The Political Voice of Clergy

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Whether clergy are influencing opinions, setting agendas, mobilizing, or empowering parishioners, the primary mechanism is public speech. Using a national sample of 2,400 ELCA (Lutheran) and Episcopal Church clergy, surveyed in the late summer and fall of 1998, we explore the nature, frequency, and determinants of clergy public speech. We find that clergy public speech is relatively pervasive and conveys a significant amount of normative judgments about the workings of the policy process. In assessing its determinants, we find that clergy public speech is a product of personal motivation situated in an environment conducive to action, which includes the pressures exerted by the congregation, national political cues, and community. Specifically, we find that clergy speak out publicly on political issues when mobilized, but also as a way to represent their congregations in the public sphere and to motivate members to add their distinctive voices to public debate.

Whether clergy are influencing the opinions, setting the agendas, mobilizing, or empowering parishioners, the primary mechanism is public speech. Consequently, numerous studies have examined the nature, frequency, and ability of clergy to speak their minds to their members and the public (Crawford and Olson 2001; Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, and Poloma 1997; Hadden 1969; Jelen 2001; Olson 2000; Quinley 1974; Stark, Foster, Glock, and Quinley 1971). Scholars have observed differences rooted in theology and ideology (Stark et al. 1971), which have narrowed over time, and differences based on resources and opportunities (Crawford and Olson 2001; Guth et al. 1997; Olson 2000). To

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date, scant data have been employed to investigate the congregational and community limitations on and motivations for clergy political speech.

We are concerned with two primary questions. First, are clergy publicly engaging important political issues of the day? If they are, then parishioners are provided with a direct link between their faith and their political values and opinions, which may then affect their political behavior; and second, why do clergy speak out on political topics? We understand this question to mean, in part, what roles do clergy envision when they take on political issues in public: are clergy representatives of their congregations, their faith traditions, or their political philosophies?

Data for the 1998 Study of ELCA and Episcopal Church Clergy

The data for this note come from a random national sample of 1,400 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and 930 Episcopal clergy who responded to a mail survey in the late summer and fall of 1998.[1] These two denominations are firmly in the mainline Protestant camp, and both are considered liturgical denominations, though both have a healthy mix of theologically conservative and modernist clergy.[2] The ELCA is concentrated in the upper Midwest, especially in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and the Dakotas, while the Episcopal Church is concentrated in New England and the mid-Atlantic states.

This study builds upon previous work (Guth et al. 1997) and, in a sense, returns to early investigations of the political action of clergy (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959). That is, this study is the first national sample of clergy to incorporate a concern for the social and political environment in which clergy work and live. Therefore, we asked respondent clergy detailed questions about their church and professional ties and how their church compared to the local community.

These data come from two predominantly white, mainline, midwest and eastern denominations, so they represent one slice of the spectrum of American religion. Yet, we believe that our general theory and relationships witnessed herein will extend to other faith traditions. In much the same way, white and black evangelical, Jewish, and mainline Protestant clergy reference their own beliefs along with their professional ties, congregation, and community in or-

[1] We mailed two waves to each denomination, beginning with 3,000, randomly sampled, in each. The response rate for the ELCA, therefore, was 47%, and it was just under one-third for the Episcopal Church. Second-wave respondents were not significantly different from first-wave respondents on measures of interest.

[2] Modernist clergy tend to see the Bible as a moral guidebook and not something to take literally. Religiously conservative clergy, on the other hand, believe that Jesus will return to earth bodily one day and that the Bible is to be take literally in all respects. Most sample clergy fall in the middle of our religious conservatism scale in a near normal distribution.

der to discover their role in politics (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959; Thomas 1985).

Clergy Public Speech: An Overview

There are many ways clergy can make their views known in public. The most common mode of political speech that clergy utilize to address political and social issues during 1998 appears to be public prayer—54.6% of clergy prayed publicly on a political or social issue during 1998, though there is a wide, 12-point gap between ELCA and Episcopal clergy. A majority of ELCA and Episcopal clergy have publicly taken a stand on a political issue, and about half have taken a stand on an issue while preaching. By contrast, just under one-fifth of clergy have prayed for candidates in public, while just over one-tenth have publicly endorsed a candidate. Clearly, these clergy feel more comfortable addressing public policies and problems than parties, candidates, and elections.

