together, are the inseparable, empirical objects that make up society.

1.2 Civic Action and Religious Collectives

America has long been noted for the civic participation of its citizens. Max Weber referred to the country as the “association land par-excellence,” and Alexis de Tocqueville keenly observed the propensity of ordinary citizens participate in public life. While, today, some observers write of declining sociability and an apathetic civil society, the United States continues to stand out, relative to many other countries, in terms of citizen participation in public life (Curtis, Baer, and Grabb 2001). The reasons behind America’s active civic arena have long been of interest to scholars.

Tocqueville, perhaps the earliest observer of American civil society, pointed to the country’s religious life when explaining its active civic arena. Christianity in the United States, according to Tocqueville, was of a unique form, “a form of Christianity which I cannot better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion.” Modern day observers continue to see a connection between religion and public life. Robert Putnam, known for his pessimistic opinions about American civic engagement, claims that religious participation is “the single most important repository of social capital in America” (2000: 66). The relationship between religiosity and civic involvement is many faceted and stable in the United States, and empirical verification is frequent (Peterson 1992; Harris 1999; Smidt 1999; McKenzie 2001; Lam 2002; Brown and Brown 2003; Wuthnow 2004a; Tsitsos 2003; Loveland et. al. 2005; Ecklund 2005).
The radically social ontology argued for above directs attention to the collective nature of religious and civic life. Democratic societies are built on the cooperative spirit of active citizens, and religious life is centered on a community of believers. The primary collective of American religious life, the congregation, is the focus of this dissertation. While the relationship between individual religiosity and civic engagement is well documented, and the connections between religious and political organizations are frequently noted, a congregationally oriented examination of the civic participation of congregation members has not occurred. Such an analysis is the primary substantive contribution of this dissertation.

1.3 The Project’s Necessity

Congregations are the foundation of U.S. religion. While private devotion is undoubtedly important (Lam 2002), and denominational structures persist (Ammerman 1990), it is in the collective, relational setting of congregational life where U.S. religion receives its daily bread (Ammerman 1997; Wuthnow 1994). Congregations are primarily houses of worship with a defining interest is the satisfaction of members’ spiritual appetite, but they are undeniably involved in their communities (Beyerlein and Chaves 2003; Chaves 2004; Becker 1999; Becker and Dhingra 2001). For example, congregations provide social services to their members and the wider community (Ammerman 2005), enter into community debates as corporate political actors (Demerath and Williams 1992), and often serve communities with schools (Chaves 2004). However, the relationship between congregations, as organizations, and communities is a limited measure of the overall civic involvement resulting from congregational sources.
If a congregation has a formal connection to its community through a congregational or denominational program, or a local inter-congregational council, the work, the action, is realized in the individuals who make up a congregation’s participants. Further, congregation members are often involved in their communities independently of the congregation’s formal programs, but congregational dynamics impact these seemingly independent acts nonetheless (Patillo-McCoy 1998).

As such, the degree to which congregations serve civic life cannot be fully understood by simply taking the congregation as the unit of analysis. At the same time, while individuals do the formal and informal civic work of congregations, their personal activity cannot be understood devoid of the collective congregational forces it is embedded within. The congregational factors may be explicit, as in institutional (Morris 1984; Demerath and Williams 1992) or network driven (McAdam and Paulsen 1993) opportunities for civic involvement, or implicit, as in symbolic sustenance for activism (Smith 1996a, 1996b) or in the cultivation of general strategies of social action (Swidler 1986; Patillo-McCoy 1998).

Individual religiosity is associated with civic life (Lam 2002; Brewer, Kersh, and Peterson 2003; Loveland et. al. 2005), and congregations, as houses of worship, are essential to the maintenance of individual religiosity (Finke and Stark 1992). Emile Durkheim’s keenest insight was that “religion is an eminently social thing” (1995: 9), and congregations are the most explicitly social manifestation of the religious impulse. A complete picture of how religion works in public life, therefore, requires appropriate attention to the collective phenomena of congregations and how a congregation’s social characteristics matter to the civic involvement of its members. Beyond the substantive
questions about religion and civic participation, this project will also speak to general questions about durable collectives and individual action. This basic question is of interest to sociologists regardless of their sub-discipline, but the empirical findings of the project will be of particular value to those interested in generating a general multilevel theory of action.

1.4 Religious Context and Public Life

Of course, some researchers have looked at the relationship between churches and public life. Anna Greenberg (2000) argues that churches serve as a connecting point between personal and private life, stating that, “churches occupy this position because they are political institutions, serving as sources of political information, opportunities, resources, and incentives to engage the political process. At the same time, religious institutions are connected in important ways to the local community and the state, which makes them important locations of political empowerment” (2000: 378). It is the church’s connection to the community, and the individual’s church involvement, that makes the civic skills learned in church valuable. Greenberg (2000) cites instances of ministers presenting political issues in sermons, allowing political groups access to the congregation, and reminding church members of civic duties.

Recent statistical evidence suggests Greenberg’s ideas are generalizable. In fact, congregations are generally more politically active then other nonpolitical voluntary associations (Beyerlein and Chaves 2003). Findings from the National Congregations Study tell us the kinds of activities congregations tend to be involved in. The most frequent political activity of congregations is to tell members about opportunities to get
involved in activism, and the second most reported activity was distributing voter guides. A little less than 30% of congregations told people about opportunities to get involved, while about 17% distributed voter guides. Between 4% and 9% organized small groups for the following purposes: to organize or participate in a march or demonstration, hold political discussion, voter registration, or to lobby elected officials. Four percent of the congregations reported being visited by a candidate for a political office. In all, 41% of the congregations reported at least one of the activities.

The best example of religion and politics intersecting at the organizational level comes from Morris (1984). Tracing the origins of the civil rights movement, Morris argues that the black church served as the movement’s institutional center. A potent combination of charismatic leadership, material, and human resources, the church was the organized framework of the black community. In its pastors, the black church provided trained leadership who could rely on the laity’s communal allegiance to the most self-sufficient institution of African American social life.

Similarly, the Central America Peace Movement of the 1980s relied on religious organizations (Smith, 1996b). Groups like Sanctuary, Witness for Peace, and Pledge of Resistance served as feeder groups for the movement by providing willing participants, and at the same time provided the necessary organizational infrastructure. Further, each of these instances also point to the power of religious organizations to take advantage of moral commitments. Religious organizations, then, have great potential to connect religious people with opportunities to get involved.
1.5 Linking Contexts to People

Congregations are involved in politics, and we know that religious people are involved in politics. The missing theoretical step is to demonstrate that contextual factors of congregations influence the behavior of individuals. While there is little research showing direct links between religious context and individual political behavior, there is a body of literature demonstrating a link between context and attitudes.

Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox (1993) looked for the presence of contextual religious effects on individual abortion attitudes. To do so, they used an aggregate measure of the number of Catholics living in a state. They found that, net of significant individual level effects, the percent Catholic in a state had a liberalizing effect on the abortion attitudes of those living in areas with greater numbers of Catholics. Jelen (1992) showed that mean congregational conservatism predicted support for public figures. Examining Midwestern Protestant congregations, he found congregational effects to be important antecedents of individuals’ political attitudes, above and beyond a spate of individual level attributes.

Some have examined, from a social psychological perspective, the nature of congregations as collectivities of like minded people. Wald, Owen and Hill Jr. (1988) demonstrate a relationship between congregational theology, individual theology and political attitudes, such that conservative congregational theologies impact the individual’s political views in a conservative direction. Churches are contexts within which political attitudes are created and reinforced through “associations of individuals bound by affective ties and regular social interaction” (Wald, Owen and Hill Jr 1988: 523). The authors stress the importance of recognizing the content of religious values,
citing historical developments such as liberation theology, Christian socialism, and the social gospel to demonstrate the potentially disruptive nature of theological understandings.

Huckfeldt, Plutzer and Sprague (1993) make the point that individuals live their lives in multiple overlapping social contexts. One of the contexts they consider in the religious congregation, finding that the mean attitudes of fellow congregation members about abortion influence the abortion attitudes of the respondent. The authors disentangle the relationship between personal preference and contextual influence. In other words, it can be argued that people who attend a congregation where pro-life attitudes dominate choose to attend such a congregation because of their own pro-life preferences. However, Huckfeldt, Plutzer and Sprague find a statistical interaction between individual attendance and congregational attitudes, such that those who attend pro-life churches more frequently hold stronger pro-life attitudes than those who attend the same churches less often. In sum, church members “make locational choices on rational grounds, but in the process they also define – even if indirectly and unintentionally – the dimensions of their social experience” (Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague 1993: 380). The authors make a strong case that congregations influence the political attitudes of individuals, and argue that the contextual effects in churches are stronger than that of neighborhoods.

The current project follows from the larger body of research about context and individual attitudes and behaviors, and also the work on religion and political life. The analysis serves primarily as an empirical test of existing theory of the general macro micro link, while intending to advance theory and knowledge about the religion and politics relationship.
1.6 Plan of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 outlines a theory of individual civic involvement grounded in the culture and network structures of congregations. Chapter 3 describes hierarchical non-linear modeling and the data used to test the theory’s propositions. Chapter 4 examines an individual level model of civic engagement before demonstrating the presence of contextual variation. Chapter 5 examines how congregational culture and network characteristics impact standard forms of civic involvement, voluntary association and community activism. Chapter 6 posits evangelism as a form of civic involvement from a Christian perspective and demonstrates that characteristics common to all congregations impact the activity. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes what the dissertation can say about congregations and civic life, more general sociological questions about the embeddedness of individual action, and suggests avenues for future research.
CHAPTER 2

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I lay out the theoretical model of the relationship between congregations and individual civic engagement. Before doing so, I discuss the place of my dissertation within the sociology of religion and sociology in general. I then provide an overview of the basic concepts and address epistemological issues related to the systematic connection of the micro and macro characteristics of social life. The project is designed to empirically explore questions about congregations and churchgoer civic engagement as a way to address a broader theoretical interest in the reflexive relationship of groups and individuals. In this regard, I take into account not only the standard individual level factors known to be associated with civic engagement, but also the actor’s congregational ties and the congregational and religious tradition settings within which these relationships are embedded.

2.2 Context and the Sociology of Religion

In the sociology of religion, explicit hypotheses about the relationship between individuals and groups, and statistical tests meant to demonstrate the mediating role of the collective have been rare. Most analysts are content to use individual level measures of personal identification with these social collectives, for example Evangelical
Protestantism, to capture collective variation. Whether it is implicit or explicit, methodological individualism in the sociology of religion is perhaps surprising given the primacy placed on the collective in many theoretical statements about religion and social life. The individual level bias of the sociology of religion is less the result of theoretical shortcomings, and more reflective of the methodological individualism of sociology as a whole.

This individualism, in turn, rests on the popularity of micro level theoretical approaches like symbolic interactionism, and the development of quantitative analysis in the 20th century. Good reviews of sociology’s methodological development are plentiful, but see Bossarte (2004) for a recent take on the issue. The ideal-typical approach to quantitative sociology is to conduct survey research on a random sample of individuals. Individual characteristics become not only the goal of measurement, but also the standard way to represent collective concepts. Said more directly, theoretical concepts that are collective in definition are operationalized in terms of individual level expressions of the characteristic. Instead of focusing on how Protestantism, as a supra individual social force, influences behavior, sociologists ask if an individual is a Protestant and use the individual identification as an indicator of exposure to the culture of Protestantism.

An example serves to illustrate a primary shortcoming of such an approach. Using multi-level modeling, Moore and Vanneman (2003) demonstrate the contextual effect of Christian Fundamentalism on gender attitudes. While a number of studies have shown that individual fundamentalism is related to conservative gender attitudes, Moore and Vanneman (2003) show that the proportion of fundamentalists in a state has an effect on the gender attitudes of state residents regardless of individual fundamentalism.
According to the authors, living in an area with a sizable proportion of fundamentalists, in this case the U.S. south, results in exposure to fundamentalist culture that, in turn, colors the attitudes of non-fundamentalists.

The study by Moore and Vanneman (2003) is one of the few in the sociology of religion to utilize contextual modeling (Bjarnason and Welch 2004; Schwadel 2002; Schwadel 2005). Undoubtedly, however, the congregational nature of U.S. religion lends itself to a multi-level perspective. Congregationalism is the defining feature of American religion, and individual religiosity in the United States is largely dependent upon the regular association of a community of believers (Stark and Finke 1992). The congregational ethic is so pervasive in American religion, that even non-Christian immigrants coming from non-congregational backgrounds commonly adopt the congregation model when organizing in the United States (Ebaugh and Chavetz 2000).

Further, a growing number of researchers have studied the ways in which congregations, as organizations, are involved in their communities. Chaves and Beyerlein (2003) outline the common types of programs connecting churches to their local environments, and demonstrate that churches are more politically engaged than other non-political organizations. Other researchers (Ammerman 2005) studied the connections between congregations and denomination structures and how these relationships impact congregational organization and outcomes. What these kinds of studies fail to do, however, is to demonstrate the impact of congregational programs, culture, and social ties on the engagement patterns of church members.

Schwadel (2005) begins to address these questions with a multilevel analysis of congregations and voluntary association membership. Employing a hierarchical linear
model to explain contextual variance in a count of voluntary memberships, Schwadel finds congregational biblical literalism and within-group social networks depress individual membership counts. Important because it recognizes the centrality of the congregation in American religion and applies an appropriate method, the individual and contextual level models in the study leave unexplored several factors, individual religious devotion and congregational heterogeneity for example, which are likely associated with civic involvement. Further, the data are drawn from only Indiana and Illinois and cover only 11 denominations. After developing a theory of the reflexive nature of congregations and attendees, the current project moves beyond the current state of knowledge of congregational impacts on individual level civic life by way of examining a wider range of individual and congregational factors and testing hypotheses with a more representative survey of American congregations.

2.3 Definitions

In paying explicit attention to the general sociological endeavor to link the micro level of individual action to the macro level of social structure, and doing so within the specific context of religious individuals embedded within congregations, this dissertation contributes not only to paradigmatic discussions of interest to all sociologists, but also to the sociology of religion by emphasizing a surprisingly understudied connection between churchgoer social behavior and their congregational environment. Before outlining a theory of congregations and individual civic involvement I define the project’s major concepts. Drawing on a range of literature, I describe the working definitions of: Religion, Culture, Congregation, and Action. As the definition of congregation relies on
both culture and religion, I begin with these and work to a conceptualization of individual action.

Sociological definitions of religion are placed into one of two general types. A functional definition portrays religion primarily as an integrative social fact. From this perspective, religion serves as the glue that holds a community of believers together and the substance of belief is secondary. A substantive definition, on the other hand, places primary emphasis on the ideational aspect of religious thought. Each perspective provides insight into what is sociologically relevant about religion - its ability to generate social organization, consolidation and elaboration, and, hence, to act as a cultural basis for observed variation at the level of individual action.

The champion of the functional approach, Durkheim claimed that religion is an “eminently collective thing,” and further, that, “religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (1995: 44). The stress in the definition is certainly on the unity of a community of believers, but Durkheim does not reject the notion of the supernatural to the degree that some have argued. In fact, a footnote to the famous paragraph shows that Durkheim felt he had previously under estimated the relevance of the “content of religious representations” (Durkheim, 1995: 44). Individual religious belief, however, is more an indicator of the community to which the believer belongs, and Durkheim believed strongly that sociologists should focus on the social structural aspects of community before devoting effort to analyzing the empirically challenging nature of individual values and behaviors.
Stark (2000) chides Durkheim’s functional approach to defining religion, stating that a definition of religion must focus primarily on belief in the supernatural. In Durkheim’s definition, the sacred does not need to be imbued with supernatural qualities, but must only be understood as sacred by a community of believers. For Stark, the supernatural, or a god, is a required element. God is understood by the religious as an active force above and beyond nature who can act independently in human affairs. Communication with god is possible, and religion is defined as the routines by which humans interact with the supernatural.

Stark, like others before him, contrasts religion with magic. Whereas magic involves sporadic, temporary manipulation of supernatural forces (gods are unnecessary), religion is built on a stable, extended exchange relationship between humans and god(s). As these exchange relationships are routinized, social structures of religious authority and organization develop. “Religious organizations are social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and supply religion to some set of individuals and to support and supervise their exchanges with a god or gods” (Stark and Finke 2000).

Instead of focusing on the differences of these two theoretical approaches, it is more helpful to recognize the similarities.

When Stark writes of routinized interaction with a god or gods, Durkheim would see a “unified system of beliefs and practices” relative to the sacred. For Durkheim, the primary focus of the sociologist should be placed on the social organization of a religious community and the behavioral outcomes of religious differentiation (i.e. Suicide). Stark, on the other hand, emphasizes belief in a god or gods and the ensuing development of exchange relationships between humans and the supernatural being. From these
foundational beliefs spring formal religious organizations, organizations Durkheim would recognize as a Church. Stark and Finke, concluding the introduction to their theory of the “micro foundations of religion,” make the following claim, “When religion is anchored in stable social groups, people are able collectively to maximize their confidence in religious explanations and in the security of otherworldly rewards, and also effectively to reinforce one another’s commitment. Put another way, as we define it, a stack of books or a few pamphlets in the library qualify as a religion, but these systems of explanations only come to life when they are embodied in collective activity” (Stark and Finke 2001: 113)

A Durkheimian approach can perhaps be faulted for failing to completely grasp the complexity of the symbiotic relationship between individual action and collective solidarity, but the micro oriented approach of Stark and Finke provides only a secondary appraisal of the importance of religious community. Nonetheless, two theories of religion that are often understood as fundamentally at odds with one another in fact speak in unison about the importance of the collective, community of believers giving life to individual religiosity. Sociologically, then, religion consists of a shared set of beliefs and practices, and a community organized around the support of said beliefs and practices.

In the early 20th century, Edward Sapir wrote of the concept of culture, “There are certain terms that have a peculiar property. Ostensibly, they mark off specific concepts, concepts that lay claim to a rigorously objective validity. In practice, they label vague terrains of thought that shift or narrow or widen with the point of view of whoso makes use of them, embracing within their gamut of significances conceptions that not only do not harmonize but are in part contradictory” (Sapir, 1924: 401). Today, many
sociologists would agree that this sentiment well describes their understandings of the culture concept.

Of course, many social theorists devote careers to developing operational conceptions of culture. A traditional understanding of culture is that of the overall worldview or values of a group, and modern theorists posit culture as the range of symbols available to a people for the purpose of expressing meaning. Each of these basic formulations capture substantial portions of what most social observers mean to signify with their use of the word. As culture is multidimensional, extracting any particular dimension risks stilting the analytical construct’s capacity to capture any of the phenomenon’s fundamentally interdependent elements. Noting this caveat, it is reasonable to make an analytical distinction between ‘culture as values’ and ‘culture as practice.’

Culture as values calls attention to the historical, traditional, predispositional nature of collective life. Social groups have access to unique myths, histories, and narratives that compose the template for their present time relationship to society at large. Subcultural identity theory and work on the social relevance of distinctive group preference structures (Smith and Emerson 1998; Sherkat 2001; Loveland 2003) each shed light on how socialized in-group versus out-group understandings impact individual social action. While such abstractions are just that in the instance of individual cognitive processes (Collins 1981), they are essential in understanding the value oriented action of members of sub-cultural groups (i.e. Latter-day Saint Temple Weddings).

Writing about questions similar to those motivating my study, Ammerman comments on how a “congregation’s situatedness within a particular religious tradition”
predisposes the congregation, as an organization, to a particular relationship with society at large (2001: 27). Patterns of congregational of social life are rooted in the history and tradition of religious families. Similarly, the argument of Steensland and colleagues (2000) draws on the historical development of denominational families in the United States to create a set of categories for empirical study of religious phenomena. Legitimizing the denominational approach, they write that “Denominations generate their own worldviews through symbols, pedagogy, and rituals” (Steensland et. al. 2000: 292). Also, referring specifically to Mainline Protestant churches, Peter J. Thuesen writes about the “logic of mainline churchliness,” which includes “a reasonable tolerance of ethical differences, a thoroughgoing commitment to ecumenical cooperation and a all embracing conception of the church’s public role” (2002: 27). Pointing out the relevance of history and tradition in shaping modern denominational stances toward public life, Thuesen traces the development of the Mainline logic through the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the American Revolution, the American Civil War and the founding of modern capitalism. Each of these arguments proposes the relevance of what can be named culture as values.

