

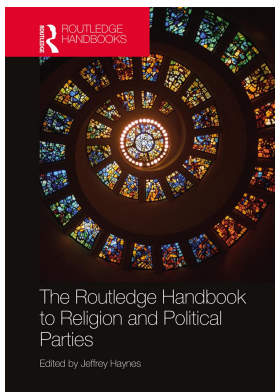
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Religion and political parties in America

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RELIGION AND POLITICAL
PARTIES IN AMERICA*Allen D. Hertzke*

To understand the relationship of religion and political parties in the United States one must first grasp the nature of the American party system. As Duverger's law suggests, 'first past the post' plurality elections with single member districts tend to favour a two-party system. The Electoral College also militates against multiple parties and reinforces a long-standing political culture of two-party competition, now baked into public consciousness by the ubiquitous electoral maps of red states and blue states.

Owing to their longevity and institutionalisation, parties in the 'American mold' are distinct in the democratic world (Epstein 1986). Party membership is loosely defined, not organised by dues-paying members as elsewhere. Nor do American parties operate as private associations governed by their own rules. Rather, over time the two major parties have become like state-regulated public utilities – granted a duopoly but regulated in the public interest. Democrats and Republicans are given automatic ballot access by the states, while upstart parties face the daunting task of gathering specified signatures to get on the ballot. States also register voters under the two party labels, which provide party organisations with valuable lists of their identifiers. But regulation, in the form of state-run primary elections, also strips party organisations of their control over the nomination of candidates for local, state and federal office. Candidates are not selected by party leaders or organisational members, but rather gain the nomination through their own appeals to a mass primary electorate. This produces porous parties, which can be readily entered, shaped and possibly even captured by entrepreneurial candidates or outside movements.

The durability of the two parties and their permeability tend to channel the salient religious cleavages of the nation. Indeed, throughout American history, religious currents have flowed powerfully through the party system, defining partisan attachments and shaping voting behaviour.

Religion, in fact, played a key role in the first genuinely contested presidential campaign of 1800, when Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party challenged the Federalists, who were led by incumbent president John Adams. Since several states retained legally established churches or vestiges of them, adherents of these religious establishments, especially Episcopalians and Congregationalists, aligned closely with the status-quo Federalists. Committed to ending such privilege and the discrimination that came with it, Jefferson gained huge support from such religious minorities as Baptist and Methodists. Part of this alignment traced to the class profiles of these churches: members of higher-status churches supported the Federalists, whereas populist upstarts backed Jefferson (Reichley 2002).

Mass emigration of Catholics from Europe, which began in the 1830s and continued unabated until 1920, resulted in a softening of earlier cleavages between Protestant denominations and produced the development of something far more durable: a Catholic–Protestant cultural and political divide. This division profoundly shaped political and voting patterns for more than a century. While Catholics quickly became heavily Democratic, northern Protestants gravitated towards their opponents: first the Whigs, then the Republicans. This alignment also shaped partisan positions on important issues. State aid to Catholic parochial schools, a perennial issue in American politics, found its strongest resistance among Republicans, who took many of their cues from Protestant activists. Moreover, the Republican Party’s platforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contained ‘strict separationist’ planks designed to block Catholics from making social inroads (Reichley 2002). In addition, Catholics chafed at Protestant moral crusades, such as Prohibition, that seemed directed at them (Kleppner 1970).

The turn of the twentieth century saw emergence of a momentous theological split between those (often higher status) Protestants who adapted to modernity and those who tightly adhered to ‘the fundamentals’ of the faith and stressed the need for a conversion (or born-again) experience. As seminaries of the Mainline denominations embraced higher criticism and less literal teachings about the Bible, the descendants of today’s evangelical churches formed their own separate cultural institutions. By the middle of the twentieth century, when those institutions came under perceived threat from an increasingly secular state, evangelicals became a cohesive political force (Marsden 1982).

In the South, on the other hand, religious factors often were supplanted by the politics of race and regional pride. During the post-Civil War Reconstruction era (1865–1877), southern whites saw the Republican Party literally as a conquering army of occupation, so they voted Democratic. African Americans voted overwhelmingly for Republicans, but when southern whites seized control of politics in the South, where most African Americans resided, they disenfranchised and otherwise kept African Americans subordinate and made the South solidly Democratic up until the 1960s. The civil rights transformation that enfranchised southern blacks flipped the partisan dynamics of the South, but religion also played a key role in the subsequent realignment of white southern evangelicals to the Republican Party.

