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**A DIFFERENT FACE OF FAITH-BASED POLITICS:  
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE PUBLIC ARENA**

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## Abstract

The role of religion in American politics and civil society has drawn significant scholarly focus, but most of the recent attention has fallen on the religious right's political influence and, more recently, on new initiatives to broaden the channeling of social service funding through faith-based organizations. These are important issues, but they exclude another historically important face of religiously-grounded public engagement: religious pressure for deeper political and economic democracy. We examine a widespread contemporary aspect of such engagement, faith-based community organizing (FBCO), through which poor and middle-income religious congregations advance the interests of their members. We analyze data from the first national study of faith-based organizing and link that analysis to recent theoretical work on civil society and the public realm to argue that FBCO makes a distinctive contribution to contemporary democracy by forging "bridging social capital" and creating "bridging institutions" that link the civic, political, and state levels of the public sphere.

## **A Different Face of Faith-Based Politics: Social Capital and Community Organizing in the Public Arena**

### **I. Introduction**

The growing efforts of religious communities to pursue political goals has sharpened scholarly attention to the role of religion in the public realm (Wald 1992; Casanova 1994; Williams 1999). In the United States, much of this attention has focused on the religious right, which has proven capable of bringing people into active political participation (see Wilcox 2000, for an overview of this voluminous literature), but has often been intolerant of legitimate pluralism in public life. Yet historically religious activism has frequently undergirded political causes seen as progressive, and has often introduced greater pluralism in the political arena (for example, see Morris 1984 on the civil rights movement; Baggett 2000 on religion and low-income housing; C. Smith 1996a on the peace movement and 1996b on progressive religion generally). The new tenor and changing forms of religiously-based political participation raise important questions about the role of faith communities in public life:<sup>1</sup> Can religious communities organized around particularistic and sometimes sectarian beliefs collaborate constructively and effectively in the public sphere – particularly when the latter incorporates contrasting faith communities and is organized around secular institutions? Can they do so in ways that are broadly-enough organized to strengthen democratic strands in American politics?

These questions have recently gained further urgency in the United States as a result of efforts to redirect some federal funding of social service programs through religious institutions. As this "faith-based initiative" has moved forward, it has heightened scholarly attention to the role of churches and other religious institutions as service providers and more broadly as centers for renewal in poor communities (Cnaan 1999; DiIulio 1997; Thomas and Blake 1996).

In contrast both to recent activism by religious conservatives and to faith-based social service provision, this paper focuses on a quite distinct religious intervention in civil society. Rather than provide services, in this kind of intervention, known as faith-based community organizing (FBCO), religious communities seek to empower their members to pursue political goals in the public sphere. Moreover, these organizations tend to pursue goals congruent with the economic interests of their mostly urban, low-to-middle income, and racially diverse participants. This paper documents the emergence of FBCO as a national phenomenon in American public life, and analyzes the implications of that emergence for democracy in America. We show that faith-based community organizing represents one of the broadest based initiatives in the American public sphere, and that it addresses two fundamental weaknesses of our contemporary polity (see following section).

FBCO refers to a model of locally based organizing that engages people primarily through their membership in religious congregations and trains them for leadership on behalf of their communities. To a smaller but significant extent, the organizations have incorporated participation by non-faith institutions such as unions, schools, neighborhood organizations, and an array of other community-based organizations – either through direct membership or looser collaboration in pursuit of shared issue agendas. These agendas are often quite broad in their efforts to improve the quality of life for families in low-income communities, including living wage campaigns, public works projects, affordable housing, school reform, job training, health care, and public safety.

A growing number of case studies of FBCO networks and organizations argue that these groups make particularly important contributions to the revitalization of American democratic

life. They show how FBCO groups foster broad participation and leadership of those often excluded from politics and project this organized power into the public arena (Warren 1998, 2001; Wood 1999, 2002; Rooney 1995; Shirley 1997; McRoberts 2000; Hart 2001). These studies have portrayed how particular FBCO groups and networks work and what they accomplish. However, until now, it has been impossible to gauge the actual and potential democratic impact the faith-based organizing field as a whole. This paper reports the findings of the first national survey of the FBCO field (Warren and Wood 2001), which allows us to measure more precisely the size and scope of the field – and thus to assess its contributions as a national phenomenon in American public life.

## **II. Social Capital and the Public Sphere**

To more sharply analyze the contributions and limitations of faith-based political organizing, we draw primarily on the concepts of “social capital” and “the public sphere.” Both concepts have been the object of extensive scholarly debate in recent years, with contested meanings and divergent positions having emerged from these debates. We do not attempt to settle these disputes here, but rather to draw on this literature to construct an analytic framework for assessing the work of FBCO. For a sample of the extensive social capital literature and its critics, see (Putnam 2000; Foley and Edwards 1997; Edwards and Foley 1998; Portes 1998; Warren, Thompson, and Saegert 2001); on the public sphere, see (Habermas 1984; Habermas 1989; Calhoun 1992; Cohen and Arato 1992).

Social capital:

By social capital, we refer to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam 1995: 67). These kinds of social connections provide a foundation for political democracy in several ways. First, it is through such ties that people develop a sense of commonality and a concern for each other. Moreover, skills developed in social institutions and habits of cooperation cultivated there can translate to the political arena. Equally important, whereas individuals stand powerless against large-scale economic and political institutions, in association, they have the opportunity to generate power in pursuit of common interests; social capital reserves allow the individuals thus connected to act on their shared interests.

The nature of social capital and its trends in the United States have been a controversial subject (see, for example, Putnam 2000; Portes 1998; Edwards and Foley 1998). Nevertheless, scholars have usefully contrast two types of social capital: bonding and bridging (see especially Warren, Thompson and Saegert 2001; Gittel and Vidal 1998). Bonding social capital refers to connections among people who are like each other regarding some relevant dimension of social life; it can be thought of as within-community social ties. Bridging social capital refers to connections across communities, ties among those who are different along a relevant dimension of social life.

Relatively homogeneous communities may be more or less well-organized internally, but what appears often missing in American social and political life is much of a bridge across communities. Interracial bridging social capital is particularly in short supply. Our neighborhoods continue to be highly segregated by race (Massey and Denton 1993) and class (Jargowsky 1997). Despite efforts at integration, the level of racial segregation in our schools is

actually increasing (Orfield and Eaton 1996). Internally, churches remain highly divided by race. And evidence from the Gallup polls suggest that social clubs and churches are even more segregated than neighborhoods and schools (reported in Putnam 2000, p. 357-8). Interest groups appear to remain largely divided by race as well, with a definite skew in membership towards the affluent.

The contributions of social capital to American democracy are quite limited by these divisions. If people tend to connect only with those like themselves, then there is much less opportunity for developing broader social identities, a conception of the common good, or shared strategies for promoting an economic or political agenda serving the interests of the majority. In this context, we seek to examine the role of FBCO in forging bridging ties across communities and among institutional sectors in civil society.

#### Public sphere:

For present purposes, we may think of the public sphere as made up of all those arenas of social life in which members of a community and their representatives in roles of institutional leadership reflect upon, argue about, and make decisions regarding the problems they face and the rules under which they live (Habermas 1989; Calhoun 1992; Cohen 1992). For analytic purposes, the public sphere can be divided into three levels. The first level is the state, that is, all those government settings (from local to national) in which elected representatives make the formal laws that govern societal life. These settings include the legislative process in city councils, schools boards, state legislatures, and Congress; judicial review at all levels; and executive policy formulation by mayors, governors, and presidents and their aides. Especially to



the extent that decisions in these government settings are made in ways not purely technocratic but involving deliberation through dialogue with constituencies, they are key components of the public sphere.

But the public sphere also includes far more than government. Indeed, the most crucial dynamics for long-term political change arguably do not lie within government at all, but in the formation of political will and aggregation of interests among both the general citizenry and leaders of non-governmental institutions in society.

