

Research Statement

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Organizations are often core sites for the production and perpetuation of social inequality, yet they can also be vehicles for promoting social good. My research draws on organizational theory and network analysis to assess the social, political, and economic impact of community-based organizations, giving particular attention to service provision and advocacy. Using innovative multimethod approaches to analyze dynamics related to social diversity, my work seeks to reveal how people from different backgrounds can most effectively work together to address social needs. My scholarship advances understanding of organizational impact across several disciplines: sociology, political science, psychology, religion, management, and public health. Its ultimate aim is to identify means of promoting better understanding and collaboration across social differences in order to help communities flourish and strengthen the fabric of U.S. society.

The three streams of my research agenda are 1) social diversity and community-based advocacy organizations, 2) congregation-based social service provision and political participation, and 3) interorganizational networks and organizational action.

1. Social Diversity and Community-Based Advocacy Organizations

My primary stream of research analyzes how community-based advocacy organizations navigate internal social differences and leverage those differences to enhance their effectiveness. Analyses for this research are based primarily on data I collected for the National Study of Community Organizing Organizations (NSCOO). The organizations in the NSCOO bring together a broad array of local institutions to collectively address social, economic, and political issues impacting their respective communities. Each organization has a board of directors consisting of representatives from its member institutions, which include religious congregations, nonprofit organizations, schools, unions, and other civic associations.

I surveyed the entire field of these organizations by distributing a two-part survey to the director of each organization. Part one was an online survey that gathered extensive data on each organization's history, interactions, and activities. Part two consisted of customized spreadsheets that directors used to provide detailed demographic information about their institutional members, board members, and paid staff. This multi-level study achieved a response rate of 94%—gathering data on 178 of the 189 organizations in the U.S. and demographic information on the 4,145 member institutions, 2,939 board members, and 628 paid staff affiliated with these organizations.

Given this extraordinary response rate, my article “Organizations and Survey Research,” published in *Sociological Methods & Research* describes several response-enhancing strategies and explains how they were implemented in the NSCOO. The article also includes nonresponse bias analyses on several important individual and organizational characteristics, and provides evidence that surveys of nonprofit organizations with a relatively low response rate risk overestimating the proportion of organizations led by people who are white, U.S. born, college-educated, and full-time employees. A pre-published version of this article was selected for the 2014 *Academy of Management Best Paper Proceedings*.

Analyzing data from the NSCOO, I have published one co-authored book and six articles (two sole authored and four co-authored), and I have five manuscripts under review (all of which are described below). The NSCOO research project and related publications have received awards from the American Sociological Association, the American Political Science Association, the Academy of Management, Organization Science / INFORMS, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, and the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).

1a. Social Diversity and Political Efficacy

To examine how social diversity is associated with the political efficacy of advocacy organizations, I combined data from the NSCOO with additional qualitative data to co-author the book *A Shared Future* (University of Chicago Press 2015). With a broad view of the entire community organizing field and an in-depth focus on specific organizations, this book explains how socially diverse advocacy organizations navigate differing perspectives on universal versus targeted policies. It finds that when organizations engage this tension effectively, they can increase their mobilizing capacity and bolster their political efficacy. *A Shared Future* also reveals how some organizations are leveraging their internal diversity to credibly and effectively confront economic and racial inequality and advance ethical democracy. This book received the 2016 Outstanding Book in Nonprofit and Voluntary Action Research award from ARNOVA.

1b. Organizational Culture and Navigating Social Differences

To better understand how internally diverse organizations navigate challenges arising from social differences, I collaborate with ethnographers who study community-based organizations. The first of these collaborations has been published in the *American Sociological Review*. In this article, my co-authors and I combined data from the NSCOO with ethnographic data to explain how organizations with racially and socioeconomically diverse boards draw on cultural practices to bridge social differences.

This study makes a unique contribution by being the first to use a national sample to examine the socioeconomic diversity of organizational boards. Apart from the NSCOO, I am not aware of any other national study of organizations that collected data on the socioeconomic status of board members. This article received the 2015 Dennis Gouran Research Award for an Outstanding Article on Group Communication from the National Communication Association and the 2016 Clifford Geertz Best Article Award from the American Sociological Association.

