

# Who wants to make America great again? Understanding evangelical support for Donald Trump\*

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## Abstract

White evangelicals overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump in the 2016 election, producing extensive debate as to who evangelicals are, what it means to be an evangelical in the United States today, and whether the electoral results are surprising or not. This paper offers empirical clarity to this protracted discussion by asking and answering a series of questions related to Trump’s victory in general and his support from white evangelicals in particular. In doing so, the analyses show that the term “evangelical” has not become a synonym for conservative politics and that white evangelical support for Trump would be *higher* if public opinion scholars used a belief-centered definition of evangelicalism rather than relying on the more common classification strategies based on self-identification or religious denomination. These findings go against claims that *nominal* evangelicals, those who call themselves evangelicals but are not religious, make up the core of Trump’s support base. Moreover, high levels of electoral support among devout evangelicals is not unique to the 2016 election but is rather part of a broader trend of evangelical electoral behavior, even when faced with non-traditional Republican candidates. Finally, the paper explores why white evangelicals might support a candidate like Trump. The paper presents evidence that negative partisanship helps explain why devout evangelicals—despite Trump’s background and behaviors being cause for concern—coalesced around his presidential bid. Together, the findings from this paper help make sense of both the 2016 presidential election and evangelical public opinion, both separately and together.

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On November 9—the day after the 2016 presidential election—headlines such as “White evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Trump, exit polls show” in *The Washington Post* and “Evangelicals back Donald Trump in record numbers, despite earlier doubts” in *The Wall Street Journal* ran in newspapers all around the country. These articles note that just over 80% of self-identified white evangelicals—who have long been considered values voters, dedicated to bringing personal morality into the public sphere—supported the thrice-married, casino-owning candidate who frequently uses foul language, had a series of religious gaffes while campaigning, and was caught on tape denigrating women. The high level of support Trump received from white evangelicals set off a torrent of discussion among academics, religious leaders, journalists, and average Americans about who evangelicals are (Barna 2018; Keller 2017; LifeWay Research 2017), how pollsters *should* classify evangelicals (Boorstein 2016; Djupe, Burge, and Lewis 2017; Fea 2018; Kidd 2017; 2016), whether the term “evangelical” has lost its religious meaning (Bruinius 2018; 2017; Kidd 2017; Merritt 2015; Wehner 2017), and why white evangelicals supported Trump despite his shaky religious and moral footing (Cox 2018; Jelen and Wald 2018; Mansfield 2017; Prothero 2016; Posner 2017). The aim of this paper is to offer some answers to these timely questions that have been extensively debated and discussed but, to date, have not been adequately addressed.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section offers a brief overview of recent, and ongoing, debates surrounding white evangelicals’ political attitudes and behaviors. Importantly, the political science, sociology, and religion literatures offer multiple ways to conceptualize and measure evangelicalism. These different strategies, in turn, give rise to the possibility that our understanding of evangelical public opinion would change with different definitions of who is and who is not an evangelical. In particular, survey results may vary when using a belief-based definition of evangelicalism, in which holding certain beliefs is the defining feature, rather than the standard self-identification question. The paper then introduces two data sources that help answer three specific questions. First, is there belief-based variation in evangelical support for Donald Trump? The data show that, among

self-identified white evangelicals, holding evangelical religious beliefs is strongly associated with Trump support in the general election, even after taking partisanship and ideology into account. In contrast to claims that *traditional* evangelicals—those holding specific religious beliefs commonly associated with evangelicalism—would not support Trump, the data show that the *nominal* evangelicals—those who call themselves evangelicals but do not hold beliefs commonly associated with evangelicalism—were the most likely to support Clinton or a third-party candidate. That said, the data show that Trump’s successful bid to win the Republican nomination occurred, in part, due to Trump’s ability to secure support of *nominal* evangelicals in the primary election. In other words, both *nominal* and *traditional* evangelicals helped Trump ascend to the White House.

Second, does the 2016 election represent a special case of evangelical behavior or is the election indicative of broader trends in evangelical electoral support? Data from the 2012 presidential election suggest that, when faced with a different sort of non-traditional Republican nominee for president (in this case, a Mormon), white evangelicals looked and behaved similarly to 2016. Together, these results show that while devout evangelicals may have been uncomfortable with the last two Republican nominees, they were nonetheless staunch supporters of the Republican standard bearer in the general election.

And third, why did white evangelicals support Trump at such high rates? The paper offers negative partisanship as one explanation for the electoral results. While evangelical Republicans’ levels of religiosity or faith are relatively uncorrelated with evaluations of Trump in 2016 and Romney in 2012, there is a strong negative correlation with Clinton and Obama evaluations. These findings both show that the Republican Party has benefited from devout evangelicals’ negative affect toward recent Democratic candidates and also call into question claims that enthusiasm for Trump is weak among *traditional* or *believing* evangelicals, despite high levels of electoral support. All told, these findings offer insight into an often-discussed but poorly understood religious bloc that makes up the single largest Republican constituency.

## Who are evangelicals?

Even before the election, religious leaders, journalists, and academics were wondering about these rank and file evangelicals who appeared so enthusiastic about Donald Trump. Russell Moore, the president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and an outspoken critic of Donald Trump, questioned whether evangelical Trump supporters were “real” or whether they were just claiming to be evangelical. After all,

At least in the Bible Belt, someone may claim to be an evangelical who’s drunk right now and who hasn’t been to church since someone took him to vacation Bible school back in the 1980s. And so that’s not a useful category. What’s useful is finding out whether or not people are actively following Christ, whether they’re church attenders, for instance (quoted in Gjelten 2016a).

And in order to explain how Trump was winning over self-described white evangelical Christians during the primaries, Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, responded that perhaps there are not as many evangelicals in the United States as previously assumed:

We have taken comfort in the fact that there have been millions and millions of us in America. And a part of that evidence has been the last several election cycles, with the evangelical vote being in the millions. And now we’re having to face the fact that, evidently, theologically defined—defined by commitment to core evangelical values—there aren’t so many millions of us as we thought.

Scholars have echoed Moore and Mohler’s sentiments. Thomas Kidd (2016), a religious historian, argued that “.in American pop culture parlance, ‘evangelical’ now basically means whites who consider themselves religious and who vote Republican.” According to Kidd, modern political polling has helped the term “evangelical” lose its meaning by letting survey takers decide how they affiliate religiously. In doing so, many who claim to be evangelical on

a survey may not understand what the term means. Instead, “They figure ‘I’m conservative [another ill-defined term] and a Protestant, therefore I am an evangelical.’ Or maybe they think, ‘Well, I watch Fox News, so I must be an evangelical.’ Or, ‘I respect religion, and I vote Republican, so I must be an evangelical’” (Kidd 2016). George Marsden, professor emeritus of history and scholar on evangelicalism similarly voiced how the term “evangelical” has become muddled, particularly in survey research: “You have all sorts of people who say, ‘I guess so.’ That makes it seem that the group of evangelicals are bigger than they actually are. And it also invites all sort of people who aren’t very deeply religious to say that they are in this cultural group” (quoted in Bruinius 2018).

There is social science research suggesting that these claims have merit. The evangelical and Republican labels have become closely linked in recent years (Hout and Fischer 2002; Patrikios 2008; Putnam and Campbell 2010), with some Americans now viewing the once-separate labels as a single, fused identity (Patrikios 2013). Moreover, this close association that some people hold between evangelical and Republican identification can have important religious consequences. Scholars have shown that the current political environment, in which conservative Christianity and the Republican Party are tightly intertwined, has shaped Americans’ levels of religiosity (Margolis 2018a), willingness to identify (or not) with a religion (Campbell et al. 2018; Margolis 2018b; Hout and Fischer 2014; 2002), decisions to disaffiliate from church (Djupe et al. 2018), and choices about whether to self-identify as a born-again Christian (Egan 2018). This growing area of research demonstrates that partisan identities, coupled with the political environment in which partisans finds themselves, can profoundly impact their involvement in, identification with, and views of the religious sphere. This raises the possibility that individuals respond “yes” to the standard survey question that asks whether they are an “evangelical” or “born-again Christian” in order to signal something about their political outlooks even if religious leaders, like Moore and Mohler, and religious scholars, like Kidd and Marsden, would not recognize these individuals as evangelicals.

A testable hypothesis from these claims emerge in which *nominal* or *cultural* evangelicals rallied around Trump while more *traditional* evangelicals supported another candidate. This might have occurred on account of *traditional* evangelicals protesting Trump’s candidacy, Trump supporters adopting the evangelical label despite not holding evangelical views, or both.

If religious leaders and scholars think there are *nominal* evangelicals within the evangelical ranks, who exactly are, as Mohler calls them, these “theologically defined” evangelicals? Religious scholars and leaders have long emphasized that there is more to being an evangelical than simply adopting the label or belonging to a specific church. Instead, evangelicalism is about holding a specific set of beliefs, often about the Bible, Jesus, the afterlife, and the desire to spread God’s word to others (Bebbington 1989; Keller 2017; Kidd 2017; 2016; Marsden 1991; Merritt 2015; Noll 2001; Smith 2016). British historian, David Bebbington, developed the most common definition of evangelicalism in his 1989 book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. And while there is not universal agreement on a single definition of evangelicalism, Bebbington’s identification of four main characteristics of evangelicalism (biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and evangelizing) is commonly cited among historians, scholars of religion, and journalists. Admittedly, certain doctrinal beliefs associated with evangelical Christianity apply to many religious denominations—both Christian and non-Christian; however, the combination of the ideas and concepts produces “something that is unique” (Fea 2018). Using a definition meant to distinguish *believing* or *traditional* evangelicals from *nominal* or *cultural* evangelicals, according to these scholars and leaders, would change our understanding of evangelical public opinion and might show that evangelical support for Trump is less impressive than previously thought.

Fortunately, social scientists and polling firms have spent the past four decades operationalizing these overarching definitions in order to identify evangelicals on public opinion surveys. In particular, there are three broad ways that political scientists identify evangeli-

cals on public opinion surveys. First, evangelicalism can be thought of as a group identity or identification with a social movement (Hackett and Lindsay 2008; Smith 1990; Wilcox, Jelen, and Legee 1993), and usually relies on a self-identification measure. A second way to classify evangelicals is based on their membership in a specific religious family that is generally thought to adhere to evangelical theology. This perspective emphasizes that belonging to a religious community and interacting with other community members produce a set of shared experiences and outlooks that can affect partisan loyalties and political attitudes, similar to identification with and membership in other social groups that exist in society (Smidt 2013; Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 2009; Wald and Smidt 1993). This strategy requires asking multiple questions about church affiliation and then classifying respondents into a religious tradition using a coding scheme that relies on denominations' official doctrines and theology (Green 2010; Kellstedt et al. 1996; Smith 1990, Steensland et al. 2000). Most social scientists use one of these two ways to classify evangelicals in surveys.<sup>1</sup>

A third way of classifying evangelicals relies on adherence to a set of beliefs. Two large religious research organizations use a series of belief statements to identify evangelicals. George Barna, founder of the Barna Group, created an “elaborate set of belief affirmations” (Lindsay and Hackett 2008: 503) meant to identify evangelical Christians. The Barna Group has been using the nine-item measure for over 30 years. And in 2015, LifeWay Research, in conjunction with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), created a four-item battery for survey researchers interested in evangelical public opinion. The logic behind measuring beliefs is simple. Evangelical Christianity is associated with specific religious beliefs and tenets. It therefore makes sense, according to proponents of this strategy, to identify evangelicals based on the beliefs a person holds rather than on what church a person goes to or whether a person adopts a particular label.<sup>2</sup> In fact, neither the Barna Group nor NAE/LifeWay

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<sup>1</sup>An additional area of research tries to adjudicate between these two evangelical classification schemes (see Burge and Lewis 2018 as well as Volume 57, Issue 4 of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* for an entire forum devoted to the discussion of religious measurement). This paper, however, sidesteps this question and instead focuses on the relationship between holding certain religious beliefs and political attitudes among white evangelicals, using both self-identification and denominational classification schemes.

<sup>2</sup>Beliefs may not always be an appropriate measure to focus on, but are in this instance. While certain

classification schemes include measures of self-identification or denominational affiliation.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to discussions about how best to identify evangelicals on a survey, social scientists have repeatedly argued that there are many dimensions to religion, and scholars miss important nuance when they treat members of the same religious tradition as a monolithic group.<sup>4</sup> For example, work by Guth et al. (2006), Green (2010), and Guth and Bradberry (2013) show how *traditionalist* evangelicals—defined as evangelicals who hold certain traditional beliefs and participate frequently in their religious communities—voted for Republican presidential candidates at a much higher rate than *centrist* and *modernist* evangelicals in the 2000s. Although the exact measurement strategies differ across studies, the same picture emerges: more devout evangelicals are more steadfast supporters of the Republican Party. Green (2010) shows that a similar relationship appears when looking at issue positions. More devout evangelicals differ from their less devout counterparts on social issues, such as abortion and gay marriage; foreign policy, in this case, support for the Iraq War; and other domestic policies, such as attitudes about health care.<sup>5</sup>

This literature, which shows there is a lot to gain from looking at variation within religious groups, also presents an alternative hypothesis to the one previously laid out. If more traditional evangelicals have been shown to support Republican candidates and conservative policy positions over time, this should lead us to expect more of the same in

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faiths emphasize the importance of ritual and behavior (Kellstedt and Green 1993), evangelical Christianity emphasizes an “adherence to orthodoxy” and has a “tendency to reject diversity of interpretation” (Wald and Smidt 1993: 34). The importance that evangelical Christianity places on doctrine—such as, views about the Bible, spreading the gospel, and achieving salvation (Kellstedt 1989)—makes measuring beliefs among evangelicals an appropriate strategy.

<sup>3</sup>These different definitions of who “is” an evangelical produce a great deal of variation both in how many evangelicals there are in the United States and what an average evangelical looks like. For example, LifeWay Research found that less than half of self-identified evangelicals are evangelical according to their classification scheme (Smietana 2017). Similarly, the Barna Group argues that less than 10% of Americans are evangelicals (2016).

<sup>4</sup>Research using the “3B” framework of religious measurement—which focuses on belonging, believing, and behaving (Green 2010; Kellstedt et al. 1996; Leege and Kellstedt 1993)—reveals important variation within religions (Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Research focusing on variation among evangelicals recognizes the restructuring that took place during the latter part of the 20th century whereby societal divisions between people of different faiths gave way to divisions between the orthodox and progressive strands of various religions (Hunter 1991; Wuthnow 1988). The result of this restructuring includes important differences among evangelicals’ attitudes and beliefs.



2016: more *traditional* evangelicals—those who hold beliefs closely tied to the core tenets of evangelicalism—should support Donald Trump in the general election compared to their evangelical counterparts who hold fewer beliefs.

The two research areas both present plausible hypotheses about how our understanding of evangelical electoral behavior might change once public opinion scholars take beliefs—a defining feature of evangelicalism—into account. On the one hand, if Republicans adopted the evangelical label as a way to signal something about their cultural or political outlooks or if devout evangelicals protested Trump’s moral failings by not supporting him, then *nominal* evangelicals—those holding very few beliefs commonly associated with evangelicalism—may represent Trump’s main base of support. On the other hand, *traditionalist* evangelicals—those holding many of the beliefs commonly associated with evangelicalism—by virtue of supporting Republican candidates and conservative policies in the past, may have remained in the Republican camp in 2016 despite Trump’s character issues.

A similar logic applies to the 2012 general election. There was a great deal of speculation about whether evangelicals would vote for Mitt Romney on account of his Mormon faith (Becker 2012; Hagerty 2012; Mooney 2012). While white evangelicals eventually stood strongly behind Romney (Pew 2012), we do not know if there is variation in support among evangelicals. It is possible that *nominal* evangelicals were unbothered by Romney’s Mormonism, particularly if their Republican partisan identity encouraged them to identify as an evangelical, while *traditionalist* evangelicals could not get behind him. If this were the case, differing views of authority and compromise (Hunter 1991) might explain less devout evangelicals’ willingness to support a candidate from a non-traditional religion while more devout evangelicals were unwilling to do so. Conversely, *traditionalist* evangelicals, due to their strong Republican attachments and conservative policy positions, may once again be solidly supportive of Romney despite concerns surrounding his faith.