The economic upheavals of the Great Depression in the 1930s produced the last stable partisan majority alignment – the New Deal Democratic coalition of working-class, poor, and rural voters (including most evangelicals in the South) along with religious and ethnic minorities. As a core New Deal constituency, for example, Catholics at every socioeconomic level were far more likely to identify themselves as Democrats and vote that way than were similarly situated Protestants. The peak of Catholic support came with the candidacy of John Kennedy, who received some 80 percent of the votes of self-identified Roman Catholics, or nearly half of his entire vote. Since then, loyalty to the Democratic Party has dropped dramatically. Jews, on the other hand, have remained solidly aligned with the Democrats from the New Deal on. The Republican Party remained the home to the white Protestant (predominately those from Mainline denominations, along with some evangelicals outside the South)

From the 1960s onward, divisive cultural issues fractured the New Deal coalition, producing new political alignments that heightened religion’s political significance. Scholars attribute these phenomena to the nature of postindustrial society, in which cultural values structure political responses (Inglehart 1990). In this new era religious traditionalists, whether Protestant or Catholic, often find common cause against liberal cultural forces. In addition, since the mid-1960s the enfranchisement of African Americans and waves of immigrants from Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and Africa have dramatically expanded ethno-religious diversity in the American electorate, fuelling disputes over national identity and inclusion.

Finally, demographic shifts within American Christianity transformed the composition and character of the parties. With their higher birth rates and stronger intergenerational retention, evangelicals surpassed Mainline Protestants in the population and in the Republican electorate. In 1960, more than 40 percent of all white adults claimed membership in Mainline denominations, compared with only 27 percent in evangelical churches. White evangelicals now comprise over a quarter of the entire electorate compared to less than a fifth for Mainline Protestants. In turn, as the secular population grew dramatically – owing in large part to lapsing faith among Mainline Protestants and white Catholics – secular voters became a strong Democratic voting constituency.

In brief, the Republican constituency now includes an overwhelming majority of religious traditionalists, especially evangelical Protestants, conservative Catholics and most Eastern Orthodox adherents, along with traditional business and rural voters. The broader Democratic coalition includes Christian progressives (particularly among liberal Mainline Protestants and Catholics), religious minorities (Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs), immigrant and ethno-religious communities, and a growing secular constituency. Before exploring these voting patterns in more detail, it is helpful to know the relative sizes of the different religious constituencies. Table 15.1 provides a broad snapshot of the religious composition of the electorate over the last four elections. Reflecting a long-term trend, we notice the declining proportion of Protestants and the corresponding increases in other faiths and the religiously unaffiliated (which increased from 12 to 17% as a proportion of the electorate, a huge shift).

Table 15.1 Religious composition of voters of the electorate, 2012–2018 national elections

	<i>Presidential</i> 2012 %	<i>Midterm</i> 2014 %	<i>Presidential</i> 2016 %	<i>Midterm</i> 2018 %
Protestant/Other Christian	53	53	52	47
Catholic	25	24	23	26
Jewish	2	3	3	2
Other faiths	7	8	8	8
Religiously unaffiliated	12	12	15	17
White evangelical/born-again Christians	26	26	26	26

Note: Figures for first five rows – denominational categories – may not add to 100 percent due to rounding. White evangelical/born-again Christians are a self-reported category, mostly from the Protestant/Other Christian category but also include a few Catholics and Mormons who so report.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of national exit poll data from Voter News Service/National Public Radio 2016 data. 2018 data from NBCNews.com.

Table 15.2 provides more detailed breakdowns from a different survey of the broad Protestant and Catholic categories. As we see here, Evangelical Protestants are the largest category at a quarter of the electorate. Other Protestants are quite diverse, with shares of the electorate including Mainline Protestants at 17.5 percent, African American Protestants at 10 percent, and Hispanic Protestants at 3 percent (though that figure is higher and growing). Among Catholics we see that Hispanic Catholics comprised over 5 percent of the electorate at the time of a 2012 survey, a figure that has since grown.

With this background we can now delve into patterns of partisan voting among different American religious groups. Tables 15.3 and 15.4 provide summaries from two different surveys of presidential elections, and Table 15.5 provides breakdowns in midterm elections. Since all

Table 15.2 Percentage of the electorate by religious tradition

<i>Religious tradition</i>	<i>% of voting electorate</i>
Evangelical Protestants*	25
Mainline Protestants*	17.5
Hispanic Protestants	2.9
African American Protestants	10.5
Hispanic Catholics	5.2
Non-Hispanic Catholics	18.3
Mormons	2.0

Source: 2012 National Survey of Religion and Politics, Conducted by the University of Akron.

surveys have strengths and limitations, I draw upon several different sources to analyse voting trends of each different constituency.

Roman Catholics

Intensifying clashes between the Catholic Church and liberal authorities over abortion, same-sex marriage and threats to conscience rights have created powerful cross-pressures for Catholic Democrats and pushed a cohort of devout white Catholics toward the Republican Party. But Catholic social teaching also contains strongly progressive stances on immigration, social welfare, and the environment. Not surprisingly, the Catholic constituency shows a relatively even split between the two parties, with considerable switching back and forth depending on issues and candidates.

