The New Evangelicals: How Donald Trump Revealed the Changing Christian Conservative base

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Abstract

I analyze how Donald Trump, who many see as an uncertain standard bearer of Christian values, given his colored personal life and various tortured exchanges on the Bible, became the champion of Christian conservatives. Using Pew data from a January 27th, 2016 survey, I analyze how the Republican presidential candidate went from the lowest rankings of religious association just 10 months prior, to winning the highest white evangelical support since George W. Bush in 2004. More research will be conducted on how the specific group known as evangelical voters has changed, as well as what other variables such as economic, gender equality, and international policy played within the demographic that assisted in voting for president elect Donald Trump. This project will contribute to understanding the results of the 2016 presidential campaign, and specifically the behavior of the white evangelical vote. Although Donald Trump did not show significance in numerous religious variables, control variables such as Republican identity were a strong indicator for supporting Trump as a potentially great president upon his election. By analyzing changing and complex evangelical voting trends, along with the changing influence of religion on American society, I believe Donald Trump's election win revealed a major section of the U.S. electorate's true message: to be represented regardless of a candidate's personal background in an increasingly secular American society.

Introduction

On January 27th, 2016, the Pew Research Center released a survey of 2,009 Americans concerning religion and politics. This survey was conducted at a point in the primary elections where the Democratic Party had narrowed down candidate selections to Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton. For the Republicans however the potential list of presidential candidates still had a full bill, even after campaign suspensions by prominent candidates such as Scott Walker and Lindsey Graham in late 2015. One question from the Pew Research survey asked participants "How religious do you think (Candidate) is?", to which Ben Carson held the highest response percentages in "Very" and "Somewhat" with 35%, and 33% respectively. Hillary Clinton, the eventual Democratic Presidential candidate drew a 10% response to very religious and 38% somewhat religious to provide some perspective. Fast forward to November 9th, 2016, and the

President elect had been chosen, Donald J. Trump. Donald Trump was listed in the same Pew study 10 months prior, and surveyed at the lowest ranking among any candidates in religious view, with roughly 59% deciding that Trump was "Not too" or "Not at all" religious. Within 48 hours of the election's conclusion, a surprising statistic was beginning to circulate amongst publications; Donald Trump's exit polling data revealed that he had drawn 81% of white evangelical vote in the 2016 Presidential election. While it may not be surprising that the Republican candidate pulled a majority of white evangelical vote in a presidential election, how did Donald Trump go from the lowest religious sentiment numbers in a political survey, to winning the Presidential Election 10 months later with over 20% more white evangelical support than Mitt Romney received in 2012? My research will be conducted in 3 sections; Sentiment over the last 10 years is that American religion is in decline, and my goal will be to understand how big the decline is and more so how it can translate to voter participation. With the assumption that religion in America is in decline, what role has religion played in the recent 2008 through 2016 presidential elections? Lastly, what are some of the possible explanations for a presidential candidate polling exceptionally low religiosity scores, and then proceeding to win the presidential election with almost record percentage of white evangelical vote? (Pew, Faith and the 2016 Campaign, 2016)

Literature Review

The Decline of Religion in America

One year prior to the 2016 Presidential Election the Pew Research Center released a study titled *U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious*. This study analyzed the responses of 35,000

adult individuals within the United States with survey questions covering topics of religious practices and social/political attitudes. With a majority of comparison taking place between the 2014 study and a previous 2007 study also conducted by Pew, the data released revealed some significant trends in American religious beliefs and practices that became the subject of numerous news report citations. One significant finding in the report addressed the question "How important is religion in your life?" What the report found is that adults who are religiously affiliated, or identify with religious observance has been stable. Christian respondents to "Very" religious in the 2007 survey reached 64%, that number increased by 2% in 2014. The same trend was prevalent among the non-Christian faiths as well, with a 39% decline to 37% over a seven year span. (Pew, U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious, 2015) When factoring in the United States population as a whole, there is moderate decline in specific measures of religious observance, "The share of Americans saying religion is "very" or "somewhat" important in their lives has declined, while the share saying religion is "not too" or "not at all" important to them has grown by 5 percentage points". (Ibid, pp.17) Another interesting point brought forward in this study identified the Religious "Nones", or those who do not identify as being affiliated with any religious identity. The major trend for this group is that the religiously unaffiliated population is growing, from 16.1% of adults in 2007, to 22.8% in 2014. (Ibid, pp.19-20)

Two additional findings in the Pew survey highlight some important factors that might have played into the 2016 Presidential election. When American Older and Younger Millennials were surveyed on the importance of religion, it revealed that Older Millennials found religion as unimportant, with a shift from 23% to 39% in the "Not at all" category. (Ibid, pp.24) In searching for reasons behind the spike in evangelical vote for Trump in 2016, low youth turnout was considered a significant factor in his victory, with only 55% of youth voters 18-29 going to

Clinton, a 5% decrease from Obama's numbers in 2012. (Richmond, Zinshteyn, & Gross, 2016)

While voting numbers among youth was similar in totals between 2012 and 2016, other variables should be considered such as third party candidate significance in 2016 and the previously mentioned religious shift among youth voters. Overall, the survey data found that Christians are in decline and the religiously unaffiliated are growing within both major political parties. Two comparisons of interest in this finding revealed that among Christians polled, 74% leaned or identified as Democratic in 2007, this number dropped to 63% in 2014; similarly, amongst the unaffiliated 19% identified as Democratic, a number that increased to 28% in 2014. (Pew, U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious, 2015, pp. 33-34) What the Pew Research found in summation was that the American public is becoming less religious, however, within the religious landscape of the United States there is stability within the religiously affiliated ranks.

