From Left to Right? White Evangelical Politicization, GOP Incorporation, and the Effect of Party Affiliation on Group Opinion Change

Devon B. Shapiro
Bowdoin College, devon.b.shapiro@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/honorsprojects

Part of the American Politics Commons, Christianity Commons, Politics and Social Change Commons, and the Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/honorsprojects/2

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship and Creative Work at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mmcderm2@bowdoin.edu.
From Left to Right? White Evangelical Politicization, GOP Incorporation, and the Effect of Party Affiliation on Group Opinion Change

An Honors Paper for the Department of Government and Legal Studies

By Devon Bresler Shapiro

Bowdoin College, 2013

©Devon Bresler Shapiro
List of Tables and Figures iii
Acknowledgements iv
Chapter 1: Introduction 1
Chapter 2: The “Fourth Great Awakening” and the Politicization of White Evangelicals 20
Chapter 3: “God and the GOP”? How White Evangelicals Became Republicans 51
Chapter 4: Toward a Party Affiliation Effect of Group Opinion Change 81
Chapter 5: Conclusion 115
Appendix 1: Wording of Survey Question 123
Bibliography 127
List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1.1: Connotations of “Evangelical” Over Time ........................................ 11
Table 1.2: White Evangelical and White Mainline Denominations ....................... 12
Table 1.3: Major Christian Right Groups .......................................................... 14
Table 2.1: Strongly Oppose the ERA, 1977 and 1982 ........................................ 37
Table 3.1: Groups Most Closely Associated with the Parties .............................. 57
Table 4.1: Political Attitudes of 1988 Presidential Campaign Contributors ........... 111
Table 4.2: Select Issue Positions of White Religious Groups, 2008 ...................... 114
Table 5.1: Select Issue Positions of White Evangelicals by Age, 2012 .................. 121

Figures

Figure 2.1: Women Should Take Care of the Home, 1974-1998 .......................... 36
Figure 3.1: Catholics and Party Identification, 1960-2008 ................................. 53
Figure 3.2: White Evangelicals and Party Identification, 1960-2008 ..................... 58
Figure 3.3: Communism is the Worst Kind of Government, 1973-1994 .................. 65
Figure 3.4: Civil Rights Pushes Too Fast, 1964-1992 ....................................... 67
Figure 3.5: Prefer Strict Segregation, 1964-1978 .............................................. 67
Figure 3.6: Southern White Evangelicals and Party Identification, 1960-2008 ......... 70
Figure 3.7: Geographic Distribution of White Evangelicals, 1960-2008 ............... 75
Figure 3.8: Rates of Evangelical Adherence by State ..................................... 75
Figure 3.9: Southern Whites and Party Identification, 1960-2008 ....................... 80
Figure 3.10: Southern White Evangelicals and Party Identification, 1960-2008 ...... 80
Figure 4.1: Whites Receiving a Bachelor's Degree by Age 25, 1974-2004 ............. 95
Figure 4.2: White Evangelicals: Let the Free Market Handle the Economy, Income Adjusted, 1990-2008 ................................................................. 97
Figure 4.3: White Evangelicals: Government in Washington is Too Strong, Income Adjusted, 1970-2000 ................................................................. 97
Figure 4.4: Government Should Stay Out of Providing Assistance With Medical Care, 1960-2008 ................................................................. 101
Figure 4.5: Government Should Let Each Person Get Ahead On Their Own (Jobs), 1960-2008 ................................................................. 101
Figure 4.6: Government Should Not Reduce Income Differences, 1978-2010 ......... 102
Figure 4.7: Government Does Too Much, 1975-2010 ....................................... 102
Figure 4.8: People Should Help Themselves to Improve Their Standard of Living, 1975-2010 ................................................................. 103
Figure 4.9: We Should Let the Free Market Handle the Economy, 1990-2008 ....... 113
Acknowledgements

This project would have been impossible without the feedback, guidance, and support of my advisor, Professor Jeff Selinger. Professor Selinger’s comments, questions, and ideas have been invaluable, and he always pushed me to write a better thesis. For that, I am hugely grateful. Also, I am indebted to my committee members, Professor Richard Morgan and Professor Andrew Rudalevige, for spending their valuable time on providing insightful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper, as well as asking difficult questions and showing me where my arguments were lacking. I am further thankful of Lynne Atkinson, the Bowdoin Government Department, and the Bowdoin library for all of the support I have received since beginning the project in September. Finally, I thank all the people who afforded me the opportunity to undertake such a project: my family, my teachers, and my friends.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Puzzle

During the summer of 1925, Americans paid close attention as religious and secular forces battled in a Dayton, Tennessee courtroom. In what Edward Larson calls in his Pulitzer Prize winning *Summer for the Gods* “the most famous scene in American legal history,” the aging politician, three-time presidential nominee, and fervent evangelical Protestant William Jennings Bryan argued against the noted litigator Clarence Darrow – according to Larson, America’s greatest criminal defense attorney. At hand was whether high school biology teacher John Scopes had violated Tennessee’s new Butler Act (passed in the spring of 1925), which outlawed teaching evolutionary theory in public schools. The simple legal question came to represent a far greater and more controversial problem in American society: modern evolutionary science seemed to disprove literal biblical interpretation. As Larson points out, not only did “most fundamentalists reject evolutionary theory as contrary to a literal reading of the Bible,” but also were troubled by the implications of random variation and natural selection. Perhaps for the first time in America, there was an apparent and visible contradiction between science and religion. It seemed to many that there was no answer.

This conflict was outwardly apparent in the trial itself, which was nothing short of a circus. To accommodate the hordes of reporters and churchgoers that came to Dayton, the arguments moved to the courthouse lawn. It became clear that Darrow’s strategy was to push Bryan to admit that he – the biblical literalist – in fact engaged in interpreting Scripture, thereby

---

2 Ibid., 25.
proving that evolutionary theory was simply an alternate biblical interpretation.\(^3\) With Bryan on the witness stand, Darrow pressed Bryan into a corner on the terrestrial geology, physics, and timing of Genesis. Through the objections of his colleagues on the prosecution that the questions had nothing to do with evolutionary teaching, Bryan was defiant:

**Bryan:** They [the defense] came to try revealed religion. I am here to defend it, and they can ask me any question they please. [The crowd thundered in applause.]

**Darrow:** Great applause from the bleachers.

**Bryan:** From those who you call “yokels.” Those are the people whom you insult.

**Darrow:** [Shouting] You insult every man of science and learning in the world because he does not believe in your fool religion.\(^4\)

Darrow continued the interrogation. Although Bryan never explicitly admitted to engaging in biblical interpretation, the point was made. Convinced that he had “won the intellectual argument,” Darrow conceded the case – there was little doubt that Scopes did indeed violate the Butler Act.\(^5\) Moreover, according to political scientist James Morone, the point was not to win in Dayton but rather to get to the Supreme Court, where Darrow could create an even bigger controversy by arguing that all state laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools were unconstitutional.\(^6\) However, the case never got there. On appeal, the Tennessee Supreme Court reversed the decision on a technicality, stopping “Darrow and the liberals” from reaching the nation’s high court.\(^7\)

---


\(^6\) At the time of the trial, Tennessee was one of three states (the others being Mississippi and Arkansas) in which teaching evolution was a crime. By the end of the 1920s, however, 23 state legislatures had debated legislation to outlaw evolutionary teaching.

\(^7\) Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*: 337.
The outcome of the trial was telling. Although Darrow lost the battle, most scholars contend that Bryan and his evangelical brethren lost the war.\(^8\) They were portrayed harshly in the liberal media – as a disorganized, extremist, anti-intellectual Protestant sect. Perhaps most notably, the journalist H.L. Mencken ridiculed Bryan and the antievolutionists in a series of editorials in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* that were widely reprinted.\(^9\) For example:

The Scopes trial, from the start, has been carried on in a manner exactly fitted to the antievolution law and the simian imbecility under it. There hasn't been the slightest pretense to decorum. The rustic judge, a candidate for re-election, has postured the yokels like a clown in a ten-cent side show, and almost every word he has uttered has been an undisguised appeal to their prejudices and superstitions. The chief prosecuting attorney, beginning like a competent lawyer and a man of self-respect, ended like a convert at a Billy Sunday revival. It fell to him, finally, to make a clear and astounding statement of theory of justice prevailing under fundamentalism. What he said, in brief, was that a man accused of infidelity had no rights whatever under Tennessee law.\(^10\)

Consequently, evangelicals retracted from the public spotlight. As historian George Marsden explains, “Very quickly, the conspicuous reality of the movement seemed to conform to the image thus imprinted and the strength of the movement in the centers of national life waned precipitously.”\(^11\) The fallout had lasting effects on conservative evangelicals, and it was not until the latter half of the 20\(^{th}\) century that evangelicals widely returned to the political mainstream.\(^12\)

---

\(^8\) This was the opinion of most intellectuals of the day. However, because there is no polling data available, what mainstream America thought of the trial is largely a mystery. It is notable, however, that most Americans were probably more sympathetic to the creationists – as most Americans during the early 20\(^{th}\) century were creationists themselves – than the liberal-minded media.


\(^12\) Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*: 223. It is important to note that some evangelicals mobilized in support of anticommunist groups during the 1950s, but this mobilization, although symbolic, was not substantial in the number of evangelicals it attracted.
It is from this point in American religious and political history that I begin an analysis of the
dynamics of white evangelical political behavior.

The debate between creationism and evolution rages on today. I do not endeavor to
comment further on the trial itself, its legal implications, or the conflict more generally. Rather, I
begin the analysis with the Scopes trial for two central reasons. First, it thrust evangelicals into
the national limelight and prompted discussion of a “clash of two worlds.”

Indeed, political scientists have gone as far as to call the Scopes trial the “classic confrontation between tradition
and modernity.” While evangelicalism has been a distinct characteristic of American
Protestantism since the Founding, evangelicals tended to shy away from the political spotlight prior to the early 20th century. Although the group returned to relative political dormancy after
the conclusion of the trial, evangelicals later politicized to some extent during the 1950s and
again significantly more widely in the 1970s. Thus, the trial, the debates it prompted, and the
cultural cleavages it revealed foreshadowed contemporary political battles between evangelicals
and secularists.

Secondly, the Scopes trial – and more specifically the role of William Jennings Bryan
therein – serves as an ideal starting point because it provides a noteworthy counterpoint to the
contemporary popular association between white evangelicals and political, social, and fiscal
conservatism. Bryan was a successful politician who applied morality, grounded in conservative evangelicalism, to politics. This, by itself, is not likely to be surprising to contemporary political observers – many of today’s self-identified evangelical politicians frequently invoke God and the

13 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*: 187.
role of the Church in their lives.\textsuperscript{15} However, Bryan differed in the political positions and ideologies he advocated. Specifically, Bryan’s commitment to conservative theology did not get in the way of his positioning as an ideological liberal and an economic populist who championed the poor, fiercely criticized big business, and condemned America’s involvement in war. In the words of biographer Michael Kazin, Bryan was very much a “Christian liberal,” and it was not until later that people saw reason to “separate Bryan the orthodox Christian from Bryan the fearless reformer.”\textsuperscript{16} According to Robert Putnam and David Campbell in their influential volume on religion and American politics, “No politician in American history better exemplifies the ideological malleability in the connections that can be drawn between religion and politics [than Bryan].”\textsuperscript{17} This “ideological malleability” is evident in the political transformation of white evangelicals in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Contemporary white evangelicals tend to be consistent conservatives – culturally, socially, and fiscally.\textsuperscript{18} This contrasts with Bryan’s ideological commitment to fiscal and foreign policy liberalism. Indeed, Bryan is perhaps most remembered for delivering the “Cross of Gold” speech at the 1896 Democratic National Convention. The speech not only propelled Bryan into contention for the Democratic nomination, which two days later he won, but also exemplifies Bryan’s brand of economic populism. This ideology is further evident in Bryan’s stance as an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Most recently, George W. Bush won the 2000 and 2004 elections as a self-identified “born-again” evangelical Protestant. Also, there are numerous conservative white evangelicals currently serving in Congress. See, for example, Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, \textit{Religion and Politics in the United States}, 6th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011). 224-25.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, \textit{American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). 416.
\end{itemize}
enemy of big business, as an advocate for unskilled labor, and later as a “trust-buster.” More importantly, it was not just Bryan – liberal preferences on economic issues were common among Protestants, especially those with evangelical tendencies, during the early 20th century.

Indeed, as Putnam and Campbell make clear, “Many radical Populists raging against inequality were fervent evangelical Protestants.” The Fundamentals of Faith – a series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915 largely credited with beginning the Christian fundamentalist movement in America – contained an essay asserting that the “genuine Christian profession was compatible with personal advocacy of socialism.” More generally, there was a clear link between the primarily evangelical Social Gospel and populist politics existing before Bryan came to political prominence and continuing after his death. According to Morone, at the turn of the century, “The Social Gospel pushed Christian duty toward public service rather than personal salvation … Believers denounced economic exploitation and cutthroat capitalism.” Evangelical organizations at the turn of the 20th century echo this sentiment; for example, the Salvation Army considered the primary social evil to be the unequal and unjust distribution of wealth. This ideology later turned into support for wide scale progressive politics, and the southern white evangelical roots of the Social Gospel turned into mass support of New Deal

---

22 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*: 120.
initiatives. Evidently, there was a strong tradition of white evangelicals advocating social equality and redistributive policies dating to the early 20th century and lasting through the New Deal. As a prominent evangelical leader of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who embodied the religious and political perspectives of white evangelicals of the day (and at least one generation after), Bryan and his many followers differ sharply from their contemporary religious brethren. While the religious preferences of white evangelicals have changed little in the last century, the group’s partisan and fiscal policy/social welfare preferences have changed dramatically. I seek to explain this transformation.

A historical analysis of white evangelical political behavior is especially interesting in light of the assumed “symbiosis” between white evangelicals today and the Republican Party. As socio-moral/socio-cultural (“social”) issues have penetrated American politics since the 1960s, white evangelicals have become both politically active and Republican Party constituents. The contemporary GOP has become the socially (morally, culturally, sexually27) conservative party, and, consequently, the preferred party of white evangelicals. As the “God gap” has become a preeminent fixture of American political discourse, many Republican candidates have adopted a religious “brand label.”28 Observing this “branding” of the GOP raises questions pertaining to why some American religious groups are consistently affiliated with a political party (such as contemporary white evangelicals with the GOP) but others are not (for example, Catholics.)

More generally, it is unclear what conservative theology has to do with conservative politics,

---

27 Throughout this paper, I refer to “sexual liberalism/conservatism.” By “sexually liberal” or “sexually conservative,” I refer to liberal/conservative positions on most issues pertaining to sex, sexuality, and the family. This list includes but is not limited to: abortion, contraception, the ERA, family policy, homosexuality, and pornography.
especially given the historical legacy of William Jennings Bryan. Chapter 2 analyzes how white evangelicals became politically active, and Chapter 3 considers how the politicized group largely became Republicans. In studying these political phenomena, effects of partisan affiliation on group opinion become apparent. I observed that the commonly cited link between religious and social conservatism could be intuitively explained by white evangelical biblical literalism and moral traditionalism. However, as an important group in American elections and party politics, contemporary white evangelicals are multidimensional political actors – they advocate policy positions on a wide range of issues. In contrast to white evangelical preferences on social issues, the contexts in which religious conservatism translates to fiscal conservatism are less intuitively explained (or not at all). This is echoed in the figure of Bryan and what Putnam and Campbell (cited above) call ideological malleability. From a fiscal policy perspective, white evangelicals in the 20th century began with Bryan, the economic populist and monetary liberal, and over time moved towards the GOP status quo – for example, low taxes, a minimal welfare state, and small government. I treat these questions in Chapter 4, and propose a party affiliation effect in explaining white evangelical fiscal conservatism.

The Basis of the Study: Who is an Evangelical?

I follow Marsden’s description in using “evangelical”:

Evangelical is broadly defined to include those in traditions that emphasize the Bible as the highest religious authority, the necessity of being “born-again” or regenerated through the atoning work of Christ on the cross, pietistic morals, and the necessity of sharing the Gospel through evangelism and missions. 29

Similarly, religion in politics scholar Robert Booth Fowler provides three theological characteristics unique to evangelicals. First, all evangelicals believe in the universal sinfulness of

29 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*: 235.
man – all people are born sinners – as well as the necessity of a born-again experience. Second, as articulated by Mardsen, all evangelicals affirm the truth of Scripture. Although there are denominational differences in specific interpretations, all evangelicals agree upon the necessity of literal interpretation. 30 Thirdly, evangelicals interpret Scripture to command them to spread the word. 31 Thus, between Mardsen and Fowler it is possible to begin to understand the theological characteristics of contemporary American evangelical Protestantism. Additionally, evangelicals are distinct in their view of the end of time. Evangelicals tend to be strict premillennialists – people who believe in the fact of the Second Coming, and that Jesus Christ will “personally and bodily” return to earth to defeat evil. 32 This is theologically distinct from mainline Protestants, who tend to hold more liberal views of the end of time.

Less technically, most evangelicals believe that they engage in direct communication with God. In a recent study, social anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann explores this relationship in detail. Luhrmann explains that one of the key characteristics of evangelicalism, in addition to biblical literalism, the born-again experience, and the necessity of spreading the Gospel, is that evangelicals tend to believe in a literal and ongoing conversation with God. The most drastic examples of this are “speaking in tongues,” a method of direct communication with God mainly practiced by Pentecostals, and supernatural healing, in which a pastor calls upon the Holy Spirit

30 It is important not to discount denominational differences between evangelical sects as a complicating factor in defining who is an evangelical. See below discussion.
31 Robert Booth Fowler, A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982). 2-4. Religion in politics scholar John Green offers a similar treatment, providing four tenants of evangelical belief: “One belief is that the Bible is inerrant. It was without error in all of its claims about the nature of the world and the nature of God. A second belief is that the only way to salvation is through belief in Jesus Christ. A third belief, and one that is most well known, is the idea that individuals must accept salvation for themselves. They must become converted. Sometimes that’s referred to as a born-again experience, sometimes a little different language. Then the fourth cardinal belief of evangelicals is the need to proselytize, or in their case, to spread the gospel, to evangelize.” See John C. Green and Raney Aronson, "Interview with John C. Green," PBS Frontline, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jesus/interviews/green.html.
to heal, for example, back pain. Less dramatic examples include interactions with the divine spirit in daily, mundane activities, as described by the noted evangelical pastor Rick Warren in his recent book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. These interactions tend to define evangelical life, and are important to keep in mind when considering evangelical theology.

Yet, there are several complications in using “evangelical.” To begin with, it is important to understand the difference between the terms “fundamentalist” and “evangelical.” Although the two words connote essentially the same thing – biblical literalism, the necessity of being born-again and spreading the Gospel, and the universal sinfulness of man – some scholars differentiate them. Generally, “fundamentalist” implies a greater militancy of views than “evangelical,” as well as a narrower understanding of conversion (the born-again experience, which most fundamentalists see as a specific event in time whereas some evangelicals see as a transition over time) and a dispensational view of time. In short, all fundamentalists are evangelicals, but some evangelicals may not be fundamentalists, though the differences between the two terms are nuanced, stylistic, and generally small.

A further complication arises in that the definition of evangelical has changed over time. While most Protestants who arrived in America during the 17th and 18th centuries likely considered themselves evangelicals, today the term implies a more fundamentalistic brand of Protestantism. Marsden traces the concept of evangelical Protestantism from the 19th century to today, noting four time periods in which the connotation of “evangelical” has changed.

---


34 Dispensational refers to a particular understanding of “sacred time” in which God’s activity is divided up into several dispensations, or eras. Adherents believe that a new dispensation will begin with Christ returns to earth. There is some disagreement in the literature as to the degree to which evangelicals adhere to the dispensational view of time – although evangelicals are quite serious about the bodily return of Christ to Earth, not all evangelicals follow a dispensational interpretation of time.

35 Green and Aronson, "Interview with John C. Green".
Table 1.1\textsuperscript{36}

1. \textbf{19\textsuperscript{th} Century – Evangelicalism}:
   Most major Protestant denominations and also newer revivalist groups. By the end of the century, American evangelicalism began to polarize into theological liberals and conservatives\textsuperscript{37}.

2. \textbf{1920s – Fundamentalism}:
   Conservative Protestants began to be called “fundamentalists” (or “Christian fundamentalists”) at least in part as a result of the Scopes Trial. The term connoted a militant opposition to modernism in both churches and cultural values.

3. \textbf{1950s to mid-1970s – New Evangelicalism}:
   Also referred to as evangelicals, New Evangelicals were generally Protestants with a fundamentalist heritage who advocated for the “positive evangelicalism” best exemplified by Billy Graham. This meant theological conservatism and biblical literalism. Theologically similar to Fundamentalistic Evangelicals, New Evangelicals were not widely politically active and mostly nonpartisan.

4. \textbf{Late 1970s to Present – Fundamentalistic Evangelicalism}:
   Like New Evangelicals, Fundamentalistic Evangelicals are also referred to as evangelicals. Fundamentalistic Evangelicals are theologically conservative and morally absolute, but differ from New Evangelicals in their tendency to be politically active.

These explanations are adapted in Table 1.1. Although the connotation of the term evangelical has evolved over time, there is little doubt of the distinguishing characteristics of evangelicals. However, a more nuanced treatment would additionally note the denominational differences between evangelical and mainline sects. See Table 1.2. Yet like theology, denominationalism is imperfect in identifying evangelicals. Although many denominations are by definition evangelical, it is impossible to judge the extent to which individual adherents exhibit evangelical tendencies. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest evangelical denomination in the US, but it would be impossible to measure the degree to which each Southern Baptist church member adheres to evangelical doctrine.

\textsuperscript{36} Adapted from Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture}: 234-35.

Furthermore, analogous to the theological and denominational differences between evangelical and mainline Protestants, white and black evangelicalism exist as theologically separate Protestant sects. A key question arises in considering the political history of black evangelicals, who are largely Democratic Party constituents and exhibit liberal preferences on some social issues and many fiscal issues.\(^{39}\) If the role of issues or strategic politicians is at least part of the explanation of evangelical political activity and partisan preferences, why black evangelicals do not exhibit the same policy preferences as white evangelicals is unclear. In answering this question, the literature suggests that black evangelicalism should be considered a

---


distinct religious tradition from white evangelicalism. This accounts for the differences in political preferences. As political scientists Wilcox and Robinson explain, “Although African Americans and whites read from the same Bible, the meaning of the text is socially constructed in different ways in the two traditions.” As a result, I exclude black evangelicals from the analysis.