The particular policies and problems that clergy address have been found to collapse into two categories, social justice and moral concerns (this discussion draws heavily on Guth et al. 1997, 14–16). Social justice issues have their roots in the Social Gospel movement within mainline Protestantism, with supporters pushing for reforms and growth of the welfare state during the Progressive, New Deal, and Great Society eras. Social justice issues also have a strong civil rights component, with applications to race, gender, and the environment. The rise of a moral concerns agenda resembles the rise of the Christian conservative movement, though the two are not synonymous. The primary moral concerns issues involve sexual politics, social vices (e.g., gambling), and religion's role in society and government.

Almost all of the sample clergy (at or above 90%) discussed such social justice issues as hunger and poverty, the environment, education, civil rights, women's issues, and unemployment (see Table 1). Fewer (about two-thirds) discussed moral issues such as abortion, gambling, and school prayer. These clergy are clearly willing to go beyond merely touching upon current events, as was more common in the late 1960s (Stark et al. 1971), and to take a stand on important issues, connecting their faith and public policy for their constituent publics.

The Determinants of Clergy Public Speech

Early work on clergy involvement in politics focused on the theological motivations for action. For example, Stark et al. (1971) examined denominational differences in clergy political activity and found underneath the denominational labels a difference generated by otherwordliness—those with a focus on the importance of the afterlife were less likely to speak out on politics than those focused on this life. Others, namely Campbell and Pettigrew (1959), Hadden (1969), and Quinley (1974), suggested that the motivations of clergy were

TABLE 1

Percentage of Clergy Addressing Public Policy Issues in 1998[a]

Social Justice Issues	Percent	Moral Concerns Issues	Percent
Hunger and poverty	98.4	Family problems in America	95.3
Environment	93.0	Homosexuality	80.0
Education	92.8	Capital punishment	75.7
Civil rights	91.8	Current political scandals	74.3
Women's issues	89.4	Abortion	73.0
Unemployment, the economy	87.0	Gambling laws	66.1
Gay rights	74.0	Prayer in public schools	66.0
Budget deficits, gov't spending	60.9	National Defense	61.7

Source: 1998 ELCA/Episcopal Church Clergy Study.

[a]The question asks: "How often have you addressed the following issues publicly in the last year? Very often, often, seldom, rarely, or never." The cell entries report the combined responses for all categories except "never."

tied more closely to the maintenance of their jobs. They found that many clergy faced the withholding of funds by church boards, the departure of members, and even termination when they involved themselves in politics (especially racial politics) in the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1980s, following these studies and others, Guth et al. (1997) find mainly, but not exclusively, psychological influences driving political activity: "A minister's understanding of the propriety of various activities has an enormous effect on action, as do a variety of ideological factors, including agenda, beliefs, and partisanship" (180).

Campbell and Pettigrew (1959, 87; Thomas 1985) suggest that three systems work on the clergy to shape their political behavior: the personal, the professional (or denominational), and the congregational. We adopt this system with one slight modification, the addition of secular community influences. Therefore, in order to understand clergy public speech we must inquire into the environment in which clergy work and reside, the norms that guide their work, the nature of their congregations, and their individual motivations for speaking out.

While we include and test a wide variety of hypotheses, our primary contention is that clergy respond to the political and social environments in which they live and work. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

1. Congregations play a central role in structuring the frequency of clergy public speech by the level of their approval of clergy political action, as well as the need of the congregation for public representation. In particular, clergy in congregations that are unlike *the rest of the local community should be more active in order to represent the church in the public sphere.*

2. Resource differences, which are slight among these clergy, should not play a strong role in driving clergy political speech.

3. Moreover, clergy receive inspiration for public political speech from numerous other sources, including the media, public affairs groups, and the degree to which an issue fills the national agenda.

Dependent Variables

We test these hypotheses using four dependent variables representing two moral issues (abortion and school prayer) and two social justice issues (gay rights and the environment). Using issue-specific dependent variables allows us to develop a sense of whether clergy use different calculations in deciding whether to address publicly specific policy issues. That is, the nature of the issue, the connection of the issue to the congregation, and the cues offered by the political environment may all affect whether clergy address that specific public policy or problem.

