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# The Dynamics of Church Attendance and Voluntary Engagement

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— FIRST DRAFT\* —

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## Abstract

Recent years have seen an increased interest in the role of voluntary engagement for the workings of democracy and the social integration of modern societies. Much research suggests that next to education, religious involvement is the most powerful predictor for active engagement in voluntary organizations on the individual level. This contribution examines the dynamics of church attendance and voluntary engagement in a longitudinal perspective relying on panel data from the GSOEP. Preliminary results suggest that although contested in the literature, the linkage between religion and voluntary engagement is no observational artefact but indeed a cause of the latter.

Section: Religion & Politics - the impact of religion on politics and of politics on religion.

Workshop: Beyond Individuals and States: Religiosity, Nationalism and Political Discourse

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# Introduction

Recent years have seen an increased interest in the role of voluntary engagement for the workings of democracy and the social integration of modern societies. Thereby, much research suggests that next to education, religious involvement is the most powerful predictor for active engagement in voluntary organizations on the individual level. Religious people simply are more active and civically engaged. Although this finding is well established in the empirical literature, the exact causal relationship between religious involvement and voluntary engagement is far from clear. While theory suggests that people that attend religious services on a regular basis acquire important civic skills and are integrated in social networks that will eventually lead to voluntary work, the idea of a unidirectional causal link from attending religious service to volunteering was not left without critics.

The most important counter argument stresses the importance of hidden third factors which cause volunteering and attending religious service to be connected. So, when estimating the effect of attending religious service on volunteering the estimates are biased due to unobserved heterogeneity. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to empirically scrutinize the relationship between church attendance and voluntary engagement in order to shed more light on the relationship. Does church attendance indeed lead to voluntary engagement as much of the literature suggests or is the usual made observation of there relatedness due to unobserved heterogeneity?

The structure of the paper then is as follows: First, I present theoretical arguments concerning the relatedness of church attendance and volunteering. Thereafter, I introduce statistical models able to cope especially with the problem of unobserved heterogeneity and will present their results. Last but no least, I will sum up the study in the conclusion section.

# Theory

The widely accepted knowledge that religion and religious actors play a crucial role in American civil society can be traced back to the days of de Tocqueville (1956). More recently, Putnam (2000, 66) noted that "nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context." Indeed, the finding that religiosity and church attendance in particular is an important predictor for civic engagement and voluntary work is by now a well established fact in the literature (e.g. Bekkers 2005; Borgonovi 2008; Campbell and Yonish 2003). This positive association between church attendance and volunteering is by no means restricted to the American case as studies for Germany show. von Rosenbladt (2000, 61), for instance, reports that while only 8% of the group of 'not volunteering at all' have a strong church commitment, this proportion raises to 28% in the group of the 'most volunteering'. Gensicke, Geiss and Picot (2006, 76), in his follow up study, identifies church commitment as the second strongest effect on volunteering. More recently, Traunmüller (2009), also found regular attendance of religious services to increase the individual probability to engage in voluntary work.

My theoretical foundation of the relationship between attending religious service and doing voluntary work follows the ideas of Verba, Brady and Schlozman (1995) who basically state that for volunteering and participation three factors are required: *motivation*, *opportunity* and *resources*. The importance of these factors may differ depending on what level, type, particular person, or organization is studied, but nevertheless all are necessary factors for individuals to become participants or volunteers.

Being regularly present at religious services provides and enhances these factors. *Motivation* for example might be fostered in three ways. First, religion itself provides norms encouraging good deeds like helping the poor and so on. Second, religious services, especially the priest's sermons, reinforce these norms by preaching, repeating, and explaining its contents. Third, social pressure imposed by and on members of the community further motivates religious community members to behave in a norm conforming way which then eventually leads to voluntary work.

But church attendance and religious denomination can also build up *opportunity* to volunteer. Christian and Muslim churches usually provide a wide scope of social services. They run social organizations, hospitals, do poor feeding and are concerned with community and social issues in general. These already built up structures offer an easy way to participate and volunteer in different fields and organizations. So, if members of a religious community are motivated to volunteer they probably will do so because it is just easy for them having a lot of opportunities at hand provided by their community.

