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THE RISE OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT: EVIDENCE FROM THE MORAL MAJORITY AND THE JIMMY CARTER PRESIDENCY

Giulia Buccione
Brian G. Knight

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The Rise of the Religious Right: Evidence from the Moral Majority and the Jimmy Carter Presidency

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ABSTRACT

We investigate the rise of the religious right in the context of the Moral Majority and Jimmy Carter, the first Evangelical President. During Carter's Presidency, the Moral Majority, an Evangelical group headed by televangelist Jerry Falwell, turned against the incumbent Carter, a Democrat, and campaigned for Ronald Reagan, a Republican, in the 1980 Election. To investigate the role of religious groups and leaders in the political persuasion of followers, we first develop a theoretical model in which single-issue religious voters follow better-informed religious leaders when choosing which candidates to support. Using data from county-level voting returns, exit polls, and surveys, we document that Evangelical voters indeed shifted their support from Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980. We also provide three pieces of evidence that the Moral Majority played a role in this switching: survey data on Moral Majority campaign issues, exposure to Jerry's Falwell's television ministry, and exposure to state headquarters of the Moral Majority.

Giulia Buccione
Brown University
giulia_buccione@brown.edu

Brian G. Knight
Brown University
Department of Economics, Box B
64 Waterman Street
Providence, RI 02912
and NBER
Brian_Knight@brown.edu

1 Introduction

The Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution prohibits the government from establishing an official religion. Yet, this has not prevented religion from playing a key role in U.S. politics and policy. Indeed, religion casts a wide shadow over controversial policy issues today, such as abortion, funding of basic science, public funding of religious schools, school curriculum, and gay marriage. Moreover, the religion of candidates for public office has often been a key issue on the campaign trail, from John Kennedy's Catholicism in 1960 to controversy over Barack Obama's faith in the 2008 and 2012 elections. Moreover, religious leaders have often played a key role in shaping U.S. politics and elections, from allegations over a link between the Evangelical leader Billy Graham and President Richard Nixon to, more recently, the endorsement by Jerry Falwell Jr., another Evangelical leader, of Donald Trump in the 2016 Republican primary.

In this paper, we investigate these issues in the context of Jimmy Carter, a Southern Democrat and the first Evangelical President. Carter received support from many Evangelical voters and leaders in the 1976 Presidential election, in which he defeated President Ford. Evangelical leaders grew disillusioned with Carter during his Presidency (from 1977 to 1981). Jerry Falwell Sr., a televangelist, played a key role in the formation of, and ultimately became head of, the Moral Majority, a religious special interest group that formed in 1979 and campaigned against Carter and in favor of the Republican Ronald Reagan, a non-Evangelical who ultimately won the 1980 Presidential election.

To more formally analyze the role of religious leaders and voters in elections, we begin by developing a theoretical model of multi-dimensional politics. One dimension involves religious policy and the other dimension represents a general ideological dimension. Religious leaders, but not voters, observe the religious policy preferences of the candidates and endorse the pro-religion candidate. Single-issue voters, those with extreme pro-religion policy preferences, follow the lead of religious leaders and support the endorsed candidate, even when it goes against their general ideological inclinations.

The empirical section of the paper is divided into two parts. The first part investigates whether, given the Moral Majority's support for Reagan in 1980, Evangelical voters shifted their support from Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980. To do so, we rely on three datasets on voting in Presidential Elections. The first dataset is at the county level, with the dependent variable being the change in the Carter vote share between 1976 and 1980 and the independent variable being the share Evangelical. Using these data, we document a strong negative within-state relationship, conditional on demographics, such as race, between the presence of Evangelicals and a change in county-level

support for Carter. That is, support for Carter fell between 1976 and 1980 in counties with more Evangelicals, relative to counties within the same state and with fewer Evangelicals. In terms of magnitudes, a 10 percentage point increase in the share of Evangelicals in the county is associated with (roughly) a one percentage point drop in the vote share for Carter in the 1980 election, relative to the vote share in the 1976 election and relative to other counties within the state. We find opposite effects, an increase in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980 for mainline Protestants and Catholics, suggesting that the decline in support among Evangelicals is not driven by religiosity per se. We also find that the results are not driven by the U.S. South. This is re-assuring given both the realignment of white voters in the U.S. South towards the Republican Party during this time period along with racial animus among whites in the South.

One limitation of the county-level analysis involves the ecological inference problem. That is, we cannot rule out the possibility that non-Evangelical voters living in Evangelical counties are the ones shifting from Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980. To address this point, we next turn to information from two surveys, one based upon exit polls in the 1980 election and one based upon the 1980 American National Election Survey (ANES). Both surveys have questions about religion as well as voting in the 1980 election and, retrospectively, voting in the 1976 election. In both cases, we find that, conditional on demographics and geography, Evangelical voters were significantly less likely to support Carter in the 1980 election, relative to their support for Carter in the 1976 election. These results are robust to focusing on Protestant voters, thus comparing Evangelical voters to mainline Protestant voters.

As in the county-level analysis, we document that our results are not driven by the U.S. South. With individual-level data, we can also investigate heterogeneity according to demographics. In both datasets, we find evidence that the effects are stronger for White Evangelicals, consistent with the leaders of the Moral Majority being disproportionately white. The effects are also stronger for female voters, consistent with an important role for some female Evangelical leaders in promoting traditional gender roles for women during this time period.

While this evidence is consistent with a role for religious leaders, it does not allow one to separate a role for religious leaders from individual decisions made by Evangelical voters. Given this, the second part of the empirical analysis delves into the role of Evangelical leaders and the Moral Majority in particular in shifting these Evangelical voters from Carter to Reagan. We begin with the survey data, documenting that Evangelical voters, when identifying key issues driving their vote in 1980 exit polls, highlighted the importance of policy issues central to the Moral Majority platform. Likewise, in the ANES data, we document that Evangelical voters gave higher ratings to the Moral Majority in a feeling thermometer score.

We then turn to two measures of exposure to the Moral Majority, one involving the centralized structure of the organization and one involving the decentralized structure. Regarding the centralized structure, we use variation across counties in exposure to Falwell via his televised ministry the "Old Time Gospel Hour". Using the Irregular Terrain Method and county-level voting returns, we provide evidence that exposure to Falwell's program was associated with a shift in support for Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980. This result is robust to controls for the share Evangelical in the county.

Regarding the decentralized structure of the Moral Majority, we incorporate information on the location of state Moral Majority headquarters. Using the county-level data again, we show that proximity to the state headquarters was associated with a shift in support for Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980. This result is again robust to controls for the share Evangelical in the county.

This paper is closest to a literature on religious media, religiosity, and political outcomes. Wang (2021) studies a Catholic Priest named Charles Coughlin and his popular radio program in the U.S. during the 1930s. Coughlin's programming involved anti-FDR content, and Wang (2021) documents that exposure to the program reduced FDR's vote share in the 1936 election. Moreover, these results were particularly strong in counties with a larger share of Catholic voters. Buccione and Mello (2020) study television stations associated with the Pentecostal church in Brazil. They first document strong conversion effects, with exposure to the TV channel leading to an increase in the share of Pentecostals in exposed areas. Building upon this evidence of religious conversion, they then document the socioeconomic consequences, such as higher fertility rates, of this conversion but, more relevantly for our study, increased support for Pentecostal candidates in elections. Related to this, Sola (2024) studies the political influence of Pentecostals in Brazil via an identification strategy based upon the staggered translation of the Bible by an Evangelical organization in the U.S. She finds that an increase in the share of Pentecostals is associated with an increase in the vote share of Evangelical and far-right candidates. Grosfeld et al. (2021) examine the effects of religious programming, in the form of pro-Catholic propaganda on government television, on religious participation in Poland. While areas with access to independent television experienced trends towards secularization, areas without independent television relied on government television, leading to a reversal of the trends towards secularization.

We contribute to this literature via an examination of a new setting, the religious right in the U.S. We also focus on the role of candidate religion, with Evangelical leaders turning against the first Evangelical President during his first term in office and supporting Ronald Reagan, a non-Evangelical, over Carter in the 1980 election. In addition, we focus on the organization of the group, distinguishing between the centralized structure and the decentralized structure. Finally, via

survey evidence, we can address the ecological inference problem and shed light on the underlying mechanism.

Given our time period of the 1970s, the strength of Evangelicals in the U.S. South, and the shift in support from Carter to Reagan, our paper also contributes to a literature on the re-alignment of Southern voters away from the Democratic Party and towards the Republican Party following the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. Kuziemko and Washington (2018), using newly available survey data, document an important role for racial attitudes among conservative White voters in explaining this shift. Likewise, Ang (2019) documents White backlash against the Voting Right Act, with newly covered areas in 1975 experiencing a drop in support for Democratic candidates. We contribute to this literature via an examination of the Evangelical movement, which, as noted above, was concentrated in the U.S. South, and the associated shift among these voters towards the Republican Party between 1976 and 1980.

Finally, our paper contributes to a literature on single issue voters. Bouton et al. (2021) consider a model with single-issue voters, a small group of voters who care intensely about secondary policy issues, and politician responses to these groups. Based upon an empirical application of gun and environmental policy, they document a political cycle, under which members of Congress pander to these groups in roll-call voting decisions but, consistent with recency bias, only in the year prior to elections. Along these lines, Bombardini and Trebbi (2011) consider a role for special interest groups in terms of delivering votes from their members versus campaign contributions, and the former is more relevant for special interest groups with large memberships, such as religious groups. We contribute to this literature via an examination of a religious group and show that religious leaders of this group can hold a significant sway over voting decisions among single-issue followers, delivering votes to the candidate supported by the group.

2 Context

Protestants are typically characterized as either Evangelical or Mainline. Evangelicals emphasize the concept of being "Born Again", and conservative denominations emphasize Christian fundamentalism and a literal reading of the Bible. The largest denomination of Evangelicals in the U.S. is the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which was founded in the U.S. South in 1845. More recently, evangelicalism has been associated with televangelism, which grew sharply in the 1960s and 1970s following the spread of broadcast television in the 1950s and a ruling by the Federal Communication Commission in 1960 allowing stations to sell their required public service airtime to religious leaders. Today, Evangelicals are strongly linked to the Republican Party, with roughly

80 percent of Evangelicals supporting Trump over Biden in the 2020 Presidential Election.[1]

Jimmy Carter, an Evangelical from Georgia, won the Presidential election over Gerald Ford in 1976. Carter was a Southern Democrat but, among White Southerners, tended to be more liberal on race relations. Carter was the nation's first Evangelical President and had a strong faith, teaching Sunday school in his hometown of Plains, Georgia. Carter defeated President Gerald Ford, who became President following Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974, in the 1976 Presidential Election. Carter integrated his faith and politics, popularizing the phrase "born again" during his 1976 campaign and praying several times per day during his Presidency.[2]

During his Presidency, Carter supported policies that were often at odds with the socially conservative nature of the Evangelical Church. These issues included Carter's support for women's rights, such as the Equal Rights Amendment and pro-choice abortion policies, along with opposition to prayer in public schools. Moreover, his Administration attempted to remove the non-profit status of so-called religious "segregation academies", all-white private schools that arose following desegregation of public schools in the U.S. that began during the Civil Rights Era.

Given these issues, Evangelical leaders began to move against Carter and towards the Republican side of the partisan spectrum. This movement led to the formation of the Moral Majority in 1979. The Moral Majority was headed by Jerry Falwell, a conservative Southern Baptist preacher with a popular television ministry titled the "Old Time Gospel Hour" (OTGH).

