



Young Evangelicals, Social Justice, and Political Disenfranchisement

Research Paper

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Introduction

Nearly 20% of Americans born between 1990 and 1996 are Evangelical Christians, which is a considerably smaller percentage than the overall population but still quite significant. (Lipka, 2015) Evangelical Christians overall tend to be significantly more conservative than the average citizen, with white evangelicals in particular voting overwhelmingly for President Trump; 81% of white evangelicals voted for the GOP president. (Shellnutt, 2016) Vote choice in the election was also correlated with church attendance; those who attended church at least once per week chose Trump by 16% and those who attended monthly by 3%. (Smith and Martinez, 2016) There has been considerable speculation on the political views of young evangelicals, especially as there has been significant growth in left-leaning views and activism amongst the younger generations and a possible split between older evangelicals and younger evangelicals. (Tice-Jen, 2017) These viewpoints often center around issues of social justice like homelessness, employment, and education, but also seem to reflect a sort of distancing, not just from typical evangelical political views but from politics overall. The possible change in young evangelicals' political views is not a distancing from faith but rather a new attempt for them to apply their faith to politics in a manner different than the typical reactions of the Christian Right in a new climate of diversity. (Flory, 2016) They can draw from the Bible in support of their social justice positions but may be placed in an uncomfortable situation leading

to political disenfranchisement when considering Biblical positions on social issues as well as the positions of those in their faith community, in particular those in leadership.

This study seeks to investigate the changing political attitudes and behavior of young evangelicals with a focus on discontinuity between their views on social justice (proxied by income inequality), their views on social issues, such as same-sex marriage and abortion, and the views of their church. It will look at whether or not these discontinuities may result in political disenfranchisement or other reactions in one's political life. Vote choice, voter turnout, and attitudes toward alternative means (non-governmental) of addressing social justice issues amongst young evangelicals on a university campus will be measured using online survey research.

Literature Review

Younger Americans are largely thought of as being more socially conscious than those older than them, as they are the generation embracing socially responsible business practices, conscious consumerism, and supporting the rise of socialist-type candidates like Bernie Sanders. Helen Fox, in her book "Their Highest Vocation: Social Justice and the Millennial Generation," asserts that today's college students are "the most politically progressive generation in U.S. history." (from book summary as cited) This line of thinking may have translated into the church in various forms, including what has been termed the "social gospel,"

however it may or may not have necessarily translated into changes in the political viewpoints in the churches young evangelicals attend.

However, social justice is not part of the fabric of the Christian Right or the Republican Party it supports, leading to criticism over alleged Biblical hypocrisy from political opponents. Liberals have used the Bible to levy criticisms against Evangelical Christian Republicans over their party's positions in opposition supporting the poor through welfare programs and regulatory changes designed to help those less fortunate, like increases in the minimum wage. (Uygur and Weber) They assert that the positions of Republican Christians contradict Biblical principles to help the poor and downtrodden, such as Proverbs 22:9 (KJV) "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor." (Uygur and Weber, 2015) Hence, it can be stated that liberals are claiming that conservative Christians are placing their politics over their faith. Liberals often further point out that the rhetoric used by conservatives in the media can be interpreted as demeaning and blaming the less fortunate for their plight, a further mark against the conservative Christians' Biblical obedience in regards to these matters. (Groch-Begley and Boguhn, 2015, Uygur, 2016) Tice-Jen posits that there are perhaps evangelical Christians who use their evangelical identity not necessarily marker of religious faith, but rather as a cultural identity, adhering to the perceived Christian Right viewpoints of "white supremacy, prescribed gender roles, and homophobia" who are differentiated from young evangelicals and their views. She also explains that the political and cultural attitudes of the

Christian Right are often improperly imputed as being part of evangelicalism itself, rather than this particular strain of the Christian Right, citing examples of past evangelical movements that Hearing that the church is hypocritical on an issue of importance to young people may validate their concerns and discontentment if they have personal experience or other information on the matter, or form their attitude toward the church and its political views, contributing to disenfranchisement.

Further, the types of candidates who appeal to the younger generation's thinking on social justice generally do not align with the conservative social issue positions, such as the protection of life from conception and the preservation of traditional marriage, synonymous with evangelical Christianity and responsible for much of its alignment with the GOP. There has been waning interest among young Christians in these social positions, opposition to same-sex marriage in particular, with 51% of Millennial evangelicals accepting same-sex marriage. (Murphy, 2015) However, this is barely a majority and many (if not the majority) of the pastors who influence this generation of believers, including Greg Laurie (Harvest Crusades)/Harvest Christian Fellowship), Louie Giglio (Passion City Church), Ryan Ries (The WhosoEVERS), Steven Furtick (Elevation Church), and Rick Warren (Saddleback Church), still hold to these positions. (Jennings, 2013, Hallowell, 2015, Corner, 2016, Ries et al., 2017, Tapper, 2012) However, given the survey data aforementioned, it is possible that young parishioners may disregard the teaching in this regard.

