Losing the Faith: How a Child Abuse Scandal in the Catholic Church Affected Ceremonies and Rituals of Churchgoers in Philadelphia

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Organizational research on scandals has overlooked the internal dynamics of a scandalized organization and focused on aggregate reactions of external constituents. To address this, we theorize that scandals lead to a decline in membership at those units within the organization that are directly implicated. We then propose that scandals affect organizational members’ involvement in rituals less than in ceremonies. We finally theorize that the effects of a scandal on membership, ceremonies, and rituals depend on the geographic proximity of a focal unit to scandalized units. We test our hypotheses in the context of a child abuse scandal at the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Using yearly church-level data from 1990–2010, we find that an individual church’s direct association with an accused priest led to a decrease in membership and a decrease in more ceremonies than rituals. Further, ritualized behaviors declined at churches surrounded by implicated neighbors. In follow-on analyses, we explore these effects at neighboring United Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches. We then analyze historical public polling data to understand how individuals’ perceptions of this scandal varied as a function of their religious affiliation and involvement. Our study paints a more comprehensive picture of scandals’ effects on organizations.
INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic Church child abuse scandal represents one of the most visible instances of systemic organizational wrongdoing of the last century. It occurred in what some consider to be “the largest and most influential nongovernment organization in the U.S.” (Bloomberg Businessweek, 2002: 36). Whereas researchers have begun investigating the effects of this scandal and related transgressions (Hungerman, 2013; Bottan & Perez-Truglia, 2015; Piazza & Jourdan, 2018), a more in-depth investigation is required to understand the dynamics of this scandal in particular, and how it informs research on organizational consequences of scandals more broadly. This is partly because organizational scholars have traditionally focused on the impact of misconduct as opposed to scandals (Piazza & Jourdan, 2018), and only recently have begun to directly investigate the effects of scandals, defined as the “disruptive publicity of transgression” (Adut, 2005: 219). These studies systematically associate scandals with lower support and decreased involvement from various organizational constituents (Graffin et al., 2013; Jonsson, Greve, & Fujiwara-Greve, 2009; Pontikes, Negro, & Rao, 2010).

While instrumental in forming our understanding of the effects of scandals, this research faces three limitations. First, studies on scandalized organizations have treated the inner workings of those organizations as a black box. However, there is typically variance across organizational units in terms of the degree of their implication in a scandal. As a result, a scandal may affect individual units within the organization differently. Second, as Yenkey (2018) recently noted, current organizational research on scandals has tended to focus on aggregate reactions by constituents, but there is value for organizational scholarship in disaggregating behaviors. Further, this research has largely focused on reactions of external constituents, such as investors and the media, and has paid less attention to how a scandal affects different behaviors by organizational members, whose engagement with an organization is vital for its survival.
(Piazza & Jourdan, 2018). Third, organizational researchers have not considered the role of geography in how a scandal unfolds. Yet, in settings where members engage with an organization at physical locations, geographic proximity between organizational units may alter the impact of a scandal: the extent of neighbors’ association with the scandal may affect member behaviors at a focal unit.

We address these limitations by developing theoretical arguments that paint a richer picture of the organizational consequences of scandals. We propose, as a baseline, that an individual organizational unit’s direct association with a scandal will result in higher membership loss. We then theorize that different types of member behavior are influenced by a scandal in different ways and specifically explore the distinction between organizational ceremonies and organizational rituals (Fine, 1984; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Trice, Belasco, & Alutto, 1969). Both ceremonies and rituals are essential for the maintenance of social order in organizations (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010), yet they differ in substantial ways. Whereas ceremonies are elaborately planned and dramatically performed activities organized around a discrete occasion (Dion, 1996; Trice & Beyer, 1984), rituals are routinized commonplace activities that help build a sense of belonging and shared reality within organizations (Kane & Park, 2009). Due to these differences, an organizational unit’s direct association with a scandal may affect member engagement in rituals less than ceremonies. Yet rituals may not be immune to decline. When a scandal is widespread, implicating not only the focal organization but also its neighbors, members may begin to withdraw even from ritualized behaviors.

We test our hypotheses in the context of churchgoer reactions to a child sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This context allows us to directly address the three limitations of prior work in this domain. First, recent research has begun to explore the impact of the scandal on Catholic membership at aggregate levels (Hungerman, 2013; Bottan &
Perez-Truglia, 2015; Piazza & Jourdan, 2018). Yet individual churches varied in the extent of their association to the scandal depending on their employment of specific publicly accused priests.1 An extensive grand jury report published in 2005 made public for the first time information about dozens of accusations against local priests, including detailed records of their professional assignments to specific Catholic churches during their careers. When a priest was first publicly accused of abuse, the churches where he had worked became more directly associated with the scandal than churches where he had never worked. Second, churchgoers engage with their local churches through a variety of behaviors. Qualitative evidence suggests that churchgoers’ reactions to the scandal varied: some viewed the scandal as a “crisis of faith,” others remained loyal and assisted in the Church’s renewal (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, & Scully, 2010). These differing responses might have affected member engagement in ceremonies (e.g., baptisms, marriages, and funerals) and rituals (e.g., weekly mass attendance, monetary contributions, and youth programs attendance) in different ways. Third, churchgoers engage with churches at physical locations. This means that the news about a direct association of a focal church’s neighbors with an accused priest had the potential to affect member reactions as a function of their geographic proximity. Thus, geography may also influence the consequences of the scandal for individual churches.

Combining these three sources of variance—an individual church’s direct association with transgressors, members’ engagement in ceremonies and rituals, and geographic proximity to other associated churches—allows us to look inside the organization and assess how a scandal affects different units within the organization and different types of member behavior at those units. By focusing on the geographic region around Philadelphia, we are also able to conduct

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1 We use the term “church” to refer to the physical building where a churchgoer visits to worship. The term “Catholic Church” refers to the religious denomination rather than a specific place.
what we believe is the first study that explores the effects of this scandal on churchgoer engagement at individual churches, arguably the most important organizational unit in organized religion.

Using longitudinal church-level measures, we found evidence that Catholic churches associated with priests who were publicly accused of sexual misconduct were more likely to experience a subsequent decline in membership. A direct association with a scandal negatively affected more ceremonies than rituals. We also document that the closer a church was to implicated neighbors, the larger the decline in ritualized behaviors.

Given our findings of the scandal’s effects within the Catholic Church—and building on research that has documented that scandals spill over to non-implicated organizations—in follow-on analyses we examined how this scandal affected membership, ceremonies, and rituals in neighboring non-Catholic churches. We found that United Methodist churches experienced a relative decline in membership and baptisms if they neighbored Catholic churches associated with accused priests. Nearby Lutheran churches, on the other hand, did not experience a meaningful change in attendance. And, surprisingly, Episcopal churches that were neighbors with associated Catholic churches had a relative increase in monetary pledges. The latter finding highlights that geographic proximity to a scandal may not always result in negative spillovers, akin to those found in prior work (Barnett & King, 2008; Jonsson et al., 2009; Pontikes et al., 2010), but instead may be beneficial for some organizations, as recent research demonstrates (e.g., Piazza & Jourdan, 2018).

