

# The Church Potluck: Using Social Capital to Explain Membership Patterns of Christian Denominations in the United States<sup>1</sup>

Russell Knight  
University of Puget Sound  
rknight@ups.edu

## I. RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN AMERICA

### *A shift in 'market share'*

It was standing room only and spirits were high at Second Baptist Church on the evening of September 16, 2001. The Arkadelphia, Arkansas congregation was gathered to vote to approve plans to build a new sanctuary to accommodate their rapidly increasing membership. After overwhelmingly approving the plans, the congregation dispersed with great expectations and motivation as they set out to raise the necessary 2.4 million to complete the facility (Second Baptist Church, 2001).

Numbers of evangelical Protestants, such as the Southern Baptist and Pentecostal Church, have been steadily growing for the past 50 years, increasing church membership by over one-third since 1960 (Putnam, 2000: 76). This statistic is particularly surprising given that religious participation as a whole in the United States has seen a decrease over the past half-century (Putnam, 2000: 65). The sharpest drop has been among moderate Protestant denominations, such as the Episcopal and Methodist Churches.

Given the competitive nature of Christian denominations to draw and retain members, the religious community can be looked at as a market. Much like economic markets, individuals can select among multiple alternatives, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The different denominations of Christianity in this market attempt to increase their share of the pool. I will examine why moderate, or mainline Protestants continue to lose "market share" to fundamentalist, or evangelical denominations.

The answer to this puzzle, I argue, lies at the very heart of why Americans become involved in organized religion: Congregations provide community for people and

---

<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Professor Patrick O'Neil, Department of Politics and Government, University of Puget Sound, for his critiques of this paper.

help form strong social connections. It is my hypothesis that people living in regions of the United States with low levels of civic involvement or “social capital”, shown through low voting rates and few formal clubs and organizations, are turning to religion to form connections and feel part of a social group. Similarly, individuals living in regions where civic participation and social trust are high turn away from church membership because they no longer need it to feel socially connected to people they can trust. I will also show that the religious theologies of mainline and evangelical churches are geographically divided, with evangelical churches located in areas of low social capital and mainline churches located in areas with high social capital. Therefore, joining a church in search of community in a region where connections are low would account for the rise in evangelical churches in the United States.

To test this hypothesis, I will identify the level of social capital and dominant religious theology in three regions of the United States. If the areas with high social capital are exclusively mainline and the areas with low social capital are exclusively evangelical, there may be a connection. If declining social capital comes before increasing religious participation, people may be adding religion to their lives to increase connectedness. People in areas of high social capital may be becoming less involved in religion when they feel a high level of social trust. This correlation can provide insight into why levels of social capital are so sharply geographically divided. Additionally, by examining the causality of the shift in market share of the religious economy, we may be able to better understand why people join churches and the role religion plays in our society today. The findings of this paper may be used to explain the implications of declining social capital and religious participation in different areas of the country.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The Mainline and Evangelical Theologies*

A wealth of literature is available assessing the strengths and reasons for growth or decline of different Christian denominations in the United States. With the large number of scholars writing on the subject, they are bound to use terms and classify theologies in slightly different ways. For consistency, I have focused only on works dividing the Christian faith into mainline and evangelical theologies, the most standard and widely accepted lines of division (Marsden, 1991).

It should be noted that placing every Christian denomination into two categories, or theologies, could be problematic. One critic compared lumping denominations into theological categories to placing foods in the categories of lunch and dinner foods. The foods that clearly fit into one category are the exception, while many foods – like many denominations – have attributes in line with both categories. And then others do not easily fit into either—for example, try to place M & M’s in a category (Johnson, 2003).

There is, however, some consensus on the overall meaning and values of the theologies. Evangelical Protestants favor a significantly more literal reading of the Bible than mainline Protestants and Catholics. The evangelical faith relies on the acceptance of Jesus as one’s personal savior to a much greater extent than the mainline, labeling many

evangelicals as “born again” Christians (Ellingsen, 1988). Evangelicals are also called to “spread the word” more than their mainline counterparts Hammod and Johnson, 1996). Robert Wuthnow, a sociology professor at Princeton University and one of the country’s foremost scholars of religious trends in America summarized the difference between mainline Protestants and evangelicals by describing how they would answer a question of a religious issue. “Evangelicals say, ‘Jesus is the answer,’ mainliners say ‘it’s more complex ... a metaphor” (Wuthnow, 2001).

Because mainline Protestant churches and the Catholic Church have a very similar makeup in terms of fellowship and community – that is, a central mission is to serve those outside the church – many authors combine the two theologies for the purpose of comparison with the evangelical faith (Rahtjen, 1966). I will use this classification in my analysis of the growth trends of mainline and evangelical Christians.