As we see in Table 15.3, George W. Bush won the overall Catholic vote in 2004, which flipped back to Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, and then edged back to Trump in 2016, though other surveys question that finding (Latino Decisions 2016; O’Loughlin 2017).

Hidden beneath this overview lies a demographic transformation. The significant decline in the white (European ethnic) Catholic population at large has been partly compensated by a massive infusion of new Catholic immigrants, especially from Latin America, but also from Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. These minority Catholics are far more Democratic in their voting loyalties than are their white counterparts. As we see in Table 15.4, Clinton won at between two-thirds and three-quarters of the votes of Hispanic Catholics, while she lost the white Catholic vote by a wide margin to Trump (Latino Decisions 2016). Nonetheless, the 2018 midterm results suggest that suburban white Catholics, especially women, are not comfortable with the Republican Party under Trump, as their votes contributed to the Democratic victory in the House (Exit Polls 2018).

Protestants, Mormons and the GOP

While the American evangelical community includes many religious minorities, white evangelicals remain one of the largest and most cohesive voting blocks in America, pivotal to Republican fortunes. On the other hand, members of historically Mainline denominations, though smaller in number, have become swing voters.

As liberalism – and by extension the Democratic Party – became associated with the counter-culture, the sexual revolution and gay rights, Republicans made huge gains among conservative

Table 15.3 Exit poll breakdowns of presidential elections, 2000–2016

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

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

Table 15.4 Presidential vote by religious category, 2012–2014

Religion	2012			2016			Difference from 2012	
	Romney	Obama	Other	Trump	Clinton	Other	Republican	Democrat
White Evangelical	75	23	2	78	16	5	+3	-7
White Mainline Protestant	51	47	2	55	40	5	+4	-7
Black Protestant	4	95	0	8	89	3	+4	-6
Hispanic Protestant	50	47	3	51	44	6	+1	-3
Other Protestant	61	37	2	57	34	6	-4	-3
Non-Hispanic Catholic	54	45	1	54	42	5	0	-3
Hispanic Catholic	25	73	1	23	73	4	-2	0
Orthodox	54	44	2	60	36	3	+6	-8
Mormon	82	16	2	52	23	25	-30	+7
Buddhist	10	86	4	20	67	14	+10	-19
Hindu	12	88	1	18	82	0	+6	-6
Jewish	32	66	1	28	68	4	-4	+2
Muslim	16	82	2	14	81	5	-2	-1
None/Unaffiliated	25	72	3	30	63	7	+5	-9

Notes: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. White Evangelical = protestant + born again + white. White Mainline = protestant + not born again + white. None = 'nothing in particular' or Atheist or Agnostic.

Source: Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2013, 2017.

Protestants (Black and Black 2003). All surveys show voting support among white evangelicals of 70 percent and above for Republicans, with the highest margins at the presidential level.

President Obama's liberal presidency especially solidified evangelical support for the Republican Party. From abortion funding to same-sex marriage to contraceptive mandates to federal protection for transgender rights, the Obama era fostered among evangelicals a perception of assaults on religious autonomy and the right to live according to religious principles. In 2016 Republican presidential contenders, particularly Donald Trump, seized on this sense of threat and incorporated provisions, pledging to reverse Obama policies and protect conscience rights and religious liberty, into the GOP platform. In this sense, Obama's presidency set the stage for the surprising election of Donald Trump, a man with no clear religious background or identity, to the White House.

Table 15.5 Religious breakdowns by midterm election
% who voted for ___ candidate for Congress in their district

	2006		2010		2014		2018	
	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.
Among those who are...	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Protestant/other Christian	44	54	38	59	37	61	42	56
Catholic	55	44	44	54	45	54	50	49
Jewish	87	12	n/a	n/a	66	33	79	17
Other faiths	71	25	74	24	67	31	73	25
Religiously unaffiliated	74	22	68	30	69	29	70	28
White, born-again/ evangelical Christian	28	70	19	77	20	78	22	75

Note: Data on Jewish voters in 2010 are not included due to insufficient sample size.

Source: National Election Pool national exit polls. 2018 data from NBCNews.com.

No figure in recent American politics has sparked such a vigorous and divisive response in the religious community as President Donald Trump. During the Republican primary season, more than a few prominent conservative Catholics and evangelicals joined religious liberals in criticising what they saw as Trump’s bullying style, impulsiveness, thin skin and ‘narcissistic’ character traits as unsuited for the presidency (O’Loughlin 2016; Crouch 2016). Not to mention the scant evidence of any serious ties to churches as an adult (Lee 2017). On the other hand, Trump actively courted Christian conservatives, especially evangelicals, and gained the endorsements of some of their key leaders. While Trump never won the majority of evangelical votes in the primaries and caucuses, he earned more than enough to prevail in such a crowded field of candidates. Once Trump secured the Republican nomination, some of his previous critics in the evangelical community offered grudging support. More importantly, his pledge to defend ‘embattled’ believers won him the overwhelming majority of the born-again vote in the general election. In a sense, Trump’s blustering style indicated that he would be the kind of ‘strongman’ evangelicals and other religious traditionalists felt they needed. As we see elsewhere around the world, religious traditionalists have joined working-class voters in backing populist nationalists against the perceived threats from globalisation and cultural liberalism.