This second level of the public sphere has been termed “political society,” to denote all those arenas lying outside government but loosely linked to it (Stepan 1988; Casanova 1994). Most notably, political society includes political parties, lobbyists and political action committees, labor unions and business associations, “think tanks” associated with interest groups, and similar organizations with directly political goals. Within political society, citizen demands are channeled and possible responses are formulated. As the reach of government into society has lengthened, and the number and diversity of issues facing governments have broadened, political society has gained a central role in policy formulation. But the relative weight of different actors within political society has also shifted. Political parties, once fairly robust channels of popular participation, are now largely organizational shells for raising the vast sums of money needed for electoral campaigns. Labor unions still play significant political roles but are much weaker than they were two decades ago, despite recent reinvigoration. In contrast, the roles of business associations, policy institutions, and political action committees have grown considerably (Pomper 1992; Aldrich 1995; Coleman 1996; Wattenberg 1998; White and Davies 1998).

The third level of the public sphere is “civil society”: all those organizational settings that are not part of government or political society, but in which the values and attitudes of societal members are shaped. Such politically-relevant socialization occurs in myriad settings throughout society – civic groups, political discussion groups, issue study groups, ethnic associations, and churches, to name only a few. The concept of civil society provides a way of understanding how the associational life of voluntary groups helps form political identities, shape political attitudes, and generate the solidarities that underlie political mobilization.<sup>2</sup>

The public sphere can thus be understood analytically as constituted at three levels of social life: the "state," made up of deliberative governmental settings; "political society," made up of non-governmental individuals and organizational political actors that seek to intervene directly in government; and "civil society," made up of organizational settings in which politically-relevant but not always directly political conversations occur. More accurately, the public sphere is a *potential space* lying across these three societal levels, a space which must constantly be reconstituted by people and groups actually engaging in public deliberation. That is, public life must be regularly re-enacted; otherwise it withers. Democratic theorists argue that only when this occurs vigorously through many levels of society does democracy flourish and does democratic decision-making really guide societal direction (cf. Cohen and Arato 1992).

The public sphere is a useful analytical construct, but it obscures a crucial fact: the three levels of the public realm exist in rather different organizational spaces: in government; in political associations like parties, unions, political action and lobbying groups; and in civic associations. Linking them analytically does not suffice to make the public realm an effective arena for societal deliberation. There must exist *institutional linkages* to facilitate

communication across these three levels. Political parties and labor unions have historically provided the institutional means for linking political society downward into civil society (via their roots in ethnic associations, business groups, workplaces, families, etc) and upward into the state (through electoral influence and the exercise of political power). But political parties' downward linkages have weakened considerably in recent decades, replaced by new technologies of opinion surveys, mass marketing, and fundraising through direct mail (Coleman 1996; Aldrich 1995; Pomper 1992), and labor unions – despite recent strengthening – represent a small portion of private-sector employees (Voss and Sherman 2000).

Public sphere theorists are criticized for assuming a single idealized public and failing to pay sufficient attention to how power dynamics within the public sphere coopt or undermine challenger groups. In response, Fraser (1992) has constructed a more radical understanding under the rubric of “subaltern counterpublics” – i.e. the promotion of multiple smaller public spheres within which subaltern groups engage in counterhegemonic discourse. Yet Fraser's position begs the question: To what extent do such subaltern counterpublics actually promote the deepening of democratic life for a national society as a whole, as opposed to isolating subaltern groups without giving them any real impact on democratic life?

In order to avoid idealized assumptions of a single polity and, simultaneously, to insist on asking whether counterpublics actually deepen democratic dynamics in the broader society, we see the public sphere as both a conflictive and collaborative arena, in which groups both compete for influence and also forge understandings of a common good – or, at least, a shared societal future. The ability of any subaltern counterpublic to influence the broader polity will vary. This study suggests a specific counterpublic's contribution to democratic life will depend partly on

the extent to which it is located within institutions that bridge the gap between levels of the public sphere (and thus bridge the divide between subaltern groups and hegemonic elites, whether opponents or potential allies).

Without such bridges communities within civil society can be either passively isolated from the flow of communication in political society and the state, or actively colonized by political and economic forces utilizing these new technologies. In either case, these anemic or colonizing downward linkages erode democracy in America by making political parties – and through them, elected officials – less exposed to democratic pressure from below. We term this the *structural fragmentation of the public sphere*. One goal of this report is to examine the extent to which faith-based organizing bridges the institutional gap between civil society and the other two levels of the public sphere, and therefore offers at least a partial antidote to this fragmentation.

### **III. The Faith-Based Organizing Model**

FBCO finds its roots in the model for community organizing created by Saul Alinsky during his work in Chicago's stockyard neighborhoods in the 1930s (Horwitt 1989). The hard-driving style of organizing that characterized Alinsky's work was often effective, especially in its early decades, but Alinsky never succeeded in building stable organizations that remained focused on a progressive organizing agenda. In the early 1970s, initially in San Antonio, Texas and subsequently in many sites around the country, organizers began much more systematically developing ties to religious cultural expressions within poor communities and treating religious congregations as the key institutional foundation for building their organizations (Warren 2001

and Hart 2001 for discussions of this history). Under this faith-based model of community organizing, groups developed stable foundations and their numbers began to increase.

By the late 1990s, it was possible to identify a nation-wide field of faith-based community organizing, present in most metropolitan areas around the country. Most of these organizations are affiliated with one of several organizing networks: the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF, representing about a third of the organizations); the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO) and the Gamaliel Network (each representing about 20% of the organizations); Direct Action, Research, and Training (DART, 15% of the organizations); and a smaller number of organizations operating independently or with the RCNO network in southern California. We use the term faith-based community organizing as the best way to describe the type of organizing conducted by all the groups in the field, although other descriptors like congregational or broad-based organizing are sometimes used by participants. Warren (2001) and Jacobsen (2001) have termed the resulting fusion of faith and politics a “theology of organizing,” while Wood (2002, chapter 2) stresses that faith-based organizing – when practiced well – creates a symbiosis between religious culture and political organizing which “allows churches to make their ethical and democratic values active in the public realm, without undermining the moral community that sustains those values.”

FBCO groups share a common set of characteristics that make them distinctive, as follows.

- Faith-based: The membership of faith-based community organizations are drawn primarily from religious congregations. FBCO groups strive explicitly to ground their organizing in the values and traditions that come from religious faith.
- Broad-based: FBCO groups strive to be inclusive of the diversity of communities that make up their local organizing area. They are typically ecumenical (incorporating a

variety of Christian congregations) or interfaith (incorporating non-Christian congregations as well), and many include in their membership schools, unions and a variety of other community-based institutions like neighborhood associations. To varying extents, they bring community leaders together across lines of race, income, and gender.

- **Locally constituted:** FBCO groups conduct their organizing in areas that range from large neighborhoods to entire metropolitan areas. Although these groups are linked into the national and regional networks discussed above, their emphasis remains on local organizing.
- **Multi-issue:** The organizations are explicitly multi-issue. Their purpose is to train local leaders in how to effectively address pressing issues facing their communities, as the leaders themselves determine them (in consultation with each other and with organizers).
- **Staffed by professional organizers:** FBCO groups hire professional organizers whose main responsibility is the recruitment and training of local leaders. The leaders themselves work with the organizations on a voluntary basis. Using a relational organizing approach, organizers teach people how to build relationships with each other within and across their institutions as a basis for public action.
- **Political, but nonpartisan:** FBCO groups seek to exert power in the public arena based upon the strength of these relationships and their member institutions. The groups are usually incorporated as nonprofit 501-C(3) or 501-C(4) organizations.

Although FBCO groups are locally constituted, the networks mentioned above play key roles in the development of the field. They structure leadership training, typically coordinate staff development, and seek to launch new projects. Many networks increasingly attempt to coordinate strategy at state and regional levels. In fact, local organizations have worked together in their networks to pursue state level campaigns in such places as Texas, California, Louisiana, Arizona, Maryland, Florida, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Colorado.

