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Diverse Religious Coalitions and Legislator Voting

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Abstract

Diverse religious coalitions have been found to be influential in shaping certain foreign policy legislation, but little research has examined the effect of religious coalitions on contemporary domestic legislation. This paper examines the extent to which a diverse religious coalition in Minnesota representing Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Muslims, is more likely to have sway over legislators when they are united than when they are divided. Most members of the legislature claim a religious affiliation that is a part of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition. This paper explores this question by examining twelve legislative votes between 2011 and 2013, including seven where a religious coalition takes a unified position and five where religious groups in the state are divided.

Introduction

One of the ways scholars have attempted to measure the influence of religion on public life is by examining whether a legislator's self-identified religious affiliation has any bearing on voting patterns for key issues. While an affiliation captures only part of the potential influence of religion on legislators, a number of studies have shown it to be significant (Guth; Witt and Moncrief; Yamane and Oldmixon). These studies suggest that a legislator with a particular affiliation is more likely to vote a certain way on a bill than those without such an affiliation, but such studies often examine issues that divide the religious community. For example, differences related to abortion legislation among Catholic, Jewish, and Mainline Protestant legislators may be evident in voting patterns because legislators may be influenced, in part, by differing teachings and positions within their religious traditions.

For example, Catholic legislators may be more likely to vote in accordance with the pro-life position of the Roman Catholic Church and Mainline Protestant legislators may be more likely to vote pro-choice, in keeping with the pro-choice positions of their religious traditions (D'Antonio, Tuch, and Baker; Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph).

There is no research that examines the effect of religious affiliation when a religious coalition of diverse traditions actively lobbies with a unified position. This absence of research is due in part because such coalitions are not common. Fowler, Hertzke, Olson and Den Dulk say it is "rare" when religious groups come together to advocate for public policy change but when they do, they can have a ". . . meaningful impact on public policy" which is ". . . usually the result of creative problem-solving and coalition-building" (153). Specifically, they say there has been significant religious influence on foreign policy issues like debt relief for poor countries, world hunger, and AIDS in Africa. Additionally, others have demonstrated that religious coalitions have been very influential in shaping legislation addressing foreign policy concerns such as protecting religious freedom abroad, genocide in the Sudan, human trafficking, and rights abuses in North Korea (Hertzke; Mitchell). There are also historical examples of the effectiveness of religious groups when acting in coalition on issues like prohibition and civil rights.

It seems possible that when religious advocacy groups are united their combined pressure and moral authority may have more effect on legislator voting. But, does this apply to contemporary domestic policies as well? Does it apply only to certain types of issues? How broad does the coalition have to be? This paper begins to explore these questions by studying the effect of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) on legislator voting in Minnesota. The JRLC was the first long-term statewide interfaith advocacy group in the United States (Knutson: 4), and unlike many temporary or single-issue religious coalitions, it is permanent and addresses a broad range of issues.

Literature Review and Hypothesis

Religious affiliation may influence legislator voting for multiple reasons, but we need to be clear about what aspect of religion is captured by denominational measures. As others have pointed out, religious affiliations of legislators can be nominal and do not necessarily tell us about actual religious commitment, religious practices, spirituality, or efforts to connect faith to politics. While not perfect, measures may be useful if we are interested in things like "the effect of beliefs or social group identification" (Oldmixon: 501).

Most studies that examine various influences on legislator voting identify party, constituency, and ideology as the primary influences (Oldmixon). However, a number of studies do show the significance of religious affiliation on legislator voting. For example, Guth and Kellstedt have looked at social, economic, and foreign policy issues and found that while party affiliation is the strongest influence on voting behavior, the religious affiliation and religious commitment of legislators does have a significant impact. They note, "[r]eligiously active Evangelicals, Mainliners, and Catholics are, on balance, more conservative on a wide range of issues than their inactive co-religionists and other religious groups" (Guth and Kellstedt: 231). In a more recent study across policy domains Guth found that "even when party membership and district partisanship are controlled, some member affiliations and theological traditionalism still have a direct impact on members'

voting . . . Indeed, for the three largest Christian traditions – Evangelical and Mainline Protestants and white Catholics – it is now this facet of religion that shapes member choices” (21).

