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RELIGIOUS VOTING IN THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: TESTING ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

Abstract

Scholars of American electoral politics have documented the recent partisan realignment of religious groups. Indeed, careful analysts often find that religious variables are better predictors of partisan choice than classic socioeconomic divisions. Still, there has been relatively little effort to put this religious realignment in both theoretical and historical perspective. In this article, we update our previous work on the historical evolution of religious partisanship, demonstrating the continued relevance of *ethnocultural* (or *ethnoreligious*) theory, utilized by political historians, and *restructuring theory*, an important sociological perspective. Both viewpoints help us understand presidential elections since the 1930s, as we demonstrate with data from a wide range of surveys. After utilizing the 2020 Cooperative Election Study to examine the contemporary voting of ethnoreligious groups in greater detail, we test the impact of religious variables controlling for other demographic, attitudinal, and partisan influences and find that religious identities and orientations often retain independent influence even under stringent controls for other factors shaping the presidential vote.

Keywords: ethnoreligious, restructuring theory, traditionalists, modernists

In 1936 FDR and the Democrats were riding high in national politics and religious communities were key parts of the “New Deal” coalition. These included newly energized Roman Catholics, largely working-class, recent immigrants, and concentrated in Northern cities, and Jews, a smaller but vital part of the cosmo-

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politan culture. White Protestants in Dixie, mostly Evangelicals, still constituted an impenetrable Democratic phalanx in the “Solid South.” Other Democratic allies included the non-religious, few and mostly unnoticed. And although still largely excluded from American political life, particularly in the South, Black Protestants were increasingly drawn to the policies of the New Deal, while retaining some loyalty to the Party of Lincoln. The Great Depression had ended the Republican advantage in electoral politics that began in 1896, but the GOP’s chief religious constituency, the Protestant Mainline, still dominated national religious life, both in sheer numbers and cultural leadership.

By 2020 religious politics had been transformed, bearing only a modest resemblance to the picture eighty years before. Donald Trump was in the White House, but religious communities were still key parts of the Republican coalition. Evangelical Protestants, one of the largest religious traditions in America, have helped create a new “Solid South”, one that is now Republican. And Evangelicals are numerous in other regions as well, bolstered by Latter-day Saints in the West, all identifying and voting Republican. But the Protestant Mainline has declined in numbers and in loyalty to the GOP and white Roman Catholics no longer congregate in the Democratic Party. Like Mainline Protestants, they were “up for grabs” in presidential campaigns, increasingly prone to vote for Republican candidates. The contemporary Democratic coalition is still diverse, but with many new actors. Their key “religious” supporters include Black Protestants, liberated by the civil rights movement; a burgeoning Latino Catholic contingent; the smaller but still vital Jewish community; and, perhaps most importantly, a growing “unaffiliated” or secular population.³ In addition, a host of new ethnoreligious minorities have joined the Democratic camp, including Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. Theologically modernist Mainline Protestants and Catholics have also moved toward the Democrats, joining a few Evangelicals who still fly the Democratic flag.⁴

Thus, even a quick look at partisan coalitions suggests that contemporary connections between religion and politics are quite different from those in 1936. We examine three models of the linkages between religion and voting behavior, document changes in presidential voting since the 1930s utilizing these models, and analyze the 2020 presidential vote to test their continued applicability. Although largely descriptive, this effort establishes the “data” of religious change as a prerequisite for explanation.⁵ In the conclusion, we test the power of ethnoreligious identity and theological orientations against the influence of other factors often featured in analyses of electoral politics.

3 David E. Campbell, Geoffrey C. Layman and John C. Green, *Secular Surge, A New Fault Line in American Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

4 Lyman Kellstedt and James L. Guth, “Religious Groups as a Polarizing Force”, in: *Polarized Politics: The Impact of Divisiveness in the U.S. Political System*, William Crotty (ed.), Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2015, pp. 157-186.

5 John Gerring, Mere Description, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 42, 2012, pp. 721-746.

Religious Groups in American Politics

There are two major competing interpretations of religious alignments in American politics. *Ethnoreligious* or *ethnocultural theory* emphasizes the political alignment of religious groups that migrated to America, mainly from Europe, and often multiplied upon reaching her shores. As historians have argued, nineteenth-century electoral politics consisted largely of assembling winning coalitions of contending ethnoreligious groups. Well into the twentieth century, the Republican Party (GOP) represented historically dominant Mainline churches, such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Methodists, while Democrats spoke for religious minorities: Catholics, Jews, and southern Evangelicals.⁶ But important changes began at midcentury and accelerated thereafter. By the 1980s, Mainline Protestants had dwindled in number and their affection for the GOP had cooled, Evangelicals had moved toward the Republicans, the ancient Catholic-Democratic alliance had frayed, and Black Protestants had become a critical Democratic bloc.⁷ Growing religious diversity added Latino Catholics and Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and many others to the equation, usually on the Democratic side. Despite these changes many analysts still think in ethnoreligious terms, referring to the “Evangelical”, “Catholic”, “Jewish”, or even “Muslim” vote. Scholars have variously attributed alignment choices by ethnoreligious groups to differing worldviews, conflicting cultural preferences, and negative reference groups—all shaping distinctive views on public policy.⁸ And although contemporary scholars are often inclined to distinguish religion, race and ethnicity in analyses, we concur with sociologist Melissa Wilde that “in many cases, these variables cannot be separated”⁹.

A recent challenge to the ethnoreligious approach is the *religious restructuring* theory, first offered by sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1988) to explain growing divisions inside American faith traditions, and then brought into common political parlance by James Hunter’s *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991). Hunter saw new religious battles emerging *within* the old traditions, based on theology: “Orthodox” believers accepted “an external, definable, and transcendent authority,” and adhered firmly to traditional doctrines, while “progressives” replaced old religious tenets with new ones based on experience or scientific rationality.¹⁰ Progressives were often joined by the growing numbers of secular

6 Paul Lazarsfeld, *The People's Choice*, Columbia University Press, 1944; Bernard Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting*, University of Chicago Press, 1954.

7 Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, “Survey Research: Religion and Electoral Behavior in the United States, 1936-2008”, in: *Political Science Research in Practice*, Akan Malici and Elizabeth Smith (eds.), Routledge, New York and London, 2013, pp. 93-110.

8 Robert Swierenga, “Religion and American Voting Behavior, 1830s to 1930s”, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and James L. Guth (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 69-94.

9 Melissa J. Wilde, *Complex Religion: Interrogating Assumptions of Independence in the Study of Religion*, *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 79, No. 3, 2018, p. 287.