Concerning an individual's *resources* it is argued that religious factors contribute to resources of its members – especially civic skills – as well. Empirical studies find that religious communities actively help structural disadvantaged – from less educated and less rich background – to improve civic skills (see [Brown and Brown 2003](#)). Another source of civic skill improvement might be the easy access to volunteering itself – described in the above section. For a lot of voluntary work one needs at least some civic skills – organizational skills, the ability to be responsible, self-esteem and so on. Being integrated in a religious community can provide these features – besides directly training them – by volunteering step by step, from less to more demanding volunteer's responsibilities. Thereby further fostering volunteering and providing necessary skills to otherwise not recruited ones. This becomes even more evident if one considers that religious services are open to and practised by a whole range of people from very different socio-economic backgrounds and from very young aged up to very old. This setting then results in both an early learning of the required skills by doing voluntary work itself and in addition to a strong socialization into volunteering.

Although theory provides several paths in which religion and being member of a religious community leads to volunteering and empirical findings seem to point in one direction the idea of a causal link from religion to volunteering was not left without critics. Two alternative explanations of the empirical found correlation are mentioned in literature – unobserved heterogeneity and reciprocity. Unobserved heterogeneity refers to factors which have an effect on both variables but are not controlled for – if unobserved third factors are at work the frequently observed correlation between church attendance and voluntary work is spurious in regard to a causal connection. [Oesterle, Johnson and Mor-](#)

timer (2004) stress this particular endogeneity problem. They state that the motivation to volunteering is set up in earlier stages of the life course which is also true for the disposition to practice one's religion. Another possible mechanism, also stressing unobserved heterogeneity, is provided by McIntosh, Sykes and Kubena (2002) as well as by Stark and Finke (2000, 118ff) who explain attendance of religious services by the structure and influence of one's social networks. Reciprocity refers to the direction of the causal error, i.e. does not deny the causal connection as such but claims that volunteering might as well cause attending religious service at the same time or in the most extreme case exclusively. Norris and Inglehart (2004, 192, 194) argue for both a possible reversed or a reciprocal relationship by stating: "people [...] in church-related organizations [...] learn to become more engaged in the social concerns [...] But the reverse causal process could equally well be at work - with people who are socially trusting 'joiners' being most likely to engage in civic activity and to belong to religious associations". On the other hand if volunteering is due to the mere proneness of those 'socially trusting joiners' than this is in fact a problem of unobserved third factors, i.e. the general proneness to join irrespective of what exactly is joined, a religious community or a voluntary work opportunity. While the first problem – referring to unobserved heterogeneity – will be tackled in this study all attempts to disentangle the direction of the causal arrow failed so far. Indeed the problem was tried to solve by Meißner and Trautmüller (2010) making use of cross-lagged structural equation models based on the ideas of Finkel (1995). But replicating those results mainly revealed that covariance structures are too unstable to derive firm statements although the causal arrow seems to point from church attendance to volunteering and not the other way around.

Therewith the gap between the empirical fact that religious people are more volunteering and different theoretical interpretations of why they do so demands further investigating. I will provide this necessary analysis in a more and sufficient depth. If my conception of the underlying mechanism and processes is right and the critics are to be rejected, I should be able to observe that: When controlling for unobserved heterogeneity the effect of attending religious service on volunteering does not vanish.

# Data

## Church Attendance and Volunteering in the GSOEP

As data source I rely on the high quality panel data of the German Socio Economic Panel (GSOEP). The GSOEP “is a wide-ranging representative longitudinal study of private households”<sup>1</sup> for the German population which started in 1984. Questions covering volunteering and attending religious service were asked several times. Fortunate for my statistical models, both volunteering as well as attending religious service were asked for all years in between 1994 and 1999 providing me with a panel dataset with thousands of respondents at six time points. An example of how these questions are formed is presented in the following:

Which of the following activities do you do in your free time? Please enter how often you practice each activity:

- Honorary activities in clubs, organizations or social service:  
each week – each month – less often – never
- Going to church, attending other religious events:  
each week – each month – less often – never

(questions KP1206 and KP1208 from the GSOEP in 1995)

Although, questions as well as answer categories differ slightly all questions refer to volunteering and respectively church attendance. The difference of questions concerns the introductory texts to the questions as well as the number of answer categories. An overview of all volunteering and church attendance questions can be found in the appendix (table 8 - 10). All answer categories were recoded into four categories to make them comparable over time with 0 denoting *never*, 1 *less often than monthly*, 2 *each month / monthly*, 3 *each week / weekly or more*.