The quintessential statement of culture as practice comes from Ann Swidler who defines culture as “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life” (1986: 273). Swidler continues, these symbolic forms are the means through which “social processes of sharing modes of behavior and outlook within [a] community” (c.f. Hannerz, 1969: 184). Patillo-McCoy provides an excellent empirical application of the culture as practice approach, showing how the everyday
“rhetorical, interactional, and material tools” of black churches “establish the grounds for social action” (1998: 781). The strategies of action generated in church based interaction are available for adaptation and use in public life. Regardless of the setting of cultural elaboration, the strategies are transmutable into other spheres of social life.

Important in the definition is the final piece Swidler incorporates from the work of Hannerz, namely the emphasis on the place of culture “within a community.” Culture, as a nebulous, extant concept is difficult to explicitly connect to individual action. If culture is to be thought complicit in the decisions of actors, a link connecting the range of meaningful symbols to the actor is needed. This link is the ‘community’ Hannerz emphasizes. Through the networks of valued and trusted social ties that make up community, individuals are continuously socialized in ways that influence their personal preferences and action (Loveland 2003; Sherkat 2003).

The congregation is the primary social manifestation of religion, and is at the meeting point of culture as values and culture as practice. The face to face interaction of members facilitate familiar ways of life unique to the congregation (Patillo-McCoy 1998), but congregations are also embedded in larger traditions that predispose them to general relationships with wider society (Ammerman 2001). Congregations are the durable collectives, the organized community, in which religious individuals share their worship experience. Max Weber simply and elegantly referred to congregations as permanent associations of laymen, but they are also more than this. Mark Chaves, describes the congregation as a “social institution in which individuals who are not all religious specialists gather in physical proximity to one another, frequently and at regularly scheduled intervals, for activities and events with explicitly religious content.
and purpose, and in which there is continuity over time in the individuals who gather, the location…and the nature of activities” (2004: 1). Congregations are complex social phenomena with interpersonal, organizational, and cultural components.

Each component is distinct, but they blend to give a congregation a unique character. A congregation is composed of connections between people who voluntarily engage in interaction, and come together regularly for the purpose of religious worship. The emphasis in this definition should be placed on the connections between people. The individuals who make up a congregation are its lifeblood, but the relationships that exist between members are the congregation’s heart. Congregations, then, are not aggregates of individuals, but they are collectives of relationships. As collectives, they take on characteristics that at once are composed of and transcend both the individuals and relationships, as well as global properties that do not spring from the individuals or relationships (Lazarsfeld and Menzel 1980).

This network of relationships is embedded in an organizational and cultural context. For example, as an organization, a congregation maintains an authority structure. While denominational congregations will relate to the translocal body through either a congregational, presbyterian, or hierarchical system, what is more important for a congregation’s local civic outcomes is its internal authority system. This is the mechanism through which a congregation’s decisions are made. For example, nearly all congregations have a recognized religious leader whose position begets pragmatic authority, divine legitimation, and relational authority (Ammerman 1997). Beyond this, congregations may have a governing board consisting of lay members who assume
responsibilities such as hiring a new pastor or budgeting, and the role of lay members varies across congregations in regard to congregational planning.

Congregations also have a cultural component which includes the symbolic reservoir provided by the larger religious tradition to which the congregation belongs (in this dissertation, I focus solely on Christian congregations), and the “everyday patterns of action and interaction.” The congregational culture is both received through historical and theological development of religious traditions (Ammerman 2001 – Doing Good) and freshly lived and created by active individuals (Becker 1999). As congregation members meet frequently and regularly they maintain and create the routines of collective life. Following a standard approach, I place congregations into categories of mainline, evangelical and black Protestant, as well as Catholic. The meaningful aspects of the traditions and congregational routines relevant for an analysis of civic engagement are discussed shortly.

2.4 The Micro and Macro of Social Action

A long history of work in sociology attempts to specify the nature of human action, but for my purposes a few themes are most important. Weber argued that action must be understood in terms of the meaning attributed to it by actors. “We shall speak of action insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior…Action is social insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course” (Weber 1978). For Weber action cannot be understood without reference to the concept of relationship. Active individuals take account of the action of others, orienting their behavior in accordance. Similarly, Mead
(1934) discusses the importance of meaning and interaction while outlining his theory of gestures and the social act. When a gesture “has the same effect on the individual making it that it has on the individual to whom it is addressed” it becomes a significant symbol making possible communication and the development of social relationships (Mead 1934: 46).

Social action can only be interpreted if viewed as embedded within a social relationship, and Weber stresses that meaning is dependent upon context. The meaning sociologists seek is that attributed by a social group, not a “metaphysically true meaning” and should the members of a social group, for example a congregation, cease to attribute similar meaning to action and to fail to orient their behavior in regard to this meaning, the social group will disintegrate (Weber 1978: 27). Action, then, has two component parts – individuals and stable communities - the micro and macro are joined in the active individual.

The previous claim requires a deeper examination, and a brief comparison of the work of two contemporary action theorists helps to substantiate the claim. James Coleman’s treatise, *Foundations of Social Theory*, stands as a primary example of a theoretical system built from a micro framework. Coleman’s interest is in formulating a theory of social systems that grants due relevance to both individual action and macro order while explaining emergent system level phenomena from micro foundations. His theory takes as its starting point an ontology of purposive action. Coleman writes, “this principle of action constitutes a necessary fixed kernel, which gives rise to different systemic behavior” (Coleman 1990: 11). Coleman’s approach is categorized under the
heading of rational choice theories of social behavior as his ontology of purposive action assumes that actors weigh the costs and benefits of decisions in regard to their context.

More should be said about Coleman’s conception of the actor. The actor is hedonistic, the “wellspring of action” regardless of the social structure’s complexity, and action is determined by the individual’s perceived ends. The elementary actor is understood as a two dimensional, calculating creature. The object self is the locus of experience. When the actor experiences the consequence of cost or benefit, it is the object self receiving the signals. In concert with the object self is the acting, or agent self. The agent self carries out lines of behavior to bring satisfaction to the object self. The object and agent self are linked through interests - what actors hope to achieve or avoid through action. Interests are sometimes referred to as preferences in the broader rational choice literature (Loveland 2003), and, in Coleman’s theory, serve as both the metric used by the object self to determine satisfaction and to inform the agent self about the adequate amount of effort needed to achieve the desired result – the maximization of utility.

Coleman urges caution in regard to sociological use of the maxim of maximization. As his theory is meant to explicitly delineate and conjoin the micro and macro, he stresses that rationality must only be attributed to a system’s actors. “Purpose and goal-directedness are useful in theory construction, but not if they characterize the entity or system whose behavior is to be explained. They must instead characterize elements of the system, which in the case of sociology can be regarded as actors in the system, either persons or corporate actors” (Coleman 1986: 1312). Attempting to overcome common critiques of functionalism, such a use of rational maximization allows
Coleman to maintain an individual level voluntarism without falling victim to the circular logic system level needs.

Coleman and others (Brennan and Buchanan 1985; Feld 1997; Yamada 1997), use the metaphor of a game to describe social order. Actors are understood to behave as if they are following rules which all relevant actors are familiar with. The players and the structure of the game make up two distinct components, “the players contain within themselves some principle of action [purposive action], and the game comprises the structure which sets in motion these actions and combines them to produce behavior of the system (Coleman 1990: 11). Actors strive toward a common goal, and their action is compelled and constrained by the object and secondary rules of the game, and the actions of other players. From the decisions of all players emerges a new and evolving context. The elements of the game represent the macro and micro aspects of society, and the transition that takes place from one to the other. All of the “elements that establish the conditions” under which a player’s decisions are made reflect the macro to micro transition, and the micro to macro transition is simulated by the consequences of ego’s actions upon the decisions of other players.

As is apparent, the micro level is emphasized in the above outline of the micro macro link. In fact, when describing the relationship between societies and individuals, the macro level exists solely as an abstraction in Coleman’s representation of the link between macro level uniformities and micro level action. System behavior can be reasonably posited as the interdependent behavior of component parts. Coleman’s general conception of systems and units then becomes quite powerful. Making the macro level more concrete, it could be used to describe organizations where the micro level is
made up of individual actors within an organization, for example a bureaucracy. Similarly, the macro level may be the United Nations and the micro level the states that make up the body’s members.

The previous examples are used to locate a more nebulous form of social order that is the general subject matter of sociology. Abstracted individual level action is akin to a purely economic conception of collective action – the simple aggregation of individual level decisions, decisions based solely on an individual actor’s maximization function. Formal, active organizations, on the other hand, are exemplified by Weber’s bureaucracy and are the most readily observable form of what may be called a durable collective. More challenging to empirical analysis is the situation “in which no unitary actor emerges at the macro level but there are well-defined properties or concepts characterizing that level” (Coleman 1990: 12). It is this middle range of order that stands as Coleman’s mechanism for linking micro level purposive action to macro level. The properties of the macro level enter into the decisions of actors, compelling and constraining their action.

Randall Collins has developed a complex understanding of the link between micro and macro. The most important difference from Coleman’s work (which might explain how Coleman’s treatise on social action can ignore Collins’ theoretical work altogether) is ontological. While Coleman posits an objectively rational actor, Collins argues that human cognitive capacity limits the role of rationality. Actors are thought to seek not benefits in light of costs, but rather emotional satisfaction that results from human interaction. Collins goes so far as to suggest that the limitations of human cognitive capacity make teleological depictions of action untenable. Because “cognition
is limited to a few relatively uncomplex operations…people cannot follow a chain of thought” to the conclusion of a means-ends strategy (1981: 992). Courses of action, then, are not objectively calculated, but rather are the result of taken for granted routines.

Presented as a methodology of observing and describing macro social forces, Collins theory is grounded in the micro level interactions of individuals. Similarly to Coleman, Collins understands macrophenomena as “combinations of micro-events,” arguing that the “empirical realities of social structures [are] patterns of repetitive micro-interaction” (Collins 1981: 985). Macro concepts “have their effects by impinging upon the actors’ situational motivations. Macro-aggregates of microsituations can provide the context and make up the results of such processes, but the actual energy must be microsituational” (Collins 1981: 990). In sum, macro level phenomena are evident in their effects on individual action, and knowable only through observation of the micro level.

I follow the lead of each of these contemporary scholars by focusing on individual outcomes as conditioned by collective level factors. From Coleman, I take the idea of a macro level with no “unitary actor” but characterized by “well defined concepts.” Such a generalized theoretical construct follows the logic of the culture of values that can be used to characterize broad religious tradition within which congregations are located. The characteristics of these larger traditions are expected to generate differences in congregations, and following the logic of the project, to in turn impact individual outcomes. From Collins, in conjunction with the culture as practice literature, I take the idea of interactive individuals constructing small scale routines that in turn impinge upon their behavior. Individuals are not only exposed to pre-existing culture at congregations,
but they also help to generate it as they engage in the social relationships that are the substance of congregational life. In combining the ideas of these two writers, and sharing the emphasis of each on the determinants and consequences of individual action, I make explicit the link between the micro and macro.

2.5 Religion, Culture, and Action

I move next to a theory of congregationally contingent individual civic action. Swidler (1986) provides a useful starting point to address the existing debate among social scientists about the causal connection of collectives and individuals in the terms of cultural analysis. According to Swidler, “Culture influences action not by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by shaping a repertoire or ‘tool-kit’ of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct ‘strategies of action’” (1986: 273). “A realistic cultural theory should lead us to expect not passive ‘cultural dopes,’ but rather the active, sometimes skilled users of culture whom we actually observe. If culture provides the tools with which persons construct lines of action, then styles or strategies of action will be more persistent than the ends people seek to attain” (Swidler 1986: 277). The reader is reminded that cultures contain a wide, conflicting, range of symbols and action guides, and that both actors and collectives “know how to do different kinds of things in different circumstances.” Her metaphor of the ‘tool-kit’ represents the idea that culture consists of different pieces, each useful for different “lines of action” (1986: 277). Swidler’s theory leads to the following question: In cases of individual action, does a lone actor choose from multiple strategies of action, or is the process of strategy selection more appropriately understood as a group phenomenon?
Juergensmeyer’s (2000) cultural theory of terrorism provides an excellent example of the systemic relationship between cultural tools, social networks and individual action. Terrorism is a dramatic example of public engagement, but the process of converting cultural meaning into action within terrorist networks mirrors the processes that end in the more mundane acts of civic involvement. Juergensmeyer defines terrorism, in part, as an assault on the civil order. Terrorists rely on cultures of violence, and terrorism is rarely the act of a loner. The terrorist’s act of violence depends upon “a community of support and…a large organizational network,” and requires “moral presumption” if one is to validate taking lives of those for whom one holds “no personal enmity” (Juergensmeyer 2000: 11).

Even when terrorism appears to be the act of a lone terrorist, there are often “networks of support and ideologies of validation” that latently provide aid. Juergensmeyer provides the Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, as an example, suggesting that from the “strident student activist culture of the late 1960s...one could easily become infected by the feeling that ‘terrible things’ were going on” (2000: 11). Terrorists like Kaczynski and Timothy McVeigh believe that their acts are “supported not only by other people but by a widely shared perception” within which their actions acquired “moral meaning” (Juergensmeyer 2000: 11). Beyond ideological validation and cultural support, terrorists and terrorism are also dependent upon leaders, networks of activists and material support. These are the tangible, objective elements of action working in concert with the cultural elements to produce individual outcomes. Theorists steeped in cultural understandings of action are careful to remember that culture provides the sustenance and
actors provide the action (Coleman 1988; Wildavsky 1987; Swidler 1986; Patillo-McCoy 1998).

The theory of civic involvement put forth in this dissertation mirrors Juergensmeyer’s theory of terrorism. On the surface, terror and civic involvement seem vastly different, but sociologically their similarities emerge. If terrorism is an assault on the civil order, civic involvement is similar and opposed to terrorism in that it is the maintenance of civil order. The definition of civic involvement provided by Robert Wuthnow demonstrates its sociological similarity with terrorism as outlined by Jurgensmeyer: “Broadly conceived, civic involvement consists of participation in social activities that either mediate between citizens and government or provide ways for citizens to pursue common objectives with or without the help of government. These activities are purposive, but their objectives can range from putting pressure on the government to pass a particular bill, to ensuring that local schools operate effectively, to helping people who have no other means of support. Some of these activities may be performed alone. But most require people to work together, and even those that are ostensibly solitary are generally the result of organized efforts” (1998: 7). Civic involvement, like terrorism, is carried out by active individuals who engage an existing social order intent on achieving ends justified by cultural norms and sustained by communities of like minded people.

2.6 Religion, Culture, and Public Participation: A Big Picture

Communities develop their own sets of meaningful symbols. Alexander (1988) provides multiple models of such group differentiation, two of which, specification and
refraction, deserve attention. Cultural specification occurs when competing social groups
draw upon a single and consistent cultural reservoir. While groups are distinct in their
symbolic patterning, they are not in conflict in anyway beyond that of a taxonomical,
ecological sense of niches, what Alexander refers to as a “division of labor” (1988: 155).
Cultural refraction describes the situation in which social groups tend toward
“antagonistic subcultures” but share a “fairly integrated” cultural system (Alexander
1988: 155). While subcultures may experience conflict, their common cultural values
compel “substantial, if unacknowledged commonality” (ibid, 155). In such a refracted
cultural system, general symbols available to multiple subcultures and each attributes
different meanings to the same symbol. The most complex theoretical accounts of
religion and civic life in modern America can be ordered accordingly.

Robert Bellah (1970) has written about America’s civil religion, and in
Durkheimian fashion, Bellah suggests that there is an essentially religious belief in what
is sacred about the United States. This civil religion exists alongside and distinctly from
the churches of the United States. It is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals
relative to what is held sacred about America. Civil religion does not involve the specific
religious beliefs of any of the many religious denominations in the United States, but it
does include the concept of god. America is understood as God’s chosen land, and its
people thought to live in covenant with God. America’s responsibility is to bring His
teachings and rules to the rest of the world. Another foundational story borrowed from
Judeo/Christian theology is that of exodus. According to Hatch (1989) the American
Revolution is the most important event in U.S. history, and represents the county’s
freedom from tyranny. Official promotion of general religious faith serves to entrench
religiosity into American life. For example, Eisenhower’s insertion of the phrase “under God” transformed the Pledge of Allegiance from a nationalistic oath into a prayerful creed.

Civil religion also has its sacred symbols, holidays, and historical figures. The flag of the United States is a sacred symbol, to be revered, honored and protected. For example, the rules surrounding flag handling and care demonstrate its sacred quality. Willfully burning a U.S. flag is the ultimate act of disrespect to those who revere it, but a flag which has been spoiled by touching the ground can only be properly disposed of through incineration. The 4th of July is a patriotic holiday on which U.S. citizens gather together in worship of ideas of freedom and democracy and witness ritual fireworks displays. According to a civil religion perspective, Abraham Lincoln is a Jesus-like figure in American lore. Bellah argues that Lincoln (and the Civil War) added a sacrificial death and rebirth theme to civil religion. Lincoln was the Great Emancipator who gave his life in the country’s “second time of trial” so that the United States might live on remembering the importance of freedom and unity.

Bellah outlines a singular cultural system composed of symbols carrying similar meanings to Americans. Exploring the concept further, Wuthnow (1988) outlines the substance of what he calls the two civil religions, namely the priestly and prophetic. Priestly civil religion is a conservative form of civil religion in which the United States is understood as a chosen land living out God’s plan as an example for the rest of the world. Prophetic civil religion portrays the United States as a nation with high ideals that are not being realized. This form of civil religion stresses the ideas of equality and tolerance and
hopes that someday the country will live up to is aspirations. While the two understandings are dramatically different, the symbols of each are largely the same.

For example, political speeches often rely on the power of shared civil religious meanings, and speeches from two prominent American politicians embody the spirit of the competing civil religions. In his 2001 inaugural address, President George W. Bush expressed the priestly form of civil religion, “Through much of the last century, America's faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea. Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations ... we are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image.” Demonstrating the versatility of America’s civil religious culture, candidate John Kerry evoked the prophetic version of civil religion in his speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, “I don't want to claim that God is on our side. As Abraham Lincoln told us, I want to pray humbly that we are on God's side. And whatever our faith, one belief should bind us all: The measure of our character is our willingness to give of ourselves for others and for our country.

Wuthnow (1988) outlines the opposing civil religions in his argument about the declining significance of denominationalism in the United States. According to this thesis, denominations were once the defining characteristic of American religion. The larger categories of Protestant, Catholic and Jew put forth in arguments like those of Herberg (1960), while once meaningful, have devolved in modern America. Wuthnow argues, instead, that the more general categories of conservative and liberal are meaningful today because conservative members of any denomination are more likely to agree on theological and social issues with conservatives of other denominations than they are to agree with liberals from their own tradition. Wuthnow does not emphasize the
possibility of conflict between liberal and conservative religion. His description of American religion follows the cultural specification model outlined by Alexander in which competing but congenial sub-cultures coexist under the umbrella of generally similar larger culture.

Throughout the history of American religion, then, denominations were meaningful units because of the similarity among individuals who belonged. Societal changes have caused disruptions of the traditional structures of society, one of them being religious denominations. A common result of arguments like those of Wuthnow (1988) is an increased empirical focus on the role of personal religious beliefs and attitudes. Individual religious attitudes, such as Biblical literalism, are used to index actors as religiously conservative or liberal. Sociologists continue to seek a meaningful scheme for categorizing and grouping denominations (Steensland et. al. 2000), but relationships between personal level religious and social attributes are emphasized.

While some might be encouraged privilege the role of the individual over that of the denomination based on a reading of Wuthnow’s thesis, collective forms of religious organization are still understood as central to American religion and the behavior of religious people. Hunter (1991) makes an argument similar to that of Wuthnow, but in his conception of America’s religious divide the Progressives and the Orthodox are locked in a culture war. According to Hunter, the Orthodox rely on a transcendent moral authority, in which right and wrong is absolute and cannot be socially determined. Progressives, on the other hand, have a subjective, socially determined moral authority according to which right and wrong are not clearly delineated. Commitment to opposing moral authorities leads to polarization, and the resulting struggle to define America.
Elites representing the fundamentally opposed cultures strive for control of the symbolic realm, and want to set the agenda of public life. The resulting culture war is fought in public view by leaders who are able to use the media to make moral claims about American society. Each camp understands the meanings of cultural symbols differently, the public debate is essentially two sides talking past each other, discussion leads to no solution, and contentious or even violent political tactics are the next option.

