Is Faith the Ultimate Divider?: The Intersections Between Religion and Political Behavior in the United States

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Is Faith the Ultimate Divider?: The Intersections Between Religion and Political Behavior in the United States

An Honors Paper for the Department of Government and Legal Studies

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Bowdoin College, 2023

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Preface

Growing up, I was raised Catholic by my parents. My father was the ninth child in an Irish-Catholic family in the Boston suburbs, so naturally he was born Catholic. My mother was raised Protestant, seldomly attending religious services, but in a classic 21st century American Christian manner, celebrated major religious holidays with family. In the mid-1990s, my mother spent a few years teaching at a Catholic elementary school in Brunswick, Maine, and eventually converted to Roman Catholicism during this time, primarily because she believed in the importance of a family practicing the same religion together.

My parents dragged me and my older sister, Delaney, along with them to Catholic mass at St. Joseph’s parish –where I attended Sunday school– in Needham, Massachusetts every groggy Sunday morning for eighteen years. We lived a modestly religious lifestyle, saying nightly prayers before bedtime and reciting “Grace” before every dinner. We did the bare minimum out of a Catholic household, but nonetheless, were considered moderately religious. In Needham, I never once felt an outsider due to my religious identity, yet upon coming to Bowdoin, I recall feeling self-conscious about my Catholic faith for the first time. I began to worry how I may be perceived by my peers if I told them about my upbringing, and thus looked to hide a part of my identity that I had always been taught to embrace.

Fast-forwarding to my Junior year at Bowdoin, in 2022, I enrolled in Professor Selinger’s seminar, entitled “American Political Development.” He generously gave us a very open-ended prompt for our final paper –a literature review– essentially allowing us to write on any topic in America that pertained to political development. For this paper, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to write about at first, but finally decided that I was intrigued by the Catholic church’s relationship with politics. It seemed to me that at Bowdoin, students assume just because one identifies as
Catholic, that they are therefore pro-life and going to vote Republican. I wanted to explore this in greater depth because obviously, this is not the case at all. In fact, historically, the majority of American Catholics have identified with the Democratic Party, and furthermore, the only two ever elected to the presidential office were both Democrat. I wanted to comprehend why Bowdoin students felt this way towards religious folks on campus, particularly Catholics.

I quickly learned, from just a little bit of research, that Catholics are cross-pressured voters, pulled in both directions by both policy preferences and historical trends. In the end, I wrote about twenty pages discussing how various scholars have approached the increasing (not total) Catholic defection towards the Republican Party in recent years, some of which made it into the final version of this thesis. Although at this point, I seemed to have a stronghold on Roman Catholic political development in the United States over time, I was fascinated by the overall relationship between religion and voting behavior, particularly as someone coming from a college that de-emphasizes religious institutions to such a large degree.

Upon learning about senior theses in the Government & Legal studies department at Bowdoin, I knew immediately that I wanted to explore this intersection between religiosity politics in America. I approached Professor Selinger with this idea, and he agreed that this topic was intriguing, and that a potential thesis could be written on it. Following an explanation of my initial thoughts; however, he redirected me to Professor Franz, suggesting that he might be more qualified to advise, given the quantitative nature of the project. Upon initial discussions with Professor Franz, he jumped at the opportunity. Although he was already advising two other honors projects for the 2022-2023 academic year, he thankfully decided to take on a third.

I would like to thank the Bowdoin Government & Legal Studies department for assisting me with this thesis and supporting me throughout the project’s entirety. First, Professor Selinger
for encouraging me, with serious caution I must add, to extrapolate upon last year’s seminar paper and pursue an honor’s project. Secondly, my committee of Professor Yarbrough and Professor Saavedra, for carefully reading through my drafts and providing me with thoughtful feedback during meetings and on their own time—adding unique perspectives and insights into a complex topic. Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Franz for meeting with me consistently throughout the academic year. He always over-extended himself to find appropriate data for my project and kept just the right amount of pressure to keep me going. He always spoke with a sense of positivity and optimism that allowed me to believe in myself and persevere, even when doubts crept in.

Finally, I want to express a special sense of gratitude to my mom, my dad, and my sister Delaney. I would not be where I am today without their unconditional support. They taught me the value of religion from a young age, and seeing how the Catholic community embraced our family was always awe inspiring and certainly a motivating factor for me writing this paper. Furthermore, both my parents, especially my mom, has consistently helped me improve my writing, when quite frankly, it could not have been worse just a few short years ago. From my first academic papers, to this one right here, I have always relied on my mom for edits and feedback. I bet both my parents doubted that I would ever be able to write a one-hundred-page paper ten years ago… but look at me now! I could not have done it without you both.

There are plenty of others that I could thank here as well, from Needham High School to Bowdoin College, all my teachers, professors, classmates, and friends helped me get to this point. I hope those who taught me so much can learn a thing or two from me about religion’s role in American politics after reading this thesis!
Introduction
Our Current State and How We Got Here

While deliberately omitted from United States’ founding documents, Christianity has always been deeply embedded within the culture and day-to-day operations of America. For example, the country follows the Christian calendar, Americans receive Sundays off from work as a traditional Holy Day of rest, and one can find the word “God” on the back of dollar bills and within the transcript of our country’s “Pledge of Allegiance.” There is no escaping the United States’ religious roots, which were brought here by European explorers four centuries ago.

Early observers of the United States quickly realized that religion plays a unique role in American society, unlike in any other nation. For example, following his travels to the Americas in the early-to-mid 19th century, the French political philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville, in 1835, wrote *Democracy in America*, explaining democratization in the United States, focusing on the driving forces behind its initial success.¹ In his view, religion was fundamental, observing that while “the law permits the American people to do everything, religion prevents them from conceiving everything and forbids them to dare everything.”² According to Tocqueville, religion was necessary in a democracy like the United States as it grounded individuals, prohibiting them from taking advantage of one another and devolving into a resemblance of anarchy. Tocqueville furthermore noted that while “there is an innumerable multitude of sects in the United States… all agree on the duties of men toward one another… [and] all the sects… are within the great Christian unity, and the morality… is everywhere the same.”³ Essentially, he argued that while

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¹ Tocqueville also included a corollary to *Democracy in America*, entitled “The Three Races” to address systemic racial issues in U.S. democratization, noting that its benefits did not extend to all inhabitants.
² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 280.
³ Ibid, 278.
religious diversity was present in 1835, it was generally accepted in America because nearly every denomination fell beneath the umbrella of Christianity. Therefore, citizens developed shared principles that guided the advancement of the country and its people, contributing to a sense of happiness, unity, and security.

While European influence is deeply embedded within the founding principles and doctrines of the United States, the role of religion in the Old and New Worlds has differed tremendously over time. As is the case for America, much of Europe was built on Christian principles, but to a much greater magnitude. Historically, a separation of church and state did not exist in many European nations. Tocqueville acknowledges this in his writings, noting how this distinction affected the ways in which the citizenry interacted with religion in their lives. He explained that the division of American Christianity into several sects prevented any single denomination from developing an alliance with the state and thereby protected the integrity of the greater faith.4 Unlike most European countries which were dominated by a single denomination, the choice of worship in America allowed the citizenry to maintain a common morality that could be accepted, without involving religion in politics.5 In turn, a greater sense of happiness and independence with regards to religious affiliations grew in the United States, laying the framework for a democratic society.

Tocqueville marveled at the American religious phenomena, astounded that a separation of church and state at the national level could result in such strong attachments to faith. In his

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4 This phenomenon existed more at the national level, whereas the states, during Tocqueville’s time, were permitted to establish a religion, happening regularly in the highly religious Northeast. This remained true until the 20th century, particularly in 1947, when the “Establishment Clause” was added to the First Amendment, prohibiting government from “establishing” a religion. Soon after, the post-Civil War Fourteenth Amendment eventually applied the Bill of Rights to the states, and subsequently, Supreme Court cases emerged as a result of numerous constitutional legality challenges pertaining to free religious practices.
writings, he communicated that “from the beginning, [in America,] politics and religion were in accord, and they have not since ceased to be so since.”6 According to Tocqueville, religion supplied the moral boundary within where the political world operated. In addition, in America, Tocqueville argued that religion is stronger when it is independent of the state because it must pull its own oar. As a result, both the state and the church are more resilient because there is no mutual dependency between the two, as was the case in many European countries of the time, where the two were deeply intertwined.7

Differences in European and American religiosity can also be traced to each’s approach to the Enlightenment during the 17th to 19th centuries. According to British Sociologist Grace Davie, the Enlightenment in Europe, particularly in France, was widely viewed as a “freedom from belief,” rather than the American idea of a “freedom to believe.”8 In the United States, the Enlightenment existed alongside a vibrant, developing democracy, so it was more efficiently embedded into industrial cities following the country’s founding. In Europe, citizens viewed this period as a time free of compulsory religious institutions that dominated the public sphere, and thus looked to break from the chains that had historically oriented their lives towards one single direction or focus.9 According to Spanish sociologist José Casanova, this process led to what many scholars refer to as the emergence of a “post-Christian Europe.”10 By emphasizing this term, Casanova deliberately pushes back on the term “secularization,” arguing that rapid

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6 Ibid, 275.
7 Ibid, 284.
9 Ibid.
religious transformations in Europe should be considered an “unchurching,” as Davie subsequently coined the phrase “believing without belonging.”11

Today, Europe boasts some of the most impressive churches in the world; however, a large majority of pews have been left vacant as this “unchurching” process has unfolded. Many Europeans see religion as an irritant, fueling “glimmering embers,” as it ignites passionate political conflicts, thus making liberal political coexistence and tolerance in a united Europe nearly impossible. According to Casanova, Christians, Jews, and Muslims in numerous European countries are being asked to keep religious beliefs, norms, and identities private in an effort to maintain the peace in a “modern, secular, enlightened Europe.”12

Coinciding with these emergent ideas regarding the role of religion in European society, many citizens have begun to disassociate from traditional religious institutions. For example, American sociologist, Theodore Caplow, in a 1981 Princeton Religious Research Center study, asked respondents “How do you usually spend your weekends?” The survey results suggested that 25 percent of the U.S. sample mentioned religious activities, compared to just a 5 to 8 percent range in four West European samples.13 Furthermore, in the same study, the proportion of young adults who thought religion should be very important in life was 41 percent in the United States, compared to just 7 to 11 percent in West European countries.14 It appears, then, that this “unchurching” in Europe has been a deliberate effort to maintain peace and civility in a society where religion was once overpowering and polarizing, contributing to significant

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14 Ibid.
warfare. Learning from past conflicts, Europeans today are largely content to keep their religious affiliations private, and move forward in a modern, secular civilization.

While Tocqueville, and later Caplow, emphasized the importance of religion in American social and political life in comparison to Europe, rates of religiosity in the United States have increasingly begun to resemble Europe in recent years. Currently, the religious make-up of the U.S. includes primarily Christians, who account for 64 percent of the population; those with no religious affiliation, make-up another 30 percent; while those practicing another religion, fill out the remaining 6 percent. Just thirty-six years ago, in 1990, Christians made up about 90 percent of the country’s population, while those with no religion affiliations accounted for only 5 percent. These shifts are astronomical in such a short span, and recent studies project that transformations likely will not slow in future years. By the year 2070, it is projected that Christians could range anywhere between 35 to 54 percent of the population, while those without a religion are likely to rise to within the 34 to 52 percent range. As a result, it is increasingly evident that the United States is moving away from a fundamentally Christian society to one that is split nearly evenly between Christians and seculars in just a mere eighty years (Figure 0.1).
Not surprisingly, as the percentage of self-identifying Christians in the U.S. has fallen, so has the number of those attending church services regularly. As noted above, the United States does remain a religious nation, with about seventy percent affiliating with some organized religion. However, far fewer, below fifty percent, have a formal membership with a specific religious denomination, according to Gallup data collected in 2020 (Figure 0.2). In this collection, 47 percent of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue, or mosque, down from 50 percent in 2018 and 70 percent in 1999. Church membership is also strongly correlated with age, as 66 percent of traditionalists – U.S. adults born before 1946 – belong to a church, compared with 58 percent of baby boomers, 50 percent of those in Generation X and 36 percent of millennials.\textsuperscript{17} These data suggest that a reversal of trends is unlikely – at least in the near

future— as younger Americans, who will make-up the population of this country in future decades, are abandoning this way of life. It is likely, then, that the percentage of Americans attending services will continue to decline, rather than increase anytime soon.

Figure 0.2:

![Graph showing church membership among U.S. adults](https://example.com/graph.png)

Citation: Jones, Jeffrey M. “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time.” *Gallup*, 20 Nov. 2021.

The exact reasons for an overall declining sense of religiosity in America are still relatively unknown, though several hypotheses have gained varying degrees of recognition in recent years. Crediting social theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim, some scholars have argued that secularization is inevitable because as societies modernize, religion fades in importance. For example, famous 20th century writer and political commentator, Walter Lippmann once said, “the acids of modernity corrode the pillars of faith.” Some scholars have also theorized that secularization is driven by a backlash to the politicization of religion. This idea, to which will return in Chapter One, is backed by professors

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Michael Hout and Claude Fischer, suggesting that many Americans are moving away from religion “as a symbolic statement against the Religious Right.” Others have argued that because the United States is no longer in a constant battle against the “godless” Communists and is instead facing threats from “militant” Islamists, the stigma of disclaiming a religious affiliation has lessened, and thus, the religious landscape altered by political activity itself.

Moving away from some of the more politically oriented theories behind decreasing religiosity, cultural norms have also been viewed as a primary cause. For example, many have argued that generational shifts have highlighted broad changes in marriage customs, such as delayed family formation and increased interfaith marriages, in addition to the sexual revolution, which has led to a de-emphasis on religion. Lastly, some scholars have surmised that diversity, dynamism, and decentralization of religion in America regularly brings different religions into contact with one another in ways that have never been seen before, resulting in a decrease in importance of old traditional values. Whatever the cause, it is undoubtedly true that Americans are moving away from traditional religious institutions and an increasingly secular society is emerging.

The decline of religiosity has far-reaching consequences, including within the arena of politics and voting behavior. For example, there is a known positive correlation between attending religious services and political participation, with those reporting regular church attendance being much more likely to vote. Membership with a house of worship not only fosters camaraderie and facilitates activity within the community, it also allows individuals to

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21 Ibid, 12.
receive cues from the church hierarchy, which can orient individuals in a certain direction politically. Historically, American religious groups have made their presences felt at the ballot box to ensure that their country and communities embrace the values of their denomination. As a result, recent trends are altering what has always remained constant in America: although the United States was not expressly founded as a Christian nation, it has always been intertwined with the country’s self-definition. This Christian identity is increasingly beginning to disappear, and in turn, Americans on both ends of the political spectrum no longer have a common culture on which to fall back.23

Overall, there are some silver linings to a declining sense of religiosity in America, as politically salient issues fueled by religion—namely, abortion and same sex marriage, have caused significant divisions and polarization in the United States.24 These issues are far less divisive in European societies predicated on private religiosity and an “unchurching” process. While a less religious America may very well result in fewer factions and thus, less animosity, I contend that we are seeing opposing trends manifest. Arguably, the United States has never been more affectively polarized, while simultaneously, never been less religious than it is today.25 So long as religion is important to a subset of individuals, it will remain relevant in the political sphere and fuel the polarization we see today.

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25 Affective polarization refers to how partisans feel about the opposing side and the symbols that represent them. While Americans are not actually as divided ideologically as it often appears, a zero-sum two party system has caused both the Democratic and Republican Party elites and platforms to drift towards the poles, and thus, the American public has begun to strongly dislike the other side or anything that represents it, Morris P. Fiona, Samuel A. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, “Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings,” The Journal of Politics (April 2008), 70(2), 556-560.
Essentially, it seems that the only way to establish a cohesive society is to remove religion altogether — something that seems entirely infeasible at this point — or the opposite, all cling to one set of religious beliefs. As Tocqueville suggested nearly two centuries ago, in a free democratic society, a sense of moral grounding is essential, and therefore, a lack of religious ties can prove dire, resulting in a citizenry fueled by hatred, disgust, and general misunderstanding. Right now, we are situated somewhere between the unchurched 21st century Europe and the morally grounded America observed by Tocqueville in 1835 — a dangerous place to be. To assess adequately the religious future of the United States, we need to analyze the religiosity of our present, exploring how various sects have behaved politically, and what has either remained constant or changed over time. By doing so, we can explore what types of commonalities exist between religious groups today and what types of effects these recent developments may have on our democratic system in the future.
Chapter One
The Political Development of American Religious Groups

While it is no secret that members of certain religious groups have often affiliated more with a given political party throughout history, society is fluid, and many changes have occurred, causing groups to alter their alignments. For example, while founded on Christianity, mass immigration in recent centuries has opened the door to other religions that do not fall under Tocqueville’s “innumerable sects.”26 In addition, not only are the religious affiliations of Americans in constant flux, but so also are the two major political parties—both changing stances, and even flipping policy allegiances in the past century. Accounting for each of these ideas, the topic of religion and political behavior is bound to be complex and multi-layered.

American religious groups have distinct identities, and although coalitions have formed, they often vote separately from one another and have accelerated some of the polarization that plagues our nation today. However, as religion has decreased in importance to many individuals, cross-pressures have become especially influential, with other identities, such as race and gender, also influencing how individuals cast their ballots. In this chapter, I look to explore some of the most well-known and politically engaging religious (or non-religious) groups in America, analyzing recent trends that have emerged regarding political behavior.

Seculars

Beginning with the group that has increased the most in recent years, “seculars” have begun to play an ever more increasing role in American politics. To understand seculars better, they can be broken down into distinct categories. The most common identity of seculars in

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26 Tocqueville, Democracy in America. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, 278.
America is those with no religious affiliation. These individuals, referred to as “Nones,” were reported to make-up nearly 23 percent of America’s population in 2018, up from 5 percent in 1972. While Nones are often equated with atheists, many of them, over half, still believe in some form of God or higher power today.

In a general analysis of American politics, it remains clear that the Democratic Party has embraced seculars more than Republicans in recent years. For example, a 2011 survey from the American Humanist Association suggests that committed secularists are far more likely to be Democrats– with over ninety percent of the secular sample responding that politically they identify as either leaning, weak, or strong Democrats. In addition, seculars are often one of the most radical groups on the political spectrum. For example, just as Evangelical Christians are more conservative on cultural issues than the average Republican, committed secularists see themselves as more liberal than the Democratic Party on the same issues.

Highlighting the importance of this secularist voting bloc within the Democratic Party, in his 2009 inaugural address, Democratic President Barack Obama described the United States as a “nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews, and Hindus, and nonbelievers.” This moment marked the first time in American history that a presidential inaugural address mentioned those that are unreligious. In addition, controversy has arisen regarding the inclusion of “God talk” in the Democratic platform over the years. Prior to 1996, it was unprecedented for the Party to omit “God” from its platform, yet ever since, religion’s inclusion has greatly varied. For example, in 2012, the Democratic platform neglected religion completely, and after amendments

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27 Layman, Campbell, and Green, Secular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics, 3.
28 Ibid, 7.
31 Layman, Campbell, and Green, Secular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics, 1.
were passed to include it, the official announcement was met with boos from a liberal crowd. As a result, many prominent newspaper headlines read, “Democrats boo God.” For these reasons, the Party has often been labeled as atheists who lack “tradition” and “class,” having little respect for American democratic principles.

