Chapter 15
Does Praying Together Mean Staying Together? Religion and Civic Engagement in Europe and the United States

Pippa Norris

15.1 Introduction

Chapters in this volume have considered a broad range of issues to explore whether religious affiliations contribute toward the social and political involvement of European citizens. Several questions are at the heart of this debate and these can be seen as three concentric circles, where the impact of religious participation diffuses like widening ripples in a pool. Does belonging to churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and sects directly strengthen activism in faith-based charities and philanthropic work? Does it reinforce broader dimension of social engagement in the local community, such as membership in nonreligious associations, exemplified by the Rotary club, YMCA, school boards, and social networks? And, finally, does it mobilize civic activism, expressed through voting turnout, party affiliations, campaign donations, and protest politics? In the United States, the answer to these questions is usually assumed to be "yes." Mainline Protestant churches—Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Lutherans—have long been regarded as playing a vital role in their local communities. The underlying mechanisms are poorly understood but in general they are believed to do so by providing places for people to meet, fostering informal social networks of friends and neighbors, developing leadership skills in religious organizations and church committees, informing people about public affairs, delivering welfare services, providing a community forum, drawing together people with shared beliefs from diverse social and ethnic

P. Norris (✉)
Department of Comparative Politics, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney, Sydney NSW, Australia
e-mail: Pippa_Norris@Harvard.edu

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backgrounds, and encouraging active involvement in associational groups concerned with education, youth development, and human services (Wuthnow 1999, 2002; Wuthnow and Evans 2002). Through bridging diverse social groups with common beliefs, in particular, the informal bonds of community are assumed to be strengthened, thereby fostering social tolerance, interpersonal trust, and the cultural roots of democratic processes.

But do religious institutions actually function in this way in the United States? And do they perform similar functions in comparable European societies, thereby encouraging faith-based voluntary work, associational membership, and political engagement? There is a wealth of research on American churches but the answer to this second question in the scientific literature is far less clear-cut. In earlier studies, Norris and Inglehart have examined these issues worldwide, comparing in diverse countries around the globe (Norris and Inglehart 2010). This concluding chapter study allows these questions to be explored in more depth within Europe compared with the United States. To understand these issues, the first section of this chapter outlines alternative theories why religious organizations are believed to link citizens with their communities, focusing upon Robert Putnam's argument about the role of religion in generating social capital. The study then compares cross-national empirical evidence to see how far religious participation (defined by frequency of attendance at religious services) shapes voluntary activism for religious organizations, membership of a broader range of secular community associations, and patterns of political activism. Comparisons are examined across a wide range of 34 European societies, as well as between Europe and the United States. Data is drawn from waves of the World Values Survey conducted since the mid-1990s. The conclusion summarizes the major findings—demonstrating considerable similarities in the positive effects of religious participation in strengthening civic engagement in Europe and the United States, although with contrasts in the effects on social trust—and considers their implications.

15.2 Theories of Religion and Civic Engagement

In the political science literature, religious organizations have long been regarded as one of the classic mechanisms mobilizing civic engagement, political participation, and voting behavior. The foundations were laid by Almond and Verba's seminal study comparing *The Civic Culture* during the late 1950s. This study regarded membership in a range of organizations, such as trade unions, business associations, and churches, as critical for citizens' feelings of civic competence and internal efficacy: "Voluntary associations are the primary means by which the function of mediating between the individual and the state is performed" (Almond and Verba 1989: 245). Nevertheless Almond and Verba recognized that patterns of organizational membership varied substantially across countries; one-fifth (19 %) of Americans reporting membership in religious organizations during the late 1950s, compared with few of those living in the UK (4 %), Germany (3 %), and Italy (6 %) (Almond and

Verba 1989: 247). Many subsequent studies have highlighted the central role of church networks in fostering civic engagement in America. Hence, Verba et al. (1995: 389) found that being recruited through church, work, or other nonpolitical organization was an influential predictor of political participation, being approximately as powerful as the well-known effects of education or political interest. As well as the "push" of motivational attitudes such as feelings of duty and a sense of political efficacy, and the availability of resources such as time and money, Rosenstone and Hansen (1995, cf. Cassel 1999) argue that people are "pulled" into political activism by social networks, including through church membership.

The seminal theory of electoral behavior in Western Europe by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan also emphasized that during the mid-twentieth century, religious identities formed one of the traditional building blocks underpinning party support and voting behavior (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; cf. Alford 1967; Rose and Urwin 1970; Rose 1974). In this account, contemporary European party systems were stamped by social divisions established decades earlier, including the regional separation of urban center vs. rural periphery, the class struggle between workers and owners, and the religious cleavages that split Christendom between Catholics and Protestants. Churches in Western Europe were thought to have created organizational networks, fostering close political ties with Christian Democratic and other religious parties, just as trade unions mobilized workers into supporting socialist, social democratic, and communist parties.

Thus theories of political participation have long provided several plausible reasons to suspect that religious organizations (churches, temples, and mosques) can play a critical role by mobilizing civic engagement in postindustrial societies, whether through providing active members with ways to mobilize and lobby government around common policy issues and thereby increasing psychological feelings of political efficacy and competence among their congregations (the Almond and Verba claim), through shaping social identities and partisan politics (the Lipset and Rokkan argument), or through actively recruiting members of religious organizations to participate (the Verba, Scholzman and Brady theory).

