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Religion, Politics, and Issue Polarization in the United States Congress, 1959–2013

Josiah R. Baker
Department of Financial Economics
Methodist University

Steven A. Tuch
Department of Sociology
The George Washington University

William V. D'Antonio
Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies
The Catholic University of America

Abstract

In this study we examine whether, and if so how, the confluence of religion and party has impacted voting in the U.S Congress over the past half century. We address two primary questions: first, has religion contributed to the growing political partisanship among members of Congress over this period, and second, if so, are these cleavages reflected in congressional voting patterns? We answer both questions in the affirmative.

Keywords: polarization in U.S. Congress, culture wars, orthodox and progressive religious worldviews
Słowa kluczowe: polaryzacja w Kongresie Stanów Zjednoczonych, wojny kulturowe, ortodoksyjne i postępowe światopoglądy religijne

Background

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the polarization resulting from the "culture wars" that arguably wracked American society during the latter part of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century[1]. According to proponents of the culture

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wars thesis, conflict over a wide range of social and cultural issues has become so divisive and intractable that compromise between opposing factions is rendered difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. As groups lacking the common ground necessary for compromise become increasingly polarized, some argue, effective governance is impeded.

What is at the core of this conflict and how, if at all, is religion implicated? In their voluminous studies of the sources of partisan polarization over the last several decades, political scientists have identified numerous factors thought to contribute to gridlock over policy issues among both elected officials and the public[2]. These include: "conflict extension", or simultaneous conflicts across several policy areas[3]; partisan "sorting" of the electorate into ideologically liberal (mostly Democratic) and ideologically conservative (mostly Republican) groups[4]; increasing racial and ethnic diversity and deepening cleavages over religion and moral values[5], and factors such as gerrymandering, the post-1960s realignment of southern political affiliations, redistricting, growing income inequality, and region of residence[6] among others.

As discussed below, although the role of religion in the growing partisan divide *among the mass public* has been extensively studied, what role, if any, religion plays in the deeply polarized U.S. Congress has been largely ignored. We argue that a deeper analysis of the role of religion in *elite* partisan politics is long overdue.

In *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991), James Davison Hunter argued that partisan cleavages reflect two opposing visions of the "good society", each with a fundamentally different religious worldview. The *orthodox* vision is grounded in a belief in a transcendent God and God-ordained values. According to this view, people need only obey the laws that God has provided – laws that are to be understood literally and accepted as inerrant. The *progressive* vision of the good society, on the other hand, sees truth as unfolding, as a goal to be sought through science and reason. This view emphasizes the human capacity to create moral codes that are not based exclusively on scripture. In short, the orthodox perspective treats

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[2] See: G.C. Layman, T.M. Carsey, J.M. Horowitz, *Party Polarization in American Politics*, "Annual Review of Political Science" 2006, no. 9, pp. 83–110; and for reviews: M.J. Hetherington, *Review Article: Putting Polarization in Perspective*, "British Journal of Political Science" 2009, no. 2 (39), pp. 413–448, http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=5106892 [accessed: 8.08.2009].

[3] G.C. Layman, T.M. Carsey, J.C. Green, R. Herrera, R. Cooperman, *Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics*, "American Political Science Review" 2010, no. 2 (104), pp. 324–346, http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=7793127 [accessed: 18.07.2010].

[4] M.P. Fiorina, S.J. Abrams, J.C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, London 2010; A.I. Abramowitz, K.L. Saunders, *Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate*, "The Journal of Politics" 1998, no. 3 (60), pp. 634–652, http://www.jstor.org/stable/info/2647642 [accessed: 6.08.2009].

[5] A.I. Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy*, New Haven 2011; *idem*, *The Polarized Public*, London 2012.

[6] *Negotiating Agreement in Politics. Report of the Task Force on Negotiating Agreement in Politics*, J. Mansbridge, C.J. Martin (eds.), Washington 2013 (report of American Political Science Association), http://www.apsanet.org/media/PDFs/Publications/MansbridgeTF_FinalDraft.pdf [accessed: 12.07.2013].

the Bible as historical, not allegorical, while the progressive vision views truth not as God-given but as a goal to be sought through reason and lived experience[7].

The culture wars thesis has not gone unchallenged. Critics have noted that, with only a few exceptions, public opinion data from the last quarter of the 20th century do not show evidence of increased attitudinal polarization among the American public consistent with Hunter's arguments[8]. However, one of the exceptions is among political party identifiers, with Republicans and Democrats often on opposite sides of divisive social issues. DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson concluded that "Our findings – that the social attitudes of groups in civil society have converged at the same time that attitudes of party identifiers have polarized – raise troubling questions about the role of political parties in a pluralistic society"[9].

