

***Religious Groups as a Force in Party
Politics***

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Abstract

This paper delineates the position of American religious groups in modern party politics. We first outline two different models of religious politics, the *ethnoreligious* and the *religious restructuring model*. We then use a number of data sets to reconstruct the contribution that religious groups have made to party coalitions from the New Deal era to the present, considering both theoretical perspectives. We test the influence of religious factors against other influences on party identification, including region, social class and gender during the 1960s, the 1980s and the contemporary era. Finally, we explore the role that religious influences play in the contemporary ideological polarization between the Republican and Democratic parties.

Throughout American history, political parties have depended upon religious groups to help build winning electoral coalitions. Parties and candidates can mobilize the citizenry in their churches, while pastors and denominational leaders can relay partisan cues to their flocks and voice the concerns of their members to party elites. Such activities tend to promote stable partisan ties for religious groups. Nevertheless, changes in the alignment of religious groups with political parties can and do occur. Indeed, party coalitions have changed dramatically since the end of World War II, and religious groups have played a significant role in those changes. It is no exaggeration to say that religion has been an engine of partisan realignment in the past generation.

The details of this realignment are complex. Religious groups have not only shifted their partisan attachments, but have altered these identifications at different times and for different reasons. In addition, cleavages have emerged *within* some religious traditions that mirror the partisan divisions so apparent in contemporary American politics. This chapter explores these transformations, demonstrating that the underlying nexus between religious groups and political parties has changed in a way that has contributed to today's partisan polarization.

Models of the Ties between Religious Groups and Political Parties

Although the earliest social scientific studies of the electorate focused on the socioeconomic differences between Republicans and Democrats, they also confirmed the continuing power of religious divisions (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Berelson et al. 1954). Catholics were more likely to identify as Democrats than were their Protestant counterparts, regardless of social class. Conversely, Protestants outside the South were more likely to choose the Republican label than Catholics were during the postwar period. Early research based on the American National Election Studies (Campbell et al. 1954, 1960) reached similar conclusions. Even today,

political scientists, pollsters and pundits talk about candidates' pursuit of religious groups, using the common parlances of "the Catholic vote," the "Jewish vote," or the "white Protestant vote." In recent years, as religious groups have multiplied, the lexicon has extended to the "Muslim," "Mormon" or even "Hindu vote." All these references suggest the historic focus on religious affiliation as a marker in electoral politics.

Recently the analysis of religious voting has become even more complicated. With the rise of the Christian Right in the late 1970s and its increasing influence within the Republican Party, observers have implicitly defined religion not by affiliation, but by types of belief, often using terms such as "Evangelical," "fundamentalist," "conservative Christian," or "traditionalist Catholic." At the other end of this "belief" dimension are the rising numbers of non-religious or secular voters. This dimension of religion is often captured rather crudely in the shorthand of "the God gap," measured empirically by the frequency of church attendance (Sullivan 2008, 4-7; Olson and Green 2006). As a result, anyone perusing the burgeoning popular and scholarly literature on religion in American politics is likely to be confused by the vast array of religious classifications and measures used by analysts. Our basic assumption here is that the scheme which taps best all the important facets of American religion will provide the most insight into political behavior.

To construct such a classification requires consideration of two competing views about the critical components of American religion. The first of these, the *ethnoreligious perspective*, stresses categories based on religious belonging, especially membership in religious traditions, and the long-term political conflicts and alliances *among* those traditions. The second, the *religious restructuring perspective*, emphasizes emerging divisions *within* religious traditions, based on changes in religious belief and behavior, and the consequent formation of new political

coalitions across the boundaries of old traditions. Each perspective highlights different facets of religious faith and, thus, different operational measures, and each has virtues for political analysis (see Smidt, Kellstedt and Guth 2009). We shall outline the basic contentions of each and then proceed to an empirical examination of religion's influence on party identification from 1940 to the present.

The Ethnoreligious Model

The earliest social scientific studies of religion and voting behavior relied implicitly on an *ethnoreligious* interpretation of the links between religion and American politics. As developed in more systematic fashion by the so-called ethnocultural historians in the 1960s and after, this theory identifies the key religious groups as the historic denominations and religious families born in Europe and later multiplying on America's shores. Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, and a myriad other Protestants combined distinct religious worldviews with cultural attributes such as ethnicity, race or regional location. They were soon joined by other ethnoreligious traditions, including Catholics, Jews, and Eastern Orthodox. All these groups developed distinct political cultures, fostered by religious leaders, houses of worship, and tight-knit ethnoreligious neighborhoods. Although the assumptions underlying this analytic framework are often not articulated, ethnocultural historians usually argued that ethnoreligious groups held differing worldviews, cultural preferences, and negative reference groups that shaped their political alliances (McCormick 1974).

Thus, for these historians religion influenced American politics primarily through *affiliation* or *belonging*, with partisan attachments and voting behavior reflecting "political expressions of shared values derived from the voter's membership in, and commitment to, ethnic and religious groups" (Kleppner 1970, 35). Given the context of a two-party system, religious

groups naturally sought compatible allies, as even the largest denominations needed assistance in influencing electoral politics. And as religious groups were often in conflict, party politics naturally involved competing ethnoreligious alliances (Kleppner 1970, 1979; Jensen 1971; Formisano 1983; Swierenga 1990, 2009). In the nineteenth century, a Whig and later Republican coalition of “pietists” faced a Democratic alliance of “liturgicals,” eventually joined by southern white Protestants after the Civil War and Reconstruction (Kleppner 1970, 1979; Jensen 1971).

By the early New Deal years, these coalitions had reorganized; important theological and organizational changes in the religious world had split white Protestant churches into “Evangelical” and “Mainline” traditions, but ethnoreligious loyalties remained at their base (Carpenter 1997; Marsden 1987). Mainline Protestants provided much of the GOP’s leadership, as well as its most faithful voters, whereas Catholics, Jews, and other religious minorities, such as southern Evangelicals, constituted the bedrock of the Democracy. As a result, early social science research in the 1940s found religious divisions still vital, even in the context of the supposed dominance of class-based New Deal politics (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954).

The Restructuring Model

Despite the virtues of the ethnoreligious model for historical analysis, it has lost at least some of its explanatory power in contemporary politics. The underlying bases for ethnoreligious politics have largely vanished: the powerful social integration within religious traditions, the social isolation of those traditions, and the strong tensions among them (Kleppner 1979). Where these conditions still obtain, the model may still be relevant, as in describing the political behavior of certain close-knit ethnoreligious communities such as black Protestants, Latino Catholics, Jews, and Latter-day Saints. Indeed, even affiliation with churches in the historic

Evangelical, Mainline Protestant or Catholic traditions may still matter politically, in part because such membership is now truly elective, allowing believers to choose a congenial religious, and perhaps political, environment (Green and Guth 1993; Hout and Fischer 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Thus, many analysts still focus on ethnoreligious tradition, variously defined (Manza and Brooks 1999; Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox, and Woodberry 2000; Layman 2001; Lege, Wald, Krueger, and Mueller 2002).