This is consistent with other studies of roll call voting on specific issues that have shown the importance of affiliation, specifically on issues like gay rights and abortion (Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph; Haider-Markel; Schechter). For example, Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph found that on the issue of abortion, after controlling for party, ethnicity, and gender, “religion does affect roll call voting . . .” with Mormons, Catholics, and Evangelicals more likely to vote pro-life and Jews and Black Protestants more likely to vote pro-choice (689). They state that “. . . with the exception of Black Protestants, religious groups in Congress follow their churches’ teachings” (692). Similarly, a study of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) church’s influence in Idaho found: “The LDS presence in Idaho state politics is strongly felt on those few occasions when the church takes a definitive position on public policy” (Witt and Moncrief: 147). On the other hand, a study of LDS legislators suggested that religious leaders have very little influence over members of Congress, saying, “. . . beyond formal religious sanctions there is little religious leaders have to induce support from their members who are elected officials” (Cann: 112). Other studies also show voting patterns that reveal little consistency with church teaching on certain issues. For example, Oldmixon and Hudson report that, apart from abortion, Catholic Republican legislators diverge from Catholic positions in their voting on a number of issues.

While these findings are mixed, none of these studies address domestic policy situations where coalitions of diverse religious groups are exerting pressure on legislators. Such action is not common, but when it does happen, there is reason to think that the moral authority behind a religious coalition is more effective than that of religious groups that are divided. This paper tests the hypothesis that when organized religious lobbies work in coalitions, legislators are more likely to cast votes consistent with the position of the lobby; when religious lobbies do not work in coalitions and are divided on issues, they may be perceived as having less combined moral authority and, therefore, are less likely to influence legislator voting.

There are several reasons to expect empirical support for this hypothesis. First, legislators who are interested in ensuring that their faith informs their legislative votes are likely to have more confidence that it accurately does so when religious groups are united. For example, a legislator might more readily support the position that torture is immoral if a coalition of religious institutions agree with this position than if religions are divided on it. When religious lobbies seek to influence legislation, typically they are not advancing their own self-interest, but are offering a moral perspective on public policy (Fowler et al.: 152). A collective effort to do so is more powerful.

Second, politicians might feel more pressure from religious lobbyists because of the perceived moral authority of a coalition of diverse religious interests. Some politicians in Minnesota are evidently conscious of this moral authority. The governor of Minnesota said it was “humbling to be surrounded by so much moral authority” when speaking before JRLC (Knutson: 81).

Third, relative consensus among major religious institutions on a public policy issue means that a possible majority of constituents could be mobilized toward that consensus. Wald writes that “[c]hurches are fantastic contexts for mobilization because they combine culture, leadership, money, facilities, infrastructure, an audience, and a communication network.” Additionally, “[r]eligious organizations are often a part of broad networks of members and sympathizers that can be marshaled to champion their cause” and can affect attitudes among the public (124). In fact, religious institutions have taken advantage of these opportunities and resources, have done a variety of things to influence public policy, and have mobilized voters on a wide variety of issue. They often distribute voter guides to public policy, write newsletters, and urge members to pursue particular political actions. Research shows it is common for clergy to send political messages and “that these messages are well received by parishioners . . .” with clergy and other religious activists “. . . play[ing] a major role in framing political discourse and supporting political engagement” (Wald: 135, 126).

A recent detailed study of JRLC in Minnesota revealed abundant evidence of the strategies it uses. JRLC encourages people to participate in demonstrations and rallies, makes use of the media, and details six ways to contact legislators (Knutson: 84). Additionally, the group organizes an annual “Day on the Hill” event, which drew over 850 people in 2011.

