THE ELECTORAL EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS HOMOGENEITY

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Abstract

Do religiously concentrated areas vote in similar fashion? Among the six major religious subcategories in the United States, loyalty of voting behaviors within the last three national election cycles (2008-2016) has varied from extremely loyal to the Republican Party to extremely opposed. Urban geographies are associated with many choices in religious and political beliefs, making certain regions more heterogenous than others. This study identifies historical and societal phenomena that impact group behaviors, such as social surveillance, microtargeting, religious brand loyalty, the salience of moral values, and more. The research compares the religious concentration of United States counties and compares the measure to a standardized vote for the Republican Party using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression and Moran’s I measure of spatial autocorrelation.

**Keywords:** Religious Tradition, National Elections, Voter Choice, Geographic Homogeneity, Location Quotient, Ordinary Least Squares Regression, Spatial Autocorrelation
Introduction

In the 2016 election, the media dwelt on the cohesiveness of the White Evangelical protestant vote in securing Donald Trump’s decisive but unexpected victory in the Electoral College (Pulliam Bailey, 2016). This study will seek to further corroborate whether this pattern in national elections can be attributed to the homogeneity of a certain religious population within states and counties. Does more religious homogeneity result in less competitive national elections? How does religious homogeneity in conjunction with racial and socioeconomic factors compare to observing religious homogeneity alone? Because of the interrelatedness between how the individual forms religious and political beliefs and the social pressures and acceptance felt by members of a given congregation, I seek to demonstrate that religious homogeneity is strongly correlated with group voting patterns. I see this geographic variable as a dimension of voter choice which is yet to be adequately studied, especially in the wake of elections that have seen historical political realignment of various religious traditions (Fowler et al., 2010). This research places great emphasis on the importance of religious hotspots, high concentrations of certain religious populations within a given geographic region. Is there a more dominant vote share for right-wing parties within hotspots of White Evangelical Protestants? Can any other religious population boast of having the same robust electoral effects that White Evangelicals have? Concurrently, do hotspots of more liberal religious groups negate the effects of Evangelical support for the right by a comparable degree of support for candidates on the left?

By observing the relationship between religious homogeneity and electoral margin by region, a correlation between the two could suggest regional clustering plays an important role for multiple religious groups, not only White Evangelical Protestants. Such electoral effects of the spatial distribution of religious groups are yet to be studied in great detail. This paper makes
the claim that highly concentrated religious areas, because of their likelihood to vote in a similar
fashion, result in less competitive elections. Counties with no strong affiliation for either party
or religious affinity can be identified and further analyzed to study whether campaign efforts
should be concentrated there. I set out to explain that geographic concentration does matter
when compared against exit poll aggregates, as religious denominations impose strong implicit
and explicit pressures upon a more localized unit than at the national scale, while simultaneously
attracting like-minded constituents who share a common sense of civic duty.

This research seeks to answer the question, “do religiously concentrated areas vote in a
similar fashion?” Additionally, “what group factors contribute to the present trends?” The
methodology behind this study is not overly complex. This research intends to produce evidence
that geographic concentration of religious groups mobilizes voters through the following
mechanisms: Waldo Tobler’s First Law of Geography (Tobler, 1969) and Tiebout Sorting
(Tiebout, 1956). The literature on Tobler’s Law agrees that individuals and groups in close
proximity will have more in common than those spatially farther apart (Tobler, 1969). This
study assumes that Tobler’s Law holds true even for patterns as nuanced as religious identity and
voter choice. There are many reasons that people who share a common political ideology might
aggregate, including religion, race, and socioeconomic class, for example (Brint, Abrutyn, 2010).
Tiebout sorting analyzes self-selection into a geographic region (or geo-region as it will be
referred to throughout this paper) based on clustering of similar group characteristics, measured
by increasing levels of spatial autocorrelation (Tiebout, 1956).

This study will validate the claim that geographic concentration of White Evangelical
Protestants is largely correlated with vote for the right, just as high geographic concentration of
Black Protestants is largely correlated with vote for the left. Areas with higher rates of religious
pluralism dilute the effects of Tobler’s Law with respect to religion, thus resulting in closer political races than in areas where greater levels of homogeneity of religious groups are present. Should research provide strong evidence for this claim, these conclusions could alter where candidates decide to concentrate campaign efforts, namely, which states and counties are considered electoral battlegrounds. Moreover, candidates may adjust campaign rhetoric or strategies from one geo-region to another. Finally, the study may suggest which demographics should be more closely polled and at what scale polling is most effective.

The research will be broken up into the following phases: coding various denominations into larger categories of religious groups (Leege, Kellstedt, Wald 1990), computing both a denomination concentration as well as a locality concentration of various religious groups and comparing those measures to the respective geo-region’s electoral margin between the two major parties. In order to control for the effects of political polarization within recent election years, the research process will be conducted for the 2008, 2012, and 2016 election years. By comparing models of religious geographic concentration to models with additional racial and socioeconomic data incorporated, I intend to demonstrate that religious geography contributes unique electoral effects not significantly explained by the geographic clustering of other causes.

Political Alignment of Religious Denominations in the United States

Over time, candidates for President of the United States have consistently appealed to the religious majority of the nation to bolster their path to victory. Identifying with a Christian denomination significantly helps associate a candidate to the American populous, as roughly 80% of Americans identify as a member of some Christian church. The United States of America boasts of impressively high belief in God, as well as high rates of attendance at
religious services when compared to other industrialized nations (Espinosa, 2014). America is a melting pot of religious backgrounds, and thus the most successful campaigns are those that adhere to a plurality of faiths and religious traditions.

Religious groups have aligned with certain candidates and parties in national elections since the earliest stages of our nation’s history. Additionally, religious groups have traditionally adhered to geographic patterns of clustered hotspots, where a multitude of citizens with similar religious views reside. Though individuals do not often have complete control over where they reside, a religious or ideological connection to an area can ultimately affect such a decision. Historians often attribute regional distinctions to a myriad of factors, many of them being economic differences. However, at the onset of the American nation and throughout the centuries, religious affiliation has also played a critical role in determining the outcome of elections; Catholics amassed a large electorate in Maryland, the Quakers and Lutherans in Pennsylvania, Puritans in New England, and a number of Jewish settlers in New York, for example. Freedom from religious oppression was foundational to the United States, and the opportunity to exercise one’s right to preserve such freedoms through democratic measures was revolutionary (Fowler et al., 2010). As time has progressed, religious groups have varied both spatially and demographically, as pluralism has diluted the geographic distinctions of religion that were previously much more defined (Espinosa, 2014).

Social scientists have observed a number of unique divisions in the American political-religious landscape. The earliest example of religious division dates back to 1800 and the divide between establishment religions such as Episcopalian and Congregationalists, and non-establishment religions such as Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. The establishment religions closely aligned with John Adams and the Federalist party, favoring a national religion,
whereas the non-establishment religions aligned with Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republican Party, strong advocates for separation between the church and the state. As immigration into the country rose drastically throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, large numbers of Catholics entered the United States giving birth to the Catholic-Protestant split.

Much of the historical literature suggests that Catholics found themselves overwhelmingly politically aligned with the Democratic Party, yet the Protestant response varied based on geographic region. Catholics and certain ritualistic Protestant groups including many Lutherans banded together in elections as the core constituents of the Democratic Party, as Evangelical Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and the remaining Lutherans formed the “pietists” who were loyal to the Republican Party. The ritualist-pietists divide became another cleavage for political campaigners to be mindful of when strategizing and building a coalition. As time progressed, the issue of race would only divide the country further, Black Protestants supporting the Democratic Party and white Protestants supporting the Republicans. Though these religious divides are commonly thought to be a product of social class, race and education among other factors, this research intends to highlight the particular importance of geographic homogeneity and its ability to affect the margins and competitiveness of elections.