My second collaboration, on which I am co-lead author, is forthcoming in *Social Problems*. This article extends research on representative bureaucracy by analyzing how an organization's group style—its customs that shape everyday interactions—influences its ability to recruit and retain a socially diverse base. The analysis examines ally immigrant rights organizations to demonstrate how cultivating a “representative group style” can influence an organization's ability to involve a diverse group of people. The results show how having an immigrant-friendly group style can promote immigrant involvement, indicating that an organization's group style can impact its social composition. The research project associated with this article received the RGK Center – ARNOVA President's Award (a highly competitive award presided over by three past presidents of ARNOVA).

My third collaboration, on which I am the lead author, has conditionally accepted by *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*. This manuscript advances research on organizations and inequality by examining whether and how leaders of color within predominantly white organizations can help their organizations address racial inequality. This study draws on institutional work research, the outsider-within concept, and insights from critical whiteness theory to explain how leaders of color can use their position and “critical standpoint” to help guide their institutions toward promoting racial equality. The analysis finds that organizational leaders from marginalized status groups can help their organizations address social inequality, if those leaders possess a critical standpoint and sufficient organizational authority. This manuscript received the 2017 Felice Perlmutter Best Paper Award from ARNOVA.

1c. Social Diversity and Organizational Performance

In a subsequent pair of manuscripts, I advance diversity-performance research through analyses involving the leadership teams of the organizations surveyed in the NSCOO. Specifically, I examine how a team's social composition and the social interactions of its members are associated with the organization's performance. Social bridging theories argue that organizations with a diverse leadership team will perform better because they have access to a greater variety of social resources via their members' diverse networks. Social bonding theories, on the other hand, argue that organizations with a diverse leadership team will perform worse because they are less cohesive as a result of their members' social differences. When scholars test these competing theories, they often (mis)specify bridging and bonding as the inverse of each other.

My first manuscript is under second review at *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. This study advances diversity-performance research by identifying bridging and bonding as distinct mechanisms and measuring them independently; bridging is based on the diversity of a team's social composition and bonding is based on the social interaction of its members. The analysis then assesses the mechanisms' independent effects on performance by analyzing data from the NSCOO, which contain information on the race, class, gender, and religion of each organization's leadership team as well as information on the frequency, type, and content of their interactions. Results of this analysis indicate that both bridging and bonding are positively associated with an organization's performance. However, their respective performance benefits depend on the type of task being performed. More broadly, this study provides evidence that bridging and bonding are not mutually exclusive. An organization can both expand its access to resources by increasing the diversity of its leadership team and improve its ability to coordinate activities by increasing the intensity of its leadership team's social interactions.

My second manuscript is under second review at *Social Forces*. This study seeks to identify how organizations can leverage their social differences to improve performance. The analysis focuses on organizations with a diverse leadership team and examines social interactions among team members to assess whether engaging members' social differences is associated with better organizational performance. The study finds that teams whose members participate in bridging cultural activities and regularly talk about their social differences perform better. Overall, this study indicates that an organization's ability to realize the performance benefits of having a diverse leadership team depends partly on its leaders interacting in ways that engage their social differences.

1d. Next Phase of Research in this Stream: Internal Dynamics of Organizations

Despite the ubiquity of community-based organizations in the U.S., relatively little is known about what goes on inside them or how these internal dynamics influence the organizations' outcomes. While ethnographies of organizational micro-contexts can provide detailed insights into the internal dynamics of organizations, such studies are not designed to demonstrate the distribution of characteristics across large numbers of organizations. In contrast, large-scale data collection techniques like survey research cannot attain the detailed insights of extended observations.

To help bridge the gap between in-depth ethnographies and large-scale survey studies, I collaborated with O'Neill School Associate Professor Matthew Baggetta to develop a research project that applies an innovative data collection technique—systematic social observation—to organizational settings. This method gathers detailed information about organizations' internal dynamics at a relatively large scale by using multiple trained observers and carefully constructed protocols to collect rich, comparable data from several observable settings.

We were awarded a \$144,000 federal research grant in 2017, followed by a second grant for \$146,651 in 2018, from the Corporation for National and Community Service to conduct a pilot study using the systematic social observation method. This study investigates three types of community-based organizations in Indianapolis: business associations, community organizing groups, and neighborhood councils. This project—Observing Civic Engagement—is increasing knowledge about what goes on inside such organizations and how these internal dynamics influence the organizations' efficacy in promoting democratic engagement and impacting local political processes. This project received the 2018 Dugan Research Award on Philanthropic Impact from ARNOVA.

