

# Religion and Political Change: Getting Inside the “God Gap”

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We examine the changing relationship between religion and politics over the past half-century by focusing on a pivotal cohort—people who graduated from high school in 1965, made the transition from adolescence to early adulthood in the midst of the wrenching cultural upheavals of the 1960s, and experienced as adults the rise of the “religious right” and a growing partisan “God gap.” We find that faith in the Bible strongly shaped their reactions to the social change of the ’60s (including attitudes toward authority, the role of women, and civil rights) and, by 1973, significantly eroded their loyalty to the Democratic Party. In contrast, Republican gains in the 1980s and ’90s were associated with church attendance rather than traditional religious beliefs; these shifts probably had more to do with a strengthening association between partisan and religious *identities* than with views on hot-button cultural issues like abortion and gay rights.

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## Religion and Political Change: Getting Inside the “God Gap”

The role of religion in American political life has changed significantly over the past half-century. But how? And why? Scholars and pundits alike have pointed (awkwardly, albeit vividly) to a growing “God gap”—an increase in Republican partisanship among frequent church attenders relative to non-attenders. They have generally attributed that political development to the efforts of political entrepreneurs associated with the “religious right,” and to the resulting emergence on the political agenda of charged moral issues marked by sharp differences in opinion between more and less religious people.

In their magisterial study of religiosity in late 20th century America, Robert Putnam and David Campbell (2010, 384-385) asked, “why, beginning in the mid-1980s and continuing to the present, religiosity and partisanship have become so intertwined?” They answered that “[t]he coalition of the religious has come together around a small bundle of issues,” of which “only two unequivocally fall into the category where religiosity matters a lot: abortion and same-sex marriage.”

Michele Goldberg’s best-selling study of Christian nationalism, *Kingdom Coming*, described the same sequence of events in a more active voice. Christian nationalism as “a partisan political force,” she wrote (2006, 11),

developed out of the modern religious right born in the late 1970s. That’s when a group of right-wing strategists including Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, and Howard Phillips—all veterans of the Barry Goldwater campaign—recruited a somewhat obscure Baptist televangelist named Jerry Falwell to found the Moral Majority. Their idea was to use issues like abortion as a wedge to split social traditionalists from the Democratic party, and to harness the energy of the evangelical movement to the GOP.

“It worked,” Goldberg added. “It was the beginning of a massive political realignment

in Middle America that Democrats have yet to cope with.”

Geoffrey Layman’s influential scholarly account of “religious and cultural conflict in American party politics” is similar in flavor. According to Layman (2001, 11),

conservative Protestants abandoned their apolitical moorings in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With encouragement and assistance from organizations such as the Moral Majority, the Religious Roundtable, the Christian Voice, and later the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council, religious conservatives became actively involved in battles over cultural issues such as abortion, the place of religion in the public schools, pornography, gender equality, and homosexual rights, and they infiltrated the ranks of the Republican party to fight these battles.

While these accounts are correct and insightful as far as they go, we propose to push one step back in the co-evolution of American politics and religion. Putnam and Campbell (2010, chap. 4) described the recent history of religion in America as consisting of a “shock and two aftershocks.” First, “The comfortable era of civic calm” of the early 1960s was punctuated by “the combination of unprecedented affluence and the rapid expansion of higher education, ‘the Pill,’ the abating of Cold War anxieties, Vatican II, the assassinations, the Vietnam War, Watergate, pot and LSD, the civil rights movement and the other movements that followed in its wake—the antiwar movement, the women’s liberation movement, and later the environmental and gay rights movements.” In response to “such widespread, rapid, multifaceted change—in sexual morality, in politics, and in every other sphere of society—religion could hardly remain unchanged.” The results included “a dramatic loss of confidence and self-confidence” on the part of traditional religious institutions, a “rapid decline in religious observance,” especially on the part of young people, and “unprecedented religious experimentation outside traditional denominational channels” (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 91, 94-97).

Putnam and Campbell portrayed the rise of religious conservatism in the 1970s and '80s as a response to this cultural and religious upheaval. “Many Americans were deeply unhappy about the direction the country had taken during the long Sixties,” they wrote (2010, 100, 92), “and they expressed themselves both religiously and politically over the next several decades ... [V]irtually every major theme in the Sixties’ controversies would divide Americans for the rest of the century, setting the fuse for the so-called culture wars.”<sup>1</sup> In this paper we attempt to show how religious practice and beliefs shaped—and in turn were shaped by—responses to the cultural upheaval of the 1960s, and how those changes contributed to “setting the fuse” for the more familiar political shifts of the 1980s and '90s.

We explore the changing relationship between religion and politics in late 20th century America by tracing the views and behavior of a pivotal cohort, people who were born in the late 1940s and graduated from high school in 1965. They made the transition from adolescence to adulthood in the midst of the social and religious “shock” of the 1960s described by Putnam and Campbell, while their adulthoods spanned the “aftershock” of religious reaction and the increasing intertwining of religion and partisan politics.

Our analysis is based on data from the Political Socialization Panel Study, an ambitious long-term study of political attitudes and behavior conducted by M. Kent Jennings in collaboration with Richard G. Niemi, Gregory B. Markus, and Laura Stoker.<sup>2</sup> The Jennings study began in 1965 with interviews of 1,669 high school seniors in 97

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<sup>1</sup> Putnam and Campbell's (2010, 120-132) second “aftershock”—the increasing rejection of organized religion by young people in the 1990s and 2000s—is beyond the scope of our analysis, which focuses (roughly) on the parents of those young people.

<sup>2</sup> The data are publicly available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (Jennings et al. 2005; Jennings 2007).

schools across the United States and one or both of each student's parents.<sup>3</sup> The students were reinterviewed in 1973, 1982, and 1997, providing an unprecedented record of political stability and change over more than three decades. Our analysis relies primarily upon the 935 respondents (56%) who participated in all four waves of the study.<sup>4</sup>

We supplement our understanding of the Jennings respondents' political lifetimes through in-depth reinterviews with a small subsample of those who participated in all four waves. We are in the early stages of this portion of our study, having reinterviewed just five of the respondents so far. They are by no means a representative subsample; all five are non-Hispanic whites, all are married, and four graduated from the same high school in a small city in the Upper Midwest. (The fifth moved to the area from upstate New York following college.) Four conveyed working or middle class status, while one man who had moved to a different small city in the same area seemed to be considerably more affluent.<sup>5</sup> Our conversations with them spanned a broad range of topics, including their upbringings, their socioeconomic status across their life course, major social and economic changes, their perceptions of

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<sup>3</sup> This study design facilitated the investigators' goal of examining the impact of families and schools on the political socialization of adolescents (Jennings and Niemi 1974). However, a notable defect of the original sample for our purposes here is that it excluded people who left high school before the spring of their senior year—approximately 26% of this cohort. Thus, all of our findings reflect the experiences of the most educated (and, by extension, more affluent and politically interested) three-fourths of the cohort.

<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, sample attrition over the four waves of the study was not entirely random. For example, students who were less interested in politics in 1965 were more likely to drop out of the sample by 1997. In order to minimize the impact of differential attrition on our conclusions we weighted the data to reflect as closely as possible the original distribution of key characteristics. The weighting scheme is described in the Appendix, and the resulting sample weights are reported in Table A1.

<sup>5</sup> We make this assessment based on his occupation and household income as reported in previous surveys, and on his remark in the reinterview that he expects to have over \$150,000 a year in personal income during his retirement.

the U.S. political parties and political system, and, most importantly for the purposes of this paper, their reflections on the role of religion in their lives.

Obviously, focusing on a single cohort, however pivotal, ignores much that is important in the changing relationship between religion and politics in contemporary America; as Putnam and Campbell (2010, 377-381) noted, the broader story is as much or more about changes *across* cohorts as about changes *within* cohorts. However, the analytical leverage provided by repeated observation of the religious practices and beliefs and social and political attitudes of individuals over much of their lifetimes seems to us to make the Class of '65 well worth detailed examination.

Our aim is to shed light on the role of religion in the political history of the late 20th century, not to “test” a set of theoretically-derived “hypotheses.” Nonetheless, we believe our analyses offer important broader lessons for scholars of religion and politics. First, they underline the fact that religious practice and beliefs are fluid, changing over time not only in response to apolitical “life cycle” factors like marriage and parenthood but also in response to social and political events. Second, they illustrate the complexity of “religiosity” by documenting the distinct and sometimes even off-setting effects on political attitudes of religious practice, religious beliefs, and denominational identities at different times and in different political domains. And finally, they provide strong evidence that the role of religion in contemporary partisan politics is not solely, or even primarily, a matter of evangelical political entrepreneurs pushing hot-button issues like abortion and gay marriage. Religious identities are politically charged—and politically significant—in their own right.

### **Religious Practice and Beliefs, 1965-1997**

We begin by examining shifts over the life course in the frequency of attending

religious services.<sup>6</sup> The left panel of Figure 1 shows the average level of self-reported church attendance among people raised in each of the four most prominent religious traditions represented in the 1965 Jennings sample—white mainline Protestants (38%), Catholics (24%), white evangelical Protestants (21%), and black Protestants (8%).<sup>7</sup> All four of these groups showed substantial declines in church attendance between 1965 (when respondents were in their late teens) and 1973 (when they were in their mid-twenties). This decline was especially precipitous for people raised as Catholics; 85% reported attending church “almost every week” as high school seniors (a notably higher proportion than in any of the other three groups), but only 27% did so in their mid-twenties (well below the corresponding percentages of black Protestants and white evangelicals). Significant numbers in all four groups returned to church later in life, but only in the case of black Protestants did that rebound come close to recouping the losses in attendance in early adulthood.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1965 Jennings survey, respondents who indicated any religious preference were asked, “Would you say you go to church almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?” In subsequent waves a fifth response option was added, “every week.” We code the five response options (ranging from “never” to “every week”) 0, .25, .50, .75, and 1.0. In 1965, we code “almost every week” (which subsumes the top two categories in subsequent waves) .90, roughly reflecting the relative frequency of “every week” and “almost every week” responses in 1973. In 1982 and 1997, respondents who declared no religious preference (“nones” in contemporary parlance) were still asked about church attendance; however, we count them (as well as a few respondents in each wave who said they were atheists or agnostics) with non-attenders, even if they said they occasionally attended religious services.

<sup>7</sup> The classification of religious denominations in the 1965 survey is not sufficiently detailed to make a precise distinction between “mainline” and “evangelical” Protestants. We include Baptists, “non-denominational,” and “other” Protestants along with “neo-Fundamentalist” denominations in the evangelical category, and all other Protestant denominations in the “mainline” category. The smaller religious groups not included in any of these four categories include Jews (4.0%), “non-traditional” Christians (2.9%), Greek and Russian Orthodox (0.7%), non-Christians other than Jews (0.3%), and “no preference” (1.5%)

<sup>8</sup> Just 53 black Protestants were interviewed in all four waves of the Jennings study; nonetheless, the distinctiveness of their rate of return to church in middle age (relative to other

\*\*\* Figure 1 \*\*\*

The statistical analyses reported in Table 1 relate church attendance in each wave of the survey to church attendance, faith in the Bible,<sup>9</sup> and partisanship in the previous wave of the survey, as well as a variety of demographic characteristics and identification with each of the four primary religious traditions. The estimated effects of lagged church attendance shown in the first row of the table indicate that religious practice was rather fluid in early adulthood but much more stable later in life.<sup>10</sup> However, changes in church attendance were far from random. For example, the substantial estimated impact of biblical faith in 1965 on church attendance in 1973 implies that decisions in early adulthood to continue or cease attending religious services were powerfully shaped by preexisting religious *beliefs*. Thereafter, biblical faith seems to have had no additional effect; for people in their thirties and forties, persistence in church attendance seems to have been primarily a matter of habit or social attachment rather than a direct reflection of religious beliefs.

