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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Eating Your Cake and Having it Too: US Megachurches and Factors Associated with Attending Multiple Congregations

Katie E. Corcoran[1] · Stephanie M. House-Niamke[1] · Warren Bird[2] · Scott L. Thumma[3]

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Abstract

Background It is typically assumed in the social scientific study of religion that individuals attend one congregation or none. As such, there is scarce research on individuals who attend more than one congregation yet doing so may affect congregational participation.

Purpose This study theorizes factors affecting whether someone attends multiple congregations and how this might influence congregational volunteering and giving in the context of megachurches. It hypothesizes that parents, those who are single, those of lower socioeconomic status, those who are racially and ethnically minoritized, and those who are not socially embedded in a congregation will be more likely to attend a megachurch and other congregations. It also theorizes competing hypotheses regarding the association between attending multiple congregations and congregational volunteering and giving.

Methods This study draws on survey data from 12 representative megachurches to test the proposed hypotheses using logistic and ordinal logistic regression models.

Results Those who are single, those of lower socioeconomic status, those who are racially and ethnically minoritized, and those who are not socially embedded in the megachurch are more likely to attend multiple congregations simultaneously. Attending multiple congregations is negatively associated with congregational volunteering and giving.

Conclusions and Implications The results demonstrate the need to reconceptualize congregational attendance to recognize that individuals may attend more than one congregation. Accordingly, future surveys should allow respondents to identify attending multiple congregations. The results also highlight how congregations may be negatively impacted by non-exclusive attendees who are less likely to volunteer and give money.

Keywords Multiple congregational attendance · Megachurch · Volunteer · Tithe

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

The religious landscape of the US has in many ways changed over the past 30 years and a core factor in that has been the emergence and proliferation of megachurches (Bird and Thumma 2021; Chaves 2006)—Protestant churches with an average weekly attendance of 2,000 or more members. The majority of US churchgoers attend churches in the 90th percentile for size even though 65 people is the median size of US congregations (Thumma and Travis 2007). Megachurches have large impacts on their local religious markets in which they influence attendance at other congregations (Eiesland 1997; Wollschleger and Porter 2011). While this research suggests that megachurches may 'steal' attendees of other congregations, it fails to recognize that individuals may both attend a megachurch and another congregation (Thumma and Bird 2009). Yet, other than Thumma and Bird's (2009) work, we know little about this phenomenon.

This is likely due to the influence of Western Christian assumptions on the study of religion in which religious affiliations have historically been treated as "mutually exclusive, indeed antagonistic, categories" (McGuire 2008:12). Ideas about how one "ought to be committed" (McGuire 2008:12) (e.g., that people 'should' only attend one congregation) appear to affect how data on congregational attendance are collected. Surveys typically only ask questions about the respondent's "church" or "congregation" singular without allowing a respondent to identify more than one congregation. Lived religion, how religion is actually practiced in real-life, does not always conform to categories created by organized religion and/or scholars of religion (McGuire 2008). For example, while religious identities have often been treated as mutually exclusive, people can simultaneously hold multiple religious and non-religious identities (Corcoran et al. 2021). Likewise, people can attend multiple congregations.

There are only a handful of studies that address attending multiple congregations. In a U.S. nationally representative survey of adults, Pew (2009) found that 35% of respondents attend more than one congregation and 24% of all respondents attend congregations of different faiths. Thumma and Bird (2009) found that around 12% of megachurch attendees in their survey considered the megachurch their "home church" but also attended another congregation. These studies suggest that attending multiple congregations is not a rare phenomenon in the US, which has important theoretical and methodological implications. Methodologically, congregational membership and participation counts are taken to be independent of each other, but if 35% of the population attend more than one congregation (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2009), then the numbers reported may overlap and not represent independent populations, thereby affecting counts of the number of religiously affiliated individuals.

Numerous studies indicate a trend in the US toward individualism in religious choices in which individuals 'shop' in a religious or spiritual marketplace for the congregation or spiritual practice that best fulfills their needs and beliefs (Bellah et al. 2007; Dougherty and Mulder 2020; Hammond 1992; Roof 1989; Sikkink and Emerson 2020; Stark and Finke 2000; Turner 2004; Twitchell 2007; Wellman Jr, Corcoran, and Stockly 2020; Wolfe 2003). They may even choose to switch congregations in order to attend one that better satisfies their social and spiritual needs (Sikkink and Emerson 2020). What has yet to be considered is that individuals may

choose to attend more than one congregation in order to have more of their needs met, perhaps the ultimate expression of religious individualism. Multiple attendance also has possible organizational ramifications. As voluntary associations, congregations need members who are willing to donate their time and money (Ammerman 1997; Chaves 2004; Stark and Finke 2000). In the US context—in which religion and spirituality are mostly unregulated—congregations and other organizations compete for members/practitioners (Stark and Finke 2000). But this logic largely depends on conceptualizing congregational participation as exclusive—if you attend one, you cannot attend another. Given that some individuals do attend multiple congregations (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2009; Thumma and Bird 2009), understanding the factors associated with it can aid congregations in their recruitment and retention efforts. If multiple attendance affects measures of differential participation or congregational commitment (e.g., monetary donations and volunteering) (Thumma and Bird 2009), it also has important implications for congregational vitality and livelihood.