Many Mainline Protestants, on the other hand, seem to be re-evaluating their ties to a Republican Party so heavily invested in culture war issues. Especially on social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage, Mainline Protestants are more liberal than evangelicals (Olson and Warber 2008). Whereas two-thirds reliably voted for the GOP a generation ago, that margin now hovers at 50 percent, including a number of swing voters. As we see in Table 15.4, Mainline voters gave George W. Bush a 51 percent margin in 2004, shifted to Obama in 2008 (54 percent), then switched back to give Romney a 51 percent edge in 2012 (National Survey of Religion and Politics 2012). The Trump margin of 55 percent in 2016 represented almost entirely a surge in the votes of Mainline Protestants only loosely connected to actual congregations. In 2018, many apparently switched to back Democrats in congressional races.

Mormons – adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) – share the cultural conservatism of evangelicals. With their high levels of religious practice, conservative

moral values, large families, and relative affluence, Mormons form a cohesive political community, strongly identify with the Republican Party, and routinely give nearly three-quarters of their votes to Republican candidates (Campbell and Monson 2007). Mormon ethnic solidarity expanded that margin for Mitt Romney in 2012, who gained fully 90 percent of the Mormon vote, up from 72 percent for McCain in 2008, a margin almost matching African American support for Obama (National Survey of Religion and Politics 2012). In yet another irony of American politics, a group vilified by Republicans and evangelicals alike in the nineteenth century provided near monolithic backing for the Republican nominee.

The election of 2016 was a different story entirely. Trump's bombastic style and stigmatisation of ethnic minorities and immigrants offended many Mormons, who remember when they were the victims of religious repression. Romney criticised Trump during the primaries and Evan McMullin, a Mormon, mounted an independent candidacy for President. As shown in Table 15.4, Trump's margin among Mormons was 30 points lower than Romney's.

Jews

American Jews always have been in the vanguard of a secular vision of American politics. The vast majority of Jews in the United States are liberals who celebrate the Enlightenment ideal of the nonsectarian state. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that, although they look like Episcopalian Republicans in socioeconomic status, they vote more like Hispanic Democrats. Here we see the impact of a kind of value-based voting that is independent of social class. And in this case, the values are liberal ones because liberalism constitutes a kind of 'lay religion' among American Jews (Greenberg and Wald 2001). As we see in the various tables, Jews commonly provide at least two-thirds of their votes for Democrats.

Republicans have attempted to make inroads among this constituency, particularly by assuming a more hawkish stance towards Israel's adversaries, and we do see variation from year to year among that constituency. But the results of the 2016 and 2018 elections not only show continuity in Jewish support for the Democratic nominee (with Clinton gaining 71 percent according to exit polls) but distinct weakness for Donald Trump and his party. Indeed, one of the most telling findings is the comparison of the last two midterm elections, in which Jews went from providing 66 percent of their votes to House Democrats in 2014 to 79 percent in 2018, a clear reaction to the Trump presidency. Given Jewish commitment to civil liberties, Trump's divisive ethno-nationalist appeal likely alarmed even some conservative and Republican Jews.

A long-term concern for Jews is that their share of the US population, though always modest, has declined in the past generation, from 4 percent to 2 percent (Abrams 1997). With barely any infusion of immigrants, low birth rates and intermarriage that tends to dilute Jewish identity with each generation, the Jewish population growth has not kept pace with that of most other religious groups. Because the Orthodox uniquely have large families and are successful in passing the faith to the next generation the Jewish population will become more Orthodox and conservative over time. Whether this trend increases Republican voting patterns will depend on candidates, parties and the salience of issues.

African Americans

African Americans in the United States are overwhelmingly Christian and mostly evangelical. Moreover, religious salience is quite high in the African American community (Pew Research Center, Forum on Religion & Public Life 2015). Nonetheless, the blacks provide the highest

margins to Democrats of any constituency. Part of the African American outlook is explained by the uniquely American tradition of black Christianity, which often blends evangelical pietism with prophetic and liberationist messages. African Americans also remain loyal to the Democrats because of their crucial support for the civil rights movement and because the party remains committed to government-sponsored welfare programmes and affirmative action.

As the 'precinct' for African American mobilisation, the black church is central to the fortunes of the Democratic Party. Democrats now routinely campaign in black churches. Black church members are far more likely to vote than nonmembers. And contrary to the pattern for whites, frequent church attendance is correlated with increased identification with the Democratic Party (Harris 2001).

