

# Partisan Pastor: The Politics of 130,000 American Religious Leaders

Eitan D. Hersh\* and Gabrielle Malina†

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## Abstract

Pastors are important civic leaders within their churches and communities. Several studies have demonstrated that the cues pastors send from the pulpit affect congregants' political attitudes. However, we know little about pastors' own political worldviews, which will shape the content and ideology of the messages transmitted to congregants. In this paper, we employ a novel methodology to compile a database of over 130,000 American clergy across forty religious denominations. These data provide us with a sweeping view of the political attitudes of American clergy. Using CCES data, we compare pastors' partisanship to congregants' political affiliation and policy views. The results demonstrate that pastors' denominational affiliation is much more informative of their partisanship than for congregants. These results provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between clergy's political orientations and those of the individuals they lead.

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\*Eitan D. Hersh is Associate Professor of Political Science, Tufts University, 108 Packard Hall, Medford MA, 02155, 617-627-2043, eitan.hersh@tufts.edu.

†Gabrielle Malina is doctoral candidate in government, Harvard University, 1737 Cambridge Street, Cambridge MA, 02138.

# 1 Introduction

Attitudes and behaviors of ordinary Americans are affected by “elite influencers.” Among these influencers are not only politicians and media personalities, but also local leaders to whom citizens turn for moral and political guidance. One industry in the U.S. incorporates moral leadership into its professional duties more than any other: congregational religious leaders. In spite of a decline in religious attendance and affiliation in recent years, it is still the case that millions of Americans attend weekly church services.<sup>1</sup> At these services, and in pastoral duties throughout the week, congregational leaders probably have more opportunity than any other group of professionals in the U.S. to set political agendas, mobilize action, and influence opinion. Moreover, when religious communities make consequential political decisions - for example whether to provide sanctuary to undocumented immigrants - it is largely up to the clergy to decide how to act.

Prior research has acknowledged the power of religious leaders as influencers and as mobilizers, but studying this population has presented a challenge. Pastors compose too small a share of the population to show up in meaningful numbers in nationally representative surveys. Studying pastors has generally meant partnering with one or two denominations who share lists for surveys (Bjarnason and Welch 2004; Smith 2005; Kellstedt and Green 2003), relying on qualitative evidence (Brewer, Kersh and Petersen 2003), or focusing on specific geographic areas (Olson 2000).<sup>2</sup>

In this research, a new methodological approach allows us to assess religious leaders in a new light. Most denominations in the U.S. have find-a-church websites where anyone can look up information about churches in their area. We scraped forty denominations’ websites

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<sup>1</sup>The exact percentage of Americans who attend weekly services is difficult to estimate because of mis-reporting. Chaves (2011) suggests attendance might be 20-25% of Americans. See also: <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/attendance-at-religious-services/>

<sup>2</sup>One exception is the Cooperative Clergy Study (Smidt 2003), which surveyed clergy from 21 Jewish and Christian denominations with a total sample size of 8,933.

to compose a list of 186,000 Christian and Jewish pastors.<sup>3</sup> We then utilized the name of the pastor and the location of their congregation to find 130,000 of these individuals in public voter registration records. To our knowledge, this is the largest compilation of religious leaders ever assembled. Our effort follows recent work in assembling publicly accessible data sources to study politically-impinged industries like medicine (Hersh and Goldenberg 2016) and law (Bonica, Chilton and Sen 2016).

Using these data, we are able to examine the ways that political behaviors like party affiliation and voter turnout vary across and within denomination and along a variety of demographic characteristics. Furthermore, since public opinion surveys like the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) ask detailed questions about religious affiliation, we can compare political traits of pastors with congregants within their denominations and geographic areas.

This new dataset not only allows us to describe in detail the political leanings of this important class of professionals, but it also allows us to weigh in on a key question about the relationship between pastors and congregants. Specifically, we investigate the extent to which a pastor's and a congregant's religious *denomination* is informative of their party affiliation. Past literature suggests that a pastor's denominational affiliation may be closely tied with their theological, and in turn their political, orientation (Guth 1997). However, when it comes to the mass public, Putnam and Campbell (2012) recently show that "religious devotion has largely replaced religious denomination as a salient political dividing line (35)." In general, more religiously engaged individuals are Republican and unaffiliated individuals are Democratic, but among the engaged, denominational differences are less apparent than they once were. Denominational differences may be limited in the mass public in part because individuals are now intermarrying and switching denominations from how they were raised

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<sup>3</sup>Throughout this essay, we use the term 'pastor' or 'clergy' as catch-all for priests, rabbis, reverends, and all other professional religious congregational leaders.

much more than in past generations. One's choice of church today might be less a decision about faith and theology than about marriage, social relations, and geography.

With detailed data on pastors within all of the major denominations, we expect to find that a denomination is much more informative of a pastor's political affiliation than a congregant's. The causal process that may have led denomination to bear a weaker relationship to politics in the mass public is unlikely to apply to pastors. After all, pastors are religious elites who represent specific denominations and their associated theological worldviews. In weekly sermons, pastors translate the connection between theological teachings and real world social and political issues for their congregants. From such a position of spiritual and moral leadership, pastors can shape the political agendas of congregants, as well as advocate specific issue positions that likely hold greater weight than positions taken by other political or social elites. In sum, a pastor's moral position is a powerful one, shaped by her *theological* orientation, and tightly linked to her *ideological* orientation (Guth 1997). Thus, even if congregants are not sorting into denominations for reasons closely tied to politics, the messages and agenda that they are hearing in church are nevertheless likely to be informed by their pastor's political worldview. That worldview, we posit, is tightly linked to the pastor's denomination.

## 2 Denominational Politics for Pastors and Congregants

Our interest in the politics of pastors rests on the assumption that pastors have influence over a substantial share of the American public. Prior work supports this assumption, demonstrating that pastors are aware of their power as moral, spiritual, and political leaders and that this power has real consequences both for congregants' political attitudes as well as their connections with local government officials (Beatty and Walter 1989; Djupe and Gilbert 2001; Guth 1997; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Olson 2000). Further, pastors have,

historically and contemporaneously, played an instrumental role in mobilizing black and liberal Protestant churches on issues of civil rights and evangelical churches on issues like abortion and gay marriage.

Pastors can influence their congregants through overt political messages in sermons from the pulpit, but this is unlikely to be the primary way they guide congregants politically (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Putnam and Campbell 2012). Clergy can implicitly or indirectly shape attitudes through cue-giving and agenda-setting (Brewer, Kersh and Petersen 2003; Crawford and Olson 2001; Guth 1997; Smidt 2016; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; McCombs and Shaw 1972). In his study of the political influence of Catholic priests, Smith (2005) suggests that clergy act much like political elites in their ability to prime and frame certain issues and control the agenda by discussing church teachings related to specific social and political issues. These political signals sent from the pulpit then spread through congregations, and are reinforced through congregants' discussions with one another. Several studies have illuminated the way political messages are transmitted among congregants through informal conversations and socializing, church bulletins, and small-group meetings. (Djupe and Gilbert 2006; Smidt 2016).

Because pastors have the ability to significantly influence the political attitudes of their congregations, it is important to understand the factors that influence clergy's own political attitudes and behaviors. The relationship between pastors and congregants in many ways looks similar to a standard model of political representation between politicians and constituents. Pastors both lead their congregants and are constrained by them. In different communities, a pastor's agenda may operate under more of a delegate model or more of a trustee model of representation. After all, in some denominations, pastors are hired by their congregations and may be more constrained in their political leadership. In other denominations, pastors are assigned by central leaders and may have more freedom to lead as they see fit. Whether a pastor is placed in a congregation by the denominational authority (like in

the Catholic Church) or is hired by local denominations (like in the Southern Baptist Convention), he or she is a representative of the denomination, much like a member of Congress is a representative of the party. Just as a party and its partisans adhere to certain ideological tenets, a denomination has specific theological and eschatological commitments that should shape its clergy's religious and political beliefs.