During recent decades, much of the research literature on civic engagement has been dominated by theories of social capital, emphasizing how social ties and shared norms derived from membership in voluntary associations are thought to be important for societal well-being, economic efficiency, and the health of democracy. These theories originated in the seminal ideas by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman.[1] In recent years these arguments have been revived and popularized by Robert Putnam, notably in *Making Democracy Work* (1993), *Bowling Alone* (2000), and, most recently, *Amazing Grace (2010)*.[2] In Putnam's version of this theory, social capital is conceptualized as "connections among individuals – social

[1] See Bourdieu (1970) and Coleman (1988, 1990). For a discussion of the history of the concept, see also the introduction in Baron et al. (2000).

[2] See also Putnam (1996b, 2002) and Pharr and Putnam (2000).

networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000: 19).[3] This is understood as both a *structural* phenomenon (social networks of friends, neighbors, and colleagues) and a *cultural* phenomenon (social norms which facilitate collaborative cooperation). Putnam's account rests on three key claims.

The first is that horizontal networks embodied in civic society, and the norms and values related to these ties, have important *social consequences*, both for the people in them and for society at large, by producing private goods and public goods. In particular, networks of friends, colleagues, and neighbors are associated with norms of generalized reciprocity in a skein of mutual obligations and responsibilities. Churches are seen as critical for fostering faith-based community links in American society. Bridging networks, in particular, which span diverse sectors and groups, are thought to foster the conditions for collaboration, coordination, and cooperation to create collective goods. Voluntary organizations such as churches, synagogues and mosques, philanthropic and charitable organizations, parent-teacher associations, women's groups, and youth clubs are regarded as particularly important for this process, because active engagement is thought to bring local people into face-to-face contact, to achieve specific community goals, and to encourage broader traits, including interpersonal trust and social tolerance. Patterns of religiosity have become increasingly polarized in America, dividing believers and nonbelievers, as well as adherents to different sects and denominations, but at the same time Putnam and Campbell emphasize that religious pluralism and tolerance is maintained, largely because of the "churn" of fluid denominational identities, as like-minded people sort themselves out into different religious communities (Putnam and Campbell 2010). In turn, social capital is believed to function as an important resource leading towards a diverse array of benefits from individual health and happiness to child welfare and education, social tolerance, economic prosperity, reduced ethnic violence, and good institutional performance: "social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer" (Putnam 2000: 290).

Moreover, in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam argues religious organizations, particularly Protestant churches, are uniquely important for American civic society: "Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America" (Putnam 2000: 66). Religious involvement is seen as central for American communities, with faith-based organizations serving civic life directly by providing social support for members and services to the local area, as well as indirectly, by nurturing organizational skills, inculcating moral values, and encouraging altruism among members. If churches have traditionally played a vital role in American civic life, then the process of secularization may have significantly undermined community activism. "Americans are going to church less often than we did three or four decades ago, and the churches we go to

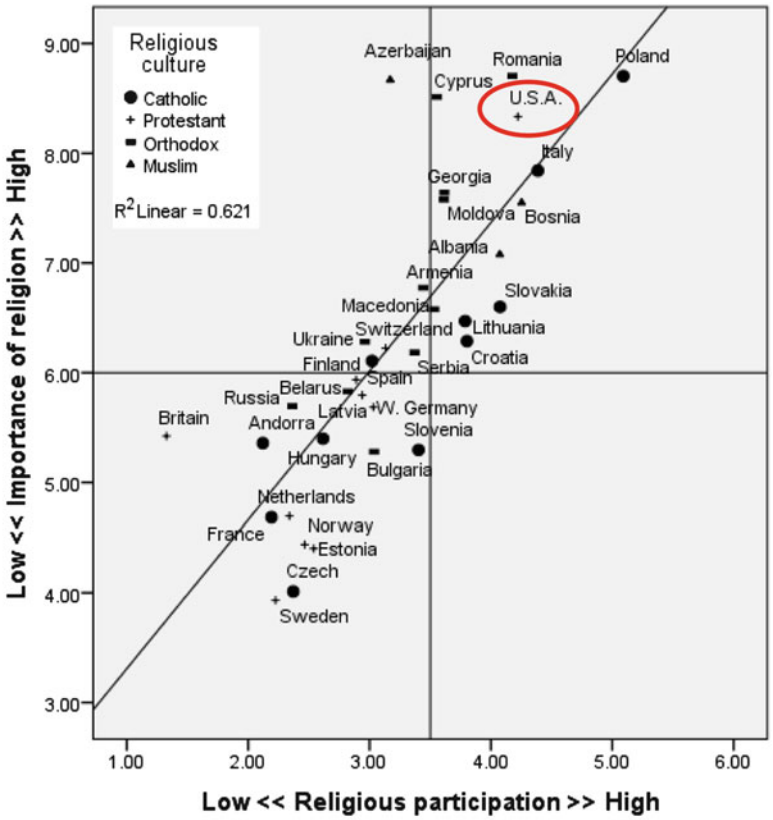
[3] Putnam also offers a related definition: "By 'social capital' I mean features of social life—networks, norms and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1996a).

are less engaged with the wider community. Trends in religious life reinforce rather than counterbalance the ominous plunge in social connectedness in the secular community" (Putnam 2000: 79). The decline in religious involvement during the twentieth century, he suggests, is most evident among the younger generations. Putnam suggests that the United States is far from unique as a fall in church attendance is also evident in similar affluent societies elsewhere: "The universal decline of engagement in these institutions is a striking fact about the dynamics of social capital in advanced democracies" (Putnam 2002: 409).

