

Which Congregations Will Take Advantage of Charitable Choice? Explaining the Pursuit of Public Funding by Congregations*

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Objective. To determine the effects of clergy attitudes on the willingness of congregations to seek public funding to provide social welfare. *Methods.* Survey data are drawn from a probability sample of clergy leading congregations in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia. A logistic regression model examines the effects of clergy attitudes on the potential pursuit of public funding by congregations. *Results.* Controlling for a set of congregation attributes, a positive attitude toward partnerships between congregations and secular groups and a fear of government entanglement with religion are the strongest attitudinal predictors of congregation willingness to pursue public funding. However, attributes, particularly the racial composition of members and denominational affiliation, also predict congregation willingness to seek public funding. *Conclusions.* Congregation willingness to pursue public funding is a function of clergy attitudes and congregation attributes, which has implications for politics and public policy.

Since the initial enactment of Charitable Choice (i.e., the collection of federal and state laws, regulations, and rules that encourages government agencies to fully open competitions for public contracts and grants to provide social services, and perhaps make awards to a greater proportion of faith-based organizations over secular groups) as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, social scientists have sought to better understand the place and potential of faith-based organizations in the social welfare system. Much of their research falls within one of three themes: the behavior of faith-based organizations as social welfare providers (Cnaan, 2002; Wuthnow, 2004; Chaves and Tsitsos, 2001; Owens and Smith, 2005); the capacity of congregations and faith-related agencies to collaborate with government to

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provide services (Wineburg, 2001; Farnsley, 2003; Owens, 2004a); and the effects of funding faith-based organizations on constitutional, electoral, and advocacy politics (Davis and Hankins, 1999; Harris, 2001; Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz, 2004; Owens, 2004b). There is, however, a theme-cutting subject, one that relates to the implementation of Charitable Choice—the willingness of congregations to collaborate with government to provide social services, especially as paid contractors or grantees. That is, aside from the issue of whether government should fund faith-based organizations is the issue of whether and which congregations are willing to seek public funding. Such is the focus of this article.

Knowledge of the predictors of congregation willingness to take advantage of Charitable Choice is limited to a single study modeling the effects of congregation characteristics on the future pursuit of public funding (Chaves, 1999). Unlike previous studies, however, I ask: How do attitudes, especially those of clergy leading congregations, influence the inclination of congregations to take advantage of potential funding opportunities Charitable Choice creates? I employ a unique data set of congregations and logistic regression to test the effects of clergy attitudes on the willingness of congregations to seek public funding, controlling for a set of congregation characteristics. My results show that a positive attitude toward partnerships between congregations and secular groups, a fear of government entanglement with religion, and concern about church-state separation are the most significant clergy attitudes that may influence congregation willingness to pursue public funding. The results also show that the racial composition and denominational affiliation of congregations, along with the age of senior clergy and the operation of social welfare programs by congregations, are the attributes that may most influence congregation behavior toward government funding.

Explaining the Willingness of Congregations to Seek Public Funding

The provision of social welfare by congregations, particularly its determinants, is well studied (Chaves and Tsitsos, 2001; Cnaan, 2002; Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1993; Barnes, 2004; Tsitsos, 2003; Owens and Smith, 2005). The pursuit of public funding by congregations to support and extend the provision of social welfare to the poor is understudied. Studies of the factors that influence congregations to avail themselves of the new policy regime Charitable Choice creates are limited to research conducted before the formation of the Bush Administration and contained in a single study. Mark Chaves (1999), using data from the 1998 National Congregations Study (NCS), a national random sample of congregations in the United States derived from respondents to the General Social Survey, modeled the effects of congregation attributes. He found that racial composition, attendant size, denomination, theological and political ideology,

region, and openness to secular and religious speakers were significant predictors. Controlling for other attributes, majority-black congregations were five times more likely than other congregations to claim that they would seek public funding. Also, congregations with more than 900 adult attendants, theologically and politically liberal congregations, congregations in moderate to liberal denominations, and congregations outside the South were most willing to seek public funds.

Attributional analysis of congregations provides a parsimonious model of congregation behavior. Moreover, it identifies target congregations most likely to respond to government invitations to church-state collaboration (e.g., large, black, and liberal congregations), thereby permitting social science to guide government action. Despite the benefits of attributional analysis, the characteristics of congregations may reveal only portions of the equation of congregation choice in pursuing public funding. Political participation research in relation to religion confirms that attitudes, in addition to attributes such as race, income, and education, are salient predictors of political behavior by religious institutions and individuals (Harris, 1999; Kohut et al., 2000; Wald, 2003). Furthermore, institutional behavior is the product of human agency, bounded by rationality and rules. Thus, attitudinal factors, too, may predict the likelihood that congregations will take advantage of Charitable Choice. Specifically, the attitudes of clergy may explain some of the prospective behavior of congregations. I posit that three types of clergy attitudes may influence congregations to take advantage of Charitable Choice: (1) openness to congregations collaborating with secular organizations; (2) hopes or perceived advantages about congregation-based social services; and (3) fears or concerns of public funding of congregations.