Several attributes of these issues recommend themselves to this investigation. First, they cover the two agenda dimensions: abortion and school prayer fall in the moral concerns category, while gay rights and the environment fall in the social justice category (homosexuality, which we listed separately on our survey instruments, falls in the moral concerns category for these clergy). Second, while all four issues were potent, public, and present in American politics, 1998 was not a strong year for moral issues. Gay rights received far more coverage and attention, primarily due to the growing national debate over the right of gays to marry and the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming. The environment was a popular issue during the election year, fueled by a less-than-green Republican Congress.

The ELCA and Episcopal Church have had varied responses to the issues of abortion and gay rights. The ELCA has lobbied on behalf of hate crimes legislation, yet it has also drawn negative publicity by ousting some openly gay clergy, sparking uproars in several congregations (Martha Sawyer Allen, "Engaging the Debate," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 5 May, 2001, sec. B). The Episcopal Church, by contrast, stands out within the worldwide Anglican Communion as far more supportive of the ordination of gays and lesbians, and Episcopal congregations generally have been perceived as more welcoming and tolerant of gay and lesbian relationships (Gustav Niebuhr, "Reading Signposts on Church Unity," *New York Times*, 13 March, 2001, sec. A). Both denominations have affirmed greater environmental protection, but have not made it a top priority, and both oppose prayer in public schools, a stance not widely publicized in the ELCA. This institutional pattern reflects the denominational differences of clergy addressing the issues. There is no difference in the frequency of addressing abortion or the environment, but Episcopalians addressed gay rights more frequently, while ELCA pastors talked about prayer in public schools more often, no doubt due to pressure from their congregations and perhaps a stronger sense of church-state separation in the ELCA.

Clergy addressed the environment in public the most of the four issues, with 46% of all sample clergy doing so often or very often during 1998. Twenty-four percent addressed gay rights often or very often in 1998, while only 15% addressed abortion and 12% addressed prayer in public schools often or very often.

Empirical Results

The estimation results are presented in Table 2. We have integrated our specific expectations into the discussion of the results. The results are organized around our modifications of Campbell and Pettigrew's categories: ideological orientations, community, congregational, denominational, and personal resources.[3]

IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS. Relatively few ideological or political orientations drive public speech on abortion and school prayer. The religiously conservative talk about abortion and school prayer more often, as do those interested in politics, yet Republicans and the efficacious addressed only school prayer more often, whereas conservatives addressed abortion. That is, the pattern is not especially clear, and it seems that these clergy were not the targets of mass mobilization on these issues.

Addressing gay rights and the environment, on the other hand, is more reliant on access to national networks of information, shown by robust ideological influences and access through group memberships, periodical subscriptions, and, tellingly, newspaper readership. In contrast to the moral issues, both liberals and conservatives show effects on these issues—liberals addressed them more often, conservatives less. From this pattern of results, it seems clear that gay rights and the environment were in play, with cues for all sides, whereas forces motivating abortion were given by periodicals and groups, and received only by conservatives and Republicans.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES. It is also important to capture elements that reflect how clergy and their churches relate to the secular community outside of church. Clergy involve themselves in groups and activities outside of their churches and profession, and they live in communities with distinctive political and social traits, both of which may carry political ramifications. We asked clergy if they belonged to any public affairs groups with a religious motivation or affiliation. Just under half of sample clergy indicated that they were members of at least one group, and we find that more public speech on all four issues results from these group memberships (Table 2).

[3] Full coding notes are available on the following Web site: http://www.denison.edu/~djupe/survey_results.html.

TABLE 2

OLS Regression Estimates of Clergy Speaking out on Abortion, School Prayer, Gay Rights, and the Environment[a]