Putnam also argues that social capital has significant *political consequences*, both for democratic citizenship and ultimately for government performance. The theory can be understood as a two-step model which claims that civic society directly promotes social capital (the social networks and cultural norms that arise from civic society), which in turn facilitates political participation and good governance. "Civic engagement" refers to a variety of activities, ranging from the act of voting to more demanding forms of participation exemplified by campaign work, party membership, contacting officials, and protesting. Drawing on the American survey evidence available since the late 1960s and early 1970s, Putnam documents an erosion of traditional forms of conventional political engagement, exemplified by attending public meetings, working for a political party, and signing petitions, which he links with the decline in voluntary associations during the postwar era (Putnam 2000: 27). Putnam demonstrates that membership in many forms of civic associations, including labor unions, social clubs like the Elks and the Moose, and community organizations such as the PTA, expanded in the early twentieth century but then faded in postwar America.

These arguments have been widely influential yet, with the notable exception of *Making Democracy Work*, the vast bulk of the empirical evidence used to buttress these arguments has been derived from American survey research.[4] Contemporary European societies differ sharply from America in many regards, notably the historical and institutional legacy of established churches, the experience of state repression of religion under Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, persistently lower levels of church attendance among European publics in most (but not all) nations, and weaker adherence to religious cultural values (Berger 1999; Greeley 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2010). To illustrate some of the key contrasts, Fig. 15.1 shows the strength of religious participation (frequency of attendance at religious services) and the importance of religion (or religious values) across the postindustrial societies under comparison, based on data drawn from the World Values Survey. Among these countries, as expected, Americans indeed prove highly religious whether measured by frequency of attendance at religious services or adherence to religious values (measured by the importance of God scale). Nevertheless the United States is not an

[4]It should be noted that a major survey-based study, *The Harvard-Manchester project on the Transatlantic Comparison of Religion's Role in Society*, is currently underway comparing religiosity in Britain and the United States. http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/socialchange/research/social-change/Religion.html



Notes:
Religious Participation: Q186 *"Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week, once a week, once a month, only on special holy days, once a year, less often, never or practically never." (Coding reversed)*
Importance of religion: Q192: *"How important is God in your life? Please use this scale to indicate. 10 means 'very important' and 1 means 'not at all important'.*
Classification of the predominant religious culture: Based on the largest plurality group as a proportion of the population in each society, CIA Yearbook.

Fig. 15.1 Religious values and religious participation (*Source*: World Values Survey 3rd and 5th waves)

absolute outlier compared with all other European nations in either regard (knocking one fallacy on the head); levels of church attendance are slightly higher in Poland and Italy, while religious values are similar or even marginally stronger in Romania and Cyprus. As we shall see, however, the United States does have exceptionally widespread membership and activism in a wide range of voluntary associations (a less well-known, although not novel, observation).

It therefore remains unclear whether generalizations based on evidence drawn from the American context can also be observed more broadly across a wide and diverse range of European societies. Indeed, as earlier chapters in this volume have

emphasized, and as can be observed in Fig. 15.1, there are also striking contrasts in the strength of religiosity observable within continental Europe, such as among predominately Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Muslim societies, as well as significant variations seen among the Nordic region, postcommunist societies, and Mediterranean Europe. Wide disparities are also evidenced within Europe, for example, separating religious Poland and secular Sweden, or religious Italy and secular France. One of the primary factors which studies have found to contribute towards such contrasts concerns levels of human security, meaning the vulnerability to multiple threats and risks in the world, whether arising from lack of income and wealth, poor health, unemployment, and old age, or the perceived or actual threat of crime, violence, and physical harm. In general, more secure societies such as Sweden are also usually the most secular in their values (Inglehart and Norris 2012). Less secure societies, such as Bosnia, Georgia, and Romania, are usually more religious in their values. The disparities within Europe's postindustrial economies are not as extensive as the gap between rich and poor societies worldwide, but they remain evident. But the gap is not simply the result of economic differences; comparisons also reveal persistent differences in the vitality of civic society within different cultural regions in Europe, which may plausibly relate to the imprint of historic relationships between civic society and the state decades or even centuries earlier. In Poland, for example, the Catholic Church generally supported the solidarity movement (*Solidarność*), coming out on the right side of history, while Hungarian church leaders collaborated more closely with the Communist party, with enduring consequences for religiosity after the transition from autocracy (Borowik 2002; Froese 2001; Froese and Pfaff 2001; Zrinscak 2002).

Comparisons also need to be drawn because of cross-national contrasts in the vitality of membership in traditional civic organizations in Western Europe (Aarts 1995). Historical case studies of civic associational membership in particular nations have generally reported complex trends over time. For example, Peter Hall examined trends in support for voluntary associations in Britain, concluding that membership had been roughly stable since the 1950s, rising during the 1960s, and subsiding only modestly subsequently (Hall 2000, 1999; cf. Maloney et al. 2000). While he found that churchgoing has faded in popularity in recent decades, environmental organizations and charities have simultaneously expanded, so that overall the voluntary sector in Britain remains rich and vibrant. Case studies in Sweden, Japan, and Australia confirmed similar complex trends (Rothstein 2000). An emerging array of studies comparing postcommunist and developing societies also belie the existence of any simple decline in social capital (Dasgupta and Serageldin 2000; Rose 2000; cf. Rose et al. 1997). There is clear evidence that adherence to religious values and religious participation have weakened in nearly all affluent societies (including in the United States; Norris and Inglehart 2010). Yet it remains unclear from the research literature whether this process has thereby eroded faith-based organizations across Europe, such as church-related charities, social networks, and youth clubs, as might be expected. Emptying pews could have reduced more peripheral adherents, while the core faithful continue to belong to community associations.

