

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Sociology Department, Faculty Publications

Sociology, Department of

2002

Testing the Promise of the Churches: Income Inequality in the Opportunity to Learn Civic Skills in Christian Congregations

Philip Schwadel

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, pschwadel2@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Schwadel, Philip, "Testing the Promise of the Churches: Income Inequality in the Opportunity to Learn Civic Skills in Christian Congregations" (2002). *Sociology Department, Faculty Publications*. 84.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub/84>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology Department, Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Testing the Promise of the Churches: Income Inequality in the Opportunity to Learn Civic Skills in Christian Congregations

Philip Schwadel

Abstract

Political researchers point to church activities as a major avenue for lower-class individuals to learn the civic skills necessary for many forms of political participation, the skills that higher-status individuals learn through education and occupation. This article tests this theory through multilevel analyses of the effects of both individual income and average congregational income on three measures of participation in church activities and organizations that offer participants the opportunity to learn and exercise civic skills. The results show that churches are only slightly stratified when it comes to members' participation in charity, public policy, or social justice organizations within the church, suggesting that they offer some promise to teach civic skills to the lower-income members. Nevertheless, churches are moderately stratified in terms of members' participation in administration, finance, or buildings organizations within the church, and strongly stratified in organizations in general within the church, suggesting that higher-income members receive the majority of civic-skill practice and training in Christian congregations in the United States.

Recently, sociologists and political scientists have bemoaned the decline of social capital and civic participation in the United States (e.g., Putnam 1995). The civic participation and social capital literatures proclaim a strong civil society to be a prerequisite for a proper functioning democracy. High levels of civic engagement preclude an overreliance on the state and help build a strong civil society. Lower levels of civic participation, on the other hand, lead to an apolitical populace with a lack of civic skills. Civic skills, such as organizing and public speaking, are essential for political participation, particularly nonelectoral or informal political participation. Without the skills necessary to participate in the political arena, people are left out of the democratic process.

Social science research has begun to recognize the unequal distribution of civic skills in the United States, particularly between social and economic classes (e.g., Putnam 1995; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Educational and occupational settings generally provide opportunities to learn civic skills, two settings in which lower-income individuals are disadvantaged. Middle- and upper-income individuals learn many civic skills through education, which is more thorough and longer lasting for them than for lower-income individuals. They also learn and practice civic skills in occupations that emphasize writing, organizing, and leadership, occupations that are generally unattainable for the lower classes. Simply put, civic-skill education is extremely skewed toward the more privileged in contemporary America.

Political researchers point to one possible ray of hope in this dim picture: the promise of the churches. Church members may take part in a variety of activities other than attending regular services that offer the opportunity to learn civic skills. Church members who participate in activities and organizations, and possibly help lead activities, can become proficient organizers, leaders, public speakers, and writers. Lower class participation in church activities and organizations can potentially equalize the disparities between social classes in civic-skill education. While little research has been conducted on income disparities in membership in church organizations, the sociology of religion literature finds no significant correlation be-

tween people's incomes and their general church attendance (e.g., Goode 1966; Mueller and Johnson 1975), which suggests that, perhaps, there is also no correlation between people's incomes and their participation in the church activities that can help build civic skills.

Political researchers repeatedly point to religious activities as a major source of civic-skill education, though their terminology often varies. For example, Peterson (1992) highlights the "spillover effect" in churches, whereby participation in religious activities "spills over" into political participation. Peterson's examination also finds no correlation between income and church involvement, thus permitting the lower classes to benefit from the "spillover effect." Similarly, Harris (1994) affirms his hypotheses concerning the intermediary positive relationship between church activism and political participation among African Americans. In their respective analyses of religion and politics, both Hougland and Christenson (1983) and Wald (1987) point to the importance of the civic skills learned through church participation. These researchers hold church participation to be a major civic-skill educator, particularly for the lower classes and minorities.

Social capital research has also espoused the connection between church-related activities and political participation. Church activities are seen as a major opportunity to build civil society and, therefore, bring the lower classes into the political realm (e.g., Wood 1997). Similar to the political sociology and political science literatures, the social capital literature also holds churches to be a primary source of civic-skill education for the lower classes and minorities.

