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Politics in My Good Christian Suburbs: How Christian Right Organizing in the Greater Chicago Area Continues Down a Path of Self-Destruction

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Acknowledgements:

Karen Armstrong, in *A History of God,* writes that "religion starts with the perception that something is wrong"[1] – a beginning not unlike that of Prof. Clayton Harris III's theory of good public policy: the identification of some "social ill", some state of affairs that those with power or influence deem as "wrong" and seek to change. The intertwining of public policy and religion may ruffle some feathers and conjure up arguments over Thomas Jefferson's "Letter to the Danbury Baptists", but it cannot be denied that both disciplines wield incredible power to change the world.

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Public Policy and Religious Studies Departments for pushing me, intentionally or not, down this path of realization and, hopefully, towards an illustrative thesis. I'd like to thank Sol Lee, my preceptor, for helping me through this process, and thank Dr. Curtis J. Evans, my second reader, whose class on Religion and the Civil Rights movement fundamentally changed how I look at the world. A huge thank you to all the politicos and members of the clergy who let me pepper them with questions over the past few months, and my friends who helped me reckon through some of the finer points. Thank you to the Institute of Politics for connecting me with some politicians who have left office and were a little harder to track down. Though it's tangential, I want to thank Jack Jenkins, whose Twitter account gave me a whole bunch of ideas for this bad boy. Finally, a great deal of thanks to my mother for supporting me since I was at Round Hill.

[1] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, Vintage, London: 1999, p43.

Abstract

Since Jerry Falwell's Christian Right broke onto the national stage in the U.S. election of 1980, American politicians and prognosticators have treated the white evangelical community as a powerful bloc of voters and activists. However, the stocks of the Christian Right organizations that are heirs to Falwell's movement have fallen in recent years. This paper examines the ability of Christian Right organizations and white evangelical communities to affect political outcomes in the Chicago suburbs. I draw upon a body of literature focused on evangelical Protestants' high rates of volunteerism and their propensity to support the Republican Party in order to establish an expected high level of political involvement and coordination between more politically-oriented Christian Right organizations and the evangelical community. However, through an analysis of endorsement and fundraising trends, combined with qualitative interviews of clergy and political candidates, I find a reality in the suburbs of Chicago that deviates from this expectation. Though a spirit of civic involvement does exist within the evangelical community, there too exists a dissatisfaction with Christian Right organizations. Coupled with an observed lack of volunteers from said organizations for any but a handful of conservative Christian politicians, these factors reveal a low level of ability of Christian Right organizations to affect political outcomes in their favor. The findings of my suburban case study add another element the findings of Djupe (2018), who asserted that areas with increased salience of Christian Right organizations may face reduced evangelical growth rates: even in areas of increasing evangelical growth like the Chicago suburbs, perceived extremism from Christian Right organizations may still push those who remain members of the evangelical community away from the Republican Party. Christian Right organizations should therefore pivot to focusing on municipal-level issues or face the potential that Democratic candidates may peel their voters away from the Republican Party base.

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Introduction

A little under thirty miles west of Chicago, nestled between suburban McMansions, commuter rail lines, and the many, many acres of the DuPage Forest Preserve, there is a college – a small, liberal arts institution that each year graduates some six hundred students – that has played an outsized role in American politics and policy. Founded on the eve of the Civil War by staunch abolitionists, this college had become "the center of a new evangelical movement"[2] by 1940, and it grew to new and greater heights on the coattails of its most famous alumnus: William Franklin "Billy" Graham Jr., class of 1943. Today, Wheaton College's Billy Graham Center provides its students – and those who visit from around the country – with a history of Graham's evangelism and the man himself, he who had "preached the [Christian] gospel to more people around the globe than anyone in history,"[3] including every president from Harry Truman to Barack Obama.

The religious history of Chicagoland is long and storied, evangelical or otherwise. Beyond the roots of Billy Graham's international empire in the heart of DuPage County, Chicago's "collar counties", Lake, Kane, Will, McHenry, and DuPage – so named because they form a "collar" around Cook County to the north, west, and south – are home to some of the largest evangelical megachurches in the United States. South Barrington's Willow Creek Community Church – the first megachurch in the United States[4] – continues to average 24,000 congregants every weekend[5], and other evangelical churches number among the fastest growing in the nation.

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[2] Daniel K. Williams *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK: 2010, p22.
[3] Barry M Hortsman, "Man with a Mission," *Cincinnati Post*, 11/28/2008. https://web.archive.org/web/20081203122410/http://cincinnati.com/billygraham/p_man.html, accessed 12/02/19.
[4] Robert Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How American Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Simon & Schuster, New York, NY: 2012, p113.
[5] Emily McFarlan Miller, "As Christmas nears, Willow Creek hopes for a fresh start," *Religion News Service*, 12/19/2018. https://religionnews.com/2018/12/19/as-christmas-nears-willow-creek-hopes-for-a-fresh-start/, accessed 12/04/19.

All in all, 906 evangelical congregations called the collar counties home in 2010, an increase of 125% since 1980 per the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA). The Catholic Church too remains a daunting monolith of the western suburbs, boasting over one million adherents in the 2010 census, but its dominance has begun to wane. Since 2000, the growth of the Catholic population has grown faster than the population as a whole, and the percent of collar county residents who identify as Catholic has fallen to 34 percent – its lowest mark since 1980.

In the current political age, the combination of a large Catholic population and a booming evangelical community should provide nothing but smiles for the Illinois Republican Party and President Donald Trump. In 2016, the president "would not have won without the strong support of evangelicals,"[6] both nationwide and in crucial swing states like Michigan and Wisconsin, and white Catholic voters "helped carry Donald Trump into the White House … by a 23-point margin, compared with Mitt Romney's 19-point margin in 2012."[7] However, in 2018, the collar counties were a Republican nightmare. Governor Bruce Rauner became the first Republican candidate for governor (let alone an incumbent) to lose Kane County since 1912[8] on his way to a fifteen-point statewide loss to Democratic billionaire J.B. Pritzker. Democratic congressional candidates Sean Casten and Lauren Underwood – both political newcomers – defeated incumbents Peter Roskam and Randy Hultgren, respectively, while six Democratic candidates for state house and three for state senate flipped Republican-held seats across the collar counties (Figure 1).

[6] Mark Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, ed., *God at the Grassroots 2016: the Christian Right in American Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield, Boston, MA: 2018, p184.
[7] Gabby Orr, "Trump looks to reward conservative Catholics for their loyalty," *Politico*, 1/14/20, accessed 12/05/2019. https://www.politico.com/news/2020/01/14/trump-catholics-reelection-098518
[8] In 1912, four of the five collar counties were won by state Senator Frank H. Funk of the Progressive Party who finished third with 26% of the vote, leading to Chicago Mayor Edward F. Dunne (D)'s victory over incumbent Governor Charles Samuel Deneen (R) 38-28. Dunne carried Will County by fewer than 100 votes. Source: https://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=263304

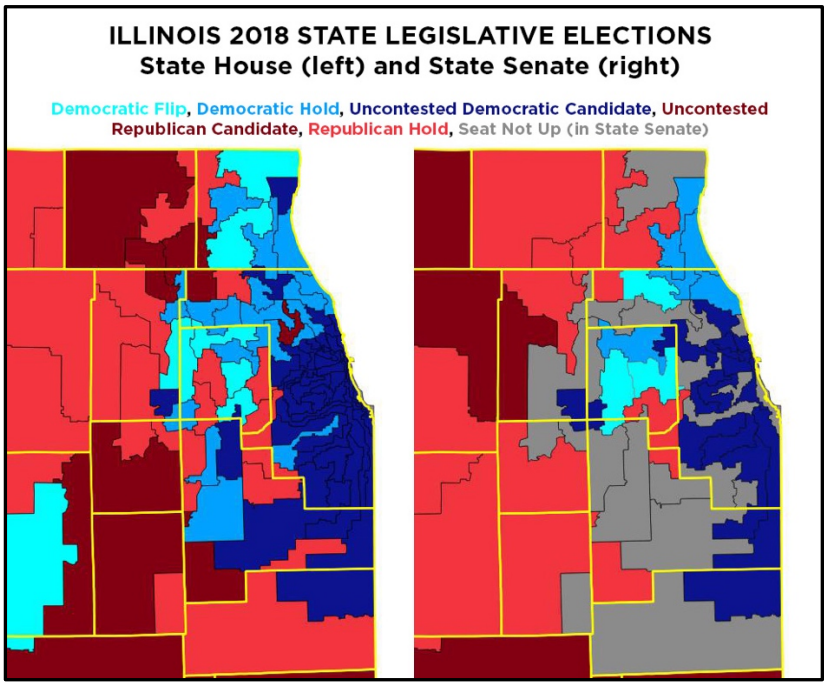

Figure 1: *State legislative election results in Greater Chicago Area, 2018*

It is expected for the party who controls the White House to face down-ballot losses during midterm elections, but the extent and strength of the Democratic candidates in the Chicago suburbs should raise eyebrows. In 2016, Congressmen Roskam and Hultgren each won by 20-point margins. Many of the Republican state legislators who lost their seats had faced only nominal – if any – competition in the past. Where was the Christian Right that had bolstered candidates in other 2018 races across the country, flipping Senate seats in Indiana, North Dakota, and Missouri? Had state and national organizations of the Christian Right engaged in Illinois politics, but been unable to overcome the anti-Trump Blue Wave that pushed the Democrats into a statehouse supermajority, or did they not engage at all? Have the Christian Right organizations that once bolstered political giants Dennis Hastert and Henry Hyde gone the way of the dodo? Why didn't millions of conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants – nationally, the base of "God's Own Party" – prove a boon for the suburban Chicago Republican Party in 2018? Through a combination of interviews and quantitative analyses, I plan to answer these questions.

Background

The geographic focus of this paper is Illinois's suburban collar counties: DuPage, Kane, Lake, Will, and McHenry. Some agencies, such as the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), also include Kendall County in this set, for though it does not directly border Cook County, Kendall County is home to a number of commuters and suburbanites in the city of Oswego. Kendall County was not included in the qualitative portion of this study due to its relatively new entrance as a suburban community – since 2000, the county's population has more than doubled from 54 to 128 thousand residents – but was included in the quantitative side as a barometer of Republican electoral successes.

The collar counties are some of the wealthiest and most densely populated in the state of Illinois, typical of suburban counties nationwide. They boast the highest per capita income, median household income, and median family income of the Prairie State's 102 counties, offsetting the lower incomes in urban Chicago, the St. Louis metro area, and rural counties (Figure 2). Not only are suburban collar counties wealthier than both "downstate" counties and Chicago-based Cook County, they also face cultural differences significant enough to prompt some political candidates to suggest dividing Illinois into three states: "Chicago, the suburbs …, and everything [else]."[9]

[9] Daniel Tucker and Tony Sarabia, "Robert Marshall's Diagnosis? Democrat says Illinois Needs to be Divided in 3," *WBEZ*, 2/21/18, accessed 4/23/20, https://www.wbez.org/stories/_/3b881a61-e583-4944-8827-5be3162d0c72.

COUNTY	PER CAPITA INCOME (RANK)	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (RANK)	MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME (RANK)
LAKE	38,120 (1)	78,948 (2)	91,693 (2)
DUPAGE	37,849 (2)	76,581 (3)	92,423 (1)
MCHENRY	31,838 (3)	76,482 (4)	86,698 (4)
WILL	29,811 (6)	75,906 (5)	85,488 (5)
KANE	29,480 (7)	67,767 (7)	77,998 (7)
(ILLINOIS)	*28,782*	*55,735*	*68,236*
KENDALL	30,565 (5)	79.897 (1)	87,309 (3)

Figure 2: Compared per Capita, Household Income of Selected Areas

The collar counties have a rich tradition of religiosity with roots stretching back to the 19th century accompanied by a huge increase in the number of churches in the post-war era. As veterans returned home from World War 2, many of them – mostly white – moved from Chicago to the surrounding areas, creating homogenous communities of urban expats. Extant suburban churches – realizing that they functioned as "a way of meeting people"[10] – began to adapt both architecturally and in terms of programming, and as new churches were built, room was specifically set aside for social events.

In the current day, while smaller, local churches still offer some sense of community to those who attend, a large portion of the evangelical population in the suburbs has flocked to the emergent megachurch. Megachurches have their fair share of critics, those who accuse the preachers of these massive congregations of "promoting and defending an image of prosperity and plastic religion that reflects a self-imposed image of the suburb they seek to serve" and adapting the gospel in ways as to "relieve suburban guilt."[11] However, megachurches also have

[10]Gretchen Buggeln, "Spaces for Youth in Suburban Protestant Churches," in *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America*, University of Minnesota Press, St. Paul, MN: 2015, 236.
[11] Charity R. Carney, "Sanctifying the SUV: Megachurches, the Prosperity Gospel, and the Suburban Christian," in *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America*, University of Minnesota Press, St. Paul, MN: 2015, 241-250.

the ability to "create a small-town community in a placeless suburbia,"[12] an analogous sense of community to the churches of the post-war era. Suburban churches – whether small, historical congregations or megachurches planted in the last decade – have placed and continue to place an incredibly high value on community, an emphasis with profound political ramifications, as it is not uncommon for "religious leaders to exhort their followers to a more robust and thoughtful participation in public life [during election season]."[13]

For decades, Chicago suburbanites supported Republican candidates at the local, state, and federal levels. At the turn of the century, the collar counties voted in line with the average Midwestern suburban county[14], giving George W. Bush 53.4% of the vote (Figure 3) in 2000 and 53.9% in 2004. Given Senator and President Obama's home-state advantage, they shifted to the left in 2008 and 2012, but continued to vote approximately in line with their neighboring-state analogues in midterm elections. Even as recently as 2014, the collar counties gave an average of 59.4% of the vote to Republican candidates for Congress as then-gubernatorial candidate Bruce Rauner (R) won them in blowouts[15].

[12] *Ibid*, 245-46.
[13] Corwin E. Smidt et al. *Pews, Prayers, and Participation: Religion and Civic Responsibility in America*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC: 2008, p1.
[14] Throughout this study, I will use a sample of 33 suburban counties from across the upper Midwest. More information in Appendix.
[15] Rauner won over 60% of the vote in McHenry, DuPage, and Kane Counties, and over 55% in Will and Lake.

	PRESIDENT (GOP %)		STATEWIDE REPUBLICAN %		CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLICAN %	
region	IL	Midwest	IL	Midwest	IL	Midwest
2000	53.4	53.3		51.3		
2002			57.9	55.8		
2004	53.9	55.2	31.1	47.1		
2006			52.5	50.9		
2008	43.1	46.7	32.7	42.1[16]		
2010			57.1	59.2	56.3	58.1
2012	46.4	51.4		46.3	52.9	53.2
2014			55.7	59.4	53.3	58.2
2016	41.0	49.0	45.3	53.0	50.4	53.9
2018			45.5	48.8	42.3	49.3

Figure 3: Republican Vote % by Collar Counties v. Other Midwestern Suburbs

From 1975 to 2007, the DuPage-based sixth congressional district[17] was represented by Congressman Henry Hyde, a Catholic Republican and champion of the pro-life movement whose legacy lives on in the 1976 Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funds from being used to pay for abortion services[18]. Throughout his tenure, Congressman Hyde chaired two incredibly influential committees in Washington – the House Judiciary Committee (1995-2001) and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (2001-2007). Not to be outdone, the neighboring district,

[16] Wisconsin had no statewide Republican in 2012. Butler County, OH not included in 2012 congressional results because uncontested race. 2016 had no statewide Republicans in Minnesota or Michigan.
[17] Until 2012, the Sixth Congressional district was made primarily of Wheaton and its surrounding suburbs, taking in most of DuPage County. After redistricting, the district shifted westward and north to take in portions of Kane, McHenry, and Lake County (see Figure 15).
[18] The Hyde Amendment makes exceptions for rape, incest, and life of the mother.

