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The Social Context of Organized Nonbelief: County-Level Predictors of Nonbeliever Organizations in the United States

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Many recent social scientific studies have noted that the percentage of Americans with no religious affiliation is on the rise, but few have examined the nonbeliever organizations that some of these "nones" might join. This study uses an original data set, the first attempt at documenting the population of local nonbeliever organizations in the United States, to explore where these groups are more likely to flourish. Though one might assume that less religious counties, as measured by the percentage of those with no stated religious affiliation, would be more likely to contain nonbeliever organizations, this article provides evidence that they emerge more frequently and in greater numbers in counties with proportionally more evangelical Protestants. The percentage of evangelicals among a county's population is strongly associated with both the existence (dichotomously coded) and the number of nonbeliever organizations, even when controlling for a range of demographic and institutional factors.

Keywords: *nones, nonbelievers, small groups, religion, evangelicals, secularism.*

Introduction

In February 2012, several thousand nonbelievers gathered on the lawn in front of the Washington Monument in Washington, DC for the "Reason Rally": an event billed as the largest-ever gathering of nonbelievers on the National Mall. Like the Godless Americans March on Washington 10 years earlier, the Reason Rally was meant to show the presence and size of the nonbeliever population in the United States. Those assembled came from across the nation, and most were members of nonbeliever organizations such as the American Humanist Association, American Atheists, or the Secular Student Alliance. The primary goals of the event were community, identity, and political collectivity. As several speakers emphasized, this event was meant to mark the presence of a significant portion of the population (Garcia 2012).

Many recent social scientific studies have noted that an increasing percentage of Americans have no religious affiliation, but few have examined the nonbeliever organizations that some of these "nones" might join. Although historically these groups have had a minor presence in the organizational landscape of the United States, they have increased in number over the past two decades (Blankholm 2014; Kettell 2014). Nonbeliever groups merit close analysis given the widespread interest in the rising percentage of nones in the United States, as well as the growth

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in media attention that nonbeliever organizations have received in recent years. Scholars might also consider these organizations as potential sites of political, social, and civic involvement. As Putnam and Campbell (2010) find, religious Americans have higher levels of charitable giving, volunteering, community engagement, and general civic participation. Emphasizing that religious *belonging* matters much more than religious *believing* when measuring impacts on civic engagement, they suggest that "close, morally intense, but nonreligious networks could have a similarly powerful effect" (2010:361). In short, as more nonbeliever organizations emerge, it becomes increasingly imperative to study them as part of the organizational landscape of the United States. Nonbeliever organizations could provide the communal ingredient that would increase levels of civic engagement among the nonreligious and spur cooperation across the religious/nonreligious divide.

The growth of these organizations raises an important question: What are the social contexts that might be associated with nonbeliever groups? What sociological variables might predict their presence and number? This study uses an original data set, the first attempt at documenting the population of local nonbeliever organizations in the United States, to explore where these groups are more likely to flourish.

Nones, Nonbelievers, and Organized Nonbelievers

Many recent studies (Hout and Fischer 2002; Kosmin et al. 2009; Pew Research Center 2012) have demonstrated a steady increase in the percentage of Americans who claim no religious affiliation since the early 1990s. Prior to this decade, the so-called religious "nones" remained at a stable 5 to 7 percent of the population. In a special report from the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey, Kosmin and colleagues (2009) identify the 1990s as a period of "secular boom": each year saw 1.3 million more survey respondents claiming no religion. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), nearly 20 percent of U.S. adults claim no religious affiliation, including 32 percent of adults under 30.

On the whole, researchers have found that the "nones" category is highly complex and diverse: it includes the anti-religious, the atheistic, the secular, the spiritual, and even the "unchurched believers" (Hout and Fischer 2002; Pew Research Center 2012). Although Vernon (1968) called this group "a neglected category" and, more recently, Bainbridge (2009) wrote that the social scientific study "of irreligion remains meager, fragmentary, and unappreciated," every year sees more publications relating to the nones: on disaffiliation and the loss of faith (Smith 2011; Vargas 2012; Zuckerman 2011), the mental health of the nonreligious (Galen and Kloet 2011; Whitley 2010), the composition of the category more generally (Baker and Smith 2009a, 2009b; Lim, MacGregor, and Putnam 2010), and the symbolic and social boundaries between atheists and believers (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006; Smith 2013). New academic ventures dedicated solely to the study of the nones and nonreligiosity have also appeared in the last five years, such as the journal *Secularism & Nonreligion* and the collaborative Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network.

"Nones" and "nonbelievers" are not coterminous, however, and scholars must avoid conflating affiliation, personal beliefs, and self-description. "Nones" refers only to those who claim no religious affiliation, and it can include Americans who state that they believe in God or a universal spirit (Pew Research Center 2012). Researchers have shown that there are far more nones in America than there are nonbelievers. According to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey, "roughly 12 percent of Americans are atheist (no God) or agnostic (unknowable or unsure)" when measured by their stated beliefs (Kosmin et al. 2009). This is roughly double the nearly 6 percent of Americans who actually describe themselves as "atheist" or "agnostic," and far less than the nearly 20 percent who claim no religious affiliation (Pew Research Center 2012).

"Nonbelievers" is an umbrella category intended to capture the wide variety of self-descriptors with which Americans signify their lack of belief in God. Such terms include atheist, agnostic, humanist, freethinker, secularist, nontheist, naturalist, and Bright. We follow the usage of scholars like Blankholm (2014) and Cimino and Smith (2014), who use the term "nonbelievers" as an expedient way to refer to all of these groups at once. Blankholm, in particular, addresses the challenge of choosing a term given ongoing debates among nonbelievers over labels (2014:776). The data set used here captures the population of local organizations that organize nonbelievers qua nonbelievers (see Appendix 1). We call these groups "nonbeliever organizations," and by extension, "organized nonbelievers" are those who join them.

Nonbeliever organizations may have multiple aims, including fundraising for charities, advocating for atheists' rights, or lobbying for science education. All of the groups that we define as "local" nonbeliever organizations explicitly aim to facilitate the face-to-face meeting of nonbelievers. Though many "national" nonbeliever organizations, such as the American Humanist Association, organize annual face-to-face conferences, they rely on local chapters to organize face-to-face communities that meet year round (see Appendix 2 for a list of national nonbeliever organizations). Because these local groups are the central concern of this article and comprise the data set on which it relies, we hereafter restrict our use of the term "nonbeliever organizations" to refer solely to "local nonbeliever organizations." In turn, we hereafter use the term "organized nonbelievers" to refer solely to those who meet face-to-face in local groups.