Variable	Abortion		School Prayer		Gay Rights		Environment	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Political/Ideology								
Democrats	0.008	(0.031)	0.011	(0.032)	−0.009	(0.031)	−0.066	(0.031)**
Republicans	0.040	(0.037)	0.102	(0.037)***	−0.028	(0.037)	−0.094	(0.036)***
Liberals	−0.015	(0.051)	0.059	(0.051)	0.427	(0.051)***	0.136	(0.049)***
Conservatives	0.224	(0.070)***	−0.006	(0.071)	−0.264	(0.070)***	−0.393	(0.068)***
Political Interest	0.102	(0.049)**	0.129	(0.050)***	0.082	(0.049)*	0.101	(0.048)**
Political Efficacy	0.021	(0.019)	0.074	(0.019)***	0.074	(0.019)***	0.024	(0.019)
Religious Conservatism	0.181	(0.040)***	0.156	(0.040)***	−0.276	(0.040)***	0.021	(0.039)
Community								
Group Memberships	0.077	(0.021)***	0.049	(0.022)**	0.063	(0.021)***	0.049	(0.021)**
Church Belief Isolation	0.041	(0.100)	−0.138	(0.102)	0.248	(0.100)**	0.167	(0.097)*
Church Involvement Isolation	0.233	(0.116)**	0.062	(0.118)	0.129	(0.116)	0.028	(0.114)
Newspaper Reading	−0.000	(0.012)	0.009	(0.012)	0.032	(0.012)***	0.001	(0.012)
Periodical Subscriptions	0.041	(0.015)***	0.003	(0.015)	0.038	(0.015)**	0.029	(0.015)*
Rural Church	0.091	(0.061)	0.220	(0.066)***	0.021	(0.061)	0.213	(0.059)***
Southern Church	0.016	(0.065)	0.173	(0.066)***	−0.050	(0.065)	0.056	(0.063)

Congregation/Denom.								
Avg. Church Approval of Speech	0.222	(0.033)***	0.093	(0.034)***	0.252	(0.033)***	0.132	(0.033)***
Clergy vs. Church's Views on Issue	−0.123	(0.024)***	−0.025	(0.023)	−0.030	(0.026)	−0.042	(0.014)***
Church Size	−0.000	(0.000)	−0.000	(0.000)	−0.000	(0.000)	−0.000	(0.000)
Political Dividedness of Church	−0.021	(0.035)	−0.001	(0.036)	0.021	(0.035)	0.037	(0.034)
Member Brand Loyalty	−0.023	(0.040)	0.007	(0.041)	0.039	(0.040)	−0.057	(0.039)
Pct. Members in Small Groups	0.002	(0.001)*	0.003	(0.001)**	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Tenure Length at Church	0.003	(0.004)	0.004	(0.004)	−0.003	(0.004)	0.000	(0.004)
Feels Denomination Supportive	−0.017	(0.035)	−0.008	(0.035)	−0.028	(0.035)	−0.032	(0.034)
Episcopalian	−0.021	(0.065)	−0.196	(0.067)***	0.149	(0.065)**	−0.032	(0.064)
Personal								
Seminary Education	−0.088	(0.041)**	−0.028	(0.042)	−0.023	(0.041)	−0.000	(0.040)
Years in the Ministry	0.015	(0.003)***	0.012	(0.003)***	0.008	(0.003)***	0.013	(0.003)***
Gender	−0.084	(0.075)	0.006	(0.076)	−0.203	(0.075)***	−0.214	(0.073)***
Constant	0.662	(0.354)	0.177	(0.357)	1.551	(0.354)	2.475	(0.343)

Model Statistics:
N = 1645; Adj.R^2 = 0.155; SEE = 1.00; F = 12.58***
N = 1638; Adj.R^2 = 0.084; SEE = 1.015; F = 6.75***
N = 1632; Adj.R^2 = 0.310; SEE = 0.100; F = 29.249***
N = 1642; Adj.R^2 = 0.112; SEE = 0.978; F = 8.93***

Source: 1998 ELCA/Episcopal Church Clergy Study. ***$p < 0.01$ **$p < 0.05$ *$p < 0.10$

[a]For all issues, "How often have you addressed the following issues publicly in any way in the last year?" Each is coded 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Seldom; 4 = Often; and 5 = Very often.

Clergy are typically seen as the spiritual representatives and leaders of their churches. At times, clergy may feel compelled or are encouraged to extend their responsibilities beyond their roles as spiritual leaders, to become the voices and representatives of their churches in the political process. A lack of political representation may make it difficult for the church and church members to exist in a locale through adverse zoning decisions, unfavorable school board policies, and other undesirable social policies. These situations result from the minority status of the congregation's beliefs in the community and/or the underinvolvement of the congregation in the community. These two problems often appear together but are in fact independent of one another—a group can have beliefs representative of the community and yet not participate fully in it. Since most clergy have strong civic orientations and realize that democracy is deficient without the full participation of its citizens, they will attempt to mobilize their congregation to achieve higher participation rates. Of course, the involvement of congregants in public affairs is another way to ensure the representation of their beliefs and maintenance of relevant community standards. Yet, the strongest motivation for clergy political speech is likely to be the relative absence of their congregation's voice and their own beliefs in community decision making.