Knutson claims “JRLC demonstrates that religious coalitions can be effective participants in the political process at the state level, particularly on issues not always considered ‘religious,’ such as taxes, budgets, and social services” (2). In making the case for JRLC’s influence on legislators, she states, “[l]eaders of various religious groups have a natural connection to legislators who identify as part of the religious group. This does not necessarily translate to influence, but it does help group leaders gain access, and it may carry weight among some legislators. Religious groups that join together in coalition multiply that access” (80). As evidence, she points to two situations where she argues JRLC had significant influence over legislation. The first was on the tax fairness index in 1989-1990 when “. . . 112 of the 201 members of the Minnesota legislature self-identified with a religious tradition represented by the JRLC.” The second was a 2011 debate over budget cuts when “. . . 113 members of the legislature self-identified with a religious tradition represented by the JRLC” (Knutson: 80).

Methodology

The data for this study come from twelve votes in the 87th and 88th Minnesota legislative sessions on which religious lobbies tried to influence the outcome. The 87th legislative session took place in 2011-2012. Both houses of the legislature were controlled by the Republican Party. The governor, Mark Dayton, represented the Democrat-Farmer-Labor (DFL) party. Dayton remained the governor in the 88th legislative session, but both houses switched to DFL control.

Voting data was collected from the Minnesota *Journal of the House* and the Minnesota *Journal of the Senate*. Data for gender, education, age, party, and religious affiliation of legislators were obtained from the Minnesota Legislative Reference Library. Religious affiliation not reported by these sources was augmented by an Internet search to collect additional religious affiliation data for members of the legislature. Member affiliations were categorized by the religious traditions commonly used in the literature.

Religious Coalition Votes

The religious coalition in Minnesota is represented by JRLC. Its purpose is to lobby the Minnesota legislature on issues of social justice, to conduct research on social issues, and to mobilize grassroots support for JRLC initiatives. JRLC claims to be the first interfaith public-interest lobby group in the United States. It is sponsored by the Minnesota Catholic Conference, the Minnesota Council of Churches, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, and the Islamic Center of Minnesota, allowing them to claim that they represent about 80% of Minnesotans who acknowledge a religious identity. JRLC has been active on a wide range of issues, including “welfare reform, housing, health care, human rights, criminal justice, environmental stewardship, tax policy, ethics in government, gambling, economic justice, bias crimes, firearms regulation, and other policy areas” (JRLC n.d.). The board of each sponsoring organization approves all Coalition position statements. According to Knutson, this process gives “status and influence” to JRLC leaders when they interact with legislators (80). JRLC does not have a significant Evangelical Christian membership.

Table 1 shows the proportional size of groups represented by JRLC. Minnesota has a higher proportion of Catholics and Mainline Protestants, and fewer Evangelicals, than the U.S. population as a whole. This breakdown is similar in the legislature, although there is a significantly smaller proportion of Evangelicals in the legislature than in the state population.

Table 1. Minnesota Religious Affiliation in Comparison (Pew Forum)

Religious Tradition	Minnesota	National	MN legislature 87 th session	MN legislature 88 th session
Evangelical	21%	26%	14.1	12.9
Mainline Protestant	32	18	29.6	29.4
Black Protestant	1	7	0 [†]	
Catholic	28	24	34.0	23.4
Jewish	1	2	4.4	5.0

[†] There were four black legislators in the 87th session: one was Roman Catholic and three did not report any religious affiliation.

JRLC is a very active lobbying force in Minnesota politics. They ranked 90th in lobbying expenditures in 2012, out of almost 1000 groups that spent money lobbying the Minnesota legislature. Their annual budget in 2011 was \$329,000, of which \$140,000 went directly to lobbying (Minnesota Campaign and Finance Disclosure Board). In addition to lobbying, they publish policy papers, participate in organizing coalitions, provide training, community forums, issue briefings throughout the state, produce opinion pieces and commentary in the press, and are active in social media. They attempt to mobilize constituents through lobby visits, vigils, rallies, letters and emails, and meetings with policy makers. JRLC claims to have had direct influence over tax reform, healthcare, and budget legislation. There were seven votes in the 87th and 88th legislative sessions on issues for which JRLC developed public policy positions and worked for a specific outcome.