In summary, *nones* are those who claim no religious affiliation in surveys. This is a wide and varied category and does not reflect their personal beliefs about the existence of God. *Nonbelievers* is an umbrella term for those who identify as atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, secularists, nontheists, naturalists, or Brights. For the purposes of this article, the term *organized nonbelievers* refers to a subset of nonbelievers who meet face-to-face through local nonbeliever organizations.

These organizations remain altogether underresearched in the United States (for research on nonbeliever organizations in other countries, see Froese and Pfaff 2001; Quack 2012). Overall, therefore, some of the most intriguing and obvious questions remain unaddressed. How many nonbeliever organizations are there, and where are they located? Why would some nones organize as nonbelievers, especially since there are numerous other secular or nonreligious social activities in the United States, including volunteer organizations, the arts, and athletics? What explains the variation in the density of these organizations over time and across space?

Nonbeliever Organizations

America's nonbelievers have organized themselves since at least the 1820s (Post 1943). Nineteenth-century freethinkers, as they were then most commonly known, were a diverse group that emphasized "free thought" and "free religion" more than "no religion" (Jacoby 2004:4). The latter third of the long 19th century, from Reconstruction to the start of World War I, marked what some historians have called "the golden age of the freethought movement"; until the past decade, it was the closest American nonbelievers had ever come to broad-based organization (Jacoby 2004; Post 1943; Warren 1943). Twenty-first century nonbelievers, catalyzed in part by the emergence of the so-called New Atheism (Cimino and Smith 2011; Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp 2013), organize primarily around the idea of "no religion." Organizations like American Atheists (founded in 1963), the Council for Secular Humanism (f. 1980), and the Secular Student Alliance (f. 2001) all emphasize "no religion" and are some of the largest and most influential nonbeliever organizations in the country.

Some recent studies have examined various aspects of nonbeliever organizations. Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006), for example, survey approximately 300 members of atheist organizations

in the United States and Canada. Their psychological analysis focuses more on the views and opinions of atheists than the organizations of which those atheists are members. Galen and Kloet (2011) use a sample from a branch of the Center for Inquiry for their study of religiosity and mental health, and their analysis aims to determine whether mental health benefits differ for participants in a nonbeliever organization versus a religious congregation. Pasquale (2012) presents qualitative work from groups in Oregon, Washington, and southern British Columbia and gives detailed descriptions of attitudes, backgrounds, and worldviews of group members. Cimino and Smith investigate the role of nonbeliever organizations in the formation of a subcultural nonbeliever identity and examine the ways in which they make use of new technologies (Cimino and Smith 2007, 2011; Smith and Cimino 2012). And more recently, J. M. Smith (2013) and Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp (2013) examine how members of local atheist groups in Colorado and California, respectively, create a collective identity both within their groups and relative to the wider population.

These studies have furthered our understanding of nonbeliever organizations at the micro level; most focus on case studies, ethnographic analysis of one or two groups, or analysis of a few groups in a region. No study has attempted to document and analyze local nonbeliever organizations across the United States. This article seeks to answer the following questions: Where do nonbeliever organizations exist? How are they distributed throughout the country? And what are the social contexts that might predict where they are found?

Theory and Hypotheses

To address these questions, this article uses an original data set that represents the first attempt at documenting the population of nonbeliever organizations in the United States. Through cross-sectional analysis of these data, we offer insight into where these groups are and what helps explain their presence and the variation in their frequency across counties in the United States. We offer three hypotheses in all.

Hypothesis 1

It has long been held that organizations are shaped by the contexts in which they are found (Aldrich and Ruef 2006; Singh and Lumsden 1990). One of the primary resources for groups like nonbeliever organizations is a source of potential members; as with all voluntary associations, nonbeliever groups cannot exist without a population of interested individuals (Popielarz and McPherson 1995). In asking what conditions might be associated with the presence of a nonbeliever organization, therefore, the first variable we consider is the population of possible joiners.

Beyond indicating levels of joiners, the overall percentage of nones in a county can also serve as a proxy for the county's religious environment. There is evidence of geographic differences in levels of no religious preference in the United States, with some areas of the United States (such as the Pacific Northwest) having higher levels of nones (Killen and Silk 2004; Kosmin et al. 2009). The percentage of nones could indicate areas where both the absence of belief and the founding/joining of nonbeliever organizations might be socially acceptable, as these are areas in which the organizational legitimacy of these groups would be greater (Baum and Oliver 1996). Though nonbelievers tend to be nonjoiners (Caldwell-Harris 2012), we use the percentage of nones in a county as a proxy measure of potential joiners and a county's nonreligious climate.

With all of this, then, we form our first hypothesis:

H1: A higher percentage of nones in a county will predict the presence of a nonbeliever organization and will correlate with higher counts of nonbeliever organizations.[1]

Hypothesis 2

In his study on why evangelical churches have fared better than mainline Protestant churches in the United States, Smith (1998) shows that evangelicals have relied on a simultaneous distinction from and engagement with other faiths and the wider secular culture. An emphasis on their embattled difference has provided a strong basis for collective identity. According to Campbell (2006), evangelicals might alter their voting behavior in response to a perceived "religious threat." His study shows that in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, white evangelicals were more likely to vote Republican when there were more secularists in their community.

In these examples, the presence of secularists and a wider secular culture were catalysts for evangelicals. Could the opposite also be the case? Drawing from the General Social Survey (GSS), the American National Election Study, and Gallup polls, Hout and Fischer (2002) offer two reasons for the increase in the percentage of those claiming no religious affiliation. First, GSS data show that a demographic shift took place in the 1990s, during which time newer cohorts who were less attached to religion began to overtake older, more religious cohorts. Second, the Religious Right and the Moral Majority, two groups that have woven conservative Christian theology into political ideology, became powerful sociopolitical movements in the 1990s. According to Hout and Fischer, this combination of faith and conservative politics caused many American Christians to reconsider their religious identity (Hout and Fischer 2002).[2]

Could the presence of evangelical Christians also be a catalyst for the formation of nonbeliever organizations? Cimino and Smith (2007) show that organized nonbelievers understand themselves as an embattled minority, with individuals seeking communities that affirm their shared identity. Relying on content analysis of secular humanist magazines and interviews with participants and leaders of nonbeliever organizations in both New York City and Tulsa, Oklahoma, they find that "the transition from being an inactive or 'nominal' secular individual to becoming involved in secular humanist groups and activism was often instigated by contact and growing concern with individuals and issues associated with the religious right" (Cimino and Smith 2007:418). Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp (2013) likewise show in their qualitative study of an atheist group in California how part of the collective identity work of members depends upon the construction of religious others as a threat to atheists. For instance, through debates that sometimes include evangelical Christians, the group they studied was able to draw and maintain the social boundary between themselves and religious others.