In this study we address the issue of culture wars and polarization by focusing on the voting behavior of political elites, in this case members of Congress. We ask if there is any evidence in the voting patterns of the U.S. Congress of Hunter's two opposing visions of the good society. Our analytic approach is two – fold: first, we examine congressional roll call votes in three specific areas – defense spending, taxes, and welfare spending – between 1969 and 2013; and second, we analyze roll call votes on **all** legislative issues over the same time period in order to determine whether voting on defense, welfare, and taxes are exemplars of congressional voting more generally or are, rather, uniquely polarizing issues.

The first book to systematically examine whether the religious beliefs of members of the U.S. Congress impact their voting behavior was Peter Benson and Dorothy Williams' *Religion on Capitol Hill*[10]. Based on interviews conducted in 1978 with a sample of 80 legislators randomly selected from the 535 members of the House and Senate, Benson and Williams found that the overwhelming majority were Christians who claimed that their religious beliefs and values influenced their voting on at least some legislative issues. Nearly all affirmed a belief in God and in the historical accuracy of the Bible. Benson and Williams concluded that: "Religious belief should join some of the more recognized factors, like party affiliation and constituent pressure, as forces that bear on political behavior... Knowing how members [...] [think about] religious themes can tell us as much or more about how they will vote than knowing whether they are Republican or Democrat"[11]. Despite Benson and Williams' now

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[7] J.D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York 1991; *idem*, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture War*, New York 1994.

[8] P. DiMaggio, J. Evans, B. Bryson, *Have Americans' Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?*, "American Journal of Sociology" 1996, no. 102, pp. 690-775, http://educ.jmu.edu/~brysonbp/pubs/PBJ.pdf [accessed: 21.07.2009]; J. Evans, B. Bryson, P. DiMaggio, *Opinion Polarization: Important Contributions, Necessary Limitations*, "American Journal of Sociology" 2001, no. 4 (106), pp. 944–59, http://educ.jmu.edu//~brysonbp/pubs/PBJreply.pdf [accessed: 19.07.2009]; T. Mouw, M.E. Sobel, *Culture Wars and Opinion Polarization: The Case of Abortion*, "American Journal of Sociology" 2001, no. 106, pp. 913–43, http://www.unc.edu/~tedmouw/papers/mouw%20opinion%20polarization.pdf [accessed: 23.07.2009].

[9] P. DiMaggio, J. Evans, B. Bryson, *op.cit.*, pp. 738.

[10] P.L. Benson, D.L. Williams, *Religion on Capitol Hill*, San Francisco 1982.

[11] *Ibidem*, pp. 164–165.

three decades old admonition, there remains today insufficient scholarly attention to the role of religion in political polarization.

Beginning in the late 1970s, just prior to Ronald Reagan's election to the U.S. presidency in 1980, Conservative Protestants, especially Evangelical Christians, became politically energized and began to align themselves with the Republican Party. Reagan encouraged this realignment during his campaign for the presidency and nurtured it throughout his two terms as president (1981–1989). Catholic Republicans also became a force within the Republican Party in this period, dramatically increasing their numbers in both the House and Senate. What other changes in the religious affiliations of members of Congress have occurred since the 1960s? Have these changes contributed to the increasing partisan polarization in congressional voting behavior? Is the Republican Party the only party with religiously grounded worldviews, or is there evidence that the political ideology of the Democratic Party is also grounded in religious beliefs?[12] Has Hunter's thesis of two distinct visions of the good society become a reality in the U.S. Congress? These are the questions that we address in this study.

Methodology and Analysis

Our goals are, first, to examine key roll call votes in the House and Senate over the period 1959–2013 focusing on three high profile, politically charged issues selected from a list of seventeen key votes in Barone and Ujifusa (1972–2012), *The Almanac of American Politics*[13] (volumes 1972 to 2012): defense spending, tax cuts, and welfare spending; and second, to expand the analysis to include the totality of roll call votes over the same period. In order to accomplish these goals we used a variety of sources to compile a data set that includes the name, political party, self-reported religious affiliation, and state or district represented of every member of Congress over this timeframe. We classified members into four major religious groups: Mainline Protestant, Conservative Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish[14].

We begin by examining the changing religious composition of Congress over the period 1959–2013. As shown in Table 1, substantial changes in the religious affiliations of members of the Senate occurred between 1959 and 2013. Among Catholic Senators, Democrats increased from 12 in 1959 to 18 in 2013; the corresponding increase among Republican Senators was from zero Catholics in 1959 to 9 in 2013.

[12] We refer specifically to the Abrahamic tradition of social justice. In Genesis chapters 15 and 16 Abraham is sitting in his tent on a hot day when he sees three strangers walking in the sun. Instead of turning his back on them, he welcomes them into the tent, providing water and a meal. This is the beginning of the Jewish tradition of "welcoming the stranger", which is also reflected in the teachings of Jesus as "love thy neighbor". This does not mean that all Democrats are consciously aware of the Abrahamic tradition, only that their socialization – as Jews, Catholics, Mainline Protestants, black Protestants, or in other religions – instills this tradition in their lives.