Nevertheless, many sociologists of religion argue that the ethnoreligious description of religious life and its political implications has less and less utility. As ascriptive affiliations break down, ethnic and religious neighborhoods disappear, geographic mobility rises and intermarriage abounds, Americans move freely among religious settings, ignoring historical ties of denomination, ethnicity, region, and even family (Ammerman 1997; Pew Forum, 2008; Putnam and Campbell 2010). For such theorists, it is now *belief*, not *belonging*, that serves as the fundamental basis for religious alignments in politics. As people re-sort themselves into congenial theological environments, American religion has been restructured into two camps with opposing worldviews, fostered by competing religious institutions and leaders. As Robert Wuthnow (1988) and James Davison Hunter (1991) have argued, old religious traditions have been polarized by theological, social, and cultural conflicts into a *conservative, orthodox, or traditionalist* faction on one side, and a *liberal, progressive, or modernist* bloc on the other. And the growing number of secular Americans may well represent a natural extension of the liberal or progressive side—perhaps as the product of restructuring battles (Hout and Fischer 2002). Wuthnow saw such developments splitting religious institutions, but Hunter’s apocalyptic title, *Culture Wars*, projected the divisions into the polity as a threat to social stability. Hunter’s assumption was that religious factionalism clearly led to political polarization.

Although scholarly reaction to the “culture wars” thesis has tended to focus on these purported political manifestations (Williams 1997; Fiorina 2005; Nivoli and Brady 2006), it is important to remember that Wuthnow and Hunter’s original formulations were rooted in theological developments, especially the emergence of opposing worldviews. Their competing camps were characterized by alternative belief systems, different religious practices, and adherence to rival religious movements. Indeed, identification of these polarizing forces probably constitutes the most valuable insight of the restructuring perspective.

Although critics are rightly skeptical about extreme statements of the restructuring theory, anecdotal evidence for a milder version is convincing, especially in “old-line” American religious institutions. The religious press reports continual battles between traditionalists and modernists in almost every major Protestant body, as well as in the American Catholic church. Conflicts over how best to interpret the Bible in the Southern Baptist Convention, the controversy over the installation of gay bishops in the Episcopal Church, and the continuing factionalism within the United Methodist Church are just three examples of divisions arising within Protestant churches in recent decades that seem to mirror Wuthnow and Hunter’s descriptions.

Although rooted in theology and religious practice, these struggles also produce opposing moral, social, economic, and political perspectives. Most of the scholarly literature focuses on the political controversies over social issues, such as abortion and gay rights, but there is growing evidence that these theological divisions have come to influence public attitudes on foreign policy issues and economic policy attitudes as well (Guth et al. 2006; Guth 2009). It is true that some culture war theorists overstate the consequent polarization, both within religious institutions and the mass public: there are *centrists* in the religious wars, just as there are

moderates in the political wars. However, the religious divisions they identify may well influence the structure of electoral politics, if only because both religious and political elites are polarized along these lines, thus shaping the cues presented to the public (Guth et al. 1997; Fiorina 2005).

A third “hybrid” theoretical formulation builds on the insights of the ethnoreligious and restructuring perspectives, arguing that both religious affiliation and religious beliefs help to explain how religion shapes American politics (Layman 1997, 2001; Kohut, Green, Keeter, and Toth 2000; Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt, and Green 2006; Green 2007; Green, Kellstedt, Smidt, and Guth 2007; Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 2009). According to this perspective, some groups behave as the ethnoreligious model would suggest, such as Jews, black Protestants, Latino Catholics and other smaller religious groups, many of them recent additions to the American religious smorgasbord. Others respond on the basis of contemporary divisions over beliefs, perhaps with religious behavior added to the mix. For the three largest white religious traditions—Evangelical and Mainline Protestantism and “European” Catholicism—we expect that the interaction of ethnoreligious affiliation and restructuring variables provides the best explanation for political choices and behavior. These traditions have not only had the longest experience in American politics, but are also the primary battlegrounds for the theological quarrels identified by restructuring theorists. Each includes many *traditionalists*, an apt term for believers who seek to preserve their tradition against the intellectual encroachments of the modern world. On the other side are *modernists*, who want to adapt beliefs and behaviors to modernity. Still other members (*centrists*) retain the beliefs and practices characteristic of their tradition, but with less consistency and commitment than traditionalists do. Centrists are often puzzled by the conflicts between traditionalists and modernists and tend to sit on the sidelines of internal battlefields.

Given the varied impact of ethnoreligious forces and restructuring influences among American religious groups, we think such a hybrid model is appropriate, emphasizing the study of belonging, believing, and behaving, as well as their interactions, as the best means to understand religion's impact on American politics. We expect that both religious affiliation and traditionalism in belief and practice are factors that connect people to contemporary party politics, if in varying degrees (Smidt, Kellstedt and Guth 2009; Layman and Green 2005).

Religious Groups and Party Identification

Delineating the contours of partisan identification by religious groups over the past seventy years is by no means an easy task. The available data on religious affiliation have various limitations, especially during the early years of the analysis, and finding evidence on religious belief and behavior is even more arduous. Nevertheless, we have produced a time-series for religious affiliation and partisanship that allows us to trace the transformations in partisan religious alignments with some degree of confidence.¹ And although we cannot test the restructuring thesis for the entire period, given the absence of data on religious belief in the earliest years, we have adequate measures for selected years in the 1960s and beyond.

First, we consider the contours of partisan identification by ethnoreligious groups over the past seventy years. Table 1 reports the net partisan advantage among major ethnoreligious traditions from 1940 to 2008. This figure is calculated simply by subtracting the percent of Democratic identifiers from that of GOP identifiers, with a minus score representing a Democratic advantage and a positive score, a Republican one. Independents are excluded from

¹ See the Appendix on Data Sources. For more discussion of the problems involved in this exercise, see Kellstedt et al. 2007.

the analysis. As the last row shows, there has been only a small net change in the ratio of Republicans to Democrats from 1940-44 to 2008, despite considerable Democratic advantages at times from the 1950s to the 1970s. The Democratic electoral victories in 2006 and 2008 brought a small spike in Democratic numbers during the 2008 election year, but Gallup data show that in 2010 the disparity between parties had reverted to the four-point difference that existed in 2004 (Newport 2010).

Despite the small national change over this extended period, the partisan transformations of ethnoreligious groups were often dramatic. At the beginning of the era, we see a New Deal religious coalition that fits the picture drawn by the early voting studies. In 1940-44, both white Evangelicals and black Protestants identified as Democrats, as did white Catholics, in the latter case by an enormous margin.² Jews were also solidly in the Democratic camp, as were the small number of religiously unaffiliated citizens, albeit by a smaller margin, but one that increased over the next three decades. On the other side, the large national body of Mainline Protestants was the sole group with a significant Republican advantage. Ethnoreligious groups that play a much larger role in contemporary politics (e.g. Latino Catholics and Protestants, Latter-day Saints) were too small even to allow estimates, although the “all other religion” category does show a modest Democratic bias. In sum, a modified version of nineteenth-century ethnoreligious politics was alive and well in the 1940s.

As we move across time (and across the table), we see several clear developments in ethnoreligious alignments. First, Evangelical affiliation with the Democrats peaks in the early 1960s, declining thereafter to an even split during the Reagan era. In 1992 a GOP advantage

² By contemporary standards, black Protestant voting during this era seems almost evenly divided between the parties, with the community not yet having completely abandoned the party of Lincoln. Unfortunately, we have no solid data on party identification itself for this period.

appears that continues to grow until 2004, receding only slightly in 2008. Thus, by the 1990s white Evangelicals, one fourth of the public, had come to exhibit a strong Republican preference. At the same time, the rapidly diminishing cohort of their Mainline brethren retained their solid Republican preference up until the election of 2004, but then abandoned that historic position for a true “swing” status, almost evenly divided in partisan attachments. During the second half of the twentieth century, black Protestants moved from a modest to an overwhelming identification with the Democrats, reaching a peak in the pivotal 1960s and remaining at a very high level thereafter. At the same time, however, the New Deal alignment of white Catholics was reduced to a very modest edge for the Democrats by 1992. Indeed, Catholics had joined their ancient opponents, Mainline Protestants, as a pivotal swing group in both partisan alignments and elections. Jewish preference for the Democrats fluctuated somewhat, but stayed at a high level throughout the period, while the growing ranks of the religiously unaffiliated have demonstrated a steady Democratic advantage, one that diminished only briefly in the late 1990s.