Indeed, prior research leads us to believe that denomination is a key to understanding how pastors lead and represent their religious communities. Beatty and Walter (1989) hypothesize that denominations develop their own norms and cues regarding clergy political involvement, and that clergy act as "gate-keepers" to the political world, communicating the connection between religion and politics to their congregations. As denominational leaders, therefore, clergy should communicate the political orientations associated with their denomination's theology and doctrine. Indeed, Beatty and Walter demonstrate that both general theological liberalism and conservatism are strongly related to clergy's political ideology, and that ministers' doctrinal orthodoxy is positively associated with conservatism. Further, they demonstrate significant differences in the type and levels of political involvement across denominations, lending credence to the hypothesis of group-specific norms regarding political behavior of clergy and congruence between orthodoxy and political orientations.

Black Protestant denominations, in particular, illustrate the importance of denomination for clergy political attitudes and behavior. Black Protestant theology differs from that of white mainline or evangelical theology, emphasizing communalism and collective salvation (Dawson 1994). Speakes-Lewis, Gill and Moses (2011) describe the connection between theology and political activity, suggesting that liberation theology and the Social Gospel underpinned the political leadership of African American ministers throughout the Civil Rights movement. Throughout the 60s and 70s, African American and mainline Protestant clergy were routinely involved in the political struggle over desegregation and universal franchise (Hadden 1969; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Nelsen, Yokley and Madron 1973), as well as the

resistance to the Vietnam War. In the early twentieth century, evangelical Protestant leaders played an active role in the Prohibition movement as well as debates over teaching evolution (Beatty and Walter 1989). More recently, scholars have posited that the rise of the Religious Right and the emerging consensus among conservative Christian leaders regarding the need for a national moral redirect has spurred orthodox clergy to assume a more political role (Guth 1997).

While a denomination is likely to proxy for a certain set of core theological and even political beliefs of pastors, it may be a weaker proxy for congregants. Research dating back two or three decades found denominational affiliation is correlated with political ideology (Layman and Carmines 1997; Kellstedt, Smidt and Kellstedt 1988; Wilcox 1990); however, more recent work by Putnam and Campbell (2012) demonstrates that the main religious cleavage no longer falls between denominations, but instead between religious individuals and those who claim no religious affiliation, or the “religious nones.” More religious individuals are typically Republican, no matter their denomination, while those with no religious affiliation are overwhelmingly Democratic. In the 2016 election, those who attended services at least weekly voted for Trump 56-40% compared to never-attenders who voted for Clinton 62-31%.<sup>4</sup>

While religious attendees lean Republican, those who attend churches in different traditions might receive quite a different message and agenda from their pastor depending on the denomination. Indeed, a recent Pew survey found significant differences across faith traditions in the types of political and social issues clergy discussed from the pulpit. Specifically, 49% of evangelical Protestants reported hearing their clergy discuss the need to protect religious liberties in recent months, compared to 30% of mainline Protestants. Nearly twice as many mainline Protestants reported hearing their clergy encourage acceptance of gays and

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<sup>4</sup>Gregory A. Smith and Jessica Martinez, “How the faithful voted: A preliminary 2016 analysis,” Pew Research Center, 9 November, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>

lesbians, while 30% of evangelical Protestants heard their clergy speak out against homosexuality.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while denomination might not be highly predictive of congregants' partisanship after accounting for traits like demographics and location, we suspect that denomination will more powerfully predict the party affiliation of a pastor. Of course, without a detailed assessment of pastors, we cannot assess with certainty whether the political messages conveyed to congregants vary substantially by denomination. However, examining how the partisanship of pastors varies by denomination will yield an important initial insight into trends in political orientations that likely guide clergy's political speech and cues.

In assessing how the relationship between politics and denomination differ between pastors and ordinary church-goers, we aim to unmask a key facet of religion and politics. In short, we anticipate that among pastors, denomination is highly informative of political leanings, while it will be less informative among congregants. This relationship is an important one; even if an ordinary church-goer selects a denomination for reasons unrelated to politics, she will likely be influenced by the political worldview of the presiding pastor.

### 3 Data

In the spring and summer of 2016, we assembled a list of denominational websites through which we could scrape directories of churches.<sup>6</sup> Most of these websites are owned by the umbrella denomination. In a few cases, third party curators (e.g. [theblackchurches.org](http://theblackchurches.org)) were used to supplement the denominational resources.

Given the highly decentralized nature of religion in the U.S., our list of denominations (see Table 3) does not cover all religious congregations, but it does cover the largest umbrella groups among Christian and Jewish affiliates. Some missing denominations, like the Church

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<sup>5</sup>Pew Research Center, "Many Americans Hear Politics from the Pulpit," August 8, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/08/08/many-americans-hear-politics-from-the-pulpit/>

<sup>6</sup>This research was approved by Yale University Institutional Review Board, Protocol Number 1606017891.



of Latter Day Saints, are missing because online directories are not made available to the general public. Other denominations, like Muslim communities, are not listed in reliable centralized directories. Based on the religious landscape assessed by the Pew Research Center, we estimate that our data collection covers at least two-thirds of all religious congregations in the US, and probably a larger share of religiously affiliated individuals (assuming the denominations included in the analysis have larger congregations on average than the smaller less centralized denominations not included.<sup>7</sup>)

Nearly all of the websites list the name, address, and other contact information for the churches. Several denominations list other useful information, such as the size of the church congregation. In most cases, the name of the pastor and other church staff members are listed in the directory. In about 4% of the cases, a pastor's home address is listed. In 0.05% of cases, a pastor's spouse is listed. In three denominations, lay leaders (e.g. congregational presidents) are also listed.

In five denominations, pastors' names were not listed in the online denominational directories in more than 90% of cases (American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, EFCA, Orthodox Jewish, and Nazarene). Several other denominations had missing pastor names for a sizeable share of the churches (AME: 31%; Black Churches: 58%; Church of Christ: 30%; Unitarian: 25%, and others with 1-15% of churches missing pastor information). For churches with missing pastor names, we hired Mechanical Turk workers to find the pastors' names. In many cases, they simply needed to click on the church's website URL (which we obtained from the directories), search for the pastor name, and enter it. In other cases, the Mechanical Turk workers conducted a web search for the church and the pastor. In total, we identified 25,000 additional pastors from listings that did not have pastor name by using Mechanical Turk.

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<sup>7</sup>Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," 2015 report, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

Table 1: Denominations in Study

Denomination	Churches	Pastors Named	Catalist Linked	Pct. IDed
AME	3,878	873	398	46
Adventist	5,425	5,330	2,700	51
American Baptist	4,959	3,407	1,737	51
Assemblies of God	12,703	12,042	9,904	82
Baptist General	1,423	1,371	1,015	74
Black Churches	2,533	1,954	1,130	58
Brethren	113	101	86	85
COG General Conf	462	462	419	91
COG Anderson	2,063	1,769	1,380	78
Catholic	18,435	16,439	10,783	66
Church of Christ	12,853	2,859	1,570	55
Church of God	5,957	5,347	4,127	77
Disciples of Christ	3,262	2,156	1,334	62
EFCA	1,561	1,339	990	74
ELCA	10,886	9,310	7,530	81
Episcopal	6,826	6,105	3,660	60
The Evang. Church	124	124	94	76
Foursquare	3,842	3,813	2,896	76
Fundamentalist Baptist	4,875	4,803	2,714	57
Greek Orthodox	664	618	311	50
Independent Baptist	7,846	7,249	5,016	69
Jewish, Conservative	530	527	436	83
Jewish, Orthodox	718	601	326	54
Jewish, Reform	1,446	1,445	972	67
Missouri Synod	7,182	6,238	5,218	84
Methodist	32,507	31,395	21,937	70
Nazarene	4,995	3,414	2,345	69
OCA	576	576	249	43
PCA	1,837	1,752	1,466	84
Pentecostal (PCG)	783	33	26	79
Pentecostal (UPCI)	4,416	4,285	3,134	73
Presbyterian	13,454	9,918	7,782	78
CRCNA	953	871	681	78
Reformed Presbyterian	265	238	150	63
Southern Baptist	51,944	24,113	16,392	68
UCC	5,138	4,535	3,240	71
Unitarian	1,412	1,272	724	57
Wisconsin Lutheran	1,207	1,143	996	87
Totals	240,053	179,827	125,868	71 (Med)

Note: In addition to denominations listed here, we also attempted to link COGIC churches and churches endorsed by Joel Olsteen. Both sets of records fail to match to the Catalist file. In addition, we exclude a database of Baptist World Alliance Churches, which only had 12 pastors' names available.

