

*Religion and Roll Calls:
Religious Influences on the U.S. House of Representatives, 1997-2002 **

James L. Guth

Department of Political Science
Furman University
Greenville SC 29613
864-294-3330
jim.guth@furman.edu

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Abstract

Although the influence of religion on the political behavior of the mass public is the subject of a growing literature, few studies have assessed the way that religion affects the behavior of political elites, including members of Congress. This project uses documentary and roll call data to analyze how religious factors impacted voting in the House of Representatives from 1997 to 2002 (during the 105th through the 107th Congresses). We begin by putting legislative institutions in the context of the two dominant theoretical approaches to the electoral influence of religion, the ethnoreligious and religious restructuring models. We then note that the limited work on Congressional behavior has not fully reflected the frameworks or insights used by that electoral literature, which stresses the multidimensional nature of religion. We then outline an alternative approach, showing how religious affiliations, as well as theological perspectives and religious involvement influence voting on several summary measures of legislative behavior. In addition, we consider the impact of district religious composition on member behavior. We conclude with a stringent multivariate analysis that controls for several important variables typically included in legislative analysis, finding that religious measures often survive those controls.

Religion and Roll Calls

Religion has a very spurious relationship with political ideology and voting. It's one of those variables that just explains nothing independently.

Political scientist Thomas E. Mann, in *The Arizona Republic*, August 25, 1990, on the role of religion in Congressional voting.

All politicians, Democrats and Republicans alike, love God. Or, more accurately, they love to use God to baptize their political agendas. In the Congressional Directory...no one is an atheist. Even those who have not been to church or synagogue in years (or have never gone) and probably claim nothing more than a generic Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish 'faith' list themselves as something under the category 'Religion.' You never know when it might help you to be religious.

Columnist Cal Thomas, in *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* (1999): 83

In recent years political scientists have made enormous strides in understanding the influence of religion on political attitudes and behavior, both in the mass public and among political activists. Indeed, religious variables have become a staple in the best analyses of voting (Miller and Shanks 1996; Legee et al. 2002), citizen activism (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and party involvement (Layman 2001). As a result, we have an increasingly rich picture of the complex, vital role that religion plays in party and electoral politics. Scholars have not only developed precise measures of religious affiliations, beliefs and behaviors, but have gone a long ways toward understanding their impact on citizen and activist attitudes and behaviors.

In stark contrast, the literature on the influence of religion among public officials is much more tentative and preliminary. This is especially true with respect to Congress. Indeed, a quick search reveals only a couple of books, a dissertation or two, some conference papers and a slowly growing collection of journal articles. Peter Benson and Dorothy Williams' *Religion on Capitol Hill* (1982) was based on in-depth interviews with eighty members of the 96th Congress

and argued that legislators were not only just as religious as the American public, but also that they were influenced politically by their faith. The powerful results reported by the authors could never be confirmed, however, as their data were never made available for secondary analysis. As neither author was a congressional specialist or even a political scientist, this provocative work has been largely ignored.

Nor has other scholarly work filled the gap. The other studies available are usually confined to comparing members' religious affiliations with those of the mass public, or to analyzing the influence of those affiliations on issues that seem likely to admit such influence, such as abortion, gay rights, prayer in school or support for the state of Israel (Duke and Johnson 1992; Tatalovich and Schier 1993; Adams 1997; Haider-Markel 2001; Oldmixon, Rosenson and Wald 2005; Oldmixon, 2005; Oldmixon and Calfano 2007). Only a few scholars have suggested that religion might play a broader role in influencing legislative behavior (Green and Guth 1991; Fastnow, Grant and Rudolph 1999; Guth and Kellstedt 2005). Tellingly, a standard text on Congress offers only a paragraph on religion (Davidson, Oleszek and Lee 2008) and a major work on the "social bases of institutional change" in Congress ignores religion altogether (Polsby 2004).

This scholarly neglect has several causes. For many years, social scientists have assumed that the primary cleavages in American politics are economic, not cultural (Wald and Wilcox 2006). And although the 2004 presidential election might seem to have finally buried that assumption (Campbell 2007), not all political analysts (or politicians) have bought the "it's the values, stupid" interpretation of that contest. Indeed, many political scientists still adhere to hoary academic assumptions about the inevitable secularization of modern societies. Other barriers to understanding may be ideological. Many academics favor a strict separation of church

and state and assume that the historic American commitment to that ideal means that religion does not influence legislative decisions, or that if it does, it shouldn't. But the most important deterrents may be practical ones: few scholars—especially predominantly secular political scientists—are willing to invest the energy needed to understand the complex structures of American religion (Leege and Kellstedt 1993: 4-8; Wald and Wilcox 2006). Thus, some research on Congress uses crude affiliation measures long since abandoned by students of voting behavior. Classifications such as “Catholic/Non-Catholic,” “Protestant, Catholic, Jewish,” or “Baptist, Methodist, Catholic” still pop up in legislative studies (see e.g. Tatalovich and Schier 1993; Rae 1998). And gathering data on member religion is inherently difficult, a sensitive task that most Congress scholars would rather avoid (Benson and Williams 1982: 17-18; Fastnow, Grant and Rudolph 1999: 689). Indeed, in-depth surveys of the “universe” of national legislators are almost impossible—or are widely presumed to be so.

Thus, work on religion in Congress suffers from the same problems that frustrated political scientists in their early efforts to analyze the role of religion in electoral behavior, especially difficulties in specifying and measuring the independent variable. In recent years, however, social scientists have developed much more accurate measures of religious affiliation, religious behavior and religious belief when dealing with the mass public. The importance of such multiple measures of religion lies in the fact that religion is multidimensional, with “belonging, believing and behaving” facets (Layman 2001).