### *Three Answers to the Puzzle*

There is no disagreement that the past half-century has seen growth of evangelical churches and relative decline of mainline protestant and Catholic Churches (Putnam, 2000:76). There is, however, a wide range of explanations for the mainline’s loss of market share. Three explanations come to mind when describing America’s move toward evangelism. One of the most common explanations, most famously advanced by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, argues that the religious shift reflects a recurring historical trend (Finke and Stark, 1992). A second explanation, given by Wuthnow, is that demographic factors favor a growing population in the evangelical church. Finally, Phillip Hammond and Benton Johnson argue the shift may be explained by studying the geographic distribution of mainline and evangelical denominations, looking at the cultures of each region (Hammond and Johnson, 1996).

A large and growing group challenges the “common misconception that America is a secular nation” (Finke and Stark, 1992) Purdue University sociology professor, Roger Finke, and University of Washington comparative religion professor, Rodney Stark, turn to history to explain this religious shift. In their book, *The Churching of America: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*, they assert that today’s religious trend has been experienced before. Pointing to a shift in the mid-nineteenth century where many Episcopalians joined the growing and more disciplined Methodist Church, the two scholars agree it could be predicted that even more disciplined denominations, such as the Baptist Church, would draw from the Methodists in the twentieth century (Finke and Stark, 1992).

Finke, Starke, and others believe Americans naturally have fundamentalist ideals (see also Marsden, 1980; Bedford and Luckmann, 1989). To scholars of this school of thought, a sense of belonging and salvation will drive churchgoers’ choices, resulting in more worldly, mainline denominations continuing to lose market share to the more sect-like, evangelical theologies (Beckford and Luckmann, 1989).

However, a study examining polls of religious participation over the past 50 years refutes the claim that the shift is simply a recurring historical trend. Robert Wuthnow,

who directed the polls, explained there has not been a shift at all. People are not “jumping ship,” moving *from* mainline denominations *to* evangelical ones. Rather, mainline Protestants are simply becoming uninvolved in religion all together while evangelical denominations are attracting people who haven’t been previously involved in religion at all. Wuthnow explains this using the “demographic factor.” People who belong to mainline churches tend to be more middle-class families. They get married later and have fewer children than their evangelical counterparts. There are simply fewer children growing up to replace those gradually leaving the mainline churches<sup>2</sup>.

This explanation, however, is not all-inclusive either. Mark Ellingsen, author of *The Evangelical Movement*, asserts that children of mainline Protestants remain much more loyal to their church after they move away from home than evangelicals. Therefore, even if there are fewer of them, the loyalty mainline individuals have as they grow up should insure that the mainline theology grows as well (Ellingsen, 1998). Yet it has still declined.

Phillip Hammond and Benton Johnson take another angle in their book, *American Mosaic: Social Patterns of Religion in the United States*. They argue that the above scholars are all disregarding the fact that the distribution of mainline and evangelical churches is highly regional (Each of the aforementioned works has noted uneven concentration of theologies in different areas of the United States, but dismissed it as irrelevant). Using a wide array of sources, Hammond and Johnson track the concentration of theologies across the country. They establish that the overall makeup has not changed. For the past 60 years, evangelical churches have been concentrated in the South. Mainline Protestants in the Midwest and Catholics in the Northeast<sup>3</sup>. They also assert that religious participation overall has risen in the South and fallen in the Midwest and Northeast. Therefore, Hammond and Johnson argue that to answer the question of why numbers of evangelicals have grown and mainline fallen, one needs to answer the question of why religious participation overall has grown in the South and decreased in the North (Hammond and Johnson, 1996). Citing only “Southern culture,” the observations of Hammond and Johnson fall short of causality.

The current explanations for the revitalization of the evangelical religion are not sufficient by themselves. In the next section, I will add to the debate by picking up where writers such as Hammond and Johnson have left off. After confirming the assertion that evangelical and mainline denominations are concentrated geographically, I will look to trust and social connections – two of the most important components of religion – to explain regional increases or decreases in religious participation. Could individuals who live in regions with poorly connected communities be turning to religion for fellowship? Similarly, are individuals living in areas with tightly connected communities where trust is high turning away from religion because they no longer need to be a member of a congregation for social connectedness?

---

<sup>2</sup> Ellingsen explains but refutes the ‘demographic factor’ (Ellingsen, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> This geographic distribution is also noted by Handy (1977), and Marty (2000).

