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Religious Involvement and Volunteering: Implications for Civil Society

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of congregations in civil society by examining the relationship between religious involvement and volunteering. We draw

on a survey and interviews with respondents from upstate New York to analyze a set of inter-related questions: how does congregational involvement lead people into volunteering and influence the meaning of volunteer activity? How do church members choose a volunteer site? What role do congregations play in generating civic engagement and social capital? We find no liberal/conservative differences either in the likelihood of volunteering or in choosing between secular and religious volunteer opportunities. Rather, we find that social networks and impressions of organizational identity draw people into volunteering and into particular organizations, and that there is a competition between congregations and other civic groups for members' time. We conclude that congregations foster both “loose” and strong connections to civic life for members at different stages of the life course.

Issue Section:

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