Indeed, the two major approaches to understanding the impact of religion on American political alignments put primary emphasis on different facets of religion. The *ethnoreligious* perspective, long dominant among political historians and some social scientists, argues that denominational affiliation or membership in religious traditions was and remains the primary

mediator of religious influence on electoral politics (see, for example, McCormick 1974; Manza and Brooks 1999). More recently, the proponents of *religious restructuring* or, more popularly, “culture war” perspectives have argued that religious beliefs and associated religious practices produce the real political divisions among Americans, as “orthodox” believers oppose “progressives” in the major religious traditions (Wuthnow 1988; Hunter 1991). As we have shown elsewhere, both perspectives are helpful in understanding the electoral influences of religion (Guth et al. 2005; Guth et al. 2006; Green et al. 2007) and the influence of religion on party elites (Layman 2001; Green and Jackson 2007). It seems only natural then, that the same conceptual framework should be used to analyze one product of the electoral process, decision-making in the United States Congress. Such an approach is not only more likely to uncover the full impact of religion on legislative behavior, but will also allow us to connect developments in the electorate and the party system with the actions of political elites.

The multiple religious measures necessary for such an approach are almost entirely absent, however, from the study of Congress. Given the difficulties in acquiring information on members’ beliefs and religious activities, scholars have almost invariably relied on easily available public information on “religious affiliation,” by default adopting a crude version of the ethnoreligious approach, rather than attempting to acquire measures on religious practice and belief that would permit testing the restructuring or culture wars model as well. In this paper we attempt to demonstrate the utility of a more comprehensive approach.

Research Strategy, Measures and Data

Our strategy has been to gather data on all three major dimensions of religion among members. Since 1996 the author, three research colleagues, and teams of student researchers

have devoted thousands of hours to amassing the information necessary to construct a religious profile for each House member, beginning with the 105th Congress, elected in 1996, and continuing to the present. Each profile includes all the data we could acquire about that member's religious affiliations, behavior and beliefs. Most of the information was obtained through unobtrusive techniques, either using public sources or relying on informed observers. We started with the religious affiliation reported in the *Congressional Directory*, the *Almanac of American Politics* and similar sources, but went beyond that. Members often list much more specific information on their congressional or campaign websites. Many name their local house of worship, and some detail personal activity, such as holding leadership positions in their parish, serving on committees and task forces, or teaching Sunday school. Some proudly claim to be "regular attendees," or otherwise indicate the extent of their religious involvement. We took such assertions at face value as indicators of religious commitment—unless we found strong evidence to the contrary. We also gleaned additional religious information from the on-line publications of *Project Vote Smart*, which in recent years has asked congressional candidates to fill out a long standardized questionnaire that includes an item on organizational commitments. Not all candidates respond, but many supply lists of affiliations and activities, including religious ones, often elaborating on the information on their websites.

Modern Internet search engines also permit extensive investigation into the religious activities of members as chronicled in the *Congressional Record* and the media. And although the elite national press tends to ignore such activities, specialized religious publications and district newspapers often show much more interest. By thorough searches in the *Dow Jones News Retrieval Service*, *Lexis-Nexis*, *Newsbank*, the *Public Affairs Information Service*, and Google, we found treasure troves of data on legislators' religious lives, their interaction with

churches and religious organizations, and their personal religious "constituencies." These sources ranged from articles in which enterprising reporters discussed religious matters with members (in two especially helpful cases, with *all* the members from Tennessee and Wisconsin), to accounts of private devotionalism, such as small prayer groups on Capitol Hill to published income tax returns showing substantial religious contributions.

In addition to electronic searches, we canvassed other information sources, including autobiographical material (Koopman 2001), journalistic biographies (Dubose and Reid 2004), and studies of particular congressional "classes" (Killian 1997) or state delegations (Frank 2004). We also contacted many individual members, their staffs or other key informants (including religiously sensitive political scientists). In addition, the research team's numerous congressional interns have been very helpful conduits of information, with easy entree to members not always accessible to their academic sponsors. (Some of these observers become even more useful when hired as professional congressional staffers.) By the time a member has served a few terms, we usually had enough data for confident judgments on his or her affiliation, religious involvement, and theological orientations. As our approach is at least somewhat innovative, we must comment in more detail on the development of the measures used in the following analysis.

1. Toward More Useful Measures: Religious Affiliation

To assess the utility of the ethnoreligious interpretation of congressional politics, we need valid and accurate measures of religious affiliation. And affiliation is the most accessible and widely used measure of religion in Congress. Unfortunately, publicly reported denominational affiliations such as "Baptist," "Methodist," "Lutheran," and so on are often used uncritically in

many popular and some scholarly treatments. Or scholars simply collapse these affiliations into “Catholic,” “Protestant,” “Jewish” or even broader categories for ease of analysis. Either strategy involves significant measurement error and may contribute to a negative verdict on the legislative influence of religious affiliation.

As in our own work on the mass public, we classify members of Congress into *religious traditions*, groups of denominations and churches which share common doctrines, practices, histories and organizational attachments; these traditions represent the major actors in the ethnoreligious perspective on religion in American political life (see Green et al. 1996 for more details). The major analytic categories used here are evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, white Catholic, Hispanic Catholic, Jewish, Black Protestant, Latter-day Saints and Seculars. Although we have kept some other denominational groups (Christian Scientists, Unitarians, Eastern Orthodox) distinct for some purposes, we combine them as “All Others” in the subsequent analysis, given their modest numbers. This classification generally accords with both the historical and contemporary realities of American ethnoreligious alignments (cf. Fastnow, Grant and Rudolph 1999).¹ Our scheme not only allows us to assign members from the diverse denominational “families” to the proper tradition, but also permits us to manage the increasing religious complexity of Congress. Adoption of the same strategy used to analyze religion’s impact on voters and political activists is another advantage, allowing us to link mass and elite developments (cf. Legee and Kellstedt 1993; Green et al. 2007).