Over time, these targeted labels have been further exacerbated by the fact that secularists are among the most liberal activists within the Democratic camp. In the mainstream media, it is often the least religious individuals that are vocally prioritizing ideological goals and standing in strong opposition to compromising with the GOP. This phenomenon has posed a problem for a Democratic Party whose largest sympathizers have historically identified as religious working-class individuals. They have thus had difficulty balancing the needs of the outspoken secular portion of their constituency and the more silent religious individuals. Overall, the secularism gap among activists is widely regarded as one of the largest intraparty gaps, with the ideological distance larger than the racial, education, age, or gender gaps within the Democratic Party.

On the other end of the political spectrum, secularists are still embedded within the depths of the Republican Party as well. Although traditional religiosity has been a distinguishing quality amongst Republican activists since the early 1970s, conservative secularists still exist, making up nearly 10 percent of delegates to the 2012 Republican National Convention. In addition, this figure has increased in recent years, with the proportion of the Republican Party not identifying with a religion growing from 10 percent in 2007 to 14 percent in 2010, according

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32 Ibid, 152
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, 153.
35 Ibid, 162.
36 Ibid, 166
Supplement 17

These trends can largely be explained by Republican Nones often adopting a Libertarian philosophy—a group that comprises about one quarter of all Libertarian identifying Americans today. Regarding a willingness to politically compromise, religionists are the least accommodating GOP activists, while secularists are the most willing to seek common ground, in direct contrast to those on the Democratic side.

Secularism also played an interesting role in the Republican vote for President Trump as well. Although Trump is seen as a controversial figure to many devout religionists, 2016 numbers suggest that core Trump supporters were not secularists, but people who identified with a religion who were not especially devout. In her analyses of the “Five Types of Trump Voters,” Emily Ekins, a Democracy Fund pollster, showed that most of Trump’s support in the Republican primaries were from “American Preservationists,” a group that rarely attends services within their religion, but attach sizeable importance to their religious identities. In an elaboration of her findings, Ekins describes that Preservationists “appear more likely to desire being around people like themselves ... [and] are far more likely to have a strong sense of their own racial identity.” On the contrary, Ekins suggests that the more devout religious tend to exude generosity and express greater trust towards people who are different from themselves, and are thus more tolerant toward immigrants and minority groups. As a result, the less-devout religious affiliates who prioritize their religious identities without the exposure to the messages

39 Layman, Campbell, and Green describe Religionists as individuals who “embrace religion but eschew secularism” (7-8).
40 Layman, Campbell, and Green, Secular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics, 170.
41 Ibid, 172.
of universal love, acceptance, and generosity taught at services, were most likely to vote for Trump in the 2016 presidential primaries. Ekins’ data suggest that Trump’s calls for a travel-ban, attacks on undocumented immigrants, and questions regarding President Obama’s place of birth resonated more with nonreligious Republicans than religiously devout affiliates of the GOP. These revelations suggest that if non-religionist, or secular, numbers within the Republican voter coalition grow, and they become more influential over time, there may be new political tensions with the religionist core of the party base.

While outspoken in politics and influential at the ballot box, secularists have had a very difficult time obtaining political office in the United States. On the surface, there should be low barriers to seculars getting elected into office— they are a heavily-populated group and the U.S. Constitution states that: “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Nevertheless, America’s Christian roots consistently plague secularists, and informal discrimination against them continues to persist in the political realm. Principally, stereotypes regarding their lack of morality, including low levels of trustworthiness, have hurt the campaigns of many atheists over the years. To highlight this bias, Gallup poll responses from 1978 to 2012 demonstrated that the percentage of Americans who would support a “generally well-qualified” candidate from their preferred political party who is an atheist began at 40 percent and increased to about 54 percent by 2012. While a slight increase, the percentages are still relatively low, especially considering many more respondents

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44 Ibid, 178.
46 Except the Mississippi State Constitution declares that: “No person who denies the existence of a Supreme Being shall hold any office in this state (Mississippi State Constitution — Article 14, Section 265).
47 United States Constitution — Article VI, Clause 3.
49 Ibid, 598-599.
are being asked to evaluate those with religious views not so dissimilar from their own.\textsuperscript{50}

To further test the attitudes of Americans towards atheist political candidates, in 2017, 219 workers were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk online workforce to participate in a study by Professor Andrew Frank from Lake Superior State University. Participants were asked whom they would prefer in an election between an atheist and a non-atheist. The first major takeaway from this survey was that religiously affiliated survey participants strongly preferred the Christian candidate, while unaffiliated participants preferred the atheist candidate.\textsuperscript{51} Second, previous performance in office seemed to be the biggest indicator of electability regardless of the candidate’s faith status.\textsuperscript{52} Lastly, voters were more supportive of the atheist candidate when his opponent held strong theocratic views about the role of religion in government.\textsuperscript{53} While these data suggest that atheist candidates can succeed, conditions must be squarely in their favor, either many atheist voters, previous success in office, or an overly extreme religious opponent. While this survey evaluated atheists, not seculars, between 2015 and 2017, there was only one openly non-religious Representative out of 535 members in the 114th United States Congress, thus demonstrating that those who even remotely lack religious ties have struggled to gain office over time.\textsuperscript{54} As a result, it is evident that this increasingly secular nation has a ways to go for its government to begin identifying proportionally with the general population religiously.

Seculars, it can be noted, play a complex role politically in the United States. First, they are fast-growing, particularly those that identify as Nones. Second, they still overwhelmingly identify with the Democratic Party, though there are a substantial proportion that classify

\textsuperscript{51} Franks, "Improving the Electability of Atheists in the United States: A Preliminary Examination," 607.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 611.
\textsuperscript{53} Fears about separation of church and state are of concern for the American public. Ibid, 614.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 600.
themselves as Libertarian and have found a home with the GOP, looking to counter vocal religionists on the right. Lastly, they have not fared well in elections as Americans still seem reluctant to support those without religious beliefs assuming office, and it seems that only a continued rise in seculars within the electorate will reverse this trend. Overall, however, this is a group that has gained significant steam and likely will continue to grow in the future.

Christians

Roman Catholics

In a Protestant-founded nation, Roman Catholics have historically been regarded as the Christian outcasts within the United States. However, beginning at the end of the 19th century, Catholics emigrated to the country in high numbers, increasing their proportion of the population from a mere 1 percent in 1790 to nearly 22 percent today.55 While still constituting a minority in America, Catholics now make-up a significant portion of the electorate, and therefore comprise a key demographic that politicians seek to attract. Recent evidence supports this claim as Catholics have become an integral swing-vote in recent elections; 52 percent voted for Joe Biden and 47 cast their ballots for Donald Trump in the 2020 Presidential Election, according to Edison Exit Polls. In 2016, a similar breakdown occurred, as 46 percent of Catholics favored Hillary Clinton, and 52 percent voted for Donald Trump.56 Strikingly, the Catholic electorate goes back-and-forth, and is evenly split between America’s two major political parties nationally.

With a few exceptions, Roman Catholics have overwhelmingly identified with the Democratic Party throughout much of American history. This allegiance can be attributed largely to the function of Tammany Hall, the main Democratic political machine, founded in 1789, in New York City. The machine used patronage resources to build a loyal, well-rewarded core of voters and leaders, capitalizing on an influx of distressed Irish, Italian, and Eastern European Catholic immigrants who ventured to America in the mid-19th century as a result of economic hardship. During these years and into the 20th century, the Democratic Party represented laissez-faire policies, free trade, toleration of local rights, and opposition to religious tests for state office—of great appeal to Catholics who desired tolerance for their own religious practices. As a result, even during years of national Republican dominance throughout the early-20th century, many Catholics remained loyal to Democratic political machines with a defined hierarchy, much like the Roman Catholic church itself. As the century wore on, a number of Catholic politicians also rose to prominence, including Al Smith, who ran for president in the 1928 election. While Smith lost handily to Herbert Hoover, he secured 80 percent of the Catholic vote during the election. This trend continued when John Fitzgerald Kennedy ran for president in 1960 and emerged victorious, earning 78 percent of the Catholic vote. Up until this time, Catholics consistently casted ballots for Democratic candidates in large numbers and most Catholic politicians remained Democratic as well.

As the 20th century progressed, however, it became increasingly apparent that the Democratic Party was struggling to retain its Catholic constituency. While Catholics turned out

57 Commonly defined as “hands off,” where the government abstains from interfering in the workings of the free market.
59 Ibid, xvi.
60 Ibid, 261.
for President Kennedy, his candidacy marked one of the first signs of uneasiness, as even in a winning effort, he received a lower proportion of the votes than Al Smith had in 1928. Finally, in the 1972 election, it became apparent that the tide was changing, as Republican candidate Richard Nixon received a whopping 59 percent of the Catholic vote. These trends persisted during the Reagan era, as the percentage of Catholics who identified with the GOP jumped from just 17 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 1986. During this time, American pollster George Gallup noted, “one thing is clear, no Democrat will ever be elected president without heavy Catholic support, and no candidate, Democrat or Republican, can take the Catholic vote for granted.” These words stand out today following recent voting trends, and are supported by party identification—46 percent of Catholics identify as Republican, while 47 percent consider themselves Democrats. As a result, it is evident that Catholic defection towards the Republican Party was both real and consequential.

One explanation for this defection to the Republican Party was advanced by D.G Hart in his book, *American Catholic: The Politics of Faith During the Cold War*. He suggests that the Cold War era steered many Catholics towards the right as conservative policies took a harder-line stance against communism. In his piece, Hart suggests that the first Roman Catholic political conservatives revised national political ideals in ways that made Americanism acceptable for Catholicism and political conservatism within the Republican Party plausible to

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61 Ibid, 282.
64 Americanism is viewed as the attachment or allegiance to the traditions, institutions, and ideals of the United States. These allegiances had been controversial within a Catholic church that historically had never really found a home in the U.S. In fact, in 1899, Pope Leo XIII condemned “Americanism—or adjusting the church to freedom, democracy, and popular sovereignty—as a heresy in a reaction to modernity.” D.G. Hart, *American Catholic: The Politics of Faith During the Cold War*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2020), 9.
Roman Catholics. In Hart’s view, the Cold War marked a new opportunity for Catholics to defect from a Democratic Party to which they had remained loyal for decades. In his view, leading Catholic conservatives appealed to the Catholic voting bloc by casting the United States as a redeemer nation set to liberate the world from tyranny.

To substantiate these claims, Hart relies on the rhetoric employed by American Catholic conservatives that appealed to the Catholic electorate. He suggests that there was a significant change in language during this era as Catholics began to find their place in a Protestant-dominated society that had historically looked down upon them. Following two world wars, Catholics were not only provided new opportunities, but a rise in Americanism swept across the nation as the United States emerged victorious in the face of totalitarianism and fascism abroad. Due to greater opportunities presented to Catholics during this time, this rise in sentiment spread amongst a number of leading Catholic conservatives who began displaying their “city on a hill” rhetoric, encouraging Catholics to strengthen their patriotic relations. Hart references several individuals, including Phyllis Schlafly, who in the 1950s, suggested that “Americanism” and “Catholicism” faith now go hand-in-hand. Several leading conservatives began to suggest that the West, particularly America, is “God’s civilization,” and therefore communism has no place here, and only a strong reliance on faith could keep it out. During the Cold War, these ideas appealed to Catholics who feared that communism threatened their religious values and saw America as the antithesis of such atheistic practices. Hart observes that such arguments also encountered little resistance from the church hierarchy, who began to push the idea that Roman

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66 Ibid.
67 Derived from the teaching of Salt and Light from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, John Winthrop’s 1630 sermon described the Massachusetts Bay colony as “A City on a Hill,” emphasizing that they would represent an example for all to follow. In a more modern context, the phrase refers to America acting as a "beacon of hope" for the world.
69 Ibid, 94.
Catholicism would restore the United States to its rightful place in world affairs as a Christian and liberal society, further strengthening the connection between religion and nationhood. As a result, conservative Republican values, which employed extensive anti-Soviet rhetoric, began to turn many against their traditional Democratic loyalties.\footnote{Ibid, 16.}

Another reason for the Catholics heading in the Republican direction was advanced by Michael Novak in his 1996 book, *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics & Culture in American Life*, an enlarged version of his 1972 book, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*. Novak argued that an influx of immigration from Eastern Europe over time brought together a new class of ethnic whites who grew wary of competitive advantages gained by minorities in the post-World War II era, including desegregation and Civil Rights. As a result, many of these Catholics grew skeptical of a Democratic Party that seemed to favor the interests of everyone but their own.

In this book, Novak outlines the views of many ethnic whites, or Catholic PIGS (hailing from Poland, Italy, Greece, and Slovakia\footnote{Novak discusses the incorporation of Irish immigrants into this acronym—he asserts in a subsequent section: “I have not fully included the Irish because, to most southern and eastern Europeans, the Irish were the first face of America... politically, however, ethnic politics is bound to include the Irish. Although their perceptions, their style, and their preferred methods differ from those of the PIGS, as Catholics [they] share much in common.” Novak, Michael. *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics & Culture in American Life*, (Transaction Publishers, 1996), 55-56.}) from the 1960s and 1970s in several sections within the book, noting their opposition to social integration. Interestingly, Novak notes that at the time, most PIGS believed blacks were treated improperly in this country, yet wondered why the gains of blacks should be at their expense, since they had so little and felt so constricted.\footnote{Michael Novak. *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics & Culture in American Life*, 15.} In addition, Novak asserts that many ethnics adopted traditional lower-class southern white views,\footnote{This is a reference to the idea that during 19th century primarily most lower-class whites in the American South were in favor of slavery. This was not due to the fact that it advanced their direct economic benefits in any way as it did for rich landholding whites, but because it kept them afloat socially—above a group that was solidly situated below them. It also eliminated economic competition that would inevitably affect them if blacks were freed.} seeing blacks as a threat, looking to jump over their heads and form coalitions with white
intellectuals. Novak also argues the importance of “law and order” rhetoric during this period. He asserts that the term “law and order” was viewed as a code for further injustice to both blacks and lower-class white ethnics. Many ethnics believed that the rich were protected from criminals, but the working man was not. Liberal Democrats in the 1960s began to take inspiration from those who did not feel the weight of crime, and as a result began to lose touch with the working-class, opening the door for the Republican Party to reach out to these ethnics and ultimately win their support.\textsuperscript{74}

Novak suggests that ethnics began taking a more conservative stance overall due to the perception that liberal intellectuals consistently discounted them. Catholic PIGS grew frustrated with being targeted as perpetrators of racist behavior, arguing that they had moved into a society in which racism was already widespread. Novak argues that the entire experience of becoming American is summarized in the experience of being made to feel guilty.\textsuperscript{75} In this era of great social upheaval, Novak suggests that lower-class ethnics were often an afterthought and highly neglected, echoing Hart’s notion that many Catholics historically felt like they were treated as un-American.

Novak tends to agree that the Cold War created great changes in party identification, as the rise in progressivism during this era alienated the Catholic coalition from their voting blocs. The rise in radical leftists within the Democratic coalition during the 1960s and 1970s who pushed for desegregation, forced busing, and anti-war protests, left many ethnic Catholics feeling like they had been left behind, and that the Party did not value their vote anymore.\textsuperscript{76} Novak quotes an ethnic Boston policeman during this time who complained that, “I think the… left-

\textsuperscript{74} Michael Novak. \textit{Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics & Culture in American Life}, 36.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 74.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 75.
wing college crowd, is trying to destroy this country, step by step… and let me tell you, the ordinary people of this country, the average workingman, he’s sick and tired of those students, so full of themselves, and their teachers.” In his writings, Novak provides substantial first hand evidence from this time period to suggest that the Democratic Party lost favor among ethnic whites through their overly liberal approach.

Another argument for this defection includes a more conventional idea, described in detail by Dave Bridge in his article, “How the Republican Party Used Supreme Court Attacks to Pursue Catholic Voters.” As the title suggests, Bridge argues that Republican politicians capitalized on liberal Supreme Court decisions during the mid-20th century to deliberately appeal to Catholic voters by incorporating them into their coalition.

Like Hart and Novak, Bridge argues that Republican defection began during the Cold War era. However, he asserts that it was no accident that Catholics fell to the GOP, but rather leading Republicans actively incentivized voters to join in their cause. While Bridge argues that the 1973 Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade played a massive role in these efforts, earlier court cases pertaining to school prayer and busing had a large impact as well—abortion was just the tipping point. As a result, Bridge argues, Republican leaders began “hunting where the ducks are,” as they took advantage of the new court-created fault lines, and sought out Catholic voters via court-curbing efforts.

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77 Ibid, 76.
78 Dave Bridge, “How the Republican Party Used Supreme Court Attacks to Pursue Catholic Voters,” U.S. Catholic Historian, 34, No. 4, (Fall 2016), Published by The Catholic University of America Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/642283.
79 Ibid, 103.
80 “Hunting where the ducks are” is a classic phrase used to describe the Republican strategy of appealing to individuals—mainly traditionally Southern Dixiecrats—during the party sorting era of the 20th century. It suggests that the Republican Party, namely under Nixon, reacted to changes in the Democratic Party to seek opportunities in places where they are most likely to occur.
81 Court-curbing is a deliberate effort from politicians directed at constraining the influence of the courts.
82 Bridge, “How the Republican Party Used Supreme Court Attacks to Pursue Catholic Voters,” 88.
To support this argument, Bridge provides various statistics about Catholic voters during this time. He shows that Catholics began to shift their voting patterns between 1960 and 1980 nationally, as 16 percent switched from voting Democrat to Republican in House elections, while in Senate elections, 15 percent switched their allegiances as well. Bridge argues that the Supreme Court became an easy target for Republican politicians looking to attract Catholic voters during the 1960s and 1970s because Justices are not voted in by the electorate. Two decisions prior to *Roe v. Wade* that spurred significant backlash were *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) — which ruled that state-sponsorship of school prayer violated the Establishment Clause, while *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) held that federal courts could intervene when local school district desegregation plans proved ineffective. Bridge argues that many Catholics grew wary of these decisions because they aimed to uphold traditional values within their neighborhoods and communities. Bridge notes that Republicans consciously reached out to Catholics through advocating specific positions on each issue, and Republican Congress members attacked a liberal Supreme Court through court-curbing proposals, such as campaign speeches, platform planks, and special commissions. In total, between 1970 and 1980, Republican members of Congress launched 381 verbal attacks at the court's school prayer ruling and 93 verbal attacks targeting the busing decision.

Finally, Bridge emphasizes the importance of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), one of the most influential turning points in Catholic defection towards the Republican Party. While hotly contested in today’s political climate, abortion did not enter American politics until the mid-20th century. The Catholic church has always taken a firm stance against abortion, as Number 2271

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83 Ibid, 83.
84 Ibid, 88-91.
85 Ibid, 92.
86 Ibid, 97.
of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states “the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable.” As a result, the Supreme Court's 1973 decision making abortion more accessible in states where it had been prohibited, provoked opposition from the church hierarchy and the Catholic electorate as a whole. In order to capitalize on this decision and further bring Catholics into their coalition, from 1973 to 1980, Republican members of Congress introduced 128 abortion-related court-curbing attacks, resulting in four pro-life related amendments being passed. Bridge argues that the Supreme Court’s decision and the subsequent reaction to Roe v. Wade was a tipping point—following a lengthy trend of unfavorable Supreme Court decisions—for Catholics who had historically identified with the Democratic Party.

Another argument, developed by Laura Hussey and Geoffrey Layman in their piece, “Coping with Cross-Pressures: Electoral Choice and Political Perceptions among American Catholics,” pushes back on a number of previous claims. Hussey and Layman argue that Catholic voters experience cross-pressures drawing them towards both parties, but that it is actually the Democrats that win out, since most Catholic voters stick with the party with which they have historically identified.

