

Full Title: Reconsidering the Role of Politics in Leaving Religion: The Importance of Affiliation

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## Abstract

Studies have pointed to politics as an important force driving people away from religion – the argument is that the dogmatic politics of the Christian Right have alienated liberals and moderates, effectively threatening organized religion in America. We argue that existing explanations are incomplete; a proper reconsideration necessitates distinguishing processes of affiliation (with specific congregations) from identification (with religious traditions). Using three datasets, we find evidence that qualifies and complements existing narratives of religious exit. Evaluations of congregational political fit drive retention decisions. At the same time, opposition to the Christian Right only bears on retention decisions when it is salient in a congregational context, affecting primarily evangelicals and Republicans. These results help us understand the dynamics of the oft-observed relationship between the Christian Right and de-identification and urge us to adopt a broader, more pluralistic view of the politicization of American religion.

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It is all but settled that religion can influence political behavior through a number of mechanisms, including beliefs, identity, and communication. However, apart from some older work on loyalty to social institutions (e.g., Bergesen and Warr 1979; Djupe 2000; Hadaway and Roof 1988), scholars have largely characterized religion in much the same way as party identification once was – namely, as an “unmoved mover” (Campbell et al. 1960; though see March and Olsen 1984: 735). At the very least, religion has typically been treated – almost without question – as independent of the political process. This treatment has begun to change as studies have reversed the arrow of inquiry, exploring whether politics affects individual religious behavior. Research has honed in on whether the extreme faith and politics of the Christian Right have driven up rates of exit from organized religion and reduced levels of religiosity. For instance, Hout and Fischer (2002) find that the rise of the Religious Right in American politics drove those with more moderate and liberal political views to claim that they had “no [religious] preference” (see also Baker and Smith 2009; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Similarly, Patrikios (2008) demonstrates that Democrats have reduced their attendance at religious services in recent years, presumably as a reaction to what they perceive to be a close connection between organized religion and the Republican Party (see also Patrikios 2013).

The implications of such findings are profound for two facets of our understanding of religion and politics. First, scholars have long presumed that religion is independent of the political attributes with which it is correlated; this new line of research asserts a degree of interdependence. Second, these findings suggest that people are willing to leave what may be long-term relationships with a religious organization because of the political presence of an unpopular group in the political environment. This latter facet could be seen as a cause of polarization and partisan sorting – and one that is beyond ideological (Levendusky 2009) or media sources (Prior 2007).

We focus on the role that politics plays in a mechanism that is crucial to this larger story. Specifically, we take up the charge from Patrikios (2008, 386) and concern ourselves with the role of politics in involvement and affiliation decisions regarding particular congregations. Notably, we draw attention to the fact that congregational *affiliation* processes are distinct from the *identification* processes that previous studies have examined. Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) examined de-identification with religion: self-reporting as a religious “none.” By contrast, our focus is on the drivers of organizational exit: church disaffiliation. While de-identification has been linked to attitudes toward the Religious Right, we question whether evaluations of the Christian Right bear on decisions about congregational affiliation unless the issue is salient (via disagreement) in the congregational context.<sup>1</sup>

These twin processes of disaffiliation and de-identification are not incompatible and may take place in varying orders. If there is a causal order, we suspect that disaffiliation most often precedes de-identification.<sup>2</sup> In the discussion section we discuss how these perspectives can be reconciled and present some evidence to support that argument. However, our broader point is that only looking at one process – de-identification – paints an incomplete picture. Indeed, recognizing the role of politics in disaffiliation helps to connect the research agenda on religious exit with other literatures and religious patterns. While the functional result of people leaving because of political disagreement may be that disaffiliation is concentrated on the left side of the political spectrum (see Hoge 1988; Nelson 1988; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Zuckerman 2012), we suspect that result is

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<sup>1</sup> To be clear, in this paper we focus on the conditions under which individuals’ feelings toward the Christian Right will bear on their decisions to draw down their participation in a particular congregation or to leave it altogether. We suspect that evaluations of (or feelings toward) the Christian Right are relevant for such determinations when the congregational context makes it difficult for individuals to ignore political differences between themselves and their fellow congregants; this recognition of difference with the congregation – organizational disagreement – is what we refer to when we talk about “salience” (we elaborate on this idea in the third section of the paper). By salience we *do not* mean perceptions of threat with respect to the Christian Right, or the simple prominence of particular policies/issues.

<sup>2</sup> Our goal in this paper is to highlight processes of affiliation as a complement to processes of identification. That said, in the Supplementary Information (SI) document we also provide some analysis of the drivers of identification. We find some suggestive evidence in the PALS data that affiliation may precede identification (please see the penultimate section of the paper for a discussion).

due to the aggregation of a set of localized differences. Moreover, the decline of mainline Protestantism belies a population-level Christian Right effect – very few mainline congregations have any connection to the Christian Right. Members in such churches should be unlikely to conflate the Christian Right with their own denomination or congregation, and reactions to the movement should have no bearing on membership retention decisions for them. This suggests, in fact, that disaffiliation due to disagreement with the Christian Right should be more common *among evangelical Republicans*. In addition, we expect that people are seeking and sorting along lines of differences across the religious spectrum, such that upon closer examination, reduced religiosity and disaffiliation are in fact reasonably well distributed across religious traditions.

In this paper, we attempt to sort out the degree to which individual religious involvement and retention decisions are made as a result of political disagreements. We draw on a series of datasets that are well-suited to this investigation, as they combine assessments of the Religious Right with information on the dimensions of disagreement between respondents and their congregations.

To preview our key results, we find that differences, political and not, felt within houses of worship are the chief culprit behind patterns of disaffiliation. We also find that the Christian Right is driving congregants out of the pews, which certainly jells with familiar narratives. *But, instead of driving out Democrats across the board, we find that the Christian Right drives out those who disagree with the movement and are likely to experience disagreement in their congregations – that is, evangelical Republicans*. This pattern serves to reinforce our notion that affiliation decisions work differently than decisions about religious identification and underscores the importance of giving attention to both processes.

We conclude, however, on a reasonably optimistic note. Political disagreement tends to drive the decision making of those marginally attached to a congregation, since more points of connection work to sustain membership even in the face of disagreement (see Cornwall 1989 for a related set of findings). Therefore, the skill-building role that religious institutions can play is maintained and is

accessible to a wide range of citizens (e.g., Verba et al. 1995; though see Djupe et al. 2007 for qualifications). The drive in American religion to be politically relevant surely promotes both processes; it yields a slow but steady drip that drains marginal affiliates from congregations. However, the upshot is that religious organizations in the United States appear to be robust entities that are able to survive the negative evaluations associated with one of its most visible elements in the public sphere—the Christian Right.

### **Political Forces and Religious Exit**

In their seminal piece, Hout and Fischer (2002) demonstrated that the increased visibility of the Religious Right in the early 1990s corresponded with an uptick in the proportion of survey respondents who indicated that they have “no religion.” Since the level of religious belief (belief in God) in the population had not changed, they turned to the question of what was forcing individuals towards de-identification. For Hout and Fischer, that force was the visibility of the Religious Right. The authors have returned to this question in a recent paper (2014), which reinforces the connection between political backlash and religious de-identification, while acknowledging the strong influence of generational change. The authors add panel data from the General Social Survey, which helps them to show that liberals who start with some religion are more likely to claim no religious preference later in the panel (conservatives are far less likely to adopt “no religious preference”). In essence, the message is that political identities shape religious identities.

Hout and Fischer’s findings are supported by Patrikios (2008), who employs panel data to examine over time changes in church attendance as a function of partisan identification. Republican identifiers came to attend church more often over time while Democratic identifiers attended less frequently. Putnam and Campbell (2010, Ch. 5) add to these studies with their own panel data, finding that political liberals grew more secular over the course of their study, while political conservatives became more religious over the same period of observation. They conclude that when

an individual's religious identity and his or her political identity come into conflict, that religious identity gives way. On the basis of these diverse but related studies,<sup>3</sup> it seems reasonable to infer that the Religious Right is making religion inhospitable to those with more liberal views.<sup>4</sup>

Older pieces that focused on religious exit (apostasy) – whether characterized as leaving a particular congregation or falling from the faith altogether – also found it more prevalent among political liberals (e.g., Hadaway and Roof 1988; Nelson 1988). Put differently, Mainline Protestantism lost members in the post-war period, while evangelical Protestant denominations largely have not (until recently, that is – see Finke and Stark 2005). At the same time, early observers were supremely skeptical of the suggestion that political leanings *cause* individuals to disaffiliate. They dismissed the correlation between liberalism and disaffiliation as inconsequential, owing to the tendency for dropouts to be less involved politically (Nelson 1988). For instance, citing earlier research by Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977), Dean Hoge argued that “political attitudes were [not] important in causing apostasy” (1988: 86).

We believe that this dismissal of political factors was – and remains – premature due to misspecification. The connection is not with ideological direction, *per se*, but with political disagreements within houses of worship. This squares with findings from other early scholarship which found that politics played an important role in understanding how clergy and churches engaged in the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. From one view, the threat of declining donations and disaffiliation shaped whether mainline Protestant clergy participated in civil rights and anti-war struggles (Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974; Stark et al. 1971). Moreover, clergy's participation in high profile political activities was connected to a decline of mainline denominations (Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974; Roof and McKinney 1987; Wuthnow 1988; though see Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens

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<sup>3</sup> Please see the SI (p. 28) for further discussion of the measurement variation in this literature.

<sup>4</sup> For elaboration in the sociology of religion literature, please see the SI (p. 28).

1994). This link is not limited to the 1960s – there is recent evidence that the financial health of a religious institution affects whether even Catholic priests address abortion politics (Calfano, Oldmixon, and Gray 2014).

### **The Political Conditions for Religious Disaffiliation**

We start with an expectation: if some combination of religion and politics is turning individuals away from religion, incidences of politically-motivated disaffiliation will be localized within particular congregations. This expectation turns on the fundamental logic of organizational affiliation articulated by Olson (1965) that conceptualizes membership in cost-benefit terms, the result of a range of attractive selective benefits weighed against costs. From this perspective, political difference is but one aspect of a broader calculus that may bear on membership retention (e.g., Rothenberg 1988).

Following from this logic, politics contributes to membership retention in two primary ways. First, members evaluate their fit in the congregation, with most preferring congruence over incongruence, homophily over diversity (e.g., McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; Scheufele, Nisbet, and Brossard 2003). Not all forms of difference are salient at all times. For instance, views on gun rights may remain dormant until the church is asked to support a boycott of stores supporting open-carry laws. Simply put, anything that raises the salience of political differences should reduce the value of being a member for some. One of those conditions could be a church culture that values politics by encouraging involvement in political opportunities and making clear connections between religious values and political choices (Calhoun-Brown 1996; Djupe and Gilbert 2009). Being in such a “political church” should raise the salience of politics, which may prove problematic for political minorities in the church.

Of course, political differences may still be easy to ignore if a member values other aspects of the church experience, or is otherwise able to compensate for such differences by “seeking out

religious communications that reinforce their minority (relative to the congregation) attitudes” (Jelen 1992: 708; see also Finifter 1974). If other factors lower the value of key selective benefits, this could also increase the odds of disaffiliation. In early research on the activism of religious elites in the 1960s, clergy political engagement reportedly entailed ignoring core services the church would otherwise offer (Quinley 1974; Roof and McKinney 1987; Wuthnow 1988). More recent work has found support for this notion by showing that political agreement does not bear on how congregation members evaluate the political involvement of clergy, which is instead a function of satisfaction with worship and other core church-provided services (Djupe and Gilbert 2008). Therefore, an organizational agenda that departs from some members’ expectations may lead them to weigh political differences more heavily and to reduce their involvement.

Importantly, this perspective is able to incorporate the politics of the Christian Right. The proper assessment of such a story requires evidence that (ideally) consists of the following components: 1) congregations promoting Religious Right political ends and means, and 2) negative feelings toward the Religious Right being associated with disaffiliation from those congregations. To date no study has demonstrated both components to be true (e.g., Vargas 2012), and no study has reported measures appropriate for gauging congregational mechanisms. Moreover, even lacking these specific measures, no study has looked for effects due to disagreement over the politics of the Christian Right in those pockets of American religion where that disagreement is likely to be salient: evangelical congregations rather than non-evangelical ones. Such an analysis would go a long way toward sorting out whether observed correlations between partisanship and religious behavior are attributable to the Religious Right generally, or are perhaps part of a broader story about the politics that are on display in pews and pulpits on any given Sunday.

### **Designs, Data, and Measures**

We draw upon three data sources – each with its own strengths – in an effort to better understand the impact of congregational difference and opposition to the Christian Right on disaffiliation processes. All three are panel designs that include different samples at different time periods, covering different spans of time between waves. The behaviors studied naturally include disaffiliation (the act of leaving a particular congregation) as well as church attendance. Full variable coding information is available in the Supplementary Information (SI) Appendix (pp. 2-4).

#### *The 2012 Election Panel Study*

The first panel dataset we draw upon was gathered in 2012 around the general election season. In mid-October 2012, we used *Qualtrics Panels* to interview 1,753 individuals from across the United States – individuals responded to a request to complete a 10 minute, online pre-election survey.<sup>5</sup> In late November, 2012, *Qualtrics* sent out requests for a follow-up interview, and 1,097 respondents agreed to complete our 20 minute, post-election questionnaire.<sup>6</sup> The structure of the dataset is crucial to our enterprise and is shared to different extents with the next two studies: it includes religious attendance in both waves, comparisons of the respondent to the congregation, feelings toward Christian fundamentalists,<sup>7</sup> and a wave 2 measure of whether individuals left their wave 1 house of worship. These data enable a direct test of the two perspectives: 1) whether opposition to, in this case, Christian fundamentalists is linked to declining attendance and increased disaffiliation, and 2) whether differences felt with the congregation drive down attendance and increase disaffiliation, especially among marginal wave 1 attenders.

#### *The 2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study*

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<sup>5</sup> For sample details, please see the SI (p. 28).

<sup>6</sup> The re-interview rate from pre to post-waves is a respectable 62.5%. Importantly, we find no statistically significant differences between respondents who completed both waves (versus those who completed one) on education, ideology, and several other characteristics of interest.

<sup>7</sup> Christian fundamentalists are not functionally the same as the Religious or Christian Right, though Americans tend to perceive them as one and the same (see Bolce and De Maio 1999a, 1999b, 2008; Patrikios 2013). The results across datasets here suggest that the specific question wording (whether Christian fundamentalist or conservative Christians active in politics) is not particularly influential.

The second panel dataset is essentially a city-study fashioned in the image of the pioneering efforts of the Columbia scholars (e.g., Berelson et al. 1954; Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), and the more contemporary efforts of Huckfeldt and colleagues (e.g., the 1984 South Bend Study). It was built in 2006 from a first wave surveying participants in the Republican gubernatorial primary in Franklin County, Ohio (home to Columbus, Ohio). Following the May, 2006 gubernatorial primary, a random sample of 4,000 Republican primary voters was drawn immediately after the voter file was released to the public and was surveyed by mail. In all, 1,062 usable surveys were received from three waves of mailing for a response rate of 26.6 percent; the total return was a few percentage points higher. The response rate is not high, though it is in line with or greater than typical, non-governmental mail surveys (see, e.g., Shih and Fan 2008). The follow-up wave of the panel was conducted after the general election in November, 2006. Roughly 640 voters responded (again across multiple reminder waves), yielding a healthy panel retention rate of just over 60 percent.<sup>8</sup> As with the 2012 data, the key attributes of this study are that we asked respondents for comparisons of the respondent to other members of their congregation at wave 1, their feelings toward prominent conservative Christian groups (and not just “Christian fundamentalists”), worship attendance in both waves, and whether they were still attending the same church in wave 2 (disaffiliation).<sup>9</sup>

Like the 2012 study, these data enable a direct test of the two perspectives: 1) whether opposition to the Christian Right affects attendance and affiliation, and 2) whether political and other differences felt with the congregation drive down attendance and affiliation, especially among marginal attenders (at wave 1).<sup>10</sup> The focus on these Republican primary voters is particularly useful

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<sup>8</sup> We found no panel retention bias on measures of interest.