Budget Cuts

JRLC lobbied on two legislative votes in the 87th and 88th legislative sessions. In the 87th session they lobbied against a health and human services budget bill (SF760) that would have resulted in large cuts and reduced services for the disabled, the poor, and the elderly. In the 88th session, they supported and lobbied in favor of many of the features of HF1233, the Health and Human Services budget bill, which included measures to increase access to healthcare, provide for more affordable housing, and a range of what JRLC called “enhancements” to the Minnesota Family Investment Program. With the DFL in control, the bill passed 73-61 in the House and 39-28 in the Senate and was signed by the governor (JRLC 2013).

Taxation

JRLC has long been an advocate for a more progressive tax system, and has actively lobbied for higher taxes on the wealthy (JRLC 1990). There were two votes on taxation. First, in the 87th session a bill that would have increased taxes on the wealthy was voted down 70-63 in the House (HF1261). The issue came up again in the 88th legislative session when a bill raising taxes for wealthier Minnesotans (HF677) passed 69-65 in the House and 36-30 in the Senate and was signed into law by the governor.

Minimum Wage

JRLC has advocated for an increase in the minimum wage (JRLC 2005). A house bill in the 88th session (HF92) would have raised the minimum wage from \$6.15/hour to \$9.50 and tied it to the inflation rate. It passed 68-62. The Senate version of the bill would have raised the minimum wage fifty cents above the federal minimum wage, but was not tied to inflation. It passed 39-28. However, the two houses could not reconcile the differences in the legislation; the legislation was not sent to the governor to be signed into law.

Healthcare

JRLC has long been an advocate for healthcare reform. The legislature passed a bill in the 88th session creating a health exchange in accordance with the federal healthcare law. The bill, HF5, passed 72-61 in the House and 39-28 in the Senate. It was praised by JRLC as a measure that would increase access to healthcare (JRLC 2013).

Carbon Emissions

Another bill of significance to the religious community was repealing a cap on carbon emissions (SF 86). It passed in the House 75-54 and in the Senate 44-22, but was vetoed by the governor. Although JRLC did not take a position on this legislation, repealing the cap is at odds with JRLC’s principles on ecology and energy conservation (JRLC 1997).

Votes on Which Religious Groups were Divided

There were five votes that came up in the 87th and 88th legislative sessions on which religious groups were divided. Reflecting the lack of consensus, JRLC did not take positions on these votes. Other religious groups did.

Same Sex Marriage

A bill in the 87th session proposing a constitutional ban on same sex marriage (SF1308) passed 70-62 in the House and 38-27 in the Senate. Because of the law in Minnesota, the governor could not veto it; it went before voters in referendum, but did not pass. The bill was supported by the Minnesota Catholic Conference. JRLC and the Minnesota Council of Churches did not take a position on this legislation. The Minnesota Jewish Community Relations Council opposed the marriage amendment, as did many clergy from other denominations (Minnesotans United). However, there were also organized religious groups supporting the amendment (Minnesota for Marriage). On another occasion in the 88th legislative session, a bill legalizing gay marriage was passed by both houses and signed into law by the governor. This bill, HF1054, passed 75-59 in the House and 37-30 in the Senate.

Abortion

There were two bills related to abortion that came up for a vote in both houses in the 87th session. One bill proposed banning state funding of abortion (HF201), which passed 84-48 in the House and 40-26 in the Senate, but was vetoed by the governor. The other bill would have banned abortions after 20 weeks (HF936). It passed the House 84-48 and 41-20 in the Senate, but was also vetoed by the governor. JRLC did not take a position on these bills because Mainline Protestant groups and Jewish groups favor abortion rights. However, the Catholic religious leadership supported these bills.

Voter Identification

Legislation requiring voter identification at elections (SF509) was opposed by the Jewish Community Relations Council and the Minnesota Council of Churches, representing Mainline Protestants, but the Minnesota Catholic Conference chose not to take a position, preventing JRLC from taking a position. It passed 74-58 in the House and 37-25 in the Senate, but was vetoed by the governor.