Initial publications related to this research comprise my co-authored article published in *Voluntas* and a sole-authored article published in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy & Civil Society*. The *Voluntas* article assesses the impact of religion on democracy by examining how some civil society organizations draw on structural and cultural characteristics of religion to promote democratic civic engagement. The second article examines civic engagement among Muslims in the U.S. This analysis finds multi-faith initiatives to be a viable pathway for Muslim communities to develop civic leaders, mobilize Muslims to address issues affecting their community, and strengthen their ties with non-Muslims.

To conduct a larger-scale version of the Observing Civic Engagement project, Matt Baggetta and I are in the process of submitting a revised proposal to the National Science Foundation, and I am submitting a proposal to the Lilly Endowment to conduct similar observations within religious congregations.

2. Congregation-Based Social Service Provision and Political Participation

As a second major stream of research, I examine activities and trends of religious congregations engaged in service provision and political participation. This research analyzes data from the National Congregations Study (NCS), which I have assisted with since 2009. The NCS is a nationally representative, repeated cross-sectional survey of religious congregations in the U.S. that gathers data from key informants. Its four waves of data collection to date occurred in 1998, 2006, 2012, and 2018. These data include extensive information on each congregations' history, leadership, member composition, activities, and programs. Analyzing data from the NCS, I have published seven articles (three sole authored and four co-authored). In addition, I wrote the chapter on religious organizations for the forthcoming 3rd edition of *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*.

2a. Social Services

My article published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* examines factors influencing congregations' responsiveness to social issues by analyzing black churches and their responses to people living with HIV/AIDS. Although black churches have historically served as institutional hubs within their communities, scholars have questioned their contemporary role in addressing challenges currently facing African Americans. My article engages this debate about the institutional centrality of black churches by analyzing variation in their levels and types of external engagement. The analysis finds that externally engaged black churches, especially those that collaborate with secular organizations, are more likely to sponsor an HIV/AIDS program. This finding indicates that some black churches maintain institutional centrality and their status as a hub of social support for African Americans by actively engaging their external environment.

Building on this research, I published a co-authored article in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* that examines all types of congregations and their health-related programs. Another co-authored article published in *Psychiatric Services* specifically assesses the prevalence and predictors of mental health

programming among U.S. congregations. The findings indicate that greater coordination between mental health providers and congregations with programs that support people with mental illness could foster more integrated and holistic care, which in turn may lead to improved recovery outcomes. I published two additional co-authored articles—one in the *Journal of HIV/AIDS & Social Services* that examines congregations' activities to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS and another in *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* that analyzes national trends in food insecurity and congregation-based food provision programs.

2b. Political Participation

In addition to examining congregations' service provision, my research examines their political participation. My article published in the journal *Religions* analyzes three waves of data from the National Congregations Study to provide the first longitudinal analysis assessing how U.S. congregations' involvement in service provision and political participation has changed over the past three decades. The analysis finds that, since the 1990s, the percentage of congregations participating in service-related activities has been substantial and increasing, while the percentage of congregations participating in political activities has been less substantial and decreasing. This decline in political participation has implications for the social impact of congregations. Relieving immediate needs through service provision without also pursuing long-term solutions through political participation can limit congregations' ability to effectively address social needs.

2c. Next Phase of Research in this Stream: National Study of Congregations' Economic Practices

Although a tremendous amount of research has been dedicated to analyzing congregation-based service provision and political participation, minimal data exist on the finances of the congregations organizing these activities. Furthermore, even though congregations are the most numerous and ubiquitous type of nonprofit organization in the U.S. and nearly one third of all charitable dollars go to congregations, little is known about how congregations receive, manage, and spend their financial resources.

To fill this data gap and to gain a broader understanding of the social, political, and economic impact of congregations, I collaborated with IU's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy Assistant Professor David King to propose a research project that examines the finances and economic practices of U.S. congregations. In 2016, we were awarded a \$104,102 planning grant from the Lilly Endowment to develop our proposed project; in 2017, the Lilly Endowment awarded us a \$1.6 million grant to conduct the National Study of Congregations' Economic Practices (NSCEP).

