

How Would Jesus Vote:

Contemporary Christian Ie4f4(s)-10(u)-19(e)-5(s)-10()-19Dwemonstrated trou oter udes

demonstrated their continued support

there is a general pattern across them. A prominent feature of voter guides is their endeavor to encourage their readerships to vote. They do this by providing information on how to register to vote, dates when voting takes place, and encouraging the reader to sign up to participate. Now that these voter guides have given the information necessary to vote, they then persuade the reader

organizations can advertise or distribute these voter guides. These are the voter guides examined in this essay. Although there are a variety of political organizations with voter guides, all of the groups this essay examines include in their mission the spreading of biblical or Christian values in America. The specific types of Christians that promulgate these voter guides primarily include white, Protestant Christians, however, they aspire to reach all types of Christians. The prominent Christian political groups that give people voter guides and information for how they should vote that this essay examines include: Biblical Voter, Christian Coalition of America, iVoterGuide, Vision America and MyFaithVotes. According to the MyFaithVotes Voter Guide, these voter guides are important because,

for selecting leaders. ⁷ In a similar vein, the Biblical Voter Guide claims that it is -

Partisan Review of Six Critical Issues Key to Faith-B

⁸ These voter guides are not

only used by the organizations previously stated. Many prominent Christian organizations are able to point their followers to these voter guides for information on how they should vote. For instance, the Concerned Women for America, a Christian organization of women, as well as the American Family Association, both with a large following, direct their people to the iVoterGuide for information on voting.

The format of all the Christian voter guides is similar: all state an issue and then explain the candidates , or major political parties , position on the issue. Since they give the

wording of the guide or the information given make evident that one side is clearly favored.

What is implicit in the guides becomes explicit when one turns to the main websites of the organizations that distribute the guides, where one can clearly see which side of the issue these Christian political organizations advocate for.

This topic of Christian political interests is important as it helps explain a relatively new feature of our political system. Over the past forty years, the Republican Party has come to be associated with advancing the religious interests of Christians in America. The alliance between the Republican Party and Christian organizations is mutually beneficial and allows both bodies to preserve political power. The United States political system today, specifically post-2016, seems to be much different than what the founders envisioned for the structure of American politics. We are extremely partisan today. Without doubt, one of the factors that contributes to the strict partisan lines between Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, right-wing and left-wing, involves what

America to exercise their religion without limitation by the government), guns, and the environment. There are unique issues in some voter guides that are not addressed in this essay. I address the most common issues across all voter guides because this essay seeks to understand which issues are the most important to all of these organizations and are then relayed to their followers. This essay will examine each of the issues to gain a greater understanding of why these issues are seen as central to spreading biblical and Christian values in America today. After examining the issues mentioned in the voter guides, the paper asks why evangelical Christians emphasize these political issues over others and ultimately makes the argument that the issues mentioned allow Christians to harness political power through alignment with the Republican Party as well as a push back to the social revolution in America that caused evangelicals to lose their higher status.

Abortion On Demand

All f

Another issue mentioned in this one-

Assuming that the rationale for defunding Planned Parenthood is because of

show both sides, there is a clear violation of unbiased, factual information that it is supposed to share.

iV and then proceeds to outline the two different stances of the political parties. The wording of the issue itself, *right to life*, shows where this organization stands. Although it gives both perspectives of the political parties, this has the effect of favoring right to l while Democrats favor the ability to have an abortion.

The Christian Coalition voter guide presents two issues related to abortion:

video, the pastor claims that Psalm 1:

¹¹ Pointing to G

role in creating life as stated in the Bible, the pastor supports his position that a life should not be ended through abortion. In the end, the presenter concludes

vote pro- ¹² Just like the voter guides, this video hopes to educate people on the issue of

abortion and give them information

In the MyFaithVotes voter guide mentions two issues: .

of the Democrats is characterized as being

largest corporations must pay their fair share of taxes. , on the other hand,

the establishment of a pro-

lower taxes, one issue of _____, called _____,

the Bible teaches individual work ethic and self-support for our families when we are able, and

place an incredible burden on our children and grandchildren and limit their access to the

17

it still

claims a moral argument in favor of lower taxes.