Hussey and Layman challenge the idea that Catholics have blindly followed the Republican Party due to their conservative stance on social issues. Hussey and Layman evaluate the impact of two traditional Catholic teachings, pro-life and pro-welfare. They argue that this has been a point of conflict because both stances cross-cut American partisan lines, with the

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87 “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” 2nd ed. No. 2271.
Republican Party supporting the former position, and Democrats the latter. As a result, the Catholic faith brings cross-pressures to voters who are being pulled in opposite directions.

To substantiate these claims, Hussey and Layman tested hypotheses with data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) during the 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 election years. They analyzed four dependent variables: “the combination of abortion and social welfare policy views that an individual holds; two-party presidential vote choice; whether an individual misperceived the Democratic candidate’s abortion policy position; and whether an individual misperceived the Republican candidate’s social welfare policy position.” Results suggest that pro-life, pro-welfare Catholics gave 77 percent of their votes to the Democratic Party, while 91 percent of liberal Catholics (just pro-welfare) and 26 percent of conservative Catholics (just pro-life) voted for the Democratic candidate. Hussey and Layman conclude that those who truly follow the beliefs of the church hierarchy—pro-life and pro welfare, are more likely to vote for the Democratic Party. They build upon arguments made by Bridge which suggest that those who are exclusively pro-life have found a home with the Republican Party, yet demonstrate that the “truly” Catholic voter has stuck with the Democratic Party primarily.

In addition, they determined that pro-life and pro-welfare Catholics are 19 percentage points more likely than Catholic Democratic voters to misperceive the Democrat’s abortion position and are 33 percentage points more likely than Catholic Republican voters to misperceive the Republican’s social welfare position. Therefore, these cross-pressured voters do not so much change allegiances depending on their views as twist reality to conform to their liking. In this explanation, Hussey and Layman demonstrate the difficulties that Catholics face when the

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90 Ibid, 10.
91 Ibid, 17.
92 Ibid, 2.
93 Ibid, 23.
two-party system cuts across their religious beliefs, as voters often misinterpret policy views, rather than acknowledging that they are voting against their morals.

The final argument to explain transforming Catholic voter preferences stems from Michele Margolis’s, *From Politics to the Pews: How Partisanship and the Political Environment Shape Religious Identity*, which pushes back on prior claims regarding the Catholic electorate. She suggests that in the United States, voters are no longer divided according to religious denomination; rather partisanship now depends on the intensity of one’s beliefs—traditionalists versus modernists.

Margolis relies on substantial quantitative evidence to differentiate between traditionalists and modernists. First, she suggests that more committed Catholics identify with the Republican Party. The table evaluates Catholics’ partisanship based on church attendance, derived from the 2012 ANES Data. Catholics who “seldom attend” are 51 percent Democrat and 32 percent Republican, those who “attend a few times a year” are 53 percent Democrat and 32 percent Republican, those who “attend a few times a month” are 43 percent Democrat and 41 percent Republican, and lastly, those who “attend weekly or more” are 30 percent Democrat and 61 percent Republican. In addition, Margolis provides evidence to reveal that among Mainline Protestants, those who “seldom attend” are 48 percent Democrat and 44 percent Republican and those who “attend weekly or more” are 33 percent Democrat and 57 percent Republican. For Evangelical Protestants, those who “seldom attend” are 34 percent Democrat and 53 percent Republican and those who “attend weekly or more” are 16 percent Democrat and 79 percent Republican. By observing denominational trends, Margolis suggests that individuals are no longer substantially divided by affiliation, but rather, intensity of religious beliefs and behaviors.

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94 Michele F. Margolis, *From Politics to the Pews: How Partisanship and the Political Environment Shape Religious Identity.*
Margolis essentially argues that a Catholic identity is no longer a very strong of an indicator regarding how one casts their ballot. She notes that religious commitment became an important indicator of vote choice in the 1980s and 1990s for the first time, and can be evidenced through a divergence in partisanship during these years through an observation of voting patterns from religious non-identifiers and biblical literalists, in addition to church attendees.95 These trends are particularly relevant as Catholics today are divided into two distinct camps: Catholics who no longer attend weekend masses and those who make it a priority to go to religious services. As evidenced in a 2014-2017 dataset, this latter group has greatly reduced in size as 39 percent of Catholics recorded attending church in the past seven days, opposed to 75 percent in 1955.96 As Catholics have moved towards the right, and are simultaneously attending services to a lesser degree, the larger story may not be the voting behavior of a diverse denomination itself. Changes within a weakening Catholic church might tell a new narrative within religiosity and political behavior in the United States—a coalition between traditionalists and modernists within the Christian church, including Evangelical Christians.

This growing coalition and an overall increase in polarity between religious and nonreligious is further evidenced by a 1994 document, entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.” As the year 2000 approached, leading Evangelicals and Catholics organized to find common ground under American Christianity amongst fears of a transforming society. In this ecumenical document, followers signed that, “the Christian mission… must be advanced against formidable opposition… Islam, which in many instances denies the freedom to witness to the Gospel, must be of increasing

concern… At the same time… a widespread secularization increasingly descends into a moral, intellectual, and spiritual nihilism that denies.. the very idea of truth itself.” Christian religious leaders of this era feared that their traditional society was being penetrated by evils, such as Islam and secularism, and thus launched a defense. Today, this Catholic and evangelical coalition has only grown, as an increasingly secular progressive society has formed around us.

**White Evangelical Christians**

Evangelical Christian essentially means “good news” or “the Gospel,” and today is often associated with “born again,” in a reference to regeneration and personal conversion, emphasizing God’s revelation to humanity in spreading the Word of the Lord. In America, evangelicalism was produced through the First and Second Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries, reaching all denominations in an attempt to steer individuals back to a strict interpretation of *The Bible*. Interestingly, evangelicals are a diverse group, with its members belonging to several sects, such as Southern Baptists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Dutch Reformed groups, and some who do not belong to any denominational churches.

In America, evangelicalism began to take off, and morphed away from the more extremist label of “fundamentalism,” primarily in the post-World War II era. During this time, due to the return of war veterans and the pressing threat of communism, Americans began filling the church pews once again, seeking the Gospel as a blueprint for their everyday lives. Several prominent pastors, including Billy Graham, Harold Ockenga, Jerry Falwell, R.J. Rushdoony, and

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Francis Schaeffer began to assert their influence, creating coalitions that ran counter to the rise of liberalism in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{99} In 1979, Jerry Falwell launched the “Moral Majority,” an organization that aimed to mobilize conservative Christians, announcing the battle against “secular humanism,” exclaiming to the people: “we are fighting a holy war… and this time we are going to win.”\textsuperscript{100} Evangelicals, while they appear somewhat similar to Catholics in their position on social issues, never had the same magnitude of Democratic affiliations outside of the American South. While Catholics were a significant voting bloc for the Democratic Party for about a century, staunch evangelicals have only gained relevance in politics over the past few decades, beginning with the religious revival in the 1960s, and with help from the noteworthy individuals listed above. Evangelicals today, however, are extremely active in politics, and comprise a significant portion of the American constituency, over 25 percent, according to 2014 data from the \textit{Pew Research Center}.\textsuperscript{101}

Today, the terms “Evangelical” and “Republican” have become essentially synonymous. A study conducted by David E. Campbell, John C. Green and Geoffrey C. Layman demonstrates just how consequential this assumption has been throughout the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. In an evaluation of perceived party image versus actual 2006 congressional election voting behavior, 74 percent viewed Evangelical Christians as “Mainly Republicans,” when 70 percent voted Republican in that election cycle. While similar to actual results, Campbell, Green and Layman demonstrate that other groups, such as Mormons and Catholics, are not assumed to embody this political label, even when it may also be fitting. For example, Mormons were perceived by 51 percent of

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\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 3-8. \\
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 291. \\
\textsuperscript{101} “Chapter 1: The Changing Religious Composition of the U.S.” (web page), Pew Research Center (website), accessed December 19, 2022. \\
\end{flushright}
respondents to be “Mainly Republicans,” while a whopping 72 percent voted Republican during the 2006 election. Catholics were perceived by 25 percent to be “Mainly Republican,” while over half, 53 percent, voted for the GOP that year.\(^\text{102}\) Their study suggests that evangelicals, and perhaps deservedly so, have acquired a conservative Republican label, yet other groups who are not entirely distinct from them politically, have not.

In a similar study, conducted in 2011, Campbell, Green, and Layman also measured the impact of group perceptions on the electorate’s voting behavior through the presentation of voting profiles. The results of this experiment were staggering as Republicans were just as likely to favor a candidate labeled “evangelical” who had Democratic priorities as someone with no religious label but prioritized a Republican agenda. On the contrary, Democrats exhibited the same patterns when choosing between a Democratic Evangelical and a candidate with no party affiliation.\(^\text{103}\) This study illustrates the influence that a candidate's social group traits exert on partisan voting, as the label “evangelical” appears to neutralize the impact that “Democrat” has on a candidate’s identity.

Looking backward, it is useful to analyze trends that have morphed this evangelical religious group into the reliable Republican voting bloc they are known as today. During President Reagan’s tenure in office, evangelicals mobilized politically, as they had finally been given a voice on the national level. There were, however, significant concerns that evangelicals’ political prominence was short-termed, as voter turnout decreased between the 1980 and 1984 presidential elections. In addition, the group experienced little success in the 1986 congressional


\(^{103}\) Ibid, 49-52.
campaigns, and numerous credibility and financial scandals surfaced regarding televangelists during the late 1980’s. Prior to 1980, Evangelicals had turned out for Democrats in slightly higher numbers, but during Reagan’s tenure, this trend reversed.

Interestingly, in the 1980s, it was younger evangelicals that were most Republican in their behavior, while older voters remained more Democratic. Contrary to general American voting behavior, older evangelicals historically strayed away from politics, with lower voting turnout and political activism. The young, however, began receiving cues from church hierarchy, and thus flocked to the polls in large numbers to exert influence during this time.

Further highlighting these trends, data from the ANES show that young evangelicals (under 35), voted in much higher numbers than non-evangelicals in their age group. For example, in 1988, 68 percent of young evangelicals turned out, opposed to just 61 percent of non-evangelicals in the non-South. In the South, these numbers were similar, at 56.3 percent and 45.7 percent. These numbers may explain why older evangelicals are often more outspoken and politically involved in today’s political climate.

Increasingly, the political knowledge of many evangelicals has come into question with voting behavior often running contrary to many of the group’s core religious values, and opposition to mainstream media has run rampant. A study conducted by Ben Gaskins evaluated the motivation and ability of evangelicals to learn political facts from the media environment. Gaskins offers three hypotheses pertaining to Evangelicals within this study: The “Media Distrust Hypothesis,” that evangelicals with high religious service attendance will see the media

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104 Televangelists are evangelical leaders who were champions of the media to get messages across—especially through the use of the television. Examples include Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker and Tammy Faye Bakker, and Pat Robertson.
106 Ibid, 333.
107 Ibid, 334.
as hostile to them and their values; the “Religious Attendance Hypothesis,” that those who often
attend religious services will be as informed as those who do not on general and static types of
political knowledge, but will have less knowledge on surveillance-policy information; and
lastly, the “Evangelical Identification Hypothesis,” that evangelicals will be less informed on all
forms of political knowledge, with the gap between evangelicals and non-evangelicals widening
only for surveillance-policy knowledge.

To evaluate these three hypotheses, Gaskins conducted a study using data from several
national studies, including the 2016 ANES. His results suggest that evangelicals are over 15
percentage points more likely to view the media as unfriendly to their religion than other groups.
In addition, people with the highest religious attendance are over 30 percentage points more
likely than those with low attendance to say that the media is hostile to their values, and
evangelicals are over 17 points more likely than high attenders of other religions to say this.
Gaskins also suggests that religious beliefs directly influence how individuals obtain their news.
For example, due to their mistrust, evangelicals are less likely to choose public television to
obtain information. Therefore, if mainstream news conveys neutral information about public
policy to its audience, those who are highly religious or evangelical tend to miss out on this.

There is a notable increase, however, in highly religious evangelicals’ knowledge of
issues with higher versus lower coverage. For this study, Gaskins compiled 86 unique political
knowledge questions from 19 separate surveys and evaluated the accuracy of the respondents’
answers. While he does not elaborate on the specific qualifications of each group, he separates

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108 Surveillance-policy information is regarded as news that has gained widespread media attention and is being
widely discussed on mainstream sources. In other words, this type of policy news has the cameras on it extensively,
thus the term surveillance.
109 Ben Gaskins, “The Effects of Religious Attendance and Evangelical Identification on Media Perception and
110 Ibid, 356.
111 Ibid, 358.
the evangelical respondents into “high church attenders” and “low church attenders.” The results of this study suggest that for issues with low media attention, high attenders were predicted to get 42 percent of questions correct, while low attenders only 33 percent. However, for issues with increased media coverage, low attenders got nearly 55 percent correct, while high attenders, only 31 percent. Overall, religious attendance for evangelicals reduces mainstream political knowledge as the highly religious view the secular news media as hostile and unfriendly, which subsequently affects their opinions and political choices. As a result, religious evangelicals are most likely to reject factual information that emanates from the mainstream media.

Most recently, evangelicals have been under fire, not only for their rejection of news outlets, but for their support of President Donald Trump, who appears to embody nearly every value that the group would detest. It was shocking to many Americans that over 80 percent of white evangelicals, dedicated to personal morality, supported the thrice-married, casino-owning, foul-mouthed candidate who was caught on tape degrading women. According to Michele Margolis, however, the data tell a complex story. In 2016, following the presidential election, Margolis conducted a Survey Sampling International (SSI) study of 2,000 people, including 500 evangelicals. While her data ultimately suggest that support for President Trump in the general election increased with religiosity, evangelicals with stronger religious ties were more likely to report being undecided in the weeks leading up to the election. As a result, although they ultimately cast their ballots for President Trump, many traditional evangelicals who have consistently voted Republican since the Reagan years had a difficult time doing so in 2016.

112 Ibid, 364.
113 Ibid, 370.
In addition, Margolis’s 2016 SSI survey asked Republicans about their preferred nominee during the primary elections. In contrast with the previous study, holding a greater number of religious beliefs was correlated with less support for Trump in the primary and more support for a different candidate. In the end, roughly ninety percent of white evangelical Republicans voted for Trump—about the same percentage of non-evangelical Republicans who voted for him. As a result, Margolis demonstrates that Evangelical Republicans behaved no differently than other Republicans during the 2016 election. These findings show that negative partisanship plays an important role in understanding evangelical public opinion—they simply had no other satisfactory alternatives. While often dismayed by the choices at their disposal, devout evangelicals are more likely to hold negative evaluations of out-party candidates and are thus unlikely to abandon the Republican Party.

While the trends above suggest that evangelicals, in many senses, have been cornered, forced to vote a certain way; it is also important to acknowledge the effects evangelicals have had on America’s political climate overall. Alluding to some of the factors that have driven many away from religious identities, some have argued that the increased rightward movement of evangelicals and the Christian Right has alienated liberals and moderates alike, and thus threatened organized religion in the United States. For example, in 2002, Michael Hout and Claude Fischer suggested that the increased visibility of the Religious Right in the early 1990s corresponded with an increased number of survey respondents indicating that they have “no religion.”

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116 Ibid, 104.
118 Ibid, 110.
However, Paul Djupe, Jacob Neiheisel, and Anand Sokhey, draw from three studies between 2006 to 2012 to push back on this interpretation. First, in 2006, they note that across a six-month span, nearly one-fifth of the conservative population changed church affiliation. Again, in 2012, another study showed that the proportion of individuals who disaffiliated from their church after six months was the same. During this same time, however, the political involvement of the clergy began to grow, and the barriers to organizational exit fell. Overall, then, political engagement within congregations created conditions where members could more easily disaffiliate given declining “brand” loyalty. In addition, their studies seem to suggest that disaffiliation is most prevalent among those whose initial attachment to a church is weak, and that its causes are embedded more in social ties and everyday experience than a dissatisfaction with the Christian Right.

White evangelical Christians have gained significant national attention in recent years as a reliably Republican voting bloc—a phenomenon that has accelerated over time. Evangelical Christians have also fallen victim to alienation within the mainstream media, often feeling attacked by the public, and have thus opted to get news from unconventional outlets. Most interestingly, however is the rise of a traditionalist religious coalition, as similar voting patterns have emerged between them and pro-life religious Catholics, further reinforcing a divide with a growing secular society around them.

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121 Ibid, 19.
122 While their evidence may demonstrate that the political visibility of the Christian Right is not driving people to disaffiliate, the data are rather weak and dated. Future studies of more recent years on a similar premise may be necessary to help answer whether evangelicals are pushing Americans away from organized religion, and what consequences this may have on politics.
Black Protestants

Black Protestants have long played an important role in the American constituency and have influenced politics, though recently, the Protestant church has decreased in importance to the lives of many Black Americans. Historically, Southern Methodist and Baptist churches were the primary driving forces behind the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, with many activists rallying the coalition together during times of worship in the church. Black Protestant religious leaders continue to look towards faith, arguing that the best way to address racial discrimination is through Biblical study, confession, and prayer. By contrast, ‘The Black Lives Matter’ movement has focused more on protesting in the streets and gaining visibility through the mass media to publicize societal ills. As a result, a number of individuals have abandoned the church due to its inability to address systemic racism and reliance on an approach that has seemed to repeatedly fall short in the 21st century. Consequently, between 2008 and 2020, religious disaffiliation among blacks rose from 18 percent to 35 percent. These data emphasize the difficulties that the church has had in communicating to the public and mobilizing its constituents in a meaningful way in the past few decades.

The Protestant Church, however, remains an integral force for the mobilization of some blacks within the political sphere today. For example, the church serves as a unit—a force in which African Americans can bind together and push for demands as one bloc, rather than through their individual voices. Sociologist Bradley Koch noted that “the Black church has long been an opportunity for [them] to make economic demands and advances through grassroots

mobilization where traditional American political structures otherwise stripped them of upward mobility.” Overall, in some communities, the church remains a driving force behind political change, while in others, it has fallen short.

These data raise questions regarding how Black Protestants have generally cast their ballots over time. While it is no secret that African Americans have voted overwhelmingly Democrat since the mid-to-late 20th century – with over 90 percent doing so in the past four presidential election cycles alone – it is interesting to compare race and religion, in particular, evangelicals, who, as noted in the preceding section, have already been established as predominantly Republican. Republicans, subsequently, have attempted to appeal to Black Evangelicals through the emphasis on certain social issues such as school prayer and gay marriage. However, political scientist, Brad Lockerbie acknowledges that the level of marginalization for blacks seems to outweigh the social sentiments expressed by the Republican Party. As a result, more Democratic-backed sentiment is relayed from the church hierarchy to its constituents in these denominations. Using data from the 1990 to 2008 ANES studies, Lockerbie found that a black who is not an evangelical has a 4 percent chance of voting Republican and one that is evangelical has a 2 percent chance. These data show that evangelicalism works in an opposite effect for blacks and whites with regards to party identification. The church hierarchy in black evangelical churches tend to focus primarily on

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128 Unfortunately, we have no data in the post-Trump era, so it would be interesting to acknowledge if these numbers would be any different.
129 Ibid, 1151.
economic welfare, and not the social issues that influence many white evangelicals. As a result, it appears that the Republican party’s efforts to persuade black evangelicals on this basis have not been very productive. They have had marginal success elsewhere, however, particularly with the Latino population in the United States.