Illinois-14, was home to born-again Congressman Dennis Hastert, who served in Congress from 1987 to 2007, including an eight-year tenure as Speaker of the House (1999-2007).

In 2010, Focus on the Family Action – the political arm of a prominent national Christian Right organization, Focus on the Family – endorsed then-state Senator Randy Hultgren in its very first round of national endorsements[19], calling him "a true friend of the family" in his quest for Rep. Hastert's old seat, which had been picked up by Democratic candidate Bill Foster in a 2008 special election. The victorious Congressman Hultgren, and Rep. Hyde's chosen successor, Congressman Peter Roskam, both represented large swaths of the western suburbs and exurbs, each facing only token opposition following post-census redistricting. The same could be said for elected officials at the state level, with many state representatives and state senators earning the endorsements of local and national Christian Right organizations and facing little but token opposition every two to four years prior to 2018.

The combination of an existing Catholic infrastructure and burgeoning evangelical population in the collar counties throughout the 1980s and '90s created a prime location for the conservative religiopolitical organizations of the Christian Right to organize and push policies that aligned with their worldviews, a cross-denominational alliance that began at "the end of the 1960s … [when] evangelicals … decided that it was imperative to unite with socially conservative allies, even if they happened to be Catholic."[20]

Defining the "Christian Right" can be tricky: there is no set "Christian Right" any more than there is a set "left" and "right" in U.S. politics. However, for the purpose of my forthcoming analysis, it is crucial that we attempt to set clear boundaries and guidelines for what does and does not fall within the Christian Right. One common tale of the emergence of the Christian

[19] FRC Action PAC. "Randy Hultgren for Congress endorsed by FRC Action PAC." 02/19/2010. http://web.archive.org/web/20100805060531/http://www.frcaction.org/frcapacinternal/randy-hultgren-for-congress-endorsed-by-frc-action-pac. Accessed 11/27/19.
[20] Williams, 5.

Right revolves around the Reverend Jerry Falwell's mobilization of white evangelical Protestants during the 1980 presidential election. As the story goes, at the urging of new religiopolitical leaders like Falwell, once apolitical evangelical ministers and congregants became more willing to engage in politics. In 1980, during his massive voter registration campaign, Rev. Falwell put out a call to evangelical ministers across the country: "What can you do from the pulpit? You can register people to vote. You can explain the issues to them. And you can endorse candidates, right there in church on Sunday morning."[21]

Much of the focus on 1980 as the origin of the Christian Right stems from Jerry Falwell's infamously bombastic style and the final willingness of the Southern Baptist Coalition (SBC), the largest evangelical denomination, to become more involved in politics in that election cycle. However, the SBC – though large – was and is not the only evangelical denomination. To (Reform) Presbyterians, for instance, the gospel was always meant to shape "law, education, and government,"[22] even before Falwell's campaign for increased evangelical involvement in politics. Today, scholars of American religious history view the Christian Right as a "national coalition of conservative Christians (mostly evangelicals along with some Catholics and Mormons) who had participated in conservative social and political initiatives for decades before winning widespread attention in 1980," choosing to focus on the movement's roots as a "thinly disguised white response to the civil rights movement"[23] and its emphasis on so-called "family values" rooted in "a nostalgic idea of the home"[24] to combat troubling economic, social, and political times.

[21] George Vecsey, "Militant Television Preachers Try to Weld Fundamentalist Christians' Political Power," *New York Times*, January 21, 1980, A21.
[22] Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: the Making of the Christian Right*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK: 2010, p15.
[23] Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA: 2015, p17-18.
[24] *Ibid*, 3.

Family values rhetoric predates the idea of a unified Christian Right, with roots in the Protestant campaigns in favor of prohibition and against overt Catholic political influence at the turn of the 20th century. Over time, "the vision of family values created a bond between evangelism and political conservatism"[25] and "as evangelism evolved … it became sharper in its engagement with culture, using family values politics to soften theological divides and attract additional supporters," leading to the emergence of what historian Seth Dowland refers to as a "trans-denominational populism" [26]. As family values rhetoric has provided some coherence to the "loosely connected network"[27] of the Christian Right, what those values *are* has changed dramatically since the era of Prohibition. The reach of Christian Right organizations is "increasingly defined by the desire to convert conservative sexual morality[28] into public policy,"[29] as the term "'Christian Right' [has become a] pejorative in most Americans' view, representing a noxious mixture of religion and political ideology."[30]

While there is no official, national group named "THE Christian Right", Christian Right organizations can be considered as a somewhat nebulous group of pro-'family values' and pro-life organizations made up of white evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics, bound together by family values rhetoric, nostalgia for an "imaginary past"[31] of American greatness, and a desire for conservative sexual morality, with roots that stretch back far before the Reagan Revolution.

[25] *Ibid*, 2.
[26] *Ibid*, 16.
[27] *Ibid*, 11.
[28] Anti-abortion sentiment, opposition to gay rights and womens' liberation/feminism.
[29] Putnam, 131.
[30] *Ibid*, 120.
[31] Dowland, 231.

Literature Review

Christian Right Organizing and the White Evangelical Community

Christian Right political activism in the elections of the 1980s "occurred predominantly in rapidly-growing and relatively prosperous suburban areas in the South, Southwest, and Midwest."[32] Local Christian Right groups popped up like daisies in suburbia, "where close-knit communities and sophisticated parachurch networks represent potent political resources."[33] The Chicago suburbs should fit well into this analysis as well-off counties where an ongoing population boom was accompanied by a greater-than-corresponding explosion of the number of churches, evangelical or otherwise, per ARDA data. Christian Right activism tended to occur where "motivations, resources, and opportunities for political action converge[d],"[34] so the Chicago suburbs, with not only its large evangelical and Catholic population, but also resources enough to run successful political campaigns and a non-negligible number of competitive seats, should have provided parachurch organizations with a recipe for success. However, in 2018, even as these religious and economic resources remained, there was very little to show for it in terms of Christian Right electoral success.

A further feature of continuing Christian Right activism in congressional elections is simple: activists like to win. Christian Right "activism persisted where the movement's favored candidates won, and this usually occurred in competitive districts. … National and local Christian Right activity were most associated with general election 'winners',"[35] while districts that exhibited a large number of evangelical Protestants and other sectarian (fundamentalist and

[32] John C. Green, James L. Guth, Kevin Hill, "Faith and Election: The Christian Right in Congressional Campaigns 1978-1988," in *Religion and the Culture Wars: Dispatches from the Front*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Boston, MA: 1996, p108.
[33] *Ibid*, 112.
[34] *Ibid*, 111.
[35] *Ibid*.

charismatic) denominations while lacking organizational Christian Right support – national or local – were far less associated with victory. As Republican politicians in the suburbs of Chicago claimed victory year after year, this association between winning elections and persistent activism should have proven a panacea for any ills that might have resulted from suburban demographic shifts. However, this does not appear to have been the case in 2018.

The Risk of Over-Mobilization

Hout and Fischer (2002) suggest that "the rise of the new nones [individuals who do not identify as members of a faith group] corresponds … to the visibility of the Religious Right in public media,"[36] creating a dangerous feedback loop for Christian Right organizations in which overreaching "religious mobilization" pushes more people away from the movement than it brings in. Djupe et al. (2018) takes this analysis one step further, in a study conducted to check Hout and Fischer's hypothesis under different circumstances. They find that white evangelical protestants "may have reduced growth rates in states where Christian Right activity was salient and controversial, [as] ... there is clear evidence that people … use the Christian Right as proxy for religion as a whole and discontinue their religious identities as a result"[37] of what they view as extremism on the part of Christian Right organizations.

Signs of this potential pivot too far began to emerge in 1994, after evangelicals gave a "historically high" [38] 75% of their votes to Republican congressional candidates. While this high vote share demonstrated how "grassroots religious institutions can mobilize … Republican

[36] Putnam, 127.
[37] Paul A. Djupe, Jacob R. Neiheisel, and Kimberly H. Conger, "Are the Politics of the Christian Right Linked to State Rates of the Nonreligious? The Importance of Salient Controversy," *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2018): 910-22, accessed April 22, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/26600637, p916-918.
[38] Lyman A. Kellstedt, et al., p292.

religious constituencies," some feared that "if religious mobilization goes too far, [such institutions can drive] dissident groups to the Democrats, the traditional 'party of diversity.'"[39]

As social mores are tending more and more liberal – especially in the Chicago suburbs, where the key Illinois "swing voter … the suburban woman … is generally pro-choice and pro-gay rights"[40] – the risk of religious over-mobilization is likely a far greater threat for the continued success of Christian Right groups and candidates. Consider a recent case out of Ohio. In conjunction with a lobbyist from a Christian Right organization, the Right to Life Action Coalition of Ohio, State Representative John Becker "proposed legislation extending insurance coverage to a procedure considered medically impossible as a way of fighting abortion,"[41] drawing criticism from the medical and scientific communities. Legislation that "jumps the shark" such as this proposal serves to discredit the work of Christian Right organizations and to push suburban swing voters away from those politicians who would support it.

The Christian Right's Slide into the Republican Party

The continuing slide of Christian Right organizations into the Republican Party structure threatens to change the way that evangelical voters see Christian Right groups, from fighting for the issues that matter to them to fighting over partisan politics. An analysis of the intersection of the Christian Right and Donald Trump's 2016 campaign in Minnesota postulates that even though

> "full integration into the Republican Party could mean that evangelicals will continue to offer a distinctive voice as the GOP discerns how best to operate in the Trump era and

[39] *Ibid*, 298.
[40] Wagner Acerbi Horta and Benjamin Polony, "Key to a Bluer Illinois: Growth of Suburban Democrats," *Center for Illinois Politics,* 01/26/20, accessed 02/09/20. https://www.centerforilpolitics.org/articles/key-to-a-bluer-illinois-growth-of-suburban-democrats
[41] Associated Press, "Lawmaker Says He Didn't Research Ectopic Pregnancy Procedure Before Adding to Bill," *WOSU Public Media*, 12/12/19, accessed 12/30/19. https://radio.wosu.org/post/lawmaker-says-he-didnt-research-ectopic-pregnancy-procedure-adding-bill

> beyond … such integration has the concomitant effect of reducing the distinctiveness of being evangelical as a salient independent factor predicting vote choice."[42]

At the national level, many if not most Christian Right organizations who supported Donald Trump in 2016 already had "had affinities with the Tea Party"[43], as did many evangelical voters – so-called "teavangelicals". At levels state and national, organizational and individual, some portions of the Christian Right have slipped further and further into the Republican Party, and these organizations and individuals run the risk of alienating evangelicals who may agree with them on issues but disagree with their high level of political involvement.

In 2016, many non-national Christian Right organizations turned their focus away from the presidential race to state and local-level races, given Hillary Clinton's widely expected victory. An analysis of the 2016 presidential election in Michigan found that "the Christian Right played a far less significant role in helping Trump to carry Michigan than the role played by the Clinton campaign in assuming the state would continue to vote Democratic."[44] An analysis of key swing states found that Donald Trump "won … evangelicals without the organizational help of the Christian Right"[45] and even "if Christian Right groups are no longer critical tools of GOP operatives, evangelical voters remain the center of the GOP voter base."[46] With white evangelical voters at the heart of the Republican base, any action that may serve to push these voters away would be disastrous for the GOP, whether or not it is intentional. However, if grassroots and state-level Christian Right organizations follow those at the national level and

[42] Christopher P. Gilbert, Joseph Cella, and Alexander Jensen. "Minnesota: the Resurgence of Evangelical Political Strength in 2016," in *God at the Grassroots 2016: the Christian Right in American Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield, Boston, MA: 2018, p107-108.
[43] Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America*, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY: 2017, p629.
[44] Corwin E. Smidt and Mikael Pelz, "Michigan: the Christian Right in the Presidential Election," in *God at the Grassroots 2016: the Christian Right in American Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield, Boston, MA: 2018, p91.
[45] *God at the Grassroots 2016,* p184.
[46] *Ibid*, p189.

grow more intertwined with state Republican Parties, their continued slide into politics may push away their members, resulting in a boost to the Democratic Party.

The blame for this integration into the Republican Party does not fall solely on the shoulders of Christian Right organizations or the Republican Party. Christian Right activists are activated primarily by legislation concerning abortion[47] and "not motivated primarily by economic issues."[48] As socially conservative Democrats retire, switch parties, or are voted out of office, Christian Right organizations were left with fewer and fewer anti-abortion options outside the Republican Party. This is the case in Illinois, where Christian Right activists continue to focus on social issues ahead of economic issues. In an October 2018 episode of Illinois Family Action's podcast titled "How Can My Vote Glorify God?", the guest – a former pastor and political candidate – discussed his views on politics and legislation: "Public policy does matter. We've had a lot of abortions since *Roe v. Wade*, and there's going to be a lot of young kids experimenting with homosexuality now that we've made … homosexual marriage legal."[49]

Volunteerism, Civic Participation, and Religion

The Chicago suburbs offer more to Christian Right organizations than just abundant resources and competitive politics. The high number of community-seeking, religious suburbanites alone should provide Republican politicians in the collar counties with one of the most valuable assets to any political campaign: a highly-motivated volunteer base.

Those who regularly attend church or other associational meetings are more likely to engage in volunteering than those who do not. Church even has a leg up on those other

[47] James L. Guth, John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt, "The Political Relevance of Religion: the Correlates of Mobilization," in *Religion and the Culture Wars: Dispatches from the Front*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Boston, MA: 1996, p309.
[48] James L. Guth, John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt ; Corwin E. Smidt, "Onward Christian Soldiers: Religious Activist Groups in American Politics," in *Religion and the Culture Wars: Dispatches from the Front*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Boston, MA: 1996, p75.
[49] Benjamin Smith, "SPOTLIGHT: How Can My Vote Glorify God?" *Illinois Family Action*, 10/17/18, accessed 04/21/20. https://illinoisfamilyaction.org/2018/10/spotlight-how-can-my-vote-glorify-god/

associational meetings: unlike areligious associations such as the Elks or the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), "churches can serve as a recruiting ground for volunteers" by "turning the good intentions of worshippers into concrete actions."[50] These 'concrete actions' are not limited to religious causes or charities – 60% of highly religious individuals volunteer for nonreligious causes (Brooks, 2003)[51]. While membership in voluntary associations can also correspond to increased rates of volunteerism, "more Americans report church membership than report membership in all other kinds of voluntary association combined!"[52]

Evangelical Protestants, the Christian community most likely to exhibit religious behavior through both church attendance and private actions of faith, show this tendency towards volunteerism in spades. Those who worship both publicly and privately "are more likely to volunteer than those who [only attend public worship services] … despite the fact that both attend worship services at the same level of frequency."[53] Some attribute the high volunteerism rate of evangelical Protestants to their ecclesiastical structure. Evangelical churches allow far more participation by congregants in church hierarchy and committees than Catholic churches do. This participation also allows for the development of leadership and communication skills that easily translate into political organizing and action (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995) [54].