Winning the general election is only one part of the story, however. The literature gives us little guidance about what to expect in the primary elections. While it is possible that

*traditionalist* evangelicals supported Trump and Romney in the general election simply on account of their Republican label, both primaries were awash with potential candidates who had better “religious credentials” relative to the eventual nominees. Here, we might expect that devout evangelicals supported Trump and Romney in the primaries at a lower rate than their less devout counterparts. In other words, *nominal* evangelicals may have been instrumental in earning Trump and Romney the Republican nomination in back-to-back elections.<sup>6</sup>

A final way to explore the role of beliefs among evangelicals is to test to what extent Republicans who preferred a nominee other than Trump in 2016 (Romney in 2012) rallied around Trump (Romney) once he became the candidate. It is possible that devout evangelicals came around most strongly for Trump due to the fact that they are more politically conservative than less devout evangelicals (Guth et al. 2006; Green 2010). Conversely, *traditionalist* evangelicals who opposed these non-traditional candidates in the primary—by virtue of the strict views of moral authority and uncompromising worldview (Hunter 1991)—may have been the least likely to come to support the nominees in the general election. The data, which I describe below, will help adjudicate between these possibilities.

## Data

### *2016 SSI Study*

The first data source is a large national survey of 2,000 American adults as well as an additional oversample of 500 white evangelical respondents. The sample comes from Survey Sampling International (SSI) and the survey was in the field just a few weeks before

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<sup>6</sup>The dynamic nature of the U.S. primary system in which the number and types of candidates change over the course of the primary season makes it difficult to create generalized theories associated with evangelical support in primary elections. See Brewer and Powell (2014) for a detailed description of the 2012 primary season and how Mitt Romney, a Mormon about whom many evangelicals had concerns, emerged as the Republican nominee.

the 2016 presidential election, between October 10 and 18.<sup>7</sup> The survey asks respondents about their religious beliefs and practices; political attitudes, preferences, and behaviors; and politically relevant social-psychological measures. First, respondents answered an evangelical self-identification question using the same question wording as Pew and the 2016 exit poll: “Would you describe yourself as an evangelical or born-again Christian?”<sup>8</sup> Second, respondents answered a series of questions about their religious affiliations, including their denominations or the churches they attend. These responses then became the basis for classifying respondents as evangelical using the Steensland et al. (2000) coding scheme. And third, respondents reported their levels of agreement with seven statements that are similar, but not identical, to the Barna Group’s classification scheme of evangelicals. These statements measure respondents’ views about: the Bible; sharing religious beliefs with others, otherwise known as evangelizing; how one achieves eternal salvation; whether Jesus Christ committed sins during his life, the importance of religious faith in daily life, whether the Devil is real or a symbol of evil, and belief in God. The full question wordings are available in the Appendix A.<sup>9</sup>

The analyses that follow rely on an additive belief scale based on how many of beliefs respondents accept (either somewhat or strongly). Individuals can therefore have a belief score ranging from 0 (agree or agree strongly with none of the statements) to 7 (agree or agree strongly with all of the statements). This strategy, which allows me to look at variation in beliefs among those who call themselves evangelicals, differs from the Barna

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<sup>7</sup>SSI is a global market research company that recruited an online sample that matches the 18+ population on education, age, geography, income, and gender without using quotas. The result, while not a nationally representative sample, is a diverse national sample. To account for biases that may arise due to the sample, I created sample weights based Current Population Survey (CPS) estimates of age, race, gender, and education. Importantly, the results are not markedly different when using the weighted and unweighted data. SSI uses a self-identification measure to identify evangelicals in the pre-screening process; however, the results are similar with and without the oversample. The key difference is that the smaller sample size in the model that excludes the oversample produces more uncertainty around the estimates. Appendix D replicates the 2016 SSI electoral results using a nationally representative poll taken in November, 2016.

<sup>8</sup>Only respondents who first answered that they identify as Protestant or Christian received this question.

<sup>9</sup>Some of the questions are reverse coded, meaning that adhering to a traditional evangelical viewpoint means disagreeing with the statement in some cases. I have rescaled these variables accordingly so that “accepting” a belief means accepting the evangelical belief and not necessarily agreeing to the statement itself.

Group’s classification strategy which identifies evangelicals as those who strongly adhere to all the beliefs.

Operationalizing belief as a ordered scale rather than an all-or-nothing classification has both theoretical and empirical justifications. From a theoretical standpoint, the goal of this paper is not to claim that the Barna Group’s classification scheme is how scholars *should* identify evangelical Christians in surveys. It is easy to debate whether the Barna Group asks all the necessary and sufficient questions needed to identify an evangelical. Moreover, it is certainly the case that some of the Barna Group’s measurement strategies—such as agreeing with the statement that faith is an important part of one’s life and agreeing that God exists—are not unique to evangelical Christians and are statements with which many *nominal* evangelicals agree. Instead, the goal of the analyses is to look at how holding a greater number of or fewer beliefs corresponds with different political outlooks.<sup>10</sup> From an empirical standpoint, an additive scale offers additional information that a closed classification scheme cannot. An additive scale, for example, can show whether increasing the number of beliefs corresponds to linear changes in political attitudes or whether there are thresholds above or below which self-identified evangelicals hold similar political views. And by having a diverse set of beliefs—some of which are overwhelmingly accepted by evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike while others are more specific to evangelical theology—it is possible to uncover previously unknown political trends within this large bloc of American voters.

A detailed analysis and discussion validating the additive scale is available in Appendix A. The section asks and answers a series of questions about the data and shows that: white evangelicals hold religious beliefs associated with the Barna Group’s conception of evangelicals; non-white evangelicals look similar in the number of average beliefs held to white evangelicals; white non-evangelicals, who are nonetheless Christian, do not hold many of the religious beliefs asked by the Barna Group to identify evangelicals; self-identification and

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<sup>10</sup>Importantly, this strategy still allows us to evaluate claims that *real* evangelicals did not support Trump. Even if there is not agreement on exactly which beliefs should be used in a belief-based evangelical classification strategy, individuals at the very top of the scale certainly meet the belief-based criteria of being an evangelical whereas those at the very bottom of the scale can safely be thought of as *nominal* evangelicals.

denominational measures of evangelicals yield similar distributions of religious beliefs; Republican evangelicals hold, on average, a greater number of religious beliefs than Democratic evangelicals; and the religious belief scale correlates with other measures of religiosity in expected ways.

### ***2012 Barna OmniPoll***

The second data source is a nationally representative survey of 1,021 American adults. The Barna Group commissioned Knowledge Networks to run the study between February 10 and 18, 2012.<sup>11</sup> The survey does not ask the Pew version of the evangelical self-identification question and instead asks whether respondents have “ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?” Respondents also answered a question aimed at measuring denominational affiliation as well as a series of questions tapping into religious beliefs. While the SSI question wording differs slightly to the SSI survey wording, the religious belief questions measure the same general beliefs and ask about the same topics as the SSI survey. There is one additional question, which asks respondents about they believe happens after they die, that is part of the questions that Barna uses to identify evangelicals but did not appear in the SSI survey. The exact wording for all the question wording is available in Appendix A. Just as in the SSI survey, the individual items can form an additive scale of religious beliefs, ranging from 0 (holds none of the beliefs) to 8 (holds all of the beliefs).<sup>12</sup> The survey—which took place at the beginning of the 2012 Republican presidential primary season—also measures political preferences, including support electoral support and evaluations of politicians.

The next section explores how variation in beliefs among white evangelicals corresponds

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<sup>11</sup>Participants are initially selected at random by telephone numbers and residential addresses and invited to take part in the web-enabled panel. Those who are willing to participate in the panel but do not have Internet access receive a laptop and ISP connection at no cost. Those who already have computers and Internet in the home participate in the surveys using their own computers and Internet connection. Panelists then receive e-mail invitations to take part in research.

<sup>12</sup>The extra question in the Barna poll means that the scale runs from 0-8 rather than 0-7. Those individuals who hold all eight beliefs and also report that they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ are the individuals whom the Barna Group would consider to be evangelical.

to electoral support.

## Evangelicals supported Trump in the general election

Undergirding, sometimes implicitly and other times explicitly, critiques about evangelical measurement lies the claim that *traditional* or *believing* evangelicals would not support Trump. According to this narrative, it is the *nominal*, *cultural*, or *political* evangelicals who overwhelmingly supported Trump and produced the 80% statistic in exit polls that has gripped the attention of so many. On its face, this assertion is plausible. After all, many self-identified evangelicals do not hold all the beliefs commonly associated with evangelicalism meaning that there are enough nominal evangelicals within the evangelical subsample to skew the survey results. And recent research highlights that individuals may think or act religiously as they are politically. The data should be able to show if *nominal* evangelicals—those who do not hold many of the religious beliefs—represent Trump’s main base of support.

Figure 1 presents four panels testing this possibility. The top-left panel shows white self-identified evangelicals’ weighted responses to a question asking who they planned to vote for in the upcoming election, separated out by how many beliefs they held. The least religious category includes those white evangelicals holding zero, one, two, or three evangelical beliefs to account for the small number of evangelicals who hold so few beliefs.<sup>13</sup> The white boxes with black outlines represent the percentage of respondents who report that they plan on voting for Donald Trump. Support for Donald Trump increases alongside holding a greater number of religious beliefs. The black boxes represent the percentage of respondents who report that they plan on voting for Hillary Clinton. Here, the trend reverses itself: the share of Clinton support decreases among evangelicals as the number of religious beliefs held increases. Evangelicals holding a greater number of beliefs, therefore, are more likely to vote for Trump and less likely to vote for Clinton relative to their more nominal counterparts.

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<sup>13</sup>Weighted and unweighted data produce similar results as does running analyses both including and excluding the evangelical oversample. Details about the sample sizes of each bin in this and all subsequent analyses are available in Appendix B. Results are robust to different binning strategies.

The top two boxes in the bar chart represent support for a third party candidate (light gray) and undecided voters (dark gray). The third party candidates include Jill Stein of the Green Party and Gary Johnson of the Libertarian Party.<sup>14</sup> While support for third-party candidates was generally small, ranging between 7 and 13%, rates of third-party support were actually slightly *higher* among those holding fewer evangelical beliefs. Looking at the white evangelical population as a whole, therefore, there is not evidence that more *traditionalist* evangelicals were more likely to abandon Trump in favor of a third-party candidate. That said, there is some evidence that evangelicals holding a greater number of beliefs were more likely to report being undecided just a few weeks out from the election. For example, just 3% of evangelicals holding three beliefs or fewer were undecided, whereas 16% of evangelicals holding six beliefs and 10% of evangelicals holding all seven beliefs reported being uncertain about their upcoming vote choice. While there are numerous reasons why a person could be uncertain about his or her vote choice—deciding between Trump and Clinton, deciding between Trump and a third-party candidate, deciding about whether to vote at all, and deciding whether to share his or her decision with a survey researcher—these raw data offer some suggestive evidence that perhaps evangelicals holding a greater number of religious beliefs were conflicted in the lead up to the election. The top-right panel of Figure 1 shows the predicted electoral support for Trump versus Clinton based on the number of religious beliefs held after taking other demographic, socio-economic, and religious variables into account. Support increases steadily, with evangelicals holding all seven of the religious beliefs in the survey showing the highest rates of Trump support.

The first set of analyses exclude political variables in order to show basic relationships in the data, but we know that partisanship is the strongest predictor of vote choice (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008), evangelicals are disproportionately Republican, and evangelical Republicans hold a greater number of beliefs on average than Democratic evangelicals.<sup>15</sup> The political

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<sup>14</sup>The overwhelming majority of third-party support is for Gary Johnson; however, the trends and major takeaway points are the same after merging support for both candidates.

<sup>15</sup>Figure A1 in the Appendix shows that evangelical Republicans hold more religious beliefs than evangelical Democrats.

composition of evangelicals, therefore, might explain the first set of results. The middle panels of Figure 1 present replicated analyses for white self-identified evangelical respondents who also identify as Republicans. A smaller, but still sizable, increase in Trump support emerges when looking at the Republican subsample. Whereas 66% of white evangelical Republicans holding three beliefs or fewer—those who we might safely categorize as *cultural* or *nominal* evangelicals—83% of those holding all seven beliefs reported in the weeks leading up to the election reported that they would vote for Trump. The middle-right panel presents the predicted levels of support for Trump versus Clinton among Republicans after taking socio-demographic traits, other religious behaviors, and political ideology into account. These results show that, even after accounting for other correlates of vote choice, Trump support is lower among evangelical Republicans holding four beliefs or fewer and that two-party support caps out among evangelicals holding five, six, or seven beliefs. The results, presented in full in Table B2 in the Appendix, show that the gap between evangelical Republicans believing a greater number of beliefs and those believing a fewer number of beliefs is statistically significant.<sup>16</sup>

These data contribute to our understanding about evangelicals’ role in the 2016 election in two ways. First, these results go against the narrative that *believing* or *real* evangelicals would not support Trump. When looking at beliefs, which represent the core underpinnings of evangelicalism and the (proposed) measurement strategy of religious (scholars) research firms, there is a strong relationship between religiosity and Trump support even after controlling for partisan identification and ideology and in analyses that look at Republican identifiers only. Instead of finding evidence that *real* evangelicals—based on their beliefs—disassociated themselves from Trump, the results trend in the other direction: a deeper commitment and more adherence to the beliefs is associated with more support for Trump in the general

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<sup>16</sup>There is no statistical evidence that the number of beliefs held corresponds with likelihood of reporting “don’t know” or voting for a third-party candidate among evangelical Republicans. Moreover, there is little evidence that evangelicals stayed home on Election Day rather than vote for Trump. There is not an association between the number of evangelical beliefs held and stated intention of voting in the SSI data. And while turnout findings should be taken with caution due to overreporting of turnout, the data should be able to detect some movement if people are actively abstaining to make a political statement.



election. As such, these data do not suggest that many non-religious Republicans or Trump supporters adopted the evangelical label for political purposes, rather they corroborate work showing that *traditionalist* evangelicals are stronger Republican supporters than their less devout counterparts. And second, these findings build on previous empirical results showing that evangelical support for Trump existed among both frequent and less frequent church attenders (Djupe, Burge, and Lewis 2017; Grant 2016; Newport 2016). While church attendance is uncorrelated with Trump support among evangelicals—a result the SSI data show as well—it would be a mistake to infer religiosity had no association with white evangelicals’ political decision making in the 2016 election.<sup>17</sup>

The next step is to see whether this relationship between beliefs and support for Trump is generalizable beyond 2016. If these findings are specific to the 2016 election, then scholars have more work to do when it comes to explaining why evangelicals were so drawn to Trump, or so opposed to Clinton. But it may also be the case that religious evangelicals represent an extremely loyal Republican constituency in the face of non-traditional candidates of various stripes. Data from the 2012 presidential election indicate that the answer is the latter. I use data collected by the Barna Group before the 2012 presidential campaign season got underway to replicate the previous findings. These results, presented in the bottom panels of Figure 1, rely on a question that asks respondents to state their preference in a hypothetical race between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. While this turned out to be the choice on offer in the 2012 election, the Republican nominee had not yet been selected when respondents answered the question. Here, the response options were: definitely Romney, probably Romney, probably Obama, and definitely Obama. The raw results for the full sample of white evangelicals (left-bottom panel) show a similar pattern as the 2016 results. For these analyses, I collapsed the religious belief categories to ensure there are enough re-

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<sup>17</sup>A close look at the relationship between church attendance and holding religious beliefs reveals that these measures are not synonymous with each other. For example, 20 and 40% of white evangelicals holding three or four beliefs, respectively, report attending church weekly or more in the SSI data. In contrast, roughly 50 and 40% of white evangelicals holding six and seven beliefs, respectively, do not attend church on a weekly basis. As such, it would be a mistake to assume that the null relationship found between church attendance and Trump support among white evangelicals would be similar when looking at religious beliefs.

spondents within each category; however, the trends are similar when using the full belief scale. As the number of beliefs held increases, rates of “definite” and “probable” support for Romney increase and rates of “probable” and “definite” support for Obama decrease. And once again, these results do not appear due to partisan differences among evangelicals of varying levels of belief. A similar trend appears among Republican evangelicals in which 100% holding all eight Barna beliefs reported that they would vote for Romney compared to 80% of evangelical Republicans holding three beliefs or fewer (bottom-right panel). These trends hold in models that control for socio-demographic predictors associated with political and religious attitudes (results available Appendix C).<sup>18</sup>

Taken together, these analyses illustrate that devout evangelicals, those holding a greater number of religious beliefs, were not just more likely to support Trump in 2016 but appear to represent a steadfast bloc of support in the face of non-traditional Republican candidates. In stark contrast to the claims that evangelicals who hold traditional evangelical beliefs would not support Trump, *traditionalist* evangelicals represent Trump’s most loyal supporters, and this support goes above and beyond what partisanship would predict. While these results tell us something important about the general election, the next section explores what happens when partisans have multiple co-partisans from which to choose.