Similar to the evangelicals in Smith's (1998) study, organized nonbelievers see themselves as an embattled minority struggling against a wider antithetical society (Cimino and Smith 2007, 2011; Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp 2013; Smith 2013). We hypothesize, therefore, that an environment of heightened evangelical Christianity is conducive to the formation of nonbeliever organizations. Due to evangelicals' emphasis on evangelization and open expression of faith, higher levels of evangelical Protestants could promote the formation of nonbeliever organizations by creating an environment that nonbelievers perceive as antagonistic. This antagonistic

[1]Higher counts of groups do not always indicate relative influence of those groups in a county. For instance, a county may have several groups, but if those groups have a small number of members, their salience and influence at the county level will be limited. The opposite could also be true: one large organization with hundreds of members could be highly salient and influential in its community. Data on the relative size of the groups are unavailable, so we cannot analyze the counts of individual organized nonbelievers at the county level. We thank an anonymous *JSSR* reviewer for this suggestion.

[2]Putnam and Campbell (2010) offer a similar argument, which sees the rise of the nones as an "aftershock" of the conservative Christian religious political platforms of the 1990s.

atmosphere would encourage collective identity formation like that of a nonbeliever organization (Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp 2013; Smith 2013).

Large congregations such as megachurches could also be a highly visible indicator of the presence of evangelical Christianity in a county. The term "megachurch" is reserved for Protestant congregations that have 2,000 or more in total attendance, and the majority of these churches consider themselves evangelical (Bird and Thumma 2011). Because of their size, megachurches might differ from smaller evangelical churches in their qualitative presence at the county level. H2, therefore, could also indicate that counties with higher counts of megachurches would be more likely to have a nonbeliever organization.

Nonbelievers could also perceive higher levels of Republicanism as related to higher levels of evangelical Protestantism because political affiliation can correlate with religious commitment. Evangelicals often identify as Republican (Campbell 2006), and nones tend to identify as Democrat (Pew Research Center 2012). If nonbelievers perceive the presence of Republicans as indicating the presence of evangelicals, higher levels of Republicans in a county could correlate with an increase in the likelihood of a nonbeliever organization being present.

H2: A higher percentage of evangelical Protestants in a county will predict the presence of a nonbeliever organization and will correlate with higher counts of nonbeliever organizations.

Hypothesis 3

H3 concerns other organizations that may facilitate the emergence of nonbeliever groups. Organizational theory has long emphasized the importance of the ecology surrounding an organization as part of the explanation for organizational creation, change, and demise (Aldrich 1979; Aldrich and Ruef 2006; Singh and Lumsden 1990). Many organizational studies show "a bias toward large, publicly held organizations" because data on these groups are readily available from reports filed with several federal bodies (Aldrich and Ruef 2006:7–8). Nonbeliever organizations, however, can be considered "minimalist organizations" (Halliday, Powell, and Granfors 1987) because of their very low start-up costs, low overhead, strong niche definition, easy adaptability to changes in environment, and a relatively low emphasis on competition with other similar groups. Organizations employing Meetup.com, for instance, can be created and maintained with minimal effort and minimal overhead cost. National organizations like the American Humanist Association and the Secular Student Alliance have also made this process even easier by providing resources and encouragement to those wanting to start local groups.

Unlike established churches and congregations, most nonbeliever organizations lack their own physical spaces for meetings and events. The expansive meeting spaces of the New York Society for Ethical Culture and the Los Angeles branch of the Center for Inquiry are unique exceptions and far from the norm. Many nonbeliever organizations meet in local cafes or pubs, and other groups organize activities in museums, art galleries, or parks. Reviewing their meeting locations, we found that many groups that organize through Meetup.com hold their events in bars. Some groups even bear names that reflect their choice of venue, such as "Drinking Skeptically" and "Skeptics in the Pub." Dependence on these spaces could limit a group's growth or frequency of organization. An understanding of the social context of nonbeliever organizations therefore requires an understanding of their organizational ecology. Nonbeliever organizations sometimes depend on other sorts of establishments or institutions to meet face to face. A dearth of bars, museums, or parks could hinder the founding and growth of nonbeliever organizations.

H3: The presence and number of nonbeliever organizations will be predicted by larger counts relative to population of (1) bookstores, (2) universities and colleges, (3) museums, and (4) drinking places (alcoholic beverages).

Data and Method

Dependent Variable: Count of Nonbeliever Organizations by County

Our primary data set is a compiled list of all nonbeliever organizations in the continental United States. The list is a validated and expanded version of one provided by the Stiefel Freethought Foundation, an organization that describes itself as "a 501(c)3 non-profit private foundation [that] provides financial support and volunteer strategy consulting to the Freethought Movement."[3] The Stiefel Freethought Foundation produced this original catalog by aggregating the registries of the national nonbeliever organizations in the United States and by communicating with leaders of national organizations.[4]

In its original form, the database was incomplete: organizations appeared more than once, some no longer existed, and other groups were missing. We validated, cleaned, and expanded this original data set through a three-stage process. A detailed description of its creation can be found in Appendix 1. First, we validated each organization, one by one, and included only active groups while filling in missing data such as ZIP codes and web addresses. Second, we cross-checked this data set with the listings available on the websites of the national umbrella organizations. (Appendix 2 shows the websites that were consulted.) Any new groups identified through this cross-check were added to the overall data set following the protocol above. Third, we spot-checked by e-mailing groups in each state to ask about nearby organizations.

Many of these groups meet in several spaces, making it difficult to define their location at a more detailed level than the county. Groups that use the website Meetup.com, for instance, provide only the city and state location for the group. Events often take place in different locations throughout the area. Other websites only list an organization's city and state. As a result, the present analysis uses the county as the geographic unit of observation.

The final data set contains 1,390 organizations across the 48 contiguous states and is the first compilation of the population of nonbeliever organizations in the United States used in the academic literature.[5] Despite our attempts to include every qualifying organization (see Appendix 1), some groups might remain missing. First, very few local nonbeliever organizations obtain 501(c)3 nonprofit status. As a result, we could not rely on data sources for 501(c)3 groups, such as the National Center for Charitable Statistics. Second, many local organizations are affiliated with national groups that track their activity and list them on their websites. Many local organizations function independently, however, meaning that they remain untracked and unlisted by national groups, and they are thus more difficult to identify. Third, the data set does not capture organizations that lack even a minimal online presence, such as a website URL, an e-mail address, or other contact information listed on a website. Smaller groups comprise the vast majority of the data set, though some form of online presence was critical for inclusion.