The black electorate has also expanded. Inspired by the candidacy of Barack Obama, African Americans flooded the polls in 2008 and 2012, and for the first time in history, black voting rates surpassed white turnout in 2012 (66 percent compared to 64 percent) (Krogstad and Lopez 2017). African American churches have been crucial to the galvanising of the black portion of the US electorate.

Democrat Hillary Clinton, however, could not equal that enthusiasm among African Americans in 2016, whose voting participation fell seven points to 59 percent, while her margin dropped from Obama's (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017). An unheralded aspect of her loss of votes among African Americans was gender. Donald Trump won 13 percent of the votes of black Protestant men versus only 5 percent of the women. Clearly gender differences lurk beneath the surface of near monolithic voting support for Democrats. That gap did narrow in the 2018 midterm elections, benefiting the Democrats.

Latino religionists

One of the fastest growing groups in America is the diverse Latino (or Hispanic) ethnic constituency. As a heavily immigrant population, its share of the electorate will rise significantly in the coming years (especially as the children of immigrants come of voting age), making the Latino vote increasingly important to the electoral fortunes of candidates and parties. Latinos also illustrate how religious voting patterns are shaped by the interweaving strands of religious beliefs, church involvement and ethnic solidarity.

Like African Americans, Latinos in the United States combine high levels of religiosity with a deep consciousness of ethnic identity. Nearly eight in ten claim a religious affiliation, and 60 percent say religion is very important to them (Pew Research Center, Forum on Religion & Public Life 2014). Religious affiliation and commitment among Latinos account for a certain degree of social conservatism, especially among Latino evangelicals. On many issues related to immigration, government health insurance, and services for poor people, Latinos lean to the left of the ideological spectrum and routinely give at least two-thirds of their votes to Democratic candidates.

Catholics represent the largest share of Latino voters. But a growing percentage of Latino Americans (nearly 20 percent) have found church homes within Pentecostalism and other branches of evangelical Protestantism (Pew Research Center, Forum on Religion & Public Life 2015). These evangelicals are more likely to describe themselves as conservative and prioritise socio-moral issues. They strongly oppose gay marriage and legalised abortion, for example. In various polls Hillary Clinton was 22–29 points higher among Latino Catholics than among Born-Again Protestants (Latino Decisions 2016). Republicans' hope of making inroads in the growing evangelical segment of the Latino electorate, however, clashed with the populist revolt against immigration and the election Donald Trump. Trump's vitriolic rhetoric about Mexican immigrants

and harsh family separation policies at the border appear to have sparked a surge in Latino voting rates and Democratic support in the 2018 midterm. The continued erosion of support for Republicans among Latinos, especially among otherwise conservative evangelicals, remains a problem acknowledged by GOP strategists (Republican National Committee 2013).

Muslims and other religious minorities

The increasing religious pluralism of America is reflected in measurable voting behaviour. Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and other religious minorities represent a modest but growing constituency, and they overwhelmingly vote for Democratic candidates. In 2016, for example, Donald Trump earned 20 percent or less from several of these religious traditions, as we see in Table 15.4.

No group has received the attention as American Muslims, whose civic participation has been forged in the crucible of the post-9/11 world. Though Muslims comprise slightly less than 1 percent of the American voting public, their concentration in certain states, rapid growth, and heightened political consciousness make them more important than their numbers might suggest. As a political community, American Muslims are conservative on moral values but progressive on economics and civil liberties. Owing to socioeconomic status and high marriage rates, many Muslims were initially drawn to the GOP. In fact, in 2000 George W. Bush won a plurality of the Muslim vote (but not quite a majority because many cast votes for independent candidate Ralph Nader, who is of Lebanese descent) (Bukhari and Nyang 2004).

Muslim attitudes, however, have never fully conformed to the economically libertarian agenda of today's Republican Party, and reaction against domestic surveillance and Bush foreign policies moved them swiftly into the Democratic camp. Indeed, American politics seldom has seen as rapid an electoral turnaround as the shift in the Muslim electorate between 2000 and subsequent elections (Bukhari and Nyang 2004). This trend strengthened with the candidacy of Barack Obama, who enjoyed substantial support from the American Muslim community. Not surprisingly, the candidacy of Donald Trump, whose rhetoric about 'Islamic terrorism' and proposal to shut down immigration from some Muslim nations, solidified this Muslim loyalty to Democrats. In 2016 Hillary Clinton earned over 80 percent of the Muslim vote.

The secular vote

In 1960, Americans were decidedly a society of churchgoers. Only a small percentage of the population claimed no religious preference, and those who were not religious had relatively low voting rates.

By the 2000s, however, religious observance had declined among a much larger segment of the American public, and secular citizens were voting differently from the religiously observant. Figure 15.1 shows the yawning partisan gap by the frequency of worship attendance, indicating that the less embedded people are in religious communities, the more they vote for Democratic candidates. This pattern is especially pronounced among whites, where ethnic or racial solidarity does not confound the influence of worship attendance or moral traditionalism.