Social scientists have consistently split religious traditions into voting blocs because of their tendency to be accurate indicators of how an individual will vote. 56% of Evangelical Protestants identified with the Republican Party after the 2008 election, as compared to only 25% that identified as members of the Democratic Party. Mainline Protestants split 40-40% and Catholics are split similarly; both religious subcategories have undergone historical political realignment within the past few national election cycles (Fowler et al., 2010).

African American
Protestants heavily favor the Democratic Party 86-7%, whereas Mormons are 65-22% in favor of the Republican Party. Others/unaffiliated persons also favor the Democratic Party (Henry Institute, 2008). The percentage of vote share has also been historically variable by religious group. Catholics make up 25% of the electorate, White Evangelicals 23%, white Mainline Protestant 14%, Hispanic and Minority Protestant make up 7%, Mormons and other White Christians make up 3%, Jews 1.5%, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other sum to another 3%, and then unaffiliated individuals tallies 15% and continuously growing (University of Akron, 2008).

It is important to make a distinction between two types of homogeneity when observing religious traditions: internal homogeneity and homogeneity over geography. Internal homogeneity describes a tendency across members of a religious group to express similar political attitudes. For instance, a group can hold a strong commitment to the salience of moral values such as pro-life doctrine and traditional views of marriage (De La O, Rodden, 2008). Alternatively, geographic homogeneity describes the tendency for members of a religious group to be similar across space. The presence of these types of homogeneity vary across religious traditions. White Evangelical Protestants are internally homogenous in favor of the Republican Party but are less geographically homogeneous than a group like the Mormons. Mormons do not comprise nearly the same overall percentage of the electorate that Mainline Protestants or Catholics do, but because they are overwhelmingly loyal to the Republican Party and concentrated in the American west, specifically Utah, they have considerable political influence within that region. Therefore, should the Mormons vote homogenously, this one religious subcategory should control the six electoral votes in the state of Utah.
Catholics and Mainline Protestants are internally heterogenous, as the political alignment of their members is not significant in support for either the Democratic or the Republican Party. Black protestants are internally homogenous in favor of the Democratic Party, and also fairly geographically homogenous, concentrated heavily in the American south and other urban areas (Fowler et al., 2010). Though one could intuitively argue that greater raw aggregates of a religious group would result in greater influence on the outcome of national elections, I propose that it is geographic concentration of religious denominations that leads to greater margin of victory. I believe that greater levels of geographic homogeneity help explain greater levels of internal homogeneity. How concentration mobilizes voters will be expanded upon in the sections to come.

Evangelical Christianity is a broad umbrella term used to describe many different denominations. The common traits throughout include being “born-again” and having a view of scripture as the divinely inspired word of God. Their unique political behavior makes demarcating between Evangelical Christians and other Christians so critical. The Evangelical Protestant voting bloc has remained steady, core constituents of the Republican Party in recent decades, even while Mainline Protestants have simultaneously abandoned the GOP for alternative parties. Not only has the vote for the Republican Party been marginally higher among Evangelical Protestants, of those who regularly attend religious services these numbers are higher still. An analogous effect is present among Roman Catholics who frequently attend church, though they have traditionally favored the Democratic Party (Kellstedt et al., 1994).

Now largely referred to as ‘Liberal Protestantism,’ Mainline Protestants have consistently declined in loyalty to the Republican Party. The exit polls of the 2008 presidential election suggest that a slight majority of Mainline Protestants now identify with the Democratic Party,
which connotes an important historical shift in ideology. This is a similar case for Roman Catholics who, though traditionally aligned with the Democratic Party, are shifting to a more conservative position along the political spectrum and supporting the Republican Party in larger numbers than in previous years (Fowler et al., 2010). This trade-off could be indicative of how certain religious subcategories are choosing to respond to a changing political landscape by either being steadfast moral traditionalists or embracing a new liberalism.

It is important to acknowledge that both Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics hold a fair amount of political power. Considered key swing voters, pluralism reigns among these denominations in the American political sphere. Both Catholics and Mainliners support members of both major parties, retaining a large vote share for each. The challenge of declining membership is one that both Catholics and Mainline Protestants face, likely due to an ideological disconnect from lay people to their religious leadership (Fowler et al., 2010). This decline is important to note when measuring denominations as a percentage of the electorate, and the subsequent predicted growth of the non-religious and unaffiliated over the coming years. Likely related to earlier childbearing and higher rates of fertility, Evangelical Protestants and other conservative Christians have not experienced the same drop off over the twentieth century as many of the Mainline Protestant denominations have (Hout et al., 2001).

Evangelicals divide along party lines when the variable of race is introduced. African Americans overwhelmingly belong to Protestant congregations, the majority of whom are loyal to the Democratic Party. There is a consensus in the literature that people who are more devout, regardless of denomination, are more likely to favor the Republican Party (Campbell, 2007). However, devout African Americans are the exception, contributing small pockets of Democratic support where their congregations are geographically clustered (Campbell, 2007). Many studies
have been conducted trying to understand why Evangelicals, particularly White Evangelicals, have remained so loyal to Republicans.

Social scientists theorize the Christian right has felt a strong call to wage a “culture war” against deteriorating moral values (Guth, 1988; Wilcox, 1990; Gorski, 2017). The salience of moral values was particularly important in the 2004 election, as Bush’s Evangelicalism proved to build a stronger coalition than either Kerry’s Catholicism or Dean’s secularism could. “Microtargeting” of social conservatives proved to be an effective strategy; the Bush campaign would avoid polarizing negative statements about homosexual marriage but would make strong statements affirming traditional marriage—statements that Evangelicals responded to favorably (Campbell, 2007). Evangelicals frequently hear political messages at the pulpit, and by interacting with like-minded members of their congregation are more likely to adopt more conservative ideals. Religiosity, specifically the frequency of attending religious services, is also correlated with one’s level of political conservatism as those who attend frequently are also the individuals most likely to actively mobilize and mount political efforts against the growing “culture war” (Brint and Abrutyn, 2010). This is especially the case in regard to one of the most polarizing political issues: legalized abortion (Himmelstein, 1986; Evans, 2002). Community mobilization efforts are expected to be geographically clustered, as individuals engaged in similar political behaviors tend to aggregate.

It has been proposed that political loyalty can be derived from psychological and social factors through a type of “brand loyalty” that determines an individual’s political alignment based primarily upon group membership. This occurs across multiple religions, but at especially high rates among Evangelical Christians (Djupe, 2000). Such brand loyalty suggests membership in certain religious groups defines the political party and candidates a voter will
align with because of the prominence of ideology within various facets of daily life. Social pressures to conform to community norms are common throughout many denominations and magnified among those who receive more exposure to other group members.

To test the effects of social pressures on political involvement, Gerber, Green and Larimer conducted a field experiment in which the treatment group experienced the threat of scrutiny from family and neighbors to turn out to vote. Several hundred thousand voters received mailings that their turnout to the polls would be publicized to their household or their neighbors. As predicted, those who received mailings threatening to publicize if they had fulfilled their civic duty turned out in significantly higher numbers than those who received no mailing threatening to publicize their turnout (Gerber et al., 2008). This experiment demonstrates how “social surveillance” (40) helps mobilize voters to conform to the social norm of fulfilling one’s civic duty. Could it be that shared religious views amongst neighbors only magnifies these results? What if the individual’s voting status was shared within their given religious group? One could likely conclude that religious congregations with a strong degree of social surveillance are also more likely to consist of individuals who turnout to vote.

Current literature shows little headway has been made observing the relationship between geographic homogeneity of religious populations and electoral effects. Studies have been conducted to measure religious homogeneity and suicide rates, determining that communities adhering to a single religion or a small number of faiths are inversely associated with suicide cases, yet effects varied based on geo-region (Ellison et al., 1997). The findings of this study add substance to the theory I will expand on shortly, that religiously homogenous regions are more likely to be rich in social capital, with robust networks of interconnectedness through
belief, practice and common identity. These indicators that would result in lower rates of suicide can be likened to those that build strong social capital.

