

Religion and Political Behavior in the Sunbelt

Lyman A. Kellstedt
Professor of Political Science (Emeritus)
Wheaton College
lyman.kellstedt@gmail.com

James L. Guth
William R. Kenan, Jr.
Professor of Political Science
Furman University
jim.guth@furman.edu

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For many years social scientists have explored in great depth the social divisions that influence American political behavior, such as region, social class, race and ethnicity, age, gender and marital status (Shafer 1991; Miller and Shanks 1996; Stonecash 2000). Region has always been near the top of the list given historic sectional divisions going all the way back to the Founding. The Civil War left its mark on the culture, the economy, the politics, and even the psyche, of southern states that persisted well into the 20th century. If the South is no longer “Solid,” it still retains certain characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of the country. Where else can you find grits and “moon pies” in almost every restaurant and a Southern Baptist church in every town, if not on every street corner?

Scholarly literature on the South is voluminous. In political science, V.O. Key’s *Southern Politics* (1949) remains a classic that Ph.D. students avoid at their peril. Despite the attention given to the South, other regions have received but little attention (Fenton 1957, 1966; Lockard 1959). In addition, social scientists have been slow to provide adequate conceptualization for *region*. Nicole Mellow (2008) is a recent exception. She argues that regions can be viewed in material or economic terms as well as cultural and demographic phenomena (pp. 18-23). Such a conceptualization clearly fits the states of the Old South. But does it fit other possible “regions” historically, or at present? And, in particular, does it fit the “Sunbelt”? Is the Sunbelt a viable region with common historical roots, economic and cultural similarities, and unique demographic characteristics? In particular, does religion provide one element of the glue that distinguishes the Sunbelt? Or is the Sunbelt simply a figment of our imagination, a series of states, or parts of states, across the southern tier of the country where the weather is warm and the living is easy?

This chapter will not answer these questions with any finality, but it will take a careful look at the role of religion in the political behavior of Sunbelt states. It is only in the past few decades that scholars have become interested in the role that religious factors may play in contemporary American elections. Although there is still much dispute about the relative power of various social traits (social class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, region) in describing American political behavior (Campbell 2007), there is a growing consensus that religion has played an increasing role, perhaps eclipsing the impact of other demographic influences (Guth et al. 2006). But virtually all of the massive literature on the role of religion in American electoral politics has been national in focus. Although most analysts recognize that religious groups are not evenly distributed across the country, the tendency is to assume that their behavior does not vary significantly by region. Although there are a few exceptions (Green 2007; Black and Black 2007; Mellow 2008; Silk and Walsh 2008), we have very few efforts to consider the way that religion and politics interact in identifiable regions.

We start with the assumption that the Sunbelt is a meaningful political entity (Mellow 2008, especially chapter 3). If the Sunbelt is truly “a unified region rivaling traditional centers of power in the East,” or, for that matter, matching the distinctiveness of the Old South, that unity must subsist in a degree of social and political homogeneity. Much of the early discussion of the concept found the Sunbelt distinctive in its religious and political conservatism, reflecting on the one hand the cultural dominance of evangelical religion and, on the other, the increasing political dominance of the GOP (Phillips 1969; Hagstrom 1988). Indeed, for many scholars these two developments were intertwined aspects of the same larger trend. For other analysts, these features represented the extension of distinctively “Southern” religious and political traits into the burgeoning regions of the Southwest and southern Pacific coast—or even the entire country

(e.g. Egerton 1974). Although some authors have insisted that both religious and political conservatism were transformed in that transition (Shibley 1996), others argue that they maintained their distinctive features.

Despite these differences in interpretation, one thing is clear—the population in Sunbelt states has grown at the expense of the rest of the country in the years since World War II. These changes have enormous political implications. For example, representation in the Congress has been transformed by these changes (see Appendix A). After the 2010 Census, the Sunbelt will almost match non-Sunbelt areas in the number of U.S. House seats, giving it the potential to be a powerful force in American politics—if it musters a certain amount of unity.

In this chapter, we address that question of Sunbelt unity from the perspective of both religious traits and political characteristics—and their intersection. Although one body of thought continues to insist on considering the Sunbelt as a meaningful analytic category, other scholars would argue that the Sunbelt states are better thought of in sub-regional groupings. For example, a recent series on American religious regionalism has divided the Sunbelt into at least four regions: the South (Wilson and Silk 2005), the “Southern Crossroads” (Lindsey and Silk 2005), the “Pacific Region” of California and Nevada (Roof and Silk (2005), with Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico relegated to the “Mountain West” (Shipps and Silk 2005). Still others would argue that as political, economic and cultural units, even this level of aggregation hides important social and political traits, and that individual states maintain a considerable degree of religious and political distinctiveness (Key 1949; Elazar 1966). Finally, many scholars are much more impressed with the impact of regional convergence, producing an increasing nationalization of politics (Lunch 1987; Shafer and Claggett 1995; Mohl 1990).

In this chapter, we focus on the question of religious and political change in the Sunbelt, with a view to determining whether the concept has clear meaning in these respects. This essay, then, has several objectives: (1) to describe the religious composition of “Sunbelt” states; (2) to consider the way that religious affiliation influences electoral behavior in the same area; and, (3) to compare our Sunbelt findings to the those of various “sub-regions,” as well as the rest of the country, to put the purported distinctiveness of the geographical entity into focus.

Religious Traditions in the Sunbelt States

Although there are a number of religious variables that are relevant to political analysis (Guth et al. 2006; Smidt, Kellstedt and Guth, 2009), in this chapter we start with religious affiliation and its key concept—religious tradition. By religious tradition we mean a group of “religious communities that share a set of beliefs that generates a distinctive worldview” (Kellstedt et al. 1996, 176). In a larger historical and theoretical sense, these are the communities identified by *ethnoreligious theory*, which emphasizes the historic European religious groups that migrated to America and often multiplied upon reaching her shores. Nineteenth century party politics consisted largely of assembling winning coalitions of contending ethnoreligious groups (Kleppner 1979). Well into the twentieth century, the GOP represented historically dominant Mainline Protestant churches, such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Methodists, while Democrats spoke for religious minorities: Catholics, Jews, and Evangelical Protestants (especially in the South).

By the 1980s, these configurations had shifted, as Mainline Protestants dwindled in number, Evangelicals moved toward the GOP, the ancient Catholic—Democratic alliance frayed, and Black Protestants became a critical Democratic bloc. Growing religious diversity added

Latino Catholics and Protestants, and even groups like Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others to the equation, usually on the Democratic side. Still, even today many analysts think in ethnoreligious or ethnocultural terms, referring to the “Evangelical,” “Catholic,” “Jewish” or “Muslim” vote. And, as we shall see, these religious traditions are indeed often distinctive in contemporary electoral politics.

Data Sources.

Our first task, then, is delineating the religious composition of the Sunbelt states. There are a number of potential data sources for estimating that religious population. One frequently used source is the well-known Glenmary Research Center series that uses official denominational counts to depict the membership of religious bodies by counties across the United States (Bradley et al. 1992). Although the decennial Glenmary surveys are useful for many purposes, they have a number of drawbacks for ours. Not surprisingly, given their sources, the Glenmary studies are usually quite good at portraying the membership of religious bodies that keep good statistics, i.e. the mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church. They are much less accurate in estimating the numbers in less centrally organized religious bodies, such as the great variety of fundamentalist, evangelical and Pentecostal churches, many of which are functionally independent of any centralized organization, and black Protestant churches, which share the same decentralization and lack of denominational bureaucracy. Although Glenmary researchers have made valiant efforts to compensate for such deficiencies, their efforts have not been entirely successful (Jones et al. 2002).

Another source widely used in recent years to describe the religious composition of the American public has been the national surveys carried out by Barry Kosmin and his colleagues at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York: the National Survey of Religious

Identification (1990) and the American Religious Identification Project (2001). In one important respect, these are attractive data sources: they are based on very large samples derived from random digit dialing procedures (Kosmin and Lachman 1993). Unfortunately, the surveys used an open-ended question on respondents' affiliation: "What is your religion?" that makes it quite difficult to determine actual denominational membership or make correct assignments to religious traditions. Although these surveys do provide some purchase on religious change over time, they also provide relatively little information about the political traits of respondents. Other specialized surveys, such as the quadrennial network exit polls, though useful for limited purposes, lack both religious and political details (Green 2007).

