

BELIEF OR BELONGING? UNTANGLING EVANGELICAL RELIGIOSITY AND
ITS IMPACT ON AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

by

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A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

For my Mom and Dad, who stood by me every step of the way. I couldn't have done this without them.

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ABSTRACT

BELIEF OR BELONGING? UNTANGLING EVANGELICAL RELIGIOSITY AND ITS IMPACT ON AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

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While previous research has shown that evangelicals are seemingly more polarized than other religious groups and secular Republicans, less is known about why this might be the case, and what impact, if any, distinct aspects of religiosity play in driving these high levels of affective polarization. This dissertation examines the relationship between evangelical religiosity and affective polarization by disaggregating religiosity into discrete categories of belief and belonging to better understand how each influences polarized political behavior, as well as how they interact with one another. Through the use of a novel survey and a systematic historical analysis, this dissertation finds that deep religious belonging tends to produce high levels of bonding social capital, something that often produces mistrust and animosity toward the outgroup. Additionally, bridging social capital, or one's connection to their civic community, does not appear to have much of an influence on affective polarization, particularly in the face of deep levels of belonging to

one's own religious community. While claims of causality are muted, this dissertation finds important patterns within American evangelical religious belonging, its relationship to the production and maintenance of bonding social capital, and the subsequent influence on affective polarization.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“I think our people hate the right people,”¹ was the quote from J.D. Vance during an August 2021 interview with the *American Conservative* magazine. Vance, the best-selling author of *Hillbilly Elegy* and current Republican candidate for the open Ohio Senate seat, is capitalizing on an old form of political rhetoric, but one that is at the moment perhaps the most effective way to win votes in American politics – direct and public antagonism and hostility toward one’s political opponents. Polarization is not a new topic in American politics, and over the last few decades countless studies and scholars have devoted themselves to understanding how polarized we really are, whether it is issue or behavioral based, and what is causing Americans to increasingly distrust and hate the opposite political party. Additionally, the role of religion in the process of American polarization is not a novel endeavor, as the culture wars and the consequences of an increasing alignment and sorting of one’s religious and political identities have both received a great deal of scholarly attention. This attention has only increased with the presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016, and the overwhelming majority of white evangelicals who cast their vote for him not only in 2016, but during his re-election campaign in 2020.

“Evangelicals” have become an increasingly visible and controversial group in the raging culture wars, as well as the American political arena, but who exactly are these “evangelicals?” The classification and categorization of this religious group has been difficult not only for scholars, but the broader public as well. One thing that has become obvious though is that this group appears to be more politically polarized than other religious denominations, as well as secular Republicans (Margolis 2020). However, less is known about not only *why* evangelicals are apparently more polarized, but also how religiosity might be influencing this relationship, if at all. A great deal of literature details the effects that religion and specific forms of religiosity have on political behavior, so any discussion of the polarization of a specific religious group warrants an investigation into those concepts and forms of religious behavior. It is certainly the case that the alignment of both one’s religious identity and political identity creates a potent brew of out-group hostility and behavioral polarization (Patrikios 2008, 2013), but religious identity goes beyond simply self-selecting a category on an exit poll or survey.

There are distinct aspects of religiosity, such as belief and belonging, which might be individually having an effect on a host of political outcomes, including levels of affective polarization. Certain religious beliefs have been shown to motivate political behavior in specific ways (Glazier 2015), just as the degree to which an individual belongs to not only their religious community but their wider community produces various aspects of social capital (Putnam 2000). There is as of yet, no current study which seeks to unpack both the belief and belonging aspects of American evangelicalism and to explore how and to what degree these various aspects of religiosity might be influencing

affective polarization, if at all. Evangelicals are not the only polarized group in American politics, and as this study will reveal, there are other groups from the other end of the political spectrum with similarly high levels of polarization, but understanding the reasons behind these high levels of affective polarization might be a first step in understanding political polarization more broadly.

The purpose of this research project is to address the role of religiosity in influencing affective polarization, specifically asking whether belief or belonging matters more and how they might be interacting with one another. In order to accomplish this task, I blend both data from a novel survey with a systematic historical analysis that traces the process of how American evangelicals became involved in the political system, as well as help to provide context and background on the development, origin, and manifestation of evangelical beliefs and patterns of belonging. The initial hypothesis of this study is that belonging matters more in accounting for the rates of polarized political behavior among American evangelicals.

A focus on strict evangelism, or the belief in saving as many souls as possible in a fallen world before Jesus Christ returns to earth long influenced many Bible-believing Protestants to neglect social and political commitments and reforms, effectively rendering them as cultural bystanders and outsiders. However, with the rise of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority in the late 1970's and 1980's, evangelicals have increasingly become an influential and powerful voting bloc. As noted in Putnam (2000), evangelicals have historically possessed the lowest amount of bridging social capital among religious groups, as congregations tend to deeply invest in activities in their own churches, with

relatively little broader civic participation. What impact has the shift from a relatively apolitical community focusing primarily on their own churches to a highly political and mobilized one still invested in bonding forms of social capital had on affective polarization? In an attempt to answer this question, this research project takes a closer look at the role of bonding social capital, which is inherently prone to producing deep in-group solidarity and mistrust, suspicion, and antipathy towards outsiders, and its influence and relationship to the higher than usual levels of affective polarization among American evangelicals.

It is useful here to briefly pause and elaborate on a handful of concepts and provide definitions for crucial terms. The difficulty in defining what is meant by “evangelical” has already been touched on, and the development and origin of the term itself will be elaborated on in the first chapter on the history of American evangelicalism, but I will provide a brief explanation here. During the nineteenth century, most Protestants in America would have called themselves “evangelical,” in that they believed they had been born again through Christ, possessed a duty to evangelize, and spread the good news of the Gospel in America and abroad (Fitzgerald 2018). This consensus ends for reasons to be discussed later, but for the purposes of this research project I opt in favor of classifying this group based on beliefs, rather than simple self-identification or selection measures on surveys. This builds directly on Margolis (2020), who identifies evangelicals based on the beliefs they hold, rather than self-selection. The beliefs I use for categorization purposes come from the Barna Group, which identifies seven traditional evangelical beliefs in their classification system. These beliefs are: the

inerrancy of scripture, the importance in sharing one's beliefs with others, salvation only through the grace of Jesus Christ, the existence of a living devil, that Jesus Christ was sinless while on earth, having no doubt that God exists, and the importance of faith in one's daily life.

However, while this classification system for evangelicals is certainly a step in the right direction, there are also opportunities to improve it and in turn deepen our knowledge of this religious group. Throughout this project I will also refer to "fundamentalists," another religious group intimately related and connected to "evangelicals." Fundamentalists, colloquially referred to as "an evangelical who is mad about something,"² come from the same system of beliefs as American evangelicals, but they often are distinguished by the militancy of these beliefs. Their militancy is usually directed towards liberal theology in the churches and "secular humanism" in broader American culture. The other context in which "fundamentalism" is most commonly used is in reference to Islamic fundamentalism, which also proposes strict and rigid adherence to a set of religious beliefs. In this project though, "fundamentalist" will refer to an evangelical Christian who strongly agrees with six or all seven of the above Barna Group evangelical beliefs. I believe "fundamentalist" to be a better, more historically rich term to classify these strong evangelical believers. This classification allows for better in-group distinctions among evangelicals, as well as an ability to better understand the connection between religiosity and affective polarization among fundamentalists.

Also important before moving forward is to elaborate on the concepts of "bonding" and "bridging" social capital, advanced by Putnam (2000). These forms of

social capital are not “either/or” categories, but should rather be understood as having “more or less” of one type of social capital. Bonding, which is often exclusive in terms of the capital it produces, is good for “undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity,” and as Putnam states: creating “dense networks in ethnic enclaves, which provide social, psychological, support for less fortunate members of the community while financing start-ups, markets and labor.”³ Bridging is typically inclusive, and can be seen in examples such as youth service groups or ecumenical organizations. Bridging, for Putnam, creates links to networks of association that provide external resources and information. Bonding might be good for surviving and getting by, but Putnam argues that bridging is crucial for “getting ahead.”⁴ Perhaps most importantly for understanding how bonding and bridging social capital work in the context of this project, Putnam argues that “bridging also broadens our identities and reciprocity, while bonding bolsters and strengthens our narrow selves.”⁵ Thus, bonding, while useful in creating in-group solidarity, is also prone to producing out-group suspicion and hostility.

Again, this is not an either/or equation, and as will be shown self-identified evangelicals and fundamentalists both possess bridging social capital, or a connection to their outside community, as well as their own religious community. The key though, is the production of bonding social capital, of which American evangelicals and fundamentalists possess decidedly more of than any other religious group. Putnam himself does state that we need better conceptualization and distinction of bonding and bridging forms of social capital, and this project ultimately finds the indicators used for bridging social capital to be in need of improvement. However, this study’s focus and

development of religious belonging, or how deeply one is involved and connected to their own religious community, is perhaps a first step in better understanding the idea and production of bonding social capital, and how this influences levels of affective polarization.

Hypotheses:

First, I expect that higher bonding forms of social capital, here given by one's level of connection to their own religious community, will produce higher levels of affective polarization. I am also hypothesizing that higher levels of bridging social capital, or the amount of connection one has to their broader civic and social communities, will reduce affective polarization. Finally, I predict that evangelical religious communities will produce higher levels of bonding social capital and lower forms of bridging social capital than other religious groups, which in turn produces greater affective polarization among evangelicals.

Existing Literature:

The broader scholarly literature on polarization has vigorously debated whether or not the recent political polarization in America is elite or public driven, and while both schools of thought seem to have a kernel of truth, recent work on the issue has broadened the scope to include behavioral and affective polarization in evaluating the phenomena (Mason 2013, 2016; Iyengar et. al. 2012). This is perhaps a better way to understand and explore the issue, and also a more appropriate lens to utilize in understanding the function

religion is playing in American polarization, primarily because affective polarization investigates attitudes and feelings towards an out-group. There has been excellent scholarly work done on how different forms of religious belief, behavior, and belonging might be motivating and influencing political behavior and attitudes, but significantly less about how these classic measures of religiosity influence levels of affective polarization. Recent research (Margolis 2020) suggests that more devout evangelicals, measured through the aforementioned additive belief scale, have greater hostilities towards the political outgroup, suggesting a strong relationship with this indicator of religiosity and affective polarization.

However, while Margolis's work is important for demonstrating a connection between evangelical beliefs and negative partisanship, measuring religiosity only through beliefs is incomplete. While identifying evangelicals through doctrinal belief is a step in the right direction, this approach could also be utilized to further determine *which* evangelicals are the most polarized. One of the most pernicious issues in scholarship related to evangelicals in the United States is just how to properly identify such a nebulous and fractured group, as members from a host of denominations and religious traditions are often lumped into this broad category. A fundamentalist is likely to possess different beliefs than a more moderate member of a different evangelical tradition, yet these two are often conflated into the same category. Knowing how many evangelical beliefs an individual possesses, as well as the strength of those beliefs, would go a long way in improving our classification and study of this religious group in American politics. There has also been a recent call to disaggregate the notion of religious identity

and religiosity (Miles 2019), as these conceptions often contain complex, interconnected dimensions. Additionally, although the scholarly literature suggests that religious and doctrinal beliefs might affect political behavior, less is known about which specific religious beliefs might contribute to higher or lower levels of affective polarization. Reese et. al. (2007), Driskell et. al. (2008), and Glazier (2015) have all shown how certain religious beliefs influence political behavior, so it is plausible to think that there could there be a difference in political behavior between an individual who believes in the existence of Satan, and someone who does not. However, while beliefs are important in accounting for the connection between religiosity and political behavior, only focusing on this specific aspect risks obfuscating the full scope of the relationship.

For example, Putnam and Campbell (2010) found that a greater degree of religious belonging, more so than religious beliefs, contributed to increased generosity and neighborliness, but would the same hold true for one's feelings towards a member of the opposite political party? Or perhaps in other words, does a deep sense of belonging in the church have the ability to transcend partisan animosity, or does it simply intensify one's tribal sense of belonging and foment more acrimony towards the opposite political party? As mentioned, Putnam (2000) has found that evangelical churches created more bonding forms of social capital at the expense of establishing external networks that produced more community-wide reservoirs of trust. Could this be contributing to higher levels of partisan animosity amongst evangelical Republicans?

It is clear that both belief and belonging seem to motivate political behavior, but how do these specific forms of religiosity interact with one another, and which one

matters more in accounting for high levels of affective polarization among evangelical Republicans? Or perhaps in other words, to what extent does belief without belonging cause polarized political behavior, or belonging without belief affect polarization? The increasing alignment between Republicans and evangelicals, as well as Democrats and the religiously unaffiliated, has certainly contributed to the increased polarization of these groups as the number of cross-cutting influences and pressures is decreased. However, religious identity goes beyond merely self-selection on a survey – it often includes discrete, sometimes amorphous systems belief and patterns of belonging. Therefore, when “evangelicals” are found to be more prone to affective polarization, it should be questioned what is meant by this categorization, and why this religious group appears to possess more anger and hostility towards the out-group than other religious groups or their fellow partisans.

Thus, this research project seeks to address the connection between religiosity and affective polarization, specifically answering how evangelical beliefs might motivate hostile out-group feelings, whether or not deep religious belonging intensifies or soothes negative partisanship, and how these two concepts might influence another. Examining these questions will add to our existing knowledge of polarization, religiosity, and the connection between the two.

Data and Methodology:

The methodological tools one uses in any scholarly analysis typically depend on the question one seeks to answer. Here, I have chosen to blend a systematic historical

analysis with novel survey data and a robust statistical analysis in order to properly address a question that requires deep contextual background and knowledge of concepts with a need for inference and generalizability. This mixed methods approach allows me to properly conceptualize and operationalize thorny concepts such as religious and social belonging and distinct evangelical beliefs, while also creating the possibility for statistical inference and generalizability beyond this study. Historical accounts from George Marsden, Frances FitzGerald, Ernest Sandeen, Nancy Ammerman, and others are used to trace the process and development of evangelical beliefs, patterns of belonging, and how this group came to be highly visible and involved in American politics. Additionally, sermons and works by Jerry Falwell, the founder of the Moral Majority and impetus behind the end of fundamentalists self-exile will be utilized to illustrate the manifestation of evangelical belief and patterns of belonging.

In addition to these historical sources, I also incorporate the use of novel survey data collected during the Summer of 2021 with a grant from George Mason University. The nationally representative survey was in the field between July 16 and July 28th and was distributed online by Dynata, an panel survey company. A total of 1260 responses were collected, and asked respondents a battery of questions on their religious beliefs, how deeply they belonged to their religious community (if applicable), their broader social and civic community, how they felt about the respective American political parties and partisans, as well as a host of demographic questions utilized for controls. Because there was no existing survey which properly addressed belief, belonging, and partisanship in the same dataset, I opted to field my own survey, and I earnestly hope the data that I

collected will help advance the existing knowledge of how religiosity influences partisanship and polarization.

After the collecting the data and in conjunction with the information gathered in the historical analysis, I was able to operationalize belief, belonging, and affective polarization. Following Mason (2013, 2016), I operationalized affective polarization, my primary dependent variable, as the standardized difference between how an individual rated the Democratic and Republican Party. This allowed me to not only see how far the gap was between someone's rating, but also the direction in which an individual was polarized – having either warmer or colder feelings for Democrats and Republicans. Evangelical beliefs came from the seven-item Barna Group list as well as Margolis (2020). These questions were asked as Likert scale questions, which then allowed me to create an evangelical belief scale ranging from holding zero to holding all seven beliefs. This also allowed me to identify fundamentalists, or the strongest, most zealous evangelical believers in the survey, as individuals who strongly held six or all seven beliefs.

Belonging was split into two aspects – one's relationship to their own religious community and one's connection to the broader social and civic community. Because the survey asked respondents not only how often they attended service at a house of worship, but also a number of questions about their attendance at other religious activities, including Sunday school, Bible study, and church social functions, I was able to create a religious belonging scale which captured how deeply an individual belonged to their own religious community. In a similar process, I created a social belonging scale based on

how engaged the respondent was with their civic and social networks, based on Putnam's (2000) conceptions of social belonging, including how often the individual volunteered, donated to charity, and went over to a friend's house for the evening. The creation of these scales of belief and belonging allowed me to perform statistical tests on my variables of interest, including factor analysis, path analysis, OLS regression models, as well as a host of descriptive statistics, graphs, and charts.

Through this mixed methods approach, I have attempted to understand how distinct measures of religiosity may or may not be contributing to affective polarization. Through a systematic historical analysis of the origins and development of evangelical belief and belonging, I hope to have provided conceptual clarity, reduced conceptual stretching, and improved internal validity for the indicators I utilize in my statistical analysis. I believe this enhances the statistical analysis and provides confidence in the results from the statistical tests based on the survey data.

Conclusion:

The discussion of the role of evangelicals in the American political arena, has become a frequently common sight to see on the front page of major media outlets like the *New York Times* and *The Atlantic*, among countless others. This study hopes to continue moving this conversation and discussion forward, with a particular focus on how American evangelicals relate to their religious and social communities, and what ramifications, if any, this has on their higher than usual levels of polarized political behavior. What follows is an in-depth examination of what American evangelicals

believe, how they belong to their own religious communities and their broader civic networks, and how those two forces might be interacting. Through historical process tracing and statistical analysis of novel survey data, I hope to provide insights into one of the more noteworthy and impactful phenomena in contemporary American politics.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction:

This study will focus on affective polarization and will seek to unpack and untangle classic measures of religiosity to determine what specific aspects of religious behavior might be contributing to the apparent high levels of affective polarization among white evangelicals in the United States. After discussing the broader literature on religion as a conceptual category and the general polarization literature, this review will address previous studies involving religion's role in motivating political outcomes and behaviors.

Both religious beliefs and belonging have been shown to influence distinct political outcomes, but less is known about how each of these items influence opinions of the out-group or in-group, as well as how they might be interacting with one another. This study will seek to fill this gap by drilling down into both the belief and belonging aspects of religiosity to expand our knowledge of not only these concepts themselves, but how they might be influencing political outcomes, here being primarily one's polarized political behavior. What follows is a systematic review of the relevant scholarly literature, where the gaps exist, and how this study will seek to contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Religion as a Conceptual Category:

Any study involving religion must first critically assess the utility in deploying religion as a conceptual category in scholarly analysis. There are inherent difficulties in defining and delineating the concept of religion in the social sciences, as it does not readily allow for easy operationalization and conceptualization. A critical analysis of the treatment of religion as a category in the social sciences is explored by W.F. Sullivan (2005), who sharply portrays the difficulty American court systems have in defining religious freedom and subsequently litigating cases involving religious freedom in the United States. While Sullivan explores a single religious freedom case in Florida, the implications of her analysis range far beyond her minimal scope as Sullivan finds that the trouble with religious freedom cases is often the poor fit between how the law defines religious practices and behaviors and what is not religious. Religion, Sullivan argues, often goes beyond mere dogma or clearly delineated practices and beliefs. “Lived religion” often varies a great deal from hierarchical conventions and mandates, but still remains tremendously salient and important in the day-to-day religious behaviors of adherents. This tension between viewing believers as passive agents of religion absorbing strict rules, texts, and authorities from some external source, and an image of believer as active and personally engaged with religious, often heterodox, practices is where Sullivan fully illuminates the difficulties the social sciences have had incorporating religion in an analytical capacity.

For the purposes of this study, Sullivan makes an important point on understanding religious identity and religious behavior. There is, as some of the witness

testimony Sullivan recounts points out, no clean, distinct process through which religious identity or self-identification translates into religious behavior. There was no direct, discernible path through which the mourners in the Boca Raton cemetery translated their Catholic, Jewish, or Christian identity into placing objects on the graves of loved ones. The impetus often came through family traditions or personal faith traditions, completely devoid of any legitimating doctrine or dogma. However, as Sullivan points out, as these personal, individual displays of religious faith began to comprise their own faith structure, this structure increasingly came to link them to larger religious communities at the local, national, and transnational level. Context, then, becomes critical to interpreting and understanding the translation of religious identity into religious behavior. Ordinary religion for ordinary people has difficulty fitting into legally bound definitions, not to mention the public square at large. In addition, as Sullivan argues, the current standards for evaluating religious freedom claims privileges the religious over the non-religious, or perhaps even further, those who feel like they are behaving in religiously motivated ways over those who, despite holding deep values and beliefs, might be behaving in secular ways.

While Sullivan emphasizes the difficulty the American legal system has in defining religion and religious freedom as it relates to lived or ordinary religion, Masuzawa (2005) highlights further problems inherent in the categorization of religion, namely that the “invention of world religions” did not erase the legacy of Christian, European authority, but rather further cemented and reinforced it. He argues that the creation and categorization of world religions, while on the surface seemed to signal a

shift away from Eurocentric perspectives towards a pluralistic interpretation of religion and religious identities, in fact served to further establish a Western, Christian notion and understanding of religion. In addition, the construction of categories of world religions stems from religion's supposed disappearance in perceived secularizing world, which Masuzawa notes means that, somewhat ironically, modern discussion and discourse about religion is in fact more of a dialogue on secularization. The discourse, creation, and subsequent categorization of world religions created "others," who did not fit into neat classifications, while also creating the belief that any viewpoint which was oriented towards values and ethics must certainly come from a religious heritage. Again, similarly to the argument Sullivan makes, the rigid classification, grouping, and cataloguing of religion and religious practices obscures the full picture of the way these forces manifest themselves in the world.

Elizabeth Hurd (2015) demonstrates some of the difficulties that the categorization of religion and politics of difference have created, specifically in international policies relating to religious freedom. "Isolating religious difference as a causal factor in politics obscures the broader fields in which social tension, discrimination, and conflict take shape."⁶ Hurd echoes Sullivan's argument about religious freedom, but this time on a much larger, international scale. Promoting religious freedom abroad privileges some forms of belief and belonging over others, marginalizing at-risk communities. In addition, the dichotomy of treating religion as either a force for good or evil is becomes highly problematic, particularly when the category of religion itself is so resistant to classification. Hurd questions the idea of world religion as a

distinct entity with agency, capable of motivating and explaining political action. Not only does this treatment of religion erase the “lived religion” of individuals, but it also obscures the complex array of historical, social, geographical, and communal factors that might be accounting for specific outcomes. Instead, Hurd argues that scholars utilizing religion in an analysis should explore the ways in which religion is “deployed in specific legal, institutional, historical, and political contexts, by whom, and for what purposes.”⁷ Demarcating specific forms of religious belief, behavior, and belonging can often obscure the full picture, which is why Hurd implores scholars to emphasize the connections between religious discourses their broader contexts.

This obfuscation between religious and political forces is part of the knot that Connolly (2005) attempts to untangle in his exploration of the connection between Evangelical Christianity and the Republican Party. These twin forces – of religious identity and political party – create what Connolly refers to as a “resonance machine” where each element feeds of the other, eventually causing traditional accounts of causality and explanation impossible, as once separate components melt into one another. Connolly argues that identities are “composed of a mixture of faith, doctrine, and sensibility,”⁸ and when evaluating the potential connection between Evangelical and capitalistic identities, he pulls on one thread that might be working to create a greater sense of resonance and reverberation between the two. It is at once extreme economic greed and the deep hatred of those yearning for the return of Christ and his subsequent righteous violence. These potent energies serve to bolster one another as they create a sort of feedback loop, as “one discounts the future of the earth to expand economic

wealth, while the other prepares for the day of judgment against non-believers.”⁹

Connolly’s argument makes clear the need for precise demarcation and delineation of which particular elements in any sort of religiously or political oriented identity might be at work, what their relationship might be to one another, and how scholars investigating questions of the interconnection between religion and politics must be careful when incorporating identity into fixed, stable models of causality.

For a sharper discussion about the interconnectedness of religion and politics for the purposes of this project, it is worth turning to work by both Lewis (2018) and McAlister (2018), both of whom examine how American Evangelicals have influenced domestic and international politics over the last few decades. Lewis argues that more than any other issue, it is the singular issue of abortion which has drastically changed Evangelical political tactics over the last few decades. This shift in strategy has pushed Evangelical leaders and individuals towards more rights-based arguments and claims on the state, and it is the success that both secular and religious groups have had in making liberal-based arguments that has unleashed the culture wars. It is a shift from communitarianism and domination towards minority protection of rights. Of note, Lewis’s isolation of abortion allows him to isolate one aspect of Evangelical identity and trace how it has motivated political behavior through not only rigorous statistical models of public opinion data, but also through newspaper reports and historical document analysis. The mixed methods approach allows for religion to still be deployed usefully in statistical analysis, while also providing much needed context surrounding the issues and

ideas examined. It should be noted that the way in which McAlister deals with the thorny categorization of Evangelical is particularly adroit and worth adopting.

Religion, McAlister states, cannot be defined through beliefs alone, as beliefs are often constructed in and through a community of believers. Evangelicals and Evangelicalism should not be seen as a list of specific beliefs, but rather as “a way of operating in the world,”¹⁰ a lived religion approach. McAlister refers to Harold Ockenga, an Evangelical leader who wrote in the 1960’s that Evangelicals were distinguished by being “zealous for practical Christian living, distinguished from mere orthodoxy.”¹¹ In applying this lens to Evangelicals, McAlister highlights the fact that American Evangelicals are animated and highly motivated by the belief in their own victimization and persecution – both domestically and globally. This has motivated how Evangelicals have engaged the rest of the world, how they have advocated for specific policies, and construct their own identities. Reiterating Connolly’s argument about the resonance machine, McAlister isolates one aspect of how Evangelicals operate in the world, namely persecution, and demonstrates the consequences this has on identity construction and political behavior. Likewise, this lends support to the incorporation of Evangelical configurations of belonging, as how an individual participates in their religious community likely has an important impact on their political behavior.

It should be clear that incorporating the concept of religion into any scholarly study is tremendously complicated, intricate, and multifaceted. There are inherent difficulties in categorizing and classifying not only religions but religious practices and beliefs as well, which makes utilizing these concepts in stable, fixed causal models

problematic. Therefore, this research project will strive to include historical and textual analysis that provides context and detail to the religious practices and beliefs which are incorporated into statistical models.

Political Polarization in the United States: Mass Public or Elite Driven?

In 1950, the American Political Science Association (APSA) argued that ambitious reforms were required in order for the political party system in the United States to be more effective, responsible, and democratic. There was little ideological distinction between the two parties, and voters needed a clear issue and policy platform from each in order to make wiser choices and hold the parties accountable for how they governed. Ironically, the APSA received what they desired but the consequences were heightened polarization with the rise of extremes in each party and an expanded role for the executive branch – the exact outcomes they were trying to prevent. The rise of political polarization in the United States has led to an enormous amount of scholarly literature and thinking devoted to further understanding and exploring the issue. While explanations for this rise have varied from increased geographical sorting (Oppenheimer 2005) to the invention of air conditioning (Polsby 2004), the central debate in the literature is primarily concerned with whether the American public has truly polarized, or if the phenomena is simply elite-driven.

Abramowitz (2010), Jacobsen (2000), and Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) among others, all see an American public as full of hardened partisans who have become increasingly far apart on the ideological spectrum, with a significant and substantial decrease and disappearance in the number of ideological moderates. Abramowitz (2010)

in particular argues that the separation in America is more and more between engaged and unengaged citizens, with the surge and growth of political activism and activists creating a more polarized electorate. This creates a “disappearing center” of American moderates, a view also supported by Jacobsen (2000) and Abramowitz and Saunders (2008), who find that the space along the ideological continuum between Democrats and Republicans continues to grow, even among non-activists. This image of the ideological middle of America rapidly being swallowed up by polarized activists on each side is disputed by a number of scholars, primarily by Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2005). Instead, they argue that most Americans are still in fact centrists and more hold more moderate policy positions than the general scholarly consensus believes. The public only appears to be polarized because they are forced to choose between more and more extreme legislators and political elites. Polarization in the United States is therefore an elite-driven phenomena, with centrist Americans stuck in a no-win situation choosing between two ideological extremes.

There is likely truth in both the Abramowitz and Fiorina schools of thought with regards to political polarization, but it is extremely difficult to untangle whether or not polarization is elite or public driven. It is difficult to dispute that political elites and elected representatives have taken progressively more polarized policy positions throughout the last few decades of American politics. Yet Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope make a convincing argument that an explosion of political activism and the media’s expanded coverage of partisan conflict between by ideological extremists has left many Americans in the ideological middle stuck between unsatisfying policies. This dilemma

in elucidating the source of polarization in the United States can be seen in Grimmer (2013), who argues that members of Congress in districts composed of co-partisans, or members of their own party, are more likely to emphasize position-taking in their home style, while legislators representing districts full of members of the opposite party will adopt a home style that stresses appropriations and by and large try and avoid taking specific policy stances. This creates, as Grimmer notes, a political environment where policy discussions are dominated by the most ideologically extreme, which only heightens polarization. Thus, political elites are taking more extreme policy stances and giving citizens fewer and fewer moderate options, but are doing so when they find electoral benefits in promoting such policies, usually in response to a more activist, ideologically extreme constituency.

Grimmer's work highlights how the electoral connection obscures and muddies the elite versus public driven polarization debate. However, exploring political polarization through the lens of issues and policy might only be one way to approach a multi-faceted issue. Perhaps there is another, more nuanced way to explore and analyze political polarization in the United States, particularly when accounting for increased levels of incivility and hostility in the political arena. Mason (2013, 2016) and Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) both argue that only looking at issue polarization and policy division is just one aspect of a larger, more complex question. Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes assert that mass polarization should not be studied through policy preferences, but rather through the extent to which partisans see each other as a disliked out-group. Through half a dozen surveys utilizing affective thermometers, the authors conclude that Democrats

and Republicans have stable feelings of warmth towards their own partisans, but feelings towards the opposite party have significantly changed for the worse. The authors even find that the number of Democrats and Republicans who would be upset if their child married someone from the opposite political party increased significantly from 1960 to 2008. Importantly, they also find that the partisan cleavage was greater than any other social cleavage, race and religion included, and that partisan identity is only weakly informed by ideological beliefs.

Mason (2013, 2016) agrees with Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes that partisan ideology has little effect on partisan identity. In fact, Mason finds that issue position among the electorate is not a significant ingredient in stimulating affective polarization. Partisan ideological-sorting has driven affective polarization far more than issue polarization, or in other words, as American political parties have become more ideologically aligned, partisan identities have strengthened and polarized, while not having the same effect on our ideological identities. Americans are, according to Mason, an electorate that generally agrees on most issues, but is nevertheless “angry, biased, and politically active.” Issues are thus not driving political behavior, but rather group allegiance and solidarity. It is this “team spirit” that is driving polarization, not necessarily a disagreement about issues. Mason and Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes studies that argue group allegiances and in-group, out-group dynamics power affective polarization are particularly important when investigating religion and religiosity’s role in contemporary American polarization. There are certainly issues which have united religious groups in American politics over the years, particularly Evangelicals and the issue of abortion. However, works put forth by

Mason and Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes suggest that while issues such as abortion might serve as mobilizing factors, merely belonging to a religious group or community might be a more powerful, fundamental element in predicting polarized behavior. It is for this reason that affective polarization, as articulated by Mason, will be the focus of this research project.

Religion and Polarization in the United States: Religious Identities and Culture War Attitudes

Understanding, identifying, and operationalizing religious identity is a thorny, complicated task in the social sciences. Despite the methodological difficulties present in determining what it means to be an “Evangelical” or even “Christian,” these identities have increasingly manifested themselves in powerful ways in American politics, particularly over the last few decades. Attempting to chip away at the enigmatic nature of what it means to be an “Evangelical” or a “Christian” in American politics remains a tremendously important task for social scientists. Patrikios (2008) explores a broad question about how political and religious identities affect one another when it comes to participation in both religious and political arenas. By highlighting the role of church attendance, Patrikios argues that individuals react to the hyper-politicized American landscape by altering their church attendance according to their partisanship. Thus, conservatives and Republicans would increase church attendance in order to confirm their partisanship and further demarcate the out-group, in this case Democrats who would decrease church attendance. Patrikios makes a clear argument that partisanship and partisan identity affect and influence religious behavior, namely church attendance.

While Patrikios's (2008) account does illustrate a potentially important partisan shift occurring in Evangelical churches, it is not exactly clear what makes a church "conservative" or "liberal" other than the composition of partisans. It is also not clear what happens to Republicans or conservatives who do not attend church originally – are they more likely to be converted? There are also questions regarding partisanship influencing more than simply church attendance, but religious beliefs or forms of belonging as well. Perhaps the most important aspect of Patrikios's piece is the assertion and evidence of further alignment between religious and political identities, here being the confluence of the Republican Party and Evangelicals. In addition, the consequences of Patrikios's (2008) account are greater polarization of American churches, an idea partially developed in Bean and Martinez (2015), Putnam and Campbell (2010), among many others. These themes are discussed in-depth by Margolis (2018), who argues that the causal arrow is pointed firmly in the direction of partisan identity influencing and determining religious identity and religious behavior. Margolis proposes that partisans select into organized religion based on their partisan preferences, instead of the other way around.

Instead of the religious environment informing and motivating political attitudes and behavior as previously assumed, Margolis argues that it is the political environment and context that instead informs where an individual chooses to attend church and how involved they will be. For Margolis, religious identities become expressions of social membership in a group, both to themselves and others. In order to understand the private, individual beliefs of a congregant and how these might affect and motivate behavior, one

must understand the theological position of the group and the religious communities in which they participate (Wald et. al 1988). A critical step in Margolis's argument is the assertion that religious identities, unlike partisan identities, are not stable and wax and wane over the lifetime of an individual. This makes them more susceptible to outside influences and pressures, often in the form of partisanship. The ramifications of the landscape presented by Margolis (2018) and Patrikios (2008) are fleshed out in McDaniel (2018), and to a lesser extent Patrikios (2013), who sees the fusion of religious-partisan identities primarily in conservative, Evangelical churches and communities.

McDaniel (2018) extrapolates the consequences of this alignment further, arguing that instead of greater cohesion within each group, this fusion will only serve to weaken and denigrate both the Republican Party and the Evangelical movement, as both will lose trust and credibility in the eyes of the public, further increasing political polarization. Patrikios (2013) asserts that the days of religion serving as a "bridge" or cross-cutting cleavage in American politics have come to an end with the greater alignment between the Republican Party and conservative churches. Patrikios (2008, 2013), Margolis (2018), and McDaniel (2018) all address and capably answer important questions with regards to the role religious identity, primarily Evangelical Christianity, plays in American politics. Yet, their accounts for the most part do not adequately address how this relationship between religious identity and political behavior affects polarization, specifically feelings towards members of the outgroup, or which "B" in the belief, behaving, and belonging heuristic of religiosity more powerfully motivates political polarization.

Putnam and Campbell (2010), in an almost encyclopedic look at religion and politics in the United States, take the two competing interpretations of the “good society,” a growing division in American society coming out of the social revolutions and counter-revolutions of the 1960’s and 1970’s between fundamentalism, religious orthodoxy and “modern,” secular American society elaborated on by Hunter (1991), Marsden (2005), among many others. They take the resulting polarization of this cultural divide a step further by highlighting two distinct religious reactions to the tumultuous events of 1960’s and 1970’s America. What the cultural revolution produced in America according to Putnam and Campbell was a reaction by two different groups towards opposite ends of the spectrum. The first was borne out in Evangelical Christianity, which moved towards what Hunter would classify as the orthodox vision of the good society, characterized by a literal interpretation of scripture, a focus on eradicating immorality, and a world based on fundamental beliefs, values, and norms. The second, and related reaction, went in the other direction, or what Hunter might refer to as the modern vision of the good society. This manifested itself in the growth of “religious nones” a growing group in American society increasingly affiliated with no religious group, a significant development in a country as historically religious as the United States. These two groups, Putnam and Campbell argue, moved towards each end of the pole and thus added to an increasingly polarized political climate.

The question of the rise of religious “nones” is closely inspected by Hout and Fischer (2014), who argue that it is not secularization which is contributing to the growing disaffiliation with organized religion, but a combination of political backlash

and generational succession, both of which are anchored in the cultural earthquakes of the 1960's. The rise of the "nones" has come primarily in the form of those who were only weakly attached or affiliated with a religion – the strongly attached have remained basically untouched by political backlash or generational succession. In addition, religious beliefs have persisted throughout the changing nature of the American religious landscape, as the authors warn that not having a religious identification does not equal not possessing religious beliefs. The "unchurched believer" (Hout and Fisher 2002) increased from 4% to 12% between 1988 and 2012, which accounts for most of the new religious "nones." "Americans believe in God, but suspect churches"¹² according to Hout and Fischer, as they present an image and narrative of religious belonging as a variant of political polarization where someone is either strongly attached or not at all.

How then, do these culture war attitudes and beliefs manifest themselves in forms of political behavior and belonging? Goren and Chapp (2017) challenge traditional models of party and religion-based opinion change, arguing instead that culture war attitudes cause people to reevaluate and update their partisan and religious predispositions. The classic model of opinion change from Campbell et. al. (1960) argues that the average citizen will change his or her cultural opinions based on their religious and political inclinations in order to prevent dissonance. Goren and Chapp's work contends that while partisanship and religion remain strong influences in the lives of ordinary Americans, culture war attitudes are foundational aspects that often exceed the motivating power of religion and party. They emphasize this point through statistical analysis and panel data that shows how culture war attitudes, such as predispositions

towards abortion and gay rights, move party ID, biblical literalism, and religious behavior, measured by the frequency of prayer, attendance at worship, and religion's importance in someone's life.

However, Goren and Chapp again measure culture war attitudes through respondents' issues attitudes towards abortion and gay marriage, not feelings towards the out-group or those on the opposite side of the moral fence and vision of the good society. Their work illustrates how an individual's views on abortion or gay marriage might influence the way they vote or their religious beliefs, but less about the ways in which those culture war issue opinions affect one's level of affective polarization. An individual's opinion on abortion might affect where they attend church or who they vote for, but does it change the way they view someone who has the opposite opinion, even if they are members of the same congregation? It can be assumed they would react negatively, but it is not discussed in Goren and Chapp's work. Despite this, Goren and Chapp's work presents compelling evidence that "culture war issues have power sufficient to alter fountainheads in political and religious belief systems."¹³

Religiosity and American Politics: Belief, Behavior, and Belonging

The classic approach to measuring religiosity in political science comes through the belief, behavior, and belonging paradigm (Layman 2001), which has typically operationalized religiosity through church attendance, frequency of prayer, biblical literalism, and religious affiliation among many other related variables. There is a great deal of research on how church attendance affects political behavior (Guth and Green 1990; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), as studies have found a specific connection

between higher levels of church attendance and more conservative political and social values (Campbell and Putnam 2010; Chaves 2017). Work by Beyerlin and Chaves (2003) has shown that the variance across denomination in political behavior is more of type than amount, with different religious traditions engaging politically and civically at roughly the same level, with political activism simply taking different forms. While there seems to be a connection between religious attendance and political participation, it is also worth considering whether or not religious beliefs motivate political behavior, and if so which specific beliefs affect which forms of political behavior.

Exploring the connection between doctrinal belief and political behavior, Driskell, Elizabeth Embry, and Larry Lyon (2008) find evidence that macro and micro political beliefs affect political behavior differently. Individualistic religious beliefs were measured by asking respondents about their prayer activity, not how much they prayed, but whether they prayed for more local concerns, such as a member of the congregation, their personal finances, or their individual relationship with God. Macro religious beliefs were measured by asking whether they prayed for people they did not know, whether God was directly involved in world affairs, and the importance of seeking economic and social justice in being a good person. They find variation among denominations, with Evangelical Christians and black Protestants having lower political participation scores correlating to a more macro, global belief in God. The authors suggest that if congregants view God as actively involved in world affairs, they will be less likely to participate politically or in civic events. This is contrasted with Jews and mainline Protestants, whose view of a more inactive God likely leads them to be more active in political and

civic life. Another interesting discovery from Driskell et. al.'s study is that church attendance is not a significant predictor of political participation, but the level of church participation such as singing in the choir, seems to boost levels of political participation. Therefore, " simply sitting in the pew appears not to matter, yet participating in various church activities and levels of church involvement play a significant role in political participation,"¹⁴ which seems to correspond with Jonathan Haidt's argument (2012) that deeper networks of association matter with regards to the behavior of religious observants.

In addition to Driskell et. al.'s assertion that religious beliefs regarding God's active or passive role in the world affects political participation, research by Laura A. Reese, Ronald E. Brown, and James David Ivers (2007) has found that the presence of a black Christ worldview has served as a motivator for protest behavior, evidence that specific religious beliefs might have the ability to motivate specific forms of political behavior, in this case political protests. Similarly, Glazier (2015) finds that providentially, or the belief that God has plans humans can further and achieve serves to motivate believers to become involved in politics. However, this transition from providential belief to political action is no given, as Glazier points out. Members of a religious congregation may possess providential beliefs, but Glazier finds that these individuals are often less likely to engage in political activities than non-providential believers. The mechanism which turns these non-political providential believers into zealous political activists comes from the pulpit, as Glazier argues that when they hear

sermons from their clergy that are highly political, they are significantly more likely to participate politically.

The “high political activity cue” which Glazier creates, measured by the sum of six political items in the American National Elections Survey (ANES), serves to mobilize providential believers to donate money to political campaigns, encourage someone to vote, volunteer for a political candidate or campaign, attend rallies, sign petitions, and even put campaign bumper stickers on their cars at significantly higher levels. Perhaps the most interesting piece of Glazier’s work is the development of this mechanism that translates religious beliefs into political action, a persistent problem in related studies. There are still dangers in assigning too much of a causal role in the messages and sermons given behind a pulpit due to problems of self-selection by congregants, but there does appear to be some power in the role of the church in not only shaping beliefs and value sets of members, but also translating those beliefs into political activity.

The power of the church to influence distinctive political orientations is emphasized again in Kenneth E. Wald, Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel S. Hill Jr. (1988), as they take a contextual approach to understanding how churches affect political behavior, arguing that the theology of the congregation is the most important predictor of a member’s moral and political conservatism, far more than individual theology. The extent of a congregation’s theological traditionalism vastly influenced members to adopt more conservative preferences on social issues and far more likely to identify as conservative politically. In addition to the messages and sermons disseminated from the pulpit on Sundays, it is also the informal network and conversations that occur within the

walls of the church that give congregants, who often hold inconsistent ideologies and imperfect information (Campbell et. al. 1960), cues on how to act, think, and behave politically and socially. This environment provides churches with “an array of tools to promote uniformity in social and political outlook”¹⁵ There are, however, methodological downsides to the approach taken by the authors. The generalizability of the study should be questioned, as the distribution of the surveys was contained to only the geographical region of Gainesville, Florida, and only among Protestant congregations. In addition, the surveys were distributed on a small subset of the possible Sundays in a calendar year. The mix of respondents on a given Sunday was probably not representative of the congregation as a whole, and the respondents were probably biased towards congregants more likely to attend and thus hold more conservative political views (Putnam and Campbell 2010; Chaves 2017).

The power of the church in motivating political behavior is again explored in *The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy* by Guth et. al. (1997). Instead of focusing the analysis on the church as a contextual environment shaping political attitudes, Guth et. al. study how theological beliefs affect the political attitudes and behavior of Protestant clergy. If Wald et al.’s findings about the influence of the congregation’s theology on political behavior and attitudes is correct, understanding the underpinnings of pastoral politics is tremendously important. The simple model that the authors use asserts that a minister’s social theology, modified by social context of the church, generates and motivates political goals and activities.¹⁶ Guth et al. describe Protestantism in the United States as a two-party system, divided by distinct perspectives and opinions about the role

of the church in the world, or a social theology. Reminiscent of how Driskell et. al. (2008) measure macro and micro views of God's role in the world, these two perspectives also epitomize the divergent culture war attitudes, with orthodox, individualist worldviews opposing modernist, communitarian visions of God and the church's role on earth.

The authors argue that for much of American history, the individualist, orthodox disposition of Protestant clergy focused on the "vertical" problem of the individual's soul to God, while the modernist, communitarian vision of Protestantism stressed the "horizontal" aspect of religion in community-building. Thus, more modernist Protestant clergy began to adopt more social justice and social gospel approaches, while individualist Protestant clergy emphasized the personal salvation, future reward, and conversion of sinners. These two social theologies as described by Guth et. al. mirror the growing culture war divide in the United States and motivated congregations to pursue two different paths of political and social action, one aimed at the salvation of the individual with the other focused on the salvation of the broader community. However, as the authors note, the increasing nationalization of policy issues and the rise of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority led many Evangelical congregations and orthodox clergy within Protestantism began to jettison the individualist approach in search of more competitive tactics. Observing what they believed to be the corruption and decay of the moral order and fabric of society, these more orthodox, individualist groups within Protestantism began a new course of political activism aimed at a moral reform agenda in order to protect the integrity of families and religious liberty.

Just like Glazier (2015), Reese et. al. (2007), and Driskell et. al. (2008), a minister's theological beliefs about the role of God and the church in the world, view of salvation, even eschatological beliefs, are critical in understanding how Protestant clergy choose to engage with their local congregations politically and socially. While Guth et. al. demonstrate the theological beliefs influence the message clergy deliver from the pulpit on Sundays, there are a handful of unsolved questions from their study. For one, there is no specific causal mechanism for congregational mobilization as in Glazier (2015). While their hypothesis that those members of the Protestant clergy who stress the moral reform agenda or social justice issues will be more active and in turn have more active congregations carries some validity, it is unclear what the specific mechanism at play would be. It is also worth considering for both Guth et. al. and Wald et. al. if the mobilization process works the other way, or in other words, do the religious beliefs of a congregation as a whole influence the behavior and beliefs of a minister? Does a clergy member at a more conservative or liberal church modify their message or behavior to more closely align with the ideological or theological makeup of the congregation in order to have more resonance or keep their job?