The vast majority of analyses on religious denominations and voting consist of national-level aggregates, with few studies observing religious affiliation at the state and county level (Wilcox, 1990; The Religious Typology, 2018). Other studies attempt to explain the link between religion and politics simply controlling for geography by differentiating between urban and rural cases, disregarding other factors of spatial similarity between individuals (Brint and Abrutyn, 2010). Where are the modern-day religious hotspots, and do they really have influential electoral effects? How has recent realignment contributed to these effects? I believe that state and county-level hotspot analysis of individual denominations will provide valuable insight into the variation behind the competitiveness of national elections. The research may also uncover previously unrecognized or uncharacteristic behaviors of certain religious denominations in regard to their expected political behaviors. Additionally, more information on the competitiveness of regions will encourage further comparisons to be drawn across states and counties, providing greater opportunities to analyze the relationship between religiously homogenous regions and elections that may not be visible when aggregated at the national level. Such knowledge could change the demographics we poll and the geography we poll them at. Observing margin of victory by geo-region will delineate what areas are considered battlegrounds and whether or not the presence of certain religious populations prevents a region from being competitive. Looking at the margins of victory in elections over three election cycles will enable conclusions to be drawn regarding shifts from one election to the next, as well as noting the effects of increasing political polarization in the most recent elections.
Theory Development

The primary contribution of this research is to demonstrate that religious populations’ electoral effects are a function of their geographic concentration and tendency to cluster. I aspire to demonstrate that concentrated religious clusters have a noticeable impact on the competitiveness of any given election for a few possible reasons: a “push” from the geographic religious majority, manifesting as implicit and explicit pressures exerted upon the regional constituents to vote for a preferred candidate. This is the manifestation of the social surveillance component. Additionally, there could be a “pull” effect, attracting voters towards a hotspot of other like-minded individuals who share religious or political beliefs. This is the Tiebout Sorting component (Tibout, 1956). Both effects can lead to the mobilization of voters in a religiously concentrated area that would not otherwise occur in a more diluted region. The presence of these effects would corroborate the expected effects of Tobler’s First Law of Geography (Tobler, 1969).

Depending on the scale of geo-region that is selected for analysis, varying results can be returned. This is due to the modifiable aerial unit problem, or MAUP as commonly referred to by geographers. The MAUP acknowledges that spatial data will yield a range of outcomes for the same study area. Uniform distribution over a geographical surface rarely exists, and thus geographers must recognize the effects of scale. As smaller units are merged or aggregated, resolution is lowered and many smaller demographics and activities in the region become muddled (Wong, 2009). This is precisely what occurs within the states of the American south, as the right-leaning white Protestants far out-number the even more loyal left-leaning Black Protestants. State level analysis shows no indication of Black Protestants influencing the results of national elections whatsoever. Table 1 shows the six states with the highest percentage of
Black Protestants as compared to their concentration of White Evangelicals. At the state level, electoral effects of Black Protestants are nearly indistinguishable because of the relative influence of white Evangelicals within the same states (ARDA, 2010). The effects of groups such as the Black Protestants are expected to be better represented at a smaller level of analysis such as the county.

Table 1. Association of Religious Data Archives, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>% of Population Black Protestant</th>
<th>% of Population White Evangelical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>7.25%</td>
<td>66.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>6.15%</td>
<td>67.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>5.54%</td>
<td>58.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>4.75%</td>
<td>38.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>4.32%</td>
<td>67.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>3.94%</td>
<td>57.94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are many reasons individuals with similar religious beliefs are theorized to aggregate, most directly in order to build and sustain social capital amongst members (Kaasa, 2013). Additionally, there are many reasons that parallel religiosity with political conservatism. Brint and Abrutyn lay out five competing explanations for the relationship between religiosity and ideology, claiming three are more common within the literature: religiosity, moral traditionalism and gender and family ideology, and two are less common: class culture and cultural geography (Brint and Abrutyn, 2010). This research intends to expand on Kaasa’s theory of religious aggregation from social capital while adapting Brint and Abrutyn’s theory as it applies to conservatism. Surely like-minded conservatives are able to find reasons to aggregate, whether they be socioeconomic reasons or amassing a culture war on deteriorating
moral values. Yet, on the other end of the political spectrum a similar argument could be made, albeit not likely aggregating to the same degree because of the diversity of the typical urban and suburban Democratic hotspots. By meshing the theories of Kaasa (2013) and Brint and Abrutyn (2010), this study will explain the relationship between religious and political homogeneity as it pertains to conservative and liberal ideology alike.

Kaasa conducted cluster analysis measuring the relationship between the religious composition of European geographies and the prominence of associated social capital. In this context, social capital is measured by level of trust especially in institutions, building of networks, and civic engagement. Aggregate religion is highly related to the development of such social capital (Kaasa 2013). Individuals desire interconnectedness and robust networks within local communities, especially religious communities built around similarities in moral values. Moral values, as corresponding to specific issues such as abortion, gay marriage, stem-cell research, etc., are shaped by the individual voter’s opinion on the qualities of candidates such as integrity and honesty, and opinions shaped by religious figures, family members, personal beliefs, group beliefs or other internal and external influences. This definition of moral values was identified as the issue most affecting how the nation voted within the 2004 election according to exit polls (Keeter, 2007). Though such perceptions of moral values may be more influential on an individual going to the polls in support of a conservative like Bush as opposed to a liberal like Kerry, moral values are not exclusively associated with conservatism; it becomes increasingly critical to stratify by religious tradition, as these traditions vary in political influence, participation, and ideology.

The political alignment of individuals can be pivotal to establishing networks of social capital, especially within religious traditions in which central tenets are challenged by the politics
of a given party or candidate. This has been observed in both conservative and liberal responses alike; for example, the Catholic Church has been stalwart in its efforts to promote the pro-life message, as legalized abortion, euthanasia and the death penalty undermine their doctrine on the sanctity of life. Furthermore, Catholics and particularly Black Protestants have consistently preached a message of mercy towards the poor and the downtrodden, placing a high degree of confidence in the hands of government as a tenable instrument for social change (Fowler et al., 2010). Religious subcategory views on immigration, climate change, worker’s rights and countless other issues all have the ability to shape and build networks of social capital to varying degrees.

Religious beliefs and identities are often passed down within the family unit and are commonly adopted by children regardless of party affiliation. Additionally, individuals tend to be restricted to the congregations which are local to them. Though many urban regions in particular grow increasingly secular, a strong shared faith can define a local community. Oftentimes, religious institutions offer much more than simply a place of worship; additionally, they serve as a communal space to congregate, out of which great social capital is derived (Brown, 2003). Such spaces allow neighbors to influence neighbors, appealing to their moral values and social standing. We can observe much clustering of religions in the American political landscape across many Christian traditions and multiple regions of the United States (Zelinsky, 1961). Waldo Tobler’s First Law of Geography states that nearby things are more closely related than those farther away, and religious groups by and large hold true to this claim.

Waldo Tobler’s Law (Tobler, 1969, 2004) additionally holds true for political behavior. Partisanship, often passed down within families like religion, is not randomly distributed across space. Chen and Rodden use Tobler’s First Law of Geography as the basis of their argument:
“the probability that two individuals exhibit similar political preferences is a function of the distance between their residential locations” (Chen and Rodden, 2009). Partisanship is not randomly distributed, but rather clustered in neighborhoods with others who share similar attitudes and hold like beliefs. This is critical to understand the “push” mechanisms by which this paper explains the relationship between religious homogeneity and margin of victory in elections: implicit and explicit social pressures.