(Table 1 about here)

By the 1970s the smaller ethnoreligious groups, previously hard to identify in ANES (and other) surveys, had become both more numerous and politically consequential. For example, Latino Protestants and Catholics appear in considerable numbers in the 1970s, identifying generally as Democrats, although the smaller but rapidly growing Protestant contingent moved toward the Republicans in the 1990s and after. The same can be said of Latter-day Saints, whose numbers now surpass those of American Jews and generally give the GOP a strong edge in partisan affiliation. At the same time, the catch-all category of “all other religions” is not only becoming larger, but also solidly Democratic in preference. All in all, by 2008 religious groups

had moved substantially; indeed, all the large groups can be said to have “realigned,” by any definition of the much-disputed term.

A focus on changes in the past seventy years is instructive, but it also neglects the timing, and potentially the causes, of the alterations for particular groups. For example, Evangelical Protestants retained a clear identification with the Democrats through the 1960s, but began to move away in the 1970s, voting strongly against McGovern in 1972 (Kellstedt et al. 2007, 273). They became evenly divided between the parties in the 1980s, and joined the Republican ranks after 1990 with a vengeance. Meanwhile, Mainline Protestant evolution was slow; not until the 1990s was their love affair with the Republican Party usurped by Evangelicals. For black Protestants, stronger Democratic attachments came swiftly with the civil rights movement in the 1950s and the Civil Rights and Voting-Rights Acts of the 1960s. White Catholic migration from Democratic identification began with voting for Nixon in 1972 (Kellstedt et al. 2007), warmed with affection for Reagan in the 1980s (as so-called “Reagan Democrats”), and has continued gradually ever since. Ironically, Mainline Protestants and white Catholics, historically the bulwarks of the GOP and the Democratic Party respectively, have moved from opposite positions to occupy the middle of the partisan spectrum.

In theoretical terms, Table 1 suggests that there is still some support for an ethnoreligious model linking religion to political behavior. Jews and Latino Catholics join black Protestants as strong supporters of the Democratic Party, suggesting that religion and ethnicity are critical to partisan attachments, as the ethnoreligious model would indicate, a conclusion buttressed by the Democratic bias of other faiths and, perhaps, the religiously unaffiliated. And the Evangelical religious tradition is now clearly tied to the GOP, more strongly than Mainline Protestants (the

former “Republican party at prayer”) had ever been, and at much the same magnitude as white Catholicism was for the New Deal Democracy.

In sum, religious traditions still differ in partisan attachments, as the ethnoreligious model suggests, but we also need to examine a religious restructuring model to see if it is a better fit in the twenty-first century. This is especially important in considering party identification among Mainline Protestants and white Catholics, the new “swing groups” in American religious politics; after all, most members of these communities are still partisans, not independents. And although they are not always explicit on this point, the restructuring theorists tend to see theological divisions most potent within the large, “older” American religious traditions such as Evangelical and Mainline Protestants as well as European-origin Catholics. These groups are increasingly acculturated or assimilated, well-educated, and engage in high rates of intermarriage, thus reducing ethnoreligious sources of conflict (Putnam and Campbell 2010). On the other hand, the influences of higher education, critical approaches to religion, modern communications and globalization have all served to create the very theological divisions described by the restructuring theorists. If restructuring is occurring and has political implications, it should be most evident in the three largest American religious traditions.

(Table 2 about here)

Testing the claims of restructuring theory before the 1960s is quite difficult, given the limitations of available data.³ Table 2 examines more recent periods for which ANES and other survey data is available in the form of questions on biblical interpretation and church attendance. Although these items provide only a minimal measure of what we call *religious traditionalism*,

³ We have demonstrated earlier that in 1944 there was little evidence of any politically relevant religious divisions *within* the major traditions in presidential vote (Kellstedt et al. 2007, 288-289).

we use them to classify respondents as “traditionalists” (high view of the Bible and regular attendance), “modernists” (low view of the Bible and infrequent attendance), and “centrists” (intermediate scores on both).⁴ Although the measures are quite crude, they are also quite powerful. As Table 2 shows, in the 1960s partisan differences between traditionalists and modernists were nonexistent among Evangelicals, but by the 1970s there is a clear monotonic tendency for theological traditionalism to reduce Democratic affiliation.⁵ In subsequent decades, the partisan split between traditionalist and modernist Evangelicals grows, reaching truly massive proportions by 2004 and 2008. The large traditionalist contingent favors the GOP over the Democrats by a margin of four to one, while the much smaller modernist segment is evenly divided. The impetus for these changes is not crystal clear; the traditionalist/modernist divide coincides with the rise of the Religious Right and its focus on “social” issues, but by 2004 the division extended to foreign policy and economic issues as well (Guth et al. 2006).

The historical patterns for Mainline Protestants and Anglo-Catholics differ from the Evangelical one, but in instructive ways. For Mainline Protestants, through the 1980s traditionalists are the most Republican, while modernists are the least so. (It is church attendance that accounts for this; Mainline regular attenders appear to have picked up partisan cues more readily than their less observant co-religionists.) This Mainline pattern reversed briefly in 1992 before reemerging in 1996, but with more modest differences between traditionalists and modernists than present among Evangelicals. In some ways the most dramatic changes have

⁴ A “high” view of the Bible is the ANES option that “The Bible is God’s word and all it says is true.” A “low” view is either that “the Bible is a good book because it was written by wise men, but God had nothing to do with it,” or that “the Bible was written by men who lived so long ago that it is worth very little today.” The “intermediate” response is that “the Bible was written by men inspired by God but it contains some human errors.”

⁵ No bible item was available in the ANES in the 1970s, so traditionalists are simply high church attenders.

occurred among white Catholics: in the 1960s it was the *traditionalist* segment that was the most *Democratic*, but by 2004 this group was much more Republican. Catholic centrists moved from a strongly Democratic bias in the 1960s to a virtual tie by the 2000s, and modernist Catholics started the period as strong Democrats, flirted with the GOP in the 1990s but reverted to their Democratic loyalties after 1996. Thus, if we confine our attention to the 1990s and after, we see that culture war divisions are strong among Evangelicals, present but less striking among Mainliners, and opening up even among Catholics.

To recapitulate: the ethnoreligious model was a good fit in the 1960s for all three large white religious traditions. There were relatively few partisan divisions by theological orientation, and the ones that appeared among Mainliners and Catholics show that those most attached to their religious tradition tended to adhere most strongly to that tradition's historic "party," whether the GOP for the Mainliners or the Democrats for Catholics. This began to change for Evangelicals in the 1970s. Although all three Evangelical subgroups still identified as Democrats, traditionalists were least likely to do so. By the 1980s traditionalists had moved to the Republican side of the partisan ledger and they continued this migration after 1990. Evangelical centrists and modernists moved toward the GOP as well, but not as far as their traditionalist counterparts. Thus, a restructuring model seems to describe contemporary partisan divisions among Evangelicals exceedingly well.