In a comprehensive study of political participation in the United States, and one of the few thorough examinations of civic skills, Verba and colleagues conclude that the opportunity to learn civic skills in church "may partially compensate for the weakness of institutions that ordinarily function to mobilize the disadvantaged" (1995:333). Elsewhere, the same authors conclude, "in providing opportunities to exercise skills, workplaces discriminate the most—and churches least—on the basis of educational attainment" (Brady, Verba, and Scholzman 1995:275). These authors believe that the economic and racial homogeneity of local congregations produces the least stratified context for civic-skill education. Local congregations are seen as possibly the only place where the lower classes are given equal access to learn civic skills.

The current research tests the promise of the churches hypothesis by examining the level of income inequality within church organizations in a sample of Christian congregations in the United States. A multilevel analysis will clarify not only the relationship between individuals' income and their participation in church organizations, but also the relationship between average congregational income and participation in these organizations. This extends previous research in two ways: first, by testing the promise that churches offer equal opportunities for civic-skill education; and second, by investigating this research question through multilevel analysis, which allows for comparisons of individual and congregational/contextual effects of income on membership in church organizations. Social scientists recognize vast inequalities in our society. Many hope that churches do not simply reflect these inequalities.

Data

The data used in this research is from the 1987 Church and Community Planning Initiative (CCPI).¹ The data was collected from 5,123 church members of 62 congregations in 11 major denominations.² Each denomination submitted a list of its congregations from which a stratified cluster sample of the "typical" congregations was chosen by the project coordinator and denominational leaders (see Dudley 1991) in the Indiana and Illinois area (one-third rural, one-third small cities, and one-third metropolitan). The congregations ranged in size from 47 to more than 2,000 members; those sampled ranged in size from 14 to 222 per congregation. About one-third of the congregations asked to participate declined, many stating a lack of interest among the lay leaders. The average response rate to the mail surveys of church members was 55 percent per congregation. The CCPI data is appropriate for this research because

it contains individuals nested within congregations, in addition to measures of income and civic-skill opportunities. The nesting enables a multilevel analysis of the individual and congregational effects of income on the opportunity for civic-skill education in churches.

Dependent Variables

The three dependent variables are: (1) holding a leadership position in church administration, finance, or buildings committees, (2) holding a leadership position in church-sponsored charity, public policy, or social justice committees, and (3) number of church organization memberships (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). As discussed above, political researchers stress the importance of church activities, aside from regular services, as a primary setting for civic-skill education among the less advantaged. Participating in these activities and holding leadership positions on these committees provides opportunities to learn and practice skills that less-advantaged individuals miss out on due to their lower education levels and lower-skill occupations. These three variables are used to measure the opportunity for civic-skill education or social-capital production in churches. Multiple measures are used to ensure the validity of the measurement as well as provide an examination of income inequality in different types of church organizations and activities that can provide the opportunity to learn and practice civic skills.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Independent Variable Coding

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean
Leadership position in charity, public policy, or social justice	3,766	0.76	1.38
Leadership position in administration, finance, or buildings	4,130	1.10	1.66
Number of memberships in church organizations	5,122	1.30	1.36
Congregational income	62	0.73	3.53
Protestant (dummy variable)	62	0.37	0.84
Individual income	4,500	1.81	3.74
Time in congregation	4,348	17.08	19.66
Church attendance	5,028	1.10	5.43
View of the Bible	4,856	0.71	2.81
Sex	4,998	0.48	1.64
Age	4,927	18.18	51.46
Race	4,925	0.30	1.10
Marital status	4,833	0.45	1.72
Child at home	4,963	0.47	1.68

Income is coded in \$10,000 increments (i.e., 1 = \$9,999 or less, 2 = \$10,000 to \$19,999, ... 7 = \$60,000 or more). Sex is coded 1 for males and 2 for females. Age is coded as the respondents' actual ages. Race is coded 1 for white respondents and 2 for African-American respondents. Marital status is coded 1 for respondents who are currently single and 2 for those who are currently married. The presence of children is coded 1 for respondents who currently have an 18 year old or younger offspring living in their home and 2 for those who do not. Church attendance is coded 1 for respondents who never attend, 2 for those who attend about once or twice a year, 3 for those who attend once or twice every three months, 4 for those who attend about once a month, 5 for those who attend about two or three times a month, 6 for those who attend four times a month or more, and 7 for those who attend every day. Length of time in congregation is coded as the number of years the respondent has been a member of his or her congregation. View of the Bible is a scale ranging from 1 for those who believe the Bible is valuable, but not God's actual words, to 4 for those who believe the Bible is the literal word of God.