The first two columns of data in Table 3 lists the number of churches per denomination and the number of pastors' names we identified by denomination. In addition to the data listed in Table 3, we also collected names of 2,967 faculty associated with 144 seminaries in addition to lay leaders listed in a few directories.

After creating this dataset, we linked the name of the pastor and associated address to the voter file supplied by Catalist. We asked Catalist to send us plausible matches on name that lived in a commuting distance to the church address. (For the small number of records that listed pastors' with their home address, we utilized home address). In 44% of cases, there was exactly one plausible match between a pastor and a voter registration address. These are individuals with unique names within their geographic area. We took a series of steps to identify matches among pastors who matched to multiple voter file records. If a pastor linked to two potential voter file records but only one of these records matches the pastor exactly on first and last name, we counted that as a match. If the pastor's name contained a middle name or a suffix (e.g. Jr.) and only one of the potential voter file records contained that value, we counted that as a match. If a pastor linked to a record of a current registered voter and a record of someone who used to be a registered voter or is unlisted, we counted the registrant as a match, since this is likely to be the more up-to-date record.

Finally, we consider spatial distance from the church location. In some denominations, pastors live on the church property or very close by. For instance, because of the prohibition of driving on the Sabbath, all Orthodox Jewish congregational rabbis live in walking-distance of the synagogue location. For each denomination, we calculated the median distance between the registration address of unique matches to the church location. For the multiple matches, if only one match is closer than the median distance for that denomination, we counted it as a unique match.

This procedure resulted in a match rate of 70% to a unique Catalist record and a 63% match rate to a current registered voter. This is very similar to the match rate found using a

similar methodology in Hersh (2013); Hersh and Goldenberg (2016). The match rate is quite close to the national registration rate of 71%.<sup>8</sup> Some individuals do not match here because they are unregistered. Others would not match because, perhaps on account of a common name, they match to multiple records. The method generates very low rates of false positive matches (Hersh and Goldenberg 2016).

The final column in Table 3 shows the percent of all pastors for whom we sought voter file records who matched to a unique record. The median denomination had a match rate of 70%, but there is variation by denomination. This variation is likely attributable to the quality of the data in the original denominational directories. Some directories may be more up-to-date than others or contain more information (like middle names) than others. The variation is also possibly attributable to the fact that different religious traditions might use different naming conventions. Denominations that use common names may fail to match to unique records at higher rates.

Most pastors in our matched dataset (91.4%) are the sole pastors at their church. Six percent of pastors have a single co-pastor in the dataset at the same church location, 1.7% have two co-pastors, 0.8% have three co-pastors and 0.07% have between 4-9 co-pastors. We include all matched pastors in our study, even those who are part of a team of leaders at their church.

In a small number of cases (less than 2%), a single pastor at a single church location is listed under multiple denominations. Of the 2,151 records that have such a duplicate, 70% are duplicates of Fundamentalist Baptists and Independent Baptists. Another 5% represent overlaps between Southern Baptists and one of these first two groups of Baptists. Particularly for Independent and Fundamentalist Baptists, such duplicates are expected; while we identified separate directories for these two denominations, they are typically considered as

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<sup>8</sup>US Census Bureau (2012) Reported voting and registration, by sex and single years of age, November 2012. Voting and Registration. Available at [www.census.gov/hhes/](http://www.census.gov/hhes/)

one in the same. Apart from these Baptist denominations, there seem to be a small number of church communities that perhaps have merged into single institutions, but fall under two different umbrella denominations. For all of these instances, we retain the duplicative records to maintain a comprehensive list by denomination. That is, if a pastor is listed in our database twice, once as a Southern Baptist pastor and once as a Fundamentalist Baptist pastor, we include his record for both denominations. In some analysis below, however, we combine these three Baptist denominations and note our decision to do so.

The key variables utilized in our study come from the Catalist voter file and typically originate in public voter registration records. We utilize party affiliation in the 29 states where registrants are asked to register with a party. We also utilize age and gender, available in voter files and consumer data.

To study the mass public, we utilize pooled 2012 and 2014 CCES surveys, which ask detailed questions about denominational affiliation. We utilize self-reported party registration. We also use a variety of self-reported demographic characteristics available on the CCES surveys.

Party affiliation is a simple proxy for a pastor and congregant's political attitudes, but it is a powerful one. In recent years, about 90% of partisans vote for their party's candidates for nearly all offices. Partisanship is also a strong predictor of issue positions. For example, in the CCES, 74% of Democrats support abortion rights whereas 29% of Republicans do. Similarly, 82% of Democrats believe action should be taken to halt climate change, compared to only 25% percent of Republicans. In this research we assume that a pastor's party affiliation is broadly indicative of the issues and candidates they support. This is, of course, an assumption, and it is possible that pastors differ from the rest of the public in that their party is less informative of their general political worldview. However, given existing evidence of a tight link between theology and political ideology among pastors, as discussed above, and the fact that political elites are more likely to hold ideologically consistent attitudes,

we feel confident in our assumption that pastors' partisanship is highly informative of their political attitudes.

## 4 The Partisanship of Pastors

In Figure 1, we focus just on pastors who live in 29 party registration states.<sup>9</sup> In these states, voters can choose to register as Democratic, Republican, or independent. This designation becomes a public record. In the figure, we calculate the percentage of pastors who are Democratic, Republican, and no party affiliation. This third category includes a very small set of pastors (1.4%) who are listed with a third-party registration.

The diversity in partisanship among religious pastors is not unexpected, but it is dramatic. Denominations like Reform and Conservative Jews, Black churches, and Unitarian-Universalists are nearly entirely Democratic. Pastors associated with Fundamentalist Baptist churches, Independent Baptist Churches, the Evangelical Church network, Brethren churches and others are nearly all Republican. Seventh Day Adventists, the Orthodox Church of America (OCA) and Greek Orthodox churches stand out in that close to half of the pastors in these denominations are registered without a party.