This study extends the research of Thumma and Bird (2009) and theorizes factors affecting whether megachurch attendees attend more than one congregation and whether this is associated with congregational volunteering and giving. We draw on qualitative and quantitative data on megachurch attendees; we use qualitative interview data to empirically ground our hypotheses and a large-N survey of megachurch attendees to test our hypotheses.

Data

Thumma and Bird (2011) have been tracking and compiling data on US megachurches since 1992. They created the Database of Megachurches in the United States from that data, which provides an approximate census of US megachurches. There were 1,250 megachurches in the database in 2007. Using this as their sampling frame, Thumma and Bird (2011) specifically selected 12 megachurches to reflect the US megachurch landscape in terms of region, attendance, dominant race, church age, denomination, and other characteristics. The sample has an average size that is somewhat larger than the typical megachurch and slightly underrepresents the western region of the US, otherwise it is fairly representative of the megachurch population in 2007 (Thumma and Bird 2009). In 2008, Thumma and Bird distributed surveys to all adult attendees during church services on a given Sunday at each church, conducted focus groups, interviews, and also observed services. The survey responses were coded into a data set and the interviews were transcribed. Leadership Network, a nonprofit research group and consultancy, funded and, together with the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, collected these data. Two hundred eighty-two attendees (132 males and 150 females) were interviewed in focus groups lasting roughly 1.5 h. Interviewees were asked questions about how they started attending the megachurch and became involved in it. Respondents were not specifically asked about multiple church attendance but, after reading and coding the transcribed interviews, it emerged as a topic in several focus groups across congregations in which many respondents provided their reasons for doing so. We use this data to empirically ground our theoretical

hypotheses and suggest their feasibility. We test them with the attendee survey data, which we will describe after presenting the hypotheses.

Multiple Congregational Attendance

There is little research on attending multiple congregations. Pew's (2009) nationally representative sample of US adults is one of the first major studies on the topic. They found that 35% of respondents regularly/occasionally attend religious services at more than one congregation, the majority of which reported that sometimes the services are at congregations of different faiths. While 37% of White evangelicals, 31% of White mainline, and 40% of Catholics reported attending multiple congregations, 57% of Black Protestants identified attending more than one congregation. Black Protestants also had the largest percentage of individuals reporting attending other places regularly (12%) compared to 6% for White evangelicals and White mainline Protestants and 9% of Catholics. Black Protestants also have higher percentages of attending "two other faiths" (14%) and "three or more" other faiths (9%), the next largest percentage for "two other faiths" was among White evangelicals (9%) and for "three or more" mainline Protestants (5%).

Using the 2008 megachurch attendee survey data from the 12 megachurches described above, Thumma and Bird (2009) found that roughly 12% of respondents identified attending other congregations while considering the megachurch their "home" church. They note: "There was a time when church participants were members of only one congregation. Switching, when it occurred, happened serially […] This may no longer be true for all congregations' attenders but it is certainly no longer descriptive of many megachurch attenders." We extend the work of Thumma and Bird (2009) and hypothesize factors that affect whether respondents attend multiple congregations.

There is considerable research identifying that many church-goers in the US shop around for congregations and choose one that best satisfies their needs and may switch congregations looking for the right one (Bellah et al. 2007; Hammond 1992; Roof 1989; Sikkink and Emerson 2020; Stark and Finke 2000; Twitchell 2007; Wolfe 2003). The same logic applies in the context of multiple congregational attendance. Given that many individuals are seeking to satisfy a wide variety of needs (e.g., spiritual, religious, social, emotional, and material), to the extent that one congregation cannot satisfy all their needs, they may choose to attend multiple congregations each of which satisfy certain needs that the others do not. In this environment, it benefits congregations to be inimitable, such that they serve a particular niche in a religious market and may thereby satisfy particular needs that other congregations do not or cannot (Miller 2002). We draw on the unique features of megachurches to derive hypotheses regarding what factors should affect someone's likelihood of attending a megachurch and another church(es).

Megachurches are known for being distinct from smaller Protestants churches in several ways. Megachurches are intentional about meeting the spiritual and personal needs of attendees and even go as far as polling their members to determine their interests and needs (Thumma and Travis 2007; Wellman Jr et al. 2020). Economies

of scale allow megachurches to offer a wide variety of ministries, small groups, and programs for attendees to meet a diverse array of interests and the size of the church ensures that there will be a sufficient number of participants in these activities. In comparing US megachurches to non-megachurches, von der Ruhr and Daniels (2012) found that a higher percent of megachurches offer small groups across all categories. Wellman and colleagues (2020:164) note the many types of small groups and ministries that megachurches offer: "prenatal care, newborn care, childcare, schools, youth sports leagues, afterschool tutoring, college prep help, college-age activities, singles groups, marriage classes, car maintenance facilities, hair salons, job search help, dance classes, fitness classes, recovery resources, medical care, Senior living facilities, even a columbarium."

Many of the programs listed are social welfare services. A congregation's ability to provide social support to its congregants is often tied to their desire to participate in the congregation. Previous studies show social supports such as assistance in the housing and job market, presence of relevant ministries, and social networks available to congregants impacted attendance and commitment to their church. In Tsang's study (2015), Chinese immigrants consistently mentioned that their church offered help in finding jobs, housing, and visa paperwork for employment. An important consideration for social support is how the congregant's race and ethnicity informs their social needs. Many Black church congregants have less need for assistance with visa paperwork and language interpretation and more need for support in managing racism in daily life (Fitzgerald and Spohn 2005). For working class and married, young adult congregants, the presence of a children's ministry is vital (Gurrentz 2017).