**Latinos**

The largest minority group in the United States, now comprising 18.9 percent of the population, is Latinos.\textsuperscript{130} According to the United States Census Bureau, a Latino is defined as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race”\textsuperscript{131} Latinos, therefore, are a diverse array of individuals, whose origins come from a variety of different countries and regions with distinct cultures and languages. While the backgrounds and experiences of Latinos in the United States are distinct, nearly every immigrant from Latin America was born in a country with a strong historical Catholic influence. For many Latino immigrants, religion is a fundamental aspect of their lives, and thus, a significant proportion have a strong Catholic faith that has been passed down generationally to descendants in the United States.

Catholic Latinos behave differently than white Catholics in America, largely due to their ethnic make-up. While white Catholics are essentially split with respect to their party affiliations, over two-thirds of Latino Catholics identify as Democrats or lean in that direction, while only about one quarter lean towards the Republican Party.\textsuperscript{132} An interesting movement

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\textsuperscript{132} Gregory A. Smith, “Eight Facts about Catholics and Politics in the U.S.” (web page), Pew Research Center (website), accessed May 1, 2023.
within Christianity, is the charismatic movement, meaning a “promot[ion] of the experience of
the Holy Spirit as manifested in spiritual gifts.”¹³³ In Latin America, the charismatic Catholic
movement, representing born again Christianity to a degree, has gained significant steam.
According to data from the Pew Research Center in 2014, over 50 percent of Latino Catholics
describe themselves as “charismatic Christians.”¹³⁴ While these charismatic groups are
commonly viewed as “more religious,” this increase in religiosity has not translated to much of a
difference in party identification.¹³⁵

Recently, the religious makeup of Latinos in the United States has begun to change, away
from the Catholic church. These transformations in religious identity were highlighted in a 2014
States.” The contents of this report are derived from survey data between May 24 and July 28 of
2013, among a nationally representative sample of 5,103 Hispanic adults. At that time, a strong
majority of Latinos still maintained their traditional Catholic identity, at 55 percent. In addition,
16 percent identified as Evangelical Protestant, 5 percent as Mainline Protestant, and 18 percent
unaffiliated. While over half of American Latinos self-identified as Catholic in this survey,
additional results suggest that nearly one quarter (24 percent) now classify themselves as former
Catholics, either entering the unaffiliated or Protestant camp. According to this study, the
decline has been rather immediate as well, with 2010 surveys suggesting that 67 percent of

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¹³⁵ Angel Saavedra Cisneros, Latino Identity and Political Attitudes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 217.
Latinos identify as Catholic, meaning a twelve-percentage point drop occurred over the four-year span before these data were published.\textsuperscript{136}

A 2021 article published by Meaghan Winter in \textit{The Atlantic}, “The Fastest-Growing Group of American Evangelicals,” further documents this phenomenon. Winter discusses the increase in Latinos who have begun affiliating with the Evangelical Protestant church, highlighting its deliberate recruitment efforts with the minority group. Latino Protestants have high levels of religiosity, especially in comparison to White Protestant and Latino Catholics, meaning they attend church, pray, and read the \textit{Bible} often. To mobilize this highly religious group, many evangelicals have begun recruiting and training more Latino Pastors so that the constituency will feel an increase in comfort and thus continue to convert. These efforts have been largely successful, especially considering many Latinos have felt underrepresented or even out of touch with the American Catholic church. For example, about 40 percent of all American Catholics are of Latin American descent, yet only 10 percent of the country’s Catholic clergy identify this way. In response, many Latinos are thus abandoning their traditional affiliations and entering evangelical churches.\textsuperscript{137}

The effects of these trends have some far-reaching political consequences. According to the 2014 \textit{Pew Research Center} data, Latino evangelicals behave differently than Catholics.\textsuperscript{138} On the topic of abortion, Latino evangelicals are far more likely to take an unfavorable stance,

with 70 percent saying that it should be illegal in all or most cases, opposed to just 54 percent of Catholic Latinos, 46 percent of Latino mainline Protestants, and 35 percent of unaffiliated Latinos. In addition, when asked about the church speaking against political issues, 61 percent of evangelicals support the expression of political views, while just 49 percent of Latinos Catholics, 37 percent of mainline Protestant Latinos, and 33 percent of unaffiliated Latinos express the same stance. The religious affiliations of Latinos affect partisanship as well. While Latinos have historically gravitated towards the more immigration-friendly, welfare promoting Democratic Party, due to their religious ties, Latino evangelicals are less likely to fall into line with the rest. Overall, only 21 percent of Latinos are Republican or lean in this direction, including 21 percent of those who are Catholic, 23 percent of mainline Latinos, and 16 percent of those unaffiliated, yet 30 percent of Latino evangelicals lean Republican. While the majority of evangelical Latinos still identified with the left (48 percent Democrat), their religious views cause them to sympathize with the Republican Party more than others. Therefore, in comparison to white evangelicals, they are less likely to be conservative, but far more likely than evangelical Black Protestants. Overall, however, a greater proportion of Latino evangelicals may result in more conservative Latinos making an impact at the polls in the coming years.\footnote{Ibid.}\footnote{Sarah Allen Gershon, Adrian D. Pantoja, J. Benjamin Taylor, “God in the Barrio?: The Determinants of Religiosity and Civic Engagement among Latinos in the United States,” \textit{Politics and Religion} (March 2016), 9, No. 1, 85.}

For years, Republicans have tried to incorporate Latinos into their coalition. Due to their high levels of religiosity and church attendance, it seems as if this minority group would be a natural ally of a GOP with policies that have historically been supported by religious-minded individuals. Echoing this sentiment, in 1983, President Reagan was quoted remarking that “Latinos are Republicans, they just don’t know it yet.”\footnote{Ibid.}
National Survey, Saavedra Cisneros found that the most religious Latinos, measured by self-reported church attendance, are nearly 17 percentage points more likely to prefer conservative social policies than the least religious ones.\textsuperscript{141} This trend should be seen as a positive sign for Republicans, especially with a growing evangelical bloc, yet a consistent issue remains: despite the religiosity of Latinos, many Republican values are not necessarily salient for Latino voters. Polling data acquired by Daniel Cox, Juhem Navarro-Rivera, and Robert Jones from the Public Religion Research Institute in 2013, found that Latinos consistently rank jobs, unemployment, education, and other issues as more important than abortion and same-sex marriage, the policy issues that Republicans have looked to emphasize during recruitment efforts.\textsuperscript{142}

Simultaneously, another interesting phenomenon is unfolding within Latinos in the United States. While some Latinos are beginning to identify more with Evangelical Protestantism, many are also moving in the opposite direction, self-identifying as “Nones.” Data collected from the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey demonstrate a trend toward secularism among Latinos. Specifically, the percentage of Latinos claiming “no religion” doubled in comparison to the two decades preceding, while in addition, 38 percent of Latinos answered that they “seldom or never attend” church services, a sharp decline from years prior when nearly all American Latinos flocked to the pews.\textsuperscript{143}

Two theories attempt to explain this trend towards secularism—the modernization theory and existential security theory. Modernization relies on the idea that as society develops and industrializes, religion moves to the periphery. While modernization is viewed as more universal, the existential security theory is more unique to Latin American immigrants. This

\textsuperscript{141} Saavedra Cisneros, \textit{Latino Identity and Political Attitudes} (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 222.
\textsuperscript{142} Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor, “God in the Barrio?, The Determinants of Religiosity and Civic Engagement among Latinos in the United States,” 86.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 86-87.
theory suggests that a fear of physical insecurity causes one to turn towards religion, and once these fears subside over time, religion no longer becomes necessary. Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor make a strong case for the existential security theory, paying close attention to the differences in generations of Latinos. Extracting data from the 2006 Latino National Survey, they demonstrate that amongst subsequent generations, one can expect secularism to rise. Therefore, the window for Republican recruitment exists primarily among first generation Latinos, who are on average more religious and possess weaker partisan identities.\footnote{Ibid, 97.}

Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor make several interesting claims regarding the civic engagement of Latinos in America as well, many of which are also extremely generationally dependent. While education promotes civic engagement no matter the generation, other factors are more variable. For religious denomination, evangelicals, in comparison to Catholics, are more likely to be politically engaged for the first generation, less likely for the second generation, with no differences in the third. Interestingly, though, those identifying as “Other or None” religiously are more likely than Catholics to be civically engaged in the third generation. Because there are increasingly more third generation Latinos being born every day, one can reasonably expect those without religious affiliations to be involved politically in the future. Lastly, conservative Latinos are less likely than liberals to be engaged in the first generation, but for the subsequent generations, there are no effects.\footnote{Ibid, 100-102.} Evidently, there are many factors at play which determine Latino political engagement, and most noteworthy, a decline in religion for recent generations does not appear to correlate with a downturn in participation.

Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor conclude with some overall assessments of civic engagement and religious identity. While economic well-being seems to cause many to move
away from traditional religion—an institution that has historically promoted political participation—successive generations are more likely to be politically engaged.\textsuperscript{146} This phenomenon is a result of greater wealth and educational opportunities, which outweighs religiosity, contrary to expectations derived from extensive literature on minority and socio-economic status predictors of civic engagement.\textsuperscript{147} As the proportion of evangelical Latinos, in addition to seculars, begins to rise, it is likely that two clashing forces will emerge, creating two distinct identities—one staunchly Democratic and another more sympathetic to Republican causes. As the proportion of Catholic Latinos continues to fall precipitously, it will be fascinating to determine if the rise in evangelicals continues, or finally faces a secular fate similar to other American religious institutions.

\textit{Muslims}

Another religious group that has gained prominence in America, largely in response to recent immigration trends, is Muslims. While the proportion of Muslims in the United States remains relatively small, at just over one percent, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the country. In addition, their role in politics has loomed large, especially in the past two decades, during the post-9/11 era, as they have been increasingly alienated and on the defensive.\textsuperscript{148} The

\textsuperscript{146} Political engagement in this survey is based on the answer to three questions: “Do you participate in the activities of one social, cultural, civic, or political group, more than one such group, or do you not participate in the activities of any such groups?” “When an issue or problem needs to be addressed, would you work through existing groups or organizations to bring people together, would you get together informally, or would you do nothing to deal with this matter?” “Have you ever tried to get government officials to pay attention to something that concerned you, either by calling, writing a letter, or going to a meeting?”

\textsuperscript{147} These arguments relate back to previous ideas discussed regarding the fostering of civic skills and aptitude through the direction and environment of houses of worship. Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor, “God in the Barrio?: The Determinants of Religiosity and Civic Engagement among Latinos in the United States,” 100.

attacks on the World Trade Center in New York had a major impact on Muslims’ political participation in the United States. As they became targets of widespread profiling, violence, and discrimination, Muslims sought to involve themselves politically. In a 2004 nationwide survey, John W. Ayers and C. Richard Hofstetter analyzed political acts such as voting, volunteering, writing to politicians, signing petitions, and attending rallies. Their findings suggest that American Muslims engaged in a mean of 3.12 political acts, compared to a mean of 1.63 among the rest of the American voting public.\textsuperscript{149} As a result, in 2004, Muslims averaged more than two political acts in addition to voting, and other Americans less than one. In addition, the survey findings demonstrated that just over 10 percent of Americans participated in four or more acts, while 44 percent of American Muslims did.\textsuperscript{150} Muslims have become more anxious since 9/11, subsequently influencing political interest and participation as well.

Extending 2004 Muslim political participation to today, results suggest that political engagement remains quite high. For example, immediately following the election of President Trump in 2016, a record number of Muslim candidates ran for local, state, and national public office, attempting to gain prominence and get their voices heard.\textsuperscript{151} Interestingly enough, however, is the diversity that exists within the “Muslim vote,” as there is not a single race or ethnicity that makes up this constituency. For example, Muslims are more diverse than any other religious group in the United States, with tremendous linguistic, cultural, and racial differences within the bloc. In addition, there is no single understanding of Islam, as American Muslim beliefs and practices exist along a broad spectrum.\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid, 12.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{151} Youssef Chouhoud Christopher, Karam Dana, and Matt Barreto, “American Muslim Political Participation: Between Diversity and Cohesion,” \textit{Politics and Religion}, (December 2019), 12, No. 4, 737.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, 738.
\end{footnotesize}
Highlighting these differences, Youssef Chouhoud, Karam Dana, and Matt Barreto ran several models using 21st century data from *The Muslim American Public Opinion Survey* (MAPOS) dataset. Their findings are three-fold: that the political participation gap between Sunnis and Shias evaporates at higher levels of mosque involvement, college educated Arab Muslims are the most politically educated, and a significant participation gap exists between Arab and non-Arab Muslims at lower levels of religiosity, with Arabs most active. While making up just one percent of America’s citizen body, it is impossible to group all Muslims under one umbrella category because there is significant diversity within the religion itself. However, one trend that is consistent for all Muslims, and in line with church attendance for Christians, pertains to mosque involvement and greater political engagement. Strong community ties and direction from the hierarchy influences Muslims in a similar way across the political spectrum. While these data advance the knowledge of a fast-growing, albeit still miniscule portion of the population, there is much more to learn about American Muslims, whereas another religious minority, Jews, are far more understood from a political standpoint.

**Jews**

The final religious group analyzed here is American Jews. While comprising just two percent of the U.S. population, Jews have been overrepresented in American politics in proportion to their actual make-up. For example, in the 116th Congress, from 2019 to 2021, Jews held over 6 percent of all seats. In addition, they have consistently had some of the highest

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153 Sunnis and Shias are the two major sects of Islam. Shias generally have been seen to have higher rates of political participation than Sunnis in the United States.
154 Ibid, 748-750.
155 Ibid, 757.
voting turnout rates of any religious group in U.S. general elections. Historically, Jewish Americans, like Roman Catholics, voted for Democrats in high numbers, yet unlike the latter group, have continued to turn out for the party in extremely high numbers today. For example, in every presidential election since 1972, about seventy percent of all Jewish voters have cast their ballots for the Democratic candidate running for office.

The Jewish-Democratic alliance in America has puzzled many who have analyzed the voting bloc over time. First, American Jews rank near the top in measures of social class in comparison to other groups, so one might expect them to defect towards the Republican Party as its platform has historically favored laissez-faire policies, economic deregulation, and lower taxes for the wealthy. Second, the American Jewish community has generally shared tradition, inheritance, and minority status with other Jewish communities across the globe– most of whom fall in the center or even lean to the right politically. Most explanations for this reliable Democratic portion of the constituency, however, focus on the Jewish American commitment to liberalism. Because the Democrats prioritize welfare and racial justice, most Jews have tended to favor their policies and candidates.

In America, Jews can be separated into two groups: Jews by religion and Jews with no religion, known as “cultural Jews.” While many Jews continue to adhere to their beliefs and attend services, a large number are linked to the religion through their identity, namely because Jews make-up such a small portion of the population– Judaism is thus often viewed more as a culture than a religion. In an examination of these two distinct groups, party identification

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becomes a factor, as 77 percent of Jews with no religion identify as Democrat, as opposed to 68 percent of Jews by religion. In addition, 62 percent of Jews with no religion self-identify as “liberal,” whereas just 46 percent of those by religion do.\(^{159}\) As a result, while all Jews are more left leaning than other religious groups, there are differences within the coalition, with more religious Jewish Americans less sympathetic with the conservative Republican Party.

One political issue believed to influence American Jews tremendously is the country’s stance on Israel. Surprisingly, while most Jews are Democrats, it is the Republican Party that has taken a more pro-Israel stance, supporting it as state and sacred homeland for the Jewish religion. While American Jews have responded to these views in different ways, it has not been a largely effective means for Republicans to attract Jewish voters. In a recent study conducted by Graham Wright, Leonard Saxe, and Kenneth D. Wald, two surveys of American Jews in 2019 examined how Jewish liberals and conservatives have expressed different patriotism toward both Israel and America. Some disparities were found— including 24 percent of conservative Jews reporting being “very much” connected with Israel, opposed to just 11 percent of liberal Jews.\(^{160}\)

Furthermore, just like many Americans, the studies conducted by Wright, Saxe, and Wald demonstrate that politically liberal Jews seem to have a predisposition toward constructive patriotism,\(^{161}\) where criticism of both the United States or Israel is considered a marker of concern and care. On the other hand, politically conservative Jews are more likely to express uncritical patriotism towards both countries and view criticism of either as incompatible with patriotism.\(^{162}\) These data suggest that Jews who identify as Democrat, then, might be more


\(^{161}\) Constructive patriotism is known to be the ability to criticize the territory that one belongs to or is affiliated with. One can still love their country and be willing to call out its mistakes.

\(^{162}\) Ibid, 52-53.
accepting of the criticism levied towards Israel by the party, while still retaining a strong
attachment to the land. Republican Jews, on the other hand, may find the Democratic stance too
much for them to overlook.

**Conclusion**

Much can be learned about religion in America from a thorough examination of Seculars,
Roman Catholics, Evangelical Christians, Black Protestants, Latinos, Muslims, and Jews. Each
of these groups tell a narrative about American religion from the mid-20th century to today.
From Seculars increasing in numbers over time and their complex affiliation with both major
parties, to Catholics becoming a cross-pressured swing vote, to the stronghold of Evangelicals
over the political sphere with their strong Republican identities. Religious trends within these
American groups will remain fascinating to observe into the future.

It is doubtful that religion in America will completely collapse anytime soon, but recent
data do suggest that a changing landscape will further influence the American electorate and
politicians who affiliate with the two major political parties. For now, we must continue to keep
a close eye, as both the Democrats and the Republicans continue their attempts to expand their
broad coalitions into the mid 21st century. Unlike in Europe, religion is still very much
intertwined with American politics, though the “innumerable sects” that Tocqueville once
referred to now includes a new group that is exerting its influence: seculars without affiliations.

In the next chapter, I will evaluate how major religious groups, including nonreligious
Americans, have interacted with religion, politics, and policy issues over time, according to
actual survey responses over the past decade, and what these results may signify moving
forward.
Chapter Two
National Survey Shifts and Campaign Reactions

Now that we have outlined the framework and discussed scholarly literature regarding some of America’s most prominent religious groups, we can analyze data pertaining to how these individuals have behaved politically from year-to-year based on their affiliations. To evaluate American religious trends in relation to politics, I have run analyses using responses from the American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys. The ANES, dating back to 1948, is one of the most reputable political surveys in the world, providing reliable data on hundreds of questions that have been asked to voters pre and post elections during midterm and general election seasons. In this chapter, I aim to extrapolate on some of the general trends presented in Chapter One—providing more thorough answers to potent questions about American religious history through a political lens. Every datapoint presented in this chapter represents an American citizen who deliberately answered a question according to his or her own political or ethical beliefs throughout the past few decades. As a result, while I will make conjectures behind why individuals of a certain background or group identity may have answered a certain way, this data can be presented and interpreted as factual based on legitimate and tangible survey responses.