\*\*\* Table 1 \*\*\*

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survey respondents) is highly “significant” in statistical terms, amounting to 17 points on the 100-point scale (with a standard error of 4.4 points and thus a *t*-statistic of 3.8).

<sup>9</sup> Respondents in each wave of the Jennings survey were asked to choose among four alternative interpretations of the Bible: “The Bible is God’s word and all it says is true” (1.0); “The Bible was written by men inspired by God but it contains some human errors” (.667); “The Bible is a good book because it was written by wise men but God had nothing to do with it” (.333); and “The Bible was written by men who lived so long ago that it is worth very little today” (0). The 1965 responses were heavily concentrated in the first two categories (41.8% and 52.0%, respectively).

<sup>10</sup> In interpreting the estimated effects of lagged church attendance, biblical faith, and partisanship in this and other tables it is important to bear in mind the varying length of time between interview waves—just eight years between the first and second waves, nine between the second and third waves, but fifteen between the third and fourth waves. Allowing for these differences, the estimated stability of the Jennings respondents’ church attendance in Table 1 is essentially constant over the second quarter-century of their lives.



In the five in-depth reinterviews we have conducted to date, when we asked about the role of religion in their lives, the respondents all mentioned their spouses in the course of talking about their choice to attend or not attend church. They conveyed that going to church was a social choice, not a decision driven primarily by their religious beliefs. Those who attend less now than they did as children were quick to say that they are still believers. One man who had had multiple marriages over the course of his life explained the changes in his church attendance by referring to how often each of his wives had wished to attend. “I don't go to church really at all. But, do I believe in religion and God, and all that? Yeah, definitely. ... [My current wife] now is not religious really. She's very much a believer but, not in a ... go-to-church kind of thing. So, we haven't really, even on Christmas or Easter, or really ... maybe a couple times we have or whatever. ... With [my previous wife] when she was around [before passing away], we would go to church. She was Catholic, so [the children he had with her] kind of came up in the Catholic church.” When we asked if there were certain things that had made him stop going to church, he said, “Not really. No. Just kind of gravitated away from it.”

Similarly, a female respondent who had gone to the same high school as this man said she no longer attends, but “I pray every day.” She noted that as a child she and her four siblings had to attend their Lutheran church every Sunday, but her second husband had a serious hobby that pulled them away from attending each week.

Two of the people we interviewed reported becoming *more* religious over time (in the surveys as well as in our in-depth interviews), and they, too, related changes in church attendance to social ties. One is the woman who grew up in upstate New York, and the other is one of the men who remained in the small city in the Upper Midwest where he went to high school. Both have spouses who were deeply involved in religious communities before they became involved themselves. Both talked about their close personal relationship with God and their turn toward evangelical Protestantism, but in

their version of events, their involvement in the religious community came before the intensification of their religious beliefs.

The fifth respondent stopped attending church over the course of his life and doubts many aspects of the Catholic faith in which he was raised. “I grew up in a Catholic family, and I went to parochial grade school. Catholic church every Sunday, and that kind of thing. When I got into my 20s, I didn't feel that way anymore. ... I thought, as a kid, that a lot of the stuff that they were teaching us was hogwash.” However, he consistently referenced his wife’s struggles with the Catholic faith, in which she, too, was raised, and her choice to not attend as he explained his own. “[My wife] had all of the same stuff pounded into her, and she still had guilt feelings until recently. But we’ve evolved away from that. We’ve evolved to the point that I guess I’ve always felt that, in regards to religion, I don’t need that.” Thus, as with the other members of our small subsample of the Jennings respondents, this man explained his change in religious practice as a social choice, not simply a reflection of religious beliefs or doubts.

For more insight on the precipitous decline in church attendance between 1965 and 1973 evident in Figure 1 we turn back to the other parameter estimates reported in Table 1. The substantial negative coefficient for non-whites in the first column of the table indicates that they were probably more likely than whites to stray from church in early adulthood, other things being equal.<sup>11</sup> There is also significant evidence here of a class gradient in the abandonment of religious practice, though not on the

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<sup>11</sup> In order to facilitate consistent comparisons across religious traditions our analyses include separate indicators of having been raised in a black Protestant denomination and being non-white. However, in interpreting the results it is worth bearing in mind that these variables are highly correlated. Of our 73 non-white survey respondents, 64 were African Americans and 53 were members of black Protestant denominations in their senior year of high school.

basis of current family income.<sup>12</sup> Rather, people from high-SES *high schools* left church at a substantially higher rate than those from more modest backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the raw correlation between high school SES and church attendance nearly doubled between 1965 (-.13) and 1973 (-.24), providing the first real inkling of a significant social divide between a more affluent, cosmopolitan secular America and a more traditional, religiously observant working class.

After early adulthood the demographic differences in church attendance were mostly rather modest, perhaps not surprising given the relative stability of church attendance through middle age. As was clear in Figure 1, church attendance rebounded more strongly among black Protestants than in other denominations after 1982.<sup>14</sup> There was also a gradually widening gap in church attendance between women and men, increasing from 8 points on the 100-point scale in 1973 to 10 points in 1982 and

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<sup>12</sup> We measure each respondent's family income as a percentile in the distribution of incomes in the same wave of the Jennings survey. We lack income data for 17% of the survey respondents in 1973, 16% in 1982, and 6% in 1997. (The higher proportions of missing data in 1973 and 1982 reflect the fact that respondents who participated by mail were not asked to report their incomes.) In order to guard against possible biases resulting from these missing data, all of our statistical analyses include indicator variables for cases missing income data; but the coefficients associated with those variables are not reported in the tables.

<sup>13</sup> Our measure of family socio-economic status is constructed from eight indicators in the 1965 surveys: father's educational attainment, mother's educational attainment, family income, the head of household's occupational prestige, subjective social class, having a telephone, owning a home, and belonging to a labor union. The resulting scale scores are roughly normally distributed with a mean value of .05 and a standard deviation of .87. Our measure of high school SES is simply the average family SES for the students in each of the 97 high schools represented in the Jennings sample; it has a mean value of zero and a standard deviation of .54. For additional details regarding the construction and distribution of these measures see Bartels and Cramer (2018).

<sup>14</sup> The implicit denominational reference group in our analyses is the 9% of respondents who, as high school seniors, did not identify with any of the four most prominent Christian traditions—a heterogeneous mix of non-Christians, non-traditional Christians, and people expressing no religious preference. Thus, for most purposes, differences in parameter estimates across the four main traditions will be more informative than the absolute values of the parameter estimates for any one group considered in isolation.

11 points in 1997, other things being equal.

The right panel in Figure 1 shows average levels of faith in the Bible for each of the four main religious traditions in each wave of the Jennings survey. Not surprisingly, white evangelical Protestants and black Protestants were consistently more likely than white mainline Protestants and Catholics to say that “The Bible is God’s word and all it says is true.” However, all four groups experienced declines in biblical faith as they entered early adulthood. Both these declines and the rebounds in biblical faith later in life roughly parallel those in church attendance, but on a much more modest scale. Once again, the shift away from religion in early adulthood was most pronounced among people raised as Catholics, while the rebound later in life was most pronounced among black Protestants.

The statistical analyses reported in Table 2 shed some additional light on these changes over the life course in biblical faith. One notable trend is that the impact of church attendance on biblical faith declined fairly sharply over time. In the transition from adolescence to young adulthood religious practice and beliefs seem to have been mutually reinforcing; but the much more modest effects of church attendance on biblical faith later in life are consistent with our interpretation of church attendance in middle age as increasingly reflecting a *social* commitment more than a *theological* commitment.

**\*\*\* Table 2 \*\*\***

The increasing association between social class and religion is even clearer and more sustained in the case of biblical faith than in the case of church attendance. Family SES and high school SES (both measured in late adolescence) and college

attendance were all related to lower levels of biblical faith throughout adult life.<sup>15</sup> The impact of college attendance is especially noteworthy. The expected difference in biblical faith between someone with four years of college and someone with no college, other things being equal, was 5 points in 1973 and 6 points in 1982 and 1997.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, there is some evidence in Tables 1 and 2 that religious practice and beliefs in adulthood were bolstered by Republican partisanship, turning the conventional interpretation of the relationship between religion and politics on its head. Michele Margolis noted this pattern in the 1982 Jennings data, attributing it to an interaction between life-cycle factors (the relative fluidity of religious practice and beliefs in young adulthood) and the shifting political landscape of the 1970s, in which “political elites and the parties themselves began separating on important religious questions” (Margolis 2018, 76). Our own analysis implies that church attendance in 1982 was four or five points higher among people who had identified as Republicans in 1973 than among otherwise similar people who had identified as Democrats, while faith in the Bible was three or four points higher.<sup>17</sup> The apparent effect of partisanship on changes in biblical faith had evaporated by 1997, but the estimated impact on church attendance was almost as strong in 1997 as it had been in 1982, especially once we allow for the greater (15-year) lag between partisanship and subsequent religious

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<sup>15</sup> These differences were partially offset by the positive effect of current family income on biblical faith in early adulthood. The expected difference in biblical faith between a person with above-average income and an otherwise similar person with below-average income amounted, after compounding, to 2 or 3 points in each wave of the survey.

<sup>16</sup> The differences in 1982 and 1997 reflect indirect (lagged) as well as direct (contemporaneous) effects of college education.

<sup>17</sup> The average difference between Republicans and Democrats on our 100-point partisanship scale increased from 60 points in 1973 and 1982 to 65 points in 1997.

practice.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, as Margolis (2018, 190) put it, Americans have “updated aspects of their religious attachments in response to politics,” producing some “partisan-driven religious sorting.”

### **Religion and the Cultural Upheaval of the '60s**

In this section we turn to the political impact of religious practice and beliefs, beginning with the Class of '65's responses to Putnam and Campbell's (2010, 91-100) “shock” of the 1960s. While we have seen evidence that “religion could hardly remain unchanged” in the face of that cultural upheaval (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 94), an equally important part of the story is how religion shaped young people's reactions to social change. History, including social history, is mostly written by the winners, and in retrospect it is easy to forget that cultural shifts we have come to take for granted were bitterly contested at the time, even among young people. In 1973, 31% of Jennings' respondents agreed that “women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government,” and another 29% leaned in that direction; but 22% were closer to thinking that “women's place is in the home” and 18% put themselves midway between these two positions.<sup>19</sup> Government involvement in integrating schools was favored by 49% but opposed by 35%—and opposition was, if

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<sup>18</sup> The latter effect suggests that the salience of the connection between partisanship and religion may be at least as important as the life cycle in accounting for partisan shifts in religious practice. In any case, the impressive stability of church attendance between 1973 and 1982 does not seem to have inhibited partisan shifts in both church attendance and biblical faith among Jennings' respondents.

<sup>19</sup> “Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. Others feel that women's place is in the home. And other people have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?”

anything, slightly stronger *outside* the South.<sup>20</sup> Only 22% fully supported legalizing marijuana, while 26% thought the penalties for marijuana use should be increased; the rest were fairly evenly distributed across the intervening positions.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, resistance to the social changes of the 1960s was powerful even among young people. And that resistance was significantly shaped by religious commitments.