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of mail-based panel surveys, please see the SI (p. 28).

<sup>10</sup> We focus on political factors throughout this paper. However, to be fair, we would acknowledge that these data do not allow us to effectively adjudicate between political and *non*-political sources of difference within congregations as explanations for disaffiliation; the majority of the variables included in our index of differences with the congregation could be construed as having at least some political content. Indeed, (arguably) even measures of difference that are ostensibly non-political in nature (such as racial/ethnic, or theological differences) could possibly, in today’s polarized political environment, be construed by churchgoers as having a political component.

as it allows us to consider an electoral context in which Christian Right politics was made especially salient; the primary contest had pitted a candidate who was closely aligned with Christian Right organizations against a more moderate opponent. If there is anyone who is likely to experience conflict in church over the Christian Right, it should be Republicans opposed to its politics.<sup>11</sup>

*The Portraits of American Life Study (PALS)*

The third panel dataset we draw on is a nationally-representative sample of 1,300 that was re-interviewed after 6 years (in 2012) from an initial sample of 2,610.<sup>12</sup> These interviews were conducted face-to-face and included measures crucial to our enterprise, especially views toward “conservative Christian groups active in politics.” The religious variables are plentiful if somewhat different than those described above, including a number of measures that capture tension and satisfaction with the congregation. The key outcome measure we consider asks respondents if they left their 2006 church by 2012. The test we employ interacts partisanship and religious tradition with opposition to conservative Christians active in politics; this follows upon the logic discussed previously – an expectation that *congregational conflict will be more common for evangelical Republicans who disagree with the Christian Right.*

### **Results: Looking for Difference in Congregations**

We begin by documenting the necessary conditions for this analysis: do some congregants feel different from others, especially in their politics? Two of the surveys we used asked explicitly for respondents’ subjective feelings of difference from fellow congregants. The results in Table 1 show

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<sup>11</sup> During the GOP primary, the more conservative, Christian Right-affiliated candidate was Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell; the moderate candidate was Ohio Attorney General Jim Petro. Blackwell won the primary (55.7% to 44.3%) – a margin that would qualify as “divisive” by classic formulations (e.g., Bernstein 1977) – but would go on to lose to Democrat Ted Strickland in the general election (full results are available at: <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/>). Aside from the leverage provided by the electoral context, focusing on Republicans also makes sense as levels of support for the Christian Right tend to be higher among such partisans, highlighting the importance of looking at variance within this group, and at the consequences of exposure to difference in congregations. For example, in the (nationally-representative) PALS data, we find that opposition to the Christian Right is lowest among strong Republicans, and highest among strong Democrats (please see p. 31 of the SI).

<sup>12</sup> Further details about the sampling methodology (as well as the data themselves) are available here: <http://www.thearda.com/pals/researchers/methodology.asp>

that feeling different from one's fellow congregants can hardly be considered a rare event. Survey evidence from the 2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study suggests that – across a host of dimensions – churchgoers feel different from others in their congregation at high rates. This is especially true when it comes to politics, as nearly half (45.5 percent) of those responding to the question perceived differences in party affiliation between themselves and other members of their congregation. Over a third (36.9 percent) saw their level of political activism as differing from that of their fellow churchgoers.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Importantly, these figures are not considerably different from a similar set of questions that was asked of the nation-wide sample of Americans in our 2012 Election Panel Study. Also shown in Table 1, we observe just about the same levels of political difference: just over a third perceived political interest (38%) and political opinion (36%) differences with congregants, though it is notable that SES and education differences were reported by more. *These figures provide us reassurance that feelings of difference are widely experienced in congregations.* Overall, three-fourths of congregants feel different on at least one dimension, and about half feel different on 3 or more dimensions. These results help put to rest concerns that individuals self-select into churches on political grounds (see also Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Neiheisel et al. 2009; Sokhey and Mockabee 2012; Wald et al. 1988).

### **Attendance and Disaffiliation in Three Panel Studies**

Next, we use three panel datasets to examine whether political differences in congregations and affect toward the Christian Right predict church attendance rates and, ultimately, religious disaffiliation (leaving a church). Most previous quantitative efforts that examine disaffiliation have drawn on the General Social Survey, or have effectively employed the strategy of the GSS, which is to compare a current affiliation to recalled religious affiliation at age 16. Switching rates that result are high: rates range between 40-50 percent (Pew 2008). However, approaches that use broad

religious tradition or even denominational identities only scratch the surface of religious change. In our surveys we included a question asking (in wave 2) whether the respondent was still attending the same house of worship as in wave 1.

Starting with our 2006 panel, we find that by late fall (November) 14 percent had left the church they were attending in May of that year; additionally, three percent had switched, and 1 percent had joined (from having no church in the first wave). That is, across a 6 month span, nearly a fifth of a geographically stable, conservative population (Republican primary voters surveyed by mail) had changed a church affiliation. Notably, the disaffiliation figure was higher among mainline Protestants (18) than evangelicals or Catholics (both 11 percent).

We asked this question again in the 2012 online panel, among whom the proportion attending a church was lower than among Republican primary voters in Ohio. However, the proportion who had disaffiliated from their church after six months was the same – 14.4 percent. The breakdown among religious traditions in the national sample is similar to the 2006 study as well: 15 percent among mainline Protestants, and about 10 percent among evangelicals (10), Catholics (11), Black Protestants (12.5), and Jews (10). This represents an enormous amount of churn in the religious economy.

#### *2012 Election Panel Study Results: Attendance*

In Table 2, we estimate wave 2 attendance while including wave 1 attendance,<sup>13</sup> controls, and a critical interaction term between wave 1 attendance and the index of differences with the congregation constructed from the items listed in Table 1.<sup>14</sup> Attendance at wave 1 is a strong, significant, and positive predictor of wave 2 attendance. Differences with the congregation experienced at wave 2 are linked with lower levels of attendance, and the interaction between wave 1 attendance and the congregational differences index produces distinguishable slopes (see Figure A1

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<sup>13</sup> We include the lagged value of the DV, as is typical in static-score and other panel data techniques (e.g., Finkel 1995).

<sup>14</sup> This index holds together well ( $\alpha=.81$ ). Please see the SI for additional information on its construction (p. 3).

in the SI).<sup>15</sup> Greater differences with the congregation are associated with lower levels of attendance at wave 2 at low levels of initial (wave 1) attendance. The effects of difference dissipate quickly and become indistinguishable at regular levels of wave 1 attendance (once a month or more). Notably, once we control for congregational differences, feelings toward Christian fundamentalists have no effect on attendance rates either alone or when interacted with ideology.<sup>16</sup>

[Insert Table 2 about here]

### *2012 Panel Results: Disaffiliation*

In column 2 of Table 2, we show estimates for disaffiliation (leaving the wave 1 church as reported in wave 2; this is coded 0-1). Lagged attendance is a statistically significant predictor in the model – higher attendance serves to drive down the likelihood of leaving the church. Feelings toward the Religious Right have no effect alone or when interacted with ideology or partisanship.<sup>17</sup>

Importantly, feeling politically different from the rest of one’s congregation at wave 1 is a positive and statistically significant predictor of leaving the church by wave 2. As shown in Figure 1, this covariate interacts with wave 1 attendance such that political difference only helps to push out marginal attenders. On this score, it is important to note that partisan difference with the congregation and worship attendance are *not* correlated in wave 1 ( $r=-.03, p=.34$ ). We cannot say (of course) that partisan difference is a random intervention, but this finding helps to reinforce the idea that politics is a secondary consideration for membership. Thus, we suspect that if attendance ebbs for some reason (e.g., the “summer melt,” or the ability to do something else on Sunday – see Gerber, Gruber, and Hungerman 2015), that individuals are likely to reflect on their fit before reengaging.

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<sup>15</sup> We provide an extensive discussion of our treatment of interaction terms in the SI (p. 29).

<sup>16</sup> For further analysis with the Christian Right, please see the SI (p. 29).

<sup>17</sup> We also looked for effects of opposition to Christian Fundamentalists once congregational differences are excluded, mirroring the analysis of a triple interaction discussed in the previous note. The results here are not significant, but are suggestive that opposition to Christian Fundamentalists increases disaffiliation among strong conservatives who attend regularly.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Age is the only other predictor in the model that reaches conventional levels of statistical significance, as older individuals are less likely to leave their church. Somewhat surprisingly, there is no evidence that religious tradition (denominational affiliation) matters in explaining disaffiliation net of everything else. Even in a specification without other covariates, only the catchall category of “other” religious groups is more likely to experience disaffiliation than evangelicals – no other religious tradition is significantly different in this regard (results not shown).

*2006 Franklin County Panel Results: Church Attendance*

Now we shift gears to examine the same tests, but with a sample of Republican primary voters observed in the wake of a nomination contest that highlighted Christian Right politics. This is a group that our theory predicts should be likely to exhibit changes in religious behavior as a response to the politicization of their houses of worship by Christian conservatives. The first column of results in Table 3 shows ordered logit estimates of attendance at wave 2, controlling for wave 1 attendance. We find that an index of the 6 dimensions of difference with the congregation (this is similar to what was presented in Table 1)<sup>18</sup> points toward lower attendance at wave 2 (which is 6 months later), but is not significant at conventional levels.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

We also find that support for the Christian Right is positively associated with an increase in attendance at wave 2. This is the relationship found in the literature, only it is essential to recall the nature of the sample and timing – as mentioned above, these data were gathered from Ohio Republican primary voters in an election cycle that involved a clearly identified Christian Right candidate (Ohio gubernatorial candidate Ken Blackwell). Accordingly, a different way to look at these results is that Republican primary voters who disliked the Christian Right opted to reduce

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<sup>18</sup> For this index, the alpha=.58.

attachment to their churches across this election cycle, in which a tough primary fight made the Christian Right salient in their houses of worship.

#### *2006 Franklin County Panel Results: Disaffiliation*

Next, we assess the same model's effect on disaffiliation. Table 3 (column 2) shows that differences felt with the congregation interact with wave 1 attendance to predict disaffiliation. That relationship is depicted in Figure 2, which shows the sensible relationship that differences have a much greater impact on increasing disaffiliation when involvement is marginal to begin with (see also Figure 1). Feeling different has no effect if an individual is well integrated into the life of the church. None of the individual difference items stand out in the same way (see column 2 of Table A2 on p. 6 of the Appendix), which emphasizes that political differences are not unique, but part of a larger set of linked considerations.<sup>19</sup> In this model, feelings toward the Christian Right have no effect one way or another on disaffiliation.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

#### *Portraits of American Life Study: Disaffiliation*

The last of the panel data we draw on is of a longer time span, with respondents re-interviewed a full 6 years after first contact in 2006. We focus our attention here on the key variable of whether the respondent has left the house of worship they were attending in 2006.<sup>20</sup> We begin with the subset of 2006 respondents who indicated a religious affiliation, and then differentiate them using an item from 2012 that asked whether they were still attending the same church (using its actual name provided in 2006). Of those who are included in our model results, 29.4 percent reported that they had left their 2006 congregation in the interim 6 years.

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<sup>19</sup> Table A3 (p. 7) in the Appendix presents tetrachoric correlations (given binary variables) between all items of perceived difference with the congregation. All of the items are significantly and positively correlated with each other, with the exception of "racial/ethnic differences," which is not correlated with any other measure but political activity.

<sup>20</sup> In the SI (Table A5, p. 9), we present results for the stability of attendance across the 6 year span. The essential result is that there is no effect of opposition to the Christian Right, either alone or in interaction with partisanship.

This survey does not have an extensive battery of questions about congregational difference, though it does include questions about satisfaction with the church experience, attendance at both waves, feeling like an outsider in church, and other relevant items. While we cannot test for the role of general political difference in the congregation, we can assess the effect of support for conservative Christians active in politics, conditional on religious tradition and partisanship.<sup>21</sup> If Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) and others are correct, then Democrats and moderates should be more likely to leave their 2006 congregation, especially when they oppose the Christian Right. However, if our revisions to this narrative are correct, then those opponents of the Christian Right who are likely to face disagreement over such views in their congregation – that is evangelical Republicans – should be the most likely to leave. In particular, we suspect that evangelical Republicans who oppose the Christian Right will exhibit the greatest propensity to disaffiliate. In an ideal world we would have measures of perceived difference with the congregation in all of our datasets. Absent such items, however, focusing on evangelical Republicans helps to capture those most likely to experience political divisions over the Christian Right in church.<sup>22</sup>

The full model results are available in the Appendix (Table A4, p. 8). In Figure 3 we focus on the estimates of interest – the plot of a triple interaction between evangelical identification, partisanship, and opposition to the Christian Right. In contrast to the proposed relationship in the literature, *we find that evangelical Republicans who oppose the Christian right are more likely to have left their congregation.* Among non-evangelicals (left panel), opposition to the Christian Right has no effect, and partisans are not distinguishable from one another in their rates of disaffiliation. Among evangelicals (right panel) who support the Christian Right, we see no differences across partisanship. However,

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<sup>21</sup> Unlike with the other datasets, the results here are not the same when we substitute political ideology for partisanship. One possible source of this difference is that this ideology question included the option “or haven’t you thought much about this?” which was subscribed to by 26.5% of the sample and was much more common among Democrats.

<sup>22</sup> In the SI in Figure A13 (p. 31), we use these data to look at how opposition to the Christian Right is distributed across partisanship and religious traditions – there is considerable minority opposition among evangelicals and Republicans. In doing so, we further comment on the use of such indicators to get at (likely) exposure to difference in congregations in the absence of more detailed contextual items.

evangelicals who opposed the Christian Right and were strong Democrats were less likely to leave their congregation than Republican evangelicals who opposed the Christian Right.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

While these results rely on a proxy for congregational salience rather than direct measures of it, the results lend weight to our assessment that political difference that is salient to a congregation is an important driver of congregational attachment. These results also square with our findings among Republican primary voters in Franklin County (see also Figure A2 in the SI) – individual opposition to the Christian Right helped individuals loosen ties with their congregations when subjected to Christian Right information via an electoral contest.

### **Discussion: Reconciling Affiliation and Identification to Understand Religious Exit**

We have presented strong evidence that the political visibility of the Christian Right is itself not driving people to disaffiliate (or at the very least, that such a dynamic is neither the sole nor the primary mover). Rather, our story focuses on how information about the Christian Right intersects with individuals in organizational contexts: opposition to the Christian Right that finds disagreement in congregations encourages disaffiliation among the marginally connected. Of course, we also believe Hout and Fisher (and others) who show convincing evidence that people are willing to part with marginal religious *identifications* given their opposition to coverage of the Christian Right’s political activities. How can these two perspectives be reconciled?

Stressing the theme that runs throughout our effort, it is critical to distinguish affiliation processes (with a congregation) from identification processes (with a religious label). Under this scheme, we suspect that media coverage of a controversial group only comes into play when the referent is no longer a local religious community, but the idea of religion in general. Put differently, once people disaffiliate from a congregation, cues that might inform what “religion” represents in public then become salient. Two pieces of evidence from the PALS data help support such

speculation. First, de-identification (moving from a religious label in wave 1 to a non-religious label in wave 2) is a wholly owned subsidiary of those who left their wave 1 congregation. Of those remaining in their wave 1 congregation, none are de-identifiers in wave 2, while 28 percent of those who left their congregation de-identified. Second, we verify the Hout and Fischer story that opposition to the Christian Right is implicated in higher de-identification rates, an effect that is particularly strong among Democrats (see Figure A12 on p. 26 of the SI).<sup>23</sup>

Thinking more about these two processes, a broader integration of the forces involved is possible (though only a brief account of them can be shared here). In this view, the beginning of these dynamics can be found in the 1960s, during which time political issues that were salient to American clergy began to ignite their political activism (e.g., Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974). From the scant evidence available, the political involvement of clergy – including cue giving – began to grow during that time (Djupe and Gilbert 2008; Guth 1996), and earlier differences in political activity between liberal and conservative clergy have since closed (Guth et al. 1997). Moreover, the barriers to organizational exit were falling throughout this period; the widespread decline of denominationalism (Wuthnow 1988) has been associated with intensifying rates of movement in the religious economy (Sherkat 2001). Put together, then, political engagement within congregations helped to provide the seed for recognizing difference, which has allowed members to more easily disaffiliate given declining brand loyalty.

