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# A Mighty Ballot: Patterns of Voting Discussion in Christian Publications During Presidential Elections, 1960-2008

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A Mighty Ballot: Patterns of Voting Discussion in Christian Publications  
During Presidential Elections, 1960-2008

by

Erica J. Dollhopf

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## Introduction

Religious institutions have been engaged in United States political life since the first religious exiles began founding colonies in what would become the United States during the seventeenth century. As the United States established itself and expanded its boundaries during the nineteenth century, religious groups were notably engaged in political issues such as slavery, tariffs, and imperialism.<sup>1</sup> While outlooks on religious participation vary across American religious traditions, across time, and sometimes within a person's life – Jerry Falwell, before forming the Moral Majority, argued against Christian political engagement so as to not interfere with evangelization efforts<sup>2</sup> - members of religious organizations have engaged in the polity through voting, working for candidates, running for office, and the myriad levels of political engagement in between. *The Diminishing Divide* describes the relationship between religion and politics for Americans as one that is deeply intertwined: “Because politics concerns how people arrange their lives together, it is inevitable that religion and politics will intersect and that religious beliefs will inform and influence political views.”<sup>3</sup> Religious publications concerned with current events have discussed regularly and at length the ways in which religious beliefs should be “informing and influencing” political views as well as political behavior from the latter half of the twentieth century into the present day.

Although incidences of political behavior on behalf of religious organizations and individuals is well-documented, the discussion and reasoning behind this behavior is more challenging to capture and is consequently less well-documented.<sup>4</sup> Of the many manifestations of American political behavior, though, voting for president is one activity that is a clearly-defined, regular act, well-recorded across time, and afforded to virtually every United States citizen of voting age.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as Kenneth Wald states in *Religion and Politics in the United States*, “Presidential elections give citizens an opportunity to act on their more abstract political leanings.”<sup>6</sup> These abstract leanings are certainly formed through a variety of influences, including race, socio-economic standing, geographic community, and politics.<sup>7</sup> Robert Wuthnow argues in the *Restructuring of*

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 151-152.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Kohut, et. al., *The Diminishing Divide* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 2000), 34.

<sup>4</sup> See Dawne Moon, *God, Sex, and Politics: Homosexuality and Everyday Theologies* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> This ideal, of course, only becoming close to reality with the passage of the nineteenth amendment to the US Constitution in 1920 and the Civil Rights Act of 1960 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Although poverty and racism, among other things, continue to disenfranchise voters, most *legal* barriers to adult suffrage have been removed in the twentieth century.

<sup>6</sup> Wald, 177.

<sup>7</sup> These have been analyzed in works including: Andrew Kohut, et. al., *The Diminishing Divide*; Paul Allen Beck, et. al., “The Social Calculus of Voting: Interpersonal, Media, and Organizational Influences on Presidential Choices,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Mar., 2002), 57-73; Eric L. McDaniel and Christopher G. Ellison, “God's Party? Race, Religion, and Partisanship over Time,” *Political*

*American Religion* that these factors have also affected political realignments in post-World War II America.<sup>8</sup>

Studying religious discussions of presidential voting behavior allows for the comparison political discussions across organizations and time. Since religious periodicals provide a forum and ultimately a record for such discussions, they are an obvious source of research. For the sake of limiting the scope of the study, Christianity was selected as the focus, being the dominant form of religious identity in the United States.<sup>9</sup> To contribute to an understanding of American religious-political behavior, this study seeks to answer how engaged in voting discussion have major Christian publications been during presidential elections from 1960-2008 and how has this voting discussion been framed.

Frame analysis provides a systematic way to organize a publication's overarching rhetorical arguments. Framing is generally used as a device used to create a rhetorical structure through which the world can be understood. In his landmark 1974 work, Erving Goffman introduced the concept of framing, remarking that "...each primary framework allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms."<sup>10</sup> David Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven Worden, and Robert Benford built on Goffman's concept in their 1986 "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," articulating the process by which a social movement organization member aligns his or her views with the with the movement's aims through frame bridging, linking two related but independent concepts; frame alignment, elaborating on an established frame; frame extension, when a person is drawn to be personally concerned about a framed issue; and frame transformation, when a new outlook completely replaces an old one, which no longer guides a person's thinking. A wide variety of literature has reviewed the usefulness and implications of framing theory for analyzing social situations.<sup>11</sup> From this conceptual standpoint, then, this study examines of Christian publications' framing as an expression of their political aims as manifested during presidential elections. Although this study cannot measure the efficacy of framing, patterns of sustained framing emerge when compared across time.

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*Research Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Jun., 2008), 180-191; Laura R. Olson and John C. Green, "The Religion Gap," *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Jul., 2006), 455-459.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> 78.5% of Americans are identified as Christian, according to a 2007 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Affiliations, (2007), Retrieved April 17, 2010 from <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>.

<sup>10</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 21.

<sup>11</sup> See Benford, Robert D., "An Insider's Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective," *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (Fall 1997): 409-430; Benford, Robert and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26 (2000): 611-639; Fisher, K., "Locating Frames in the Discursive Universe," *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Sept. 30, 1997): U40-U62; Hart, S., "The Cultural Dimension of Social Movements: A Theoretical Reassessment and Literature Reivew," *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spr. 1996): 87-100; Jasper, James. M. *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Steinberg, M. W. "Tilting the Frame: Considerations on Collective Action Framing From a Discursive Turn," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 6 (Dec. 1998): 845-872.

Anna Greenberg's "The Church and the Revitalization of Politics and Community" uses framing in a specifically political-religious context in her work, "The Church and the Revitalization of Politics and Community," to describe the rhetorical connection church leaders make between civic and Christian duties.<sup>12</sup> According to Greenburg, this kind of framing is employed to convey the importance of Christian voices in public life and thereby encourage members to engage in political activity such as voting, contacting public officials, and community outreach.<sup>13</sup> Both Kenneth Wald and Ted Jelen use framing to describe the rhetorical relationship of the Christian Coalition in the 1990s to the American public and why a change in framing made the Christian Coalition's appeals more effective than those of the Moral Majority in the 1980s.<sup>14</sup> These authors agree that the Christian Coalition's adoption of rights-based language in favor of the Moral Majority's biblical language enabled the organization to appeal more broadly to Americans.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, this study seeks to identify framing activity that links a religious concept to political behavior while analyzing the objects of this framing and its efficacy in achieving these objectives.

Given this theoretical basis and existing scholarship, the results of the study will be analyzed both election-by-election and through a framing comparison. The overall trend of election coverage will be reviewed in the "Trends over Time" section in order to examine the evidence in context with historical electoral forces and outcomes. Later, cross-publication framing patterns will be explored in "Additional Framing Trends" to discuss denominational differences in framing activity.

## **Methodology:**

Building on the previous applications of framing discussed in the introduction, this study uses the concept to parse out the political objectives of *America, Christian Century*, and *Christianity Today* and analyze the intent as well as the repercussions of their framing strategies. The goal of publication selection for this study was to find the most widely-distributed Christian publications with a regular discussion of politics in order to capture the most popular or widespread Christian political perspectives possible, establishing as much as possible a relationship between the publications and national religious and political trends. The publications used in analysis were taken from the online database Ulrich's Periodicals directory ([www.ulrichsweb.com](http://www.ulrichsweb.com)), a periodicals database compiling detailed publisher and publication data for periodicals worldwide. The initial sample of publication came from the pool of all English-language publications that are distributed in the United States, Christian in nature, have been an active

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<sup>12</sup> Anna Greenberg, "The Church and the Revitalization of Politics and Community," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115, No. 3, 382 (Autumn 2000): 377-394, JSTOR, Lehigh University Library, Bethlehem, PA, 13 June 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Greenberg, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Wald, 236; Ted G. Jelen, "Cultural Wars and the Party System: Religion and Realignment, 1972-1993," *Cultural Wars in American Politics*, Ed. Rhys H. Williams (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), 153.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

publication for at least ten of the years that the study covers, and have a circulation as currently listed in Ulrich over 20,000.<sup>16</sup> Publications needed to be published at least quarterly so that any election coverage was certain to be captured. Finally, in order to ensure the selected publications were as general interest as possible, special interest publications (e.g., those aimed towards singles, women, a single geographic region) were eliminated along with publications that did not discuss politics, such as publications aimed at missionaries. Newspapers were also excluded.

From this narrowed pool of 60 publications, the publications were then profiled on WorldCat ([www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)), an online search service providing detailed information about resources held in library collections. With this profiling, the cultural penetration of each publication was determined by the number of libraries in the United States that have part or all of the publication in their holdings. The three publications that were held significantly more than any others were *America*, *Christian Century*, and *Christianity Today*, partially or completely held in 2,670; 3,076; and 2,834 libraries across the U.S., respectively.<sup>17</sup> Copies of these publications were obtained via microfilm and directly from the publication, both physical and electronic.

All articles referencing the upcoming presidential election in some way were gathered from each election year, 1960-2008. Articles were collected from June of the election year through the last issue published in November before the election. This time frame was selected to ensure a consistent time frame across election years and the shift from selecting candidates at party conventions to selecting candidates through primaries. Since this study is only examining framing activity directed towards the general election, this approximately six month window during each election allowed the analysis to focus on the articles most relevant to the general election.