[13] M. Barone, G. Ujifusa, *The Almanac of American Politics*, Washington, DC 1972–2012.

[14] For the specific religious denominations that constitute each of the Protestant groups, see W.V. D'Antonio, S.A. Tuch, J.R. Baker, *Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religiopolitical Conflict is Changing Congress and American Democracy*, Lanham 2013.

Conservative Protestant Senators, though virtually unchanged in overall number, have nearly reversed their party representation from 14 Democrats and 4 Republicans in 1959 to 14 Republicans and 3 Democrats in 2013. Mainline Protestants, on the other hand, accounted for almost the entire decline in representation in the Senate over this time frame, constituting 64% of the Senate in 1959 but only 38% in 2013. Today, Catholic Democrats outnumber Mainline Protestant Democrats in the Senate while the majority of Mainline Protestants are Republican. The decline in Mainline Protestants also affected Republicans – in 1969, during the Nixon administration, there were 41 Mainline Protestant Republicans but only 8 from the South. In the 113th Congress, there are only 22 Mainline Protestant Republicans, 13 from Southern states. Aside from the increased Southern presence, some Mainline Protestant Senators in the Midwest and in the Mountain states also maintain strong affiliations with Conservative Protestants and are effectively "Evangelical Mainline Protestants". Some of these Senators profess beliefs similar to those of G.W. Bush, who is "born again", yet still self-identify as Mainline Protestants. The traditional Mainline Protestant Republicans, who were moderate in their politics, are fewer in number and less influential within the party. Missing from the Senate today are senators such as John Warner, John Danforth, Nancy Kassebaum, and Robert Dole who worked across party lines.

Table 1: Religious Makeup of U.S. Senate, between 1959 and 2013*

	86th Congress (1959–60)				**113th Congress (2013–14)**			
	(D)	**(R)**	**Total**		**(D)**	**(R)**	**Total**	
	#	**#**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**#**	**#**	**%**
Catholics	12	0	12	12	18	9	27	27
Mainline Prot.	34	30	64	64	16	22	38	38
Conservative Prot.	14	4	18	18	3	14	17	17
Jews	1	1	2	2	10	0	10	10
	61	35	96	96**	47	45	92	92***

* The figures do not add up to 100% because not all members of Congress self-identify with one of these four groups.

** In the 86th Congress, 4 senators said "Protestant, Christian, or other".

*** In the 113th Congress, 1 Democrat gave "no religious affiliation"; 7 other Democrats said "Protestant or Christian".

Among Jews, representation in the Senate increased exclusively for Democrats, from one in 1959 to 10 in 2013[15]. In 1959, there was one Jewish Republican senator. Today, there are none.

[15] There is an eleventh Jewish senator, Sanders of Vermont, who is an independent, but almost always votes with Democrats.

As shown in Table 2, the House witnessed similar but not identical changes in the religious affiliations of its members between 1959 and 2013. Among Catholic Democrats there was little change in numbers, from 76 in 1959 to 73 in 2013. However, Catholic Republicans increased dramatically, from 14 to 61, during this period, reflecting a political split among American Catholics that did not exist in previous years. Among Conservative Protestants in the House the shift to Republicans was less obvious due to the increasing number of black Protestants in the Democratic Party. These African Americans, new to the Democratic Party following the 1964 and 1965 voting rights acts, are among the most progressive voters in Congress despite the conservative theology of their churches. If we were to sort for race we would see a departure during this period of white Conservative Protestants from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, especially in the South.

Table 2: Religious Makeup of U.S. House of Representatives, between 1959 and 2013*

	86th Congress (1959–60)				**113th Congress (2013–14)**			
	(D)	**(R)**	**Total**		**(D)**	**(R)**	**Total**	
	#	**#**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**#**	**#**	**%**
Catholics	76	14	90	21	75	61	136	31
Mainline Prot.	137	113	250	57	46	80	126	29
Conservative Prot.	46	11	57	13	31	55	86	20
Jews	9	1	10	2	21	1	22	5
	268	139	407	93**	173	197	370	85***

* The figures do not add up to 100% because not all members of Congress self-identify with one of these four groups.

** In the 86th Congress, 28 members, both Democrats and Republicans, said either “Protestant or Christian”.

*** In the 113th Congress, 2 Democrats were Muslim, 1 Buddhist, 1 Hindu, 1 said “no religion”, and the others said “Protestant or Christian or other”.

It is clear that, among House Republicans, Conservative Protestants have greatly increased their voice, constituting 55 members in 2013 from only 14 in 1959. With the exception of African Americans, however, Conservative Protestants have a substantially decreased presence in the Democratic Party in the House. Jews also substantially increased their membership in the House, from only 5 in 1959 to 22 in 2013. With the exception of Eric Cantor of Virginia, however, all of them are Democrats. This is intriguing because approximately 30 to 35 percent of American Jews are Republicans, or tend to vote Republican, yet they are sparsely represented in Congress. Finally, Mainline Protestant representation dropped to 35% in 2013, down from 57% of all House members in 1959. This decline, which also occurred in the Senate, was much more dramatic among Democrats. While Mainline Protestants may

persist in greater numbers among Republicans, many of them profess to be "born again" and publicly align themselves with Conservative Protestants despite retaining their original religious identities.