## Primary support and rallying around the candidate

Did *real* evangelicals want Trump to be the nominee? The 2016 SSI survey asked Republican respondents about their preferred Republican nominee for president. Unlike the previous results, holding a greater number of religious beliefs is correlated with *less* support for Trump in the primary. The top-left panel of Figure 2 presents the distribution of primary support among self-identified white evangelical Republicans. Trump’s support at the primary stage decreases as the number of beliefs held increases. Thirty-four percent of white evangelical

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<sup>18</sup>I further corroborate these findings in a third election with yet another controversial Republican candidate. Appendix E describes details surrounding the 2017 special Senate election and the results from originally collected exit-poll data.

Republicans holding three beliefs or fewer and 38% of white evangelicals holding four beliefs reported wanting Trump to be the nominee. In contrast, only 18% and 14% of white evangelical Republicans holding six and seven beliefs, respectively, reported wanting Trump to be the nominee. This is the first piece of evidence in support of the claim that less devout evangelicals were crucial to Trump’s victory. These results comport with others who have shown that Trump was not the first choice of religious evangelicals—usually defined by church attendance (Chang 2016; Douthat 2016; Guerra 2016; Miller 2016; Public Religion Research Institute 2015)—and offers credence to the critiques that evangelical support of Trump during the primaries was overblown.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, however, primary support for Trump was slightly lower among *nominal* evangelicals—those holding three beliefs or fewer—than white non-evangelical Republicans (34% versus 42%). Table B4 show that the raw trends remain in models that include control for demographics and outlooks that may correlate with holding religious beliefs and primary support.

How did white evangelical Republicans who preferred that someone other than Trump become the nominee behave in the general election? Trump may have faced an electoral problem if devout evangelical Republicans who preferred another nominee decided to stay home or vote against Trump. But, among those who did not want Trump to be the nominee, it was the more devout evangelicals who rallied most strongly around the Republican candidate. The top-right panel of Figure 2 shows raw levels of reported support for Trump in the general election among evangelical Republicans who wanted *someone other than* Trump to be the nominee. While it is important to interpret the results at the bottom end of the scale with caution as they have relatively small sample sizes, collapsing the bins so that the categories are four or fewer, five or six, and seven produces the same trends. And once again, Table B6 shows that the gaps remain in models that include control variables.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>For example, Donald Trump placed fourth in the precinct at Liberty University in Virginia, despite Trump having received an endorsement from the school’s president, Jerry Falwell Jr. (Byrnes 2016). Andy Crouch—editor of *Christianity Today*—cited this result as evidence that the more enmeshed a person is within the evangelical community the less likely he or she is to support Trump.

<sup>20</sup>Additional analyses in Appendix F use another data source to show that the SSI primary results are not a function of retrospective reporting of primary preferences.

The bottom panels of Figure 2 return to the 2012 poll conducted by the Barna Group. The bottom-left panel presents the distribution of primary preferences among white evangelical Republicans, separated by number of beliefs held. Similar to the 2016 results, there is not unified evangelical support around Romney to become the nominee, and support for Romney was particularly low—less than 10%—among those who the Barna Group would classify evangelicals (holding all eight beliefs). These results comport with journalistic accounts of evangelicals being uncomfortable with Mitt Romney’s Mormonism, especially early in the primary season (Goodstein 2012; Reynolds 2012). Despite this initial skepticism, evangelicals—particularly evangelicals holding most or all of the religious beliefs that make up the Barna Group’s classification scheme—overwhelmingly supported Romney in a mock election against Obama (bottom-right panel). In fact, 100% of evangelicals holding all eight beliefs reported that they would vote for Romney, either definitely (approximately 80%) or probably (approximately 20%). In contrast, roughly 18% of those we might consider to be *nominal* evangelicals—those holding three beliefs or fewer—reported that they would vote for Obama in the general election despite these respondents both identifying as evangelicals and Republicans.<sup>21</sup> By way of comparison, 22% of white Republicans who do not identify as evangelicals and preferred a different Republican nominee reported that they would vote for Obama (either “definitely” or “probably”) in the hypothetical election. Once again, *nominal* evangelicals—those holding three beliefs or fewer—look similar to their non-evangelical Republican counterparts when it comes to supporting a Republican candidate who was not their first choice. More devout evangelicals, on the other hand, coalesced around Romney. These results are robust to the inclusion of demographic and religious control variables (presented in Appendix C).

Three consistent trends emerge when looking at the Republican primary process. First,

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<sup>21</sup>While it would be a mistake to assume that these responses accurately reflect how people voted in November, 2012, there is reason to suspect that the relative differences across the religious groupings is meaningful. For example, while it is easy for a person to engage in “cheap talk” and say that he or she will defect from the party’s candidate, this possibility only affects the interpretation of the findings if we believe that rates of cheap talk also vary across the number of religious beliefs held.

identifying as an evangelical in general, and holding evangelical beliefs in particular, is correlated with wanting more traditionally “religious” candidates. Neither Donald Trump nor Mitt Romney are candidates whose superficial profiles would make them obvious candidates for evangelical support, and this becomes evident in competitions in which there are religious alternatives. In 2016, devout evangelicals reported wanting Ted Cruz, Ben Carson, or Marco Rubio, while a plurality of devout evangelicals in 2012 reported wanting Mike Huckabee—the Baptist minister—to be the nominee, with some evangelicals supporting Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich as well. Second, white evangelical Republicans who hold a greater number of evangelical beliefs are more likely to rally for their party’s nominee than evangelicals who hold fewer beliefs or non-evangelicals. And third, this result is not merely a phenomenon from 2016. Finding similar results using the 2012 Omni Poll indicate that these *traditionalist* evangelicals can be counted on to support the Republican Party regardless of how the primaries play out.

Having shown that incorporating religious beliefs adds nuance to our understanding of evangelical electoral support, the next section pivots to explore one explanation for why this relationship exists.

## **Why did white evangelicals support Trump?**

Trump’s large base of support from white evangelicals produced many headlines, leading many to wonder how religious Christians could endorse Trump’s personal behaviors by voting for him. On the one hand, the explanation is incredibly straightforward: about 90% of white evangelical Republicans voted for Trump and this is roughly the same percentage of non-evangelical Republicans who voted for Trump. In other words, Republicans voted for the Republican candidate. Jelen and Wald (2018) make this point when writing about evangelicals in the 2016 election; partisanship is a strong social identity that is closely tied to evangelicalism, another strongly held identity. As such, it should be wholly unsurprising that

white evangelicals supported Trump in the presidential election. This partisan explanation, which satisfactorily describes evangelical support for Trump at the aggregate level, ignores the discussions and critiques surrounding how scholars, pollsters, and journalists measure, classify, and identify evangelicals. Additionally, the partisanship-is-powerful account alone cannot explain why devout evangelical Republicans are more supportive of Republican candidates than Republicans holding fewer religious beliefs or Republicans who do not identify as evangelical.

To better understand why—even among Republicans—it was the most religious evangelicals who were also the most supportive of Trump’s candidacy, I test whether negative partisanship and affective polarization explains white evangelicals’ continued support for non-traditional or controversial Republican candidates. The affective polarization explanation—in which partisans have come to increasingly dislike and distrust members of the opposing party (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar and Westwood 2015)—hinges on the idea that, for example, evangelicals may not like Trump but they voted for him because Hillary Clinton, the alternative, was completely unpalatable. This justification of support is far from a ringing endorsement of Trump. Instead, we could interpret it as a begrudging acceptance in the face of a terrible alternative. This explanation builds on the earlier findings that *traditionalist* evangelical Republicans were more likely than *nominal* evangelical Republicans and non-evangelical Republicans to support both Trump and Romney. These religious evangelicals may have disliked certain aspects of the candidates’ personal profiles, but voted for them anyway because they felt like they had no choice.<sup>22</sup>

The left panel of Figure 3 presents the relationship between number of religious beliefs held and favorability ratings of Donald Trump (black circles) and Hillary Clinton (gray squares). The black circles and solid confidence intervals represent the average predicted feeling thermometer scores, which range between 0 and 100, for Trump as a function of beliefs held, controlling for socio-demographic characteristics. *Traditionalist* evangelicals—

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<sup>22</sup>See Iyengar et al. (2019) for a detailed description of affective polarization, including its origins and consequences.

those holding all seven beliefs—give an average feeling thermometer score that is about 8 points higher than evangelicals holding three or fewer (p-value < 0.05). The black open circles and dashed confidence intervals represent the results from a similar model using the Republican subsample. In this case, *traditionalist* evangelical Republicans held slightly more negative evaluations of Trump than evangelicals holding three beliefs or fewer; however, this gap is not statistically significant at conventional levels (difference = -7; p-value = 0.12). Among both the full and Republican subsample, there appears to be a relatively weak correlation between number of beliefs held and evaluations of Donald Trump in 2016.

The solid gray squares with dashed confidence intervals and open gray squares with dotted confidence intervals present the same relationships, but using Clinton feeling thermometer scores. Looking first at the solid gray squares, which represent predicted feeling thermometer scores in models that include all evangelicals, an increase in the number of beliefs held corresponds to a sharp drop in evaluations. Whereas individuals who hold three or fewer or four beliefs have an average feeling thermometer score of 48 and 53, respectively, the average feeling thermometer score for Clinton is only 20 among the most devout evangelicals (difference between most and least devout = -28; p-value < 0.01). The open gray squares replicate the results among Republican identifiers. Here, the starting point among more *nominal* evangelicals is unsurprisingly lower than the full sample (33 and 29 for the first two groupings); however, the steep decline remains as the number of religious beliefs increases. The average feeling thermometer score is about 12 among those at the most devout end of the spectrum (difference between most and least devout = -21; p-value < 0.01).

The weak relationship between beliefs and feelings toward Trump contradicts an important claim that white evangelicals will “hold their noses” and vote for Trump (David Brody, national correspondent for the Christian Broadcasting Network, quoted in Johnson 2016).<sup>23</sup> If this were the case, we would expect devout evangelicals to register their dissatisfaction with Trump despite their plan to vote for him. Instead, we see relative stability in evalu-

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<sup>23</sup>Similarly, Franklin Graham said in October, 2016 that Christians should “hold their nose and vote” for Trump in the wake of the Access Hollywood tapes coming to light (Barrett 2016).

ations across the board. Conversely, devout individuals may have been driven to support Trump, in part, due to their extreme dislike of Clinton. Even among the Republican subsample and in models that include control variables, a persistent evaluation gap emerges in which more devout evangelicals view Clinton more negatively than their more *nominal* counterparts. Negative partisanship may have kept *traditionalist* evangelicals steadfastly in the Republican camp.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, replicating these analyses during a different election offers necessary context for the 2016 results. Perhaps religious beliefs are strongly and positively associated with evaluations of a different non-traditional Republican candidate. If this were the case, the weak results previously described may actually indicate a tepid reaction to Trump among devout evangelicals as their evaluations of the Republican presidential candidate was lower in the 2016 election than in 2012. Similarly, it is possible that the negative evaluations of Clinton were specific to Clinton and do not generalize to other Democratic candidates. The right panel replicates the evaluation results using the 2012 Barna Group Omni Poll. Here, the dependent variable is a four-point favorability rating of Mitt Romney (black circles) and Barack Obama (gray boxes) that ranges between 0 (very unfavorable) and 100 (very favorable). Once again, there is relative stability in evaluations of Romney based on religious beliefs; however, beliefs have a strong correlation with evaluations of Obama, both in the full evangelical sample (solid gray boxes) and the Republican subsample (open gray boxes).<sup>25</sup> Despite including demographic controls in both models and looking specifically at Republicans in the latter model, a large evaluation gap between more and less devout evangelical persists.

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<sup>24</sup>Tables G1 and G2 present the full results from these models.

<sup>25</sup>In the model that includes the full evangelical sample (closed black circles), the Romney evaluation difference between the most and least devout is 6 points (p-value = 0.16); however, respondents holding six or seven beliefs evaluated Romney more favorably than those holding three or fewer (difference = 12; p-value < 0.01). There is no statistical difference between respondents in the upper two categories. In the model that looks specifically at Republican evangelicals (open black circles), there is no detectable relationship between beliefs held and evaluations of Romney. Obama evaluation gap between most and least devout (all evangelicals): -38; p-value < 0.01). Obama evaluation gap between most and least devout (Republicans): -24; p-value < 0.01.



These results show us that the 2016 evaluation findings seem to be part of a broader trend rather than unique to the 2016 election. In both the 2012 and 2016 elections, evangelical Republicans held similar views of their own party’s candidates, regardless of their levels of beliefs, while evaluations of the Democratic Party’s candidates declined precipitously as the number of beliefs held increased. These results highlight that negative partisanship—feeling of dislike toward the political out-party and its candidates—exists in spades among white evangelical Republicans and may help explain Republican candidates’ high levels of support among this group.

These findings, which add important insight into why devout evangelicals may support non-traditional Republican candidates, contribute to a large body of research exploring the determinants of Trump’s electoral appeal. Attitudes about gender roles, sexism, and race (Van Assche and Pettigrew 2016; Major, Blodorn, and Blascovich 2016; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2017; Valentino, Wayne, and Oceno 2018); views about social structures, hierarchy, and obedience (Choma and Hanoch 2017; Feldman forthcoming; MacWilliams 2016; Pettigrew 2017; Van Assche and Pettigrew 2016); feelings of political efficacy (Friedman 2016; Hetherington 2015); populist attitudes (Groshek and Koc-Michalska 2017; Norris and Inglehart forthcoming; Tesler 2016); and holding Christian Nationalist beliefs (Whitehead, Perry, Baker 2018) have all been shown to be important determinants of the 2016 vote. These findings show that negative partisanship, which has been repeatedly documented in the general public (Abramowitz and Webster 2017), also plays a particularly important role in understanding evangelical public opinion: more devout evangelicals, even after taking partisanship and ideology into account, are more likely to hold negative evaluations of out-party candidates relative to their less devout counterparts. One implication of these results is that evangelical Republicans are unlikely to ever abandon the Republican candidate, as their dislike for Democratic candidates—and possibly the party as a whole—keeps them squarely in the Republican camp.

## Conclusion

Evangelical Christians represent an important political bloc and have received extensive attention from politicians, the media, and academics. Some thought that the 2016 election, with the unlikely Republican nominee, would change the electoral landscape with evangelical Christians taking a stand against Donald Trump by abstaining, voting for a third-party candidate, or even crossing party lines to vote for Hillary Clinton. But none of those things happened, and Trump continues to enjoy high levels of approval among white evangelical Christians despite low rates of support overall (Burton 2018a; 2018b). This paper explores variation in evangelical electoral support and public opinion with the purpose of understanding what explains white evangelical support for Donald Trump.

The empirical results show that more devout or *traditionalist* evangelicals were more likely to support Trump in the general election compared to less devout evangelicals. These findings both help to adjudicate between conflicting expectations and add to the body of knowledge about evangelicals' role in elections. While there is a growing body of research showing that political affinities can shape reported religious identities (Campbell et al. 2018; Djupe et al. 2018; Margolis 2018a; 2018b) and a chorus of critiques that evangelical support for Trump came largely from *nominal* or non-believing self-identified evangelicals (Bruinius 2018; Gjetlen 2016a; Kidd 2016), the data do not show evidence of this. Instead, the evidence corroborates work showing that *traditionalist* evangelicals are more loyal to the Republican Party relative to more *centrist* or *nominals* evangelicals (Guth et al. 2006; Green 2000; Guth and Bradberry 2013). While there are numerous legitimate critiques of the self-identification evangelical survey question, the question does not produce an overestimation of Republican support among white evangelicals. On the contrary, if holding certain beliefs became part of the evangelical definition, as the NAE proposes and as other religious historians and scholars suggest, evangelical support for recent Republican candidates would be even higher.