Attitudes of church leadership toward social justice-related issues like income inequality vary considerably, with some churches embracing the so-called “social gospel,” desiring to emphasize social justice in their church’s agenda, but this has become a pejorative term that theologians and discernment ministries will use to indicate that a church is de-emphasizing the Gospel of salvation through believing in Jesus and repenting of sin as they are emphasizing these social goals. (McMahon, 2008, Smith, 2010) Many churches, particularly larger ones, have begun offering programs that support the poor that go above and beyond the typical (though often extremely useful) benevolence funds and food pantries, like Saddleback Church’s Peace Center, which offers a food pantry, medical and dental services, computer skills training, and legal services. However others will retract from the idea of helping the less fortunate, perhaps making some efforts on a very low level or limiting their efforts to helping church members in need. Some particularly argumentative ministers, who are likely far outside of the norm given that 68% of pastors surveyed by LifeWay Research state their church maintains a list of mental health resources, go so far as to use language that may be interpreted as offensive to certain groups of individuals, specifically the mentally ill, who may be seeking assistance. (Rudd, Zylstra, 2014) This is one, albeit very extreme, example of the kind of potentially politically motivated rhetoric from the pulpit that young evangelicals may find disconcerting in discussions of social justice, faith, and political alignment, The cognitive

dissonance resulting from this rhetoric may contribute to political, or possibly religious, disenfranchisement.

Perhaps the actions of anti-social gospel theologians are a mere overcorrection in a feedback loop in response to the efforts of liberal and social gospel-oriented ministers which they perceive to be deemphasizing the true gospel message. However, the actions of ministers who are against the mere idea of social justice may also be influenced by the political climate and the perceived importance of social issues such as gay marriage and abortion and a lesser importance of issues like income inequality. Ministers may feel like they have to take a side and giving the “dividing” and unique nature of social issues they choose to take the conservative side with its “baggage” of not seeking to address the issues of poverty and inequality, possibly to the detriment of the Biblical concept of caring for the poor, whether this is consciously acknowledged by the ministers or leadership or not. Some secular commentators seem to view the more conservative forms of Christianity as being in contrast to “progressive Christian churches withan interest in social justice,” conflating politics, moral ideals, and theology into a neat, dichotomous package (Winell and Tarico, 2014) This view of social justice in the church, if internalized, leaves young believers in a situation wherein they would have to make a choice between churches and theologies based upon their views on social justice or retreat from one or the other completely due to the perceived conflict. A dichotomous view would seem to imply that a church cannot be active in social justice issues without being a

“progressive” church, a label churches who are conservative theologically may not want to take on and young evangelicals who hold conservative theological positions may not be comfortable with.

This shows a trend of politicization and a zero-sum, dichotomous of the church's role in social justice issues wherein such is deemed antithetical to conservative viewpoints theologically, not just politically. (McMahon, 2008, Smith 2010) Political commentator and radio host Glenn Beck asserts that communism and Nazism are the true meanings behind the efforts of some churches to alleviate social justice issues. (Smith, 2010) As such, he urges his audience to avoid churches that discuss "social justice" and "economic justice" on their websites. The Mormon commentator asserts that such is a “perversion of the gospel.” (Smith, 2010, Albert, 2016)

This conflation of helping with an issue like social justice and a particular modality of doing so such as political systems like socialism and/or communism, regardless of the merits of such systems, is problematic for attaining progress in these crucial issues, in this author's opinion. Further, the conflation of theology and orthodoxy with policy, party identification, or even worse, desire to address an issue that is dealt with in the Scriptures, is equally problematic in that adverse views of one may result in the unnecessary dismissal of the other. However, such is perhaps understandable in the moment to a point given that many supporters of the concept of social justice have espoused ideologies that do conflate those. The level to

which church members have delinked the social justice goals from political viewpoints and actions should be examined to understand if an alternative pathway has been embarked upon by believers, Further, the more these components are linked, the greater the level of political disenfranchisement may be for those who hold pro-social justice viewpoints and are evangelical.

These political criticisms that liken it to socialism, along with pointing out the aberrant theology of supporters, appear to be the most common criticisms of the social gospel per Smith, with the latter being of much more significance to the church for the obvious reasons. The theological criticisms start on the basis that the social gospel's proponents historically have been largely liberal ministers and the movement has been described as "interpret(ing) the Kingdom of God as requiring social as well as individual salvation." The latter is the emphasis in most evangelical Protestant churches, hence the term evangelical - as in evangelism, and theologically no goal is seen as remotely equal to such, hence the basis for seeing these ideas as being against orthodoxy. McMahon (2008) likens the social gospel to being "ashamed of the gospel," following a path that leads to a belief in works salvation, and allowing for greater levels of compromise in doctrine given the claimed efforts of some who hold such views to include other faiths in the process of attaining such objectives. He also finds that this view derives from differences in eschatology. According to Daniel, E. (2015), further doctrinal errors that have been committed by social gospel advocates include a belief that men are not as depraved as is

believed in more orthodox forms of Christianity, that the gospel is more about cultural than personal redemption, and that social salvation is viewed as more important than individual salvation. Hence, cultural transformation rather than the Gospel's salvation for each individual becomes the end goal. Daniel asserts that this cultural transformation remains important but should not be the main objective of our faith. These are certainly legitimate criticisms that go to the core of evangelical faith and must be analyzed in light of sound doctrine, however likewise the real social justice issues in society are deserving of discourse within the church. Further theological elucidation is imperative to attain a greater level of discernment regarding the proper approach to and management of associations to particular (potentially aberrant) doctrines in discussions of these issues in light of orthodoxy.