Finally, to more directly assess individual-level perceptions of the scandal that resulted in the dynamics we document in this study, we complement our church-level analyses with historical polling data from the local area. These data, that the lead investigator shared with us, were the result of a representative public opinion poll that was administered by Temple
University’s Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) in collaboration with The Philadelphia Inquirer immediately following the release of the 2005 grand jury report and at the height of the scandal. It illustrates individual-level differences in how Catholics and non-Catholics with varying frequencies of church attendance perceived the Catholic Church, the leadership of the Philadelphia Archdiocese, and the media’s handling of the scandal.

We conclude the paper by discussing its theoretical and empirical contributions to research on scandals and provide a number of future research avenues.

**ON SCANDALS**

A scandal is the disruptive publicity of a transgression that breaches group or societal norms (Adut, 2005: 219; Piazza & Jourdan, 2018; Sims, 2009). The literature on scandals, rooted largely in sociology, identifies two necessary elements of scandals. First, scandals result from intentional misconduct or transgressions committed—or alleged to have been committed—by social actors (Adut, 2005; Turner, 1974). They are, therefore, preceded by “disgraceful or discreditable” occurrences that may lead to negative reactions from audiences (Marcus & Goodman, 1991: 284; Warren, 2007). When these occurrences become known to the public, such behaviors are difficult to deny as wrongdoing (Adut, 2008; Molotch & Lester, 1974; Warren, 2007); they create “moral disturbances” (Adut, 2008). Compared to related constructs such as organizational wrongdoing, accidents, or disasters (Vaughan, 1999), a defining characteristic of a scandal is that there is little uncertainty surrounding the intentionality of the transgression.

Yet, not all transgressions lead to scandals. The second necessary element of a scandal is publicity. Even if the commitment of a transgression is known to some, only when information about it is collectively acknowledged in the public sphere is a true scandal created (Adut, 2005); in short, “No publicity, no scandal” (Adut, 2008: 19). When violations of social rules and order
are exposed in a public manner, they generate collective negative reactions from audiences. As a consequence, a genuine scandal ensues. As Adut (2005: 244) put it,

> Combining disruptiveness with salience, scandals like Watergate or the Dreyfus affair can galvanize popular passions (Posner, 1999), become central references in the collective consciousness of societies (Birnbaum, 1994; Schudson, 1992), and function as “historical events” transforming social structures (Sewell, 1995).

The inherent publicity, social disruptiveness, and all-encompassing element of a scandal separate it from other, more mundane negative events that can befall an organization.

Because not all organizational wrongdoing is intentional nor receives a large amount of public attention, to understand the effects of scandals on organizations one must investigate disruptive events that contain both elements. Piazza and Jourdan (2018) note, however, that rather than investigating scandals per se, much of the organizational literature has focused on related topics of misconduct or wrongdoing. This research has been instrumental in developing our understanding of negative events in terms of their consequences for the culpable organization (Greve, Palmer, & Pozner, 2010). And recent organizational studies have begun to explicitly focus on events that meet the definitional criteria of a “scandal” (e.g., Graffin et al., 2013; Jonsson et al., 2009; Piazza & Jourdan, 2018). The literature appears to have reached an agreement that organizational wrongdoing and scandals are frequently associated with lower support and decreased involvement from organizational constituents (Graffin et al., 2013; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger, & Hubbard, 2016).

While influential in building our understanding of scandals in organizations, this research stream has three limitations. First, it has treated the inner workings of the scandalized organization as a black box. Yet, not all organizational units are equally implicated in a given scandal and the effect of a scandal on units within the organization may vary. Second, prior quantitative work has examined the effects of scandals on coarse-grained behavior proxies by external stakeholders, such as investors (Jonsson et al., 2009) or the media (Graffin et al., 2013).
Yet, it is important to investigate how scandals affect behaviors of organizational members, as these individuals are “critical to the functioning and survival of organizations” (Piazza & Jourdan, 2018). And third, research has not considered the role of geography in scandals. For organizations that serve their stakeholders at physical locations (e.g., restaurants, retail stores, and churches), geographic proximity to implicated units may be an important factor.

We address these limitations by investigating how a child abuse scandal that broke in the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 2005 affected individual churches. Several recent studies have investigated how similar child abuse scandals in the Catholic Church affected religious activity. For example, Hungerman (2013) found that allegations of abuse resulted in a plateau of the general Catholic population at the national level. Using data from the General Social Survey, he documented a decrease in self-reported membership among Catholics but an increase among other denominations, particularly Baptist. Similarly, using decennial county-level data, Piazza and Jourdan (2018) provided evidence of decreased membership in the Catholic Church as a result of local abuse cases; however, they examined the time period before child abuse in the Catholic Church became a national issue. They also found positive correlations with membership in some other denominations with “stricter standards of conduct” (Piazza & Jourdan, 2018: 185). Finally, using ZIP code and county-level data, Bottan & Perez-Truglia (2015) found that allegations of child abuse by priests resulted in a decline in religious participation as proxied by the number of Catholic schools and the number of employees in religious institutions as well as a decrease in general charitable contributions.

Some studies provide evidence that although parishioners’ engagement changed after allegations of child abuse, it is less likely that their deep beliefs and values underwent universal adjustments (Bottan & Perez-Truglia, 2015). This conclusion is in line with the qualitative evidence provided by Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, and Scully (2010), who document split
identification by churchgoers following the 2002 revelation of child abuse by clergy in Boston: some dedicated Catholics maintained identification with the Church’s values and beliefs while disidentifying from individual church leaders. While providing insight into the effects of the scandal, these studies either employed geographically aggregated data or supplied qualitative evidence and did not explore the impact of the scandal on individual churches or the role of geography in this process. As a consequence, they also were not able to systematically examine how the scandal affected churchgoers’ engagement in ceremonies and rituals within individual churches.

We highlight that unlike recently published work on the Catholic Church child abuse scandal that used geographically aggregated data (e.g., state, county, or ZIP code) and was typically limited to high-level metrics of engagement (e.g., membership), our unique fine-grained longitudinal data allow us to explore the differential effects of a specific scandal within the larger organization of the Catholic Church. We are able to examine the inner workings of a scandalized organization by assessing how individual Catholic churches’ association with the scandal impacted those churches and their Catholic neighbors, as well as how the scandal led to church-level changes in membership and two types of member involvement: ceremonies and rituals.

**SCANDAL’S EFFECTS WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION**

It is rarely the case that an entire organization is directly involved in the transgressions that are at the root of a scandal. Rather, some parts of an organization—what we will refer to as “units”—are typically more closely tied to the transgression than others. For example, specific projects and teams within Enron were corrupt while others were not (Aven, 2015). The 2015 Volkswagen emissions scandal originated with an engineering team, leaving other organizational
units unaware of the transgression. And some, not all, members of cycling teams in the 2010 Tour de France used performance-enhancing drugs (Palmer & Yenkey, 2015).

As a result, when a scandal ensues from such transgressions, member responses may vary depending on their unit’s direct association with the scandal, and those from implicated units may experience the scandal more personally. This is consequential, because as Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994: 240) noted, “If members interpret the external organizational image as unfavorable, they may experience negative personal outcomes, such as depression and stress.” Negative reactions may make exit from an organization more likely (Hirschman, 1970), and an organization without members ceases to exist.