To address both religious and political questions simultaneously, we rely on the National Survey of Religion and Politics (NSRP), conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Akron during the presidential elections of 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008. These large national studies have the major advantage of well-developed affiliation questions and substantial batteries of other religious and political items. At times we use the combined 1992-2004 file to aggregate sufficient cases to provide comparative data for the Sunbelt, for various sub-regions, and the rest of the country. To extend our political analysis over time, we also use that standard data source for political scientists, the American National Election Studies (ANES). Although the religious affiliation measures in ANES have changed over time, careful use of the presidential election year studies since 1964 provides us with time series data for our analysis.¹

¹ Because of the limited number of cases for some periods, especially in the American National Election Studies, we are often hampered in the comparisons we can make, either for smaller religious groups or for particular states. For sub-regional analysis we have divided the Sunbelt into the Old South, Florida, Texas, the Southwest (Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Nevada), and California. Although the size of state samples permits us to look separately at Florida, Texas, and California, there are also good theoretical reasons to expect that if there are distinctive state political cultures within the Sunbelt, they might well appear in these large and electorally critical states.

Using both ANES and NSRP data allows us to compare the partisan proclivities and vote choices of religious groups in the Sunbelt over a fifty-year period.

Whenever possible, we compare ANES and NSRP results with data from Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life's *U.S. Religious Landscape* survey, a massive study conducted in 2007 with over 35,000 respondents.² This data set has a religious affiliation measure that is directly comparable to those in the ANES and NSRP surveys. The extremely large sample size provides numerous respondents in even the smallest Sunbelt states, increasing confidence in our findings.³

The Religious Composition of the Sunbelt.

Is the Sunbelt a homogeneous religious entity? Does it share religious characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of the country? Or is there more diversity than unity? Table 1 reports the proportion of the population that falls within various religious traditions for the Sunbelt,⁴ various sub-regions, and the rest of the country, using data from the 2007 Pew Forum *Landscape Survey*. We have ordered the states in Table 1 by size of the white evangelical Protestant population, often thought to be a marker of Sunbelt religion. As the data reveal, there is some truth to that characterization: while slightly less than one-quarter of the national population are evangelical Christians, that percentage rises to 27 percent in the Sunbelt, compared with only 20 percent in the non-Sunbelt states. Certainly, evangelical religion and, presumably, its political manifestations, are more evident in the Sunbelt than elsewhere.

[Table 1 about here]

² The Landscape Survey data are not yet for dissemination, but these data have been provided for use in this chapter. We thank Greg Smith of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life for his technical assistance and Professor John C. Green of the University of Akron for similar assistance.

³ See Pew Forum (2008) for a comprehensive report on the findings.

⁴ We have included Nevada and Colorado in the Southwest, as well as Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Tennessee in the South as Sunbelt states in order to cast our net broadly. Given the lack of consensus about the conceptual definition of the Sunbelt, this decision seems defensible.

Perhaps even more striking than the differences between Sunbelt and non-Sunbelt states, however, is the wide range in evangelical numbers in the Sunbelt states. Evangelicals make up more than half the populations of Arkansas and Oklahoma—with Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina following closely behind—but less than a fifth in a composite of the four Southwest states as well as California. Evangelicals are obviously most numerous in the “Old South” (with the exception of Louisiana) and decline in proportions in the “Rim South” states of Virginia, Texas and Florida. The Southwest and California actually look more like the rest of the country than like the “Old South” states. Thus, any “evangelical” predominance in the Sunbelt is mostly the statistical artifact of averaging the highly evangelical Old South with the rather different states of the Southwest and West.

The story for other Protestants is also one of diversity. Mainline Protestants are actually considerably less numerous in the Sunbelt states (about 15 percent) than in the rest of the country (about 20 percent), but once again the population varies dramatically, from a high of 20 percent in North Carolina to a low of eight percent in Louisiana. Of course, mainline Protestants are still overrepresented among the political elites of Sunbelt states (as elsewhere), but that advantage is shrinking with their population. Black Protestant numbers are also larger in the Sunbelt than in the rest of the country, but they vary even more by state. They are largest in the Old South (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi), where they make up at least one-fifth of the citizenry, but are much less numerous in the western Sunbelt states. As in the case of evangelicals, black Protestants are a larger part of Sunbelt populations only by virtue of averaging highly varying regional figures. Finally, Latino Protestants are becoming a significant population group in the Sunbelt, more than twice as numerous there as in the rest of the country. They are especially evident in Texas and California, where they have already demonstrated

considerable political clout, but they are only a minor, if growing, presence in the Old South (see Appendix B).

In some ways, the Sunbelt is better characterized by the status of other religious traditions. If the Sunbelt is more evangelical than other regions, it is distinctively less Anglo Catholic than the non-Sunbelt states (9.8 to 22.4 percent). Of the Sunbelt states, only Louisiana has more than one-fifth of the population identifying as white Catholic, and with only a handful of other states rising above 10 percent. The small proportions of Anglo Catholics contrast with the substantial numbers of Latino Catholics, especially in New Mexico and other Southwest states, as well as in California and Texas. The Latino Catholic population is very small in Old South states, although percentage increases in these states are substantial (as documented in Appendix B and in the Manzano chapter in this volume). But even combining the two Catholic groups leaves the Sunbelt much less Catholic than the rest of the country (20 percent to 27 percent). In the same vein, the Jewish populations of Sunbelt states are small, from virtually undetectable in the Old South to 3.4 percent in Florida.

Finally, the table also reports the proportion of respondents with no religious affiliation whatever. Recent surveys have led some analysts to argue that this number is increasing nationally and may especially characterize rapidly growing regions (Hout and Fischer 2002). Once again, we discover more diversity than unity in the Sunbelt. Southern states range from 5.8 percent unaffiliated in Mississippi to 18 percent in Virginia, but that number rises to over one-fifth of the population in California, and similar proportions in the Southwest. Thus, the presumably “secular” population varies considerably across the putative Sunbelt—and may be increasing rapidly in the western regions. If this is the case, the sub-regions of the Sunbelt have even less in common religiously.

To make this point more concisely, in the last section of Table 1 we summarize religious affiliation by sub-region, separating the Old South, the “Rim South” states of Texas and Florida, the Southwest states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada, and the Pacific monolith of California. Evangelical populations decline dramatically from the Old South to California; mainline Protestants have a roughly similar presence across these areas; black Protestants are much more numerous in the Old South than in the other regions; Catholics—Anglo and Latino—are concentrated in Florida, the Southwest and California; and, the unaffiliated are more numerous in the western Sunbelt, i.e. the Southwest and California. Thus, the component parts of the Sunbelt have quite distinctive religious configurations.⁵

And it is important to remember that those religious populations are ever-changing. Over the past fifty years there has been an impressive increase in the number of Latinos regardless of religious persuasion. Appendix B documents these changes. If the major demographic movement in the Sunbelt from the end of World War II through the 1980s was the migration of Rust Belt whites to Sunbelt states, the key population changes since that time resulted from the immigration of Latinos and the high birth rates of U.S.-born Latinos. These increases have been particularly large in Florida, Texas, and California, and the states of the Southwest. By the beginning of the 21st century, moreover, Latino numbers are growing even in the Old South, in particular Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia. Population projections are always tricky, but the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that the Latino population in this country will triple between now

⁵ Other religious changes in the Sunbelt should be noted. Latter-day Saints and adherents of non-Christian faiths have multiplied, albeit from a low base. At the same time, both evangelical Protestants and the unaffiliated have enjoyed modest growth in numbers, while Anglo Catholics have suffered a slight decline. Finally, a big religious story in the Sunbelt, as elsewhere, is in the precipitous drop in the proportion of mainline Protestants (data not shown).

and 2050 (Pew Hispanic Center 2008), making Latino population growth in both the South and Southwest a major demographic factor in the next few decades.