We should emphasize that we used the original data set as a starting point for collecting the population of nonbeliever organizations rather than as the sole source of information for this study. The multiple steps taken to validate the data significantly improved and expanded the original data set. Because there is no other census or collection of these types of groups, it is impossible to compare our data set with other sources. We are confident, however, that the significant steps we have taken have produced the first collection of the population of nonbeliever organizations in the United States.

[3]http://www.stiefelfreethoughtfoundation.org/about.html. Many thanks to Todd Stiefel for providing this original list.

[4]Todd Stiefel, personal e-mail correspondence, summer 2012. We gratefully thank Mr. Stiefel for his help in providing these data. The authors revised and cleaned the data and then provided this new data set to Mr. Stiefel for his foundation's use. The authors do not have an ongoing, cooperative research relationship with Mr. Stiefel.

[5]The original list from the Stiefel Freethought Foundation contained a total of 1,551 organizations.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Dependent Variable					
Nonbeliever organizations (all)	3,109	.44	1.55	0	42
Nonbeliever organizations (> 0)	539	2.55	3.25	1	42
Nonbeliever organizations (binary)	3,109	.17	.38	0	1
Religion (%)					
Evangelical Protestant[a]	2,859	33.34	26.80	0	100
None[a]	2,859	17.10	18.50	0	100
Catholic[a]	2,859	14.50	18.10	0	100
Mainline Protestant[a]	2,859	17.05	2.64	0	100
Black Protestant[a]	2,859	4.45	12.02	0	100
Demographics					
Higher education (% BA/+)[b]	3,109	19.23	8.72	4.24	71.96
Republican (%)[a]	2,859	33.84	24.67	0	100
Aged 18–29 (%)[b]	3,109	14.70	4.52	3.57	57.20
White (%)[b]	3,109	84.24	16.13	3.60	100
South (binary)[b]	3,109	.46	.50	0	1
Institutions (per 10,000)					
Bookstores[c]	3,109	.08	.23	0	3.27
Universities and colleges[d]	3,109	.07	.19	0	3.89
Museums[c]	3,109	.01	.09	0	1.89
Bars[d]	3,109	1.99	4.13	0	161.29
Nonprofits[e]	3,104	38.68	31.03	2.91	124.76
Megachurches[f]	3,109	.02	.05	0	.84

[a]Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (pooled: 2007, 2008, 2010).
[b]American Community Survey (2007–2011), U.S. Census.
[c]Economic Census, U.S. Census (2007).
[d]County Business Patterns Register, U.S. Census (2010).
[e]National Center for Charitable Statistics, Urban Institute (2012).
[f]Hartford Institute for Religion Research (2012).

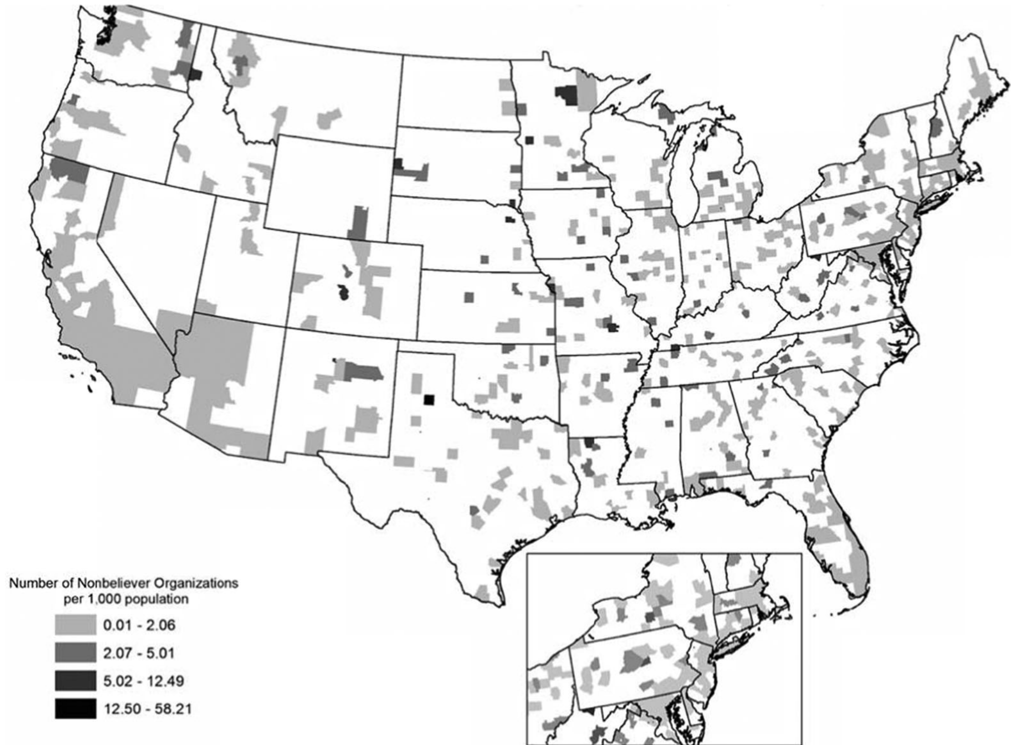
Table 1 presents the summary statistics for the number of groups at the county level. The values are differentiated in three ways: the summary statistics for all counties, for counties that have one or more nonbeliever organizations, and the dummy variable of the dependent variable (whether a county has more than zero groups). Figure 1 shows the spread of nonbeliever groups across the country at the county level. The map shows the density of groups per 1,000 in population across the United States.

Independent Variables and Controls

Religion and Party Identification

The Cooperative Congressional Election Study is a biennial national stratified sample survey administered to approximately 30,000 individuals each time. We pooled survey results for religious and political identity from the 2007, 2008, and 2010 waves to produce a data set of 98,200 total respondents. We collapsed individual responses to produce county-level estimates of religious identification using the standard religious traditions (RELTRAD) typology (as produced in Steensland, Robinson, and Wilcox 2000 and amended by Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson 2007). The variables created for this study include percentages of evangelical Protestant, none,

Figure 1
Nonbeliever organizations by county, 2012



Catholic, mainline Protestant, black Protestant, and party identification (percent Republican) for each county.[6]

Demographics

Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey is an ongoing random-sample survey of individuals conducted each year. The ACS contains more variables on a variety of measures not included in the decennial census (such as the percent of movers). Moreover, because data are collected annually, the ACS also provides current information at a more detailed level than the decennial census (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Because individual-year ACS samples are smaller than those of the decennial long-form census, data are available in one-year, three-year, and five-year estimates. One-year estimates have the smallest sample size: they provide data from 12 months of collection and only include areas with populations greater than 65,000 (less than a quarter of U.S. counties). The three-year and five-year estimates increase reliability and allow for the analysis of areas with much smaller populations. We use the five-year ACS (2007–2011) for demographic data at the county level, which includes complete estimates

[6]We chose the CCES as the source for religion data instead of the Religious Congregations Membership Study from the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies because the RCMS only tabulates *members* of religious congregations rather than those who *identify* as being in a particular faith. Moreover, the CCES religion questions have options for "none" categories (such as identifying as "Atheist," "Agnostic," or "Nothing in particular") while the RCMS only provides data for *nonadherents* (which would include many devout who do not participate in congregational life). The data from the CCES, in short, give a closer approximation to "real" nones while the ASARB data can only give data on the much wider group of nonadherents.

for all counties in the United States (Mather, Rivers, and Jacobsen 2005; U.S. Census Bureau 2008).