Once collected, the articles were coded and analyzed with the help of the software ATLAS.ti. This qualitative analysis software allows innovative research design, giving the use ways to categorize and compare far vastly more pages of text pages than would have been possible to do manually. For example, this particularly project would have required nearly 2,000 printed pages of text for its analysis, but through ATLAS.ti, this study's 920 articles could be organized and compared completely electronically. After coding, articles can be compared easily by category, such as election, publication, or issue, allowing for a much more comprehensive study than possible without the software.

Coding within ATLAS.ti refers to the use selection of text or an image and tagging it with a user-generated identifier, known as a code. This can be as simple as coding an article title with the name of the publication from which it came. More abstract concepts, such as the framing used in this study, can also be coded and elaborated on with explanatory notes attached to the coding instance. When each

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<sup>16</sup> This selection was created through a search of: Subject, Religions and Theology; Start year, 1700-1999; Circulation, from 20,000; Status, Active OR Ceased; Serial type, Consumer OR Academic. Academic publications were considered widely distributed enough to be influential with a circulation of over 20,000. From this grouping, periodicals were further narrowed based on relevance to the study. Bible study guides, curriculum guides, and music guides were excluded.

<sup>17</sup> For comparison, the fourth most widely-held publication under this study's criteria is *US Catholic*, available in only 1,134 libraries nationwide, which is less than half of those of the top three publications.



document has been coded, the text can be comprehensively analyzed through the comparison of all text segments that have been tagged with a particular code.

From the universe of articles that pertained to elections, all articles were coded based on publication, month, and year. The resulting article totals were: *America*, 405; *Christian Century*, 347; and *Christianity Today*, 168. Since the focus of the study is on the discussion of voting behavior, articles were then coded for whether or not voting discussion was present. Two independent coders reviewed an approximately 5% random sample of the articles for the presence of voting discussion.<sup>18</sup> Both coders agreed with the assessment of voting discussion's presence 80.0% of the time and both disagreed with the assessment of voting discussion's presence only 4.4% of the time. For those articles where voting discussion was, articles were then further coded for framing activity,<sup>19</sup> voting discussion (encouraged, discouraged and why) as well as for election years, election year months, publications, issues, candidates, parties, denominations and religions, and Biblical references.<sup>20</sup>

A few biases in this selection process are possible. Since the publications are partially selected based on circulation information, publications that do not supply this information publically were not included for consideration. Since most major publications share this information, this should have had little to no affect on the publications ultimately used for analysis; no major publications are known to have been excluded. Also, organizations that never mention politics in their publications, particularly as of a result of an explicit theological stance against political involvement, are not represented in this study, although such objections to voting are noted when discussed in the publications that are used. Furthermore, in using library holdings as a proxy for cultural penetration, a geographical and educational bias may be introduced. Since overall circulation data over time is neither readily available nor consistently measured across publications, however, library holdings are the most consistent available measurement.

## Results

The publication selection process had the fortunate outcome of including publications representing each of the major strains of Christianity within the United States. *America*, a Jesuit publication,<sup>21</sup> is a publication of the Roman Catholic Church, generally having an editorial staff comprised of Catholic clergy. Although the publication has a reputation of being on the liberal side of Catholicism, as a church publication, editors are expected to produce work consistent with church teachings. *Christian Century*, which is generally regarded as a moderate-to-liberal Protestant

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<sup>18</sup> 45 articles out of the 920 used in this study.

<sup>19</sup> See: Snow, David, et. al. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4, Aug. 1986: 464-481.

<sup>20</sup> For a complete list of codes, see Appendix A.

<sup>21</sup> History of America, (2010), Retrieved April 27, 2010 from <http://www.americamagazine.org/content/about-us.cfm>

publication, considers itself as having “informed and shaped progressive, mainline Christianity”<sup>22</sup> as a non-denominational publication. Perspectives offered and discussed in the publication, however, range from the mainline Protestant to Evangelical, Catholic, and even occasionally reporting context of election year coverage on denominations deliberately not politically active. In contrast, *Christianity Today*, which seeks to be a source to evangelical leaders,<sup>23</sup> covers elections mostly as they pertain to evangelical Christians.

The evidence from the study demonstrates that all three Christian publications have been unquestionably engaged in presidential election politics throughout the thirteen elections examined. Measured in quantity of articles per election across all publications, Figure 1 shows that, although the intensity of coverage varies, Christian publications have routinely covered presidential campaign news. In addition, when this coverage is broken down among the publications, every publication has provided coverage in every year, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

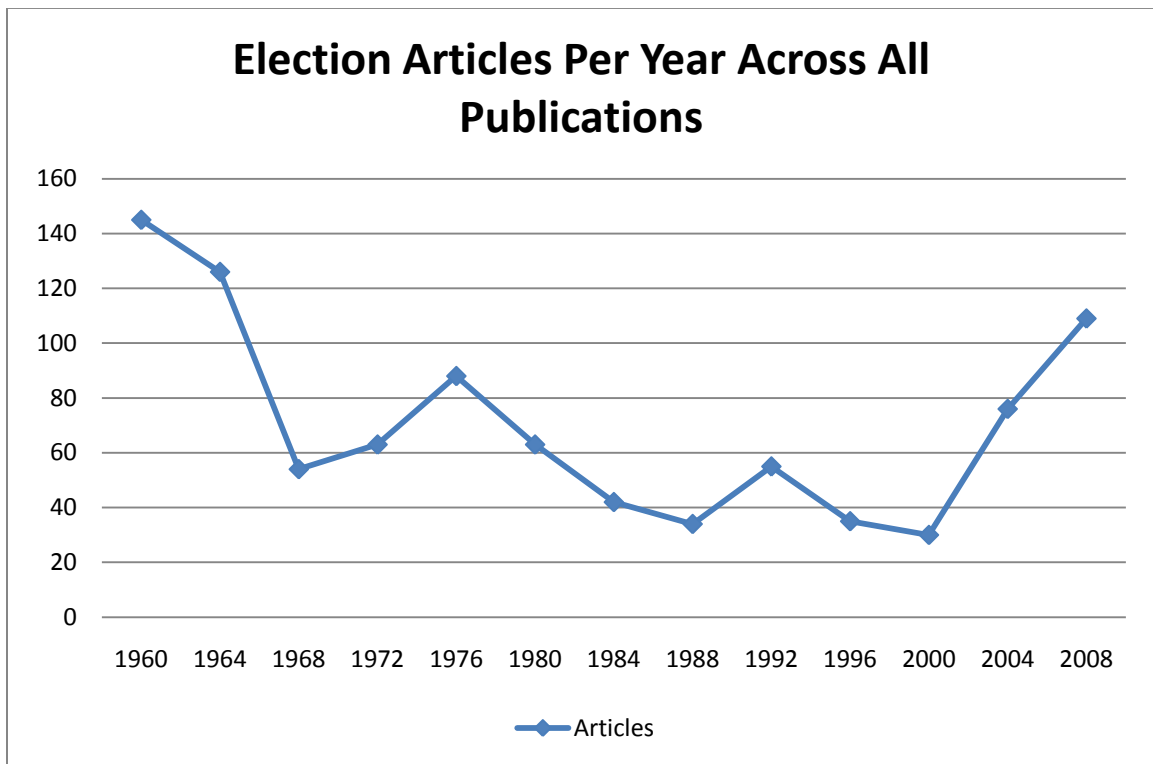


Figure 1

<sup>22</sup> About us, (2006), Retrieved April 6, 2010 from <http://www.christiancentury.org/cpage.lasso?cid=2>.

<sup>23</sup> Welcome to Christianity Today, (2010), Retrieved April 6, 2010 from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/help/info.html>.