All twelve legislative votes were coded as dummy variables with 1 signifying a yes vote, and 0 a no vote. Dummy variables were also set up for gender with 1 representing male legislators and 0 representing female. Party affiliation was coded with a 1 representing Republican legislators and a 0 representing the DFL members. Member age was calculated by taking the year 2013 and subtracting the year of birth. Education was coded with a series of dummy variables for degrees at the elementary, secondary, community college, college, and graduate school levels. Dummy variables were set up for religious affiliations, with separate variables for Evangelical, Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Jewish affiliations. Dummy variables were also set up for those legislators who self-identified as Protestant or Christian and those who had no reported religious affiliation. A 1 represents the presence of the affiliation and a 0 the absence of it.

Bivariate correlations were run for an initial analysis of the data. Then, an initial binary logistic regression was then run with all variables but resulted in substantial multi-collinearity. In response, the Protestant, Christian, and “not reported” variables were removed and graduate school education was retained as the only education variable. Although political party is clearly the most significant explanatory variable by far, it was removed because of

Table 2. Correlations for 87th Minnesota Legislative Session

		Repeal emissions cap on power plants	Ban abortion after 20 weeks	Ban same sex marriage	Ban State Funding of abortions	Cuts to programs affecting the needy	Requiring voter I.D.	Raising taxes on wealthy
Political Party	Pearson Cor.	.877**	.728**	.928**	.825**	.950**	.990**	-.970**
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Evangelical	Pearson Cor.	.241**	.218**	.262**	.224**	.248**	.229**	-.232**
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Roman Catholic	Pearson Cor.	-.036	.053	-.006	.053	-.044	-.040	.020
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Mainline Protestant	Pearson Cor.	-.034	.012	-.073	-.039	-.039	-.060	.125
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Jewish	Pearson Cor.	-.230**	-.311**	-.227**	-.282**	-.233**	-.232**	.222**
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Christian	Pearson Cor.	.126	.075	.182*	.110	.101	.178*	-.068
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Protestant	Pearson Cor.	.041	.014	.009	.035	.071	.061	.021
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Religion not reported	Pearson Cor.	-.047	-.122	-.053	-.088	-.039	-.014	-.067
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Gender	Pearson Cor.	.274**	.196**	.133	.180*	.174*	.156*	-.197*
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Age	Pearson Cor.	-.104	-.142*	-.129	-.181*	-.138	-.129	.120
	N	187	204	196	197	195	193	133
Secondary	Pearson Cor.	.099	.139*	.097	.135	.145*	.107	-.137
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Community College	Pearson Cor.	.169*	.170*	.181*	.164*	.148*	.144*	-.106
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
College	Pearson Cor.	.185*	.128	.154*	.087	.098	.124	-.161
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134
Grad school	Pearson Cor.	-.352**	-.319**	-.330**	-.275**	-.280**	-.285**	.306**
	N	188	206	197	198	196	194	134

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

strong multi-collinearity with other independent variables. Jewish affiliation was also removed because of the low sample size – only nine legislators in the 87th session and ten in the 88th session had this affiliation. A binary logistic regression was then run with Evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Mainline Protestant religious traditions, as well as age, gender, and graduate school education.

Results

The results of initial bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2 for the 87th legislative session and Table 3 for the 88th legislative session. Political party and level of education have the highest correlations with issue votes. Only Evangelical and Jewish religious affiliations have statistically significant correlations across the issues.

The results of binary logistic regressions for issues on which JRLC took a position are presented in Table 4. Of the three main religious traditions, only the Evangelical affiliation is statistically significant in explaining voting outcomes and it is significant in six of the seven votes. Being an Evangelical legislator is negatively associated with positions favored by JRLC. However, JRLC does not officially represent the Evangelical tradition. There is no significant relationship between Roman Catholic and Mainline Protestant affiliation and voting on the issues addressed by JRLC.

Among the control variables, having a graduate school degree is highly significant in all seven votes and the coefficients show consistency with JRLC positions on all seven votes. Age is statistically significant in five of the seven votes, but the coefficients are close to zero. Gender is statistically significant in three of the seven votes. Being a male legislator is positively associated with cuts to the human services budget and eliminating the cap on CO₂ emissions, and negatively associated with raising taxes on the wealthy.

