

# SOURCES OF CLERGY SUPPORT FOR DENOMINATIONAL LOBBYING IN WASHINGTON

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*Do clergy approve of official lobbying by their denominations? Using a data set of nearly 2,300 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Episcopal Church clergy surveyed in 1998, we investigate how clergy evaluate the work of their official denominational Washington lobbying offices. In particular, we assess the effects of four factors—political ideology, social theology, political engagement, and internal denominational politics—on clergy’s evaluations of these Washington offices. We find that clergy evaluations of their Washington office are driven by (1) their own politics, (2) whether they feel it is appropriate for their denomination to pursue political ends, and (3) their support for the general direction of the denomination—not directly connected to the lobby.*

Most Americans are well aware of the interconnections between religion and politics in the United States, particularly insofar as religious attitudes affect voting behavior. However, much of the American public does not realize that most religious traditions—from the Roman Catholic Church, to Orthodox Judaism, to the Mennonite Church, to the Unitarian Universalist Association—support official lobbying offices in Washington, D.C. (Adams 1970; Ebersole 1951; Hertzke 1988; Hofrenning 1995; Moen 1989; Olson 2002). These offices function like interest groups by representing the political interests of organized religious traditions and coordinating their national advocacy efforts. The oldest and largest of these offices, the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Church and Society, traces its history to the Prohibition era, which was also a time when liberal American religious traditions were increasing their presence in the political world.<sup>1</sup> These Washington offices lobby members of Congress and executive branch staff, often working in coalition with religious and secular interest groups alike, and file *amicus curiae* briefs in key federal cases. To connect with local congregations, many of the offices support “action networks” designed to stimulate grassroots discussion of politics and involvement in lobbying activities among interested clergy and laity.

Different religious lobbies work on the political right and left; some, such as the Catholic Church, have the good fortune of enjoying legitimacy on both sides. The offices representing mainline Protestant denominations traditionally have comprised the core of the liberal religious witness in Washington.<sup>2</sup> Although these offices attract mixed reviews for their

accomplishments and agendas, there are enough forces within mainline Protestant denominations that support their efforts to ensure their continued existence and political significance. In this article we explore the extent to which clergy, as ground-level elites, support the work of their denominational Washington offices.

We focus specifically on the Washington lobbying offices of two mainline Protestant denominations: the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Like their mainline Protestant counterparts, both denominations have maintained formal lobbying offices in Washington, D.C. since the 1950s that they use to advocate largely liberal policy positions. Few dispute the fact that the Episcopal and Lutheran offices (like the other mainline offices) played a more visible role in Washington in the 1960s and 1970s (particularly around civil rights and the Vietnam War) than they do today. Yet the offices do still exercise some political clout, particularly in debates about international economic and human rights issues. As recently as 2000, for example, the Episcopal office played a leading role in the Jubilee 2000 international debt-relief movement, which secured one-time forgiveness for millions of dollars of debt owed by impoverished developing countries (Olson 2002).

In this article we ask whether rank-and-file clergy support (1) the concept of denominational lobbying generally and (2) the work of their denominations' Washington offices in particular. It is especially instructive to examine questions of mainline Protestant clergy's support for their Washington offices' efforts because of the controversy that swirls around them. And we examine clergy support for the offices rather than lay-level support because clergy are more likely than laity to know about the offices and their work. Clergy are also more likely than laity to have the opportunity to share their views about the offices in public forums.

There are at least four plausible theoretical explanations for clergy support of denominational lobbying efforts. First, we offer an ideological explanation, hypothesizing that clergy whose own political orientations are most consistent with the agendas pursued by the offices will be most supportive of them. Second, we argue that clergy map their theological understanding of the appropriate role of the church in society onto the lobbies. Their *social theology* underpins their attitudes about whether the church should attempt to reach out and remake society in its image or try to change society from within through the altered hearts of adherents (Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, and Poloma 1997). Third, we assert that clergy who engage in politics themselves by linking their own ministry to a political agenda will likely approve of that link also being made at the denominational level. Fourth, we adapt Mancur Olson's (1965) byproduct theory, which is commonly applied to secular interest groups, to analyze clergy support for the Washington offices. Specifically, we gauge the lingering effects of the controversial new full communion relationship between the Episcopal Church and the ELCA upon clergy support for denominational lobbying. Though this controversy had nothing to do with the Washington offices, it did affect clergy's attitudes toward their denominations, which may, in turn, have affected their support for the official political presence of the denomination.