From the wording of the issues and the information presented on the websites of the voter guide organizations, it is evident that they believe that the issue of taxes is important to their mission of spreading biblical values. Similar to the issue of abortion, the organizations employ different methods for explaining or persuading others why they take their stance on lower taxes. Some provide no explanation, the Christian Coalition claims a moral justification, and others refer to the Bible to show that private property, apart from government intrusion, is seen as important. As Congress has the power to control the federal budget, it makes sense that the issue of taxes is included in voter guides. If they are able to persuade people to vote for political candidates who believe in lowering taxes, then it is possible these elected officials will advance their interest to lower taxes and reduce government intrusion.

Repealing Obamacare

The issue of healthcare was also mentioned in all five of the voter guides. The issue of healthcare, which is closely related to taxes and abortion, focused on the support or opposition to the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) passed under the Obama Administration in 2010. As with the other two issues previously mentioned, the Christian political organizations mentioned all have a similar policy stance that this act should be repealed.

According to

dishonestly named Affordable Care Act of 2010: Obamacare." Although they do not take an explicit stance on who should provide healthcare or how, the reference to repeal and the use of reflects a similar pattern as with the other issues presented in the MyFaithVotes voter guide: they align with the position of the Republican party.

Throughout the guides, the issue of healthcare seems closely tied to both the issue of taxes and the issue of abortion. As described above, many of these organizations want to repeal Obamacare so they have lower taxes and so they are not required to pay for healthcare that provides abortion. By presenting the issue of healthcare in this way, the Christian political organizations are hoping to elect leaders that will repeal the Affordable Care Act and its , which closely aligns with the Republican position.

Defending "Traditional" Marriage

The issue of marriage was brought up in four of the voter guides examined, one time fewer than the previous issues examined. Many of the voter guides framed the issue as marriage, means that they opposed the legalization of same-sex marriage that was made federal law in the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v Hodges* (2015). The position of these political organizations shared the same view and endorsed the -sex couples.

The MyFaithVotes website points to the command in Ephesians 5:25, _____ church and gave Himself for her, as evidence for why one should defend traditional marriage.²¹ Once again, MyFaithVotes provides biblical quotes to support its position.

The Biblical Voter Guide similarly echoes the two stances on marriage that MyFaithVotes shared regarding the Democratic and Republican views on the legalization of same-sex marriage. They claim Republicans understand _____, on the other hand, support the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Vision America titles _____ clarifies in the subtext that _____ (which, the guide makes clear, Donald Trump supports and Joe Biden opposes)

Protected M

uses dramatic

language to describe the Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage:

lived there previously and the Jews who claim it as their homeland, has led to continued conflict. For all of the Christian organizations, the military support of Israel by the U.S. is important in order to fight against people who wish to see its control disappear from the Jewish people. By including the issue of Israel in their voter guides, they hope to elect politicians who will continue to advocate for the security of Israel, either through military support or through a strong allied relationship. There is a variety of possible explanations for why Christians strongly support the security of Israel, including the idea that Israel is a biblical nation and that the state of Israel is opposed by some Islamic countries in the Middle East. I think both of these explanations have some merit. The reason for Christian support of Israel seems to be more of representation of interests rather than direct assault. Israel, which is a Jewish state, is supported by America, a predominantly Christian state. Christians support Israel so that the interests of Jews and Christians living and connected to state of Israel win over the interests of Muslims.

In the MyFaithVotes voter guide, Democrats are depicted as wanting a two-state solution

Biblical Voter Guide, both the Democrats and Republicans express support for Isra

which both Joe Biden and Donald Trump support. All three voter guides allude to the fact that both Democrats and Republicans support the security of Israel. In America, support for the security of Israel is not different across party lines. America has made its policy of support for Israel clear since its beginning. Even though the issue is not clearly distinct when voting across party lines, its inclusion in the voter guides can be explained because Christian po

Christians hope to keep the security of Israel, despite pushback, not from Democrats but from

In the Biblical Voter Guide, the issue is stated as

The Christian Coalition v

Although the wording is

of gun control and the Second Amendment as a central issue for their Christian organizations.