The statistical analyses reported in Table 3 focus on four attitudes relating to the role of authority in American society—feelings toward the military, the police, and radical students<sup>22</sup> and support for legalizing marijuana. In all four instances, religious practice and beliefs had a substantial impact on cultural attitudes, even after allowing for a variety of other important social characteristics. People who attended church regularly as high school seniors expressed much more conservative cultural views in their mid-twenties, as did those with strong faith in the Bible. The expected difference between someone who attended religious services every week or almost every week and accepted the Bible as “God’s word,” on one hand, and someone who attended once or twice a month and believed the Bible “contains some human errors,” on the other, amounted to 14-point warmer feelings toward the military, 10-point warmer feelings toward the police, and 11-point cooler feelings toward radical students. The expected difference in attitudes toward legalizing marijuana was even greater, 30 points on the 100-point scale.

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<sup>20</sup> “Some people say that the government in Washington should see to it that white and Negro children are allowed to go the same schools. Others claim that this is not the government’s business. Have you been concerned enough about this question to favor one side over the other? [If yes] Do you think that the government in Washington should see to it that white and Negro children go to the same schools, or stay out of this area as it is none of its business?”

<sup>21</sup> “Some people think that the use of marijuana should be made legal. Others think that the penalties for using marijuana should be set higher than they are now. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

<sup>22</sup> Feelings toward these and other groups were measured using a “feeling thermometer” ranging from zero (for very unfavorable feelings) to 100 (for very favorable feelings). The standard deviations of these ratings range from 18.1 to 23.2.

**\*\*\* Table 3 \*\*\***

The combined impact of religious practices and beliefs on attitudes toward authority rivaled or exceeded that of the single most important social characteristic in Table 3—college education. People with four years of college were, on average, 16 points cooler toward the military, 6 points cooler toward the police, 8 points warmer toward radical students, and almost 20 points more favorable toward legalizing marijuana than those with no college. People from affluent high schools were also more liberal than those from poorer backgrounds, regardless of their own families' socio-economic status. In combination, these factors point to a clear pattern of social polarization in young people's responses to the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, with those from more cosmopolitan backgrounds (less religious, better-educated people from affluent communities) in the vanguard of the challenge to authority and those from more traditional backgrounds (strongly religious, unexposed to college, from less privileged communities) generally much more supportive of the existing order.

Attitudes regarding the role of women in American society were also shaped, in part, by traditional religious beliefs. The statistical analyses reported in Table 4 focus on four such attitudes—support for the notion that “women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government,” perceptions that women had “too little influence in American life and politics,”<sup>23</sup> and feelings toward the women's liberation movement and one of its prominent leaders, Gloria Steinem.<sup>24</sup> In

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<sup>23</sup> “Some people think that certain groups have too much influence in American life and politics, while other people feel that certain groups don't have as much influence as they deserve.” We code people who said that women have “too much influence” at zero, those who said women have “just about the right amount of influence” at 50, and those who said women have “too little influence” at 100.

<sup>24</sup> Despite Steinem's prominence in the feminist movement, 28% of the Jennings respondents said they didn't know enough about her to rate her on the feeling thermometer and another 31% gave her a neutral rating of 50. Even having a view about Steinem, much less a positive



every case, young people who were raised with strong faith in the Bible expressed markedly more conservative views about the role of women. The expected difference in views between people who accepted the Bible as “God’s word” and those who considered it “inspired by God” but with “some human errors” amounted, other things being equal, to 8 or 10 points for the question about women’s role and 3 to 5 points for the other items. However, unlike the attitudes toward authority in Table 3, views about the role of women do *not* seem to have been influenced by church attendance.

**\*\*\* Table 4 \*\*\***

The disparate effects of religious beliefs and practice are even more striking in the case of racial attitudes and policy preferences. Table 5 reports the results of statistical analyses of views regarding the influence of blacks, school integration and school busing,<sup>25</sup> and government aid to minority groups.<sup>26</sup> These results suggest that regular church-goers were generally *more* sympathetic toward blacks and toward government efforts to bolster their position in American society, other things being equal. However, people who grew up with strong faith in the Bible expressed more conservative racial attitudes, even after allowing for the effects of race, region, socio-economic status, and other factors. These offsetting effects were roughly equal in magnitude; on average,

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view, was a mark of cosmopolitanism. Among people who had not attended college, 40% did not know enough about her to rate her; only 16% rated her positively and 13% negatively. Among people with four years of college or more, only 14% declined to rate Steinem, while 36% rated her positively and 21% negatively.

<sup>25</sup> “Some people think achieving racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools out of their neighborhoods. Others think letting children go to their neighborhood schools is so important that they oppose busing. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

<sup>26</sup> “Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should help themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

people who attended church every week or almost every week were about 7 points more liberal on these racial issues than those who attended only once or twice per month, while those who accepted the Bible as “God’s word” were about 5 points more conservative than those who believed it “contains some human errors,” other things being equal. In both cases, the differences were greatest for the survey questions focusing on school integration and busing. So were the even larger differences in views between white Christians, on one hand, and non-whites and non-Christians, on the other hand. There was no discernible difference among the major white Christian religious traditions in this respect—Catholics, mainline Protestants, and evangelical Protestants were, respectively, 13, 14, and 15 points more conservative on school integration and busing, but only 4, 3, and 2 points more conservative on the broader racial attitude items.

**\*\*\* Table 5 \*\*\***

So far we have focused on how adolescent’s religious practice and beliefs affected their social views in the cultural crucible of the late 1960s and early ’70s. But there is also good reason to think that their reactions to social change had a reciprocal impact on their religious practice and beliefs. To what extent were the declines in church attendance and biblical faith documented in Figure 1 specifically attributable to cultural liberalization?

The statistical analyses reported in Table 6 address that question by adding some additional explanatory factors to the analyses presented in Tables 1 and 2 (for church attendance and faith in the Bible, respectively). These variables capture attitudes toward the military, legalizing marijuana, and the role of women—three important dimensions of the cultural upheaval of the late 1960s and early ’70s. As it turns out, views on these issues seem to have had substantial effects on the evolution of young Americans’ religious lives as they made the transition to young adulthood, even after

making statistical allowance for the effects of prior religiosity and of a variety of key demographic characteristics.

**\*\*\* Table 6 \*\*\***

The first and third columns of Table 6 focus on church attendance and biblical faith in 1973. In these analyses, measures of social views are simply added to the analyses presented in Tables 1 and 2 as additional explanatory factors.<sup>27</sup> The results show that liberal cultural views were strongly associated with decreases in both church attendance and biblical faith in 1973. However, interpretation of that statistical association is clouded by the fact that these cultural views were themselves not measured until 1973. Thus, it is possible that the results reflect a transitory association between cultural views and religiosity at a point in life when, as we have seen, religious beliefs and (especially) practice were unusually fluid.

The analyses reported in the second and fourth columns of Table 6 go some way toward allaying that concern. They focus on church attendance and faith in the Bible as measured in 1982, when the Jennings respondents were in their mid-thirties. At that point the disruptions of early adulthood were mostly past; the impact of church attendance in high school was actually stronger in 1982 than it had been in 1973.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For the sake of clarity, some of the less important control variables in Tables 1 and 2 are omitted from the analyses reported in Table 6. However, including them would not materially alter the results.

<sup>28</sup> In our in-depth interviews, the respondents recalled church attendance in their youth, over 50 years ago, quite vividly. The woman who grew up in upstate New York said, "I grew up in a Reform church. You know, pretty formal and staid. The minister's way up there and his wife kind of thing. So, it was a pretty formal kind of thing but that's what everybody did. So, you know, it was part of our life. We always went to church." The woman who grew up in the small Midwestern city where she still lives said, "We would have to go to Sunday school and church [every week]. No matter what, and I had no problem with that. ... Even when I was little, if I was tired, I'd put my head on my dad's leg. We went to church. I had my little coins in the knot of my hanky and stuff, so I knew what I had to give to Sunday school and what to church."

Nonetheless, the strong association between cultural views and religious life clearly persisted. The magnitudes of this association may be illustrated by comparing people with moderately liberal views on each of the three cultural issues included in the analysis (one standard deviation above the mean) to otherwise similar people with moderately conservative views on each issue (one standard deviation below the mean). Average church attendance in 1982 was 30 points lower among people with more liberal social attitudes in 1973, while faith in the Bible was 17 points lower. These results suggest that young people's responses to the cultural upheaval of the '60s were not only strongly shaped by their religious upbringings, but also had a durable impact on their subsequent religious lives.

### **Abortion, Morality, and the Rise of the “Religious Right”**

In this section we turn from the cultural “shock” of the 1960s to the first of the two “aftershocks” described by Putnam and Campbell (2010, 100-120)—the “rise of religious conservatism” in the 1970s and '80s. According to Putnam and Campbell (2010, 116), “Americans not swept up in the cultural revolution sought support for their resistance to that revolution (and what they feared would be its social and moral consequences) in a more conservative religious tradition.” Evangelical Protestant denominations in particular thrived, they noted, both due to demographic trends (evangelicals had more children, and those children were more likely to maintain their parents' religious traditions) and to conversion from other faiths. Moreover, “religion itself and conservatism (theological, social, moral, and political) became increasingly symbiotic and identified, especially in the public eye, as the Religious Right” (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 120).

Putnam and Campbell (2010, 119) inferred from cross-sectional evidence that “what sparked the growth of evangelicalism was less hot-button politics than deeply personal moral concerns,” especially regarding premarital sex. However, they added

(2010, 384-385, 120) that the *political* “coalition of the religious has come together around a small bundle of issues,” of which “only two unequivocally fall into the category where religiosity matters a lot: abortion and same-sex marriage. ... Religiosity and conservative politics became increasingly aligned, and abortion and gay rights became emblematic of the emergent culture wars.”

In the next section we will examine in more detail the shifting relationship between religiosity and partisan politics. In the meantime, however, we focus here on the relationship between religiosity and views about abortion, gay rights, and morality. That relationship is often taken to be at the heart of conservative religious tradition, making it “the glue which holds religiosity and partisanship together” (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 370). As Putnam and Campbell (2010, 387) noted, “while the tie between religiosity and partisanship has varied, the link between religiosity and attitudes on both abortion and same-sex marriage has been constant. Since at least 1972, the first year of the General Social Survey, and almost certainly much longer, frequency of religious attendance has consistently been a strong predictor of opposition to abortion and disapproval of homosexuality.”

The Jennings respondents were not asked about abortion until 1982, when they were in their mid-thirties. At that point, about 7% of the respondents said that “by law, abortion should never be permitted,” while an additional 21% said that “the law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman’s life is in danger.”<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, pro-life views were substantially more common among more religious people. For example, 20% of those who reported attending church every week said that

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<sup>29</sup> Respondents were asked which of four opinions best agreed with their views: “By law, abortion should never be permitted,” “The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest or when the woman’s life is in danger,” “The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest or danger to the woman’s life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established,” or “By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.”

abortion should never be permitted, while only 3% of those who attended less often took that position. The overall correlation between church attendance and abortion attitudes was substantial, .44.

