

Community Organizing in Britain: The Political Engagement of Faith-Based Social Capital

Mark R. Warren*

Graduate School of Education, Harvard University

Faith-based community organizing in the United States has emerged as one of the most effective ways to rebuild democratic life in urban communities. Scholars have argued that the success of modern community organizing lies in its ability to engage the social capital embedded in religious congregations. I examine this claim through a comparatively set case study of the effort to apply an American community organizing strategy in Britain. Using interviews, observations, and documentary sources, I analyze the experience of the British Citizens Organizing Foundation (COF), which is affiliated to the U.S.-based Industrial Areas Foundation. I find that the COF has attained more national influence than its American counterpart, but its local foundations remain much weaker. The relative weakness of faith-based social capital in Britain only partly explains this result. The orientations of religious institutions toward political engagement also matter, and so does the relative power of local versus national political institutions. I argue for bringing a more institutional approach to our theoretical understanding of community organizing and of the role of social capital in revitalizing democratic life more broadly.

Faith-based community organizing has become recognized as an effective way to generate political participation and empower low-income communities of color in the United States (Warren, 2001; Wood, 2002). This American style organizing strategy is beginning to be tried outside of the United States, in places like Germany, South Africa, Central America, and Canada. Most of these efforts are quite young and have not been the subject of research.¹ In this article I present a case study of the longest running of such experiments, that is, the organizing efforts of the Citizens Organising Foundation (COF) in Britain, which started in the late 1980s. I set out to discover how an American organizing strategy has worked in the very different social and political context of Britain. As I show in this article, a comparative case study can yield important lessons for our understanding of community organizing and of the political engagement of faith-based social capital more broadly.

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZING IN THE BRITISH CONTEXT

As Britain enters the new century, there is growing concern about the state of its democracy. For a while, Britain was thought to be immune from the declines in civic life and

*Correspondence should be addressed to Mark R. Warren, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 207 Nichols House, Cambridge, MA 02138; mark.warren@harvard.edu.

social capital experienced by the United States (Putnam, 2000). There was supposed to be little cause for concern in Britain because social capital was alive and well, to be seen especially in Britain's rich voluntary sector (Hall, 2002). Other studies (Milner, 2003), however, have suggested that traditional membership associations have recently begun a serious decline, as they have in the United States (Skocpol, 2003). Particular attention has fallen on a growing social capital gap along class lines, as some scholars (Grenier and Wright, 2004) highlight the decline in civic participation by less affluent Brits. Moreover, studies of inner city communities suggest that involvement in community activities and the fabric of civil society is particularly weak there (Williams and Windebank, 2000; Wills, et al., 2002). The British government became so concerned about the social exclusion of poor, largely ethnic minority communities in the late 1990s that it formed a special unit to address the issue (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). Attention has focused on Muslim discontent in the wake of September 11th, but the concern predates that event and extends broadly to marginalized communities.

Recent studies show a growing class gap in political participation as well, as political life becomes increasingly dominated by better educated and higher income people (Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley, 2004), mirroring concerns of growing political inequality in the United States as well (Schlozman et al., 2005). In the postwar era, the British working classes had been incorporated into the political system through a powerful nexus of trade unions, local Labour Party branches, and affiliated associations and clubs (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992). But these institutions began to unravel in the 1980s under the weight of economic and political change, leaving the ranks of British people with few avenues for active participation in political life beyond voting (Knight and Stokes, 1996; Li et al., 2002).² Ethnic minorities and the poorest of British people were never fully included in the old Labour Party institutions.³ They remain particularly powerless today. In the words of one study, growing ranks of lower income Brits are becoming "utterly disengaged" (Electoral Commission and Hansard Society, 2006).

This article examines the emergence of a different form of democratic engagement in Britain, as represented in the COF. Unlike professionally managed advocacy groups, the COF follows an American-style community organizing strategy that prioritizes the training of local volunteer leaders to act collectively on their own behalf (Whitman, 2006). In fact, the COF applies an American community organizing strategy that it adopted from the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), one of the largest faith-based community organizing networks in the United States (Warren, 2001). The COF is affiliated to the IAF, which supplies a senior organizer to the British network for periodic consultation and assistance with leadership training. Using the IAF strategy, the COF network works to build broad-based organizations that engage local people in political action primarily through their faith institutions. Recently, the London Citizens affiliate of the COF has received national attention for launching Britain's first living wage campaign and winning economic guarantees for impoverished East London communities in the United Kingdom's 2012 Olympics bid (Lydall, 2004).

The experience of the COF is important to examine in its own right, as a potential new form of democratic engagement in Britain. However, the design of this study allows for a wider theoretical purpose. So far, studies of community organizing have been largely confined to the United States. This comparatively set case study allows us to examine the experience of applying the same organizing strategy as followed by faith-based organizing groups in the United States to a country with very different

social and political institutions. By allowing us to see whether and how a country's institutional structure matters for the development of community organizing, this study is intended to advance emerging theory in this field, and has implications for understanding the relationship between faith-based social capital and democracy more broadly.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING THEORY AND FAITH-BASED SOCIAL CAPITAL

Although community organizing in the United States takes a variety of forms (Fisher, 1994; Smock, 2004), I focus on the growing field of faith-based community organizing and use the term "community organizing" in this article sometimes as short-hand to refer to this phenomenon. In the United States, faith-based community organizing has emerged as a powerful vehicle for democratic engagement by faith communities in low-income communities of color, and in American communities more broadly as well (Warren and Wood, 2001). Groups in this field take as their primary goal the organizing and training of local community leaders drawn primarily from member faith institutions like congregations. They build nonpartisan organizations oriented to creating power for these communities in the political arena. These groups are quite different from those on the religious right. Community organizing groups pursue a progressive socioeconomic agenda, not hot button moral issues like abortion or gay rights. They work to build affordable housing, reform urban schools, create job-training programs, increase neighborhood safety, and improve health care.

The IAF is one of the most prominent faith-based community organizing networks in the United States, and the path-breaker in developing this model of organizing. Saul Alinsky founded the IAF in Chicago during the 1930s (Alinsky, 1971; Horwitt, 1989). But the network revised Alinsky's approach in the 1970s and moved more deeply to engage faith communities (Warren, 2001, chapter 2). The IAF itself uses the term broad-based rather than faith-based to describe its organizing work, because it wants to make clear that it does not pursue a religious agenda and because IAF organizations include some secular institutions like public schools and unions in their membership (Chambers and Cowan, 2003). Nevertheless, faith institutions play by far the largest role in the network, comprising about 85 percent of institutional membership, and IAF organizers draw explicitly on such faith traditions as Catholic Social Thought and the Social Gospel to encourage congregants to work for social justice (Warren and Wood, 2001).

The IAF has developed a distinctive style of organizing (Chambers and Cowan, 2003; Warren, 2001), which is shared broadly in the American faith-based organizing field (Warren and Wood, 2001) and by the COF in Britain. It is *institutional* in the sense that it organizes in and through its member institutions, mostly religious congregations from a variety of denominations. It is *broad-based* in that it seeks to build organizations made up of diverse institutions and communities, by race, economic status and faith, although the center of gravity of most U.S. groups lies in low-income black and Latino communities. It is *relational* in the sense that it explicitly teaches leaders to build long-term relationships as a basis for common action, rather than emphasizing quick mobilization around hot issues. And it is *nonpartisan* because, although the work is explicitly political and seeks to build power to influence governmental authorities and other elites, IAF groups do not endorse candidates.

A growing body of research on the IAF (Orr, 1999; Osterman, 2002; Shirley, 1997; Shirley, 2002) and on other faith-based organizing groups (Hart, 2001; Kleidman, 2004; Wood, 2002; Wood and Warren, 2002) have documented how the field has built wide and deep *local* roots in American congregations and communities over the past twenty-five years.⁴ A national survey conducted in 1999 found that the field as a whole, including IAF organizations, groups affiliated with other networks, and independents, comprised 133 local organizations active in 33 states and the District of Columbia (Warren and Wood, 2001). About 3,500 religious congregations participate in these groups, who reach between one and three million Americans through their organizing work. Faith-based organizing has the reputation of generating large numbers of local leaders. The survey found that nearly 24,000 core leaders participated actively in these groups, an average of 178 in each, while at least 100,000 supporters attend public actions of these groups on a regular basis.

