Protestants and the Poor:
How Religiosity Affects Support for Social Welfare Policy

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Introduction

What happens when the people who are supposed to care for the poor, who are even mandated to do so by their religious beliefs, do not support social welfare policies? What does that mean for American politics? What does it mean for the poor?

Trump's victory in 2016 was a wake-up call concerning the political power of religious groups, specifically evangelical Christians. Since the group makes up about 25% of adults in the United States (Masci and Smith 2018), and 80% of white evangelicals voted for Trump in 2016 (Martínez and Smith 2016), they were a major factor influencing Trump's victory. This election provides a good opportunity to reconsider the relationship between religious beliefs and political beliefs and behavior. Both religion and politics are important because they can affect the lives of millions of people. Both are especially important for the poor, oppressed, and vulnerable. This paper will examine the effect of religiosity among Christians and their support for social welfare policy.

Christianity is one of many faiths that tells its followers to support the poor. Passages from the Bible might come to mind for those familiar like Psalm 82:3-4, which reads "Defend the weak and fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed" (Bible Gateway 2022). Jesus himself often commanded his followers to take care of those experiencing poverty. FOr example, Luke 12:33 records Jesus saying explicitly "Sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Bible Gateway 2022). Therefore, we might expect that people following the Christian faith to have high levels of support for social welfare policy. However, American Christians, especially Protestants, also tend to be politically conservative (Lipka 2016). This divide gets even more

dramatic when looking at evangelical Protestants (Lipka 2016). So, there is a tension here between the expected behavior of Christians based on their theology and their actual behavior. Furthermore, classic social theorists such as Durkheim and Weber suggest that there is a difference between Catholics and Protestants, with Protestants favoring more individualistic policies (Collins and Makowsky 2010). Because of the size of the Protestant voting block in the United States–forty-six percent of the voting public–their voting behavior has huge impacts on American life (Newport 2020). Their influence especially matters in light of improving the condition of the poor–if Protestants, some of those mandated by their faith to care about poverty–do not support alleviating poverty through social welfare policy, then there are huge implications for the political feasibility of achieving improvement that way.

Protestants have not been historically as affiliated with the political right as they have right now, but this association has grown over time (Du Mez 2020). Therefore, we would expect the relationship between religion and support for policies generally, especially support for social welfare policy, to change over time among that group. It is important to look at degree of religiosity specifically in order to establish whether the church could be a factor driving increasing association between Protestants, specifically evangelicals, and right-wing politics. How Protestants behave is important because of their political influence, how Protestants who go to church a lot behave is even more important because it informs the state of one of the largest religious groups in the nation. I expect that as time goes on, religiosity will get better at predicting Protestants' support for social welfare policy.

This article first examines the question: Does degree of religiosity affect support for social welfare policy among Protestants and Catholics, and does this effect change over time? I first review various theoretical explanations for Protestant voting behavior and increasing

right-wing political mobilization. I also explain the importance of using three main time periods to track this mobilization. Then, I review the data and methods used. Results are reported and discussed with limitations of the data, methods and analyses. In the end, I conclude that those Protestants who attend church more are less likely to support social welfare policy after the year 2000.

Background

Differences Between Protestants and Catholics

There are several theoretical lenses to understanding the ways that religiosity affects support for social welfare among Protestants and Catholics in the United States. Parts of this question have been present since the very beginning of social thought, like the differences in social behavior between Protestants and Catholics. Max Weber and Emile Durkheim both thought about the differences between Protestants and Catholics in their theologies and worship styles, and how those theological differences result in different social behaviors. The distinction between the two groups is largely lost in popular modern thought, where both are grouped under the label "Christian." While many of the core ideas and theologies between the groups are similar, they have a fundamentally different posture and organizational structure that many argue creates vastly different social effects.

Emile Durkheim's classic work, *Suicide,* found that Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics (Collins and Makowsky 2010:99). His explanation drew on the different understandings of personal responsibility between the two faiths. The Catholic faith is highly communal, with priests mediating an individual's relationship with God and communal times of worship emphasized as essential (Collins and Makowsky 2010:99). In contrast,

Protestant Christian faiths emphasize an individual's personal relationship with God and personal responsibility for sin (Collins and Makowsky 2010:99). Durkheim theorized that the pressure of Protestant individualism and lack of community ties could explain the disparate rates of suicide between Protestants and Catholics (Collins and Makowsky 2010:99).

