

# Four Vignettes on Race, Religion, and Politics

Luke Bellinger

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Supervisor: Eric McDaniel, Ph.D.

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## 1 Introduction

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

“Bismillahir Rahmannir Rahim.”

“Barchu et Adonai ham’vorach.”

“Om.”

For millions of Americans, these words are some of the first said in the morning and the last said at night. What religion represents, to a large portion of the United States population, is a deep, constant, all-encompassing commitment to their beliefs on how the entire universe works, what one might even call a “world view.” These integral philosophies, which often include helping one’s neighbor, doing no harm, and treating people with justice, shape the lives of the vast majority of Americans. (These philosophies also include broad rulings on other issues, such as sexual ethics and punishment through the concept of sin). Yet, the body politic of America disagrees on almost everything. Why?

This thesis is a sprawling study of religion and politics in America. It seeks to ascertain how religious people form differing beliefs on a vast number of political issues despite shared philosophies, both inside and across religious traditions. In terms of how political issues interact with identities, there is a common adage in public opinion research that goes: “Demography is not Destiny.” Religion is perhaps one of the most obvious examples of demography not being destiny, in that people in every religious tradition disagree on many issues within religion and politics. Religion is a social cleavage that operates differently from many others, in that it is built from

the bottom up. In general, a person does not decide on their own their race, gender, social class, age, etc. But people do choose their religion, and this choice is one that, for many, constitutes the most important aspect of their demographic identity, and in some traditions, the difference between life and death. However, race and ethnicity is deeply tied to religion in America. From segregation for several hundred years to minority religious and ethnic communities that exist today, most religious spaces remain racially homogeneous. Thus, how race relates to religion in the United States is an important avenue of study because it touches on two salient identities, one externally assigned, and another internalized.

This thesis is built on much of my previous work on religion and politics in regard to race. This thesis is meant to engage with the growing body of literature on religion and politics and demonstrate that the relationship between religion and politics is modified by race in complex ways. I theorize that the way that people arrive at religious and political outcomes start with personal beliefs that are then made more or less salient for religious outcomes through racial homophily and social constraint. This leads some people to engage in politics through religion in a very linear and direct fashion and others through additional lenses of race and community.

I seek to test this theory by various qualitative and quantitative means. This thesis proceeds as follows: In section 2, I review existent literature on race, religion, and politics and set up my theory. In section 3, I create my initial theory of how religion and politics are connected through race. In section 4, I design the remainder of my thesis to test various ideas related to my theory. In section 5, I use panel data to demonstrate that political beliefs affect contemporaneous religious belief,

as does race, but the effect of political belief on religious belief does not interact with race. In section 6, I use cross-sectional data to model different determinants of religious and political belief, and I demonstrate that social constraint is stronger among non-White Americans in predicting religious outcomes and that personal belief is stronger among White Americans in predicting religious outcomes. In section 7, I do ethnographic site visits to determine that top-down political communication in religious spaces is uncommon and that political beliefs are passed laterally through informal conversation. I also find that non-White religious spaces are ideologically heterogeneous, whereas White religious spaces are ideologically homogeneous. In section 8, I do interviews, funded by a grant from the Undergraduate Research Fellowship, to learn that many people choose their churches based on a mix of beliefs and culture. Individuals' decisions on where to go for church services depends on both ideology and homophily. In section 9, I briefly revise my theory to include mixed evidence from the substantive sections of this thesis.

## **2 Literature Review**

When studying identity politics, one finds a large mass of disparate literature that investigates separately various different identity groups and their intersections. At the minute intersection of race, religion, and politics, the number of pieces of research diminishes significantly, so this literature review also includes some pieces of research that only consider race or religion. This chapter covers some of what has been written on the subject of race, religion, and politics, and synthesizes the much what we know about how race, religion, and politics interact in order to build a broad model of race,

religion, and political behavior in the next chapter. This chapter proceeds by first looking at religion and politics broadly, then looking at the distinct literatures in each racial group, Black, Latino, and Asian, and pulls together certain points from each literature that can be used for later analysis.

## **2.1 Religion and Politics, broadly**

There are several present theories of the structure of religion and politics. The ethnoreligious theory is based on the idea that denominations combine with social groups, such as race or regional location, to form distinct political cultures, such that “political expressions of shared values derived from the voter’s membership in, and commitment to, ethnic and religious groups” (Kleppner 1970, 35, qtd. In Smidt, Kellstedt and Guth 2010, 4). Another perspective is the restructuring theory which finds that because Americans’ religious identification changes more freely than in previous generations, people sort themselves into “congenial theological environments” which now form two camps of “conservative, orthodox, or traditionalist faction on one side, and a liberal, progressive, or modernist [...] on the other,” (Smidt et al. 2009, 7). A third hybrid model, religious classification, finds that some groups behave according to the ethnoreligious theory, and that others behave based on current theological decisions according to the restructuring theory (Smidt et al. 2009, 8). The ethnoreligious model is better at accounting for the political behavior of Latino Catholics, Black Protestants, and minority religions, whereas the restructuring model better explains the behavior of White religious people (Smidt et al. 2009, 28).

Further considering the restricting theory and religious sorting, the way that

party identity shapes religious identity is examined in Michele Margolis' book *From Politics to the Pews*, which ascertains how politics and religion interact (Margolis 2018). She finds that partisan influence has an effect on how a person's religious identity develops (Margolis 2018). Her life cycle model assumes that rebelling against religion happens at the same time as when party identification crystallizes in young adulthood such that partisan identities are more stable than religious identities at younger ages (Margolis 2018, chapter 3). Partisans in a phase of religious flux often realign their religious beliefs to be more in line with their politics (Margolis 2018). She uses both experimental and panel data to show that when Democrat-leaning people are younger, they are less likely to return to religion during a stage of religious flux than Republicans, and that when primed with political issues, they lower their religious engagement (Margolis 2018, chapter 5). The notable exception to her theory is Black Christian Democrats. She finds that the reason the Black Democrats remain predominantly Christian is because during the stage of religious flux when religion is not yet crystallized, Black Democrats are about as likely to return to religion as White Republicans, though less likely to weigh religious endorsements for political candidates (Margolis 2018, chapter 7). She earlier notes that "minority groups' unique religious and political histories mean that group members might not follow the same religious trajectory as their white copartisans." (Margolis 2018, chapter 3).

Thus, race and religion do interact to affect political beliefs. Taking Biblical literalism as a religious ideology, McDaniel and Ellison (2008) find that race has an interactive effect that tempers literalist viewpoints: Hispanic literalism has a lesser effect on Republican identification than White literalism, and Black literalists are not

more likely to become Republican (McDaniel and Ellison 2008, 186-187). Furthermore, for various issues, such as birth control in schools, abortion, and mandatory sentencing, the effect of literalism on Black and Latino respondents is diminished or even opposite that of White literalists (McDaniel and Ellison 2008, 187). This shows that religious beliefs are moderated by and interact with race in some way.

Furthermore, religious beliefs have an effect on how political communication is received. Robinson (2010) conducts an experiment on right-leaning Evangelicals and finds that Evangelicals who hear a left-leaning message from a Catholic are more likely to rate that message higher than when they hear the same message from a Mainline Protestant (Robinson 2010, 504-505). Robinson's main point in this article is that Evangelicals are more receptive and tolerant to cross-cutting ideas only when they hear them from people who are perceived to be part of the right-wing movement (Catholics) and are less likely to be tolerant of differing ideas when they come from people outside of their movement (Mainline Protestants) (Robinson 2010, 511).

In terms of political socialization in churches, Djupe and Gilbert do work on showing how individuals assimilate into congregations and how clergy opinion affects the opinion of church members (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). Within churches, there are different sources of information and subgroups that may be in tension (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). They also find that church congregation opinion has a strong effect on agenda setting for individuals in the congregation, and that the clergy have a far lesser effect on agenda setting (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). People also react negatively when the clergy's views do not line up with their own (Djupe and Gilbert 2009).

## 2.2 Black

In terms of Black political socialization, the most obvious political structure that exists is the Black church. These churches, born out of segregation, form an integral part of the Black community, and their "gospels" blur the line between religion and politics. McDaniel, Dwidar, and Calderon (2018) study the effects of three "gospels" on Black public opinion, namely, the social gospel, based in the idea that salvation is based in "working to achieve social equality", the prosperity gospel, which is based in the idea that faith is rewarded with personal wealth, and Black liberation theology, which draws parallels between the suffering of biblical figures and that of Black people in America, and calls for more radical change (258). Out of these, prosperity gospel followers are more likely to be conservative, whereas Black liberation theology followers are more likely to be Black feminists, whereas social gospel followers are less likely to be Black conservatives or Black nationalists (McDaniel, Dwidar, and Calderon 2018, 271).

In addition to the broad typologies of Black theologies influencing Black people's political ideologies, individual communities and their leaders have an effect on people's political opinions. Harris-Lacewell (2010) uses expansive qualitative work to determine how "everyday talk" influences Black peoples' political opinions. This work includes ethnographies and interviews from Orange Grove Missionary Baptist Church, a Black church by a progressive pastor (Harris-Lacewell 2010, 53-54). The pastor espouses support for LGBT rights, runs a ministry for AIDS victims, and has appointed women to the church ministry (Harris-Lacewell 2010, chapter 2). The study finds that the response to these positions was different based on the individual

congregant. She finds that those who have been in the church for less time focus on family as the root cause of Black America's problems, for example, a person who has attended for one month says "I think that the family is our biggest problem. We are disjointed. We have forgotten old-fashioned values." (Harris-Lacewell 2010, 50). However, members who attend for longer locate the problem as broader racism: "We need to have some events that include white churches. I think if they experience that, then they may find that "hey, they're not that bad, they worship the way that we do, or whatever." You're worshipping the same God, who sees no color. I don't see any other forum that can bring people together." (Harris-Lacewell 2010, 66). Thus, the broad religious environment that Black people inhabit both affects their political ideology at a large scale (McDaniel, Dwidar, and Calderon 2018) and the specific church that one attends has an effect on their political thought at a small scale (Harris-Lacewell 2010).

In terms of the mechanism by which Black political socialization takes place, White and Laird 2021 put forward the model of "racialized social constraint" to explain the political behavior of Black people (46-47). They explain it as: "rather than weighing how what happens to the group affects them as individuals, [B]lacks are instead weighing the relative costs and benefits of siding with their individual interests or beliefs versus conforming to racial group expectations of them," (Laird and White 2021, 46-47). These include both positive and negative effects of siding with a certain party, such as material gain for siding with the in-group, and social ostracization for siding with the out-group (Laird and White 2021, 47). This political socialization is perpetuated in part through social networks, with 73.9 percent of

Black people saying they were contacted by friends and family to vote for Barack Obama, compared to 44.9 percent of White Democrats (Laird and White 2021, 42). They also found in an experiment that Black people donated significantly more money to Barack Obama in the presence of a Black confederate who gave money to Barack Obama, as compared to those without the confederate, and this effect was even greater for ideologically conservative Black people (Laird and White 2021, 159-161).

Taken together, these three pieces of literature form a coherent understanding of religion and politics as it relates to Black political socialization. Individual congregations cause people to change the salience of certain political beliefs (Harris-Lacewell 2010), and the religious ideology of a church affects how individuals' political ideology forms (McDaniel, Dwidar, and Calderon 2018), and the homogeneity of these spaces causes the autonomy-overriding "racialized social constraint" (Laird and White 2021) through both existence around other Black people, and political contact from the pastor of a church to the congregants. Other literatures, however, have less work that immediately lends itself to the intersection of race, religion, and politics.

### **2.3 Latino**

The most immediate thing that one notices about religion in the Latino community is how much change it is currently undergoing. According to a recent Pew Research poll, Catholic identification in the Latino community dropped below 50% for the first time, with Evangelicals, Protestants, and Irreligious people making up the other half of religious identification among Latinos (Pew Research Center 2023a). Though

Latino Catholicism is currently declining, it remains relevant as the largest religion among Latinos.

Catholicism is unique because of its issue positions spanning both sides of the political spectrum, such as being pro-immigration reform, against the death penalty, against abortion, and against same-sex marriage (Matovina 2014, 213). Further demonstrating this non-coherence to traditional political parties, the Convocation '95, which was written by 500 Latino Catholic clergymen, declared their most important issues to be: "abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, drugs, the arms trade, poverty, women's and workers' rights, discrimination against immigrants, health care, education, domestic violence, the dignity of the family, and respect for the elderly." (Matovina 2014, 213). This disparate mix leaves individual Latinos to weigh their votes, largely based on issue salience alone. As such, "like other Catholics, many Latinos give more decisive weight to issues they believe affect them and their families most immediately" (Matovina 2014, 213), which leads many to support Democrats (Matovina 2014). A good example of a high salience issue to Latino Catholics is immigrants' rights, where many are compelled to vote Democratic by undocumented immigrants in their own churches (Matovina 2014, 212). It should be noted that, generally, Hispanic Catholic leaders do not attempt to sway their constituents towards a political party (Matovina 2014, 214). This *mixed bag* of political issues and lack of explicit guidance for a religious leaders leaves Hispanic Catholics with a non-committed vote for whichever party best helps them in the immediate term. The influence of religious leaders reasserts itself when moving from big-tent Catholicism to Evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism, the second largest Christian group among Latinos (Pew Research Center 2023a) is far more likely to cause coherent party identification. (Gibson and Hare 2012) find that Catholic Latinos are more likely to be conservative ideologically than the reference, but not more likely to be Republican (68), but that find that “...Evangelical Latinos are 24% more likely than secular Latinos, and 6% more likely than committed Catholic Latinos, to identify themselves as ideological conservatives, and are 12% more likely than committed Catholic Latinos and 18% more likely than secular Latinos to be Republicans,” (Gibson and Hare 2012, 67-68). Religiosity has a far greater effect on Latino Evangelicals than on secular or Catholic Latinos, and their opinions on social issues, like gay marriage and abortion, are far more conservative than those of Catholics (Gibson and Hare 2012, 66).