National Election Data

In my analysis of the ANES interface, I relied primarily on religious identity as my independent variable and chose a confluence of dependent variables to highlight the ways in which individuals have responded to survey questions over time. Unfortunately, the ANES religious identity options for respondents are somewhat limited and outdated as only four options
are presented—Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Other/none (which includes “don’t know” preference). For the purposes of my analysis, I focus primarily on Protestants, Catholics, and Other (which I will interpret as the unaffiliated group, since the proportion of religious non-Christians in America has consistently been low). In addition, I refrain from paying much attention to Jewish respondents in this portion because their sample size is extremely low and, as a result, their responses would skew the data one way or another. Because Protestants are presented as an umbrella category in the ANES, I was unable to do much analysis on various denominations referenced in the previous chapter—such as evangelicals and Black Christians. In a few cases, I attempt to differentiate between various religious groups through implementing a new variable such as “Religious Importance” to an individual, but even these efforts do not allow for a distinction between Protestant sub-denominations.\footnote{163}

\textbf{Denominational Religious Shifts}

The introduction of this other variable, in addition to religious group affiliation, raises the question: who are these individuals that believe religion is important to them? These numbers have varied over the years since the ANES first began asking this question to its respondents in 1980. Initially, 75 percent of all respondents agreed that religion is extremely important in their lives—including 81 percent of Protestants, 82 percent of Catholics and 34 percent of those who are nonreligious. In 2016, only 65 percent of ANES respondents agreed that religion is important to them, and of those, 85 percent of Protestants, 72 percent of Catholics, and 36 percent of those without religious affiliations (Figure 2.1).\footnote{164}

\footnote{163}{A disclaimer for this section— the data percentages may not always add up to 100 percent because often, respondents elect “I don’t know/don’t care” responses, which I elected to omit for my analyses.}

\footnote{164}{All the subsequent data points are based on respondents from the American National Election Studies website interface, sponsored by the University of Michigan, Stanford University, with funding from the National Science Foundation. I inserted codes from a variety of years between 1948-2016 to extract data about religion and politics.}
These data suggest that overall, Catholics have begun to lose attachments to their faith, while many identifying as Protestant have, or at least more so, adhered to it. Further ANES data highlight this trend, as in 1970, 56 percent of self-identifying Catholics reported attending mass at least almost every week and only 6 percent reported never going. By 2016, only 32 percent reported attending mass almost every week and 32 percent never. For Protestants, in 1970, 37 percent attended church services almost every week and 13 percent never. By 2016, 27 percent reported going every week and 20 percent never. As a result, the percentage of Catholics who never attend has risen by 31 percentage points and is even equivalent to the percentage of those who do attend every week (Figure 2.2). In comparison, while Protestants have also followed the

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165 For this analysis, almost every week and every week responses were merged for because in 1970 questionnaire, the ANES did not have a category for every week.
overall American trend of abandoning religious services, the changes are far less dramatic than those that have emerged for self-identifying American Catholics in recent years.

**Figure 2.2:**

![Percent That Attend Religious Services Weekly](chart)

*Citation: American National Election Studies, 1970-2016.*

Further illuminating this narrative about Catholic and Protestant religious attachments are ANES responses regarding the “authority of The Bible.”

For example, when respondents were first asked about its authority in 1964, 55 percent of Protestant respondents reported that “The Bible is the actual Word of God and is to be interpreted as such.” By 2016, this number decreased to 49 percent of all Protestants, just under half. On the other hand, in 1964, for Catholics, 47 percent reported believing the statement above to be fact, while in 2016, only 20

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166 In political science, the authority of the Bible is referred to as *biblical literalism*, a method of interpreting Scripture holding that, except in places where the text is obviously allegorical, poetic, or figurative, it should be taken absolutely literally.
percent reported these same beliefs (Figure 2.3). As a result, while both groups decreased in their adherence to the principles of the Bible overall, Catholics decreased from nearly half in agreement with biblical literalism to just one-fifth interpreting the Word of God as actual and most supreme. These numbers further outline the collapse of religious principles in America, particularly amongst Catholic voters.

**Figure 2.3:**

![Graph showing the percent who interpret the Bible as the "God's Word" over time.](image)

*Citation: American National Election Studies, 1964-2016.*

Although the introduction suggests that the proportion of the American Catholic population has remained relatively constant, while the proportion of Protestants has vastly decreased over time, from the data above, it appears that these numbers cannot be taken at face-value (Figure 0.1). More specifically, it is likely that Catholics have not lost their religious

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167 In 1984, the wording and code changed for “the authority of the Bible” question in the ANES so I merged the 1964-1984 and 1984-2016 results together to create one graph in the appendix.
identity over time yet have largely abandoned their faith and activity in the church, as Margolis alluded to in Chapter One. Catholicism has thus grown to become more of a social or cultural label, rather than a religion, meaning many who refer to themselves Catholic may not practice their religion to the same degree today. On the other hand, a number of formerly identifying Protestants, rather than continuing to adhere to a false religious label, have abandoned the title altogether, and instead, have begun to refer to themselves as Nones. Furthermore, Protestants that still consider themselves active members of the church today, have then largely continued to classify themselves with this label, in more genuine fashion than Catholics. While it has been established that some denominations, on average, have adhered more to religious principles than others over time, it is time to discuss how those with varying religious identities have interacted with politics in America over time.

**Interactions with Politics**

While I was unable to differentiate between sects of Protestantism within the ANES data, fortunately, I was able to obtain some data from the General Social Survey (GSS), an alternative interface that has been asking similar questions to its respondents since 1972. The GSS, while a bit more limited in its scope and over-time analysis capabilities, has asked Americans about their

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168 Akin the way in which “cultural Judaism” has become a more common term in recent years, as discussed in chapter one, maybe it’s time that “cultural Catholicism” receive similar recognition. It has been mentioned scarcely in the media, but it makes sense considering many Catholics in America have ethnic backgrounds that are distinct from a white Protestant legacy, such as Latinos and PIGS from Novak’s *Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*. 169 In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville predicted such a trend in his writings. He suggested that, “In our day more than earlier periods, one sees Catholics who become nonbelievers and Protestants who make themselves Catholic. If one considers Catholicism internally it seems to lose; if one looks outside it, it is gaining… our descendants will tend more and more to be divided into only two parts, those leaving Christianity entirely and others entering into the bosom of the Roman [Catholic] Church” (Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 424-425). Tocqueville saw in a democratic society, a climate in which the growing Catholic church would attract converts from a watered down Protestantism to those with spiritual longings who grew in admiration to its dogmas and discipline. Whereas, many of those who already identify as Catholic from birth might be repelled by these aspects, and thus disaffiliation into a nonreligious camp would be commonplace. Many of these ideas may be manifesting in trends observed into the 21st century.
interest in politics relative to their religious identities. The categories presented to respondents were significantly more specific than ANES options, including “fundamental,” “evangelical,” “mainline,” “liberal,” and “none.” Essentially, these categories present a spectrum of how individuals interpret the Bible. With fundamentalist Christians adhering to a literal interpretation of God’s word, then liberal Christians, and especially Nones, with a much looser interpretation and a sense of freedom in decision-making independent of the Bible. In the aggregate responses from 1972 to 2021, 53 percent of fundamentalists are either “fairly interested” or “very interested” in politics, while 24 percent were “not very” or “not at all” interested. Moving down the line, 57 percent of evangelicals fell in the former category, with 20 percent in the latter. For mainlines, the numbers were 46 percent and 19 percent. For liberal Christians, 43 percent, and 26 percent. Finally, Nones were 34 percent and 29 percent (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Political Interest</th>
<th>Fundamentalist</th>
<th>Evangelical</th>
<th>Mainline</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly interested</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat interested</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very interested</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all interested</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Column percent

Column TOTAL | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Citation: General Social Survey, 1972-2021.

170 The General Social Survey, similar to the ANES, includes a website and interface where I used codes to extract data regarding religion and politics. The GSS is operated by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, with funding from the National Science Foundation.
Overall, one might expect the more staunchly religious groups to express a greater interest in politics as a vehicle to protect their views in this country. However, the data are more complex—consistent with scholarly findings in Chapter One, evangelicals expressed the most interest in politics, and mainlines the lowest, with almost complete disinterest. As a result, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the more religious are increasingly politically involved to an extent—up until society’s ideas are so vastly distinct from a group’s views that a sense of hopelessness emerges, knowing that the outside world will never conform to their beliefs, which seems to be the case with fundamentalists. Nones, on the other hand, are significantly less politically interested, perhaps an indication of overall apathy, or ambivalence from the historical prevalence of religious politicians in Washington. It is important to note that these data points are aggregated, and year-by-year analyses may serve to paint a clearer picture of further trends, which will be subsequently examined through an analysis of ANES survey responses.

Principally, when discussing political attentiveness, tangible acts often serve to tell the story more accurately. While the GSS asks respondents about their overall interest in politics, this is subjective since every individual has a distinct interpretation of what this means. The ANES, on the other hand, asks several questions about performing civic duties. In the succeeding analysis, I use the bare minimum to discuss the emergence of recent trends—casting ballots in elections. In this analysis, I aim to determine whether an individual’s religious affiliation affects how often they participate in major elections over time. This analysis can thus be viewed as an extension of the GSS data, with voting representing one’s interest in politics over time.171

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171 The one major downside in asking about voting behavior, opposed to political interest, is that it fails to account for those who go above and beyond—participating in civic groups, protests, canvassing, or other political acts. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this project, it is a relatively reliable indicator of one’s interest in politics.
Using data from the ANES, comparisons can be made regarding how certain religious
groups have cast their ballots over time. The question about voting was first asked in 1952,
when overall, 74 percent of Americans voted. Breaking this figure down further, 72 percent of
Protestants, 85 percent of Catholics, and 51 percent of those who were unaffiliated voted in
1952. When this question was asked most recently, in 2016, 76 percent of the population voted,
including 80 percent of Protestants, 79 percent of Catholics, and 68 percent of those who are
unreligious (Figure 2.4). While some elections received greater turnout than others over time,
overall, the proportion of the population that votes in major American elections today has been
largely constant over seven decades, only two percentage points higher in 2016 than in 1952.
There are, however, some distinct differences to observe between Catholics and Protestants, with
the former decreasing its overall presence at the ballots and the latter increasing. The increase in
proportion of Protestant voters can likely be explained by the rise in political activity amongst
evangelicals in addition to the disaffiliation of apathetic and nonreligious Protestants. For
Catholics, the drop in voter percentage may be in response to increased religious security over
time, making voting less essential, or the rise in proportion of cultural Catholics who do not
attend services, and thus have less interest in politics.

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172 It is important to note here that Americans have historically over inflated their level of turnout, so it is likely that
a number of individuals reported voting when they did not.
173 Due to the rise in proportion of Catholics making up the American electorate, the emphasis on political behavior
has lessened as their beliefs and customs are largely accepted now. Throughout much of the 20th century, Catholics
needed to vote in order to make their voices heard.
The major difference in voting data, however, can be observed through an evaluation of the proportion of Nones who voted in 1952 versus 2016. Because this group made up such a small proportion of the population in 1952, it is feasible to assume that these data are more variable and may have been skewed; however, 17 percentage points is still a rather large increase.\textsuperscript{174} As a result, I conducted further testing, this time changing the independent variable from religious group to interest in religion. This question was first asked of respondents in 1980, not 1952, so that is the point of origin in this analysis. In 1980, 73 percent of those with an interest in religion voted, opposed to 66 percent of those with no interest. In 2016, these figures rose to 78 percent and 73 percent, respectfully (Figure 2.5). While these changes mark encouraging trends in overall voting behavior, they support the idea that those who are more

\textsuperscript{174} Only about 3.5 percent of all respondents in 1952 were not affiliated with a religion.
religiously inclined are more likely to cast their ballots on election day. This trend has persisted for decades and has been readily accepted by scholars as churches are known to foster civic engagement through hierarchical cues, community engagement, and a distinct set of values.\textsuperscript{175}

**Figure 2.5:**

![Percent Who Voted in a Given Year](chart)

Citation: *American National Election Studies*, 1980-2016.

Another political question asked in the ANES survey beginning in 1972 that I chose to examine is “Do you like anything about the Republican Party?” and “Do you like anything about the Democratic Party?” In 1972, only 42 percent of all respondents reported liking anything about the Republican Party, which remained constant in 2016, when this question was asked again (Figure 2.6). Regarding the second question, in 1972, 51 percent liked anything about the Democratic Party, while in 2016, this figure lowered to just 44 percent (Figure 2.7). Rather

astonishing figures on the surface due to the ambiguity of the term “anything,” it appears that the two-party system has been viewed through a rather skeptical lens over time, with the Republican Party always being rather unfavorable, and the Democratic Party decreasing in its appeal.

**Figure 2.6:**

![Graph showing percent who like 'Anything' about the Republican Party over time.](image)

*Citation: American National Election Studies, 1972-2016.*

Further breaking down these questions regarding the United States’ two-party system, religious groups have been dispersed across the feeling thermometer over time. In 1972, 42 percent of Protestant respondents reported liking anything about the Republican Party, while in 2016, this number rose to 51 percent. In 1972, 43 percent of Catholics noted liking anything about the Republican Party, and in 2016, 42 percent reported these same views. Lastly, 35 percent of those who are nonreligious answered “Yes” to liking anything about the Republican Party.

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176 In political science, a feeling thermometer is used to measure how positively or negatively individuals feel about a specific group, individual, issue, or organization. In this case, the Republican and Democratic Parties.
Party, while in 2016, this figure fell to 31 percent. While the overall percentage of those who like anything about the Republican Party has remained at 42 percent over the forty-four-year period between ANES samples, the three religious groups being studied appear to move in opposite directions regarding their stance on the GOP (Figure 2.6).

**Figure 2.7:**

![Graph showing percentage who like 'Anything' about the Democratic Party from 1972 to 2016](image)

**Citation:** American National Election Studies, 1972-2016.

The Republican Party increased in its appeal to Protestants, perhaps because of previously mentioned trends regarding the abandonment of religious labels for former Protestants who now identify within the nonreligious sect. Since 1972, the Republican Party has shifted further right on the political spectrum, so it seems natural that more conservative Protestants who are strong adherents of the Bible would favor the agenda of the GOP over the Democratic Party. In addition, the rise in the number of evangelicals in America into the 21st century, large vocalists within the Republican Party, has certainly contributed to these trends as
well. To test this hypothesis, the same analysis was run for the religion as important variable. These results suggest that initially, in 1980, 39 percent of those viewing religion as important reported liking anything about the GOP, and by 2016, this number increased to 48 percent. On the contrary, in 1980, 36 percent of those who did not view religion as important liked anything about the Republican Party, and by 2016, this number fell to 31 percent (Figure 2.8). Over this thirty-six-year span, the Republicans have become more favorable to those who value religion and less favorable to those who do not. In addition, the gap has increased significantly, with an initial three percentage point difference in favor amongst the two groups, and by 2016, a 17-percentage point gap. These trends suggest that two coalitions are emerging, a traditional religious group that is enticed by the GOP and a religiously ambivalent group that is turned off by the party’s messages.

Figure 2.8:

Percent who Like 'Anything' About the Republican Party

Citation: American National Election Studies, 1980-2016.
Catholic respondents may be a further indication of growing religious versus non-religious coalitions. The absence in movement along the feeling thermometer might be a product of two factors— one, the rise in the proportion of those who are solely Catholic by identity, and not faith; and two, the coalition of religionists who strictly adhere to faith and are increasingly more attracted to the pro-life messages communicated by the Party.\textsuperscript{177} As a result, two forces may be at play here— one pushing upward and the other downward, resulting in the percentage of Catholics who find anything about the Republican Party attractive remaining stable.

In a further analysis of the Democratic Party question, it is plausible that similar forces caused the more religious sector to fall out of favor with the party and those without religious attachments to increase their appeal. From 1972 to 2016, the percentage of Protestants who like anything about the Democratic Party decreased seven percentage points, from 47 percent to 40 percent. Catholics displayed similar trends, with a decrease of 17-percentage points, from 63 percent to 46 percent. Lastly, the percentage of those unaffiliated who like anything about the Democratic Party increased from 42 percent to 47 percent (Figure 2.7). These numbers, while striking, align congruently with the trends regarding individuals’ attraction to the Republican Party as well.

As expressed in the previous chapter, several scholars have argued that an alliance has formed between traditional religionists— namely, the Catholics and Protestants, both of which contain parishioners who have adhered to the principles of the “church” while an increasingly secular society has formed around them. The Democratic Party was once the “Solid South,” where many traditional Protestants reside, and in addition, historically recruited many Catholic immigrants during the 19\textsuperscript{th} and into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The Democratic Party, since 1972, has

\textsuperscript{177} Remember that Religionists individuals who “embrace religion but eschew secularism” (Layman, Campbell, and Green, 7-8).
moved in an entirely different direction, with many staunchly religious individuals claiming that it has been infiltrated by “godless seculars.” As a result, many Protestants who once had more sympathy for the Democratic Party have changed their stance over the next decades. Catholics, while losing some religious adherence as a group, were once solidly a Democratic coalition, yet by 2016, have begun to show a distaste for the Party and moved in the opposite direction. Those who are without affiliations, on the other hand, have been encouraged by trends within the Party over the past few decades, and while still expressing an overall distaste—potentially due to alienation or ambivalence from politics overall—have warmed up to some Democratic ideals.

To further test this hypothesis, I conducted a similar analysis as before, with the same independent variable about the importance of religion. Initially, 53 percent of those who value religion reported liking anything about the Democratic Party, a number which decreased to 41 percent by 2016. For those who do not view religion as important, 47 percent initially reported liking anything about the Democratic Party, and by 2016, this number had risen to 51 percent (Figure 2.9). These trends confirm the rise in these religious coalitions, as they have traveled in opposite directions, initially seven percentage points more favorable for those who value religion to 10 percentage points more favorable for the opposite group—a 17 percentage point swing over the thirty-six-year span.

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In a similar fashion to the question about America’s two major political parties, since 1984, the ANES has asked its respondents in what direction they lean politically—liberal, moderate, or conservative. Overall, in 1984, 23 percent of respondents reported being liberal, 27 percent as moderate, and 40 percent as conservative. By 2016, these figures became 31 percent liberal, 25 percent moderate, and 43 percent conservative (Figures 2.10-2.12). As a result, more people describe themselves as liberal and conservative, while less self-report as moderate today, in comparison to those who responded to the question in 1984.
Breaking these responses into religious groups provides further means for analysis. In 1972, 16 percent of Protestants reported themselves as being liberal, 26 percent as moderate and 27 percent as conservative. In 2016, these figures shifted to 22 percent liberal, 26 percent moderate and 52 percent conservative. In 1972, 18 percent of Catholics described themselves as liberal, 32 percent as moderate, and 25 percent as conservative. By 2016, these numbers transformed to 26 percent liberal, 34 percent moderate, and 40 percent conservative. Lastly, within the unaffiliated group, in 1972, 38 percent reported being liberal, 16 percent moderate, and 24 percent conservative. In 2016, these individuals shifted to 45 percent liberal, 31 percent moderate, and 24 percent conservative (Figures 2.10-2.12).179

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179 The data here is inconsistent because in 2012 and 2016 the ANES removed the “Don’t known, haven’t thought much about it” category to the responses, meaning all respondents were required to answer liberal, moderate, or conservative. This is important because this category frequently received 20-30 percent of all responses. In my analysis of Figures 2.10-2.14, I attempt to fill in the gaps but comparisons are not perfect due to this omission.
Figure 2.11: 
Percent Self-Identifying as "Moderate"

Citation: *American National Election Studies, 1972-2016.*

Figure 2.12: 
Percent Self-Identifying as "Conservative"

Citation: *American National Election Studies, 1972-2016.*
These breakdowns are consistent with similar trends expressed in the preceding paragraphs, yet there are a few surprises. Over time, Protestants, in line with earlier discussions, appear to align more with the right as they self-report maintaining religiosity in recent years. In this analysis, it makes sense that given the omission of an “I don’t know” category in 2016, Protestants are 25 percentage points more conservative today than just a few decades ago. Catholics, on the other hand, have exhibited somewhat similar trends to Protestants. While overall, slightly more liberal, and much less conservative than the former, Catholics have seen themselves moving towards the poles, as the proportion of those who are moderate has remained relatively constant.\textsuperscript{180} A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be a rise in nontraditional norms in mainstream society, pushing some Catholics to further adhere to the teachings of the Bible, entering a religious coalition with some Protestants. While maybe not more conservative than they once were, many Catholics may feel that they have moved further right because society has shifted further left. The rise in liberal Catholics could stem from the previous discussion regarding identity Catholics who have moved with a mainstream liberal society yet abandoned their faith. In addition, in a polarized America today, Catholics may be pressured by their pro-life and pro-welfare stances and have thus been forced to choose one side or the other as they feel there is no other option in a two-party system that has dominated contemporary U.S. politics.