Openness to Sacred-Secular Collaborations

At least one-half of congregations in the United States provide social welfare (Chaves, 1999). The majority of them collaborate with other organizations to do it, either co-delivering the services or sponsoring them via money and volunteers (Chaves and Tsitsos, 2001). Their “extra-congregational partnerships” are with other faith-based organizations, but also with secular organizations, including nonprofit social welfare agencies and government agencies (Ammerman, 2002:140; Chaves, 2004). These partnerships are possible because clergy leading the congregations believe them to be worthwhile, perhaps vital, in addressing the problems of the poor. They are also possible because clergy themselves sought or empowered others to seek on behalf of their congregations partnerships with nonreligious organizations. Therefore, I hypothesize that those *congregations with clergy that actively pursue collaborations with secular organizations to address community problems are more willing than other congregations to pursue public funding to provide social services.*

Hopes of Congregation-Based Social Welfare Services

Religion can provide believers and the faithful with a psychological disposition toward efficacy, empowerment, and social change (Harris, 1999; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Wood, 1994). Religion and religious practices for sacred, secular, or mixed purposes can influence motivation, group consciousness, and cultural expectations that influence the responses of believers and others to temporal situations. They also can influence the values and behaviors of those who come in contact with them over sustained or brief periods (Johnson, 2003a, 2003b). Accordingly, a hope among clergy may be that public funding of congregations will procure the transformational power of religion and its institutional manifestations (e.g., volunteerism) to shape the moral development and personal decisions of the poor, potentially reducing dependency and deviance. Thus, a second hypothesis is that *congregations with clergy who believe religion will reform the lives of the poor are more willing than other congregations to pursue funding to provide social services.*

Additionally, clergy may hope that public funding of congregations will purchase greater compassion as part of service delivery. The needy seeking to become self-sufficient may most need from institutions to be valued and assisted as citizens worthy of love and concern. Clergy may hold that congregation-based social welfare will address the core needs of target populations in ways that respect their dignity and move them further toward self-sufficiency, while remaining accountable to moral values and the fulfillment of spiritual missions. Moreover, because congregations have access to faith-filled, compassionate volunteers and professionals, clergy may believe that congregation-based programs will be more considerate and empathic of the challenges of the poor than would be the staff of secular organizations, which is what the needy seem to think (Wuthnow, Hackett, and Hsu, 2004). Therefore, clergy may view public funding of congregations as rational, placing this perspective within the conventional critique of the public sector as too bureaucratic and impersonal to perceive and interact with target populations (e.g., welfare recipients or formerly incarcerated persons) as anything other than dependents or cases to be dealt with (Flake, 2001; Rivers, 2001). Consequently, a third hypothesis is that *congregations with clergy who believe congregations will provide more compassionate services than government or secular groups are more willing than other congregations to pursue public funding to provide social services.*

Furthermore, clergy may hope that congregation-based services will be more efficient than government in delivering social services. This is what policymakers generally assume concerning nonprofit organizations (Smith and Lipsky, 1993). Theoretically, the potential for greater efficiency by congregation-based services would result mainly from their use of volunteers and paying professional staff salaries lower than does the government. From this perspective, clergy may believe that public funding of congregations

would reduce government costs, or at least permit government to realize and then allocate savings to increase services coverage, invest in service-provider capacity building, and implement previously neglected initiatives. Thus, my fourth hypothesis is that *congregations with clergy who believe congregations will provide more efficient services than government or secular groups are more willing than other congregations to pursue public funding to provide social services.*

Fears of Public Funding

Under Charitable Choice, unless they create separate nonprofit affiliates, congregations awarded public contracts must submit to fiscal audits by government agencies, as well as open their social welfare programs to monitoring and evaluation. They may also have to alter their practices in ways that reduce their perceived effectiveness, especially in terms of services design, hiring co-religionists as staff, and evaluation and measurement of effectiveness. This may put bureaucrats in the position of determining proper behavior by religious institutions or dictating to them that they follow practices that conflict with their missions, as well as redirecting their energies away from a complete focus on service delivery (Brazier, 2001; Robertson, 2001). Furthermore, Charitable Choice may chill congregation-based political participation and advocacy, silencing prophetic voices for social justice on behalf of the poor or putting them in the position of defending by their actions public policies that work against the interest of the poor (Wallis, 2001; Roberts, 2003; Harvey, 1997; Adams, 2001; Owens, 2004b). Thus, clergy may fear that public funding of congregations, particularly direct funding via purchase of service contracts rather than vouchers, will engage government too deeply in the affairs of congregations receiving funding (Jeavons, 2004a, 2004b). This yields a fifth hypothesis: *congregations with clergy who fear public funding of congregations will foster government entanglement with religion will be less willing to pursue public funding to provide social services.*

