

**Between Preference and Strategy: Reference Group Effects
on the Political Behavior of Religious Elites**

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Abstract

Can religious elites be considered rational actors? Though personal preferences continue to matter greatly in determining elite political behavior, I find that congregational clergy and church bureaucrats, who are often considered to be powerful political influences in American politics, are sometimes compelled to mask their sincerely held preferences due to pressures generated by cues from specific institutional reference groups. Though church bureaucrats have generally lower odds of pursuing strategic behavior than congregational clergy, evidence does suggest that bureaucrats may do so under certain circumstances. These findings point to a number of new insights into why religious elites arrive at specific political positions. While personal preferences certainly remain salient in an elite's decisional calculus, reference group pressures also prove critical. This provides justification for further research on the effects that institutional context might have on the behavior of political elites in secular political settings, including political parties and interest groups.

Political elites have long been considered nodes of critical influence for the publics they lead (Downs, 1957; Campbell et al., 1960; Truman, 1971; Berkman and Kitch, 1986; Zaller, 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). A case can be made that the American clergy represent an important class of political elites because they serve as highly influential agents in the development of parishioner political attitudes and behavior (Wald, Owen, and Hill, 1988; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague, 1993; Guth et al., 1997; Crawford and Olson, 2001; Djupe and Gilbert, 2002, 2003; Lege et al., 2002; Wald, 2003; Brewer, Kersh, and Petersen, 2005; Smith, 2005).¹ Given their position of social and political influence, significant scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding why religious elites take specific positions on political issues. Extant studies have focused mainly on the personal beliefs of individual clergy to explain their behavior (see especially Guth et al., 1997). The consensus from this research is that clergy preferences drive behavior.

The purpose of this project is not to challenge the central importance of personal preferences in the study of clergy behavior. It would be unrealistic to suggest, for example, that elite behavior is not influenced by personal preferences. As such, I assess whether the reference group expectations these religious elites encounter hold additional causal influence beyond personal preferences (Merton, 1968; Merton and Rossi, 1968; March and Olsen, 1989). In doing so, I compare congregational clergy to their institutional counterparts in the denominational bureaucracy. Only by situating clergy and bureaucrats in their wider institutional contexts can

scholars gain appropriate leverage on the degree to which factors beyond personal preferences might shape the public political positions that religious elites take. This approach holds promise for understanding differences in political positions between elites in secular political institutions as well, especially those in political parties, interest groups, and lobbying organizations.

Since religious elites are, by definition, well-situated in highly-specified institutional contexts, rational choice theory is an appropriate tool to gain leverage on the dynamics at play in determining elite political positions (Alba and Moore, 1978; Tsebelis, 1990; Hall and Taylor, 1996). Ironically, political science has lagged behind other disciplines in using rational choice to understand religious elite behavior (Young, 1997). A good case can be made that the discipline stands to gain from this approach. After all, to the extent that religious elites have invested heavily in obtaining their professional skills and credentials, and are dependent on their vocation for economic and purposive benefits, it is logical to assume that they wish to derive the highest possible yield from their professional identity and activities. Of course, one might suggest that religious belief constitutes the antithesis of rational behavior. Iannaccone (1998) and Stark, Iannaccone, and Finke (1996) counter this perspective by claiming that religious behavior can be modeled according to assumptions of behavior maximization. As such, I employ rational choice assumptions as a way of explaining religious elite behavior over and above the effects of personal preferences.

The key question of interest is whether the pursuit of maximum payoffs motivates religious elites to strategically mask their sincerely held political preferences in order to avoid conflict with specific institutional reference groups. The importance of these reference groups cannot be overstated, as they often have the power to impose an array of sanctions, including work-related stresses (Jex and Beehr, 1991; Spector et al., 1998). In several religious

denominations, reference groups (ranging from parishioners and congregational lay leaders for ministers, to coworkers and supervisors for denominational bureaucrats) may also have the authority to impose professional sanctions, including changing an elite's salary and benefits package, re-evaluate an elite's qualifications for her/his job, and even orchestrating job removal (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1974; Finke and Stark, 1992).