When the Jennings respondents were reinterviewed 15 years later the distribution of opinions about abortion had barely changed. The proportion who expressed pro-life views increased by a few percentage points while the proportion saying that “a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice” declined by a single percentage point. The correlation between church attendance and views about abortion remained virtually constant at .45. The magnitude and stability of this association are indeed impressive.<sup>30</sup> However, the image of a “constant” link misses two important features of abortion attitudes and their relationship to religiosity. One is that views about abortion were strongly bound up with broader attitudes toward moral traditionalism independent of religion; for example, abortion opinions in 1982 were more strongly correlated with previous (1973) views about women’s role (.34) and marijuana (.33) than with faith in the Bible (.30) or support for prayer in schools (.23).<sup>31</sup> The other is that the relationship between views about abortion and religiosity did not persist simply due to inertia; religious practice and beliefs played a crucial role in *sustaining* support for the pro-life position in the intervening decade and a half.

The statistical analysis reported in the first column of Table 7 relates abortion

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<sup>30</sup> The American National Election Study surveys included similar questions on abortion beginning in 1972. Among respondents roughly comparable to Jennings’—high school graduates born between 1942 and 1952—the correlation between church attendance and abortion views was .40 in the 1970s, .46 in the 1980s, .41 in the 1990s, and .38 from 2000 through 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Respondents were invited to choose between two alternatives: “Some people think it is all right for the public schools to start each day with a prayer. Others feel that religion does not belong in the public schools but should be taken care of by the family and the church.” We code those who said they weren’t “interested enough in this to favor one side over the other” or volunteered a qualified response (“other,” “depends”) midway between the two endpoints.

views in 1997 to church attendance, biblical faith, Republican partisanship, and abortion views in 1982, as well as denominational backgrounds and key demographic characteristics.<sup>32</sup> Despite the fact that abortion was “one of the most salient issues” in American politics in this era (Adams 1997, 720) and one that “tap[s] deep-seated moral and religious values” (Layman 2001, 31-32)—and despite the impressive stability of the aggregate distribution of abortion views in the Jennings panel—the statistical results reveal a surprising amount of change in individual respondents’ views about the issue over the course of their late thirties and forties: on average, only about 60% of 1982 abortion opinion persisted to 1997.<sup>33</sup>

**\*\*\* Table 7 \*\*\***

One factor contributing to instability in abortion opinion was the tendency of Republicans and Democrats to gravitate in the direction of their parties’ increasingly clear pro-life and pro-choice stands on the issue over the course of the 1980s and ’90s (Adams 1997; Layman and Carsey 2002; Achen and Bartels 2016, 258-264). The estimated effect of partisanship reported in the first column of Table 7 implies that Republicans shifted 7 or 8 points toward the pro-life position between 1982 and 1997, relative to Democrats with similar demographic characteristics, religiosity, and prior abortion views. As Achen and Bartels (2016, 264) put it, “preexisting partisan identities and partisan persuasion played a substantial role in shaping people’s political views, even on a momentous and highly salient policy issue.”

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<sup>32</sup> Since views about abortion were only measured twice in the Jennings panel (in 1982 and 1997), we estimated the measurement error variance using responses to the same question in the 1992-94-96 American National Election Studies Panel (<http://www.electionstudies.org>).

<sup>33</sup> It is worth recalling here that our errors-in-variables regression analysis corrects the usual downward bias in the estimated stability of opinion stemming from random measurement error in abortion attitudes. Ordinary regression analysis produces an even lower estimate of the impact of 1982 abortion views on 1997 abortion views, .419.

Church attendance and biblical faith had even stronger effects of the same sort. The statistical results reported in the first column of Table 7 imply that people who attended church every week or almost every week in 1982 shifted 6 or 7 points toward the pro-life position over the next 15 years, relative to similar people with similar abortion views in 1982 who rarely or never went to church. And those who accepted the Bible as “God’s word” shifted an additional 6 or 7 points toward the pro-life position relative to those who said the Bible was “inspired by God” but “contains some human errors.” The “constant” link between religiosity and attitudes on abortion described by Putnam and Campbell (2010, 387) was actively bolstered by religious practice and beliefs, even in middle age, and even in a period when abortion was already near the top of the national political agenda.

The analyses presented in the second and third columns of Table 7 focus on the flip side of this relationship—the potential role of abortion views in sustaining religious practice and beliefs. In the case of church attendance (in the second column) there is no evidence at all that people with pro-life views were more likely than otherwise similar people with pro-choice views to maintain or increase their religious involvement. However, the results presented in the third column clearly indicate that people with pro-life views *were* more likely to maintain or increase their faith in the Bible. The expected difference in biblical faith in 1997 between someone who had said 15 years earlier that abortion should be permitted “only in case of rape, incest or when the woman’s life is in danger” and someone who had said that “a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice” amounted to 7 or 8 points on the 100-point scale—a substantial difference, given the overall stability of biblical faith in mid-life and the fact that almost 90% of the Jennings respondents’ views were concentrated in the top one-third of the scale.

If pro-life convictions and religious faith were mutually reinforcing in the life courses of Jennings’ respondents, what about views about homosexuality and other



moral issues? Unfortunately, it is impossible to trace a parallel process of mutual reinforcement for those issues because they were not included in the Jennings surveys before 1997. However, the statistical analyses reported in Table 8 show that church attendance and biblical faith in 1982 were both strongly—and negatively—related to favorable feelings toward gay men and lesbians, opposition to anti-gay discrimination in the workplace,<sup>34</sup> and general moral tolerance<sup>35</sup> in 1997, even after allowing for differences in demographic characteristics and partisanship.

\*\*\* Table 8 \*\*\*

Remarkably, biblical faith as expressed *in 1965*, when the Jennings respondents were still in high school, was even more strongly related to their views about gays and moral difference more than 30 years later; church attendance in 1965 was also related to those views, albeit somewhat less strongly than church attendance in 1982.<sup>36</sup> The strength of these relationships suggests, though it does not prove, that respondents' religious upbringings fundamentally shaped their moral attitudes for decades into adulthood.

Looking back into the past also sheds light on the relationship between Republican partisanship and moral traditionalism documented in Table 8. Averaging across the three issues included in the table, people who were Republicans in 1982 were about 10 points less tolerant than Democrats with similar religiosity, race, sex, regional

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<sup>34</sup> Respondents were asked whether and how much they favored or opposed “laws that protect homosexuals against job discrimination.”

<sup>35</sup> Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own.”

<sup>36</sup> In analyses paralleling those reported in Table 8, the estimated effects of biblical faith as expressed in 1965 were  $-.217$  (with a standard error of  $.063$ ),  $-.311$  ( $.102$ ), and  $-.206$  ( $.078$ ). The estimated effects of 1965 church attendance were  $-.089$  ( $.052$ ),  $-.087$  ( $.082$ ), and  $-.102$  ( $.064$ ).

upbringing, and socioeconomic status. But at what point did partisanship become related to moral traditionalism? Repeating the analyses in Table 8 with partisanship and religiosity measured in 1973 would reduce the average difference between Republicans and Democrats to about 6 points, while focusing on partisanship and religiosity as measured in 1965 would reduce the average difference to just 2 points.<sup>37</sup> The young people who identified as Republicans on the threshold of adulthood would not turn out, three decades later, to be discernibly less tolerant than their Democratic peers. But by the time they reached their mid-twenties—well before abortion and gay rights emerged as salient political issues—the connection between partisanship and moral tolerance was forged, and over the next quarter-century it would only strengthen.

### **Religion and Partisan Change: The Magnitude and Meaning of the “God Gap”**

Finally, in this section we focus directly on the “God gap”—the increasingly strong correlation between religiosity and Republican partisanship in late 20th century America. Figure 2 provides two complementary perspectives on that development. The left panel shows the average levels of church attendance of Republicans and Democrats in each wave of the Jennings panel, while the right panel shows the average levels of partisanship among people who reported attending religious services every week or almost every week and those who said they attended a few times a year or less. Regardless of which perspective one prefers, the trajectory is clear: the “God gap” was non-existent in 1965 but widened considerably over the course of the next three decades.

#### **\*\*\* Figure 2 \*\*\***

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<sup>37</sup> The estimated effects of partisanship measured in 1973 were  $-.089$  (with a standard error of  $.034$ ),  $-.086$  ( $.053$ ), and  $-.107$  ( $.041$ ). The estimated effects of partisanship measured in 1965 were  $-.017$  ( $.030$ ),  $-.021$  ( $.047$ ), and  $-.051$  ( $.036$ ).

The relationship between church attendance and partisanship, even in the late 1990s, may look too modest to justify being characterized as “a massive political realignment” (Goldberg 2006, 11). In part, that reflects our limited focus on change in a single cohort, ignoring the effects of substantial generational replacement over 32 years and of further change in the decades after the final wave of the Jennings survey.<sup>38</sup> It also reflects the fact that, unlike some scholars, we include non-whites in our tabulations. Excluding them would produce a more dramatic picture,<sup>39</sup> but would beg the question of *why* the relationship between religion and partisanship looks different for non-whites and whites—a question we cannot adequately address here, given the limitations of the Jennings data (but see, for example, Harris 1999; Margolis 2018, chap. 7; and Wong 2018).<sup>40</sup>

The statistical analyses reported in Table 9 provide a more detailed look at the impact of religion on partisanship over the three decades covered by the Jennings panel. Unlike the simple tabulations presented in Figure 2, they allow for the independent effects of other important factors, including race, sex, and socioeconomic status. In addition, they incorporate three distinct dimensions of religiosity—church attendance, biblical faith, and affiliation with each of the four main

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<sup>38</sup> Margolis (2018, 27) used data from the General Social Survey to document partisan differences in religious identification, church attendance, and faith in the Bible in the general public from the early 1970s through 2014. The gap in regular church attendance increased from about 10% in the late 1990s to about 15% in recent years.

<sup>39</sup> The raw correlations between church attendance and Republican partisanship in the Jennings sample as a whole increased from  $-.01$  in 1965 to  $.05$  in 1973,  $.04$  in 1982, and  $.11$  in 1997. The correlations among whites only increased roughly in parallel but were about twice as large:  $.04$  in 1965,  $.09$  in 1973 and 1982, and  $.20$  in 1997.

<sup>40</sup> The partisan evolution of non-whites in the Jennings sample was clearly very different than that of whites, a fact reflected in the substantial negative coefficients for non-whites in each column of Table 9. However, excluding non-whites from the analysis would not significantly alter the other results. The total effect of church attendance across the three time periods (including both direct and lagged effects) would increase from  $.110$  to  $.127$ , while the total effect of biblical faith would increase from  $.141$  to  $.176$ .

Christian religious traditions. The results reveal striking differences in the apparent impact of these different dimensions of religiosity, and also striking changes in their apparent impact as we look across the three columns of the table, which focus on shifts in partisanship from 1965 to 1973, from 1973 to 1982, and from 1982 to 1997.

\*\*\* Table 9 \*\*\*

In the first interval, as Jennings' respondents made their way from adolescence to early adulthood, there was a significant pro-Republican shift among those who had embraced a literal interpretation of the Bible while still in high school. Other things (including adolescent partisanship) being equal, people who believed that “the Bible is God’s word and all it says is true” were about 5 points more Republican by 1973 than those who believed that “the Bible was written by men inspired by God but it contains some human errors.”<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, differences in church attendance had no discernible impact on partisan shifts in this period. The contrast between religious *beliefs* and religious *practice* in this regard echoes the contrasting effects of religious beliefs and practice on the responses of young people to the cultural upheavals of the 1960s recorded in Tables 3, 4, and 5: faith in the Bible was strongly associated with conservative views about authority, the role of women, and race, whereas church attendance had mixed effects (or none at all) across these three domains. The most plausible interpretation of this pattern is that the Republican Party’s significant gains in this period were fueled primarily by the reactions of religious traditionalists—whether or not they happened to be frequent church-goers—to the Democratic Party’s seeming embrace not just of “acid, amnesty and abortion” (as critics of 1972 presidential candidate George McGovern put it), but of social change on every front.