Volunteering and church attendance’s answer category distributions are shown in figure 1 and figure 2. These figures show that the distribution of answer categories over time is smooth with no erratic or stark changes. This underlines the assumption that both variables measure the same things and questions were understood quite identical despite four or five answer categories to choose from or the sometimes differing texts used.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: [http://www.diw.de/en/diw\\_02.c.221178.en/about\\_soep.html](http://www.diw.de/en/diw_02.c.221178.en/about_soep.html), accessed 13 June 2012

FIGURE 1: Distribution of Voluntary Work Answer Categories Over Time

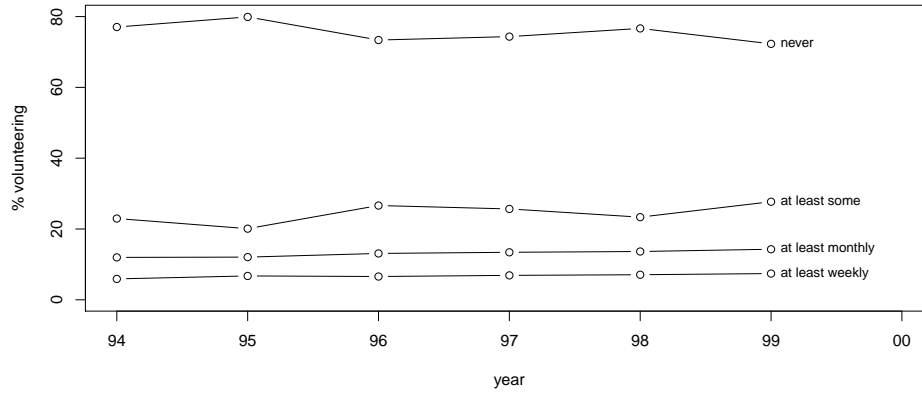
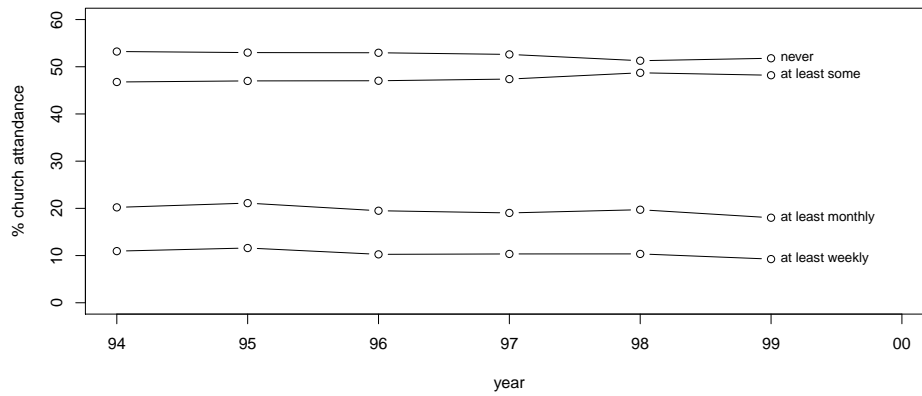


FIGURE 2: Distribution of Church Attendance Answer Categories Over Time



## ‘Talking’ Numbers

As mentioned before the aim of this paper is to empirically describe the general causal relationship between church attendance – a measure of religious involvement – and doing voluntary work and resolve the question of the causal direction between both measures. Before going ahead in how exactly I suppose to solve these problems I briefly present what usually can be observed on the surface when looking merely on cross tabulations church attendance and volunteering.

Table 1 and 2 present the cross tabulation for both variables as frequencies and column percentages. Both tables were weighted to represent population estimates for the German population captured by the GSOEP – all German inhabitants aged 18 and above summing

TABLE 1: Population Weighted Cross Tabulation of Church Attendance and Volunteering for 2009 – Frequencies

| Volunteering | Church Attendance |            |            |           |           |            |
|--------------|-------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
|              | no answer         | never      | less       | monthly   | weekly    | sum        |
| no answer    | 424,583           | 80,661     | 134,725    | 88,590    | 84,539    | 813,098    |
| never        | 81,940            | 30,715,225 | 11,775,695 | 2,917,698 | 2,654,388 | 48,144,946 |
| less         | 9,097             | 3,087,252  | 3,793,578  | 1,014,529 | 634,273   | 8,538,729  |
| monthly      | 793               | 1,673,757  | 1,965,213  | 864,692   | 716,733   | 5,221,188  |
| weekly       | 45,442            | 2,203,564  | 2,041,747  | 898,529   | 1,144,954 | 6,334,236  |
| sum          | 561,855           | 37,760,459 | 19,710,958 | 5,784,038 | 5,234,887 | 69,052,197 |