#### Data and Methods:

The rest of this paper draws upon the findings of a national survey of all local faith-based

community organizing groups active in the United States (Warren and Wood 2001).<sup>3</sup> The research project sought to identify all local organizations in the country that followed the FBCO model above and were functioning in 1999 – that is, had an office and a paid organizer on staff. Projects that were still at an early stage of development or ones that had languished into inactivity were not included in the survey.

Using these criteria, researchers identified 133 organizations that were operating in the FBCO field in 1999. Typically the most senior paid organizer on the staff of the organization collected the information necessary to answer the survey questions. Questionnaires were completed via telephone interviews; in most cases, organizers also faxed information to the interviewer, including lists of member institutions and members of the governing boards, and demographic data on the local community. In open-ended questions, respondents were asked about their organizations' participation in broader networks and partnerships of various kinds, but state, regional and national FBCO organizations were not directly surveyed. Interfaith Funders adopted a confidentiality policy that no findings would be reported that could identify any particular organization or network, or its characteristics; this paper adheres to that policy. We draw on both the quantitative and qualitative response data for this analysis.

Of the 133 organizations constituting the universe of the FBCO field, 100 responded to the survey, a response rate of 75%. In an effort to extrapolate the results from this survey to reflect patterns in the entire field, a weight was created as the ratio of potential respondents to actual respondents, specific to network affiliation. In general, applying such a weight has the effect of increasing the number of cases with data to equal that in the universe. However, using such a weight requires the assumption that the non-respondents are similar to the respondents.

This is a reasonable assumption, but not a perfect one. One particular source of response bias lies in the fact that a number of organizations in the New York/New Jersey area did not participate in this survey. Therefore, their potentially distinct characteristics and experience are not well represented in our description of the field.

#### **IV. A National Phenomenon**

Results from the survey suggest that faith-based community organizing is now a national phenomenon with a broad reach into American congregations and communities. The FBCO field incorporates a large number of institutions, as about 4,000 institutions are official members of the organizations in the field. Of these, about 3,500 (or 87.5%) are religious congregations, while 500 (or 12.5%) are non-congregational institutions like unions, schools and other community organizations.<sup>4</sup>

The 133 identified organizations in the FBCO field are active in most states across the country: Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia have at least one local faith-based organization. Six states incorporate half of all of the organizations; these states are geographically dispersed and represent most of the crucial electoral battlegrounds nationally. The states with the highest numbers are California (19), Texas (11), New York (11), Florida (10), Illinois (8) and Ohio (8).<sup>5</sup> The regional distribution is given in Table 1 which also provides mean descriptors for organizations in the field. Table 2 provides a more detailed breakdown.

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

The FBCO field is composed of organizations that are fairly young. The average founding date for faith-based organizations in existence in 1999 (measured as the year a group hired a professional organizer) is 1991. Of the FBCO groups operating in 1999, 41% were founded after 1994 and 71% were founded since 1990.



The relative youth of FBCO groups suggest the field is growing fairly rapidly. Of course, older organizations may have folded, but qualitative studies (e.g. Warren 2001) find that FBCO groups take a while to form, and then tend to persist, suggesting that the field has a relatively low attrition rate. Moreover, a study conducted in 1994 (Hart 2001) identified 90 groups in operation at that time, so the field has grown by nearly 50% since then.

FBCO groups vary considerably in size. The average faith-based community organization has 30 institutional members. Some are fairly small, with 37% having less than 20 institutional members. About half have between 20 and 40 institutional members. Others are quite large; 11% have between 40 and 69 members, while a few have over 100. The largest has 230 member institutions.

Some sense for the relative significance of this field can be gained from some historical comparison. The 3,500 congregations active in FBCO comprise between 1 and 1.5% of all congregations in the country.<sup>6</sup> Depending on how we estimate the numbers of people who are members of these congregations, the FBCO field reaches between 1 and 3 million people.<sup>7</sup> Scholars who have studied civic participation throughout American history note that very few organizations have ever incorporated more than 1% of Americans into their membership (Skocpol, Ganz and Munson 2000).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that FBCO has achieved a significant size and a broad reach into American communities.

The descriptive data offered so far show that FBCO is now a national phenomenon, is growing considerably at present, and represents a political presence within the American polity that in quantitative terms is historically significant. In the following two sections, we consider more analytically the role FBCO plays within the American polity: first FBCO's impact on social capital, then its role within the public sphere.

## V. The Bridging Ties of FBCO

Early faith-based organizing efforts often took place in rather homogenous racial communities, whether made up of ethnic whites in Chicago in the 1950s or Hispanic Catholics in San Antonio in the 1970s. Today, such FBCO groups composed of a single denominational or racial group are highly atypical. In this section, we report what the survey reveals about the diversity of institutions in the FBCO field, as well as about the diversity that exists within particular organizations – that is, we report on the extent to which FBCO fosters bridging social capital.

### Bridging social capital across religious groupings

The survey reveals that, nationally, the FBCO field bridges religious institutions across three main categories: Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants and historic Black Protestants. As Table 3 shows, Catholics make up about 33% of the congregations. A variety of mainline Protestant denominations make up another third of the congregations in membership, including (in order of concentration from highest to lowest) United Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists (UCC). Baptists (including Missionary) hold about a 16% share. From our observations of the field, as well as other reports, we surmise that the Baptists are largely black. If we include the Methodist Episcopal and Other Black Protestant group with Baptists, then historic black Protestant denominations hold about a 20% share. There is some wider religious presence as well, with Jewish, Unitarian-Universalist, and black evangelical (mostly Church of God in Christ) congregations each constituting about a 2% share of the total.

[Table 3 about here]

To assess the extent to which FBCO promotes interfaith ties at the local level, we divided the 93 respondent organizations in the survey that supplied data on this question into categories

based on the proportion of member congregations from the following religious groups: Catholic, historic black Protestant, mainline (liberal and moderate) Protestant, traditionalist Protestant (many Pentecostal, including COGIC), and non-Christian (mostly Jewish and Unitarian, with a few Muslim and other congregations).<sup>9</sup> Table 4 shows the religious diversity *within* the 93 respondent organizations, grouped according to their religious homogeneity or diversity.

[Table 4 about here]

The table shows that the large majority of FBCO groups bring at least two, if not three, major religious groupings together at the local level. There is a modest degree of wider religious diversity beyond Catholic/Mainline Protestant/Black Protestant participation as well. In 20 of the 93 organizations at least 9% of FBCO member congregations were non-Christian; and in 12 of the 93 organizations at least 9% of FBCO member congregations were traditionalist Protestant (in 3 of these 12, most of the churches were COGIC congregations, a predominantly black denomination).

Thus, the strong religious diversity of faith-based organizing on the national level largely holds up on the local level: FBCO promotes widespread ecumenical and interfaith ties within its primary arena of activity, the citywide and metropolitan public sphere.

#### *Religious absence:*

Returning to a discussion of the FBCO field as a whole, the survey also reveals who is *not* participating at significant levels in this phenomenon (see Table 3). White evangelicals and fundamentalists are noticeably absent, especially considering their prominence in American society. A cluster of theologically conservative Protestant denominations (including, for example, Assembly of God, Nazarene, Apostolic and Wesleyan) constitutes less than 3% of the

field's congregations. Given the importance of Jewish participation in social justice efforts historically, the 2% figure for their participation might be interpreted as low. Meanwhile, non-Christian groups other than Jewish and Unitarian-Universalists congregations constitute less than 1% of the congregations in the field; yet Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu congregations are growing in importance in urban America (Warner and Wittner 1998).

Although largely absent as formal members, institutions in these under represented denominations may have some connection to faith based organizing. When asked in open-ended questions about the involvement of Jewish congregations and evangelical, Pentecostal, or fundamentalist churches, a large number of respondents said such congregations were indeed involved in their FBCO groups, at least to some degree. Many FBCO groups reported significant outreach efforts to Jews, white evangelicals and non-Christians, with fully 88% reporting "some contact" with at least one of these groups. Forty-seven percent of organizers interviewed noted some contact with Jewish congregations and 56% noted some contact with evangelical or Pentecostal congregations. Very few, however, claimed contact with congregations identified as "fundamentalist."

