

# God or Greed? The “American Dream,” Religion, and White-Collar Crime

Andrew Whitehead  
Baylor University

# Overview

- Institutional Anomie Theory
- Moral Communities Thesis
- White-Collar Crime
  
- Does the pressure to achieve economic success dominate the ethical demands made by most religions?

# Institutional Anomie Theory

- Messner and Rosenfeld build from Robert Merton's work on "anomie"
  - High crime rate in US due to uneven emphases
- Name emphasis on monetary success "American Dream"
- "American Dream" interacts with social structure found in US
- Family, Polity, and Education all dominated by the Economy

# Institutional Anomie Theory

- Sanctioning and regulating ability of Family, Education, and Polity lost
- “American Dream” pursued by any means necessary
- Strengthen noneconomic institutions to reduce levels of anomie

# Institutional Anomie Theory

- Various levels of support for theory
  - Support: Baumer and Gustafson 2007, Hannon and DeFronzo 1998, Maume and Lee 2003, Messner and Rosenfeld 1997, Savolainen 2000
  - Mixed: Piquero and Piquero 1998, Cullen et al. 2004, Batton and Jensen 2002
  - No Support: Jensen 2002, Cao 2004
- Testing institutional aspects of theory as well as cultural
- Various ways to operationalize the various institutions

# White-Collar Crime and IAT

- White-Collar Crime Theories
  - Fear of falling (Weisburd et al. 1991)
  - Low self-control (Benson and Moore 1992, Simpson and Piquero 2002)
  - Desire for control (Piquero et al. 2005)
- White-Collar Crime and IAT
  - Effects of anomie applicable to all sectors of society
  - Lack of noneconomic institutional regulation of behavior

# White-Collar Crime and IAT

- Schoepfer and Piquero (2006)
  - Mixed support for IAT: economy, polity, and education all associated with white-collar crime levels

# Religion and IAT

- Religion significantly associated with crime levels using IAT
  - Antonaccio and Tittle 2007, Baumer and Gustafson 2007, Chamlin and Cochran 1995, Cullen et al. 2004, Maume and Lee 2003
- Moral Communities Thesis
  - Religion is a group phenomenon not just individual one
  - Religious culture matters

# Hypothesis

- Higher overall levels of religiosity will result in lower levels of white-collar crime

# Data/Methods

- Follow closely Schoepfer and Piquero's study
  - White-collar crime: Embezzlement rates per 100,000 for each state in 2001
  - Economy: % unemployed
  - Family: Divorce to marriage ratio
  - Education: % of population not graduating high school
  - Polity: % of population who voted for US Representatives in their area in 2000
  - Religion: adjusted total adherence rate as a % of state population (2000 RCMS)

# Results

## Poisson Estimates of Embezzlement Rates 2001

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Variable	Estimate	S.E.
% Unemployed (Economy)	-0.238**	0.074
% Not High School Grad (Education)	0.122***	0.020
% Voted in Last Election (Polity)	-0.013	0.009
Divorce to Marriage Ratio (Family)	2.159***	0.425
% Total Religious Adherence (Religion)	-0.003	0.005
Constant	0.789	0.740
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.171	

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p<.05 \*; p<.01 \*\*; p<.001 \*\*\*

# Discussion

- No effect for religion
- White-collar criminals more religious? (Benson and Kerley 2001)
- Mixed support for IAT when considering white-collar crime

# Limitations

- Operationalization
  - Economy
  - Religion
  - White-Collar Crime
- Data
  - Uniform Crime Reports

# Conclusion

- Thankfully, there is no conclusion as of yet.

Thank you!