## DATA

We explore clergy's reactions to their Washington offices using data drawn from a random national sample of 2,300 clergy in the Episcopal Church and the ELCA who responded to a mail survey in the late summer and fall of 1998.<sup>3</sup> The survey offered a comprehensive exam-

ination of clergy's theological views, political orientations and activities, church and community characteristics, and views on the work of their denominations. The survey instrument specifically measured attitudes about their denomination's activities and agencies, including the ELCA's Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) and the Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations (OGR). We also asked the clergy to indicate what types of denominational activities they find appropriate, including lobbying government.

Why do we focus our analysis on clergy? Clergy are among the most important contacts on the ground for the national-level lobbying offices. They tend to dominate the national meetings where policy guidelines for the denominations and their lobbies are set. Moreover, they are often the targets of mobilization efforts by the Washington offices (Adams 1970; Hertzke 1988; Olson 2002; Reichley 1985). Congregation members have much lower levels of knowledge than clergy about the lobbies (or even which denomination their church belongs to; Kellstedt and Green 1993) and participate in denominational decision-making roles far less frequently than clergy. As such, clergy are among the most important constituents of the lobbying offices. It is through clergy that the offices can cultivate grassroots support for their efforts (Olson 2002).

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In this article we are concerned with four plausible theoretical explanations of clergy's levels of support for their denominations' official national lobbying efforts. Surely ministers' own ideological orientations affect support, particularly in light of the fact that mainline Protestant Washington offices pursue identifiably liberal agendas. So too their attitudes about how fully their denominations should be involved in public political witness should affect their support for the offices. Ministers' personal levels of political engagement should also play a role in shaping their attitudes toward denominational lobbying, with those who are least politically engaged being least supportive of the offices. Finally, we explore the lingering ramifications of the internal dispute over full communion for clergy support of the Washington offices.

### ***Political Orientations***

It is only natural for citizens to feel kinship with political organizations perceived to advocate causes they support. People are drawn to organizations that they think approach politics from their own ideological vantage point. And "citizens ... are remarkably accurate in estimating the issue positions of strategic groups in politics.... Citizens can draw an impressively accurate map ... of who wants what politically, of who takes the same side, and who lines up on the opposing side of key issues" (Brady and Sniderman 1995: 93). Social elites should be even better than the average citizen at determining who stands where politically, as elites usually possess more political resources and information than ordinary citizens (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). Thus we hypothesize that clergy whose own political orientations are most consistent with the agendas pursued by their denominational Washington offices will be most supportive of them.

Specifically, the more liberal the minister's own politics, the more he or she should be expected to support the work of the Washington office. Mainline Protestant Washington offices are known for their political liberalism. Since the 1950s, the offices have pursued a peace-and-justice agenda by advocating for human rights at home and abroad, working to preserve the environment, questioning the United States' use of military force, and above

all else demanding that the government assist the disadvantaged. In fact, certain mainline Protestant Washington offices have faced serious challenges from critics within their own denominations who think their agendas are too liberal. Controversy has swirled around the Presbyterian Washington Office; a conservative publication, *The Presbyterian Layman*, accused the office of pandering to liberals (Adams 1999; Marcum 2000). The United Methodist Church's Washington office (which it calls the General Board of Church and Society) has also attracted its share of recent controversy ("Talk of Schism" 1998). Not surprisingly, we expect those clergy who are most likely to appreciate the social justice witness that the offices provide in Washington to support it most enthusiastically.