Drawing from the 2012 Pew survey on the nones (Pew Research Center 2012), we also include a series of control variables that correspond to traits associated with having no religious affiliation in the United States. As a proxy for measuring the educational attainment in a county, we include the percent of the population with a BA or higher. Because nones also tend to be young—35 percent of the unaffiliated population is aged 18–29 (Pew Research Center 2012)—we include a control variable for this portion of the population. Nones also tend to be white, so we include a variable for percent white.

We include two other control variables because of their relevance for group formation. As with education, the level of wealth in a county is positively correlated with group formation in general. We thus control for the median income in a county.

The percentage of individuals who have moved into a county is also an important variable to consider. People move for many reasons, one of which could be the intentional avoidance of evangelicals. Moving could also affect whether individuals join organizations. Migration, for instance, can have a negative effect on forms of religious participation (Welch and Baltzell 1984; Wuthnow and Christiano 1979) and might have a similar effect on the number of potential members of nonbeliever organizations. To account for how this selection mechanism might confound the relationship between the percentage of evangelicals and the presence of nonbeliever organizations, we control for the percentage of movers.[7]

Variables drawn from the ACS include percentages for higher education (population with a BA degree or more), median household income, population aged 18–29, population that is white, and population that moved into a county. A dummy variable was also created for whether the county is in the South U.S. Census region.

Organizations

Also conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Economic Census is the official measure of American businesses conducted every five years (in years ending in "2" and "7"). This census collects data on employment, sales, transportation uses, ownership, and other business-related metrics. We use the 2007 data set for counts of bookstores and museums (which include art galleries, planetariums, art museums, and science/technology museums).

The County Business Patterns Register from the Census Bureau documents economic details for each known establishment with paid employees located in the United States. This information is collected annually for only certain types of businesses (U.S. Census Bureau n.d.). Counts of bars (drinking places—alcoholic beverages) and universities and colleges were obtained from the 2010 County Business Patterns data set.

Another aspect of the institutional environment is a varying baseline probability for the formation of organizations. For instance, the populations of certain counties might be more likely to form organizations due to a culture of civic engagement. To evaluate this possibility, we include a variable for 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations as a proxy for levels of organizational development in a county. Counties with higher counts of nonprofit organizations would therefore be more likely to have a nonbeliever organization. Counts of nonprofit organizations come from the National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute (n.d.). These counts include all of the 501(c)3 public charities at the county level in 2010. Data on megachurches were compiled

[7] We did not include gender in the models for two reasons. First, there is almost no noticeable variation at the county level, and so there is little use for the variable in our models. Second, other empirical studies (e.g., Baum and Oliver 1996) demonstrate that the effect of gender on voluntary associations is more dependent upon a "token" status of the individual according to his/her gender (such as a female in a predominantly male group or vice versa). Although nonbeliever groups are typically seen as being predominantly male, no empirical evidence suggests that the gender at the *county* level would be an influential measure to consider.

by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. The data used in this project come from the 2012 web version of the Institute's listings.

All institutional count variables were transformed to refer to the number of organizations per 10,000 inhabitants. Descriptive statistics for all independent variables are given in Table 1.

Analytic Model

This study addresses two central questions. The first question asks what variables help predict the presence of a nonbeliever organization in a county. To answer this question, we use a binary measure of the dependent variable: presence (1) or absence (0) of any nonbeliever organization in the county as of the fall of 2012. We predict this outcome with standard logistic regression and analyze both the coefficients and odds ratios for the independent variables included in the model.[8]

As Mood (2009) details, logistic regression estimates are highly affected by which variables are included in analysis. Models with different independent variables (as in the results presented here) have different levels of unobserved heterogeneity. As a result, the coefficients of logistic regressions with different variables cannot be analyzed across models in the same way as linear models like ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.

Although logit coefficients cannot be directly compared across models at the outset, Winship and Mare (1984) suggest that one *can* compare logistic coefficients with the same sample but different independent variables by y-standardizing the coefficients—i.e., dividing the coefficients by the estimated standard deviation of the (unobserved) latent dependent variable (Mood 2009). These y-standardized coefficients give the number of standard deviation changes in the dependent variable given a one-unit increase in the independent variable. Table 2 presents the values of the y-standardized coefficients, the standard errors, and the odds ratios for each of the variables. Y-standardized coefficients were obtained in Stata 11 using Long and Freese's (2006) *spost9* program.

The second question asks what variables help predict the *number* of organizations at the county level. Since the dependent variable is overdispersed (mean = .441, variance = 2.752), a standard Poisson model for counts is not appropriate for the data. Normal transformations, such as logarithmic or quadratic transformations, do not produce a normal distribution for the dependent variable. What is more, there is a high number of counties with zero values: 2,570 of the 3,109 counties (82.66 percent) do not have any nonbeliever organizations.

Several statistical models are meant to take into account both overdispersion and high-zero-count data. A zero-inflated negative binomial model was attempted to analyze the dependent variable, but the model could not reach convergence. Two other statistical models—the zero-inflated Poisson and negative binomial regressions—were analyzed for model fit using the *countfit* command in Stata 11. This command compares model residuals in order to determine which model is appropriate for the data. While both the zero-inflated Poisson and negative binomial models produce very similar results for counties that have five or more organizations, the negative binomial model was markedly better at predicting values for counties that have less than five organizations. These results, therefore, determined that a negative binomial model was preferred over a zero-inflated Poisson model for analyzing the count data in this study.

