

“The American National Flag and American Congregations”

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1. Aim

This paper analyzes the prevalence of American national flags inside worship halls of congregations (churches and other religious organizations) in the United States of America. Many Christian churches, for example, display an American national flag at a visible location inside their worship halls. Because the national flag for many Americans is a very important symbol of their country and their patriotism, the presence of the national flag appears to indicate that their members' religious faith is closely intertwined with their concept of America as a religious nation, and that such congregations engage directly or indirectly in patriotic socialization of their members. This paper attempts to explain what congregational characteristics tend to determine the presence or absence of American national flags in worship halls.

2. Methods

The data set we analyze is the National Congregations Study conducted in 2006 and 2007. The data set includes information on 1,506 randomly-chosen congregations in the U.S. The dependent variable consists of binary answers to the following question: “Does your congregation display an American flag in your main sanctuary or worship space?” Independent variables include measures of religious tradition, ethnic compositions, and other demographic characteristics. (We may add an analysis of the newer version of the data to the paper.)

3. Results

A majority (62 percent) of congregations in the sample answered that they display the American national flag in their worship halls. Our preliminary analysis indicates that Southern Baptist and Methodist churches are more likely than other congregations to display American flags in worship halls. Congregations of minority religions are the least likely to display American flags in worship halls. We also found that the proportion of white members has a positive effect on the presence of American flags in worship halls.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results above, we tentatively conclude that congregations with dominant social characteristics in terms of religion and ethnicity are more likely to display the American national flags in their worship halls.