The primary results, however, showed important variation among self-identified evangelicals: less devout or *nominal* evangelical Republicans were more likely to support Trump in

the primary. Even in models that control for other religious measures, political ideology, and social traits and predispositions that have been shown to be correlated with Trump support, the most *traditonalist* evangelical Republicans supported other Republican candidates while more *nominal* evangelical Republicans threw their support behind Trump from the very beginning. It is possible that Thomas Kidd and George Marsden’s claims that these individuals adopted the evangelical label for political reasons have merit, although additional research is necessary to demonstrate whether this occurred. That said, more devout or *traditionalist* evangelicals came around most strongly for Trump, even after preferring another candidate to be the nominee, compared to their less devout counterparts who initially supported another Republican candidate. Moreover, similar trends appear when looking at a different set of candidates during the 2012 election. The results, therefore, are not simply the result of the idiosyncrasies surrounding the 2016 election but are instead part of a broader pattern.

The paper then evaluates one claim associated with why evangelicals supported non-traditional candidates, like Trump and Romney, while continuing to take seriously how the measurement of evangelicals might shape the results. I find that negative partisanship, an important predictor of electoral behaviors in recent elections, varies systematically among self-identified white evangelicals. While negative partisanship represents only one of many explanations for Trump’s electoral success, the findings illustrate important correlational differences in outlooks based on religious beliefs. Moreover, these results further corroborate the notion that it is important to look at variation within religious traditions and groups (Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 2009) rather than to paint members with the same brush. Future research exploring religious variation on other politically relevant attitudes, beliefs, and traits would shed further light into how evangelicals think and act politically.

Importantly, this research does not weigh in on how evangelicalism *should* be measured on surveys, although this represents an area ripe for future research. Instead, the paper focuses on understanding how evangelicalism, measured by beliefs as historians and religious scholars suggest, would change political scientists’ understanding of evangelical public opinion. In

particular, the additive scale of beliefs offers a useful strategy for scholars who are interested in incorporating religious beliefs into analyses of white evangelicals but do not want to adhere to an all-or-nothing classification scheme, like the Barna Group and LifeWay Research do. This strategy also allows scholars to look at variation uncover important differences within this politically important religious group.

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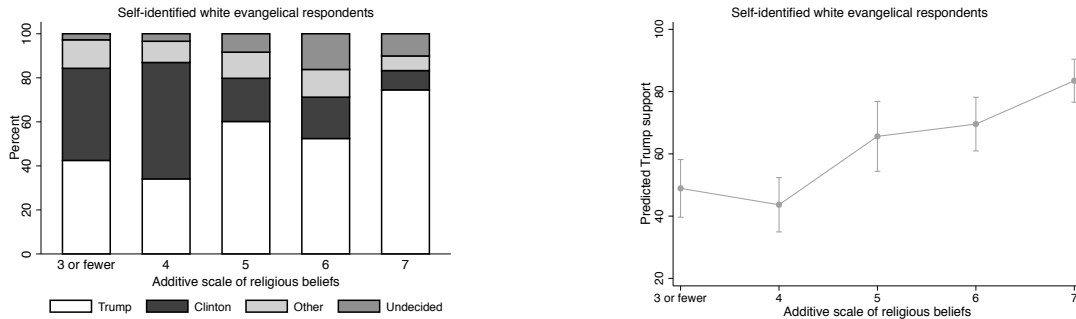
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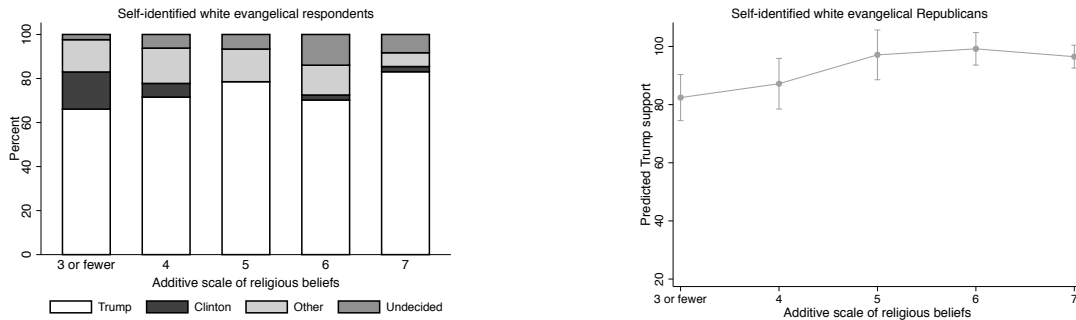
# Figures

Figure 1: Religious beliefs correlate with electoral decisions

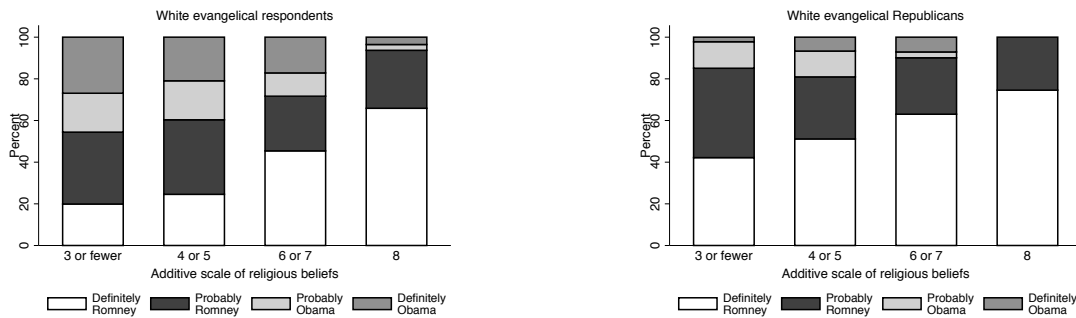
### 2016 electoral decisions among white evangelicals



### 2016 electoral decisions among white evangelical Republicans



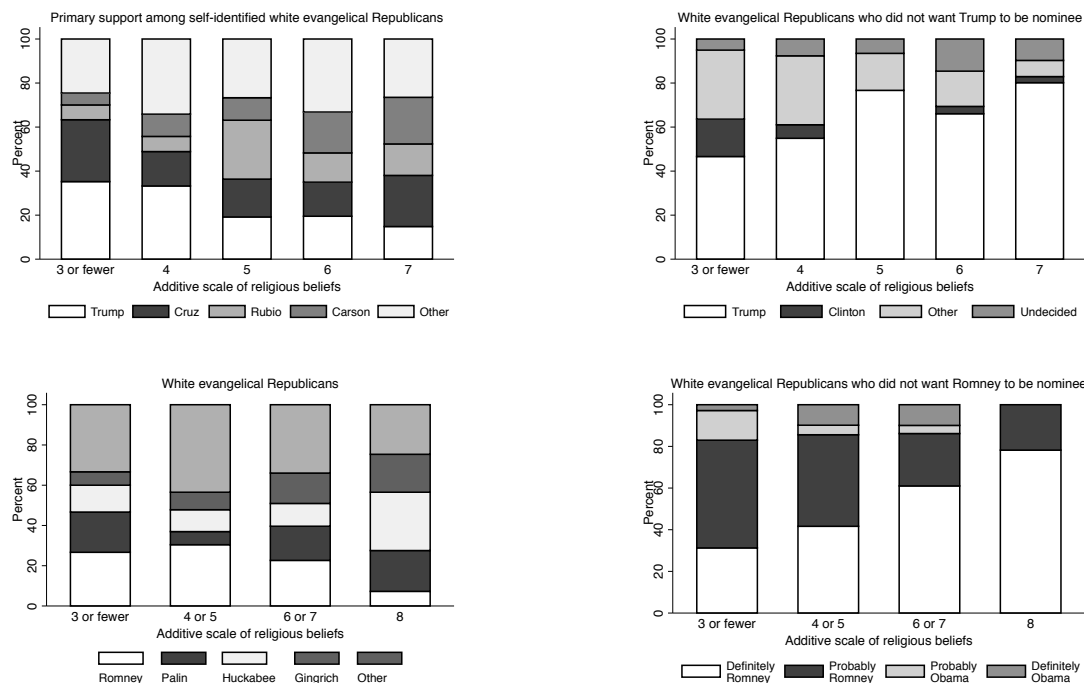
### 2012 electoral decisions among white evangelicals



Note: The top-left panel presents the weighted distribution of general election preferences among self-identified white evangelicals in the 2016 SSI data, including the evangelical oversample. The top-right panel presents the predicted probability of a Trump vote based on number of religious beliefs held while controlling for: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, parental status, frequency of church attendance, and frequency of prayer. The middle panels present results from the same analyses and data source, but focusing on self-identified white evangelical Republicans. The middle-right panel also includes ideology as a political control variable. The bottom-left panel presents the weighted distribution of a general election question among self-identified white respondents who “have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important today” in the 2012 Barna Omni Poll. The bottom-right panel presents the weighted distribution of election preferences among those in the subsample who also identify as Republican.

Source: 2016 SSI and 2012 Barna Omni Poll

Figure 2: Religious beliefs correlate with primary support and rallying around the nominee

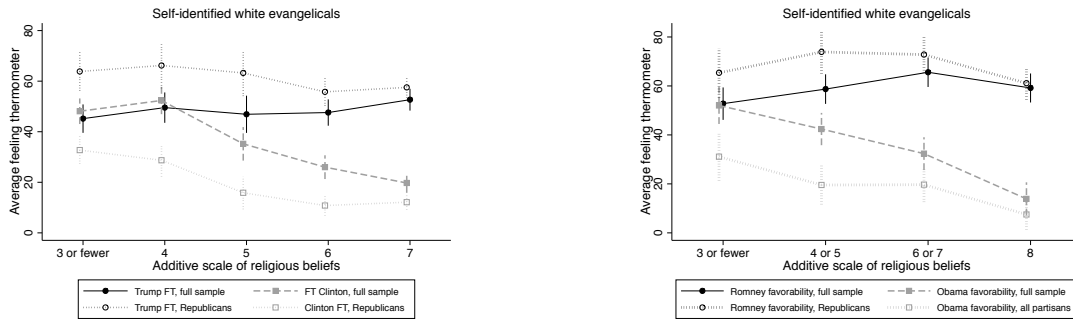


Note: The top-left panel presents the weighted distribution of primary election preferences among self-identified white evangelical Republicans in the 2016 SSI data, including the evangelical oversample. The top-right panel presents the weighted distribution of general election preferences among self-identified white evangelical Republicans who wanted someone other than Trump to be the nominee in the 2016 SSI data, including the evangelical oversample. The bottom panels present results from the same analyses using the 2012 Barna Omni Poll.

Source: 2016 SSI and 2012 Barna Omni Poll



Figure 3: Religious beliefs correlate with out-party evaluations



Note: The left panel presents the average feeling thermometer scores for the 2016 presidential nominees among self-identified white evangelicals. The dependent variables are feeling thermometer scores, ranging from 0-100, for Donald Trump (black circles) and Hillary Clinton (gray boxes). The right panel presents the average feeling favorability ratings for the 2012 presidential nominees among self-identified white evangelicals. The dependent variables are favorability ratings, ranging from 0-100, for Mitt Romney (black circles) and Barack Obama (gray boxes). Solid points and lines represent models that include all evangelicals. Hollow points and dotted lines present models that include the Republican subsample only. All models control for: gender, age, education, income, marital status, and parental status. The 2016 models also control for income and region of residence.

Source: 2016 SSI and 2012 Barna Omni Poll

# Appendix

## Appendix A: Measurement

### Religious belief question wordings

#### 2016 SSI

- Barna likert scale questions
  - I, personally, have a responsibility to share my beliefs with other people.
  - If a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their life, he or she will earn a place in Heaven.
  - When Jesus Christ lived on Earth, He committed sins like other people.
  - My religious faith is very important in my daily life.
  - The Devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.
  - I have no doubt that God exists.
- Additional questions that go into the Barna scale
  - Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? (The Bible is the actual Word of God to be take literally, word for word; The Bible is the Word of God but not everything in the Bible should be take literally, word for word; The Bible is written by men and is not the Word of God.

#### 2012 Omni Barna Poll

- Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?

- Which one of these statements best describes your own belief about what will happen to you after you die. [When you die you will go to Heaven because you have tried to obey the 10 Commandments; When you die you will go to Heaven because you are basically a good person; When you die you will go to Heaven because you have confessed your sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior; When you die you will go to Heaven because God loves all people and will not let them perish; When you die you will not go to Heaven; You do not know what will happen after you die.
  
- There are many different beliefs about God or a higher power. Please choose which one of the following descriptions comes closest to what you, personally, believe about God. [Everyone is god; God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today; God refers to the total realization of personal, human potential; There are many gods, each with different power and authority; God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach; There is so such thing as God.]
  
- Which one of these statements best describes your own belief about what will happen to you after you die. [When you die you will go to Heaven because you have tried to obey the 10 Commandments. When you die you will go to Heaven because you are basically a good person. When you die you will go to Heaven because you have confessed your sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior; When you die you will go to Heaven because God loves all people and will not let them perish; When you die you will not go to Heaven; You don't know what will happen after you die.]
  
- Likert scale
  - The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches.
  - You, personally, have a responsibility to tell other people your religious beliefs.
  - Your religious faith is very important in your life.

- The devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.
- When He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins, like other people.

## **Other SSI survey questions**

### **Other religiosity questions**

- Not counting weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?
- How often, if ever, do you pray by yourself?
- And aside from attending services, are you involved in any special activities, programs, volunteer work, committees, or small groups in your religious community?
- Please mark whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Most of my friends are part of my religious community.
- Extrinsic religiosity
  - While I am a religious person, I do not let religion influence my daily life.
  - Occasionally, I compromise my religious beliefs to protect my social and economic being.
  - One reason for me going to church is that it helps establish me in the community.
  - I go to church because it helps me to feel at home in my neighborhood.
  - One reason for me praying is that it helps me to gain relief and protection.
  - I pray chiefly because it makes me feel better.
- Intrinsic religiosity
  - My religious beliefs really shape my whole approach to life.
  - I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life.

- I allow almost nothing to prevent me from going to church on Sundays.
  - The church is most important to me as a place to share fellowship with other Christians.
  - I stay at home because it helps me to be aware of God’s presence.
  - I pray chiefly because it deepens my relationship with God.
- Quest religiosity
    - I was driven to ask religious questions by a growing awareness of the tensions in my world.
    - My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious beliefs.
    - I value my religious doubts and uncertainties.
    - For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious.
    - As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change as well.
    - I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs.

### **Predispositions, outlooks, and attitudes**

- Likert scale statements
  - We need to protect traditional American values from foreign influence.
  - Please mark whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: The right of religious liberty is under threat in America today.
  - Symbolic racism
    - \* Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

- \* Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.

– Populism

- \* What people call “compromise” in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles.
- \* The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.
- \* The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people.
- \* Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.

– Social Dominance Orientation

- \* There are many kinds of groups in the world: men and women, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities, and political factions. We want to know your views about groups in general. For each statement, select a number from 1 (extremely oppose) to 10 (extremely support) to show your opinion.

- In setting priorities, we must consider all groups.
- We should not push for group equality.
- Group equality should be our ideal.
- Superior groups should dominate inferior groups.

- In December, do you think stores and businesses should greet their customers by saying ‘Merry Christmas’, or do you think stores and businesses should use less religious phrases such as ‘happy holidays’ and ‘season’s greetings’?
- How big a problem is sexism in our society today?
- Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Suppose these people are on one

end of the scale, at point 1. Other people feel that it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on the scale?

- There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Below is a short list of opinions. Which one of these options best agrees with your views? [By law, abortion should never be permitted; The law should permit abortion only in cases of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger; The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established; By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.]
- As you may know, the Affordable Care Act, also referred to as Obamacare, was signed into law in 2010. Given what you know about the Affordable Care Act, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?
- There has been much talk recently about whether gays and lesbians should have the legal right to marry someone of the same sex. Which of the following options comes closest to your position on this issue? [I support full marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples; I support civil unions or domestic partnerships, but not gay marriage; I do not support any form of legal recognition of the relationships of gay and lesbian couples]
- Political efficacy
  - How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think?
  - In general, do you think the best candidates win the elections or is it just the candidates who raise the most money that get elected, or something in between?

– In some countries, people believe their elections are conducted fairly. In other countries, people believe that their elections are conducted unfairly. Do you believe presidential elections in the United States are generally...