Of course, these forces were at play at precisely the time when the Christian Right rose to prominence – a movement that was also reacting to the same set of issues that sparked clergy to act. As the story of religion in American politics is increasingly being sold as the Christian Right agenda (Bolce and DeMaio 2008) – one which is generally portrayed in a negative light (Kerr 2003; Kerr and Moy 2002) – it makes sense to think that people without readily available benchmarks (the

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<sup>23</sup> To be fair, the six year gap – a large temporal unit – between panels leaves open the possibility that people de-identify before disaffiliating. However, there are no people still in the same congregation who can be classified as non-identifiers.

disaffiliated) would use available cues to evaluate the status of religion in their lives. Though there are other forces impinging on religious identification, we argue that a broader, more pluralistic, politicization of American religion was laying the groundwork for the Hout and Fischer story – that marginal identifiers shed their identification as the prominence of the Christian right rapidly grew during the early 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence presented by scholars such as Hout and Fischer (2002) and Patrikios (2008) is, *prima facie*, consistent with a story about forces at a societal level affecting individual religious behavior. However, in our view this narrative omits a crucial part of the overall picture: the congregation-level dynamics experienced by the faithful.

Individuals may develop notions about religion in general, but they make decisions about whether to leave particular congregations. Choosing to leave a congregation entails weighing an Olsonian mix of costs and benefits – a mix that involves politics in two forms. As political attitudes signal a vision for how society should be ordered, encountering disagreement over such core orientations raises deep questions about institutional fit. Those concerns can be papered over if other valued benefits are available – social ties, programs, and a message.<sup>24</sup> But, this also suggests a path for how politics may undermine attachment to a congregation: if a political agenda weakens the provision of benefits or raises the salience of political difference, then it becomes harder for congregants to avoid evaluating their political fit.<sup>25</sup> In two panel datasets, while controlling for prior attendance, political differences with the congregation draw down attendance among marginal attenders. Political differences – in terms of attitudes as well as interest in politics – are part and

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<sup>24</sup> There are undoubtedly other, non-worship, activities that can help to promote congregational cohesion that we are unable to capture consistently (or at all) with the available data. Social ties, in particular, may help to keep marginal attenders in the pews. As we show in Figure A11 in the SI (p. 25), those who attend church infrequently *and* feel different from the rest of the congregation are less likely to discuss politics and other important matters with someone affiliated with the church.

<sup>25</sup> Please see the SI (pp. 12-17) for additional evidence regarding the effects of the salience of political activity on lower church attendance from the United States Congregational Life Study.

parcel of a broader suite of differences, which are quite commonly found in congregations. These differences are not salient to retention decisions for everyone, but for those with more tenuous connections to the congregation and hence fewer benefits to outweigh the costs of diversity.

While we do find some evidence that opposition to the Religious Right influences religious behavior, we see that its impact is limited to those who are likely to confront disagreement in the context of a congregation. We capture this in several ways. In panel data collected from a single county in 2006 (an electoral context highlighting the Christian Right), we find that opposition to Christian Right groups drives Ohio Republican primary voters out of their churches. In a national sample, after six years we see that the rate of leaving a church is actually higher among evangelical Republicans who opposed the Christian Right.<sup>26</sup>

In the end, we join the chorus of other scholars who acknowledge a reversal of the usual order – the idea that politics can and does influence religion (Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014; Margolis 2016; Patrikios 2008; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Vargas 2012). Of course, we also diverge in important ways from this growing body of work, and recognizing these differences is important. While emphasizing the ways in which our work complements previous efforts, we wish to issue a call for future researchers to acknowledge the considerable difference between attachment to a congregation (affiliation) and the religious identities (identification) that may float from concrete social attachments (e.g., Welch and Lege 1991).

Indeed, religious disaffiliation is of great consequence for a number of other outcomes about which political scientists and other social scientists care greatly. Leaving a church disrupts the channels of interpersonal and organizational communication within the church environment, both of which often transmit politically-relevant information and invitations to political activity (e.g., Djupe, Sokhey, and Gilbert 2007; Gilbert 1993; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague 1993; Wald, Owen,

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<sup>26</sup> For additional evidence on this point, please see the discussion in the SI (p. 29) regarding results from the ANES.

and Hill 1988). However, we close with a bit of good news for those who care about the democratic goods that can be generated in religious institutions (e.g., Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995): disaffiliation appears to be most prevalent among those whose initial attachment with a church is weak. More generally, our findings spell good news for those who care about broader patterns of associational and civic health in the United States. In finding evidence to reinforce the potency of congregational evaluations, we are reminded that the logic of organizational affiliation in the United States is not as fragile as some accounts would make it out to be – rather than an affiliation that is blown about easily by the winds of group evaluations, it appears to be firmly embedded in social ties, exchange, and everyday experience.

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**Table 1** – The Prevalence of Reported Differences from Other Church Members

	% Different	N=
<i>2012 Election Panel Study</i>		
Overall Political Opinions	35.8	618
Level of Interest in Politics	37.8	621
Age	54.1	619
Income and Social Class	45.8	622
Education Level	41.6	622
Race/Ethnicity	28.6	615
Religious Beliefs	22.5	618
<i>2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study</i>		
Political party affiliation	45.5	365
Members' political activism	36.9	388
Stance on gay marriage	35.0	414
Support for the Religious Right	27.6	402
Theological beliefs	31.9	442
Ethnicity/race	30.5	455

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**Table 2** – Predicting Worship Attendance and Disaffiliation by Perceived (Partisan) Difference with the Congregation (2012)

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Worship Attendance*</i> (ordered logit)		<i>Disaffiliation</i> (logit)	
	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Partisan difference with church, wave 1	—		.69	.03
Attendance, wave 1	1.60	.00	-.23	.18
Partisan difference * attendance	—		-.13	.11
Differences index, wave 2	-2.92	.16	—	
Differences index * attendance	.52	.27	—	
Political interest, wave 1	.04	.64	-.14	.31
Church discussant, wave 1	-.15	.53	.05	.89
Political ideology	-.19	.32	.01	.98
Feelings twd Christian Fundamentalists	-.52	.57	.68	.64
Ideology * Christian Fundamentalists	.21	.49	.13	.77
Female	-.07	.75	-.09	.79
Income	.07	.30	-.12	.21
Education	-.21	.07	-.06	.73
Age	-.01	.12	-.04	.01
Mainline Protestant	-.39	.21	.16	.76
Catholic	-.55	.07	.25	.61
Black Protestant	-.25	.54	.34	.60
Other religion	.43	.28	.86	.12
Evangelical Protestant (excluded)	—		—	
Constant	—		.40	.79
Cut point 1	1.39		—	
Cut point 2	2.56		—	
Cut point 3	4.42		—	
Cut point 4	7.95		—	
Cut point 5	10.24		—	
Model Statistics	N=414, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.36		N=441, % correctly predicted=88.0 Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.13	

Source: 2012 Election Panel Study.

\*Among those still affiliated with their wave 1 house of worship.

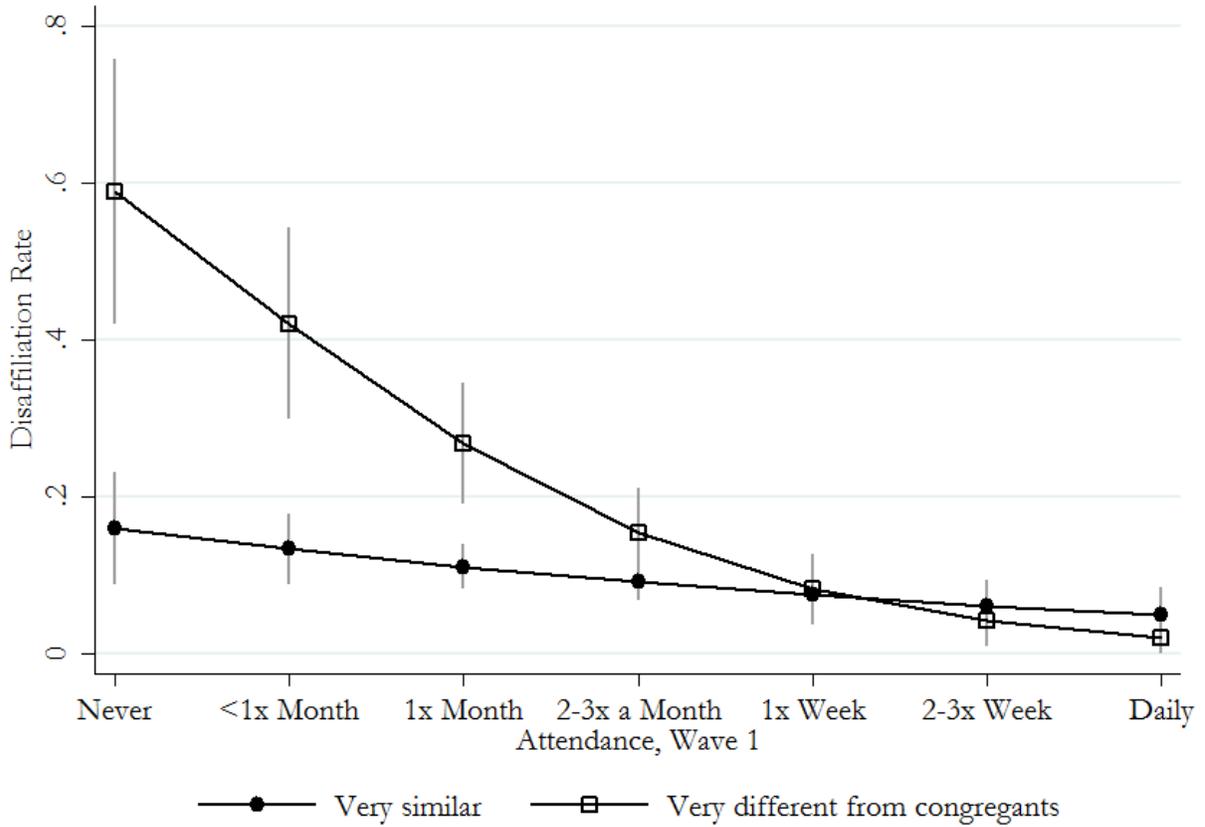
**Table 3** - Predicting Worship Attendance and Disaffiliation by Perceived Differences with the Congregation

	<i>Worship Attendance</i> (ordered logit) <sup>a</sup>		<i>Disaffiliation</i> (logit)	
	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Attendance, wave 1	1.91	.00	-.29	.02
Diffs w/ congregation index	-.09	.20	.86	.00
Attendance * Differences	—		-.22	.00
Church member friends	.40	.28	-.76	.18
Female	-.18	.42	.10	.73
Religious right support	.36	.01	.07	.72
Mainline Protestant	-.37	.18	.25	.46
Catholic	-.25	.39	.01	.99
Constant	—		-.77	.11
Cut point 1	3.48		—	
Cut point 2	6.13		—	
Cut point 3	8.09		—	
Cut point 4	12.00		—	
Model statistics	N=357, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.31		N=468, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.15	

Source: 2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study.

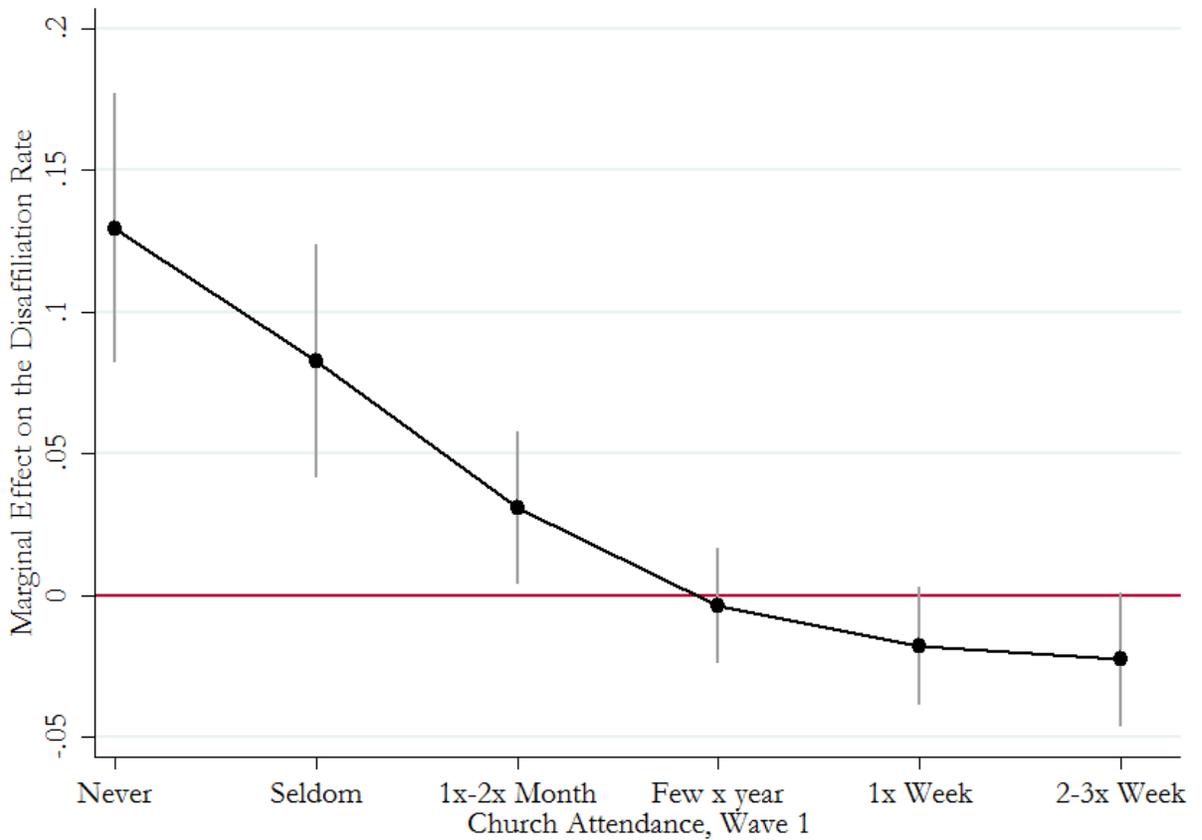
<sup>a</sup> The brant test is  $\chi^2=20.62$ ,  $p=.48$

**Figure 1** – Predicted Levels of Disaffiliation given Feelings of Differences with the Congregation, across Wave 1 Attendance (Estimates from Table 2— CIs for a 90% test presented).