While Falwell did criticize Carter in the 1976 election over an interview of the candidate by Playboy Magazine, Falwell also criticized the Republican incumbent candidate Gerald Ford. Moreover, the Moral Majority had not yet been formed, and Falwell did not campaign for Ford. In addition, other Evangelical leaders supported Carter in 1976, with Bailey Smith, the future President of the Southern Baptist Convention, noting in his keynote address at the 1976 SBC that the U.S. needed a "born-again man in the White House. And his initials are the same as our Lord's".[3]

During the 1980 Presidential Election, by contrast, Evangelical leaders in general, and the Moral Majority in particular, put their full support behind the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. Reagan spoke at Falwell's Liberty Baptist College in Lynchburg, Virginia during the final months of the 1980 campaign. Other Moral Majority activities included voter registration drives, fundraising, and television advertising.[4] At its start, the Moral Majority capitalized on the resources of Falwell's

[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/30/most-white-americans-who-regularly-attend-worship-services-voted-for-trump-in-2020/ (accessed October 2023)

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Carter (accessed October 2023).

[3] Williams (2012)

[4] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moral-Majority (accessed October 2023)

Old Time Gospel Hour and its mailing list of 2.5 million members.[5] While Falwell played a key central role, the Moral Majority also created a decentralized movement, establishing local chapters, appointing chairs in the each of the 50 states, and enlisting pastors of local Evangelical churches in spreading the conservative message. This decentralized network was formed around the Baptist Bible Fellowship, a collection of independent evangelical churches and thus outside of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest denomination of Evangelicals.[6] Due at least in part to this decentralized structure, the Moral Majority, in collaboration with aligned Christian Right groups, reportedly registered at least 2 million new Evangelical voters through local voter registration drives.[7]

Carter lamented the Moral Majority's support for Reagan, writing in his diary "that autumn [1980] a group headed by Jerry Falwell purchased 10 million dollars in commercials on southern radio and TV to brand me as a traitor to the South and no longer a Christian."[8] Reagan ultimately won the 1980 election by a large margin, winning 44 out of 50 states in the Electoral College.

The Moral Majority continued to support Reagan throughout his two-term Presidency but the group dissolved in 1989, following the end of Reagan's Presidency. Yet the legacy of this movement remains, with Jerry Falwell's son Jerry Falwell Jr. issuing a key endorsement for Donald Trump in the 2016 Republican Presidential Primary.

3 Theoretical Model

This section, following Chiang and Knight (2011), develops a model of informative endorsements in elections and voter responses to these endorsements. In our model, church leaders observe candidate platforms over policies related to religion and support the pro-Church candidate. In the context of this model, we analyze how pro-Church voters process and respond to these endorsements. We also study how the responsiveness of the endorsement depends upon whether the individual is a single-issue voter.

Voters, indexed by v, have preferences over religious policy (r) and all other policies, which we aggregate into a single policy labeled ideology (i). Candidates are policy motivated, and candidate c implements policies r_c and i_c. There are two candidates, a Republican ($c = R$) and a Democrat ($c = D$). Voter v receives the following quadratic payoff from the policies of candidate c:

[5] Liebman and Wuthnow (1983)
[6] Williams (2012)
[7] Williams (2012)
[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_Majority (accessed October 2023)

$$U_{vc} = -\alpha(r_c - r_v)^2 - (1-\alpha)(i_c - i_v)^2,$$

where r_v and i_v are the voter bliss points over the two policies and α is the weight that voters place on religious policy, relative to ideological factors. Thus, voters prefer candidates with platforms that are close to their bliss points. We assume that the Republican candidate lies further to the right in ideological space ($i_D < i_R$) and, for simplicity, that candidate ideology is symmetric around zero, so that $i_D = -i_R$. These candidate ideologies are assumed to be known to voters due to, for example, party labels.

Regarding religious policy, candidates can be either pro-religion (r^P) or anti-religion (r^A). Again, we assume that religious policy is higher for the pro-Church policy and that religious policy is centered around zero, such that $r^A < r^P$ and that $r^A = -r^P$. Regarding preferences over religious policies, there are three types of voters, those preferring pro-Church policies ($r_v > 0$), those preferring anti-Church policies ($r_v < 0$), and those indifferent, such that ($r_v = 0$). Among voters preferring pro-Church policies, there is heterogeneity in the intensity of such preferences, with some voters having more extreme pro-Church preferences and some voters with more moderate views. Likewise, there is heterogeneity in the intensity of preferences for anti-Church voters.

We assume that Church leaders observe the religious platforms of the two candidates and endorse the pro-Church candidate when the two candidates have different policy preferences and make no endorsement otherwise. For now, we assume that only pro-Church voters, those preferring a pro-Church policy, observe the endorsement. This could be due, for example, to local pastors discussing politics during Church services or by pro-Church voters learning from other pro-Church voters in their networks. We later consider an extension in which anti-Church voters might also observe the endorsement.

First consider the simple case of no endorsement. In this case, pro-Church voters learn that the two candidates have the same platforms over religious policy and thus vote purely based upon the ideological dimension. In particular, voters with $i_v > 0$ vote Republican, and voters with $i_v < 0$ vote Democratic.

When religious leaders endorse the Republican, by contrast, voters learn that the Republican is the pro-Church candidate and that the Democrat is the anti-Church candidate. Assume for now that only voters preferring pro-Church policies ($r_v > 0$) observe the endorsement. In this case, these pro-Church voters support the Republican under the following condition:

$$-\alpha(r^P - r_v)^2 - (1-\alpha)(i^R - i_v)^2 > -\alpha(r^A - r_v)^2 - (1-\alpha)(i^D - i_v)^2$$

Focusing on voters who support Democratic candidates in the absence of an endorsement ($i_v < 0$), the condition requires that voter preferences over Church policy be sufficiently extreme, relative to their preferences over the general ideological dimension:

$$r_v > \frac{-(1-\alpha)i_v(i^R - i^D)}{\alpha(r^P - r^A)}$$

Given that we are focusing on voters who support Democratic candidates on the ideological dimension ($i_v < 0$), the threshold on the right-hand size is positive. This threshold is higher, meaning that voters need more extreme pro-religious preferences to be persuaded by religious leaders, when voters place more weight on the ideological dimension ($1-\alpha$), when voters have extreme preferences over the general ideological policy (i_v), when differences between the religious policies (r^A and r^P) are small, and when differences between the ideology of the two candidates (i^R and i^D) are large. The latter two factors both make differences in policy positions between the pro-Church and the anti-Church candidate less salient.

This result is summarized in Figure 1. As shown, those voters persuaded by an endorsement for the Republican candidate necessarily lie to the left of the ideological spectrum. Single-issue pro-religion voters are those with sufficiently strong preferences over the religious policy, relative to the general ideological policy.

We next extend the model to allow other voters, including anti-Church voters ($r_v < 0$), to observe the endorsement with probability $q < 1$. Those indifferent over religious policy naturally do not respond to the endorsement, and the behavior of pro-religion voters is unchanged. Anti-religion voters, conditional on observing the endorsement, by contrast, might switch their vote from the endorsed candidate to the candidate not endorsed, and, by symmetry, this occurs when preferences over religious policy, which are negative in this case, are sufficiently low:

$$r_v < \frac{-(1-\alpha)i_v(i^R - i^D)}{\alpha(r^P - r^A)}$$

For these voters, who would support the Republican candidate on ideological grounds ($i_v > 0$), the threshold on the right-hand side is negative. As before, this threshold is lower, meaning that voters need more extreme anti-religious preferences for the support by religious leaders to backfire, when voters place more weight on the ideological dimension ($1 - \alpha$), when voters have extreme preferences over the general ideological policy (i_v), when differences between the religious policies (r^A and r^P) are small, and when differences between the ideology of the two candidates (i^R and i^D) are large. The latter two factors both make differences in policy positions between the pro-Church

and the anti-Church candidate less salient to voters.

There are three implications to this extension. First, to the extent that there is backlash, our empirical results will capture the relative effects of the endorsement on support for the endorsed candidate. And, in this sense, we cannot distinguish between the positive effects of an endorsement and the backlash effect. Second, religious leaders will only issue endorsements when the electoral backlash associated with these spillovers is sufficiently small. Third, following the logic in Glaeser et al. (2005), religious leaders face incentives to minimize these informational spillovers to anti-Church voters and, in lowering q, to ensure that only pro-religion voters observe the message.

4 Evangelicals and Support for Carter

In this section, we first investigate whether Evangelical voters shifted from supporting Carter in 1976 to supporting Reagan in 1980 following the formation of the Moral Majority in 1979 and the associated shift in support among Evangelical leaders away from Carter and towards Reagan. We first do so using county-level data before shifting our attention to two surveys from 1980.

4.1 County-level Analysis

We begin with a county-level analysis of changes in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980. Our voting outcome measure is based upon the change between 1976 and 1980 in the two-party vote share for Carter. These data are taken from Amlani and Algara (2021), cover the 48 continental states, and, as noted above, are at the county level. The Republican candidates in these Presidential elections were Gerald Ford, a Congressman from Michigan who became President in the wake of Nixon's resignation in 1974, in 1976 and Ronald Reagan, previously governor of California, in 1980.[9]

Our county-level data on Evangelicals are based upon the share of Evangelical adherents within the county. That is, we count the number of Evangelical adherents within the county using data from ARDA during 1971, and this count is then scaled by 1970 Census county population; in some specifications, we use more historical measures from 1952, matched to 1950 Census county population. Our definition of Evangelical is based upon Shibley (1991).[10]

[9] In some specifications, we also examine additional years and always compute the Democratic two-party vote share in that year.

[10] Shibley (1991) also distinguishes between Southern Evangelicals [Assemblies of God, Baptist Missionary Association of America Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Pentecostal Holiness Church, and Southern Baptist Convention] and Non-Southern Evangelicals [Baptist General Conference, Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed Church, Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), Church of the Nazarene, Conservative Baptist Association of America, Free Methodist Church in North America, International

Our empirical strategy involves a regression of the change in Carter's vote share between 1976 and 1980 on the share of Evangelicals in the county. We include state fixed effects in order to account for both the concentration of Evangelicals in the U.S. South, as documented in Figure 2, and the overall re-alignment among Southerners from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party following the Civil Rights Era.[11] That is, by including state fixed effects, we conduct a within-state analysis and do not compare changes in Northern counties to changes in Southern counties.

We begin with spatial representations of residuals from state fixed effects. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, counties that tended to have more Evangelicals, relative to other counties within their state, also tended to shift away from Carter between the 1976 and 1980 Presidential elections. These areas included, for example, northern Texas. Overall, the spatial correlation between share Evangelical and changes in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980, both within state and at the county level, in the two maps is roughly -0.26.

We next turn to bin-scatter diagrams using within-state variation in share Evangelical and within-state changes in the Carter vote share between 1976 and 1980. As shown in Figure A2, there is again a negative relationship, with increases in share Evangelical associated with a reduction in support for Carter in 1980, relative to support in 1976. In terms of the magnitude, a 10 percentage point increase in share Evangelical is associated with a decline in excess of 1 percentage point in support for Carter in 1980, relative to 1976.

To more formally quantify and test for the statistical significance of these relationships, we next run a regression with, as the dependent variable, the change in the Carter two-party vote share between the 1976 and 1980 Presidential elections. Our key independent variable is the share Evangelical in the county. As noted above, we also control for state fixed effects, and our analysis is thus based upon within-state comparisons. We also include the following 1970 Census controls in all specifications: population, share black, share female, employment rates, and education levels. Accounting for the Black share is particularly important as the Evangelical leaders were disproportionately Whites, and, more generally, as noted above, there was a shift among Whites from the Democratic Party to the Republican party during this time period in the U.S. South. Finally, we weigh specifications by county population in order to make these results representative at the individual level and for comparability with the individual-level survey evidence presented later in the paper.

Church of the Four-Square Gospel, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventists, and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod]

[11] As shown in Figure A1, the share Evangelical ranges from close to zero in New England states to over 30 percent in several states in the U.S. South.