Such pressures would not carry the same weight over a region where partisanship was randomly distributed as opposed to spatially clustered. Social surveillance and religious brand loyalty is strongest among regions that are the most homogenous, thus coercing the individual to vote according to the interests of the larger group. The threat of losing status within one’s network of social capital is greater within these hotspots. Because of the social ramifications of supporting the minority party or candidate, it is entirely plausible that those who do vote in opposition of the family, church or neighborhood norm are “closet supporters” of the minority, not identifying with or openly campaigning for them out of fear. Polling and survey data is limited in this way.

Additionally, the attraction of gaining status through social capital entices other like-minded individuals to aggregate. Should the individual’s religious and political beliefs fit the mold of a given geo-region, their perception of this region is a positive one. In other words, religious concentration within a region can be explained by a positive reputation for people of a shared affinity. This attraction is the “pull” mechanism used to explain the aggregation of religious groups and their subsequent electoral effects. It is expected that religious persons, in order to practice their faith, concentrate in close proximity to a congregation of other religious individuals, though this does not always occur because of outstanding circumstantial factors.
The research leads to multiple interrelated hypotheses relating to religious homogeneity and its subsequent electoral effects.

*Hypothesis 1:* Geographic hotspots of White Evangelical Protestants and Mormons will be largely positively correlated with higher vote for the right because of their strong internal homogeneity and loyalty to the Republican Party. I believe the competition will be much smaller among White Evangelicals and Mormon hotspots in favor of right-wing parties. Similarly, regions with high concentrations of Black Protestants will also yield uncompetitive elections in favor of left-wing parties.

*Hypothesis 2:* Black Protestant hotspots will be correlated with higher vote for the left because of their strong internal homogeneity and loyalty to the Democratic Party. Therefore, these Black Protestant regions are theorized to be negatively correlated with the same measure of vote for the right. Because of the MAUP as previously mentioned, it is hypothesized that these effects will be much more pronounced at the county-level analysis as compared to the state-level analysis.

*Hypothesis 3:* Due to their lack of internal homogeneity, Catholics, Mainline Protestants, and Orthodox Christians will not yield significantly higher margins for either party. These religious traditions are politically pluralist by nature, and therefore regional hotspots will not yield the most competitive elections. For these religious subcategories, it is hypothesized that neither major party will be favored over the other.

In short, internal homogeneity magnifies the effects of geographic homogeneity. Religious groups with high internal homogeneity will yield less competitive elections than religious groups with low internal homogeneity. Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 would be supported should a wider margin of victory be observed within hotspots associated with a highly internally
homogeneous religious population politically aligned with the victorious party from that region as compared to a less internally homogenous religious population at a similar level of geographic homogeneity. The coefficients for the relationship between religious geographic homogeneity and margin of victory will likely be more significant for right-aligning religious traditions than those coefficients pertaining to left-aligning religious traditions. It is predicted that right-wing hotspots will yield tighter correlations, as the geographic distribution of the territory favors more sparsely populated areas that are inherently less diverse than left-wing hotspots which are commonly dense, urban areas.

To verify that these relationships hold true across time and that the 2016 election was not an outlier, the data would be expected to show similar results from 2008 to 2016. **Hypothesis 4:** The relationship between religious homogeneity and margin of victory is independent from growing political polarization. I would expect to observe that the relationship is not significantly more positively correlated in 2016 than in 2008 or 2012 to demonstrate that party polarization is not the cause of wider margins of victory. The vote margins instead are predicted to be a function of religious homogeneity.

To measure evidence of selection bias effects, Hypothesis 5 will attempt to explain the possibility of social pressures from a religious group exerted on the voters of the geo-region the group is contained within. **Hypothesis 5:** As the denomination and locality concentration measures increase, the percentage of that group voting for the victorious candidate from that region will also increase exponentially. As relative group size is increased compared to the remaining percent of the constituency, a given religious group increases in relative influence on a given region. There would be evidence for social pressure if percentage voting in favor of the victorious party increased significantly as a function of the proportion of religious individuals to
the greater constituency. These effects, once again are magnified amongst internally homogenous religious groups.

Tests that do not yield results indicative of these exponential effects might suggest that religious geographic concentration does not affect the electoral margin in the expected way. Such results might suggest that campaigning in highly contested, religiously diverse areas could be a critical factor in mobilizing voters. The possibility of elected officials who threaten the beliefs of a given group leads members to engage in elections, causing a shift in margins of victory not previously anticipated within certain regions. This public perception of the electoral outcome is something I would like to study more in depth in the future. Sociologists attribute the White Evangelical perception of the Democratic Obama Administration and the fear of four more years under Hillary Clinton with mobilization of members to wage a “culture war” at the polls in 2016. Consequently, Republican Donald Trump ran away with certain regions that were previously believed to be Democrat-leaning (Gorski, 2017). The mobilization of voters due to anger cannot go without notice.

The presence of the Evangelical “culture war” in 2016 highlights a fundamental difference between the Democrats and Republicans who turn out to vote. The structure of local religious communities provides a basis for organization against opposing beliefs and politics, and organization is more effective in less diverse, more homogenous areas (Kaasa, 2013). Geographic concentration is more conducive to social surveillance and brand loyalty mechanisms driving collective voter choice.
Data

For this study, two different models can be used to represent geographic homogeneity, clustered religious groups over space. These measures include the location quotient or the simple proportion method, that after preliminary analysis do not yield discernable differences. The former method for measuring concentration, location quotient, allows the researcher to measure the concentration of a specific religious population by activity hotspots. The latter method, simple proportion, measures the proportion of one specific religious group as compared to all religions within a geo-region.

To measure the relative impact of a religious group on a specific geo-region, location quotients will be computed for counties and states. The location quotient will capture the independent variable Religious Tradition Concentration by taking a proportion of the activity in a given geo-region and comparing it to the overall proportion of that activity in the larger population. The location quotient provides a numeric value for the area in question. Comparing these values allows us to identify where a religious tradition has the greatest concentration of members. High location quotient values are indicative of an activity being highly concentrated. This is known as an activity hotspot. The location quotient does not, however, account for the relative size of that religious group as compared to other groups in the area, which could affect the overall political influence that group exerts.

To measure the potential political influences of a group, the religious tradition within a geo-region over the total geo-region population will yield a percentage value. This simple proportion will be referred to as the Religious Tradition Proportion. This measure will capture the relative influence of a religious group as compared to other groups in a given region, whereas the location quotient finds the hotspots of a specific religious tradition as compared to the sum of
that group’s members across the entire population. Hotspots can help pull out concentrations of smaller religious traditions that are drowned out by larger more popular religious traditions in the simple proportion of the total population.

There are limitations when using these methods to measure the relationship between geographic homogeneity of religious traditions and subsequent electoral effects. First and foremost, the location quotient is a measure of geographic homogeneity, not internal religious homogeneity. The location quotient does not capture the religiosity of specific religious traditions, as different tradition’s average member varies in loyalty, practice and belief. These variances can affect the likelihood that members of a religious group votes as a bloc or is split between multiple candidates or parties. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes that only certain religious groups will experience this effect, those groups with high levels of internal religious homogeneity. Additionally, the simple proportion of a religious group within an area is not a complete measure of homogeneity at all. The make-up of the remaining proportion of the population varies in size and number of other religious traditions. For all intents and purposes, charts and maps were created using the location quotient method. The research subsequently used location quotients to infer about the effects geographic religious homogeneity has on internal religious homogeneity of the religious subcategories.

For the variables Religious Tradition Concentration and Religious Tradition Proportion geocoded data on respondent’s religious affiliation will be required. The spreadsheet, U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations and Membership Study, 2010 (County File) from the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA) will satisfy. This organization is also a credible source for sorting religious traditions into the following six subcategories: White Evangelical Protestants (WEP), Black Protestants (BPRT), Mainline Protestants (MPRT),
Catholics (CATH), Orthodox Christians (ORTH), and the Church of Latter-Day Saints and Other Religious (LDSOTH).