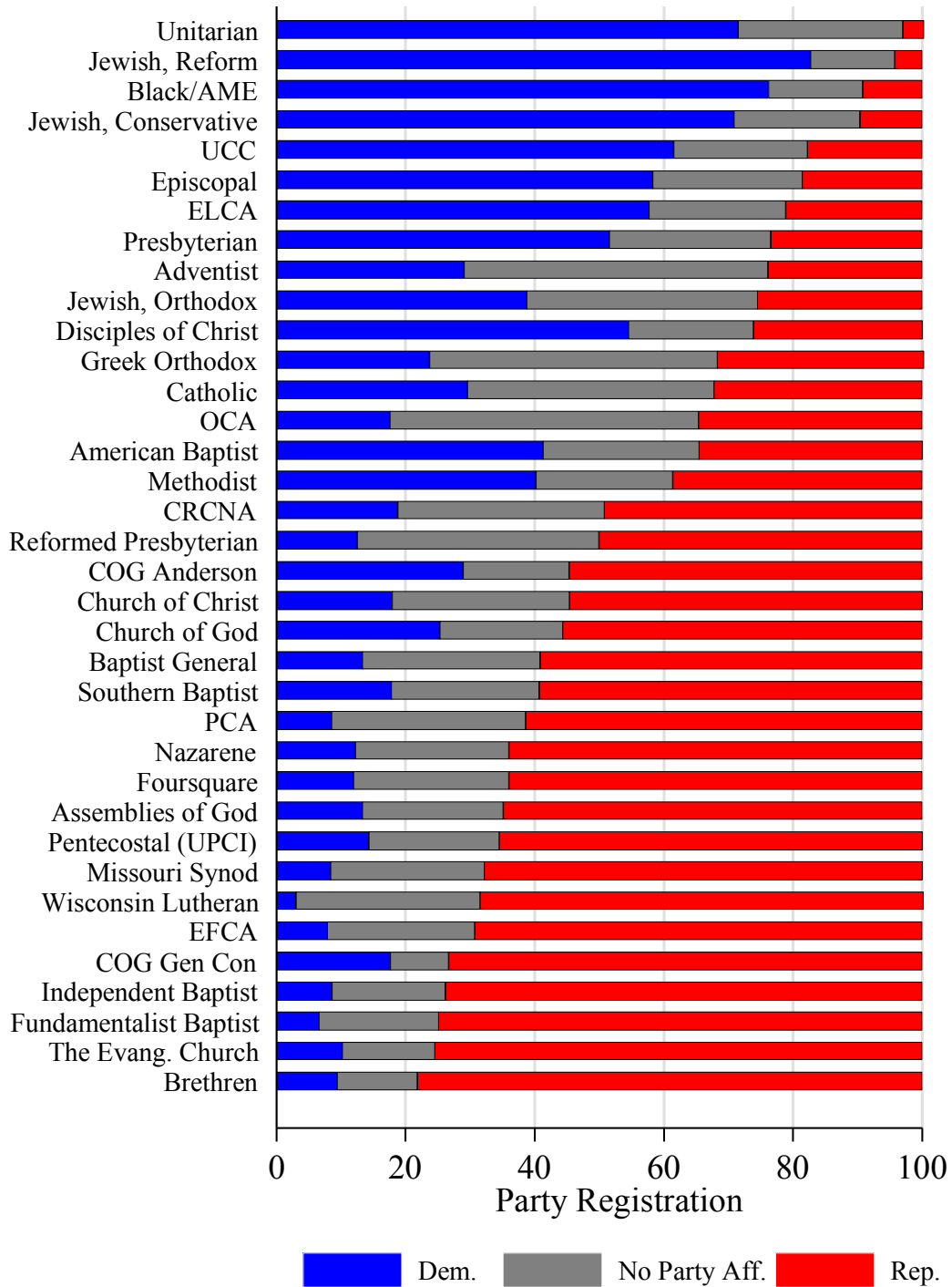
The Democratic denominations also show other signs of liberalism, which aren't particularly surprising. For instance, whereas Republican denominations tend to be entirely staffed by male pastors, the most Democratic of the denominations are 20-60% female. In fact, the two denominations at the top of Figure 1 have the greatest share of female pastors, with 45% of Reform Jewish rabbis and 57% of unitarian ministers listed as female. Overall in the population of pastors, only 16% are female.

As discussed above, our assumption is that partisanship is a useful proxy for understanding a pastor's - and even a church's - general views on political issues. Our data on

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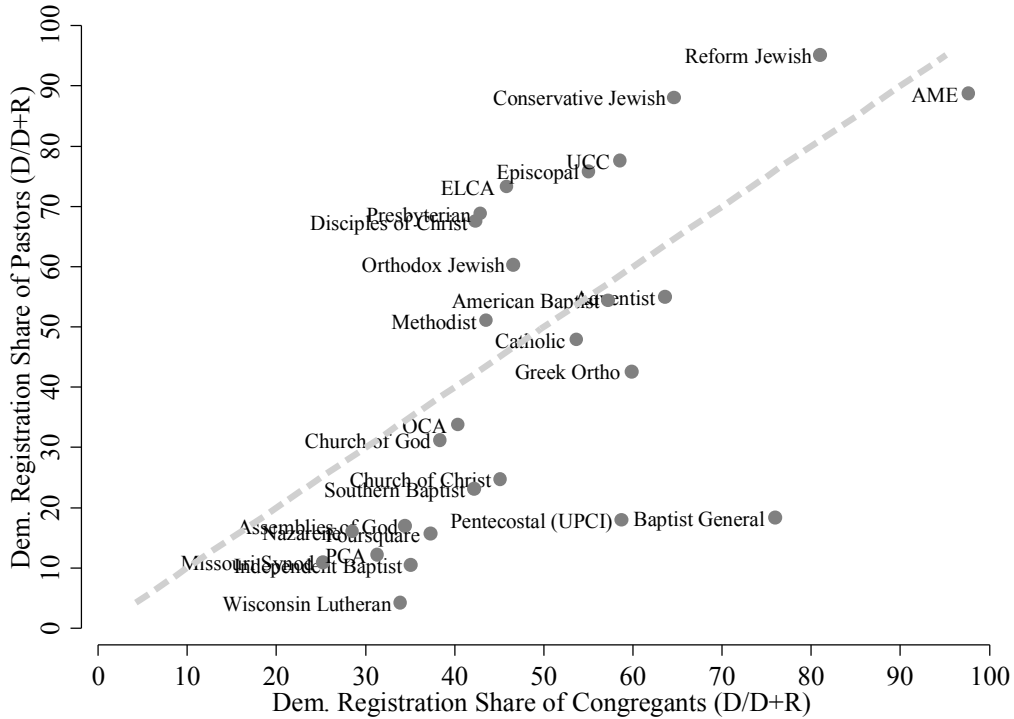
<sup>9</sup>Party registration states are quite representative of the country as a whole (Hersh 2015).

Figure 1: Party affiliation by Religious Denomination in Party Registration States



United Church of Christ provides an interesting metric of churches' political views. Some UCC churches (31%, N= 1,932) are listed in their directory as Open and Affirming, which

Figure 2: Party affiliation of Pastors vs. Adherents in the Mass Public



Note: Forty-five degree line indicates equal share of partisans among congregants and pastors.

means they are welcoming to LGBT congregants. Democratic pastors are four times more likely to be working at an Open and Affirming Church compared to Republicans (38% vs. 9%). Of course, this may be because the church community is liberal and hired a liberal pastor to reflect its views or because of a pastor imposing Democratic-aligned views on the congregation. Either way, partisanship is highly correlated with this religiously sensitive and politically sensitive policy issue, which is indicative of the political climate of these churches.

In the next figure, we compare our data on pastors’ partisanship with data on the partisanship of the mass public. Figure 2 plots the Democratic share of pastors registered either Democratic or Republican against the Democratic share of CCES respondents (2012, 2014, pooled and weighted) by denomination. To make the CCES more comparable with the pastor dataset, we focus only on CCES respondents in the same set of party registration



states. We include all denominations for which we have at least twenty party-identifying respondents in the CCES.

Figure 2 first illustrates that there is a clear relationship between partisanship of pastors and partisanship of congregants for denominations. In denominations that lean Republican, the pastors are Republican; in denominations that lean Democratic, the pastors are Democratic. The biggest exceptions to this pattern are the Pentecostal denomination and Baptist General Conference, where the church members are quite Democratic but the pastors are quite Republican.<sup>10</sup>