Per the 2010 ARDA religious census, the three largest white evangelical groups in Illinois' collar counties[55] were the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, the Assemblies of God (a Pentecostal denomination), and the Southern Baptist Convention: these three denominations boast over 200 congregations and over 100,000 adherents. A 2000 nationwide survey of clergy in these denominations have found them to be both politically active and

[50] Smidt et al. p106.
[51] *Ibid*, 101.
[52] *Ibid*, 110.
[53] *Ibid*, 129.
[54] *Ibid*, 136.
[55] Aside from 'non-denominational', the largest group.

strongly supportive of Republican politics (Figure 4). I also include survey data from the Willow Creek Association, which runs South Barrington's non-denominational Willow Creek megachurch, and clergy of the Roman Catholic Church.

	Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod	Assemblies of God	Southern Baptist Convention	Willow Creek Association	Roman Catholic Church
While preaching, take a stand on some political issue (% approving)	29%	71%	66%	50%	58%
Publicly (not preaching) support a candidate (% approving)	38%	69%	56%	44%	27%
Urged their congregation to register and vote	52%	68%	59%	56%	54%
2000 Election: Bush % vs. Gore %	87-8	91-3	86-11	85-13	59-31

Figure 4: Comparative Rates of Approval & Political Action, from "Pews, Prayers, and Politics"

Across these evangelical denominations and megachurch association, there are varying levels of willingness to publicly support political candidates – but the evangelical willingness always exceeds that of the Roman Catholic Church, even as Catholic priests display a similar propensity to urge voting among their congregants. The willingness to take political matters to the pulpit also varies, as only 3 in 10 clergy of the Missouri Synod (the largest evangelical denomination in the Collar counties) conveyed their approval, while over 7 in 10 clergy of the Assemblies of God conveyed theirs'. While the validity of this study to the collar counties is limited due to its national scope, the broad Republican support from evangelical clergy and their

general willingness to urge civic participation and voting is important in any Christian Right organization's attempt to collect political volunteers.

After three decades of declining civic participation[56] between 1978 and 2008, any place where motivated volunteers may be found is likely to be besieged by friendly, local politicians looking for folks willing to knock doors during election season. This large group of potential volunteers can even change the ways in which political campaigns operate – take, for example, a 2008 case study of "volunteer tithing" in a Virginia congressional race. The Eleison Group, a left-leaning political firm focused on faith and rural outreach, utilized the 2008 race for Virginia's 5th congressional district[57] to test their pioneering strategy, incorporating the quintessentially religious practice of tithing into political campaigns by having the Democratic campaign "commit to 'tithe' at least 10% of all volunteer hours to community service."[58] The practice paid off in this race, becoming "the most successful volunteer recruitment tool" and many volunteers' "favorite part of the campaign … [creating] a strong narrative of faith-in-action."[59] In part by changing this narrative around volunteer recruitment to be more faith-based, Democratic candidate Tom Perriello was able to pull off an upset win, winning the race by 727 votes out of over 317,000 cast[60].

Since 2008, however, there has been an uptick in civic participation by formerly less-involved individuals and groups. From the Tea Party movement of 2010 to the 2017 Women's March and 2018 March for Our Lives, civic involvement on the political right and left has seemed to halt its creeping decline. One interviewee, a campaign worker on a successful

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[56] *Ibid*, 12.
[57] Democratic candidate and diplomat Tom Perriello challenged Republican incumbent Virgil H. Goode, Jr. in a historically conservative district stretching between urban and rural portions of Virginia.
[58] *Eleison Group LLC,* "Ingredient 1: Volunteer Tithing – Good Values, Smart Politics." Accessed 04/21/20. https://www.eleisongroup.com/volunteertithing
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] Janelle Rucker, "Perriello wins recount in 5th District House race," *the Roanoke Times*, 12/17/08, accessed 04/21/20. https://www.roanoke.com/archive/perriello-wins-recount-in-th-district-house-race/article_9200cdcd-1ca8-599a-9647-72f042b5c813.html

Democratic campaign for U.S. Congress, noted that there were a substantial number of potential voters who had gone from “passively supporting Republicans to actively supporting and volunteering for Democrats”. Whether or not the decline in civic participation is slowing, religious communities continue to excel in this area.

Methods

The data in this study come from a combination of interviews, surveys, and observations, along with publicly-available data from the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA), Dave Leip's Elections Atlas, the U.S. Census and American Community Survey accessed via Social Explorer, the Federal Elections Commission (FEC), and the Illinois State Board of Elections via Illinois Sunshine, a tool of the nonpartisan research and advocacy group Reform for Illinois.

Quantitative data on endorsement and fundraising trends are used to gauge the presence and level of involvement by Christian Right organizations in the Chicago suburbs over time. Further data were used to compare suburban evangelical electoral trends in Illinois with other Midwestern states.

Interviews were conducted in the political arena with candidates for state legislature and U.S. Congress in 2018, or campaign workers if the candidates were unavailable. Further surveys and interviews were conducted with members of evangelical clergy selected at random from all five of the collar counties. Clergy were interviewed to see both whether Christian Right organizations were conducting church outreach and the levels of political and civic engagement within the white evangelical community. Interviews with politicians were conducted to see if they utilized Christian Right organizations or local evangelical congregations to solicit volunteers.

I combine these qualitative and quantitative data to paint a picture of the interrelation of Christian Right organizations, political candidates, and evangelical church communities in the Chicago suburbs, so as to answer my original question: was 2018's anti-Trump wave too much for strong Christian Right organizations in the collar counties, or had these organizations been bluffing their strength for years?

Church-Side Data

Surveyed clergy were selected at random through a stratified sampling of all evangelical and non-denominational churches in Chicago's collar counties (DuPage, Kane, Will, Lake, and McHenry), stratifying first by county, and then by broadest denominational body (Pentecostal, Holiness, Baptist, Methodist-Pietist, Non-Denominational[61], Lutheran, and Presbyterian-Reformed) as recognized by the ARDA[62]. Specific churches were then randomly selected from within those denominational bodies by county. As some selected churches had closed since the collection of the ARDA census data in 2010, I researched each church to find a physical address and method by which to contact them. If I could not find an address for a selected church or it's phone number had been disconnected, another church of the same denomination (ex: SBC, PCA, LCMO) in the same county was randomly selected in an attempt to combat non-response. If there were no other churches of that same denomination in the same county, another church was drawn at random from the same denominational body (ex: Pentecostal, Lutheran).

	Baptist	Pentecostal	Holiness	Non-Denom	Pres-Ref	Lutheran	Meth-Piet	SUM
DuPage	6	4	3	7	0	2	2	24
Kane	2	5	1	5	0	3	1	17
McHenry	0	1	0	4	0	3	1	9
Lake	5	0	1	6	4	3	2	21
Will	4	2	1	6	2	4	0	19
SUM	17	12	6	28	6	15	6	90

Figure 5: Breakdown of Churches in Sample by County, Denominational Body

The final sample included 90 churches – 24 from DuPage County, 17 from Kane, 21 from Lake, 9 from McHenry, and 19 from Will County – with 28 non-denominational, 17

[61] Non-denominational churches are recognized as "evangelical" by the ARDA. I take this into account with a question in my survey asking if the member of the clergy considers themselves to be "evangelical", among other descriptors, of which multiple may be selected.
[62] Denominational bodies of the evangelical Protestant tradition with very few members were excluded. These bodies were Evangelical Episcopalianism/Anglicanism, the European Free-Church movement, Independent Fundamentalist churches, and Seventh-Day Adventists.

Baptist, 15 Lutheran, 12 Pentecostal, and 6 each of the Holiness, Methodist-Pietist, and Presbyterian-Reformed traditions. (Figure 5)

I contacted each church multiple times, by phone and email, soliciting responses to a short survey questionnaire described as an "anonymous civic engagement survey". 31% of churches (28) originally agreed to participate in the survey, but only 18% (16) returned full or usable responses. Though originally presented as a survey, I offered individual clergy the option to elaborate as much as they wanted to allow them to contextualize their answers. Approximately 63% (10) of the completed surveys were done in this interview style. Unfortunately, response rates were not high enough to create a representative sample of the full church population, but the interviews still remain an interesting window into the minds of clergy from every county.

The clerical survey consisted of nine questions about the respondent's church and congregation, whether or not their church held voter registration drives prior to the 2016 and 2018 elections, their thoughts concerning the allowability of other clergy to engage in activities considered political (such as the questions in Figure 11), and whether or not they had been contacted by political groups prior to the 2018 election. Other questions were of a more theological nature, in an attempt to better classify the churches within the evangelical tradition. A sample survey may be found in the Appendix. Responses were recorded anonymously in an Excel workbook, with denomination and county as kept as identifying descriptors. The churches' addresses were recorded for the purpose of geospatially mapping the responses (Figure 8), then deleted.

Politician-Side Data

The second group I interviewed were those involved with political campaigns in the Chicago suburbs and select congressional districts that are fully or partially contained within the

collar counties[63]. The goal of these interviews was to speak directly with candidates for state legislature and U.S. Congress in 2018; however, as about half of these individuals won their elections[64], many were busy in Washington, D.C. or Springfield. As such, if the candidate him- or herself was not available, I asked to speak with a member of their campaign staff. Copies of the questions I asked either candidates or staffers are available in the Appendix.

. I was able to find some form of contact information for all but six candidates and conducted interviews with all those willing. I originally only sought out contacts for the past campaigns, but eventually decided to also reach out to the offices of those who won their elections in order to boost response rates. I conducted 16 interviews with former candidates for office and an additional 3 interviews with former campaign staffers. Of the candidates with whom I spoke, 7 were Democrats and 9 were Republicans; 11 were candidates for state House, 3 for state Senate, and 2 for U.S. Congress. 11 were unsuccessful, while 5 were victorious. The campaign workers with whom I spoke all worked for victorious Democratic candidates – two for U.S. Congress and one for state Senate.

These interviews with political organizers and candidates were far more open-ended than the clerical surveys, and they contained fewer questions. Each question was geared toward ascertaining the degree to which the interviewee thought evangelical churches or Christian Right (generally pro-life or pro-'family values') organizations had an impact on their 2018 campaigns. A follow-up question asked if the candidate had sought out faith groups for help with campaign events or if they had addressed a congregation or meeting of an evangelical organization in the past.

[63] These congressional districts were the 6th, 8th, 10th, 11th, and 14th. Some congressional districts that represent large swathes of the collar counties (primarily Will County) receive the majority of their votes in Cook County and the city of Chicago and were excluded to focus on suburban effects.
[64] Some ran uncontested.

The interviews were conducted anonymously, with the interviewee's knowledge that – if a quote of theirs was to be used – they would be identified as an un/successful Democratic/Republican candidate from the Chicago suburbs in 2018. Some noted that they were willing to be quoted by name.

Endorsements, Voter Guides, and Campaign Finance Data

To measure support by Christian Right organizations, I tracked historical endorsement and favorable voter guide trends[65] and conducted longitudinal analyses on spending by federal and state PACs and organizations. I retrieved FEC data from five political organizations[66] associated with the Christian Right and broader evangelical community between the years of 2004 and 2019. Twenty-seven Illinois candidates or groups received funds from these organizations, the majority of whom were running in the Chicago suburbs or statewide. I also retrieved fundraising data from five PACs[67] eligible to donate to local-level candidates from the Illinois State Board of Elections via Illinois Sunshine. I tracked historical endorsement trends from Illinois-based Eagle Forum, a national Christian Right organization founded in the 1970s to stop the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and Family Research Action, the political wing of the Family Research Council. Only the former organization is included in my final analysis.

Election Results and the Impact of Suburban Evangelicals

After conducting my political interviews and clerical surveys, it became clear that the level of Christian Right organizational strength in the 2018 midterms in the Chicago suburbs was

[65] Many voter guides are put out by non-profit organizations that are legally prohibited from endorsing candidates. This does not prevent them from highlighting specific actions, policies, or opinions of candidates they view in line with or against their values.
[66] The Concerned Women for America Legislative Action Committee, Eagle Forum PAC, Family Research Council Action Political Action Committee, the Illinois Federation for Right to Life PAC, and the Susan B. Anthony List Inc. Candidate Fund.
[67] Illinois Citizens for Life, Eagle Forum of Illinois, Illinois Citizens for Ethics, Illinois Federation for Right to Life PAC, and Susan B. Anthony's List's state PAC.

low. Multiple interviewees blamed Governor Bruce Rauner, a pro-choice Republican running for reelection against the pro-choice Democratic candidate, JB Pritzker, for stifling evangelical interest in the Prairie State. In order to ensure that low evangelical involvement wasn't due solely to the then-governor's pro-choice views, I added a longitudinal analysis of election results across 33 suburban Midwestern counties in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. Five or six counties per state were selected for this analysis that fall within the metropolitan areas of major cities, but primarily outside the cities themselves. See appendix for full list of counties.

I collected a number of variables to use as constants in the regression analysis but focused on measures of income (median household income) and race (% population that is white) to hold constant while regressing ARDA's measured evangelical adherence rate (# of evangelicals per 1000) against Republican vote share in recent elections. Median household income and racial data was pulled from Social Explorer, while presidential, senatorial, and gubernatorial results were pulled from Dave Leip's Elections Atlas. In order to find congressional results by county, I manually aggregated data from the websites of county clerks in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana and the Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio secretaries of state.

As ARDA's censuses are decennial, the evangelical populations of each county were linearly interpolated for years between 2000 and 2010, and linearly extrapolated for years after 2010, presenting a large limitation and area for further review in studies done after ARDA releases their 2020 census data. These interpolated and extrapolated values were divided by the true population values in order to ascertain an approximate evangelical adherence rate.

```
Call:
lm(formula = data$MCCAIN08 ~ data$evr08 + data$MHHI10 + data$WNHPER08)

Residuals:
    Min      1Q  Median      3Q     Max
-7.1993 -2.5870 -0.6445  1.7973 11.7655

Coefficients:
               Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)   -3.854e+01  9.580e+00  -4.024 0.000375 ***
data$evr08     7.100e-02  1.582e-02   4.489 0.000105 ***
data$MHHI10    1.965e-04  5.841e-05   3.364 0.002178 **
data$WNHPER08  7.392e+01  1.071e+01   6.904 1.38e-07 ***
---
Signif. codes:  0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘ ’ 1

Residual standard error: 4.364 on 29 degrees of freedom
  (2 observations deleted due to missingness)
Multiple R-squared:  0.7726,    Adjusted R-squared:  0.7491
F-statistic: 32.85 on 3 and 29 DF,  p-value: 1.838e-09
```

Figure 6: Example regression output in R

In order to check for associations between the rate of evangelical adherence in a county and that county's Republican vote share, I ran similar regressions for 2008-2018 presidential and statewide races, and in 2010-2018 congressional elections as this example regression denotes, done for the 2008 presidential race (Figure 6).