In the current day and age, the line that defines a church or religious congregation is blurry. The complete ARDA approved denominations list can be found in Appendix A. Larger, more popular congregations of Evangelical Protestants include Adventists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, the Church of God, Reformed Presbyterians, Reformed Methodists, and Evangelical branches of Lutherans, Presbyterians and Methodists among countless other less populous. According to the ARDA denominations lists, Mainline churches include American Baptist Churches in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Quakers, the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church among others. ARDA has lists for Black Protestant denominations as well as Catholics and other religious groups, which all will need proper sorting. Those who do not fall into any of the appropriate categories shall be labelled “non-categorized other religious” and consolidated. The RELTRAD coding schemes is widely used to categorize many denominations into the handful of categories previously mentioned.

The values for the variable Electoral Margin of Victory were scraped from county level exit polls on Townhall and the Guardian for the years 2008, 2012 or 2016 and consolidated. The data will be stratified by vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate for each election, and cases in which no vote or vote for another party was cast will be dropped from the model. Though this method of collecting election data by county is not ideal data due to concerns about reliability in transfer, the data provided geo-region totals for both Democrat and Republican vote that was not available from other sources. The American National Election Studies (ANES)
would be limited in the fact that not all counties would be represented in the survey, and additionally the geocoded data is not released to the public. The U.S. Census Bureau only releases totals on voter registration and total votes, not split by vote share for specific parties.

**Methods**

To test the effects of the independent variables *Religious Tradition Concentration* and *Religious Tradition Proportion* on the dependent variable *Electoral Margin of Victory*, linear regression analysis will be run. Additionally, the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression tool, with additional Moran’s I tests for spatial autocorrelation will be used to run statistical tests on the relationship between the variables. Geographic Weighted Regression (GWR) can also be run to fit a regression equation into every spatial feature within the dataset. This requires accurately projected data in order to be measured consistently across the study area. Essentially, GWR solves for a Y-value given a finite number of X-values that are grouped in close proximity. These models will be used to demonstrate the effects of religious concentration on voting for the popular party within a given state or county. The slopes between highly concentrated, religiously homogeneous areas versus areas with low levels of religious concentration and homogeneity will be compared. The difference between slopes and the $R^2$ values will indicate the strength of the effect that highly concentrated religious areas have.

Begin by downloading the US_County_Level_Presidential_Results_08-16 dataset and the U.S. Religion Census Religious Congregations and Membership Study (County File) and (State File). Merge the data to be combined by unique county identifier code, known as the *county_fips*. Once all the electoral data has been matched and sorted to the corresponding religious data, tests on the independent variable may begin. For each religious subcategory,
these raw totals are added up to create a count per each geographic region. This value is the Geo-region Subcategory Count (GSC). This value will be divided by the Geo-region Population Count (GPC). After all columns are appropriately sorted, total counts for each subcategory can be summed, giving the value of the Total Subcategory Count (TSC). The value for the total count of all individuals in the data set is also summed, yielding the Total Population Count (TPC). Each of these four values will be used to compute location quotients as seen below:

\[
\frac{\text{GSC}}{\text{GPC}} \cdot \frac{\text{TSC}}{\text{TPC}}
\]

The location quotient approximates how clustered a religious group is within a given geo-region. Out of all members of this religious group, this value represents the concentration of members that are contained within that region. The ARDA dataset also provides state totals for all statewide adherents, and that value will be referred to as the Geo-region Adherents Count (GAC). The total count of all religious individuals as accounted will be referred to as the Total Adherent Count (TAC). These values can simply replace the GPC and the TPC respectively to observe the measure for solely religious adherents as opposed to the population at large.

For Religious Tradition Proportion the proportion is simply the Geo-region Subcategory Count (GSC) divided by the Geo-region Population Count (GPC). This equation is essentially the percentage of a given religious group as compared to the total population of that geo-region. This simple ratio approximates the likelihood that a random individual within a geo-region is a member of a specific group\(^1\). The measure for geographic homogeneity, the location quotient for each religious tradition and geo-region combination, will be used to compare against relative margins in the vote share for the majority party.

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\(^1\) Preliminary analysis shows no discernable difference in results between the location quotient and simple proportion methods.
To obtain a measure for electoral margin, all six religious subcategories will be compared to the geo-region’s votes for the Republican Party. A standardized measure is required to compare electoral margin to the measure of geographic homogeneity. For each geo-region, take the number of votes for the Republican Party divided by the sum of votes for both the Democratic and Republican parties. This variable will be the Standard Republican Margin ($SRM$), creating a consistent output that all variables can be measured against. The outstanding vote for neither major party is intentionally dropped from the model. These values are dropped to ensure neither party receives the additional share of votes that would not realistically aid the party nominee for that election year win the general election. The $SRM$ yields a positive value between 0 and 1. Low values indicate that it is extremely unlikely that constituents who voted for one of the major parties voted Republican. High values indicate that out of the two major parties, voting Republican is very likely within the given geo-region. I set out to see if measures of religious homogeneity plotted against the $SRM$ will yield the expected correlations based on a given religious group’s internal homogeneity.

**Figure 1.** Correlation between Population Location Quotients for White Evangelical Protestants and Electoral Margins for the Republican Party by State
To create visual representations of the level of spatial randomness, local indicators of spatial autocorrelation (LISA) values can be computed in the GeoDa software program and both the state and county level of analysis. LISA tests for spatial randomness or spatial structure. Spatial randomness suggests that every location is equally as likely in the distribution of spatial data, whereas spatial structure suggests clustering of similar data across space. The purposes of the LISA analytical tool are twofold: LISA can help identify hotspots of activity, as well as identifying outliers based on the Moran scatterplot (Anselin, 1995). Measuring spatial autocorrelation measures the geographic concentration of a specified activity, in this case the relationship between religion and vote, and compares those values to surrounding neighbors.

The geo-region is placed into one of four categories, high-high, low-low, high-low and low-high. The first high or low indicates that a geo-region has either a high or low value of spatial autocorrelation, followed by whether or not that geo-region is surrounded by neighbors that have high or low value of spatial autocorrelation. High-highs and low-lows highlight significant positive measures of spatial autocorrelation, whereas low-highs and high-lows are referred to as spatial outliers (Anselin, 1995).
Begin by running the GeoDa tool: Bivariate Local Moran’s I cluster map. By adding religious homogeneity, either LQ or SP, as the explanatory variable and vote for the Republicans, SRM, as the response variable, GeoDa can produce a Moran’s I scatterplot and a LISA cluster map. The user must also input a contiguity method into the weights manager which compares geo-regions to bordering geo-regions; the user can choose between rook contiguity and queen contiguity. Rook contiguity is more conservative than queen contiguity, as rook contiguity requires multiple vertices in common with another geo-region to be considered a neighbor, and queen contiguity only requires one vertex. For example, queen contiguity would consider the states of Arizona and Colorado neighbors because they meet at the Four Corners, but rook contiguity would not consider these states neighbors. The Moran’s I scatterplot plots the geo-regions into one of the four quadrants, high-high, low-low, high-low and low-high, and the LISA map highlights the regions in which those values were statistically significant. Dark red values on the map are high measures of spatial autocorrelation surrounded by other high values, dark blue are low measures surrounded by neighboring lows. As for the spatial outliers, light red colored regions are high values surrounded by lows, and light blue are low values surrounded by neighboring highs. Using GeoDa, LISA maps for counties and states for each religious subcategory will be produced, and then compared across the years 2008, 2012 and 2016.
In order to see evidence for Hypothesis 1, the data for White Evangelical Protestants would have to yield a positive or upward trend between measures of geographic religious homogeneity and vote for the republican candidate in an election. Hypothesis 2 would suggest Black Protestants yield a negative or downward trend between religious homogeneity and vote for the republican candidate in an election, whereas Hypothesis 3 would suggest no significant directional trend for Catholics and Mainline Protestants. The Orthodox subcategory of religious traditions, also lacking in internal homogeneity, are also not expected to yield a significant directional trend. The Mormon totals, which will be extracted from the Other subcategory, are expected to follow trends similar to the White Evangelical Protestant subcategory.