In a study from 2002, Clem Brooks identified the levels of public concern for family decline, and what significance that had in political influence. Brooks looks to answer the following questions; "Are there trends in the level of public concern with family decline?" Second, "What are the causal sources of concern with family decline?" Lastly, "Have changing levels of concern over family decline led to the emergence of new political cleavage?" (Brooks, 2002, p. 192) In identifying the variables causing concern in family decline Brooks identifies Divorce rates, Single-Parent Families, Children's Socialization, and Child Poverty. (Ibid, pp. 193) The focus for this research lied within religious influence, where he begins by citing how the United States is still characterized by very high levels of religious commitment compared to other Western Democracies, a sentiment that continues from the previous Pew research study. The three major influences Brooks lists in relation to religion are "Denominational membership",

"Exposure to denomination-specific influences" and "Variable rates of church attendance" all of which can be associated with concern over family decline. (Ibid, pp. 194-195)

To answer the three proposed theories earlier in the research, Brooks analyzed NES surveys from 1972 – 1996, which deals with data on voting behavior and public attitudes. Using variables such as family decline as "Most important Problem", and politically affiliated topics of gender attitude and welfare reform the following results were found. Specific to public concern for family decline, the research shows that concern had grown significantly from 1980, with a significant spike from 4% in 1990 to 10% in 1996. [One key result found that religious variables such as increased church attendance lead to higher percentages of concern for society within the groups that attended more frequently.] The central finding was not age, class, or gender, but more so with church attendance and religious interaction. (Ibid, pp. 198-200) With regards to political influence or change from the family concern variable, the research found that growing levels of concern for family decline from 1980 to 1996 in connection with political involvement can be explained with religious communication, with evangelical Protestants having a significant variation compared to other groups in growing concern. (Ibid, pp. 205-210) This research is significant in showing that although feelings of family decline relate to religious association it also exists within the general population. What is significant with this research is that with clear religious decline in the modern era, a question remains of what is influencing political participation more in current elections: religious affiliation, or variables such as sexual preference and race?

The future of evangelical voters, specifically white evangelicals was analyzed by Robert P. Jones (2016). One area of focus for Jones was the shrinking white Christian voter pool in the United States, specifically with statistics such as the 1992 electorate of Bill Clinton had a 73%

white Christian makeup, whereas in 2012 white Christians had dropped as a portion of the electorate to 57%. (Jones, pp. 105) Summarily Jones predicts that the white Christian strategy of the Republican Party will show diminishing returns in future election cycles, where specifically if trends continue the year 2024 will be the year of the first American election in which white Christians do not constitute the majority of voters. (Ibid, pp. 105) Jones also addressed the reaction of white Christian voters coming to terms with statistics highlighting their decline as a majority of the population, specifically with anger, "As denial subsides, it is not uncommon for responses such as anger, rage, and resentment to appear in its wake", "In the religious realm, anger sometimes materializes when what had been taken as divine promises of future well-being seem to be broken." (Ibid, pp. 198-199) This negative reaction is important when we attempt to analyze why polling for Trump as a religious candidate did not match with the end results in November, specifically a concept that white evangelical voters have more interest in voting for push back to secularization rather than a candidate's track record or moral identity.

Religion and U.S. Elections since 2006

With evidence showing trends of religious decline in the United States, how has religion played a role in presidential elections since 2006? Eric L. McDaniel and Christopher G. Ellison (2008) identify the trends associated with religion that affect presidential elections. Their research looked to address how the GOP's failed success in recruiting black and Latino evangelicals could be explained by examining religious views. The research begins by identifying that public perception identifies "the Republican Party is the party for Anglos, while the Democratic Party is the party for racial minorities." (McDaniel & Ellison, 2008, p. 181) Highlighting the racial trends in voting over time, it is pointed out that there have been efforts in both political parties to recruit or shift the racial party identification, with one example being the

2000 presidential election where the GOP attempted to paint itself as an inclusive party by "showcasing black members of the party, such as Colin Powell." (Ibid, pp.181-182) The research goes on to highlight the religious ties to race, where "In sum, scriptural interpretation has shaped, and has been shaped by, the collective lived experience of social groups." (Ibid, pp. 183) By identifying scriptural interpretation as a racial identifier in religious affiliation, the argument is made that groups such as blacks and Latinos will be more focused on socio-economic groups rather than literal scripture translation amongst Anglos. The study conducted by McDaniel and Ellison used a social survey of 13,658 respondents from HAS (Houston Area Survey) that examined biblical literalism amongst Anglos, Latinos, and blacks concerning partisanship. The key dependent variable was partisanship, and the biblical literalism variable was used as the measure to identify how literalism shaped partisan identification over time. Summarily the research found that "In sharp contrast to the strong, unequivocal movement of Anglo Literalists into the Republican Party, biblical literalism seems to hold markedly different political implications for racial/ethnic minorities", and highlighted the difference between Anglo Americans versus blacks or Latinos in a number of partisan identifying variables such as stance on money spent on poor or rights for homosexuals. (Ibid, pp. 188-190)