Implications of Compositional Changes in Congress

As discussed above, the religious composition of Congress has changed significantly over the past half century. The House has seen increases in Republican Catholics, Democratic Jews, and black Protestants; in the Senate there have been increases in Republican and Democratic Catholics as well as Baptists, Mormons, and other orthodox groups who have had a growing influence within the Republican Party. Mainline Protestants have lost half the number they held in the 1959 House, and about 4 in 10 of their Senate seats. Because Senators have longer terms and tend to be older than House members, it is likely that further declines among Mainline Protestants will occur in the Senate, eventually reflecting the membership trends in the House. Meanwhile, Democrats have added three Buddhists, two Muslims, one Hindu, and several others who state no religious affiliations – all mirroring the changing religious composition of the country itself.

What differences do these changes in Congressional religious composition make in legislative voting patterns? To answer this question we used Barone and Ujifusa's *Almanac of American Politics* to examine all roll call votes that came before the House and Senate beginning in 1969 and ending with the Health Care Bill of 2009–10. From this voluminous database we analyzed three key issues: defense spending, tax cuts, and welfare spending. Barone's key votes are widely considered by congressional scholars as the most critical legislative decisions in each congressional session.

In recent decades, the Republican Party has been associated with strong opposition to welfare spending and support of defense spending and lower taxes; Democrats, on the other hand, are seen as in support of welfare spending, tax increases, and defense spending cuts in order to bolster social programs. Our examination of these issues is designed to ascertain, first, if and when signs of polarization across parties can be identified; and second, if and when particular religious denominations within parties deviated from the party voting line. We present our findings regarding defense spending, tax cuts, and welfare spending in turn.

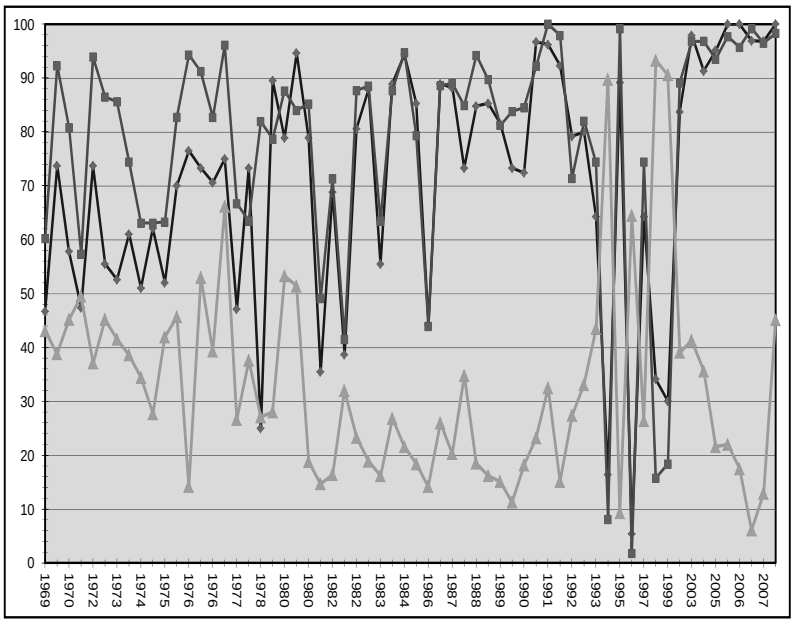

Figure 1: U.S. House Votes, Defense Spending Blue = Catholic Republicans Red = Other Republicans Light Green = Democrats

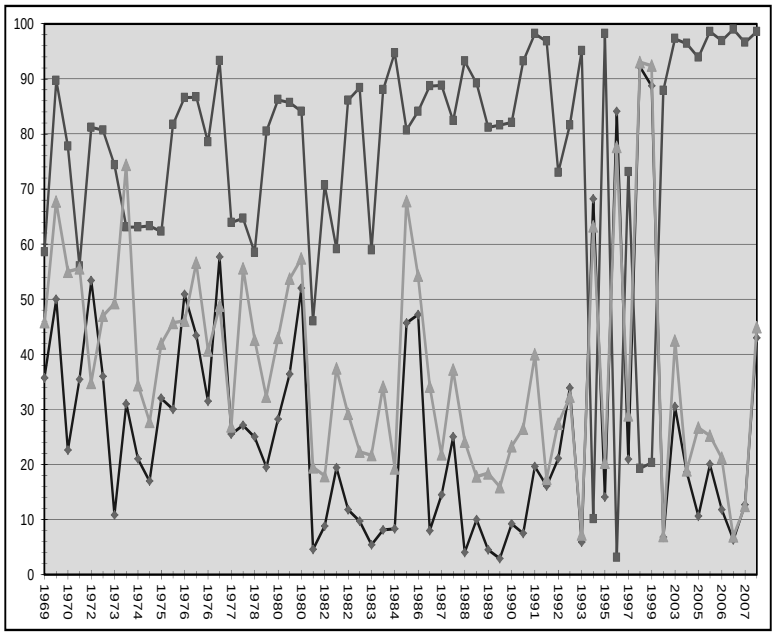

Figure 2: U.S. House Votes, Defense Spending Blue = Catholic Democrats Red = Republicans Light Green = Other Democrats

