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Religion and the Interracial/Ethnic Common Good

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Abstract

This study suggests that clergy and laity who engage in political discourse within houses of worship are able to bridge social capital in a manner that yields recognition of common interests among groups of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. However, for blacks and whites, the influence of such discourse has no impact on whether they believe that whites and minorities can be comfortable with one another or in the possibility of interracial/ethnic political alliances. Alternatively, politically conscious religious leaders contribute to Hispanics believing that whites and minorities can be comfortable with one another and in the possibility of interracial/ethnic political alliances.

Introduction

[1] This study assesses the impact of religion on perceptions of inter-group solidarity among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Gordon Allport has had perhaps the largest impact on the field of religion and racial out-group tolerance. In his classic book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Allport argues that religion serves a dual role in promoting and challenging racial/ethnic prejudice. On the one hand, he maintains that members of dominant religions are more racially prejudiced than are members of minority religions, as members of minority religions tend to identify with other minority groups. On the other hand, the more religiously involved dominant group members are, the more tolerant they are of out-groups. Allport argues that highly religious persons tend to have an intrinsic commitment to a faith's core teaching of love and compassion. In contrast, members of dominant groups that are marginally attached to religion tend to claim religious identification for social status purposes. While Allport's theory of religion and prejudice has spurred nearly half a century

of research on this topic, his thesis falls short in discussing the capacity of religion to foster a sense of solidarity or a common good between groups.

[2] To be clear, racial/ethnic tolerance as a psychological disposition that recognizes virtue in cultural differences among racial/ethnic groups is a key step in moving towards a multiracial/ethnic common good. However, standing alone, tolerance does not assume that members of diverse social groups see themselves in solidarity with one another such that all persons view their life chances as being genuinely inter-dependent (Hollenbach 2008). There are limits in the ability of racial/ethnic tolerance to reduce long standing social-economic inequalities between dominant and minority racial/ethnic groups, which are based upon a history of racist actions and differential access to opportunities (Hollenbach 2002, 2008). Rather, a level of inter-group solidarity is required so that racial/ethnic inequalities are seen as unjust and destructive for all members of society (Hollenbach 2002, 2008). Growing global economic competition is making it increasingly important for the United States to act upon a common good in which the concerns of racial/ethnic minorities are connected to national concerns. Census projections estimate that by 2050, White Americans will no longer total over half the U.S. population (Passel and Cohn). As such, non-Whites will play an increasingly important role in keeping this nation economically viable.

[3] Nonetheless, a number of scholars and political activists have questioned the ability of dominant and minority group members to act politically in solidarity with one another (Carmichael and Hamilton; Dillard). In the shadows of the civil rights era of the early 1960s in which Whites and Blacks linked arms as they marched in defiance of racial oppression, Carmichael and Hamilton maintained that mutual self interests and not “appeals to conscience” are the basis for coalitions. Hence, they argued that coalitions between liberal Whites and Blacks were doomed because members of dominant and marginalized groups have opposing interests. Members of dominant groups have an inherent interest in maintaining their political and economic dominance, while minority groups are interested in redistributing such power (Niebuhr). This poses an obvious problem for prospective coalition building between such groups. And, in the absence of equal power relations, coalitions between Whites and Blacks that yield outcomes satisfactory to both parties are virtually impossible as dominant groups have little incentive to compromise (Carmichael and Hamilton). Carmichael and Hamilton would argue that there is little incentive for liberal Whites to join forces with Blacks in pushing for legislation that requires sacrifices from Whites in an effort to reduce racial disparities in overall quality of life. Vaca points out that even for ethnic minorities of roughly the same economic position, such as Blacks and Hispanics, a commitment to individual group interests inevitably kills inter-group solidarity efforts. As opposed to recognizing shared interests as economically marginalized minorities, the initial impulse of minority groups is to close ranks and vie over finite resources in an effort to climb the social-economic and political status ladder (Rogers; Vaca).