The Christian Right

As a study of white evangelical political behavior and public opinion, I largely omit analysis of the movement known in media circles as the Christian Right, New Christian Right, or Religious Right. By definition, the Christian Right is a movement of connected, primarily white evangelical, organizations that work to lobby the government, raise money, and advocate positions on specific political causes. See Table 1.3 for a non-exhaustive list of contemporary Christian Right organizations and a short description of their purpose or method. A large literature exists on the Christian Right, its foundations, and the degree to which it has influenced contemporary politics. Although I draw on much of this literature, my project is grounded in white evangelical public opinion. Thus to the extent that the Christian Right influenced white evangelical public opinion it is included in the analysis; however, I do not purport to examine the Christian Right as a movement or its influence on American politics.


Table 1.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Purpose/Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Family Association</td>
<td>Fights obscenity in the mass media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Coalition for Traditional</td>
<td>Establishes traditional values in American institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Coalition of America</td>
<td>Lobbies conservative positions on social issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens for Excellence in Education</td>
<td>Supports evangelicals in school board elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned Women for America</td>
<td>Opposes gay rights legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Forum</td>
<td>Fights secularism in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Research Council</td>
<td>Lobbies for &quot;traditional&quot; families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the Family</td>
<td>Offers evangelical perspective on family matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Values Coalition</td>
<td>Advocates traditionalist positions on social issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data and Methodology

The data used for this study comes from both the American National Election Studies (ANES), administered jointly by Stanford University and the University of Michigan, and the General Social Survey (GSS) administered by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. The National Science Foundation funds both the ANES and the GSS. The ANES has provided survey data, generally every other year, since 1948 while the GSS has been delivering survey data yearly since 1972. Both the ANES and GSS include a set of basic core questions that are asked in every survey year. In both cases, these include race, gender, region, religion, work status, income, political affiliation, and other general questions. In addition, both the ANES and GSS ask questions specific to political and/or social issues that may come up in one survey or be asked over several surveys. These generally have to do with presidential and congressional approval (ANES), salient issues (for example, the ERA during the 1970s, on both ANES and GSS), and others such as feeling thermometers of different groups or, for example,

---

42 Information taken from the organization’s websites and Glenn H. Utter and John W. Storey, *The Religious Right: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1995). 110-37. For a more comprehensive list, see ibid.
social class identification. Wordings of survey questions presented in this paper appear in the appendix.

The first and most problematic issue in using survey data to assess white evangelical opinion is the difficulty in distinguishing between evangelical and mainline Protestants. Due to reporting differences between the ANES and GSS, I use different methods to distinguish evangelicals in the two data sets. Using ANES data, I define evangelical denominationally following the framework proposed by political scientists Kellstedt and Green in studying the denominational differences in American Protestantism.\(^{43}\) I used both the ARDA Religious Congregations and Membership study (cited above) as well as the white evangelical/white mainline denominations list provided by Kellstedt and Green (reproduced above in Table 1.1).\(^{44}\) For years before 1992, I recoded answers to the question, “If Protestant, What Denomination Are You?” into evangelical and mainline Protestant based on the above denomination lists. After 1992, the ANES question changed to ask the respondent to self-identify as evangelical or mainline Protestant. The ANES cumulative data file (data from 1948-2010 aggregated) recodes responses denominationally such that evangelical is an option in the religious preference question.

Because most GSS years do not break Protestant identifiers into specific denominations, I distinguished between evangelical and mainline using the fundamentalism index. The GSS asks respondents to self-identify as religious fundamentalists, moderates, or liberals. I recoded the religious preference variable with the fundamentalism index to define evangelicals as Protestant fundamentalists. Protestant moderates and Protestant liberals were recoded into mainline Protestants. Although this is an imperfect measure – as previously, it is possible to be an

\(^{43}\) See above Figure 1.2. Kellstedt and Green, "Knowing God's Many People: Denominational Preference and Political Behavior," 53-71.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 70-71.
evangelical without being a fundamentalist but not possible to be a fundamentalist without being 
an evangelical\textsuperscript{45} – it nonetheless captures my target demographic.

Generally speaking, these assumptions present a sizeable margin for error in the data 
presented in this paper. In addition to the aforementioned difficulties in defining exactly who is 
an evangelical, polling and/or survey data itself is seen as a somewhat problematic measure of 
opinion.\textsuperscript{46} Survey respondents may be untruthful, and data quality may depend on factors outside 
the control of the study. Noted public opinion scholar James Stimson lays out his assumptions 
about public opinion data and analysis, explaining that while public opinion can be informative 
and a useful tool, it must be qualified.\textsuperscript{47} For example, according to Stimson, not only is public 
opinion highly influenced by the media, but also the specific wording of questions is influential 
in results.\textsuperscript{48} Simply put, some degree of inaccuracy is inevitable.

\textbf{Outline for the Study}

This paper is organized into five chapters. The next provides the historical, social, and 
political contexts of the most recent politicization of white evangelicals (during the 1970s), as 
well as insight into the formation of a political ("Christian") group identity. I present two 
simultaneous factors at play in this process. On the one hand, I argue that the social and political 
turbulence of the 1960s at least in part factored into a new issue calculus in American politics 
that included questions deeply rooted in culture and morality. I focus on the movement of sex-

\textsuperscript{45} For example, Steve Bruce, \textit{Conservative Protestant Politics} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). 145-48; 
also Adam J. Berinsky, "Introduction," in \textit{New Directions in Public Opinion}, ed. Adam J. Berinsky (New York: 
\textsuperscript{47} James A. Stimson, \textit{Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics} (New York: Cambridge 
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 17-18.
related questions into the political arena – abortion, contraception, homosexuality, and pornography, for example – as well as family policy (the ERA) and changes in education policy. Combined with the general leftward drift of public opinion on these new and/or newly salient issues, the American political equilibrium began to change. This offended white evangelicals, who clung to traditionalist – grounded in literal biblical interpretation – views on sex, culture, and family. I assert that evangelicals viewed their lifestyle and cultural foundations as threatened by the cultural, moral, and social transformation of American politics and society. Partly as a result of this conflict, white evangelicals moved towards the political arena. At the same time, the group enjoyed newfound resources and sources of capital. Technological advancements paved the way for televangelism and the institution of the electronic church, which became key factors in the white evangelical political mobilization. Coupled with the rise of charismatic leadership – Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson – white evangelicals enjoyed a massive upswing in financial, social, and human capital. I argue that the combination of changes in the political atmosphere with newfound sources of capital at least partially provided the group with the agency to become politically active.

Chapter 3 considers the partisan affiliation of this group of politicized white evangelicals. I argue that once politicized, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that white evangelicals would widely become Republican Party constituents. Instead, I contend that the fact of affiliation with the GOP was a result of two simultaneous political phenomena. These are perhaps best defined as concurrent top-down and bottom-up methods of partisan incorporation. The top-down method suggests that GOP elites shifted issue positions and rhetoric in order to attract white evangelicals (as a new constituency) into the existing party coalition. This contributed to party polarization on social issues, as the GOP moved to the right to appeal to socially conservative
voting blocs. Meanwhile, the same cultural changes that created a new issue calculus (and prompted the leftward movement of public opinion on these issues) also changed the American party dynamic. Heightened polarization around social issues helped to not only reorganize the party coalitions but also provide the opportunity for the parties to further expand their existing coalitions. This had large implications for white evangelicals. Historically (although weakly) Democratic Party constituents, white evangelicals were to some degree alienated by Democratic cultural and racial policymaking during the 1960s. I argue that this initiated a process of partisan dealignment and realignment through the 1970s, which culminated with white evangelicals voting in large proportion for Reagan in 1980 and 1984. Because it was mostly group leaders and clergy who initiated realignment, we can describe this process as a bottom-up partisan affiliation. Indeed, group leaders mobilized rank and file members to vote for a new party (the GOP) based on Democratic cultural and racial liberalism I argue that the simultaneous initiation of these two processes (top-down and bottom-up) explains contemporary white evangelical consistent affiliation with the GOP.

I then consider (Chapter 4) how the group changed as a result of partisan affiliation, presenting partisan incorporation as a key driver of opinion change. First, I argue that conventional wisdom explanations of the rightward drift of white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy/social welfare issues are incomplete. As a result, a more holistic understanding of white evangelical fiscal policy and social welfare preferences takes into account the effect of affiliation with the Republican Party. I suggest that party affiliation affects the way people see political issues. I rely on a large public opinion literature – as well as intuition dating to the famed letter from Martin Van Buren to Thomas Ritchie (1827) suggesting that the Republican Party could be

---

49 White evangelical historical loyalty to the Democratic Party is at least partly a result of the group’s overwhelming geographic concentration in the South.
reconstituted by creating a partisan bridge between the planters of the South and the Republicans of the North – for the qualitative basis of my argument. Affiliation with the GOP on the basis of party position taking on social issues and moral conservatism thus helped to change the way white evangelicals saw fiscal policy and social welfare issues. Consistent with this theory, I offer longitudinal analyses of ANES and GSS data that shed light on the timing of opinion changes. I find that since the 1970s, white evangelicals have moved to the right (away from most Democrats and towards Republicans) on select fiscal policy and social welfare questions. I conclude that the effects of party affiliation help to explain the change in white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy and social welfare issues.

The study closes with brief concluding remarks. I comment on the key findings of the study and the possible contributions to the literature that this paper provides. I will then comment on journalistic accounts that tend to treat white evangelicals reductionistically. Specifically, I consider Thomas Frank’s controversial What’s the Matter With Kansas, and argue that the Frank’s value judgments are unhelpful in understanding the political motivations of white evangelicals. I conclude with a short discussion of the future of evangelicals in American politics, and provide insight into the possibility of future party position change.
Chapter 2: The “Fourth Great Awakening” and the Politicization of White Evangelicals

The organization of white evangelicals into a movement with considerable power in American politics was not an overnight transformation. Rather, as I will show, it was a gradual and complex process that involved group formation, political mobilization, and partisan realignment. Yet before I discuss the group’s political and partisan preferences, it is first important to understand the basics of white evangelical group identity. As we know, socially conservative evangelicals are an important constituency of the Republican Party; however, that was not always the case. In fact, it was only after politicization and group formation processes that this group became active in politics, and eventually came to wield some power as a constituency of the GOP.

Although the roots of American evangelicalism can perhaps be traced to the pre-revolutionary settlement of the American frontier, few accounts of meaningful politicizations of evangelicals exist prior to the Scopes trial. Despite the fact that the Tennessee court ruled against the teaching of evolution in public schools, the group’s foray into the American mainstream was met with limited success. As I suggest in Chapter 1, conservative evangelicals

---


51 This is a relative distinction. I argue that this process began during the 1960s and culminated with widespread support for Reagan in 1980 and 1984. I suggest that Pat Robertson’s campaign for the 1988 Republican Presidential nomination serves as an identifiable moment in which the completed politicization of white evangelicals is evident.


were undone by a lack of organization, fragmented leadership, and harsh treatment by the liberal-minded media. Consequently, evangelicals, as a political group, fell back into temporary political obscurity after the conclusion of the trial. This brief political mobilization during the 1920s was important for future evangelical political activity, and served as a launching pad for future evangelical politicizations.

Some white evangelicals resurfaced on the national political scene during the height of the Cold War to join the fight against domestic communism. As political scientist Clyde Wilcox explains, “McCarthy’s campaign helped establish a political market for anticommunist groups, and [Christian] fundamentalist entrepreneurs formed a set of new political organizations to take part in the anticommunist movement.”

Although weak, short-lived, and never attracting a large audience, the existence of politically mobilized, primarily white evangelical organizations demonstrates an important midpoint between Scopes trial and contemporary white evangelicals. The issue agenda of evangelical anticommunist groups was broader than the one pursued by the antievolution groups of the 1920s, and included the opposition to Medicare (so called “socialized medicine”) and sex education in addition to combating domestic communism.

Moreover, after the demise of McCarthy’s crusade, the movement’s infrastructure turned its attention to supporting Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential bid. Thus, the participation of white evangelicals in the domestic anticommunist, anti-Medicare, and anti-sex education movements during the 1950s foreshadowed the emergence of a group of politically mobile white evangelicals in the 1970s.

The sociologist James Davidson Hunter describes these three politicization processes (1920s, 1950s, 1970s) as the “three waves” of evangelical political activism in the 20th century. Wilcox agrees, and points out that a period of political inactivity followed each of the first two (1920s, 1950s) episodes of political activity. Yet as we will see, the third “wave” shows several divergent characteristics from the previous two. Perhaps most importantly, despite several claims of the movement’s inevitable failure on the part of historians and sociologists, white evangelicals, have remained influential in the GOP since the late 1970s. Wilcox’s observation that evangelical political activism tends to be followed by inactivity is thus problematic – the movement remains relevant in American politics today.

As a result, this chapter will consider the most recent political mobilization of white evangelicals. From a socio-historical perspective, there seem to be more reasons to see the 1970s mobilization of white evangelicals as an anomaly rather than an expected outcome. As political scientist Duane Oldfield explains, “From the 1930s through the 1960s, evangelical resources tended not to be mobilized for political ends. … Any such mobilization would have to deal with some serious problems rooted in the historical legacy of evangelicalism.” In noting these problems, Oldfield refers to the fact that evangelical doctrine was previously interpreted to demand a largely apolitical lifestyle. Moreover, evangelicals tended to be geographically, socially, and economically isolated. Consequently, the political mobilization of conservative

57 Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*: 116-54. Note that these are not the Great Awakenings to which Fogel refers.
62 Ibid., 12.
evangelicals should not be thought of as a foregone conclusion. Rather, the fact that the group did in fact mobilize and form a political identity requires explanation.

I will first contextualize the white evangelical political mobilization during the 1970s from a cultural-moral perspective. In doing so, I argue that the leftward movement of public opinion on social issues during the period prior (1950s-1970s) to widespread politicization in many respects created a cultural cleavage that “pushed” the group to the brink of mobilization. As a new and changed set of cultural issues gained salience in American politics, evangelicals were tasked with defending their lifestyle and cultural foundations. I will then consider the impact of newfound resources that came into the possession of white evangelicals during this time period. These include technological innovations leading to the rise of televangelism and the emergence of charismatic leadership. In short, white evangelicals during the 1970s-1980s gained access to economic, human, and technological resources that at least in part provided the group with the capacity to become politically active. Thus, my argument suggests that cultural changes created a new issue calculus in American politics, which, along with the leftward movement of mass opinion on those issues, served as a primary motivating factor for evangelical politicization. Coupled with access to a new set of resources and capital, this paved the way not only for white evangelicals’ foray into politics but also the formation of a political identity.

A Pathologically Limited Literature?

Before beginning the argument, however, it is important to note that that much of the literature focuses on an exclusively capacities-based explanation of white evangelical politicization. By emphasizing the resources and ignoring the cultural shocks of the 1950s-1970s, these explanations are limited. I thus observe a pathology of the literature that portrays white
For example, in explaining white evangelical political mobilization, scholars have cited resources and structure, status politics and the rapid expansion of the electronic church, technological advancements, and new Christian groups with dynamic leadership, to name a few. These treatments view evangelicals as simply waiting for the capacity to become political. Given this perspective, those resources happened to arrive in evangelical hands at the right time. While this assessment is plausible, a more complete account would consider both the social changes that produced a new set of culturally threatening (to evangelicals) issues and the leftward drift of mass opinion on these issues. As a result, I argue that a broader historical perspective – one that considers both the historical context of issue evolution and public opinion as well as the group’s newfound resources – is necessary to analyze the observed politicization more completely. I will first consider the historical context of social change and its influence on white evangelical political mobilization.

Social Change: New Issues and New Problems

Scholars have debated whether contemporary American society is engaged in a “culture war” between those with “progressive” and “orthodox” moral views. According to this...
literature, at the heart of the conflict are fundamental religious and moral divisions between different groups in society. While there are merits and pitfalls to this viewpoint there is little doubt that substantial social changes have occurred in the US in the last century. Public opinion analysis reflects these changes. For example, national mood data shows that mass opinion has drifted leftward in the 20th century. Specifically, noted public opinion scholar James Stimson’s account finds that, across several salient issues, the US experienced a drift toward liberalism between 1956 and 1976. Thus not only were new issues apparent – or old issues becoming newly salient – but also there was a general leftward drift of opinion on these issues. This finding is central to understanding the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of white evangelical political mobilization.

In assessing these changes, noted political scientist Ronald Inglehart’s postmaterialism hypothesis provides a useful qualitative framework. In short, Inglehart suggests that in the post-World War II period, a fundamental change has occurred in the value systems of Western industrial democracies. Inglehart argues that Western societies tend to be moving away from “material” values, such as economic growth and domestic order, and moving toward “postmaterial” values such as quality of life and social solidarity. This, according to Inglehart,


65 See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth analysis of this argument. There is a growing literature that problematizes the culture wars hypothesis; see, for example, Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy Pope, Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005). Conversely, much scholarship remains committed to the notion of deep cleavages in American society that exacerbate political polarization. See, for example Alan Abramowitz, The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). For an argument that cultural politics and social issues changed voter mobilization strategies in the 20th century, see Leege et al., The Politics of Cultural Differences: Social Change and Voter Mobilization Strategies in the Post-New Deal Period: 13-38.

has significant implications for political culture, and accounts for both the development of new salient issues and the leftward movement of public opinion on those issues.\(^{67}\)

Political scientists have considered the degree to which Inglehart’s predictions hold true in the American context, and in some cases conclude that Inglehart’s hypotheses have been realized. For example, in his assessment of social issues in American politics, Jelen asserts that, “Since the 1960s, the salience of noneconomic domestic, or the so-called social, issues has risen dramatically.”\(^{68}\) To the same end, Layman and Carmines in their paper on cultural conflict and political behavior argue that, “The percentage of postmaterialists in the American populace has increased considerably, class-based political cleavages have weakened, and social and cultural concerns such as abortion, homosexual rights, women’s rights, and prayer in the public schools have moved to the forefront of American politics.”\(^{69}\) Furthermore, and more specifically, scholars have argued that the rise of postmaterialist societies helps to explain religio-political mobilization.\(^{70}\) This insight helps to contextualize the white evangelical response to rising postmaterial values and leftward drift of opinion on salient social and cultural issues. I follow Inglehart’s reasoning explaining the origins of the white evangelical politicization of the 1970s.


White evangelicals saw new, or newly salient, sociocultural issues as a marked change from the previous status quo – in Inglehart’s dichotomy, the materialist view. Perhaps more importantly, the leftward movement of public opinion on these issues threatened conservative evangelical moral traditionalism. Yet it was not just evangelicals. As Hunter points out, “From the 1920s to the 1960s, most Americans, whether they were conservative Protestants or not, continued to believe in the legitimacy of 19th century definitions of moral and familial property.” This observation is illustrative of the extent of cultural change that came about during the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, it is important to understand that white evangelicals, like many moral conservatives, saw the leftward drift of public opinion on issues deeply rooted in morality and culture as threatening to their way of life.

Frank Lambert, in his treatment of religion and politics in the 20th century, embraces the notion of American cultural change and resultant conflict, and furthermore suggests that it incited evangelical political action. For example, “They [conservative evangelicals] were appalled at the cultural assault on the nation’s Christian heritage that was mounted in the 1960s when a radical counterculture movement attacked what conservatives deemed sacred while embracing what that which they held to be sacrilege.” Lambert argues that new issues, and progressive mass public opinion on those issues, may have led white evangelicals to political mobilization. This resulted in a symbolic “political reawakening” of white evangelicals. Political scientists Bolce and De Maio summarize this viewpoint in considering a “religious divide” in the American electorate: “What later became known as the ‘Christian Right’ movement was itself a defensive reaction against threats to traditional values brought about by


the secularization of national culture in the 1960s.” This implies that lifestyle defense is a key engine of change. I will corroborate this viewpoint.

**Lifestyle Defense**

Several scholars discuss lifestyle defense as an impetus for white evangelical political mobilization. This literature suggests that evangelicals feel that they have no choice but to become involved politically in order to protect their lifestyle. Lifestyle defense is qualitatively consistent with the arguments outlined above pertaining to white evangelical political action incited by newly salient issues and the leftward drift of opinion on those issues. Although few empirical studies test this hypothesis, many scholars find it persuasive. For example, according to Bruce, “The NCR [New Christian Right] is a movement of cultural defense … it is concerned with the politics of lifestyles.” More convincingly, journalist Michael Sean Winters, in his 2012 biography of Jerry Falwell, makes the case for lifestyle defense as a primary motivating factor for evangelical political activity. For example:

Falwell had established himself as a national player in the evangelical world, but in the 1970s he and other evangelicals came to believe that their world was under attack. On a host of issues, their core beliefs were being challenged or repudiated by mainstream culture. Their cultural isolation from that mainstream culture and efforts to evangelize had not been able to prevent what they viewed as cultural decline. On issue after issue, from abortion to the tax-exempt status of Christian schools, the political world seemed, at best, to be infringing on the moral universe of the fundamentalist community, or attacking it at worst.

---


Sociologist Christian Smith’s ethnographic study of evangelicals shows that the group tends to see the protection of the evangelical lifestyle as a mission from God. This mission has caused several important developments in evangelical society and culture. For instance, the lifestyle threat posed by secular education caused a substantial growth in Christian higher education. As a result, Christian colleges rose dramatically in popularity during the 1960s-1980s, providing a conservative Christian alternative to growing liberalism on college campuses. Simultaneously, Christian printing houses helped to create infrastructure and organization among socially conservative evangelicals, and provided a forum for expression of lifestyle defense concerns. These printing houses led to a rise in Christian bookstores, and Hal Lindsey’s 1969 *The Late, Great Planet Earth* – a “fundamentalist” book with a “premillennial message about the Second Coming” – became one of the best selling books of the 1970s.