Also, clergy may fear that public funding will increase competition and conflict among religious groups. Because discussions of public funding of congregations have not led to overall increases in budget outlays, Charitable Choice creates a zero-sum politics of public funding, whereby there are more groups competing for a small pool of resources, one that is expected to shrink as federal budget deficits grow and state tax revenues recover slowly from recession (De Vita and Palmer, 2003). Plus, there have been calls against funding the social services programs of some faith-based organizations, especially those associated with new religious movements such as Hare Krishna, Scientology, and the Nation of Islam (Robertson, 2001). There also is a worry among clergy about politically active religious groups, especially evangelical Christian groups like the 700 Club, using demagogic rhetoric and partisan connections rather than evidence of effective programs

to secure public funds (Formicola, Segers, and Weber, 2003). Therefore, a sixth hypothesis is that *congregations with clergy who fear public funding of congregations will increase competition and conflict among religious groups will be less willing to pursue public funding to provide social services.*

Lastly, some clergy, regardless of political ideology, may fear that public funding of congregations will weaken church-state separation, potentially corrupting government, secularizing the faith sector, or both (Saperstein, 2001; Roberts, 2003). For them, even if faith is a significant factor in moving poor people from welfare dependence to self-sufficiency, they fear upsetting national tradition. Moreover, many believe the weight of constitutional jurisprudence leans against permitting government to procure religion as a deliberate instrument of government action (Saperstein, 2001), a belief seemingly backed by constitutional scholarship (Lupu and Tuttle, 2002). Consequently, my seventh hypothesis is that *congregations with clergy who fear public funding of congregations will upset church-state separation will be less willing to pursue public funding to provide social services.*

Caveats Regarding Clergy-Centered Models

In determining whether to pursue public funding, it is plausible that congregations will seek the wisdom and leadership of their senior clergy. Yet there are caveats to relying on clergy-centered models of congregation decision making and behavior. Focusing on clergy attitudes raises conceptual concerns about the sites and use of power and influence within congregations and the influence of attributes on clergy authority and congregation behavior (Ammerman, 2002; Chaves, 2004; Bedford, 2004). Lay members in some congregations are as, or even more, influential than clergy in determining congregation behavior. In terms of their social services activities, lay boards and laity interests can affect the behaviors of some congregations (Cnaan, 2002). Lay influence may stem from clergy yielding some of their own influence. The U.S. Congregational Life Study (USCLS), based on survey data from approximately 120,000 respondents, reports 48 percent of congregation members describe the leadership of their clergy as inspiring members to “take action” (Woolever and Bruce, 2002:Table 7.3). Lay influence may also result from denominational tradition. Either way, lay attitudes may most matter in decisions by congregations regarding the pursuit of public funding, as well as general support for providing social services.

Furthermore, some clergy have more influence and power than other clergy within and across congregations. Junior clergy, for example, may have attitudes about the direction of their congregations, but are unable to influence senior clergy. Or the attitudes of clergy with certain expertise and resources may have greater influence in specific issue domains and decisions than clergy without them. Additionally, some denominations and faith traditions provide far greater discretion to clergy than do other denomi-

nations and religions. Moreover, denominational structures and leadership may influence congregational decisions and behavior in ways that sideline clergy. Congregation conventions restricting collaboration with secular organizations or banning the receipt of public funding may also render clergy attitudes toward church-state collaboration irrelevant. Finally, clergy attitudes may be indistinguishable from congregation attributes. There is a possibility, especially in congregations where lay leaders and not denominational leaders appoint clergy, that clergy will reflect the values and attitudes of their congregations, canceling out clergy attitudes as independent predictors of congregation behavior.

Nevertheless, in considering whether to engage in certain practices as a congregation, social science research suggests that congregation members will look to their clergy for guidance and decisions (Cnaan, 2002). Clergy may then filter the choice through their attitudes toward congregations collaborating with secular organizations, their hopes about congregation-based social services, and their fears of public funding.

