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Moral-Values Politics: From Status Group Conflict to Institutionalized Party-Movement Electoral System

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Historical sociologists interested in “moral-values politics” in the United States have focused on episodic outbreaks of campaigns against drink, vice, and corruption, in which the dominant Protestant majority has asserted traditional, ascetic moral standards in the face of the pleasure-seeking enjoyments and alternative cultural norms of urban, working-class, and immigrant groups. The idea of conflict over moral values as Protestant status assertion against the backdrop of rising Catholic and immigrant strata can be found, for example, in Gusfield’s (1962) work on the “symbolic politics” of the Temperance movement and in Beisel’s (1990) work on “moral panics” in urban campaigns against vice. Some analyses of the contemporary religious Right have also adopted the status-group conflict interpretation (see, e.g., Evans 1996). These interpretations are indebted to the Weberian theme that status politics arise during periods in which economic growth brings challenges to the dominant status group. In this view, “moral values” campaigns can be interpreted as symbolic reassessments of the dominance and prestige of white Protestant culture.¹

A classical statement of the status politics position is found in Richard Hofstadter’s (1955) essay “The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt”: “We have at all times, two kinds of processes going on in inextricable connection

to each other: *interest politics*, the clash of material aims and needs among various groups and blocs; and *status politics*, the clash of various projective rationalizations arising from status aspirations and other personal motives.

In times of depression and economic discontent...politics more clearly a matter of interests...In times of prosperity and general well-being on the material plane, status considerations among the masses can become much more influential in our politics..." (p. 84).

Contemporary conditions require reconsideration of these classic arguments with respect both to agency and causality. In this paper, we will argue that recent moral-values politics in the United States cannot be interpreted as an assertion of traditionalist white Protestant status culture in the face of perceived threats to social order. Instead, as a result of political entrepreneurship (Layman 2001: chap. 3) and partisan competition in a narrowly divided polity (Baker 2005: chap. 3), moral-values conflict has become institutionalized as a regular feature of American political life, embodied in the activities of political parties and social movement organizations throughout the electoral cycle – during economic expansion and downturn alike. These changes are largely the result of improved technologies for monitoring and mobilizing public opinion, combined with stronger, albeit imperfect, coordination between the Republican Party, religious Right social movement organizations, and broader conservative movement organizations. What we have seen over the last 30 years is a largely successful, if tenuous, effort to institutionalize the concerns of Christian conservatives as a stable base from which to

extend Republican Party control. This era culminated in the election of the conservative Republican and “born-again” Christian George W. Bush in 2000.

This paper draws from a wide range of sources, including published studies, original analyses of survey data, and original content analyses of speeches and websites to develop a synthetic picture of contemporary moral-values politics in the United States. We will begin with a brief discussion of the meaning of moral values in contemporary American political discourse. We will then provide a critique of the status politics argument and develop our theoretical alternative to it. We will describe the role of three interacting sets of actors in the current system: the Christian conservative base, the Republican Party, and religious Right social movement organizations. In our view, religious Right social movement organizations were largely responsible for the creation of this system. However, in the institutionalized party-movement system that crystallized following the 2000 presidential election, the Republican Party took a leading role and social movement organizations played a secondary role, transmitting party priorities to the Christian conservative social base while exercising pressure on the executive branch to make appointments and policy changes consistent with movement priorities. We will conclude by discussing the evidence for a possible weakening of the Republican-Christian conservative alliance as a force in American political life.

“MORAL VALUES” IN RECENT AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Several polling firms have asked Americans to describe what the term “moral values” means to them. In one such study, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (2005) asked respondents to choose from a list that included phrases drawn from several

discourse domains. The most popular choice was “personal values, such as honesty and responsibility” (36%). “Family values, such as trying to protect children from sex and violence on TV and the Internet” was the next most popular choice (26%). Other choices, with more explicit religious connections, were selected by fewer respondents. These included one set of values connected to conservative religion, “social issues, such as abortion and gay marriage” (10%); and one set of values connected to liberal religion, “social justice, such as preventing human rights abuses and discrimination” (10%).

The distribution of responses shows that referents resonating with conservative Protestantism (“social issues” and “family values”) were approximately twice as likely to be chosen as referents resonating more directly with Catholic and Jewish religious traditions and with the sensibilities of minorities (“social justice” and “caring and compassion”).² Other studies using open-ended questions about the meaning of “moral values” have yielded a similar mix of references to personal qualities, “family values,” social issues, social justice, compassion and caring, and Christian religion (Democracy Corps 2005). In these cases as well, conservative responses were more than twice as frequent as liberal referents to social justice or the social compact.

Table 1
Meaning of “Moral Values”

A. All Voting Age Adults

1. Closed-Ended Question	2. Open-Ended Question ¹
Percent of those polled mentioning:	Percent of those polled mentioning:
Personal Qualities (e.g., honesty)	Personal Qualities
Family Values (e.g. protecting kids from sex and violence)	22%
	28%
	14%
36%	
26%	Social issues

Social issues (e.g., abortion, gay marriage)	10%	Social justice	10%
Social justice (e.g., ending discrimination)	10%	Religious faith	8%
Compassion and Caring	9%	Compassion and caring	7%
All of the above (volunteered)	9%		(Democracy Corps 2005)

(Greenberg Quinlan Rosner 2005)

B. Voters for whom Moral Values Were Important in Vote

1. Open-Ended Question: “very important in vote” (45% of those polled) (multiple responses allowed)²

Percent of those polled mentioning:

Social issues	51%
Personal Qualities	34%
Religious faith/Christianity	33%
Social justice/Equal rights	21%
Family values	14%
Compassion and caring	6%

(Harris Interactive 2004)

2. Open-Ended Question: “most important in vote”(36% of those polled) (single response allowed)

Percent of those polled mentioning:

Gay marriage	29%
Abortion	28%
Personal qualities	23%
Religion/faith	18%
Traditional/family values	17%
Other policies	9%

(Pew Research Center 2004)

Notes

¹ Personal qualities include: honesty; integrity; honor; knowing right from wrong; standing up for what you believe; doing the right thing. Family values include: family/home (unspecified); respecting and valuing life (abortion not mentioned); taking good care of children. Social issues include: abortion; homosexuality; fidelity in marriage. Social justice includes: taking care of people in need; helping the less fortunate; tolerance for others. Religious faith includes: religion; faith; Christianity; belief in God. Compassion and caring includes: treating other people well; following the Golden Rule; compassion.

² Social issues include: protecting marriage between a man and a woman; homosexuality; same sex marriages; abortion; stem cell research. Personal values include: honesty; integrity; good morals/ethics. Religious faith includes: belief in God; faith; religion; Christian attitude; Biblical values; following the Ten Commandments; maintaining Christian foundation of the U.S.; school prayer. Social justice includes: equality; civil rights; issues of peace and war; helping those less fortunate; human rights; health care for all; religious freedom. Family values includes family morals/values; caring for families. Compassion and caring includes caring; respect for others; compassion.

The capacity of conservatives to associate the term “moral values” with evangelical Protestant meanings is a significant achievement. After all, every religious tradition has distinctive teachings about right and wrong, and every tradition also has a complex history of exegetical and hermeneutic texts related to these teachings. Traditions of secular ethics also exist, of course, and have offered bases for grounding morality, not in religion, but rather in universalistic principles of Enlightenment (Kant [1784] 1985), social obligations (Durkheim [1893] 1997), dialogical ethics (Buber [1923] 1958), a utilitarian calculus (Smith [1759] 1986; Bentham [1789] 1973), or neural “hard-wiring” acquired during human evolution (Hauser 2006).