### III. TESTING THE SOCIAL CAPITAL HYPOTHESIS

#### *Overview of Social Capital*

Americans are very aware of the level of trust and connectedness among the individuals around them. Some cities “have community” and others do not; some people can be trusted while others are dangerous. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam introduces the term “social capital” to describe the cohesiveness of a society, the “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000:19). Social capital can include voting, participation in formal clubs and organizations, getting together with friends, or simply saying hello to your neighbor as you pass on the street (Putnam, 2000).

More importantly, Putnam tells us why we should care about social capital. Higher levels of community involvement lead to higher levels of productivity and happiness. He formally reiterates the belief that many hold, but few can define: that being part of a network of people you can trust is beneficial to every member of society, even outside of individual networks. Putnam has also devised ways to formally measure social capital across different communities and in its different forms. He tracks the level of social capital within communities, states and across the nation, concluding that, on the whole, social capital has declined in America over the past half-century (Putnam, 2000).

Organized religion has played a big role in social capital. As church congregations provide an important network and community for their members, it is not surprising that Putnam asserts “religious attendance [is] the most powerful predictor of the number of one’s daily personal encounters” (Putnam, 2000). While participation in a mainline or an evangelical church yields different forms of social capital, simply the act of coming together to worship is perhaps the most recognizable form of a social network. People in general don’t join the PTA or attend city council meetings to “feel connected,” but one of the underlying reasons people join a church is in search of community (Marty, 2000).

The thesis of Putnam’s book is that social capital has been on the decline in the United States. He cites advances in technology, the rising divorce rate, and children watching longer hours of television among the factors contributing to the decline. Putnam establishes that the level of social capital is not equal across the country, and charts the geographic distribution of social connectedness in the United States. In this paper, I accept Putnam’s analysis of social capital and examine one possible effect of high or low social capital in different regions. Where are people in areas of historically low social capital turning for connections? Are individuals in the most connected states becoming over involved and over committed?

#### *Geographic Distribution and Measurement*

To look for a correlation between theology and social capital, I will examine the presence of both factors in two large areas of the country:

<b>Northeast and</b>	<b>Midwest</b>	<b>South</b>
Connecticut	Illinois	Alabama
Delaware	Iowa	Arkansas
Maine	Michigan	Georgia
Massachusetts	Minnesota	Kentucky
New Hampshire	Nebraska	Louisiana
New Jersey	North Dakota	Mississippi
New York	Ohio	Missouri
Pennsylvania	South Dakota	North Carolina
Rhode Island	Wisconsin	South Carolina
Vermont		Tennessee

As the Northeast and Midwest are similar both in terms of social capital and religious preference, I will group the two regions for this discussion, as noted in the table above. I will not further examine the Western United States because levels of social capital and distribution of theologies are fairly moderate. The three regions in the Eastern portion of the United States provide more variation in both social capital and religious theology, which will allow for a more meaningful comparison.

To measure levels of social capital in each region I will defer to Putnam's analysis based on the compilation of studies and polls in many disciplines. He measures the overall level of social capital on fourteen components, including the number of clubs and organizations one is a member of, voting rates, levels of volunteering and philanthropy. Informal social capital is also taken into consideration through polls asking about the amount of time spent with friends and degree of trust people have for each other.

To determine the dominant theology in each state and region, I rely most heavily on the American Religion Data Archive (ARDA). The organization completes a detailed survey every ten years on the total number of congregations, total adherents and percent of the population in each of over 200 Christian denominations in the United States. Additionally, they group the denominations into theologies (Catholic, mainline and evangelical) to show the geographic distribution. Because I will be using the grouping of ARDA, I accept their placement of denominations in each category. (See appendix I-II) I will also use the *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* and the *Statistical Analysis of the United States*, provided by the US Census Bureau, to identify the speed at which denominations are growing in different areas of the country, and track trends in the distribution of theologies.

#### *Religion in America: Geographically divided*

The distribution of religious theologies across the country is far from consistent across the map. The South, which makes up 10.1 percent of the total population of the United States (Bureau of Census, 2000, Table 22), makes up 64.3 percent of the total number of evangelicals and only 7.9 percent of the nations mainline congregations (ARDA, 2003). The Midwest and Northeast, on the other hand, house 54.5 percent of the

nation's citizens (Bureau of Census, 2000, Table 22) and account for 75.8 percent of mainline adherents. Evangelicals make up only 9.6 percent in these regions (ARDA, 2003).

This distribution is not new. In 1948, J. Hughley noted similar geographic lines with respect to religion in his book, *Trends in Protestant Social Idealism*. While he did not divide denominations into the categories of evangelical and mainline, he noted that "social gospel" churches were concentrated in the South and "neo-protestant" churches were becoming more popular elsewhere in the country (Hughley, 1948). The two categories he defines very closely fit today's evangelical and mainline theologies with social gospel and evangelical churches favoring a more literal reading of the Bible. While his prediction of a boom in neo-protestant groups did not materialize, this dated work demonstrates the consistent distribution of theologies for over 50 years and helps to establish the geographic placement of denominations as the constant variable in this paper.