David E. Campbell (2006) analyzed evangelical voters in responding to "Religious Threat", the concept that evangelicals see themselves in tension or conflict with secular society. Campbell used social identities along with racial compositions of a given society in measuring the evangelical voter response to the given variables. Using data from the National Election Studies for individual voting data, specifically county-level data, Campbell then broke down the denominations within those counties. (Campbell, Religious "Threat" in Contemporary Presidential Elections, 2006, pp. 108-109) The group conflict effect was tested in an interactive

sense, with evangelicals and secularist variables, where evidence found that for a "Religious Threat Effect" 1996 was more convincing than the year 2000, where evangelicals were more likely to support Bush where secularists controlled a greater share of that given population, emphasizing that evangelicals are more likely to identify stronger with a Republican candidate when they felt threatened. Interesting as well was the fact that secularists were not affected by the presence of evangelicals in their communities in either election. (Ibid, pp. 109) The key finding in this research acknowledges that evangelicals as a group, "In contemporary elections the religious conflict in American politics has shifted again, as now we see evangelicals reacting to what they perceive as a hostile secular culture. (Ibid, pp. 112-113) This is important in relation to our analysis of Donald Trump because I feel recent legislation and pending governmental control for the Republican Party like the vacant SCOTUS seat could have tied into garnering more support from evangelical voters based off a threat to their ideals rather than true support for Donald Trump as a presidential Candidate based off his personal attributes. Put simply a vote against the Democratic occupancy of the White House rather than true support for Donald Trump.

Leigh A. Bradberry (2016) analyzed Republican Party candidate selections and religion in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Bradberry's research analyzed Pre-Super Tuesday surveys conducted by Pew to identify which Republican candidates appealed most to religious voters. Bradberry begins by explaining prior work in voter choice with regards to presidential primaries, and how party identification remains the strongest predictor of voter choice, and how variables such as electability or ideology have yet to emerge as the dominant variable in predicting selection. (Bradberry, 2016, p. 3) Bradberry moves on then to two theories in how religion might influence presidential primary voting; First that "the candidate may explicitly

discuss the importance of his religion or faith, and or the candidate can explicitly and effectively label himself as a Christian or born again." Another theory addressed "in addition to the first method, a candidate can explicitly discuss political issues that are intimately connected to certain religious beliefs, which attracts the attention of religious voters for whom those issues are often crucial." (Ibid, pp. 4-5) Bradberry proceeds to analyze the effects of religious attendance in the 2008 and 2012 presidential primaries. The measurement used looked at percentage of respondents who said a candidate was their first choice, and what was that candidate's attendance at religious services.

The results for the 2008 analysis found that McCain, the eventual Republican selection, scored highest in the four out of five levels of attendance. Another significant finding is that McCain's lead decreases substantially from the lowest level of attendance to highest (59% to 38%), and that Huckabee's score spikes significantly from "Once a week" to "More than once a week" from 22% to 47%, scoring higher than McCain. (Ibid, pp. 9-11) In 2012 Santorum pulled the highest levels of support in the survey at 30%, followed by Romney (the eventual Republican candidate) at 29%. The significant spike between Santorum and Romney took place again at the "More than once a week" category, where Santorum spiked from 36% to 48%, versus Romney who declined from 33% to 29%. Summarily, Braderry's research found that in 2008 Mike Huckabee was the preferred candidate of the Republican primary voters, and had the highest church attendance rate. Similarly, in 2012 Rick Santorum was the Iowa Republican primary selection for the same reasons as Huckabee in 2008. Eventually both candidates would take 2nd place within the Republican primary races, but this research is significant in showing that religion variables such as attendance explained candidate preference in 2008 and 2012. (Ibid, pp.22-23) This research will be significant going forward, as it identifies religious variables like

attendance as being a predictor in voter preference for the Republican Party. What is interesting

is how this research can be factored into the 2016 presidential election, where in a church

statement from Marble Collegiate Church they identified Donald Trump as "not an active

member". (Scott, 2015) So how did a Republican presidential candidate pull record setting

numbers of evangelical support with a questionable religious affiliation?

As mentioned previously the 2012 presidential campaign was unique for the Republicans,

as Mitt Romney would become the party candidate going into the election. Mitt Romney's

religious background as a Mormon became a topic of discussion as the campaign went on, and

after his loss to Obama in the 2012 election, theories began to circulate that Romney's religious

identification could have hurt his campaign. Campbell, Green, and Monson (2012) would

attempt to identify why Romney faced such antagonism towards being Mormon in the 2008

election, even though he did not represent the Republican Party during that presidential election,

it would be variable that would travel with him to 2012. The research begins providing the facts

and theories involving religion in politics, such as religious affiliation trending toward

Republican support, and wavering as time goes on with Democrats. The research is broken down

into four parts; first with describing the attitudes of Americans towards Mormons. Second,

drawing on the literature to develop two competing hypotheses on how social contact mitigates

the negative perception of Mormons as an out group. Third, describing our survey experiments,

present analysis of results. Fourth, understanding the role of Romney's religious affiliation in the

2012 presidential election. (Campbell, Green, & Monson, 2012, p. 279) Using data from the

Cooperative Congressional Campaign Analysis Project, a panel study that took place over the

2008 presidential campaign, where the respondents were provided with a brief description of