Weber uses similar reasoning in his classic explanation of the rise of capitalism. He suggests that the Protestant theology of an individual relationship with God (in opposition to the more communal/mediated Catholic conception) led to more individual-based economic preferences (Collins and Makowsky 2010:122). Most modern understandings of the overlaps between Protestants and economic conservatism use the same reasoning (see for example Barker and Carman 2000). Studies continue to test and confirm Weber's basic idea that Protestants are more economically individualistic than Catholics. Benito Arruñada found that Weber held true in his global analysis, though for different reasons than work ethic (Arruñada 2010).

H1: Catholics will be more likely than Protestants to support social welfare policy.

Protestants and the Political Right

There is not only a historic relationship between Protestant Christians and conservative economic policy, but also between American Protestant Christians and the political right over time. It is well-established in the literature that American Christians are affiliated with the political right, and increasingly so (see for example Lipka 2016). This is largely due to the evangelical movement, which began sweeping the nation as early as the 1940s, picking up steam in the seventies and eighties. I theorize, based on the work of Kristen Kobes Du Mez and others,

that there are three main time periods along which I ought to divide this analysis following the rise of the evangelical movement.

GSS data is available from 1974-2018. The first important time period within this range is 1974-1979. This is because the election of Ronald Reagan was such an integral turning point for the affiliation between evangelical Protestants and the political right in America. Reagan was the first presidential candidate to fully tap into the voting power of the evangelical movement and mobilize them towards his cause (Du Mez 2020:106). Therefore, before his election, we would expect lower rates of support for social welfare than Catholics (based on Weber and Durkheim), but no dramatic differences between the group.

H2: Before 1980, Protestants will support social welfare policy less than Catholics but will not have dramatically lower support.

The second important time period is 1980-1999. After Reagan, the political power and engagement of the evangelical movement began to grow substantially. During this time, the "culture wars" ideology really began to grow and evangelicals became increasingly more affiliated with the political right. Opposition to Clinton and (Du Mez 2020:143), the rise of the purity movement (Du Mez 2020:170), and the culture around Christian patriarchy overlapping with the political right (Du Mez 2020:168) helped to solidify an identity for Protestants as people on the political right.

H3: From 1980-1999, we will see an increased difference in support for social welfare policy between Protestants and Catholics.

The final important time period is 2000-2018. The 2000s saw a real sense of entrenchment of the evangelical movement and the political right, especially in overlaps with support for the military. The Bush era, and the beginning of the war in Iraq, created a final solidification of the affiliation, where Protestants saw Bush as a "kindred spirit" (Du Mez 2020:231). Of course, the election of Donald Trump, and the incredible Protestant coalition around him, is the final indication of the connections between Protestants and the political right.

H4: After 2000, we will continue to see increased difference in support for social welfare policy between Protestants and Catholics.

The organic connections model has historically been used to explain political divides within the United States. The organic connections model suggests that the world is divided into a 'culture war' so intense that there are essentially intrinsic divides between "religious conservatives and secular liberals" (Malka et al 2012). This theory essentially argues that there are conservative people with a certain set of characteristics (including being religious), and then liberal people with another set of characteristics (Jost et al 2008). The idea here is that those who are religious are the same kinds of people who are politically conservative, and therefore will not support social welfare policy, and then there is another kind of person who is not religious, does not go to church, and supports social welfare policy. This model, if true, is quite pessimistic and fatalistic. One way to test it is to look at variation within religious groups. This study is especially compelling because it looks within one religious group–Christians–to see if their political beliefs and attitudes towards the poor are different.

Religiosity and Political Beliefs

Therefore, there is a theoretical basis for a difference in social behavior between Protestants and Catholics. There is also an increasing affiliation between the political right and American Protestant Christians. I now turn to examine past understandings of the effects of degree of religiosity on support for social welfare policy, and political behavior more broadly. There is literature studying religiosity and support for social welfare globally (Aiken and Ben-Nun Bloom 2019). While these are helpful for understanding the relationship between religious beliefs and political behavior on a macro level, they fall short at capturing the exact and unique social processes happening in each country. Because of the uniqueness of the evangelical movement in America, in this case there is a need to move to a more specifically American explanation.

