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The Changing Values of American Evangelicals in Politics

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The University of Vermont

Department of Sociology

The Changing Values of American Evangelicals in Politics

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Honors College Thesis

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Abstract

In 2016 81% of self-identified white evangelical Christians voted for Donald Trump in the Presidential election and continued to support him after (Smith & Martinez, 2016; Peters & Dias, 2018). White evangelicals were willing to back a Republican candidate that appeared to deviate from their normal expectations of morality. The relationship between the Republican Party and white evangelical Christians has existed since the election of Ronald Reagan. This project examines the political history of white evangelicals in the United States. It analyzes recent data to compare the differences between white evangelicals and the general population and analyzes reports on white evangelicals during and after the 2016 election. This information is used to establish long-term historical trends that show why white evangelicals showed strong support both during and after the 2016 election within the broader historical context of white evangelicals' relationship with politics.

The results show that white evangelicals support for Trump is due to his alignment with their core political issues. Evangelicals as a political force are reactionary and established themselves in opposition to progressive change in the United States. Their core issues during their emergence have remained mostly consistent, and they have developed new core values in response to the United States' changing political landscape. Donald Trump's policies and rhetoric match the white evangelical position on all their primary issues. In combination with this, evangelicals now care less about the personal morality of candidates than any other group which shows a change in how they view candidates. White evangelicals feel as though Donald Trump is on their side and since immoral personal conduct is no longer an issue, his behavior does not pose a significant obstacle to white evangelical support. In summation white evangelicals like other voters, support candidates who will address their issues of concern which

is why they supported Donald Trump during the 2016 election and continued to support him afterward.

The results of this thesis confirm the findings of the majority of the scholarship on white evangelicals and Trump. Other research consistently concludes that white evangelicals support Trump because he is able to effectively address their fears about the direction that the United States is going and enacts regressive policies which suit their reactionary political agenda. Where the results diverge from previous work is on the matter of how to court evangelicals using religious rhetoric. Previous research has concluded that using religious rhetoric has been a necessary part of wooing the white evangelical voting bloc. This thesis shows that this rhetoric is no longer a requirement to gain white evangelical support. Today white evangelicals are more interested in enacting their values through policies than through a “Godly candidate”. Finally, this thesis goes beyond existing scholarship by placing the events of the 2016 election with the broader history of white evangelicals as reactionaries in American politics. It establishes that white evangelicals did not change radically as a group to accommodate Donald Trump. Their positions now are due to long term changes within the group and Trump’s populist policies addressing their long-term concerns. There is no evidence to suggest that their support will decline as he continues to accommodate their needs and further solidifies their ties to the Republican Party which is actively changing to support the president.

Introduction

Most historians agree that four key elements define evangelical Protestants: Biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism (Hankins, 2008, p. 1). Biblicism means that the word of the Bible is the highest authority for religious matters (Hankins, 2008, pp. 1-2). Crucicentrism is a focus on Christ's crucifixion believing that "Jesus's crucifixion was a sacrifice for the sins of humankind followed by Christ's literal and bodily resurrection without which there is no hope for the salvation of humans" (Hankins, 2008, p. 2). Conversionism covers the "born again" aspect of evangelicalism. It asserts that conversion is a single "life-transforming event" where a person finds God and becomes a Christian (Hankins, 2008, p. 2). The final element of evangelical Protestantism can be connected to politics. Activism is a central part of being an evangelical. It can take many forms such as "preaching, witnessing, and missionary work" as well as "other forms of cultural engagement including moral and political reform" (Hankins, 2008, p. 2). If all these elements are present, a person can be identified as an evangelical. This definition covers all evangelical Protestants; however, this thesis will be exploring the actions of only white evangelicals. Given the racial segregation that has plagued the United States since its inception white evangelicals have developed as a distinct bloc that is shaped as much by its ethnic identity as its religious one.

Due to the complexity of historians' definition, it is not used for data analysis regarding white evangelicals. There is no universal definition of evangelicals that all data collection organizations abide by and different sources will define the term differently. Due to this, data on evangelicals may vary depending on the source. In addition to these, different data sources survey different people. PRRI's "2016 American Values Atlas" used a "sample of more than 101,000 Americans from all 50 states" (Jones, 2017). In this survey "evangelicals" are defined as

those who self-identify as Protestant Christians who also identify as evangelical or born again” (Jones, 2017).

On the other hand, Barna Group defined evangelicals by characteristics in the survey rather than allow them to self-identify (Barna, 2016). People were determined to be evangelicals if they met nine criteria. These included a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today,” and that their faith is very important in their life today (Barna, 2016). They also believe that when they die, they will go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior (Barna, 2016). They strongly believe they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians, firmly believe that Satan exists, and strongly believe that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works (Barna, 2016). Additionally, they strongly agree that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth, strongly assert that the Bible is accurate in all the principles it teaches, and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today” (Barna, 2016). Smietana defines evangelicals in yet another way for Lifeway. “The representative online survey asked 1,000 Americans four questions about core evangelical beliefs on the Bible, the crucifixion of Jesus, salvation, and evangelism. Those who strongly agreed with all four (17 percent) qualified as having evangelical beliefs” (Smietana, 2016). These differences may affect who each survey identifies as evangelical and the total sample size. This thesis used self-reporting to define white evangelicals. Respondents to the analyzed surveys who identified themselves as white, Protestant, and would “describe [themselves] as a 'born-again' or evangelical Christian” were counted.

White evangelicals are often confused with fundamentalist Christians. While there is overlap between the two groups, not all evangelicals are fundamentalists. Fundamentalist is an

ever-evolving term which is at the center of scholarly debate and can have political, religious, or cultural implications (Denemark, 2004, p. 143). Here fundamentalist refers to fundamentalist Christians within the United States. In historical context, fundamentalists were primarily Northern Protestants who rejected theological liberalism in favor of literalist interpretation of the Bible (Bendroth, 2017). The rejection of theological liberalism is also a defining feature of early evangelicals, but being an evangelical was not a prerequisite since many Protestant denominations were also fundamentalists. In the modern context fundamentalist support, extreme adherence to religious doctrine; however interpretations of what this means may vary so an exact set of values cannot be established (Bendroth, 2017). It is important to note that not all fundamentalists are evangelicals and despite an apparent adherence to the bible many evangelicals do not consider themselves fundamentalists.

White evangelicals have always been a vocal group in American politics. White evangelical leaders often voice support for candidates and causes they believe represent their religious interests. White evangelicals played an important part in the 2016 election, voting overwhelmingly for Donald Trump. It was expected that white evangelicals would vote for the Republican nominee, but Donald Trump was different from a typical conservative nominee. White evangelical leaders usually focus on morality, but Trump was a candidate who was a divorcee, an adulterer, used vulgar language, and bragged about extramarital sex. From the white evangelical perspective, Donald Trump would be considered immoral. Despite this, more white evangelicals voted for Trump than any of the previous four Republican candidates (Smith & Martinez, 2016).

Additionally, it is clear that this support was not a begrudging acceptance of the nominee since white evangelicals have been a core part of Trump's base following the election. During

the 2018 midterm elections, white evangelicals were more supportive of Republicans than they had been before the election of Donald Trump (The Economist, 2019). They were also almost 40% more likely to be supportive of the Republican administration than Protestants and over 50% more likely than Catholics according to The Economist (The Economist, 2019). This data indicates that not only did evangelical support continue after his election, but it has also remained high throughout the first half of his presidency. It also shows that white evangelicals make up the religious core of Trump's base since they are more likely to support him than any other religious group.

This project is significant because it explores the recent decisions of white evangelicals in the U.S. as part of a larger historical trend among white evangelicals. A lot of research has been done on white evangelicals' relationship to politics and more specifically the Republican Party in the past, but the 2016 election and Donald Trump's candidacy violated both Republican and political norms. The 2016 election showed both a continuation of white evangelicals' strong connection to the Republican Party along with a dramatic shift in what values they considered necessary in a candidate. This thesis will explain how what went on during and following the 2016 election fits into historical-social patterns for white evangelicals. This research is relatively new because the 2016 election only happened recently and will contribute to a growing body of work that examines white evangelicals' relationship with Trump. Donald Trump's candidacy does not follow earlier Republican models, and it is necessary to examine further how it fits in with the longstanding relationship between white evangelicals and the Republican Party, especially if it has changed the dynamic in some way. This thesis will not examine the 2016 election as an isolated incident but will explore it as part of a larger historical trend to fully explain how white evangelicals have come to this point.

Previous Work

In order to understand the choices white evangelicals made during the 2016 election and its aftermath, it is helpful to examine their attitudes towards the Republican Party and politicians at various points in American history. There is a large body of work that looks at the presence of evangelicals in American politics. White evangelicals played an important role in the 2016 election, but their relationship with the Republican Party did not begin in 2016. It is necessary to understand the historical relationship between white evangelicals and the Republican Party in order to understand the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Religion has always been a part of American politics; however, the close relationship between Republicans and the evangelical right was established with the election of Ronald Reagan. The evangelical right or Christian Right emerged during his election in 1980 (Hankins, 2008, pp. 38-43). The growth of white evangelicals as an important constituency of the Republican Party occurred at this time because of social change such as sex education that had mobilized evangelicals followed by elections of key conservatives (Hankins, 2008, pp. 140-143). Jerry Falwell, a prominent evangelical leader at the time, emphasized sexual sins and moral failing and held similar ideas to Reagan about an idealized Christian America which helped to connect white evangelicals with the president and his party (Gorski, 2017a, pp. 196-198). According to a study done by Kevin Coe, Reagan was favored by evangelicals because his views aligned with theirs on social issues such as abortion and school prayer as well as providing a strong military which was necessary to Christianize communist states according to evangelicals (Coe, 2006, pp. 309-330). The development of the evangelical right in conjunction with the rise of conservative politicians that met their demands cemented the relationship between evangelicals and Republicans under Reagan. These issues were particularly important to religious Americans at this time. Research shows that from 1976

onward, many Americans felt the need to reaffirm their country's morality. The increased focus on morality made elected officials' religion a priority for voters (Ribuffo, 2006, pp. 19-20). It also made the rise of communism a major concern because communism threatened America's religious values with its competing secular ideology (Ribuffo, 2006, pp. 19-20).

Further research supports the idea that the Republican Party developed a relationship with evangelicals due to the creation of the Christian Right at this time and adds that the relationship was further strengthened as prominent evangelical figures were brought into the administrations they supported (FitzGerald, 2017, p.360). The Christian Right is a social movement that emerged as an oppositional force to progressive movements within the United States during the 1970s. The movement was made up of smaller conservative religious groups the most influential of which were headed by white evangelical leaders (Gorski, 2017a, pp. 193-195; Hankins, 2008, p. 149). The most talked about groups were Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and later Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition (Hankins, 2008, p. 149). While the Christian Right was not exclusively made up of white evangelicals, they were a core part of the movement, and their leaders had a significant role in directing the goals of the movement (Gorski, 2017a, pp. 193-195). Since the Christian Right was made up of white evangelical groups, its historical goals align closely with the political interests of a majority of white evangelicals. The name of the movement was even changed due to evangelical influence. It was formerly known as the new religious right, but was changed to match Pat Robertson's group "because his organization had the word "Christian" in the title, the name for the entire movement changed from New Religious Right to Christian Right, which remains to this day the most popular term" (Hankins, 2008, p. 149).

Further research suggests in 1980 that issues of morality became more central to evangelicals as they were disappointed by Jimmy Carter's lack of opposition to abortion, gay rights and civil rights (Harley, 1980). Additionally, during the election of 1980 highly religious evangelicals did not vote based on the usual predictors and were more likely to be conservative and vote for Reagan (Brudney, 1984, pp. 1072-1079). The change in voting habits can be connected to the other research that found that moral traditionalism among evangelicals was successfully able to explain evangelical agreement with political conservatives on a large number of issues (Brint, 2010, pp. 328-350).

Additional sources show how this growth has continued over time and that the connection between the two groups still exists today. Even among younger generations of evangelicals, high religiosity is strongly related to Republican Party identification (Pelz, 2015). Additionally, evangelicals outside of the south have become more Republican over time, showing the continuing formation of a bond between the groups (Kiecolt & Nelsen, 1991, pp. 552-569). In addition to the growth of the evangelical right there was also no evangelical alternative on the left due to internal fracturing. In 1970 research shows the attempt to build a left-wing evangelical movement failed because of fragmenting along other identity lines, with different groups prioritizing the advancement of their own race or gender while ignoring the need for intersectional cooperation (Swartz, 2011, pp. 81-120). As a result, the Left was never able to compete with the power of the Right which was able to unify under key conservative issues (Swartz, 2011, pp. 81-120).

While many white evangelicals tend to be conservative, not all research depicts them as a unified group. Evangelicals in America present a broad spectrum both on opinions of how much they should be involved in politics and what role religion should play in politics (Smith, 2002).

Despite this, the other data still established a link to the Republican Party and research on the diversity of evangelicals does not refute this but instead establishes a plurality which is necessary to note to avoid over generalization.

Evangelicals are important in American politics not only because of how they react to presidential candidates but also because of how candidates respond to them. The literature on the subject indicates that Republican candidates are aware of evangelicals as an essential voting bloc and actively court their vote. A former aide accused George W. Bush of manipulating evangelicals to retain their vote (Kuo, 2006). Additionally, research suggests that Bush actively cultivated a conservative Christian base to support him, increasing the presence of evangelicals in politics (Gilgoff, 2007, pp. 33-35). Low evangelical turnout for Bush in 2000 led him to make the evangelical vote a priority of his 2004 campaign (Gilgoff, 2007, pp. 33-35). Further research found that presidents purposefully used religious rhetoric and that Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush's rhetoric was tailored to gain evangelical support (Coe, 2006, pp.309-330).

Like all voting blocs, evangelicals choose candidates that will give them what they want. The key feature of white evangelicals is their religious values. White evangelicals were historically concerned with issues tied to their religiously based morality. Candidates have also emphasized their own religiosity to gain evangelical approval (Coe, 2006, pp. 309-325; Hamby, 2008; Carnes, 2008; Luo, 2007). One would assume based on their previous voting patterns that evangelicals would vote based on the religious morality in 2016; however, research suggests this is not the case. Trump has little understanding of the religious rhetoric and Biblical literacy used by previous Republican presidential candidates (Boston, 2015, pp. 38-39). Therefore, their support for Trump must be based on something besides personal morality.

The research in this thesis will show that white evangelicals support Donald Trump because his policies support their goals on key issues, and he provides a solution to their anxiety about the changes facing America. Additionally, personal immorality has become a lower priority for white evangelicals in recent years, and this shift contributes to their embrace of Trump. White evangelicals support for Trump will be placed within the broader context of white evangelicals' political history and their resulting relationship with the Republican Party. This thesis will analyze previous research to illustrate white evangelicals' growth as a political force which is deeply connected to the Republican Party in the United States. White evangelicals' historical growth provides context for the political landscape of the 2016 election and a baseline for change within the group. Previous research will also be used to determine the core concerns of the group and how Donald Trump diverges from traditional Republicans. Existing analysis of survey data will be used to show statistically what was happening within the white evangelical group prior, during, and after the 2016 election. Shifting opinions and demographics among white evangelicals along with their history of racial insecurity are necessary to understand the vulnerable position white evangelicals were in when they decided to vote for Trump. Data from both the Public Religion Research Institute and The Pew Research Institute from recent years is used to independently establish support for trends among white evangelicals that contribute to their embrace of Donald Trump. This data also shows their continued support which suggests that Donald Trump continues to alleviate their status anxiety by addressing their core issues during his presidency.

Evangelicals Historical Development in America

Foundation of Evangelicalism in American Protestantism

Evangelicals developed from white American Protestantism. They began to emerge as an influential group within American Protestantism during the revivals which occurred consistently from the 1740's onward (Hankins, 2008, p. 12). Revivals involved sermons where charismatic preachers drew large crowds, sometimes in the tens of thousands, to hear them speak (Hankins, 2008, pp. 9-15). Revivals could be held in any space, as the only requirements were a speaker and an audience, which allowed them to be mobile. This mobility combined with the work of preachers such as Charles Grandison Finney who moved revivals into urban areas allowed the active spread of "revivalist evangelicalism" until it was a mainstay of American religious culture (Hankins, 2008, pp. 11-14). These revivals were the beginning of American evangelicalism, and they created a consciousness in American Christianity that would later affect their forays into the political sphere. Hankins concludes that revivals led to the "democratization of American Christianity (Hankins, 2008, p. 16). Since revivals targeted all types of people, and who spoke was primarily determined by popularity, Christians felt empowered within their churches (Hankins, 2008, p. 16). As a result, they turned to them rather than institutions like the government where they had less control (Hankins, 2008, p. 16). The feeling of empowerment through religion remained relevant as evangelicals began engaging with the government through religious groups rather than as individual citizens.

Theological conflict and the separation of Evangelical Protestantism

After the revivals of the First and Second Great Awakenings, evangelicals still hadn't fully developed their political consciousness. Evangelicals emerged as a mostly conservative

group after a series of scholarly debates within Protestant Christianity in the United States had played out. Conflict arose as different Christian groups in the United States adopted or rejected the new ideas of Theological Modernism (Hankins, 2008, p. 19). Theological Modernism is a progressive lens of Biblical interpretation that looks at religion using new ways of thinking and believes the Bible can be interpreted as a metaphor or that language in the Bible may not be literal (Hankins, 2008, pp. 19-23). Evangelicals rejected this new scheme of interpretation. They separated themselves from this new wave of Protestants by reaffirming their belief in a literal reading of scripture which became a defining feature (Hankins, 2008, pp. 19-45; Grover, 2013, pp. 26-30). This split cemented the majority of American evangelicals as a conservative religious group that rejected modernism in favor of a fundamentalist reading of the Bible. The fundamentalist beliefs that became a core part of the evangelical identity at this time would affect what issues of morality they deemed important later on as their main areas of concern in politics aligned with issues relevant to their religion.

The New Christian Right

Early Growth

At this point evangelicals while demonstrating a more conservative interpretation of the Bible had yet to enter American politics fully. They were not yet tied to the Republican Party. In fact, evangelicals were actively opposed to engaging with politics. In the 1960s Jerry Falwell declared in a sermon that “he would never get involved in politics because his call was to preach the gospel” (Hankins, 2008, p. 139). Despite this statement, Falwell would get involved in politics and in doing so would help shape the relationships between white evangelicals and the American political system as a key member of the American New Christian Right (Hankins,

2008, pp. 139-145; Gorski, 2017a, pp. 194-196). This new movement began during the 1960s in response to the controversy surrounding the government funding of sex education in schools while also removing school prayer around the same time (Hankins, 2008, pp. 140-148). Evangelicals perceived this as an attack against morality; however, they did not fully mobilize until later in the 20th century (Hankins, 2008, pp. 141-156; Gorski, 2017a, pp. 154-156; Dudley, 2014). Despite this, evangelicals learned about mobilization during these controversies and “that by marshaling their arguments, organizing their forces, and stomping on the hottest buttons, they could exert influence out of all proportion to their numbers or the true popularity of their positions” (Martin, 1996 as cited in Hankins, 2008, p. 141). The New Christian Right started to successfully impose its influence in the late 1970s and early 1980s around the time of Ronald Reagan’s first election, however, it was the election of Jimmy Carter that first drew more evangelicals into politics (Gorski, 2017a, pp. 196-198; Hankins, 2008, pp. 142-143). Jimmy Carter was open about his status as an evangelical which excited the group, but they became disappointed at his failure to install the conservative policies they favored (Hankins, 2008, p. 143). It was this disappointment, and a perceived government mandated secularization which led the prominent evangelical leader Francis Schaeffer to attempt to push other evangelicals into politics to fight a cultural war against it (Hankins, 2008, p. 145). While Schaffer did not witness the ultimate culmination of the movement, he left his mark through his publications and his student Jerry Falwell (Hankins, 2008, p. 145).

Changes Under Falwell

Jerry Falwell was not the only leader in the New Christian Right; however, he was hugely influential, and major changes were made to the movement under his leadership (Gorski, 2017a,

pp. 193-196; Hankins, 2008, pp. 144-146). Falwell influenced the New Christian Right through his own organization known as “The Moral Majority” (Hankins, 2008, p. 147). Under Falwell, there were six significant changes which defined the new movement.

The first change was Falwell focused exclusively on sexual sins while ignoring or dismissing sins that were more present in the national structure of America such as greed (Gorski, 2017a, p. 180). He was also more likely to cite previous conservative Christian leaders than the scripture itself (Gorski, 2017a, p. 180). These leaders were part of what came to be known as the Old Christian Right which was more openly fundamentalist and had previously been considered a radical conservative fringe group in mainstream society. Falwell’s actions indicate that the New Christian Right was creating a narrative of moral absolutism that used the Bible for its purposes but had a focus on the conservative ideals they wanted to present over an actual interpretation of scripture. In addition to this, Falwell did not focus his attention on encouraging fundamentalists like himself. He put all responsibility for the Nation’s failings on those who were not already converted to his cause, the secularists (Gorski, 2017a, p. 180). The New Christian Right was establishing a conflict, with themselves on the side of morality in opposition to an outside corrupting influence.

Another major change of the New Christian Right under Falwell was support for constitutional fundamentalism. Constitutional fundamentalism is not unique to evangelicals or the Christian Right. It is a position that is also held by many American conservatives including the late Supreme Court judge Antonin Scalia (Kettle, 2016). Constitutional fundamentalism is another way of describing constitutional originalism, which can be defined as “the idea that we should follow the original intent of the Founding Fathers in interpreting the Constitution” (Snyder, 2015). This means that the constitution is viewed as an objective, unchanging document

that can only be interpreted in the immediate historical context of when it was written (Calabresi). Under Falwell, the New Christian Right adopted this stance, but with the added caveat that the Constitution was divinely inspired in its original form and therefore could not be altered (Gorski, 2017a, p. 181). The adoption of these views about the constitution is significant to the movement's relationships with politicians. They were more likely to support constitutional originalists, a group that often intersects with conservative Republicans. Falwell also rejected earlier Christian ideas about spiritual discovery and committed to a set of unalterable fundamentalist principles which halted all ideas of religious reformation and progress (Gorski, 2017a, p. 181). This change is a reflection of Falwell's own fundamentalist ideals and explains why the core values of conservative evangelicals remain similar to what they were in the '80s (Hankins, 2008, pp. 147-149). Falwell's organization, the Moral Majority, was only the most influential group in the Christian Right until the mid-'80s however Falwell's early involvement shaped the core values of the movement which continue to today (Hankins, 2008, p. 149). The movement had not significantly adapted any of its spiritual ideals. The final change that occurred under Falwell was that he presented individuals who opposed him as being unredeemable and as servants of the devil (Gorski, 2017a, p. 181). Falwell's black and white interpretation of morality illustrates how the movement saw itself as the only moral option, and that compromise with its opposition was ethically unacceptable. These changes are what separated the New Christian Right, which emerged in the 1970s, from earlier Right-wing religious movements. Their belief in the complete moral decline of America along with the development of a strong oppositional sense of identity is likely what drove them into politics.

The New Christian Right and Reagan

The emergence of the New American Christian Right cannot fully explain evangelical political power by itself. The rise of certain Republican leaders at this point and their reactions to this new movement are what gave evangelicals power through the Republican Party. An influential Republican in the development of evangelicals in politics was President Ronald Reagan. He used “God talk”, rhetoric that refers to a divine being, more than any other preceding president and there was a significant increase in this type of talk under Reagan compared to previous presidencies (Coe, 2006, pp. 317-325). He even went so far as to adopt the rhetoric of the Christian Right in his speeches (Fitzgerald, 2017, p.253). His choice to use religious rhetoric indicates that he represented a change in the way presidents and presidential candidates referenced and related to religion in America. Reagan developed close relationships with leaders of the Christian Right, specifically Jerry Falwell. Falwell supported Reagan’s economic plan and actively endorsed the presidency as being one that represented his values (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 252). Eventually “Reagan’s liaison to conservative religious groups estimated that he had more contact with the president than any other religious leader” (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 252).

Reagan was attractive to the Christian Right for several reasons. His inclusion of God in his politics endeared him to the New Christian Right movement. He also aligned with the New Christian Right on several of their core issues. Reagan was anti-abortion and supported prayer in schools which were two major issues for the New Christian Right (Coe, 2006, p. 312; Jefries, 2017, pp. 196-197). Reagan as a candidate also appealed to religious individuals wanting to reaffirm America’s national morality (Ribuffo, 2006, pp. 19-20). He also had a similar view of morality to Jerry Falwell and accepted that groups he opposed such as liberals and homosexuals were inherently evil (Gorski, 2017a, p. 198). Reagan was the ideal candidate for the emerging

evangelical Right. The relationship that began with his election would continue through his presidency. Additionally, this relationship between presidents like Reagan and evangelicals was strengthened as evangelicals were brought into presidential administrations (Fitzgerald, 2017, pp. 251-253). The presence of people who were part of evangelical movements in positions of power and influence increased the political power of evangelicals in politics as a whole.

A Continuing Relationship

The relationship between evangelicals and Republican presidential candidates continues after Reagan. “God talk” continued to be higher following Reagan’s presidency reaching its highest point under George W. Bush (Coe, 2006, pp. 317-325). Following Reagan, there was a continuing trend of religious importance in politics. George W. Bush had the most “God talk” of any president up to that point (Coe, 2006, pp. 317-325). Like both Reagan and Falwell, Bush made clear distinctions between good and evil with himself and America on the clear side of good fighting against evil groups that lacked nuance (Gorski, 2017a, pp. 202-203).

Bush sought out the evangelical vote more actively than Reagan. According to former Bush aide David Kuo’s book *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*, George W. Bush pandered to evangelical voters in order to manipulate them into voting for him (Kuo, 2006). The evangelical Right had become a powerful voting bloc by this point, and Republican presidents felt the need to ensure the continuation of a strong relationship with them. Bush recognized low evangelical turnout in the 2000 presidential election was bad for him which led him to pursue the evangelical vote as a priority in 2004 in order to reaffirm the existing relationship with the reliable bloc (Gilgoff, 2007). As a result of his “I Vote Values” campaign “Some estimate that 7 to 9 million new evangelical voters attended the polls in the election,

presumably to vote for Bush” (Hankins, 2008, p. 156). Republican presidents have come to understand that evangelical support is necessary for them to win. Evangelicals have likewise realized that Republicans will support their God-based platform, so they have consistently sided with them since the election of Ronald Reagan.

By looking at the development of evangelicals, it is clear that evangelicals tend to be conservative. However, not all evangelicals are conservative. In the early 1970s, before the New Christian Right gained its power, there was an attempt by left-wing evangelicals to construct their own movement (Swartz, 2011, pp. 81-120). This attempt began in the 1960s when a significant amount of young well-educated evangelicals began to pull away from older generations conservatism (Wuthow, 1988, pp. 185-192). Unfortunately for liberal evangelicals, this shift caused many conservative evangelicals to split off from their established churches to form new ones leading to an ultra-conservative trend among some evangelicals that grew at the same time as the liberal one (Wuthow, 1988, pp. 185-192). As has been discussed conservative evangelicals formed the base of the Christian Right in response to America’s growing liberalism. The left-wing movement that mirrored this had a chance in the 1970s to present an evangelical opposition to the New Christian Right, however, the project ultimately failed. The evangelical left was unable to present a unified front based around a core set of issues like the right. According to David Swartz in his article “Identity Politics and the Fragmenting of the 1970s Evangelical Left,” the movement fell apart because of identity-based political divisions (Swartz, 2011, p.83). These divisions developed around gender, race, and theological perspectives that could not be resolved causing the movement to break apart into smaller groups that served individual demographics (Swartz, 2011, p.83). Since the evangelical left failed to develop there

was no oppositional group within the evangelical community to compete with the Christian Right for influence.