In order to assess elite behavior within the context of institutional reference group pressure, I examine the behavior of a national sample of congregational clergy and bureaucrats currently serving in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Though not a representative sample of religious elites across the United States, Presbyterian elites serve as a natural test case for several reasons. First, and in contrast to certain other Christian denominations (including the Roman Catholic Church), both Presbyterian ministers and bureaucrats are generally more politically and theologically liberal than the congregants who provide the funds necessary for denominational operations (Roof and McKinney, 1987; Guth et al., 1997; Wald, 2003; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Research Services, 2002, 2005, 2006). Second, the denomination is in a season of factional discord, with intra-institutional interests vying for policy-making control (Weston, 2003). This often draws clergy and bureaucrats into debates of political significance, and may even expose preference-based differences between elites and the laity. Third, the Presbyterian Church has a federated institutional structure that formally links its congregations and bureaucratic institutions, making comparison between these two sets of elites possible and appropriate. Importantly, this federated structure is shared in varying degrees by religious denominations *and* political interest groups and parties across the United States, thereby extending this study's external validity.²

Modeling Strategic Behavior

In addition to the influence wielded by their personal preferences, the positions that religious elites take on political issues can be described as a process-based outcome in which several reference groups play distinct and influential roles. The reference groups of greatest salience in determining elite behavior are those that provide vocational security, professional advancement, and elite access to intra-denominational influence and/or “good” denominational policy. These items are not created equal, however. For instance, if an elite’s primary reference group (usually the one that is most institutionally proximate to them) is not pleased with the issue positions s/he takes, the group can impose sanctions. Given the nature of these sanctions, religious elites should want to keep their most proximate group colleagues satisfied to the fullest extent possible. This reality reflects what can be termed the collegial goal, in which an elite takes public positions that s/he believes will provide the greatest career utility in relation to reference group expectations, even if the position taken contradicts her/his sincerely held preferences.

Pursuit of the collegial goal is similar to the assurance game because all agents (including reference group members) gain the greatest utility from mutual cooperation. Mutual cooperation or defection are equilibria strategies because no players have the motivation to deviate once a pattern of play has commenced. Importantly though, cooperation, not defection, produces the greatest utility for all players (Tsebelis, 1990). This is seen in the assumption that where (p) represents the probabilities of collegial relations and vocational satisfaction/advancement, and (q) represents the probabilities of sanction and retaliation by the primary reference group for agent defection

$$(R - S)p + (T - P)q > (T - S)$$

There are additional goals that elites can pursue. These include implementing what the elite perceives to be good denominational policy and gaining intra-denominational influence.

These goals are provocative because they may create incentives for elites to behave in ways that are not in keeping with the collegial goal. For instance, congregational ministers, seeking the opportunity to gain greater denominational influence, may attempt to endear themselves to denominational bureaucrats by taking issue positions that appeal to the bureaucracy. This runs counter to the collegial goal because, generally, congregations and their lay leaders are far more ideologically conservative than denominational bureaucrats in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other mainline Protestant denominations. However, as Finke (2004) suggests, church bureaucrats may not, *prima facie*, pursue liberal policy agendas because they too want to avoid costly institutional conflict. Building on Finke's characterization, denominational bureaucrats may themselves pursue non-collegial goals by attempting to curry favor with the more conservative congregants whose monetary contributions constitute most of the denomination's operating budget. As such, rational bureaucrats, concerned that their more liberal ideological preferences will alienate the laity, may pursue better relations with the denomination's primary contributors by strategically taking positions that are more conservative than their own sincerely held preferences.

Of course, elites are free to pursue the collegial and non-collegial goals simultaneously. This is a necessary assumption given the institutional dynamics and exigencies these elites encounter. After all, while the collegial goal is the most important for near term utility, it is also true that, for liberal congregational ministers, currying favor, and perhaps even future employment, in the denominational bureaucracy is itself a rational move (Wald, 2003). Likewise, bureaucrats, whose operating budgets are heavily dependent on the laity's financial support, would be foolish not to try and build bridges to the rank-and-file in local churches. All the while, both sets of elites must continue to work well with their closest reference group colleagues. This

likely presents more of challenge for congregational ministers, but it is also possible for strategically-inclined bureaucrats to encounter resistance from their colleagues who view bureaucratic power as the opportunity to exercise a prophetic policy voice, irrespective of the intra-institutional tension it creates. Important to note for clarification is that the use of reference group cues is not considered here to be a strategic decision in-and-of itself. Strategic behavior is defined as elites intentionally masking sincerely-held preferences when responding to perceived pressure or the threat of sanctions. The use of group cues, and pursuit of the specific goals related to them, is considered a utility maximizing, or rational choice-type, decision, but not strategic *per se*.

I operationalize pursuit of the goals outlined here as an elite's explicit taking of cues from specific reference groups in developing a public position on a political issue. For instance, the collegial goal is pursued when ministers look to their lay leader colleagues in the congregation, or when bureaucrats look to their closest coworkers, for cues on developing a position. The intra-institutional or policy goals are pursued when elites look to cues from the less proximate reference groups. The baseline assumption is that all religious elites use their sincerely-held, personal beliefs to shape their political positions. This is the extant literature's general finding, and is considered the basic resource that elites use to order their political behavior (Stark et al., 1971; Guth et al., 1997). However, I hypothesize that while personal beliefs continue to matter for elites, there are also conditions under which they will behave strategically.