The unaffiliated group is the only one that has drastically increased its percentage of moderates, by 15 percentage points over the thirty-two-year span. It seems unsurprising that Nones would fall in the middle more often than some of the religious sects, particularly in a

\textsuperscript{180} This is with the removal of the “I don’t know” category, so Catholics are likely less moderate overall today than in 1972.
polarized world where they may feel somewhat alienated. In addition, this group is seven
percentage points more liberal, and even with the omission of “I don’t know” responses, the
proportion of conservatives did not change. As a result, it appears that those without religious
affiliations are either uninvolved in politics or feel as if they have found a home within a liberal
Democratic Party that has, with caution, somewhat embraced this group into their coalition.

Figure 2.13:

Citation: American National Election Studies, 1980-2016.

To further test this analysis, I explored the responses of those who view religion as
important to them versus not important. In 1980, 14 percent of those who view religion as
important to them identified as liberal, 19 percent as moderate, and 30 percent as
conservative. In 2016, 22 percent of the individuals in this group saw themselves as liberal, 28
percent as moderate, and 50 percent as conservative. In 1984, 24 percent of those who do not
see religion as important to them identified as liberal, 22 percent as moderate, and 27 percent as
conservative. By 2016, in this group, 49 percent saw themselves as liberal, 30 percent as moderate, and 21 percent as conservative (Figures 2.13-2.15).

Figure 2.14:

These data are very much consistent with what I was expecting. Even with the omission of “I don’t know responses,” it is evident that there is a clear increase in the proportion of those viewing religion as important who identify as conservative, 20 percentage points over the thirty-six-year span. In addition, there is a growing proportion of those who do not view religion as important that identify as liberal, 25 percentage points. While these groups are each moving towards the political poles, it is furthermore fascinating that those viewing religion as

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181 To reiterate the footnote above, the data here is inconsistent because in 2012 and 2016 the ANES removed the “Don’t known, haven’t thought much about it” category to the responses, meaning all respondents were required to answer liberal, moderate, or conservative.
unimportant were slightly more likely to identify as conservative than liberal in 1980. These data describe a narrative about American culture, as it is far more accepting to identify as liberal today than it was during the conservative 1980s, as society has shifted. Overall, these figures provide tangible evidence to support the hypothesis that increasingly, one’s view on religion does influence where they perceive themselves residing on the political spectrum, while also demonstrating that these two groups are moving towards the poles.

**Figure 2.15:**

![Percent Self-Identifying as "Conservative"

Citation: *American National Election Studies*, 1980-2016.

**Opinions on Religiously Salient Party Issues**

The next task at hand is breaking down these religious trends within the context of religiously salient party issues. I have chosen four issues to focus on—each of which has had varying levels of significance over time and have been asked about intermittently throughout the
course of the ANES’ existence. They are school busing, the size of the federal government, abortion, and same-sex child adoption. School busing, as noted in Chapter One, was hotly contested by Catholics who prioritized the value of neighborly ties and relations. The size of the federal government has deliberately affected the ways in which individual religious liberties have been protected in American communities. Abortion is targeted by several major religions as immoral due to the killing of an unborn child with no right to defend itself. Lastly, same-sex child adoption has been targeted in American churches, too, as something that can endanger the youth by placing them into a household predicated on ignoring the tradition of marriage between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation.

School busing was extremely controversial in America during the 1970s and 1980s as cities looked to integrate schools, increasing the opportunities for minority students and the interactions between children of different racial backgrounds. This question was only asked over a twelve-year period, from 1972 to 1984, but over these years, responses varied significantly. In 1972, 71 percent of Protestant respondents said they wanted to keep children in their own neighborhood schools and by 1984, 52 percent agreed with this. In 1972, 72 percent of Catholics expressed a desire for children to remain in their neighborhood schools and by 1984, only 45 percent wanted this. For those without religious affiliations, in 1972, 53 percent wanted this and by 1984, only 35 percent expressed this desire (Figure 2.16).

Busing has traditionally been viewed as a liberal policy, embraced more readily by a Democratic party that was shifting further left during this time. Interestingly, all religious groups began to favor busing more over the period in which the ANES asked this question, likely due to its decreasing salience. By 1984, only Protestants had over half of their respondents in support of keeping students in their neighborhood schools. These results suggest that at least for this
issue, each religious group began to see firsthand the benefits of busing and warmed up to the idea of integration. For Catholics especially, who have always leaned on the importance of neighborhood values, these results are somewhat surprising as they had long been opponents of busing since it entered the national agenda during the latter half of the 20th century.182

**Figure 2.16:**

![Percent Who Oppose Busing in Schools](chart.png)

**Citation:** *American National Election Studies*, 1972-1984.

The second issue that I examined in the ANES sample is feelings towards the size of the federal government in the United States. This question was first asked in 1964 and was removed from the survey after 2000.183 In 1964, 33 percent of Protestants agreed that the government had gotten too big, while 40 percent of Catholics, and 44 percent of those unaffiliated thought so as

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183 The ANES is consistently updating their questionnaire, often removing questions for unknown reasons, or rewording them using a new code, completely altering its nature altogether. For the size of the government, the ANES offers no explanation for its removal.
well. In 2000, 16 percent of Protestant respondents believed that the federal government had become too large, while 19 percent of Catholics and 18 percent of those without an affiliation agreed with this sentiment (Figure 2.17).

**Figure 2.17:**

![Graph showing percent who believe government is "Too Powerful"](image)

**Citation:** *American National Election Studies*, 1964-2000.

It seems surprising that overall, Americans have not sensed the size of the U.S. government growing too large—often a complaint of many conservative Americans. Especially considering that in the thirty-six years from 1964 to 2000, the federal government increased in size astronomically. It may be plausible, though, that in the 1960s, the expansion of the government was viewed as a shocking development, and by the turn of the century, this became a widely accepted fact. Protestants have been least skeptical over time, perhaps because they have been largely represented in American politics, and thus, have little worry that a controlling
federal “regime” will infringe upon their rights. I am slightly bewildered, though, that those without religious affiliations were the most likely to argue that the government was too strong in 1964 and agreed with Catholics and Protestants in 2000. One would assume that those without affiliations would be in favor of a national government that has been the main vehicle in ensuring a secular America, as many states have pushed back throughout history. This salient issue is therefore an example of religious groups not necessarily falling into line with the parties that may represent their best interests overall.

The next issue, one that has been particularly consequential for many religious Americans pertains to abortion. In my analysis of these responses, I evaluated the opinions of those at the poles—always in favor of a woman’s right to an abortion or never in favor. Overall, Americans have moved towards the extremes: when this question was first asked in 1980, 11 percent said abortion should never be permitted and by 2016, this number rose to 14 percent. Subsequently, the percentage of all American respondents saying abortion should always be allowed in 2016 was 36 percent and 45 percent by 2016. In addition, in 1980, 12 percent of Protestant respondents answered that one should never be able to obtain an abortion and 34 percent said that a woman should always be able to get one. In the same year, 14 percent of Catholics answered never and 27 percent always. For those without affiliations, in 1980, four percent responded never and 56 percent always. By 2016, 19 percent of Protestants responded never and 34 percent always. For Catholics, these responses became 13 percent never and 42 percent always. Lastly, for those without affiliations, in 1980, nine percent responded never and 58 responded that a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion (Figures 2.18-2.19).
Figure 2.18:

Citation: *American National Election Studies*, 1980-2016.

Figure 2.19:

Citation: *American National Election Studies*, 1980-2016.
These trends yielded some rather fascinating results about these religious groups over time. Principally, it must be reiterated that being pro-life is a primarily conservative stance backed by the Republican Party today, while pro-choice has been embedded within the liberal Democratic Party’s platform. In the thirty-six years that this question has been asked, the percentage of Protestants who have taken the liberal pro-life stance has remained constant, while those who oppose abortions altogether has increased. This may be, in part, explained by a rise in evangelical identification and a coinciding departure of Protestants with more liberal political views. For Catholics, an opposite interaction has taken place— with essentially the same proportion responding never, from 14 to 13 percent over the thirty-six-year span, and a 15-percentage point rise in those who suggest that a woman should always have the right to an abortion. Alluding to the trends seen in the Catholic church, many have strayed away from the teachings of the Bible and thus abandoned these traditional beliefs, while still adhering to their religious identities. As a result, it seems rational that many Catholics would express these sentiments in their survey responses. For those without an affiliation, the results remained rather constant, with a small proportion responding never— from four to nine percent, and a large majority answering always. Although a slight increase in pro-life unaffiliated respondents, they still constitute a strong majority of the pro-choice sector within this politically salient issue.
Figure 2.20:

Percent Who Think Abortions Should Always Be Allowed

Citation: American National Election Studies, 1980-2016.

Figure 2.21:

Percent Who Think Abortions Should Always Be Allowed

Citation: American National Election Studies, 1980-2016.
In addition to specific religious groups, I also ran analyses for this question with the other independent variable, on the importance of religion.\textsuperscript{184} In 1980, 14 percent of those who view religion as important to them agreed that abortion should never be permitted, and by 2016, this grew to 19 percent. For those who do not view religion as important, two percent answered that abortion should never be allowed, opposed to four percent by 2016 (Figure 2.20). On the other side, 27 percent of those viewing religion as important to them argued that a woman should always have this right, and by 2016, this grew to 32 percent. For those who do not view religion as important, 63 percent agreed that a woman should always be able to get an abortion, and thirty-six years later, in 2016, 65 percent answered the same (Figure 2.21).

Interestingly, a distinct narrative has played out regarding opinions on abortion for those with varying perceptions of religion’s importance. First, both the pro-life and the pro-choice coalitions saw a rise in support from both the nonreligious and religious groups. The proportion of those viewing religion as important who are pro-life grew five percentage points, and pro-choice also grew five percentage points. The proportion of those viewing religion as not important who are pro-life rose two percentage points, and pro-choice went up two percentage points as well. Even though the percentage of religious individuals that are in favor of a woman’s right to choose rose five percentage points, this is still less than the average increase over these years, which is nine percentage points. As a result, religious individuals have moved with American society on tolerance to social issues, but to a lesser degree. In response, it seems many have moved in the opposite direction too, as those taking a firm “no” stance has risen, in an attempt for many religious Americans to cling to their beliefs. Lastly, these trends are yet

\textsuperscript{184} I was unable to use this independent variable for the first two questions because it was first asked in 1980, meaning the sample size was too small in order to tell a narrative regarding how religious individuals have internalized the salient policy issues.
another example of America’s growing polarization. As each of these extreme positions rises for all respondents, regardless of the importance of religion, further evidence is provided by the fact that Americans feel a greater need to identify with the poles—required to choose a side as both political parties have taken firm pro-life and pro-choice stances.

One final issue, also relevant within the context of Biblical interpretations, pertains to homosexuality. The question presented to survey respondents asks, “Should Gays/Lesbians be able to adopt children?” One would expect those with stronger religious affiliations to be more skeptical as many are taught in church that marriage is between a man and a woman to procreate and start a family that will adhere to similar religious principles. While the temper of America has cooled regarding same-sex marriage as it has become increasingly bipartisan, adoption of children is a bit more radical within this context and would likely receive more backlash.

**Figure 2.22:**

![Graph showing percent saying gays/lesbians should be able to adopt children from 1992 to 2016.](image)

**Citation:** American National Election Studies, 1992-2016.
This question was first asked by the ANES in 1992, when 26 percent answered “Yes,” and then most recently, in 2016, when 72 percent responded “Yes.” Therefore, American society has become exceedingly more tolerant, with a rise in 46 percentage points in twenty-four years. In 1992, 21 percent of Protestants, 29 percent of Catholics, and 36 percent of those without affiliations responded “Yes,” and in 2016, 62 percent of Protestants, 79 percent of Catholics, and 82 percent of those unaffiliated answered in the affirmative (Figure 2.22). Since there are few concrete takeaways from this analysis, as each group grew more accepting by 40 to 50 percentage points, I extended it to the other independent variable: the importance of religion. In 1992, 22 percent of those viewing religion as important said “Yes,” while in 2016, this figure grew to 64 percent. In the same span, 40 percent of those not viewing religion as important answered “Yes,” which grew to 88 percent by 2016 (Figure 2.23). While both groups increased in acceptance, the latter group is 24 percentage points more likely to argue that gay couples should be able to adopt children, showing a rather large divide. Overall, though, the major storyline here is the growing progressivism of America over this twenty-four-year span. As the country has grown more accepting of same-sex marriage, so have many religions, as even Pope Francis recently proclaimed it to be a sin, but not a crime, in contrast with previous popes.¹⁸⁵

Overall, through an analysis and interpretation of the ANES data, it can be acknowledged that religious groups within America have shifted within the past few decades. While some of these trends are rather predictable, there are surprising results, including some that might be more pronounced than initially anticipated. For example, while the percentage of the country’s population that is Protestant has fallen, those that identify within this group have remained largely religious, sympathetic to a Republican Party that prioritizes their needs. In addition, as it has become more of a cultural label for some, Catholics have decreased in religiosity overall, leaving some staunchly religious members to coalesce with religious Protestants, thus causing a range in perspectives amongst those who self-identify with the Catholic church. Lastly, those who are unreligious have either strayed away from politics, located somewhere in the middle, or wrapped into a polarized two-party system, becoming more Democratic as a group over time. While there are many takeaways from these ANES responses, one theme remains constant:
though waning in the importance of everyday American life, religion is still relevant to many, and even its absence can be noteworthy. Unlike in European society, religion certainly still serves to orient individuals within the political sphere. The question remains, how have politicians reacted to religious changes over time during campaign efforts as a result?

**Campaign Ads**

In addition to gathering data on public opinion over time, the impact of religion on politics can be analyzed through an examination of how politicians have interacted with it while trying to communicate with the electorate. In every election season, office seekers receive cues from the public regarding how they can achieve success in elections, and therefore, religion in this arena can show the extent to which office seekers have prioritized it when interacting with potential voters.

In order to conduct this analysis, I have gathered together advertisement data from two different election seasons, the 2004 general elections and the 2022 midterm elections.\(^\text{186}\) These two years provide an eighteen-year span to compare and contrast with one another, 18 years in which church membership has dropped roughly 17 percentage points\(^\text{187}\) and the percentage of Americans who do not identify with a formal religion has risen from 23 percent to now over one-third from 1948 to 2016.\(^\text{188}\) Evidently, there have been great shifts in how Americans interact

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\(^{186}\) The advertisement data come from the *Wesleyan Media Project*. These ads include any that aired on broadcast television in federal or gubernatorial races in each year. These are unique ads and do not count how many times each ad aired on television. The covered media markets in 2004 were the top 100 in the country. The covered media markets in 2022 were all 210 media markets. Due to availability, the data provider only tracked the top 100 markets in 2004.


\(^{188}\) American National Election Studies 1948-2016.
with religion personally during this span, and thus, advertisement data are an adequate tool to measure how these shifts have played out politically.

To make these comparisons, any advertisement containing the terms “religion,” “freedom,” “God,” “faith,” “Bible,” “religious,” “Jesus,” “Christian,” and “pray” were extracted from the greater pool of ads. While there may be some exceptions, such as phrases that have become commonplace American jargon such as “My God,” “God Bless America,” and several generic mentions of “faith,” the idea is that any advertisements where politicians used such religious terms was a deliberate appeal to a certain subset of voters. These data show us to what extent religion seems to impact American politics at the top, and whether campaigning on behalf of religious ideals seems worthwhile in the 21st century.

Overall, in 2004, 3,385 federal and gubernatorial ads were run,\textsuperscript{189} with 140 of them including some sort of religious terminology in them, resulting in just 4.1 percent. In 2022, 7,500 congressional and gubernatorial ads were run, and 286 of them included religious terminology, totaling in 4.4 percent.\textsuperscript{190}

There are several important distinctions between the 2004 and 2022 elections that must be acknowledged to fully digest these data. First, the 2004 election included presidential advertisements, meant to appeal to the national sphere. While regional markets can be targeted by presidential candidates, many of these commercials are catered to a more general audience, and thus may influence the results when measured against the 2022 midterm elections, which was only statewide. Secondly, the 2022 midterm elections were just four months following the overturn of \textit{Roe v. Wade}, which resulted in stripping the federal government’s protection of a

\textsuperscript{189} Again, these were only in the top 100 media markets.

\textsuperscript{190} The 2004 ads included two “God Bless America” clippings that were omitted and 2022 included two “God Bless America” and five “Oh My God” clippings that were excluded from final calculations as well.
woman’s liberty to choose to have an abortion. As noted earlier in the chapter, abortion is a salient religious issue, and thus often accompanies religious terminology when politicians are enduring the campaign season. As a result, as expected, the 2022 midterm election ads that referenced religion included 27 abortion mentions, opposed to just seven in 2004. One final distinction between the years is the advancement of technology. The internet has significantly advanced today, so more advertisements are now reaching audiences online and fewer in-person methods (which may be more suitable for the elderly religious folk) are being employed. These three distinctions, while small, may have resulted in fluctuations that may not have been present had other similar years been used as the points of comparison.

In addition to the distinctions outlined in the preceding paragraph, the political ads mentioning religion highlight just how distinct these two years were and how much American society has evolved over an eighteen-year span. For example, in 2004, religious terms were used within the context of anti-terrorism, the fight to preserve traditional marriage, gun rights, and the preservation of ‘God’ in of the Pledge of Allegiance. In 2022, religious terms were seen primarily in conjunction with pandemic-related policies, environmental preservation, trouble at the borders, police defunding concerns, and most importantly, abortion.

One major conclusion that can be drawn from these data is the infrequency in which religion is mentioned in both 2004 and 2022. While hundreds of advertisements in each year

191 Interestingly, although the 2022 election took place immediately following the overturn of Roe v. Wade, 2004 exit polls suggest that moral issues were of primary concern for many voters. 2004 exit polls gave respondents a list of seven issues to choose the ONE which mattered most when deciding presidential vote. Of the seven issues, the most frequently chosen, at 22 percent were moral issues. Of note, however, is that 80 percent of those who chose moral issues as most important voted for President Bush, and even more interestingly, Gary Langer, ABC’s director of polling at the time, argued that "While morals and values are critical in informing political judgments, they represent personal characteristics far more than a discrete political issue. Conflating the two distorts the story of Tuesday's election… [six are] concrete, specific issues. The seventh, moral values, is not, and its presence on the list produced a misleading result."

included religious terminology, they were extracted from a pool of thousands; meaning thousands of ads ran from politicians looking to appeal to their audiences in ways that are entirely independent from any religious references. This number is likely even smaller when the generic “faith” references are accounted for as well. “Faith” is one of the weaker religious terms included in this data as it is often difficult to determine whether politicians mean it in a genuine religious context, so I did not exclude it. However, “faith” appears fifty-eight times in the 2004 campaign advertisements and seventy-two times in the 2022 ads. Therefore, it is likely that the percentage in both years is even lower than initially reported.