The South also accounts for the largest increase in evangelical churches in the United States. According to the *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, the percentage of individuals who live in the South and claim to be a member of an evangelical church rose by 12 percent from 1980 to 2000, while the national increase was only 5 percent (Gaustad, 1962). This statistic becomes more substantial when population growth is taken into consideration, as the South has experienced slower growth than the nation as a whole (Bureau of Census, 2000).

Therefore, in this paper I do not seek to directly answer the question: why has membership in evangelical churches increased across the United States. I will instead attempt to answer one component of that large question. That is, why religious participation overall has increased in the South and decreased in the rest of the country, particularly in the Midwest and Northeast. Because of the nature of the distribution of the theologies, the answer to my question will, in a large part, account for the aggregate shift in religious market share.

#### *Midwest and Northeast: High social capital and high mainline membership*

In Robert Putnam's impressive map of social capital in the United States, he reveals that social capital is higher in the Midwest than anywhere else in the country. The states of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota boast the highest level, just slightly ahead of the rest their midwestern neighbors. Social capital is also high in the Northeast, especially in the far Northeastern states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island (Putnam, 2000:292).

Many Midwestern and Northeastern states took first place in the 14-point test of social capital. North Dakota, for example, reports the highest level of social trust at 67 percent. The average turnout in recent presidential elections in Minnesota was 69 percent, the highest in any state. Vermont has the highest number of non-profit organizations per 1,000 inhabitants, 3.6. People attend more club meetings in North and South Dakota than in any other states, averaging 11 per year, and 32 percent of the population of New

Hampshire attended a school or town meeting in the past year, again, higher than any other state (Putnam, 2000:292).

The regions of the Midwest and Northeast are clearly set apart from the rest of the country with regard to their level of social capital. Given this distinction, I now look to other unique features of these regions.

The concentration of mainline congregations is an equally dramatic feature of the Midwest and Northeast. The percentage of the total population who belong to mainline Christian denominations in the Midwest and Northeast is 44.6, amazingly high as the percentage of the population of those regions reporting membership to any church is only 58.8 and the percentage of the United States reporting church membership is 52.7 (Bureau of Census, 2000). Evangelicals make up a mere 9.2 percent of the population in this region (ARDA, 2003).

Breaking mainline Christians back into the categories of mainline Protestants and Catholics shows another geographic division. The Northeast, in particular the states of Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware, house the highest concentration of Catholics in the United States. 39.7 percent of the population of those states is Catholic, and over 50 percent of the population of Rhode Island attends Catholic mass (ARDA, 2003).

The Midwest, on the other hand, is home to the most mainline Protestants in the country. The five states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska account for 26 percent of the total population (ARDA, 2003). The Midwest is also known for small congregations, so there are a lot of individual church buildings. Robert Wuthnow jokes, "From any given vantage point in small town, Wisconsin at least two Lutheran Churches can be seen" (Wuthnow, 2003).

The mainline faith has been the dominant faith in the Midwest and Northeast for over 50 years, but overall religious participation has fluctuated in these regions, which accounts for the sharpest drop in the United States over the past half-century. Northern religious participation decreased by 10 percent between 1960 and 1990 (Gaustad, 1962), the majority of which was made up by individuals who were no longer interested in religion leaving mainline churches (Gaustad, 1962).

The correlation of high social capital and mainline membership in the Northern regions is very strong. Given this relationship and the fact that these regions have seen the sharpest drop in religious participation, it is therefore possible to point to the high levels of social capital as a contributor to mainline religious disengagement. This relationship becomes even more significant when the South shows exactly the opposite trends in terms of social capital, religious theology, and religious growth.

*South: Low social capital and high evangelical membership*

Social capital and religious participation in the South is equally as dramatic. Putnam awards the five Southern states of Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama

and Georgia the lowest possible social capital score with the rest of the South not far ahead.

More states in the South came in dead last in his 14-point test of social capital than in any other region in the country. The level of social trust in Mississippi is only 17 percent, compared to North Dakota's 67 percent. Voter turnout in South Carolina has been only 42 percent in recent presidential elections; there are only 1.2 non-profit organizations per 1,000 inhabitants in Mississippi. People volunteer less in Mississippi and Louisiana than any other state, at 5 times a year, and only 10 percent of the residents of Georgia have attended a town or school meeting in the past year, fewer than any other state (Putnam, 2000:292). This level of Southern social capital is not new. Robert Putnam looked to the work of Alexis de Tocqueville in 1830, who noted:

As one goes further south [from New England], one finds less attractive municipal life; the township has fewer officials, rights, and duties; the population does not exercise such a direct influence on affairs; the town meetings are less frequent and deal with fewer matters (Putnam, 2000:292).