Lydia Bean and Brandon C. Martinez (2015) take a step in addressing some of these questions by focusing their study on religious lay leaders or volunteers, and how they shape and influence political talk in churches. Guth et. al. and Wald et. al. both show the importance of the contextual role of the church and theological beliefs of the clergy in motivating the political behavior of congregants, but less is known about the specific ways in which the informal networks and patterns of association within churches might

influence that behavior. By examining lay leaders in Evangelical and Mainline Protestant churches, as well as Catholic churches, Bean and Martinez explore an understudied aspect of the role of the church in molding and shaping the political behavior of congregants. Lay leaders often play important organizing roles in local churches, who teach Sunday school, host small groups, and engage in church governance. The authors find that one of the most important roles that lay leaders play is in setting the agenda of small group interactions, which often prompts discussion on social and political issues. Lay leaders are un-ordained, but this does not mean that they neglect theological beliefs, as Bean and Martinez argue that their “everyday theology” of drawing on personal experiences to justify particular moral stances and political attitudes serves as a way for other congregants to connect their religious identity to the political beliefs and behaviors.

In fact, Bean and Martinez find that political talk in evangelical churches is by and large not minister-driven, but the majority of it comes informally from evangelical lay leaders. As the scholarly consensus suggests, because these lay leaders are more active in their congregations, they are also more active, and more ideologically extreme, than their fellow church members. The politics of these evangelicals serve as a cohesion mechanism that generates more political and moral cohesion within their congregations, which the authors use to explain the greater interconnectedness of evangelical religious communities. Do these lay leaders play the same role as political party activists both in terms of pushing congregations to more ideological extremes and attitudinal polarization? According to Bean and Martinez’s account, these lay leaders are more likely to be “culture warriors” bridging the gap between the political and religious world and link

religious identity to political identity. They present an account of contemporary American congregations full of uniform, polarized congregants where discussion is one-sided. If true, the role of lay leaders in influencing not only political polarization, but congregational polarization should be studied further.

It is clear from account by Glazier, Reese et. al., Driskell et. al., Guth et. al., and Bean and Martinez, that American churches play a distinct and important role in influencing belief and behaviors of congregants. All put forward strong evidence that religious beliefs affect political behavior, but so far political behavior has been constrained to different measures of political participation. Less is known about how religious beliefs influence views and attitudes towards religious and political out-groups, and levels of affective polarization. Additionally, while the contextual role of the church as a community capable of influencing beliefs has been explored in Bean and Martinez and Wald et. al., less is known about how the church-as-community influences affective polarization. Again, does a deep belonging in a religious community bridge the partisan divide or simply intensify it? There is also the question of how the different concepts within the belief, behavior, and belonging paradigm interact with one another. Is any particular measure of religiosity more potent and powerful in motivating political behavior and attitudes than another?

Writing in an effort to re-think and re-adapt the believing, behaving, and belonging paradigm in the study of politics and religion, Miles (2019) asks how we might improve our study of the relationship between politics and religion in light of people increasingly worshipping outside of traditional congregational settings and holding

religious beliefs despite not affiliating with traditional religious groups? Miles argues that the strength of group identification, measured through how important a specific group identification is to an individual's sense of self, matters more than the beliefs that underlie those specific group attachments. As he demonstrates, religious identification and attachments, while being more malleable than beliefs, remain even when an individual no longer remembers or believes specific teachings or values, behaves a certain way, or even belongs in a meaningful way. Miles argues that the context or social environment matters tremendously in the deployment and resonance of religious identities, and that when identities become threatened, they are more likely to be displayed or defended. This might be a reason why religious identities appear to be a powerful motivator for political behavior in the context of culture war debates which often threaten, or at least appear to threaten, the moral foundations of many conservative, orthodox Christians.

Interestingly, Miles notes that as the Republican and Democratic Parties become more and more ideologically polarized at each end of the spectrum, the most religious Americans have begun disassociating themselves with a specific political party. Miles explains this phenomena by stating, "Americans for whom religion is a dominant identity find it easier to disengage with either party than to try to accommodate political positions incongruent with their religious identities."¹⁷

Miles also develops the "competing identities hypothesis" that isolates conditions under which partisan identities influence views and vice-versa.¹⁸ Through this hypothesis, Miles works towards answering the question of what happens when opposing identities,

such as partisan and religious, happen when they come into conflict. Through an extension of the concept of cross-pressured identities, Miles argues that whichever identity is strongest, dependent on the social context, will prevail in the battle, and in the United States, partisanship often wins this struggle as the higher status group.

Both Cassese (2020) and Margolis (2020) investigate the competing identities hypothesis by studying how religious, specifically Evangelical voters, behaved in the 2016 presidential election. Cassese questions whether and how gender worked as a cross-pressuring identity for white, Evangelical, Republican women and found that rather than cross-pressuring their Evangelical identity, gender often reinforced an individual's religious identity. Interestingly, Cassese found that affective polarization was highest among Evangelical Republicans and secular Democrats. Secular Republicans were far less polarized than their Evangelical counterparts, as were Evangelical Democrats. In Cassese's study, Evangelical Democrats and secular Republicans were far more likely to cross party lines and vote for the opposing candidate, suggesting that religious identification, or the lack thereof, serves an important role in either reinforcing partisanship or as a cross-pressure lessening affective polarization.

Cassese's findings support Patrikios's (2008) earlier work in suggesting that the fusion between Republican and Evangelical identity creates a powerful combination that can often be difficult to distinguish and often leads towards strong negative feelings towards the outgroup. Margolis (2020) uncovers similar findings, as she finds that it was negative partisanship, not an alignment of core beliefs, that contributed most strongly to white Evangelicals ardently supporting Donald Trump in 2016. Obviously partisanship

played a factor and devout Republicans are not the only partisans experiencing affective polarization, but Margolis finds that the more devout the individual, the more affected affectively polarized they are. Why then, is this the case? Perhaps the answer lies in the effect of cross-pressuring identities investigated by Cassese, which would argue that more religious Republicans feel less pressure to cross party lines than a more secular Republicans.

However, Margolis measures Evangelical devotion through an additive scale of belief, making the point that prior to previous notions, more religious Evangelicals did in fact vote for Trump, despite the candidate not appearing in the classic mold of a “believer.” While an excellent measure for her purposes, mere belief does not adequately encapsulate religiosity, nor does it fully elucidate why highly devout Evangelicals, specifically, might be more prone to affective polarization than secular Republicans or Republicans of different faith traditions. Additionally, while the identification of Evangelicals through belief goes a long way in properly elucidating who this group really is, it could be taken a step further. Knowing not only which beliefs an individual possesses, but how ardently they hold those beliefs could potentially help to distinguish fundamentalists from more moderate Evangelicals, an important distinction, particularly in a study of affective polarization.

Religious Belonging and Political Polarization: A Bridge or Exacerbator?

In an exploration of why politics and religion seem to serve as a great divider in American society, Jonathan Haidt in *The Righteous Mind* (2012) identifies six

foundations upon which morality is built, arguing that it is the sanctity foundation that is at the crux of the American culture wars. Haidt argues that it is the belonging aspect of religiosity that is crucial in understanding the importance of religion's power to "bind and blind." Recalling Putnam and Campbell (2010), who find that it is not beliefs that motivate generosity and neighborliness, but religious belonging,¹⁹ Haidt argues that deep and dense networks of enmeshment between co-religionists is what brings out the best in people. A lack of trust in society has been shown to lead to greater levels of polarization (Grechnya 2016), so what then are the ramifications of Haidt's assertion that belonging makes people less selfish? Does belief without belonging contribute to greater levels of affective polarization? Does a dense, rich network or community within a church affect how one might view those outside the network, or even people belonging to the opposite political party? Would a member of a politically heterogeneous congregation have a more or less favorable view of the opposite party? Or in other words, does religion still have the potential to serve as a social bridge or do individual beliefs and values hold sway in motivating attitudes? Haidt's argument that a deeper social embeddedness and sense of belonging increases trust relies on the substantive *type* of belonging an individual possesses.

The nature and history of American forms of belonging are studied in-depth by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (2000), and while the entire scope of the work is beyond the specific focus of this study, Putnam makes some important arguments with regards to how forms of belonging should be examined. A crucial idea woven throughout *Bowling Alone* is that of social capital, of which Putnam distinguishes two forms:

bridging and bonding. Bonding focuses on exclusive social capital and is good for “undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity – dense networks in ethnic enclaves provide social, psychological, support for less fortunate members of the community while financing start-ups, markets and labor.”²⁰ Bridging on the other hand, produces inclusive forms of social capital, and according to Putnam creates networks that are better at linking to external assets, information diffusion, and ultimately broadens our identities and reciprocity. Neither are mutually exclusive to the other, but some communities and organizations promote one more than the other. Putnam also warns, that while bonding is often essential for getting by, might also create strong out-group antagonism.

While not directly addressing the production of bonding or bridging social capital, the idea is tangentially addressed by Robert P. Jones in his recent book, *White Too Long* (2020), which addresses a history of white supremacy and the exclusion of non-whites in the Southern Baptist Church, one of the historically largest and most influential Evangelical denominations. Jones’s work is fundamentally an appeal to white churches to address the white supremacy that he argues they have let fester and define them for so long. He utilizes a variety of survey data and experiments to show that a higher score on his Racism Index is predictive of identifying as a white Christian.

Until this point race has not been directly addressed in this study, but Jones’s work shows its importance in accounting for the connection between forms of religiosity and affective polarization. One of the themes in Jones’s study is the uniform whiteness of the church, particularly in the South. According to Jones, these white churches in the

South did much to prevent integration of not only their churches, but their cities, neighborhoods, and societies as well. This is because these institutions were instrumental in “producing, protecting, and promoting white supremacy.”²¹ The church then, served as a sort of central hub in these communities, where local religious, political, and civic leaders would meet, discuss, and even receive religious blessing for their actions, here being racism. This mirrors, although perversely and on the opposite side, the role of the black church in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960’s and 1970’s (McAdam 1982).

Importantly for this study, Jones’s description of the white church calls to mind the power of bonding social capital in facilitating deep connections between members of a community that looks largely the same. He describes his own experience growing up in this environment, where the church would fulfill specific social functions, from looking for work opportunities when a member lost their job to holding graduation banquets where the congregation would celebrate young adults before they sent them off into the world. There is thus a peculiar paradox, where this deep-sense of belonging and community instilled a sense of resiliency, safety, and security for those on the inside, while also working to exclude, marginalize, and persecute those outside the church’s walls.

Thus, “bonding” social capital appears as a double-edged sword, providing material and spiritual benefits for members, while simultaneously negatively affecting those not included. It should be noted that the white church in the South was the dominant cultural force at the time Jones is describing, and the exclusion of minorities

was likely a by-product of not wanting to lose this hegemonic grip on society. However, if, as Putnam has suggested, Evangelical churches are only in the business of producing bonding forms of social capital, regardless of their cultural position in society, it stands to reason that members of these congregations would be more hostile to outsiders than other religious groups.

This is a phenomena worth exploring, as not only are self-identified Evangelicals one of the largest growing religious groups in America, but they have become an increasingly political active group in American society. While previous literature has shown that religiosity might have an effect on the polarization of evangelicals, conceptions of religiosity in these studies have been partial or incomplete. This study will address why evangelical religious communities seem more likely to produce bonding forms of social capital and how this has increasingly manifested itself in contemporary American politics. Thus, filling a gap by studying not only how religious beliefs affect polarization, but how forms of belonging do as well.

Conclusion

Examining political polarization in the United States in terms of behavior and attitudes towards the out-group seems to be a more productive way to investigate the phenomena, rather than position on an ideological spectrum, where it becomes difficult to untangle the elite versus mass-driven debate. To this end, religion's role in influencing affective polarization in the contemporary United States should be further developed. Recent research suggests that religious identity matters with regards to affective polarization, as one's evangelical religious identity might serve as a cross-pressure or

further entrench partisanship, but exactly what specific aspects of religious identity and religiosity might be influencing levels of affective polarization remain unclear. The number of Evangelical beliefs an individual possesses seems to correlate to feelings of negative partisanship, but beliefs are not the only aspect of religiosity. Miles is correct that more work needs to be done in understanding the ways in which discrete aspects of religiosity interact with one another, and how they manifest themselves in the political sphere. The current state of the literature does not have an adequate answer for *why* Evangelicals in particular seem to be more affected by negative partisanship than other religious groups or their fellow partisans. The lack of a strong cross pressure on these voters certainly matters here, but a full examination of not only the distinct elements within religiosity as well as the specificities of those elements is needed.

Putnam (2000) notes that Evangelical churches are more likely to create bonding forms of social capital, and this is backed up by the historical analysis of Guth et. al. (1997), who demonstrate the more individualist theology of Evangelical churches. Is it the specific beliefs of Evangelicals that contribute to more negative partisanship, or is it the tendency to engage in more bonding forms of social capital that produces heightened out-group antagonisms? There does not appear to be a clear answer in the literature.

This study seeks to address this gap, by unpacking distinct forms of religiosity and examining how they might be influencing not only levels of affective polarization, but one another as well. Do specific evangelical beliefs motivate hostile feelings towards the out-group, does deep religious belonging exacerbate or moderate negative partisanship, and how might these two concepts be influencing one another? This study

seeks to address these questions and add to our existing knowledge of polarization, religiosity, and the relationship between the two.

CHAPTER THREE: DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction: Historical Process Tracing, Survey Data, and Statistical Analysis

There is unfortunately no simple methodological way to properly evaluate and analyze the degree to which differing aspects of evangelical religiosity have influenced affective polarization over time. As noted in the literature review, merely plugging religion or religious identification into neat conceptual boxes which are then utilized in a regression analysis can be problematic. One must understand the historical and social context behind the aspects of evangelical religiosity in order to not only properly elucidate the relationship, but also to provide clarity to the concepts and categories used in the subsequent statistical analysis. It is for this reason that a mixed methods approach and research design will be implemented here, as this project attempts to blend the historical and social context to American evangelical religiosity with a robust statistical analysis.

Definitions and Historical Process Tracing:

What does it actually mean to be an evangelical, and what is meant by evangelical religiosity? Since the 2016 presidential election, a great deal of effort has gone into pinning down who the “evangelical” classification actually captures. This study argues that “evangelical” goes beyond simple self-selection or checking a box on a survey. Rather, this research follows the lead of Margolis (2020), which utilizes an additive scale of seven distinct religious beliefs to identify evangelicals. The scale consists of seven

Likert scale questions based on beliefs identified by the Barna Group as especially emblematic of American evangelicalism. The questions which constitute the scale are: whether or not the respondent believes the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, whether or not the devil is a living being or symbol of evil, if Jesus Christ sinned while on earth, if one's place in heaven is achieved only through the salvation provided by Jesus Christ, that the respondent feels a personal responsibility to share their beliefs with others, if they doubt the existence of God, and how important religion is in their daily lives. While not exclusive to evangelical Christianity, these seven items are perhaps the best approximation for the belief set of American evangelicalism.

Margolis's (2020) additive scale of belief allows for not only a better classification of evangelicals, but also fundamentalist Christians, a subgroup of American evangelicalism that has also historically been difficult to pinpoint. Margolis's study refers to the high level believers in her study as "traditional evangelicals." This study will argue that classifying these respondents as "fundamentalists" is perhaps a better conception of these ardent believers. Marsden (1991) colloquially refers to fundamentalists as "evangelicals who are mad about something,"²² and more precisely as an evangelical who is "militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with 'secular humanism.'"²³ As will be discussed, it seems that not only is it important to use the additive belief scale to better identify evangelicals, but also as a way to identify subgroups within a religious denomination and categorization that has historically been denominationally diverse and disparate. For this reason, the classification "fundamentalist" is deployed in this study to

indicate respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with six or all seven of the conventional evangelical beliefs.

But using a system of beliefs to better identify these American religious groups requires a better understanding of the beliefs themselves, including where they came from, how they have developed, and how they have motivated American evangelicalism. For this reason, much of this study is dedicated to a systematic historical analysis of the development of evangelical beliefs, including the inerrancy of the Bible, salvation only through Jesus Christ, and specific premillennialist beliefs, which become particularly important in a holistic understanding of evangelical religiosity. Fortunately, a number of rich historical accounts exist to provide tremendously useful context in creating a picture of the origin, development, and importance of evangelical patterns of belief and belonging. Throughout this study, historical accounts from George Marsden, Frances FitzGerald, Ernest Sandeen, Nancy Ammerman, and others will be utilized to systematically trace the process of not only how distinct evangelical beliefs developed and influenced political behavior and forms of belonging, but also the tremendously important shift from an aversion to the political world to serious engagement with it. One of the central questions in this study revolves around the seemingly low levels of bridging social capital in evangelical communities, and what effect this has had on levels of affective polarization, given this group's increased visibility, power, and role in American politics.

It's therefore important to properly identify when and how this shift occurred, and it is this project's contention that the formation of the Moral Majority and the efforts of

Jerry Falwell, particularly his jeremiads, served as one of the primary impetuses for this change. In order to properly do so, Falwell's jeremiads are examined, specifically in the form of sermons he delivered and works that he published, *Listen, America!* being the best example of one of Falwell's jeremiads. Falwell's jeremiads, as will be discussed, not only are important examples of how previously sidelined religious groups entered the American political arena, but also the important connection between specific forms of belief and patterns of belonging. They are examples of empirical evidence for how beliefs sometimes influence deeper levels of religious belonging, making them particularly important in this analysis. Another way to empirically observe the ways in which evangelicals have historically belonged to their broader communities is through specific church statements and resolutions. This research also utilizes church statements, particularly those on education, which has historically been an important issue in the development of American evangelicalism, to show the historical patterns of belonging among evangelicals.

The historical process tracing, church statements, and Falwell sermons and works are important and provide a strength precisely where statistical and quantitative methods fail, namely in their ability to reduce conceptual stretching, identify and precisely measuring the proper indicators, increase internal validity, and demonstrate through process tracing how causal mechanisms may or may not be influencing outcomes. It is for this reason that this study will incorporate a systematic historical analysis of not only the origin of specific forms of evangelical belief and belonging, but how they have developed over time. Evangelicals have taken an increasingly public position in the

American political arena, and understanding the foundations of their religiosity and how that might be motivating their political behavior remains an important task. However, while the historical survey and assessment of evangelical modes of religiosity is a crucial aspect of this research project because of its ability to create a more nuanced understanding of specific concepts and processes, it is not wholly sufficient. In order to properly supplement the historical analysis, a statistical analysis based off of novel survey data is also utilized in the analytical hope of making more inferential, robust, and generalizable findings.

Operationalization, Survey Data, and Statistical Analysis:

Operationalization:

The key dependent variable being analyzed in this project is an individual's level of affective polarization, which is distinct from issue polarization following Mason (2013, 2016). Mason employs a number of indicators from the American National Election Study (ANES) to create a measure of "partisan bias," which provides a template for the operationalization of "affective polarization." In order to properly construct this indicator, the survey asked respondents to rate the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, conservatives, liberals, President Donald Trump, and President Joe Biden on a scale from 0 to 100. This then allowed me to take the difference between how an individual rated the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, and then standardize that difference, creating a measure that captures how many standard deviations away from the mean each individual's polarization score is. This also allows for an understanding of which direction that polarization occurs, either in favor of one partisan group or the other.

In addition to utilizing political polarization as a dependent variable, this study also explores religious polarization, as another measure through which to understand affective polarization. This was constructed in a very similar way to the measure of political polarization, as the survey also asked respondents to rate a number of religious groups on a feeling thermometer from 0 to 100. For religious polarization, the difference between how an individual rated atheists and evangelicals was calculated and then standardized in the same way as the partisan bias measures. Again, this allowed me to not only see how far away from the mean religious polarization score an individual was, but also in which direction.

For the purposes of this research project, there are two primary variables of interest which might be influencing affective polarization – both the beliefs and belonging aspects of evangelical religiosity. The operationalization of both of these is not a straightforward process, particularly when incorporating these concepts into a statistical analysis. However, previous scholars have established ways in which these concepts might be included into a quantitative process, and combined with the qualitative methods previously discussed, it is believed the findings will be robust. The operationalization of evangelical belief has been noted in the work of Margolis (2020), as her additive scale attempts to measure who evangelicals actually are. In addition to the seven traditional evangelical beliefs which are asked in the survey, the survey also asked a couple of questions to better understand how distinct premillennialist beliefs might be influencing affective polarization and other political outcomes. Following previous work by Wilcox, Linzey, and Jelen (1991), this study asked respondents:

- Whether or not they believed society had gotten more wicked in the last twenty years
- Whether or not they believed God had a plan, and if they believed they had a role to play
- If they sometimes felt bothered by being involved in social or political activities

While useful, this battery of questions trying to capture premillennialist attitudes might need to be further developed, as not all the above questions proved useful in the analysis.

Following Putnam's (2000) concept of bridging and bonding social capital, the belonging aspect of religiosity has two primary components worth evaluating. First, to what degree are individuals involved with their own religious communities? This is often measured through church attendance, but this study will attempt to drill down deeper into religious belonging, incorporating other measures of religious belonging, including attendance at Bible study or Sunday School, attendance at church social functions, how many of an individual's friends attend one's place of worship, and how long an individual has been attending their place of worship. This study hypothesizes that as one's attendance at these religious events increases, so will the level of bonding social capital they possess. Putnam's work itself suggests that both bonding and bridging forms of social capital need better conceptualization, and this study hopes to add to and improve our understanding of these phenomena. Additionally, a scale of religious belonging is constructed utilizing how often a respondent attends their place of worship, Sunday school or bible study, and church social functions. This scale ranges from 0 to 11, and provides another useful tool in better understanding how various levels of religious belonging might contribute to polarization. The Cronbach's Alpha score of .7271 suggest that while the scale is not perfect, it is acceptable.

The other form of belonging that will be evaluated here is a sense of belonging tied to the larger community outside the walls of one's place of worship. Following Putnam, this could include membership or association with a service club, professional organization, farm organization, sports club, political club, among numerous other voluntary associations. As opposed to bonding, individuals who have a greater number of associations with these civic and secular organizations will likely possess bridging social capital. In an effort to capture the ways in which individuals belonged to their broader social and civic communities, the survey asked respondents a battery of questions about a range of activities they participated in weekly, monthly, and yearly. Respondents were asked how often they volunteered, donated to charity, went to a friend's house, attended a meeting of a club or organization, or attended a public meeting on town or school affairs, among a number of others. A full description of these questions is too long to detail here, but they can be found in the survey itself. It is worth briefly noting here that the overall low levels of connection to the broader social and civic community among all respondents in the survey was striking. A greater elaboration on this will be provided in the conclusion, including some suggestions on how to improve the study of these forms of belonging, but for now it appears that Americans are simply not well enmeshed in traditional social and civic networks.

Survey and Data:

Before beginning this study, as is often the case, there was no perfect data set for my specific line of investigation. Plenty of datasets existed which studied distinct aspects

of polarization, evangelical beliefs, and forms of belonging, but none that incorporated all three concepts. Therefore, I was fortunate enough to receive a 2021 Summer Fellowship grant from George Mason University to conduct my survey online. After creating and developing the survey instrument, I applied for and received IRB approval on July 2, 2021. The survey was programmed through Qualtrics with the help of Marina Manganaris. I contracted Dynata, a survey panel company who also conducted the survey in Margolis (2020), to distribute a nationally representative survey online, which was in the field from July 16th until July 28th. Dynata uses weighted randomization to assign surveys to panelists in their system based on the required specifications for the survey. They also included quotas for specific demographic characteristics including age, region, and gender in order to balance completes and try to achieve as close to a nationally representative sample as possible. Panelists were sent emails with the below recruitment script and the standard IRB consent form. After virtually signing consent, the panelist was directed to take the survey, with only fully completed surveys counting towards the number of total completes.

“The purpose of this survey is to better understand the connection between different types of religious and political behaviors in the United States. By participating in this survey, you will be asked to answer a number of questions related to your religious and political practices and behaviors, if applicable. This is a short survey and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete.”

After performing a quality control check for low effort answers and failed tests (i.e. respondent selecting 2+2=something other than 4), the total number of responses was 1260, the final N for this study.

Before statistical analysis began, post-stratification weights were applied to the data based on gender, age, race, and region, based on the available population demographics from the U.S. Census, and for religious affiliation based on Public Religion Research Institute's (PRRI) 2020 Census of American Religion.¹ Because there are often problems simply multiplying weights for different variables, I applied an iterative raking process in Stata which introduces each demographic factor in a sequence, and then computes the weights separately, but sequentially. This automatic iterative solution not only saved me from manually calculating the weights, but it allowed me to create a single, stable weight for the dataset and subsequent analysis.

The actual statistical analysis consisted of a host of descriptive statistics, graphs, and charts, as well as factor analysis, path analysis, and a number of multivariate regressions. Through the survey I was able to control for a number of other variables, including age, gender, race, region, income, education, and marital status.

Conclusion:

Methodologically speaking, the study of the connection between religion and politics is often messy, dense, and multifaceted. Religious studies are often anthropological in nature, and shy away from large datasets and hard quantitative analysis, while the study of politics, especially American political science, leans towards large datasets with quantitative methodological solutions. For this study, which seeks a better understanding of the concept of religiosity and how distinct aspects within it might

¹ Available here: <https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>

be motivating affective polarization, neither approach on its own seemed wholly satisfactory. Certainly, these methodological tools are not “either or,” and many times the best tool to use is determined by the nature of the study and question itself. For this reason I have chosen to utilize tools both common in the study of religion and in political science.

A work that seeks to untangle common notions of religiosity and then determine how those items might be influencing levels of polarization needs a deep and nuanced historical background, as well as a robust statistical analysis. I have therefore attempted to answer the question of how evangelical religiosity might be influencing higher levels of affective polarization among evangelicals by historical process tracing and a sound statistical analysis. This allows me to reduce conceptual stretching, properly identify and define indicators, increase internal validity, and allow for complicated causal mechanisms, while also increasing the generalizability and inferential strength of the study. My hope is that I have threaded that needle.

CHAPTER FOUR: A SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

Introduction:

Bonding and bridging are important factors in understanding contemporary polarization trends in the United States, but before proceeding to a thorough discussion of the data and how belief and forms of belonging might influence affective polarization, it is first worth exploring what “bonding” and bridging” mean in the context of American evangelicalism. By their nature, many religious communities will often inherently produce strong forms of bonding social capital. Many of the activities associated with typical religious communities naturally lend themselves to strengthening interpersonal ties and deepening a sense of connectedness to fellow worshippers and adherents. Regularly meeting, fellowshiping, networking, and behaving similarly according to a prescribed set of rules or guidelines will almost certainly create the sort of solidarity and group cohesion that Putnam (2000) attributes to bonding social capital. While a deep sense of belonging to a specific religious community will produce some level of bonding social capital, do some religious groups do better than others at engaging with the broader community? As Putnam himself notes, American evangelicals were more likely than other religious groups to have deep in-group cohesion, but fewer relationships and lower levels of connection outside their own religious enclaves. Where does this tendency come from, and how has this manifested itself in contemporary American politics as American evangelicals have become highly mobilized politically?

This chapter will thus proceed in four parts: first, it will begin with a brief sketch of the history of evangelicalism in the United States, hopefully elucidating and clarifying what is often a complex, complicated, and misused characterization. Next, it will explore the origin of distinct evangelical beliefs and how they have and have not evolved over time. This chapter will also explore how these values within American evangelicalism have influenced the ways in which American evangelicals have related to their broader civic and social communities, and how this has changed over time. This chapter will explore that pattern and trace the process of how American evangelicalism became highly involved in the political arena. I contend that bonding and bridging matter in accounting for affective polarization. This chapter seeks to uncover what that means in the context of American evangelicalism.

American Evangelicalism: Definitions and Characteristics

Before discussing distinct evangelical beliefs and how evangelicals have typically belonged to their religious and civic communities, it is worth attempting to illuminate the tradition of evangelicalism in America, with a special emphasis on specific beliefs, how some of those beliefs have ended up serving as the source of division and schism within the religious tradition itself, and the ways in which these have influenced patterns of belonging. As Frances FitzGerald persuasively shows, virtually all Protestants in 19th century America would have considered themselves “evangelicals” in the sense that they believed they had been born again in Christ and had an inherent duty to evangelize or spread the good news of the Gospels in America and abroad.²⁴

A useful starting point in pinning down a precise definition of contemporary American evangelicalism comes from George Marsden, particularly because it frames the evangelical tradition in terms of belief, one of the principal goals of this project. Marsden says:

“Evangelicalism today includes any Christians traditional enough to affirm the basic beliefs of the old nineteenth-century evangelical consensus: the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, the real historical character of God’s saving work recorded in scripture, salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, the importance of evangelism and missions, and the importance of a spiritually transformed life.”²⁵

Here, Marsden lays out the basic tenets present in American evangelicalism. First and foremost is the belief in the inerrancy of scripture. This, as will be shown, perhaps more than any other doctrine, has been the biggest source of conflict and mobilizing force within American evangelicalism. *Sola Scriptura* – no creed but the inerrant Bible – harkens back to the Protestant Reformation, but also has roots in Enlightenment thinking and Scottish Common Sense Realism, which took root at Princeton Seminary in the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century and would serve as the bulwark for this doctrine. The concept of Common Sense Realism also refuted Calvinist doctrine and argued that individuals had the ability to not only interpret the Bible for themselves but also find truth from this process. Additionally, the centrality of the Bible is essential for any conservative Protestant minister, and references to the Bible and scripture are frequent and forceful. This is in large part where they derive their ultimate source of authority and legitimacy. The Bible is never far away in conservative Protestantism.²⁶

Additionally, evangelicalism as a distinct form of Protestantism finds its roots in the great revivals of the early American republic, in both the First and Second Great Awakenings. Both outpourings of religious fervor and spiritual zeal can be seen as rebellions against the established churches in early America, an emphasis on emotion, not intellect, and the importance and power of conversion in the life of the individual. As FitzGerald shows, both Mainline Protestantism and evangelicalism still contain the threads and legacies from these movements in their contemporary forms. Much of the enthusiasm for these revivals took place on America's frontier, where a message of individuality, salvation for all who wanted it, and an aversion for the established religious institutions of the day fell on fertile ears. Calvinism, particularly during the Second Great Awakening, was ill-suited to deal with a new democratic spirit in the country that championed popular sovereignty and individual freedom, as revivalist and itinerant preachers tended to stress the ability of an individual to have a personal and direct relationship with God. This relationship often came through dramatic conversion experiences, where the new convert would submit themselves to Jesus Christ and receive the sudden and overwhelming grace of God.²⁷

The conversion experience, beyond granting the convert eternal salvation and a new path, served to differentiate and distinguish them from the rest of society. Both anti-revivalist preachers and ministers, as well as those who simply had not experienced their own conversion story, were soon labeled the "unconverted" and the impure. As FitzGerald notes, some of the more radical revivalists even began to urge their communities to separate from the unconverted, and recommend "the saved" to retreat

from impure churches, lest they too become tainted with by association with those considered not saved.²⁸ This is crucial in understanding the patterns of belonging within the evangelical tradition – one that goes back to the beginning of this country’s existence.

There are two related strands of thought in this episode at the beginning of American evangelicalism. First is the overwhelming importance of the conversion story in differentiating the saved from the unsaved, the pure from the impure. Only through an individual decision to be saved could one receive the blessings of an eternal life. The conversion experience itself serves as a force for more evangelism. Receiving the grace of God, through an individual decision, is the first step. The next is to share that good news with all those you come into contact with. This is, in essence, what evangelicalism is and where the word evangelical comes from – to share the good news of God’s ability to redeem a fallen world and offer a path towards salvation.

Once an individual is “saved” they no longer belong to the temporal world – their home is in heaven, and it is their responsibility to share that good news. They are thus separate from those who have not had their own conversion experience, and enter into their own community with fellow converts and believers. Everyone not saved is on the outside looking in, and it is the believer’s responsibility to bring them into the church. This Manichean outlook – the saved and unsaved, believers and non-believers, has persisted in evangelical thought, particularly in the more fundamentalist segments of American evangelicalism. How this tendency influences and affects an individual’s views towards non-converts and non-believers is unclear, particularly in the modern American political climate, where non-believers are often members of the opposite political party.

While perhaps not important to evangelicals in the 1950's or 60's, the increasing alignment between the Republican Party and evangelicals has made this strand of thought relevant.

The second strand of thought revealed here that remains a force within contemporary American evangelicalism is that of deliberate separation between the believers and non-believers for risk of polluting the purity of the community. The emphasis, once saved, was on striving towards living a Christ-like life surrounded by people working towards the same goals – namely saving souls and emulating Christ's behavior. For some radical revivalist preachers, and as will be shown later, conservative evangelicals, this often meant removing oneself from “the world” and focusing on purity within one's own church community. Why the emphasis on separation? Is it simply to prevent the immorality of the world from leaking in at the cracks and negatively influencing the behavior of converts? That is certainly part of the motivation, but perhaps the more influential piece of doctrine in the impetus towards separation comes in the form of premillennial dispensationalism, an idea made popular through John Nelson Darby, an English sectarian, and disseminated widely through the Scofield Reference Bible.²⁹

The basic idea of premillennial dispensationalism is that civilization is in inevitable decline, and the world was heading towards an apocalyptic battle of Armageddon between the forces of good and evil where Christ would eventually prevail and restore his kingdom in Jerusalem. Premillennial thought sees the world as irredeemably fallen, and the current “age” that we are living in as the “church age” where

the faithful would need to fight off apostates and the gradual decline of morality within the church itself. This idea is a tremendously important one in understanding evangelical thought, and will be discussed throughout this work. It also calibrates the evangelical message through a very specific lens. It gives the listener a piece of bad news first, namely that the world and human nature are both fallen, and that all are lost sinners condemned to hell without the intervention of God. Then, after properly depressing the potential convert, it offers a bit of good news – that those who repent, open their hearts to God and his saving grace will not only gain everlasting life, but experience a blissful, close personal relationship with God.³⁰

Premillennial dispensationalism further enhances the two strands of thought discussed above – by emphasizing the fallen nature of humankind and the world in general, it urges believers to separate themselves not only from a doomed world, but from non-believers, who are doomed as well. The impetus for evangelizing is about saving as many souls as possible before Armageddon actually happens and thus distinguishing yourself from the unsaved, who are ultimately doomed. Historically, adherents to premillennial dispensationalism have been loath to involve themselves with politics and social reform. What is the point of trying to redeem a fallen world through earthly solutions when the only true solution comes in the form of the return of Jesus Christ? However, there is a peculiar paradox within premillennial dispensationalism and those who have typically adhered to its principles. While simultaneously believing that not much in the world really matters, premillennial dispensationalists also are usually on the front lines of fulfilling the vision of a city on a hill set out in early Puritan thought. The

church suddenly becomes a key figure in the history and story of the world, with dispensationalists themselves serving in the role of prophet and key actor.³¹ Marsden describes: “Premillennialists were also the heirs to the Puritan assumption of responsibility for the country, and the tension between their two commitments remained an ever-present paradox in their thinking.”³²

How then does this manifest itself in contemporary evangelical communities, and more importantly for this project, what are the consequences then for bonding and bridging forms of social capital? Separation from a fallen world and delineation between the saved and unsaved both seem to lend themselves towards producing high forms of in-group solidarity and bonding social capital. Belief that you belong to a sacred and saved group of believers, who will see out the trials and tribulations of this lifetime with like-minded individuals can only serve to strengthen in-group ties. But what of one’s relations to the broader community? A good deal of American evangelicalism tends to emphasize the world as one giant mission field, with believers called to seek out, convert, and save people all over the world. This might produce a sense of communal obligation, as one seeks to save those who have not heard the good news. While maybe condescending, it is not difficult to see how this might produce more bridging social capital, as believers feel a responsibility to save their communities from eternal damnation. Additionally, it would not be surprising for contemporary American evangelicals to have higher levels of social and political participation. While historically they may have shunned involvement in worldly affairs, that is no longer the case, as will be discussed later. However, what happens when the potential convert is not a neutral actor, but seen as actively working to

hinder the efforts of evangelism? Here is where the question of partisanship becomes particularly interesting, as American evangelicals tend to possess exceptionally high levels of partisan animosity. If Democrats or “liberals” are seen as the harbingers of the decline of church and culture, would it not make sense for this group to be seen as equivalent to the “impure” individuals warned about by revivalist preachers? And if so, would separation and delineation from this group not make sense?

Divisions within American Evangelicalism: Race, Region, and Theology

Region and Race:

So far the focus has been specifically on distinct beliefs within the American evangelical religious tradition and how these might influence bonding and bridging forms of social capital. However, American evangelicalism has not been static, and has seen a great deal of evolution, development, and division since its period of relative consensus in the nineteenth century. There have been notable splits and divisions within such a broad, complex category used to identify religious adherents, and tracing a handful of these divisions and splits within the tradition, allows for better identification of the various clusters and factions. While not entirely comprehensive, there are three primary divisions within American evangelicalism worth addressing here: race, region, and the split between liberal and conservative theological positions.

The first two divisions, race and region, are interconnected. As Frances FitzGerald (2017) shows, Southern evangelicalism split from Northern evangelicalism in large part over the issue of slavery, just as Southern Baptists split from their northern

counterparts over the very same issue.³³ Additionally, Jones (2020) shows that most mainline Protestant denominations in United States split over the issue of slavery, with many churches simply refusing to integrate black Christians into their congregations and parishes.³⁴ As calls for emancipation grew louder and louder, southern evangelicals began to disapprove of any form of social reform, as in their eyes any challenge to the existing status quo or social order would threaten to bring the entire system, including slavery, crashing down. The doctrine of “the spirituality of the church,” created in large part due to the belief that the institution of slavery was outside the scope of church, created the idea that the church was not permitted official involvement in the social reform of the state. Here again is a tendency within the evangelical tradition to eschew involvement in social and political affairs – this instance being particularly motivated by racism and prejudice.³⁵

The divide between Northern and Southern evangelicals continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century, as assaults on slavery pushed Southern evangelicals further and further towards isolation and alienation from the rest of American Christianity. The South was “the sacred community,” while the North became the essence of what good Southern evangelicals should avoid: the world.³⁶ However, it should be emphasized that this isolation and intentional separation was not to protect the pure, the saved, and the holy remnant, as the goal was for many revivalist ministers in the eighteenth century. This intentional distancing from social and political affairs by evangelical churches in the south during the first half of the nineteenth century was motivated primarily by a desire to preserve the existing social order that they had helped

establish. This “doctrine of spirituality” of Southern evangelicals would dominate its churches for 150 years³⁷, only being broken largely by the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent calls from Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others that it was way past time for American evangelicals to become involved in politics, a change and shift that will be discussed at length later.

While Southern evangelicals distanced themselves further and further from the political arena and broader social scene in the United States, Northern evangelicals took up a different strategy. Northern evangelicalism shifted its focus and directed its energies on bringing the kingdom of God to earth, on perfectionism, and the eternal struggle with self, all of which led to a greater emphasis on social justice. For Northern evangelicalism, the life of a Christian did not stop at conversion. Yes, the conversion experience remained an important aspect of one’s faith, but one’s religious journey did not stop with entrance into church. On the contrary, one’s life as a Christian inside the church was just as important as one’s entrance into it. One was always in the process of becoming a Christian; the process did not magically stop once someone was baptized or accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. The most important thing then in the life of a Northern evangelical was this process of becoming, with the focus being on constantly seeking to live out the Christian ideals and bring the kingdom of God to earth, largely through what is now commonly referred to as the social gospel.³⁸

As Northern evangelicalism became more focused on the outside, Southern evangelicalism turned inward, solidifying around the belief that saving souls was far and away the most important task in the life of a Christian. Religion, then, was a matter of

one's individual relationship to God and to Christ as a personal savior. "Paradoxically, this intensely asocial, individualistic religion created an extraordinary degree of social cohesion among white southerners."³⁹ As Robert Jones (2020) details, the white church in the South became a sort of central networking hub, connecting religious, civic, and political leaders throughout their respective communities. While Jones argues that the homogeneity of these institutions helped serve to protect and continue to produce white supremacy throughout the South, he also inadvertently demonstrates how these Southern churches produced a form of bonding social capital, which served to legitimize and bless largely racist actions and behaviors.

Jones himself details the explicit ability of these churches to produce bonding social capital, detailing his own experience in growing up in the pews. He recounts going to graduation banquets for high school seniors in the congregation, where they would be sent out into the world with the blessing of not only the congregation, but God as well. He describes specific services and functions the church would serve for members who lost their job and needed special assistance, like looking for existing opportunities within the church community, and encouraging others to look within their own circles for potential work. The belief that not only does a robust community have your back when life gets difficult or misfortune finds you, but that God does as well, can serve as a powerful reservoir of resiliency and source of strength, something Jones himself admits served him well.⁴⁰ Southern, white Christians drew on the bonding social capital produced within their religious communities as a source of strength and resilience. In the South, a largely homogenous region where blacks were marginalized and reduced to the

outskirts of society, there would have been little reason for white Christians to need to produce bridging social capital. Evangelical churches were the primary banks of social capital, producing largely bonding forms among members that welded them together.

So while white, Southern evangelicals focused on individuality, saving as many souls as possible, and the subsequent production of bonding social capital, Northern evangelicals took a different, more outward facing approach. The specific theological divisions between Northern and Southern evangelicals, and the related consequences of this schism, will be discussed at-length later, but it is useful to turn towards another divide within American evangelicalism, one inextricably linked to region – race. Black evangelicals, while sharing similar systems of belief to white evangelicals, have had a very different social, political, and religious experience in the United States. While white evangelicals, particularly those residing in the South, enjoyed social, political, and economic hegemony, the story of black evangelicals is one of resistance to slavery, Jim Crow laws, and segregation, among countless other instances of racism and prejudice. For black evangelical Protestants, the church served as a crucial factor in cultivating resistance to discrimination and injustice. They were centers of community and help in a hostile and threatening world. Throughout the Civil Rights Movement they served an important role of providing space to meet, organize, mobilize, and train members in the art of resistance and civic engagement.⁴¹

In a strange, inverted way, the black church in the South provided a similar function and service to members as the white church did in Jones's account. These religious communities functioned as networks for members to gather, assist one another

with whatever might be troubling them, and in the case of the black church, provide resources and community to try and resist and survive a hostile, racist society that sought to keep them marginalized. In both cases the church distributed forms of bonding social capital amongst its members. While producing the same form of social capital, the capital produced served vastly different purposes in the real world. In the case of the white evangelical church in the South, the bonding served to keep blacks, and their churches, marginalized to the outskirts of society and maintain the status quo. On the other hand, those marginalized black churches produced their own forms of bonding, helping blacks survive an adverse and inimical society by empowering members with a network and support system, eventually working to change and alter the system itself through mobilization and organization. While the ramifications of this example for contemporary levels of affective polarization among evangelicals remains to be seen, both bonding and bridging social capital can be used for distinct and varied purposes.

Theology: The Rise and Fall of American Fundamentalism

The classic account of the liberal-conservative divide in American Protestantism is that the advent of Darwinism in the scientific community, the growing problems of a rapidly industrializing society, and modern Biblical scholarship and higher criticism created a myriad of problems for traditional evangelical beliefs. American evangelicals were faced with a choice about how to approach and engage with American culture – should they work from within to reshape it or condemn modernity and separate from it entirely? Both schools of thought agreed that Christianity had an important role to play in

play in the world and the construction of civilization, but they disagreed on what was most important in achieving that goal.

The more theologically liberal proponents sought to adapt their theology to the new wave of modern scientific thinking and bring the kingdom of God to earth, while simultaneously taking an optimistic view of human nature and the perfectibility of man on earth. This led to the creation of what is commonly referred to as the “social gospel,” which has chiefly concerned itself with bringing the kingdom of God to earth. On the opposite side of the spectrum, conservative evangelicals and premillennialists took a more pessimistic view of human nature and the Fall of Man, and that Christianity’s primary contribution to civilization was not perfecting what was already a doomed humanity, but providing a path to a heavenly afterlife, through morality and the “right” beliefs. Liberal theologians and the new social gospel sought the regeneration of not only the social order, but the life of man as well, a task only made possible by suffusing the institutions of society with the Christian spirit of truth and love. Christianity was thus a lifelong quest and journey, not a set of iron clad doctrines. The conservative reaction to the social gospel was a new and invigorated defense of biblical authority, a commitment to premillennial eschatology, and new Holiness doctrines.⁴²

This division was beginning to form in early 20th century America, but it became far more pronounced following World War I and the beginning of the 1920’s, as fundamentalists “engaged in holy warfare to drive the scourge of modernism out of church and culture.”⁴³ This divide would serve as the fault lines for the modernist-fundamentalist controversy in American Protestantism, a schism that would significantly

shape American religion and society. A number of different anti-modernist movements sprang up at this time in American history, fundamentalism being one of many. Holiness and Pentecostal churches and their ministers demanded that their congregants observe extreme asceticism and separation of Christians from politics and ungodly culture that had permeated the world. The term “fundamentalist” was coined by the editor of a conservative Baptist paper, Curtis Lee Laws, who called for a “General Conference on the Fundamentals” in order to discuss and fight back against the invasion of liberal theology into their denominations.⁴⁴ The roots of fundamentalism, according to Ernest Sandeen (1970), stretch back to the millenarian movement that blossomed at Bible and prophecy conferences in the late nineteenth century. In addition, the fundamentalism that sprang up in 1920’s America was a broad movement with roots in conservative revivalism, traditional Calvinism, as well as a millenarian eschatology, with one of the distinguishing traits being the militancy of its anti-modernism. Indeed, it is this very militancy which has often been used, by observers and fundamentalists themselves, to separate them from other conservative evangelicals. The movement’s insistence on retaining the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith, particularly the inerrancy of scripture and salvation through only Jesus Christ separated it from other elements of evangelical Protestantism in the 20th century.⁴⁵

Ernest Sandeen (1993) also makes the argument that one of the keys to understanding American fundamentalism is to not confuse its often explicitly political goals with what is really driving the movement – its theology. It is, according to Sandeen, a religious movement that developed an alliance with dispensationalism, an idea from the

Princeton Theological School, which advocated Scottish Common Sense Realism, a school of thought which asserted that humanity had the ability to understand the external world and apprehend the principles of morality.⁴⁶ The blending of these two ideas has helped in giving American fundamentalism its particular flavor and characteristics. The first of these, “common sense,” was the surest guide to obtaining truth. The idea that anyone could discover truth, was appealing to many Americans as well as Protestant clergy, who could deliver this message and avoid skepticism about religious truth. This path led to the eventual championing of the inerrancy of the Bible, which became a bulwark for Protestant clergy against higher criticism of the Bible.⁴⁷

Fundamentalism and its championing of the inerrancy of scripture became a distinct phenomenon between 1920 and 1925. Fundamentalists became prominent on two separate fronts in American culture during this period. First was in the battle over those who deny or tolerate denial of the fundamentals of traditional faith, like the ultimate authority of the Bible. The other conflict took place in American schools, where fundamentalists fought to prevent evolution from being taught. As the fundamentalist movement waged war on both of these fronts, it also pushed more moderate evangelicals away, as fundamentalists would tolerate no compromise and no sympathizing.⁴⁸

While Fundamentalism developed largely in the North, where it took root as a reaction against the liberal theology that had won over numerous converts among the mainline denominations, it had a distinctive appeal for many Southerners, where perhaps the most famous instance of fundamentalist-modernist conflict took place. Southerners had an inherent mistrust of “modernity” in the early 20th century, and the teaching of

evolution in schools had long been seen as liberal, Northern culture making inroads into the region. The groundswell of the fundamentalist movement led many Southern denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention and Southern Presbyterian Church to adopt declarations declaring their loyalty to the fundamental doctrines of the faith.⁴⁹ Despite this seemingly growing momentum within the fundamentalist movement, maybe the most infamous historical event for the group served to stall the assault and subdue the energy of the group for decades.