10 James Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, Basic Books, New York, 1991, p. 44.

Americans who reject religion but see morality in a similar vein.¹¹ Although defined primarily by traditionalist beliefs, the “orthodox” also are more observant than “progressives,” complicating the task of distinguishing effects of belief and behavior. Although the existence and political implications of these divisions have intrigued sociologists more than political scientists, these questions have recently crossed over disciplinary lines.¹²

Although these two theoretical perspectives have produced massive literatures in history and sociology, they have seldom been applied simultaneously to contemporary electoral politics. As we have shown previously¹³, both approaches have some merit, contributing to a “hybrid” model in which the “older” American religious communities increasingly exhibit “culture wars” tendencies, and more recent ethnoreligious entrants to the party system maintain the electoral unity described by the older model.¹⁴ To begin our analysis, then, we chart the changes from a predominantly ethnoreligious electoral system to a more complex hybrid pattern.

American Religious Groups and the Presidential Vote from FDR to Donald Trump

Despite America’s growing religious diversity (Eck 2001), in most presidential elections since 1936 over 80 percent of the votes come from four religious communities (Evangelical, Mainline and Black Protestants, plus white Roman Catholics) and the religiously unaffiliated. As a result, we begin with the voting behavior of these five groups.¹⁵ Producing such a historical overview is not easy, especially for early years when surveys often used only crude religious measures, if any. We used several sources: Gallup surveys from the late 1930s and early 1940s; the American National Election Studies (ANES) from 1948 to 1988; the National Survey of Religion and Politics (NSRP), conducted by the authors and others from 1992 to 2008; the 2012 ANES survey; and the massive Cooperative

11 Susan B. Hansen, *Religion and Reaction: The Secular Political Response to the Religious Right*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2011; David E. Campbell, Geoffrey C. Layman and John C. Green, *Secular Surge, A New Fault Line in American Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

12 Morris Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* Pearson Longman, New York, 2005; Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation and the Rise of Donald Trump*, Yale University Press, 2018.

13 Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, “Survey Research: Religion and Electoral Behavior in the United States, 1936-2008”, in: *Political Science Research in Practice*, Akan Malici and Elizabeth Smith (eds.), Routledge, New York and London, 2013, pp. 93-110; Lyman Kellstedt and James L. Guth, “Religious Groups as a Polarizing Force”, in: *Polarized Politics: The Impact of Divisiveness in the U.S. Political System*, William Crotty (ed.), Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2015, pp. 157-186.

14 John M. McTague and Geoffrey C. Layman, “Religion, Parties, and Voting Behavior: A Political Explanation of Religious Influence” in: *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 330-370.

15 Indeed these five are the only groups with enough poll respondents for analysis, especially in the earlier periods.

Table 1. Republican Percent of the Two-Party Vote for President by Major Religious Traditions, 1936-2016.

Religious Tradition	1936	1940	1944	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	Gain or Loss
Evangelical Protestant	36	46	44	38	63	60	60	38	69	84	51	65	74	69	69	67	74	78	76	78	81	+45
Mainline Protestant	48	58	58	55	72	71	70	46	72	75	64	70	72	62	57	54	60	50	50	59	59	+11
Black Protestant	35	38	32	6	20	36	32	0	4	16	7	7	11	8	10	11	4	17	5	4	9	-26
White Catholic	18	28	33	25	49	55	17	22	40	64	44	58	55	51	46	46	50	53	51	53	59	+41
Unaffiliated	28	41	39	37	56	53	45	32	46	53	44	59	57	50	34	43	36	28	27	32	30	+2
Total Sample	36	45	48	41	58	60	51	33	54	64	49	56	58	53	47	47	50	51	46	48	49	+13

Sources: 1936-1944 Gallup polls, AIPO 0149 Forms A & B, AIPO 0208, AIPO 0209, AIPO 0210, AIPO 0211, AIPO 0308, AIPO 0335, and AIPO 0360. For all religious groups in 1948 and for evangelical and mainline Protestants in 1952 and 1956, ANES 1956-1960 Panel Study; 1952-1984 ANES Cumulative File; 1988-2004 National Surveys of Religion and Politics, University of Akron; 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008; ANES 2012, and the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Congressional Election Study (CCES) in 2016.¹⁶ Although these surveys have religious affiliation items of varying quality, we have tried to produce substantially comparable measures. Table 1 presents the Republican percentage of the two-party presidential vote cast by the five groups from 1936 to 2016, with the last column summarizing the GOP's net gain or loss in each group. What do we find?

White Evangelical Protestants

"Evangelicals" strongly backed Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, but by 2016 were overwhelmingly Republican. Only 36 percent voted for Republican Alf Landon in 1936, but over 80 percent for Donald Trump in 2016. Despite party identification that favored the Democrats as late as the 1980s, Evangelicals have voted for GOP presidential aspirants at higher rates than the nation as a whole since the 1950s. Until 1984 Evangelicals were less Republican than Mainline Protestants (except for 1972), but since 1984 they have been the strongest religious supporters of the GOP, moving a massive 45 percentage points in a Republican direction by 2016, a transformation that is especially evident among regular church attenders and southerners (data not shown). This GOP support seemed likely to continue in 2020, as Evangelical attitudes lined up with party ideology—not only on "social" or "moral" questions, but also on foreign policy and economic issues.¹⁷

To illustrate this Evangelical transformation, consider the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination. As the heart and soul of religion in the South, Southern Baptists set the region's cultural tone and played a major role in politics as well. Southern Baptists (and other white southerners) were less supportive of GOP candidates than the nation as a whole until the 1960s, but have been consistently more Republican since then. Both groups moved in tandem toward the Republican Party from the 1970s onward, but while GOP support among all white Southerners levelled off in the 1980s (at about two-thirds), Southern Baptists' GOP presidential voting has steadily increased, reaching 86 percent for Donald Trump in 2016, despite many initial reservations about his candidacy.

And among Southern Baptists regular church attenders have voted more Republican than the less observant since the 1960s, with the gap increasing af-

16 Gallup surveys in the 1930s and 1940s often lacked denominational specificity and rarely included questions about partisan identification and church attendance. We were able to use two surveys in 1939, two more in 1940, and one each in 1944 and 1945. The ANES lacked much denominational specificity until 1960. Fortunately, ANES conducted a panel study from 1956 to 1960, allowing the use of 1960 denominational data for 1956. The 1956 survey asked questions about partisanship and vote choice in 1948 and 1952, as well as 1956, allowing the time series to go back to 1948. The University of Akron surveys were conducted by the authors beginning in 1992 and in each presidential year through 2008. The 1992 survey allows us to reconstruct 1988 presidential choices as it asked how respondents voted in that election.