All three oppose gun control legislation and support the Second Amendment.

The Biblical Voter Guide shares

nd

respect

(NRA) and the Republican Party. In their party platform, Republicans state that -
 conceived laws that would restrict magazine capacity or ban the sale of the most popular and
 common modern rifle.³⁶ upholding of the Second Amendment
 could be explained as reflecting an alignment with Republican political positions rather than as
 having a foundation in Christian values. It could also be tied to a Christian critique, similar to
 what we observed related to taxes, that the federal government overreaches its own power by
 taking away the freedom and independence of American citizens to bear arms.

Energy and Climate Change

Issues relating to the environment were mentioned three times, specifically related to
 U.S. policy on regulations related to fossil fuels and climate change. Interestingly, the stance that
 was taken endorsed an independent, economically beneficial method to deal with issues related
 to the environment.

d Use of U.S.

of its six critical issues. The Republican candidate in the following
 way:

agreement Supports the enactment of policies to increase domestic energy production in order

likewise ate change is an

that

would help one discern which side should be endorsed. However, from all the previous issues

³⁸ The Christian Coalition makes it clear that the issue of energy is not an environmental problem, rather it is a matter of national security. Instead of framing energy issues

ce to God being in control of the world, the emphasis on energy independence and economically beneficial methods stressed by these Christian organizations was not argued with reference to biblical passages. The issue seems similar to the issue of guns, where the correct policy stance has more to do with other politit

their associated candidates; through implicit wording or explicit support, the guides consistently encourage voters to vote for Republicans. The last hypothesis is that the inclusion of these issues in the voter guides reflects a reaction to the progressive cultural change that has taken place in society over the last century. We see evidence for this pushback against the direction of society support for overturning legislation and court decisions that have taken place

important to the conservative Christian community, I will conclude with implications of these highlighted issues on society today and in the future.

Emphasis on the Word of God

The most touted reason for why these Christian political organizations champion their specific issues is that these are concerns about which God Himself has a position on. According to these organizations, the stances one should take on these issues come directly from the word through the evidence provided for where they stand on certain policy positions. For example, the main page of iVoterGuide On the Million Voices website, which is the voter advocacy group of Vision America, key issues are , ing to its audience that the issues advertised are rooted in a correct theological interpretation. There is a clear attempt to convey to Christians that by adhering to the voter guide recommendations, they are advancing biblical principles in the world.

Biblical quotations are used often to provide evidence for why a certain issue is important and where God stands on that issue. In iVoterGuide, beneath each issue and the political stances

provides direct quotes or summaries of biblical passages and then analyzes them to advocate for a certain stance. On MyFaithVotes website, there are numerous videos posted to teach people what the Bible says about certain issues advocated for in their voter guides. These examples from the voter guide organizations demonstrate an attempt to prove that God is on their side and this is the reason they are advocating for the issues that they do.

It is important to highlight that there are many American Christians who understand themselves as following the word of God but do not advocate for these particular issues as central to their understanding of Christianity

of the Christian Left, who may not understand how Christians could come to conclude that these are the most critical issues for Christians or who may not see them as being central concerns of the Bible. Another group of people who could question the Christian values motivating the issues presented on the voter guides would be self-critical evangelicals, meaning those who may agree with the issues presented and the policy stances advocated by the Christian political organizations, but still question the motives of these organizations making the specific issues prominent in Christian politics. One such person is Michael Gerson, an evangelical Christian and former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, who claims that the leaders of the Religious

authors over multiple centuries and it often contains passages that could be used to directly

⁴² The serious injury in question is referencing the mother. The death of the fetus only results in a fine, implying that it is property, not rights-bearing.