In Dayton, Tennessee during the summer of 1925, John Thomas Scopes, a high school teacher, was put on trial for teaching evolution in his classroom. This was in direct conflict with a law that had been passed in March of that year, which had made it a misdemeanor to “teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.”²⁵⁰ Scopes deliberately violated the law, hoping to take the case to court and organize a defense against the law, with lawyer Clarence Darrow leading the charge. Upon hearing about the case, William Jennings Bryan, the populist, former Democratic nominee for president, and staunch Christian fundamentalist decided that this was the perfect opportunity to defend the cause of fundamentalism in the United States. The case received a great deal of publicity and press attention, with H.L. Mencken famously reporting the account to the nation.

The Scopes trial can be seen as a sort of watershed or defining moment in the history of American evangelicalism. At that moment in the United States, the

fundamentalist movement in American Christianity was fighting a war against what it saw as a liberal, secularizing trend in the mainline denominations, a pattern that if left unchecked would spell the end for American Christianity as they knew it. The end of World War I combined with greater urbanization, the advent of Darwinism, and the overall outgrowth of modernity all served to create a schism within American Protestantism. As George Marsden (2005) details, “the old order of American Protestantism was based on the interrelationship of faith, science, the Bible, morality, and civilization.”⁵¹ When the Bible could no longer hold up to the standards of science that Darwinism had set, the whole system threatened to crumble and fall.

Marsden highlights two primary reasons for this reaction: first, more aggressive and radical forms of theological liberalism developed and proliferated. Perhaps more importantly though, the social environment and context of America post-WWI and the Roaring 20’s and the associated moral decay pushed fundamentalists to mount a counterattack against what they saw as the dilapidation of culture and church. This counterattack though, while aimed at what was seen as a decay in the social and political conditions of the day, was in actuality a response to what was seen as false doctrine in more conservative evangelical circles. The spread of this false doctrine, or more liberal theology that neglected the all-importance of the Bible, was seen not only as a crisis within the American church, but one on a much grander scale - it was thus a civilizational crisis. John Roach Straton, a fundamentalist reformer, summed up the central tenet of a growing fundamentalist movement in American religion while addressing the modernist sin of dancing: “The Bible...is the foundation of all that is decent and right in our

civilization.”⁵² Straton’s quote highlights a core foundation of fundamentalist thought, namely the all importance of *sola scriptura* or the primacy of the Bible and scripture in whatever conflict or debate and against whoever they were arguing.⁵³

Elements of conservative Protestantism had always been concerned with social and political reform in the United States, famously championing causes like Prohibition and temperance laws. However, it is in this period immediately following WWI that the more conservative theological strands of evangelicalism in America merged with a concern for the moral well-being of the nation, and the battle over the inerrancy of scripture became not just a theologically motivated conflict, but one for Christian civilization itself.

That battle for Christian civilization played out in the most high profile way at the Scopes Trial in the Summer of 1925. The watershed moment in the conflict between fundamentalism and modernism, the two sides represented what was a growing divide not only in American evangelicalism, but in the country writ large. William Jennings Bryan and the rural, agrarian setting of Dayton, Tennessee perfectly encapsulated the stereotype of the bucolic, backwards religious leader that fundamentalism was charged with. On the other side was Clarence Darrow, defending science and modernism and presenting an image of a slick, well-educated urbanite. These two images mirrored the growing divide and changing dynamics of the country, as cities filled up and the culture of city-dwellers came to dominate. Scopes was found guilty of teaching evolution, it was a rather cut and dry case, but in the court of public opinion modernism had won a sweeping and resonate victory. Bryan could not answer Darrow’s questions about the

accuracy of specific biblical episodes, like how exactly Eve was made from a rib or where Cain got his wife. After pointed questioning by Darrow, and Bryan's subsequent inability to adequately defend himself and biblical authority, the association between fundamentalism and rural backwardness was hard to shake. It was clear after the Scopes Trial that "the twentieth century, the cities, and the universities had won a resounding victory, and that the country, the South, and the fundamentalists were guilty as charged."⁵⁴

Fundamentalism in Exile:

It was hard for fundamentalism to be taken seriously after 1925, and the heaping amounts of ridicule resulting from the widely publicized trial only served to exacerbate this scorn. The Scopes Trial had the twin effects of raising the national consciousness about fundamentalism, while at the same time relegating it to the background and determining it to be a doomed religious movement out of touch with modern reality.⁵⁵ In fact, many Northern Baptists and Presbyterian denominations, as well as moderate and even conservative Protestants dropped their support from the movement and fundamentalist positions entirely rather than face the embarrassment of being associated with such a movement that was obviously destined to wilt in the face of modernity. However, there were a number of issues with the picture that H.L. Mencken and other journalists had depicted at the Scopes Trial. First of all, as FitzGerald notes, there were no fundamentalists in Dayton, Tennessee. What Mencken and others had described was simply white, Southern evangelicals, or preachers who taught folk religions, but not fundamentalists. Fundamentalism was by definition militant anti-modernists, and

virtually of all of them at the time were Northerners, chiefly concerned with driving the scourge of modernism out of their existing denominations. Despite this, fundamentalism was pushed to the outside of American culture, placing fundamentalists in a difficult situation. The pendulum of cultural dominance had swung decidedly in favor of liberal Christians and secularism, leaving fundamentalists little to no place in the broader culture. They were outsiders, exiled from the culturally dominant positions they had seemed so close to capturing.⁵⁶

While fundamentalists and fundamentalism in general went into cultural exile post-1925, the movement did not disappear, as many of its critics predicted it would. In fact, while mainline Protestantism began to falter in the middle of the twentieth century, fundamentalism grew and proliferated, just out of view from the wider public. It changed, taking on more of a Southern accent in the hands of leaders like Bob Jones and John R. Rice, who located their fundamentalist headquarters directly in the South. Fundamentalism flourished in places where people felt disconnected from broader American society, and it was often groups outside traditional spheres of influence in American cultural life who were most attracted to the fundamentalist camp. As Joel Carpenter (1980) said, “It provided ordinary people with a compelling critique of modern society.”⁵⁷

This cultural exile suited many fundamentalist leaders, who were able to portray themselves as martyrs and a faithful remnant cast out but still fighting the devil and the secular forces of the world. As America came out of the Great Depression and the brutality of the Second World War, fundamentalism attracted Bible-believing Protestants

who felt alienated and were searching for a sense of stability in a rapidly changing world. Not only did fundamentalism appeal to uprooted Americans and those seeking a firm footing in a strange new society, but it fostered group solidarity as it continually played up the fact that they had been culturally exiled and cast out – this martyr mentality only reinforced strong in-group community. “In reaction to the strange new environment of cities, fundamentalists formed the equivalent of urban ghettos: church communities in which they could separate themselves from what they considered the corruptions of ‘the world.’”⁵⁸ They could not of course, separate themselves from the world entirely, but fundamentalists would typically spend most of their non-working hours at church, in church, or at church related activities. Additionally, they practiced traditional evangelical standards of behavior, which included no drinking, playing cards, dancing, or even going to the theater. Additionally, fundamentalists stressed Bible studies, and as FitzGerald describes, the most enthusiastic supporters went even further in displaying their religious commitments. “The zealous interpolated their conversation with biblical phrases and etched Bible verses onto jackknife handles, automobile spare-tire covers, and plaques for the walls of their homes – “such practices served as boundary markers between the Lord’s people and apostate others”⁵⁹ Here again we see clear examples of how fundamentalists set out to demarcate themselves from others, only reinforcing in-group solidarity and bonding social capital. If, as recent research has shown (Patrikios 2008, 2013), “evangelical” has become just a stand in for “Republican” wouldn’t this process serve a similar purpose in weeding out apostates and create greater polarization?

As the fundamentalist movement continued to operate outside of the cultural limelight, two camps developed in post-World War II fundamentalist thought, both of which still appear today. The first, sought to guard doctrinal purity without compromise, while the other pursued a vision of retaking America and gaining the world for Christ through a campaign of revivals. These movements within American fundamentalism were not mutually exclusive, and virtually all fundamentalists believed in both courses of action, but most felt that choices had to be made about which was more important and where priorities should lie. Thus, two parties developed within the fundamentalist movement around these two issues – one which was concerned with doctrinal purity and highly separatist, militant, politically extreme, and the other focused primarily on evangelism and spreading the good news, which was inclusivist and sought to regain some semblance of cultural respectability and influence, preferring the term “evangelical” to fundamentalist.

Thus, American evangelicalism further fractured from the sort of consensus that it had enjoyed during the nineteenth century. Not only had American Protestantism split along theologically liberal and conservative lines, but the more conservative faction fractured as well. While this characterization is admittedly painting with broad brushstrokes and there is certainly overlap between these divisions described, it is helpful to lay out exactly where the fault lines occurred in American evangelicalism and Protestantism more broadly, in order to understand the historical threads that persist today. So in 1942, led by Harold Ockenga, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was established with the purpose of uniting a wide range of traditional evangelical

groups in order to present their concerns to government, deepen ties within the broader evangelical community, foster cooperation between churches, and promote revivals across the country. While still conservative in their beliefs, the NAE, Ockenga, and rising star preacher Billy Graham sought to cross some of the doctrinal divide that had long separated conservative Protestants, and ultimately create a lasting and durable coalition of white evangelicals. Graham, while sounding like a classic fundamentalist of the time, deliberately avoided that terminology and instead called himself simply, “an evangelical.”⁶⁰

Graham, Ockenga, and the NAE eschewed the term “fundamentalist” and all the connotations that went along with that word. Instead, they focused their efforts on saving America’s soul first and foremost through conversion and evangelism, as well as uniting the disparate and scattered factions of mid-twentieth century American evangelicalism. Surprisingly, scholars have found that Graham’s revivals did not so much swell the ranks of evangelicals as they did to mobilize and energize existing believers and congregants. Most attendees at his revivals during the 1950’s were already card-carrying evangelicals, many of whom either doubled-down or found new energy in their conflict against the forces of the modern world and secularism. So, maybe in other words, despite his best efforts, what Graham’s revivals and evangelicalism mainly achieved was to produce more energy and cohesion among existing conservative Christians, or bonding social capital.⁶¹

Graham enjoyed widespread success in motivating evangelicals throughout the United States, eventually currying favor with influential politicians like Richard Nixon

and Dwight Eisenhower. However, the fundamentalist wing of evangelicalism strongly disliked Graham's treating with politicians and broader strategy of engaging with the world, leading to fundamentalism being further defined by its belief in militant separation. Graham continued calling himself an "evangelical Christian" and "born again," and while his audiences, if asked, would have probably identified themselves by their respective denomination, whether that be conservative Baptist, Lutheran, Assembly of God, etc. The journalists covering these revivals started using "evangelical" as a convenient shorthand for describing the complex, often puzzling variety of conservative Protestants.

By the 1970's, this term had caught on within the evangelical community, as evangelical became a way for conservative Protestants to identify with one another and themselves. Some scholars, such as Jonathan Edwards (2015), have even argued that because fundamentalist thought and the reaction against modernity and liberal theology has influenced so much of contemporary American evangelicalism, that contemporary evangelicals can be thought of as a subgroup of Fundamentalists. The purpose is not to ignore or deny the diversity of religious or spiritual perspective and thought, but to classify these groups based off of a shared history and common hope in the "triumph" of the true church over the world.⁶² Moving forward, this project, while acknowledging the ways in which fundamentalism has influenced American evangelicalism as a whole, will treat fundamentalists as their own distinct category, defined by the ardency and militancy of their belief compared to other evangelicals.

Fundamentalism's Return to the Political Stage, Jerry Falwell, and the Moral Majority:

While Graham and Ockenga did succeed in building a bringing together Northern and Southern conservative white Protestants and housing them all under one broad, “evangelical” banner, perhaps the more important story regarding contemporary levels of polarization among evangelicals revolves around the rise of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority. Falwell, a Southern Baptist and staunch fundamentalist, made it his mission to bring fundamentalists out of exile and deliberate separation into the American political, social, and cultural sphere. The appearance of Falwell and other fundamentalist leaders and organizations was a surprise, not so much in terms of the content of their message, but in simple terms of their reemergence, as it challenged the notion that fundamentalism was destined to decline and vanish in a secularized world.⁶³

“The war” according to Falwell, was “not between fundamentalists and liberals, but between those who love Jesus Christ and those who hate him.”⁶⁴ Again, there is an inherent “othering” in this speech, a pattern and aspect that has come to characterize much of American fundamentalist rhetoric.⁶⁵ Another historical pattern within many fundamentalist congregations is the attraction of members who felt culturally alienated or dislocated. Those who disliked city life, urbanization, and the fluidity of modernity that often seemed strange and discomfiting often found themselves at home in fundamentalist congregations. Nancy Ammerman described the fundamentalist composition of Falwell’s congregation as those for whom exposure to diversity was high, but who were also the ones least equipped to deal with it. In describing Falwell’s congregation, Ammerman

says: “the church provided believers with an orderly, well-mapped territory in the midst of an uncharted, chaotic, modern wilderness.”⁶⁶ Additionally, she asserts that these people “build congregational cultures in which they can be protected from the cognitive challenges of the world, adding schools, Christian media, and a network of friends to their organizational armor.”⁶⁷

To that end, Thomas Road Baptist Church was a center of activity all week long. There were specific ministries for children, the deaf, the divorced, singles, the elderly, among others, and each ministry planned and held their own trips, Bible studies, lectures, picnics, sporting events, etc. There was always something to do at Thomas Road, and there was a ministry for everyone. If one wanted, they could spend all their time at church, and many did just that. Eldridge Dunn, the head of the children’s ministry at Thomas Road, told Frances FitzGerald when she visited in the 1980’s that their purpose was to create a total environment for children separate from the world. “Our philosophy is that children should not have to go out into the world, they should not have to get involved with drugs or Hollywood movies...but you have to give them something to do....Our idea is to compete with the world.”⁶⁸ He went on to tell her that this philosophy is not unique to Thomas Road, but “shared by all churches advocating separation from the world, however limited or extensive their resources.”⁶⁹

But here is a subtle shift in the fundamentalism of Jerry Falwell et. al. and the fundamentalism of the Bob Jones and John R. Rice’s of the world. When Falwell spoke of separation from the world and creating a society separate from the evils inherent within the world, he did not mean from American life in general, but rather separation

from the *evils* of the world as he saw them. This is a tremendously important distinction, and helps to not only explain Falwell's philosophy and theology that he created and promoted through the Moral Majority, but also perhaps the political worldview many conservative evangelicals hold today.

Jerry Falwell's clear ideas of how society should be organized, absolute faith that this vision was the correct one, and his aspirations of converting the world to this image made it inevitable that Falwell would participate politically. Despite this, Falwell and fundamentalists writ large were hesitant and reluctant to engage in direct political action and activity. Falwell even condemned Christian involvement in American politics in his sermon, *Ministers and Marchers*, warning against the dangers of the church becoming involved in contemporary political affairs at the cost of corrupting the body of Christ and losing sight of the real goal – winning souls.

“If as much effort could be put into winning people to Jesus Christ across the land as is being exerted in the present civil rights movement, America would be turned upside down for God. Hate and prejudice would certainly be in a great measure overcome.”⁷⁰ Falwell's sermon in 1965 invokes the traditional fundamentalist stance towards social involvement – that social and political reforms were ultimately futile in a fallen world. Humanity could not be perfected through temporal policy prescriptions, and instead the focus should be on transformation of the individual. “The gospel does not clean up the outside but rather regenerates the inside.”⁷¹ Therefore, “preachers are not called to be politicians.”⁷² However, when “Ministers and Marchers” was delivered in 1965, Falwell

was using this rhetoric to defend segregation to his congregation and denounce ministers and preachers who became highly active and involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

Falwell's stance on Christian political involvement would radically change between 1965 and his founding of the Moral Majority in 1979. Why the shift from total political abstention to seeking to create a nationwide coalition of conservative Christians and mobilize them into a political force? Falwell himself claimed in his autobiography that his entrance into American politics came because of the *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion law, combined with an overall realization of the threats towards the structure of the American family.⁷³ The truth is that while Falwell's position on abortion probably did motivate his political involvement, a number of other factors contributed to not only his own entrance into the American political arena, but the entry of numerous other previously uninvolved and apolitical fundamentalists and conservative Americans, the first of which being the Civil Rights movement's destabilizing effect on the American South.

Since the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, fundamentalists in the South began to preach about domestic political issues, focusing on desegregation and what was seen as the federal government's intrusion on states' rights, things which would upset the racial status quo in the region. Even as fundamentalists inveighed against direct social and political action, they watched as their more liberal, social gospel-oriented counterparts effectively utilized their voices to mobilize, organize, and influence politics and public policy. Somewhat ironically, the political efficacy of ministers in the Civil Rights Movement opened the eyes of Falwell and other fundamentalists ministers to the

political efficacy that preachers could wield. In other words, it gave fundamentalists and ministers focused on separation their political voices back and an opening to speak out against the aspects of American culture that they abhorred. Andrew Lewis (2018) makes a similar argument in his book on how the issue of abortion served as a crucial device in motivating conservative Christians to make rights-based arguments, following the example of liberal and secular groups and the successes they had in these sorts of appeals.

A prime example of this, and perhaps the most accurate reason why the Moral Majority was created, was a 1978 IRS ruling, which threatened to take away the tax exempt status of private schools that did not meet certain standards of racial integration. The ruling directly threatened many Christian schools that conservative Protestants had built in order to deliberately separate from the broader culture and the dangers of “secular humanism,” whereas in reality most were built in a response to racial desegregation as a way to preserve all white education.

This event ignited and mobilized many in the conservative Christian community, as these private schools were seen as a sort of last bastion and insulation for their families and communities from the moral decay of broader society. It was seen as a direct assault against their interests, and it would have to be dealt with. Thus, Falwell and other fundamentalist ministers saw an opportunity to reenter an arena that they had removed themselves from for decades, justifying it largely through the perceived crisis in American society, politics, and culture that they threatened posed an existential crisis to not only their way of life, but the fate of the country as well.⁷⁴

How Falwell's congregation engaged with the broader Lynchburg, Virginia community helps in understanding the complexion of this newly active group in American politics, particularly in terms of how they related to each other and their neighbors. Lynchburg, Virginia was otherwise regarded as a tight-knit, if sleepy community, where people generally got along well and cooperated without too much trouble. Falwell's church, however, complicated this quaint picture of American harmony, as civic leaders in Lynchburg spoke of the Thomas Road as being in Lynchburg, not a part of it.⁷⁵ There was clearly a division between members of Thomas Road Baptist and the other members of the Lynchburg community who did not regularly attend or belong to the church. The extracurricular activities and ministries sponsored by the church have been briefly mentioned, and it seems that the all-enveloping nature of Falwell's church altered how members of the congregation regarded the their unchurched neighbors and the rest of Lynchburg's civil and social societies. The separation from the rest of Lynchburg and the deep enmeshment in the church's existing social networks created a feeling where members saw their neighbors and the broader community as one big mission field, full of souls waiting to be saved. FitzGerald describes this separation as such:

“The separation of the church from ‘the world’ was as much a matter of practice as it was doctrine. It had to do with the dress the Thomas Road people wore, the prohibitions they observed, even their manner of speaking. Most Thomas Road people had to spend their workaday week in ‘the world’ but otherwise they kept themselves apart from the life of the city, taking no part in civic organizations or local politics”⁷⁶

This account of Thomas Road Baptist as a sort of foreign country in the midst of Lynchburg highlights and emphasizes what sorts of social capital were being produced in

the congregation. There does not appear to be much in the way of bridging, but it's apparent that there were intense forms of bonding social capital for members of Thomas Road.

This sense of in-group solidarity among members can be extrapolated out to the creation of the Moral Majority, where Falwell himself told members that not only were they fighting a holy war, but that they were going to win.⁷⁷ Falwell saw the foundation of the Moral Majority as the first step in combatting secular humanism and the decay of American values and culture. This is the onset of the Christian Right in American politics, a group with amorphous theological beliefs with members from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. It contained separatist Baptists like Falwell, members from the Southern Baptist Convention who were not as radical about separation, right-wing Calvinist Presbyterians, conservative Catholics, Pentecostals, and individuals and groups who did not fit easy categorization, like many conservative evangelicals from diverse religious traditions and backgrounds. Members of the Christian Right and Moral Majority did, however, share things in common – the foremost of which being an inerrant Bible and literal creation story. Almost all were premillennialists, and most came from the Sunbelt states of the South and Southwest.⁷⁸

The Moral Majority would serve as the instrument through which many conservative Protestants would return from self-imposed exile. It would provide information about political issues and basic trainings about the political process. Falwell told ministers, “you can register them to vote, you can explain the issues to them, and you can endorse candidates right there in church on Sunday mornings.”⁷⁹ Falwell's call to

conservative Christians across the country is a classic jeremiad, a form of rhetoric named after the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, that can be traced back to early Puritanism and John Winthrop, who famously called America a “city on a hill.” Falwell’s book, *Listen, America!* is one long jeremiad, where he directly addresses fundamentalist and conservative evangelicals who had long believed that they were a saving remnant and that their separation from a fallen world was necessary, and their primary tasks were to fulfill the Great Commission of evangelization and wait for the rapture. However, as previously mentioned, fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals had another tradition besides widespread evangelism, namely the belief that they were ultimately responsible for the well-being of the country and civilization itself.

Falwell utilizes the jeremiad to call upon this tradition and flip the responsibility of fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals from separation and exile to intentional engagement and commitment to saving American society. He turns these groups from outsiders into the very ones who will save and redeem the nation in its time of need. By claiming that America was economically, militarily, and politically sick because the country’s morals were sick, Falwell’s jeremiad also flips the calculus from focusing on individual sin to a nation’s sin. This has the effect of empowering his audience and granting them with a measure of agency. Normal people now had the formidable ability to change the course of the nation’s fate, simply through individual decisions to abstain from drinking or sexual promiscuity. It also placed the sins not in the souls of members of the broader church community, but in outside forces. The enemy was the Other, in this case a mix of feminists, homosexuals, government bureaucrats, and liberal theologians,

all of whom fell under the umbrella of secular humanism. Preserving America meant protecting the last great launching pad for evangelization of the world. Political action allowed them to do what the Bible required of them, namely evangelize, but instead of separating from their communities to do so, it meant engaging with the world in organized, targeted ways.⁸⁰

Falwell's Moral Majority eventually faded from national prominence, as it was never truly able to deliver what it promised – a cohesive organization capable of consistently delivering votes and mobilizing voters. However, he and his allies did steer fundamentalism and conservative Protestantism back into national politics, as they provided a political agenda and justification for separatist religious groups to join the national debate. By harnessing the sense of cultural breakdown that led many to join these fundamentalist and conservative evangelical churches in the first place, the Moral Majority brought the most marginalized religious groups into mainstream politics. And these groups brought with them “the fundamentalist sense of perpetual crisis, and of war between the forces of good and evil, into national politics, where the rhetoric has remained ever since.”⁸¹

Conclusion: Looking Ahead

What then can be said of the involvement of fundamentalist and conservative Protestant groups in American politics today? The explosion of the Tea Party around

2009, while composed of a loose association of economic libertarians, conspiracy theorists, and disgruntled conservatives, was shaped and influenced by themes within American fundamentalism, particularly the centrality of the United States Constitution and a sort of “conversion experience” where one’s eyes are opened and the individual is “reborn.”⁸² Additionally, while the Republican Party has in many ways subsumed the amorphous Christian Right into its base, the party elites have had difficulty in organizing and directing its membership in unified political action.

For example, in 2016 Southern Baptist Convention leaders Russell Moore and Albert Mohler came out staunchly against Donald Trump in the primary, but had little effect in turning their congregants’ votes to other candidates. What was once a self-exiled group in American politics, deliberating shunning the political system and its ability to bring policy reforms to a fallen world is now very much involved, and to a degree, less controllable by its ostensible leaders. As has been mentioned, a plethora of attention has been given to how white evangelicals behave in American politics, but less is known about fundamentalists, a group that is also often mischaracterized and has often been lumped in to the broad term “evangelical.”

Could fundamentalists, those conservative evangelicals who are militant in their beliefs and traditionally separatist, be coloring perceptions of American evangelicals as a whole? Or have the strands of fundamentalist theology permeated vast swaths of conservative evangelical thought, which in turn have created higher levels of affective polarization? Fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals are fully ingrained in the American political process, any effort to understand their role in our politics will require

drilling down into who this group actually is, what they believe, and how they relate to their community.

CHAPTER FIVE: BELIEF

Introduction:

One of the primary goals of this project is to untangle measures of religiosity in accounting for higher than usual levels of affective polarization among American evangelicals. To that end, this chapter will specifically investigate the role of belief in motivating affective polarization. This chapter will continue the discussion of the history and development of evangelical belief and theology that was presented in the previous chapter, but it will also include a more formal statistical analysis from a nationally representative survey focused on American evangelicals. Previous research from Glazier (2015) and Reese et. al. (2007) have shown how holding specific religious beliefs can influence distinct types of political behaviors, but less is known about the connection between specific evangelical beliefs and political orientations, namely affective polarization. What follows is a discussion about the particular beliefs measured in the survey, how they relate to one another, and how they might be influencing the polarization of evangelicals in the United States.

Belief Scale of Evangelicals: Divisions

Following previous research from Margolis (2020), this study utilized a seven-item scale of evangelical belief based on the Barna Group's classification. It should be noted that individual questions could be applied to other religions, such as "how important one's religious faith is in their daily life," but taken together, they comprise an extremely close approximation of the American evangelical belief set. On a Likert scale

(strongly agree to strongly disagree), the survey asked respondents their opinions the following items: their personal responsibility to share their beliefs with others, gaining salvation without accepting Jesus Christ, whether Jesus Christ sinned while on earth, that the devil or Satan is not a symbol of evil but a living being, doubt that God exists, the inerrancy of the Bible, and the above mentioned importance of one's religious faith in daily life. From this, an additive scale was created based on the number of evangelical beliefs a respondent held, ranging from zero to all seven. An individual holding all seven of these standard evangelical beliefs would be considered, in Margolis's classification system, a "traditional evangelical." These were the individuals with the highest levels of negative polarization or self-reported antipathy toward the Democratic Party in Margolis's study. This makes logical sense for a number of reasons, perhaps the most obvious being the continued fusion between the Republican Party and staunch conservative Protestants and evangelicals. However, as has been mentioned, while Margolis's study is a useful step towards a better classification of American evangelicals, there is perhaps a better way to identify those who hold all of the above classic evangelical beliefs – fundamentalists.

Fundamentalism and fundamentalists have a very distinct connotation and self-designation today. While outsiders might refer to fundamentalists as any militant conservative, self-styled fundamentalists are typically separatist Baptists dispensationalists, or perhaps more plainly: Bible-believing Protestants who are certain that not only do supernatural forces of good and evil exist, but that they have a part to play in the upcoming spiritual warfare. Susan Friend Harding (2000) has made note of

two popular distinctions of fundamentalism in broader American culture. The first are the self-identified fundamentalists, like Bob Jones Sr. and Jerry Falwell, those who represent themselves explicitly as militantly antimodernist and call themselves fundamentalists. The second shade to American fundamentalism is those who would not identify themselves as fundamentalists, yet are the sort of Bible-believing Protestants who outsiders, often liberal Protestants, journalists, or academics would categorize as fundamentalists. This only further obfuscates the picture, as many of these in the latter category would label themselves as evangelicals, Pentecostals, Bible-believing Christians, born-again believers, or simply Christian.⁸³ This is borne out in my own survey results, as only a miniscule number of respondents self-identified as fundamentalists despite having the available option, while far more respondents held all seven traditional evangelical beliefs. This is perhaps evidence of how the term “fundamentalist” has taken on highly negative connotations in broader American culture, especially when used to apply to Islamic fundamentalists.

One of the questions that arises is how different these two groups of conservative Protestants, evangelicals and fundamentalists, really are? Much has been made of the competing visions of “the good society” and the resulting culture wars in motivating political polarization, but just as Americans are broadly divided along the liberal and conservative moral visions of society, evangelicals are also fragmented. The last chapter, which traced the development of American evangelical thought and the resulting fracture of the 19th century consensus, touched on the two paths that conservative Protestant ministers and leaders were faced with in the middle of the 20th century – namely whether

they should remain separate from larger American society and focus on winning souls, or to enter the political, social, and cultural arena and stop the moral decay of the nation as they saw it. While certainly not mutually exclusive, the tension between these two poles of thought - whether or not to separate and convert as many souls as possible or engage with the wicked and immoral aspects of American culture - permeates American evangelicalism. While both courses of action remain present in conservative American Protestantism, distinguishing between the two and identifying how these belief sets manifest themselves seems to be an important task.

Factor Analysis:

In seeking to further untangle these two paths in American evangelicalism, both an exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis of the seven primary evangelical beliefs was performed to better understand which beliefs might correlate with one another and whether this supposed division within American evangelicalism actually exists. The purpose of performing an exploratory factor analysis in this context is to attempt to uncover any latent variables which might be strongly linked to a set of empirical indicators. In this case, the exploratory factor analysis uncovered two primary factors, which appear to fall along the divisions within American evangelicalism just discussed: saving souls and addressing and fighting the decline of American culture and morality through spiritual warfare. The results are as follows:

Table 1

Factor Analysis/Correlation	Number of Obs: 1260	Number of Retained Factors: 2	Method: Principal Component Factors	Rotation: Orthogonal
Factor	Variance	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor 1	2.75727	0.77052	0.3939	0.3939
Factor 2	1.98676	.	0.2838	0.6777
chi2(21)=3230.31	Prob>chi2=0.000			
Factor Loadings				
Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Uniqueness	
Inerrancy	-0.737	0.1887	0.4290	
Sharing Beliefs	0.8059	-0.1887	0.3153	
Salvation only through Jesus Christ	0.0127	0.8279	0.3144	
Jesus Christ was sinless while on Earth	-0.3148	0.7430	0.3489	
Faith is important in daily life	0.8806	-0.1098	0.2126	
Devil is a living being	-0.1521	0.8148	0.3130	
No doubt that God exists	0.8214	-0.0500	0.3228	

Table 2

Factor analysis/correlation Number of obs = **1,260**
 Method: principal-component factors Retained factors = **2**
 Rotation: orthogonal varimax (Kaiser off) Number of params = **13**

Factor	Variance	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	2.75727	0.77052	0.3939	0.3939
Factor2	1.98676	.	0.2838	0.6777

LR test: independent vs. saturated: $\chi^2(21) = 3230.31$ Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.0000$

Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Uniqueness
inerrancy	-0.7317	0.1887	0.4290
belief_share	0.8059	-0.1877	0.3153
belief_hear~n	0.0127	0.8279	0.3144
belief_JCsin	-0.3148	0.7430	0.3489
belief_faith	0.8806	-0.1098	0.2126
belief_devil	-0.1521	0.8148	0.3130
belief_doubt	0.8214	-0.0500	0.3228

Two factors are retained from the initial seven variable exploratory factor analysis. As can be seen from the factor loadings, the importance of sharing one's religious beliefs, the importance of one's faith in daily life, and having no doubt that God exists all define factor one with fairly high factor loadings, which could be thought of as the strict evangelism factor or latent variable. The second factor has strong factor loadings for belief that the devil is a living being, not a symbol of evil, a strong belief that Jesus Christ was sinless while he lived on earth, a belief that only through Jesus Christ is salvation possible and heaven achieved. The second factor appears to represent beliefs associated with the supernatural and the more Manichean beliefs of good versus evil, the blamelessness of Jesus Christ, the living evil of Satan, and the existence of spiritual warfare. The variable inerrancy, while being more closely aligned with the second factor, does not have a particularly high factor loading, and does not meet the 0.30 threshold that is typically associated with keeping a variable in exploratory factor analysis (O'Leary-Kelly and Vorunka, 1998). Additionally, each item has a relatively low uniqueness score, indicating the amount of variance that is "unique" to the variable and not shared with other variables. This result also suggests an overall coherence to the seven-item belief scale used here and developed by the Barna Group.

After dropping inerrancy from the factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha for each factor was also utilized as a measure of internal consistency and reliability for the constructs, with the first factor having scale reliability coefficient of 0.8336 and the second factor having an alpha of 0.7402. Both of these scores appear to be high enough to warrant keeping both factors in the analysis.

Following the initial exploratory factor analysis, I performed a confirmatory factor analysis to further investigate if the various items making up the two latent factors in the evangelical belief scale properly measure the apparent division within the belief set. Based on the below model:

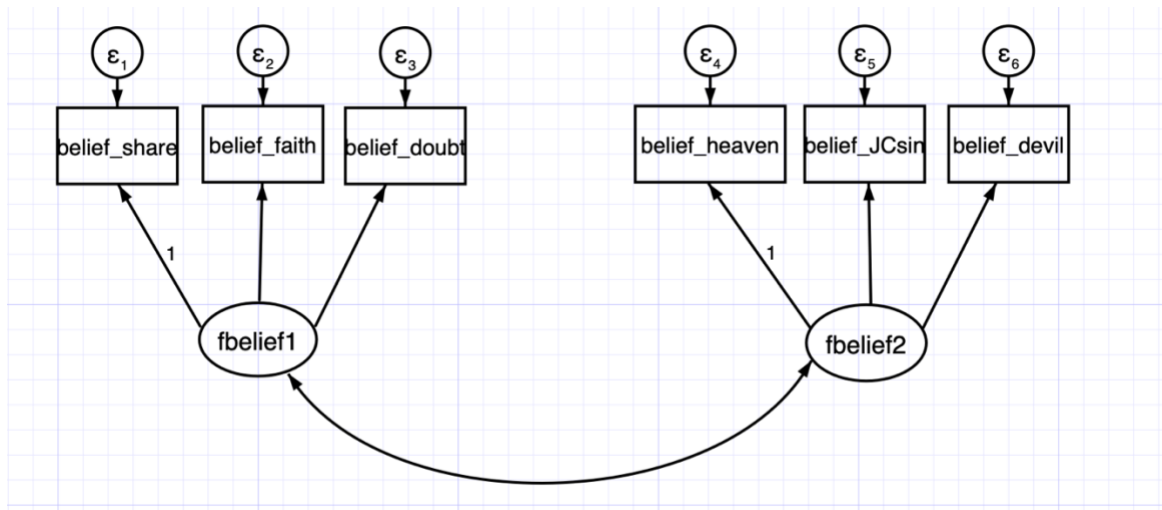


Figure 1

Where “fbelief1” is the first latent variable from the factor analysis, more emphasis on sharing one’s faith, and “fbelief2” is the second latent variable, more emphasis on the supernatural elements of evangelicalism and elements associated with a spiritual warfare mindset. Running goodness of fit tests for this model produced the following results:

Table 3

Fit statistic	Value	Description
Likelihood ratio		
chi2_ms(8)	109.661	model vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
chi2_bs(15)	2632.353	baseline vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
Population error		
RMSEA	0.100	Root mean squared error of approximation
90% CI, lower bound	0.084	
upper bound	0.118	
pclose	0.000	Probability RMSEA <= 0.05
Information criteria		
AIC	23036.682	Akaike's information criterion
BIC	23134.320	Bayesian information criterion
Baseline comparison		
CFI	0.961	Comparative fit index
TLI	0.927	Tucker-Lewis index
Size of residuals		
SRMR	0.053	Standardized root mean squared residual
CD	0.967	Coefficient of determination

There are a handful of values that indicate that the model is not a good fit, including the chi-square value of $p < 0.000$ and the root mean square error of approximation. These both suggest that taken together, the items composing each latent variable do not properly explain the emphasis on sharing one's faith and spiritual warfare. However, the comparative fit index of 0.961 and standardized root mean square residual of 0.053 offer conflicting information, both of which suggesting that the model might in fact offer a good fit for the latent variables.

So while the exploratory factor analysis seems to confirm that there are in fact divisions within the American evangelical system of belief, the confirmatory factor analysis offers conflicting evidence, suggesting that any bold claims about substantive and hard divisions existing within contemporary American evangelicalism should be muted. The more pertinent question to unravel in this chapter is how these specific beliefs within American evangelicalism might be influencing levels of affective polarization among adherents.

Beliefs and Polarization

Previous research has shown that self-identified American evangelicals appear to be more politically polarized than other religious groups (Margolis 2020), and the general findings of my survey seem to confirm this, as self-identified Evangelicals and the religiously unaffiliated are the farthest apart in their feeling thermometer ratings of liberals and conservatives.

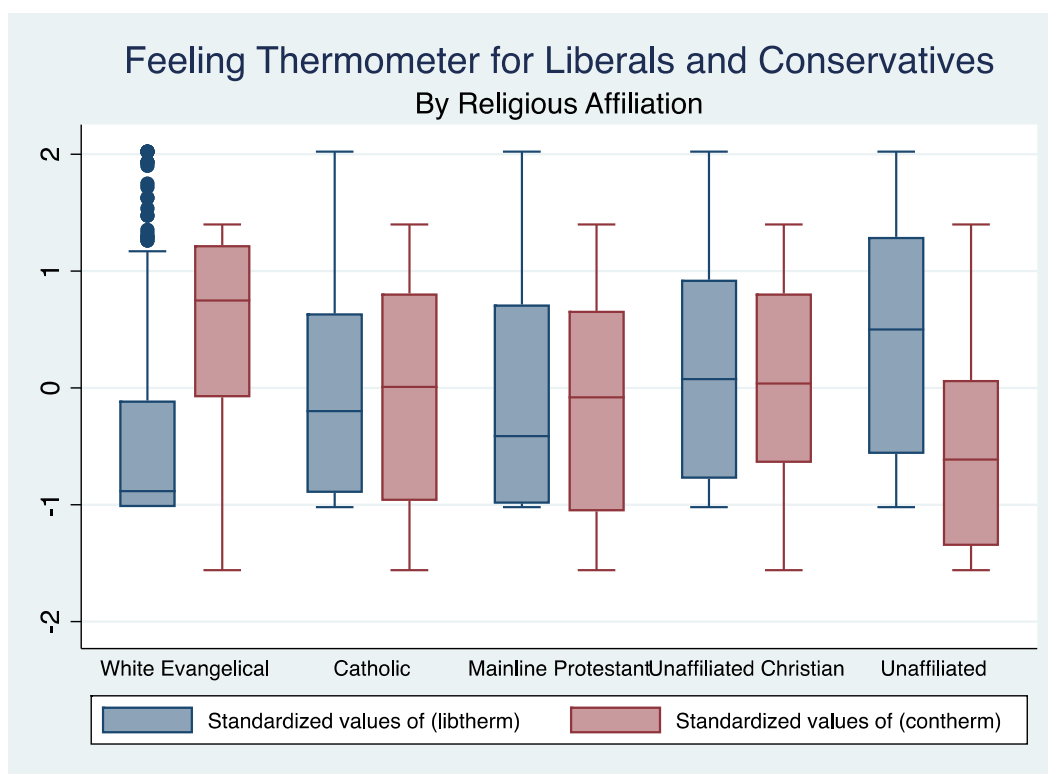


Figure 2³

The above graph shows the standardized feelings thermometer ratings for liberals and conservatives by 5 separate religious affiliations, four primary Christian denominations and the religiously unaffiliated.⁴ As can be seen, white evangelicals and the religiously unaffiliated differ vastly in their ratings of liberals and conservatives, with white evangelicals rating conservatives far more highly than any other religious group, and the religiously unaffiliated rating them far lower than any other denomination. This graph

³ Oneway ANOVA for feeling thermometer for Liberals: $p < 0.001$, and for Conservatives: $p < 0.001$

⁴ While other religious groups are included in the overall analysis, they do not appear in this graph do to either low response rate and/or visual clarity. Additionally, contrasting evangelicals with the other main Christian denominations as well as the religiously unaffiliated allows for a better comparison of this research project's specific scope. Bolstering the analysis to include other religious groups and avoid being too Christian-centric is a goal for future research.

should not be particularly surprising. Much has been made of the increasing alignment between the religiously unaffiliated with the Democratic Party and the religiously affiliated with the Republican Party. This is also borne out when comparing the feeling thermometer rating of the Republican and Democratic Parties:

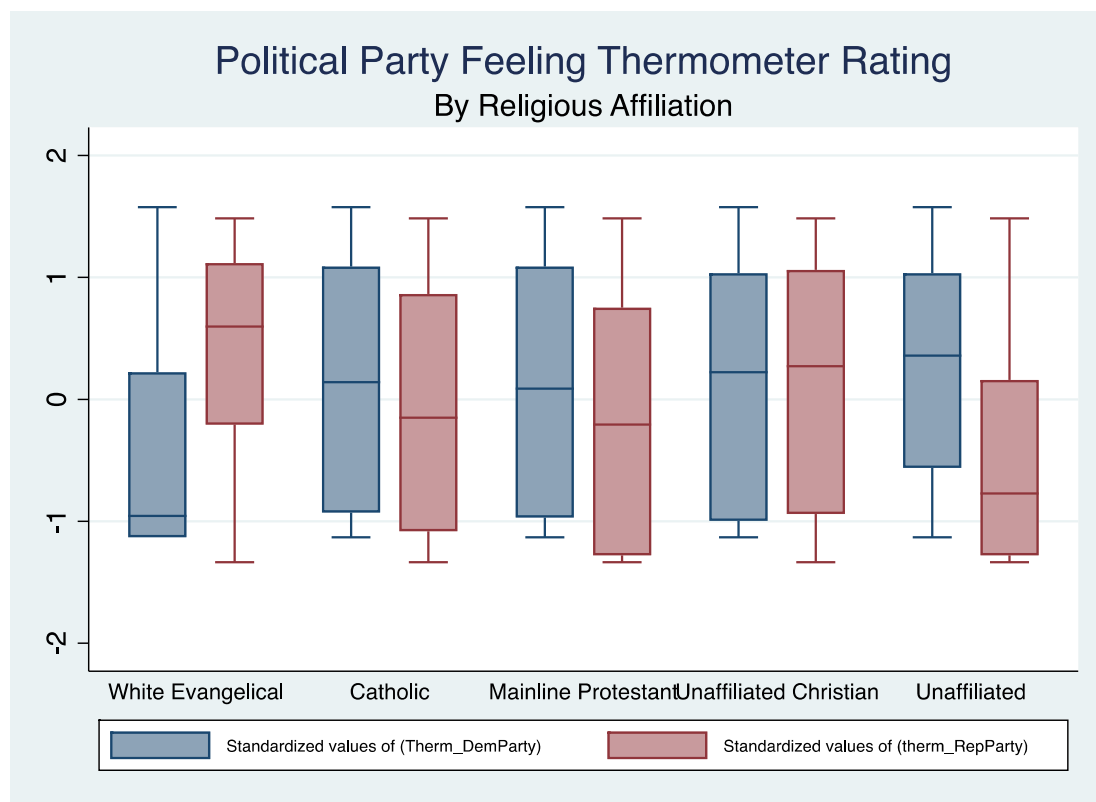


Figure 3⁵

⁵ Oneway ANOVA for feeling thermometer for Democrats: $p < 0.001$, and for Republicans: $p < 0.001$

Again, the main difference in rating comes from self-identified white evangelicals and the religiously unaffiliated. Interestingly though, both Catholics and Mainline Protestants appear to rate the Democratic Party more highly than the Republican Party, where when asked to rate liberals and conservatives, each group was more likely to rate conservatives higher than liberals. It is also worth noting here that the above two graphs show the religiously unaffiliated just as highly polarized as white evangelicals, a result that while maybe not surprising, is worth noting. It offers further evidence of increased partisan sorting along religious lines, with the unaffiliated finding a home in the Democratic Party, while Republicans continue to attract “evangelicals.”

However, the above graphs look only at the polarization levels by self-identified affiliations. What are the results when applying the additive evangelical belief scale?