The two leadership position variables (i.e., charity, public policy, or social justice, and administration, finance, or buildings) are each coded 1 for those who are not active, 2 for informal leaders, 3 for official members, and 4 for committee chairs. These two variables allow for an examination of the relationship between measures of income and participation in specific types of church activities. These committee leadership positions, even when informal, provide opportunities for learning and exercising civic skills. The variable that measures leadership positions in charity, public policy, or social justice provides an examination of the relationship between measures of income and these social-service-oriented committee activities. The variable that measures leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings, on the other hand, examines the effects of income on holding leadership positions in management- and organization-oriented committees. While both measures should tap into the opportunity to learn and exercise civic skills, the administration, finance, or buildings measure should provide a clearer picture of which members learn and practice organizational and management skills. Holding a leadership position in charity, public policy, or social justice, however, might be more prevalent among lower-class individuals and within lower-class congregations, as charity and social justice might be more poignant issues for the disadvantaged.

In contrast to the specific forms of participation measured by the first two dependent variables, the third dependent variable provides a more general examination of the relationship between income and participation in church organizations. Number of memberships in church organizations other than the congregation itself, the third dependent variable, is coded as the number of memberships the respondent holds, from 0 to 4 or more. This variable examines formal memberships, which suggests greater demand for regular participation. Hence, more memberships should indicate more opportunities to learn and exercise public-speaking, management, and organizational skills. Additionally, this variable allows for more varied forms of organizational participation than the first two dependent variables.

Explanatory Variables

Individual income and the mean congregational income are the primary independent variables of interest (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).³ Individual income is the individual level or within-congregation measure of income. Congregational income is the congregational level or between-congregation measure of income. Congregational income is simply the mean income in each of the 62 congregations. Individual income tests for within-congregation, or individual level, social-class inequalities in the three measures of participation in church organizations. These models (discussed below) control for congregational differences when assessing individual-level effects. The addition of average congregational income allows for an examination of the differences between higher- and lower-income congregations in terms of individual members' participation in church organizations and committees.

Control Variables

A variety of measures are used to control for demographic variations, differences in members' embeddedness in their congregations, religious beliefs, and differences between congregations (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Sex, age, race, marital status, and the presence of children control for demographic variations in individuals' participation in church organizations and committees. Church attendance and the length of time respondents have been members of their congregations control for variations in congregational embeddedness. Church members who are more embedded in their congregations are more likely to participate in church organizations and committees (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995:282-83). Two measures control for religious differences in the three dependent variables. At the individual level, view of the Bible controls for differences between "conservative" and "liberal" Protestants in the three measures of organizational participation. At the congregational level,

a dummy variable for Protestant congregations is added to test for differences between Catholics and Protestants in the three measures of participation. Tests of denominational differences in the three dependent variables revealed no significant differences between the 11 denominations (results not shown). The only meaningful differences were between Catholics and Protestants, as some of the literature suggests (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), hence the necessity of including a Protestant dummy variable.

Methods

This research presents multilevel analyses that explore the effects of individual income and average congregational income on three measures of participation in church activities that may build social capital and civic skills.⁴ Previous research shows congregations to be an important aspect in studies that examine religion and politics (e.g., Gilbert 1993; Jelen 1993; Wald et al. 1990). The congregational context is especially important when examining membership in church organizations and committees. Due to a lack of resources, lower-income congregations may not provide the same opportunities for activity in church organizations as do higher-income congregations. Higher-income congregations, however, may use more hired staff to fill positions that could provide valuable experience to members in lower-income congregations. The addition of congregational income to the models, which is only possible using multilevel analysis, also allows for a clearer picture of the relationship between individual-level income and participation in church organizations, by controlling for the effects of church-level income.

This analysis uses HLM (hierarchical linear modeling), which allows for a full decomposition of both individual and contextual effects.⁵ In HLM, a submodel represents the relationship at each of the two levels. The submodels specify both levels of the model and the relation of each level's variables to relationships at other levels (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). In this instance, it enables an examination of the effects of individual income (i.e., Level 1) and average congregational income (i.e., Level 2) on participation in church activities and organizations.