Using a representative sample of US megachurches, Bird and Thumma (2011) found that community service was identified as a program of "strong emphasis" in their congregation by 74% of megachurches, which was the second most prevalent program listed as a "strong emphasis" of the congregation, following youth activities. In terms of types of welfare services: 98% identified cash assistance, 94% financial counseling, 80% food pantry/soup kitchen, 60% daycare/pre-school, 59% job training, 55% elder care, 54% tutoring, and 52% literacy. This emphasis on community service is not surprising as larger congregations participate in more social service activities likely due to their increased financial and human resources (Chaves and Tsitsos 2001). This could mean that those who need social service programs the most (i.e., those of lower-socioeconomic status) would be more likely to attend megachurches. Yet, larger congregations, including megachurches, have larger percentages of higher-socioeconomic status (SES) attendees (i.e., college degrees and high incomes) and higher-SES individuals are more likely to attend larger congregations (Eagle 2012). Thus, it seems that, overall, megachurches do not generally appeal to those of low SES. Given this, we hypothesize that those with low SES who attend megachurches will be more likely to also attend other congregations that satisfy their non-material needs.

H1: Lower-SES megachurch attendees will be more likely to attend another congregation(s) than higher-SES megachurch attendees.

Youth groups and ministries are a core emphasis of the majority of megachurches. 91% of megachurches identified "youth activities" as a "strong emphasis" of their congregation. The size of megachurches allows them to offer large youth programs specifically tailored to varying ages. For example, a megachurch could "have roughly five hundred fifty children from birth to eleven years old and around three hundred youth in the twelve-to-seventeen age range" (Thumma and Travis 2007:104). Megachurches offer "high-quality, relevant, and safe" programs for children, youth, and young adults including "special-purpose spaces" specifically for those ministries (Thumma and Travis 2007:176). 75% of attendees of the largest Protestant churches identify being satisfied with the children and youth ministries of their churches (Thumma and Travis 2007). One megachurch church attendee from the interview data noted that the youth ministries was the main draw of the megachurch: "Because my son will be coming to live with me to go to high school […] I was looking for […] a congregation, a community that is youth based." Individuals who attend primarily for their children may have other unmet needs. We expect that megachurch attendees with children will be more likely to attend another congregation(s).

> H2: Megachurch attendees with children will be more likely to attend another congregation(s) than megachurch attendees without children.

Akin to their youth ministries, megachurches are also typically able to offer larger singles groups as they generally have a higher number of singles in their congregations. Several interviewees noted this as a reason for joining the megachurch:

> I was really wanting to get back into a church and get more involved, and I figured a larger church would have more opportunities for getting connected with other people […] I'd been to both [small and large churches], but I know that from going to larger churches before, they have singles groups. They have outings. They have other stuff that a lot of the smaller churches don't have the organization.

A focus group of longtime megachurch attendees noted that their post-graduate small group attracted many new attendees because it was one of the best places to meet other single young adults:

> Well, I think when I came back here, it was probably primarily to come into what they called the grad group then. It was like a singles group of post grads […] And it had the largest singles group around. Sometimes it sort of veered between **either [other place] or here**, but then it was definitely here. (emphasis added).
> Yeah, I would say there are a lot of people that go to [group name], which is our 20's group that go to [group name] first and then go to church. And that's mainly been written up in several magazines in the last five years being one of the in places to meet singles. […] we figured out about […] **25 to 30% of the people that were involved in [group name] didn't go to [megachurch's name]**. (emphasis added).

This last quote identifies that a large percentage of attendees of that small group didn't attend the megachurch and thus were obviously attracted to the church due to the singles/young adult group. We predict that singles will be more likely to attend multiple congregations as they may attend the megachurch for the large singles groups that other congregations do not have.

> H3: Singles who attend megachurches will be more likely to attend another congregation(s) than megachurch attendees who are not single.

Congregational choice in the US is increasingly an individualistic and voluntary choice in which individuals choose a congregation(s) that meets their needs. This reflects an understanding of congregational choice and religious identities as achieved or chosen, rather than ascribed. Even though there is a move toward religion as an achieved status with less connection to race, ethnicity, or nationality (Davidman 1991; Sikkink and Emerson 2020), there are still many individuals for which it is ascribed or both ascribed and achieved (Cadge and Davidman 2006; Chafetz and Ebaugh 2000; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Ecklund 2006; Hartman and Kaufman 2006). Hartman and Kaufman (2006:384) describe how distinguishing between religious and ethnic identities rarely captures lived religious experiences, which suggests that "religious, ethnic, racial, and secular identities are intertwined." Religious identities and commitments can simultaneously be both achieved and ascribed. Ethnic congregations serve many functions for their communities including incorporating attendees into civic life, social integration, cultural preservation, supporting ethnic identity, and providing social services, social status, organizational resources for civic engagement, and an extended fictive family/kinship network (Chafetz and Ebaugh 2000; Chong 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Ecklund 2006; Ellison and Sherkat 1990; Fitzgerald and Spohn 2005; Kurien 2013; Tsang 2015). Some research on second generation Christians has found that they are drawn to evangelical Protestant values and practices including a nondenominational, individualistic, anti-liturgical focus in which evangelism, ministry, and outreach to those outside of one's immigrant community is important (Ecklund 2006; Kim 2010; Kurien 2012, 2013; Min and Kim 2005). In fact, "many Western-born children of immigrants no longer see religious identity and ethnicity as linked. Instead, they embrace a religion that is purified of the cultural traditions and observances of their parents" (Kurien 2012:448). While some second-generation Korean Christians have created their own congregations (Kim 2010), other second-generation Christians do not have the numbers to do so and often must choose between attending an ethnic congregation and a non-immigrant congregation that satisfies their spiritual/religious needs (Kurien 2012). Yet, there are reasons other than religion to attend ethnic congregations including familial obligation, ethnic community and culture, and familial and fictive kinship relationships (Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Kurien 2012, 2013).