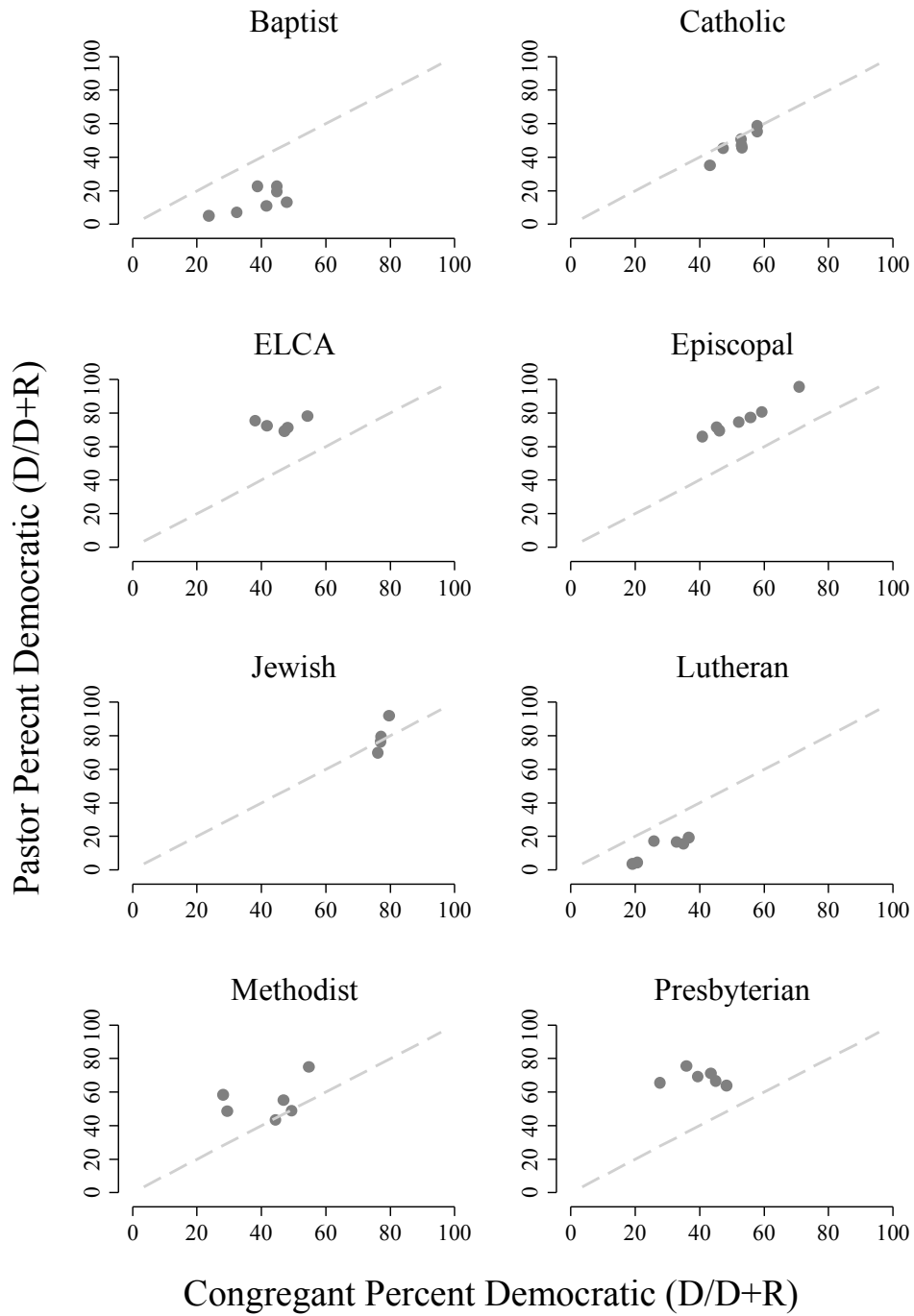
Secondly, pastors are also clearly more one-sidedly partisan by denomination compared to the mass public. That is, in the more liberal denominations, where about half of the partisans are Democrats, 60-80% of the pastors are Democratic. For example, in ELCA churches, 46% of the members are Democratic while 73% of the pastors are registered Democrats. In the more conservative denominations, where 20-40% of congregants are registered Democrats, pastors tend to be 0-20% Democratic. The median denomination in Figure 2 exhibits an absolute difference between pastors and congregants of 19 percentage points.

This figure summarizes partisanship by focusing on Democrats and Republicans (leaving out independents). But the one-sidedness in party affiliation among pastors compared to congregants does not appear to be related to the rates at which pastors or congregants identify as independent. Among pastors, 24% are not registered Democratic or Republican. Among CCES respondents affiliated with a denomination, 23% are not registered Democratic or Republican. What Figure 2 is showing, then, is that within any given denomination,

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<sup>10</sup>This is likely due to the fact that nearly 30% of Pentecostals in the CCES data are African American, the majority of whom identify as a Democrat, while our clergy data contains no black Pentecostal pastors. For Baptist General Conference, nearly 40% of CCES respondents are African American, while only 9% of pastors are African American. This imbalance suggests two possibilities; first, pastors may be politically out of touch with their congregants if these Pentecostal and Baptist churches are racially integrated. Alternatively, our source for black churches came from a third party provider and contained an assortment of denominations and an overall smaller number of churches than directories of other denominations. Therefore, we could be missing black Pentecostal churches in our pastor sample, leading to the apparent imbalance between congregants and their pastors in Figure 2.

Figure 3: Party affiliation of Pastors vs. Adherents in the Mass Public, by Census Division for Eight Denominations



Note: Forty-five degree line indicates equal share of partisans among congregants and pastors.

congregants will be much less homogenously partisan than pastors.

Figure 3 provides a different view on this for eight large denominations. In this figure, we combine evangelical Baptist denominations (Baptist General Conference, Fundamental-ist Baptists, Southern Baptists, and Independent Baptists), Conservative and Reform Jews (note in Figure 1 that Orthodox Jews are different in the partisan orientation from the two more liberal denominations) and the Wisconsin and Missouri Lutheran Synods; these are distinct from the mainline Lutheran denomination, ELCA. Then, we calculate the Democratic share among pastors and CCES respondents by denomination, within Census divisions. We use Census divisions (New England, Mid Atlantic, Midwest, South Atlantic, South, Mountain West, and Pacific)<sup>11</sup> to group states so that we have sizeable samples within geographic region.

Notable in Figure 3 is how the relationship between pastor party and member party varies by region. Surprisingly, there is the clearest linear and balanced partisan relationship between pastors and members among Catholic churches, where congregational leaders are assigned by the denomination rather than hired by individual congregations; however, no such relationship exists for Methodists, who also assign pastors centrally rather than locally. In the case of Catholics, which as seen in Figures 1 and 2 are evenly split between Democrats and Republicans among both priests and adherents, priests are more liberal where adherents are more liberal and they are more conservative where adherents lean conservative. A similar linear emerges with Episcopalians, who use a more decentralized hiring process; only in this case, the pastors are in all regions 20-25 percentage points more Democratic than congregants. And in the case of Lutherans (Missouri-Synod and Wisconsin Synod), the pastors track congregants linearly, but are 15-20 percentage points more Republican than the congregants.

Presbyterian pastors and mainline Lutheran (ELCA) pastors do not track members by

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<sup>11</sup>The only division not represented in party registration states is the eastern Midwest states. So our Midwest designation is focused on IA, KS, NE, and SD. We also combine the East and West central South divisions, which contain the party registration states of KY, LA, and OK.

region, and in most regions are 25-35 percentage points more Democratic. Baptist ministers also do not track members by region and are 15-30 percentage points more Republican. Jewish and Methodist leaders tend to be more liberal than the congregations, but the difference is smaller than in other denominations and does not bear such a strong relationship to geography.

To help illustrate the significance of Figure 3, consider some examples. In the three party-registration states composing the mid-Atlantic region (New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania), 59% of CCES respondents who say they are registered with a major party are registered as Democrats. Baptists, ELCA, Methodist, and and Presbyterian adherents in this region are all 40-50% Democratic. Compared to the general population of the region, that is, these denominationally affiliated individuals are considerably more Republican than the general population and are not noticeably different from one another. However, compared to 48% of Baptist members who identify as Democratic, only 13% of Baptist pastors are registered Democrats; whereas 45% of Presbyterian members are Democratic, 67% of their pastors are; whereas 42% of ELCA members are Democratic, 72% of their pastors are. Methodist pastors and members are both about 44% Democratic in the region. In other words, within a geographic region, denomination is not differentiating members but it is differentiating pastors.