15.3 Comparing Associational Membership

To examine these issues, this chapter will scrutinize systematic evidence derived from the World Values Survey to test some central empirical propositions. According to social capital theory, religious *participation* (defined as regular attendance at services of worship) is predicted to affect several dimensions of civic engagement, as depicted schematically in Fig. 15.2, including:

1. *Membership in closely related religious organizations*, exemplified by active membership in faith-based charitable and philanthropic associations, where the effects of churchgoing can be expected to be strongest and most direct
2. *Belonging actively to a broader range of nonreligious voluntary organizations and community associations in civic life*, exemplified by active membership in diverse educational and cultural groups, sports clubs, and trade unions, where any effects are expected to be moderate
3. *Civic engagement more generally*, including both attitudes (feelings of social trust, political interest, social tolerance, and support for democracy) and behavior (exemplified by voting turnout and protest politics), where religious participation can be expected to have a weaker and more indirect impact

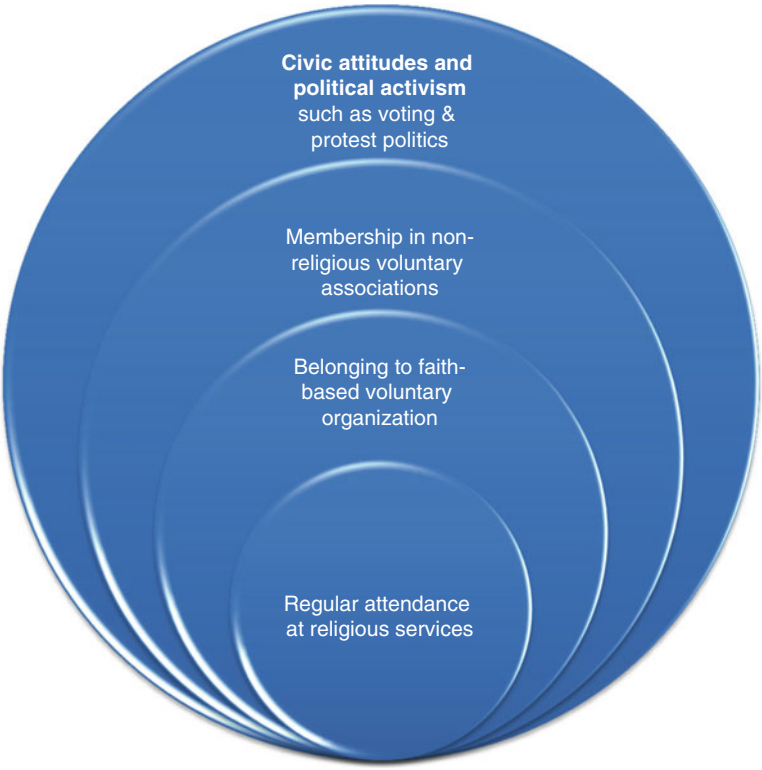


Fig. 15.2 The predicted effects of religious participation

Any comprehensive models need to control for a range of intervening variables that could influence these relationships. In particular it is important to determine whether any patterns vary among different types of faith, for example, if there are contrasts in civic engagement between more "horizontal" and egalitarian organization typical of Protestant churches and the more "hierarchical" organization found in the Catholic Church. Denominational differences may matter; Robert Wuthnow has noted that in the USA, membership in mainline Protestant congregations generates the kinds of social networks, norms, and relationships that help individuals and communities attain important goals, encouraging volunteering, civic engagement, and political participation—but that membership in evangelical churches does *not* have these effects. He suggests that social capital in America may have fallen due to the demographic shrinkage of mainline Protestant congregations since the 1960s, in contrast with the rapid growth of Baptist churches and evangelicals such as Pentecostals, fuelled by trends in population and immigration (Wuthnow 1999, 2002). For these reasons, we also examine whether religious participation causes significant differences in activism in voluntary associations controlling for the predominant type of religious faith in each society. European regions also vary substantially in their historical experiences of democracy and democratization, influencing the strength of civil society and opportunities to join voluntary organizations, so models control for the duration of liberal democracy during the third wave era.[5] Individual-level characteristics, such as age, gender, education, and income, are also often systematically associated with participation in religious services, as well as consistent predictors of membership in community associations and patterns of civic engagement. The multivariate regression models analyzing the impact of religious participation therefore include with prior controls for the length of experience of liberal democracy, as well as individual-level education, income, gender, and age.

The empirical analysis utilizes the third and fifth waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) that carried identical measures of associational membership, as follows[6]:

[5]This is measured by the average standardized score on the Freedom House index monitoring political rights and civil liberties from 1972 to 2005.

[6]Unfortunately the wording of the questions used to monitor membership and activism in voluntary associations varied over different waves of the WVS survey, as follows:

> Wave I: Early 1980: *"Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say which, if any, do you belong to?"*
> Wave II and IV: Early 1990 and 1999–2001: *"Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say… a) which, if any, do you belong to? b) Which, if any, are you currently doing unpaid voluntary work for?"*
> Wave III: Mid-1990s: *"Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization?"*
> Wave IV: 2000: *"Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say… a) Which, if any, do you belong to? b) Which, if any, are you currently doing unpaid voluntary work for?"*
> Wave V: 2005: *"Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization?"*

This makes it difficult to compare *activism* among all waves, although here we can use the identical items carried in Wave III and V. The questions on voluntary associations were also excluded from the fifth wave of the survey conducted in many Muslim nations.

> Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization?

In contrast to earlier research, this study focuses upon *active* membership, the most demanding form of engagement. Both waves of the survey were included for analysis to facilitate comparison of a broad range of 34 European societies and the United States. These waves of the survey list nine types of social groups, including church or religious organizations, sports or recreational organizations, political parties, art, music or educational organizations, labor unions, professional associations, charitable organizations, environmental organizations, and any other voluntary organization. The diverse range therefore includes traditional interest groups and mainstream civic associations, as well as some new social movements. These items were recoded and summed so that the strength of activism in a range of nonreligious voluntary associations was measured on a standardized 10-point scale. The study also examines both the structural and cultural dimensions of social capital—that is, the strength of *social networks* (measured by activism in a wide range of associational groups) and the strength of *cultural norms* (gauged by feelings of social trust).

Religious participation was gauged using the standard measure, monitoring frequency of attendance at religious services. This measure has its flaws, in particular "frequency" does not necessarily reflect the *strength* of religiosity; certain faiths require adherents to observe religious practices more frequently than others. The measure is most appropriate within Christian churches, but it is particularly problematic when comparing certain Eastern religions and new forms of spirituality with collective religious practices. Moreover frequency of attendance may reflect a sense of habitual duty, or social norms and conventions, as much as the strength of religious adherence. Nevertheless this measure has become the standard indicator used in the comparative sociology of religion, and frequency of attendance at religious services is closely correlated with others types of religious behavior, such as frequency of prayer or meditation.

15.3.1 Explaining Membership in Religious Organizations

The study examines the impact of religious participation on active membership in church or religious-based voluntary associations, with the latter measured as a dummy variable. We hypothesize that attending religious services on a regular basis will be closely related to engagement in other church groups, typified by congregations volunteering to help with Protestant Sunday schools, Jewish charities, or Catholic youth programs. The results of the multivariate logistic regression model presented in Table 15.1 confirms that in Europe, active membership in religious organizations increased with experience of democracy; the spread of civic society which often accompanies the process of democratization boosts membership in church-related associations, as well as strengthening belonging to many other

Table 15.1 Explaining active membership in religious organizations

	Europe			United States		
	B	s.e.	Sig	*B*	s.e.	Sig
Societal controls						
Historical experience of liberal democracy	0.030	0.001	***			
Individual controls						
Age (years)	0.005	0.001	***	0.010	0.003	***
Gender (male = 1, female = 0)	–0.093	0.040	*	–0.276	0.096	N/s
Educational scale (from low to hi)	0.005	0.010	N/s	0.013	0.026	N/s
Income (10 categories low to hi)	0.000	0.009	N/s	0.024	0.021	N/s
Religious participation and type of faith						
Religious participation	**0.894**	**0.014**	***	**1.084**	**0.034**	***
Protestant	0.002	0.157	N/s	0.751	0.257	**
Catholic	0.702	0.723	N/s	0.476	0.191	**
Orthodox	–18.8	273.226	N/s	–0.201	0.799	N/s
Muslim	–0.192	0.525	N/s	–21.22	211.602	N/s
(Constant)	–8.142			–5.670		
% Correctly predicted	93			52		
Nagelkerke R^2	0.343			0.637		
N. respondents	48,875			3,834		
N. societies	34			1		

Source: World Values Survey Waves III and V

Notes: The table presents the results of a binary logistic regression model where membership in a religious organization is the dependent variable. The figures represent the unstandardized beta (*B*), the standard error (s.e.), and the significance of the coefficient (Sig). *** $P = .001$, ** $P = .01$, * $P = .05$, *N/s* Not significant

Religious participation: Q185 "*Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week, once a week, once a month, only on special hold days, once a year, less often, never or practically never*"

Active membership in religious organization: "*Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an 'active' member, an 'inactive' member or 'not a member' of that type of organization?*" *A religious or church-related organization (coded active (1)/inactive or not a member (0))*

Type of religious faith: "Do you belong to a religious denomination?" If yes, "Which one?" Measured at individual level

interest groups and new social movements in civil society. Individual membership in religious organizations also rises with age in both Europe and the United States, characteristics associated with civic engagement in many studies, where the young are usually less participatory. Moreover gender also proves to be significant in Europe, although not reaching the level of statistical significance in the smaller US sample; the stronger religiosity of women, which has been widely documented, strengthens their propensity to join faith-based organizations (see Norris 2005; cf. Inglehart and Norris 2003; Moore 1990; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982). Education and income also prove to have no significant impact on membership of religious organizations in either Europe or the USA, contrary to the usual pattern of participation in many other civic organizations.

Most importantly for our purposes, even after this battery of controls has been applied, in both Europe and the United States, regular attendance at collective services in churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues has a significant impact on active membership in religious organizations, such as volunteering to help run faith-based charities, soup kitchens, and join social clubs. The coefficient was particularly strong in the United States. Among Europeans and Americans who attended a service of worship at least weekly, one third belonged to a religious or church-related association, compared with only 4 % of those who did not attend regularly. In America (although not in Europe) the relationship was strongest for Protestants and Catholics, where about one in four people belonged to a religious organization. But those of Orthodox or Muslim faith were not significantly more likely to be active in faith-based associations in either region, an observation which may well have important implications limiting the capacity to generalize globally from the American evidence, based on mainstream Christian churches.