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<sup>41</sup> Obviously, the contrast in partisanship with people who expressed even less faith in the Bible was even more dramatic; but those people comprised only 4% of the Jennings sample.

Somewhat surprisingly, further shifts in partisanship in the Jennings sample between 1973 and 1982 were unrelated to both church attendance and faith in the Bible. However, there was a clear pro-Republican shift among people who grew up in all four of America's major Christian traditions—including Catholics (5.6 points on the 100-point partisanship scale), white mainline Protestants (8.3 points), white evangelical Protestants (10.8) points, and even black Protestants (13.5 points)—relative to the 10% of people who did not grow up in any of these traditions.<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding some evidence suggesting that “people were becoming less concerned about denominational identity and loyalty” (Hunter 1991, 87) and that a “new ecumenism” pitting cross-denominational groups of religious traditionalists and progressives marked “the institutional battle lines for the contemporary culture war” (Hunter 1991, 98), partisan polarization in the late 1970s and early 1980s seems to have been driven by denominational differences, with Catholics and (especially) Protestants pulling away from non-traditional Christians and non-Christians, rather than by religious attendance or faith.

This religious identity shift, if that's what it was, continued through the 1980s and 1990s, albeit in diminished form. The average Republican gain among the four main Christian groups (weighted by their respective numbers) declined from 8.6 points in 1973-1982 to 4.5 points in 1982-1997. Perhaps surprisingly, these denominational shifts were not a great deal larger among white evangelical Protestants than among other Christians with similar demographic characteristics and levels of biblical faith. Indeed, even in raw terms there is remarkably little evidence in the Jennings panel of

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<sup>42</sup> The apparent pro-Republican shift among black Protestants is almost entirely counterbalanced by a pro-Democratic shift among non-whites more broadly. In effect, the (relatively few) non-whites who were *not* black Protestants became significantly more Democratic during this period while black Protestants did not.

significant Republican gains among whites raised as evangelical Protestants.<sup>43</sup>

Describing the strategic position of the Republican Party in the late 1970s, Layman (2001, 45) wrote, “Evangelical Christians were a large, unattached constituency, and cultural conservatism provided a way to draw them into the GOP.” But the Jennings data tell a different story. In 1965, the average level of Republican partisanship among white evangelical Protestants was already 7 points higher than in the rest of the sample. By 1973 that gap had grown to 11 points. There is good reason to think that “cultural conservatism” was responsible, at least in significant part, for that four-point shift; white evangelical Protestants in 1973 were 16 points more favorable toward the military, 17 points more conservative regarding the role of women, and 25 points more likely to oppose legalizing marijuana. However, after 1973 there was *no further increase* in the distinctive Republican partisanship of this group—they were still 11 points more Republican than the rest of the sample in 1982 and again in 1997. While they were indeed more conservative than other groups on the hot-button issues of abortion, homosexuality, and moral tolerance (by 13, 16, and 12 points, respectively, in 1997), that moral conservatism merely contributed to maintaining—not increasing—their Republican partisanship.<sup>44</sup>

The facet of religiosity that seems to have been the primary driver of Republican

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<sup>43</sup> Of course, some people who considered themselves evangelical Protestants in high school ceased to do so later, and some people raised in other traditions came to embrace evangelical faiths. Putnam and Campbell (2010, 102-119) addressed the relative importance of conversion, generational replacement, and distinctive values in the evolution of evangelical faiths in this period. Our interest here, as elsewhere, is in the effect of specific religious upbringings in the Jennings cohort, not in changing denominational identities later in life.

<sup>44</sup> The gaps in average views toward homosexuality between people raised in the evangelical Protestant tradition and the rest of the Jennings sample were similar in magnitude to those on other cultural issues; in the 1997 survey the evangelicals’ feelings toward gays were 14 points cooler and they were 16 points less likely to favor new laws protecting gays from discrimination. Their views about abortion were slightly less distinctive, with the gap between evangelicals and others increasing from 10 points in 1982 to 13 in 1997.

gains in the 1980s and '90s was not evangelicalism or even biblical faith, but church attendance. Other things being equal, people who attended church every week or almost every week in 1982 (roughly one standard deviation above the sample mean) became 9.5 points more Republican by 1997 than those who attended a few times a year or less (roughly one standard deviation below the sample mean). This estimated effect is a good deal larger than the 4-point increase in the raw partisan gap between regular church-goers and infrequent attenders shown in the right panel of Figure 2. The difference mostly reflects the fact that two groups of relatively frequent church attenders, women and non-whites, were trending Democratic for other reasons during this period.<sup>45</sup> Thus, a simple comparison of church-goers and non-church-goers understates the distinctive impact of church attendance on partisanship.

The statistical evidence presented in the third column of Table 9 handsomely supports the familiar notion of a growing partisan split along religious lines in the 1980s and '90s; but it also provides a starting point for a more precise account of how and *why* the “God gap” widened during this period. As many observers have noted (e.g., Adams 1997; Layman 2001; Putnam and Campbell 2010, chap. 11), the two parties took increasingly clear and distinct stands on the fraught issues of abortion and (somewhat later) gay rights, precipitating a process of “issue evolution” (Carmines and Stimson 1989) in which people with conservative attitudes on those issues gravitated toward the Republican Party and those with liberal attitudes gravitated toward the Democratic Party.

The increasing correlation between abortion views and partisanship among Jennings’ respondents—from just .06 in 1982 to .21 by 1997—is certainly consistent

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<sup>45</sup> Republican partisanship declined by 7 points among women (relative to men) and by 20 points among nonwhites (relative to whites) between 1982 and 1997, other things being equal; but church attendance in 1982 was 12 points higher among women than among men and 8 points higher among nonwhites than among whites.

with that account. Moreover, as we saw in Table 7, regular church-goers were already much more likely to express pro-life views on the issue of abortion in 1982 and became increasingly likely to do so between 1982 and 1997. Similarly, as we saw in Table 8, church attendance was strongly associated with more conservative views regarding gay rights and moral tolerance. Thus, it seems logical to conclude that the growing political salience of these two issues provided “the glue which holds religiosity and partisanship together” (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 370).

But how much of the growing “God gap” of the 1980s and '90s was specifically attributable to differing views on abortion and gay rights? A rough answer to that question is provided by the statistical analyses presented in Table 10. The analysis presented in the first column of the table mirrors the one presented in the fourth column of Table 9; the only difference is that we omit family and high school SES as explanatory factors. As with the analysis presented in the fourth column of Table 9, the results imply that frequent church attendance boosted Republican partisanship by 9 or 10 points between 1982 and 1997.

**\*\*\* Table 10 \*\*\***

The analysis reported in the second column of Table 10 includes pro-life opinion as measured in 1997 as an additional explanatory factor. As expected, pro-life views were strongly associated with Republican partisan gains. However, the more important point for our purposes here is that, even after taking account of abortion views, church attendance in 1982 was strongly associated with increasing Republican partisanship over the next 15 years. The estimated effect is reduced by about one-third, from 9 or 10 points to 6; but *most* of the estimated impact of church attendance remains even after holding abortion views statistically constant.

Adding additional controls for contemporaneous opinions regarding moral tolerance and gay rights, in the third column of Table 10, produces similar results.



These views are strongly related to shifts in partisanship, just as the conventional account of the growing “God gap” suggests; but even after taking them into account the estimated impact of church attendance is substantial—5 or 6 points—and “statistically significant” by conventional standards. The impact of opinions regarding moral tolerance, gay rights, and abortion are no doubt exaggerated in this analysis, since views on these issues in 1997 were *consequences* as well as *causes* of partisanship and religiosity (as we saw in Tables 7 and 8). But even stacking the statistical deck in their favor, we can confidently reject the notion that these issues were the *only* “glue [holding] religiosity and partisanship together” in this era (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 370), and indeed it seems likely that they account for less than half of the overall impact of church attendance on partisan change.

The analysis presented in the fourth column of Table 10 provides a more conservative test of the impact of abortion views on partisan change. In this case we use abortion attitudes as measured in 1982 rather than 1997 to help account for changes in partisanship in the intervening 15 years.<sup>46</sup> Rather remarkably, the results suggest that *pre-existing* views about abortion probably had little impact on partisan change. The strong association between abortion attitudes and partisanship evident in the second column of the table is reduced by more than three-fourths when we focus on prior rather than contemporaneous abortion attitudes. Meanwhile, the apparent impact of church attendance (likewise measured in 1982) on partisanship in 1997 is barely dented by incorporating abortion opinion as an additional explanatory factor. Far from being the “glue” bonding religiosity and partisanship, abortion views seem here to be something more like a *byproduct* of a more elemental connection between religiosity and partisanship—shaped by both (as we saw in Table 7) even as they

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<sup>46</sup> We cannot do the same thing for views regarding gay rights and moral tolerance because those questions were not included in the 1982 Jennings survey.

became more intertwined over the course of the 1980s and '90s (as we saw in Tables 1 and 9).

Of course, that way of putting it begs the question of *why* religiosity and partisanship became more intertwined, if not because of the emergence of clear partisan differences on the issues of abortion and gay rights. One likely answer is that prominent Christian religious leaders—Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and many others—became salient figures in Republican Party politics, providing strong cues for those inclined to let religiosity (or an antipathy to religiosity) color their political attitudes. Partly for this reason, we suspect, Americans gradually came to associate the Republican Party with religion and vice versa. For example, they overestimate the share of the Republican Party made up of evangelical Christians.<sup>47</sup> Democratic and (especially) Republican partisans have come to see the Republican Party as more “friendly toward religion” than the Democratic Party.<sup>48</sup> And indeed, Republicans express much more favorable attitudes toward Christians—and much less favorable attitudes toward atheists—than Democrats do (Bartels 2018, Figure 1).

Our in-depth interviews help to illuminate the primary role of religious identity rather than political leanings in accounting for the growing “God gap” among Jennings’ respondents. All five of our interviewees have become more Republican since graduating from high school in 1965. But looking at their views and life experiences holistically, the partisan shift in each case was just part of a broader increasing identity with one side of the cultural divide. For example, evangelical religion has played an increasingly large role in the life of the woman who grew up in upstate New

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<sup>47</sup> In a 2015 survey, Douglas Ahler and Gaurav Sood asked respondents to estimate the share of the Republican Party made up by “evangelicals.” The average estimate by Republicans was 43% and by Democrats 44%; the true proportion at the time was 34% (Ahler and Sood 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Margolis (2018, 53-59) presented Pew Research Center survey data to this effect in the context of a broader discussion of the relationship between religious and partisan identities.

York, as she and her husband have been “always looking for the *more* .... We want more of the presence of the Lord.” And although she called herself a Republican in the Jennings surveys, she was adamant in our interview that she does not care about politics, literally saying “I don’t care” when it came to politics ten times in an 80-minute conversation.