Results for votes on issues that divided the religious community are presented in Table 5. Evangelical affiliation is statistically significant in all five votes and is positively associated with the vote proposing voter identification at election, both bills limiting abortion, and the bill proposing a constitutional amendment banning same sex marriage. It is negatively associated with the vote to legalize same sex marriage. Roman Catholic affiliation is statistically significant in two of the five votes, those restricting abortion. Mainline Protestant affiliation is significant in only one case, the vote to ban abortion after twenty weeks.

On the five votes representing religious division, graduate school education is statistically significant and is positively associated with more liberal positions on all five issues. Gender is statistically significant only on the two abortion votes; being a male legislator is positively associated with banning abortion after twenty weeks and cutting state funding for abortions. Age is statistically significant for the bill banning abortion after twenty weeks, and for the bill establishing a healthcare exchange, but in both cases, the coefficients are close to zero.

Table 3. Correlations for 88th Minnesota Legislative Session

		Creation of state health exchange	Raising taxes on wealthy	Legalize same sex marriage	Increased funding to programs affecting the needy	Raising the minimum wage
Party	Pearson Cor.	-.990**	-.890**	-.899**	-.970**	-.960**
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Evangelical	Pearson Cor.	-.282**	-.224**	-.313**	-.249**	-.260**
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Roman Catholic	Pearson Cor.	.107	.115	.043	.096	.086
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Mainline Protestant	Pearson Cor.	.072	.119	.069	.053	.072
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Jewish	Pearson Cor.	.205**	.122	.204**	.206**	.166*
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Christian	Pearson Cor.	-.131	-.120	-.051	-.129	-.124
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Protestant	Pearson Cor.	-.088	-.082	-.088	-.087	-.084
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Religion not reported	Pearson Cor.	.031	-.048	.078	.034	.046
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Gender	Pearson Cor.	-.094	-.017	-.112	-.119	-.094
	N	199	199	200	200	197
Age	Pearson Cor.	.216**	.199**	.124	.197**	.209**
	N	187	187	188	188	185
Secondary	Pearson Cor.	-.093	-.083	-.094	-.091	-.111
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Community College	Pearson Cor.	-.103	-.118	-.166*	-.131	-.092
	N	200	200	201	201	198
College	Pearson Cor.	-.152*	-.169*	-.094	-.147*	-.148*
	N	200	200	201	201	198
Grad school	Pearson Cor.	.279**	.299**	.242**	.291**	.273**
	N	200	200	201	201	198

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4. Binary Logistic Regression Results for Issues of Religious Consensus

Independent Variables	Cuts to programs affecting the needy	Increased funding to programs affecting the needy	Raising taxes on the wealthy 87th	Raising taxes on wealthy 88 th	Repealing emissions cap on power plants	Raising the minimum wage	Creation of State Health exchange
Evangelical	1.774**	-1.454*	-1.02	-1.219*	2.053**	-1.576**	-1.745**
Roman Catholic	0.394	0.317	-0.118	0.554	0.482	0.3	0.417
Mainline Protestant	0.217	0.178	0.401	0.562	0.263	0.235	0.215
Gender	0.692*	-0.243	-0.906*	0.064	1.277**	-0.112	-0.073
Age	-0.03*	0.041**	0.023	-0.041**	-0.018	0.042**	0.047**
Grad degree	-1.271**	1.315**	1.474*	1.376**	-1.704**	1.228**	1.287**
N	195	187	133	186	187	184	186
Nagelkerke R square	0.231	0.239	0.25	0.247	0.325	0.235	0.263

**p value ≤ .01; *p value ≤ .05

Table 5. Binary Logistic Regression Results for Issues with Divided Religious Opinion

Independent Variables	Requiring voter I.D.	Legalize same sex Marriage	Ban abortion after 20 weeks	Ban State funding of abortion	Ban same sex marriage
Evangelical	1.552*	-2.205**	2.745**	2.264**	2.151**
Roman Catholic	0.286	-0.164	1.196**	0.969*	0.646
Mainline Protestant	0.018	0.02	1.117*	0.686	0.261
Gender	0.587	-0.236	0.895*	0.734*	0.466
Age	-0.028	0.024	-0.032	-0.038*	-0.028
Grad degree	-1.286**	1.103**	-1.48**	-1.193**	-1.526**
N	193	187	204	197	196
Nagelkerke R square	0.214	0.219	0.309	0.259	0.27