The prominence of such a book suggests that a significant component of the white evangelical politicization is the defense of an “evangelical way of life.” This includes the rejection of “secular humanism,” defense of the role of religion in public life, and more generally a desire for moral, cultural, and social traditionalism. Lifestyle/cultural defense is

---

83 "Secular humanism" refers to a moral philosophy centering on human values that denies the influence, and perhaps even existence, of supernatural forces (God). Evangelicals see secular humanism as a major threat to the Christian way of life. See Wilcox and Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics*: 213.
thus helpful in considering the group’s reaction to salient issues during the 1970s. However, lifestyle defense literature has been criticized. For example, Smith contends that lifestyle defense explanations are insufficient. Rather, Smith argues that a more complex identity theory is necessary to understand evangelical politics. This concept includes lifestyle defense, but also incorporates collective identity, distinctions between evangelicals and other (Protestant) religious groups, and the concept of an evangelical social mission. Additionally, Smith asserts that explanations of evangelical politics should consider the nuance inherent in defining “evangelical” and the variation of belief (discussed in Chapter 1) within the group.\(^85\) Though these complications are valid, lifestyle defense theory remains useful and relevant in considering evangelical political action.

Also, some scholars argue that a rise in socioeconomic status contributed to the white evangelical political mobilization. These arguments consider status gains in education and income central in providing white evangelicals with the capacity and desire to become politically active.\(^86\) However, a large literature problematizes status politics explanations. For example, both Oldfield and Wilcox and Fortenly note that evangelicals tend to be at or near the bottom of the social ladder; therefore, it is unlikely that widespread increases in socioeconomic status could have incited evangelical politicization.\(^87\) As I will show in Chapter 4, while white evangelicals have gained in terms of educational attainment and other measures of socioeconomic standing,

---

the group remains relatively behind other demographic groups.\textsuperscript{88} Although it is important to note the individual status gains some white evangelicals have made, particularly the emergence of an evangelical elite, these gains may not be compelling as an explanation for white evangelical political mobilization.\textsuperscript{89}

However, the combination of newly salient issues, the leftward drift of mass public opinion on those issues, and need to defend the evangelical lifestyle provide a plausible theoretical framework for white evangelical politicization. Work by political scientists Leege, Wald, Krueger, and Mueller suggests that cultural differences, resulting in differences of opinion on salient political issues, may be a primary factor in political mobilization.\textsuperscript{90} I support this contention. I argue that cultural cleavages during the 1950s-1970s produced newly salient issues – among others, abortion, the ERA, and school prayer/the Christian school movement – that, along with the overall movement left of public opinion on these issues and new resources and sources of financial and political capital, helped to incite evangelical political activism.

\textit{Abortion}

Sexual politics did not become common in American political discourse until the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century. In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court decided in 1965 that a Connecticut statute banning the spread of information about contraceptives was unconstitutional in \textit{Griswold v. Connecticut}. The Court thus interpreted the Constitution to afford citizens a right to privacy,

\textsuperscript{88} See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth analysis of white evangelical social status gains, in particular with respect to educational attainment and income.


thereby invalidating the last vestiges of state laws against birth control distribution.\textsuperscript{91} Historian Daniel Williams points out that Griswold contributed to a changing national attitude on sexual politics that both helped to make abortion a salient issue and set the stage for \textit{Roe}.\textsuperscript{92} Indeed, the proximity of abortion to “ultimate concerns of human life” and sexual morality helps to explain why abortion is both a culturally and morally fraught issue and politically polarizing.\textsuperscript{93} While the 1960s saw many instances of sexual liberalism/liberation, the decade also saw a conservative backlash against what was seen as “licentiousness.”\textsuperscript{94} As a result, the movement of sex into mainstream American culture and politics may have compelled evangelicals to take a stand on sexual issues.\textsuperscript{95} Fundamentally morally traditionalist and largely culturally conservative, it is not surprising that white evangelicals rejected sexual liberalism. Indeed, political scientist Amy Fried argues that abortion was (and still is) a symbolic issue for evangelicals, which may help to explain why evangelical discourse on abortion is highly emotional.\textsuperscript{96} This being the case, white evangelicals situated themselves in opposition to abortion and pro-choice policy as the issue became politically divisive.

Consequently, evangelicals reacted strongly to the Court’s 1973 decision permitting early-term abortions in \textit{Roe v. Wade}. Although the fastest religious anti-abortion response in the wake of \textit{Roe} belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, evangelicals undoubtedly rejected abortion on moral grounds.\textsuperscript{97} Because \textit{Roe} came down before white evangelicals became  

\textsuperscript{91} For example, Isserman and Kazin, \textit{America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s}: 112.
\textsuperscript{94} Putnam and Campbell, \textit{American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us}: 117.
\textsuperscript{95} As I have mentioned, by sexual issues I refer not only to abortion, but also to contraception, family policy, the ERA, pornography, and homosexuality.
politicized, it is not surprising that there was not an immediate evangelical backlash. Yet as white evangelicals moved into the political mainstream, their sexually conservative views on abortion became apparent. Moreover, the white evangelical tendency to associate pro-abortion activism with feminism and the sexual revolution exacerbated the group’s rejection of *Roe*.98

As Putnam and Campbell show, evangelicals are significantly more likely to disapprove of abortions than non-evangelicals for social reasons. In 1973, nearly 60% of evangelicals disapproved compared with only 40% of non-evangelicals. Over time, this gap has increased – by 2008 over 70% of evangelicals disapproved of abortion for social reasons.99 As abortion became a salient social issue in American politics, evangelicals took a side, seeing *Roe*, and the institution of abortion more generally, as threatening.100

So much so, in fact, that Ronald Reagan garnered substantial support among evangelicals by speaking out against abortion and nominating the noted antiabortionist doctor C. Everett Koop to surgeon general.101 Reagan appointed several other prominent antiabortionists to administration posts including evangelical Gary Bauer in the Public Liaison Office as well as all three heads of the Department of Health and Human Services: Richard Schweiker, Margaret Heckler, and Otis Bowen.102 Koop had become famous among evangelicals after authoring and starring in the antiabortionist book and later film *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (1979) The film, which is widely credited with helping to mobilize white evangelicals against

---

99 Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*: 118. Note that “social reasons” refers to abortions in cases of a single mother, poor family, and/or a mother not wanting more children. In addition to abortion, Putnam and Campbell show several empirical measures of evangelical versus non-evangelical opinion on social issues. The authors’ analysis concludes that evangelicals are consistently more conservative on these issues than non-evangelicals.
100 Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*: 211.
101 Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*: 40-42. See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of Reagan and his stance towards abortion.
abortion, argues that the Judeo-Christian “high view of human life” has been replaced by a 
humanistic, “low view of human life. ”103 This rhetoric was echoed by evangelical leaders, who 
utilized Roe as an example of secularists exerting “godless” influence on political debates.

Fervent anti-abortion sentiment from white evangelical leaders contextualizes the 
strength of the evangelical response to Roe. As Susan Harding points out in her treatment of the 
language of Jerry Falwell, Falwell and other evangelical leaders, “convinced many conservative 
Protestants that a strict pro-life position was both God’s word and the traditional Christian 
position.”104 Consequently, the emergence of sexual politics as a contentious political issue 
forced evangelicals, as “protectors” of a “traditional lifestyle,” to push their rejection of sexual 
liberalism into the political arena. To do so, white evangelicals had to become politically active. 
Therefore, it becomes clear that Roe and pro-abortion politics helped to spark the evangelical 
political mobilization and, as we will see in Chapter 3, helped to shape evangelical affiliation 
with the GOP. In the next section, I consider an additional issue and associated cultural shift that 
gained salience during the 1970s: the ERA, feminism, and the rejection of traditional gender 
roles.

*The ERA, Feminism, and Changing Gender Roles*

At the same time that white evangelicals were beginning to speak out against abortion, 
they too made clear their opposition to the ERA. Famously considered by Congress (and debated 
in the national media) during the 1970s, the ERA was a proposed constitutional amendment that 
would guarantee equal rights to all persons regardless of sex.105 Although its language was

---

104 Ibid., 190.
simple, there was uncertainty as to what social changes the amendment would require. As a result, after the Senate voted to approve in 1972, sending the ERA to the states for ratification, political discourse over the proposed amendment increased dramatically. Though the ERA was not a new issue in Washington, the fact that the 92nd Congress voted to ratify demonstrated its newfound salience. Also, the national attention and support given to the amendment, feminism, and the sexual revolution provides an example of one instance of the leftward drift of mass opinion. Because the ERA raised questions fundamental to the individual conception of family and gender roles, it became politically divisive. Partly as a result of the political debates surrounding the ERA, according to Putnam and Campbell, “The 1970s witnessed a dramatic change in gender norms and gender roles in America.”\textsuperscript{106} This offended traditionalist white evangelicals.

Indeed, the movement towards gender equality contrasted with the traditional evangelical conception of family. As Smith explains, evangelicals tend to adhere to traditional, patriarchal gender roles. That is, the husband is the “head of the family and of his wife.”\textsuperscript{107} Not surprisingly, white evangelical leaders framed their opposition to the proposed constitutional amendment as part of the “defense of the traditional family.”\textsuperscript{108} Interestingly, political scientist Kristi Anderson explains that many white evangelical women did not oppose the ERA until they saw it as fundamentally challenging their worldview.\textsuperscript{109} This observation further implies that the feminist movement can be counted as one of the cultural-social trends that thrust white evangelicals towards political mobilization. In commenting on Anderson’s findings, religion in politics scholars Wald and Leege point out that evangelicals did not see the ERA as a measure

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{106} Putnam and Campbell, \textit{American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us}: 115.
\textsuperscript{107} Smith, \textit{Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want}: 177.
\textsuperscript{108} Hunter, \textit{Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation}: 76-77.
\end{flushright}
for gender equality, but rather, “an important pillar of cultural degradation and a revolt against God’s law.”

Reflecting this sentiment, many white evangelicals viewed the women’s liberation movement as indicative of other troubling social trends such as the movement of women into the workplace and women choosing not to procreate. Empirically consistent with this claim, Figure 2.2 shows white evangelical agreement with the statement, “women should take care of the home,” between 1974 and 1998.

**Figure 2.1**

![Graph showing women's agreement on taking care of the home](image)


As we would expect, white evangelicals are more likely than total whites or the population at large to believe that it is the woman’s job to take care of the home. Given this context, it is not surprising that many white evangelicals mobilized in response to the ERA – the ERA was an infringement of the traditional conception of family values and, to some, social order.

---


As a result, like abortion, anti-era sentiment politically united evangelicals. Indeed, white evangelicals were important actors in the anti-era movement, especially after the amendment got within three states of the two-thirds needed for ratification. As Jane Mansbridge suggests in her influential *Why We Lost the ERA*, white evangelicals not only rallied against the ERA, but also some adherents became important strategic actors in its failure.\(^{112}\) Further, the Concerned Women for America (CWA), an important anti-era group, was principally organized in evangelical churches and largely populated by white evangelical women.\(^{113}\) Therefore, the ERA became a political venue for evangelical activists to “fight back” against the “infringement” on traditional gender roles that, to many, the ERA represented. Empirically, evangelicals tended to favor the ERA at lower levels than the general public.\(^{114}\) Hunter finds that even on college campuses – generally an area of high support for the proposed amendment – 25% of evangelical students supported the ERA compared with 66% of public university students.\(^{115}\) More generally, Table 2.1 displays white evangelical attitudes on the ERA in 1977 and 1982.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Oppose the ERA, 1977 and 1982</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Evangelicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As we can see, white evangelicals were more likely to strongly oppose the ERA than both all whites and the total population. This finding is consistent with the observation that through the


1970s and 1980s, white evangelicals were more conservative on women’s role in society than all whites and the total population.

The political mobilization stemming from white evangelical opposition to the ERA was vast. In Harding’s words, the ERA “led conservative Protestants to form dozens of lobbies and organizations to represent their interests and publicly promote their points of view.”116 Moreover, headlined by the CWA, many anti-ratification activists and groups were based in evangelical churches.117 As a result, the fight to defeat the ERA became an important element of the group’s political mobilization.

Furthermore, the anti-ERA campaign was especially significant because it demonstrated that a grassroots campaign could have a substantial national impact. Despite being directed at a national level and concerning a federal issue, the anti-ERA campaign was “in operation a coalition of local efforts.”118 Thus the largely evangelical-led campaign against the ERA demonstrates two important factors in considering the mobilization of evangelicals. First, anti-ERA mobilization revealed that evangelicals were willing to fight for their conception of traditional family values. Perhaps more importantly, the fight against the ERA showed both the world and evangelical actors themselves that a grassroots campaign confined to a relatively small geographic region – in this case, the South – could have a meaningful impact on national politics and federal policymaking. In short, the success of the anti-ERA campaign (the proposed amendment expired in 1982) illustrated both the sizeable resources and potential power of a politically mobilized white evangelical community.

While both abortion and the ERA hit home for socially conservative evangelicals, there is perhaps no issue more important to the group’s foray into politics than education. Between the fight for school prayer and the perceived “assault on the Christian school,” white evangelicals vehemently defended prayer in public school, advocated for vouchers to sustain evangelical schools, and opposed the proposed IRS requirement that private schools meet minority enrollment quotas to be considered tax-exempt. As a result, education became significant in the political mobilization of white evangelicals. Unlike abortion and the ERA, religion in public education has been a political issue throughout the 20th century. However, new developments in federal education policy during the 1960s-1970s in many ways made education newly salient and culturally polarizing. The first of these developments was a series of Supreme Court rulings during the 1960s.

The separationist rulings in *Engle v. Vitale* (1962) and *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) set the stage for a political battle between conservative evangelicals and educational liberals. As Jelen and Wilcox point out in their assessment of public opinion on church and state, conservative evangelicals tend to be “Christian preferentialists,” meaning that they take an accommodationist stance on church and state issues and want a public role for Christian symbols and practices. As a result, the Court’s declarations that Christian symbols, practices, and prayers have no place in public schools in *Engle* and *Abington* threatened white evangelicals. Specifically, *Engle* ruled that New York could not require teachers to read a non-denominational prayer before the school day under the First Amendment while *Abington* prohibited school-

---

sponsored Bible readings in public schools.\textsuperscript{120} The evangelical backlash provoked by these decisions helped to make education a key component to the white evangelical political mobilization.

Because many white evangelicals during the 1960s began to see (and still do) public schools as unfit to educate their children due to the perception that it promotes anti-Christian values, they turned to homeschooling, and more commonly, “independent Christian schools.” These schools, generally affiliated with an evangelical church, aimed to reintroduce discipline, moral education, and God to children’s educations.\textsuperscript{121} As religion in politics scholar James Guth points out, “Christian schools were an institutional embodiment of the fundamentalists’ social and moral concerns.”\textsuperscript{122} After the aforementioned Court rulings made it public policy to separate Church and state, evangelical schools cropped up with striking regularity. By 1980, there were 16,000 evangelical elementary schools in the US. However, recurring battles with state authorities over textbooks, facilities, and teacher qualifications presented a new set of political problems for white evangelicals.\textsuperscript{123} These problems led many to become active participants in the politics of education. This political engagement helped to push evangelicals to mobilize.

Furthermore, white evangelicals strongly opposed a 1978 IRS proposal that would have mandated that private schools meet a quota of minority students to maintain tax-exempt status.\textsuperscript{124} The proposed Civil Rights Act enforcement measure caused a substantial negative reaction among the Christian school community. Christian schools were predominantly white, and parents and school administrators alike protested. As Williams explains, it was not that Christian

\textsuperscript{120} Wald and Calhoun-Brown, \textit{Religion and Politics in the United States}: 87.
\textsuperscript{122} Guth, ”The Politics of the Christian Right,” 14.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Williams, \textit{God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right}: 163.
schools discriminated per se, but rather that, “the political and social conservatism that pervaded many Christian schools repelled the majority of African Americans.”

Instead of create scholarships or attempt to attract minority students, Christian school advocates engaged political channels. There was a principally white evangelical lobby organized against the law, and over 400,000 letters were sent to members of Congress and over 120,000 sent to the IRS. This engagement demonstrates that many white evangelicals saw the measure as a government-sponsored attack on Christian schools. Not only did evangelical leaders speak out against the proposal, but also the fight forced many white evangelical advocates of Christian schools into politics.

Combined with other salient issues rooted in culture and morality, education encouraged white evangelicals to mobilize. While each issue noted above (abortion, the ERA, and education) independently pushed white evangelicals to mobilize, we should also recognize that the issues most important to white evangelicals tended to overlap. That is, most supporters of pro-life abortion policy also opposed the ERA, and moreover advocated for prayer in public schools. As a result, not only were white evangelicals on the individual level pushed toward political mobilization, but also found many religious peers who shared their concerns.

It is important to keep in mind that it was not only the aforementioned issues, but also the leftward drift opinion on these newly salient issues that drove the politicization of white evangelicals. As noted above, we observe a substantial leftward drift of public opinion on new

125 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 103.
128 Other notable salient issues include, but are not limited to, drugs and drug culture, homosexuality, and pornography.
social issues during the 1950s-1970s. During this time, the issues most important to evangelicals were suddenly debated nationally, and both elite and mass opinion on these issues moved away from the evangelical preferred traditionalism. However, the impetus for political mobilization on the part of white evangelicals was also defined by access to resources that provided the capacity for political mobilization. Specifically, I will discuss technological innovations – the advent of mass direct mailings and the ability to broadcast one image instantaneously to millions of televisions – that led to televangelism, dynamic group leadership, and the rise of the “electronic church” as an institution.  

The Resources: Televangelism, Charismatic Leaders, and the Gospel of Politicization

As I have shown, the motive for white evangelical political activism may be plausibly seen as a response to cultural conflict that brought salience to new social issues. In addition to newly salient issues, evangelicals simultaneously enjoyed newfound resources and sources of capital – economic, technological, and human – that gave the group the agency to mobilize. I will first consider the role of Billy Graham as a strategic actor in the politicization process.

The Beginning: Billy Graham

There is perhaps no single factor more fundamental to the mobilization of white evangelicals than the emergence of politically active leaders who both engaged and recruited members and imposed organization onto a previously fragmented movement. One of the first

---

130 By “electronic church” I refer to the mass-congregations who tuned in to televangelists and their broadcasts in place of or in addition to physically attending church.
such leaders of the modern era was Billy Graham.\textsuperscript{131} Born in 1918 as a southern conservative Presbyterian, Graham was born-again during the 1930s and attended Bob Jones College, the Florida Bible Institute, and finally graduated from Wheaton College (Illinois).\textsuperscript{132} In 1949, Graham received his big break. William Randolph Hearst, a prominent conservative newspaper tycoon, got wind of Graham’s fervent anticommunist gospel and, “recognized the potential of the young evangelist’s message to foster socially conservative values.” As a result, Hearst has his editors “puff” Graham, and almost overnight Graham’s celebrity was born.\textsuperscript{133} By the late 1950s, Graham was a nationally known radio personality.\textsuperscript{134}

Throughout the 1950s, Graham embarked on “crusades” in which he traveled nationwide to spread the evangelical gospel, and at the same time, advocate anticommunism and social conservatism. As a result of these crusades, the creation of an affiliated magazine (called \textit{Decision Magazine}), and Graham’s writing several books, the preacher’s fame grew.\textsuperscript{135} Although Graham remained nonpartisan throughout his preaching career – according to his autobiography, his two greatest political friends were Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon – Graham was a central actor in “bringing politics to the pulpit.”\textsuperscript{136} Beginning with his charged Cold War rhetoric and later as an advocate of more general social conservatism, Graham was one of the first

\textsuperscript{131} There were several salient evangelists before Graham’s time, but perhaps none more popular. One of the most notable pre-Graham evangelists was Aimee Semple McPherson, who became the most famous minister in America during the interwar years. See Matthew Avery Sutton, \textit{Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007). 4.

\textsuperscript{132} Williams, \textit{God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right}: 22. The institutions are evangelical colleges.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 23.


evangelical leaders to use mass media to spread the evangelical gospel. Furthermore, Graham encouraged and led the formation of networks between religious leaders. These networks gained in influence intradenominationally, and later became important as existing organizational structures when white evangelicals began to mobilize.\footnote{Wuthnow, \textit{Christianity in the Twenty-First Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead}: 158.} Therefore, though he was not the first religious conservative to gain fame in America, and despite his outward rejection of partisanship, Graham was influential in the future formation of a white evangelical political identity.

With this in mind, it is important to note that Graham is still alive today and has publicly renounced some of the policy preferences of the Christian Right. Although a self-identified social conservative and moral traditionalist, Graham was a civil rights moderate and, after Watergate, denounced politics completely. Coupled with his insistence on preaching about personal salvation and leaving partisan politics out, Graham’s later disagreements with Christian Right leaders are unsurprising.\footnote{Miller, \textit{Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South}: 200-02.} In contrast to the overtly political nature of contemporary white evangelical leaders, Graham never saw himself as a political figure. Although he at times acknowledged the political implications of his sermons, he insisted that he was solely “an evangelist for Christ.”\footnote{Fowler, \textit{A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought, 1966-1976}: 43-48.} This key philosophical difference distinguishes Graham from later noted televangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.

Yet, the public disagreements between Graham and other white evangelical leaders do not discount Graham’s influence in paving the way for the group’s mobilization. A celebrity, Graham became, in the words of evangelical historian Mark Noll, “the most attractive public face that evangelical Protestantism has offered to the wider world since the Second World
Not only did Graham’s sermons attract thousands to massive auditoriums, but also they were broadcast on radio and, later in his career, television. As Harding points out, Graham was a principal pioneer of modern televangelism. Never before had sermons been recorded and played back on the radio or seen on television, and this innovation, when later utilized by preachers who were not outwardly partisan agnostic, became essential to white evangelical politicization.

Technology and the Rise of Televangelism

The technological advancements leading to the rise of the electronic church were significant in providing evangelical leaders the ability to mobilize their congregants for political ends. Before there were Christian radio and television stations broadcasting evangelical sermons, however, mass-mailings became a primary mode of communication between group leaders and constituents. This technology allowed evangelical group leaders to cross-reference voter preferences on certain issues. Thus it became easy to get a list of people who were, for example, anti-ERA and anti-school busing. Churches and political groups could then send out a flier to those people using a mass-mailing company to solicit donations and, more importantly, create the appearance of an active political coalition. Further, the advent of direct mass mailing became a useful tool for consciousness-raising in that it allowed groups to direct their constituents’ attention towards a particular issue. Accordingly, mass-mailings created a market

---

143 I use “electronic church” and “televangelism” interchangeably.
145 Ibid., 60-62.
for information dissemination between white evangelical leaders and group members. As television became a primary mode of white evangelical communication, this market grew.