Classification into religious traditions is not always a straight-forward task. Public affiliation reports often do not provide enough information to place members correctly, as their specificity varies greatly. “Catholic” is usually clear enough, as such members are almost universally Roman Catholics and not Polish National Catholics, Old Catholics or members of the

Liberal Catholic Church. But the second largest “denominational” family presents many more problems: “Baptist” can mean Southern Baptist, American Baptist, National Baptist, Progressive National Baptist, independent Baptist, or any of a dozen smaller denominations that differ greatly in history, ethnicity, and, above all, theology. “Baptists,” in fact, are numerous in three major religious traditions: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Black Protestant. In the same vein, “Presbyterian” can mean the mainline Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), evangelical bodies such as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), or some smaller Black Protestant churches. “Lutheran” might signify the mainline Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), theologically quite liberal, or the more conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS).

Further complications arise from “Christian” or “Protestant.” “Christian” is often a shorthand for one of several Restorationist movement churches, such as the mainline Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the evangelical Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, or the independent Churches of Christ. “Christian” may also be an affirmation of “born-again” identity, often expressed in membership in an independent evangelical congregation. Or, finally, it might signify nominal adherence to “Christianity” as opposed to Judaism. “Protestant” presents similar ambiguities, although it usually turns out to be a more “generic” or nominal religious affiliation.

As in the study of electoral behavior (Leege et al. 2002), then, the first step is to determine precise denominational affiliations. In fact, the patient researcher can often improve on *Congressional Directory* data. For example, a “Lutheran” member’s affiliation with a specific parish permits us to identify him as part of the theologically conservative LCMS, rather than the

mainline ELCA. Or membership in the First Christian Church of a specific Kentucky town prompts a quick trip to a denominational website (or a call to the church) to confirm that the member belongs to the mainline Disciples of Christ, rather than one of the evangelical Restorationist bodies. Or a member listed only as “Protestant” can often be placed by his or her actual local church affiliation. The determination of precise denominational identity and classification into theoretically meaningful broader traditions has become even more imperative in recent years as the actual religious complexity of Congress has increased, with the entry of new members representing religious groups seldom or never present before, such as Apostolic Christians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Primitive Baptists, General Baptists, Bible Church adherents, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance.²

This is not to say that all ambiguity can be removed from measures of religious affiliation. Like other Americans, members sometimes “migrate” religiously or have “mixed” affiliations. To take one prominent example, Republican presidential aspirant Sam Brownback of Kansas began his congressional career as a United Methodist, albeit a very traditionalist one, but later converted to Catholicism. After this conversion, however, he continued to worship at an evangelical congregation with his (unconverted) family, as well as attending Mass every Sunday. A current House member has considered herself a Catholic from childhood, adopting the affiliation of one parent, but in the absence of a Catholic parish attended a Southern Baptist church. Like Brownback, today she is in a “mixed” marriage and attends her husband’s Baptist church as well as her own Catholic parish. Such cases remind us that legislators often exhibit the same complex mix of attachments as other Americans.

2. Toward More Useful Measures: Religious Activity

Improving the measurement of affiliation is an important prerequisite for assessing the legislative impact of religion, but not all members of a tradition are equally committed to its beliefs and values. In the mass public, at least, commitment measures are important links between affiliation and political variables, as the voters most committed to their faith are also most prone to exhibit its dominant political tendencies. Thus, church-attending evangelicals are more likely than their less observant co-parishioners to hold conservative political attitudes and vote Republican (Guth et al. 2006). The same tendency appears, but is less marked, among their mainline Protestant and Catholic counterparts. During the 2004 campaign, for example, the press endlessly discussed the electoral divide between those attending religious services regularly (who voted for Bush), and those who don't (who voted for Kerry) (Green 2007).

Thus, in addition to putting members in the correct tradition, we also want to gauge their religious commitment. This is no simple task, however. Indeed, only one previous study even attempted it. Benson and Williams (1982) argued that their sample of national legislators was quite religious, even more than the American public, although they produced no rigorous comparative data on this point.³ Although our data allow us to measure religious commitment, we are obviously limited to fairly crude distinctions. For this paper, we use a four-point scale: no apparent religious involvement (0); formal membership in a congregation, but no evidence of regular activity (1); frequent or regular attendance at services (2); and, leadership positions in a congregation and/or in parachurch groups (3). Of course, it is possible that some legislators maintain total silence about their activity and that their religious involvement has escaped the notice of the press, religious publications and other observers. If so, however, our commitment

measure errs on the conservative side, as any estimate of political effects produced by activism will be reduced by the erroneous placement of the observant in the “non-active” category.

3. Toward More Useful Measures: Theological Orientation

The most difficult theoretical and practical task—but perhaps the most important—in constructing religious measures for House members is gauging theological orientation. Some scholars have argued that American political alignments are increasingly defined by a "culture war" between the “orthodox” in all major faiths, on the one hand, and religious “progressives” and secular citizens on the other (Hunter 1991). Although we think the "culture war" thesis neglects continuing differences among religious traditions, we have found such divisions among Protestant clergy (Guth et al. 1997), members of religious interest groups (Guth et al. 1995), political activists (Green, Guth and Fraser 1991; Layman 2001; Green and Jackson 2007), and the mass public (Guth et al. 2006).

Not only do we anticipate that the same divisions affecting other religious and political elites should appear in the House (Fastnow, Grant and Rudolph 1999: 689), but some earlier work on Congress also hints that this should be the case. Mary Hanna’s (1979) classic study argued that “Catholics” in Congress were not a single religious type; rather, two broad streams of historic Catholic theology existed among members, one conservative, one liberal. Similarly, Benson and Williams (1982) found broadly similar religious divisions among members, although their theological categories were somewhat more complex than Hanna’s. As such orientations might have a potent impact on political ideology, especially among a well-educated political elite with high attitudinal constraint, we need to tap theological worldviews.