For the Mainline, traditionalist/modernist differences were substantial in the 1970s and 1980s, driven by the relatively high church attendance of the former. This pattern reversed in 1992 before reasserting itself in 1996 and continuing ever since. The largest theological differences in partisanship in the Mainline occurred in 2008, although the gaps do not approach the size of those among Evangelicals. Still, this seems to be evidence for a restructuring

interpretation. For white Catholics, an ethnoreligious explanation is a good fit for partisan attachments until 2000, as traditionalist/modernist differences remained minimal and all three white Catholic subgroups moved toward the Republicans at about the same rate. In the past three presidential elections, however, considerable gaps have opened up as Catholic traditionalists' shifted toward the GOP and modernists moved strongly toward the Democrats (this gap was especially large in 2004 when George W. Bush made direct appeals to Catholic traditionalists).

In sum, Tables 1 and 2 document a linkage between religion and party attachments that suggests an ethnoreligious interpretation is appropriate for black and Latino Protestants, Latino Catholics, Jews, smaller religions, and Latter-day Saints throughout the time period. However, for the three largest white religious traditions, a restructuring model works best in recent decades for Evangelicals, since 1996 for Mainline Protestants, and since 2000 for Anglo-Catholics. Not only have religious groups and subgroups realigned, but the model that best explains religion and partisan ties has changed as well. Finally, the realignment has probably contributed in a variety of ways to greater partisan polarization in the society. Much of this is related to the shifting religious coalitions of our two major parties, to which we now turn.

Religion and Partisan Coalitions: The Ethnoreligious Perspective

What are the contributions of ethnoreligious groups to the coalitions of the two major parties? How has the importance of each group changed over time? Tables 3a and 3b look at the ethnoreligious composition of party coalitions from 1940 to 2008. As Table 3a demonstrates, the Republican coalition was dominated by Mainline Protestants in the 1940s through the 1970s, as this group provided fully one-half of all party identifiers during those decades, a proportion that slipped slightly over the period, first with the relative and then the absolute decline in the number of Mainliners. This decline accelerated during the 1980s, when Mainliners still constituted three-

eighths of the GOP, through the 2000s, when the tradition contributed less than one-fifth of the GOP religious coalition. At the same time, the Evangelical contribution grew from one-sixth of Republican identifiers in 1940-44 to two-fifths in 2008, making Evangelicals by far the largest single GOP religious component. These changes in the absolute contributions of the two white Protestant traditions are due to several factors: the massive decline in Mainline affiliation since 1940, the relative stability in Evangelical membership, and, of course, the Evangelical movement toward the GOP and the decline in Mainline identification with the Republicans noted in previous tables.

(Tables 3a and 3b about here)

As Evangelicals surpassed Mainliners as the dominant religious force in the Republican Party, the contributions of other religious groups also changed. By the 1980s, white Catholics regularly constituted about one-fifth of the Republican coalition (about the same proportion as among Democrats). Latter-day Saints and Latino Protestants also added a small, if growing, number of identifiers, but the GOP attracted few black Protestants, Latino Catholics, Jews or members of other smaller religions. The religiously unaffiliated made up an increasing percentage of Republican Party adherents over time, reflecting their growing numbers, but their proportions slipped in 2008 back into the single digits. In many ways the GOP coalition is ethnoreligiously homogeneous: Evangelicals, Mainliners and white Catholics always account for at least 70 percent of Republican identifiers.

The Democratic Party ethnoreligious coalition looks very different. No single religious group has ever dominated among Democrats the way Mainline Protestants once did within the GOP. But the larger components of the Democratic alliance have shifted dramatically over time. Although we often think of the Democratic Party as an alliance of ethnoreligious minorities, it is

important to remember that it once attracted substantial numbers of the dominant Mainline community. In 1940-44, for example, Mainline Protestants actually formed a plurality of Democratic identifiers, reflecting their large share of the national population. White Catholics came in next with about a quarter of the Democratic total, followed closely by Evangelicals. These three groups together made up over 80 percent of Democratic identifiers in the 1940s, with other religious groups contributing only small proportions of the party.

Over time the contributions of the three large groups steadily diminished; this was especially true for Mainline Protestants, reflecting their declining numbers—even as many of the remaining Mainliners moved toward Democratic preferences. Meanwhile, black Protestants, Latinos, other religions, and the unaffiliated became much more important. The Democratic coalition today is clearly not dominated by any single religious group and is much more heterogeneous than the Republican alliance. This explains why religious mobilization efforts in campaigns are difficult for Democrats: religious diversity creates problems in identifying common religious appeals, locating Democratic identifiers, and attracting religious voters without alienating others. Finally, the coalition data highlight something often missed by pundits: white religious groups cannot be neglected by the Democrats. Despite their declining importance to the Democratic coalition, white Catholics, Evangelicals and Mainliners are still too numerous to ignore, matching the contributions of black Protestants, the religiously unaffiliated, and Latino Catholics and Protestants.

Religion and Partisan Coalitions: The Restructuring Perspective

The substantial contributions that the large white religious traditions make to both parties prompt us to look at the partisan role that theological factionalism plays within those traditions. The evidence is found in Tables 4a and 4b. On the Republican side, Evangelical traditionalists

have significantly increased their “market share” since the 1960s, accounting for over one-fifth of all GOP identifiers since 2004, bolstered by a substantial growth in the contribution by Evangelical centrists. At the same time, the proportion of Mainline traditionalists and centrists has dropped precipitously: each group by itself constituted almost one-quarter of the national GOP in the sixties, but by 2008 they accounted for only one-eighth even when *combined*.

Although the white Catholic contribution to the Republican coalition has increased slightly over time, traditionalists have actually lost ground while centrists and modernists have gained a little. Nevertheless, combining all religious traditionalists in Table 4a produces one-third of all GOP identifiers, a proportion bolstered by theological conservatives in other groups, such as Latter-day Saints (5 percent) and Latino Protestants (3 percent). This supplies a very large number of religious traditionalists who are easy to reach: they are in the pews on Sunday and are active members of religious organizations and groups. Thus, both in numbers and accessibility, traditionalists have achieved dominant position within the GOP.

(Tables 4a and 4b about here)

Turning to the Democratic coalition, we recall from Table 3b that the three white traditions accounted for 77 percent of Democratic identifiers in the 1960s—about the same as their contribution to the GOP in 2008—but that proportion had declined to less than 50 percent in 2008. That “loss” was not shared equally among all theological factions, however. As Table 4b demonstrates, the decline in Democratic coalition contributions among Evangelicals, Mainliners and white Catholics was most significant among theological traditionalists and, to a lesser extent, centrists. This loss was especially notable among traditionalist Catholics, a very significant cohort of the party in the 1960s, but a minuscule one in 2008. Modernists in all three traditions, on the other hand, actually increased slightly their Democratic market shares. In sum, the data

demonstrate the power of Evangelical traditionalists and centrists in the Republican Party and the massive decline in the importance of Mainline Protestants to the GOP. On the Democratic side, the key findings are the heterogeneity of the coalition and the decline in the importance of traditionalist white Catholics. The differing religious composition of the parties not only explains variations in mobilization strategies but, more fundamentally, different party priorities and policies.

Party Identification over Time: The Impact of Religious and Demographic Variables

Ethnoreligious tradition and theological traditionalism clearly have an impact on partisan attachments. But are they as important as social demographic variables like education, income, employment status, age, gender, marital status, and region (Stonecash 2000)? We cannot provide a full assessment of the relative power of religious and demographic factors in structuring party identification, but we can shed some light on the question. In Table 5, we compare the impact of both kinds of variables in explaining party identification in three periods: the late 1960s, the 1980s, and 2008. These eras were chosen because we have comparable measures of religion and other variables needed for the analysis. Although the measures in the three regressions in Table 5 are not always exactly the same, we have made them as comparable as possible, even where this resulted in some loss of information.⁶

First, our analysis includes the religious variables used in previous tables: dummy variables for ethnoreligious traditions, a traditionalism measure derived from items tapping views on Biblical authority and attendance at religious services, and interaction terms for traditionalism within the four largest American traditions: Evangelical, Mainline and black

⁶ We have used ANES surveys for the first two periods and the National Survey of Religion and Politics with its larger sample for 2008. For the most part, the variables used are identical or very comparable across the two types of survey.