In contrast with the fragmentary left, the Christian Right was very good at uniting different Christian groups under a single cause. Falwell was especially adept at this. His rhetoric joined together fundamentalists and evangelicals as well as uniting Christians with differing levels of militancy behind moral reform (Harding, 2000, p. 164). Rather than fragmenting like the left Falwell actively excluded diversity from his movement making it a white movement which condemned other religions and those with more liberal tendencies (Harding, 2000, p. 166). As a result, the movement was not subject to the same type of splintering because it was relatively homogeneous in terms of race and conservative status. Despite having different churches and conservative groups within the evangelical Right, they were able to present coherent conservative goals in their political platform. The lack of a stable opposition among evangelicals in conjunction with the Republican Party's active courting of the evangelical vote contributed to the creation of a stable evangelical voting bloc for Republicans.

In politics, evangelicals are usually represented by conservative leaders and groups as part of the New Christian Right. However, it is important to note that the goals and beliefs of these groups are not representative of all evangelicals in America. While evangelicals hold a broad array of opinions on different issues, an especially important issue is their role in politics (Smith, 2000, pp. 92-128). According to Smith, there are different positions on how involved evangelicals should be in politics ranging from evangelicals who believe Christians should not engage in politics to those who believe that Christian should "impose their standards on the country (Smith, 2000, pp. 94-99). Smith notes that the majority of evangelicals fall in neither of these categories. The majority of evangelicals view participation in politics as a normal aspect of

life in America and that Christians have as much right as anyone else to be a part of it (Smith, 2000, p. 98). This shows that the majority of evangelicals are not intent on imposing their moral order on America, but they do want to engage in political discourse. However, despite this diversity, there is still a link between white evangelicals and conservatives. In his book *American Evangelicals: A contemporary history of a mainstream religious movement* Barry Hankins writes,

Evangelicals and fundamentalists are highly visible during political campaigns, especially presidential races every four years. A key question for every would-be Republican presidential candidate is how well he or she will appeal to evangelical voters ... Because evangelicals have become the most reliable and influential voting bloc in the Republican Party (Hankins, 2008, p. 1).

It is well established that evangelicals are important to the Republican Party and their votes are highly sought after despite the diversity of white evangelical perspective. As Hankins points out, they are a visible bloc during campaigns. Their visibility shows that they are an active political force in the United States that holds influence over one of America's two political parties.

Trump Compared to Other Republican Candidates

If Trump were the standard Republican candidate, there would be no confusion over why white evangelicals supported him. However, Trump appears to deviate significantly from other Republicans both with his own approach to religion and in the way evangelicals react to him. Despite their overall support for past Republican candidates, white evangelicals have criticized other candidates for what they considered to be moral failings. Additionally, the way Trump talked about religion and courted religious voters was far from the "god talk" demonstrated by

Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush (Coe, 2006, pp. 309-325). The most relevant comparisons to Trump in terms of Republican candidates are John McCain and Mitt Romney as they are the most recent Republican candidates. Both McCain and Romney appealed to evangelicals using religious rhetoric but also were viewed with skepticism because of their faith. Donald Trump does not appeal to evangelicals in the same way, but he has also been less critical of far-right evangelical leaders than previous candidates. His lack of criticism may explain his preferential treatment.

McCain

John McCain ran as the Republican candidate in the 2008 election. In this election, he won 74% of the white evangelical vote (Smith, 2017). Additionally, during this election, McCain actively courted the evangelicals vote. Despite this McCain was not on the best terms with white evangelicals going into the election and white evangelicals were wary of his campaign at first (Luo, 2008; Hagerty, 2008). During the Republican primaries for the 2000 election, McCain had a problematic relationship with white evangelical voters and lost the Republican nomination to George W. Bush (Luo, 2008; Hagerty, 2008). He rebuked attack ads for the Bush campaign many of which were funded by evangelical groups (Hagerty, 2008). McCain's main problem with gaining evangelical support appeared to be his rejection of far-right evangelical leaders in his attempt to court moderates (Luo, 2008; Hagerty, 2008). During the 2000 election, John McCain referred to Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell as "agents of intolerance" which did not play well with evangelical voters (Luo, 2008; Hagerty, 2008). Additionally, McCain was endorsed by Rev. John Hagee and the Rev. Rod Parsley who were both prominent evangelicals but rejected their support because of Islamophobic and antisemitic remarks the preachers had made (Luo,

2008; Hagerty, 2008). Needless to say, that John McCain was not the most popular Republican among white evangelicals going into the 2008 election.

Still in 2008 McCain more actively pursued the evangelical vote and was successful in gaining a majority among white evangelicals. One of his appeals to religious voters involved his own use of faith-based rhetoric and personal religion (Hamby, 2008; Carnes, 2008). John McCain's use of faith changed dramatically over the course of the election as it became clear this was a way to tap into the religious voting bloc he had lost previously lost (Hamby, 2008). Early in the campaign McCain talked about the importance of God to him but explained that he felt his relationship with God was a private matter (Hamby, 2008). By the end of the campaign "the GOP nominee-in-waiting sat onstage with mega-pastor Rick Warren at his Saddleback Church in California, earning cheers for telling an audience of evangelicals that he was "saved and forgiven" (Hamby, 2008). McCain was able to reverse some of the earlier suspicions about him through his use of religious rhetoric. This is a pattern which holds true for Mitt Romney as well.

Romney

White evangelicals also had a problem with Mitt Romney going into the 2012 election. The primary issue they had with Romney was his faith. Evangelicals appear to be highly suspicious of Mormons; some are even concerned that Mormonism is a cult rather than a religion (Chittum, 2012; Slater, 2012). Many evangelicals call Mormonism a "false religion" and "assert that Mormonism denies the divinity of Christ and is therefore not a branch of Christianity" (Reynolds, 2012). During the primaries, Romney's faith was a larger issue for evangelicals than the immorality of other candidates (Reynolds, 2012). During the primaries in evangelical-heavy states such as South Carolina, "Newt Gingrich, a thrice-married Catholic won twice as much

support from evangelical Protestants as Mitt Romney, a Protestant” (Reynolds, 2012). This information shows that Trump is not the first amoral candidate that evangelicals have preferred and further illustrates how Romney’s relationship with religion alienated him with their voting bloc.

Despite his faith being the major point of contention for evangelicals, Romney like McCain used religion to win over evangelical voters. During the campaign, Romney “invoked the Rev. Rick Warren, a popular evangelical author, and megachurch pastor. He has quoted Scripture and alluded to the Gideon Bible as favorite late-night reading. And he has cited his belief in Jesus Christ as his personal “savior” (Luo, 2007). Evangelicals were still suspicious because Mormons understanding of the bible was different from their own (Luo, 2007). In order to combat evangelical suspicion in the general election, Romney chose to appeal to evangelicals by playing down his own faith in exchange for shared “Judeo-Christian values” which he hoped would endear him to religious conservatives (Burke, 2012).

Trump vs. Cruz

It is also important to compare Trump to his fellow Republican primary candidates. The most relevant comparison is with Senator Ted Cruz. Both Cruz and Trump were popular with white evangelicals during the primary (Sargent, 2015). During the Iowa Republican Caucus Cruz and Trump were the top Republican candidates with 27.6% and 24.3% of the vote respectively (Andrews, 2016). The evangelical vote is necessary to win the state since it makes up a large proportion of Republican voters; in 2008 60% of the Republican Caucus vote were born again Christians or evangelicals, and 59% were in 2012 (Chinni, 2016). White evangelicals during the campaign were split between Trump and Cruz because of their similarities (Sargent, 2015).

While their approach to religion may be different Donald Trump was very similar to Cruz in policy. Both Cruz and Trump supported securing the border, Trump with a wall and Cruz with additional fencing and technology (Prignano, 2016). Both agreed that illegal immigrants should be deported and that Muslims presented a threat to national security, with Trump proposing his Muslim ban and Cruz suggesting patrolling in Muslim neighborhoods to prevent radicalization (Prignano, 2016). On the issue of Islamic extremism both also agreed that increased bombings were the correct way to deal with ISIS (Prignano, 2016).

They were both popular with evangelicals because their rhetoric tapped into evangelical concerns about declines in American value (Sargent, 2015). Where Trump and Cruz differ were on understanding policy and religious rhetoric. Trump was a political outsider with no experience while Cruz had experience making policy decisions (Rogers, 2016). Additionally, Cruz followed the pattern of earlier Republican candidates of using religious rhetoric as a way to appeal to conservative voters (Hamilton, 2016). Cruz actively linked God and American ethos in a speech. He said, “[F]or so many Americans, the promise of America seems more and more distant. What is the promise of America? The idea that—the revolutionary idea that this country was founded upon, which is that our rights don’t come from man. They come from God Almighty” (Hamilton, 2016). This statement reasserts the idea of America as a Christian nation and that American values are Christian values. As has been discussed this is a widespread sentiment among evangelicals. Ted Cruz made courting Christians a priority of his campaign. Cruz had campaign staff members whose sole purpose was outreach to religious leaders and attended a large number of faith events (Jervis, 2015). Aside from religious rhetoric and outreach Cruz also made the importance of religious liberty a key part of his message (Jervis, 2015). His

approach was popular among evangelicals, and he did well in evangelical-heavy states (Goldmacher, 2016).

Trump

Trump and Cruz were very similar in policy ideas, however; Trump diverged from Cruz, Romney, and McCain when it came to religious rhetoric. Donald Trump's relationship with Christianity shows a lack of understanding and low regard for its importance. After the Access Hollywood tape, Trump's apology did not include God. He also has stated that he has never asked God for forgiveness which is out of line with common Christian conduct (Scott, 2015). According to CNN columnist Daniel Burke, Trump has "tried to put money in the Communion plate and referred to the sacrament as "my little wine" and "my little cracker." He mispronounced a book of the Bible, and when asked about his favorite verse, has either deferred or, in one case, cited "an eye for an eye," an Old Testament revenge scheme specifically condemned by Christ" (Burke, 2016).

In contrast to the other candidates who make allusions to Biblical scripture, Trump is very vague in his religious rhetoric. When asked about his feelings about the Bible Trump said, "I think the Bible is certainly, it is *the* book," (Moyer & Starrs, 2016). When asked if he had any favorite passages in the Bible Trump deflected saying he did not want to go into specifics and that it was very personal (Moyer & Starrs, 2016). When asked if he had a favorite Testament, he replied "Probably equal," Trump said. "I think it's just an incredible, the whole Bible is an incredible—" (Moyer & Starrs, 2016). In his most famous book "The Art of the Deal, he never invokes a personal relationship with Christ as part of the path to success (Moyer & Starrs, 2016).

These examples show that during the campaign Trump did not use the same type of religious rhetoric as other Republican candidates.

Trump not only broke the mold with his vague religious rhetoric he also called into question his opponents' faith. In a meeting with prominent evangelicals, Trump said of Clinton "we don't know anything about Hillary in terms of religion" (Easley, 2016). He went on to say that people should not pray for all their leaders because "all of your leaders are selling Christianity down the tubes, selling the evangelicals down the tubes," (Easley, 2016). He says this despite his own lack of disclosure about religion. Donald Trump has a pattern of questioning the religious legitimacy of those he opposes. Before his Campaign even began, he questioned whether then President Obama was secretly a Muslim (Moody, 2015). He continued to support this conspiracy during the campaign. At a town hall meeting, Trump did not correct a supporter who asserted the President was a Muslim (Moody, 2015). "We have a problem in this country. It's called Muslims," a man attending Trump's rally in Rochester, New Hampshire, said. "You know our current president is one. You know he's not even an American." "We need this question," Trump said, chuckling. "This is the first question" (Moody, 2015). Trump's campaign later tried to backtrack saying that he didn't hear that part of the man's statement (Moody, 2015). However, this was not the only time that Trump acknowledged this during the campaign. At a rally, Donald Trump called then President Barack Obama the "founder of Isis" and repeatedly stated that Isis was celebrating him and that Hillary Clinton was also responsible for Isis (Siddiqui, 2016). These types of attacks are out of character for Republican candidates. Neither McCain nor Romney questioned Barack Obama's Christianity during the campaign. Romney did accuse Obama's administration of assaulting religious freedom in America but did not question Obama's own faith (Murray, 2012).

Trump's attacks on opponents' religion were not limited to Democrats. He questioned both Mitt Romney's and Ted Cruz's religion. When talking about Cruz Trump asked, "How can Ted Cruz be an Evangelical Christian when he lies so much and is so dishonest?" (Hensch, 2016; Schlesinger, 2016). He also questioned whether Cruz could be evangelical because of his Cuban heritage because according to Trump "not too many evangelicals come out of Cuba" (Margolin, 2016; Schlesinger, 2016). Trump also attacked Romney in front of a Salt Lake City crowd asking, "Are you sure he's a Mormon?" and "Are we sure?" in reference to Romney (Margolin, 2016). The attacks on his fellow party members further remove him from a typical Republican candidate.

How is Trump Different?

Evangelicals have had some strong reservations about the previous two Republican presidential candidates, many of these reservations centered around their faith or lack thereof. Additionally, evangelicals responded positively to Ted Cruz's religious rhetoric. Trump exhibited an even lower level of religiosity than McCain or Romney, attacked the faith of others including his fellow Republicans, and didn't use religious rhetoric to appeal to evangelicals. So, it would make sense for white evangelicals to be highly critical of Trump. However, evangelicals did not react as expected when it came to Trump. It was not that there was no evangelical criticism of him, but what stands out was the leniency of their reactions compared to how severe his indiscretions were compared with previous candidates. Trump's campaign was plagued with scandals. During the campaign a tape came to light where "Donald Trump bragged in vulgar terms about kissing, groping and trying to have sex with women during a 2005 conversation caught on a hot microphone" (Fahrenthold, 2016). In the tape, he specifically mentioned trying

to sleep with a married woman. White evangelicals normally condemn this type of behavior, but this was not the case with the Access Hollywood tape. After the Access Hollywood tape, the majority of evangelical leaders did not condemn Trump (Holland, 2016). Evangelical leaders were concerned with the comments, but that did not make them reject Trump as a candidate. “The president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said, “I don’t appreciate the comments and I don’t understand the comments, but at the same time, you’re going to find that most evangelicals ... have to understand that people are going to say things that are not always right” (Caldwell, 2016).

Trump was also supported by some of the most influential evangelicals in the country. Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham who was one of the most prominent white evangelicals in American history, was an early supporter of Donald Trump’s campaign (Griswold, 2018). Graham “leads a seven-hundred-and-sixty-five-million-dollar evangelical empire, which includes the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and also his international Christian relief effort, Samaritan’s Purse” so his influence among evangelicals cannot be understated (Griswold, 2018). Graham has made statements condemning Islam as an evil religion after 9/11 and his support of Trump early on was linked to Trump’s proposed Muslim ban (Griswold, 2018). This attitude is similar to the attitude toward Muslims of the evangelical leaders whose support McCain rejected during his run (Griswold, 2018). However, Trump unlike McCain, did not reject endorsements so while his overall attitude made evangelicals skeptical he did not alienate them further by rejecting their assistance. Graham was not the only prominent evangelical leader who sided with Trump. Trump’s promises must have appealed to evangelicals because once Trump took office, he has been praised for his actions. Jerry Falwell Jr. goes so far as to state “I think evangelicals have found their dream president,” and according to author Nancy Wadsworth this is “an oft-

heard variation on this view is that Trump may be a sinner, but he's one chosen by God for a providential mission" (Wadsworth, 2018).

While morally Trump may not be the ideal candidate he has lived up to the expectations of many influential white evangelicals. Since Trump does not attempt to connect to them primarily through his own religion, it can be assumed that the reason Donald Trump is treated differently from other Republican candidates is that his policies resonate with white evangelicals and their leadership. This is not surprising given white evangelicals' history in politics. They have preferred candidates because the morality of the policies they proposed followed white evangelicals' own agenda not necessarily because they were the most moral candidate. In the past white evangelicals have responded positively to candidates who used a plethora of religious rhetoric to connect with them, but what Trump was offering appeared to be more important than his lack of religiosity. In order to receive the level of support he did in 2016, it is necessary to understand what evangelicals want now and how Trump gave it to them. For white evangelicals, it is conservative policy, not faith that makes Donald Trump "their dream president" (Wadsworth, 2018).

Moral Concerns of the New Christian Right

White evangelicals have a few core issues which define them as a group. Many of the moral issues evangelicals were concerned with during the 2016 election came with the development of the New Christian Right. The issues which became the core concerns of white evangelicals did not start out that way. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s prominent conservative Christians created a platform with the goal of altering American culture by getting other Christians to reject cultural changes they believed were leading the country in a sinful direction.

This activism was spurred by the cultural changes, such as the growth of feminism, gay rights, and civil rights, that were occurring in America at the time. For white evangelicals, these concerns were both cultural and political. They addressed them both through participating in a culture war for America's future with opponents of their moral values and by influencing legislation and judicial decisions through their relationship with conservative Republicans. Their major concerns at this time, many of which continue to this day, were abortion, reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, women's rights, and religious rights.

Abortion

While abortion falls under the larger category of reproductive rights, historically it has been a much larger issue than other reproductive concerns such as contraceptives for white evangelicals. It is important to understand that evangelicals' opinion on abortion was not always static. "In 1968, Christianity Today published a special issue on contraception and abortion, encapsulating the consensus among evangelical thinkers at the time" (Dudley, 2012). This issue stated that based on scripture, life began at birth, not conception and there was no part in the bible which outlawed abortion because a fetus was not the same thing as a soul (FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 198-200; Dudley, 2012). This general sentiment toward abortion was changed radically by the activism of Jerry Falwell along with Schaeffer and Dr. Charles Everett Koop (Dudley, 2012; Hankins, 2008, pp. 144-145). It was not easy to change the opinions of evangelicals. Many anti-abortion activists were frustrated by the apathy of the general evangelical population which lasted well into the 1980s (Dudley, 2014). At this point, Falwell began disseminating rhetoric that stated that life begins at conception and this is biblically implied (Dudley, 2014). In addition to this, evangelicals began to come forward against abortion because of Schaeffer and Koop's

1979 propaganda film *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 176-184; Hankins, 2008, p. 145; Martin, 1996, pp. 194-196). This film “connected abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, calling these issues collectively “a culture of death” reminiscent of Nazism” (Hankins, 2008, p. 145). These graphic depictions of abortion along with Falwell’s propaganda campaign were successful in turning a large number of evangelicals against abortion for anyone, not just themselves. Due in large part to this film, “Abortion shot to the head of their list of national sins, and opposition to it became known as the “traditional” evangelical position” despite the previous nuance with which it had been viewed (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 283). This was when abortion began to become a key issue for white evangelicals, and the previous apathy was replaced with Falwell’s conservative position.

Abortion was a cornerstone issue for Falwell’s Christian Right because it was a central point of the larger idea of “Family Values” which was the core of the movement’s identity and it was consistent with Falwell’s focus on sexual sin and degeneracy (Dowland, 2009, pp. 606-633; Gorski, 2017a, pp. 204-216). Abortion was a threat to their ideal model of the American family. They connected abortion to a “devaluation of motherhood and, by extension, the family” (Dowland, 2009, pp. 607-608). Many evangelicals would later claim that in 1973 *Roe v. Wade* was what spurred them to political involvement (Dowland, 2009, p. 610). In reality “In the early 1980s the issue of abortion was still not settled in northern evangelical circles” (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 283). The rewriting of history by these evangelicals shows just how central being anti-abortion had become to the white evangelical identity. These evangelicals wanted to assert that they were and had always been on the morally correct side of the abortion issue despite the majority of evangelicals initially being apathetic (Dowland, 2009, p. 610).

The anti-abortion sentiment became a foundational part of white conservative evangelical movements. Due to this, politicians attempted to connect to these groups by including anti-

abortion sentiments in their rhetoric. Ronald Reagan speaking at an evangelical convention said

The fight against parental notification is ... one example of many attempts to water down traditional values and even abrogate the original terms of American democracy ... is all of Judeo-Christian tradition wrong? Are we to believe that something so sacred can be looked upon as a purely physical thing with no potential for emotional and psychological harm? (Jefries, 2017, p.210).

Here Reagan directly references the potential negative impacts of abortion. He deliberately includes references to traditional values and implies that there is political value in the ideas of the Judeo-Christian tradition. These comments touch on evangelical concerns, and it is clear that Reagan understands the political value of taking a stance against abortion when addressing evangelicals. This is also supported by Reagan's choice of Surgeon General, Dr. Charles Everett Koop who as discussed earlier was an instrumental part of the New Christian Right's anti-abortion campaign (Hankins, 2008, p. 145).

Reproductive Rights

Evangelicals have historically taken issue with both abortion and birth control and often conflated the two issues. However, evangelicals' stance on contraceptives has changed over time. Before the 1920s, for evangelicals the only legitimate reason for intercourse was reproduction. In the late 1960s, evangelical beliefs about contraception shifted due to growing concern about overpopulation in the United States (White, 2012, pp. 5-11; FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 199-200). Family planning and use of contraception as part of one's "Christian duty" to prevent

overpopulation became widely accepted among the Evangelical community (White, 2012, pp. 8-9). Even conservative white evangelical leaders such as Billy Graham supported evangelicals using family planning (White, 2012, pp. 8-9; FitzGerald, 2017, p. 200). Later evangelical opinion shifted again. From 1987 onwards, evangelicals worked to create laws on both the state and federal level that criminalized contraception and information relating to it (White, 2012, p. 5-11). Much like Catholics, many evangelicals justified this antagonism with a passage from Genesis in which God admonishes someone for withdrawing which prevented his wife from being impregnated (White, 2012, pp. 6-7).

Even though evangelical opinions toward some types of contraception progressed in the '60s, their opinion on the subject would later be colored by their opinions on abortion. This is important to recognize because their strong stance against abortion in the late 1980s would affect the way they saw birth control. The attitudes evangelicals had toward contraception were changed significantly by the Supreme Court's decision on *Roe v. Wade* (White, 2012, pp. 9-11). After the decision, contraception and abortion once again became blurred and more conservative evangelical groups began preaching about the dangers of contraception (White, 2012, pp. 9-11). The relationship evangelicals have with birth control today is not universal. Many see it as a way to prevent abortions while others see it as something that has contributed to abortions being more widespread (White, 2012, pp. 10-11). It is clear that even when contraception is opposed by evangelical groups, it has more to do with their link to abortion rather than a belief that all sex must be for purposes of procreation. It is necessary to look at this historical development of evangelical opinion on birth control because it helps to illuminate what issues are not a priority for evangelicals and are subject to change. How abortion has affected their view of contraception

indicates that stopping abortion has historically been a priority for many evangelicals while stopping access to all contraception may not be.

As will be discussed further, reproductive rights were also inherently tied to 2nd wave feminism in the U.S. which the New Christian Right strongly opposed. In the feminist movement birth control was a part of the sexual liberation of women. Birth control meant that women could more actively pursue nonmarital sexual relationships without the potential consequence of pregnancy. This was a problem for evangelicals because it was in opposition to evangelical moral standards. For early evangelicals and fundamentalists “‘morality’ is often just a code word for conventional gender behavior and ‘immorality’ a code word for sexual and gender impropriety” and they held that women’s role was primarily as mothers (Hankins, 2008, p. 108). Even without abortion in the equation, birth control allowed women to forgo motherhood in favor of other pursuits which made conservative evangelicals concerned about the future of society.

LGBTQ Rights

Reproductive rights are central to modern evangelical political involvement; however, evangelicals concern with sex is not limited to conception. Sexuality and sexual “deviancy” are also major concerns for white evangelical groups. As discussed previously “family values” is the central concern of Falwell’s Christian Right. Homosexuality diverges from the traditional value of heterosexual marriage. They believe that if the state supports gay marriage, it is supporting the destruction of society by destroying the family unit (Hankins, 2008, pp. 132-133). Before the 1970’s most people “considered homosexuality an aberration”; however, it was not a major issue for any religious group because the majority of gay individuals hid their identity to avoid

persecution (Dowland, 2009, p. 625). This meant they were not a visible threat to the moral fabric of the country if they remained hidden and were not an issue for evangelicals and other conservative Christians until people began to view being gay as a preference and not something inherently wrong (Dowland, 2009, pp. 624-627; Hankins, 2008, p. 132). Unlike with abortion and reproductive rights, evangelicals have “almost uniformly opposed the gay lifestyle, largely because the Bible is quite consistent in its condemnation of homosexual practice” (Hankins, 2008, p.132). Evangelicals felt they were morally obligated to oppose it if it was influencing American morality.

The 1970s gay rights movement made the issue of homosexuality and the treatment of gay men and women in the United States a major political issue (Dowland, 2009, pp. 624-627; FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 234-236). Though the movement started in the 1960s, by the 1970s some cities in America responded positively to it and passed anti-discrimination legislation which shocked evangelicals into action against the growing movement (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 235). As the idea of homosexuality began to gain wider acceptance within both the medical community and American public the Christian Right and Jerry Falwell became increasingly concerned that homosexuals would rise to positions of political power (Dowland, 2009, pp. 624-627). They believed that gay activists would “use the power of government to foist their own morality on the rest of the population” and this would lead to the normalization of homosexuality causing the complete disintegration of moral values within the United States (Dowland, 2009, pp. 624-627; Hankins, 2008, p. 133). In order to get moderates to acknowledge gays as a threat, evangelicals chose to focus on the image of gays as pedophiles in order to scare the general public and gain support in their opposition to gay rights (Dowland, 2009, pp.626-627). This portrayal of gay men as sexual predators continues to this day.

Falwell was the president of the Moral Majority, so it is reasonable to assume his opinions expressed their general sentiment towards homosexuality. In addition to the gay rights movement, another issue that made homosexuality a target for the Christian Right was the AIDS crisis. Falwell expressed the opinion that the AIDS crisis was caused by homosexuality. In a televised sermon he is reported saying,

that the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) was a divine punishment visited on homosexuals for breaking the laws of nature and of God. And he accused the homosexual community in the United States of using its political influence to prevent the government from acting more quickly to stop the spread of the epidemic (David, 1983).

In this sermon, Falwell again indicates that there is significant concern among the Christian Right about the influence of homosexuals on the United States government. He also suggested a complete quarantine of those afflicted by the disease (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 256). This act would largely target the gay population in the U.S. and remove them from society.

Despite evangelicals' best efforts, homosexuality began to become more accepted in America, and gay individuals were able to claim more rights for themselves. Despite their losses, evangelicals continue to oppose gay rights. Their recent activity regarding homosexuality shows that it continues to be a serious issue from their perspective. The commitment of evangelicals to opposing acceptance of homosexuality is most clearly demonstrated in how far they are willing to go to spread anti-gay beliefs. For over ten years, conservative evangelical groups in the U.S. have actively encouraged anti-gay sentiments in Uganda which resulted in the anti-gay law being passed in the country (Mugisha, 2014). Evangelicals' determination to morally oppose homosexuality was not weakened by advancements in gay rights; rather they see advancements as evidence that the threat they are opposing is growing stronger.

