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10. Growing Age and Education Gaps?

The Evolution of Partisan Vote Choice among Religious Voters in the U.S.,
2008–2018

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, two divergent trends help to explain voter support for the two political parties. Voter support for each party by religious affiliation has remained remarkably stable. In contrast, coalitions of party support seem to be shifting along the lines of age and educational attainment, with younger voters and college educated voters increasingly likely to support Democratic candidates. In this research we examine how age and education condition support for the political parties within religious traditions. We draw upon survey data from the 2008–2018 waves of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). Our findings suggest that among faith traditions with generally higher levels of support for Democratic candidates, there are small differences between younger and older adherents. Similar small differences are observed between college educated and other voters. However, among faith traditions with higher levels of support for the Republican Party, we find growing rifts between

young and old voters. We also find disparate trends in support between college educated and non-college educated voters. We identify the implications for these findings moving forward.

Keywords: religious affiliation, age, education, partisanship, vote choice

Introduction

During the 2016 election, political observers wondered whether evangelical Christians would maintain their strong support of Republican candidates at the polls. The exit polls showing that 81 percent of Evangelicals voted for Donald Trump came as a surprise to election watchers who predicted his lifestyle choices might cause “values voters” to consider other candidates (Cox 2016). Yet, a sudden shift in the partisan preferences of Evangelicals would have been the true surprise, given that their support for Republicans has remained fairly stable for nearly three decades (see Layman 2001; Pew Research Center 2014).

Over the same time period, partisan differences have grown between Americans of different ages and education levels. Young and college-educated Americans increasingly vote for Democratic candidates (Pew Research Center 2018b). The stability of partisan support along religious lines coupled with the shift along age and education lines presents a puzzle, since Americans of different ages and education levels worship together. Do age and educational attainment condition support for Democratic candidates among religious voters?

We present descriptive data suggesting they do, but only in certain faith traditions. We analyze data from six waves of the Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES), a large national survey that allows us to observe partisan vote choice among small groups of religious Americans. The analysis shows that younger and college-educated Americans of faith favor Democrats more than their older and non-college-educated counterparts. However, the Democratic advantage among these groups is limited to the traditions in which adherents split their votes between the parties or lean Republican. For the faith traditions in which adherents lean Democratic, we see few differences in vote choice along the lines of age or educational attainment.

The results contribute evidence that, while the relationship between religious affiliation and partisanship has remained mostly static in recent decades, religious groups display internal political heterogeneity. Political scientists have previously documented a religiosity gap, in which more observant practitioners within faith groups are more likely to affiliate with the Republican Party (Leege et al. 2002; Green 2007). Similarly, political cleavages emerge along the lines of age and educational attainment, even among Americans committed to religious practice. While this research focuses on recent elections, the implications are potentially much longer lasting. As the percentage of college-educated Americans grows and younger, Democratic-leaning voters become a greater share of the electorate, the competitive balance between the two parties may begin to tilt toward a Democratic advantage, absent any broader repositioning by party elites.

Predictors of Partisanship: Religious Affiliation, Age, and Education

To contextualize our question, we survey the literature on the relationship between partisanship and our three factors of interest: religious affiliation, age, and education. We begin

with religious affiliation. The association between religious affiliation and partisan affiliation has remained largely constant for the past 25 years. The 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted by Pew Research Center, estimated that 56 percent of evangelical Protestants identify as Republicans or Republican-leaning independents. Catholics and mainline Protestants split between the parties, with 37 percent and 44 percent respectively identifying as Republicans or Republican-leaning independents. Black Protestants and Jews were less likely to identify as such, with only 10 percent of black Protestants and 26 percent of Jews identifying as Republicans or Republican-leaning independents. These figures are strikingly similar to the predicted probability of a vote by religious affiliation for Republican nominee Bob Dole in the 1996 presidential election, as estimated by Layman (2001, 72).

Scholars of partisanship working in the middle of the twentieth century created an ethnoreligious model, positing that one's religious affiliation helped to determine one's partisan identification (Berelson et al. 1954; Knoke 1972). Over time, the associations between specific religious traditions and the two parties have evolved. Cultural changes on matters of race, sex, and sexuality in the 1960s produced a conservative backlash in the 1970s (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Interest groups like the Moral Majority formed to articulate and advocate for conservative positions on issues like abortion and gay rights. In response, Republican politicians positioned themselves to appeal to newly activated religious voters in the 1980s and 1990s (Layman 2001). Religious denominations with more traditional religious teachings, such as evangelical Christians, came to align themselves with the Republican Party. The realignment ended by the 1990s and has remained stable since.

Even as the relationship between religious affiliation and partisanship solidified, greater religiosity within religious traditions has emerged as a stronger predictor of partisanship. This "restructuring principle" complicates the ethnoreligious model, holding that attending religious services and practicing faith in daily life make religious teachings salient and lend them political importance (Wuthnow 1988). When Republican elites adopted conservative issue positions and spoke of faith in the public sphere, the more observant within faith traditions responded positively (Green 2007). As a result, the highly observant within religious traditions tend to lean Republican while the less observant lean Democratic (Layman 2001; Leege et al. 2002; Olson and Warber 2008).