The NSCEP aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the economic practices of congregations in the U.S. by examining their theological, cultural, and practical orientations toward money. This study will generate a deeper understanding of how congregations receive, manage, and spend their financial resources. The foundation of the NSCEP is a nationally representative survey of congregations, which I designed and implemented in 2018. The survey collected data from key informants in 1,233 congregations. We are currently collecting supplemental data comprising open-ended interviews with 100 congregation leaders and on-site observations of 10 congregations. By focusing explicitly on the economic practices and impact of congregations, the NSCEP provides unique and important data for understanding the financial state of congregations in the U.S. as well as the economic scale of their social service provision and political activity.

Four initial manuscripts have resulted from this research. My co-authored article published in *Social Compass* that provides a comprehensive review of research on congregational finances, assesses available sources of data on congregations' economic practices, and offers recommendations for new avenues of research in this field. In addition, I have three manuscripts in process that respectively

focus on: 1) assessing methods for building a sample frame of congregations in the U.S., 2) analyzing the effectiveness of using probability-based panel studies to generate hypernetwork samples, and 3) examining nonresponse bias among studies of congregations.

3. Interorganizational Networks and Organizational Action

As a third stream of research, I analyze the relationship between interorganizational networks and organizational action. My article published in *Management and Organizational Studies* integrates social capital theory and network analysis to examine the collaborative partnerships congregations form to provide social services. The analysis finds that congregations that collaborate with other organizations offer more programs, and the effect is still greater for congregations with a diverse portfolio of collaborators. Furthermore, a network analysis indicates that congregations with a similar portfolio of collaborators offer a similar menu of services.

In addition, I have two manuscripts under review that analyze outcomes associated with different types of interorganizational collaborations. The first manuscript, under second review at *Social Service Review* identifies benefits and drawbacks of community organizing organizations collaborating with labor unions. The second manuscript, under review at *Social Forces* finds that evangelical organizations are more likely to collaborate with secular organizations than with interfaith organizations.

3a. Next Phase of Research in this Stream: Indiana Data Partnership Project

Efforts to effectively address the most difficult challenges facing society are often impeded by limited access to informative data and minimal collaboration among relevant stakeholders. Recognizing the critical need to develop an integrated system that supports data sharing and facilitates collaboration between stakeholders, I became a co-PI with the Indiana Data Partnership (IDP) project. The IDP is a collaboration between the State of Indiana's Management Performance Hub and three Indiana University centers—the Public Policy Institute, Polis Center, and Indiana Business Research Center.

In 2018, we were awarded a \$3 million planning grant from the Lilly Endowment to develop a working model of a collaborative decision-support framework using two test case issues—opioid abuse and workforce development. As co-PI, I formed and have since been leading a team of researchers to conduct the network analysis component of this project and develop a sustainable data infrastructure plan. The aim of the planning grant is to design a scalable model that can be proposed and implemented as a full-scale project to help address Indiana's 10 most pressing challenges, which include issues related to healthcare, education, and food security.

Moving Forward: Mapping the Entire Nonprofit Sector and Assessing its Impact

Looking ahead, I am working to integrate these three streams of research by undertaking a comprehensive multi-level, multi-method national study of the U.S. nonprofit sector. No such study of this scale has been conducted to date. I have already accessed and begun to analyze Form 990 data on over one million cases that have been made available in machine readable format by the IRS. I have acquired diversity data on 15,470 nonprofit organizations from GuideStar (a leading curator of nonprofit sector data), and I am in the process of obtaining organizational impact data from Charity Navigator (the largest and most-utilized charity evaluator in the U.S.). I will integrate these institutional data with the survey data I collected on community-based organizations and the systematic social observation data collected with Matthew Baggetta on the internal dynamics of such organizations to identify characteristics and mechanisms associated with organizational impact.

My research experience, methodological expertise, and grant-writing proficiency uniquely prepare me to pursue this ambitious project. My aim is to advance understanding of the U.S. nonprofit sector as a whole, enable comparisons between subsectors, and assess the sectors' overall impact on facilitating civic engagement, fostering social cohesion, and promoting the common good.

Research Summary

Collectively, my research is theoretically driven, methodologically innovative, and substantively relevant. It advances understanding of how community-based organizations with diverse leadership teams and diverse external networks can maximize their social, political, and economic impact. My research record, which includes one book, 14 peer-reviewed articles, two chapters, \$5 million in external funding, and 14 national awards, demonstrates my productivity and the quality, scope, and significance of my scholarly contributions.