Women's Rights

In addition to their concern with the gay rights movement, the Christian Right was also concerned with the women's rights movement. In 1990 Pat Robertson, a prominent evangelical leader, wrote in a letter, "feminism makes women leave their husbands, kill their children, destroy capitalism, practice witchcraft and become lesbians" (Ruether, 2002). This statement was supported by Falwell who also "suggested that the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon represented God's punishment of America for allowing the existence of such evils in this country as feminism, gays, abortion providers, and the ACLU" (Ruether, 2002). From the evangelical perspective feminism, like homosexuality, presents a threat to the traditional family values they are concerned with protecting. As discussed earlier, reproductive rights and abortion became major issues for the Christian Right. Feminists were often the ones advocating for both of these which put them in opposition to conservative evangelicals (Dowland, 2009, pp. 618-624). Evangelicals believed women and men had specific roles and the consequence for giving women access to abortion would be the potential erosion of "the sexual order, traditional morality, and the law of God" (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 234). However, as with these two issues, evangelical opinion of feminism and the women's rights movement changed over time.

Originally many evangelicals were interested in feminism and some developed biblical arguments that supported the idea of men and women as equals that had been socially conditioned into separate roles (Dowland, 2009, pp. 618-620). Evangelicals overall largely supported the Equal Rights Amendment (Dowland, 2009, pp. 618-620). This opinion was changed in part due to the work of a Catholic named Phyllis Schlafly who marketed the

Amendment to evangelicals as something which would destroy “the traditional family concept of husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker,” restrict motherhood ... and embed “the first anti-family amendment in the Constitution” (Dowland, 2009, pp. 620-621). This campaign was successful among conservative Christians who accepted that feminism would denigrate the American family and what had started as an attack on the bill turned into a culture war against secular feminism (Dowland, 2009, pp. 620-624; FitzGerald, 2017, p. 233). This idea resonated with evangelicals because of their perspective on gender roles.

As discussed earlier, evangelicals often conflate morality and adherence to biblical gender roles (Hankins, 2008, p. 108; FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 233-234). Feminism disintegrated these traditional roles by allowing women to choose their own role in society. For evangelicals, especially evangelical women, this new freedom threatened to destabilize the structure and safety of traditional marriage (Dowland, 2009, pp. 610-631; Hankins, 2008, p.115). According to some evangelicals “feminist freedom meant each individual was free to pursue his or her own end” and this meant men would no longer feel obligations to their family, but instead would prioritize their own self-interest leading to an increase in broken families (Hankins, 2008, p.115).

Evangelicals vs. Secularism

Prayer in Schools

While the Christian Right developed its platform in opposition to reproductive rights, feminism, and gay rights these were not the issues which originally sparked evangelicals’ journey to America’s political sphere during their early formation; it was secularization by the United States Government (Hankins, 2008, p.144). In order to understand this concern, it is first necessary to understand the issue of prayer in schools. In 1962 the Supreme Court declared in

Engel v. Vitale that prayer in public schools violated the first amendment and was therefore unconstitutional (Goodman, 1984; FitzGerald, 2017, p. 187). Like with many of the issues discussed evangelical opinion changed significantly on the issue over time. At first, evangelicals supported the Supreme Court's decision because they opposed the state teaching a sanitized non-denominational type of religion and they believed it would help them in their fight to prevent Catholic schools from receiving federal funding (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 188). This feeling changed with a second Supreme Court ruling.

The Court *Abington v. Schempp* ruled against devotional Bible reading in public schools. Protestant educators had made devotional reading from the King James Bible a part of the public-school curriculum in the early nineteenth century. For Catholics, it had been one of the reasons to build parochial schools, and for Protestants, it had been a symbol of the nation's Protestant identity (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 188).

Many evangelicals were not happy with this decision. For Northern evangelicals, this decision was about America being a Christian nation and a threat to their protestant identity (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 188). In 1982 Robert Dugan, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, expressed his concern to Congress with the Supreme Court's decisions in *Abington v. Schempp* and *Engel v. Vitale* (Goodman, 1984). On the other hand, Southern evangelicals were more willing to accept the decision as part of the first amendment which provided them religious liberty (FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 188-189). While evangelicals were somewhat divided on school prayer, when it came to public schools these Supreme Court rulings were the first signs of the state becoming more secular and would lead to a major issue for evangelicals; state intervention in Christian schools.

Freedom from anti-discrimination

In order to understand why the state chose to intervene in Christian schools, it is necessary to examine white evangelicals' relationship with racial integration. In an investigation of white evangelicals' racial history, Nancy D. Wadsworth states "most politically conservative white evangelicals actively fought every racial inclusion effort from abolitionism to affirmative action" (Wadsworth, 2018). Due to this, evangelicals had a tenuous relationship with desegregation even before it became an issue involving their schools. Many Southern evangelicals opposed any intervention by the U.S. government to force integration. White Southern evangelicals believed that integration would lead to intermarriage which they viewed as immoral (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 189). Many churches remained segregated even after public institutions became integrated and those in the evangelical community who chose to embrace integration were often shunned or driven from their churches (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 189). Eventually, due to public pressure, evangelical leaders chose to begrudgingly accept public integration while they kept white Christian institutions largely segregated.

White evangelicals gave up the fight of legal public segregation but continued to practice self-segregation among their communities. In the 1960s preachers like Falwell built what came to be known as "segregation academies" in response to the integration of the public school system (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 237). These schools were run by churches and began to multiply rapidly in the 1970s (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 237). In addition to segregation "the motive for building them was generally to provide the children of conservative Protestants with religious training and to protect them from the contagions of "secular humanism" and the sinful new youth culture" (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 237). These institutions were constructed for white conservative Christians by white conservative Christians.

These schools which had become part of how evangelicals demonstrated their own religious agency apart from an increasingly secular government came under threat in the late 1970s. Under the Carter administration, the IRS planned to revoke the tax-exempt status of any private school that did not meet federal integration requirements (Hankins, 2008, pp.143-144; FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 137-138). Christian leaders such as Falwell, Bakker, Robertson, and Dobson immediately protested the decision viewing it as an attack on American Christianity (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 237). Forced integration was the issue that spurred many evangelicals and was the issue which developed the Christian Right as a political entity (Hankins, 2008, p. 143-144; FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 237-238). On other issues of morality such as gay rights and abortion white evangelicals felt they could combat the immorality of the issues somewhat through their personal choices and teachings within their community; however, this was not an option when the government interfered with their schools (Hankins, 2008, p. 144). Evangelicals believe that their religious status should make them exempt from anti-discrimination policies and that government interference on these issues violates their freedom of religion.

What Evangelicals Want Now

White evangelicals as a political bloc are often depicted as unchanging and opposed to all progress due to their conservative beliefs. As discussed in the section detailing evangelicals historical concerns this is not the case. White evangelicals experience changes within their group just like any other demographic group engaged in politics. During the emergence of the New Christian Right white evangelical political stances shifted drastically within just a few decades. While Donald Trump is not the typical Republican candidate, white evangelicals would have voted for when they emerged as a political force it does not mean he isn't a candidate who fits

their values now. For this reason, it is important to identify which issues are most important to white evangelicals now and how they have changed as a group since they became an active force in politics.

White Evangelicals as Reactionaries

In order to understand the motivations of white evangelicals, it is necessary to understand that movements controlled by white conservative evangelicals, such as the Christian Right, are for the most part reactionary. A reactionary is the only alignment on the political spectrum that desires Retrogressive change (Baradat, 2002, p. 16). This means that a reactionary is someone that wants to reverse progress. All political alignments left of reactionary including conservative allow progressive change from the status quo (Baradat, 2002, p. 16). “Only the reactionary wants a change from the status quo to something that existed previously” (Baradat, 2002, p. 16). Reactionaries come into being when progress changes the status quo. They seek to move society back to a version of the status quo in a fight against progressive change. The New Christian Right, as discussed in the historical section, is a clear example of a reactionary group. In an interview with Tara Isabella Burton, historian John Fea states “Whenever the United States has faced significant demographic or cultural changes, it has always resulted in some kind of reactionary backlash. Evangelicals are almost always part of that backlash and, in many cases, have led the backlash” (Burton, 2018). Their core values and political issues are a direct response to the rise of equal rights movements in the 1960s, and the beginning of government enforced integration policies (Hankins, 2008, pp. 105-134; FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 233-238). This is illustrated in how their view on issues radically shifted with the growth of Gay Rights, Feminist and Civil Rights movements and their entrance to politics being a response to Jimmy Carter’s

strong-arming of their private schools to accept integration. All their core political issues center around preserving an American system of values which is threatened by progressive change. (Dowland, 2009, pp. 606-631; Gorski, 2017a, pp. 173-202). As the country has changed due to the success of progressive movements, white evangelical priorities have shifted as well to react to current political changes. So, the question becomes what are evangelicals reacting to that makes them favor Donald Trump today?

Racial Anxiety

White evangelicals have always had anxiety about other races corrupting or replacing them. Many Southern white evangelicals fundamentally opposed integration and viewed the potential intermarriage resulting from it as immoral (FitzGerald, 2017, p. 189). Their primary reason for joining politics was in reaction to the government forcing integration on their schools (Hankins, 2008, pp. 143-144; FitzGerald, 2017, pp. 136-138). This anxiety has not improved over time. White evangelicals' anxiety about the status of their race may have actually increased due to shifts in demographic trends. The overall percentage of white evangelicals is declining while the percentage of non-white evangelicals is on the rise (Jones, 2017). "Between 2006 and 2016, the proportion of white evangelical Protestants has fallen six percentage points, from 23% to 17%" (Jones, 2017). This data refers to what percentage of the total American population are white evangelical Protestants and shows that the number of non-white evangelicals has increased in proportion. This decline is similar to the general decline in the percentage of white Americans. In her research on evangelical opinions on race, Janelle Wong found that "white evangelical conservatism correlates strongly with their perceptions of anti-white discrimination, even after taking into account economic status, party, age and region" (Wong, 2018). It was found in this

survey that 50% of white evangelicals “reported feeling they face discrimination that’s comparable to, or even higher than, the discrimination they believe Muslim Americans face” (Wong, 2018). Additionally, 50% of white evangelicals believe “immigrants hurt the economy” (Wong, 2018).

White Evangelicals and White Nationalism

White evangelicals’ problems with race do not end with their concerns with their own status and economic anxiety. White evangelicals view the United States as a white Christian nation. They significantly overlap with another group that heavily favored Donald Trump during the 2016 election, white Christian nationalists. White Christian nationalists are often defined by four key elements: racism, sacrificialism (which focuses on a need for sacrifice and martyrdom to achieve a higher purpose), apocalypticism, and nostalgia (Gorski, 2017b, p. 339). In polls, white evangelicals often answer similarly to white Christian Nationalists (Gorski, 2017b, pp. 338-349). It has been estimated that over two-thirds of white evangelicals today are also white Christian nationalists (Gorski, 2017b, pp. 338-349). This number has increased since 2004 when only about half of white evangelicals identified this way (Gorski, 2017b, pp. 338-349). The increasing number of white evangelicals that identify as white Christian nationalists indicates that the importance of white Christian nationalist issues within the white evangelical community has grown.

White evangelicals’ relationship with white nationalism is also evident in the way they respond to Trump’s rhetoric. Donald Trump tapped into feelings of America as a white Christian nation during his campaign. Trump offers evangelicals an image of the America they want (Gorski, 2017b, pp. 338-349). Gorski argues, “Trumpism echoes all the traditional themes of

WCN – blood purity, blood conquest, bloody apocalypses, and golden age nostalgia” albeit from his own secular perspective (Gorski, 2017b, p. 343). This claim about Trump is supported by other sources with one study finding that Trump uses language which affirms white evangelicals feelings of marginalization and promises a return to power for them even if he is not the idealized Christian candidate they would have preferred (Barrett-Fox, 2018, pp. 502–522). White evangelicals’ ties to white supremacy are illustrated most clearly in how evangelicals have reacted to new groups changing the demographic make-up of the country. New non-Christian non-white groups entering the country threaten America’s status as a white Christian nation.

Additionally, white evangelicals have struggled with non-white demographics that are already in America and are not the result of recent immigration. Trump’s message has responded to this by consistently using negative rhetoric in describing the newly feared groups of “Mexicans” and Muslims” (Gorski, 2017b, p. 343). Trump also included the traditional antisemitism of white Christian nationalists (Gorski, 2017b, p. 344). He alluded to Jews control of politics through big banks and did not mention Jewish victims when speaking about the Holocaust (Gorski, 2017b, p. 344). His constant attacks on groups disliked by white Christian nationalists made him the favored candidate for their group. The white Christian nationalism demonstrated by both white evangelicals and Trump is visible in further issues concerning race that white evangelicals found important during the 2016 election.

Opinions on Race

White evangelicals’ white nationalism is not a new development; it is something that has been part of the development of white evangelicals in the United States. Currently, white evangelicals are struggling with racial tensions in the U.S. White evangelicals have not been very

supportive of efforts to combat the oppression of minorities in the United States. White evangelicals do not believe that police brutality against African Americans is a problem of oppression; 72% of white evangelical Protestants “believe that killings of African American men by police are isolated incidents” (Cooper, 2015). This is consistent with other white Christian sects, but a majority of those with non-Christian religions and those who are religiously unaffiliated believe these killings are a part of a pattern of police behavior toward minorities (Cooper, 2015). White evangelicals were also more likely to be concerned about anti-Christian discrimination than other racial and religious groups with 51% believing Christians face a lot of discrimination while only 38% of black Protestants and 25% of white mainline Protestants believed the same (Cooper, 2015). White evangelicals like other white denominations are more likely to justify symbols which are associated with racism by blacks. When it comes to the Confederate flag 70% of white evangelicals “say the Confederate flag is more of a symbol of Southern pride” while 76% of black Protestants see it as “a symbol of racism” (Cooper, 2015). White evangelicals also believe more than any other group “enough has been done to compensate for past racial discrimination” at 63% (Cooper, 2015). These results all came from the Public Religion Research Institute, but similar results were also found from studies done by Barna Group. They found 13% of evangelicals said, “racism is mostly a problem of past”. This is almost double the total population but is very similar to the percentage of conservatives who believed the same (Barna, 2016). They also found that only 56% believed people of color are disadvantaged while 67% of Americans believe this and 28% strongly disagreed with the idea (Barna, 2016). Evangelicals are less likely to support Black Lives Matter than the average American and were the group most likely to use the phrase “all lives matter”. Evangelicals are also more likely to believe in “reverse discrimination”, discrimination against whites because of

their race (Barna, 2016). This data indicates that evangelicals are a group that is likely to have a problem with race today and have tensions with the Black Lives Matter movement. White evangelicals' ambivalence toward racism and belief in their ownership of the United States as a white Christian nation was a central component of two major issues that revolved around race and religion in the 2016 election.

Fear of Islam

While many evangelical issues in 2016 were based on them losing ground on issues they already had and their decline, the changing demographics of America also brought two new threats. These threats were the rise of Islam and illegal immigration which both clashed with white evangelical's white Christian nationalist tendencies and their anxiety surrounding becoming a racial or religious minority. Over the past 50 years, the number of Muslims in the U.S. has increased significantly (Kettani, 2010). While white Christians are an aging group, 42% of Muslims in the United States are under the age of 30 (Jones, 2017). Although Muslims account for only roughly 1% of Americans, the number of Muslims in North America is projected to reach 388 million by 2020, more than double the number in 1950 (Jones, 2017; Kettani, 2010). This increase, in combination with their own decline and negative feelings toward Muslims, has made the rise of Islam a serious concern for white evangelicals.

Part of evangelicals' distrust of Islam came from its association with the 9/11 terrorist attacks and other terrorist activity in the U.S. (Bhatia, 2016, pp. 27-36). Many Christians viewed these attacks as part of a larger conflict between Christians and Muslims because of their view of the U.S. as a Christian nation (Bhatia, 2016, pp. 27-36). White evangelical leaders also openly displayed animosity toward Muslims; "Franklin Graham commenting that the God of Islam is "a

different God” and that Islam is “a very evil and wicked religion” (Cox, 2001). Additionally, Falwell who is still highly influential among white evangelicals is quoted saying “Muhammad was a ‘demon-possessed pedophile’ and that Islam teaches the destruction of all non-Muslims” (Falwell, 2002). This is a common trend among influential evangelicals. Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Jerry Vines, Jimmy Swaggart, Franklin Graham, Pastor Terry Jones, and Miroslav Volf, part of the evangelical faculty at Yale, have all made comments referring to Islam as a violent and dangerous religion (Bhatia, 2016, pp. 27-36; Harris, 2016). Many evangelicals do not inherently hate Muslims and do value religious pluralism; however, they also fear Muslims, and this often prevents a mutual understanding from forming (Bhatia, 2016, pp. 27-36). “White evangelicals express more concerns about U.S. Muslims than any other religious group” (Shellnutt, 2017). Two-thirds believe “Islam is not part of mainstream American society and contend that it encourages violence more than other faiths” (Shellnutt, 2017). White evangelicals’ value of religious pluralism appears to be present when evangelicals feel secure in their position. One of the major fears white evangelicals display in regard to Islam is the fear that Muslims will attempt to take over Christian Nations through forceful conversion (Bhatia, 2016, pp. 30-36). Here it can be seen once again that white evangelical fears stem from the prospective loss of the United States as a White Christian Nation.

Donald Trump was the ideal candidate to alleviate the fears of white evangelicals about Islam in the United States. During the lead up to the 2016 election, the Trump campaign released a statement stating, “Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on” (Johnson, 2017). This policy came to be known as Trump’s Muslim ban. White evangelicals were supportive of this action. Following the election, 76% supported “a policy to stop refugees

and to prevent people from seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the U.S.” (Smith 2017). Additionally, Trump’s rhetoric during the campaign connected with evangelical fears about Islamic extremism.

Immigration

White evangelicals’ racial anxiety also manifested in another way, fear of immigrants. Immigration was a major issue during the campaign. Both Donald Trump and Ted Cruz made it a central point of their campaign (Prignano, 2016; Sargent, 2015). As previously discussed, Donald Trump’s Muslim ban would have prevented legal immigration from seven Muslim majority countries (Prignano, 2016; Gladstone, 2018). White evangelicals overwhelmingly supported this (Smith, 2017). Both Trump and Cruz were harsh towards immigrants during the campaign and popular with white evangelicals (Prignano, 2016; Sargent, 2015). The root of white evangelical fear of immigration stems from their conception of America as a white Christian nation (Gorski, 2017b, pp. 338-349). This nationalism is one of the central reasons that evangelicals don’t like immigrants.

Immigrants both Muslim and Latino present a threat to the United States’ identity as a white Christian nation. Like Muslims, Latinos are a growing group in the United States (Flores, 2017). The number of Hispanics in the United States has increased significantly. “Twenty-five years ago, nearly nine in ten (87%) Catholics were white, non-Hispanic, compared to 55% today. Fewer than four in ten (36%) Catholics under the age of 30 are white, non-Hispanic; 52% are Hispanic” (Jones, 2017). This information also indicates that like Muslims Hispanic Catholics are a growing young population in the United States while white evangelicals are an aging population (Jones, 2017). Aside from Catholics, the overall Hispanic population in the United

States has increased by around 500% since 1970, jumping from 9.6 million to 57.7 million in 2016 (Flores, 2017). This growth makes immigration, especially illegal immigration, from Central and South American an issue that it was not previously.

White evangelicals are suspicious of people coming into the country including refugees. While evangelical leaders like Franklin Graham have criticized Trump's family separation policy, Trump has not lost the support of his white evangelical base (Stroop, 2018). White evangelicals' true feelings about immigration were not as visible during the election other than their support for candidates with harsh immigration policy proposals. However, following the election, their support for Trump's policies show that Trump's version of immigration reform was what many of them wanted. A poll conducted by The Washington Post and ABC News found that 75% of white evangelicals believed that "the federal crackdown on undocumented immigrants" was a positive thing compared to 46% of Americans (Burton, 2018).

Additionally, while evangelicals may not completely agree with some of Trump's harsher measures, they are not necessarily sympathetic to refugees; 68% of white evangelicals agreed that "America has no responsibility to house refugees" (Burton, 2018). White evangelicals also continue to support one of Donald Trump's key campaign promises, the U.S. Mexican border wall. A survey done in 2019 found "nearly three-quarters of white evangelicals expressed support for substantially expanding the wall along the U.S. border with Mexico" (Schwadel & Smith, 2019).

White evangelicals were concerned about issues involving demographic change during the election. They opposed large scale immigration because it would change the U.S. from being a primarily white and Christian nation. With Muslims, there is a clear pattern of fear from white evangelicals and their leaders. For those immigrating from Central and South America the same

level of fear is not present, however white evangelical support for restrictions on immigration show it was a major concern. During the election, many of evangelicals' concerns arose in reaction to new religious and ethnic circumstances. These concerns aligned with Donald Trump's platform as shown by the post-election support of white evangelicals for Trump's policies. While Trump may not have been an ideal religious choice for evangelicals, his policies were ideal to combat white evangelicals' new fears that arose due to their demographic decline. White evangelicals favored Ronald Reagan because his campaign issues aligned with their reactionary concerns at the time; this appears to be the case for Donald Trump as well.

Hillary Clinton

One thing which white evangelicals did not want during the 2016 election was for Hillary Clinton to win the presidency. Clinton opposed white evangelicals on their core issues, and white evangelicals' antagonistic relationship with feminism made her even more undesirable to them. Most of the support given to Trump by white evangelicals did not occur until after he became the Republican nominee, at that point support for Trump was also opposition to Hillary Clinton. Evangelicals concern over Clinton is supported by other research which suggests white evangelicals may view Trump as representative of a new Christian masculinity which stands in direct contrast with Hillary Clinton who represents a dangerous feminine political force (Adams, 2018, pp. 80-99). This research shows how this opposition to Clinton is connected to a deeper concern about the feminization of America.

Morality

Research also suggests that during the 2016 election some of the previous concerns of the white evangelical voting bloc had changed. While white evangelicals have demonstrated certain patterns of voting in the past centering around the use of religious rhetoric by candidates, there is evidence that suggests that evangelicals behaved differently in the 2016 election. Discourse around the development of the evangelicals in the Christian Right indicates that white evangelicals have changed significantly since their inception in 1980 and that now the group no longer behaves the way it has historically in terms of personal morality (Rozell, 2018, pp. 8-10). The Public Religion Research Institute found many evangelicals have changed their position on the importance of morals and religiosity of candidates (Jones, 2016). The survey found that in 2011 only 30% of white evangelicals believed someone who acted immorally in their personal life could act morally in their professional life (Jones, 2016). In 2016 this number increased to 72% indicating white evangelicals were more comfortable with the idea that an immoral politician could behave ethically while in office (Jones, 2016). It also found that the percentage of white evangelicals surveyed that said strong religious beliefs were “very important” for a presidential candidate went down from 64% in 2011 to 49% in 2015 (Jones, 2016). This decline indicates a change in evangelical values towards presidential candidates before the 2016 election. This research suggests that the personal morality of candidates is no longer a major issue for white evangelicals, which means that Trump’s immoral behavior did not count against him in the election.

A threatened Christian future

White evangelicals' core issues in politics have always centered around fighting against the corruption of American morality caused by progressive change. The majority of the new concerns for white evangelicals in the 2016 election centered around race. White evangelicals' strained relationship with other races, specifically their white nationalism in combination with their declining numbers has made them fear for America's future as a white Christian nation. America's status as a Christian nation is very important to evangelicals' relationship with politics. "According to Straughn and Feld (2010), the claim that America is a Christian nation can also serve as a means for many Christians to align their religious and national identities—namely, by implying that Christians are more truly American than other religious groups" (Braunstein & Taylor, 2017, p. 39). Since this view is so central to their identity threats to it are a large concern for white evangelicals. As Christian values decline within the general culture of the United States, white evangelicals become more fervent in their beliefs, and their solidarity strengthens (Braunstein & Taylor, 2017, pp. 39-40).

Anxiety surrounding identity decline was a major issue among white Republican voters during the 2016 election. Many tea party voters overlap significantly with white evangelicals (Braunstein & Taylor, 2017, pp. 33-56). One said "I feel like my country is being stolen by people who have come here illegally" (Tesler & Sides, 2018, p. 84). Overall white Republican voters had a more negative view of other racial groups than the Republican leadership and felt that their position was threatened by these other groups (Tesler & Sides, 2018, pp. 80-87). They felt as though the future of their white identity was in jeopardy. As white nationalist Richard Spencer put it, "an unconscious vision that white people have— [is] that their grandchildren might be a hated minority in their own country" (Tesler & Sides, 2018, p. 88). This concern is a

result of whites experiencing hardship in America believing they are suffering because minorities have taken what is rightfully theirs (Tesler & Sides, 2018, pp. 87-90). This fear of replacement is applicable to white evangelicals whose identity is centered around their race as well as their religion. Donald Trump's extreme rhetoric against illegal immigrants and Muslims as well as his apparent apathy toward white supremacists gave him the ability to connect with white voters who feared that their country was moving away from being a white Christian nation which was threatening to their own status (Tesler & Sides, 2018, pp. 87-90).

Due to all the perceived threats to white evangelical identity that were happening in America at the time, it can be inferred that the issue white evangelicals cared about most during the 2016 election was the preservation of their own identity. Research conducted by Andrew Whitehead supports this idea that fear of future decline was a driving force in the 2016 election. Christian nationalism is directly tied to "racialist sentiments, equating cultural purity with racial or ethnic exclusion" (Whitehead, 2018, p. 150). White evangelicals' anxiety over future decline is tied to both Christian nationalism and white nationalism as part of their dual identity. Trump alleviated some of these concerns with rhetoric which firmly supported the idea of the United States as a Christian nation (Whitehead, 2018, pp. 150-153). Whitehead ultimately concludes that Christian nationalists view their Christianity and their American identity as being connected (Whitehead, 2018, p. 165). Christian nationalism was also the best predictor of support for Donald Trump showing that Christian nationalists believed that Trump would protect America's status as a Christian nation (Whitehead, 2018, p. 165).

These traits indicate that in addition to being a reactionary group white evangelicals are also an orthodox group (Martí, 2019, p. 2). According to Sorcha Brophy, "orthodox orientations are defined not only with an eye toward their past but also—and perhaps more importantly—

toward projections regarding their future” (Martí, 2019, p.2). As a result of this perspective white evangelicals were not concerned with finding a candidate that demonstrated their religious values, but instead wanted a candidate capable of protecting those values (Martí, 2019, pp. 2-7). Their recent decline has left the group in a vulnerable position so in the 2016 election any candidate who was defending them would be favorable. According to Gerardo Martí, “Trump generates strong support among white Evangelicals ... because of his willingness to enforce their convictions through the apparatus of the State” (Martí, 2019, p. 3). He still represents an orthodox political force, even if he himself is not religious, through his defense of evangelicals (Martí, 2019, pp. 1-7). He is viewed by white evangelicals as being led by God because he has shown he will defend their values thus preserving them a future (Martí, 2019, pp. 1-7; Whitehead, 2018, pp.150-153).

Overall the majority of evangelical concerns appear to be rooted in fear of an uncertain future for their identity group. Increasing diversity threatens America’s status as a Christian nation which in turn threatens the position of white evangelicals. This threatened future was their top priority during the 2016 election. Donald Trump was able to effectively capitalize on this anxiety through reaffirming the idea that the United States was and would continue to be a white Christian nation during his presidency. This strategy earned him large levels of support from white evangelicals whose focus was on preventing further decline within their group.