Political Alignment and Power

Another way that one could understand the significance placed on these issues is through political alignment and power by grouping conservative Christians with the Republican party to create a stronger electorate and enhance the political power of both groups. Michael Gerson argues that the Republican party has been defending, and exploiting, them. The voter guides of religious conservatives have often been suspiciously similar to the political priorities of movement conservatism.⁴⁴ Gerson explains the clear political alignment with the Republican party in Christian voter guides is motivated by a desire to support its defenders (Republicans) and defend against its exploiters (Democrats). We see evidence of this political alignment clearly in the voter guides. Voter guides themselves are political tools, created by Christians, to influence their followers to vote a certain way. It was evident within the voter guides that the Republican side of an issue, either implicitly or explicitly, happened to match exactly what the Christian political organizations were advocating for.

This strong allegiance between Republicans and conservative Christians was not always present. The Moral Majority, founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979, advocated for socially conservative issues in response to what he saw as the moral deterioration of America evident in issues including the legalization of abortion, gay rights, and the civil rights movement.⁴⁵ The founding of this group marked the first time conservative Christians advocated strongly and collectively for issues in the political system. The coalition of Christians acting collaboratively in the political sphere was seen as a success as it helped elect Ronald Reagan in 1980. The election

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵

of Reagan represented the moment where evangelicals became actively involved in Republican politics. Reagan was able to receive two-thirds of the evangelical white vote.⁴⁶

election between the Republican party candidate and the Democratic party candidate, conservative Christians overwhelmingly voted for the Republican, Donald Trump. This mutual

lower taxes and gun control with very few, or far-fetched, biblical references to prove that God was on their side.

Michael Gerson claims that negative consequences occurred when evangelical Christians aligned with the Republican party. He argues, after the election of Donald Trump, that, for a

certain Christians (and many Trump supporters), there is a widespread narrative that the nation is in moral decline. The broad contours of this narrative go like this: in early America, Christians thrived in a society that tolerated religious freedom and established a legal system that protected their interests. Over time, the status of Christians changed. Michael Gerson points to the increase of biblical criticism, the theory of evolution, industrialization, and immigration as causes that contributed to a fundamentalist movement espousing a return to foundational and conservative values. Those tendencies crystalized in 1925, a pivotal moment in the eyes of Christians in America. That year, a court case colloquially known as the Scopes Monkey Trial deemed the teaching of evolution illegal in Tennessee. Despite the fact that the teacher of evolution, who broke Tennessee law, lost the case, the case was a catalyst for the nation. Those who opposed evolution lost the respect of broader American society. Michael Gerson clai activism and

⁵⁵ As a result, fundamentalists created their own subculture of conservative talk shows and religious schools to create a community of like-minded people.

Not only did some conservative Christians not readily adapt to new scientific understanding and secularization, but the culture around them also kept changing. As a whole, the last fifty years has marked an increasingly tolerant culture regarding ues. This has been perpetuated by increasing secularity among people and universities, marked by a decrease in church attendance and a decrease in theological teaching, and the portrayal of acceptance of socially liberal views in the media. The courts in America also judged cases in a way that went against the values of conservative Christians. In 1963, the Supreme Court decided

nation to be in:

no to God. Raise your hand if you were born after 1962. I feel sorry for you, the country I grew

2, we threw prayer out of public schools. In 1973, we

⁵⁹ The time before 1962 is seen as better for Christians

dominionists, Michele Goldberg writes

people take what

⁶² This point is very evident when we see which issues the political organizations highlight and which issues they do not. Americans have long adapted their beliefs to fit their idea of what kind of a world they want to live in. For example, slaveholders, as well as abolitionists in America, pointed to the Bible to justify the position that they wanted to be legalized related to slavery. Conservative Christians in America seem to have adapted their beliefs, just like liberal Christians, to advocate for the kind of world they want to live in.

From examining the voter guides and analyzing possible reasons for why we see these issues as central to the conservative Christian organizations chosen, it is evident that the history and context in which these issues and groups evolved had an important impact on creating the issues that we observe now. This brief historical examination illuminates that there are complicated reasons that these issues are at the forefront of the Christian political discussion. These voter guides also demonstrate the fact that groups with ample support and prominent voices in society are able to gain power in advancing the interests that they want as is the story with Trump and the evangelical community. It is possible that by learning about why these issues matter to conservative Christians, we can attempt to find common ground on caring about people in need and lessen the cultural pushback the groups feel from elites and liberals in order to end the strong cultural and political divide in America demonstrated through these voter guides.