We asked clergy how their churches compared with other churches in their communities on a host of factors: theology, political beliefs, race, social status, church activity, community involvement, worship styles, and political activity. From these responses, we create two indices of community isolation, one of isolation based on beliefs (different theology, different political beliefs, more minorities, different worship styles, and different amounts of church activity) and the other, isolation rooted in a lack of community involvement (lower social status, less community involvement, and less political activity). Churches judged by clergy to be unlike their surroundings were quite likely to be located in urban areas. We expect a positive relationship to result from both indices—the more isolated the church is from the community, the more public speech in which the clergy will engage.

For both of the social justice issues, greater belief isolation leads to more public speech (Table 2). There is no effect of belief isolation on the moral issues, and involvement isolation encourages more public discussion of abortion. Therefore, in situations where the congregation is not well represented, the clergy can dictate the congregation's public voice directly and indirectly. Where their churches are isolated from the surrounding community, clergy will more likely speak out on public problems, influencing opinions directly and perhaps motivating members to act themselves. The national events surrounding gay rights threw the policy community equilibrium off balance in 1998, leading clergy to believe they had an opportunity to effect change (c.f., Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Therefore, clergy were active on the issue when a prophetic voice was called for, when their own and their congregation's beliefs were not in the community mainstream.

CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCES. Investigating the decisions of Little Rock pastors to speak out for integration, Campbell and Pettigrew (1959) suggested that of the three systems they posited influencing clergy political behavior, the congregation would exert the strongest effects. For the emotionally charged issue of segregation of the races, they argued that the professional system provided mixed messages; on the one hand, denominational officials urged clergy to speak out for what was right, but on the other hand, denominations also demanded that clergy maintain the flock. Personally, clergy were ambivalent as well. Guilt about remaining quiescent could have been mitigated by the epithets and charges from the segregationists—charges from that negative reference group indicated to clergy that they were performing their duties adequately (94). Instead, Campbell and Pettigrew argued, clergy found their congregations the most compelling influences on their political activity. In essence, ensuring a comfortable work environment, the continued flow of funds from the church council, and the safety of the clergy's job provided more immediate and important directives.

The role of the congregation in shaping clergy's political behavior lies at the intersection of congregational approval of clergy public speech and ideological agreement with the clergy. While approval of activity may allow clergy to act, opinion differences will shape the issues on which they can be active. To test these hypotheses, we take the average of church approval (from the clergy's perspective) of three methods of clergy public speech. Using clergy perceptions captures the conscious set of information that individuals have about their environments: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas 1928). This is a well-established practice in clergy and contextual research (Guth et al. 1997; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995).[4]

For all issues, perceived congregational support drives clergy public speech. On the other hand, clergy who are more distant from their congregants' opinions on abortion and the environment speak out less often, especially on abortion. Interestingly, there is no effect of opinion difference on gay rights, and no other congregational effects on clergy discussion of gay rights. It appears that the national circumstances of the gay rights debate in 1998 trumped (at best) tepid gay rights support and other barriers within congregations.

Several additional factors about the congregation and the clergy's relationship to it may affect clergy public speech, though few are salient in Table 2. Political divisions within the congregation may force clergy to downplay politics to avoid a schism and the consequent loss of members, but this proposition finds no support in our model. Moreover, tenure length, church size, and member brand loyalty all have no effect on specific issue speech. However, the percentage of members involved in small church groups and activities does increase abortion and school prayer speech, suggesting that having organized

[4] Further theoretical and empirical discussion of this issue (using perceptual data) can be found on the following Web site: http://www.denison.edu/~djupe/survey_results.html.

constituencies within the church may promote the clergy's addressing issues of concern to them.

DENOMINATIONAL RESOURCES. In their professional lives, clergy come to identify and be socialized into one denomination through personal beliefs and religious practice, seminary training, calls to denominational pulpits, and regular meetings with peers. Moreover, denominations take stands on important public issues and publish them, with the hope that constituent clergy and their members will support those stands privately or even publicly. Denominations often suggest that sermons and church activities be dedicated to any number of issues, including world hunger, sanctity of life issues, racism, and the environment. Therefore, one would expect the denomination, through its many layers of contact with clergy (especially for the ELCA and Episcopal Church), to exert powerful socializing effects on clergy behavior.