This comparison would be impossible using ordinary least squares (OLS) methods due to the dependence between the individual level and the congregational level. Using OLS regression there is no way to differentiate the individual and contextual effects of a variable because all measures are pooled measures. HLM, on the other hand, breaks down the individual and contextual effects along with their separate variance components. This provides more precise estimates of the standard errors, parameters, and significance tests than is possible using OLS (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). Furthermore, HLM controls for variation at other levels. In this research, HLM provides individual effects that control for congregational differences and congregational effects that control for individual variation.

Results

The three models examine the effects of individual income, congregational income, and the control variables on the two leadership measures and membership in church organizations (see Table 2). Before discussing the results, a few comments on multilevel analysis are in order. The congregational-level variables are, as mentioned above, aggregated versions of their individual-level counterparts. The ranges of the variables diminish when aggregated (see Table 1). Therefore, the coefficients for congregational income must be larger than individual-level incomes' coefficients to have the same impact. To clarify the explanatory power of each variable, standardized coefficients, or betas, are reported along with the raw coefficients; the beta coefficients take the range of the variable into account. HLM produces Level 1 and Level 2 variance components, which are used to construct both an individual-level R^2 (i.e., variance explained) and a congregational-level R^2 (see Kreft and De Leeuw 1998 for a discussion of variance com-

ponents and variance explained). It should be noted that the variance explained at the congregational level might be partly explained by individual-level variables. As a final note, HLM coefficients can be read in the same manner as most linear regression results. For example, all else being equal, for each one unit increase in individual income a respondent is expected to increase 0.015 on the measure of holding a leadership position in charity, public policy, or social justice (Model 1, Table 2).

Individual income has a positive and significant, but not very strong, effect on leadership positions in charity, public policy, or social justice (Model 1, Table 2). Congregational income, on the other hand, has little effect in this model. In terms of holding a leadership position in charity, public policy, or social justice, there is some within-congregation income stratification, but no significant between-congregation differences. The small individual-level R^2 and non-existent congregational-level R^2 reveal this to be a poor model, suggesting that there are fairly equal opportunities for most church members to hold leadership positions in charity, public policy, or social justice.⁶ Figure 1 demonstrates this finding, graphically depicting the fairly equal opportunities for individuals of all income levels to hold leadership positions in charity, public policy, or social justice in low-, middle-, and high-income congregations.

Individual income strongly and positively affects holding leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings, while congregational income significantly, but less strongly, and negatively affects holding leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings (Model 2, Table 2). All else being equal, higher-income church members are more likely to hold leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings; however, they are more likely to hold these leadership positions in lower-income congregations. In contrast to Model 1, Model 2 explains a fairly large amount of the variation in the dependent variable.⁷ Model 2 explains more than 43 percent of the between-congregation variation and more than 9 percent of the within-congregation variation. While certain control variables certainly contribute to the explained

Table 2. Three Multilevel Models Examining the Effects of Individual and Congregational Income and Control Variables on Three Measures of Organizational Church Activity

	Model 1: Leadership Position in Charity, Public Policy, or Social Justice		Model 2: Leadership Position in Administration, Finance, or Buildings		Model 3: Number of Memberships in Church Organizations	
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta
Intercept	1.429		1.769		1.402	
Congregational income	-0.019	-0.018	-0.100*	-0.066	0.166*	0.093
Individual income	0.015*	0.035	0.078***	0.128	0.023*	0.032
Protestant (dummy)	0.070	0.034	0.471***	0.158	0.712***	0.203
Time in congregation	0.000	-0.004	0.003***	0.052	0.004**	0.054
Church attendance	0.081***	0.117	0.141***	0.141	0.365***	0.309
View of the Bible	-0.022	-0.021	0.003	0.002	-0.002	-0.001
Sex	-0.004	-0.003	-0.313***	-0.136	0.132**	0.049
Age	0.002*	0.040	0.003***	0.056	0.000	-0.004
Race	-0.081	-0.032	-0.064	-0.018	-0.032	-0.007
Marital status	-0.029	-0.017	0.018	0.007	0.015	0.005
Child at home	-0.082**	-0.050	-0.103***	-0.044	-0.197***	-0.071
Level 1 <i>N</i>	2,780		3,018		3,555	
Individual R^2 (Level 1)	0.022		0.094		0.104	
Congregation R^2 (Level 2)	0.000		0.432		0.501	

Significance tests: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

variation (specifically the congregation being Protestant, and individual-level gender and church attendance), congregational income and, especially, individual income explain much of the variation in holding leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings (recall that Level 1 variables can explain variation at Level 2). Figure 2 graphically depicts the greater level of leadership positions in lower-income congregations and among higher-income individuals.