Summary of Existing Analysis

Opinions during the 2016 election

As a major religious group within the United States, many surveys have collected and analyzed data regarding white evangelicals. This research indicates specific trends among white

evangelicals and highlights several important changes within the group. One of the most important changes among white evangelicals was on their views on personal immorality. White evangelical attitudes toward candidates were different during the 2016 election than they had been in the past. The PRRI/Brookings October 2016 Survey results indicate white evangelical feeling during the election cycle. At the time of the survey, 69% of white evangelical Protestants supported Donald Trump while only 15% supported Hillary Clinton (Jones, 2016). These results are unsurprising since Trump was the Republican nominee and white evangelicals were hostile toward Clinton. However, there was another factor that contributed to Trump's popularity. As was discussed previously in the past white evangelicals responded negatively to candidates who did not share their personal moral and religious values. They responded positively when candidates used strong religious rhetoric. Donald Trump behaved extremely immorally, according to white evangelical standards and did not effectively use religious rhetoric during his campaign. Despite his policies, this lack of religious campaigning would have hurt him in the past. However, white evangelical opinions about the personal values of a candidate have changed. The PRRI/Brookings October 2016 Survey revealed that white evangelicals have changed their opinions on the necessity of morality for a candidate to be effective.

White Evangelicals Grow More Accepting of Politicians' Personal Indiscretions



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

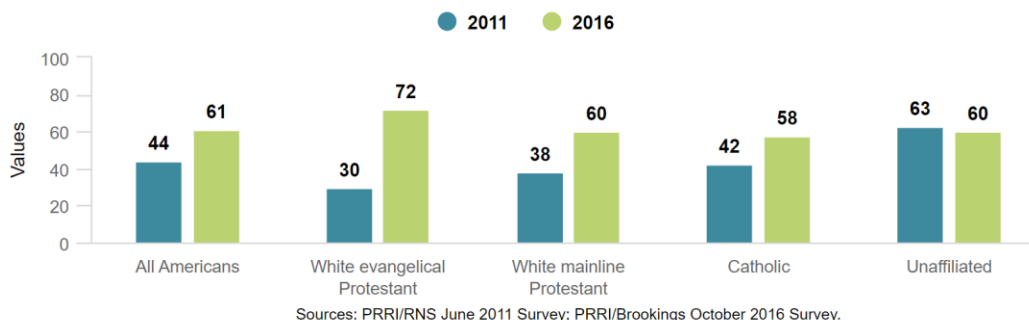


Figure 1. Concern with official's personal morality by religion and year. From Jones, (2016).

The percentage of white evangelical Protestants that believe “an elected official can behave ethically even if they have committed transgressions in their personal life” has risen sharply from 30% in 2011 to 72% in 2016; the largest increase of any group (see figure 1). White evangelicals went from the group least likely to hold this belief to the most likely (see figure 1). This change among white evangelicals means that things such as the Access Hollywood Tape and past affairs were no longer major obstacles to white evangelical support. In the same vein as this change white evangelicals have also changed their attitudes about how important it is for a candidate to have strong religious beliefs.

White Evangelicals Less Likely to Say Strong Religious Beliefs Very Important for Presidential Candidate

Thinking about your vote for president, how important is it for a candidate to have strong religious beliefs?

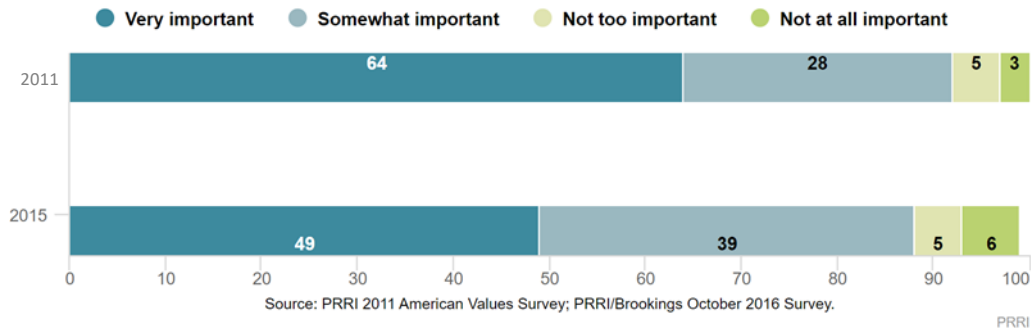


Figure 2. Importance of president’s religious beliefs to white evangelicals by year. From Jones, (2016).

In 2011 64% believed it was “very important” while in 2015 only 49% reported it as being “very important” (see figure 2). This change means that Donald Trump’s failure to integrate religious rhetoric into his campaign was less likely to count against him among white evangelical voters. The decrease in both these figures indicates a growing flexibility on the part of white evangelical voters toward the moral standards they hold elected officials to. This shift meant that Trump was not at as much of a disadvantage as he would have been running in the past. White evangelicals would not be dissuaded from voting for him despite the constant criticism of his character in the media. This change also meant his policy choices would carry more weight among white evangelical voters since his personal character was less concerning to them. This shift can partially explain why evangelical voters were willing to accept Donald Trump as a candidate despite his moral values diverging from their own.

Evangelical context for the 2016 election

In addition to changes in opinion among white evangelicals, the group was also experiencing demographic changes leading up to the 2016 election. As has been discussed white evangelicals are a reactionary group whose primary concerns have centered around the decline of the United States as a white Christian nation. This is relevant to the 2016 election because white evangelicals were experiencing demographic shifts that may have contributed to their concerns about racial issues going into the election. White evangelicals are a group in decline.

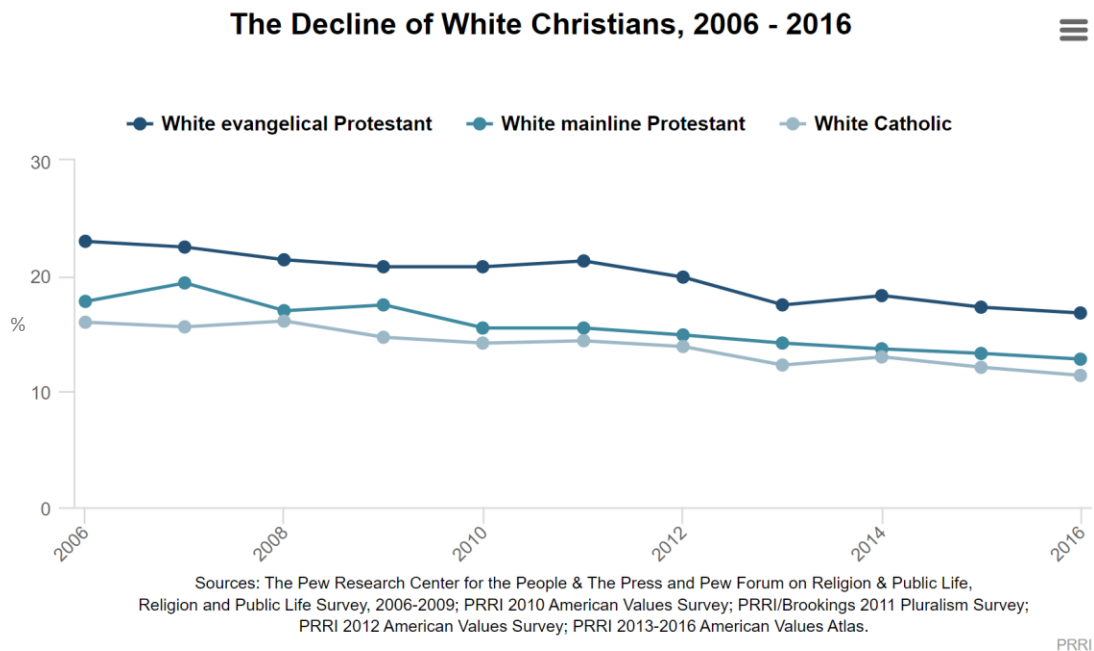


Figure 3. Religious population percentage by year. From Jones, (2017).

Both white Christians and white evangelicals are currently experiencing a demographic decline. The total percentage of Americans that identified as white Christians has dropped from 81% in 1976 to 43% in 2016 (Jones, 2017). White evangelicals have begun experiencing decline more recently falling from 23% in 2006 to 17% in 2016 (see figure 3). Jones writes that evangelicals missed the first wave of Christian decline but have not avoided the current trend of decline

(Jones, 2017). If this trend of decline continues white evangelicals' political influence will be reduced over time as their voting bloc becomes smaller and less sought after by Republicans. One cause of the decline is that white evangelicals are an aging population. There are fewer young white evangelicals today than in previous decades.

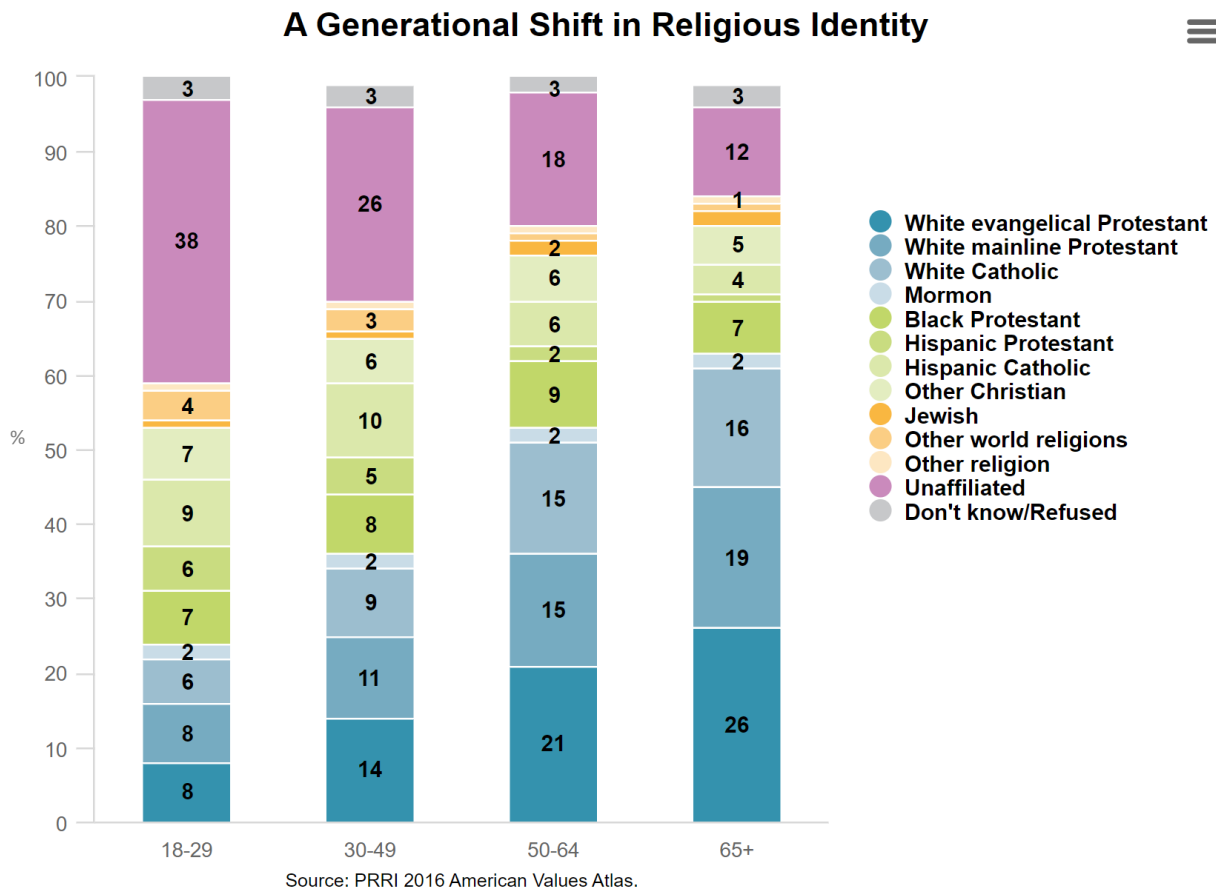


Figure 4. Religious identity by age cohort. From Jones, (2017).

In 2016 only 8% of people in the age bracket of 18-29 identified as white evangelical Protestants, this number was 14% for 30-49, 21% for 50-64, and 26% for 65+ (see figure 4). This data shows that white evangelicals are becoming a group that is primarily made up of older generations (see figure 4). The 18-29 age bracket also was more likely to be unaffiliated than any other at 38% (see figure 4). This information indicates that not only are younger generations less likely to be evangelical they are also less likely to have any type of Christian affiliation. These

changes directly feed into white evangelical fears that America’s morality is declining. They associate morality with their Christian values, so a decline of Christians in the U.S. is a direct threat to their goals of preserving American morality.

Along with this generational change, there is also another generational shift regarding the racial makeup of American evangelicals. In 2016 evangelicals made up 26% of all Americans, but white evangelicals only make up 17% of all Americans (Jones, 2017). This percentage is also on the decline. “Only half (50%) of evangelical Protestants under the age of 30 are white, compared to more than three-quarters (77%) of evangelical Protestant seniors (age 65 or older)” (Jones, 2017). The data shows that the racial make-up of evangelicals as a group is shifting. As older white evangelicals die evangelicals of color will replace them diminishing the power that whites hold within the evangelical group.

The American Religious Landscape in 2016

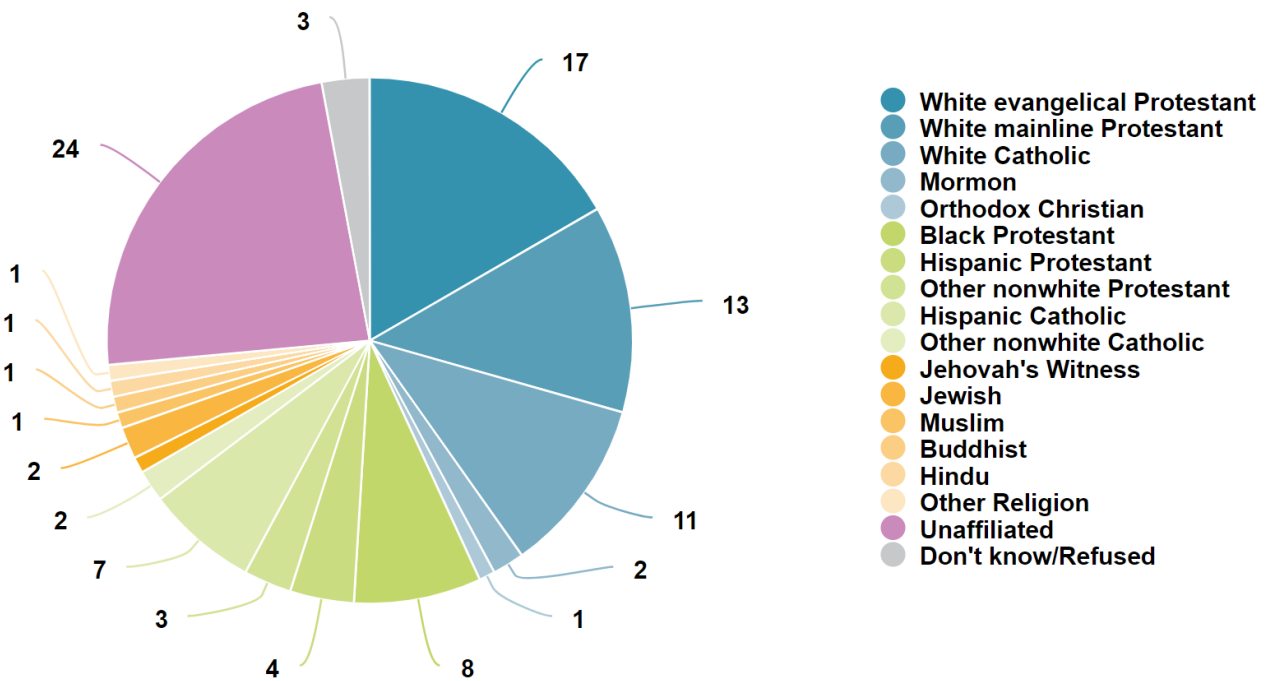


Figure 5. Religious identity breakdown for 2016. From Jones, (2017).

Additionally, this means that the political power white evangelicals hold will be reduced as the group decreases in size compared to other groups including evangelicals of color. This change is important because as has been discussed white evangelicals' racial identity is just as important in their political engagement as their religion. Evangelicals of color are politically and culturally distinct from white evangelicals. It is unlikely that evangelicals of color would carry on the political traditions of white evangelicals.

The political differences between non-white and white evangelicals were present in data from 2016. In a 2016 study, it was found that when asked who they would vote for in the 2016 election that 62% of "African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian-Americans with evangelical beliefs" favored Hillary Clinton while 65% of white Americans with evangelical beliefs said they would vote for Donald Trump (see figure 6). This indicates that evangelicals as a whole are not a unified bloc. Out of Americans who hold evangelical beliefs 45% said they would vote for Trump while 31% said they would vote for Clinton. White evangelicals are still the most influential evangelicals because they are the currently still the largest racial group among evangelicals. However, due to the changing racial demographics, it seems that the influence of white evangelicals will decrease over time. These demographic changes also mean that evangelicals as a whole will likely become a less conservative group as it is white evangelicals that tend to favor Republican candidates. As was discussed earlier one of white evangelicals' top priorities is the preservation of their own group. The current demographic trends put this goal in jeopardy and leave white evangelicals in a vulnerable position. While the demographic trends in themselves do not explain evangelical support for Trump in combination with their white Christian Nationalism and their anxiety about group decline it may indicate why

white evangelicals were so enthusiastic to embrace a candidate who aligned himself with white America.

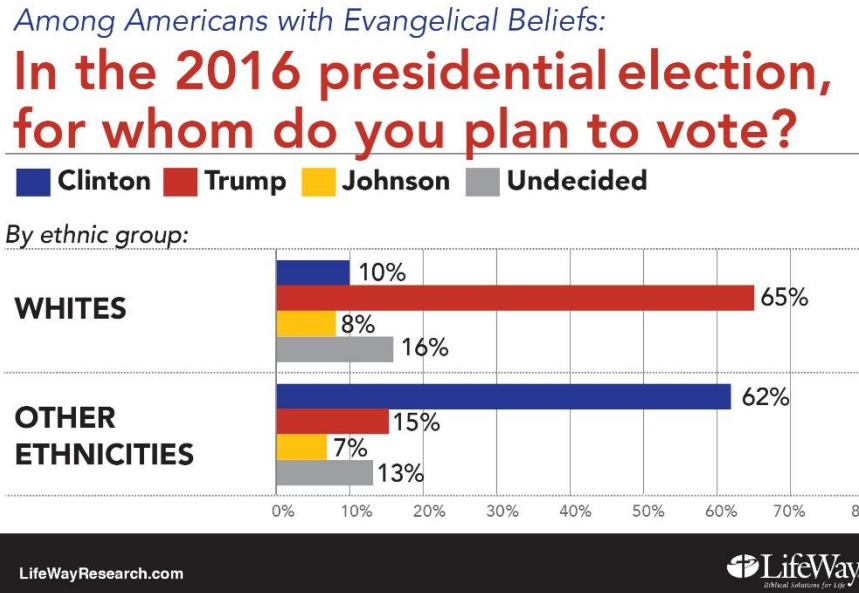


Figure 6. Evangelical support for candidates by ethnicities. From Smietana, (2016).

White Evangelicals Political Alignment

As well as demonstrating changes recent data also shows some consistent trends among white evangelicals. Unsurprisingly the data supports that there is a continuing relationship between white evangelicals and the Republican Party. The relationship is still strong in 2016 with 49% of white evangelicals identifying as Republicans; 31% are independent, and only 14% identify as Democrats (see figure 7). Even though only 49% of white evangelicals identify as Republican, 62% identify as “politically conservative” (Jones, 2017). A higher percentage of white evangelicals are Republican than any other religious group (see figure 7). Even as the group declines white evangelicals become less liberal with white evangelical Democrats declining from 17% in 2006 to 8% today (Jones, 2017).

Party Affiliation by Religious Affiliation

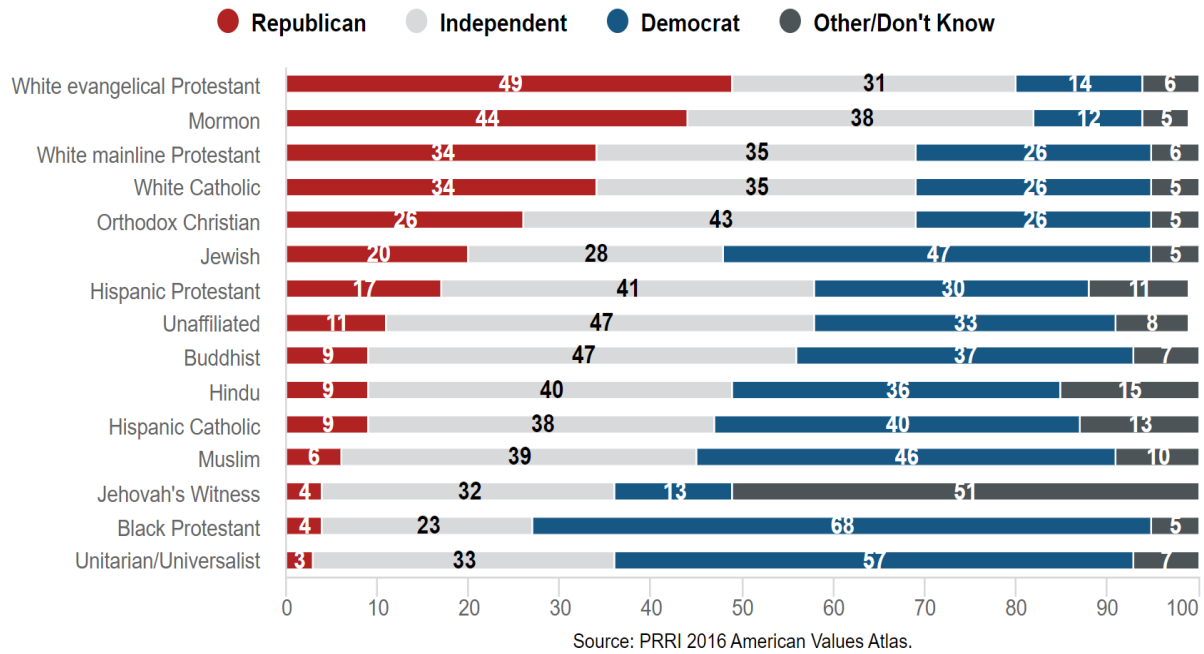


Figure 7. Political party by religious identity. From Jones, (2017).

The continuing link between the two groups is evident in all presidential elections from 2004 to 2016. Due to their political conservatism white evangelicals typically vote for Republican presidential candidates. During the previous three elections, a large majority of white evangelicals voted for the Republican candidate. In 2004 78% of white evangelicals voted for Bush, in 2008 74% voted for McCain, and in 2012 78% voted for Romney (see table 1). The data also indicates that the relationship was actually stronger during the 2016 election than it had been previously. White evangelicals showed more support for Trump than any of the previous three Republican candidates; 81% of white evangelicals surveyed by the PEW Research Institute voted for Donald Trump (see table 1). This shows that Donald Trump received more white evangelical support than any recent Republican candidate.

Presidential vote by religious affiliation and race

	2000		2004		2008		2012		2016		Dem change '12-'16
	Gore %	Bush %	Kerry %	Bush %	Obama %	McCain %	Obama %	Romney %	Clinton %	Trump %	
Protestant/other Christian	42	56	40	59	45	54	42	57	39	58	-3
Catholic	50	47	47	52	54	45	50	48	45	52	-5
White Catholic	45	52	43	56	47	52	40	59	37	60	-3
Hispanic Catholic	65	33	65	33	72	26	75	21	67	26	-8
Jewish	79	19	74	25	78	21	69	30	71	24	+2
Other faiths	62	28	74	23	73	22	74	23	62	29	-12
Religiously unaffiliated	61	30	67	31	75	23	70	26	68	26	-2
White, born-again/evangelical Christian	n/a	n/a	21	78	24	74	21	78	16	81	-5
Mormon	n/a	n/a	19	80	n/a	n/a	21	78	25	61	+4

Note: "Protestant" refers to people who described themselves as "Protestant," "Mormon" or "other Christian" in exit polls; this categorization most closely approximates the exit poll data reported immediately after the election by media sources. The "white, born-again/evangelical Christian" row includes both Protestants and non-Protestants (e.g., Catholics, Mormons, etc.) who self-identify as born-again or evangelical Christians.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of exit poll data. 2004 Hispanic Catholic estimates come from aggregated state exit polls conducted by the National Election Pool. Other estimates come from Voter News Service/National Election Pool national exit polls. 2012 data come from reports at NBCnews.com and National Public Radio. 2016 data come from reports at NBCnews.com and CNN.com.

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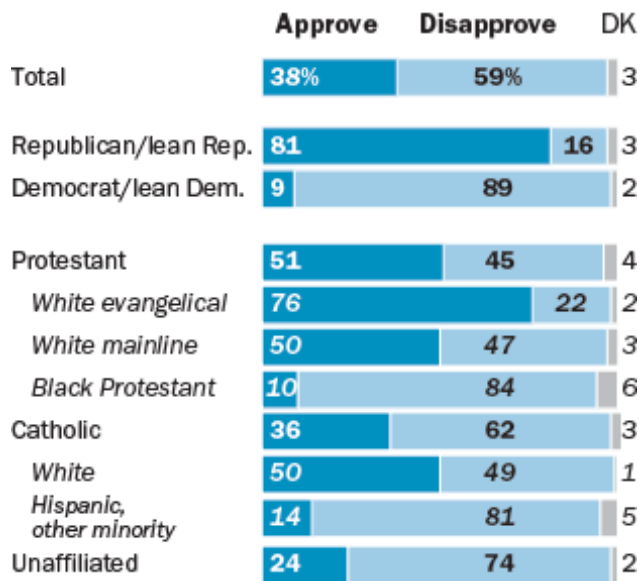
Table 1. Presidential election results by religious affiliation. From Smith, (2016).

Support for Anti-Muslim Policies

Another important thing that previous research provides is further evidence that Donald Trump’s Islamophobic policies are one reason that white evangelicals support him. Data from the Pew Research Center found 76% of white evangelicals surveyed approve “of a policy to stop refugees and to prevent people from seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the U.S.” (see figure 8). This is the highest amount of support among any non-political demographic group (see figure 8). This data shows that Trump’s anti-Muslim policies are successfully addressing white evangelicals support about extremist Islam. Support for his policies as president shows that Trump has been able to give white evangelicals what they want which backs up the idea that fear of Muslims was a major factor in their 2016 vote.

Most white evangelicals approve of Trump's refugee policy, most religious 'nones' disapprove

% who ___ of policy to stop refugees and to prevent people from seven majority-Muslim countries from entering U.S.



Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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Figure 8. Support for the Muslim ban by identity. From Smith, (2017).