As secular voters have grown in number and cohesiveness over time, they have become a crucial part of the Democratic coalition. By 2016 the unaffiliated comprised more than a fifth of the Hillary Clinton's total voter base, which expanded further in 2018 for Democratic congressional candidates. The voting gap between secular and religious Americans is larger than differences in education, gender, income, age and numerous other factors (Olson and Green 2006).

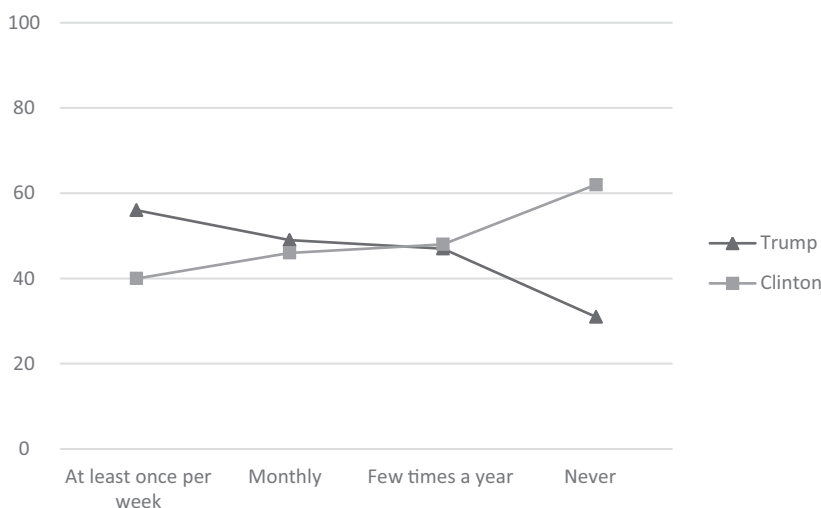


Figure 15.1 Pew Research Center: ‘How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary Analysis’

Source: www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/

Summary on religion and partisan voting patterns

The growing divide between religiously observant and more secular Americans has led some commentators to wonder whether a European-style party alignment is emerging in the United States, pitting a Christian conservative party (the Republicans) against a more secular, liberal party (the Democrats). As we have seen, this analysis is only partly accurate because many progressive Mainline Protestants and Catholics, along with religious minorities and immigrant groups, inhabit the same political coalition as secular voters. Indeed, recent surveys show that on religious values, ethnic and racial minorities and immigrants have greater affinity with Republican Christians than with white secular Democrats (Diamant and Smith 2018). Moreover, women remain overrepresented in most religious communities and they tend to vote more liberally than their male counterparts (Hertzke *et al.* 2019, Ch. 6).

Beyond these specific dynamics, the electoral forces Trump ignited may portend new divisions in the religious community. The emergence of the so-called alt-right, which encompasses overt forms of white nationalism, has attracted some religious conservatives and repelled others. For years, critics of the Christian Right claimed that the movement in part reflected white southern resistance to integration and African American empowerment. Some figures in the alt-right movement overtly embraced that connection, but this fusion of white nationalism and religion also sparked counter-moves in the religious community. Most notably, the Southern Baptist Convention explicitly condemned all forms of racism and ethnic hatred, including ‘alt-right white nationalism,’ as a ‘scheme of the devil’ antithetical to the gospel (Southern Baptist Convention 2017).

Projecting into the future, demographic trends will also be fateful for religious alignments and electoral fortunes. Momentously, the US Census Bureau reported that minority births outnumbered whites in 2013 and continued to grow in the following years. Before the middle of this century whites will no longer be the majority in America, although assimilation and intermarriage may bely that trend somewhat (Cohn 2016). Thus, over time we will see a continued rise in non-Christian voters, such as Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. But the Christian population will also become more diverse, with growing numbers of Latinos, Asians, Filipinos, Africans, Chaldeans, etc. The other

trend is the anticipated rise of the non-religious sector, as older, more religious cohorts die out and are replaced by less religious generations. While these long-term trends favour the Democrats, Republicans retain certain structural advantages with the Senate and Electoral College, which provide disproportionate representation to smaller rural states that are home to religious traditionalists, both Catholic and Protestant.

The results of the 2018 midterm elections provide a foreshadowing of these trends. With a nearly nine million vote margin of victory, Democrats surged to flip the House of Representatives, splitting the Catholic vote and receiving large majorities of religious minorities, ethnic minorities and secular voters. Republicans kept the Senate by gaining seats in states with large shares of religious traditionalists (Missouri, North Dakota and Indiana), while losing seats with growing minority populations (Nevada and Arizona).