In contemporary American political discourse, “moral values” operate as a condensation symbol resonant with three separate sources of Republican Party appeal: “*family values*,” which are particularly attractive to church-going married people with children; “*social issues*,” such as gay marriage and abortion, which are appealing to activist evangelicals; and *the more diffuse status credit* extended to politicians for subscribing to beliefs rooted in conservative Christian religious traditions. The phrase has strength as a cue for party identifications, because it draws in several distinct constituencies in the Republican Party coalition, while simultaneously defining several constituencies in the Democratic Party coalition as less moral – or even, by implication, immoral. For people who are very religious those who are secular are natural antagonists, and this group (approximately 15 percent of the electorate) is an important constituency in the Democratic coalition. Family-oriented conservatives disapprove of single parents, and those who are cohabitating outside of marriage. These latter groups

also favor the Democratic Party by wide margins. Conservatives who are interested in social policy issues such as abortion and gay marriage, have as their natural opponents feminists and homosexuals, two other groups on the liberal-left.

The achievement of conservative moral-values rhetoric is particularly impressive because those who are strongly attracted to it represent a minority in American society, no more than 35 to 40 percent of all adults. Nor are the demographic groups who are the primary audiences for this rhetoric more numerous than those who are outside its symbolic perimeter. Evangelicals (under 30% of the population), regular church goers (no more than 30%), and people living in traditional nuclear family arrangements with two parents and children (less than 25%) are all numerical minorities when compared to non-evangelicals (Green et al. 2005), those who do not attend church or attend irregularly (Hadaway, Marler and Chaves 1998), and unmarried or childless people (Stacey 1996).

MORAL VALUES IN A PARTY-MOVEMENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM

We see a number of weaknesses in the status group conflict model when applied to the contemporary era. Members of racial and cultural minority groups have hardly been assertive since the mid-1970s; instead, they have been on the defensive (see, e.g., Piven and Cloward 1982; Wilson 1987). Moral-values politics has persisted during periods of economic expansion and recession alike. Indeed, the greatest influence of the Christian conservative movement has occurred during a period of sustained weakness in the economic prospects of non-college educated whites, who make up the majority of white evangelicals (Frank 2004). The idea that the social base gives rise to social movement organizations acting in its name is itself a problematic formulation. A division

of labor existed from the beginning, with religious conservatives specializing in the mobilization of church groups and Republican Party leaders specializing in the training of candidates to appeal to these mobilized church groups. During the candidacy and presidency of George W. Bush, the Republican Party proved able to shape the symbolic environment in which movement politics took place. We will argue that the control of the party has been significant enough to reject the conventional social movements-led model of the influence of conservative Christians during the period.

The primary difficulty with the status group model is its failure to look at politics from an organizational perspective. Such a perspective allows for the appreciation of the workings of centralized, technologically sophisticated political party organizations. In a democratic system, the achievement of executive power provides many resources for the cooptation and coordination of constituency organizations, including social movement organizations. Even during periods in which the party is out of power, coordination between party and constituency organizations can grow, thereby preparing the way for a future capture of executive power. Political party organizations have the financial resources, the data on party identifiers, the recruitment and training networks for candidates and activists, and the policy discussion networks to coordinate constituency organizations and the status groups in the service of achieving the party's electoral and policy objectives. Against the earlier models of status group conflict, we therefore posit the construction, beginning in the 1980s, of a more durable, centrally-directed structure of moral-values politics.

In its origins, the party-movement system was clearly led by religious Right social movement organizations and their conservative allies on talk radio. Religious Right

social movement organizations, such as the Moral Majority (founded 1979), Concerned Women for America (1979), the American Coalition for Traditional Values (1980), and the Family Research Council (1983), developed a set of issues to contest in the public arena, including opposition to abortion, gay rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment; opposition to “judicial activism,” and support for prayer in schools and public representations of religious symbols. These groups proved that voters could be mobilized through appeals to Christian religious sensibilities and moral-values issues. These groups specialized in building networks of activists and mobilization around issues.

Most of the techniques of the contemporary party-movement system were developed by leaders of social movement organizations, not by the Republican Party. Between 1992 and 2000, the voter guide was the chief weapon of the religious Right as a grassroots coalition. These were distributed to an estimated 40 million voters in 1992 showing where candidates stood on issues like abortion, gay rights, prayer in schools, and other issues appealing to conservatives (Kuo 2006: 65). In the early and mid-1990s, church directories were often used for get-out-the-vote telephone drives and door-to-door canvassing. Politicians credited the voting guides with changing elections by five to seven percentage points. The 40 million voter guides prepared in the watershed year of 1994 were distributed to 100,000 churches (though some were left unopened in bulk). Religious right organizations also pioneered techniques for reaching voters on the issues they cared most about through sophisticated surveying and targeted mailing. Religious Right organizations held regional and national conferences to build commitment and social ties among sympathetic ministers and church leaders. These methods were later adopted by Republican Party strategists.

Social movement organizations also pioneered tactics for control of state party committees, beginning in the presidential campaign of the televangelist Pat Robertson in 1988. These tactics centered on filling low-turnout meetings with dependable social conservatives who had the time and stamina to outlast their opponents and then elect themselves to important posts. Religious Right organizations had, by one estimate, successfully gained majority control of 18 state Republican committees by the mid-1990s, together with “substantial” influence in 13 others (Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998).³

Religious Right organizations encouraged evangelical Christians to align with the Republican Party, because Republican Party leaders, beginning with Ronald Reagan, took positions on “moral-values” issues consistent with movement positions. Republican Party politicians also courted the religious Right, even if they were not very vocal about their support in public and did not promote the religious Right agenda vigorously when in office. By contrast, religious Right leaders demonized the Democratic Party as a godless, anti-family party beholden to the far left and the bohemian values of Hollywood and other “liberal elite” enclaves.

The Republican Party and its allied organizations nurtured these religious Right social movement organizations from the beginning and contributed directly to their success. Para-party organizations, such as Empower America and the Heritage Foundation, played a distinct role in forging a bond between conservative Christians and Republican Party politicians and operatives. These groups specialized in marketing, data dissemination, and (in the case of Empower America) candidate training. Empower America provided data about “moral decline” through its influential *Index of Leading*

Cultural Indicators (Bennett 1993), and it trained politicians to run campaigns that could be perceived as moderate enough to appeal to independents, but conservative enough to gain the enthusiastic support of evangelicals. According to a one-time staffer, Empower America helped to focus Republicans on culture, realizing that issues such as religious discrimination, abortion, and “Hollywood values” appealed strongly to religious conservatives. In 1993 and 1994, Empower American trained more than 600 candidates on how to run for office. More than 300 won in the Republican tide of 1994. Empower America told candidates to use code to keep religious discussion general, not specific, and to use “softer, more nuanced language such as phrases from parables” to signal religious voters without alienating Republican moderates and independents (Kuo 2006: 62-63).

In this paper, we will focus on the workings of the mature party-movement system that arose during the George W. Bush presidency. We will emphasize the important continuing role of social movement organizations in promoting conservative policies, sustaining commitment among grassroots activists, and serving as a conduit to the grassroots for the party. However, leadership and direction of the movement shifted during this period from religious Right social movement organizations to the White House and the Republican Party. The mature system has some characteristics of a political machine, including patronage, but it also differs in some important respects from classical political machines.

The Social Base

For sociologists, feelings of social superiority are the foundation out of which positively privileged status groups develop. White evangelical Protestants indicate feelings of humility in relation to God, yet many feel morally elevated in relation to other groups in American society (Smith et al. 1996). Their claims to status in American society are supported, at the deepest level, by their membership in the dominant racial and religious groups in the country. But in a more proximate way they are most strongly supported by their convictions of acting (or of striving to act) in harmony with the commands of Christian morality.

The Christian conservative movement is, at the same time, a product of the historical development of American identity politics. Religion has only recently come back into focus as an element in these politics. The backlash politics of the 1960s focused instead on the urban white working class in the North (the so-called “hardhats”) and on race-conscious “states-rights” conservatives in the South (see, e.g., Edsall 1985). Religion became central as an element in American identity politics only in the late 1970s as Civil Rights and student protest subsided as political forces in the Northern states, and as the South became a wealthier region and otherwise more like the rest of the United States (Marsden 2006: 236-239). As race, class, and sectional identities receded in significance, Christian conservatives emerged as a mobilized identity category largely through the work of social movement organizations operating in the receptive milieu of theologically conservative church communities.