It is difficult to assess precisely how substantive the involvement of groups outside formal membership may be. The language used by respondents in the open-ended questions was often that of being "in conversation" with Jewish congregations or others in their area. Our data do not allow us to assess how important a dialogue this may be at present, though Jewish participation in some local areas is quite significant.

The extensive number of contacts reported with evangelical and Pentecostal Christian churches suggests that lead organizers recognize the significance of this burgeoning sector of the American religious spectrum. The Pentecostal and evangelical churches "in conversation" with FBCO groups appear to be primarily African-American (especially Church of God in Christ) and

Latino congregations, and less frequently white evangelical congregations. Many reasons might explain the absence of white evangelicals/fundamentalists: the lack of an emphasis on action for social justice, an aversion to interfaith collaboration, racial prejudice, and/or prior organization into a politics of the religious right (see Warren 2001 for a more extensive discussion focused on Southern Baptists).

Respondents noted potential benefits and significant obstacles for FBCO groups collaborating with evangelical or Pentecostal churches, whether minority or white. Among the benefits cited were the scriptural fluency common in these churches, the fact that they “bring lots of diversity” to an organization, and the belief that evangelicals “are less likely [than other church-goers] to explain away the demands of scripture if they understand those demands.” Organizers reported that the most significant obstacle to working with these strands of Christianity was the theological or cultural divide separating them from FBCO. They said these churches “tend to be otherworldly,” “do not have much trust of us,” do not see this work as “part of their definition of their mission,” or “see no need to hold systems accountable.” A few noted that evangelicals sometimes feel marginalized by the Catholic and liberal/moderate/Black Protestant cultures that have been central to faith-based organizing. One reported that his organization lost some evangelical members due to the fact that other member churches accepted gay and lesbian members or had female pastors. One organizer summed up the experience of working with these congregations in these terms:

It takes two or three years to build trust, overcome the distrust across interfaith lines. Evangelicals and Pentecostals have lots of distrust about interfaith work, and about the word 'interfaith.' Jewish congregations have distrust of being involved in anything that seems Christian-dominated. They have lots of sensitivity to the language that's used, to the religious cultural stuff that's used. Our approach in board meetings, task forces, committee meetings has been to invite people to reflect and pray in

their own faith traditions, and over time everybody gets exposed to a little bit of various traditions. At actions, in public actions, we ask people to use more universal language, or we'll have three or four different faith traditions pray at the same action.

The question of how to combine faith traditions in one organization becomes even more pointed given the diversity of congregations represented in faith-based organizing, albeit at low levels of participation. In addition to the religious communities discussed above, lead organizers reported having done outreach, sought membership, or held exploratory conversations with the following traditions (with rough counts in parenthesis): Islamic (23), Unitarian Universalist (10), and Buddhist (8), with smaller numbers of contacts with congregations of the Adventist, African spiritualist, Christian Science, Hindu, Mormon, Religious Science, Sikh, and Word of Faith traditions.<sup>10</sup>

### Building Bridges across Racial/Ethnic Groups and to Immigrants

The survey reveals that FBCO brings together Americans from the nation's three largest racial/ethnic groups, white, black and Hispanic.<sup>11</sup> The FBCO field is quite diverse racially in its institutional membership, with white, black and Hispanic institutions all well represented. As revealed in Table 5, institutions whose membership is predominantly white make up 36% of all member institutions. Predominantly black institutions comprise about 35% of institutions, with those predominantly Hispanic about 21%. Interracial institutions, that is, those that do not have one predominant racial/ethnic group, make up the rest with nearly 6.5% of the total. Meanwhile, predominantly Asian-American institutions are few at only 1.3%, and Native American institutions are virtually absent at only .02%.

If we look at the governing boards of faith-based organizations, we can also see racial diversity (Table 5). Although the meaning of membership on governing boards does vary across

the organizations, generally they include the most active and committed leaders of the organization. About 43% of governing board members are white, 32% are black, and 21% are Hispanic. However, only 2% are Asian and Native Americans are largely absent.

[Table 5 about here]

But, as with religious diversity, we also analyze the racial composition of groups within the field. This second measure of diversity is critical because, although FBCO is a national phenomenon, it does not operate as a unified field. The primary locus of political action in FBCO is local, and so it is important to know whether it bridges sectors *within* the local arena, or only in the aggregate.

If we examine the racial composition of the FBCO groups within the field (Table 6), we find that, by and large, FBCO groups do work to forge multiracial ties within their local political arenas. Only 9 out of the 82 groups with valid data on that question (11%) are monoracial, that is, composed entirely of institutions whose membership is predominantly of one racial/ethnic group. Another 4 (5%) have one racial group in strong dominance, that is, more than 80% of the institutions are in one group; these are divided between white-dominated and black-dominated organizations. About one quarter of all FBCO groups (21) organize interracially to a significant extent, but with one racial group in a strong majority (65-80% of member institutions); in two-thirds of these cases, the majority group is white. The 48 remaining FBCO groups (59%) are racially diverse. Most (35) are essentially biracial, while 11 are at least triracial.

[Table 6 about here]

The FBCO field also works to incorporate a significant number of immigrant communities. As reported in Table 5 almost 11% of all institutions that are members of FBCO are predominantly immigrant in composition. Of those immigrant institutions, 57% are Hispanic, 17% white, 15% black, 6% Asian and 3% interracial. When asked about their outreach to

immigrants, 50% of organizers responding to the survey reported work with immigrant communities; this suggests that, at least in some cities, faith-based organizing has recognized the importance of the vast influx of new immigrants that has occurred in recent years. Recipients of this outreach are primarily Mexican, but a remarkable array of specific populations were mentioned in the interviews, including Brazilians, Cambodians, Cape Verdeans, Chinese, Filipinos, Guatemalans, Haitians, Hmong, Koreans, Liberians, Polish, Portuguese, Russians, Salvadorans, and Vietnamese. Religious congregations are the dominant conduit for this work. But FBCO groups also reach immigrants through their work in public schools and in collaborative efforts with migrant labor communities, day laborer co-ops, ethnic associations, and labor unions. It is hard, however, to determine from this data how significant the latter forms of outreach may be.

It appears that some of the more innovative work in the field is dedicated to reaching immigrants. This includes one network that offers a separate introductory national training in Spanish, and a few local organizations with initiatives focused on immigrants. According to one respondent:

We are placing considerable emphasis on organizing Mexican immigrants in our area. These people are farm-workers or employees at a meatpacking plant.... [who we reach through] three Roman Catholic parishes that are members. These immigrants have been recruited to attend [our faith-based organizing network's] four-day training for Spanish speakers. One church sent five of its immigrant leaders to training.

Our organization has created a separate organizing track to reach immigrants. [We do this] as an empowerment step, followed by bringing these immigrant leaders together with second and third generation Hispanic leaders. This process has been necessary to overcome the tendency for Spanish-speaking immigrants to drop out when meetings are dominated by English-speaking Hispanics. The goal is to empower immigrants so they can participate on an equal basis with whites and English-speaking Hispanics.

From this analysis we conclude that faith-based organizing appears to build social capital that transcends the racial/ethnic boundaries that divide much of urban society in America, as



well as those between recent migrant communities and longer-established social institutions.

We have already shown that the field has made significant gains in bridging communities across faith/denominational lines. A final way to consider the issue of bridging social capital is to examine newer initiatives within FBCO to incorporate a growing number of nonfaith institutions like unions and schools into their organizations.