Faith-based community organizing groups are known for building strong local roots, and they are sometimes criticized precisely for their localism (DeFillippis, Fisher, and Shragge, 2006). There has, nevertheless, been some movement beyond the local. The Gamaliel network works on regional strategies around its base in the urban core (Kleidman, 2004), as do some other networks. Local groups within any one network work together to influence policy in at least eight states (Warren and Wood, 2001), most notably the IAF in Texas and the PICO (Pacific Institute for Community Organization) network in California. Very recently groups in the PICO network have begun to experiment with influencing Congressional representatives around health care and Hurricane Katrina reconstruction (Whitman, 2006; Wood, 2007) and the Gamaliel Foundation has begun some national work on immigration reform. But these are very new efforts. Despite its wide spread in localities across the country, faith-based community organizing has almost no national profile and has not become a national political force.⁵

Scholars (e.g., Hart, 2001; Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2001; Wood, 1997) have argued that the spread of community organizing in the United States can be attributed, in large part, to its ability to engage the social capital resources embedded in faith institutions like local congregations. Recent work on the concept of social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000) has highlighted the social foundations of democratic life, suggesting that democracy is stronger where citizens are connected to each other in rich networks of voluntary associations and institutions. This argument has a long tradition dating back to Tocqueville (1966), who maintained that Americans learn the habit and skills of cooperation by working together at the local level in a variety of community-based and political activities. Face-to-face relationships provide the venue for citizens to build the trust and the understanding of the common good necessary to ground modern democracy.

Of all civil society organizations, faith-based institutions may offer the greatest potential to contribute to democratic engagement especially in the inner city, but more broadly in the United States as well. First of all, they represent the largest stock of social capital, reaching a large proportion of Americans. Over 40 percent of Americans say they attend religious services at one of these institutions on a weekly basis (Gallup Jr. and Lindsay, 1999), although the real figure may be lower (Chaves and Stephens, 2003). Moreover, faith institutions sponsor a rich variety of community services and voluntary associations, which connect them to community residents beyond the church walls (Cnaan, 2002; Wilson and Janoski, 1995). Robert Putnam (2000, p. 66) has suggested that, "As a rough rule of thumb, our evidence shows, nearly half of all associational memberships

in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context.” Faith institutions may be particularly important to low-income urban communities, the main locus of community organizing efforts. Where other types of institutions have declined in the inner city, these communities remain as well-endowed with faith institutions as the suburbs (Foley, McCarthy, and Chaves, 2001). Meanwhile, where people lack other resources for political action, like money and education, their social connections and resources become all the more important as a basis for political power (Warren, Saegert, and Thompson, 2001).

Moreover, faith institutions like churches provide firm institutional foundations for organizing. These institutions tend to be long-lasting, containing rich networks based upon deeply shared understandings and a certain degree of trust and reciprocity (Warren, 2001). In addition, they are perhaps the most egalitarian form of associational life in the United States. While more educated, affluent, and white Americans are over represented in almost every form of voluntary association, low-income people and people of color participate at relatively higher rates in faith institutions (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Community organizers spend much of their time looking for indigenous leaders in religious congregations, potential movers and shakers in their communities, and then help them develop into public leaders.

Faith institutions, however, represent more than organized networks of people and potential leaders. Faith communities contain rich theological traditions, many of which call for their congregants to care for community, work for social justice, and participate in the public life of their society (see, e.g., Jacobsen, 2001). When community organizers engage these moral frameworks, they can provide people of faith with powerful motivations for political action, as activists did during the American civil rights movement (Harris, 1999). Religious commitment can help sustain people’s engagement through the inevitable ups and downs of political action (Warren, 2001). Faith traditions can provide a language and a rich set of stories that help people think about community and public life, and that frame action for a socially just society (Baggett, 2001; Hart, 2001; Wood, 2002).

Research on faith-based community organizing is relatively new, although quickly growing, and it has taken the form of the case studies of U.S. groups cited above. While scholars of the IAF and faith-based community organizing have been right to emphasize the social capital resources embedded in religious congregations as a key element to explain the development of the field, they have paid less attention to the interface between faith communities and political institutions. Two issues deserve attention. First, however strong religious participation may be, faith institutions must be oriented toward political engagement if these resources are going to be effectively mobilized. Scholars have examined how community organizers work to engage the faith traditions of congregations (Wood, 2002). However, the case study design of most research on American community organizing has contained an implicit assumption that any faith institution is available for recruitment. Little comparison across denominations has been conducted to examine the extent to which various particular faith institutions’ social capital resources have the potential to be readily engaged through a community organizing strategy.⁶ Looking at the attempt of community organizing to engage faith communities in a context characterized by a different institutional nexus of religion and politics, as Britain offers, promises to shed light on how the interface between faith and politics matters.

The second issue to consider is how the structure of political institutions might shape the opportunities for community organizing. Again, the design of research on American

community organizing has not allowed us to gain purchase on this issue because the institutional context has not varied significantly. If there are significant differences by locality or state, scholars have not paid attention to them.⁷ The contrast between the United States and Britain, however, is quite strong. In American politics, local governments retain important powers that make them attractive targets for organizing efforts. By contrast, Britain's political structure is much more centralized. Meanwhile, state and church are constitutionally separated in the United States, whereas British religious institutions and government are much more intertwined, albeit in complex ways, as we will see. As such, a comparatively set case study of community organizing in Britain can shed important light on whether and how the interface between faith and politics matters for the engagement of faith-based social capital in community organizing and more broadly in democratic renewal.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

I now turn to an examination of the efforts of the COF to apply the IAF's organizing strategy in Britain. Data for this study come from fieldwork I conducted between 1999 and 2004. Fieldwork concentrated primarily on London, the national center for the COF as well as the location of its most important affiliate, The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO). However, I also conducted fieldwork in other localities in which COF has organized, including Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Sheffield.

As is typical in case study research (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), I employed a combination of data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. I conducted 54 interviews for this study, including participants in the COF network, actors who have experience with the network, as well as independent observers.⁸ These semistructured interviews were designed to reveal organizing processes and outcomes from multiple perspectives.

I conducted observations at a wide variety of COF activities, including leadership training sessions, meetings of staff organizers, action team meetings, larger public assemblies, direct action events, and organizational leadership meetings. These were designed to see organizing in action, to better understand the role of various kinds of participants, and to observe the dynamics in the relationships between various stakeholders (volunteer leaders, paid organizers, allies, and the targets of the COF's actions). These observations also provided an opportunity to assess the extent of participation in the network and its depth. Detailed field notes were taken. Twenty-two meetings were observed in all.

Finally, I collected and examined a variety of documents. Internal COF publications (newsletters, leaflets, budget reports) provided further information about the network's practices and its finances. Newspaper articles provided information about the public activities of the network.

I analyzed the interview materials, observational field notes, and documents using categories derived from the social capital theoretical framework discussed above as well as those that arose inductively from the data. In order to increase the accuracy of the analysis, data sources were "triangulated" by checking wherever possible what people said in interviews against what was observed and what was stated in published accounts. To strengthen the validity of the findings, I looked intentionally for discrepant data (e.g., by interviewing observers who were independent of the COF and sometimes critical of the

network) and alternative interpretations for emerging patterns in the analysis (Maxwell, 1996). Due to space limitations, and as is typical in case study presentations, I have not cited the data sources (interviews, observations) for all of the specifics and details in the case history recounted here. These sources are available from the author upon request.

THE CITIZENS ORGANISING FOUNDATION

ORIGINS OF THE COF

In 1977 Neil Jameson, a Quaker social worker in the United Kingdom, won a Churchill Fellowship to travel to the United States to study vandalism and self-help efforts. Jameson discovered the IAF through his research and became intrigued with the network's emphasis on organizing rather than service provision. Frustrated with the paternalism of the British welfare state, Jameson was particularly drawn to the IAF's concept of the iron rule, "never do for others what they can do for themselves" (Cortes Jr., 1993), as a way to empower communities and build their indigenous leadership. He decided to look up Ed Chambers, the network's director, and proceeded to visit IAF projects in New York and to attend several of the network's training sessions.

Jameson returned to the United Kingdom with the idea of trying some of the IAF's organizing techniques back home. Eventually, he approached fellow Quaker Eric Adams, Assistant Director of the Barrow Cadbury Trust, for financial backing. Jameson had run a model social program funded by the trust and had become friends with Adams. Responding to Jameson's initiative, Adams himself visited the IAF in the United States and returned impressed enough to commit funds to bring several British religious leaders to IAF training sessions in the states. The trust subsequently became community organizing's main financial backer in the United Kingdom, providing more than 150,000 pounds (about 250,000 dollars) in core funding annually through the 1990s. Paid a salary with funds from the trust in 1989, Jameson began to establish a sponsoring committee of religious leaders in Bristol, near where he lived.