Of course, theological beliefs are difficult to assess without surveys or interviews. Once again, we have followed a conservative strategy. As the sociology of religion literature suggests that these theological divisions have been most evident in the major Christian traditions (Wuthnow 1988), rather than among “minority” faiths such as Black Protestants, Hispanic Catholics or Latter-day Saints, we have focused (but did not limit) our classification efforts on the three largest traditions (evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants, and white Catholics). Utilizing our accumulated data, we classified these members as *traditionalists*, *centrists*, or *modernists*. Briefly, traditionalists insist on an orthodox interpretation of their faith’s beliefs, modernists seek to reinterpret those doctrines in accordance with modern science and culture, and centrists try explicitly to work out a middle position.

We used several kinds of evidence to assign members to a theological category. First, we drew on “personal testimony”: many legislators are not shy in speaking about their religious faith. Not surprisingly, this is probably most true of evangelical Protestants, but also occurs in other traditions. (Indeed, the religious outspokenness of many evangelicals in Congress has evoked more frequent religious expression from those in other traditions.) Some Catholics, for example, readily align themselves with either traditionalist or “liberal” religious movements, perhaps by expressing effusive admiration for John Paul II or Benedict XVI, or alternatively, for the Third World liberation theologians who have so vexed these pontiffs. Some organizational memberships are strong indicators of personal theology. For example, leadership roles in Focus on the Family, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes or the Christian Legal Society suggest theological traditionalism among Protestants, as does Catholic membership in certain religious movements, such as the liberal Call to Action. Even congregational affiliation sometimes provides a clue. An Episcopalian who moves from a well-known “liberal” parish to a notorious

“conservative” one can be reasonably counted as a theological traditionalist. Of course, a switch in the opposite direction produces in a very different judgment. All in all, we were very cautious in making assignments, but were able to place most evangelicals (89 percent) and about two-thirds of the mainline Protestants and white Catholics (69 and 66 percent, respectively). This leaves the remaining members of each tradition and most members of other ethnoreligious traditions unclassified. In the analysis below, we include the “unknowns” in a single theology scale on empirical grounds.⁴

Having constructed our measures of affiliation, religious activity, and theological orientations, we turn to the task of considering whether these religious factors influence legislator behavior and, if so, on what issues. To accomplish this, we analyzed the total set of House members who served in any session of the 105th, 106th, and 107th Congresses, and who had enough recorded votes to receive a score on several comprehensive voting scales: the DW-Nominate general ideological score (Poole and Rosenthal 2007); the *National Journal* annual scores on social, economic and foreign policy issues; and, the *Congressional Quarterly* party voting score.⁵ For each of the 533 House members we produced a mean score for each measure over all sessions served. Although this strategy runs the risk of missing changes over time, in fact members’ positions were very consistent over this “stable era” in congressional history (cf. Poole and Rosenthal 2007). Pooling members bolsters the available *N* and allows for a more economical presentation.

Our presentation proceeds as follows. After providing a brief religious profile of the House from 1997-2002, we present bivariate evidence that legislator voting reflects the same religious patterns that we find in the mass public and among political activists in contemporary America, both in terms of the members’ own religious traits and those of their constituency. We

then consider in detail whether the influence of religion is primarily through the effects of historical religious traditions, religious commitment, or theological orientation—or some combination thereof. We also examine the important question of whether legislative behavior stems primarily from the House members' own religious traits, or is also influenced directly by the religious affiliation of his or her constituents. Finally, we test the impact of religious factors by including other important political and personal variables in the analysis.

Results

Table 1 reports the results of our classification efforts, locating House members in their appropriate religious traditions, assessing their religious involvement, and judging their theological perspectives. The distribution of religious affiliations among members reveals the continuation of some historic tendencies: white evangelical Protestants are still underrepresented in comparison with their one-quarter of the national population, claiming less than one-sixth of House members, while mainline Protestants count about twice the proportion of their one-sixth of the citizenry. Combining white Catholics and Hispanic Catholics produces a Catholic percentage reasonably in line with the national population, although the former constituency may be slightly over-represented and the latter, under-represented. Similarly, Black Protestants are somewhat under-represented and Jewish legislators more numerous than population numbers would suggest. These percentages were essentially stable during the three Congresses under study here (data not shown), although they represent significant changes from those in past eras (see Guth and Kellstedt 2001 for historical changes in affiliation since 1950).

[Table 1 about here]

The partisan location of religious groups is more interesting. As in the electorate, the evangelical contingent in Congress is overwhelmingly Republican, as are Latter-day Saints. Mainline Protestants are still solidly in the GOP camp, while white Catholic legislators show a slight Democratic bias. Not surprisingly, Hispanic Catholic, Jewish, Black Protestant, and Secular legislators are overwhelmingly Democratic, reflecting similar patterns in the electorate. Looking at it from the other direction, the House GOP is largely a mainline (37 percent), evangelical (28 percent), and white Catholic (22 percent) body, while the Democratic caucus is more diverse with white Catholics (28 percent), mainliners (24 percent), Black Protestants (14 percent), and Jews (13 percent) all having substantial contingents.

Both religious activity and theology also differentiate the parties, very much as they distinguish voters and party activists: over two-thirds of the “religious activists” are found in the GOP conference, while three-fifths of those with no discernible religious involvement are in the Democratic caucus, with regular attenders solidly Republican and less faithful “members” leaning toward the Democrats. In the same vein, theological traditionalists are overwhelmingly Republican, while the smaller coterie of modernists is almost as firmly Democratic. Two-thirds of those for whom we could not make a judgment (including many religious minorities) are Democratic, while theological centrists lean Republican. Although our religious practice and theological variables must be used cautiously, the fact that they show the same relationships with partisanship in Congress that they do in the mass public (Guth et al. 2005) and among party leaders (Green and Jackson 2007) is reassuring.