### Faith-Nonfaith Ties

Although FBCO groups are largely composed of religious institutions, the survey reveals their increasing ability to draw other kinds of institutions into public action. Their efforts to do so expand the membership base of FBCO and foster new forms of public collaboration between congregations and secular based institutions. Non-congregational institutions (NCIs) now represent almost 13% of all member institutions in the FBCO field. Of the NCIs, schools represent about 42% of the total nationally, unions about 15%, and neighborhood associations nearly 7% (Table 7). A wide variety of other community based organizations make up the remaining 36% of NCIs. This diverse category includes housing cooperatives, civic organizations, community and economic development corporations, etc.<sup>12</sup>

[Table 7 about here]

Although the field as a whole includes NCIs, many FBCO groups do not. Forty-three percent of FBCO groups have no NCIs as members. But for those who do have NCIs in membership (57% of all FBCO groups), on average these institutions constitute about 18% of the group's membership, a fairly significant proportion.

FBCO groups tend to specialize in type of NCI in membership, either union or school, for

example, but not typically both. About 13% of FBCOs have at least one union in membership, while a very small percentage have more than three unions in their membership. About 24% have schools as members, and some have sizeable school membership. Over 11% of faith-based organizations have more than five schools in their membership.

We can conclude that just over half of FBCO groups work to forge ties between faith and nonfaith institutions within their organizations in a significant way. In most of these cases, nonfaith institutions make up a significant enough part of the membership of the groups, so that connections between faith and non-faith based institutions appears significant.

Nonfaith institutions, however, often participate in FBCO in ways other than formal membership. If we broaden our lens to consider the role of secular based institutions as non-member collaborators in faith-based organizing, then labor unions, universities, community colleges, and public schools all figure prominently in local area collaborations.

The directors of 40% of the FBCO organizations surveyed reported working with labor unions. These ties varied from transitory links to substantial collaborative efforts. In addition to working with Central Labor Councils and state federations affiliated with the AFL-CIO, faith-based groups collaborated with a wide variety of individual local unions, including the unions of teachers, farm workers, public employees, and construction workers.. Several work with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and their Justice for Janitors program.

FBCO directors varied in their stance toward these collaborations with labor, with some expressing strong appreciation. For example, one respondent reported:

Labor collaboration has been very positive and fruitful. [Local labor council] has been impacted culturally by their relationship with us in terms of their operation of meetings, [which are now] shorter, more on time, have relational components. This has changed labor's vision of "church people". We worked together with [a labor local] to create a training program for workers that recruits trainees from our institutions. Church leaders from our organization are beginning to become actively involved in supporting labor organizing campaigns.

Those FBCO organizers less convinced of the benefits of collaborating with labor unions generally focused on the contrasting cultures of the two forms of organizing:

The negative [in working with unions] is also organizational culture; they're more into mobilizing people than organizing people, tend to be more staff-driven than leader-driven, like we are. They'll have all these business reps that operate like our leaders, but are paid staff.

One respondent offered this observation on the benefits of faith-labor collaboration:

When you mix labor and church people, the labor folks are clear that they're about people's incomes and standards of living. They bring that consciousness into the mix, help church people come down from the heavens, to see what people really are living, the nitty-gritty. Church folks are good on what else is happening in these people's life, it's not JUST about money, but also the schools in the neighborhood [and other issues]. It's the mixing of union and church that has all kinds of benefits.

Thus, collaborative relationships between FBCO and labor are quite diverse; it is possible that this is an arena of significant potential growth, offering the opportunity to expand both FBCO's and labor's influence. However, taking advantage of this potential is likely to require extensive work and mutual learning, in order to build bridges between very different organizational cultures.

Beyond labor, respondents reported an array of contacts or collaborative relationships with non-member organizations too varied to be reasonably grouped. The most common of these were public schools, parent-teacher associations, and other groups connected to schools. A large number of FBCO groups throughout the country reported working with education-related groups. This work addressed a wide array of issues: reducing class size, providing all-day kindergarten, creating school-to-work transition programs for high school students, eliminating institutional discrimination against children of immigrants, providing a safer school environment, and increasing funding to

public libraries.

Overall, the respondents saw collaborative relationships as potential sources of real benefits to their organizations, but they noted that the work necessary to create these collaborations entailed the risk of wasting precious time, energy, and limited resources.

For example, one respondent reported:

Collaborations broaden our base, and bring some expertise on deeper issues that we can't get ourselves, like economic development. But often they don't understand our model. There's some tension around how we approach action. [Other organizations often] don't like our conflict orientation, don't understand it. Also, our most precious resource is our leaders' time, and these kinds of collaborations, if we don't do them well, can squander that. So we have to evaluate the pros and cons of each one... You can't never [*sic*] collaborate, there are too many benefits to it, but you can't collaborate blindly, either.

Summarizing this review of bridging ties, it is fair to characterize FBCO groups as follows: They are highly diverse racially, certainly at the national level but also generally within their local organizing arenas. They are relatively diverse religiously, though within a fairly constricted religious universe made up of the Catholic, liberal-to-moderate Protestant, and historic African-American denominations. FBCO groups incorporate a small but locally-significant presence of Jews and Unitarian Universalists, and rather little representation of conservative Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, and other minority religions. The groups show quite variable diversity in their organizational base, with some quite specifically based in religious congregations and others including significant participation from labor unions, public schools, community organizations, and other institutions.

Based upon this review, we conclude that FBCO generates new bridging social capital within American civil society in a number of ways: by fostering inter-

congregational, inter-denominational, and interfaith links between religious congregations; by building inter-racial ties between racial and ethnic communities often isolated or in competition with each other; and by linking faith-based and secular institutions. Such bridging social capital may well of itself constitute a vital contribution to the long-term development of a more democratic American political culture. But its impact will be greatest if FBCO groups mobilize these social capital resources to project power in the public sphere. If they can effectively connect their base in civil society organizations with governmental institutions, then they might contribute to overcoming what we have termed the structural fragmentation of the public sphere. We now turn to a consideration of this question.

## **VI. Projecting Power in the Public Sphere:**

Directly assessing the actual impact of individual political groups in their local public arena involves intensive on-site research into the power dynamics and the make-up of government coalitions in that location. In turn, fully assessing the role of FBCO as a whole field – i.e. in local and statewide public arenas around the country – would require a large number of similarly-designed case studies of a representative sample of organizations. Though we have strong case studies of individual FBCO efforts (*op cit.*), they are not necessarily representative of the field, nor similarly-designed. In the absence of such a study, we instead strive here to indirectly assess FBCO intervention in the public sphere by analyzing its mobilization capacity and the kinds of issues it addresses, and by drawing on the case studies that do exist.

Leadership participation figures provide a starting point: Over an eighteen-month period, FBCO as a field drew 24,000 people into a significant leadership role – defined

by the survey respondents as “core leaders” actively involved in day-to-day organizing efforts. Typically, these core leaders come from member institutions (most often religious congregations, but also labor unions, schools, and community organizations), from which other participants are also drawn. Some 2,700 of these core leaders were sufficiently involved in high-level decision-making for respondents to identify them as “board members” – itself designating a variety of roles, but usually involving some degree of long-term strategic planning for their organizations. Meanwhile, some 1,600 key leaders, or those envisioned by their local organizers as future leaders, attended multiple-day, network-sponsored national events that train leaders in the core principles and strategies of the faith-based organizing model. Finally, the field employs some 460 full-time professional organizers.

These numbers suggest at least some *potential* for FBCO to play a significant role in the public sphere. But we need to have some measure of the degree to which FBCO organizations actualize that potential in their local political arenas. As a measure of the extent to which FBCO groups can project power in these arenas, we took the highest reported attendance at a political action sponsored by respondent organizations (each of which reported attendance at its three largest public actions for the 18-month period prior to the 1999 interviews). Though raw numbers such as these do not directly measure these organizations’ full political capacity (in the sense of their ability to project power into the public sphere), they are a rough measure of one key determinant of that capacity: their *mobilizing* capacity. These maximum attendance figures for the 100 respondent organizations totaled slightly over 100,000;<sup>13</sup> more relevant here, they grouped into the following categories:

[Table 8 about here]

We interpret these data as follows: in virtually any city in the country, an organization that can mobilize more than 1,000 people to a public action with a focused agenda and reasonably skilled leadership can be expected to have powerful influence upon local political decision-making at least on some issues; about a quarter of FBCO organizations report this level of political capacity. Organizations with the political capacity to mobilize many hundred supporters around a focused policy agenda can likewise be expected to carry significant influence upon local political decision-making; more than a third of FBCO organizations report this level of political capacity. We would expect the political capacities of groups mobilizing up to a few hundred supporters to depend greatly on other factors, most notably the solidity or fractured quality of local governing coalitions, the organization's ability to garner support from other organizations, skillful organizational leadership, and other facets of political opportunity. It also presumably depends simply on the size of the local polity; in a small city, mobilizing 200 supporters may give an organization significant local political influence. Just over one third of FBCO groups have this more conditional political power. These data suggest – though they do not prove – that most FBCO organizations are capable of projecting quite significant influence up into the decision-making processes in municipal governments and into local political society.