### ***Social Theology***

Clergy's evaluations of the Washington offices should also be rooted in their own normative theological understandings of the extent to which church and society should interact. James Guth and colleagues (1997) explain that clergy differ dramatically in their social theologies, or their perceptions of whether the church should be active in this world by tackling societal problems wherever possible or focus instead on changing the world by transforming individuals' spiritual lives one at a time. Consequently, clergy's attitudes toward their denominational Washington offices should be influenced by their views on whether churches in general should be involved in public political witness.

Most mainline Protestant clergy do agree that their denomination should be active in public affairs, but there is substantial disagreement over both means and ends (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Guth et al. 1997; Olson 2000). Clergy are also likely to believe that the lobbying office does important work but that it is peripheral to the denomination's primary mission and their own (Olson 2002). Perhaps not surprisingly, denominational lobbies are therefore granted few resources by their denominations; denominational decision makers tend to see political lobbying as less important than core activities such as outreach, mission work, and social work. Nevertheless, those clergy who are most committed to a progressive social theology should be most supportive of the offices.

### ***Political Engagement***

Like other citizens, some clergy are interested and engaged in political action and others eschew the political realm (Olson 2000). Clergy who make time for political action—which is, of course, a secondary pursuit for them (Crawford 1995; Crawford and Olson 2001)—do so because they feel a personal commitment to the need to "keep the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other" (as goes a familiar saying in mainline Protestant circles). Therefore, clergy who are accustomed to political action in their own day-to-day lives should not be likely to find similar action on the part of others unacceptable. As such, we expect that clergy who engage in politics themselves approve of the same at the denominational level.

### ***Intra-Denominational Conflict***

Like many Protestant denominations in recent decades, the ELCA and Episcopal Church have explored or finalized several formal agreements with other, like-minded denominations; indeed the ELCA itself is the product of a three-body merger in 1988. More important for our analysis, since the late 1960s the Episcopal Church and the ELCA's precursor denominations had engaged in discussions focusing on common theological beliefs and

larger goals that might be accomplished through joint efforts while maintaining separate identities and governance structures. Ultimately the two denominations established a full communion arrangement in which they agreed to share clergy and mission resources. However, this decision did not come without substantial controversy and continuing internal fallout within both churches (Djupe and Gilbert 2003).

Within the ELCA, the move to establish full communion with the Episcopal Church generated protests by a substantial minority of Lutherans beginning in the mid-1990s. This faction was narrowly able to prevent passage of the full communion proposal during the 1997 ELCA General Assembly; both denominations subsequently approved a revised agreement within three years' time, although even these revisions have not ended the controversy.<sup>4</sup> ELCA dissenters continue to resist implementation of the agreement through reduced financial contributions and calls for revisiting the issue of full communion, moves that signify strong discord within the ELCA and that may be a precursor to eventual schism (Djupe and Gilbert 2003).

To understand the effects of full communion on clergy support for the Washington offices, we draw on Mancur Olson's (1965) argument that if organizations—especially professional associations created for purposes other than politics—satisfy the primary expectations of members (thereby sustaining an effectual selective benefit exchange), they build political capital that may later be expended on politics.

Denominations are akin to professional associations in that they are the primary mechanisms through which clergy secure employment. If satisfaction with the benefit exchange between the member and the organization creates support for the organization, Olson's theory implies that a reduction in benefits could weaken support (Brown 1989). In some ways, full communion strikes at the heart of the benefit exchange. Although full communion does not likely affect the ability of a minister to get a job, for some it may alter the terms of employment. This shift is particularly troublesome for those ELCA pastors, seminarians, and lay people who hold strong theological objections to Episcopal ordination beliefs and practices such as the historic episcopate (Djupe and Gilbert 2003).

A substantial number of clergy we surveyed in both denominations expressed dissatisfaction with the direction full communion takes their denominations. Therefore, clergy who feel that their denomination is not meeting their expectations because of its pursuit of full communion should be expected to have weakened support for other activities the denomination undertakes, including lobbying.