Protestantism and white Catholicism. The religiously “unaffiliated” are the suppressed reference category for the first two periods, as the group closest to the partisan mean, but in 2008 that role fell to the subgroup of “unaffiliated but religious” respondents.⁷ Age, income, and education are measured in linear fashion, while the remaining variables (gender, married once, never married, female homemaker, employed, unemployed, Northeastern and Southern residence) are included as dummies.

(Table 5 about here)

Despite the limitations of our religious traditionalism measure, the results are quite instructive. In the 1960s, some ethnoreligious traditions are significant predictors of party identification. Black Protestants and Jews are significantly more Democratic, while the Mainline Protestant coefficient is solidly Republican. Evangelical Protestants also lean Republican, once the social class and region variables are in the analysis, although previous bivariate results showed Evangelicals (predominantly Southern and working class) still in the Democratic camp at that time. Note that religious traditionalism has no significant effect by itself, although it tends to work in a *Democratic* direction. The interaction terms do show results: Mainline Protestants who had a literal view of the Bible and who attended church regularly were more Republican in partisanship, even when other variables are controlled for. On the other hand, Biblical literalists and regular church attending white Catholics lean in a Democratic direction, although the coefficient does not reach statistical significance. Clearly, theological restructuring was not a major force in the 1960s in explaining partisan alignments, as its clear influence is in the

⁷ These are the substantial number of citizens who claim no religious affiliation but attend church frequently and have an orthodox view of the Bible.

tendency for the most observant to support more strongly their tradition's "normative" party, the GOP for Mainliners and the Democrats for Catholics.

The contours of the New Deal party system are clearly seen in the impact of the socioeconomic and demographic variables. Higher education and income were significant contributors to Republican identification, while older citizens also tended to be more Republican. The historic regional bases for the party system were also still in evidence in the 1960s, as residents of the Northeast were somewhat more Republican and southerners still adhered to the old "solid Democratic South." Married respondents were slightly more Democratic, but no gender gap was in evidence. All in all, the results show that both ethnoreligious factors and socioeconomic variables made substantial contributions to party identification.

The 1980s are critical politically both for the rise of Reagan Republicanism and that of the Christian Right. Theoretically, this was also the period that saw the coming to fruition of religious restructuring and the displacing, in part, of the old ethnoreligious alignments. Do we see new sources of party cleavages in the data? In the 1980s, the coefficients for the ethnoreligious traditions change only modestly, with the addition of Democratic Latino Catholics in larger numbers. Religious traditionalism does not have any pro-Republican effect across the sample, but shows up as a significant interaction among Evangelicals as the most orthodox and observant become substantially more Republican. At the same time, the size of the interaction effect among Mainliners drops somewhat, but is still significant. Among white Catholics, on the other hand, traditionalists are still significantly more Democratic when everything is taken into account. Thus, in the 1980s the GOP retains its ethnoreligious core of Mainliners, also picking up traditionalist Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints, while the Democrats attract an expanding

coalition of religious minorities, as the “all other faiths” category leans toward the party of Roosevelt.

As religious influences shifted during the 1980s, the old socioeconomic and demographic markers lost some of their power. Higher education drops significantly as a predictor of GOP identification, while income becomes slightly stronger. Although Southern residence still mildly predicts more Democratic tendencies, Northeasterners no longer lean toward the GOP. Interestingly, however, there is now a gender gap, with males more Republican, and a “homemaker” gap, with stay-at-home moms more Republican as well.⁸ Older citizens are now more Democratic when everything else is in the equation. Note that the variance explained by the model decreases from the 1960s, indicating that party identification was not as well accounted for by the model variables as it was earlier. Still, religious tradition and socioeconomic status remain significant predictors, with some new help from gender and family status.

The 2008 results are quite different in several important respects. First, the coefficients for the Evangelical and Mainline Protestant traditions are both virtually zero, indicating that these religious affiliations have no added explanatory power once the other variables are in the equation. On the other hand, significant coefficients appear for all the ethnoreligious “minorities”: black Protestants, Latino Catholics and Protestants, Jews, all other faiths, and the non-religious unaffiliated (secular) citizens are all more Democratic, while Latter-day Saints are more Republican. The coefficient for white Catholics returns to a significant Democratic predictor, although this results from the effects of other variables in the equation. A second significant development is the clear intrusion of religious traditionalism into the explanation,

⁸ Although scholars have paid a good bit of attention to the “gender gap” and the “marriage gap,” there is very little systematic scholarship on the way that parenthood and work status might influence electoral behavior. Our evidence suggests this is an important subject for further investigation.

working in favor of the GOP in the sample as a whole and having an added effect among Evangelicals and white Catholics, but not among Mainliners. Only among black Protestants does religious traditionalism reinforce the impact of ethnocultural identity, favoring the Democrats. Thus, religious “restructuring” does seem to have had a considerable impact on party divisions for some groups, but for others ethnoreligious identity remains more important.

What about the competing socioeconomic and demographic influences? While higher income still predicts somewhat stronger GOP identification, in 2008 higher levels of education actually become a slightly pro-Democratic influence, perhaps confirming the expectations of some party theorists that the future of the party lies with the highly educated, technocratic and professional classes (Judis and Teixeira 2002). The gender gap continues to rise in importance, as men are much more Republican, joined by female homemakers, while single Americans are more prone to identify as Democrats. At the same time that family status indicators are rising in importance (and deserve much more attention), region has now been reduced to insignificance, with the coefficients for Northeastern and Southern residence virtually zero, as is the coefficient for age. On balance, then, the evidence suggests that ethnoreligious status, religious traditionalism and family status have become more powerful predictors of party identification, while socioeconomic status and region have declined in importance. Note that the variance explained in 2008 is the largest in Table 5.

The Ideological Sources of Religious Differences and Partisan Polarization

We have demonstrated that ethnoreligious tradition and religious restructuring are reflected in the composition of American “parties in the electorate,” but what are the fundamental sources of these differences? Much of the literature on polarization focuses on ideological divisions (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006), with scholars variously emphasizing

differences on social, economic or even foreign policy attitudes.⁹ Those who see emerging religious divisions tend to focus on social issues, such as abortion, gay rights or stem-cell research, but there is evidence that religious groups have distinctive positions on other issues that may also contribute to the characteristic party alignments we have shown.

As a first cut at such ideological differences among religious groups, we draw on the 2008 National Survey of Religion and Politics, with its large battery of religious and issue items. To simplify presentation, we have calculated three factor scores for respondents' positions on social, economic welfare and foreign policy issues, respectively. *Social conservatism* is calculated from four items on abortion, gay rights, same-sex marriage and federal support for embryonic stem cell research. *Foreign policy militancy* is drawn from eight items on support for the Iraq war (two), priority of the war on terrorism, backing for pre-emptive U.S. military action, preference for Israel over the Arabs in the Middle East, favoring a strong military, and two questions claiming a special role for the United States in international politics (for more documentation and discussion, see Guth 2010). Finally, *welfare conservatism* is derived from six items on the benefits of large tax cuts, the need for higher taxes to fund programs to aid the poor, the preference for more government services, the need for greater government assistance for minorities, support for an expanded national health care system, and approval of expanded environmental protection.¹⁰ Table 6 reports the mean factor scores for each religious category, showing the degree of issue divergence among groups, with negative factor scores representing

⁹ For an alternative perspective stressing the social identity of voters, see Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2002.