In addition to supporting the Travel Ban other research also supports white evangelicals' continued fear of Islam. It was found that 75% of white evangelicals were "very concerned" about extremism in the name of Islam around the world", and 69% were "very concerned" about extremism in the name of Islam in the U.S." (see table 2). Additionally, 51% of white evangelicals said, "there is 'great deal' or 'fair amount' of support for extremism among U.S. Muslims" (see table 3). Smith comments that "This is a minority viewpoint in every other major religious group" (Smith, 2017). This data suggests that white evangelicals did not just support

Trump in opposition to Clinton. Their support for him did not wither following the election because he has effectively addressed their concerns while in office. Alternatively, it can represent a continuation of evangelical concerns about Islamic extremism exhibited during the election. The data suggests that evangelicals feel that Trump is effectively defending the U.S. from the “Islamic extremism” they are concerned about.

Most white evangelicals ‘very concerned’ about extremism in name of Islam around world, in U.S.

	<i>How concerned are you about extremism in the name of Islam <u>around the WORLD</u> these days?</i>			<i>How concerned are you about extremism in the name of Islam <u>in the U.S.</u>?</i>		
	Very %	Somewhat %	NET very/somewhat concerned %	Very %	Somewhat %	NET very/somewhat concerned %
Total	49	33	=83	43	27	=70
Protestant	59	25	=84	54	26	=80
<i>White evangelical</i>	75	18	=92	69	20	=89
<i>White mainline</i>	59	29	=89	48	29	=77
<i>Black Protestant</i>	42	27	=69	41	29	=70
Catholic	50	34	=84	44	31	=74
<i>White</i>	52	33	=85	46	29	=75
<i>Hispanic & other minority</i>	48	35	=83	40	33	=73
Unaffiliated	32	46	=78	27	26	=53

Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. “Not too concerned,” “not at all concerned” and “don’t know” responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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Table 2. Concern over Islamic extremism by identity. From Smith, (2017).

Half of white evangelicals say there is ‘great deal’ or ‘fair amount’ of support for extremism among U.S. Muslims

% who say there is _____ support for extremism among Muslims living in the U.S.

	NET great deal / fair amount	Great deal	Fair Amount	NET not much / none at all	Don't know / refused
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	35	11	24	54	10=100
Protestant	43	13	30	43	13
White evangelical	51	16	35	34	15
White mainline	40	6	34	51	9
Black Protestant	32	12	20	51	17
Catholic	33	9	24	56	11
White	37	7	29	54	10
Hispanic/other minority	28	11	17	60	12
Unaffiliated	27	9	18	66	7

Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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Table 3. Belief in U.S. Muslims support of extremism by identity. From Smith, (2017).

Evangelical support for Trump in the post-election period

As the Republican candidate, it made sense that white evangelicals would support Donald Trump during the election. However, as has been shown white evangelical support was not limited to the Republican candidacy. In addition to supporting Trump’s policies, white evangelicals have also seen Donald Trump as more favorable than all Americans (see figure 9). During the primaries, Trump’s favorability was under 50% but then increased to 61% following his nomination (see figure 9). His favorability went up even further following the election to 74% in February 2017 (see figure 9). Following this, support for him among white evangelicals has fluctuated but has never dropped below 65% (see figure 9). In March 2018 it was at its

highest point within the data range at 75% (see figure 9). Additionally, the gap between what all Americans think of Donald Trump and white evangelicals has widened with all Americans viewing Trump as less favorable. In October 2015 white evangelicals were 18% more likely to find Trump favorable while in March 2018 they were 33% more likely (see figure 9). These results indicate that white evangelicals support for Trump has grown since the election and their level of support separates them from the general populace. This growth in support shows that white evangelicals did not just vote for Trump as the Republican nominee or in opposition to Hillary Clinton since he has continued, to be favorable among a majority of them over a year into his presidency. Since support for him has continued, it can be inferred that his policies were the biggest factor in white evangelical support as his goals have not changed since taking office and white evangelical support has remained high.

Favorability of Donald Trump Among White Evangelical Protestants, 2015-2018

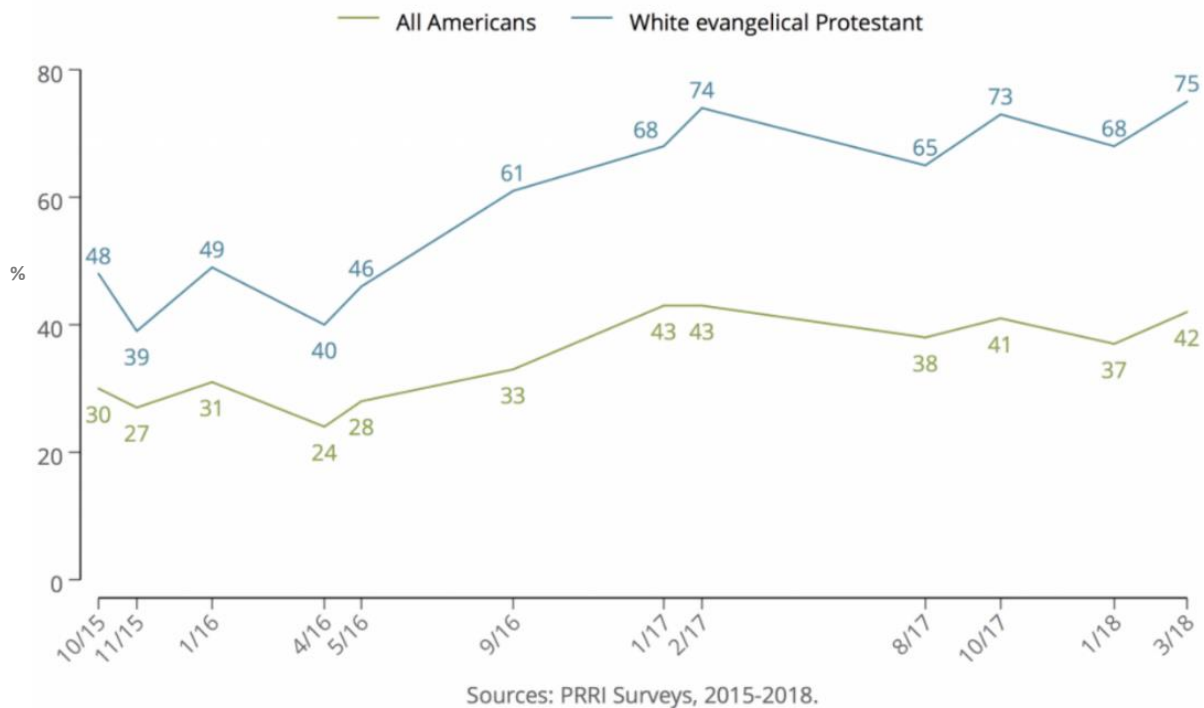


Figure 9. White evangelical support for Trump over time. From Jones, (2018).

Methodology

The previous research indicates that Donald Trump did not possess the religious rhetoric or characteristic usually used to court white evangelicals. It is expected that the data will show that white evangelicals' support for Trump is due to his key positions aligning with issues that have been either historically important or have recently become important to white evangelicals. The topics which white evangelicals should be most likely to have strong opinions on include, gay marriage, religious freedom, abortion, immigration, Islamic extremism, and the declining status of the United States as a white Christian nation. Some questions that require further research include understanding the full overlap between white nationalists and white evangelicals. Previous research indicates that these groups support Donald Trump for similar reasons; however, the full extent of their support for the new 2018 Republican House of Representatives has not been fully established (Gorski, 2017b, pp. 338-349). Another topic that would require further research was to what extent the relationship with Donald Trump has served to further radicalize an already reactionary group? Little data is out for 2018 and 2019, so it is not yet possible to fully analyze if Donald Trump's presidency has made white evangelicals significantly more hostile towards groups they oppose or if they retain the same feeling they did during the 2016 election. Finally, more research should be conducted on the growth of the Christian Right and whether Trump's election caused growth or decline within the movement. Additionally, it should be examined if the Christian Right's leaders have changed in any way in order to accommodate Trump's unorthodox politics in order to gain further influence as any changes may suggest a changing dynamic in the relationship between sitting presidents and white evangelical leaders.

Data sources and analysis

For the data section of this paper recent data from both the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), and the Pew Research Center was used (see APPENDIX A). “All PRRI public opinion research is based on probability sampling to ensure that results are broadly representative of the population of interest” (PRRI About). The Pew Research Center conducts surveys through “random digit sample of both landline and cellphone numbers in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia” (Pew Research Center, Our survey).

All data sets were filtered by selecting cases in the SPSS data sets. It was filtered to only include participants that identified as white, a Protestant, and “would describe [themselves] as a 'born-again' or evangelical Christian”. Questions relevant to white evangelicals’ political beliefs were examined. Questions were selected based on historical research which indicated evangelical values and issues that were major concerns during the 2016 election, specifically regarding Donald Trump.

For each relevant question, the number of responses for each answer was counted using the Countif formula in Excel for both the white evangelical group and the data from the total survey. The numbers were converted into percentages excluding participants who did not know or refused to answer the questions. The percentages based on the white evangelical data sets were examined to see how a majority or large percentage of white evangelicals answered in order to identify white evangelical values. Additionally, the white evangelical percentages calculated from the survey were compared with the percentages from the total survey in order to determine if there were any differences between white evangelicals and the general population surveyed. The percentages of questions that appeared across multiple years were compared to

establish changes in the attitudes of both white evangelicals and the total population surveyed over time.

Tables, Graphs, and Analysis

Previous research has established the core issues of white evangelicals; however, research often looks at white evangelical leaders who are extremely vocal in politics. As was discussed earlier despite their clear link with the Republican Party white evangelicals may hold a variety of opinions on different issues. Additionally, white evangelicals may have changed their opinions on past issues since this research was conducted. This is entirely plausible considering that white evangelical opinion has in the past shifted greatly on issues such as abortion, contraception, and women's rights. For this reason, it is important to establish, through recent survey data, that white evangelicals' opinions and voting patterns are consistent with previous research and these were indeed the core issues which influenced their vote during the 2016 election. Data also shows white evangelicals' opinion of Donald Trump. Data on Trump did not exist until 2015; however, earlier data can show what issues white evangelicals agreed with Trump on.

Continuing views on immigration

One of the primary concerns for white evangelicals during the 2016 election was immigration. This has been a consistent concern for white evangelicals since 2010. The percentage of white evangelicals who viewed immigrants as either a burden or a threat to

American values has remained above 50%, and changes have been within 5 percentage points (see figure 10). The general population has also remained relatively consistent across the three surveys (see figure 10). White evangelicals were consistently more likely than the total population to view immigrants negatively (see figure 10). The greatest difference between the two groups was in 2016 when white evangelicals were 20% more likely to view newcomers to the United States as a threat to American values (see figure 10). These results support the idea that white evangelicals are more concerned with immigration than the general public. The fact that a majority of white evangelicals have viewed immigrants negatively since 2010 shows that this was an ongoing concern for them and that it was a concern going into the 2016 election.

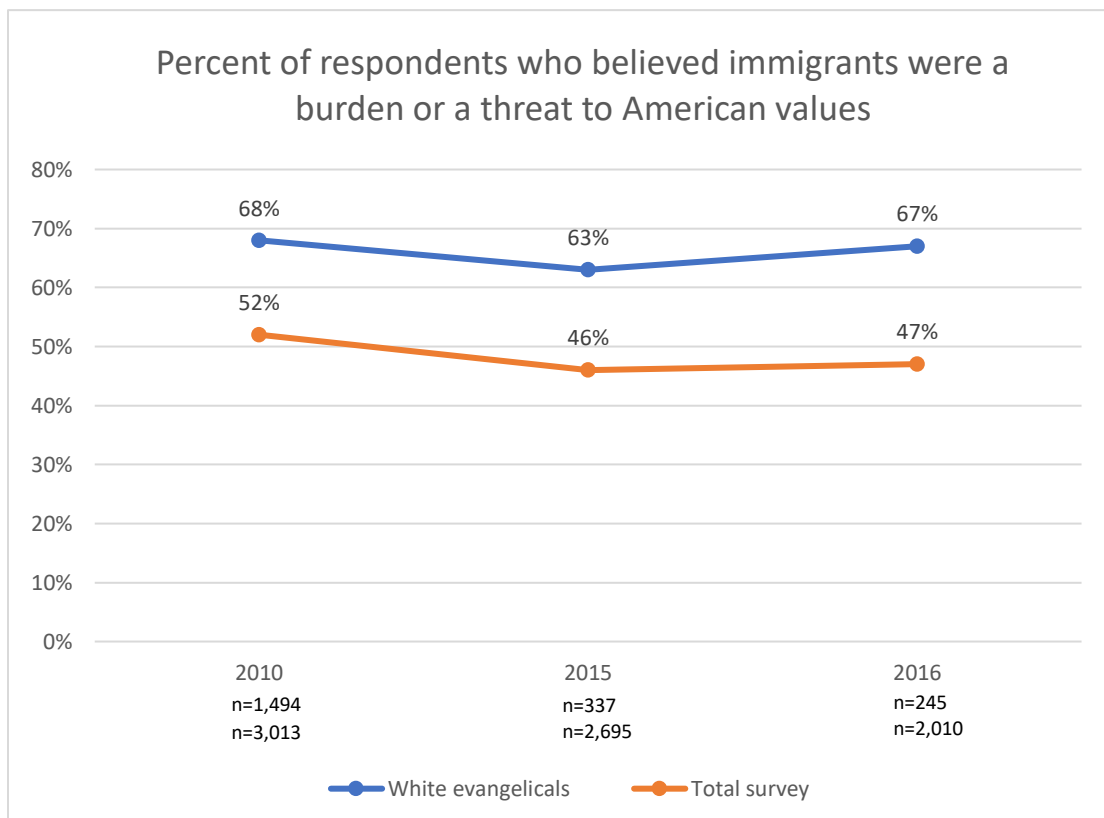


Figure 10. Opinions on immigrants. Created with data from PRRI. (2010; 2015; 2016a).¹

¹ The American values surveys for 2010 and 2016 asked if the statement “Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and health care” was more aligned with the respondent’s values than the positive opposing statement. The 2016 American values survey asked of variation of this question where the negative statement was “The growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American

Concern over immigration is also evident in which issues have been most important in recent elections. When voting in congressional and presidential elections from 2010 to 2014 the most important issue for both white evangelicals and the general population has consistently been the economy (see table 4). It also appears that white evangelicals have similar priorities to the general public on all other issues, with the largest disparity between the groups being only 8% (see table 4). This data also shows that immigration became a more important issue for both groups from 2010 to 2014 (see figure 11). If this trend continued into 2016, then immigration may have been an even more important issue in the 2016 election. Additionally, as the 3rd most important issue for white evangelicals in 2014 it was a substantial priority for white evangelicals two years prior to the 2016 election (see table 4).

Issue that is most important to respondent's vote	2010 White Evangelicals n=1,494	2010 Total Survey n=3,013	2012 White Evangelicals n=299	2012 Total Survey n=3,003	2014 White Evangelicals n=812	2014 Total Survey n=4,507
The economy	40%	48%	62%	61%	35%	39%
The federal budget deficit	13%	10%	2%	3%	14%	15%
Immigration	8%	7%	12%	10%	18%	14%
The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan	9%	9%	14%	19%	21%	22%
Health care	19%	19%	3%	2%	4%	4%
Same-sex marriage and abortion	10%	6%	6%	4%	6%	4%
Other (VOL.)	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%

Table 4. Most important factor for voting. Created with data from PRRI. (2010: 2012a: 2014a).

customs". The two statements are used together in this data since they are both variations of questions which are designed to determine if immigrants are seen as helpful or harmful by the respondents.

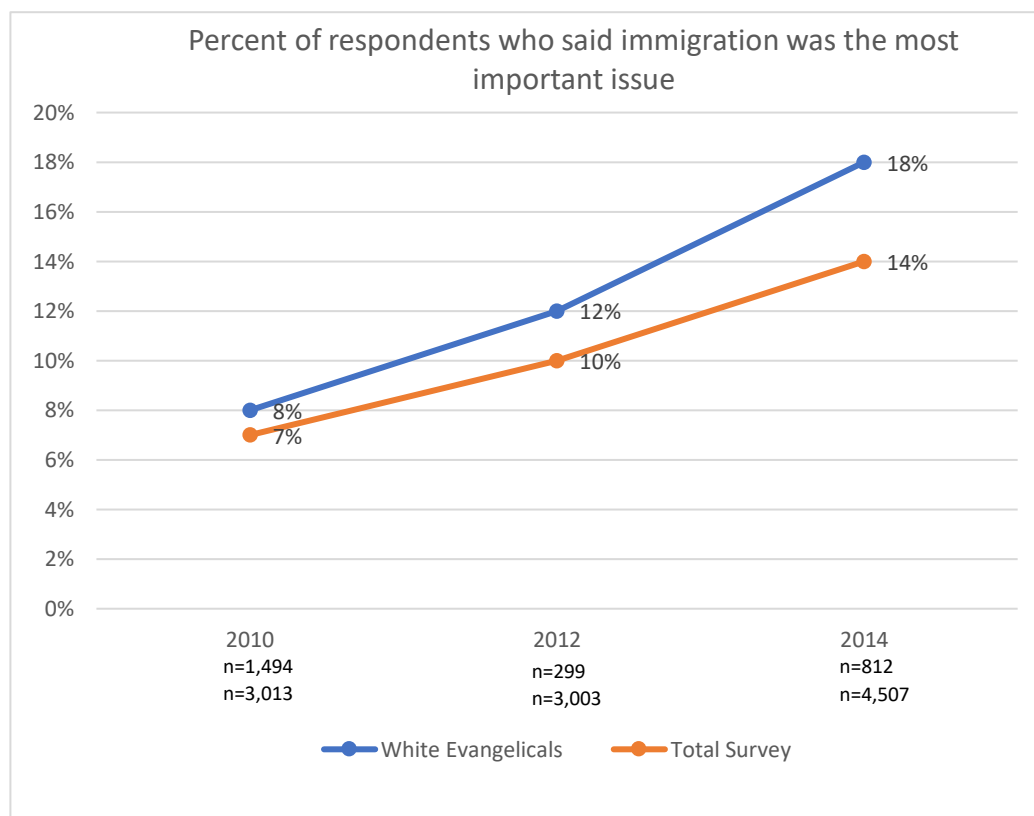


Figure 11. Immigration as the primary concern. Created with data from PRRI. (2010: 2012a: 2014a).

In addition to older data which shows immigration was a continuous concern data collected just prior to the 2016 election shows the level of concern of white evangelicals on specific immigration issues. White evangelicals were more likely to think that issues that involved keeping illegal immigrants out were “very important”; 80% believed that improving border security was “very important”, 22% more likely than the general population, and 51% believed increasing deportation of illegal immigrants was “very important” (see figure 12). This was 21% higher than the total population (see figure 12). They were also 24% more likely than the total population to say it was “very important” to keep illegal immigrants off government benefits at 80% of white evangelicals (see figure 12). Additionally, 69% thought it was “very important” to prevent immigrants from overstaying their visas (see figure 12). On the other hand, white evangelicals appear to be less concerned with a path for illegal immigrants to become legal

citizens. Only 19% of white evangelicals said establishing a way for most immigrants currently in the country illegally to stay here legally was “very important” and 26% said that it was very important to allow illegal immigrant children to stay in the U.S (see figure 12). White evangelicals appear to care more about keeping out and removing illegal immigrants than about creating a path to citizenship. This negative response to illegal immigrants further supports the idea that Trump was able to use immigration to win over white evangelicals. Trump’s rhetoric and policies regarding immigration have been exceptionally harsh. Directly before the 2016 elections white evangelicals prioritized keeping immigrants out and removing them from the country which aligns their interests with Donald Trump on this issue.

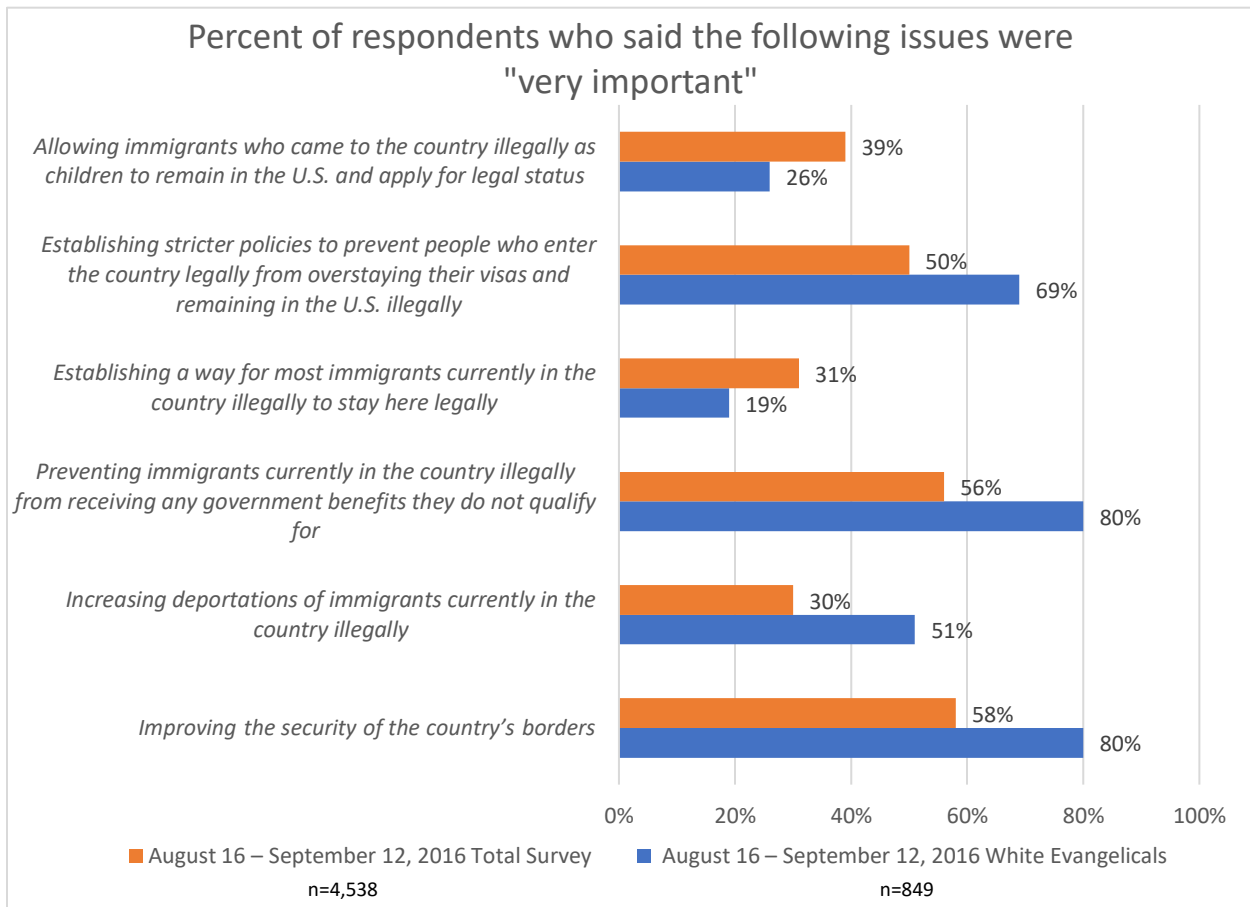


Figure 12. Importance of immigration issues. Created with data from Pew. (2016b).

Continuing views on abortion

A historical concern of white evangelical that has remained important in recent years is abortion. Evangelicals have been consistent on their opinions on abortion from 2010-2016. The majority believe that abortion should be illegal in “most cases” or “all cases” (see figure 13). The general population has also been consistent with the majority believing that abortion should be legal in “most cases” or “all cases” (see figure 13). This data indicates that abortion rights have remained a concern for white evangelicals since the majority believe it should almost always be illegal. Outlawing abortion is still a primary concern for the group. This consistent concern surrounding abortion is relevant to the 2016 election because whoever was elected in 2016 would likely be responsible for choosing several Supreme Court judges. For abortion to be illegal on a federal level, the Supreme Court must overturn the Roe vs. Wade decision. As almost all Republican candidates are pro-life this information does not explain early support for Trump; however, it does contribute to support for him as the nominee since Democrats usually run on a platform that includes pro-choice. Voting for Donald Trump was the best way for white evangelicals to realize their goal of making abortion illegal.

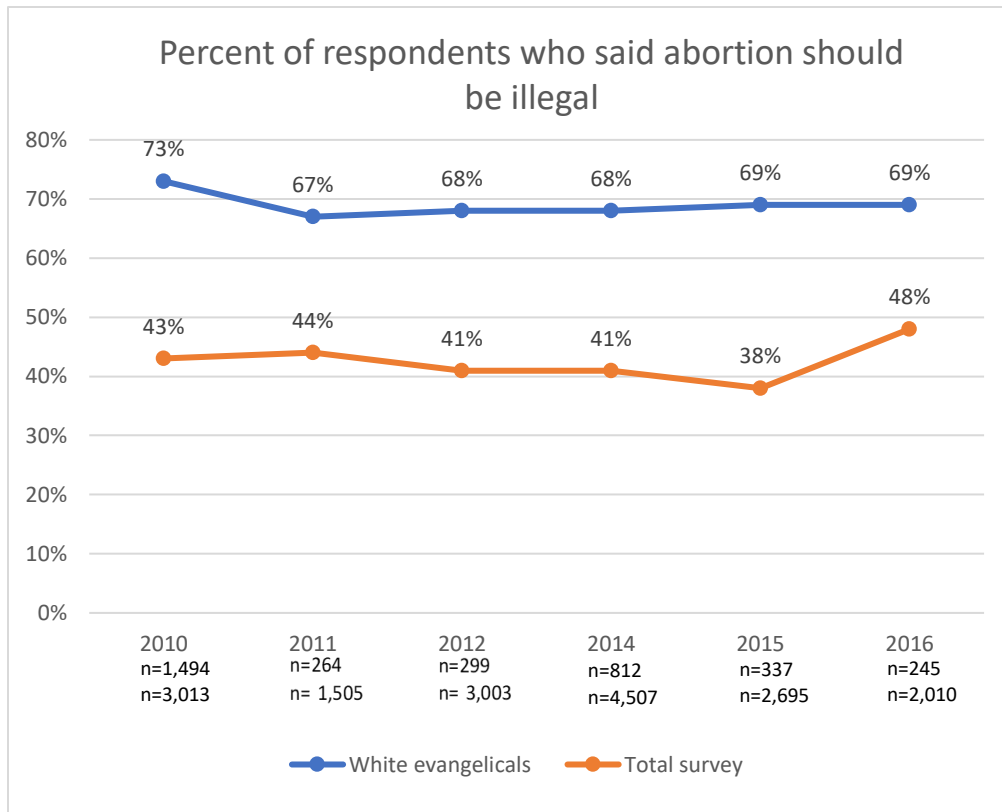


Figure 13. Opinion on abortion over time. Created with data from PRRI. (2010: 2011: 2012a: 2014a: 2015: 2016a).

Continuing views on Gay Rights

Another historical concern that can still be seen today is opposition to homosexual behavior. In 2010 the white evangelicals surveyed were 10% more likely to report that their clergy spoke to them about gay people (see table 5). Of those whose clergy spoke to them 82% of them discouraged homosexual relationships (see figure 14). This was 14% higher than what the general population reported (see figure 14). This data indicates that white evangelical clergy more likely to discourage homosexuality among their followers which is consistent with their historical views on homosexuality. White evangelical clergy have historically been the political leaders within the group. Since they are more likely to discourage homosexuality this influences the views of the group.