Findings

Findings from interviews and publicly available data do not paint a happy picture for the future of Christian Right organizations seeking to engage with the white evangelical Protestant population in the Chicago suburbs. Organizations of the Christian Right and evangelical religiopolitical groups at the national level have grown more and more focused over the last fifteen years, homing in on elections where their influence could make the difference. Very few Illinoisan political candidates and clergy interviewed reported seeing much religiopolitical involvement: Illinois's evangelical organizations appear to follow this success-optimizing behavior at the state level. By tracking the onset of this focusing in, it becomes clear that the decline of Illinois Christian Right organizations did not begin in 2018, or even in 2016 – it began before Donald Trump took the reins of the Republican Party – but it continues to this day, as more and more conservatively religious politicians retire or lose their reelection bids.

Politicians

Of the interviews conducted with political figures, 12 individuals over 11 contests reported that religion and faith groups paid no role in their 2018 campaigns, 6 individuals over an additional 5 contests said it played a small role, and only 1 interviewee – state Rep. Terra Costa Howard – reported that religion played a large role in her race. (Figure 7) Several interviewees who reported no or low levels of religious involvement in their own races did report witnessing evangelical engagement in other races nearby, generally in Rep. Howard's race. The evangelical community supported her opponent, then-Rep. Peter Breen, in part due to his strong opposition to House Bill 40 (HB40), a bill in the Illinois General Assembly that would expand abortion access.

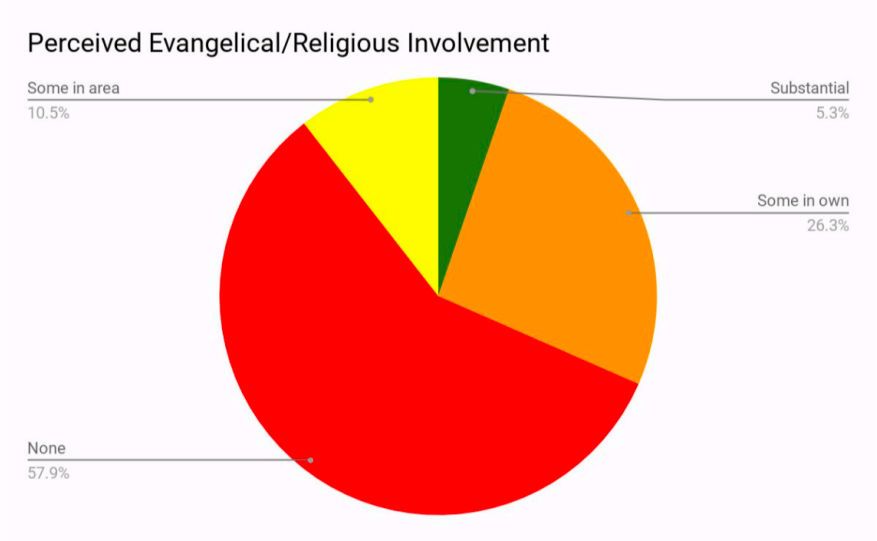

Figure 7: *Very few political candidates perceived any involvement by evangelical or religious groups in 2018*

No Perceived Involvement

Of the individuals who reported that evangelical churches or other faith groups played no role in their elections, a number reported interacting with such groups in their capacities as private citizens or as elected officials as a form of "community outreach". However, as this study focuses on the interactions between religious groups and politicians during 'election season', those observations have been omitted. During the run-up to elections, the individuals who reported that evangelical churches or faith groups played no roles in their general election campaigns gave three main reasons for what they perceived as this lack of religiopolitical action: the candidates' own messaging, the weakness of Christian Right organizing, and a focus of these groups on other specific races. Geographic elements also played a role. Additional research indicates that some of these individuals simply did not engage in basic forms of outreach – such as the completion of questionnaires – to Christian Right groups.

While the collar counties have been a Republican stronghold for decades, there was always ideological variation within the party: there have been Republican state representatives more-friendly to the Christian Right, but there have also been a number of self-identifying moderate Republicans. These more moderate Republicans tend to focus more on fiscal issues and be more liberal on social issues, a liberalness that has the potential to turn off potential evangelical supporters. "In my … district, … neither candidate was really addressing [evangelical] interests," said one such self-identifying moderate, "I, the incumbent Republican, was very supportive of LGBTQ rights."

Two bills voted on by the General Assembly just prior to the 2018 midterm elections had oversized effects on the levels of evangelical involvement in specific races: the aforementioned HB40 and the largely ceremonial ratification of the ERA, which was accused by its opponent as of "ensuring an expansion of abortion rights for women."[68] A Republican state Senator credited a lack of evangelical support for his reelection campaign directly to his vote in favor of ratifying the ERA, saying, "there are always pro-life groups that get involved in competitive races, but in 2018, in my race, they sat on their hands in protest of my vote on the Equal Rights Amendment."

How important this sitting on hands was is up for debate, as that same interviewee lambasted Christian Right organizations in his district and county. Such groups have "no strong financial backing and, organizationally, I don't think they're very effective," the Senator said. "All they can provide is highly motivated volunteers when it's hard to get most people out to vote at all." This element of volunteer recruitment is still a crucial element of advocacy and lobbying groups, though – the ability to turn out a number of volunteers to knock doors, attend

[68] Rick Pearson and Bill Lukitsch, "Illinois approves Equal Rights Amendment, 36 years after deadline," *Chicago Tribune*, 05/31/18, accessed 02/02/20. https://www.chicagotribune.com/politics/ct-met-equal-rights-amendment-illinois-20180530-story.html

town halls, or conduct other business for the organization is crucial, even if the groups have diminished financial backing.

The history of conservatism – political and theological – in the suburbs had born and bred a number of such activists who are more than happy to conduct the business of activism without pay. But this form of conservatism may be just that: history. An unsuccessful Republican candidate for state representative said of the leader of a once-powerful local Christian Right organization,

> "as big a group as she purportedly represents, they get no one … They're all so old. They get money but there's no ground game, no people reaching out. Members of [that organization] would come out for big dinners with big speakers, but they've lost every battle in Illinois."

The potential geographic element of Christian Right organizing becomes most apparent in the comparison between DuPage and McHenry counties. One campaign worker noted that "DuPage and McHenry [counties] have a lot more religious, white conservatives" than the other suburban counties. Despite this comparison, however, McHenry County seems far less of a hotbed for Christian Right political organizing than DuPage. A Republican candidate for state senate credited this discrepancy as how they "do politics very differently [in McHenry] than in Chicago. [It's] much more the candidate and the voters as opposed to organizations on behalf of candidates … [either] because organizations have found it unviable or the mentality is different." On the other hand, DuPage County is home to the only interviewee who reported a large level of religious involvement in her race, Rep. Terra Costa Howard. The largest of the collar counties and the closest to Chicago, DuPage also was home to three of the four interviewed churches that reported being contacted by outside political organizations. (Figure 8)

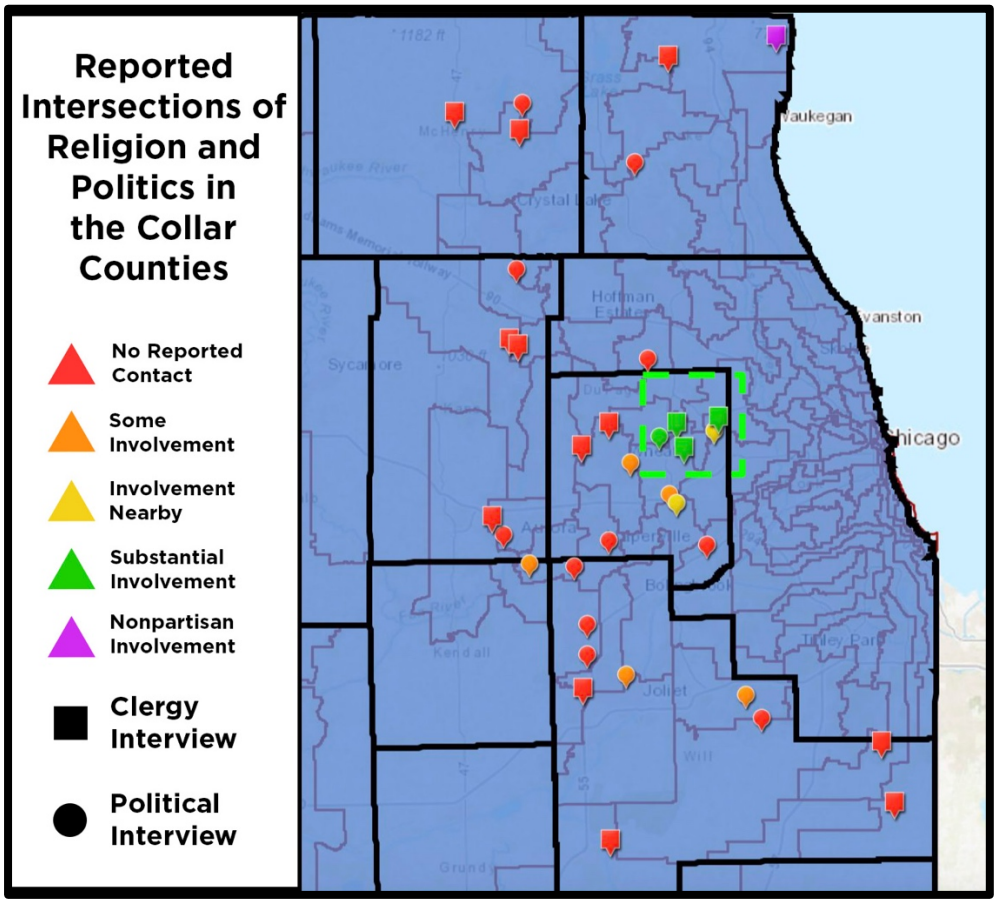

Figure 8: Geographic distribution of clerical, political interviews indicate a higher level of religiopolitical involvement in DuPage County than others.

Returning to the collar counties more broadly, many political interviewees equated the activity of evangelicals to actions by pro-life/anti-abortion organizations such as Illinois Right to Life. However, the mere ideological support of pro-life policies was not a sufficient condition to warrant the attention of pro-life political groups in a candidates' race. A Republican state representative who had voted against HB40 and won reelection noted that outreach to pro-life groups "wasn't a specific part of the campaign" even if his pro-life views "probably attracted some of those groups." Other successful and unsuccessful Republican candidates echoed this sentiment. Despite many candidates being pro-life – one even going so far as to say that "we cannot kill babies because of choice" – pro-life and Christian Right organizations did not actively support every pro-life candidate. The conservative evangelical community and pro-life

groups focused their attentions on a select few races in which the candidate running was an active friend to their cause. I will now discuss two such candidates, Republican state Representative Peter Breen and Democratic Congressman Dan Lipinski, in depth.

High Perceived Involvement – Peter Breen & Dan Lipinski

I was unable to interview now-former Rep. Peter Breen, a Catholic, likely due to his current campaign to win back the DuPage County seat he lost in 2018 to now-state Rep. Terra Costa Howard, but his prolific campaigning, fundraising patterns, and his noticeable draw to conservative Christian groups provided me with substantial information. Two Republican interviewees, one former state Representative and one former state Senator, both cited Breen's race as the Illinois race that was activating evangelicals to the highest degree, especially as the race for governor between two pro-choice candidates "demoralized" the evangelical base. Pro-life and Christian Right groups "got bodies out for Breen," said the state Senator, again reinforcing the ability of these groups to mobilize a core group of volunteers. Breen's race not only drew from organizations but allowed evangelical voters without an organizational affiliation an outlet; evangelical "voters were drawn to his campaign if they wanted to get involved in the state," said the former state Representative, citing Breen's notoriety as "a strong opponent of abortion."

Beyond volunteers, Christian Right groups supported Breen financially. Through his four-year tenure in the Illinois House of Representatives, Peter Breen dominated the non-federal fundraising undertaken by Christian Right groups in the Chicago suburbs. Of the five well-known Christian Right organizations whose fundraising information I analyzed, all directed more money to Breen in just five years than they did to every other candidate in seven (Figure 9).

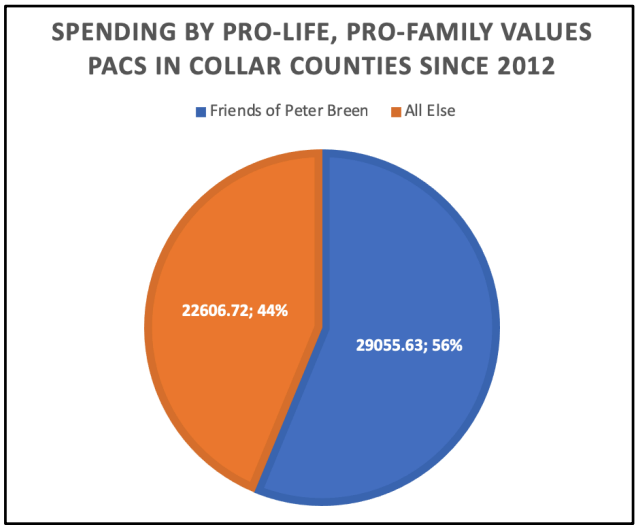

Figure 9: Peter Breen received more contributions from Christian Right organizations from 2014 to 2019 than all other suburban candidates combined from 2012 to 2019.

Within Breen's race, the feeling of religious involvement was palpable. The number of religiously-motivated volunteers was noticed, and their actions were often tangentially religious in nature as well. "In the weeks before the election, Breen's followers plastered churches in the district with pro-birth fliers [in order] to demonize me," said Rep. Howard, who also went so far as to question the impartiality of district churches as possible sites for volunteer recruitment. Reports of potential intermingling between churches and campaigns are not unique to this race or election cycle – for example, a successful Democratic candidate for state House shared a rumor of "Catholics putting [campaign] literature in church bulletins" in her district, and Joliet's Crossroads Christian Church reported political fliers being placed on parked cars as far back as 2010.[69] However, in the most recent election cycle, Breen's race was the only collar county campaign in which there was described a "concentrated [religious] effort."

This focus of Illinois's Christian Right organizations and their activists on a single race at the state legislative level mirrors the recent trajectory of Christian Right organizations at the

[69] Crossroads Christian Church's Facebook page, accessed 4/20/20, https://www.facebook.com/crossroadsofjoliet/posts/120661704662405.

federal level in Illinois. Though there are always a number of pro-life candidates for federal office in Illinois and in the collar counties, in recent years, at the federal level, the focus of Christian Right groups has turned towards one individual: Democratic Congressman Dan Lipinski. Though Rep. Lipinski's district is based almost entirely in suburban Cook County and the city of Chicago (taking in only a tiny sliver of DuPage), he is an important figure to discuss in this study as he was one of the last pro-life Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives before his loss in the 2020 Democratic primary for his district.

Figure 10 shows the combined spending of five groups associated with the Christian Right in Illinois between 2000 and 2019 according to the FEC, with money going to support Rep. Lipinski in light blue, and all other spending (on 14 different candidates) in dark blue. Since 2010 redistricting, Congressman Lipinski had faced more and more serious challenges in Democratic primary elections due to his pro-life views, winning only 51-49 in the 2018 primary. The 2018 primary attracted national attention from both Christian Right groups and groups that oppose them, with one national pro-life group deploying 70 canvassers to the district, who visited a total of 36,240 voters[70]. In a race decided by only 2,145 votes, this organization likely played an important, if not pivotal, role in that race.