17 James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green, and Corwin E. Smidt, "Religious Influences in the 2004 Presidential Election", *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 36, 2006, pp. 223-42; Lyman Kellstedt and James L. Guth, "Religious Groups as a Polarizing Force"...

ter 1990. In 2016, Southern Baptists who seldom or never attended church gave Trump 79 percent of their votes, weekly attenders 89 percent, and those attending more than once a week, a whopping 93 percent. (This same pattern appeared among all white Southerners, but at much lower levels.) And prior to the 1990s Southern Baptists were *less* inclined to *identify* as Republicans than were other white southerners, but in that decade Southern Baptists finally caught up, and then became *more* Republican. In 2016, for example, only 18 percent of Southern Baptists identified as Democrats and 70 percent as Republicans, while the comparable figures for the white South were 31 and 49 percent, respectively.

Although several factors played a role in this realignment, clerical leadership may have been critical. Southern Baptist pastors shifted their partisanship earlier and more dramatically than even the regularly attending laity.¹⁸ The only deviation was in 2016, when “only” 80 percent of SBC pastors voted for Trump, falling behind their congregants. (That this lapse had more to do with reservations about Trump than discontent with the GOP is suggested by the fact that SBC clergy were still six points less Democratic and two points more Republican than their parishioners.) In addition, political cues provided by lay activists in most SBC churches are strongly “Republican,” reinforcing partisan identities¹⁹. Thus, Southern Baptist GOP propensities are not likely to be reversed easily, although the denomination’s political involvement has created considerable internal conflict. Although this account of realignment could be replicated in other Evangelical groups, such as the Assemblies of God, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Presbyterian Church in America, the SBC’s size makes its “Republicanism” more significant in electoral terms.

Mainline Protestants

Through much of the party’s history Mainline Protestants were the religious bulwark of the GOP (“The Republican Party at prayer”), both in public office and within the electorate. As Table 1 shows, Mainline support for GOP candidates was consistently ten points or more above the national average from 1936 to 1992, falling just below that line in 1996, before rising again in 2000. In 2004, however, the Mainline vote for Bush fell to 50 percent, the first time in the history of polling that it lagged the national average, before moving back toward the GOP in 2012 and 2016. But both the weakening of GOP propensities and the plummeting numbers of Mainline Protestants greatly reduced their electoral contribution

18 This discussion is based on our analysis of Southern Baptist lay respondents in surveys used here and on presidential year surveys of Southern Baptist pastors beginning in 1980. For results of the earliest surveys in this series see: James L. Guth, John C. Green, Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Margaret M. Poloma, *The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1997.

19 Lydia Bean, *The Politics of Evangelical Identity: Local Churches and Partisan Divides in the United States and Canada*, Princeton University Press, 2014.

to the party.²⁰

Trends in Mainline electoral politics are exemplified by the United Methodist Church (UMC), the second largest Protestant—and largest Mainline—denomination. Indeed, there is hardly an American community of any size without a Methodist church. And with tongues firmly in cheek, we call the UMC “the church of the large standard deviation,” given its internal theological and political diversity. Despite this diversity, Methodist laity have voted for Republican candidates for president consistently since the 1940s and at rates above the national average, reaching about two-thirds in the 1970s and 1980s. Beginning in 1992 and continuing to 2008, some movement toward the Democrats was apparent, led by less observant, older, and northern Methodists (data not shown), but this trend was reversed to some extent in 2012 and 2016 as Methodist laity gave majorities to Mitt Romney and Donald Trump.

Unlike Southern Baptist pastors who are more Republican than their congregants, Methodist ministers are somewhat more Democratic than those in the pews, although closely divided in vote choice and partisanship.²¹ In 2016, UMC clergy gave Trump 43 percent, while 46 percent identified as Democrats compared to 41 percent Republican. Thus UMC pastoral cues are less likely to point laity toward the GOP than is the case for Southern Baptists. Denominational communications are also much more liberal in their theological and political direction than among Southern Baptists. Yet, despite pastoral and denominational influences, Methodists are somewhat more Republican than Mainline laity as a whole. Nevertheless, they exhibit the same divisions as most Mainline churches do, divisions addressed below.

Black Protestants

Black Protestants’ affinity for the GOP (“the party of Lincoln”) dated from the Civil War and the end of slavery, but eroded as the New Deal Democracy became identified with aid to the poor. Table 1 shows Black Protestants still giving 38 percent of the vote to Willkie in 1940, but in the 1964 ANES survey, not a single Black reported voting for Goldwater, and Black Protestants have been overwhelmingly Democratic ever since. The Black Protestant GOP vote plummeted to recent lows in 2008 and 2012 with Barack Obama as the Democratic candidate, recovering only slightly in 2016. Given this monolithic unity, factors such as church attendance, region, and age have not divided Black Protestants as they have white Protestant groups. There are few better examples of ethnoreligious political unity than Black Protestants.

20 Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, “Survey Research: Religion and Electoral Behavior in the United States, 1936-2008”, in: *Political Science Research in Practice*, Akan Malici and Elizabeth Smith (eds.), Routledge, New York and London, 2013, pp. 93-110.

21 John C. Green, “United Methodist Church”, in: *Pulpit and Politics*, Corwin E. Smidt (ed.), Baylor University Press, 2004, p. 96.

White Catholics

According to most historians, Catholics voted for the Democrats throughout the nineteenth century, a propensity that varied somewhat by ethnic group²², but the New Deal really solidified the Catholic vote. As Table 1 shows, this alliance persisted until the 1970s, except for a brief flirtation with Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s. Democratic Catholicism reached its peak in the elections of John Kennedy in 1960 and Lyndon Johnson in 1964. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, white Catholic voters were “up for grabs”²³. Republicans won on some occasions, while Democrats were victorious in others, with the Catholic vote closely mirroring the national division. Since 2004, however, white Catholics have supported Republicans at higher rates than the rest of the country, reaching a ten-point advantage in 2016.

What accounts for this dramatic change over the past eighty years? Many argue that Catholics’ movement results from their upward mobility from the working class toward the middle-class with its traditional Republican ties. Many others cite a split between traditionalist Catholics, attracted by the GOP’s social conservatism, and modernists, who prefer Democratic liberalism²⁴. This division is reflected in the political choices of observant and less observant Catholics. Until the 1990s regular mass attenders were more Democratic, but this changed in the 1990s, perhaps reflecting persistent anti-abortion messages that may have moved observant Catholics toward the pro-life party, the GOP. In 2016, approximately 55 percent of less observant Catholics voted for Trump, but 65 percent of weekly attenders did; fully 73 percent attending mass more than once a week voted for the New York businessman. In addition, the small southern Catholic population was strongly Democratic into the 1950s, but since then southern Catholics have voted Republican more consistently than their northern counterparts. This trend persisted in 2016 among the one-quarter of white Catholics who now live in the South. Southern Catholic support for the GOP does not equal that of Evangelicals, but matched that of Mainline Protestants in 2016. Age differences in presidential voting were not apparent until the 1970s, when younger Catholics were the strongest supporters of Republican candidates. This tendency disappeared in 2004 and 2008, and in 2012 and 2016 younger Catholics were more supportive of Obama and Clinton than their elders were, a pattern replicated among Evangelicals and Mainliners in 2016. It seems likely that all these factors influenced Catholic partisanship at various points.