Defense Spending: Republican Catholics v. Republican Party

House Catholic Republicans did not always vote in lockstep with the Republican Party on defense spending. During the Vietnam years, Catholic Republicans offered far less support for funding the war effort than other Republicans. Later, this same pattern emerged in the 1980s over votes that included funding war efforts in historically Catholic countries in Latin America such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Guatemala, and Cuba. Also, many Catholic Republicans voted for nuclear freezes, or voted against the development of nerve gas or chemical weapons. This suggests that the social teachings of the Catholic Church along with a common concern for fellow Catholic countries contributed to a departure from the party line. However, by the late 1990s, there was very little difference in voting between Catholic Republicans and the larger Republican Party. Since the votes have not focused on weapons development or wars in Catholic countries, it would seem that the party has overcome the difference or that the votes may reflect a new and more conservative Catholic view that has found its way into the Republican Party.

Defense Spending: Democrat Catholics v. Democratic Party

The trend for less support of defense spending is also evident among House Catholic Democrats compared to the Democratic Party overall. Figure 3 shows consistently less support for defense spending among Catholic Democrats. This was clear during the Vietnam War years but also in the 1980s on votes that included funding war efforts in historically Catholic countries. Also, more Catholic Democrats voted for nuclear freezes, or voted against the development of nerve gas or chemical weapons. These results suggest that the social teachings of the Catholic Church along with a common concern for fellow Catholic countries contributed to less support for defense spending than among other Democrats. By the late 1990s, the difference decreased but is still fairly evident. Some of the reduction in voting differences may be attributed, again, to issue changes in the votes in that they have not focused on weapon development or targeting military expenditures in Catholic countries. Since 2001, many defense spending votes have focused on Islamic or non-Catholic countries.

Tax Cuts: Mainline Protestant Democrats v. Democratic Party

Among Barone's selected tax votes were included regulatory and budget changes that had indirect or implicit tax consequences. Although the Congressional Record shows that in almost all legislative sessions there were far more bills consisting of tax increases than tax decreases, they did not receive as much media and public attention, leading Barone to exclude them as "key votes". Often, these tax increase bills were gradual or perceived as insignificant while tax cuts were usually proportionately

larger. A partisan split exists in that many Republicans deliberately seek media attention while pursuing tax cuts while few Democrats want such attention while trying to increase taxes. Therefore, most of these votes consist of explicit tax cuts rather than direct or indirect tax increases.

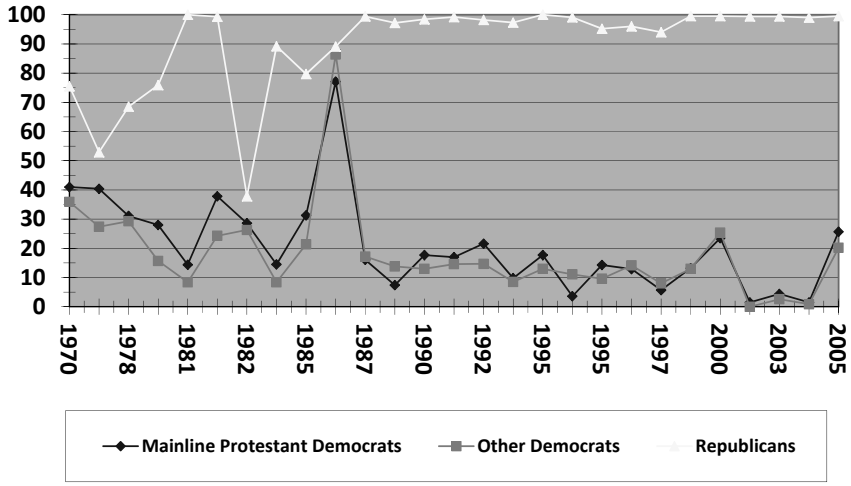

Figure 3: Percent in Favor of Tax Cuts, U.S. House

Among Democrats in Figure 3 we see, unexpectedly, that Mainline Protestants were the most consistent and most likely of all Democrats to support legislation with tax cuts. Prior to the mid-1980s the voting discrepancy between Mainline Protestant Democrats and other Democrats was greater and consistent. This may be partly attributed to the larger numbers of Southern Democrats who were Mainline Protestants during that time period. Between 1959 and 2013, Southern Mainline Protestant Democrats substantially declined proportionately and in their overall number. Much had happened to the South, which included changing demographics (i.e., many more Catholics and Jews migrating to the region), the full impact of the Civil Rights Movement, and the overall decline of Mainline Protestants[16]. In this time period there was only one tax vote that was supported by more than 50% of Democrats. This was the 1986 tax reform bill that consisted of lowering marginal income tax rates while eliminating many tax deductions and closing some corporate tax loopholes. The vote was championed by a compromise between a Catholic, Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL), and Bob Packwood (R-OR), a moderate Mainline Protestant Republican Senator.