- Authoritarian Personality

– Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. For each pair, choose which one you think is **more important** for a child to have:

- \* Independence; Respect for their elders
- \* Good manners; Curiosity
- \* Obedience; Self-reliance
- \* Being considerate; Being well-behaved



## Measuring evangelicals

The main text describes three common ways of measuring evangelicals in surveys: self-identification, religious denomination, and religious beliefs. Each strategy of measuring evangelicals has advantages and drawbacks. While the most obvious benefit to a single self-identification question is its ease and convenience (Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 1999), there are other theoretical reasons to employ this line of questioning. First, there is a great deal of diversity both between denominations that make up a religious tradition as well as between congregations of the same denomination (see Djupe and Calfano (2014) and Djupe and Gilbert (2009) for a more detailed discussion of this critique). It would therefore be a mistake to assume that just because a person belongs to a certain church that she is exposed to specific messages or interacts with a certain type of person. Second, when respondents self-identify as a born-again or evangelical Christians they are adopting an identity, whereas they passively receive evangelical denominational identities when researchers classify them based church affiliation. Therefore, researchers can use the born-again Christian measure as an identity measure as they can be certain, rather than assume, the respondent holds a particular identification.

That said, it is easy to question whether a simple yes/no question can accurately classify individuals into a religious camp, especially in light of the fact that non-Protestants can and do identify as evangelicals on surveys. On the other hand, self-identification as an evangelical allows individuals to express their “identification with a movement” (Lindsay and Hackett 2008) and allows researchers to account for the heterogeneity across religious denominations within a broad religious family or even across churches within a single denomination (Djupe and Calfano 2015; Djupe and Gilbert 2009), as aspects of evangelical theology and practice appear within some mainline churches (Wilcox and Larson 2006). Identifying respondents based on religious denomination has the benefit of relying on official church doctrine and objective classification by trained scholars. Additionally, whereas survey respondents may have motivations separate from religion—such as politics—to self identify as

an evangelical or born-again Christian or not (Margolis 2018), church membership may be less vulnerable to this sort of expressive responding. This strategy, however, raises scholarly debates about the classification scheme (see Burge and Lewis 2017; Steensland et al. 2000). But, as discussed above, differences among denominations within a religious tradition as well as among churches in a specific denominations both impact the classification scheme, possibly categorizing some as mainline who might be more appropriately considered to be evangelical and vice versa. Additionally, the classification scheme is quite specific, with for example, the American Baptist Association being classified as evangelical and the American Baptist Churches USA being classified as mainline churches. It is difficult for scholars to measure the amount of measurement error present, as even multi-wave surveys usually only ask religious denomination once. But the General Social Survey ran a panel study in 2006 and 2008 in which religious denomination was asked in both waves. Approximately 30% of self-identified Protestants changed their denomination in a two-year period. While some of these changes may reflect true changes in affiliation, many of these changes are between denominations with similar names. Moreover, the sharp increase in non-denominational churches as well as the increasing number of Christians who choose not to identify with a specific denomination make classifying larger groups of people more difficult. And while classifying evangelicals based on their beliefs circumvents the issue that researchers do not know exactly what sort of church an evangelical—classified through their denominational affiliation—actually attends, this strategy raises questions surrounding which beliefs are so fundamental to evangelicalism that individuals can be classified as evangelical or not based on these views. Moreover, focusing solely on beliefs might miss individuals who identify as an evangelical and view themselves as part of the evangelical team, despite not adhering to all the requisite beliefs.

## Validating the belief scale measure

### Has “evangelical” lost its religious meaning?

One explanation for why evangelicals are so politically cohesive is because the term evangelical is devoid of religious meaning. Instead, the term “evangelical” operates as a cultural or political label in the United States, signaling something about a person’s culture, values, and politics that is separate from religion. To investigate this claim, I use the additive scale of religious beliefs from the 2016 SSI data to answer a series of descriptive questions. In contrast to the claims that most self-identified evangelicals do not hold evangelical beliefs or that evangelicalism is a religiously meaningless term today, I find ample evidence that self-identified evangelicals maintain an evangelical worldview.

First, do white self-identified evangelicals hold religious beliefs associated with the Barna Group’s conception of evangelicalism? The top-left panel Figure A1 shows the distribution of the number of religious beliefs that self-identified white evangelicals hold.<sup>26</sup> Two trends are immediately evident, which arguably muddle the interpretation of these data. On the one hand, there is a noticeable left skew in these data. Only 13% of the sample hold two religious beliefs or fewer, and 44% hold six or seven beliefs. The strong skew in the data can be interpreted as evidence that the term evangelical retains much of its religious meaning. On the other hand, there is also a second peak in the middle of the distribution, with 24% holding four beliefs. In particular, many of the self-ascribed evangelicals in this category accept the arguably “easy” beliefs that are accepted by many non-evangelicals—such as agreeing that God exists and reporting that faith is important—while not accepting the more uniquely evangelical beliefs surrounding views about Jesus living a sinless life, that good deeds alone are not enough to earn a place in heaven, and the importance of sharing one’s religious beliefs with others. These results offer merit to the claims that the term

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<sup>26</sup>The distributions look similar when using a denominational classification to classify white evangelicals. The main text focuses on self-identified evangelicals, as it is the self use of the label “evangelical” that is currently being questioned by academics and media pundits. These distributions rely on weighted data but do not include the evangelical oversample. Unweighted data produce substantively identical results.

evangelical has become a term that denotes Christians who respect religion and God but without adhering to some of the main tenets of evangelicalism.

Second, what do these distributions look like for non-white evangelicals and white non-evangelical Christians? While the emphasis in the paper is on white evangelicals, non-white evangelicals represent an important comparison group in assessing whether or not “evangelical” remains a religious term. If, for example, virtually all non-white evangelicals hold all the religious beliefs laid out by the Barna Group, then the distribution of white evangelicals’ beliefs would look even less impressive by comparison. This, in turn, would further give credence to the idea that white Americans have adopted the evangelical label for reasons separate from religion. The top-right panel of Figure A1 presents the distribution of beliefs among non-white evangelicals using white bars with black outlines.<sup>27</sup> Non-white evangelicals, as it turns out, look similar in their distribution of evangelical beliefs to white evangelicals. It is also worthwhile to look at the distribution of beliefs among white people who identify as Protestant or Christian but do *not* consider themselves to be evangelical. It would be reasonable to question the Barna Group’s evangelical classification strategy if it turned out that white non-evangelicals, who are nonetheless Christians, hold similar beliefs to white evangelicals. The dark gray boxes in the top-right panel show the distribution of beliefs among white non-evangelicals and reveal a skew in the opposite direction: The most common number of religious beliefs is one, 91% hold four beliefs or fewer, and just shy of 4% hold six or seven evangelical beliefs. The sharp contrast in distributions between white evangelicals and white non-evangelicals illustrates that the scale differentiates self-identified evangelicals and non-evangelical Christians with respect to their religious beliefs.<sup>28</sup> Table A1 in the

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<sup>27</sup>This group includes African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. Separate distributions for each of the three racial and ethnic groups produce similar trends to the full non-white group.

<sup>28</sup>These results also offer a response to those who criticize the classification of evangelicals based holding certain beliefs on the grounds that the beliefs are not unique to evangelical traditions (e.g., Gloege 2018). While this is certainly true and non-evangelicals—both when classified by self-identification and denomination—hold some of these beliefs, evangelicals are much more likely to accept these beliefs. So while there may be theoretical reasons to be worried about this measurement strategy, the empirical results indicate a strong correlation between these beliefs and membership in evangelical communities. These findings comport with Fea (2018) who recognizes that each individual feature may not be unique to evangelicalism, the combination of these beliefs paints a uniquely evangelical profile.

Appendix presents the results from regression models comparing the number of evangelical beliefs held for white evangelicals, white non-evangelicals, and non-white evangelicals. These results show that the gap between white evangelical Christians and white non-evangelicals (but still Christians) remains even after controlling for a host of socio-demographic, religious, and political characteristics. The small gap in which white evangelicals hold, on average, more religious beliefs than non-white evangelicals (difference in average number of beliefs = 0.39; p-value = 0.052) disappears once various control indicators are included in the model.

Third, would classifying evangelicals based on religious denomination change our understanding about the distribution of beliefs among white evangelicals? Perhaps the ease with which one can self-identify as an evangelical means that evangelicals—classified based on where people attend church—will yield a more religious subsample. While a plurality of those who identify as an evangelical or belong to an evangelical denomination would actually be considered an evangelical using either classification strategy (48%), roughly similar percentages of respondents—26%—self-identify without belonging to an evangelical denomination and belong to an evangelical denomination without self-identifying as an evangelical. That scholars would categorize different people as evangelical using the different classifications schemes lends credibility to the claim that the problem lies in pollsters tendency to use a simple, catch-all self-identification question for measurement.<sup>29</sup> The bottom-left panel of Figure A1 addresses this possibility by looking at subsamples of respondents who would be considered evangelical under one classification scheme but not the other. Here, the white bars with black outline represent respondents who call themselves evangelical but do not belong to a religious denomination that scholars would classify as evangelical (N=118). The gray bars denote the opposite: those who belong to an evangelical denomination but do not self-identify (N=98). The divergent trends highlight that evangelicals classified by denomi-

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<sup>29</sup>Scholars have previously shown that despite there being differences in who calls themselves evangelicals on a survey and who scholars classify as evangelical using a scholarly coding scheme (such as Steensland et al.'s (2000) RELTRAD), the groups look similar in their social and political outlooks (Burge and Lewis 2017). The SSI data similarly show that the distributions of beliefs among self-identified evangelicals and evangelicals classified based on denomination produce similar distributions of beliefs.

nation alone actually hold fewer religious beliefs, on average, than self-identified evangelicals who do not belong to an evangelical denomination.<sup>30</sup> While it is difficult to say why this result appears—it may be due to measurement error of religious denominations or real differences across members of these different groups—the data rule out that the self-identification measure is to blame for the term evangelical losing its religious meaning.

And fourth, what is the partisan breakdown of religious beliefs among evangelicals? While the emphasis is usually placed on white evangelicals and their close relationship with the Republican Party, roughly one-third of white self-identified evangelicals in the SSI data identify as Democrats or Democratic leaners.<sup>31</sup> Knowing the distribution of beliefs for Democratic and Republican evangelicals can further help us evaluate the claim that the term evangelical has become devoid of religious meaning, instead becoming a term for cultural conservatives or Christian Republicans. The bottom-right panel of Figure A1 presents the distribution of beliefs among self-identified Democrats (gray bars) and Republicans (white bar with black outlines) who also self-identify as evangelicals. The distributions clearly look different for Democrats and Republicans. First, Democrats have a single high peak at four beliefs. Looking back at the distribution of full sample of white evangelicals (top-left panel), it becomes clear that most of the people in this bin are Democrats. The distribution of beliefs among the Republican subsample, on the other hand, shows a stark skew toward holding a large number of beliefs: the most populated bin consists of holding all seven beliefs and 60% of white evangelical Republicans hold six or seven beliefs. In contrast, only about 10% hold two beliefs or fewer. This result calls into question the claim that “evangelical” has become a purely political term that Republicans who believe in God and respect religion have adopted. While these results cannot rule out the possibility that Republicans adopted the evangelical label for political reasons and then subsequently internalized the corresponding beliefs, the results do not support the claim that there are many *nominal* evangelical Republicans, those

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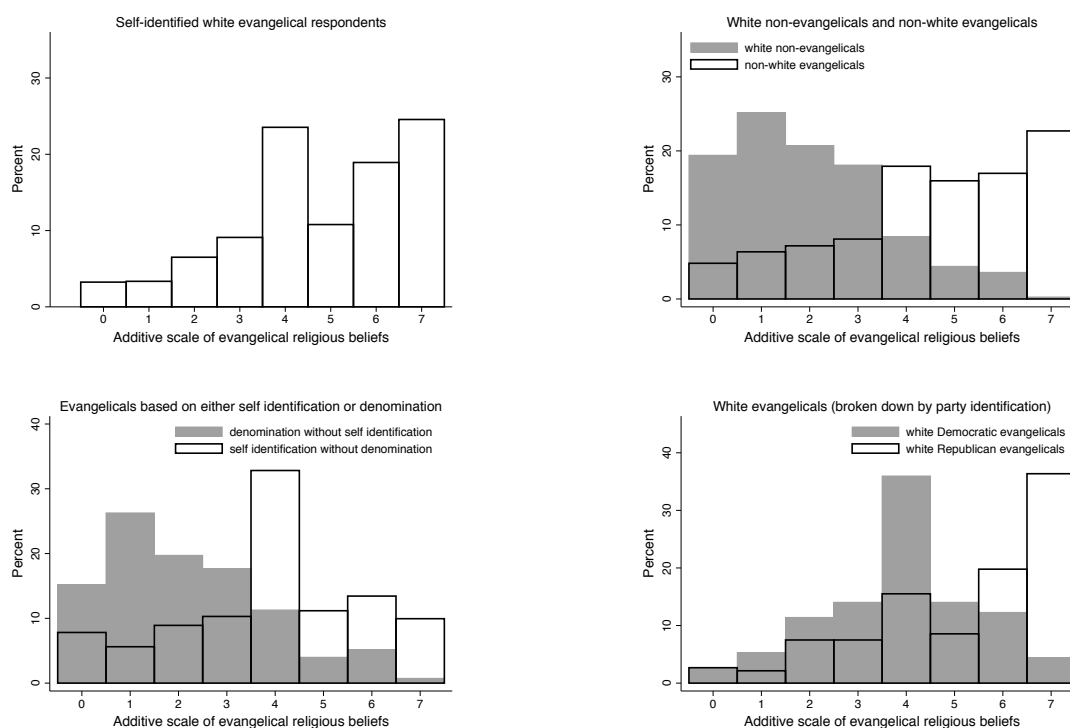
<sup>30</sup>Perhaps unsurprisingly, individuals who both self-identify and are part of evangelical denominations hold, on average, a greater number of religious beliefs. Two-thirds hold either six or seven beliefs. In contrast, only about 15% hold three beliefs or fewer.

<sup>31</sup>N=115 in the sample that excludes the evangelical oversample.

who self-identify but have not accepted the corresponding beliefs.

These results present important descriptive results showing that evangelicalism has not lost its religious meaning and that nominal evangelicals are more prevalent among Democrats, casting doubt on the claim that evangelicalism merely denotes culturally conservative Republicans in today’s society.

Figure A1: “Evangelical” maintains a religious meaning



Note: The dependent variable is the number of beliefs held using a modified seven-item scale created by the Barna Group to identify evangelical respondents. The top-left panel includes all white respondents who reported “identifying as an evangelical or born-again Christian.” The top-right panel includes white respondents who do not self identify as evangelical or born again but identify as Protestant or Christian (gray boxes) and non-white respondents who self-identify as evangelical or born again (white boxes with black outlines). The bottom-left panel includes white respondents who would be classified as evangelical using either the denominational or self-identification approaches, but not both. The bottom-right panel includes white self-identifying evangelicals who identify as Democrat (gray boxes) or Republican (white boxes with black outlines). These distributions represent weighted data from the main survey without the evangelical oversample.  
Source: 2016 SSI

While the findings from Figure A1 in the main text tell us something specific about the relationship between holding an evangelical label and accepting specific religious beliefs, these findings rely on scholars (such as Bebbington (1989)), religious umbrella organizations (such as the NAE), and Christian polling companies (such as LifeWay Research and the Barna Group) who claim that evangelicalism should be a belief-based classification. Scholars, however, may prefer to distinguish among self-identified evangelicals empirically using other measures. For example, researchers might think that religious behaviors—the frequency with which people attend church or pray—are important measures when trying to identify cultural evangelicals from the highly devout. Alternatively, scholars may want to measure evangelicalism based on involvement in the evangelical sub-culture and therefore might care about whether people are involved in their churches (outside of attending religious services) or whether most of their friends are the same religion. These are all reasonable ways a researcher may want to distinguish between evangelicals who are deep in the religious fold versus more nominal evangelicals.

Importantly, however, these variables correlate with the Barna Group’s belief scale, as shown in Figure A2. For example, self-identified white evangelicals who attend church weekly or more are more likely to hold a greater number of evangelical beliefs than those who attend rarely (an average of five beliefs versus three). Similar trends appear for questions that measure frequency of prayer, involvement in church groups, and the number of friends who share the respondents’ religious beliefs. This result is perhaps not surprising if we think that different forms of religiosity likely reinforce each other. For example, those who attend church frequently are more likely to be invited to join a church group or to participate in the Bible study, and people who pray often may come to be more involved in their church communities. A similar logic applies to holding evangelical beliefs: people may come to adopt these beliefs through their involvement in their religious communities or they may change their levels of involvement in their religious communities on account of holding certain beliefs.