Party Affiliation in the Sunbelt

Is the same kind of diversity characteristic of the political affiliations of Sunbelt residents? To provide a comparable summary measure of Sunbelt political characteristics, we turn to an assessment of party identification among Sunbelt residents over time. Table 2 reports the Republican and Democratic Party identification percentages of the U.S. electorate, the non-Sunbelt states, the Sunbelt states, and the sub-regions we reported on previously. (For simplicity, “Pure Independents” are left out of the table.) As political scientists have long known, party identification is not only the best predictor of voting decisions, but of a host of other political choices as well. It is thus the central variable in electoral analysis. To provide the longest possible time span for our analysis, we have added data from the American National Election Studies going back to 1960 to our information from the 1992-2004 National Surveys of Religion and Politics (NSRP), the 2007 Pew Forum Landscape Survey, and the 2008 NSRP. As the number of respondents in the ANES studies is relatively small, we have combined several elections to produce large enough numbers in the sub-regions for stable estimates.

[Table 2 about here]

As is evident from the first row in Table 2, the nation as a whole gravitated in a Republican direction from 1960-78 to 2000-04, moving from a 21 point deficit in the earliest period to almost a tie in 2000-04. Most of that change, however, was concentrated in the Sunbelt, where partisanship shifted dramatically toward the GOP, with the percentages identifying with the two parties at an exact tie in 2000-04. Pro-Republican change in the rest of the country was

much more modest, with the Democrats maintaining a five-point edge in 2000-04. To this point, at least, some of the old conventional wisdom about the Sunbelt being a source of “rising Republicanism” is correct. The bottom portion of Table 2 forces some revision in that picture, however, as partisan change is dramatically different by sub-region. By 2000-04, Texas had shifted from being the most Democratic area of the Sunbelt (to some extent reflecting identification with a favorite son, Lyndon Johnson) to one of the most Republican, while the Old South moved almost as strongly in the same direction. Florida and California, on the other hand, as well as the Southwest states, experienced more modest net Republican gains. Note the dramatic pro-GOP move by Californians in the 1980s, during the Reagan White House years, a move which was reversed in later periods. Still, although the partisan change pattern is quite different by sub-region, the end result is somewhat less variation across the Sunbelt in 2000-04 than was present in the earliest period, when Texas and the Old South still represented the remnants of the historically Democratic “Solid South.”

Table 2 also demonstrates that the Republican gains over the 40 years beginning in the 1960s came to a screeching halt by 2007. The extremely large sample numbers in the 2007 *Landscape* survey give us confidence that the GOP losses are not illusory; data from the 2008 NSRP election survey seem to confirm the 2007 results. Republican losses in partisan identification occurred all across the Sunbelt’s sub-regions, but particularly in the Old South. Clearly, the pattern in California is very different from that in other Sunbelt areas, with the Democrats holding a wide margin in partisan identities. In terms of geography and weather, California fits conceptions of a Sunbelt, but it does not seem to fit politically with the remaining states and sub-regions.

Religion and Partisanship in the Sunbelt

The preceding section shows a movement over time in the Sunbelt toward the Republican Party, a movement slowed somewhat since 2000-04. How did religious traditions participate in these partisan shifts? Did Sunbelt residents behave differently from those outside the region? Or were partisan changes by religious groups similar across regions? Table 3 provides the answers to these (and other) questions. We begin our analysis with evangelical Protestants. As the Table shows, evangelicals became substantially more Republican over the period, particularly in the Sunbelt, moving from the Democratic side of the scale to the Republican. GOP identification peaked in 2004, and then fell off slightly in 2007 and 2008. However, Democratic identification dropped as well, actually reaching its lowest point in 2008. Although there has been an overall decline in Republican identification since 2000-04 (see Table 2), evangelicals have not contributed to that decline. In addition, within-Sunbelt differences among evangelicals are minimal with large margins in favor of the GOP in every region. In sum, evangelicals everywhere look much alike by 2008, solid identifiers with the Republican Party. They have truly become a “national” religious bloc, as is readily apparent when comparing evangelicals with other religious groups in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

Mainline Protestants, on the other hand, have been quite stable politically, at least at the national level, resting solidly on the GOP side of the scale through 2004. In 2007, however, this historic Republican group (once dubbed “the Republican Party at prayer”) had moved toward the Democrats, but they shifted back toward the GOP in 2008. In the Sunbelt, mainliners had begun the time period as Democrats, although not as staunch as evangelicals, but quickly jumped to GOP partisanship in the 1980s, joining the Reagan Revolution, and maintaining these ties

thereafter. In recent years, Sunbelt mainliners have been somewhat more Republican than their non-Sunbelt counterparts. Whatever their partisan ties, the declining number of mainliners across the nation reduces their significance compared to a generation ago. White Catholics have also shifted away from their historic Democratic affiliation at the national level, but that change was greatest in the Sunbelt where the Anglo-Catholic presence tends to be small, with partisanship running in favor of the Republicans in 2000-04 and again in 2008.

What about smaller religious groups? We combined Latino Protestants and Catholics in the table because of the small numbers in the earliest eras (the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s). Latinos follow the trajectory discussed above—toward the Republican Party through the 1990s—but stabilizing thereafter.⁶ The failure of the GOP to make further gains is no doubt due to Latino frustration with the Republican Party’s recent immigration stands and some attraction for minority candidate Barack Obama in 2008. Although differences between Sunbelt and other Latinos are generally not large, sub-regional differences among Sunbelt Latinos are evident, with the small subsample of Latino Floridians identifying as Republicans, while in other parts of the Sunbelt Latinos are almost a mirror image of Sunbelt evangelicals. Given the growing demographic importance of Latinos, especially in the Sunbelt, (see Table 1 and Appendix B) their partisan preferences are of considerable, and increasing, importance.

Black Protestants, the nation’s most Democratic religious group, hardly shifted at all over this period, in the Sunbelt or elsewhere. Sunbelt Jews may have become a little less Democratic than their counterparts elsewhere, but their numbers are too small to be very

⁶ In the 1992-96, the 2000-04, and 2007 periods, we have much larger numbers of respondents and can focus on Latino Protestant/Catholic differences. In 1992-96, we find Latino Protestants 3 percentage points more Republican than Latino Catholics in both the Non-Sunbelt and Sunbelt. For 2000-04, the comparable figures are 2 percent in the Non-Sunbelt and a sizable 12 percent in the Sunbelt. The latter may have been due to the candidacy of George W. Bush, whose Texan background and evangelical faith appealed to Latino Protestants. In the 2007 “Landscape” survey, again, Latino Protestants were more Republican than Latino Catholics—12 percent more in the Non-Sunbelt and 9 percent greater in the Sunbelt. This remained the case in 2008 where the disparity between Protestants and Catholics reached 20 percent in the non-Sunbelt and 28 percent in the Sunbelt.

confident about this. Finally, the religiously unaffiliated, solidly on the Democratic side of the scale, nevertheless joined the general movement away from the Democrats from the 1960s until 2000-04, with those in Sunbelt more prone to do so. However, like most other groups, the unaffiliated moved back to the Democrats more recently.

All in all, then, we find that, among most religious groups Sunbelt residents moved more in a Republican direction than their counterparts elsewhere. In the case of evangelical Protestants, this really represents a kind of nationalization of their political profile, as regional differences among coreligionists were reduced or virtually eliminated. Among mainline Protestants and white Catholics, however, the processes of change opened a partisan gap where none existed previously, as Sunbelt residents moved more decisively in a Republican direction, although admittedly these groups are relatively small in the region. In sum, Table 3 suggests that religious differences are much more important in explaining partisan preferences than regional distinctions.

Regional Religious Party Coalitions

Over time these partisan changes have altered the coalitional character of the Republican and Democratic parties. More than a few observers have argued that the growth of the Sunbelt has increased its political weight, especially in the Republican Party, and that the increasing Sunbelt influence in the national GOP has been accompanied by a new conservative religious constituency, dominated by evangelical Protestants, who have moved party policy sharply to the right, especially on moral issues. The Texas GOP's declaration that the United States is a "Christian Nation" is often cited as an example of such impact. Some observers have even seen the need to compete in the Sunbelt as a "conservative" force in the Democratic Party, especially

in the form of the New Democratic centrism advocated by the Clinton-Gore wing of the party or by the so-called “Blue Dogs” and “New Democrats” in the Congress.