22 Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892*, University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

23 William B. Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith*, Georgetown University Press, 1999; George J. Marlin, *The American Catholic Voter: 200 Years of Political Impact*. St. Augustine’s Press, South Bend. 2004.

24 Lyman Kellstedt and James L. Guth, Catholic Partisanship and the Presidential Vote in 2012, *The Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2014, pp. 623-640.

The Secular or the Religiously Unaffiliated Population

Secular citizens (defined as those with no religious affiliation) are a growing force in electoral politics, a role that has been rather neglected until recently.²⁵ As Table 1 shows, the religiously unaffiliated began the period voting Democratic, and then supported Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956, Nixon in 1960, McGovern in 1972, and Reagan and G.H.W. Bush in the 1980s. As social issues became more salient in the 1990s, more secular voters have cast more Democratic ballots, especially since 2000. As long as gay rights, abortion, church-state and other “cultural” issues are prominent, this trend is likely to continue. Although much journalistic and some academic coverage treats the unaffiliated as a single, undifferentiated community, there are in fact significant political differences among these citizens.²⁶ Later in this paper we explore electoral differences between atheists, agnostics, and those who simply have no religious affiliation.²⁷

Other Religious Groups

Other religious groups (omitted from Table 1) have been less important historically given small size and, in some cases, low turnout. Despite a small national population, however, Jews are a significant constituency in New York, California, and South Florida, and maximize their impact by high turnout and political activism, and have voted for Democratic presidential candidates since 1936, usually by wide margins.²⁸ Latter-day Saints (Mormons), on the other hand, are growing in number and are increasingly dispersed from their base in Utah. They are as strongly Republican as Jews are Democratic, reaching an apex of over 80 percent in 2012, when fellow Saint Mitt Romney was the GOP nominee.

Latinos were almost absent from surveys before 1970. Now the US's largest ethnic minority, their votes are courted by both parties (but particularly by Democrats), despite persistently low turnout. Few observers, however, have stressed that the Democratic vote is consistently higher among Latino Catholics than among Latino Protestants, who are theologically conservative and dispro-

25 Susan B. Hansen, *Religion and Reaction: The Secular Political Response to the Religious Right*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2011; David E. Campbell, Geoffrey C. Layman and John C. Green, *Secular Surge, A New Fault Line in American Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

26 Philip Schwadel, The Politics of Religious Nones, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 59, No. 1, 2020, pp. 180-189.

27 The unaffiliated are often referred to as “Nones,” suggesting they have no religion. But careful polling shows that many claiming no affiliation do participate in religious practices and have some traditional beliefs. Indeed, some express a clear religious “preference” if pressed. Thus, various parts of the unaffiliated group exhibit somewhat varying political tendencies, which we examine in connection with the 2020 data discussed below. See: Susan B. Hansen, *Religion and Reaction: The Secular Political Response to the Religious Right*. . .; Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, “Seculars and the 2008 Election”, in: *Religion, Race, and Barack Obama's New Democratic Pluralism*, Gaston Espinosa (ed.), Routledge, New York and London, 2013, pp. 149-165.

28 Surveys show the small segment of Orthodox Jews tending to vote Republican; this is the case in the 2016 CCES study where the Orthodox gave Trump 59 percent, compared to less than 26 percent for other Jews in the sample.

portionately Pentecostal or charismatic in religion, inclining them toward the Republican Party. When the GOP takes anti-immigration stands, both Catholic and Protestant Latinos move toward the Democrats, as in 1996 and 2012, but when moral issues are central, Latino Protestants gravitate toward the GOP as they did in 2004, giving over 60 percent to George W. Bush²⁹. In 2008 and 2012, Latino Protestants supported Barack Obama, but at a much lower level than their Catholic brethren. In 2016 Latino Protestants were split, with Evangelicals giving Trump an edge, but a small group of Mainliners favoring Hillary Clinton.

Other ethnoreligious groups are smaller and less relevant to electoral outcomes. Black Catholics, for example, have never accounted for as much as one percent of the electorate, but are as reliably Democratic as Black Protestants. And although there is much speculation about the growth of other religious groups in American society³⁰, surveys do not show large electoral constituencies of Muslims, Buddhists or Hindus, but these “other world religions” tend to vote Democratic—the historic home of religious “minorities.” We show later that this was again the case in 2020.

In sum, presidential voting reveals dramatic changes among ethnoreligious groups over the past eighty years. Evangelical Protestants and white Roman Catholics have realigned both moving toward the GOP. Mainline Protestants have lost their old preeminence as a Republican constituency, and by 2004 had become a smaller “swing” group. Meanwhile, Black Protestants and the religiously unaffiliated have gravitated toward the Democrats, the former in the 1960s and the latter in this century, becoming core party constituencies. And most other ethnoreligious minorities have voted Democratic, with the exception of the Latter-day Saints, Orthodox Jews, and (sometimes) Latino Protestants.

Religious Restructuring: Evidence for a New Pattern?

That high church attendance is now associated with Republican voting in the Evangelical, Mainline and white Catholic traditions hints that ethnoreligious identity no longer provides a full description of religious voting. In the past, deep engagement in a religious community often reinforced its dominant partisan slant, whether Republican or Democratic. Today, however, religious service attendance favors the GOP in almost every major ethnoreligious tradition—and in some minor ones. If Wuthnow (1988) and Hunter (1991) are correct, this reflects new divisions over beliefs and practices—and the associated stances on political issues—that separate “traditionalist” believers from the more “progressive” or “modernist.” Yet, the findings presented thus far provide no evidence that beliefs

29 John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt and James L. Guth, “How the Faithful Voted: Religious Communities and the Presidential Vote”, in: *A Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election*, David E. Campbell (ed.), Brookings, Washington DC, 2007, pp. 15-36.

30 Diane Eck, *A New Religious America*, Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, 2001.

are driving any of the changes noted,³¹ as most early Gallup and ANES surveys lacked any belief measures, preventing us from testing a restructuring model.

In a few instances, however, we have enough data from Gallup and ANES to offer a crude historical test of the restructuring model, using items available in 1944, 1964 and 1968 and in each presidential year beginning in 1980. (To increase the sample size and smooth out variations for particular elections, we combined cases for 1964–68.) We divided the major white traditions into three groups: “traditionalists” are regular church goers who hold literal or inerrant views of the Bible; “modernists” attend church infrequently and have “low” views of Scripture; and “centrists” fall in the middle on both.³²

After 2000 these patterns solidified, and the within-tradition differences are quite large. The gaps among Evangelicals were largest in 2000, while among Mainline Protestants and white Catholics the largest differences appeared in 2008 and 2012, respectively. Interestingly, Evangelical and Mainline internal divisions changed little in 2016, while that for white Catholics was substantially reduced, due to the higher Republican vote among modernists. Nevertheless, today the partisan gap between traditionalists and modernists is impressive in all three ethnoreligious groups, suggesting that the restructuring of religion has a significant impact on presidential voting.