[4] However, a growing body of research suggests that religious bodies are well suited to foster solidarity between diverse racial/ethnic groups (Swarts; Warren; Wood). With over 350,000 religious congregations and roughly three million members, religious congregations have the largest membership base of all non-profit organizations in the U.S. (Warren and Wood). Given the social capital held by most congregations, congregants are likely open to messages that emphasize beliefs shared by all major religions about a common good that

calls individuals to love members of out-groups as fellow in-group members (Swartz; Warren; Wood). The presence of social capital within houses of worship assumes that congregants trust that their clergy and fellow congregants are speaking and acting in their best interests (Coleman; Putnam; Swartz; Warren; Wood). Inducements from fellow congregants to consider a particular worldview are also likely effective because such appeals are often delivered in a culturally relevant manner via songs, sermons, announcements, and prayers that resonate with group members (Harris; Patillo-McCoy; Warren; Wood). Moreover, it is plausible that clergy and laity who engage in political talk in houses of worship have some influence over how congregants think about their common interests with racial/out-group members.

[5] The archival and qualitative evidence on this topic provide a fair amount of evidence on the effectiveness of religious leaders in increasing solidarity and initiating political alliances among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics (Warren; Wood). Nonetheless, there has not been any survey-based research on the relationship between exposure to political cues from clergy and feelings of interracial solidarity. Moreover, the role that politicized congregations play in shaping racial/ethnic solidarity among members of dominant and non-dominant racial/ethnic racial group remains unclear. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature.

Religion and Racial Attitudes

[6] For over forty years, nearly all American religious bodies have publicly proclaimed a commitment to interracial/ethnic tolerance and unity in the form of resolutions and diversity programs (Cooper; Findlay; Greenberg; NAE; SBC 1971-2007; USCCB). Such a commitment to racial tolerance seemingly filters down to local congregations, as over half of church-going Americans report hearing messages about the importance of improving race relations in their houses of worship over the course of a year (Brown 2009). Close to 40% of church-going Americans report attending congregations that host programs intent on improving race relations (Brown 2009). Many congregations that are concerned about race go beyond conversations to pushing elected officials to pass policies aimed at reducing racial disparities in qualities of life. This is made evident by a number of national and regional studies that indicate that a commitment to civil rights and social justice plays a key role in motivating clergy and congregations as a whole to participate in the political process (Barnes; Brown 2008, 2009; Guth et al.; Jelen; Smidt et al.). In fact, support for social justice is a stronger motivational force for Protestant clergy, regardless of denomination, to engage in political activism than is support for moral reform issues, such as abortion, pornography, or gay rights (Guth et al.).

[7] Nonetheless, there is a long line of research that suggests that White church members are more racially prejudiced than are non-members (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis; Gorsuch and Aleshire; Hunsberger and Jackson). Some scholars argue that the empirical connection between White religious involvement and racial prejudice is linked to prejudiced Whites being more likely to conform to the status quo of White and Christian hegemony in the United States (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis; Gorsuch and Aleshire; Hunsberger and Jackson). There is also quite a bit of research that documents the resistance of White congregants to clergy and lay efforts to involve their congregations politically in racial justice

efforts (Brown 2008; Cavendish; Findlay; McGreevy). Such resistance is well documented in the accounts of mainline Protestant and Catholic Church leadership efforts to enjoin their congregants to support civil rights policies during the 1950s and 1960s (Brown 2008; Findlay; McCarthy 1998). Clergy and lay leadership of middle class White congregations face similar obstacles today in convincing their congregations to recognize their shared social-economic interest with poor and working class racial/ethnic minorities (Warren; Wood). The difficulties that congregational leaders face in encouraging interracial/ethnic solidarity among congregants are heavily rooted in the United States' hyper segregated racial landscape, which creates different opportunity structures for Whites and non-Whites (Farley, Danziger, and Holzer; Massey and Denton; Williams and Collins).