Given the level of criticism made, entanglement with unappealing political ideologies like socialism and communism, accusations of unbiblical doctrines used in past and possibly current efforts, and the use of the term "gospel," there is a significant issue in using the "social gospel" for the church's efforts to proceed in assisting in the world's challenges but this question should be dealt with efficiently and accurately, but such should not be used as an excuse for the church recusing itself from the entire issue. (Smith, 2010) Due to its historical and present negative connotations, the use of the term "social gospel" appears to be hindering mobilization in addressing social justice issues since conservative churches who may recognize the Biblical basis for caring for the poor and addressing various issues in their communities for

fear that they will be associated with the social gospel, and hence, liberal theology. (Smith, 2010) There are multiple potential options for churches to deal with such an issue and the optimal approach to such is not yet known, as such interventions should be studied separately. One other potential response may be to engage in such efforts but de-emphasize them, which can lead to less of a congregation being mobilized as volunteers. This may be a church's means of working around the social identity theory implications of the out-group signal of being a liberal church (as opposed to a conservative, theologically or politically) caused by involvement in such levels at a high level, or the discussion of such on their websites as Glenn Beck has asserted.

Given the aforementioned analyses by Smith (2010), McMahon (2008), and Daniel (2015), theology contrary to orthodoxy has apparently permeated into these discussions and appears to have caused considerable problems which will undoubtedly require correction to move forward. In accordance with evangelical thought, compromise of Biblical doctrine and its spiritual effects can compromise the efficacy of efforts to create social change as from a spiritual perspective the Gospel is the primary means of solidifying a moral society in all respects. The challenge of ensuring Biblical accuracy, protecting against doctrinal compromise, and still following the Bible's mandates to help those in need is beyond the scope of this paper and the expertise of the author, however this subject should be further explored using Biblical analysis by those equipped for such a work. For political scientists, however, the work to be

done is to determine how these ideologies and perceptions have impacted voting choices and other political behaviors as well as to propose possible political or non-political actions that avoid the perception of socialism and other ideologies the church may not wish to be associated with.

Along these lines, Smith cites successful examples of the church not compromising doctrine and being active in social justice issues in history such as the Clapham Sect and its efforts to abolish slavery and improve working conditions, the “reform societies” of the Second Great Awakening, and evangelicals between 1880 and 1920 who worked on labor and racial issues. Faith-based organizations are often on the “front line” of effective multi-service, wraparound homeless programs that not only provide immediate help to and help rehabilitate the homeless but also may prevent hospitalizations and save taxpayers money. (Bass, 2009) Further, Christian missionaries often build hospitals and schools and work to address social issues in the communities where they serve. (Smith, 2010) Given these significant examples, it may be entirely possible to avoid socialist politics and have the church be active and effective in addressing social justice issues.

Ideological Inconsistencies and Disenfranchisement

There is considerable evidence that ideological inconsistencies result in a decrease in voter turnout. Research based upon Pew Research Center's political typology and data from the American Trends Panel in 2014 shows that ideologically inconsistent voters, including a group of young people termed "young outsiders," who have conservative views on economic but not social issues, are among the least likely to vote. (Igielnik, 2014) In fact, this group is the second least likely group to vote in the Pew study. Moreover, Harder and Krosnick find that voters who were further ideologically from the closest candidate to their ideologies were less likely to turn out to vote than those voters for whom the closest candidate is closer to their policy preferences. (Harder et al, 2008, p. 538) This candidate-to-voter distance is more determinative of likelihood to vote than the separation between the candidates themselves in terms of ideology.

There is also some evidence to prove that political views within the church conflicting with the views of the parishioners can lead to parishioners departing from the church. A survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute shows that a significant portion of younger individuals who have lost their religious identity credit such to their religion's views on homosexuality, with 31% of those ages 18-33 who left organized religion crediting "negative teachings about, or treatment of, gay and lesbian people" were either a somewhat or very important factor in their decision to leave. (Timm, 2014, Cox et al., 2014) It is possible that the

separation shown by Cox et al. for social issues may also occur for economic and social justice issues and such will be investigated herein. It is also possible that this is an “either-or” choice that leads to one choosing the church or choosing their political identity, hence some may choose church over politics and self-censor in the form of not voting or otherwise expressing their views. This choice of repressing expression of one’s own views due to a power situation is consistent with Gaventa’s third dimension of power. The ideal situation, wherein a parishioner would be able to engage in dialogue to explore and understand the issue Biblically in their church with the expertise of their pastor and ministry tea,, would be more consistent with the 1-dimensional view of power expressed by Gaventa. This is in no way to say that churches should compromise doctrine whether on social justice, gay marriage, or abortion; it would be a shame if churches compromised their doctrine in order to attract parishioners and this prevalent criticism of many churches that are “seeker-sensitive” is a valid one.

