



1-1-1996

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Recommended Citation

Dailey '96, Tricia (1996) "The Effects of Political and Demographic Variables on Christian Coalition Scores," *Res Publica - Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 1

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/respublica/vol1/iss1/6>

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The Effects of Political and Demographic Variables on Christian Coalition Scores

Abstract

One of the most interesting phenomena in American politics is the recent rise of the Christian right. First termed the "Moral Majority" by Jerry Falwell in the late 1970s, the Christian Right has undergone a name and a leader change. The Christian Coalition is currently led by Pat Robertson who seeks to continue much of the early work pioneered by the Moral Majority. The Moral Majority sought to reintroduce Christian principles into the political sphere. The Christian Coalition focuses on continuing these efforts in an attempt to reverse "the moral decay that threatens our great nation" (Christian Coalition, 1996).

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The purpose of this research is to measure the political and demographic variables on House representatives' frequency of voting with the Christian Coalition agenda. This is measured by the Christian Coalition's Congressional Scorecard as the percentage a representative supports the position held by the Coalition. The independent variables used in this research include: party affiliation of the representative, how the district voted in the 1988 presidential election, the percent minority in the district of voting age, percentage of district who had attended some college, and the median household income of the district. These are examined to analyze their independent and collective effect on the representative's frequency of supporting the Christian Coalition (CC) agenda.

The following hypotheses are the expected empirical patterns based upon logic and conventional wisdom. It is expected that party affiliation will be a major factor in the frequency of a representative voting with the CC agenda, regardless of the non-partisan claim made by the CC organization. Specifically, if a representative were a Republican, she or he would vote more consistently with the CC agenda than a Democrat.

Additionally, it is hypothesized that the greater a district's vote for Republican George Bush in the 1988 presidential election, the higher their representative's support for the CC agenda. This assumption is based on the belief that a Republican vote for president would generally translate into the election of a Republican or at the least, a conservative Democrat representative. With regard to the percent minorities in a district, it is hypothesized that because high concentrations of minorities tend to live in urban areas, which tend to receive a large portion of social services and entitlements, the elected representative would not vote in favor of the CC agenda which often seeks to limit federal spending in these areas.

It is also hypothesized that the higher percentage of constituents with some college education, the less likely their representative would vote in

favor of the CC agenda. This hypothesis rests on the findings of Moore and Whitt who concluded that "education increases knowledge of the organization [e.g., the Moral Majority], but does not influence support for it" (Moore and Whitt, 1986). Finally, it is hypothesized that districts with higher median household incomes will elect representatives who are less supportive of the CC agenda than districts with lower income levels. This hypothesis runs counter to the finding in Moore and Whitt which states "respondents with high income levels are more likely to support the Moral Majority organization" (Moore and Whitt, 1986). This research suggests instead a status politics explanation, "that those economically or socially dispossessed should be opposed to any threat to tradition" (Moore and Whitt, 1986).

Data, regarding the CC agenda, are obtained from the Christian Coalition office in Bloomington, Illinois. Demographic data are obtained from the profiles published on each representative in the *Almanac of American Politics*. Data from the Christian Coalition Congressional Scorecard, 1994 Election Year Edition, as well as the 1994 version of the *Almanac*, are the body of the data used. Since this study focuses on the House of Representatives, the sample size is four hundred and thirty-four, one less than the total number due to one Socialist in the House. All relative data for each case in the study are examined through multiple regression analysis.

The operationalization of the variables is relatively simple. Party affiliation is coded with Democrats as a one and Republicans as a zero. The 1988 presidential election is selected because it is the most recent election in which divergent ideologies and no third-parties are evident. The percentage of minorities of voting age in a district is used to measure the race variable. Education is operationalized as simply the percentage of people in the district with at least some college education. Finally, income is operationalized as the median household income.