Methods

This study relies on a data set that specifically identifies clergy attitudes toward public funding, the 2002 Faith and the City Survey (FATC). The FATC was a telephone survey of a random sample of congregations in the metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia, inclusive of the 20 counties ringing its central city. The FATC sampling frame was drawn from congregation mailing lists maintained by Faith and the City, an ecumenical and interfaith leadership organization serving the Atlanta metropolitan area and the survey sponsor, as well as congregation directories maintained by the Interdenominational Theological Center (a consortium of six seminaries representing historically black religious denominations), Emory University Candler School of Theology, and Columbia Theological Seminary. The combined lists identified 4,452 congregations, which is 67 percent more congregations than listed in a 2002 census of congregations and membership in metropolitan Atlanta (Glenmary Research Center, 2002).

The sample size for the FATC was 400 congregations, whose geographic distribution across the urban, suburban, and rural sections of metropolitan Atlanta were comparable with the overall sampling frame and the 2002 census of congregations. A total of 325 congregations agreed to participate in the survey, yielding an 81 percent response rate. Responses came from a single informant. Unlike most previous studies that accepted responses from junior clergy or lay leaders (Chaves, 2004; Cnaan, 2002), the FATC surveyed the most senior clergyperson. It assumed that senior clergy have more influence over their congregations than other clergy or lay leaders. It also assumed, borrowing from Ram Cnaan (2002:284), that “the clergy are the gatekeepers of the congregation and also its bridge to the wider society and its many institutions,” especially government agencies.

An advantage of the FATC is that it was administered in April 2002, 14 months after the creation of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) and its initial efforts to increase the flow of public funds to congregations and faith-related agencies, as well as six years after the enactment of PRWORA. By then, national and local media had broadcast dozens of stories about Charitable Choice and the OFBCI had held regional contracting/grantsmanship conferences for the faith sector. At the time of the FATC, clergy awareness in metropolitan Atlanta regarding broader issues and changes in the award of federal contracts and grants for social services was high. Specifically, 80 percent of FATC respondents were aware of Charitable Choice. This is in contrast to findings from earlier surveys. The NCS, for instance, was conducted within two years of the passage of PRWORA and before the first presidential administration of George W. Bush. It found low awareness of Charitable Choice among clergy, with 24 percent knowing about the enactment of the initial legislation (Chaves, 1998). Given the time and high degree of awareness, it is likely that the FATC respondents had sufficiently thought about the core issues in advance of the survey to provide meaningful responses to its questions.

Another advantage of the FATC over previous surveys is that many of its questions focused on Charitable Choice. Beyond awareness and whether congregations received public funding, the survey asked respondents about the preparation of their congregations to compete for public funding, the advantages and disadvantages of government support of congregations, and the effect of welfare reform on social welfare provision by congregations. Thus, the FATC permits direct and indirect measurement of both the attitudes of senior clergy and the attributes of congregations that may influence congregation willingness to compete for public funding. Save for general political and theological stances (i.e., conservative vs. liberal), the NCS does not include attitudinal measures for predicting the likelihood of congregations to seek public funds (Chaves, 1998). As for the USCLS, especially its clergy module, it did not ask respondents questions related to public funding (Woolever and Bruce, 2002).

Furthermore, a committee of clergy and lay administrators of faith-based organizations, as well as seminary faculty with ordinations from across different denominations, participated in the design and pretest of FATC. All survey questions were screened by the committee and a group of political scientists for clarity, terminology, and comprehension, with an eye toward increasing measurement validity and detail, while minimizing question complexity for respondents. Although recognizing that lay persons and denominations may exert influence equal to or greater than that of clergy, the designers of the FATC did not ask respondents to identify the locus of power within congregations or to identify the most influential actors concerning the interactions of their congregations with secular groups, particularly government agencies.

A weakness of the FATC is that the data are from a sample of clergy leading congregations in a single metropolitan area, one not necessarily representative of the national population of congregations. Table 1 compares the FATC respondents with NCS respondents. The differences suggest that the Atlanta data may not reflect the attitudes of clergy and the attributes of congregations outside the Atlanta metropolitan area. Recognizing that caution is required when interpreting the empirical results of the data, I limit my interpretations of the findings solely to the likelihood of congregations in metropolitan Atlanta of pursuing public funding. This reduces generalizability, but increases internal validity.