Hunter overstated the degree to which America’s opposing cultures would come into conflict, but Americans do not rely on a single, unified set of values. For example, Olson and Carroll (1992) posit that while liberals and conservatives do hold strongly opposing attitudes, their most deeply held convictions are about different issues, and Davis and Robinson (1996) suggest that it is over a subset of family related issues that cultural conflict is most likely. Recent political debates seem to provide evidence in support of Davis and Robinson. For example, while conservative movement leaders like Pat Robertson support Republican calls for the Protection of Marriage amendment, the theologically liberal United Church of Christ has produced television advertisements welcoming of same sex couples to worship at its ‘open and affirming’ congregations.

That Hunter’s predictions of overt conflict have not materialized, but that battles about same sex marriage have taken place through social and political debate leading to court decisions is evidence of the cultural situation Alexander refers to as refraction. Recalling from above, this is the existence of sub-cultures drawing on a common, ultimately unifying, reservoir of meaningful symbols. Though liberal and conservative Christians understand the issue of same sex marriage differently in regard to their theological beliefs, they each choose the legal, adversarial method of debate central to
American democracy to make their public claims. While church and state are officially separate in the United States, Americans are generally open to the participation of religious groups in the political process (Williams and Demerath 1991), and groups on either side draw on their perceived moral authority and publicly viable religious symbolism to enter into the national dialogue. Exemplifying the resonance between American civil and religious life, those on either side of the debate are comfortable making religious claims in a public manner, and the majority of Americans do not contest the right of religious organizations to make public claims.

The discussion thus far has highlighted the development of cultural institutions and the role of active elites who mobilize followers around meaningful symbols. The examples serve to demonstrate the continued importance of distinct cultural camps and their role in individual action. Hunter explains the connection between collective and individual action as the result of deliberate elite driven mobilization around specific goals, but how are the common, statistically uniform, routines of civic life to be understood? An answer to this question begins to address the issue of contextually situated, endogenous social action and requires the presence of stable cultural systems, durable social organization, and variation at the level of individual civic participation. The next section describes how U.S. religious traditions serve as a general cultural camp within which discrete congregations develop an organizational culture that relies on the larger tradition’s symbols and history, and the day to day activities of congregational life. The congregation’s synthesis of tradition, history, and organizational dynamics plays an independent role in patterning the civic action of its participants.
2.7 Religion, Congregations, Action

Civic involvement in the United States is encouraged by the country’s heritage of participatory democracy (Lipset 1963), and the connection of civic and religious life longstanding (Demerath and Williams 1992; Williams and Demerath 1991; Tocqueville 2000). The general religious dimension of U.S. civic life outlined by Bellah’s concept of civil religion points not to any specific Christian religion, but because of its religious language it resonates with a wide variety of Christians. Congregations are quite straightforwardly cast as the most successful of America’s voluntary associations (Ammerman 1997; Chaves 2004; Harris 1998), and for many Americans church involvement takes on the character of public involvement and “being religious” is part of being a “good citizen” (Williams and Demerath 1991).

Under the umbrella of the general civil religion, each of the United States’ major religious traditions has a historically rooted and continually developing logic of public involvement. Congregational affiliation with a larger tradition and its specific theological tenor are meaningfully different ways to measure how culture matters in the congregation. Congregations have a great degree of freedom to affiliate with or remove themselves from denominational involvement. Further, the history of American Protestantism is at its core the history of the birth, separation, and reconciliation of its various denominations (Chaves 2004). Congregational affiliation with a denomination or inter-denominational body is rarely taken lightly, and is more often than not a considered decision to align with a trusted ally (Ammerman 2005). Affiliation with a religious tradition indicates not only theological agreement, but also an endorsement of a particular history and stance toward general society.
From the 18th century on, Protestant churches have played an important role in most social debates. Mainline Protestant churches have a well documented history of social involvement, and can be described as having an open relationship with mainstream culture (Roof and McKinney 1987; Steensland et. al. 2000). More telling is the tradition’s Social Gospel history that revolves around a theology of public awareness and involvement (Smith 1957). Empowered by the Social Gospel and a postmillennial theology – the belief that Jesus will return to earth only after God’s Kingdom is established, liberal Protestants were active in the early 20th century’s social and political debates. Liberal Protestant Churches were again active in both Vietnam era debates and the Civil Rights Movement. Today, liberal Protestants, at the individual level, are less involved in public life than at times past (Regenerus and Smith 1998), but their churches remain closely connected with mainstream culture suggesting that the boundaries between church participation and wider social participation are permeable.

The history of American conservative Protestantism has seen periods of strident public engagement and times of strict separation from political affairs. After the early 20th evolution debate, for several decades the conservative movement had little public presence (Regenerus and Smith 1998; Woodberry and Smith 1998). While the conservative Christian churches were not politically visible, they were silently gathering organizational resources and preparing for an increased public presence (Carpenter 1997). During the late 20th century, with the Presidencies of Carter and Reagan and the success of movements like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, Evangelical Christianity emerged as a political force. The movement’s political relevance remains significant, but questions exist about the participation of individual conservatives in
politics (Ammerman 1987). For example, while conservative Christian churches and movement organizations are politically savvy, analyses repeatedly show that Biblical literalists are less involved in civil society than those with more liberal views about the Bible (Loveland et. al. 2005; Lam 2002; Schwadel 2005). Regenerus and Smith (1998) report, however, that conservative Protestants are more likely than others to feel religion should speak to public issues. The reconciliation of these two claims, which are frequently supported and possibly in conflict, might be facilitated by a shift in the way sociologists think about civic involvement. Such a shift is proposed below.

In terms of social activism, the denominations commonly grouped together as the Black Protestant Churches (see Steensland et. al. 2000) are arguably the most present in public life. The Black Church served as the organizational center of the Civil Rights movement (Morris 1984), providing material and cultural resources used to carry on the struggle. Churches served as ideal meeting places, and pastors served as charismatic, professional leaders to ignite a ready base of support. Today the black church remains a public presence (Steensland et. al. 2000, Lincoln and Mamiya 1990) and is a primary institution in the lives of African Americans. It is generally accepted that congregational life for religiously active African Americans influences all spheres of social life, and certainly the black church is important both in national and local politics (Patillo-McCoy 1998).

American Roman Catholicism does not have the Social Gospel history of the Protestant Mainline or the visibility of the Conservative Protestant political wing. However, the Catholic Worker movement represents a fairly well established grassroots social movement founded on basic Catholic principles. The movement, founded by
Dorothy Day in 1933, consists today of more than 130 Catholic Worker communities across the United States. Active on many fronts, the movement is epitomized by its concern for the poor, support of labor unions, and its emphasis on community and prayer. The movement has never been formally organized, instead its practitioners prefer the autonomy guaranteed through the lack of centralization or official state recognition. While its lack of formality prevents the movement from impacting American Catholicism on a large scale, its corporate, communal ideal exemplifies a Catholic approach to civic engagement.

Further, Catholic Bishops regularly speak out on social issues, and the church has well outlined positions on issues ranging from abortion to war. For example, the Catholic Church opposes what it sees as a “culture of death,” leading it to oppose abortion while at the same time advancing a politically liberal anti-death penalty argument. Whether or not the church’s positions impact individual attitudes and behaviors is an open question, but in regard to the death penalty Catholics who are strongly committed to their parish do appear less likely to support capital punishment than the general population (Bjarnason and Welch 2004). Regenerus and Smith (1998) show Catholics to be similar to mainline and liberal Protestants in regard to their willingness to inject religion into public debates.

The history of each of the main traditions is important, and there is utility in recognizing a congregation’s relationship to the Conservative, black Protestant and Catholic religious fields. More important than any of the traditions’ particular historical development, however, is the general, now overt, now covert, affinity between public participation and religious life in the United States. Serving as a common symbolic reservoir, and despite the official separation of church and state, most Americans are
comfortable with the mingling of religion and public affairs. Because of this comfort, congregations are well suited to serve as a connecting point private religious life and public civic life (Cassel 1999).

2.8 Congregations and Individual Action: Networks and Civic Engagement

The discussion of civil religion, cultural elites and the histories of religious traditions is necessary because it serves as the canvass on which active, civically engaged individuals are the paint. These abstract descriptions of religion and public life are missing a vital, concrete component of individual public engagement. I now move to a discussion of the mechanisms functioning to translate the potential energy of religious collectives into the kinetic energy of individual civic action.

Social ties are the catalysts of civic life, and much of the recent scholarship about social ties uses the language of social capital. In general, social capital refers to the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations (Fukuyama 1995). Ties and social capital are dependent upon shared understandings of community, the ability to place communal interests over individual interests. This is the basis of trust, the trust that is invaluable to thriving communities (Fukuyama 1995). Trusted contacts are capable of inviting and welcoming willing individuals into civic life (Rotolo 2000).

Smith (1999) provides the most extensive picture of congregational networks and their impact on individual attitudes. Smith shows that members of a conservative protestant church are more encapsulated than members of a mainline protestant church. In other words, on average, members of the conservative church have more ties inside the
congregation than do the mainline church members. In turn, the more encapsulated conservative church members were found to be more conservative in their personal attitudes toward abortion and gender roles. While limitations in the data preclude making a strong case for social influence, Smith finds evidence that the attitudes of an individual’s close associates impact the person’s own viewpoint. “If two otherwise identical individuals had entirely different groups of friends, one group having solidly moderate views on abortion and the other having strongly conservative views on abortion, we would expect the former person to have a more moderate attitude toward abortion than the latter, even controlling for other predictors of attitudes such as political ideology” (Smith 1999: 128).

There is evidence, however, that social ties do impact individual joining behavior. McAdam and Paulsen (1993) showed how many different social ties impact a potential activist’s decision to become active or to stay out of a movement. In their study of Freedom Summer activists, they showed that having a friend involved in the movement was an extremely important factor in determining whether or not a person would take part in activism, as those who had friends were much more likely to participate. In general, membership in organizations is positively related to individual activism and is “an extension of the interpersonal social tie” (McAdam and Paulsen 1993: 644). It is the friendships and acquaintances made in these organizations, such as congregations, that serve as conduits for information about civic involvement opportunities. Of course, an individual’s ties to a congregation are not uniformly pro-social, and ties may constrain an individual’s extra-church involvement (McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague 1993; Iannaccone 1994; Wuthnow 1994; Schwadel 2005).
The strict church literature in the sociology of religion is informative regarding questions about congregational network structure and community involvement. Strict churches are generally characterized according to the limitations they impose on individual behavior. For example, some churches place restrictions on diet, drinking, romantic relationships or recreational activity. An often noted result of church strictness is social exclusivity. Those who attend strict churches are frequently less involved in non-church activities than are those involved in less strict churches (Iannaccone 1994) because the limitations on their behavior prohibit alternative activities that might otherwise compete for their civic resources (McPherson 1983). Strict churches, generally those of conservative Protestants, then, tend to limit the outside involvement of their members because individuals are so tightly embedded into the congregation’s social network, but at the same time they increase the investment of time and in turn the individual’s interest in the group and its goals.

In order to adequately portray the role of social ties as elements of social networks, it is essential to consider the network characteristics that transcend the individual ties. For example, networks are often characterized by their heterogeneity (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987; Rotolo 2000). Homophily describes the degree of individual similarity across networks according to status and value of characteristics. For example, the friendship of two Biblical literalists is as a value homogeneous tie, while two friends who share the same level of education are homogeneous according to a status characteristic. As a network’s number of homogeneous ties increases, it is characterized as more homophilous. In contrast to homophily is heterogeneity, or the instance of dissimilarity across network
members. As the characteristics of network members diverge, heterogeneity increases. In terms of civic involvement, homophilous ties are the most effective in drawing individuals into new arenas of public life. Referring to the above discussion of ties and social capital, it is recalled that trust is the key element of vital group life. Familiarity and trust are characteristics of homophilous networks thought to make them powerful civic catalysts for external engagement because the information flowing across such ties is well received.

In the social movement literature, however, the role of network heterogeneity is shown to be somewhat more complex. Within a social movement organization, resource and interest heterogeneity are related to the presence of a critical mass of movement participants (Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl 1988; Oliver, Marwell, and Teixeira 1985). Resource heterogeneity is related to demographic heterogeneity (Heckathorn 1993). The metaphor of the critical mass refers to the theorized need for an initial small group of activists to energize wider collective action. Because a primary goal of any Christian organization is to spread the word of God (Stark 2001), it follows that increased congregational heterogeneity is positively associated with individual evangelism. While individual evangelism might in fact be quite rare relative to other forms of public action, at the organizational level Church growth is a common concern among religious leaders and scholars (Evans 2003; Graham 1984; Hadaway 1991; Hoge and Roozen 1979; Kelley 1972; Shenk 1983; Wagner 1979, 1981; White 1992).
2.9 Summary

We are now in position to see how congregations matter for civic life. From sociology’s basic epistemological standpoint, it is attractive to attend to the symbiotic relationship between religious individuals and religious communities. As a primary wellspring of individual religiosity (Fink and Stark 1992), and the modal form of American religious organization (Ebaugh and Chavetz 2000), it is analytically and theoretically beneficial to recognize the religious individual’s embeddedness within a congregational community (Schwadel 2005). Congregations lie at the connection of macro social structure and micro social action. The strength of this claim is supported by the ease with which a range of more general sociological theory, generated to understand either level, can be applied to the particular substantive questions raised in thinking about congregations and individual civic life.

Congregations are social organizations, similar in many ways to any other voluntary association (Harris 1998), with cultural and network components. Existing as they do within larger traditions that provide basic symbolic understandings (Berger 1967; Ammerman 2003; Steensland et. al. 2000) and serving as sites for generative social interaction (Patillo-McCoy 1998; Swidler 1986; Collins 2004), sociologists studying congregations will find utility in the cultural sociology perspectives of culture as values and culture as action. The network characteristics of congregations are grounded in the relationships between members and leaders, and extend outside of the congregation to the extent that the ties of congregation participants connect them to overlapping social worlds. In the analytical chapters that follow, I derive and test hypotheses drawing on
each of these elements, demonstrating that congregations matter for the civic lives of the people in the pews.

2.10 Operationalizing Civic Involvement

What kind of social action constitutes civic involvement? From the perspective of many analysts, civic involvement is operationalized quite narrowly. For example, Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) examine voting, donating money to political parties, contacting officials, protest behavior, serving on or attending board meetings, and engaging in informal community activity or voluntary associations. This range of activities has become the standard set of outcomes used in recent analyses of civic engagement (Ayala 2000; Oliver 2000; Brown and Brown 2002; Lam 2002), and voluntary association is perhaps the most frequently analyzed outcome (Babchuch and Booth 1969; Verba and Nie 1972; Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Curtis, Baer and Grabb 2001; Loveland et. al. 2005). To test the theory put forth in this project I will examine congregational impacts on voluntary association membership and community organizing. However, the project also examines individual participation in evangelism as civic involvement.

The standard indicators of civic involvement are used because it is assumed they are behaviors thought, by the civic actor, to promote the “public good” (Rice and Feldman 1997). Given that Conservative Protestants have traditionally held a unique version of social consciousness, we might expect those exposed to the tenets of the tradition to express their common objectives toward the public good in a unique way. According to Larry C. Ingram Conservative Protestants “are distinguished by their
emphasis on personal regeneration, or the new birth, as a means of *restructuring society* by changing individual attitudes and values” (1989: 19, emphasis added). If the premise is accepted, the issue is primarily one of measurement and amounts to answering the question: “What kind of social action constitutes civic involvement from the perspective of Conservative Christians?”

Of course, Christian evangelism may be analyzed from the perspective of either the evangelist or the prospective convert. Evangelism is a prophetic activity which imposes itself upon members of a perceived out-group and an oppositional culture. For the evangelist, winning converts requires engaging the civic order in pursuit of the short term interest of spreading the word and the long term goal of adapting society to a Christian vision of ‘the good.’ To the potential convert, however, the evangelist’s behavior is uncivil because it disrupts rules of public life, first and foremost the “right to be left alone” (Ingram 1989: 20). It is however, the disruption of civility felt by the potential convert that serves as further evidence that evangelism engages the social order and is oriented toward altering the public sphere – a primary element of civic involvement.

According to Weber (1978) meaning is attributed by the social group which the individual is part of, so for the evangelist the meaning of the act is found by examining the logic of his or her particular Christian community. Evangelism, in general, is about converting unbelievers to the message of Christianity. On the surface, the evangelist has an interest in saving souls because it is a biblical mandate, but evangelism for many serves as a way of improving society at large (Ingram 1989). For example, C. Peter Wagner makes a theological argument about the social action components of evangelism.
According to Wagner, growing the church through evangelism serves the biblical “cultural mandate” to “preach the good news” and has a “permanent effect on society” (1998: Chapter 1, especially pp. 16 - 17). The social concern implicit in evangelism is voiced by Billy Graham in his book *Peace with God*, “Jesus taught that we are to take regeneration in one hand and a cup of cold water in the other. Christians…should be concerned with social problems and social injustices…The Christian is to take his place in society with moral courage and stand up for that which is right, just and honorable” (Wagner 1998: 14). Following the logic of Christianity in general (Stark 2001), and perhaps more so for Conservative Christians, evangelism is conceived as civic involvement.

2.11 Hypotheses

A number of testable hypotheses emerge from the basic theoretical statements above. After outlining an individual level model of religion and civic involvement, the first set of congregational hypotheses grow out of the previous discussion of congregational culture. First, does a congregation’s location within a larger religious tradition impact a member’s public action? Measuring tradition at the organizational level, it is expected that those who attend congregations affiliated with Mainline Protestant denominations are exposed to a history of social engagement and general good will toward mainstream culture (Steensland et. al. 2000; Roof and McKinney 1987), and are thus more likely than Conservative Protestants to be involved in traditional forms of civic engagement. The voluntary association is the civic engagement measure par excellence for writers in the vein of Robert Putnam or Sydney Verba, and as such it is
likely that those in the traditionally Mainline congregations are more likely to be members of such groups. Catholicism is today considered to be part of the religious mainstream (Roof and McKinney 1987), such those at Catholic congregations, while not a formal hypothesis to be tested, may be more similar to Mainline Protestants than Conservative Protestants in their propensity to join voluntary associations.

Conversely, conservative Protestants have historically embraced an alternative vision of productive social action and are described as living in worlds of opposition (Ammerman 1987). While the Social Gospel history of Mainline churches involves seeking large scale structural change through active public organizing, Conservative Protestants have instead focused on a ‘soul-saving’ mission meant to achieve long term change one conversion at a time. Given this history, it is expected that those who attend conservative Protestant congregations are less represented in competing voluntary associations, less likely to join community action groups, and more likely than other U.S. Christians to engage in evangelical activities as a form of public involvement.

Following the basic claim that the congregation is the primary collective unit of religious life, it is necessary to account for congregational variation within larger religious traditions. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention is commonly classified as a conservative denomination, but the theological tenor of congregations within the denomination is not completely determined by denominational affiliation. A particular congregation’s sense of belonging to the larger denomination is variable, with some congregations mirroring denominational stances more than others (Ammerman 2005). Accordingly, it is expected that congregations characterized as theologically conservative, net of denominational affiliation, dissuade individual members from
becoming engaged secular voluntary associations or community action groups, while such congregations likely compel individuals to engage in evangelical behavior.

Denominational affiliation and congregational theology indicate a congregation’s location within an historical, cultural field, but congregations are also sites where culture emerges from the ongoing, regular interactions of members. In the lived, day to day activities of congregations, ways of life develop. These congregationally fueled cultural patterns become blueprints for action outside of the congregational sphere.

Patillo-McCoy (1998) discusses the role of call and response prayer as a cultural tool useful for political mobilization in the Black Church, and it can be inferred from the existing theory that this process likely occurs across the scope of American congregations (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). For civic involvement outcomes, a congregation’s decision making practices are relevant. Some congregations may be characterized as participatory because lay members are highly involved in the process when decisions are made about future programs and congregational directions. At other congregations, however, decisions about policy and directions are left largely in the hands of the leader who is trusted by the members to make important decisions. It is expected, then, that these decision making styles are learned strategies of action that in turn pattern the non-congregation civic participation choices of congregation members. Those who attend congregations with a participatory decision making strategy are expected to be more likely to join voluntary associations and community action groups.

After testing the set of culture hypotheses, a series of network hypotheses are examined. The initial network hypotheses focus on the tie structure of a congregation, and are based on logic of bridging versus bonding connections that serve to limit or
expand the range of information available to congregation members. For example, the active, regularly gathering individuals who are the lifeblood of a congregation each are connected in various ways to the others involved in the congregation and to others not associated with the religious community. In the aggregate, these ties combine to form networks that are more or less open to the outside social world. Because social ties are an important catalyst of civic involvement, it follows that those who attend congregations that can be characterized as having relatively closed networks, with fewer connections to the outside, will be less likely to become active in civil society than those in congregations with more connections to the outside world, regardless of their own social ties (Wuthnow 1994; Schwadel 2005).