**Conclusion**

In sum, politicians did not use religion to appeal to potential voters in large numbers in 2004, nor did they in 2022. While there was a slightly larger share of religious mentions in 2022, the numbers are nearly identical. Interestingly, even when Americans did attend churches and identify with a particular religion in greater numbers, office seekers were not focusing on this aspect of voters’ identities. Religion, while important to many Americans, and the driving force behind many salient political issues, at least in the 21st century, has remained largely unmentioned throughout the campaigning season. Perhaps, since religion can be a polarizing topic, we are seeing similar trends to the unchurching of Europe manifesting in America through a lack of mention during campaigns. On the other hand, however, religious terms are still appearing in conjunction with some of the country’s biggest policy issues, likely in an appeal towards the traditionalist religious factions that are emerging, according to ANES responses. The question remains whether we will get to the point where religion goes entirely unmentioned in American politics, or will it always maintain some small place in American elections?
Chapter Three
American College Students and Religion

Now that data has been accumulated about religion in politics across the entire American population, in this chapter, I aim to narrow the focus of this evaluation, focusing directly on the future of this country—college students. College students are highly educated young people in America, likely to make the greatest impact at the ballots, run for office, and have the most power to incite change once they ascend to adulthood. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to analyze how college students interact with religion in their daily lives, particularly in comparison to the ways in which religion has played a role in students’ lives in the past. As a result of this analysis, we can make more educated conjectures regarding how religion will play a role in United States’ politics into the ensuing 21st century decades.\(^{192}\)

**CIRP Freshman Survey Analysis**

The first mode of analysis for this chapter derives from a collection of data in the CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS). Created by Dr. Alexander “Sandy” Astin in 1966, TFS has been a useful method to provide “data on incoming [college] students’ background characteristics, high school experiences, attitudes, behavior, and expectations for college.”\(^{193}\) The CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program) Freshman Survey is conducted each year, collecting data from students before beginning their first year in college. Today, most colleges distribute questions to their students in a proctored web-based setting during orientation, though it was initially conducted on paper. Since 1973, TFS has been overseen by academics within the Higher

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192 The major focus of this chapter will be Bowdoin College because of recent survey data collected in Spring 2023.
Education Research Institute at The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). The datasets provide information on a wide range of topics, with over 15 million student respondents at over 1,900 institutions — of all sizes and affiliations— having participated over time.

Throughout the decades in which TFS has been conducted, there have been several questions related to religious affiliations, telling a narrative that seemingly falls in-line with the rest of American society, though maybe even more amplified. In an analysis of data from the beginnings of the CIRP Freshman Survey to today, it is evident that the percentage of college freshmen who are losing religious ties is increasing rapidly over time. For example, each year, the survey asks its respondents: “choose your current religious preference.” Students are then presented with several dropdown choices, including “None.” Using the survey’s raw data, which only extends to 2010, the percentage of incoming college students identifying as “None” has increased from just eight percent in 1966 to 23 percent in 2010— up nearly three-fold (Figure 3.1). Using data from TFS yearly reports, which extend through 2018, these numbers are even more striking. In 1970, only 11 percent of respondents identified as “None,” and eventually, by 2018, over one-third of students responded this way, at a whopping 34 percent. According to the data, the rise in Nones on college campuses appears relatively linear — with a slight uptick during the more radical late ‘70s and a decrease in the conservative ‘80s— a consistent upwards trend from the question’s beginnings until present day (Figure 3.1).

194 “None,” introduced in Chapter One, refers to those without religious affiliations.
While many have identified as not affiliated, some students in TFS reported Christian identities, though these numbers have decreased drastically over time. Using numbers from the raw survey data, in 1966, 27 percent of students responded being Catholic and 51 percent Protestant. By 2010, these numbers shifted to 26 percent Catholic and 42 percent Protestant. Interestingly, the proportion of Catholics eclipsed that of Protestants between 1980 and 1984, though these numbers have seemed to revert to a strong Protestant majority in recent years (Figure 3.2). In addition, those reporting themselves as “born again Christian”\textsuperscript{195} also saw a decline, from 29 percent in 1978 to 23 percent in 2010 (Figure 3.3). While some groups saw a greater loss in membership than others, it is evident that across all Christian denominations, the percentage of students identifying with a religion has decreased.

\textsuperscript{195} “A reference to regeneration and personal conversion, emphasizing God’s revelation to humanity in spreading the Word of the Lord” (Supple, Chapter 1).
Figure 3.2:

Citation: *CIRP The Freshman Survey, 1966-2010*. University of California Los Angeles.

Figure 3.3:

Citation: *CIRP The Freshman Survey, 1978-2010*. University of California Los Angeles.
A further evaluation that I conducted using this CIRP Freshman Survey data is how the religious affiliations of college students measure up to the American population overall during this time. The initial ANES responses (Figure 0.1) provide us with an accurate gauge of how Americans tend to identify religiously, so we can use this data as point of reference. According to the ANES, in 1966, 71 percent identified as Protestant, 22 percent Catholic and four percent as None. Comparing this to the student data, the proportion of the general population was 20 percentage points more Protestant, five percentage points less Catholic, and five percentage points more nonaffiliated. As a result, then, in this year, newly matriculated college students were far less likely to be Protestant and slightly more likely to identify as “None” than the rest of the American population.

The final year that we have corresponding ANES and TFS data is 2008, so we can make comparisons between college students and the American public most recently in this year. In the 2008 ANES response, 53 percent reported themselves as Protestant, 19 percent as Catholic, and 27 percent as None. In the CIRP Freshman Survey, 43 percent identified as Protestant, 26 percent Catholic, and 23 percent None. As a result, similar to 1966 data, there is a significantly greater proportion of Protestants in the ANES responses than the TFS data, while there is a lower proportion of Nones by 4 percentage points. Interestingly, the proportion of college students that identify as Catholic was seven percentage points greater than the overall population. While the data on Protestants is unsurprising, a greater proportion of Catholics is because one would most likely expect college freshmen to be less religiously oriented than the average American, as they tend to be “free thinkers” with less traditional values than preceding generations. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is a disproportionate number of students from Catholic colleges and universities being studied. If this were the case, it is likely that a disproportionate number of
students would self-identify as Catholic in comparison to Protestant or None. However, we do not have enough background information about this year of the study to make this claim confidently.

Whether in line with trends seen in the rest of the American population or not, one thing remains abundantly clear: more college students today have no religious affiliation than ever before. In the 2018 edition of the CIRP Freshman Survey report, an acknowledgement of these religious trends was observed and analyzed. First, the report discussed the necessity of adding “Atheist” and “Agnostic” categories—which was done in 2015—both of which were previously grouped-in with the unaffiliated group. It became necessary to further differentiate those who do not practice an organized religion because the group has become so numerous, and distinct identities more apparent. By 2018, the report notes, the percentage of students selecting a particular religion decreased below 70 percent for the first time, now at 69 percent. In addition, for the unreligious group, nine percent identified as agnostic, six percent as atheist, and 16 percent as none, so these respondents are rather dispersed today. Paralleling this trend, the report notes that in 2018, incoming freshmen were far less likely to have attended religious service (75 percent to 68 percent) or have discussed religion in the past year than a decade ago (79 percent to 76 percent). In 2018, the majority of those identifying with a religion had attended a service in the past year, opposed to just 24 percent of atheists, 29 percent of Nones,

196 The 2018 report summary describes as follows: “It is not surprising that more than 80% of incoming freshmen at Catholic 4-year colleges (80.3%) and other religious 4-year colleges (80.4%) identify with a specific religion. This proportion at other institutions ranges from 61.4% at nonsectarian 4-year colleges to 69.7% at public 4-year colleges… Private universities (12.1%) and public universities (10.9%) had the largest percentage of students who identify as agnostic. Nonsectarian 4-year colleges had the largest proportion of students who identified as either atheist (7.8%) or who selected "none" (21.5%)” (The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2018. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 20).

and 39 percent of agnostics. These trends certainly suggest the diminishing importance of religion in the lives of incoming college students today.

According to the 2018 Report, spirituality tends to have an interesting relationship with religion for college students as well. For example, 44 percent of students who identify with a religion ranked their spirituality as at least above average, in comparison to just 19 percent of Nones, 15 percent of agnostics, and 11 percent of atheists. Most of these unreligious groups have rated their level of spirituality as below average, with many falling in the bottom tenth. Next, students were asked how important it is for them to integrate spirituality into their personal life. 52 percent of those identifying religiously responded that this integration is either very important or essential, as opposed to just 12 percent of atheists, 18 percent of agnostics and 24 percent of Nones. As a result, it appears that to incoming college students, spirituality and religiosity are viewed with a similar lens, each of which complement one another, rather than clash. In other words, spirituality does not seem to act as a replacement to religion for the majority of these newly matriculated college freshmen.

Lastly, in the 2018 Report, politics were briefly addressed in relation to religion. The results suggest that the same proportion of those with a religious identity place themselves on the right as do the left, at 28 percent. The remaining 44 percent lie somewhere in the middle. For those who are agnostic and atheist, over half fall on the left of the political spectrum, at 56 and 57 percent, respectfully. For Nones, 50 percent see themselves in the middle, while 39 percent are on the left. As a result, it appears that most college students are on the left, particularly those without religious affiliations. Those who do identify with a particular religion, however,

199 Ibid, 22, 23.
200 Ibid.
are not necessarily on the right, but are split between all three camps. While it is common that young Americans are more drawn towards liberal philosophies, it appears that religious ties can counteract this youth, causing some students to identify with more conservative philosophies. For the general population, the ANES suggests that today, around 20 percent of those viewing religion as important identify with the left, so students will either begin to resemble the greater population eventually or religious college students are increasingly more liberal (Figure 2.13).

**Bowdoin College Polar Poll Analysis**

To further explore how college students interact with religion in their daily lives, I also analyzed data from Bowdoin College’s Polar Poll. The Polar Poll is an annual survey created by Professor Franz of Bowdoin College’s Government & Legal Studies Department. For the most recent iteration, the poll is based on 270 full or partially completed surveys from a random sample of Bowdoin students between March 7 and April 1, 2023. While Professor Franz has distributed this survey to the Bowdoin students for a number of years, for the 2023 version, I assisted him with crafting six distinct religion focused questions, meaning this iteration includes more questions pertaining to religiosity. The aim of these questions is to gauge how Bowdoin students identify with their religion, and to what extent it is prioritized in their lives at college.

Beginning with the questions that have been asked in previous versions of the Polar Poll, the 2020 iteration included a general demographic question of, “What is your current religion, if

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201 This survey was distributed via email using the Qualtrics software system and students took a few minutes to carefully answer the questions according to their own personal experiences and beliefs.

202 Franz prefaced: “As with all surveys and polls, one should be cautious in drawing too many strong inferences about Bowdoin student attitudes and opinions. Inferences from data like these assume a representative sample and unbiased instruments. In designing this survey, we have worked to minimize bias in sample selection and question wording/order, but we must make assumptions that respondents answer truthfully and/or understand the intention of the questions.”
any?” In 2020, 222 students answered this question, 16 percent of whom were Protestant, 18 percent Catholic, 10 percent Jewish, 26 percent Atheist or Agnostic, and 26 percent Nothing in particular (Table 3.1). Overall, these survey respondents were 34 percent Christian and 52 percent either Atheist, Agnostic, or Nothing in particular—a healthy majority, significantly more than the proportion of nonreligious individuals in any year of the CIRP Freshman Survey.

Table 3.1:

2020: “What is your current religion, if any?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christian/Protestant</td>
<td>15.77%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>18.02%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>10.36%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Atheist or Agnostic</td>
<td>26.13%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nothing in particular</td>
<td>26.13%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Another one not listed here</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2020 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).

In 2023, when this same question was asked, it received 226 responses, 15 percent of whom answered Protestant, 13 percent Catholic, eight percent Jewish, 12 percent Atheist, 20 percent Agnostic, and 16 percent Nothing in particular.203 Therefore, in 2023, the make-up of

203 Note that Atheist and Agnostic were split up in the 2023 version of the Polar Poll.
Bowdoin students is 28 percent Christian and 58 percent either Atheist, Agnostic, or Nothing in Particular (Table 3.2). Over this three-year span, according to the results of the poll, the proportion of Bowdoin students identifying as Christian decreased by six percentage points and those identifying as Atheist, Agnostic, or Nothing increased by six percentage points. While much more amplified, these trends seem relatively consistent with the American public—a decreasing sense of religiosity overall.

Table 3.2:

**2023: “What is your current religion, if any?”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christian/Protestant</td>
<td>15.04%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>12.83%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>7.96%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>2.65%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>0.44%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1.33%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>12.39%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>19.47%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nothing in particular</td>
<td>25.66%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Another one not listed here</td>
<td>2.21%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Citation:** 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).

While secularization has been the norm over the past few decades, the magnitude to which Bowdoin students have shifted is somewhat astonishing. For example, in the most recent reports of the CIRP Freshman Survey, in 2018, still nearly 69 percent identified with a particular religion, while only 31 percent identified themselves with the unaffiliated category. In addition,
2016 ANES data reports suggest that Christians make-up about 65 percent of the population, while those without a religion only about one-third. While still heightened in proportion to the overall United States, TFS data results hardly compare to the lack of religiosity at Bowdoin College, where nearly 60 percent of all students appear not to identify with a formal religion in 2023.

Furthermore, the 2020 Polar Poll also asked those who did report a religious affiliation, "Do you practice your religion? Ultimately, the poll saw 107 responses, 25 percent of whom reported “Yes, often,” 37 percent of whom responded, “On occasion,” 29 percent “Rarely,” and 8 percent “Never” (Table 3.3). Overall, 63 percent of the 107 affiliated respondents at least practice their religion on occasion. Of the total sample though, the original 222 Bowdoin respondents, only 30 percent practice some sort of religion at least on occasion, and only 12 percent report practicing often.

Table 3.3:

2020: “Do you practice your religion?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes, often</td>
<td>25.23%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>On occasion</td>
<td>37.38%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>28.97%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>8.41%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2020 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).

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204 This excluded Atheists, Agnostics, and Nothing in Particulars.
In the 2023 Polar Poll, results are relatively similar. In this iteration, the question was slightly different than in 2020, but the aim is the same. The question asked, “What level do you consider yourself to be religious?” Like in 2020, only those who reported some sort of religious affiliation were included in these responses.\textsuperscript{205} Overall, 96 students answered this question, 15 percent of whom responded as “Not religious,” 47 percent as “Slightly religious,” 29 percent as “Moderately religious,” seven percent as “Very religious,” and two percent as “Unsure” (Table 3.4). Ultimately, of the 96 students who answered this question, 85 percent reported being at least slightly religious, and 39 percent at least moderately. Including those who are atheist, agnostic, and Nones in the sample, those at least slightly religious decreased to 41 percent and those at least moderately down to just 16 percent. Furthermore, for the entire Bowdoin sample, only three percent report being very religious.

Table 3.4:

2023: “To what level do you consider yourself to be religious?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Slightly religious</td>
<td>37.66%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moderately religious</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very religious</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).

\textsuperscript{205} This excluded Atheists and Agnostics and Nothing in Particulars.
It is moderately difficult to compare the 2020 and 2023 data for these questions because they differ slightly between the two samples. However, given only 30 percent reported practicing religion at least on occasion and only 12 percent said often, it is clear that religion was rarely a part of the typical Bowdoin student’s weekly life in 2020. In 2023, these results are possibly even more revealing. With only 16 reporting themselves as at least moderately religious and three percent as very, a similar narrative of a secular Bowdoin campus can be told just three years later. Even of those who do report religious affiliations, there was a seven-percentage point rise in those who do not ever practice their religion at Bowdoin over the three-year span. Overall, in both 2020 and 2023, the proportion of religious students is rather miniscule, especially in comparison to the greater United States population.

Table 3.5:

2023: “Do you feel comfortable talking about your own religious experience on Bowdoin’s campus?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Might or might not</td>
<td>14.48%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Probably yes</td>
<td>45.25%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Definitely yes</td>
<td>28.51%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).

While it has been established from the 2020 and 2023 Polar Polls that religion is not the norm at Bowdoin, this was somewhat expected. As a result, another question in the 2023 iteration of the Polar Poll is “Do you feel comfortable talking about your own religious
experience on Bowdoin’s campus?” For this question, 221 students answered, 29 percent of whom responded with “Definitely Yes,” 45 percent “Probably yes,” 15 percent “Might/might not,” 9 percent “Probably not,” and 3 percent “Definitely not.” Breaking these figures down further, 74 percent responded with at least “Probably Yes,” and only 12 percent answered with at least “Probably not” (Table 3.5). Overall, it seems that although religion may not play an integral role in the lives of most Bowdoin students, most seem to have little problem discussing it with their peers on campus.

These results seem overwhelmingly positive, so I decided to further control a third variable, using the responses for the previous question, “What level do you consider yourself to be religious? By controlling for this variable, I was able to break down how comfortable those who have various relationships with religion feel about discussing this topic on campus. The results were quite astonishing. For example, of those who are not religious, 79 percent answered at least “Probably Yes” when asked about their comfort level speaking about religion at Bowdoin, 68 percent of those slightly religious answered at least “Probably Yes,” while only 47 percent of those moderately religious said at least “Probably Yes.” Subsequently, 14 percent of those not religious said at least “Probably Not,” 14 percent of those slightly religious answered at least “Probably Not,” and 25 percent of those moderately religious described themselves as “Probably Not” comfortable talking about their own religious experience on campus (Table 3.6). These results suggest that those who feel most comfortable talking about religion on Bowdoin’s campus are those who do not experience it in their lives, meaning it is most likely being discussed in a scholarly or analytical manner, rather than personal.

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206 This analysis only included those with religious affiliations because this question was not asked of students who said they were atheist or agnostic or who said "nothing in particular."

207 We also did not run this analysis for those who self-reported as “Very religious” because the number of students was too low and thus there was not enough statistical significance.
Table 3.6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Definitely not</th>
<th>Probably not</th>
<th>Might or might not</th>
<th>Probably yes</th>
<th>Definitely yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly religious</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately religious</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).

These data from the 2023 Polar Poll tell a narrative that one may not expect. Often, one would imagine that those who are more religious would feel comfortable talking about their experiences because it is meaningful to them. However, at Bowdoin, it seems as if the opposite phenomenon has taken place. Because Bowdoin has moved so far in the secular direction with regard to religion, those who have stronger religious beliefs are more apprehensive speaking about it with their fellow classmates. On the other hand, those without strong religious affiliations have few problems discussing their lack of religion with other students because this is the norm at Bowdoin. Students who identify as religious may feel isolated on this campus, as they would be interrogated by others who do not understand their beliefs, a rather uncomfortable experience. Even worse, some religious students may feel judged or antagonized for their
beliefs, and thus, more inclined to keep their faith quiet, rather than discussing it with others who may end up viewing them differently as a result.

