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

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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
  - 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

- 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

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

$p < .05\,*; p < .01\,**; p < .001\,***$
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!