Ironically, although these authors see party identification as *analogous* to religious affiliation, they do not treat religious affiliation as one of the formative social identities influencing partisanship.

¹⁰ The theta reliability coefficients for the social, foreign policy militancy and welfare policy scores are .70, .75 and .70, respectively.

“conservative” positions and positive scores, “liberal” ones (the mean for all the factor scores, of course, is zero, representing the center of the issue dimension).

(Table 6 about here)

A look at religious group scores on social issues certainly supports some common observations about the way that abortion and gay rights divide the public. As an ethnoreligious community, Evangelicals clearly define the conservative end of this spectrum, although Latter-day Saints and Latino Protestants come close. Black Protestants and Latino Catholics are also slightly to the traditionalist side, while white Catholics are barely on the “socially liberal” side and Mainline Protestants are a little further in that direction. On the other hand, the other faiths category, the unaffiliated, and Jews occupy the liberal end of the social issue continuum. Within the three major white ethnoreligious traditions, moreover, there are striking differences between religious traditionalists and religious modernists, with Evangelical traditionalists the most conservative and Mainline modernists, the most liberal. And among the unaffiliated, the truly secular and the agnostic/atheist groups match Jews in social liberalism. In any event, scholars arguing for a “culture war” interpretation of American politics can certainly find some evidence here in the striking divergence of important religious groups on these issues.

A glance at the next column on foreign policy militancy suggests that such differences are not confined to social issues. Once again, Evangelicals are the most conservative, followed by Latter-day Saints. On this policy dimension, Mainliners and white Catholics are slightly to the “militant” side, as are American Jews.¹¹ All the remaining ethnocultural groups and unaffiliated respondents constitute the “liberal” or “antimilitarist” contingent on these issues. When we

¹¹ The seemingly anomalous position of the Jewish respondents on this measure is partly an artifact of their strong support for Israel, one of the items in the militancy factor, but omitting this item only moves Jews to the center of the scale, not to the antimilitancy side.

consider the effects of restructuring, we see that Evangelical traditionalists hold down the most militant end of the continuum, followed by Mainline traditionalists, and then Catholic traditionalists and centrists. Although the pattern here differs slightly from that for social issues, as black Protestants and the Latino groups shift to the “liberal” side, clearly the overall alignment is quite similar.

On welfare issues the religious divisions are less stark, but follow the same general pattern. Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints are both solidly to the right, with Mainline Protestants and white Catholics slightly to the right of the mean. The other ethnoreligious groups are all well to the liberal side of the economic welfare continuum. Note, however, that religiously unaffiliated Americans are only mildly liberal on welfare issues, in contrast to their strong social issue liberalism and anti-militancy positions. And once more, the restructuring thesis finds some support: traditionalist Evangelicals are by far the most conservative subgroup, with traditionalist and centrist Mainliners and Catholics on the conservative side of the mean, but far behind their Evangelical counterparts. In the same vein, believers among the unaffiliated respondents are also slightly conservative, while seculars are more liberal and agnostics and atheists are substantially more so.¹²

To summarize overall ideological divisions, we have used two procedures. First, we ran a secondary factor analysis of the three issue dimensions to produce an overall measure of *issue ideology*. As a second check, we used the z-scores for *self-identified ideology* to provide a comparable measure. Reassuringly, both produce very similar patterns among the religious

¹² Although we cannot consider the issue here, evidence from the National Survey of Religion and Politics from 1992 to the present suggests that the religious divisions have “extended” from social to foreign policy to economic issues over time. The mechanism for this evolution is not clear but may involve various processes of religious and secular elite influence and partisan socialization.

groups, with Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints the most conservative communities across the religious spectrum, Mainline Protestants and Catholics in the center, and most other religious faiths and the unaffiliated well to the left. In restructuring terms, Evangelical traditionalists almost define the conservative pole, both on issue ideology and self-identification, while Jews, other faiths, the secular and agnostic/atheists are far to the left. Note that on both summary measures, black Protestants look more conservative than one might expect, reflecting perhaps their traditionalist posture on social issues.

To summarize: the evidence suggests that the religious divisions we have discovered in party identification are at least partially the result of the distinctive issue positions taken by religious groups. Evangelicals, and especially their large traditionalist contingent, hold strongly conservative positions across the board on social, foreign, and welfare policies, while many religious minorities, as well as the increasing cohort of secular citizens, express distinctly liberal views on these same dimensions. Mainline Protestants and Catholics as ethnoreligious groups tend toward more centrist positions, but traditionalists among them move toward the right, and modernists toward the left. And although we cannot demonstrate conclusively that such differences explain the growing political polarization in American politics, there is certainly a lot of circumstantial evidence pointing in that direction, as Evangelical traditionalists have become a growing presence in the GOP, and religious minorities and secular citizens have enhanced their position in the Democratic party.

Finally, are religious influences fully mediated by the ideological traits of religious groups? Are there still traditional ethnocultural factors apart from ideology that account for some degree of party attachment? Or, perhaps, does religious traditionalism exercise some additional direct influence over party identification? In Table 7, we address these questions with an OLS

regression, including religious and other variables, using the expanded measures available in the 2008 National Survey of Religion and Politics. As the table shows, the influence of ideological factors in explaining party identification in 2008 is very impressive. Welfare conservatism, foreign policy militancy and social traditionalism all have very solid impacts on party identification, as does a residual score for the part of self-identified ideology not accounted for by issue attitudes.¹³

(Table 7 about here)

On the other hand, many of the ethnoreligious tradition dummies drop out of the analysis, although Latter-day Saints are more Republican than their other attitudes and traits would predict and Catholics, along with most religious minorities, are more Democratic, indicating the residual influence of ethnoreligious status, a tendency that is especially strong for black Protestants. Note, however, that secular and agnostic/atheist respondents do not exhibit greater Democratic propensities, once other factors are in the equation. And although religious traditionalism has a sign in the right direction, the coefficient is not statistically significant in predicting greater Republican identification, suggesting that the impact of traditionalism seen at the bivariate level is fully mediated by ideological conservatism.¹⁴ Note once again the extremely modest effect of demographic factors. When issues and ideology are in the equation, higher education and income have very small pro-GOP effects, gender and region have no influence, and the unemployed are

¹³ It is interesting to note that within the three large white ethnoreligious traditions that the issue scores have varying degrees of influence over party identification. For Evangelicals, the foreign policy score has the strongest impact, followed by social issues, and then welfare conservatism. Among Mainliners economic policy is most important, followed by foreign policy and then social issues. For white Catholics, foreign policy has the largest impact, followed closely by welfare issues, and at a considerable distance by social issues (data not shown).

¹⁴ Nor does traditionalism interact with ethnoreligious tradition to produce higher levels of Republican or Democratic affiliation. In preliminary analyses we included interaction terms, but none approached statistical significance and thus were omitted from the analysis reported in Table 7.

slightly more Democratic while homemakers are more Republican. In summary then, some ethnoreligious traditions maintain a preference for the Democrats beyond that explained by ideology, while restructuring theological influences are mediated almost entirely by ideology.