In contrast to the previous two models, both individual and congregational income positively and significantly affect the number of church organizations to which a church member belongs (Model 3, Table 2). Again in contrast to the previous two models, congregational income has a far stronger effect on church organization memberships than does individual income. Taken together, this suggests an expansive amount of income differentiation in mem-

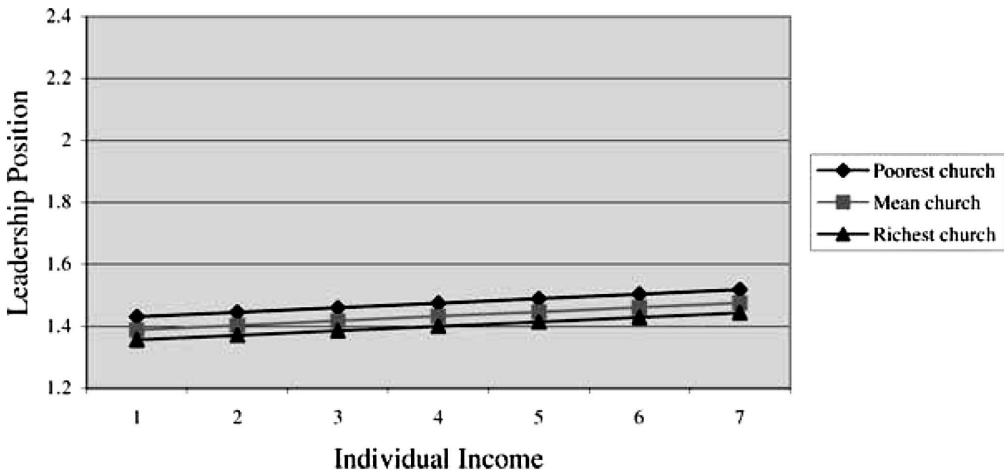


Figure 1. Individual Income by Leadership Positions in Charity, Public Policy, or Social Justice (Graphed relationship controls for all other variables in the model.)

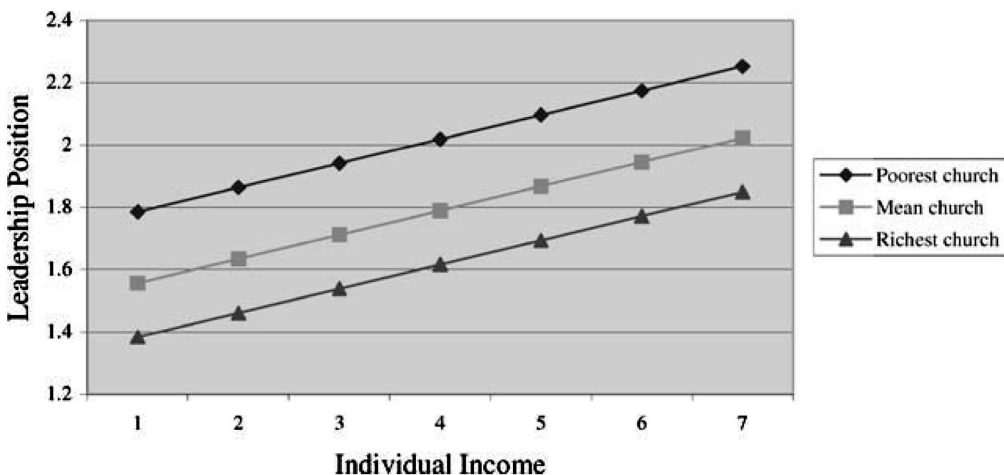


Figure 2. Individual Income by Leadership Positions in Administration, Finance, or Buildings (Graphed relationship controls for all other variables in the model.)