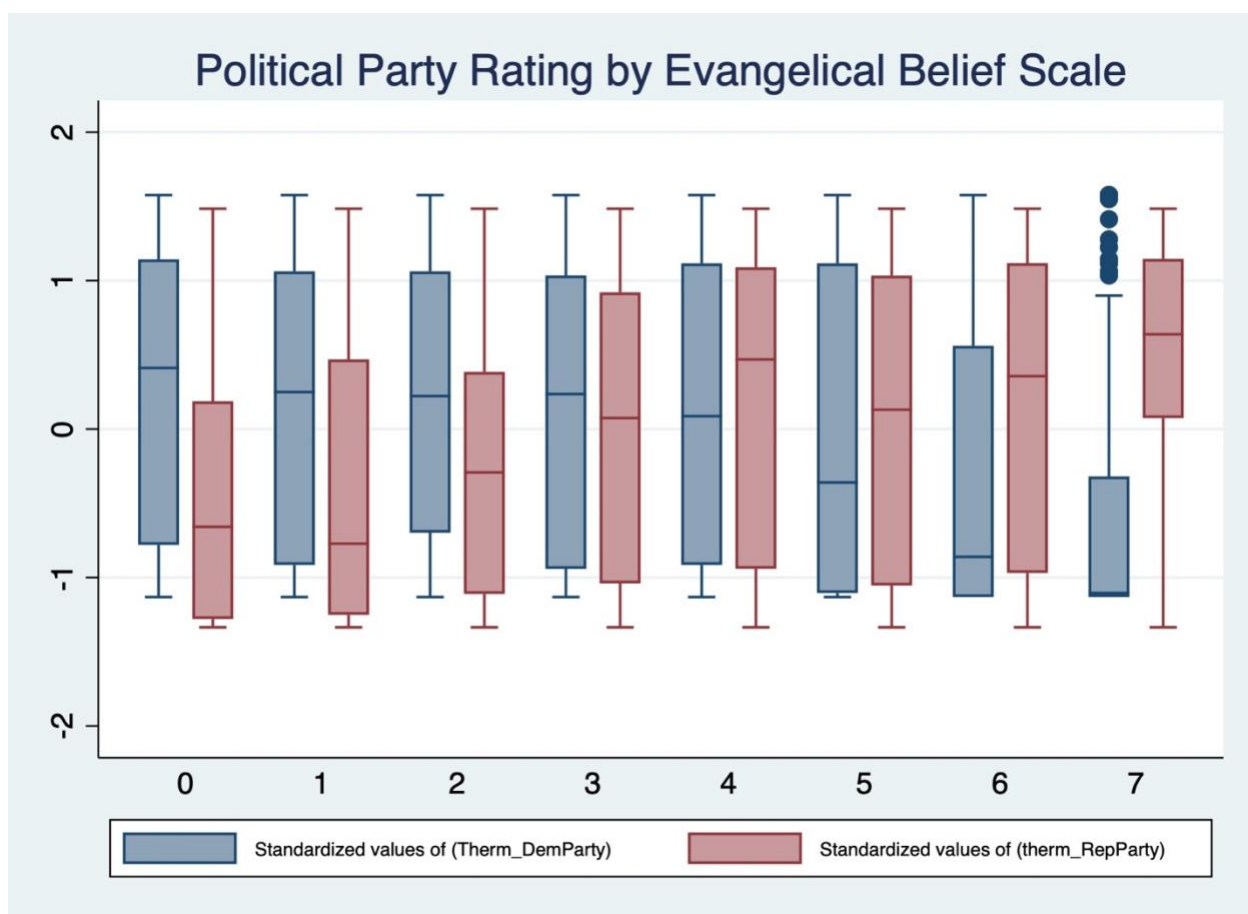


Figure 4⁶

The above graph seems to show that as evangelical beliefs increase, or in other words, the more evangelical beliefs a respondent holds, the higher their rating for the Republican Party and the lower their rating for the Democratic party. This difference is especially pronounced when an individual holds six or seven beliefs, at the far right end of the graph. Holding three or fewer beliefs seems to be the threshold for having a higher

⁶ Oneway ANOVA for feeling thermometer for Democrats: $p < 0.001$ and for Republicans: $p < 0.001$

opinion of the Democratic Party, with higher ratings of the Republican Party starting at four beliefs.

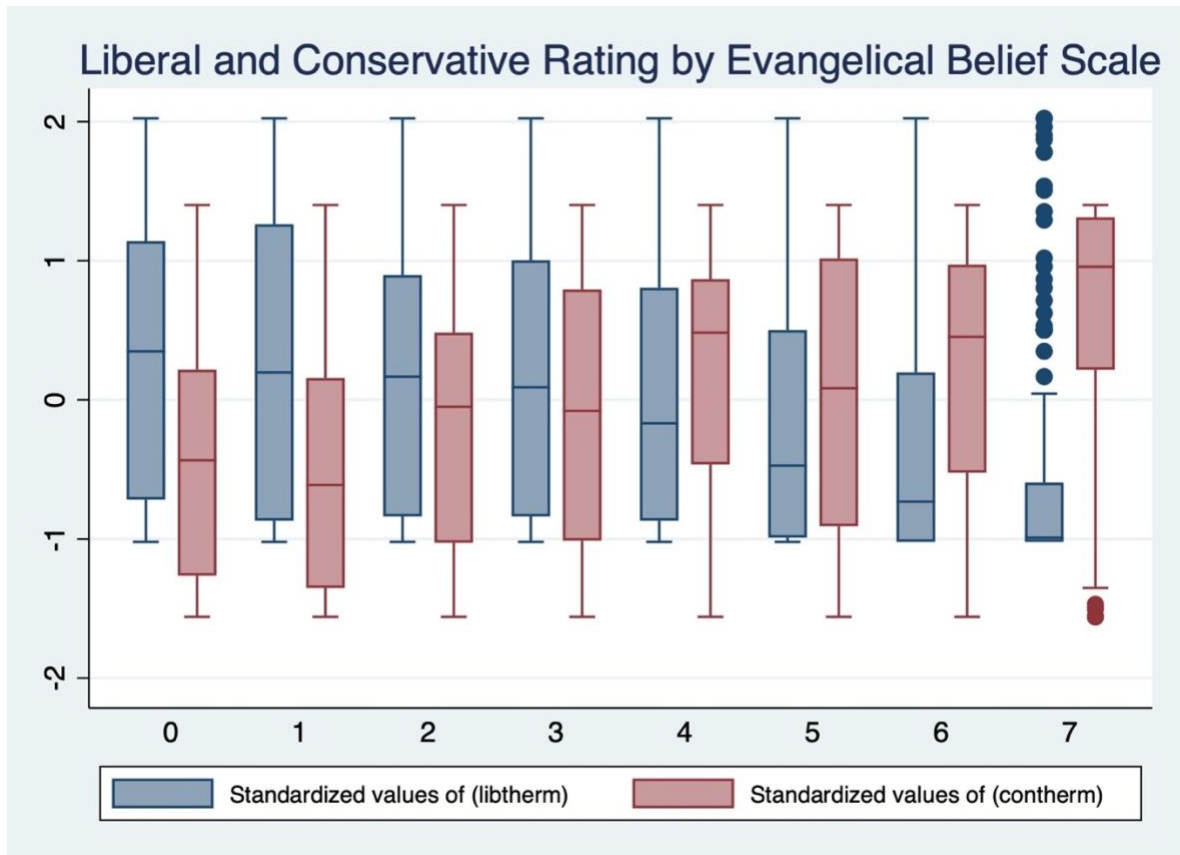


Figure 5⁷

The same story emerges when investigating the difference in feeling thermometer rating of liberals and conservatives by the additive belief scale. There are a handful of outliers

⁷ Oneway ANOVA for feeling thermometer for Democrats: $p < 0.001$ and for Republicans: $p < 0.001$

among those holding all seven beliefs, but as an individual holds more evangelical beliefs, they rate liberals more unfavorably and conservatives far more favorably. This relationship also works in the same direction, and appears to have the same cutoff point as the rating for the political parties. The fewer evangelical beliefs an individual holds, the more warmly they rate liberals and the colder they rate conservatives. Additionally, it appears that at both ends of the belief spectrum – holding none or a couple beliefs and holding all produces the largest gap in rating between liberals and conservatives. The difference is far less pronounced in the middle of the scale. The ends of the spectrum of evangelical belief are far more polarized and self-identified evangelicals appear far more polarized than other major Christian denominations, but could it be that the farthest ends of the spectrum are the real drivers of polarization among self-identified evangelicals?

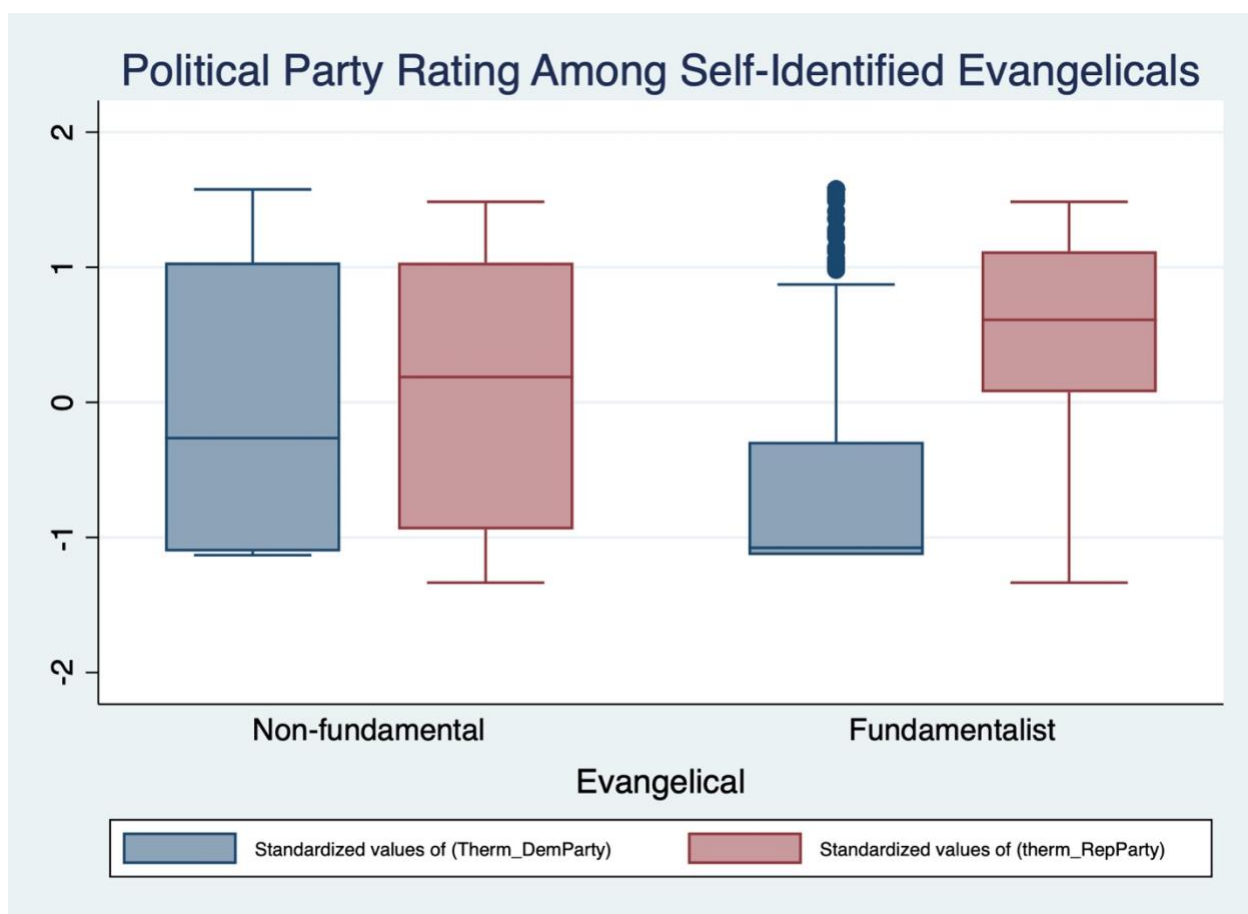


Figure 6⁸

The above graph drills down deeper into the self-identified evangelicals within the survey and splits them into two categories: fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists.

Fundamentalists here are categorized as those individuals who agreed or strongly agreed with six or seven of the indicators of evangelical belief in the survey. Unlike previous research, I am referring to this group of strong believers as fundamentalists, as I believe this to be a better terminology with a richer historical background. The graph takes the

⁸ T-test for feeling thermometer of Democratic Party: $p < 0.001$ and Republican Party: $p < 0.001$

self-identified evangelicals in my survey and splits them into two groups based off the previously-discussed belief scale: fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists, or those who hold most or all of the evangelical belief set and those who do not. It shows the difference between the two groups feeling thermometer rating of the Democratic and Republican parties, with fundamentalists having a much larger difference between the two ratings. While both groups expectedly rate the Republican Party higher, those falling in the fundamentalist camp not only have a larger difference in rating, but, with the exception of a handful of outliers, are also far more concentrated around rating Republicans warmly and Democrats coldly.

This pattern plays out in a similar way when comparing thermometer scores for liberals and conservatives:

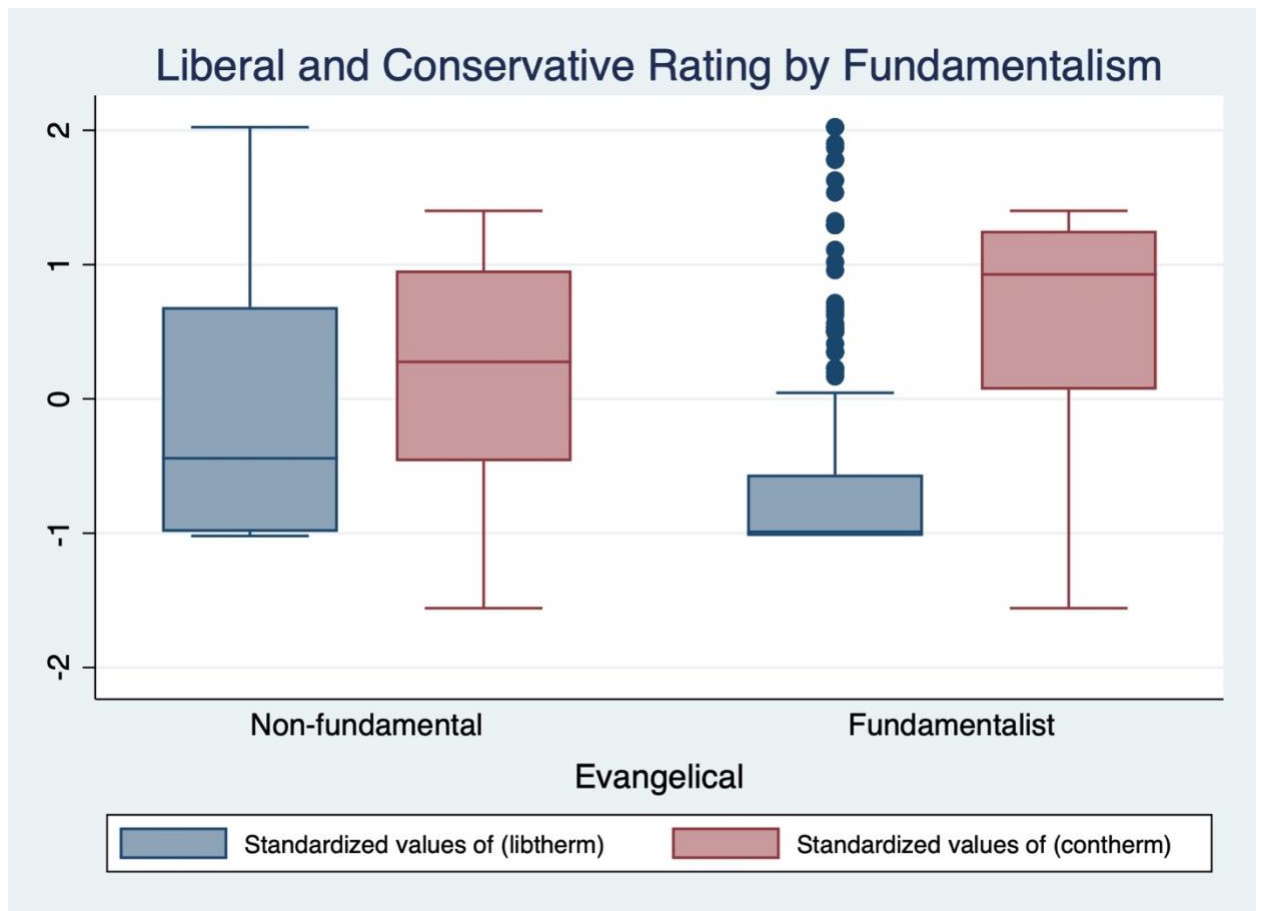


Figure 7⁹

Again, both non-fundamental and fundamentalist evangelicals have higher ratings for conservatives than liberals, but fundamentalist evangelicals have a far greater difference between the two. Additionally, fundamentalist evangelicals rate conservatives higher than non-fundamentalists, and are pretty solidly negative towards liberals, where basically the

⁹ T-test for feeling thermometer of Liberals: $p < 0.001$ and Conservatives: $p < 0.001$

only fundamentalist evangelicals who rated liberals close to the mean of the entire survey would be considered an outlier.

The picture presented here is one of all evangelicals possessing a measure of polarization and dislike of liberals and the Democratic Party, but fundamentalists, or those self-identified evangelicals who agree with all or most of the tenets in the evangelical belief scale, being particularly divided on their opinions of liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans. Recall the exploratory factor analysis, where out of the seven evangelical beliefs, there appeared to be a split along historical divisions within American evangelicalism, namely the drive to spread the good news of the Gospels and save souls, and the impetus to reengage with the broader American political and social arena as a way to prevent the moral decline of the country. Again, neither of these are mutually exclusive, and it's clear from the survey data that a number of evangelicals do in fact hold all of these beliefs. But what happens when evangelism is not just the simple matter of saving souls, but a much more pressing, existential mission? It could very well be the case that saving souls and capturing the American political and cultural arena are inextricably linked. For Jerry Falwell, evangelism went far beyond spreading the good news – it was conflict, battle, and warfare. Throughout his sermons, military and war analogies are frequently utilized. In addition to calling the local church an “organized army equipped for battle, ready to charge the enemy,” a “disciplined, charging army,” and Sunday school as “the attacking squad,”⁸⁴ he said the following about the role of an evangelist:

“Radio became the artillery that broke up my fallow ground and set me to thinking and searching, but the local church became the occupation force that finished the job and completed the task the artillery had begun. It is important to bombard our territory, to move out near the coast and shell the enemy. It is important to send in the literature. It is important to send that radio broadcast and to use that dial-a-prayer telephone. It is important to have all those external forces being set loose on the enemy’s stronghold.

But ultimately some Marines have to march in, encounter the enemy face-to-face, and put the flag up, that is, build the local church...I am speaking to Marines who have been called of God to move in past the shelling, the bombing, and the foxholes and, with bayonet in hand, encounter the enemy face-to-face and one-on-one bring them under submission to the Gospel of Christ, move them into the household of God, put up the flag and call it secured. You and I are called to occupy until He comes.”⁸⁵

Evangelism looks a lot like warfare here, but not just spiritual warfare – indeed, the enemy that Falwell vaguely alludes to here is human in nature. The goal is to win America for Christ and to defeat secular humanism in the process.

Indeed, what chiefly distinguishes and characterizes much of American fundamentalism is its militancy towards modernism and liberal theology. Compromise is seen as conciliation and cowardice. These metaphors of warfare often first led to denominational disputes, which also had the potential to spread outwards into the broader community. Again, this Manichean thinking manifests itself by eliminating the middle ground. One could not be anything other than lost or saved. There were no other distinctions in-between these two poles of thought. Harding, who spent extensive time at Falwell’s Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA, discusses how this process works and how this fundamentalist rhetoric shapes this sort of dichotomous, either-or, us vs. them thinking. She sought to attend Falwell’s church as a neutral observer and better understand the culture of American fundamentalism, but she notes that despite telling members of the community, including Falwell, that she was merely conducting academic

research and was trying to remain separate and outside of the community, that everyone believed she was there because God had called her there on purpose, that she must have been searching for God, and that God works in mysterious ways. There was simply no neutral ground for Harding to simply “gather information.”⁸⁶

Harding goes on:

“The moment of salvation is when one realizes that Christ died for *you*. Suddenly, all the stories in the Bible become relevant – the context in which biblical stories are meaningful and the context of one’s personal life collapse into each other, and the fusion evokes a sense of great insight, of miracle. All of these stories are speaking to you. These stories are God speaking to you.”⁸⁷

This realization, or this conversion, that the supernatural, incredible events that take place in the Bible are not only true, but that your own individual life can be connected back to these events must be a powerful intoxicant for congregants. This belief would radically influence your identity, your behavior in private and public, and your view of human history and what your role should be in it. When asked whether or not they believed God had a plan and if they had a part to play in it, fundamentalists responded overwhelmingly that they did, compared to non-fundamentalists.

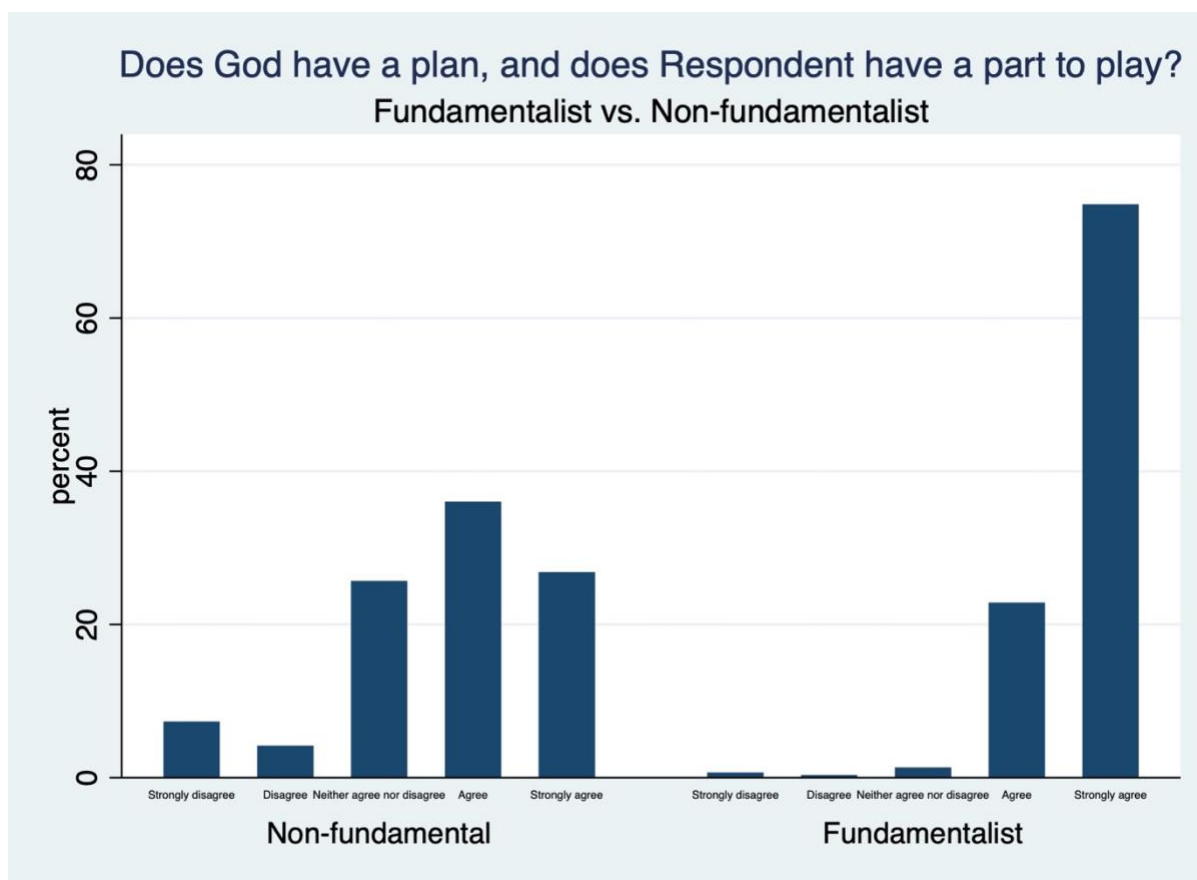


Figure 8¹⁰

Those holding six or seven traditional evangelical beliefs overwhelmingly believe that they have a part to play in God's plans. What this plan is and what role each individual might play in it is up for debate. But what is clear is that part of this plan is conflict and struggle against the forces of darkness, often referred to in fundamentalist thinking as "secular humanism." Secular humanism became a target for American evangelicals more

¹⁰ Chi-square for Fundamental and Respondent believing God has a plan and respondent has a part to play: $p < 0.001$

broadly and entered into the common vernacular of evil through Christian Right thinkers and preachers like Francis Schaeffer in the 1970's. Fundamentalist thought in the United States has almost always been militant and has consistently deployed rhetoric invoking conflict and warfare, but typically this rhetoric had been aimed at abstract, opaque ideas and concepts, like "Communism" or "the devil." Secular humanism gave fundamentalists a clear target for their attacks, as larger secularizing trends in American culture combined with noticeable moral and legal changes gave these assaults against the new "secular humanist" enemy more credibility and force.⁸⁸

This new enemy gave more ammunition to traditional fundamentalist jeremiads, which warned that the decline and decay of national morality would result in punishment by God, unless the guilty parties reversed course and repented for their sins before God. Thus, the blessings and curses from heaven were dependent on national righteousness or sinfulness, a concept directly from the Old Testament. Jerry Falwell's *Listen America!* is one long jeremiad, and he states directly "America has been great because her people have been good."⁸⁹ All of America's internal problems are pinned on the spiritual condition of the country,⁹⁰

the decline of which Falwell blames on secular humanism. The survey data bears out that a large majority of fundamentalists are pessimistic about American society, as the below graph shows that fundamentalists were more likely to strongly agree that society has gotten more wicked in the last 20 years. Additionally, very few fundamentalists are confused about this issue – almost all either agree or strongly agree. While a majority of the respondents surveyed agree that society has gotten more wicked in the last 20 years (a phenomena other research will have to investigate), the uniformity of fundamentalists here is noteworthy. Again, it doesn't look like there is much neutral ground within the fundamentalist camp.

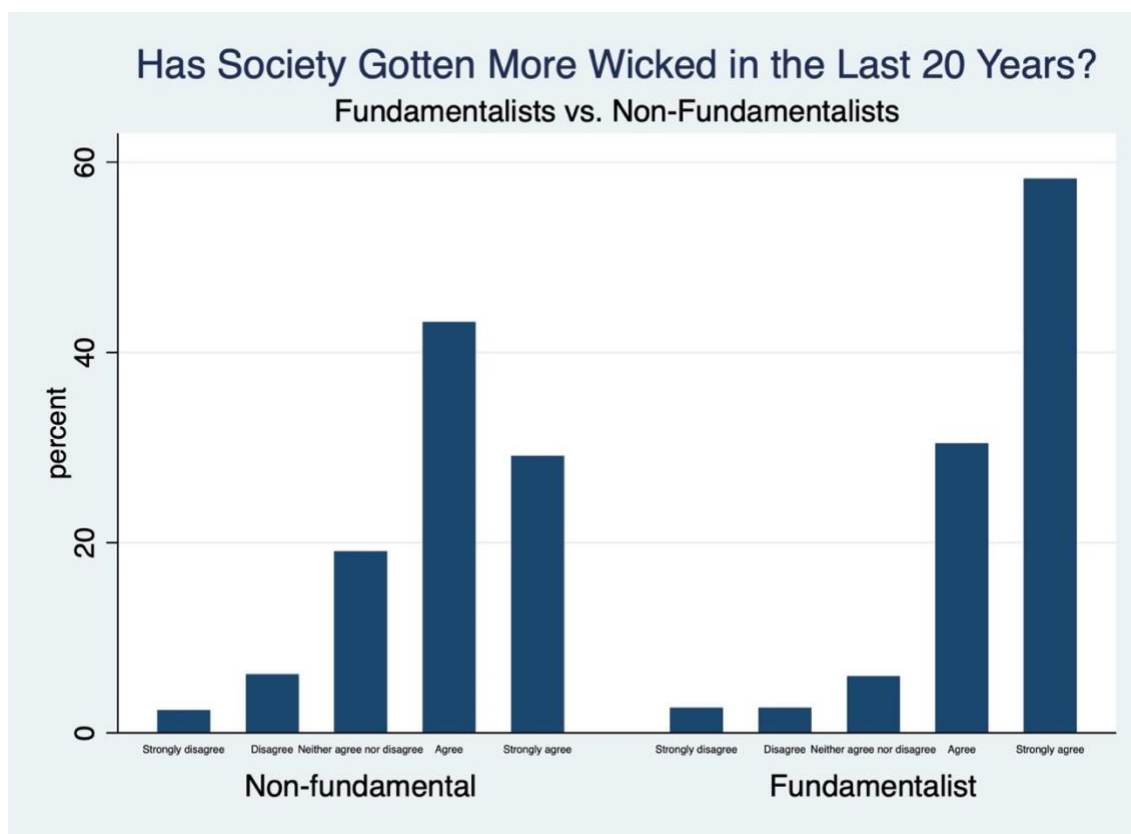


Figure 9¹¹

It is also worth comparing how fundamentalists view two recent and politically important, if divisive, issues in American politics: the Black Lives Matter Movement and whether the 2020 presidential election was stolen. When asked for their opinion on whether the election was stolen, fundamentalists were more likely than their counterparts to believe that it was stolen, while close to 60% of non-fundamentalists believe that it wasn't.

¹¹ Chi-square for fundamental and whether or not society has gotten more wicked in last twenty years: $p < 0.001$

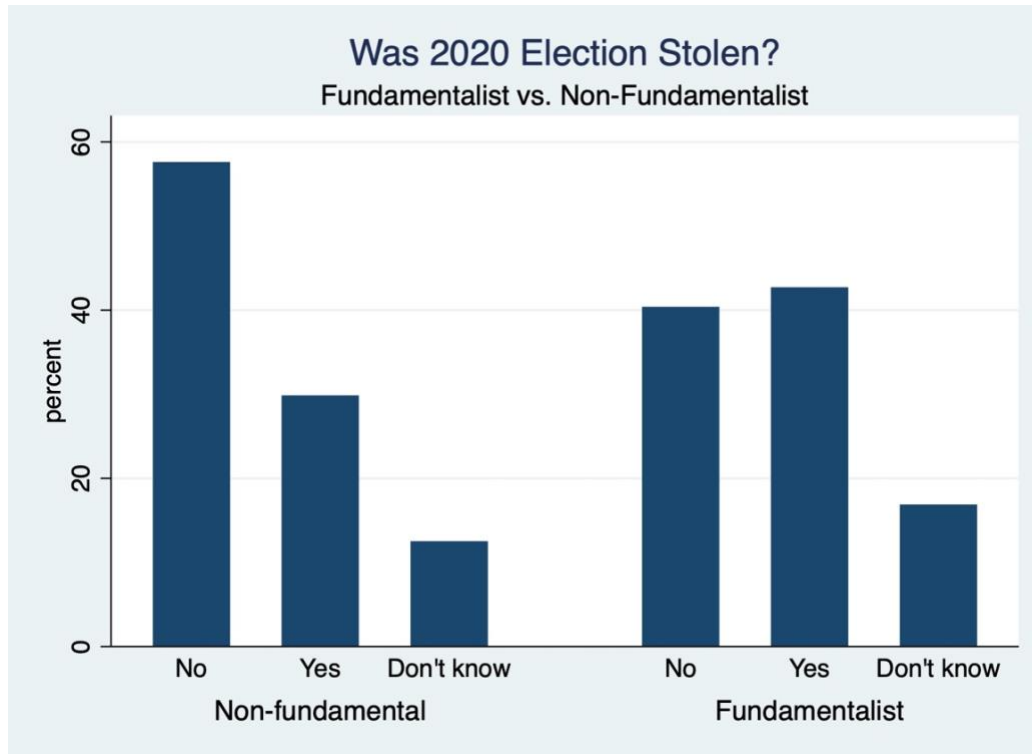


Figure 10¹²

The same sort of relationship appears when asked about their opinions on the Black Lives Matter Movement:

¹² Chi-square for fundamental and stolen 2020 election: $p < 0.001$

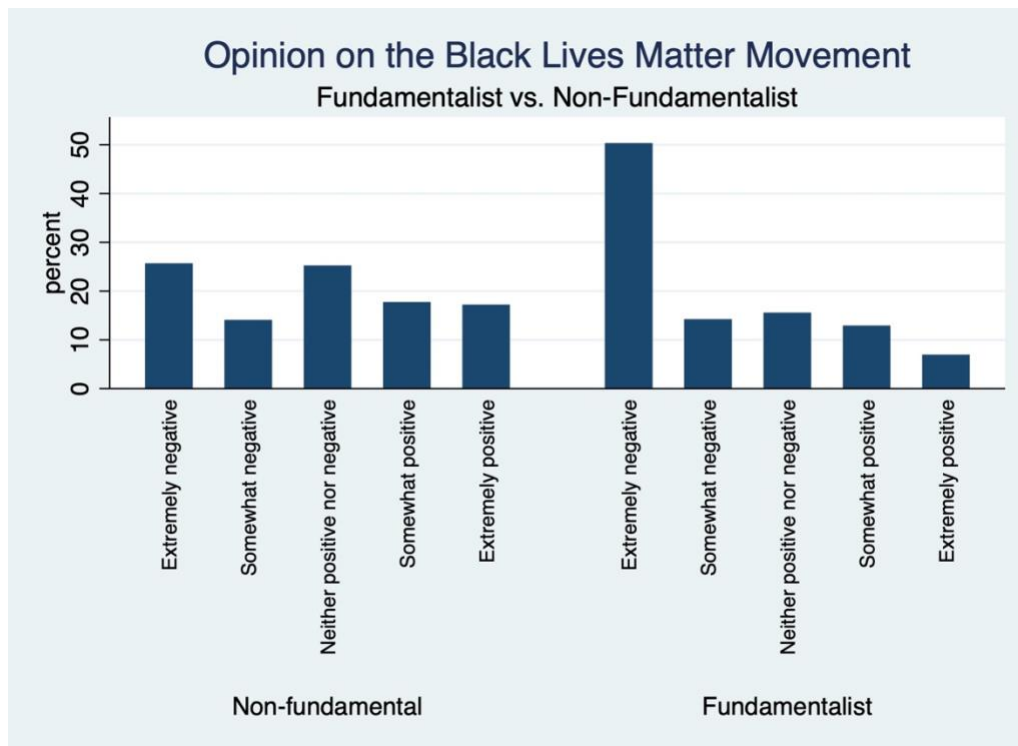


Figure 11¹³

Around 50% of fundamentalists have extremely negative views of the BLM Movement, far more than non-fundamentalists. Again, this is more than likely the result of the increased fusion between the religious right and the Republican Party, but it is noteworthy to see how unified fundamentalist thinking is compared to non-fundamentalists on two highly charged political topics. An individual who holds most or all traditional evangelical beliefs is far more likely to respond like a typical conservative or Republican than not.

¹³ Chi-square for fundamental and Black Lives Matter movement: $p < 0.001$

Path Analysis and Regression Results:

So far the statistical analysis from the survey has confirmed that American evangelicals appear to be particularly polarized, and within this group of strong believers, or fundamentalists, seem to hold significantly more negatively partisan views than non-fundamentalist evangelicals. But are beliefs really driving this apparent polarization? Or is this simply another outgrowth of the continued fusion between the Republican Party and evangelicalism? In order to properly evaluate this question, more advanced statistical analysis is necessary, including path analysis and multivariate regression in order to account for both direct and indirect effects, as well as highlighting whether specific beliefs influence polarization.

The below path analysis shows how various indicators might be directly and indirectly influencing an individual's level of affective polarization, here given by "thermbiaz" which was derived by taking the difference between how someone rated conservatives and how they rated liberals on a 0-100 scale, then standardizing those values so one can tell how far away from the mean thermometer rating an individual is. Having a value of zero would denote that an individual is averagely polarized given the sample. As the scores move away from zero, the more polarized an individual becomes, with positive values indicating more favorable ratings of conservatives and unfavorable ratings of liberals, and negative values specifying the inverse relationship. The approach to evaluating polarization not only allows for a general measure of polarization instead of one for each group, but it also allows one to see the direction of the polarized behavior,

i.e. towards conservatives or liberals. This makes interpretation of the results a bit easier and reduces the need for multiple models with multiple dependent variables.

First, a path analysis for polarization will be evaluated, which helps to account for the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables. Here, the independent variables included in the model are region, race, gender, age, political identification, income, ideology, religious affiliation, and whether or not an individual holds six or seven of the traditional evangelical beliefs, given by a dummy called “fundamental.” The proposed model with the above independent variables and dependent variable for polarization described in the previous paragraph is below:

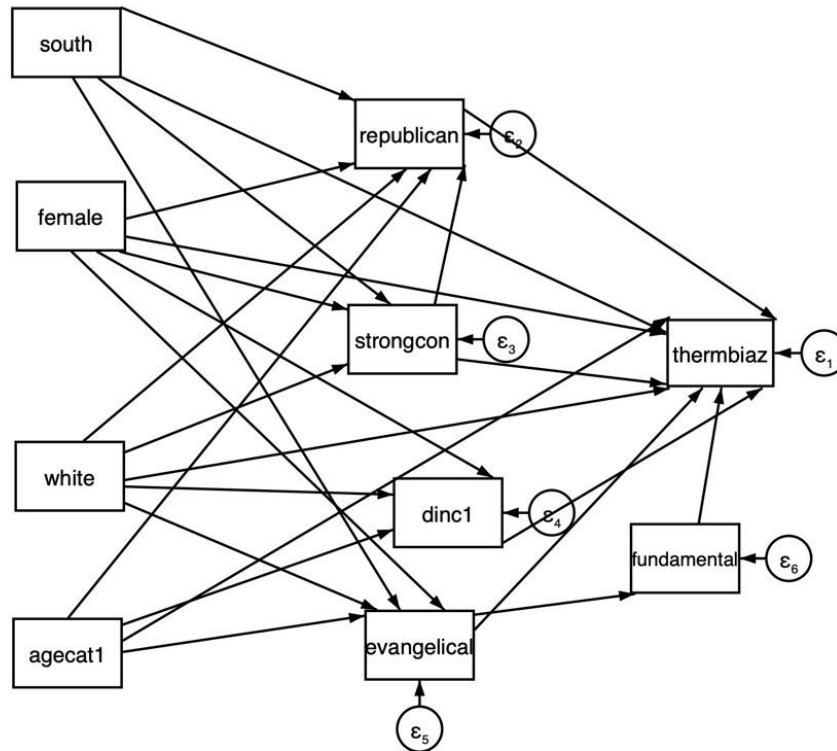


Figure 12¹⁴

A path analysis for the above model was performed and coefficients for each “path” were determined. The results of that analysis are below:

¹⁴ The independent variables in the above model are indicator variables as follows: south representing region, female representing gender, white representing race, agecat1 representing 18-29 year olds, evangelical representing religious affiliation, dinc1 representing the lowest income group, those making less than \$10,000, stroncon representing the extremely conservative ideological respondents, republican representing political identification, and fundamental representing individuals holding 6-7 evangelical beliefs. Is there a problem with having DINC in the second level?

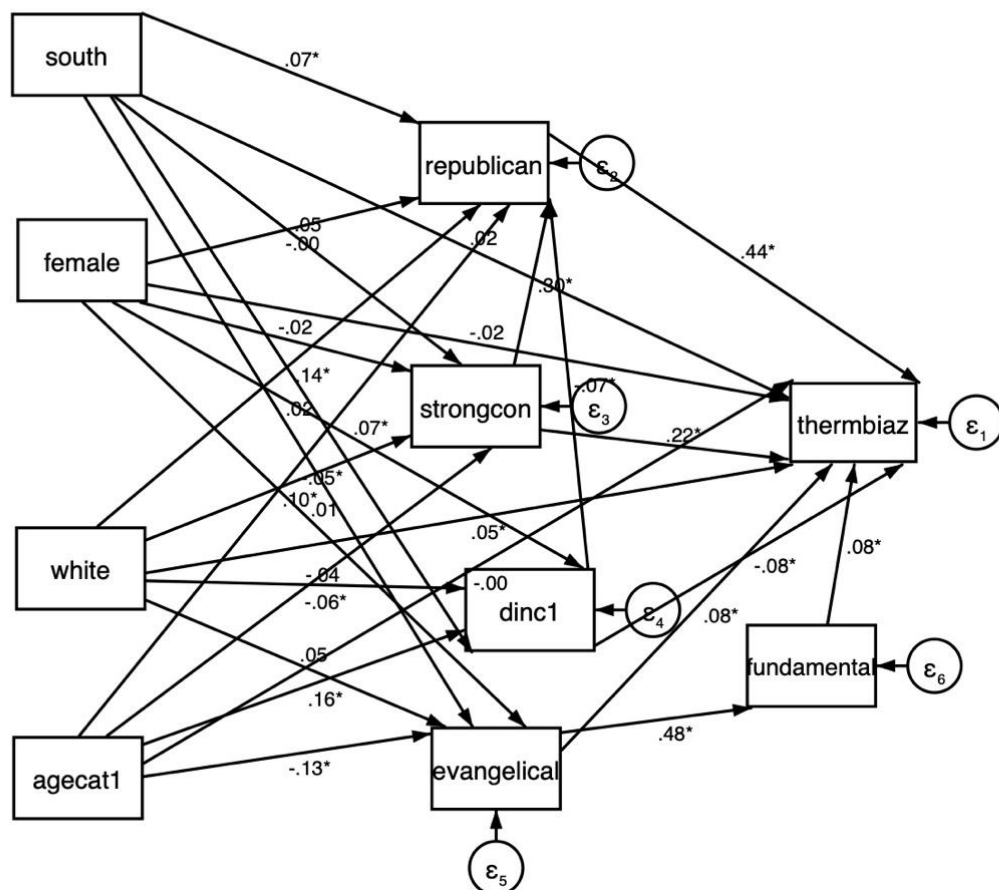


Figure 13¹⁵

Running a multivariate regression model for the dependent variable “thermbiaz” produced the following table of results¹⁶:

¹⁵ Statistically significant path coefficients are represented with an *

Table 4

Regression Table 1 for "thermbiaz"	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
fundamental	.045	.045	0.99	.323	-.044	.133	
1Democrat (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	.337	.049	6.93	0	.242	.433	***
3.Republican	.558	.053	10.50	0	.453	.662	***
4.Other	.381	.133	2.87	.004	.121	.641	***
1Ext. Con. (ref)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	-.232	.057	-4.06	0	-.344	-.12	***
3.Slightly Con.	-.6	.067	-8.91	0	-.732	-.468	***
4.Moderate	-1.054	.062	-17.06	0	-1.176	-.933	***
5.Slightly Lib.	-1.484	.087	-17.06	0	-1.654	-1.313	***
6.Liberal	-1.852	.083	-22.34	0	-2.015	-1.689	***
7.Extremely Lib.	-1.944	.092	-21.19	0	-2.124	-1.764	***
1Less than \$10,000 (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.\$10,000-20,000	.32	.098	3.26	.001	.127	.513	***
3.\$20,001-35,000	.313	.088	3.56	0	.14	.485	***
4.\$35,001-50,000	.345	.088	3.92	0	.172	.517	***
5.\$50,001-\$100,000	.34	.084	4.04	0	.175	.505	***
6.\$100,001-\$150,000	.416	.094	4.43	0	.231	.6	***
7.\$150,001-\$200,000	.346	.111	3.13	.002	.129	.563	***
8.\$200,001-\$250,000	.389	.171	2.27	.023	.053	.725	**
9.\$250,000+	.346	.141	2.45	.014	.069	.623	**
1Midwest(ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Northeast	.006	.052	0.11	.913	-.096	.107	
3.South	.022	.042	0.53	.597	-.06	.105	
4.West	-.05	.051	-0.97	.331	-.15	.051	
female	-.036	.034	-1.05	.293	-.104	.031	
1White (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.

2.Black	-.024	.063	-0.38	.705	-.147	.099	
3.Hispanic	0	.081	0.00	.997	-.158	.159	
4.Other	-.098	.139	-0.71	.48	-.371	.175	
5.Asian	.219	.099	2.21	.027	.025	.414	**
1.18-29 years(ref)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.30-39 years	-.075	.07	-1.07	.285	-.212	.062	
3.40-49 years	-.099	.071	-1.41	.16	-.238	.039	
4.50-59 years	-.081	.073	-1.12	.265	-.224	.062	
5.60-69 years	.011	.074	0.15	.884	-.134	.156	
6.70-79 years	-.068	.073	-0.92	.357	-.212	.076	
7.80+ years	-.093	.079	-1.18	.237	-.248	.061	
1Catholic(ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.MainlineProtest.	-.118	.063	-1.88	.06	-.241	.005	*
3.Evangelical	-.003	.055	-0.06	.953	-.11	.104	
4.Unaff. Christian	.022	.059	0.37	.714	-.094	.137	
5.Unaffiliated	-.072	.058	-1.25	.211	-.185	.041	
Constant	.286	.121	2.35	.019	.047	.524	**
<hr/>							
Mean dependent var		0.014	SD dependent var			0.998	
R-squared		0.696	Number of obs			1183.000	
F-test		72.729	Prob > F			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		2017.469	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			2205.274	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Unsurprisingly, both partisan identification and political ideology are both highly statistically significant in accounting for levels of affective polarization. The direction of the relationship is also unsurprising, as the more ideologically conservative respondents and self-identified Republicans are both highly polarized in the direction of favoring conservatives. The relationship also works the other way, as the more liberal the respondent and self-identified Democrats are more polarized against conservatives and towards liberals.