Furthermore, immigrants that convert to Evangelicalism are significantly more likely than Catholics to be partisan, both Republican and Democrat (Weaver 2015, 502). Crucially, they are also more likely to be partisan than non-convert Evangelicals as well, suggesting that this partisanship happens through conversion itself (Weaver 2015, 503). Weaver theorizes that this is because religious communities are closer in peoples’ lives than political parties, and thus form “psychological attachments and social ties that are particular to the United States. As a result, religious conversion can serve as an intervening adaptation that facilitates the acquisition of partisanship,” (Weaver 2015, 505).

Immigration is actually a very important dynamic in both Latino and Asian political socialization, and the finding that immigrant converts gain partisan identification is notable as immigrants generally are less likely to participate in politics.

(Li and Jones 2020) find that immigrants are less likely to participate in politics overall, and that age at immigration makes someone less likely to vote, with those who immigrated as adults significantly less likely to vote than those who immigrated as children (Li and Jones 2020, 72). They also find that low socioeconomic status also makes immigrants less likely to vote (Li and Jones 2020, 84). They attribute this gap to less political socialization in the formative years of an older immigrant, and that the different experiences in those formative years between young immigrants (like dreamers) and older immigrants cause the gap between these two groups in political participation (Li and Jones 2020, 64).

Even though immigrants are less likely to participate in politics, Latino immigrants can be socialized into partisanism not only through conversion but also through discrimination, as Latino immigrants have higher political participation if they perceive religious discrimination (Huckle and Silva 2020, 12). In addition to religious discrimination, social capital, whether or not a person is part of some social group, predicts higher rates of political participation for immigrants of all racial groups, though church attendance does not have an effect on political participation for Latino immigrants in this sample (Huckle and Silva 2020, 17). Thus, other groups that immigrants be socialized in also have an effect on political participation.

In addition to religion and social groups, family can also have an impact on immigrant socialization. (García-Castañón 2018) studies the effects of spousal political socialization on informal membership (broadly, various factors leading one to become more politically active) for Mexican immigrants (García-Castañón 2018, 391). They find that political discussions with spouses are more likely to cause higher

informal membership (García-Castañón 2018, 397). Also, “For youth immigrants, talking to their spouses about how to register depresses their informal membership development, while for adult immigrants, it enhances it,” (García-Castañón 2018, 397). Thus, spousal dynamics and political socialization have an overall mixed, but in some cases, positive effect on ground-level politics for Latino immigrants.

In terms of irreligion, the fastest growing group in Latino religious identification, this trend primarily happens among younger generations. For Latinos, church attendance predicts more civic engagement across all generations (Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor 2016, 100). However, later generations are significantly less likely to be religious, with men and Catholics also being less likely to attend church (Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor 2016, 97-98). Even though later generations are less likely to attend church, they are still likely to have comparable civic engagement to people who attend church frequently, as increasing generation has a positive effect on civic engagement (Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor 2016, 99), suggesting that the demographic decline of Christianity in the Latino community does not lead to a decline in Latino political engagement, overall (Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor 2016, 102-104). It should be noted that (Gibson and Hare 2012) did find that irreligious Latinos were more liberal and Democratic than Christians, so this decreasing religiosity paired with no decrease in political participation may have ramifications for party identification in the aggregate political opinion of Latinos.

Taken together, Catholic Latinos are not strongly socialized to favor a particular party and thus begin voting based on substantive concerns (Matovina 2014), leaving them with a non-committal party identification (Matovina 2014) and with the most

centered political opinion of any Latino religious group (Gibson and Hare 2012). On the other hand, Evangelicals are far more likely to be Republican and conservative (Gibson and Hare 2012), and this happens specifically through socialization, rather than solely through sorting as can be seen through Evangelical convert immigrants (Weaver 2015). Immigrants can also be socialized into politics through social capital (Huckle and Silva 2020), family discussions (García-Castañón 2018), and immigrating earlier in life (Li and Jones 2020). Irreligious Latinos are more common among the younger generation (Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor 2016), are more likely to be liberal and Democratic (Gibson and Hare 2012), and are no less likely to participate in politics (Gershon, Pantoja, and Taylor 2016).

## **2.4 Asian Americans and Minority Religions**

Uniquely, a majority of Asian Americans are not Christian, with the Asian religious community being typified by large populations of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and irreligious people (Pew Research Center 2023b). The literature surrounding Asian-American religion and religiosity is also, by far, the smallest.

As best as I can tell, the best quantitative piece written on Asian-American religiosity and party identification is Lien (2003). Her analysis of a 2001 survey of 1218 Asian Americans analyzes Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic Asians' ideology, political integration, and public opinion (Lien 2003). She finds that Buddhists are more likely to describe themselves as "middle of the road" when it comes to ideology, whereas Hindus and Muslims are more likely to describe themselves as liberal, with Hindus being more likely than any other group to identify as

very liberal (Lien 2003, 271). Hindus and Muslims are also overwhelmingly more likely to describe themselves as Democrats as compared to Christians, and non-Democrat Hindus and Muslims are more likely to be Independents than Republicans, whereas Buddhists are far less likely to support either party and a high percentage claim to not think in terms of Republican, Democrat, or Independent (Lien 2003, 271). Also, Asian Americans who go to religious service are more likely to participate in politics and become US citizens than those who don't (Lien 2003, 272).

In terms of Asian Christians, Yi (2022) includes an analysis of Asian Evangelicals through political organizing and candidates. Asian evangelicals can be fiscally liberal, being far more likely than White evangelicals to support a larger government, as well as being more likely to support civil rights, better treatment for Muslims, and affirmative action, while also being just as conservative as White evangelicals on social issues, such as Homosexuality (Yi 2022, 230). This stance can be attributed to far higher education among Asians, leading even conservative Evangelical Asians to care about the poor more than Republicans (Yi 2022, 230). Conservative Asian Republicans do exist, though, with Republican Asian candidates winning elections in various jurisdictions, such as Congressman Young Kim, or former Governor Nikki Haley, all of whom identify with being pro-life and Christian (Yi 2022, 230-231).

Going back to immigration, Audette, Brockway, and Weaver (2017) find that immigrants who convert from Buddhism to Christianity are more likely to develop partisanship than Buddhists alone (705), and that they are more likely to become partisan the longer they spend in the United States (706). They also find that "religiosity would not seem to fully account for the effect of conversion on partisan-

ship” and that this effect of conversion on partisanship is unique to immigrants and is not seen in foreign-born converts (707-708). They also find that these converts are more likely to be Republicans than Democrats (Audette, Brockway, and Weaver 2017, 710-711). This echoes the previous findings on Evangelical conversion of Latino immigrants in (Weaver 2015).

Raychaudhuri (2018) finds that there is a generational divide in Asian American political socialization in terms of party identification. Using qualitative methods, she finds that first-generation immigrants are primarily socialized through interactions with other immigrants, and that because these other immigrants are less likely to be politically active and can have diverse political positions, first-generation Asian immigrants end up with mixed opinions towards both parties (Raychaudhuri 2018, 13). She finds that family socialization from one generation to the next rarely happens in immigrant households, with second-generation respondents noting that their parents rarely discuss politics at home and often view all politics as not worth their time, (Raychaudhuri 2018, 13-14). The second-generation then develops their political opinions through interactions with racially diverse social groups in schools and universities, especially through having more non-Asian friends (Raychaudhuri 2018, 14-17).

In terms of religious minorities, the largest two groups among Asians are Muslims and Hindus (Pew Research Center 2023b). Muslim public opinion is highly liberal (Lien 2003). In terms of political socialization, Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto (2018) find that Muslims who live near other Muslims are more likely to vote, and that those who have been discriminated against in airports are also more likely to vote

(Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto 2018, 90-91). Also, those who participate in voluntary charity (sadaqah) and have more knowledge are more likely to vote, suggesting that those who more deeply understand the religion are more likely to engage in politics (Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto 2018, 92). Muslims are overwhelmingly more likely to vote Democrat (Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto 2018, 93) likely because of Muslims' demonization by Republican candidates (Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto 2018, 85).

Regrettable, Hindu and Sikh public opinion is almost non-existent, so instead this piece on political organizing in these communities is included. (Kurien 2016) considers how activism organizations formed in the Indian-American community through religious means (Kurien 2016, 283). These organizations began to form on college campuses in the 1990's and grew after the attacks of 9/11, in response to backlash against South Asians that belonged to religious minorities (Kurien 2016, 277-281). These organizations, such as those in the Sikh community, were formed to prevent and fight against hate crimes in the aftermath of the attacks (Kurien 2016, 282). These advocacy organizations also try to affect educational policy and gain national recognitions for their religious minority communities (Kurien 2016, 282-284).

A few things can be understood from the literature on Asian American religion and politics. Asian Americans have a high proportion of religious minorities (Pew Research Center 2023b), and among these, Muslims and Hindus are more likely to be Democratic and liberal, whereas Buddhists generally don't form partisan identification (Lien 2003). Christians are also more partisan than Buddhists, and conversion to Christianity is more likely to cause conservatism and Republican identification (Audette, Brockway, and Weaver 2017; Yi 2022). Finally, high education (Yi 2022;

Raychaudhuri 2018) and diverse social groups (Raychaudhuri 2018) cause overwhelming liberalism among younger generations of Asians.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

I want to put together a few points about the interaction of race, religion, and politics from the literature. First, political socialization in religious spaces can change how people form partisan identification (Harris-Lacewell 2010; Weaver 2015; McDaniel, Dwidar, and Calderon 2018). Second, immigrants start out non-partisan and non-political (Li and Jones 2020; Raychaudhuri 2020), but can be socialized into politics through religion, particularly Christianity (Audette, Brockway, and Weaver 2017; Weaver 2015). Third, there are many racial dynamics that have been shown to have effects on political belief, through group influence (Laird and White 2021), and that piece on tangentially includes discussion on religion. An important component to add to the literature is a study on how specific mechanisms of political socialization affect political beliefs in religious spaces.

## **3 Theory**

Good research is theory based, so expanding on the existing theories of religion and politics in America by adding the dimension of race adds important context for the behavior of individuals today. To repeat and summarize the existing models of religion and politics, the ethnoreligious model assumes that the relationship between religion and politics is based on membership in an ethnoreligious group whereas the restructuring theory suggests that people sort themselves into different communities

based on ideology, and that is why religious communities are politically homogeneous. The existing hybrid model (Smidt et al. 2009) takes into account differences in the structure of religious communities and assumes that some behave in accordance with the restructuring theory and others as ethnoreligious groups. Working under the assumption that different religious communities socialize their members in different ways, the restructuring seen in American religion may have different consequences for different groups of people. Margolis' life cycle surmises that people are generally free to change their religion and tend to do so in their early twenties, but that Republicans' and Democrats' pre-existing social views lead them to different religious paths, one group returning to religion, and the other leaving it. Margolis also surmises (with very limited evidence) that Black Democrats, when facing the same choice as White Democrats, remain attached to their churches rather than leaving.<sup>1</sup> Given that much Black politics literature has been based around the idea of social constraint pushing people to be homogeneous in partisan choice, perhaps these same social constraints (social reward and ostracization, homophily, strong ties with family and friends) apply to decisions with regard to religion as well. Whereas the hybrid theory suggests that both the ethnoreligious theory and the restructuring theory happens simultaneously and in parallel in disparate communities, I suggest that the ethnoreligious theory should be nested within the restructuring theory. All individuals, regardless of background, have choices to move around with regard to religion, but social constraints in some congregations, but not in others, moderate and constrain the decisions that people ultimately make. The ethnoreligious com-

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<sup>1</sup>It should be worth noting that this is Margolis' only discussion of race throughout her books.

ponent is not an attribute inherent to a religious community, but rather part of an individual's engagement with that community.

This explains differences between how Black and White people deal with religion and politics. From the political side, White people have the relative freedom to choose their politics how they please, to align with their existing values and beliefs, whereas Black people are constrained in their partisan choice such that they are pushed into homogeneous choices for the purpose of fulfilling the expectation of their social networks. Similarly, White people are free to choose where to go to church or whether to disaffiliate based on their opinions on various issues, whereas Black people are similarly constrained in their decision on whether or not to disaffiliate with religion through the same structures of social reward and ostracization. This explains why Black people remain more Christian and less likely to disaffiliate and why so many remain in Black denominations (Pew Research Center 2021). Even among those who choose to disaffiliate, almost none actively identify as Atheist or Agnostic; almost all disaffiliated Black individuals put themselves in the “Nothing in particular” category. The social constraints that restrict the way that people vote are likely the same social constraints that restrict the way that people engage with religion.

Of course, Black people are very unique, and simply applying assumptions about how Black people work on other American minorities is a fraught endeavor. However, previous work (McClain et al. 2009) suggests that some assumptions about Black politics do retain some merit when thinking about other minorities. Minoritization as a process is theoretically based in the Black/White divide (Bonilla-Silva

2004) such that even though other minorities may hold little in common with Black people in terms of history or culture that might build a unique political culture, their engagement with politics may mirror the structures of Black politics by virtue of receiving similar treatment. Just as Black Americans face social constraints when engaging with politics, other groups face similar social constraints (Anoll 2022). It is reasonable to expect that these social constraints may apply to non-Black groups similarly to how they apply to Black people. However, what these social constraints look like may be different. Starting with Asian Americans, constraints like language and minority religion may have an impact on how Asian Americans choose religion, as Asian Americans' religion is vastly different to that of any other group. Because Asian Americans form discrete and insular communities, these communities remain politically homogeneous, especially in response to racialization (Kurien 2016; Lien 2003). Just as the Black community is tight knit with strong social ties and just as they form a statistical minority in many places, it is reasonable to apply some of the logic behind Black social constraint to other tight-knit, statistical minority communities.