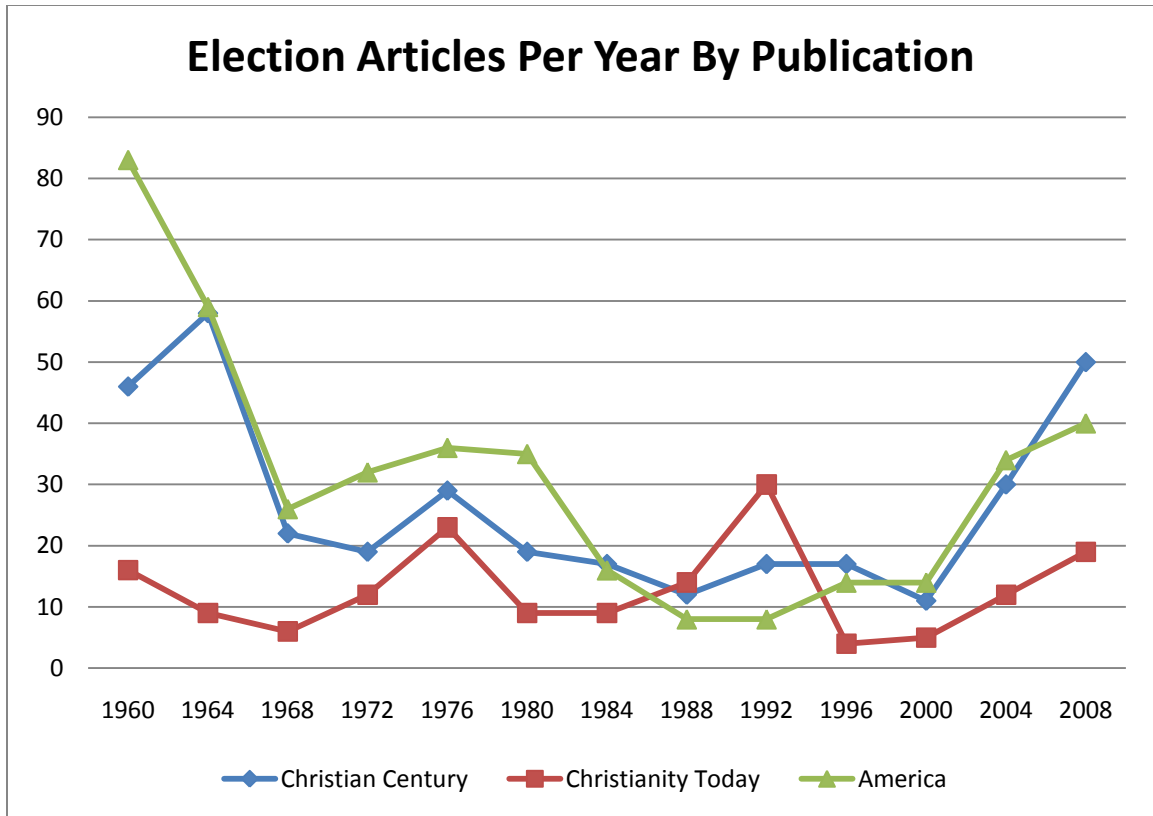


Figure 2

When comparing elections across time, a few notable trends emerge. Contrary to the popular idea that religious groups have only been interested in politics in recent decades, gradually building interest over time, this study has revealed that religious publications have covered presidential elections have been consistently covered since at least 1960. The heaviest amount of coverage, measured in number of articles, are the 1960 and 1964 presidential elections, followed by the 2008 election. Yet the three elections of the 1980s, for example, which are noted for the pointed courting of religious groups – particularly evangelical Christians – from presidential candidates, produced some of the fewest articles. When comparing the articles with voting discussion as a proportion of all election articles in a year across publications, the proportion generally varies between 20% and 50%; the trend appears to be slightly increasing across time (see fig. 3).

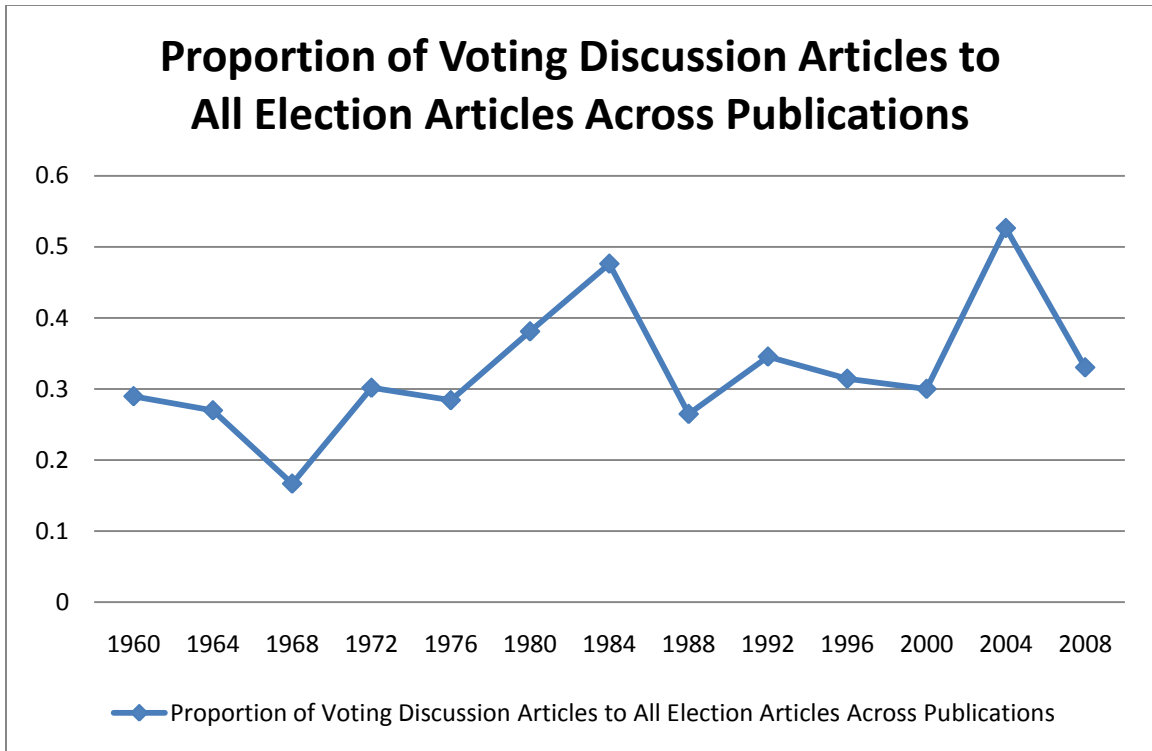


Figure 3

Figure 4 illustrates the proportion of all election articles over time and figure 5 makes the same comparison with only the election articles discussing voting. A further chronological examination of these trends among and within publications of article coverage illuminates what may have influenced an individual publication to become especially engaged in covering an individual election and why certain elections have garnered various levels of coverage across all publications.