In social networks, certain nodes are more connected than others. In the context of congregations, a leader, a pastor or priest, by nature of his or her position of authority (Ammerman 1997), will be connected in practical and symbolic ways to a large number of (if not all) congregation members (Hallett 2003). Leaders, however, are not only connected to the members of the congregation. Many church leaders are involved in social life beyond the congregation (Crawford and Olson 2001), be it through denominational affairs or local community involvement. When leaders are connected to organizations and people beyond the congregation, he or she can be characterized as a bridging tie. As a bridging tie, the leader serves as a conduit to the outside world across which information about opportunities and invitations to participate can travel. If a leader is involved in the outside community, it is expected that those who attend these congregations are more likely to themselves be active in civic life because they are exposed to opportunities through the leader’s connections.
In the case of evangelical activity, however, the network structure of a congregation is expected to operate in a different fashion. That is, the denser a congregation, the more likely it is that those who attend will actively seek new members through purposeful evangelical behavior. The hypothesis flows quite naturally from a synthesis of the literature about networks, collective action, and congregations even as it appears at odds with much of the previous discussion of networks and community involvement. First, Christianity is in meaningful ways a social movement with a fundamental objective of increasing the number of committed followers (Stark 2001), and congregations, some more consciously so than others, are social movement organizations (Becker 1999). While perhaps more likely to find strong expression within Conservative Protestant congregations, evangelism is a fundamental form of community outreach for all strains of Christianity and network density is likely related to individual evangelism regardless of congregational conservatism. A growing church is a successful church, and winning converts is a sign that the good work is being done (Ammerman 2005). Attracting a new member to the church is a social movement success, and evangelism is a form Christian activism.

Again, the religious economies approach suggests a mechanism through which congregational density should be related to individual behavior. Iannaccone (1998) applies a club model to the religious production that takes place at churches, arguing that congregations function as mutual-benefit organizations. Worship is the primary role of congregations (Chaves 2004), and the satisfaction one receives during the worship experience is partly dependent upon the participation of other worshipers (Durkheim 1995; Iannaccone 1990, 1998). The benefit of the worship experience is collectively
produced; the religious experience of worship is a collective good. The satisfaction derived during worship depends on, among other things, “how many other people attend” and “how deep their commitment” (Iannaccone 1998: 1482). Certainly, literature about the free rider problem suggests that an active member is more valuable than simply another member, but before someone can become an active member they must become another participant in the congregation. Further, we would expect that existing participants in the dense congregations are less likely to be free riders because of the increased commitment motivated by the greater probability of sanctioning from close, trusted others (Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl 1988; Heckathorn 1993; Iannaccone 1994). Because of their strongly reinforced interest in producing a more valuable religious experience, members of socially dense congregations, regardless of theology, would be expected to be more likely to engage in evangelistic behavior (Heckathorn 1990: 380).

Finally, the proposed theory suggests that congregational heterogeneity matters for civic involvement outcomes. Because social ties are most conducive to generating trust and cooperation when they are between similar people, heterogeneity is generally expected to be negatively associated with participation. Heterogeneity within the congregation, then, should impede participants from joining outside voluntary associations or community action groups because the likelihood of having the kind of trusting relationships that promote further, outside engagement is decreased. On the other hand, viewed as a social movement organization with a primary goal of increasing membership as a way to serve the public good, congregational demographic heterogeneity might increase the likelihood of evangelism by way of putting a critical mass of movement participants in contact (Marwell and Oliver 1993).
2.12 Conclusion

This project is founded on the basic proposition that the congregation is the primary collective unit of religion in the United States. The claim is not controversial, but little theoretical attention has been offered to the question of linkage between the stable collective of the congregation and the active individuals give it life. Considering the cultural and network components of congregations testable hypotheses have been derived allowing for a unique examination of the religion and civic life relationship. The analyses that follow first establish the veracity of the claim that the congregation matters independently of individual characteristics and then proceeds to explain the congregational variance that is found.
CHAPTER 3

3.1 Introduction

The questions posed in this dissertation require the use of multilevel modeling. As has been argued above, the role of religion in public life cannot be completely understood with a simple focus on individuals’ religious characteristics. Religious life is experienced in congregations, and congregational characteristics are supra-individual. The general situation of lower level units embedded in higher level units is common, and methods to analyze such relationships have been developed and used to address a number of social phenomenon. The most common example is that of students nested in schools. While student level characteristics like reading ability or SES impact educational outcomes, multilevel analyses have demonstrated that class and school characteristics are also relevant for student outcomes. Class variables might measure aggregated student level characteristics, or they could indicate relevant teacher characteristics. Of course, classes are in schools, and schools are further nested in districts (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). For the questions specific to my research, congregants are nested in congregations. Congregational characteristics are discussed in terms of aggregated individual characteristics, leader characteristics, and leader characterizations of congregations.
Luke (2004) suggests three guidelines for judging the need for a hierarchical model. First, an analyst may use an empirical justification. Graphing procedures can be used to demonstrate that the relationship between two specified variables varies across groups. For example, the relationship between education and income might be plotted for each congregation, showing that in some congregations a clear linear relationship exists, while in others a relationship is not readily observable with a scatter plot. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) is a statistical way to determine the need for contextual modeling. The ICC is a formal measure of the amount of overall variability in the dependent variable that can be attributed to the collective unit. After fitting a null model (a model without predictors on any level), the level two variance is divided by the sum of the levels 1 and 2 variances, yielding the ICC. Similarly, an analyst may test the hypothesis that the individual level intercept varies across groups (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992).

The second justification is data based. Much sociological data has an inherently hierarchical structure as sub units are nested in larger units. The intraclass correlation is, in the last analysis, a statistical verification of structurally reasonable assumption. In the case of congregants attending a congregation, it is reasonable to assume that there will be greater similarity between individuals within congregations that across congregations. Statistically, this is the violation of the independence of observations assumption of OLS, and contextual modeling accounts for data with correlated errors. Whereas OLS estimates of clustered data yield biased standard errors, contextual modeling estimates will be larger reducing the likelihood of committing Type 1 errors. This hints to the final, strongest justification for the use of mixed models, the theoretical justification.
“Any time a researcher utilizes a theoretical framework or poses hypotheses that are composed of constructs operating and interacting at multiple levels, then the researcher should use multilevel statistical models” (Luke 2004: 22 – 23). This is certainly the strongest justification for the use of hierarchical models for the questions I pose. While the use is empirically justified and the data are of a hierarchical nature, the importance of congregations to religion in the United States suggests that a sound sociological analysis of religion and public life will account for the possibility of congregational, contextual effects.

Hierarchical modeling, then, is an appropriate approach to the research questions I pose. While the use can be empirically justified, and the data is structured as such, the theoretical justification is the primary reason I will use multilevel models. This is the greatest strength of my dissertation, and as will be outlined through this chapter, the sociology of religion is only now beginning to take advantage of the method. Beyond the general conceptual fit of the model with the research question, there are more fundamental reasons to explore the use of multilevel models to answer questions in the sociology of religion.

While Sociology as a discipline has always understood the relevance of context, the most common quantitative methods do not adequately model and test for the presence of meaningful contextual effects. It cannot be said that hierarchical modeling is a new approach, and its use is certainly common in some of sociology’s sub-disciplines, such as education and medical sociology. However, in the sociology of religion and other areas, quantitative analysts have used, and continue to use, econometric tools designed primarily for the modeling of individual level effects as a means to ostensibly
demonstrate contextual effects. The reasons for this can be traced to longstanding epistemological traditions (Luke 2004), but in many cases it may simply be a result of unfamiliarity with relatively recent advances in statistical modeling. Sociologists, after all, are prone to the same kinds of cultural lag they often observe in society at large (Choukas 1936). Uncritical use of standard individual level methods such as OLS or logistic regression as a means to explore contextual effects fails to recognize important analytical problems.

The most fundamental problem can be referred to as a tacitly assumed methodological individualism. While theorists from a rational choice perspective ground their theoretical elaboration and empirical investigations in an explicit, foundational methodological individualism, many other sociologists who would superficially reject such claims as blind to the contextual, cultural complexities of social life proceed to apply individualistic methods. Methodological individualism is not an inherently faulty assumption and is common to many scholarly traditions (Collins 1988). In the case of sociology, however, such a methodological assumption deserves critical reflection. This is certainly the case in the sociology of religion given a commonly accepted understanding that collective life is a primary element of religious experience. While those tracing their intellectual roots to Durkheim take collective expressions of belief and solidarity as their starting point (Mellor 2000; Shilling and Mellor 1998), even Rodney Stark (a staunch methodological individualist) affords theoretical attention to the development of religious organizations and their consequences for individual religiosity (2001).
Whether or not analysts grant epistemological primacy to the individual or the collective, when it comes to quantitative analysis individual centered approaches are common. An exception is that of Moore and Vanneman (2003) who use mixed models to examine the effect of regional fundamentalism on individual gender attitudes. In general, however, concepts that are conceptually collective are operationally, through measurement, bound to individuals. It is not that sociologists ignore the collective in theory construction, but rather that the common observational and analytical techniques posit individual outcomes as dependent upon combinations of a particular individual’s characteristics. While measures are intended to capture collectively meaningful concepts, they are often understandably limited to proxies captured at the individual level.

For example, measures of a respondent’s denominational affiliation are often included in sociological analyses of religion. When following the standard survey methodology approach, indicators of denominational affiliation take the following form, “What is the denomination you belong to?” Measures of individual denominational affiliation are used to capture cultural and historical differences across major religious divides (Steensland et. al. 2000). Theory may draw connections between official denominational teachings and individual outcomes, with the measurement technique meant to represent an individual’s exposure to said teachings.

The concept of denomination, however, seems better suited to classify organizations than it does to indicate meaningful differences among individuals. Such logic is akin to the argument of Robert Wuthnow in The Restructuring of American Religion. Wuthnow argues that denominational distinctions are less meaningful than in the past because individual differences within denominational families blur the lines. In
fact, per the argument, those with conservative religious beliefs in one denomination are
more similar to conservatives in other denominations than they are to liberals in their own
tradition. If this argument is accepted, using denominational classification as a measure
of religious identification makes little sense.

This issue can be addressed in more general terms of measurement and level of
analysis. Theorized carefully, denomination is a valuable measure of religion’s role in
society, and improved precision in terms of level of analysis allows researchers to say
with more confidence what elements of religious life are socially relevant – this is a
primary benefit of multilevel modeling. Lazarsfeld and Menzel (1980) clarified the
difference between characteristics of members and collectives systematically. Members
are the sub-units nested in the larger unit of collectives. While the two are distinctly
different, some characteristics may be measured at the same time (Luke 2004).
Collectives can be classified according to their analytical, structural, and global
properties.

Analytical properties are those resulting from an aggregation of individual
characteristics. A congregation, as a collective, might be measured in terms of the
proportion of members who are Biblical literalists. The structural characteristics of
collectives are observed in the relations between the sub-units. For example, I later
discuss the role of congregational friendship networks in compelling individual civic
behavior. The networks are a structural property of the congregation, observed through
measurement on the individual level. Finally, global properties refer solely to the
collective, and cannot be observed through the individual level sub-units. In the case
congregations and their members, denominational affiliation is such a global property of
a congregation. Denomination classifies the congregation’s official relationship with an organized religious group, and this is not observed through members.

As a measurement issue, then, denomination is not a clear indicator of an absolute individual property (Lazarsfeld and Menzel 1980). Ammerman, (2005) presents findings in support of this argument. When the leaders of congregations were asked about how strongly the congregation identified with the denomination, two thirds of leaders reported a strong identification. At the same time, when individuals were asked how strongly they identified with their congregation’s denomination, two thirds reported a moderate to weak identification (Ammerman 2005: 215 – 216). If a measure of denominational affiliation is included as a way to delineate organization divisions and the theoretical import of such group characteristics, its inclusion in the contextual level of a multilevel model is appropriate.

3.2 Statistical Issues

Thus far the discussion has highlighted conceptual and measurement difficulties that are addressed with the use of multilevel modeling. In many cases ignoring the theoretical differences between hierarchical and individual level methods might lead to only minor differences in a research projects’ conclusions. The possibility is present, however, for serious statistical shortcomings. It is to these issues I now turn.

Statistically, the problem has to do with issues of unobserved heterogeneity and violations of the assumptions of individual level models like OLS. By including denomination as a *functionally* residual term, the measure captures undifferentiated contextual variation consequently “pooled into the single individual error term of the
OLS assumes uncorrelated errors, but individuals belonging to the same group are likely more similar to one and other than two randomly chosen people. Failing to measure this contextually rooted similarity introduces error, and violates the assumptions of OLS.

A related issue is that of the homogeneity of regression assumption. Applications of standard regression assume that the prediction equation does not vary across contexts. In cases where this assumption is problematic random effects modeling allows for empirical testing and modeling of between context variation in both the intercept and coefficients of the prediction equation. For example, the magnitude of a church attendance effect might vary significantly by congregation such that a standard application of OLS would be misleading. Essentially, random effects models would allow the researcher to say not only that attendance matters, but that its effect is conditioned by the congregation one attends.

These arguments, both epistemological and statistical, point to a fundamental problem with much of the quantitative sociological literature about religion to date, and help to explain why contextual modeling techniques are becoming increasingly common in a range of other fields. The sociology of religion would be energized with the increased application of hierarchical modeling. My research question is not the only common question in the sociology of religion that could benefit from a multilevel approach. For example, the secularization debate often flounders when those on opposing sides fail to recognize level of analysis issues. Societal secularization, conceived as the decline of institutional religious authority (Casanova 1994; Chaves 1994), and persistent individual religiosity (Stark and Finke 2000) are not essentially
opposite forces. Hierarchical modeling would allow for empirical analysis that could address these kinds of issues with measures of secularization and religiosity at the right theoretical levels.

What follows is an overview of multilevel modeling starting from standard hierarchical linear models and moving into the non-linear transformations of the general constructs. The non-linear transformations are appropriate for the questions posed in the dissertation. The logic of multilevel modeling is straightforward. A researcher who wants to model outcomes measured at one level as a function of variables at more than one level will use a contextual model (Luke 2004). My dissertation explains individual civic involvement as a function of both individual level characteristics (i.e. church attendance) and congregation level characteristics (i.e. leadership style). The civically engaged individual is modeled at level 1, and the congregation is referred to as level 2. Such a multilevel structure can be posited as a system of equations, or the system can be reduced to a single, mixed equation.

The system of equations makes the multilevel nature of the estimator clear, and for the case with one predictor variable at each level appears as follows:

Level 1: \( Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}X_{ij} + r_{ij} \)
Level 2: \( \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}W_j + u_{0j} \)
\( \beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}W_j + u_{1j} \)

In this style of presentation the level one model looks very similar to a standard OLS regression. The subscript i refers to the individuals within a group, and the inclusion of the subscript j indicates that a unique level one model is being estimated for each of the separate level two units. For example, each congregation may have a different average
level of civic involvement, represented by $\beta_{0j}$, and a different effect of church attendance, represented in the equation by $\beta_{1j}$. As described above, the equation demonstrates that the intercept and slopes are allowed to vary by congregation. Importantly, the intercepts and slopes are modeled as outcomes of level 2 variables as can be seen in the level 2 part in the model above.

Each level 1 term is a function of level 2 predictors and variability. The level 1 intercept in a level 2 unit $j$ is represented by $\beta_{0j}$, $\gamma_{00}$ is the average value of the level 1 dependent variable net of the level 2 determinant $W_j$ and $\gamma_{01}$ is the slope of $W_j$. The term $u_{0j}$ represents unmodeled variability for a level 2 unity $j$. The second level two equation models the level 2 effects on the slope of $X_{ij}$. $\beta_{1j}$ is the level 1 slope of $X_{ij}$ in a level 2 unit, $\gamma_{10}$ is the average value of the level 1 slope net of level 2 determinant $W_j$, $\gamma_{11}$ is the effect of $W_j$, and $u_{1j}$ is the error for unit $j$ (Luke 2004: 10).

The term mixed model refers to the equation combining the two parts above. A mixed model looks like this:

$$Y_{ij} = [\gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}X_{ij} + \gamma_{01}W_j + \gamma_{11}W_jX_{ij}] + [u_{0j} + u_{1j}X_{ij} + r_{ij}]$$

In the first set of brackets is the fixed portion of the model and the second brackets encompass the random component. Multilevel models are sometimes called mixed effects models because they are made up of these two components, fixed and random. Fixed effects constrained to be invariant across level 2 units, and random effects are error terms and other sources of variability. In the mixed model above, $u_{0j}$ represents the variability of intercepts across level 2 units, $u_{1j}$ is the variability of the coefficient for $X_{ij}$ across congregations, and $r_{ij}$ is a standard level 1 error term.
Building on this basic structure, a number of models are possible. A primary
distinction separates random intercept models from models with both random intercepts
and slopes. A random intercept model allows for the intercept to vary by group while
posing the level one slopes as fixed across groups. The mixed effect equation reads:

\[ Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}X_{ij} + \gamma_{01}W_j + u_{0j} + r_{ij} \]

In this case, the outcome is regressed on both level 1 and level 2 variables allowing for
the researcher to test for contextual effects. In the case of my dissertation, the level 1
predictors (\(\gamma_{10}X_{ij}\)) will include a set of variables standard to research on the religion and
civic involvement relationship. The level 2 variables (\(\gamma_{01}W_j\)) will be the primary focus,
allowing me to outline congregational characteristics that influence individual outcomes
net of the individual level predictors.

Another option for multilevel modeling is that of randomly varying slopes. In this
case, individual level predictors are allowed to vary across contexts, suggesting the
following equation:

\[ Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}X_{ij} + u_{0j} + u_{ij}X_{ij} + r_{ij} \]

This model portrays individual level betas as unique to a context, allowing for group
level variability, but it does not model variability in the level 1 slopes. Modeling the
variability is possible, and the equation would then look like the following:

\[ Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}W_j + \gamma_{10}X_{ij} + \gamma_{11}W_jX_{ij} + u_{0j} + u_{ij}X_{ij} + r_{ij} \]

The term \(\gamma_{11}W_jX_{ij}\) is a cross level interaction explicitly positing the mediating role of
group level characteristic \(W_j\) on individual level characteristic \(X_{ij}\).
3.3 Hierarchical Logistic Regression

The outcome variables examined in this dissertation are dichotomous, calling for non-linear modeling techniques. The generalized hierarchical linear model (GHLM) transforms the dependent variable and accounts for differences in error distribution between continuous and categorical dependent variables. The measures of civic involvement used all are dichotomous, requiring the use of a binomial (Bernoulli) error distribution and logit transformation.

When a binomial error distribution is assumed, the mean is noted with $\mu$. The estimate of $\mu$ is the probability of the event occurring, or $p$. As probability must range between 0 and 1, a standard hierarchical linear model may yield outcomes outside of this range. To overcome the estimator's difficulties the dependent variable is transformed into a form yielding reasonable predictions. The transformation of the dependent variable is called the link, and this particular transformation is the logit link:

$$\text{Logit} (p) = \ln \left( \frac{p}{1 - p} \right)$$

The untransformed dependent variable is noted with the symbol $Y$ and the transformed version is $\eta$. The transformational function is $\eta = \text{logit} (Y)$.

Once the transformation is complete, a level 1 model is set up like before.

$$\eta = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + B_k X_k$$

An essential difference between the logistic hierarchical model and the linear hierarchical model is the logistic model’s lack of a level 1 error variance term. In the case of a binary outcome variable, the variance is determined by the mean and not estimated. To estimate level 1 betas, level 2 models are set up exactly as in the linear version of the model. The level 1 intercept is interpreted as the average probability of scoring a 1 on the outcome.
variable. To interpret the coefficients of the hierarchical logistic regression they must be transformed back into the original units. This is done just as it is in a standard logistic regression using the logistic function.

\[ Y = \text{logistic} \left( \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + B_k X_k \right) = \frac{e^{\left( \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + B_k X_k \right)}}{1 + e^{\left( \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + B_k X_k \right)}} \]

Once estimation is complete the logistic function is used to calculate the predicted probability of the outcome variable.