Latinos, on the other hand, are very different. They do not form a statistical minority in many places, and are not homogeneous within ethnic groups. Because Latinos are not as tight knit in community, it is reasonable to expect that Latinos' constraints are less strong and that Latinos are more likely to behave like White people in both politics and religion. The traditional institution of Catholicism has declined sharply among Latinos, mirroring the decline of all Christianity among Whites. Qualitative research suggests that though many Latinos grow up Catholic,

those who feel less attached to their religion face fewer social barriers to exiting, as Bullivant says, “Cultural Catholicism, when not packaged up with personally owned belief and practice, only passes on for a generation or two: the children who were baptized only to please their Polish, Mexican, or Bostonian grandmothers will not grow up needing to placate their own mother when it comes to their offspring.” (Bullivant 2022, 181). Among those who leave Catholicism because it is Conservative (not just Latinos), social constraint leads them to complete disaffiliation, rather than simply staying. Similarly, among Latinos who move to Evangelicalism, many cite culturally conservative principles, such as an increase in the acceptance of homosexuality in society, and crusading to begin the kingdom of God on earth, both things that the Catholic church waffles on. Latinos’ lessened social constraint also explains differences in voting, as Latinos who go to predominantly Latino churches are far more likely to be Democratic, and those who do not are more likely to be Republican (Bellinger 2025a). This is suggestive of Latino social ties being important to the relationship between religion and party identification for Latinos. Those with fewer social ties are more Republican.

Social constraint also explains the behavior of other pan-racial religious groups, such as Mormons or Muslims.

My point is that the restructuring theory is correct—everybody has a choice. That choice is mediated among certain groups by social constraint, and that social constraint explains the extent to which a person’s behavior follows the restructuring theory or the ethnoreligious theory. Social constraints are not necessarily tied to race, but often can be. Under this model, the continuum of behavior from restruc-

turing to ethnoreligious goes from White (most restructuring) to Latino to Asian to Black (most ethnoreligious). These social constraints explain both heterogeneity and homogeneity among racial groups in both religion and politics.

This, then, explains the relationship between race and religion in terms of the relationship between race and politics. This theory better explains how examples of both the restructuring theory and the ethnoreligious theory exist today, and how they relate to each other. In place of restructuring and ethnoreligion being separated by disparate religious communities, they are rather related by social constraint. These models exist on a continuum that reflects the extent to which each group is governed by social constraint. This theory also introduces race into the model of religion and politics, which is important given the history of religion in the United States. However, race is not introduced flippantly, or for its own sake, but rather as a term that partially explains the social constraint that underpins religious choices. Put plainly, whether a person falls into the restructuring camp or the ethnoreligious camp depends on their social constraints, largely related to race. <sup>2</sup>

## 4 Research Design

*For transparency, this research design has been altered after some data collection. I believe that my previous research design was too complicated and made theoretical connections that weren't sufficiently supported by the tools I use.*

This theory is rather broad and as of yet unrefined. This thesis is meant refine my

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<sup>2</sup>I often think that REP research throws race into the mix of political behavior too easily and assumes propter hoc that all expressions of behavior interact with race. I write this theory primarily to explain why there are concrete anecdotal and observational reasons to think that religion and politics is affected by race.

theory through the process of abduction. I do multiple studies testing various parts of my theory to get a better insight as to which parts work and don't work, then I revise my theory with confirming and disconfirming evidence to make it stronger (or weaker). I call these short studies vignettes, and I complete four of them, each using a different method to get at a different question. I also consider the possibility of my theory being entirely wrong by including disconfirming evidence in the discussion portion of each vignette.

To test each part of the theory, first I look at the likelihood that a person changes their political and religious opinions, and how those correlate with race. Secondly, I consider what indicators of social constraint correlate with certain religious and political outcomes, and I test the similarity of these two outcomes. Third, I consider how socialization happens within racial-religious communities and how these communities differ in culture through ethnographic site visits. Fourth, I analyze rich interview data on peoples' past and current religious affiliation, social networks, and political and religious beliefs.

I decided to use mixed methods for multiple reasons. First, I believe that it is important to flesh out ideas using multiple types of inquiry, and fully investigating a broad question requires a broad methodological outlook. Second, both quantitative and qualitative work has been done that relates closely with my thesis, and I want to engage fully with those works using similar methods. Third, some parts of my theory lend themselves to qualitative work, such as socialization within political spaces, people's motivations for changing religions, whereas other parts lend themselves to quantitative work, such as competing patterns of behavior in individuals.

Mixed methods allow me to use the best tool to answer a series of very different research questions. Finally, relating social science research more closely with human experience and including individual narratives is a normative plus.

This thesis also closely engages with previous literature on these subjects. I spend an entire chapter mirroring and testing work by Margolis, and another deeply inspired by work by White and Laird, and Anoll. I want to further investigate relationships established in previous literature in order to flesh out the conclusions of those pieces and add my own take on those works.

As such, this research design is meant to add to multiple literatures, primarily on religion and politics, and also on social constraint, race and ethnicity, religious disaffiliation, and religion and public life. This is the primary reason why I choose to make each chapter so different methodologically—so I could add to multiple streams of research. I also want to demonstrate how many of these literatures are highly connected. As such, the remainder of my thesis consists of four connected vignettes using different methods, and a commentary chapter where I revise my theory and consider similarities and differences from the results of each chapter.

Research Question: Under what circumstances do people change religious practices and is that change related to change in politics?

For my first vignette, I analyze existing panel data and engage more deeply with Margolis' work. I use Margolis' very old Youth-Parent Socialization Panel data and newer Voter Study Group panel data links between change in religion and change in partisanship. Much work has been done with aggregate level religious change, especially the sharp increase in Irreligion, but little work, other than Margolis' work,

explains how this happens at an individual level. Margolis' book includes a chapter on why the behavior of Black americans is different to that of White americans with respect to her broader thesis that politics effects religious decisions in early adulthood. Her work is limited by the poor sampling of the YPSP, so I expand on her work with new data and analysis. Given that part of my theory has to do with the circumstances under which a person chooses to change their religion, I look at cases within those panels in which people change their church attendance and regress those changes against changes in partisanship, race, and other variables, using lagged panel models that include random effects. These models are more advanced than the estimators that Margolis used in analysis of her panel data. This chapter further illuminates this idea of religious change and choice and adds to the body of literature on religious decline, but at an individual, rather than aggregate level.

Research Question: Does social constraint explain religious affiliation and if so, is that relationship the same as the established relationship between social constraint and politics? This chapter expands on my previous work (Bellinger 2025a) in examining the relationships between racial and non-racial social constraint, religious choice, and political choice in cross-sectional data. This work is meant to expand on existing literature on social constraint (Laird and White 2021; Anoll 2022) by examining religion as a dependent variable with similar characteristics to politics. This chapter is the primary chapter testing my model of religion and politics. I compare two indices of different versions of social constraint, one that is norms-based and another that is network-based. I regress these against the likelihood of changing religion and the likelihood of being a Democrat.

Research Question: What are racially homogeneous religious spaces like and how are politics discussed in those spaces?

Qualitative research has lent itself to answering complex social questions about communities that may be harder to answer using quantitative research. To get a pulse on the way that religion and politics functions within religious communities, I do 17 site visits in religious communities and gatherings in the Austin area and rural areas outside of Austin. I choose ethnography as a research method to re-center the human aspect of social science research in my own work, and to get a better sense of how racially homogeneous and heterogeneous religious spaces actually function. I also test some assumptions of my theory against what I observe in religious spaces, especially illuminating social constraint in churches. I observe variations in religious experience among units and choose sites that will best allow me to explain differences between racial-religious communities. I investigate religious decline and replacement in different communities, to understand how people come to leave or join churches. I tell stories from various religious spaces and talk about my experience as an ethnographer traveling through the moments that many people hold most sacred. I also observe conversations after church services and recruit interviewees from these site visits. By including these ethnographic site visits in my research, I hope to illustrate a more human aspect of religion, explain relationships between race, ethnicity, and religion at the micro level, and I seek to temper aggregated statistical research with stories from individual religious spaces. This sample is non-representative because of budgetary and time constraints associated with undergraduate research.

Research Question: How do people arrive at their present political and religious

positions, and are those journeys related?

My final vignette is an analysis of 17 interviews I completed with individuals recruited from my ethnographic site visits. Graciously funded partially by the UT Undergraduate Research Fund, and partially from my own pocket, I recruit several individuals from each religious space to talk about their religious and political experiences. I compare personal religious histories to understand how individuals come to their present in both religious affiliation and political affiliation. I recruit mostly White and Black participants, with some participants of other races.

Ryan burge uses three panel surveys to determine correlates of being born-again. This paper looks at religious change in the direction of becoming more religious, rather than less religious. He finds that each panel has mixed results for partisanship and demographic variables on becoming born again. He finds that being born again is highly correlated with an increase in church attendance, but is not correlated with partisan change.

## **5 First study: Panel Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Religious and political change across a lifetime**

The unique interaction of race, religion, and partisanship has already been recognized in previous literature. Margolis argues that Black Americans do not conform to her “life-cycle” model of political-religious disaffiliation because liberal leaning young Black Americans choose to return to the church rather than disaffiliating, like liberal leaning young White Americans, (Margolis 2018, Chapter 7 page 10). This is evident even in the very small number of Black respondents in Margolis’ analysis

of the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel. Even though the study only had 9% Black respondents, the effect was still visible, if likely biased and insignificant. This provides some weak evidence towards the trend in disaffiliation due to political beliefs being heterogeneous by race.

Yet at the same time, traditional religious institutions, such as Black Churches, are on the decline. As Eddie Glaude writes in Huffpost, “The Black Church, as we’ve known it or imagined it, is dead. Of course, many African Americans still go to church. But the idea of this venerable institution as central to black life and as a repository for the social and moral conscience of the nation has all but disappeared,” (Glaude 2010). He talks about the loss of Black parishioners to non-Black non-denominational and televangelist churches and the Black church becoming increasingly irrelevant to modern-day problems as people associate it with historical struggles against injustice. Though my ethnographic work appears in a later chapter, it is worth leaving an anecdote here. When I visited a Black church, nearly the entire congregation had greying hair. I saw only one young family in the church that Sunday. Evidently, there is some shift happening in Black American religion.

At the same time, for Latino Americans, decline in the Catholic church is obvious and rampant. Catholicism used to be the religion of 67% of Latinos in 2010, whereas now it is only 43%. Irreligion has vastly risen as well, from 10% to 30%. (Pew Research Center 2023a). Qualitative work has demonstrated that many people who grew up Catholic lose their religion because the church is “extremely conservative” (Bullivant 2022, 188), echoing Margolis’ analysis of why people leave religion. This change is not, however, associated with a change in partisanship in the aggregate

(Bellinger 2025b) .

On the other side of the coin, there exists mixed evidence that early Conservative political leanings are associated with increase in religiosity. There is minor evidence from one panel dataset that change in party ID leads to increase in attendance and that increase in attendance leads to change in party ID (Burge 2021). Burge’s analysis, however, does not consider race as a covariate in the regression analyses.

Taken all together, there is an open question as to whether the effect of a person’s political views on their religion is moderated by race. This illuminates the mechanism through which a person chooses to lose religion and the extent to which it is related to race.

Note to self: Democrats staying in churches leads to more democratic socialization in churches explain religious democrats both ways.

H1: Descriptively, Liberals that are non-White will be less likely to disaffiliate, with the least likely being Black Liberals. H2: The effect of party identification on religious disaffiliation is moderated by race.

## **5.2 Panel Research Design**

There are several panel datasets in existence that contain religion, church attendance, and political opinion asked across multiple waves, all of which have already been analyzed in a previous publication. Each has its own flaws. The first is the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study (Jennings 2005), with four waves taken from 1965 to 1997, which is the primary data source for several chapters of Margolis’ book. Its main benefit is that its four waves are spread out through a lifetime, taken about

every ten years. This means that there is a higher likelihood that a person changes their political view or religion throughout their life. The main drawback is that the data is quite old, taken before the dramatic decline in christianity starting in the 2010s, so the motivations of those who left religion while it was still unpopular or uncommon to do so may be different from those of people today. Additionally, there are very few people of color in the dataset, with the original wave being 91% White.

Another dataset, used in (Burge 2021), is the Voter Study Group panel (Democracy Fund Voter Study Group 2021), which had eight waves between 2011 and 2020. It is more representative of the modern population, being 67% White, 10% Black, and 13% Hispanic. The first drawback is that the panel’s waves are highly unbalanced, with there being two waves in 2011 and 2012, and the rest being between 2016 and 2020. Second, the panel covers a shorter period of time than the YPSP, meaning that the window in which a person may change one of the variables of interest is smaller.