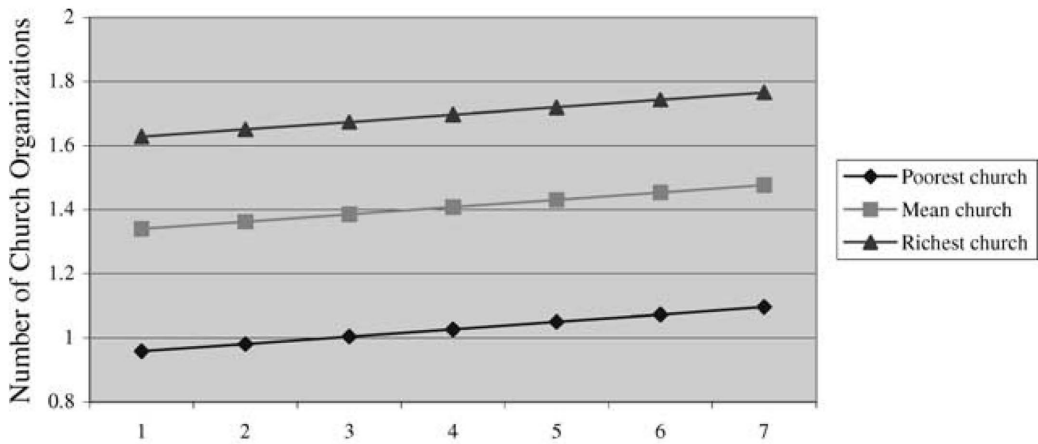


Figure 3. Individual Income by Number of Church Organization Memberships (Graphed relationship controls for all other variables in the model.)

berships in church organizations and committees. This is further verified by the variation explained in Model 3: more than 50 percent of the between-congregation variation and more than 10 percent of the within-congregation variation.⁸ As in the previous model, church attendance and a congregation being Protestant contribute to the variation explained. Nevertheless, individual and, especially, congregational income also contribute to this explanatory power, as is graphically portrayed in Figure 3.

Discussion

The three dependent variables employed in this research demonstrate varying degrees of individual-level income stratification in the opportunity to learn and practice civic skills in church. Individual-level income is positively and significantly related to each of the three measures of opportunities to learn and exercise civic skills in church. Of the three dependent variables, individual-level income has the least association with holding leadership positions in charity, public policy, or social justice. As suggested earlier, this is a leadership position that may particularly appeal to lower-income church members. Lower-income individuals can probably relate to the issues in this type of position, particularly social justice and charity. Additionally, they are likely to live in areas where there is a greater need for churches to address local issues. In contrast, the strongest individual-level effect of income is on holding a leadership position in administration, finance, or buildings. Higher-income individuals are far more likely than lower-income individuals to hold leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings. This does not reflect positively on the promise of the churches, as leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings are management- and finance-oriented activities that surely provide ample opportunities to learn and practice civic skills. Contrary to the promise of the churches evident in the charity, public policy, or social justice committees, there is little promise that churches will offer lower-income individuals equal opportunities to learn and exercise civic skills in administration, finance, or buildings committees.

The results show that individuals with higher incomes are likely to hold more memberships in church organizations. While this variable does not test specific forms of participation, as the other two dependent variables do, it allows for a broader examination of the opportunity to learn civic skills in church. As with the previous two dependent variables, there appears to be at least a moderate amount of individual-level income stratification in the opportunity to learn civic skills

in church. As opposed to the previous two models, however, higher-income congregations offer more opportunities to learn civic skills than do lower-income congregations. Church members belong to more church organizations when they are in higher-income churches and when they earn higher incomes. This suggests that there is both individual and congregational stratification in the opportunity to learn civic skills through memberships in church organizations. The combination of the dual-level income stratification in membership in church organizations and the individual level-income stratification in holding a leadership position in administration, finance, or buildings paints a dim picture for the promise of the churches.

The only exception to the income stratification in the opportunity to learn civic skills in church is at the congregational level in both of the committee leadership variables. There is no significant congregational income stratification in holding leadership positions in charity, public policy, or social justice. Leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings, however, reveal a negative and significant effect of congregational income on the opportunity to learn civic skills in church. There are more leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings in lower-income congregations than in higher-income congregations. This is the only significant and negative effect of either level of income in any of the models. As suggested earlier, this is probably due to the use of hired staff to fulfill many of these positions in higher-income congregations. This finding does not promise to provide too many opportunities for lower-income individuals, however, since the effects of individual income on holding leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings is positive and significant, and much stronger than the negative effect of congregational income.

