

*Two Faces of Civic Participation:  
Political and Social Action Among American Clergy*

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## *Abstract*

As leaders of the largest voluntary associations in the United States, clergy have long played an important role in American political life. Their participation in conventional and, sometimes, less conventional political action has been the subject of a number of studies by historians, sociologists and political scientists. But these forms of civic action hardly exhaust the participatory options for clergy: like other citizens, they can address political and social issues directly through a variety of programs and projects.

This paper uses data from a large national study of American clergy to map their participation in both political and social action activities. We discover that clergy as a group are quite active in both types of civic activity, but that the two forms of participation represent fairly distinct choices and are not strongly correlated. We then test several theories that predict the frequency of civic participation among local religious leaders, discovering that political action and social action have rather distinct determinants, suggesting that each appeals to a different set of clergy. We conclude with some discussion of the implications of our analysis for future studies of not only religious leaders, but other religious activists as well.

Citizens hoping to address public issues have a number of options. They can seek to influence “governmental politics,” largely through the conventional (or more unconventional) channels such as electoral politics, lobbying or, perhaps, protest. Indeed, political scientists have focused much of their analysis of civic participation on just such efforts (Verba and Nie 1972; Barnes and Kaase 1979; Jennings and Van Deth 1989; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In recent years, however, political activists have increasingly explored roles in “nongovernmental politics,” especially as “purveyors of humanitarian care and protectors of rights and liberties” (Feher 2007, 23). With the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies in many Western nations, civil society groups have increasingly sought to fill the void left by government in the provision of social services and other humanitarian programs. In the same vein, dissatisfaction with the results of the contemporary political process has led many citizens to address public policy problems more directly.

Some scholars who have observed these trends have noted the prominence of churches and religious organizations in the provision of social services, as advocates for recipients, and as “direct actors” in addressing other issues (Feher 2007, 22-23). This is especially notable in the United States (Cnaan, Boddie and Wineburg 1999), but also in some European nations (Dinham and Lowndes 2007). In the American context, churches and religious organizations constitute one of the largest providers of direct assistance and advocacy on behalf of the disadvantaged. Indeed, public policy in the United States has long recognized and encouraged that role (DiIulio 2007), although the extent of such encouragement has been hotly contested in the battles over the Bush administration’s “charitable choice” policies.

Thus, churches, religious organizations and religious activists concerned with the course of public policy in the United States have two broad options for influence: (1) participation in the governmental process in which formal public policies are developed, and (2) direct action designed to address public problems, either in conjunction with governmental agencies or independently.<sup>1</sup> To a considerable extent, American religious groups have developed specialized agencies devoted to each kind of task. For example, the United States Catholic Bishops

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<sup>1</sup> Here we sidestep some of the important conceptual distinctions addressed by other papers at this conference. While our “governmental” activities fit neatly into the expanded catalog of participatory acts discussed by others (van Deth 2007), “social action” activities represent a kind of engagement broader than those included there, but narrower than the general “civic engagement” discussed by Putnam (2000). As the reader can see, our list of programs and projects stresses direct, usually local efforts to solve the kinds of social problems often addressed by the political system as well. In many ways, this is more a “Tocquevillian” conception of participation, requiring not just “association,” but association for a public purpose.

Conference maintains a lobbying presence in Washington to address issues such as social welfare and immigration, but the Church also supports Catholic Charities and a variety of diocesan immigrant assistance offices. In the same vein, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has its own Washington office, supports the lobbying of the National Council of Churches, but also assists those in need through Lutheran Social Services. Both Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services draw some financial resources from government contracts, but also depend on gifts of time and money from rank-in-file Catholics and Lutherans, both clergy and laity.

Such diversity in approaching policy problems characterizes religious action in areas other than social welfare. For example, mainline Protestant churches have not only been vocal lobbyists for stronger national environmental policy, but have also encouraged churches and their leaders to start local projects to foster environmental awareness and improve the ecology. Similar combinations of conventional lobbying with direct action at the community level can be seen in programs on race relations, family problems and domestic violence, gay and lesbian concerns, employment issues and economic development (Wuthnow and Evans 2002). The Catholic Church has long been active in many of these same arenas, and some evangelical Protestant churches, especially the proliferating suburban mega-churches, have developed programs addressing these and other social problems directly.

Clergy are key actors in both channels of civic participation, of course, and are the subject of this paper. They are an important target for research not only because of their role as leaders of the largest voluntary organizations in the United States, but also because of their characteristically high level of political, civic and social involvement. They are not only instrumental in mobilizing the resources of congregations and other religious institutions, but they are also important activists in their own right, contributing personal energy and financial resources to a host of causes. Indeed, their role in the conventional political process has long been recognized, from the observations of Tocqueville (1945, 1:317) to those of contemporary social scientists (Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974; Guth et al. 1997; Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Olson, Crawford and Deckman 2005). In that literature, the political engagement of clergy as cue givers, organizational leaders and direct actors has been explored in some depth. On the other hand, much less research has focused on the nongovernmental civic activities of American clergy (Guth 2001a; but see Brown, Smidt and Penning 2001; Kellstedt and Green 2003; Walz and

Montreal 2007). This paper is designed to fill a part of that gap and, for the first time, provide an explicit comparison of the two types of civic engagement conducted by American clergy.