Has the respondent's clergy discussed gays recently	2010 White Evangelicals n=1,494	2010 Total Survey n=3,013
Yes	50%	40%
No	50%	60%

Table 5. Discussion of homosexuality by clergy. Created with data from PRRI. (2010).

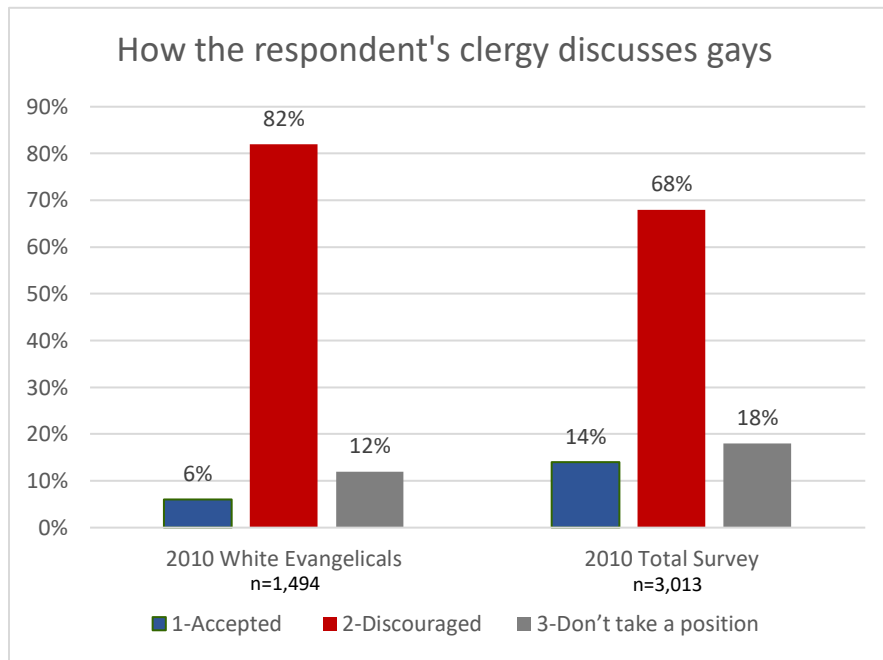


Figure 14. How clergy discusses homosexuality. Created with data from PRRI. (2010 A).

Aside from their clergy white evangelicals overall continue to be oppositional to gay rights. White evangelicals have been consistently more likely to oppose gay marriage than the general population (see figure 15). However, this opposition has declined slightly since 2012 which mirrors a decline in the total population (see figure 15). While the slight decline may indicate a trend towards acceptance the higher percentage opposed is consistent with white evangelicals' historical conflict with gay rights and shows that it has remained a key issue. White evangelicals' opposition to gay marriage is especially relevant to the 2016 election because gay marriage was officially legalized in all 50 states in 2015 (Chappell, 2015). Like abortion, this issue probably did not help Trump in the primary. However, in the general election, a majority of

white evangelicals would want to vote for the Republican candidate in order to stop what they considered to be the immoral practice of gay marriage and this may be a contributing factor to their overall support for Donald Trump.

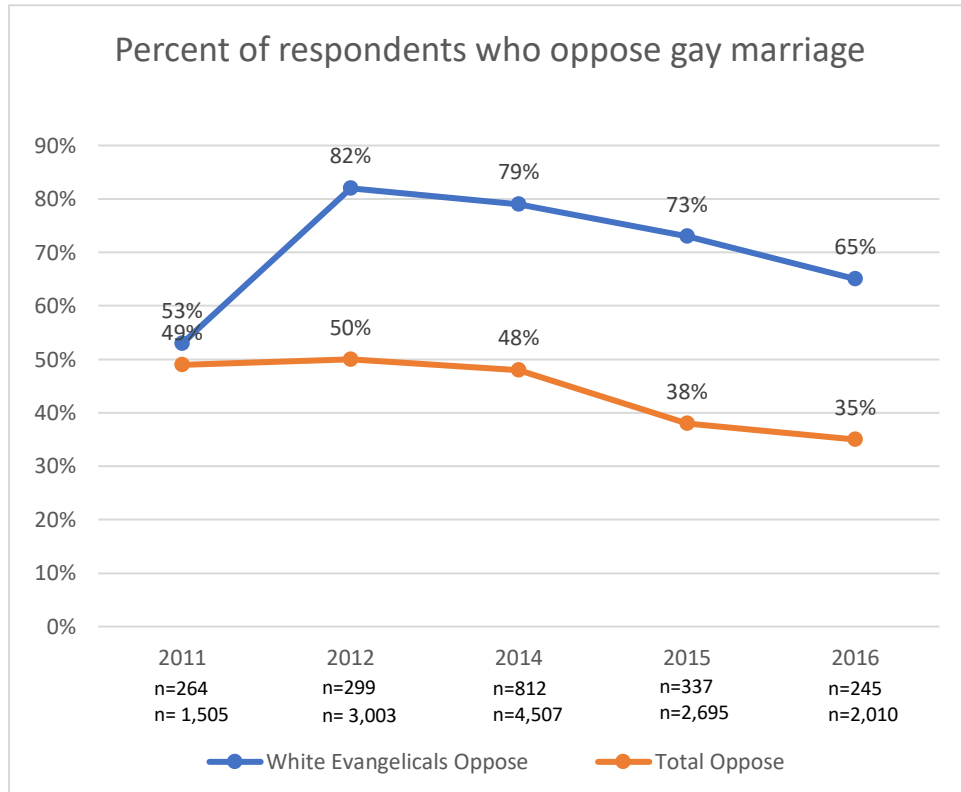


Figure 15. Opposition to gay marriage. Created with data from PRRI. (2011 A: 2012 A: 2014 A: 2015 A: 2016 A).

Continuing concerns over status

As has been discussed previously white evangelicals experience a lot of anxiety surrounding the continuation of their group in the United States. A majority of current white evangelical concerns stem from a fear that white Americans are losing their rights to racial minorities and non-Christians. The survey data supports this assessment. In both 2014 and 2016, a higher percentage of white evangelicals believed that discrimination against whites was equal to discrimination against blacks and other minorities (see figure 16). In 2016, 67% of white evangelicals “mostly agreed” or “completely agreed” that this was the case (see figure 16). This

was 20% higher than the general population (see figure 16). In 2016 a majority of white evangelicals believed that they faced as much discrimination as minorities in the United States. White evangelicals also believed they were victims of another type of discrimination. In 2015 53% of white evangelicals believed that evangelicals faced a lot of discrimination in the United States (see figure 17). This was 24% higher than the general population (see figure 17). White evangelicals were more likely to believe they were victims of both racial and religious discrimination. In 2012 white evangelicals were more likely to believe that the government has paid too much attention to the problems of blacks and other minorities than the general public surveyed; 45% of white evangelicals completely agreed or mostly agreed with this idea compared to only 32% of the general public who reported the same (see figure 18). Together this data indicates that white evangelicals were feeling that they were the victims of discrimination. Since a majority felt the government was paying too much attention to minorities, it is likely that a majority felt the government was not paying enough attention to the problems of white people in America.

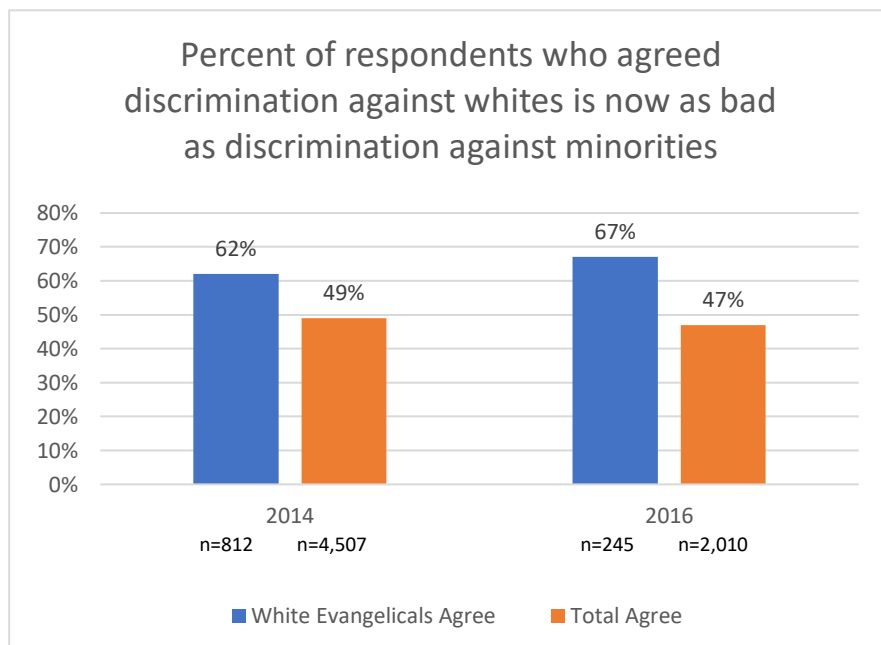


Figure 16. Severity of anti-white discrimination. Created with data from PRRI. (2014a: 2016a).

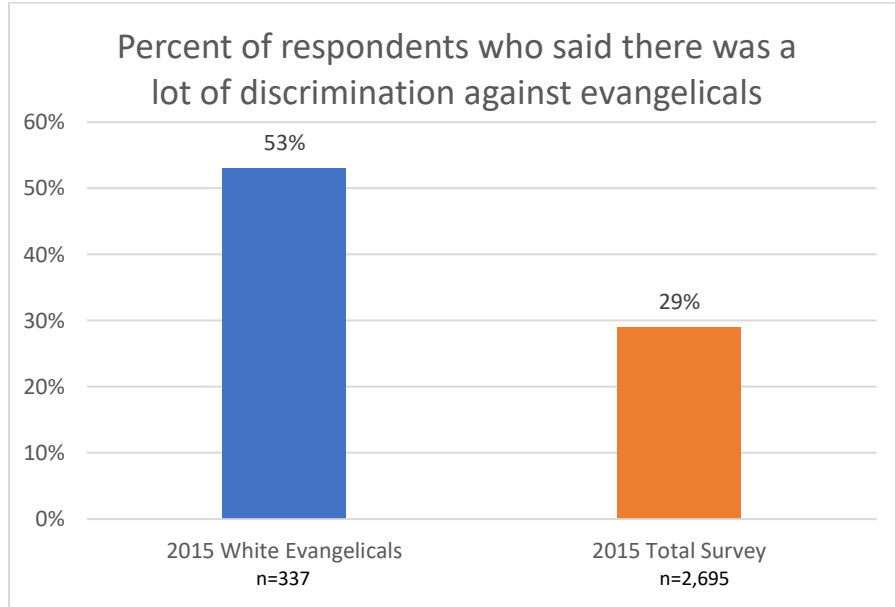


Figure 17. Severity of anti-evangelical discrimination. Created with data from PRRI. (2015).

Percent of respondents who agree that the government was paying too much attention to the problems of minorities

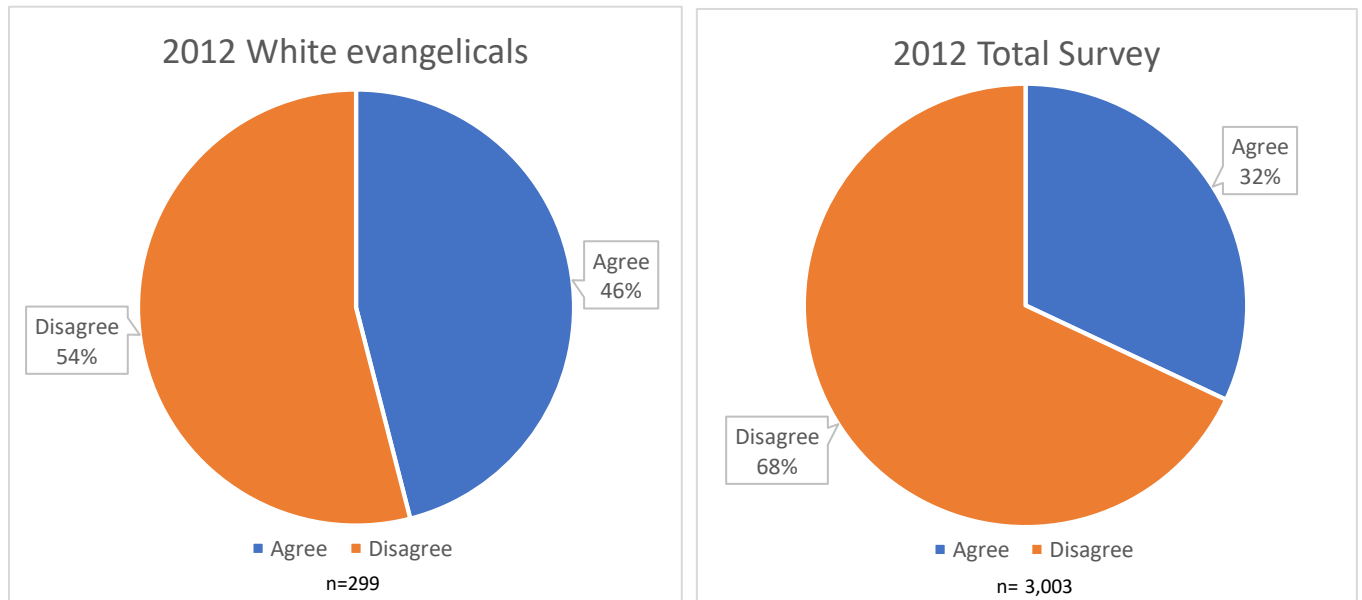


Figure 18. Opinion of governments stance on minority issues. Created with data from PRRI. (2012b).

Additionally, surveys have indicated white evangelicals themselves do not take the problems of other races seriously. When it came to opinions on protests against police brutality against African Americans a majority of white evangelicals, 58%, think the protests have been motivated a great deal by existing bias against the police (see table 6). This is 14% higher than the total population (see table 6). This data shows that white evangelicals believed that there is widespread bias against police within police brutality protests and shows they are less sympathetic towards this issue than the general population. Their belief that these protests are a result of existing bias against the police show that they do not see the severity of police brutality against minorities as a major problem. Their own dismissiveness toward minority issues may explain why they believe the government pays too much attention to minorities.

How much, a respondent thinks protests against police brutality toward blacks have been motivated by bias against the police	August 16 – September 12, 2016 White Evangelicals n=849	August 16 – September 12, 2016 Total Survey n=4,538
A great deal	58%	44%
Some	33%	37%
Not much	7%	13%
Not at all	2%	6%

Table 6. Motivations of Black Lives Matter protests. Created with data from Pew. (2016b).

The idea that white evangelicals were anxious about their future status going into the 2016 election is further supported by their concerns over religious liberty and how they feel within their own country. In 2012 white evangelicals were concerned about religious liberty; 77% believed that religious liberty in America was being threatened (see figure 19). This is 28% higher than the general public (see figure 19). Additionally, in 2014 78% of white evangelicals believed it was harder for people with strong religious faith than it was 10 years ago (see table 7). This is 28% higher than the total population. These results show that in 2014 white evangelicals felt that if they had strong religious faith life in America had become more difficult

for them (see table 7). These findings indicate that white evangelicals were seriously concerned about the relationship between the United States government and religion. Following the 2016 election white evangelicals were concerned with the state of America. A majority of white evangelicals “completely agreed” or “mostly agreed” that they felt like a stranger in their own country; 68% (see figure 20). This is higher than all Americans who answered the survey which was 45% (see figure 20). A slight majority of white evangelicals also believed that attempts to push diversity in the United States were always at the expense of whites; 54%. Only 34% of the general population believed the same (see figure 20). In addition to race white evangelicals appear very concerned about gender; 73% believing that society is now too feminine (see figure 20). This is 30% higher than the general population which was at 43% (see figure 20). These results indicate that after the 2016 election white evangelicals felt more uneasy about the state of the country. It also shows that white evangelicals felt that the increasing diversity of the country was a threat to their own interest and implies that white evangelicals have a problem with institutions becoming more feminine which is consistent with their historical struggle with the feminist movement. All of this data together strongly suggests that white evangelicals were feeling displaced or threatened by other groups prior to the 2016 election. This was a major fear for them and they were looking for a candidate who would put their interests first. Donald Trump’ s campaign consisted of him lashing out at groups that were critical of him and praising the white Americans that made up his base. His policies against immigrants and Muslims as well as his nonchalant attitude toward white nationalists made him very attractive to white evangelicals who were feeling vulnerable about their own status in the United States.

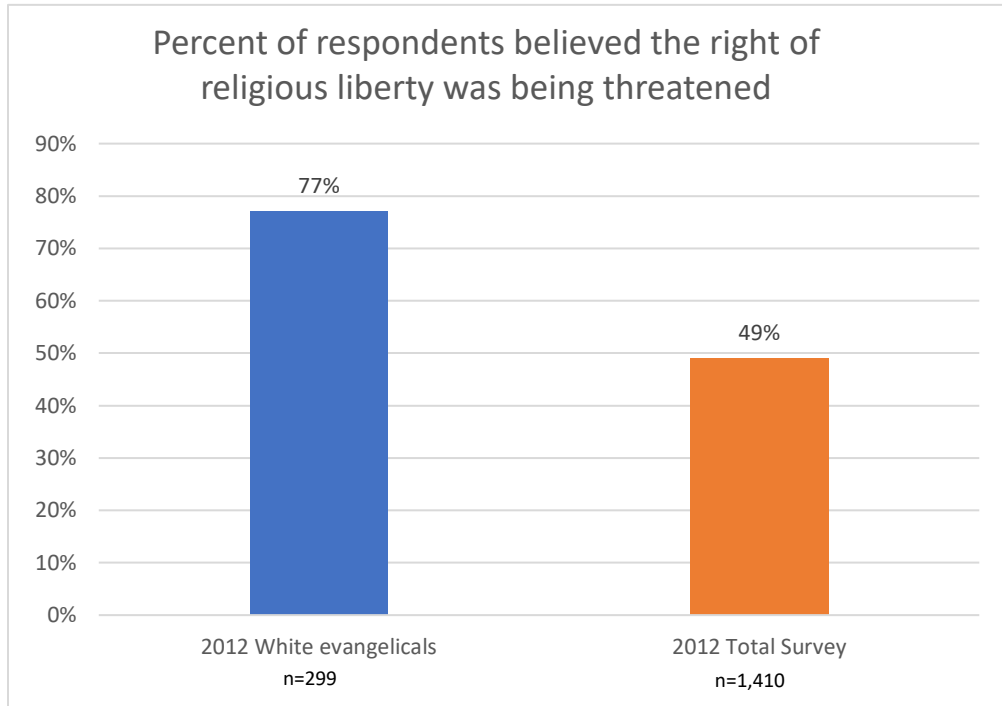


Figure 19. Concern over religious liberty. Created with data from PRRI. (2012b).

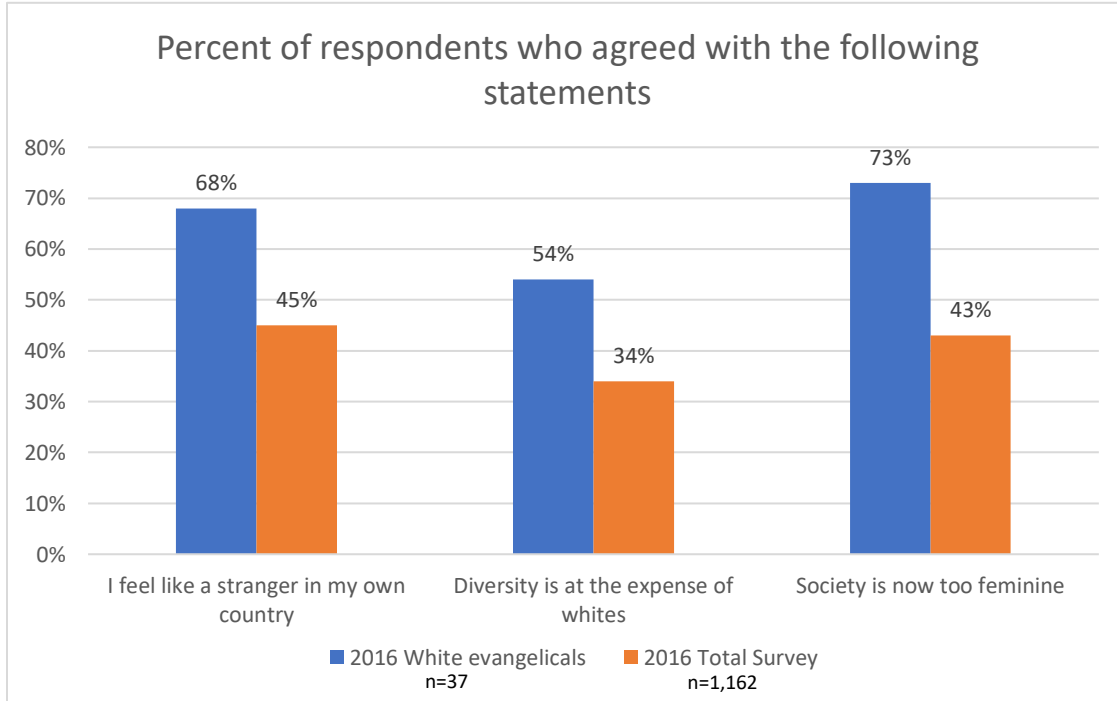


Figure 20. 2016 concerns. Created with data from PRRI. (2016b).

Respondents opinion on if living in the U.S. today is easier, harder, or about the same as it was 10 years ago for people who have strong religious faith	MAY 30-JUNE 30, 2014 White Evangelicals n=439	MAY 30-JUNE 30, 2014 Total Survey n=3,217
Easier today	4%	11%
Harder today	78%	50%
About the same as 10 years ago	18%	39%

Table 7. Difficulty of living as a person of faith in the United States. Created with data from Pew. (2014).

Along with this sense of being at a disadvantage as a white evangelical in the U.S., the data also shows that white evangelicals feel very differently toward different groups. White evangelicals unsurprisingly have warm feelings toward evangelical Christians, only 2% had feelings which ranged from 0-33 (see table 8). White evangelicals have more mixed feelings toward Mormons. These feelings reflected those of the total population with a difference of only 1% between the two groups (see table 8). White evangelicals had much cooler feelings towards Muslims and Atheists; 60% reported feelings of 0 to 33 towards Muslims, 19% higher than the total population (see table 8). In addition, 62% reported feelings of 0 to 33 towards Atheists, 25% higher (see table 8). While white evangelicals have historically been suspicious of Mormons, it appears that at least in 2014 they were not more so than the general population. The results also show that white evangelicals feel colder towards Muslims and Atheists. This is consistent with their concerns over terrorism and their opinions regarding Islamic extremism and supports the idea that Donald's Trump negative rhetoric regarding Muslims helped him secure the white evangelical vote.

**How respondents felt about different groups
(0 meant they felt very cold and 100 meant they felt very warm)**

Feeling scale: evangelical Christians	MAY 30-JUNE 30, 2014 White Evangelicals n=439	MAY 30-JUNE 30, 2014 Total Survey n=3,217
Rating of 67 to 100	84%	54%
34 to 66	14%	42%
0 to 33	2%	4%
Feeling scale: Mormons		
Rating of 67 to 100	28%	27%
34 to 66	45%	46%
0 to 33	27%	27%
Feeling scale: Muslims		
Rating of 67 to 100	7%	17%
34 to 66	33%	42%
0 to 33	60%	41%
Feeling scale: Atheists		
Rating of 67 to 100	6%	23%
34 to 66	32%	40%
0 to 33	62%	37%

Table 8. Feelings toward religious groups. Created with data from Pew. (2014).

Trends as a religious group

Previous research suggests that one of the driving forces behind evangelical participation in politics is their view of America as a white Christian nation. In 2010 a similar percentage of white evangelicals and the general population agreed that America is and always has been a Christian nation at 47% and 48% (see table 9). An almost equal number of white evangelical respondents, 48%, believed that America was previously a Christian Nation, but is not one currently while only 36% of the general public said the same (see table 9). Only 5% of evangelicals believed America has never been a Christian nation (see table 9). The general population was more likely to believe this with 16% agreeing (see table 9). Overall 95% of white evangelicals believe that American is currently or was a Christian nation while 84% of the general population believed the same (see table 9). These results indicate that a large majority of

white evangelicals view America as originally being a Christian nation. The data supports the earlier research that indicates the preservation of a white Christian nation is an important issue for white evangelicals since a majority view it as having been one.

Respondents opinion on the United States Status as a Christian nation	2010 White Evangelicals n=1,494	2010 Total Survey n=3,013
America has always been and is currently a Christian nation	47%	48%
America was a Christian nation in the past, but is not now	48%	36%
America has never been a Christian nation	5%	16%

Table 9. Opinion on the U.S. as a Christian nation. Created with data from PRRI. (2010).

White evangelicals have historically been a major component of the Christian Right. Today a large portion of white evangelicals continue to identify with this movement. The percentage of white evangelicals surveyed who identify as part of the Christian Right has remained mostly unchanged between 2010, 2014, and 2015 (see figure 21). White evangelicals were much more likely to associate themselves with the Christian Right than everyone who was surveyed (see figure 21). This confirms the idea that white evangelicals associate with and make up a large portion of the Christian Right. Their continued association also shows white evangelicals support for the goals of the Christian Right.

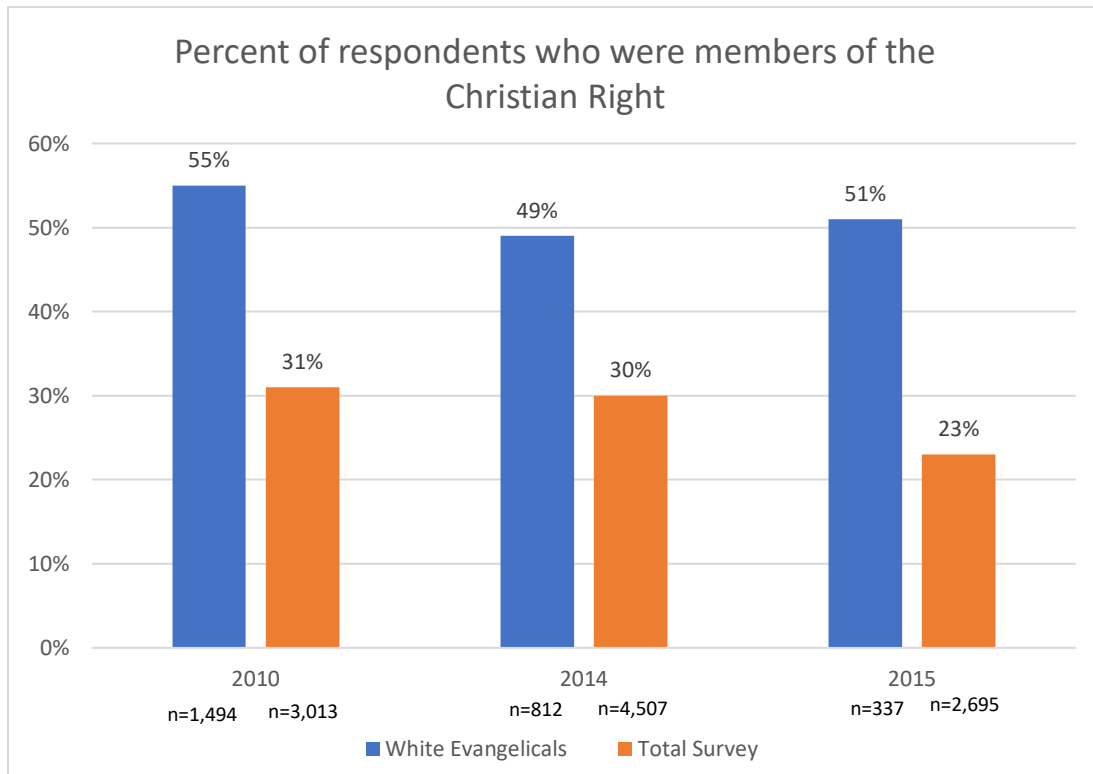


Figure 21. Christian Right Membership. Created with data from PRRI. (2010 A: 2014 A: 2015 A).