Rather, a better understanding of what the Scripture says in relation to all issues and not censoring legitimate social justice-related Biblical concepts acceptable within the bounds of orthodoxy in favor of politics and as a response to the political power of one party is in order. Likewise, it is entirely possible that pastors are self-censoring the Biblical concepts of social justice (expressed in a proper doctrinally sound form) due to the perceived power that right-wing politicians and commentators have over the church. Such self-censorship may lead to skewed perceptions of the Christian perspective on social justice issues and even possibly

skewed perceptions of the church by young parishioners. The perceptions resulting from self-censorship may result in disengagement from politics, disengagement from social justice issues, other changes in political behavior, or even potentially the congregant dropping out of church since the social identity does not align on its face with their own preferences that value social justice highly.

Church Involvement and Involvement with Social Justice Issues

Further, some aspects of church fellowship and engagement may also be ineffective in spurring action on community issues of various types. Research by Dr. Roger Walton of (qtd. in Packiam, 2016) shows that participants in church small groups do not feel the groups made them more involved in justice issues whether national or international nor do they feel that the groups get them more involved in local issues. A slight majority (51%) of participants surveyed did, however, feel that the groups made them “more likely to help their neighbor.” Perhaps this disparity indicates a more subtle attitudinal shift resulting from the small group participation that has not yet become mature enough to yield effects in larger issues but also perhaps this disparity indicates an overarching mindset that the actions of the faithful are most effective or simply are more suited to the “micro” level of interpersonal interaction rather than in actions to create societal change. Whether or not this mindset transfers over to young evangelicals, who may be more progressive than the sample used by Walton, will be assessed herein.

Prior Young Evangelical Politics Research

There is limited recent academic literature studying the specific issue of the politics of young evangelicals, however Pelz and Smidt (2015) and Farrell (2011) have examined the political views of young evangelicals. The main issue with these studies is that they use data that is largely out of date. For example, Pelz and Smidt used data from 2007 along with a limited data set from 2012 and Farrell used data from 2006. Hence, neither data set would capture the revealed political preferences and potential “realignment” arising from the 2016 election nor would they adequately capture the recent trend in favor of social justice among America’s youth.

Pelz and Smidt found that there were two possible theoretical perspectives that could potentially explain the political preferences of young evangelicals, each leading to a different possible conclusion. The first is generational analysis based on political socialization theory, which emphasizes the unique political socialization, meaning a unique set of circumstances under which each generation acquires their political beliefs and practices, and how that can lead to a unique, common perspective. The prerequisite for the aforementioned is that there is a difference between the events and circumstances of the given generation and prior generations, which can be anything from political events, wars, or even technological developments, lending itself to an experience unique to that generation in its formative years, a “spirit of the age,” so to speak. The patterns established during these formative years persists

and continues to influence the people of the given generation for the rest of their lives. (Pelz and Smidt, 2015, p. 381)

They assert that for millennials, their political experience was considerably different than the prior generation of evangelicals, as the prior generation had been exposed to a strong and burgeoning atmosphere of Christian right organizations. These organizations focused heavily on advocacy for traditional positions on social issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion, engaging in the so-called “culture war.” Given their influence, they were able to incorporate their positions and preferences into the Republican Party. However, since the 1990s, these organizations have largely disbanded or shrunk in size and other political issues have appeared to come into play for evangelicals, such as immigration, the environment, and race relations. Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama attempted to make a play for voters of faith, perhaps attempting to break a “monopoly” of the GOP on the Christian vote. (*Id.* 382)

On the other hand, social identity theory would posit that given shared group identity, those of all generations in the same group would conform to the group identity. This theory focuses on whether or not one identifies themselves as being part of a group and asserts that one who is a member of a group will not only have positive perceptions of the members of the group but negative perceptions of those outside of the group. Conformity with this pattern and with the group’s viewpoints is dependent upon the level of involvement in the given group, hence the more religious an evangelical is, the more likely they are to recognize and antagonize

out-groups and conform to group characteristics such as the group's political views. However, no matter the level of involvement one has in a group, if a group has no clearly evident position on an issue, one will be free to choose their own position on said issue. (*Id.* 383) Pelz and Smidt found evidence that young evangelicals are separating from older evangelicals on politics to some degree, though remaining largely adherent to traditional positions on social issues. However, there is a significant change relating to Republican party identification and positions "non-essential" issues. The former may follow a trend of younger voters not identifying with either party at a greater level than other age groups, with 41% of millennials in California not registering with the 2 major parties. (Berken, 2016)