Similarly, consider the southern states of Kentucky, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. In the CCES, 50% of respondents who say they are registered with a party are registered as Democratic. Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, and Episcopalian denominations have average Democratic shares between 36% and 45%. Again, the religious affiliates here are more Republican than the population at large. But, the denominations exhibit a much larger partisan range when viewing the pastors. Over 70% of Presbyterian and Episcopal pastors in these states are registered Democrats (compared to 36% and 45% of congregants). On the other extreme, 23% of Baptist pasors and 15% of Lutheran pastors are registered Democrats,

compared to 39% and 35% of congregants.

One simple way to summarize how informative denomination is of a pastor's party affiliation compared to a member of the public's is through a basic regression analysis. Consider an OLS regression where a binary variable for partisanship (1 for Democrats, 0 for Republicans) is predicted by age, gender, and race (categorical variables for Black, Hispanic, and other nonwhite), including state fixed-effects. For CCES respondents, the  $R^2$  from this model is 0.12, (N=22,141) and for pastors, the  $R^2$  is 0.16 (N=45,203). Now, if we add fixed-effects for denomination, the  $R^2$  for the mass public rises only to 0.16, but the  $R^2$  for pastors doubles to 0.33. Simply put, once accounting for age, race, gender, and state, denomination does not explain much variation in partisanship among the mass public. For pastors, however, denomination adds a good deal of explanatory power, beyond demographics and state of residence.

## 5 The Pastor-Policy Link

Having determined that pastors' partisanship is more strongly correlated with their denominational affiliation than congregants', we turn to the question of whether this trend matters. We know that pastors are more extreme partisans than congregants; will this extremity matter for congregants' views beyond their partisanship? Previous work has demonstrated that pastors' cues related to salient theological and social issues influence congregants' attitudes on these issues (Djupe and Gilbert 2001; Smith 2005). Therefore, we might expect that even within faith traditions where we see little difference between denominations in congregants' partisanship, we may see differences in congregants' opinions related to salient moral, theological, or social issues. For example, Episcopalian and Methodist congregants look relatively similar in partisanship, with 55% and 43% of congregants identifying as Democrats, respectively, but their pastors look quite different from one another; 76% of Episcopalian

pastors identify as Democrats, compared to 51% of Methodist pastors. Thus, we might expect Episcopalian and Methodist congregants to diverge in opinions related to the issues that their clergy are most likely to discuss.

To explore this possibility, we leverage policy questions from the CCES to examine how congregants' policy preferences track pastors' partisanship. Specifically, we examine whether partisan differences among pastors translate into meaningful differences in congregants' policy views across denominations. Figure 4 plots the percent of congregants (from pooled 2012 and 2014 CCES) agreeing that a woman should always be allowed to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.<sup>12</sup> Figure 5 plots the percent of congregants in favor of "allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally."

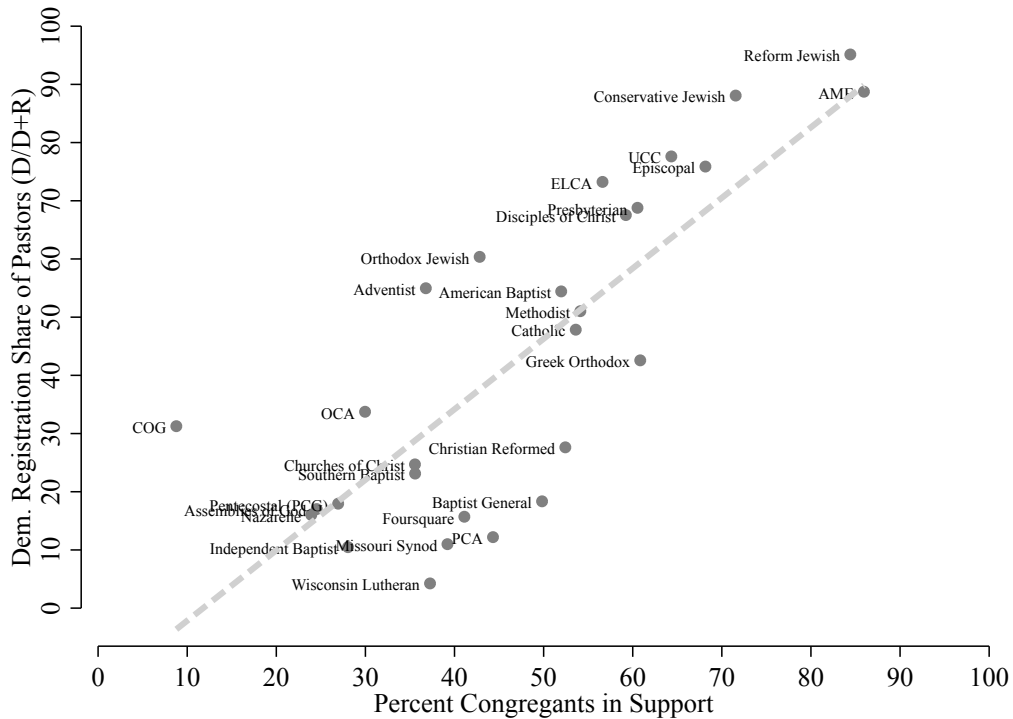
These graphs show how closely members' policy views track the partisanship of pastors. In keeping with the motivating example of differences between Episcopalians and Methodists, Figure 4 demonstrates substantial differences in congregants' policy views on the legality of abortion, which are strongly correlated with pastors' partisanship; 68% of Episcopalian congregants believe a woman should have the right to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice, compared to 54% of Methodists. Looking at Figure 5, we see the same trend holds for views about gay marriage; 71% of Episcopalian congregants believe gays and lesbians should be legally allowed to marry, compared to 51% of Methodists. Comparing these percentages, once again, to the partisanship of pastors, we see that aggregate-level pastors' partisanship is a better predictor of congregants' policy views than the aggregate-level congregant partisanship; 76% of Episcopalian pastors identify as Democratic compared to 51% of Methodist pastors.

In another test of this relationship, we run a simple OLS model, predicting denomination-level policy views of congregants as a function of congregants' partisanship and pastors'

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<sup>12</sup>Note that the question was asked as a binary "Agree/Disagree" in 2014, while in 2012 it was a categorical question with four options regarding the circumstances under which a woman should be allowed to obtain an abortion. The results for each year are virtually identical to the results from the pooled data.

Figure 4: Congregants' Abortion Views vs. Pastors' Partisanship

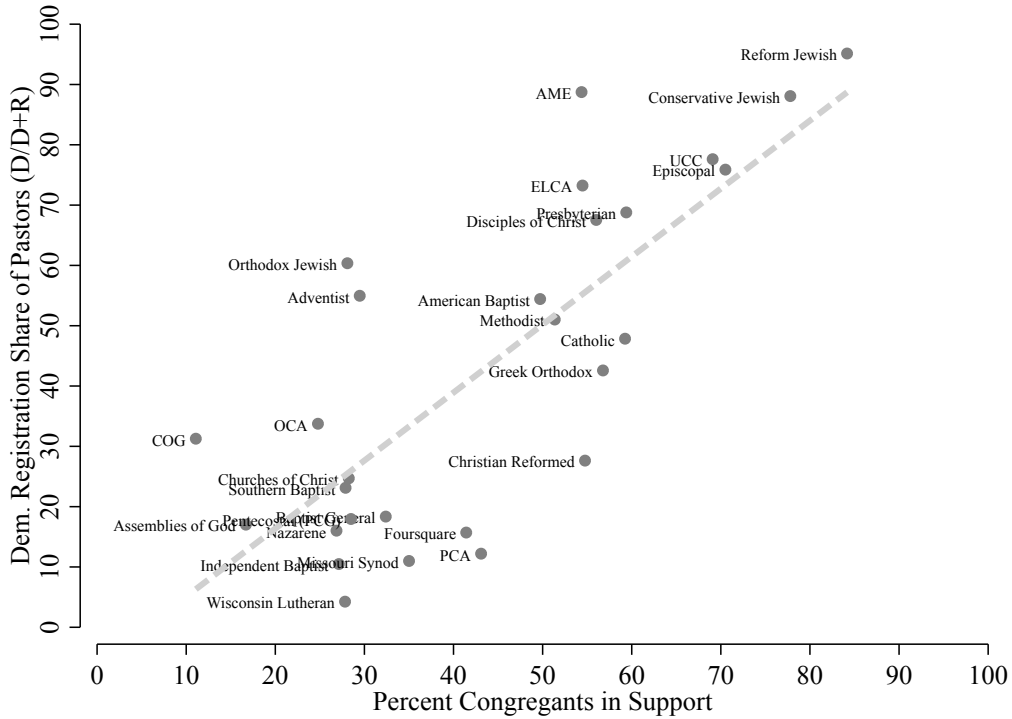


Note: Forty-five degree line indicates equal share of pastor partisanship and congregant policy support.