The most likely of these conditions is when a minister admits to taking cues from less proximate reference groups in developing new political positions. Recall that in the Presbyterian Church, the proximate groups for clergy, including the congregational lay leaders hold generally more conservative preferences than the less proximate groups, especially the bureaucracy. If a

clergyperson is taking cues from the less proximate groups, this will likely place her/him out-of-step with the preferences of her/his closest colleagues in the congregation. Since it is these colleagues who are equipped to dole out sanctions, clergy should feel pressured to mask their political positions (which were developed, in part, by cues from an alternative reference group) to avoid this outcome. Conversely, the pressure to behave strategically should decrease when ministers rely on cues from their congregational colleagues. The situation is perhaps less complicated for denominational bureaucrats. Since there are few instances in which bureaucrats would be looking to enter the congregational clergy ranks, there is likely not the same kind of alternative reference group pressure. However, the one case where this pressure might manifest is if moderate bureaucrats, following Finke's (2004) expectations, seek to curry favor with congregational contributors by not pursuing policy agendas that alienate the more conservative laity.

Of course, a clergy's personal preferences may also trigger the strategic motive, especially when encountering a session or congregation more conservative than her/him (given that mainline Protestant clergy are generally more liberal than their congregants). For denominational bureaucrats, strategic pressure should increase when they look for position cues from reference groups outside of their closest coworkers and supervisors, and decrease when relying on cues from the same. Concomitantly, bureaucrats who report little concern for whether their behavior will alienate the laity should be less pressured to behave strategically. There are, then, two main causal mechanisms that should trigger strategic behavior in religious elites: reliance on cues from less proximate reference groups, and the differences in preferences between elites certain reference groups.

I use ordered logistic regression to test for strategic pressure on religious elite behavior. Data were collected from original surveys of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregational ministers and denominational bureaucrats from April-August 2006. Ministerial respondents were identified according to a stratified (according to congregational membership size) random sample of 1,000 denominational churches. The response rate for this mail-based survey was 42% (n of 422), which is slightly ahead of the most recently published congregational survey of Presbyterian ministers (see Weston, 2004), and is in-line with expected response rates for mail-based surveys (Alreck and Settle, 1985; Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen, 1996). In coding these data, it was discovered that several respondents did not complete the relevant survey portion sufficiently for use in this analysis. As such, the available n drops to 382, or slightly over 38%. To ensure a representative sample, responses were examined for their comportment with the known characteristics of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ministers (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Research Services 2002, 2005, 2006). In almost all congregations where there is more than one minister, only the senior minister replied to the survey.

A second survey was sent to the 1,746 bureaucrats (defined as full time employees who not do also have a full time pastoral position) serving at all non-congregational levels of institutional service in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including presbyteries (which are district-level overseers of local congregations) synods, the denomination's national headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky, and the denomination's seminaries. 517 responses, representing approximately a 29% response rate were received. As with the ministers, several bureaucratic respondents did not answer several key questions. As such, they were dropped from consideration, leaving a total n of 405, or just over a 23% response rate. Since this is believed to

be the first religious bureaucrat survey of its kind, there is no opportunity for comparison to response rates for preceding projects.

The dependent variable in table one measures clergy perception of pressure from her/his session (the board of lay leaders in Presbyterian congregations) to adopt public positions on political issues that s/he would not otherwise. The session is used here instead of the congregation because of its official institutional responsibility to make local church policy decisions on behalf of the laity. The dependent variable in table two measures bureaucratic perception of pressure from their closest coworkers to adopt public positions on political issues that they would not otherwise. Coding for the dependent variable in both models runs from 1 to 7, with 7 representing a low degree of perceived pressure by the respondent. The primary independent variables in tables one and two are respondent identification of the specific reference group (from a list of five for clergy and four for bureaucrats) that s/he primarily looks to in developing new, publicly acknowledged political positions.

Importantly, there was no forced choice between reference group influence and personal preferences for respondents. They were instructed to leave the reference group response blank if they believe group specific cues play no part, over and above their sincere preferences, in determining their new positions on political issues. This way of asking respondents is useful because it allows them to deny the use of reference group cues while keeping the continued importance of personal preferences intact. Important to reiterate for clarification is that the use of reference group cues is not considered here to be a strategic decision in-and-of itself. Strategic behavior is defined as elites intentionally masking sincerely-held preferences when responding to perceived pressure or the threat of sanctions. The use of group cues, and pursuit of the specific

goals related to them, is considered a utility maximizing, or rational choice-type, decision, but not strategic *per se*.