[16] According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the South was either the fastest or second fastest growing region, receiving many people from the North and the Midwest who were not Mainline Protestants.

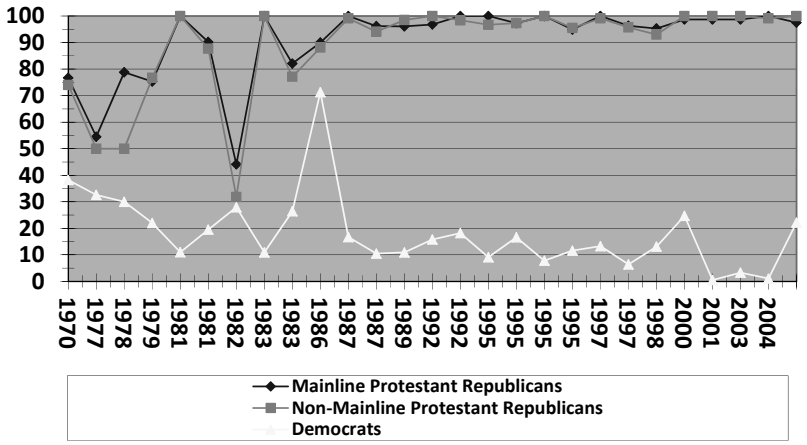

Figure 4: Percentage in Favor of Tax Cuts, U.S. House

Among Republicans in Figure 4 we detected almost no difference between Mainline Protestants and other Republicans on tax cut votes. Although there was relatively less support for tax cuts or opposition to tax increases prior to the mid-1980s, nearly all Republicans subsequently supported tax cuts, eliminating any noticeable variation between the religious groups. Mainline Protestant Republicans nearly mirrored the Republican Party overall. Given that Mainline Protestant among Democrats were more accepting of tax cuts than other Democrats, it might be that the religious beliefs of Mainline Protestants has some influence in both parties (with tax cuts becoming a core value within the Republican Party).

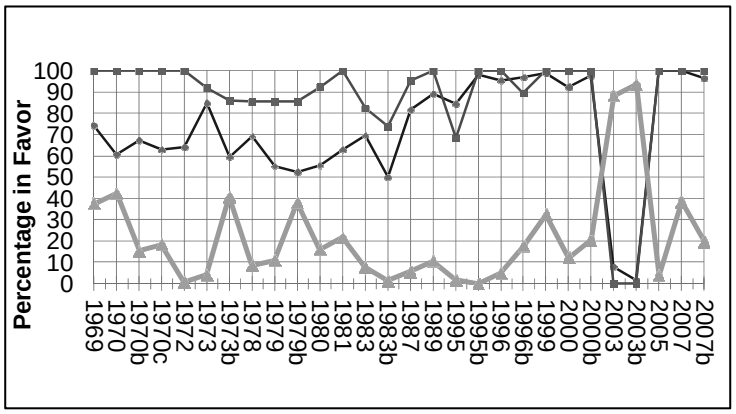

Figure 5: U.S. House Votes on Welfare Spending Blue = Other Democrats Red = Jewish Democrats Light Green = Republicans

As Figure 5 above indicates Jewish Democrats were consistently much more supportive of welfare spending bills than other Democrats. This trend continued even while the proportion of Jewish Democrats in the House more than doubled during this time. Polarization of welfare spending votes began to peak between Republicans and Democrats during the Reagan era, and has continued. There are two votes that stand out which illustrate a Republican form of proactive welfare spending. The first was for a prescription plan attached to Medicare to help offset medication costs for the elderly and the second was a vote for private school vouchers which would give low income children education subsidies to attend a private school. Democrats, including Jewish Democrats, overwhelmingly voted against the bill, very likely a reflection of their parties' special interests with the teachers' unions. In the case of the Medicare vote, the vote against the bill was based on Republicans passing the bill without funding it with tax increases, meaning that additional debt or future cuts in other programs would pay for the legislation.