These results are nothing new, but what perhaps is surprising for the scope of this analysis is that the indicator variable “fundamental” or those respondents who believe 6 or 7 of the traditional evangelical beliefs, while favoring conservatives, is not statistically significant. This suggests that simply holding all or most evangelical beliefs does not significantly impact an individual’s opinion of liberals or conservatives. Additionally, the only religious affiliation that appears significant in the model is that of Mainline Protestantism, at the $p < .1$ level. Taken together these initial results suggest that it is political affiliation and political beliefs that are driving the majority of anti-partisan sentiment. But what happens when evangelical beliefs are separated and applied to the model? The below regression output table removes “fundamental” as an indicator variable and replaces it with two indices created based off of the previous factor analysis, which identified a potential evangelism latent variable and supernatural, spiritual warfare variable. Each variable was on a 1-5 Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagreeing and 5 being strongly agreeing with each item. The index was created by adding each of the beliefs together on a 3-15 scale, with 3 representing a respondent who strongly disagreed

with all items and 15 being a respondent who strongly agreed with all items. The results for that regression analysis are as follows:

Table 5

Regression Table 2 for "thermbiaz"	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
supernatindx	.001	.006	0.23	.816	-.01	.013	
evangelindx	.023	.007	3.54	0	.01	.036	***
1.Democrat (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	.342	.048	7.08	0	.247	.437	***
3.Republican	.562	.053	10.65	0	.459	.666	***
4.Other	.396	.133	2.99	.003	.136	.656	***
1Ext. Cons. (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	-.232	.057	-4.11	0	-.343	-.121	***
3.Slightly Con.	-.592	.067	-8.85	0	-.724	-.461	***
4.Moderate	-1.04	.062	-16.90	0	-1.161	-.92	***
5.Slightly Lib.	-1.472	.087	-16.99	0	-1.642	-1.302	***
6.Liberal	-1.823	.083	-21.91	0	-1.986	-1.66	***
7.Extremely Lib.	-1.916	.092	-20.76	0	-2.097	-1.735	***
1Less than \$10,000 (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.\$10,000-\$20,000	.344	.098	3.51	0	.151	.536	***
3.\$20,001-\$35,000	.327	.087	3.75	0	.156	.499	***
4.\$35,001-\$50,000	.356	.088	4.07	0	.184	.528	***
5.\$50,001-\$100,000	.355	.084	4.23	0	.19	.519	***
6.\$100,001-\$150,000	.43	.094	4.60	0	.247	.614	***
7.\$150,001-\$200,000	.364	.11	3.30	.001	.148	.58	***
8.\$200,001-\$250,000	.419	.171	2.45	.014	.084	.754	**
9.\$250,000+	.377	.141	2.68	.008	.101	.653	***
1Midwest (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Northeast	.011	.051	0.22	.827	-.09	.112	
3.South	.017	.042	0.40	.69	-.065	.099	

4.West	-.044	.051	-0.87	.386	-.145	.056	
female	-.04	.034	-1.16	.246	-.107	.027	
1.White (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Black	-.048	.063	-0.77	.443	-.172	.075	
3.Hispanic	0	.08	-0.01	.996	-.158	.157	
4.Other	-.119	.139	-0.86	.391	-.391	.153	
5.Asian	.198	.099	2.00	.046	.004	.392	**
1.18-29 years (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.30-39 years	-.087	.07	-1.25	.211	-.224	.05	
3.40-49 years	-.121	.071	-1.72	.086	-.26	.017	*
4.50-59 years	-.101	.073	-1.38	.166	-.244	.042	
5.60-69 years	-.005	.074	-0.07	.943	-.15	.14	
6.70-79 years	-.081	.073	-1.11	.268	-.225	.062	
7.80+ years	-.11	.079	-1.40	.162	-.264	.044	
1Catholic (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.MainlineProtest.	-.109	.062	-1.75	.08	-.232	.013	*
3.Evangelical	-.012	.054	-0.22	.83	-.118	.095	
4.Unaff. Christian	.024	.059	0.42	.676	-.09	.139	
5.Unaffiliated	.007	.062	0.11	.91	-.114	.128	
Constant	.001	.157	0.01	.995	-.306	.308	
<hr/>							
Mean dependent var	0.014	SD dependent var	0.998				
R-squared	0.699	Number of obs	1183.000				
F-test	71.733	Prob > F	0.000				
Akaike crit. (AIC)	2007.528	Bayesian crit. (BIC)	2200.409				

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Again, it appears that that political ideology and affiliation are overwhelmingly influential in accounting for affective polarization. However, when separating evangelical belief out into the two latent factor, it appears that the evangelism index becomes statistically significant at $p < .01$. The results suggest that as an individual more strongly believes in sharing their beliefs with others, has little doubt that God exists, and an increased importance on faith in their daily life, they'll gradually see conservatives in a more favorable light and liberals in a negative one. This result could go back to Jerry Falwell's interpretation of mission work and evangelism as a "battlefield" where evangelicals and fundamentalists and engaged in a holy war for the soul of America, with secular humanism as the primary enemy to be eradicated.

However, while this might indicate that the evangelism index produces more polarized sentiments, there is a distinct lack of mechanism here, which makes causal interpretation difficult. Further research should investigate potential mechanisms, maybe in the form of the traditional jeremiad, which might appear as a call from the pulpit to action in order to save the country or one's community.

Conclusion:

There are perhaps two main takeaways from the statistical analysis of evangelical beliefs and affective polarization, the first being that there does seem to be a division within American evangelicalism along the lines discussed by Marsden (1991, 2005), FitzGerald (2017), and others, namely the choice between evangelism and separation and engaging the culture and conflict. While this may have been a choice for many

conservative Protestants throughout the twentieth century, there's evidence that this dichotomy was eroded at the end of the century with the deliberate efforts of fundamentalists like Jerry Falwell to not only continue the mission of saving souls, but to engage in spiritual warfare through the very process of evangelism. Fundamentalists, or those holding all or most of the evangelical beliefs, were some of the most polarized respondents in the survey. Recall that the factor analysis showed two latent variables, one containing items more associated with evangelism, and one more associated with the supernatural and the ideas of good versus evil. Someone holding all of these beliefs might tend to see evangelism as warfare, much in the same way as Falwell did. It is not simply enough to spread the good news, one must spread the good news in order to win the war between good and evil, darkness and light, or between political parties.

The second takeaway from the statistical analysis of belief's impact on polarization is that simply holding beliefs appears to have relatively little power in motivating affective polarization in the face of political and ideological tribalism. Self-identified white evangelicals, and to a greater degree fundamentalists, do appear more politically polarized than other denominations, but when controlling for partisanship and ideology, the effect of religious affiliation and belief seem muted. This points to a growing amount of research has shown that one's political identity has increasingly come to influence one's religious identity and behavior. The fusion of one's religious and political identity (or lack thereof) appears as strong as ever. Thus, beliefs on their own do not seem to be producing the exceptionally high levels of polarization among evangelicals and fundamentalists, but perhaps beliefs influence the way in which

individuals relate to their broader community, which in turn exacerbate the continued fusion between the religious right and the Republican Party. Beliefs, while not directly influencing polarized behavior, might be inherently prone to produce the sort of either/or, Manichean mindset that affect how an individual relates to their surroundings and acts in the world. Moving forward, this project will hone in on the patterns of belonging among evangelicals and those individuals who would classify as fundamentalists according to the evangelical belief scale, seeking to further untangle classic measures of religiosity and explore how they might be driving affective polarization.

CHAPTER SIX: BELONGING

The evidence from the last chapter presents a picture of partisanship and political identity overwhelming and negating any influence that specific doctrinal beliefs might have on levels of affective polarization. If specific beliefs do not seem to be influencing affective polarization in meaningful ways, the question becomes how different forms of belonging might be driving the relationship. The survey data does show self-identified evangelicals as far more polarized than other Christian groups, and fundamentalists, those individuals holding six or seven evangelical beliefs, as even more polarized than their self-identified evangelical counterparts. It could always be the case that fundamentalists are simply more conservative and subsequently more Republican than other evangelicals, but why they might be so remains unanswered. This chapter will seek to further unravel and untangle religiosity's influence on affective polarization by examining how evangelicals and fundamentalists belong to their own religious communities, their broader social and civic communities, and how that might affect their high levels of political polarization.

First, this chapter will provide context for how evangelicals and fundamentalists have historically belonged to their own religious communities and their societal networks, tracing their self-imposed exile from American civic, social, and political life, with an emphasis on their re-entrance in the 1970's and 1980's and the effect this has had on the American political system as well as bonding vs. bridging forms of social capital. Next, forms of belonging will be separated into one's own religious community and the

broader civic and social community to show the differences in these categories between evangelicals and fundamentalists and other religious groups. Finally, inferential statistics will be applied to the survey data to determine if and how these distinct forms of belonging might be influencing the extreme levels of polarization among evangelicals and fundamentalists.

Exile and Re-Entry:

While a number of conservative, Bible-believing Protestant groups such as Adventists, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witness, all engaged in various levels of cultural isolation, none did so as earnestly as fundamentalists, and among fundamentalists it was primarily those in the South who led the way. Southern pastors consistently promoted separation from "the world," and that their congregations should evangelize and patiently and faithfully wait for Christ's return. They also often played up idea of martyrdom in their exile, a theme that was highly resonant in the post-Civil War South that was less industrialized and less economically-developed than its northern counterpart. In fact, in some accounts it appears the focus on personal piety in the fundamentalist and evangelical tradition reflects the poverty and sense of despair in the South after the Civil War. Many churches following fundamentalist doctrine, including Pentecostal and Holiness churches, were quite poor and rejected the trappings of the material world in favor of a life focused on the rewards of heaven and life after death. This is further emphasized by the typical converts to evangelicalism being not southern aristocrats, but rather farmers, tradesmen, and the very poor, to which the tenets of

evangelicalism offered them a structured, ordered life, with the promise of rewards after death.⁹¹

The rapid industrialization of the South after World War II, which the North had experienced in the late nineteenth century, at first only caused Southern churches to double-down on isolation, as the strange new rhythms of cities seemed foreign and alien to many in the region. They built the walls around their religious communities higher and thicker, as pastors denounced the corruptions of the world and the related social sins that they warned would bring America to ruin and destruction. Abstinence from alcohol, gambling, premarital sex, and even social dancing came to define Southern evangelical and fundamentalist churches, and was used to further demarcate who was a true believer and who was not. Denouncing these social sins and refusing their indulgence was yet another way ministers and adherents removed themselves from the rest of society. Additionally, bible study was stressed as a way in which congregants could not only demonstrate their commitment to the cause outside of traditional services, but also to hold one another accountable and ensure the world did not creep in at the edges.⁹²

City life and urbanization created a crisis in Southern evangelicalism, particularly in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which by the 1960's had more than 10 million members and remains one of the largest Protestant organizations in the country today. For most of its history, the SBC had been the equivalent of an established church in the South, where local churches served as the guardians of morality, deep social networks, and the protector of a segregated, racist social order. Attendance at church on Sunday morning was not simply an act of religious piety, but rather a social event and in many

ways a civic duty. In many instances the public school teacher from Monday through Friday would also wake up Sunday morning to teach Sunday School, just another example of the deep enmeshment of church and public life, as well as religious homogeneity. However, increased industrialization and urbanization led more people to city life and further away from SBC churches, which were typically located in rural areas. As cities brought with them greater diversity of peoples, social customs, and thought, the hegemony of the SBC was in danger of being overturned.⁹³

What then was the response from fundamentalist and evangelical leaders to these changes? How did fundamentalists, most of whom were not even registered to vote in the 1960's⁹⁴, go from one of the least politicized groups in the country to one of the more divisive? Jerry Falwell's role in bringing fundamentalists and other conservative Protestant groups out of cultural exile has already been discussed, but the fundamentalist and evangelical churches that Falwell implored to re-enter American society and cultural life were particularly adept at producing bonding social capital, or dense networks that provide members with social, psychological, and financial support. For the poorer denominations, such as the Pentecostal church, this allowed the marginalized in society to get by, but for the SBC in particular, it only further entrenched the status quo and inequalities within the South. Falwell's mission to bring fundamentalists, and conservative Protestants more broadly, out of exile, thus brought a group with high levels of in-group solidarity and the potential for heightened levels of out-group antagonism into the American political, social, and cultural arena.

The formation of the Moral Majority brought two things together that had been kept apart for most of the American twentieth century – “routine public activism and aggressive Bible-believing Protestantism.”⁹⁵ This fusion began to slowly make its presence felt in the American public square, frequently in the form of protests and debates over school curriculum. In 1974, fundamentalist pastors and parents closed schools down in Kanawha County, West Virginia in protest over the inclusion of schoolbooks which in their words were “un-Christian, unpatriotic, and destructive of the family and constituted an incitement to racial violence.”⁹⁶ Similar protests against schoolbooks which included information on sex education and evolution occurred throughout the country during the 1970’s, and many parents, often on the encouragement of Jerry Falwell, pulled their children out of public schools and attempted to form “Christian academies.” Based on Falwell’s own estimations, there were only 1400 Christian schools in the United States in the early 60’s, but that number had risen to around 16,000 by the Fall of 1980. One of the biggest spurs to this growth of Christian academies was integration, particularly in the South.⁹⁷

Falwell’s Moral Majority asked followers to carry their moral agenda, the pietistic prescriptions that fundamentalist and evangelical churches had been preaching for decades, into their everyday life. While most observers at the start of the 1980’s saw religion as a force confined to one’s private life, Falwell was encouraging the opposite – to bring it to the public square. If one wanted to become a doctor or nurse, one should do so and ardently oppose abortion. If someone felt compelled to become a teacher, they should do so and teach creationism instead of evolutionary biology. And if an individual

sought a career in politics, they should run for election and seek to represent the fundamentalist Christian worldview in Washington, D.C. Falwell was the “cobbler and distributor of the hybrid religious and political rhetoric that enabled hitherto unallied and inactive white conservative Protestants to see themselves as a singular political and moral force.”⁹⁸ The increased focus on encouraging adherents to not reject the world, but to turn towards it and engage with it is readily apparent not only in the quantity of SBC resolutions on the American education system but within the messages themselves.

In a resolution from June 1, 1979 entitled: “The Crisis in Public Education,” the SBC states the following:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That while recognizing the validity of the ministry of church-related private schools, Southern Baptists be urged to become more involved in shaping and supporting public schools, participating responsibly wherever possible in the local school and in the decision-making bodies which determine the course of public education⁹⁹

In addition to seeking more influence on the curriculum and content being taught in public education, the SBC urged believers to take up not only teaching positions, but to run for school board positions as well:

RESOLVED, That we affirm the hundreds of thousands of Christian men and women who teach in our public schools, and we encourage our young people who are seriously considering the teaching profession as a possible calling of God to pursue that calling; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we encourage all Southern Baptist churches to solicit individuals from their membership to engage the culture of our public school systems nationwide by running for election to their local school boards and exerting their godly influence upon these school systems.¹⁰⁰

Schools were but one area in which Falwell and the Moral Majority advocated for more mobilization and direct political action. Falwell's *Listen! America*, in addition to erasing the boundaries between moderate and conservative evangelicals and seeking to unite all conservative Christians, lays out in detail the reasons behind why the continued separation of fundamentalists would ultimately spell ruin for the United States. He states,

“We have tended to develop the attitude that our only obligation is to preach the Gospel and prepare men for heaven. We have forgotten that we are still our brother's keeper and that the same spiritual truths that prepare us to live in eternity are also essential in preparing us to live on this earth...If we as moral Americans do not speak up on these essential moral issues who then will?”¹⁰¹

Thus, not only is the United States in decline, but that decline is the fault of fundamentalists for separating and giving up on societal engagement. Falwell goes on to say, “As Christians we need to exert our influence not only in the church but also in our business life, home life, and social and community life as well,”¹⁰² which again highlights the stress he places on participating in society. He explicitly calls for an end to separation in three distinct areas: between fundamentalist and evangelical ministers, from personal separation that prevented and discouraged adherents from pursuing careers in the secular areas of higher education, journalism, law, and other culturally resonant occupations, and finally from political exile.¹⁰³

Falwell and the Moral Majority's efforts to end these forms of isolation and separation ultimately worked, and the 1980's saw the self-imposed quarantine end, with Bible-believing, white Protestant Christians smashing through the various cultural barriers they had placed before themselves. However, this shift did not mean that fundamentalists came to dominate American culture and replace the existing secular

modernity that it placed itself in direct contrast against, and as Harding notes, “the marginalized groups were mainstreamed, but the mainstream groups were not marginalized.”¹⁰⁴ The Moral Majority fused together fundamentalists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, and all other sorts of conservative Protestants and conferred upon them a healthy dose of righteous indignation and encouraged social involvement and direct political action and engagement. The question then is what are the ramifications for affective polarization when this group, bestowed with large amounts of in-group solidarity and a belief that their cause was not only blameless, but the necessary course of action to prevent existential crisis, went out into their communities and became politically active.

Two Forms of Belonging: Religious vs. Civic and Social Communities

Traditionally, studies which utilize the belonging aspect of religiosity focus primarily on church or religious attendance as a way to determine the strength of one’s attachment. A fair amount of scholarly work has been done on how religious attendance might influence specific forms of political behavior (Guth and Green 1990; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), while other studies have shown a distinct connection between higher levels of church attendance and more conservative political attitudes (Campbell and Putnam 2010; Chaves 2017). However, this study seeks to drill down deeper into the idea of belonging – both to one’s own religious community as well as the connections one has to the civic and social networks outside of their direct religious community, something other studies about the connections between religiosity and political behavior have not adequately evaluated. This study broke belonging out into two

categories: the level of connection one has in their religious community, as well as how deeply one belongs to their civic and social community. To do this, a survey was distributed which asked respondents not only how frequently they attend a place of worship, but how often they attended Sunday school, Bible studies, and potlucks or other church social functions, as well as how long the respondent had been a member of their place of worship (if applicable), and how many friends attended that same place of worship. A battery of questions asked how often respondents volunteered, donated to charity, attended meetings of a club or civic organization, or went to a friend's house for the evening in an attempt to capture the level of broader societal involvement and connection. These questions were based on Putnam's (2000) work on social belonging, in an attempt to capture how deeply a respondent belongs to their broader community.

Jerry Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church, an archetypical example of a fundamentalist congregation, had a very distinct view of the role of their church in fostering community. Elbridge Dunn, the head of Thomas Road's Children's Ministry, said the following about the ministry:

the purpose of this ministry is to provide a total environment for children – a society apart from the world. Our philosophy is that children should not have to go into the world. They should not have to get involved with drugs or Hollywood movies. But you can't just tell kids not to do things. You have to give them something to do. So we try to provide them with everything that's necessary for children....Our idea is to compete with the world.¹⁰⁵

The role of the church as shelter and protectorate from "the world" was often the philosophy of fundamentalist churches, but this separation increasingly did not mean exile from American life in general. Rather, it meant not giving in to the earthly and immoral temptations of "secular humanism," like alcohol, premarital sex, drugs, and rock

and roll. So how then does this manifest itself empirically? How do self-identified evangelicals and fundamentalists belong to their own religious communities and the broader community? The initial hypothesis of this work is that these religious groups have deep levels of belonging to their own religious communities, but lower levels of civic and social forms of belonging compared to other religious groups.

First, overall levels of religious attendance by religious affiliation can serve as a sort of baseline in understanding how various denominations belong to their own communities. As the graph below shows, the results from the survey are not particularly surprising on this matter:

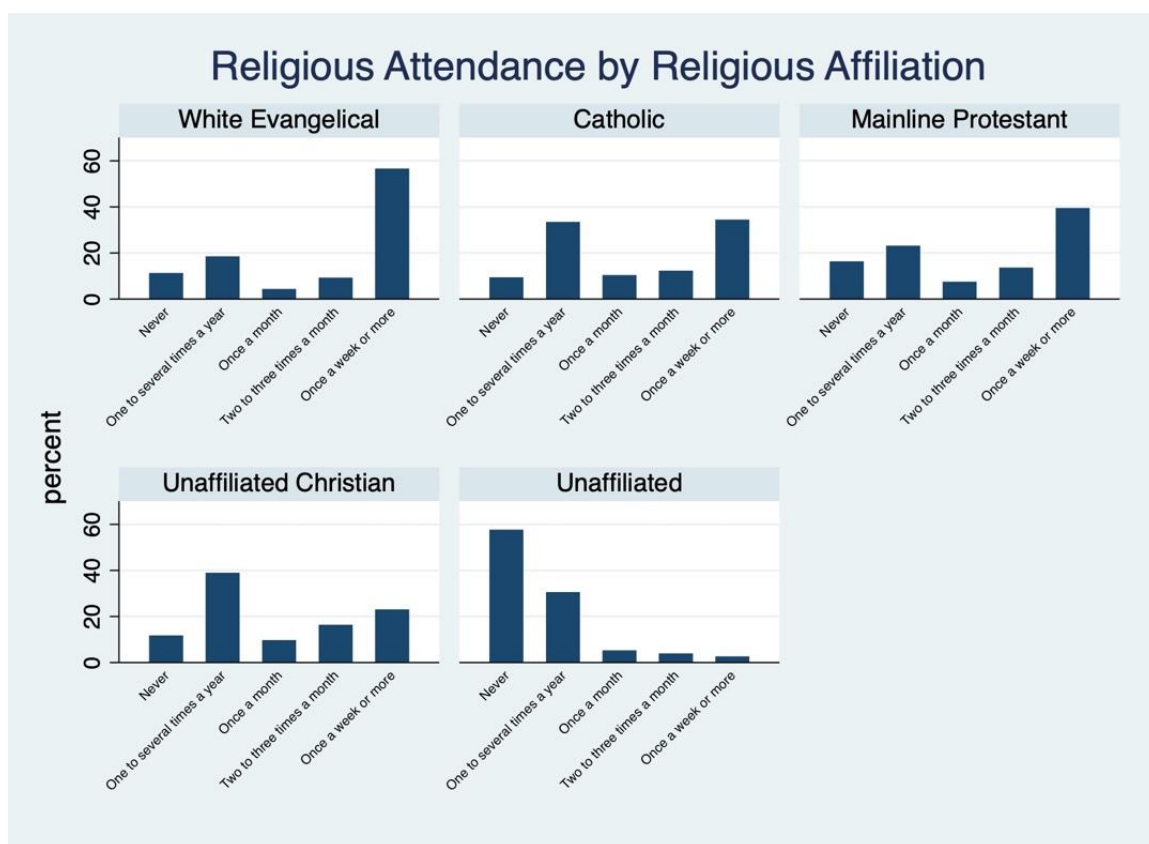


Figure 14¹⁷

The above shows, as expected, that self-identified white evangelicals are far more likely than the other religious groups to attend church once a week or more. But what happens when we drill down into the self-identified white evangelical category? When grouping white evangelicals by whether or not they hold six or seven traditional beliefs, or dividing the group out into fundamentalists vs. non-fundamentalists, the results are quite interesting:

¹⁷ Chi-square for religious attendance and religious affiliation: $p < 0.001$

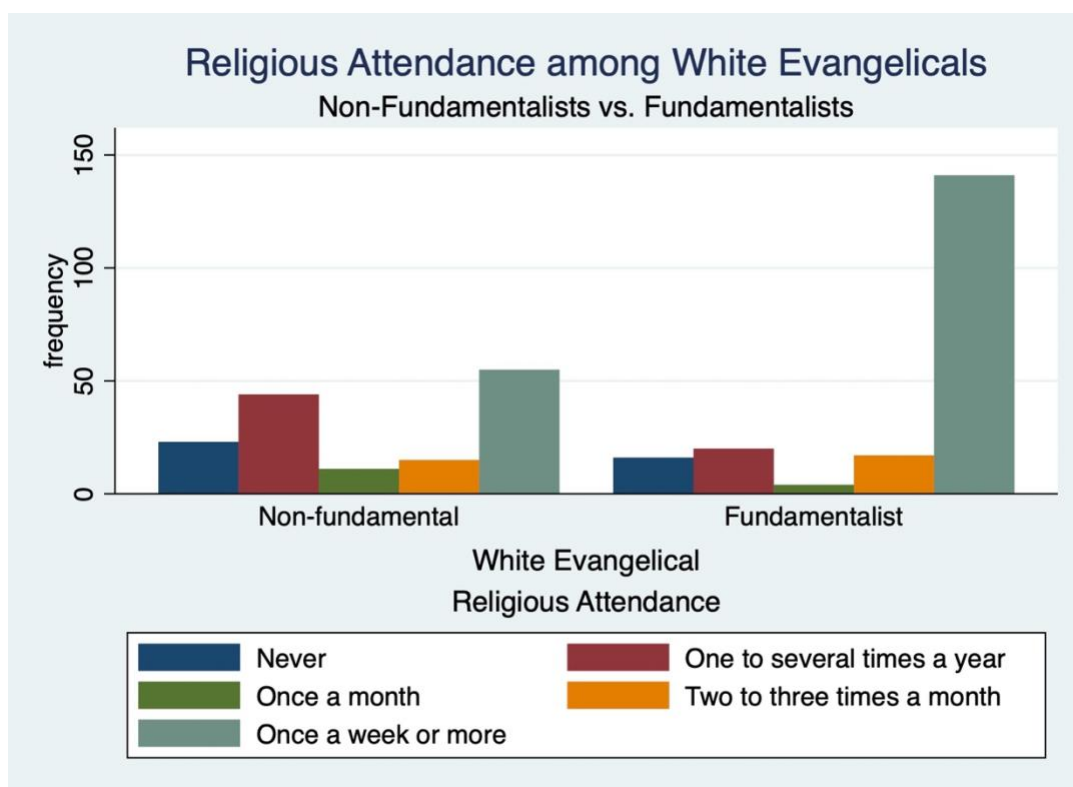


Figure 15

It seems that while most of the non-fundamental self-identified white evangelicals still attend church once a week or more, the next most frequently occurring categories for this group are attendance one to several times a year or never. When looking at just fundamentalist white evangelicals, attendance at church once a week or more is far and away the most frequently selected option. Thus, when one returns to the original graph and sees the vast numbers of white evangelicals attending church once a week or more, it appears that this is being driven by the fundamentalist section of this group.

These results should be expected – both self-identified white evangelicals and fundamentalists have far higher levels of religious attendance, going once a week or

more, than other religious groups. But are the results the same when looking at other forms of belonging in a religious community, like attendance at church social functions or at Bible study, historically a specific emphasis for fundamentalists?

The below graph shows monthly attendance at Bible study or Sunday school broken out by fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists. While a decent number of fundamentalists did not attend any Sunday school, a majority attended at least once, and compared to non-fundamentalists, the rates of attendance are far higher.

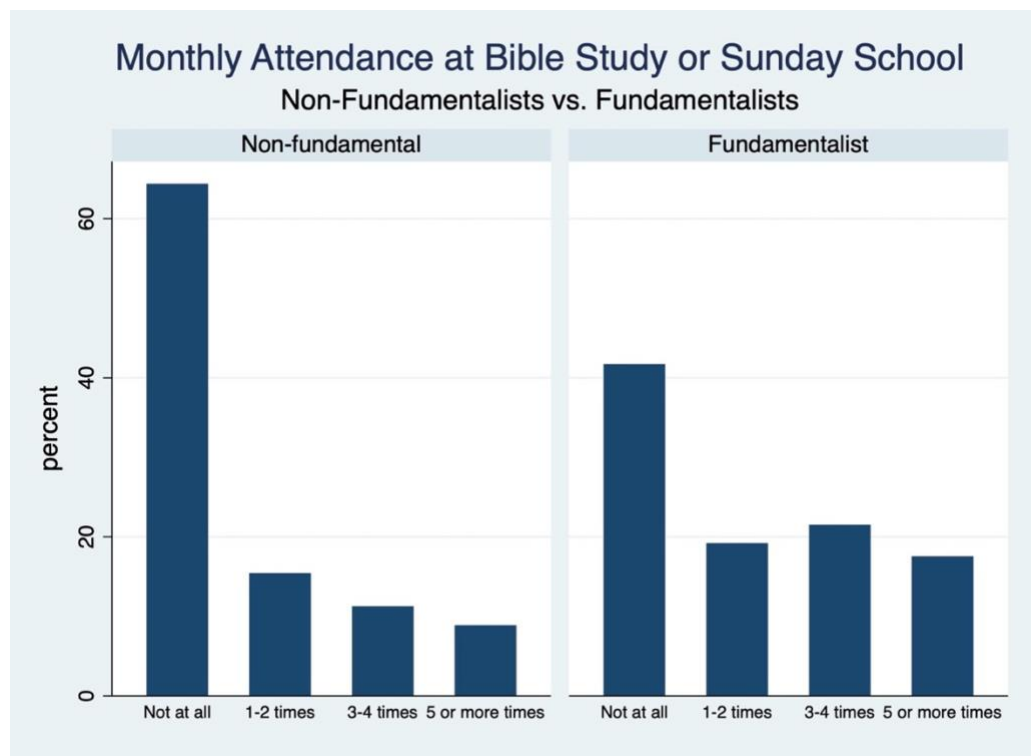


Figure 16¹⁸

¹⁸ Chi-square for Bible study attendance and fundamentalist: $p < 0.001$

The same sort of results show up when examining attendance at church social functions:

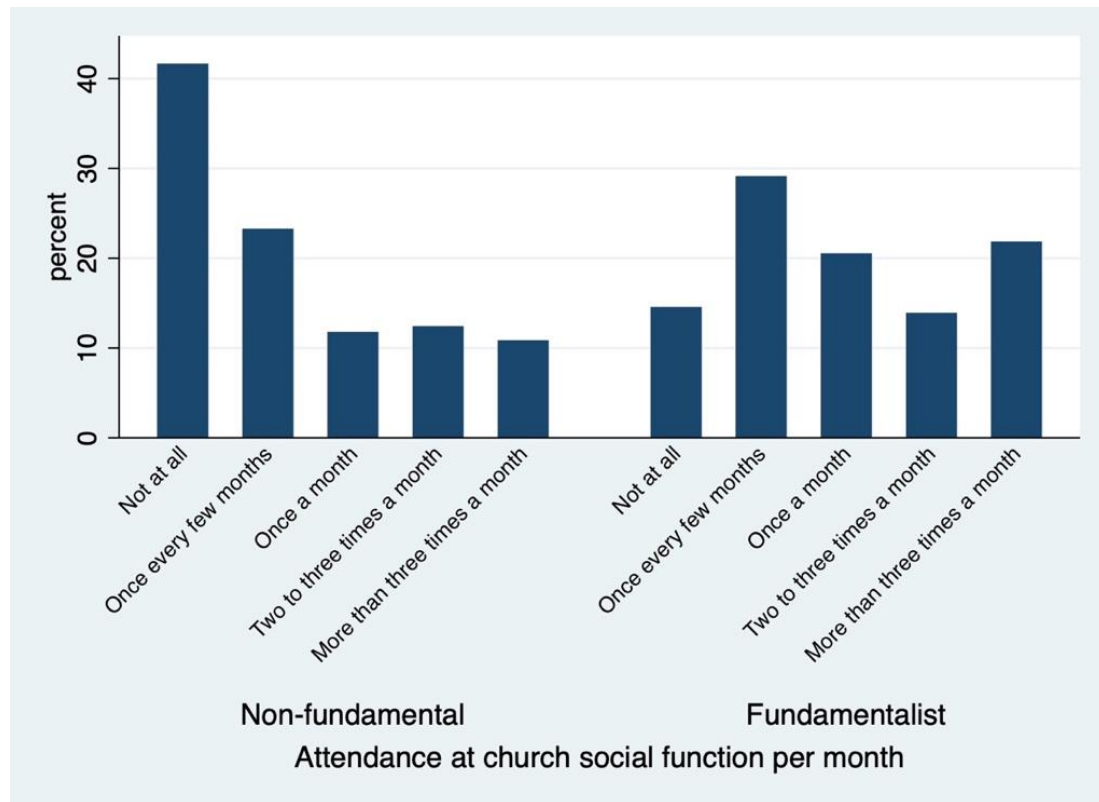


Figure 17¹⁹

Fundamentalists are far more likely to have attended a social function, with a little over twenty percent responding that they attended more than three times a month.

When asked about how many of their friends attend their place of worship, a higher percent of fundamentalists responded with “most” compared to non-

¹⁹ Chi-square for religious attendance and fundamentalist: $p < 0.001$

fundamentalists, while the majority of both categories only said “a few.” This result does not seem as convincing as previous charts, with the distribution among fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists being roughly the same, but the higher rates of “most” do warrant presentation here.

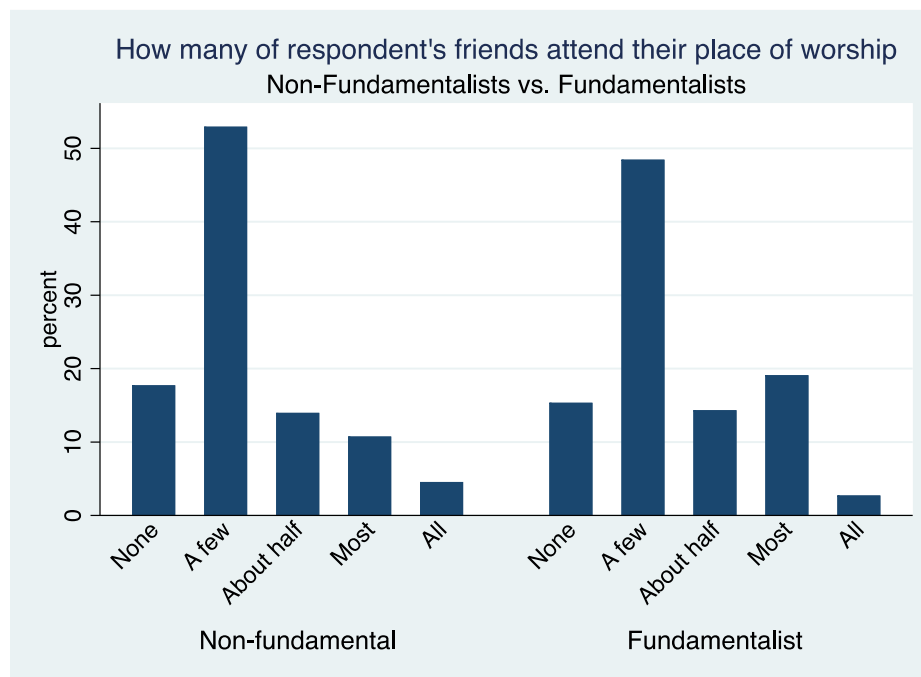


Figure 18²⁰

So far, it looks like fundamentalists have higher attendance rates at church social functions, Bible studies and Sunday school, as well as simple church attendance than non-fundamentalists, as well as compared to other white evangelicals who are not fundamentalists.

²⁰ Chi-square for friend's attending place of worship and fundamentalist: $p = 0.006$

The below graph shows the amount of contributions to charity per month for religious affiliations in five categories: white evangelicals, Catholics, Mainline Protestants, Unaffiliated Christians, and the religiously unaffiliated.

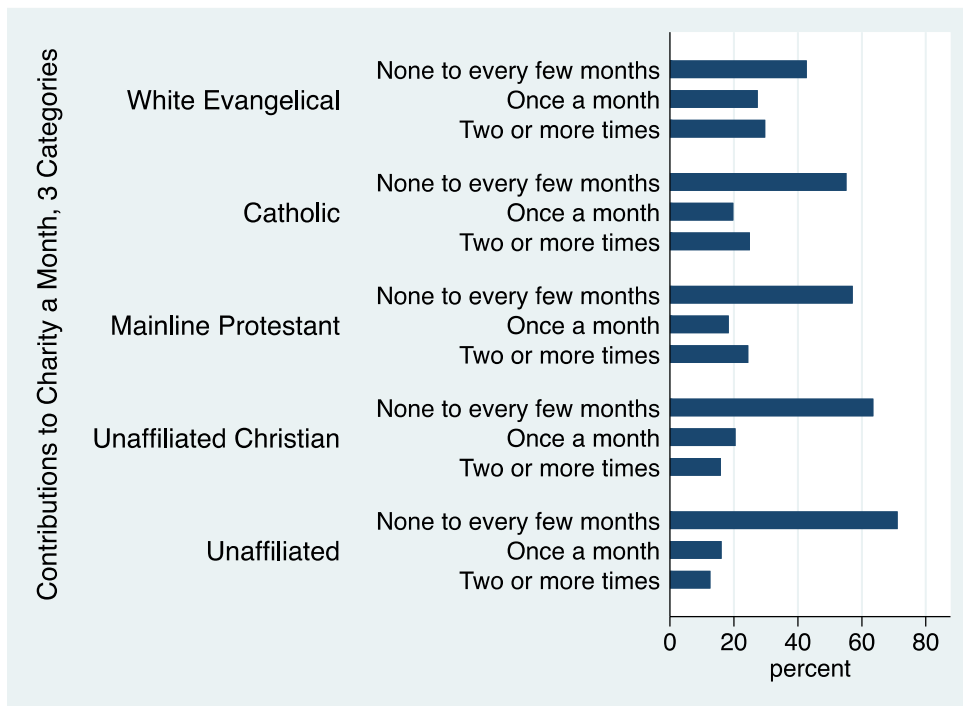


Figure 19²¹

The results above suggest that white evangelicals, compared to the other religious affiliations captured in the survey, donate to charity more frequently. Those white evangelicals who responded that they contribute to charity two more times a month was

²¹ Chi-square for religious affiliation and contributions to charity: $p < 0.000$

higher than the other religious affiliations surveyed. However, contributions to charity is a broad category, and this could mean a number of things in the real world. Which charities white evangelicals frequently contributing to, and the very definition of “charity” is likely different for each denomination above. Additionally, the amount may vary dramatically as a percentage of the respondent’s income, as well as in absolute terms. A respondent might have frequently contributed to charity, but the amount may not be very much, while an individual might make a yearly contribution of a large sum of money.

To further explore social belonging, the amount of volunteer work respondents reported per month was also investigated.

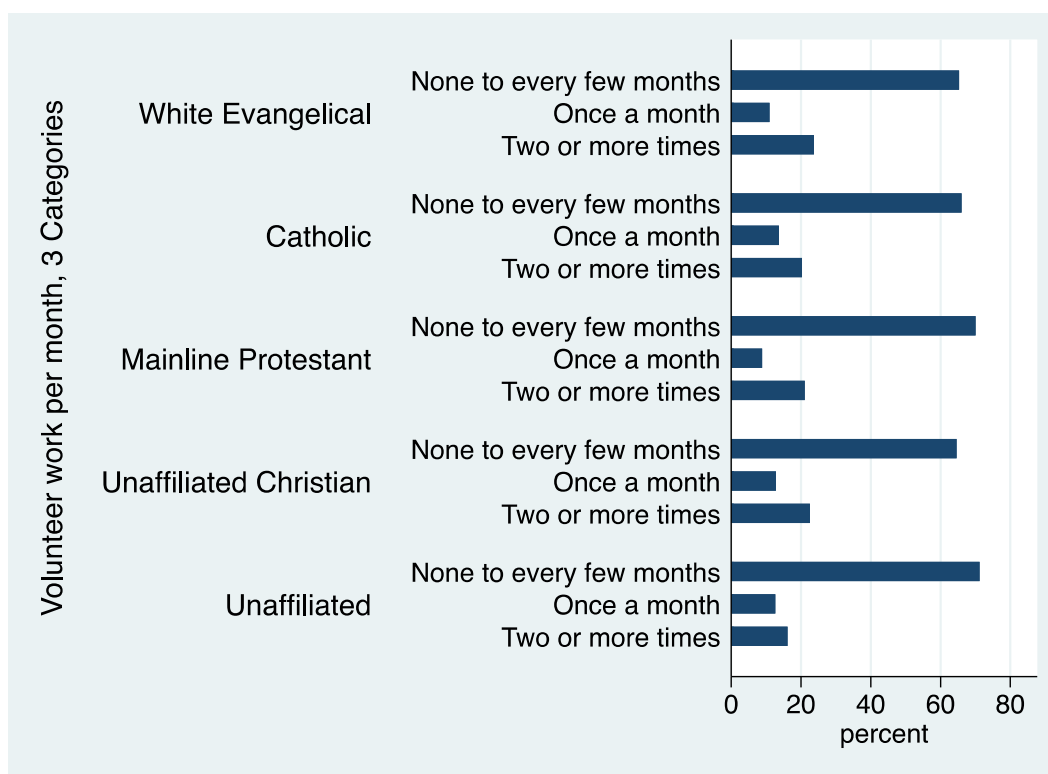


Figure 20²²

The above shows how often respondents within each self-identified religious group volunteered per month, with there not being much of a difference across denominations. White evangelicals and unaffiliated Christians volunteer most frequently, with both groups having the highest percentage of respondents who volunteered two time a more per month; however, the chi-square value for these two variables indicates no statistical significance. It is also noteworthy that a majority of each religious group reported no volunteer work per month, or only every few months. The coronavirus pandemic might

²² Chi-Square for religious affiliation and volunteer work: $p = 0.656$, not statistically significant

have impacted responses, but this question asked respondents to think back to before that event, so the high rates of none, on both this question and charity work are striking for religious groups, which in theory would be more amenable to both charity and volunteer work. Future research might be able to explore these low rates of volunteer work among American religious groups, but that is beyond the scope of this project.

Again, both charity and volunteer work often occur in conjunction with a church or religious organization, and are also sometimes even sponsored by a place of worship. Do the seemingly higher rates of donations to charity for evangelicals and fundamentalists carry over to attendance at club or civic meetings, meetings on town or school affairs, or even spending an evening at a friend's house?

The below graph shows the rates of attendance per month at a club or civic organization meetings for fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists. Again, while most individuals surveyed did not attend one of these meetings, a higher percentage of fundamentalists did not attend any such meetings in a month. Additionally, non-fundamentalists appeared to attend these meetings more frequently than their fundamentalist counterparts.

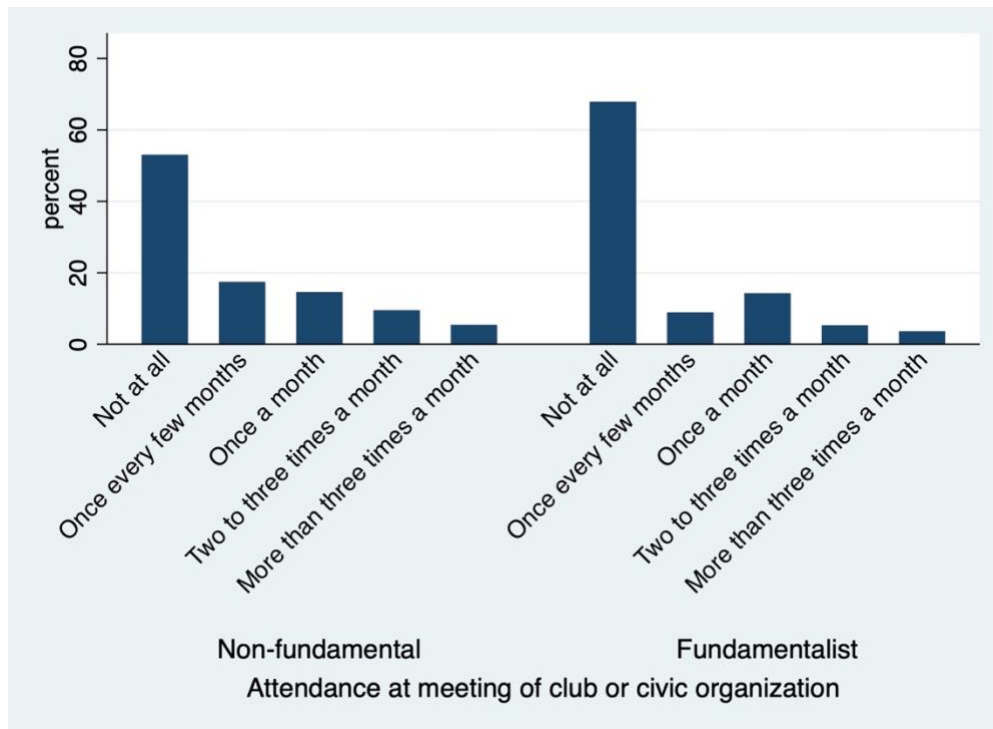


Figure 21²³

This pattern is similar when looking at how fundamentalists responded when asked about their attendance at meetings on town or school affairs. Again, while most respondents indicated that they did not attend any sort of these meetings, fundamentalists were more likely to have abstained than non-fundamentalists.

²³ Chi-square for attendance at club meeting and fundamentalists: $p < 0.001$

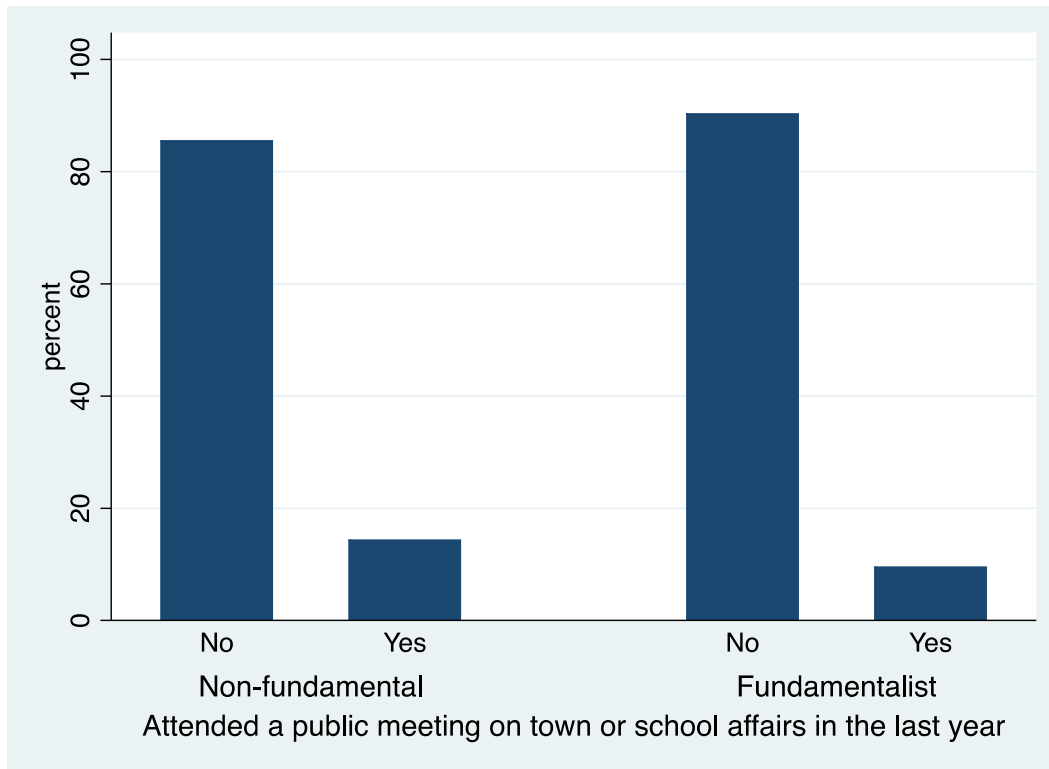


Figure 22²⁴

Another chart with seemingly contradicts the charge of Falwell and the Moral Majority that all moral Americans should take a greater interest in their local communities and the political arena is the rates of political activism between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists. When asked whether they engaged in a number of political activities during the 2020 presidential election²⁵, fundamentalists had roughly the same amount of political participation as non-fundamentalists.