[8] The separate lived experiences between racial/ethnic groups also contributes to different cultural tastes, styles of communication, and styles of worship that make it difficult for varying racial/ethnic groups to feel comfortable around one another (Massey and Denton). The opinion that Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics have of one another is often shaped by non-intimate interactions and observations while shopping, at sporting events, by watching television, and during unequal status relations at work in which Whites are often supervisors (Welch et al.). The lack of intimate interaction between racial/ethnic groups makes it difficult for such individuals to honestly discuss similarities and differences, an important prior step to discussing areas of common policy interests from which diverse racial/ethnic groups can politically mobilize.

[9] The impact of religion on the out-group attitudes of Blacks and Hispanics is not readily apparent. In an effort to bring more attention to their concerns, it is seemingly in the interests of minority groups to align their interests with that of other minorities and with the dominant group. On the one hand, Blacks and Hispanics experience similar social-economic disadvantages and have similar concerns about crime, jobs, and the quality of public education in their communities (Kohut). However, as stated earlier, because these groups tend to view themselves as competitors over jobs and community control as opposed to allies from social-economically marginalized racial/ethnic groups, building solidarity between these groups has also proven difficult (Vaca; Warren; Wood). Along these lines, a recent survey found that Hispanic Americans identify more closely with Whites than with Blacks, tend not to trust Blacks, and tend to view Blacks as lazy (McClain et al.). Similarly, Blacks tend to identify more closely with Whites than Hispanics, tend not to trust Hispanics, and are less likely than are Whites to recognize the work ethic of Hispanics (McClain et al.). This reality is likely suggestive of the difficulty that congregational leadership face in fostering a sense of solidarity between varying racial/ethnic out-groups.

Religion and Interracial/Ethnic Solidarity

[10] The studies discussed thus far raise doubts about the extent to which congregational leaders can effectively bridge solidarity across racial/ethnic boundaries. However, it is important to recognize that few studies based upon survey data adequately assess the role that political cues from clergy and fellow congregants have on the racial attitudes of congregants. As mentioned earlier, common religious beliefs and narratives that emphasize the universality of God's love and loving the stranger provide an initial foundation from which religious leaders and laity can potentially convince fellow congregants to extend their

social capital resources of trust and solidarity across racial/ethnic boundaries (Warren; Wood). Case studies have shown religious congregations to be more successful than secular groups in encouraging Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics to agree upon a set of policy issues, to mobilize community members in support of such policies, and to push elected officials publicly to commit to their policy agenda (Swarts; Warren; Wood). The effectiveness of religious groups is, in part, rooted in the fact that unlike secular groups, religious faith provides a community that connects the histories, rituals, and core beliefs of diverse groups (Warren; Wood).

[11] Nonetheless, because studies based upon nationally representative samples have yet to assess the impact of clergy and lay political cues on racial out-group attitudes, it is difficult to make claims of the capacity of politically conscious clergy and lay leaders to inform perceptions of interracial/ethnic solidarity. To be clear, survey-based studies have found clergy and laity to have some influence over the ideological and non-race-based policy positions of congregants (Brenneman; Daniels and von der Ruhr; Djupe and Gilbert; Gilbert; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague; Smith). So, it is plausible that the extent to which clergy and lay leaders emphasize the importance of politically acting upon a multiracial/ethnic common interest, congregants are likely to at least consider such suggestions. This leads to this study's central research question: To what extent do political messages heard in religious congregations contribute to inter-group solidarity among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics?