As mentioned earlier white evangelical clergy are an important part of their political engagement. This makes the issues white evangelical clergy discussed in 2016 relevant to how white evangelicals voted in the election. A majority of clergy for both white evangelicals and the total population did not speak about any political issue that was in the survey; however, a decent proportion did discuss them. White evangelicals were more likely to report their clergy spoke to them about being against abortion, at 32% compared with 24% for the total survey (see figure 22). White evangelicals were also more likely to report being spoken to in defense of religious liberty; 48% compared with 35% (see figure 22). They were also more likely to report their clergy has spoken out against homosexuality; 34%, compared to 19% for the full survey (see figure 22). These results show that white evangelical clergy were more likely to give their parishioners a negative opinion on abortion and homosexuality and implied to them that religious liberty was under attack and in need of defense. These results support the earlier data which

showed white evangelicals continuing concern surrounding abortion, religious liberty, and homosexuality. Only 11% of white evangelical clergy spoke about welcoming immigrants while 22% of the general public’s clergy did (see figure 22). These results are consistent with white evangelicals’ negative views about immigrants.

Only 4% of white evangelicals reported their clergy spoke in support of a candidate (see figure 23). This is lower than the total population’s 6% (see figure 23). However, of clergy who did support a candidate, 62% of white evangelical clergy spoke in support of Donald Trump (see figure 24). Only 25% of the total survey said the same (see figure 24). This means that it was very unlikely that individual white evangelical clergy members directly encouraged their parishioners to support a candidate, but if they did the majority endorsed Donald Trump.

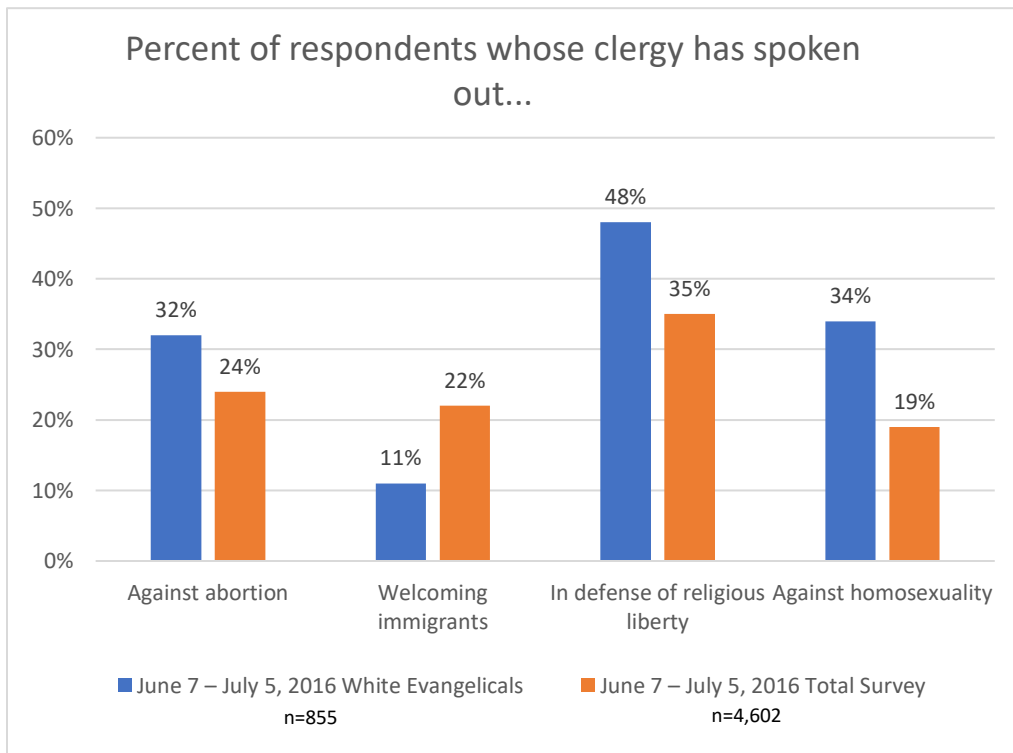


Figure 22. Issues clergy has spoken about. Created with data from Pew. (2016a).

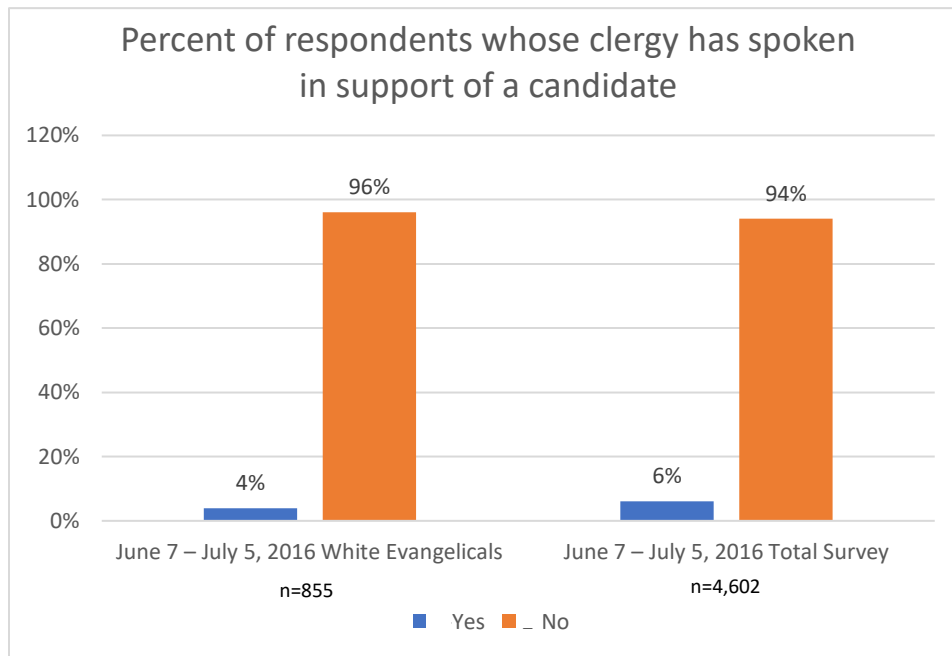


Figure 23. Whether respondent’s clergy have spoken in support of a candidate. Created with data from Pew. (2016a).

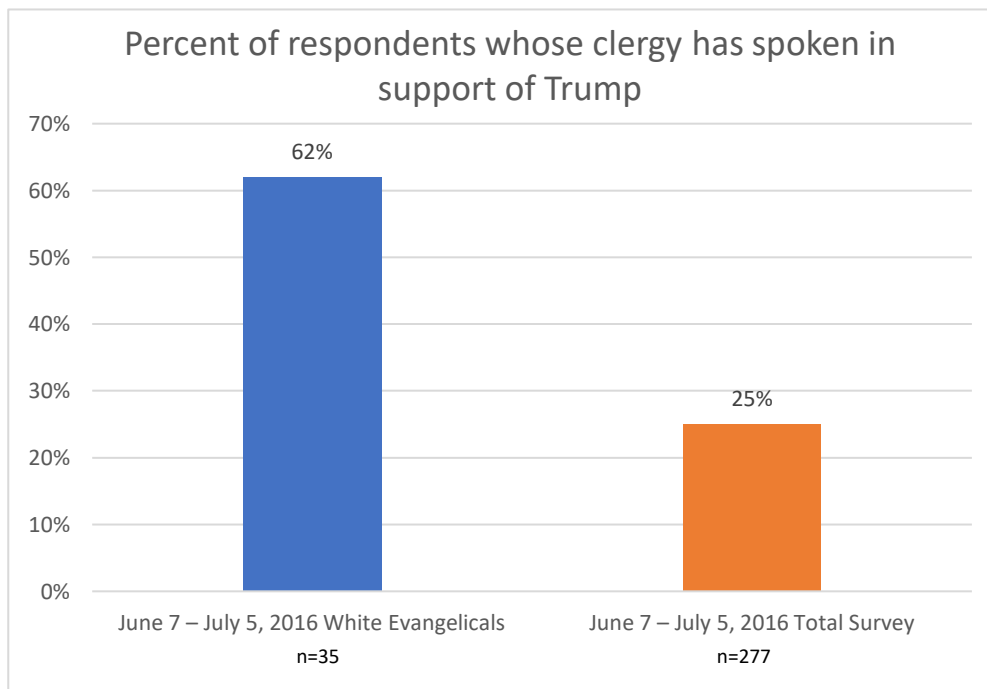


Figure 24. Whether respondent’s clergy have spoken in support of Donald Trump. Created with data from Pew. (2016a).

Current priorities

The summer before the 2016 election white evangelicals surveyed indicated that they were more likely to connect their views on economic policy, immigration policy, terrorism policy, foreign policy, the federal budget, abortion, and gun policy with their fundamental beliefs about right and wrong than the general population (see figure 25). This shows which issues were a moral priority for white evangelicals in 2016. White evangelicals were much more likely to strongly connect their values to terrorism policy; 62%, 12% higher than the general population. They connected the federal budget to it at 44%, 11% higher, and abortion at 73%, which was 21% higher (see figure 25). These are the values that strongly separate white evangelicals from the general public. The only issues that a lower percentage of white evangelicals strongly connected with their values were healthcare policy, which was 6% lower and climate change which was 12% lower (see figure 25). This shows these issues are less important to white

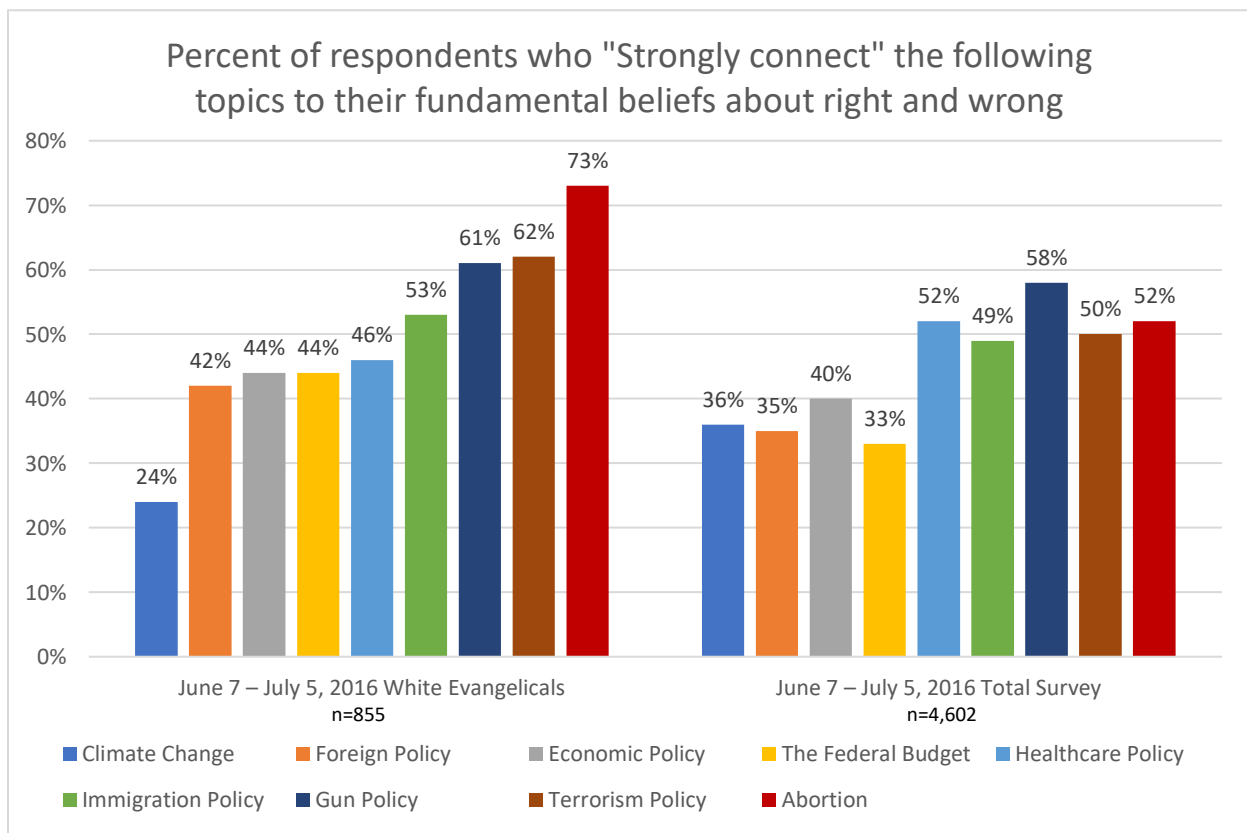


Figure 25. Connection between personal morality and policies. Created with data from Pew. (2016a).

evangelicals' morality. Overall white evangelicals were more likely to strongly connect political issues to their own morality. Of all the issues listed white evangelicals were most likely to connect their views on abortion to their morality which is consistent with their historical stance on the issue.

The previous data is consistent with a later survey which showed 79% of white evangelicals believed that having an abortion was morally wrong (see figure 26). This is 36% higher than the total population. White evangelicals were also opposed to homosexuality with 73% saying it was morally wrong (see figure 26). This was 49% higher than the total population (see figure 26). These results indicate that white evangelicals' historical opposition to abortion and homosexuality has continued until at least before the 2016 election. On the other hand, a very low percentage of both white evangelicals and the total population believe that using contraception is morally wrong at 4% and 2% which indicates people using contraception was not a priority for white evangelicals going into the 2016 election (see figure 26).

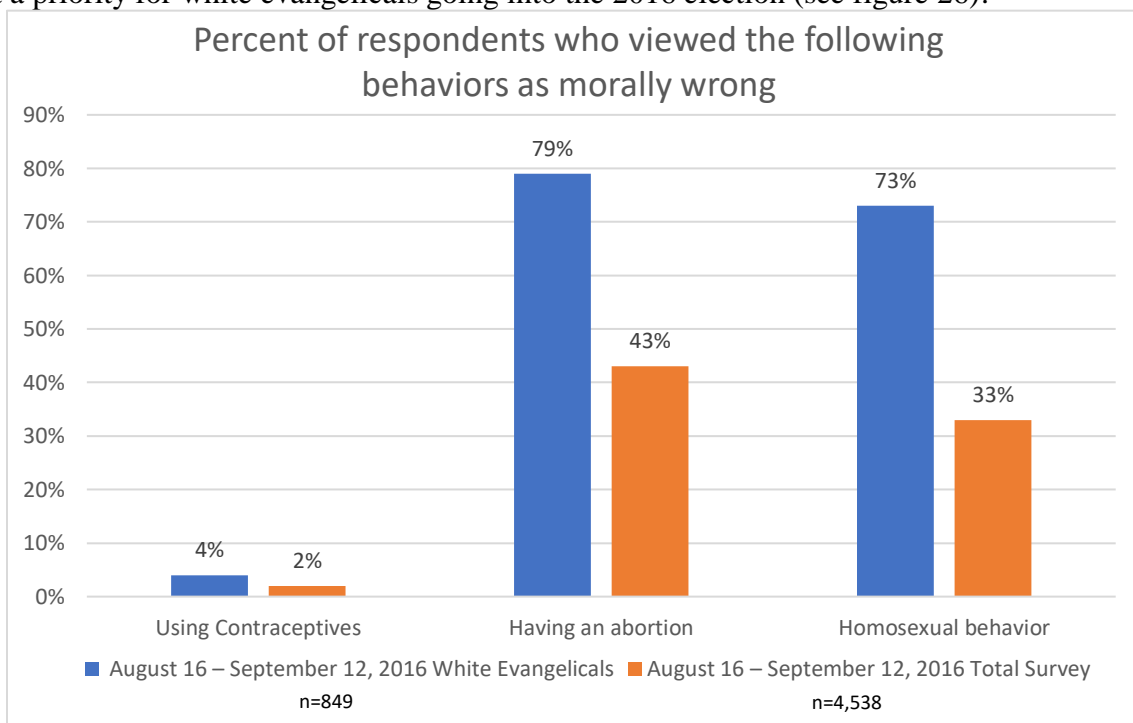


Figure 26. Moral status of different actions. Created with data from Pew. (2016b).

The groups that white evangelicals sympathized with just prior to the 2016 election also can show their positions that they voted from. In 2016 62% of white evangelicals reported that they sympathize a lot with people who say businesses should be able to refuse service to same-sex couples for religious reasons (see figure 27). This is twice as much as the total population. White evangelicals were also more likely to sympathize a lot with those who say employers have the right to refuse to provide birth control through healthcare for a religious reason; 47%, 24% higher than the total population (see figure 27). They were also more likely to sympathize a lot with those who said transgender people should be made to use the bathroom that corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth; 54% agree with this which is 23% higher than the total population (see figure 27). This data shows that evangelicals are significantly more likely to accept discrimination against gays and women in need of birth control when a religious justification is given than the general population. Additionally, they were more supportive of those who wanted to discriminate against transgender people. These results support white evangelicals' prioritization of religious liberty and their opposition toward the LGBT community. It also shows they were more likely to side with individuals that held these

positions. All of these positions are part of the Republican platform and would have helped Trump during the general election.

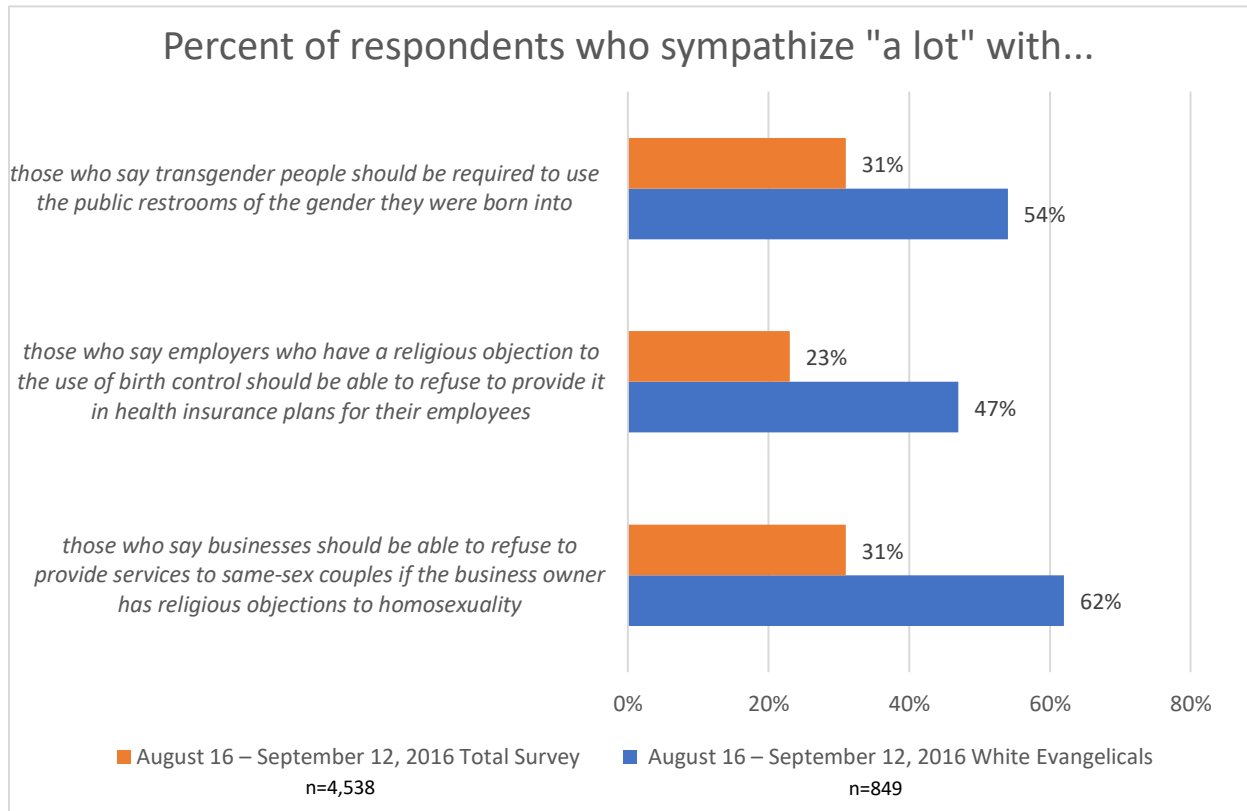


Figure 27. Sympathy for certain groups. Created with data from Pew. (2016b).

After the election

The trend of white evangelicals being anti-immigrant and against gay rights continues following the election. In 2017 white evangelicals were more likely to favor allowing businesses to refuse service to gays and lesbians with 61% saying they “strongly favor” or “favor” it compared 34% of the general public (see figure 28). This is consistent with their past views on gay marriage and homosexuality. White evangelicals also favored a border wall more than the general population. A total of 62% said they “strongly favor” or “favor” it (see figure 28). In comparison, only 39% of the total population said the same (see figure 28). The border wall with Mexico was a major campaign promise of Donald Trump. White evangelicals support for the

policy indicates both a concern with illegal immigration which is consistent with pre-election data and a continued support for a key goal of the Trump presidency. It also indicates that white evangelicals believe that a wall is an effective way to reduce immigration.

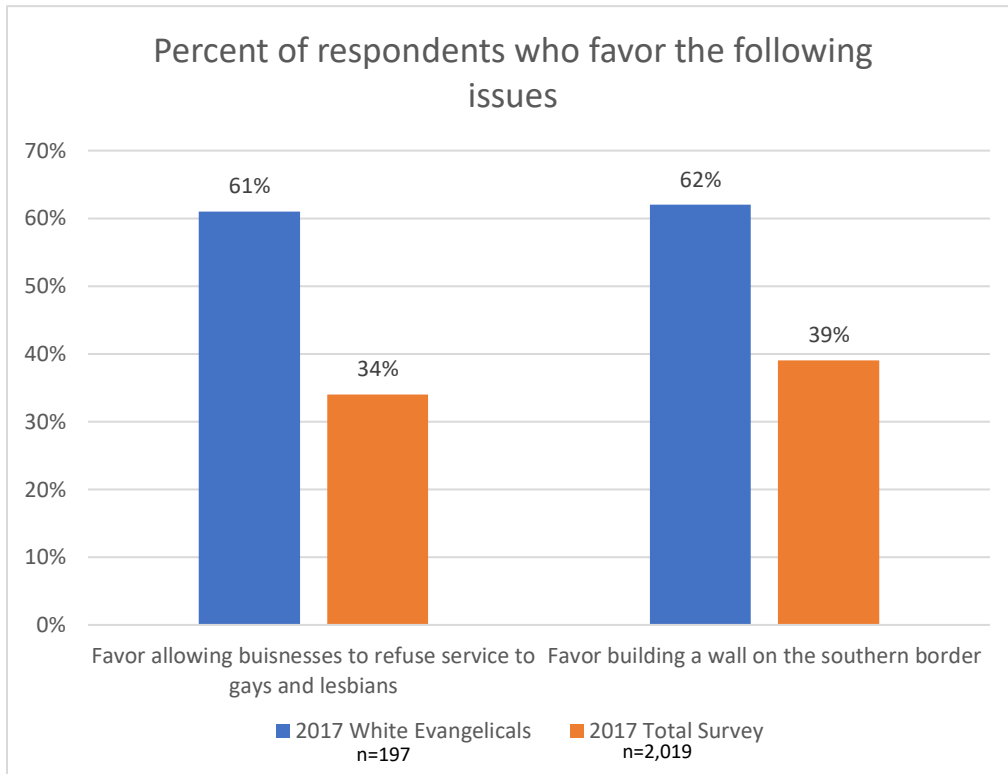


Figure 28. Favor for allowing stores to discriminate against gays and border wall. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

Following the election white evangelicals continued to be more supportive of Donald Trump than the total population showing that he has effectively addressed some of the concerns they had during the election; 71% of white evangelicals “strongly approved” or “somewhat approved” of the job Donald Trump is doing as president while only 45% of the total population reported the same (see figure 29). White evangelicals and the general population were about the same on whether Trump could do something to lose their approval (see table 10). When it came to feelings toward the presidency white evangelicals were more likely to respond positively; 61% reported feeling “satisfied” or “excited” with the Trump presidency (see figure 30). On the other

hand, a majority of the general population responded negatively with 62% reporting they were “disappointed”, “worried”, or “angry” because of the administration (see figure 30). In 2017 the majority of white evangelicals were also more likely to find Trump favorable with 70% finding Trump “very favorable” or “mostly favorable” compared with only 45% of the general public (see figure 31). These results indicate continued support of Trump by white evangelicals after the 2016 election and show they still feel positively about his administration while the majority of the general public did not.