Across the years from 2008 to 2012 and 2016, slopes for religious subcategories are not predicted to experience large shifts. Should margins widen as time progresses, this would be
suggestive of a polarization effect. To be consistent with Hypothesis 4, the difference between
the slopes and r-squared values is expected to vary across religious tradition, but not across
election year. Should the slopes follow a logistic pattern, the results would be consistent with
Hypothesis 5, and the possibility of push and pull effects.

Certain geo-regions will be selected for comparison against potentially confounding
variables, specifically race and socioeconomic indicators for counties. This will be done to
observe if clusters of religious traditions have similar or stronger effects than counties clustered
by similar racial composition or counties with similar socioeconomic standing. This will be
valuable information for determining which demographic clusters have the largest effects on
national elections.

Using the ARDA adherents count will not be appropriate, as then the concentration
measures would only be applicable to the religious population, instead of the larger voter
population. Counties yield a higher spatial resolution to suggest more specific areas that follow
or disregard the hypothesized trends. The Modifiable Aerial Unit Problem, MAUP, smooths
some variation, such as distribution of votes for the Republican Party as seen in Figure 3. We
can observe significant change over the course of the three elections in the counties of the
American Southwest and numerous other regions that do not appear to vary at the state level.
Additionally, a higher sample size, n = 3107, allows for more degrees of freedom in our
statistical model, and more accurate p-values than analysis done at the state level.
All data will be properly converted into CSV files for statistical and geographic processing within the ArcMap 10.6 interface. The attribute data on religious concentration, vote for political party, and additional controls are joined to the geographic shapefiles for United States Counties. The county shapefiles are projected onto the NAD 1983 (2011) Contiguous USA Albers projection to preserve shape and distance. To return the most accurate results, null values are dropped by choosing to include only matching records. The final analysis will be conducted over the 48 contiguous states, as well as the District of Columbia.

The Ordinary Least Squares spatial statistics tool within ArcMap is used to output complete statistical regression analysis reports. In addition, the tool produces geographic representations of the spatial objects that fall above or below the standard residual line. Darker blue areas depict a region that falls below the residual line, as darker red areas show regions above the residual line; lighter blue and red areas fall nearer to the residual line.
Results

The ordinary least squares regression results can aid in explaining the relationship between the two variables in this study. Generally, the relationship between geographic concentration of religious tradition and vote for the right or left followed similar trends within each individual subcategory in the model. Among the 3,107 counties being tested across the contiguous United States, White Evangelical Protestants consistently return the strongest positive coefficients in support for the Republican Party, followed by positive trends from Mainline Protestants and the Church of Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons. Scatterplots with corresponding maps depicting the geographic distribution of the outputs can be found below in Figures 4, 5, and 6. Dark red counties are counties that overperformed for the Republican Party, whereas blue counties underperformed; scatterplot points correspond to the same shading for county maps.

The coefficients for the model’s explanatory variables can be found in Tables 2, 3 and 4. In 2016, the explanatory variable WEP yielded a coefficient of positive 0.052583, slightly decreasing each year from 0.056962 in 2008 and 0.054558 in 2012. This means that for every one-unit increase in the value of WEP, the model predicts a 0.52583 unit increase in the value of vote for the Republican Party. LDSOTH yields a coefficient of 0.001651, which suggests a flatter slope than in previous election years. MPRT coefficient values fluctuated, but ultimately grew over time, with 2008 and 2012 yielding results that are not statistically significant.
Table 2-4. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Outputs, election years 2008, 2012, and 2016 for all religious traditions

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Adjusted R² Value</th>
<th>Variable Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Intercept Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>F Stat</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
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In the opposite direction, BPRT coefficient values very slightly increased to suggest greater support for non-Republican parties from 2008 to 2016, with a spread of -0.014680 to -0.024870. Surprisingly, concentration of the Catholic religious tradition yielded the steepest negative slope, culminating in 2016 at a coefficient value of -0.053688. Orthodox Christians also had a consistently negative trend and increased in steepness from -0.032606 in 2008 to -0.045530 in 2016. All results over all three election years gave statistically significant outputs for the three negatively correlated religious traditions.

**Figure 4-6.** White Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, LDS and Other Religious Scatterplots and maps illustrating the relationship between geographic concentration and vote for the Republican Party
Across national election years, negative trends have also been observed in various religious traditions, including the Black Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. These groups, within geographically concentrated areas, tended to vote against members of the Republican Party. This is illustrated in the scatter plots below, once again with corresponding maps (Figures 7, 8 and 9).

**Figure 7-9.** Black Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian Scatterplots and maps illustrating the relationship between geographic concentration and vote for the Republican Party.
Analyzing the corresponding geographic output of a given scatter can aid in the process of identifying specific counties or regions that follow or disregard expected trends. For example, the largest outlier across all religious traditions is observed within the Orthodox Christian scatterplots, and can be attributed to the City of Fairfax, VA boasting a location quotient value of 38.851. This can be identified through the ArcGIS attribute tables and sorting based on ascending order. Additionally, a group of plotted points can be lassoed, and they will appear highlighted on the mapping interface. This is useful for determining the clustering of high values, low values, outliers, etc.

Regarding the trends of individual religious traditions, there is a general stability that can be observed across the studied elections. Within the election years of 2008 to 2016, no religious tradition flipped from being negatively correlated to positively correlated, or vice versa. Clusters generally kept the same shape, slopes, and intercepts. See Figure 10 below.

**Figure 10.** All religious traditions and all election years scatterplot matrix
There is evidence that the relationship between concentrated religious tradition and vote share for a given political party is tending towards greater geographic clustering as opposed to dispersal. Over the past three presidential elections, the $z$-value for Moran’s I measure of spatial autocorrelation has increased from 84.3% in 2008, to 88.5% in 2012, to 93.3% in 2016. These outputs suggest that over the study years, the relationship between the variables has grown less spatially random. Counties with high values of either the explanatory or response variables are
more likely to be near other high values- and low values near other lows- in 2016 as opposed to the year 2008.

For models incorporating all six religious traditions, all groups, WEP, BPRT, MPRT, CATH, ORTH, and LDSOTH, are simultaneously measured against the Standard Republican Margin and the adjusted $R^2$ value is computed. The value for the adjusted $R^2$ slightly increases each year, from 0.341 in 2008, to 0.357 in 2012, to 0.365 in 2016. Similar to the trend with Moran’s I z-values, this is suggestive of a steadily increasing importance with observing the relationship of concentrated religious populations and their voting behaviors.

To test for common socioeconomic confounders, two states were selected for further analysis comparing additional variables such as county GDP and racial background, specifically percentage white. For the 2012 election year, Illinois and Tennessee were both compared with and without these control variables to measure their fit within the model. With controls, Illinois’ 102 counties yield an adjusted $R^2$ value of 0.587, and without, that value is nearly identical at 0.587. Tennessee’s 95 counties with controls yield an adjusted $R^2$ value of 0.533 and without, that value is more notably less at 0.517. The fact that adjusted $R^2$ values are initially 20-25 points higher at the state level than the nationwide level is likely because nationally, there is more variation to explain than across one single state. Illinois’ $R^2$ value is likely lower than Tennessee because the state is less internally homogenous to begin with. Though adjusted $R^2$ values and the OLS outputs (see Figure 11 and 12 below) do not suggest large shifts when incorporating control variables, variables such as GDP and racial composition of a county undeniably have effects that should be noted when drawing conclusions from this study. This illustrates one limitation of this study and provides an adequate starting point for future research.
Conclusions

Most basically, the research set out to find evidence for the claim that increased internal homogeneity of religious groups is most magnified within geographically homogenous regions. The tendency for religious groups to align with similar political ideologies is not unique to either
the Democratic or the Republican Party. The overwhelming statistically significant results suggests that some real relationship does exist between geographically homogenous regions of religious traditions and the party individuals from that region vote for in presidential elections. These findings lead to further belief that geographically homogenous religious groups are simultaneously more likely to be internally homogenous, also in line with the narrative of Tobler’s First Law of Geography.