The onset of televangelism was at least partly spurred by the 1960 Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruling that, “no public interest was served by it discriminating between commercial and sustaining time.”\textsuperscript{146} This meant that broadcasters were no longer coerced into giving away airtime for religious programming. Those who were most willing to pay for airtime – due to the theological emphasis on evangelism, this meant many evangelicals – benefitted tremendously from the seemingly minor rule change.\textsuperscript{147} Competition for prime slots ensued, and, coupled with the advent of the videotape – one sermon could be recorded and broadcast all across the country in the same week – widespread televangelism was born.\textsuperscript{148} According to Bruce, direct mass-mailing technology and the arrival of televangelism redefined the relationship between church leaders and congregants, making it more personal.\textsuperscript{149} This may have allowed clergy to refocus white evangelical social and financial capital on new causes, many of them located in the political arena.

Thus the impact of televangelism should not be understated. As noted religion in politics scholar Robert Wuthnow asserts, white evangelicals may never have formed a political group identity or widely became politicized if not for televangelism.\textsuperscript{150} Further, the electronic church generated a surplus of resources for white evangelical churches and organizations. These provided new sources of capital – both financial and human – that afforded movement leaders the opportunity to move and direct assets in new ways, importantly towards political

\textsuperscript{146} Bruce, \textit{Pray TV: Televangelism in America}: 30.
\textsuperscript{148} Hadden and Shupe, \textit{Televangelism, Power, and Politics on God's Frontier}: 51.
\textsuperscript{149} Bruce, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right: Conservative Protestant Politics in America, 1978-1988}: 64.
\textsuperscript{150} Wuthnow, \textit{Christianity in the Twenty-First Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead}: 162.

The “Falwell Operation”

Jerry Falwell was born in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1933 to a Southern Baptist family. After graduating from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri in 1956, Falwell became an ordained Southern Baptist minister.\footnote{For a more in-depth discussion of Falwell’s early years, see Harding, The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics: 94-102.} Like Graham, Falwell’s popularity and financial success helped not only to put his organization, the Moral Majority, on the map but also contributed to the political mobilization of evangelicals.\footnote{Ibid., 16-20.} The “Falwell Operation,” as Bruce calls it, came to include Thomas Road Baptist Church and its 16,000+ members, Liberty University ($30 million of real estate and 6,500 students), a network of churches, and even a television station.\footnote{Bruce, Pray TV: Televangelism in America: 54-58.} A relentless traveler and fundraiser, Falwell conducted “I love America” rallies across the country during the late 1970s. By the end of the decade, Falwell had set up 47 state chapters of what became the Moral Majority in 1979.\footnote{Guth, "The Politics of the Christian Right," 17.}

At the same time as he was travelling nationwide, Falwell’s television program, The Old Time Gospel Hour gained in popularity. During its peak, the show garnered as many as 20 million daily viewers and was broadcast on more than 300 stations.\footnote{Bruce, Pray TV: Televangelism in America: 96-97. Note that audience estimates for The Old Time Gospel Hour vary from as high as 30 million (Playboy) to 18 million (The New York Times); Falwell himself claimed to have 25 million viewers. See also Wilcox and Robinson, Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics: 43; Winters, God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right: 80.} As Falwell’s celebrity
rose, visitors poured into the Thomas Road Baptist Church. Not only did these visitors make contributions, but also they became church members and therefore were expected to tithe 10% of their income. The resultant financial stability allowed Falwell to buy more airtime across the country, which reinforced the trend and produced more donations and visitors to his ministry.\textsuperscript{157}

This fame was not lost on Falwell, and he used it to direct resources towards political ends. According to Harding, Falwell did not just build a “profitable empire of evangelical institutions.” More importantly, he led the white evangelical community, “toward a more open engagement with American society, culture, and politics, and he helped make that worldly engagement part of the definition of a true Bible-believing Christian.”\textsuperscript{158} Indeed, Falwell urged white evangelicals towards political involvement and effectively blurred the line between morality and politics. For example, Falwell frequently asserted that the only difference between morality and politics was that the government chooses to call moral questions political questions.\textsuperscript{159} In short, Falwell “grasped the symbiosis between conservatism in religion and politics.”\textsuperscript{160} This is evident in Falwell’s leadership decisions as head of the Moral Majority. The organization frequently mobilized for political ends, calling on its members to flood their representatives with mail and phone calls.\textsuperscript{161} In addition, Falwell pushed ministers to make politics a primary topic in sermons, register voters, and even endorse specific candidates.\textsuperscript{162} Thus, Falwell became more than a charismatic leader with a popular television show – he was a major contributor in the political transformation of white evangelicals. Before the 1970s, the

\textsuperscript{157} Winters, \textit{God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right}: 80.
\textsuperscript{158} Harding, \textit{The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics}: 28.
\textsuperscript{161} Wilcox, \textit{Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics}: 86.
group tended to be relatively partisan agnostic, and only politicized to the extent that politics could help achieve religious ends. As we know, this changed by the 1980s. The success of Falwell’s fellow televangelist and evangelical leader Pat Robertson echoes this transformation.

Robertson: Preacher Meets Politician

The son of a longtime Democratic Congressman from Virginia who served in the House (1933-1946) and Senate (1946-1966), Marion “Pat” Robertson graduated from Washington and Lee, served in the military (1948-1952), and graduated from Yale Law School in 1955. Seemingly unfulfilled, Robertson was born-again in 1956. According to Williams, he “poured his liquor down the drain, gave away most of is possessions, and moved to New York” to study divinity at the New York Theological Seminary, an evangelical institution. After becoming ordained as a Southern Baptist minister, Robertson launched the nation’s first Christian television network, called the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), in 1961.

From the CBN, Robertson helped to create the national evangelical organizations the Christian Voice and the Christian Coalition. Between the CBN, his own The 700 Club, and the periodical Pat Robertson’s Perspective, a monthly with 247,000 subscribers, Robertson spread his religious and political views. Politically, Robertson combined moral, social, fiscal, and foreign policy conservatism, and frequently interpreted political events as forerunners to the Second Coming. As Robertson’s fame grew, white evangelicals became increasingly political. This led Robertson to pursue political aspirations, running for the 1988 Republican presidential

---

nomination. Although a comprehensive study of Robertson’s political career is outside the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the existing infrastructure of the CBN, the Christian Voice, and the Christian Coalition became important in Robertson’s bid. Although he failed to secure the nomination – he came in third behind Bush and Bob Dole – the fact that Robertson was able to bid at all relying upon evangelical institutions and infrastructure illustrates the extent of the group’s mobilization by 1988. More generally, the gospel of politicization spread by both Falwell and Robertson helps to explain the role of televangelism in the white evangelical politicization.

Once political, however, white evangelicals needed a political party with which to affiliate. In the next chapter I will consider the group’s partisan affiliation calculus. I argue that there is little historical evidence to support the expectation that white evangelicals would become Republican Party constituents. Rather, this affiliation is better thought of as the result of a complicated partisan dealignment and realignment that requires context and explanation.

167 Ibid., 143-67. See also Wald and Calhoun-Brown, Religion and Politics in the United States: 133. See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth, although by no means comprehensive, study of Robertson’s bid.
Chapter 3: “God and the GOP”168?  
How White Evangelicals Became Republicans

I argue in Chapter 2 that between changing cultural-political norms, “trigger” issues, the need to defend the evangelical lifestyle, and the institutions and resources to mobilize, white evangelicals became active in the political arena. The result of this politicization – a national movement – demonstrates the multidimensionality of white evangelicals as political actors. While earlier evangelical politicizations are perhaps best seen as chiefly single-issue campaigns, the movement beginning during the 1970s offered a broad social, moral, and political program.169 Organizations comprised of primarily white evangelicals such as the Moral Majority and Christian Voice had opinions on everything from traditional “Christian issues” such as school prayer and abortion to far less Christian issues including, but not limited to, foreign policy and economics. In short, according to Christian Right scholar Robert Liebman, white evangelicals in the 1970s “embarked on a war of ideologies.”170 The traditional view of the group as one-dimensional is thus problematic. Rather, it becomes clear that evangelicals should be viewed as multifaceted actors with complex preferences.

This multidimensionality made the partisan decision for white evangelicals complicated. Although today pundits and scholars point to white evangelicals as a fundamental component of the GOP electoral coalition and an important “pressure group” in Republican Party politics, it should not be thought of as inevitable that white evangelicals would become GOP

169 Evangelical politicizations during the 1920s and 1950s had only limited goals. For example, 1920s evangelicals mobilized to fight for prohibition and creationism in schools. Likewise, evangelicals during 1950s fought domestic communism, sex education, and (to a lesser degree) Medicare. During each of these politicizations, evangelicals did not advocate broad political agenda, but rather focused on a specific issue-oriented goals. See Liebman, “The Making of the New Christian Right,” 229.
170 Ibid., 230.
constituents.\textsuperscript{171} It is useful to begin an explanation of why they did with a somewhat comparable religious group that, from a party affiliation perspective, ended up quite differently: Catholics. Indeed, a historical analysis of Catholic partisan preferences helps to contextualize the white evangelical-GOP affiliation by presenting a plausible alternative scenario.

The difference in historical trajectory of American Catholics and white evangelicals is particularly interesting based on both groups’ predisposition for social conservatism.\textsuperscript{172} Like white evangelicals, Catholics are traditionally socially conservative. For example, both the McCarthyites and the John Birch Society drew substantial backing from Catholics, and, as noted in Chapter 2, many Catholics rejected Roe.\textsuperscript{173} Indeed, Catholics became a major force in resisting sexual liberalism and the liberalization of abortion laws.\textsuperscript{174} Nonetheless, during the 1960s a large and growing number of American Catholics began to associate with more progressive political causes. So much so that during the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, “Catholicism shed its once predictable moral traditionalism to embrace a number of major social reforms.”\textsuperscript{175} Thus, contemporary Catholics are split between those who adhere to traditional Catholic social conservatism (identify as Republicans) and those who advocate more progressive politics (identify as Democrats.).\textsuperscript{176}

Catholics’ historically strong ties to the Democratic Party – stemming from large numbers of Catholic immigrants during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and later overwhelming pro-New Deal politics –


\textsuperscript{172} The two groups also share historical ties to the Democratic Party, but as previously mentioned, evangelicals’ historical affiliation with the Democratic Party is weak. Conversely, Catholics voted strongly democratic through the 1950s. See Wald and Calhoun-Brown, Religion and Politics in the United States: 239-42. See also Figure 3.1

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 242.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 250.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 241.

\textsuperscript{176} Those who follow the official position of the Catholic Church in opposition to abortion and stem-cell research, for example, embody the traditional catholic social conservatism.
have become markedly less robust since 1960. Figure 3.1 shows Catholic partisan identification longitudinally.

**Figure 3.1**

![Catholics and Party Identification, 1960-2008](chart)

Note: “Democratic” and “Republican” includes those who indicated they were leaning to the party in question. Source: American National Election Studies (1960-2008)

Since 1960, when over 70% of Catholics identified as Democrats, there has been a substantial movement of Catholics out of the Democratic Party and into the GOP. By 2008, Catholics split evenly between the two parties.

Scholars have explained this realignment in a variety of ways. Perhaps most compelling, the noted political scientist A. James Reichley points out that party position change may account for the realignment, stating, “Since at least 1964 conservative strategists have regarded working-class Catholics as one of the two major blocs of voters (white southerners being the other) who would have been attracted to the conservative side in order to achieve a realignment of American politics.”

However, there is a fundamental difference between the Catholic and white evangelical partisan realignments. While white evangelicals changed from Democratic to

---

overwhelmingly Republican between 1960 and 2008 (see Figure 3.2), Catholics, in 2008, split evenly between the parties. Realignment has clearly occurred in both cases, but while contemporary white evangelicals dependably vote for Republicans, today’s Catholics have no consistent partisan preference.

Because Catholics and evangelicals, in a sense, started from the same place – social conservatism – but developed as political groups in distinctly different ways, Catholics’ split partisan allegiance may present a plausible alternative scenario to the evangelical partisan trajectory. However, there are important theological differences between the two groups. Perhaps most notably, Catholicism does not connote the same intensity of views – for example, biblical literalism – that evangelicalism does. Indeed, there are few “moderate” evangelicals based on the theological definition of who is an evangelical. As a result, the comparison is limited. Yet, Catholic party identification data demonstrates that, given a changed set of historical, social, and political circumstances, we might observe a different affiliation pattern – or no consistent partisan affiliation at all – with regards to white evangelicals.

Given the possibility of a different outcome, I explore the historical, social, and political dynamics of white evangelical partisan affiliation. In doing so, I provide an explanation for why we observe white evangelicals today widely affiliated with the GOP. First, I explain why the group was perhaps best thought of as “up for grabs” in terms of party affiliation as late as the middle part of the 20th century. I then examine the group’s incorporation into the Republican Party, critically evaluating two scholarly explanations of how and why white evangelicals became a constituency of the GOP. The first, from David Karol, focuses almost exclusively on party elites as political entrepreneurs. The other, from Geoffrey Layman, places the movement of conservative evangelicals into the GOP as part of a larger partisan realignment of southern
whites, focusing more on group actors. I will conclude that while Karol’s framework is in many respects instructive, it is limited because it considers evangelicals one-dimensional Christian issue political actors. That is, it does not account for issues or political conflict outside the direct political transaction between Republican elites and white evangelical actors, thereby ignoring the fact that evangelicals have preferences on both Christian issues and other issues.\(^{178}\)

Conversely, Layman’s model, by embracing the cultural conflicts that resulted from Democratic cultural and racial liberalism (and Civil Rights policymaking) during the 1960s-1970s, takes into account at least some simultaneous political turmoil. This allows for a more complete understanding of evangelical political behavior and partisan preference. However, by emphasizing the idea of a culture war, Layman’s explanation is also limited. The culture wars thesis is problematic in that it minimizes the influence of political entrepreneurs and oversimplifies complex religious, social, and moral cleavages.\(^{179}\) I will therefore conclude that because both explanations are limited in scope and applicability, they should be thought of as simultaneous political processes.

### A “Sleeping Giant”? White Evangelicals and Party Affiliation

Despite salient evangelical Republicans such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, it is problematic to assume that white evangelicals would inevitably become (or always were) Republican Party constituents. In fact, it would be better to consider white evangelicals, who were weakly affiliated with the Democratic Party through the 1960s, relatively unattached voters

---

\(^{178}\) By “Christian issue” I refer to the issues traditionally important to religious conservatives. For example, sexual politics (abortion, the ERA, the “traditional family”), school prayer, and the Christian school movement. As we will see, evangelicals also have strong opinions on issues not traditionally associated with religious conservatives such as foreign policy and the politics of race.

\(^{179}\) See discussion in Chapter 2. The term culture war comes from the sociologist James Davidson Hunter’s 1991 book of the same name. See Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. 

55
until the late 1970s. Political scientist Albert Menendez goes as far as to characterize evangelicals as historically the “sleeping giant of American electoral politics” in his 1977 book.\textsuperscript{180} Menendez draws on both the group’s size – white evangelicals make up approximately 25% of the electorate – and historically nonpartisan inclinations to support his claim.\textsuperscript{181} Years of relative political isolation, perhaps due to geographic, social, and economic isolation, help to contextualize Menendez’s claim.\textsuperscript{182} Additionally, evangelicals historically resisted politicization, preferring instead to attempt to “save souls” rather than reform society.\textsuperscript{183} Reichley sums up this perspective in observing that white evangelicals were historically “quiescent” Democrats, mostly as a result of their concentration in the South where the Democratic Party had “monopolized” political power.\textsuperscript{184} Based on white evangelicals’ historical status as relatively unattached voters as well as group’s theological distrust of politics, incorporation into the Republican Party does not seem intuitive or expected.

This is further illustrated in Table 3.1, showing the groups that were most closely associated with the Republican and Democratic Parties in 1972 and 1984. During the early 1970s, evangelicals remained, to use Reichley’s terminology, quiescent, at least in the eyes of party constituents – the group was not closely associated with either party in 1972. Yet by 1984, evangelicals were strongly associated with the GOP, demonstrating the group’s partisan incorporation.\textsuperscript{185} Therefore there must have been some group-party affiliation process between

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 23.
1972 and 1984 that to a large degree drove evangelicals into the Republican Party. In this light, Menendez’s early portrayal of evangelicals as a “sleeping giant” seems fitting.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups Most Closely Associated with the Parties</th>
<th>1972</th>
<th>1984</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Black Militants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor People</td>
<td>Liberals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>Women's Liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td>Civil Rights Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labor Unions</td>
<td>Gays and Lesbians*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>Labor Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>Evangelicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Military</td>
<td>Big Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Conservatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big Business</td>
<td>The Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Antiabortionists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Party identification data supports this conclusion. See Figure 3.2 for a longitudinal analysis of white evangelical partisan identification. As we can see, since 1960 there has been a marked shift in party identification among white evangelicals. Over 60% of white evangelicals indicated they were either strongly or leaning Democratic in 1960; yet, by 2008 fewer than 30% of white evangelicals identified as Democrats. These data illustrate the extent of the partisan realignment undergone by white evangelicals since 1960.

Prior to gaining political significance in the 1970s, there was little to foreshadow evangelicals’ future alignment with the GOP. This brings us back to William Jennings Bryan. Arguably the first self-identified Christian fundamentalist politician, contemporary political analysts might view Bryan’s position taking as contradictory.
As we noted in the introduction, he was socially conservative, an economic populist, and an evangelical Protestant. As an advocate of prohibition and women’s suffrage, and an outspoken critic of teaching Darwinism in schools, Bryan’s staunch religious beliefs shaped his political agenda. Thus Bryan and his numerous supporters complicate the notion that early Christian fundamentalism in the US foreshadowed the contemporary evangelical association with the Republican Party. In fact, the opposite seems more accurate: to the extent that they were politicized, evangelicals’ political sympathies remained loosely with the Democratic Party well after Bryan’s death in 1925. Indeed, while white evangelicals have always been socially conservative, they have not always aligned themselves with the market-liberalism and fiscal conservatism of the GOP.

That there is no obvious or inherent link between socially conservative evangelicals and market-liberalism, states’ rights, and pro-business policy, for example, should not come as a

---

187 I will address evangelical belief and GOP fiscal policy more specifically in Chapter 4.
surprise. At their core, evangelicals hope to restore Judeo-Christian values to a country that they see as “steeped in moral decline.” This has seemingly little, if anything, to do with a political party ideologically concerned with classical liberalism, individualism, and small government. In light of this, the contemporary affiliation between the group and Party becomes significantly less intuitive.

Indeed, there is no unambiguous reason that evangelicals should have chosen to affiliate with the GOP. Rather, the evangelical partisan realignment presents a political phenomenon that requires explanation. Scholars have attempted to explain this a variety of ways. I will focus on two specifically, first assessing David Karol’s top-down “Coalition Group Incorporation” model.

**GOP Elites and the Top-Down Theory of Incorporation**

Karol’s *Party Position Change in American Politics* explains party position change principally three ways: what Karol calls “Coalition Maintenance,” “Coalition Group Incorporation,” and “Coalition Expansion.” Because Karol’s Coalition Maintenance and Coalition Expansion explanations concern existing party constituencies and not the incorporation of new groups, they exist outside the scope of this paper. However, Karol offers a useful hypothesis in his Coalition Group Incorporation model. In short, party leaders shift positions in order to attract a particular group or constituency, thereby redefining the existing party coalitions with new policies. These party elites thus become political entrepreneurs who alter the party’s

---

190 For a brief explanation of each of these models of party position change, see Karol’s introduction. David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). 19.
191 Ibid., 19, 56-101.
positioning with respect to strategic issues, initiating a political transaction with a previously unsatisfied or unincorporated group.

Though Karol does not address the evangelical incorporation into the GOP specifically, he does discuss the politics of abortion as an example of his theory. Karol argues that that Nixon, Reagan, and other GOP elites sought to expand the Republican coalition by targeting specific elements of the Democratic coalition. This process highlights abortion, and more generally sexual conservatism, as an ideal vehicle to expand the Party’s reach. Because a large block of socially conservative voters – traditionally affiliated with the Democratic Party – expressed strong anti-abortion views, and there was a relative lack of sizable groups on either side of the debate in the GOP during the 1960s-1980s, Reagan changed the official Party position on abortion from moderate to pro-life.192 According to Karol, this helped to incorporate sexual conservatives into the Republican coalition.

Karol’s argument is also applicable to the partisan incorporation of white evangelicals. Republican leaders during the 1960s and 1970s searched for pockets of Democrats or unaffiliated voters to incorporate into the Party. According to Nixon’s chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, Nixon envisioned a, “[Republican’s] new coalition based on the Silent Majority, blue collar Catholic, Poles, Italians, and Irish.”193 Although Haldeman did not specifically mention evangelicals, who were only beginning to organize politically at this time, it is plausible that that GOP leaders looked to social conservatives (specifically white evangelicals and Catholics) when it came to expanding the Republican coalition.

In applying Karol’s framework to the evangelical-GOP affiliation, it is important to note that both the Republican and Democratic Parties were in flux during the mid-20th century. The

192 Ibid., 59-70.
193 Ibid., 59. Haldeman goes on to say that there was, “no promise with Jews or Negroes.”
post-New Deal period brought changes in partisan politics, and both parties looked to expand their coalitions. According to Karol, one strategy the GOP adopted was to “reach down” and appeal to specific constituencies that could be incorporated without comprising the GOP position as the party of business and market-liberalism. Therefore, Karol explains the white evangelical-GOP affiliation by arguing that Republican elites courted social conservatives, a large bloc of whom were white evangelicals. White evangelical voting patterns (Figure 3.2) support this conclusion. If GOP leaders during the 1970s and 1980s appealed specifically to (relatively unattached) evangelical voters, we would expect evangelicals to realign with the Republican Party. Indeed, between 1976 and 1984, evangelicals began voting for Republicans at a significantly higher rate.