We gain further evidence in this regard by considering the kinds of issues faith-based organizing addresses. In the survey, lead organizers were asked an open-ended question regarding “what kind of issues” their organizations had addressed in the last two years. We group their responses into the following broad categories:

Education/Schools: Public school reform, after-school programs, teacher home visits, site-based management, reading in schools, in-school suspension policy, tutoring, charter schools, safe schools

Economics:	Economic development, living wages, human development tax, worker rights, workforce development, immigration rights, first source hiring, sweatshops, minority hiring
Housing:	Affordable housing, senior housing, <i>colonias</i> (poverty housing in border states; mostly work on deed conversion, water access, and waste removal)
Policing:	Community policing, gang violence, drugs and crime, anti-police-abuse, more police presence, restorative justice, gun control, police relations
Healthcare:	Expanded access to healthcare for children, working families and immigrants; public health infrastructure
Race relations:	Anti-racism, interracial understanding, anti-hate crime legislation, anti-KKK
Public finances:	Bond issues (public school support, <i>colonia</i> infrastructure), banking (mostly community reinvestment act), tax-based sharing, equalization
Environment:	Environmental clean-up, anti-nuclear work, Superfund
Social services:	Long-term care for seniors, welfare rights, senior services

The most common issues cited were those involving public schools, the economy, policing, and housing. What this list does not communicate is the *scale* on which contemporary faith-based organizing addresses these issues. Considerable work occurs around relatively small-scale issues like street repair and neighborhood safety. Such "bread and butter" issues were the staple diet of community organizing for many years; they continue to be used to help new groups experience some early success, develop new leaders' skills, and sometimes significantly affect the quality of life in neighborhoods. However, many organizers have long recognized that such work does little or nothing to address the social structures and policies that largely determine the quality of life for working families. Their goal now is to win on issues that generate institutional reform, and in the process to accumulate greater power within their organizations. Such work can help to strengthen civil society in ways that will foster democratic power in the future.

The issue areas reported by FBCO groups suggest that their political influence may indeed be focused on structural issues affecting large numbers of people – at least, phrases such as “public school reform,” “economic development,” “living wages,”



“worker rights,” “immigration rights,” “minority hiring,” “*colonias*,” “access to healthcare,” and “public health infrastructure” *might* plausibly refer to such structural reform efforts. While these issue areas are vague enough that they might instead represent low-level work requiring only a minor degree of political power, we know from case studies that many FBCOs indeed engage in structural reform (Hart 2001; McRoberts 2003; Osterman 2003; Warren 2001; Wood 2002). Since scholars have tended to research the more successful and advanced cases of FBCO, their findings should be interpreted not as representative samples of the field’s political influence, but rather as showing the field’s general potential.

Case studies of faith-based organizing in Texas and California are especially illuminating here. FBCO has attained some of its most significant influence in these populous, politically-influential states. In Texas, eleven local organizations in the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) network have worked together since the early eighties to influence policy at the state level (Warren 2001). In its early campaigns, the Texas IAF led a drive to establish the state’s first consumer counsel for public utilities and then provided the grass-roots muscle to push the legislature to adopt a \$2.8 billion increase in funding to poor schools as part of a broader education reform package. The IAF network proceeded to win a \$70 million indigent health care package of state aid to counties, representing the first time the state of Texas had made a commitment to provide health services for the poor. In the late eighties, the Texas IAF won a \$100 million state bond package to fund water and sewer services for the *colonias*, America’s equivalent of shanty-towns along the border with Mexico. In 1990 the network brought 10,000 members from across Texas to its official founding convention. In the nineties, the state network moved to launch more sophisticated reform programs, featuring an Alliance

Schools initiative with the state department of education that involved IAF in parental and community organizing at over 100 schools across the state. By the late nineties, the Texas IAF had spread its networks to affiliates across the southwest, and began to coordinate strategy regionally. In the fall of 1999, six thousand members attended a convention in San Antonio to celebrate “twenty-five years of organizing in the southwest.” The IAF took the occasion to unveil its human development program, a new initiative that attempts to place a unifying umbrella over the wide array of issues the regional network addresses across the region: job training, living wage ordinances, school reform and after-school programs, citizenship classes and voter registration, health care and neighborhood safety.

In California, the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO) faith-based organizing efforts in 18 cities have since 1997 collaborated on the “PICO California Project,” working to knit together a vehicle for political influence on statewide issues (Wood 2001, 2002). Initial efforts focused on public school improvements and resulted in \$50 million in new after-school programs, many in poor school districts or individual schools located in poor areas. The California Project also played a key role in a successful 1998 bond initiative that provided \$9.2 billion for new school construction and repairs. In 1999, the organizations gained \$15 million in direct state funding for a new program of home visits by teachers in 400 public schools; this program has subsequently been refunded annually and become a national model for closing the gap in parental involvement between middle class and poor/working class parents. In May 2000, the organizations turned their attention to health care access, organizing a multiracial gathering in Sacramento of 3,000 people from across the state. They gathered to push for state-sponsored health insurance for the working poor who did not qualify for Medicaid

but held no private insurance (some 7 million Californians) as well as for some 1.5 million California children qualified for state coverage but unenrolled due to cumbersome procedures and poor information. They gained the public endorsement of the heads of both houses of the California state legislature and, after a great deal of conflictive political work to overcome opposition to any new entitlement programs, the endorsement of Governor Gray Davis. As of this writing, they have won \$50 million in new funding to clinics (which provide most health care for indigent Californians) and got the legislature to establish a new state insurance program for the working poor. Although funding for the latter was postponed until 2003 due to the costs of the California energy crisis and lost revenue from a weakening economy, the PICO-led effort appears to be on track to become the largest single expansion of health care access in decades.

The Texas and California efforts – as well as strong or emerging statewide and regional efforts in Arizona, Minnesota, Louisiana, Florida, Maryland, New England, Colorado, and the upper Midwest – demonstrate that faith-based organizing can attain a powerful role in the public sphere in large political arenas. In these and other locations, the role of FBCO has included both influencing policy-making within government and forging partnerships with key institutional leaders in political society.

A similar pattern holds in the more local work of strong individual FBCO organizations operating within local political arenas: by combining sometimes-conflictive political engagement and more collaborative partnerships with key leaders in political society (both elected officials and non-elected institutional leaders), these organizations have sometimes become influential players in local decision-making and agenda-setting. The strongest FBCO groups hold preponderant influence in the local committees that control expenditures of federally-funded Community Development Block Grants, meet

with incoming mayors to set priorities, and foster significant policy initiatives on housing, education, immigrant rights, medical care, and economic development. Where this occurs, FBCO groups become the kind of democratic bridging institutions we discussed above, linking civil society, political society, and state levels of the public sphere.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Beyond the sheer size and geographic scope of the field of faith-based organizing (which the national survey reported here documents for the first time), we argue for its analytic importance based on the evidence we have reviewed on the field's role as a "bridging institution" that generates significant democratic impact. "Democratic impact" here includes political participation by previously-marginalized constituencies, substantive egalitarian outcomes, and the forging of upward institutional linkages from civil society into political society and the state. Together, these allow low- and moderate-income social sectors to represent their interests in the deliberative settings that determine the distribution of societal resources. In the process, these social sectors begin to overcome their own political marginalization and resist the forces of colonization that would exploit them purely in the service of elite interests. In this role as democratic bridging institutions, FBCO organizations thus begin to address a fundamental institutional crisis of the modern American polity, what we termed above the structural fragmentation of the public sphere.