A straightforward form of an organizational unit’s association with a scandal is its association with the individuals who committed the transgression. We expect that members’ reactions to a scandal may be stronger at these units. For organizational members, news about “their” unit’s direct association with the scandal unambiguously ties it into the broader public narrative of the scandal. Details of the transgression are also likely to be more salient and vivid to the members of directly associated units, resulting in more visceral reactions. For example, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article described one local churchgoer’s reaction, noting that she “couldn’t stop crying when she learned Gausch [a priest who died in 1999] was among those accused in a blistering grand jury report of molesting children” (Graham & Pompilio, 2005). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1: Within a scandalized organization, a unit’s direct association with the scandal will reduce membership at that unit.*

**How a Scandal Affects Member Involvement in Ceremonies and Rituals**

While exploring the effects of a scandal on aggregate membership is informative (e.g., Piazza & Jourdan, 2018), we highlight that members engage with organizations via a variety of behaviors, and a scandal can affect different types of member involvement in different ways.
Building on work in sociology, we propose that organizational member involvement is usefully categorized into ceremonies and rituals (Fine, 1984; Trice et al., 1969). Ceremonies and rituals exemplify ways and settings in which members learn how “we do things around here” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 60) and induce individuals to “buy into” the system (Fine, 1984). These practices help organizations express meanings that are essential to their members. Both provide for a socialization process that weaves the very substance of organizational culture and helps the organization to exist (Dion, 1996). As a result, both ceremonies and rituals provide the foundation for member interactions (Trice & Beyer, 1984) and ensure the maintenance of social order within the organization (Dacin et al., 2010).

Ceremonies and rituals are enacted by individuals, but they have important organizational consequences. For example, Dacin, Munir, and Tracey (2010) explored how the practice of formal college dining at Cambridge University was actually a ritual that served to maintain elements of the British class system. As a result, these micro-level interactions become “powerful devices” that help structure and support macro-level outcomes (Dacin et al., 2010: 1401). Therefore, rituals and ceremonies are important for individuals, organizations, and even broader social institutions.

Despite general similarities, ceremonies and rituals differ in substantive ways. Ceremonies are planned series of formal, elaborate, and dramatic activities performed around a single occasion or event (Dion, 1996; Trice & Beyer, 1984). They are extraordinary events that provide members with memorable experiences. Harris and Sutton explain that activities such as graduation, retirement parties, and funerals are examples of parting ceremonies (Harris & Sutton, 1986). Deal and Kennedy discuss how the company Mary Kay spent millions of dollars each year to stage “seminars” at the Dallas Convention Center to celebrate their heroes (1982: 63, 74). As the authors put it, “ceremonies are to the culture what movie is to the script” (Deal &
Akin to rites of passage, ceremonies help organizational members transition from one role to another (Van Gennep, 1960).

Rituals, on the other hand, are standardized and detailed sets of commonplace activities in an organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Trice & Beyer, 1984). Although seemingly mundane and routine, rituals are unspoken rules that guide members’ day-to-day behavior and create a sense of certainty and shared reality (Kane & Park, 2009). Rituals produce feelings of solidarity, camaraderie, and communitas among organizational members (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Islam & Zyphur 2009; Kane & Park, 2009; Mazmanian & Beckman, 2018). They can be understood as habits that “bring order to chaos” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 62) and help “manage anxieties” of organizational life (Trice & Beyer, 1984: 655). Because of their permeation throughout social interactions among organizational members, rituals institutionalize members’ connections to one another. Moreover, they help members establish a sense of belonging to the organization (Dion, 1996). So “in enacting the ritual they [members] enhance their own sense of self-worth” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 68; Mazmanian & Beckman, 2018). For example, Deal and Kennedy (1982: 69) recounted how regular meetings used during the Navy’s construction of the Polaris submarine, “were ‘like going to church’; they bonded everyone together.” In discussing how companies were “computerizing work at the technical level” the same authors wrote:

[...]eluctance to change makes sense if we look at technical work as a cultural ritual that contributes to the stability of the company. The employees are signaling that they are comfortable with the work the way it used to be done... To these employees, it is like substituting a Cheezit cracker for a communion wafer (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 68).

Overall, whereas ceremonies are discrete dramatized events that take place during specific occasions, rituals are routine behaviors that help establish members’ sense of self and belonging. Because of these underlying differences, we expect that an organizational unit’s association with a scandal will affect these two types of member behaviors in different ways. Whereas it may be easier for members to forgo ceremonies after a scandal, withdrawing from
rituals may be a more effortful endeavor because rituals are more strongly intertwined with members’ daily routines and their sense of self.

_Hypothesis 2: Within a scandalized organization, a unit’s direct association with the scandal will reduce member involvement in rituals less than in ceremonies at that unit._

**The Role of Geographic Proximity to Associated Units**

In addition to a direct association with an individual who committed a transgression, the scandal may affect rituals and ceremonies at an organizational unit through its geographic proximity to other units within the organization. Geography may have a particularly strong influence on the spread of personally relevant negative information simply because “[w]e are more likely to have contact with those who are closer to us in geographic location than those who are distant” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001: 429). The scandal may affect members from geographically proximate organizational units more because it involves people with whom they are likely to directly interact. Being a neighbor to implicated organizational units may thus amplify the salience of the scandal and perceptions of how widespread it is.

Organizational members are also more likely to experience events at nearby units more personally than those at more distant ones. This is why, for instance, local events are more newsworthy (Gant & Dimmick, 2000), as they can have a more direct impact on people’s everyday lives. As individuals learn about negative news, they care about whether the event occurred “close to home” and can affect “people from here” (Potter, 2006: 5). Therefore, because of the increased exposure to personally relevant negative information about the scandal, we expect that the negative effects of a scandal on an individual unit’s membership, ceremonies, and rituals will be stronger with higher geographic proximity of other implicated units.

_Hypothesis 3: Within a scandalized organization, a unit’s geographic proximity to other units directly associated with the scandal will reduce (a) membership, (b) ceremonies, and (c) rituals at that unit._
In sum, we propose that scandals affect membership, ceremonies, and rituals at individual units within an organization differently, depending on the unit's association with a scandal and the extent to which its neighbors are implicated in the scandal. To examine these ideas, we turn to the context where a scandal affected a multi-unit organization whose members engaged in ceremonies and rituals at physical locations—a child abuse scandal at the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

CHILD ABUSE SCANDAL AT THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

The Catholic Church was first involved in a major child abuse scandal in 2002 when the Boston Globe published “the first of a series of articles on the sexual abuse of minors by priests in the Archdiocese of Boston of the Roman Catholic Church” (Gutierrez et al., 2010: 673). Investigations and reports of abuse quickly spread to other parts of the United States (Hungerman, 2013) and around the world. The social implications of this scandal were particularly extreme not only because of the egregiousness of the underlying transgressions, but also because of the sheer size and history of the organization. In the United States, the Catholic Church is comprised of about 64 million members, spread across 20,000 individual parishes, operating under 194 administrative units known as dioceses, making it one of the largest organizations in the world (Bloomberg Businessweek, 2002).