An important element of hierarchical modeling is the estimation of the variance components. In the case of unbalanced data maximum likelihood estimation is used to accomplish this task. A balanced data set would consist of level 2 units with the same number of nested observations and predictors with equal distributions with higher level units (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). In most applications, including the current project, such balance is not realistic. Two approaches, full maximum likelihood and restricted maximum likelihood, are generally accepted.

Maximum likelihood parameter estimates are those that are most likely to produce the actually observed data. Estimates of this type are consistent and asymptotically efficient. That is, given a large sample, full maximum likelihood estimates will be near the true parameters and the estimators are approximately unbiased with minimum variance (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992: 45). Restricted maximum likelihood differs primarily in the method of estimating variance components, and fixed effect estimates will be the same regardless of which method is chosen. Restricted maximum likelihood variance estimates account for uncertainty about fixed effects by including information about the degrees of freedom.
Differences between the two are minimal in the presence of more than 30 level 2 units and use of full maximum likelihood is recommended for most purposes (Luke 2004: 26 - 28). Further, the analyses in this dissertation are done with HLM 6.0 which uses penalized quasi likelihood to approximate Bayesian estimates. While the Bayesian approach is attractive for several reasons, its computational difficulty calls for approximation methods. Partial quasi likelihood is widely accepted, and has been shown to produce acceptable inferences in hierarchical models (Breslow and Clayton 1993). Finally, Laplace iterations are implemented to produce an accurate approximation of maximum likelihood and allow for estimation model fit statistics such as deviance.

For the models in this dissertation, level 1 predictors will be centered on the grand mean. Centering is simply a transformation of the independent variables meant to ease interpretation of the intercept. In the case of grand mean centering, the full sample mean of $X$ is subtracted from each $X_{ij}$. The new variable is interpreted as a deviation from the grand mean. For example, centering church attendance on the grand mean leads to a variable representing how much more or less a person attends church relative to the average attendee. Centering can be used to attain a meaningful zero point when a variable does not have one otherwise. The primary reason for centering on the grand mean, however, is to aid in interpreting the intercept. In the case of centering, the intercept is interpreted as the expected outcome for an individual who is average on the independent variables.
3.4 Summary

Hierarchical modeling is the appropriate method to answer the theoretically driven questions of this dissertation. Congregations are durable collectives that are not only composed of individuals but also compel and constrain those individuals’ action. Models allowing for individual characteristics, those of the churchgoers, and collectives, congregations, to be simultaneously considered as important to individual outcomes resonate with the real life experience of religion in the United States. Further, there is a strong case to be made for hierarchical modeling to become common in the sociology of religion.

3.5 Data

The data for the project come from the United States Congregational Life Survey (CLS) directed by Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce in April of 2001. Data were collected about churchgoers at each congregation, a subset of congregation’s primary religious leader, and each congregation’s organizational structure. Of 810 congregations included in the project, 437 returned completed organization and individual level surveys (54.0%) and a subset of 347 congregations were asked for responses from leaders (42%). At the individual level, all of those present at a congregation’s worship services on April 29th 2001 were asked to complete the member survey. After removing congregations for which fewer than 30 members participated in the individual level survey, in order to improve contextual estimation stability (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992), complete data is available for 59,215 respondents in 296 congregations, or 85% of congregations for which surveys were conducted at each of the three levels. The sample of non-Christian
congregations is restrictively small, and as such analyses are limited to Christian congregations.

Non-response bias at the congregational level is a serious concern. For organizational surveys, missing data are rarely missing at random, and the causes of item non-response are classified according to issues of authority to respond, capacity to respond, and motivation to respond (Tomaskovic-Devey, Leiter, and Thompson 1995). Some in an organization simply do not have the authority to respond to survey requests making response impossible. In the case of the CLS, organizational surveys were administered to the congregation’s primary leader (pastor, priest, or rabbi) making the issue of congregational authority an unlikely source of non-response. Capacity to respond, in the context of congregational studies, refers to congregation practices and policies that restrict access to information requested on the survey. For example, the congregational profile portion of the survey asked for congregation membership numbers. Definitions and records of membership vary widely across congregations, with some keeping very detailed counts (i.e. Jehovah’s Witnesses), and others using methods that lead to significant over or under-reporting (i.e. Roman Catholic Church). Because of various record keeping practices, some respondents likely found it difficult to answer questions about congregational size. In many cases, even when available, membership responses are likely over-estimates and the general difficulties of relying on key informant estimates are well known (Chaves et. al. 1999).

Finally, the motivation to respond must be considered. Congregations are often social organizations on the brink of collapse with limited resources. As such, CLS investigators made considerable efforts to communicate the benefits of participation for
particular congregations. All collected data and reported findings were to be made available to denominational offices, and customized reports useful in planning and policy development were provided to each participating congregation. The project was marketed to congregations as a useful tool for measuring and increasing congregational vitality, and as such was attractive to denomination and congregational leaders.

Nonetheless, expected differences are found in rates of participation across traditions. Most notably, conservative Protestant congregations are under-represented both in terms of unit and item non-response. For example, in their analysis of non-response, Woolever and Bruce compared the distribution of congregational affiliation in the CLS to the NCS led by Mark Chaves and found that the sample under-represents Baptist and non-denominational Christian congregations. Given the defensive stance of many conservative Protestant congregations versus mainstream American culture, it is not surprising that skepticism about social science and suspicion of outside interference lead to lower rates of participation for conservative Christian congregations. Further, the sample is skewed by region as congregations in Middle and South Atlantic regions, as well as those in the East and West South Central were less likely than others to participate in the project.

The method of collection for the individual level data presents some difficulties for the analysis. Instead of conducting a sample within each congregation, the investigators chose to collect data for all those present at worship services. Importantly, the primary interest of this project is on contextual effects and the congregations were randomly sampled. Church attendance, however, is not a random process, and the volunteerism that characterizes American congregational participation suggests that those
in attendance at any given service might be unique. The extent of church attendance in
the United States has been of much interest to scholars, with most analysts agreeing that
standard survey approaches succumb to the social desirability effect and over report
levels of attendance (Hadaway, Marler and Chaves 1993; Presser and Stinson 1998). In
the case of the CLS data, the surveys were conducted in congregations during worship
services and so 100% of the sample is service attendees. While the frequency of
attendance question likely remains susceptible to over-reporting, the more pressing
question has to do with the characteristics of those attending on the day of data collection
and how they might differ in important ways from typical service attendees.

Less work exists on this question, but McKenzie (2001) has used selection models
to differentiate the process of attendance from the relationship between congregational
participation and civic participation. Those whose religious beliefs are characterized as
more fundamentalist, measured as biblical literalism, are shown more likely to be church
attendees. Similarly, SES, gender, age, and number of children are each shown to be
predictors of church attendance. Those with higher SES, women, and those with more
children are more likely to attend than others, and the relationship between age and
church attendance is modeled as a V shaped curve (McKenzie 2001: 485). Importantly,
McKenzie’s findings are not dependent upon denominational affiliation, suggesting that
the operative mechanism in the attendance selection process is constant across tradition
boundaries (McKenzie 2001: 483).

Unfortunately, given the complexity of measuring congregational membership,
accurate measures of individual survey participation rates are difficult to obtain. When
distributing member surveys to congregations, the investigators asked for typical
attendance at worship services, and sent this amount plus 25 surveys. Once a congregation had agreed to participate in the project, focus group information suggests that motivation to participate on the part of congregation members was quite high (The U.S. Congregational Life Survey: A Summary of Focus Groups, Interviews with Clergy). The project was viewed as a rare opportunity to learn about the congregation and for each member to express opinions about community life within the congregation. Further, efforts were made to accommodate the elderly, the illiterate, and non-English speakers (the survey was produced in English, Spanish, and Korean). Observations for each congregation can be expected to be quite representative of regular attendees as the method of distribution should have generated a near saturation sample. Non response at the individual level is reported by the primary investigators to range from 0.0 to 5% within the average congregation (Bruce and Woolever 2005; correspondence with Cynthia Woolever, 5/5/2005) and these estimates are based on in person observation of the survey’s administration in many congregations.

3.6 Dependent Variables

The analysis covers three dichotomous dependent variables, 2 of which measure individual civic engagement beyond congregational involvement, and a third that measures evangelical outreach through the church. To measure voluntary associational behavior outside of the congregation, respondents are asked, “Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups not connected to this congregation?” Thirty-two percent of respondents report such involvement. The second civic engagement variable is measured with the question, “In the past 12 months, have
you done any of the following – Worked with others to try to solve a community problem?” Twenty-one percent of the respondents have done so.

The measure of evangelical behavior is not standard in the literature on religion and civic involvement. In the spirit of Robert Wuthnow’s broad definition of civic involvement (1998), and Nancy Ammerman’s contention that conservative Protestants seek change differently than other religious people (1987), I employ the evangelical behavior variable as an indicator of public participation. If conservative Protestants seek change one soul at a time, an analysis of their public participation is strengthened with a measurement approach conscious of the presence of such a value system. Whereas the traditional religious liberal is thought to seek change by directly engaging social ills (Smith 1996b); it may be that conservative Protestants pursue the growth of the church as a means to overcome social problems one sinner at a time.

Further, evangelism is common to more than simply conservative Christians, and is a form of social activity designed to engage and confront the civic order. As social activism, individual evangelism is likely related to those characteristics of congregations which compel or constrain individual pursuit of the organization’s collective goals. To measure evangelical behavior respondents are asked, “Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community?” Thirteen percent of respondents responded, “Yes, in evangelism or outreach activities.”

3.7 Individual Level Variables

At the individual level, several measures from the religion and civic life literature are included as controls (see Table 3.1). To account for the civic skills model proposed
TABLE 3.1

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL DESCRIPTIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE NAME</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>MAX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Association</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelize</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends in and out</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length Attend</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>51.30</td>
<td>16.66</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 59,215
by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), multiple measures of congregational participation are included. A position of leadership in a congregational group provides people with the opportunity to learn transferable civic skills. To control for this individual level characteristic, I use the question, “Do you currently have any of the following roles here?” Seven percent of respondents replied, “Officer or leader of men’s, women’s, youth or other group.” Also accounting for civic skills is the question, “What best describes your involvement in the making of important decisions in this congregation?” A dichotomous variable takes the value of one for the 13% who responded, “I have been given the opportunity and often participate in decision-making.”

To measure connection to the congregational community, a way to incorporate the concept of social capital, respondents are grouped according to their response to the question, “Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?” Eighty-two percent of the sample responded affirmatively to the question and are coded 1 on a dichotomous variable, while all others are coded 0. The individual level model also includes a dichotomous measure of participation in congregational social groups based on the question, “Are you regularly involved in any group activities here?” Thirty percent of respondents replied, “Yes, in fellowships, clubs, or other social groups.”

Continuing to measure social ties, congregation attendees were asked, “Do you have any close friends in this congregation?” The response categories are, “No, I have little contact with others from this congregation outside of activities here,” “No, I have some friends in this congregation, but my closest friends are not involved here,” “Yes, I have some close friends here as well as other close friends who are not part of this congregation,” and “Yes, most of my closest friends are part of this congregation.”
These responses are used to create two dichotomous measures indicating whether or not the respondent’s closest friends are all in the congregation, or if the respondent has friends both inside and outside of the congregation. Thirteen percent of respondents say that most of their closest friends belong to the congregation, while 55% report having close friends inside and outside of the congregation. These measures are used to indicate each individual’s position relative to the congregation’s networks and networks outside of the congregation.

To measure devotional practices, respondents were asked “How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone)?” Responses ranged from “Never” to “Every day or most days.” A measure of Biblical literalism is included to capture individual level religious conservatism, and the question is worded, “Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible?” A dichotomous variable is scored one for those 26% who responded “The Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word,” and 0 for all others. To control for frequency of individual service attendance, respondents are grouped according to their responses to the question, “How often do you go to worship services at this congregation?” Responses are in 7 categories ranging from “This is my first time” to “More than once a week.” Respondents were also asked for the length of time they have been attending the congregation, and the categorical measure ranges from “less than one year” to “More than 20 years.”

The remaining individual level variables account for a common set of social characteristics. To control for race dichotomous variables are entered for whites (80%) and African Americans (5%). Also, the model includes measures of employment (62%
employed), education ranging from “no formal schooling” through “masters or other graduate degree,” with the median level of education being “associate degree.” Annual household income is measured in six categories ranging from “less than $10,000” to “$100,000 or more,” and the median reported income level is “$50,000 to $74,999.”

Missing values on the education and household income are replaced with the average value from a respondent’s congregation. Age is measured continuously with an average of 51 years. Dichotomous variables also account for marital status (70% married), and gender (60% female).

3.8 Contextual Variables

A set of contextual variables are used to test the hypotheses generated from a multilevel theory of religion and civic involvement (see Table 3.2). Following the argument above about the appropriate level at which to measure denominational affiliation, measures of tradition are included at the congregational level, and based on the classification given by a congregation’s primary leader. Following the work of Steensland et. al. (2000), congregations are classified as Mainline Protestant (49%), Conservative Protestant (27%), Black Protestant (3%) and Catholic (22%). The small number of Black Protestant churches (n=9) is restrictive, and for most analyses the categories of Conservative and Black Protestant are collapsed according to the frequent theological similarities of the two traditions (Steensland et. al. 2000). Some congregations are affiliated with multiple denominations and associations, so, when necessary, the first denomination listed is used to denote affiliation.
TABLE 3.2
CONGREGATION LEVEL DESCRIPTIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE NAME</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>MAX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Protestant</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Protestant</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Theology</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Style</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s Involvement</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Density</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Heterogeneity</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Heterogeneity</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Size</td>
<td>273.75</td>
<td>363.71</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>2847.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach Programs</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also relevant for questions of public engagement is a congregation’s theological orientation, and as such multiple measures are used to differentiate congregations along this dimension. While the denominational categories outlined above do consider variation in theological viewpoints, I include direct measures of congregational theological perspective to account for congregation level variation within denominational traditions. The primary measure of congregational outlook is based on a key informant’s response to the following statement, “Theologically, would your congregation be considered...” Responses included, “More on the conservative side,” “Right in the
middle,” and “More on the liberal side.” Following Beyerlein and Chaves (2003), a dichotomous measure of conservative theology is included in the models, and 41% of the congregations are characterized in this way.

The measures of denominational affiliation and congregational theology are included to account for the culture as values perspective. Another perspective on culture emphasizes the daily lived experiences of group life (Ammerman 1997; Patillo-McCoy 1998). I include a measure of congregational decision making style as an indication of the cultural tools available to congregation participants. Congregation leaders were asked to describe how decisions are typically made, and responded “I make most of the decisions; lay members generally follow my lead,” “I try to inspire and encourage lay members to make decisions and take action, although I will take action alone if I believe that it is needed,” “Lay leaders come up with most of the initiatives in the congregation, although I try to exert a strong influence on their decisions,” and “Lay leaders make most of the decisions about the congregation’s directions and programs; my role is to empower them to implement their decisions.” A dichotomous variable indicates those congregations in which lay leaders make most of the decisions, and these congregations comprise 19% of the sample.

To test the network hypotheses outlined in the theory and analyses chapters several measures are included. Each congregation leader was asked to “estimate how many hours in a typical week you devote to…involvement in community organizations and issues beyond the congregation.” Those leaders who reported spending time outside of the congregation (78%) are noted with a dichotomous variable used to indicate that the leader serves as bridging tie to outside organizations.
The remaining network measures indicate aspects of the relationships between attendees and the congregational network’s composition. To capture a congregation’s overall density, the friendship question described above ("Do you have any close friends in this congregation?") is again utilized. For each congregation, I aggregate the measures indicating close friendships inside and outside of the congregation or close friendships mostly within the congregation. In the typical congregation, 15% of respondents report that most of their close friends are also attendees, and 58% report having close friends both inside and outside of the group.

Following the work of Rotolo (2000), I examine the impact of congregational heterogeneity. Using measures of individual level of education and race, I construct a familiar measure of heterogeneity (Blau 1977: 9; Rotolo 2000: 276):

\[ 1 - \sum p_i^2. \]

The quantity \( p_i \) represents the proportion of attendees in each congregation with each educational or racial characteristic. For each heterogeneity variable, a larger value indicates a lower probability that any two congregation members share a characteristic. The average level of racial heterogeneity is 0.23, while the least heterogeneous congregation is completely homogeneous (0.00), and the most diverse congregation scores 0.73. For the measure of educational heterogeneity, the average congregation scores 0.63, the least heterogeneous congregation 0.17, and the most heterogeneous 0.75.

In addition to the contextual variables used to test the set of hypotheses, a measure of congregation size is included. The measure is constructed as a sum of the individual level surveys completed in each congregation on the survey date. While other measures of congregation size, such as the leader’s estimate of active members, are
available, the count of completed surveys is used as an unobtrusive measure of members participating in weekly worship services. The median number of completed surveys is 152.

3.9 Format of Analyses

Following the advice of Bryk and Raudenbush (1992: 211), models are initially tested including subsets of contextual variables. The initial hierarchical model, presented in chapter 4, includes only a random intercept term to demonstrate the presence of congregational variance. After congregation level variance is demonstrated for each dependent variable, contextual variables are added in blocks according to each of the primary theoretical components outlined in chapter 2. For example, chapter 5 covers voluntary association membership and community organizing by first examining culture effects, next testing for network effects, and finally developing a preferred model combining elements of each general perspective (culture and networks). The same procedure is followed for the analyses of evangelical behavior presented in chapter 6.
CHAPTER 4

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the basic individual level models of three forms of civic involvement. Before setting up a multilevel model an adequate set of individual level predictors should be in place. The point of the multilevel model is to determine variance that remains after individual level factors have been taken in to account. At the individual level, a number of stable relationships have been catalogued.

4.2 Individual Level Model

Most explanations of how religion affects participation in wider society focus on individual level factors like church participation and belief. Lam (2002) provides excellent coverage of the individual level religious factors theorized to impact civic life. She breaks religious life into 4 arenas, and then examines the impact of each on voluntary association membership. First, she demonstrates the importance of the affiliative dimension. This refers to those who claim a religious identity such as Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. Lam finds that, overall, those who report affiliation are more active in voluntary associations than those who do not indicate religious affiliation, and that Protestants are more active then Catholics or Jews.
It is noteworthy that Lam finds no significant differences across the liberal, moderate and conservative camps of Protestantism. While affiliation, conceptualized at the individual level, has been shown to impact civic engagement, per the argument laid out in chapter 3 I will not control for denominational affiliation at the individual level. Instead, because people are affiliated with congregations and not denominations, a measure of an individual’s sense of connection to the congregation is entered into the models.

Next, Lam discusses the participatory dimension of religious life and its relation to civic involvement. While many have demonstrated a link between church participation and public participation, the most complete theoretical explanation is that of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), who discuss participation in church social activities when describing their Civic Voluntarism Model. For them, churches are institutions that provide opportunities to learn political skills. They describe American churches as a democratic arena where opportunities such as collective decision making, letter writing, or speech making are distributed relatively equally across a variety of demographic characteristics. By participating in these ways, people learn skills that are easily transferable to politics.

Regardless of the organizational focus of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), the theory is grounded in individual level factors. Churches are thought to provide opportunities, but it is when an individual takes advantage of the opportunities that skills are gained. So, the committee leader learns transferable skills, but those who do not gain access to such positions earn no such civic skills. Churches are thought to be a relatively democratic institution in that such opportunities are available to people who might
otherwise be barred from such positions. For example, while educational characteristics limit a person’s chance to obtain a job that would provide civic skills, churches are more open to the educationally disadvantaged, and as such skill building opportunities are more likely at church rather than at work.

Involvement in religious organizations is positively related to involvement in secular organizations. More importantly, a position of leadership in a congregational group provides people with the opportunity to learn transferable civic skills (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Religious service attendance, however, is negatively related to secular membership. This finding echoes that of others (Wuthnow 1999; Iannaccone 1994; McPherson and Rotolo 1996), and is explained in terms of time economy. Time given to one organization, through the likes of attendance, is time not available to competing organizations. In light of these findings, the individual level model includes measures of service attendance, membership in a congregational social group, congregational friendships and sense of belonging, group leadership, and participation in congregational decision making.

A third dimension of religion relevant for civic involvement on the individual level is that of devotional religiosity. The personal, devotional, aspects of religiosity are exemplified by prayer and religious reading. Both prayer and reading are positively related to secular voluntary association membership (Lam 2003, Harris 1999, Patillo-McCoy 1998, Poloma and Gallup 1991, Loveland et. al. 2005). For example, Loveland et. al. (2005) demonstrate a positive relationship between prayer and voluntary association membership. Those who pray more frequently develop a cognitive
connection to the needs of others that compels public involvement, and directs such involvement to associations organized around direct assistance.