Millennials are adding issues of importance not as relevant to older evangelicals, presumably taking more liberal positions on such, which is in accord with the concept that group identification, regardless of strength, will not have an effect on positions for which there is no clearly evident preference in the group. Given the small group survey data from Walton showing that actions and attitudes on social justice issues are relatively unaffected by involvement in one of the most "personal" aspects of church involvement, we may be led to believe that there is no "clearly evident" preference in the group, or as Christians may say, it is a "non-essential." However, as aforementioned, the dichotomous "conservatives Christian, liberals not" view that may have been reinforced by the Christian Right may result in the silencing of support for any issue that may be identified as being a "liberal issue" as such could

signal that one is, in reality, a liberal overall. This is an alternative hypothesis of social identity theory's impact on political positions that relates not to ideological conformity but rather to out-group identification. Holding particular views on social justice may be an identifier of being a part of an out-group, thus alienating a person from their in-group or preventing one from taking such a view given the risk of such. Such is in accord with the "social justice" website "signal" that Beck argued should indicate to a prospective parishioner that a church is not one that they should attend. This out-group signal that may be formed by addressing social justice issues may result in alienation from the in-group or merely the fear of such occurring, even though in reality such fear may be unjustified, and hence the expression of these issues is repressed not because they are unimportant but because expression signals something that a person may not want to signal. Again, there may be no reason for a believer to be worried and there further may be no intention to exclude these issues from the dialogue from leadership in the church or otherwise, believers and leaders may truly want to address these problems, but the effect of strong GOP identification being intertwined with evangelical identification and the liberal "signal" that desires to address social justice issues form may have a pacifying effect. This is effectively a potential causal mechanism of the 3rd dimension of power self-censorship theorized by Gaventa.

Pelz and Smidt found that millennials were consistent with social identity theory in some ways but not others. There was much alignment with the conservative politics of evangelicals of

past generations, but greater levels of variation in the political views of young evangelicals compared to that of other generations. Further, there were significant reductions in the rate at which millennials identify with the Republican Party and a lower likelihood of the most religious millennial evangelicals to hold anti-same-sex marriage positions versus the most religious older evangelicals. Religiosity tended to have only a small impact on positions on “non-essential” issues that the church does not necessarily preach on such as the environment, foreign policy, and government aid to the needy. This relatively lower effect on these issues positions did not hold for Gen-X or Baby Boomer evangelicals, which for the last category of government aid is particularly relevant to this study as it alludes to a shift amongst millennials in favor of policies to address inequality, poverty, and social justice, consistent with the overall “social responsibility trend” of younger individuals. And overall, the greatest levels of variation in policy positions were in the most religious young evangelicals, which goes against the social identity theory’s holding that those who are most attached to a group will be the most consistent in the group’s ideals.

Farrell found that, based on a 2006 data set from the Panel Study of American Religion and Ethnicity, young evangelicals were more likely to express liberal viewpoints on “same-sex marriage, premarital sex, cohabitating, and pornography, but not abortion.” This may evidence an overall leftward shift and as such is marginally relevant to this study but given the constant intermixing and “mistaken identity” signaling of social justice issues for overall liberalism in social issues wherein orthodoxy would dictate a more conservative position, it is best that these

issues be separated so action on one is not contingent on the other and Biblical positions in both issue positions can be expressed openly and honestly sans retribution related to association with the other.

Farrell discusses the idea that higher education may act as a “liberalizing force.” He cites to Loftus (2001) and others who assert that higher education is among the strongest predictors of liberal positions on same-sex marriage. However, he also finds others like Petersen (2001) who find that conservative Christianity is one of the most effective religions in insulating one from the liberalizing effects of higher education. He also cites to various examples of evangelicals who have succeeded in academia at elite institutions conducting significant research, which leads to curiosity whether these scholars have too been influenced by their environment and accordingly shifted leftward. The study herein tests young evangelicals within the purview of the alleged liberalizing force of higher education which may influence the outcome of its results, however it also serves as an analysis of what could happen when evangelicals are in an environment where they may be pressured to divest themselves of their views. Farrell asserts that his research is limited by whether or not the attitudes measured by it “will result in more liberal electoral behavior” since there may be a gap between attitudes and behaviors. Whether a similar type of influence to the kind Farrell discusses for social issues exists on economic and social justice issues will be examined herein and electoral behavior in the form of vote choice in the 2016 presidential election will also be examined.

It is not the place of the author, who has no formal theological training, to determine the level of involvement each church should have in this issue nor is it his role to set forth doctrine, however this study will look to determine potential correlations between political disenfranchisement or perhaps even disenfranchisement from their fellowship and discontinuities between the social issues (same-sex marriage, abortion) and social justice political viewpoints (proxied by income inequality) of young people and the views of their church. Political options will be discussed but it is the role of church leaders or theological researchers who have the necessary spiritual gifting and training to apply the findings in a Biblically accurate manner.

Hypothesis

Young evangelical voters who hold both conservative social issues positions and place a high importance on income inequality will either a) simply become politically disenfranchised as symbolized by not voting in the 2016 Presidential election or not even being registered, b) accept the conservative viewpoint politically and adopt a view that helping the poor is the role of the church and civil society, or c) become politically disenfranchised and adopt a private actor-oriented approach in lieu of political involvement. Political disenfranchisement is also significantly more likely when the overall perceived political views of the voter conflict with those of the church. Conversely, individuals may retract from Christian fellowship, as evidenced by reduced attendance, in the event of such a conflict.