[70] "Mobilizing the Pro-Life Vote to Win a Senate Majority," Susan B. Anthony List, 12/7/2018. https://www.sba-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/12.07.18-2018-Election-SBA-List-By-the-Numbers.pdf, accessed 12/04/19.

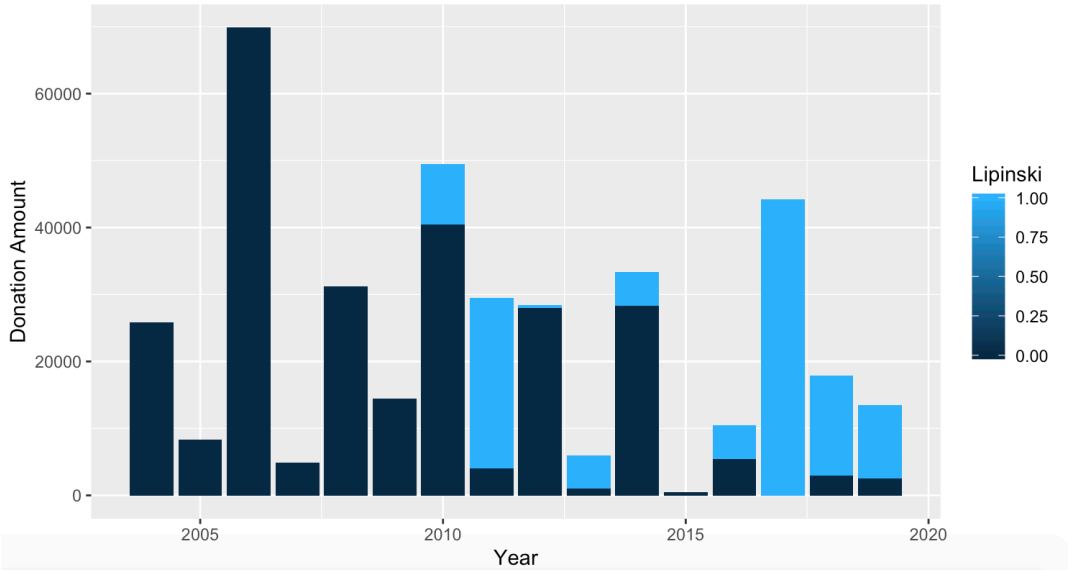

Figure 10: Federal Political Contributions by Christian Right and Evangelical Related Groups in Illinois, 2004-2019

In the 2020 primary, Dan Lipinski was ousted by his 2018 opponent, Marie Newman, in an election marred by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. While Newman received 2,568 more votes in 2020 than in 2018, she actually won a lower percentage of the vote (47.3% in 2020 compared to 48.9% in 2018) in a race between four candidates. A large-scale field effort was impossible given the pandemic, but one prominent Christian Right organization still put in a "five-figure campaign to support"[71] Lipinski in the final days of the campaign.

Middling Perceived Involvement

While Christian Right organizing played substantial roles in Peter Breen and Dan Lipinski's races and a negligible role in most others, there remain a set of races in which interviewees saw a small impact of evangelical or Christian Right political organizing on their own races. Such involvement fell into two categories: informational and volunteer-recruitment and failed to transition into substantial involvement for a number of reasons.

[71] Alexandra Desanctis, "Pro-Life Group Launches Campaign to Reelect Democrat Dan Lipinski," *National Review,* 3/6/20, accessed 04/21/20. https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/03/pro-life-susan-b-anthony-list-launches-campaign-reelect-democrat-dan-lipinski/

Informational involvement by Christian Right groups tended to occur following some level of outreach from the candidate to such groups. However, this outreach did not require the candidate to be a member of the evangelical community – it was solely dependent on political ideology. One interviewed Republican state representative, who said of the evangelical community, "that's not the group I hang out with," nevertheless touted the recommendation she earned from the Illinois Family Institute (IFI), a pro- 'family values' group, by submitting a candidate questionnaire. The evangelical community "had some influence, and I certainly had their support in my area … there are people in my district who follow the IFI and know my stances on issues like marijuana, abortion, marriage, etc.," she told me.

The ability of Christian Right groups to properly distribute information about candidates – generally those who fill out their questionnaires – is an important method by which those individuals with a propensity towards volunteerism may learn about races with which to get involved. Even as Christian Right groups may lack sufficient financial backing, the internet has provided these groups increased ability to spread information they view as pertinent. In the same breath as discussing candidate questionnaires, an interviewed Republican candidate for state House mentioned that "some groups advanced [my campaign] by way of advancing me on Facebook." This interviewee had initiated outreach to Christian Right groups, saying that "there was one group that I had a connection with, and I asked if they would endorse me, and they did."

The lions' share of Christian Right-endorsed or -recommended candidates were affiliated with the Republican Party, but Democratic candidates I interviewed did not view this spreading of information as positive or negative. One Democratic state Representative said she only witnessed Christian Right groups engaging in informational involvement, elaborating that "most [Christian Right] involvement was mailers to those who were already members … not grassroots

organizing. They'll send out [campaign literature], voter guides, questionnaires, but they're [only] informing those who are already members."

As discussed before both in existing literature and in races where Christian Right organizations were heavily involved, religious participation is highly correlated with volunteerism, and this propensity extends into races where the Christian Right may have played only a small role. "We would have connected [with Christian Right groups] for volunteer activities or phonebanks, door-to-door [canvassing], those types of things," said one unsuccessful Republican candidate for U.S. Congress. Like informational involvement, the impetus of much volunteer recruitment appears to lay in a candidates' campaign, even though this campaign – a marquee race in the collar counties – likely attracted the attention of evangelical groups local and national: the candidates' pro-life views "appealed to a pro-life constituency," and he earned endorsements from Illinois Right to Life and the Family Research Council's political arm.

In this particular case, the impact of Christian Right groups was likely perceived as middling due to this individuals' longer-term outreach to conservative religious groups in the district over his tenure in office. In our conversation, this candidate mentioned a "close relationship with a large Hindu temple" and that "a number of pro-Israel groups … were active" in their campaign, connections that the candidate had developed over "the past couple of years in anticipation of building relationships for the election." A combination of this candidate's maintained communication with these communities and the large size of the campaign in question likely led to the perception of a non-overwhelming influence of the Christian Right on this race. This candidate had become a personal fixture within the conservative religious community, not just with Christian Right organizations but with the conservatively religious themselves.

All in all, very few political candidates saw Christian Right organizations have an effect on their own 2018 races: these groups appeared to focus in on certain races in specific areas of the collar counties, and even then, only in a capacity of limited volunteer recruitment or information sharing. The actions of Christian Right groups over the past two decades indicate that this finding is not unusual in Illinois – analyses of both federal financial reports and endorsements indicate that Christian Right organizations are more and more focusing in on certain races rather than broad scope action, despite the evangelical population boom in the collar counties since 2000.

Clergy

Over the course of this study, I interviewed a number of evangelical clergy members from across the collar counties to see if the apparent decrease in the organizing power of the Christian Right was reflected in a change in the mentalities or reported political involvement of local churches. I reached out to a random sample of 90 churches from across the collar counties and was able to interview representatives from sixteen[72], with representation from every county. (Figure 8)

The surveys were intended to determine how members of the evangelical clergy personally felt about civic engagement and the levels to which they promoted civic engagement at church, as well as to provide a rough gauge of each interviewee's theology. I also asked if the churches had been contacted by outside Christian Right organizations, other political groups, or individual politicians. Overall, the members of the clergy were supportive of their congregants' civic engagement – particularly the importance of voting – and looked down on the Falwellian practice of endorsing candidates from the pulpit.

[72] Some church representatives only answered a selection of the questions, which results in some of my analyses having different denominators.

Twelve of thirteen respondents reported voting in 2018, and 9/14 reportedly urged their congregation to do so – however, none reported advocating for a particular candidate or party. One respondent elaborated,

> "We expressed how important the voting would be, but we do not expressly … choose a party or a candidate. … I did nothing more than encouraging people to vote and vote in the way that they thought God would lead them. … I think that pastors should allow people to vote their conscience and vote how they feel God is leading them more than the pastor leading them."

Most respondents agreed with this sentiment, with 13/14 responding that religion "should … be a guiding principle in political participation"; a handful elaborated that it should be "one guiding principle" of many. The idea of ones' vote glorifying God is reflected in Christian Right publications and periodicals, however, given the surveyed clergies' unwillingness to support particular parties from the pulpit, the onus is placed more on the congregants themselves to make partisan decisions.

While a majority of interviewed clergy reported urging their congregations to vote, very few went beyond that pulpit pronouncement. Only one respondent reported hosting a voter registration drive in 2016, and none reported holding one in the most recent midterm election. One pastor noted that he did not think that a voter registration drive would have been a cost-effective use of resources for his congregation of forty, but other, larger churches did not provide a justification. The pastor of this same small church, however, did note that his church "supports a lobbyist in Springfield" and will periodically invite him to church meetings to update the congregation on the goings-on at the state capital.

Further, it seems that the urging to vote was likely a one-off, a reminder during the sermon perhaps the Sunday before election day. In an attempt to locate additional messages in favor of voting, I analyzed the Facebook pages of every church in my sample. Of the 73 Facebook pages that existed in November 2018, only one, DuPage County's Community of

Hope Church of God in Hanover Park, posted prior to the 2018 election: "Remember to vote today! Vote your conscience!"[73] Though another church – Lake County's Heritage Lutheran – also referenced the midterm elections, they posted after the elections had ended, soothing their congregations' potential concerns as "changeovers can be scary"[74]. Thirteen additional churches had referenced elections in the past, most during the presidential elections of 2012 or 2016. One church in my sample, Faith Church Beecher, has posted about voting since 2018, encouraging people to register to vote on National Voter Registration Day in 2019[75].

Though very few respondents reported political action beyond urging voting and voting themselves, they did not look unfavorably on the idea of other members of the clergy conducting most political activities. I included this set of questions in order to allow clergy an option to show support for actions that may be illegal or risk a church's tax-exempt status, such as direct endorsement of political candidates from the podium, without admitting to these actions themselves. Asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale of appropriateness of clergy engaging in a certain activity, with 1 being most inappropriate and 5 being most appropriate, most respondents expressed neutrality towards a number of the activities in which they did not engage, with the most disdain reserved for pulpit partisanship and pew petition passing. (Figure 11)

[73] Community of Hope Church's Facebook page, accessed 2/25/20. https://www.facebook.com/135693256567161/photos/a.358567700946381/1382131538589987
[74]Heritage Lutheran Church's Facebook post, accessed 4/20/20. https://www.facebook.com/HeritageLutheranChurch/photos/a.850443821708437/1944473318972143/?type=3&theater
[75]Faith Church – Beecher's Facebook post, accessed 4/20/20. https://www.facebook.com/FaithChurchBeecher/posts/1920670674702262

	Share who engaged in action	Approval of action (5-point scale)
Urging voting	9/14	4.57
Urging direct contact of elected officials	2/14	3.36
Circulating petitions for elected officials	1/14	1.92
Urging voting for particular candidate/party	0/14	1.43
Giving political donation	1/13[76]	3.36
Attending political meeting	0/13	3.36
Volunteering for political candidate	1/13	2.79
Voting	12/13	5.00

Figure 11: Select Survey Responses by Members of Evangelical Clergy

Though very few members of the clergy urged their congregations to contact their elected officials, personally attended political meetings or gave political contributions, most clergy viewed these actions neutrally. Even volunteering for a political candidate on ones' own time is seen as fairly neutral, if not slightly discouraged (2.79). The truly discouraged actions were circulating petitions for elected officials (1.92) and urging voting for a particular candidate or party (1.43), yet some interviewees who expressed allowance of these actions added their own caveats as well. For example, one respondent noted that while they wouldn't generally circulate petitions, if a member of their own congregation were running, they might.

With a continued willingness of the clergy to promote civic engagement, could the lack of significant Christian Right volunteerism be a result of an already existing suburban evangelical shift to the left? While Republican vote share has fallen in the collar counties, a lack of Christian Right volunteers is likely not due to an already liberalized evangelical community: only one respondent believed that their congregation had grown more liberal over the past few years, while 12/15 reported that their congregations had "stayed the same". Two respondents said they had found their congregations growing more conservative, but one offered that this

shift was "not because of the church and not because of the preacher, but because of the polarizing climate." Online, only a handful of churches posted about politics in a favorable way to one party or another. While one, the nondenominational Harvest Church Plainfield, called out then-candidate Donald Trump for his misquoting of 2 Corinthians as "Two Corinthians"[76], another, Divine Shepard Lutheran Church in neighboring Bolingbrook, shared an article from the Federalist that labeled president-elect Trump "an instrument of God's wrath against sinners."[77] While some congregations may be shifting one way or another politically, writ large, the opinions of the evangelical community in suburban Chicago appear to have remained the same in recent years.

The approximately constant ideological state of these churches, in conjunction with their population explosion and their clergy's continued propensity towards encouraging civic engagement further indicates that the downfall of the Illinois Christian Right lies within Christian Right organizations themselves. Of the church representatives surveyed, only four reported being contacted by a political group in the lead-up to the 2018 election: three, all in DuPage, were encouraged to engage in some level of partisan activity, while one additional pastor in Lake County was asked to encourage his congregation to vote.

One church representative who reported outreach from a political group, described the outreach as "mostly conservative, pro-life" mail he had received "personally and shared with the congregation" but noted that his denomination already was home to a pro-life organization that served to "inform Christians" and was "not political *per se*." It is likely that this interviewee did not see any significant difference between the external political outreach and the internal advocacy stemming from his own denomination, and thus found it permissible to share that

[76] Harvest Church Plainfield's Facebook post, accessed 4/20/20. https://www.facebook.com/HarvestChurchPlainfield/posts/1022683107788477
[77] Divine Shepard Lutheran Church (Bolingbrook, IL)'s Facebook post, accessed 4/20/20. https://www.facebook.com/DSLCbolingbrook/posts/10154219972963212

which he had received externally. An interviewee who did not report outside contact by a political group explained that a lack of contact did not mean that his church was isolated entirely from the world of politics, saying, "most [small] churches would tell you that they're not contacted … sometimes you'll get a local alderman or local state representative who might want to address the church, but nothing national."

The pastor of the Lake County church that reported receiving outside instigation to urge voting described it as non-partisan yet expressed an unwillingness to cooperate. All political emails that he had received were Republican-leaning ("but never any pressure, no 'Vote for Trump'"), so he deleted them, but the urging-to-urge-to-vote was and is fairly nonpartisan, if with a Republican tilt. As for the potential of working with a political group, the pastor offered that "the Moral Majority is gone – good riddance … even if I agreed with them on some issues. They would put inserts in the [church] bulletin, saying [which representative] voted what way. … [They] got into the politics biz too big." This disdain for involvement with politics, reflected both by this preacher and the overall survey responses, indicate that the failure of the Christian Right to work with the evangelical churches of today is tied to the perceived extremism and hyper-partisanship of national Christian Right organizations, as detailed in existent literature.