American studies have been done examining the effect of degree of religiosity on political beliefs. One study found that places with more Catholic sex abuse scandals were less likely to support social welfare policy (Dills and Hernandez-Julian 2014). Malka, Cohen, and Miller found that religiosity has a negative effect on support for social welfare policy (Malka et al 2011). However, their work does not break down their analysis to specific religious groups. I am arguing that something special is happening among American Protestants specifically. Pelz and Smidt found that religiosity does have a negative effect on American evangelical Protestant support for social welfare policy, as well as on a number of other social issues (Pelz and Smidt 2015:386). They also include analysis over time, examining Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials (Pelz and Smidt:380). This study goes beyond their work, building on their thoughts, to compare American Protestants and Catholics, rather than just looking at evangelical

Protestants. The evangelical movement is an essential part of this story, but examining the religious landscape in the United States more broadly allows us to take a more holistic view of religious movement and can establish the significance of the evangelical movement. In other words, to understand whether Pelz and Smidt's findings reflect a unique element of change within evangelicals, or if they are reflective or larger American religious and political shifts.

Pelz and Smidt use social identity theory to explain the connections between religiosity and political conservatism (Pelz and Smidt 2015:382). Social identity theory, in its most basic form, identifies a social group as "individuals who view themselves as members of the same social category" (Stets and Burke 2000:225). People form this view by comparing themselves with others and picking up on patterns of characteristics of those seen to be in the group and those seen to be outside of the group (Stets and Burke 2000:225). By this definition, religious groups are clearly social groups–theology is a significant characteristic by which people can categorize themselves and others into distinct religious groups. What Pelz and Smidt suggest is that there are other characteristics becoming associated with group membership with evangelicals specifically, such as conservative political views, which explains why they found that higher religiosity tends to decrease support for social welfare policy (Pelz and Smidt 2015:386).

My comparison of Protestants and Catholics is the most significant way to expand the application of this theory. I suggest that because, based on classic social theory, there seem to be essential differences between the social behavior of Catholics and Protestants. If Protestants are becoming more aligned with the political right through a changing social identity, I argue that Catholics will be less likely to have increasing or decreasing affiliation with any political movement during this time. One reason for this is my expansion of Weberian or Durkheimian

ideas about the differences in structure between Catholics and Protestants. First, that there is little room for social movement among Catholics. The religion has centralized power and authority structures, unlike Protestantism, which is split into many different denominations, including a large number of independent, nondenominational churches. Therefore, Catholicism is more regulated and has less room for new interpretations or emphases. Furthermore, the religion's emphasis on church tradition means that Catholic theology and beliefs are more likely to remain stable over time, whereas Protestantism was founded on reinterpretation. It makes more sense that the distant descendants of the Reformation would continue to be open to new ideas and emphases, while Catholics will prioritize tradition. Finally, Catholicism is a more global faith organizationally, with the chief authority, the Pope, living outside of the United States. In contrast, Protestant denominations, and especially independent churches, have very little governing them outside the United States. They may be more vulnerable to political influences affecting their social identity because there is little organizationally that would prohibit an American focus.

Therefore, because the social identity of Catholics is not very likely at all to have room for explicitly political ideology, it is unlikely that Catholics' support for social welfare policy will be able to be predicted by their religiosity. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

H5 : Religiosity will be an increasingly accurate predictor of a lack of support for social welfare policy among Protestants over time, but Catholics will exhibit little change.

In sum, there is historical and modern theory suggesting that there are differences between the social behavior of Catholics and Protestants. The organic connections model,

traditionally used to explain political behavior by saying there are just two fundamentally different kinds of people in the world, would suggest that all of those who attend church are more likely to be politically conservative. Social identity theory, as applied by Pelz and Smidt, suggests that religiosity will affect Protestant voting behavior when there is voting behavior implicit in group belonging (Pelz and Smidt 2015). I combine the two to argue that the organic connections model has not been consistent over recent American history among Protestants, but has grown stronger. As the connections between the political right and Protestants grew stronger throughout the eighties and nineties, into the 2000s, I theorize that an organic connection begins to emerge through social identity. In other words, as the evangelical movement began to influence Protestants, that social identity process began to create a seeming organic connection between Protestants and conservative political conditions, creating a sense that there are two fundamentally different kinds of people. However, by using Catholics as a comparison group, based on Weber and Durkheim, I hope to push back against the organic connections model, broadening the application of Pelz and Smidt's use of social identity theory.