Romney, and then asked if the information made them more or less likely to vote for him among

four groups of two hundred respondents. (Ibid, pp.285) Some of the key results found that when comparing Christianity versus Mormonism, the latter triggers the most negative response and even including that Romney was a leader at his local church did not significantly change his support. This is significant as the same theory was applied to both Hillary Clinton and Mike Huckabee, with results showing that religious affiliation of Methodist or Baptist did not have nearly the same effect as the Mormon faith. (Ibid, pp.290) These findings suggest that voter's negativity towards Romney was due to his Mormonism, more so than him identifying as "Religious", with every type of respondent responding negatively to the Mormon Frame, especially amongst those who did not personally know someone who identified as Mormon. (Ibid, pp. 290-293) Summarily this research found that "using experimental data testing the claims and counterclaims made in the real time of the 2008 presidential primaries, we find that being identified as a Mormon caused Mitt Romney to lose support among some voters", this was shaped largely by personal experience such as exposure to Mormons or religious affiliation. (Ibid, pp. 295) What's interesting in this research is that Romney's Mormon affiliation, regardless of being "Christian" hurt his chances in the campaign, so how does this explain or relate to a candidate having minimal or vague religious preference in affiliation while identifying as Christian?

Donald Trump's Evangelical Surge

The Pew Research Center conducted an analysis of the presidential election exit polls analyzing the effect of religion on the results in 2008, 2012, and 2016. Focusing on the Republican candidates, Donald Trump pulled 58% of the Protestant/Other Christian voters, a one percentage point increase from Romney in 2012, and 4% increase over that of McCain in 2008. (Pew, How the Faithful Voted, 2016) Amongst white Catholics Trump won 52% of the vote, an

increase from Romney at 48%, and McCain at 45%. Perhaps the most surprising statistic revealed that 81% of White evangelical Christians supported Trump, a 3-percentage point increase over Romney, and 7 percentage point increase over McCain. (Ibid) So what does this mean regarding the trends of religious voting going into the future? How did Donald Trump surpass the two previous Republican candidates in religious vote? So far there has been a series of theories, albeit suggestive, that attempt to explain the 2016 election results.

One of the suggested sentiments circulating through media has touched on the topic of racism, and its role in Trumps election. In an article published by talkingpoverty.com, dealt with the Facing Race conference in Atlanta Georgia, where 2,000 activists and journalists participated in a discussion on racial justice. Suggestions that racism swayed the 2016 presidential election have been widespread among media outlets, with emphasis seemingly being placed upon CNN's Van Jones comment on "white-lash against a changing country". (Tensley, Richardson, & Frederick, 2016) Exit polling statistics are cited in the article as well, such as how 58% of white voters preferred Trump, with special emphasis being placed on 94% of black female voters going Clinton, and 53% of white females going Trump. (Ibid) This article then goes on to say that "Indeed, Trump's upset in the presidential race has cracked wide open just how persistent and pervasive American racism has always been", summarizing what sentiment the article is saying. (Ibid) While this stance can be viewed as extreme, this is not the only article of this nature to be published in attempting to explain Trump's election.

Counter arguments concerning race and sex regarding the white vote and "racism" have circulated also and more specifically just how the electorate changed from 2012 to 2016. In an update by the Washington Post, a graphic was created showing that part of the 2016 electorate that voted for Donald Trump were the same voters who placed President Obama in the White

House twice. (Uhrmacher, 2016) A major statistic revealed that "of the nearly 700 counties that twice sent Obama to the White House, a stunning one-third flipped to support Trump", and in attempting to explain just who these voters were that had voted for Trump four years after voting Obama the article stated that "On average, the counties that voted for Obama twice and then flipped to support Trump were 81% white". (Ibid) While most counties who never supported Obama went to Trump by huge margins, the concept of racism becomes cloudy when statistics reveal that a majority of counties that flipped were white former Obama supporters. While it is credible to mention that Trump did not denounce the support of the Ku Klux Klan during his election, statistics like that presented in this Washington Post article provide a solid counter argument to racism being the determining factor of the 2016 presidential race.

Darren Sherkat (2007) looked at response bias in relation to political polling, and more specifically how religious factors play into a respondent's willingness to participate in polling. Sherkat opens his research by laying the basis of religious affiliation in connection with social interaction, (Brennan and London 2001) but showed stronger association with groups of similar religious views and practices.(Ibid, pp. 85-85) Sherkat also addressed studies concerning race and polling interaction, specifically within Pew data in 1998 that found respondents reluctant to take part in initial telephone polling who identified as conservative and who held unfavorable views of African Americans. Sherkat's methodology took General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1984 – 2004 and used the survey to compare variables including those associated with respondent attitudes towards the interviewer, religious identification, belief in biblical inerrancy (Literalism), religious participation, and political conservatism. (Ibid, p. 88) Sherkat's results included the following; that "prayer has a significant effect on respondent cooperativeness", religious affiliation was related to non-cooperativeness where Catholics were significantly less

cooperative (1.116**), and that those with higher religious affiliation, regardless of racial background, were associated with declining survey responses from 1984 to 2004 (Ibid, pp. 89-93)