Due to certain aspects of the Southern culture, it has always been a black hole for social trust and civic participation, declining most rapidly since 1950 (Putnam, 2000:292).

As with the Northern regions, the South has a clearly distinct culture with respect to social capital. Again, I seek not to explain the reasons for the lack of social connectedness and involvement in the South. Instead, I will look to Southern religious patterns to see what church participation looks like in an area with such weak formal connections.

The South, by far, holds the highest concentration of the nation's evangelical churches. The Percentage of the Southern population reporting an evangelical faith is 36.9. The highest concentration of evangelicals is in the five states of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee, in which 40.1 percent of the population is evangelical. Again, this represents a portion of the total population, not just those who practice religion. The overall Southern religious participation is 47.4 percent. Just 9.7 percent of the population participates in mainline Christianity.

More impressive than the number of evangelicals in the South is the absence of evangelism in the rest of the United States. Less than 10 percent of the population of all non-Southern states attends evangelical services. As noted earlier, the South has historically held the majority of the evangelical faith and evangelism in the South has increased by over 20 percent in the past 40 years, more than twice the rate of the increase in non-Southern states (Gaustad, 1962). The rise in Southern evangelicalism accounts, in a large part, for the overall increase in the number of individuals in the South practicing religion.

Just as a strong correlation was present in the Northern states, so too is there a correlation between the concentration of religious theology and the level of social capital

in the South. The data reveals an interesting trend: Religious participation, one factor contributing to the level of social capital, has increased while the overall level of social capital has decreased. As service organizations fade in the South, more people are turning to religion to find a sense of community. Because the distribution of religious theologies is regionalized, the Southerners' increase in religious participation has resulted in an increase in evangelical churches.

*Analysis, Cause and Effect*

Through the examination of two regions of the country, I have shown that religious theology is geographically distributed and concentrated in distinct regions of the United States. Additionally, the examination shows a strong correlation between direction of growth or decline of social capital and religious participation. Given this evidence, I argue that many individuals in the South are turning to religion to gain social connections, and many individuals in the Midwest and Northeast are so involved they no longer need formal religion for the social benefits. Because mainline churches are concentrated in the North and evangelical churches are concentrated in the South, this explanation accounts for a large degree of the shift in market share in the religious economy.

The described correlations alone, however, are not enough to show causality. It is necessary to determine the order of changing variables to understand the cause and effect. A historical look at the level of social capital and religious participation can confirm the direction of causality. This is most evident in Southern timelines. Putnam marks the early 1950s, with the soldiers return from WWII and the baby boom, as the beginning of the decline of social capital in many regions of the United States, including the South. With the bonding effect of the war gone, and mistrust of the government rising, the baby boomers were becoming less and less formally involved (Putnam, 2000:292). It was not until a decade later that the boom of evangelical churches began growing rapidly in the South according to the *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, which cites the 1960s as the date evangelical churches sparked. The decade delay in religious trends in the South suggests that individuals turned to religion after social capital started to decline in other areas, confirming the direction of causality.

Second, the data I use to assess the level of social capital reflects the entire population, while the dominant theology makes up only 44.6 and 36.9 percent in the North and South, respectively. It cannot be expected that the remaining population (those who attend no church, or one other than the dominant theology in their region) are affected by a church of which they are not members. Clearly, there are other forces holding social capital down in the South and up in the Midwest and Northeast.

These two factors help can eliminate the possibility that evangelical churches cause low social capital or mainline churches cause high social capital. The geographic distribution of the theologies and the confirmation in direction of causality establishes the hypothesis that individuals in the South are looking for connections and turning to the churches that are available, namely the evangelical. Similarly, individuals in the Midwest and Northeast, content with the level of social trust around them, are no longer attending

the mainline churches they were once members of. Social capital then emerges as a likely explanation for the shift in religious market share.

### *Social Capital as a Product of Religion*

Given that religious participation is a form of social capital, one might ask, “If religion overall is growing in the South, why does it remain an area of low social involvement?” This question leads to an important division in social capital and religious theology.

Putnam divides social capital into the categories of bridging and bonding. He classifies bonding social capital as close connections between groups of homogeneous people. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, is connections across different groups of people – reaching out to the less fortunate and talking with individuals who have different values.

The central theological division between mainline and evangelical theologies noted earlier is now important to examine more closely. Mainline churches, concentrated in areas of high social capital, place a high value on service projects and helping those outside the walls of the church. Evangelical churches, on the other hand place more importance on building a strong trust among the members of the congregations.