In the following pages, we outline several perspectives that seek to explain the political and social engagement of clergy. We then use a national study of sixteen American denominations to address several questions: (1) How active are clergy in governmental and nongovernmental politics? What sorts of activities and programs are they most engaged in? (2) Are there systematic differences in the extent of involvement by denomination? Are some denominational clergy more engaged in political activities, while others focus on programs directly addressing social problems? Or do governmental and nongovernmental activism go together? And (3) what factors explain the degree of involvement by individual clergy in these two forms of civic work? Do the same influences tend to structure both sorts of activity, or do governmental and nongovernmental activities flow from different sources? Our analysis should provide us with a much richer picture of the full civic lives of the leaders of Tocqueville's "first" American political institution: religion (1945, I: 316).

### ***Theoretical Perspectives on Clerical Political Participation and Social Action***

Scholarly analysis of political participation has traditionally focused on the mass public, with little attention to occupational groups, although Verba, Scholzman, and Brady have noted that professional groups may display "different configurations of participatory factors and levels of activity" (1995, 414). We take their hint by drawing on converging perspectives from both the literatures on mass participation and on clerical politics. Together, these offer five partially competing theories stressing: (1) the *personal resources* of the potential activist, such as socioeconomic status and psychological engagement; (2) *professional ideology*, such as theological perspectives and ministerial role orientations; (3) *issue mobilization*, especially agenda priorities and ideological perspectives; (4) *organizational mobilization*, stressing the motivation provided by outside groups and information flows; and (5) *contextual influences*, involving the immediate social and congregational environment of the clergy member.

#### ***1. Personal Socioeconomic and Psychological Resources.***

***Socioeconomic Status (SES).*** The classic works on mass political participation often utilized the "Socioeconomic Status (SES) Model," positing that political involvement is the product of high social class, wealth, and advanced education—all of which supply citizens with

the resources for effective action (Verba and Nie 1972, 148; cf. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In addition, most studies find that older citizens, who have more life experience, know more about politics, and are more settled in their communities, evidence higher activity levels (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 136-141). In the same vein, at least until recently, men have tended to be more active than women in most political venues (Barnes and Kaase 1979, 110ff).

Are clergy affected by SES variables in the same way as other citizens? At first glance, status perspectives might seem less applicable to clergy, as socially homogeneous, well-educated professionals with middle-class incomes. Indeed, most scholars accepted this premise (Quinley 1974), concluding that such status explains the clergy's characteristic high rates of political participation (Beatty and Walter 1989). This assumption probably derived from early scholars' focus on mainline Protestant clergy, who did tend to exhibit these traits. Clergy in the evangelical tradition, however, come from almost every imaginable social class background (often working-class), have differing educational experiences, and enjoy a wide range of incomes. This variation in personal status is reflected in the congregations they serve: those with larger, middle-class congregations are not only wealthier, but have at their disposal additional resources (and perhaps incentives) for political involvement (Sapp 1975, 164). In this respect, Catholic priests may represent an intermediate case, drawn from a range of social backgrounds, but achieving a fairly high level of professional training prior to entering the clergy.

Other status factors may have different impacts among clergy than in the mass public. For example, older citizens are usually more active, but in the 1960s, at least, Quinley (1974) found that younger clergy were most politically engaged, perhaps because of their extensive education, the political stimuli of the civil rights and Vietnam War era, or as a result of new role expectations inculcated in seminaries. In recent years, the same pattern has appeared among young conservatives: today's evangelical Protestant ministers are increasingly well educated, grew up in the midst of protracted "culture wars" over abortion, gay rights, and sex education in the schools, and may be especially influenced by the new politicization of conservative Protestantism (Guth et al. 1997).

Finally, some scholars have found that the growing number of women clergy have distinct political characteristics. Although there is some disagreement, there is evidence that women clergy are more active politically than male clergy, tend to specialize in somewhat different kinds of action—and are especially likely to be involved in social program activities (Deckman et al. 2003; Olson, Crawford and Deckman 2005). It is not always clear whether this

participatory advantage is due to some special trait of women clergy, or from their youth, advanced education, or other factors linked to activism among pastors of both genders.

***Psychological Engagement.*** Many analysts argue that the most important personal resources are attitudinal, not socioeconomic. Psychological dispositions such as strong political interest and a sense of political efficacy lead to greater political activity (Verba and Nie 1972; Jennings and Van Deth 1989; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). In the mass public, of course, these orientations often result from higher status and education, but among professional leaders the continuing experience of conducting “public” activity may substitute for status and schooling in producing attitudes conducive to participation. Indeed, if church *membership* produces civic skills and attitudes (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Putnam 2000), church *leadership* should have an even stronger effect. Another source of psychological engagement is strong partisanship, whether Republican or Democratic. As there is some evidence that clerical partisanship has strengthened in recent decades, exhibiting the same polarizing tendencies seen among other activists (Nivola and Brady 2006), we expect those with strong party attachments to be more active in governmental politics, though perhaps not in social action activities.

## ***2. Professional Beliefs and Role Orientations***

***Theological Worldviews.*** Rather than focusing on SES resources or psychological engagement, the classic clergy studies stressed other attitudes, especially theological beliefs that highlight this-worldly political involvement, foster approval of the church’s political role, and argue that ministers should be politically active (Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974). Indeed, we have previously confirmed that such theological and professional role orientations are powerful predictors of activism (Guth et al. 1997).