Conclusions

Religion has served as one of the key social bases of partisan attachments throughout American history. Yet the nature of the ties between religious groups and the major parties has changed over time. This chapter has documented the recent partisan “journeys” of the major religious groups in this country. The partisan transformations have often been dramatic. Evangelical Protestants have left their previous home in the Democratic Party and become the keystone in the GOP coalition, led by their traditionalist core. Mainline Protestants have lost pre-eminence in the Republican Party, partly due to rapidly shrinking numbers and partly to decreasing party loyalty. Together with white Catholics, their old opponents and the historic centerpiece of the New Deal coalition, Mainliners have become a swing group in national elections, closely divided between Republican and Democratic identifiers. Meanwhile, black Protestants have moved from modest to strong identification with the party of Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Obama. Latinos, Catholic and Protestant alike, were of little political consequence two generations ago, but their growing numbers make them a force in the Democratic Party today. Although Latino Protestants’ theological traditionalism and social conservatism have often drawn them toward the GOP, especially under George W. Bush, Republican policies on immigration have halted this movement. Throughout the time period that we have examined, smaller religious groups, such as Jews and other non-Christians, have favored the Democrats, joined in recent years by growing numbers of the unaffiliated. Among religious “minorities” only Latter-day Saints consistently choose the GOP in large numbers.

Thus, party coalitions look much different today than they did in the 1940s. Then the numerically dominant Mainline Protestants overwhelmed all other groups on the Republican side until the 1990s, and were the largest single group within the Democratic coalition as well until the 1970s. Their diminution in the coalitions of both parties has been dramatic. For the GOP, Evangelicals are now the senior religious partners in their coalition, while the Democratic religious coalition is marked by extreme heterogeneity with several religious and non-religious groups contributing significant numbers to the party ranks, and expecting a significant internal role as well.

What is less obvious is the exact role that religious affiliation and religious beliefs and behaviors have played in these processes of transformation. We have argued that religious belonging has been the driving force in partisan attachments for most religious groups throughout American history. For black Protestants, Latino Protestants and Catholics, Jews, Latter-day Saints, and other smaller religious groups (Muslims, Buddhists, and Unitarians, to name only a few), affiliation with the group is associated with partisan ties. This model of party attachments—the ethnoreligious model—was the basis of partisanship in the nineteenth century (Kleppner 1979) and remains so today for these groups. However, for the three largest white religious traditions—Evangelical and Mainline Protestantism and Anglo-Catholicism—the basis for party ties has changed in the past generation.

Differences of religious belief and behavior *within* these traditions, produced by religious restructuring, have become central to partisan attachments. *Traditionalists* have moved most dramatically in a Republican direction, while their *modernist* counterparts have often gravitated in the other direction. These developments have been most evident among Evangelicals, somewhat weaker among Mainliners, and still developing among white Catholics. All in all, the

best explanatory fit for current trends is a hybrid model, given the importance of both ethnoreligious tradition, especially for smaller “outgroups,” and theological traditionalism, which has increasingly come to shape the partisan choices of the major white traditions.

Most, but not all, of these religious influences on partisanship appear to be mediated by issue attitudes and ideology. Many observers have focused on how social issues, such as abortion, gay rights and similar questions have moved religious traditionalists toward the GOP, and religious liberals and secular citizens toward the Democrats, contributing to partisan polarization. But we have suggested a broader influence for religious traditionalism, arguing that it also produces attitudes favoring a militant foreign policy and conservative economic welfare policies, benefiting the GOP and furthering partisan polarization by creating a vast constituency of thoroughgoing conservatives, dominated numerically by Evangelicals, Latter-day Saints, and other traditionalists. On the other side, Democrats benefit from the support of thoroughgoing liberals, who are numerous in the party’s ethnoreligious minorities and among the growing ranks of the secular population. This contingent is buttressed to some degree by religious modernists from the Mainline Protestant and white Catholic traditions, who nevertheless are often more left-center than left on these policy dimensions. Although we have just begun to tap the nature of religious influences on American party alignments, we would argue that in the future no scholar can afford to tackle contemporary American partisanship without accounting for the role of religious factors.

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Appendix on Data Sources

Data sources paper include: (1) Gallup surveys from 1940 through 1944; (2) American National Election Studies (ANES) 1956-1960 Panel Survey; (3) the ANES Cumulative File for the years from 1964 to 1988; (4) the National Surveys of Religion and Politics, the University of Akron, for 1992 to 2008.

Most Gallup surveys beginning in 1936 do not include in-depth measures of religious affiliation. Only rarely are belief measures included, although church attendance is regularly asked. When affiliation questions are asked, they offer “religious family” options, such as “Baptist,” “Methodist,” “Presbyterian,” or “Lutheran.” Assigning these families to the modern Protestant Evangelical or Mainline traditions is somewhat problematic. Although most Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans are in Mainline churches, some are affiliated with smaller Evangelical denominations. In the early surveys, however, all have to be assigned to the Mainline. White Baptists, on the other hand, must be assigned as Evangelical, despite the existence of Mainline Baptist denominations. A somewhat similar problem exists in working with the ANES data, whether the 1956-1960 Panel Study or the 1960-1988 Cumulative File. The ANES religious affiliation codes here are also not very specific, although more detailed than Gallup’s. Church attendance is asked each survey, but only one religious belief measure—a Bible item—and then only in 1964 and 1968 and again in 1980 and subsequent years.

The National Surveys on Religion and Politics beginning in 1992 have detailed religious affiliation codes and many belief and behavior items (see Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 2009, chapter 1). As a result, we have much greater confidence in our findings since 1992. Yet, despite the caveats about earlier surveys, it is worth the effort to go back as far as possible in time to examine the links between religion and partisan attachments.

Table 1
Religion and Party Identification, 1940-2008

	1940-1944	1956-1960	1964-1968	1970-1978	1980-1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	Change
	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D	R-D
Evangelical Protestant	-18	-25	-27	-15	0	16	24	26	32	28	46
Mainline Protestant	12	9	3	10	15	14	11	11	4	-1	-13
Black Protestant	-7	-34	-81	-74	-74	-69	-69	-66	-60	-71	-64
Latino Protestant				-35	-30	-27	-15	-15	-4	-5	30
White Catholic	-43	-45	-47	-38	-17	-8	-5	-4	-3	-6	37
Latino Catholic				-50	-44	-31	-20	-32	-47	-36	14
Latter-day Saints		7*	-13	14	22	26	47	38	50	55	48
Jewish	-27	-63	-67	-58	-48	-46	-44	-39	-47	-50	-23
All Other Religions	-5	1	-17	-42	-43	-28	-19	-14	-33	-40	-35
Unaffiliated	-11	-20	-29	-33	-20	-16	-5	-8	-17	-27	-16
National	-8	-17	-26	-20	-13	-8	-2	-3	-4	-9	1

Cells are the percent Republican for the group minus the percent Democratic for the group.

Sources: Gallup 1940-1944; ANES American Panel Study 1956-1960; ANES Cumulative File 1964-1988; National Surveys of Religion and Politics 1992-2008.

* N less than 20.

Table 2
Religious Belonging, Beliefs, and Behavior and Partisanship
1940-2008

	1964-1968	1970-1978	1980-1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	Change
Evangelical Protestant									
Traditionalist	-21	-8	17	28	44	47	56	56	77
Centrist	-36	-12	-7	4	14	13	18	9	45
Modernist	-23	-20	-13	-1	-3	2	0	2	25
Mainline Protestant									
Traditionalist	9	24	23	15	22	23	25	14	5
Centrist	-1	6	15	13	11	9	-3	5	6
Modernist	-10	-5	4	23	-3	8	-1	-17	-7
Anglo Catholic									
Traditionalist	-48	-37	-18	-9	-6	9	31	-2	46
Centrist	-33	-38	-16	-18	-6	-6	-9	0	33
Modernist	-33	-47	-18	3	-4	-10	-20	-27	6
National	-16	-20	-13	-8	-2	-3	-4	9	7

Cell scores are determined in the same manner as in Table 1.

Sources are identical to those in Table 1.