The relationship between congregational-level income and participation in church activities and organizations varies with the measure of participation; although, taken with the individual-level effects of income, churches clearly provide higher-income members more opportunities to learn and exercise civic skills. Congregations with higher mean incomes provide more opportunities for members to join church organizations in general, increasing the individual-level stratification already present in the church members' memberships in church organizations. On the other hand, congregations with lower mean incomes provide more opportunities for members to hold leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings, although the members with higher incomes are far more likely to hold these positions, regardless of mean church income. Finally, there is no relationship between mean congregational income and holding a leadership position in charity, public policy, or social justice, although there is a moderate and positive individual-level effect of income. Although the pattern of relationships between congregational income and individuals' participation in church activities and organizations varies, there remains a constant individual-level, income inequality in participation in church activities and organizations that might increase civic skills. The results suggest that churches do not provide an "even playing field" for civic-skill education and practice, although it remains to be seen whether they provide a more even playing field than educational and occupational contexts.

Conclusions

The political sociology and political science literatures have both long lamented the cleavages in political participation (e.g., Dalton 1996; Manza and Brooks 1999). In addition to race, gender, age, and religious cleavages, researchers point out that individuals with lower incomes are less likely to vote or participate in other forms of political action. Research demonstrates that the income cleavage in political participation is neither a recent occurrence nor is it dissipating (e.g., Manza and Brooks 1999). Simply put, in the United States political participation is mostly an activity of the middle and upper classes.

The lack of civic skills among the poor is believed to be a major reason for the income cleavage in political participation (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Brady, Verba, and

Schlozman 1995). Nonelectoral political participation, in particular, requires skills that the middle and upper classes acquire through education and occupation. Writing skills, public-speaking skills, and organizing skills are three examples of the preparation of which lower class individuals are deprived. The CCPI data demonstrates that lower-income church members are less likely than higher-income church members to participate in church activities that can teach civic skills. The present research casts doubt on the promise of the churches, the idea that congregations are an equal opportunity civic-skill educator, put forward by some social scientists. Membership in church organizations and the opportunity to learn civic skills in these organizations seem to be yet another economically stratified sector of our society. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen if churches are significantly less stratified than education and occupation in terms of teaching and exercising civic skills, which would suggest that churches do provide some promise to teach civic skills to lower-income members, though not as much promise as the literature has suggested.

The results from the current analyses need to be expanded upon. The CCPI data, being from only 11 denominations and from Indiana and Illinois, may not be representative of the entire population of Christian church members in the United States. There are also a limited number of congregations in the CCPI data. Future research on this topic and other topics concerning possible contextual effects in congregations would benefit from larger samples of congregations. Additionally, the present results are based on three measures of church participation that are employed as proxies for the opportunity to learn civic skills in churches. While these operationalizations are congruent with the literature on the topic, more research on the relationship between religious activity and civic skills would be advantageous. Comparisons between church members and the unchurched are necessary to assess the contribution of church activities to civic-skill education and social-capital production.

While the current research casts doubt on the ability of congregations to teach civic skills equally to their lower-income and higher-income members, more research is needed in mapping the connections between church affiliation and political participation. First, civic skills may be learned at a younger age, which would require a duplication of the current research with a sample of younger church members. A replication of this kind would address the opportunity to learn civic skills in church during childhood, when many of our lifetime habits, such as practicing civic skills, are learned. Civic skills may be as much of a prerequisite for participation in church activities as they are a result of these activities. Perhaps civic skills are a result of activity in church organizations during childhood and a prerequisite for activity in church organizations during adulthood. This leads to the second suggestion for future research: the relationship between church activity and civic skills. While some researchers have found positive and significant relationships between church activities and civic skills (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), more research is needed to examine how factors such as age, race, and religious affiliation affect this relationship. Third, income differences in civic-skill education in other arenas, such as education and occupation, must be compared to income differences in civic-skill education in churches to assess the full impact of the promise of the churches. While the current research reveals unequal access to civic-skill education in churches, it is possible that this level of stratification is far less than that found in other civic-skill education contexts. Fourth, congregational studies suggest that messages from the pulpit and the influence of fellow church members can greatly affect one's political behavior (e.g., Jelen 1993; Wald et al. 1990). Perhaps this is the real promise of the churches, that the influence of clergy and fellow parishioners can persuade people politically rather than teaching them skills that educational institutions often fail to impart.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Amy Anderson, John McCarthy, Jason Schwadel, an anonymous reviewer and the editor for *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* for invaluable comments on this article.