Some individuals may resolve the tension between attending an ethnic congregation versus a congregation that satisfies their spirituality by attending both congregations. Kurien (2012:461), in her study of second generation Indian Christians, notes that "the community orientation and familial nature of the [ethnic] church was the

primary factor motivating some second-generation members to continue to attend the services (sometimes in addition to a nondenominational church), to return to serve the youth, or to want to raise their children in the church." Here she indicates that some members attended both a nondenominational church and Mar Thoma (i.e., ethnic church). For example, one respondent in the study indicated that he attended both a nondenominational church and Mar Thoma because "while he liked attending the Mar Thoma church because of the community there, he attended the nondenominational church to address his spiritual needs" (Kurien 2012:459). Another respondent "who attended a nondenominational church and only came to the Mar Thoma church once a month with her husband, said that the reason she continued to attend the Mar Thoma church was to keep in touch with Indian culture, the Malayalam language, and their friends" (Kurien 2012:461).

These findings may be applicable outside of immigrant congregations to ethnic congregations more broadly. Ethnic community and extended fictive kinship relationships are also present in Black churches (Chatters et al. 1994). In addition to the spiritual/religious reasons for viewing the Black church favorably, Black Americans also indicated its historical importance and its role in providing social ties and community (Taylor, Thornton, and Chatters 1987). McRoberts (2003) found that, after moving to a different neighborhood, some Black Americans chose to continue to attend the congregation in the neighborhood in which they previously lived. Our qualitative data from a Black megachurch further suggests this. We provide an extensive back-and-forth conversation within one focus group to illustrate this:

> "Because we have a lot of people that come to this church that are still members of other churches. So I know when I first started coming, […] I'd come to the 7:30 service and attend and then go back to my church and teach Sunday school, you know. […]"
> "We have a lot of people that come over for 8:30 service that actually goes to another church that'll come over and hear the Word and then they'll go out to their church and do their duties at their church. […]"
> "Because a lot of people and I know this happens a lot of places, but I know it happens a lot within the African-American community, where you are tied to a church because like, I'm here because I've been here all my life." "All my life, I grew up here." "I can't stand it, I hate it, but I've been here all my life." "For my family." "Exactly." "My family's here, yeah." "Family ties and so on." "And so a lot of folks in this church, […] probably grew up in churches here, probably have family here. And to switch from one church to another means turning your back on family ties." "Huge!" "Ostracized by the whole family!" […]

These respondents indicated that, in their experience, ties to a family church made it more difficult for Black Christians to leave that church to exclusively attend the megachurch even if they wanted to and instead, many would attend both. We expect that because ethnic congregations and megachurches may meet different needs, racial and ethnic minorities will be more likely to attend a megachurch and another congregation(s) compared to White megachurch attendees.

H4: Racially and ethnically minoritized megachurch attendees will be more likely to attend another congregation(s) than White megachurch attendees.

Many individuals participate and remain in congregations in part for friendship and feelings of belonging and community (Ferguson et al. 2017; Gallagher 2020; Sikkink and Emerson 2020; Stark and Finke 2000; Tsang 2015). Given the large size of megachurches, it may be harder for some people to make friends and feel a strong sense of belonging. One megachurch attendee noted: "I have not gotten any friends yet through this church. I've been kind of at this other church, you know, where I have lifetime friends and I'm going to gain from that previous church. And I'm looking at gaining more here." We hypothesize that attendees who are not socially embedded (i.e., have fewer friends in the megachurch and feel like they do not belong) will be more likely to attend other congregations:

H5: Megachurch attendees who are less socially embedded will be more likely to attend another congregation(s) than megachurch attendees who are more socially embedded.

Multiple Attendance and Congregational Volunteering and Donating Money

In order to survive and thrive congregations need attendees to donate time and money (Ammerman 1997; Chaves 2004; Finke et al. 2006; Stark and Finke 2000). The average American congregation receives 91% of its total income from member contributions (Corcoran 2015). It's thus important that congregations "strive to convert affiliates with tepid commitments into constituents willing to sacrifice resources" both time and money (Scheitle and Finke 2008:815; Stark and Finke 2000).