A Pre-Trump Decline in Illinoisan & Midwestern Christian Right Power

More evidence of the Christian Right's decrease in scope in favor of increased focus on particular races can be seen in a longitudinal analysis of endorsements by Eagle Forum, an Illinois-based Christian Right group that operates on both the state and national levels. Figure 12 graphs endorsements by Eagle Forum over time, comparing the number of endorsements in Illinois to the average number of endorsements per state on the left axis, and the full number of endorsements nationally on the right axis. After just three Illinois endorsements in 2004 – on par

with the national average – Eagle Forum endorsed far more Illinois candidates in subsequent election cycles, mapping onto the national number of endorsements from 2008-2012.

2014, however, showed a major drop in the number of Illinois endorsements by Eagle Forum, a trend that continued in 2016, even as the number of endorsements by the organization nationwide stayed fairly stable. In 2018, the group endorsed its fewest candidates since at least 2002 (only two – Congressman Randy Hultgren and state Rep. Tom Morrison[78]), and the number of Illinois endorsements was effectively back to the national average, despite the fact that many politicians it had endorsed in past years were running for reelection. Further, the organization endorsed neither Peter Breen nor Dan Lipinski, indicating a lack of inter-Christian Right organizational information sharing.

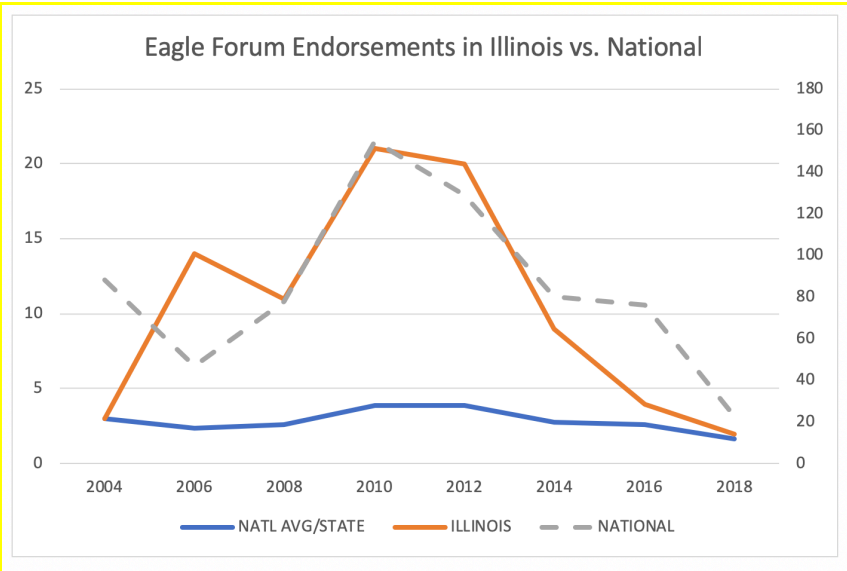

Figure 12: Endorsements by Eagle Forum in Illinois v. Nationally, 2004-2018

Interviews with members of the evangelical clergy and political candidates indicate that the Christian Right not only played a small role in 2018 campaigns, but also plays a small role in

[78] Tom Morrison and Randy Hultgren were both unable to be reached. Morrison's 2018 Democratic opponent declined to be interviewed. Congresswoman Lauren Underwood, Hultgren's opponent, could also not be reached, but a campaign staffer was interviewed in her stead.

volunteer recruitment from the broader evangelical community despite that community's massive population increases over the past two decades. Even before Donald Trump's election in 2016 and the blowback against suburban Republicans that came in 2018, Christian Right organizations in Illinois appear to have served merely as nametags for a collection of already-dedicated volunteers.

Across the Midwest, suburban evangelicals have grown less and less helpful to Republican candidates even before Donald Trump's 2016 campaign despite remaining a part of the Republican base. Since 2000, a county's evangelical percentage has been associated with lower and lower Republican vote shares when holding median household income and a county's racial composition constant, as the adjusted-R^2 value remains high enough to indicate substantial correlation. (Figure 13)

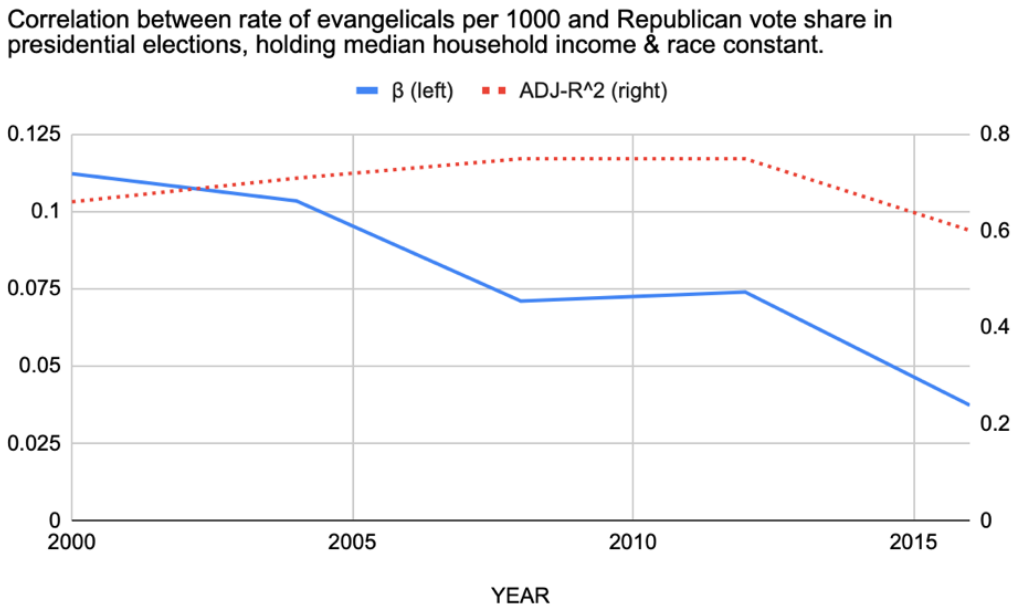

Figure 13: Correlation between Evangelicals as % of Population and Republican vote share in Presidential Elections, 2000-2016 across select Midwestern counties, holding median household income and race constant.

Implications & Looking Forward

Through a combination of interviews with politicians and members of the clergy, a longitudinal analysis of fundraising information and endorsement statistics, and a regression analysis of Midwestern counties over the past two decades, I am confident that Christian Right organizations in Illinois were not destroyed in 2018's anti-Trump wave. Organizationally, they had already faded from relevance despite a booming evangelical population, a historically active conservative religious community, and historically high rates of evangelical volunteerism suggested by literature.

Should Illinois Christian Right organizations wish to reverse their decline, I would make the following recommendations: first, a pivot of focus to municipal-level campaigns, and second, a coordinated campaign to appear less involved with politics and more involved with issue campaigns. However, the feasibility of these changes without significant financial backing is highly unlikely – the organizations in their current states, as cultural signifiers of a certain static set of volunteers, have shown no sign of wanting to change how they act.

As an interest group continues to lose power, the concentrated interests of its membership become more and more diffuse, lessening the power they hold over public policy at the large scale. One man lobbying his representative is nothing when standing next to 100, or 1000 – or a lobbyist representing that many. Should current trends continue, Illinois Christian Right organizations' inabilities to effectively bring in new volunteers and swing races at the margin – races like Peter Breen's – are pushing their downfalls. These organizations face a double irony: their failure to bring in new volunteers from the evangelical community is likely due to their perceived partisan extremism, and their failures to win elections assist their eternal enemies in the pro-choice movement.

A Pivot to the Municipal?

As the number of volunteers has dropped below the number necessary to move the needle at the state legislative level, remaining members of Christian Right organizations should pivot to the municipal level, where politicians rely on even smaller voting populations to sway public policy one way or another. There is early evidence of an organizational pivot by the Christian Right to the municipal level on the topic of Illinois's new law concerning the sale of recreational cannabis.

In late 2019, municipal governments debated allowing or disallowing dispensaries or other cannabis-related businesses within their city or town limits, an option available under the law, and Christian Right organizations began to organize. Anita Bedell, executive director of Illinois Church Action on Alcohol and Addiction Problems (ILCAAAP), called on citizens to "pray … and contact your local officials … because they are the ones who can stop [the sale of legal cannabis] in your community."[79] In Darien, a city in which local government narrowly voted to allow dispensaries, a local alderman informed me that he had "seen a lot of religious people come out against the recent cannabis law … I see evangelical and religious voters as fearful of change, fearful of the unknown." Online, Christian Right organizations encouraged this action. Illinois Family Action uplifted the "action plan" of the ILCAAAP, which included a call on citizens to "attend and speak at municipal and County Board meetings."[80]

A potential institutional pivot of Illinois Christian Right organizations to focus their joint resources on municipal issues such as implementation of Illinois's new cannabis law presents these organizations with a trade-off: do they give up on working for bigger-name candidates for

[79] Illinois Family Action's Facebook video, 3/12/20, accessed 4/24/20, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=879933645781769.
[80] Illinois Church Action on Alcohol & Addiction Problems, "Action plan to protect your municipality and county," 10/3/19, accessed 4/24/20, http://ilcaaap.org/action-plan-to-protect-your-municipality-and-county/.

state legislature or U.S. Congress in order to implement policy changes that fit their ideology in municipal-level elections, where voter turnout and citizen interest are generally lowest?

If they choose to shift and focus to municipal elections, which take place in April of odd-numbered years and have incredibly low turnout, the organizations would likely go against the will of the citizenry at large, and this divergence of preference may galvanize local individuals to band together against the Christian Right. Early evidence highlights this potential divergence, as an advisory referendum in Naperville on whether or not to allow adult-use cannabis dispensaries within city limits passed with 53% voting in favor[81] in March 2020 (see Figure 14), despite opposition by Christian Right activists such as Ms. Bedell. As with discussion of Congressman Lipinski's loss, the coronavirus pandemic must be taken into account, as turnout was cut almost in half from 2016.

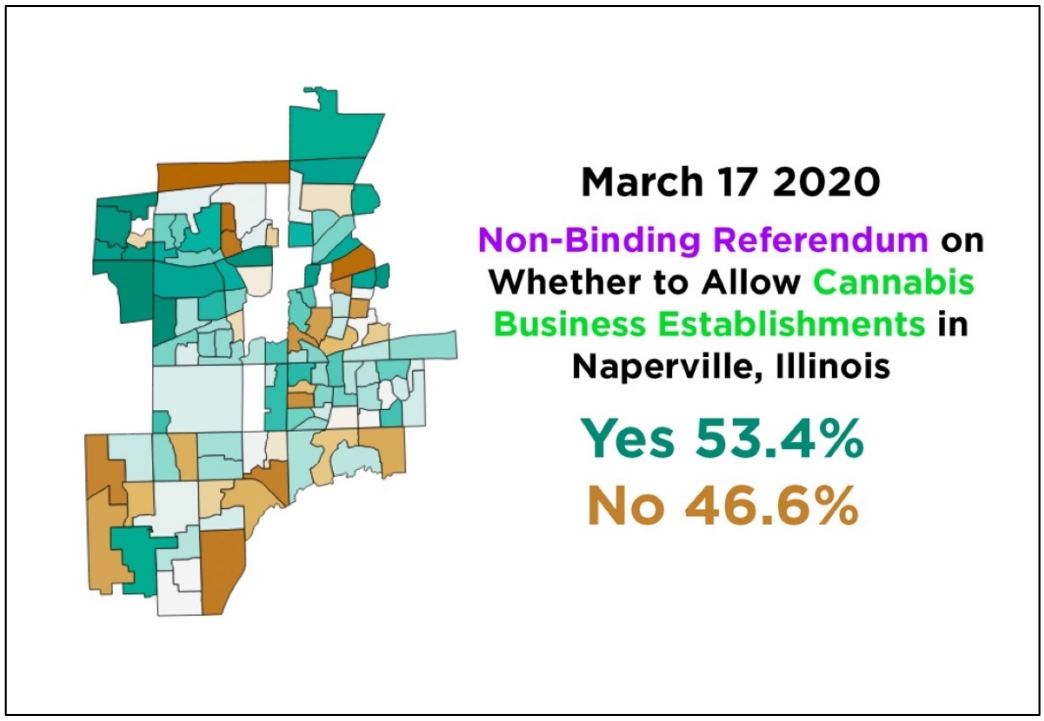

Figure 14: March 2020 Referendum on Allowing Adult-Use Cannabis Businesses in Naperville, IL

[81] Offices of the Will and DuPage County Clerks.

2020's Christian Right Slate

However – in a blow to this already unlikely pivot – 2020 has the potential to be a banner year for Christian Right congressional candidates in Illinois, giving Christian Right activists myriad options of volunteering for big name candidates rather than municipal policies. An Illinois Family Action headline from February declares, "Illinois poised to be Leader in Freedom Caucus Freshman,"[82] before extolling the pro-life and pro-family *bona fides* of congressional candidates Jeanne Ives, James Marter, and Mary Miller. Ives and Marter were both primary candidates for the 6th and 14th congressional districts, both in the collar counties. Though Ives was the heavy favorite to advance to the general election against Democrat Sean Casten, Marter faced a more crowded primary – and several of his opponents had received the highest possible rating from Illinois Right to Life. Another suburban race, in the 11th congressional district, also offers Christian Right activists a promising recruit: Rick Laib, who had received a coveted and uncommon endorsement by the national Family Research Council in his unsuccessful 2018 run for state Representative.

Ives, Miller, and Laib claimed victory in their respective elections in the March 2020 primary, while James Marter placed fourth behind state Senators Jim Oberweis (the Republican nominee) and Sue Rezin, and former Trump administration official Catalina Lauf. Oberweis – like Marter, Laib, Miller, and Ives – had received the highest possible rating from Illinois Right to Life Action.

While the presence of these candidates may provide activists with campaigns that excite them, both the candidates and activists risk the further decline of Illinois Christian Right organizational power by continuing to alienate suburban moderate swing voters and their more socially liberal views. Jeanne Ives gained a reputation for social conservatism in her narrow 2018

[82] Paul Hurst, "Illinois poised to be a Leader in Freedom Caucus Freshman," *Illinois Family Action*, 2/1/20, accessed 4/23/20, https://illinoisfamilyaction.org/2020/02/illinois-poised-to-be-leader-in-freedom-caucus-freshman/.

primary loss against incumbent Governor Bruce Rauner by running a controversial ad described as "sexist, racist, and homophobic."[83] James Marter faced criticism in 2019 when a volunteer on his campaign gave a Democratic parade float the Nazi salute.[84] These extremist candidates are prime examples of the feedback loop that occurs when the Christian Right gains media attention: the number of those who lack religious affiliation rises and evangelical protestants move away from the Christian Right.

Expanding Democratic Opportunities

The presence of Republican candidates who engage Christian Right activists and organizations presents the Illinois Democratic Party and its suburban offshoots with two opportunities: the first, the risk that Republican candidates who court Christian Right groups are too extreme for suburban moderates; and the second, that a continued focus by Christian Right organizations on congressional races further degrades the influence these organizations have over suburban evangelicals, allowing Democrats an opportunity to swing the suburban evangelical community their way.