**p value ≤ .01; *p value ≤ .05

Discussion and Conclusion

Religious affiliation does not appear to matter in voting patterns when JRLC acts as a coalition representing religious interests. Legislators with no religious affiliation are more

likely to vote in accordance with the coalition view on any issue. This is even more surprising given that Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Jewish legislators occupied a disproportionately large proportion of legislative seats. These groups make up JRLC's base. Further, Evangelical affiliation is statistically significant and negatively associated with JRLC positions on eleven of twelve votes. It is not apparent whether JRLC has any combined moral authority in the state than it has on legislators.

On issues where JRLC does not take a position because its membership has no consensus, the results show only slight evidence that religious affiliation has explanatory significance for Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Catholic legislator votes are positively associated with Catholic positions in only two of the four cases (both votes restricting abortion) where the Minnesota Catholic conference took a position. This is consistent with other studies that find Catholic affiliation has an influence on abortion votes (Day; Oldmixon and Hudson). Mainline legislator votes have significance in only one of five cases (restricting abortion after 20 weeks). In contrast, Evangelical affiliation is significant in all five votes. Overall, religious affiliation is very significant for Evangelical legislators across all votes, but hardly significant for Mainline Protestant and Catholic legislators. For these two groups, the significance shows up only on the abortion issue, but not for any issue addressed by JRLC.

Why do these results show little evidence of significant religious group influence, even when religious groups act as a coalition, and why is this inconsistent with the cases of religious group influence in certain foreign policy cases? One possibility is that, unlike the issues examined here, religious freedom, genocide, human trafficking, and rights abuses are not strongly divisive and generally do not divide Republicans and Democrats. On the other hand, issues addressed by religious lobbies in Minnesota deeply divide Republicans and Democrats. The Pearson correlation coefficients (Table 1 and Table 2) for political party affiliation on the twelve votes in this study are extremely high. Republic and Democratic positions are fairly predictable on issues like healthcare reform, abortion, same sex marriage, cuts to social programs, the minimum wage, taxation, voter identification, and regulating carbon dioxide emissions. On most of these issues, party affiliation seems to outweigh religious affiliation.

Another factor may be the number of Minnesotans represented by JRLC. A majority of legislators, 68% in the 87th session and 57.8% in the 88th session, came from religious affiliations connected with JRLC. Despite the significance of the coalition, the majority of the population of the state is not represented by JRLC as their sponsoring affiliations account for only 41% of the general population (Knutson: 121).¹

An even more important factor that might explain the limited influence of JRLC is the fact that Evangelicals are not part of JRLC. Evangelical legislators make up a disproportionately small portion of the legislature (14.1% in the 87th session and 12.9% in the 88th session), and there are fewer Evangelicals in Minnesota than there are nationally, but their absence from JRLC might be significant. JRLC has not attempted to establish structured relationships with Evangelicals because Evangelicals in Minnesota do not have a

¹ JRLC claims this number is 48% of the state population.

unified body to represent them (Knutson: 38). In light of how religious coalitions influence foreign policy, the lack of Evangelical unity appears to limit combined religious influence in Minnesota. Hertzke makes the case that Evangelicals “spearheaded” and were central to the success of religious coalitions on foreign policy (36). Catholics and Mainline Protestants had certain strengths that were important, but they lacked Evangelical assets like the “. . . booming network of schools, colleges, associations, publishing houses, direct-mail groups, parachurch organizations, and broadcast ministries.” He says grassroots Evangelicals are successful at mobilization because they are “enmeshed in webs of local churches, channels of religious information, and networks of religious association” (34). Evangelical assets contributed to what Hertzke describes as a social movement on particular foreign policy issues.