As shown in the first column of Table 1, we find, within states, a negative and statistically significant relationship between Evangelical share and the change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980. In terms of magnitudes, a change in Evangelical share, from, say, 10 percent to 20 percent within states is associated with a 1.1 percentage point reduction in the change in the vote share for Carter between 1976 and 1980. This is consistent with a role for the Moral Majority in shifting Evangelical voters from supporting Carter in 1976 to supporting Reagan in 1980.

To give readers a further sense of the magnitude of these results, Figure 5 computes counterfactual vote shares in 1980 by removing the Evangelical support for Reagan. In particular, we inflate each county's vote share by an amount equal to the product of the coefficient in column 1 of Table 1 and the share of Evangelicals in the county. As shown, while Carter won only five out of 48 states in the 1980 election, he would have won 11 states in the absence of the Evangelical shift to Reagan, and these new six states were concentrated in the U.S. South. While Reagan still would have won the electoral college under this counterfactual, the election would have been substantially more competitive.

Note that our analysis includes all counties and that very small counties might experience large swings in vote shares from year to year, given the small number of votes tabulated in these places. Moreover, as shown in Figure 1, some counties have a share Evangelical in excess of one.[12] To address this point, we next drop very small counties, those with population below 10,000. As shown in column 2 of Table 1, our results are very similar in this specification, relative to our baseline specification in column 1.

We next control for the share Mainline Protestants and the share Catholic. This is motivated by two factors. First, due to omitted variables bias, the share Evangelical might be capturing an absence of Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Second, it is possible that our documented shift among Evangelicals is driven by religiosity rather than by Evangelicalism. As shown in column 3, and consistent with omitted variables bias, the effect of share Evangelical on support for Carter is smaller after controlling for the presence of Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Yet the effect remains large in magnitude and statistically significant at the 99 percent level. Moreover, the positive coefficients for both Catholics and Mainline Protestants suggest that our result documenting a shift among Evangelicals from Carter to Reagan is not driven by religiosity per se as these two other religions shifted further towards Carter in 1980.

We next address regional differences in these results. We do so for two reasons. First, despite our inclusion of state fixed effects and controls for race, concerns remain regarding the re-alignment

[12] These tend to be small counties that might be drawing attendance at their Evangelical churches from out-of-county followers

of white voters in U.S. South during this time period. We begin this investigation by separately controlling for the share Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which is the largest branch of the Evangelical movement and concentrated in the U.S. South. This is also the branch of both Jimmy Carter and Jerry Falwell, the leader of the Moral Majority in the 1980 Election. As shown in Column 1 of Table 2, we find that, if anything, the results are stronger for other branches of the Evangelical Church. Considering again a change within states in Evangelical share, from, say, 10 percent to 20 percent, this is associated with a roughly 1.4 percentage point reduction in the change within states in the vote share for Carter between 1976 and 1980 for non-Southern Baptists within the Evangelical Church but only a 1.1 percentage point reduction for Southern Baptists. This is consistent with, as noted above, the Moral Majority state headquarters being located in independent Baptist Bible Fellowship churches and thus outside of the dominant Southern Baptist Convention.[13]

Further examining regional differences, we next distinguish between Southern Evangelical denominations and non-Southern Evangelical denominations, based upon the classification in Shibley (1991). Similarly to our results for Southern Baptists, we again find that our results are somewhat stronger for non-Southern Evangelicals, relative to Southern Evangelicals. During this time, non-Southern Evangelicals tended to operate in states in the Midwest, with concentrations in excess of 10 percent in the states of Wisconsin and Nebraska, for example (See Figure A1). Moreover, as noted above, the Moral Majority had local headquarters in every state.[14]

Finally, we include separate controls for the U.S. South, based upon states in the U.S. Confederacy during the Civil War.[15] As shown in Column 3, we find much stronger effects outside of the U.S. South. Taken together, these three analyses all document that our results are not driven by the U.S. South and thus cannot be explained by the re-alignment of white voters towards the Republican Party and racial animus in this region.

Given that our religion measure is from the 1970s, it is also possible that religious affiliation already had political meaning prior to the Jimmy Carter Presidency. Indeed, during the 1970s, the U.S. South was already undergoing a political transformation, with Whites shifting to the Republican Party following the Civil Rights Era. To address this point, we next use a measure of religiosity from 1952, prior to the Civil Rights era and the realignment of Whites in the South. In

[13]In addition, it is possible that many Southern Baptists were already shifting towards the Republican Party prior to the 1980 Presidential Election. It is also possible that Southern Baptists were not willing to abandon Jimmy Carter, given their shared faith, for Ronald Reagan in 1980.

[14]It also is possible that Southern Evangelicals were less willing to abandon Jimmy Carter in 1980 given his Southern roots and Evangelical faith.

[15]These states include South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

particular, we examine the change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980 as a function of religiosity as of 1952.[16] As shown in Table 3, the results are broadly similar to our baseline results in Table 1.

Finally, using this more historical 1952 measure of religion and 1950 Census controls, we next run the same regression but using changes in vote shares in other years, from 1956 to 2000. As shown in Figure 6, the 1956 coefficient, for example, reflects the relationship between share Evangelical in 1952 and the change in the vote share for the Democratic Presidential candidate between 1952 and 1956. The first election that captures a statistically significant shift is 1960. In this election, the Democrat John F Kennedy Jr. became the first Catholic President and there was strong backlash from Evangelical voters, as shown here.[17] Outside of this election, there are not documented shifts among Evangelicals in any of the other pre-Carter elections. In 1976, by contrast, there was a large shift among Evangelical voters towards Carter, relative to support for George McGovern in 1972. As documented previously, there was a significant shift away from Democrats in 1980 and this continued into 1984, when Carter was no longer on the ballot and support for the Democrat Walter Mondale slipped even further among Evangelical voters. There were essentially no shifts in 1988 and 1992, followed by further shifts to the right among Evangelical voters in 1996 and 2000.

4.2 Evidence from Exit Polls

One limitation of the county-level analysis involves the ecological inference problem. In particular, we cannot rule out the possibility that it was non-Evangelicals in Evangelical counties who shifted their support from Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980. To address this concern, we next turn to two independently collected surveys conducted in 1980. Both included questions on support for Presidential candidates in both 1980 and, retrospectively, 1976 as well as questions about individual religion.

Our first analysis is based upon exit polls conducted by CBS and The New York Times (ICPSR 7812). These surveys were administered as voters left their polling stations in the 1980 Presidential election. Crucially, the interviewers collected information on not only the 1980 vote decision but also, retrospectively, their 1976 vote decision. In addition, there were two questions about religion. The first question asked respondents whether they were Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, other, or had no religion. While this question does not distinguish between Evangelical Protestants and Mainline

[16] Consistent with more historical religion measures, we also include controls from the 1950 Census rather than the 1970 Census.

[17] This large negative coefficient is also driven by omitted variable bias: including the 1952 share Catholic in this regression diminishes the coefficient on Evangelical.

Protestants, a second question asked respondents whether they were a "Born Again Christian", a concept that is central to beliefs of Evangelicals.[18] Indeed, according to the General Social Survey, in 1988, the first year in which the question was asked, roughly 70 percent of Evangelicals identify as "Born Again" versus less than 30 percent of Mainline Protestants and roughly 10 percent of Catholics.[19]

Given this, our regression analysis is based upon a change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980, with -1 indicating a shift from Carter to Reagan, +1 indicating a shift from Ford to Carter, and 0 indicating no change (i.e., the respondent supported either Carter or the Republican candidate in both 1976 and 1980). We again control for available demographics (gender, age, education, and race). Our total sample size, based upon individuals who responded to all questions, is 10,372. While we do not have any precise information on geography, above and beyond region, the data include precinct indicators, allowing us to include precinct fixed effects and thus conduct a within-precinct analysis.

As shown in column 1 of Table 4, we again find a negative relationship between Born Again Christians and the change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980. In terms of magnitudes, comparing a Born Again respondent to a non-Born Again respondent within the same precinct, we find that the Born Again respondent was 4 percentage points less likely to support Carter in 1980, relative to their support for Carter in 1976, and thus more likely to vote for Ronald Reagan. This evidence is again consistent with a role for the Moral Majority in persuading Born Again Christians to support Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Given that the within-precinct comparison group for Born Agains might include Catholics, other religions, or individuals who are not religious, we next conduct a within-Protestant analysis, comparing Born-Again Protestants to non-Born Again Protestants. As shown in column 2, the results are, if anything, a bit stronger. That is, comparing Born Again Protestant respondents to non-Born Again Protestants within the same precinct, we find that Born Again respondents were nearly 5 percentage points less likely to support Carter in 1980, relative to their support for Carter in 1976, and thus more likely to vote for Ronald Reagan.

We next explore the degree of heterogeneity in these results. Consistent with our results using county-level data (Table 2), we show that the results in our exit polls are not driven by the U.S. South, with somewhat stronger effects outside of the South (Table 5). Moreover, consistent with Moral Majority leaders being disproportionately White, we document that our results are driven by

[18] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born_again (accessed October 2023)

[19] www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/january/us-born-again-rise-mainline-catholic-evangelical.html (accessed October 2023)

White voters who identify as Born Again Christian. Finally, we shown that our results are stronger for female voters than for male votes. On the one hand, this is surprising given that the Moral Majority campaigned against women's rights via the Equal Rights Amendment. At the same time, the broader movement against the Equal Rights Amendment was led in part by Phyllis Schlafly, a female Evangelical leader who attempted to organize female Evangelicals against the Amendment and in support of traditional gender roles.[20]

One advantage of individual-level data involves our ability to measure mobilization versus persuasion. That is, we can ask whether the decrease in the Carter vote share 1976 to 1980 among Evangelicals, as documented in Table 1, was driven by new voters or voters who supported Carter in 1980. While our results in Table 4 are based upon a sample of respondents who voted in both elections, we can distinguish between mobilization and persuasion by including voters in 1980 who reported not voting in 1976. As shown in Table A1, which includes supporters of Carter in 1976, supporters of Ford in 1976, and non-voters in 1976, the Evangelical shift towards Reagan in 1980 was strongest among non-voters in 1976.[21] That is, Born-Again respondents, relative to non-Born Again respondents, who did not vote in 1976 were 14 percentage points less likely to support Carter in 1980. For Carter and Ford supporters, by contrast, the difference between Born-Again respondents and other respondents was around 4 percentage points. These differences between Born-Again non-voters in 1976 and Born-Again voters in 1976 are statistically significant at the 95 percent level.

4.3 Evidence from the 1980 ANES

We next turn to evidence from the 1980 American National Election Survey. Similarly to the Exit Poll Survey, the ANES in 1980 included questions on the vote choice in both 1980 and, retrospectively, 1976. Given this, our regression analysis is again based upon a change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980, with -1 indicating a shift from Carter to Reagan, +1 indicating a shift from Ford to Carter, and 0 indicating no change (i.e., the respondent supported either Carter or the Republican candidate in both 1976 and 1980). The survey question regarding religion is more detailed than that in the exit polls, allowing us to directly measure Evangelical Protestants as well as Mainline Protestants. We again control for available demographics (gender, age, education, and race). Our total sample size, based upon individuals who responded to all questions, is smaller in this case, only 1,035. In terms of geography, we have state-level identifiers and, for comparability with our county-level analysis, thus include state fixed effects.

[20] Williams (2012)

[21] In this analysis, we drop the youngest age category, those 21 and under in 1980, given that they would have been too young to vote in 1976.