As articulated originally by Habermas (1989 [1962]) and elaborated more recently by a variety of scholars (see especially Cohen and Arato 1992 and the chapter by Benhabib in Calhoun 1992), the concept of "public sphere" – despite its historical origins in efforts by the bourgeoisie to advance its narrow interests – offers important analytic

leverage for understanding the prospects and challenges of broader democratic projects. In particular, fragmentation of the public sphere places obstacles before all contemporary democratic projects; offering one model for how to overcome this fragmentation by forging new vertical linkages within the public sphere represents an important contribution of faith-based organizing today.

FBCO makes an important democratic contribution when it helps communities alienated from political decision-making to organize, represent themselves, and generate the power necessary to compete with other interests in political society. To the extent that the public sphere is more inclusive, it is likely to perform its democratic function more successfully.<sup>14</sup> But such vertical linkages alone are not sufficient to revitalize the public sphere in a society that is becoming increasingly fractured horizontally into isolated and sometimes antagonistic communities of identity (Gitlin 1995). In such a society, the public sphere can well become a cacophony of separate interest groups, each leveraging power for its own narrowly conceived interests.

Thus, for democracy to thrive, the public sphere must also draw social groups beyond their own particularistic "identities." This is not to say the public sphere must generate consensus, but it must provide a forum for discussing a shared societal future and taking action together, thus broadening social identities. When people have active connections to each other, they tend to become more tolerant and to increase their awareness of how their fates are linked. Generally, social capital and tolerance are strongly associated (Putnam 2000, p. 356-7). Bridging social capital that brings people together who are different from each other can therefore play an important role in forging broader identities and sense of the common good. Yet, as we discussed in the introductory section, bridging social capital is in short supply in American society.

In this context, faith-based organizing offers a second important contribution to constituting a more democratic society. By linking individuals and institutions across religious and racial barriers and the divides that often separate faith-based from secular social institutions, FBCO generates significant new bridging social capital. The religious right remains overwhelmingly white, heavily evangelical, and largely fails to promote the socio-economic interests of low-income Americans. By contrast, the civic and political engagement of religious communities fostered by FBCO is multi-racial, significantly interfaith, and active in pursuit of a broad set of socio-economic issues.

The two contributions of FBCO are, in fact, linked. Its role as a bridging institution comes from the field's ability to project power within the public sphere. Yet the elements of that power – leadership development, mobilizing capacity, issue work, and alliance building – are dependent upon the field's social capital base. That is, FBCO's ability to project power publicly is a function of its access to the bonding social capital embedded in its member congregations and institutions, as well as its ability to build bridging social capital by linking institutions to one another.

In creating bridging institutions, in forging bridging social capital, and in the sheer scale of its issue work, FBCO thus carries real democratic promise for American society – albeit with significant limitations and ambiguities.<sup>15</sup> At present, there is nothing to suggest that it has the political vision or social depth to lead a thoroughgoing national democratization project on its own; indeed, it has not begun to play a role in national political life and has only influenced public life at the state level in a few places. But if it continues to spread geographically, successfully replicates the more sophisticated organizing approaches already in place, and learns from its expanding alliances with

other sectors, faith-based organizing has the potential to become one crucial ingredient in a broader movement for deeper democracy in America.

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1. See Wuthnow (1988) on the "restructuring" of American religion, particularly its public

presence. Framing our discussion in the way posed here risks assuming religious participation in public life to be illegitimate. We make no such assumption; the key question concerns the appropriate forms of such participation. See also Wuthnow (1996) and Wuthnow and Hodgkinson, et al. (1990).

2. Though civil society may include the private realms of family as well, we emphasize here the organizational and associational element of civil society. Though historically the concept of civil society developed in contrast to the realm of government, we use it in contrast to both government and economic activity — that is, in contrast to what Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action* calls “the Systems.” Civil society thus represents the organizational and associational component of the Lifeworld. See also Wuthnow and Anheier (1991) and Seligman (1995, 1997).

3. The survey was sponsored by Interfaith Funders of New York, and carried out in collaboration with a “Scholars Group” which included the present authors, Stephen Hart, Omar McRoberts, Janice Fine, Marshall Ganz, John Powell, and Rob Kleidman.

4. The numbers of institutions have been rounded off in recognition of the fact that they are estimates taken from survey responses. The precise figures calculated from the survey are: 4,037 total institutions, of which 3534 are congregations and 503 are non-congregational institutions.

5. The locations of FBCO groups are taken from the known universe of all groups in the field. In everything else that follows in this paper, however, figures for the field as a whole are estimated from the results received from the 100 groups that participated in the survey.

6. These proportions are calculated using data from the Independent Sector (1993, pp. 115-116). The Independent Sector estimated from telephone company yellow pages that in 1992 there were 257,648 congregations in the United States. Using lists supplied by the American Church Lists, Inc., Independent Sector gave an alternative number of 355,235 congregations.

7. The low end of the estimate assumes that congregations involved in FBCO groups are about the same

size as the average American congregation. Most likely, though, they are larger because so many are Catholic parishes that are quite large. The high end of the estimate comes from an estimate of the average size of congregations involved in FBCO given by respondents to a survey conducted by Stephen Hart in 1994; see Hart (2001).

8. The comparison is illustrative but not strictly speaking correct. These scholars measure individual membership, while we measure institutional membership. According to Skocpol, Ganz and Munson (2000, p. 529), only 58 associations in American history have ever exceeded the 1% threshold.

9. Three notes regarding this classification: first, because many of the “traditionalist Protestant” congregations were Pentecostal, and due to the strong differences between the historic black churches and the black Pentecostal tradition represented by COGIC, we classify COGIC congregations as “traditionalist Protestant.” Second, we here classify the congregations listed by respondents as “other (=non-Missionary) Baptist” in the historic black church category – though, in principal, white American Baptist and Southern Baptist congregations would have been listed this way, our years of fieldwork in this field convince us that nearly all of these are National Baptist, Primitive Baptist, and other black baptist congregations. Finally, there were a small number of congregations classified as “other Christian” by the respondents; we exclude these from this analysis, as we are unable to classify them into these groups. From other information, we believe most of these to be non-denominational evangelical churches; if so, they would increase the religious diversity reported here.

10. We note that, as reflected in the above quote, at least two strategies exist for handling religious diversity. One strategy encourages participants to speak strongly from their own traditions, with other participants translating this into their own faith languages. Another strategy is to ask all participants to pray in neutral terms that seek to avoid any language that is not acceptable in other traditions. The former strategy places a burden on everyone to learn

something about others' cultures; the latter strategy runs the risk of so diluting faith language that it no longer "moves" participants.

11. See Warren (2001) and Wood (2002) for case studies of the experiences of FBCO groups in trying to forge interracial cooperation.

12. This NCI category includes a small number of religious associations, but so few that it remains legitimate to describe the connections between congregations and NCIs as faith-nonfaith.

13. The purposes of these meetings, however, varied between organizations. Many, perhaps most, have held bigger meetings. So this figure is not the highest measure of public support, but the best figure we have. These figures probably also underestimate the political capacity of FBCO groups that participate in statewide organizing efforts. They can often use the state network's political influence for local effect (Warren 2001).

14. Its political capacity will of course depend on other factors as well, including an ability to mobilize cultural resources. Rhys Williams (1999) has shown how "common good" language rooted in religion – though originating in hegemonic projects of dominant groups – provide powerful cultural resources for marginalized groups as they struggle to make democratic claims on society. Qualitative studies of FBCO (Wood 2002; Hart 2001; McRoberts 2000) suggest that the field's influence flows from its capacity for the democratic mobilization of religious commitments.