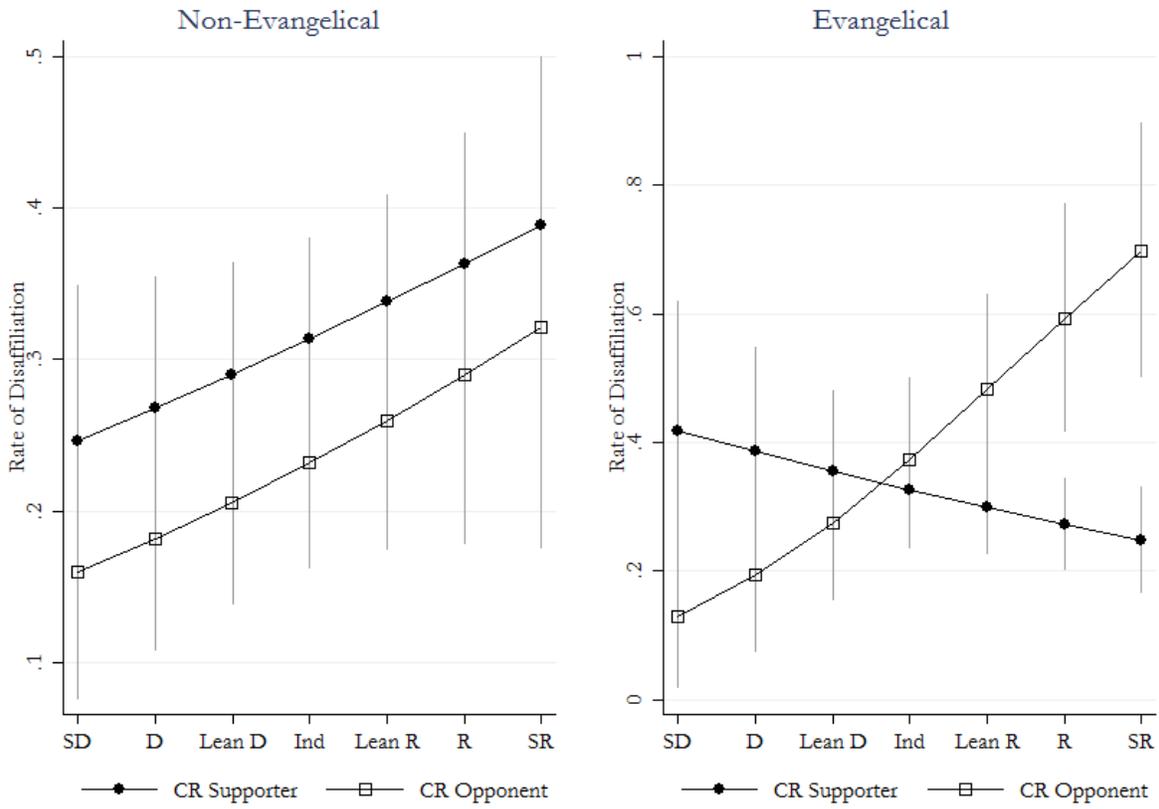
Source: 2012 Election Panel Study.

**Figure 2** – The Marginal Effect of a Difference with the Congregation on Disaffiliation, given Wave 1 Attendance (Estimates from Table 3 –90% CIs are presented)



2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study.

**Figure 3** – The Interactive Effect of Partisanship, Evangelical Tradition, and Opposition to Conservative Christians Active in Politics on Leaving 2006 Church by 2012 (2012 PALS; Estimates from Table A4—CIs for a 90% test presented)



## Supplementary Information Appendix

“Reconsidering the Role of Politics in Leaving Religion – The Importance of Affiliation”

### Table of Contents

<i>Pages</i>	<i>Content</i>
2-4	Variable coding information for all datasets
5	<b>Table A1</b> - Predicting Worship Attendance by Perceived Differences with the Congregation
6	<b>Table A2</b> - Predicting Leaving a Church by Perceived Differences with the Congregation
7	<b>Table A3</b> – Tetrachoric Correlations Among Dimensions of Feeling Different from the Congregation, 2006
8	<b>Table A4</b> – Predicting Leaving a Congregation between 2006 and 2012
9	<b>Table A5</b> – Predicting Worship Attendance in Wave 2 Among Those who Retained Membership in the Same House of Worship
10	<b>Figure A1</b> – How the Interaction of Differences with the Congregation Interact with Wave 1 Church Attendance to Shape Wave 2 Attendance
11	<b>Figure A2</b> – Feelings Toward Christian Fundamentalists Interact with Ideology to Shape Wave 2 Attendance Across Wave 1 Attendance Once the Congregational Differences Measure is Excluded from the Model
12-17	Supplementary results from the US Congregational Life Study
13	<b>Figure A3</b> – Average Attendance Levels in USCLS Congregations
15	<b>Table A7</b> – Multi-Level Estimated Effects of Politicization Differences in the Extent of Church Attendance
16	<b>Figure A4</b> – Interactive Effects of Political Activity Difference Given the Average Political Activity Level in the Congregation
17	<b>Figure A5</b> – Average Congregational Political Activity Levels and Average Differences Among Congregants
18-22	Supplementary results from the ANES Time Series
18	<b>Figure A6</b> – The Effect of the Christian Right on Church Attendance Conditional on Partisanship, 1988-2012
19	<b>Figure A7</b> – The Effect of the Christian Right on Church Attendance Conditional on Partisanship, 1980-1988
20	<b>Figure A8</b> – The Effect of the Christian Right on Church Attendance Conditional on Partisanship (1988-2008, by Year)
21	<b>Table A8</b> – The Conditional Effect of Opposition to Christian Fundamentalists by Partisanship on Church Attendance, 1988-2012
22	<b>Table A9</b> – The Conditional Effect of Opposition to Evangelical Groups Active in Politics by Partisanship on Church Attendance, 1980-1988
23	<b>Figure A9</b> – Comparisons of Perceived Congregational Differences by Partisanship
24	<b>Figure A10</b> – Comparing Worship Attendance by Ideology and Feelings toward Christian Fundamentalists.
25	<b>Figure A11</b> – The Probability of Having a Church Member Discussion Partner as a Function of Congregational Differences and Wave 1 Attendance
26	<b>Figure A12</b> – De-Identification from Religion as a Function of Partisanship and Opposition to the Christian Right
27	<b>Table A10</b> – Predicting De-Identifying with a Religious Tradition between 2006 and 2012 (PALS data, logit model)

## Appendix – Variable Coding

### *2012 Election Panel Study*

Attendance (waves 1 and 2)—“Aside from weddings, baptisms, and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?” 1=Never, 2=Less than once a month, 3=Once a month, 4=2-3 times a month, 5=Once a week, 6=2-3 times a week, 7=Daily.

Disaffiliation—“Are you still attending the same house of worship as you were 6 months ago?” 1=Those who were attending more than never in wave 1 and said “no” to this question are disaffiliates, 0=otherwise.

Partisan difference with church, wave 1—“Thinking about the following, how strongly Democratic or Republican leaning would you say they are? Please think of the rating as a percentage -- move the slider left to signal that the group/place is more Democratic, and move it right if the group/place is more Republican. You have to click on the scale to register a response.” “My house of worship (if you have one)”. Responses, which ranged from 0-100, were reset on a 0-6 scale and were then subtracted from the respondent’s partisanship response (followed by the absolute value).

Differences index, wave 2—Uses the same procedure as “Diffs w/ congregation index” from the 2006 data and the items listed in Table 1.

Political interest, wave 1—“Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How interested have you been in the political campaigns so far this year?” 1=Not at all interested, 2=Slightly interested, 3=Moderately interested, 4=Very interested, 5=Extremely interested.

Church discussant, wave 1—Uses the same procedure and name generator text as in the 2006 data.

Feelings twd Christian Fundamentalists—“Moving on, we'd like to get your feelings towards some groups/figures in society. Thinking about the following groups and figures, please use the following rating scale to indicate how warm or cold you feel towards each of these groups/individuals. 100 indicates that you feel very warm towards that group/person, and 0 that you feel very cold towards that group/person. (You must click on the scale in order to register a response)” “Christian fundamentalists.”

Female—1=female, 0=male.

Income—“In what category does your total family income fall before taxes?” 1=under \$25,000; 2=\$25-40,000; 3=\$41-60,000; 4=\$61-80,000; 5=\$81-100,000; 6=\$101,000 or greater.

Education—“What is the highest level of education that you have completed?” 1=Less than High School; 2=High School or GED; 3=Some college or trade school; 4=4-year college graduate; 5=Graduate education.

Age—The respondent’s age in years (recoded from reported year of birth).

Mainline Protestant—Uses the same procedure as the 2006 data, except that mainline Protestants are simply not “born again or evangelical Christian.”

Catholic—“Of what religious denomination or faith, if any, do you consider yourself?” Catholic=1, 0=otherwise.

Black Protestant—1=If the respondent self-identified as Protestant or Other Christian and then self-identified as “African American,” 0=Otherwise.

Other religion—1=If the respondent self-identified as Jewish, Muslim, None, Agnostic/Atheist, or Other.

### *2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study*

Worship attendance (waves 1 and 2)—“Aside from weddings and funerals, how often have you attended a church in the past year? 6=More than once a week, 5=Once a week, 4=Once or twice a month, 3=A few times a year, 2=Seldom, 1=Never.

Disaffiliation—For those who attended a church more than “never” in wave 1, this variable uses responses from the following question, “Are you presently attending the same church as you did this past summer?” Disaffiliates responded 1=no, 0=yes.

Differs w/ congregation index—Sums the items listed in Table 2, which were in response to the question asked in wave 1, “Are your fellow church members mostly the same as or different from you in these ways?” Any time the responses differed from “Same as me” the index gained a point. The other responses for “theological beliefs” were “more liberal” and “more conservative;” for “Political party affiliation” they were “more Democratic” and “more Republican;” for “Ethnicity/race” they were “different than me” and “my church is mixed;” for “stance on gay marriage” and “support for the Religious Right” they were “more in favor” and “more opposed;” and for “members’ political activism” they were “lower than mine” and “higher than mine.”

Church member friends—At wave 1, the survey included a social network batter that used this name generator, “From time to time, people discuss government, elections, and politics. Looking back over the last few months, we would like to know the people you talked with about these matters. These people might be relatives, spouses, friends, or acquaintances. Please think of the first four people that come to mind and answer each question for each person. We will **not** record the names of people you list below.” This measure is 1 is the respondent listed any discussion partner who was “A member of your church?” and zero otherwise.

Women—1=female, 0=male.

Religious right support—“For the following groups, please tell us how close you feel to them.” Our measure averages closeness toward the Ohio Christian Coalition and Ohio Right to Life using measures coded 1=very far, 2=far, 3=close, 4=very close.

Catholic— “Do you think of yourself as part of a religious tradition? How would you describe yourself?” 1=Catholic, 0=otherwise.

Mainline Protestant—Self-identified “Protestant” or “Other Christian” (using the same intro text as the Catholic entry above) who did not identify as evangelical, fundamentalist, born again, or charismatic when asked, “Some people use these terms to describe their religion. Circle as many as apply to your faith.”

#### *2006-2012 Portraits of American Life Study (PALS)*

Christian right opposition—“Do you support or oppose conservative Christian groups active in politics, such as the Christian Coalition, American Family Association, or Focus on the Family?” 1=Strongly support, 2=Somewhat support, 3=neither support or oppose, 4=Somewhat oppose, 5=Strongly oppose.

Partisanship—Used a branched set of questions so that 1=Strong Democrat, 2=Democrat, 3=Lean Democrat, 4=Independent, 5=Lean Republican, 6=Republican, 7=Strong Republican.

Age—In years.

Church satisfaction—Averages over 7 items following the common question prompt, “How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following activities at your congregation?” The items included: Sermons, preaching, or homilies; the music at worship services; community outreach or service ministries; Religious education classes for adults, such as Sunday, Church, or Sabbath school, Bible class, Quran class, etc.; the children's programs or youth groups; how money is handled or spent; how major decisions are made. The final scale runs from 1-5 mirroring the original coding scheme: 1=Very dissatisfied, 2=Somewhat dissatisfied, 3=neither or not applicable, 4=Somewhat satisfied, 5=Very satisfied.

Arguments in church over tradition—“Are/Were you aware of any arguments in your congregation between people who want to preserve its traditional beliefs and people who want to adopt new or contemporary beliefs?” 0=no, 1=yes.

Income—"The next two questions are about your total household income from all sources during 2005 before taxes and other deductions. Please include all sources of income." 1=Less than \$5,000, to 11=\$200,000 or more.

Education—"What is the highest level of schooling you have completed, or what is the highest degree that you have earned?" 0=Less than HS, 1=HS or GED, 2=Vocational tech or associate's degree or 2 year religious degree, 3=Bachelor's, 4=Masters or more.

Female—1=Female, 0=Male.

Attendance (both waves)—"How often do you attend worship services, not including weddings or funerals? 1=Never, 2=Once or twice a year, 3=Several times a year (but less than once a month), 4=Once a month, 5=Two or three times a month, 6=Once a week, 7=Twice a week, 8=Three times a week or more.

Feeling like an outsider—"I feel like an outsider in my congregation." 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Strongly agree.

Catholic—1=Catholic, 0=Other.

Other faith—1=Muslim, Jewish, LDS, Buddhist, Hindu; 0=Other.

Ideology—"When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as..." 1=Very liberal, 2=Somewhat liberal, 3=Middle of the road, 4=Somewhat conservative, 5=Very Conservative. Those indicating they "hadn't thought much about this" were set to missing.

Moved since 2006—"When we interviewed you in 2006, you were living at [FILL RESP\_ADD/2006]. Is this where you live today?" 0=Yes, 1=No (moved).

Risk attitudes—Is an average of three 5-point, likert scale items (where 5=strongly disagree) including, "I like doing things just for the thrill of it."; "I sometimes like to do things that are a little frightening."; and "I enjoy getting into new situations where you can't predict how things will turn out."

Left the church—0=They identified as religious in wave 1 (not agnostic, atheist, spiritual but not committed to a particular faith, don't give religious things much thought, or other); 1=If they replied "no" to "When we interviewed you in 2006, you (FILL: were attending/had attended) worship services at [FILL CA\_4/2006]. Is this the same place where you [FILL: attend most often now/attended most often in the last six years]?"

**Table A1** - Predicting Worship Attendance by Perceived Differences with the Congregation (ordered logit regression)

	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Attendance, wave 1	1.91	.00	2.42	.00
Diffs w/ congregation index	-.09	.20	—	
Party difference	—		-.01	.97
Political activity difference	—		-.33	.29
Theology difference	—		.17	.63
Race difference	—		-.35	.29
SSM opinion difference	—		-.20	.59
Religious right opinion diff	—		-.09	.79
Church member friends	.40	.28	.76	.12
Women	-.18	.42	.06	.84
Religious right FT	.36	.01	.44	.02
Mainline Protestant	-.37	.18	-.22	.54
Catholic	-.25	.39	-.48	.23
Cut point 1	3.48		4.56	
Cut point 2	6.13		8.00	
Cut point 3	8.09		10.59	
Cut point 4	12.00		15.36	
Model statistics	N=357, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.31		N=252, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.37	

Source: 2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study.

**Table A2** - Predicting Leaving a Church by Perceived Differences with the Congregation (logistic regression)

	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Attendance, wave 1	-.29	.02	-1.06	.00
Differences w/ congregation index	.86	.00	—	
Attend * Differences	-.22	.00	—	
Party difference	—		.19	.72
Political activity difference	—		.37	.47
Theology difference	—		.01	.99
Race difference	—		.51	.35
SSM opinion difference	—		-.21	.72
Religious right opinion diff	—		.22	.70
Church member friends	-.76	.18	-1.41	.15
Women	.10	.73	-.15	.77
Religious right FT	.07	.72	.17	.59
Mainline Protestant	.25	.46	-.12	.84
Catholic	.01	.99	.02	.98
Constant	-.77	.11	1.92	.10
Model statistics	N=468, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.15		N=277, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.26	

Source: 2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study.

**Table A3** – Tetrachoric Correlations Among Dimensions of Feeling Different from the Congregation, 2006

	Party	Political Activity	Theology	Race	Same Sex Marriage
Political Activity	0.26				
Theology	0.48	0.24			
Race	0.08	0.22	-0.06		
Same Sex Marriage	0.51	0.28	0.59	0.11	
Religious Right	0.48	0.33	0.55	-0.07	0.59

Source: 2006 Franklin County Republican Primary Study.