## Distribution of Election Coverage Articles Across Time, By Publication

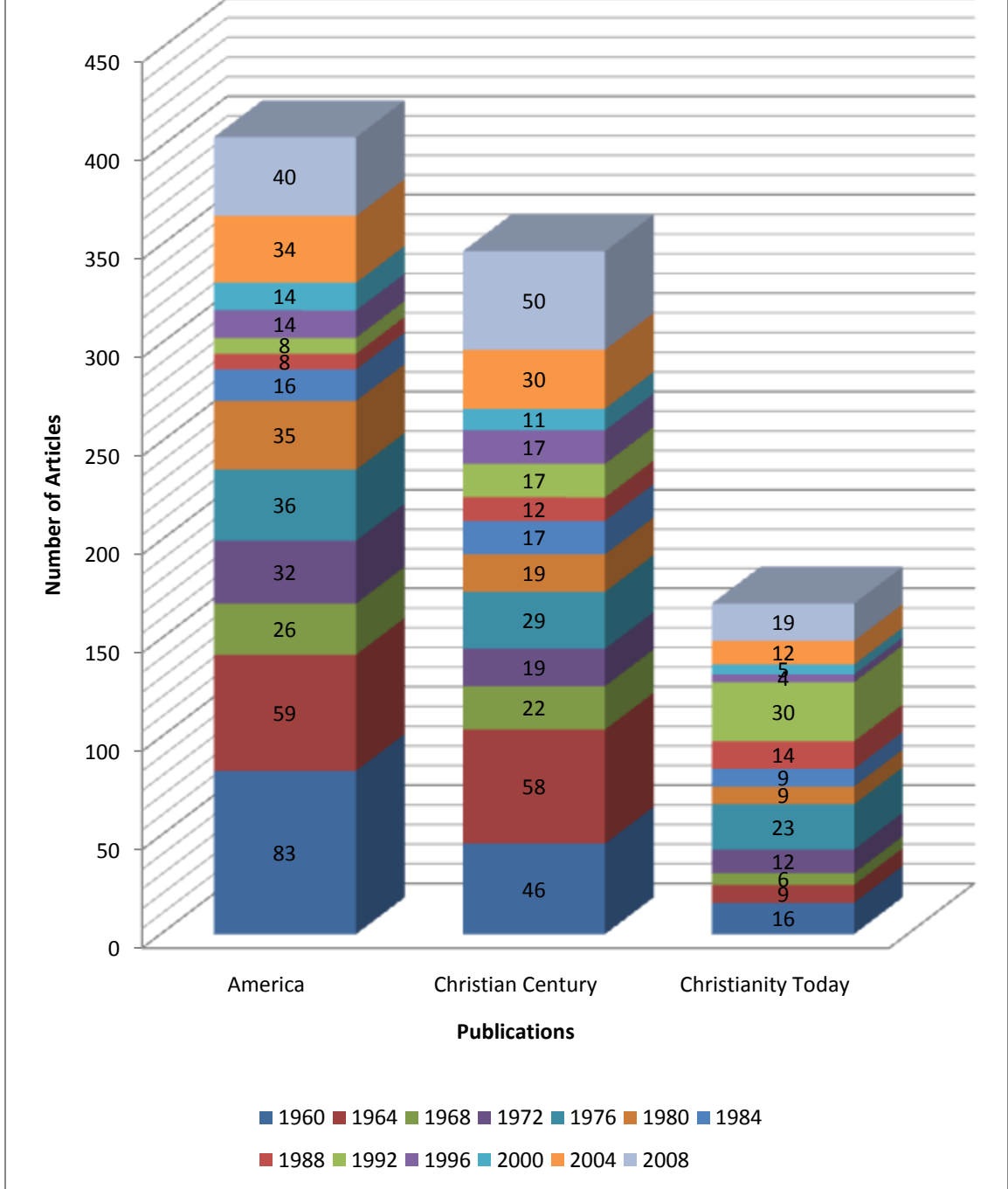


Fig. 4

## Distribution of Voting Discussion Articles Across Time, By Publication

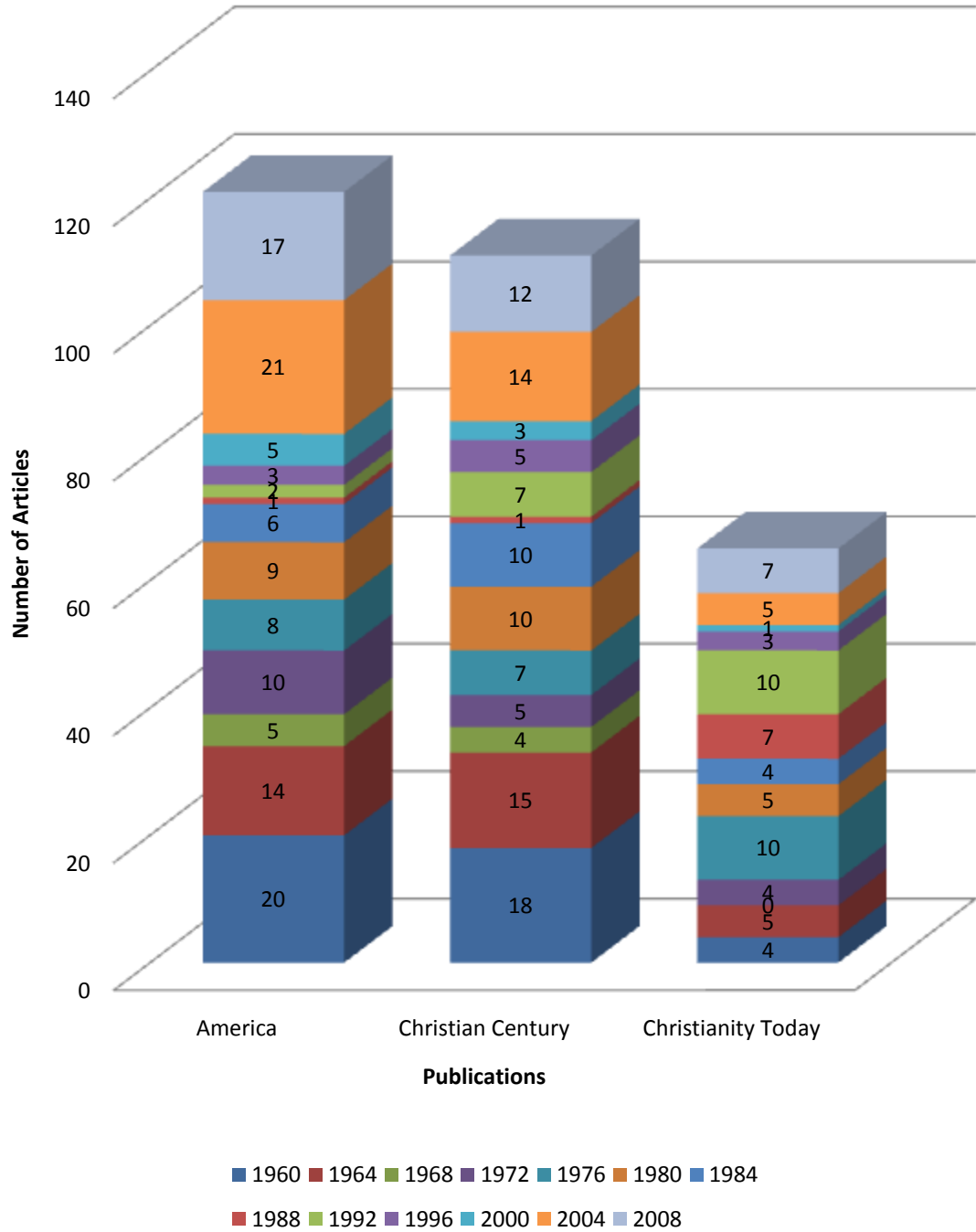


Fig. 5

## Trends over Time

### *1960: Kennedy-Nixon*

The Kennedy election entered uncharted religious territory in American history and consequently generated extensive political engagement across the nation and within religious communities. In considering the cyclical intensification of political interest among Christian publications, only the most recent presidential election (2008) has come close in intensity compared to the interest in the first two elections of the 1960s. The Kennedy-Nixon election of 1960 is the most impressive example of political engagement in this study, with an impressive 145 articles across all three publications. Of those 145 articles, 42 included voting discussion, which is also the most across all election years.

The majority of the election discussion came, not surprisingly, from *America*. As much as Kennedy's religion was of interest to the general electorate, the matter was particularly of interest to Roman Catholics because of the potential implications of a Kennedy election to the church. Although Kennedy asserted his political independence from the Church, stating he would not allow the church to control his decision-making,<sup>24</sup> his candidacy, though, evoked suspicion among some non-Catholics.<sup>25</sup>

While *Christianity Today* does not actively oppose Kennedy's election and does make a point to discuss some of blatant acts of Protestant bigotry towards Catholics during the campaign,<sup>26</sup> Kennedy's Catholicism is regarded critically in some letters to the editor.<sup>27</sup> *Christianity Today's* engagement in the Kennedy election, though, is also significant because it runs contrary the reputation of evangelical Christians for not becoming political active until the late 1970s and early 1980s. The publication does not just talk about the campaign, but also includes voting discussion in 25% of its 1960 election articles. Even earlier in time, evangelicals had been a major component of the New Deal Democratic Coalition and while evangelical support for the Democratic Party had diminished by 1960, evangelicals continued to be politically active.<sup>28</sup> Although Kennedy's Catholicism is likely to have resulted in evangelical votes for Nixon,<sup>29</sup> evangelicals nevertheless were demonstrably politically active in the 1960 election.

### *1964: Goldwater-Johnson*

1964 was another source of prolific and heated discussion among the three periodicals examined. *America* and *Christian Century* published campaign-related articles at essentially equivalent rates - 58 and 59 total articles, respectively, with 15 and

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<sup>24</sup> Allitt, 67.

<sup>25</sup> James H. Moorhead, "'God's Right Arm'? Minority Faiths and Protestant Visions of America," *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, Ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 337.

<sup>26</sup> See Pre-election Review of 'the Religious Issue,' (1960, Oct. 24), *Christianity Today*, pp. 25, 31.

<sup>27</sup> The Supra-partisan Level, (1960, Oct. 24), *Christianity Today*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>28</sup> Kohut, et. al., 88-89.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

14 articles containing voting discussion, respectively. *Christian Century*'s engagement, however, is remarkable for its active opposition to Barry Goldwater's candidacy, despite their tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization status, which states that such an organization may not "intervene in any political campaigns."<sup>30</sup> In a July 1, 1964 editorial, the publication declared, "if he [Goldwater] does obtain the nomination, we will do what we can to contribute to his defeat."<sup>31</sup> The same article goes on to explain their vehemence: "His election would in our opinion jeopardize the position of the United States in the word, would inflame the cold war and sap the confidence of our allies. His position on civil rights... would set our country back half a century."<sup>32</sup> The *Christian Century* editorial staff continued to speak out regularly against Goldwater, believing the national consequences of his election to be so severe that it warranted vocal opposition, even in one article comparing the current state of the US to that of 1933 Germany.<sup>33</sup>

*Christian Century*'s moral opposition was not without consequence. The IRS found the publication to be in violation of their tax status, which was subsequently revoked for a year. Also, during the campaign season, *Christian Century*'s editorial stance was met with derision in *Christianity Today*. An October 9, 1964 article expresses disapproval of various publications stance against Goldwater, mentioning *Christian Century* by name among other religious and non-religious publications, calling this "liberal press" "unfair and biased."<sup>34</sup> *America*, though thoroughly covering the election and its attendant controversies, takes neither an active stance against a candidate nor religious publication editorial policies.

#### *1968 and 1972: Humphrey and Nixon, McGovern and Nixon*

After the height of campaign discourse in 1960 and 1964, levels which would not be revisited for nearly four decades, a precipitous drop in election coverage occurs across all three publications, with only 54 articles in 1968 and 63 in 1972 – barely half of the coverage from either of the previous election cycles. Politics aside, one contributing factor is that after having their tax-exempt status revoked in 1964, *Christian Century* deliberately shied away from election coverage. An October 30, 1964 editorial acknowledges the silence, commenting "People with long memories recall the fun we had

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<sup>30</sup> Bette Novit Evans, *Interpreting the Free Exercise of Religion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 139. The entire provision for a 501(c)(3) reads: "1. It must be organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes; 2. No part of its net earnings may inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual; and 3. It must not engage in substantial lobbying activities or intervene in any political campaigns." (ibid)

<sup>31</sup> Goldwater? No!, (1964, Jul. 1), *Christian Century*, p.851 [microfilm page]. The same article also quips "We can think of only one circumstance which might lead the *Christian Century* to support Senator Goldwater for presidency of the United States. That circumstance would arise if Alabama's Governor Wallace were to sweep the Democratic convention and become the nominee of the party."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> The 1964 Religious Issue, (1964, Oct. 7), *Christian Century*, pp. 1227-1228[microfilm page]. . *Christian Century* also published the responses of readers opposed to their stance as well as their outspokenness, see Campaign and Candidates, (1964, Oct. 14), *Christianity Today*, pp. 1276-1277; Goldwater, (1964, Jul. 22) *Christian Century*, pp 933-935 [microfilm page].