As shown in Table 6, we again find a strong link between Evangelicals and a shift in support from Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980, and despite the small sample sizes, the effects are statistically significant. In terms of magnitudes, comparing an Evangelical respondent to a non-Evangelical respondent within the same state, we find that the Born Again respondent was 8 percentage points less likely to support Carter in 1980, relative to their support for Carter in 1976, and thus more likely to vote for Ronald Reagan. As shown in column 2, when restricting the sample to Protestants, the results are, if anything, stronger. That is, comparing an Evangelical Protestant respondent to a Mainline Protestant respondent within the same state, we find that the Evangelical respondent was 9 percentage points less likely to support Carter in 1980, relative to their support for Carter in 1976, and thus more likely to vote for Ronald Reagan. Taken together, this evidence is again consistent with an important role for the Moral Majority in persuading Evangelical voters to support Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter in the 1980 election, relative to their support in the 1976 election.

We again explore the degree of heterogeneity in these results. Consistent with our prior results, we again show that the results in the ANES are not driven by the U.S. South, with much stronger effects outside of the South (Table 7). Moreover, consistent with Moral Majority leaders being disproportionately White, we document that our results are driven by White voters who identify as Born Again Christian (though, due to small sample sizes, differences between Black and White Evangelicals are not statistically significant). Finally, we shown that our results are again much stronger for female voters than for male votes (though, due to small sample sizes, differences between Black and White Evangelicals are again not statistically significant).

5 The Role of the Moral Majority

To summarize, we have documented, in three separate datasets, a shift in support among Evangelical voters from the Democrat Jimmy Carter in 1976 to the Republican Ronald Reagan, who was supported by the Moral Majority, in 1980. While this evidence is consistent with an important role for the Moral Majority, there are important alternative explanations for these results. It is possible, most importantly, that these patterns were driven by private choices made by Evangelical voters. We next attempt to shed light on a role for the Moral Majority via survey evidence, an investigation of the centralized structure of the Moral Majority, and an investigation of the decentralized structure.

5.1 Survey Evidence

Using the exit polls data, we next investigate information on key issues driving voter decisions in 1980. In particular, in the exit polls respondents were given a long list of possible issues driving their voting decisions: the federal budget, the crisis in Iran, jobs, federal tax policy, the economy/inflation, needs of big cities, U.S. prestige around the world, and, most critically for our purposes, a single category labeled the E.R.A. (the Equal Rights Amendment)/Abortion, two of the critical issues for the Moral Majority in the 1980 Presidential Elections. We create an indicator for whether an individual chose this category for either their "most important" or "second issue". There was a strong link between these issues highlighted by the Moral Majority and Born Again Christians. That is, as shown in column 3 of Table 4, Born Agains, relative to other respondents in the same precinct, were nearly 6 percentage points more likely to choose the E.R.A./abortion category. The results are again stronger with an 8 percentage point difference, as shown in column 4, when restricting the sample to Protestants, and thus comparing Born Again Protestants and non-Born Again Protestants. As shown in Table A2, we run similar regressions for the other possible responses. Consistent with these Evangelicals being "single-issue voters", we find no corresponding statistically significant increases in other key policy issues among Born Again voters. Moreover, there are reductions in support for nearly every other policy, with the strongest effects for the role of the economy/inflation. This is consistent with these voters prioritizing cultural issues over economic issues. Overall, while we do not have corresponding retrospective questions around the 1976 voting decision, this evidence is consistent with an important role for the Moral Majority in persuading Evangelical voters to support Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter in the 1980 election via the salience of these policy issues.

As further evidence on the mechanism, we examine a question in the ANES around a "feeling thermometer", in which respondents were asked to express their feelings, from cold to warm to hot, on a 0 to 100 scale. As shown in column 3 of Table 6, we find a link between Evangelicals and support for the Moral Majority, and results are similar when comparing Evangelical to Mainline Protestants in column 4. While these results are not statistically significant, and we do not have corresponding retrospective questions around the 1976 election, this evidence is again consistent with an important role for the Moral Majority in persuading Evangelical voters to support Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter in the 1980 election.

5.2 Centralized Structure

To provide further support for the role of Evangelical leaders and, more specifically, Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, we next turn to an analysis of the televised ministry of Jerry Falwell, the Old Time Gospel Hour. The show started in 1956 on radio but quickly expanded to television and gained a national following. The show aired for many decades, until its end in 2007 following the death of Jerry Falwell.

While the OTGH and the Moral Majority were separate, they were linked by Jerry Falwell. Thus, viewers of Falwell's religious ministry might have been more easily persuaded by his political message. Moreover, as noted above, during its formation, the Moral Majority attempted to capitalize upon the organization of the OTGH, using, for example, its mailing list for circulation of print materials and fundraising efforts. Given all of this, there could be an important link between the OTGH and the Moral Majority.

To conduct a media exposure analysis, we have obtained a listing of the television stations in the U.S. that carried the Old Time Gospel Hour from the archives of the Jerry Falwell Library.[22] While we do not know exactly when the listing of stations was compiled, a few dates listed on the document (e.g. effective dates) suggest that the listing was compiled around the time of the 1980 Presidential election. Based upon this list of stations, we then compiled information on the characteristics of the towers for these stations (i.e., height, power, and latitude/longitude) from the Television Factbook.[23]

Based upon this information, we then computed the signal strength for each tower-county centroid pair using the Irregular Terrain Model and then took the maximum signal received for each county across all towers. As shown in Figure 7, the signal propagates further from antennas in flatter parts of the U.S., such as Kansas, but does not travel as far in more mountainous regions, such as the western part of neighboring Colorado. Following Buccione and Mello (2020), we then convert the continuous signal measure into a discrete measure, indicating exposure to the Old Time Gospel Hour signal, when the signal strength exceeds -55.

As shown in Figure 7, antennas tended to be clustered in more urban parts of the U.S. and thus, to avoid an urban-rural comparison, we also compute the free-space signal, the maximum signal strength in each county centroid were the terrain of the U.S. completely flat. Combining the two measures, the signal and the free-space signal, we compare two areas with the same free-space signal, meaning that they were equally close to an antenna, but one area received the signal and

[22] https://cdm17184.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/

[23] https://www.worldradiohistory.com/Television_Factbook.htm

the other did not due to the terrain.

Our regression approach, similarly to that in Table 1, relates the change in the Democratic vote share between 1976 and 1980 to an indicator for Old Time Gospel Hour exposure and the measure of the free-space signal. We again include state fixed effects, leading to within-state comparisons, and Census controls include population, share black, share female, employment rates, and education.

As shown in Table 8, comparing two counties with the same signal in free space, we find that exposure to the Old Time Gospel Hour ministry is associated with a reduction in support for Carter equal to roughly 1 percentage point. As shown in column 2, results are similar when dropping small counties, those with population under 10,000. In column 3, we also incorporate our measures of percent Evangelical. As shown, controlling for share evangelical leads to very similar results. So, comparing two counties within the same state, the same share of Evangelicals, and the same distance from an antenna broadcasting the Old Time Gospel Hour, the county that received the signal experienced a reduction in the Democratic vote share in 1980, relative to 1976, equal to 1 percentage point. Importantly, however, religion still matters. That is, comparing counties within the same state and the same media environment, counties with more Evangelicals experienced a larger drop in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980.

Turning to the longer run trends, we provide analyses for other elections in Figure 8. These regressions are run in an analogous way to those in Figure 6, based upon changes in Democratic vote share and with controls from the 1950 Census. As shown, there are not statistically significant differences in changes in vote shares for Democratic candidates between exposed and non-exposed counties until the 1980 election. There is some evidence of a negative effect in the 1964 election but not in the three elections preceding the 1980 election. As documented previously, there is a shift from Carter to Reagan between 1976 and 1980 in counties exposed to the OTGH. After 1980, there are no further shifts towards the right and some evidence of shifts to the left after 1988, consistent with the Moral Majority dissolving in 1989.

One alternative explanation for our results involves exposure to television, more generally, rather than exposure to Falwell via the OTGH. That is, places exposed to the OTGH may have stronger television signals overall and turned against Carter in 1980 due to news coverage of issues, such as inflation and the hostage crisis in Iran, that were arguably bad news for Carter. We attempt to address this point in two ways. First, as documented above and based upon Figure 8, we find limited evidence that exposure to OTGH mattered in prior elections. Given that broadcast towers tended to be operational in prior election years, an effect driven by exposure to television signals should also be reflected in prior years, rather than just appearing in the 1980 election. Second,

returning to the ANES survey data, we can incorporate measures of reliance on television news.[24] As shown in Table A3, respondents who follow politics and current events via television did not disproportionately shift away from Carter in 1980, relative to their support in 1976. While these media consumption measures reflect voter choices rather than exposure to broadcast signals, they provide no evidence of a key role for television more generally in driving voting choices in 1980.

For comparison with the existing literature, we next compute persuasion rates based upon our results in Table 8. These persuasion rate calculations follow the formula provided by DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) and can be interpreted as the fraction of voters supporting Reagan in 1980, conditional on both watching the OTGH and not voting Republican in 1976. Incorporating measures of OTGH viewership and other measures, as detailed in the Online Appendix, yields a persuasion rate of 6.3 percent. That is, among those individuals watching the OTGH and not voting Republican in 1976, 6.3 percent supported Reagan in 1980. This measure is comparable to the persuasion rates discussed in DellaVigna and Gentzkow (2010). For example, DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) compute a persuasion rate of 11.6 percent and Enikolopov et al. (2011) compute a persuasion rate of 7.7 percent.

5.3 Decentralized Structure

We next investigate a role for the decentralized structure of the Moral Majority. As noted above, the headquarters tended to be located in churches associated with the Bible Baptist Fellowship, a loose collection of independent fundamentalist Evangelical churches. State headquarters did not receive financing from the national organization and were expected to be financially independent. Key activities of state headquarters included lobbying on key state and local policy issues (e.g., restricting gay rights and shaping school curriculum), collective action (e.g. marches and protests), and voter registration drives.[25]

To capture the influence of these state chapters, we use our county-level dataset and measure the distance between every county and the state headquarters.[26] Using this variation, we then investigate whether proximity to the state headquarters matters.

As shown in Table 9, we find counties that are closer to their state headquarters did experience a reduction in support for Carter in 1980, relative to their support in 1976. This is true in our baseline specification (column 1), when excluding small counties (column 2), and when controlling

[24] In the ANES, respondents were asked "which do you rely on most for news about politics and current events–television, newspapers, magazines, or radio?"

[25] Liebman and Wuthnow (1983)

[26] Locations of the Moral Majority state headquarters were taken from pages 62-65 of Liebman and Wuthnow (1983)

for share Evangelical in the county (column 3). The final specification is particularly important given that, as noted above, state headquarters tended to be Evangelical churches and Chairmen tended to be Pastors at these churches. In terms of magnitudes, moving the state headquarters 100 kilometers closer to the county is associated with a 0.5 percentage point reduction in support for Carter in the county during 1980, relative to 1976. Figure 9 documents effects on the change in the Democratic vote share in other years. As shown, there was a large effect in 1960, comparable to the effect in 1980. While the Moral Majority did not exist in 1960, it is possible that these Evangelical churches and their followers supported Nixon over the John F. Kennedy in this election, reflecting more general backlash among Evangelical voters against the Catholic candidate, as discussed above in the context of Figure 6. We also see a large negative and opposite effect in 1976, consistent with Evangelical support for Carter in his first Presidential election, as also discussed above in the context of Figure 6. Following the shift to the right in counties close to Moral Majority state headquarters in 1980, there was a continued shift to the right in 1984, followed by some shifts to the left following the dissolution of the Moral Majority in 1989.