**Table A4** – Predicting Leaving a Congregation between 2006 and 2012 (PALS data, logit model)

	B	SE	<i>p</i>
Christian right opposition	-.69	1.31	.60
Evangelical	1.24	1.25	.32
CR opposition * Evangelical	-1.89	2.26	.41
Partisanship	.13	.14	.33
CR opposition * partisanship	.05	.28	.87
Evangelical * partisanship	-.29	.23	.20
CR * Evangelical * partisanship	.66	.46	.15
Age	-.02	.01	.01
Church satisfaction	-.46	.21	.03
Arguments in church over tradition	-.06	.28	.84
Income	-.04	.03	.26
Education	.34	.13	.01
Female	-.13	.27	.61
Attendance, wave 1	.11	.08	.17
Feeling like an outsider	-.18	.14	.18
Catholic	-.63	.32	.05
Other faith	.88	.63	.16
Moved since 2006	1.11	.27	.00
Risk attitudes	.19	.15	.21
Left religion	.54	.37	.15
Constant	.27	1.35	.84
Model statistics	N=592, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.17		

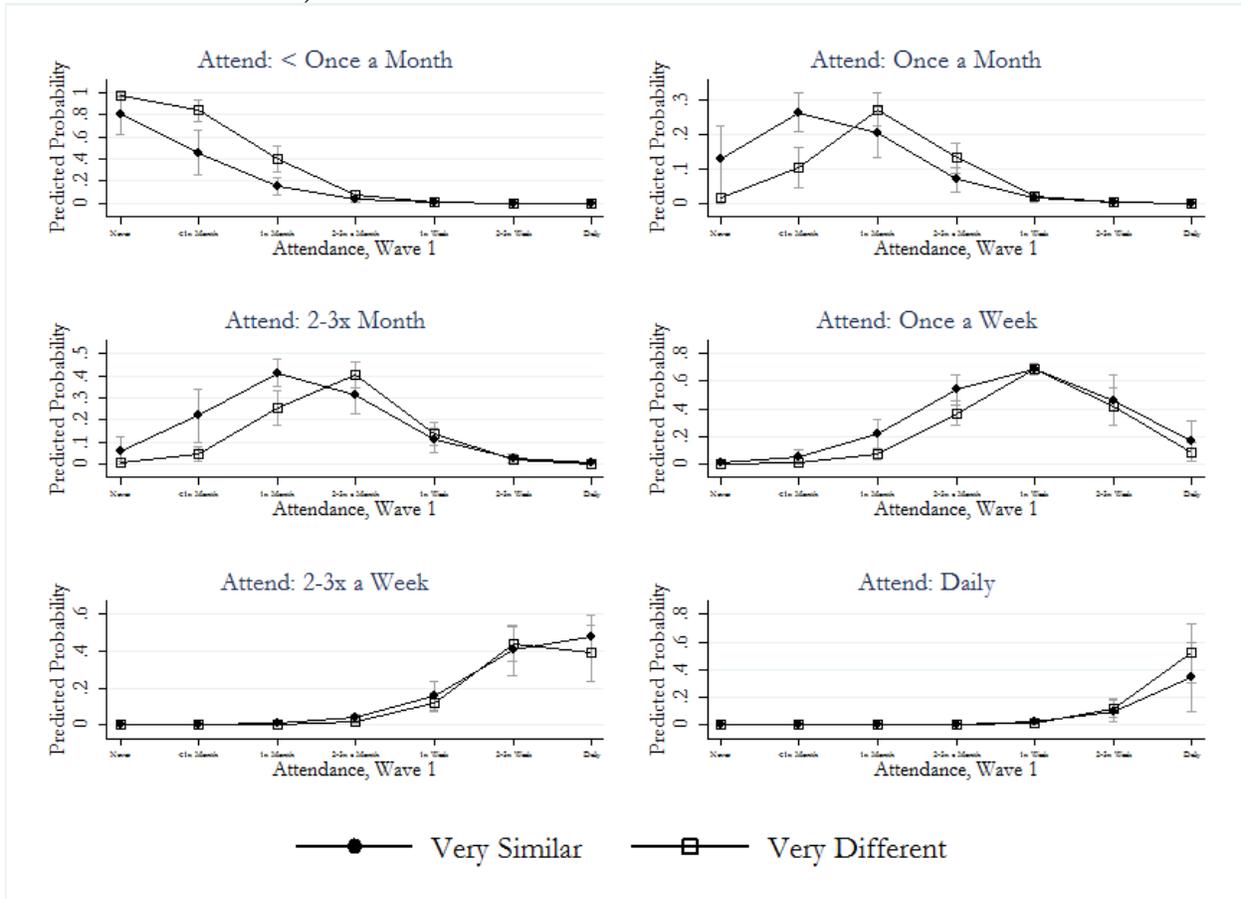
Source: 2006, 2012 Portraits of American Life Studies.

**Table A5** – Predicting Worship Attendance in Wave 2 Among Those who Retained Membership in the Same House of Worship (ologit)

	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Opposition to the CR	-.99	.29	-.30	.59
Partisanship	.00	.98	.08	.26
Opposition * Partisanship	.19	.34		
Church satisfaction	.29	.16	.27	.18
Argument in church about tradition	-.03	.90	.00	.99
Income	-.01	.78	-.01	.77
Education	.00	.97	-.01	.90
Female	-.29	.24	-.29	.24
Attendance in Wave 1	.93	.00	.93	.00
Felt like an outsider	-.15	.37	-.15	.35
Evangelical (reference)				
Mainline Protestant	-.65	.04	-.64	.04
Catholic	-.43	.18	-.41	.19
Other faith	-.82	.20	-.82	.21
Ideology	-.07	.70	-.06	.70
Risk attitudes	.06	.68	.04	.78
Age	.02	.02	.02	.02
(Cut points omitted)				
Model statistics	N=353, pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.21		N=353, pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.21	

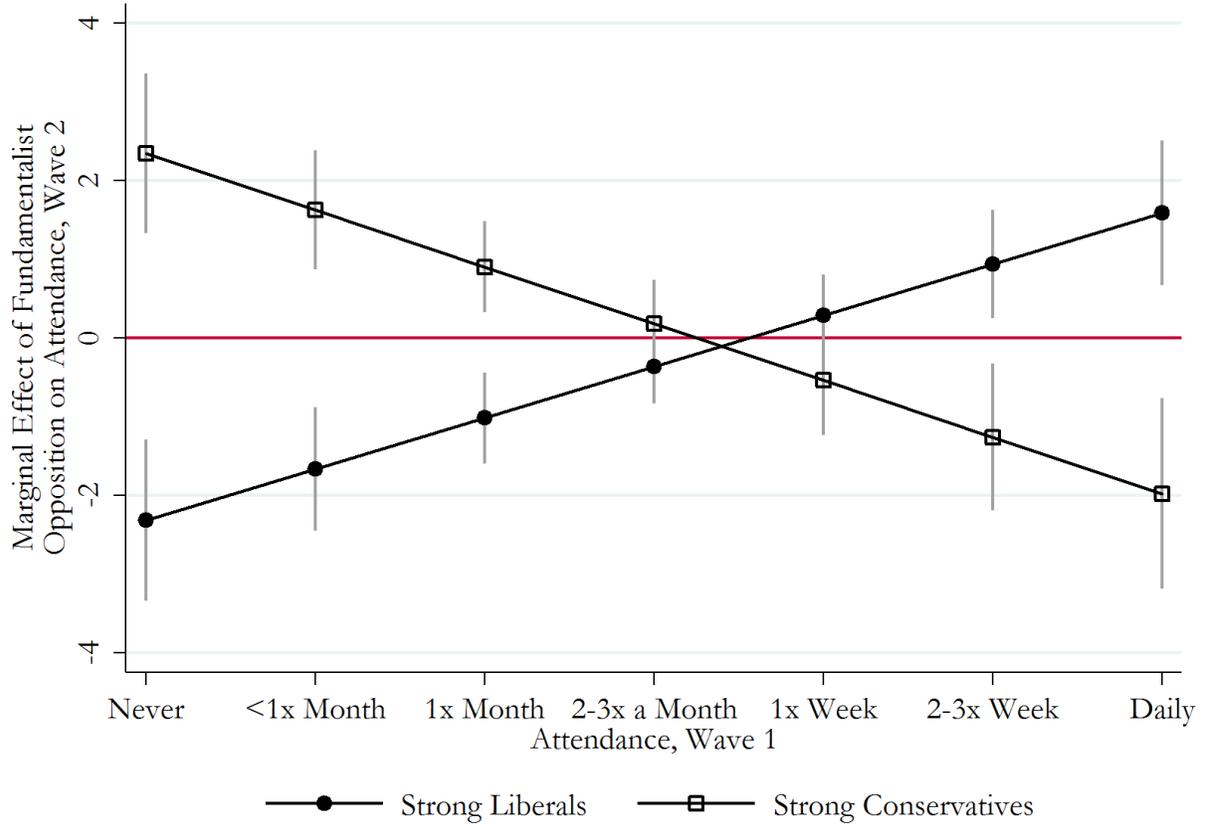
Source: 2006, 2012 Portraits of American Life Studies.

**Figure A1** – How the Interaction of Differences with the Congregation Interact with Wave 1 Church Attendance to Shape Wave 2 Attendance (panels run from the probability of never attending in the upper left to Daily in the bottom left); those experiencing many differences are more likely to reduce their attendance in wave 2 if they attended at low rates in wave 1 (Estimates from Table 2—90% CIs)



Source: 2012 Election Panel Study.

**Figure A2** – Feelings Toward Christian Fundamentalists Interact with Ideology to Shape Wave 2 Attendance Across Wave 1 Attendance Once the Congregational Differences Measure is Excluded from the Model (Marginal Effects, 2012 Data—90% CIs)



Source: 2012 Election Panel Study.

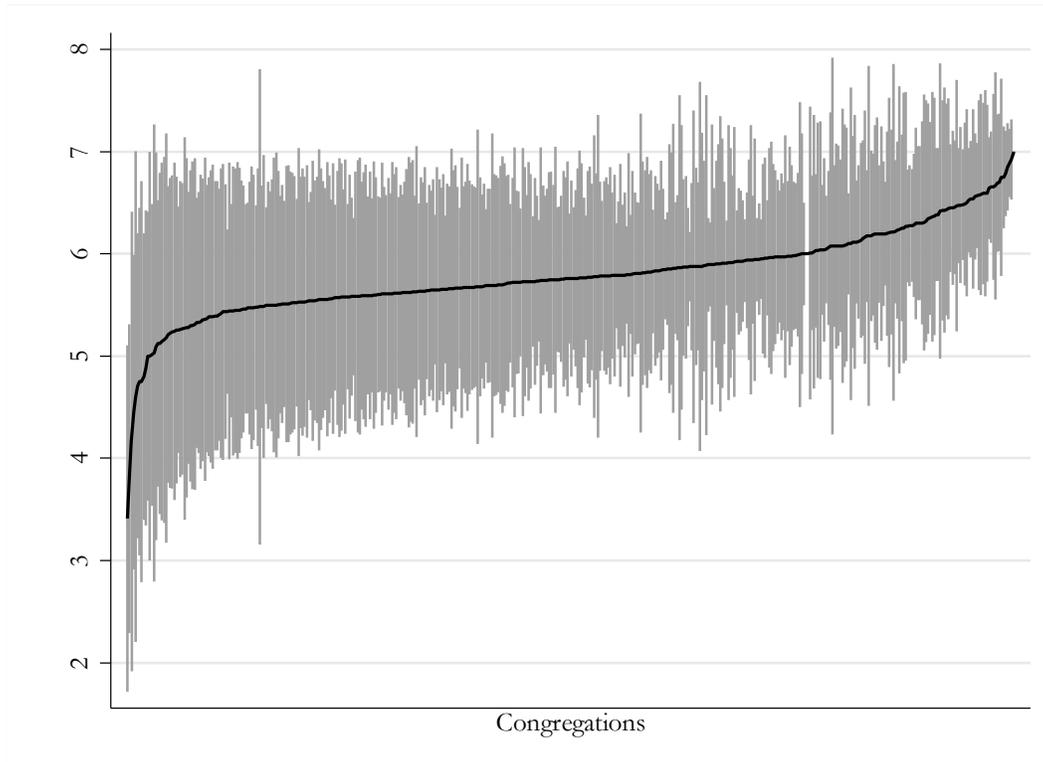
## Supplementary Analyses from the United States Congregational Life Study

We also sought to test for the effect of diversity in a dataset less well-known to students of religion and politics: the 2001 US Congregational Life Survey (USCLS). The “random attender” component of the USCLS contains a national sample of over 115,000 churchgoers – clustered within over 400 individual congregations – thereby affording an unparalleled look at how aspects of the church environment shape member behavior. The congregations were selected through a snowball sample from the 2000 GSS, and surveys were administered to all adult attenders on the Sunday after Easter in 2001. The USCLS is a cross-sectional survey, which limits our ability to comment on disaffiliation – after all, these respondents *are* church attenders. Moreover, the USCLS did not contain feelings toward the Religious Right. However, it did contain measures of individual political participation, which can be compared to aggregated measures for congregations to assess the effect of differences in politicization on levels of attendance.

We begin our investigation of the relationship between affiliation and political activity with an outcome that has long been at the center of such debates: church attendance. In the congregations participating in the 2001 USCLS, church attendance varies greatly both across as well as within congregations (see Figure A3). Some congregations certainly exhibit average attendance levels at the high end of the scale, and others come in at the low end of the range. The vast majority, however, fall within a fairly narrow range, though the spikes from each mean showcase that individuals within congregations vary considerably in their average attendance.

[Insert Figure A3 about here]

**Figure A3** – Average Attendance Levels in USCLS Congregations (+/- 1 SD spikes)



Source: 2001 USCLS, N=409 congregations.

While average attendance levels are similar across a variety of congregations, how might we best explain the within-church variation exhibited across the board? A model predicting church attendance, the estimates from which are displayed in Table A7 indicates that differences between individuals' own level of political activism and the mean level of activism in the church effectively drive down attendance. Of course, other forces boost church participation: having extensive friendship networks in the church, feeling a greater sense of belonging, and valuing particular aspects of the congregation predict higher levels of church attendance. Indeed, the only other factor that negatively affects involvement with the congregation is the presence of an income difference between the individual and the congregational average.

[Insert Table A7 about here]

**Table A7** – Multi-Level Estimated Effects of Politicization Differences in the Extent of Church Attendance

<i>Level 1</i>	B	<i>p</i>	$\Delta$
Political participation difference	.04	.14	
Difference * mean participation (L2)	-.06	.03	
Educational difference from congregational average	.02	.00	.03
Income difference from congregational average	-.03	.00	-.05
Feeling of belonging	.21	.00	.46
Valued attributes of congregation	.11	.00	.17
Extent of friendship	.12	.00	.22
Female	.03	.00	.03
<i>Level 2</i>			
Congregational participation mean	-.29	.00	
Constant (grand sample mean)	4.95	.00	

Source: 2001 USCLS. N=91,174 (L1) N=436 (L2).

L1 SD=.87(.00)

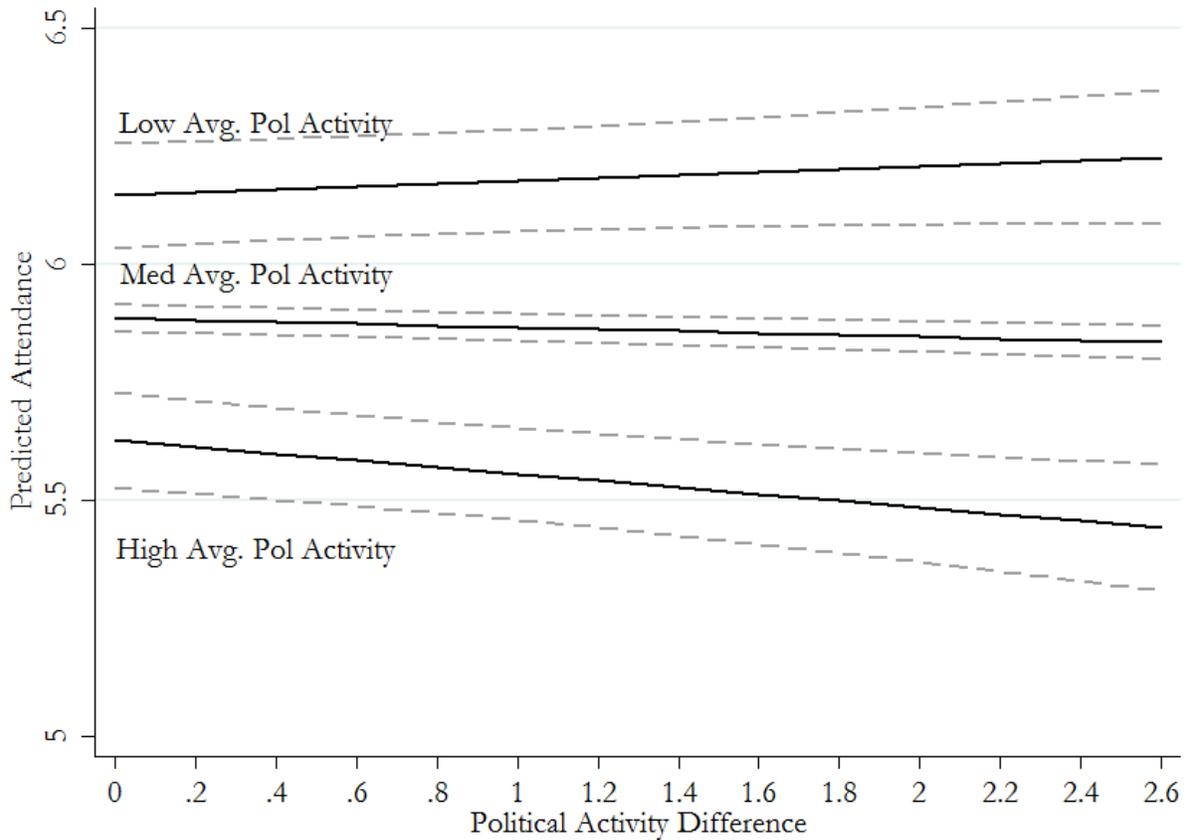
L2 SD=.28(.01)

$\Delta$  is the effect from the mean – 1 sd to the mean + 1 sd. See Figure A3 for effects of interacted variables. Estimates produced with Stata’s xtmixed.