The differential timing of the theological split within the three major white traditions does raise interesting questions. McTague and Layman (2009) argue that the activation of theologically based moral issue cleavages within religious groups was largely the result of partisan elite cues, as the GOP leaders took traditionalist positions on critical issues such as abortion, and Democratic politicians espoused more modernist views³³. Why then did Evangelical traditionalists respond earlier? Perhaps because of the strong clerical leadership noted earlier in connection with the Southern Baptist Convention and also present in some other Evangelical denominations³⁴, or perhaps because of more effective mobilization of traditionalist lay activists by Christian Right organizations.³⁵ In the

31 Hunter (1991) posits a dichotomy between orthodox and progressive camps, ignoring religious centrists who do not identify with either polar position. A polarized model may, however, characterize religious and political elites. See: Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation and the Rise of Donald Trump*, Yale University Press, 2018.

32 There are minor differences in the restructuring measures from year to year and survey to survey, but we did our best to make the specifications comparable.

33 John M. McTague and Geoffrey C. Layman, “Religion, Parties, and Voting Behavior: A Political Explanation of Religious Influence” in: *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 330–370.

34 James L. Guth, John C. Green, Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Margaret M. Poloma, *The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1997; James L. Guth, Brent Nelsen, Linda Beail, Greg Crow, Beverly Gaddy, Jeff Walz, Steve Montreal, and James Penning, The Political Activity of Evangelical Clergy in the Election of 2000: A Case Study of Five Denominations, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 42, 2003, pp. 501–514.

35 James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green, and Corwin E. Smidt, “A Distant Thunder? Religious Mobilization in the 2000 Campaign”, in: *Interest Group Politics*, 6th ed., Allan Cigler and Burdett Loomis (eds.), Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington DC, 2002, pp. 161–184; Lydia Bean, *The Politics of Evangelical Identity: Local Churches and Partisan Divides in the United States and Canada*, Princeton University Press, 2014.

Table 2. Republican Vote for President for Religious Traditions, Controlling for Traditionalism, 1944-2016 (in percent)

Religious Tradition / Theological Group	1944	1964-68	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	Gain / Loss
Evangelical Protestant	44	52	69	69	67	74	78	76	78	81	+37
Traditionalist	44	54	74	83	81	87	88	88	84	87	+43
Centrist	44	43	65	68	58	63	70	68	67	72	+27
Modernist	45	58	64	44	43	43	56	54	57	61	+16
Traditionalist/Modernist Gap	-1	-4	+10	+39	+38	+44	+32	+34	+27	+26	+27
Mainline Protestant	58	57	62	57	54	60	50	50	59	59	+1
Traditionalist	58	59	63	64	65	76	65	68	68	69	+11
Centrist	57	52	61	59	53	52	49	49	62	57	0
Modernist	58	59	63	50	46	54	39	39	46	48	-10
Traditionalist/Modernist Gap	0	0	0	+14	+19	+22	+26	+29	+22	+21	+21
White Catholic	33	30	51	46	46	50	53	51	53	59	+26
Traditionalist	30	28	51	54	54	61	74	58	77	69	+39
Centrist	32	35	48	47	49	49	52	63	56	58	+26
Modernist	41	33	54	39	37	39	35	34	30	49	+8
Traditionalist/Modernist Gap	-11	-5	-3	+15	+17	+22	+39	+24	+47	+20	+31
Total Sample	46	42	53	47	47	49	51	46	48	49	+3

Sources: Gallup Poll, AIPO 0335, 1944; National Election Studies Cumulative File: 1964-2000; National Surveys of Religion and Politics, University of Akron, 1988-2008; National Election Studies 2012; Cooperative Congressional Election Study 2016.

Mainline and Catholic cases, clerical cues and organizational mobilization may have been later and, no doubt, more equivocal, delaying the partisan sorting by theological orientation.

A Deeper Dive into the “Hybrid” Religious Politics of 2020

One merit of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study is that the massive post-election sample ($N > 40,000$) not only allows us to examine large contingents of voters in the major ethnoreligious groups (and their theological subgroups), but also to profile voting patterns of myriad smaller religious groups.³⁶ Although the assignment to ethnoreligious traditions is complicated, given the somewhat confusing set of affiliation “screens” and follow-ups available to respondents, careful inspection allows us to produce a rich picture of American religious voting. In Table 3, we present data on presidential voting, party affiliation, and electoral coalitions in 2020, bringing our historical analysis up to date, and adding information on important emerging religious constituencies.

As the first column shows, there are dramatic ethnoreligious differences in presidential voting, with white Evangelical Protestants voting overwhelmingly for President Trump, followed at some distance by white Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Not surprisingly, Black Protestants remain an overwhelmingly Democratic constituency, with nine out of ten voting for Joe Biden. The smaller religious traditions go in different directions, with the Latter-day Saints remaining Republican, but at a level somewhat lower than customary, followed at a distance by Eastern Orthodox voters. Latino Evangelicals split evenly, but were much more Republican than their Catholic brethren. As ethnocultural theory would predict, non-Christian minorities were overwhelmingly Democratic, with Muslims—perhaps understandably—the most likely to shun Donald Trump. And as scholars have noted recently, the growing ranks of the religiously unaffiliated are usually in the Democratic camp, as they were in 2016, but with some variations. Those with no particular religious affiliation gave a little over a third of their vote to Trump, far more than the one in five agnostic voters or the one in ten atheists, who voted for the president. Thus, we see the outlines of the old ethnocultural system, with the white Protestant traditions still favoring the GOP, now joined by many white Catholics, who have deserted their old Democratic home, and by a substantial bloc of Latino Protestants, a growing minority. Other religious minorities are still inclined to call the Democratic Party their political home.

36 It should be noted that the CES religious affiliation items are a minefield for unwary analysts. Although the elaborate screens allow detailed assignment of “Protestants” to specific denominations and religious traditions, careful examination of the “something else” and “nothing in particular” categories shows that many respondents choosing these options are in fact members of specific denominations, as indicated by responses to follow-up screens. As we have argued before, an initial “Protestant” prompt fails in eliciting accurate responses from many “Protestants,” who do not recognize that term as applicable to their affiliation. And members of other traditions exhibit something of the same lack of recognition.