The other person for whom religious practice has played an increasing role in his life talked about religion as central but politics as rather peripheral. He “accepted Christ into my life” in May of 1989 and became active in youth sports in his community through getting involved in his church. He identified as a Democrat in 1965, an Independent in 1973 and 1982, and a Republican in 1997, and in our reinterview he called himself someone who “always considered myself an independent ... who recently has voted more Republican.” He grew up “poor” and his family “lived in rent.” His father was a union worker in a local large factory in which he, too, subsequently spent his entire working life, but he had no strong feelings toward unions. He served in Vietnam reluctantly, but found that the experience gave him enormous personal growth as a patriot and responsible person, calling it both “the best and worst that has ever happened to me.” He was not in favor of the war, but was scarred by a long (over an hour) cab ride home from the airport upon his return, during which, while in full uniform, he had to endure the driver lecturing him about “soldiers who were nothing but baby killers .... You have no respect for human life.” When asked if the experience of the war made him feel differently about the parties, he looked surprised and said, “No, parties not at all. ... It had nothing to do politically, I mean LBJ was a Democrat, Nixon was a Republican. [He had voted for both.] We didn’t care about that. It was about relationships. Vietnam was the biggest change in my life.” He talked about politics as something from which he wanted to distance himself, but had strong opinions about the way people ought to treat one another and ought to behave.

The other three respondents no longer attend church, but two of them nevertheless identify as people who believe in God. The third, a man who remained in the small upper Midwestern city in which he grew up Catholic, no longer identifies with a religion. He has also shifted toward the Republican Party over the course of his life, because he worked in the news media and had an opportunity to interview many politicians. From this he realized that “the thing that appealed to me about the Republican Party was, they were for the opportunity for individuals to meet their highest expectations without government intrusion.”

For this man, his shift to the right happened *despite* the increasing alignment of the Republican Party with Christianity. For the others, the shift to the Republican Party was probably not a product of indoctrination through their churches, but it did enable them to maintain their identity as Christians.

The harnessing of Christianity to Republican partisanship and vice versa is reminiscent of the (partly overlapping) realignment of white southerners in the wake of the parties' contrasting responses to the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002, chap. 6; Achen and Bartels 2016, 246-258). As Achen and Bartels (2016, 250) described that momentous shift, “signals about where one's group belonged made a big difference to individual voters, while racial policy issues played a less central role.” Similarly in the case of the widening “God gap,” people who attended church regularly seem to have gravitated toward the Republican Party in the 1980s and '90s not primarily because of their views on hot-button moral issues like abortion and gay rights, but because they increasingly came to see the Republican Party as where their group belonged.

## **Conclusion**

The momentous social and cultural changes of the 1960s obviously ramified through every segment of American society; but their impact may have been most

profound for people who experienced them on the verge of adulthood. These people found themselves on the front lines of the emerging cultural conflict. But just as their families and communities equipped them more or less adequately to respond to the personal challenges of adulthood, they equipped them to respond, each in their own way, to the social challenges of their era.

Biblical faith was a crucial part of the cultural inheritance that many members of the Class of '65 carried with them into the adult world and used to make sense of the social upheaval they encountered there. It significantly shaped their attitudes toward social order (Table 3), women's equality (Table 4), race (Table 5) abortion (Table 7), and gay rights (Table 8). The range and magnitude of these effects are especially impressive because they appear even after allowing for differences in religious traditions (and a variety of key demographic and political characteristics), even among people who did not become or remain frequent church attenders, and even, in the case of racial attitudes, as church attendance had an offsetting liberalizing impact. Clearly, religious faith was an important aspect of how many (though of course not all) of the Jennings respondents interpreted their social world.

By comparison, inherited partisan identities seem to have been of rather little help to them in navigating new social conflicts. Thus, as people figured out where the parties and people like them stood in this new cultural terrain, their partisan loyalties shifted. Those shifts seem to have been relatively rapid, at least by the standards familiar to scholars of partisan change; our evidence in Table 9 suggests that they were mostly complete by the time the Class of '65 reached their mid-twenties.

We do not mean to suggest that faith in the Bible was an entirely "unmoved mover" of social and political views. Most importantly, it is clear from Figure 1 that biblical faith dipped significantly in the Jennings respondents' transition to adulthood, and from Table 2 that this crisis of faith was particularly acute among people from

relatively privileged backgrounds and those who attended college. Insofar as the contemporary “culture wars” pit a socially progressive and (relatively) secular educated stratum of society against a more traditional, and traditionally religious, “disenfranchised lower middle class” (Hunter 1991, 118), those battle lines seem to have taken shape, or at least sharpened considerably, in the late 1960s and early ’70s.

Our evidence suggests that partisan loyalties later became more deeply implicated in this cultural and religious divide, but more as consequences than as causes. The apparent effects of partisanship on church attendance (in Table 1) and biblical faith (in Table 2) look rather modest once we take direct account of social attitudes (in Tables 6 and 7). Conversely, church attendance seems to have played an important role in bolstering Republican partisanship in the 1980s and ’90s, even after allowing for differences in social attitudes correlated with religious practice (Table 10). We interpret this impact as reflecting shifting identity politics more than theological convictions, politicking from the pulpit, or “battles over cultural issues” (Layman 2001, 11). As ties between Christianity and the Republican Party became stronger and clearer, people for whom church was an important aspect of life (and, by extension, of social identity) gravitated toward the Republican Party, even (as we saw in Table 7) shifting their stances on central cultural issues such as abortion in the process. Church attendance mattered, we believe, because it reminded people to think of themselves as Christians and thus to think and behave, politically as well as in other ways, as they thought good Christians should.

It is hardly surprising to find that the enormous cultural shifts of the past half-century have had profound effects on the Class of ’65. But people do not encounter such enormous changes as blank slates. Their social identities significantly shape their responses to social change. In their senior year of high school, Jennings’ respondents were not yet what they would eventually become; but their social backgrounds and adolescent identities would play an important role in determining the course of their

future social and political lives. For many, religious beliefs were an important facet of those backgrounds and identities.

## Appendix

Our analysis of the Jennings data relies primarily upon the 935 respondents (56% of the original 1,669) who participated in all four waves of the panel study. In order to minimize the effect of differential panel attrition on our conclusions, we have reweighted the data from four-wave survivors to approximate the joint distribution of race,<sup>49</sup> region,<sup>50</sup> sex, partisanship,<sup>51</sup> and political interest<sup>52</sup> in the original 1965 sample.<sup>53</sup> (Where the resulting cells were very sparse, we combined them for the purpose of constructing weights. This had the effect of substituting black females for missing black males, especially in the South.)

The resulting panel sample weights are reported in Table A1. They range from .756 for the respondents who were least likely to drop out of the sample (white southern females who were politically interested Republicans in 1965) to 2.214 for those who were most likely to drop out (blacks who were Republicans or Independents in 1965). However, most of the weights fall in a much narrower range, with 90% between .791 and 1.605.<sup>54</sup>

### \*\*\* Table A1 \*\*\*

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<sup>49</sup> The 1965 survey classified respondents as “white,” “Negro,” or “other (including Mexican and Puerto Rican).”

<sup>50</sup> We distinguish southerners (those who reported growing up in the 11 states of the former Confederacy) from non-southerners.

<sup>51</sup> We classify respondents who reported being “closer” to the Democratic or Republican Party as partisans and those who reported identifying with some other party or being “apolitical” along with (“pure”) Independents.

<sup>52</sup> We classify respondents based on whether they reported following politics and public affairs “most of the time” (41%), “some of the time” (42%), or “only now and then” or “hardly at all” (17%).

<sup>53</sup> The original sample was itself weighted to reflect differing selection probabilities for the 97 high schools in which Jennings’ team conducted interviews. We employ those weights in characterizing the joint distribution of respondents.

<sup>54</sup> In combination with the weights associated with high schools in the original Jennings sample, these panel weights produce overall weights ranging from .346 to 3.194. Here, too, most of the weights fall in a much narrower range, with 90% between .611 and 1.742.



The structure of the Jennings panel allows us to estimate the measurement reliability of many of the variables employed in our analysis, which in turn allows us to mitigate biases in regression parameter estimates stemming from measurement error by estimating errors-in-variables regression models (Achen 1983). We employ the measurement error model developed by Wiley and Wiley (1970), which exploits the repeated measurements of many of our key explanatory variables in 1973, 1982, and 1997 to estimate the measurement reliability of these indicators.<sup>55</sup> Table A2 reports the estimated magnitude of measurement error and the corresponding estimated reliabilities of these explanatory variables in 1965, 1973, and 1982.

**\*\*\* Table A2 \*\*\***

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<sup>55</sup> The key assumptions of the model are that “true” scores follow a first-order lag process (so 1997 true scores depend on 1982 true scores but not—directly—on 1973 true scores) and that measurement errors are random (uncorrelated with each other and with the true scores).

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**Table 1: Church Attendance, 1965-1997**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	1973	1982	1997
Church attendance (lagged)	.564 (.071)	.847 (.045)	.775 (.035)
Biblical faith (lagged)	.479 (.087)	-.051 (.079)	.011 (.071)
Catholic (1965)	-22.72 (4.55)	2.48 (3.41)	.54 (3.16)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	-15.13 (3.90)	1.98 (3.29)	.04 (3.09)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	-11.51 (4.63)	-1.28 (3.84)	2.72 (3.57)
Black Protestant (1965)	-4.60 (8.57)	3.08 (7.68)	16.31 (7.00)
Non-white	-12.58 (7.38)	1.95 (6.69)	1.37 (6.13)
Female	2.37 (2.20)	2.88 (1.90)	3.65 (1.77)
South (1965)	-2.98 (2.91)	5.70 (2.60)	.03 (2.42)
Family SES (1965)	-.92 (1.60)	-1.55 (1.43)	-.65 (1.34)
High school SES (1965)	-8.34 (2.59)	2.84 (2.37)	-1.23 (2.19)
Current family income (percentile)	.022 (.039)	.011 (.036)	.001 (.033)
College (years)	.49 (.62)	-.22 (.56)	.64 (.51)
Moved to new state	-2.45 (2.42)	.66 (2.34)	.36 (2.35)
Republican partisanship (lagged)	-.027 (.040)	.072 (.041)	.050 (.037)
Intercept	-23.26 (7.42)	9.49 (5.81)	5.83 (5.46)
Standard error of regression	30.51	27.66	25.66
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.25	.47	.55
<i>N</i>	926	930	928

**Table 2: Biblical Faith, 1965-1997**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	1973	1982	1997
Church attendance (lagged)	.168 (.043)	.069 (.027)	.042 (.022)
Biblical faith (lagged)	.555 (.052)	.578 (.049)	.748 (.044)
Catholic (1965)	-8.74 (2.72)	-1.41 (2.12)	-3.01 (2.01)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	-.23 (2.34)	3.36 (2.03)	-1.24 (1.96)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	2.77 (2.76)	3.78 (2.38)	1.87 (2.26)
Black Protestant (1965)	-4.49 (5.16)	.54 (4.75)	-3.02 (4.44)
Non-white	4.53 (4.39)	6.79 (4.17)	1.70 (3.93)
Female	.83 (1.31)	.63 (1.17)	1.11 (1.11)
South (1965)	.98 (1.74)	-.79 (1.61)	-.51 (1.51)
Family SES (1965)	-1.00 (.96)	-2.52 (.89)	-.01 (.84)
High school SES (1965)	-1.93 (1.57)	-.49 (1.49)	-1.70 (1.37)
Current family income (percentile)	.038 (.024)	.038 (.022)	-.004 (.021)
College (years)	-1.24 (.37)	-.82 (.34)	-.40 (.32)
Republican partisanship (lagged)	.017 (.024)	.050 (.025)	-.022 (.024)
Intercept	16.35 (4.48)	24.11 (3.68)	19.68 (3.39)
Standard error of regression	18.17	16.97	15.94
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.35	.44	.53
<i>N</i>	910	912	910