Methods

To test these hypotheses, I analyze data from the General Social Survey (GSS), a nationwide study collected by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The GSS has been collected since 1972. It was collected annually until 1994 (excepting 1979, 1981, and 1992, due to budget shortage). The GSS conducts representative sampling aiming to represent the variety of opinions among American adults. Though the opinion questions vary with issues that are important year to year, every year includes basic demographics. Though the actual sample size varies greatly, the GSS aims for about 1500

interviews per year. Because of its long number of years available and its commitment to representative sampling, the GSS is ideal to map trends in American culture, particularly political and religious trends. The GSS is generally collected through in-person interviews. However, computers have increasingly been utilized to assist, and in 2021 the GSS used phone interviews and computer surveys because of COVID-19 (everything in this section is from Smith et al).

I measured religiosity by church attendance. It aligns well with my research question by using interaction with churches themselves, rather than a measure asking respondents about their subjective strength of affiliation, in order to look more directly at religiosity rather than ideas *about* religiosity. In the GSS, religiosity is measured on a nine-point scale ranging from "never" to "several times a week" (Smith et al 2014). I treated this as a numeric variable in my regressions.

Protestants and Catholics are determined using the "relig" variable, a self-reported measure asking respondents what their religion is. My regressions consider Protestants where relig=1 and Catholics, where relig=2. This was an integral part of understanding the relationship between religiosity and support for social welfare policy among my target group.

I also created an interaction term between church attendance and Protestants. This variable was created so that I could capture not only the effect of being a Protestant or church attendance on support for social welfare policy, but the two together.

I measured support for social welfare policy using a series of questions the GSS asks about people's evaluations of government spending on a variety of issues. There were three options—"two little," "about the right amount," and "too much" (Smith et al 2014). I specifically analyzed the question in this series asking about welfare policy. There are three different versions

of this question. Asked every year from 1974-2018 was "natfare," which asked participants, "We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on (WELFARE)?" (Smith et al 2014). Version Y, which asked about "assistance to the poor" instead of "welfare" was asked every year after 1984 (Smith et al 2014). There was a Z version, only asked in 1984, asking about "caring for the poor" (Smith et al 2014). I chose to index all of these together into one variable. While the wording is significantly different, in this case it is irrelevant. All of these questions are asked in the context of government interventions with the poor, therefore all test my basic question of whether religiosity will affect people's ideas about the government doing poverty relief. The question here is not the specific connotations of *how* the government is intervening, or more or less compassionate language, but *whether* religiosity will have any affect on how Christians think about support for social welfare policy.

I controlled for sex, age, race, poverty level, education level, and political affiliation in my regressions. To test my hypothesis, I conducted three linear regressions–one for each time period–with all my dependent and independent variables, and all my controls.

Results

Table 1: OLS Regression of Religiosity on Support for Social Welfare Policy, Pre-1980

	Pre-1980
Protestant	-.007
Attendance	.003
Interaction of Church Attendance	.004
Female	-.057***
Age	.002***
Black	-.605***
Other Race	.255*
Poverty	-.151***
Education	.016***
Political Affiliation	.073***

Data Source: GSS (see full citation at Smith et al 2014)

Notes: *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Model 1 $F(10, 5686)=64.57$, $p<.01$, $R^2=.10$) shows that after controlling for sex, age, race, poverty level, education level, and political affiliation, being a Protestant has no statistically significant effect on support for social welfare policy before 1980 ($\beta=-.01$, p=ns). Attendance of religious services also has no statistically significant effect on support for social welfare policy ($\beta=.004$, p=ns). The interaction term of Protestant's attendance of religious services also has no statistically significant effect before 1980 ($\beta=.004$, p=ns).