## **CLERGY EVALUATIONS OF DENOMINATIONAL LOBBYING**

To investigate clergy support for denominational involvement in national politics, we analyze ELCA and Episcopal clergy's responses to two key questions: whether their denomination's Washington lobbying office is effective, and whether lobbying is a legitimate activity for their denomination. Table 1 provides marginal percentages for, and shows the interrelationship between, these two variables. A modest majority (56 percent) of sample clergy agree that their denomination should lobby government, while 27 percent disagree and one in six are neutral or not sure.

Table 1 also reports the marginal percentages for the job evaluations clergy gave their Washington offices. As shown in the "marginal percentage" column, 32 percent rated their denomination's Washington office job performance as "good" or "excellent," 36 percent rated it "fair" or "poor," and 32 percent did not offer an opinion.

**Table 1**

**Clergy Evaluation of Denomination's Washington Lobbying Office,  
by Clergy Beliefs about Whether Their Denomination Should Lobby Government  
(column percents)**

Evaluation of Washington Office	The Denomination Should Lobby Government						Marginal Percentage	N
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure/ Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree			
Excellent	4.8	2.2	3.4	5.5	13.5	5.6	114	
Good	6.9	12.1	20.3	32.3	44.4	26.0	541	
Fair	12.4	23.7	24.3	25.9	19.5	23.4	487	
Poor	37.9	22.5	10.9	6.2	7.9	12.7	263	
Don't Know	37.9	39.6	41.1	30.1	14.7	32.4	674	
Marginal Percentage	7.0	19.9	16.8	43.5	12.8	~100.0		
N	145	414	350	904	266		2079	

Source: 1998 ELCA/Episcopal Church Clergy Study.

Clearly these two variables are related. Clergy evaluation of the offices improves as basic agreement with their purpose grows (the two measures are correlated at  $r=0.372$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). There does appear to be a cap on granting positive job evaluations, however. Whereas clergy are more likely to rate the office's job performance as "excellent" if they agree strongly that the denomination should be involved in lobbying, there are far more clergy who rate the office's work as "poor" when they strongly disagree with denominational lobbying on general principle. That is, few clergy are willing or able to say that their denomination's Washington office is doing an excellent job despite modest support for the idea of lobbying.

### MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES OF SUPPORT FOR THE WASHINGTON OFFICES

We now turn to investigate our four core hypotheses with multivariate regression models explaining the two Table 1 measures: clergy support for their denomination lobbying government, and clergy evaluations of their denomination's Washington lobbying office. The models we present in Table 2 include additional control variables for proper model specification. In both models a positive coefficient indicates greater support or agreement (see Appendix for independent variable coding).

#### *Support for Denominational Lobbying*

The first column of Table 2 presents the OLS regression estimates of agreement with the statement, "The (ELCA/Episcopal Church) should lobby government." The Lobby Government model demonstrates that political and theological orientations are both closely related to clergy approval of lobbying. This pattern is not surprising given the explicitly political mission of the Washington offices. Conservatives and Republicans are more likely to disagree that the denomination should lobby since it would be unlikely to represent their political views.

Two social theology variables achieve significance and are strong indicators of approval of denominational lobbying (as indicated by the standardized coefficient, beta). Clergy who

**Table 2**  
**Estimated Clergy Beliefs about Whether Their Denomination Should**  
**Lobby Government and Estimated Clergy Evaluation of Denomination's**  
**Washington Lobbying Office (OLS regression estimates)**