[8]It can be argued that the measure of mere presence or absence can gloss over significant details of the organizational size of these groups. To use a parallel case, the presence of a house church is drastically different than the presence of a megachurch. Yet the measure of presence or absence is justified in this analysis because of the relatively small size of nonbeliever organizations overall. There are no "megachurches" of nonbeliever organizations. All groups are fairly small in size and, as a result, we feel confident that measuring the presence/absence of these groups at the county level is justified. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

Table 2: Y-standardized coefficients, standard errors, and odds ratios of logit models for presence/absence of a nonbeliever organization

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Religion (%)			
Evangelical Protestant	.0007	.0054*	.0055*
	(.0060)	(.0074)	(.0075)
	1.0020	*1.0184*	*1.0185*
None	.0050*	.0049	.0046
	(.0073)	(.0092)	(.0094)
	1.0150	*1.0167*	*1.0154*
Catholic	−.0034	.0008	.0009
	(.0072)	(.0083)	(.0086)
	.9900	*1.0026*	*1.0029*
Mainline Protestant	.0025	.0049	.0046
	(.0071)	(.0085)	(.0088)
	1.0075	*1.0166*	*1.0154*
Black Protestant	.0021	.0016	.0014
	(.0088)	(.0123)	(.0126)
	1.0061	*1.0055*	*1.0046*
Demographics			
Higher education		.0268***	.0214**
(% BA or more)		(.0143)	(.0156)
		1.0946	*1.0736*
Republican		−.0004	−.0008
(%)		(.0052)	(.0053)
		.9986	*.9974*
Aged 18–29		.0457***	.0433***
(%)		(.0258)	(.0264)
		1.1664	*1.1547*
White		.0013	.0010
(%)		(.0070)	(.0072)
		1.0045	*1.0033*
South1		−.0346	−.0486
(dummy)		(.1900)	(.2060)
		.8901	*.8511*
% Population that moved into		.0030	.0036
county		(.0336)	(.0345)
		1.0102	*1.0121*
Institutions (per 10,000)			
Bookstores			.3470***
			(.3033)
			3.1620
Universities			−.0328
			(.4904)
			.8968
Museums			−.2519
			(.6058)
			.4336

(*Continued*)

Table 2 (*Continued*)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Bars			.0014
			(.0556)
			1.0047
Nonprofits			.0005
			(.0020)
			1.0016
Megachurches			.2463
			(1.3413)
			2.2642
ln(Population)	.5889***	.5086***	.4907***
	(.0781)	(.1013)	(.1073)
	5.7243	*5.5438*	*5.0932*
Constant	−21.100***	−24.2300***	−23.1500***
	(1.034)	(1.5880)	(1.6487)
N	2,859	2,859	2,858
Pseudo R^2	.4348	.5385	.5444

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Values are presented as: Y-standardized coefficient (standard error), *odds ratio*. Median income (not shown) also reaches significance at the $p < .001$ level; however, its coefficient is nearly zero and is thus not shown here.

Results

We begin by asking what variables predict the presence of a nonbeliever organization in a county. Model 1 in Table 2, which only takes into account the religious composition and size of the population in a county, shows a significant positive value for the percent none in a county. This result would confirm the simple demand hypothesis: a greater percentage of nones in a county would mean a greater percentage of nonbelievers and, as a result, would increase the odds of having a nonbeliever group. A 1 percent increase in the population of nones would increase the odds by 1.5 percent.

The coefficient for the percent none variable is no longer significant, however, when demographic variables are included in model 2. Among the religion variables, only the percent evangelical Protestant reaches standard levels of significance: the more evangelical Protestants in a county, the more likely it is to find a nonbeliever organization. Of the demographic variables, higher education and age are significant and also positive. The coefficient for income is significant, though its effect is negligible; it is not included in the table as a result.

These findings are interesting: once one takes the tendency of educated individuals to form organizations (of any kind) into account, the prevalence of nones, who are on average more highly educated, in and of itself no longer increases the chances of finding a nonbeliever organization in a county. The percent of evangelicals, conversely, does become significant in increasing the odds of finding a nonbeliever organization. The logic of friction due to an environment produced by evangelical Protestants in H2 now moves to the foreground.

All four of these variables (percent evangelical, higher education, age, and income) remain significant with similar coefficients in model 3, which includes the institutional count variables. Of all the institutions included, only the coefficient for the number of bookstores is significant and positive, a partial confirmation of H3 on institutions. The fact that the variables for bookstores and higher education are significant could indicate that nonbeliever groups flourish best in educated environments, a finding that is consistent with previous evidence linking educational

levels and group formation in general (Putnam and Campbell 2010). This result can also indicate that there might be an institutional advantage to having bookstores nearby for meeting purposes and other organizational needs. Again, however, it is noteworthy that universities and museums do not affect the odds of finding a nonbeliever organization.

Robustness checks confirm that these findings hold even when analyzing a subset of the population and when considering the urbanness of a county. Restricting the model to only those counties that have at least 10 respondents in the CCES also yields consistent results: the coefficient for the percent of evangelical Protestants remains significant and positive. All other variables retain their significance levels except for that of higher education (which becomes marginally significant $p < .10$) and that for nonprofit organizations (which reaches standard levels of significance, $p < .05$). Rerunning the analyses using a control for the percent urban (from the 2010 U.S. Census) also provides results fully consistent with model 3. All variables retain their significance levels (results not shown).

Using different data for measures of "belongingness" or levels of general group formation did not yield different results. We included the social capital index created by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (Rupasingha, Goetz, and Freshwater 2006) as a replacement for the nonprofits variable in our original model. The significance levels of all variables remained robust, and the inclusion of this new variable did not considerably improve the predictive power of the model (results not shown).[9]

The variable for the percent Republican in a county is not significant in any of the models. Replacing the percent Republican with other levels of conservative politics—such as the percentage of "strong Republican" individuals in a county—does not change the significance levels of any of the variables in the model, nor does replacing the variable with percent Democrat. An interaction term that crossed percent evangelical with the percent Republican was also included in the model in order to approximate levels of the Religious Right in a county. This interaction term did not have an effect on the other variables in the model, was not itself significant, and did not improve the pseudo R-squared values for the models. The prevailing religiopolitical identification in a county does not, in the end, matter for the formation of nonbeliever organizations (results not shown).

We also reran the analyses using alternative measures for evangelical Protestantism. The CCES survey contained a question asking respondents: "Would you describe yourself as a 'born-again' or evangelical Christian, or not?" Replacing the variable for percent evangelical with a variable for percent born again did not change significance levels of demographic or institutional variables. Unlike the variable for percent evangelical, however, the variable for percent born again does not reach normal levels of significance in any of the models (results not shown).

The count variable for megachurches does not influence the odds of finding a nonbeliever organization in these models. The lack of a significance value for this variable, however, could be a product of the relatively small correlation between megachurches and percent of evangelical Protestants in a county ($r = -.085$).