TABLE 2: Population Weighted Cross Tabulation of Church Attendance and Volunteering for 2009 – Column Percentage

| Volunteering | Church Attendance |        |        |         |        |        |
|--------------|-------------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|
|              | no answer         | never  | less   | monthly | weekly | sum    |
| no answer    | 75.57             | 0.21   | 0.68   | 1.53    | 1.61   | 1.18   |
| never        | 14.58             | 81.34  | 59.74  | 50.44   | 50.71  | 69.72  |
| less         | 1.62              | 8.18   | 19.25  | 17.54   | 12.12  | 12.37  |
| monthly      | 0.14              | 4.43   | 9.97   | 14.95   | 13.69  | 7.56   |
| weekly       | 8.09              | 5.84   | 10.36  | 15.53   | 21.87  | 9.17   |
| sum          | 100.00            | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00  | 100.00 | 100.00 |

up to about 69 million people represented. As we can see from table 1 most people – about 48 million – do not volunteer at all in 2009 while another 20 million do at least some voluntary work. In table 2 we can observe that the amount of time spent on voluntary work does rise with the frequency of attending church – religious people simply are more active and civically engaged. But these numbers can as well be interpreted the other way around: civically engaged people are prone to religious involvement. Furthermore, the tables do not reveal if some third factor might actually cause both – volunteering as well as attending church – and therefore render the whole relationship spurious.

The above presented empirical regularities brings us back to the research question posed in this paper: Does being involved in religious communities cause people to do voluntary work or is it the case, as some authors argue, that these regularities actually are caused by unobserved third factor like e.g. a general proneness to join or childhood socialization?



## Coping with Unobserved Heterogeneity

One way of coping with unobserved third factors possibly biasing effect estimates is to use only those parts of variable variance which are less prone to endogeneity. In present study the causal interpretation of the relationship between attending religious service and volunteering was mainly challenged by alternative explanations referring to general tendencies or socialization. If these factors are at work – which is plausible to assume – observed cross sectional correlations like those presented in the previous section are misleading because they are at least partly due to these unobserved third factors influencing both variables. Fortunate, in the case of time invariant third factors one might partial out these influences by taking the difference of the dependent variable between succeeding time points (see [Halaby 2004](#)). Because time invariant factors like those presented in the challenges posed against the causal linkage between attending church and volunteering are present at all time points these should only have an effect on the level of volunteering and attending church but not on changes over time. Naturally the interpretation of effect estimates does change: An estimate now expresses the amount of change expected when the explanatory variable changes by one unit from time  $t-1$  to  $t$ . In conclusion I will rely on first difference models to get effect estimates which are robust to unobserved time invariant third factors.

## Models of Voluntary Work Workload Change

One problem when trying to apply first difference models to ordinal variables as dependent variable is that there exists no statistical model for this special purpose. Therefore, I will apply a little workaround. First of all I will recode the differences of the dependent variable between succeeding time points to capture only stability, upward change, and downward change – usually more than two-thirds of all changes are indeed changes of one category. Second, because doing more voluntary work or attending church more frequently is assumed to be more or less difficult depending on the level to start from I estimate separate regressions for each level of volunteering held at time  $t-1$  and introduce church

attendance as set of dummy variables. To control for live-course events age and age's polynomials up to the fourth grade are used as control variables as well. Furthermore, church attendance at time point  $t-1$  as well as the change between time point  $t-1$  and  $t$  and their interaction are used to estimate the effect of church attendance on volunteering.

TABLE 3: Null Model of Volunteering Change

|             | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 0$<br>never | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 1$<br>some | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 2$<br>monthly | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 3$<br>weekly |
|-------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (Intercept) | 0.111                           | -0.315                         | -0.236                            | -0.391                           |
| (P)         | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |
| n           | 47576                           | 6825                           | 3939                              | 4250                             |
| R2adj       | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |

TABLE 4: Age Dependent Model of Volunteering Change

|           | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 0$<br>never | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 1$<br>some | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 2$<br>monthly | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 3$<br>weekly |
|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| intercept | 0.415                           | -0.941                         | -0.891                            | -0.789                           |
| (P)       | 0.000                           | 0.005                          | 0.053                             | 0.007                            |
| age       | -0.029                          | 0.053                          | 0.024                             | 0.034                            |
| (P)       | 0.000                           | 0.071                          | 0.325                             | 0.146                            |
| age2      | 0.001                           | -0.002                         | 0.000                             | -0.001                           |
| (P)       | 0.000                           | 0.083                          | 0.497                             | 0.139                            |
| age3      | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |
| (P)       | 0.000                           | 0.080                          | 0.420                             | 0.099                            |
| age4      | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |
| (P)       | 0.000                           | 0.068                          | 0.401                             | 0.055                            |
| n         | 47576                           | 6825                           | 3939                              | 4250                             |
| R2adj     | 0.005                           | 0.002                          | 0.012                             | 0.009                            |

Table 3 presents simple change estimates for volunteering without any covariates. As one can see for all levels of volunteering at  $t-1$  different tendencies to change the amount of volunteering from one year to the other exist. While 11% of those never volunteering choose to increase their engagement for all other categories a general negative tendency exists. Although, some of those doing some voluntary work and doing it on a monthly base might increase their engagement there much more lowering their engagement. Note, that the positive trend for the first and the positive trend for the last category are not surprising because change for them can only go in one direction.