Control variables in both the clergy and bureaucratic models include the nature of a respondent's personal political preferences (coded 1 to 7, with 7 representing strongly liberal), respondent's perception of session or coworkers' ideology (coded 1 to 7 with 7 representing strongly liberal), respondent sex (coded 1 for female), the number of years the respondent has served in her/his current position, whether the respondent has served as a commissioner to the Presbyterian Church's General Assembly (coded 1 for service), or as a member of one of its Permanent Judicial Councils (coded 1 for service), for ministers specifically, the average attendance at regular Sunday services, and for bureaucrats specifically, the number of coworkers s/he works with on a regular basis (the number of session members is based on congregation size, and is already controlled for in the sample's stratification), and whether the respondent is a member of a liberal interest group within the Presbyterian Church.

Preferences and Pressure Points

[Table one about here]

Immediately noticeable is the significant, pressure *reducing* effect that a minister's reliance on her/his session to generate new, public political positions has on respondents. The odds that Presbyterian ministers do not perceive pressure from their sessions to adopt positions on political issues that they would not otherwise are 2.58 times higher for those relying on session cues. This serves as strong confirmation of the session's primary importance in a minister's decision-making calculus, and points to both the collegial goal's theoretical import and the role of equilibrium payoffs. As aggregate proxies of congregant preferences, sessions

prove themselves to be an important cue agent for Presbyterian ministers—ones that enable them to avoid feeling pressured into behaving strategically.

These findings are in contrast to the pressure *inducing* effect that liberal presbyteries have on ministers. Since ministers are ordained and placed in their specific congregations with presbytery approval, the aggregate impression that a minister has of her/his presbytery's ideological preferences can be of unique consequence, especially for those looking to pursue intra-denominational influence. The odds that ministers in presbyteries more liberal than themselves do not perceive pressure from their sessions to behave strategically are .842 times lower than for clergy with presbyteries less liberal than themselves. This suggests that cues from less proximate, and generally more liberal, groups increase a sense of strategic pressure on clergy in relation to their more conservative session colleagues. Finally, and as evidence that the strategic motive may break down along gender lines, female clergy have higher odds (1.19) of feeling session pressure than their male counterparts. This builds on Olson et al's (2005) findings of conflict avoidance among female clergy, especially those serving in more conservative congregations (141). It might be that conflict avoidance increases pressure for female clergy but not men, and certainly points to an important topic for future research.

[Table two about here]

Reference group cues are statistically inconsequential for Presbyterian bureaucrats on the question of perceived co-worker pressure. Instead, it is the specific institutional location that bureaucrats occupy that proves critical. Most notable is the pressure *reducing* effect of working at the denomination's national headquarters. The odds that bureaucrats at the national headquarters do not perceive pressure from their coworkers to behave strategically are 3.10 times higher than for those not working at the national offices. A similar effect is found for seminary

professors (2.99 times higher). These results are strong statistical confirmation of what the religion and politics scholarship has generally concluded through impressionistic or local survey evidence—denomination bureaucrats pursue their personal ideological preferences with greater latitude than their congregational clergy because bureaucrats, generally, work among like minds (Ammerman, 1981; Roof and McKinney, 1987; Wald, 2003). Indeed, if no reference group crosspressures induce strategic behavior, an elite's personal preferences have a free hand in ordering public behavior. This is corroborated by a bureaucrat's increased odds (1.45) of not perceiving coworker pressure the more liberal her/his personal preferences are.

Also of note in table two is evidence of a reverse acclimation effect for bureaucrats who once served as congregational ministers. Bureaucrats with longer tenure as congregational ministers have lower odds of not perceiving co-worker pressure to behave strategically (.584) than bureaucrats with shorter or no past experience in a ministerial capacity. At the same time, the length of time in the church bureaucracy significantly increases the odds that bureaucrats do not perceive coworker pressure (1.04). This might point to a systematic difference within the denominational bureaucracy, where those having prolonged experience with negotiating competing reference group demands (such as seems to exist at the congregational) remain more sensitive to pressure to conform to reference group expectations. It is telling that church bureaucrats who do not report concern that their public issue positions may contribute to a loss of congregant monetary contributions have higher odds of not perceiving coworker pressure to behave strategically (1.15).