partisanship. The results, displayed in Table 2, demonstrate a strong effect of pastors' partisanship on congregants' policy views on both abortion and gay marriage. The bivariate model (Column 1) of congregants' policy views on abortion regressed on *pastors'* partisanship produces an  $R^2$  of .66, while a bivariate model (Column 2) on *congregants'* partisanship produces a much smaller  $R^2$  of .39. The multivariate model (Column 3) demonstrates that pastors' partisanship remains a significant predictor of congregants' policy views on abortion once controlling for congregants' partisanship, producing an  $R^2$  almost identical to that of the bivariate model of pastors' partisanship. The results for gay marriage are substantively identical. In sum, once taking into account pastors' partisanship, knowing congregants' partisanship explains little variation in congregants' policy views.

Knowing pastors' partisanship informs us of congregants policy views related to issues of

Figure 5: Congregants' View of Gay Marriage vs. Pastors' Partisanship



Note: Forty-five degree line indicates equal share of pastor partisanship and congregant policy support.

theological and moral importance. These findings have ramifications for our understanding of the influence of clergy's cues related to certain policy issues. While the causal direction of this association is outside of the scope of this paper, we can imagine the arrow running in either direction; congregants may not sort into denominations and into churches because of partisanship *per se*, but they sort for reasons closely related to salient religious, moral, and social issues. In this case, clergy's cues would serve to reinforce congregants' opinions rather than change them. However, we can imagine another story, wherein congregants sort into denominations for reasons unrelated to these issues such that their views may be incongruent with those of their clergy. Thus, clergy may sway congregants' opinions on these issues when they send cues and advocate issue positions that differ from the views held by their members. Of course, as with most of political behavior, the relationship is likely



Table 2: Regression of Policy Views on Pastors' and Congregants' Partisanship

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Abortion	Abortion	Abortion	Gay Marriage	Gay Marriage	Gay Marriage
Pastor % Dem.	0.59 (0.08)	– –	0.50 (0.13)	0.54 (0.08)	– –	0.53 (0.11)
Cong. % Dem	– –	0.72 (0.14)	0.22 (0.16)	– –	0.58 (0.17)	0.05 (0.17)
Constant	22.33 (4.13)	11.47 (8.87)	15.25 (6.62)	20.91 (4.18)	15.45 (9.13)	19.45 (76.91)
$R^2$	0.66	0.39	0.69	0.61	0.27	0.61
N	30	30	30	30	30	30

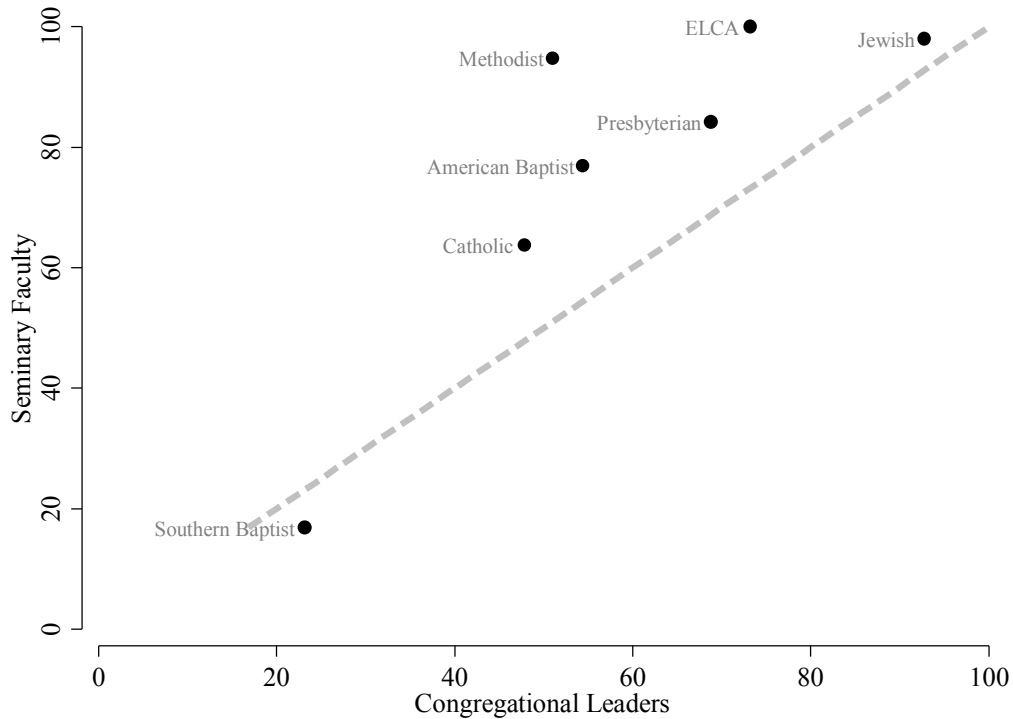
complex, with influence flowing in both directions.

## 5.1 Why do denominations signal partisanship for pastors?

Pastors are more one-sided in the partisanship than congregants. As stated above, the literature on pastoral leadership would predict a strongly positive relationship between political views and denominational affiliation (Guth 1997; Beatty and Walter 1989). Of course, while an ordinary congregant might affiliate with a particular denomination for reasons related to upbringing, location of churches, and social connections, a pastor is likely to have been more deliberate. The denomination, and its theological perspective, may provide a pastor with a set of values tied more directly to his or her party's politics. Perhaps in their training, pastors draw a clear connection between their religious values and political values.

To get a sense of the politics of clergy training, we composed a list of about 3,000 seminary faculty from 144 different seminaries. Focusing just on those who matched to a Democratic or Republican registered voter in a party registration state, we learn that 67% of the seminary faculty are Democrats (N= 604) compared to 42% of congregational pastors. In Figure 6, we focus on seven denominations where our dataset contains at least 20 seminary professors who are registered as Democrats or Republicans. We again combine Reform and Conservative

Figure 6: Party affiliation of Pastors vs. Seminary Faculty



Note: Forty-five degree line indicates equal share of pastors and seminary faculty.

Jewish denominations.

Whereas pastors tend to be more politically one-sided than congregants, seminary faculty are even more one-sided than pastors. In Figure 2, we learned that even though Southern Baptist adherents are about 60% Republican, their pastors are 77% Republican. Here we see that Southern Baptist seminary faculty are 83% Republican. The heavily Democratic denominations are even more extreme; Methodist congregants are only about 45% Democratic, while clergy are 51% Democratic and the seminary faculty are 95% Democratic. Seminary faculty training clergy in ELCA and Jewish denominations are 98-100% Democratic.

On the one hand, it is not surprising that seminaries, like other institutions of higher learning, are heavily Democratic. Even denominations like Catholics and Methodists, wherein pastors and congregants exhibit similar rates of Democratic affiliation, seminary faculty are

overwhelmingly Democratic. Therefore, the partisan disconnect between the teachers of pastors, the pastors themselves, and the congregants in the pews is extreme. Congregational pastors are learning in settings that are overwhelmingly one-sided, they themselves are predominantly one sided, but they lead religious communities that are much more politically diverse. The disconnect is more important in this context than in other industries because ideology, moral values, and political priorities are inextricably tied to a pastor's work and pastors are seen as leaders on these issues.