The late 1980s was a propitious time to launch this new initiative. During the early and mid-1980s Conservative Party forces moved to suppress Labour's left wing, which included many of Britain's progressive political activists who were organizing, or "campaigning," as it was called, in working class and minority communities (Seyd, 1987). The Labour Left had attempted to maintain high levels of spending in many of the urban borough governments it controlled. However, in the words of former Greater London Councilor Andrew Harris, the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher "broke their backs" (Interview, July 16, 2003). After successfully defeating the Miners' Union in its famous strike, the Tories abolished the Greater London Council entirely, a key power center for the Labour Left, and placed other Labour Left-controlled local councils under strict spending limits. Meanwhile, Labour Party Leader Neil Kinnock moved to marginalize the left so that the party could present a more moderate face to the British electorate. As Labour Left councils and campaigning organizations fractured, poor and minority communities were left with few advocates.

Into this void stepped the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, issued a report entitled *Faith in the City* (Church of England, 1985), which challenged the policies of the Conservative government at the time. It cited public neglect

of the poor in Britain as a grave injustice and called for action. The Church set up the Church Urban Fund (CUF) in order to provide financing to groups that were advocating for the growing ranks of those excluded from Thatcher's project of an aggressively capitalistic Britain. Between 1979 and 1994, the CUF funded over a thousand groups, including Jameson's new organizing projects (Lawless et al., 1998).

Encouraged by the Archbishop's stance, and with the backing of the Anglican Bishop Peter Firth, many Anglicans in Bristol became attracted to the new citizen organizing effort. Jameson spent time courting Sikh and Hindu leaders as well, and was able to launch Communities Organised for Greater Bristol (COGB) in 1989.⁹ Jameson succeeded in getting 26 religious institutions, primarily but not exclusively Anglican, to join up.

In the early 1990s COGB launched a series of campaigns around a variety of local community concerns in Bristol. It took up the kind of bread and butter issues for which Alinskyite organizing is so famous, like getting local governmental authorities to place bus shelters in poor areas and traffic lights at dangerous junctions. However, Jameson soon realized that ethnic Indians in Bristol also cared deeply about more symbolic issues that reflected on their standing in the city. Consequently, COGB lobbied for the erection of a statue for Rajah Rammohun Roy, a famous Indian who lived in Bristol. The campaign helped demonstrate that the new group took seriously the concerns of ethnic minority communities.

The still young group proved willing to confront a major financial institution when it decided to pressure the Bristol and West Building Society to increase the amount of funds it made available for affordable housing and to address the needs of the homeless. COGB brought 1,500 people to its spring 1989 assembly, a huge turnout in a city like Bristol. Nevertheless, the society's chief executive, Tony Fitzsimons, refused the group's demands at the assembly. COGB kept up the pressure, meeting informally with society executives and eventually mobilizing 200 members to protest outside the society's annual meeting, where the company's chairperson finally agreed to review its policy.

Fresh from these early victories, COGB launched a big and very public campaign to get the Chief Constable of Police to improve public safety in low-income communities. COGB was able to turn out over a thousand supporters to an assembly with the Chief Constable. The impressive mobilization gained the otherwise recalcitrant police officer's cooperation. With that action, COGB placed community organizing on the UK map.¹⁰

COF EXPANSION

About the same time Jameson was organizing in Bristol, Sister Mary MacAleese set up the UK's second community organizing project in Liverpool. This effort found support amongst Liverpool's large Catholic population. The Merseyside Broad-Based Organisation (MBBO) formed in Liverpool in 1992, with 2,000 supporters at its founding assembly. The group had 41 member institutions, with heavy Catholic participation and some significant support for the first time from Muslim groups as well. MBBO targeted illegal dumping of waste in poor communities and lobbied for improved street lighting.

With initial successes in Bristol and Liverpool, and with an expanding group of supporters within Catholic and Anglican denominations, the network was able to set up projects in a number of other British localities during the 1990s. These included groups in England's fourth largest city, Sheffield, as well as in North Wales, the Black Country (outside

of Birmingham), and East London. The groups were linked together in the COF, officially founded in 1990 with Jameson as its director. The COF proved able to secure a yearly contribution of 10,000–20,000 pounds (about \$17,000–\$34,000) for each of its local organizations from the CUF. Combining these funds with the long-term financing provided from the Barrows Cadbury Trust, the COF hired a small professional staff to head the projects, supplying one or two organizers for each.

Meanwhile, Jameson moved to London so he could direct the network's organizing efforts in East London, which would eventually lead to the formation of The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO). Jameson felt that, to be taken seriously as a political force in the country, the COF needed a base in London. Moreover, East London offered the opportunity to ground a COF group in Britain's large and growing Muslim population, as well as in the area's historic Catholic community. East London had long been a traditional bastion of working class Britain and home to new immigrant groups. Most recently, Muslims from Bangladesh had arrived in large numbers, growing to make up nearly one-third of the population of Tower Hamlets, a key borough in East London. Bangladeshi Muslims represent perhaps Britain's poorest and most socially excluded minority group (Modood, 1997). Fully 73 percent of Bangladeshi and Pakistani children live in poverty in London, while one-third of London children overall grow up in poverty (Mayor of London, 2002, p. 5).

Jameson worked hard to demonstrate that the new group was serious about including Muslims. He joined the governing board of a local school predominantly composed of Muslim children and spent time building relationships with Muslim leaders. Jameson eventually succeeded in recruiting the area's largest mosque, the East London Mosque, into TELCO by supporting the institution in its effort to acquire land for expansion. The growing mosque required larger worship spaces as well as room for the variety of community services it offered. Originally, the local authority (i.e., the borough government) of Tower Hamlets planned to use the adjacent land for housing. But TELCO helped the mosque organize its members and brought out TELCO leaders from its other institutions to back the mosque. Three thousand supporters marched together in the campaign's largest show of force. Eventually, the council bowed to pressure from the mosque and its religious allies in TELCO and sold the land to the mosque. According to Dr. Mohammed Abdul Bari, vice chair of the Mosque and Deputy Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, TELCO's backing for the campaign helped overcome the Muslim community's mistrust, which ran strong since the community was new and felt it faced racism and Islamophobia in Britain. Meanwhile, Muslim COF leaders like Bari found a strong basis in Islam for participation in interfaith groups like TELCO. According to Bari, "Muslims are taught to live in harmony with others across faiths. Islam emphasizes to seek the common good, to look for agreement among people. But many Muslims don't lead with that. TELCO represents that for us. A street light is an issue of the common good" (Interview, August 3, 1999).

TELCO announced its official formation in 1996 at an assembly of 1,300 people from about 36 member institutions. An impressive diversity of faith communities were represented, including Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and Black majority churches, as well as several schools and community associations. Nevertheless, the real heart of the organization lay in its large number of Catholic parishes, several important Anglican parishes, and a few key mosques. Because the Catholics included both Irish and Afro-Caribbean parishioners, however, the group was significantly multiracial. After its founding, TELCO proceeded to

launch campaigns on several fronts. It pressed for better health services at local hospitals and for affordable housing, a key issue as housing costs skyrocketed in the red-hot London market of the 1990s.

TELCO's ability to mobilize thousands drew attention to the group. With the labor movement and left-wing community sector cowed by years of Conservative Party rule, TELCO was one of the few groups to be conducting any real grassroots organizing in Britain during the 1990s. The group's multifaith and multiracial character also made it distinctive. Although Britain had some tradition of Muslim and Christian leaders meeting at high-level forums, there were few venues in civil society for local Christians and Muslims to interact. TELCO's diversity proved powerful for the group. In fact, many leaders claim the group's diversity creates its dynamism and keeps them involved. For example, Sister Petronia, a white Catholic leader of TELCO, reported:

It's difficult to cross cultural barriers within our own faith communities. If you stand on the altar and look out, our parish appears diverse, with Irish and West Africans sitting together. But there is little meaningful interaction between the groups. TELCO gives us the opportunity to build relationships with each other, to discuss what we really care about, and do something together. Working with Muslims is interesting and enriching, although at times it can be threatening, because we have different ways of approaching issues and different ideas about the role of women. (Interview, July 20, 1999)

Bridging different cultures did prove challenging, particularly across the divide between Bangladeshi Muslims and native-born Christians. To build cross-faith relationships COF meetings and retreats came to include reflections where participants spoke from their different faith traditions about the issues of concern at the time. These reflections offer a chance for people to learn about each other and to find common ground. COF leaders seem to struggle at these meetings for a way to discuss some areas of difference, as several white Christian participants reported difficulty in raising their concerns about the participation of Muslim women in public life. Generally, though, the COF appears to embrace tension as a force for change. According to Jameson (Interview, July 14, 1999), "diversity keeps people in, not the victories. And the organizer is key to that, agitating people into new relationships with people different from them. Without the organizer, people retreat into their own congregations and communities, and they get narrow-minded and complacent."