Table 2: OLS Regression of Religiosity on Support for Social Welfare Policy, 1980-1999

	1980-1999
Protestant	.061 *
Attendance	.005
Interaction of Church Attendance	-.001
Female	-.064***
Age	.002***
Black	-.416***
Other Race	-.128***
Poverty	-.056***
Education	.010***
Political Affiliation	.079***

Data Source: GSS (see full citation at Smith et al 2014)
Notes: *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Model 2 $F(10, 18953)=126.39$, $p<.01$, $R^2=.06$) shows that between 1980 and 1999, after controlling for sex, age, race, poverty level, education level, and political affiliation, being a Protestant has a statistically significant effect on support for social welfare policy ($\beta=.06$, $p<.05$). Attendance of religious services still has no statistically significant effect on support for social welfare policy ($\beta=.005$, p=ns). The interaction term also has no statistically significant effect ($\beta=-.002$, p=ns).

Table 3: OLS Regression of Religiosity on Support for Social Welfare Policy, Post-2000

	Post-2000
Protestant	-.037
Attendance	-.005
Interaction of Church Attendance	.014 **
Female	-.016
Age	-.00003
Black	-.296***
Other Race	-.066**
Poverty	-.148***
Education	.011***
Political Affiliation	.095***

Data Source: GSS (see full citation at Smith et al 2014)
Notes: *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Model 3 $F_{(10, 13375)}$=94.3, p<.01, R^2=.07) shows that after the year 2000, after controlling for sex, age, race, poverty level, education level, and political affiliation, being a Protestant once again has no statistically significant effect on support for social welfare policy (β=-.04, p=ns). Neither does attendance of religious services (β=-.01, p=ns). However, the interaction term of Protestants and religious services does have a statistically significant effect (β=.01, p<.05).

Taken together, these results tell an interesting story that provides insight into my question about whether religiosity affects support for social welfare policy, and whether that changes over time. Before 1980, none of my variables of interest (being a Protestant, religiosity, or the interaction between Protestants and religiosity) were able to predict support for social welfare policy. In 1980-1999, being a Protestant was able to predict lower rates of support for social welfare policy. Here, religiosity nor the interaction term matter for predicting support for social welfare policy. Finally, after 2000, neither being a Protestant nor religiosity matters for predicting support for social welfare policy. However, in this period, Protestants who attend church more often are more likely to have lower support for social welfare policy. These are true regardless of a respondent's sex, age, race, poverty level, education level, or political affiliation.

Discussion

Thus, religiosity can predict support for social welfare policy better over time. There are two potential explanations for why this is the case. The first is the mobilization of the political right as discussed in my theory section. This is especially important when considering that between 1980-1999, being a Protestant was able to predict lower rates of support for social welfare policy, regardless of the political affiliation of the respondent. This would make sense in light of Reagan's election, where Protestants, especially evangelical Protestants, began to be mobilized politically in a new way.

There is another, parallel process that could drive these results. Liberal Protestants could not be attending church anymore (Eastwood 2022). This is the idea of the "unchurched believer" studied by Michael Hout (see for example Hout 2017). This is consistent with GSS data. Table 1 shows the mean attendance of Protestants over their political affiliation before 1980, 1980-1999,

and after 2000. As time goes on, extremely conservative Protestants, on average, attend more church services. As time goes on, extremely liberal Protestants, on average, attend fewer church services. Therefore, there is a real indication that part of the increasing mobilization of Protestants and the political right could be due to liberal Christians attending church less. This makes sense in the context of social identity theory and the rise of the evangelical right. As low support for social welfare policy and general political conservatism become associated with being a Protestant, or are promoted in churches, Protestants who do not hold those political values may no longer feel a part of the group and no longer desire to be a part of it.

The best explanation for these results is to combine these two approaches. My original theory of increasing political mobilization as a result of the evangelical movement could explain the period from 1980-1999 where being a Protestant was able to predict lower support for social welfare policy. This would make sense in the wake of the Reagan era, where right-wing politicians first began intentionally creating ties with Protestants, especially evangelical Protestants. Then, as this process began, liberal Christians became turned off from the church and stopped attending as frequently, making church attendance a better predictor of rates of support for social welfare policy.

Another interesting finding here is that Protestants are only statistically significantly different from Catholics in terms of support for social welfare policy from 1980-1999. In no other time period are they significantly different. This is different from what we would expect based on Weber, Durkheim, and the theories built off of them. Perhaps social identity theory could illuminate this finding as well. Social identity theory argues that individuals will make choices along with the group if the group has defined or implied norms in that area, but that individuals do not feel pressure to conform to the group if group membership is not contingent

on that characteristic (Pelz and Smidt 2010:383). Perhaps Catholics do not have a defined group norm concerning support for social welfare policy, and therefore members shift with the tides of their political affiliations, resulting in their behaving similarly to Protestants before 1980 and after 2000.