Early models of panel analysis are very simple in nature, and are nearly identical to basic time-series models. For example, (Finkel 1995) proposes

$$\Delta Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_t + \beta_2 Y_{t-1} + \epsilon_t$$

and

$$\Delta Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_t + (\beta_2 - 1)Y_{t-1} + \epsilon_t$$

where  $\beta_1$  is the causal estimator of  $X_t$  on  $Y_t$ . Margolis uses a modified version, swapping out  $X_t$  for  $X_{t-1}$ . Thus,

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{t-1} + \beta_2 Y_{t-1} + \epsilon_t$$

where  $X_{t-1}$  is lagged party identification and  $Y_t$  is contemporaneous church attendance. These coefficients are estimated using OLS. These mediators take into account temporal autocorrelation but not differences between individuals. I was tempted to take Margolis' model specification and interact it with race, but there are flaws with her model. In choosing to use only lagged party identification rather than differenced party identification ( $\Delta X$ ), it is likely that for most units  $X_{t-1} = X_t$ , so the lagged term, which is meant to be *the causal effect of past party identification on church attendance*, doesn't clearly measure anything unique to the lagged term. Thus, much of what she measures is just party ID on church attendance, without any temporal component. It should be noted that Margolis' main point with her model is not that change in politics affects change in religion, rather only prior existent political leanings effect religious habits. Additionally, given that my analysis has to do with race, which is already highly correlated with partisanship, it may be better use some other term like ideology to capture the propter hoc disposition of a person changing their religious habits.

Thus, for panel data with a long duration, I estimate model 1

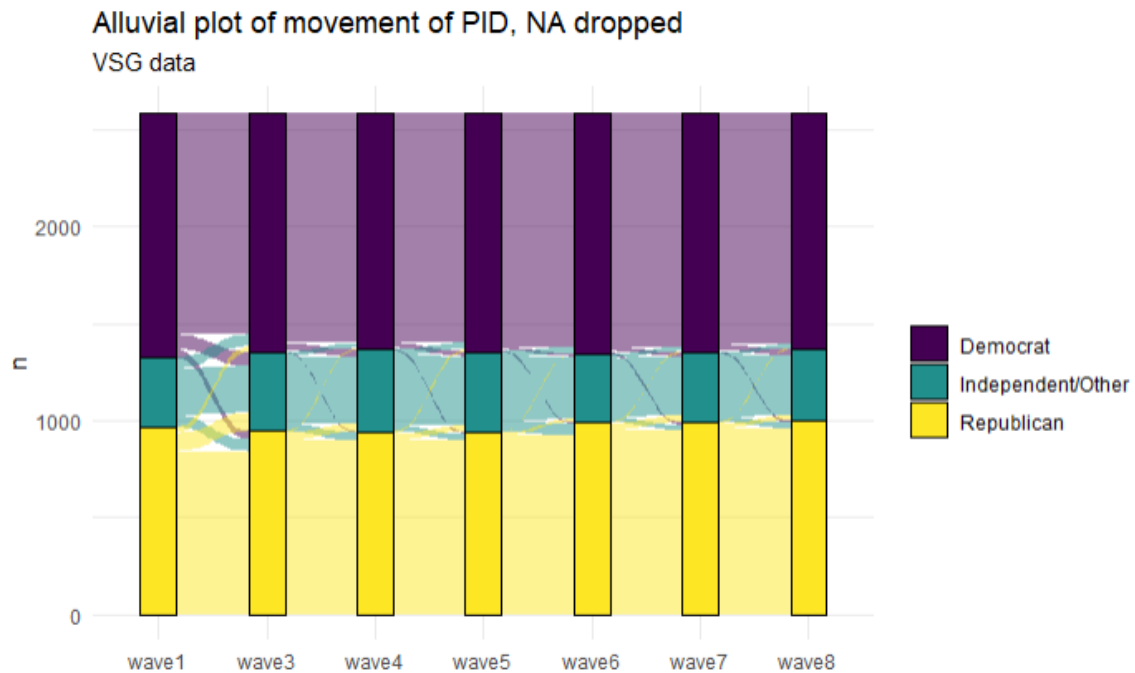
$$\Delta Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta X + \beta_2 X_{t-1} + \beta_3 Y_{t-1} + \gamma_k RACE_k + \delta_j W_j + \mu_i c_i + \epsilon$$

to estimate whether race alone leads people to be more likely to attend church, similar to the Margolis model.  $Y$  is religious attendance on an ordinal scale,  $X$  is

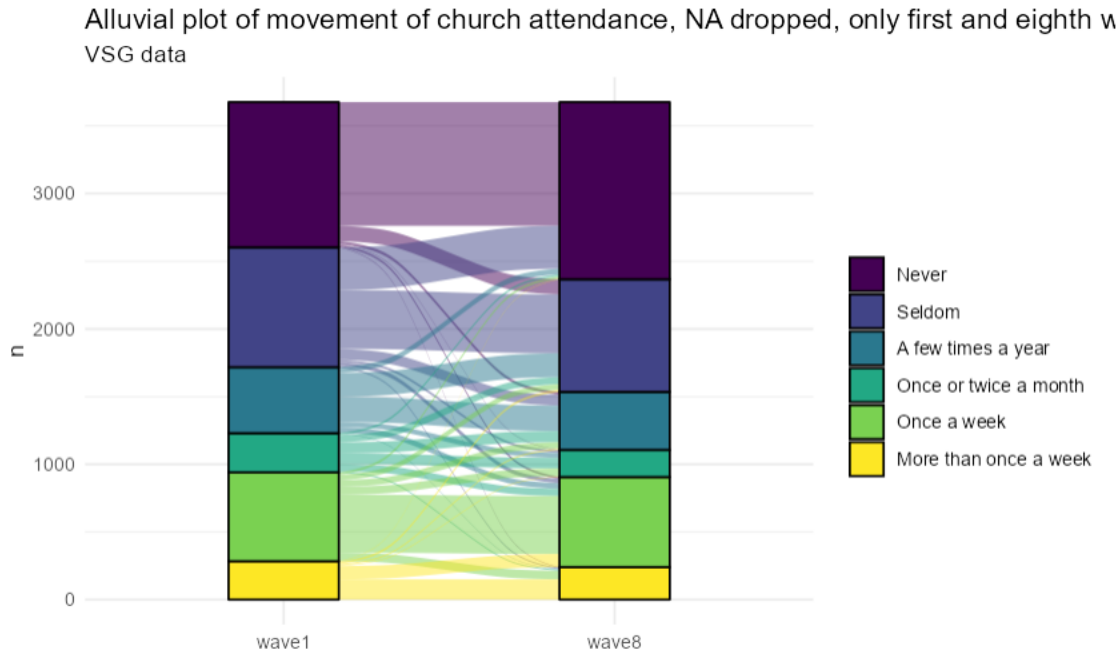
party ID or ideology on an ordinal scale,  $RACE$  is a series of binary vectors, in which the reference is White, and  $\delta_j W_j$  is a dummy variable for the wave and  $\mu_i c_i$  are random effects. I expect  $\gamma_{BLACK}$  to be positive and all other race coefficients to be insignificant. I also estimate model 2

$$\Delta Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta X + \beta_2 X_{t-1} + \beta_3 Y_{t-1} + \gamma_k RACE_k + \lambda_k (\Delta X \times RACE_k) + \delta_j W_j + \mu_i c_i + \epsilon$$

where race is an interactive effect. I expect  $\beta_1$  to be positive and  $\lambda_{BLACK}$  to be negative. Controls are age, education, income, and gender.

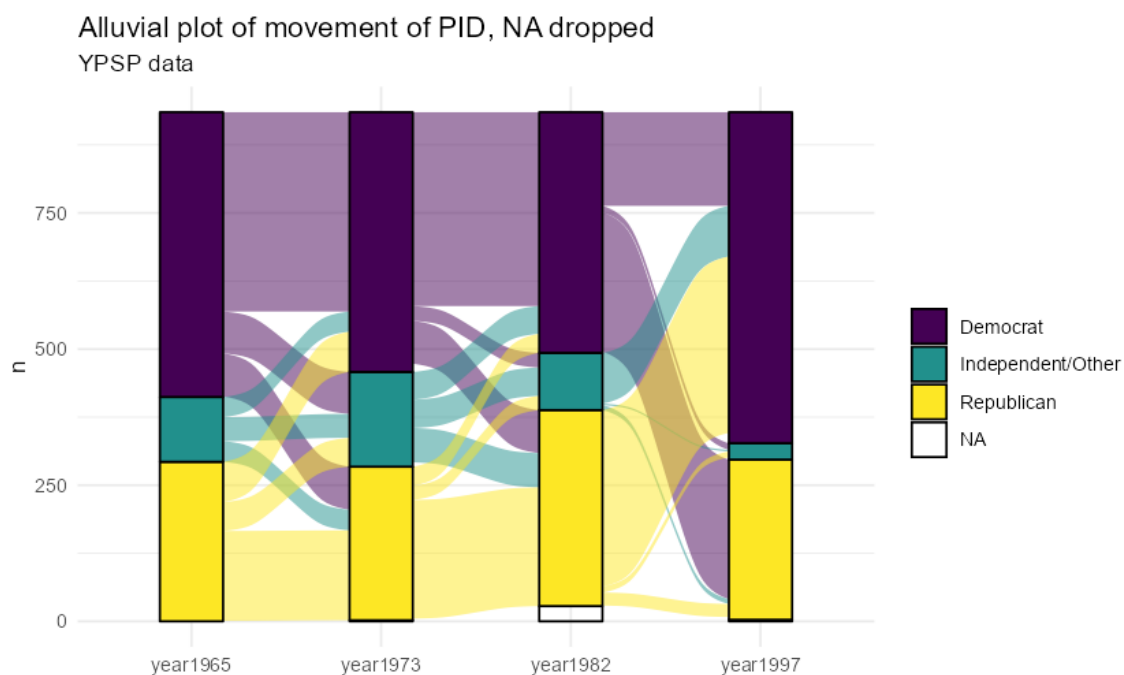


As can be seen from the preceding alluvial plot, changes in party identification from wave to wave in the VSG panel are relatively uncommon. However, over the entire period of nine years, around 40% of the respondents that completed every wave changed their party identification some time during the panel. However, fewer of the respondents changed their ideology over the course of the study, with only 21% doing so. This is especially interesting given that any change of ideology on the five-point likert scale (e.g. very conservative to conservative) is coded as a delta. On the other hand, a delta in party identification would require someone to go from Republican to Independent or Democrat to Independent or vice versa. I would think that psychologically, the change in party identification would be more drastic than that of ideology, but apparently it is not.



The number of people who changed on the scale of church attendance over the course of the VSG panel is similar to that of party identification, 40%. This number is stable across Democrats and Republicans, among both groups, change in church attendance is also 40%. As for religious *decline* 25% of Republicans and 27% of Democrats attended church less at the end of the panel, compared to the beginning. There is also no difference across race, around 30% of White and Black respondents declined in religion over the course of the panel.

In the GSS panels, the share of people who changed their party identification over the course of the four years is 48% for the panel beginning in 2006, 44% for 2008, and 45% for 2010. The share of people who changed their ideology any amount was 55% for 2006, 53% for 2008, and 52% for 2010. The number of people who changed church



attendance was 57% for 2006 and 2008, and 55% for 2010. One notable idiosyncrasy from the GSS panels is that there is far more change among the participants than the VSG panel. I do not know why.

As for the YPSP data, there was far more change over the course of the longer time period. 63% of people changed their party identification over the course of the panel. Between those two waves alone, 77% of people changed their party affiliation. As can be seen from the alluvial plot, a large portion of this happened during the “party switch” of the late twentieth century. This means that much of the effect that Margolis measured might be solely attributable to most of the sample changing their party affiliation over the course of the panel, rather than Democrats and Republicans diverging in church attendance. In terms of church attendance, 45% of

people changed their church attendance over the course of their lifetime.

Table 1

|                                                         | <i>Dependent variable:</i> |                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                                         | $\Delta Attendance$        |                             |
|                                                         | (1)                        | (2)                         |
| $Attendance_{t-1}$                                      | -0.040*** (0.003)          | -0.040*** (0.003)           |
| $\Delta Ideology$                                       | 0.142*** (0.014)           | 0.115*** (0.019)            |
| $Ideology_{t-1}$                                        | 0.031*** (0.005)           | 0.031*** (0.005)            |
| Black                                                   | 0.051*** (0.020)           | 0.055*** (0.020)            |
| Hispanic                                                | -0.036* (0.019)            | -0.036* (0.019)             |
| Asian                                                   | 0.026 (0.032)              | 0.028 (0.032)               |
| $Black \times \Delta Ideology, (\lambda_{Black})$       |                            | 0.155*** (0.049)            |
| $Hispanic \times \Delta Ideology, (\lambda_{Hispanic})$ |                            | 0.043 (0.035)               |
| $Asian \times \Delta Ideology, (\lambda_{Asian})$       |                            | 0.132** (0.057)             |
| Observations                                            | 7,154                      | 7,154                       |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                          | 0.035                      | 0.038                       |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                                 | 0.033                      | 0.035                       |
| F Statistic                                             | 14.350*** (df = 18; 7135)  | 11.246*** (df = 25; 7128)   |
| <i>Note:</i>                                            |                            | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

From the VSG panel models, the first thing that stands out is that, as expected, differenced ideology and lagged ideology are significant predictors of differenced attendance. This is a decent sanity check and demonstrates that change in ideology and change in attendance coincide. This is not, however a causal estimator because there is no lag in time between differences. In both models, the coefficient for Black is significant and positive, meaning that Black people are significantly more likely to increase their church, regardless of their ideology. This is not an unsurprising research finding, as it is well known that Black people go to church. Hispanics are

likely to decrease in attendance, holding all else constant, though this effect is only marginally significant at the .1 level. For model 2, which contains the interaction, the coefficient of interest,  $\lambda_{Black}$  is significant and positive. This was unexpected as I had this coefficient to be near zero, negative, or insignificant. I hypothesized that being Black would make it such that changes in ideology do not affect changes in attendance. This was, however, wrong. It seems that a Black person becoming more conservative is associated with an increase in church attendance and a Black person becoming more liberal is associated with a decrease in church attendance. The interaction for Asian and change in ideology is significant, I do not comment on this coefficient as I have no theoretical backing for it. It is only significant at the .02 level, meaning it may be spurious.