Furthermore, the formation of the “New Right” in the late 1960s was important to the movement of white evangelicals into the Republican Party. According to Williams, “New Right activists combined the laissez–faire economic conservatism of Goldwater with the antielitist, blue-collar cultural conservatism of George Wallace, Nixon, and the ‘silent majority.’” Thus, the primarily secular and Catholic New Right outwardly invited evangelicals into the GOP coalition. The New Right “offered aid to conservative evangelicals’ moral campaigns” not only by opposing both abortion and gay rights, but also by supporting “pro-family” legislation and, importantly, evangelicals’ ongoing educational battles. Perhaps most importantly, New Right activists took vital steps in turning white evangelical “apolitical social conservatives” into Republican Party advocates. The political partnership that emerged between white evangelicals and New Right activists was especially significant for several reasons. For one, New Right activists encouraged white evangelicals to take positions on a variety of issues in

---

195 Ibid., 170.
addition to the Christian issues about which the group was historically most passionate. Furthermore, not only did this begin a political synergy between secular/Catholic conservatives and white evangelicals, but also allowed New Right activists to introduce political fundraising techniques to the white evangelical community. Republican politicians continued the trends commenced by New Right activists.

Political rhetoric from GOP leaders began to cater to the evangelical voter during the 1960s-1980s. Prior to Nixon’s election in 1968, there were few outward appeals to evangelicals by Republican elites. However Nixon publicly aligned himself with conservative Catholics and evangelicals by writing a plan grounded in social conservatism published in Reader’s Digest in 1967. Further, Nixon’s friendship and publicized White House meetings with Billy Graham made him a visible ally of evangelicals. Reagan’s victories in 1980 and 1984 – with substantial support from white evangelicals – legitimized Nixon’s belief in the possibility of a partisan realignment to the Republican’s benefit. Reagan thus took Nixon’s subtle appeals to evangelicals one step further.

For example, white evangelical leaders became common visitors to the White House during Reagan’s time in office. Reagan both appointed notable evangelicals to government posts – Moral Majority leader Bob Billings in the Department of Education and antiabortion activist C. Everett Koop became Surgeon General – and met with white evangelical leader Gary Bauer to discuss policy initiatives. Although Reagan was the only divorced man to ever

196 Ibid., 89. Nixon asked, “Does America have the national character and moral stamina to see us through this long and difficult struggle?”
197 Ibid., 98-99.
occupy the White House and rarely attended church, he ran as a pro-family candidate and openly courted the support of white evangelicals. This courtship is evident in Reagan’s direct address to evangelicals in his 1983 “Evil Empire” speech. Reagan spoke to the national assembly of evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, calling communism the “evil of the modern world” and advocating for traditional morals, pro-life policy, parental notification for teens seeking an abortion, and quoting the Bible several times. Although the speech spanned several issues, it essentially, “combined culture war themes with the Cold War in an effort to enlist evangelical support for his [Reagan’s] nuclear arms program.”

Reagan, who as Governor of California signed what at the time was the most liberal abortion law in the country, abandoned his previous stance as a social moderate to appeal directly to his audience. Moreover, Reagan’s rhetoric played into evangelicals’ strong anticommunist tendencies and connected Reagan’s pro-business, anti-communist agenda to white evangelical preferred moral traditionalism. Because Reagan shifted positions on a divisive social issue, ostensibly to attract evangelicals, there is little doubt that Karol’s top-down model of incorporation holds at least some merit.

The model also suggests that after an initial shift in the party platform based on elite position change on strategic issues, the original political entrepreneurs are replaced by leaders with stronger opinions. This replacement serves to polarize the parties over a specific issue – abortion, for example – and encourages activists on each side to join the appropriate party. According to Karol, the process is cumulative and self-reinforcing: “Once inside the party they [political elites] reinforce its new position, producing further polarization and forestalling

---

backsliding. Eventually the activist base and finally the party identifiers in the electorate reflect the parties’ new positioning. Applying this process to the incorporation of evangelicals into the GOP, Reagan magnified Nixon’s appeals to white evangelicals by reinforcing the traditionalist GOP position on social, cultural, and sexual issues. As I argued in Chapter 2, cultural change, newly salient issues, and new resources contextualize the political mobilization of white evangelicals. As a result, partisan differences on issues such as school prayer, abortion, the ERA, and foreign policy reinforced the party polarization trend and encouraged white evangelicals to pick a side. Although there are several possible explanations for heightened polarization beginning during the 1960s, it is important not to discount the effect of white evangelicals in the GOP via party elite replacement. Also, because political discourse focused on sex and family issues more than ever before, partisan polarization began to reflect religious polarization. Yet despite several compelling points, Karol’s argument may not be a complete explanation of the group incorporation processes.

Problematizing the Top-Down Model

One limitation of Karol’s argument stands out: it does not account for political conflicts that unfolded at the same time as GOP elites appealed to white evangelicals. Given Karol’s treatment, the coalition group is one-dimensional – political behavior is explicable based on only one (or one set of) issue(s). In the context of the white evangelical affiliation with the GOP, the group was invited into the Party exclusively on the basis of Christian issues. That is, Republican elites incorporated white evangelicals by changing their stance or advocating new positions on

---

206 Karol, Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management: 84.
208 Putnam and Campbell, American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us: 3-6, 113-18.
social issues important to evangelicals such as abortion, ERA, and school prayer. However, this explanation is limited. White evangelicals are not one-dimensional political actors, and they have preferences on both Christian issues and non-Christian issues.

For example, a small, but substantial, number of white evangelicals mobilized in the GOP in support of domestic anticommunist groups in the wake McCarthy’s campaign.\textsuperscript{209} Indeed, the Party’s position as the traditional party of national unity and strength – and therefore its position as the anticommunist party – attracted white evangelicals absent of direct appeals.\textsuperscript{210} This is especially significant given white evangelicals opposition to communism. See Figure 3.3 for a longitudinal analysis of white evangelical, total white, and the total population’s attitudes on communism as the worst form of government.

\textbf{Figure 3.3}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.3.png}
\caption{Communism is the Worst Kind of Government, 1973-1994}
\end{figure}


Figure 3.3 demonstrates that beginning in the 1970s – both before and after widespread affiliation with the Republican Party – white evangelicals were more likely to consider

\textsuperscript{210} Wilcox, \textit{God's Warriors: The Christian Right in Twentieth-Century America}: 70-71. Groups include the Christian Crusade, the Church League of America, and the Twentieth Century Reformation.
communism the worst form of government than both the white population and the total population at large. As a result, it is not surprising that white evangelicals were attracted by the GOP’s stance as the anti-communist Party. This is an important aspect of the story of evangelical-GOP affiliation. Yet because it has little to do with GOP leaders shifting positions to appeal to white evangelicals as a new constituency per Karol’s model, it is left out of the analysis. Thus, it shows that the Karol group incorporation model ignores the multidimensional preferences of white evangelicals and instead shows them as one-dimensional Christian issue actors. A more complete picture of the white evangelical-GOP affiliation would consider the evangelical support of the domestic anticommunism movement, noting that this may help to explain the shift in partisan preferences of white evangelicals.

Similarly, white evangelicals had strong views on racial politics and civil rights policymaking, which may have made the Republican Party a more attractive option. Given Karol’s model, we would expect that racial politics had little effect on the affiliation because GOP elites did not explicitly shift positions on race as to attract white evangelicals. However, survey data shows that white evangelicals did in fact have opinions on racial matters. See Figure 3.4 and 3.5.

Figure 3.4 shows that in 1964, white evangelicals were more likely than general whites to opine that civil rights pushes too fast, and remained dependably more conservative than both total whites and the overall population on civil rights until 1992. Likewise, Figure 3.5 demonstrates that white evangelicals were more likely to prefer strict segregation than both total whites and the total population through the 1960s and 1970s. Because the Republican Party was the racially conservative party, it may not be surprising that white evangelicals – who are more conservative than the overall white
population on civil rights and segregation – chose to affiliate with the GOP.

**Figure 3.4**

![Graph showing Civil Rights Pushes Too Fast, 1964-1992](image)


**Figure 3.5**

![Graph showing Prefer Strict Segregation, 1964-1978](image)


However, Karol’s model does not acknowledge that racial politics may have played a part in the observed partisan affiliation. Akin to the case of opinion on communism, it is important not to discount the role that the group’s opinions on political questions outside of traditional Christian
issues played in the partisan affiliation calculus. Because Karol’s model ignores these aspects, it is notably limited. A more complete explanation of partisan affiliation would account for multidimensional preferences.

That being said, Karol’s argument provides a useful method of thinking about party affiliation and is in many respects compelling. Clearly there was a top-down aspect to the white evangelical-GOP affiliation. However, because Karol fails to account for the impact of foreign affairs and racial politics, or other non-Christian issues on which white evangelicals advocated distinct positions, his theory of incorporation is limited. White evangelicals, like all political actors, have multidimensional preferences, and models of group incorporation should thus take into account all variables that affected their political decisions. Political scientist Geoffrey Layman at least partly accounts for this multidimensionality in his explanation of the evangelical-GOP affiliation

The Politics of Race and the Bottom-Up Theory of Incorporation

Layman expands upon Hunter’s culture wars thesis. As noted in Chapter 2, term refers to the notion that contemporary American society is fragmented between those with “orthodox” and “progressive” religious and moral orientations.211 According to Hunter, the division manifests itself as hostility between groups with different understandings of morality.212 Layman’s argument reflects this conflict, applying the progressive-orthodox cultural divide to party politics. In Layman’s words, “Cultural progressivism of the 1960s and 1970s and the orthodox

---

211 This literature was foreshadowed by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that came to light during the 1920s as a result of the media and political attention paid to the Scopes trial. See Wuthnow, The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II: 134-38.
response of the 1970s and 1980s drew the lines for a new form of American cultural conflict.”

This new form of cultural conflict helps to explain the partisan changes during the latter half of the 20th century. Consistent with the arguments presented in Chapter 2, increasingly secular and modernist opinion in the 1960s and 1970s in many ways forced white evangelicals “out of political hiding.” However this political coming out party for evangelicals, and their subsequent affiliation with the GOP, was no immediate undertaking. Rather, it is perhaps better described as a process of dealignment and realignment.

As seen in Figure 3.2, beginning in 1964 and lasting through the mid-1970s, there was a noticeable decline in the number of white evangelicals identifying with the Democratic Party. For example, in 1964 over 60% of white evangelicals identified themselves as strongly Democratic, weakly Democratic, or leaning Democratic. However by 1980 that number was under 40%. As previously mentioned, evangelicals prior to the 1970s tended to weakly identify with Democrats. Despite its weakness, this partisan preference suggests that there had some reason for the loss in Democratic allegiance. According to Layman, Democratic cultural, racial, and sexual liberalism pushed evangelicals to change their partisan identification. This partisan

---

216 The notion of partisan dealignment and realignment is a corroborated hypothesis in political science literature. For an overview of the dealignment/realignment argument as it pertains to the politics of race, see James L. Sundquist, Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1983). 352-75.
217 I invoke the notion of partisan dealignment and realignment to describe the movement of evangelicals from the Democratic to Republican Parties. This can also be thought of a push and pull effect: Democrats “pushed” evangelicals out of the Party by advocating racial and cultural liberalism. White evangelicals (and perhaps more generally southern whites) were later “pulled” into the Republican Party (per Karol’s argument) by GOP elites. See Ibid., 353-358 and Marjorie Randon Hershey, Party Politics in America, Longman classics in political science. (New York: Longman, 2011). 135-36.
realignment is even more striking if we narrow the analysis to include only white evangelicals in the South.

Figure 3.6

![Southern White Evangelicals and Party Identification, 1960-2008](image)

Note: “Democratic” and “Republican” includes those who indicated they were leaning to the party in question. South is defined per U.S. census regions: AL, AR, DE, D.C., FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, VA, WV, SC, TN, OK, TX. Source: American National Election Studies, 1960-2008

Fewer than 30% of southern white evangelicals identified as Republicans in 1960; however, by 2008 that number was nearly 70%. This shift was at least in part caused by the fact that beginning in the 1960s, the national parties and their candidates began to take distinct stands on cultural issues, and liberal Democrats importantly dictated civil rights policymaking.²¹⁸

There is a large literature that considers the creation and evolution of issues over time. Political scientists Edward Carmines and James Stimson, in studying issue evolution, have presented several hypotheses explaining why issues change. The most relevant of these hypotheses is that of mass party realignments. According to Carmines and Stimson, the

underlying cause of much party realignment is issue evolution.\textsuperscript{219} As I argued in Chapter 2, new and newly salient issues in American politics became apparent in the 1960s as a result of a changing cultural matrix, which led to the aforementioned Democratic cultural liberalism. Thus, it becomes clear that there may be a direct connection between new issues and white evangelical partisan realignment. As the authors point out, the “new lines of conflict [new political conflict as a result of new issues] may alter the coalitional structure of the parties.”\textsuperscript{220} In this case, the coalitional structure of the Republican Party expanded to include white evangelicals.

However, white evangelicals’ dealignment from the Democratic Party did not make for an immediate affiliation with the GOP. Rather, as Layman and Hussey point out, “With the Republican Party not yet presenting a clear culturally-conservative alternative, there may have been stronger incentives for conservative Christians to leave the Democratic fold than for them to identify with the GOP.”\textsuperscript{221} Therefore during a roughly ten-year period between the mid-1960s and 1970s, evangelicals were in a state of political flux. Alienated by their traditional Democratic allies, many struggled with the notion of switching political allegiance. Scholars have cited alienation as a possible explanation for dealignment. Alienation literature suggests that social change – of which there was no shortage during the 1960s and 1970s – creates large numbers of citizens who reject their traditional social or political allegiances. These citizens then look for


\textsuperscript{220} Carmines and Stimson, "On the Structure and Sequence of Issue Evolution," 902.

new institutions to align themselves with.\textsuperscript{222} This argument may apply to the case of white evangelicals, who by the mid-1970s had begun to realign with the GOP.

A possible cause for the time lag between dealignment and realignment is the political success of Jimmy Carter, president from 1976-1980, and white (Southern Baptist) evangelical from Georgia. Despite his conservative religious beliefs, Carter was a political liberal, and a politician who, at least outwardly, did not advocate the moral traditionalism of his religious brethren. Nonetheless, Carter’s electoral success focused national attention on evangelicals, and provided proof that by 1976, evangelicals were well on their way to politicization.\textsuperscript{223} Moreover, Carter’s candidacy foreshadowed two important political developments with regards to white evangelicals. First, it demonstrated to political elites that evangelicals had become a sizeable voting bloc. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Carter’s presence likely helped to break down evangelicals’ longstanding apolitical tendencies.\textsuperscript{224} As a result, many white evangelicals assumed that a Christian politician such as Carter would commit himself to opposing secular humanism and promoting a return to traditional values. Accordingly, Carter benefitted from many evangelical votes in the election of 1976.\textsuperscript{225} Yet rather than the socially conservative stalwart evangelicals perhaps desired, Carter focused his religious beliefs on personal piety rather than public morality, and, in the view of conservative evangelicals, “was on the wrong side of the culture wars.”\textsuperscript{226} Consequently, white evangelicals became widely disenchanted with the Carter administration. Not only did Carter advocate for the aforementioned IRS proposal to require parochial schools to prove that they were not established to preserve segregation, but also

\begin{description}
\item[\textsuperscript{225}] Guth, "The Politics of the Christian Right," 12.
\item[\textsuperscript{226}] Williams, \textit{God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right}: 133-34.
\end{description}
the economy worsened during this presidency and stagflation caused political harm. The existence of “one of their own” running for office may have discouraged evangelicals from quickly changing their political allegiance. However when it became clear that Carter was unwilling to incorporate an evangelical notion of morality in his policy initiatives, white evangelicals seemed to recognize that the time had come to move away from their traditional, albeit weak, loyalty to the Democratic Party.

Specifically, the literature points to 1978 – two years into Carter’s presidency – as the year in which evangelical dealignment from the Democratic Party became realignment with the GOP. However, during the 1960s-1970s it was not just white evangelicals moving out of the Democratic Party and into the Republican Party – cultural and racial liberalism may have also alienated conservative southern whites. Empirical evidence corroborates this claim. To begin with, white evangelicals were historically (and remain today) located primarily in the South. See Figures 3.7 and 3.8 for graphical representations of evangelical geographic location.

Both since 1960 (Figure 3.7) and today (Figure 3.8), we observe a concentration of evangelicals in the South. This illustrates that the overwhelming number of white evangelicals in the South may have followed other southern Whites out of the Democratic Party due to racial and cultural liberalism. Consistent with this claim, partisan trends for southern white evangelicals mirror those of southern whites.

---

Figure 3.7

Census regions defined as: Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT), North Central (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, WI, ND, SD), South (AL, AR, DE, D.C., FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, VA, WV, SC, TN, OK, TX), and West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY). Source: American National Election Studies, 1960-2008.

Figure 3.8: Rates of Evangelical Adherence by State per 1000 Population (2010)


See Figures 3.9 – 3.10 for partisanship of southern whites and southern white evangelicals. The overall shape of the southern white evangelical graph parallels that of southern whites. By placing the movement of white evangelicals into the GOP as part of a larger movement of
Figure 3.9

Southern Whites and Party Identification, 1960-2008

Note: “Democratic” and “Republican” includes those who indicated they were leaning to the party in question. South is defined per U.S. census regions: AL, AR, DE, D.C., FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, VA, WV, SC, TN, OK, TX. Source: American National Election Studies (1960-2008)

Figure 3.10

Southern White Evangelicals and Party Identification, 1960-2008

Note: “Democratic” and “Republican” includes those who indicated they were leaning to the party in question. South is defined per U.S. census regions: AL, AR, DE, D.C., FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, VA, WV, SC, TN, OK, TX. Source: American National Election Studies (1960-2008)
southern whites from the Democratic to the Republican Parties, Layman’s explanation – and
more specifically its commentary on racial politics – makes an important distinction from
Karol’s group incorporation model.

Indeed, Layman’s explanation of white evangelical partisan preferences shows the group
as politically multidimensional. While white evangelicals have strong preferences on Christian
issues, the group also has policy preferences on other issues, such as racial politics and foreign
policy. According to Layman, the influence of secularism and cultural/racial liberalism within
the Democratic Party in the 1970s likely made the Republican Party a more attractive political
option for white evangelicals. This treatment portrays evangelicals as concerned with both
moral and racial liberalism, thereby providing a more complete explanation of the white
evangelical-GOP alignment.

Further, the role of racial policymaking in Layman’s account suggests that the impetus
for the evangelical-GOP affiliation seemingly lies more with group actors than political elites. As
it became clear that the Democratic Party would take liberal stances on social, cultural, and
moral issues, white evangelical actors began to mobilize in support of the GOP. As political
scientist Axel Schaffer points out in his study of evangelicals and the state, white evangelical
elites during the 1970s “developed a coherent political ideology, fostered ties to secular
conservatism, and sidelined evangelical liberals.” Undoubtedly, televangelists during the
1970s-1980s helped to achieve these ends. Thus at least part of the observed realignment towards
the GOP was motivated by group elites. In opposition to the overtly top-down nature of Karol’s
group incorporation model, in many ways Layman’s explanation suggests a bottom-up

231 Axel R. Schaffer, Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America (Philadelphia:
understanding of group-party affiliation.\footnote{232} It is not that strategic political elites have no role in the culture wars model, but rather that politicians often respond to the demands of a group as opposed to a group responding to the invitation of a party.

However, like Karol’s model, Layman’s theory is compelling but suffers from limitations. A more complete picture would provide more insight into the role of strategic politicians in the dealignment and realignment processes, as well as more thorough discussions of issue evolution literature and the role of foreign affairs in the party affiliation decision.

\textit{Problematizing Layman’s Model}

Indeed, the culture wars explanation does not come without complications. In fact, as Wilcox points out, “The culture-war idea oversimplifies the dimensions of conflict over social and moral issues.”\footnote{233} While it is true that those with progressive and orthodox worldviews differ on cultural issues, it is also true that people with progressive only, or orthodox only, views differ on these issues as well. Additionally, it would be wrong to assume that all secularists are hostile to religion; in fact, most secular citizens turn out to be supportive of the rights of religious expression.\footnote{234} Thus, while there is clearly some cultural conflict in America, it is multifaceted and complex, and white evangelicals represent only one dimension.\footnote{235}

To the same end, the cultural conflict Layman invokes is perhaps best seen as a microcosm for a larger, and more nuanced, cultural division in society. As Wuthnow makes clear, “the heritage of fundamentalism and modernism has provided only a starting point for the

\footnote{232} By “top-down” I refer to the idea that group incorporation is driven by strategic decisions on the part of party elites. On the other hand, by “bottom-up” I refer to the opposite notion that group incorporation occurs based on the demands of groups and/or political actors on party elites.
\footnote{234} Ibid.
present [cultural] division [in American society].” In other words, the culture wars hypothesis oversimplifies not only the conflict itself but also its frame. To cleanly divide American society into only two groups – those with purely orthodox or purely progressive moral outlooks – generalizes what are in fact nuanced disagreements. Moreover, Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope suggest in their aptly titled critique of the culture wars hypothesis, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, that party polarization along religious lines may be a fallacy. In providing empirical evidence problematizing the culture wars theory, the authors argue that most Americans lie in the middle of the spectrum on social issues. Therefore, most Americans do not exhibit ideological constraint; rather, most see some issues in an orthodox (conservative) light and others in a progressive (liberal) light. This suggests that religious differences may not provide a complete explanation for party polarization, complicating Layman’s argument.

Further, the culture wars explanation for group incorporation discounts the role of party elites in the incorporation process. As I have argued, Nixon, and later and more importantly Reagan, appealed to white evangelicals by incorporating white evangelical elites into their administrations as well as changing their positions on social issues. Additionally, it was not just presidents – GOP elites of the New Right worked to incorporate white evangelicals into the Republican coalition. It thus becomes clear that Hunter’s culture wars hypothesis, and Layman’s repurposing of it, may over-generalize (and perhaps over-emphasize, according to Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope) cultural conflict and its impact on American society.