Sample

[12] This study utilizes the 2004 National Politics Study (NPS) to test the relationship between clergy messages and inter-group solidarity attitudes. The primary goal of the NPS is to gather comparative data about individuals' political attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, and behaviors at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Program for Research on Black Americans of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research went into the field in September 2004, shortly before the Presidential election, and concluded a few months later in February 2005. All of the 3309 interviews were conducted over the telephone. The interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish, depending on the preference of the respondent, and the overall response rate was 31%. This response rate is comparable to the 30% median response rate within over two hundred national studies reported in thirty-five published articles (Groves). The NPS is the first multi-racial and multi-ethnic national study of political and racial attitudes. This study is based on a national sample of individuals, aged 18 years or older, from a variety of different racial and ethnic groups. Interviews occurred throughout the United States in urban and rural centers of the country where significant numbers of Black Americans reside. In total, 756 Blacks, 919 non-Hispanic Whites, 757 Hispanics, and 503 Asian Americans were interviewed. An additional 404 Afro-Caribbean respondents were also interviewed. Weights have been applied to adjust for the actual social-demographic characteristics of the population as measured in the 2000 Census. Each of the NPS racial/ethnic groups were sampled from separate sampling frames. As a result, researchers must treat these racial/ethnic samples as completely separate studies and separately analyze the data from each racial/ethnic group. As mentioned earlier, the current study only focuses on Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics.

Measures

Dependent Variables: Solidarity Attitudes

[13] This study utilizes measures of shared interests with racial/ethnic out-groups, comfort between racial/ethnic groups, and support for political alliances between racial/ethnic groups to assess interracial/ethnic solidarity. To assess support for shared interests, respondents are asked to report if they believe that their ideas, interests, and feelings are close to the corresponding out-groups of Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Afro-Caribbeans. For Whites, the shared interest index has an alpha score of .785 and ranges from 0 to 4 with 4 indicating that Whites believe they share interests with all non-Whites. For Blacks and Hispanics, the shared interest index is a shared non-Black and non-Hispanic minority interests index respectively. Because shared interests with Whites loaded poorly on the same shared interest factor with the minority groups, it was looked at separately. The non-Black and non-Hispanic shared interest index range from 0 to 3 with 3 indicating that Blacks and Hispanics believe they share interests with all non-Black and non-Hispanic minorities respectively. The shared interest index maintains an alpha score of .743 and .661 for Blacks and Hispanics respectively. In an effort to measure comfort between groups, this study assesses the extent to which individuals disagree with the statement that Whites and racial and ethnic minorities can never be really comfortable with each other, even if they are close friends. Lastly, support for interracial political alliances is measured by assessing the extent to which individuals disagree with the statement that the problems of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans are too different for them to be political allies or partners.¹

Independent Variables: Exposure to Political Messages

[14] Respondents' exposure to political messages in their houses of worship is measured by whether, in the last year, they heard any discussions of politics at their place of worship; whether they had talked to people about political matters at their place of worship; whether a member of their clergy, or someone in an official position, ever suggested that they take some action on a political issue, such as sign a petition, write a letter, attend a protest, march or demonstrate, or get in touch with a public official; and whether their clergy encouraged them to vote for a certain candidate. Taken together, the *political message* index maintains an alpha score of .672 and ranges from 0 to 4 with 4 indicating that respondents were exposed to all four types of political messages. Table 1 includes the frequency distributions of the dependent and independent variables.

Control Variables

[15] In an attempt to replicate the analytical approach of past studies on religion and out-group attitudes, the current study controls for frequency of church attendance, denominational affiliation (following Steensland et al.'s classification and membership in the

¹ Because all of the dependent variables are dichotomous, this study employs odds ratios derived from logit regression analyses to assess the above research question.

NCC and NAE), college education, family income,² employment status, gender, and Southern residence (Brenneman; Daniels and von der Ruhr; Gilbert; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague; Smith). This study also controls for the immigration status of Hispanic Americans.