Further, Harris (1999) proposes that “religion’s psychological dimension could potentially empower individuals with a sense of competence and resilience, inspiring them to believe in their own ability, with the assistance of an acknowledged sacred force, to influence or affect governmental affairs, thus—in some instances—to act politically” (Harris 1999: 82). According to Patillo-McCoy’s ethnography of the black church, prayer is “a cultural tool for social change,” that often focuses “not on individual salvation but on the needs of the family, the neighborhood, and even African Americans as a racial group” (1998: 773). The individual level model of civic involvement includes a measure of devotional religiosity.

Another well studied aspect of religiosity and public life is personal religious belief. Belief in the sinfulness of mankind (McVeigh and Sikkink 2001), and Biblical literalism (Sherkat and Ellison 1997) have also been related to public engagement. In the case of literalism, some have argued conservative Christians may be less likely to get involved in secular society. Ammerman (1987) theorizes that conservative Christians avoid conventional politics because they live in a “world of opposition” (1987: 188), where compromise is unacceptable and pluralism creates unstable definitions. Given this worldview, participation in conventional adversarial politics is perhaps understood as not only futile, but a dangerous compromise of belief. As Ammerman writes, “Their strategy for change differs from that of liberal or secular political reformers. It begins with seeking spiritual change in individuals.” (1987: 200) Expecting a negative impact on the
likelihood of civic involvement, Biblical literalism is included as a measure of individual conservatism (McKenzie 2001; Peterson 1992).

Previous research has demonstrated the influence of several other individual level characteristics on civic involvement (Park and Smith 2000). Included in the individual level model are dummy variables measuring race (White and African American, other race is reference group), gender (female), marital status (married), employment status (employed versus non-employed). Also included are categorical measures of household income and educational attainment (Smith 1994; Putnam 2000; Rotolo 2000). Marriage tends to increase participation in congregations more so than in secular organizations, and so I expect that married congregation members will be less involved outside of the congregation than the non-married. Workplace ties are often considered less likely than others to generate civic involvement because these connections are less meaningful than those generated in religious organizations or neighborhoods (Putnam 2000). Those with more education and income are consistently shown to be more involved in their communities.

4.3 Fixed Intercept Models

The initial step in building a multi-level model is to specify the individual level component, and to do so, I specify a fixed intercept logistic model including the predictors outlined above for each of the three dependent variables – voluntary association membership, community organizing, and evangelical behavior. To begin, I summarize these models.
The individual level model predicting voluntary association reveals few surprises. Table 4.1 shows that age, female, African American, white, household income and education are significantly and positively associated with membership. Employment and married are each significantly and negatively associated with voluntary association. The indicators of devotional and participatory religiosity also behave as expected. Those who spend more time in devotional activities are more likely to report voluntary association membership than those who spend less time in such activities, and Biblical literalists are less likely to report voluntary association memberships. Service attendance is negatively associated with secular membership, while length of time attending the congregation is positively associated with voluntary association.

The measures of civic skills and social capital also behave according to the claims of previous literature. Those who lead church groups are more likely to report voluntary association membership, as are those who report they are often involved in congregational decision making. Those who report a strong sense of belonging to their congregation are no more likely to be voluntary association members than those who report a weaker connection to the congregation. Social ties to the congregation, in the form of close friendships, are positively associated with membership in secular voluntary association, as is membership in a church social group.

A closer examination of the relationship between friendship ties and voluntary association reveals that bridging friendships appear to be a stronger pull into public life. Relative to those with no close friends at church, those with friends both in and outside of the congregation are about 44% more likely to be voluntary association members. In comparison, those who report that most of their close friends are also congregation
### TABLE 4.1

**VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION**

**FIXED INTERCEPT LOGISTIC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-3.346</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.528</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.362</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>-0.341</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>-0.204</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.243</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Congregation N = 296
Individual N = 59,215
Deviance = 68,972.07
members are about 12% more likely than those with no friends at church to join a voluntary association. Further, the t-ratio for the significance test is approximately 5 times larger for extra-congregation friendships.

Next, in table 4.2, is the individual level model predicting membership in a community action group. Employment, household income, level of education, and racial identification as African American or white are each significantly and positively associated with community action. The older, women, and the married are all significantly less likely to work on community problems by way of this type of organizing. Time spent in devotional activity is positively and significantly associated with community organizing, and Biblical literalism is negative and significantly associated with working on community problems. Service attendance is negatively related to involvement, and length of time attending the congregation is not significantly associated with such activity.

Church group leadership increases the likelihood of becoming involved in community action groups, as does being involved in congregational decision making. A strong sense of congregational belonging does not impact involvement in community action groups. As expected, friendships of either type are positively associated with community action group membership. Again, those with friendships both inside and outside of the congregation are more strongly pulled into civic involvement. Membership in congregation social groups is also positively related to joining community action groups.

Finally, table 4.3, presents the individual level model of evangelical behavior. Those with more education are more likely than those with less education to report being
### TABLE 4.2

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

**FIXED INTERCEPT LOGISTIC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-2.935</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.299</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>-0.311</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.140</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Congregation N = 296  
Individual N = 59,215  
Deviance = 57,947.14
### TABLE 4.3

**EVANGELISM**

**FIXED INTERCEPT LOGISTIC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.961</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.901</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.659</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>0.564</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.266</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-0.255</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Congregation N = 296  
Individual N = 59,215  
Deviance = 35,839.47
involved in evangelical behavior, while increased income decreases the likelihood of proselytizing and employment is unrelated. The older and the married are each more likely to report evangelical behavior, while gender is not statistically related to evangelizing. African Americans are more likely than those of other races (the non-White reference group) to seek converts, while whites are less likely to do so than those of other races. Time spent in devotional activity is positively associated with evangelical behavior, as is Biblical literalism. Increased frequency of church attendance is related to a greater likelihood of evangelizing, while length of time attending is negatively associated with proselytizing.

Holding a position of leadership in the congregation or being involved in decision making each increase one’s odds of seeking new members. Those who report a strong sense of belonging to the congregation are also more likely to report evangelical behavior than those who do not feel as close to the group. Again, both friendship situations and social group membership are positively related to proselytizing. In the case of seeking new members for the church, those who report that all of their close friends are in the congregation appear to be more strongly influenced to proselytize, relative to those with no friends in the congregation, than those with friends both inside and outside of the church.

4.4 Random Intercept Models

The fundamental claim of this project is that the congregation matters in such a way so that modeling individual religious dynamics without accounting for variation between congregational groups is inadequate. Following Bryk and Raudenbush, one
approach to demonstrate the veracity of this claim is testing the hypothesis that the estimated intercept varies by the level 2 units (1992: 55), in this case congregations. For each dependent variable, the individual level model presented above has been estimated with the allowance for a random intercept, and the corresponding hypothesis test conducted.

Table 4.4 presents the results of the test for each model. For voluntary association membership, the estimated variance component for the random intercept is 0.10 testing significant at the 0.001 level with a Chi-square value of 1329.59. When predicting involvement with community action groups, the variance component is estimated at 0.12 with a Chi-square value of 1247.30, again significant at the 0.001 level. Finally, evangelism reveals the most variation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Association</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1329.59</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1247.30</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>1712.08</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
between congregations, with a variance component of 0.28 and a Chi-square statistic of 1712.08 also significant at the 0.001 level.

When voluntary association membership is predicted with a random intercept model, religious service attendance no longer remains a significant deterrent. The random intercept model also produces changes when predicting membership in a community action group, as the race variables and marital status lose significance. Finally, when proselytizing is predicted with a random intercept model, individual biblical literalism and identification as African American fail to reach standard levels of statistical significance.

4.5 Summary

The series of models presented here serves as the baseline for the current project, providing the first evidence of the study’s methodological and substantive contribution to the existing literature. Of the three dependent variables included in this analysis, it appears that evangelizing is more susceptible to congregational effects than are the more standard measures of civic involvement after the individual level model is put in place. Nonetheless, after accounting for well understood aspects of the religion and public life relationship, congregational variance remains for each measure. This not only suggests that the initial theoretical idea about the importance of congregations is correct, but also encourages an attempt to account for the congregation level variance. Such explanations are the goal of the remainder of this dissertation.
CHAPTER 5

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin to analyze congregational level variance in individual civic engagement by testing hypotheses about the standard forms of civic engagement – voluntary association and community organizing. The method of analysis follows the advice of Bryk and Raudenbush (1992) to test contextual variables in theoretically meaningful blocks as a way to build a full model. The initial culture models include measures of congregational affiliation with a denomination, congregational theology, and congregational decision making strategy. Next, I test the hypotheses generated from the theory about congregational networks using measures of congregational density, leader participation in the community, and congregational heterogeneity.

5.2 Restatement of Hypotheses

Several hypotheses are based on the conceptualization of congregations as the primary collective unit of American religious life and the theoretical propositions about congregations and civic engagement. In terms of congregational culture:

H1: Congregations affiliated with conservative Protestant denominations dissuade individuals from becoming involved in civic engagement, and as such those at Mainline and Catholic congregations are more likely to report standard forms of civic engagement.
H2: Conservative congregational theology, as indicated by the congregation leader, decreases the likelihood that individuals will become involved in civic engagement.

H3: Congregations with participatory decision making strategies compel individuals to become civically involved.

Next are a series of network hypotheses.

H4: Congregation leaders active in their communities serve as bridges and increase the amount of civic involvement of congregation laity.

H5: Congregations characterized with dense social networks negatively impact individual’s civic engagement.

H6: Increases in congregational heterogeneity, in terms of race and educational attainment, decrease the likelihood that an individual will be civically involved.

5.3 Results

To examine these hypotheses, HLM 6 is used to estimate a two level random intercept model for dependent variables with a Bernoulli distribution – a hierarchical logistic regression. All models include the individual level variables discussed in chapter 4 and a contextual level control for congregation size.

Before analyzing the contextual level factors and their impact on voluntary association, it is valuable to again examine the null model of voluntary association. The null model, allowing the intercept to vary across congregations but excluding any contextual explanatory variables, will serve as the baseline from which the amount of congregational variance explained will be determined. Looking at the null model (see
we see that the variance component is estimated at 0.10. The variance explained statistic is calculated by subtracting the full model variance from the null model variance and dividing the result by the null model variance (Rotolo 2000; Bryk and Raudenbush 1992).

Table 5.1 presents the cultural model of voluntary association. As a way to account for the culture as values perspective outlined by Nancy Ammerman (1997) the model includes the previously described measures of denominational affiliation – affiliation with Mainline Protestantism or Roman Catholicism is entered into the model, while conservative Protestants (including Black Protestants) are the reference group. Individuals who attend congregations affiliated with Mainline Protestantism are about 36% more likely than those at Conservative Protestant congregations to have voluntary association memberships outside the church. Those who attend Roman Catholic congregations are not significantly different from the Conservative Protestant reference group.

The second ‘culture as values’ hypothesis concerns the congregation’s specific theological orientation. Because congregational culture is not completely determined by denominational affiliation measurement is improved by direct assessment of the congregation as an organization. Based on the leader’s characterization, congregations are classified as theologically conservative, moderate, or liberal. The dichotomous measure included in the models represents those congregations characterized as theologically conservative, with the other orientations as the reference group. When predicting non-church voluntary association membership, conservative congregational theology is a barrier to individual participation. The model predicts that those attending
### Table 5.1

**Voluntary Association, Culture**

#### Random Intercept

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>980.11</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fixed Effects

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<thead>
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<th>Intercept</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-0.805</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Congregation Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>0.305</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Theology</td>
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<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Style</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Size</td>
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<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### Individual Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
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<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.497</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.351</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>-0.257</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>-0.181</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.234</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
conservative congregations are about 12% less likely to belong to secular voluntary groups than those attending more liberal congregations.

A second perspective on congregational culture suggests that culture is created and maintained in the daily process of interaction and religious practice. While the activities of congregational life revolve around worship, the general patterns of behavior enacted in the religious setting are thought to be lived in other settings as well. For example, if a congregation places emphasis on creating new relationships and being welcoming of strangers, it might be expected that those active in such congregations would be more gregarious in general public life. Related to question of civic engagement, it is expected that those who attend congregations where decision making is a collaborative process between church leadership and laity carry with them participatory tools that will allow them to be more involved in civil society. Importantly, it is expected that affiliation with such a congregation will have an impact regardless of the individual’s participation in practices, like committee leadership, thought to imbue civic skills transferable to the outside community (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

Looking at the individual level portion of model 5.1, we see that leadership and active participation in congregational decision making are in fact significantly and positively associated with voluntary association. When leadership and decision making are set to values of 1, indicating that the respondent is a group leader and active in congregation decision making and all other individual level predictors are set to their grand mean scores, the model predicts a 51% probability that one who attends a Mainline congregation of average size would also have an outside membership. Conversely, one in the same congregation who does not serve as a leader or help with decision making has
a 36% probability of being a voluntary association member. While these predictions should not be given more weight than due, they do demonstrate that the individual level characteristics matter in light of contextual effects. When predicting voluntary association membership with the hierarchical model, however, congregational participatory decision making strategy does not prove significant. It would appear then, that the skill building qualities of congregational involvement depend upon active individual participation in such activities, and at least in terms of voluntary association membership, a congregation’s decision making culture is unimportant.

As a final note, the size of the congregation does seem to have a marginal impact an individual’s propensity to join outside voluntary associations. In larger congregations, individual members are less likely to have outside memberships. The impact, while statistically significant, is substantively quite small. For each 100 additional members in the congregation, an average individual is about 1% less likely to hold a secular voluntary association membership.

In table 5.2 the results for the community organizing model are presented. A second form of civic involvement, community organizing differs from voluntary association in that it frequently indicates interest in particular short term issues and mobilized groups of like-minded individuals that are not as permanent as voluntary associations like the Lions Club or Rotary. Special interest groups are an increasingly common form of public involvement (Wuthnow 1988) and serve a vital role in connection between civil society and the state (Linz and Stepan 1996). Such groups are exemplified by anti-pornography movements (Sherkat and Ellison 1997), local environmental activism (Kriesi, Saris and Wille 1993), or anti-Wal Mart movements.
### TABLE 5.2

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, CULTURE

RANDOM INTERCEPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>1,045.70</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effects</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-1.384</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Congregation Level**  
*N = 296*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Theology</td>
<td>-0.088</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Style</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Size</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual Level**  
*N = 59,215*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>-0.217</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.155</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.200</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moving to the contextual variables, tradition differences are evident when predicting individual participation in community action groups. As expected, those who attend congregations affiliated with Conservative denominations are less likely to report such activity. As conservative Protestant denominations have historically championed a “soul-saving” approach to social change, it is no surprise that Mainline traditions, drawing on a Social Gospel history, are more likely to house members who are active in community action groups. All else being equal, the model suggests that those attending Mainline congregations are about 22% more likely than those at Conservative congregations to be in such groups. The model predicts that those at Catholic congregations see their odds of community organizing increased by about 36%.

As in the model predicting voluntary association membership, the individual level civic skill measures of group leadership and decision making activity are positively associated with community organizing. These findings again lend support to the claim that congregations are settings in which transferable skills are learned by those who take advantage of such opportunities. Congregational decision making strategy, the subject of hypothesis 3, is again unrelated to individual involvement. Also, congregational size again negatively impacts individual involvement to a small, but statistically significant, degree. For each additional 100 participants in a congregation, an individual is approximately 1% less likely to be involved in community organizing.

Beyond the impact of the hypothesized parameters, multilevel modeling allows the researcher to examine the amount of variability explained when contextual factors are
taken into account. Using the equation detailed above, the cultural model of voluntary association explains about 30% of the congregational variance in the intercept. The cultural model of community action explains about 17% of the variance. See table 5.3 for these results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture Model</th>
<th>Null Variance</th>
<th>Culture Model Variance</th>
<th>Variance Explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Association</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, the set of network hypotheses are tested. Table 5.4 presents the network model of voluntary association. The measure of congregational size is again included, and given the importance granted to religious tradition in most quantitative analyses in the sociology of religion I include indicators of the congregation’s denominational affiliation. The controls prove to be significant yet again, as each additional 100 congregation participants reduce an individual’s likelihood of membership by about 1%. Those attending Mainline congregations are about 24% more likely to hold a voluntary membership.

Moving to the network measures and testing hypothesis 4, those who attend congregations lead by a leader active in the community are indeed more likely to themselves be voluntary association members. The individual odds of membership are
### TABLE 5.4

**VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION, NETWORK**

**RANDOM INTERCEPT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>848.28</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Fixed Effects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.286</td>
<td>0.150</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Congregation Level**

- **N = 296**
  - Mainline: 0.213, 0.055, 0.000
  - Catholic: 0.033, 0.068, 0.623
  - Leader’s Participation: 0.129, 0.046, 0.006
  - Friendship Density: -1.149, 0.305, 0.000
  - Racial Heterogeneity: -0.065, 0.147, 0.657
  - Education Heterogeneity: -0.700, 0.183, 0.000
  - Congregation Size: -0.010, 0.000, 0.015

**Individual Level**

- **N = 59,215**
  - Group Leader: 0.248, 0.035, 0.000
  - Decision Maker: 0.349, 0.028, 0.000
  - Church Social Group: 0.498, 0.022, 0.000
  - Closest Friends: 0.157, 0.034, 0.000
  - Bridging Friends: 0.356, 0.023, 0.000
  - Service Attendance: -0.005, 0.011, 0.670
  - Length of Attend: 0.032, 0.007, 0.000
  - Strong Belonging: -0.043, 0.030, 0.144
  - Devotional Time: 0.107, 0.007, 0.000
  - Biblical Literalist: -0.254, 0.025, 0.000
  - Employed: -0.180, 0.023, 0.000
  - Married: -0.229, 0.023, 0.000
  - Female: 0.106, 0.020, 0.000
  - Black: 0.178, 0.070, 0.011
  - White: 0.063, 0.033, 0.058
  - Age: 0.004, 0.001, 0.000
  - Household Income: 0.102, 0.009, 0.000
  - Education: 0.190, 0.007, 0.000
multiplied by a factor of 1.14 when the leader spends time in the community. Serving as a bridge to the outside, a leader active in the community is a pathway for information about opportunities and can serve as a catalyst of participation simply by asking followers to devote time to a cause. Conversely, and in support of hypothesis 5, a dense congregation composed of many close ties negatively impacts a participating individual’s propensity to join outside associations. For example, someone attending a conservative Protestant congregation of average density (0.21) has a 37% probability of membership, while someone at the densest congregations (0.48) has a probability of 30%, controlling for the remaining contextual level variables. Importantly, each of these findings is also net of the individual’s own congregational friendship situation.

For an individual, their own church friendships are connections that matter for outside civic involvement. Looking at the individual level portion of table 5.4, it is evident that church friendships increase an individual’s odds of belonging to secular voluntary associations. Those who report that most of their closest friends are also congregation members see their odds of being voluntary association members multiplied by a factor of 1.17, while those who report close friends in and outside of the congregation have their odds multiplied by a factor of 1.43.

That the individual level effect of having most close friends inside the congregation is in the opposite direction of the effect when an individual’s congregation is characterized by a larger number of such ties points to the value of a multilevel approach to congregational life. At the individual level, friendships serve as connections that have the potential to draw people into social life (Wuthnow 2004b; Olson 1989). However, the network of relationships within which a particular tie exists is unique from
any of its constituent ties. When networks of relationships become more closed to outside networks, the civic lives of individuals are affected because of the overall network structure within which they are embedded.

Next, the heterogeneity measures are examined as a test of hypothesis 6. In general, it is expected that heterogeneity is detrimental to civic engagement because relationships between two people who are alike are most likely to produce the trust required to draw someone into social life. Referring to table 5.4, congregational racial heterogeneity is not associated with individual voluntary association membership. Educational heterogeneity, however, does impact an individual’s likelihood of joining a voluntary association. The interpretation of the heterogeneity measures is somewhat complicated.

A unit change in heterogeneity makes little substantive sense, but it is reasonable to determine predicted probabilities for realistic levels of congregational educational heterogeneity. For example, the probability that an average individual, attending an average sized congregation with the average level of educational heterogeneity (0.63), belongs to a voluntary association is 33%. If, however, educational heterogeneity decreases to the minimum level among all congregations (.17), then the model predicts a voluntary association probability of 40%.