Therefore, one reason religious participation has not spilled out into other areas of civic involvement in South lies in the theology of evangelical churches. This distinction, however, leads us to ask more questions. What are the reasons evangelical and mainline churches have concentrated in the areas they have? What are the implications of having a geographically divided country in terms of religion and social capital?

## **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

The shift in religious market share towards evangelical denominations and the geographic concentration of denominations in the United States are two of the most notable features of religious participation over the past half-century. In this paper, I have joined the debate on the explanation of this shift.

The Midwest and Northeast stand out as a region of very high social capital with recently declining levels of religious participation. The South, on the other hand, shows an opposite trend where the decreasing levels of social capital are leading to increasing levels of religious participation. The social capital explanation, therefore, accounts for the increase in religious participation in the South and decrease in the North. Because mainline denominations are concentrated in the Midwest and Northeast and evangelical denominations in the South, this explanation addresses, in part, the national shift in religious market share towards evangelical churches.

The conclusion of this paper serves as an introduction to many other areas of research. The causal relationship described in this paper casts an important light on religion in America. It leads one to ask why groups of Christian denominations are so

geographically divided, or if the large theologies of evangelical and mainline Christians are still meaningful with so many denominations grouped together. Is placing them in two categories too limiting? Many critics who separate the Christian denominations into two categories themselves joke, "There are two categories of people in the world; one which divides everything into two categories, and the other which doesn't" (johnsom, 2003).

More important than the geographic distribution or grouping of religion, however, are the implications this correlation raises with respect to individuals connections to society, through religious participation or other organizations. Can a church congregation fulfill the important role of connecting people as well as other organizations? Are the other benefits of church membership lost when people become religiously disengaged because they are over involved in other areas? The findings of this paper also bring into question social capital as a product. Will the rising participation in evangelical churches in the South spill over to increased voting rates and volunteering?

A sense of community and trust is a valuable and fragile element in our society today. As individuals in different regions of the United States turn to different organizations to find their form of connectedness, religious congregations stand as powerful beacons of fellowship. In the competition to attract and retain members, mainline and evangelical churches alike should remind churchgoers of the community they will gain as a member of their congregation.

## Appendix I – Evangelical Churches, Compiled by the American Religion Data Archive

---

- Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection
- Advent Christian Church
- African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- American Baptist Association, The
- Amish; Other Groups
- Apostolic Christian Churches (Nazarean)
- Apostolic Christian Church of America, Inc.
- Apostolic Lutheran Church of America
- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
- Assemblies of God
- Baptist General Conference
- Baptist Missionary Association of America
- Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches
- Berean Fundamental Church
- Bible Church of Christ, Inc.
- Black Baptists Estimate
- Brethren Church, The (Ashland, Ohio)
- Brethren In Christ Church
- Barren River Missionary Baptists
- Bruderhof Communities, Inc.
- Calvary Chapel Fellowship Churches
- Central Baptist Association Ministries
- Church of God in Christ, Mennonite
- Church of God General Conference
- Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)
- Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)
- Church of God, Mountain Assembly, Inc.
- Church of God of Prophecy
- Church of God (Seventh Day)
- Churches of God, General Conference
- Church of the Lutheran Confession
- Church of the Brethren
- Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America
- Church of the Nazarene
- Christian and Missionary Alliance, The
- Christian Brethren
- Christian Churches and Churches of Christ
- Christ Catholic Church
- Christian Reformed Church in North America
- Christian Union
- Churches of Christ
- Community of Christ
- Conservative Mennonite Conference
- Conservative Baptist Association of America
- Conservative Congregational Christian Conference
- Cumberland Presbyterian Church
- Duck River and Kindred Baptists Associations
- Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church
- Enterprise Baptists Association
- Evangelical Congregational Church, The
- Evangelical Covenant Church, The
- Evangelical Free Church of America, The
- Evangelical Lutheran Synod
- Evangelical Mennonite Church
- Evangelical Methodist Church
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church
- Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches
- Fire Baptized Holiness Church, (Wesleyan), The
- Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, The
- Free Methodist Church of North America
- National Association of Free Will Baptists
- Fundamental Methodist Conference, Inc.
- General Six Principle Baptists
- Hutterian Brethren
- Independent Fundamental Churches of America
- Independent, Charismatic Churches
- Independent, Non-Charismatic Churches
- Independent Free Will Baptists Associations
- International Churches of Christ
- International Church of the Foursquare Gospel
- International Pentecostal Church of Christ
- Interstate & Foreign Landmark Missionary Baptists Association
- Jasper Baptist and Pleasant Valley Baptist Associations
- Landmark Missionary Baptists, Independent Associations and Unaffiliated Churches
- American Association of Lutheran Churches
- Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod
- Mennonite Brethren Churches, U.S. Conference of
- Mennonite Church USA
- Mennonite; Other Groups
- Midwest Congregational Christian Fellowship
- Missionary Church, The
- National Primitive Baptist Convention, USA
- New Hope Baptist Association
- New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches and other Fundamental Baptist Associations/Fellowships
- Old Missionary Baptists Associations
- Old Order Amish Church
- Old Order Mennonite
- Old Order River Brethren
- Old Regular Baptists