Among its strongest adherents, conservative Protestantism is restrictive on issues of sexuality, at least “softly” patriarchal in relation to gender roles (Wilcox 2004),

judgmental in relation to those perceived as holding lax moral standards, and life transforming in orientation. These outlooks, recreated by doctrine and reinforced by small town and suburban life in which churches are primary community-binding institutions, resonate strongly among the 25 to 30 percent of the electorate that self-identifies as evangelical Protestants (Green et al. 2005). Politically, the most important features of the culture have been the vision of ideal social organization that it holds, and the strong feelings of disapproval it directs against individuals and groups perceived to be failing to live up to a righteous way of living. For theological conservatives, the Christian community is “world-transforming” on the basis of following God’s plan for humanity; those who have strayed from a righteous path of living are sinful and must be saved, if possible, or marginalized if incapable of salvation.

The content of moral-values discourse emphasizes actions in the world that demonstrate the superior qualities of activist Christianity and the special place that God has determined for the American nation led by upright Christians. Individual autonomy is prized, but in the context of a high level of culturally-defined perfectionism in daily life, particularly related to sexual morality, self-control, and devotion to the family unit and the church community. Activist Protestantism has been highly attuned to the contrasting examples of the impure and impious, and it has encouraged feelings of superiority to those lacking ascetic virtues. The connection between desires for purity and fears of pollution are in all likelihood psychologically heightened in religions that expect strict compliance from ordinary believers.⁴

These feelings of moral elevation are potently combined with feelings of exclusion from the mainstream of American culture. White evangelicals frequently feel

themselves to be on the periphery of American society, a circumstance not dissimilar to that of an ethnic group rooted in a traditional culture not accepted by the dominant society. They feel that their practices and beliefs are not well understood by secular society, that they are disrespected by the larger society, and because of this they are psychologically estranged from the larger society. The social psychology of moral superiority combined with perceived peripheral status fuels an oppositional culture among the members of a group that many outside observers mistakenly see as the dominant status group in the United States. It is no surprise that the language of the civil rights movement permeates the language of the Christian conservative movement, including similar demands for equality, respect, and acceptance of cultural diversity.

Moral values serve as a primary cognitive-emotional link between conservative Christian religious groups and the Republican Party. White, church-going evangelical Protestants have been attached to the Republican Party through the party's appeals on abortion, gay rights, and the public role of religion since the early 1980s. The terms "Christian" and "values voter" have become nearly synonymous with conservative positions on these and related issues. Moral-values appeals have also shown the capacity to attract non-evangelical voters. Independent voters frequently approve of Democratic positions on governmental activity to ameliorate social and environmental problems, but they have been closer to Republicans on these socio-cultural issues and sentiments. In recent years, church-going Catholics, Hispanic Protestants, Orthodox Jews, and even African-American Protestants have shown signs of growing support for the Republican Party and Republican Party candidates, largely because of their efforts to reach out to faith communities (Green et al. 2005).

Table 2
Two-Party Presidential Vote in 2004 by Ethno-Religious Category

A. Bush Groups

	<u>% Population</u>	<u>% Bush</u>	<u>Turnout</u>
Traditionalist Evangelicals	12.6%	88%	63%
Mormons (and “Other Christians”)	2.7%	80%	60%
Traditionalist Catholics	4.4%	72%	77%
Traditionalist Mainline Protestants	4.3%	68%	78%
Centrist Evangelicals	10.8%	64%	52%
Latino Protestants	2.8%	63%	49%
Centrist Mainline Protestants	7.0%	58%	68%
Centrist Catholics	8.1%	55%	58%
Total Bush Groups	52.7%		

B. Kerry Groups

	<u>% Population</u>	<u>% Kerry</u>	<u>Turnout</u>
African-American Protestants	9.6%	83%	50%
Modernist Mainline Protestants	4.7%	78%	71%
“Other Faiths” (e.g. Muslim, Hindu)	2.7%	77%	62%
Jews	1.9%	73%	87%
Seculars	16.0%	72%	52%
Latino Catholics	4.5%	69%	43%
Modernist Catholics	5.0%	69%	70%
Modernist Evangelicals	2.9%	52%	65%
Total Kerry Groups	47.3%		

Source: Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, Post-Election Sample (n=2730)

Public opinion polls show that church-going evangelical Protestants are the most conservative group in the United States on moral-values issues. In particular, evangelical Protestants express markedly conservative views on heterosexual and homosexual relations, and on abortion and end-of-life issues. They also strongly favor an expanded role for religion in the public sphere, including prayer in school and openly religious

displays in public spaces (such as posting the Ten Commandments in courtrooms and erecting crèche scenes at Christmas time). Religious Catholics also express markedly conservative views on abortion and end-of-life issues. Both religiosity (as measured by frequency of church attendance) and “moral absolutism” (as measured by the propensity to resist any change in Biblically-sanctioned moral standards) are strongly and independently connected to conservative positions, controlling for religious denomination and other significant covariates (Bolzendahl and Brooks 2005; Langer and Cohen 2005; Loftus 2001).

Our analysis of General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1980-2004⁵ shows common patterns of division among Americans on each of six moral-values scales: religious people and Republicans were significantly more conservative on each scale. Evangelicals were significantly more conservative on issues of sex, abortion, and end-of-life. Catholics were more conservative on issues of abortion and end-of-life. Younger people and more educated people were more liberal on all issues, and women were more liberal on issues of gender roles, homosexuality, and abortion.⁶ In every case, people who expressed an absolutist cognitive style, measured here as a literalist interpretation of the Bible, were more conservative than others.⁷ Moreover, racial attitudes were significantly entangled with attitudes on gender and sexuality; those who express high levels of social distance from blacks were more conservative on attitudes concerning gender roles and sexuality.⁸

The social base can be organized because it is situated in a common milieu, the conservative church and small town or suburban communities, and is steeped in a broadly similar religious doctrine and cultural outlook. To be sure, a wide range of opinion can

be found among evangelical Christians (Smith et al. 1996). Moreover, some views of evangelical Protestants do not conform to the stereotypes many on the left hold of them as an aggressively right-wing population: For example, white evangelical Protestants show a willingness to devote governmental resources to the amelioration of poverty, and a majority say they will tolerate abortion in cases in which the mother's health is threatened (Greeley and Hout 2006). Even so, the range of evangelical Protestant opinion is restricted when compared to other religious and secular groups (Woodberry and Smith 1998). More important, the inchoate ideas of individual "rank-and-file" evangelical Christians can be effectively aggregated in support for party candidates through the political technologies available to social movement and political party organizations. The same techniques have been used to attract moderately religious Catholics and mainline Protestants, groups now perceived by both parties as critical to electoral success.

From the perspective of the Republican Party, the significance of the Christian conservative social base lies in its willingness to turn out and vote for candidates of the party at election time and to participate in get-out-the-vote campaigns. White evangelicals have been a reliable element of the Republican Party coalition, turning out in higher numbers than many other groups and voting 70 percent or more of the time for Republican candidates. They represent a large bloc of voters, and they are the most reliably Republican voters of any bloc.⁹ In recent elections, they have provided a little more than a third of the Republican vote nationally. Regular church-goers from mainline Protestant and Catholic traditions are smaller blocs, but they are also reliably Republican. The same "faith and family" messages that appeal to white evangelicals also appeal to

these groups. The reputation of Republicans as supporters of “moral values” issues and the reputation of liberal Democrats as opponents of these issues is by now so well engrained that religious voters need few reminders that the Republican Party supports their causes and that the Democratic Party is in the hands of secular humanists and hedonistic liberals who oppose them.

The Party

National parties cannot win elections by appealing to the sentiments of a single group, and particularly not to a group as controversial as the religious Right. Politicians who are too closely associated with the religious Right rarely win elections. For this reason, most politicians avoid the appearance of a close association with the religious Right. Politicians will declare their fellowship with conservative Christians only in private meetings.