As such, the correlations found between holding evangelical beliefs and various po-



litical attitudes can be interpreted in one of two ways. First, holding evangelical beliefs (or not) can distinguish *true* or strict evangelical Christians from their nominal or cultural counterparts. This interpretation—adopted by Christian research groups such as Barna and LifeWay Research as well as the NAE—uses beliefs as the important distinguishing feature in identifying evangelical Christians. A second interpretation is that holding evangelical beliefs is a proxy for, rather than a clear indicator of, evangelical identity. A measurement based on belief, by virtue of being strongly correlated with other plausible measures of evangelical identity strength, can be interpreted as a variable that indirectly measures evangelical identity.<sup>32</sup>

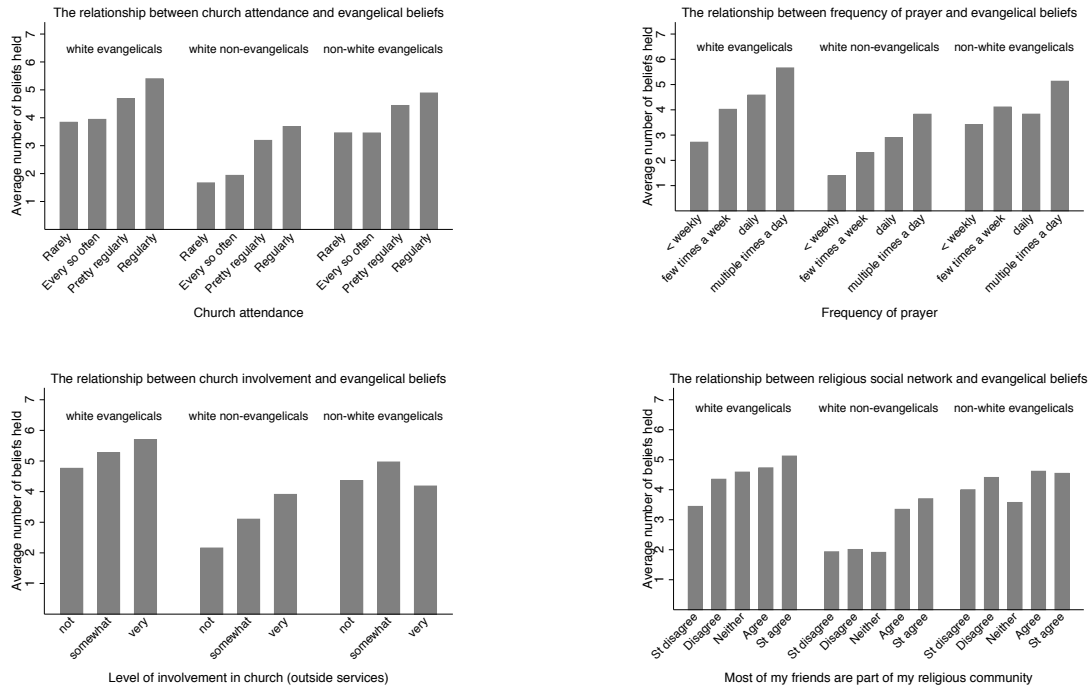
The four panels of Figure A2 look at church attendance, prayer, church involvement, and having friends of the same religion for self-identified white evangelicals, white non-evangelicals (who nonetheless identify as Christian or Protestant) and non-white evangelicals. Two important trends emerge. First, the positive correlation that exists between other measures of religiosity and average number of beliefs held exists among these other subgroups. Religious behaviors and involvement in a religious community are both positively correlated with private religious beliefs, even among non-evangelicals. But the second trend highlights that evangelicals are distinct on account of their beliefs. For example, white evangelicals who report rarely or never attending church hold more of the Barna religious beliefs, on average, than non-evangelical Christians who attend church weekly. Similarly, those white evangelicals who are not involved in church activities and strongly disagree with the statement that most of their friends are part of their religious communities hold a greater number of beliefs than those non-evangelical Christians who are very involved in church activities and report that most of their friends are part of their religious communities. These trends indicate that evangelicals, even those who scholars would not otherwise classify as religious, hold beliefs and outlooks that are distinct from non-evangelicals, even those who are religiously involved. While these findings do not negate the importance of religious behav-

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<sup>32</sup>With either interpretation, models controlling for other measures of religiosity help rule out that another measure of religious identification actually represents the key association between evangelicalism and politics.

iors and involvement in politics, they highlight that beliefs represent an important part of evangelical identity and that beliefs seem to separate evangelicals from non-evangelicals.

Figure A2: Validating measure



Note: The dependent variable is the average number of religious beliefs held, which can range between 0 and 7. The various religious measures which make up the independent variables are: church attendance (top-left panel), frequency of prayer (top-right panel), level of involvement in church separate from services (bottom-left panel), and agreement with a statement about whether most of the respondents' friends are part of their religious communities (bottom-right). Within each panel, the first set of bars represents the results for self-identified white evangelicals, the second set of bars represent the results for white non-evangelicals who nonetheless identify as Protestant or Christian, and the third set of bars represent the results for non-white evangelicals.

Source: 2016 SSI.

Table A1 presents the analyses described in the main text comparing the average number of religious beliefs held for white evangelicals, white non-evangelicals, and non-white evangelicals. White non-evangelicals, despite still identifying as Christian or Protestant, hold fewer beliefs on average than white evangelicals. This relationship holds even when including demographic, religious, and political control variables in the models. Non-white evangelicals, on the other hand, look similar in the average number of religious beliefs held relative to white evangelicals.

Table A1: White evangelicals are more likely to hold evangelical beliefs

	Number of beliefs held (0-7)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
White non-evangelicals	-2.37*	-2.31*	-1.08*	-0.98*
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Non-white evangelicals	-0.39*	-0.33	-0.22	-0.09
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.17)	(0.19)
Intercept	4.61*	2.67*	1.34*	0.48
	(0.10)	(0.65)	(0.61)	(0.66)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
religious controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
political controls	No	No	No	Yes
$R^2$	0.265	0.316	0.577	0.614
Observations	774	744	644	562

Note: Coefficients represent the difference in the average number of beliefs held for white non-evangelicals and non-white evangelicals relative to white self-identified evangelicals, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of beliefs held using a modified Barna evangelical belief scale. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. Religious controls include: church attendance and frequency of prayer. Political controls include party identification and ideology. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05  
Source: 2016 SSI.

## Appendix B: 2016 electoral results (SSI sample)

### Sample sizes in various SSI subsamples

Table B1: Sample size

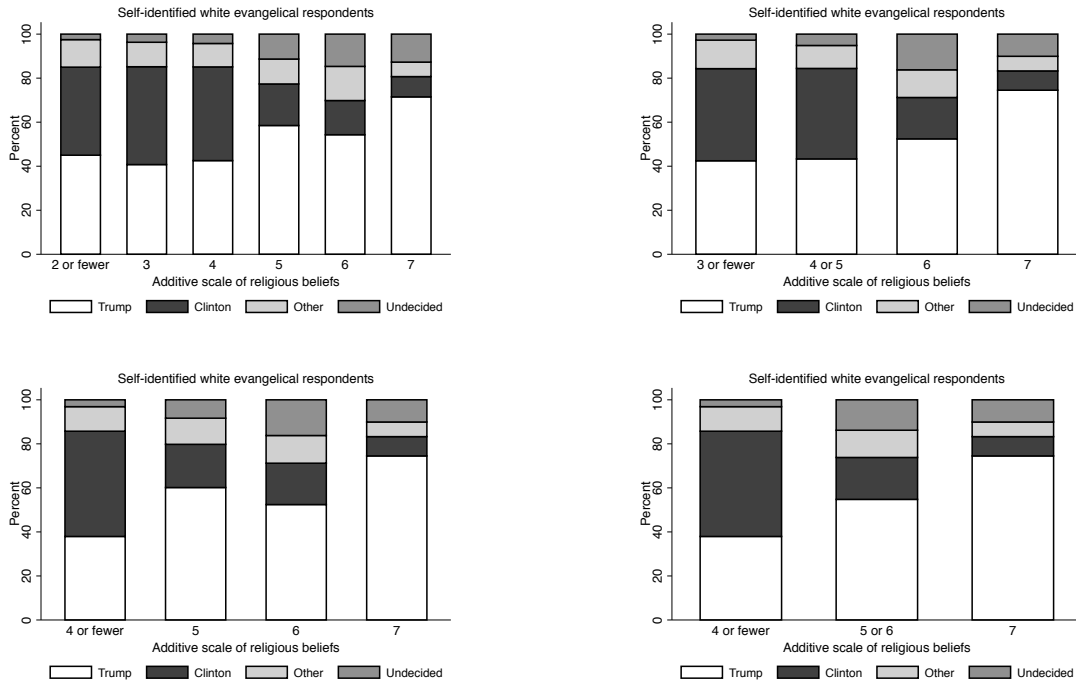
	full sample (no oversample)	white evangelical (no oversample)	white evangelical (w/ oversample)	white evan Rep (no oversample)	white evan Rep (w/oversample)
0	126	11	14	5	8
1	205	15	29	4	13
2	244	30	45	14	21
3	282	38	60	14	21
4	382	79	132	29	46
5	215	37	85	16	46
6	260	62	162	37	110
7	326	80	248	68	210
Total	2040	352	775	187	475

Note: The columns consist of sample sizes.

Source: 2016 SSI.

# Replication of results

Figure B1: Evangelicals beliefs and 2016 vote choice (alternative binning strategies)



Note: The panels present the weighted distribution of general election preferences among self-identified white evangelicals in the 2016 SSI data, including the evangelical oversample. Each panel presents a slightly different binning strategy.

Source: 2016 SSI

Figure 1 in the main text presents both raw trends as well as findings that come from regression models that include control variables. Despite the evangelical over sample, it is reasonable to be concerned about the number of respondents in each belief category and whether the results appear due to just a handful of people. This concern is valid as there are not a large number of white self-identified evangelicals in each bin: 58 in two beliefs or fewer, 29 in three beliefs, 54 in four beliefs, 61 in five beliefs, 138 in six beliefs, and 248 in seven beliefs. Figure B1 replicates these raw results using different binning strategies in order to show that the results are robust to having a greater number of bins (top-left panel) or fewer bins that group the beliefs together in different ways (top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right). Having a greater number of bins has the benefit that the results do not appear on account of the researcher's decision about how to collapse the scale but has the drawback of there being a small number of respondents in certain bins. Having fewer bins results in an opposite set of concerns. Finding similar trends using alternative binning strategies should strengthen our confidence in the results.

Tables such as B2 present the parametric results associated with the figures from the main text. In general, the estimates are OLS regressions and standard errors are in parentheses. Column 1 presents a model without any control variables and only includes the ordered religious belief scale. Coefficients represent the difference in the support for Donald Trump relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. The second column includes the following demographic control variables: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. The third column also includes church attendance and frequency of prayer as religious controls. The fourth column includes political variables, namely, binary indicators of party identification and ideology. Identifying as a Democrat and liberal serve as the partisan and ideological reference category, respectively. The fifth column adds in a whole host of additional traits, outlooks, and beliefs that are likely associated with both religious and political attitudes. Racial conservatism is based on two questions from the symbolic racism

scale (Henry and Sears 2002; Tarman and Sears 2004). A social dominance orientation scale (Pratto et al. 2012) measures respondents' preference for hierarchy and adherence to a social order. A four-item parenting battery that asks whether it is preferable for children to be independent or respectful serves as a measure of authoritarian tendencies (Ehrenfreund 2016; Feldman and Stenner 1997). The populist attitudes are measured using a modified four-item scale (Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck 2016). The political efficacy measure uses three questions that come from the NAES / ISCAP study asking about whether the government is responsive to the people. The sexism question asks respondents to indicate how large of a problem sexism currently is in today's society, which ranges from "not at all" to "a big problem". Finally, the external threat includes a question that asks respondents to agree or disagree with the following statement: "We need to protect traditional American values from foreign influence." The final column presents the results specifically for the sub-sample of white evangelicals who are also Republicans.

Importantly, it is not clear whether all of these control variables are appropriate. If, for example, religious beliefs encourage a person to identify as a Republican or Democrat, then it is inappropriate to control for party identification as it is post-treatment. Doing so will produce a biased estimate of the relationship between religious beliefs and political support. The same logic goes for the politically relevant traits and outlooks. If holding beliefs associated with evangelicalism causes these people to hold certain views about obedience and hierarchy, then it would again be a mistake to include these control variables in the model. If, however, having certain traits or worldviews shapes which religious beliefs a person holds, then it is quite important to include the controls in the model. To account for this uncertainty, the tables incorporate different sorts of models incrementally, which allows readers to see how the inclusion of different variables changes the results.

Table B2: Support for Trump

	Self-identified evangelicals					Evangelical & Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>						
4 beliefs	-7.17 (6.01)	-7.10 (6.03)	-5.26 (6.21)	7.19† (3.80)	7.13† (3.89)	4.23 (5.80)
5 beliefs	19.37* (7.02)	14.61* (7.12)	16.71* (7.36)	13.27* (4.53)	12.71* (4.53)	14.62* (5.83)
6 beliefs	27.56* (6.12)	17.93* (6.18)	20.65* (6.67)	9.62* (4.07)	8.57* (4.09)	16.00* (5.08)
7 beliefs	42.96* (5.32)	31.55* (5.64)	34.59* (6.42)	9.15* (4.09)	7.98† (4.11)	13.41* (4.95)
<b>Religious controls</b>						
Church attendance			0.87 (2.02)	1.03 (1.24)	1.13 (1.25)	0.45 (1.54)
Frequency of prayer			-2.75 (1.85)	-2.27* (1.13)	-2.26* (1.14)	-1.46 (1.41)
<b>Political controls</b>						
Independent				80.10* (7.40)	77.44* (7.54)	
Republican				77.14* (3.05)	74.68* (3.26)	
Moderate				10.97* (3.75)	10.07* (3.80)	6.97 (6.55)
Conservative				13.66* (3.57)	12.30* (3.62)	10.81† (6.00)
<b>Other outlooks</b>						
Racial conservatism					9.64† (5.78)	6.06 (6.77)
Hierarchy & status					5.38 (5.96)	3.10 (6.26)
Obedience & submission					5.91 (5.39)	4.70 (6.15)
Populist attitudes					7.31 (7.27)	12.85 (8.29)
Sexism					4.79 (4.18)	1.59 (4.70)
External threat					-2.12 (4.70)	2.03 (6.27)
Intercept	45.63* (4.26)	60.82* (22.54)	59.23* (23.21)	-7.39 (14.33)	-19.20 (14.99)	42.20* (17.32)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.179	0.261	0.265	0.749	0.754	0.159
Observations	548	525	525	502	502	316

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who self identify as evangelical or born again. Belief coefficients represent the difference in the support for Donald Trump relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2016 SSI.



Table B3 replicates the main electoral results from the paper but use a denominational classification scheme to identify evangelicals rather than through a self-identification question. The results are substantively similar to the self-identification question, indicating that the broader trend about the association between number of beliefs held and support for Trump is robust to both main strategies used to classify evangelicals.