Experiment

Given the aforementioned already conducted studies, this preliminary, small-scale study is unique both in its focus on social justice (proxied by effects of income inequality) and its recency. This study is being conducted months into a new presidency that has divided much of the United States and reinvigorated protest efforts and activism relating to social justice, hence though we may not call this election a realigning election, its impacts upon attitudes may be considerable, hence a post-election study may be particularly insightful. (Hope, 2017)

This study is a survey research experiment to measure attitudes toward income inequality-related issues, as a proxy for social justice attitudes, and the parties, social issues, voter registration, voter turnout, vote choice, and overall attitudes toward the capacity and desirability of politics or non-political institutions, including the church to make an impact on said issues. Subjects will include members of evangelical Christian groups and other self-identified evangelical Christians on the campus of a large private research university and will be surveyed using the online survey tool Qualtrics.

Survey questions are included in appendix A.

Methodology

First, the discontinuities between the political views of the subjects and their churches will be analyzed. A discontinuity here will be identified when the political ideologies of the church and the participant (as proxied by party identification) conflict.

Discontinuities will be measured on a -1 to +1 scale, -1 being liberal, +1 being conservative, and 0 being moderate, as would be plotted on a number line. The discontinuity will be measured as the difference between the church view and the participant view and will be calculated individually for each response. For issue-related questions, “Maybe” answers will be counted as 0. On party identifications and overall ideology, viewpoints are viewed as dichotomous, meaning that being moderately conservative or moderately liberal is the same as being very conservative or very liberal, given the American two-party system. However, the strength of the church’s political views may affect the level of discontinuity or disenfranchisement, hence levels of conservatism (or liberalism) for a church’s leadership will be identified with an “A” (meaning stronger or “very conservative”/“very liberal”) or “B” (less strong or “moderately conservative”/“moderately liberal”).

For this study, notwithstanding the potential problems with conflating a position on an issue with a political solution, positions against same-sex marriage and abortion will be counted as conservative positions and positions in support of solving income inequality problems will be counted as liberal positions. This is done as this study’s data analysis deals primarily with the **perceptions** of a particular view, whether or not such a perception is correct. For example, one may argue that a liberal can still be against same-sex marriage, but the common perception is assumed to be that one cannot be. Likewise, one may argue that a conservative can support solving income inequality, but the perception is that one cannot. Role-ranking questions will be used to address the potential conflation and alternative modality of resolution issues in relation to social justice and income inequality.

Secondly, the internal discontinuities of the subjects will be measured on the issue level and the party level. Discontinuities on the issue level are defined here as differences in liberal/

conservative indicating views on the same -1 to 1 scale between political views on income inequality and social justice issues and social issues.

Overall summary survey results will also be reported. Only responses that answered yes accepting the conflict disclosure for the lead investigator, Greyson C. Peltier, will be reported.

Conflict Disclosure:

Note: Greyson Peltier, student researcher for this survey, is the founder of Off Speed Solutions/RepublicanSocialJustice.org, providing consulting and information regarding alternative solutions to social justice issues in politics. Your personal information will solely be used for the drawing for the prize and will not be sold or rented, however anonymized survey results (such as percentages etc., which will NOT contain any personally identifiable information) may be published. Submit survey?

Survey Results and Analysis

There are a total of 25 responses that accepted the conflict disclosure and passed initial screening questions . Results only include responses from those ages 18-34. There were 24 eligible responses under the study criteria (one respondent was over the age criteria)

Age Distribution

19 respondents, 79.17% of the included sample, are ages 18-24. Five respondents, 20.83% of the included sample, were ages 25-34.

Voter Registration

22 respondents, 91.67% of the included sample, were registered to vote. Two respondents, 8.33% of the included sample, were not registered.

Party Identification

Parties listed are those who had presidential candidates in the state of California.

14 respondents, 58.33% of the included sample, identify as Republicans. Seven respondents, 29.17% of the included sample, identify as Democrats. Strangely, three

respondents, 12.5% of the included sample, identify with the American Independent Party, a far-right party that some people in California will inadvertently register under when they really intended to register with no party preference, or as it is known colloquially, registered as an independent. A disclosure on the difference between being independent and being part of the AIP was included in the survey to avoid confusion. Notably, respondents who identified with the AIP voted for Hillary Clinton and Jill Stein equally with one not indicating a choice for president. Hence, the voters who selected AIP and a contradictory presidential candidate will be identified as liberal for the discontinuity analysis and respondents who selected AIP but did not select a presidential candidate will be excluded from the party-based discontinuity analysis. (Myers et al., 2016)

Presidential Election

19 respondents, or 79.17% of the included sample, voted in the last election. A plurality of our sample, 10 respondents, or 50% of those in the included sample who answered this question, voted for Hillary Clinton. Six respondents, 30% of our sample, voted for Donald Trump. One respondent, or 5%, each voted for Gary Johnson and Jill Stein. Two respondents, or 10%, indicated they voted for another candidate.