By the late 1990s, the COF was beginning to establish itself as an important force in the local communities in which it organized. It did so in part because it was able to foster a new group of leaders typically left out of British democratic life. These leaders often came from Britain's newer communities of color. Blanche Davies, an immigrant from Sierra Leone, is a good example. She got involved in TELCO through her Anglican church, the Parish of Divine Compassion in Canning Town, during the group's campaign to stop the closing of bank branches in poor communities. According to Davies:

Before I got involved in TELCO, I can't even open my mouth to speak to people. I can't face a crowd. I was just a lady sitting in the house looking after children. As soon as I entered TELCO, I started going to meetings, seeing other people speak

up at meetings. I became one of them. TELCO just gives me the zeal, the power to speak. It gives you confidence. TELCO gave me my independence. (Interview, July 20, 1999)

Many leaders reported finding in the COF a way to “make their faith real,” to get outside the confines of their small congregations, and to address important issues facing British society.

Meanwhile, the COF began to gain recognition and largely favorable reviews from a number of observers. For example, a 1994 Church Urban Fund evaluation (Farnell et al., 1994, p. 49; see also MacLeod, 1993) declared, “The achievements of BBO (broad-based organizing) during its short history in Britain should not be underestimated. In both Bristol and Merseyside organizations have been built in which even the size of the activist core would be the envy of many local political parties or church alliances.” Referring to the transformation of leaders like Davies, Ann Morisy (Interview, July 23, 1999), a long-time observer of Anglican Church involvement in community life, commented, “Nothing I know of could have done that, [helping people] find a secure center of gravity. . . . The other impressive thing is that this is the first time in London that Muslims and Christians have cooperated. That’s seriously impressive.” Morisy, though, questioned whether the brash style of American community organizing was fully appropriate in Britain’s more deferential culture, expressing reservations about what she saw as the sectarian tone of COF organizing, concerns raised by some others as well (Farnell et al., 1994; Henderson and Salmon, 1995).

As local COF affiliates began to take up larger issues in their localities, however, they soon ran up against the limitations of the power of local authorities. For example, COGB tried to improve the treatment of people seeking immigration to the United Kingdom in order to join family members. They soon found, however, that they needed the support of other COF affiliates to influence the Home Office.

Meanwhile COF groups across the country began to notice that banks were closing their branches in many low-income communities. More than 3,500 such branches had closed between 1990 and 1999, as financial institutions consolidated in Britain. COF affiliates began to organize at the local level in 1999 around the bank closing issue, but it quickly became clear that the network would have to engage national political authorities in order to gain influence over the nationally based home offices of local banks. The COF brought 300 supporters from its projects across Britain to a meeting in London on April 23, 1999, with the Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, and the Director of the Government’s Financial Services Authority, Howard Davies. George agreed to a private meeting with COF later that summer, where the group pressed its demand for a biennial audit of banking operations as a way to monitor and pressure banks to continue to serve poorer communities. George announced his support for the group’s complaint. Although he stopped short of calling for legislation to require branch banks to remain in operation, George did charge banks with taking some responsible action or else facing the possibility of regulatory legislation (Poulter, 1999). Subsequently, several banks developed local projects with COF groups that addressed several of the network’s concerns. The COF and many observers considered this a big victory. Within 10 years and with minimal levels of funding, the COF had become a national political actor.

CRISIS AND REORGANIZATION

As the COF gained national attention, though, it struggled to build truly firm local foundations. Although COF affiliated groups were supposed to raise funds from their member institutions to cover basic organizing costs, the local organizations had never actually succeeded in doing so. According to COF financial records, most of the salaries of local organizers came from the foundation grants raised and distributed centrally by the COF. Although organizers set as their goal to raise 30 percent of the organizational budget from member dues, they rarely, if ever, met this goal.

Meanwhile, although COF groups could mobilize impressive numbers to big actions, my observations of COF activities and interviews of participants seemed to suggest that network organizers struggled to build a group of leaders who could direct the organization. In fact, a number of leaders and organizers reported a tension between national action and local leadership development. National actions were exciting, but they took time away from working with new leaders who were more likely to come forward first around local concerns. COGB organizer Simon Bale admitted, "We sometimes became too heady, like with the banking issue, and didn't always bring local leaders along" (Interview, July 23, 2001).

COF groups did have committed leaders who participated in its various campaigns. Yet, these leaders appeared focused on their own institutions and their own particular campaigns; few led the organization as a whole. Other observers of the COF (e.g., Farnell et al., 1994) have noted the greater influence of staff organizers compared to leaders as well.

The internal weaknesses of COF organizations came to a head in late 1999. The Barrows Cadbury Trust's commitment to long-term financing of the network was about to expire the next year, and local organizations had so far failed to demonstrate they could raise enough funds to continue to operate. COF director Jameson, with the support of the chair of the trust's board, Eric Adams, decided to force the issue. He proposed to COF's own board of trustees that local organizers no longer be paid out of the COF's national grants, but from member dues to local organizations instead. The local organizers rebelled, fearing they would not be able to raise sufficient funds to keep their jobs.

The ensuing crisis led to the withdrawal of the North Wales group from the COF. The group in Liverpool decided to remain in the network, but its main staff organizer resigned and the organization eventually folded. The organization in Bristol also stayed on for a couple of years, but failed to raise enough funds to survive. Tensions between Jameson and the Sheffield group IMPACT eventually led to that group's withdrawal from the network in 2002, although it remained quite active as an independent organization for a time.

Despite these losses, Adams proved able to get the Cadbury Trust to commit five more years of funding to COF so that its organizing could continue. In fact, the COF emerged from this crisis with renewed vigor in London and in Birmingham where its two remaining projects were located. The organizers once again tried to focus on local work, and had some success when they did. The Birmingham group built Young Citizens in the West Midlands, a largely Muslim group led by a young COF organizer, Faraz Yousufzai. The group received public acclaim for its efforts to investigate problems faced by young people in Saltley, a very poor, largely Muslim section of Birmingham. Known as the "People's Enquiry into Saltley," the group's report targeted the interrelated problems of drug

trafficking, poor sanitation services, and school failure, and led to action campaigns by young people to address these concerns (Naqvi, 2002; Young Citizens of the West Midlands, 2003).

The campaign also engaged the broader Muslim community around efforts to exert a measure of leadership and control over the Park View School in Saltley, whose students are largely Muslim. Tahir Alum (Interview, July 11, 2003), the official chairperson of the Saltley Enquiry, expressed the anger that many Muslims felt about the situation in many schools. "We have schools that are one hundred per cent Muslim, but without one Muslim teacher; that's deliberate. . . . Muslims make up twenty-five per cent of Birmingham students, but one year ago, only 3% of school governors were from these communities." As a result of the mobilization around the Saltley campaign, Alum became chair of the school's board of governors and moved to make the school more responsive to its Muslim student body.

Despite the excitement generated by young people in Birmingham, the COF focused its resources largely on London. TELCO itself emerged relatively unscathed from the internal COF difficulties. It continued to work to improve health services at local hospitals, to address housing issues, and to build a base in the growing Muslim community. The COF hired its first Muslim organizer, Nadeem Malik, to help deepen its capacity to reach out to the Islamic community. And the network worked hard to strengthen its ties to Muslims on the national level, collaborating with the Islamic Foundation of Britain and other associations.

TELCO also moved to strengthen its local base by expanding membership beyond congregations to include schools. For example, it helped to organize young people at the Norlington Boys School, a public secondary school in Leyton, to pressure the local council to construct play yard facilities at their school. The racially mixed group of teenage boys, half of whom were Muslim, later developed a major campaign against street crime in the neighborhood surrounding the school. The Norlington Enquiry, as it was called, was a great success in drastically reducing muggings, which had been running at the rate of 100 per school term, and the project gained wide publicity (see TELCO, 2000). TELCO's work with Norlington was cited in a government commissioned report as a model for citizenship education in schools (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998). TELCO took up some other local initiatives as well, organizing against long waits at hospitals, for example.