Hypothesis 1 stated that geo-regions with high concentrations of White Evangelical Protestants and Mormons would be positively correlated with vote for the Republican Party because of the historical internal homogeneity of these religious groups. The results showed that concentration of WEP, MPRT and LDSOTH were all positively correlated with vote for the Republican Party. Out of all three of the election cycles, WEP were consistently statistically significant, there were 2 election years where LDSOTH were statistically significant, 2008 and 2012, and only 1 year were the yields from MPRT concentration statistically significant, 2016. By observing the spread of the dependent variable, Standard Republican Margin, White Evangelicals resulted as the least variable subcategory, Mainline Protestants varying moderately, and LDSOTH varying quite dramatically. Should the “other religious” have been divided more precisely, the LDS group would likely not have suffered such a wide range of deviations.

Hypothesis 2 stated that geo-regions with high concentrations of Black Protestants would be negatively correlated with vote for the Republican Party because of the group’s historical internal homogeneity in opposition with the GOP. The results here showed that CATH, BPRT, and ORTH all were negatively correlated, and Catholics even yielded a larger coefficient than that of the Black Protestant religious tradition. These results are contrary to the initial predictions, as Catholics were not theorized to be internally homogenous. Measuring the
dependent variable for Black Protestants and Orthodox Christians, relatively tight spreads were observed. Alternatively, Catholics were highly variable in the range of outputs for Standard Republican Margin. One potential reason the Catholic subcategory returned the final outputs could include the differing attitudes towards Republican candidates from Hispanic Catholics and non-Hispanic Catholics that went unaccounted for in the model. Future research could also benefit from closer observation of this important religious-political divide.

This leads into Hypothesis 3, which stated that geo-regions with high concentration of Catholics, Mainline Protestants and Orthodox Christians would not significantly be correlated with vote for either political party. Within the years 2008, 2012, and 2016 and across all six religious tradition groups, only Mainline Protestant trendlines yielded statistically insignificant results in the first two election years 2008 and 2012. By 2016, Mainline Protestants had significantly joined the ranks in voting for the Republican candidate. Should Hispanic Catholics have been removed from the model, the Catholic subcategory may have been in line with Hypothesis 3, and not have yielded a significant negative correlation.

When analyzing the data across election years, Hypothesis 4 predicted homogeneity to be independent of growing polarization forcing the nation’s voters towards the extremes in recent years. Generally, slopes and coefficients did not reflect a division among groups supporting the Republican Party, except in the case of Mainline Protestants, who appear quite pluralist in 2008 by concentrations being correlated with vote for both major parties. However, by 2016, Mainline Protestant loyalty grew to be more clearly in favor of the Republican Party. Democrats saw similar trends among Black Protestants and Orthodox Christians, but neither group was as split at the onset of the study in 2008 like the Mainline Protestant tradition. The Catholic religious group fluctuated back and forth instead of following one direction over time, ending in
2016 slightly more in support for the Democratic Party than in 2008. These findings suggest polarization may not have as large of effects on the outcome of vote share for the Republican Party.

Previously, I hypothesized that religious traditions in favor of the Republican Party would yield more statistically significant coefficients than their left-leaning counterparts when explaining the dependent variable, voter margin. This hypothesis does not prove to be consistent with the results; the relationship between BPRT, CATH, ORTH and SRM across all three election years is statistically significant every year with a negative slope through the data. It is very important to understand that what is expected for individuals may not have proved true at the group-level analysis. Another opportunity for future research could be closely following a few individuals and collecting timeseries data across the election cycles to observe the individual trends.

The relationship between concentrated religious group and vote for a given political party did not hold the same significance when analyzing the results in the positive direction. Though WEP results were consistently significant, both LDSOTH and MPRT gave insignificant values in one and two of the election years, respectively. One major limitation is associated with the sorting of the LDS and Other Religious group, as the ARDA data has lumped Muslim, Jewish, and other estimates (refer to Appendix A) in with this subcategory. Though the Church of Latter-Day Saints may have strong internal homogeneity, it is extremely likely that their effects are negated by the influence of other religious groups that are not as internally homogenous. If specific other religious groups, such as Muslim or Jewish populations, are internally homogenous in favor of the Democratic party opposite to the LDS, then the internal homogeneity of the LDS/OTH subcategory would be nullified.
Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of this study is the observation of an increasing Moran’s I value over the course of the last three presidential election years. The incremental increase Moran’s I, a measure of spatial autocorrelation, raises questions about increased ideological polarization across the country. The importance of observing the level of spatial autocorrelation lies in the fact that individuals are gravitating towards other members of similar religious and political ideology; whether this is a conscious or subconscious decision remains unanswered. In addition, such measures could suggest that local decisions based on geographic self-selection could be driving this trend. This is suggestive of ‘Tiebout Sorting,’ where consumer-voters are willing (but also able) to move to areas that match their preferences and values. These voters have acknowledged the difference in expenditures and freely choose to reside in one of the many communities that follows a predetermined pattern of beliefs (Tiebout, 1956).

A point of contention with this theory is that political economists argue not all individuals are realistically mobile; restrictions on employment and variation in community population as well as cost of living all affect the ability of individuals to relocate. However, with measures of spatial autocorrelation rising over the past three elections, voters seeking out areas tolerant of their religious and political ideology may be more common at present then in previous election cycles.

**Discussion**

When it comes to religious tradition, change is often a slow-moving process. Some would rather change where they live then change what they believe. Others might feel more strongly about their political beliefs than their religious beliefs, and act similarly. Nonetheless, we must be cautious about predicting any rapid transitions in the American political landscape.
National elections are never decided by one factor alone. Surely the relationship between religiously concentrated local communities and voting can be predictive of larger patterns developing on the national level, but varying candidate profiles, party platforms, campaign strategies, and many more factors all contribute to the outcomes of National elections.

Geography will continue to be a factor that drives electoral competition. Voting blocs within urban or rural locales prioritize religious and political identification differently. In attempt to understand what really drives group and individual vote, it is difficult to narrow down just one factor that can be controlled for. It is no surprise that citizens are a product of many societal factors, but the choices those citizens have vary from place to place. Are there too many choices of which religion or party to identify with in a large urban area? Does having too many choices prevent city-dwellers from making any decision at all? It could be that religiously homogenous areas make the decision easy- or even expected. These are all questions I would love to explore at a deeper level.

Should the findings of this study continue within the current trajectories, the candidates that study the developing trends among local concentrations of religious groups could have an advantage on the campaign trail in 2020. According to the current trajectories, geo-regions with high concentrations of White Evangelical Protestants will likely continue to prove loyal Republican territory, maintaining a tight grip on their 23% portion of the national electorate. Likewise, Catholic, Black Protestant and Orthodox Christian hotspots may mirror these electoral effects in loyal Democratic territory as polarization is predicted to continue gradually increasing. Mainline Protestants seem to be rising in loyalty towards the Republican Party, but a Democratic candidate that appeals to the Mainline Protestant base may be able to reverse the trajectory for
this large constituency that makes up roughly 14% of the American electorate as previously mentioned (University of Akron, 2008).