The percentage of our sample that voted is higher than the overall population as it is estimated that approximately 58% of eligible voters voted in the 2016 election. (Regan, 2016)

Social Issues

14 respondents, 58.33% of our sample, believe that same-sex marriage should not be legal. Seven respondents, 29.17% of our sample, believe that same-sex marriage should be legal. Three respondents, 12.5% of our sample, answered maybe.

15 respondents, 62.50% of our sample, believe that abortion should not be legal. Four respondents, 16.67% of our sample, believe that abortion should be legal.

Income Inequality/Social Justice

45% of our sample, 11 respondents, say the issue of income inequality is important to them (extremely or very important). Eight respondents, 33%, say it is moderately important. Three respondents, 12.5%, believe it is slightly important, Only two respondents, 8,33%, believe it to be not at all important.

Over 70% believe that action should be taken to resolve income inequality (37.5% definitely yes, 33.33% probably yes), 16.67%, four respondents believe maybe, and 12.5%, three respondents think that no action should be taken (1 probably not, 2 definitely not).

Church Politics

Over 60% (16 respondents, 3 very conservative, 13 moderately) estimated that the average political views of the leadership of their churches were at least moderately conservative. About 30%, seven respondents, estimated the political views of their church leadership to be moderate. Only one (4.17%) believed their church leadership was moderately liberal, no respondents indicated leadership was very liberal.

Only two respondents (8.33%) reported that they felt pressured to embrace their church's political views. 25% of respondents (6) indicated they might or might not feel pressured. The vast majority, over 60%, reported in equal proportions of 33.33% for each, that they probably or definitely did not feel pressured to embrace their church's political views.

Church and the Poor

Respondents on average rated fellow parishioners 7.86 on their inclination to help the poor, with two responses of "not sure," and they rated leadership an average of 8.74, with one response of "not sure."

Alternative Resolution Options and Role Ranking

Almost 80% (41.67% definitely yes, 37.5% probably yes) believe that the actions of believers can make a significant difference on the issue of income inequality. The remainder, 5 respondents or 20.83% stated that believers maybe could make a significant difference. None chose either definitely or probably not.

Likewise, over 83% (50% definitely, 33.33% probably) believe that greater levels of engagement believers in positions of leadership in business and application of Christian principles in society can cause a significant improvement in income inequality. Again, only 4 respondents (16.67%) believe that it maybe can create a significant improvement.

However, 54.55% of the sample ranked the government as having the largest role in resolving income inequality, then the majority selected citizens and business as having the second largest role, followed by a plurality of 45.45% selecting the church and believers.

This data indicates that there is significant interest in alternative resolution options for income inequality, however the majority of our sample does not find that they are sufficient to overtake the governmental role in such. The fact that this sample is largely Republican but believes that government has the primary role in resolving income inequality is intriguing.

Discontinuity Analysis

One immediately apparent discontinuity is that, though a majority of our sample identifies as Republican, only 30% voted for now President Donald Trump while 50% voted for Democratic former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. However, this may have more to do with the candidate than ideology as many high-profile Republicans defected from their party to vote for Clinton for reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper. (Blake, 2016)

Eight respondents had a leftward discontinuity, a positive number in our discontinuity analysis (meaning the respondent was more left) with their church. Of those eight respondents, four respondents had a complete discontinuity, meaning the church is conservative and the respondent is liberal. Two respondents had a rightward discontinuity, meaning their church was more liberal than they were. In both cases, they were conservative and the church was moderate. Given the focus of this study on the Christian Right, conservative church politics, and its effect on potentially more liberal younger believers, the complete leftward discontinuity (four respondents) will be focused on herein.

Complete leftward discontinuity between church and respondent (discontinuity of 2)

75% of respondents with this discontinuity ranked government as the actor with the most responsibility for resolving income inequality, higher than the overall 54.55% choosing government first. This is perhaps explained by the fact that, by nature of the discontinuity, this sample is more politically liberal than the overall sample.

Further, they were slightly less likely to vote in the last election, with 75% voting (vs. 79.17% overall) and less likely to be registered, with 75% registered (vs. 91.67% overall). This indicates a possibility of disenfranchisement but the larger apparent disparity in relation to the registration figures may be a function of sample size, given that there was only one respondent not registered and thus did not vote (hence 25% of a group of 4).

As far as faith is concerned, respondents with this discontinuity also engaged less in overall fellowship with average cumulative monthly attendance (church, Bible study, and Christian group) of 6.5 times versus the sample average of 11.04. They also were less likely to feel parishioners and leadership want to help the poor. They rated fellow parishioners an average of 7.75, versus sample average of 7.86, and church leadership an average of 6.75, versus sample average of 8.74. The disparity is much greater between the average and their view for church leadership and unlike the average they rated their church leadership lower than other members. This may indicate discontentment with church leadership and such is potentially further validated by reduced levels of fellowship

On average, they were split 50-50 on whether their church leadership was very or moderately conservative. However, 50% believe they probably feel pressured to accept the church's political views, which is very much higher than that 8.33% of the sample overall that feel they are pressured, in fact, all respondents in the study who felt pressured were in this segment of the sample. It is possible that only when there is a considerable rift in policy preferences that one would feel like their politics are being changed because it logically follows that if one already agrees they would not have to be coerced to change their views to conform. The remaining respondents were equally split (25%) between definitely not feeling pressured and might or might not.