Table 4 provides an overview of the religious composition of the Republican and Democratic party coalitions in the Sunbelt and Non-Sunbelt, giving us a wealth of insight into interregional battles within the parties, especially those tied to religious divisions. First of all, note the major differences between the religious coalitions of the two GOP regional wings. At the beginning of the period the dominant Non-Sunbelt GOP reflected the religious dominance of mainline Protestants, the party’s historic religious base, with almost half of all Republican identifiers affiliated with that tradition. Evangelical Protestants were no more numerous than Anglo Catholics, and both were distinct minorities. By the end of the period, evangelicals had more than doubled their share of GOP identifiers in the Non-Sunbelt, and Anglo Catholics had slipped past mainliners for second place by 1992-96. Latino contributions to the party coalition were negligible in the earliest period, and are still small. Unaffiliated citizens were about as numerous in the GOP coalition in the first period as in the last (slipping only 4 percentage points). In sum, the Republican Party coalition outside the Sunbelt went from mainline to evangelical Protestant dominance.

[Table 4 about here]

The coalition pattern for the Republicans in the Sunbelt is somewhat different. At the beginning of the period, the still relatively small Sunbelt Republican party was based almost equally in the two white Protestant traditions, with mainliners having a slight edge, while Catholics, Latinos, the unaffiliated and other religious groups combined for a little over a third of the GOP constituency. As in the rest of the country, over the coming decades the evangelical community increased its share of the GOP and mainline Protestants lost ground. As elsewhere,

white Catholics became a somewhat larger component over time, as did “all others.” By 2000-04 these changes had created a Sunbelt GOP in which evangelicals outnumbered mainliners by more than 2 to 1, and Catholics by 3 to 1. In 2007 and 2008, evangelical domination of the GOP coalition became even more evident, as the party lost adherents from other religious groups. Thus, although evangelicals were the largest single GOP religious constituency in both regions, their position was more entrenched in the Sunbelt. In non-Sunbelt areas, they were merely the senior partners in a three-way alliance with mainline Protestants and Anglo Catholics.

What about the Democrats? Here, too, we see major changes in religious coalitions, as well as rather different regional alliances among religious groups. In the earliest period, the regional bases of the party are quite different, reflecting some of the historic splits among Democrats between the urban, ethnic and Catholic north and the rural, WASP, and Protestant South (Burner 1968), as well as the party’s historic role as a haven for ethnic and religious minorities (Kleppner 1979). Outside the Sunbelt, the Democratic coalition in the first period was a broad alliance of Catholics, with almost a third of the party, and almost equal sized groups of mainliners, unaffiliated citizens, and religious minorities (including, of course, Jews and Black Protestants). Evangelical Protestants were a *small* Democratic constituency outside the Sunbelt. Within the Sunbelt, however, evangelicals replaced Catholics as the centerpiece of the Democratic alliance, followed by other religious groups, the unaffiliated and mainliners (both at about one-sixth of the party’s base), with Anglo-Catholics only a small Democratic group.

By the 21st century the Democratic religious coalition had changed dramatically in the Sunbelt, with smaller changes in the rest of the country. In the Non-Sunbelt states, the Catholic plurality was reduced somewhat, while the mainline Protestant portion of the coalition fell more dramatically. Note the sizable number of Latinos, Black Protestants, and the “all others”

classification (of Jews and other small religious groups). What is noteworthy about the Non-Sunbelt Democratic coalition is its religious diversity and “balance” among groups. Democratic electoral appeals must be made to a broad array of groups.

The Sunbelt Democracy looks different. The 1960-78 evangelical contribution to the coalition declined significantly over the period. Mainline, Catholic and unaffiliated Democrats also declined somewhat in importance across the era. The dramatic change is, of course, in the proportion of Sunbelt Democrats drawn from among Latinos.⁷ By 2008, the Black Protestant contribution to the Sunbelt Democrats had also increased, making the coalition a minority-based phenomenon. The result of these transformations, as well as those on the Republican side, is two-fold. First, the Sunbelt GOP and Democratic parties still look somewhat different from their Non-Sunbelt counterparts: the Sunbelt GOP is more evangelical, less mainline and Catholic, while the Sunbelt Democracy is more “minority” religion, and less mainline and Catholic. And a glance at the last period also reveals that there is less religious “overlap” between the Republicans and the Democrats in the Sunbelt than present elsewhere, with the largest religious groups in each—evangelicals in the GOP and minorities in the Democratic party—in a more dominant position.⁸ These religious differences in party composition may well contribute to the much-noted political polarization characterizing modern American politics.

The religious composition of the GOP and Democratic party constituencies is important for a variety of reasons. First, of course, most voters usually make their electoral choices in accordance with their long-term identification. This “standing decision” is an important constraint on election outcomes. In addition, party identifiers are much more likely to participate in other decisions: to vote in primaries and caucuses choosing party candidates for office, to

⁷ Differences between Latino Protestants and Catholics can be noted in the last three periods.

⁸ Given the rapid increase in the Latino population in the Sunbelt, regional dependence on “minorities” by the Democratic Party is almost certainly going to increase in the future.

influence party platforms, or to contribute money or energy to campaigns. Those who participate in these ways are much more likely to shape party operations and their ideological bent.

Religion, Region and the Presidential Vote, 1960-2008

Of course, people sometimes deviate from their identification in making electoral choices. Various short-term forces may lead a voter to choose a candidate of the other political party. Indeed, such deviating choices may take place over a string of elections, eventually leading the voter to reassess his or her party identification. Thus, we need to look also at the electoral decisions of voters in different regional and religious groups. Table 5 reports the Republican vote for president, using the same sources as our previous tables. Once again, our interest is both in the electoral propensities of religious groups and how those vary by region and sub-region.

[Table 5 about here]

We begin with observations of all voters before turning to religious groups, finding that since the 1990s the Sunbelt has provided somewhat greater support for Republican presidential candidates than has the rest of the country. Florida and Texas were more likely to support the GOP than other parts of the Sunbelt in the 1992 and 1996 elections, while Texas led the way in 2000 and 2004 with George W. Bush as the candidate. In 2008, there was little variation in support for John McCain within the Sunbelt, except in California where Obama won handily.

The observant reader will have noted that evangelical Protestants were voting Republican before they began to identify with the GOP (cf. Table 3). In particular, Nixon in 1960 and 1972 received strong support from evangelicals. Nationally, the evangelical vote for Republican presidential candidates reached its peak in the 21st century, with an impressive average of 75

percent going to George W. Bush in 2000-04 and with an even higher 76 percent going to John McCain in 2008. In 2008, evangelicals were the only religious group to increase their support for the GOP over 2000-04 figures. And although evangelical voting did not vary enormously by region, during the first two periods “Northern” evangelicals were slightly more likely to vote Republican than their Sunbelt brethren, but this pattern reversed later, as Sunbelt evangelicals took the prize for GOP voting.

The sub-regional breakdown among evangelicals shows the reason for the global change. In the earlier periods, the Old South ran only slightly behind non-Sunbelt evangelicals, but Texas lagged far behind, no doubt reflecting native son LBJ’s candidacy in 1964 and Jimmy Carter’s “southern” candidacy in 1976. By the most recent period, however, the Old South’s GOP vote had risen considerably, Florida’s had remained fairly high, and Texan evangelicals went overwhelmingly for their governor in 2000 and 2004 and for McCain in 2008. Note also that California evangelicals became regular Republican voters by 1980-88, perhaps reflecting the Reagan appeal. The support for Bush and McCain by California evangelicals is also quite impressive given the minority support he received by voters in the state as a whole.