LONDON CITIZENS AND THE LIVING WAGE

However, other forces pulled the network toward national level work. Through the late 1990s, COF organizers had been hearing about the struggles of people to support their families as low-wage service jobs began to dominate the economy in East London. In response, TELCO launched a campaign that would propel the group forward and garner it real national attention. With energetic leadership from a new organizer, Catherine Howarth, the group launched Britain's first living wage campaign in 2001. The COF took the idea from IAF colleagues in the United States. Although American living wage campaigns typically call upon local governments to require their contractors to pay a designated amount as a living wage (Luce, 2004), TELCO first targeted private employers in the Docklands.

Located in the heart of East London, the Docklands emerged in the 1990s as London's new financial center, full of gleaming office buildings and highly paid executives. The

great concentration of global wealth in the Docklands contrasted sharply with the poverty of the surrounding community: the borough of Tower Hamlets has the highest concentration of poverty in the country.¹¹ The global companies hired private contractors who paid their largely minority cleaning, catering, and security staff as low as £4.50 per hour (roughly \$7.50 per hour) with no benefits. TELCO worked to bring these inequities to public light and later to pressure the companies into socially responsible employment policies. It set £6.30 (roughly \$11) as a minimum living wage for East London and publicized research it sponsored (Wills, 2001) showing dramatic gaps between the low pay received by many East London workers and the high cost of living in the area. TELCO held protests outside of the offices of one of the largest Docklands employers, the global headquarters of HSBC bank. The group organized a big march in November 2002 to put pressure on the new citywide London government to take up the issue. Eventually, the group scored major victories in 2004 when Barclays Bank and HSBC agreed to improve pay and benefits for their cleaners.

Meanwhile, national government policy for contracting out services in hospitals and in local governmental authorities had led to private companies paying many cleaning and service staff rock bottom wages. TELCO moved to form an alliance with local branches of the public sector union, UNISON, to launch campaigns to organize these mostly Afro-Caribbean workers and increase their pay. UNISON was already working on its own campaign to raise Britain's minimum wage from £4.10 to £6 per hour (UNISON, 2002). Seven local UNISON branches joined TELCO and together they pressured the National Health Service trust boards responsible for local hospitals to address low pay (Wills, 2004).

The living wage campaign brought new energy into TELCO as union branch leaders became excited about the potential of TELCO to be a vehicle for trade union activism after so many years of passive alliance with the Labour Party government. According to Charlotte Munroe of the Waltham Forest health branch of UNISON (Interview, September 19, 2001), "There is a huge will for this, when people take up politics in a real way. We have a right to have a say in decisions that affect us, and we're getting that again through this alliance."

The living wage campaign once again brought the COF to national attention (Lawson, 2006). Yet some participants worried that the resources it required for these intense action campaigns took attention away from efforts to sink deeper roots in COF member institutions and develop stronger leadership. TELCO leader Angus Ritchie admitted, "We know we need to reinvigorate leadership at the borough level, but that hasn't really happened. We've focused on national action instead" (Interview, July 15, 2003).

As the living wage campaign began to achieve some victories, Jameson moved to expand the network to the rest of London under the name London Citizens. Committees formed in North, South, and West London. The South London Citizens group was the first to establish itself formally with 23 institutions in membership by 2004, followed by West London Citizens in 2005. South London Citizens took up the living wage campaign and also began organizing around a variety of neighborhood issues, including housing and young people's concerns. Responding to the concerns of immigrants about their treatment by government agencies, the group launched an inquiry into the operations of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, which happened to be located in the South London borough of Croydon, once again moving quickly to a national-level issue.

London Citizens put itself on the political map with a London-wide assembly on May 4, 2004, attended by 2,000 supporters. The organization got all the mayoral candidates

for the upcoming election to come to the meeting, where it presented them with its agenda for action (Jamoul, 2005). No other community organization held anything like that size of a meeting during the campaign. After Ken Livingston was reelected mayor that year, he agreed to set up a Living Wage Unit to establish a minimum pay scale that all contractors for the Greater London Authority, the citywide governmental body he ran as mayor, would be required to pay (Waugh and Prynne, 2004).

The COF was now used to launching high visibility, nationally significant campaigns. London Citizens struck gold again when it won economic guarantees for East London in the city's 2012 Olympics bid (Lydall, 2004). By 2007, the COF had expanded its national-level immigration work and established a "Strangers into Citizens" campaign to create pathways to legal status for undocumented migrants.

The COF appears to excel in its ability to get out ahead and take advantage of issue opportunities, like financial exclusion, living wage, and London Olympics, at times when few other organizations seem prepared to act. The network marshals its forces and works effectively with powerful elites. All the campaigns resulted in important gains for poor and working class families. Yet the network continues to struggle with establishing a firm foundation. Local organizations continue to have difficulty raising sufficient funds from member institutions. According to organizational records, TELCO, the strongest group, raises only about £25,000 (about \$40,000) a year from dues, not enough to pay the costs of a single organizer. Perhaps even more importantly, the network struggles with cultivating a wide and deep leadership base, the most outstanding hallmark of faith-based community organizing in the United States. Research on American community organizing (e.g., Warren, 2001) has shown that community leaders typically get involved first in neighborhood issues. If organizations do not focus sufficiently at that level, they tend to be staff-dominated.

Observations and interviews conducted for this study uncovered a relative handful of leaders who could speak authoritatively about the organization's work overall, its strategy and plans. Leaders are certainly consulted on these issues, but they remain most knowledgeable about their own institutions or a particular issue. Only staff organizers and a very small number of leaders appear ready to speak authoritatively about the organization as a whole. As noted above, other studies (e.g., Farnell et al., 1994) have also commented on the apparent staff-driven nature of the network.

IAF organizers admit this weakness. According to Catherine Howarth, "our best people are the institutional leaders, but they aren't involved in day-to-day decision-making" (Interview, July 10, 2003). COF director Jameson argues, "Ownership of the organization by leaders is higher after seven years. But we still can't point to primary leaders like the IAF in the U.S. That speaks to us as organizers, but also our institutions are weak" (Interview, July 15, 2003).

EXPLAINING THE COF PATTERN: FAITH-BASED SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN BRITAIN

If we look back over the 15 years of COF organizing, we see a twin dynamic. The network has built itself into a national political force at the same time as it struggles to establish firm local foundations. The COF touched a nerve within faith communities and among those concerned with poverty and racism in Britain. The network expanded rapidly,

becoming a national political force rather quickly. Its weak local roots caused a retraction in the late 1990s as many of the local projects withdrew. Yet the network moved forward again, this time mainly in London, with an exciting and innovative living wage campaign, and made some progress in bringing Muslims, Christians, and more secular-oriented unionists together for concerted action. The COF achieved national recognition twice again with the Olympics contract and its immigration work. Yet it continues to struggle with establishing firm local roots in terms of raising member dues and developing strong leadership.

While a comparison to the experience of community organizing in the United States must be done cautiously, it can be very revealing because the British dynamic is exactly the opposite of the experience of community organizing in the United States. During a similar period, that is, in the fifteen years starting in the late 1980s, the number of American community organizing groups expanded rapidly. From roughly 38 groups in 1989, the field grew to about 135 organizations in 1999 (Warren and Wood, 2001), while one estimate put the number at 175 in 2004.¹² The IAF itself grew rapidly as well, from about 20 to 60 affiliates (Warren, 2001). Of course, community organizing had a much longer history and stronger infrastructure upon which to build in the United States. Yet the contrast is striking, all the more so because American community organizing has remained a relentlessly local phenomenon where it has a reputation for developing strong local leaders (Warren, 2001) and raising regular dues from member institutions (Warren and Wood, 2001). Only very recently have the PICO and Gamaliel networks even begun to experiment with national level campaigns. Meanwhile, groups in the IAF network have never worked together on a national level issue campaign. Despite its strong local foundations, with rare exception has the American faith-based organizing field received national attention or acted as a national political force.¹³

How might we account for the national prominence of community organizing in Britain, at the same time as we consider its comparatively weak local roots? To help explain the weakness of local roots, I examine first the state of religious participation in Britain, that is, the faith-based social capital resources available to community organizing. I then consider the institutional context of British politics to help explain the field's national reach.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN BRITAIN

At first blush, we might expect to explain entirely the weak local roots of COF efforts by the weakness of faith-based social capital in Britain as a whole. Organized religion among white British people has suffered dramatic declines in participation during the twentieth century, especially from the 1970s to the present, so that today as few as 9 percent of identified Anglicans report they attend church on a weekly basis. That figure compares to the roughly 40 percent or so of Americans who report they attend weekly.¹⁴ A higher percentage of British Catholics attend church. Of the 4.2 million Catholics in England and Wales, about 1 million attended church regularly in 1999—an attendance rate of about 25 percent. However, that number has declined steadily from the nearly 1.4 million recorded in 1989. Meanwhile the number of serving diocesan priests has fallen significantly.¹⁵ A recent estimate claims that as few as 7.5 percent of all adult English people attend church regularly and most of these are older people (Bruce, 2001).