TABLE 5: Volunteering Change and Church Attendance I

|                   | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 0$<br>never | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 1$<br>some | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 2$<br>monthly | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 3$<br>weekly |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| intercept         | 0.090                           | -0.384                         | -0.268                            | -0.434                           |
| (P)               | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |
| c.a. $_{t-1} = 1$ | 0.040                           | 0.073                          | 0.030                             | 0.077                            |
| (P)               | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.141                             | 0.000                            |
| c.a. $_{t-1} = 2$ | 0.063                           | 0.140                          | 0.031                             | 0.061                            |
| (P)               | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.199                             | 0.006                            |
| c.a. $_{t-1} = 3$ | 0.066                           | 0.192                          | 0.104                             | 0.052                            |
| (P)               | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.001                             | 0.005                            |
| n                 | 47505                           | 6806                           | 3921                              | 4228                             |
| R2adj             | 0.007                           | 0.007                          | 0.002                             | 0.004                            |

TABLE 6: Volunteering Change and Church Attendance II

|             | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 0$<br>never | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 1$<br>some | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 2$<br>monthly | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 3$<br>weekly |
|-------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| intercept   | 0.11                            | -0.311                         | -0.234                            | -0.388                           |
| (P)         | 0                               | 0                              | 0                                 | 0                                |
| c.a. change | 0.026                           | 0.13                           | 0.152                             | 0.06                             |
| (P)         | 0                               | 0                              | 0                                 | 0                                |
| n           | 47419                           | 6789                           | 3909                              | 4211                             |
| R2adj       | 0.002                           | 0.008                          | 0.011                             | 0.003                            |

The next table (table 4) presents results when age is introduced as control. While this model is hard to interpret directly due to the age polynomials the intercept estimates have changed a lot and most polynomials are significant emphasizing the claim made before that general life-course events might have an important influence on the when to start or stop volunteering.

Table 5 gives the first, although preliminary, results for my variable of interest. In comparison to the null model presented in table 3 all intercepts became smaller and all estimates for the level of church attendance in the previous year are significant, which indicates that the previous level of church attendance encourages people to increase their voluntary engagement or prevents them quitting. Note, that these results are to be handled with caution due to the fact that this model lacks any kind of further control and does not incorporate the change in the level of church attendance which might have taken place.