Given their centrality to clerical worldviews, theological perspectives have always been crucial in discussions of pastoral politics. Hadden (1969) and Quinley (1974) found that “this-worldly” modernists, having abandoned supernatural Christian orthodoxy for a more liberal, naturalistic faith, were far more active than “other-worldly” traditionalists. Other scholars have argued that it is not so much theological tenets but the underlying *social theology* of clergy that influences political action. Protestant modernists and Catholic clergy generally have a communitarian social theology that stresses the importance of “horizontal” relations among human beings as the prime focus of religion, while Protestant traditionalists still see the

relationship between the individual and God as their central concern, creating an individualist social theology that de-emphasizes social and political action.

There is massive evidence, however, that the relationship between theological perspectives and political activism has changed. Clergy who were not only orthodox, but also *otherworldly*, fomented early Christian Right activism. While some scholars have argued that such beliefs were downplayed to facilitate activism, there is little survey evidence to confirm this contention. Rather, at least some traditionalists have modified their social theologies to accommodate a larger political role for Christians, including clergy. These revisions have been encapsulated in a new social theology that we have called “the civic gospel” (Guth et al. 1997). This perspective connects traditionalist theology’s characteristic pessimism about human history with the slide of American society away from its Christian origins toward a new, secular, and sinful identity. Unlike earlier versions of individualist social theology, the civic gospel holds out some prospect for social reform if true Christians act. Just as the turn-of-the-century “social gospel” provided theological liberals with an invitation into worldly politics, so the new civic gospel supplies a rationale for at least some conservative activity. And although the original Social Gospel provided a rationale for both “governmental” politics and other forms of direct social action, it is not clear whether the civic gospel encourages local social action.

***Role Orientations.*** Although theological perspectives may influence ministers’ views on the legitimacy of social and political activism, specific beliefs about such activity are likely to be embodied in stable role orientations shared by those with similar theological views. Quinley (1974) showed that in the 1960s heyday of “New Breed” political activism modernist clergy held far more positive views about the appropriateness of political participation than did their orthodox brethren. Even today, in mainline Protestant denominations theologically liberal clergy are still somewhat more likely to approve activism, although the differences have certainly diminished since the 1960s. Indeed, in some conservative denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest Protestant church, the most orthodox actually have *more* positive attitudes (Guth 2001b).

In any event, we expect a strong link between role orientations and political activism, either because positive attitudes lead to greater activism or, as some argue, because greater activism produces more positive attitudes about ministerial involvement. To test these expectations we use measures of approval for *individual political activity* and for *denominational activism*. We expect that professional beliefs, whether incorporating theology or political role

orientations, are likely to surpass the influence of SES and perhaps even that of political interest on conventional political involvement. We are more agnostic as to whether these factors will influence clergy's personal involvement in nongovernmental civic activities, although we expect the influence should be at least mildly positive.

### ***3. Issue Mobilization: Agendas and Ideology.***

Many analysts of political participation have stressed issue mobilization: the way in which political attachments, beliefs, and issues prompt people to become involved. Political scientists have long noted that ideological commitments often stimulate activism. Sometimes the *strength* of ideological commitment is key, whatever its *direction*, but more often we find ideological "asymmetry" in activism, so that during particular eras either conservatives or liberals may dominate activist roles (Nexon 1971; Verba and Nie 1972). This phenomenon may be partially explained by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's argument that citizens with strong sentiments on new issues such as abortion or the environment are activated by those feelings (1995, 391-415). If the national agenda is not "balanced" in its ideological incentives, we should expect eras of advantage for one side or the other.

Clergy may be motivated more generally by the issues they perceive to be the most important confronting the country. In earlier work, we discovered that clergy differed on the priority of *moral reform* and *social justice* agendas. Moral issues such as abortion, gay rights, school prayer and gambling commanded the attention of many conservative clergy, but modernists were more inclined to worry about social welfare policies, the environment, women's rights and similar questions. Finally, ministers' attitudes on specific issues may influence their activity. Those with strong sentiments on moral issues on the one hand, and social welfare issues on the other might be expected to be more active in both political and social arenas.

### ***4. Organizational Mobilization.***

Activism also results from organizational mobilization. This may take the form of party efforts to turn out the vote (Teixeira 1992), interest group leaders seeking to elicit member activity (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), or other institutions attempting to activate citizens. Such mobilization has been neglected in studies of clerical politics, but should be especially pertinent, as clergy are enmeshed in complex organizational networks. They collaborate with other clergy in local organizations, are involved in

denominational networks, and may join special purposes organizations attractive to clergy. In the same vein, there are attentive to religious and secular media.

To tap such external mobilization, we first asked ministers whether they belonged to and were active in various religious interest groups. Political activism by clergy, especially during a presidential election year, may also be influenced by the mobilization efforts of religious interest groups. Similarly, the political information sources clergy use, especially the politics-laden religious TV and radio programs available to conservative Christians, might make a difference in clergy involvement. Ministers' favorite political information sources may also have a significant bearing on social program activity.

#### *(5) Contextual Factors.*

Finally, a number of scholars have suggested that the social context of the clergy influences political and social activism. These assertions take a number of forms. Some argue that activism is most likely in large urban areas, with their attendant concentration of social problems and greater stimulus to action (Crawford and Olson 2001; Djupe and Gilbert 2003). In the same vein, the social class of the congregation may have an impact, as ministers and priests strive to provide either political voice or social services for congregants. And, of course, the attitudes and expectations of congregations should influence at least some clergy activity. According to most observers, "New Breed" liberal activists of the 1960s were ultimately reined in by hostile parishioners, who not only rejected ministerial activism, but also favored more conservative politics (Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974). And although most surveys, including ours, find evangelical clergy much more in tune ideologically with their laity than are their mainline counterparts are, some observers have seen a new "gathering storm" in these churches, as conservative activists antagonize moderate laity (Campolo 1995). Finally, we also expect that ministers with longer tenure in their current posts might feel freer to participate politically or in social action activities, having built trust for their activity by long service.