To determine the effects of clergy attitudes on the potential pursuit of public funding by congregations I employ logistic regression using unweighted FATC data from the 274 cases without missing data on the dependent and independent variables. Comparisons between respondents with missing data and those without showed no significant differences. My model

TABLE 1
Profile of the Metropolitan Atlanta Sample

Congregation Characteristics	Faith and the City Study	National Congregation Study
<i>Size</i>		
< 100 members	21%	36%
100–499 members	51%	42%
≥ 500 members	28%	13%
<i>Denomination</i>		
Mainline Protestants ^a	31%	23%
Catholics	3%	6%
Nondenominational	32%	18%
Other	34%	53%
<i>Racial Composition</i>		
Majority white	61%	66%
Majority black	23%	16%
Other	16%	18%
<i>Location</i>		
Urban	26%	44%
Suburban	75%	15%
<i>Educational Attainment of Senior Clergy</i>		
No college degree	11%	26%
College degree	89%	74%
	N = 325	N = 1,236

^a“Mainline Protestants” includes congregations affiliated with the six largest mainline Protestant denominations: American Baptist Churches in the USA; Episcopal Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Presbyterian Church (USA); United Church of Christ; and United Methodist Church.

NOTE: Proportions may not equal 100 due to rounding or the absence of some categories of characteristics.

tests whether clergy attitudes toward church-state collaboration predict the willingness of congregations to apply for public funds, holding congregation attributes equal.

Measures

Dependent Variable. The willingness of a congregation to take advantage of Charitable Choice is measured by whether a senior clergyperson believes his or her congregation would apply for government money to provide social services programs if it was available (1 = yes, 0 = no).

Independent Variables. All predictor variables are attitudinal. One predictor is clergy openness to congregations collaborating with secular organizations. The FATC measures it two ways: it asks clergy a normative question concerning their attitudes toward congregations collaborating with secular groups and it asks clergy an empirical question about their actual behavior regarding collaboration. I include the second measurement in my model, which captures general clergy support for collaboration between congregations and secular groups through a dummy variable identifying whether clergy, as leaders of their congregations, actively partner their congregations with secular organizations to improve neighborhood conditions (*secular collaboration*: 1 = yes, 0 = no).

Three other variables measure clergy hopes of congregations providing social services at public expense. Respondents were read a statement: "I'm going to read you a few reasons why some people look favorably upon a policy of allowing churches and other houses of worship to use government money to provide social services. Regardless of whether you favor or oppose the policy itself, please tell me whether you consider this a very strong, somewhat strong, not too strong advantage, or do you consider this no advantage at all." The potential advantages of public funding of congregations included: *transformational power of religion* (i.e., congregations would do a better job because religion has the power to change lives); *compassionate service delivery* (i.e., the staff of congregation-based social welfare programs would be more caring and compassionate of the needy than the staff of secular organizations); and *efficient service delivery* (i.e., congregations would provide services more efficiently than government). I recoded all responses originally given according to the four-part scale as dichotomous variables (1 = very strong, 0 = not very strong).

Three more variables measure clergy fears of public funding. Respondents were read the following statement: "I'm going to read you a few reasons why some people might have concerns about a policy of allowing churches and other houses of worship to use government money to provide social services. Regardless of whether you favor or oppose the policy itself, please tell me

whether each raises a concern.” The concerns addressed *church-state separation* (i.e., concerned public funding would upset the separation of church and state); *religious competition and conflict* (i.e., concerned public funding might increase competition and conflict among religious groups); and *government entanglement with religion* (i.e., concerned government might get too involved in the affairs of houses of worship). Again, I recoded original responses (i.e., very strong concern, somewhat strong concern, not too strong a concern, and not a concern) into dichotomous variables (1 = very strong, 0 = not very strong).

Controls. Expecting *racial composition* to affect the willingness of congregations to seek public funding, FATC respondents were asked: “Which of the following best describes the racial composition of your congregation?” They could identify their congregations as predominately (greater than 75 percent) of one racial group (i.e., black, white, Hispanic, or Asian) or as an “integrated congregation.” The responses were recoded into dummy variables for each racial group (1 = yes, 0 = no), with white congregations serving as the reference category. *Denomination*, which should also influence the dependent variable, was measured by asking respondents to name the denominational affiliations of their congregations, with their responses recoded into dummy variables for mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and a residual other Christian category (1 = yes, 0 = no). Baptists are the reference category in determining the effect of denomination on the dependent variable. To test the influence of *congregation size* on the likelihood of congregations applying for public funding, the survey asked informants to indicate the approximate membership size of their congregations, relying on conventional categorizations (i.e., less than 100, 100–499, greater than or equal to 500). For analysis, I constructed dummy variables for each category, with less than 100 members being the reference category. Assuming higher educational attainment by clergy predicts the dependent variable, I use *college-educated clergy* as a dummy variable (1 = yes, 0 = no). I constructed it by recoding a categorical variable that asked respondents about their highest level of formal education. (The categorical variable does not measure whether a clergyperson actually attained a college degree nor does it distinguish between seminary training and other postsecondary education.)