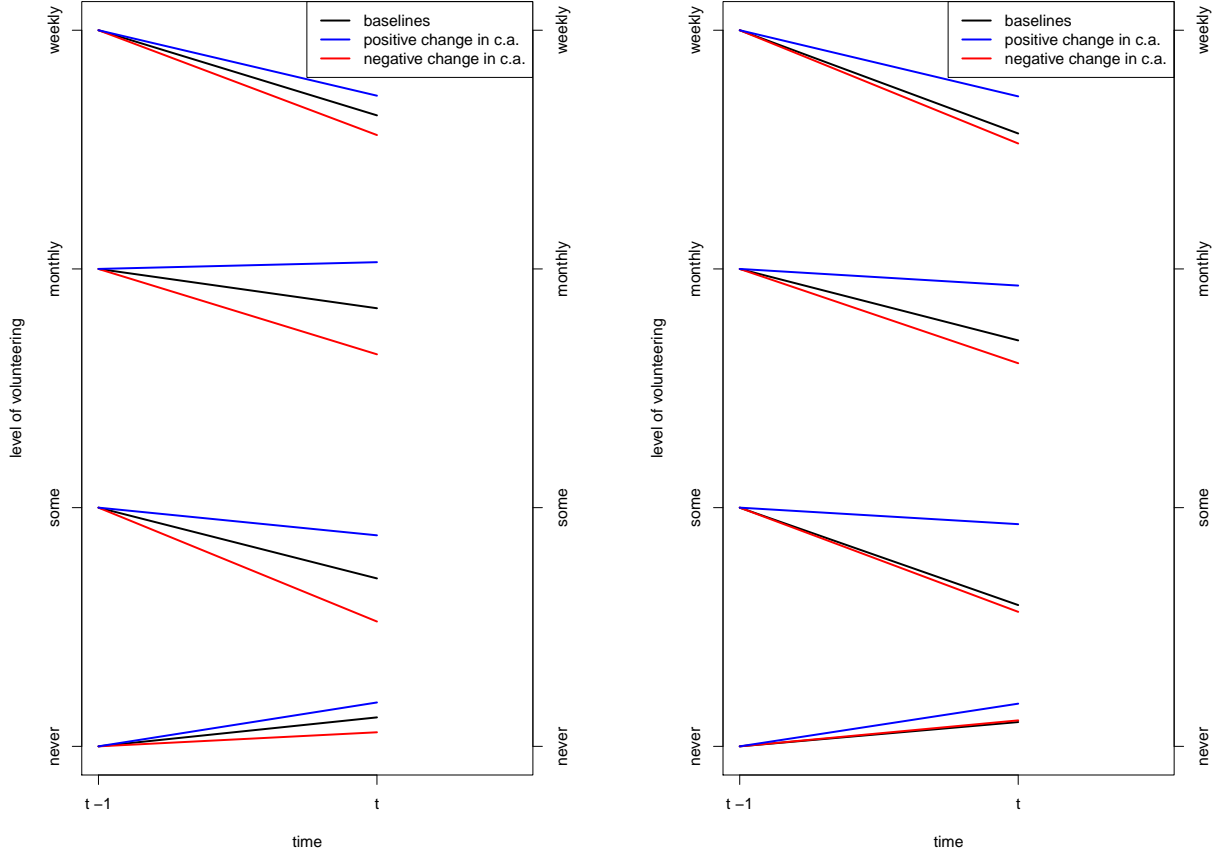
TABLE 7: Full Model of Volunteering Change

|                                 | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 0$<br>never | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 1$<br>some | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 2$<br>monthly | $\text{vol}_{t-1} = 3$<br>weekly |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| intercept                       | 0.417                           | -0.861                         | -0.778                            | -0.801                           |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.009                          | 0.079                             | 0.007                            |
| c.a. $t_{-1} = 1$               | 0.060                           | 0.119                          | 0.072                             | 0.081                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.007                             | 0.000                            |
| c.a. $t_{-1} = 2$               | 0.089                           | 0.187                          | 0.069                             | 0.080                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.031                             | 0.001                            |
| c.a. $t_{-1} = 3$               | 0.108                           | 0.263                          | 0.183                             | 0.091                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |
| c.a. change                     | 0.076                           | 0.140                          | 0.184                             | 0.003                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.463                            |
| age                             | -0.032                          | 0.039                          | 0.011                             | 0.033                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.137                          | 0.418                             | 0.154                            |
| age2                            | 0.001                           | -0.001                         | 0.000                             | -0.001                           |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.149                          | 0.417                             | 0.142                            |
| age3                            | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.143                          | 0.341                             | 0.101                            |
| age4                            | 0.000                           | 0.000                          | 0.000                             | 0.000                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.125                          | 0.326                             | 0.056                            |
| c.a. $t_{-1} = 1$ : c.a. change | -0.032                          | 0.088                          | -0.014                            | 0.047                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.030                          | 0.415                             | 0.137                            |
| c.a. $t_{-1} = 2$ : c.a. change | -0.048                          | -0.020                         | -0.049                            | 0.113                            |
| (P)                             | 0.000                           | 0.355                          | 0.243                             | 0.008                            |
| c.a. $t_{-1} = 3$ : c.a. change | -0.019                          | 0.070                          | 0.113                             | 0.211                            |
| (P)                             | 0.052                           | 0.162                          | 0.094                             | 0.000                            |
| n                               | 47419                           | 6789                           | 3909                              | 4211                             |
| R2adj                           | 0.021                           | 0.024                          | 0.027                             | 0.023                            |

Table 6 now states the first, preliminary results for the effect of a change in the level of attending church. As hypothesized those estimates are positive as well as significant.