As we have noted at points above, most previous studies of clerical activity has focused on explicitly governmental politics, involving what might be thought of as conventional political activities. Whether the same influences that prompt such action by clergy will also apply to the non-governmental social action activities is not clear, although we expect that many variables included in the five perspectives discussed above will be applicable in the somewhat different context of social action—although they might sometimes operate in very different fashion.

## *Data and Methods*

The data for this paper come from the Cooperative Clergy Study Project, coordinated by Corwin Smidt of the Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin College. The Project engaged over twenty scholars who conducted mail surveys of clergy in twenty major American religious groups, including ministers in most major white Protestant denominations, Roman Catholic priests, some Black Protestant pastors, and Jewish rabbis. Just after the 2000 presidential election, almost 9000 clergy filled out extensive questionnaires on their religious orientations, political activities and social engagement (see Smidt 2004). As the questions asked of a few denominations do not include all those of interest here, this paper uses data from fourteen predominantly white Protestant bodies, both mainline and evangelical, Unitarian-Universalist ministers, and Catholic priests.<sup>2</sup> Although the number of clergy from each denomination varies somewhat, in the data analysis we weighted each denomination equally.

### *Political and Social Activities Among Clergy*

The questionnaire asked clergy about an extensive number of political and social program activities. In Table 1, we report the proportion of clergy who reported engaging in the various political actions during the previous (election) year, and those who reported contributing either time, money or both to various kinds of social programs during that same period. In the latter category, it is important to note that we are focusing on the *personal* involvement of clergy, not the programs maintained by or contributed to by their congregations. Obviously, pastors are often engaged in these endeavors, but it is clear that most contributions reported by clergy are *not* connected directly to congregational service programs (Chaves 2004), but are directed at outside organizations, many of which are clearly religiously inspired. Indeed, if pastors confined their activities to programs sponsored by their congregations, they would be much less engaged.<sup>3</sup>

To compare participation in conventional politics and social program activity we created additive indices of both kinds of activity (see note 3 below). Interestingly, the political and social ministry activity scores are only modestly correlated ( $r=.23$ ), suggesting that different types of

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately we were unable to use data from the predominantly black Church of God in Christ and African Methodist Episcopal Church samples because of some variation in the questionnaire. For case studies of black clergy activity in both politics and social action, see Smith and Harris, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> We did ask clergy about the programs maintained by their congregation. Reassuringly, the results conformed quite closely to those of the massive National Congregational Survey (Chaves 2004). Most congregations sustain only a few such programs and the most important factor influencing that number is the size of the congregation: large churches have more programs, as do middle-class churches and those in large urban areas. We should note that clergy at churches with more extensive programs were somewhat more active generally.

pastors specialize in each. To organize clergy activity into empirically meaningful categories, we subjected each set of activities to a principal components analysis to identify modes or types of activity. For example, clergy who engage in a “campaigning” action are more likely to engage in another activity within that mode and those engaged in one “liberal” agenda program are inclined to participate in others, as well.<sup>4</sup> We have organized each side of Table 1 according to these common modes of political activity and of social program involvement.

[Table 1 about here]

Let us first consider political activity. As many previous studies have discovered, clergy are quite active in comparison with other American citizens. They are most active in what we have labeled here as *pronouncement* or cue-giving, taking stands on issues or communicating to a larger public or public officials. Solid minorities also are involved in electoral *campaigning* in one way or another, and an even smaller group engages in what we might think of as *vigorous action* such as boycotts, full sermons on controversial political issues, forming political study and action groups in the congregation, or engaging in protest marches. In contrast to the “New Breed” of the 1960s and 1970s, however, few contemporary clergy engage in civil disobedience. Finally, a very few are appointed to public office, but only a handful endorse candidates from the pulpit and even fewer run for public office.

On the social activism side, the most common contributions are to social programs such as food pantries, international aid, homeless shelters, and similar charities. Clergy are much less likely to contribute to what we have called “liberal agenda” social programs, such as race relations ministries, assistance to gays and AIDS victims, or environmental causes.<sup>5</sup> Support for education and childcare programs falls in a similar range, as do substance abuse programs, but economic projects find much less favor among clergy, with only small minorities participating. Nevertheless, comparison of the two sides of Table 1 reminds us that clergy are more fully engaged with the public sphere than formal political involvement alone might indicate.

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<sup>4</sup> Although these modes of activity are important subjects for analysis (see Guth et al. 1997), in this paper we are interested primarily in the aggregate level of all such political and social action actions. Statistical analysis shows that in both political and social arenas almost all of the actions contribute to a highly reliable additive index (*alphas* >.88). As we discuss briefly below, however, each mode of political and social action has a somewhat different array of influences producing it.

<sup>5</sup> These frequencies confirm the observations of denominational officials, sometimes frustrated with the lack of local response to mainline Protestant church initiatives on the environment, AIDS, gay rights and race relations (Verter 2002; Moody 2002; Steensland 2002). Not surprisingly, the list also bears some resemblance to the reports of congregational programs discussed by Chaves (2004). Interestingly, scores on this dimension of social action have the highest correlations with the “political” modes of campaign activism ( $r=.31$ ) church activism and protest ( $r=.19$ ), and ranks second on issue activism ( $r=.11$ ).