We focused specifically on the Philadelphia Archdiocese as the setting for our study because in the early 2000’s the Archdiocese was subject to a grand jury investigation, which was “the gold standard of investigative work on the Catholic abuse crisis in the United States” (BishopAccountability.org, Inc., 2017). We also chose this setting because we were able to obtain yearly longitudinal data on various churchgoer involvement statistics at individual churches for the entire Archdiocese as well as for individual churches in three other denominations that we use in follow-on analyses. Finally, to complement our church-level data
with individual-level insights, we were able to employ historical polling data about Philadelphia residents’ perceptions of the scandal when it broke.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia covers the five southeastern Pennsylvania counties of Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Bucks, and Philadelphia, and in 2010 was comprised of roughly 1.16 million registered Catholics (representing nearly 30% of the entire local population), spread across 268 churches with 367 priests. The scandal in Philadelphia largely began in February of 2002, when in light of public revelations of child abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston, the Philadelphia Archdiocese announced that it had evidence that 35 priests had been involved in sexual abuse of minors during the previous five decades. The Archdiocese declined to turn over the names of the priests (Rubinkam, 2002). After a series of meetings with diocesan lawyers, on April 24, 2002, Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne M. Abraham announced that she would convene a grand jury to fully investigate the extent of the alleged sexual abuse by the Archdiocese clergy (Hepp & Panaritis, 2002). The result of the investigation, a 418-page report, was released to the public on September 21, 2005.

The exact content of the report was not known until the day of its release, because “under [Pennsylvania] law, a grand jury investigation is secret” (Hepp & Panaritis, 2002). The report provided details of the crimes alleged against sixty-three priests that were affiliated with various churches within the Philadelphia Archdiocese at some point in their careers. According to the report, the occurrence of the alleged crimes was known to the Archdiocese officials who “did nothing” to investigate or stop the abuse (Grand Jury Report, 2005: 21). Furthermore, officials “cycled” the abusive priests through different assignments “without any restrictions on contact with minors” (Grand Jury Report, 2005: 5). The crimes detailed in the report included “rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, statutory sexual assault, indecent assault, endangering welfare of children, corruption of minors” (Grand Jury Report, 2005: Section I: 6). It chronicled
the stories of individual victims and documented vivid and gruesome details of the abuse of children and the devastating consequences it had on their lives. The grand jury report noted that “victims who report their abuse represent merely the tip of the iceberg, that abusive priests likely have preyed on many more victims who have not come forward” (Grand Jury Report, 2005: 17), and that “it takes many years – often decades – before most victims of child sexual abuse are able to come forward” (Grand Jury Report, 2005: 6).

We assert that this was a true scandal. First, the report and related media coverage alleviated any ambiguity surrounding priests’ misconduct and left little room for reinterpretation of the wrongdoing. Second, the publicity of the transgression was widespread. The region’s largest daily newspaper, The Philadelphia Inquirer, published an editorial entitled “Reading the Grand Jury Report; Painful but Needed” (2005). Soon after the release of the report, the Temple University/Philadelphia Inquirer public opinion poll documented that 69% of residents of the five Pennsylvania counties were “very closely” or “somewhat closely” following news about the report, and only 14% were not following the news at all. This confirms that the transgressions were highly publicized and occupied the public consciousness, a condition necessary for a scandal.

**DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

To build our dataset, we first contacted representatives from the Catholic Church. We were provided yearly data on various measures of churchgoer involvement at all individual Catholic churches located within the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This area covers the geographic boundaries of the five southeastern Pennsylvania counties near Philadelphia. Churchgoer involvement statistics at these churches serve as our dependent variables. Our independent variables are based on the grand jury report along with news articles that publicly
accused specific priests for the first time. We use these news reports to link specific Catholic churches to the scandal. We next describe each stage of this process.

**Dependent Variables**

The churchgoer involvement data that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia made available to us were sampled as part of standard Catholic Church practice in October of each year from 1990–2010. We measure individual churches’ *membership* in a given year as the number of the registered population of the church.

To understand which behaviors in our context represent ceremonies and rituals, we turned to related literature. As our discussion above illustrates, many ideas about ceremonies and rituals in organizations take their inspiration from religious traditions. In the context of our study, ceremonies and rituals are components of what sociologists of religion call “religiosity,” which has been conceptualized as “the behavioral aspects of religion” (Myers, 1996: 860). Religiosity encompasses frequency of church attendance, involvement in church activities, or financial giving to the church (e.g., Collett & Lizardo, 2009; Mancini & Shields, 2014; Myers, 1996).\(^2\)

Ongoing rituals, by their very definition, are more repetitive routines than ceremonies.

Keeping these distinctions in mind, we use three variables to assess Catholic churchgoers’ involvement in *ceremonies*: the number of baptisms, marriages, and funerals at an individual church each year. We also use three variables to assess churchgoers’ involvement in *rituals*: the average weekly attendance during October masses\(^3\), the number of households making monetary contributions, and the number of children attending youth programs at each individual church. Baptisms, marriages, and funerals are rare events in a churchgoer’s life, and

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\(^2\) Because we examine how a scandal affected members’ organizational behaviors, such as ceremonies and rituals, rather than their private behaviors, such as prayer or reading the Bible (e.g., Myers, 1996), what we study is more directly related to “institutional religiosity” rather than “personal religiosity” (e.g., Donnelly & Inglis, 2010).

\(^3\) No major Catholic holidays take place in October; thus, the average weekly attendance in this month provides the best estimate of member involvement in rituals.
they provide for a performed celebration of a transition from one life stage to the next. Thus, they are more reflective of ceremonies. Attending a mass, making donations, and taking children to a youth program, on the other hand, are more routine behaviors that weave together the essence of churchgoers’ everyday lives and, therefore, reflect members’ engagement in rituals.

Our final sample is a church-year panel spanning the twenty-one-year window. Due to ambiguity, we recoded as missing those variables that were reported as having a value of zero in the data originally provided to us. Data completeness varied by measure: the data on contributing households was not available until 1995, while the registered population variable was the most complete with 5,888 observations. In addition, the panel of churches changed slightly over the twenty-one-year period, as some churches closed and new ones opened, with 301 churches in 1990 and 267 churches in 2010.

**Independent Variables**

We created two independent variables. The first one measures a church’s direct association with accused priests. The second one measures the extent to which a church’s neighbors were associated with accused priests.

*Direct association between a church and accused priests*. To determine a focal Catholic church’s direct association with the scandal, we needed to match publicly accused priests to specific Catholic churches. The 2005 grand jury report provided data on the majority of new public accusations against priests. However, some priests in Philadelphia were first publicly accused before or after the grand jury report was published. We thus complemented the grand jury report data with a second data source: “The Database of Publicly Accused Priests,” a comprehensive public archive of media reports about the scandal created by the nonprofit organization BishopAccountability.org, Inc. (2017). Prior research has used the materials
When we accessed the *BishopAccountability* website in November of 2013, there were 133 publicly accused clergy (e.g., priests, assistant pastors, parochial vicars) listed as associated with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, including the subset identified in the 2005 grand jury report. For each priest, the website included links to the sources of the public allegations (e.g., news articles and the grand jury report), as well as information on priests’ professional assignments. Using these data, we constructed a professional work history for each priest.

To be consistent with theoretical accounts of scandals—“scandals are occasioned by a communicative act...as in a news story” (Adut, 2005: 219)—we focused on public news about allegations rather than when abuse was alleged to have originally occurred. We therefore used the year of the first publication about a priest’s alleged abuse to associate specific Catholic churches where he worked with the scandal in that year. We constructed a binary variable *associated church* equal to zero in all years before a church was associated with an accused priest or if a church was never associated and one starting in the year of its first association. If the first accusation against a priest who had ever been employed at a focal church was revealed from the 2005 grand jury report, the church’s direct association with the scandal took on the value of zero during all years up to and including 2005 and one in each subsequent year. We used this variable to test the direct effect of the scandal on associated Catholic churches.