Nevertheless, the national Republican Party has proven an able manager of Christian conservative support. It has vastly extended outreach programs to conservative Christian communities, and it has brought many more Christians into the White House for social and political events. It has included Christian conservative leaders as never before in regular briefings on White House and Republican Party priorities. It has successfully focused on a few values issues, like abortion and gay marriage, which have crossover appeal to other groups, while working to keep less popular issues, such as changes in divorce and pornography laws, off the agenda. The Party has developed rhetoric for appealing to white evangelicals without mentioning religion directly. It has

also distributed patronage through appointments to federal agencies and the judiciary, and through funding of faith-based social programs.

Outreach and Coordination. The White House is designed to service every important constituency in the country. Religious leaders are an important constituency in the United States and special briefings have been organized for them from the beginning of the modern presidency. Charles Colson described his experience with religious interest groups in the early 1970s, before the rise of the new religious Right: “I arranged briefings in the Roosevelt Room for religious leaders, ushered wide-eyed denominational leaders into the Oval Office for private sessions with the president, and even arranged dinner cruises on the presidential yacht for key leaders...From these meetings grew very agreeable alliances” (Colson, quoted in Kuo 2006: 171).

The extent of outreach expanded significantly in the Bush White House. A steady stream of national Christian leaders were given briefings and presented with presidential mugs and pins. These briefings were often led by Timothy Goeglein, Special Assistant to President Bush and Deputy Director of Public Liaison. One such briefing for 30 leaders of the national Apostolic (Pentecostal and Charismatic) church associations was described by an official of the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ. The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance with stress on the “under God” portion: “The consistent theme presented throughout the day was that the United States is at a critical point in history. Strong, value-oriented leadership must be continued. America is at an important crossroads and the right path must be taken” (Martin 2004). During the meeting, church leaders were briefed by a national security advisor on the “War on Terror,” by a State

Department official on Israel and the Middle East, by a political affairs official on President Bush's "strong" leadership and the "imperative" that people of faith remain engaged in politics; and by a domestic policy advisor on the social consequences of same-sex marriage in Sweden. Goeglein ended the session by discussing the need to end filibusters on pro-life judges and by emphasizing that the main issue in the United States was the "issue of values, values that must be preserved." During the years of Republican ascendancy, annual events such as the National Prayer Breakfast (begun in 1953) have grown into larger enterprises, with 3000 church and international dignitaries now attending (Sharlet 2003).

The Republican Party and the White House also sent out emissaries to church communities. As part of its efforts to inform religious and non-profit leaders about its "compassion" agenda, the White house held dozens of conferences in politically important states. According to a former White House aide, an average of 1500 people per conference received information, materials, and resources. All were leaders of larger organizations – and most went back to their organizations impressed by how much the President and his staff cared about their concerns" (Kuo 2006: 171-2).

As part of the outreach effort, White House deputies held weekly – and sometimes more frequent -- conference calls with leaders of the religious Right to provide updates on Administration projects and priorities, and to solicit feedback. According to Kuo, regulars on the call included the director of public policy for Focus on the Family; the head of the National Association of Evangelicals; the publisher of the conservative Catholic magazine *Crisis*; the director of Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice; the head of the Family Research Council; the president of the

Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; and two Christian radio talk show hosts (*ibid.* 170-1). “Talking points were distributed and advice was solicited. The advice rarely went any further...The true purpose of these calls was to keep prominent social conservatives and their groups or audiences happy” (*ibid.* 171). Christian Coalition and other movement activists were also drawn into the Party’s orbit through invitations to events like the Americans for Tax Relief Wednesday meetings (Cassidy 2005), Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute seminars, and the Conservative Political Action Conference. Policy forums like these help to build elite cohesion through their focus on a common set of topics, the sense of belonging they encourage, and the informal social ties they produce (Domhoff 2002).

Issue Management. In our model of the party-movement electoral system, the Republican Party filters and edits policy ideas with public opinion in mind. Before endorsing policy ideas, strategists consider the distribution of public opinion, the degree to which issues create strong emotions for activists on either side of the issue, and the likelihood of divisions among members of the opposing party. The political party emphasizes only a handful, among all possible moral-values issues, and works to keep the focus on those issues. The party redirects moral-values policies that have a more limited appeal to those who have a special interest in them, while attempting to minimize their salience at the national level.

Polarized issues play an important role in this system. Our analysis of 2004 data from three national surveys indicates that, while few issues are polarized by party identification or political ideology, between one-fifth and one-quarter of attitude items on

each of the surveys are polarized or “borderline polarized” by ethno-religious categories.¹⁰ We define “polarized” as at least two-thirds of one group favoring a position and two-thirds of another opposing that position within the confidence interval of the sample. On many of these polarized issues, such as the permissibility of abortion and teenage sex, the views of evangelicals and seculars have been sharply polarized going back to the 1970s. Not surprisingly, on polarized moral-values issues the most decisive splits divide white, church-going evangelical Protestants from religiously non-affiliated and secular people. In the General Social Survey, gaps of 50 percentage points or more separate white, church-attending evangelical Protestants from religiously non-affiliated and secular people on issues such as prayer in school, pornography, teen access to birth control, gender roles, abortion, and control over end-of-life (Brint and Abrutyn 2007).

Some issues (such as acceptance of homosexuality) have been trending Democratic; others (such as opposition to abortion and support for prayer in school) have been trending Republican. The most important feature of polarized issues is not the trend line, however, but rather the extent to which positions supported by white evangelicals are also supported in the broader population. The majority of Americans tilt toward evangelicals on issues of abortion and homosexuality; while they tilt toward seculars on issues of premarital sex, divorce, pornography, and control of end of life issues. Polarized issues favoring the evangelical position have become featured in partisan political conflicts advanced by Republican Party politicians, while those that tilt toward the Democratic Party have been largely avoided.

Examined from the point of view of the Republican Party, these *winning, non-consensus issues* have had the following characteristics: public opinion is supportive of the party (though often narrowly); divisions exist in the opposing party's coalition; and a constituency subgroup feels very strongly about the issue. In recent years, the “moral values” issues of gay marriage and abortion have fit the profile, as have “tough-minded” foreign policies, including the Patriot Act and (until early 2005) the war in Iraq. A major discovery by Republican strategists has been that wedge issues are winning issues, if public opinion tilts at least slightly in favor of the party. Wedge issues not only turn out fervent supporters; they bring out opponents, who thereby become visible and can be demonized for the benefit of attracting moderate, but conservative leaning “swing voters.”¹¹ This process of symbolic interaction requires visible, threatening others to activate fears. Wedge issues reliably create these visible others.¹²

The Republican Party has also benefited from a second type of moral-values issue. *Exploitable, consensus issues* are characterized by strong support throughout the electorate, particularly strong support within the dominant party coalition, and divisions within the opposition party about the validity of appealing to voters on these issues. In the “moral values” domain, the most general reference to faith and family issues favor Republicans. Religious belief and support for heterosexual marriage are favored by three-quarters or more of all Americans, and by majorities or near-majorities in all subgroups.

In the highly rationalized system of American political campaigning, it may seem surprising that these issues can provide advantages to a particular political party. However, advocacy of consensus positions can be effective if the opposition party does

not counter, either because mobilized minorities within the party coalition are opposed to adopting the consensus position, or because statements would violate matters of party principle. Republicans' emphasis on the importance of having two parents raising children is a good example of an exploitable consensus issue. Four out of five Americans agree with this position, including a sizable majority of Democrats. Social science evidence is also largely supportive of this view (see, e.g., Entwistle, Alexander and Olsen 1997: chap. 5; Waite and Gallagher 2000). Key constituencies within the Democratic coalition represent single parents and poor people and would like to keep the focus of social policy on poverty rather than family structure. Similarly, many Democrats have been reluctant to talk about faith for fear of alienating secular supporters, or because of principled positions about the separation of church and state. Because Democrats have until recently been reluctant to express majority views about faith and family, Republicans found it easy to paint them as members of an irreligious, anti-family party.