⁶² Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, 9.

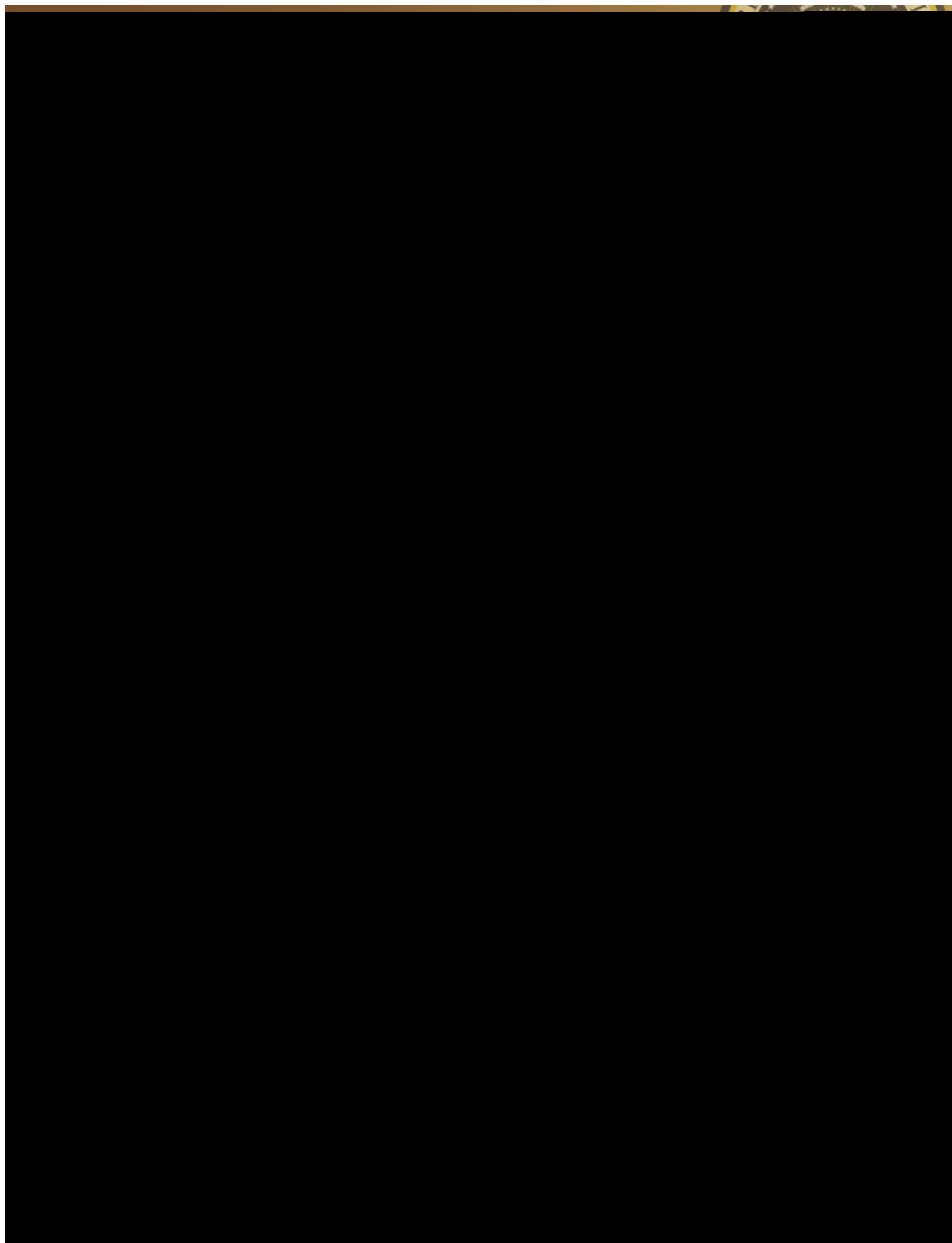
II.