- Open Bible Standard Churches, Inc.
- Original Free Will Baptists
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The
- Pentecostal Church of God
- International Pentecostal Holiness Church
- Presbyterian Church in America
- Primitive Advent Christian Church
- Primitive Baptists Associations
- Primitive Baptist Churches--Old Line
- Primitive Baptists, Eastern District Association of
- Primitive Methodist Church in the USA
- Progressive Primitive Baptists
- The Protestant Conference (Lutheran)
- Protestant Reformed Churches in America
- Reformed Baptist Churches
- Reformed Episcopal Church
- Reformed Mennonite Church
- General Association of Regular Baptist Churches
- Regular Baptists
- Seventh-day Adventist Church
- Salvation Army, The
- Schwenkfelder Church
- Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, USA and Canada
- Separate Baptists in Christ
- Southern Baptist Convention
- Southwide Baptist Fellowship
- Strict Baptists
- Truevine Baptists Association
- Church of the United Brethren in Christ
- United Christian Church
- United Reformed Churches in North America
- United Baptists
- Vineyard USA
- Wayne Trail Missionary Baptist Association
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
- Wesleyan Church, The

## Appendix II - Mainline Churches, Compiled by the American Religion Data Archive

- Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America
- American Baptist Churches in the USA
- Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, The
- Armenian Apostolic Church / Catholicosate of Cilicia
- Armenian Apostolic Church / Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin
- Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, North American Dioceses
- Bulgarian Orthodox Diocese of the USA
- Byelorussian Council Of Orthodox Churches In North America
- Catholic Church
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Congregational Christian Churches, Additional (not part of any national CCC body)
- National Association of Congregational Christian Churches
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Episcopal Church
- Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
- Friends (Quakers)
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Vasiloupulis
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
- Holy Orthodox Church in North America
- International Council of Community Churches
- Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Macedonian Orthodox Church: American Diocese
- Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, American Diocese of the
- Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America
- Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches
- Moravian Church in America--Alaska Province
- Moravian Church in America--Northern Province
- Moravian Church in America--Southern Province
- North American Baptist Conference
- Netherlands Reformed Congregations
- Orthodox Church in America: Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese
- Orthodox Church in America: Bulgarian Diocese
- Orthodox Church in America: Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America
- Orthodox Church in America: Territorial Dioceses
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Reformed Church in America
- Reformed Church in the United States
- Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia
- Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA
- Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA
- Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA (New Gracanica Metropolitanate)
- Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch
- Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church, The