However, members of ethnic minority groups in Britain, where COF organizers place a significant emphasis, do attend religious services at high rates. Sixty-two percent of Muslims and 57 percent of Black Pentecostals report attendance on a weekly basis. Meanwhile, 27 percent of Hindus and 39 percent of Sikhs attend weekly, while another 24 percent and 32 percent, respectively, attend more than once a month (Modood, 1997). The 2001 census of Great Britain revealed a large and growing population of religiously identified ethnic minorities: a total of 810,000 black Christians with another 347,000 Christians of mixed ethnic background, 658,000 Pakistani and 301,000 Bangladeshi Muslims, with 467,000 Indian Hindus and 301,000 Indian Sikhs. Although ethnic minorities (including mixed race people) still make up only 8 percent of the total British population, they constitute a significant proportion of urban dwellers. Ethnic minorities are heavily concentrated in certain urban areas, with half of Caribbeans and Bangladeshis living in greater London (Modood, 1997). Recent estimates place the proportion of Londoners who are nonwhite as high as 27 percent (Greater London Authority, 2002), with very high concentrations in the poorest boroughs like Tower Hamlets in East London.

The United Kingdom, then, does contain significant faith-based social capital resources, at least in ethnic minority communities where community organizing often focuses. To more fully understand the COF experience, then, we must examine institutional roles and religious traditions to see how likely various racial and faith communities are to participate in the democratic life of a country via community organizing (Warren, 2001, chapter 7). I will examine the major religious groups in turn.

Church of England

As the established church, the Church of England has always had a formal public role in British society and politics. In fact, the House of Lords still reserves a bench for 26 Anglican bishops. Historically, the Church of England allied itself with the establishment, in particular the Conservative Party; and there was a strong correlation between Anglican Church attendance and Conservative voting (Medhurst, 1999). At the local level, there were alternative Anglican and especially nonconformist church efforts to participate in urban community organizations and the trade unions through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bebbington, 1982; Machin, 1998). But as an establishment institution, the Anglican Church only began to move in a more progressive direction after the second world war, as the ranks of clergy and bishops opened up to lower middle class and even working class people. Meanwhile, the failures of the churches in Europe to respond adequately to fascism and world war pushed many clergy to take a more critical stance toward structures of social, economic, and political power (Kent, 1993). Since 1970, with the change to the synod system, the Church of England has also become more open to participation from and shared decision-making with the laity. All of these trends contributed to the Archbishop of Canterbury's *Faith in the City* declaration (Church of England, 1985), and the openness of many Anglican priests to participate in COF groups. Even if there is some tension between American style community organizing and Anglican traditions (Furbey et al., 1997), the Church of England has an orientation to public engagement and a faith tradition that can support progressive democratic action.

Anglican pews, however, are relatively empty. Many parishes involved with the COF report weekly attendance in the region of 40 parishioners. Moreover, attendees tend to be older, and their attention is often focused on the preservation of historic church buildings. The strategy of community organizing is premised upon the idea that indigenous

community leaders, potential movers and shakers, can be found in church pews. But, however motivated an Anglican pastor might be to join the COF, the parish cannot supply many of such leaders.

Catholic Church

Historically, the Catholic Church in Britain was a persecuted church. Identified with a minority religion and with the subjugated Irish, it had a defensive character up until recently. For example, the Catholic Church concentrated in the 1960s and 1970s on building its own schools and attaining greater government funding for them (Hornsby-Smith, 1989). During the same period, Catholic Action developed into an important social justice effort that mobilized Catholics around educational concerns, but also against abortion.

Since the 1970s, Catholics have become more like the rest of the British socioeconomically, and they have often moved out from inner city ghettos to working class suburbs. The Catholic Church in Britain is now diverse ethnically and racially: about half of its parishioners are people of Irish descent, most of the rest English, but with a significant Caribbean and growing African presence as well, perhaps numbering 100,000 (Hornsby-Smith, 1989). Many priests began to draw upon Catholic Social Thought and became excited about Liberation Theology as it emerged from Latin America. Looking to the church's tradition of standing up for the persecuted, many Catholic priests were ready for community organizing in the 1990s. Indeed, it would be fair to say that Catholics came to supply the largest base for religious participation in the COF. Nevertheless, the church has struggled with a declining and aging membership and a severe shortage of priests. Several priests involved in COF complained to this author that they spend so much time performing funerals that they are left with little opportunity for community organizing.¹⁶

The Black Church

When Caribbean immigrants first came to Britain in large numbers in the 1950s, most joined the Church of England. However, racial hostility, insensitivity, or simple indifference by the English to their plight led many to leave. In addition, many black Christians disliked the Anglican worship style in England (MacRobert, 1989).

Consequently, independent black churches, mostly Pentecostal, began to form. These came to be called Black Majority Churches (sometimes Black-led Churches or Black Churches), and include such denominations as the Seventh Day Adventists, New Testament Church of God, and the Church of God of Prophecy. A quarter of Christian Caribbeans belong to these churches (Modood, 1997). They constitute some of the fastest growing churches in England, with young people prominent in attendance; fully one third of young black Christians belong to one of these churches. Some are under the denominational control of majority white Pentecostal groups from the United States, while others broke free from that control or became connected to Black religious networks in the United States or the Caribbean.

Although strong and active internally, Black Majority Churches have remained largely uninvolved in politics. In part, some may have shunned politics because of directives from their intensely other-worldly American leaders (MacRobert, 1989). At the same time, these churches are relatively young and perhaps fear entering a world of politics that

is hostile to religious intervention. Of course, Britain never had the kind of civil rights movement that oriented American black churches toward political engagement. Nevertheless, recent trends have moved some black religious leaders toward greater political involvement of a race-based type. In particular, the racially motivated killing of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, and the subsequent police indifference and neglect, led to new initiatives for black church action against racism. In February of 1999, a number of Black Majority Churches formed a coalition called the Black Churches Civic Forum to provide a platform for social action, civic participation, and political education (Motune, 1999; Muir, 1999).

The COF has tried to engage these churches in interfaith and interracial political action along community organizing lines, but it has had only modest success. Bishop Eric Brown of the New Testament Church of God in North London chairs London Citizens. He argues for the importance of Black Church engagement in British democracy through interfaith and multiracial venues like community organizing. However, in his view (Interview, March 15, 2000), "The whole concept of broad-based organizing is new and novel. It's not part of our cultural tradition. We've had problems getting people to understand it. . . . But I remain hopeful, although level-headed, that it will take off."

Muslims

The Muslim community in Britain is very diverse with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis representing the largest groups. Muslims have the highest rate of religious attendance of any group in Britain with fully 62 percent reporting attendance at weekly services (Modood, 1997). While Anglican churches remain empty on Sunday, many mosques are packed on Friday. The East London Mosque involved in TELCO fills its hall with over 3,000 worshipers on a typical Friday. Mosques in Britain have evolved into centers of community life for new immigrants in what they often perceive as a hostile country. The East London Mosque campaigned for land, for example, so that it could expand the wide variety of community services, study groups, and action programs it seeks to offer.