<sup>34</sup> Current Religious Thought, (1964, Oct. 9), *Christianity Today*, p 55.



with the Goldwater-Johnson contest in 1964, and some of them have asked, ‘Whatever has happened in 1968?’”<sup>35</sup>

1972 is not much more discussed than 1968 among the three publications, especially when compared to the first two elections of the 1960s. Though the election is unremarkable as far as article coverage, the 1972 election marks the beginning of the most significant issue trend across presidential elections. Despite its absence in any voting discussion for three out of thirteen of the elections analyzed, abortion is the single most mentioned issue in the context of voting across all three publications, being mentioned in 107 articles across all elections.<sup>36</sup> The presence of abortion dwarfs the next most-mentioned issue, the economy, with a comparatively distant presence in 50 articles. Although *Christian Century* does not mention abortion in the context of voting until 1976, the first mentions appear in both *America* and *Christianity Today* in 1972.

The timing of this is not accidental. *Roe v Wade* was not decided until 1973, but the case was argued before the Supreme Court in 1971 and was therefore on the radar of organizations with strong convictions about the case’s desired outcome. Wald states that the Roman Catholic Church did not become politically active on the abortion issue “until the Supreme Court struck down most legal restriction on the availability of abortion,”<sup>37</sup> and certainly abortion is not discussed at length in either of the two 1972 *America* articles that mention it. *Christianity Today*’s initial mentions of abortion focus on the issue’s polarizing power, criticizing the “radical” element of George McGovern’s followers who “want public approval of...abortion on demand”<sup>38</sup> and in a later article, acknowledging that the religious community has become divided on the abortion issue, among other issues such as Vietnam and welfare.<sup>39</sup> These mentions of abortion are comparatively mild to the impassioned language that follows in the voting discussion of future elections, but *Christianity Today*’s inclusion of abortion as source of religious polarity is a statement that remains true over the span of this study.

### *1976: Ford and Carter*

After an eight-year lull in election coverage, 1976 was an election of interest for Christian publications, receiving relatively equal coverage from *America*, *Christian Century*, and *Christianity Today*. Compared to coverage of other elections, though, 1976 is especially notable for *Christianity Today*’s enthusiasm, being the publication’s second-most covered election behind 1992 (23 articles in 1976, 30 in 1992), and on equal footing with 1992’s level of voting discussion, with 10 articles each of coverage.

The most compelling subject for all the publications, however, is the candidacy of Jimmy Carter, a self-described born-again Christian at a time when such a statement was an anomaly for a presidential candidate. With one of their own in the spotlight, Robert

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<sup>35</sup> The Making of a President, 1968, (1968, Oct. 30), *Christian Century*, p 1387 [microfilm page].

<sup>36</sup> Only articles with voting discussion present were coded for candidates, parties, issues, denominations, and biblical references. With the exception of biblical references, codes in these categories were noted for first instance only so as to gauge the number of articles in which the code was present.

<sup>37</sup> Wald, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Objective 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, (1972, Jul. 28), *Christianity Today*, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Backing their Man, (1972, Oct. 27), *Christianity Today*, p. 38.

Wuthnow describes the effect in *The Restructuring of American Religion* as “provid[ing] evangelicals with a sense of political entitlement that they had not felt for a number of years. Suddenly it was part of one’s Christian duty to exercise the responsibilities of citizenship. Magazines like *Christianity Today* recovered from the earlier confusion and began running editorials encouraging their readers to become involved in political issues.”<sup>40</sup> The data from this study questions part of Wuthnow’s statement; *Christianity Today* appears to have been more engaged in covering the Carter election than in previous elections, but the publication did not seem to have been confused about whether or not to advocate political participation in previous elections.

A review of *Christianity Today*’s instances of articles encouraging voting behavior, however, suggests that this was not true for all evangelicals. 1964 had five instances of voting encouraged in *Christianity Today* and were consistent with the widespread evangelical support for Goldwater. Two of these instances discussed the way other religious organizations were encouraging voting against Goldwater (a practice *Christianity Today* cast in an unfavorable light, as discussed earlier),<sup>41</sup> two encouraged voting as a Christian duty,<sup>42</sup> and one because every vote counts.<sup>43</sup> Only one other instance encouraging voting behavior occurs before 1976, in a 1972 letter to the editor encouraging a write-in protest vote for a third party candidate because of the lack of quality candidates on the main party tickets.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, this evidence strongly suggests that the evangelical Christians publishing and perhaps reading *Christianity Today* felt their involvement in the political realm to be appropriate. Recalling Jerry Falwell’s proclamation of non-involvement discussed in the introduction, political involvement was likely an issue over which the evangelical community was divided, having seen pre-1976 expressions supporting both sides of the argument. What this most aptly demonstrates, perhaps, is that the evangelical community is broad and diverse; thereby categorizations of “evangelical activity” should be taken with that caveat.

The Christian publications’ attention on the 1976 election is further important to understanding how that election sets the political stage for the 1980s elections. Evangelicals may have found Carter initially attractive for his religion (despite *Christianity Today*’s urgings not to vote on that basis) and a nation may have found Carter’s wholesome demeanor a welcome change from the shroud of scandal that Nixon’s presidency cast on the office of president earlier in the decade.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, “faith alone” was not enough to retain evangelical support for Carter in a time when the New Christian Right sought to combat the forms immorality such as abortion, feminism, and homosexuality that, to them, Carter was not doing enough to oppose.<sup>46</sup> In the words of Steve Bruce, in his discussion of the divisions within the evangelical Christianity:

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<sup>40</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 199.

<sup>41</sup> Religion, Politics, and Tax Exemptions, (1964, Sept. 25), *Christianity Today*, n.p.; Politics and the Protestant Press, (1964 Nov. 6), *Christianity Today*, p. 1263 [microfilm page].

<sup>42</sup> Indifference Is No Virtue, (1964, Jul. 17), *Christianity Today*, p. 23; Squared Away for What, (1964, Sept. 11), *Christianity Today*, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> Getting Ready for November 3, (1964, Jul. 17), *Christianity Today*, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Copping Out, (1972, Oct. 27), *Christianity Today*, p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> Allitt, 151.

“Conservative Protestants may have had their morale boosted by having Jimmy Carter, a born again Baptist lay preacher, as President, but he acted like a liberal.”<sup>47</sup> In the 1980 election, evangelicals would turn their backs on Jimmy Carter for Ronald Reagan, who, despite his well-known lax church attendance, essentially promised evangelicals not to act like a liberal in exchange for their support.

*1980 – 1984: Carter and Reagan. Mondale and Reagan*

The 1980 elections are remembered for the widespread enlistment of evangelical Christians into political participation. Ronald Reagan aggressively courted the evangelical vote during both elections, despite being neither particularly religious (no church membership, donating little income to charity) nor personally exemplifying evangelical ideals (divorced, former Hollywood star).<sup>48</sup> The data, however, shows a decline in campaign discussion and voting discussion across the three publications studied for both 1980 and 1984 from the 1976 and much less than seen in the early 1960s. *Christianity Today* does not display unusual interest in either election compared to its other years of coverage or even to the other Christian publications in the study. What accounts for this discrepancy? Previous studies of the first two elections of the 1980s provide some insight on why these elections were not heavily covered despite their branding as having heavy religious influences.

First, the media coverage outside of religious publications may have overstated the role of role of evangelicals in the elections and only did so after the elections,<sup>49</sup> which would explain why during the elections none of the Christian periodicals studied paid unusual attention to the election. Clyde Wilcox contends that the media needed an “easy explanation” after the 1980 election to explain why Reagan defeated Carter after a dead heat in the polls weeks before the election.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Jerry Falwell had recently established the Moral Majority and was already garnering attention as a national evangelical figure. Wilcox furthers attributes inaccurate media coverage to Falwell, noting “he claimed that the Moral Majority and other Christian right organizations had mobilized previously apolitical fundamentalists and other evangelicals into electoral action.”<sup>51</sup> As a consequence, the groundswell of religious, particularly evangelical, support may have been overstated and construed in hindsight.

Another lens through which to view the unremarkable election coverage for both Reagan campaigns is through the central argument of Robert Wuthnow’s seminal *Restructuring of American Religion* that since World War II, religious groups have become increasingly aligned along a liberal-conservative axis rather than a denominational axis.<sup>52</sup> Patrick Allitt affirms this paradigmatic shift, noting that by the

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<sup>47</sup> Steve Bruce, *Rise and Fall of New Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 165.

<sup>48</sup> A 2004 *Christianity Today* article, “Wowed,” discusses this paradox in hindsight. (2004, Aug.), pp. 48-49.

<sup>49</sup> Clyde Wilcox, *God’s Warriors* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xiv.

<sup>50</sup> Wilcox, *God’s Warriors*, 96.

<sup>51</sup> Wilcox, *God’s Warriors*, 96.

<sup>52</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 1-13.