The next step is to ask whether voting behavior varies systematically by religious affiliation, activity, and belief. As Table 2 shows, the answer is clearly “yes.” As the first column reveals, religious traditions vary rather strongly on Poole and Rosenthal’s general

ideological measure (DW-Nominate), with evangelicals the most conservative, followed closely by Latter-day Saints, and at a distance by mainline Protestants. White Catholics fall very slightly to the liberal side of the mean, Hispanic Catholics and Black Protestants much more so, while Jewish and Secular members hold down the liberal end of the continuum. The *eta* statistic for difference of means suggests a fairly strong relationship.

[Table 2 about here]

Much of the literature on the impact of religion on mass public attitudes argues that such effects are most noticeable on social issues and some studies have either assumed or demonstrated this tendency among legislators as well. Our results both belie and support such conclusions. First, the patterns on social, economic and foreign policy issues are *all* monotonously like that on the general ideology dimension tapped by DW-Nominate. Still, the *eta* statistic is indeed slightly higher on social issues, with a wider range of means between evangelical and secular members. In addition, the party unity scores are also correlated quite strongly with the religious tradition measure, although at a slightly lower level than the three issue areas or DW-Nominate.

The theological scale also has a powerful relation with all the voting scores, with modernist members the most liberal, followed by those whose theology cannot be ascertained and then by centrists, with traditionalists having the most conservative (and Republican) voting scores. Once again, the relationship is strongest on social issues, but not by very much. The religious activity scale is clearly less powerful, as shown by the *etas*, even though the patterns are consistent across the dependent variables. Although the religiously inactive are the most liberal, and the most active are the most conservative, the differences between categories are much smaller than for the other religious measures. This suggests that the greater conservatism

of the more religiously active is probably an artifact of the tendency for traditionalists to be more involved in religious institutions than their centrist and modernist counterparts are. The multivariate analyses later tend to support this conjecture.

If the personal religious traits of members are strongly associated with their legislative decisions on a wide range of issues, is the same true of constituency religious factors? A hoary theme of the congressional voting literature is the role that constituents play in legislative decisions. Of course, the problem is always to find the relevant constituency variables to use in the analysis. Here we will draw on the most available—if not the most easily used—data: the religious composition of congressional districts, based on the 1990 Glenmary Research Center census.⁶ As the bottom of Table 2 shows, House voting does bear a reasonable relationship to the religious composition of congressional districts. Evangelical membership produces a distinctly conservative impact on all the voting scores; so, to a lesser extent, does mainline Protestant membership, followed by LDS numbers. White Catholic membership predicts only a modestly higher score on economic liberalism, but the size of the Black Protestant, Hispanic Catholic and Jewish constituencies is solidly associated with liberalism on all the voting scores. Thus, for the most part, the influence of constituency religion seems to parallel that of member religious traits.

This raises the classic issue of the relative influence of personal and constituency opinion on legislator behavior. Where we find, as in this case, that legislative action seems to respond to constituencies, does this suggest that districts tend to elect members who share their own traits and attitudes? Or do representatives defer to their constituency, even if their own traits and opinions differ? We cannot completely resolve this question, but Table 3 throws some light on it. To assess the relative impact of member and constituency religious traits we include both types of variables in regressions predicting our five voting scores. We have included dummy variables

for each major ethnoreligious tradition (with “All Others” serving as the omitted reference category), the measures of member religious activity and theology, and the percentage of district residents who are members of various religious groups.

Table 3 presents a fairly consistent picture. With the single exception of greater white Catholic liberalism on economic issues, member affiliation with the three largest religious traditions has no direct impact on voting, once the other religious factors are in the equation. Clearly, theological orientation is by far the strongest predictor on all five measures, with traditionalism having a negative relationship with liberalism and Democratic voting. Thus, for evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and white Catholics it is their location on the theological scale that influences voting. On the other hand, it is membership in several minority ethnoreligious groups that produces liberal and Democratic votes. Once again, a combined ethnoreligious and culture wars model seems to produce the best results in predicting voting behavior—this time in the U.S House of Representatives, rather than in the electorate.

[Table 3 about here]

Constituencies seem to influence voting primarily by electing members who share their general religious orientation, as most constituency coefficients are insignificant when member traits are in the equation. Still, Table 3 shows that some district religious constituencies may have an added independent impact. The proportion of evangelical Protestants in a district increases conservative and Republican voting on all five scores, while Black Protestant membership consistently has the opposite effect. That these are the most faithful Republican and Democratic religious constituencies, respectively, suggests that members—especially those from other traditions—pay them special attention. The only other notable constituency effect is the mild conservatizing influence of mainline Protestant numbers.

A review of Tables 1, 2, and 3 will leave connoisseurs of the literature on religious voting in recent national elections with a strong sense of *deja vu* (perhaps all over again). Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints have been strongly Republican in recent elections, mainline Protestants and white Catholics have been swing groups, while religious minorities and secular voters have contributed disproportionately to the Democratic coalition. Even more important, perhaps, theological traditionalists have backed the GOP, while modernists have supported the Democrats. The fact that representatives from these traditions and theological perspectives and from districts dominated by them are located in analogous political space in Congress should not be surprising. And that religious measures alone account for half or more of the variance in voting scores is impressive.