Table 1
Party Affiliation, 1988 Vote, Race, Education, Income
and the Christian Coalition Agenda

	Variable B	Beta	Significant T
Party	-52.679932	-.680827	.0000
'88 Pres Vote	1.106142	.356282	.0000
Race	-.032362	-.017129	.5361
Education	-.211867	-.061810	.0589
Income	-.613104	-.135257	.0001
(Constant)	48.970702		

Adjusted R Square .78172

Significant F= .0000

The multiple regression data in Table 1 demonstrates that the independent variables have a significant collective impact on the dependent variable. Therefore, one may reject the null hypothesis that party affiliation, 1988 presidential election vote, percent minority population in district, percent of district population having had some college education, and income have no bearing on whether a representative votes with the CC agenda. The significant F test demonstrates that these findings are significant to the .00001 level, meaning there is less than a one in one hundred thousand chance that this pattern occurred randomly in the data. The adjusted R Square indicates that 78% of the variance in the dependent variable, CC vote, is explained by knowing the independent variables.

With regard to party affiliation, controlling for all other independent variables, a Democratic representative recorded a decreased voting frequency of voting with the CC agenda. The actual average coefficient decrease was by 52.68 percentage points. This independent variable exhibits the strongest beta weight of $-.680827$. The effect of party is significant at the .00001 level. Party has apparently a significant effect on a representative's propensity to support the CC agenda. Republican representatives vote with the CC agenda more often than Democratic representatives. These findings, in particular, raise serious questions concerning the CC assertion that they play a strictly non-partisan political role.

According to the data, the outcome of the 1988 presidential vote in a district is also statistically significant. For every percentage point in which Bush gained a larger vote margin, the representative's frequency of voting with the CC agenda increased by a little more than one percentage point. Similar to the results from party affiliation, the vote split of the 1988 presidential election was significant at the .00001 level. Party and presidential vote have a significant impact on how a representative votes in respect to the CC agenda. These findings indicate political factors are the most influenced by CC ratings. This too raises doubts about the organization's claim of impartial interpretation of Christian principles.

Race, in contrast to the political variables, does not prove to be a significant variable in determining the support of a representative with regard to the CC. For every percentage point in which minorities constituted a larger portion of the district's population, the frequency of supporting the CC agenda decreases by only .032 percentage points and this pattern is not statistically significant. This result is inconsistent with my hypothesis. Education is a significant independent variable at the .10 level. The B value for education is $-.211867$. For every percentage point of the district's population who had some college education, the frequency of the representative voting with the CC agenda decreased by 2.1 percentage points. This result confirms my hypothesis that the greater the percentage of people

in the district having some college education, the less likely their representative will vote with the CC agenda. Income ranks below party affiliation and 1988 presidential election vote but is the strongest demographic variable in the study. The B value of income is $-.613104$, which means for every thousand dollar increase in the median household income, the frequency for a representative to vote in support of the CC agenda declines by six percentage points. With relation to the significant T-test, income is significant at the .0001 level.

The political culture from which the representative is elected, certainly appears to play a major role in his or her voting behavior. Elected officials appear to be remarkably representative of their district. Previous literature has established that party affiliation greatly affects how a representative votes and what ideology is employed when making voting decisions. This study also shows that political culture of the district is important (measured by how the district voted in the last ideologically divergent presidential election). The fact that the presidential vote was significant, when controlling for all other variables, demonstrates the impact of political culture on a representative's voting behavior.

It is evident that support for the CC agenda does not exist in a political vacuum. There are a number of factors which influence the votes needed to carry out policy initiatives set by the CC leadership. It has been shown that party affiliation and the 1988 presidential election vote contribute significantly to creating a political culture appropriate for the election of a representative who will or will not support the CC agenda. The demographic variables of race, education, and income are not as strong in predicting a representative's behavior. Except for race, they do, however, exhibit a statistically significant impact. The present research shows that there are a number of variables which actively affect a representative's voting behavior. These results are not exhaustive and warrant further study, factoring in other variables such as region, percentage of district population over the age of 62, and percent of the district population living in rural areas. A study focusing on the effect of all these variables, both individually and collectively, may shed further light on the theory of status politics with regard to the Christian Coalition agenda.

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