Table 1: Frequency Distributions for Interracial/Ethnic Solidarity Attitudes and Exposure to Church-based Political Messages

	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Shared Interests with Whites	–	59.66	69.62
Shared Interests with Blacks	68.23	–	55.09
Shared Interests with Hispanics	57.89	66.40	–
Shared Interests with Asians	50.92	41.40	38.84
Shared Interests with Caribbeans	34.39	49.74	41.74
Whites and Minorities Can be Comfortable	85.42	66.40	52.97
Political Coalitions among Racial/Ethnic Minorities are Possible	72.91	68.78	59.31
<i>Independent Variable: Political Church Messages</i>			
0 Political Church Messages	56.37	41.40	68.96
1 Political Church Message	15.89	19.97	14.53
2 Political Church Messages	16.43	17.99	8.85
3 Political Church Messages	7.83	15.08	5.42
4 Political Church Messages	3.48	5.56	2.25
N =	919	756	757

Results

[16] The findings reported in Table 2 suggest that the more Whites hear political messages at their place of worship, the more likely they are to believe that they and minorities share similar interests. However, there is no evidence that attending political congregations contributes to Whites believing that Whites and minorities can truly be comfortable with one another or that minorities can act as political allies. The data findings for the Black subsample reported in Table 3 largely mirrors the findings reported in Table 2 for Whites. The more political messages that Blacks hear at their places of worship, the more likely they are to believe that they share similar interests with Whites and with other minorities. However, there is no evidence that political churches contribute to Blacks believing that Whites and

² Missing values for family income were imputed from an imputation procedure that organizes missing cases by patterns of missing data so that the missing-value regressions can be conducted efficiently. The imputations did not significantly or substantively alter the analyses.

minorities can truly be comfortable with one another or that minorities can act as political allies. Similar to the White and Black samples, the Hispanic data reported in Table 4 point to the impact of political congregations on perceptions of shared interests with non-Hispanic minorities. However, attending political congregations has no impact on Hispanics believing that they and Whites share common interests. Unlike the White and Black samples, the Hispanic sample suggests that political churches contribute to Hispanic congregants believing that Whites and minorities can be comfortable with another and that political alliances between racial/ethnic minorities are possible. Outside of college graduates, who tend to report higher levels of support on the solidarity measures, the control variables are fairly inconsistent predictors of solidarity for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. In addition, in three of four interracial/ethnic solidarity measures, immigrant Hispanics report lower levels of support.

Table 2: Impact of Church-based Political Messages on White Interracial/Ethnic Solidarity Attitudes: Logit Regression Analyses: Odds Ratios

	Shared Interests with Minorities	Whites and Minorities Can be Comfortable	Political Coalitions among Racial/Ethnic Minorities are Possible
Political Church Messages	1.164** (0.067)	1.145 (0.116)	1.077 (0.081)
<i>Controls</i>			
Church Attendance	0.891 (0.060)	1.097 (0.118)	0.883 (0.076)
Mainline Protestant***	1.010 (0.186)	1.310 (0.398)	1.181 (0.281)
Catholic	1.471* (0.259)	1.022 (0.280)	1.116 (0.249)
Secular	1.523 (0.373)	1.883 (0.763)	1.157 (0.365)
Other Faith	1.125 (0.224)	1.389 (0.462)	1.073 (0.274)
College Graduate	1.401** (0.172)	2.716** (0.600)	2.179** (0.355)
Family Income	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)
Unemployed	0.969 (0.282)	3.142 (2.333)	1.684 (0.739)
Female	0.914 (0.113)	1.751** (0.353)	1.185 (0.189)
South	1.008 (0.130)	0.739 (0.154)	1.033 (0.171)
Weight Variable	0.966 (0.040)	1.254** (0.105)	1.192** (0.072)
N =	919	919	919

* $<.05$, ** $<.01$ (two-tailed test); Standard errors are in parentheses.

***Mainline Protestants, Catholics, Secular, and Other Faith are compared to Evangelical Protestants.

Table 3: Impact of Church-based Political Messages on Black Interracial/Ethnic Solidarity Attitudes: Logit Regression Analyses: Odds Ratios