Mainline Protestants have a different story, but one that parallels their changes in party identification. Their propensity to vote Republican has dropped fairly consistently in both regions, although Sunbelt mainliners remained more likely to choose the GOP than their northern brethren. And as we might expect from the partisan change data reported above, Anglo Catholics have shown a slowly increasing propensity to vote Republican in presidential elections. Indeed, in 2000-04, they gave a majority of their votes to George W. Bush and did the same for John McCain in 2008. Throughout the period covered in Table 5, Sunbelt Anglo Catholics have outpaced their northern counterparts in voting for the GOP.

Latino support for Democratic candidates has remained strong throughout the time period, increasing in importance as population percentages have increased. Throughout the past half century, Sunbelt Latinos have been somewhat more prone to support GOP candidates than their non-Sunbelt compatriots, particularly in 2000-04.⁹ And we note that black Protestants and Jews have remained very Democratic throughout the time period, with blacks and Latinos giving Democratic candidates a large edge, particularly in the Sunbelt. The unaffiliated also join the Democratic voting coalition, except for the 1980s (where an attachment to Reaganomics seemed to motivate this group to vote Republican). Since that time, the unaffiliated have moved rather dramatically toward the Democrats in presidential elections, although once again, the Sunbelt contingent lags slightly behind in this tendency.

Religion, Region and Political Issues

Politics is about more than which candidate wins elections. Winning candidates and parties make important decisions on a wide range of public policy issues. Public opinion on these issues may well shape which candidates win elections, and may influence the decision-makers once in office. There is some conventional wisdom that the shift in political power to the Sunbelt has had a conservative impact on a range of public policy issues, from abortion to tax policy to free trade to national defense. Other analysts doubt that such regional differences exist (Wolfe 1998). In this section of the paper, we look at the configuration of regional and religious group opinion on seven issues in 2008. In Table 6 we report the results for questions on abortion, gay rights, national health insurance, preference for lower taxes and fewer public services, support

⁹ Small numbers make Latino Protestant and Catholic comparisons hazardous except in 2004 where Sunbelt Protestants gave Bush three-quarters of their votes, while Sunbelt Catholics gave Bush only 37 percent.

for Israel over the Palestinians in the Middle East, approval of free trade,¹⁰ and backing for a strong military. We have reported “conservative” responses to each question. (Remember that on all questions, a varying number refuse to answer or are “not sure,” so that 46 percent may actually represent a plurality response or even a majority of those with an opinion.)

[Table 6 about here]

First, are Sunbelt residents more conservative than Americans elsewhere? The first section of Table 6 would suggest that the answer is “yes, but not by a whole lot.” The conservative margin in the Sunbelt on these seven issues runs from a high of 9 percentage points on pro-life and strong defense to a single point advantage on national health insurance. Indeed, the variation is much greater within sub-regions. Old South residents are much more pro-life and opposed to gay rights than Californians, and Texans stand out in opposition to increased government spending.

In fact, a quick glance at the Table suggests that religion is a much better explanation for ideological differences than region is. Evangelicals consistently demonstrate the greatest conservatism across the board, with Sunbelt evangelicals leading the way. And, in data not shown, the sub-regional differences among evangelicals are relatively small and apparently random in nature except for California evangelicals who hold slightly more liberal views than their counterparts elsewhere (data not shown).

Mainline Protestants are much more liberal on these issues than evangelicals. Within the mainline tradition, there are few differences by region, with a slight tip to the conservative side by the Sunbelt respondents, except on abortion and gay rights. Anglo-Catholics tend to be more liberal than evangelicals and more conservative than mainline Protestants with Sunbelt Catholics

¹⁰ Mellow (2008: 47) suggests that free trade is a “defining” Sunbelt issue. She calls the Sunbelt region “trade-dependent.”

often much more conservative than their brethren elsewhere. Black Protestant stances vary rather dramatically by issue area. Sunbelt Black Protestants do have strong pro-life attitudes, while in both regions the group is more opposed to gay rights than the national average. Both non-Sunbelt and Sunbelt Black Protestants favor a strong military, but are less likely to favor Israel than most other religious groups. Both groups are very skeptical about free trade, but are fairly liberal on national health care and government services.

We also note the greater political conservatism of Latino Protestants as opposed to Latino Catholics, particularly on abortion and gay rights with the former resembling evangelicals on these two issues. There is a slight tendency for Sunbelt Latinos to hold more conservative attitudes than do their counterparts in the rest of the country. Table 6 also shows the strong and unsurprising liberalism of Jewish respondents, with the exception of massive support for Israel over the Palestinians. Finally, unaffiliated respondents support liberal policy attitudes with little variation between regions.

Have these issue positions changed over time? The NSRP time series has data for most of these issue variables going back to 1992, and the results are revealing. In data not shown, they indicate that Americans have become more pro-life with the Sunbelt leading the way. At the same time, attitudes toward gay rights are more favorable in 2008 than in 1992. In addition, opposition to a national health plan has increased, spurred by evangelicals, while, at the same time, Americans are now more favorable to increased government services. Favorable attitudes toward Israel have increased, led by the Sunbelt and by evangelicals in that region. Finally, negative attitudes toward free trade have increased, while a strong national defense is viewed more favorably. As this review suggests, there appears to be no broad, consistent ideological direction to these changes.

Is there an “issue basis” for maintaining that the Sunbelt is a viable region? Yes, the Sunbelt does exhibit more conservative attitudes than the rest of the country, but the results in Table 6 do not provide as much support for regional issue differences as for religious polarity. If the Sunbelt is to achieve political viability in the manner of the old “Solid South,” it must foster a set of issues that exhibit strong support across the region among elites, political parties and interest groups, and the mass public. An earlier effort among elites, the so-called Sunbelt Caucus, formed in 1981, suggested the possibility that a set of issues might bind together states in the Sunbelt. It is interesting that California was not represented in the caucus, although Kentucky, Missouri, and West Virginia were. The caucus went out of existence in 1995.¹¹ Despite increased numbers of legislators from Sunbelt states (see Appendix A), there is no congressional caucus representation from this “region” today. This suggests that the dominant issues of contemporary American politics do not generally divide citizens along Sunbelt/Non-Sunbelt lines.

Summary and Implications

No observer of American political history would deny that regionalism has been a powerful force from the very beginning of the nation. Political conflict between regions was evident in the Constitutional Convention, in the struggle over slavery, in the great battles over economic expansion and regulation, and in the partisan warfare of the New Deal period. Even as late as the 1960s, a vast literature in political science explored the distinctive politics of one region, the American South, in large part occasioned by the great struggle over civil rights. Indeed, this large body of literature continues to this day.

¹¹ For the Sunbelt caucus, (http://www.opencongress.org/wiki/Congressional_Sunbelt_Caucus; <http://www.ou.edu/special/albertctr/archives/sunbelt.htm>).

Despite this historic concern for regional explanations, the dominant perspective in contemporary American political science strongly favors what might be called the “nationalization” hypothesis: the notion that with economic growth in formerly disadvantaged regions, the nationalization of the media, massive population movements, and the creation of a national legal regime by the federal courts, the once great disparities in political behavior among regions has been eliminated (cf. Mohl 1990). Yet this contention has often been challenged by those who see continuing regional differences, or even distinctive state political cultures. Certainly, the much-touted “red state, blue state” political labels are a popular expression of such continuing assumptions.

What do our findings on the interaction of religion and politics contribute to this debate? First, our data certainly support the nationalization hypothesis in a number of ways. Most importantly, the last fifty years have produced a major homogenization of political orientation among most major religious groups, but especially in the large evangelical Protestant community, so important in many parts of the Sunbelt. Evangelicals now behave politically in very much the same way whether they live in the North, the Old South, or California. The same tends to be true of other religious groups as well, although in a few cases, Sunbelt residents do lean slightly to the Republican and conservative side. Thus, from the perspective of religious factors, differing regional politics are largely the effect of the composition of their religious communities—not the result of some distinctive “regional” culture on all religious groups.

And those differing religious populations do create differing political environments. As we have argued, from a religious and political perspective, the Sunbelt does not hang together as a single region. The religious composition of the area differs in major ways as one moves from the Old South to the Pacific coast. And the political choices made by Sunbelt residents are quite

different as well. Indeed, the sub-regions and individual states we were able to examine often reveal considerable individuality in political behavior, providing some comfort to those theorists who note that it is still American states that are the basic political units, with their own history, culture and traditions. But it is important to note that individuality may be a thing of the past, as adherents to any single religious tradition now look very much alike across regions and states.