Further highlighting the secularization of Bowdoin’s campus, another religious question in the 2023 Polar Poll yielded some surprising results. This question pertained to the qualities of Bowdoin’s newly appointed President. Following the 2022-2023 academic year, current president, Clayton Rose, is retiring from his position as college president, a title which he has held since 2015. On March 9, 2023, Bowdoin announced that the new president will be Safa Zaki, set to assume her role for the 2023-2024 academic year. Professor Franz, however, distributed the Polar Poll to students beginning on March 7, before Zaki was announced as the college’s next president, so this was a hotly discussed topic on campus at this point. Using the Polar Poll, we saw an opportunity to gauge what types of qualities Bowdoin students may desire in their preferred presidential candidate, similar to Professor Andrew Frank’s 2017 Lake Superior State University study regarding atheist candidates, referenced in Chapter One.208

We figured that capitalizing on the Bowdoin presidential opening would mimic American citizens’ voting behavior, as it is a pressing topic that directly impacts the lives of all students. In the 2023 Polar Poll, Bowdoin students were randomly assigned to four different iterations of this question—the first four items remained the same for each respondent and the fifth one varied. A visual is presented in the appendix, with the only difference being that each respondent only saw five items—always age 45, white female, worked in health care sector, and PhD in psychology; and one of the following: Devout Catholic, Evangelical Christian, Atheist, and Bowdoin Alum (Figure 3.4). In this activity, student respondents were asked “We are still waiting to hear about a new Bowdoin president. But if you knew the following facts about the selected candidate, how

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would you rank their importance to you? Drag and drop the options from 1 to 5, with #1 being the most important to you.”

Figure 3.4:

We are still waiting to hear about a new Bowdoin president. But if you knew the following facts about the selected candidate, how would you rank their importance to you? Drag and drop the options from 1 to 5, with #1 being the most important to you.

Table 3.7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age 45</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Worked in health care sector</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PhD in Psychology</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Devout Catholic</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Evangelical Christian</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bowdoin alum</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).
The results of this activity suggest a great deal about the preferences of the Bowdoin student population overall. Ultimately, there were 226 respondents for this part of the poll, a quarter of whom received one of each option: Devout Catholic, Bowdoin alum, Atheist, and Evangelical Christian. The results suggest that Atheist and both religious labels were ranked, on average, at 4 or lower, but to different degrees. Being an atheist was chosen at 4.09 on average, Devout Catholic at 4.59, and Evangelical Christian at 4.68 (Table 3.7). Breaking this data down further, two percent of respondents ranked atheist as 1, seven percent as 2, 18 percent as 3, 27 percent as 4, and 46 percent as 5. Five percent ranked Devout Catholic as 1, zero percent as 2, two percent as 3, seven percent as 5, and 86 percent as 5. Lastly, four percent ranked Evangelical Christian as 1, four percent as 2, four percent as 3, nine percent as 4, and 80 percent as 5 (Table 3.8).

Table 3.8:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</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>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age 45</td>
<td>13.27%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15.93%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>20.80%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>32.74%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23.89%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14.16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25.22%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>11.50%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Worked in healthcare sector</td>
<td>15.93%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>32.30%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>25.66%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16.81%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PhD in Psychology</td>
<td>38.50%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>30.09%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18.14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9.37%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Devout Catholic</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7.02%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>85.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Evangelical Christian</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8.93%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>80.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>1.79%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17.86%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>26.79%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>46.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bowdoin alum</td>
<td>22.81%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>17.54%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).
The 2023 Polar Poll results suggest that Bowdoin students prioritize one being atheist above all other religious labels. For example, on average, being an atheist was valued at least .5 points more important than being a Devout Catholic or Evangelical Christian. In addition, far fewer students ranked atheist as their fifth choice—less than half—while over 80 percent ranked the other religious labels as their fifth choice. Interestingly, it does seem that few Bowdoin students feel extremely strongly about the atheist identity, since only two percent ranked it as their most important item, opposed to five percent and four percent choosing Devout Catholics or Evangelical Protestants as their number 1. Is it likely that there were a few extremely religious respondents that ranked those labels as most important, while those who are unreligious—most Bowdoin students—felt more comfortable with an atheist as their president yet did not view it as a quality that is imperative to them.

Bowdoin’s campus seems to operate contrary to the rest of the country when analyzing the results of this question. In Chapter One, we showed that Americans still have a difficult time electing atheists into office, although the country has secularized tremendously over the past few decades. At Bowdoin, atheism seems not to act as a deterrent to students. While a great deal of Americans seem to fear that an atheist will lead to a leader without morals that may not respect the integrity of United States political tradition, it seems that Bowdoin operates contrary to this. As Bowdoin has solidified itself as a secular campus where religion is scarcely discussed or practiced, students appear worried that a religious president may jeopardize this aspect of campus lifestyle that the population has grown accustomed to in recent years. It appears, then, that a lack of morality, a common fear amongst the American public with regards to atheists, is not of concern to Bowdoin students. On the contrary, an individual that presents themselves

as either “traditional” or “backwards” through religious beliefs would be viewed as an outsider that is unrelatable, or even ignorant, to the greater student body.

A final question about religion that was newly incorporated into the 2023 Polar Poll pertains to religion versus spirituality, something the 2018 report on the CIRP Freshman survey discussed in length. First, Bowdoin students were asked whether they feel that being religious and spiritual are different. 224 students answered this question in the poll, to which 77 percent responded “Yes,” eight percent said “No,” and 16 percent replied, “Not sure” (Table 3.9).

Furthermore, 222 students responded to another question, “To what level do you consider yourself to be spiritual?” 32 percent responded as “Not spiritual,” 31 percent as “Slightly spiritual,” 24 percent as “Moderately spiritual,” seven percent as “Very spiritual,” and five percent as “Unsure” (Table 3.10). Overall, then, the 2023 Polar Poll suggests that only 37 percent of students see themselves as at least “moderately spiritual.”

Table 3.9:

2023: “Do you feel being religious and spiritual are different?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76.79%</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>15.63%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.59%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).
Table 3.10:

2023: “To what level, do you consider yourself to be spiritual?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not spiritual</td>
<td>31.98%</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Slightly spiritual</td>
<td>31.08%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moderately spiritual</td>
<td>24.32%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very spiritual</td>
<td>7.21%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>5.41%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citation: 2023 Polar Poll of Bowdoin students, administered by Professor Michael Franz in conjunction with students in Gov 2080 (Quantitative Analysis of Political Science).

The relationship between spirituality and religion for Bowdoin students is fascinating as well. While they are overwhelmingly nonreligious, it does not seem as if they are supplementing religion with spirituality either. As 16 percent of Bowdoin students reported being at least moderately religious, 37 percent saw themselves as at least moderately spiritual. While the latter number is much greater, it is still relatively low in proportion to the total number of Bowdoin students. In a further breakdown of this data, only 14 percent of those who are not religious describe themselves as at least moderately spiritual, 32 percent of those slightly religious see themselves as at least moderately spiritual, and 57 percent of those moderately religious described themselves as at least moderately spiritual. Overall, similar to the TFS, it is students who feel a connection to their religiosity that have also expressed high levels of spirituality, meaning the two have served to complement one another.

\[\text{210 Like before, there were too few individuals self-reporting as “Very religious,” so a proper analysis of the spirituality of this group could not be conducted.}\]
**Spirituality, Science, and Religion**

Over time, many scholars have attempted to tackle the distinction between spirituality and religion, with little to no understanding of the difference between the two. For example, Stephen Ellingson, in 2001, described that there is a “growing division between organized religion and spirituality,” while Mark Chaves, in 2011, suggested that growing spirituality is a reaction to dissatisfaction with contemporary religion, yet offered little insight as to what the fast-growing term of “spirituality” means. While it is commonly referred to as a finding of something greater within one’s inner self, this is rather vague and ambiguous, and up for differing interpretations. In 2013, Boston University Professor of Sociology, Nancy Ammerman, offered her interpretation of the relationship—arguing that the vast majority of individuals fit within either the religious and spiritual or neither category, and thus, they are intertwined. To explain the phenomenon of spiritual but not religious, she suggests that these individuals exist more under a moral and political category, rather than empirical. Extrapolating upon this idea, she cites Elaine Ecklund and Christopher Scheitle’s *Religion vs. Science* text, noting that often, the concept of religion is entirely misconstrued, meaning the spirituality that people tend to romanticize isn’t all that different from the religion that they claim to condemn.

Notably, one can hypothesize that college students often feel hostile towards religion because they are enveloped within an academic world. Students learn all sorts of complex information about society through scientific lectures, labs, and readings, and thus, many believe they understand perfectly how the world operates at its core, and therefore, that there is no room

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for religion. In fact, often I have heard students express that religion is inherently flawed and that those who practice their faith have no conception of reality.

In addition to young people, many Americans view religion and science as rivals, and feel disdain towards religious individuals as a result, something Ecklund and Scheitle tackle in *Religion vs. Science*. For example, they describe a study conducted by Kimberly Rio and a team of social psychologists in 2015, asking about how groups are stereotyped with regards to religion. Their results suggest that Christians specifically are viewed as less trusting and less competent in science than the average individual—even the Christian participants recognized this stereotype. Atheists, on the other hand, were seen as more trusting and competent. This study may account for Bowdoin students favoring an atheist president over one with traditional religious affiliations. To test this theory, Ecklund and Scheitle conducted their own study, asking respondents what type of relationship they understand religion and science to be: Conflict (on the side of religion), Conflict (on the side of science), Independence, or Collaboration. Ultimately, very few individuals saw themselves on the side of religion in a conflictual relationship, with evangelicals being most likely, at a mere 29 percent. Every religious group saw either a majority collaborative or independent relationship between the two—meaning it is very much possible for the two to exist simultaneously. Interestingly, it was the atheists, agnostics, and unaffiliated participants that were the only group to see a predominantly conflictual relationship between science and religion, with 52 percent feeling this way.

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214 And even most evangelicals saw the relationship as collaborative over any other type—48 percent.
Therefore, it is this nonreligious group that tends to perpetuate the stereotypes that exist for the relationship between religion and science, not the religious groups themselves.

**Conclusion**

Whether their conception of science is to blame or not, it is at least a plausible hypothesis to explain why Bowdoin students may feel antagonized by the existence of religion in their lives, and its presence on campus. Interestingly, comparing the data from the CIRP Freshman Survey with that of the Polar Poll, it is evident that Bowdoin students are much more secular than the average college or university in America. Nevertheless, the future generation of politicians, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals are straying away from religion in either similar or more pronounced trends than the American public as a whole. It remains to be seen whether college students are leaving religion because America is secularizing overall or if these numbers will regress to the mean following college years—some of the most transformative times of one’s life. In other words, will students continue to not identify themselves following graduation or is a distaste for religion only short term?

Unfortunately, the decline in religiosity is such a recent phenomenon that there are very few studies regarding how trends amongst college students translate into adulthood, and what this could mean for America’s future. One can only think about Tocqueville’s views on religion and morality and feel some sense of fear. While on the other hand, maybe leaving religion behind will mark one less divisive aspect of American identity, as it seems to have in Europe, thus fostering unity and agreement. However, religion is still fundamental in the lives of many, and thus, a college like Bowdoin, aiming to matriculate students from a range of backgrounds and claiming to support all perspectives, seems like an unfortunate place for religious students to
feel a growing sense of discomfort when discussing their faith with friends, classmates, and faculty. More bottled-up anger and affective animosity, especially during collegiate years, when many form their political opinions, will likely only make our polarized society worse, further creating a divide between American religious and nonreligious coalitions.
Conclusion
Implications of a Religiously Polarized Society

As can be seen, religion is an extremely complex component of American society. As it has diminished in its overall presence in everyday life, it almost lurks in the shadows today, not forgotten but often taken for granted. As individuals enter and exit our borders, and new generations are born and pass on, the traditional religious identity of the United States is evermore shaken. In addition, over time, new issues emerge, other identities take precedent, and technology brings us into contact with others at accelerating rates. Our religious backbones thus ebb and flow, either orienting us in a given direction, or showing us that our faith is more fragile than ever before. In a political society, our identities determine what we prioritize, whom we vote for, and signal with whom we align. As politics have transformed into a constant battle, religion often struggles to keep up, remaining just enough afloat to cause conflict of its own, with some shaping their entire lives around it, and others unclear why it even exists in the first place.

In Chapter One, we learned about the political development of several religious groups in the United States. Seculars, while growing over time, are still scarcely represented in politics. While overwhelmingly more Democratic, there is a secular contingent within the Republican Party as well, most of whom identify as Libertarian. Roman Catholics, a relatively stable group proportionally over time, were initially overwhelmingly Democratic, but have defected towards the right in recent years as the Republican Party has embraced key social issues from which the Democratic Party has distanced itself. This has led to a cross-pressed group of Catholic voters, unable to sort themselves amongst polarized parties. Evangelical Protestants have greatly increased their political prominence in the past few decades, becoming essentially synonymous with the Republican Party, but becoming somewhat isolated from a more progressive
mainstream American society. Black Protestants, who are decreasing in number as social activists who once utilized the church to communicate to their congregations, are spreading messages through other means today. In addition, this group is primarily motivated by their racial, not religious identity, including black evangelicals, who are more likely to be Democratic than the rest. Latinos, the largest minority group, are still primarily Catholic, and have seen themselves become more secular, but also more evangelical over time. Overall, however, they behave similarly to Black Protestants politically, motivated by racial factors, and thus usually vote liberal. Muslims, one of the faster-growing religious groups in the U.S., are getting involved in politics more often, both running for office and performing many other civic acts in a post 9/11 society. Lastly, Jews, a small religious group in America, are overrepresented, and although on paper appear to align with conservative values, are overwhelmingly Democratic, not defecting in the same way that other groups, such as Catholics have, over time. Overall, American religious denominations are transforming rapidly alongside a fluid political society.

In Chapter Two, we ran some of our own analyses on religious groups within the U.S., using ANES data; first pertaining to their own religious values, then with regard to political affiliations, and lastly, in relation to salient voting issues. Overall, it became quite clear that there is a non-affiliated group that is emerging in America, with very little exposure to traditional religious institutions and thought. In addition, while the proportion of Protestants has fallen, their adherence to religious principles has not, so it appears that they are self-identifying elsewhere today. Simultaneously, while the Catholic population has maintained remarkably consistent over time, their religious priorities have not, and thus, it appears that many Catholics today are in name only, not practicing religion, but holding on to traditional identity. Next, while there seems to be an overall distaste for American political parties, Protestants are most likely to
be conservative, and there is a growing contingent of those viewing religion as important that have begun to align with the Republican Party. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, remains popular for both cultural Catholics and non-affiliated individuals interested in politics. However, a significant proportion of those without affiliations self-identify as moderate, likely due to apathy or maybe in response to the rise of the Religious Right. Overall, however, most Americans are picking a side, with a polarized political climate resulting in religious groups following suit. Lastly, salient religious issues demonstrate a growing liberal America, though some religious individuals have stuck to their moral beliefs, looking to preserve their faith in a society where it may be tough to do so—while others with religious affiliations have moved left with the rest. The major takeaway from this chapter is the diminishing importance of religious groups, with the importance of religion largely a more important independent variable in many political situations today.

In Chapter Three, we conducted an analysis on America’s youth, in particular, college students. We began with a discussion of data from the CIRP Freshman Survey, which reveals an increasing proportion of incoming college freshmen beginning to disassociate with traditional religion, referring to themselves as “Nones.” In addition, the data suggest that although college students are known to be quite liberal, which almost all unaffiliated students are, those with religious ties are essentially dispersed along the entire political spectrum. Next, we examined data from the Bowdoin College’s Polar Poll. Comparing the 2020 iteration to the 2023 one, demonstrates that an already secular college campus has become even more so today. In addition, students with religious backgrounds are more uncomfortable discussing religion with others on campus because the environment is not conducive to openness about one’s faith, as they fear judgment from an unreligious and “scholarly” group of individuals. Furthermore,
mimicking a political election, Bowdoin students were more likely to support a new president with an atheist background than one with traditional religious affiliations, in contrast with the rest of American society. These data show that students are wary of religion orienting the thought-process of its campus leaders and fear it will make them less approachable or understanding. Lastly, because it is assumed that many college students dismiss religion as unscientific, we analyzed its relationship with science and spirituality, concluding that all three can coexist. Ultimately, we concluded that it is those without religious affiliations that view the relationship as most conflictual, not religious folks. Overall, while college students are quite turned off by religion, the question remains as to whether this religious animosity is short lived, or the beginnings of overly secular campuses translating into a greater society where individuals are apprehensive about sharing their faith, and what political effects would ensue?

As growing secularism has been emergent for decades, the trends are astonishingly linear, showing no signs of stopping in the near future. Often, the only way to shake-up consistent evolving trends is the presence of a societal altering event that impacts the lives of everyone. While 9/11 has often been categorized in this manner, so has the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020. The pandemic was viewed as a time that could greatly shape religion in America and across the globe. Not only was it a period of uncertainty, potentially causing one either to rely heavily on their faith or abandon it altogether, but also it physically closed many houses of worship. As a result, some were forced to find new ways to practice their religion, adding a layer of difficulty; while others gained more free time and were just the click of a button away from attending services from the comforts of their own home.

As many scholars have been curious about pandemic-related effects, religion is certainly on the list. Recently, the Pew Research Center published results from five data collection cycles,
beginning in the height of the pandemic, in July 2020, and ending recently, in November 2022. Overall, the percentage of those attending services at least once a month has only dropped slightly, from 33 percent to 30 percent. In addition, while the majority, 87 percent report no changes in their attendance, more (eight percent) report a decrease than an increase (four percent). The major differences in forms of worship were also expected, as 20 percent report attending in person less often versus 15 percent who say they are participating virtually more often.\footnote{Justin Nortey and Michael Rotolo. “How the Pandemic Has Affected Attendance at U.S. Religious Services.” (web page), Pew Research Center (website), accessed May 5, 2023. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/03/28/how-the-pandemic-has-affected-attendance-at-u-s-religious-services/} In total, while more people report attending services less often, it is a small drop—only three percentage points, relatively in-line with pre-COVID religious trends, meaning it is difficult to argue that the pandemic has caused a drop off in religious participation overall.

In early 2023, another study, conducted by the Survey Center on American Life at the American Enterprises Institute, in conjunction with researchers at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, measured religious affiliation and service attendance before the pandemic, and after, in spring 2022. Their data, while relatively consistent with the Pew Research Center, tell a more layered narrative. For example, they also report a slight increase in those not attending church services post-pandemic but note that these trends were largely driven by those who had sporadic attendance patterns before the pandemic. Their findings suggest that few Americans who regularly attended before the pandemic report no longer doing so, and few of those who occasionally attended before the pandemic reported the same. The largest changes they reported were amongst young adults –aged 18 to 29– an already disaffiliating portion of the population, nearly 30 percent of whom report attending religious services less today than before.
COVID-19 first emerged in the United States.217 As a result, it seems that the pandemic did not mark changes, but accelerated an already emerging trend regarding religious worship in America. This post-pandemic religious decline may be a signal of increasing religious polarization, with more Americans moving to the poles, either being very religiously active, or completely inactive. These trends are largely reminiscent of a growing polarity in American politics between Democrats and Republicans.218

In the 21st century United States, we have certainly drifted away from Tocqueville’s conception of religion during the 1830s, but we have not evolved into the same lack of religiosity in politics that has been seen to stabilize much of European society today. For better, or for worse, we have found ourselves somewhere in-between, with the majority expressing a more progressive stance on moral issues and disaffiliating from churches, yet a religious subset still contends that “Evangelicals and Catholics [must] be Christians together in a way that helps prepare the world for the coming of him to whom belongs the kingdom.”219 We are therefore seeing a polarity of religion in conjunction with a polarization of politics, as there are few individuals intermittently involved in either today. America has incentivized an all-in mentality, so we are always moving apart, in a divided society. As a result, our religious situation is beginning to resemble our political parties, with each fueling one another. So long as religion remains important, these trends will continue to persist, even in an increasingly secular society. While faith is often the great unifier, it can also serve to be the ultimate divider.


218 Ibid.

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