<i>Variable</i>	Lobby Government			Job Evaluation		
	Coeff.	S.E.	Beta	Coeff.	S.E.	Beta
<i>Political Orientations</i>						
Political ideology	-0.183	(0.033) ***	-0.149	-0.175	(0.034) ***	-0.188
Partisanship	-0.053	(0.014) ***	-0.101	-0.011	(0.014)	
<i>Social Theology</i>						
Denomination should lobby govt.	—			0.118	(0.024) ***	0.153
Denominational political engagement	0.366	(0.026) ***	0.324	0.082	(0.028) ***	0.093
Churches should transform social order	0.001	(0.018)		0.044	(0.016) ***	0.071
Churches should cooperate in politics	0.153	(0.023) ***	0.133	0.047	(0.024) **	0.052
<i>Political Engagement</i>						
Political activity frequency	0.192	(0.043) ***	0.089	-0.051	(0.044)	
Political interest	0.034	(0.038)		-0.017	(0.038)	
<i>Intra-Denominational Conflict</i>						
Full communion stance	0.072	(0.017) ***	0.084	0.069	(0.018) ***	0.103
ELCA clergy	0.232	(0.047) ***	0.099	0.336	(0.048) ***	0.182
Denominational isolation	0.085	(0.105)		-0.230	(0.106) **	-0.053
<i>Control Variables</i>						
Doctoral degree	0.055	(0.051)		-0.014	(0.050)	
Male	0.159	(0.063) **	0.053	-0.261	(0.063) ***	-0.110
Years in the ministry	-0.002	(0.002)		0.001	(0.002)	
Church size	-0.000	(0.000)		-0.000	(0.000) **	-0.055
Urban church	0.001	(0.049)		-0.007	(0.049)	
Upper Midwest church	0.010	(0.058)		0.039	(0.057)	
Southern church	-0.118	(0.057) **	-0.041	-0.070	(0.058)	
Constant	1.232	(0.201)		1.896	(0.213)	
	Number of Cases=	1876		1274		
	Adj. R <sup>2</sup> =	0.355		0.270		
	S.E.E.=	0.911		0.749		
	F=	61.596 ***		27.093 ***		

Source: 1998 ELCA/Episcopal Church Clergy Study.

Notes: See text for dependent variable question wording and coding; see Appendix for independent variable coding. \*  $p < 0.10$  \*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . For Job Evaluation model, "don't know" responses (~32%) were excluded.

agree that their denomination should be more involved with “social and political issues” approve more of lobbying. Agreeing that religious groups need to cooperate politically even if they disagree theologically—an ecumenical viewpoint—also increases approval of denominational lobbying. While this statement is not about lobbying per se, agreement does signal a pragmatic stance that solving social problems is more important than maintaining theological distinctiveness. An ecumenical orientation suggests a lack of trepidation about the coalition-building activity that all lobbies must pursue in order to thrive (Hula 1999). Agreeing that the church should work to transform the social order, however, has no bearing on evaluations of whether the denomination should lobby.

The Lobby Government model also shows that clergy who are politically engaged approve more of denominational lobbying. As is the case for clergy studied elsewhere (Crawford and Olson 2001; Guth et al. 1997; Jelen 1993; Olson 2000; Smidt 2004), many of the clergy in our sample mix religion and politics through their own personal involvement in politics on a regular basis; we would expect such clergy to find little fault with their denomination for doing the same. This relationship is independent of political interest and ideology, but recall that politically conservative and Republican clergy are less likely to approve of their denomination lobbying than are liberal clergy.

Variables tapping sentiments about intra-denominational conflict are also significant predictors of lobbying approval, as Olson’s byproduct theory suggests. Clergy opposed to the ELCA-Episcopal full communion agreement are less supportive of denominational lobbying. As noted previously, internal debates over full communion have led to significant dissension within the ELCA, where clergy are less supportive of full communion than Episcopal clergy (in the ELCA, 58 percent approve; in the Episcopal Church, 65 percent approve). This effect suggests that dissent over intra-denominational issues can poison the well and negatively affect other denominational activities. In this instance, even though the full communion issue has no specific connection to lobbying on national political issues, it seems to be an indicator of general dissatisfaction with the denomination that bleeds over into disapproval of the Washington lobbies. The effect is not determinative, of course, as the beta value confirms.