Religious party activists

While voting patterns rightly predominate any discussion of religion and political parties, party organisations and office-holders both lead and ratify such trends. Party activists represent the vanguard of America's party organisations. They staff the vast volunteer and paid networks in states and counties, work for candidates, attend conventions and vie over the language of party platforms.

Because of demographic changes and mobilisation, religious and secular activists have pushed the two parties farther apart on religious and cultural questions. Demographically, as evangelicals surpassed Mainline Protestants in the electorate, the activist pool for the Republican Party shifted accordingly. In turn, with the growth of the unaffiliated population, secular activists took a more prominent place in the Democratic coalition (Claassen 2015).

Mobilisation also plays a key role. Capitalising on porous party structures, activists with religious or secular aims have gained increasing leverage in party organisations, shaping platforms and policy agendas (Bolce and De Maio 2002; Rozell and Wilcox 2017). For many evangelicals and other religious traditionalists, for example, a profound sense of threat from secularising forces catalysed them to flood Republican Party caucuses and conventions (Oldfield 1996; Rozell and Wilcox 2017). Surveys of national convention delegates from 1972 to 2012 show how this Christian Right infusion pushed the Republican Party to the right on social and cultural issues (Layman and Brockway 2018).

The capture of the party by the Trump movement in 2016 both reinforced this trend and infused party counsels with an unpredictable cadre of populist nationalists. This alt-right mobilisation, in turn, has led some prominent figures, like Jewish neoconservatives, to leave the party or oppose its drift.

On the left, we see the exceptional and growing influence of secular activists in the Democratic Party. Prior to the 1970s, 'There was something of a tacit commitment among elites in both parties to traditional Judeo-Christian values regarding authority, sexual mores, and the nuclear family' (Bolce and De Maio 2002). In the 1970s, however, secular activists began to take a more prominent place in some state- and local-level Democratic Party organisations. Ever since, Democratic activists have been far more likely than their Republican counterparts to describe themselves as secular or marginally attached to religion. And because they advance a liberal cultural agenda, they often see themselves in mortal clash with conservative religionists over the soul of the nation (Layman 2001). To be sure, ethnic minorities and immigrants often combine devout religion and Democratic affiliation, but the activists in the party are disproportionately secular in outlook.

Party platforms, hammered out every four years at the parties' nominating conventions, illustrate how these religious and secular cleavages now define party alignments. While often

dismissed as symbolic, party platforms do matter; they help set the agenda of legislative and executive officials. In 2016, religious conservatives were given a great deal of access to the GOP platform writing committee, which produced unusually detailed proposals backing the ‘sanctity of human life’, traditional marriage and religious liberty, as well as an unprecedented number of religious references. In turn, religious liberals and secular activists helped shape the Democratic platform to endorse unqualified abortion rights, contraceptive funding, LGBT rights, and marriage equality, demonstrating how deeply religious and cultural cleavages now separate the two major parties (Hertzke *et al.* 2019, p. 275).

Partisan religious patterns in Congress

The voting and activist alignment of religious and non-religious Americans is increasingly reflected in their representation in Congress. As we see in Table 15.6, congressional Democrats are far more religiously diverse than their Republican counterparts, and that diversity is growing. Every Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and unaffiliated member of the 116th Congress (beginning in January 2019) was a Democrat, as were all of those who refused to list a religion. Overall, the Democratic congressional membership was 42 percent Protestant, 35 percent Catholic, 11 percent Jewish, and over 10 percent non-Christian or unaffiliated.

Meanwhile, over 99 percent of Republican members of Congress identify as Christian, with only two Jews (less than 1 percent) rounding out the GOP membership (there are no unaffiliated Republicans). Reflecting long-standing partisan loyalties, the majority of Republicans in Congress are Protestants (70 percent), with a solid number of Catholics (26 percent) and Mormons (over 3 percent). This pattern reflects both the Republican Party’s political constituency, as well as the overrepresentation of Republicans from rural and suburban communities, which feature less religious diversity than the urban and high tech areas that Democrats tend to represent (Sandstrom 2019).

Party affiliation of American clergy

While national religious leaders capture the media spotlight, no group has more potential reach and collective influence than the thousands of local clergy across the country. Thanks to a creative new study, we have unique data on their partisan affiliations (Hersh and Malina 2017). By accessing directories of churches, Eitan Hersh and Gabrielle Malina obtained the names of some 180,000 Christian and Jewish pastors across 40 religious denominations. Using public voter registration records, they identified the party registration of the majority (130,000) of those pastors. With this massive dataset, they illuminate striking patterns of clergy partisanship in different American religious traditions. For example, more than 80 percent of rabbis in Reformed Judaism are Democrats, while less than 10 percent of Missouri-Synod Lutheran pastors share that party affiliation.