As with the interpretation of logistic coefficients, the analysis of pseudo R-squared values is also plagued with difficulties. While the R-squared values in standard OLS regression are understood as the proportion of explained variance, the pseudo R-squared values in logistic regression can only be seen as rough estimates of model fit and cannot be interpreted in the same way as linear OLS R-squared values (Hu, Shao, and Palta 2006). The pseudo R-squared values in logistic regression only have meaning when compared to other models that predict the same outcome with the same data set; higher pseudo R-squared values indicate better model fits. We can conclude from the results presented in Table 2 that these models display strong increases

[9]We thank an anonymous *JSSR* reviewer for suggesting and providing information about these data.

in pseudo R-squared values (from .43 to .54), giving some evidence of an increase in model fit. Model 3, therefore, gives the best estimation of the coefficients.

Ultimately, these logistic models show that contrary to H1, the religion-related variable that predicts the presence of a nonbeliever group in a county is not the population of nones. Rather, consistent with H2, it is the percent of evangelical Protestants. Institutionally, only bookstores are good predictors for the presence of a nonbeliever organization—a very partial confirmation of H3.

Table 3 presents the coefficients for the negative binomial models used to determine which variables predict the number of groups. Using the same variables as the logit model above, a similar picture emerges: the percent none in a county increases the number of organizations in model 1 of Table 3, thus providing evidence for H1. The percent of nones no longer influences the count of nonbeliever organizations once we include demographic and institutional variables. Instead, it is the coefficient for percent evangelical that becomes significant in these final two models.

Along with the coefficients for none and evangelical Protestant, the percentage of mainline Protestants is significant in models 1 and 2. Without controlling for institutions, the percent of mainline Protestants significantly increases the number of nonbeliever organizations. It could be the case that, together, mainline Protestants and evangelical Protestants present a relatively higher level of Protestant religiosity in a county. Although a possibility, this cannot be proven using the county-level data employed in this study. The final model demonstrates that the effect of percent of mainline Protestants washes away with the inclusion of all variables.

Interpreting these coefficients can be difficult, however; Frank, Camp, and Boutcher state it succinctly: "The exponentiated values of negative-binomial regression coefficients indicate the effect of a unit change in the independent variable on the incidence of the dependent variable" (2010:882). The exponentiated slope for percent evangelical ($e^{.0107} = 1.011$) suggests that every percentage increase in evangelical Protestants in a county increases the number of nonbeliever organizations by approximately 1 percent. Although the effect is small, this provides further empirical support for H2.

Consistent with the results from the logit models, the variables for percent higher education, median income, and percent aged 18–29 are also significant. What is more, the percent white in a county appears to increase the count of groups as well. The effects of higher education and age are quite strong (with exponentiated values between 1.033 and 1.050) while the effect of race is similar in strength to that of percent evangelical.

The number of bookstores is again a significant variable. Unlike in the logit model, however, the number of universities also increases the number of groups in a county. These two variables do not correlate with one another ($r = .16$), and neither correlates highly with percent of higher education. Yet altogether, these variables indicate that there might be a connection between levels of erudition in a county and number of nonbeliever organizations.

Replacing the nonprofits variable for the social capital index from the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development does yield two differences. First, the coefficient for universities is no longer significant in the new model. Second, the social capital variable itself *is* significant, thus indicating that this measure captures something that is conducive to greater numbers of nonbeliever organizations. This result is to be expected since the social capital index is an approximate measure of group formation.

In sum, the results from the negative binomial model also offer more support for H2 (evangelicals) than H1 (nones). The percentage of nones in a county is significant in increasing the number of nonbeliever organizations in early models that only take into consideration religious variables, but this effect disappears with the addition of other covariates. In the final model, it is only the percent of evangelical Protestants that seems to have a positive effect.

It remains the case that while the percent of evangelical Protestants increases the number of nonbeliever organizations in a county, other friction variables—such as percent Republican and

Table 3: Negative binomial coefficients and (standard error) for counts of nonbeliever organizations in a county

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Religion (%)						
Evangelical	.0020	.0109**	.0107*	.0053*	.0215*	.0208*
Protestant	(.0040)	(.0041)	(.0042)	(−.0075)	(−.0096)	(−.0096)
				1.0176		
None	.0169***	.0096	.0074	.0044	.0157	.0151
	(.0049)	(.0051)	(.0051)	(−.0094)	(−.0095)	(−.0095)
				1.0147		
Catholic	−.0089	.0020	.0003	.0008	.0031	.0029
	(.0047)	(.0045)	(.0045)	(−.0086)	(−.0086)	(−.0086)
				1.0027		
Mainline	.0123**	.0125**	.0091	.0039	.0152	.0129
Protestant	(.0047)	(.0047)	(.0048)	(−.0090)	(−.0089)	(−.0090)
				1.0132		
Black Protestant	.0045	.0100	.0082	.0008	.0152	.0033
	(.0058)	(.0072)	(.0074)	(−.0127)	(−.0089)	(−.0128)
				1.0026		
Demographics						
Higher education		.0448***	.0323***	.0194***	.0708***	.0637***
(% BA or more)		(.0058)	(.0062)	(−.0166)	(−.0156)	(−.0167)
				1.0663		
Republican		−.0030	−.0027	−.0008	.0011	.0013
(%)		(.0032)	(.0033)	(−.0053)	(−.0089)	(−.0090)
				.9972		
Age 18–29		.0486***	.0413***	.0450***	.1440***	.1500***
(%)		(.0105)	(.0108)	(−.0269)	(−.0264)	(−.0269)
				1.1608		
White (%)		.0127***	.0129***	.0010***	.0033	.0033
		(.0037)	(.0037)	(−.0072)	(−.0072)	(−.0072)
				1.0034		
South1		.0079	.0104	−.0366	−.1630	−.1220
(dummy)		(.0868)	(.0901)	(−.2090)	(−.2060)	(−.2090)
				.8858		
% Population		.0376*	.0280	(.0058)	.0120	.0195
that moved into		(.0184)	(.0190)	−.0350	(−.0345)	−.0351
county				*1.0195*		
Institutions (per 10,000)						
Bookstores			.7740***	.3379***	1.150***	1.1170***
			(.1340)	(−.3050)	(−.3020)	(−.3040)
				3.0612		
Universities			.5220*	−.0470	−.1030	−.1510
			(.2450)	(−.4930)	(−.4910)	(−.4940)
				.8560		

(*Continued*)