Based on the findings of this study, the religious traditions that candidates may find the most success appealing to is the members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints as well as other faith traditions, such as the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other smaller faith traditions. Further research could also be conducted predicting the impact that concentration of non-religious and unaffiliated have. The map in Figure 13 below shows counties cross-hatched in light purple labelled as “fringe counties.” Such counties with this label do not fall within the confidence interval of the explanatory or response variables that would render that county a hotspot or cold spot. Essentially, these are the toss-up counties in which religious tradition is not particularly impactful on constituent’s vote, and in addition the county is not likely considered an electoral “safe seat.” A case could be made for a campaign strategy that appeals to the fringe counties across the American Southwest- Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, throughout Nevada into Oregon as well as counties in Central Illinois and Kansas. This might be a strategy that assists in securing vote share among candidates that do not appeal to the given religious traditions.

**Figure 13.** Fringe Counties Not Falling within Religious Tradition/Political Party Hot or Cold Spots, 2016
Should the results of the 2020 election be consistent with the narrative of this research, the next election should see White Evangelical and Mainline Protestant hotspots as the major supporters of the Republican Party nominee, as well as significant Catholic, Black Protestant, and Orthodox Christian support for the Democratic nominee. High geographic concentrations of the Church of Latter-Day Saints and Other Religious are the most likely to be a toss-up, as the parties continue to polarize but the LDS/Other group remains diluted with a variety of political affiliations.

Future research should be conducted on the impact of the non-religious and whether they would have similar effects when geographically concentrated like religious groups. The subcategory claimed 21% of the electorate in the most recent Presidential election, a margin up from 14% in 2008 and now representing the largest religious voting bloc (Ingraham, 2016). Understanding how the non-religious and unaffiliated choose to cast their vote will be critical for
predicting the outcome of national elections for years to come. Additionally, timeseries studies could be extremely valuable in order to compare the same individuals who have lived in both religiously homogenous and heterogenous regions and studying their voting patterns across time. Following individual voters over a long period of time would be beneficial in narrowing down which individual and group identities are most responsible for swinging votes and impacting elections.
Appendix A

Mainline Protestant Denominations

The following Mainline Protestant denominations are included in the Religious Congregations & Membership Study 2000.

American Baptist Churches in the USA
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Congregational Christian Churches, Additional (not part of any national CCC body)
Episcopal Church
Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends (Quakers)
International Council of Community Churches
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Moravian Church in America--Alaska Province
Moravian Church in America--Northern Province
Moravian Church in America--Southern Province
National Association of Congregational Christian Churches
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Reformed Church in America
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church
Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

Black Protestant Denominations

Historically, the Black Church has been composed of seven major denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Church of God in Christ, the National Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc..

While the religious-meaning system and social organization of these denominations are similar to those found in white evangelical denominations, African American Protestants emphasize different aspects of Christian doctrine, especially the importance of freedom and the quest for justice. Black Protestants tend to be liberal on economic attitudes and conservative on social issues.

The following 12 Black Protestant denominations are included in the Religious Congregations & Membership Study 2010.

African Methodist Episcopal Church
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Church of God in Christ
Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Inc.
Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America
Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship
National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.
National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.
National Missionary Baptist Convention, Inc.
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
United Holy Church of America, Inc.
Evangelical Protestant Denominations

Evangelical Protestant denominations emphasize a personal relationship with Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, and the importance of sharing faith with non-believers. Evangelical Protestantism is usually seen as more theologically and socially conservative than Mainline Protestantism, although there is obviously variation between denominations, congregations, and individuals within the "Evangelical" category.

The following 146 Evangelical Protestant denominations are included in the Religious Congregations & Membership Study 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)</td>
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<td>Church of God (Seventh Day)</td>
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<td>Church of God by Faith, Inc.</td>
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<td>Church of God General Conference</td>
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<td>Church of God in Christ, Mennonite</td>
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<td>Church of God of Prophecy</td>
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<td>Church of the Apostolic Faith, Inc.</td>
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<td>Church of God, Mountain Assembly, Inc.</td>
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<td>Church of the Brethren</td>
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<td>Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America</td>
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<td>Church of the Lutheran Confession</td>
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<td>Church of the Nazarene</td>
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<td>Churches of Christ</td>
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<td>Churches of Christ in Christian Union</td>
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<td>Churches of God, General Conference</td>
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<td>Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches</td>
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<td>Congregational Holiness Church</td>
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<td>Congregational Methodist Church</td>
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<td>Conservative Baptist Association of America</td>
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<td>Conservative Congregational Christian Conference</td>
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<td>Conservative Lutheran Association</td>
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<td>Conservative Mennonite Conference</td>
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<td>Conservative Yearly Meetings of Friends</td>
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<td>Convention of Original Free Will Baptists</td>
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<td>Converge Worldwide/Baptist General Conference</td>
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<td>Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church</td>
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<td>Cumberland Presbyterian Church</td>
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<td>Elim Fellowship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enterprise Baptists Association</td>
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Evangelical Association of Reformed, and Congregational Christian Churches
Evangelical Church, The
Evangelical Congregational Church, The
Evangelical Covenant Church, The
Evangelical Free Church of America, The
Evangelical Friends Church International
Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Evangelical Methodist Church
Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Federation of Reformed Churches
Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches
Fellowship of Evangelical Churches
Foursquare Gospel, International Church of the
Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)
Free Methodist Church of North America
Free Presbyterian Church of North America
Free Reformed Church of North America
Fundamental Baptist Fellowship
General Association of Regular Baptist Churches
Grace Gospel Fellowship
Heritage Reformed Churches
Hutterian Brethren
Independent Baptist Fellowship
International
Independent Fundamental Churches of America
International Churches of Christ
International Fellowship of Bible Churches
International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies
International Pentecostal Church of Christ
International Pentecostal Holiness Church
Korean Presbyterian Church Abroad
Korean Presbyterian Church in America
Korean-American Presbyterian Church
Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod
Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ
Maranatha Amish Mennonite
Mennonite Christian Fellowship
Mennonite Church USA
Midwest Beachy Amish Mennonite
Midwest Congregational Christian Fellowship
Missionary Church, The
National Association of Free Will Baptists
New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches
Non-denominational
North American Baptist Conference
North American Lutheran Church
Old Order River Brethren
Open Bible Standard Churches, Inc.
Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The
Pentecostal Church of God
Pentecostal Fire-Baptized Holiness Church
Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, Inc.
Pillar of Fire
Presbyterian Church in America
Presbyterian Reformed Church
Primitive Baptists, Eastern District
Assembly
Primitive Methodist Church in the USA
Protestant Reformed Churches in America
Reformed Baptist Churches
Reformed Church in the United States
Reformed Mennonite Church
Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly
Reformed Presbyterian Church Hanover Presbytery
Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
Salvation Army
Schwenkfelder Church
Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, USA and Canada
Seventh-day Adventist Church
Southern Baptist Convention
Southern Methodist Church
Tampico Amish Mennonite
U.S. Mennonite Brethren
Unaffiliated Conservative Amish Mennonite Church
United Pentecostal Church International
United Pentecostal Council of the
Assemblies of God
United Reformed Churches in North America
United Zion Church

Unity of the Brethren
Vineyard USA
Wesleyan Church, The
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Catholic Denominations

Roman Catholicism is an ancient, liturgical, sacramental, and western form of Christianity. Roman Catholic doctrine emphasizes the Trinity and Jesus Christ’s incarnation. The Roman Catholic organizational structure is hierarchical with the Pope presiding over all Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church is currently the largest religious body in the United States. This family also includes the Polish National Catholic Church.

The following Catholic denominations are included in the Religious Congregations & Membership Study 2010.
Catholic Church
Polish National Catholic Church
United Catholic Church, Inc.

Other Denominations
The following "other" denominations are included in the Religious Congregations & Membership Study 2000.

Bahá’ís
Buddhists
Church of Christ, Scientist
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Hindus
Jains
Jewish
Muslims Estimate
Sikhs
Taoists
Unitarian Universalist Association
Zoroastrians

2 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be removed from the “other” category and isolated.
Works Cited


Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990. Collected by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) and distributed by the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.theARDA.com).