Table 2

| <i>YPSP panel</i>           |                          |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Dependent variable:</i>  |                          |                          |
|                             | <i>Attendance</i>        |                          |
|                             | (1)                      | (2)                      |
| $\Delta PID$                | 0.013 (0.041)            | 0.009 (0.042)            |
| $PID_{t-1}$                 | 0.031 (0.041)            | 0.030 (0.041)            |
| $Attendance_{t-1}$          | 1.023*** (0.021)         | 1.023*** (0.021)         |
| <i>Black</i>                | 0.220** (0.091)          | 0.253** (0.124)          |
| <i>OtherRace</i>            | 0.080 (0.181)            | -0.011 (0.196)           |
| $\Delta PID \times Black$   |                          | -0.064 (0.179)           |
| $\Delta PID \times Other$   |                          | 0.266 (0.220)            |
| Constant                    | -0.909*** (0.159)        | -0.886*** (0.160)        |
| Observations                | 925                      | 925                      |
| R <sup>2</sup>              | 0.732                    | 0.732                    |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>     | 0.730                    | 0.729                    |
| F Statistic                 | 357.127*** (df = 7; 917) | 277.826*** (df = 9; 915) |
| <i>Note:</i>                |                          |                          |
| *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |                          |                          |

For the YPSP models, a major shortcoming of the data is the lack of an ideology question in the first wave. The small-n unbalanced panel already only had three possible waves for analysis, so cutting that to two by excluding the first wave would be unacceptable. The tradeoff is that party identification changed drastically in the latter half of the twentieth century, so it is not a very good representative of ideology or liberalism today. Additionally, party identification is highly correlated with race. As for the models themselves, differenced and lagged party identification is not a significant predictor of contemporaneous church attendance, likely because of the noted problems in shifting party identification during this time period. The interactions are also insignificant. The only significant variable of interest is the coefficient on Black which is positive, again confirming that Black people go to church.

The outcomes of these regressions suggest several things. First, lagged and differenced political belief is useful in predicting change in religious belief. Second, Black people go to church more often than any other group. Third, no evidence is found that race interacts with the relationship between political belief and religious belief in these models.

## **6 Second study: Cross-Sectional Analysis**

Note: (When I use the words endogenous and exogenous in this section, I refer to the endogeneity or exogeneity of social pressure with individuals' lives, using the plain definition of those terms. I am not referring to the statistical definition of those terms.)

This chapter primarily contends with Anoll's *Obligation Mosaic* and Laird and White's *Steadfast Democrats*. I think that the ideas of norms and constraints introduced in both books have utility in explaining how people gain religious ties. Starting with Anoll, she argues that the primary social norms of honoring one's ancestors and helping others in the community structure some non-White Americans' political participation. Notably, she identifies the same groups, Black and Asian Americans, as being most likely to be affected by these norms. Her political ancestors index predicts voting patterns, whereas her helping hands index is correlated with more complex forms of political participation. The indexes she uses are constructed from answers on certain survey questions, such as "Honoring the struggles and traditions of my ancestors is a guiding principle in my life" (76) and "I should make sacrifices of my own, time, money, or other things, to help people in need" (109). These measures are meant to capture "norms" of participation that are endogenous to individuals, and these indexes do have strong effects on participation. On the other hand, Laird and White's work focuses on exogenous constraints that explain how Black political behavior is shaped. Part of this work has to do with how Black individuals believe they are perceived by other Black people, such as race-of-interviewer effects and public notification of political actions (chapter 4). Part of their work also deals with racial homophily in social networks that socialize and constrain decision making with regards to public opinion (chapter 3). They also discuss the possibility of social sanctions against those who do not conform, which are especially strong for Black people given that Black social networks already exhibit strong homophily. As they explain, "Racialized social pressure is an effective mechanism for maintaining group

cohesion. Group members with opinions that may differ from the norm understand that they must perform the expected behavior or risk social sanctions. Individuals that opt not to perform the expected behavior find themselves isolated or even marginalized within the group for their lack of compliance.” (196).

Putting these two works in conversation, they exhibit different explanations for homogenizing forces in minority communities. Anoll’s framework is endogenous to the individual, whereas Laird and White’s framework is based partially in socialization in homophilous networks and partially in ostracization and penalty from those networks, both of which are exogenous to the individual. Returning to my original theory of ethnoreligious social constraint, it is worth understanding if the term that moderates the relationship between values and religious and political choice is endogenous to the individual, based on pre-existing values and beliefs regarding their own place in the world, or exogenous to the individual, based on pressures from social networks and the wider community to conform. My theory assumes that the ethnoreligious effect is associated with the latter—that the extent to which a person’s decision making conforms to a group or reflects their own belief is based in outside social pressure. However, I can also imagine a world in which individuals make religious decisions partially based in the adoration of the traditions of their ancestors, both in the case of Black churches and Asian minority religions. Thus, I want to understand where homogenizing effects come from and how these two models of constraint compete with each other.

To test which framework of social constraint is more correct, I estimate two models. For a simpler model, I create indices for each type of social constraint

and allow them to compete in a Multivariate Multiple Regression that is specified as a linear probability model. For a more complex model, I use structural equation modeling to fit regression paths between latent dependent and explanatory variables.

## 6.1 Multivariate Regression

I use data from the 2020 Collaborative Multi-racial Post-election Survey (Frasure et al. 2020) because it contains oversamples for each racial group and because it contains many variables that relate to race and ethnicity in the United States. Because of the character of the CMPS, I am not entirely able to test my idea of social constraints being color-blind and must use questions that involve race and ethnicity to create indices. The indices are made using the Schmid-Leiman solution for the primary  $g$  factor of McDonald's  $\omega$ . Likert outcomes are converted to numerics by linear scaling for  $\omega$ . The first index I make follows from Anoll's idea of social norms being endogenous to the person and includes a series of questions that relate to a person's beliefs around their duty to help others. The series of questions used to create this index are:

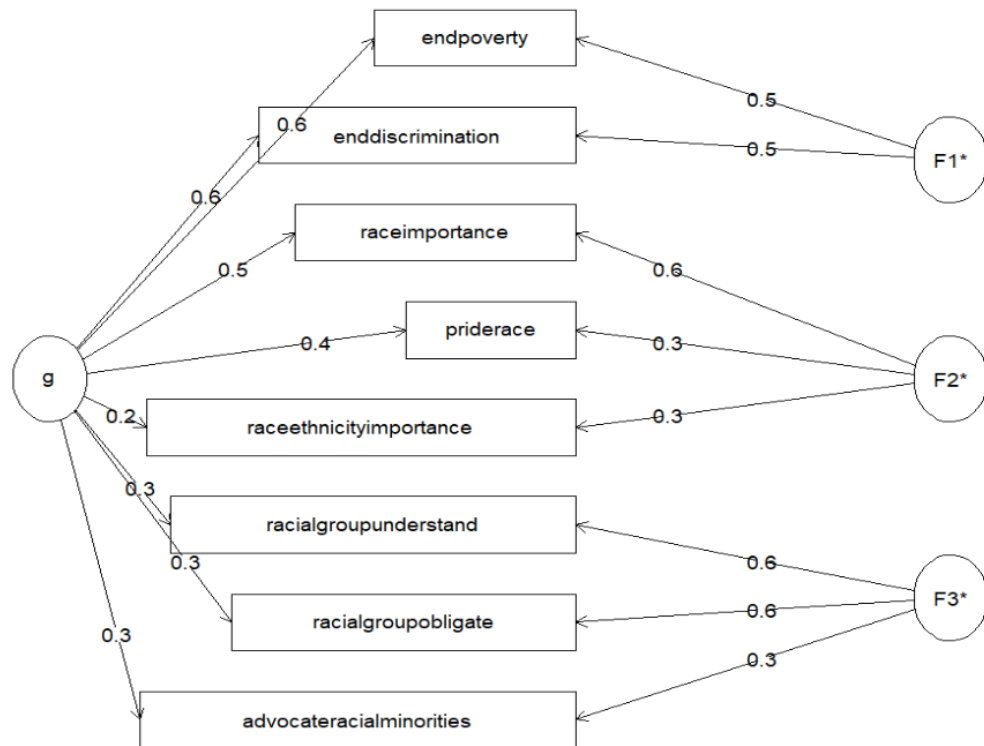
- Groups who have faced racial or ethnic oppression are obligated to help other groups who have also faced racial or ethnic oppression.
- Groups who have faced racial or ethnic oppression have a better understanding of other groups who have also faced racial or ethnic oppression.
- How much effort should the government put into alleviating poverty among [respondent's race]?

- How much effort should the government put into eliminating discrimination against [respondent's race]?
- How much pride would you say you feel when you view news or think about protests on issues that are important for [respondent's race]?
- How important is being [respondent's race] to your identity?
- The federal government should advocate the values of racial minorities.
- Which of these groups is most important to your sense of personal identity?  
(Race or Ethnicity being chosen as higher or more important is coded as positive).

I call this the "Beliefs Index".

This index is internally consistent with a McDonald's  $\omega$  of 0.78 and a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.71

# Omega

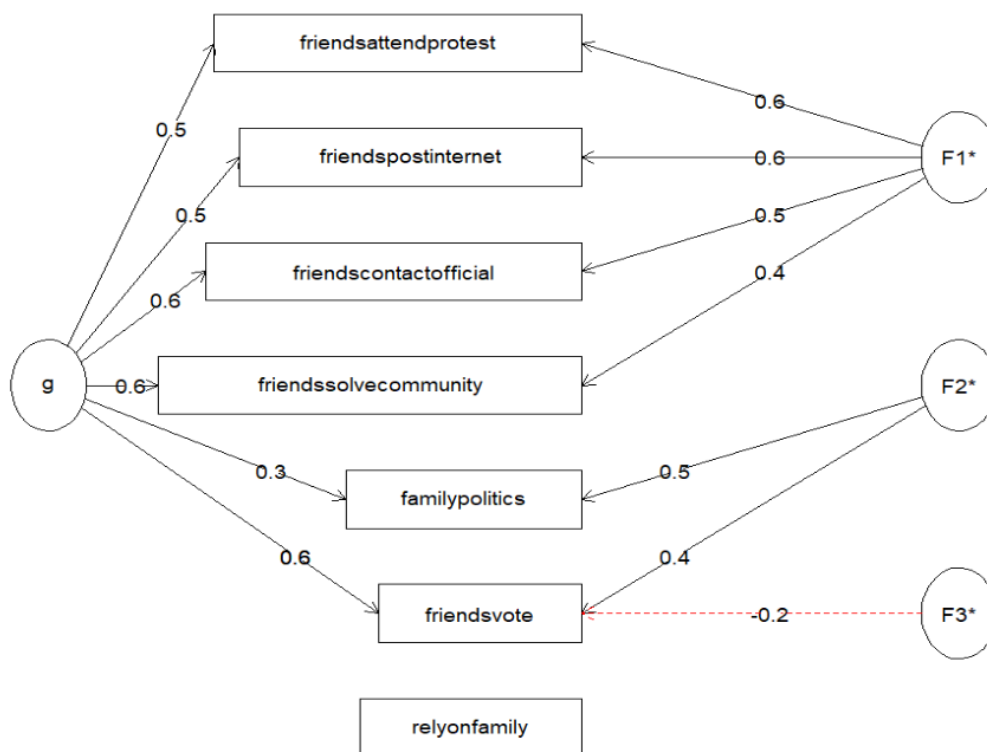


On the other hand, social-network based constraints as Laird and White described them are modeled as a combination of a series of related questions on how others perceive political actions. These questions are:

- Since January 2020, have you discussed politics with family and friends?
- For each of the following activities, indicate if the people you care about, like your friends and family, think doing each activity is important or unimportant, or do they disapprove?
  - Voting in elections
  - Working with others to solve community problems
  - Attending protests for issues you care about
  - Posting on the internet about issues you care about
  - Contacting officials about issues you care about

There is a concern about validity for the questions used, especially given that most of them have to do with how important friends and family consider a respondent’s political actions. I wanted to capture something like reliance or strength of relationship with friends and family members, but when adding other questions that might further get at the strength of non-political relationships with family, the primary vector for McDonald’s  $\omega$  did not take these variables into account. I think that the resulting combination of the remaining variables makes some sense as a measure of how much family or friends notice and care about a respondent’s actions, but this

# Omega



measure is biased towards political actions and does not entirely capture the totality of a person's social network. I subsequently call this the "Network Index"

This scale is internally consistent with a McDonald's  $\omega$  of 0.83 and a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.77.

I then model the relationship of these indices with two outcome variables: binary party ID (Democrat = 1) and whether a person changed their religion during their lifetime (change = 1). These are modeled with a multivariate multiple regression of form

$$\mathbf{Y} = \mathbf{ZB} + \mathbf{E}$$

Where  $\mathbf{Y}$  is a matrix of vectors of outcome variables  $[\vec{Y}_1 \cdots \vec{Y}_j]$ ,  $\mathbf{Z}$  is a matrix of measurements of explanatory variables,  $\mathbf{B}$  is a matrix of coefficients, and  $\mathbf{E}$  is a matrix of errors. When estimated as a linear probability model, the outcome matrix is estimated almost identically to the OLS,

$$\hat{\beta} = (\mathbf{X}'\mathbf{X})^{-1}\mathbf{X}'\mathbf{Y}$$

In this form, the columns of  $\mathbf{B}$  are identical to vectors of coefficients of OLS regressions in which the only response variable is the column.