**Table 3: Religion and the Crisis of Authority, 1965-1973**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	Feelings toward the military	Feelings toward the police	Feelings toward radical students	Legalize marijuana
Church attendance (1965)	.128 (.056)	.066 (.045)	-.099 (.048)	-.257 (.078)
Biblical faith (1965)	.172 (.065)	.158 (.052)	-.128 (.056)	-.396 (.094)
Catholic (1965)	-4.83 (3.52)	.38 (2.82)	1.92 (3.04)	12.23 (4.93)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	2.89 (3.01)	2.98 (2.42)	-1.12 (2.61)	2.55 (4.23)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	6.27 (3.54)	1.86 (2.84)	.39 (3.06)	-2.90 (5.06)
Black Protestant (1965)	-10.66 (6.65)	-2.70 (5.33)	6.92 (5.75)	20.07 (9.17)
Non-white	4.74 (5.68)	-11.38 (4.55)	12.23 (4.90)	5.59 (7.74)
Female	3.66 (1.71)	1.33 (1.37)	3.68 (1.48)	-4.11 (2.40)
South (1965)	6.00 (2.27)	4.66 (1.82)	-1.56 (1.97)	-1.99 (3.14)
Family SES (1965)	.75 (1.23)	-.04 (.99)	.19 (1.06)	2.59 (1.72)
High school SES (1965)	-5.44 (2.01)	-2.29 (1.62)	.98 (1.74)	9.73 (2.82)
Current family income (percentile)	.041 (.028)	.003 (.022)	-.035 (.024)	-.085 (.042)
College (years)	-3.97 (.47)	-1.45 (.37)	1.86 (.40)	4.79 (.66)
Republican partisanship (1965)	-.032 (.031)	-.003 (.025)	.020 (.027)	-.029 (.044)
Intercept	35.05 (5.65)	50.46 (4.54)	42.48 (4.90)	89.45 (8.02)
Standard error of regression	21.77	17.43	18.80	32.84
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.25	.13	.12	.27
N	792	790	783	911

**Table 4: Religion and the Role of Women, 1965-1973**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	Women should have equal roles	Women deserve more influence	Feelings toward women's lib	Feelings toward Gloria Steinem
Church attendance (1965)	-.033 (.071)	.017 (.034)	-.058 (.057)	-.007 (.057)
Biblical faith (1965)	-.268 (.086)	-.102 (.040)	-.123 (.066)	-.141 (.065)
Catholic (1965)	5.37 (4.49)	1.92 (2.14)	7.30 (3.59)	.95 (3.40)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	3.88 (3.85)	1.21 (1.84)	4.76 (3.08)	-.37 (2.83)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	-6.27 (4.58)	1.26 (2.16)	-.65 (3.62)	-.54 (3.40)
Black Protestant (1965)	-6.61 (8.49)	4.01 (4.06)	1.90 (6.92)	-8.16 (6.53)
Non-white	2.98 (7.30)	-.98 (3.47)	1.24 (5.97)	12.43 (5.40)
Female	4.02 (2.18)	3.09 (1.04)	3.42 (1.75)	.82 (1.66)
South (1965)	2.27 (2.90)	-2.24 (1.40)	2.62 (2.33)	4.46 (2.29)
Family SES (1965)	.90 (1.59)	-.28 (.75)	1.80 (1.26)	1.13 (1.16)
High school SES (1965)	-.17 (2.58)	1.50 (1.22)	.69 (2.07)	-.95 (1.91)
Current family income (percentile)	.032 (.039)	-.023 (.017)	-.037 (.029)	-.054 (.028)
College (years)	4.54 (.61)	1.83 (.29)	1.00 (.48)	-.06 (.46)
Republican partisanship (1965)	-.101 (.040)	-.036 (.019)	-.029 (.032)	.030 (.030)
Intercept	78.37 (7.35)	38.23 (3.45)	62.77 (5.81)	62.26 (5.45)
Standard error of regression	30.27	13.28	22.21	18.10
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.15	.12	.05	.02
N	919	789	787	575

**Table 5: Religion and Racial Attitudes, 1965-1973**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	Blacks deserve more influence	Washington see to school integration	School busing justified	Government aid to minorities
Church attendance (1965)	.029 (.047)	.211 (.103)	.126 (.062)	.087 (.063)
Biblical faith (1965)	-.093 (.055)	-.202 (.125)	-.223 (.075)	-.071 (.076)
Catholic (1965)	-4.55 (2.95)	-14.38 (6.52)	-10.97 (3.94)	-3.77 (3.99)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	-4.31 (2.54)	-16.52 (5.62)	-12.36 (3.38)	-1.89 (3.42)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	-1.35 (2.99)	-17.84 (6.64)	-12.95 (4.00)	-3.96 (4.05)
Black Protestant (1965)	5.08 (5.57)	-2.46 (12.76)	-3.39 (7.38)	-8.75 (7.52)
Non-white	13.94 (4.75)	22.87 (11.12)	19.80 (6.28)	27.36 (6.41)
Female	-.06 (1.43)	-.47 (3.14)	-3.08 (1.91)	2.37 (1.95)
South (1965)	-8.63 (1.92)	4.69 (4.22)	-4.29 (2.53)	-7.50 (2.58)
Family SES (1965)	1.68 (1.04)	4.57 (2.31)	.95 (1.39)	3.26 (1.42)
High school SES (1965)	3.47 (1.70)	3.23 (3.76)	2.19 (2.26)	3.73 (2.30)
Current family income (percentile)	-.033 (.024)	.033 (.056)	-.104 (.034)	-.089 (.035)
College (years)	.95 (.39)	2.03 (.89)	3.05 (.53)	2.61 (.54)
Republican partisanship (1965)	-.029 (.026)	-.142 (.058)	-.067 (.035)	-.100 (.036)
Intercept	37.63 (4.78)	68.39 (10.59)	45.15 (6.41)	56.14 (6.50)
Standard error of regression	18.22	42.84	26.62	26.78
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.13	.10	.18	.13
N	778	874	931	900



**Table 6: Social Attitudes and Religious Change, 1965-1982**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	Church attendance		Biblical faith	
	1973	1982	1973	1982
Church attendance (1965)	.476 (.067)	.664 (.076)	.137 (.042)	.146 (.044)
Biblical faith (1965)	.312 (.082)	.229 (.092)	.489 (.051)	.405 (.053)
Catholic (1965)	-17.49 (4.22)	-21.21 (3.39)	-6.74 (2.65)	-9.13 (2.75)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	-13.46 (3.61)	-15.84 (4.01)	.07 (2.27)	-.42 (2.33)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	-13.22 (4.27)	-20.36 (4.83)	1.03 (2.67)	-.79 (2.78)
Black Protestant (1965)	-1.09 (8.03)	-6.14 (9.09)	-4.00 (5.03)	-4.46 (5.17)
Non-white	-9.44 (6.85)	-6.94 (7.66)	5.29 (4.25)	7.21 (4.44)
Female	1.90 (2.05)	2.96 (2.30)	.58 (1.28)	-.04 (1.33)
South (1965)	-3.18 (2.72)	1.78 (3.06)	.68 (1.69)	-.56 (1.75)
High school SES (1965)	-5.52 (2.18)	-3.17 (2.45)	-1.45 (1.37)	-3.54 (1.41)
College (years)	2.72 (.63)	1.67 (.71)	-.10 (.39)	-.56 (.41)
Republican partisanship (1965)	-.054 (.037)	.027 (.042)	.006 (.023)	.052 (.024)
Feelings toward the military (1973)	-.018 (.080)	-.034 (.091)	.133 (.050)	.158 (.053)
Legalize marijuana (1973)	-.324 (.053)	-.205 (.061)	-.057 (.033)	-.051 (.035)
Women should have equal roles (1973)	-.182 (.065)	-.262 (.074)	-.113 (.040)	-.076 (.042)
Intercept	19.26 (9.65)	20.59 (10.87)	26.30 (6.09)	30.46 (6.38)
Standard error of regression	28.33	32.03	17.54	18.18
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.35	.30	.39	.36
N	926	930	910	912

**Table 7: Religious Practice and Beliefs and Pro-Life Attitudes, 1982-1997**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	Pro-life opinion	Church attendance	Biblical faith
Church attendance (1982)	.082 (.040)	.793 (.041)	-.002 (.026)
Biblical faith (1982)	.186 (.069)	.022 (.072)	.720 (.044)
Catholic (1965)	1.41 (3.07)	.60 (3.16)	-3.27 (1.99)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	-1.77 (2.98)	-.15 (3.09)	-.92 (1.95)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	-.66 (3.45)	2.86 (3.56)	1.68 (2.24)
Black Protestant (1965)	-6.24 (6.90)	15.53 (7.05)	-1.12 (4.43)
Non-white	6.86 (6.01)	1.87 (6.14)	.42 (3.90)
Female	-3.73 (1.76)	3.29 (1.82)	1.82 (1.12)
South (1965)	1.12 (2.35)	-.19 (2.43)	-.10 (1.50)
Family SES (1965)	-1.42 (1.31)	-.82 (1.35)	.40 (.84)
High school SES (1965)	-3.27 (2.14)	-1.02 (2.20)	-2.14 (1.37)
Current family income (percentile)	-.088 (.032)	-.004 (.033)	.006 (.021)
College (years)	.54 (.50)	.58 (.52)	-.24 (.32)
Republican partisanship (1982)	.110 (.036)	.052 (.037)	-.026 (.023)
Pro-life opinion (1982)	.607 (.049)	-.047 (.050)	.109 (.032)
Intercept	-4.09 (5.25)	6.11 (5.44)	19.36 (3.36)
Standard error of regression	24.75	25.64	15.77
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.45	.55	.54
<i>N</i>	923	928	910

**Table 8: The Impact of Religious Practice and Beliefs on Tolerance, 1997**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	Feelings toward gays	Oppose anti-gay discrimination	Tolerance of moral differences
Church attendance (lagged)	-.072 (.030)	-.164 (.048)	-.137 (.036)
Biblical faith (lagged)	-.141 (.061)	-.237 (.096)	-.222 (.073)
Catholic (1965)	3.17 (2.75)	5.18 (4.32)	-.09 (3.31)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	.66 (2.68)	.61 (4.20)	-1.64 (3.22)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	-9.00 (3.10)	-7.56 (4.88)	-8.51 (3.73)
Black Protestant (1965)	8.30 (6.08)	.51 (9.74)	2.25 (7.33)
Non-white	-2.68 (5.33)	-6.71 (8.54)	-5.26 (6.41)
Female	12.93 (1.54)	15.52 (2.41)	5.62 (1.85)
South (1965)	1.87 (2.11)	1.66 (3.32)	.89 (2.52)
Family SES (1965)	.45 (1.17)	1.90 (1.84)	1.55 (1.40)
High school SES (1965)	.07 (1.90)	-2.71 (2.97)	-1.03 (2.29)
Current family income (percentile)	.029 (.028)	.162 (.045)	.018 (.034)
College (years)	.71 (.44)	1.38 (.70)	-1.21 (.53)
Republican partisanship (lagged)	-.108 (.033)	-.233 (.051)	-.116 (.039)
Intercept	56.94 (4.73)	84.74 (7.39)	94.16 (5.69)
Standard error of regression	22.29	34.72	26.85
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.18	.17	.12
N	923	913	932