Are there systematic differences in the extent of political and social activities by denomination? The classic literature showed that theologically liberal clergy from mainline Protestant denominations dominated clerical politics during the 1960s and 1970s, as expressed in activities in the civil rights, anti-war and social justice movements of that era (Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974). But conservative clergy from evangelical churches closed much of the gap by 1990 and on some modes of clerical involvement, such as campaigning, may even have gone ahead (Guth et al. 1997). On the social program side, we have much less evidence to go on, although one might expect more involvement from the mainline and Catholic clergy, as their denominations have had a much longer period of social program creation and maintenance than have evangelical churches (Ammerman 2002). Nevertheless, press reports suggest that conservative bodies have begun to put more of their growing resources into just such efforts.

In Table 2 we report the mean number of political acts and social program contributions made by clergy in each denomination. For purposes of organization, we have classified white Protestant denominations as either evangelical or mainline, and listed Catholic priests and Unitarian Universalist ministers separately. The overall means for the sample show roughly comparable numbers of political and social actions, with clergy reporting six or more activities in each sphere during 2000, a presidential election year. By religious tradition, evangelical Protestants are quite “balanced” across the two kinds of involvement, but mainline Protestants match evangelicals in total political involvement, and are *much* more involved with social ministries and activities. Catholic priests are less active politically than either group of Protestants, but more involved in social programs than evangelicals. They fall well behind mainline Protestants in contributions to social programs, however. Unitarians score quite high on each indicator, being hyperactive politically and almost matching mainline Protestants in social action (cf. Green 2003).

[Table 2 about here]

There is nevertheless considerable variation *within* the two Protestant traditions. Evangelicals include both the most politically active clergy (the Assemblies of God) and the least (the Mennonite Church). Similarly there was a gap between the most active mainliners in the Reformed Church in America and the least active ministers in the Presbyterian Church USA. On social activities, however, the Assemblies were the *least* involved among the evangelicals (joining the Church of the Nazarene), while Mennonites were *most* active, followed by the Christian Reformed Church. Among mainline denominations, ELCA ministers were most

engaged in social action, while American Baptists were least active. Obviously, political and social action appeal to somewhat different sets of clergy.

### ***Testing Theories on the Determinants of Political and Social Activism***

What factors influence political and social action activities of clergy? As a systematic test of our five theories, we ran OLS analyses of the two activity scores, using indicators designed to tap each perspective on political participation. (For variable construction, see the Appendix.) In Table 3 we report the results of this exercise. To begin with, we found that our theoretical expectations work better with governmental activism than with social action activities, explaining almost one-third of the variation in the former, but only about a fifth of that in the latter. More important, as a quick glance at the two columns suggests, the strongest explanatory factors often tend to differ from the political to the social action sphere.

First, note the relative weakness of SES factors in both analyses: the personal income of clergy is not a strong predictor—and even runs in the wrong direction on political activities, with poorer clergy slightly more engaged. More extensive *secular* education does tend to encourage greater political activity, but has no significant effect on social action, while more extensive *seminary* training works in just the reverse fashion, encouraging social but not political action. As anticipated, age has the opposite effect as in the mass public, with younger clergy being significantly more active, especially politically. This suggests that a new conservative generational cohort has abandoned the old apolitical or even antipolitical attitude of older evangelical clergy.

[Table 3 about here]

In fact, a close examination reveals interesting tendencies obscured by the multivariate analysis. On the one side, younger evangelical clergy tend to be most active politically, while among mainline Protestants younger clergy have fallen away somewhat from the political activism of earlier generations. In social activities, just the reverse is true: older evangelicals are much more active than younger colleagues, while younger mainline clergy have apparently substituted social activities for the more conventional political efforts of their elders. Younger Catholic priests are also quite high on social, but not political activism, while age makes little difference to either activity among Unitarians. Finally, gender has no significant independent impact on either type of action: women clergy are, on balance, no more or no less active than

their male counterparts. Although they do have some advantage at the bivariate level, this is due largely to their youth, high levels of education, and high scores on liberal agendas and issues.

Thus far, the personal resources perspective has provided little assistance in our quest for the motivating factors for clerical involvement. But psychological engagement is more helpful. General political interest abets political action somewhat more than social activity, but is significant to both, while attention to the 2000 electoral campaign helps predict only political action. Interestingly, strong partisan identification does not influence political action, but has a strong *negative* effect on social action. In other words, social action activities are more common among independents and weak partisans than among strong Republicans and Democrats.

Although the emphasis on personal resources provides some entrée to the world of clerical politics and social action, we need to look further. As earlier studies of clergy politics have demonstrated, clergy activity is strongly influenced by theological perspectives and professional role orientations. Historically, modernist clergy who emphasized the importance of *thisworldly* reform were more engaged in political and social reform activities, while *otherworldly* theological traditionalists abstained from both. As we have shown here and elsewhere, that imbalance has been largely eliminated (some would even claim it has been reversed). To test the impact of theological and role orientations, in Table 3 we include measures of *theological traditionalism*, *individualism-communitarianism*, *the civic gospel*, and *approval of clerical and church activism*. As the Table reveals, approval of political involvement by clergy has a powerful positive impact on political activism, but has only a modest effect on social action. Ministerial approval of activism by the church and denomination has a much weaker impact on political action—and a slight negative influence on social action. Thus, social action activities seem only modestly connected to ministerial role orientations about conventional political action. This suggests that many clergy are developing an alternative professional orientation stressing the clerical and denominational role in providing social programs, rather than influencing the political process.