*Neighboring churches’ association with accused priests*. To determine the role of geography during the scandal, we next created a measure of geographic proximity among Catholic churches. We followed the empirical approaches from spatial competition research (e.g., Kalnins, 2003) to construct these neighbor measures. Because this method focuses on neighboring market areas rather than linear distances between institutions, it better accounts for...
the variance in density between urban, suburban, and rural areas, which is a feature of our geographic setting. We started by dividing the total geographic area covered by the Archdiocese into smaller territories covered by each Catholic church. We used the latitude and longitude coordinates of each Catholic church to calculate a set of corresponding polygons. Each of these irregular polygons enclosed a single church, where every point within the polygon was closest to that church; these are known as Thiessen polygons. We illustrate the polygon construction and the resulting full map in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

We based this mathematical construction on the assumption that, on average, individuals living within a focal area are most likely to attend that specific church given that it is closest to their home. Because the number of Catholic churches changed over time, we used the snapshot of active churches in 2005, the year of the release of the grand jury report. We also limited our neighbor analyses to the churches in more common “territorial parishes,” which are defined by geography, as opposed to the less frequent “personal parishes,” which may be based on language communities or other non-geographic criteria.

After constructing Thiessen polygons for each Catholic church in our sample, we used each church’s polygonal territory to determine what percentage of a given church’s perimeter was shared with Catholic churches directly associated with the scandal. The greater the relative length of a shared boundary between two churches, the greater was the potential influence of one neighboring church on the other. This associated neighbors variable was calculated for each church-year and ranges from zero percent (none of the church’s neighbors were associated with an accused priest in a given year) to one hundred percent (all of its neighbors were associated with an accused priest), with any value in between determined by the specific geographic
configuration of that church and its neighbors. We illustrate this shared boundary calculation in Figure 1.

**Control Variables**

We controlled for unobserved church-level differences and year-level trends by including church- and year-level fixed effects. Any other control variables had to be unrelated to religious activity because church-level statistics were at theoretical risk of being influenced by the scandal. Further, because we employed church and year fixed effects, control variables also needed to be time-variant at the level of the small geographic territories covered by each church. Local population counts satisfied these criteria, as it is unlikely that the local population changes were meaningfully impacted by the scandal. We used census tract-level population measurements for this purpose. Census tracts are granular enough to provide variance across most church locations: There were 998 census tracts within the five Philadelphia counties, with an average 2010 population of 4,017 people. We used the 2000 and 2010 census tract data provided by the Minnesota Population Center (2011) and interpolated data for each year in our sample. We then reverse geo-coded each church’s latitude and longitude to determine its census tract and assigned it the appropriate values. The five counties comprising the Archdiocese underwent only a modest total population change of 4% from 2000 (3,849,645) to 2010 (4,008,994), significantly lower than the national average. We present summary statistics and correlations for all variables in Tables 1 and 2.

[Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here]

**Estimation Approach**

To estimate the effect of the scandal on churchgoer involvement at Catholic churches directly associated with the scandal and at nearby Catholic churches, we used ordinary least squares models with church and year fixed effects along with census tract-level population
controls and robust standard errors. We used a separate model to estimate the effects for each of the seven dependent variables. Therefore, our estimates reflect the within-church effect of being associated with a publicly accused priest or being located near Catholic churches that had such associations.

**RESULTS**

In Table 3, we present the results of the first set of models that estimate the main effect of news about association with an accused priest on membership, ceremonies, and rituals. Models in this table include church, year, and local census tract population controls and employ the full continuous range of Catholic data from 1990-2010. We logged the dependent variables, so the coefficients can be directly interpreted as percent changes in the dependent variable. In line with Hypothesis 1, the results presented in Table 3 Model 1 indicate that news reports about specific churches’ associations with accused priests led to statistically significant declines in membership (-7.3%). Models 2, 3, and 4 of Table 3 indicate that all three types of ceremonies were negatively impacted: The number of marriages (-9.6%), baptisms (-7%), and funerals (-5.8%) decreased in these churches. Among our measures of rituals, Models 5, 6, and 7, only youth program attendance had a significant drop (-13.2%). Overall, in support of Hypothesis 2, following the news about an individual church’s direct association with an accused priest, fewer rituals than ceremonies were negatively affected.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

To assess the extent to which geographic proximity to scandalized churches affected a focal church, we regressed the associated neighbors variable on involvement statistics while also controlling for whether the church itself was directly associated with an accused priest. Again, the unit of analysis was the church-year and we included church and year fixed effects. We present the results of these estimations in Table 4. Because the associated neighbors variable is a
continuous percentage that ranges from zero to one, the coefficients in these models can be interpreted as the percentage change in the dependent variable given a change from having no neighboring churches associated with the scandal to having all neighboring churches associated with the scandal (note: this means that the coefficients for associated neighbors and associated church variables cannot be directly compared). From Table 4, having all neighbors associated with the scandal leads to a 20.8% decrease in membership. It also is associated with a significant decrease in one type of ceremony: baptisms (-19.1%). Further, two of the three ritual measures also decreased: attendance (-25%) and households making financial contributions (-12.5%). In partial support of Hypothesis 3, these results suggest that having neighboring Catholic churches implicated in a scandal results in membership loss and decrease in some, but not all, rituals and ceremonies. Notably, more rituals than ceremonies are influenced by geographic proximity to churches implicated in the scandal.

We interpret these results as consistent with theoretical arguments put forth by Harrison, Ashforth, and Corley (2009), who proposed that if the severity of a scandal is high, or if the scandal taints the very core on which the organization built its relationship with its constituents, then even the most dedicated constituents may stop supporting the organization. High severity scandals violate trust even for very involved constituents and may lead to a sense of betrayal. Such scandals can “shatter a person’s faith and worldview and thus be seen as unforgiveable” (Harrison, Ashforth, & Corley, 2009: 243). Therefore, even member involvement in rituals can decline as neighboring organizational units become directly implicated in a scandal.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

We performed two sets of sensitivity analyses based on the time window of the data and the specification of the independent variable. In the first set, we ran all the previously presented models on a sample limited to 2004–2007, a time period immediately before and after the 2005
grand jury report. In these models, only marriages remained negatively affected by a church’s
direct association with the scandal (-7.8%), none of the geographic proximity results were
significant. We also employed a more restricted scandal definition used by Bottan and Perez-
Truglia (2015). We recalculated both the associated church variable and the associated
neighbors variable using only instances when an abuser was active in a church at the time of the
first public accusation (an extremely rare occurrence in our data) and when an alleged abuse
occurred at a specific church, but the abuser was no longer working there at the time of the first
public accusation. Using the full range of years and this restricted independent variable, we
found that marriages (-10.5%) and attendance (-7.1%) were significantly affected. Thus, our
main results exhibit sensitivity to the selected window of years and the measure of the scandal. It
is possible that this is a function of reduced sample size and limited variance due to our focus on
a single Archdiocese. However, in the Discussion section, we also explore potential theoretical
explanations for this sensitivity that highlight a number of future research directions.