Table 3. Religion and the 2020 Presidential Vote (in percent)

	Trump Vote	Republican Party ID	Democratic Party ID	GOP Vote Coalition	Dem Vote Coalition
Major Religious Traditions:					
Evangelical Protestant	80	71	17	37.6	8.3
<i>Traditionalist</i>	87	79	11	28.2	3.7
<i>Centrist</i>	66	58	26	7.9	3.5
<i>Modernist</i>	54	49	37	1.5	1.1
<i>Traditionalist/Modernist Gap</i>	+33	+30	-26		
Mainline Protestant	57	50	36	12.3	8.1
<i>Traditionalist</i>	70	62	28	5.2	2.0
<i>Centrist</i>	55	51	37	5.5	4.0
<i>Modernist</i>	41	38	49	1.6	2.1
<i>Traditionalist/Modernist Gap</i>	+29	+24	-21		
White Catholic	59	50	34	17.8	11.1
<i>Traditionalist</i>	72	64	25	5.7	2.0
<i>Centrist</i>	59	48	34	9.3	5.8
<i>Modernist</i>	43	37	36	2.8	3.3
<i>Traditionalist/Modernist Gap</i>	+29	+27	-11		
Black Protestant	11	14	75	1.7	13.0
Smaller Religious Traditions:					
Latter-day Saints	69	63	20	2.1	0.9
Eastern Orthodox	59	46	23	0.7	0.5
Latino Evangelical Protestants	50	36	41	1.7	1.5
Latino Mainline Protestants	38	25	49	0.2	0.4
All other religions	31	26	42	7.0	6.4
Latino Catholic	30	22	58	2.6	5.5
Jewish	29	27	63	1.6	3.4
Buddhists	22	17	62	0.5	1.5
Hindus	21	31	43	0.2	0.5
Muslims	15	21	55	0.2	0.8
Religiously Unaffiliated	26	20	55	14.4	37.4
"Nothing in Particular"	35	25	43	10.4	17.1
"Agnostic"	19	14	70	2.4	9.0
"Atheist"	11	13	73	1.6	11.3
Total Sample	47	38	43	100	100

Source: Cooperative Election Study 2020.

What about the impact of religious restructuring? To test this possibility, we created a traditionalism score arbitrarily divided into thirds.³⁷ As the top section of Table 3 shows, religious traditionalists – primarily the most observant believers in each tradition – favor the GOP, while their more modernist brethren vote Democratic. Indeed, within the three historic traditions, the gap between traditionalists and modernists is quite wide (and actually growing since 2016). Using the same measurement strategy, we find that the traditionalist/modernist gap has grown from 26 to 33 percent among Evangelicals, from 21 to 29 percent among Mainline Protestants, and from 20 to 29 percent among white Catholics.³⁸ Interestingly, we find similar gaps developing in other traditions, most notably among Jews where the Orthodox gave Trump 70 percent, Conservatives, 35 percent, and Reform adherents, 18 percent. Similar theological divisions appear among the growing numbers of Asian-American Protestants and Catholics (data not shown). Thus, religious restructuring may be influencing many ethnoreligious groups previously immune. Indeed, among Black Protestants, Latino Protestants, Latino Catholics, and those with no particular religious affiliation, Trump's best showing was among religious traditionalists (data not shown).

Columns 2 and 3 of Table 3 report the partisanship of religious groups (partisan leaners are included with those claiming a party identity and pure independents omitted). These data largely replicate patterns seen in the presidential vote, suggesting considerable stability. We can see the overwhelming GOP preference of Evangelicals, especially among traditionalists and centrists, and a more modest Republican edge among Mainliners and white Catholics, once again strongest among traditionalists, then centrists. Not surprisingly, Black Protestants are overwhelmingly Democratic in party identification as well as voting and for the smaller ethnoreligious groups, party identification tracks very closely with the presidential vote, as it does among the groups of the religiously unaffiliated.

The last two columns in the table reveal the proportion of the Republican and Democratic presidential vote accounted for by each religious group. Each ethnoreligious tradition makes a distinct contribution to party coalitions. Evangelicals provided fully *three-eighths* of the 2020 Republican presidential vote, with one-quarter supplied by traditionalists alone. White Catholics supplied another fifth of the Trump tally, with Mainliners (the old Republican Party at prayer) reduced to one-eighth of the Trump total. These three major traditions in total made a much smaller contribution to the Democrats: only 27.5 percent of the Biden vote. Indeed, Black Protestants were a larger component of the Biden coa-

37 The religiosity measures (frequency of service attendance, frequency of prayer and importance of religion) tap one aspect of restructuring, as the observant tend toward the traditionalist end, but religious belief measures are much more central to the restructuring theory. Here the 2020 CES has only a "born-again or evangelical Christian" item, a somewhat inadequate proxy for theological traditionalism, and then only for Christian and, especially, Protestant respondents. Nevertheless, the four variable measure reveals strong partisan differences, which might appear even larger with more and better belief measures..

38 For the 2016 data see: Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, "Survey Research: Religion and Electoral Behavior in the United States, 1936-2008", in: *Political Science Research in Practice*. . .

lition (13 percent) vote than the old religious core of the New Deal coalition, European-origin Catholics (11.1 percent). Looking at it from the restructuring perspective, traditionalists across the electorate provided 49 percent of 2020 Republican vote, with only 18 percent coming from modernists.

Ethnoreligious patterns still characterize many smaller religious groups, with their strong attachment to the Democrats. Indeed, most ethnoreligious minorities identify quite strongly with the Democrats; even Latino Evangelicals, who actually gave a slim majority to Donald Trump, more often identify as Democrats than as Republicans. But aside from Latino Catholics (5.5 percent) and Jews (3.4 percent), most of these groups make only small contributions to the Democratic vote, although significant when aggregated. Another larger component of the Democratic coalition are the religiously unaffiliated, who also identify with the Democrats, especially if they are agnostics or atheists. Indeed, the religiously unaffiliated provided fully three-eighths of Biden's votes – the statistical counterpart to the Evangelical contribution to the GOP totals. Among the unaffiliated, agnostics and atheists are most strongly tied to the Democrats. Indeed, their Democratic identification has grown over the past three two presidential elections, albeit lagging somewhat behind their Democratic voting. Thus, the Democratic Party today is largely a party of seculars, ethnoreligious minorities (most notably Black Protestants, Latino Catholics, and Jews), along with small contingents of religious centrists and modernists from the historic white religious traditions.

All in all, the 2020 results show that our previous characterization of religious voting still obtains: the historic ethnoreligious voting patterns have been modified by religious restructuring, especially in the “old” white ethnoreligious traditions, but without a full-blown “culture war,” as posited by Hunter.³⁹ There are large numbers of centrists in each major tradition and ethnoreligious voting continues on the part of Black Protestants, Latino Catholics, Jews, and most other religious minorities, although with hints of emerging restructuring. Thus, we find a *modified culture wars* paradigm superimposed on the remnants of the old ethnoreligious pattern.