The Lobby Government model further demonstrates that Episcopal clergy are less likely than ELCA clergy to approve of their denomination lobbying government. This is due in large part to less knowledge on the part of Episcopal clergy about what the Episcopal OGR does, fueled by the OGR’s own lack of farming the grassroots (for discussion of this general notion, see Cigler 1991; Jordan and Maloney 1998; Milbrath 1959; Rothenberg 1992). The LOGA, by contrast, has state-level offices in roughly half of the fifty states that support additional networking with clergy. Finding supportive clergy and maintaining a relationship with them at the state level evidently leads to greater denomination-wide support for the work of the Washington office. However, the denominational difference also signals differing levels of intra-denominational political disagreement—we find greater diversity in the Episcopal Church in terms of clergy’s political ideology, partisanship, and religious conservatism.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the Lobby Government model in Table 2 indicates that clergy who approve of their denomination’s lobbying efforts are more likely to be ecumenical, politically engaged, liberal, Democratic, Lutheran, and non-southern, whereas those who disapprove are more often religious particularists, politically quiescent, conservative, Republican, Episcopalian, southern, and opposed to full communion. The question of whether religious lobbies are

legitimate therefore cuts along some of the most contentious lines in American religion. Although the most potent explanations concern the role of church in society and the liberal politics advocated (or assumed to be advanced) by the Washington offices, the principle of denominational lobbying is not immune to clergy's opinions of the direction of the denomination more generally.

### ***Washington Office Job Evaluations***

The factors affecting the job performance evaluations clergy give their denomination's Washington offices appear in the second column of Table 2. There are strong similarities between this Job Evaluation model and the Lobby Government model. A few telling differences also emerge due to the specificity of the job evaluation question, which asks clergy to judge whether their denomination's Washington lobby is effective.

Like the idea of denominational lobbying, job evaluations are affected by political factors. Political ideology has the strongest effect in the model, with conservatives granting lower marks. This, again, is not surprising given the consistently liberal political agendas of these denominations' Washington offices.

As in the Lobby Government model, several aspects of social theology also structure how clergy view Washington offices. Clergy rate the Washington office more positively when they believe their denominations should focus more on transforming the social order than on individual salvation. Clergy espousing this social theology have always been more engaged politically (Guth et al. 1997), which would generate more support for the lobbies, especially since both offices emphasize social justice issues. More positive evaluations also flow from the sentiment that churches should cooperate politically despite theological differences. This again reflects the tacit support for the ecumenical coalition building that must accompany any meaningful support for the work of the Washington offices. But it also suggests a practical approach to religion's intersection with the world that resonates positively with the tactics of the political process. Note, however, that this effect is much weaker than it is in the Lobby Government model, where general principles are more salient.

Agreeing that the denomination should lobby government—the dependent variable in the Lobby Government model—also leads to positive job evaluations of the Washington offices. Clergy who believe the church's mission in the world must include politics evaluate the Washington offices from an entirely different vantage point than those who are less outwardly directed. After all, the offices are dedicated to promoting policies consonant with their denomination's core beliefs.

The Job Evaluation model results demonstrate once again, and here more strongly, that denominational relations influence clergy attitudes. Approval of full communion is associated with positive evaluations of the Washington offices even though the offices had nothing to do with the full communion agreement. Meanwhile, Episcopal clergy approve of their OGR far less often than Lutheran clergy support LOGA, mirroring the results from the previous model.

The similarity between the clergy's congregation and others in the same denomination is also a significant influence on clergy evaluations of the Washington lobby offices. Using an index measuring the extent to which each minister feels that his or her church differs in substantial ways from the denominational norm (Djupe and Gilbert 2002, 2003; see Appendix for details), we find that clergy who perceive their congregations as isolated from and different than others in their denominations have more negative feelings toward the Wash-

ington lobbying offices. Such clergy are less likely to perceive the Washington office's activities as central to their own needs and mission, particularly because they see their churches existing somewhat apart from the rest of the denominational structure. As a Lutheran minister in rural New England told us:

We're so isolated here. The bishop was here ten years ago.... but other than that, there's not a whole lot of contact or connection. I really feel disconnected up here.... Years ago [while serving in New Jersey] I felt connected and I could pick up the phone and easily talk to somebody in Trenton or Washington, [but not now].<sup>6</sup>

Yet clergy in isolated churches also may need to play down their denominational ties—a growing trend today in mainline churches (Chesnut 2000; Dudley and Roozen 2001)—and be proud of this fact. If a pastor is trying to market his or her church by de-emphasizing denominational ties, then it makes little sense to expect them to find the denomination's Washington office effective.