With the cooperation of social movement organizations, party leaders can give oxygen to issues by mentioning them in press releases and speeches, or they can reduce the oxygen in the case of unpopular issues. The rhetorical emphases and themes of party leaders are signals to their allies in social movement organizations about issues that are politically viable. Analysis of eight speeches by Republican politicians to religious Right organizations shows that three topics were given prominence: homosexuality (multiple references in half of the speeches); abortion (multiple references in half of the speeches); and traditional families (at least one reference in five of eight speeches). By contrast, less popular issues (such as divorce laws, pornography, and abstinence) were avoided.

Speeches to religious Right organizations differed from speeches to broader conservative audiences. Here references to national security, terrorism, and government spending were far more common, and moral-values issues were largely avoided. This analysis suggests that terrorism, judicial activism, and public religious expression were the only issues that crossed audience lines.¹³

Evidence of the success of this strategy can be found in the distribution of “moral-values” issues covered by the press. In Table 3, we provide the results of a Lexis-Nexis search for the period March 1 through Election Day 2004 on a set of moral-values issues and values. The table shows that coverage of moral-values issues in the months leading up to the election was skewed to those with which most Americans agreed.

Table 3
Newspaper/Magazine Coverage of Moral-Values Issues, 2004

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Lexis-Nexis Counts</u>
Abortion	6000+
“Christian Values”	6000+
Family Values	6000+
Gay Marriage	6000+
Gay Adoption	330
Divorce Law	322
Prayer in School	198
Pornography Laws	166
Abstinence Pledges for Teens	82
Decency Laws	21

Source: Lexis-Nexis U.S. Newspaper and Magazine Database, March 2004-Election Day 2004

Tailored Rhetoric. Republican Party candidates are willing to declare their commitment to the “culture of life” and to the idea that marriage is “between a man and a woman.” They are less often willing to talk about the importance that faith plays in their lives. George W. Bush played down his religious faith in public. According to a former White House aide, “While Bush said the right things when asked about the issues, he didn’t dwell on them. On abortion, for instance, he embraced the conservative Christian position, saying he was against it except in special circumstances, and he was in favor of a constitutional amendment banning abortions. Yet he quickly followed that statement by saying that Americans wouldn’t go for it and it was pointless to talk about it” (Kuo 2006: 124). Religious Right leaders, beginning with the Christian Coalition’s Ralph Reed, counseled their candidates throughout the 1990s to follow the same course.

Out of the public eye, candidate George W. Bush met with religious leaders and spoke to church groups. In these meetings, he emphasized his personal faith. He told believers the story of his drinking and his redemption. Throughout his presidency he followed this same approach – quietly reassuring Christian leaders and audiences of his passionate personal faith, while trying to preserve a moderate public image. “For the pastors with whom he spoke, it was all they needed to hear. George Bush was a brother in Christ, a sinner who had been redeemed... More than anything, they wanted a good Christian in the White House. The story he told Christians wasn’t a story. He was giving them his testimony.” (ibid. 125).

A good part of the Party’s effort in the moral-values arena is to signal belief to Christian audiences without alienating moderates. One mechanism has been the use of quotations from the Bible that do not raise alarms among moderates. Thus, the speeches

of Republican Party politicians include phrases such as the following: “An America that recognizes the infinite worth of every individual and leaves the 99 to find the one stray lamb,” “the American family, the rock upon which this country was founded,” “We have this land and are told to be good stewards of it and to be good stewards of each other,” “There’s power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.” As Kuo observes, each one of these examples “conveys Christianity without...mentioning the name of Jesus” (*Ibid.* 61).

Political parties have become skillful in tailoring rhetoric for both broadcasting and “narrowcasting.” Rhetoric used in national campaigns must have wide appeal. “Compassionate conservatism,” a George W. Bush campaign slogan in 2000, is the most important recent example of rhetoric that builds beyond the base to other religiously inclined groups. According those close to the Bush campaign, politically motivated evangelicals were not the primary target for “compassionate conservatism.” Instead, this rhetoric was aimed at Catholics, suburban women, and minorities – all groups with a culture of support for those in need (Kuo 2006: 60-61; Morris and Slater 2006: 96-98). The constant reiteration of the term “strong” is another example of rhetoric for broadcasts. Political parties attempt to place their issues and candidates on the popular end of three important polarities in American political culture: strength-weakness, honesty-corruption, and belonging-separation. Of these three, the strength-weakness dimension may be particularly attractive to Christian conservatives, who are sensitive to the discipline required to overcome temptations of the flesh and other moral weaknesses. But the appearance and reference to “strength” clearly also resonates far beyond the

evangelical Christian community, particularly during periods of international challenge and war.¹⁴

Through the use of surveys, focus groups, and by drawing on the knowledge of culturally sensitive local informants, the Republican Party has developed techniques for tailoring messages for sub-cultural constituencies. Thus, Catholic audiences for Republican politicians hear the word “scripture” instead of “Bible” and the phrase “social renewal” rather than “moral decline,” while evangelical Protestant audiences typically hear the opposite terms. The phrase “culture of life” crosses religious cultures, but it has special meaning for Catholics, because it repeats a key term in Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical, “Evangelium vitae.” In general, Republicans attempt to guard against self-righteous and haughty-sounding rhetoric when communicating with Catholics, because this language and tonality is reminiscent of the Southern Baptist culture that many Catholics grew up distrusting (Morris and Slater 2006: 99-100).¹⁵

Policies and Patronage. Parties in power have two key forms of patronage to bestow: appointments to office and funding of policies supported by constituency groups. The Bush Administration has used each of these tools to cement the party-movement system, although its priorities have been more closely aligned with other Republican constituencies: wealthy donors, the corporate community, military contractors, foreign policy hawks, and small business owners.

More than 6500 executive branch jobs can be filled by political appointees outside the competitive civil service system (not including Ambassadors and U.S. Attorneys). More than 2600 political appointees were at work in the Bush Administration before the

2004 election (Barr 2004). These appointees do not include members of blue-ribbon commissions or delegations. It is impossible to know how many appointees, commission members, or members of delegations were closely associated with the religious Right, because most appointees do not advertise their connections to controversial organizations. Some high-profile appointees had close ties, including the first Attorney General John Ashcroft and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, Kay James Cole (former vice president of the Family Research Council and Dean of Pat Robertson's Regent University). Christian conservatives have been particularly interested in judicial appointees and in policy arenas close to the "moral values" agenda, and they have gained some important appointees in these areas. Early appointees of the Bush Administration included Michael McConnell, an opponent of the separation of church and state, to the federal bench; religious Right activist Eric W. Treene as special counsel in the Justice Department for religious discrimination, and several religious Right leaders as members of a delegation to change UN policy on abortion. The two Supreme Court justice appointments were conservative Catholics and members of the Federalist Society, an association of religious and political conservatives.

The Bush Administration initially indicated ambitious plans to provide federal funding for faith-based organizations involved in social services. This funding could have served, not only as a contributor to helping the poor, but as a source of funds to evangelical churches. Allocated funds failed to live up to expectations. The Bush Administration originally promised a "Compassion Capital Fund" for faith-based organizations at a level of \$200 million per year, but this fund was cut down to \$30 million in later appropriations (Kuo 2006: 212). The fund functioned as a venture capital

source for charities and represented all of the new funding received by faith-based organizations. The funds, although theoretically open to representatives of all faiths through peer review, went almost exclusively to evangelical Christian organizations (*ibid.* 215-216).¹⁶

The Social Movement Organizations

In the years 1976-2000, religious Right leaders adopted the classical social movement stance as challengers of authority, even as leading members were becoming incorporated as part of the Republican governing coalition. In the mature party-movement system, social movement organizations have continued to mobilize conservative Christians through fundraising appeals and newsletters that cast the forces of secular liberalism as ascendant and intent on the destruction of religious and family values. However, the position of national social movement organizations shifted subtly in the institutionalized party-movement system of the early 2000s. The national social movement organizations became a more coordinated and cooperative partner of the Republican Party electoral/governing organization. Facing upwards toward party elites, social movement organizations acted as pressure groups advocating appointments and policy changes. Facing downwards toward the base, they acted as conduits for party messages to activist members of local church communities.