We are not able to claim that pastors are more politically one-sided than their denominations' members *because* of their training, although that might be part of the story. The available data does not inform us of why the pastors differ so much from the congregants on this dimension. We suspect, however, that pastors are able to draw (or are interested in drawing) more uniform connections between their theological worldview and a political affiliation compared to congregants. A religious denomination is likely a smaller part of the identity of a congregant than a member of the clergy; therefore, it weighs less heavily in the minds of congregants than pastors when connecting theology and partisanship. Such a mechanism would make sense in the context of existing political science work that demonstrates political elites and politically sophisticated individuals are more likely to maintain consistent ideological beliefs compared to the mass public (Converse 1964).

## 6 Discussion

Very few people who attend church (fewer than 20%) say that they chose their congregation for its political or social views (Putnam and Campbell 2012). More than twice as many claim that the style of worship or the preferences of their spouse were important to their decision. Such statistics suggest that the political climate of a church is likely to matter less to people when choosing a congregation than other factors. Our results bolster

and bear out this trend; one does not see much of a difference between the partisanship of Baptists, Methodists, or Episcopalians, once controlling for demographics and geography. In other words, Catholics in Florida do not look too dissimilar, politically, from other denominational affiliates in Florida.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude from data on the mass public that denomination is not an important signal of a church's orientation. Our data on pastors' political affiliations provide unmistakable support for the hypothesis that denomination is a powerful proxy for the partisanship of pastors. Both within and between faith traditions, American clergy are significantly diverse in their political affiliations, suggesting that different religious denominations have profoundly different orientations toward politics; such differences are likely due to theological traditions and orthodoxy, as well as denomination-specific norms surrounding politics and political behavior.

The new information we have compiled from the personal data of pastors provides several avenues for future work. Pastors' political worldviews are likely to seep into their leadership in ways small and large; future research, should seek to understand exactly how pastors' political views influence their leadership. It may be the case that pastors feel constrained by the mismatch in political views between themselves and congregants; scholars of religion and American politics should examine whether and on what issues clergy perceive congruence and incongruence with congregants, and how this congruence varies by denomination. Furthermore, on issues where pastors are deciding, perhaps unilaterally or perhaps with consultation of their congregation, about whether to take political action like providing a sanctuary for immigrants, future studies with these data could help shed light on the kinds of leaders and communities that make different decisions on such matters.

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Wilcox, Clyde. 1990. "Religion and politics among white evangelicals: The impact of religious variables on political attitudes." *Review of religious research* pp. 27–42.



Table 3: Denominations Names and Directory URLs

Denomination	Full Name	URL
AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church	<a href="https://www.ame-church.com/directory/find-a-church/">https://www.ame-church.com/directory/find-a-church/</a>
Adventist	Seventh-Day Adventist Church	<a href="http://eadventist.net">http://eadventist.net</a>
American Baptist	American Baptist Churches USA	<a href="http://www.abcis.org/public/ChurchSearch.asp">http://www.abcis.org/public/ChurchSearch.asp</a>
Assemblies of God	-	<a href="http://www.ag.org/top/church-directory/">www.ag.org/top/church-directory/</a>
Baptist General	Baptist General Conference	<a href="https://converge.org/locate-converge">https://converge.org/locate-converge</a>
Black Churches	-	<a href="http://theblackchurches.org/churches/">http://theblackchurches.org/churches/</a>
Brethren	The Brethren Church	<a href="http://www.brethrenchurch.org/upload/documents/CHURCH_LISTS/2016_May_Churches.pdf">http://www.brethrenchurch.org/upload/documents/CHURCH_LISTS/2016_May_Churches.pdf</a>
Catholic	The Catholic Church	<a href="http://www.thecatholicdirectory.com">http://www.thecatholicdirectory.com</a>
COG General Conf	Church of God General Conference	<a href="http://www.cggc.org/connect/directory/pastor-search/">http://www.cggc.org/connect/directory/pastor-search/</a>
COG Anderson	Church of God (Anderson, IN)	<a href="http://www.jesusisthesubject.org/church-finder/">http://www.jesusisthesubject.org/church-finder/</a>
Christian Reformed	Christian Reformed Church in North America	<a href="https://www.crcna.org/church-finder">https://www.crcna.org/church-finder</a>
Churches of Christ	-	<a href="http://www.churches-of-christ.net/usa/index.html">http://www.churches-of-christ.net/usa/index.html</a>
Church of God	-	<a href="http://www.churchofgod.org/index.php/church-locator">http://www.churchofgod.org/index.php/church-locator</a>
Disciples of Christ	-	<a href="http://disciples.org/find-congregation/">http://disciples.org/find-congregation/</a>
EFCA	Evangelical Free Church of America	<a href="https://churches.efca.org">https://churches.efca.org</a>
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	<a href="http://www.elca.org/tools/findacongregation">http://www.elca.org/tools/findacongregation</a>
Episcopal	The Episcopal Church	<a href="http://www.episcopalchurch.org/browse/parish">http://www.episcopalchurch.org/browse/parish</a>
The Evang. Church	The Evangelical Church of North America	<a href="https://www.theevangelicalchurch.org/churches">https://www.theevangelicalchurch.org/churches</a>
Foursquare	The Foursquare Church	<a href="http://www.foursquare.org/locator">http://www.foursquare.org/locator</a>
Fundamentalist Baptist	-	<a href="http://fundamental.org/fundamental/churches">http://fundamental.org/fundamental/churches</a>
Greek Orthodox	Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America	<a href="http://www.goarch.org/parishes/">http://www.goarch.org/parishes/</a>
Independent Baptist	-	<a href="http://baptistinfo.org/directory/index.shtml">http://baptistinfo.org/directory/index.shtml</a>
Jewish, Conservative	United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism	<a href="http://www.uscj.org/kehilla.aspx">http://www.uscj.org/kehilla.aspx</a>
Jewish, Orthodox	Orthodox Union	<a href="https://www.ou.org/synagogue-finder/">https://www.ou.org/synagogue-finder/</a>
Jewish, Reform	Union for Reform Judaism	<a href="https://www.urj.org/congregations">https://www.urj.org/congregations</a>
Missouri Synod	The Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod	<a href="http://locator.lcms.org/nchurches_frm/church.asp">http://locator.lcms.org/nchurches_frm/church.asp</a>
WELS	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	<a href="https://yearbook.wels.net/unitsearch">https://yearbook.wels.net/unitsearch</a>
Methodist	The United Methodist Church	<a href="http://www.umc.org/find-a-church/search">http://www.umc.org/find-a-church/search</a>
Nazarene	Church of the Nazarene	<a href="http://nazarene.org/find-a-church">http://nazarene.org/find-a-church</a>
OCA	Orthodox Church in America	<a href="https://oca.org/parishes">https://oca.org/parishes</a>
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America	<a href="http://www.pcaac.org/church-search/">http://www.pcaac.org/church-search/</a>
Pentecostal (PCG)	Pentecostal Church of God	<a href="http://www.pcg.org/findchurch">http://www.pcg.org/findchurch</a>
Pentecostal (UPCI)	United Pentecostal Church International	<a href="http://www.upci.com/churchLocator/">http://www.upci.com/churchLocator/</a>
Presbyterian	Presbyterian Church (USA)	<a href="https://www.pcusa.org/search/congregations/">https://www.pcusa.org/search/congregations/</a>
Reformed Presbyterian	The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	<a href="http://arpchurch.org/arp-church-directory/">http://arpchurch.org/arp-church-directory/</a>
Southern Baptist	Southern Baptist Convention	<a href="http://www.sbc.net/churchsearch/">http://www.sbc.net/churchsearch/</a>
UCC	United Church of Christ	<a href="http://www.ucc.org/find">http://www.ucc.org/find</a>
Unitarian	Unitarian Universalist Association	<a href="https://my.uua.org/directory/congregations/">https://my.uua.org/directory/congregations/</a>