1980s, “an alliance of conservative Protestants and conservative Catholics was working together on ‘family,’ educational, and foreign policy issues against a coalition of liberal Protestants and liberal Catholics, with each faction enjoying support from a sharply divided Jewish community.”<sup>53</sup>

Given this information, why was the evangelical impact on the Reagan elections potentially overstated and why would Christian publications not cover the 1980 and 1984 elections with gusto? To the first question, Richard Pierard concluded in his study of the 1984 election that, “It is clear that although moral concerns occupied a central position in the campaign, they were not crucial to the voters' decisions. Those evangelicals who were predisposed toward Reagan would probably have voted for him anyway despite the informational efforts of the Christian Right.”<sup>54</sup> Evangelicals certainly mobilized for Reagan, but not in such a way that would have had a significant impact on the election. Returning to the publications, then, it is possible that an affect of the religious restructuring of political alignments is that the coalition of voters most strongly supporting Reagan simply was not represented among these Christian publications. Or, this may also indicate that much of Reagan’s support (he did win two elections, after all) actually came from outside of the religious community, thereby not necessarily filling the pages of Christian publications with debate.

#### *1988-1996: Bush I and Dukakis, Bush I and Clinton, Clinton and Dole*

1988 was an election of transition following eight years of a Ronald Reagan presidency. In article coverage, interest in 1988 had tapered from the 1980 election, although election coverage in the publications studied would not return to levels comparable to the 1960s until 2008. When observing the individual publications trends in fig. 2, *Christianity Today*’s election coverage actually *increased* in 1988 over 1980 and 1984.<sup>55</sup> This trend will take center stage in *Christianity Today*’s 1992 election coverage, but in 1988 was still developing. With this study’s focus on the general election, it does not capture an important element for Christian communities on both sides of the ideological divide, which were the Democrat and Republican primaries of 1988. Prominent clergy pursued the presidential nomination within each party; Jesse Jackson for the Democrats and Pat Robertson for the Republicans. Neither candidate, however, fared well in their respective primaries. Reagan’s vice president, George H. W. Bush, would ultimately capture the Republican nomination and defeat Michael Dukakis for the presidency, but by the general election, some of the more religiously salient headlines had passed.

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<sup>53</sup> Allitt, xiii.

<sup>54</sup> Richard V. Pierard, “Religion and the 1984 Election Campaign.” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 112-113 (Dec. 1985): 98-114. Clyde Wilcox reaches similar conclusions about the 1980 elections in *God’s Warriors*. Wald also comments on Wilcox’s findings that, “The most we can say from this evidence is that evangelicals may vote more heavily in national elections but only under extraordinary circumstances.” Wald, 253.

<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, this was in spite of concerns that the evangelical community would be apathetic towards the 1988 election. See Too Close to Call, (1988, Oct. 21), *Christianity Today*, p. 34.

George H. W. Bush encountered a different electoral environment by his 1992 campaign for reelection. *Christianity Today* takes notable interest in this election, fig. 4 displaying the prominence of this year in the publication's overall election coverage as well as compared to 1992 for *Christian Century* and *America*. *Christianity Today*'s proportion of article coverage for this election is especially significant when considering *Christianity Today* tends to have fewer articles overall than either of the other two publications. Even within the publication, 1992 is the most article-heavy year for *Christianity Today*, approaching one-fifth of all its election coverage in 1992 alone. The overall voting discussion, however, is unremarkable; comprising about 35% of all campaign-covering articles.

Clearly the 1992 election was significant to the evangelical community for reasons, as mentioned previously, that began to emerge in the 1988 election. Whereas the 1976 was important to evangelicals because of Jimmy Carter's nomination and the attendant conversation of what that meant for evangelicals in politics and for political participation, 1992 was important for the prominence of issues most imperative to the evangelical community. Rather than being focused on a candidate, the 1992 efforts were focused against Bill Clinton, whom the Christian Right vilified for his policies.

Clinton's pro-choice views were especially controversial in the evangelical community; two of the three 1992 *Christian Today* articles encouraging issues-based voting evoke Clinton's abortion stance and make it clear that this should be a deciding factor in casting one's vote (presumably against Clinton).<sup>56</sup> These sentiments were echoed in the 1992 GOP convention, during which Pat Buchanan was applauded for advocating a "religious war" for the soul of America," citing Clinton's positions on abortion, pornography, and gay rights as reasons to vote for George H. W. Bush.<sup>57</sup> In spite of these efforts the *Christian Century* reported in a November 5, 1992 published before the election that:

"A strong attempt of the Republican party to win the votes of religious conservatives has apparently failed...[poll respondents] who said they believe the Bible word for word were slightly more likely to favor Clinton despite the decision by Republican leaders to include luminaries of the Religious Right among the party's key speakers at the party's convention this year"<sup>58</sup>

Herein lies a puzzle. The voting discussion and framing within *Christianity Today* supports George H. W. Bush as did the Christian Right historically, yet even before Bush lost the election, polling tendencies of religious conservatives still favored Clinton, as mentioned above. The answer to this quandary lies outside the parameters of

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<sup>56</sup> Prolifers Look to Abortion Regulation, (1992, Aug. 17), *Christianity Today*, p. 44; Politics Over God's Creation, (1992, Nov. 9), *Christianity Today*, p. 5. The third article encouraging issues-based voting encourages women to stop "picking on" Hillary Clinton regardless of whether their stance on issues has them vote for another candidate. Why pick on Hillary?, (1992, Oct.), *Christianity Today*, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Wald, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Religious Conservatives for Clinton, (1992, Nov. 4), *Christian Century*, p. 992 [microfilm page].

the study and is not directly addressed in the present literature; making this subject a compelling issue for future research.

By the 1996 election, following the high level of campaign coverage in 1992, *Christianity Today* reaches its lowest level of election coverage, with only four articles discussing the campaigns. Coverage from *America* and *Christian Century*, as seen in Figure 2, continues to be relatively low as part of a precipitous drop in overall election coverage occurring after 1976. In a departure from the usual election-year discussions, though, the publications somewhat diagnose this change from within their own pages, indicating a sense of apathy leaning towards disdain for both of the candidates and their campaigns. *Christian Century* published an editorial in July which refers to Clinton and Dole as both having “uninspiring candidacies,” and finding little to be enthusiastic about on either ticket.<sup>59</sup> *America*, in its most substantive article on voting discussion in the 1996 campaign, does not find the candidates uninspiring, but neither does it find one completely preferable.<sup>60</sup>

*Christianity Today*, meanwhile, finds Clinton and Dole to be part of a trend towards indistinguishable candidates and suggest that eventually, when “the two giant political engines run along the same track, voters who find such a vision appealing are likely to stay home.”<sup>61</sup> The same article goes on to report overall born-again support going to toward Clinton, blaming this support on Republican alienation of voters for not addressing their issues (though the author points out that born-again evangelicals should not necessarily be Republicans).<sup>62</sup> Although this observation is made about the 1996 campaigns, it may well be a reaction to similar evangelical support for Clinton during 1992. This may also offer a clue to the evangelical behavioral disconnect in 1992, if not identifying the source, possibly lending insight to the evangelical interpretation of the election outcome.

#### *2000-2004: Bush II and Gore, Bush II and Kerry*

2000 received the least article coverage among *America*, *Christian Century*, and *Christianity Today*, with only thirty campaign articles covered, comprising only 3.2% of the election coverage from 1960-2008. Candidate George W. Bush’s conversion to evangelical Christianity was a well-known story and was even the subject of lengthy articles in the Christian press.<sup>63</sup> Al Gore’s selection of an Orthodox Jewish running mate in Joe Lieberman also made news and was the topic of additional discussion.<sup>64</sup> The publications may have had other priorities than campaign coverage, or perhaps could not

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<sup>59</sup> The System is Broken, (1996, Jul. 31), *Christian Century*, p. 750 [microfilm page].

<sup>60</sup> See Catholic Voters Pulled in Two Directions, (1996, Nov. 2), *America*, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> The Oprahcizing of American Politics, (1996, Oct. 7), *Christianity Today*, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> See Dubya-ism, (2000, Sept. 13), *Christian Century*, p. 912 [microfilm page]; A Presidential Hopeful’s Progress, (2000, Oct. 2), *Christianity Today*, p. 62.

<sup>64</sup> See Lieberman Says US Needs Spiritual Balance, (2000, Nov. 8), *Christian Century*, p. 1143 [microfilm page]; Observing Lieberman, (2000, Aug. 30-Sept. 6), *Christian Century*, p. 853 [microfilm page]; A Special Kind of Courage, (2000, Sept. 16), *America*, p. 6.

find enough content to cover. In hindsight, the 2000 election is probably better known for its electoral aftermath than any religious issue.

One clue in the lack of religious engagement with this election is in George W. Bush's treatment of the Christian Right. For all his talk of "compassionate conservatism," Bush attempted to distance himself from the Christian Right, for fear that they may hurt his campaign. According to a *Christian Century* article, at the 2000 GOP convention, "[Pat] Buchanan and [Newt] Gingrich were absent and the other icons of the Religious Right – Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Gary Bauer, and Alan Keyes – were hardly to be seen. It's not that they weren't invited; they were just told not to speak."<sup>65</sup> The silence of usually-vocal newsmakers during the campaign may have contributed to the flattened interest among Christian publications – whereas Pat Buchanan declared a "religious war" at the 1992 convention, he was not even present at the 2000 convention.<sup>66</sup>

What is most striking about the data of the 2000 election is that for its lack of coverage, four years later with one of the same candidates in the race, the coverage of 2004 explodes among the publications. After a trough in election coverage from 1976-2000, election coverage more than doubles in 2004 from 2000, leaping from 30 articles to 76 articles. Even more impressively, the number of articles containing voting discussion in 2004 (40) nearly equals that of 1960 (42), which is even more significant considering that 2004 generated about half the total articles that the 1960 election did. Not surprisingly, 2004 has the highest ratio of articles with voting discussion to overall coverage; over 50% (see fig. 3).