There has been considerable research identifying predictors of religious or congregational giving and volunteering including socio-demographic (e.g., education, marital status, age, and income) (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Chaves 2002; Finke et al. 2006; Iannaccone 1997), religious beliefs (Corcoran 2013; Finke et al. 2006; Luidens and Nemeth 1994; Peifer 2010; Scheitle and Finke 2008; Smith et al. 2008; Vaidyanathan and Snell 2011; Whitehead 2010), religious behaviors (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Chaves 2002; Lam 2002; Lewis et al. 2013; Loveland et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2008; Yeung 2017), religious social ties (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Corcoran 2013, 2020; Finke et al. 2006; Polson 2016; Scheitle and Finke 2008; Whitehead 2010; Whitehead and Stroope 2015), and religious emotions (Corcoran 2015, 2020). Yet, there are no studies testing the association between attending multiple congregations and congregational giving and volunteering. Thumma and Bird (2009) identified that those who attend megachurches and another congregation(s) tend to volunteer and give less; this paper extends their work in a multivariate context.

One line of research on religious giving and volunteering identifies these behaviors as zero-sum—one only has a certain amount of time and money to give, so the more one gives to one organization the less they should give to other organizations (Hill and Vaidyanathan 2011). As Kitts (1999:556) notes "It seems obvious that a person who donates some time or money to one organization cannot, by definition,

donate those same resources to another organization. This implies that organizations are competing for essential resources from a finite pool." Much of the research on giving focuses on whether those who are religious, in addition to donating to their own religious organizations, also donate more money to secular or out-group organizations than the non-religious. In Yasin, Adams, and King (2020) review of the literature on the relationship between religiosity and giving to out-groups, they identified that most studies found a positive relationship between religiosity and charitable giving to out-group organizations. Numerous studies of social movements have found positive associations between external organizational affiliations and participation in a social movement or protest (Corcoran et al. 2011, 2015; Kitts 1999; McAdam 1986; Passy and Giugni 2001; Schussman and Soule 2005; Somma 2010; Walsh and Warland 1983) even when the external organizational affiliations are other social movement organizations (Kitts 1999). Thus, "involvement in voluntary associations tends to generally breed more involvement" (Kitts 1999:571). This is contrary to a purely zero-sum interpretation of commitment. This could be because participation in voluntary associations increases civic skills and knowledge of other organizations (Almond and Verba 2015; Kitts 1999; Klandermans et al. 2008; McClurg 2003), which facilitates further participation, or because prosocial values or identities may encourage volunteering and donating money to multiple organizations. This leads to the following hypothesis:

> H6a: Attending multiple congregations will be positively associated with donating time and money to the megachurch.

Yet, Kitts (1999:557) found that participation in "parallel groups", those that promote "equivalent goals", decreases involvement in the focal social movement organization. Since many congregations promote similar goals, we expect that attending multiple congregations may be associated with less money and time donated to the megachurch. Given this, we also specify a competing hypothesis:

> H6b: Attending multiple congregations will be negatively associated with donating time and money to the megachurch.

Quantitative Data and Method

Surveys were distributed by Bird and Thumma in 2008 to adults (18 years or older) during all religious services over a given weekend at all 12 megachurches. 58% was the average survey response rate, which was calculated based on the percentage of adults in attendance who submitted a survey. We exclude first-time attendees and those who say they are visiting from the sample as their experiences are likely different from those of other attendees. After listwise deletion, we have a sample of 17,986 attendees.

Dependent Variables

To measure attending multiple congregations, we use the following question: "Do you consider this church your home church?" Respondents could answer "yes (this church only), yes (but I also attend other churches), and no. We are only interested in comparing individuals who consider the megachurch their home church as those who do not may be fundamentally different from those that do. Home church identification denotes church membership, whether officially or unofficially, and allows us to predict attending multiple congregations among those who consider the megachurch their home. Additionally, the question doesn't allow us to distinguish between those for whom the megachurch is not their "home church" and they do not attend other congregations and those for whom the megachurch is not their "home church" and they do attend other congregations. Given these reasons, we drop those who answered "no" from the sample.

To capture congregational volunteering, we use the question: "How often do you typically volunteer in any capacity at this church?" With the following response categories, 1 = never, 2 = occasionally (a few times a year), 3 = regularly (once or twice a month), and 4 = three times a month or more. We measure congregational giving with the question "About how much do you give financially to this church?" Respondents were provided with the following response categories: 1 = I do not contribute financially here, 2 = I give a small amount whenever I am here, 3 = I give less than 5% of net income regularly, 4 = I give about 5–9% of net income regularly, and 5 = I give about 10% or more of net income regularly.

Predictor Variables

Respondents were asked their marital status with the following response choices: single, never married; married, first marriage; remarried; separated or divorced; widowed; and other. We created a single binary indicator (1 = single, never married and 0 = otherwise). To measure having children in one's household, we used the question "Which statement best describes the people who currently live in your household?" Respondents were given the following options: I live alone; a couple without children; one adult with child/children; two or more adults with child/children; some adults living in the same household. We used these categories to create a binary has children in the household measure (1 = adult with child/children and two or more adults with child/children; 0 = otherwise).

To measure SES, we use household income and education. Respondents were asked for their total household income before taxes and were given the following response choices: under $25,000; $25,000- $49,999; $50,000-$74,999; $75,000-$99,999; $100,000-$149,999; and $150,000 or more. We took the midpoints of these categories, used $150,000 for the highest category, and then logarithmically transformed the variable.[1] For education, respondents were asked "What level of education have you finished?" 1 = some high school; 2 = High school Diploma; 3 = Some

[1] Using the original ordinal scale does not alter the results.

college, trade, or vocational school; 4 = College degree; and 5 = post-graduate work/degree.