Table B3: Support for Trump

	White evangelicals (by denomination)					Evangelical & Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>						
4 beliefs	0.01 (6.69)	8.15 (6.71)	7.51 (7.11)	12.22* (4.42)	12.88* (4.48)	7.61 (5.85)
5 beliefs	21.04* (7.98)	24.14* (8.11)	23.24* (8.53)	13.35* (5.30)	13.35* (5.24)	14.30* (5.97)
6 beliefs	25.17* (6.45)	23.47* (6.44)	22.41* (7.17)	10.53* (4.50)	9.65* (4.47)	17.57* (5.14)
7 beliefs	36.67* (5.41)	34.84* (5.60)	33.50* (6.83)	9.19* (4.41)	8.26† (4.43)	13.73* (4.91)
<b>Religious controls</b>						
Church attendance			0.94 (2.43)	0.07 (1.53)	0.09 (1.53)	0.32 (1.79)
Frequency of prayer			0.06 (2.01)	-0.87 (1.25)	-0.60 (1.25)	-1.73 (1.44)
<b>Political controls</b>						
Independent				84.36* (8.24)	80.45* (8.21)	
Republican				76.13* (3.49)	70.44* (3.70)	
Moderate				13.76* (4.42)	12.21* (4.37)	20.87* (7.17)
Conservative				11.88* (4.36)	9.47* (4.34)	14.50* (6.78)
<b>Other outlooks</b>						
Racial conservatism					21.75* (6.61)	11.85 (7.22)
Hierarchy & status					8.50 (6.49)	-0.09 (6.54)
Obedience & submission					3.82 (5.73)	-1.99 (6.10)
Populist attitudes					3.88 (7.82)	7.56 (8.46)
Sexism					2.72 (4.57)	4.14 (4.80)
External threat					1.55 (5.18)	7.05 (6.32)
Intercept	51.46* (4.22)	73.03* (24.67)	70.71* (25.34)	7.86 (15.69)	-8.15 (16.22)	37.99* (17.52)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	448	428	428	409	409	278
$R^2$	0.124	0.227	0.228	0.726	0.739	0.204

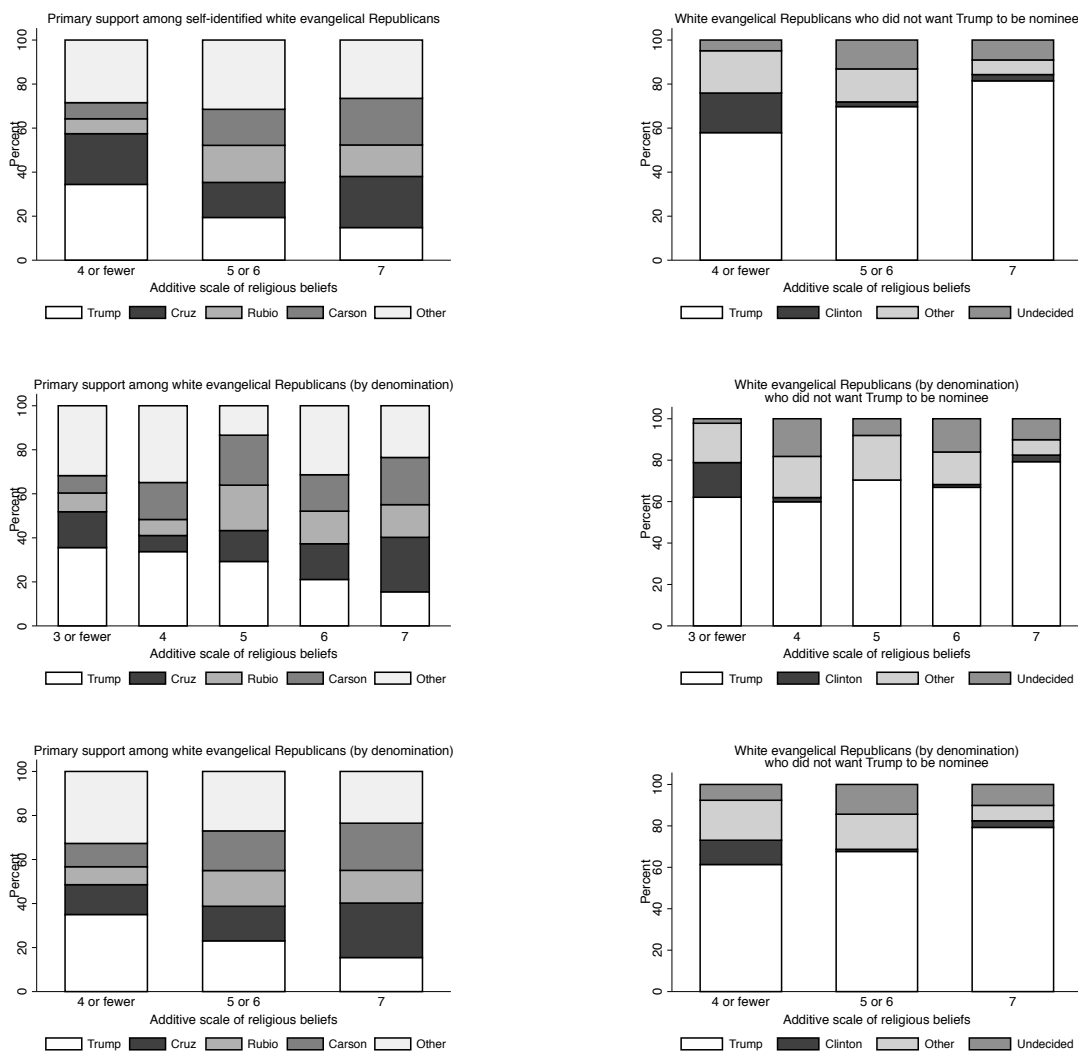
Note: The sample consists of white respondents who belong to an evangelical denomination according to the RELTRAD coding scheme (Steensland et al. 2000). Belief coefficients represent the difference in the support for Donald Trump relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2016 SSI.

## Primary results

Figure B2 replicates the distributions presented in the main text of the paper using an alternative binning strategy (top row) and a classification strategy that relies on denominational affiliation and the Steensland et al (2000) coding scheme to identify evangelicals (middle and bottom rows). Tables B4 and B5 present the primary results from parametric models using both a self-identification and denominational approach to measure evangelicals. Tables B6 and B7 present the general election results among those white evangelical Republicans who wanted a candidate other than Trump to be the nominee.

Figure B2: Distribution of primary support and general election support among those who wanted someone other than Trump to be the nominee



Note: The top row of panels replicates the main findings from the text using an alternative binning strategy. The top-left panel presents the distribution of primary election preferences among self-identified white evangelical Republicans in the 2016 SSI data, including the evangelical oversample. The top-right panel presents the distribution of general election preferences among those individuals who wanted someone other than Trump to be the nominee. The middle set of panels replicates the main findings from the text using religious denomination (Steensland et al. 2000) to identify evangelicals. The bottom set of panels replicates the denominational findings using an alternative binning strategy.

Source: 2016 SSI

Table B4: Support for Trump in primary

	self-identified evangelical Republicans				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>					
4 beliefs	4.17 (8.06)	4.57 (8.44)	4.65 (8.57)	1.30 (8.87)	-0.33 (8.96)
5 beliefs	-14.42† (8.12)	-14.53† (8.60)	-14.13 (8.89)	-10.82 (9.26)	-11.76 (9.24)
6 beliefs	-15.66* (6.55)	-15.02* (6.83)	-13.30† (7.56)	-11.36 (7.89)	-11.62 (7.90)
7 beliefs	-20.00* (5.97)	-20.79* (6.40)	-18.27* (7.50)	-17.67* (7.89)	-19.39* (7.91)
<b>Religious controls</b>					
Church attendance			-4.29† (2.28)	-3.51 (2.37)	-2.92 (2.38)
Frequency of prayer			1.37 (2.10)	1.02 (2.15)	0.47 (2.17)
<b>Political controls</b>					
Moderate				-2.36 (10.04)	-0.38 (10.09)
Conservative				-3.66 (9.27)	-4.51 (9.40)
<b>Other outlooks</b>					
Racial conservatism					6.59 (9.92)
Hierarchy & status					-4.99 (9.66)
Obedience & submission					13.18 (9.30)
Populist attitudes					9.58 (12.61)
Sexism					9.15 (7.24)
External threat					19.58* (9.39)
Intercept	33.93* (5.28)	-9.77 (21.41)	-1.33 (21.92)	-7.45 (23.53)	-24.58 (24.81)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.045	0.082	0.090	0.092	0.125
Observations	444	424	424	404	403

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who self identify as evangelical or born again. Belief coefficients represent the difference in the support for Donald Trump relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2016 SSI.

Table B5: Support for Trump in primary

	White evangelicals (by denomination)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>					
4 beliefs	1.17 (8.32)	5.47 (8.56)	3.78 (8.96)	-0.51 (9.38)	0.01 (9.47)
5 beliefs	-10.95 (8.47)	-7.09 (8.89)	-7.72 (9.32)	-7.24 (9.55)	-6.85 (9.50)
6 beliefs	-17.35* (6.67)	-14.23* (6.75)	-15.53* (7.80)	-13.81† (8.22)	-10.60 (8.23)
7 beliefs	-24.31* (5.94)	-21.26* (6.18)	-22.50* (7.69)	-21.82* (8.12)	-19.48* (8.14)
<b>Religious controls</b>					
Church attendance			-2.55 (2.67)	-2.55 (2.77)	-3.31 (2.79)
Frequency of prayer			2.35 (2.20)	2.70 (2.28)	2.23 (2.27)
<b>Political controls</b>					
Moderate				0.20 (11.78)	-1.54 (11.72)
Conservative				-5.13 (11.10)	-6.14 (11.14)
<b>Other outlooks</b>					
Racial conservatism					11.67 (10.68)
Hierarchy & status					-21.52* (10.49)
Obedience & submission					12.43 (9.53)
Populist attitudes					8.52 (13.31)
Sexism					14.36† (7.73)
External threat					9.74 (9.64)
Intercept	36.67* (5.14)	27.82 (22.35)	30.19 (22.92)	28.10 (25.41)	17.89 (26.41)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.060	0.134	0.138	0.139	0.176
Observations	398	377	377	360	360

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who belong to an evangelical denomination according to the RELTRAD coding scheme (Steensland et al. 2000). Belief coefficients represent the difference in the support for Donald Trump relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2016 SSI.

Table B6: Support for Trump in general election

	self-identified evangelical Republicans Trump not preferred candidate				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>					
4 beliefs	13.12*	7.86	7.44	6.15	4.51
	(7.62)	(8.48)	(8.65)	(8.32)	(8.53)
5 beliefs	30.77**	28.26**	27.77**	21.05**	21.30**
	(6.99)	(7.63)	(7.79)	(7.92)	(8.11)
6 beliefs	26.85**	25.04**	24.22**	22.97**	21.73**
	(5.89)	(6.44)	(6.95)	(6.90)	(6.95)
7 beliefs	27.07**	24.49**	23.66**	18.83**	17.40**
	(5.23)	(5.88)	(6.55)	(6.64)	(6.76)
<b>Religious controls</b>					
Church attendance			-0.30	-0.18	-0.48
			(2.04)	(1.98)	(2.04)
Frequency of prayer			0.67	-0.33	-0.60
			(1.88)	(1.82)	(1.86)
<b>Political controls</b>					
Moderate				7.35	7.43
				(8.67)	(8.94)
Conservative				17.57**	16.96**
				(7.81)	(8.02)
<b>Other outlooks</b>					
Racial conservatism					2.10
					(8.95)
Hierarchy & status					12.20
					(7.81)
Obedience & submission					5.07
					(7.59)
Populist attitudes					14.40
					(10.45)
Sexism					-0.08
					(6.50)
External threat					1.06
					(8.50)
Intercept	69.23**	47.55**	47.47**	46.75**	33.32
	(4.79)	(18.64)	(19.49)	(19.39)	(20.58)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.118	0.193	0.193	0.228	0.245
Observations	252	238	238	230	230

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who self identify as evangelical or born again. Belief coefficients represent the difference in the support for Donald Trump relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2016 SSI.

Table B7: Support for Trump in general election

	evangelical Republicans (by denomination)				
	Trump not preferred candidate				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>					
4 beliefs	21.90*	19.57*	18.96*	16.16*	16.51*
	(7.67)	(8.37)	(8.56)	(7.90)	(8.03)
5 beliefs	28.57*	27.64*	27.44*	19.01*	18.87*
	(7.24)	(7.99)	(8.23)	(7.70)	(7.83)
6 beliefs	26.13*	25.05*	24.48*	20.94*	19.50*
	(5.88)	(6.21)	(6.82)	(6.49)	(6.57)
7 beliefs	24.37*	21.10*	20.48*	15.57*	14.22*
	(5.04)	(5.50)	(6.48)	(6.19)	(6.27)
<b>Religious controls</b>					
Church attendance			-0.64	-1.75	-1.37
			(2.46)	(2.36)	(2.43)
Frequency of prayer			0.83	-0.08	-0.41
			(2.00)	(1.86)	(1.87)
<b>Political controls</b>					
Moderate				35.93*	35.22*
				(9.30)	(9.40)
Conservative				34.11*	32.83*
				(8.69)	(8.80)
<b>Other outlooks</b>					
Racial conservatism					6.62
					(8.96)
Hierarchy & status					11.47
					(7.68)
Obedience & submission					0.65
					(7.30)
Populist attitudes					15.19
					(10.23)
Sexism					3.39
					(6.21)
External threat					3.48
					(8.29)
Intercept	71.43*	31.70	31.93	23.59	7.94
	(4.53)	(19.85)	(20.59)	(19.44)	(20.49)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.112	0.228	0.229	0.275	0.305
Observations	221	208	208	200	200

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who belong to an evangelical denomination according to the RELTRAD coding scheme (Steensland et al. 2000). Belief coefficients represent the difference in the support for Donald Trump relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

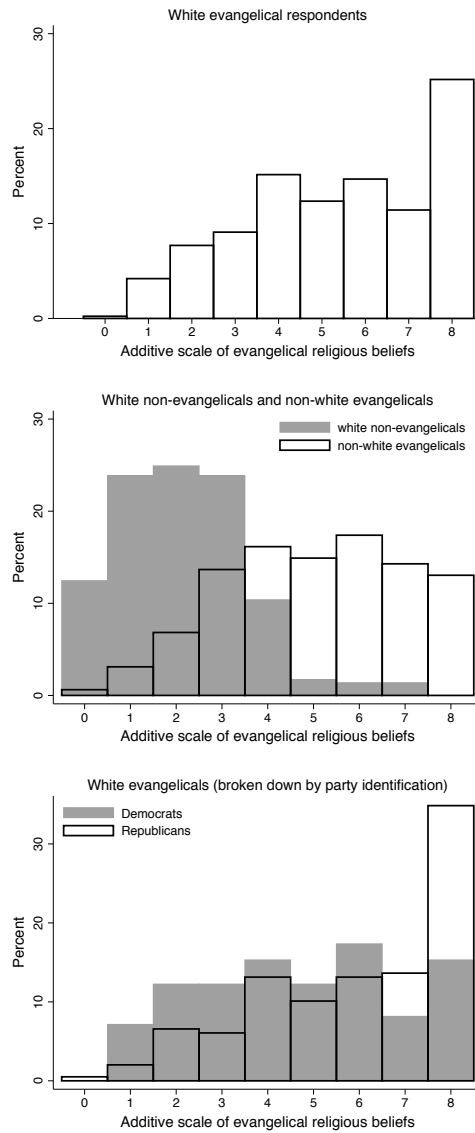
Source: 2016 SSI.



## **Appendix C: 2012 Barna Omni Poll results**

Figure C1 presents the distribution of beliefs among those who have “made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important today”. These trends in these data corroborate the results from the SSI data presented in the main text of the paper.

Figure C1: Distribution of religious beliefs in the Barna poll



Note: The dependent variable is the number of beliefs held using the eight-point scale created by the Barna Group to identify evangelical respondents. There is no evangelical self-identification question, rather self-identification is measured by a question asking whether respondents “have ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today.” The top panel presents the distribution of religious beliefs for all those who say that they have made this personal commitment to Jesus Christ. The middle panel presents the distribution of religious beliefs among white non-evangelicals (gray boxes) and non-white evangelicals (white boxes with black lines). Respondents who did not report having made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ did not receive a question asking respondents their beliefs about what happens after dying. As such, the belief scale for those who have not made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ ranges from 0 to 7 (gray boxes in middle panel), whereas the scale for those who answered in the affirmative have a scale that ranges from 0 to 8. The bottom panel presents the distribution of religious beliefs among Democratic evangelicals (gray boxes) and Republican evangelicals (white boxes with black lines).