This somewhat contradicts Finke's (2004) suggestion that denomination bureaucrats pursue moderate policies over concern for broader institutional health, as it shows that bureaucrats are generally not pressuring each other to cater to the laity. Importantly, these

findings also help to explain why many Christian denominations in the United States, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), have devolved into internecine conflict over various political issues, including gay rights and abortion, with bureaucratic actions helping to stoke tensions (Olson and Cadge, 2002; Stockton, 2005). Though it appears that there is little strategic pressure on bureaucratic behavior, a more robust assessment can be conducted by using a dependent variable that gauges whether ministers and bureaucrats actually report changing their expressed political views on issues to avoid conflict with their most proximate reference group. The models in tables three and four use this dependent variable, and contain the same controls as in the first two models. Added is the variable measuring the perception of session/coworker pressure (which was the dependent variable in models one and two).

[Table three about here]

It appears that clergy pursuing the collegial goal with their sessions have higher odds of not changing their expressed views to avoid conflict. Specifically, the odds that ministers relying primarily on their sessions to develop new views on political issues do not change their expressed views to avoid session conflict are 4.03 times higher than for those not relying on their sessions in this manner. A decided lack of perceived session pressure also increases the odds (.962) of clergy not changing their expressed positions. A significant, and countervailing, effect is found for ministers looking to cues from denominational bureaucrats. This, again, demonstrates the crosspressures on clergy created by less proximate reference group cues. The odds that clergy do not change their expressed views to avoid conflict with their sessions are 1.96 times lower than for those not relying on the bureaucracy in this manner. This is clear evidence that ministerial pursuit of non-collegial goals contributes to an undertaking of strategic behavior in order to avoid sanction from their primary reference group—the session. Again

contributing to strategic behavior is clergy gender, where females have lower odds (.562) of not changing their expressed views.

[Table four about here]

As with the results in model two, there is no statistical evidence that competing reference group cues induce strategic behavior in denominational bureaucrats. In fact, there is robust evidence that personal preferences serve to increase the odds (1.24) that bureaucrats will not undertake strategic behavior. Table four shows that the effect of bureaucratic preferences is significantly reinforced by both her/his tenure in the bureaucracy (1.06) and her/his coworkers' (liberal) ideological preferences (1.17), with all three indicators increasing the statistical odds that bureaucrats do not change their expressed views to avoid conflict with their closest coworkers. Why would they need to given the optimal payoffs for cooperation with like-minded colleagues? Of course, congregational ministers enjoy high payoffs for cooperating with their sessions. The obvious difference, however, is the general ideological disparity between a minister and session creates temptation for clergy to pursue goals involving reference groups outside of the congregation. As a result, congregational ministers, when relying on cues from less proximate reference groups, have higher odds of pursuing strategic behavior to facilitate cooperation with their sessions. In plain terms, clergy appear willing to go along to get along in order to avoid sanction.

Though the effect of personal preferences go a long way in explaining bureaucratic behavior, the finding of strategic behavior in congregational clergy suggests that scholars (to say nothing of the church going public) should pay closer attention to the contextually-based motives elites have for taking specific political positions. After all, if these elites are not basing public statements entirely on their sincerely-held preferences, then one is justified in asking whether

clergy, indeed, elites in all political institutions where reference groups can provide both sanctions and incentives, are at least forced to contemplate strategic behavior when taking public political positions. In order to more fully assess this possibility, I examine respondent position on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s long-standing policy of support for a woman's right to undergo an abortion late in her pregnancy. Until 2006, the denomination was the only one in the United States that supported a woman's right to the procedure at a late stage in the pregnancy. As would be expected with this type of issue, the policy enjoyed high salience throughout the denomination (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). Also as expected, policy supporters were well represented in the denominational bureaucracy, while opponents were well often found in the pews (leaving congregational clergy to negotiate between the two!).

Some might argue that inquiring as to how respondents develop new views on abortion is unrealistic, as they have likely set their position on this issue long ago. While may be true regarding abortion as a general political issue, it is not the case concerning the denomination's policy toward the procedure. The dependent variable in models five and six is respondent position (based on a 1-7 scale, with 7 being strongly opposed) on the 2006 General Assembly overture that called for a repeal of the denomination's standing policy. These models contain two additional controls over those in tables three and four. They include whether respondents change their expressed views to avoid reference group conflict (which was the dependent variable in models three and four), and alternative reference group indicators. The first indicator asks clergy whether they will change their expressed political positions to curry favor with denominational bureaucrats. The second asks bureaucrats whether they will change their expressed political positions to please the denominations' congregants. This is an attempt to account for any

crosspressures elites encounter from their less proximate reference groups. Table five examines the minister respondents.