The Table 2 Job Evaluation model further explains that clergy serving larger congregations evaluate the Washington offices more negatively. Some comments we received from clergy indicate why this might be so. Denominational (and national) politics can be quite divisive in specific church contexts. For example, several clergy commented that issues of homosexuality brought up through denominational channels had divided their congregations and that they had lost members as a result (see also Cadge 2002; Olson and Cadge 2002). It is important for clergy who are interested in playing what some derisively label “the numbers game” to steer clear of divisiveness (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959). Any outside influence that might threaten the balancing act it takes to build a large congregation would be viewed less than favorably.

The Table 2 models demonstrate clearly that the simple act of evaluating the political arm of the denomination involves a complex combination of benefits and considerations. Although clergy's personal politics and social theology are the dominant predictors of lobbying approval and office job evaluations, our results show this is only a part of the story. It is clear that some ELCA and Episcopal clergy are dissatisfied with, or distant from, their denominations. Their lack of support lessens the denomination's political capital, among other resources, that can be spent on lobbying. Our results therefore bolster the contention that intra-denominational political divisions affect the entire scope of denominational activities. Our results also confirm a portion of Mancur Olson's understanding of group political activity as a byproduct of stored political capital.

## CONCLUSION

Religious lobbies' power lies in their claim to an authoritative and prophetic voice, combined with the fact that they represent large, geographically diverse sets of Americans. Yet, the Washington offices of the ELCA and the Episcopal Church speak for and are directed by their denominations. The offices must take care not to alienate the professionals who work in—and often chart—the overall directions of the denominations.

Of course, clergy care about the substance of the Washington offices' work. They filter this concern through their own political orientations and their beliefs about the propriety of mixing religion and politics in such a direct manner as lobbying. As we might expect from elites (which clergy surely are), complicated and nuanced belief systems drive cler-

gy's attitudes about whether their denominations should attempt to influence government. Clergy also evaluate their denominational lobbies through the lens of their vocation: those who do not feel their church is closely connected to the denomination may not support its missions, especially byproduct initiatives such as lobbying.

Olson's byproduct theory of lobbying also lends theoretical insight into how ELCA and Episcopal clergy evaluate the work of their denominational Washington offices. From this perspective, the denomination is seen as akin to a professional association that provides considerable selective benefits to the clergy who join. As Allen Hertzke notes, "Churches, after all, are not primarily political institutions, and members do not join for such representation" (1988: 206). Therefore, clergy will evaluate the activities of the denomination with selective benefits in mind, especially concerning the specific performance of their jobs.

The Washington offices of mainline Protestant denominations are and will likely remain in an uncomfortable position. Evidence here suggests that they could build stronger, more active grassroots support for their activities among resourceful clergy, yet doing so could weaken their denominational position through membership raveling (Johnson 1996) or by bringing attention to the possibilities of resource reallocation and increased oversight and scrutiny of their affairs (Lowry 1994). "Strategically, this representational weakness may translate into political marginalization, because effectiveness increasingly requires tangible links with mobilizable constituencies" (Hertzke 1988: 203). At the same time, support for the Washington offices is dependent partly on decisions and actions outside of their control. The offices carry on the difficult task of lobbying as a byproduct of their denominations with few resources, looking for access, all the while trying to maintain a distinctive religious presence on Capitol Hill.

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## Appendix: Independent Variable Coding

### *Political Orientations*

**Political ideology:** Measured on a five-point scale, 1=most liberal through 5=most conservative.

**Partisanship:** 0=strong Democrat, 1=weak Democrat, 2=independent, leaning Democrat, 3=independent, 4=independent, leaning Republican, 5=weak Republican, 6=strong Republican.