Table 3a
Religion and the Republican Party Coalition
1940-2008

<i>Religious Tradition</i>	1940 1944	1956 1960	1964 1968	1970 1978	1980 1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	Change
Evangelical Protestant	16	21	23	26	28	34	32	35	38	39	23
Mainline Protestant	56	52	53	46	38	22	21	21	19	18	-38
Black Protestant	6	4	1	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	-4
Latino Protestant					1	1	3	2	3	3	3
White Catholic	14	13	15	16	19	21	18	19	19	18	4
Latino Catholic				1	2	3	3	3	2	4	3
Latter-day Saints		1	1	3	2	2	2	2	3	5	4
Jewish	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	-1
Unaffiliated	4	6	3	4	7	12	14	13	12	9	5
All Other Faiths	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	3	1	2	0
Column Totals	100	100	99	101	102	99	101	101	102	101	

Columns do not always add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 3b
Religion and the Democratic Party Coalition
1940-2008

<i>Religious Tradition</i>	1940-1944	1956-1960	1964-1968	1970-1978	1980-1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	Change
Evangelical Protestant	22	25	25	23	21	19	17	17	16	16	-6
Mainline Protestant	35	28	28	22	20	13	15	15	16	14	-21
Black Protestant	4	7	14	13	18	17	16	17	16	16	12
Latino Protestant					1	3	4	3	3	3	3
White Catholic	25	28	24	25	21	21	19	19	18	18	-7
Latino Catholic				2	4	5	4	6	7	9	7
Latter-day Saints		0.3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Jewish	6	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	3	2	-4
Unaffiliated	5	6	3	6	8	16	16	15	18	16	11
All Other Faiths	3	2	3	3	3	3	5	4	4	5	2
Column Totals	100	100	102	99	100	101	101	100	102	100	

Table 4a
Religious Restructuring and the Republican Party Coalition
1964-2008

	1964-1968	1970-1978	1980-1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	Change
Evangelical									
Traditionalist	12	13	11	13	15	18	21	22	10
Centrist	9	10	13	15	12	10	12	13	4
Modernist	2	3	4	6	6	6	5	5	3
Mainline									
Traditionalist	23	17	8	5	5	6	7	5	-18
Centrist	24	21	21	8	9	8	6	7	-17
Modernist	6	7	9	9	6	7	6	5	-1
White Catholic									
Traditionalist	9	9	6	5	4	6	7	6	-3
Centrist	5	6	10	7	7	7	7	7	2
Modernist	1	1	3	9	7	6	6	5	4
Percent of National	91	87	85	73	71	74	77	75	-16
All Others	9	13	15	27	29	26	23	25	16

Table 4b
Religious Restructuring and the Democratic Party Coalition
1964-2008

	1964-1968	1970-1978	1980-1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	Change
Evangelical									
Traditionalist	11	9	6	5	5	5	4	4	-7
Centrist	12	11	11	8	8	7	7	8	-4
Modernist	2	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	2
Mainline									
Traditionalist	10	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	-7
Centrist	14	11	11	5	7	6	6	5	-9
Modernist	4	5	6	5	6	6	7	6	2
White Catholic									
Traditionalist	16	13	6	6	5	4	3	5	-11
Centrist	7	10	11	8	8	7	8	6	-1
Modernist	1	3	4	7	7	8	8	8	7
Percent of National	77	72	62	52	54	51	51	47	-30
All Others	23	28	38	48	46	49	49	53	30

Table 5
Predicting Republican Party Identification with Religious and Social Demographic Variables

	1964-1968	1980-1988	2008
Ethnoreligious Tradition			
Evangelical	.05	.00	.00
Mainline	.10***	.10***	-.01
Latino Protestant		-.01	-.03*
Black Protestant	-.16***	-.08*	-.11***
White Catholic	-.02	.03	-.13***
Latino Catholic		-.05***	-.11***
Jewish	-.10***	-.06***	-.08***
Latter-day Saints	.04**	.05***	.08***
All Other Faiths	.06***	-.09***	-.08***
Unaffiliated/Non-Religious			-.09***
Restructuring Measure			
Traditionalism	-.05	.01	.14***
Interaction Terms			
Evangelical*Traditionalism	.07	.11***	.11***
Mainline*Traditionalism	.10 **	.07**	-.02
White Catholic*Traditionalism	-.04	-.06*	.08**
Black Protestant*Traditionalism	.00	-.01	-.11***
Socioeconomic Status			
Income	.06***	.09***	.07***
Education	.19***	.05***	-.03*
Employed	-.10*	.01	.04**
Unemployed	-.08	.00	-.01
Other Demographics			
Age	.07***	-.05***	.01
Male	.01	.05***	.12***
Married Once	-.03*	-.02	.01
Single Never Married	-.02	.01	-.04***
Female Homemaker	.01	.04***	.08***
Region			
Northeast	.11***	.02	-.01
South	-.09***	-.06***	.01
R Squared	.16	.12	.18

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

Table 6.
Ideological Divisions by Ethnoreligious Traditions and Restructuring
(Mean Standardized Factor Scores)

	Social Traditionalism Factor Score	Foreign Policy Militancy Factor Score	Economic Welfare Policy Factor Score	Overall Conservatism Factor Score	Self-identified Ideology (Z score)
Evangelical	-.50	-.40	-.38	-.57	-.41
Traditionalist	-.83	-.65	-.57	-.90	-.62
Centrist	-.13	-.03	-.11	-.11	-.13
Modernist	.24	-.03	-.11	.03	-.02
Mainline	.30	-.05	-.08	.06	.02
Traditionalist	-.32	-.33	-.19	-.37	-.39
Centrist	.34	-.05	-.13	.06	.03
Modernist	.67	.13	.06	.36	.29
White Catholic	.09	-.11	-.09	-.05	-.02
Traditionalist	-.56	-.15	-.14	-.36	-.33
Centrist	.03	-.24	-.17	-.18	-.12
Modernist	.48	.12	.05	.27	.28
Latter-day Saint	-.44	-.46	-.46	-.63	-.45
Latino Protestant	-.44	-.00	.35	-.02	-.17
Black Protestant	-.24	.34	.36	.22	.04
Latino Catholic	-.11	.31	.68	.41	.25
All Other Faiths	.34	.62	.46	.64	.50
Jews	.86	-.11	.36	.47	.62
Unaffiliated	.63	.44	.14	.53	.46
Believers	.06	.13	-.10	.04	.03
Secular	.81	.45	.17	.62	.56
Agnostic/Atheist	.99	.99	.43	1.04	.87
Total Mean Score	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00

Minus (-) scores are on the conservative side of the mean; positive scores, on the liberal side.

Table 7.	
Predicting Republican Identification: Issues, Religious Groups, and Demographic Influences, 2008	
Ideological Factors	beta
Welfare Conservatism	.271***
Foreign Policy Militancy	.237***
Social Traditionalism	.209***
Self-Identification (Residual)	.200***
Ethnoreligious Tradition	
Evangelical	-.004
Mainline	-.014
White Catholic	-.065**
Latter-day Saints	.033*
Latino Protestant	-.015
Black Protestant	-.208***
Latino Catholic	-.045*
Jews	-.043**
Other Non-Christian	-.033*
Secular	.018
Agnostic-Atheist	.009
Restructuring Measure	
Religious Traditionalism	.028
Socioeconomic and Other Demographics	
Education	.035*
Income	.020
Female	-.012
Unemployed/Student	-.029*
Homemaker (female)	.042**
Northeast	-.004
South	-.015
Adjusted R squared=	.403

Source: 2008 National Survey of Religion and Politics, N=4000.