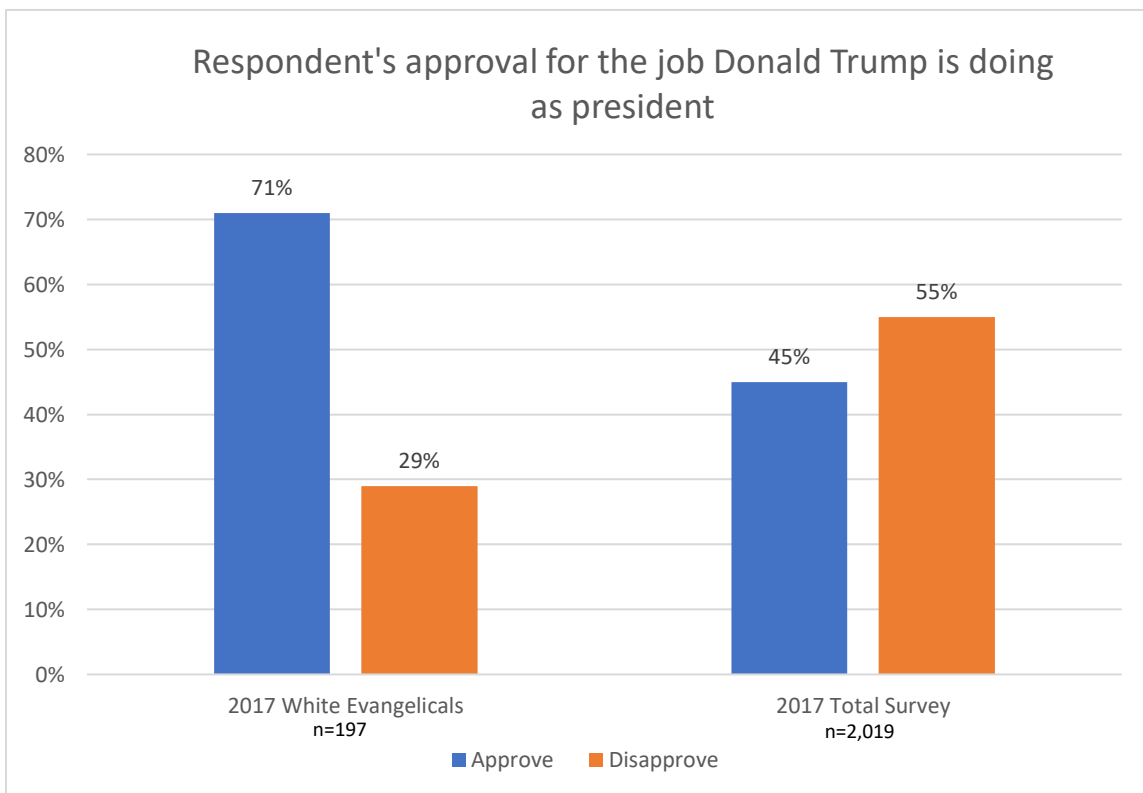


Figure 29. Approval for Donald Trump. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

Whether Trump could lose the respondent's approval	2017 White Evangelicals n=197	2017 Total Survey n=2,019
President Trump could do something to lose my approval	57%	60%
There's almost nothing President Trump could do to lose my approval	43%	40%

Table 10. Views on Donald Trump. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

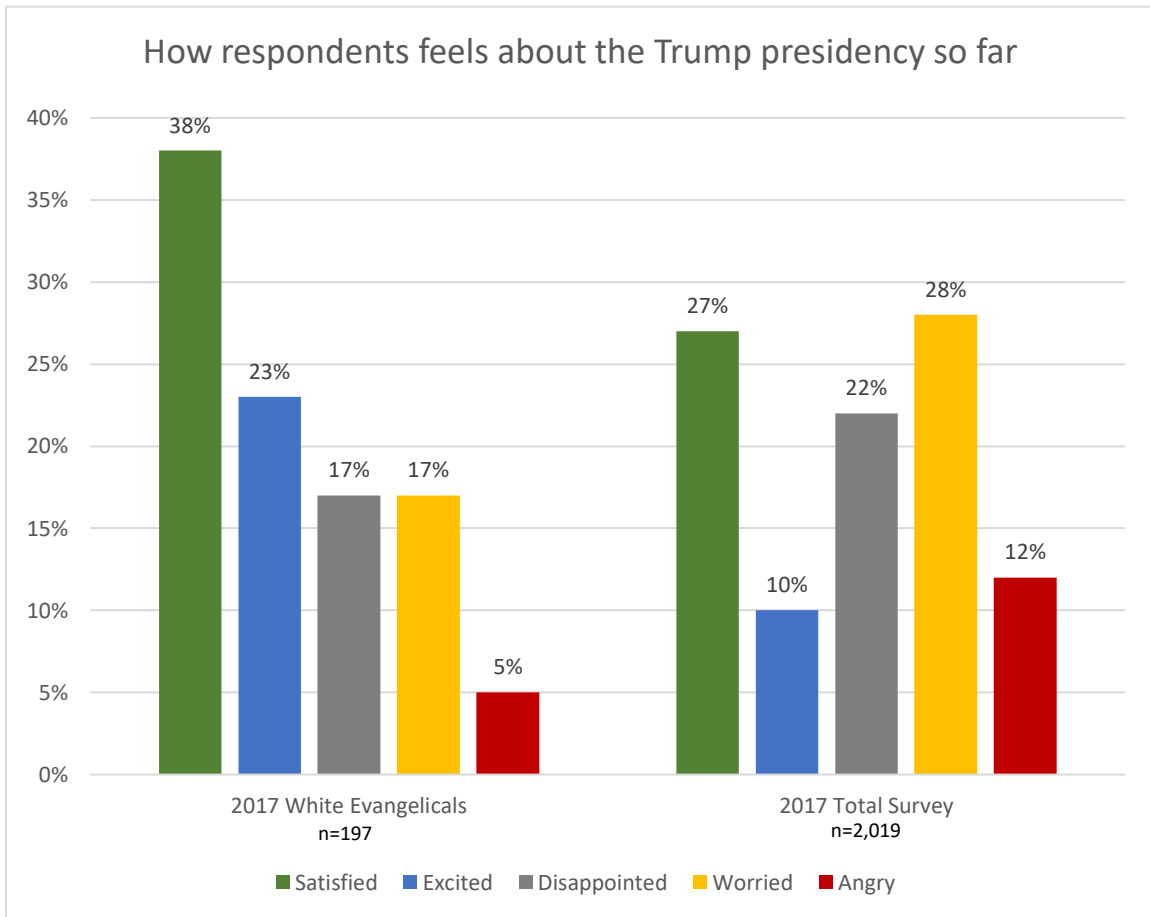


Figure 30. Feelings on Trump's presidency. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

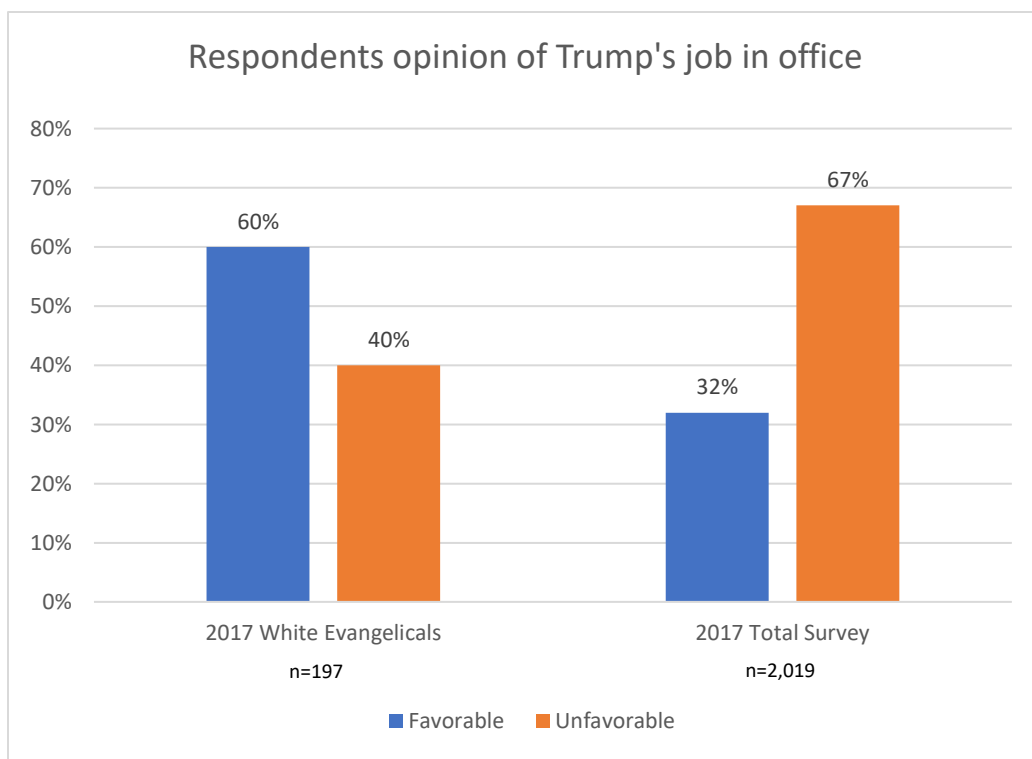


Figure 31. Favorability of Donald Trump. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

In 2017 white evangelicals were also considerably more likely to believe President Trump was looking out for their interests than the general public. A majority of white evangelicals said Trump represented their interests “very well” or “somewhat well” at 72% (see figure 32). This was 35% higher than the general population which was 47% (see figure 32). This shows that white evangelicals believe that Trump has represented their interests since becoming the president and further supports the idea that white evangelicals supported Trump during the election because they believed he would look out for their core interests.

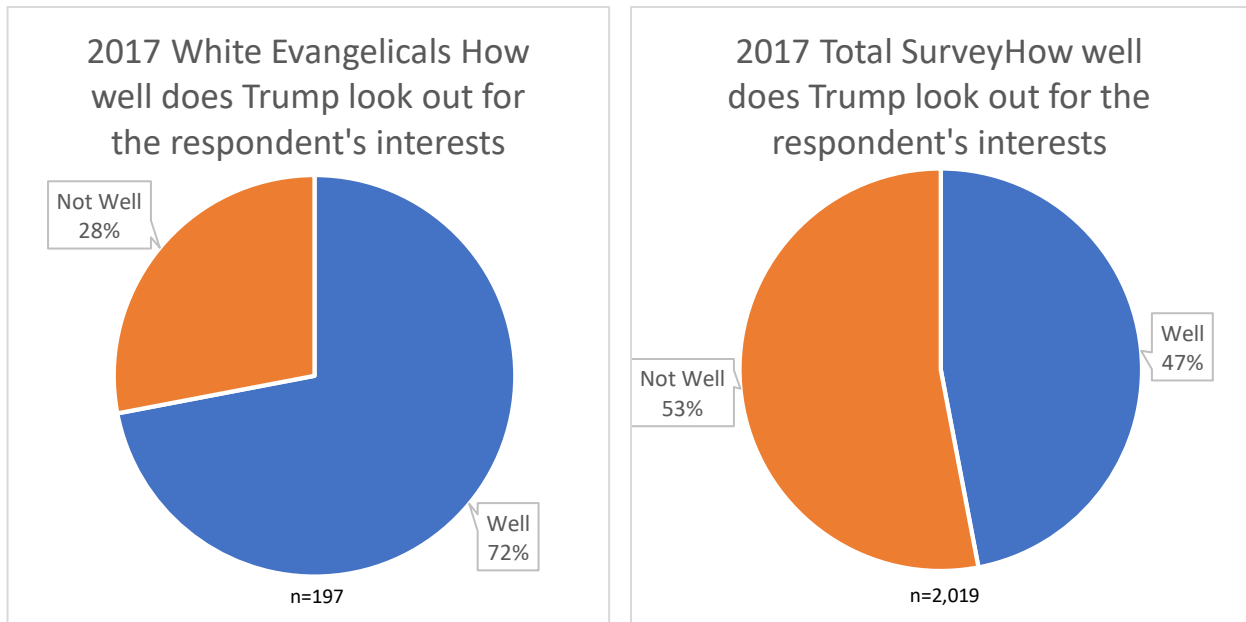


Figure 32. How well does Trump look out for your interests. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

Following the election white evangelicals continued issues with race. White evangelicals were 14% less likely to associate Confederate monuments with racism than the general public (see figure 33). Additionally, white evangelicals were more likely to say “Professional athletes should be required to stand during the national anthem at sporting events”; 81% of white evangelicals said they “completely agreed” or “Mostly agreed” compared to 59% of the general public who said the same (see figure 34). This issue is important to race because players kneeling during the national anthem was a direct response by athletes to police brutality against African Americans in the United States. These two data sets show that having empathy for racial minorities was still a struggle for white evangelicals after the 2016 election. White evangelicals were however only slightly more likely to be uncomfortable with immigrants who speak little to no English than the general population. Since Donald Trump has both supported people, who wanted to show their heritage through Confederate monuments and criticized athletes for standing this data shows that Donald Trump continues to be on the same page as white evangelicals regarding cultural issues.

The respondent views the Confederate flag as representing ...

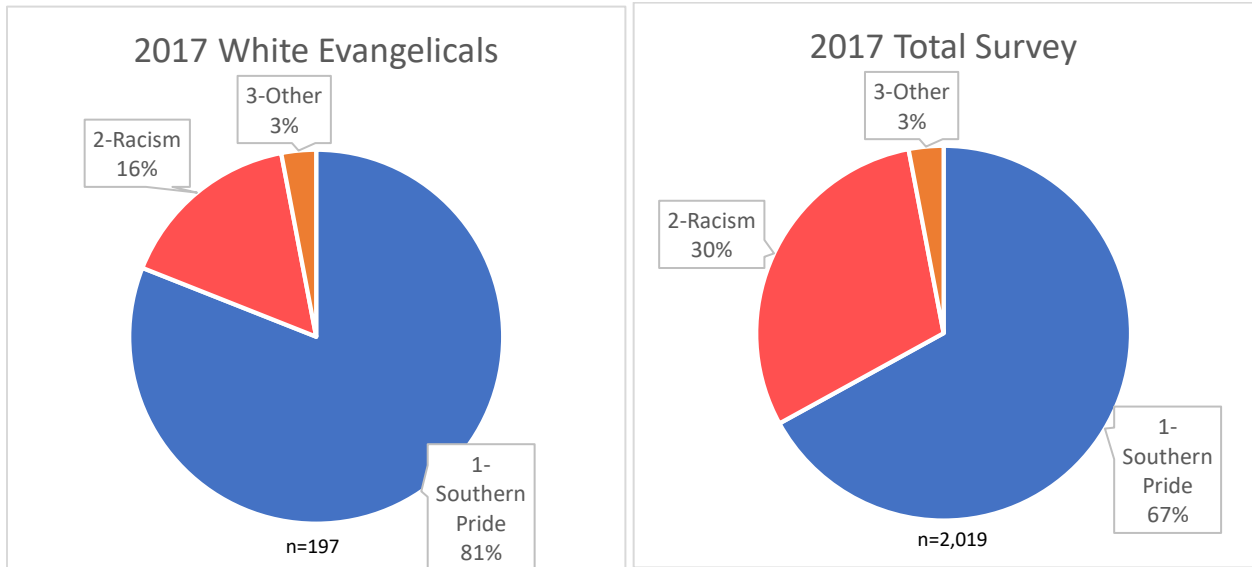


Figure 33. Beliefs on the meaning of the Confederate flag. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

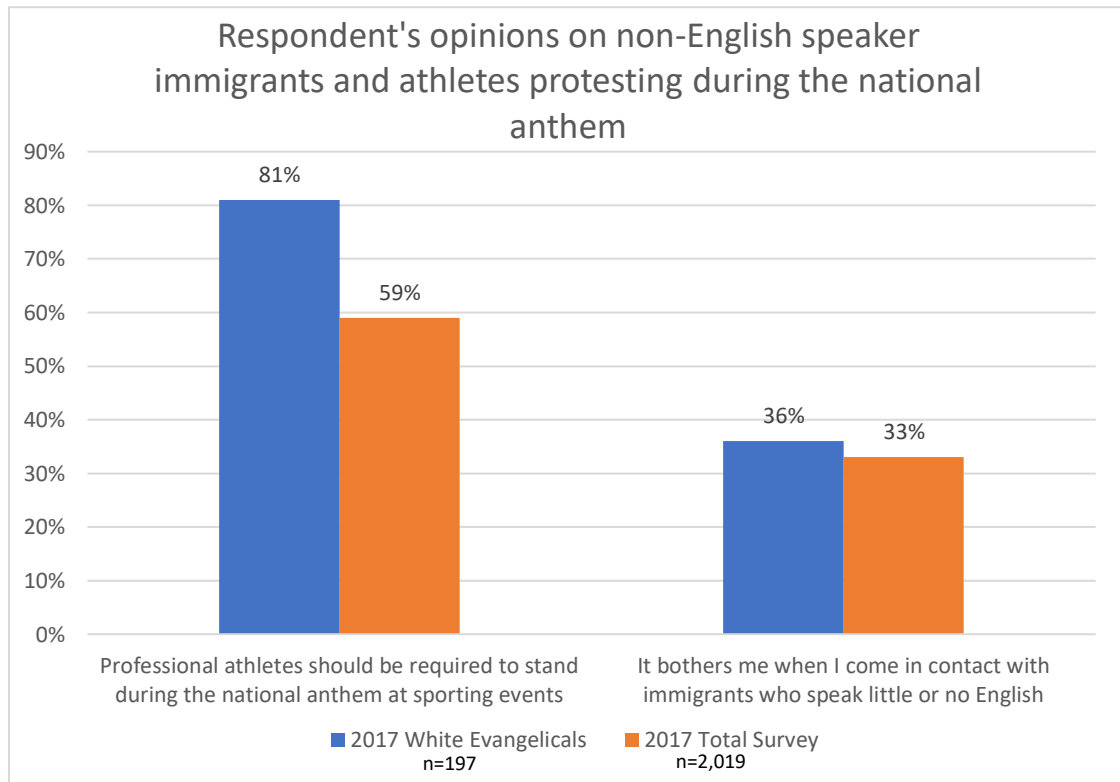


Figure 34. Opinions on non-English speaker immigrants and athletes protesting during the national anthem. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

On the issue of the United States being a Christian nation following the election, white evangelicals were split on whether being American meant “Having a mix of different cultures and values from around the world” or “Having a culture grounded in Christian values” with the later only having a slight minority (see figure 35). While white evangelicals were split 74% said being American meant “Having a mix of different cultures and values from around the world”, 24% more than white evangelicals (see figure 35). This indicates that while evangelicals are split, they are still much more likely to associate being American with Christian values than the general population. The earlier data showed that white evangelicals were very likely to identify the United States as having been a Christian nation. This data supports that and indicates that in 2017 white evangelicals were more likely to associate a sense of national identity with Christian values.

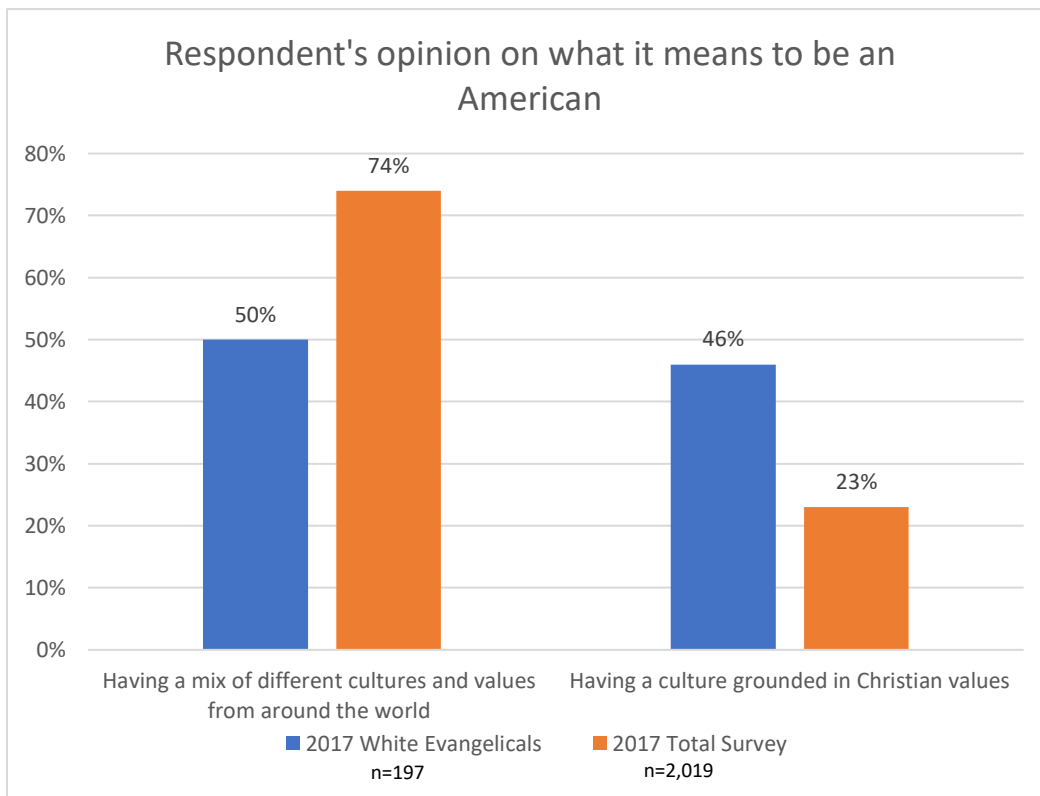


Figure 35. What does it mean to be American. Created with data from PRRI. (2017).

Conclusions

In this thesis, the goal has been to understand the long-term political trends of white evangelicals and how their support for Donald Trump during and after the 2016 election fit into these trends. Donald Trump differed significantly from both Mitt Romney and John McCain in his approach to religion and his attacks on other people's faith. Additionally, despite his lack of religious rhetoric, he was similarly popular to Ted Cruz. Understanding why white evangelicals preferred Trump despite his significant deviation from Republican norms comes down to policy. While Reagan used religious rhetoric to connect with white evangelicals, the primary reason that white evangelicals fell in with the Republican Party is due to their response to core evangelical issues. As was discussed conservative white evangelicals are primarily a reactionary group. The issues that separate them from the general public are almost always in response to progressive change. Their development as a political force was a response to change in the 1960s. The growth of reproductive rights, feminism, gay rights, and mandatory integration of Christian schools were the foundation of white evangelical core political position. The Christian Right and leaders like Jerry Falwell helped to change evangelical opinion on these topics from relatively neutral to extremely oppositional. The data analyzed indicates that white evangelicals have continued to care about these issues. White evangelicals have remained consistent on abortion from 2010 to 2016 with a majority wanting abortion to be illegal in all or most cases and a majority in 2016 believing that it was morally wrong. The data also shows continuing issues with homosexuality which are consistent with the Christian Rights anti-gay agenda.

Since white evangelicals are reactionary, their goals are determined by America's changing cultural and political climate. Due to this, new issues of concern have arisen because of changes in America since the 1970s. Today white evangelicals have new problems surrounding

race such as white Christian nationalism, Islamic extremism, and immigration. The data supports the idea that in recent years white evangelicals have become more anxious about their position. They are a declining population that is being replaced by non-religious young people and evangelicals of color.

Along with fear over continuing decline they also felt that they were currently facing hardships because of their status as white Christians. As an orthodox group white evangelicals are prone to thinking about the future status of their group (Martí, 2019, p.2). They were more likely to be concerned about discrimination against whites and evangelicals. They were also more likely to believe diversity was at the expense of whites and were more dismissive of protests against discrimination. When it came to immigration data, both pre and post-election showed that white evangelicals were more concerned with removing and keeping out illegal immigrants than the regular population. Previous research shows that Islamic terrorism is a major concern for white evangelicals. Their cooler feelings toward Muslims demonstrates this concern. The demographic shifts that are occurring show a vision of the future that is less Christian and less white. White evangelicals do not like what the future will look like if these trends continue. White evangelicals wanted a candidate that would reassert the power and influence of their group on the American political system, and Trump fulfilled this desire (Martí, 2019, pp. 2-7).

As these new issues arose, white evangelicals were also experiencing changes within their group. The research by PRRI shows that between 2011 and 2016 white evangelicals began to care less about the personal morality of candidates and their religious views. This meant that going into the 2016 election white evangelicals were more focused on candidates whose policies matched their own goals than those who were more proficient at using religious rhetoric. Donald Trump was exactly what evangelicals wanted. Trump has failed to clearly condemn white

nationalists following the infamous Charlottesville rally where white nationalists protested the removal of a monument to Robert E. Lee during which they shouted Nazi chants. The following day a counter-protester was killed by a white supremacist driving his car into a crowd. In response to this President Trump evaded condemning the white nationalists saying, “you also had people that were very fine people on both sides” (Trump, 2017). He has made disparaging comments about the football player Colin Kaepernick who was protesting police brutality by kneeling during the national anthem and has constant issues when speaking about race (Desjardins, 2017; Graham, 2017). As discussed previously he has also been openly antagonistic toward both illegal immigrants and Muslims. Additionally, Trump has installed pro-life judges like Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court (Stuart, 2018). While Trump has not reinstated don’t ask don’t tell, he has banned transgender individuals from serving in the military and transgender individuals are part of the LGBT community along with gays and lesbians. His positions aligned with white evangelicals on almost all of their core issues. Their feelings toward his behavior did not outweigh their support for his policies. White evangelicals continued support following the 2016 election and believe that Donald Trump is looking out for their interests shows that they are getting what they want out of a Trump presidency.

Despite the impact, Donald Trump has had on politics due to his divergence from accepted norms he has not damaged the strong relationship between the Republican Party and white evangelicals. Their continued support and their aligning political interests may have actually strengthened the relationship. Within the historical context of white evangelicals in politics, the results of the 2016 election and continuing support for Donald Trump are unsurprising. White evangelicals will support candidates who provide policies that match their core values. Trump has been able to do this effectively so he will continue to have their support.

Donald Trump is not a Republican whom white evangelicals have begrudgingly accepted but instead is in the words of Jerry Falwell Jr. “their dream president,” (Wadsworth, 2018).

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APPENDIX A

Description of surveys used

The surveys used were the PRRI American Values Survey for the years 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017. Additionally, the PRRI Post-election American Values Surveys for 2012 and 2014 and the “PRRI/The Atlantic 2016 Post-Election White Working-Class Survey” were also used. Data for the PRRI studies came from surveys conducted by phone by professional interviewers (PRRI About).

The data for the PRRI 2010 American Values Survey was taken between September 1st to 14st and included 3,013 respondents with 620 white evangelical respondents. The PRRI 2011 American Values Survey was conducted from September 22 to October 2 and included 1,505 respondents with 264 white evangelical respondents. The PRRI 2012 American Values Survey was conducted from September 13th to September 30th and included 3,003 respondents and 299 white evangelical respondents. The PRRI 2014 American Values Survey was conducted from July 21 to August 15 and included 4,507 respondents and 812 white evangelical respondents. The PRRI 2015 American Values Survey was conducted from September 11 to October 4 and included 2,695 respondents with 337 white evangelical respondents. The PRRI 2016 American Values Survey was conducted from September 1st to 27th and included 2,010 respondents and 245 white evangelical respondents. The PRRI 2017 American Values Survey was conducted from October 18th to 30th and included 2,019 respondents with 197 white evangelical respondents. For the post-election surveys the 2012 survey was conducted from November 7th to 11th and had 1,410 participants, with 299 white evangelical respondents, the 2014 survey was conducted from November 5th to 9th and had 1,399 participants, with 284 white evangelical respondents, The “PRRI/The Atlantic 2016 Post-Election White Working-Class Survey” was

conducted between November 9th and 20th with 1,162 participants 37 of who were white evangelicals.

From the Pew Research Center, the “2014 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 4”, the “2014 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 6”, the “2016 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 18 June”, the “2016 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 20”, and the “2017 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 29”. The data from the Pew Research Center was also collected through phone interviews. “The typical Pew Research Center national survey selects a random digit sample of both landline and cellphone numbers in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia” (Pew Research Center, Our survey). The numbers for interviews conducted through a landline, which account for about 25% of the total, are determined through “random digit dialing” (Pew Research Center, Our survey). Half of the interviewers asked for the youngest male in the household over the age of 18, and the other half asked the same but for a female respondent (Pew Research Center, Our survey). The interviews conducted by cellphone, which account for about 75%, were determined “through systematic sampling from dedicated wireless banks” (Pew Research Center, Our survey). For cellphone interviews, it was only asked if the cell owner was over the age of 18 to determine their eligibility (Pew Research Center, Our survey). Pew surveys have a typical margin of error around 2.9% which may vary based on the number of participants (Pew Research Center, Our survey). The data from the Pew Research Center is weighted. The landline responses are weighted based on household size, and both landline and cellphone data are weighted based on population parameters determined by the census (Pew Research Center, Our survey).

The final data for the “2014 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 4” was taken from May 30th to June 30th, 2014 and included 3,217 participants, with 439 white

evangelical respondents. The “2014 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 6” was conducted from August 11th through September 3rd, 2014 and had 3,278 participants, with 78 white evangelical respondents. The “2016 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 18 June” was conducted between June 7 and July 5, 2016, and included 4,602 respondents, with 855 white evangelical respondents. The “2016 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 20” was conducted from August 16th to September 12th, 2016 and had 4,538 respondents, with 849 white evangelical respondents. Finally, data from the “2017 Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel Wave 29” was collected from September 14th to 28th, 2017 and had 4,867 total respondents, 862 white evangelical respondents.