---

## Bibliography

- American Religion Data Archive (ARDA). 27 April 2003  
<<http://www.thearda.com/arda.asp?Show=Home>>
- Beckford, James and Luckmann Thomas. 1989. *The Changing face of Religion*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Bellah, Robert, and Greenspahn, Frederick. 1987. *Uncivil Religion: Inter-religious Hostility in America*. New York: Crossroad.
- Demerath, NJ and Hammond, Phillip. 1969. *Religion in Social Context: Tradition and Transition*. New York: Random House.
- Ellingsen, Mark. 1988. *The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing.
- Finke, Roger and Stark, Rodney. 1992. *The Churaching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Gaustad, Edwin. 1962. *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hammond, Phillip and Johnson, Benton. 1996. *American Mosaic: Social Patterns of Religion in the United States*. New York: Random House.
- Hammond, Phillip. 1992. *The Protestant Presence in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America*. New York: State University Press.
- Handy, Robert. 1977. *A History of Churches in the United States and Canada*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hughley, J Neal. 1948. *Trends in Protestant Social Idealism*. New York: Kings Crown Press,
- Johnson, Richard. Pastor, 2003. Peace Lutheran Church. Grass Valley, CA. *Personal interview*. 15 April 2003.
- Mardsen, George. 1980. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Marsden, George. 1991. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing.
- Marty, Martin E. 2000. *Politics, Religion and the Common Good*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Marty, Martin E., Hibri, Azizah, Bethke, Jean and Haynes, Charles. 2001. *Religion in American Public Life*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Menemdez, Albert. 1977. *Religion at the polls*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- Piepkorn, Arthur. 1979. *Profiles in Belief: The Religious Bodies in the United States and Canada. Volume IV: Evangelical, Fundamentalist and other Christian Bodies*. San Francisco, Harper and Row.
- Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- Rahtjen, Bruce. 1966. *Scripture and Social Action*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966.
- Second Baptist Church, 2001. "Church Votes to Raise Money and Build New Sanctuary" 16 September 2001. <<http://www.second-baptist-church.org/information/new%20sanctuary.htm>> (accessed " 10 April 2003)
- US Bureau of the Census. 2000. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000*. Washington, DC: US Bureau of the Census; 1999. <<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/statistical-abstract-us.html>>
- Wuthnow, Robert and Hodgkinson, Virginia. 1990. *Faith and Philanthropy in America*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Wuthnow, Robert. Interview by Bob Abernethy *PBS*. 26 April 2001. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week534/rwuthnow.html>>
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1988. *The restructuring of American Religion: society and faith since World War II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Just about every denomination in the American church is seeing a decline in numbers, so if it's a competition, then we're all losing, just at different rates. Many Americans, both within and outside the church, share Evans' perception of the decline of denominations. But is it true? Are most denominations truly seeing a decline in numbers? (Note: The Presbyterian Church in America was founded in 1974 by conservative members of the Presbyterian Church in the United States who rejected that church's merger with the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.) Evangelical Free Church of America. In 1965, the EFCA had 43,851 members. The Church states that we should not eat meat on Fridays. (Using the word "church" as a formal name would require capitalization of the word.) I hope these examples showcase a few of the scenarios in which "church" may or may not be capitalized. In general, if you are using the word as a general statement do not capitalize. If the word is part of or refers to a formal person, place, or thing, then capitalize. Related Questions. More Answers Below. The United States is one of the few countries that has no "official" national language, or languages. English is the common language by use, but it is not the national language by law. About 30 million Americans speak a language other than English at home. By contrast, membership in the fundamentalist Christian churches has gone up by 35 percent, and orthodox Jewish congregations have increased by as much as 100 percent. The increase in the fundamentalist Christian groups has attracted much public attention. One reason is that many of these church groups actively publicize their beliefs and try to influence public life and political processes. Many have their own radio or television stations which they and their members finance.

The church suffered persecution and a decline in membership during the Revolution, because all the clergymen had taken an oath of allegiance to the crown at the time of their ordination, and many of them were Loyalists who were forced to flee to Canada or England. Some, however, supported the Revolution. The church also took several controversial steps. In 1988 it elected its first woman bishop, Barbara C. Harris. The new church claimed 700 parishes in 28 dioceses in the United States and Canada. The ECUSA's consecration of Mary Glasspool—who was in a same-sex relationship—as a suffragan bishop in the diocese of Los Angeles in 2010 increased tensions within the Anglican Communion between liberals and traditionalists. The Church states that we should not eat meat on Fridays. (Using the word “church” as a formal name would require capitalization of the word.) I hope these examples showcase a few of the scenarios in which “church” may or may not be capitalized. In general, if you are using the word as a general statement do not capitalize. If the word is part of or refers to a formal person, place, or thing, then capitalize. Related Questions. More Answers Below. For much of history, the Christian Churches accepted that capital punishment was a necessary part of the mechanisms of society. Pope Innocent III, for example, put forward the proposition: "The secular power can, without mortal sin, exercise judgment of blood, provided that it punishes with justice, not out of hatred, with prudence, not precipitation." The Roman Catechism, issued in 1566, stated that the power of life and death had been entrusted by God to the civil authorities. In the high Middle Ages and later, the Holy See authorized that heretics be turned over to the secular authorities for execution. The law of Vatican City from 1929 to 1969 included the death penalty for anyone who tried to assassinate the Pope. The list includes the following Christian denominations: the Catholic Church including the Eastern Catholic Churches; all the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches with some recognition and their offshoots; Protestant denominations with at least 0.2 million members; all the other Christian branches with distinct theologies, such as Restorationist and Nontrinitarian denominations; the independent Catholic denominations; and the Church of the East. Episcopal Church in the United States “ 1.8 million[46]. Church of North India “ 1.5 million[47]. Anglican Church of Rwanda “ 1.0 million[48]. A Christian denomination is a distinct religious body within Christianity, identified by traits such as a name, organization and doctrine. Individual bodies, however, may use alternative terms to describe themselves, such as church, convention, communion, assembly, house, union, network, or sometimes fellowship. Divisions between one denomination and another are primarily defined by authority and doctrine. Issues regarding the nature of Jesus, Trinitarianism, salvation, the authority of apostolic