15.3.2 Explaining Membership in Nonreligious Organizations

Confirmation that church attendance is linked with belonging to faith-based associations is far from surprising. If this were all that it claimed, social capital theory would be trivial. Putnam's account, however, makes a less obvious and more interesting claim: that civic society is denser and stronger if people belong to multiple overlapping categories, such as professional *and* philanthropic groups or unions *and* environmental organizations, so that church attendance strengthens other crosscutting linkages within the community. "Bridging" forms of social capital, which span different social sectors and ideological viewpoints, are thought to be strengthened by multiple memberships. Does participation in religious institutions therefore have the power to influence broader engagement in community life? To test this claim, we will analyze the average number of *nonreligious* community associations that people joined, using a 10-point standardized scale summarizing active membership in a variety of community organizations and voluntary associations, excluding the religious or church-related category. Overall about half (50 %) the public in the pooled sample reported belonging to no voluntary associations, one quarter (24 %) belonged to just one type of organization, while the remaining quarter of the public were members of more than one type of group.[7]

[7] Variations among different sectors, and the reason why people join, are discussed in detailed elsewhere (Norris 2002, chapter 8).

Table 15.2 Explaining active membership in nonreligious voluntary organizations

	Europe				United States			
	B	s.e.	Beta	Sig	*B*	s.e.	Beta	Sig
Societal controls								
Historical experience of liberal democracy	0.014	0.000	0.368	***				
Individual controls								
Age (years)	0.000	0.000	0.005	N/s	0.000	0.003	0.001	N/s
Gender (male = 1)	0.076	0.009	0.040	***	0.058	0.099	0.014	N/s
Education (scale from low to hi)	0.060	0.002	0.136	***	0.197	0.025	0.211	***
Income (10 categories low to hi)	0.023	0.002	0.061	***	0.177	0.022	0.216	***
Religious participation and type of faith								
Religious participation	**0.077**	**0.002**	**0.147**	*******	**0.264**	**0.024**	**0.272**	*******
Protestant	0.090	0.037	0.011	**				
Catholic	0.976	0.250	0.018	***				
Orthodox	–0.964	0.611	–0.007	N/s				
Muslim	0.434	0.144	0.014	**				
(Constant)	–0.878				–0.878			
Adjusted R^2	0.170				0.212			
N. respondents	41,300				5,775			
N. societies	34				1			

Source: World Values Survey Waves III and V

Note: The table uses OLS regression analysis where a 10-point scale measuring active membership of nonreligious organization is the dependent variable. The figures represent the unstandardized beta (*B*), the standard error (s.e.), the standardized beta (Beta), and the significance of the coefficient (Sig). *** $P = .001$, ** $P = .01$, * $P = .05$, *N/s* not significant

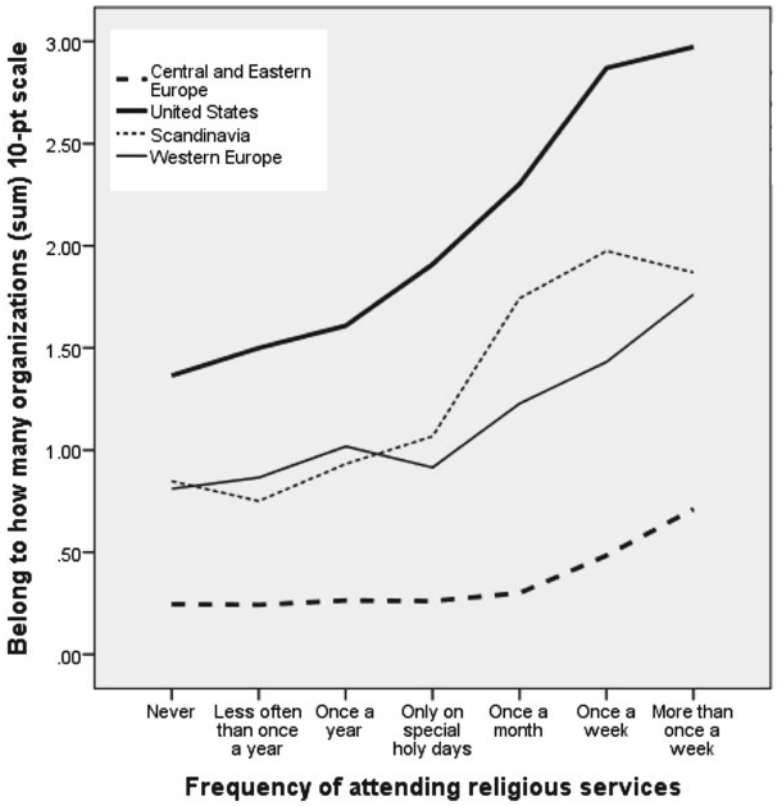
Religious participation: Q185 "*Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week, once a week, once a month, only on special hold days, once a year, less often, never or practically never*"

Active membership in nonreligious organization: "*Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an 'active' member, an 'inactive' member or 'not a member' of that type of organization?*" *Each item is coded 0/1 for active membership and summed into a standardized 10-point scale, excluding belonging to a religious association*

Table 15.2 analyzes factors predicting membership in voluntary organizations and community associations. Once again, historical experiences of democracy in Europe are positively linked with associational membership; as many have observed, the Communist state restricted civil society, whereas by contrast the growth of political rights and civic liberties, associated with the process of democratization, expanded opportunities for participation in grassroots voluntary organizations, although the residual legacy of the past persists. At the individual level, in Europe and the United States, higher education and income were also associated with belonging to more groups, a finding already well established in the general literature on political participation (Verba et al. 1978, 1995). There is usually a marked skew towards greater activism among higher socioeconomic sectors. In addition, in

Europe, men were more active than women in nonreligious voluntary organizations, although the standard age bias is (perhaps surprisingly) not evident in the analysis. The existence of social biases in membership depends, in part, upon the type of organizations which is compared; for example, participation in new social media is skewed heavily towards the younger generation, while membership in traditional economic organizations, such as trade unions, is more likely to be biased towards the older generations and towards men.