All this is not to say that the Sunbelt is not a political entity for certain purposes. For example, members of Congress from rapidly growing regions often share concerns on the allocation formulas for federal program expenditures (Mellow 2008). Similarly, Sunbelt states may exhibit a greater preoccupation with other problems occasioned by rapid economic and population growth, or more immediate concern with immigration from Latin America. But such occasions for a common political agenda within the Sunbelt have not brought about careful attention to a regional perspective in political analysis.

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Table 1.
Religious Traditions in the Sunbelt States—2007
(Percent of Population)

| | <i>Evangelical Protestant</i> | <i>Mainline Protestant</i> | <i>Black Protestant</i> | <i>Latino Protestant</i> | <i>White Catholic</i> | <i>Latino Catholic</i> | <i>Jewish</i> | <i>Not Affiliated</i> | <i>N</i> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Total U.S. | 23.1 | 17.3 | 8.4 | 2.8 | 16.5 | 7.0 | 1.7 | 16.2 | 35556 |
| <i>Non-Sunbelt</i> | 19.7 | 19.7 | 6.7 | 1.7 | 22.4 | 4.1 | 2.0 | 16.7 | 19452 |
| <i>Sunbelt</i> | 27.0 | 14.7 | 10.4 | 4.1 | 9.8 | 10.2 | 1.4 | 15.7 | 16104 |
| Oklahoma | 50.9 | 15.2 | 4.2 | 2.9 | 6.9 | 4.8 | 0.4 | 11.8 | 465 |
| Arkansas | 50.4 | 15.5 | 12.0 | 1.1 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 12.7 | 378 |
| Tennessee | 48.9 | 17.8 | 10.7 | 0.5 | 4.4 | 2.0 | 0.2 | 11.9 | 837 |
| Alabama | 45.3 | 14.0 | 21.3 | 1.7 | 4.0 | 1.5 | 0.1 | 8.3 | 681 |
| Mississippi | 42.8 | 9.4 | 28.1 | 0.9 | 4.4 | 3.4 | 0.0 | 5.8 | 333 |
| S Carolina | 42.8 | 17.7 | 17.2 | 1.1 | 6.2 | 1.4 | 0.8 | 9.9 | 570 |
| N Carolina | 37.1 | 20.0 | 15.5 | 2.7 | 5.4 | 3.5 | 0.5 | 12.2 | 1166 |
| Georgia | 32.3 | 16.0 | 20.0 | 2.5 | 6.4 | 4.5 | 0.7 | 12.9 | 967 |
| Louisiana | 27.9 | 7.6 | 22.5 | 2.1 | 23.5 | 1.3 | 0.3 | 7.8 | 528 |
| Virginia | 27.4 | 19.0 | 12.6 | 2.2 | 11.0 | 2.7 | 1.0 | 18.0 | 997 |
| New Mexico | 21.8 | 14.3 | 2.0 | 4.6 | 7.9 | 18.5 | 1.8 | 21.0 | 228 |
| Colorado | 21.3 | 18.8 | 2.6 | 1.8 | 12.3 | 7.2 | 2.1 | 25.3 | 590 |
| Texas | 20.6 | 14.0 | 10.9 | 7.8 | 7.6 | 16.2 | 0.8 | 12.1 | 2266 |
| Florida | 20.6 | 14.3 | 9.8 | 3.9 | 15.2 | 10.8 | 3.4 | 16.5 | 1694 |
| Arizona | 20.6 | 15.1 | 1.7 | 4.2 | 11.3 | 13.1 | 1.1 | 22.7 | 578 |
| California | 14.0 | 12.1 | 4.0 | 6.1 | 11.9 | 18.6 | 2.3 | 20.7 | 3574 |
| Nevada | 10.5 | 10.6 | 4.5 | 1.3 | 13.5 | 13.6 | 1.3 | 21.6 | 252 |
| <i>Summary of Sunbelt</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| South | 38.6 | 16.3 | 16.0 | 1.9 | 7.6 | 2.8 | 0.5 | 12.0 | 6922 |
| Texas | 20.6 | 14.0 | 10.9 | 7.8 | 7.6 | 16.2 | 0.8 | 12.1 | 2266 |
| Florida | 20.6 | 14.3 | 9.8 | 3.9 | 15.2 | 10.8 | 3.4 | 16.5 | 1694 |
| Southwest | 19.4 | 15.6 | 2.5 | 2.9 | 11.6 | 11.7 | 1.6 | 23.2 | 1648 |
| California | 14.0 | 12.1 | 4.0 | 6.1 | 11.9 | 18.6 | 2.3 | 20.7 | 3574 |

Source: The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008*. States are ordered by percent evangelical Protestant. Smaller groups such as non-Christians and Latter-day Saints are omitted from the table. “South” includes Arkansas, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Alabama, North Carolina, Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, and Louisiana. “Southwest” includes Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico.

| Table 2. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Partisan Identification in the Sunbelt, 1960-2008 (Independents excluded) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1960-1978 | | 1980-1988 | | 1992-1996 | | 2000-2004 | | 2007 | | 2008 | |
| | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D |
| Total U.S. | 32 | 53 | 37 | 50 | 39 | 44 | 41 | 44 | 35 | 47 | 36 | 45 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 36 | 50 | 39 | 48 | 39 | 44 | 40 | 45 | 35 | 48 | 35 | 45 |
| Sunbelt | 27 | 58 | 34 | 53 | 39 | 45 | 43 | 43 | 36 | 45 | 37 | 45 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Summary of Sunbelt</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| South | 23 | 59 | 28 | 58 | 41 | 44 | 44 | 41 | 39 | 45 | 36 | 44 |
| Florida | 38 | 50 | 38 | 47 | 37 | 51 | 40 | 42 | 35 | 47 | 39 | 49 |
| Texas | 16 | 70 | 32 | 53 | 41 | 42 | 45 | 39 | 39 | 41 | 41 | 42 |
| Southwest | 37 | 50 | 41 | 45 | 34 | 46 | 47 | 41 | 36 | 42 | 43 | 41 |
| California | 32 | 57 | 43 | 45 | 39 | 45 | 37 | 50 | 30 | 49 | 30 | 49 |

Sources: American National Election Studies 1960-1988; National Surveys on Religion and Politics (merged file) 1992-2004; *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life; 2008 5th National Survey on Religion and Politics, 2008.