²⁴ Chi-square for attendance at public meeting on town or school affairs and fundamentalist: $p = 0.032$

²⁵ The activism scale was constructed by asking whether or not respondents had engaged in any of the following activities during the 2020 presidential campaign: trying to influence the vote of others, attending a political rally, working for a political party or campaign, displaying a candidate's button or sticker, or donating money to a political party or candidate. It should be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic might be influencing these results.

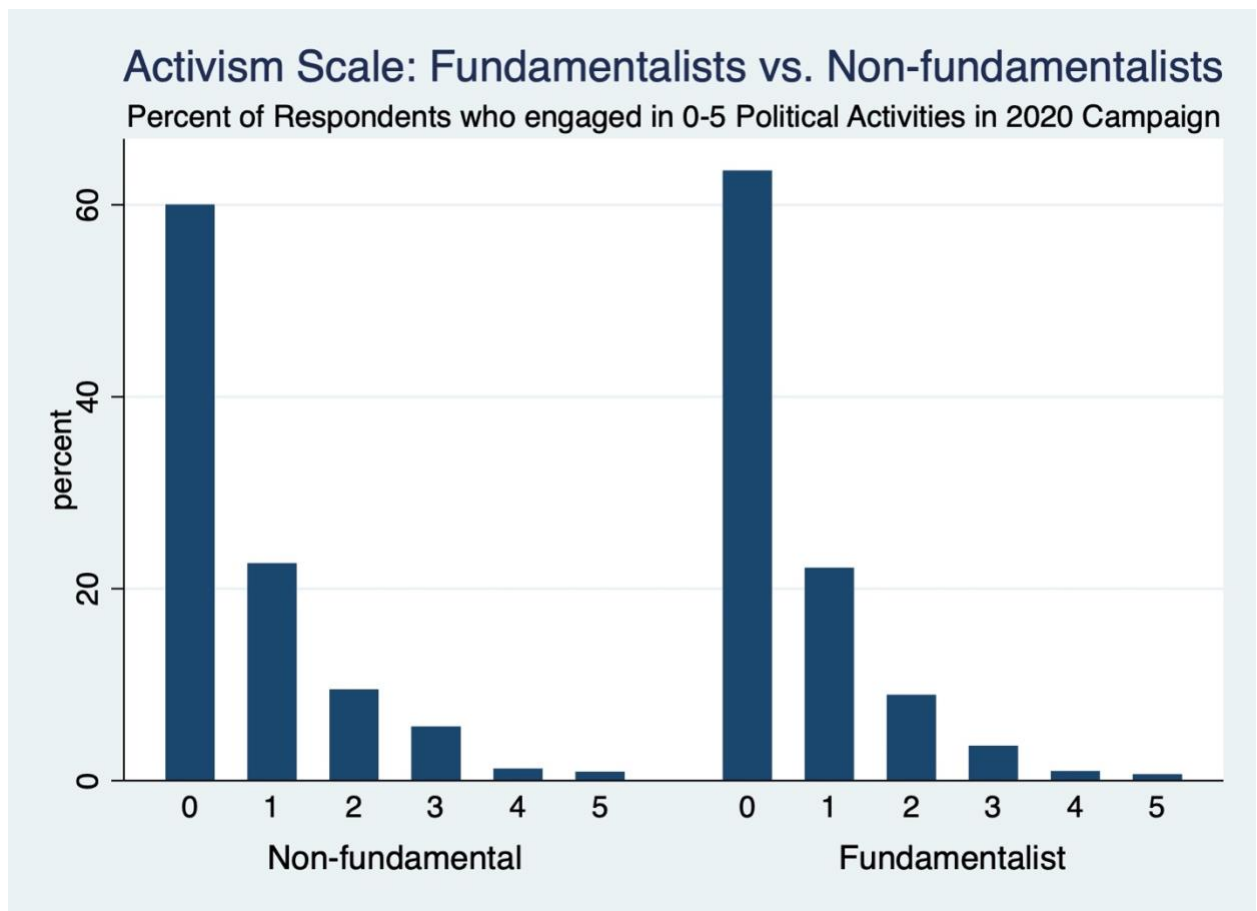


Figure 23²⁶

As the chart shows, by and large there was no widespread activism among fundamentalists, or non-fundamentalists for that matter. In fact, the distribution along the zero to five scale looks roughly the same for both groups, with a majority of respondents participating in no political activities during the 2020 presidential campaign.

Additionally, the distribution looks similar for all the religious denominations examined

²⁶ Chi-square for activism scale and fundamentalists: $p = 0.750$, not statistically significant

here, except for maybe the religiously unaffiliated, who seemed to engage in more political activism.

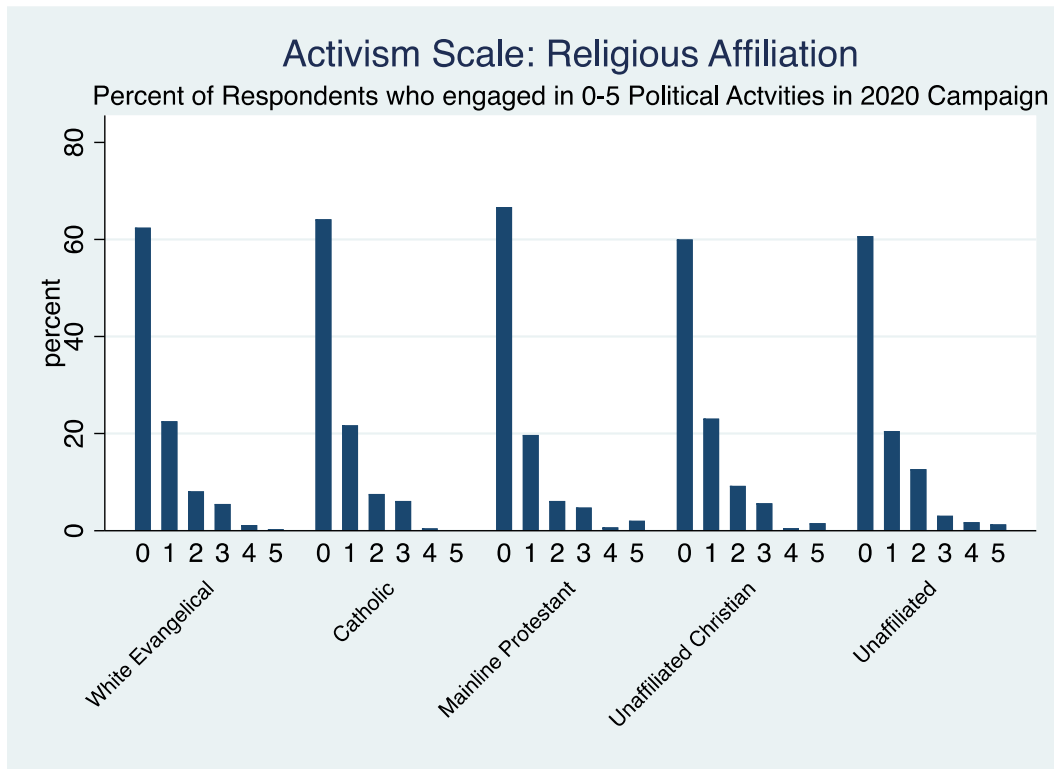


Figure 24²⁷

The above graphs highlights two important points, the first of which being that only a small number of individuals surveyed were highly politically active during the 2020 presidential campaign, with the vast majority of respondents doing none or only one of

²⁷ Chi-square for religious affiliation and activism scale: $p = 0.505$, not statistically significant

the listed political activities. This finding highlights previous work by Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012) that a majority of political activism comes from a highly motivated minority. This finding harkens back to Abramowitz's (2010) work on polarization, which argues that much of the gap is between the engaged and unengaged citizenry.

The second finding for the above graphs is precisely that the rates of political activism don't look much different between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists or among other religious denominations, given the specific religious history of fundamentalists in America. For much of the twentieth century, fundamentalists were in self-imposed political and cultural exile. This meant very little engagement, let alone activism, in the American political arena. They don't appear to be more involved or active in American politics than the average American, but that surely represents a change. In other words, Falwell and the Moral Majority's attempts to slowly pull fundamentalists into the political arena was somewhat successful.

One of the final measures of social belonging examined here is how often respondents spent the evening at the house of a friend. How often someone makes the effort to go to a friend's house might be a clue in understanding their relationship to the broader community, even if we can't know in a specific case whether the friend is a member of the same religious community.

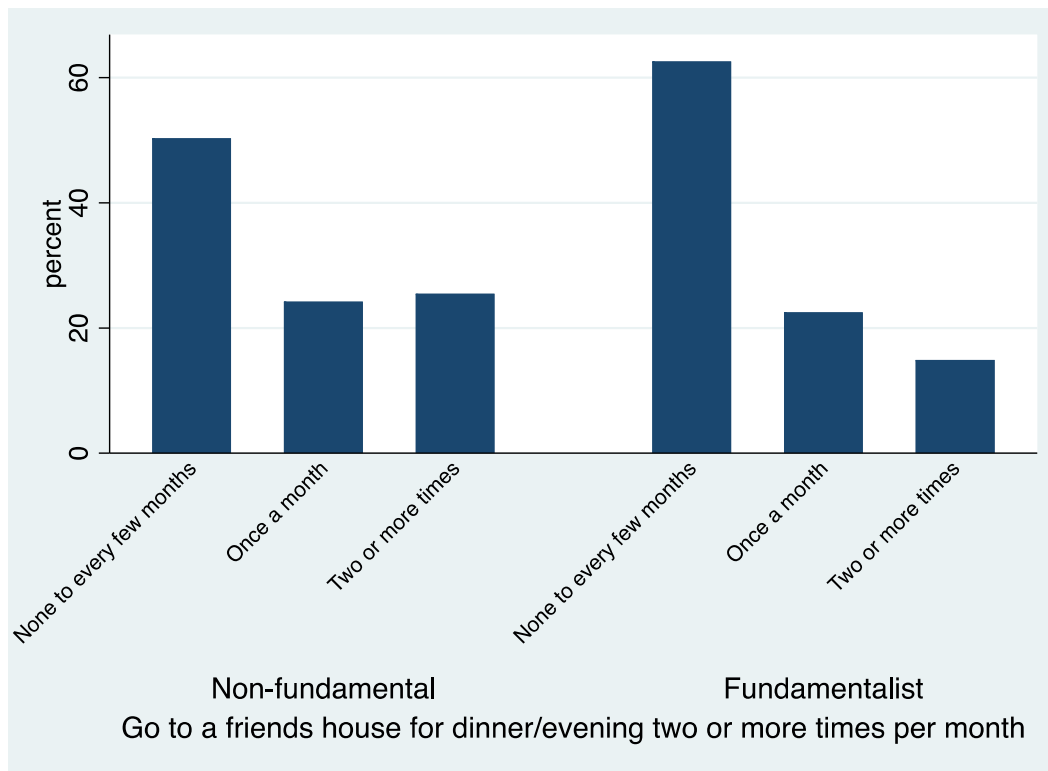


Figure 25²⁸

The above shows fundamentalists less frequently spending an evening at the home of a friend. Perhaps this is because they see all their friends at church on Sunday mornings or at a Bible study later during the week. It could also be the case that behavioral prescriptions like abstaining from alcohol make attendance at social gathering where alcohol is present, such as a football watch party, a non-starter. There are a number of various interpretations available, but the results from the survey show non-

²⁸ Chi-square for going to a friend's house and fundamental: $p < 0.001$

fundamentalists being more likely to spend an evening with friends than non-fundamentalists.

Levels of Trust and the Production of Bonding Social Capital:

Perhaps one way to start untangling whether fundamentalists produce more bonding than bridging social capital is to look at how this group trusts members of their own religious group, members of different religious communities, and their neighbors. My survey asked respondents a battery of questions about their levels of trust in these above groups, as well as others. Grechnya (2018), Rapp (2016), and many others have shown that levels of trust within a society are critical factors in mitigating political polarization. It is therefore important to understand the levels of trust fundamentalists and self-identified evangelicals have in other groups within society. If, as one of the hypotheses of this research project contends, fundamentalists have higher forms of bonding social capital and lower forms of bridging social capital, one would expect this group to have higher levels of trust in their own religious community, but less so in other religious communities, as well as potentially their own neighbors.

First, the below graph shows that when asked about their level of trust in people of different or no religions, white evangelicals appear to have lower overall levels of trust than other religious denominations.

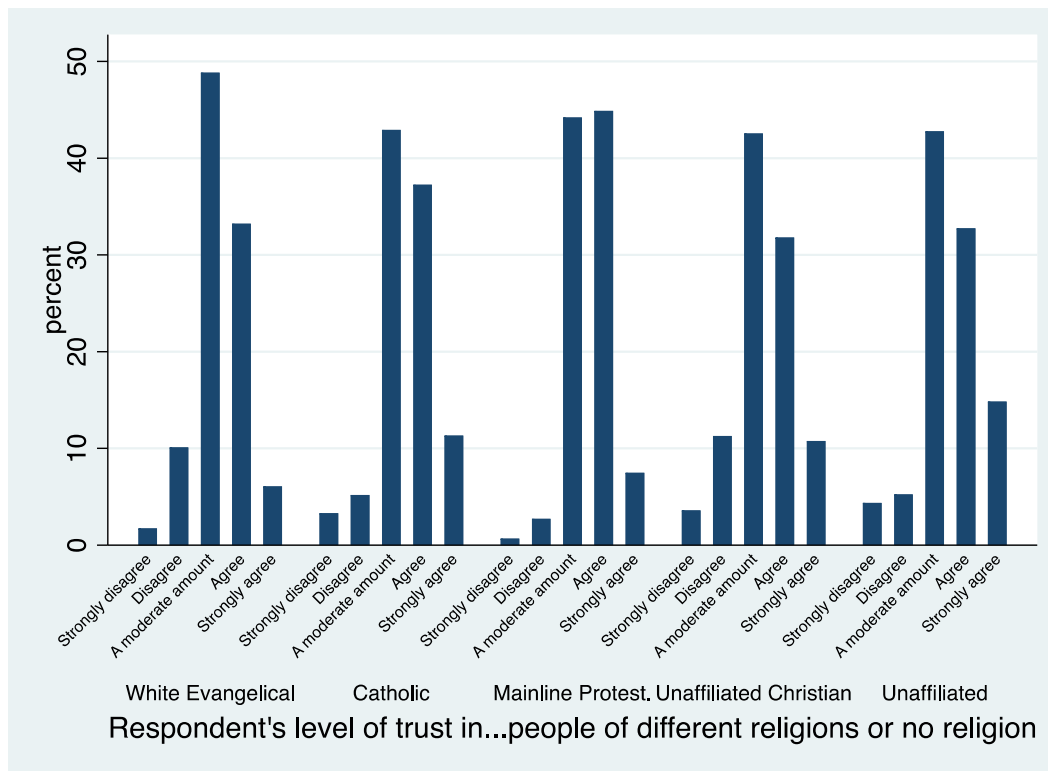


Figure 26²⁹

The chart shows that white evangelicals have lower levels of trust in people of different or no religious affiliations, responding disagree or strongly disagree to whether or not they could trust someone of a different or no religion. Interestingly, unaffiliated Christians closely followed white evangelicals in terms of disagreeing that they could trust someone of a different faith or no religion at all. Close to 50% of white evangelicals were also in the middle of the spectrum, saying that they could trust people of a different religion or none at all only a moderate amount.

²⁹ Chi-square for trust in different or no religions and religious affiliation: $p = 0.001$

Similarly, white evangelicals had higher levels of trust in members of their own religious community than other religious denominations, as the below chart shows this group having the highest percent of respondents strongly agreeing that they could trust their fellow white evangelicals.

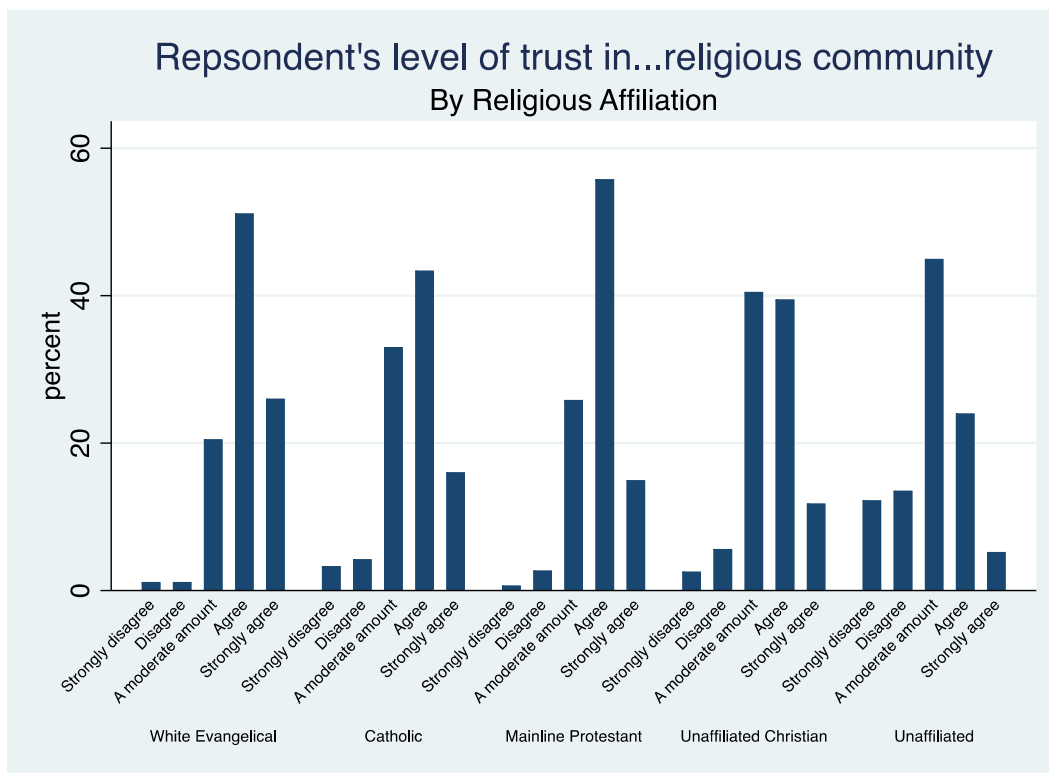


Figure 27³⁰

³⁰ Chi-square for trust in members of one's religious community and religious affiliation: $p < 0.001$

This relationship is even stronger when isolating for fundamentalists versus non-fundamentalists, as the below charts demonstrate. Fundamentalists were more likely to say they could not trust someone of a different or no religion, while also being less likely to agree that they could. Compared to the rates of trust in members of their own religious community, fundamentalists appear to have higher levels of trust in members of their own religious community, and lower levels of trust in those outside of it.

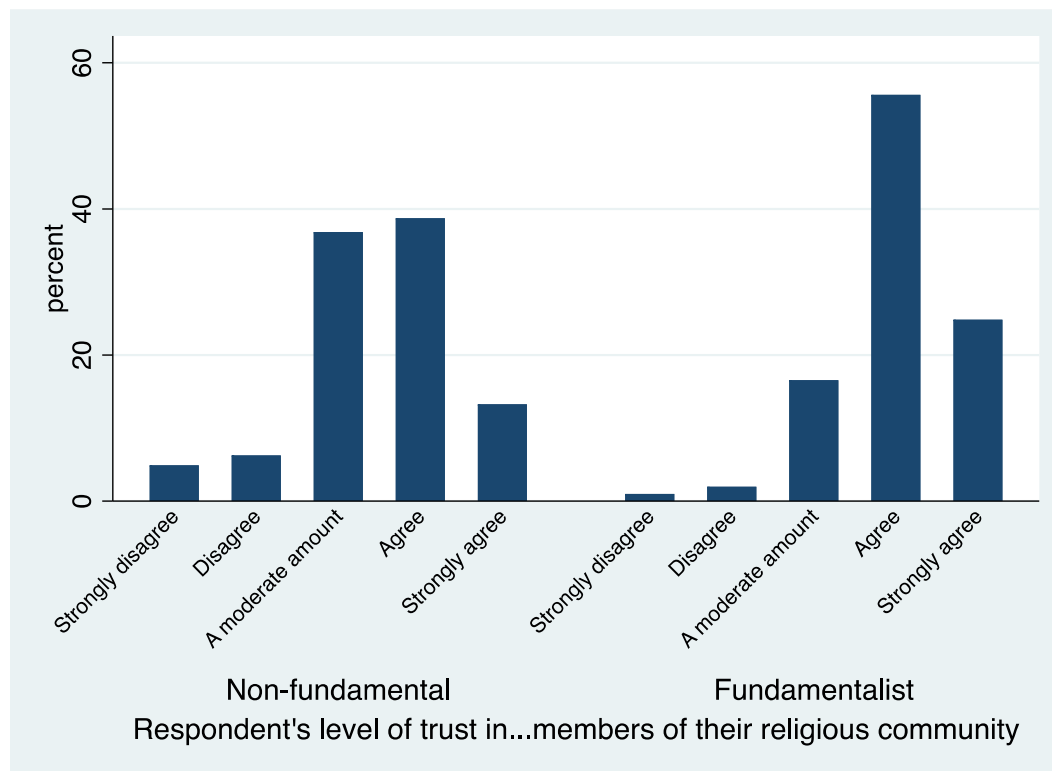


Figure 28³¹

³¹ Chi-square for level of trust in one's own religious community and fundamental: $p < 0.001$

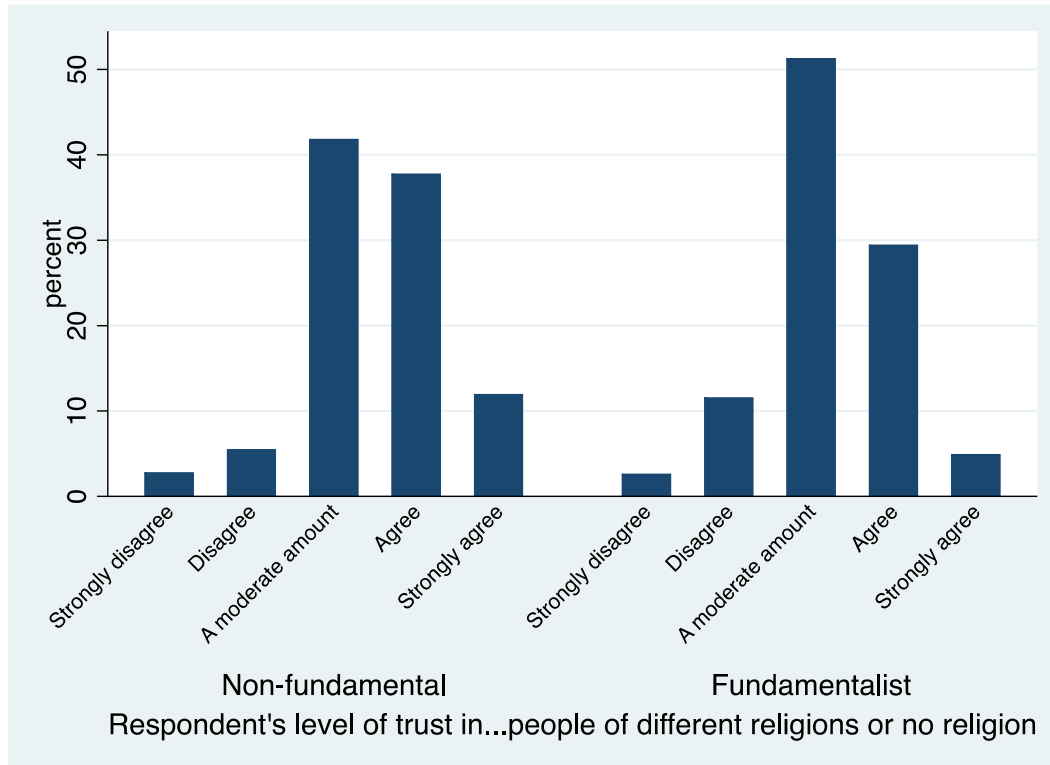


Figure 29³²

Why might this be the case? Is there something distinct within fundamentalism that might be creating high levels of trust within the tradition and lower levels of trust outside of it? Is there some sort of mechanism, like a specific religious behavior, that might help in better understanding these high in-group levels and low out-group levels of trust?

Historically, religious revivals have been particularly important in the American religious tradition writ large, but also specifically as it relates to American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Part of this revivalist tradition within contemporary

³² Chi-square for level of trust in people of different or no religion: $p < 0.001$

American fundamentalism and evangelicalism is the practice of group prayer, where members of the congregation are invited to pray out loud in front of the church. This process, which started with Charles Finney during one of America's Second Great Awakenings, took prayer and confession, at the time a private practice, and turned the experience public. This typically individual and private exercise suddenly became hyper-social and especially vulnerable events, as individuals confessed and made their thoughts and feelings known before a crowd. This had a handful of results, most importantly for this study being that it produced a deep level of social trust among congregants. "After watching people humbly ask for mercy and watch other do the same, this produced a new sense of trust in one another, as family ties were strengthened, enemies made up, and strangers found a sense of community."¹⁰⁶ There would almost certainly be greater levels of bonding social capital within a religious community that regularly practiced such a religious ritual. The question now is whether or not fundamentalists today still engage in the custom of praying out loud.¹⁰⁷

The survey asked respondents directly how often they or members of their religious community prayed out loud during religious services. The results comparing the rates for fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists are below:

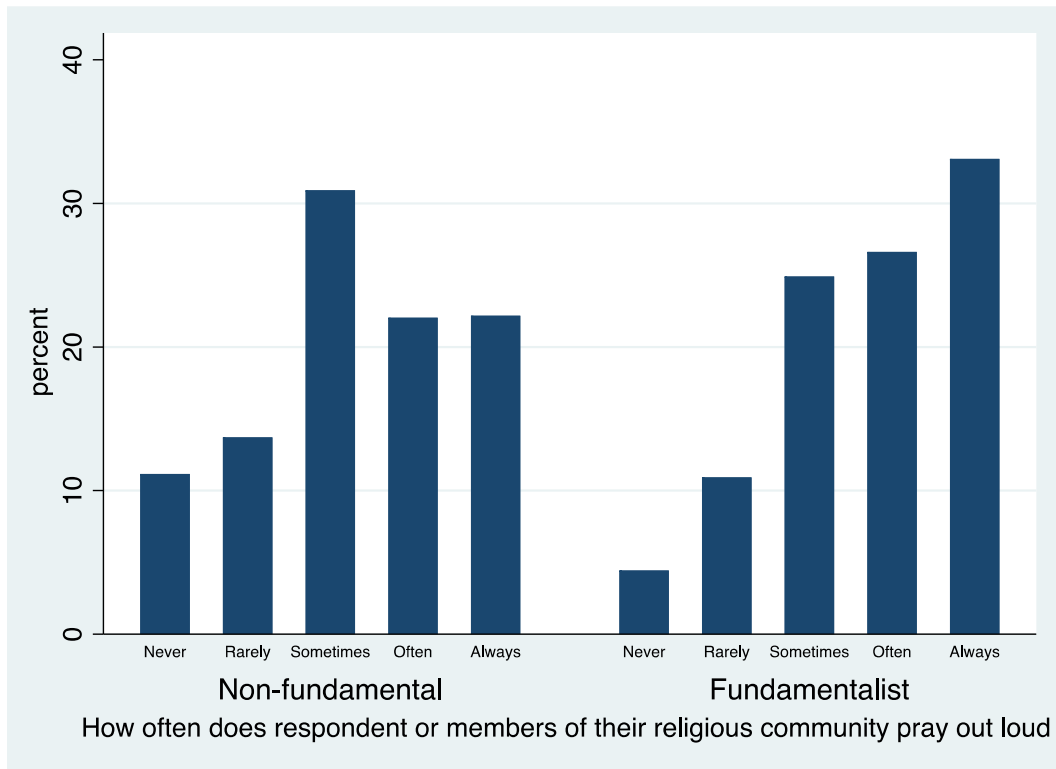


Figure 30³³

Over 30% of fundamentalists responded that they or members of their religious community always pray out loud during religious services, and close to 30% stated that they often do. This result is important in better understanding the differing levels of trust among fundamentalists. Given that the experience and custom of praying out loud might

³³ Chi-square for how often members of their religious community pray out loud and fundamentalist: $p < 0.001$

produce higher levels of in-group social trust, and relatedly bonding social capital, the fact that fundamentalists have higher rates than non-fundamentalists seems to be an important finding in accounting for the divergent levels of social trust.

Inferential Statistics: How Religious and Social Belonging Influence Political and Religious Polarization

Finally, this chapter will close by running a handful of multivariate regression models to determine what impact levels of belonging, both within one's own religious community, and with the broader social and civic community, have on affective polarization. First, the dependent variable being utilized here, "partybias" is the standardized value of the difference in how a respondent rated the Republican Party and the Democratic Party on a scale from 0 to 100. This allows one to see how far from the mean an individual actually is on this polarization scale and in what direction, either biased towards the Republican Party (positive values) or the Democratic Party (negative values).

In order to test the effect of deep religious community belonging on affective polarization, a scale from 0 to 11 was created by combining three items from the survey data. How often a respondent attended: a place of worship, Bible or Sunday school, and church social functions, were calculated and placed on a scale from 0 (no attendance at any) to 11 (high attendance at all). This was then included as an independent variable in a multivariate regression analysis. The table of results are below:

Table 6

Regression Table 1 for “partybias”	Coef.	St.Err.	t- value	p- value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
relbelonging	.016	.006	2.87	.004	.005	.028	***
1.Democrat (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	.833	.049	17.15	0	.738	.928	***
3.Repub.	1.461	.053	27.65	0	1.357	1.564	***
4.Other	.664	.133	4.99	0	.403	.925	***
1Ext. Con. (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	-.151	.057	-2.65	.008	-.262	-.039	***
3.Slightly Con.	-.297	.067	-4.43	0	-.428	-.165	***
4.Moderate	-.504	.061	-8.28	0	-.624	-.385	***
5.Slightly Lib.	-.703	.086	-8.17	0	-.872	-.534	***
6.Liberal	-.786	.083	-9.52	0	-.948	-.624	***
7.Ext. Liberal	-.735	.091	-8.05	0	-.914	-.556	***
Less than \$10,000	-.077	.081	-0.96	.339	-.236	.081	
18-29 years old	.033	.061	0.55	.584	-.086	.153	
south	.046	.034	1.33	.184	-.022	.113	
female	-.025	.034	-0.73	.466	-.09	.041	
white	.181	.046	3.93	0	.091	.272	***
1.Catholic (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Mainline Protest.	-.11	.061	-1.80	.073	-.23	.01	*
3.Evangelical	-.038	.051	-0.76	.449	-.138	.061	
4.Unaff. Christian	.044	.057	0.76	.445	-.069	.156	
5.Unaffiliated	.013	.058	0.23	.816	-.099	.126	
Constant	-.644	.091	-7.11	0	-.822	-.466	***
Mean dependent var		0.012	SD dependent var			1.001	
R-squared		0.686	Number of obs			1183.000	
F-test		133.857	Prob > F			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		2028.127	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			2129.643	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

The index for religious belonging appears to have a significant impact on determining affective polarization, with every increase in the scale resulting in a larger gap between someone's rating of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. As expected, political identification and ideology also appear as dominant forces in accounting for levels of polarization, with both being highly statistically significant, with the more conservative and liberal an individual, the more polarized they become in their ratings of the respective parties. Additionally, out of all the other independent variables controlled for in this model, income, age, region, race, and religious affiliation, only race and religious affiliation are significant, with the dummy "white" predicting more polarization towards Republicans, Mainline Protestantism being more polarized towards the Democratic Party.

This first regression output suggests that even when controlling for partisanship and political identity, how deeply one belongs to their own religious community seems to notably influence how one views the Republican and Democratic Parties, here serving as an indicator of affective polarization. As one's attendance at church, Sunday or Bible School, or church social functions increases, polarization seems to do so as well, decidedly in the direction of warmer ratings for Republicans and colder ratings for Democrats. But ratings for the two distinct political parties in the United States are but one aspect of the story. How does religious belonging influence ratings of one's own religious group as well as the religious out-group? Recall the lower levels of trust for members of different religious communities among self-identified white evangelicals and

fundamentalists. Knowing how deep religious connection influences one's feelings of those with the same religious identity and those on the outside looking in could go a long way in uncovering how the belonging aspect of religiosity influences the production of bonding vs. bridging social capital.

In order to test this connection, I ran another multivariate regression model, this time creating a new dependent variable, "relbias" which subtracted how a survey respondent rated evangelicals and atheists on the same 0-100 feeling thermometer scale and then standardized those values so the value for each respondent was the number of standard deviations away from the mean they were. Again, this allows not only to see the magnitude of how polarized a respondent was, but in which direction (either towards evangelicals or atheists). As has been discussed, American evangelicalism and fundamentalism has tended to deeply criticize "secular humanism," of which atheism and atheists would be a large part. Knowing how religious belonging influences in-group vs. out-group feelings could go a long way in better understanding the production of bonding versus bridging social capital.

Table 7

Regression Table 2 for “relbias”	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
relbelonging	.034	.008	4.21	0	.018	.05	***
1.Democrat (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	.016	.068	0.23	.82	-.119	.15	
3.Republican	.077	.074	1.04	.299	-.069	.224	
4.Other	.136	.188	0.72	.47	-.232	.504	
1.Ext. Cons. (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	-.185	.08	-2.31	.021	-.343	-.028	**
3.Slightly Cons.	-.294	.094	-3.11	.002	-.479	-.109	***
4.Moderate	-.465	.086	-5.41	0	-.633	-.296	***
5.Slightly Lib.	-.552	.121	-4.55	0	-.791	-.314	***
6.Liberal	-.764	.116	-6.57	0	-.993	-.536	***
7.Ext. Liberal	-.825	.129	-6.41	0	-1.077	-.572	***
Less than \$10,000	.111	.114	0.97	.331	-.113	.334	
18-29 years old	-.377	.086	-4.40	0	-.545	-.209	***
South	.027	.049	0.55	.582	-.069	.122	
female	.011	.047	0.24	.812	-.082	.104	
white	-.066	.065	-1.02	.308	-.194	.061	
1.Catholic (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Mainline Protest.	.173	.086	2.00	.046	.003	.342	**
3.Evangelical	.632	.071	8.86	0	.492	.772	***
4.Unaff. Christian	.135	.081	1.67	.096	-.024	.293	*
5.Unaffiliated	-.395	.081	-4.87	0	-.554	-.236	***
Constant	.119	.128	0.93	.352	-.131	.369	
Mean dependent var		0.040	SD dependent var			1.003	
R-squared		0.378	Number of obs			1183.000	
F-test		37.201	Prob > F			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		2841.138	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			2942.654	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

This regression analysis produced quite interesting results. As with the level of political polarization, deep religious belonging seems to be highly statistically significant and results in warmer ratings for evangelicals and colder ratings for atheists, or in other words greater religious polarization between the two groups. Political ideology also appears highly influential, with the strongly conservative being much more polarized towards evangelicals and against atheists. Another independent variable, age, also appears to be a factor here, with respondents between 18-29 years old being polarized against evangelicals and in favor of atheists, which would track based on the rising “nones” or the religiously unaffiliated, among young people in the United States¹⁰⁸

Finally, religious affiliation also appears to matter, with each category being statistically significant, with self-identified Evangelicals and the religiously unaffiliated, unsurprisingly, being particularly religiously polarized towards their own in-group and against the out-group.

What then do these results tell us about how one's religious belonging influences not only political polarization, but religious polarization as well? The above regression models highlight that as one's connection to their own religious community increases, not only through attendance at worship services, but through extracurricular religious activities like Bible Study, Sunday School, or church social functions, in-group feelings grow warmer and out-group feelings grow colder. Whether that group is political or religious in nature doesn't seem to matter that much, and in many ways those two groups have become even more fused together. The results also suggest that as religious belonging increases, so does the production of bonding social capital, which emphasizes strong in-group connections and cohesion, while also potentially being prone to out-group antagonism. However, the measures of church belonging used here are primarily Christian-centric, and even within Christianity focused on traditional evangelicalism. Because this study is principally focused on how evangelical religiosity might be motivating affective polarization, the analysis has tended towards these sorts of denominational specific questions. Future research can improve on this study and focus on non-evangelical focused denominations. Now that religious belonging's impact on polarized behavior has been explored, this investigation will now address how social and

civic belonging may or may not be driving political polarization, and if there is any connection between these two types of belonging.

First, a regression model for “partybias,” the same dependent variable measuring political polarization as above, was run with a scale capturing a respondent’s social and civic belonging. The scale is based on how often a respondent did the following activities monthly: volunteered, donated to charity, went to a friend’s house for dinner or the evening, and attended a meeting of a club or civic organization. The scale ranged from 0 to 16, with 16 being very high social belonging and 0 being no social or civic belonging. The results for the initial regression model are below:

Table 8

Regression Table 3 for “partybias”	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
socialbelong	.002	.005	0.47	.635	-.007	.011	
1.Democrat (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	.827	.049	16.98	0	.732	.923	***
3.Republican	1.468	.053	27.70	0	1.364	1.572	***
4.Other	.648	.133	4.85	0	.386	.909	***
1.Ext. Cons. (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	-.15	.057	-2.63	.009	-.262	-.038	***
3.Slightly Cons.	-.297	.067	-4.42	0	-.429	-.165	***
4.Moderate	-.511	.061	-8.36	0	-.631	-.391	***
5.Slightly Lib.	-.695	.086	-8.04	0	-.865	-.526	***
6.Lib.	-.795	.083	-9.59	0	-.958	-.632	***
7.Ext. Liberal	-.736	.092	-8.04	0	-.916	-.557	***
Less than \$10,000	-.061	.081	-0.75	.452	-.219	.098	
18-29 years old	.04	.061	0.65	.514	-.08	.16	
south	.05	.035	1.44	.15	-.018	.118	
female	-.03	.034	-0.89	.373	-.096	.036	
white	.164	.046	3.56	0	.073	.254	***
1.Catholic	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Mainline Protest.	-.105	.061	-1.71	.087	-.226	.015	*
3.Evangelical	-.017	.05	-0.35	.728	-.116	.081	
4.Unaff. Christian	.048	.057	0.84	.4	-.064	.161	
5.Unaffiliated	-.026	.056	-0.47	.641	-.136	.084	
Constant	-.57	.091	-6.28	0	-.748	-.392	***
Mean dependent var		0.012	SD dependent var			1.001	
R-squared		0.684	Number of obs			1183.000	
F-test		132.525	Prob > F			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		2036.235	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			2137.751	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

The primary takeaway is that one's level of social or civic belonging does not seem to significantly impact political polarization. When controlling for partisan identity, ideology, age, income, region gender, and religious affiliation, one's level of social belonging has a negligible impact on affective polarization.

It also seems to have no effect on religious polarization, as the below regression model shows, suggesting that levels of social and civic belonging don't mitigate the intoxicating influence of partisanship, ideology, and religious affiliation.

Table 9

Regression Table 4 for "relbias"	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
socialbelong	-.002	.007	-0.35	.724	-.015	.011	
1.Democrat (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	.001	.069	0.02	.987	-.134	.136	
3.Republican	.089	.075	1.19	.234	-.058	.237	
4.Other	.103	.189	0.55	.586	-.268	.473	
1.Ext. Cons. (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	-.18	.081	-2.23	.026	-.338	-.021	**
3.Slightly Cons.	-.291	.095	-3.06	.002	-.478	-.104	***
4.Moderate	-.478	.087	-5.52	0	-.647	-.308	***
5.Slightly Lib.	-.53	.122	-4.33	0	-.77	-.29	***
6.Liberal	-.776	.117	-6.61	0	-1.007	-.546	***
7.Ext. Liberal	-.824	.13	-6.36	0	-1.078	-.57	***
Less than \$10,000	.144	.114	1.26	.21	-.081	.368	
18-29 years old	-.353	.087	-4.07	0	-.523	-.183	***
south	.033	.049	0.67	.503	-.063	.129	
female	-.005	.048	-0.11	.914	-.099	.089	
white	-.11	.065	-1.69	.092	-.238	.018	*
1.Catholic (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Mainline	.18	.087	2.07	.039	.009	.351	**
Protest.							
3.Evangelical	.675	.071	9.49	0	.535	.815	***
4.Unaff. Christian	.142	.081	1.75	.081	-.017	.302	*
5.Unaffiliated	-.485	.079	-6.10	0	-.641	-.329	***
Constant	.317	.129	2.47	.014	.065	.57	**
Mean dependent var		0.040	SD dependent var			1.003	
R-squared		0.369	Number of obs			1183.000	
F-test		35.736	Prob > F			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		2858.873	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			2960.390	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Finally, comparing rates of social versus religious belonging by denomination produces the below graph, which shows that white evangelicals are the only religious group to score higher on the religious belonging scale than the social belonging scale, with Catholics, Mainline Protestants, Unaffiliated Christians, and the religiously unaffiliated all scoring higher than or equal to the social belonging scale.

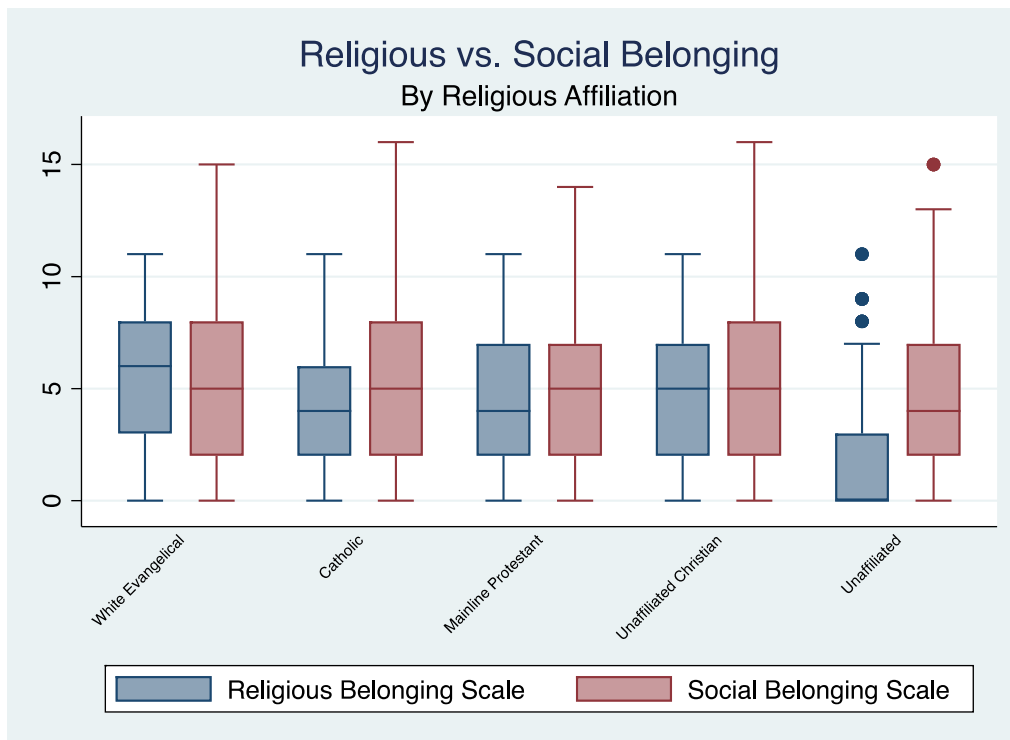


Figure 31

This suggests that self-identified white evangelicals are, even if marginally, more deeply connected within their own religious communities. This picture becomes even clearer

when comparing the rates of social and religious belonging along previously utilized evangelical belief scale.

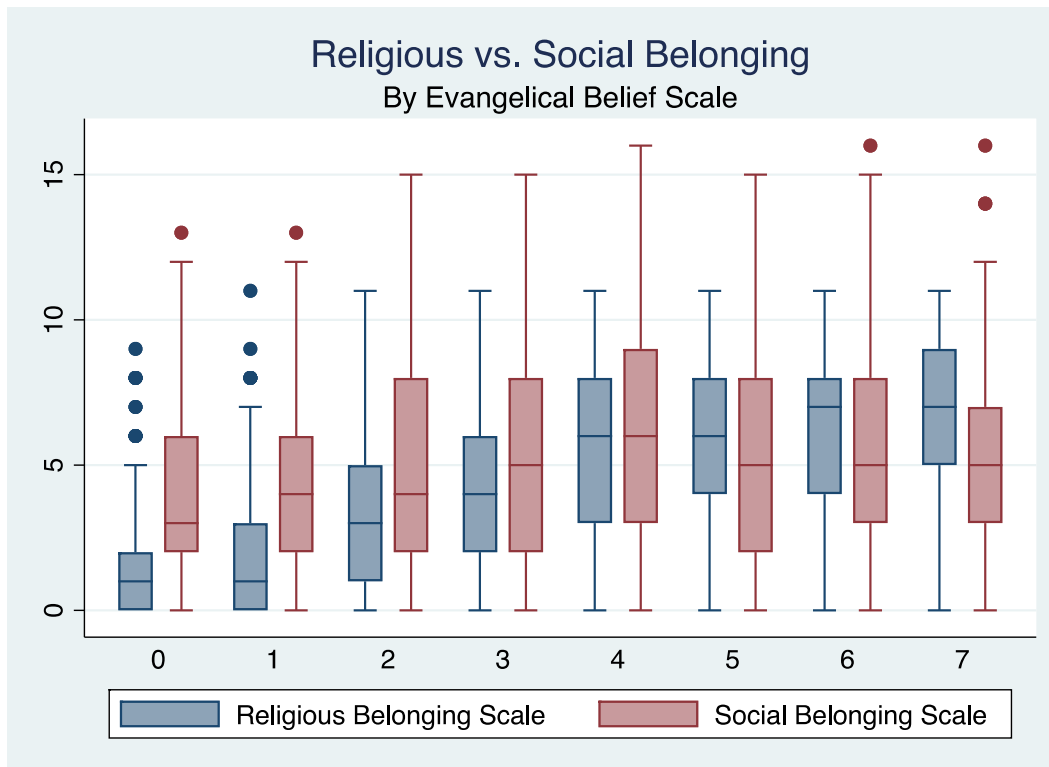


Figure 32

As one can see, as an individual holds more evangelical beliefs, the rates of religious belonging rise with the level of social belonging peaking around four beliefs. This difference between rates of religious and social belonging is especially pronounced among those individuals holding six or seven evangelical beliefs, or what this study has

classified as “fundamentalists.” Thus, fundamentalists, on the surface at least, would seem to have more bonding social capital than their religious counterparts. However, the average level of social belonging for fundamentalists is not much different than the rest of the respondents in the survey. In fact, the lowest rates of social belonging are among the low believers.