	Shared Interests with Whites	Shared Interests with non-Black Minorities	Whites and Minorities Can be Comfortable	Political Coalitions among Racial/Ethnic Minorities are Possible
Political Church Messages	1.152* (0.074)	1.124* (0.062)	1.090 (0.073)	1.107 (0.075)
<i>Controls</i>				
Church Attendance	0.961 (0.069)	0.980 (0.062)	0.970 (0.073)	1.009 (0.077)
Black Protestant***	1.092 (0.172)	1.201 (0.165)	0.883 (0.143)	0.747 (0.123)
Age	1.015** (0.006)	0.988* (0.005)	0.996 (0.006)	0.990 (0.006)
Female	0.597** (0.101)	0.683** (0.099)	1.032 (0.178)	1.159 (0.202)
College Graduate	0.908 (0.158)	1.427* (0.217)	1.866** (0.358)	1.220 (0.228)
Family Income	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)
Unemployed	1.046 (0.255)	0.781 (0.166)	0.574* (0.138)	0.805 (0.203)
South	1.224 (0.203)	0.747* (0.108)	0.759 (0.130)	0.746 (0.129)
Weight Variable	1.376 (0.369)	1.058 (0.225)	1.114 (0.301)	1.022 (0.277)
N =	756	756	756	756

* $<.05$, ** $<.01$ (two-tailed test); Standard errors are in parentheses.

***Black Protestants are compared to all other religious faiths.

[17] In sum, these data largely suggest that the more political messages that Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics hear in their houses of worship, the more likely they are to report having a common interest between themselves and racial/ethnic out-groups. However, these messages have no impact on how Blacks and Whites think about levels of comfort between Whites and non-Whites or in the possibility of political alliances among racial/ethnic minorities. On the other hand, the more political messages that Hispanics hear in their houses of worship, the more likely they are to believe that Whites and minorities can be comfortable with one another and in the possibility of political alliances among racial/ethnic minorities.

Table 4: Impact of Church-based Political Messages on Hispanic Interracial/Ethnic Solidarity Attitudes: Logit Regression Analyses: Odds Ratios

	Shared Interests with Whites	Shared Interests with non-Hispanic Minorities	Whites and Minorities Can be Comfortable	Political Coalitions among Racial/Ethnic Minorities are Possible
Political Church Messages	1.112 (0.099)	1.161* (0.079)	1.367** (0.119)	1.273** (0.108)
<i>Controls</i>				
Church Attendance	1.084 (0.079)	1.064 (0.064)	0.915 (0.064)	0.893 (0.062)
Catholic***	1.103 (0.189)	0.747* (0.104)	0.790 (0.131)	0.921 (0.149)
College Graduate	1.583* (0.363)	1.312 (0.225)	2.837** (0.622)	1.611* (0.333)
Family Income	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)
Unemployed	0.939 (0.256)	0.779 (0.179)	0.715 (0.191)	1.188 (0.313)
Female	0.774 (0.134)	0.640** (0.090)	0.831 (0.139)	1.101 (0.181)
South	1.864** (0.340)	0.954 (0.140)	1.227 (0.215)	0.912 (0.157)
Immigrant	0.704* (0.118)	0.889 (0.119)	0.402** (0.064)	0.612** (0.095)
Weight Variable	0.933 (0.234)	0.680 (0.148)	1.218 (0.317)	1.605 (0.449)
N =	757	757	757	757

* $<.05$, ** $<.01$ (two-tailed test); Standard errors are in parentheses.

*** Catholics are compared to all other religious faiths.

Discussion

[18] The current study extends past work on religion and racial/ethnic out-group attitudes. It does so by testing the effects of congregational leader cues on feelings of interracial/ethnic solidarity among national samples of Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Consistent with the work of Warren and Wood on religion and community organizing, this study suggests that activist congregational leaders play an important role in encouraging a sense of interracial/ethnic solidarity among Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics. The more political messages that Blacks, Whites, and, to a lesser extent, Hispanics hear at their places of worship, the more likely they are to perceive common interests with racial/ethnic out-groups. In encouraging congregants to take political action, this study suggests that many congregational leaders are likely emphasizing support for candidates and policies that are in the best interests of varying racial/ethnic groups as a whole. To that end, this study finds some support for the notion that politically conscious clergy and laity are effective at emphasizing a universalistic ethic that links the fate of people of all racial/ethnic backgrounds.