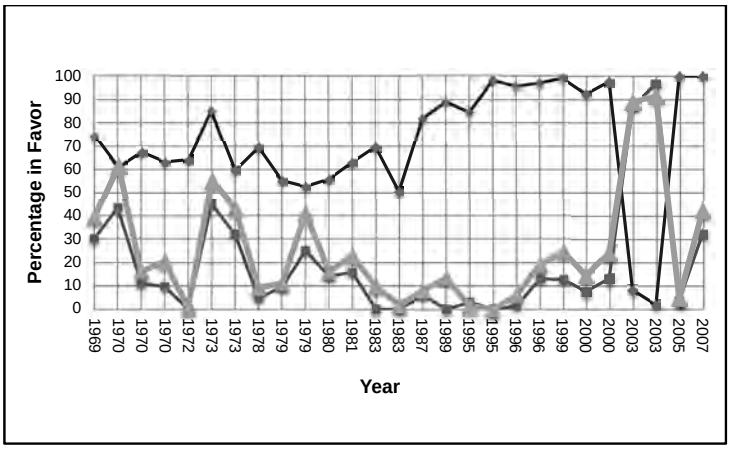

Figure 6: U.S. House Votes on Welfare Spending Blue = Democrats Red = Conservative Protestant Republicans Light Green = Other Republicans

Figure 6 shows how Conservative Protestant Republicans were less likely than other Republicans to support welfare spending. Among all groups, Conservative Protestant Republicans were the most polarized from Jewish Democrats. Although Republican support for welfare spending rarely crossed the fifty percent threshold, Conservative Protestant Republicans were consistently less supportive and never reached the fifty percent mark with the exception of the two proactive Republican welfare initiative votes on a prescription plan for Medicare and school vouchers. Among Republicans, it is important to note that this trend continued despite Conservative Protestant Republicans having increased in number by a factor of five between 1959 and 2013. Even with the two Republican initiatives, Conservative Protestants were

slightly less supportive of the Medicare prescription. For the school vouchers, which would generally subsidize private Christian schools, there was more support from Conservative Protestants.

Examining All Roll Call Votes

In this part of our analysis we examine whether issues such as defense and welfare spending and taxes are uniquely polarizing or, rather, exemplars of a broader trend in congressional voting behavior[17]. In order to address this question we examine **all** roll call votes between 1969 and 2010, encompassing the 91st through the 111th congressional sessions.

Examining all rather than a small subset of roll call votes requires a different analytic strategy than above. Here we utilize Poole's (1998) Common Space NOMINATE scores as a quantitative measure of overall legislator ideology[18]. Common space scores provide a measure of ideology by independently scaling each member's roll call votes in a given congressional session. Ideology is represented in two-dimensional space, the first dimension of which captures a liberal-conservative split, with positive scores indicating more conservative ideology and negative scores indicating more liberal ideology[19].

Table 3. Conservative Protestants by Chamber and Party, 1970–2010

House	Democrats	Republicans
1970s*	19.0	17.8
1980s	16.7	20.0
1990s	20.0	27.3
2000s	18.6	30.1

Senate	Democrats	Republicans
1970s	19.9	20.8
1980s	16.5	22.7
1990s	10.1	22.4
2000s	9.1	26.3

* Includes the 91st Congress

[17] For an in-depth discussion of the issues discussed in this section see S.A. Tuch, A. Mark, *Does Religion Transcend Social Issue Voting? The Relationship Between Religion and Congressional Ideology* [in:] W.V. D'Antonio, S.A. Tuch, J.R. Baker, *op.cit.*, chapter 6.

[18] K.T. Poole, *Recovering a Basic Space from a Set of Issue Scales*, "American Journal of Political Science" 1998, no. 42, pp. 954–993.

[19] The first dimension closely approximates D-NOMINATE values. Congressional scholars use several different NOMINATE scaling measures, but for our purposes the Common Space measure is the most appropriate because it allows comparisons across chambers and time.

Table 3 summarizes changes between 1969 and 2010 in the representation of Conservative Protestants in the House (top panel) and Senate (bottom panel) separately by party[20]. Among Democrats, the percentage of Conservative Protestants in the House fluctuated slightly over this 40-year period, but increased substantially among Republicans – from 17.8 percent to 30.1 percent. In the Senate, analogously, Conservative Protestants saw their representation decline by more than half among Democrats – from 19.9 percent to 9.1 percent – while registering a 5.5 percent gain among Republicans. Thus, over-time change in the proportion of members affiliated with Conservative Protestant religious denominations occurred in both chambers, though in opposite directions – declining among Democrats (especially in the Senate) and increasing among Republicans (in both the House and Senate).

Table 4. Average Ideology Scores by Chamber and Party, 1970–2010

House	**Democrats**	**Republicans**
1970s*	–.3025	.2717
1980s	–.3189	.3303
1990s	–.3675	.3832
2000s	–.4048	.4321

Senate	**Democrats**	**Republicans**
1970s	–.3063	.2619
1980s	–.3074	.3248
1990s	–.3238	.3506
2000s	–.3289	.3814

* Includes the 91st Congress

Table 4 shows that Democrats in both the House and Senate increased their liberal voting tendencies from 1970 to 2010, with average ideology scores ranging from –.3025 to –.4048 in the House and from –.3063 to –.3289 in the Senate. The trend among Republicans was in the opposite direction, one of steady increases in conservative voting, from .2717 to .4321 in the House and from .2619 to .3814 in the Senate. These scores also indicate that the pace of ideological change differed by party. House Republicans became more conservative at a faster pace than their Democratic counterparts became more liberal. The comparable figures for Senate Republicans and Democrats reveal the same pattern.