The estimates suggest that feelings of political difference have consequences for attendance. But it is important to note that the political activism level of the church conditions the effect of differences in political activity between the individual and fellow churchgoers. The interaction effects are shown in Figure A4. The figure shows little change in attendance due to political activity differences in congregations with moderate to low political activity (the top two lines). However, political differences in activism become hard to tolerate when politics is an important attribute of the congregational culture: churches with *higher overall levels of political activity exert a downward pressure* on church attendance among those with greater differences in political activism.

[Insert Figure A4 about here]

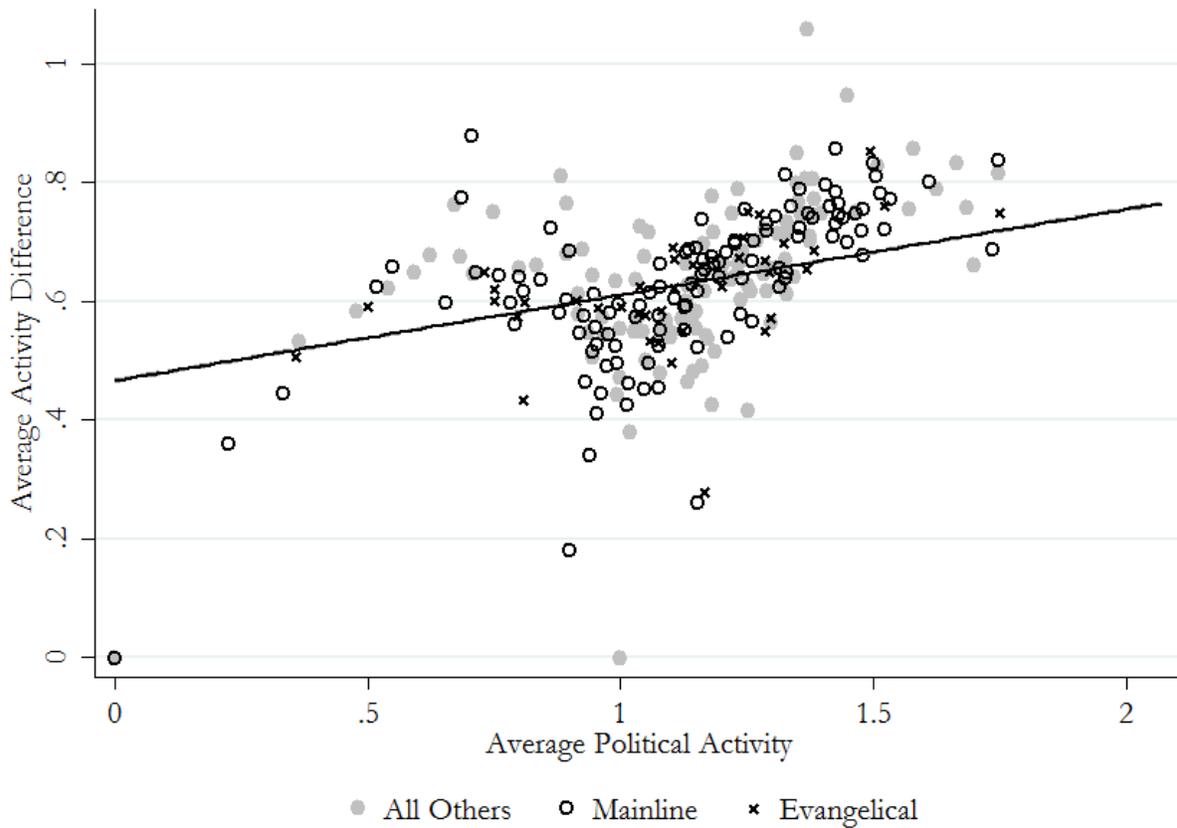
**Figure A4** – Interactive Effects of Political Activity Difference Given the Average Political Activity Level in the Congregation (95% CIs)



Given that the effects of politicization differences are located in politically active congregations, the distribution of activity becomes important. Importantly, a quick glance at congregational activity levels reveals that they are not equal across religious traditions. Figure A5 scatters congregations by political activity level and experience of average differences in activity among congregants – Mainline Protestants, evangelicals, and all others are plotted separately. The picture that emerges from the figure is that larger activity differences among congregants are more common in Mainline congregations, which also host more political activity (note their concentration in the upper right quadrant of the figure). Across traditions, 29 percent of congregations have political activity levels high enough to host negative effects on attendance among politically inactive members. That designation applies to 22 percent of evangelical congregations, 19 percent of

Catholic parishes, and 22 percent of Black Protestant congregations. But, it applies to a whopping 65 percent of mainline Protestant congregations.<sup>27</sup> However, the differences between the member and congregation have to be quite large before a drop in attendance is distinguishable from zero, and only about 3 percent of members are in that category.

**Figure A5** – Average Congregational Political Activity Levels and Average Differences Among Congregants (linear fit with 95% confidence intervals)



Source: 2001 USCLS.

There are a few ways to think about this effect. First, it is noticeable and 3 percent is not an insignificant portion, especially if this process is continuous. Second, since the differences have to be so large (above 1.8 political acts) to see a discernible effect, this indicates the extent to which politics is a secondary concern to most believers. Moreover, it suggests the extent to which congregations

<sup>27</sup> This is a mean congregational political activity at or above 1.2 (out of 3).

provide a multitude of paths through which individuals can fit in and meet their needs. Implicitly this means that in most congregations people overlook their political differences and focus on alternate bases of membership. Only when those differences grow too large in a culture that makes them plain might people reflect on their size and importance.

### **2001 USCLS Variable Coding**

Church attendance—”How often do you (go to mass/attend church)?” 1=first time, 2=hardly ever, 3=less than once a month, 4=once a month, 5=2-3 times a month, 6=every week, 7=more than once a week.

Political Participation Difference—First, we created a participation index using three available questions, all of which were prefaced by the question, “In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following?” The responses were “Voted in the last presidential election,” “Worked with others to try to solve a community problem,” and “Contacted an elected official about a public issue.” Each is coded 0=no, 1=yes, thus the index ranges from 0-3. Then we aggregated this by the congregation and the difference variable equals the absolute value of the difference between the individual and congregation (minus the individual’s contribution to that mean).

Educational difference from congregational average—We took the congregational mean of responses to the this question, “What is the highest educational level you have completed?”, coded 1=No formal, 2=K-8, 3=Some high school, 4=High school, 5=Trade certification, 6=Associate’s, 7=Bachelor’s, 8=Graduate degree. The difference measure is the absolute value of the difference between the individual and congregational scores.

Income difference from congregational average—Takes the absolute value of the difference between the individual and congregational scores using this question: “Which of the following describes your total annual household income before taxes?”, coded 1=Less 10K, 2=10K-24,999, 3=25K-49,999, 4=50K-74,999, 5=75K-99,999, 6=100K plus.

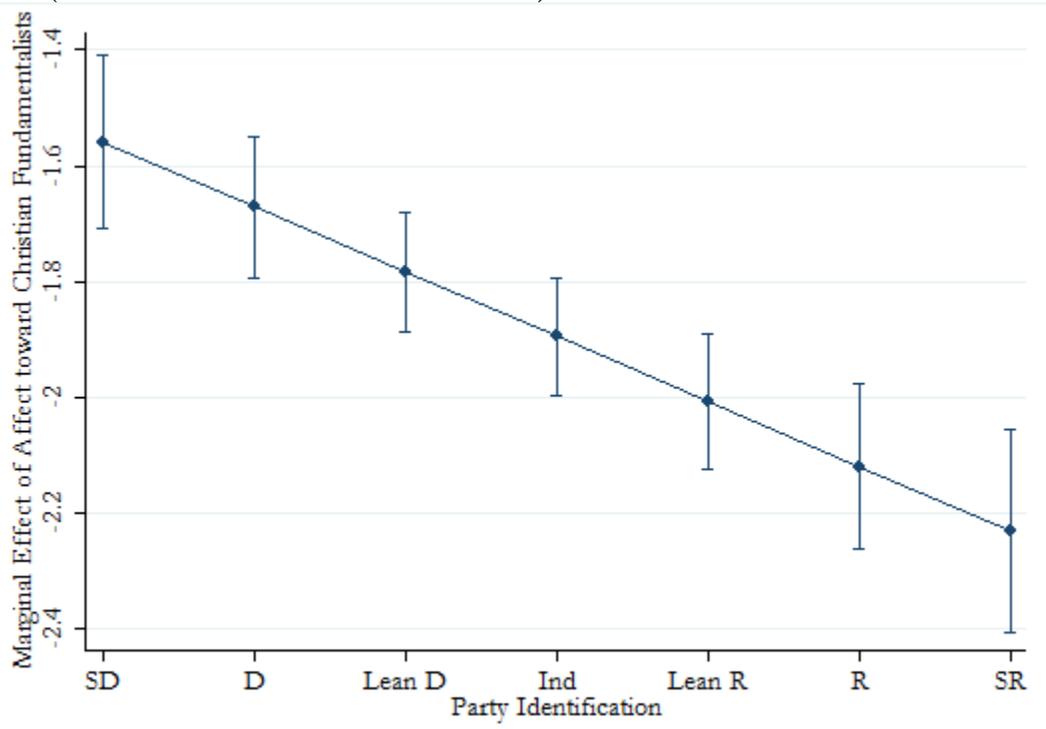
Feeling of belonging—”Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?” 1=No; 2=Yes; but perhaps not as strong as in the past; 3=Yes, a strong sense, about the same as last year; 4=Yes, a strong sense of belonging that is growing.

Valued attributes of congregation—Is an additive index ranging from 0 to 10. All items were introduced by, “Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value?” The items that respondents could check included: Wider community care or social justice emphasis; Reaching those who do not attend church; Traditional style of worship or music; Contemporary style of worship or music; Sharing in Holy Communion, Eucharist, Lord’s Supper; Social activities or meeting new people; Sermons, preaching, or homilies; Bible study or prayer groups, other discussion groups; Ministry for children or youth; Prayer ministry for one another; Practical care for one another in times of need; The congregation’s school or pre-school; Openness to social diversity; Adult church-school or Sabbath-school class.

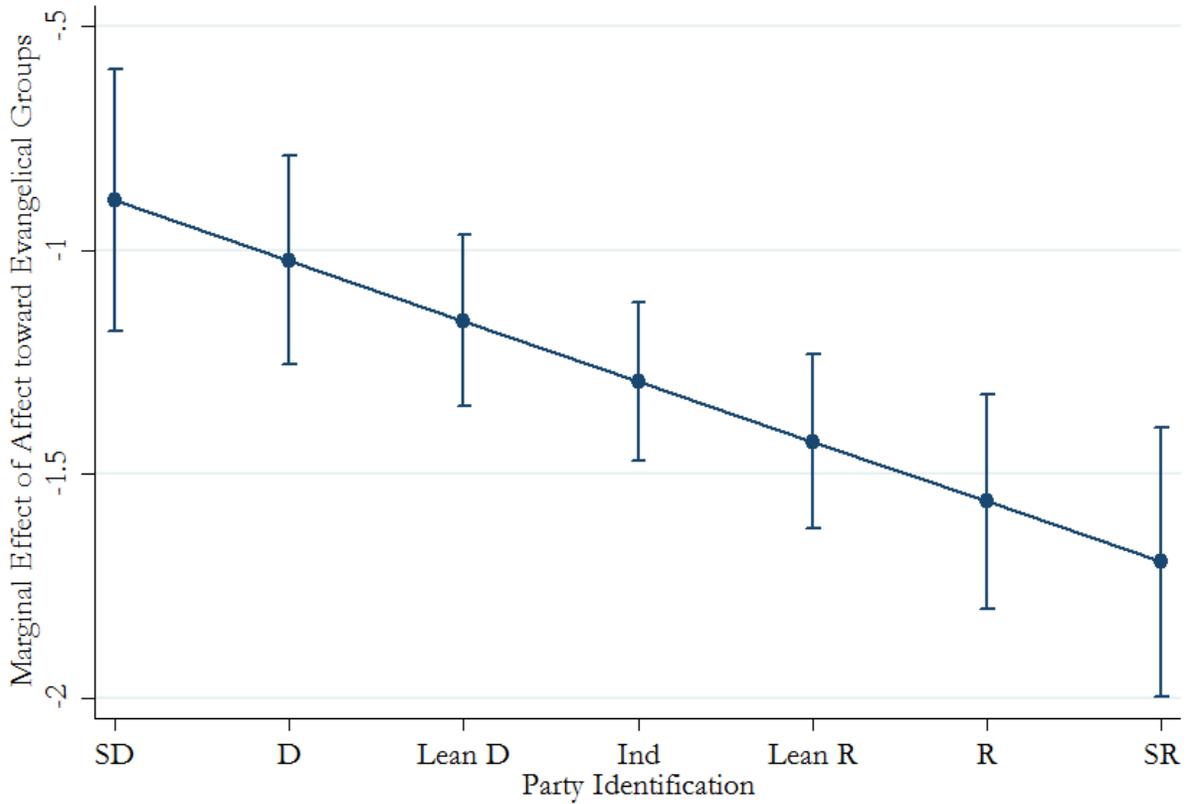
Extent of friendship—”Do you have any close friends in this congregation? 1 = No, I have little contact with others from this congregation outside of activities here. 2 = No, I have some friends in this congregation, but my closest friends are not involved here. 3 = Yes, I have some close friends here as well as other close friends who are not part of this congregation. 4 = Yes, most of my closest friends are part of this congregation.

Female—1=female, 0=male.