Source: 2012 Barna Omni Poll

Table C1: Self-identified evangelicals

	Self-identified evangelicals				evangelical Republicans
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>					
4-5 beliefs	0.1 (0.1)	0.1 (0.1)	0.1† (0.1)	0.1 (0.1)	0.1 (0.1)
6-7 beliefs	0.2* (0.1)	0.2* (0.1)	0.2* (0.1)	0.2* (0.1)	0.2* (0.1)
8 beliefs	0.4* (0.1)	0.4* (0.1)	0.4* (0.1)	0.3* (0.1)	0.3* (0.1)
<b>Religious controls</b>					
Church last 7 days			-0.0 (0.0)	-0.0 (0.0)	-0.1 (0.0)
Pray last 7 days			-0.2† (0.1)	-0.0 (0.1)	-0.1 (0.1)
<b>Political controls</b>					
Independent				0.4* (0.1)	
Republican				0.5* (0.0)	
Intercept	0.5* (0.0)	0.7* (0.2)	0.8* (0.2)	0.2 (0.2)	0.8* (0.2)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.115	0.138	0.146	0.358	0.155
Observations	407	407	407	349	192

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who report that they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important today. Belief coefficient represent the difference in the support for Mitt Romney relative to those holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. The dependent variable is a four-point measure that ranges between 0 (definitely vote for Obama) and 1 (definitely vote for Romney). Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-scale, education, marital status, and parental status. Political controls include party identification. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2012 Barna Omni Poll.

Table C2: Self-identified evangelicals

	Romney evaluation				Obama evaluation			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>								
4-5 beliefs	0.04 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	-0.10† (0.06)	-0.10† (0.06)	-0.12* (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)
6-7 beliefs	0.12* (0.05)	0.13* (0.05)	0.09* (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	-0.21* (0.06)	-0.20* (0.06)	-0.23* (0.06)	-0.18* (0.06)
8 beliefs	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.37* (0.06)	-0.36* (0.06)	-0.40* (0.06)	-0.29* (0.06)
<b>Religious controls</b>								
Church last 7 days			0.09* (0.03)	0.10* (0.04)			0.06 (0.04)	0.08† (0.04)
Pray last 7 days			-0.02 (0.06)	0.00 (0.08)			0.09 (0.08)	0.03 (0.09)
<b>Political controls</b>								
Independent				0.12* (0.05)				-0.17* (0.06)
Republican				0.19* (0.04)				-0.39* (0.05)
Intercept	0.54* (0.03)	0.44* (0.16)	0.43* (0.17)	0.22 (0.20)	0.51* (0.04)	0.50* (0.20)	0.42* (0.20)	0.72* (0.22)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.020	0.083	0.102	0.160	0.128	0.144	0.153	0.330
Observations	354	354	354	309	354	354	354	309

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who report that they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important today. Belief coefficients represent the difference in evaluations relative to those holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. The dependent variables are four-point evaluations of Mitt Romney (columns 1-3) and Barack Obama (columns 4-6), which range between 0 (very unfavorable) to 1 (very favorable). Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-scale, education, marital status, and parental status. Political controls include party identification. †  $< 0.10$ ; \*  $< 0.05$

Source: 2012 Barna Omni Poll.

## Appendix D: 2016 Barna Omni poll

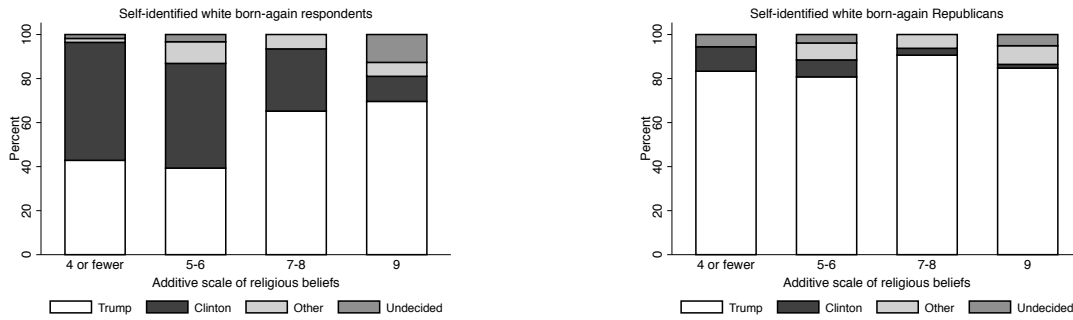
The 2016 Barna Omni poll is a nationally representative survey conducted by Neilsen. The online survey was completed online in two waves. The first wave was in the field from November 4-6, 2016. The second wave was in the field from November 9-16, 2016. The results presented below look similar when looking at the two collection windows separately. The sample size is 1,281.

Unlike the 2012 Barna Omni poll, the 2016 poll asks a question which allows individuals to self-identify as a born-again Christian. I use the self-identification measure in this instance and use the question, “Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?”, as another measure on the evangelical religious belief scale.

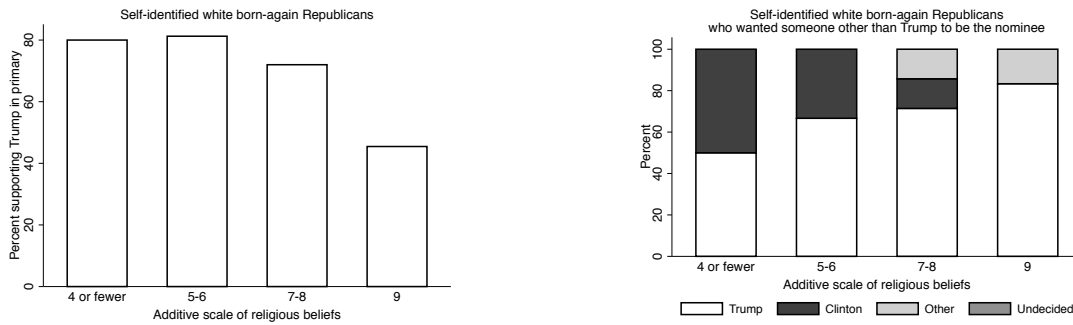
These results look quite similar to the 2016 SSI electoral results. Holding evangelical beliefs is positively associated with a Trump vote in the general election; however, these results seem to appear largely on account of more devout evangelicals identifying as Republicans. There is no correlation between number of beliefs held and Trump support when looking at Republican identifiers. While more devout evangelical Republicans were less likely to want Trump to be the nominee than their less devout counterparts, members of the former group were more likely to rally around Trump once he became the nominee.

Figure D1: Religious beliefs correlate with electoral decisions

2016 electoral decisions among white evangelicals



Primary preferences and rallying around Donald Trump



Note: The top-left panel presents the distribution of general election preferences among self-identified white born-again Christians in the 2016 Barna Omni data. The top-right panel presents the distribution of general election preferences among self-identified white born-again Christian Republicans. The bottom-left panel presents the percentage of self-identified white born-again Christian Republican respondents who reported wanting Trump to be the Republican nominee. The bottom-right panel presents the distribution of general election preferences among self-identified white born-again Christian Republican respondents who reported wanting someone other than Trump to be the Republican nominee.

Source: 2016 Barna Omni Poll

## Appendix E: 2017 Alabama Senate exit polling

I replicate the 2016 and 2012 presidential election results using additional data that comes from an originally collected exit poll taken on December 12, 2017, the day of the special election for Senate in Alabama. Similar to the 2016 presidential election, the Republican nominee for Senate—Roy Moore—was a controversial candidate and received a lot of negative attention on account of allegations of sexual misconduct. The 321 surveys come from voters at two precincts, one in Anniston and one in Weaver, Alabama. The brief exit poll only had room for two religious questions, one self-identification question asking whether the respondent identifies as an evangelical or born-again Christian, and one belief statement from the Barna battery that reads: “I personally have a responsibility to share my religious beliefs with others.” Respondents could strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree with this statement.<sup>33</sup> The survey also asked respondents who they voted for in that day’s the Senate election, who they voted for in the 2016 presidential election, and whether they approve of Trump’s job in office.

Of the 138 white evangelicals who took the exit poll, the majority strongly agreed with the religious statement (51%) while 36% somewhat agreed, leaving a small number of white evangelicals to disagree strongly (6%) or disagree somewhat (7%) with the religious statement. Due to restrictions based on the sample size, the religious belief variable is a binary measure distinguishing between those white evangelicals who “strongly” agree with the religious statement (1) versus everyone else (0). Column 1 of Table E1 presents the basic difference in Moore support between those white evangelicals who do *not* strongly agree with the statement about sharing religious beliefs (interception = 69%) and those who do strongly agree with the statement (82%; difference = 13.3; p-value = 0.07). Column 2 shows that a 10-point gap between those who strongly agree and everyone else remains after

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<sup>33</sup>I chose this statement for two related reasons. First, the notion of evangelizing or “spreading the news” is a characteristic that is thought to apply more to evangelical Christians than other Christians. And second, this statement from the Barna Group is the measure that is most closely related to the NAE’s four-point measurement of evangelicals, which reads: “It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.”

controlling for: gender, age, age-squared, education, and three-point party identification (p-value = 0.051), and column 3 shows that these results hold even after including a question about Trump approval as a control variable. Columns 4, 5, and 6 present the results from additional analyses that compare those white evangelicals who strongly agree versus those who only somewhat agree, excluding those who disagree with the statement. This robustness check ensures that the main findings do not emerge on account of a small handful of people who disagreed about spreading their faith and also supported Doug Jones, the Democratic candidate. These respondents did not produce the main results. While these results should certainly be taken with caution—they are based on a non-representative exit poll and only ask one religious belief question—the results corroborate findings from national samples during both the 2016 and 2012 elections.

Table E1: Religious beliefs correlate with a Roy Moore vote

	All white evangelicals			Dropping disagree		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Strongly agrees	13.3† (7.5)	9.8† (4.9)	11.9* (4.2)	17.5* (8.1)	11.0* (5.3)	13.1* (4.5)
Intercept	68.8* (5.3)	-47.0† (25.1)	-27.8 (21.7)	64.6* (6.2)	-42.1 (27.2)	-25.9 (23.1)
standard controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
approve of Trump	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
$R^2$	0.024	0.631	0.732	0.040	0.643	0.748
Observations	131	120	120	115	106	106

Note: Coefficients are Ordinary Least Squares regression coefficients. Standard controls include female, age, age-squared, education, and party identification. † < 0.10 \*\* < 0.05  
Source: 2017 AL exit poll



## **Appendix F: NAES / ISCAP data**

### ***2008-2016 NAES / ISCAP survey***

An additional data source is a combination of the five-wave National Annenberg Election Study (NAES), conducted over the course of the 2008 presidential election, and data from the Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics (ISCAP), where affiliated researchers conducted multiple follow-up surveys with a subsample of the original respondents between 2008 and 2016. The resultant panel dataset of 1,121 respondents spans eight years. These data allow researchers to classify evangelicals both through a self-identification question as well as through denominational affiliation, both of which were measured at the panel's outset. Wave 10 of the survey, which took place in January of 2016 at the beginning of the primary season, asked about nomination preferences, and wave 11, which took place in October of 2016, asked about general election preferences. Earlier waves of the survey also measure various predispositions and political attitudes that are known predictors of electoral choice. Importantly, these data do not ask questions about religious belief, and instead serve as a way to corroborate the cross-sectional findings by testing whether similar correlations appear when the independent variables of interest are measured prior to the political outcomes.

### **Replication of results using the NAES / ISCAP data**

#### **Primary analyses**

I use the NAES / ISCAP data to test whether the SSI primary results are likely a function of retrospective reporting, arising from asking about people's preferred nominee on the eve of the general election. The ISCAP panel data asked Republican respondents in January of 2016 to state which candidate they wanted to receive the Republican nomination and then asked these same people about their intended vote choice in the general election in October of 2016. And while the ISCAP data do not have measures of religious beliefs, the NAES survey

measures evangelical self-identification in 2008. White evangelical Republicans preferred a non-Trump nominee at higher rates than white non-evangelical Republicans (32% to 53%) when the primary season began in January. But these white evangelicals rallied around Trump to a greater extent than their non-evangelical counterparts. Among Republicans who wanted *someone other than* Trump to be the nominee, 94% of white evangelicals reported in October that they were planning on voting for Trump in the general election compared to 85% of white non-evangelicals.<sup>34</sup> These results comport with Lewis's (2018) prospective findings, measured in Spring of 2016, in which white evangelicals were less likely to report that they would consider defecting if Trump were to become the Republican nominee compared to other Republicans.

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<sup>34</sup>The same results appear when using an evangelical measure from January of 2016.

## **Appendix G: Explanations for Trump support (SSI)**

### **Negative partisanship**

Tables G1 and G2 present the parametric results of the candidate feeling thermometer among self-identified evangelicals and denominational evangelicals, respectively.

Table G1: Self-identified white evangelicals

	Trump FT				Clinton FT			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>								
4 beliefs	4.63 (4.07)	4.36 (4.13)	4.14 (4.26)	6.38 (4.14)	5.72 (3.81)	4.25 (3.72)	3.92 (3.83)	-1.24 (2.91)
5 beliefs	3.72 (4.56)	1.72 (4.73)	1.40 (4.89)	-3.70 (4.79)	-17.50* (4.27)	-12.89* (4.26)	-13.19* (4.40)	-7.77* (3.36)
6 beliefs	4.30 (3.84)	2.41 (3.94)	2.03 (4.32)	-6.34 (4.23)	-27.27* (3.60)	-22.12* (3.54)	-22.93* (3.88)	-12.96* (2.97)
7 beliefs	10.08* (3.48)	7.49* (3.70)	7.08 (4.32)	-6.27 (4.33)	-35.50* (3.27)	-28.38* (3.34)	-29.71* (3.89)	-12.90* (3.04)
<b>Religious controls</b>								
Church attendance			-0.24 (1.34)	-1.00 (1.31)			1.92 (1.21)	3.06* (0.92)
Frequency of prayer			0.46 (1.25)	1.38 (1.21)			-0.68 (1.13)	-1.58† (0.85)
<b>Political controls</b>								
Independent				9.47† (5.24)				-43.94* (3.68)
Republican				30.87* (3.28)				-46.16* (2.30)
Moderate				-2.08 (4.11)				-9.99* (2.88)
Conservative				4.95 (3.97)				-14.73* (2.79)
Intercept	44.01* (2.79)	36.97* (13.99)	37.15* (14.26)	13.53 (14.13)	51.38* (2.61)	26.67* (12.60)	23.26† (12.82)	66.66* (9.92)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.012	0.048	0.049	0.218	0.224	0.317	0.319	0.666
Observations	747	719	718	663	747	719	718	663

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who self identify as evangelical or born again. Belief coefficients represent the difference in feeling thermometer scores relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status.

† < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2016 SSI.

Table G2: white evangelicals (by denomination)

	Trump FT				Clinton FT			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<b>Religious beliefs</b>								
4 beliefs	5.39 (4.53)	8.18† (4.52)	6.41 (4.76)	5.12 (4.63)	3.25 (4.25)	-1.61 (4.23)	-2.58 (4.46)	-3.33 (3.50)
5 beliefs	8.08 (5.16)	9.07† (5.28)	6.82 (5.56)	-0.14 (5.35)	-15.87* (4.84)	-16.75* (4.94)	-17.97* (5.21)	-9.74* (4.04)
6 beliefs	3.41 (4.02)	3.76 (3.99)	0.86 (4.58)	-8.94* (4.45)	-20.67* (3.77)	-21.30* (3.74)	-22.87* (4.29)	-11.89* (3.36)
7 beliefs	8.67* (3.56)	8.75* (3.66)	5.17 (4.59)	-8.29† (4.53)	-29.22* (3.34)	-28.57* (3.42)	-30.74* (4.30)	-13.25* (3.42)
<b>Religious controls</b>								
Church attendance			0.98 (1.58)	0.07 (1.54)			2.22 (1.48)	3.59* (1.16)
Frequency of prayer			1.21 (1.31)	1.01 (1.27)			-0.57 (1.23)	-0.82 (0.96)
<b>Political controls</b>								
Independent				8.28 (5.74)				-40.00* (4.33)
Republican				32.33* (3.60)				-46.13* (2.71)
Moderate				-1.95 (4.56)				-9.61* (3.44)
Conservative				1.23 (4.57)				-13.85* (3.45)
Intercept	44.42* (2.78)	49.66* (14.77)	46.33* (15.09)	32.78* (14.64)	44.20* (2.61)	30.95* (13.84)	27.77* (14.13)	62.33* (11.05)
demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.011	0.089	0.092	0.266	0.155	0.236	0.238	0.608
Observations	624	597	596	547	624	597	596	547

Note: The sample consists of white respondents who belong to an evangelical denomination according to the RELTRAD coding scheme (Steensland et al. 2000). Belief coefficients represent the difference in feeling thermometer scores relative to white evangelicals holding 3 beliefs or fewer, who serve as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses. Demographic controls include: gender, age, age-squared, region of residence, education, income, marital status, and parental status. † < 0.10; \* < 0.05

Source: 2016 SSI.