Additionally, I include two control variables extant research neglects that may mitigate the effects of the other variables and may potentially influence significantly the decisions of congregations to pursue public funding. Since older adults are less permissive of a porous wall between church and state than younger adults (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2001; Public Agenda, 2001), I predict that older clergy will be less likely than younger clergy to lead congregations that would apply for government support. *Clergy age* is measured in self-reported years. I also predict that congregations that already operate social welfare programs are more

willing to apply for public money because they are better positioned to apply for it and win it (Farnsley, 2003; De Vita and Palmer, 2003). To assess the effect of social welfare provision by congregations on the dependent variable, respondents were asked: “Does your congregation operate social service programs to aid poor single-parent families, poor children, or unemployed fathers?” (*social welfare provision*: 1 = yes and 0 = no). The emphasis on these target populations versus a more general clientele accords with the general emphasis of Charitable Choice as expressed by PRWORA. The inclusion of social welfare provision in the model is also useful for it may provide evidence that there are two *types* of attributes that influence the decisions of congregations—attributes that pertain to the characteristics of congregations and attributes that correspond to the behavior of congregations.

I conducted diagnostic tests on all the independent variables to rule out multicollinearity. Low reliability coefficients did not reveal high consistency among the variables. The results provided no justification, in particular, for scaling the “hopes” and “fears” variables. The Cronbach’s alphas are 0.550 for the “hopes” variables and 0.490 for the “fears” variables. Intercorrelations (available on request) did not show strong relationships between independent variables, despite moderate correlations between the *transformational power of religion* and *compassionate service delivery* (0.444) and the *transformational power of religion* and *service efficiency* (0.257). I also regressed each independent variable on all the other predictor variables and the collinearity diagnostics revealed acceptable tolerance values and variance inflation factors. Looking at the “hopes” and “fears” variables, specifically, the tolerances fell between 0.744 and 0.843 and variance inflation factors were between 1.198 and 1.350, values suggesting the absence of multicollinearity (Allison, 1999).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Findings

Table 2 presents descriptive findings regarding the congregations and clergy as they pertain to Charitable Choice. It shows that a majority (54 percent) of congregations in metropolitan Atlanta operate social services programs, with 49 percent of congregations collaborating with other organizations to provide social welfare. Furthermore, 11 percent of congregations claim to receive public funding to operate their services. Whether the funding is direct to the congregations or indirect to the congregations via faith-related agencies or subsidiaries is undetermined. Unexpectedly, some congregations created their programs in direct response to welfare reform, especially PRWORA: 11 percent of respondents reported that their congregations began to operate social welfare programs following federal welfare

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics in Relation to Charitable Choice

	Faith and the City Study (N = 325)
Congregation Characteristics	
<i>Social Welfare Provision</i>	
Operates at least 1 social welfare program	54%
Collaborates to provide social welfare programs	49%
Operates social welfare programs funded by government	11%
Enacted a social welfare program in response to welfare reform	11%
<i>Charitable Choice</i>	
Clergy aware of Charitable Choice	80%
Congregations would apply for public funding	36%
Congregation would need assistance in applying for public funding	78%
Clergy Attitudes	
<i>Openness to Sacred-Secular Collaboration</i>	
Clergy actively pursue secular-sacred collaborations	30%
<i>Hopes of Congregation-Based Social Welfare Services (believes very strongly . . .)</i>	
Religion can transform the lives of people	90%
Congregations will provide more compassionate services than secular groups	92%
Congregations will provide services more efficiently than government	61%
<i>Fears of Public Funding (believes very strongly . . .)</i>	
Public funding would upset church-state separation	53%
Public funding would increase competition and conflict among religious groups	32%
Public funding would involve government too much in congregation affairs	84%

policy changes and the introduction of Charitable Choice in 1996, which is surprising because research suggests that public policy rarely affects congregational behavior (Cnaan, 2002).

Table 2 also shows that 36 percent of respondents claimed that their congregations would apply for government funds to deliver social welfare services if the opportunity were available to them. Caution is advised in interpreting this statistic, for it does not account for the potential significance of the locus of control within congregations, which may not reside with clergy. Thus, what I have identified is an approximation of the highest proportion of metropolitan Atlanta congregations that may actually pursue public funding. Nevertheless, of those clergy who averred that their congregations would apply for public funding, 78 percent of respondents acknowledged a need for assistance in completing their applications

(e.g., proposal writing, legal counsel, program design, information technology, etc.). This finding supports research that shows congregations may lack the competence and capacity to respond to the inducements of government (Farnsley, 2003; De Vita and Palmer, 2003). It may also account for why 89 percent of FATC respondents reported that their congregations did not receive government grants or contracts in support of their social services programs in 2002.