Islam contains a tradition rooted in *Zakat*, one of the five pillars of Islam, which calls people of faith to act for social justice. The Qur'an itself contains many injunctions to care for the poor, the hungry, and the downtrodden. However, the translation of that tradition to political life in Britain has only just begun; more recently, it has been caught up in debates about Islamic extremism.¹⁷ Muslim organizers in COF have worked hard to connect Islamic traditions to political engagement through broad-based organizing. Nadeem Malik, the COF's first Muslim organizer, wrote a series of papers articulating a vision for Muslim participation in British civil society. Quoting the Qur'an, he argues:

. . . Muslims need to be at the forefront of change. They need to work together with others to effect change, thus empowering themselves and others through that process. The Qur'an exhorts believers to stand up for justice, even if it be against their own kin. Furthermore it asks people, especially people of faith, to come to common grounds and work for good causes. The example of the Prophet Joseph (pbuh) shows how he took up a place in a non-Muslim government because in that was scope for him to promote good and prevent harm. This notion of promoting good and preventing harm is a central idea in the Qur'an. Many Muslim scholars would say that it is the earthly purpose of the Muslim community. (Malik, 2000, p. 7)

Muslim communities, though, remain largely insular, oriented to protecting themselves against a hostile environment. In the aftermath of the September 11th attacks and the London bombings in 2005, the Muslim community has entered an even more defensive mode (Abbas, 2005). According to Jill Rutter (Interview, July 9, 2003), a faculty member at London Metropolitan University who has worked with TELCO, Bangladeshis had a strong political tradition oriented to politics in their home country. "Today politicized Muslim students debate Islamic extremism, not the living wage." Yet in Birmingham organizer Faraz Yousufzai's experience (Interview, July 11, 2003), "It's only a tiny minority who focus on extremism and the literal principles of the Koran. Most people are living day to day and are concerned about concrete activities that improve their lives."

In this difficult context, the COF has built strong relationships with outward-looking Islamic groups at the national level, such as the Islamic Foundation and the Muslim Council of Britain. However, it has found that engaging the Muslim community at the local level represents a tougher challenge. Despite important inroads, the network faces a long, uphill struggle. Yousufzai (Interview July 11, 2003) argues, "Muslims have only just woken up to the reality of living here in Britain and gotten focused on local, British politics. If you don't feel you're accepted as a British citizen, you need a way to prove it, like through broad-based organizing. But older people are hesitant to work in what they see as a predominantly Christian organization. I'm having success as a Muslim organizer with many young people."

Hindus and Sikhs

Although Hindus worship at relatively high rates for Britain, they are not required to worship communally. Temples serve mainly as places for festivals and celebrations; they typically are not like Christian congregations or mosques in offering institutional resources for community care and social action. This makes them much more difficult to organize. A few Hindu organizations do participate in COF groups, and they especially did so in Bristol. Sikhs do worship communally, in Gurdawaras, of which there are nearly 200 in Britain, and a few have joined the COF. Traditionally, though, Asians in Britain have not engaged in political action through their religious organizations. An audit of religious organizations in the London borough of Newham, for example, found that Afro-Caribbeans establish many religious institutions and few secular community service organizations and centers; Asians do the reverse (Smith, unpublished data).

POLITICAL CONTEXT

It turns out, then, that the most likely religious candidates for engagement in political action through community organizing in Britain are Anglican and Catholic, but their parishes are weak. The stronger faith institutions of ethnic minority communities, though, are less ready to embrace such a role. This arrangement helps explain the weak local roots of the COF; but what explains its national reach? Community organizing in Britain, as noted above, faced a relatively open field that helped attract national attention to its campaigns, as few other groups were taking much initiative. Nevertheless, we still need to explain the choices made by the COF to undertake campaigns with more national, rather than local, targets. This orientation can best be explained by the nature of British political institutions.

Perhaps the most important factor, at least for explaining both the national prominence of the COF and its relatively weak local roots, is the centralization of political power in the British system (Hollingsworth and Hanneman, 1983). The national government controls the lion's share of taxation and spending in Britain. The power of local governmental authorities is limited as they act within spending limits set centrally. Although the New Labour government attempted to reform and strengthen local government in its provision of services (Stoker, 2004), the most important decisions in education, health, policing, and economic policy continue to be made at the national level.

In the United States, community organizing groups can target local power-holders and make real gains for their communities. I have argued elsewhere (Warren, 2001) that the unusual success of community organizing in cultivating broad participation rests, in an important way, in its ability to provide people with a viable form of *local* politics. It may be that many people, especially those without a lot of education or other resources, need to begin their participation in civic life and develop their democratic skills around immediate issues at the local level. It is here that the face-to-face relationships so central to social capital can best be built (Warren, 2001; Whitman, 2006). Meanwhile, advocacy groups in the United States that operate mainly at the national level tend to have weak local participation (Skocpol, 2003).

In the United Kingdom, local demands are viable to some extent, but quickly lose their force when any significant change in policy, or sizeable amount of funding, is required. Consequently, the COF historically moved rather quickly to engaging national political institutions, rather than local ones. Perhaps in recognition of this problem, the COF has struggled hard to focus on local targets in its living wage campaign. Still, corporate offices located in East London are part of global companies and local health authorities that contract out low-paid hospital jobs ultimately fall under national control.

Although this analysis has emphasized structural explanations for the COF experience, it is certainly possible to argue that COF organizers made strategic choices that reinforced the dynamic. They failed to prioritize fund-raising from member churches at the local level, relying instead on national level funds raised by the central office. Organizers kept too big a role for themselves, failing to build a strong enough corps of local leaders who could take responsibility for directing local organizations. And they perhaps too quickly moved to undertake national-level campaigns before a firm local base was established. Yet most of these choices had their roots in the institutional conditions organizers faced: weak churches with few strong leaders in a polity dominated by national government. Conversely, American community organizers like those in the IAF have chosen to prioritize local work (Warren, 2001). Only a few have even attempted national action, with those efforts very late in coming (Wood, 2007). Critics of localism argue that national organizing is necessary to adequately address the social and economic forces shaping localities (e.g., DeFillippis, Fisher, and Shragge, 2006; Wood, 2007). Nevertheless, as long as organizing groups continue to find that real improvements can be made at the local level, they retain their local focus.

Of course, some other factors might contribute to explaining the contrasting experience of community organizing in Britain versus the United States. Britain is a much smaller country geographically, and so national action is perhaps easier to organize than in the United States. Moreover, once the COF had a base in London, the country's political and financial capital, it could access national-level power brokers located in the network's vicinity. In Britain, a smaller political force can gain national attention more

easily and have a national impact. Nevertheless, I think it likely that if the United States political system was as centralized as Britain's, the IAF network would be much more likely to find some way to unite the efforts of its now nearly 60 local affiliates across the country to undertake national action.

THE NEXUS OF GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION

One final institutional factor poses some particular challenges for community organizing in Britain: the intertwining of state and religion. One of the hallmarks of American community organizing is its independence from government funding. IAF groups, for example, refuse to accept any government funds in order to assure their political independence (Chambers and Cowan, 2003). Their member congregations are also largely independent of government funding (Warren and Wood, 2001). Scholars have long argued that the financial independence of churches allows them to be advocates for social justice and other causes, as they were in the civil rights movement (Morris, 1984). In fact, there were concerns at the time that the Bush administration's faith-based initiative may limit the political role of churches, although one analysis (Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz, 2004) suggests these fears were not justified. In Britain, the state historically funded Anglican institutions and more recently has funded a variety of religious schools. Britain has a much smaller nonprofit charitable sector than the United States and it is not unusual for a church to get government funds to build a community center, for example.

Meanwhile, the New Labour government of Tony Blair has moved to support religious institutions financially in a variety of ways. After its election in 1997, the Blair government emphasized collaboration with community organizations in new programs like the New Deal for Communities, Education Action Zones, and Single Regeneration Budgets. New Labour has made a "turn to community" (Foley, 1999), which involves encouragement of community and faith participation as partners with government in these new programs (Miller, 2001; Smith, 2002).¹⁸

COF organizers fear that the independent political stance of faith institutions and community organizations can be jeopardized as they become dependent on government funding. According to Kirk Noden, a COF organizer in Birmingham:

It ranges from the city councilor giving the local Vicar £10,000 [about \$17,000] for new chairs for the meeting hall to funding programs at £200,000 [about \$340,000] a year. It is incredibly corrupting and worrying that even the Catholic churches which have traditionally been on the outside of government are beginning to look seriously at how they can access government money to fix the church hall. It is what I imagine George Bush dreams of when he purports his faith based initiatives and I find little that is positive about it.¹⁹

The historical connections between the British establishment and the Anglican Church have made progressive political activists in Britain suspicious of any explicit political role for religion. In fact, the political culture of activists on Britain's Left, those who would otherwise be supportive of grassroots organizing efforts, is intensely secular. There is much suspicion of political interventions by Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Afro-Caribbean Christian religious communities. In the United States, where the constitution separates

church and state, religious intervention in public life is more accepted. Its legitimate bounds are often contested, but social justice activists tend to appreciate the role that faith-based actors have played in the civil rights movement and other progressive causes (Smith, 1996). Community organizing groups, with their emphasis on bread and butter issues like jobs, housing, and health care, have seldom faced much hostility for their political activity.²⁰

DISCUSSION

A comparison between the experience of the COF and American community organizing confirms the importance of faith-based social capital as a resource for the development of organizing and perhaps democratic engagement more broadly (Foley, McCarthy, and Chaves, 2001; Warren, 2001; Warren, Saegert, and Thompson, 2001; Wood, 2002). Social capital, however, is only part of the story. A fuller theory of community organizing needs to appreciate the political orientations of faith-based institutions and the institutional structure in which it operates, as well as the nexus between the two.