6 Conclusion

We study the role of religious leaders and voters in the U.S. and, in particular, support for Jimmy Carter, a Southern Democrat and the first Evangelical President. Using county-level data, we begin by documenting a shift in support away from Carter in 1976 towards Reagan in 1980 following the formation of the Moral Majority, a religious special interest group led by the televangelist Jerry Falwell during the Carter Administration. We find comparable results when using data from two surveys, 1980 exit polls and the 1980 American National Election Survey (ANES). To better identify a role for the Moral Majority, we turn to three pieces of evidence. Based upon survey data, we document that Evangelical voters in the 1980 election emphasized social issues championed by the Moral Majority as driving their voting decisions. Second, we examine Falwell's televised ministry, the Old Time Gospel Hour, and document that exposure to this programming led to a shift in support away from Carter between 1976 and 1980. Finally, we show that proximity to the Moral Majority headquarters was associated with a shift in support from Carter in 1976 to Reagan in 1980. Thus, while the U.S. does not have an official religion, we document an important role for religious leaders and voters in potentially shaping policy via the selection of candidates with like-minded views on policy areas prioritized by the group.

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Figure 1: Single Issue Voters

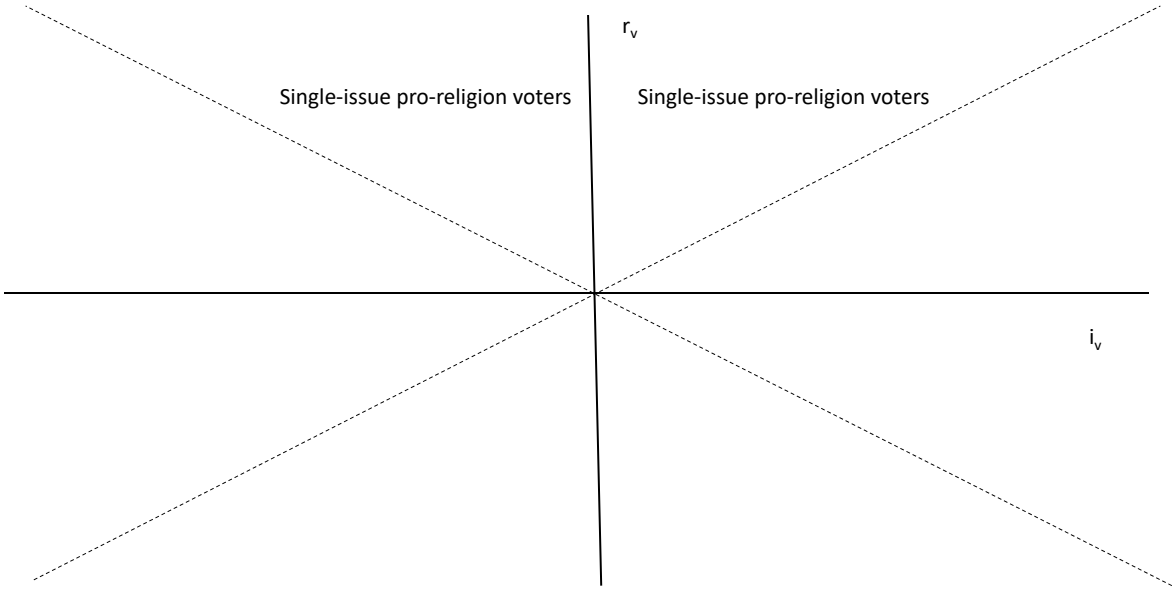

Figure 2: Variation in share Evangelical

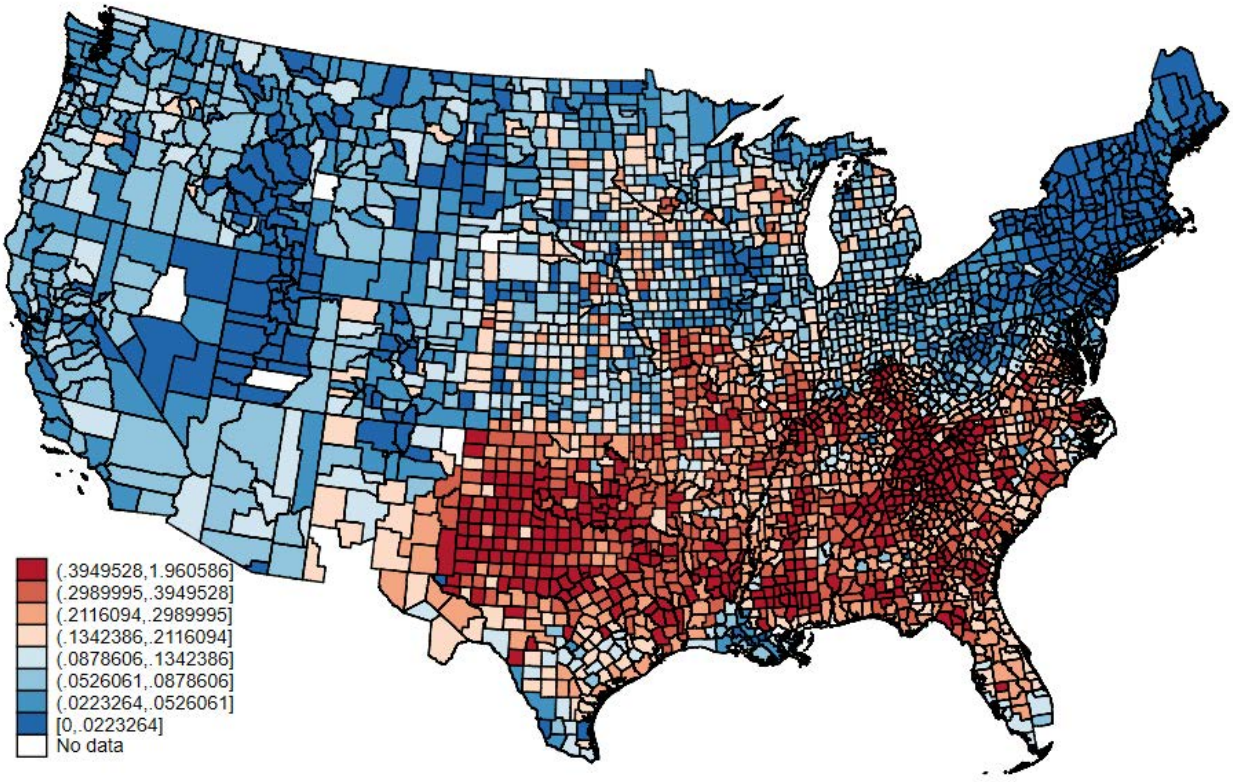

Figure 3: Within-state variation in share Evangelical

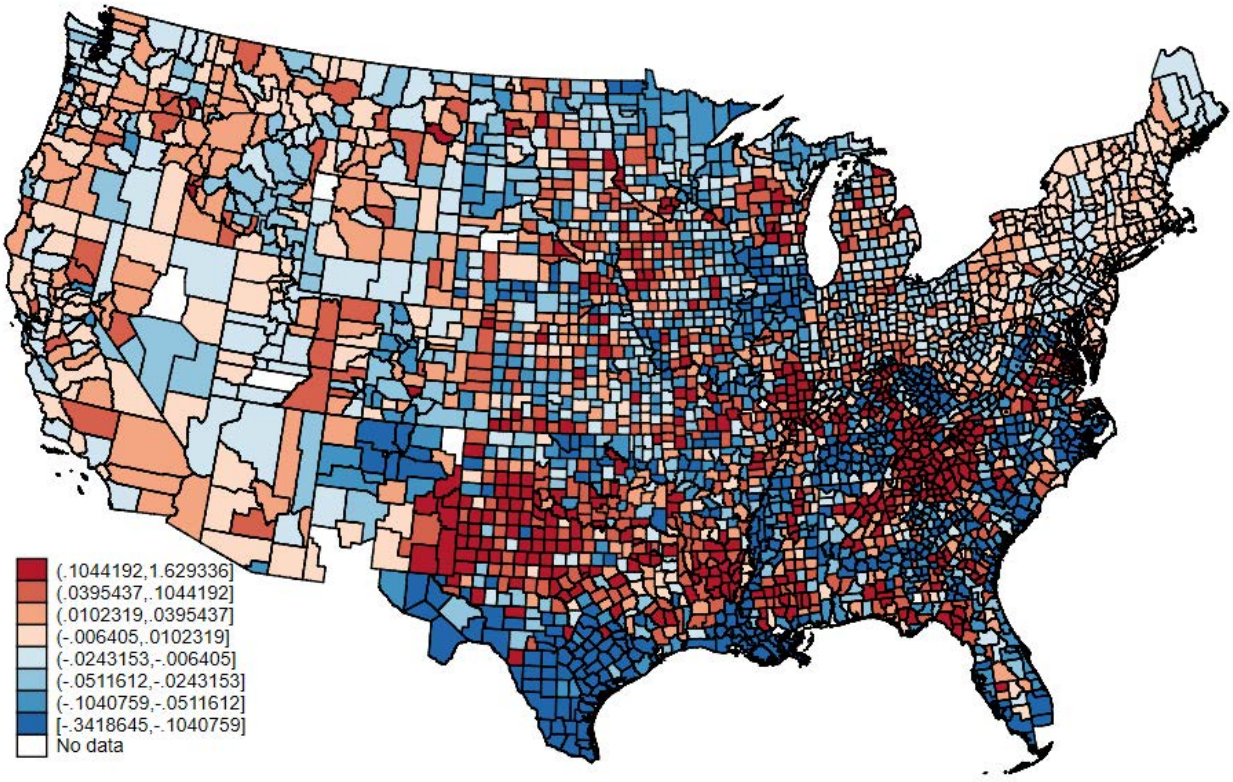

Figure 4: Within-state changes in Carter Vote Share

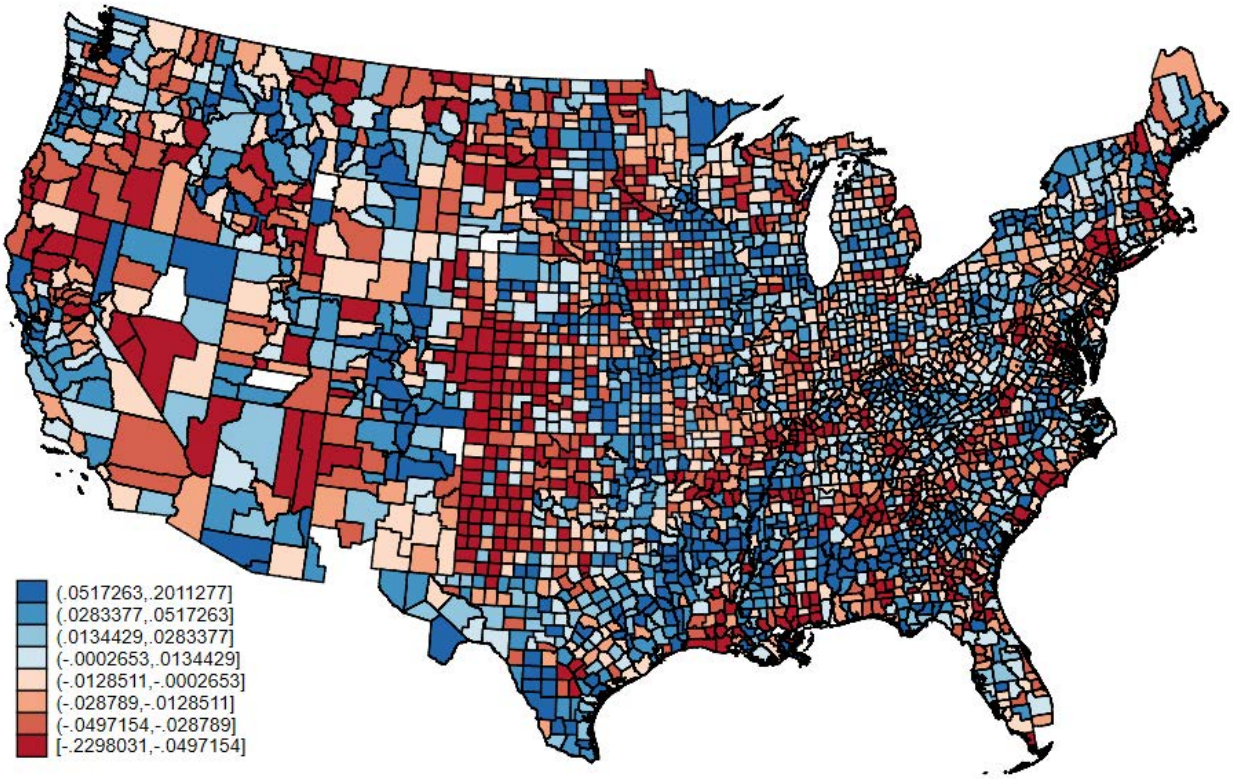

Figure 5: Removing the Evangelical Shift to Reagan

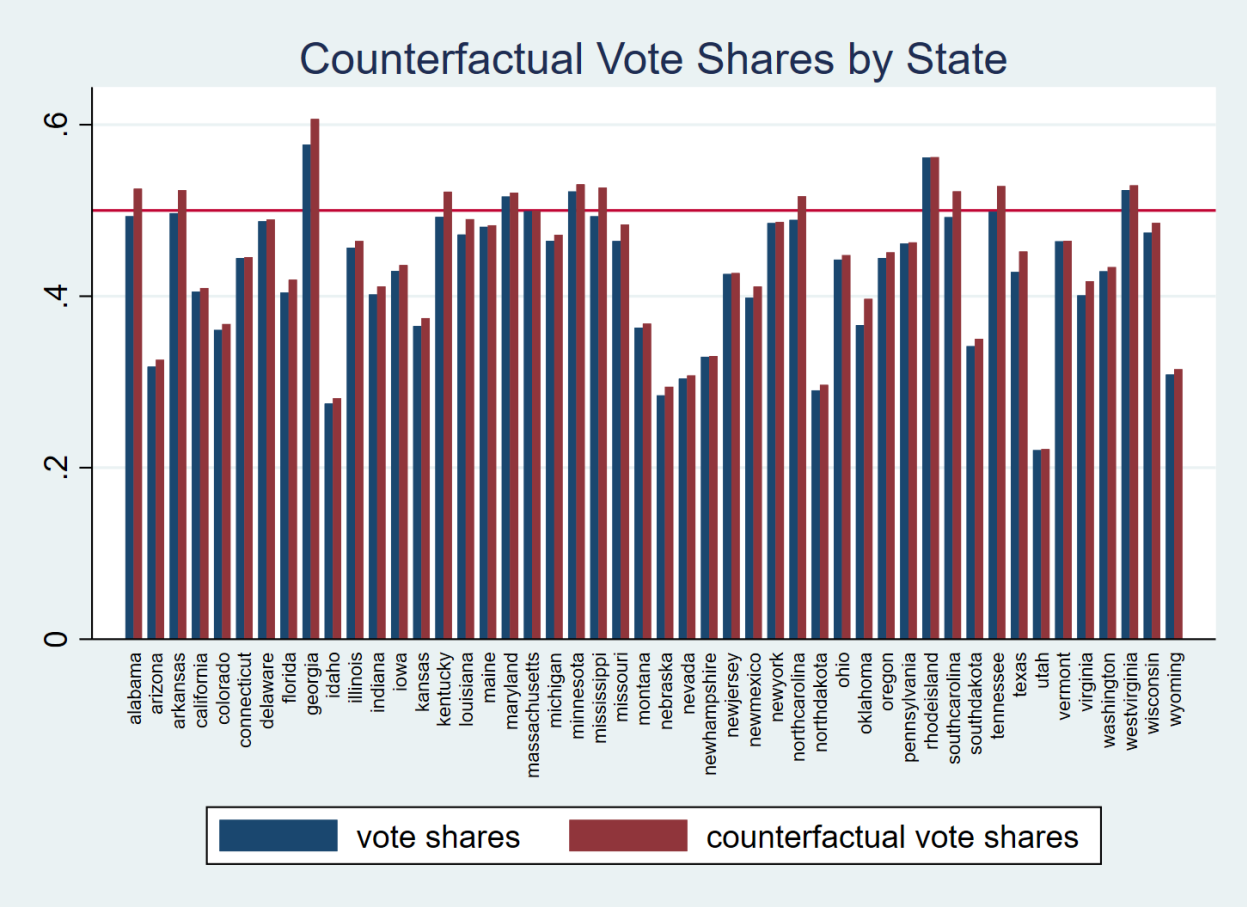

Figure 6: Changes in vote shares in other Presidential Elections

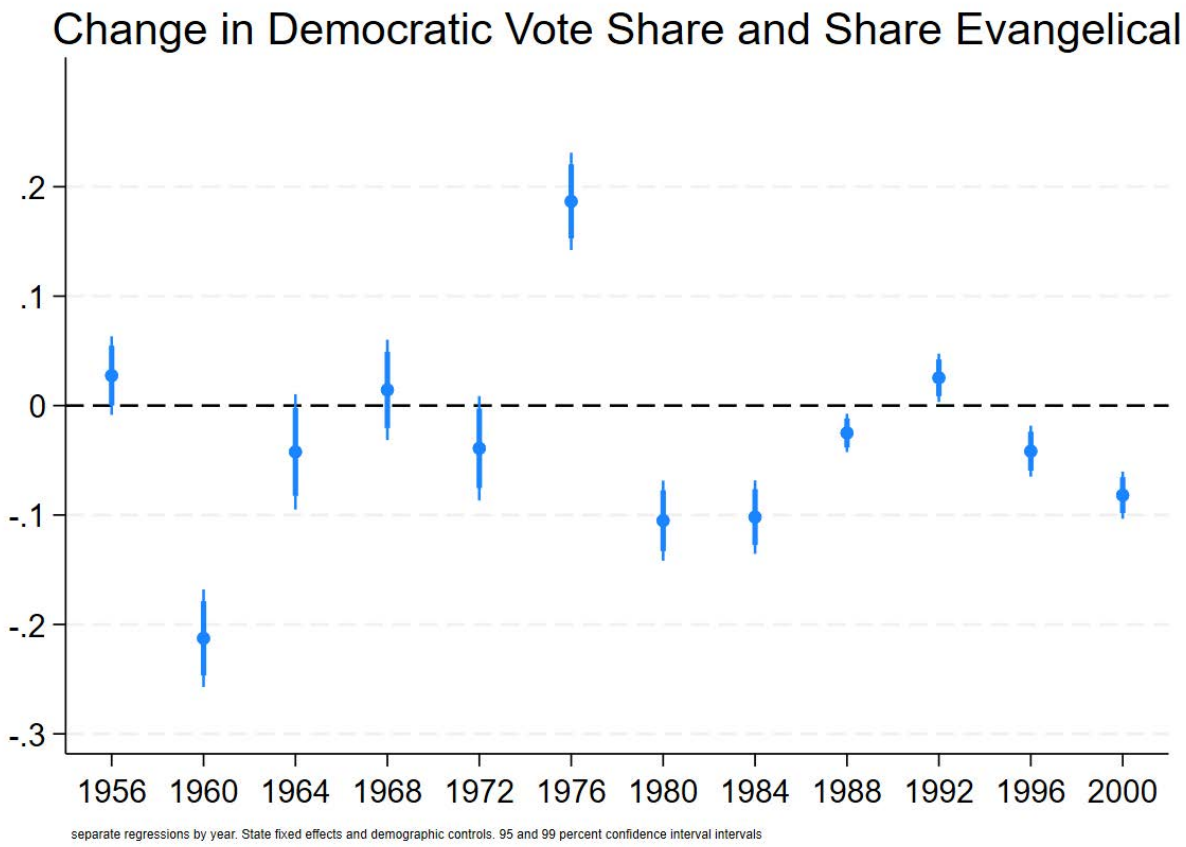

Figure 7: OTGH Antennas and county-level Exposure

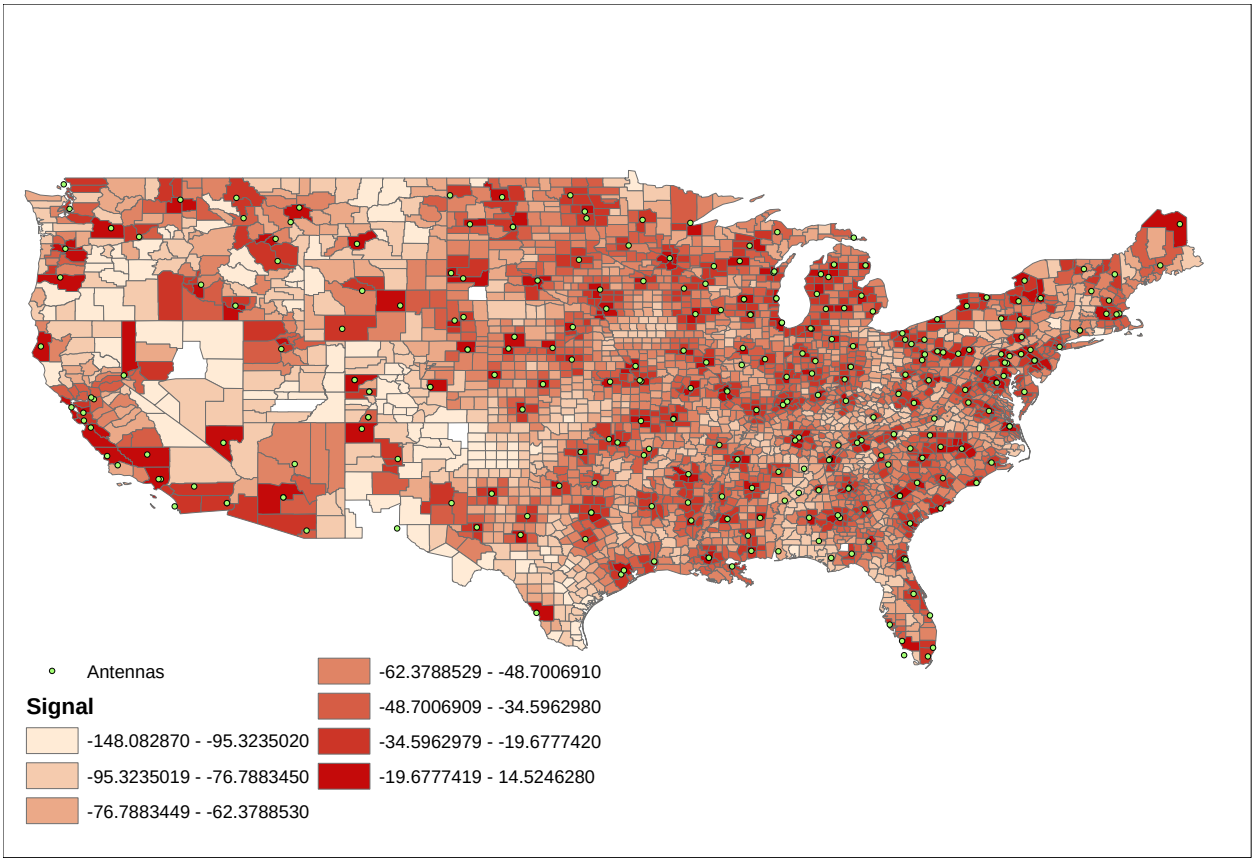

Figure 8: Changes in vote shares in other Presidential Elections (OTGH)