After applying these macro- and micro-level controls, the results demonstrate that in Europe and the United States, *religious participation is positively associated with active membership in a wide range of nonreligious community associations*. This confirms that in both places, members of congregations were more likely than average to belong to a diverse range of voluntary organizations, as social capital theory claims. This relationship is stronger in American than Europe, however. For example, in the United States those who attended religious services less than once a week report that on average they were active members of about 1.7 voluntary organizations, compared with active membership in 2.9 organizations among those who attend weekly. In Western Europe, absolute levels of membership were lower, but again those who attended religious services less than once a week report that on average they were active members of about 0.9 voluntary organizations, compared with active membership in 1.5 organizations among those who attended weekly, a statistically significant gap. Moreover this pattern varied in Europe by types of faith; Protestants and Catholics had significantly higher than average membership in these associations, as did those of Muslims' faith. Figure 15.3 illustrates the region pattern; the link between religious participation and active membership in nonreligious organizations proved strongest in the United States, moderate in Western Europe and Scandinavia, and weakest in Central and Eastern Europe. The role of the Orthodox churches may reflect the general problems facing civil society in Central and Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Communist state, after many party organs collapsed in popular support and new voluntary organizations were slow to develop. Nevertheless when interpreting these findings, it should be noted that it is not possible to determine the direction of causality in the relationship from the available cross-national survey evidence; it could be that a reciprocal relationship is at work, so that "joiners" are more likely than "loners" to be active in religious organizations, just as they are more active in many other types of social clubs and community groups. It could also plausible be argued that the relationship should be reversed, if people who are strongly embedded in local networks of neighbors and friends within their community are thereby encouraged through group norms and social conventions also to attend religious services on a regular basis. Yet it seems equally plausible to argue that the direction of causality flows from religious behavior (regular attendance at collective services of worship) towards broader involvement in other community activities and local networks. Research designs using historical case studies, panel surveys, or experimental data are required to determine these relationships more precisely.



Notes:

Religious Participation: Q186 *"Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week, once a week, once a month, only on special holy days, once a year, less often, never or practically never."*

Active membership in non-religious organization: *"Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an **active** member, an **inactive** member or **not a member** of that type of organization?" Each item is coded 0/1 for active membership and summed into a standardized 10-point scale, excluding belonging to a religious association).*

Fig. 15.3 Active membership of voluntary organizations rises with religious participation (*Source*: World Values Survey 3rd and 5th waves)

15.3.3 Explaining Broader Patterns of Civic Engagement

Social capital theory argues that associational membership is only one aspect of this phenomenon. The boldest claim in this argument is that religious participation has a positive impact upon (1) broader social attitudes, notably interpersonal trust and social tolerance; (2) political attitudes, exemplified by confidence in political institutions and support for democratic values; and (3) political activism, such as

voting turnout and engagement in political protest (see Newton and Norris 2000; Newton 2001).

Interpersonal trust is one of the most important components of social capital, for the social capital thesis holds that this lubricate cooperation and coordination, allowing communities to work together spontaneously without the formal sanction of laws or the heavy hand of the state (Fukuyama 1995). One measure of social trust in the WVS is the "classic" question: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" This standard measure also has several well-known limitations. It offers a simple dichotomy, whereas most modern survey items today present more subtle continuous scales. The double negative in the latter half of the question may be confusing to respondents. No social context is presented to respondents, nor can they distinguish between different categories, such as relative levels of trust in friends, colleagues, family, strangers, or compatriots. Nevertheless this item has become accepted as the standard indicator of social or interpersonal trust, having been used in the Civic Culture Surveys and the American General Social Survey since the early 1970s, so it will be employed here to replicate previous studies. Given its shortcomings, however, alternative scaled indices of social trust in the WVS were also tested, including trust in people from other countries and from other religions, as well as whether "most people would try to take advantage of you" or whether they would "try to be fair." The measures of civic attitudes used for analysis include the expression of political interest, confidence in major political institutions (such as government, parties, parliament, and the civil service), democratic aspirations, and satisfaction with the performance of democracy (see Norris 2010). Measures of political behavior include voting turnout, the least demanding conventional form of political participation, and having engaged in political protest (the latter gauged as a composite index using the measures developed in the Political Action surveys, concerning signing a petition, supporting a consumer boycott, attending a lawful demonstration, and joining an unofficial strike).

Table 15.3 summarizes the relationship between religious participation and this range of indicators, after multivariate regression analysis controls for the same macro and micro-level factors used in the earlier models. The pattern is fairly consistent. We find that in Europe *and* the United States, *religious participation is positively associated with significantly slightly higher than average levels of civic attitudes and behaviors*, including political interest, institutional confidence, satisfaction with the performance of democracy, and voting turnout. For example, in the United States and Western Europe, among those who attend religious services less than one a week, 70 % report voting, compared with 84 % of those who attend weekly. In these regards, these results lend further confirmation to theories of social capital.