15. Our argument has been shaped by Somers' historical and theoretical analysis of citizenship and the public sphere (see especially 1993; also 1995). In her call for "a sociology of relationships among public spheres, community associational life, and patterns of political culture" (1993, p. 587), she provides a strong conceptual framework that links the sociology of the public sphere to social networks and cultural analysis. In so doing, she gives sociological



substance to the sometimes-airy discussion of “the public sphere” understood only abstractly.

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## TABLES

**Table 1 Characteristics of all FBCO organizations**

(all figures are percentages except where noted)

Geographic location of organization, by region	
Midwest	26.0
Mountain	6.7
Northeast	21.3
Pacific	17.9
South	12.5
Southwest Central	15.6
Year founded - first hired organizer (mean)	1991.3
Number of member institutions (mean)	30.35
Number of member congregations (mean)	26.57
Size of board of directors (mean)	20.22
Number of core leaders (two months; mean)	177.82
Income (median) <sup>a</sup>	\$150,000
Expenses (median) <sup>a</sup>	\$149,898

a. Limited to cases with valid data on sources of income

Regions defined as follows:

Northeast:	MN, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD, DC
Midwest:	OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS
Pacific:	WA, OR, CA, AK, HI
Mountain:	MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV
South:	VI, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL, KY, TN, AL, MS
Southwest Central:	AK, LO, OK, TX

**Table 2 Characteristics of FBCO organizations**  
(all figures are percentages)

Characteristic	Percentage of FBCO groups
<hr/>	
Year founded - first hired organizer	
1972-1979	7.7
1980-1984	8.4
1985-1989	12.5
1990-1994	30.4
1995-1999	41.1
Number of organizers on staff	
1	29.1
2	26.9
3	19.7
4	11.6
5	6.5
6	2.7
7	0.9
8	2.5
Number of member institutions	
Less than 10	2.1
10-14	15.4
15-19	19.8
20-29	31.2
30-39	17.1
40-69	11.1
70-99	0.0
100-230	3.3
Member institutions consist of congregations only	43.6
Number of core leaders (participants over 2 months)	
10-19	3.2
20-39	11.7
40-59	15.9
60-99	9.2
100-149	14.1
150-199	10.2
200-249	10.7
250-299	11.8
300-1300	13.2

**Table 3: Religious Characteristics of member institutions for all FBCOs combined**

(all figures are percentages)

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Percentage of all member institutions that are:

Congregations 87.5

Noncongregational institutions (NCIs) 12.5

Percentage of member congregations that is:

Jewish 1.95

Unitarian Universalist 2.09

Other non-Christian 0.62

Catholic 32.92

Episcopalian 6.54

Lutheran 7.89

Presbyterian 5.71

UCC 3.52

United Methodist 8.90

Other Protestant 0.83

AME, CME, AME Zion 2.70

Missionary Baptist 1.49

COGIC 2.16

Other Black Protestant 1.49

Baptist (non-Missionary) 14.81

Theologically Conservative Protestant 2.84

Other Christian 3.52

**Table 4: Religious Diversity within Local Faith-Based Organizations**

	<u>Number</u> (N = 93)	<u>Main patterns within this category</u>
<u>Monoreligious</u> 100% one group	3	All Roman Catholic
<u>Dominant</u> >60% one group	13	7 Roman Catholic dominant 4 Mainline Protestant dominant 2 historic Black Church dominant
<u>Majority</u> 50-60% one group	11	4 Roman Catholic majority 5 Mainline Protestant majority 2 historic Black Protestant majority
<u>Bireligious</u> 2 groups > 20%	35	20 Catholic/Mainline 9 historic Black/Mainline 4 Catholic/historic Black 1 traditionalist/historic Black 1 Mainline/non-Christian
<u>Diverse</u> 3 groups >20% <u>or</u> 4 groups > 15%	31	9 with largest group Mainline 9 with largest group Catholic 4 with largest group Historic Black 9 with two essentially equal primary groups (mostly historic Black, Mainline, or Catholic)

Religious categories defined as follows:

- monoreligious: all congregations from one religious group
- dominant: more than 60%, but less than 100%, of congregations from one religious group
- majority: 50-60% of congregations from one religious group
- bireligious: more than 20% of congregations from *each* of two religious groups, but none more than 50%
- diverse: more than 20% of congregations from *each* of three religious groups, *or* more than 15% of congregations from each of four religious groups

**Table 5: Racial characteristics for all FBCOs combined**

(all figures are percentages)

Percentage of member institutions

that is predominantly:

Asian	1.29
Black	35.03
Hispanic	20.89
Native American	0.22
White/Anglo	36.06
Interracial	6.49
Immigrant (of various race)	10.81

Percentage of boards of directors

that is:

Asian	2.31
Black	31.73
Hispanic	21.05
Native American	0.47
White/Anglo	43.36
Interracial	1.07

that is:

Male	48.73
Female	51.27

**Table 6: Racial diversity within local faith based organizations**

	<u>Number</u> (N = 82)	<u>Patterns within this category*</u>
<u>Monoracial</u> (100% one group)	9	3 White 3 Black 3 Hispanic
<u>Racially dominant</u> (one group >80%)	4	2 White dominant <sup>a</sup> 2 Black dominant
<u>Racial majority</u> (65%-80% one group)	21	14 White dominant <sup>b</sup> 6 Black dominant <sup>c</sup> 1 Hispanic dominant <sup>d</sup>
<u>Biracial</u> (only 2 groups >15%)	35	22 White/Black <sup>e</sup> 8 White/Hispanic 3 Black/Hispanic 2 White/Asian
<u>Multiracial</u> (3 or 4 groups >15%)	9 with 3 groups >15% 2 with 4 groups >15%	9 White/Black/Hispanic <sup>f</sup> 1 White/Black/Hispanic/Asian <sup>g</sup>

\*Note: Secondary group listed when >=10%

<sup>a</sup> Listed as dominant/secondary group, the patterns are: 1 white/Hispanic, 1 white/black & interracial, and 2 Black/white

<sup>b</sup> Listed as dominant/secondary group, the patterns are: 6 White/Black, 3 White/Hispanic, 2 White/Black & Hispanic, 2 White/Black & Interracial, and 1 White/Interracial

<sup>c</sup> Listed as dominant/secondary group, the patterns are: 3 Black/White, 1 Black/Hispanic, and 2 Black/White & Interracial

<sup>d</sup> Listed as dominant/secondary group, the pattern is: 1 Hispanic/White

<sup>e</sup> Listed in order of concentration: 12 Black/White, 10 White/Black, 4 White/Hispanic, 4 Hispanic/White, 3 Black/Hispanic, 1 White/Asian, and 1 Asian/White

<sup>f</sup> Listed in order of concentration: 3 Black/White/Hispanic, 2 White/Black/Hispanic, 2 Black/Hispanic/White, 1 White/Hispanic/Black, and 1 Hispanic/Black/White. Groups include Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American and White. Interracial group excluded from analysis. If groups had equal proportions, then listed in alphabetical order.

<sup>g</sup> Listed in order of concentration: 1 Asian/Black/Hispanic/White and 1 White/Hispanic/Asian/Black. If groups had equal proportions, then listed in alphabetical order.

Note: two cases were indeterminate: 1 in which 11 of the 12 participating groups were interracial; 1 in which 50% of the participating groups were white and 43% were interracial.

**Table 7 Characteristics of noncongregational institutions (NCIs) for all FBCOs combined**

(all figures are percentages)

Percentage of all NCIs that are:

Unions	14.84
Schools	42.48
Neighborhood associations	6.65
Other community organizations	36.03

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**Table 8: Projecting Power: Highest attendance at political actions sponsored by local organizations:**

<u>Maximum reported attendance at a local political action</u>	<u>Number of FBCO organiza tions (n = 100)</u>
1,000 or more (max = 10,000; mean = 1,807)	27 organizations
400-900	36 organizations
120-350	28 organizations
less than 100	9 organiza tions