There are a number of reasons why this might be the case, the first of which being that individuals who are not affiliated religiously are simply less likely to feel motivated to engage and be involved civically as well. Overall, these graphs only further help to illustrate the different patterns of belonging, both religiously and socially, that exist among American evangelicals and fundamentalists.

Conclusion:

So what can be said for how religious and social belonging influence affective polarization? This chapter has explored the ways in which American evangelicals and fundamentalists belong to their own religious communities as well as their broader social and civic environments, attempting to push the conversation beyond simple measures of religiosity like church attendance. Self-identified white evangelicals as well as fundamentalists both appear to deeply belong to their own religious communities, having higher rates of not only church attendance, but attendance at Bible studies, Sunday school, and church social functions. Historically speaking, this should come as no surprise, as these denominations have typically placed a great emphasis on finding deep community within the walls of their own congregation and avoiding the contaminating influence of “the world.” However, this work has also shown that leaders like Jerry

Falwell and organizations like the Moral Majority have made intentional efforts to draw these groups out from their exile and into broader American civic and social life. What is unknown is how these groups would react to “the world” and their broader communities.

The rates of social belonging from the survey suggest that fundamentalists and white evangelicals are still somewhat connected to their broader civic and social communities, despite having much higher rates of religious belonging. Their rates of political activism are on par with the rest of Americans, a fact that while seemingly inconsequential on the surface, suggests that the work of ending political separation and cultural exile did achieve some success. However, white evangelicals and fundamentalists appear to possess low levels of trust in members of different religious communities and high levels of trust in members of their own religious community. One of the functions of bonding social capital for Putnam (2000) is the ability to produce deep reservoirs of trust, strength, and solidarity among one’s own enclave. But, as Putnam also notes, this also has the potential property of being hostile to the out-group. It could certainly be the case that bonding matters more in motivating polarized political behavior, a finding that would be consistent with the findings of this chapter.

The results from the survey data, both in the descriptive data and regression models shown in this chapter, suggest that white evangelicals and fundamentalists have high levels of bonding social capital, or a deep network of reciprocity and trust among members of the in-group, while being unfriendly and distrustful people on the outside, here being the Democratic Party, liberals, or atheists, which, while all different categories, have all become functionally equivalent – members of the out-group.

So far, this research project has investigated how belief and belonging, separately, might be influencing levels of affective polarization among evangelicals and fundamentalists. As a final way of attempting to untangle evangelical religiosity, this project will now explore how belief and belonging might be combining to influence affective polarization, or more specifically, how beliefs might be influencing the high levels of religious belonging among self-identified white evangelicals and fundamentalists.

CHAPTER SEVEN: BELIEF AND BELONGING

Introduction:

The previous chapter offered evidence that not only do evangelicals and fundamentalists have higher levels of affective polarization than other groups, but also deeper levels of religious belonging. There is also evidence that a deep sense of religious community might produce higher rates of bonding social capital among congregants, which in turn boosts positive feelings toward the in-group while also deteriorating opinions of the out-group. The increased partisan sorting of evangelicals into the Republican Party and the continued fusion between one's religious and political identity are a potential explanation for why greater levels of religious belonging lead toward more affective polarization. If one's congregation is full of like-minded partisans, and recent work on the polarization of American churches has shown this to be an increasing reality (Margolis 2018), it follows that the more one belongs to one of these enclaves, the more likely it is they will regard people similar to them positively, and those outside of the tribe negatively.

One of this project's primary goals is to untangle classic measures of religiosity. Previous chapters on specific beliefs and forms of belonging have isolated certain aspects of religious behavior and uncovered their potential effects on affective polarization. This chapter will build on the work of the previous chapters and explore how beliefs, which by themselves don't appear to motivate polarized political behavior, might be interacting with forms of belonging and influencing higher than usual rates of religious belonging

among self-identified evangelicals and fundamentalists. What one believes might influence the commitments one makes to their religious and broader communities, which in turn might intensify the continued fusion of religious and political identities, and thus, affective polarization. After exploring how the nature of specific beliefs in American evangelicalism might be encouraging deeper levels of in-group religious belonging, this chapter will utilize survey data to probe this relationship through descriptive and inferential statistics.

Beliefs Influencing Belonging: Premillennialism, Holiness Doctrines, and Intentional Separation

What religious beliefs might be influencing the ways in which an individual belongs inside and outside their own communities? Recalling the historical development of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism, there are two sets of related beliefs that might be especially influential in accounting for the patterns of evangelical and fundamentalist belonging. Premillennial dispensationalism, touched on in earlier chapters, is one of the chief distinguishing characteristics in American fundamentalism (Sandeep 1970). Premillennialism is a Protestant Christian eschatological belief that Jesus Christ will return to earth in a second coming, initiating a thousand-year golden age. Dispensationalism sees human history through a lens of distinct “ages,” the character of each being defined by humankind’s relationship, or covenant, with God. The current age, the “church age,” will last from the death of Christ to his second coming – being punctuated with the rapture of all true Christians, which will thus serve as the end of history itself. The idea of rapture, which comes from the book of Revelation, Chapter 20

verse 6¹⁰⁹, is in itself a distinct, and drastic, form of removal and separation for “true” Christians during the final days of history and the tribulations, while those left behind would be forced to suffer.¹¹⁰

A core tenet about the church age, which premillennialist dispensationalists believe we are currently living through, is that the church and society are in steady decline. Social Gospel theology and liberal Protestantism, which do not affirm the inerrancy of the Bible, are the “signs of the times” to be regarded as examples of the continual decay of the church and that the world is approaching the end of history and the return of Christ. Believing that this is the path the world is headed down would undoubtedly transform one’s commitments and relations to members of one’s religious and civic community. This sort of biblical prophecy is not a static belief set. It is something more, a way of interpreting and understanding history and one’s role in shaping it. The news is no longer neutral or impartial, and even more, current events become subject to religious interpretations even when this sort of lens might not be appropriate. The narrative for explaining history becomes Bible-based, with followers reading into current events as examples of God and Satan engaging in fierce combat for the fate of the world.¹¹¹

This way of understanding history, current events, and one’s role in it is also dichotomous in terms of who is on the right side (us) and who is on the wrong side (them). This dualistic interpretation of complex phenomena offers yet another example of American fundamentalism and evangelicalism tendency toward creating dualistic, Manichean mindsets. Dispensationalism reduces history to a battle of good and evil, a

supernatural conflict between God and Satan, where humans must pick sides in the apocalyptic conflict and Bible-believing Christians would ultimately come out on top. Implicit in premillennial dispensationalism is the belief in biblical inerrancy, because if the words of the Bible cannot be taken as indisputable fact, much of the biblical prophecy on which premillennial dispensationalism rests crumbles. The inerrancy of scripture has been shown to be a crucial aspect not only in defining American evangelicalism, but also in accounting for its historical development and divisions. A fundamental belief in inerrancy has often been seen as the first test in deciding whether an individual is a “true” Christian and thus on the right side of history.¹¹²

What makes a “true” Christian in fundamentalist thought then? Belief in an inerrant Bible and premillennial dispensationalism would certainly be a start in delineating the difference between true believers and the apostate, but another crucial aspect in the demarcation is the way in which someone lives and behaves in the world. Behavior, or the way someone presents themselves to the world and their community, is often one of the easiest ways in signaling who you are and what tribe you belong to, something that is especially true in American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Often times the first step in this process is conversion or “getting saved.” What follows is often modifying one’s behavior, lifestyle, and sometimes even appearance. In fact, many fundamentalist pastors have far more prescriptions and restrictions on not only things like alcohol, drugs, tobacco, extramarital sex, and dancing, but also specific codes for dress, child rearing, and marital structures. Conversion significantly affects and alters one’s identity, as Susan Harding asserts “conversion is an inner transformation which quickens

the supernatural imagination as it places new believers within the central storied sequence of the Christian Bible and enables them to approach the Bible as living reality.”¹¹³ Not only does one’s view and approach to viewing history change, but one’s perceived role in that narrative is also modified. You are no longer a passive bystander, but endowed with a belief that your role matters.¹¹⁴

In line with premillennial dispensationalist thought, the growing apostasy in the church led many fundamentalists to call for ecclesiastical separation and the creation of new religious communities based on a dedication to Biblical truth and these high standards of personal morality. Calls for ecclesiastical separation have occurred frequently throughout American Protestantism, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the fundamentalist movement gripped a number of denominations. In fact, the calls for ecclesiastical separation were often based on appeals to the dispensationalist thought that the church was in decay and the true believers must remove themselves from the moral rot and preserve themselves for the coming rapture. The corrupting influence of “the world” was found not only in those who rejected biblical literalism and the related prophetic power of premillennial dispensationalism, but also in the immorality of secularism, which included those traditional vices that one’s conversion was supposed to swear off, like alcohol, sexual promiscuity, tobacco, and dancing, among others.¹¹⁵

These worldly “sins” contaminated individuals and congregations, and advocates of these “holiness doctrines” advocated further ecclesiastical separation, in order to prevent temptation and ensure one’s purity. The holiness movement took the same view

of human nature as premillennial dispensationalism, namely a pessimistic outlook on the temperament of humanity and its ability to overcome evil. Both sets of belief placed themselves in direct contrast to more liberal Protestant theology, which believed in the natural tendencies of people toward good. In premillennial dispensationalism and the holiness doctrines, people were naturally predisposed toward evil and sinfulness. Only through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit could humanity be redeemed, and the human heart purged of sin. One's conversion would serve as a testament to this fact, and the swearing off worldly temptations and sins would only further signal to one's own community as well as the broader environment who you were and what group you belonged with. Premillennialist dispensationalism, conversion, and holiness doctrines served to only further separate fundamentalists into like-minded religious communities, as they acted as tests of true faith for believers, demarcating between the saved and the lost, true Christians and heretics.¹¹⁶

Thus, these beliefs served as a way of leading more fundamentalists to seek other "true believers" and intentionally form religious communities, which would then serve as the locus for most of one's social activities and a place to preach the Gospel and prepare for the second coming of Christ. As has been previously discussed, much of fundamentalist thinking is dominated by metaphors of warfare, where battle lines are often drawn not only in the broader culture, but also within church communities as well. If a test of faith for membership in a religious community is whether one believes in a coming existential spiritual warfare between the supernatural forces of good and evil, the resulting community of true believers would be supposed to possess higher than usual

levels of bonding social capital. This would only prove more true in the context of contemporary polarization, where religious and political identities have become ever more fused. These communities transitioning from intentional isolation and a strong aversion to any political and social reform, which in the mind of fundamentalists was the equivalent of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic, to a bold entry into the American political arena is a tremendously important change and process. While previous chapters have shown that this development was jumpstarted by the formation of the Moral Majority and the influence of Jerry Falwell and other fundamentalist leaders like him, the methods and tools through which fundamentalists accomplished this task are crucial in understanding the intersection between fundamentalist beliefs and forms of belonging as they relate to affective polarization.

Recall the previous division in American evangelicalism, between those preaching separation and strict evangelism and those advocating for a broader engagement with the culture in an effort to recapture it. Those encouraging pure evangelism saw saving souls as the chief aim – nothing else particularly mattered. This was the path for many premillennial dispensationalists, who saw no reason to try and change a culture that was already on its way toward doom and destruction. This group could have remained excluded and exiled from American politics, but they did not. How could fundamentalists ensure that the end of their worldly separation that Falwell advocated for would not ruin the purity of their communities? Would not the world rub off on them, tainting their efforts at remaining a holy assemblage safe in their own exile waiting for the world to end? The answer to this question lies in the tools these

fundamentalist ministers used to convince conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists to end their self-imposed exile and enter the American political arena. Falwell and others utilized the jeremiad, a classic form of religious speech originating in Puritanical rhetoric and preaching.

The traditional description of the jeremiad is as follows: the people have fallen into evil and committed sins which jeopardize their covenant with God and risk His wrath. However, the judgement and destruction can be stopped if the people repent and return to righteousness. While many American revivalists, notably Jonathan Edwards, have incorporated this form of oratory in sermons and speeches, Falwell is not referring to the sins of the individual, but rather the nation at large. Falwell often claimed that the decline of American economic and military might was due to the decline of American morality and godlessness, i.e. the country is sick because She is morally sick. There is empowerment in this message – ordinary people are suddenly responsible and capable of determining the fate of the nation through personal and moral decisions. However, by placing the blame for the decline of the nation not at the feet of the individual, but in outside forces, Falwell is creating an enemy that does not exist in the pews on Sunday morning, but an Other or outsider who has captured the broader American culture. It was thus the job of conservative Christians and moral Americans everywhere to remedy this.¹¹⁷

Those conservative Christians, many of whom had remained on the sidelines of American politics, were suddenly charged not only with evangelizing, but trying to recapture American society for, as Falwell put it, “the traditional family and family

values” in order to “somehow, some way....recapture the visions, the dreams, of making family once again the cornerstone of our society.”¹¹⁸ In *Listen, America!*, which is itself one long jeremiad, Falwell offers the reader two choices: revival or ruin.¹¹⁹ The decision that the reader made would have far-reaching consequences, further emphasizing the agency and responsibility of moral Americans to get involved with American politics and government. “Moral Americans can make the difference in America if we are willing to exert the effort to make our feelings known and if we are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to get the job done”¹²⁰ This is classic jeremiad rhetoric, where decline has occurred, but there is hope in the actions of honorable people. Again, this message is aimed at conservative Christians who had intentionally removed themselves from what they believed to be a sinking ship. Why bother with social or political reforms when only the saving grace of Jesus Christ can fix the sinful nature of man and the world?

Falwell is not denying the power of Jesus Christ or even that the church is in inevitable decline according to dispensationalist thought. He is actually affirming those beliefs, while at the same time rejecting the idea that social or political reform was useless, arguing that the decline of the church and nation was precisely because moral Americans had taken this stance. This is an attempt at reconciling the inherent tension in premillennial dispensationalism between caring only for the rewards of heaven and the afterlife, and making sure that when Jesus comes back the world is ready. It is simultaneously saying that yes, only Jesus Christ can save this sinful world, but you, the true believers, have the power to make sure the world is ready for that moment (Bledsoe 1985).

Falwell's jeremiad calls for an end of the informal policy of exile from "the world," but not for a total abandonment of the idea of separation. Falwell is calling for moral Americans to "exert our influence not only in the church but also in our business life, home life, and social and community life as well,"¹²¹ but he is notably not urging his listeners to engage in peace talks or extend any olive branches. On the contrary, there can be no compromise, the future holds either revival or ruin, and "it is only in the spiritual rebirth of our nation's citizens that we can have a positive hope in the future."¹²²

Again, Falwell's jeremiads, of which *Listen, America!* is a classic example, emphasize the inclusion of all true believers, moral Americans who for too long have been on the political, cultural, and social sidelines, while simultaneously defining and excluding the cultural other. Communism, secular humanism, feminists, and Playboy are all mentioned throughout *Listen, America!* as well as Falwell's other sermons as symbolic of the moral rot throughout American government and culture. These things and their followers were named and shamed as the corrupting Other, threatening the very civilization and noble heritage that had been handed down to Americans. Without confronting these evils, America was doomed. It thus becomes a sin to remain sidelined and not evangelize, creating a very distinct and perhaps different form of evangelism. This directive was not simply to save souls, but to take biblical morality to school boards, local elections, and especially the halls of Congress. These biblical morals would cure the ailing nation and restore America to its rightful place, while also preserving it as the last launching pad for Christian evangelism, an important factor in the trials and tribulations to come.

The United States became one big mission field ripe for evangelism. The jeremiad served to mobilize listeners around existing tenets in evangelicalism – the emphasis on evangelizing, or spreading the good news, a belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ, and very specific prescriptions for personal codes of behavior and morality. Isolation from “the world,” which had been promoted and encouraged by fundamentalist leaders in order to limit the corrupting influence of secular society while also keeping a focus on what was really important – saving souls, was abandoned, but complete separation was not discarded. Fundamentalists ended their removal from American political life, but not from American society, or at least the aspects of which they believed were immoral or spiritually corrupt. Assimilation was not the goal, in fact the call was to change and retake the culture and mold it according to the beliefs inherent in American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. The concerns over the corrupting influence of secularism were abated, and *not* trying to change and reform the culture became a transgression – one which would hamper the premillennialist vision of the end times. Evangelicals and fundamentalists were suddenly responsible for preparing the way for the second coming, and only within these communities of true believers could this be accomplished.

Thus, Falwell’s jeremiad served as the impetus for a large number of previously uninvolved, and traditionally very conservative, Americans to enter the political arena. The jeremiad stitched together a number of central beliefs in traditional evangelicalism, including premillennial dispensationalism, conversion, and rigid standards of biblical morality. Their self-imposed exile had ended, but their separation had not. While the call

was to reengage with American society, it was not to assimilate, but to change that society, particularly the elements that were often in direct opposition to evangelical beliefs – secular humanism being the catch-all bogeyman. Beliefs in evangelism, the inerrancy of scripture, premillennial eschatology, and Christian morality all served as not only a true test of faith and a way to separate the true believers from the apostates, but also the foundations for a jeremiad that brought this group into American politics. Many groups, either religious in nature or not, often share a common bond and find community based off of similarly held beliefs, but the beliefs which brought together fundamentalist communities seem particularly prone to producing out-group antipathy and in-group solidarity. The tests for true believers, the belief in a coming apocalyptic war between good and evil and one's role to play in it, and the persistent influence of dualistic, Manichean thinking all seem to lend themselves toward more polarized thinking. The rest of this chapter tests these assumptions on the intersection of beliefs and belonging through the survey data, first performing a descriptive analysis before more inferential statistics are utilized.

Inerrancy, Premillennialist Thought, and Forms of Religious Belonging:

Inerrancy is one the central tenets within the American evangelical system of belief, as without an inerrant Bible, many other beliefs come crumbling down, including the idea of biblical prophecy and premillennial dispensationalism. A Southern Baptist Convention resolution from June 2012 further emphasizes the importance of inerrancy in American evangelicalism:

WHEREAS, Some biblical scholars who identify themselves as evangelicals have in recent years denied the historicity of Adam and Eve (Genesis 1–2) and of the fall of mankind into sin (Genesis 3), among other historical assertions of Scripture; and

WHEREAS, Many of these same scholars have called on other evangelical scholars to abandon the doctrine of inerrancy and to embrace on a wholesale basis the methodology of higher critical biblical scholarship in the study of Scripture; and...

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have affirmed historically and consistently our unshakeable belief that the Bible in its entirety has “truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter,” and is therefore “totally true and trustworthy” (The Baptist Faith and Message, Article I, “The Scriptures”); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, June 19–20, 2012, do hereby reaffirm our belief in and adherence to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, as set forth in the Bible itself and in Article I of The Baptist Faith and Message; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm our belief specifically in the direct creation and historicity of Adam and Eve and in a literal, space-time fall of mankind into sin; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we call on all biblical scholars serving in Southern Baptist institutions to help shape the Christian worldview of the next generation by carrying out their work of teaching, research, and writing with an excellence and freedom that is always in submission to Jesus Christ and in the service of the inerrant Word of God.¹²³

The historical tension between biblical criticism and the doctrine of inerrancy is once again present, as well as the historical narrative of humankind’s fall and descent into sin. Thus, seeing how often believers in the inerrant word of God attend religious services is perhaps a good first step in unraveling the connection between belief and belonging. The below graph compares the rates of religious attendance by whether someone believes the Bible to be the inerrant word of God.

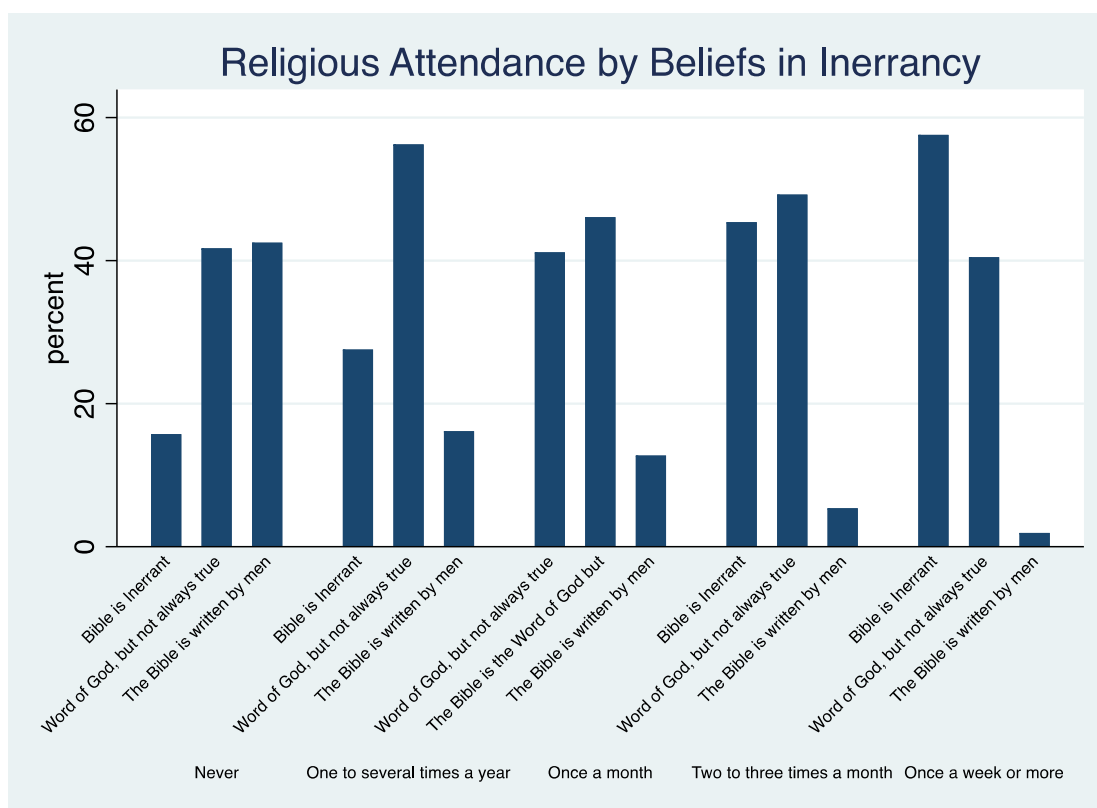


Figure 33³⁴

Those who believe the Bible to be inerrant have far higher rates of going to church once a week or more than any of the other religious attendance categories. Additionally, almost no one who attends religious services once a week or more believe the Bible to be written by men, and belief in the inerrancy of scripture appears to steadily increase as one's rates of religious attendance increase. The above chart should not be particularly surprising, as inerrancy is a cornerstone belief in American evangelical and fundamentalist thought, and evangelicals have been shown to on the whole have higher rates of religious attendance.

³⁴ Chi-square for religious attendance by inerrancy: $p < 0.001$

A similar relationship appears when comparing rates of religious attendance by whether or not someone believes God has a plan, and if they have a part to play in it.

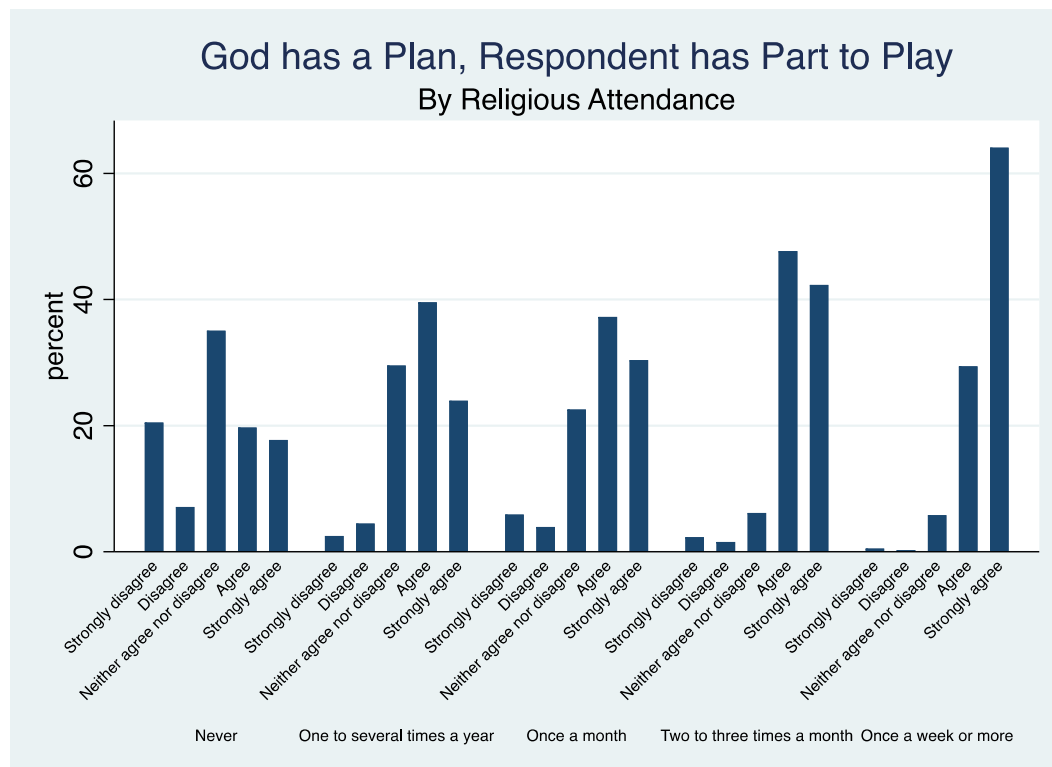


Figure 34³⁵

The above graph shows that individuals with high rates of church attendance, either going two to three times a month or once a week or more, are more likely to believe that God

³⁵ Chi-square for religious attendance by belief in God having a plan, and respondent having a part to play: $p < 0.001$

has a plan, and they have a part to play in that plan. In fact, over 90% of respondents who attended a religious service once a week or more agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that God has a plan, and they had a part to play. But what does this rate look like among fundamentalists, a religious group sometimes defined by their belief in millenarianism and, with the help of Falwell, a belief in their agency in fulfilling biblical prophecy?

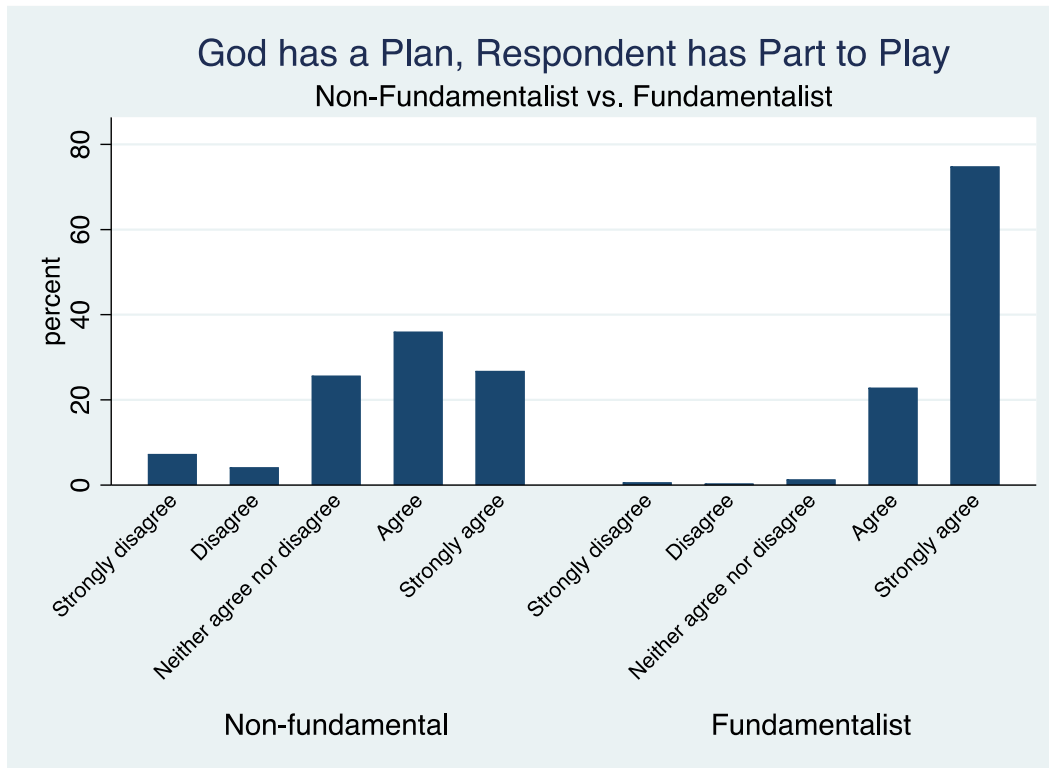


Figure 35³⁶

³⁶ Chi-square for belief in God having a plan, respondent having a part to play and fundamental: $p < 0.001$

The above looks at response rates for the same question, but this time comparing between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists, following the previous classification used for this group (holding six or all seven traditional evangelical beliefs). Close to 80% of fundamentalists in the survey indicated that they strongly agreed with the idea that God had a plan and they had a part to play. This suggests not only a firm belief in God, but a belief that God has ordered and organized the world, and that the respondent has the agency and ability to help carry out His designs. Again, recall Falwell's jeremiad, which urged moral Americans to not stand idly by any longer and to help fulfill the mission and ideal of America as a city on a hill. The above chart shows that among fundamentalists, the belief in one's own agency in bringing about the plans of God are alive and well.

Another tenet in premillennialist thought is the idea that society and the church are both in states of decay and decline. The survey I conducted also asked respondents whether they believed society had become more wicked in the last twenty years, an idea in accord with premillennial dispensationalism. The below chart compares responses to this question between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists:

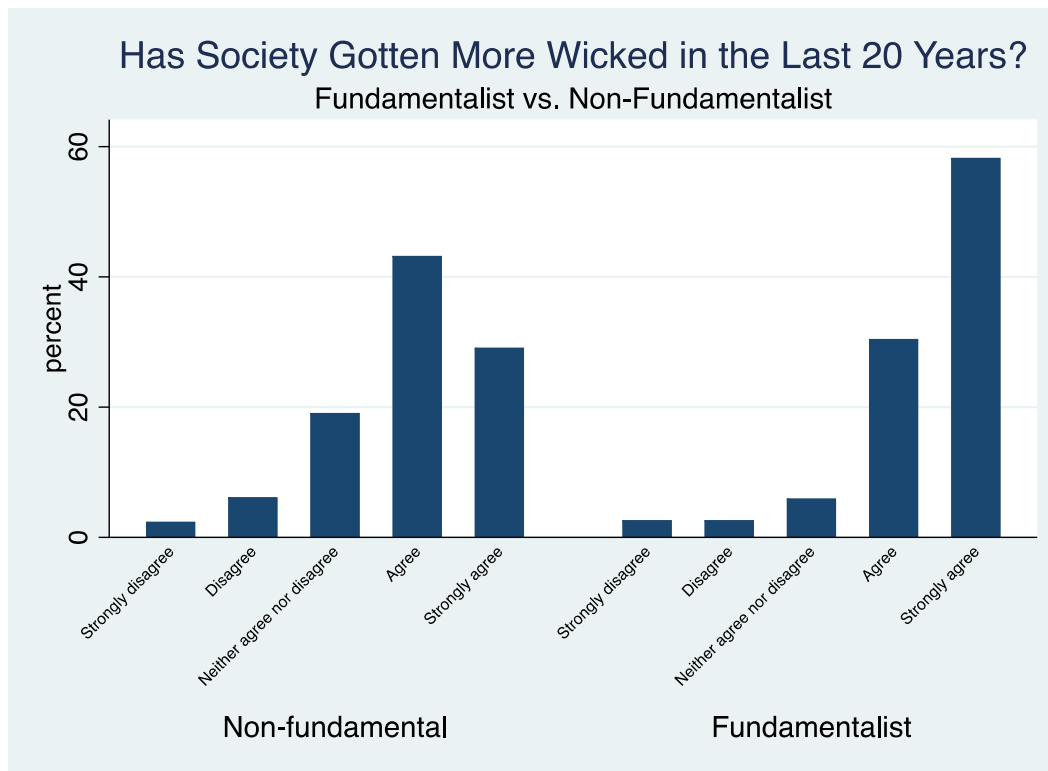


Figure 36³⁷

While most of those surveyed agreed that society had gotten more wicked in the last twenty years, a phenomena future research will need to address, fundamentalists had higher rates of strongly agreeing than their non-fundamentalist counterparts. This should be expected, as premillennialism believes in the continued decline of society until the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Again, religious attendance is only one way to measure religious belonging, so in addition to an exploring the connection between in an inerrant Bible and religious

³⁷ Chi-square for belief in society growing more wicked and fundamental: $p < 0.001$

attendance, I also looked at the relationship between inerrancy and the entire religious belonging scale, which is composed of rates of religious attendance, attendance at church social functions, and attendance at Bible studies, on a scale from 0 to 11.

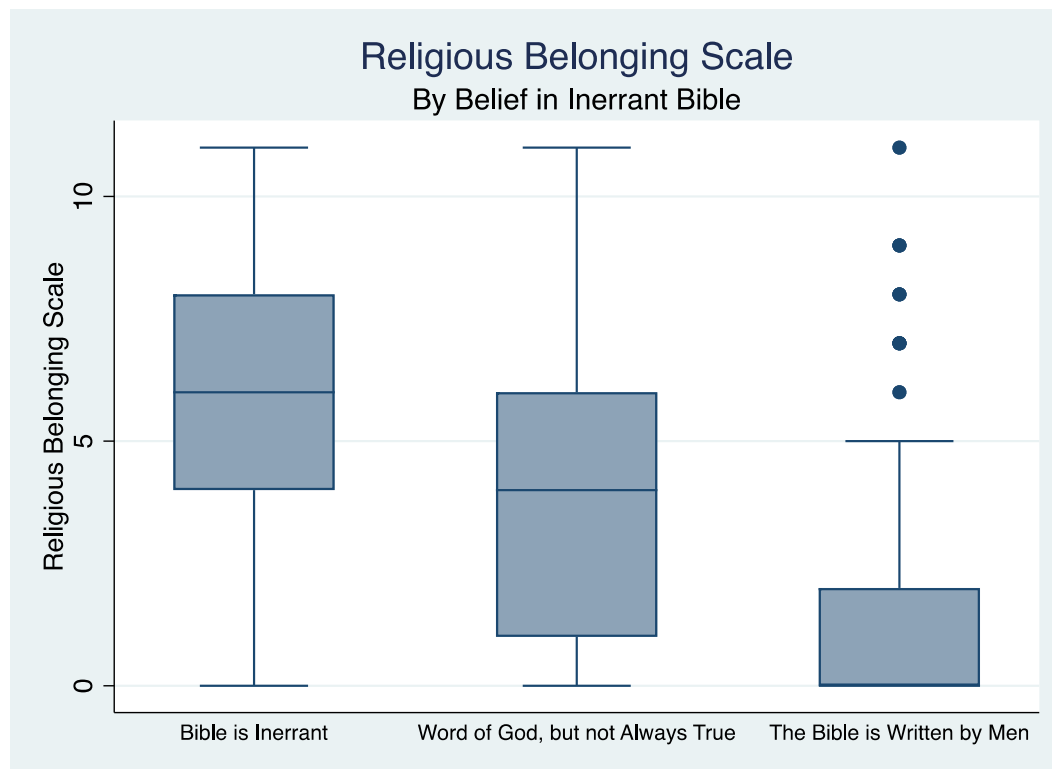


Figure 37³⁸

The above shows that those with a belief in an inerrant Bible had far higher scores on the religious belonging scale than those who believed the Bible to be the word of God but not

³⁸ ANOVA test of statistical significant for religious belonging by inerrancy: $p < 0.001$

always true, and those who believe the Bible is written by men. This again suggests that people who believe in an inerrant Bible not only attend church at higher rates, but also have deeper levels of overall religious belonging compared to those who do not believe in an inerrant Bible.

It's once again a similar picture when comparing the religious belonging scale with the question of whether or not the respondent believes God has a plan, and they have a part to play in it, as the below chart shows.

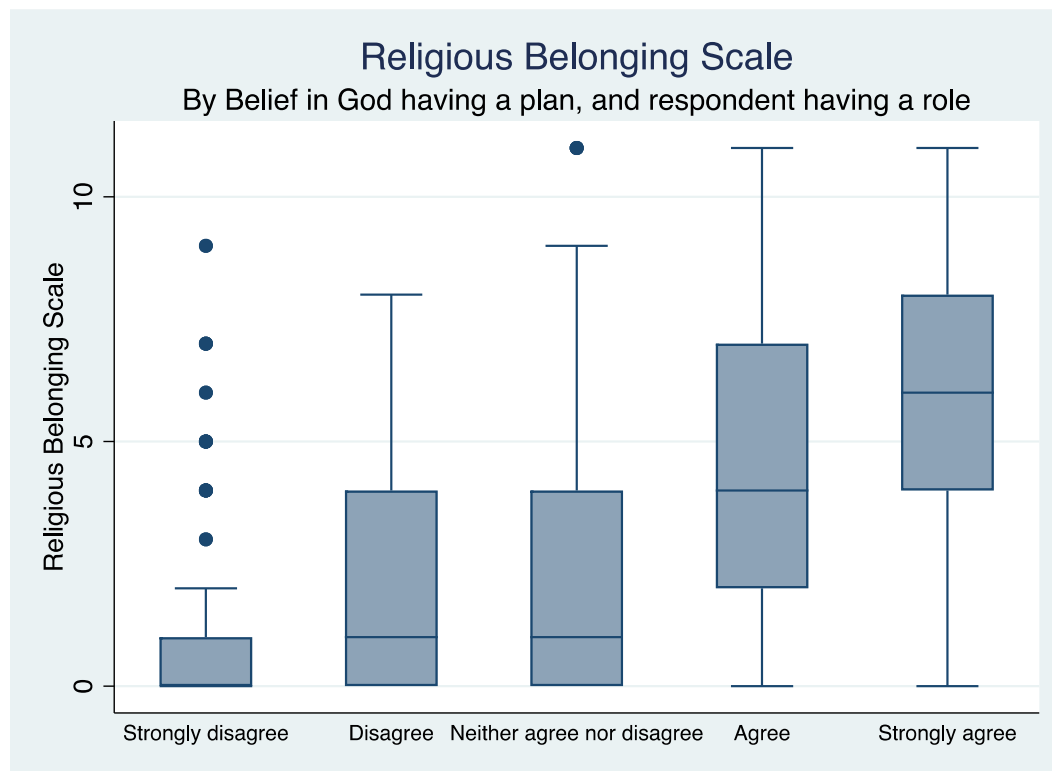


Figure 38³⁹

³⁹ ANOVA test for statistical significance for religious belonging and God having a plan: $p < 0.001$

However, if someone does not believe in God at all, it's far less likely they will attend any form of religious service, Bible study, or social function. So again, the low levels of religious belonging among those strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with the above is not surprising. What is perhaps important here is the difference in the average religious belonging between the agrees and strongly agrees. The strongly agrees have a higher average religious belonging score than the agrees by a decent amount. Again, faith in God's plan and one's role in it appears to be associated with higher levels of religious belonging.

Similar results occur when comparing levels of religious belonging by the weight one places on sharing one's religious beliefs. The below graph gives one's place on the religious belonging scale by the importance they place on sharing their own religious beliefs.

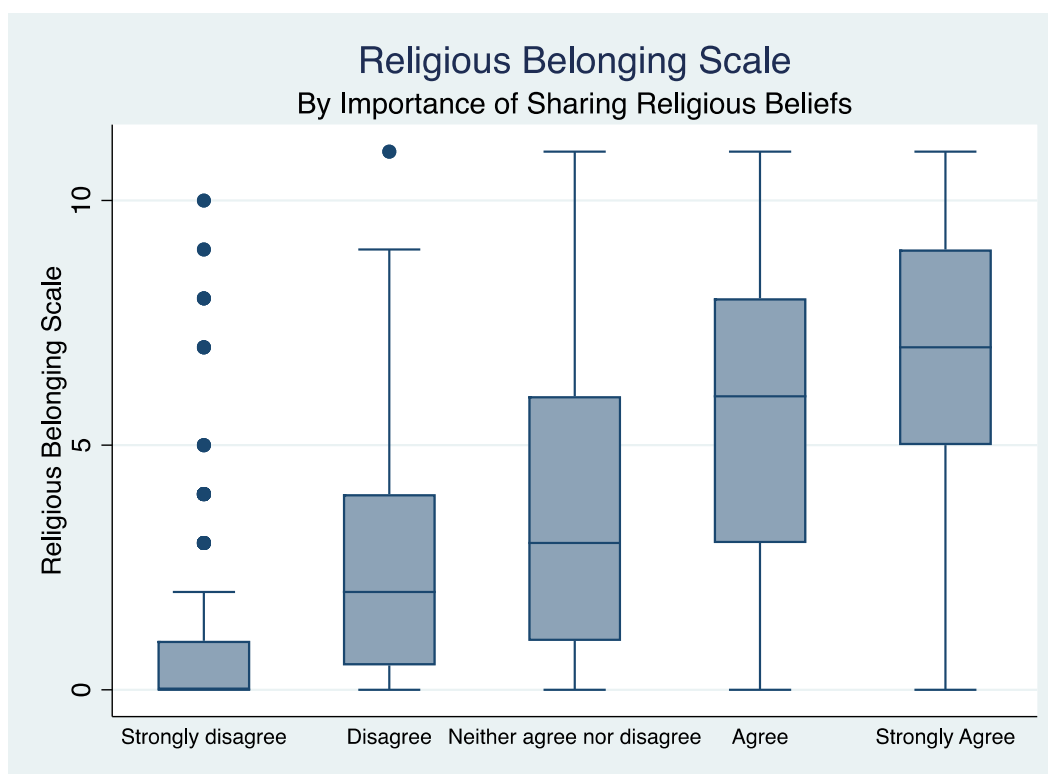


Figure 39⁴⁰

Those who agree or strongly agree in sharing their religious beliefs have far higher levels of religious belonging than those who do not. So individuals with deep connections in their own religious community also seem to feel more compelled to share their religious beliefs with others. Again, this tracks with not only higher levels of religious belonging among self-identified white evangelicals found in the survey, but also a tradition in American evangelicalism of emphasizing evangelizing and spreading the “good news.”

⁴⁰ ANOVA test of statistical significance for religious belonging and importance of sharing beliefs: $p < 0.001$

The question then becomes how and to what extent these beliefs directly influence levels of religious belonging and then subsequently affect levels of polarization.

The Interaction between Belief and Belonging, and its Influence on Affective Polarization:

First, in order to test how belief might be influencing belonging, an OLS regression was run using the religious belonging scale as the dependent variable. Again, the religious belonging is made up of three items, religious attendance, attendance at Bible study or Sunday school, and attendance at church social functions.⁴¹ The scale ranges from 0-11, where 0 indicates no religious belonging, and 11 signifies frequent attendance and deep belonging in a religious community. In order to test how specific evangelical beliefs might be explaining the variation in the religious belonging scale, an additional scale of evangelical belief was created based on the Barna Group's classification scheme, but instead of creating an additive scale based on seven indicator variables, the full range of responses for each item was created⁴², allowing for a more granular interpretation of how one's place on the evangelical belief scale influences their subsequent place on the religious belonging scale. Additionally, the model controlled for political ideology, party identification, income, region, gender, race, and religious affiliation. The results of the model are below:

⁴¹ Cronbach's alpha for the religious belonging scale is equal to .7271

⁴² Cronbach's alpha for the new evangelical belief scale is equal to .7658

Table 10

Regression Table 1 for "relbelonging"	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
evangelicalscale	.23	.021	10.89	0	.189	.271	***
1.White Evan (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Catholic	-.311	.272	-1.14	.253	-.845	.222	
3.Mainline Protest.	-.328	.288	-1.14	.255	-.893	.237	
4.Unaff. Christian	-.274	.277	-0.99	.322	-.818	.269	
5.Unaffiliated	-2.177	.305	-7.14	0	-2.775	-1.578	***
1.Less than \$10,000 (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.\$10,001-\$20,000	-2.099	.487	-4.31	0	-3.055	-1.143	***
3.\$20,001-\$35,000	-1.438	.438	-3.28	.001	-2.297	-.579	***
4.\$35,001-\$50,000	-.875	.436	-2.01	.045	-1.73	-.02	**
5.\$50,001-\$100,000	-.933	.42	-2.22	.026	-1.757	-.11	**
6.\$100,001-\$150,000	-.78	.471	-1.66	.098	-1.704	.144	*
7.\$150,001-\$200,000	-.403	.568	-0.71	.478	-1.518	.712	
8.\$200,001-\$250,000	.242	.836	0.29	.773	-1.399	1.883	
9.More than \$250,000	-1.258	.72	-1.75	.081	-2.67	.154	*
white	-1.279	.251	-5.09	0	-1.772	-.786	***
female	-.59	.17	-3.48	.001	-.923	-.258	***
1.Midwest (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Northeast	-.448	.255	-1.75	.08	-.949	.054	*
3.South	-.001	.208	-0.00	.997	-.409	.408	
4.West	-.437	.255	-1.71	.087	-.936	.063	*
1.Democrat (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	-.436	.242	-1.81	.071	-.91	.038	*
3.Republican	.354	.265	1.34	.181	-.165	.873	
4.Other	-1.303	.698	-1.87	.062	-2.673	.067	*
1.Ext. Cons. (ref.)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	.289	.282	1.03	.305	-.263	.842	
3.Slightly Cons.	.441	.334	1.32	.186	-.213	1.096	
4.Moderate	.262	.308	0.85	.395	-.342	.865	
5.Slightly Lib.	1.409	.431	3.26	.001	.562	2.255	***
6.Liberal	.286	.423	0.68	.499	-.544	1.116	

7.Ext. Liberal	.767	.465	1.65	.099	-.145	1.68	*
Constant	1.771	.833	2.13	.034	.136	3.405	**
Mean dependent var		4.222	SD dependent var			3.280	
R-squared		0.323	Number of obs			1129.000	
F-test		19.461	Prob > F			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		5500.756	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			5641.571	
*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$							

First and foremost, it appears that the scale of evangelical beliefs is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, with every increase up the scale resulting in a related .23 increase up the religious belonging scale. Interestingly, income also seems statistically significant up to \$100,000, with each increase in income resulting in lower levels of religious belonging. Again this might track with some historical evidence that many evangelical communities, particularly Pentecostal churches, are composed of the less financially secure, with these congregants coming from poorer backgrounds and finding their sense of community, order, and structure in evangelical churches.