Although professional role orientations have a powerful impact on political action, broader theological measures have little independent effect. Theological traditionalists are marginally less likely to be involved politically and social theologies of individualism-communitarianism have no effect, but belief in the civil gospel *discourages* social action activities. These modest findings may present a surprise, but further analysis shows that the theological variables work through professional role orientations. Traditionalists are still much

less likely to approve ministerial political activities, as are individualists, while adherents to the civic gospel are somewhat more likely to approve, but all the theological perspectives operate primarily indirectly.

To what extent do issue agendas and attitudes motivate the two types of actions? To address this question, we included measures of strong conservative and liberal ideological identification, perceptions that social welfare, foreign policy, and moral issues present the most pressing agenda items for ministers, and political attitudes on those three sets of issues. The results are quite interesting. Strong ideological identifiers—especially liberals—are more active politically, but do not differ from other clergy on social action activities. Ministers who claim to address social welfare, foreign policy and moral issues in their work understandably are somewhat more active in political activities, but those who address social welfare issues are much more active in social action activities. Indeed, this is the strongest predictor of such actions. And while both pro-social reform and pro-moral reform values encourage political activity by clergy, only the former significantly encourages social action. Thus, the pattern here consistently suggests that powerful agendas and strongly held attitudes motivate both conservatives and liberals toward the political action area, but only social-welfare liberals are moved in the direction of personal involvement in social programs.

Organizational mobilization has a similarly disparate impact. Involvement in Christian Left and Christian Right organizations, especially the latter, encourages political action, but Christian Left involvement has a much larger impact on social activities. This difference may well reflect the varying emphases of competing strands of American religion, as some conservatives have mobilized in electoral politics while liberals have reportedly stressed local social action in recent years (Hart 2001). Interestingly, different patterns of media use seem not to influence political action levels, but reliance on both religious media and public radio and TV foster social action.

Contextual factors, on the other side, have only modest effects on ministerial activism, although some have stressed such influences (Olson 2000; Gilbert and Djupe 2003; Olson, Crawford and Deckman 2005). While several scholars have argued that the obvious problems of large urban areas lead to greater clerical activism (Crawford and Olson 2001), size of community has no independent impact on social activities of ministers and actually predicts slightly less political activism. In the same vein, congregational social class has no impact on either type of activism. On the other hand, ministers with longer tenure at a church are somewhat more

engaged in both types of activities, but especially social action, and ministers whose political perspectives differ from their congregations in both ideological directions are slightly more active in social actions, but are, surprisingly perhaps, not less active politically.

One final “contextual” possibility not considered in the analysis is that denominational influences may influence the patterns we have seen. To test this possibility we ran the analyses reported in Table 3 with dummies for each denomination, with the denomination closest to the mean for each score serving as the omitted reference category (the Disciples of Christ for the political score and the Christian Reformed Church for the social action score). When this was done, almost none of the denominational variables showed any independent influence. In other words, clergy activity levels are almost entirely accounted for by the variables already in the analysis; knowing pastors’ religious affiliation added little information. There was one notable exception: Unitarians were markedly more active politically than their other scores would predict, but somewhat *less* involved in social action than they should be (cf. Green 2003). The only other minor deviations were that PCUSA clergy were marginally less active politically and Catholic priests were less involved in social action than we might expect.

Finally, we should observe that although activity in the conventional political arena and in the social action sector is only modestly correlated, experience in each may influence the other. For example, political participation may encourage more action in the social arena. A higher level of political activism does predict more social program involvement, even after all the other influences are taken into account. And those who are engaged in more social program activities are also more likely to be involved in conventional political activities—again, after all other influences are accounted for. So there may be “feedback” or other forms of influence that connect these kinds of activities.

A final caveat: we have been focusing on the overall political and social activities of clergy. As we noted above, they may well differ in participation by the specific modes of action that we have identified. Indeed, in earlier work (Guth et al. 1997), we showed that evangelical and mainline Protestant clergy tended to participate politically in somewhat different fashions. And we suspect the same is true for social action activities. Although generalized activity in both spheres represents our primary interest in this paper, there are in fact some distinctive tendencies by mode of participation. For example, *issue activism* is influenced heavily by positive clerical role orientations, adherence to the moral reform agenda, youth, and connections to both Christian Right and Christian Left organizations. Involvement in electoral campaigns results from positive

role orientations, strong liberal agendas and social reform orientations, and theological liberalism. *Vigorous activity* is dominated by role orientations, high political interest, ideological and social welfare liberalism—and Christian Right attachment. On the social action side, similar differences appear. Interestingly, activism on the first mode of social assistance draws support from both sides of the political spectrum: from those high on the social reform agenda and from those who are theological traditionalists and connected to Christian Right groups. Ministers with higher incomes and larger churches are also more often personally involved in these types of programs. The *liberal agenda* programs are well-labeled, as strength of liberal identity and high scores on the social reform agenda contribute strongly to activity here, whereas theological traditionalism works strongly in the other direction. Substance abuse programs, on the other hand, are favored by clergy with low scores on both social reform and moral reform agendas. To some extent, then, there is variation of determinants by activity type, although the restricted range of scores on each mode warns us to be cautious about drawing strong conclusions.