The pattern of partisanship tracks what we would expect, with Jewish, African American and Mainline denominations having the largest proportions of registered Democrats among their clergy, while evangelical denominations have the largest percentage of registered Republican clergy. On the other hand, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist congregations had the largest shares of registered Independents among their clergy. A *New York Times* headline captured these patterns in a pithy way: ‘Your Rabbi? Probably a Democrat. Your Baptist Pastor? Probably a Republican. Your Priest? Who Knows’ (Quealy 2017).

While these patterns roughly conform to the partisanship of the lay members of the clergy’s religious traditions, Hersh and Malina’s study found that clergy members in a specific tradition are somewhat more unified in their party affiliations than members of the congregations they

Table 15.6 Religious composition of the 116th Congress

Religion	Democrats			Republicans		
	House #	Senate #	%	House #	Senate #	%
Christian	187	33	78.3	198	53	99.2
Protestant	97	20	41.6	136	40	69.6
Baptist	25	2	9.6	36	9	17.8
Methodist	17	3	7.1	15	7	8.7
Anglican/Episcopal	10	4	5	12	0	4.7
Presbyterian	5	3	2.8	8	10	7.1
Lutheran	10	3	4.6	9	4	5.1
Congregationalist	0	2	0.7	2	0	0.8
Nondenominational	2	0	0.7	7	1	3.2
Pentecostal	0	0	0	2	0	0.8
Restorationist	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Adventist	2	0	0.7	0	0	0
Holiness	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Reformed	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
Unspecified/other	26	3	10.3	42	9	20.2
Catholic	86	12	34.9	55	10	25.7
Mormon	1	1	0.7	5	3	3.2
Orthodox Christian	3	0	1.1	2	0	0.8
Jewish	24	8	11.4	2	0	0.8
Buddhist	1	1	0.7	0	0	0
Muslim	3	0	1.1	0	0	0
Hindu	3	0	1.1	0	0	0
Unitarian Universalist	2	0	0.7	0	0	0
Unaffiliated	0	1	0.4	0	0	0
Don't know/refused	14	4	6.4	0	0	0
Total	234	47	100	200	53	100

Note: One race, in North Carolina had not yet been certified due to allegations of electoral fraud. Figures may not add to 100 percent or to subtotals due to rounding. Figures for Democrats include independents who caucus with Democrats.

Source: Figures for Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on 3 January 2019. 'Faith on the Hill: The Religious Composition of the 116th Congress'.

serve. The clergy in liberal traditions are consistently more Democratic than their congregants, while pastors in conservative traditions are routinely more Republican than their congregants. For example, while 55 percent of Episcopalians in the pews identify as Democrats, 76 percent of Episcopal priests do. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), 46 percent of members are Democrats compared to 73 percent of ELCA clergy.

Given the substantial number of registered Independents among Catholic clergy, they constitute a swing group in the electorate. However, the study also found evidence of regional variation among Catholic clergy: 'Catholics in states like Kansas, South Dakota, and Oklahoma are more Republican, while those in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maryland are more Democratic' (Hersh and Malina 2017).

These findings suggest that the polarisation we see in American politics today is affecting clergy. Further evidence for this emerging pattern is found in the partisanship of seminary faculty. Hersh and Malina note that seminary faculty are even more uniform in their partisanship than pastors. For example, while Southern Baptist parishioners are 60 percent Republican in identification and their pastors 77 percent, Baptist seminary faculty members are 83 percent Republican. Democratic-leaning religious traditions are even more one-sided. United Methodist congregants and clergy are 45 percent and 51 percent Democratic, respectively, but their seminary faculty are 95 percent Democratic (Hersh and Malina 2017). This extreme partisan sorting in seminaries suggests we might see the effects of ideological and partisan socialisation among new clergy as the century wears on, which would almost certainly do nothing to mitigate the political polarisation currently gripping American politics.

The striking polarisation of American politics, in which strong partisans view each other as a threat to their way of life or culture, suggests that party affiliation has taken on a tribal identity for many (Pew Research Center 2016). Indeed, the elite discourse in politics, reinforced by partisan media, seems to be leading party identifiers to align their issue stances to fit their party. For religiously devout immigrants and ethnic minorities this means accepting the regnant cultural liberalism of Democratic elites; in the case of the Republicans it involves embracing (or accommodating) the nativist populism of President Trump.

This development presents fateful implications for the relationship between religion and political parties in American. As the account of seminary faculty suggests, polarised politics may lead to polarised religion. In other words, partisanship may be affecting religious life, rather than the other way around. Scholars see mounting evidence that the growth of religious 'nones' and their alignment with the Democratic Party represent a reaction against the politicised fusion of evangelicalism with the Republican Party. Moreover, scholars are picking up evidence that when people experience cognitive dissonance with the political messages in their churches, they change congregations to align with their party identity, instead of changing their party to align with their faith (Djupe *et al.* 2018; Campbell *et al.* 2018). The challenge this poses to the integrity of religious faith is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it bears pondering.

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