**Figure A6** – The Christian Right’s Effect on Church Attendance Conditional on Partisanship, 1988-2012 (linear fit with 90% confidence intervals)

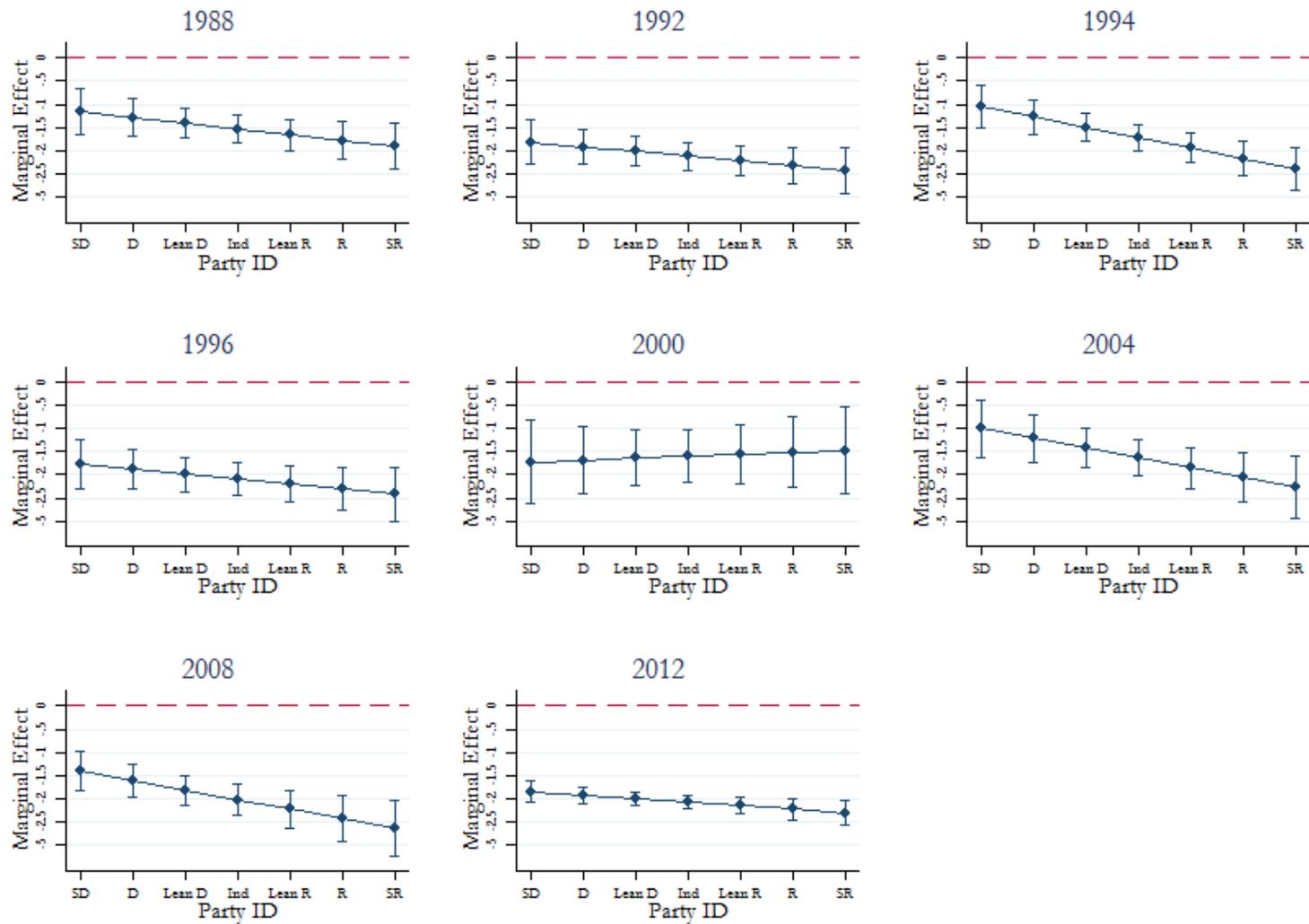


**Figure A7** – The Effect of the Christian Right on Church Attendance Conditional on Partisanship, 1980-1988 (linear fit with 90% confidence intervals)



Source: ANES Time Series (1980-1988)

**Figure A8** – The Effect of the Christian Right on Church Attendance Conditional on Partisanship by Year, 1988-2008 (linear fit with 90% confidence intervals)



**Table A8** – The Conditional Effect of Opposition to Christian Fundamentalists by Partisanship on Church Attendance, 1988-2012

<i>Variable</i>	Model 1 OLS	Model 2 OLS (Evangelicals Only)	Model 3 Ordered Logit
FT: Christian Fundamentalists (0-1)	-1.45** (.11)	-.97** (.24)	-1.93** (.15)
Party ID	.03** (.01)	.03 (.02)	.04** (.02)
PID×FT	-.11** (.03)	-.13** (.06)	-.15** (.04)
N=	10,050	2,449	10,050
Adjusted (Pseudo) R <sup>2</sup> =	.20	0.15	.08
Log Likelihood	—	—	-14,112.79

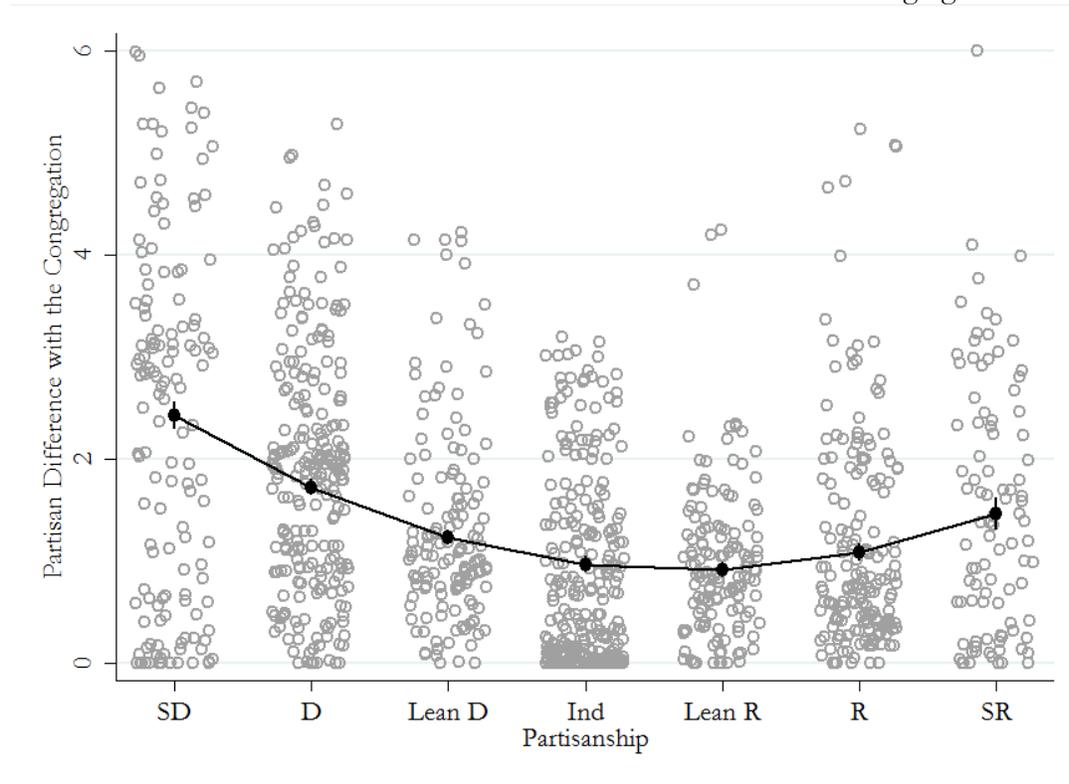
Source: ANES Time Series. \*\* $p < .05$ . The dependent variable, church attendance, ranges from one to five. Party Identification is coded from one to seven, with strong Democrats taking a value of one and strong Republicans taking a value of seven. Each model also includes the following controls: age, male, education (dummied), marital status (dummied), census region, family income, ideology, and a series of year indicators.

**Table A9** – The Conditional Effect of Opposition to Evangelical Groups Active in Politics by Partisanship on Church Attendance, 1980-1988

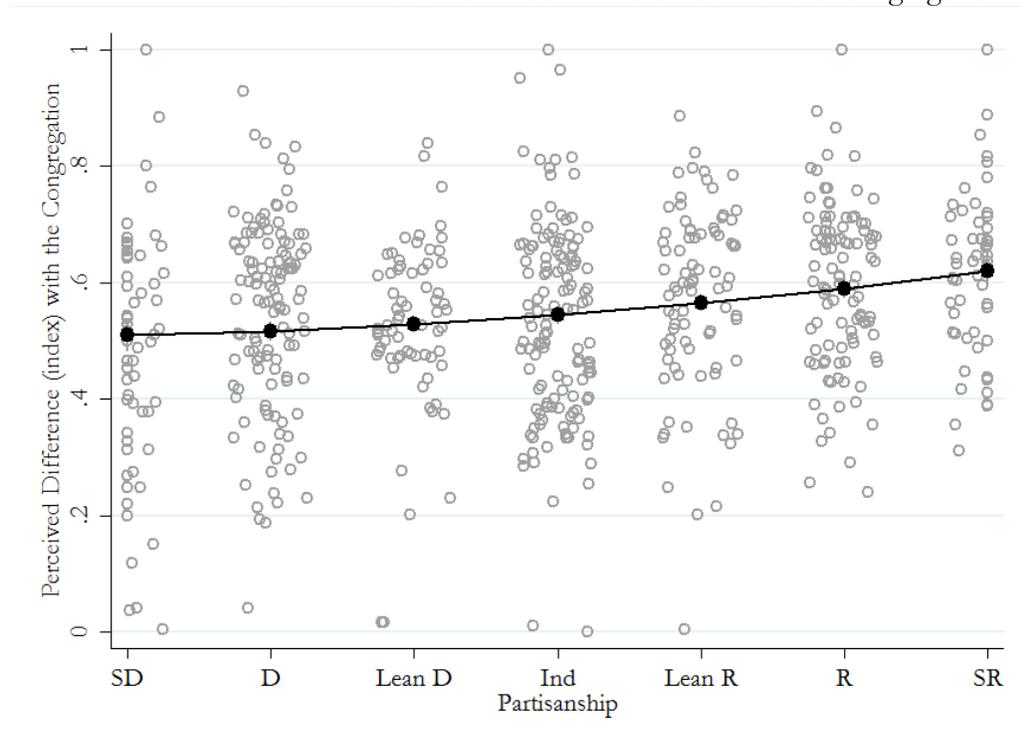
<i>Variable</i>	Model 1 OLS	Model 2 OLS (Evangelicals Only)	Model 3 Ordered Logit
FT: Evangelical Groups	-.75**	-.54	-.97**
Active in Politics (0-1)	(.22)	(.40)	(.28)
Party ID	.07**	.10**	.10**
	(.03)	(.05)	(.04)
PID×FT	-.13**	-.18*	-.19**
	(.05)	(.09)	(.06)
N=	3,001	798	3,001
Adjusted (Pseudo) R <sup>2</sup> =	0.15	0.14	0.05
Log Likelihood	—	—	-4412.00

Source: ANES Time Series. \*\* $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$ . The dependent variable, church attendance, ranges from one to five. Party Identification is coded from one to seven, with strong Democrats taking a value of one and strong Republicans taking a value of seven. Each model also includes the following controls: age, male, education (dummied), marital status (dummied), census region, family income, ideology, and a series of year indicators.

**Figure A9** – Comparisons of Perceived Differences by Partisanship (2012 data)  
 Panel A. Perceived Partisan Differences with the Congregation

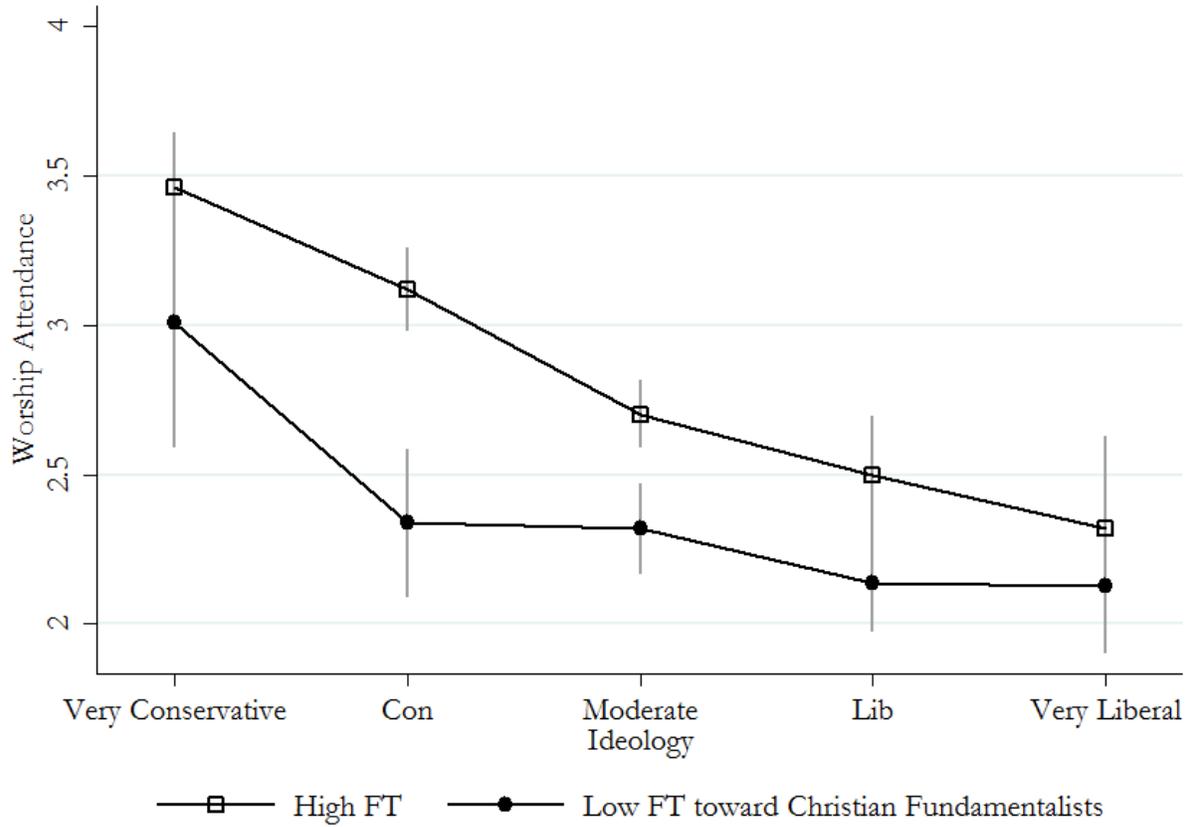


Panel B. Perceived Index Differences with the Congregation



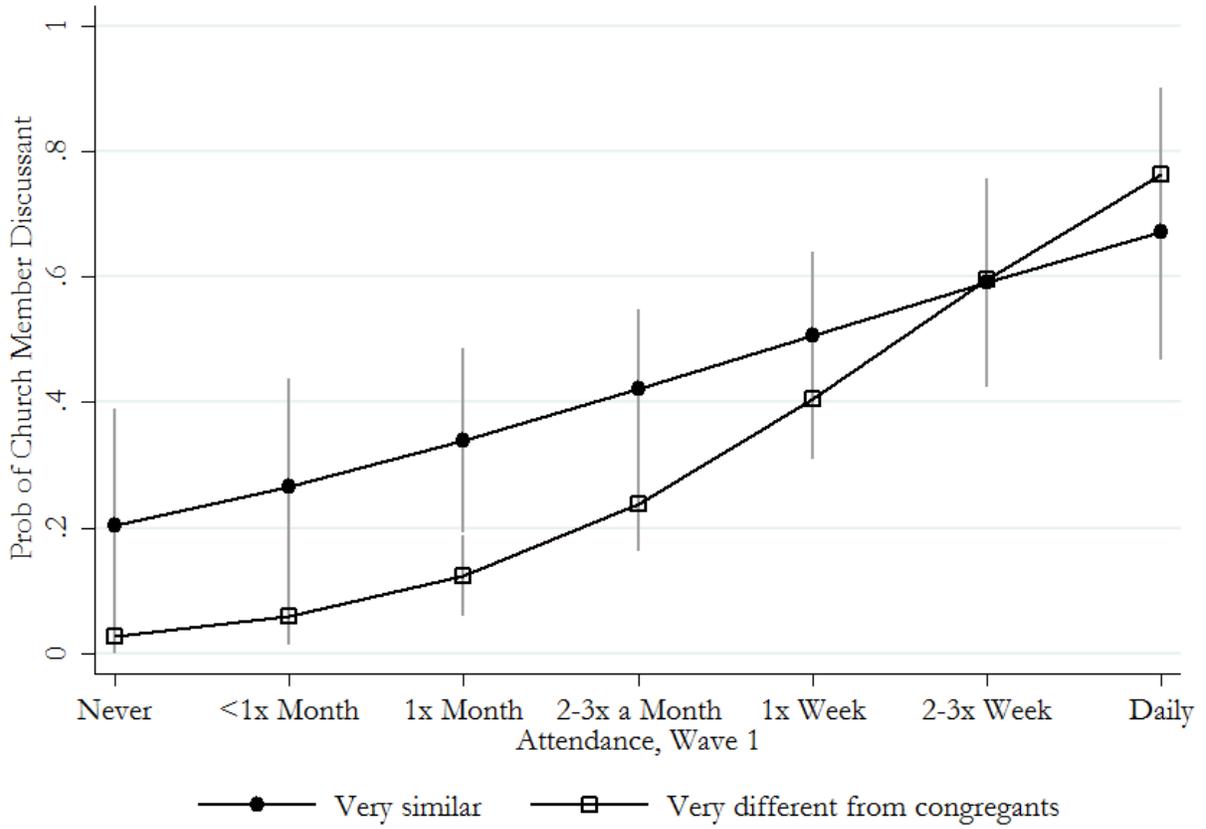
Source: 2012 Election Panel Study. 90% CIs.