Religious Voting in the Context of Other Variables: A Test of Alternative Hypotheses

But do these religious patterns reflect anything more than the idiosyncratic operation of other, more fundamental factors? Although journalists and a few scholars have been fascinated by the strong support that Evangelicals provided for the Trump candidacy and, more recently, for the Trump administration, most interpretations of 2020 stress factors other than religious ones. One group of the-

39 John M. McTague and Geoffrey C. Layman, “Religion, Parties, and Voting Behavior: A Political Explanation of Religious Influence” in: *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 330-370.

ories stress *demographic factors* as critical, citing several often interlocking traits of Trump voters. For many, Trump's appeal was rooted in economics, especially in the stagnation of incomes among traditional working class constituencies, concentrated in the Rust Belts of Midwestern states that provided the critical (and surprising) Electoral College margins for his 2016 victory. Others have stressed his evident appeal to male voters on both personality and policy grounds, especially his promise to bolster American military strength, which also attracted members of the armed services and veterans. (Of course, the other side of this gender gap was the strong propensity of female voters to favor Biden.) Still others stressed new educational divisions, with high school graduates favoring Trump and more highly educated voters, the Democratic candidate.

Many other interpretations stressed Trump's appeal on the issues, variously called "white nationalism," "social traditionalism," or "white identity" politics. These all comprised various mixtures of anti-immigration attitudes, racism, concerns about crime, pro-life views, or anti-gay rights perspectives. Such accounts often invoked a version of "religious identity" politics, where social traditionalists clung to a vision of "White Christian America" that was disappearing from their landscape.⁴⁰ More than a few other observers saw public reaction against the social welfare liberalism of the Obama years, as exemplified by the Affordable Care Act, as an important influence, while others saw Trump's isolationist militarism as appealing to his voters. Finally, some scholars downplayed the unique aspects of the Trump candidacy and stressed traditional *party identification* as the determinative influence on the outcome: in this perspective, Trump votes primarily reflected GOP partisanship.

The 2020 CES not only allows us to examine the political choices of many religious groups, but to put those patterns in the context of these other influences. In Table 4, we report the results of a series of binary logistic regressions incorporating variables representing the interpretations prevalent in the press and academic work. Although not all possible approaches are included (for example, we have no psychological variables to use), the available measures permit us to examine the empirical plausibility of the approaches outlined above.

We begin analysis with religious "identity" factors: ethnoreligious tradition and religious traditionalism. The results confirm the ethnoreligious patterns in Table 3, as modified by the inclusion of the "restructuring" traditionalism score. Traditional religiosity is a solid predictor of the presidential vote, but does not eliminate distinctive contributions from the ethnoreligious traditions, such as the strong support for Trump by Evangelicals, Latter-day Saints and the somewhat weaker backing by White Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Mainline Protestants. The religiously unaffiliated and Latino Protestants were clearly on the fence, with the first barely Republican and the second not significantly different than the omitted reference group of very small religious and unclassifiable respondents.

40 Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 2016.

Table 4. Religious and Other Variables Predicting Trump Vote (binary logistic regression coefficients)

Ethnoreligious Tradition	Model 1 Religion	Model 2 + Demography	Model 3 + Issue Ideology	Model 4 + Party ID
White Evangelicals	1.306***	1.082***	.638***	-.115
Latter-day Saints	.825***	.640***	-.090	-1.164***
White Catholics	.698***	.562***	.322**	-.030
Eastern Orthodox	.581***	.474**	.176	-.457
White Mainline	.540***	.344***	.503***	-.124
Nothing in Particular	.159**	.070	-.239*	-.431***
Latino Evangelical	-.108	.024	.199	.083
Jewish	-.319***	-.131	.104	.157
Agnostic	-.401***	-.335***	-.402*	-.476*
Latino Mainline	-.481***	-.591**	.101	-.105
Latino Catholic	-.545***	-.645***	-.966***	-.727***
World Religions	-.953***	-.845***	-.936***	-.908***
Atheist	-.967***	-.870***	-.263	-.420*
Black Protestant	-2.311***	-2.350***	-1.860***	-1.320***
Traditional Religiosity	.596***	.613***	-.092**	-.077
Demographic Traits				
Male		.563***	-.360***	-.346***
Veteran Family		.346***	.094	.089
Married		.295***	.030	-.089
Family income		.040***	.048***	-.002
Age		-.003***	-.013***	-.006**
Education level		-.188***	-.052**	-.058**
Bad economic life		-.230***	-.202***	-.159***
Experience of Covid19		-.254***	.032	-.039
Size of Place		-.256***	-.186***	-.196***
Union Family		-.342***	-.501***	-.251**
Covid19 Deaths		-.494***	-.327***	-.362***
Sexual Minority		-.937***	-.454***	-.158
Issue Conservatism			4.012***	3.242***
Republican Identification				.843***
Constant	-.569***	-1.403***	-.169	-3.005***
Nagelkerke R squared=	.331	.420	.861	.907
Correctly classified	71.8	75.2	92.9	95.6

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The explicitly non-religious (atheists and agnostics) and ethnoreligious minorities were solidly in the Democratic camp, with Hindus, Buddhists and Mus-

lims (combined here as “World Religions”), atheists and Black Protestants on the far end of the Democratic spectrum. Model 1’s religious variables alone explain a third of the variation and allow us to predict correctly 71.8 percent of voters’ choices.

Economic and social class interpretations have always been an important feature of scholarly interpretation of American elections. The classic Progressive theory of American politics saw social class differences at the center of the party system, a framework adopted and elaborated by many contemporary political scientists. In a related vein, election outcomes are often shaped by the current economic situation, a variable included in many models designed to predict election outcomes. And, of course, a rich vein of journalistic interpretation of the 2016 and 2020 elections focused on Trump’s ability to attract white working class voters hurt by the forces of deindustrialization and globalization. In addition, the covid19 pandemic not only created economic turmoil in the electorate but added other concerns to the voter’s calculus.

Model 2 offers some support for both sociodemographic and economic theories of the election results. The much-discussed gender gap persisted, with men significantly more likely than women to support Trump, as were married citizens. Veterans and their families also provided backing, as did voters residing in rural areas, and, to a modest extent, those with higher incomes. Looking at it the other way, Biden was advantaged by support from union members and their families, voters with higher levels of education, and sexual minorities. But economic assessments also mattered: a cumulative measure of bad economic fortune during the past year shows that those suffering from economic stress were more likely to vote for Biden—as were those who had substantial personal experience with the covid19 virus, especially if they had deaths in the family, or among friends or co-workers. Thus, we see the expected impact of both some historic sociodemographic patterns in the data—and the impact of the 2020 health and economic crises.