CROSS-DENOMINATION SPILLOVERS

Given that we found differing effects of a scandal on membership, ceremonies, and
rituals within the Catholic Church, and taking into account the documented importance of
spillovers in the scandal literature, we also explored how member behaviors were impacted in
other religious denominations. We did not have formalized expectations about how rituals and
ceremonies would be affected at other denominations, because past research has documented the
presence of both negative spillovers (Barnett & King, 2008; Jonsson et al., 2009; Zavyalova,
Pfarrer, Reger, & Shapiro, 2012) as well as positive substitution effects after scandals
(Hungerman, 2013; Piazza & Jourdan, 2018). Although two recent studies provide evidence of
spillover dynamics in the context of the Catholic Church scandal (Hungerman, 2013; Piazza and
Jourdan, 2018), neither study examined how geographic proximity of individual churches to
associated Catholic churches affected these dynamics, nor how the scandal affected ceremonies and rituals in other denominations. In our follow-on analyses, we explored how member involvement in ceremonies and/or rituals at non-Catholic churches changed as a function of their geographic proximity to scandalized Catholic churches.

We were able to obtain yearly church-level statistics from three other local denominations: United Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches. We obtained the United Methodist data from the United Methodist Church’s national public statistics website (umdata.org), Lutheran data were provided to us by the Evangelical Lutheran Church’s Research and Evaluation group, and Episcopal data were provided to us by a congregational research assistant at the diocesan and congressional ministries of the Episcopal Church. The availability of different types of involvement statistics, as well as the time spans of the data, vary across the three denominations; nevertheless, this is the most comprehensive data available on member involvement at a church-year level.

We filtered churches from each of the three denominations to include only those located within the five Pennsylvania counties comprising the geographic boundaries of the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The sample of United Methodist churches spanned from 1990–2013, the sample of Lutheran churches spanned from 2000–2010, and the sample of Episcopal churches spanned from 2002–2012.\(^4\) We used the same process described earlier in the analyses of Catholic neighbors to first calculate Thiessen polygons for each church in each of the three non-Catholic denominations. However, instead of calculating a shared perimeter, we calculated the percentage of each church’s area that was shared with associated Catholic churches’ area when the Catholic map was overlaid on top of the map of that church’s denomination.

\(^4\) Descriptive statistics and correlations for variables used in these samples are available on request.
Results of Cross-Denomination Spillover Analyses

We report the results of cross-denomination spillover analyses in Tables 5, 6, and 7. As shown in Table 5, in the United Methodist sample, sharing more area with Catholic churches that were associated with accused priests led to significant decreases in membership (-15.6%) and ceremonies as assessed through baptisms (-12.2%). In Table 6 we find that sharing more area with associated Catholic churches did not significantly affect rituals in Lutheran churches, which we assessed through attendance (the only available statistic for this denomination). Finally, Table 7 indicates that for Episcopal churches, sharing more area with an associated Catholic church did not significantly affect membership or the ritual of attendance, but it led to a significant increase in the money pledged to the church (+14.1%). This finding indicates the presence of a positive spillover to one behavior indicative of a ritual. Overall, the results of these exploratory analyses provide some preliminary evidence that compared to membership and ceremonies, rituals are most resistant to negative spillovers that may result from geographic proximity to a scandalized organization in an adjacent category.

[Insert Tables 5, 6, and 7 about here]

SCANDAL PERCEPTIONS AS A FUNCTION OF INDIVIDUALS’ AFFILIATION AND INVOLVEMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONS

In this paper, we theorized that differences in members’ perceptions of the scandal led to differences in engagement in ceremonies and rituals; however, because our main focus was on organizational outcomes, we did not measure individual perceptions directly. To address this, we explored media coverage and court testimonies related to the scandal. During this process, we learned about a public opinion poll jointly conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs at Temple University and The Philadelphia Inquirer (Hagen, 2005; O'Reilly, 2005). Under supervision of Temple University political science professor Michael Hagen, a team of researchers collected data about people’s perceptions of the scandal via a random-digit phone
survey of 1,500 individuals in the Philadelphia metropolitan area (1,135 people living in the five Pennsylvania counties of the Archdiocese, and the rest living in the four neighboring New Jersey counties). The data were collected starting about one month after the release of the 2005 grand jury report, from October 24 to November 6 of 2005. The survey included a range of questions about respondents’ knowledge, perceptions, and opinions of various aspects of the scandal (Hagen, 2005). The lead investigator of the poll shared the response data with us after tabulating it along the two dimensions of interest to our study: the respondents’ religious affiliation (i.e., membership in the scandalized organization) and their frequency of church attendance (i.e., involvement in rituals). We then analyzed these data along four categories of individuals: frequent Catholics, non-frequent Catholics, frequent non-Catholics, and non-frequent non-Catholics.\(^5\)

In our theorizing about how scandals affect ceremonies and rituals, we discussed that people with more frequent, or ritualized, organizational involvement would react to a scandal less negatively than those who engaged in a more detached, or ceremonial, manner. They may also be less condemning of the scandalized organization and its leadership. The same should be true of members of the scandalized organization when compared to non-members (i.e., Catholics versus non-Catholics). This means we should find the starkest difference in scandal perceptions between frequent Catholics and non-frequent non-Catholics. At the time of the scandal, the overall opinion of the Catholic Church varied significantly across the four groups of respondents (Figure 2a). For example, 69% of frequent Catholics held a favorable opinion of the Catholic Church, compared to just 26% of non-frequent non-Catholics (\(p < 0.01\)). Opinions also varied

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\(^5\) In the original survey, religious affiliation was documented as either “Catholic” or “non-Catholic,” and frequency of church attendance was documented as one of three different categories: individuals who attended church “at least once per week,” “once or twice per month,” and “a few times a year or less.” For our analyses, we used these categories to classify respondents who said they attended church at least once per week or once or twice per month as being “frequent” church attendees and those respondents who said that they only attended church a few times per year or less as “non-frequent.”
regarding the three most recent Archbishops of Philadelphia: Cardinals Krol (served during 1961–1988), Bevilacqua (served during 1988–2003), and Rigali (appointed in 2003 and current Archbishop at the time of the survey). Relative to other respondents, frequent Catholics were most positive about Church leadership. Further, this difference was larger for opinions about current leadership compared to past leadership.

The survey also revealed that the majority of respondents across all four categories followed news about the grand jury report “somewhat closely” or “very closely,” with frequent Catholics being the most attentive (86% of frequent Catholics followed the news at least somewhat closely, compared to 65% of non-frequent Catholics, 65% of frequent non-Catholics, and 63% of non-frequent non-Catholics). However, respondents’ perceptions of whether the media was paying an appropriate amount of attention varied according to their affiliation and involvement: 29% of non-frequent non-Catholics thought the media gave too little attention to the scandal, while only 12% of frequent Catholics believed there was too little attention (p < 0.01). A similar contrast was found in their perceptions of the media’s fairness: 81% of non-frequent non-Catholics believed the news coverage of reports of sexual abuse by priests in the Philadelphia Archdiocese was fair to the Catholic Church, while 72% of frequent Catholics believed the news coverage was fair (p < 0.05). The majority of all groups believed the grand jury report was fair to the Church, and the differences were not as stark as those related to the fairness of the news. This illustrates that constituents with different affiliations and involvement with an organization attend to and perceive media coverage about the same scandal differently.