In relation to this research, the religious vote in the 2016 presidential race is a topic of broad analysis going into weeks after the election's conclusion. Citing two articles regarding the religious vote booming for Trump, it becomes clear that previous theories on religious vote were countered or almost unpredictable. The Washington Post reported that 81% of white evangelical voters went to Donald Trump; the highest that has been achieved since George W. Bush in 2004 with 78%. (Bailey, 2016) With white evangelicals making up 1/5 of the electorate traditionally, it was clear during the election that evangelicals were themselves split on voting for Trump; with one specific example being prominent evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem supporting Trump, retracting his support after the sexually explicit audio tapes of Trump were leaked, then deciding to endorse him again sometime later. (Ibid) One theory presented in the article looked at how Trump did not necessarily pull evangelical vote for his faith, but more so because of evangelical dislike for Clinton, where 70% of white evangelicals held an unfavorable view of Clinton a month prior to the election (55% of the public provided an unfavorable view as well). (Ibid) Here is a key indicator going forward in analyzing the overwhelming evangelical support for Trump, how much of this electorate voted based on Trump's individual faith, and how much of it dealt with outside variables such as distrust in Clinton or hot topic points like Obamacare? Another point brought up in the article looked at the definition of "evangelical voters", where there is argument that the terminology is now too watered down to mean what it had in previous election cycles, as proposed by Thomas S. Kidd, a Professor of History at Baylor University. Kidd states that "I realize that some real evangelicals do actually support Trump. But I suspect that many of

these supposed evangelicals in the polls have no clear understanding of the formal definition of "evangelical", which calls for true conversion and a devout life." (Kidd, 2016)

One other article covering the topic similarly was published by USA Today, with the title *White evangelicals just elected a thrice-married blasphemer: what that means for the religious right*. In summation, the article is looking to address how a presidential candidate like Trump, who has been married 3 times, said sexually explicit and rude statements, and attacked former prominent conservative leaders carried four out of five white evangelical votes. (McQuilkin, 2016) The article suggests a few theories for the results of the election; one of them being that Trump was the "only candidate in this race, one major candidate, who actually asked for the votes of white evangelicals, and that was Donald Trump". (Ibid) Another suggested theory dealt with the proposed hypothesis earlier, that Trump's evangelical white voters did not cast a ballot for him per se, but conservative agenda topics like the Supreme Court. Anglican priest Thomas McKenzie is interviewed regarding this topic, and states "I had several conversations with people who said, "I'm not voting for Donald Trump; I'm voting f or a conservative Supreme Court." (Ibid) Another major point brought up in this article looked at an event where Clinton invited a team of pastors and theologians to her Washington home when running for election in 2008, included in that group was Dan Betzer, a pastor of First Assembly of God. Betzer made the following statement, "This is the strange thing, she knows the Bible as well as anyone but has such an antipodal position on the social issues as to what scripture teaches and what we believe, that was a concern for us", and "In the end Trump made it clear he would stand by biblical principles and Clinton did not." (Ibid)

Another message that remains clear as exit polling continues to be analyzed is that evangelical voters continue to see internal conflict as a section of the American electorate. In a

Washington Post article Djupe et al. found that "In the 2016 election, "leavers" were distributed across the religious population, and included 10 percent of evangelicals, 18 percent of mainline Protestants, and 11 percent of Catholics. This represents an enormous amount of churn in the religious economy." (Djupe, Et al. 2017) Leavers represent those who left their congregations over disagreements or separation that took place within that church with the lead up or conclusion of the presidential election. Another conclusion reached by the study found that those who felt disagreement among the congregation and clergy over Trump were the most likely to leave that house of worship. (Ibid, 2016) This article highlights how important the internal conflicts and division taking place within Christianity, and specifically evangelical voters. While it would appear that evangelicals united in supporting Trump, surveys and articles like this highlight the internal separation that exists regardless of the result in the 2016 election. Djupe Et al. cite the lack of evangelical clergy addressing Trump for fear of separating and losing their congregations, and this connects with the broader message of how Christianity is struggling to maintain membership amongst congregations, as well as how to address politics when attempting to recruit more to specific Christian sects.

Methods and Analysis

The dataset for my analysis is a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center of 2,000 adults contacted by Landline (500) and cell phone (1500) from January 7th through the 14th of 2016, where all participants were within the United States. By January 14th five Republican primary debates had taken place dating back to August of 2015, and national polling had Donald Trump at a 17(+/-) point lead among Republican candidates. (Fivethirtyeight.com, 2016) My decision to use the Pew Research Center January 2016 Religion and Politics Survey dataset focused around two points: First that the survey covered a series of religiously affiliated questions that previous peer reviewed studies have used in election research. The second point being that this data from the Republican primaries reflected the drastic statistical change that took place over an 11-month period. Specifically, with the Pew survey data finding that "Compared with Carson, Cruz, and Rubio, Fewer Republicans see Trump as religious person." (Pew, 2016) The dependent variable chosen for my analysis revolves around Q.22D "Regardless of who you currently support, I'd like to know what kind of president you think each of the following would be if elected in November 2016?", with the response categories ranging from 1: Great President to 5: Terrible President. With my emphasis for this thesis being on the evangelical support for Trump in the eventual presidential election, I believe this dependent variable reflects feelings toward Trump in a religious aspect, but can be used when factoring in legislation variables such as feeling thermometers on immigration and abortion rights as well.

My hypotheses for Table 1 focused on how in a comparison of individuals, Donald Trump would garner more support from respondents (1) who attended church frequently, (2) wanted an evangelical president, (3) identified as Republican, and (4) were older in age.