But are these real relationships, or as Tom Mann alleges in the quote at the beginning of this piece, are they spurious? To consider this issue requires that we include other member and constituency variables in the analysis. We experimented with a wide variety of both personal and district traits and found only a few that regularly survived multivariate analysis: party membership, gender, district party composition, and district socioeconomic status. In Table 4 we include these with the religious variables in OLS regressions predicting our five scores.⁷

[Table 4 about here]

We begin with general ideology. As Poole and Rosenthal's DW-Nominate is now virtually coterminous with partisanship in the House, we have followed the practice of other scholars in omitting party membership from the equation predicting this score (Xie 2006; Poole and Rosenthal 2007). When this is done, district partisanship understandably has the largest impact on general ideology, as the first column in Table 4 shows, with wealthier districts also producing more conservative voting. But theological traditionalism still has a powerful

independent effect, as do Hispanic Catholic, Jewish and Secular identities. District religion has no direct impact, once district partisanship is taken into account. This suggests that district religious influences are fully mediated by the party preferences of the faithful and their choice of representatives, a surmise reinforced by the fact that the variance explained increases only modestly from that explained by the religious variables alone (.621 compared to .501).⁸

The story on the more specialized scales is basically similar. On the three topical issue scales, member partisanship is the most powerful factor, buttressed by district partisanship. But theological traditionalism adds considerable explanatory power in each instance, as do evangelical numbers in the district. Secular members of Congress are also sometimes distinct and membership in a minority religious tradition adds a little to Democratic voting, but once again much of the influence of the religious variables is transmitted through partisanship—either that of the member or of the district. Note that women are more liberal on all three issue domains, but significantly so only on social and foreign policy. On party unity, we have again omitted member's party affiliation, which naturally overwhelms other variables when included in the equation. When this is done, district partisanship has the strongest impact on party voting, but theological traditionalism still pushes members away from Democratic voting, as does district wealth. On the other hand, Black Protestants, Jews and Secular representatives are even more Democratic than other variables would predict. Once again, however, the gain in variance explained from the equation with religious variables alone is modest (.522 versus .428).

Conclusions

Despite its exploratory nature, this research has demonstrated the value of studying religious influences on Congressional behavior. Our data on the House of Representatives

present a *prima facie* case for the explanatory power of religious factors. Using variables that permit us to test the impact of belonging, behaving and believing on legislative voting, we find some support for both the restructuring thesis that the contemporary influence of religion derives from the theological orientations of members and for the older ethnoreligious perspective that emphasizes denominational affiliation. Theological orientation shows a consistently strong influence on the legislative voting scores examined here: traditionalists tend toward political conservatism and Republican voting across the board, while modernists are consistently liberal or Democratic. Indeed, for the three largest Christian traditions—evangelical and mainline Protestants and white Catholics—it is now this facet of religion that shapes member choices. The apparent bivariate differences between these traditions seen in Table 2 are accounted for by the varying numbers of factional groups within each tradition. Thus, the solid conservatism of evangelical Protestants reflects their overwhelming theological traditionalism, not some specific historic doctrinal or ethnic trait. Similarly, the “centrist” position of Catholic members reflects the more even balance among theological factions in their House contingent, not primarily some “moderate” political tendencies inherent in Catholicism.⁹ On the other side, the influence of membership in the historic religious traditions—based on ethnicity, religious ethos and unique historical experience—is still seen in the tendency for Black Protestants, Jews, and Seculars to adhere to more liberal and Democratic positions.

The analysis shows that much of religion’s influence is channeled indirectly through changes in the religious composition of the two legislative parties, changes which track those transforming the mass electorate (see Green et al 2007). What some observers (D’Antonio and Tuch 2004) have seen as the declining influence of religion (as measured by affiliation) in legislative voting over recent decades is better understood as the development of more powerful

theological lines of cleavage within the House and the institutionalization of these religious influences within party structures. Nevertheless, religious influences are not entirely captured by partisanship: even when party membership and district partisanship are controlled, some member affiliations and theological traditionalism still have a direct impact on members' voting. The results certainly suggest the value of a multidimensional approach to congressional religion, especially the value of assessing religious activity and theological orientation.¹⁰

Where do we go from here? First, political scientists studying religion and politics need to refocus their attention on political elites, for all the obvious reasons. Public officials and party leaders not only are produced by the very electoral processes that have been so influenced by religious factors in recent years, but they are also major participants in providing the cues that both elicit and organize religious responses to issues (Leege et al. 2002; McTague and Layman, forthcoming). And as our results suggest, those elite cues may not be limited to "social" issues such as abortion and gay rights, but extend to domestic economic and foreign policy issues as well. Although there is growing interest in the interaction of religion and presidential decision-making (e.g. Rozell and Whitney 2007) and in the impact of religion on judicial decisions (Wahlbeck forthcoming), work in both areas is still in rudimentary form.

Certainly, the same is true of our work on the national legislature. In addition to refining measures of religious commitment and theology among members, we need to understand more about the structure of religious activity among members. We have found numerous reports about small prayer and Bible study groups on the Hill, "reflection sessions" (a term favored by the more liberal religious contingent), and a host of other activities within the legislative institution itself. These informal networks may have an impact on member behavior and, perhaps, even on legislative norms. We have much to learn about how members relate "religiously" to their

constituency. We can identify a variety of “religious home styles” (apologies to Richard Fenno), ranging from vigorous participation in the religious faiths and practices preferred by a district’s religious majority, to adamant assertions of the total irrelevance of a member’s “private” faith to his or her legislative functions. Finally, we must understand more about the way that legislators relate to organized and politicized religious groups in their district and in Washington, whether the Christian Coalition, the National Council of Churches, or their own denomination’s lobbyists. Religion clearly matters in American politics, and we need to know much more about how it matters on Capitol Hill. All this represents a substantial agenda for future work on religion in Congress.