Table 3 (*Continued*)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Museums			−.4370	−.2503	−.8170	−.8070
			(.2950)	(−.6090)	(−.6060)	(−.6090)
				.4366		
Bars			.0326	−.0033	.0056	−.0104
			(.0288)	(−.0573)	(−.0557)	(−.0574)
				.9891		
Social capital				.0423		.1460
				(−.0928)		(−.0941)
				1.1503		
Nonprofits			.0015	.2326	.0017	
			(.0014)	(1.3380)	(−.0020)	
				2.1602		
Megachurches			.4480	.2326	.8400	.7900
			(.5700)	(1.3380)	(1.3470)	(1.3440)
				2.1602		
Evangelical x Republican					−.0001	−.0001
					(−.0002)	(−.0002)
Ln(Population)	1.2190***	1.1900***	1.1780***	.5043***	1.6260***	1.6700***
	(.0358)	(.0404)	(.0428)	(−.1130)	(−.1070)	(−.1130)
				5.3127		
Constant	−15.4300***	−17.5400***	−17.4300***	−23.5000***	−23.2900***	−23.6400***
	(.5760)	(.8040)	(1.680)	(1.6720)	(1.7060)	
Alpha	−.9380***	−2.0060***	−2.2930***			
	(.1640)	(.2620)	(.3060)			
N	2,859	2,859	2,858	2,857	2,858	2,857
Pseudo R^2	.3265	.4023	.4114	.5445	.5445	.5446

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Values are presented as: Y-standardized coefficient (standard error), *odds ratio*. Median income (not shown) also reaches significance at the $p < .001$ level; however, its coefficient is nearly zero and is thus not shown here.

number of megachurches—do not. H2 is thus only partially confirmed. Of the institutions, both bookstores and universities increase the number of groups, a partial confirmation of H3.

Conclusion

Previous studies have successfully examined nonbeliever organizations at the micro level; this article analyzes these groups at the macro or national level and provides evidence of the social contexts in which nonbelievers form and join organizations *qua* nonbelievers. One might assume that nonbeliever organizations would be more likely to form in less religious counties, as measured by stated religious affiliation. And yet the logistic regression and negative binomial models presented here demonstrate that among all of the religion variables, it is actually the percentage of evangelical Protestants in a county that is statistically significant in predicting the presence and number of nonbeliever organizations.

Though nonbeliever organizations remain underexamined, existing research has demonstrated that some organized nonbelievers share a perception of minority status and feelings of

antagonism vis-à-vis the wider (religious) culture in the United States (Cimino and Smith 2007; Smith 2013). Our article supports and extends these findings. Because evangelical Protestants emphasize proselytizing, religion could be more salient in areas where they comprise a higher percentage of the population. This salience could in turn lead to perceived social antagonism toward nonbelievers and could provide an impetus for nonbeliever identity formation and the founding of a nonbeliever organization.

There are dangers in misattributing individual-level actions using contextual-level variables. As Lim and MacGregor (2012) remind us, researchers working at the county level in the United States should be cautious of performing an ecological fallacy in their arguments. The results presented here do not confirm that the presence of evangelicals prompts nonbelievers to form groups. More modestly, they provide empirical support for a connection between levels of evangelical Christianity and the presence and number of nonbeliever organizations. What else might explain this association between the level of evangelical Protestants and the prevalence of nonbeliever groups? We offer two other explanations that could account for our findings and that point to the need for future research.

First, there might be a tendency for mimetic isomorphism in areas with higher evangelical Protestants (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Higher percentages of evangelicals could correlate with increased civic engagement due to evangelicals' emphasis on community involvement (Smith 1998; Wuthnow 1988). Religious voluntary associations can impact levels of civic engagement through volunteering opportunities and avenues for social networking (Putnam and Campbell 2010). As Lim and MacGregor (2012) find, however, higher levels of religious engagement in a community decrease volunteering among the nonreligious. Future work might consider whether nonbeliever groups arise as parallels to these religious organizations in order to meet demand for volunteer opportunities among the avowedly nonreligious.

Second, the higher levels of group participation associated with higher levels of evangelical Protestants could lead to a kind of voluntary association "competition." As others have found (e.g., Curtis, Baer, and Grabb 2001), voluntary church activity could create a need for complementary interests to be expressed through alternative voluntary associations. This competitive market for voluntary associations could increase the general salience of group formation, spurring a need for individuals to join communities. In short, the presence of evangelical Protestant communities might be a trigger for nonbelievers to form their own communities. Both explanations point to the possibility of evangelical Protestants and nonbeliever groups participating in a shared culture of voluntary association and civic engagement. These areas are ripe for future study.

Further quantitative research on nonbeliever organizations would benefit from two considerations. The database of nonbeliever groups relied on here primarily contains those that have a website or are listed on the websites of others, such as Meetup.com. Though Smith and Cimino (2012; see also Cimino and Smith 2014) and Kettell (2014) emphasize the role of the Internet in the formation of nonbeliever organizations, it remains possible that our analysis misses some local groups that lack any web-based presence whatsoever. The database also lacks accurate member counts for each group, and as Lim (2013) has noted, such counts are more difficult to produce for non-Christian communities. Engaging each individual group to try to identify accurate member totals and all other groups in a given region would provide new opportunities for surveys and a better understanding of the scale of group membership.

Future qualitative work could explore the reasons nonbelievers organize. What encourages individual nonbelievers to become active and join a group? What encourages nonbelievers to start a new group when one is already available in their area? Ethnographic work could also elucidate the differences that exist among various types of nonbeliever organizations, including those that consider themselves religious. For instance, do the goals and activities of religious, nontheistic humanists differ from those of secular humanists, freethinkers, or rationalists? And, finally, what kinds of partnerships do nonbeliever organizations form? For instance, the relationships among local and national nonbeliever groups remain a fertile site of inquiry.

We offer this study as an initial step in the expansion of researchers' conceptions of congregational life and religious membership in the United States. Driven in no small part by assumptions about the proper boundary between religious and secular, research on America's religious diversity has almost entirely overlooked those who gather as nonbelievers, regardless of whether they consider themselves religious. Putnam and Campbell have pointed to the possible importance of "close, morally intense, but nonreligious networks" (2010:361) for civic engagement while observing the absence of available data on such communities. This article and the database upon which it relies offer solid footing for such an inquiry. We hope these findings will challenge those studying religious and congregational life in the United States to reassess how Americans are coming together to meet face to face with their neighbors, reflect on important moral questions, discuss the existence or nonexistence of certain material or immaterial entities, and volunteer their time toward various causes. Including such groups in large-scale studies of religion-related (Quack 2014) communities would improve current research practices that make legible only those groups and activities that bear resemblance to certain forms of Christian institutional and intellectual life.

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