**Table 9: The Impact of Religious Practice and Beliefs on Partisanship, 1965-1997**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	1973	1982	1997
Church attendance (lagged)	-.049 (.055)	.014 (.034)	.127 (.032)
Biblical faith (lagged)	.161 (.067)	-.007 (.059)	.057 (.065)
Catholic (1965)	-3.49 (3.50)	5.63 (2.56)	5.31 (2.93)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	2.01 (3.00)	8.26 (2.47)	4.43 (2.85)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	3.70 (3.55)	10.80 (2.88)	2.96 (3.29)
Black Protestant (1965)	-1.11 (6.74)	13.51 (5.94)	6.07 (6.55)
Non-white	-14.14 (5.77)	-11.69 (5.22)	-19.89 (5.72)
Female	1.27 (1.69)	-5.12 (1.41)	-6.62 (1.64)
South (1965)	-3.39 (2.24)	-4.39 (1.94)	2.44 (2.25)
Family SES (1965)	1.44 (1.23)	1.60 (1.06)	-.49 (1.25)
High school SES (1965)	-7.42 (2.00)	3.58 (1.76)	-.26 (2.03)
Current family income (percentile)	.112 (.030)	.129 (.027)	.054 (.030)
College (years)	-.24 (.47)	-.52 (.41)	-.23 (.47)
Republican partisanship (lagged)	.460 (.031)	.747 (.031)	.744 (.034)
Intercept	10.74 (5.65)	5.56 (4.37)	2.14 (5.03)
Standard error of regression	23.51	20.43	23.64
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.32	.54	.51
<i>N</i>	929	907	922

**Table 10: Religion, Moral Issues, and Partisan Change, 1982-1997**

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Church attendance (lagged)	.128 (.032)	.080 (.035)	.074 (.034)	.114 (.038)
Biblical faith (lagged)	.063 (.063)	.006 (.065)	-.018 (.064)	.054 (.064)
Catholic (1965)	5.44 (2.92)	4.82 (2.89)	5.21 (2.84)	5.37 (2.92)
White mainline Protestant (1965)	4.50 (2.85)	5.01 (2.82)	4.57 (2.77)	4.64 (2.85)
White evangelical Protestant (1965)	3.15 (3.27)	2.87 (3.23)	1.31 (3.18)	3.07 (3.27)
Black Protestant (1965)	6.34 (6.52)	8.16 (6.48)	7.37 (6.36)	6.88 (6.56)
Non-white	-19.66 (5.68)	-21.50 (5.64)	-21.46 (5.54)	-19.99 (5.69)
Female	-6.67 (1.63)	-5.35 (1.66)	-4.31 (1.65)	-6.39 (1.68)
South (1965)	2.56 (2.23)	2.66 (2.21)	2.79 (2.17)	2.72 (2.24)
Current family income (percentile)	.054 (.030)	.074 (.030)	.075 (.030)	.057 (.030)
College (years)	-.32 (.44)	-.16 (.44)	-.32 (.44)	-.26 (.45)
Republican partisanship (lagged)	.742 (.034)	.725 (.034)	.706 (.034)	.741 (.034)
Moral tolerance (current)	---	---	-.153 (.031)	---
Opposition to anti-gay discrimination (current)	---	---	-.048 (.023)	---
Pro-life opinion (current)	---	.149 (.042)	.083 (.044)	---
Pro-life opinion (lagged)	---	---	---	.034 (.046)
Intercept	1.82 (4.96)	2.33 (4.92)	20.71 (5.81)	1.66 (4.96)
Standard error of regression	23.61	23.38	22.95	23.62
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.51	.52	.54	.51
N	922	922	922	922

**Table A1: Sample Weights**

Each cell shows the panel weight for respondents with the corresponding combination of characteristics (in italics), the percentage of the original 1965 sample ( $N=1,669$ ), and the raw number of respondents who participated in all four panel waves ( $N=935$ ).

**Partisanship:** Democrats; Independents (including other and apolitical); Republicans.

**Follow politics:** “most of the time”; “some of the time”; “only now and then” or “hardly at all.”

**Race:** white; black; other. **Region:** non-South; South. **Sex:** male; female.

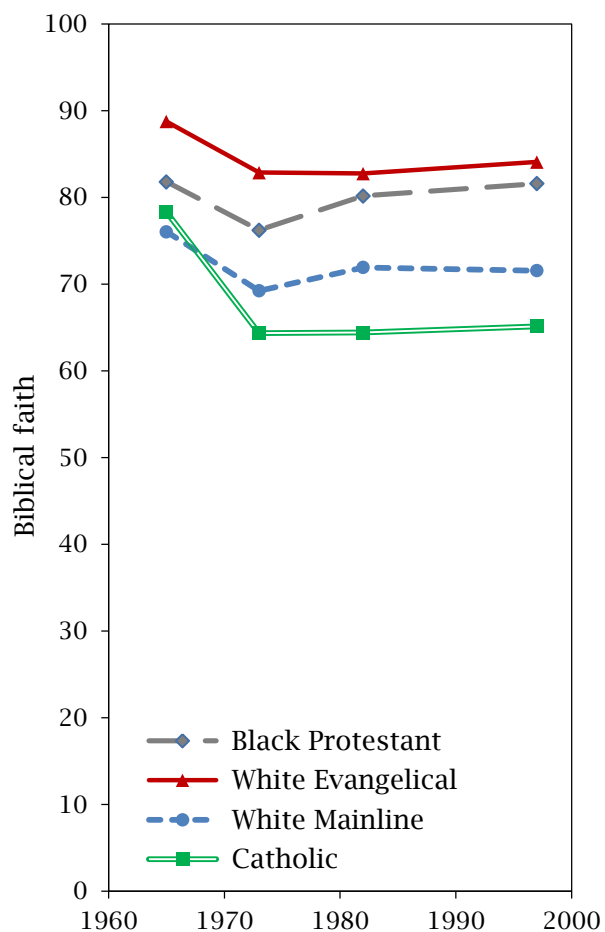
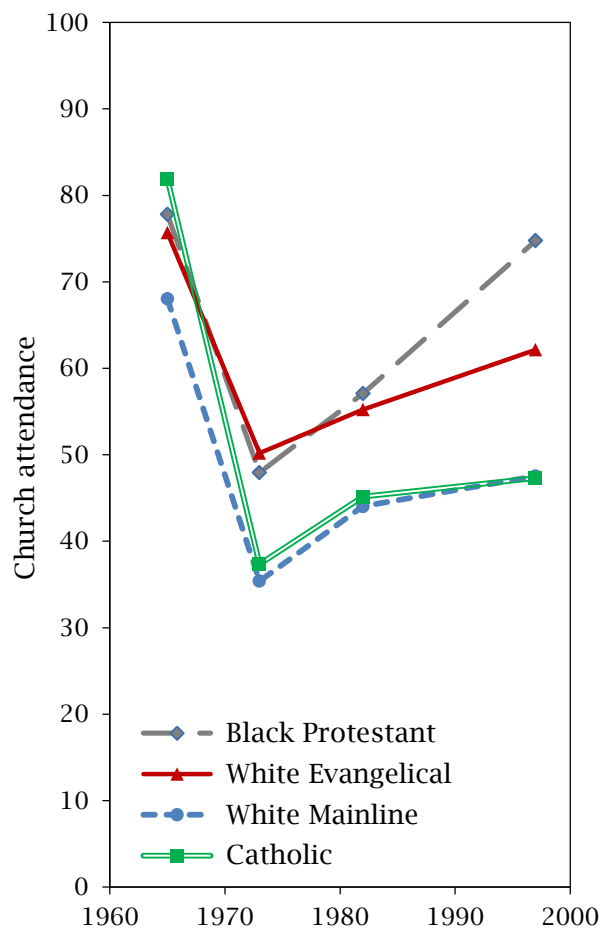
	Dems, Most	Dems, Some	Dems, Less	Inds, Most	Inds, Some	Inds, Less	Reps, Most	Reps, Some	Reps, Less	Total
White NonS Male	<i>1.035</i> 8.8% (78)	<i>.944</i> 7.1% (71)	<i>1.658</i> 3.5% (18)	<i>1.421</i> 2.6% (17)	<i>.876</i> 2.0% (22)	<i>1.332</i> 1.5% (9)	<i>.854</i> 6.1% (66)	<i>1.111</i> 5.9% (50)	<i>1.242</i> 1.9% (14)	<i>1.056</i> 39.5% (345)
White NonS Fem	<i>.908</i> 7.9% (75)	<i>.916</i> 9.4% (92)	<i>.981</i> 3.5% (32)	<i>1.064</i> 1.5% (13)	<i>.917</i> 2.0% (19)	<i>1.788</i> 1.0% (6)	<i>.816</i> 3.9% (44)	<i>.807</i> 5.5% (59)	<i>1.205</i> 1.5% (12)	<i>.916</i> 36.2% (352)
White South Male	<i>.761</i> 1.9% (26)	<i>.846</i> 2.1% (24)		<i>.964</i> 1.1% (13)		<i>.945</i> 1.0% (11)	<i>.858</i> 1.1% (12)		<i>.851</i> 7.2% (86)	
White South Fem	<i>1.085</i> 1.3% (13)	<i>.791</i> 2.5% (31)		<i>.956</i> 1.3% (14)		<i>.756</i> 0.8% (10)	<i>1.083</i> 1.1% (11)		<i>.898</i> 7.1% (79)	
Black NonS Male	<i>1.079</i> 1.4% (15)	<i>1.605</i> 2.2% (17)		<i>2.214</i> 1.6% (8)						<i>1.432</i> 2.2% (20)
Black NonS Fem										<i>1.329</i> 2.4% (20)
Black South Male	<i>1.374</i> 1.8% (11)	<i>1.940</i> 2.5% (13)								<i>3.364</i> 2.5% (7)
Black South Fem										<i>1.237</i> 2.3% (17)
Other NonS Male	<i>.773</i> 0.6% (9)									<i>.659</i> 0.1% (1)
Other NonS Fem										<i>.788</i> 0.6% (8)
Total	<i>.981</i> 23.3% (221)	<i>.945</i> 23.4% (233)	<i>1.307</i> 9.7% (69)	<i>1.262</i> 5.6% (42)	<i>.954</i> 5.4% (55)	<i>1.383</i> 3.2% (22)	<i>.845</i> 12.1% (134)	<i>.949</i> 13.4% (129)	<i>1.211</i> 3.9% (30)	1669 (935)

**Table A2: Measurement Reliability Estimates**

Estimates of measurement error and reliability based on Wiley and Wiley (1970) measurement error model.

	Measurement error	Var( $\epsilon$ )	Estimated reliability		
			1965	1973	1982
Church attendance	15.68	245.837	.681	.800	.830
Biblical faith	10.39	108.047	.724	.787	.790
Republican partisanship	10.45	109.295	.891	.865	.877
Feelings toward the military	12.57	158.021		.751	.662
Legalize marijuana	16.56	274.233	---	.815	.782
Women should have equal roles	19.45	378.187	---	.644	.472
Government aid to minorities	14.85	220.478	---	.721	.679
Risk violating rights to reduce crime	19.10	364.896	---	.616	.502
Support for school prayer	22.42	502.875	.740	.763	.757
Pro-life opinion	15.85	251.218	1997: .774	---	.762

**Figure 1: Religious Practice and Beliefs through the Life Cycle**





**Figure 2: Two Views of the “God Gap”**

Church attendance by partisanship; partisanship by church attendance