(Table 1)

Regression Analysis: Comparing Linear Regression on primary candidates Donald Trump, Ben Carson, and Ted Cruz using Candidate Greatness

Table 1

| Independent Variables	Trump (Q22D)	Carson (Q22A)	Cruz (Q22I)
Respondent Wants Christian President	.022 (.733)	.182 (.001)**	.346 (.000)***
Believe that religion is losing influence in society?	-.030 (.727)	.019 (.801)	.100 (.170)
Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?	.081 (.004)**	-.054 (.029)*	-.013 (.595)
What is your age?	.006 (.003)**	.001 (.730)	.000 (.937)
What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?	-.055 (.024)*	-.064 (.002)**	-.011 (.608)
Last year, in 2015, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?	-.001 (.904)	-.015 (.345)	-.027 (.070)
Male	.228 (.003)**	-.069 (.302)	-.044 (.497)
Born again identity	.186 (.026)*	.225 (.002)**	-.037 (.598)
Republican identity	1.567 (.000)***	.817 (.000)***	.982 (.000)***
Constant	1.235	2.581	1.968
F	56.668	27.783	37.330
Adjusted R^2	.331	.208	.260

Note: Significance at $< .05$ *, Sig $<.01$ **, Sig $<.001$ ***

According to the results of linear regression, my hypothesis was correct for three of the four proposed variables in the hypothesis. In terms of individuals wanting an evangelical president, Trump did not have any significance in this category (.733) unlike Ben Carson and Ted Cruz. Trump did however show significance in respondents viewing him as a great president for the

following categories: Individuals who attended church more than once a week, Individuals who were older in age, and those with a lower education on a scale from "Less than high school" to "Postgraduate or professional degree". Possibly the strongest variables with significance were those Individuals who were male, Individuals who identified as "Born Again" evangelicals, and the highest significance was associated with identifying as a Republican. In a comparison with fellow primary candidates Ted Cruz and Ben Carson, Trump garnered less support in candidate greatness from Individuals who attended church more than once a week. However, individuals who were older in age, identified as Republican, and identified as male showed considerably more support for Trump in comparison to Cruz and Carson. Both Cruz and Carson showed significance from individuals wanting an evangelical president, and Republican. Carson also showed significance in the attendance variable, education variable and born again identification. With three of the four categories in my hypothesis showing significance, the hypothesis is partially correct.

My hypotheses for Table 2 focuses on how in a comparison of individuals, Donald Trump would garner more religious support from individuals in the greatness variable (Q22) with those who identify as very conservative.

(Table 2)
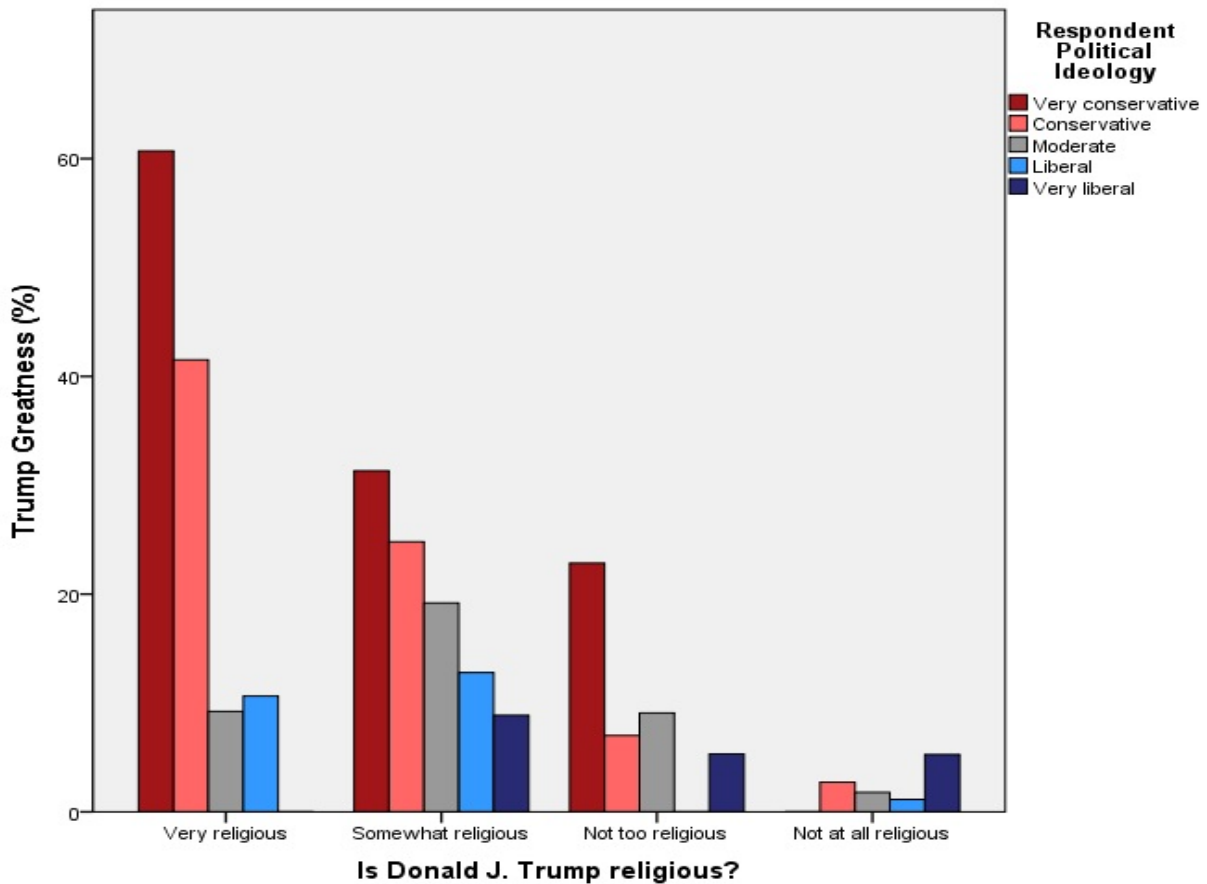
According to the findings, my hypothesis is correct in that those who associated with the very conservative ideology and viewed Trump as a potentially great candidate showed strong association in viewing Trump as religious. With those who identified as very conservative, Trump's religious association had nearly a 20-point separation from those identifying as conservatives. In the somewhat religious response category very conservative respondents again