| Table 3. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Party Identification by Religion Over Time in the Sunbelt | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1960-1978 | | 1980-1988 | | 1992-1996 | | 2000-2004 | | 2007 | | 2008 | |
| | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D |
| <i>Evangelical</i> | 32 | 53 | 44 | 43 | 52 | 32 | 59 | 29 | 54 | 31 | 57 | 27 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 41 | 45 | 53 | 34 | 51 | 31 | 59 | 29 | 53 | 32 | 58 | 27 |
| Sunbelt | 26 | 59 | 37 | 49 | 52 | 32 | 59 | 30 | 56 | 30 | 56 | 27 |
| South | 26 | 58 | 33 | 53 | 50 | 33 | 56 | 32 | 53 | 33 | 49 | 27 |
| Florida | 22 | 67 | 36 | 48 | 48 | 37 | 54 | 29 | 52 | 35 | 59 | 32 |
| Texas | 14 | 70 | 40 | 48 | 56 | 31 | 64 | 23 | 62 | 25 | 70 | 25 |
| Southwest | 45 | 40 | 47 | 28 | 44 | 34 | 70 | 25 | 61 | 25 | 63 | 31 |
| California | 41 | 46 | 62 | 26 | 62 | 27 | 62 | 33 | 60 | 26 | 67 | 23 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Mainline</i> | 50 | 38 | 53 | 36 | 48 | 36 | 48 | 39 | 43 | 42 | 46 | 40 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 53 | 34 | 54 | 35 | 49 | 35 | 45 | 42 | 40 | 45 | 44 | 42 |
| Sunbelt | 42 | 46 | 52 | 40 | 48 | 36 | 51 | 36 | 46 | 38 | 49 | 38 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Anglo Catholic</i> | 24 | 63 | 35 | 52 | 39 | 46 | 42 | 45 | 40 | 46 | 38 | 47 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 24 | 63 | 33 | 54 | 38 | 45 | 39 | 47 | 39 | 47 | 34 | 51 |
| Sunbelt | 23 | 65 | 42 | 45 | 40 | 47 | 49 | 39 | 42 | 43 | 49 | 36 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>All Latinos</i> | 13 | 73 | 24 | 59 | 28 | 53 | 28 | 56 | 21 | 49 | 24 | 54 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 12 | 66 | 22 | 60 | 32 | 50 | 34 | 51 | 20 | 54 | 21 | 55 |
| Sunbelt | 13 | 77 | 25 | 59 | 26 | 54 | 26 | 58 | 22 | 46 | 24 | 54 |
| South | | + | | + | 35 | 57 | 35 | 44 | 25 | 33 | 11 | 51 |
| Florida | | + | | + | 40 | 40 | 36 | 44 | 30 | 32 | 55 | 27* |
| Texas | | + | | + | 22 | 52 | 26 | 61 | 21 | 42 | 32 | 48 |
| Southwest | | + | | + | 27 | 63 | 14 | 65 | 21 | 41 | 23 | 54 |
| California | | + | | + | 21 | 54 | 25 | 62 | 17 | 46 | 21 | 64 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Black Protestant</i> | 879 | | 8 | 82 | 11 | 81 | 11 | 78 | 9 | 79 | 9 | 79 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 882 | | 5 | 87 | 7 | 82 | 10 | 80 | 8 | 81 | 6 | 75 |
| Sunbelt | 876 | | 10 | 80 | 13 | 81 | 11 | 77 | 10 | 77 | 11 | 82 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Jewish</i> | 16 | 72 | 20 | 68 | 22 | 69 | 20 | 70 | 24 | 66 | 12 | 71 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 17 | 70 | 15 | 73 | 25 | 62 | 21 | 69 | 26 | 65 | 13 | 74 |
| Sunbelt | 8 | 80 | 31 | 58 | 17 | 79 | 19 | 73 | 20 | 68 | 11 | 68* |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Unaffiliated</i> | 27 | 52 | 33 | 49 | 34 | 45 | 31 | 46 | 23 | 55 | 24 | 48 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 28 | 50 | 32 | 49 | 30 | 48 | 28 | 47 | 21 | 57 | 21 | 51 |
| Sunbelt | 25 | 55 | 34 | 49 | 38 | 41 | 34 | 45 | 25 | 52 | 27 | 42 |

Sources: American National Election Studies 1960-1988; National Surveys on Religion and Politics (merged file) 1992-2004; 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life; 2008 5th National Survey on Religion and Politics. * N less than 20.+ N's too small.

| Table 4. Party Coalitions Over Time in the Non-Sunbelt and Sunbelt (Column Percents) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| | 1960-1978 | | 1980-1988 | | 1992-1996 | | 2000-2004 | | 2007 | | 2008 | |
| | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D | R | D |
| <i>Non-Sunbelt</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Evangelical | 16 | 12 | 20 | 11 | 27 | 14 | 32 | 14 | 30 | 13 | 34 | 13 |
| Mainline | 47 | 22 | 35 | 18 | 24 | 16 | 22 | 19 | 23 | 18 | 21 | 16 |
| Anglo-Catholic | 16 | 30 | 21 | 27 | 26 | 27 | 23 | 25 | 25 | 22 | 22 | 27 |
| All Latinos | 0.3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 6 |
| Black Protestant | 1 | 8 | 1 | 12 | 1 | 13 | 2 | 12 | 2 | 11 | 1 | 9 |
| Unaffiliated | 14 | 18 | 18 | 23 | 12 | 17 | 12 | 18 | 10 | 20 | 10 | 19 |
| All Others | 5 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 10 |
| <i>Sunbelt</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Evangelical | 31 | 31 | 31 | 26 | 40 | 22 | 42 | 21 | 42 | 18 | 43 | 18 |
| Mainline | 36 | 18 | 24 | 12 | 18 | 12 | 20 | 14 | 19 | 13 | 16 | 11 |
| Anglo-Catholic | 8 | 11 | 9 | 6 | 12 | 12 | 14 | 11 | 11 | 9 | 13 | 8 |
| All Latinos | 1 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 6 | 11 | 5 | 13 | 9 | 15 | 10 | 20 |
| Black Protestant | 4 | 16 | 5 | 23 | 4 | 20 | 3 | 18 | 3 | 18 | 4 | 24 |
| Unaffiliated | 16 | 17 | 21 | 19 | 15 | 14 | 12 | 16 | 11 | 18 | 9 | 12 |
| All Others | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 7 |

Sources: ANES 1964-1988; National Surveys of Religion and Politics: 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 (Merged File).2007 Pew Forum U.S. Landscape Survey.2008 5th National Survey of Religion and Politics. R = Republican, D = Democratic. Column percentages for both the Non-Sunbelt and the Sunbelt do not always add up to 100 due to rounding. **All others** include Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, Jews, Muslims and all other religions.

Table 5.**Republican Presidential Vote by Religion over Time (in percent)**

| | 1960-1976 | 1980-1988 | 1992-1996 | 2000-2004 | 2008 |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|
| <i>All Voters</i> | 51 | 56 | 47 | 50 | 46 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 51 | 57 | 45 | 48 | 45 |
| Sunbelt | 51 | 55 | 50 | 54 | 48 |
| South | 49 | 51 | 45 | 57 | 49 |
| Florida | 66 | 76 | 52 | 54 | 51 |
| Texas | 39 | 50 | 52 | 60 | 53 |
| Southwest | 52 | 56 | 47 | 55 | 54 |
| California | 52 | 58 | 49 | 45 | 34 |
| | | | | | |
| <i>Evangelical</i> | 61 | 71 | 68 | 75 | 76 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 65 | 73 | 65 | 73 | 72 |
| Sunbelt | 57 | 69 | 70 | 77 | 79 |
| South | 56 | 66 | 62 | 74 | 84 |
| Florida | 72 | 89 | 62 | 69 | 70 |
| Texas | 42 | 64 | 73 | 85 | 87 |
| Southwest | 64 | 69 | 67 | 83 | 64 |
| California | 66 | 81 | 82 | 79 | 60 |
| | | | | | |
| <i>Mainline</i> | 66 | 69 | 56 | 54 | 50 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 66 | 69 | 51 | 50 | 46 |
| Sunbelt | 65 | 67 | 62 | 59 | 56 |
| | | | | | |
| <i>Anglo Catholic</i> | 39 | 55 | 46 | 52 | 51 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 38 | 53 | 44 | 48 | 47 |
| Sunbelt | 42 | 67 | 50 | 59 | 60 |
| | | | | | |
| All Latinos | 40 | 40 | 23 | 36 | 30 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 29 | 43 | 22 | 24 | 27 |
| Sunbelt | 46 | 39 | 24 | 44 | 31 |
| | | | | | |
| Black Protestant+ | 11 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 5 |
| Jewish | 19 | 29 | 13 | 28 | 23 |
| | | | | | |
| <i>Unaffiliated</i> | 46 | 55 | 39 | 30 | 27 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 45 | 51 | 38 | 29 | 22 |
| Sunbelt | 49 | 62 | 40 | 32 | 34 |

Source: ANES 1964-1988; National Surveys of Religion and Politics: 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 (Merged File). 2008 5th National Survey of Religion and Politics.+ For black Protestants, sunbelt/non sunbelt differences were tiny.