Whether or not the voting discussion had an actual affect on voting, the 2004 campaign is noted for the "increased Republicanism of evangelical and Catholic voters."<sup>67</sup> After a decrease in evangelical turnout in 1996 over 2000,<sup>68</sup> despite the evangelical George W. Bush's 2000 candidacy, "the Christian Right was widely perceived to be moribund."<sup>69</sup> 2004, however, brought a significant increase in conservative evangelical voters.<sup>70</sup> *Christianity Today* seems to confirm these sentiments. For example, an October 20, 2004 article, "Wooing the Faithful," suggests in its subtitle that it is "unclear how badly [evangelicals] want [Bush] for another four years."<sup>71</sup> Yet the article is quick to point out that polling from July suggested 91% of evangelicals support Bush.<sup>72</sup> Although *Christianity Today* was not dramatically engaged in election coverage in 2004, their coverage did rise from four articles in 1996 and 5 articles in 2000

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<sup>65</sup> Religious Right Silent at GOP Convention, (2000, Aug. 16-23), *Christian Century*, p. 824 [microfilm page].

<sup>66</sup> Bush was also reported to have downplayed his faith during the 2004 election as well. See In Campaign, Bush Moderates Faith Stance, (2004, Sept. 7), *Christian Century*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Rozell and Debasree Das Gupta, "The Values Vote?" *The Values Campaign?*, Ed. John C. Green, et. al. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, "The March Goes On," *The Values Campaign?*, Ed. John C. Green, et. al. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> "Wooing the Faithful," (2004, Oct. 20), *Christianity Today*, p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

to 12 articles in 2004. Possibly the consensus in the community supporting Bush's gave little for the publication to debate.

Debate, though, is a major contributing factor to *America's* coverage of the 2004 election. Recalling voting discussion across elections, 1960 had the most, present in 42 out of 145 articles. Notably, though, 2004 has the next highest number of voting discussion articles, which is significant in that John Kerry was the next Roman Catholic on a major party's presidential ticket after Kennedy. In both elections, *America* produced the most election coverage of the three publications and, on an individual article level, even having voting discussion present in one more article in 2004 (21) than in 1960 (20), which is higher than the voting discussion-containing articles in the other publications (*Christian Century* – 14 articles, *Christianity Today* – 5 articles).

John Kerry's Catholicism was certainly a contributing factor to the widespread discussion in *America*. Two major issues prevailed in the election, both regarding abortion: 1. Should a politician be barred from communion for supporting pro-choice policies? and 2. Can a Catholic, in good conscience, vote for a candidate who supports pro-choice policies? The latter was a key source of voting-related discussion since Kerry was a pro-choice Democrat. From the data it is impossible to determine if an increased concern in abortion drove more extensive election coverage or more extensive discussion afforded more mentions of abortion, but approximately 60% of *America* articles that mention abortion in an article discussing voting are published in 2004 or in 2008. Moreover, 81% of articles with voting discussion in 2004 also mention abortion (17 out of 21). *America* maintained its policy of not endorsing a candidate, but voting opinions expressed generally took on the general forms: either 1. No candidate who supports abortion, including Kerry, can be voted for without sinning or 2. One can only vote for a candidate supporting abortion, such as Kerry, if more pressing matters of conscience came into play. Though it was often implied more than stated, such a matter could include the gravity of the Iraq War. In the instance of the 2004 election, the weight and extent of election coverage seemed to depend on the level of denominationally divisive controversy the election generated – which was certainly higher in the Catholic Church than it was among evangelical Christians. Kerry's nomination raised issues about abortion and communion that were internally controversial in the Catholic Church; the coverage was as much about a challenge to Catholic theology as it was about the election.

#### *2008 and Beyond: McCain and Obama*

In the way that the 1960 Kennedy campaign unearthed deep-seeded religious prejudices, generating extensive election discussion, Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign confronted American racial prejudice, which contributed to that campaign's heavy coverage. All three publications increased their coverage of 2008 over 2004 and making 2008 the third highest-covered election after 1960 and 1964. Articles with voting discussion decrease a bit from 2004, but remains high overall, with the third-highest level of voting discussion after 1960 and 2004.



Obama's candidacy generated discussion of how he, particularly as a Democratic candidate, happened to be much more religious than his opponent, John McCain<sup>73</sup> and invited some discussion of whether Obama's positions on issues, such as the Iraq War and the environment, were more reflective of Christian values than the Republican platform, the party which has been previously most associated with Christian values. Although the election will require some historical distance to be fully analyzed and understood, another contributing factor to the interest of Christian publications in the campaign is that Obama frequently invoked his faith and made concerted efforts to reach faith- and values-based voters.<sup>74</sup>

Also, another trend that received some attention in the 2008 campaign was the potential generational shift among Christians in the issues considered most important. For example, the *Christian Century* ran an article reporting on a *Politics* magazine profile of an evangelical family in which the adult son and daughter-in-law are Democrats while the parents are Republicans, suggesting that younger evangelicals have a growing concern for environmental and poverty issues in contrast to the older generation's focus on abortion in gay marriage.<sup>75</sup> *America* reported on a similar trend found among young Catholics.<sup>76</sup> The next few presidential elections will indicate whether such a trend continues and affects the coverage and voting discussion among Christian publications.

Since 2008 was a landmark election in a similar way to the 1960 election, it is hard to know whether campaign coverage in the three publications will continue at its present high rate or if it will diminish similar to the way it did after the 1964 election. Given the recentness of the 2008 at the time of this writing, the election's position in general trends is harder to discern and historical distance is likely to shed light on the many unusual facets of the 2008 election, including the new forms of the social media, such as blogging, that these publications engage in but simply aren't captured in a study of print media.

### **Additional Framing Trends**

While discussions of framing have been woven into the year-by-year analysis, a few cross-publication trends deserve noting. *Christian Century* has the widest variety of framing content, which is to be expected since *Christian Century* also caters to and reports on the broadest Christian audience. The manner in which frame analysis has been identified in this study has also contributed to this variety, in that all framing is included, even if the expression is something the publication does not necessarily advocate. For example, an October 1976 article discusses an open letter to Jimmy Carter theologian

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<sup>73</sup> McCain's running mate, Sarah Palin, was also notably religious and became a source of discussion after her selection as the Republican vice presidential candidate. See Palin Nomination Offers Peek at Pentecostals, (2008, Oct. 7), *Christian Century*, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Bruce Caswell, "The Presidency, the Vote, and the Formation of New Coalitions," *Polity*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 393 (July 2009): 388-407, JSTOR, Lehigh University Library, Bethlehem, PA, 24 Apr. 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Generational Divide, (2008, Jun. 3), *Christian Century*, pp. 8-9; See also The Faith Factor, (2008, Oct.), *Christianity Today*, p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> New Poll Finds Generational Divide Among Young Catholics, (2008, Oct. 20), *America*, p. 9.

William Stringfellow wrote for the publication *Sojourners* in which he urges Christians not to vote and his own rhetorical framing heavily quoted in the article and is used essentially the article's framing.<sup>77</sup> Since *Christian Century* articles used in this study encourage voting far more than discourages voting (41 to 7, plus five discouraging church direction of voting) the editors of *Christian Century* are not likely to adhere to Stringfellow's view of voting. Also, *Christian Century* is far more likely to publish articles that include framing activity discouraging voting than either of the other two publications analyzed, with seven *Christian Century* articles containing voting-discouraging framing activity. *Christianity Today* has two such articles and *America* only one. This inclusion of a viewpoint that contradicts a publications' premise for selecting content, then, at the least indicates the breadth of opinion represented in *Christian Century*, and may also indicate a breadth of religious institutions represented in the publication as well as diversity of readership. For purposes of analysis, this also allows one to read *Christian Century* as a general backdrop for the more denominationally-specific framing activity of the evangelical *Christianity Today* and the Roman Catholic *America*.

In reviewing the framing of these two publications, one trend is especially dominant. Evangelical Christians seem most concerned with using voting as a means to becoming a visible political presence and influencing policy (particularly abortion policy) through the weight of their vote, whereas Catholics are more concerned with using voting to address and demonstrate personal commitment to doctrinal concerns (also frequently abortion). *Christianity Today's* framing from the 1976 election through the 2008 election routinely encourages the idea that votes from evangelicals could potentially comprise the margin of victory for a candidate in a given election.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, *America's* framing activity focuses heavily on issues-based voting. This framing activity in 2004 and 2008 primarily consisted of strongly-worded recommendations for readers to vote with their conscience on issues in a manner that is consistent with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>79</sup> The periodical frequently uses the related frames that voting for politicians who support abortion is a sin, but that voting for politicians who support abortion can be religiously acceptable if there are other significant (or in Catholic

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<sup>77</sup> Non-Voting as 'Political Witness,' (1976, Oct. 27), *Christian Century*, p. 920 [microfilm page].