For our purpose, the most important consideration here is the effect of adding these factors to the religious variables in Model 1. A review of the coefficients for the ethnoreligious traditions and religious traditionalism shows that there are very few substantial changes in those coefficients as a result of adding the demographic and economic variables: the pattern remains virtually unchanged, with some coefficients decreasing a little under the controls—but some actually increasing, as that for religious traditionalism. This suggests that the effect of the demographic variables is largely independent of the religious variables. And, if entered in a separate analysis, the demographic variables are a good bit less predictive of the presidential vote, classifying 67 percent of the cases correctly, with an *R squared* of only .202, much less than that of the religious variables alone. The combination of religious and demographic factors in Model 2 does add over 3 percent to the correct predictions of Model 1, and raises the pseudo *R squared* to .420.

Model 3 focuses on a traditional concern of the “Michigan model” of voting behavior: political issues. The 2020 CES has a cornucopia of questions tapping many of the issues purportedly at the center of the campaign and critical to Trump’s appeal. Although it is possible to construct a wide variety of issue scales, as Alan Abramowitz (2018) has recently noted, most contemporary political issue items fall on a single powerful ideological dimension. We created an *issue conservatism* score from a secondary principal components analysis of seven principal components scores, comprising thirty-five individual items.⁴¹ Not surprisingly, this measure has a powerful impact on the 2020 presidential vote, but even when added to the analysis does not eliminate most of the religious or demographic variables from the equation: Evangelicals, white Catholics, and white Mainline Protestants remain more Republican than their issue attitudes would suggest, while most religious minorities (especially Black Protestants), atheists and agnostics are still more Democratic than their ideological proclivities (and demography) would predict. Not surprisingly, Model 3 accounts for well over 90 percent of the variance and predicts 93 percent of votes correctly – an impressive performance.

What is the role of partisanship? The addition of party identification in Model 4 produces some important insights. The distinctiveness of the “Republican” religious traditions is eliminated, suggesting that part of their voting propensities reflect long-term attachment to the party, independent of the influence of issues and attitudes. On the other side the story is different: even when their Democratic partisanship is in the equation, Latino Catholics, members of world religions, agnostics, atheists and Black Protestants were more likely to vote for Biden (or against Trump) than their demography, issue positions, or party identification would predict. (Note also that many of the demographic indicators remain significant as well.) All in all, including partisanship in the Model 4 equation produces almost perfect prediction of the vote. On the whole, moreover, these results confirm Abramowitz’s (2018) argument that the convergence of a wide variety of ethnoreligious, sociodemographic and attitudinal factors has produced a starkly polarized contemporary party division.

Conclusions

This paper has documented the changes in presidential voting of religious communities between 1936 and 2020. Evangelical Protestants began the period as Democrats and ended up as a critical contributor to the Republican coalition. In the 1930s, Mainline Protestants were the major players in electoral politics and the bulwark of Republican support, but their declining numbers and movement

41 The individual scores summarized items on environmental policy (6), immigration (5), abortion (5), foreign policy (8), the Affordable Care Act (4), trade policy (4) and gun control (3). The secondary PCA produced a single component, explaining 63 percent of the variance in the items, with loadings ranging from .901 to .591. $\theta = .91$.

toward the Democrats left them as a smaller “swing” constituency in 2020, although still leaning Republican. White Catholics were strong Democrats in voting and partisanship in the 1930s and 1940s; now, they are a “swing” group as well. Black Protestants have also changed, but primarily between the 1940s and early 1960s, becoming staunch Democrats. The unaffiliated have tended to be Democratic in party identification since the 1930s, but their voting since 1990 has become increasingly Democratic, while their rapidly growing numbers make them important to electoral outcomes, a contribution limited only by sometimes modest turnout rates.

Quite clearly, a religious partisan realignment has taken place. The analysis shows some continuation of the ethnoreligious basis of voting, as different religious groups tend to vote in distinct fashions. This is particularly the case for small groups like Jews and Mormons, as well as Latino Catholics, and even larger groups like Black Protestants. Yet the within-tradition differences found among Evangelical and Mainline Protestants and white Roman Catholics (and perhaps spreading to other groups) suggest that a modified restructuring or culture wars perspective provides a fuller description of contemporary electoral politics, as traditionalist Protestants of all sorts and traditionalist Catholics join hands in the GOP, and their modernist denominational counterparts gravitate toward the Democrats. This new paradigm puts religious “centrists” in a critical, swing position in election campaigns. Evangelical centrists have tended to support Republicans, but Mainline and Catholic centrists have generally split their votes between the parties. Given the pattern of close presidential contests in recent years, centrists may be critical to election results in the future.

In conclusion, the voting behavior of religious groups has changed dramatically over the past eighty years. In part, these changes reflect transformations that have occurred within American religion. And, the linkages between religion and politics have, for the largest religious traditions, changed from conflicts mostly *between* religious communities to include conflicts *within* them. At the same time, smaller ethnoreligious groups still tend to vote in distinctive ways, consistent with the ethnoreligious description of nineteenth-century electoral alignments. Religion still matters for electoral politics, but it matters in some very different ways. And our analysis shows that ethnoreligious identities and religious divisions are not simply a reflection of other demographic, social or political factors. Even under rigorous controls, many ethnoreligious groups demonstrate a strong bias toward one political party and opposing theological factions (if they can be identified) also have strong partisan tendencies. Although some scholars have expressed skepticism about the impact of religious beliefs on political phenomenon⁴², our analysis here suggests that when measured effec-

42 Robert Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 2010; Lydia Bean, *The Politics of Evangelical Identity: Local Churches and Partisan Divides in the United States and Canada*, Princeton University Press, 2014.

tively, they have a significant influence on political choices. Students of electoral politics would be well-advised to take religious beliefs seriously as influences on American political choices.

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ВЕРСКО ГЛАСАЊЕ У ПРЕДСЕДНИЧКИМ ИЗБОРИМА 2020. ГОДИНЕ: ТЕСТИРАЊЕ АЛТЕРНАТИВНИХ ТЕОРИЈА

Сажетак

У оквиру изборних политика документовано је да верске групе имају одређене партијске преференције. Опрезни аналитичари често проналазе да су верске варијабле често бољи предиктори партијских преференција него класичне социо-економске поделе. Ипак, не постоји много покушаја да се ова партијска поравнања верских група ставе у теоријску и историјску перспективу. У овом чланку, ми ажурирамо наше раније радове о историјској еволуцији верске идентификације и показујемо релевантност етнокултурне (или етнорелигијске) теорије, коју користе политички историчари, али и теорије реструктуризације, која је важна социолошка перспектива. Обе теорије нам помажу да разумемо америчке председничке изборе од 1930-тих, што и показујемо подацима из различитих истраживања. Након коришћења података из 2020. године у циљу истраживања савремених изборних преференција етнорелигијских група, тестирамо утицај који религијске варијабле имају као контрола за друге демографске податке, ставове и утицај партијских подела, и налазимо да религијски идентитети и оријентације често имају независан утицај чак и након строгих контрола других фактора који утичу на гласање за председника.

Кључне речи: етнорелигијска теорија, теорија реструктуризације, традиционалисти, модернисти