Notes

1. The Lilly Endowment, Inc. and McCormick Theological Seminary funded the project. The principal investigator was Carl S. Dudley. The data was obtained through the American Religion Data Archive: <http://www.TheARDA.com>
2. Roman Catholic, Evangelical Covenant, Southern Baptist, United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, AME Zion, United Methodist, Presbyterian Church (USA), Disciples of Christ, American Baptist, and Brethren.
3. The survey question reads as follows: "In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes?"
4. Preliminary analyses reveal more than enough variation in income between congregations to examine between-congregational differences as well as enough income heterogeneity within congregations to examine within-congregation differences. A null model with income as the dependent variable shows 16 percent of the variation in income to be between congregations (chi-square = 951.42 with 61 degrees of freedom, $p < 0.001$) and 84 percent of the variation in income to be within congregations, which suggests that the congregation is a meaningful context for the current research.
5. The models are linear HLM models. There is some worry that the skewedness of the two leadership variables may bias the results of a linear model, while the measure of church organization memberships is more evenly distributed (e.g., for both of the leadership variables about half of the respondents reported holding no leadership position). Ordinal HLM models mirroring the models presented here show no significant differences; the results are the same as the linear regressions presented in this article. Due to the cumbersome presentation of results using the ordinal HLM analysis, the linear regression results are presented.
6. Note that less than 6 percent of the variation in holding leadership positions in charity, public policy, or social justice is between congregations (Level 2), while more than 94 percent of the variation is within congregations (Level 1).
7. Note that almost 10 percent of the variation in holding leadership positions in administration, finance, or buildings is between congregations (Level 2), while the remaining 90 percent of the variation is within congregations (Level 1).
8. Note that almost 10 percent of the variation in number of church organization memberships is between congregations (Level 2), while the remaining 90 percent of the variation is within congregations (Level 1).

References

- Brady, H. E., S. Verba, and K. L. Schlozman. 1995. Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American Political Science Review* 89(2):271-94.
- Bryk, A. S. and S. W. Raudenbush. 1992. *Hierarchical Linear Models*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dalton, R. J. 1996. *Citizen Politics*. Chatam, NJ: Chatam House Publishers, Inc.
- Dudley, C. S. 1991. From typical church to social ministry: A study of the elements which mobilize congregations. *Review of Religious Research* 32(3):195-212.
- Gilbert, C. P. 1993. *The Impact of Churches on Political Behavior*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Goode, E. 1966. Social class and church participation. *American Journal of Sociology* 72(1):102-11.
- Harris, F. C. 1994. Something within: Religion as a mobilizer of African-American political activism. *Journal of Politics* 56(1):42-68.
- Houglund, J. G. Jr. and J. A. Christenson. 1983. Religion and politics: The relationship of religious participation to political efficacy and involvement. *Sociology and Social Research* 67(4):405-20.
- Jelen, T. G. 1993. The political consequences of religious group attitudes. *Journal of Politics* 55(1):178-90.
- Kreft, I. and J. De Leeuw. 1998. *Introducing Multilevel Modeling*. London: Sage Publications.
- Manza, J. and C. Brooks. 1999. *Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignments and U.S. Party Coalitions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mueller, C. W. and W. T. Johnson. 1975. Socioeconomic status and religious participation. *American Sociological Review* 40(6):785-800.
- Peterson, S. A. 1992. Church participation and political participation: The spillover effect. *American Politics Quarterly* 20(1):123-39.
- Putnam, R. 1995. Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Current* 373:3-9.
- Verba, S., K. L. Schlozman, and H. E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wald, K. D. 1987. *Religion and Politics in the United States*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Wald, K. D., D. E. Owen, and S. S. Hill, Jr. 1990. Political cohesion in churches. *Journal of Politics* 52(1):197-215.
- Wood, R. L. 1997. Social capital and political culture: God meets politics in the inner city. *American Behavioral Scientist* 40(5):595-605.