75% of this group believes that the actions of believers probably can make a significant impact on the effects of income inequality, likewise 75% they believe engagement of believers and Christian principles in business and society probably (25%) or definitely (50%) can have a significant impact on the effects of income inequality.

Internal Issue Discontinuity

19 respondents had a discontinuity between social issues and income inequality, as calculated by taking the most rightward issue preference for either abortion or same-sex marriage and comparing it to importance of income inequality. Of those 19 respondents, only one had a rightward discontinuity of -0.5, resulting from a difference in importance for income inequality, a function of the binary analysis used in this study, which will be deemed irrelevant to

this analysis. Responses for abortion and same-sex marriage are binary and responses for income inequality are as follows - responses of very or extremely important are rated as -1, moderately important -0.5, slightly important as 0, and not at all important as 1. Here we will focus on discontinuities of 1.5 or greater.

Leftward discontinuity (1.5 or greater) for income inequality vs. social issues

The 15 respondents with this level and type of discontinuity were somewhat more likely to rank government higher on the role-ranking question, with 60% ranking government as having the top role in resolving income inequality versus 54.5% of the overall sample. This disproves the hypothesis in relation to adopting a private actor oriented approach.

Respondents with this discontinuity were slightly less likely to have voted, with 73.3% having voted in the last election versus the 79.17% of the overall sample. Given the relatively small variation, this finding is inconclusive as to political disenfranchisement.

Respondents with this discontinuity were more likely to engage in overall fellowship with an aggregate average monthly attendance of versus sample average of 12.2, which directly contradicts the hypothesis regarding disenfranchisement from fellowship. It could be argued that this proves that engagement in fellowship results in adopting a what would be argued is the most Biblical view on social issues and social justice.

73% of these respondents believed (probably yes or definitely yes) that the actions of believers could make a significant difference in income inequality, which is slightly less than the overall sample by approximately 6%. This again disproves the increased desire for alternative options that was hypothesized to be present in this group, since the desire is close to that of the overall group and a small bit less. However, 86% probably or definitely believe that engagement of believers in business and application of Christian principles can affect income inequality effects, which is slightly higher than the overall sample.

Conclusion

The survey results indicate that for this sample, discontinuity between church political views and personal political views nor discontinuity between social and income inequality issues results in significant electoral disenfranchisement as it relates to presidential voting for already registered voters, though as to church political views and voter registration the results are inconclusive. Further, overall the vast majority of respondents indicated that they did not feel pressured to embrace their church's political views nor did the majority have significant. However, complete discontinuity between church and individual political ideologies, which is present in approximately 16% of the sample, is correlated with lower engagement in Christian fellowship, a perception that church leaders do not care as much for the poor, and for a plurality, a feeling of being pressured to accept church political views. This indicates a small but significant number of considerably disaffected believers who churches may wish to re-engage by better addressing their concern for social justice issues like income inequality, putting forth more effort to create service opportunities designed to help the poor, or other means beyond the scope of this study.

On income inequality, the vast majority of respondents found the issue to be at least moderately important and expressed an interest in resolving the issue. They felt government plays the biggest role in its resolution, but the results indicate broad support for private sector- and faith- based approaches to income inequality amongst young evangelicals, including (though to a lesser extent) those with political discontinuities. Hence, this approach is worthy of further investigation so interested ministries and political leaders with a Christian emphasis may be able to incorporate such approaches into discussion and practice.

For the overall conceptualization of young evangelicals' political preferences, the study reflects high voter participation, a majority holding what may be a more liberal position on the issue of income inequality, indicating some of the liberal shifts previous authors have identified, a significant discontinuity between issue preferences in social issues and income inequality, affirming discontinuities posited by others and in the hypothesis herein, and a possible shift in voting behavior that does not comport with partisan preferences. For alternative resolution options, there was a mixed bag of the acceptance of the typical solution to income inequality

(that being government) and a belief that faith-led alternatives emphasizing actions of believers and implementation of Christian principles in areas of influence in society can make a significant difference,

This study is limited by its sample size, scope, and nature of research as an undergraduate-led, faculty supervised single semester project. The sample was also recruited on a university campus, participants self-selected, with flyers regularly posted in the building housing the political science department, leading to possible demographic effects. As such, more comprehensive studies are necessary to better understand the political preferences of young evangelicals and how to best approach this demographic both in politics and in ministry.

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey questions

Appendix B: Overall survey results report (PDF)

Appendix C: Anonymized responses and discontinuity analyses (Excel sheet)

Appendix D: Raw data without discontinuity analysis

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