While further research could explore this lack of distinction in economic beliefs between the two groups, there is a more basic conclusion we could draw here. Perhaps we ought not to so strictly apply theories from 19th century Germany to 20th and 21th century America. Weber was exploring the rise of capitalism, and Durkheim was trying to explain disparities in suicide rates. Their theories are extraordinarily helpful in supporting why we might expect differences between Protestants and Catholics, but as we see here, they ought not be considered necessarily directly applicable to the modern political and religious landscape in the United States. There is a need for the development of new theory to the relationship between American religions and political behavior rather than continuing to try to make applications from another time and place fit our context. Religions do have incredible staying power but, as we see in these results, can also change substantially over time.

Limitations

There are many limitations to this study. First, although part of the intrigue of this study was whether religious ideology or economic conservatism would be a better predictor of support for social welfare policy over time, this survey had no way to measure church teachings or the religious ideology of these particular Protestants and Catholics. It is unlikely, but unknowable by this study, whether perhaps the churches these Protestants attended hold some unorthodox version of Christianity that does not promote care for the poor. Perhaps those churches do not

believe that their faith calls for concern for the poor. This is unlikely, but a doctrine analysis study could be an important area of future study.

Second, and more importantly, this study is not able to capture Protestant support for means of caring for the poor outside of government aid. There is a significant chance that while Protestants (and Catholics) do not have high rates of support for social welfare policy, they might have high rates of supports for other kinds of poverty alleviation initiatives. GSS does have a charity variable asking respondents if they have done a variety of activities in the last twelve months, including "giving money to a charity" (Smith 2014). However, this variable was only asked four times, making it unable to be used in this analysis. A comparison of this kind, examining differences in Protestant religiosity and support for different kinds of interventions (government, nonprofit organizations, church aid, etc) is an area for future research.

Third, much of the theory behind my model specifically concerns the evangelical movement which is, as discussed, a particular kind of Protestants. While Pew Research has come up with a standardized measure of distinguishing evangelical Protestants from mainline Protestants (Wormald 2015), the measures they use such as born again experiences or seeking to share one's faith (Wormald 2015) were only available for four years of GSS data and did not allow for the longer term analysis with which this study was concerned. Therefore, while I suspect that the evangelical movement is a large explaining factor in the changes in the relationship between religiosity and support for social welfare policy over time, there is no way to actually measure the number of evangelicals in this group or flesh out further than speculation their particular effects. This is an area for further study that would help specify and add nuance to this analysis. More research is necessary to determine the exact degree to which evangelicals are an explaining factor in this analysis.

Despite these limitations, this work still contributes to the literature by establishing that between 1980 and 1999, being a Protestant was a predictor for social welfare policy, even when controlling for political affiliation. Furthermore, after the year 2000, Protestants who attend church more, regardless of political affiliation, are less likely to support social welfare policy. There are huge implications here for those who are concerned about the state of the poor. There is a need to begin to examine why support for social welfare policy can be predicted by religiosity, and what might be happening in churches to cause this trend. Because this voting block is so large and important, those doing work to understand and alleviate poverty in the United States would do well to consider how they can work with Protestants to improve the state of the poor.

Conclusion

The election of Donald Trump, largely by white evangelicals, brings forward how important the connections between religious identity and political behavior are. The literature suggests that Protestants are becoming increasingly politically affiliated over time because of the rise of the evangelical movement. My results show that between 1980 and 1999, the Reagan to Bush era, being a Protestant is able to predict lower support for social welfare policy. Then, after 2000 (the Bush to Trump era), while neither being a Prostestant nor religiosity is a good predictor of support for social welfare policy, those Protestants who attend church more often are significantly less likely to support social welfare policy over time. This indicates that there is a twofold process happening here. After the Reagan election, Protestants were mobilized to the political right, making being a Protestant a good predictor of lower support for social welfare policy. Over time, this effect goes away, and is replaced by the interaction of Protestants and

religiosity. Those Protestants who attend church more are significantly less likely to support social welfare policy over time. This suggests that as time goes on, liberal Christians stop going to church as frequently, supported by mean attendance tables in Table 1 in Appendix A. Therefore, the Protestants left attending church frequently are those who are more politically conservative.