In the last set of models all control variables are introduced within the same model. Due to the mass of coefficients and especially having some negative interaction effects for church attendance the overall effect is hard to interpret. I therefore choose to illustrate what actually happens by presenting these results graphically. Figure 3 presents these necessary summaries. All lines start at a fixed level of volunteering at  $t-1$  and end at their expected value at time point  $t$  according to the change in attending church which happened during the course of the year. Black lines are for those who did not experience any change in their level of attending church, blue lines are for positive change and red

FIGURE 3: The Effect of Changing Levels of Church Attendance – Formula vs. Data Prediction



lines for a negative change. The left panel shows the expected difference in the level of volunteering according to the estimates of the full model. All variables except the change of attending church are set to their mean. The right panel uses the predicted values of volunteering to illustrate how the model actually translates substantially. Again, black lines denote change in volunteering in the absence of a change in attending church, blue lines a positive change and red lines a negative change. The effect of a change in attending church than is the difference on the y-axis between the blue and the black lines, or the red and the black lines value at  $t-1$ . Let us first look at the left panel. As we can see the expected means for positive change in attending church and negative change in attending church consistently lie above above, respectively below the baseline. Therefore, a change in the level of attending church does result in expected change in volunteering although time invariant third cannot be at work due to the model design. The effects of church attendance on the expected change in the level of volunteering according to the estimates

of full model than are: 0.06 for those who did not volunteer at all at  $t-1$ ; 0.18 for those who did some volunteering; 0.19 for those who volunteered on a monthly base; and 0.08 for those volunteering on a weekly base fixing all other variables to their mean. To put it differently, when all those in who did not volunteer at all would have experienced an increase in the level of attending church by at least one category, for 18% of them the level of volunteering would have risen by at least one category.

But how do these effect sizes translate when not fixing covariates to their means but using those values found within the sample? To answer this question, let us turn to the right panel of figure 3. As we can see, although covariates are not fixed any more but set to the empirically found distribution of values, the differences between those experiencing change in their level of volunteering and those who did not are still substantial – at least for those having had a positive change. Interestingly, negative changes in the level of attending church – in the general empirical picture – seem to have only minor negative effects on the level of volunteering and for those who did not volunteer at all at  $t-1$  a negative change in the level of attending church even results in a positive change in the level of volunteering. Obviously here the previous level of attending church as well as the interaction between the level and its change kick in meaning that those who did attend church in the past – these are the only one who actually can have a negative change in the level of attending church – are reluctant to quit their voluntary engagement even so they do not attend church as frequently as before. The differences in the predicted level of volunteering using variable values found in the sample are for positive changes in the level of attending church: 0.08 for those who did not volunteer at all at  $t-1$ ; 0.34 for those who did some volunteering; 0.23 for those who volunteered on a monthly base; and 0.16 for those volunteering on a weekly base; and for a negative change in the level of volunteering, 0.01 for those who did not volunteer at all at  $t-1$ ; -0.02 for those who did some volunteering; -0.10 for those who volunteered on a monthly base; and -0.04 for those volunteering on a weekly base

To sum it up, controlling for time invariant unobserved third factors and even taking into account that live course events in general might as well influence the probability to start or end a voluntary engagement, the effects of church attendance as a measure of religious

involvement do not vanish. Therefore, results suggest, that although unobserved third factors like a general proneness to join or childhood socialization might well be at work attending religious service still has a robust and persistent effect on the probability to start or keep volunteering.

## **Conclusion**

This study set out to shed light on the relationship between attending church and volunteering. Although, the observant fact that religious involved people are simply more often doing voluntary work than those who lack this involvement was counter argued in the literature by stating that this relatedness might be artificial in the context of a causal interpretation. Alternative explanations foremost refer to unobserved third factors, like childhood socialization or a general proneness to ‘join’ as the true sources of both, volunteering as well as attending religious service. By using first difference models which ensure that time invariant unobserved third factors like those posed as counter arguments do not have any influence on the effect estimates the results of this study suggest that still attending church has a significant, robust and substantial effect on the probability to start or keep volunteering therefore implying that being involved in a religious community really is an important source of social capital. Further research might then try to test whether or not this causal connection from religious involvement to the production of social capital only works for religious involvement or if these mechanisms work for other forms of social integration as well.