[Table five about here]

The odds that a minister will not support the new restriction on late term abortion access are 1.29 times higher for clergy who will not change their expressed positions for their sessions. This is in clear contrast to ministers who report using session cues to develop new views. The odds that these ministers will not support the new, anti-abortion policy are .448 times lower for those using session cues. Notice, however, that a minister's personal preferences are a significant factor, and reduce the odds of support for the new policy by 1.76 times. This finding reinforces the importance of personal preferences in determining clergy behavior, even in the midst of reference group influence. The preference effect is reinforced by a minister's perception of bureaucrat ideology. The bureaucracy's relative liberalism increases the odds that ministers will not support the new denomination abortion policy by 1.50 times. For the first time in these models, a clergy's reliance on her/his congregation to develop new, sincerely held views also constitutes significant influence. Attention now turns to denomination bureaucrats.

[Table six about here]

Though the bureaucrats' most proximate coworkers were found not to influence respondent position on the new abortion policy, those bureaucrats relying on cues from the laity have significantly *decreased* odds of opposing the new policy (.604). This, even as their personal preferences have a significant and inverse effect (odds increase of 1.96). The effect is reinforced by the degree to which bureaucrats are members of a Permanent Judicial Council, which has the right of judicial review over denominational policies (odds increase of 1.83 of not supporting the policy) Hence, it appears that church bureaucratic elites may also be considered strategic actors,

if only on specific issues, when relying on cues from their least proximate reference groups, but will often act in accordance with their sincerely held preferences. Perhaps because of the abortion policy's salience as a rallying point for conservatives in the pews, some bureaucrats may have purposely begun taking cues from congregants. This lends credence to the possibility that church bureaucrats subset their reference group environment and pursue non-collegial goals after all, although they may only be motivated to do so when they sense a potential congregant backlash, or are concerned about funding levels for denominational programs.

Strategy and Sincerity in Elite Behavior

These findings point to a number of new insights regarding how religious elites, representing a very important cadre of opinion leaders in American politics, adopt their political positions. Most significant is that religious elites may elect to undertake strategic behavior in taking public positions on political issues, even as their personal preferences continue to matter greatly in their decision calculus. The existence of the sincere and strategic motives in elite behavior highlights the institutional tension that exists in American mainline Protestant institutions. Future research could apply this empirical framework to the behavior of elites in the mainline Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist denominations, given their general similarity to the Presbyterian Church. Admittedly, denomination bureaucrats, in contrast to ministers, appear less compelled to behave strategically, but the results do suggest that they may behave strategically on specific policy issues.

Importantly, the ramifications of these findings extend far beyond the religious realm. Elites in all types of political organizations, including parties and interest groups, must function in some relation to reference groups that are comprised of other elites, contributors, constituents,

or some combination thereof. Since there are a number of political organizations that use a federated institutional structure similar to the Presbyterian Church, scholars might find it fruitful to apply the reference group and strategic behavior assumptions to those political contexts as well. Admittedly, these findings do not explore the specifics of how clergy go about taking political positions. This was not part of the empirical question addressed here, but it remains an important consideration for future research. Djupe and Gilbert (2002, 2003) have cleared a good deal of empirical brush on the topic, and future forays into the strategic motive will benefit from incorporating elements of their research agenda.

At the same time, it will be important to apply this model to elite behavior in secular political institutions and organizations. One example would be to study interest groups to see whether state directors take different issue positions depending on whether they are trying to solicit new members from specific local constituencies, or curry favor and additional support from national group leaders. A similar examination might concern the motives and behavior of local, state, and national party leaders. Though the institutional contexts of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and secular interest groups and political parties are not an exact match, there is enough similarity to believe that elite motives can be successfully teased out by following the general theoretical framework developed here. These findings suggest that religious elites rely on both their sincerely held preferences and strategic behavior to maximize their expected utility in professional situations. It will be interesting to see what future research discovers concerning the motives and behavior of political elites in other political settings.

Notes

1 Admittedly, there have been almost no broad-based empirical studies that have assessed clergy political influence from a decidedly behavioral perspective in which parishioner political behavior was directly linked to clergy actions. Addressing this empirical gap has been an ongoing concern for religion and politics scholars. In the interim, a sizeable body of work has found evidence of an indirect, or contextual, linkage between clergy action and the laity's political behavior. As such, this study proceeds recognizing the limited claims of direct clergy political influence.