An interpretation of how evangelical beliefs contribute to religious belonging can be seen as perhaps straightforward. First, people will likely choose where they worship based off of shared beliefs. By its very definition religion often brings people together based off of a system of shared beliefs and values, but as this chapter and larger project have attempted to show, there are elements within American evangelical thought that might be predisposed toward higher levels of community bonding, or an impulse to build deep levels of community among one's own religious group. A way to begin explaining this might come from anthropologist Victor Turner's *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974), where Turner examines societies and groups of people in the process of dramatic social change. These groups of people are often in states of "liminality" or in-between major orderings of social structures. While in this state of change or liminality, groups often bond together in what he calls "communitas" or a type of community which is free, egalitarian, and "strains toward universalism and

openness.”¹²⁴ Every society, according to Turner, has aspects of “structure” and “anti-structure” where structure defines, demarcates, and delineates differences and contrasts, and anti-structure is everything which unites or brings individuals together, or for Turner, *communitas*.¹²⁵

The idea of structure, *communitas*, and liminality can perhaps be seen in the example of the relationship between recruits in an army barracks. Once they are in the barracks, all antecedent statuses of the recruits are stripped away. It doesn't matter as much where and if they went to school, who their parents were, or where they were born. They are all simply military recruits, equal in the eyes of the army, there to be trained. “Social structure, in brief, is simplified and homogenized. When control is relaxed, novices look upon each other as equals, each an integral person rather than a social persona segmentalized into a series and set of structural roles and statuses.”¹²⁶ Thus, this state of liminality, or in-between great social changes, often produces groups of people where in-group relations are not constrained by typical social roles or structures, and a brother or sister-hood can develop quickly. “The world over,” Turner says, “millenarian and revivalist movements originate in periods where societies are in liminal transition between major orderings of social structural relations.”¹²⁷

There are, to be sure, limits to the analogy of fundamentalists in the United States and the sort of *communitas* and liminality discussed by Turner. For one, fundamentalists have historically used structure to exclude based on race, and within the churches themselves, women are often forbidden from holding leadership roles. The main power of the idea of liminality as it relates to fundamentalists is within premillennial

dispensationalism, which sees the decay and decline of society and an existential transition from the current church age to a period of trials and tribulations, with Christ ultimately returning for a thousand-year reign. This would be the ultimate state of liminality for a staunch fundamentalist, and a community of people adhering to this belief would no doubt produce strong in-group bonds and connections, as banding together to help one another through would seem like the only logical path to follow in order to survive the state of transition.

As another way of testing the connection between beliefs, belonging, and their effects on affective polarization, a path analysis model was constructed to determine how beliefs might be directly influencing religious belonging, and how beliefs might thus contribute indirectly to levels of affective polarization. The below path model uses party bias, or the standardized difference between how someone rated the Democratic and Republican Party, as the primary dependent variable. The exogenous variables of note here are region, income, gender, race, and religious affiliation, with the labels below each being for their respective reference categories. Additionally, other endogenous variables besides “partybias” are ideology, party identification, whether or not someone is a fundamentalist, and religious belonging. I am hypothesizing that these intermediate variables are intervening in the causal relationships. It should be no surprise that the two strongest predictors of partisan bias in the below model are one’s ideology and partisan identification. For the purposes of this chapter and broader project, however, the analysis will focus on the relationship between religious affiliation, beliefs, and religious belonging.

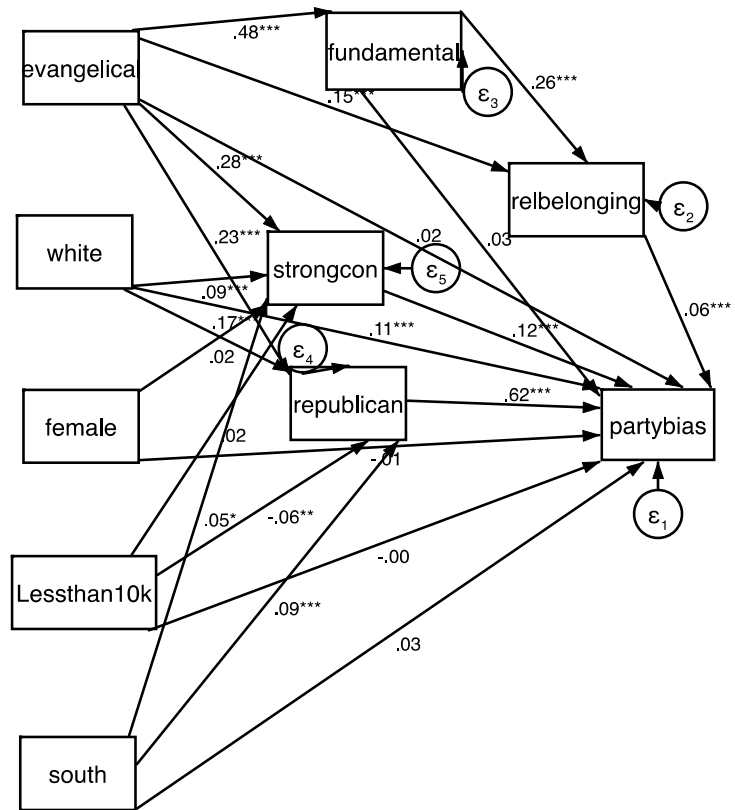


Figure 40

Recall that the previous chapter examining beliefs found little evidence that holding specific religious beliefs meaningfully motivated levels of affective polarization. Using the indicator variable “fundamental,” which was created through an additive scale

of those individuals in the survey who held six or seven of the traditional evangelical beliefs, previous statistical analysis found no significant impact of being a fundamentalist or not on levels of polarization. Or perhaps more simply, holding all or most evangelical beliefs did not appreciably influence one's levels of polarization. However, this chapter has hypothesized that while maybe not directly influencing polarization, beliefs may contribute indirectly by increasing one's level of religious belonging, an aspect of religiosity that did in fact seem to contribute to levels of affective polarization. In order to test this hypothesis, the above path analysis model allowed for a measurement of how belief might impact religious belonging and subsequently one's polarized behavior.

The above model shows that one's level of religious belonging remains a statistically significant predictor of our dependent variable, "partybias," with a beta coefficient of .06 on the path directly influencing party bias. I am hypothesizing that religious belonging is also motivated by beliefs, here given by our indicator variable fundamental, or those holding six or seven traditional evangelical beliefs, and through religious affiliation itself, here being whether someone self-identified as an evangelical. On its own, holding all or most of the traditional evangelical beliefs was not a statistically significant predictor in the above path model. It is, however, a statistically significant predictor of religious belonging, with a beta coefficient of .26. Additionally, the variable "evangelical" or religious affiliation dummy, is not statistically significant on its own, with a beta coefficient of .02. It is, however, important in understanding both the belief and belonging variables in the above path analysis. Thus, it appears the path analysis

suggests that while beliefs might not be directly influencing levels of polarization, they might be indirectly affecting polarized behavior through religious belonging.

As an additional test on the relationship between beliefs and belonging, another regression model was run, this time with an interaction term between the religious belonging scale and the previously mentioned evangelical belief scale, which combined the seven item Likert scale questions from the Barna Group. The results for that analysis are below.

Table 11

Regression Table 2 for “partybias”	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
evangelicalscale	.016	.007	2.52	.012	.004	.029	**
relbelonging	.088	.027	3.24	.001	.035	.141	***
belief*belonging	-.003	.001	-2.77	.006	-.005	-.001	***
1.White Evan. (ref)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Catholic	.099	.056	1.78	.076	-.01	.208	*
3.Mainline Protest.	-.024	.059	-0.42	.678	-.14	.091	
4.Unaff. Christian	-.135	.057	2.38	.017	.024	.247	**
5.Unaffiliated	-.155	.064	2.42	.016	.029	.281	**
1.Lessthan10k (ref)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.\$10k-\$20k	.034	.1	0.34	.731	-.162	.231	
3.\$20k-\$35k	.097	.09	1.08	.282	-.079	.272	
4.\$35k-\$50k	.099	.089	1.11	.266	-.076	.274	
5.\$50k-\$100k	.098	.086	1.15	.251	-.07	.267	
6.\$100k-\$150k	.035	.096	0.37	.714	-.153	.224	
7.\$150k-200k	-.014	.116	-0.12	.902	-.241	.213	
8.\$200k-250k	-.004	.17	-0.03	.98	-.339	.33	
9.Morethan250k	.073	.147	0.50	.618	-.215	.361	
white	.278	.052	5.33	0	.176	.38	***
female	-.035	.035	-1.00	.319	-.103	.034	
1.Midwest (ref)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Northeast	-.034	.052	-0.65	.514	-.136	.068	
3.South	.021	.042	0.50	.62	-.062	.104	
4.West	.022	.052	0.42	.674	-.08	.124	
1.Democrat (ref)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Independent	.819	.049	16.61	0	.722	.915	***
3.Republican	1.468	.054	27.23	0	1.362	1.574	***
4.Other	.678	.142	4.76	0	.399	.957	***
1.Ext. Cons. (ref)	0	.	.	.	.	.
2.Conservative	-.163	.057	-2.84	.005	-.276	-.051	***
3.Slightly Cons.	-.345	.068	-5.07	0	-.479	-.211	***

4.Moderate	-.515	.063	-8.21	0	-.638	-.392	***
5.Slightly Lib.	-.719	.088	-8.12	0	-.892	-.545	***
6.Liberal	-.799	.086	-9.27	0	-.968	-.63	***
7.Ext. Liberal	-.719	.095	-7.58	0	-.905	-.533	***
Constant	-1.221	.202	-6.04	0	-1.617	-.824	***

Mean dependent var	0.024	SD dependent var	0.998
R-squared	0.697	Number of obs	1129.000
F-test	87.369	Prob > F	0.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	1908.899	Bayesian crit. (BIC)	2059.771

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

The scale of evangelical belief and scale of religious belonging are both statistically significant in the above model, while the interaction term is also statistically significant, all at the $p < .01$ level. Additionally, while the coefficient for both the belonging and belief scales are positive, indicating polarization toward the Republican party for each increase in the respective scales, the interaction term has a negative coefficient, indicating that each unit change in belief or belonging might be producing a minimal decrease in the other variable, with the caveat that there could be some non-linear effects occurring as well.

In order to further probe the relationship between the two, I plotted the interaction term at low, middle, and high levels of evangelical belief. The x-axis of the below graph is the religious belonging scale, with the y-axis being the predicted value of the dependent variable for polarization, partybias. The three lines represent the mean of the evangelical scale of belief in red, one standard deviation below the mean of the evangelical scale in blue, and one standard deviation above the mean of the evangelical scale in green.⁴³

⁴³ This is often known as “spotlight analysis,” which comes from Leona Aiken and Stephen West’s work, *Multiple Regression: Testing and Interpreting Interactions* (1991)

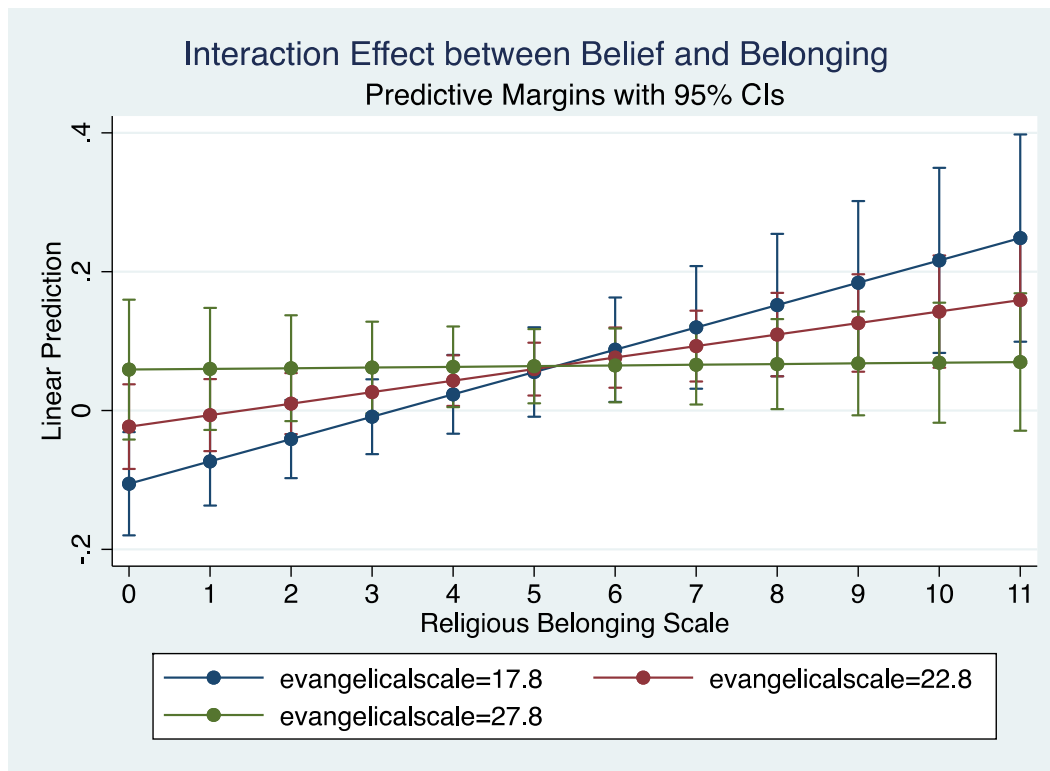


Figure 41

Quite interestingly, religious belonging seems to increase affective polarization in favor of Republicans for low or middle level evangelical believers, while not significantly impacting the slope for the higher believers. This suggests, that for those higher level believers, rates of affective polarization remain constant regardless of how deep their religious belonging is. However, for those with an average level of belief or low levels of belief, deeper religious belonging appears to serve as an exacerbating factor for affective polarization. This is a particularly interesting finding, hinting at the power of bonding

social capital in intensifying affective polarization, especially among low or average believers.

Conclusion:

What then can be said about the connection between beliefs and belonging, and their impact on rates of political polarization in the United States? First, this chapter has shown that there are elements within the belief system of American evangelicalism, namely premillennial dispensationalism and its assertion that the world and church are in decline and that true believers would be raptured up to heaven, that lend themselves to a focus more on deep religious belonging. Falwell's jeremiad, one of the motivating factors behind American fundamentalists and evangelicals entering the political arena, capitalized on this set of beliefs, preaching an end to separation from American political life, but not a total end to isolation. The jeremiad which catapulted fundamentalists and evangelicals into politics did not call for assimilation, but domination. The only way to ensure that America remained a city shining upon a hill was to end their self-imposed exile and spread the "good news" to anyone who would listen. If they did not accept, they were not only doomed, but they became the enemy, the Other, and would need to be defeated. Thus, beliefs – in the existential conflict to come, one's role in that conflict, and the need to remain a community free from the sin and corruption of the world, led these groups to find a deeper sense of community and belonging within their own religious enclaves.

The results from the statistical analysis of the survey data both confirm the relationship between X and Y and raise additional questions. The previous chapter on forms of belonging provided evidence that religious belonging was more important in predicting levels of affective polarization, and while beliefs might be indirectly motivating higher levels of religious belonging, and thus greater affective polarization, the interaction between the two is perhaps more complicated than originally thought. Possessing high levels of religious belonging does not seem to significantly impact affective polarization for the high evangelical believers, as this group appears to remain polarized at the same rates and in the same direction no matter the level of religious belonging.

However, having a low or even average level of evangelical belief combined with high levels of religious belonging, seems to flip the direction of one's polarized political behavior. With low levels of belief and low levels of religious belonging, one can expect a decent amount of polarization, but in the direction of favoring the Democratic Party and disfavoring the Republican Party. At that same level of belief, but with higher rates of religious belonging, not only does polarization tend to increase, but it increases in the opposite direction – in favor of Republicans and against Democrats. This suggests that deep connection within a religious community exacerbates affective polarization the most for low or average believers, and it does so in the direction one would expect – viewing Republicans positively and Democrats negatively.

This finding is quite interesting, as it speaks to the relationship between belief and belonging, while also demonstrating the power of religious belonging and bonding social

capital in motivating polarized political behavior. Further exploration of this relationship is needed, but initially it suggests that religious communities are particularly politically polarized, as an individual's religious and political identities increasingly align and fuse with one another. It also appears that deeper enmeshment within these communities has the potential to exacerbate affective polarization and boost in-group solidarity, as members see each other as allies and outsiders as threats.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Introduction:

This study has attempted to further our understanding of how religiosity influences levels of affective polarization, specifically among American evangelicals. This question began as an attempt to explain why this religious group appeared to be far more polarized than other religious denominations in the United States, as well as among secular Republicans, a phenomena pointed out by Margolis (2020). Previous studies have examined how church attendance or specific beliefs might be motivating political outcomes and identities, but this study has sought to broaden the scope of how distinct forms of religiosity might affect polarized political behavior by drilling deeper into religious beliefs, patterns of belonging, and how the two interact with one another. To this end, Putnam's (2000) theory of bonding and bridging forms of social capital was utilized to argue that American evangelicalism is prone to producing more bonding forms of social capital, which while useful for the in-group, often creates high degrees of out-group antipathy and animosity, here being the Democratic Party, liberals, and the umbrella term of "secular humanists."

A novel survey was distributed and that data was analyzed in conjunction with a systematic historical analysis to appropriately address and explore these questions. While a number of the findings were unsurprising and in many ways confirmatory, many of the results proved unexpected and in need of further analysis. Additionally, as has been mentioned throughout this project, utilizing religious identity, religiosity, and other

associated concepts in statistical tests and regression analyses is a complicated, often thorny process. Through careful conceptualization and operationalization, I hope to have avoided most of the common pitfalls, but sweeping claims of causality based on the statistical analysis should be restrained. At best I hope to have provided evidence of existing connections and influence between distinct aspects of religiosity on levels of affective polarization, and at worst I hope to have provided opportunities for future research. This final chapter will summarize the findings of this research project, address some of the limitations of the study, and suggest a number of areas ripe for future research.

Belief:

First, while using an additive scale of belief to better identify American evangelicals is a definite step in the right direction, more precision in its use is required. Instead of referring to the high believing evangelicals as simply “traditional,” labeling this group as “fundamentalist” is perhaps more accurate and a more historically rich and appropriate term. Additionally, while this project confirmed previous findings of self-identified white evangelicals holding more politically polarized opinions, it also found differences within this group among fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists, with fundamentalists possessing far higher levels of politically polarized opinions. Again, this suggests that even among white evangelicals, the strong believers, or those individuals holding all or most of the seven item belief scale created by the Barna Group, are particularly polarized. Further evidence of this comes from the polarization rates on each level of the Barna Group’s scale of evangelical belief, shown again below:

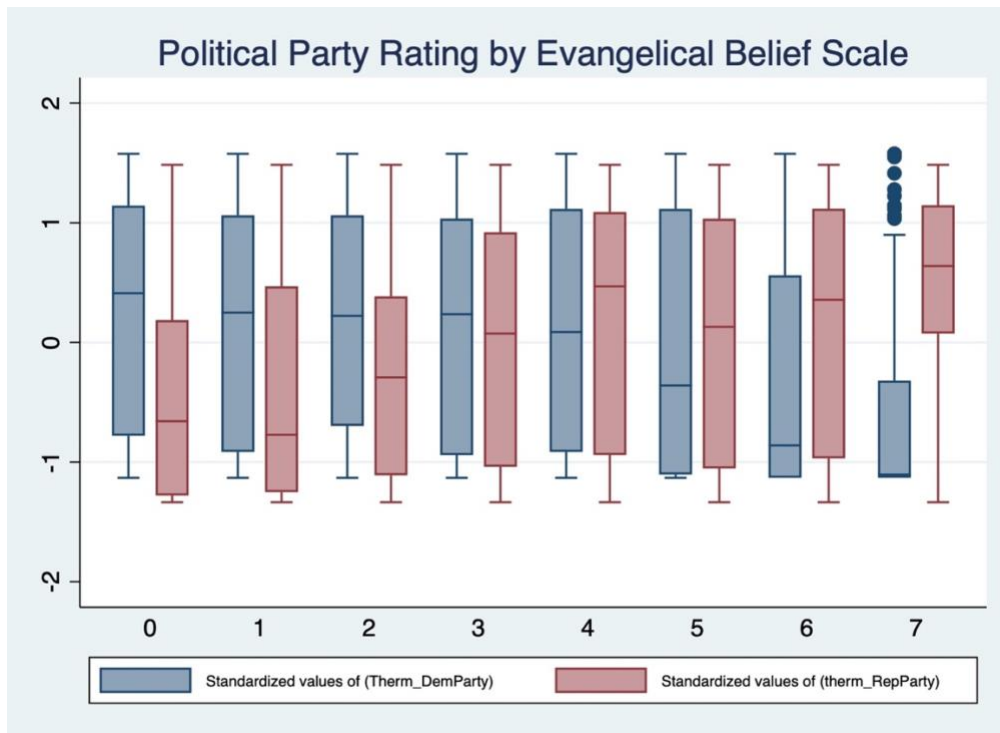


Figure 42

One can see that polarization rates, or the distance between one's ratings of each party, are highest at the ends of the spectrum, among those holding little to no evangelical beliefs and among those holding all or most. The high levels among strong believers are perhaps expected, but it is also worth pointing out the high levels of polarization among the low believers, maybe signifying the growing "God gap" between the two political parties. It will be addressed more in the section on future research opportunities, but the other groups rivaling the polarization levels of white evangelicals and fundamentalists are the religiously unaffiliated and unconnected. While this study focused on the high polarization rates of American evangelicals, the religiously unaffiliated deserve more scholarly attention.

In addition to confirming the high levels of polarization among the strong evangelical believers, or fundamentalists, the chapter analyzing religious beliefs also revealed and confirmed some of the historical divisions within the evangelical belief system, namely between calls for strict evangelism and the business of saving souls versus the supernatural elements and related urges to engage American culture and attempt to recapture it.¹²⁸ The factor analysis performed on the set of evangelical beliefs showed this division, with a belief in the importance of sharing one's beliefs with others, religion in one's daily life, and no doubt that God exists all grouping together, while belief in a living devil, salvation only through Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ committing no sins while on earth clustering together. The importance of this division revealed by the factor analysis, beyond confirming the historical account, comes when evaluating the worldview of someone holding all these beliefs.

As the historical account showed, Falwell and other fundamentalists increasingly came to see evangelism not as a separate path, but spiritual warfare itself, and a way to stay true to the historical tenets of worldly separation and the focus on evangelism within fundamentalism, while also seeking to engage with and recapture the culture. Spreading "the good news" remained a crucial part of the mission, but saving souls became a battle between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan, darkness and light – or in the contemporary politically polarized climate, between Republicans and Democrats. There are countless metaphors for warfare and conflict throughout fundamentalist thought, notably in the sermons, speeches, and works of Jerry Falwell. There are no calls for compromise or conciliation, as both are perceived to be signs of weakness and defeat.

This context sheds new light on the continued fusion of political and religious identities (Patrikios 2008, 2013), where the existential battle between good and evil is fought by political parties and their representatives, and the “us vs. them” rhetoric so common in fundamentalist thinking is sharpened and solidified in evil out-groups and righteous in-groups.

However, the other statistical tests performed in the chapter on belief suggest that any calls for its overwhelming influence on polarized behavior should perhaps be cautious and muted. Self-identified white evangelicals, and to a greater degree fundamentalists, do appear more politically polarized than other denominations, but when controlling for partisanship and ideology, the effect of religious affiliation and specific beliefs seem dulled. This again points back to a growing amount of research showing how one’s partisanship has increasingly come to influence one’s religious identity (Margolis 2018). The regression analyses performed in this chapter show that simply holding beliefs has no statistically significant impact on one’s level of polarization. Thus, beliefs on their own do not seem to be producing the exceptionally high levels of affective polarization among evangelicals and fundamentalists, reinforcing the evidence that political identity and ideology increasingly dominate the American mind. Or in other words, beliefs on their own do not seem to motivate affective polarization. However, future research should investigate if there are potential mechanisms which might trigger the beliefs into political outcomes. The introduction of a mechanism through which these beliefs could be activated, perhaps a cue from the pulpit, might change this equation. Future research can investigate this question and improve on this analysis.

Belonging:

Again, one of the main focuses of this project was to drill down into classic measures of religiosity and increase our knowledge of how distinct aspects of religiosity might be influencing the production of different forms of social capital and subsequent levels of affective polarization. The chapter on belonging split out the concept into how deeply one belongs to their own religious community and how they belong to their broader civic and social community. First, the survey data showed that both self-identified white evangelicals and strong believers, again classified here as fundamentalists, have higher rates of religious belonging than individuals belonging to other Christian denominations. One's religious belonging was captured using a scale comprised of how often an individual attended religious services, church social functions, and Bible study or Sunday school. This 11-point scale allowed for a better measure of how deeply an individual was connected to their religious community, beyond simply attendance at a place of worship. Additionally, the chapter on belonging attempted to capture an individual's level of social belonging, or their connection to their broader civic and social community. This was done by creating another scale based on how often the respondent volunteered, donated to charity, and went to a friend's house for the evening. Interestingly, white evangelicals and fundamentalists had roughly the same level of social belonging as other similar Christian denominations. The lowest levels of social belonging

belonged to the religiously unaffiliated, who scored lower on the social belonging scale than any religious denomination.

Fundamentalists were also comparable in their levels of political activity to the non-fundamentalists in the survey, a finding that on its face seems unremarkable, is noteworthy precisely because of this group's history of self-exile and intentional political isolation. It reinforces the notion that the work of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority was ultimately successful in bringing this long-sidelined group back into the American political arena, at least at comparable rates to other Americans. The reentry of this group into American politics is particularly important, as they brought with them their religious beliefs and traditional ways of belonging. While they possess a similar level of social connectedness to the rest of the survey, their levels of religious belonging were far higher, and this also corresponded to lower levels of trust in people of different or no religions and higher levels of trust in members of their own communities, as the below charts show:

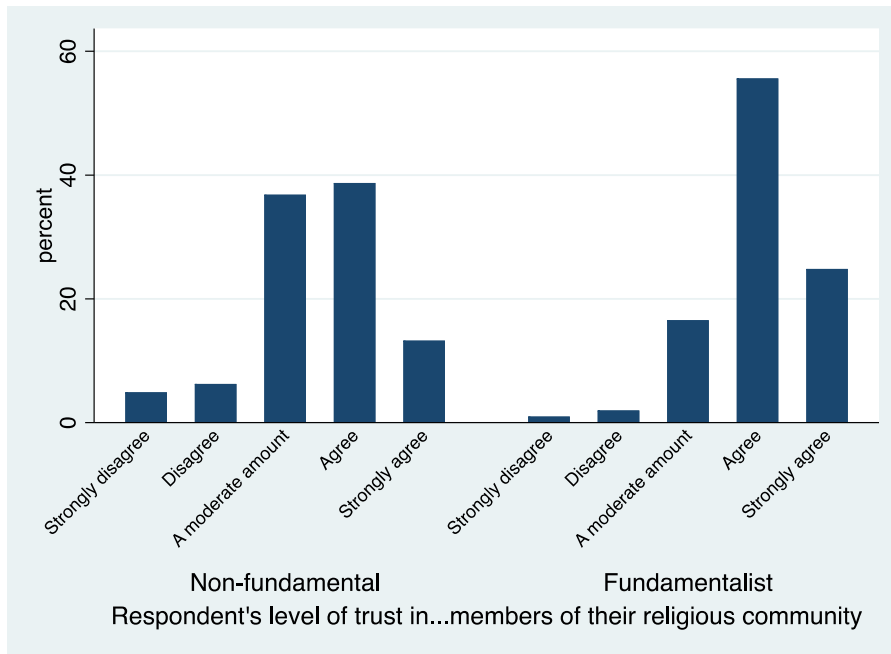


Figure 43

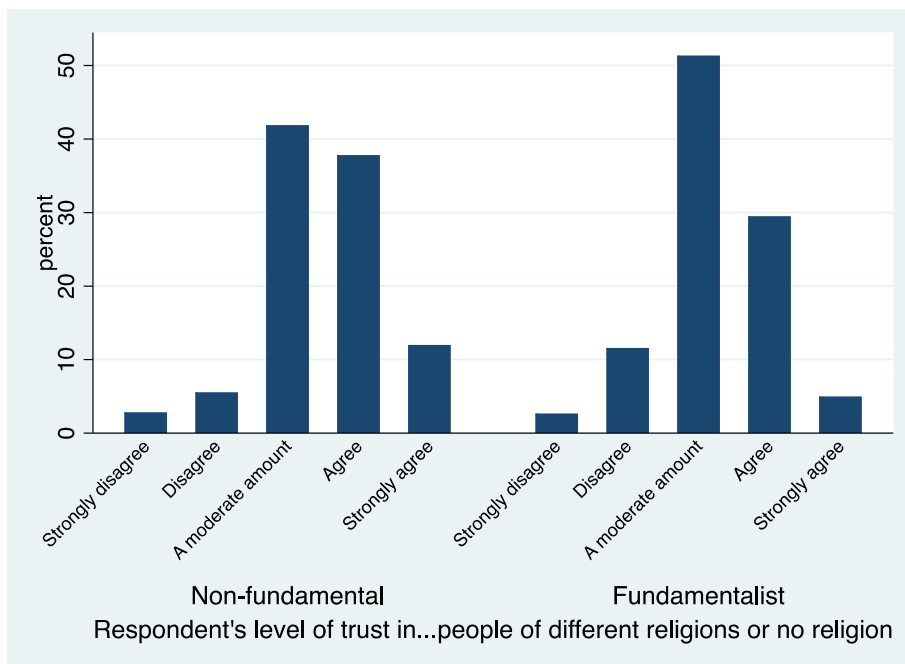


Figure 44

One of the functions of bonding social capital is the ability to produce deep reservoirs of trust, strength, and solidarity among the in-group, but the flipside of this is that bonding also has the potential of motivating out-group hostilities. One of the original hypotheses of this study was that bonding social capital would increase political polarization, while bridging social capital would reduce it. The evidence suggests that this is only partly true – bonding does appear to produce higher levels of affective polarization, but bridging, or connectedness to one's broader community, does not seem to matter.

As will be discussed at length in the conclusion of this chapter, the overall levels of social belonging in the survey were extremely low. Americans appear to have very little connectedness to their broader social and civic communities, with low percentages of those surveyed indicating any sort of deep connection to their local communities. Part of this is likely the coronavirus pandemic and the fact that many typical activities associated with social belonging were either not taking place at all or were doing so in a virtual format. Whatever the case, levels of social belonging for a vast majority of Americans appear to be quite low. Despite this, based on the regression analysis of this chapter, high levels of religious belonging do appear to influence rates of affective polarization at a statistically significant level. As one's religious belonging increases, one's polarization does as well, and it moves in the direction of favoring Republicans and disliking the Democratic Party.

As an additional check on how forms of belonging might influence out-group vs. in-group dynamics, this chapter ran a regression model of how forms of belonging influenced rates of religious polarization, or the standardized difference between how

someone rated evangelicals and atheists. The model found that, similar to rates of political polarization, religious belonging was a statistically significant predictor of religious polarization, as deeper religious belonging came with an increase in one's favorability rating for evangelicals and negative rating of atheists. This finding again indicated bonding's power of increasing in-group solidarity and out-group hostility, while also suggesting the increased polarization of American churches. The more an individual sees or interacts with members of their religious community, the warmer their feelings of those people, and the more negatively they see people outside that group. The church is thus producing, solidifying, and entrenching specific identities – likely political as well as religious, and this only serves to increase levels of political and religious polarization. Additionally, social belonging does not appear to have much of an impact on either political or religious polarization, once again suggesting that bridging social capital not have the ability to transcend partisan and tribal battle lines.

However, while the hope of this chapter was to move the study of religiosity and its effect on political outcomes beyond simple church attendance measures, the additional indicators utilized here are distinctive to Christian denominations. Again, the focus of this study was to investigate specific forms of evangelical religiosity, so there will obviously be gaps in addressing how other religious groups and denominations belong to their own communities and what effect this has on the production of bonding social capital. Future research should take this into account when seeking to further unravel the belonging aspect of religiosity and its effect on various political and social behaviors and outcomes.

Belief and Belonging:

When investigating separately, beliefs on their own do not seem to motivate polarized political behavior, while deep levels of religious belonging appear to create greater in-group solidarity and out-group hostility. However, when evaluating how beliefs and forms of belonging interact with one another, the picture becomes more complex. Beliefs, while perhaps not directly stimulating affective polarization, often influence where an individual decides to worship as well as the commitments they make to that religious community and their broader social and civic communities. Thus, while not a direct effect on affective polarization, religious beliefs are increasingly seen as markers of tribal identities and what group one belongs to. One of the most prominent indications that one belongs to the “right” tribe for American evangelicals is the importance one places on the inerrancy of the Bible. The belief in the Bible as the literal, inerrant word of God has a number of downstream effects, including the idea of biblical prophecy and premillennial dispensationalism. If the inerrancy of scripture is discarded, much of the foundation on which evangelicalism rests could begin to crumble, at least in the minds of staunch evangelicals and fundamentalists.

Premillennial dispensationalism would certainly be one of foundational beliefs that could come crumbling down if the inerrancy of scripture was ever questioned or rejected. In addition to giving fundamentalism much of its defining character (Sandeep 1970), this eschatological orientation is also key in understanding how beliefs and patterns of belonging are connected, particularly among fundamentalists. By believing that both the church and society were in inevitable decay and decline, and that only the

second coming of Christ could reverse this trend, most traditional evangelicals and fundamentalists focused on strict evangelism, building strong in-group bonds, and eschewing worldly matters and concerns because those things would eventually be swept away. This orientation towards the world generated religious communities rich in the production of in-group solidarity and cohesiveness, but poor in the amount of political and social influence they wielded. Thus, beliefs led towards deeper in-group connection and bonding social capital, but the walls which were constructed this way also made it difficult to relate and empathize with people not oriented the same way. This status quo could have potentially remained, but for reasons outlined throughout this project, it did not.

The entry of this group into American politics in the late 1970's and early 1980's, and the tools through which they arrived, is one of the key developments in understanding how evangelical religiosity influences affective polarization. Jerry Falwell and other fundamentalist leaders' use of the jeremiad to urge moral Americans to get off the sideline and get into the game capitalized on the existing premillennialist beliefs within the fundamentalist tradition that said America was in decline, but it offered a way out, namely the involvement and agency of conservative Christians who had remained in self-exile. However, Falwell's call for an end to separation did not mean accommodation and assimilation. On the contrary, the call for engagement was a call for conflict, between the forces of good and evil for the soul of America. Thus, the group that for much of the American twentieth century had comfortably lived behind their self-erected walls and neglected any sort of direct political action or engagement became plainly visible in

American culture and politics. They brought with them their calls for morality, warnings of existential demise, and deep levels of religious belonging, in-group solidarity, and out-group distrust.

Much of the statistical tests conducted in this chapter demonstrate how beliefs do seemingly influence rates of religious belonging, but additional questions arise from the statistical interaction between belief and belonging. The below shows the expected level of political polarization for low, average, and high evangelical believers as their level of religious belonging increases.

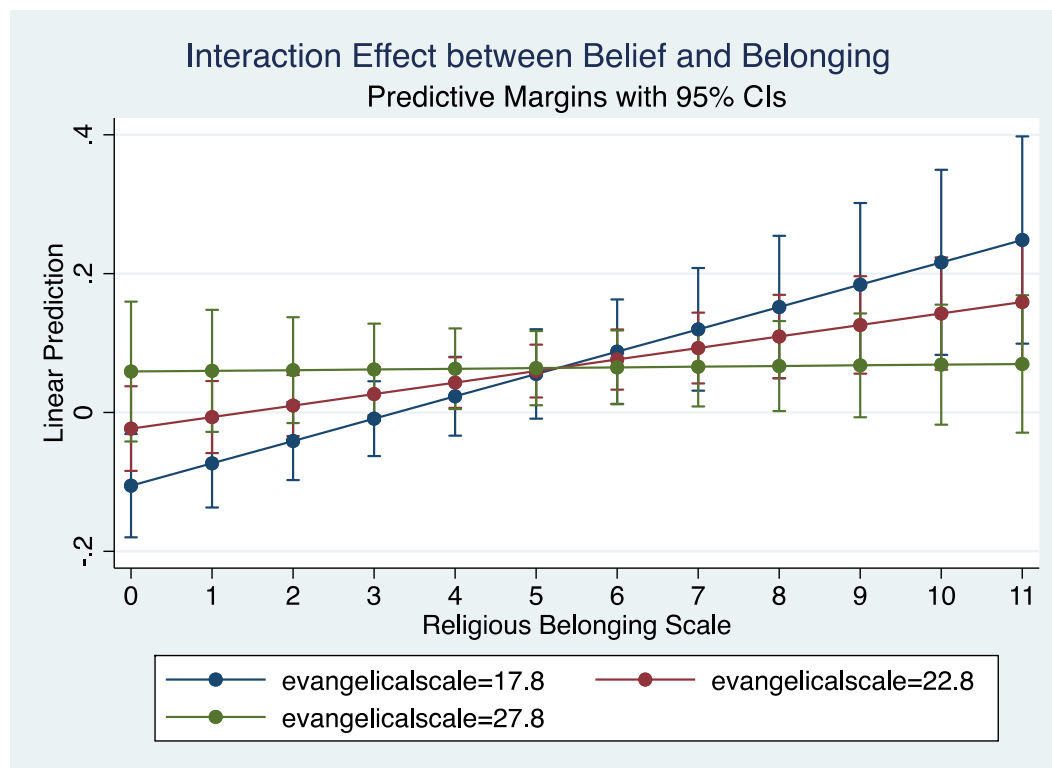


Figure 45

This produces one of the more intriguing findings, namely, belonging's effect on the low and average level evangelical believers. Not only does polarization increase for these two groups, but it also flips in the direction – where the individual would rate the Republican Party more warmly and the Democratic Party more coldly. The low believing or average evangelical is likely to be more influenced by a deeper connection to their religious community – where they likely come into contact with more people who think, look, and act similar to themselves. Again this emphasizes the polarization of American churches, where partisan identity often dictates religious identity. As churches become more homogenous, in-group solidarity and out-group hostility grows. This is again further evidence of the increased fusion of political and religious identities and the resonance of political tribalism in American religion. Much of the findings of this project point to churches as intensifying and exacerbating partisanship, tribal identities, and affective polarization.

Future Research and Limitations:

While this study aimed to advance our knowledge of how religiosity influences polarization, much work remains to be done. In an attempt to explain the higher levels of affective polarization among American evangelicals, this project's scope was specifically on this religious group – the origin and development of their beliefs, their patterns of social and religious belonging, and how these distinct aspects of their religiosity have manifested themselves contemporaneously and historically. However, there was another group in the survey data that consistently displayed similarly high levels of affective polarization – the religiously unaffiliated. In addition to possessing high levels of

polarization, this group also was one of the least socially connected in the survey. Further research should attempt to unravel why the unaffiliated or the “nones” are highly polarized, and it might have to do with their own levels of belonging.

To touch again on the concept of social belonging and “bridging” social capital, it was remarkable how few of the respondents in the survey possessed even average levels of connectedness to their broader communities. The survey asked a great deal of questions regarding one’s connectedness to their social and civic communities, yet a majority of respondents on most questions had little to no interaction with these communities. This should be explored as a phenomena on its own, and in many ways it further emphasizes the findings of Putnam (2000) twenty years ago, namely that Americans seem increasingly disconnected from their social and civic communities. However, perhaps a word of caution to this should be applied. The social belonging indicators utilized in the survey came from Putnam’s similar study, and they asked respondents about their attendance at club or civic organization meetings, amount of volunteer work, donations to charity, etc. There is an argument to be made that our conceptions of “social belonging” should be updated and improved in a world that is increasingly lived in online spaces and platforms, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic, and not captured by these traditional metrics. Future research should strive to increase our conception of social belonging and what it really means to be connected to one’s social and civic community – and what this means for the production of bonding social capital.

There are a handful of limitations to this study. The first and foremost revolves around the scope of this project – this chiefly investigated forms of evangelical religiosity and their influence on polarization. To this end, much of the survey was designed to capture evangelical beliefs and traditional forms of belonging, such as Bible studies and Sunday school, or how often a respondent prayed out loud, which resulted in results that are primarily Christian-centric. This was attempted to be alleviated by using non-descript language in the survey, asking about attendance at “places of worship” and “church social function,” but the result is still a Christian-centric project. The subsequent analysis and results should be interpreted with this fact in mind. Finally, an aspect which could decidedly improve this project but was not included due to time and resource limitations was interviewing evangelicals and fundamentalists. This would no doubt improve the internal validity of the research, as talking to evangelicals and fundamentalists would shed additional light on how beliefs might influence belonging, and how belonging in turn motivates polarized behavior. There are a number of questions remaining, and I hope that I and others are able to continue exploring these puzzles.

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BIOGRAPHY

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- ⁷⁴ FitzGerald, pp. 286-287; pp. 300-303

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- ⁷⁵ FitzGerald, p. 288
- ⁷⁶ FitzGerald, p. 287
- ⁷⁷ FitzGerald, p. 291
- ⁷⁸ FitzGerald, p. 293
- ⁷⁹ Allan J. Lichtman. *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007; p. 343
- ⁸⁰ FitzGerald, pp. 307-309.
- ⁸¹ FitzGerald, p. 318
- ⁸² Edwards (2015), p. 18.
- ⁸³ Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- ⁸⁴ FitzGerald, *Cities on a Hill*, p. 164
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Harding, p. 40
- ⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 56
- ⁸⁸ Marsden (1991), p. 108-109
- ⁸⁹ Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!* p. 243
- ⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 113
- ⁹¹ Harding (2000), pp. 11-12; FitzGerald (1986), pp. 168-169.
- ⁹² FitzGerald (2017), pp. 160-161; p. 201
- ⁹³ Ibid, pp. 229-232.
- ⁹⁴ Harding, p. 11
- ⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 23.
- ⁹⁶ FitzGerald, (1986), pp. 129-130.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 130.
- ⁹⁸ Harding, p. 24.
- ⁹⁹ SBC Resolution, "Crisis in Public Education," June 1, 1979
- ¹⁰⁰ SBC resolution, "On Engaging the Direction of the Public School System," June 1, 2006
- ¹⁰¹ Jerry Falwell (1980), p. 230
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ Harding, 163.
- ¹⁰⁴ Harding, p. 79.
- ¹⁰⁵ FitzGerald (1986), p. 138
- ¹⁰⁶ FitzGerald (2017), p. 39
- ¹⁰⁷ Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (1996), p. 83
- ¹⁰⁸ For more discussion on the rise of the religiously unaffiliated, please see Hout and Fischer (2014) and Burge (2021).
- ¹⁰⁹ Revelation 20:6, NIV translation: Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.
- ¹¹⁰ Harding (2000); pp. 232-234; Sandeen (1970); pp. 59-62
- ¹¹¹ Harding, Ibid; Sweetnam, (2010): pp. 192-194
- ¹¹² Marsden, (1991): 37-40
- ¹¹³ Harding, p. 34
- ¹¹⁴ FitzGerald (1986), p. 140
- ¹¹⁵ Marsden (1991), p. 39;
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 40-43.
- ¹¹⁷ FitzGerald (2017), pp. 307-308.
- ¹¹⁸ Sermon given by Jerry Falwell at Temple Baptist Church in 1986; Harding, p. 162
- ¹¹⁹ Falwell, *Listen, America!* p. 21
- ¹²⁰ Ibid, pp. 225
- ¹²¹ Ibid, pp. 230
- ¹²² Ibid, p. 213

¹²³ Southern Baptist Convention Resolution, “On Biblical Scholarship and the Doctrine of Inerrancy” June 19-20 2012

¹²⁴ Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974); p. 202.

¹²⁵ Turner discusses his idea of *communitas* throughout *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, including detailed discussions on p. 45, 49, and 200-203.

¹²⁶ Turner, p. 201

¹²⁷ Turner, p. 53

¹²⁸ Marsden (1991, 2005), FitzGerald (2018)