had the highest religious association but by a smaller margin of 5-points. This hypothesis was confirmed as it shows a significant increase in religious association with an increase in conservative ideology. At this time in the primary race Donald Trump had not yet conducted his "Christianity, it's under siege" (Diamond, 2016) speech at Liberty University, and his religious association was somewhat shrouded in the mass public up until the point of his announcement at Trump tower declaring is candidacy. However, as the primary process moved forward Trump made it apparent that he had religious affiliation, with one example being his speech at a football field in Alabama with 30,000 people in attendance, where he stated, "Now I know how the great Billy Graham felt." (Taylor, 2015) My belief is that the perceived unknown religious affiliation associated with gay-marriage and pro-choice legislation President Obama had carried over into the Republican primaries, where Christian conservatives were searching for a candidate who identified as a religious representative, regardless of his track record with moral decisions or statements.

Developing Trends

Analyzing the findings from the Pew data there is conflicting results in precisely defining what made evangelical voters support Donald Trump in such significant numbers. With somewhat surprisingly stable levels of evangelical support among his previous Republican presidential candidates. Two key surveys I believe reveal significant factors in the results of the 2016 election were released through surveys by the Public Religion Research Institution (PRRI).

(Table 3)

White Evangelicals Grow More Accepting of Politicians' Personal Indiscretions

Percent who say an elected official who commits an immoral act in their personal life can still behave ethically and fulfill their duties in their public and professional life

● 2011   ● 2016
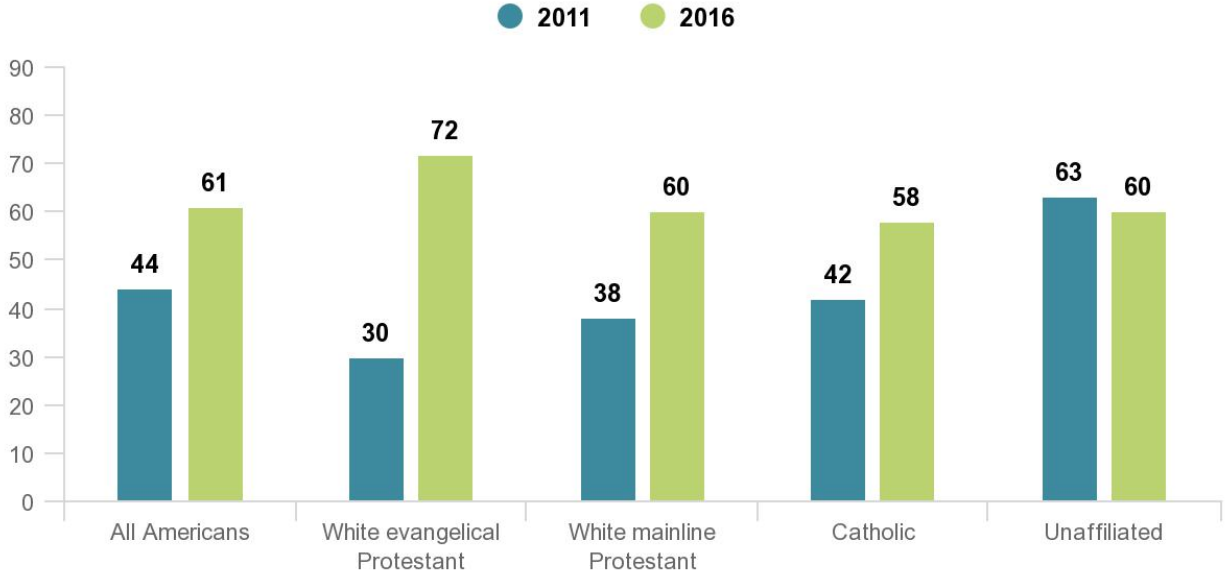
Sources: PRRI/RNS June 2011 Survey; PRRI/Brookings October 2016 Survey.