Table 5.5 presents the results of the network model for community organizing. Again, the congregational controls prove meaningful. Tradition distinctions appear important in the case of community organizing as those attending Conservative Protestant congregations are less likely than both those at Catholic and Mainline Protestant congregations to report such activity. Those at Mainline congregations have about 19%
### TABLE 5.5

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, NETWORK

RANDOM INTERCEPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.094</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effects</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Congregation Level

* N = 296

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s Participation</td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Density</td>
<td>-0.292</td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>0.428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Heterogeneity</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Heterogeneity</td>
<td>-0.453</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Size</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Individual Level

* N = 59,215

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.643</td>
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<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>-0.216</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.156</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
greater odds of belonging, while for those at Catholic congregations the odds are 34% greater. Congregation size is also significant as the odds of participating in a community action group decrease by about 3% for each 100 additional attendees.

Those who attend a congregation with a leader active in the community are more likely to be themselves involved in community action groups. If the leader reports spending time in the community beyond congregational affairs, then attendee odds of action group participation increase by approximately 20% on average. Again the leader serves as a bridge and a connection to outside opportunities. Also, when the congregation is characterized as having a dense network where many attendees report that most of their close friendships are within the group, individual odds of community organizing are decreased. For example, in a congregation of average density (0.15) the probability of belonging to a community action group is 22%. However, in the densest congregations (0.48) the probability of membership is 20%. While the difference appears small, it is statistically significant and net of individual friendship connections.

When predicting participation in community action groups, congregational heterogeneity appears marginally significant. Racial heterogeneity is not related to the outcome, but as educational heterogeneity increases the odds of belonging to a community action group decrease. For example, the average attendee of the typically educationally heterogeneous congregation (0.63) has an 18% chance of belonging to an action group holding all else constant. If, however, one attends the least heterogeneous congregation (0.17), the model predicts a participation probability of 21%. Again, the apparently small difference is statistically significant.
Finally, how does the network model compare to the null model of community organizing? Intercept variance is reduced to 0.09 from 0.12, or about 25% of the variance in individual community action group participation is explained by the congregational network measures. When predicting individual voluntary association membership, the network measures reduce the variance from 0.10 to 0.06, so they help to explain about 40% of the variance. In comparison to the culture models of civic involvement the network measures appear to have more explanatory power, as the culture model explained about 17% of the variance in community organizing and about 30% of voluntary association membership variance.

The next step in the multilevel modeling process, shown in table 5.6, is to test a preferred model including those predictors proving significant in the preliminary models. From the culture model, the preferred model of voluntary association membership includes measures of religious tradition and congregational theology. From the network model, the preferred model includes variables noting the community involvement of the congregation’s leader, the congregation’s friendship density, and congregation educational heterogeneity. Also included is the control for congregation size.

Congregational size and affiliation with a Mainline denomination are related to a greater individual probability of belonging to a voluntary association, as are leader involvement in the community, congregational friendship density, educational heterogeneity. Again, predicted probabilities are used to demonstrate the effects. Unless noted, measures of congregation density, size, and educational heterogeneity are set to their overall mean value when determining predicted probabilities, and leader’s time in the community and conservative congregational theology are set to their modal values, 1
### Table 5.6

**Voluntary Association, Preferred Random Intercept**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>849.53</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fixed Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.278</td>
<td>0.150</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Congregation Level (N = 296)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Theology</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s Participation</td>
<td>0.121</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0.184</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Size</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Individual Level (N = 59,215)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
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<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.349</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.356</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.679</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
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<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
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<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.139</td>
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<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>-0.180</td>
<td>0.023</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<td>Household Income</td>
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<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
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</table>
and 0 respectively. The full model predicts that an individual, who is average on the included individual level predictors and an attendee of a Conservative Protestant congregation, has a 31% chance of belonging to a non-church voluntary association. The same individual attending a Mainline Protestant congregation has a 36% chance of belonging to a voluntary association not connected to the congregation.

Leader’s time spent in the community is positively associated with individual voluntary association membership. For example, an average member of a Conservative Protestant congregation where the leader does not participate in the community has a 29% chance of belonging to a voluntary association, relative to the 31% probability determined above when the leader does spend time in the community. The leader’s role in facilitating a connection between religious and public life has received scant attention in the literature. While a good number of studies provide descriptive pictures of clergy involvement in social movements, national, or local politics, there has been too little theoretical consideration of the mechanisms through which the leader might influence the behavior of his or her flock. That the relationship between a leader’s involvement and that of the church members stands up after controlling for a set of theoretically important individual and contextual level variables suggests that this relationship is stable and deserves further examination.

The other measure meant to capture network connectedness, congregational friendship density, also proves significant in the full model of voluntary association. When the density measure is set to its overall sample maximum of 0.48 and other predictors are set to their sample means, the model predicts a 24% chance that a member of such a congregation would also report a non-church voluntary association. At the
other extreme, the minimum value of density in the sample (0.02), the predicted probability of outside membership increases to 34%. Dense congregations are composed of fewer outside connections, and it is the lack of these outside connections that constrains individual opportunities to become secularly involved. The data do demonstrate the relationship between conservatism and dense networks that the literature suggests (Iannaccone 1988), but the relationship between network density and individual involvement proves significant in the final model net of controls for both denominational and congregational conservatism.

Finally, the negative relationship between congregation educational heterogeneity and individual outside involvement remains significant in the full model. When heterogeneity is set at its sample maximum value of (0.75) the probability that an individual at such a congregation would report an outside voluntary association membership is 29%. If, however, educational heterogeneity is set to its sample minimum of 0.17, then the model predicts a 38% probability of belonging to a non-church voluntary association.

The full model of community organizing, table 5.7, differs slightly from the preferred model of voluntary association. A smaller set of contextual variables demonstrated significance in the preliminary culture and network models, and as such only the measures of religious tradition, leader’s participation, and educational heterogeneity are included beyond the congregational size control. Each of the included contextual level variables remains significant in the full model.

Those who attend Mainline Protestant or Catholic congregations are more likely to report involvement in community action groups than those who attend
**TABLE 5.7**

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, PREFERRED

RANDOM INTERCEPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>1,013.07</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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</table>

**Fixed Effects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>0.161</td>
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**Congregation Level**  
*N = 296*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregation Level</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>0.200</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s Participation</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Heterogeneity</td>
<td>-0.457</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Size</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual Level**  
*N = 59,215*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Level</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.658</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>-0.217</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.155</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conservative Protestant congregations, all else being constant. For example, with other contextual and individual level variables set to the sample means, the model predicts a 19% chance that those attending a Conservative Protestant congregation will be involved in community organizing. For Mainline Protestant congregations the model predicts a 22% probability, and for those at Catholic congregations the chance increases to 24%. These tradition differences lend support to the idea that Conservative Christian groups seek social change according to a different strategy than do other Christians. In the next chapter, the analysis of evangelical behavior will further address this issue.

Looking again at the relationship between leader’s participation and lay civic involvement, the model provides further evidence of the catalyzing potential of religious leadership. The baseline 19% probability of participation in community action groups for Conservative Protestants in average congregations is reduced to 16% if the leader is not involved in community affairs. Also, the relationship between educational heterogeneity and individual involvement continues to be significant when predicting community organizing. When educational heterogeneity is set to its sample minimum value of 0.17, an average attendee of a Conservative Protestant congregation has a probability of belonging to a community action group of 22%, and this probability reduces to 18% when educational heterogeneity is set to its maximum value of 0.75.

Relative to the null model, the full model for voluntary association reduces the variance component to 0.06, resulting in a 40% reduction in error. For community organizing, the full model results in a variance component of 0.09 representing a 25% reduction of intercept variance. The reader will notice that the error reduction for the full models is similar to that of the preliminary network models described above. The
network variables have done more to explain the relationship between congregations and individual civic life than have the propositions based on theories of congregational culture.

5.4 Conclusion

The individual level connections between religious belief and participation and civic involvement are well studied. Certainly, the connections generated and maintained through participating in communal religious life are important draws into public life, and the civic skills that can be learned and practiced in religious organizations prepare one for an active civic role. The individual level model posited in the current study incorporates a strong set of the usual predictors, and verifies their efficacy. For example, social capital and civic skills are two of the most commonly theorized general concepts related to civic participation. In the current study, measures of individual participation in positions of leadership or congregational decision making indicate the presence of civic skills, and the individual’s congregational friendship ties at church, measures of social capital, are positively related to involvement outside of church. After controlling for their presence, however, contextual variables prove significant.

Confirming the presence of congregational effects after controlling for individual level characteristics is the primary contribution of this project. While the sociology of religion is slowly beginning to take advantage of multi-level methods as a way to properly test context sensitive theories (Schwadel 2002, 2005), the analyses presented in this chapter are the most complete attempts at the hierarchical analyses of religious and civic life to date. Using both a cultural and social movements perspective the analyses
test theoretically based claims about group values, interaction processes, and network structure. Findings about the salience of congregational culture are mixed. While indicators of affiliation with larger traditions prove significant, it may be that these larger categories serve primarily as residual categories capturing the yet unmeasured characteristics of particular congregations. While the culture as values approach often finds voice in existing literature (Ammerman 1990; 1996; 2005), future large scale congregational studies will likely include more nuanced measures of the face to face interactional life of religious communities. For example, improved measures of friendship ties that allow for a more in depth analysis of these connections (i.e. identifying these friends) would make possible a wide range of analyses about how locations within congregational networks differentially impact civic action (Smith 1999).

However, the hypotheses regarding congregational networks have found strong support and it is the network measures which contain the bulk of the explanatory power in these analyses. The study’s findings about the role of leader’s as links to outside opportunities for involvement are unique. Following from a theoretical approach that emphasizes the relational aspects of congregational life, hypotheses about the leader as a bridging tie develop straightforwardly. That the hypothesis is supported suggests that the network approach to congregational life is beneficial. In fact, few questions about the relationship between leaders and followers have been addressed in the sociology of religion (Hammond, Salinas, and Sloane 1977). While there is a fair amount of literature about types of leadership, for example charismatic (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Greenfeld 1985; Klein and House 1995), and a number of studies about the types of clergy involvement in politics (Crawford and Olson 2001), or their ability to mobilize
followers intentionally (Morris 1984; Crawford and Olson 2001), few studies have theorized or examined the ways in which leader’s public activity serves as an independent, congregational link to the local community.

The findings about congregational density are also as expected. Congregations characterized as relatively closed to the outside world limit the civic activity of participants. Certainly, there is a relationship between congregational conservatism and network density, and conservatism independently increases the exclusivity of such congregations by placing behavioral strictures on their members (Iannaccone 1994). However, the models tested here have included congregational and denomination measures of conservatism, and report that net of these controls the network structure of a congregation matters. A closed network constrains the behavior Mainline Protestants and Catholics as well as Conservative Protestants.

Next, the findings about the relationship between congregational educational heterogeneity and outside civic involvement confirm general expectations about the efficacy of social ties at linking individuals to opportunities (Rotolo 2000). As educational heterogeneity increases, the likelihood of friendships between people with similar characteristics, the kind that generate the necessary trust to motivate civic involvement (Putnam 2000), decreases. Of course, congregations are themselves voluntary associations and we might expect that homophilous social ties are both formative of, and stabilized in congregations. For example, religious switching depends on friendship ties, so when people are looking for a congregation to participate in they are likely drawn to congregations composed of people like themselves.
This brings the discussion to an important issue concerning the role of selection effects. It may be that civically active people are choosing congregations with certain characteristics, or that the inactive choose congregations to suit their preferences. While the voluntary nature of U.S. religion allows for a large degree of religious mobility (Sherkat and Wilson 1995), in fact most people do not choose congregations based on political viewpoints. More important in the selection of a congregation are issues of convenience (i.e. is it close to home), the aforementioned friendship or marital ties, and resonance with an individual’s store of religious preferences (Iannaccone 1990; Sherkat 2001; Loveland 2003). When shopping for a church, few people are prone to consider explicit political or community issues, and instead are seeking a place to experience and express religious worship.

While it is unlikely that people choose congregations based on issues related to civic involvement, each preferred model was re-tested with the addition of a measure of whether or not the respondent had switched to the congregation. This measure is a direct assessment of the possible selection effect, and in none of the models did it result in meaningful differences in the effects of other variables. It is, however, significantly and positively related to each dependent variable. Because of missing data on the switching indicator, and given that switching is not connected to civic outcomes in existing theory, the final models do not include the measure.

In the next chapter, attention is turned to a different form of civic involvement – evangelism. I posit evangelism as a form of social activism, as a method of engaging the social order in pursuit of a desired end, and test hypotheses generated from a contextual approach to religious action.
CHAPTER 6

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I address the relationship between congregational characteristics and individual evangelism. Positing evangelism as civic involvement is unique in and of itself, and even within the larger literature of the sociology of religion, analyses of evangelism are rare. The specified individual level model, therefore, includes predictors known to be related to standard measures of civic involvement, and the analysis includes a brief discussion of how the individual component compares to the previous analyses of voluntary association and community organizing.

6.2 Restatement of Hypotheses

Evangelism, or seeking converts, is expected to be related to Conservative Protestantism in general. While welcoming new members into the community is a goal for most Christian congregations, the history of soul saving activism common the Conservative Protestant tradition remains strong among this tradition sometimes referred to as Evangelical (Steensland et. al. 2000). The congregational measure of religious tradition, then, should be related to individual evangelism so that those at Catholic and Mainline congregations are less likely to participate in evangelical outreach. Also, I
expect that congregations characterized as theologically conservative by the primary leader will encourage individual members to actively seek converts.

H1: People who attend congregations affiliated with Conservative Protestant traditions are more likely than those at Catholic and Mainline Protestant congregations to report evangelism.

H2: People who attend congregations characterized as theologically conservative will be more likely to evangelize than those at less conservative congregations.

Congregational network structure, regardless of congregational conservatism, should also be related to individual evangelism. The hypothesis is drawn from the literature on social movement success, and evangelism is posited as a social movement outcome. Movements with dense network structures are better at producing individual participation (Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl 1988; Heckathorn 1990). In the context of congregations, and because a growing church is a basic tenet of the social movement of Christianity (Stark 2001), I expect increased congregational friendship density to be positively associated with individual evangelism. Also, heterogeneity should be positively associated with evangelism.

H3: Individual evangelism is positively associated with congregational friendship density.

H4: Individual evangelism is positively associated with increased congregational demographic heterogeneity.
6.3 Dependent Variable and Additional Contextual Control

The models used to predict participation in evangelical behavior include an additional control variable at the congregational level. Respondents to the individual level survey were asked, “Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community?” Those 13% who responded, “Yes, in evangelism or outreach activities” are scored one on a dummy variable, all others are scored zero. Respondents, however, were presented with the option to answer, “No, we don’t have such activities.” Were a congregation not to provide opportunities for evangelism, then respondents at those congregations would necessarily respond negatively to the question about evangelical behavior. In no congregation, however, did all respondents report that no evangelizing opportunities were available. On average, 5% of respondents reported no opportunities, while in one congregation 30% reported no organized chances for evangelizing. This can likely be explained in terms of misinformation on the part of congregation members who are simply unaware of available opportunities.

Further, the leader at each congregation was presented with a list of 14 potential outreach programs common to congregations and asked if his or her congregation practiced the activities. From this list a variable counting the number of evangelical programs offered at the congregation is generated. The average congregation reported 7.23 programs, while 2 congregations checked all 14 and 4 reported 0 evangelical activities. A zero on the count, however, does not necessarily rule out the availability of such programs because the closed question may have left out unique activities and did not include a category for other kinds of evangelical exercises. As evidence of this
possibility, at the 4 congregations that reported 0 evangelical activities no more than 8% of participants reported that no options were available. When predicting individual evangelical behavior the models include the congregation level count of outreach activities.

6.4 Results

Referring to Table 6.1, we see that there is congregational variance in evangelical behavior. The estimated variance component from the null, without contextual variables, model is 0.28 with Chi-square value of 1712.08 significant at the 0.001 level. Based on the intercept from the null model, -2.33, the model predicts a 9% chance that the average individual would engage in evangelism. How does the individual level model of evangelism compare to common models of civic involvement.

In important ways, the individual level model of evangelism is similar to the individual level model of the more common measures of civic involvement. For example, participation in congregational decision making and position as a congregational leader are each positively associated with evangelism. These two measures are commonly used to capture the degree to which an individual holds transferable civic skills that are expected to make political and civic participation more likely (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and such characteristics are consistently found to be positively associated with civic involvement. The model suggests that some of these skills might also be of use for evangelism, and lends support to the claim that evangelistic behavior is not entirely different from more common understandings of civic engagement.
TABLE 6.1

EVANGELISM

RANDOM INTERCEPT

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variance Component</th>
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<th>P-value</th>
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Fixed Effects

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<th>Fixed Effects</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Decision Maker</td>
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<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.842</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.844</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
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<td>Bridging Friends</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
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<td>Service Attendance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.025</td>
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<td>0.011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.082</td>
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<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.419</td>
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<td>0.470</td>
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<td>0.570</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-0.315</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Individual N = 59,215
Congregation N = 296
Next, indicators of a congregation’s cultural makeup are added to the basic individual level model, as well as the control variables for number of evangelical activities held by the congregation and congregation size. To address questions about whether or not evangelism is related to conservative theology, or rather to the historical development of Conservative Protestantism as a cultural camp organized around more than simple theological conservatism, these results are presented in two models. Table 6.2 includes the controls plus indicators of Mainline or Catholic congregational affiliation, and table 6.3 further includes the indicators of congregational theology and decision making strategy. Not surprisingly, number of evangelical activities is positively related to individual evangelism in both models, and in each case an additional program results in a 3% increase of an individual’s odds of evangelizing. Congregation size is unrelated to evangelism in both cases.

Looking at table 6.2, those who attend Catholic congregations are significantly less likely, seeing their odds of evangelism reduced by about 50%, than those at Conservative Protestant congregations to participate in evangelical activity. Those at Mainline Protestant congregations are also less likely to engage in evangelism with odds reduced by approximately 16%. If, as argued above, evangelism as a primary way to engage society is historically more strongly linked with Conservative Protestantism than with the other traditions, this finding is not a surprise.

In table 6.3, theological conservatism, measured as a characterization of the congregation rather than a larger tradition, is not directly related to individual evangelism. The lack of a relationship between congregational conservatism and evangelism suggests that the activity is more dependent upon alignment with the cultural
TABLE 6.2
EVANGELISM, RELIGIOUS TRADITION
RANDOM INTERCEPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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**Fixed Effects**

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<th>Fixed Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-2.309</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Congregation Level**

- Mainline: -0.173, 0.072, 0.017
- Catholic: -0.700, 0.108, 0.000
- Congregation Size: -0.008, 0.009, 0.397
- Outreach Programs: 0.030, 0.011, 0.007

**Individual Level**

- Group Leader: 0.855, 0.039, 0.000
- Decision Maker: 0.812, 0.033, 0.000
- Church Social Group: 0.854, 0.029, 0.000
- Closest Friends: 0.853, 0.051, 0.000
- Bridging Friends: 0.619, 0.043, 0.000
- Service Attendance: 0.560, 0.026, 0.000
- Length of Attend: 0.029, 0.010, 0.007
- Strong Belonging: 0.515, 0.068, 0.000
- Devotional Time: 0.252, 0.012, 0.000
- Biblical Literalist: 0.020, 0.035, 0.561
- Employed: 0.029, 0.034, 0.399
- Married: 0.078, 0.034, 0.023
- Female: 0.020, 0.030, 0.499
- Black: -0.028, 0.099, 0.776
- White: -0.389, 0.050, 0.000
- Age: 0.006, 0.001, 0.000
- Household Income: -0.050, 0.013, 0.000
- Education: 0.043, 0.010, 0.000
### TABLE 6.3

**EVANGELISM, RELIGIOUS TRADITION, AND THEOLOGY**

#### RANDOM INTERCEPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
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<th>P-value</th>
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#### Fixed Effects

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#### Congregation Level $N = 296$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
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<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>-0.662</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Theology</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Style</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Size</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach Programs</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### Individual Level $N = 59,215$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>0.559</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>0.516</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.821</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-0.390</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
camp of Conservative Protestantism than with a theological emphasis on proselytizing. While the previous chapter showed that those attending Mainline Protestant Congregations are more likely to join voluntary associations or be involved in community action groups, it appears that the Conservative Protestants have laid claim to evangelism as a primary form of social action. However, after the inclusion of the congregational theology indicator, those at Mainline Protestant congregations are no longer less likely than those at Conservative congregations to report evangelical behavior.