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Table 1. Religious Traits of U.S. House Members, 1997-2002

	<i>N=</i>	<i>Percent of Membership</i>	<i>Democratic Percent of Group</i>	<i>GOP Percent of Group</i>
<i>Member Faith Tradition</i>				
<i>Evangelical</i>	92	17.3	14.1	85.9
<i>Latter-day Saints</i>	15	4.2	20.0	80.0
<i>Mainline</i>	165	31.0	36.4	63.6
<i>White Catholic</i>	132	24.8	52.3	47.7
<i>All Others</i>	32	6.0	40.6	59.4
<i>Black Protestant</i>	34	6.4	100.0	0.0
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	23	4.3	91.3	8.7
<i>Jewish</i>	32	6.0	87.5	12.5
<i>Secular</i>	8	1.5	100.0	0.0
<i>Religious Activity</i>				
<i>None Known</i>	167	31.3	61.7	38.3
<i>Member Only</i>	79	14.8	53.2	46.8
<i>Regular Attender</i>	119	22.3	40.3	59.7
<i>Office/Activist</i>	168	31.5	32.7	67.3
<i>Theological Orientation</i>				
<i>Modernist</i>	40	7.5	87.5	12.5
<i>Undetermined</i>	222	41.7	65.8	34.2
<i>Centrist</i>	138	25.9	41.3	58.7
<i>Traditionalist</i>	133	25.0	7.5	92.5
<i>ALL</i>	533	100	46.5	53.5

Table 2. Religion and Ideological /Partisan Orientations, House of Representatives, 1997-2002.
Mean scores.* (N=533)

	<i>DW-Nominate (Liberalism)</i>	<i>Social Issue Liberalism</i>	<i>Economic Issue Liberalism</i>	<i>Foreign Policy Liberalism</i>	<i>Party Unity Scores (Democratic)</i>
Overall Mean=	-.0489	46.17	47.40	47.41	-7.37
Member Faith Tradition					
Evangelical	-.3771	19.43	25.27	25.21	-68.11
LDS	-.3599	25.56	28.32	27.51	-59.38
Mainline	-.1426	41.29	39.89	41.14	-28.18
White Catholic	-.0156	47.60	52.27	50.60	3.35
All Others	-.0137	51.32	48.84	49.33	-15.32
Black Protestant	.3322	75.01	73.15	70.21	74.44
Hispanic Catholic	.3425	77.32	76.48	75.05	77.58
Jewish	.5035	83.14	80.07	83.83	91.49
Secular	.5511	87.22	81.69	83.74	92.95
Eta=	.589	.638	.598	.589	.547
Theological Traditionalism					
Modernist	.3544	73.76	74.08	76.96	70.80
Not Ascertained	.1423	61.17	59.49	59.13	29.37
Centrist	-.1050	42.86	44.73	45.30	-17.75
Traditionalist	-.4313	16.36	22.04	21.24	-80.87
Eta=	.589	.664	.596	.606	.551
Religious Activity					
Unknown/None	.1059	59.02	57.17	56.82	21.56
Membership	-.0079	49.43	50.96	49.71	3.33
Active Member	-.0965	42.85	45.10	45.79	-16.60
Office Held	-.1884	34.18	37.61	38.09	-34.38
Eta=	.278	.344	.285	.265	.259
Religious Constituencies					
<i>Pearson's r=</i>					
Evangelical	-.402**	-.507**	-.464**	-.425**	-.292**
Latter-day Saints	-.090*	-.091*	-.128**	-.122**	-.080
Mainline	-.350**	-.377**	-.357**	-.323**	-.307**
White Catholic	.049	.061	.105*	.060	.004
Black Protestant	.334**	.293**	.286**	.318**	.275**
Hispanic Catholic	.191**	.265**	.223**	.210**	.198**
Jewish	.286**	.321**	.314**	.255**	.217**

*See appendix for sources of data and construction of scores. All dependent variables have been recoded to run from low (most conservative) to high (most liberal).

Table 3. Religious Variables, Ideology and Partisanship in the House of Representatives, 1997-2002
(standardized regression coefficients, OLS analysis)

N=533

	DW- Nominate	<i>Social Issue Liberalism</i>	<i>Economic Issue Liberalism</i>	<i>Foreign Policy Liberalism</i>	<i>Party Unity Scores (Democratic)</i>
Member Faith Tradition					
<i>Evangelical</i>	-.013	-.045	.004	-.008	-.008
<i>Latter-day Saints</i>	.030	.005	.046	.021	.021
<i>Mainline</i>	.034	.061	.036	.037	.037
<i>White Catholic</i>	.070	.035	.114**	.090	.090
<i>All Others</i>	----	----	----	----	----
<i>Black Protestant</i>	.099	.119*	.117*	.120*	.120*
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	.171**	.153**	.197**	.177**	.177**
<i>Jewish</i>	.161**	.162**	.172**	.150**	.150**
<i>Secular</i>	.156**	.143**	.137**	.147**	.147**
Belief and Practice					
<i>Theology</i>	-.426**	-.422**	-.406**	-.454**	-.454**
<i>Activity</i>	.055	.034	.063	.090*	.090*
District Religion					
<i>Evangelical</i>	-.099*	-.212**	-.153**	-.139*	-.139*
<i>Latter-day Saint</i>	-.035	-.050	-.091*	-.069	-.069
<i>Mainline</i>	-.093	-.107*	-.118*	-.080*	-.080*
<i>White Catholic</i>	.049	.032	.085	.055	.055
<i>Black Protestant</i>	.211**	.140**	.151*	.173**	.173**
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	-.033	.017	.003	.004	.004
<i>Jewish</i>	.043	.014	.013	-.014	-.014
Adjusted R squared	.501	.609	.527	.514	.428

**p<.001, *p<.05.

**Table 4. Religious Variables, Ideology and Partisanship in the House of Representatives, 1997-2002
with control variables
(standardized regression coefficients, OLS analysis)**