The last set of findings from the survey relates to the differences in perceptions of Church officials’ motives in handling the scandal. All four groups were dissatisfied with the Archdiocese’s handling of abuse, with the rate indicating they were “somewhat dissatisfied” or
“very dissatisfied” ranging from 73%–75% across the four groups. When asked whether the Church had mainly tried to protect its reputation versus prevent abuse, all four groups also agreed that in the past the church had mainly tried to protect its own reputation (ranging from 80%–91% across the four groups; Figure 2b). However, the responses changed with respect to beliefs about the Church’s current motives. For example, while 66% of non-frequent non-Catholics believed the Church was still mainly trying to protect its own reputation rather than prevent abuse, only 37% of frequent Catholics believed the same (p < 0.01; Figure 2c). This finding suggests that frequent Catholics’ forgiveness was premature, given that the Archdiocese would undergo additional revelations of abuse after 2005. This points to the potential “dark side” of close involvement with an organization (Dukerich, Kramer, & Parks, 1998).

Overall, survey data illustrates that frequent Catholics, who engage in rituals more than non-frequent Catholics, were less condemning of the Church and its leadership during the scandal. Thus, more frequently involved constituents appear more supportive of the organization when it is scandalized than less frequently involved constituents; however, on average, even they are not blindly supportive of the scandalized organization.

**DISCUSSION**

We explored how an organizational unit’s direct association with a scandal and its geographic proximity to other scandalized units affected organizational membership and involvement in ceremonies and rituals. We tested these relationships in the context of the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Our results indicate that if an individual Catholic church employed a priest accused of sexual misconduct it led to a decrease in membership, and a decrease in more ceremonies than rituals. Geographic proximity to other Catholic churches who employed accused priests was also associated with a decrease in membership, some ceremonies, and even rituals.
Given these findings, we conducted follow-on analyses of spillover effects to local churches from three non-Catholic denominations. We found that news about abusive priests employed at nearby Catholic churches led to a decrease in membership and baptisms at United Methodist churches, no change in attendance at Lutheran churches, and an increase in monetary pledges at Episcopal churches. We complemented church-level analyses with analyses of historical public polling data from Philadelphia. We observed that individuals’ perceptions of fairness regarding news of the scandal, attitudes toward past and current church leaders, and overall attitudes toward the Catholic Church varied depending on respondents’ affiliation with the scandalized organization (i.e., Catholic or non-Catholic) as well as on their frequency of involvement in rituals (i.e., church attendance).

Contributions

This paper makes three main theoretical contributions to research on the organizational consequences of scandals. First, we illustrate that while an entire organization is typically treated as scandalized, its individual units are affected differently depending on their association with the underlying transgressions. Second, we theorized and found that member reactions to a scandal depend on whether they engage with an organization through ceremonies or rituals. Whereas ceremonies are easier to forgo and thus more of them are negatively affected by a scandal, most ritualized behaviors remain unaffected. Third, we document that in a context where organizations engage with their members at physical locations, geographic proximity to scandalized organizational units plays a critical role. Being surrounded by associated units negatively affects membership, ceremonies, and even rituals at a focal organization unit. Our conjecture is that the severity of the scandal overwhelmed even those constituents for whom involvement with a church was a part of their routine and day-to-day activities.
The results of our follow-on analyses have the potential to contribute to research on spillovers through an examination of how constituents engage in ceremonies and/or rituals at nearby organizations after scandals. Although theory would suggest that rituals may be affected less than ceremonies, we found evidence of differential spillover effects to proximate United Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches. Whereas neighboring an organization associated with a scandal may negatively affect some unassociated organizations, it may be beneficial for others.

This paper also makes two empirical advancements that may be useful in other settings. First, by obtaining detailed yearly statistics on churchgoer involvement, we were able to test the effect of the scandal on several measures of member behavior. Using multiple empirical measures to assess the same theoretical construct provides better visibility to the process under investigation. Future studies may benefit from examining the reactions of different constituents (e.g., investors, customers, and employees) to the same scandal or different types of reactions by the same group of constituents. It is possible that when these various constituents’ reactions are taken into account, the conclusions about the net effect of a scandal may differ from conclusions based on analyses that use only one measure.

Second, by using individual church-level data we were able to empirically account for the fact that different branches of the same organization may be associated with the same scandal in different ways. This is likely a generalizable distinction, with specific individual units or branches of an organization being more closely associated with underlying transgressions than others. For example, when an outbreak of food-borne illness occurs at a restaurant chain, the specific branches where people became ill are often widely known. Individual managers of business units are also often identifiable after wrongdoing and can be more closely linked to the cause of the scandal than others in the same organization. Thus, incorporating information about
direct involvement or guilt by association may help expand our knowledge about the effects of scandals on different branches within a larger organization.

**Future Research Directions**

The child abuse scandal we examined in this study is an example of a scandal with little ambiguity and severe consequences that, for many, may have shattered the foundation of their beliefs and identification with the Church (Gutierrez et al., 2010). It is possible that in the context of less egregious scandals, the changes in engagement in ceremonies and rituals by constituents are different. Future work might examine settings where scandals vary both in severity (e.g., the consequences of the transgression) as well as type (e.g., scandals caused by moral versus technical transgressions).

The unique empirical feature of our study is in its church-year level of analysis. However, the level of analysis also highlights a number of theoretical challenges that may pave the way for future research. For example, the sensitivity of our results to various specifications may be a function of how churchgoers attributed blame for the scandal. As the individual polling data indicates, some churchgoers blamed Catholic Church leaders, not only abusive priests, for their role in covering up the abuse. Perceived culpability at these different levels may have simultaneously affected churchgoer responses. Future work on scandals may benefit from attempting to isolate where attribution of guilt occurs. For instance, constituents’ reactions to scandals in other settings may be a function of whether high-level executives versus mid-level managers were implicated in the scandal.

Drawing on historical polling data, we illustrated that the attribution of guilt in our context might also depend on the nature of constituents’ affiliation and frequency of their involvement with an organization. For example, constituents who more frequently engage with the organization might be more focused in their attribution of guilt within the organization and
more forgiving, while constituents who engage with the organization less frequently, if at all, may be less deliberate in their attribution of guilt and, instead, blame the entire organization or industry. Incorporating this mechanism into future work on spillovers may prove fruitful. It is plausible that in light of a scandal, more involved constituents are less likely to view an organization as being guilty by association, whereas more detached constituents may be prone to making such judgments.