"Religion has no necessary political connotation," cultural theorist Stuart Hall once said, "Religion has been bound up in particular ways, wired up very directly as the cultural and ideological underpinning of a particular structure of power … [but] since those articulations are not inevitable, nor necessary, they can potentially be transformed."[85] If the evangelical community moves away from its historical function as a Republican Party voting bloc due to the

[83] Rick Pearson and Kim Geiger, "Ives' new ad ripped as 'sexist racist, homophobic'," *Chicago Tribune,* 2/3/18, accessed 2/15/20. https://www.chicagotribune.com/politics/ct-met-jeanne-ives-bruce-rauner-transgender-ad-cps-20180202-story.html
[84] Katie Finlon, "Democratic, Republican officials react to Nazi salute incident at Prairiefest parade," *Kendall County Now*, 6/21/19, accessed 02/10/20. https://www.kendallcountynow.com/2019/06/17/democratic-republican-officials-react-to-nazi-salute-incident-at-prairiefest-parade/apl2e3y/
[85] Stuart Hall, "On postmodernism and articulation: An interview with Stuart Hall," edited by Lawrence Grossberg, in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, Routledge, London: 1996, p142.

actions of Christian Right organizations, Democratic candidates and other political actors have the potential to make political inroads.

By framing certain issues in ways that the evangelical community can digest, Democratic candidates can expand the suburban gains they made in 2018. Interviews suggest that this opportunity was taken into account by Democratic candidates. One successful Democratic candidate for state House explained that "sometimes in the suburbs, [being pro-life or pro-choice] is not as deciding of a factor … [one can] connect with pro-life people on other issues." Other staffers and candidates emphasized how "important [it was] to choose words carefully in specific towns" – some candidates focused on corruption, others on pollution, and yet others on "the issues" more broadly to win over traditionally Republican voters.

National polling indicates that evangelical voters may even be moving away from abortion as their paramount issue, lending credence to this Democratic strategy. The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) 2019 American Values Survey found that white evangelical Protestants named terrorism (63%) as their most critical issue going into the 2020 presidential election followed by immigration (55%), with healthcare – in which abortion was included – coming in third (53%)[86]. This potential shift of white evangelical Protestants away from abortion as their primary issue – whether to terrorism or to municipal policy – may serve to lessen American political polarization and allow Democrats a way in. As political scientist Robert Putnam theorized, "should sex and family issues recede in political significance, religion – or religiosity – will gradually cease to be such a salient political division,"[87] allowing Democratic candidates a renewed opportunity to reach out to white evangelical voters in the suburbs.

[86] PRRI Staff, "Fractured Nation: Widening Partisan Polarization and Key Issues in 2020 Presidential Election", *PRRI*, 10/20/19, accessed 01/29/20. https://www.prri.org/research/fractured-nation-widening-partisan-polarization-and-key-issues-in-2020-presidential-elections/
[87] Putnam, 414.

Conclusion

The organizations of today's Christian Right in Illinois stand at a crossroad, far from the political power and influence they wielded in the era of Dennis Hastert and Henry Hyde. The rise of Donald Trump and the anti-Trump wave it sparked in the suburbs may have washed out a number of Republican candidates, but Christian Right organizations cannot blame the "Blue Wave" exclusively for their losses. Between a booming evangelical population, an existing Catholic political infrastructure, and hundreds of suburban churches built literally and figuratively to cultivate a sense of community, the Illinois Christian Right should be able to bring in enough new volunteers, activists, and voters to offset the drift of the suburbs away from the Republican Party. However, instead of focusing their full efforts on affecting policy at the municipal level – a level where they may have an opportunity to make a tangible impact – the organizations of the Illinois Christian Right risk their membership being pulled to campaigns of pro-life, pro-family values candidates for Congress who further risk alienating both the suburban median voter and more moderate, less partisan members of the evangelical community.

This inability of the Illinois Christian Right to control its dwindling membership, thus creating a feedback loop in which more and more extremist candidates give the Christian Right a worse and worse public perception, presents an opportunity for Democratic campaigns and organizations to win over those evangelical voters who find themselves unrepresented by these organizations. Further, this case study of the Chicago suburbs and their evangelical population illustrates that the white evangelical community should not be thought of as a monolithic bloc of the Republican base. Midwestern suburban white evangelicals – though still concerned with abortion and 'family values' – appear to be a voting bloc at least partially up for grabs by the right Democratic candidate in the future.

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Appendix

Figure 1: *State legislative election results in Greater Chicago Area, 2018*

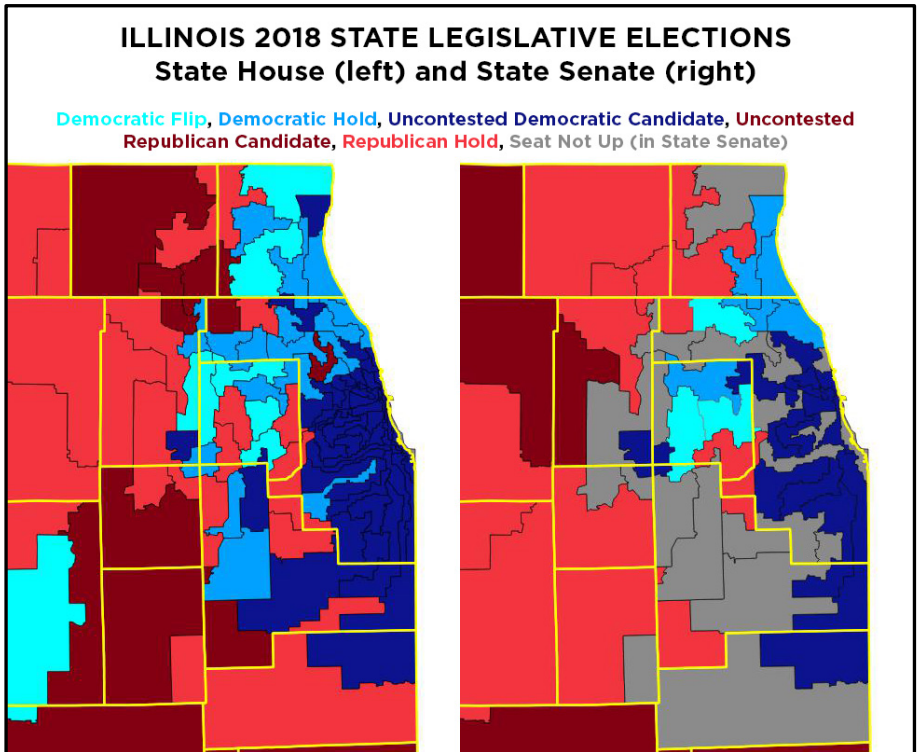


Figure 2: *Compared per Capita, Household Income of Selected Areas*

COUNTY	PER CAPITA INCOME (RANK)	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (RANK)	MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME (RANK)
LAKE	38,120 (1)	78,948 (2)	91,693 (2)
DUPAGE	37,849 (2)	76,581 (3)	92,423 (1)
MCHENRY	31,838 (3)	76,482 (4)	86,698 (4)
WILL	29,811 (6)	75,906 (5)	85,488 (5)
KANE	29,480 (7)	67,767 (7)	77,998 (7)
(ILLINOIS)	*28,782*	*55,735*	*68,236*
KENDALL	30,565 (5)	79.897 (1)	87,309 (3)

Figure 3: *Republican Vote % by Collar Counties v. Other Midwestern Suburbs*

	PRESIDENT (GOP %)		STATEWIDE REPUBLICAN %		CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLICAN %	
region	IL	Midwest	IL	Midwest	IL	Midwest
2000	53.4	53.3		51.3		
2002			57.9	55.8		
2004	53.9	55.2	31.1	47.1		
2006			52.5	50.9		
2008	43.1	46.7	32.7	42.1[12]		
2010			57.1	59.2	56.3	58.1
2012	46.4	51.4		46.3	52.9	53.2
2014			55.7	59.4	53.3	58.2
2016	41.0	49.0	45.3	53.0	50.4	53.9
2018			45.5	48.8	42.3	49.3

Figure 4: *Comparative Rates of Approval & Political Action, from "Pews, Prayers, and Politics"*

	Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod	Assemblies of God	Southern Baptist Convention	Willow Creek Association	Roman Catholic Church
While preaching, take a stand on some political issue (% approving)	29%	71%	66%	50%	58%
Publicly (not preaching) support a candidate (% approving)	38%	69%	56%	44%	27%
Urged their congregation to register and vote	52%	68%	59%	56%	54%
2000 Election: Bush % vs. Gore %	87-8	91-3	86-11	85-13	59-31

Figure 5: *Breakdown of Churches in Sample by County, Denominational Body*

	Baptist	Pentecostal	Holiness	Non-Denom	Pres-Ref	Lutheran	Meth-Piet	SUM
DuPage	6	4	3	7	0	2	2	24
Kane	2	5	1	5	0	3	1	17
McHenry	0	1	0	4	0	3	1	9
Lake	5	0	1	6	4	3	2	21
Will	4	2	1	6	2	4	0	19
SUM	17	12	6	28	6	15	6	90

Figure 6: *Example regression output in R*

```
Call:
lm(formula = data$MCCAIN08 ~ data$evr08 + data$MHHI10 + data$WNHPER08)

Residuals:
    Min      1Q  Median      3Q     Max
-7.1993 -2.5870 -0.6445  1.7973 11.7655

Coefficients:
                Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)   -3.854e+01  9.580e+00  -4.024 0.000375 ***
data$evr08     7.100e-02  1.582e-02   4.489 0.000105 ***
data$MHHI10    1.965e-04  5.841e-05   3.364 0.002178 **
data$WNHPER08  7.392e+01  1.071e+01   6.904 1.38e-07 ***
---
Signif. codes:  0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘ ’ 1

Residual standard error: 4.364 on 29 degrees of freedom
  (2 observations deleted due to missingness)
Multiple R-squared:  0.7726,    Adjusted R-squared:  0.7491
F-statistic: 32.85 on 3 and 29 DF,  p-value: 1.838e-09
```

Figure 7: *Very few political candidates perceived any involvement by evangelical or religious groups in 2018*

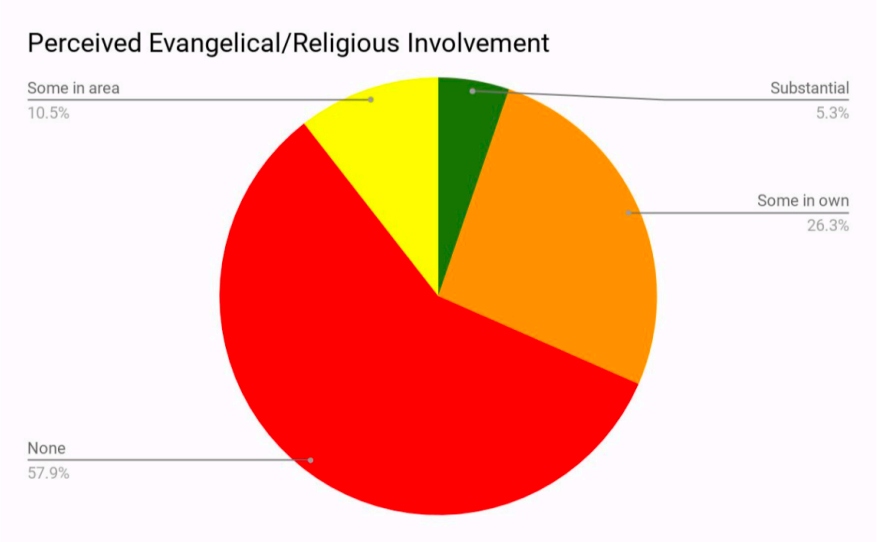


Figure 8: *Geographic distribution of clerical, political interviews indicate a higher level of religiopolitical involvement in DuPage County than others*

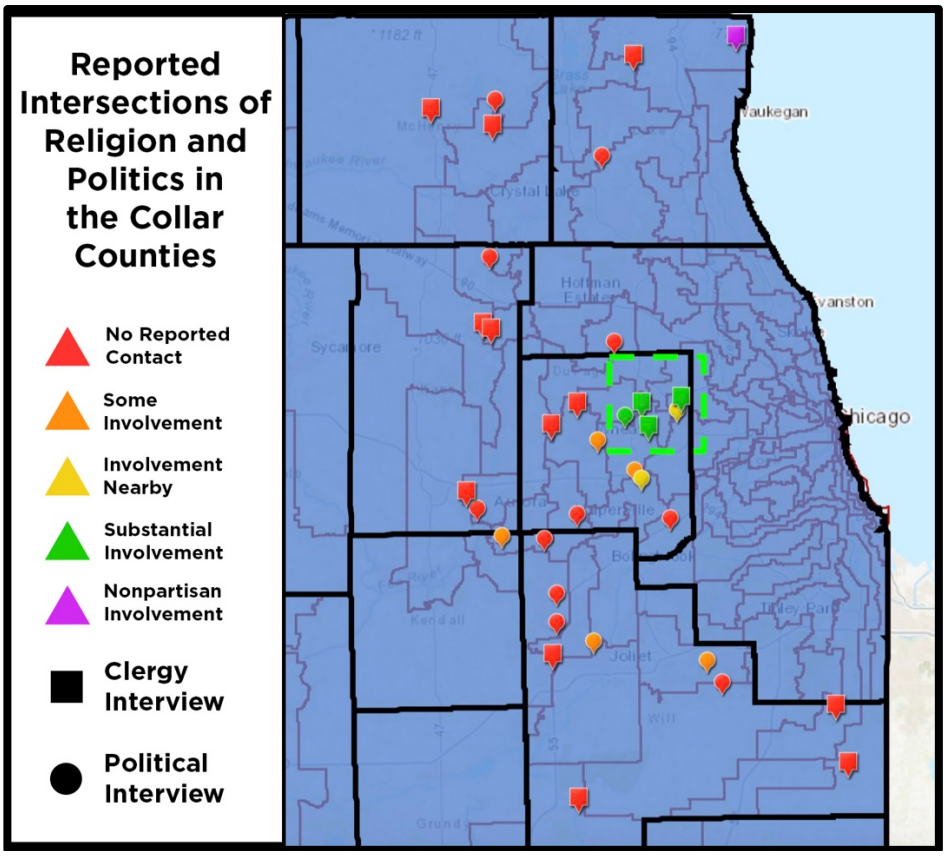


Figure 9: *Peter Breen received more contributions from Christian Right organizations than all other suburban candidates combined, 2012-2019.*

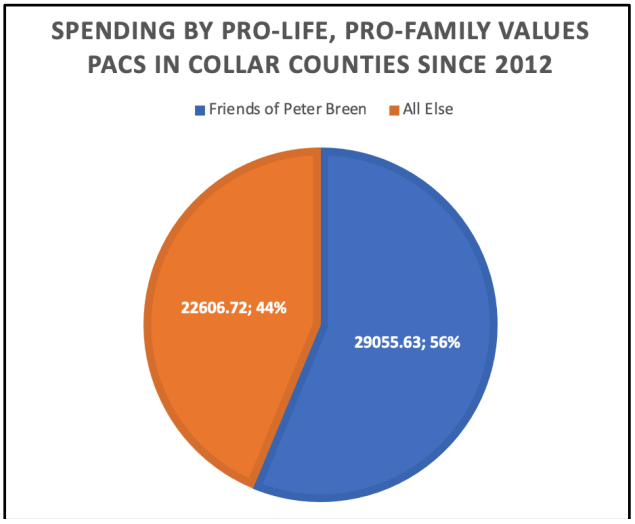


Figure 10: *Federal Political Contributions by Christian Right and Evangelical Related Groups in Illinois, 2004-2019*