Respondents were asked "How do you describe yourself?" White/Caucasian/Anglo; Black/African/African American; Hispanic/Latino; Asian/Pacific Islander; Native American; and Other. We created binary indicator variables for each of these categories and set White/Caucasian/Anglo as the reference category. Respondents were asked whether they agreed that: "I have a strong sense of belonging to this church" and "I have very few close friends at this church" (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). These variables measure social embeddedness within the megachurch.

Control Variables

We control for frequency of attending worship services at the megachurch (0 = hardly ever or on special occasions; 1 = less than once a month; 2 = once a month; 3 = two or three times a month; 4 = usually every week or more), how long the person has been attending church services at the megachurch (0 = less than one year; 1 = 1–2 years; 2 = 3–5 years; 3 = 6–10 years; and 4 = more than 10 years), gender (1 = female; 0 = male), and age in years. We also include binary indicators for 11 congregations (the number of congregations – 1) but do not present them in the tables to conserve space.

Method

We use logistic regressions to predict the multiple congregational attendance variable as it is binary. The congregational volunteering and giving variables are ordinal but measure a latent continuous concept. We first estimated models using ordinal logistic regression. The Brant test identified that the multiple congregational attendance variable passed the parallel lines assumption for models predicting both dependent variables, though several control variables failed the test. We then estimated generalized logistic regression models, which relax the assumption of parallel lines. The multiple congregational attendance coefficient mirrored the results from the ordinal logistic regression model. Finally, we also estimated Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) models and again the results for the multiple congregational attendance variable remained the same. As such, we present the results for the ordinal logistic regression models but note that the associations between the multiple congregational attendance variable and the dependent variables are robust to varying model specifications.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables. The typical megachurch attendee is white, not single, has a college education, is female and 41 years old. Females comprise approximately 60% of our sample, which mirrors their disproportionate share of American megachurch attendees and American Protestant church

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean or %	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Multiple Attendance	17,986	13%	---	0	1
Cong. Volunteer	17,986	2.126	1.111	1	4
Cong. Giving	17,986	3.684	1.288	1	5
Female	17,986	60.5%	---	0	1
Attendance	17,986	3.704	0.631	0	4
Tenure	17,986	4.742	3.531	0	10
Age	17,986	40.827	14.379	18	99
Log Income	17,986	10.966	0.799	9.433	11.998
Education	17,986	3.551	1.029	1	5
Children in Household	17,986	49%	---	0	1
Single	17,986	27.8%	---	0	1
Race/Ethnicity					
White	17,986	69.7%	---	0	1
Black/African American	17,986	22.2%	---	0	1
Hispanic/Latino	17,986	3.2%	---	0	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	17,986	3.4%	---	0	1
Native American	17,986	0.4%	---	0	1
Other Race	17,986	1.1%	---	0	1
Few Cong. Friends	17,986	2.981	1.487	1	5
Belonging	17,986	4.021	1.061	1	5

attendees (Thumma and Bird 2009). Almost 50% of attendees have children in their household. 13% of the sample considers the megachurch their home church but also attends other congregations. The average megachurch attendee identifies volunteering occasionally and contributing between the categories less than 5% and between 5 and 9% of net income regularly.

Table 2 presents the logistic and ordinal logistic regression models. Models 1 and 2 predict multiple congregational attendance. Model 1 presents the baseline model with control variables only. Compared to males, females are significantly less likely to attend multiple congregations. Those who attend the megachurch frequently and have been attending the megachurch for longer periods of time are also significantly less likely to attend multiple congregations. Age is not significantly related to multiple congregational attendance. Model 2 adds the predictors to the baseline model and Table 3 presents the predicted probabilities for select variables from this model with all other variables set to their means. Looking at SES, both log household income and education are significantly and negatively associated with the odds of attending multiple congregations. This supports hypothesis 1, which predicts that those with lower SES will be more likely to attend multiple congregations. The predicted probability for attending multiple congregations is roughly 12% for those reporting the lowest income category and 7.5% for those reporting the highest income category. The predicted probability for attending multiple congregations is approximately 11% for those with some high school and 8% for those with post graduate education. Having children in the household is also significantly and negatively associated with the odds of attending multiple congregations, which fails to support hypothesis 2. Megachurch

Table 2 Logistic Regression Predicting Multiple Attendance and Ordinal Logistic Regression Predicting Volunteering and Giving, Odds Ratios Displayed (SE)