However, Table 2 shows that the denomination seems to have little impact on specific issue speech, though Episcopalians spoke out on gay rights more often and school prayer less often. Interestingly, perceived support from the denomination for political activity did not inspire specific issue speech. The connection to denominations is a product of socialization and continues to be long term in nature. It is not surprising, therefore, that the pattern of everyday political life of clergy is not motivated by the denomination except in special cases (see Findlay 1993).

PERSONAL RESOURCES. We expected few personal differences among these clergy, partly because of low variance in crucial respects, though there are a few relationships to note. We expected no gender differences based on recent studies of political activism among women clergy (Crawford, Deckman, and Braun 2001), but female clergy talk significantly more on the social justice issues, gay rights and the environment. No doubt this reflects the different agendas and feminist orientations of women in these denominations. Also, older clergy speak out more, due to their socialization during more politically active periods, their deeper community roots, and their more secure position.

DISCUSSION. The differences between the models appear to have to do with the state of the particular policy area they address. The flux of the gay rights debate induced by the Shephard hate crime and heavy media coverage of it has softened the effects of the congregation and tipped the scales toward the clergy's personal inspiration and other extra-congregational mobilizing factors. While the environment was another hot issue, it is not central enough to the agendas of these clergy to overcome church opposition, though rare. By contrast, the battle lines in abortion politics and for most moral issues have been clearly drawn for nearly two decades, with only incremental changes in policy and public sentiment (Craig and O'Brien 1993); thus, only motivated clergy in safer, yet underinvolved congregations take up the issue anew.

Conclusion

In this note, we have explored the nature, frequency, and determinants of clergy public speech. We find that it is relatively pervasive and conveys significant normative judgments about the workings of the policy process.

But how generalizable are the results? While these denominations are similar and in the mainline Protestant camp, they do contain a diversity of political and theological viewpoints. While we would expect that the marginals of how much specific issues are discussed would shift considerably in samples of other clergy, we argue that our general theory is applicable across religious groups. In particular, the inspiration of clergy to act politically when their congregation is a minority locally is a pattern that has been observed historically (Moore 1986) for African-American clergy (Morris 1984) and Catholic priests (McGreevy 1996), but not often among staid Lutherans and Episcopalians. The patterns we find echo those for other faith traditions, and we have extended the understanding of what drives the patterns of political activism among clergy.

The significance in our models of previously excluded factors, especially the church's relationship with the community, suggests that factors external to the clergy and church cannot be overlooked as potential influences in these and other types of clergy political activity. There is no question that clergy political behavior cannot be understood in a vacuum, but rather should be considered a product of personal motivation situated in an environment conducive to action, including the pressures exerted by the profession, the congregation, and, importantly, the community.

Interestingly, and perhaps most important, we find that clergy engage in more public speech when their congregations constitute a minority within the community, based on either their beliefs or their lack of involvement. In such situations clergy represent their congregations in the public sphere and motivate members to add their distinctive voices to the public square. In this way, church involvement is an important avenue through which minority voices are represented in public decision making.

In the United States churches have always been an alternative institutional route to furthering the desires and status of groups, such as the Latter-Day Saints, African-Americans, Catholics, and others (Finke and Stark 1992). An integral part of this process is the role churches play in fostering the development of social capital—civic skills, political acumen, and interpersonal trust—of their congregations (Djupe and Grant 2001; Leege 1988; Putnam 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). We have demonstrated here that church leaders can act as more than mere trainers of citizens, but also as active participants in the political process. Moreover, the process by which clergy are encouraged to become representatives in the public square is driven, in part, by local church-community relations.

Finally, we find that the patterns of clergy addressing substantive policy issues are shaped by the opportunities presented by the nature of the policy community. Clergy become active participants in a policy debate when they sense an opportunity for change and when they are encouraged to participate by their secular ties and agreeable congregations. All these findings suggest the religious roots of public opinion and policy change. Rather than describing shifts over time only as an aftereffect of events, public opinion and policy changes must be seen as the product of conscious action on issues within social networks, a form of political influence that American churches exert on members in regular and highly significant ways.

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