From the Christian conservative social base, two layers of politically engaged activists can be defined. The “activist periphery” has been estimated at four million people (Green 2000). The members of this activist periphery provide material support for religious Right movement organizations through donations and purchases, and by

providing an audience for revenue-producing Christian television and radio programs. They provide the human energy for political activities, ranging from letter writing to “get-out-the-vote” campaigns to pro-Administration demonstrations. Closer to the center of the movement is a more fully engaged “activist core,” which numbers closer to 200,000 (Green 2000). These engaged activists follow politics closely, participate in movement activities on a regular basis, and donate at higher levels to movement organizations. Theologically and politically conservative, they tend to be better educated and more affluent than evangelicals generally (*ibid.*).

While media figures such as James Dobson and Pat Robertson are the identifiable faces of the religious Right, the real power of the movement lies in its organizational diversity and dynamism (Stevens 2001) -- and in the networks that connect it to governmental institutions and the Republican Party. Nearly a dozen distinct types of Christian conservative social movement organizations can be identified, each with a different role within the movement as a whole. These organizations lie on a continuum of more religious to more political in orientation, and on a scale of more local to more national in scope.

The more religious organizations are local churches and national denominational organizations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the United Pentecostal Church International, whose leaders identify with and informally promote Republican Party positions on the moral-values agenda. The National Association of Evangelicals arguably also fits in this category. More political arms of these primarily religious organizations include local activist groups whose members meet informally for political discussion and action.

Many of the most effective movement organizations mix spiritual reflection and inspiration with political action. These include the media personalities, such as James Dobson and Pat Robertson, who have large television and radio audiences, and the media outlets that constitute the public face of the movement. They also include the national movement organizations, such as the Christian Coalition of America, Concerned Women for America, the Traditional Values Coalition, and Vision America. These national organizations provide forums, working groups, newsletters, and fund-raising appeals to support political action. These organizations are organized by and are vehicles for top movement leaders. Among the larger organizations, membership numbers in the high tens of thousands. Like most American interest groups, these are membership and mailing list organizations, and do not hold regular face-to-face meetings in local or state chapters (Skocpol 2003). Their strength comes from dissemination of information and from their capacity to collect of donations. They typically hold national meetings once or twice a year in which prominent movement and political leaders speak and workshops are held on issues of interest to members.¹⁷

Special interest organizations focus on single issues (or a narrow set of related issues) of interest to conservative Christians. These include research and lobbying organizations, such as the American Center for Law and Justice, which prosecutes church and state issues, and the Home School Legal Defense Association. Other notable special interest organizations include the Eagle Forum and National Right-to-Life Committee, focusing on the abortion issue, and the Family Research Council, supporting “traditional families.” Special interest organizations exist in every issue domain of interest to

Christian conservatives. Only a few, such as Operation Save America, retain a commitment to direct action.

Closer to the centers of political power, some social movement organizations are directly embedded within governing institutions and policy-making networks. Christian fellowships exist in many organizations of government, including the Air Force Academy (U.S. Air Force 2005) and the Pentagon (Sharlet 2006). Daily bible study was held also at the U.S. Department of Justice during the first George W. Bush Administration (Christian Century 2001). A cross-institutional Christian fellowship of Republican leaders gathers at “the Cedars” mansion in suburban Virginia (Kuo 2006: 91-92). Some of the fellowships, such as Christian Embassy, which is a significant presence in the military, are explicitly political in support of both social movement and Republican Party objectives. Because these fellowships unite officials across bureaucratic lines, they can become a powerful force of informal organization and career mobility.

Christian elite policy discussion networks provide forums for consensus-building and elite cohesion across institutional sectors. The most important of these organizations is the secretive Council for National Policy, founded by Rev. Timothy LeHaye in 1981. The Council meets three times a year and publishes a weekly newsletter and semi-annual journal. In the recent past, Council membership has included CEOs of major American corporations, top Republican officials and Congressmen, and leaders of religious Right social movement organizations, such as Sam Moore, Sun Myung Moon, Pat Robertson, Rousas J. Rushdoony, Phyllis Schafley, Jay Sekulow, Louis Sheldon, and Don Wildmon (Kirkpatrick 2004). Other integrating organizations are part of the broader conservative movement and consequently tend to focus more on economic and national security policy

than social issues. They include leaders of religious Right social movement organizations as members or regular invitees. These groups include the Conservative Political Action Conference and the Americans for Tax Relief's "Wednesday Group." The participation of Christian conservative leaders in these meetings helps to integrate social conservatives into the broader conservative movement and its networks (Cassidy 2005).

In the party-movement system, social movement organizations are, in principle, able to address a wider range of issues than party leaders, because they are not required to worry as much about alienating moderates. Nevertheless, national social movement organizations have focused on issues that are advantageous to the national Republican Party. Our analysis of Christian conservative websites in early 2007 indicates that the issues of abortion and homosexuality received the most attention, as one would expect in a coordinated system. Second-tier issues of public expression of religious symbols, support for "traditional families," and opposition to judicial activism were addressed, but less frequently. Politically unpopular "moral values" issues, such as restriction on stem cell research, teen sexual abstinence, pornography, and divorce laws were, by contrast, rarely mentioned.

Table 4
Topics on Christian Conservative Websites (January 2007)

	Traditional Values Coalition	Concerned Women of America	Christian Coalition Legal Action	AFA/ Focus on the Family Action	Nat. Assoc. Evang. News Links.
Homosexuality/					
Gay Rights	11	3	0	>20	6

Abortion	4	>20	0	1	0
Judicial Activism	1	2	1	5	2
Public Religion	4	2	2	1	1
Traditional Families	0	3	1	4	1
Terrorism	7	0	0	0	0
Stem Cell Research	2	0	0	1	0
Pornography	0	2	0	0	0
Sexual Abstinence	1	0	0	0	0
Divorce Laws	0	0	0	0	0
Poverty	0	0	0	0	0

Following the lead of Republican Party politicians, the leaders of national social movement organizations have learned to allow hosts on talk radio, leaders of single-issue organizations, and ministers in church pulpits to advocate positions that appeal to moral-values minorities, thereby gaining the support of religious conservatives who feel strongly about these issues, while retaining distance in their public pronouncements from positions that have limited appeal in the broader population.

The Republican Party-Christian Conservative “Political Machine”

Closely connected to the leaders of religious Right organizations, pastors of politically engaged evangelical churches became a new type of precinct captain during the 1980s and 1990s, and church congregants the deliverable voters. As compared to earlier political machines, the Republican Party-Christian conservative “machine” has had the advantage of bringing voters together weekly for experiences that build collective solidarity, with the pastor as the focal point of the spiritual benefits of community. By encouraging congregants to become politically active and by strongly supporting Republican positions on moral-values issues (without, for the most part, advocating

particular candidates), pastors placed the expressed values of the Republican Party in a symbolic position as instruments of God's divine plan.

The material benefits of this exchange have been substantial for the Republican Party, given that about one-third of its vote typically comes from self-described evangelical Protestants. The benefits to Christians are primarily symbolic, however, and consist of supporting politicians who they perceive as encouraging the country along a righteous path. Christian conservatives believe that Republicans share their commitments and priorities, and Republican politicians provide signals that they do in fact share these commitments and priorities (even if they prefer not to talk about them to non-religious audiences). Very few material rewards have followed from the involvement of evangelical Christians in political life. Activists close to the Christian conservative movement have been appointed to state and federal offices, commissions, and delegations, and a few Christian charities have received federal funds. But gay rights are gaining ground, abortion remains legal, and prayer in schools continues to be proscribed. Intelligent design has failed to gain adherents, and stem cell research, although opposed by President Bush, is gaining ground in the states. Throughout the period, conservative Protestants have consistently wanted more legislatively than the Party has been willing or able to deliver.