At the same time, when it comes to comparing the effect of religious participation on social trust, the findings consistently differ for the United States and Europe: religious participation slightly strengthens social trust in America but it weakens trust in Europe. This is true whether comparing the dichotomous "classic" measure of social trust or the alternatives indicators which are available concerning trust in

Table 15.3 The effects of religious participation on civic attitudes and political activism

	Europe			United States		
	B	s.e.	Sig	*B*	s.e.	Sig
Social attitudes						
Social trust	–0.006	0.002	**	0.002	0.005	***
Trust others	–0.065	0.010	***	0.050	0.014	***
"People fair" trust scale	–0.038	0.010	**	0.084	0.021	***
Social tolerance scale	–0.044	0.008	***	–0.085	0.013	***
Political orientations						
Political interest	0.016	0.004	***	0.027	0.009	**
Institutional confidence	0.426	0.057	***	0.342	0.110	**
Democratic aspirations	0.378	0.086	***	0.105	0.193	N/s
Democratic satisfaction	0.637	0.097	***	10.160	0.277	***
Voted	0.119	0.010	***	0.102	0.025	**
Have engaged in protest politics	–0.049	0.008	***	0.001	0.015	N/s

Source: World Values Survey 3rd and 5th waves

Notes: The models with dichotomous dependent variables (trust and voting) use binary logistic regression, while those variables measured with continuous scales use ordinary least squares regression. For details of the variables contained in the models, see Table 15.1. The models control for the historical experience of liberal democracy in each society, as well as for the effects of age, gender, education, and income at individual level (with the results of the control variables not presented here)

Religious participation: Q185 "*Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week, once a week, once a month, only on special holy days, once a year, less often, never or practically never*"

Social trust: V25. "*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted (1) or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (0)*"

Political interest: V133. "*How interested would you say you are in politics?*" (% "Very"/"somewhat interested" (1), "Not very"/"Not at all"/"Don't know" (0))

Institutional confidence scale: Confidence in parliament, the national government, parties, the civil service, the courts, the armed forces, and the police

Democratic aspirations: *V162.* "*How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is 'not at all important' and 10 means 'absolutely important' what position would you choose?*"

Democratic satisfaction: *V163:* "*And how democratically is this country being governed today? Again using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that it is 'not at all democratic' and 10 means that it is 'completely democratic,' what position would you choose?*"

foreigners and the fairness of other people. The exact reasons for the different impacts of religious behavior on trust in America and Europe remain unclear; however this raises important questions about the generalizability of findings based exclusively on American research. Equally importantly, the analysis of social tolerance is also negatively related to religious participation in both Europe and the USA, in the contrary direction to that predicted by social capital theory. Some other indicators show more minor discrepancies, including democratic aspirations (which are not statistically significant in the smaller American sample) and protest activism (which is negatively related to religious participation in Europe). Overall, therefore, Europeans and Americans who are more frequent attenders at religious services

usually display stronger political attitudes and behaviors which strengthen the cultural foundation of democracy, as social capital theory predicts, with the important exception that religious behavior is associated positively with social trust and tolerance in America but negatively in Europe.

Moreover there is an important qualification to note when interpreting the direction of causality in any of these relationships. Social capital theory suggests that *because* people interact face-to-face in church-related organizations, they learn to become more engaged in the social concerns and public affairs of their community. But it remains possible that the reverse causal process could equally well be at work—with people who are "joiners" being most likely to engage in civic activity *and* to belong to religious associations. At this point, with the available evidence we can only conclude that *regular attendance at religious services does indeed go together with civic engagement in voluntary associations, with political attitudes (with the important proviso of inconsistent results on social trust and tolerance) and democratic participation,* as social capital theory suggests—but the direction of the causal linkage is not clear and the effects are not particularly large. Again, reciprocal relationships could always underlie these patterns, although it is more difficult to construct a plausible theoretical argument to explain why civic engagement leads towards religious behavior.

15.4 Conclusions

Social capital theory has generated considerable controversy in recent years. Economists, sociologists, and political scientists have debated the central claims that just as the investment of economic capital is productive for manufacturing goods and services, so social capital encourages the production of private and public goods. The American literature has emphasized the function of religious institutions in the generation of social capital, in particular that mainline Protestant churches play a vital role in drawing together diverse groups of Americans within local communities, encouraging into face-to-face contact, social ties, and organizational networks that, in turn, generate interpersonal trust and collaboration over public affairs. The theory suggests that people who pray together often also stay together to work on local matters, thereby strengthening grassroots communities.

The comparative evidence we have examined here extends the analysis from America to diverse societies in Europe. The results confirm many (but not all) of this theory's core propositions—firstly, that religious participation (as measured by the frequency of attending worship services) is positively linked with membership in closely related religious organizations. Secondly, attendance at religious services is also positively linked with belonging to a range of nonreligious voluntary organizations and community associations. Finally, we also found that attendance at religious services was significantly associated with many (although not all) indicators of civic engagement, including political attitudes and political behavior. The

available database is inadequate to determine the causality in these associations, which requires panel surveys or other research designs. Rather than a one-way process, the more conservative interpretation is that mutually reinforcing reciprocal causation is probably underlying these relationships, whereby "joiners" who are active in local sports clubs, arts associations, and youth work, as well as having a positive sense of political and social trust, are also more active within religious communities. But the implications are that despite the marked contrasts in both religiosity and civic engagement in the United States and Europe, as well as major contrasts within Europe, in fact fairly consistent and similar patterns can be observed. Attendance at religious services is usually far less common in most contemporary European societies than is found among our American cousins, but in fact the main impact of religious practices on civic engagement (although not social trust) is remarkably similar.

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