Multivariate Analysis

Table 3 presents the results of the multivariate analysis. Although the FATC limits the generalizability of the results to the nation or other metropolitan areas, the results show that a mix of clergy attitudes and congregation attributes predict the willingness of congregations in metropolitan Atlanta to pursue public funding. A positive view toward sacred-secular partnership, as measured by the behavior of clergy to foster partnerships between their congregations and secular organizations, is a significant attitudinal predictor of the likelihood congregations will pursue public funding ($p = 0.005$). Controlling for other variables in the model, congregations led by clergy who promote secular collaboration are three times as likely as congregations without such clergy to seek public funding.

TABLE 3

Logistic Regression of Likelihood of Congregations Applying for Public Funding

	Model		
	B	S.E.	Exp (B)
<i>Clergy Attitudes</i>			
Secular collaboration ($p = 0.005$)	1.132**	0.403	3.102
Government entanglement with religion ($p = 0.003$)	-0.974**	0.327	0.378
Upset church-state separation ($p = 0.024$)	-0.925*	0.411	0.396
<i>Congregation Attributes</i>			
Racial composition (Reference: majority white)			
Majority black ($p = 0.000$)	1.629***	0.403	5.101
Denomination (Reference: Baptist)			
Mainline Protestant ($p = 0.005$)	1.215**	0.429	3.369
Clergy age ($p = 0.008$)	-0.034**	0.013	0.967
Social welfare provision ($p = 0.038$)	0.671*	0.323	1.957
Constant	-0.613		
Pseudo R^2	0.417		
- 2 log-likelihood	257.221		
N	274		

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$, one-tailed tests.

NOTE: Only statistically significant variables shown.

The results also show that the fears of clergy, holding other factors constant, are more influential than their hopes in explaining the likelihood that their congregations will seek public funding to provide social welfare to the poor. Specifically, the most significant attitude is a fear of government entanglement with religion ($p = 0.003$), with the odds of congregations led by clergy fearing government entanglement applying for government funding dropping by 62 percent. Clergy fear of upsetting church-state separation also has a negative and significant effect ($p = 0.024$); congregations led by clergy fearing church-state integration are 60 percent less likely than other congregations to seek public funding. The fear of religious competition and conflict, however, while displaying the expected direction of influence, failed to achieve statistical significance. Concerning the hopes of congregation-based social services, all variables pointed in the expected direction without achieving statistical significance. Unexpectedly, congregations whose clergy believe most strongly in the transformative power of religion on the choices and behaviors of individuals are not significantly more likely than other congregations to avail themselves of public funding opportunities, despite bivariate analysis uncovering a positive and significant correlation ($p = 0.009$). Likewise, the hope that congregations would provide more compassionate service to the poor than government or other service providers is not statistically significant.

Table 3 also shows that some attributes are as strong or stronger predictors than attitudes in explaining the willingness of congregations to pursue public sources of revenue for social welfare provision. Confirming Chave's (1999) findings, the racial composition of a congregation is the single most significant predictor ($p = 0.000$) of the willingness of congregations to apply for public funding: majority-black congregations in metropolitan Atlanta are five times more likely than other congregations to pursue public funds. Furthermore, congregations with mainline Protestant affiliations ($p = 0.005$) and congregations providing social welfare ($p = 0.038$) are among the congregations most likely to avail themselves of public funding. Keeping other variables constant, a mainline Protestant affiliation approximately triples the likelihood of a congregation seeking public funding, while the provision of social welfare almost doubles the odds of a congregation pursuing government funding. Clergy age, too, as expected, significantly predicts the likelihood of congregations pursuing public funding ($p = 0.008$). The odds of a congregation pursuing public funding decrease by 3 percent for every additional year in clergy age.

In sum, I posited that seven clergy attitudes would affect the willingness of congregations to apply for public funding to provide services to the poor. Multivariate analysis showed that three attitudes influence the willingness of congregations in metropolitan Atlanta to pursue public funding: (1) clergy concern about government entanglement with religion; (2) clergy openness to sacred-secular collaboration; and (3) clergy fear of upsetting the church-state separation. Analysis also substantiated earlier findings about the

influence of congregation attributes on the willingness of congregations to pursue public funding, identifying majority-black congregations and mainline Protestant congregations as those most willing to pursue public funding (Chaves, 1999). I also posited and demonstrated that two overlooked attributes of congregations influence the willingness of congregations to seek public funding, namely, clergy age and social welfare provision.