### *Conclusions*

Our analysis of the public activism of American clergy serves to broaden the analytic framework previously used in studies of these institutional elites. Clergy are not only engaged in a wide range of conventional political activities, including some unique to religious leaders, but are also involved in many activities designed to address social problems directly or to defend the interests of marginalized groups. Although there is a modest tendency for these types of civic behavior to go together, they are clearly distinct and are influenced by different traits of clergy. Although each type of civic activity consists of several modes that are also influenced by distinct factors, the opportunities to engage in politics and social action are in a real sense alternative options for clergy. Conventional political participation is encouraged by strong professional role orientations favoring such actions, strong partisanship and political interest, and powerful agenda and attitudinal preferences on both left and right. Indeed, in the 2000 election year, the advantage in political activism long enjoyed by mainline Protestant clergy finally disappeared completely, as many evangelical clergy—especially in the largest denominations—matched their mainline counterparts in involvement. Journalistic and some social science evidence suggest that in 2004 evangelical ministers may well have exceeded their mainline counterparts in political involvement.

Social action, on the other hand, is still largely the product of liberal theological, agenda and issue choices, and is most evident among seminary-educated clergy not strongly attached to the party system, but active in “Christian Left” organizations. The observer is tempted to see social action as one resort for liberal clergy either discouraged by the influx of conservative competitors into the political realm, or disenchanted by the failure of conventional political action to address successfully the top agenda problems they see in American society. Still, the more “liberal” clergy in mainline Protestant denominations have tended to maintain fairly high levels of involvement on both kinds of activism. On the other hand, evangelical Protestants have tended to emphasize political action in their public lives. It is perhaps too early to say whether the much-discussed recent disillusionment of some evangelical clergy with the efficacy of conventional politics will produce more attention to direct social action of the sort that was once characteristic of evangelical Christianity in America.

The analysis here points to the need to expand our perspective on civic action to include not only actions directed at influencing government, directly or indirectly, but also those designed to address major public policy problems directly. As leaders of major American institutions, clergy are certainly worth study but so are their parishioners, who also combine conventional political activities with more direct contributions to the solution of national problems. Indeed, we need better conceptual and empirical maps of both types of actions among all citizens—religious and nonreligious—to delineate the boundaries of contemporary civic involvement.

### *Appendix on Variable Construction*

#### *Dependent variables*

*Political activism* is an additive index of the twenty-seven political actions reported in Table 1 ( $\alpha=.88$ ). *Social activism* is an additive index of number of contributions of time and/or money to the twenty-four programs reported in Table 1 ( $\alpha=.90$ ).

#### *Independent variables*

**SES.** *Income* is a proxy variable based on the size of the clergy person’s congregation, which is very highly correlated with income in studies of clergy demographics. *Secular education* is a five-point scale running from primary education only to postgraduate work. *Seminary education* is a five-point scale running from no attendance to postgraduate work. *Age* is actual age in years. **Psychological Engagement.** *Political interest* is a seven-point scale running from “Very

Interested” to “Not At All Interested.” *Campaign interest* is an additive index of two seven-point items asking about the respondent’s level of attention to the 2000 election campaign and to news reports about that campaign, both running from “Very Much” to “None.” *Strong Partisanship (GOP)* and *Strong Partisanship (DEM)* run from 0 to 3, with 0=“Independent,” 1= “Independent Leaner,” 2= “Weak Partisan,” and 3= “Strong Partisan.”

**Professional Orientations.** *Theological traditionalism* is the first principal component score from an analysis of fourteen five-point Likert items on Christian theology (*theta reliability*=.94). *Individualism/Communitarianism* is the first principal component score from three five-point Likert items asking whether social justice or individual morality should be at the heart of religious endeavor (*theta*=.60). *Civic Gospel* is the first principal components score from an analysis of six five-point Likert items on whether the U.S. was founded as a Christian nation, whether free enterprise is the only economic system compatible with Christianity, whether there is only one Christian position on most political issues, whether it is possible to be a liberal and a true Christian, whether religious freedom is under attack in the U.S. by secular groups, and whether government should take action to protect America’s religious heritage (*theta*=.84). *Approve political activism* is the first principal components score from an analysis of fourteen five-point Likert items asking respondents how strongly they approved or disapproved of clergy participating in various forms of political activity (*theta*=.86). *Approve church activism* is the first principal components score from an analysis of five five-point Likert items on whether churches and denominations should be engaged in political activity (*theta*=.60).

**Issue Mobilization.** *Strong Liberal* and *Strong Conservative* ideology scores run from 0 “Moderate” to 3 “Very” ideological. *Social welfare agenda*, *foreign policy agenda*, and *moral reform agenda* are all the first principal components scores from analyses of nine, four, and nine questions asking clergy how often they addressed issues such as “hunger and poverty,” “defense spending,” and “abortion,” with *thetas* of .88, .74, and .85, respectively. *Social welfare liberalism*, *Defense hawk*, and *Moral traditionalism* are first principal components scores from analysis of nine, three, and seven five-point Likert items on issues such as support for nationalized medicine, greater defense spending, and pro-life positions on abortion. *Thetas* are .76, .65, and .86, respectively.

**Organizational Mobilization.** *Christian Right* and *Christian Left* involvement are additive indices of membership in and attendance at the meetings of a number of such organizations, with each membership and attendance counting as “1”. *Religious media use* is an additive index of

two items on the importance to the respondent of religious TV and religious radio; *public media use* taps responses on the importance of PBS and public radio; *common media use* taps the assessment of newspapers and news magazines as important sources of information. *Size of community* is a nine-point scale ranging from “rural” to “very large city.” *Congregational social class* is a four-point scale from “working class” to “upper-middle class,” as assessed by the respondent. *Years at church* is the number of years the pastor has served his or her current congregation. *More Conservative* and *More Liberal than Church* are drawn from two five-point items on the clergy person’s relative position to the congregation on social issues and on economic issues. These variables range from 0, “Same as church on both types of issues” to 4 “Much more conservative (or liberal) on both types of issues.”