Thus, the model specification for this model is

$$\overrightarrow{\text{Change Religion}} = \beta_{01} + \beta_{11}\hat{\omega}_{network} + \beta_{21}\hat{\omega}_{beliefs} + \beta_{k1}X_k + \epsilon$$

$$\overrightarrow{\text{Democrat}} = \beta_{02} + \beta_{12}\hat{\omega}_{network} + \beta_{22}\hat{\omega}_{beliefs} + \beta_{k2}X_k + \epsilon$$

Where  $\beta_{11}$  and  $\beta_{12}$  are fitted onto the main vectors of the Omega solutions for the network index  $\beta_{21}$  and  $\beta_{22}$  are fitted onto the beliefs index, and the remaining betas are fitted to given  $X_k$  control covariates, which include race, gender, age, education, and religion.

I expect  $\beta_{12}$  and  $\beta_{22}$  to be negative, meaning that both personal beliefs around the importance of voting to help others and connections to family are correlated with an decreased likelihood of changing religions. I expect  $\beta_{11}$  and  $\beta_{21}$  to be positive, meaning that an increase in the beliefs index and network index is correlated with a higher likelihood of being a Democrat.

Table 3

|                                         | <i>Dependent variable:</i> |                             |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                         | $\Delta Religion$          | <i>Democrat</i>             |
|                                         | (1)                        | (2)                         |
| $\hat{\omega}_{network}$                | 0.015*** (0.005)           | 0.038*** (0.006)            |
| $\hat{\omega}_{beliefs}$                | −0.002 (0.006)             | 0.096*** (0.006)            |
| Observations                            | 11,727                     | 11,727                      |
| R <sup>2</sup>                          | 0.264                      | 0.256                       |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                 | 0.263                      | 0.254                       |
| Residual Std. Error (df = 11707)        | 0.382                      | 0.423                       |
| F Statistic (df = 19; 11707)            | 221.142***                 | 211.458***                  |
| <i>Note: HC2 robust standard errors</i> |                            | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

As can be seen from the table, a stronger social network and stronger beliefs are correlated with a higher likelihood of being a Democrat. However, stronger beliefs are not negatively correlated with a change in religion. Having a stronger social network is correlated with an increased likelihood in changing religion, though this likelihood is only 1.5%. I don't have an explanation for this.

The hypothesis that the true value of the beta of  $\hat{\omega}_{beliefs}$  is zero across the model is rejected.

Sum of squares and products for the hypothesis:

|                | pidbinary | changereligion |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| pidbinary      | 42.930835 | -0.84946101    |
| changereligion | -0.849461 | 0.01680806     |

Sum of squares and products for error:

|                | pidbinary  | changereligion |
|----------------|------------|----------------|
| pidbinary      | 2098.20899 | -68.74934      |
| changereligion | -68.74934  | 1709.24775     |

Multivariate Tests:

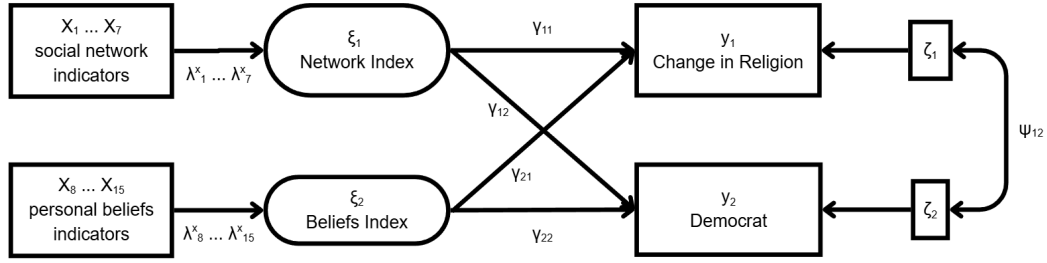
|                  | Df | test stat | approx F | num Df | den Df | Pr(>F)         |
|------------------|----|-----------|----------|--------|--------|----------------|
| Pillai           | 1  | 0.0200545 | 119.7813 | 2      | 11706  | < 2.22e-16 *** |
| Wilks            | 1  | 0.9799455 | 119.7813 | 2      | 11706  | < 2.22e-16 *** |
| Hotelling-Lawley | 1  | 0.0204649 | 119.7813 | 2      | 11706  | < 2.22e-16 *** |
| Roy              | 1  | 0.0204649 | 119.7813 | 2      | 11706  | < 2.22e-16 *** |

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Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

## 6.2 Structural Equation Modelling

The second set of models I estimate are based on Structural Equation Modelling, which are common in psychology research. The structural equation model (SEM) is a model that can connect multiple latent variables on both sides of the regression formula (Jöreskog, Olsson, and Wallentin 2016; Kline 2023). The models include multiple regression paths and vector loadings simultaneously, which leads to a more holistic model that accounts for both errors in vector loadings and regression paths by testing covariance matrices for errors from vector loadings and regression outcomes. This class of models is an improvement on the previous model estimation because it is purpose built for multiple input and output latent variables. However, the main drawback is that categorical control variables cannot be introduced into the model and neither can interaction effects be estimated. This means that the model is stronger from a statistical standpoint but weaker from a conceptual standpoint for this study, which is why I also estimate the more basic MMR model. To deal with this, I estimate separate models for each racial group. I estimate two SEM specifications for this portion of the study. Estimator is ML. The first model, which is simpler, assumes that the two outcome variables (again change in religion and Democrat) are uncorrelated and is specified as a multivariate function of  $\mathbf{y} = \tau_{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{\Lambda}_{\mathbf{x}}\xi + \delta + \zeta$  where  $\mathbf{y}$  is the matrix of outcomes,  $\tau_{\mathbf{x}}$  is the vector of intercepts from right-hand side indicators,  $\mathbf{\Lambda}_{\mathbf{x}}$  is a matrix of vector loadings based on  $\xi$  latent right-hand side variables,  $\delta$  is residuals for right-hand side indicators from vector loading and  $\zeta$  is the matrix of left-hand side residuals (glossing based on (OARC Stats, UCLA 2021)). The simplified diagram of model 1 is below:



in which  $\gamma$ s represent regression paths of interests and  $\psi$  represents the covariance matrix of residuals. I expect  $\gamma_{11}$  to be negative for all groups,  $\gamma_{21}$  to be negative for Black, Hispanic, and Asian and positive for Whites. I expect  $\gamma_{12}$  and  $\gamma_{22}$  to be positive for all groups. I expect  $\psi$  to be positive for Whites and negative for Hispanic, Black and Asian.

SEM Model 1

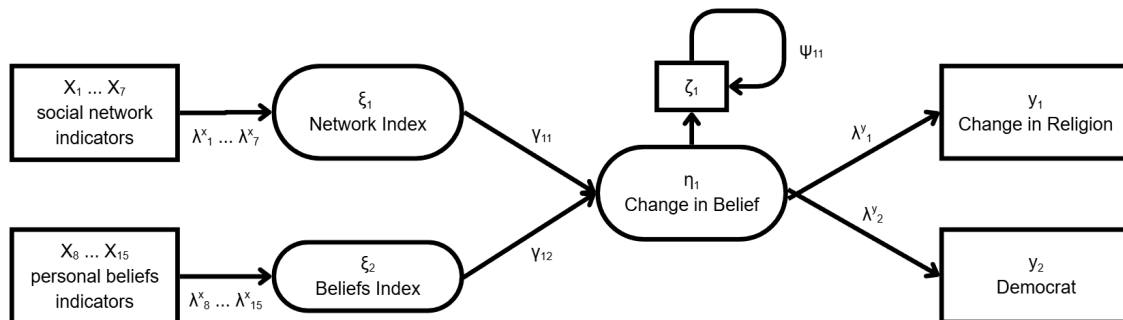
| Coefficient   | White   | Hispanic | Asian   | Black   |
|---------------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| $\gamma_{11}$ | -0.070  | -0.152*  | -0.178* | -0.061  |
| $\gamma_{21}$ | 0.061*  | 0.030    | 0.046   | -0.042  |
| $\gamma_{12}$ | 0.215*  | 0.314*   | 0.158*  | 0.564*  |
| $\gamma_{22}$ | 0.295*  | 0.346*   | 0.376*  | 0.598*  |
| $\psi$        | 0.014*  | -0.011*  | -0.004  | -0.012* |
| <i>Note:</i>  | *p<0.05 |          |         |         |

For the table for model 1, some of my expectations were correct. For example, my expectation that stronger social networks would be correlated with less likelihood of changing religion is true among Hispanics and Asians, and insignificant but sign pointing the right direction for White and Black respondents. Stronger beliefs about racial justice are correlated with more likelihood of changing religion for Whites and unexpectedly are not correlated with anything for other groups. As expected, both

indices predict Democrat identification among all groups. As expected, change in religion covaries positively with Democrat identification for Whites and negatively for Hispanics and Blacks.

This provides some evidence for the idea that the covariance of change in religion and Democrat identification is heterogeneously distributed by race, but this covariance appears to be rather weak. The "racial justice" beliefs do not covary with change in religion for minority groups suggesting that social networks, rather than personal beliefs, influence change in religion among minorities. Neither finding was significant for Blacks, whichever coefficient is more important is up in the air.

I also estimate a model in which covariance between change in religion and Democrat is more formally modeled as  $\eta = \alpha + \mathbf{B}\eta + \mathbf{\Gamma}\xi + \zeta$  in which  $\eta$  is the vector of outcomes for the LHS vector loadings,  $\alpha$  is a vector of intercepts,  $\mathbf{B}\eta$  is the matrix of coefficients based on  $\eta$  LHS vector loadings,  $\mathbf{\Gamma}\xi$  is the matrix of coefficients based on  $\xi$  RHS vector loadings, and  $\zeta$  is LHS error. The diagram of model 2 is:



In which  $\gamma_{11}$  is expected to be negative for Black, Hispanic, and Asian models and positive for the White model and  $\gamma_{12}$  is expected to be positive for Black, Hispanic, and Asian models and negative for the White model. This would mean that these

indices are correlated with a negative covaried outcome of change in religion and Democrat identification for racial minorities but not for whites.

| SEM Model 2   |         |          |        |        |
|---------------|---------|----------|--------|--------|
| Coefficient   | White   | Hispanic | Asian  | Black  |
| $\gamma_{11}$ | 0.208*  | 0.306*   | 0.150* | 0.564* |
| $\gamma_{12}$ | 0.295*  | 0.347*   | 0.377* | 0.598* |
| <i>Note:</i>  | *p<0.05 |          |        |        |

For model 2, all coefficients are significant and positive. I think that this is because the covariance between change in religion and Democrat is overwhelmed by Democrat in the vector embedding.

I take the SEM models as weak evidence of my idea that change in religion and Democrat identification covary and that predictors based on social networks and personal beliefs apply heterogeneously to different racial groups. Whereas the original MMR model suggested that stronger social networks are attached to a greater likelihood of changing religion, the first SEM model predicts the opposite for Hispanics and Asians. For these groups, stronger social networks are associated with a lower likelihood of changing religion from the one they grew up with. Additionally, these results suggest that the covariance between change in religion and Democrat identification is flipped for Hispanics and Asians, suggesting that having strong social networks both makes one less likely to change religions and more likely to be a Democrat. Thus, the processes that lead to party identification and to changes in religion covary, but not very strongly, suggesting that there is some overlap in the explanations for why people become Democrats or change their religions, but that overlap is weak and heterogeneous.

The important finding, however, is that social networks, not internalized beliefs, drive Hispanic and Asian religious choices. This means that the decision to identify with another religion than that in which one grew up is deeply affected by the strength of networks with people with whom one grew up. Alternatively, the finding that Whites with liberal racial attitudes are more likely to change their religion and that White social networks are not a significant predictor of change in religion suggests that those social networks are weaker and contain less constraint to influence decisions related to religion. Change in religion is, therefore, partially a story of social constraint in which minorities' social constraints make changing religion less likely. The idea that social constraint is a driver of both change in religion and party identification is therefore partially supported. When faced with a decision on whether or not to disaffiliate with religion, White people are freer to decide based on personal beliefs, whereas Hispanic and Asian people are more constrained by their social ties. This is interesting evidence for the hybrid model of religion and politics in which the majority group is free to change religion based on ideology, and minority groups are constrained by community ties.

## 7 Third study: Ethnography

All of my site visits were local to areas in and around Austin, Texas. This includes religious spaces that were directly in urban areas in Austin, in the suburbs, and in the country outside of Austin. The ethnographies are not probability sampled and should not be taken as representative, especially given that all of my site visits happened in one geographic area. However, previous research confined to a specific geographic area has yielded important and interesting findings, such as Cramer's Wisconsin study and Harris-Lacewell's studies in North Carolina. Given that there is already non-representativeness introduced to this study, I deliberately chose to attend religious services in as many different types of congregations as possible, including racially homogeneous and heterogeneous churches, and the services of various religious minorities. I made this choice to cast as wide a net as possible such that even though the study as a whole is biased, I minimize that bias within my geographic area by choosing spaces that are as unlike as possible, such that I do not miss further variation between units. Regardless, take the following chapter with a grain of salt.

This chapter is analyzed in three parts. First, I briefly describe each site visit through descriptives, such as ethnicity and age, by what was done during service, and other notes I may have on each particular visit.

I then explain some common themes I find between different spaces as well as compare differences between those spaces.

Finally, I summarize some main points that I come away with after having expe-

rienced a wide range of religious services.

The United Methodist Church is one of the largest mainline protestant churches in America, but has been in sharp decline since the schism of the church on the issue of gay marriage and the loss of young people to more flashy and less traditional churches. This was highly evident when I visited a suburban Methodist church and found a congregation which was at least ninety-five percent elderly. Under the tall wooden roof and beneath the light of the ornate stained-glass windows, three-quarters of the pews were deserted and the grand fifty-foot tall organ stood silent, as there was nobody there to play it. The liturgy began with only three people on the chancel: a piano player, a cantor, and a pastor. The pastor, who introduced themselves by their pronouns, went through the “traditional” order of Methodist service, and gave a brief sermon on helping others and being inclusive of other faith traditions. The thing was over in fifty minutes.