PRRI

In table 3 a survey question analyzed how individuals, specifically white evangelicals responded to a candidate committing an immoral act, but respondents believed could still behave ethically and fulfill their duties in the public and professional spectrum. As shown in the chart in 2011 only 30% of white evangelicals believed an elected official could commit an immoral act and still fulfill their duties in their professional life. However, in 2016 this number jumped to 72%, an increase of 42% over 5 years. My belief is that this almost forgiveness factor increase has been largely associated with an increasing perceived secular pressure that white evangelical Conservatives were feeling through the 8 years of President Obama's term, and that candidate personal background was ultimately going to take a back seat to the importance of finding a winning candidate to represent them in 2016. (PRRI, 2016)

(Table 4)

Religiously Unaffiliated Americans: Growing but Not Voting

● **Percent of adult population**   ● **Percent of voting population**

Sources: National Exit Polls, 2000-2014; General Social Survey 2000-2012; PRRI Surveys, 2014-2016.
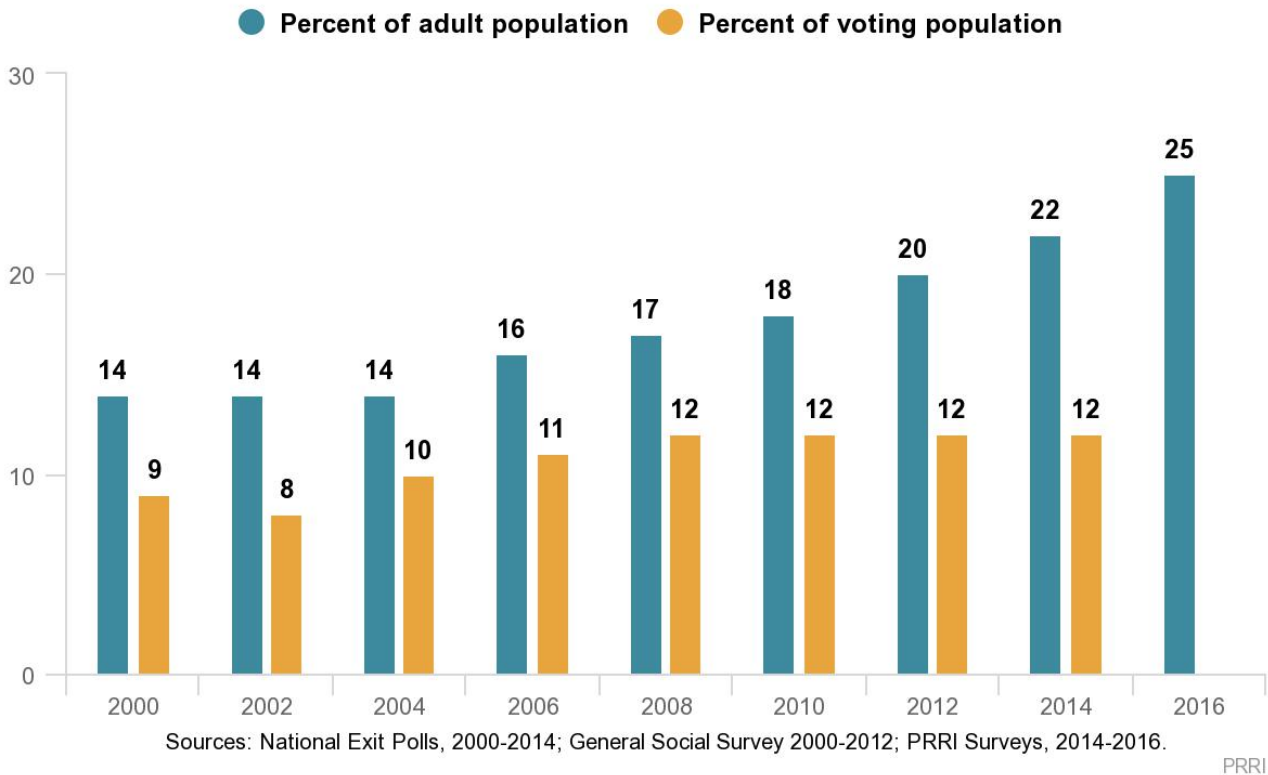
PRRI

Table 4 addresses the changing religious landscape within the United States, and specifically how it is translating to elections. As represented in table 4, the religiously unaffiliated in the United States has steadily grown in their portion of the population at roughly 25%. However, as the shown in the chart, although the unaffiliated make up a quarter of the American population, their election participation has stagnated since 2008, with only 12% voting in presidential elections. Even though such an emphasis was placed on evangelical voters surging Trump to victory in 2016, it is clear in previous research that the Christian share of the American population is on the decline, but they remain steadfast in their share of the electorate. Why is more emphasis not being placed on the increasingly unaffiliated voters not increasing their share of the voting population? It is my belief that this question will need to be addressed going into

future American elections, as highlights how the changing religious landscape is not necessarily translating to a changing electorate to match.

Results and Conclusion

Although Donald Trump showed no significance in the evangelical President and Influence variables, the raw numbers reflected an opposite feeling to that of Carson and Cruz. Donald Trump showed significance in the Attendance variable. However, it was in the opposite direction of prediction (Those who attended church less were more likely to view Trump as a future great president) Age and Education were significant in determining survey respondents view of Trump Greatness, with older individuals showing the highest support, and those with lower levels of obtained education showing greater support as well. The strongest indicators of survey respondents supporting Trump as a future potential great president appeared in the Male and Republican Identity Variables. While there is significant literature and studies on the religious vote in previous elections, my belief is that the 2016 election is unlike any previous election in American history with regards to the "evangelical vote", and a lot of my investigation going forward will have an emphasis on analyzing exit polling data from the current election, along with primary survey data leading up to the election in attempting to understand who made up the evangelical vote in 2016. It is my belief the evangelical voters in the 2016 presidential election were not focused solely on the conflicted personal background of Donald Trump, but instead were reacting to an increasing pressure of past / pending secular legislation, and the vacant SCOTUS seat.

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