The finding complicates the expected relationship between congregational characteristics and individual evangelism because the broad, cultural, tradition based differences the existing literature and current theory would predict are no longer supported. Instead of a social act resonating most strongly with Conservative Protestants, the striking difference is that between Catholics and Protestants as a whole. An unreported model verifies that the difference between Catholic and all Protestant attendees is statistically significant. Are there congregational characteristics that differentiate those that are more or less likely to encourage individual evangelism?

Beginning to address this question, table 6.3 shows that congregational decision making style is not related to the individual act of evangelism. As participatory decision making was related to none of the forms of civic involvement tested in these analyses, the models suggest little congruence between democratic decision making strategies and active civic participation. In terms of how culture matters for congregations and individual civic involvement, the congregation’s alignment with larger historical traditions appears to bear more weight than it’s lived decision process. However, it would be short sighted to dismiss the importance of the congregation’s interaction
dynamic based on a single measure of daily practices. It may be that the apparent
tradition differences are more a result of inadequate measures of daily congregational
life.

How well does the culture model explain variance in individual evangelism? Recalling that the null model estimated a variance component of 0.27, notice that the estimate after including each measure of congregational culture (Table 6.3) has been reduced to 0.16. The measures of congregational culture explain approximately 41% of the variance in the intercept term. This relatively large reduction in error in the face of insignificant congregation specific measures suggests that the larger, denominational differences are quite important predictors of evangelical behavior.

Next, table 6.4 presents the results of the model including measures of the network makeup of congregations. Again, the count of the number of congregational evangelistic programs proves a significant predictor of individual evangelism. An additional program increases the log-odds of individual evangelism by about 3%. Congregational size is not related to evangelism. Catholic attendees are still significantly less likely than Conservative Protestant attendees to proselytize, seeing their logged odds reduced by about 47%.

Unlike voluntary association membership and community organizing, the leader’s time spent in the local community is not related to individual evangelism. Whether or not a leader is involved in the local community, it is likely that the basic tenet of spreading the word is made salient in congregations. That being said, the difference between Catholics and Protestants stands out across all models of evangelism. The evangelistic impulse appears not to be present in Catholic settings. Nonetheless, Catholic churches
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effects</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-2.962</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Congregation Level**  
*N = 296*

- Mainline: 0.019, 0.080, 0.814
- Catholic: -0.627, 0.114, 0.000
- Leader’s Participation: -0.039, 0.067, 0.562
- Friendship Density: 1.646, 0.438, 0.000
- Education Heterogeneity: 0.246, 0.279, 0.379
- Racial Heterogeneity: 0.728, 0.217, 0.001
- Congregation Size: -0.011, 0.009, 0.226
- Outreach Programs: 0.032, 0.010, 0.003

**Individual Level**  
*N = 59,215*

- Group Leader: 0.857, 0.039, 0.000
- Decision Maker: 0.815, 0.033, 0.000
- Church Social Group: 0.858, 0.030, 0.000
- Closest Friends: 0.844, 0.051, 0.000
- Bridging Friends: 0.618, 0.043, 0.000
- Service Attendance: 0.556, 0.026, 0.000
- Length of Attend: 0.028, 0.010, 0.007
- Strong Belonging: 0.517, 0.068, 0.000
- Devotional Time: 0.252, 0.012, 0.000
- Biblical Literalist: 0.012, 0.035, 0.727
- Employed: 0.028, 0.034, 0.414
- Married: 0.077, 0.034, 0.026
- Female: 0.022, 0.030, 0.456
- Black: 0.014, 0.098, 0.885
- White: -0.354, 0.050, 0.000
- Age: 0.006, 0.001, 0.000
- Household Income: -0.047, 0.013, 0.001
- Education: 0.046, 0.010, 0.000
are welcome to new members, and the lack of individual reports of evangelism likely points to a different understanding of the way individual Christians should engage the social world. For Protestants, bringing new members into the fold is a useful, more or less encouraged strategy of social engagement, while for Catholics the one soul at a time, actively seeking converts approach to social change resonates less clearly. Solely organizational level evidence supports this notion as well. A regression of the congregational count of evangelical activities on the indicator of Catholic affiliation shows that, on average, Catholic parishes report over 3 fewer outreach programs (see table 6.5). The ethos of evangelism is clearly less evident within the Catholic tradition.

As expected in hypotheses 3 and 4, congregational network characteristics are significantly associated with individual evangelism. As the proportion of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONGREGATIONAL OUTREACH</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROGRAMS BY RELIGIOUS TRADITION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OLS REGRESSION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 296
Adjusted R-square = 0.20
Reference Group: Conservative Protestant
attendees who report that most of their close friends also participate in the congregation increases, so to do the odds of individual evangelism. For example, in a congregation of average density (0.14) the model predicts a 6% probability of individual evangelism when all other contextual variables are set to 0. In the densest congregation (0.48) the predicted probability is 10%. Racial heterogeneity is also significantly and positively associated with individual evangelism. In the most racially heterogeneous congregation (0.73), holding other contextual variables constant, the model predicts an 8% individual probability of evangelism. In the average congregation with a racial heterogeneity score of 0.23, the predicted probability is 6%. Once again, the seemingly small difference is statistically significant. Overall, the network model of evangelism explains about 48% of the intercept variance.

A purely empirical approach was found lacking when developing the full model of individual evangelism. Given the theoretical importance of the relationship between Christian conservatism and evangelical activity, the indicator of congregational theology remains in the full model regardless of its insignificance in the preliminary culture model. Further, while directly unrelated to the individual outcome, its impact on the other independent variables should be considered. The full model for individual evangelism, then, includes the count of outreach programs, congregational size, affiliation with Catholic or Mainline tradition, congregational theological conservatism, congregational friendship density, and racial heterogeneity.

In the final model, shown in table 6.6, congregational outreach activities, Catholic affiliation, friendship density, and racial heterogeneity are each statistically significant and related to individual evangelism in the expected direction. Overall, the full model
**TABLE 6.6**

**EVANGELISM, PREFERRED**

**RANDOM INTERCEPT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Effect</th>
<th>Variance Component</th>
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<th>P-value</th>
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**Fixed Effects**

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<th>Standard Error</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Intercept</td>
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</table>

**Congregation Level**  
\(N = 296\)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
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<td>0.914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>-0.628</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Theology</td>
<td>0.002</td>
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<td>0.982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Density</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Congregation Size</td>
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<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach Programs</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.003</td>
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**Individual Level**  
\(N = 59,215\)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P-value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
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<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Social Group</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest Friends</td>
<td>0.844</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging Friends</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Attendance</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Attend</td>
<td>0.028</td>
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<td>0.007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong Belonging</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Literalist</td>
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<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
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<td>0.034</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.869</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
predicts a 6% probability of evangelism for an average individual attending a Conservative Protestant congregation with sample minimum values for congregation outreach programs (0), friendship density (0.02), and racial heterogeneity (0). If, however, these variables are set to their sample maximums of 14, 0.48, and 0.73 respectively, then the model predicts a probability of 26% when the remaining contextual variables are set to 0.

Relative to the null model, the full model of evangelism explains about 48% of the intercept variance. Like the hierarchical models of voluntary association membership and community organizing, the full model is more similar, in its ability to explain congregational variance in the individual level outcome, to the network model than to the culture model. Once the distinction between Catholic and Protestant congregations is considered it is the network measures that appear to matter when predicting individual reports of evangelism.

6.5 Conclusion

Civic involvement consists of actively engaging the civil order in service of personal or collective interests. As such, an analysis of the relationship between religion and civic life is enriched by considering the nature of civic engagement from the perspective of the religious group of interest. In support of the claim that evangelism be conceived as Christian social activism and an example of a movement outcome, measures of congregational density and heterogeneity are related to individual evangelism in expected ways. Christianity is in many ways a world wide social movement, and congregations are to some degree movement organizations (Finke and Stark 1992).
Conceived as such, evangelism is a collective movement strategy to spread the movement’s message and increase its presence in society.

Existing literature and theory led to the expectation that evangelism is a strategy unique to those affiliated with Conservative Protestantism, but instead the important distinction appears to be between Catholic parishes and Protestant congregations. Those at Catholic parishes are substantially less likely to report having participated in evangelism, and Catholic churches provide fewer collective opportunities for such activity. The pattern suggests that the Catholic and Protestant traditions maintain differing understandings of how Christians should engage the social world. From the Protestant perspective, actively seeking to increase the size of the church, one person at a time, is a common form of social action. Catholics, as evidenced in chapter 5, seem more likely to engage society with a corporate strategy of community activism.
CHAPTER 7

7.1 Summary and Conclusions

The primary claim of this dissertation is that congregations matter, independently of personal characteristics, in the civic lives of their members. Within the sociology of religion, this claim is not surprising, but empirical evidence of this kind is only beginning to be produced (Schwadel 2005). Clearly, individual variation in religious belief and participation remains salient for questions of religion and civic life, but future theoretical and empirical work will be improved by considering congregational effects. For theorists, this could lead to the re-emergence of a perspective emphasizing collectives, and standing in opposition to the recent proliferation of individualistic models of religious preferences and practices (Iannaccone 1990). As a matter of method, quantitative sociologists conducting national analyses will be well served to recognize that individual level data and models are likely blind to the role of congregational life.

For the purposes of my dissertation, I have chosen to focus on cultural and network aspects of congregations. While hypotheses derived from a ‘culture as practice’ approach failed to find strong support, stable religious tradition differences were found. Whether these findings give support to a ‘culture as values’ perspective is an unanswered question. That I find familiar differences between Mainline and Conservative Protestant congregations in terms of voluntary association seems to suggest that Mainline
congregations do in fact have a more open relationship with outside society than do their conservative counterparts (Steensland et. al. 2000). More striking are the tradition differences found when predicting community organizing. Conservative Protestants are underrepresented in this type of direct engagement of community issues relative to other U.S. Christians, while the special interest type of civic involvement resonates strongly with Catholic attendees.

Findings related to larger religious tradition reflect long standing patterns of American religious organization. However, patterns across religious tradition are based on denominational characterizations, not congregational characteristics. It is perhaps reasonable to assume greater similarity in congregational culture within denomination than across denominations, but my theoretical emphasis on the importance of local, lived congregational dynamics leads me to desire improved measurement of congregational ethos. This approach finds parallel in the work of James Hunter and Robert Wuthnow who each show that individual attitudes cannot be simply assumed stable within denominational families (Hunter 1990, Wuthnow 1988). In fact, theories of association would lead us to expect a lesser degree of variation over a range of social characteristics within, rather than across congregations, even those affiliated with the same denomination (McPherson, Popielarz, and Drobnic 1992; Rotolo 2000). As more sensitive measures of congregational characteristics are developed and employed, I expect that differences based on religious tradition will demonstrate themselves to be weaker than those tied to congregational factors. The work of Schwadel (2005) argues for and supports this position. If this is in fact the case, and my dissertation would
suggest it to be, the congregation is the fundamental social unit within the realm of religion.

Certainly, the hypotheses derived from network theory garner the strongest support in my empirical work. Civic life is about social ties, connections to others that serve as conduits of information about opportunities to participate in public life. From the existing literature about religion and politics, we know that those who participate in religious organizations tend to be more involved in secular civic life than those who do not participate in such groups. Many reasons lie behind this basic empirical generalization, one of which is the social capital generated by participating in voluntary congregational life. The ties and trust gained at congregations give individuals the access and motivation needed to participate more widely in social life. For these reasons, it is not surprising that participation at a congregation rich in cross cutting social ties, beyond any one individual’s ties, tends to house civically engaged people. In general network theory terms, it may be said that participation in a social network composed of a greater number of bridging ties increases the odds of becoming involved with a larger number of others. Envisioning congregations as social networks, with characteristics like any social network, opens the way to a large number of questions for social analysts to explore. Others have, of course, applied network theory to congregations (Smith 1999), but the breadth of the data used in this project allow me to say much about congregational networks, and strongly supports the continued use of the approach.
7.2 Congregations and Causality

I have placed an emphasis on the catalyzing civic effects of congregational networks, when in fact it cannot be assumed that people first enter congregations and are then compelled to expand their civic horizons. In fact, it would be hard to argue that pre-existing social connections are not also extremely salient when individuals choose to participate in congregations. Friendships and other social ties are of course strong factors in determining one’s religious participation (Sherkat 2001). There is reason to believe, however, that congregations hold a special place among the voluntary association choices available to Americans.

Congregations might be described as a gateway voluntary association in the United States. When Americans are asked to name the voluntary organizations they are affiliated with, churches are arguably the most commonly cited. For example, Curtis, Grabb, and Baer (1992) analyze membership rates derived from the 1981 through 1983 version of the World Values Survey, showing that 72% of Americans report at least one voluntary membership. Removing churches from the available options, however, reduces the membership rate to 47%. The authors again analyze membership rates using the 1991 through 1993 version of the World Values Survey to find the same pattern (Curtis, Baer, and Grabb 2001). Others have demonstrated that those who report participation in church organizations are also likely to report a larger number of total secular memberships than are those who do not report participation in church organizations (Loveland et. al. 2005; Lam 2002), and Putnam argues that religious participation stands as the most potent reservoir of social capital in the United States.
Returning to an argument made previously, in the United States religious participation is frequently coupled, to a strong degree, with public participation (Williams and Demerath 1991). For a variety of reasons, including the frequency with which congregations house rituals such as weddings and funerals, congregations are likely the voluntary association to which the widest swath of Americans has been exposed. According to those who study motivations for religious participation, extrinsic religiosity includes valuing the social connectedness one finds at church (Donahue 1985). For those looking to meet new people, congregations are likely a frequently explored venue, and are arguably the voluntary groups about which most Americans are aware.

The fundamental issue of causality cannot be addressed with the data used in this project because it is from a cross sectional sample of congregations only. The evidence cited, however, provides a sound basis from which to suggest that congregations serve as a primary entrance into voluntary social life. It is virtually a sociological truism that associations breed more associations (McPherson and Rotolo 1996), and congregations can reasonably be posited as the voluntary association par excellence in the United States.

7.3 Conceptualizing Civic Participation

Research about religion and civic life also calls for a more inclusive definition of civic involvement. My basic interest in studying social action led to an action theory informed operationalization of the commonly accepted definition of civic involvement. If civic involvement encompasses behavior understood by actors as engaging and maintaining the civic order in pursuit of the common good (Wuthnow 1988), and social action is understandable only by reference to the intersubjectivity of social groups
(Weber 1978), then public behavior sustained by religious valuations of the good should be considered civic involvement. As Ingram argues (1986), evangelism is understood by evangelists as a way to address social concerns and engages common understandings of civil order. From the perspective of those wishing to spread the message of their religion in pursuit of the greater good, then, evangelism is straightforwardly cast as civic involvement.

Most conceptions of civic involvement assume that civic actors work to maintain the current order of things (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Fung 2003). To the degree that civic action is within the bounds of common civil behavior this is certainly the case. The comparison, made above, between civic involvement and terrorism provides a dramatic example of the line between maintenance and disruption of the status quo. However, it should not be ignored that much public involvement is in pursuit of change. Whether change occurs by way of influencing public officials to alter policy, or takes the form of altering the perceptions of the average citizen is a matter of an actor’s, or a group’s, focus. The majority of social groups have, to some degree or another, a basic understanding of the good society (Williams 1999), and within the realm of congregations this is certainly the case (Smith 1996b; Walzer 1965).

However, even when values attached to particular issues are in conflict in the United States, parties on opposite sides commonly agree on a set of basic civic principles. Alexander (1988) refers to this situation, which is the general agreement, in the United States, about the reasonable ways to work social change, as cultural refraction. According to the logic of the current project then, civic involvement is defined as individuals working toward a shared vision of a good society, and engaging in the social,
public acts that are required to achieve the desired ends while at the same time submitting to the basic authority of a yet more broadly shared civic culture.

7.4 The Benefit of a Contextual Approach

Given the essential role of the collective granted to religious behavior even by those who subscribe to a strongly individualistic theoretical approach (Iannaccone 1988; Stark and Finke 2001), the limited use of contextual modeling in the sociology of religion is surprising. As I and others (Schwadel 2005) have argued, the congregation is the primary social unit of religious life. For this reason, strong claims can be made that any questions about religion and social life are lacking without a strong methodological and theoretical emphasis on the inter-relationship between individuals and collectives. More specifically, however, a contextual approach can contribute to many debates within the sociology of religion.

In fact, the use of hierarchical modeling in the current project does not fully exploit the advantages of the technique. Given the lack of contextual approaches to questions about religion and civic life, my focus has been largely on what a contextual focus can add to current knowledge. As such, I have specified random intercept models without exploring for the presence of cross level effects or allowing the individual level predictors to vary within congregations. For an example of a study using this approach, see Schwadel (2002) which utilizes random coefficient models to examine propositions of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s (1995) Civic Voluntarism Model.

The theoretical development of the project focuses primarily on contextual level attributes of congregations, but does acknowledge the role of individuals as participants.
in an emergent congregational culture. The next step in the current research agenda is to
develop and test specific hypotheses about individual level variation across
congregations. The current state of theorizing within the sociology of religion, however,
calls for the contextual focus of this project. Without developing testable hypotheses
about individual level variation within congregations, a purely empirical approach testing
for the presence of such variation adds little to the body of theory within the sociology of
religion.

In essence, the individual level portion of the models tested in this dissertation
serves as a control for existing knowledge and the foundation upon which to build a
contextual argument. As such, I have paid little attention to specific individual level
results. Beyond the fact that the individual level findings follow expectations, what
stands out is the robust nature of the fixed effects. As the project builds from fixed
intercept individual level models to the preferred models including contextual effects and
a random intercept, the relevant individual portions of the model (i.e. measures of civic
skills and social capital) are only marginally affected. This suggests that individual level
characteristics remain important in light of the contextual factors, but that a full
explanation of the religion and civic life relationship calls for a contextual approach. The
relationship between civic and religious life is not the only topic of interest to sociologists
of religion that is amenable to hierarchical modeling.

For example, current debates about the social causes of religious switching or
conversion are dominated by rational choice arguments. In short, people are thought to
build up over their life-course a stock of religious preferences that can be satisfied by
specific religious inputs. In pursuit of these inputs, individuals choose religious groups
and behaviors that maximize their religious satisfaction. The basics of rational choice theory lead to a compositional emphasis on the nature of groups, assuming that collective forces are expressions of the convergence of multiple individual maximizations.

Rational choice theory has been adapted by sociologists in a way that gives greater efficacy to the role of others in influencing the choices people make. Choices, it is argued, might be made with the interests of others in mind (Sherkat and Wilson 1995), and the information one has to make choices is greatly dependent upon information gathered from close friends, family, or educational experiences (Sherkat 1991). However, even those analyses that take the role of social ties into account have not explicitly modeled the relationship between an individual and his or her social context. If, as Wildavsky has argued (1987, 1994), the concept of self-interest means little without reference to the social context within which one exists, then single level analyses of the connections between the ever emerging religious collectives people affiliate and disaffiliate with are ignoring a vital aspect of religious identity and changes of that identity.

A contextual approach might also bring satisfaction to those engaged in one of the longest running debates within the sociology of religion. This is the debate about secularization. Does secularization refer to the lack of individual religious commitment (Finke and Stark 1992), or does secularization involve the declining authority of religious organizations (Chaves 1994; Yamane 1997)? Clearly, this debate involves multiple levels of social analysis, but it seems that those on opposite sides of the argument are unwilling to engage each other at any level beside the one of their chosen focus.
By embedding religious actors within religious collectives, one can build theory based on conceptions of the strength and salience of individual religiosity that are unique from the measurable social relevance of religious groups. For example, one might test hypotheses about how belonging to marginalized religious groups impacts the strength of individual religiosity by gathering data about local communities, the role that different religious groups play in community life, and the religiosity of multiple members of these religious groups. Because the point of conflict for those engaged in the secularization debate seems to revolve around their differing level of analysis, contextual modeling has the potential to bring resolution by allowing for simultaneous consideration of contextual and individual characteristics.

Contextual modeling is increasingly common within the discipline of sociology. The sociology of religion is somewhat behind in adopting the approach, but it is likely to become less unusual as those interested in the sub-discipline become aware of the benefits of the contextual approach. A major hurdle is simply the lack of data available to address questions about people and the congregations they attend. Moore and Vanneman (2003), however, show the benefits of linking commonly available and widely used data like the GSS with existing data about the religious composition of standard geographic areas like states. There is presently, then, potential to address many questions about religion from a contextual perspective quite quickly. A truly sociological understanding of religious life requires it.
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