---

238 Ibid., 33-49.
Top-Down and Bottom-Up? Karol, Layman, and the Evangelical-GOP Affiliation

Layman’s explanation of group-party affiliation offers a substantial deviation from Karol’s group incorporation framework. The top-down model suggests that white evangelicals’ incorporation into the Republican Party can be explained almost exclusively by political entrepreneurship on the part of GOP elites. Indeed, the strategic choices of Nixon, Reagan, and other GOP elites between 1964-1980 undoubtedly help to explain the movement of the Republican Party to incorporate evangelicals. Yet this hypothesis is problematic in that it does not account for the politics of anticommunism, race, or other political issues that likely had some effect on the partisan choice of white evangelicals. Conversely, Layman’s culture-wars explanation acknowledges some political multidimensionality of white evangelicals, but is limited in that it may over-generalize, and its emphasis on evangelical actors discounts the role that political elites played in the incorporation. By the mid-1970s, socially conservative evangelicals, alienated by the Democratic Party based on the politics of race, school prayer, and other cultural issues, had organized into a self-aware political group. When it came to choosing a political party they drifted towards the GOP. There is little doubt that there was a top-down aspect to this partisan decision; however, at least part of the incorporation process can and should be described as bottom-up, coming from evangelical actors seeking political representation.

Both explanations offer compelling points that should not be ignored. In fact, the two processes need not be mutually exclusive. In order to most completely understand the evangelical-GOP affiliation, they should be taken into account together. Karol’s coalition group incorporation model undoubtedly captures part of the process by which white evangelicals came to be associated with the GOP, and the same is true of Layman’s hypothesis grounded in partisan dealignment and realignment. However, this presents a chicken and egg problem. If the process
is self-reinforcing – and it seems likely that it is – then the question, “Which occurred first?” becomes important. Given a top-down interpretation, GOP elites first appealed to white evangelical voters, thereby encouraging them to re-think their ties to the Democratic Party and realign with the GOP. On the other hand, the bottom-up explanation implies that evangelical actors looked to the Republicans as a result of the group’s alienation at the hands of Democratic social, racial, and cultural liberalism, and GOP elites responded by incorporating the new constituency. Yet if the processes occurred simultaneously, this circularity is irrelevant. Additionally, because the two explanations, on their own, suffer from limitations, neither could, unaided, offer a complete explanation of how and why a majority of white evangelicals became Republicans by the 1980s. The top-down incorporation model is predicated on the fact that a bloc of voters – in this case, white evangelicals – became politically alienated and/or dissatisfied. This implies action on the part of evangelical actors, undermining the possibility that a top-down explanation could stand alone. Analogously, the bottom-up model describes not just group actors, but also their relationship with party elites. Thus the two processes needed one another. During the 1960s-1980s, GOP elites wanted to expand their electoral coalition and conservative evangelicals needed a political home. Both sides moved toward the shared goal, and the result – the partisan affiliation between white evangelicals and the Republican Party – has undoubtedly helped to shape the contemporary American political landscape.

After affiliation, the question becomes what changed as a result of the incorporation. In the next chapter, I will assess how white evangelical opinion changed after being widely incorporated into the GOP, focusing specifically on fiscal policy preferences. In doing so, I will propose a party affiliation effect that helps to explain contemporary white evangelical fiscal conservatism.
Chapter 4: Toward a Party Affiliation Explanation of White Evangelical Opinion Change

As noted in Chapter 3, we do not observe a consistent partisan affiliation over time on the part of white evangelicals. A largely nonpartisan, group until the 1970s, white evangelicals only in recent memory became a key constituency of the GOP. I have argued that political entrepreneurship on the part of GOP elites and both Democratic and Republican position taking were key components to this alignment. Throughout American history, and through partisan change, white evangelical opinion on social issues has remained dependably conservative and traditionalist. Indeed, morality was central in each of the three waves of evangelical political activity in the 20th century. The 1920s antievolution in schools and Scopes trial politicization saw evangelicals objecting to the teaching of secular humanism in public schools – clearly a moral concern. Again during the 1950s anticommunism mobilization, evangelicals organized against communist atheism. Arguably communism is more an economic issue than a moral one; however, white evangelicals did not see it as such. Rather, to many evangelicals, communism became synonymous with godlessness, and was viewed as an ideology that threatened the evangelical (and, in their eyes, American) belief system. The final wave of evangelical political activism – the 1970s-present – is likely best seen as, at least in part, a rejection of growing cultural liberalism and the leftward drift of public opinion on salient social issues. The consistency between the three politicizations helps to establish the centrality of moral concerns to white evangelical political activity.

---

239 See Chapter 2. The idea that there have been three waves of evangelical political activity comes from Hunter. See Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation: 117-30.
However, white evangelical opinion on issues pertaining to political economy (so-called economic issues) has been more volatile, and far less predictable. During the early 20th century, American evangelicalism was defined by populist political causes. As I have discussed, William Jennings Bryan was not only an observant evangelical, but also an economic populist and a reformer influential in the movements to ban alcohol and to secure women’s suffrage.242 Moreover, the section in The Fundamentals of Faith devoted to “Christian socialism” illustrates the fiscally liberal disposition of many early 20th century evangelicals.243 This contrasts with the conventional wisdom, first conceived by Max Weber in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, that there is a connection between conservative Protestant theology and capitalism.244 Yet, contemporary political scientists seem to side with Weber. As Wilson points out, “The dominant view among modern scholars is that evangelicalism is associated with a greater propensity to endorse capitalism and be suspicious of the welfare state.”245 This conflict illustrates the difficulty in explaining contemporary white evangelical fiscal conservatism.

I argue that white evangelical opinion on economic issues is more complex than the conventional wisdom suggests. Though a primary motivation of affiliation with the GOP was social issues and moral concerns, contemporary white evangelicals, especially at the elite level, tend to advocate both social and fiscal conservatism. Scholarly explanations of this inclination generally emphasize either theology or a rise in socioeconomic status. I will problematize each of these explanations, demonstrating that a more complete picture of white evangelical fiscal

243 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: 118-23.
policy preferences would, in addition to considering theology and socioeconomic status, also take into account the effect of affiliation with the fiscally conservative Republican Party.

I propose a causal relationship between rising partisanship in the GOP and conservative opinions on fiscal policy and social welfare issues. That is, I argue that the effects of widespread affiliation with the Republican Party help to explain why evangelical political economy issue preferences were less ambiguous – and more liberal – prior to the 1950s than they were during the latter half of the 20th century. More specifically, I echo noted public opinion scholarship in proposing that partisanship permeates the many dimensions of political decision making. Empirically consistent with this theoretical party affiliation effect, I find that white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy and social welfare began to drift towards the GOP status quo during the 1980s.

**Problematizing the Conventional Wisdom**

Substantial scholarship suggests that white evangelicals tend to be oriented towards a market-liberal, individualist ideology and fiscally conservative policy preferences. Theoretically, this implies that the connection between religious and political conservatism goes beyond cultural issues and into social welfare and fiscal policy preferences. For example, Wilcox, Jelen, and Leege show that people who identify as “evangelical,” “fundamentalist,” or “charismatic” are less likely to support economic policies favoring the poor or reducing

---

246 Hunter notably makes this claim. See Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*: 128. Although empirical evidence shows that Hunter may have overstated his claims, this viewpoint is corroborated by: Layman, "Religion and Party Activists: A 'Perfect Storm' of Polarization or a Recipe for Pragmatism?," 216-17; Layman and Green, "Wars and Rumours of Wars: The Contexts of Cultural Conflict in American Political Behaviour."
poverty. More convincingly, political scientists Barker and Carman demonstrate in a comprehensive empirical study that conservative evangelicalism (what the authors refer to as “doctrinarian” Protestantism) shapes attitudes on questions of political economy. According to the authors, the results, “provide indirect support for Weber’s classic thesis,” and, “indicate that white doctrinarians may influence the balance of public opinion beyond the cultural/social realm, thus providing support for individualist economic policies.” This conclusion is echoed by several empirically grounded studies of white evangelical fiscal and social welfare policy preferences.

Moreover, many contemporary white evangelical leaders advocate a strictly market-liberal ideology. For example, Ralph Reed, as leader of the Christian Coalition, announced in 1993 that middle-class tax cuts would become central to the group’s political agenda. Further, Reed and his followers supported the abolition of the minimum wage, the privatization of the welfare system, and large spending cuts in Medicaid and other entitlement programs during the mid-1990s. By this time, the economic agenda of Reed, the Christian Coalition, and its members lined up with the pro-market, pro-business policies of the GOP.

However, noting the contemporary policy preferences of white evangelicals does little in the way of explaining how the group came to have these preferences. As I have shown, the origins of the Protestant fundamentalist movement in America were connected to an ideal closer to Christian socialism than Christian capitalism. Consequently, the observation that white

---

Evangelicals today tend to prefer conservative positions on fiscal policy and social welfare raises the question of how they got there, especially given the historical leftism of American evangelicalism.

Political scientist David Leege offers a characteristic example of the status quo explanation of white evangelical fiscal and social welfare conservatism. He claims that white evangelicals, once politically mobilized, embraced conservative economic positions as a result of “their disdain for the dependent poor (grounded in Calvinist ethic) and their rapid upward mobility (a traditional SES explanation.)”251 Most scholarly explanations follow Leege’s treatment, falling into one of two categories. The first is theological in nature. As previously mentioned, there is a substantial literature suggesting that conservative Protestant doctrine encourages support of market-liberal ideology, beginning with Weber. This literature argues that white evangelicals tend to favor fiscal conservatism on the basis of Calvinist individualism. The second concerns a rise in socioeconomic status. In short, as white evangelicals became more affluent, they also became more likely to support fiscally conservative policy positions. I will consider each of these explanations and point out limitations and inconsistencies in both.

Evangelical Theology and Capitalism

As previously mentioned, some scholars suggest that evangelical doctrine urges adherents to endorse a market-liberal ideology, thereby explaining white evangelical fiscal conservatism. Perhaps most famously, Weber suggests that the Calvinist foundation of conservative Protestantism is related to capitalist ideology.252 In short, because salvation is

predetermined in Calvinist doctrine, Calvinists believed that individual piety was illustrative of depth of faith and therefore paramount to the relationship with God. As a result, individualism became a central tenant of Calvinism.

This greatly influenced evangelical thought – although not always Calvinist in the strictest sense, evangelicals today share much of Calvinism’s legalism and individualism. According to sociologists Tamney, Burton, and Johnson, white evangelicals make up the strongest supporters of Calvinist (individualist) ideology. As a result, many contemporary evangelicals read New Testament passages hinting at individualism as endorsements of market-liberal ideology. Specifically, many point to Acts 2:44-45:

And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

According to Summit Ministries, an evangelical educational institution cited by Wilcox, this verse is interpreted to imply that “when modern capitalism is practiced with a heart, it showers blessings of wealth, generosity, good will, and happy living on every community it touches.”255 Because evangelicals see the world as fraught with sin, it is not only unjust but also immoral to distribute wealth equally among those who deserve and those who are sinful.256 Similarly, many evangelicals reject entitlement programs, arguing that they have a tendency to “discriminate against the hardworking while they reward the slothful.”257 Evangelical institutions have thus publicly aligned themselves with a market-liberal ideology. As economist Laurence Iannaccone

257 Ibid.
explains, the “intellectual and biblical defense of free enterprise ‘Christian economics” is the primary goal of institutions such as the Contemporary Economics and Business Association (CEBA) at Falwell’s Liberty University. CEBA is only one of several evangelical organizations that attempt to blur the lines between economic ideology and biblical literalism. These viewpoints provide context to the argument that many contemporary white evangelicals reject an ideal of economic equality on theological grounds.

Moreover, many white evangelical leaders have embraced the notion of “Christian capitalism.” This places the free-market institution as a “God-given system” and equates self-interest with sin in order to explain the sinful nature of humankind. That is, if all people are self-interested, they will act to maximize their personal profit, which, to many conservative evangelicals, is God’s way of keeping man grounded and hardworking (given this ideology, the danger of socialism is laziness.) The “Christian World View of Economics,” a paper published by the economics committee of the Coalition on Revival (CoR), provides insight into conservative evangelical attitudes concerning economic issues. For example:

We affirm that a free market economy is the closest approximation man has yet devised in this fallen world to the economy set forth in the Bible.

We deny that central planning and other coercive interferences with personal choice can increase the productivity of society; that the civil government has authority to set the value of property, and that the Bible teaches any “just” price other than that resulting from the interaction of supply and demand in a marketplace of free people.

---


260 The Coalition on Revival is an evangelical organization that called together 112 evangelical leaders during the mid-1980s to write and publish 17 “Worldview” documents. See http://www.churchcouncil.org/Reformation_net/default.htm

This viewpoint highlights a theological justification for fiscal conservatism. Echoing the CoR, white evangelical leaders often cite the respected scholarship of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek when discussing economics and fiscal policy.\(^{262}\) In doing so, leaders offer biblical and theological support to an ideology grounded in individualism and fiscal conservatism.

The ideological commitment to Christian capitalism is further visible in the “Prosperity Gospel” – the evangelical doctrine that God wants people to be prosperous, especially financially. According to Bradley Koch in his 2009 dissertation on the Prosperity Gospel and voting, advocates believe that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing and compensation for faith, prayer, and giving beyond the minimum tithe to one’s church. Furthermore, because adherents interpret the New Testament to show Jesus as rich, Propensity followers argue that people should live lavishly and flaunt wealth. According to this logic, poverty is a sign of God’s disfavor and lack of faith.\(^{263}\) Perhaps the most famous contemporary preacher of the Prosperity Gospel, televangelist Joel Osteen, states that, “God wants to increase you financially,” and “the only place in the Bible [Malachi 3:10-12] where God tells us to prove him – which means to test Him, or check Him out – is in the area of our finances.”\(^{264}\) Clearly, the Propensity Gospel is consistent with arguments that evangelical theology lends itself to Christian capitalism and preferences for fiscal and social welfare conservatism.

---


Additional scholarship corroborates the contention that white evangelicals are theologically predisposed to a market-liberal ideology. For example, historian Walter Trattner explains that some evangelicals see poverty and damnation as individual matters, and thus only the individual can overcome them.\(^{265}\) Moreover, Smith points out that evangelicals tend to prefer “relational” approaches to charity, and emphasize the efforts of congregations and/or individuals over impersonal institutions, such as government programs.\(^{266}\) Similarly, Johnstone argues that evangelical opposition to communism stems from an emphasis on individual salvation in evangelical thought.\(^{267}\) This literature highlights the transferability of individualism from evangelical theology to market-liberal ideology. Given this line of reasoning, white evangelicals’ religious and the political views reinforce one another.\(^{268}\)

Historian Bethany Moreton argues that this led to distinct pro-business tendencies. In her *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, Moreton traces the evolution of an evangelical-led pro-business movement, arguing that a “Christian service ethos powered capitalism.”\(^{269}\) This helps to contextualize contemporary white evangelical fiscal policy preferences. However, not all scholarship agrees on the link between evangelical theology and market-liberalism, pro-business tendencies, or fiscal conservatism.

**Evangelical Theology and Redistributive Politics**

Indeed, emphasis on the individual may not be as foundational to evangelical doctrine as the above literature would have us believe. While some evangelicals may associate individualism


\(^{268}\) Ibid.

in the New Testament with an ideology of political economy, others connect evangelical theology to redistributive policy preferences. Although as Wilson points out, this is a minority view in the literature, it is not insignificant.\textsuperscript{270} To begin with, there is a robust tradition within conservative Christianity defined by taking from each person according to ability and giving based on need.\textsuperscript{271} Political scientist Stephen Hart’s 1992 study contends that evangelicalism may in fact encourage leftism on economic issues.\textsuperscript{272} Correspondingly, Wilson argues that the strong emphasis on justice for the poor in the Old Testament and in the gospels provides some plausibility to the belief that evangelicalism contributes to leftist positions on the economy.\textsuperscript{273} As it turns out, measuring evangelical attitudes toward the poor paints a far more complicated picture of evangelical opinion on wealth redistribution than supporters of Weber’s conventional wisdom might assume.

Although few longitudinal analyses of white evangelical opinion on income distribution exist, some “snapshots” show evangelicals to be more liberal than the conventional wisdom assumes.\textsuperscript{274} For example, sociologist Timothy Clydesdale finds that evangelicals favor government efforts to eradicate poverty more readily than biblical moderates or liberals.\textsuperscript{275} Moreover, Putnam and Campbell show that nearly 60\% of white evangelicals polled in a 2006

\textsuperscript{270} Wilson, "Religion and American Public Opinion: Economic Issues," 196-97.
\textsuperscript{271} Wilcox and Robinson, Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics: 172.
\textsuperscript{273} Wilson, "Religion and American Public Opinion: Economic Issues," 197.
\textsuperscript{274} By “snapshots” I refer to studies that evaluate evangelical opinion in only one year or small set of years. Although I later empirically corroborate the idea that white evangelicals exhibit fiscally conservative preferences, it is important to note that these findings complicate the conventional wisdom that evangelical doctrine leads adherents to fiscal conservatism.
survey believed that the government should care for the poor.\textsuperscript{276} These findings contrast sharply with the individualist understanding of white evangelical economic thought. If a theological commitment to individualism shapes market-liberal ideology, we would expect evangelicals to consider poverty an individual matter. However, some measures of evangelical attitudes on poverty indicate that adherents are in fact more likely to want to help the poor than other religious groups, especially when poverty is seen as the result of bad luck as opposed to laziness or other factors. For example, Wuthnow’s 1994 study finds a positive correlation among evangelicals between the propensity to support the poor and frequency of church attendance.\textsuperscript{277} Iannaccone further problematizes the view of white evangelicals as economic conservatives in his 1991 study, finding that “evangelical-fundamentalists” are nearly as likely as other groups to advocate increased expenditures on health, poverty, education, and the environment.\textsuperscript{278} Likewise, in a 1989 study, Tamney, Johnson, and Burton argue that when it comes to economic restructuring – income redistribution and job and income guarantees – evangelicals are actually more liberal than other demographic groups.\textsuperscript{279} The findings complicate the notion of a theological coherence between evangelicals and market-liberal ideology. This leads Tamney and Johnson to conclude their study of Moral Majority supporters with the suggestion that William Jennings Bryan “seems a more apt personification of Protestant fundamentalism than does Jerry

\textsuperscript{276} Putnam and Campbell, \textit{American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us}: 257. Note that this was actually relatively low; Mormons were the most conservative with approximately 40% agreement that government should care for the poor while over 80% of black Protestants and over 90% of Latino Catholics agreed.


More generally, in a 2003 study, Campbell and Yonish find that evangelical religiosity is positively correlated with frequency of volunteering to help the poor. See David E. Campbell and Steven J. Yonish, "Religion and Volunteering in America," in \textit{Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good}, ed. Corwin E. Smidt (Waco,Tx: Baylor University Press, 2003), 98.

\textsuperscript{278} Iannaccone, "Heirs to the Protestant Ethic? The Economics of American Fundamentalists," 354.

\textsuperscript{279} Tamney, Burton, and Johnson, "Fundamentalism and Economic Restructuring," 78-81. See also Iannaccone, "Heirs to the Protestant Ethic? The Economics of American Fundamentalists," 355.
Falwell.  

This observation runs counter to the prevailing conventional wisdom of evangelicals and opinion on issues pertaining to political economy. It is important to note, however, that because these studies offer only snapshots in time, they do not necessarily suggest that evangelicals are economic liberals. What these studies do imply is that theology may not be compelling as an explanation for white evangelical fiscal conservatism. Indeed, if theology is to explain white evangelical opinion on economic issues, it is not clear to which ideological (or partisan, for that matter) direction evangelical theology points. This lack of clarity is exacerbated in considering William Jennings Bryan, his many political and religious followers, and the history of evangelicalism in America.

Bryan and the many fervent evangelicals of the early 20th century who made it their mission to fight big business, eradicate poverty, and find economic justice help to contextualize the shift in white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy and social welfare issues. Indeed, this history, coupled with some contemporary findings that white evangelicals tend to be more concerned with eradicating poverty than the population at large, importantly complicates the conventional wisdom. What becomes clear is that there is no apparent theological link between evangelical doctrine and an ideology of political economy, whether conservative or liberal. While for some adherents the individualistic nature of evangelical biblical interpretation and view of salvation shapes a market-liberal ideology, others focus on the Social Gospel and are largely committed to redistributive economic policies. As Campbell, Layman, and Green assert in discussing this very topic, “it is not obvious what a belief in authoritative scripture means for

---

one’s opinions regarding the capital gains tax.”\textsuperscript{281} Thus, there is substantial uncertainty as to the role of theology in shaping the fiscal policy preferences of white evangelicals.\textsuperscript{282} As a result, theology as an explanation for white evangelical conservative opinion on matters of political economy is incomplete at best.

\textit{Status Politics}

After theology, the second argument widely made in the literature explaining white evangelical fiscal conservatism highlights the rise in socioeconomic status of the group. According to this literature, as the socioeconomic stature of white evangelicals rose during the 1960s-1990s group opinion on political economy issues shifted to the right. For example, Wald and Calhoun-Brown characteristically assert that, “Evangelical Christians, who have experienced considerable upward mobility in the past forty years, are less inclined to support an expansion of the government’s role in society.”\textsuperscript{283} This reasoning has received considerable support as an explanation of white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy and social welfare.

There is little empirical doubt that white evangelicals have indeed experienced upward mobility in the last half-century. For example, in their paper on the social status of American Christians, Park and Reimer illustrate that both the educational attainment and income of white evangelicals have increased since the 1972.\textsuperscript{284} In terms of income, the study finds that white

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{281} Campbell, Layman, and Green, "A Jump to the Right, A Step to the Left: Religion and Public Opinion," 171. See also Layman and Green, "Wars and Rumours of Wars: The Contexts of Cultural Conflict in American Political Behaviour."
\textsuperscript{282} Wilson party addresses this uncertainty in suggesting that white evangelicals may be paradoxically both suspicious of big government and oriented towards antipoverty efforts. Wilson, "'Blessed are the Poor': American Protestantism and Attitudes toward Poverty and Welfare," 434. See also Wilson, "Religion and American Public Opinion: Economic Issues," 197.
\textsuperscript{283} Wald and Calhoun-Brown, \textit{Religion and Politics in the United States}: 183.
evangelicals exhibit comparatively high levels of intracohort individual increase, implying that the group is “catching up” to other religious groups. Likewise, despite being historically uneducated compared to other groups, the educational attainment of white evangelicals over time has increased leading the authors to suggest a convergence among religious groups.