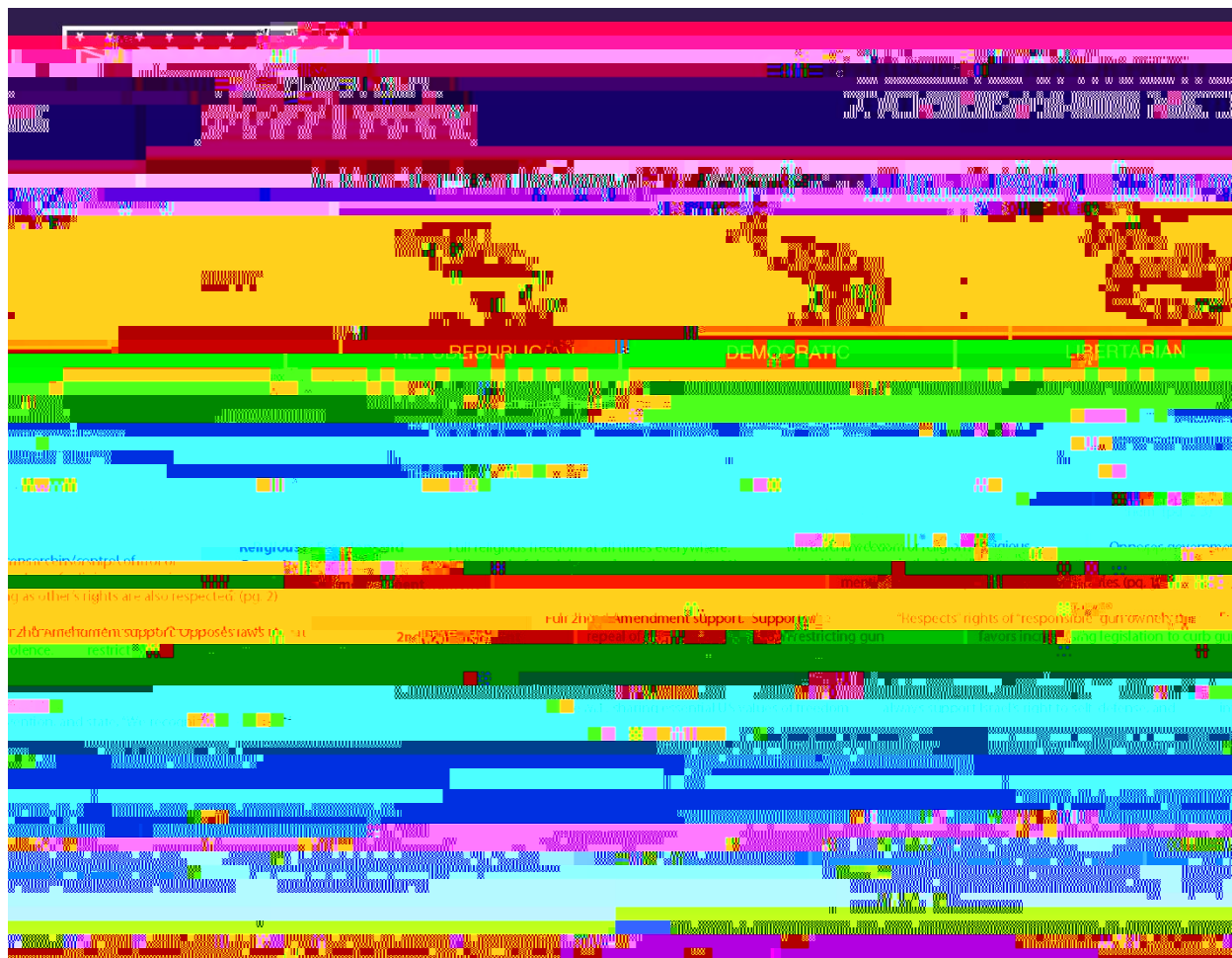
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