The one-sided material exchange of the Republican-Christian conservative alliance is a significant difference from political machines of the past. Indeed, the urban Democratic voters of the past were dependent on ward leaders primarily for material benefits: patronage jobs in government, interventions with the police and other government agencies, and family support in hard times. The mechanisms used to deliver

the vote also differ from those of the past. Rather than relying solely on face-to-face contacts, social movement organizations have distributed voting guides to congregants, and drawn connections between Christian belief and party platforms through their mailers, conferences, radio and television shows, and websites. Here, too, the symbolic dimension looms large.

We can speak of the Republican-Christian conservative organization as a new kind of political machine only with qualification, because, unlike the earlier urban Democratic machines, loyalty has been conditional and negotiated, rather than habitual. The Republican Party must contend with movement leaders who are capable of withdrawing support in the face of embarrassing scandals or failure to act on candidates for appointment or favored legislation. More important, issues of competence and policy failure can influence conservative Christians who are less firmly attached to movement organizations. Lower income evangelicals are only weakly connected to the “machine”; they are very often more concerned about jobs and health care than about abortion and gay rights (Greeley and Hout 2006). The weekly co-presence of the church community is an important organizational asset, when compared to the loose associations of the urban Democratic neighborhood-based machines, but the symbolic content of the party-church base connection is a weakness of the Republican-Christian machine when compared to the material interdependencies of its urban Democratic predecessors (cf. R. Brooks 2005).

CONCLUSION

By effectively deploying its organizational resources and cultural capital, the Republican Party has demonstrated a capacity for activating and suppressing social conflicts along politically profitable lines. At the same time, policy failures, scandals, and a newly competitive opposition have created obstacles to Republican Party strategists' aspirations for a stable, long-term electoral advantage.

Two developments pose salient problems for the alliance. The first is the development of divisions within the movement concerning a future policy agenda. The second is the effort of the Democratic Party leadership to neutralize the Republican advantage on issues of "faith and family."

The environment has become a wedge issue within the movement. In recent years, influential evangelical ministers have begun to argue that the environment is a "values issue." This position is known within the Christian conservative community as "creation care." A National Association of Evangelicals vice-president observed that creation care is "not a Red State issue or a Blue State issue or a green issue. It's a spiritual issue" (Cizik, quoted in Breslau and Brant 2006). Younger movement leaders are promoting environmental stewardship even as they risk alienating older and more prominent movement leaders by doing so. A rift is consequently developing within the movement about the importance of environmental issues, with the "Old Guard" continuing to insist on the priority of traditional family and social issue concerns.¹⁸ This division could widen as evidence accumulates on the consequences of global warming.

To a lesser degree, other issues that do not fit the traditional agenda of the religious Right have also emerged in the conservative Christian community. The most

important of these is poverty. Rick Warren, the best-selling author and pastor of a Southern California mega-church, has called for a new “war on global poverty,” and his views have been widely circulated in the Christian conservative community (Rossi 2005). Other prominent evangelical ministers, including Pat Robertson, have begun to raise money to alleviate poverty in the developing world.

As new issues challenge the unity of the conservative Christian movement, Democratic leaders have shown the capacity to adapt to the popularity of the old issues. They have become more comfortable presenting their own religious and moral values to counter this area of Republican strength. Prior to the 2006 congressional elections, Party leaders recruited candidates who could speak authentically about faith and family issues. Several candidates, including Sen. Bob Casey in Pennsylvania, Rep. Heath Shuler in North Carolina, Rep. Brad Ellsworth in Indiana, and Gov. Ted Strickland in Ohio, campaigned on pro-life, pro-marriage platforms. Leading Democratic candidates for president also began to appear on stages of mega-churches and to discuss the role of religion and traditional family values in their lives (Totten 2006). Through these efforts, Democrats have shown the capacity to reconnect with religiously oriented ethnic minority voters, and to compete again for moderate white Catholic voters.

Nevertheless, it would be premature to predict the demise of the party-movement system. In 2006, white evangelical Protestants continued to vote for Republican candidates at historically consistent levels – 70 percent of the time -- and their turnout remained high. Most evangelicals have shown no signs of changing their minds about abortion or traditional families, and Republican outreach to conservative churches remains impressive. Internal divisions within the movement over the environment and

poverty could eventually lead to issue expansion -- and therefore greater movement strength. Similarly, the efforts of Democratic candidates to reconnect with moderate religious voters could run into opposition among the party's more liberal activists and donors.

Moral-value politics in the United States can no longer be interpreted as the expression of a particular status group in society; instead, these beliefs are part of a well-financed and well-run organizational structure. For a generation, the carefully-scripted symbolic environment of moral-values politics and the social networks that carry these symbols have persisted even in the face of numerous scandals and policy disappointments. On the basis of this evidence, political sociologists do well to acknowledge the durability and strength of the bonds between theologically conservative Protestants, religious Right social movement organizations, and the Republican Party. In the context of continuing national security threats, these bonds could plausibly grow stronger, rather than weaker.

Notes

¹ Of the two leading American proponents of the status group interpretation of right-wing politics, only Lipset originally called attention to conservative Protestantism as a source: “One important factor affecting (the) lack of tolerance in American life is the basic strain of Protestant puritanical morality which has always existed in this country. Americans believe that there is a fundamental difference between right and wrong, that right must be

supported, and that wrong must be suppressed, that error and evil have no rights against the truth” (Lipset 1955 [1962]: 317). By 1962, Hofstadter had also recognized the importance of religious fundamentalism: “If (my original) essay were to be rewritten today, there is one force in American life, hardly more than hinted at in my original formulation, that would now loom very large indeed, and that is fundamentalism...To understand the Manichaean style of thought, the apocalyptic tendencies, the love of mystification, the intolerance of compromise that are observable in the right-wing mind, we need to understand the history of fundamentalism...To the three sources of right-wing sentiment that are commonly enumerated – isolationism...ethnic prejudice, and old-fashioned “liberal” economics – one must add the fundamentalist revolt against modernity, and not by any means as minor partner (Hofstadter 1962: 102-103).

² “Caring and compassion” seems, at first glance, to be associated with liberal and Catholic religious sensibilities, but the Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (2005) poll showed that evangelicals were somewhat more likely than other groups to mention this quality as a meaning of “moral values.”

³ Green, Guth and Wilcox (1998) based their conclusion on interviews with Republican Party state officials and grassroots activists. They defined “dominant” influence as a working majority in the principal state party organization. They defined “substantial” influence as at least one-quarter of state party positions held by social conservative activists. See also Rozell and Wilcox (1995).

⁴ Evangelical Christianity, while similar in cultural expectations related to the regulation of self in an (ideally) ascetic community, operates on a distinctly different emotional frequency from other forms of ascetic Christianity. It is a direct descendant of the spirit-filled Christianity of Anne Hutchinson, the Quakers, and the preachers of the First Great Awakening, each one a reaction to repressive and exclusionary Puritanism. As in earlier forms of spirit-filled Christianity, contemporary evangelical Christianity brings a far more optimistic and emotionally-open approach to Christian activity in the world, and is most attractive to less educated church-goers living in small towns and new suburban areas (Marsden 2006; Morone 2003: chap. 2).

⁵ Scales were created using factor analyses. Scales, eigenvalues, and factor loadings are as follows: ***Gender roles*** (.91): women should take care of the home, not the country (.40), women are not suited for politics (.38), women should help their husbands' careers first (.55), and it is better for the man to work and the woman to stay home with children (.55). ***Heterosexual relations*** (.91): acceptability of premarital sex (.51), acceptability of teen sex (.63), acceptability of extramarital sex (.53). ***Homosexual relations*** (1.08): acceptability of homosexual relations (one variable). ***Abortion*** (3.16): abortion in case of low income (.83), abortion in case of unmarried people (.86), abortion in case of unwanted pregnancy (.85), abortion in case of rape (.60), abortion in case of birth defect (.61), abortion allowed in any case (.82). ***End-of-Life*** (2.05): allow incurable patients to die (.37), suicide allowed in case of incurable disease (.47), suicide allowed in case of

bankruptcy (.80), suicide allowed in case of dishonored family (.80), suicide allowed for those tired of living (.64). ***Religiosity*** (1.08): self-identified intensity of devotion (.65), frequency of church attendance (.51), frequency of prayer (.62).