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# Appendix

## GSOEP's Voluntary Work and Attending Church Questions

TABLE 8: Voluntary Work and Attending Church Questions: 1984-1992

| Year | Introduction to Question  | Volunteering Question  | Volunt. Variable | Church Attendance Question                        | Ch. Att. Variable | Answers Categories  |
|------|---|--|------------------|---|-------------------|---|
| 1984 | How often do you engage in the following activities in your free time?  | Volunteer work in clubs, associations or social services       | AP0204           |   |                   | (1) Never / very rarely<br>(2) Occasionally<br>(3) Often / regularly                              |
| 1985 | Which of the following activities do you do in your free time? Please enter how often you practice each activity. | Honorary activities in clubs, organizations or social service. | BP0705           |   |                   | (1) Each week<br>(2) Each month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never                                    |
| 1986 | Which of the following activities do you do in your free time? Please enter how often you practice each activity. | Honorary activities in clubs, organizations or social service. | CP0905           |   |                   | (1) Each week<br>(2) Each month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never                                    |
| 1988 | Which of the following activities do you do in your free time? Please enter how often you practice each activity. | honorary activities in clubs, organizations or social service  | EP0905           |   |                   | (1) Each week<br>(2) Each month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never                                    |
| 1990 | Now some questions about your free time. How frequently do you do the following activities?                       | Volunteer work in clubs, associations, or social services      | GP0407           | Go to church or religious institutions            | GP0408            | (1) Daily<br>(2) Once per week<br>(3) Once per month<br>(4) Less than once per month<br>(5) Never |
| 1992 | Which of the following activities do you do in your free time? Please enter how often you practice each activity. | honorary activities in clubs, organizations or social service  | IP0706           | going to church, attending other religious events | IP0708            | (1) Each week<br>(2) Each month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never                                    |

TABLE 9: Voluntary Work and Attending Church Questions: 1994-1999

| Year | Introduction to Question  | Volunteering Question   | Volunt. Variable | Church Attendance Question                        | Ch. Att. Variable | Answers Categories  |
|------|---|---|------------------|---|-------------------|---|
| 1994 | Which of the following activities do you do in your free time? Please enter how often you practice each activity. | honorary activities in clubs, organizations or social service   | KP1206           | going to church, attending other religious events | KP1208            | (1) Each week<br>(2) Each month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never                                    |
| 1995 | Now some questions about your free time. How frequently do you do the following activities?                       | Volunteer work in clubs, associations, or social services       | LP0607           | go to church or religious institutions            | LP0608            | (1) Daily<br>(2) Once per week<br>(3) Once per month<br>(4) Less than once per month<br>(5) Never |
| 1996 | Now some questions about your free time. How frequently do you do the following activities?                       | volunteer work in clubs, associations, or social services       | MP0506           | go to church or religious institutions            | MP0508            | (1) Weekly<br>(2) Monthly<br>(3) Less than once per month<br>(4) Never                            |
| 1997 | Which of the following activities do you do in your free time? How frequently do you do the following activities? | volunteer work in clubs, associations, or social services       | NP0306           | go to church or religious institutions            | NP0308            | (1) Weekly<br>(2) Monthly<br>(3) Less than once per month<br>(4) Never                            |
| 1998 | Now some questions about your free-time. Please indicate how often you engage in the following activities.        | Volunteer work in clubs, organizations or charity organizations | OP0606           | Going to church or other religious meetings       | OP0607            | (1) Daily<br>(2) At least once a week<br>(3) At least once a month<br>(4) Less often<br>(5) Never |
| 1999 | Now some questions about your free-time. Please indicate how often you engage in the following activities.        | Volunteer work in clubs, organizations or charity organizations | PP0306           | Going to church or other religious meetings       | PP0308            | (1) Daily<br>(2) At least once a week<br>(3) At least once a month<br>(4) Less often<br>(5) Never |

TABLE 10: Voluntary Work and Attending Church Questions: 2001-2007

| Year | Introduction to Question  | Volunteering Question   | Volunt. Variable | Church Attendance Question               | Ch. Att. Variable | Answers Categories  |
|------|---|---|------------------|--|-------------------|---|
| 2001 | Which of the following activities do you take part in during your free time? Please check off how often you do each activity. | Volunteer work in clubs or social services                              | RP0307           | Attending church, religious events       | RP0309            | (1) At least once a week<br>(2) At least once a month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never          |
| 2003 | Please indicate how often you take part in each activity.   | Honorary office participation in clubs, associations or social services | TP1406           | Church-going, visits to religious events | TP1407            | (1) Daily<br>(2) At least once a week<br>(3) At least once a month<br>(4) Seldom<br>(5) Never |
| 2005 | Which of the following activities do you take part in during your free time? Please check off how often you do each activity  | Volunteer work in clubs or social services                              | VP0307           | Attending church, religious events       | VP0309            | (1) At least once a week<br>(2) At least once a month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never          |
| 2007 | Which of the following activities do you take part in during your free time? Please check off how often you do each activity  | Volunteer work in clubs or social services                              | XP0307           | Attending church, religious events       | XP0309            | (1) At least once a week<br>(2) At least once a month<br>(3) Less often<br>(4) Never          |