| Table 6. Religion and Issue Positions in the Sunbelt in 2008 | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| | <i>Pro-Life</i> | <i>Anti-Gay Rights</i> | <i>Oppose National Health Plan</i> | <i>Fewer Public Services</i> | <i>Favor Israel over Palestinians</i> | <i>Favor Free Trade</i> | <i>Favor Strong Military</i> |
| <i>All Respondents</i> | 48 | 26 | 38 | 34 | 40 | 32 | 52 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 44 | 23 | 37 | 33 | 37 | 31 | 47 |
| Sunbelt | 53 | 28 | 40 | 34 | 44 | 33 | 56 |
| South | 60 | 37 | 46 | 36 | 49 | 28 | 57 |
| Florida | 40 | 23 | 41 | 33 | 41 | 33 | 65 |
| Texas | 52 | 28 | 44 | 28 | 46 | 32 | 60 |
| Southwest | 48 | 19 | 31 | 38 | 39 | 44 | 52 |
| California | 44 | 16 | 29 | 31 | 37 | 39 | 48 |
| <i>Evangelical</i> | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 63 | 38 | 50 | 41 | 49 | 27 | 51 |
| Sunbelt | 69 | 49 | 56 | 43 | 62 | 28 | 67 |
| <i>Mainline</i> | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 35 | 20 | 41 | 33 | 39 | 33 | 42 |
| Sunbelt | 30 | 21 | 53 | 40 | 44 | 37 | 56 |
| <i>Anglo Catholic</i> | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 50 | 19 | 34 | 31 | 35 | 32 | 52 |
| Sunbelt | 52 | 26 | 45 | 43 | 42 | 49 | 59 |
| <i>Black Protestant</i> | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 37 | 33 | 14 | 30 | 31 | 15 | 56 |
| Sunbelt | 61 | 31 | 35 | 21 | 28 | 11 | 58 |
| <i>Latino Protestant</i> | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 69 | 36 | 32 | 32 | 19 | 22 | 52 |
| Sunbelt | 78 | 34 | 30 | 16 | 49 | 29 | 46 |
| <i>Latino Catholic</i> | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 55 | 16 | 24 | 15 | 20 | 30 | 45 |
| Sunbelt | 62 | 13 | 12 | 19 | 31 | 44 | 50 |
| <i>Jewish *</i> | 4 | 5 | 25 | 26 | 78 | 55 | 42 |
| <i>Unaffiliated</i> | | | | | | | |
| Non-Sunbelt | 20 | 11 | 29 | 29 | 33 | 31 | 38 |
| Sunbelt | 22 | 11 | 32 | 32 | 36 | 39 | 43 |

Source: 5th National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2008.

* Almost no Non-Sunbelt/Sunbelt differences among Jewish respondents.

Appendix A.**Representation of the Sunbelt in the U.S. House of Representatives: 1950 to 2010**

| | 1950s | 1960s | 1970s | 1980s | 1990s | 2000s | 2010 Projection | Gain/Loss |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Non Sunbelt | 284 | 275 | 267 | 252 | 234 | 225 | 219 | -65 |
| Sunbelt | 151 | 160 | 168 | 183 | 201 | 210 | 216 | +65 |
| Alabama | 9 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | -2 |
| Arkansas | 6 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | -2 |
| Georgia | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 14 | +4 |
| Louisiana | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 6 | -2 |
| Mississippi | 6 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | -2 |
| North Carolina | 12 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 14 | 14 | +2 |
| Oklahoma | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 5 | -1 |
| South Carolina | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Tennessee | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 0 |
| Virginia | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 11 | +1 |
| South | 82 | 77 | 74 | 76 | 78 | 79 | 80 | -2 |
| Florida | 8 | 12 | 15 | 19 | 23 | 25 | 26 | +18 |
| Texas | 22 | 23 | 24 | 27 | 30 | 32 | 35 | +13 |
| South + FL&TX | 112 | 112 | 113 | 122 | 131 | 136 | 141 | +29 |
| Arizona | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 9 | +7 |
| Colorado | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 | +3 |
| Nevada | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | +2 |
| New Mexico | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | +1 |
| Southwest | 9 | 10 | 12 | 16 | 18 | 21 | 22 | +13 |
| California | 30 | 38 | 43 | 45 | 52 | 53 | 53 | +23 |

**Appendix B:
Latino Population Change 1970 to 2007 (U.S. Census Data)**

| | Latino Pop. 1970 | Percent Latino in 1970 | Percent Of Total U.S. Latinos 1970 | Latino Pop. 2000 | Percent Gain Latino Pop. 1970 to 2000 | Latino Pop. 2007 | Percent Latino in 2007 | Percent of Total U.S. Latinos 2007 | Percent Gain Latino Pop. 2000 to 2007 |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| U.S. Population | 9,072,602 | 4.5 | 100 | 35,204,480 | 288.0 | 45,378,596 | 15.0 | 100 | 28.9 |
| Non-Sunbelt | 3,245,057 | 2.6 | 35.9 | 9,872,108 | 204.2 | 12,636,169 | 8.0 | 27.9 * | 27.6 |
| Sunbelt | 5,827,545 | 7.5 | 64.1 | 25,332,372 | 334.7 | 32,742,427 | 21.9 | 72.1 | 29.1 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| South | 393,448 | 1.1 | 4.3 | 1,896,249 | 382.0 | 2,803,851 | 5.1 | 6.2 | 47.9 |
| Florida | 405,036 | 6.0 | 4.5 | 2,673,654 | 560.1 | 3,751,186 | 20.6 | 8.3 | 40.3 |
| Texas | 1,840,648 | 16.4 | 20.3 | 6,653,336 | 261.5 | 8,591,352 | 35.9 | 18.9 | 29.1 |
| Southwest | 819,121 | 14.9 | 9.0 | 3,180,661 | 288.3 | 4,376,691 | 27.8 | 9.6 | 37.6 |
| California | 2,369,292 | 11.9 | 26.1 | 10,928,470 | 361.3 | 13,219,347 | 36.2 | 29.1 | 21.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Other Sunbelt States: | | | | | | | | | |
| South | | | | | | | | | |
| Alabama | 38,848 | 1.1 | 0.4 | 111,634 | 187.4 | 121,552 | 2.6 | .0027 | 8.9 |
| Arkansas | 24,358 | 1.3 | 0.3 | 85,303 | 250.2 | 145,918 | 5.1 | .0032 | 71.1 |
| Georgia | 45,289 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 434,375 | 859.1 | 733,510 | 7.7 | 1.6 | 68.9 |
| Louisiana | 70,523 | 1.9 | 0.8 | 92,836 | 31.6 | 135,077 | 3.1 | .003 | 45.5 |
| Mississippi | 15,815 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 37,811 | 139.1 | 51,921 | 1.8 | .0011 | 37.3 |
| North Carolina | 43,414 | 0.9 | 0.5 | 377,084 | 768.6 | 636,442 | 7.0 | 1.4 | 68.8 |
| Oklahoma | 51,284 | 2.0 | 0.6 | 186,340 | 263.3 | 262,223 | 7.2 | .0058 | 40.7 |
| South Carolina | 14,111 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 94,652 | 570.8 | 168,322 | 3.8 | .0037 | 77.8 |
| Tennessee | 49,584 | 1.3 | 0.5 | 142,732 | 187.9 | 211,797 | 3.4 | .0047 | 48.4 |
| Virginia | 40,222 | 0.9 | 0.4 | 333,482 | 729.1 | 488,589 | 6.3 | 1.1 | 46.5 |
| Southwest | | | | | | | | | |
| Arizona | 264,770 | 15.0 | 2.9 | 1,292,152 | 388.0 | 1,893,171 | 29.9 | 4.2 | 46.5 |
| Colorado | 225,506 | 10.2 | 2.5 | 735,769 | 226.3 | 967,536 | 19.9 | 2.1 | 31.5 |
| Nevada | 20,505 | 4.2 | 0.2 | 393,397 | 1818.5 | 643,358 | 25.1 | 1.4 | 63.5 |
| New Mexico | 308,340 | 30.3 | 3.4 | 759,343 | 146.3 | 872,626 | 44.3 | 1.9 | 14.9 |

Sources: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2000 U.S. Census data and the 2007 U.S.

Census American Community Survey. 1970 U.S. Census Data.

- New York (7.0%), Illinois (4.2%), and New Jersey (3.4%) make up over half of the Latino population in Non-Sunbelt states.