We have seen that the political orientation of British religious institutions matters greatly, that is, their willingness to undertake political action for social justice. This finding connects to recent research on the role of American congregations in the incorporation of new immigrants to the United States. Foley and Hoge (2007) recognize the importance of the social capital resources in immigrant congregations, but find that the orientation of congregational leaders toward civic engagement is also important. The more politically oriented the leaders, the more civically active are immigrants in the congregation. Moreover, strong religious communities with politically oriented leaders may decide to engage in quite partisan and noninclusive forms of politics, as those affiliated with the Religious Right in the United States have chosen to do (Ammerman, 1990; Wilcox, 2006).

In addition, the structure of a country's political institutions sets an important context for the opportunities faced by politically engaged faith institutions. Scholars of social movements have long emphasized both resource mobilization and political opportunity structures for explaining movement growth and decline (McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984; Tarrow, 1998). But scholars of faith-based community organizing have been slow to analyze opportunity structures. There has been some very recent and partial appreciation of these issues. Swarts (2007) showed the value of considering political opportunities to understand the national work of the *secular* (not faith-based) ACORN network. Wood (2007) examines the political context that has encouraged the faith-based PICO network to experiment with national-level work, but his focus is on how the network built internal strategic capacity. This study has shown the value of comparatively oriented research to reveal the role of institutional structures in understanding the development of community organizing.

A stronger institutional approach can also provide a better understanding of the conditions under which social capital strengthens democracy. Critiquing the notion that social capital simply "bubbles up" from below, more institutional oriented scholars have argued that the state plays a role in fostering or inhibiting the growth of social capital (Maloney, Smith, and Stoker, 2000; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson, 2000; Szreter, 2002). This comparative study has been concerned not so much with the role of the state in building social capital, but rather the role that institutional structure plays in shaping the possibility for

the engagement of social capital in building democratic participation. Understanding community organizing, and by implication the political engagement of faith-based social capital, requires close attention to the interface between faith and political institutions.

CONCLUSION

As a new experiment, the COF has made some important contributions toward the creation of a socially just and inclusive civil society for an increasingly multicultural Britain. It has offered a vehicle to combat social exclusion for poor and minority communities and it has offered British people more broadly the opportunity for strong and active forms of democratic life, in contrast to the passivity fostered by the centralized power of the “nanny state” and global corporations. Its energy and creativity, as demonstrated by the living wage and Olympics campaigns, breathe fresh air into a passive polity increasingly dominated by central government. Moreover, the COF works hard to bring together Christians and Muslims, black and white, the old English and the new immigrants, a task that will only increase in importance as Britain, like many Western countries, continues to grow as a multicultural society (Putnam, 2007). Yet the COF faces tough challenges. Despite achieving national attention and a degree of national influence, it has yet to prove that community organizing can sink wide and deep roots in Britain.

Since it uses a faith-based strategy, the COF’s greatest potential base lies in the rich network of vibrant religious communities found among Britain’s racial and ethnic minorities. However, community organizing faces the challenge of finding a strategy to engage those communities effectively in the context of the centralized political institutions of British society, in the face of racism and religious hostility, and in competition with isolationist or more radical Islamic alternatives.

British minority communities are indeed experimenting with new forms of political engagement (Shukra et al., 2004). In fact, the COF can be seen as an important part of the rise of a “new” civil society sector, populated both by faith-based and secular actors, that seeks to connect people to each other and to political action, in ethnic minority communities, among young people, and in other venues as well (Milner, 2003). These experiments are happening in the United States and in countries around the world (e.g., Fung and Wright, 2003). Our understanding of this phenomenon can only increase as scholars study and compare experiences not just across sectors in one country, but across countries as well.

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Notes

¹ Although there are no scholarly studies on these efforts, some information can be gained from other sources. On Germany, see Cromwell (2005) and the website of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) at www.industrialareasfoundation.org; on Canada see the IAF website; on South Africa, see the website of the Gamaliel Foundation at <http://www.gamaliel.org>; on Central America see the website of the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing at <http://www.piconetwork.org>.

² The Labour Party had 1.1 million members in 1945 and only 304,000 in 1994. Of those who remain members, few appear to directly participate in the party (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992, 2002). Studies of participation in local Labour Party branches show it is now quite small (Smith, 1998).

³ Ethnic minorities did acquire some political representation in local governmental authorities where they were heavily concentrated, generally through secular based campaigns in the Labour Party, for example, in Birmingham, and eventually won a few seats in Parliament (Shukra, 1998).

⁴ For insider accounts of the IAF, see Cortes (1993) and Gecan (2002), as well as the above cited Chambers and Cowan (2003). A few studies (Orr, 2007; Smock, 2004; Swarts, 2007) consider both secular organizing groups and faith-based ones.

⁵ The ACORN network is the only American community organizing network to operate consistently at the national level (Swarts, 2007), but it is not part of the faith-based phenomenon.

⁶ I did compare Black Protestant, Latino Catholic, and selected white Protestant denominations who participate within the Texas IAF network to assess differences in levels of participation (Warren, 2001, chapter 7). However, these were all denominations that had a history of and orientation toward progressive political engagement in American society. The religious institutions had to be mobilized, but each had a tradition of engagement upon which to draw.

⁷ For a partial exception to this claim, see Skerry (1993).

⁸ Interviews were conducted with 11 organizers, 29 leaders, 2 allies of COF, and 12 independent and knowledgeable observers.

⁹ The group was originally called Congregations Organised for Greater Bristol, but later changed its name to reflect its broader, non-Christian, membership.

¹⁰ For a more extensive account of the early years of COGB, see Knight (1991); for a discussion of some of the tensions surrounding the organization, see Farnell, Lund, Furbey, Lawless, and Wishart (1994).

¹¹ Using multiple indexes, Tower Hamlets was the most deprived local authority in the country. Two other East London authorities, Hackney and Newham, ranked second and third, respectively (Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions, 2000).

¹² The 2004 estimate comes from Interfaith Funders, a New York based foundation that provides funding to many of the groups in the field.

¹³ Several local or state-level initiatives have received some national recognition: East Brooklyn Congregations piloted a Nehemiah Homes affordable housing initiative that became the model for federal legislation; BUILD in Baltimore helped launch the first living wage campaign; and the Texas IAF network has received attention for its Alliance Schools education reform project. Recently the PICO network, which has been active at the state level in California, has tried to influence Congress around rebuilding efforts in New Orleans and children's health care (Whitman, 2006; Wood, 2007). None of the networks, however, yet operates as a national political force.

¹⁴ As noted above, actual attendance is likely to be less than reported attendance. But I am comparing reported attendance in both countries.

¹⁵ These figures come from the Catholic Church, which has been regularly collecting membership and attendance statistics since 1989, as reported in Gledhill (1999).

¹⁶ I have not addressed the role of white evangelicals in Britain. They too have some resources to draw upon. For example, politically oriented evangelicals in the Lausanne movement held an influential conference in Britain in 1974. Yet, according to Greg Smith (Interview, August 3, 1999), an important participant and observer of socialist evangelicals, these traditions simply have not been actualized in the vast majority of the evangelical movement.

¹⁷ Although Muslim extremism dominates the discussion about Islamic politics, there is a significant variety of more liberal and progressive thinking in Islam; see, for example, Kruzman (1998) and Safi (2003).

¹⁸ COF organizations themselves have taken government funds in the form of Lottery grants, although there appears to be no direct evidence that this practice has limited their independence.

¹⁹ Noden, personal communication. Local governmental authorities have also moved to increase consultation and participation with the public in decision-making (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker, 2001a; Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker, 2001b), but it's less clear if they have become any more responsive to organized pressure from independent groups like the COF.

²⁰ Although political opponents of some American faith-based community organizing groups have sometimes charged that participation in these efforts is inappropriate for a religious institution, no case study of any of these groups has reported hostility to religious engagements.

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