Finally, in line with prior literature on organizational scandals, we focused exclusively on the consequences of a scandal. A separate question in this particular setting is what shaped the spread of the abusive practices across churches in the first place (i.e., the question of "how misconduct spreads", Mohliver, 2018). In the context of our study, there is evidence that knowledge about the prevalence of abuse before the scandal was highly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals (Grand Jury Report, 2005). The abuse of power in the Catholic Church has led to the formation of organizations such as the Voice of the Faithful (votf.org) and the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (snapnetwork.org), which help address the problem more directly and seek to change the way the Church is run. We encourage researchers to study how the distribution of power within an organization affects the spread of wrongdoing as well as how scandals may be a trigger for improved organizational governance.
REFERENCES


TABLE 1
Summary Statistics and Correlations of Variables in the Catholic Sample
Used in the Analyses of the Direct Association with a Scandal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated church</td>
<td>5,940</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriages</td>
<td>5,698</td>
<td>22.19</td>
<td>19.39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>222</td>
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<td>Baptisms</td>
<td>5,817</td>
<td>55.91</td>
<td>46.13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerals</td>
<td>5,855</td>
<td>44.34</td>
<td>32.21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5,868</td>
<td>1,278.28</td>
<td>1,002.30</td>
<td>25.75</td>
<td>8,828.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>5,888</td>
<td>4,364.80</td>
<td>3,215.71</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing households</td>
<td>4,431</td>
<td>775.11</td>
<td>640.16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth program attendance</td>
<td>5,304</td>
<td>215.83</td>
<td>215.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population (census tract)</td>
<td>5,940</td>
<td>4,263.61</td>
<td>1,500.60</td>
<td>−77.00</td>
<td>10,963.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the yearly local population estimates were interpolated from the 2000 and 2010 census tract values as described in the Data and Methodology section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Associated church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Marriages</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Baptisms</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Funerals</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Attendance</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Population</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.87</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Contributing households</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Youth program attendance</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Local population (census tract)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Year</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: correlations in bold have p < 0.1
TABLE 2
Summary Statistics and Correlations of Variables in the Catholic Sample
Used in Geographic Proximity Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated neighbors</td>
<td>4,964</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associated church</td>
<td>4,964</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriages</td>
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<td>24.34</td>
<td>19.89</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptisms</td>
<td>4,944</td>
<td>61.90</td>
<td>45.92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerals</td>
<td>4,951</td>
<td>46.66</td>
<td>32.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>4,951</td>
<td>1,411.83</td>
<td>1,022.13</td>
<td>51.00</td>
<td>8,828.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>4,957</td>
<td>4,827.72</td>
<td>3,223.14</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>18,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing households</td>
<td>3,784</td>
<td>829.50</td>
<td>653.27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth program attendance</td>
<td>4,645</td>
<td>236.05</td>
<td>217.68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population (census tract)</td>
<td>4,964</td>
<td>4,292.85</td>
<td>1,502.12</td>
<td>-77.00</td>
<td>10,963.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the yearly local population estimates were interpolated from the 2000 and 2010 census tract values as described in the Data and Methodology section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
<th>(11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Associated neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Associated church</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Marriages</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Baptisms</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Funerals</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Population</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Contributing households</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Youth program attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Local population (census tract)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) Year</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: correlations in bold have p < 0.1
**TABLE 3**
OLS Regressions Predicting Churchgoer Involvement in Catholic Churches in 1990-2010, Role of Direct Association with Scandal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Ceremonies</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population (1)</td>
<td>Marriages (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated church</td>
<td>-0.073** p = 0.026</td>
<td>-0.096*** p = 0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population</td>
<td>0.0001* p = 0.087</td>
<td>0.0001** p = 0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year controls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church fixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>5,888</td>
<td>5,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
All DVs logged: ln(DV+1). All models are with robust standard errors.
TABLE 4  
OLS Regressions Predicting Churchgoer Involvement  
in Catholic Churches in 1990-2010\textsuperscript{b}, Role of Geographic Proximity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Ceremonies</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Marriages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated neighbors</td>
<td>(-0.208^{***})</td>
<td>(-0.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(p = 0.002) &amp; (p = 0.180) &amp; (p = 0.012) &amp; (p = 0.181) &amp; (p = 0.00005) &amp; (p = 0.100) &amp; (p = 0.414)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated church</td>
<td>(-0.080^{**})</td>
<td>(-0.120^{***})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(p = 0.016) &amp; (p = 0.003) &amp; (p = 0.043) &amp; (p = 0.011) &amp; (p = 0.130) &amp; (p = 0.241) &amp; (p = 0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.0001(^{**})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(p = 0.133) &amp; (p = 0.045) &amp; (p = 0.306) &amp; (p = 0.108) &amp; (p = 0.277) &amp; (p = 0.181) &amp; (p = 0.106)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year controls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church fixed effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4,957</td>
<td>4,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.318</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *\(p<0.1; \)**\(p<0.05; \)**\(p<0.01\)  
All DVs logged: ln(DV+1). All models are with robust standard errors.

\textsuperscript{b} The difference in the number of observations compared to Table 3 is because the geographic analyses are limited to Catholic churches with definite physical locations in 2005.
# TABLE 5

OLS Regressions Predicting Churchgoer Involvement in United Methodist Churches in 1990-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Ceremonies</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated neighbors</td>
<td>−0.156***</td>
<td>−0.122*</td>
<td>−0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p = 0.009</td>
<td>p = 0.096</td>
<td>p = 0.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population</td>
<td>0.00004</td>
<td>0.00001</td>
<td>0.00001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p = 0.225</td>
<td>p = 0.733</td>
<td>p = 0.722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church fixed effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year controls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4,025</td>
<td>3,244</td>
<td>3,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
All DVs logged: ln(DV+1). All models are with robust standard errors.
### TABLE 6
OLS Regression Predicting Attendance in Lutheran Churches in 2000-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rituals</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated neighbors</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.678</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population</td>
<td>0.0001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church fixed effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year controls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
DV is logged: \(\ln(DV+1)\). All models are with robust standard errors.

### TABLE 7
OLS Regressions Predicting Churchgoer Involvement in Episcopal Churches in 2002-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated neighbors</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.975</td>
<td>p = 0.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local population</td>
<td>−0.00001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.913</td>
<td>p = 0.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church fixed effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year controls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
All DVs logged: \(\ln(DV+1)\). All models are with robust standard errors.
FIGURE 1
The Catholic Churches Map

Note: To construct the map on the left, we used individual church locations, represented by the small circles and corresponding identification numbers. The irregular polygon surrounding each church is that church’s calculated area. Churches are not located at the centroid of the polygon, but instead, every point within each polygon is closest to the same church. In the full map on the right, the outer boundary is the unified border of the five southeastern Pennsylvanian counties that comprise the Archdiocese of Philadelphia: Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Bucks, and Philadelphia County.

The center church 2680 has five neighboring Catholic churches. The percentage of its total perimeter (dark line) is listed next to each shared edge with the five neighbors. In this example, none of the neighbors were associated with accused priests prior to 2005, the associated neighbors variable for the focal church was zero for those years. The upper right neighbor was first associated with an accused priest in 2005, resulting in an associated neighbors value of 4.9% in 2005 for the focal church. The following year three additional neighboring churches were first associated with accused priests, resulting in an associated neighbors value of 75.7% (30.4 + 7.1 + 33.3 + 4.9) for the focal Catholic church from 2006 onward. The fifth neighbor was never associated with an accused priest.
FIGURE 2
Analysis of Individual-level Perceptions of the Catholic Church and its Officials’ Past and Current Motives

(a) Is your opinion of the Catholic Church favorable or unfavorable?

(b) When Church officials in Philadelphia heard accusations about priests in the past, do you think they mainly tried to prevent sexual abuse of children by priests or mainly tried to protect the reputation of the Church?

(c) And how about now? Do you think Church officials in Philadelphia now are mainly trying to prevent sexual abuse of children by priests or mainly trying to protect the reputation of the Church?