2 The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is organized at three basic institutional levels. The lowest is the congregation, which is overseen by the ordained clergy and a session of elected elders. Technically, there is no difference in rank between congregational clergy and their elder colleagues on the session. Operating above the session is a district level governing body known as the presbytery. It is the presbytery that is responsible for ordaining and licensing clergy for the denomination, and it is the presbytery, along with the local session, that is responsible for assigning clergy to specific churches. Presbytery members include all clergy within the district that the presbytery oversees, and a set number of session elders to equal the number of clergy. Above the presbytery is the General Assembly, which is the highest legislative body for the church, and is comprised mainly of clergy and session elders from the denomination's congregations. The Assembly sets the church's general policies. However, because it meets for only one week every other year, it is the national church bureaucracy—comprised of hundreds of staff members tasked with carrying out Assembly policies, that should be considered the *de facto* national leadership. I make a further distinction when considering reference groups for the bureaucracy by distinguishing the small cadre of top national officials charged with running the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on a daily basis from the rest of the bureaucratic class.

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TABLE ONE: Presbyterian Ministers Pressured to Act Strategically

	β (SE)	Odds Ratio
1) Session's Preferences	.100 (.073)	
2) Years as Presbyterian Minister	-.008 (.006)	
3) Years in Current Church	.002 (.004)	
4) New Views Generated by Congregation (Reference Group)	-.227 (.142)	
5) New Views Generated by Session (Reference Group)	.444 (.194)	2.58
6) New Views Generated by Presbytery (Reference Group)	.011 (.035)	
7) New Views Generated by Bureaucrats (Reference Group)	-.360 (.176)	
8) New Views Generated by Seminary Experiences (Reference Group)	-.060 (.203)	
9) Presbytery's Preferences	-.073 (.046)	.842
10) Current Personal Preferences	.093 (.047)	
11) Gender	-.191 (.138)	1.19
12) General Assembly Commissioner	.098 (.139)	
13) PJC Member	.125 (.163)	
14) Member of Liberal PC (U.S.A.) Interest Group	-.103 (.214)	
15) Concern over Congregant Contributions	.024 (.044)	
16) Average Sunday Worship Attendance	-.002 (.002)	
Wald Chi2	20.96	
Log-likelihood	-505.524	
N	381	

Coefficients are unstandardized. All tests are two-tailed. Odds ratios are calculated for variables that are significant at .05 or higher

TABLE TWO: Presbyterian Bureaucrats Pressured to Act Strategically

	β (SE)	Odds Ratio
1) New Views Generated by Coworkers (Reference Group)	.285 (.203)	
2) New Views Generated by Seminary Experiences (Reference Group)	-.026 (.291)	
3) New Views Generated by Laity (Reference Group)	.233 (.218)	
4) New Views Generated by Denomination Leadership (Reference Group)	.444 (.194)	
5) Number of Years as a Minister	-.539 (.251)	.584
6) Gender	.482 (.211)	1.62
7) Seminary professor	1.10 (.407)	2.99
8) Number of Coworkers	-.007 (.006)	
9) General Assembly Commissioner	.453 (.221)	1.57
10) PJC Member	-.679 (.251)	.507
11) Louisville Personnel	1.13 (.351)	3.10
12) Years in Current Position	.039 (.016)	1.04
13) Current Personal Preferences	.370 (.099)	1.45
14) Concern over Congregant Contributions	.140 (.069)	1.15
15) Coworkers' Ideological Preferences	-.085 (.072)	
16) Laity's Ideological Preferences	-1.24 (.075)	
Wald Chi2	112.33	
Log-likelihood	-551.508	
N	405	

Coefficients are unstandardized. All tests are two-tailed. Odds ratios are calculated for variables that are significant at .05 or higher.

TABLE THREE: Presbyterian Ministers Changing Expressed Views for Session

	β (SE)	Odds Ratio
1) Session's Preferences	-.039 (.115)	
2) Feels Pressure from Session	.431 (.087)	.962
3) Years in Current Church	.005 (.006)	
4) New Views Generated by Congregation (Reference Group)	-.402 (.258)	
5) New Views Generated by Session (Reference Group)	1.39 (.355)	4.03
6) New Views Generated by Presbytery (Reference Group)	-.080 (.042)	
7) New Views Generated by Bureaucrats (Reference Group)	-.670 (.308)	
8) New Views Generated by Seminary Experiences (Reference Group)	-.443 (.301)	1.96
9) Presbytery's Preferences	.112 (.070)	
10) Current Personal Preferences	-.021 (.074)	
11) Gender	-.576 (.274)	.562
12) General Assembly Commissioner	.110 (.250)	
13) PJC Member	-.019 (.315)	
14) Member of Liberal PC (U.S.A.) Interest Group	.029 (.433)	
15) Concern over Congregant Contributions	.164 (.075)	
16) Average Sunday Worship Attendance	-.001 (.004)	
17) Years as a PC (U.S.A.) Minister	.004 (.011)	1.18
Wald Chi2	55.14	
Log-likelihood	-448.097	
N	381	

Coefficients are unstandardized. All tests are two-tailed. Odds ratios are calculated for variables that are significant at .05 or higher.