	Logistic		Ordinal Logistic	
	Multiple Attendance		Volunteer	Giving
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	5.433***	135.833**	---	---
	(0.754)	(56.599)		
Female	0.879**	0.831***	1.01	1.092***
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.03)	(0.031)
Attendance	0.471***	0.52***	2.21***	1.975***
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.068)	(0.046)
Tenure	0.858***	0.888***	1.147***	1.091***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.005)
Age	0.997	1.01***	1.003**	1.011***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Log Income	---	0.805***	1	1.306***
		(0.027)	(0.022)	(0.028)
Education	---	0.935**	1.303***	1.251***
		(0.024)	(0.02)	(0.019)
Children in Household	---	0.808***	0.972	0.786***
		(0.044)	-0.031	(0.025)
Single	---	1.618***	0.910*	0.683***
		(0.112)	(0.040)	(0.029)
Black/African American	---	1.324*	0.812**	0.88
		(0.151)	-0.065	(0.065)
Hispanic/Latino	---	0.974	0.738**	0.954
		(0.126)	(0.066)	(0.078)
Asian/Pacific Islander	---	2.13***	0.721***	0.871
		(0.227)	(0.063)	(0.070)
Native American	---	2.227*	1.354	1.248
		(0.739)	-0.31	(0.296)
Other Race	---	1.246	1.072	1.108
		(0.254)	-0.147	(0.152)
Few Cong. Friends	---	1.022	0.743***	0.911***
		(0.018)	-0.008	(0.009)
Belonging	---	0.626***	1.345***	1.170***
		(0.014)	(0.021)	(0.017)
Multiple Attendance	---	---	0.656***	0.574***
			(0.032)	(0.025)
N	17,986	17,986	17,986	17,986
Pseudo R^2	0.124	0.158	0.124	0.099

attendees who are single are significantly more likely to attend multiple congregations compared to all other marital statuses. The predicted probability of attending other congregations is 12.5% for single megachurch attendees compared to 8% for all other marital statuses. This supports hypothesis 3. African American, Asian, Pacific

Table 3 Predicted Probabilities[1]

Model 2 Predicting Multiple Attendance		Models 3 & 4 Predicting Volunteering & Giving		
Log Income			Only Attend Mega.	Multiple Attend.
9.433	0.124	**Cong. Volunteering**		
10.532	0.1	Never	0.346	0.446
11.043	0.091	Occasionally	0.372	0.349
11.736	0.085	Regularly	0.149	0.113
11.736	0.079	3 Times a Month +	0.133	0.092
11.998	0.075			
		Cong. Giving		
Education		None	0.033	0.055
Some HS	0.107	Some	0.152	0.227
HS Degree	0.1	Less than 5%	0.196	0.235
Some College	0.095	5–9%	0.275	0.252
College Degree	0.089	10% or more	0.344	0.232
Post Graduate	0.084			
Marital Status				
Not Single	0.081			
Single	0.125			
Race				
White	0.084			
Black/African American	0.109			
Hispanic/Latino	0.082			
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.164			
Native American	0.173			
Other Race	0.103			
Belonging				
Strongly Disagree	0.294			
2	0.207			
3	0.14			
4	0.092			
Strongly Agree	0.06			

[1] All other variables are set at their means

Islander, and Native American megachurch attendees are significantly more likely to attend multiple congregations compared to White attendees. While the coefficient for Other Race is in the predicted direction it does not reach statistical significance. Hispanic and Latino attendees do not significantly differ from White congregants in their likelihood of attending multiple congregations net of the control variables. The predicted probability of attending multiple congregations for White and Hispanic/Latino attendees is roughly 8% compared to Black attendees at roughly 11%, Asian/Pacific Islander congregants at roughly 16%, Native American attendees at roughly 17%, and Other Race at roughly 10%. This provides partial support for Hypothesis 4. Having few friends in the megachurch is not significantly associated with multiple congregational attendance. Belonging is significantly and negatively associated with the likelihood of attending multiple congregations. When belonging is at its lowest value (1), the predicted probability of attending multiple congregations is approxi-

mately 30% compared to 6% when belonging is at its highest value (5). These results provide some support for hypothesis 5.

Models 3 and 4 report ordinal logistic regression models predicting congregational volunteering and giving respectively. Multiple congregational attendance is significantly and negatively associated with volunteering for the congregation and giving to the congregation. Table 3 provides the predicted probabilities for volunteering by whether someone attends multiple congregations with all other variable set to their means. The predicted probability for never volunteering is roughly 45% for those who attend multiple congregations compared to 35% for those who only attend the megachurch. The predicted probability for volunteering 3 times a month or more is 9% for those who attend multiple congregations compared to 13% for those who don't. Looking at Table 3, the predicted probability for those who attend multiple congregations of giving 10% or more of their income is 23% compared to 34% for those who only attend the megachurch. The predicted probability of giving some money when they attend is roughly 23% for those who attend multiple congregations and 15% for those who only attend the megachurch. This supports hypothesis 6b, but fails to support hypothesis 6a.

Discussion

Studies of lived religion encourage scholars to rethink ingrained assumptions of how people practice religion based on actual lived religious experience (McGuire 2008). The social scientific study of religion has generally viewed congregational attendance as only occurring at one congregation. Yet the current paper and past research cast doubt on this viewpoint (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2009; Thumma and Bird 2009). 13% of megachurch attendees in the sample attend the megachurch and one or more other congregations. That is not a small percentage. Understanding the factors that affect multiple congregational attendance is thus important. This study theorized predictors of multiple congregational attendance and found support for all but one of them.

Megachurch attendees with higher SES are significantly less likely to attend multiple congregations, whereas those who are single are significantly more likely to attend multiple congregations. Megachurches provide a wealth of resources and services for attendees. Those with lower SES may especially need those resources and services and yet megachurches generally tend to appeal more to those with higher SES (Eagle 2012). Those with lower SES may choose to attend the megachurch for these resources but also attend other churches that fit their class niche. Singles may also attend megachurches because of the singles ministries they offer, which generally have a larger number of people than what a smaller congregation can provide. Thus, for some individuals the draw of the megachurch may be less due to its theology but specifically the services and goods it offers. Qualitative research is needed to identify the reasons why some lower SES and single megachurch participants attend multiple congregations.

Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American megachurch attendees are significantly more likely than White megachurch attendees to attend multiple congrega-

tions. This further problematizes how the social scientific study of religion measures congregational attendance, since assuming individuals only attend one congregation will disproportionately undercount Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American attendees and even more so fail to reflect their lived experience. While research on immigrant congregations and the megachurch qualitative data suggest possible reasons why certain racial and ethnic groups may be more likely to attend multiple congregations, more research is needed that focuses specifically on this issue.

Contrary to hypothesis 2, we found that having children in one's household decreases the likelihood of attending multiple congregations. This may be because those with children do not want to put in the effort or the extra time to take children to multiple congregations. Thus, congregations interested in having attendees exclusively attend their congregation may find it beneficial to attract those with children.

Finally, the results show that those with a higher sense of belonging within the megachurch are less likely to attend more than one congregation. Those who feel less belonging within the megachurch may attend other congregations in which they do feel like they belong or in order to find a congregation where they can experience this. While having few friends in the megachurch was not significantly associated with attending multiple congregations, this was due to controlling for belonging. With belonging excluded from the model, having few friends in the megachurch is significantly and positively associated with multiple congregational attendance, which suggests that having few friends in the megachurch is only related to multiple congregational attendance if it makes one feel like they do not belong.

This study also theorized and found that multiple attendance was significantly and negatively associated with congregational volunteering and giving. This is in line with viewing congregational volunteering and giving as zero sum—individuals only have so much time and money to give, so if they are giving to more than one congregation, they may give less to one or more of them. This has important implications for congregations because it suggests that they may receive less time and money from those who do not exclusively attend their congregation. Megachurches are likely less affected by this than smaller congregations due to their size, though they may also be more likely to experience it because of their size and unique features.

This study has some limitations. First, we used cross-sectional data and reverse causality is possible. It may be the case that those who attend multiple congregations are less likely to feel like they belong to the megachurch because they attend other congregations. Congregational volunteering and giving are measures of one's commitment to the congregation, which could affect whether one attends multiple congregations. We expect that these relationships are likely reciprocal and dynamic, rather than one-directional. Future research would benefit from asking multiple congregational attendance questions on a longitudinal survey that would better pinpoint causal direction. Second, the survey did not ask any questions about the other congregations participants attend. Thus, we do not know what affiliation they are or their size. These are important questions to add to future surveys. Third, we use megachurches as a case study to examine multiple congregational attendance. Future research is needed to determine if the factors that affect multiple congregational attendance among megachurch attendees also affects those who attend smaller congregations. Finally, it is not possible to test congregational-level factors that might

affect multiple congregational attendance as the survey only collected data from 12 megachurches. In all models we controlled for congregation and some were significantly more likely to have attendees who attend multiple congregations. Examining congregational-level factors associated with attending multiple congregations is a fruitful avenue for future research.

Conclusions and Implications

This is the first study to theorize and test predictors of attending multiple congregations and its association with congregational volunteering and giving using the case of megachurch attendees. It contributes to literature on lived religion by identifying the need for religion scholars to revise how they think about attendance to allow for the possibility that individuals may attend multiple congregations. Attending multiple congregations has important methodological implications for how religion is studied. For those who attend multiple congregations, what does it mean to be asked on a survey how frequently they attend religious services or how much they give to their congregation? Which congregation would the respondents use as the reference or would they average the answers they would give had they been asked the same questions for multiple congregations? These answers affect whether survey responses to congregational questions are undercounting congregational activities. Additionally, the congregations one attends may not be within the same affiliation (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2009). Since surveys only ask individuals to report one affiliation, this would undercount affiliations and may fail to accurately represent the religious affiliations of people who are more likely to attend multiple congregations, which, in this study, were Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American attendees. The results demonstrate the need for future surveys to incorporate the ability to identify attending multiple congregations in order to fully represent lived religious experience.

The findings also suggest that social location (e.g., lower SES, single, and certain racially minoritized groups) affects multiple congregational attendance. This may reflect the broader US trend of 'shopping' for the congregation that best meets one's needs (Bellah et al. 2007; Dougherty and Mulder 2020; Hammond 1992; Roof 1989; Sikkink and Emerson 2020; Stark and Finke 2000; Turner 2004; Twitchell 2007; Wellman Jr et al. 2020; Wolfe 2003). The current study extends this research by indicating that some people may feel they need to attend multiple congregations in order to fully meet their needs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more congregations are offering remote services (Hartford Institute for Religion Research 2021), which makes attending services at multiple congregations easier. Further research is needed on how people 'shop' for multiple congregations to attend and how remote options affect this. Moreover, the findings suggest that those who attend multiple congregations may volunteer and give less money, which directly impacts congregations. Additional research is needed to determine if these results are generalizable to non-megachurches.

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Authors and Affiliations

Katie E. Corcoran[1] · Stephanie M. House-Niamke[1] · Warren Bird[2] · Scott L. Thumma[3]

✉ Katie E. Corcoran
kecorcoran@mail.wvu.edu

[1] Department of Sociology & Anthropology, West Virginia University, PO Box 6326, 26506-6326 Morgantown, WV, USA

[2] Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, Winchester, VA, USA

[3] Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford International University, Hartford, CT, USA