⁶ Independent variables in this analysis included the following: ***party*** (dummy coded with “independent” as reference category); ***religion*** (evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Catholics, seculars, and others – dummy coded with “others” as reference category); ***religiosity*** (see fn. 5 above); ***race*** (white and black only); ***sex***; ***education*** (less than high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate; post-graduate – ordinal variable); ***urbanism*** (largest 12 cities, other large cities, suburbs, small towns, unincorporated areas, and rural areas – dummy coded with “small towns” as reference category); ***Southern residence***; ***Occupation*** (professional, manager, white collar, blue collar – dummy coded with “white collar” as reference category; ***Age*** (continuous variable); ***Presidential term*** (Reagan – 1980-88; Bush I – 1989-92; Clinton – 1993-2000; Bush II – 2001-2004); ***Racial attitudes*** (scale measuring social distance from African-Americans); ***Moral Absolutism*** (item measuring belief in the Bible as the literal word of God).

⁷ Better measures of moral absolutism examine R’s willingness to change moral views in the face of changing circumstances. Investigation of NES data suggests that such better measures of moral absolutism increase R^2 by 2-3 percent on social issues scales.

⁸ These analyses contribute to a long line of research showing strong divisions among whites between people anchored, either by experience or loyalty, in the moral traditions of religious, small town, Republican white America and those whose lives are not anchored in these experiences and loyalties (see Brint 1994: chap. 5; C. Brooks 2002; Brooks and Manza 2004; Bolzendahl and Brooks 2005; Hunter 1992; Layman 2001).

⁹ The 2004 National Election Study feeling thermometer shows nearly ice cold feelings among white evangelicals in relation to liberals (an average of 39 degrees with a confidence interval of plus or minus five degrees) and very warm feelings for conservatives (an average of 75 degrees with a confidence interval of plus or minus four degrees); in both cases, these rankings are at the high and low extremes when compared to those of other ethno-religious groups.

¹⁰ We used a simple measure of polarization – two-thirds or more of one group supporting and two-thirds or more of another group opposing. We use the term “polarized” when this gap holds within the statistical margin of error for the estimate. We use the term “borderline polarization” when distributions do not meet this two-thirds/two-thirds criterion, but could theoretically do so within the statistical margin of error. Thus, in a large sample, if 64 percent of traditional white evangelicals and only 35 percent of seculars feel the same way about an issue, this issue would be characterized as “borderline polarized.” Not surprisingly, the sharpest divisions separate white, church-going evangelical Protestants from religiously non-affiliated and secular people. Among the 40 Pew Research Center items we examined, only five were polarized or “borderline

polarized” by party identification and ideology. By contrast, 11 items (28%) were polarized or borderline polarized by ethno-religious identification. The latter included six issues related to religion, abortion, and homosexuality; and five issues related to national security, civil liberties, and immigration. Among the 66 National Election study items we examined, four were polarized by party identification and ideology. By contrast, 18 items (27%) were polarized or borderline polarized by ethno-religious identification. Half of these items concerned religion, sexuality, crime, and gun laws. Among the 72 General Social Survey items we examined, no items were polarized by party identification or ideology. By contrast, 16 items (22%) were polarized or borderline polarized along ethno-religious lines. Thirteen of these issues fell under the “moral values” umbrella of faith, family, gender roles, sexuality and end-of-life.

¹¹ A legal strategy sometimes used to help mobilize the vote in non-consensus, but winnable issue campaigns is to put measures on the ballot that will increase voter turnout among constituencies who feel strongly about the issue. The gay marriage initiatives that appeared on the ballot in 11 states in 2004 are an example of the effective use of this strategy. A similar strategy was pursued by the Republican Party in 2006. This strategy included initiatives on gay marriage in eight states (including two Southern states with tightly contested Senatorial elections), as well as initiatives to restrict abortion in three states and to ban illegal immigration in two Southwestern states.

¹² Particularly effective issues of this type often have as the target of policy interventions a group of small size and relatively little power. The issue of “gay marriage” is a

contentious issue that has played favorably for the Republican-Christian conservative electoral system. At least two-thirds of Americans are opposed to gay marriage. White evangelicals are almost unanimously opposed and half of these conservative religious voters tell polling organizations that they feel “very strongly” about the issue. In addition, homosexuals are a relatively small part of the population – less than five percent -- but make up a non-negligible part of the Democratic coalition. Democratic support for initiatives to ban gay marriage will be tempered for that reason. At the same time, supporters of gay marriage will naturally exercise their First Amendment rights to support efforts to legalize gay marriage, thereby visually activating the opposition of “values voters” to gay influence. The widely disseminated images of parades of gay activists in San Francisco, some dressed as transvestites, following the legalization of gay marriage served as a powerful stimulus to anti-gay backlash among conservative Christians in 2004.

¹³ This analysis is based on content analysis of eight speeches given to religious Right organizations by eight different Republican speakers (Pres. George W. Bush, Gov. Mitt Romney, Gov. Mike Huckabee, Sen. George Allen, Sen. Sam Brownback, Rep. Mike Pence, and Press Secretary Tony Snow). It also includes speeches given to the Conservative Political Action Council (CPAC) by seven Republican speakers (Vice President Dick Cheney, Gov. Rick Perry, Sen. George Allen, Rep. Tom DeLay, Rep. Sam Johnson, Rep. Mike Pence, and Rep. Paul Ryan. The analysis includes speeches given by Sen. Rick Santorum to the Heritage Foundation, Rep. Newt Gingrich to the Wednesday morning club, and Rep. Tom DeLay to Vision America. We are grateful to

Carol Kay for making recordings and transcripts of several of these speeches available for analysis.

¹⁴ Our analysis of national security items from the Pew Research Center and the National Election Surveys show a similar pattern, albeit with religiosity (measured by church attendance) playing a limited explanatory role and conservative ideology playing a more important role (Brint and Abrutyn 2007). During the years of the Bush presidency, evangelical Protestants and those with “absolutist” moral outlooks were significantly more likely than others to favor overwhelming military action to defeat terrorism, to justify unilateralism over multilateralism, to support higher levels of defense spending, and to favor restrictions on civil liberties in the name of national security (*ibid.*).¹⁴ For conservative Christians, we hypothesize that national security issues elicit, at a deep psychological level, a similar set of responses as do perceptions of disorder generally – feelings of moral superiority to those perceived as threatening, protective concerns about the national community led by co-believers, and determination to effect change. Connections between moral values and national security have been encouraged by Republican Party and social movement leaders.

¹⁵ Similarly, advertisements that would be considered excessive in a national campaign can be effective when targeted to a narrower population. One 2004 poster familiar to members of conservative evangelical churches, for example, showed a picture of a gay couple with the caption “allowed” and next to it a picture of the Bible with the caption “banned.” By defining and directing rhetoric at several levels within the polity, based on

breadth of appeal of particular symbols and terms, the party is capable of aggregating preferences within a pluralistic society, while restricting exposure to messages with limited appeal to constituencies who are most sympathetic to them.

¹⁶ According to Kuo, grant referees were supposed to review the application in a religiously neutral fashion, and assign each applicant a score on a range of 1-100. But their biases were transparent. Many of the grant-winning organizations that rose to the top were politically friendly to the Administration. One reviewer told Kuo, that reviewers were instructed to look at proposals against a list of criteria and score accordingly. “But when I saw one of those non-Christian groups in the set I was reviewing, I just stopped looking at them and gave them a zero.” (Kuo 2006: 215-216).

¹⁷ In the past, these organizations were directly involved in political campaigns, but this activity has been restricted by the IRS and has led to the creation of legal action arms of the organizations, whose income is subject to for-profit tax laws and regulation.

¹⁸ In 2006, a coalition of evangelicals issued “A Call to Action” on global warming. This effort was undermined by the withdrawal of support of prominent “old-line” evangelical leaders, including James Dobson, Ted Haggard, and Louis Shelton (Simon 2007).

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