TABLE FOUR: Presbyterian Bureaucrats Changing Expressed Views for Coworkers

	β (SE)	Odds Ratio
1) New Views Generated by Coworkers (Reference Group)	-.099 (.197)	
2) New Views Generated by Seminary Experiences (Reference Group)	.219 (.273)	
3) New Views Generated by Laity (Reference Group)	.007 (.191)	
4) New Views Generated by Denominational Leadership (Reference Group)	-.051 (.048)	
5) Years as a Minister	.306 (.230)	1.52
6) Gender	.419 (.164)	1.95
7) Seminary professor	.670 (.273)	
8) Number of Coworkers	.004 (.005)	
9) General Assembly Commissioner	-.110 (.214)	
10) PJC Member	.393 (.214)	
11) Louisville Personnel	.820 (.299)	2.27
12) Number of Years in Current Position	.057 (.015)	1.06
13) Current Personal Preferences	.213 (.083)	1.24
14) Concern over Congregant Contributions	.892 (.095)	2.44
15) Coworkers' Ideological Preferences	.153 (.075)	1.17
16) Laity's Ideological Preferences	-.022 (.062)	
17) Feels Pressure from Coworkers	-.003 (.068)	
Wald Chi2	150.84	
Log-likelihood	-656.378	
N	405	

Coefficients are unstandardized. All tests are two-tailed. Odds ratios are calculated for variables that are significant at .05 or higher.

TABLE FIVE: Presbyterian Ministers' Position on Late Term Abortion

	β (SE)	Odds Ratios
1) Session's Preferences	-.122 (.123)	
2) Average Sunday Worship Attendance	.001 (.003)	
3) Concern over Contributions	.039 (.078)	
4) Feels Pressure from Session	.004 (.061)	
5) Will Change Position for Session	.255 (.105)	1.29
6) New Views Generated by Congregation (Reference Group)	-.575 (.315)	
7) New Views Generated by Session (Reference Group)	-.802 (.334)	.448
8) New Views Generated by Presbytery (Reference Group)	-.486 (.285)	
9) New Views Generated by Bureaucrats (Reference Group)	.233 (.358)	
10) Current Personal Preferences	.566 (.095)	1.76
11) Years in Current Position	-.006 (.005)	
12) Gender	.154 (.238)	
13) General Assembly Commissioner	.497 (.144)	1.64
14) Member of Liberal PC (U.S.A.) Interest Group	.031 (.382)	
15) PJC Member	.146 (.287)	
16) Years as a PC (U.S.A.) Minister	-.005 (.010)	
17) Presbytery's Preferences	.404 (.084)	
18) Will Change Position for Bureaucrats	-.257 (.146)	1.50
19) New Views Generated by Seminary Experiences (Reference Group)	-.072	
Wald Chi2	167.18	
Log-Likelihood	-541.381	
N	376	

Coefficients are unstandardized. All tests are two-tailed. Odds ratios are calculated for variables that are significant at .05 or higher.

TABLE SIX: Presbyterian Bureaucrats' Position on Late Term Abortion

	B (SE)	Odds Ratios
1) New Views Generated by Coworkers (Reference Group)	.074 (.200)	
2) New Views Generated by Seminary Experiences (Reference Group)	-.521 (.270)	
3) New Views Generated by Laity (Reference Group)	-.504 (.209)	.604
4) New Views Generated by Denominational Leadership (Reference Group)	.033 (.053)	
5) Years as a Minister	.287 (.275)	
6) Gender	.028 (.046)	
8) Number of Coworkers	.005 (.006)	
9) General Assembly Commissioner	.232 (.215)	
10) PJC Member	.604 (.305)	1.83
11) Louisville Personnel	.091 (.280)	
12) Years in Current Position	-.011 (.021)	
13) Current Personal Preferences	.673 (.099)	1.96
14) Concern over Laity Contributions	.018 (.128)	
15) Coworkers' Ideological Preferences	.012 (.079)	
16) Laity's Ideological Preferences	-.051 (.066)	
17) Feels Pressure from Coworkers	.112 (.074)	
18) Will Change Position for Laity	-.005 (.134)	
Wald Chi2	156.96	
Log-likelihood	-679.650	
N	396	

Coefficients are unstandardized. All tests are two-tailed. Odds ratios are calculated for variables that are significant at .05 or higher.

1
2