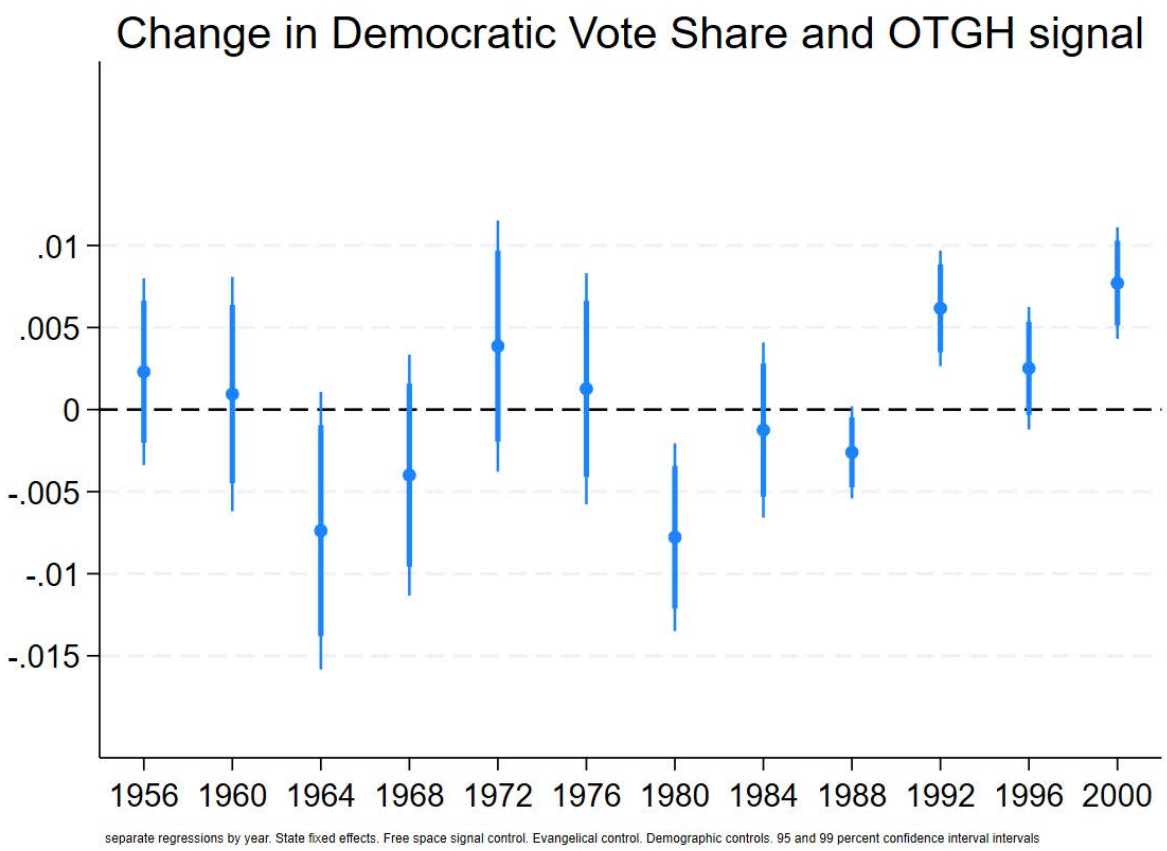

Figure 9: Changes in vote shares in other Presidential Elections (State HQ)

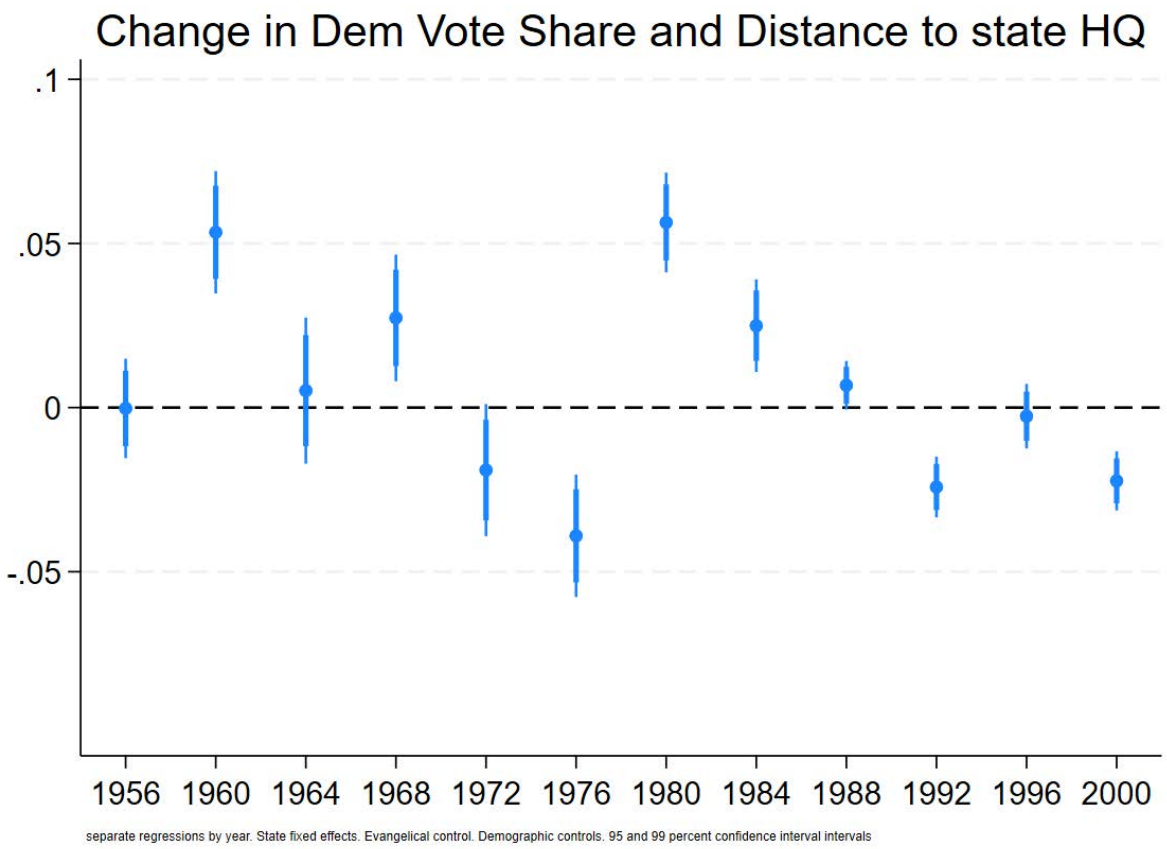

Table 1: Evangelical share and Change in Support for Carter

	(1) Chg Dem shr	(2) Chg Dem shr	(3) Chg Dem shr
Shr Evangelical	-0.1114***	-0.1103***	-0.0758***
	(0.0110)	(0.0131)	(0.0119)
Shr Mainline Protestant			0.0652***
			(0.0135)
Shr Catholic			0.0625***
			(0.0086)
Observations	3015	2195	3015

Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable: county-level change in the Democratic Presidential vote share 1976-1980

Column 2 drops small counties, those under 10,000 population.

Controls: population, share black, share female, employment, education

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 2: South versus non-South

	(1) Chg Dem shr	(2) Chg Dem shr	(3) Chg Dem shr
Shr Evangelical	-0.1408***	-0.1396***	-0.1723***
	(0.0273)	(0.0287)	(0.0190)
Shr Southern Baptist	0.0347		
	(0.0296)		
Shr Southern Evangelical		0.0321	
		(0.0302)	
South X Shr Evangelical			0.0894***
			(0.0228)
Observations	3015	3015	3015

Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable: county-level change in the Democratic Presidential vote share 1976-1980

Controls: population, share black, share female, employment, education

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3: 1952 Evangelical share and Change in Support for Carter

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Chg Dem shr	Chg Dem shr	Chg Dem shr
Shr Evangelical	-0.1051***	-0.1084***	-0.0563***
	(0.0142)	(0.0167)	(0.0144)
Shr Mainline Protestant			0.0759***
			(0.0151)
Shr Catholic			0.0876***
			(0.0073)
Observations	3019	2276	3019

Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable: county-level change in the Democratic Presidential vote share 1976-1980

Column 2 drops small counties, those under 10,000 population.

Controls: population, share black, share female, employment, education

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4: Born Again and Change in Support for Carter (Exit Polls)

	(1) Chg in Carter vote	(2) Chg in Carter vote	(3) ERA/abortion key	(4) ERA/abortion key
Born Again	-0.0407***	-0.0461**	0.0558***	0.0770***
	(0.0144)	(0.0189)	(0.0123)	(0.0139)
Observations	10372	4991	7433	3500

Standard errors in parentheses

The dependent variable in column 1 and 2 is the change in support for Carter 1976-1980 (-1, 0, or 1)

The dependent variable in columns 3 and 4 indicates respondents listing ERA or Abortion as key issues

Columns 1 and 3 are based upon all respondents. Columns 2 and 4 keep only Protestants

Precinct FE

Controls include gender, age, education, and race

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 5: Heterogeniety (Exit Polls)

	(1) Chg in Carter vote	(2) Chg in Carter vote	(3) Chg in Carter vote
Born Again	-0.0509**	0.0134	-0.0638***
	(0.0206)	(0.0228)	(0.0194)
Born Again X South	0.0267		
	(0.0275)		
Born Again X White		-0.0615**	
		(0.0277)	
Born Again X Male			0.0481**
			(0.0238)
Observations	10372	10372	10372

Standard errors in parentheses

The dependent variable is the change in support for Carter 1976-1980 (-1, 0, or 1)

Precinct FE

Controls include gender, age, education, and race

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 6: Evangelicals and Change in Support for Carter (ANES)

	(1) Chg in Carter vote	(2) Chg in Carter vote	(3) Moral Majority feeling	(4) Moral Majority feeling
Evangelical	-0.0796*	-0.0879*	3.5552	2.1309
	(0.0473)	(0.0495)	(2.3117)	(2.4764)
Observations	1035	699	1073	706

Standard errors in parentheses

The dependent variable in column 1 and 2 is the change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980 (-1, 0, or 1)

The dependent variable in columns 3 and 4 is the Moral Majority feeling thermomemter

Columns 1 and 3 are based upon all respondents. Columns 2 and 4 keep only Protestants

State FE

Controls include gender, age, education, and race

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 7: Heterogeneity Analysis (ANES)

	(1) Chg in Carter vote	(2) Chg in Carter vote	(3) Chg in Carter vote
Evangelical	-0.1136**	-0.0416	-0.1307**
	(0.0525)	(0.0750)	(0.0618)
Born Again X South	0.1853*		
	(0.1042)		
Born Again X White		-0.0468	
		(0.0893)	
Born Again X Male			0.1183
			(0.0825)
Observations	1035	1035	1035

Standard errors in parentheses

The dependent variable is the change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980 (-1, 0, or 1)

State FE

Controls include gender, age, education, and race

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 8: OTGH Signal Strength and Change in Support for Carter

	(1) Chg Dem shr	(2) Chg Dem shr	(3) Chg Dem shr
Signal	-0.0091***	-0.0098***	-0.0092***
	(0.0023)	(0.0026)	(0.0022)
Free-space signal	0.0014***	0.0014***	0.0013***
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Shr Evangelical			-0.1024***
			(0.0108)
Observations	3015	2195	3015

Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable: county-level change in the Democratic Presidential vote share 1976-1980

Column 2 drops small counties, those under 10,000 population.

Controls: population, share black, share female, employment, education

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 9: State HQ and Support for Carter

	(1) Chg Dem shr	(2) Chg Dem shr	(3) Chg Dem shr
km (1000s) to state HQ	0.0501***	0.0560***	0.0490***
	(0.0055)	(0.0063)	(0.0054)
Shr Evangelical			-0.1095***
			(0.0108)
Observations	3015	2195	3015

Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable: county-level change in the Democratic Presidential vote share 1976-1980

Column 2 drops small counties, those under 10,000 population.