Sociologists Roof and McKinney echo this finding, demonstrating a striking increase in educational achievement of the group. Whereas in 1960 only 7% of members of evangelical and fundamentalist denominations had attended some college, by the mid-1970s 23% had attended some college. Massengil further explains this trend, showing that only 10% of white evangelicals born before 1940 achieved a bachelor’s degree by age 25. However, of those born between 1960 and 1979, 21% had received a bachelor’s degree by age 25. Massengil’s results are adapted in Figure 4.1 (below, page 102). These increases serve as clear empirical measures of a rise in social status enjoyed by white evangelicals in the latter half of the 20th century.

Guth, Jelen, Kellstedt, Smidt, and Wald interpret these findings to suggest that white evangelical Protestants increasingly moved into urban areas and middle-class occupations and incomes, and more generally into positions of social and political prominence within their communities during the late 20th century. This implies that as white evangelicals’ socioeconomic status increased, the group moved into the middle class prompting widespread opinion change on economic issues. Corroborating this viewpoint, sociologist D. Michael Lindsay’s Faith in the Halls of Power examines the rise of a white evangelical elite, and documents the movement of white evangelicals into positions of power in politics and business.

---

285 Ibid., 739.
286 Ibid., 738.
between the 1970s and early 2000s. Lindsay contends that the emergence of this elite helped to
shift evangelical opinion towards pro-business policy preferences, and additionally affirmed to
many white evangelicals that individual piety and hard work, not the government, was the
primary factor in social mobility.\(^{290}\) While these arguments are in many respects attractive –
white evangelicals did experience increases in both educational attainment and average income
between the 1970s and 2000s – they in fact come up short upon further examination.

Figure 4.1


Although it is true that white evangelical educational attainment has risen in the last half-
century, the group remains both uneducated and poor relative to other groups. Although Park and
Reimer assert that religious groups are converging in terms of social status measures, white
evangelicals remain near the bottom of the pack on most metrics. For example, Figure 4.1 shows
for the educational attainment of white evangelicals against other major religious groups.
Because evangelicals have consistently attained lower educational achievement than other

\(^{290}\) Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*: 8-12.
religious groups since 1974, the fact remains that evangelicals are relatively uneducated as an American religious group.

If religious traditions in America are indeed converging, they are at a slow rate; furthermore, the relative position of each group on most measures has remained constant since the 1970s. For example, Park and Reimer demonstrate that between 1972 and 1998, mainline Protestants and Catholics were consistently both more educated and had higher total family incomes than white evangelicals and black evangelicals, despite nominal increases of all groups.\(^{291}\) Roof and McKinney reflect this complication, showing white evangelicals to be among the least educated and poorest of all major American religious denominations.\(^{292}\) The maintenance of the status quo may be a result of the general upward trend in educational achievement across all groups. Thus it seems difficult to argue that a rise in socioeconomic status led to a change in opinion on economic issues given that the group remains relatively worse off than other religious groups. As white evangelicals have remained comparatively uneducated and poor, we would expect the group to prefer fiscal policies that help them become less uneducated and less poor. Because we do not observe these preferences, socioeconomic status explanations of white evangelical fiscal policy preferences may be limited. Indeed, relative status is more important than absolute status gains when considering policy preferences.

This is further evident in that correcting for income does not change white evangelical fiscally conservative preferences. That is, if white evangelicals became more conservative on economic issues as they got richer, we would expect poor white evangelicals to prefer liberal policies and rich white evangelicals to prefer conservative policies. However, income groups do not show substantial differences.

\(^{291}\) Park and Reimer, "Revisiting the Social Sources of American Christianity 1972-1998," 737. It is important
The relative consistency between the bottom and top third of the income distribution on political economy and size of government questions as seen in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 further illustrates the limitations of socioeconomic status explanations of white evangelical fiscal conservatism. This parallels the difficulty in explaining white evangelical opinion on economic issues via theology. Thus the conventional wisdom, as outlined both by Wilson and Leege (cited
above), turns out to be incomplete. Whereas theology is limited because there is as much evidence to assume that white evangelicals would be conservative as they would be liberal on fiscal policy issues, socioeconomic status is also unconvincing because white evangelicals, despite nominal gains, remain comparatively low. As a result, I suggest an additional contributing factor in explaining white evangelical market-liberal ideology: the effect of affiliation with the fiscally conservative Republican Party.

**The Effect of Party Affiliation on White Evangelical Opinion Change**

Contemporary white evangelicals, especially at the elite level, tend to prefer fiscally conservative policies. However, given the (fiscally liberal) historical legacy of evangelicalism in America and the complications in attributing these preferences to either theology or socioeconomic status, why white evangelicals tend to be fiscal and social welfare conservatives remains unclear. Echoing the noted political scientists and public opinion scholars Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller and Donald Stokes, I argue that the effect of party affiliation helps to explain white evangelical fiscal and social welfare conservatism. The classic *The American Voter* explains this viewpoint:

If party identification deeply influences the partisan character of a field of psychological forces, it will also have marked effects on the internal consistency of the field. Our conception of the role of partisan loyalties leads us to expect this result. Identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation. The stronger the party bond, the more exaggerated the process of selection and perceptual distortion will be.

The claim that individuals see what is favorable to their party “through a perceptual screen” is critical to understanding the effect of partisan affiliation. However, the authors of *The American Voter*

---

Voter were not the first to observe an effect of partisan affiliation on issue preferences. Rather, that distinction can likely be claimed by Martin Van Buren.

In his famed 1827 letter to Thomas Ritchie, Van Buren suggested that bringing together northern Republicans and southern planters could reconstitute the Republican Party. Specifically, Van Buren believed that, “Party attachment in former times furnished a complete antidote for sectional preferences by producing counteracting feelings. … It [party attachment] can and ought to be revived and the proposed convention would be eminently serviceable in effecting that object.” Van Buren understood that the effect of partisan affiliation would be strong enough to mitigate the differences between northern Republicans and slave-owning southern planters. Campbell et al. echo this same logic more than a century later in proposing a “perceptual screen” through which voters see what is beneficial for their party.

Additional public opinion scholarship has reiterated these claims. For example, Stokes emphasizes the “capacity of party identification to color perceptions,” while more recently Zaller asserts that, “people tend to accept what is congenial to their partisan values and reject what is not.” These observations point to an important theoretical conclusion: there is some impact of partisanship on issue position taking and political ideology. Indeed, recent work by political scientist Larry Bartels not only corroborates this perspective, but also provides evidence that partisanship has a “powerful and pervasive impact on perceptions of political events.”

Consistent with these arguments, I propose an analytical framework that examines white evangelical opinion on political economy issues over time. This analysis allows me to comment

---

on the effect of partisanship on opinion change. As most studies supporting the conventional wisdom explanations offer only snapshots in time, I suggest longitudinal analysis as a more effective mode of assessing white evangelical fiscal policy preferences. Although there are complications in manipulating survey data to show ideology on economic issues, there is sufficient evidence to consider party affiliation a key factor in understanding white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy issues. I find that as white evangelicals increasingly became Republicans beginning in the late 1970s (due largely to their positions on social/moral issues), white evangelical opinions moved toward GOP positions on fiscal and social welfare policy. It is important to note that I do not assert that all white evangelicals are fiscally conservative or oriented towards a market-liberal ideology. Rather, both rank and file white evangelicals and group leaders endorse a wide range of economic beliefs. With this in mind, it is possible to identify trends in survey data over time that point towards party affiliation as a critical element of group opinion change and establish a link between rising partisanship within the GOP and conservative opinion on questions of fiscal policy and social welfare.

The Evidence

If there was a causal relationship between rising partisanship in the GOP and opinion change on fiscal policy and social welfare, we would expect a rightward movement of white evangelical opinion on these questions beginning in the 1970s and intensifying through the 1980s and 1990s. More specifically, we would expect to see liberal or moderate opinions before the mid-1970s, more closely aligning with the Democratic Party, and later a move towards the GOP status quo through the 1980s and 1990s. Longitudinal analyses of white Democrats, white

297 Iannaccone, "Heirs to the Protestant Ethic? The Economics of American Fundamentalists," 352.
Republicans, and white evangelicals on select fiscal policy/social welfare issues (Figures 4.4-4.8) empirically support this expectation.

**Figure 4.4**

![Graph: Government Should Stay Out of Providing Assistance With Medical Care, 1960-2008](image)


**Figure 4.5**

![Graph: Government Should Let Each Person Get Ahead On Their Own (Jobs), 1960-2008](image)

Figure 4.6

Government Should Not Reduce Income Differences, 1978-2010

Source: The General Social Survey, cumulative data file, 1978-2010

Figure 4.7

Government Does Too Much, 1975-2010

Source: The General Social Survey, cumulative data file, 1975-2010
Source: The General Social Survey, cumulative data file, 1975-2010

These data help to contextualize the rightward drift of white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy and social welfare issues. To varying degrees, each figure presented demonstrates that since the 1970s, white evangelicals have tended to move toward white Republicans, although we do not observe complete convergence. This suggests some influence of partisan affiliation on white evangelical opinion formation. That being said, I do not claim that this relationship is causal. Causality in political science is notoriously difficult to prove, and this analysis is likely too rudimentary to draw causal conclusions. Rather, it may be necessary to perform more advanced methods of hypothesis testing in order to show a causal relationship. However, lack of causality does not render the analysis useless. Consistent with the qualitative framework proposed by Campbell et al., Stokes, and Bartels echoing Van Buren’s intuition, empirical evidence suggests that partisanship influences opinion.
Discussion

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show that during the 1960s, white evangelical opinions on economic policy were closer to those of white Democrats than white Republicans. Because during this time white evangelicals were only beginning to realign from the Democratic Party, this observation is unsurprising. As previously mentioned, to the extent that they were politicized, 1960s white evangelicals tended to focus on social and foreign policy (anticommunism) issues. From a fiscal policy/social welfare perspective, however, the group remained largely moderate to slightly left leaning. Indeed, the primarily white evangelical supporters of the “Christian anticommunism crusade” expressed progressive views on political economy issues. For example, Wilcox finds that white supporters of the Christian anticommunist movement were more likely than non-supporters both to agree that government should help ensure a bottom living standard and to support Medicare. This is consistent with the data presented in Figure 4.4, showing that in 1960 only 20% of white evangelicals believed that government should stay out of providing assistance with medical care. While the crusade (and its predominantly white evangelical following) was conservative in its socio-moral agenda, the movement did not necessarily advocate fiscally conservative preferences. However, the 1970s began to change that status quo. As I argued in Chapter 2, Americans both politically and culturally reacted to the changes and upheaval of the 1960s, with profound implications for white evangelicals. As historian Bruce Schulman points out, the 1970s saw a “thorough southernization” of American life, and white evangelicals were at the heart of this regional and cultural shift. As we would expect based on

the party affiliation effect logic, white evangelical positions on political economy issues began to

drift toward GOP positions during the 1970s.

Several primarily white evangelical organizations came out against Carter, arguing that
he had not “lived up to his duty as a Christian” by avoiding salient issues such as pro-choice
abortion policy and the separation of church and state. White evangelicals thus supported
Reagan, at least partially as a result of his promises of social conservatism, tax cuts, higher
defense spending, and commitment to traditional values. As historians Earl and Merle Black
point out in their volume on southern Republicanism, “On issues of primary concern to religious
conservatives – opposition to abortion and support for school prayer in public schools – the
Republican platform and candidate were much closer to their own views than were Carter and
the Democratic Party.” Although it was likely his commitment to traditionalism that attracted
white evangelicals, Figures 4.4-4.8 demonstrate that the group also seemed to begin to buy into
Reagan’s economic plan. By 1984, white evangelicals were consistently closer to white
Republicans than they had been in the early 1970s.

The rightward drift of white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy/social welfare coincides
with Reagan’s rise as a politician who was sympathetic to white evangelical social
conservatism. While white evangelicals likely aligned with Reagan and the GOP on the basis
of socio-moral issues, they also began to adhere to Reagan’s (and the Republican Party’s)
prescriptions for the economy. As Morone points out, Reagan “scorned the Social Gospel and its

\[302\] Allitt, *Religion in America Since 1945: A history*: 152-53. For example, in 1979 the Moral Majority spoke out
against Carter and endorsed Reagan

for a more in-depth discussion.

\[304\] Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,

See also Layman and Hussey, “George Bush and the Evangelicals: Religious Commitment and Partisan Change
political progeny – the New Deal, the Great Society. Don’t blame society, he would repeat, blame the sinner.”306 This stress on theological, moral, and political individualism translated to economic individualism for many white evangelicals, and we observe a drift to the right on economic issues. Through Reagan’s two terms in office, white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy/social welfare moved toward convergence with GOP positions, as seen in Figures 4.4-4.8. Perhaps “captivated” by Reagan’s moral and cultural conservatism, white evangelicals “tuned-in” to his fiscally conservative agenda.

Given that white evangelicals are consistent moral conservatives – they exhibit distinctively conservative attitudes on social issues after correcting for income, education, age gender, and martial status – the rightward drift on fiscal policy is not entirely surprising.307 In this light, white evangelicals simply followed the party that more closely approximated their moral/social conservatism. Indeed, many group leaders began to advocate for “Christian capitalism,” largely on the basis of Calvinist individualism, and took credit for Reagan’s victories in 1980 and 1984.308

In fact, Jerry Falwell and other group leaders were so enamored with Reagan that they refused to criticize his policies, despite several instances of disappointment.309 For example, when Reagan appointed Sandra Day O’Connor, a known supporter of pro-choice policy from Arizona, to the Supreme Court instead of the white evangelical preferred Phyllis Schlafly (the famous conservative Catholic anti-ERA advocate), many expected a backlash from the white

308 See above section “Evangelicals and Capitalism.” See also, for example, Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan*: 256.
evangelical community. Yet Falwell, after briefly criticizing the President, came out in support of Reagan’s choice. In an interview during the Senate’s confirmation hearing of O’Connor in 1981, Falwell said, “I am very happy with this President … [Reagan is] the greatest President we’ve had in my lifetime and history may say the greatest President ever.”\textsuperscript{310} Falwell’s position exemplifies the staunch support given to Reagan by white evangelical elites, and further helps to clarify both the movement of white evangelicals into the Republican Party and the rightward drift of white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy issues.

This is consistent with the idea that ideological reciprocity between group and party elites contributed to the strongly pro-GOP rhetoric from white evangelical leaders. As I have shown, many contemporary white evangelical leaders are outspoken advocates of a market-liberal ideology and Christian capitalism. Although many political scientists and sociologists assume that fiscal conservatism stems from evangelical theology, differences in biblical interpretation over time render this assumption problematic.\textsuperscript{311} The notion that biblical interpretation can change to serve political ends points to the conclusion that the white evangelical leaders’ outspoken advocacy of market-liberal ideology served a political purpose. Specifically, the continued “symbiosis” between white evangelicals and the GOP contains an element of ideological reciprocity. While socially conservative white evangelical leaders were not necessarily predisposed to support fiscally conservative policies, they did (and still do) – and provided theological backing to their positions citing Calvinist individualism – in order to gain favor with GOP elites.


\textsuperscript{311} For example, evangelical doctrine was clearly interpreted differently during the 1920s Social Gospel movement than advocates of “Christian capitalism,” such as Ralph Reed, have interpreted it. See above sections “Evangelicals and Capitalism” and “Evangelicals and Redistributive Politics.”
Empirically, Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, and Poloma’s study of the politics of Protestant clergy show that white evangelical clergy tend to take conservative stances on a wide range of political issues, including fiscal policy.\textsuperscript{312} Because, as I have shown, there is no concrete theological explanation for white evangelical fiscal conservatism, the fact that white evangelical group leaders tend to exhibit ideological constraint contextualizes the notion of ideological reciprocity. Furthermore, the authors find that not only did a majority of white evangelical clergy polled identify as Republicans, but also that there has been a partisan realignment among evangelical clergy in the last half-century, with many clergy members reporting to have abandoned the Democratic Party.\textsuperscript{313} This fits with the notion of ideological reciprocity in that as evangelical clergy moved into the GOP, they began advocating fiscally conservative preferences to their congregations. Reichley echoes this sentiment, asserting that white evangelical leaders “accepted without much question the full conservative package [of the GOP] on economic and foreign policy issues.”\textsuperscript{314} As a result, these preferences, to some degree, trickled down from church leaders to congregants.

This may be particularly important given the significance of evangelical clergy in forming adherents’ political preferences. Political scientists Djupe and Gilbert study the political influence of churches and argue that the “dominant opinion of the church” is instrumental in forming church members’ political ideologies and opinions.\textsuperscript{315} The authors suggest that this is particularly true of white evangelical churches, finding that over 85% of congregants agreed or strongly agreed that church leaders were an important factor in their political decisions.\textsuperscript{316} This

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{312} Guth et al., \textit{The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy}: 96-116.
\item\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., 116-22.
\item\textsuperscript{314} Reichley, "Pietist Politics," 75.
\item\textsuperscript{316} Ibid., 32. This is the second highest of all the religious sects included in the study.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
finding implies that clergy are highly persuasive in forming adherent’s political opinions, and moreover helps to contextualize the importance of ideological reciprocity between white evangelical leaders (clergy) and GOP elites.

On the flip side, GOP elites have become more conservative on social issues in order to appease white evangelicals. This is evident in both the specific policy positions of Reagan, Bush, and other GOP leaders as well as in party platform literature. For example, as I argued in Chapter 3, Reagan both shifted positions on social issues and appointed prominent white evangelicals to government posts, presumably as to attract socially conservative voters.

Furthermore, an analysis of party platform literature demonstrates ideological reciprocity. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Republican Party platform noticeably moved to the right on socio-moral issues. For instance, in 1972, there was no mention of abortion at all, and only three mentions of abortion in the 1976 party platform. In 1980, however, abortion was mentioned seven times, and additionally there was a section added on the importance of a “strong family.” By 1988, the GOP platform included sections on abortion, strong family and strong communities, and pornography. It becomes clear that as white evangelicals became widely incorporated into the Republican Party, the Party began to advertise itself as socially and sexually conservative. Although I do not suggest that the evolution of the GOP into the socially

317 See Chapter 3. See also, for example, Lichtman, White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement: 341.
conservative Party is completely explained by the incorporation of white evangelicals, it is possible as the Republican Party became outwardly socially conservative, white evangelicals, especially at the elite level, drifted towards fiscal conservatism. The process defined by ideological reciprocity continued through the 1980s, perhaps culminating with Pat Robertson’s 1988 presidential bid.

There is little doubt that by 1988, white evangelicals were a key constituency of the GOP – the Reagan years proved as much. However, it was nonetheless a shock to the Republican Party establishment when Pat Robertson, a noted born-again televangelist and white evangelical, entered his name into the bidding for the Party’s nomination for president in 1988. Predictably, Robertson focused on social issues and a return to traditional morals in his initial policy platform. However, in attempting to widen his base of support, Robertson advocated a fiscally conservative ideology. While Robertson did not ignore the primary (socio-moral) policy goals of the traditional white evangelical social conservative, he also promised many of the fiscally conservative policies Reagan had never been able to enact. Specifically, Robertson supported a “balanced budget amendment, a massive ‘across-the-board review’ of federal spending, and attacked social welfare spending as misguided.”

Robertson became a legitimate contender for the bid, and thus helped to give white evangelicals a national political hero who was both socially and fiscally conservative. 

Although Robertson finished a distant third in the nomination, his bid is important in analyzing white evangelical fiscal policy/social welfare preferences. To begin with, Robertson

---

323 Williams, God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right: 216.
324 Ibid., 217.
325 Note that Robertson’s candidacy was not met with completely open arms from the white evangelical establishment. For example, Jerry Falwell believed Robertson was not capable of winning, and instead supported Bush. More generally, many rank and file white evangelicals did not approve of a preacher running for the nation’s highest office. See Harding, The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics: 249.
continued Reagan’s legacy of connecting conservative religion with conservative politics and conservative economics in the GOP. Undoubtedly a moral conservative, Robertson’s campaign showed him to be an economic conservative as well, and one who was committed to the fiscal restraint, tax cuts, and small government advocated by members of the secular right. At least in part as a result of his adherence to moral traditionalism and cultural conservatism, white evangelicals began to follow Robertson’s lead when it came to accepting the GOP establishment on fiscal and foreign policy. See Table 4.1 for an analysis of the political attitudes of campaign contributors to Robertson, Kemp, Bush, and Dole.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Attitudes of 1988 Republican Presidential Campaign Contributors</th>
<th>Robertson</th>
<th>Kemp</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Dole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Conservative on:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Policy</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense Policy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Raise Taxes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No National Health Insurance</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare Not Gov't Responsibility</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory School Prayer</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibit Abortion</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As we would expect, supporters of Robertson’s campaign were more conservative on social issues than the supporters of the other main Republican candidates. However, Robertson’s supporters were also more likely to be extremely conservative on economic policy than supporters of Kemp (25%-22%), Bush (25%-10%), and Dole (25%-6%). This is consistent with

the assertion that Robertson’s primarily white evangelical supporters adhered to the fiscal conservatism of the GOP in addition to their unsurprising moral conservatism.

Furthermore, as Bendyna and Wilcox explain in their comparison of the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, even after Robertson had left the race, his supporters continued to “work behind the scenes to influence the Republican National Convention, and to gain a foothold in state Republican Parties.”\footnote{Mary E. Bendyna and Clyde Wilcox, “The Chrisitan Right Old and New: A Comparison of the Moral Marjority and the Christian Coalition,” in \textit{Sjourners in the Wilderness: The Christian Right in Comparative Perspective}, ed. Corwin E. Smidt and Penning James M. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 46-47.} The successful foray into both local and national politics by Robertson’s supporters continued and strengthened a trend of political tradeoffs between white evangelical actors and secular GOP elites. In other words, white evangelicals penetrated state Republican Parties, advocating social conservatism and religion in public life in exchange for political capital – votes, money, and infrastructure. Also, Robertson’s endorsement of Bush after leaving the race pushed many of his supporters towards the GOP status quo. According to historian Donald Critchlow, this was key in shaping white evangelical attitudes towards non-social (economic and foreign policy) issues.\footnote{Critchlow, \textit{The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History}: 223. See also Green and Guth, “The Christian Right in the Republican Party: The Case of Pat Robertson's Supporters,” 94-95.} Since Robertson’s failed presidential bid, which in many ways crowned white evangelicals’ incorporation into the GOP, we have observed white evangelicals taking consistently conservative positions on most issues.

