

## **Going to Church for Welfare: Social Services Delivered by the Church in the US 1996-2010**

Prof. Jeanet Sinding Bentzen

With Lena Lindbjerg Sperling

Are religious beliefs influenced by policy? The faith-based initiatives, commenced in the 1990s in the US and still ongoing today, facilitated the ability of religious organizations to provide government-funded social services in a religious setting. More generally, the initiatives aimed to strengthen the cooperation between church and state. We utilize the different uptake in terms of legislative changes over the period 1996-2010 across states and find that churchgoing increased more in states that passed more faith-based initiatives. The results hold when including state and time fixed effects, various individual- and state level controls, including general public spending. The results do not seem to be driven by increased churchgoing (or any other important confounders) prior to the law changes. We proceed to show that the laws also increased intrinsic religiosity such as strength of affiliation and beliefs that the Bible is the word of God. Last, we investigate the mechanism: Is the impact due to increased money through the churches or a general intensification of religion in the public sphere [TBA]? The results point to increased church-state cooperation as one explanation for the continued high religiosity levels in many US states.