Controls: population, share black, share female, employment, education

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

7 Online Appendix

7.1 Figures and Tables

Figure A1: Share Evangelical by State in 1972

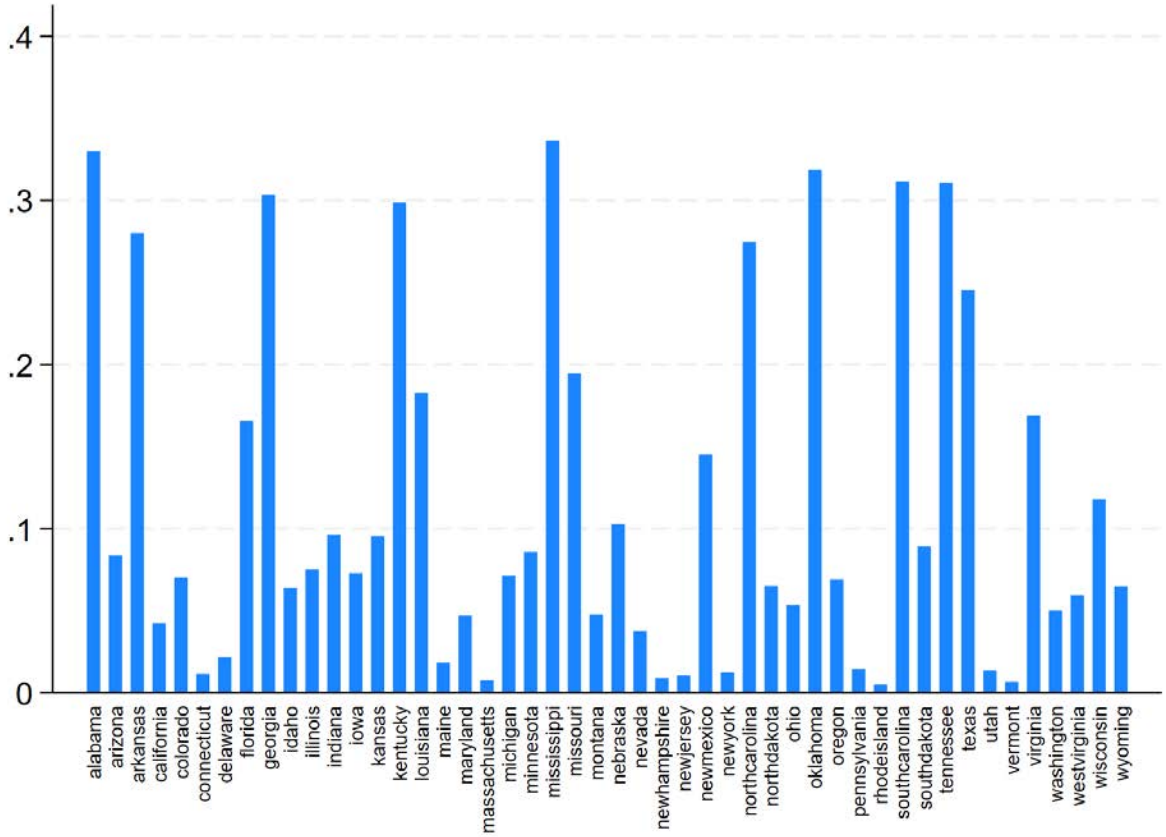

Figure A2: Binscatter with county-level data

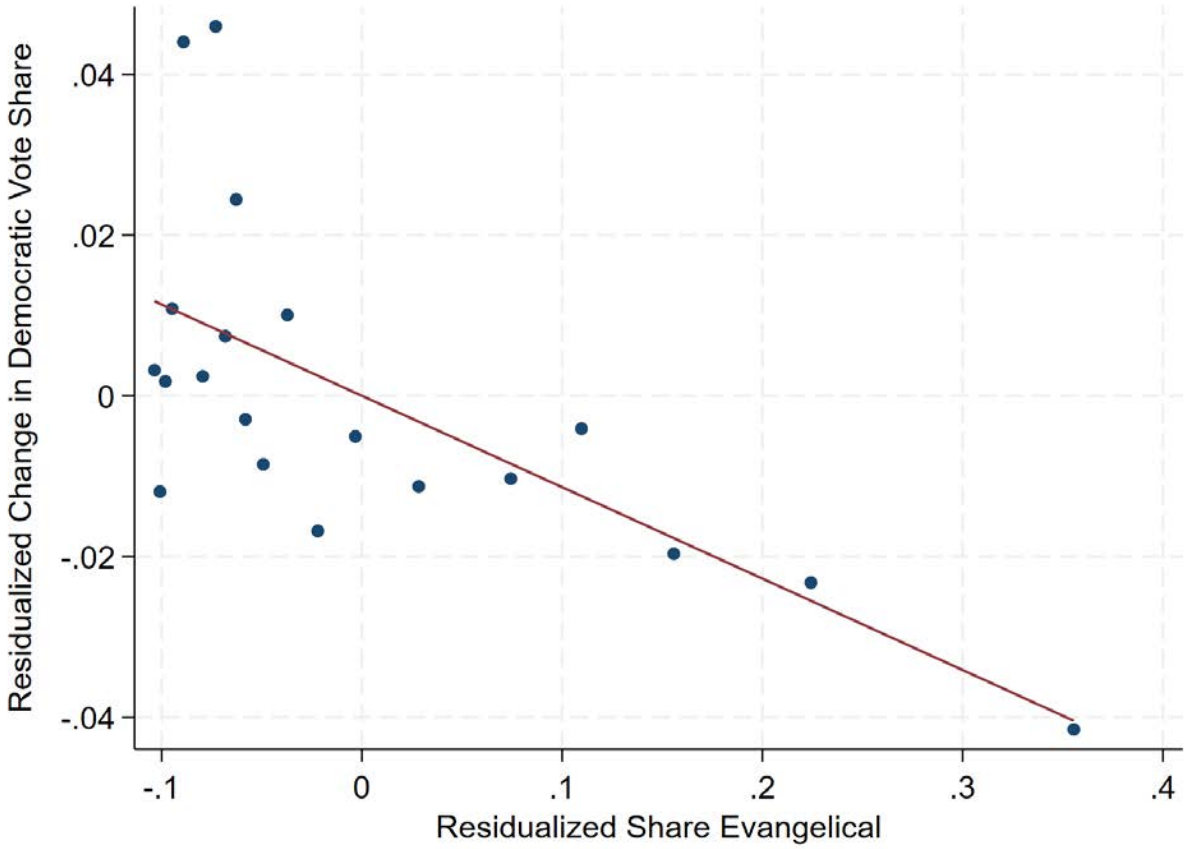

Table A1: Mobilization or Persuasion (Exit Polls)

	(1) carter80
Born Again	-0.0357**
	(0.0163)
Carter 76	0.5056***
	(0.0140)
Non-voter 76	0.3397***
	(0.0208)
Born Again X Carter 76	-0.0053
	(0.0247)
Born Again X non-voter 76	-0.1067**
	(0.0437)
Observations	11311

Standard errors in parentheses
The dependent variable is support for Carter in 1980 (0 or 1)
Precinct FE
Ommitted category is support for Ford in 1976
dropping voters under age 21 in 1980
Controls include gender, age, education, and race
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A2: Important Policy Issues in 1980 (Exit Polls)

	(1) budget	(2) Iran	(3) jobs	(4) tax	(5) inflation	(6) cities	(7) US prestige
Born Again	0.0212	-0.0131	-0.0108	-0.0079	-0.0323**	-0.0053	-0.0089
	(0.0149)	(0.0127)	(0.0189)	(0.0139)	(0.0158)	(0.0070)	(0.0159)
Observations	7434	7435	7435	7433	7433	7434	7437

Standard errors in parentheses

The dependent variable indicates an important policy issue in 1980 (0 or 1)

Precinct FE

Controls include gender, age, education, and race

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A3: Accounting for TV News (ANES)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Chg in Carter vote	Chg in Carter vote	Moral Majority feeling	Moral Majority feeling
Evangelical	-0.0781	-0.0879*	3.3835	2.5793
	(0.0473)	(0.0496)	(2.3772)	(2.5708)
TV News	0.0425	0.0007	1.4180	-1.4788
	(0.0353)	(0.0423)	(1.6041)	(2.2411)
Observations	1035	699	1034	678

Standard errors in parentheses

The dependent variable in column 1 and 2 is the change in support for Carter between 1976 and 1980 (-1, 0, or 1)

The dependent variable in columns 3 and 4 is the Moral Majority feeling thermomemter

Columns 1 and 3 are based upon all respondents. Columns 2 and 4 keep only Protestants

State FE

Controls include gender, age, education, and race

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

7.2 Details of Persuasion Rate Calculations

Based upon the formula from using the formula from :

$$f = \frac{v_T - v_C}{(e_T - e_C)(1-r)} \frac{(1-r)t_C t_T}{d}$$

where $v_T - v_C$ is the Democratic vote share difference between control and treated counties, $e_T - e_C$ is the difference in exposure between treated and counties, and where r and d represent the fraction of eligible voters supporting the Republican and Democratic candidates, respectively, at baseline. Finally, t_C and t_T represent turnout rates in control counties and treatment counties, respectively. The first term captures the persuasion rate among the voting population, and the second term adjusts for turnout.

In computing the persuasion rate, we use a treatment effect of 0.0092 from column 3 of Table 8. This is the difference in the change in the Republican two-party vote share between 1976 and 1980. While we do not have measures of turnout rate at the county level, overall turnout in 1976, at baseline was 0.548, and we assume that this is the same in treatment and control counties.[27]

To compute exposure rates, we compare viewership among eligible voters in treated counties. Note that, according to our voting data, there were 1,606 counties that received the signal, and, on average in those counties, there were 36,648 votes for either Carter or Ford in 1976. Given this, we have roughly 59 million voters in treated counties; turnout rates of 0.548 at baseline implies a total number of eligible votes of 108 million in treated counties.

For viewership data, we rely primarily on a national survey of adults conducted in 1981 by the National Broadcasting Company (accessed via the Roper Center at Cornell University). According to the topline estimates, 10 percent of respondents report having watched Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour during the last month. With 162.8 million adults in the U.S. in the 1980 Census, this implies 16.3 million viewers of the show. While lower than Falwell's claim of 25 million viewers, this is still substantially higher than Arbitron viewership estimates of the Old Time Gospel Hour, with 1.5 million viewers, as reported in Williams (2012). In understanding these differences, note that the higher figure, that from the survey, is based upon viewership in the past month, whereas the Arbitron estimate is a weekly measure. Also, note recall measures tend to be higher than diary-based measures in other settings as well. In DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007), for example, the recall measure is 3.43 times higher than the diary measure for CNN. Overall, the viewership of 16.3 million out of 108 million implies an exposure rate of 15.2 percent, and, for simplicity and due

[27] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1976_United_States_presidential_election (accessed October 2023)

to data limitations, we assume an exposure rate of zero in control counties. Plugging all of these factors into the formula above yields a persuasion rate of 6.3 percent.

As a robustness check, we can use the Arbitron measure of 1.5 million viewers. This creates a substantially higher persuasion rate of 68.1 percent. There are several possible explanations for a high persuasion rate. First, a high degree of persuasion in our setting is consistent with the idea that, in the context of belief-based models, religious leaders might have very high source credibility in the eyes of their followers, an idea discussed in DellaVigna and Gentzkow (2010). Moreover, these so-called "single-issue voters" might be particularly responsive to endorsements by religious leaders. Second, it is possible that there were indirect effects, with Evangelical adherents or even local Evangelical leaders exposed to the Old Time Gospel Hour spreading the word to non-exposed Evangelical adherents in treatment counties.[28]

[28]Of course this persuasion rate could also be overstated. As noted above, the diary based measures are much lower than recall-based measures and this Arbitron estimate is based upon viewership for a single week.