A large non-denominational church sponsored a bible study for college-age students. As I entered a six-bedroom house in a wealthy neighborhood, I was greeted by the organizers of the public bible study. As people filed in, I noticed that they were mostly wealthy and White. I considered that this demographic makeup may have simply been a reflection of the neighborhood, but as I heard people tell their witnesses and stories for the week, I learned that many had come from far away to join the bible study. Many talked of their “witness” stories that they use to evangelize others in their day-to-day lives. Almost all stressed a personal connection with God which led a significant change in their lives. Some also talked of mystical or supernatural happenings that they felt or experienced as part of their conversion sto-

ries. As I listened to them talk, I reflected on Margolis' work suggesting that young adulthood was the primary point of change for people who either grow in or lose their faiths. I found that to be undoubtedly true among the participants of the bible study. After the main part of the study concluded, we split into different meetings for men and women to talk more casually about the happenings of the week.

I definitely stood out in the urban Black Baptist church. People certainly turned their heads towards me as I walked through the parking lot and into the building. An usher tried to make me at ease and assured me that all were welcome in their church. As I explained the study to them, they asked me if I wished to see the church service the children were attending, in the Sunday school, or the main service on sanctuary. I opted for the adult service. In the main Sunday church service, only the first few rows were filled, a meeting of a women's auxiliary of some kind. The choir sang lively spirituals from an African-American hymnal and the middle of the church service included a recap of fundraising and community service that various church members had done. However, the composition of the service was, like the White mainline church, overwhelmingly elderly. There was only family present in the service, and maybe a handful of middle-aged people. Given that much has been made of the decline of the Black church, it was disheartening to see it up close—a bulletin with a dozen in memoriam prayers and no marriages.

In the urban Mosque, I attended Friday prayers and listened to the Khutbah from the Imam. He highlighted community members' response to the Kerrville floods and urged congregants to donate money and time to organizations working in the flood response. This was the primary focus of the sermon, saying that "it is our duty as

muslims to show others what we can do in a situation such as this.” The remainder of the sermon was spent talking about the impermanence of the worldly life and reminding people to temper the forces of change with the unchanging precepts of Islam.

The suburban Reform synagogue was heavily fortified; a response to previous harassment that had happened during the onset of the Gazan conflict. Inside, however, I saw a very modern space, not at all ornate looking. As self-described “liberal Jews” (Rabbi interview), the Kabbalat Shabbat service was at once highly structured and liturgical and remarkably informal. The rabbi cracked a joke when they failed to light a candle, and the modern hymns were rather jazzy. A gathering succeeded the end of the service, celebrating a contemporaneous holiday. Unlike the UMC church, which I think of as the most similar case to the Reform synagogue, there were plenty of families, in fact the synagogue had a full-time school attached to it. Whatever it was that had sucked the youth out of the UMC church clearly had not happened to the Reform synagogue.

The racially heterogeneous pentecostal church was fascinating, as it was located within driving distance of predominantly White and Black areas of Austin. The church itself was by far the most diverse of my cases, around 30 percent White, Black, and Hispanic. The practice of the service was far more modern in nature, including a rock band, call-and-response, and individuals throwing their hands up, running towards the front, bowing or jumping, and all-around being “filled by the spirit” as may be expected of a pentecostal church. In this practice, I saw some of the echoes of Black church traditions, despite the church’s pastors being White.

There were also plenty of families, as well as four baptisms (anabaptist) and the consecration of several infants. Notably, given some testimony from congregation members onstage, it seems that the congregation may have been largely middle- to low-income.

I visited an Asian American church operating out of the back of another more established church. The Asian American church was affiliated with the Southern Baptists, but nothing about the service made me immediately conceptualize of the church as a Southern Baptist church. This particular church certainly was a resource center for its co-ethnic community, running drives and initiatives for new co-ethnic immigrants, as well as being a place for people in the community to gather, especially for the weekly potluck after the end of the services. The service itself was certainly modern, with a guitar and drumset as the backing track for Christian rock songs in their native language. The sermon itself lasted about forty-five minutes, and was part of a series of the pastor going through the entire Bible book by book. That particular sermon was on the qualifications and virtues that a pastor ought to have—that he be married, be a man, and be of upstanding character. This was perhaps not the most captivating of subjects, but the pastor was certainly perceived by his congregants to be strongly focused in the Bible itself. Immediately after the service ended, everybody got up to rearrange the room with folding tables and set out the potluck spread. It was during this potluck, which occurs every week, that community members gab about jobs and lives, and to gossip about others. This was where I noticed that the composition of the church was around thirty percent White, including many people who had married into the ethnic community.

After driving for a couple hours on a divided highway, I arrived at a baptist church located in the center of a small town. This church was certainly Southern Baptist in nature, as a congregant explained to me that most matters of the church were decided by vote of the members or by committees, even including the appointment of new pastors. I attended a Sunday-morning Bible study for middle-aged congregants held in a trailer outside the church, followed by the main church service. There were actually several Sunday bible studies at this church, ranging from Sunday school for kids, to teenage groups, to a study for retirees. My particular group, of people in their thirties to fifties, was fairly standard as far as Bible studies go, with little discussion beyond that of the text of the Bible. The main church service was more traditionally Southern Baptist, but like the Baptist minister of the Asian American church, the minister of this church also cycled through the entire Bible in his sermons, this time landing on Jonah. One fascinating remark of his on the subject, in the context of a sermon on relying on God to get through hard times, was his assertion that “turning to God out of distress is his intended outcome.” Like the mainline UMC church in the city, this small-town Baptist church was very historic to the area. However, it was still very alive, with several hundred members filling nearly every seat of the church, with many young families in the congregation. It struck me how differently the paths of the suburban UMC church and the small-town Baptist church had diverged. I think that the liveliness of the Baptist church is in part due to its location, though there were several other churches in this town. More likely, the church caters to its demographic of traditional families in this small-town and is far more positively viewed by its youth, compared to more recent churches.

One important trend I noticed was a dichotomy between churches that had young families and churches that did not. Though I had expected some sorting between churches based on ideology and race or ethnicity, I did not expect to see such drastic differences based on age. However, it is not the case that some churches were overwhelmingly elderly and others overwhelmingly young. Instead, the difference was between elderly churches and churches that had a diversity of age. All of the churches that had children also had their parents and grandparents, with entire families of people attending the same church. On the other hand, a few churches had only those grandparents, coupled or widowed, without any generations further down.

Another thing I noticed is that though I sought to find politics happening in churches, I found none—anywhere. Perhaps I didn't adequately locate the type of politically engaged church that commentators make so much out of (ramos), but I think that politics happening as part of religious messaging during church services is actually quite uncommon. Preaching at times did include references to values that may affect political leanings, for example, the preacher at the Asian-American church briefly remarking on women pastors being unbiblical, or the Methodist pastor talking about accepting other church traditions that include call and response. These may signal some values shared between pastor and congregation, but they fall far from anything that looks like political socialization.

However, plenty of socialization happens after church, in everyday conversation among people after formal services have concluded. In the reform synagogue, for instance, tables chatted about recent cuts to social services from the Trump administration, and at the meal following the Asian-American service, people talked about

changes to healthcare funding, as many members of the church worked in the healthcare industry. As will be further elaborated on by interviewees recruited from these places, these casual conversations have far more socializing power than preaching.

Religion-of-ethnographer effects. Finally, I would like to briefly touch on my own experience going through some of these ethnically homogeneous churches, which may have incurred something like “religion-of-ethnographer” responses from congregants. In many churches I was easily looked over as a local; I myself am ethnically ambiguous enough sufficiently pass for Hispanic or Asian, and I speak with a similar enough accent to be well accepted by the older Southern Whites in mainline Protestant churches. However, there were cases in which I was clearly recognized as an outsider. For example, the first thing anyone said to me after the Kabbalat Shabbat service was that I didn’t look particularly Jewish, though this was said in an inquisitive, rather than condescending tone. In the Mosque especially, my lack of standing and bowing during the prayers was immediately noticed by everybody, prompting some to make conversation with me after the service, and others to shun or refuse to speak with me. In the Black church, my presence was certainly noticed, though as Christians, people mainly walked up to me in order to convince me to continue going to their church—I suppose any new congregant was badly needed by that congregation. I bring these experiences up to flag how my own perceptions may have been changed by virtue of being an outsider and to recognize my position as a transient observer through the sacred moments that many people consider to be deeply important. If given more time and resources, I would have liked to have done several visits per church, rather than just one, to more closely mirror existing norms

in anthropological research. However, I do think that my brief travels through diverse religion shine some light on the state of American religion and the stark differences between religious communities.

## **8 Fourth Study: Interviews**

After sitting in on church services and any subsequent event in the religious space, I recruited several members from many of the spaces to do an interview. In total, I did 17 interviews, mainly with White and Black participants and with participants of various other ethnicities. These interviews were funded with a grant from the UT Undergraduate Research Fellowship. My interview guide includes questions about participants' religious backgrounds from childhood to adulthood and their opinions on various political issues. I find three main things through my interviews. First, people rarely cite politics or even beliefs as a reason why they choose a particular church. Second, religion affects the way people deal with politics, but, most people claim never to have changed political beliefs, even if they have changed religious beliefs. Third, religion is stronger than race in the internal decision making of individuals when engaging with politics.

When asking about participant's experiences growing up, I primarily find that people largely do not consider politics when choosing their religious space. I identify three main ways through which people arrive at their present religious disposition. First, many individuals grow up in a tradition and stay in it for all their lives. Second, some individuals make changes in their youth spurred by the decisions of their parents to change religion. Third, some individuals, especially those in situations in which

they are ambivalent towards religion in their youth, turn to religion after a mystical or life-changing experience of some type.

The first case is most common among congregants in the most traditional of churches. For example, almost all of the people in the mainline Methodist, Black Baptist, and small-town Southern Baptist churches and the Reform synagogue grew up in the same tradition that they inhabit today. This is not necessarily tied to geographic location, as all of the interviewees from those congregations moved at some point during their lives from elsewhere to the Austin area. However, all of those interviewees chose to seek out a religious space in Austin similar to that which they inhabited growing up. For one Reform Jew, “I grew up in Fort Worth, I grew up in Reform and I’ve always been Reform. We were members of a conservative synagogue for a very short time because we didn’t really care for the rabbi here at the Reformed synagogue. But we left pretty quick. [Interviewer: I assume that was when you at some point moved to Austin.] Well, that was when my daughter with the, in the Jewish faith, a daughter has a baby naming instead of a bris. And so she had her baby naming and I really liked the rabbi there. So, and then after the baby naming, they got a new rabbi at our synagogue and I moved to our synagogue.” This person had grown up in a particular denominational tradition, and had stuck with that tradition when moving from Fort Worth to Austin. One thing that I notice among cases where a person stays in the same religion for their entire lives is that those people often have strong family ties, and cite those ties and nostalgia for their youth as a reason they continue in their tradition. As a Black Baptist explains, “[Growing up Baptist] was spiritual, family oriented, focused

on understanding the Bible for yourself and coming to know God and having a personal, building a personal relationship with him. My entire family was Christian and Baptist and church was a way of life. The whole family went to church together when I was younger. Grandmother, my mother's siblings, and myself, cousins, we were all at church together. I changed churches briefly after college. My mother joined a Methodist church. I was there for maybe a year, year and a half with her, and there were many similarities, so I didn't feel like I was in a different denomination." This person chose their religious space heavily based on the actions of her family, even briefly following her mother to another denomination. However, this person's decision to attend the church she does today is deeply rooted in how she perceived her own experience as a child, almost as if her decision to go to a Black Baptist church today is simply natural. A White mainline Methodist explains a similar experience, "I was raised in a Methodist church, baptized in a Methodist church, and I kind of got away from church a while by the time I went to college. But when I came back and started coming back to church, I went back to the Methodist church. It seemed a natural thing to do." The last line of her testimony, that attending the Methodist church was a "natural thing to do" precisely summarizes how this category of people arrive at their present religious condition. They grow up in a particular church, have no particular complaints or gripes with their tradition, and feel comfortable in their community such that they stay in the same tradition even after moving locations. For these people who have never changed their religious disposition, the choice of church is natural and comforting across space and time.

For some participants, a change in religious space happened during their child-

hood, spurred by parents' decisions regarding religion in the household. As one participant explains, "My dad grew up Baptist, and my mother grew up Methodist. . . I guess my mother came to a place where she wanted to know more and learn more, and the traditional Baptist and Methodist church, which were the ones she knew, was not providing that. So she went on this search or this journey to a more full gospel type church. And that's where she found the non-denominational church that taught more of the apostolic doctrine of the New Testament, as well as the historical Old Testament. So that opened up a whole wealth of knowledge. And thus, we became non-denominational." Her family had given up on the rigid structures of the traditional Black Baptist and Methodist traditions in order to turn to a church in which they felt more in tune with the Bible, rather than focusing on other issues. As another explains, "I was born into Catholicism and my father became non-denominational Christian and the rest of the family followed suit. For Catholicism, it was pretty basic, traditional. I did the catechism and the confirmation, probably up until my teens. Then for non-denominationalism, the difference was more in-depth reading of the Bible and then discussion of what I read. While that wasn't as common in Catholicism. So Catholicism, what I think I recall from, well, what I recall, not think, what I recall from Catholicism is after you go through it for quite some time, you tend to notice that in Catholicism, there's pretty much 52 stories that you go over in church, and so after so many years. You'll notice in week one, that most Catholic churches will be similar." For a third participant, "My grandmother had been Catholic, but they lived in West Texas and there were no Catholic churches. And there was a Methodist and Baptist Church, and a Church

of Christ in town. Methodism is a child of Catholicism and [my mother] felt comfortable with the Methodist church and she liked to sing. She and all nine of her children became Methodists and my mother was Methodist. My father didn't have any particular choices. So we all became Methodists."