[19] The political messages that congregants hear from clergy and lay leaders are likely effective in extending social capital resources of trust and fostering a sense of common interests with members of racial/ethnic out-groups because of the social capital that already

exists within individual congregations (Warren; Wood). Congregants trust that their clergy and lay leaders are acting in their best interests when engaging in a political discourse that encourages members to consider the ways in which their well-being is connected to that of racial/ethnic out-group members. Political messages that encourage recognition of a common interest with others are also likely effective because they are communicated during worship services in a manner that resonate with the social-historical and religious experience of group members (Harris; Pattillo-McCoy). However, for Blacks and Whites, there are limits in the extent to which activist congregational leaders are able to bridge social capital across racial/ethnic lines.

[20] This study suggests that the bridging of social capital does not extend beyond common interest to feelings of comfort between racial/ethnic out-groups. The inability of politically conscious clergy and lay leaders to foster a sense of comfort with racial/ethnic out-groups among Blacks and Whites may reflect an awareness of a history of White racial dominance and Black marginalization. This history likely makes it difficult for religious leaders to make the case that race is an artificial construct that should hold relatively little relevance in determining with whom individuals associate and feel comfortable. In addition, this country's racially segregated landscape yields differential access to opportunity structures and, subsequently, lived experiences among Whites and non-Whites, which contributes to disparate cultural tastes, styles of communication, and worship (Massey and Denton). Such differences likely make it difficult for individuals to feel truly at ease and comfortable around members of racial/ethnic out-groups, and especially to feel open in speaking honestly about their opinions of racial/ethnic out-group members.

[21] If congregational leaders face difficulty in encouraging a sense of comfort and commonality with racial/ethnic out-groups, even if they believe they share some common interests, taking the next step towards participation in interracial/ethnic political alliances is unlikely. This development may speak to the challenges that faith-based community organizing firms face in recruiting congregations (Warren and Wood). In this respect, Carmichael and Hamilton may have valid points when discussing the inherent challenges in solidarity efforts between dominant and marginalized groups.

[22] In contrast to Blacks and Whites, it is possible that Hispanic congregants are open to political proclamations that emphasize the possibility of a multi-cultural common good because they do not maintain a historical relationship with Whites characterized by racial dominance and marginalization. The large proportion of immigrants within the Hispanic community may also contribute to the recognition of the importance of White and non-White allies in Hispanic acculturation and social-economic mobility. Although there is a high level of competition between Blacks and immigrant Hispanics over jobs and local political control, Black civic leaders also serve as a resource for providing strategies aimed at challenging racial/ethnic injustice. Leaders of Hispanic immigrant rights groups often link their struggle to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and have made some attempts to align themselves with civil rights groups (Murguía; Hin). At the same time, because Whites are the dominant group, Hispanics also need White allies to gain access to social-economic resources and opportunities. Moreover, immigrant rights groups have also framed the Hispanic immigrant experience to that of the European immigrant experience in this country

and have sought the support of mainline Protestant and Catholic Church bodies and civil liberty groups (ACLU; USCCB; Tune and Jenks; Hin).

[23] In sum, this study suggests that clergy and laity that engage in political discourse within houses of worship are able to bridge social capital in a manner that yields recognition of common interests among groups of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. However, for Blacks and Whites, the influence of political religious congregations on inter-group solidarity extends no further than increasing awareness of inter-group common interests. The political messages that Blacks and Whites hear in their houses of worship have no impact on whether these groups believe that Whites and minorities can truly be comfortable with one another or in the possibility of interracial/ethnic political alliances. However, politically conscious religious leaders seemingly influence a belief among Hispanics in the possibility of Whites and minorities being comfortable with one another and in interracial/ethnic political alliances. Nonetheless, this study suggests that religious congregations as a whole likely face a continual challenge in bridging social capital in a manner that fosters interracial/ethnic solidarity and, potentially, the formation of interracial/ethnic political alliances.

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