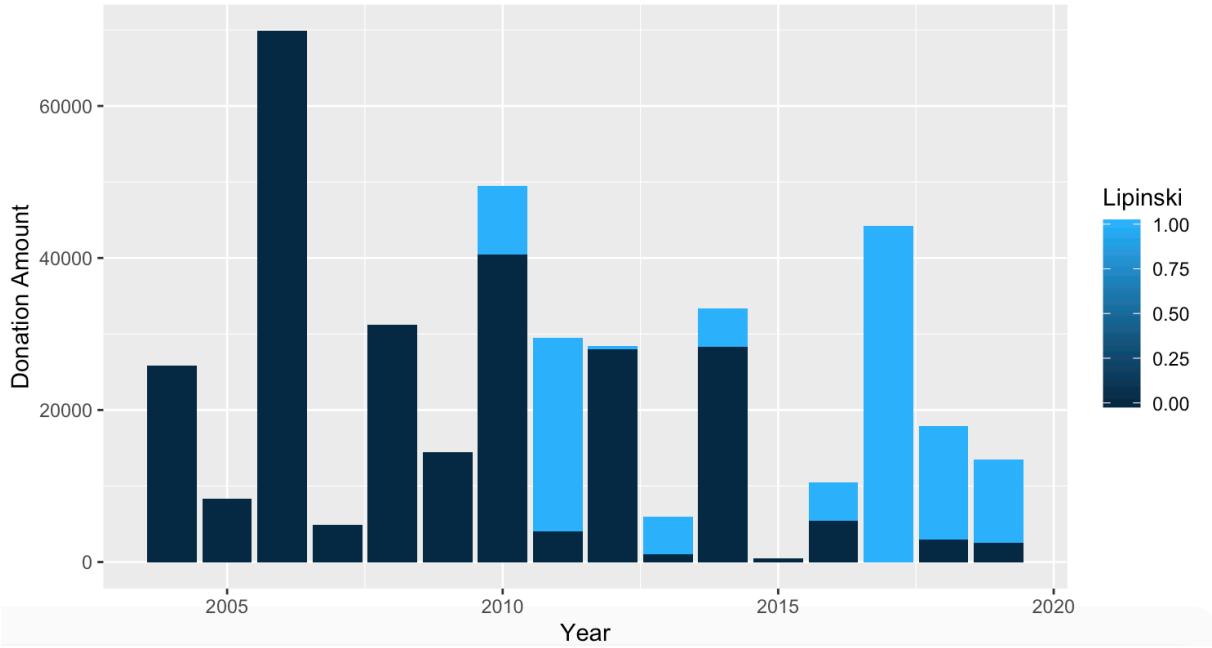


Figure 11: *Select Survey Responses by Members of Evangelical Clergy*

	Share who engaged in action	Approval of action (5-point scale)
Urging voting	9/14	4.57
Urging direct contact of elected officials	2/14	3.36
Circulating petitions for elected officials	1/14	1.92
Urging voting for particular candidate/party	0/14	1.43
Giving political donation	1/13[76]	3.36
Attending political meeting	0/13	3.36
Volunteering for political candidate	1/13	2.79
Voting	12/13	5.00

Figure 12: *Endorsements by Eagle Forum in Illinois v. Nationally, 2004-2018*

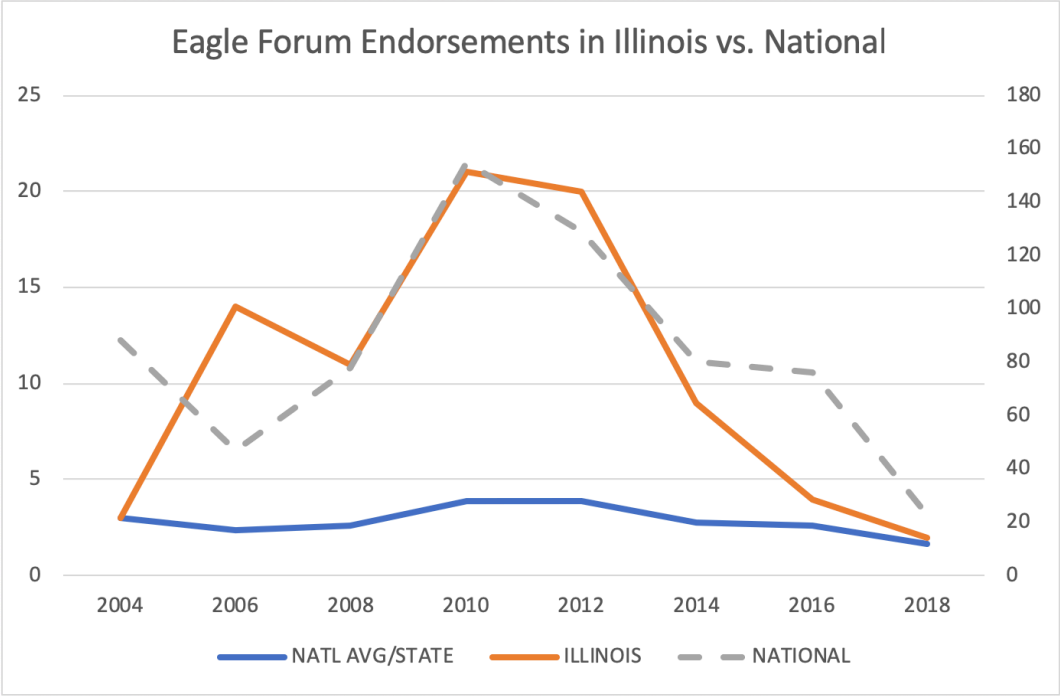


Figure 13: *Correlation between Evangelicals as % of Population and Republican vote share in Presidential Elections, 2000-2016 across select Midwestern counties, holding median household income and race constant.*

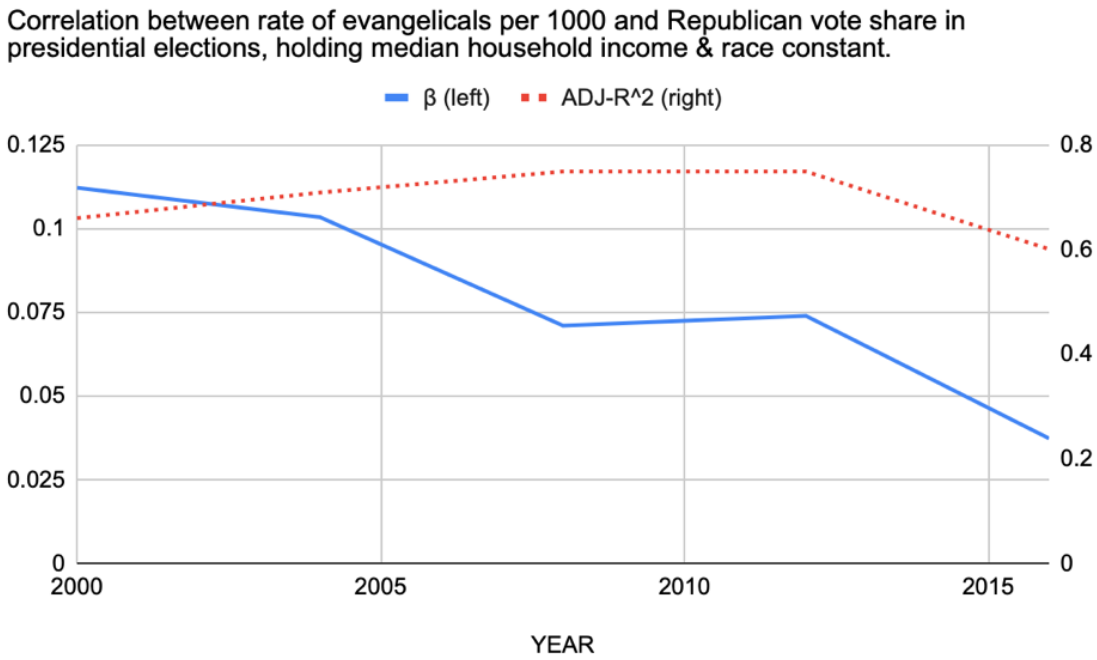


Figure 14: *March 2020 Referendum on Allowing Adult-Use Cannabis Businesses in Naperville, IL; data from local elections officials*

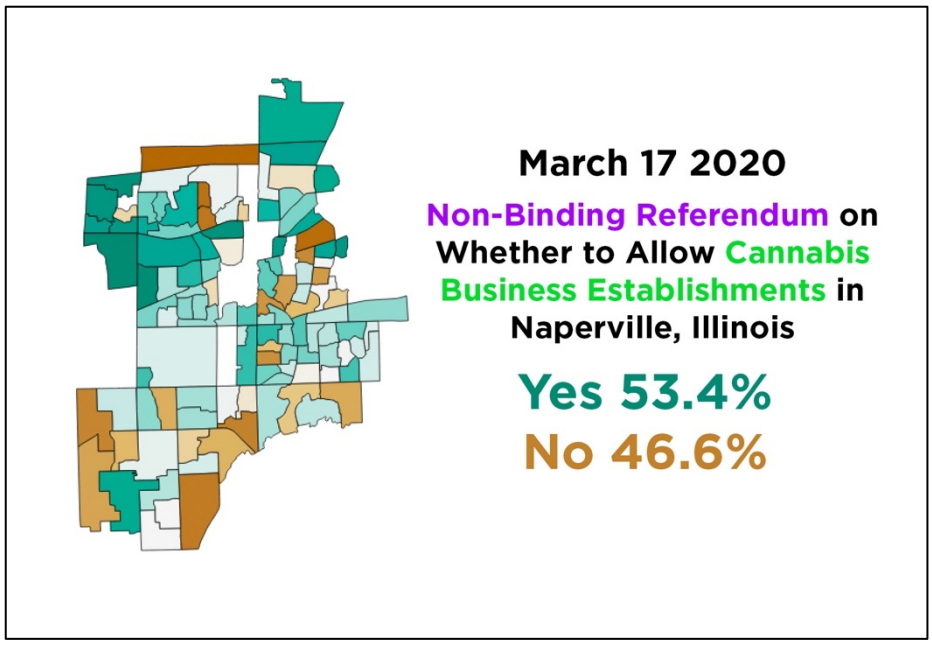
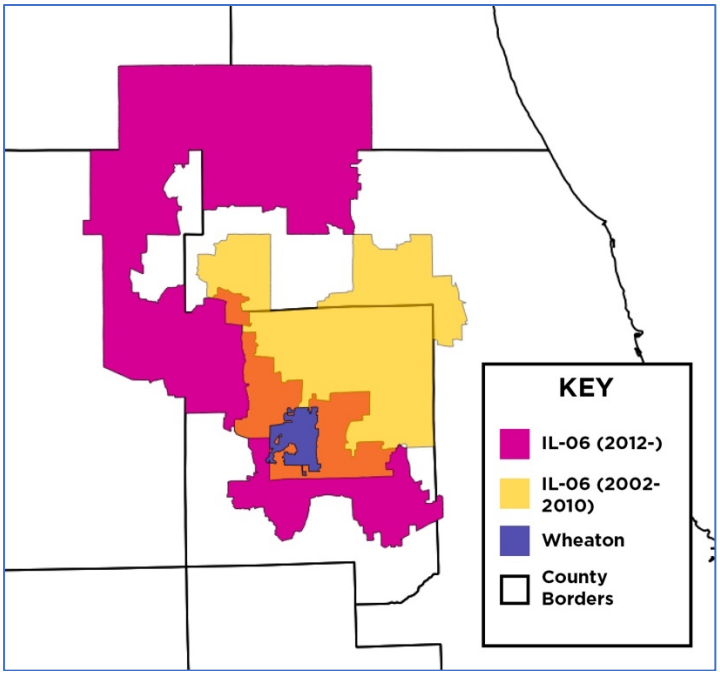


Figure 15: *Illinois's 6th Congressional District, before and after 2010 redistricting, Wheaton highlighted.*



Full List of Midwestern Suburban Counties in Quantitative Analysis:

ILLINOIS	INDIANA	MICHIGAN	MINNESOTA	OHIO	WISCONSIN
DuPage	Hamilton	Kent	Anoka	Butler	Kenosha
Kane	Hendricks	Lapeer	Carver	Delaware	Racine
Kendall	Johnson	Livingston	Dakota	Lorain	Ozaukee
Lake	Lake	Macomb	Scott	Medina	Washington
McHenry	Porter	Oakland	Washington	Warren	Waukesha
Will		St Clair	Wright		

Sample Surveys:

Clerical Survey Questions

(1) Did your church or congregation have a voter registration driver prior to the 2018 midterm elections?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Choose not to answer

(2) [If church established prior to 2016] Did you have one prior to the 2016 elections?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Choose not to answer

(3) Prior to the 2018 midterm elections, did you engage in any of the following?
   a. urging voting
   b. urging direct contact of elected officials
   c. circulating petitions for elected officials
   d. urging voting for a particular candidate or party
   e. giving a political contribution
   f. attending a political meeting
   g. volunteering for a political candidate
   h. voting

(4) Regardless of whether or not you made such an actions, how would you feel about a member of the evangelical clergy doing so? Please answer using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "a member of the clergy should never engage in such an activity" and 5 being "a member of the clergy may engage in this activity".
   a. urging voting – 1 2 3 4 5
   b. urging direct contact of elected officials – 1 2 3 4 5
   c. circulating petitions for elected officials – 1 2 3 4 5
   d. urging voting for a particular candidate or party - 1 2 3 4 5
   e. giving a political contribution - 1 2 3 4 5
   f. attending a political meeting - 1 2 3 4 5
   g. volunteering for a political candidate - 1 2 3 4 5

h. voting - 1 2 3 4 5

(5) In your time as member of the clergy at this particular congregation, do you believe your congregation has grown more conservative, more liberal, or stayed the same?
   a. More liberal
   b. More conservative
   c. Stayed the same

(6) Should the church focus more on social reform or individual morality?
   a. Social reform
   b. Individual morality

(7) Would you say religion should be a guiding principle in how people participate in politics?
   a. Yes
   b. No

(8) Would you classify yourself as evangelical, fundamentalist, religious, spiritual, charismatic or conservative? You may select choose multiple.
   a. Evangelical
   b. Fundamentalist
   c. Religious
   d. Spirit-Filled
   e. Charismatic
   f. Conservative
   g. None of the above

(9) Prior to the 2018 election, were you contacted by a national or local political group urging you to discuss political matters with congregants or urge voting?
   a. Yes - discuss political matters
   b. Yes - urge voting
   c. Yes - both
   d. No

Politician Survey Questions

1. To what degree do you think evangelical groups or churches influenced your 2018 campaign?

2. What about political groups with an evangelical religious focus?

3. Did you ever seek out evangelical faith groups for help with campaign events or activities?

4. What about other faith groups?

5. Did you ever address an evangelical church or organization? If so, which? A church or organization of another faith?

Campaign Worker Questions

1. Do you think evangelical organizations and/or churches played a role in your candidates' race in 2018?

2. Was that role for or against your candidate, or was it politically neutral?

3. Did your candidate ever address an evangelical church or organization? If so, which? A church or organization of another faith?