Through the 1990s and into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, white evangelicals reinforced the trend that began with Reagan and Robertson – affiliation with the GOP and conservative opinions on fiscal policy and social welfare issues. For example, Figure 4.9 shows opinions on whether “we should let the free market handle the economy,” or “the government should step in.” As we can see, since 1990 white evangelicals are more apt to believe that the free market can handle the
economy on its own. This is consistent with the hypothesis that as white evangelical partisanship in the GOP increased, the group became more fiscally conservative.

**Figure 4.9**

![We Should Let the Free Market Handle the Economy, 1990-2008](image)

Source: American National Election Studies, 1990-2008

By 2008, white evangelicals exhibited consistently conservative opinions on fiscal policy issues. As Wilcox and Robinson show, nearly 60% of white evangelicals in 2008 believed that the government should not guarantee jobs, and over 50% opposed the national health plan. These positions are similarly conservative to white mainline Protestants, and substantially more conservative than white Catholics and whites with no religious affiliation.\(^{329}\) Perhaps most strikingly, white evangelicals were more likely than other white religious groups to believe that jobs are more important than the environment by a significant margin. This further illustrates contemporary white evangelical fiscal conservatism. The authors’ analysis of 2008 survey data is adapted in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Position</th>
<th>Evangelical</th>
<th>Mainline</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>No Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Not Guarantee Job</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose National Health Care</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs More Important than Environment</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease Immigration</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American National Election Studies, 2008. Adapted from Wilcox and Robinson, Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics: 63. Note that Wilcox and Robinson use the term “Fundamentalist” to denote the most conservative; I use “Evangelical.”

There is little doubt that the fiscal policy attitudes of white evangelicals were less ambiguous prior to the 1950s than they are today. Although it is impossible to discount entirely the impact of both theology and socioeconomic status in explaining fiscally conservative opinions of white evangelicals, it is important to note the problematic nature of each of these explanations. Meanwhile, it is also important to consider party affiliation as a factor in explaining white evangelical market-liberal ideology. A complete picture explanation of white evangelical policy preferences would take into account all of the above explanations – both the conventional wisdom and the effect of party affiliation and incorporation into the GOP.

I conclude this study by commenting on the key findings of this analysis. I will then discuss journalistic treatments of white evangelicals, and examine on the biases therein. I will further speculate on the future of white evangelicals in American politics, discussing recent trends and contemplating the possibility of future party position change and its effect on white evangelical opinion and political behavior.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Key Findings

In the preceding chapters, I examine the dynamics of white evangelical politicization, relationship to the GOP, and the effects of party affiliation on group opinion change. This work contributes to the literature in two central ways. First, it looks to provide sociocultural context to white evangelical political behavior while maintaining a focus on political institutions and public opinion. Because much of the literature is grounded in interest group politics and/or social movement theory, there is a tendency to treat white evangelicals reductionistically. As a result, there is room for a treatment that instead emphasizes political institutions and public opinion. I attempt to provide such an analysis.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, I illuminate an irony of history with regards to public opinion. I observe that a leftward drift of mass opinion on social and cultural issues during the 1960s-1970s led, via partisan incorporation, to a rightward drift of white evangelical opinion on fiscal policy and social welfare issues during the 1980s-1990s. The irony is that these two phenomena seemingly reflect entirely separate political calculations. This provides the opportunity to shed light on a relatively unexplained (or inadequately so) observation: a group defined by biblical literalism and moral traditionalism exhibits distinctly conservative positions on fiscal policy and social welfare issues.

In concluding, I will discuss the contemporary state of white evangelicals in American politics. Specifically, I will consider journalistic predictions of the movement’s failure. I will

---

330 Many accounts treat white evangelicals as reactive, exclusively Christian issue, activists and Christian Right actors. See Chapter 2 section “A Pathologically Limited Literature?”
then offer my own thoughts concerning the political future of white evangelicals with respect to
the possibility of new party coalitions and opinion formation and/or change.

**White Evangelicals in the Media**

Some scholars have argued that the Christian Right is destined to fail – retract into
relative political obscurity and cease to be a factor in national and state electoral politics.\(^{331}\) For
example, Bruce contends that the fragmented nature of the movement’s religious base (not all
evangelical denominations believe the same thing), the requisite differences between religious
thinking and political thinking (tradeoffs must be made and coalitions built for political success,
but many evangelicals may not be willing to marginalize religious beliefs), and institutional
barriers (for example, the difficulty of 3\(^{rd}\) party formation in the US) ensure that the Christian
Right will “inevitably fail.”\(^{332}\) Yet Bruce’s conclusions suffer from observed history. In the
decades since Bruce published these theses, white evangelicals have remained central actors in
the American political arena. Not only did Ralph Reed bring the Christian Coalition to the
mainstream in the mid-1990s, but also George W. Bush won presidential elections in 2000 and
2004 with wide support from evangelicals.

Moreover, it is not just sociologists who have made erroneous predictions with regards to
white evangelicals – popular publications have also predicted that the group will politically fail.
For example, the historian and William Jennings Bryan biographer Michael Kazin argues in a
*New Republic* article that between American public opinion moving away from moral
traditionalism and a paucity of charismatic leaders, white evangelicals on the brink of political


\(^{332}\) Bruce, "The Inevitable Failure of the New Christian Right," 237-38.
extinction. This sentiment is echoed by a recent article in *The Atlantic*, in which journalist Jonathan Merritt argues that the 2012 election marks the end of evangelical “dominance” in politics for three reasons: size, waning influence, and “wanting” leadership. Though evangelicals make up roughly one-third of the electorate, Merritt suggests that this is not enough to win elections. Rather, according to Merritt, even if 100% of evangelicals voted for Romney, it may not have been enough for him to win the White House (approximately 80% did).

Furthermore, globalization and the digital age have marginalized the grassroots nature of evangelical churches, and politically influential pastors have largely died. The *New York Times* has chimed in as well, reporting after the 2012 election that evangelical leaders and churches no longer have the influence they once did. Yet these prescriptions seem to be largely inadequate. Though Merritt suggests otherwise, the nearly one-third of Americans who identify as evangelicals (about 25% of which are white) represent an influential voting bloc. And, while some scholars and pundits talk about a leftward movement of white evangelical opinion on some social issues, notably gay marriage, others, such as abortion, have remained steady since the early 1990s.

Perhaps the most controversial journalistic account of white evangelicals belongs to Thomas Frank and his *What’s the Matter with Kansas*. Frank argues that the Republican Party has used “values” to “convince ordinary [white] Americans” to vote against their economic

---

[Kazin, "The End of the Christian Right."]


[336] [See Michael S. Lewis-Beck et al., *The American Voter Revisited* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008). 231-35. From a political influence perspective, it is noteworthy that white Christians may be becoming a less important constituency. In 2012, Obama won with fewer than 4 in 10 white Christian votes. However, this does not necessarily suggest that white evangelicals will cease being active American politics.]
interests. Chief among these ordinary Americans are white evangelicals. Specifically, Frank asserts, “Republicans have hijacked several legitimate, even honorable anti-intellectual traditions. The first of these is Protestant evangelicalism.” As with his argument concerning low-income whites, Frank suggests that white evangelicals have been persuaded by the GOP to vote against their interests. Parallel to the problems with Frank’s more general thesis (see footnote 344), the notion that Republicans have “hijacked” white evangelicals is problematic. While the group essentially fits with Frank’s hypothesis – as I have shown white evangelicals do care more about social issues than economic issues, have undergone a partisan realignment from the Democratic to the Republican Party, and are relatively poorer than most American religious groups – Frank glosses over an important point: white evangelicals seem to vote with their interests. Of course, this depends on the definition of the word “interest.” I define it here as meaning that white evangelicals have not been tricked by the Republican Party. Rather, white evangelicals simply value conservative positions on social issues, and the GOP has become the party of social conservatism. Given this, white evangelicals vote exactly with their interests – for the candidates who more closely approximate their views on the issues that they care most about. To suggest otherwise, as Frank does, paints a reductionist picture.

337 Thomas Frank, What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America (New York: H. Holt, 2004). 1-2. Note that Frank’s hypothesis does not concern exclusively white evangelicals; rather, white evangelicals are a (significant) component to his target demographic. Also note that Frank’s hypothesis has been empirically questioned, most importantly by Larry Bartels. See Larry M. Bartels, "What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas?," Quarterly Journal of Political Science 1, no. 2 (2006). Although outside the scope of white evangelical politics, it is interesting to note Bartels’ critique: he finds that it is upper-middle class whites who care most about social issues, not poor whites. Given Inglehart’s analysis of postmaterialism discussed in Chapter 2, this is unsurprising – middle class voters can afford to worry about symbolic issues as opposed to voting with their pocketbooks. Based on this same logic, Frank might as well have written a book titled “What’s the Matter with Connecticut,” lamenting why some of the richest counties in America consistently vote for Democrats, theoretically against their economic interests. I thank David Campbell for the suggestion that Frank could have written “What’s the Matter with Connecticut.”

338 Frank, What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America 194. Note that white evangelicalism is not inherently anti-intellectual. For an important argument of how this group is not anti-intellectual, see Lindsay, Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite. 

118
This picture can be clarified by considering the future of white evangelicals in America. Specifically, I reflect on party position change since the 2012 election as well as 2012 polling data. I suggest that partisan movement on immigration may lead to large numbers of Latino evangelicals moving into the Republican Party. If the theory presented in this paper is correct, we expect that Latino evangelical opinion on economic issues would then begin to drift to the right.

The Future of White Evangelicals in American Politics

The future of white evangelicals is an oft-discussed topic in religion and American politics literature. Notably, evangelical constituencies are growing. As suggested in Chapter 1, black and white evangelicalism in America developed into distinctly different religious sects, but as numbers of Latino evangelicals in America increase, there may be reason to believe that the evangelical issue agenda may change. According to the PEW Forum, Latino evangelicals account for about 7.8 million voters – roughly 20% of the Latino vote. In the 2012 election, Latino evangelicals preferred Obama to Romney 50%-39%, and are more likely to align themselves with the GOP than other Latino religions. Latino evangelicals tend to be social conservatives, and, for example, strongly oppose same-sex marriage (66% opposed, 25% favored in a 2012 poll). Yet, Latino evangelicals are relatively more liberal on matters of political economy. According to Luis Lugo, director of the PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, Latino evangelicals are “big government social conservatives.”

---

question – like white evangelicals in the 1970s, will the GOP, as the socially conservative party, attempt to lure Latino evangelicals into their constituency? Perhaps they already have. Although Latino evangelicals notably led prayers at both the DNC and the RNC during the 2012 election season, GOP movement on immigration since the 2012 election might suggest that Latino evangelicals will be more inclined to vote for Republican candidates in future elections.

According to Latino evangelical leader and President of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition Gabriel Salguero, “After immigration, we still have work to do.” What this work turns out to be will be key to future party position change.

The importance of Latino evangelicals and the possibility of GOP position change is perhaps a microcosm of a larger shift in white evangelical political strategy. As Williams points out, Southern Baptist leader Rick Warren – according to Time Magazine, America’s most powerful religious leader and author of Purpose-Driven Life, the best-selling hardcover book in American publishing history except the Bible – promotes a brand of evangelicalism that appeals to a younger generation of adherents. Thus, Warren may epitomize the future of evangelical politics: theological conservatism and moral traditionalism, but with a focus on new issues, such as the environment and poverty, and an interest in bipartisanship. In fact, Warren reached out to both party’s candidates in both 2008 and 2012, and, characteristically, addressed the Clinton Global Initiative on Poverty while simultaneously campaigning against abortion and supporting a California ballot initiative prohibiting same-sex marriage. This raises important questions: Will white evangelicals stay largely GOP constituents? If Warren continues to strive towards

---

344 Ibid., 276.
bipartisanship, and is seen as having 30% of the electorate behind him, will we observe party position change? If so, will white evangelical opinion on non-social issues change?

Though it is possible, this seems unlikely. As we know, white evangelicals tend to be thorough moral conservatives, and history tells us that the group affiliates with the party that more closely approximates this preference for moral traditionalism. It seems improbable that white evangelicals would back off their mission to “restore” a Christian moral order to the nation. That being said, it is noteworthy that recently younger generations of white evangelicals are seemingly less politically conservative than the previous generation. See Table 5.1 for select 2012 issue positions of white evangelicals according to age. Because opinions seem to move to leftward as age decreases, there may be reason to believe that party position change could occur and, with it, a wide-scale partisan realignment.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select Issue Positions of White Evangelicals by Age, 2012</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No abortion for any reason</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>85.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much welfare</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much protecting the environment</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much spending on foreign aid</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>81.1%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree: Homosexuals should have the right to marry</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration should be reduced a lot</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: General Social Survey, 2012

Indeed, based on the arguments outlined in this paper, there is a theoretical possibility of party position change and resultant white evangelical opinion change. Appealing to younger evangelicals, group leaders like Warren may advocate moderate positions on issues such as the environment and poverty, and thus push some white evangelicals towards the center. White evangelicals will undoubtedly remain moral, cultural, and social conservatives. However, as exemplified by Warren, many adherents’ opinions on non-social issues may be more fungible.
Thus, party movement on foreign affairs, the environment, fiscal/social welfare policy, and immigration might lead to group opinion change around these issues.\textsuperscript{345} That being said, minor differences between age groups are unlikely to create sizeable changes in white evangelical opinion or voting behavior. The effects of party polarization on moral issues, especially gay marriage, abortion, and family policy, have set each party as firmly culturally conservative (GOP) and culturally liberal (Democratic Party). At least in the foreseeable future, it seems implausible that this would change. For example, despite general distrust of Mitt Romney due to his Mormon faith and wealth, white evangelicals in fact turned out in 2012 in slightly higher numbers than in 2008. This implies that, although Romney was likely not the group’s first choice to run, the alternative – Obama’s steady cultural and social liberalism – was far worse.\textsuperscript{346}

As a result, we expect to observe a continuation of the white evangelical-GOP status quo. More likely than wide-scale party position change, we instead anticipate that the parties will continue to attempt to expand, and, for example, as the GOP moves toward the center on immigration policy, Latino evangelicals may enter the Republican coalition.

\textsuperscript{345} This may already be underway. See Julia Preston, "For Evangelicals, A Shift in Views on Immigration," \textit{The New York Times}, April 13, 2013.
Appendix 1: Wording of Survey Questions

Table 2.1: “Have you heard or read about the Equal Rights Amendment?” If yes, “Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this amendment?”

Table 5.1:
ABORTION: “Please tell me whether or not think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion for any reason.”
WELFARE: “We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount of money on it.” Answer K. Welfare
ENVIRONMENT: “We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount of money on it.” Answer B. Improving and Protecting the Environment
FOREIGN AID: Environment: “We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount of money on it.” Answer J. Foreign Aid
HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE: “And what about a man who admits that he is homosexual … Suppose this admitted homosexual wanted to get married. Should he be allowed to get married or not?” Responses coded: “Yes, allowed; Not allowed; Don’t Know”
IMMIGRATION: “Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?”

Figure 2.1: Limited to “No” answers. “Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion: A) If she is married and does not want any more children? B) If the family is very low income and cannot afford any more children? C) If she is not married and does not want to marry the man?”

Figure 2.2: Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men.”

Figures 3.1-3.2, 3.6, 3.9-3.11:
PARTISANSHIP: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what? Would you call yourself a strong (REP/DEM) or a not very strong (REP/DEM)? (IF INDEPENDENT, OTHER, OR NO PREFERENCE:) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?” Responses coded “Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Independent – Democrat, Independent, Independent – Republican, Weak Republican, and Strong Republican.”

RELIGION: Before 1992: ATTENDS/CONSIDERS SELF PROTESTANT: (IF BAPTIST:) With which Baptist group is your church associated? Is it the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Churches in the USA, the American Baptist Association, [1992-LATER: the
National Baptist Convention U.S.A.] an independent Baptist church or some other Baptist group? (IF INDEPENDENT BAPTIST:) Are you affiliated with any larger Baptist group or is this strictly a local church? (IF LUTHERAN:) Is this church part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Missouri Synod, or some other Lutheran group? (IF METHODIST:) Is your church part of the United Methodist Church, African Methodist Episcopal, or some other Methodist group? (IF PRESBYTERIAN:) Is this the Presbyterian Church in the USA or some other Presbyterian group? (IF REFORMED:) Is this the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America, or some other Reformed group? (IF BRETHREN:) Is this the Church of the Brethren, the Plymouth Brethren, or what? (IF CHRISTIAN OR JUST CHRISTIAN:) When you say "Christian" does that mean the denomination called the "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," or some other Christian denomination, or do you mean to say "I am just a Christian?" (IF CHURCH OR CHURCHES OF CHRIST:) Is this the Church of Christ or United Church of Christ? (IF CHURCH OF GOD:) Is this the Church of God of Anderson Indiana, the Church of God of Cleveland Tennessee, the Church of God in Christ, or some other Church of God? (IF HOLINESS OR PENTECOSTAL:) What kind of church is that? What is it called exactly? Is that part of a larger church or denomination? What is that church called? ATTENDS/CONSIDERS SELF OTHER: What is it called exactly? Is that church part of a denomination? Is that group Christian?

AFTER 1992 AND CUMULATIVE DATA FILE: (IF R ATTENDS RELIGIOUS SERVICES:) Do you mostly attend a place of worship that is Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or what? ATTENDS/CONSIDERS SELF PROTESTANT: ALL CHRISTIANS: Which one of these words BEST describes your kind of Christianity: Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Charismatic or Spirit-Filled, Moderate to Liberal? Would you call yourself a born-again Christian, that is, have you personally had a conversion experience related to Jesus Christ? Responses coded “Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Black Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Non-traditional Orthodox, Non-Christian/Non-Jewish, Atheist/Agnostic/None, and Don’t Know/No Answer.”

LOCATION: What region are you from? Responses coded: Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT), North Central (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI), South (AL, AR, DE, D.C., FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV), West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY).

**Figure 3.3:** “Thinking about all the different kinds of governments in the world today, which of these statements comes closest to how you feel about Communism as a form of government? Responses coded: “It’s the worst kind of all; It’s bad but no worse than some others; It’s all right for some countries; It’s a good form of government.”

**Figure 3.4:** “Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they haven't pushed fast enough. Do you think that civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving about the right speed?” Responses coded: “Too Slowly; About Right; Too Fast; Depends/Other.”

**Figure 3.5:** “Are you in favor of desegregation, strict segregation, or something in between?”

**Figure 3.7:** What region are you from? Responses coded: Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT), North Central (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI), South (AL,
AR, DE, D.C., FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV), West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY).” Used for all geographic analyses.

**Figure 4.2:** “You might agree to some extent with both, but we want to know which one is closer to your views: One, we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; or two, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved.” Responses coded “Strong Government; Free Market; Don’t Know/Depends.”

**INCOME:** “Please look at this card/page and tell me the letter of the income group that includes the income of all members of your family living here in [previous year] before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.” Responses coded on a 5 point percentile scale (0-16, 17-33, 34-67, 68-95, 96-100 percentile). Recoded to form thirds: 0-33, 34-67, 68-100 percentile)

**Figure 4.3:** “Do you think the government is too powerful or do you think the government is not getting too strong?”

**INCOME:** “Please look at this card/page and tell me the letter of the income group that includes the income of all members of your family living here in [previous year] before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.” Responses coded on a 5 point percentile scale (0-16, 17-33, 34-67, 68-95, 96-100 percentile). Recoded to form thirds: 0-33, 34-67, 68-100 percentile)

**Figure 4.4:**

**BEFORE 1968:** “Some say the government in Washington ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at low cost; others say the government should not get into this. Have you been interested enough in this to favor one side over the other? (IF YES) What is your position?” Responses coded: “Opinion: help people get doctors and hospital care at a low cost; Opinion: government should stay out of this; and Don’t know”

**AFTER 1968:** “Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone. Others feel that medical expenses should be paid by individuals and through private insurance. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” Responses coded on a 7-point scale, with 1 being government insurance plan and 7 being completely private insurance plan. Responses 5 through 7 recoded as “Government Should Stay Out Providing Assistance With Medical Care.”

**Figure 4.5:**

**BEFORE 1968:** “Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own. Which is closer to the way you feel?” Responses coded: “Government should see to it that all people have a job and a good standard of living; Government should let each person get ahead on his own; and Don’t know.”

**AFTER 1968:** “Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his/their own. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” Responses coded on a 7-point scale, with 1 being government guarantee job and 7 being government let each person get ahead on his own. Responses 5 through 7 recoded as “Government Should Let Each Person Get Ahead On Their Own (Jobs).”
Figure 4.6: “Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this income difference between the rich and the poor. Here is a card with a scale from 1 to 7. Think of a score of 1 as meaning that the government ought to reduce the income between rich and poor, and a score of 7 meaning that the government should not concern itself with reducing income differences. What score between 1 and 7 comes closest to the way you feel?” Note: Responses 5-7 recoded as “Government Should Not Reduce Income Differences.”

Figure 4.7: “Some people think that the government in Washington is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and private businesses. Others disagree and think that the government should do even more to solve our country's problems. Still others have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you made up your mind on this?” Note: Responses given on a 5-point scale. Responses 4-5 recoded as “Government Does Too Much.”

Figure 4.8: “Some people think that the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans. Other people think it is not the government's responsibility, and that each person should take care of himself. Note: Responses given on a 5-point scale. Responses 4-5 recoded as “People Should Help Themselves Improve Their Standard of Living.”

Figure 4.9: “You might agree to some extent with both, but we want to know which one is closer to your views: One, we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; or two, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved.” Answers coded: Strong Government, Free Market, or Don’t Know/Depends.
Bibliography