<sup>78</sup> The Faith Factor, (2008, Oct.), *Christianity Today*, p. 25; Multiplying Fractions, (2008, Jul.), *Christianity Today*, p. 13; Kerry's Open Mind, (2004, Oct.), *Christianity Today*, p. 31; Candidates Court the Family Values Vote, (1996, Oct. 7), *Christianity Today*, p. 76; The Road to Reelection, (1996, Oct. 7), *Christianity Today*, p. 76; A Republican God, (1992, Oct. 5), *Christianity Today*, p. 51; Washington's Profamily Activists, (1992, Nov. 9), *Christianity Today*, p. 21; The New Faces of the Religious Right, (1992, Jul. 20), *Christianity Today*, pp. 42-45; No Kidding, (1988, Sept. 2), *Christianity Today*, p. 39; Democrats Gain Momentum, (1988, Sept. 2), *Christianity Today*, p. 40; Our November Call to Conscience, (1984, Sept. 21), *Christianity Today*, p. 12; Will Evangelicals Swing the Election?, (1976, Jun. 18), *Christianity Today*, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> See Conscientious Election, (2008, Oct. 13), *America*, p. 19; Poor Choices, (2008, Oct. 13), *America*, p. 38; Intrinsic Evil and Political Responsibility, (2008, Oct. 27), *America*, p. 15; Voting One's Conscience, (2008, Oct. 27), *America*, p. 4; A Conscientious Objector, (2008, Nov. 3), *America*, p. 38; Clarity and Vision, (2008, Nov. 3), *America*, p. 37; A Moral Vote, (2004, Oct. 25), *America*, p. 8; American Catholics and the State, (2004, Aug. 2-9), *America*, p. 15.

parlance, grave) reasons for that vote.<sup>80</sup> Given these findings, this suggests that voting for evangelical Christians is perceived as an avenue to political power, connecting evangelical Christians to an external political structure, while voting for Catholics is perceived as a means as reinforcing church doctrine both within the organization and within the individual member. Thus, organizational structure may account for the divergent aims of framing activity between these two Christian denominations.

Despite identifying with different Christian denominations, the issue stances of Catholics and evangelicals are frequently similar (abortion, gay rights, other family/"morality" issues), but the framing of acting politically on these issues are often completely different. For evangelicals, the framing is focused on the idea that if they can get the candidates they support elected, these public officials can take action that supports these issues. For example, a 1992 *Christianity Today* quotes the then-executive director of the Christian Action Council as advocating evangelicals work to elect George H. W. Bush because he may have the opportunity to appoint pro-life Supreme Court justices in an effort to change abortion laws.<sup>81</sup> Although framing in *America* also sometimes advocates electing people who will make the appropriate changes once in office, there is an additional rhetorical focus on voting for the right person so as to not commit the sin of voting for the wrong person and having to answer for the sin on earth or in heaven, such as *America* reported in 2004 when, "Some bishops are reported to have announced that all Catholics who vote for a candidate who supports embryonic stem cell research or abortion rights should themselves refrain from Communion unless they repent."<sup>82</sup> The treatment of issues in framing is consistent with what would be expected given the contrasting power structures of evangelical Christians and Catholics as well as access to existing political/governmental structures. The Catholic Church, as a highly organized international body, has a much more established and formalized relationship with political bodies than independent churches that often constitute evangelical organizations. Since the Catholic Church already has political access, is it easier to focus on individual behavior, particularly when the church is much less reliant on individual political behavior in order to make a political presence – that is, if Catholic voters don't vote, the church will still have political power, while if evangelical voters don't vote, they lose much of their political power.

## Conclusions

This study most notably demonstrates that Christian organizations have been engaged in American electoral politics throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. This engagement has not built over time, as the thorough coverage of the 1960 and 1964 campaigns demonstrate, but has ebbed and flowed over

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<sup>80</sup> While *America* reminds voters that they should be focused on life issues such as euthanasia, stem cell research, and capital punishment in addition to abortion, abortion is the issue most frequently used by name.

<sup>81</sup> Prolifers Look to Abortion Regulation, (1992, Aug. 17), *Christianity Today*, p. 44.

<sup>82</sup> Catholic Consciences, (2004, Jul. 19-26), *America*, p. 7.

the forty-eight years of the study, with the current trend returning to levels of election discussion seen in the earliest elections. Moreover, the publications have been consistently engaged in election discussion across denominations. Particular denominations have shown varying levels of interest during particular elections, such as the Roman Catholic *America's* coverage of the 1960 and 2004 elections with Catholic presidential nominees, or the evangelical *Christianity Today's* intense interest in born-again Jimmy Carter's 1976 campaign and the moral issues of the 1992 election. At no point, though, have any of the publications been disengaged from political discussion. In all the presidential elections studied, these publications have each demonstrated consistent interest in discussing the issues, election implications, and Christian electoral behavior during presidential elections. While *Christianity Today's* coverage is less extensive overall than *America* or *Christian Century's*, the publication publishes less frequently than the its counterparts in this study. Nevertheless, its authors have engaged in voting discussion in virtually all the elections covered.<sup>83</sup> Increases in publication coverage of an election often correlate with a vested interest in an election or elevated controversy about the election, either within the publication/denomination or across the electorate.

The three publications studied have also used framing activity throughout their election coverage to convey political ideals and occasionally to recommend political behavior. This is used as a tool to guide readers' vote formation and unify the voters' personal frameworks for voting with the religious institutions' framework on voting. Although the success of these frameworks is outside the purview of the study, the publications do give some evidence that frame creation is related to an organization's relationship to and power within the national polity.

Religion has been and, by all indications, will continue to be a consistent part of the American presidential election process. The question for the future of religious-political involvement, then, is not whether it will be involved, but how will religious organizations focus their involvement.

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<sup>83</sup> The exception is 1968, in which *Christianity Today* had no voting discussion present.

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## Appendix A: Codes

<i>Biblical References</i>	Lutheran	1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008)
Biblical reference – specific	Methodist	October (1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008)
Biblical reference – non-specific	Methodist Episcopal	September (1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008)
<i>Candidates</i>	Mormon	
Al Gore	Pentecostals	
Barack Obama	Presbyterian	
Barry Goldwater	Protestants	
Bill Clinton	Quaker	
Bob Dole	Roman Catholicism	
George H. W. Bush	Seventh-day Adventist	
George McGovern	Southern Baptist	
George W. Bush	Unitarian	
Gerald Ford	United Church of Christ	
Hubert Humphrey		
Jimmy Carter	<i>Election Years</i>	
John F. Kennedy	1960 Election	
John Kerry	1964 Election	
John McCain	1968 Election	
Lyndon Johnson	1972 Election	
Michael Dukakis	1976 Election	
Richard Nixon	1980 Election	
Ronald Reagan	1984 Election	
Walter Mondale	1988 Election	
	1992 Election	
	1996 Election	
	2000 Election	
	2004 Election	
	2008 Election	
<i>Denominations and Religions</i>		
African-American churches	<i>Election Year Months</i>	
Anabaptists	August (1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008)	
Assembly of God	July (1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008)	
Baptist	June (1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008)	
Buddhism	November (1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008)	
Church of the Nazarene		
Disciples of Christ		
Eastern Orthodox		
Episcopal		
Evangelical Christianity		
Fundamentalism		
Hinduism		
Islam		
Judaism		
		<i>Framing Activity</i>
		Frame amplification
		Frame bridging
		Frame extension
		Frame transformation
		<i>Issues</i>
		Abortion
		Abuse
		Birth Control
		Budget, federal
		Capital punishment
		Child care
		Civil Rights
		Cloning
		Communism
		Congregationalist
		Creationism-Evolution
		Crime
		Defense
		Draft
		Drugs
		Economy
		Education
		Environment
		Euthanasia
		Farming
		Foreign policy
		Gay Rights
		Governance
		Grenada
		Guns
		Health

*Issues, Continued*

Housing  
Immigration  
International rule of law  
Iran - hostages  
Iraq War  
Israel-Palestine  
Jobs  
Labor  
Legislative procedure  
Life value issues  
Media  
Middle East  
Minimum wage  
National security  
Natural disasters  
Nuclear weapons  
Political reform  
Population growth  
Poverty  
Prison  
Race  
Religious freedom  
Rule of law  
School busing  
School prayer  
Sex education  
Social security  
Stem cell research  
Supreme Court  
Taxes  
Terrorism  
Tobacco  
Torture  
Trade  
Transportation  
infrastructure  
Vietnam  
War  
Welfare  
Women's rights

*Parties*

Democratic Party  
Republican Party  
Third party

*Publications*

America  
Christian Century  
Christianity Today

*Voting Behavior*

Discouraged  
Discouraged – Christian  
duty  
Discouraged - dirty  
Discouraged – ineffective  
Discouraged – issues  
Discouraged – not of  
God's kingdom  
Discouraged – tax reasons  
Encouraged  
Encouraged – against  
candidate  
Encouraged – Biblical  
reference – non-specific  
Encouraged – Biblical  
reference – specific  
Encouraged – candidate  
religion regardless

*Voting Behavior -  
Continued*

Encouraged – Christian  
duty  
Encouraged – every vote  
counts  
Encouraged – for  
candidate  
Encouraged – for party  
Encouraged – in protest

Encouraged – issue  
regardless  
Encouraged – issues  
Encouraged – party  
regardless  
Encouraged – patriotic  
duty  
Encouraged – race  
regardless  
Voting-related activities  
encouraged  
Voting-related activities  
discouraged  
Voting-related activities  
discussed  
Voting discussion not  
present  
Voting outcome –  
Democrat  
Voting outcome –  
Republican  
Voting tendencies reported