**Figure A10** – Comparing Worship Attendance by Ideology and Feelings toward Christian Fundamentalists.



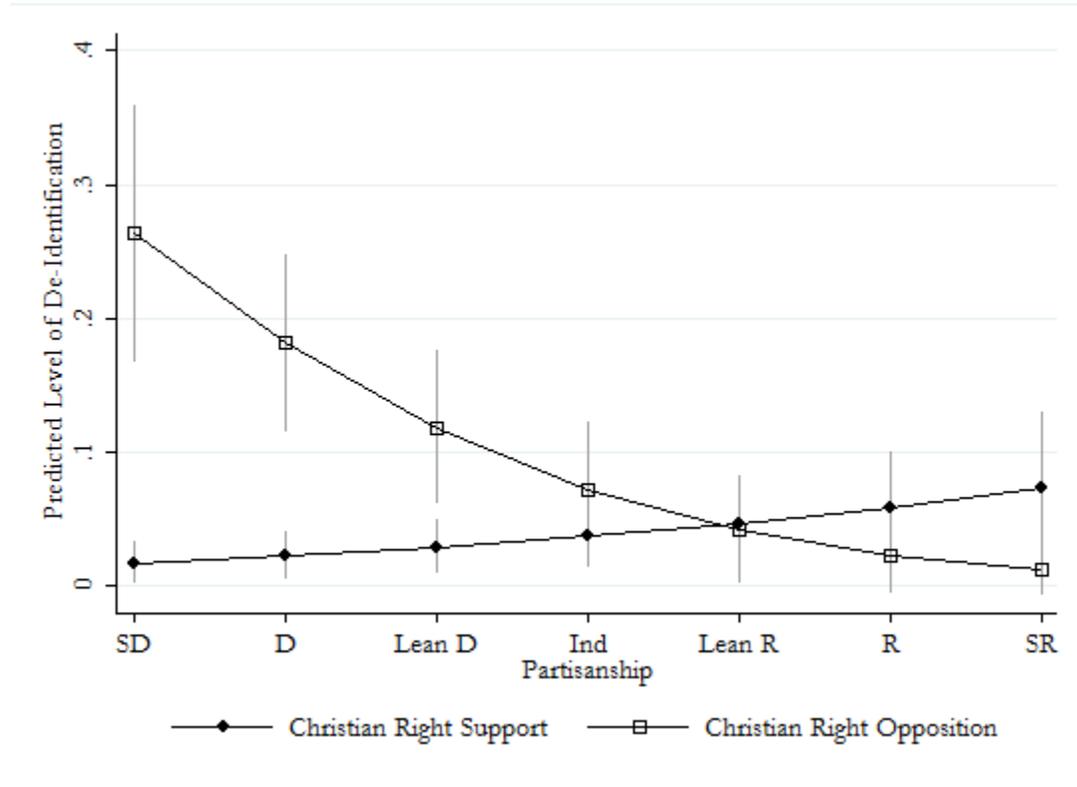
Source: 2012 Election Panel Study. A “low” feeling thermometer (FT) rating is 30 or below. We thank R1 for suggesting this analysis to us. CIs for a 90% test presented.

**Figure A11** – The Probability of Having a Church Member Discussion Partner as a Function of Congregational Differences and Wave 1 Attendance



Source: 2012 Election Panel Study. 90% CIs.

**Figure A12 – De-Identification from Religion as a Function of Partisanship and Opposition to the Christian Right**



Source: 2006, 2012 Portrait of American Life Studies.

**Table A10** – Predicting De-Identifying with a Religious Tradition between 2006 and 2012 (PALS data, logit model)

	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Christian right opposition	1.90	0.16	5.82	0.00
Partisanship	-0.24	0.08	0.35	0.14
CR opposition * partisanship			-1.20	0.02
Age	-0.06	0.00	-0.06	0.00
Church satisfaction	-0.85	0.07	-0.92	0.03
Arguments in church over tradition	-1.21	0.17	-1.01	0.26
Attendance, wave 1	0.09	0.66	0.06	0.76
Feeling like an outsider	-0.20	0.44	-0.16	0.49
Thought about dropping out	1.78	0.01	2.04	0.01
Catholic	-0.05	0.92	-0.01	0.99
White	0.83	0.22	0.89	0.22
Income	0.05	0.39	0.04	0.51
Education	-0.28	0.00	-0.36	0.00
Female	0.46	0.56	0.36	0.63
Ideology	-0.25	0.23	-0.34	0.14
Moved since 2006	0.64	0.19	0.50	0.32
Risk attitudes	-0.47	0.21	-0.52	0.20
Constant	4.28	0.05	3.31	0.12
Model statistics	N=494, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.38		N=494, Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =.40	

Source: 2006, 2012 Portraits of American Life Studies.

## Additional Discussion from the Notes

### 1. Measurement Variation, Note 3, page 5.

It is important to acknowledge the measurement differences among these studies. For example, Hout and Fischer (2002) study religious identification – this is the adoption of “no religious preference” compared to some religious preference. They make no claim that the dynamics they study affect behaviors, but do claim that they are causally linked to de-identification. Essentially, they argue that those with only nominal connections with religion cease that identification when they become more liberal. This link may not be trivial if de-identifying with religion changes one’s receptivity to religion’s presence in the public square (see Baker and Smith 2009). Patrikios (2008) and Putnam and Campbell (2010) connect ideological and partisan change to involvement with a particular congregation. Their findings indicate that partisan attachments change how people relate to particular houses of worship through church attendance. However, Patrikios (2008) also notes that his approach cannot capture whether politicized churches lead to “apostasy or switching” (386). This is one of the charges that we expressly take up in our paper.

### 2. Elaboration in the sociology of religion, note 4, p 5.

These observations are consistent with a thick strand of research in the sociology of religion stemming from the groundbreaking work of Robert Wuthnow (1988). He argued that due to a range of reasons, religious particularism was on the wane, along with the value of denominational brands. In this view, religious groups have steadily sorted into a two-party system of progressives and the more orthodox, regardless of denomination, in parallel with the political party system (Hunter 1991; Layman 2001). Any macro movement toward a decline of denominationalism has no truck in the literature about the causes of disaffiliation from religious bodies, or what is known as apostasy. Scholars have examined disaffiliation from a number of angles, focusing on the effect of moving (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1994), as well as a host of other demographic and attitudinal indicators including age, education, and gender (Bromley 1988; Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007). Particularism plays essentially no role here and the effect of politics in disaffiliation processes has been largely ignored, save for a few works (Hadaway and Roof 1988; Hoge 1988; Nelson 1988).

### 3. Sample details for the 2012 Presidential Election Study, note 5, p 8.

The opt-in design imposed a quota to achieve balance on gender (51.6% female) and variance on age (mean 43.9; std. dev.= 14.4). Given the opt-in nature of the sample, we exercise caution in making claims and verify the results with several other datasets. Moreover, our goal is not to provide authoritative population estimates, but to facilitate “our understanding of how personal characteristics interact with other survey variables such as attitudes, behaviors, and intentions” (Baker et al. 2010: 53). The sample trends Democratic (44.3%; 24.5 pure independent; 31.2% Republican), is educated (81% (at least) some college/trade school), and is politically interested (mean 2.5; std. dev. = 1.25 on 5 point measure).

### 4. Mail-based panel survey discussion, note 9, p 9.

Panel surveys conducted by mail are biased *against* religious disaffiliation. This design element therefore serves to control for alternate explanations. That is, we followed up with individuals based on their street addresses, so individuals who disaffiliate because of moving are excluded from the sample; one study finds that moving more than 100 miles away is the greatest source of religious change (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1994). In other words, our survey only picks up religious disaffiliates who stopped going to church *but who still live in the same neighborhoods and communities*.

Therefore, while the amount of religious change may be constrained, it is sacrificed to provide the considerable benefit of controlling for one important correlate of religious change.

### **5. Discussion of Interaction Terms, Note 17, page 13.**

Interaction tests for this and the subsequent models presented in the paper were conducted in *Stata* 14 using the “margins” suite of commands, and follow the advice of Berry et al. (2010, 2012), Brambor et al. (2006), and Kam and Franzese (2007). These pieces share several important recommendations: First, looking only at the tests on interaction terms can be deceptive, particularly for limited dependent variables (Berry et al. 2010, 2012: 8). That is, while the coefficient on the interaction term in OLS regression does give a sense of the degree to which conditioning is taking place, one must look beyond the significance of this term to evaluate support for an interaction – there may be portions of the range where effects emerge at conventional levels (this cannot be evaluated by simply looking at the summary test statistic for the product term coefficient). Second, in evaluating support for theories positing interaction, Berry et al. (2012) remind us that one should also consider the substantive size of the interaction and the number of cases located in the portions of the range where the effect is significant. Finally – and of direct relevance to the results that we present in the paper and the SI – Berry et al. (2010, 2012:8) also note that in the case of limited dependent variables, that the coefficient on the product term itself is actually much less informative when it comes to evaluating interactive hypotheses. When researchers are interested in evaluating probabilities from models (that constrain outcomes) using typical link functions (e.g., logit, probit), marginal effects depend on the values of all the independent variables in the model; “compression” built into the data generating process means interactive effects between variables in addition to those introduced by the interaction term included in the model specification (Berry et al. 2010: 254). In other words, researchers must evaluate marginal effects for the variables involved in the interaction, while incorporating information on the values of the other independent variables; statistically significant (or large) coefficients on product terms are not a necessary condition for substantively meaningful interactions, though non-zero coefficients on interaction terms do allow one to conclude that interactive effects are at least partly variable-specific (Berry et al. 2010: 255-57).

### **7. Further analysis with the Christian Right, note 18, p 13.**

However, when we take out congregational differences, we find a significant triple interaction between ideology, wave 1 attendance, and feelings toward Christian Fundamentalists. Figure A2 in the SI shows that negative feelings toward Christian fundamentalists have opposite effects on liberals versus conservatives. It intensifies attendance among liberals, while driving down attendance rates among conservatives – similar findings will reappear in the results from the next two studies. As noted previously, we suspect that conservatives are more likely to experience conflict over the politics of the Christian Right in their congregations.

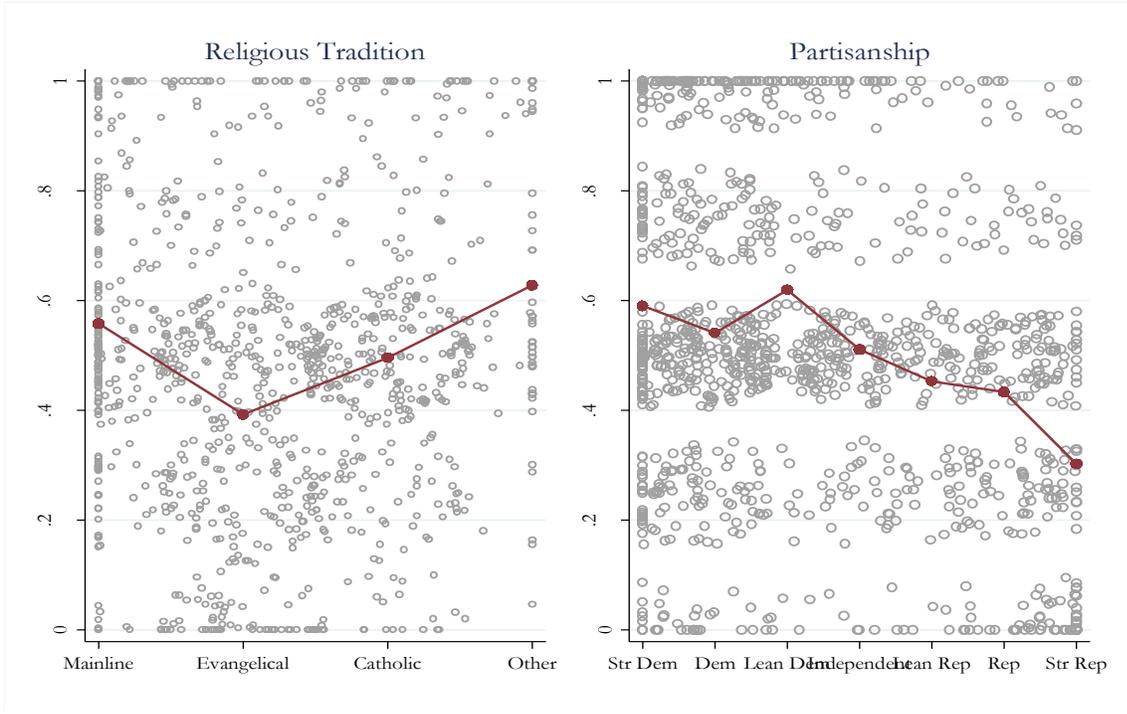
### **8. Further evidence from the ANES, note 28, p 21.**

We also find sympathetic cross-sectional evidence from the ANES time series when appropriate measures of affect toward the Christian Right are available. As Figures A6 through A8 (pp. 18-20) and Tables A8 and A9 (pp. 21-22) in this SI Appendix show, the marginal effect of moving from “very warm” on a measure of affect toward Christian Fundamentalists to “very cold” (a standard “feeling thermometer”) decreases church attendance across the board. This effect is especially pronounced, however, among strong Republicans – again, those who might experience disagreement over this political agenda first hand. The same trend obtains when the Christian Fundamentalist feeling thermometer is jettisoned in favor of a measure of affect toward “Evangelicals Active in Politics.” Intriguingly, this pattern appears to be most pronounced during

years in which the Christian Right was active in electoral politics (e.g., 1988 through 1994, and 2004-2008). In other years, however, the effect is essentially flat, thereby indicating that partisanship does not moderate the relationship between affect toward the Christian Right and church attendance (e.g., 1996, 2000). Of course, this analysis is clouded by an inability to control for prior attendance rates.

**9. Comment on a (substitute) measure of social exposure, note 23 (p. 18).** In some of our data we have measures of perceived difference with the congregation. However, once we move out to the PALS data, we need a proxy for a difference of opinion with the congregation over the Christian Right. It is easy to buy the assumption that people are more likely to run across Christian Right supporters in evangelical churches. Thus evangelicals who do not support the CR might be nudged out by such exposure. We think it is also a reasonable assumption that CR support is commonly experienced in churches where Republicans are present. Thus, Republicans who oppose the CR could be nudged out over this difference of opinion with co-religionists. There's a lot of overlap here, of course, and we cede that it is imperfect – though we do think that it is a reasonable proxy for the religious environment. In the PALS data, the average level of opposition to the CR among evangelicals is .39 (out of 1), while the average among Strong Republicans is .30, .43 among identifiers, and .45 among leaners (.42 among all Republicans, including leaners). Figure A13 below shows patterns that fit conventional wisdom, yet that also suggest real variance – indeed, CR opposition is far from perfectly sorted either along partisan or religious tradition lines (the line is mean opposition). Ultimately, we look at both of these factors – being Republican and being evangelical – together in formulating expectations and evaluating the evidence.

**Figure A13 – Opposition to the Christian Right by Religious Tradition and Partisanship**



Source: 2006 PALS