Another way people find their way into a community is through mystical experiences. For example, one participant was raised in an Agnostic household in which "[his] dad didn't like church. He just viewed them all as hypocrites and saw it as a way to take people's money." But his decision to turn to religious was spurred by a mystical experience he had: "I just honestly was driving home one day late at night from [my wife's] house and just broke down and started crying and I had an experience where like, I just was kind of looking, it was almost as if I was being shown my life growing up.. And so I ended up attending a church. I called lots of people on the phone and apologized for all kinds of stuff I had done. I don't know why. Then I was like, I need to figure this out, and somebody had told me about Jesus years ago in school, and I thought it was stupid, but this time I went to church instead. Hearing about Jesus and hearing the gospel really just for some reason at that moment settled with me as it never did before." For another, "I was doing my homework and out of the corner of my eye saw a little light that splays off into several directions. It had one vertical and one horizontal and the one that was vertical was a little longer at the bottom, and I didn't think much of it because it's just a random light that appeared and it's like shining in my eye. I was like wait a second, that's a cross; what I described is just a cross. So I sat there contemplating like this is a sign. As far as I can tell, that light came from another world." "my life was falling

apart. I was in deep throes of sin. And I remembered what my parents taught me. They taught me how to pray. And I prayed, and asked God to deliver me from the deep throes of sin. I was in over my head, and I couldn't save myself. So, I asked the Lord to save me. Kind of like Peter. And the Lord picked me up, turned me around, and placed my feet on that solid ground, and told me, run on. I've been running ever since."

Many people describe their political experiences as having been shaped by religion. One participant remarked that "I just always vote in the sense of what would either honor God, or do the least amount of damage. Sometimes I'm like, oh, I don't know how we've gotten these candidates. All of them stink. But I got to vote. Because I do believe that that's my duty. Both as a citizen and as a Christian is to cast a ballot. And then God will do what he's going to do." This theme of voting in a way that would honor God or would support Christian belief is common among Christians. This manifests itself in multiple ways. First, some people talk about voting in ways that codify what they perceive as God's preferences into law; a common example of this is abortion. One Baptist said, "How I vote is going to have to align with my faith and my belief and what the Bible says. If it goes against what God says in the Bible, then I can't be for that. It has to, it has to go with what the Bible says. [Interviewer: Any issues in particular?] Of course, big, big, big, big ones would be like abortion. And same sex marriages or I'm trying to think of any other big ones that would be part of that, but those two for sure." Abortion is a commonly brought up issue that is heavily tied to religion for those who oppose it, also heavily tied to religion are opinions on gay marriage and transgender issues. A non-denominational

Black Republican says “The rights of the unborn is very important to me because, quite frankly, aborting a baby is no different than what they did in the Old Testament by passing their babies through the fire so that they could get wealth and health and all this other kind of stuff. I call it murder. So, the other thing, this whole, we call it gender identification. You’re either male or you’re female. You’re not A to Z. You’re not a man *and* a woman. You’re not, we call it binary, non-binary, all of that jibber jabber.” On the other hand, those on the other side of the aisle are less moved by religion with regards to politics. A liberal-leaning Black Baptist says, “I think everyone should be able to make decisions for themselves. I think God gives us the ability to discern what we need.” When talking about the most important issues that affect her family, she says “I vote. [I’m] not really engaged in politics. But everything I do is political because I work in education. So I pay attention to what’s going on in politics because it impacts my job.” Another Black Baptist cited his own history in a Black church that encouraged people to vote, “My dad [a Baptist minister], he was a political activist. At age seven, I witnessed the Ku Klux Klan burn a cross in our front yard. It was because my dad and several other leaders in the community were urging African Americans to register and vote. And that’s why the cross was burned.” However, when pressed about whether he votes based on his faith, he says that his education in business “Did away with a lot of my biases as far as business. It taught me to forget religions.” When he cited motivations for voting, he did not talk about his religion at all. This is not universal; both Jewish participants talked about Jewish people being important in advocating for others. As one Jewish woman puts it, “Jews have always been at the forefront of,

you know, racial harmony and, you know, reproductive rights and immigrant stuff. And they've always been in the forefront of being, you know, advocating for the, for sort of the underdog." However, religion's effect on politics is more strongly felt among right-leaning participants than left-leaning participants.

Also, the idea that politics precedes religion is not entirely seen among people in my study. For a Black Republican, it was religion that led her to leave the Democratic party, rather than the other way around. "When, when I first started voting, you know, way back when, for whatever reason, I knew my ancestors voted Democrat, you know? So, in my mind, you grow up thinking, oh, well, grandma did, mom did, dad did, blah, blah, blah. So, I need to vote Democrat because they know what's best. They know, you know, who's going to, quote, unquote, help us the best. So, that's what I'm going to vote for. And then, you know, you start thinking for yourself a little bit and you're like, whoa, wait a minute. Um, I want to look at, um, social things, you know, what are they, what are they saying about jails? Or what are they saying about, um, uh, abortion? And what are they saying about, you know, gay marriage and this and that?" In another case, a White Republican Baptist opposes Democrats precisely because they do not fall in line with (what she believes is) God's prohibition on abortion. When I asked her what she thought of Democrats who claimed to be Christian, she said, "I find that very confusing, because if you were really following the principles of what God set forth, then they wouldn't be running on things that are not of God. And they're running on things of tolerance and acceptance. And although we can say that that's good, it's not good, because it's not what God says. So I find it hypocritical. It hurts my heart." For most of

the right-leaning respondents, religion was a starting point from which they formed political beliefs. When asked, almost all participants claimed that they had never changed their political beliefs throughout their lifetimes. Their religious practices have changed. Yet, religion appears to affect politics rather than politics affecting religion, at least in the minds of interview participants. This remains a tangle of causality that is hard to unravel. If there's anything to be taken from this series of interviews, it's that religion and politics are deeply interwoven in the decision making of individuals.

On a related note, political behavior from the view of the individual doing the behaving is deeply tied to fundamental beliefs about the world, perhaps more so than race. After interviewing racial minority Christians, I found that most justified their vote to themselves primarily as based in religion, and not as based in race. (I did include questions on both religion and race in the interview guide.) An Asian American respondent said "I vote according to what I think Jesus would want me to do," which for him included beliefs that all healthcare should be free and that workers should own their own companies. When prodded on race, he said "a guy that has \$1 that's white should be treated the same as a black guy or a Chinese guy that has \$1. And if you need to get a job or a scholarship or training, it should be based on the amount of money you have. You got no money, you should be given an opportunity. If you have money, regardless if you're black, white, Chinese, Indian or whatever." When I asked a Black participant about racial inequality, she said "the simple answer is, every man, woman, boy, girl was created equal, treat them as such, and then you, you no longer have the problem." Even though my overall thesis is on

both race and religion, I haven't touched much on race in this chapter mainly because most people didn't talk very much about it. Some did, like the man who spoke of his parents' activism work. However, most people focused on religion far more than race, even though questions were asked about both subjects. I come away with the conclusion that religion trumps race in the psychology of religious individuals, which makes sense given that race is an identity that is assigned at birth, whereas religion is a choice one can make.

To conclude, these interviews leave me with some interesting things to consider. I found a lot of evidence for the causal arrow pointing from religion to politics. Yet, politics was far more static than religion among individuals. I additionally did not see very much variation by race, despite almost all of the participants coming from religious communities that are monoracial. Future research should do more theoretical work to determine how causality works between religion and politics in churches. Also, I wonder how monoracial churches do not lead to increasingly disparate beliefs between members of different congregations.

## **9 Theory Revision**

To revise the theory, I'll start by answering the research questions from before.

From study 1, which is largely based on the work of Margolis, I asked: Under what circumstances do people change religious practices, and is that change related to change in politics?

I find that race is mildly correlated with change in religious practices and that change in politics is related to change in religious practices. I find that change in

politics is highly correlated with an increase in church attendance for Black people specifically, and change in politics is an important predictor for change in religious practices generally.

From study 2, largely based on the work of Anoll and Laird and White: Does social constraint explain religious affiliation and if so, is that relationship the same as the established relationship between social constraint and politics?

Social constraint explains religious affiliation for Hispanic and Asian people. Social constraint is generally important for party identification as well. The processes of social constraint being correlated with change in religion and change in politics partially overlap, primarily for minority respondents. This chapter provides some evidence that White Americans' religious decisions are driven by individual beliefs and that minority Americans' religious decisions are driven by social constraint.

From study 3: What are racially homogeneous religious spaces like and how are politics discussed in those spaces?

To answer this question, there again exists heterogeneity depending on whether the religious space is White-Christian or anything else. In White Christian religious spaces, people are ideologically homogeneous, and most people share similar beliefs in both religion and politics. In other religious spaces, in which constraint exists either due to ethnicity or minority religion status, people are more ideologically and theologically diverse but are bound to the church through social ties. Politics in churches is generally not discussed from the pulpit down but rather laterally among congregants in informal conversation.

From study 4: How do people arrive at their present political and religious posi-

tions, and are those journeys related?

This study may be partially biased, given that I sampled people who go to church rather than those who do not. In general, politics were pretty stable across the lifetimes of most of my subjects. Little change happened in party identification or policy positions. Among those who did change, it was unclear how correlated those changes were with religious change. Religion often changes across a lifetime. Among those who made a change in religion, many cite certain beliefs, such as those related to abortion or family, while others cite a more personal connection with their new denomination.

I come away from the substantive part of the thesis with rather mixed evidence, which was perhaps to be expected. I think that social constraint remains one factor among many that explains how change in religion and politics happens among individuals. From both the structural equation models and the interviews section, I found social constraint to be a major force among people in choosing where they go to church.

I also saw a lot of heterogeneity based on race in how social constraint influences people. In racially homogeneous religious spaces, congregants have a broad spectrum of political beliefs, such as in the Black church, which had very socially conservative and liberal members, and in the Asian American church, which had people of both parties. In these spaces, politics tended to be discussed less. Individuals described their decision to continue attending these churches as based in racial or ethnic identity and the warmth of having people of the same culture worship with them. On the other hand, the White Churches I visited and interviewed were remarkably homo-

geneous—the United Methodist Church was overwhelmingly socially liberal, and no interviewees could name any people in the church who were conservative. Similarly, the Southern Baptist church was overwhelmingly conservative, and their interviewees had identical responses to many interview questions related to politics. This suggests to me that the difference between restructuring churches and ethnoreligious churches is deeply tied to race and ethnicity, as theorized by (Smidt et al. 2009).

However, this mixed evidence includes plenty of disconfirming evidence as well. The panel analysis yielded little of value, suggesting that the relationship between religion and politics is not deeply tied to race. The structural equation models demonstrate that social constraint is far more applicable to politics than religion. The overlap between social constraints with regard to politics and religion is not large, and these processes are likely not the same. Some other factors likely interfere in the relationship between social constraint and religious change, which might be captured by something like personal belief.

So the main revision of the theory is whether a person falls into restructuring or ethnoreligion partially depends on the strength of social constraint (through race) and is partially related to other factors. There exists a unique interaction between race, religion, and politics in which minority communities become less politically homogeneous because of individuals' decision to select into co-ethnic spaces rather than co-ideological spaces. Ethnicity itself, and internal beliefs and preferences to gravitate toward one's own ethnic group, homophily, explains a different portion of the hybrid theory. Individuals arrive at their present religious situation based on beliefs, ethnicity, and social constraints. Beliefs and social constraint are more related

to politics than religion, so the relationships between the predictors and responses are not exactly the same.

Put more simply, how a person chooses their religious space depends on prior social beliefs, which are then moderated to be more or less important based on ethnicity and social constraint. This path overlaps partially but not completely with how a person chooses their political ideology.

## 10 Conclusion

In this thesis, I engage with several previous works and build a theory to explain how people sort themselves into religious spaces and how people change the way they engage with religion and politics.

Much previous work on religion and politics has yielded three theories: ethnoreligion, in which individuals vote homogeneously within religious spaces out of loyalty to that worldview, restructuring, in which individuals sort themselves into religious spaces based on pre-existing political and social opinions, and the hybrid theory which suggests that some groups, such as Black Protestants fit the ethnoreligious mold and other groups, such as White protestants, fit the restructuring theory. I theorize that the way individuals arrive at contemporary positions for both religion and politics is based on a combination of pre-existing social beliefs and social constraint, moderated by race.

I test this theory four different ways. First, I use panel data to demonstrate that pre-existing political beliefs change religious beliefs, and that race does not interact with this correlation. Second, I use multinomial regressions to demonstrate

that social constraint predicts changes in religion for Hispanic and Asian Americans and that personal beliefs predict changes in religion for White Americans. However, both predictors are far more predictive of party identification than religion, suggesting that the mechanisms through which these predictors affect religion and politics are different. Third, I do ethnographic site visits at 11 religious services to find that predominantly White churches are politically homogeneous and reflect restructuring and that non-White churches have more social constraint and are politically heterogeneous, which does not exactly reflect the ethnoreligious theory. Fourth, I interview 17 people from the religious spaces to find that prior beliefs generally influence political outcomes, but do not influence religious outcomes for non-White Americans in minority ethnic and religious traditions because of personal cultural homophily and through social constraints with friends and family. I then modify my theory to reflect that ethnoreligious does not necessarily reflect homogeneous voting and that other factors are involved in the relationship between beliefs, social constraint, and religious outcomes.

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