Implications for Politics and Policy

Extant research, confirmed by the metropolitan Atlanta data, concludes that a majority of congregations are not willing to apply for public funding. It also suggests, however, that certain types of congregations are among the willing, especially majority-black congregations and mainline Protestant congregations. The political implications of these findings are intriguing. Black churches have long supported Democrats in elections. There is the possibility, however, that GOP calls for faith-based initiatives and actual funding of congregations is intended to appeal to black clergy, who may then influence the electoral behavior of their congregation attendants and others. Thus, public funding of congregations may influence the politics of black churches (e.g., decrease their involvement in voter mobilization and protest), shift the partisanship or partisan opinions of their attendants, and increase conflict among black clergy and within the black electorate over support for GOP policy agendas, perhaps to the disadvantage of Democrats. Also, public funding of congregations may move more liberal and moderate denominations toward church-state collaboration, and perhaps the GOP, which is counterintuitive amid the rhetoric of “faith-based initiatives” as a GOP campaign issue to appeal to conservative Christians, evangelical and otherwise, and evangelical support for public funding of congregations (Wuthnow, 2004). Moreover, public funding of congregations, conceptually and practically, may create a cleavage between those behind the pulpits and those in the pews, suggesting that clergy leading congregations within conservative denominations may be out of step with their members, at least on this issue, thereby reducing the political authority of clergy.

Beyond the politics of Charitable Choice, the attitudinal findings about congregation willingness have several public policy implications, especially concerning implementation of Charitable Choice and the governmental aim of expanding the number of congregations competing for and receiving public contracts and grants. First, given that clergy openness to congregations collaborating with secular groups influences the willingness of congregations to pursue public funding, government should revisit its efforts to recruit congregations to apply for public funds. Annually, the OFBCI, along with five federal agencies (i.e., Health and Human Services, Housing and

Urban Development, Education, Labor, and Justice) and a collection of state and municipal agencies, sponsors events for faith-based organizations to learn about and apply for contracts and grants. These are broadcast events, lacking attention to specific types of congregations. The attitudinal findings suggest, however, that government should narrow its recruitment, targeting congregations that collaborate with secular organizations.

Second, given clergy fears of government entanglement with religious practice and upsetting church-state separation, policymakers should revisit an element of Charitable Choice. Charitable Choice assumes that nonprofit incorporation poses a financial and organizational barrier to congregations pursuing public funding, and that mandating the formation of a nonreligious entity may weaken the ability of faith-based organizations to transform lives through multiple “faith factors” (Carlson-Thies, 2001; DiJulio, 2002). To remove the barrier, as well as to give the suggestion that government seeks to procure religion as a public service, even if it cannot do it directly, policymakers dropped a longstanding government practice of requiring the chartering of nonprofit organizations by sectarian institutions to receive public funds. Without that requirement, however, congregations open themselves to governmental scrutiny. For some clergy, the change effectively removes protections for the churches and the constitution (Jeavons, 2003). Thus, while policymakers enacted the policy change in the name of congregations and with the aim of increasing the pool of prospective government-supported social services providers from the faith sector, the change may actually have an unintended effect—reductions in the number of congregations applying for and possibly winning public funding, or at least preservation of the status quo. Government, therefore, should consider re-instituting the requirement that congregations applying for funds incorporate separate nonprofit organizations, which would reduce entanglement and church-state fears and potentially increase the proportion of congregations pursuing public funding.

The attributional findings from metropolitan Atlanta, too, have public policy implications, mainly because they identify a fuller set of congregations that are most likely to collaborate with government to provide social services to the poor. In particular, the findings suggest that aside from focusing on majority-black congregations, especially those associated with historically African-American denominations, and congregations affiliated with main-line Protestant denominations, government should recruit among congregations that already serve the poor, alone or in collaboration with others, and congregations led by younger clergy.

Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the findings in this article and the extant research, the subject of congregational willingness to collaborate with government agencies to

provide social welfare services remains understudied. It is open to further theoretical development and waiting for greater empirical testing, especially using a nationally representative sample of congregations. In terms of the effects of attitudes, specifically, on congregation willingness to collaborate with government, future research should explore other attitudes of clergy, especially attitudes arising from theology and political ideology. Furthermore, research should focus on the attitudes of congregation members, particularly lay leaders, toward public funding and other forms of church-state collaboration, as well as determine how the loci of power within different congregations permit lay leaders to exercise their influence over congregation decisions pertaining to church-state collaboration. Finally, because a majority of congregations will not seek public funding, but many may seek to collaborate with government for free, providing volunteers for select programs (e.g., prisoner reentry, youth mentoring, recreation, etc.), social scientists should explore the determinants and capacity of congregations to voluntarily participate in faith-based and community initiatives to address the conditions and behaviors of the poor.

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