[20] Independents are included in the party with which they caucus.

Table 5. Correlations Between Ideology and Religion, by Decade

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Total
Catholic*	–0.243*	–0.1514*	–0.1562*	–0.1801*	–0.172*
Jewish	–0.153*	–0.166*	–0.233*	–0.253*	–0.205*
Liberal Protestant	0.142*	0.090*	0.119*	0.144*	0.111*
Moderate Protestant	0.106*	0.094*	0.068*	0.061*	0.077*
Conservative Protestant	0.057*	0.078*	0.125*	0.165*	0.117*

* Coded 1 for Catholics, 0 otherwise; and analogously for the other religious groups

Although we cannot unequivocally attribute the increase in liberal voting among Democrats to the departure of Conservative Protestants from their ranks, nor the increase in conservative voting among Republicans to the influx of Conservative Protestants into their ranks, the correlations between ideology and religion displayed in Table 5 suggest that such an attribution is plausible. The correlation between religion and (liberal) ideology was strongest for Catholic legislators in the 1970s and for Jewish legislators in every decade since, as well as over the entire timeline. Analogously, the correlation between religion and (conservative) ideology was strongest for Conservative Protestants in the two most recent decades, as well as overall. Moreover, between the 1970s and 2000s, the magnitudes of the correlations increased monotonically among Jews and, since the 1980s, among Catholics; among Moderate Protestants the correlations monotonically decreased; and among Conservative Protestants and, since the 1980s, Liberal Protestants, they monotonically increased.

Table 6. Average Polarization Scores by Chamber, 1970–2010

	House	Senate
1970s*	.5742	.5682
1980s	.6492	.6322
1990s	.7507	.6744
2000s	.8369	.7103

* Includes the 91st Congress

What is the extent of polarization between Democrats and Republicans when all roll call votes are analyzed? What has been the trend since the 1970s? Table 6 displays trends in ideological polarization by chamber. Polarization scores were calculated by subtracting the average Common Space score among Democrats from the average score among Republicans in each decade[21]. The differences show steady increases in

[21] Taking the difference of party means is a common way to illustrate polarization in the House and Senate; see http://voteview.com/politicall_polarization.asp [accessed: 12.07.2013].

polarization within and across chambers since 1969. In the House, polarization ranged from a low of .5742 in the 1970s to a high of .8369 in the 2000s, a range of .2627; the corresponding figures in the Senate were .5682 and .7103, a range of .1421. As Poole notes, polarization in both chambers has not been higher since Reconstruction ended.

In this section we broadened our focus to include a measure that aggregates all roll call votes between 1969 and 2010 in an effort to determine if the impact of religion extends beyond such contentious issues as defense spending, taxes, and welfare. Our goal was, first, to examine whether the religious affiliations of members of Congress are correlated with their overall voting behavior and, second, to determine if religion has contributed to the growing partisan polarization in Congress over the past four decades. Our answer to both of these questions is yes. Below, we address some implications of our work.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our findings extend a small but growing literature on congressional voting behavior that highlights religion as one factor among many in contributing to partisan polarization (see, for example, Asmussen, 2011)[22]. Our analysis shows that over the past four decades members of Conservative Protestant religious denominations have increased their representation in the Republican Party while declining in number in the Democratic Party. We have argued that this influx of Conservative Protestant members into the Republican ranks, and their simultaneous departure from the Democratic ranks, has increased issue polarization between the parties. Similarly, over the same time period, Mainline Protestants have left the ranks of the Republican Party. These members traditionally emphasized the responsibility of government to promote the common good, which often meant working across party lines to achieve compromises that insured that the political center would hold. Senator John Danforth viewed himself and many of his colleagues in that context. Today, these kinds of moderate Republicans are fewer in number and less influential within the party in both the House and the Senate.

A majority of Republicans see moral responsibility for the disadvantaged as residing at the local, not the state or national, levels, reflecting, we argue, an orthodox view of the world. On the Democratic side, the teachings of the Mainline Protestant churches, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and others who urge government officials to serve the poor and needy persist. Thus, we argue that the political ideologies of both parties are grounded in religion: Republicans in a Bible-centered orthodoxy that emphasizes traditional family values, opposes same-sex marriage, high taxes, and government funding of poverty programs, and Democrats in their support of welfare spending, same-sex marriage, and tax increases, which grounds Democrats in the Abrahamic tradition. Congressional scholars would do well to consider the role of religion in future studies of polarization.

[22] N. Asmussen, *Polarized Protestants: A Confessional Explanation for Party Polarization* (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle – Washington 2011).