These results contribute to answering a number of theoretical puzzles. The first is a test of classical sociological giants like Weber and Durkheim, who suggest that there is a fundamental difference between Catholics and Protestants (Collins and Makowsky 2010). While Protestants are different from Catholics in this study from 1980-1999, this is not consistent across time. It also confirms recent theories about the rise of the evangelical movement and affiliation with the political right. Here we can see evidence that a true affiliation is occurring rather than an organic connections framework.

These results also prompt us to consider the practical, political implications of this question. In our current time period, those Protestants who attend church more often are less likely to support social welfare policy. It is absolutely essential to understand exactly why these Christians do not support social welfare policy, and what kinds of interventions they do support. Mobilizing this large ethnoreligious group (Guth et al 2006) to care for (and vote for) the poor could have dramatically positive effects on the state of those experiencing poverty in the United States. Lives depend on continuing to understand the connections between religious affiliation, religiosity, and the poor.

APPENDIX A

Table 1: Mean Attendance for Protestants Across Political Affiliation
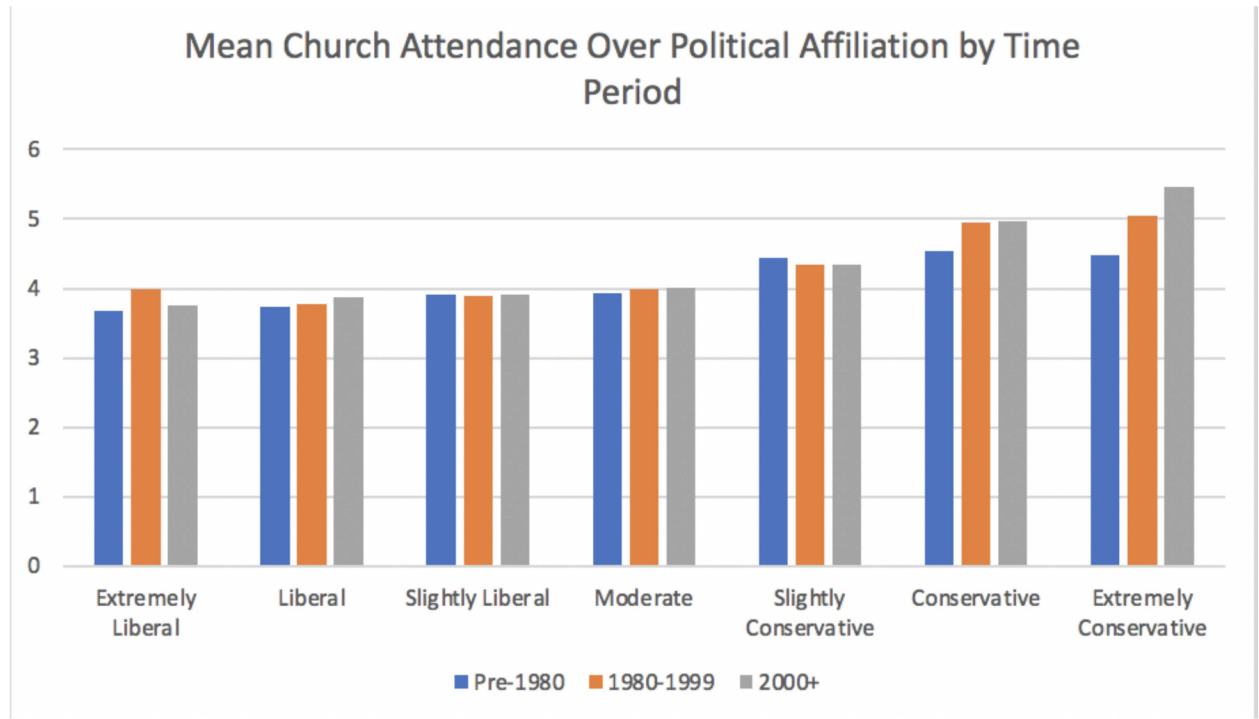
Data Source: GSS (see Smith et al 2014 for full citation)

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