N=533

	DW- Nominate	<i>Social Issue Liberalism</i>	<i>Economic Issue Liberalism</i>	<i>Foreign Policy Liberalism</i>	<i>Party Unity Scores (Democratic)</i>
Member Faith Tradition					
<i>Evangelical</i>	-.015	-.058	-.029	-.001	.016
<i>Latter-day Saints</i>	.039	-.008	-.001	-.014	.049
<i>Mainline</i>	.046	.021	-.015	.004	.065
<i>White Catholic</i>	.047	-.065	-.019	-.009	.119
<i>All Others</i>	----	----	----	----	----
<i>Black Protestant</i>	.052	.033	.007	.064	.049*
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	.098*	.037	.043	.056	.098
<i>Jewish</i>	.120*	.025	.005	.002	.170**
<i>Secular</i>	.103*	.046*	.012	.043*	.089*
Belief and Practice					
<i>Theology</i>	-.308**	-.165**	-.094**	-.133**	-.319**
<i>Activity</i>	.052	.001	.025	.057*	.055
District Religion					
<i>Evangelical</i>	.037	-.132**	-.079*	-.087*	.091
<i>Latter-day Saint</i>	.022	-.015	-.039	-.017	.020
<i>Mainline</i>	-.073	-.018	-.015	.010	-.064
<i>White Catholic</i>	.068	.010	.085**	.026	.047
<i>Black Protestant</i>	-.018	-.022	-.056	-.052	-.011
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	-.049	-.009	-.011	-.024	-.015
<i>Jewish</i>	.012	-.040	-.008	-.041	-.010
Control Variables					
<i>Party (GOP)</i>	---	-.508**	-.658**	-.664**	---
<i>District Party (GOP)</i>	-.512**	-.248**	-.255**	-.212**	-.479**
<i>District Income</i>	-.129**	.065*	-.041	.003	-.139*
<i>Female MC</i>	.056	.075**	.026	.038*	.019
Adjusted R squared	.621	.843	.896	.858	.522

**p<.001, *p<.05.

Endnotes

¹ This article uses religious tradition as an independent variable. The authors found that from 1959 to 1994 religion strongly influenced abortion votes and Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) ratings. The chief limitation was that the historical scope of the project limited the search for detailed data on the affiliation of some members. One member of the current research team (Lyman Kellstedt of Wheaton College) was involved in the planning of that research.

² The recent addition of Buddhist and Muslim legislators presents even further conceptual and measurement issues.

³ Of course, there is some room for skepticism on this count. Perhaps by interviewing a cooperative sample of legislators on the topic of religion, they observed more religious “commitment” than actually existed. And in the thirty years since their field work, legislators may have succumbed to purported secularizing influences in the culture. Even so, Cal Thomas’s introductory remark suggests that members still have incentives to emphasize publicly whatever religious involvement they can demonstrate, given the continuing “positivity bias” toward faith among most Americans. (Indeed, it was only within the last year that one member, Pete Stark of California, felt bold enough to announce that he was a “non-theist.”) Still, our own informal interviews with members suggest that religious commitment is in fact still fairly high among these national elites.

⁴ These judgments were made by two or three members of the research team in consultation. Although it would be methodologically preferable to use several independent “raters,” assessing the information available requires considerable knowledge and expertise on a wide range of American religious traditions. In many instances, we have also consulted outside experts, especially concerning traditions with which we were less familiar. Father Michael Cassabon, for example, not only assisted in the collection of data on the 107th Congress, but has provided very useful insights into Catholic members’ theological orientation, based on their affiliations and religious rhetoric.

⁵ DW-Nominate scores were drawn from Poole and Rosenthal’s website: <http://voteview.com/w-nominate.htm>. The three *National Journal* voting scales are found in the following issues: March 7, 1998; January 23, 1999; February 26, 2000; February 2, 2001; February 2, 2002; and, February 1, 2003. The *Congressional Quarterly* party unity scales are from the following issues: January 3, 1998; January 9, 1999; December 11, 1999; February 2, 2001; January 12, 2002; and December 14, 2002. The scores used here for the three Congresses combined the annual scores into a single mean for all sessions in which a member was present and voting. The CQ party unity score was recoded by multiplying GOP unity scores by -1 to produce a single scale ranging from +100 (most Democratic) to -100 (most Republican).

⁶ Here we use data from the 1990 Glenmary Research Center’s census of religious bodies (Bradley et al. 1990). The allocation of membership by congressional district was carried out by John C. Green, a member of the research team producing the current project. His estimates have been used in other studies of congressional voting (e.g. Oldmixon et al. 2005).

⁷ We included a variety of personal and constituency variables that provided little empirical leverage: age, region, education level of district residents, labor union membership in

district and others. None showed more than an occasional weak relationship with the voting scores. We have not included percent African American or Hispanic in the equations as these variables are in effect incorporated in our ethnoreligious measures.

⁸ Interestingly, if one does include party membership in the equation, which produces almost a complete “explanation” for DW-Nominate ($R^2=.93$), theological traditionalism still has a strong independent effect, although the other religious variables wash out.

⁹ Traditionalism might be expected to have a greater impact within the evangelical tradition than among Catholic or mainline members, but this is not consistently the case. If we use interactive terms to represent evangelical, mainline and white Catholic traditionalism in the equations reported in Tables 3 and 4, we find that the coefficients are generally of the same magnitude for each tradition.

¹⁰ Some readers might accept our argument about the importance of accurate affiliation measures for members, but question the validity or reliability of our commitment and theology measures. What do we lose in explanatory value when one or both of these scales are omitted from the analysis? For purposes of illustration, let us consider the DW-Nominate score: if we omit the theology scale, the variance explained by religious variables drops from .501 to .411, with other religious variables picking up part of the lost explanatory power. Most notably, the coefficients for evangelical identity and evangelical district population become much stronger and highly significant, and member religious activity becomes a solid predictor of conservative voting. If religious activity is also dropped, the evangelical coefficients increase even more, and the variance explained is reduced only a few points to .400. Obviously, the interpretation of religious influences will vary depending on which religious variables are included. Use only affiliation measures and the ethnoreligious scheme is the only available frame, and shows the expected differences, especially between the evangelical tradition and religious minorities. Add religious activity and one begins to see the possibilities for a restructuring approach, as active involvement in religious institutions predicts conservative voting. Use the theological measure and we produce a more complex pattern incorporating both theories, with restructuring explaining the decisions of members of the major religious traditions, and ethnoreligious tradition still dominating the way religious minorities behave.