It is not apparent that JRLC has instigated any social movement in Minnesota on the issues examined here. This may be because JRLC is an institutionalized interest group and a permanent organization that covers a wide range of issues. It lacks the temporary energy of a focused social movement. In 2012 alone, JRLC addressed 28 different policy areas. The permanent institutionalized character of Mainline and Catholic advocacy has disadvantages, according to Hertzke:

[E]ven when the Church takes a clear stand, its hierarchical ethos can lead to insufficient focus on lay mobilization, one of the greatest impediments to a strong voice . . . they have shown little sign of promoting serious mobilization through parishes on any issue beyond abortion. To be sure, some individual priests may raise the issue of religious persecution in their parishes, but there is nothing comparable to what the Southern Baptist Convention did, when it distributed to all of its 40,000 congregations packets to raise awareness of suffering believers abroad (93-94).

In Minnesota, JRLC’s efforts have focused on multiple levels. They lobby legislators “that might be open to persuasion” and will testify at committee hearings (Knutson: 70, 74). However, there are recognized limits to this. Two state legislators state, “statements and positions papers are of little effect upon members of the legislature. With more than 800 registered lobbyists, having another one placing information in the hands of legislators, does not have the impact that contact and letters from constituents has” (Knutson: 39). JRLC appears to recognize this reality and seeks to regularly mobilize the 5000 activists that are a part of their legislative network and the 13,000 people on their mailing list. Their stated goal is to “. . . identify and mobilize supporters in each of the sixty-seven districts” (Knutson: 39). One example is the annual “Day on the Hill” event, which in 2011 drew participants from all 67 legislative districts in Minnesota. Despite these efforts at mobilization, “. . . most people within local congregations, parishes, synagogues, and mosques are oblivious to the work of the JRLC. Many are not aware that their faith community sponsors the group or that the group even exists . . . and the gap between JRLC leaders and their constituents is regarded as primary weakness of the coalition” (Knutson: 122-23). The denominational church groups represented by JRLC often have no direct relationship with and are often distant from ordinary church members (Djupe, Olson, and Gilbert).

The fact that JRLC does not actively participate in election campaigns may be another factor limiting its influence. Legislators do not have to fear JRLC mobilizing at election time to unseat them if they do not vote in accordance with a JRLC view. As Yamane states, “. . . the most effective lobbies typically establish political action committees (PACS) to make campaign donations to candidates, parties, or other PACs, and they often endorse candidates for public office as well” (178). Religious organizations limit their influence by typically confining themselves to direct lobbying and mobilizing the grassroots. Denominationally based groups in particular almost always avoid direct involvement in election campaigns. This is true for JRLC and its sponsoring religious denominations.

While religious affiliation does not appear to affect voting patterns in light of JRLC positions, there are other ways in which JRLC might have influence. While its influence may not extend to many Republican legislators, it could have some effect in influencing Democrat priorities. While this is hard to measure, Democratic legislators could feel emboldened in their pursuit of their agenda if and when JRLC and the state’s largest religious communities largely support their agendas. JRLC did get their preferred legislative outcomes: opposing budget cuts for the needy, raising taxes on the wealthy, healthcare reform, and support in both houses for raising the minimum wage. However, this may be more a matter of timing and context with the Democrats being in control, just as Hertzke shows Evangelical foreign policy influence benefited from their special access to the George W. Bush administration (Hertzke 2004: 35). This is consistent with the factors Fowler et al. identify in their explanation of when religious interests group are more likely to influence state politics (124-28).

Fowler et al. point to two additional factors that may be relevant to the situation in Minnesota. Theological beliefs can be related to political engagement and undergird the strength and unity of a group. Clearly, the absence of Evangelicals from JRLC has reduced religious unity on the issues examined here. The lack of organizational structure for Evangelicals explains this in part, but it might also be that Evangelical theology propels action on issues of personal morality, but not on social justice issues, which are the main focus of JRLC.

The results of this study give us little confidence that JRLC, the religious coalition in Minnesota, will have much influence on legislators’ voting patterns as long as Evangelicals are not a part of the coalition. The lack of institutional unity among Evangelicals as well as the fact that there is currently a negative relationship between Evangelical positions and JRLC positions are significant barriers to religious influence on voting patterns. Controversial domestic policies will probably continue to be a challenge for religious coalitions like JRLC; any influence it has probably stems from the fact that their advocacy has been and will likely be better received when Democrats rather than Republicans are in power.

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