### *Social Theology*

**Denominational political engagement:** "Does the (ELCA/Episcopal Church), as a denomination, need to be more or less involved with social and political issues?" 1=much less, 2=somewhat less, 3=same as now, 4=somewhat more, 5=much more.

**Churches should transform social order:** "Churches should put more emphasis on transforming the social order and less on individual salvation." 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure/neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

**Churches should cooperate in politics:** "Christians of different denominations need to cooperate more in politics, even if they can't agree on theology." 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure/neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

### ***Political Engagement***

**Political activity average frequency:** Average measure (ranging from 1 to 4) of the frequency of performing 19 different political activities; for each activity respondents answered 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, or 4=often. Activities: publicly (not preaching) taken a stand on a political/social issue; publicly (not preaching) endorsed a candidate; while preaching, taken a stand on a political/social issue; while preaching, endorsed a candidate; urged congregation to register and vote; publicly (including preaching) offered prayer on a political/social issue; publicly (including preaching) offered prayer for candidates; organized a political discussion group in church; organized a social action group in church; active in a national political group; active in a local political or community group; active on a local board or council; served on a local clergy council; contributed to a candidate, party, or PAC; contacted public officials on a political/social issue; written a letter to a newspaper editor about a political or social issue; actively campaigned for a party or candidate; participated in a protest march or demonstration; engaged in some form of civil disobedience.

**Political interest:** Interest in 1998 political campaigns, 1=not interested, 2=somewhat interested, 3=very interested.

### ***Intra-Denominational Conflict***

**Full communion stance:** "The (Episcopal Church/ELCA) should enter into full communion with the (ELCA/Episcopal Church)." 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure/neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

**ELCA clergy:** 0=Episcopalian, 1=ELCA.

**Denominational isolation:** Clergy were asked to compare their church with others in the denomination on eight items: theological beliefs, political beliefs, income and social status, ethnicity/race, church activity, community involvement, worship and music styles, and political activity. The index gains one point if a clergyperson's church had different theological beliefs, political beliefs, worship and music styles, and church activity, more racial/ethnic minorities, if the church was less involved in the community, had a lower social status, or was less active in politics than other denominational congregations. The index is averaged to take account of the fact that not all clergy answered all eight questions. The final index ranges from 0 to 1; higher scores suggest more isolation from the denomination.

### ***Control Variables***

**Doctoral degree:** 0=seminary graduate (master's degree), 1=doctoral degree.

**Male:** 0=female, 1=male.

**Years in the ministry:** Measured in years, self-report.

**Church size:** Number of total members, children included (self-report).

**Urban church:** 0=no, 1=yes.

**Upper Midwest church:** 0=no, 1=yes (includes: Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin).

**Southern church:** 0=no, 1=yes (includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia).

## **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>The Methodist Office was the first to be established, but the Quakers were the first to register their lobby, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, as a formal interest group. See Hertzke (1988).

<sup>2</sup>Mainline Protestantism consists of the oldest, most hierarchically organized, most theologically liberal denominations within American Protestantism, including the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. Until at least the mid-twentieth century, mainline Protestantism was socially hegemonic in the United States. Its numbers and clout have diminished to some extent in recent decades, but it is a tradition that maintains a distinctive presence and importance in American religion. See Wuthnow and Evans (2002).

<sup>3</sup>We mailed surveys to 3,000 clergy in each denomination and contacted non-respondents once, two months after the initial mailing; the sample was drawn randomly from the ELCA and Episcopal Church annuals. The overall response rate was 47 percent for ELCA pastors and just under one-third for Episcopal priests and deacons. Respondents to the second mailing were not significantly different from first wave respondents on measures of interest.

<sup>4</sup>The second attempt at reaching full communion, "Called to Common Mission," passed in both denominations in 1999 (ELCA) and 2000 (Episcopal Church).

<sup>5</sup>For each of the three measures, the standard deviation for Episcopal clergy is a tenth to three-tenths higher than for ELCA clergy.

<sup>6</sup>This quotation from a Lutheran minister in rural New England is from an anonymous telephone interview conducted by Laura Olson on January 19, 2000.

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