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**TABLE 1. Political and Social Activities Among Clergy (in percent involved)**

<i>Political Action</i>		<i>Social Programs</i>	
<b><i>Pronouncement</i></b>		<b><i>Social Welfare Programs</i></b>	
Wrote Letter to Editor	79	Food Pantries	40
Contacted Public Official	64	International programs	39
Signed Petition	61	Homeless shelters	36
Public Stand on Issue	57	Programs on domestic violence	33
Prayer Publicly About Issue	53	Crisis pregnancy programs	26
Urged Congregation to Vote	53	Home repair and building programs	25
Touched on Issue in Sermon	48	Assistance to the elderly	28
Issue Stand from Pulpit	30	Prison programs	25
Boycotted in Protest	22	Parenting skills programs	24
Preached Sermon on Issue	18	Scouting programs	16
<b><i>Campaigning</i></b>		<b><i>“Liberal” Agenda Programs</i></b>	
Prayed Publicly for Candidate	35	Race relations programs	22
Support presidential candidate GE	33	Ministry to gays	21
Publicly Backed Other Candidate	28	Environmental programs	16
Gave Money to Party, PAC	20	Ministry to AIDS victims	13
Button, Bumper Sticker, etc.	15		
Support presidential candidate PRI	14	<b><i>Education and Childcare</i></b>	
Joined National Political group	13	Educational Programs	19
Attended Campaign Rally	12	Childcare programs	16
Worked in campaign	8	Programs for neighborhood kids	15
		After school programs	13
<b><i>Protest and Vigorous Action</i></b>		<b><i>Substance Abuse</i></b>	
Joined local civic organization	17	Alcohol treatment	21
Formed Study group in church	9	Drug treatment	18
Formed Action group in church	9		
Protest March	8	<b><i>Economic Programs</i></b>	
Civil Disobedience	2	Economic development programs	10
<b><i>Other Actions</i></b>		Gang programs	10
Appointed to public office	5	Healthcare programs	7
Endorsed from the pulpit	3	Jobs programs	6
Ran for public office	1		

<b>TABLE 2. Pastors' Political and Social Activism by Religious Tradition and Denomination</b>		
	<i>Political Activism</i>	<i>Social Activism</i>
<i>Sample Means</i>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>6.9</b>
<b><i>Evangelical Protestant</i></b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Assemblies of God (AOG)	6.9	5.0
Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)	6.2	6.0
Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)	6.2	5.2
Christian Reformed Church (CRC)	5.8	7.0
Churches of Christ (COC)	5.5	5.8
Church of the Nazarene	5.4	5.0
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)	5.0	5.9
Mennonite Church	4.0	7.2
<b><i>Mainline Protestant</i></b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>8.1</b>
Reformed Church in America (RCA)	6.2	7.5
American Baptist Churches (ABC)	5.9	7.0
Disciples of Christ (DOC)	5.7	9.3
Evangelical Lutheran (ELCA)	5.7	9.5
United Methodist Church (UMC)	5.7	7.7
Presbyterian Church (USA)	4.9	7.8
<b><i>Roman Catholic</i></b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>6.7</b>
<b><i>Unitarian Universalist (UUA)</i></b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>7.7</b>

<b>TABLE 3. Determinants of General Political and Social Activism Among Clergy (OLS analysis)</b>		
	<i>Political Activism beta</i>	<i>Social Activism beta</i>
<b><i>Personal Resources</i></b>		
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>		
Income	-.020	.019
Secular Education	.050***	.018
Seminary Education	-.001	.041***
Age	-.103***	-.058***
Female	-.007	-.015
<b>Psychological Engagement</b>		
Political Interest	.068***	.039**
Campaign Attention	.039**	-.013
Clergy Political Efficacy	.040***	.033**
Strong Partisanship (GOP)	.014	-.059***
Strong Partisanship (DEM)	-.019	-.070***
<b><i>Professional Orientations</i></b>		
Theological Traditionalism	-.042*	.017
Individualism	.009	.002
Civic Gospel	.007	-.082***
Approve Political Activism	.271***	.044***
Approve Church Activism	.054***	-.037*
<b><i>Issue Mobilization</i></b>		
Strong Ideology (Conservative)	.049**	-.009
Strong Ideology (Liberal)	.150***	.026
Social Welfare Agenda	.077***	.317***
Foreign Policy Agenda	.056***	-.019
Moral Reform Agenda	.096***	.007
Social Welfare liberalism	.084***	.047*
Defense hawk	-.029*	.024
Moral traditionalism	.061***	-.001
<b><i>Organizational Mobilization</i></b>		
Christian Right Involvement	.098***	.038**
Christian Left Involvement	.044***	.143***
Religious Media Use	-.007	.074***
Public Media Use	-.006	.032**
Common Media Use	.015	.006
<b><i>Contextual Influences</i></b>		
Size of Community	-.019*	-.009
Congregational Social Class	-.007	-.009
Years at Church	.028**	.044***
More Conservative Than Church	-.004	.028*
More Liberal Than Church	-.014	.030**
<b><i>Adjusted R squared</i></b>	<b>.300</b>	<b>.192</b>

Source: 2000 Cooperative Clergy Study Project. (N=8000)

\*p<.05;\*\*p<.01;\*\*\*p<.001.