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Divided We Stand, United We Fall: Religious Pluralism, Giving, and Volunteering.

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Topics: Religious identity, Religious pluralism, Context (language use) and Attendance

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- The study examines the relationship between, on the one hand, service attendance, volunteering, and giving and, on the other, religious pluralism, religious prevalence, and religious distribution.
- The theoretical link between social context (i.e. religious pluralism) and giving and volunteering is based on indirect effects (i.e. greater choice and more competition), direct effects (i.e. higher commitment) and favorable mechanisms (e.g. flow of information about giving and volunteering opportunities; higher costs of non compliance)
- The study uses micro-level data on individuals in a sample of 256 counties in the United States. These data on giving, volunteering, and attendance at religious services are drawn from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (SCCBS) data set – the survey, conducted in 2000, was designed by the Saguaro Seminar at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.
- The study finds:
 - High level of religious pluralism is not associated with an increase in the probability that individuals will attend religious services regularly;
 - Religious pluralism is directly and positively associated with religious volunteering;
 - The association between religious pluralism and religious giving is not statistically significant;
 - Increases in religious volunteering associated with a high level of religious pluralism do not displace secular volunteering.
- The positive association between religious pluralism and volunteering reflects, according to the author, “the role religious pluralism plays in promoting and sustaining internal motivation and the degree to which the choice to volunteer is shaped by social expectations, social connections, and peer pressure” (124).