Emerging evidence further challenges the ethnoreligious model, or at least its causal claims, suggesting that partisan affiliation causes religious affiliation instead of the other way around. Because the association between the Republican Party and religiosity has strengthened over time, average people recognize the relationship and use their partisanship as a guide to their religious orientation (Campbell et al. 2018). Because partisanship tends to crystallize in young adulthood at the very moment that religious participation tends to fall off in the life cycle, people who return to religion later in life may choose a level of religious commitment that matches their partisan identity (Margolis 2018).

Age and Partisanship

Researchers have also identified a difference in support for the two political parties based on age. In a trend that the Pew Research Center (2016) finds over the last few decades, young people are more likely to identify as Democrats than Republicans, to vote for candidates that are Democrats, and to make up a larger share of the Democratic Party now than in 1992. This

is important, as Millennial (born 1981 to 1996) and Gen Z (born after 1996) voters will become a larger share of the electorate through generational replacement. In fact, by the 2020 election, the youngest two generations are slated to comprise more than one of every three eligible voters (Pew Research Center 2019a).

Much of the research focuses on Millennials, as Gen Z has just begun entering the electorate. Nonetheless, trends in party identification show a clear difference between younger and older age cohorts. For the two youngest generations there is a strong propensity to identify or lean heavily toward the Democratic Party (Kromer and Deckman 2020). In 2018 for example, 59 percent of Millennials identified as Democrat or lean Democrat while just 32 percent were Republican or lean Republican, a difference of 27 percent. Conversely, the Democratic advantage was just 5 percent (48%–43%) for Gen X (born 1965 to 1980) and 2 percent (48%–46%) for Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964), while members of the Silent generation (born 1928 to 1945) leaned Republican by a 9 percent margin (52%–43%) (Pew Research Center 2018b). Should new voters approach or exceed this 27 percent Democratic advantage among today's young voters, and assuming no other offsetting coalitional changes, the long-term implications are straightforward; a Democratic electoral advantage will emerge in the short term and continue into the near future.

The proportion of the political party's membership by age has also changed over the last three decades (Pew Research Center 2016). In 1992, over 1 in 5 (21%) of Republicans were ages 18–29. By 2016 this number had dropped to just over 1 in 8 (13%). Conversely, the Democratic Party saw a slight increase as 18–29 year-olds grew from 18 percent to 20 percent of self-identified party members. If we expand this to include respondents 30–49 years old, the Republican coalition share of 18–49 year-olds dropped from 61 percent to 42 percent while the Democratic party saw a smaller decrease in younger membership from 58 percent to 52 percent. The decrease in younger voters as a share of party coalitions can be attributed partially to an increasing propensity for Americans of all ages to self-identify as independents and partially to the aging of the large Baby Boomer generation. However, Democrats benefitted in particular from the entry of the Millennial generation into the electorate. The result is that supporters of the Democratic Party are younger on average than Republican supporters.

The identification of a generational effect, where new voters are influenced by events during the period that they entered the electorate, fits a well-established explanation of party identification (Miller and Shanks 1996; Stanley and Niemi 1993; Shively 1979). In the contemporary era, this is described as engaged citizenship (Dalton 2016), or postmaterialism (Inglehart 1990), where young people view social, political, racial, and economic issues differently than prior generations. Specifically, younger voters favor a more activist role of government in solving problems in society; advocate for the rights of women, racial, and ethnic groups members, and members of the LGBTQ+ community; are more concerned about protecting the environment; and generally advocate for greater social justice domestically and around the world (Pew Research Center 2019b; Dalton 2016; Inglehart 1990).

Generational differences are less pronounced in the Democratic Party than in the Republican Party. Among Democrats there is more consistent support for racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ rights, and efforts to attribute global warming to manmade causes, as

well as greater support for an active role of government in solving societal problems regardless of generation. Among Republicans, younger voters are more similar to same age Democrats in their support of these issues than older party members (Pew Research Center 2019b). We find this interesting as young Democrats and Republicans (and Democrats overall) appear more similar in their issue positions than Republican Gen X and older cohorts.

Educational Attainment and Partisanship

Americans who have attained higher levels of education have become more likely to identify as Democrats over time. Recent data from the Pew Research Center (2018a) show the dividing line to fall between Americans with four-year college degrees and those without. Polling from the Pew Research Center indicates that in 1994, 54 percent of college graduates identified as or leaned Republican, compared to 39 percent who identified or leaned Democratic. In 2017, those numbers were exactly reversed. The trend can be explained in part by two opposing trends among white voters. First, the percentage of white voters with four-year degrees moved from strongly Republican, 59 percent versus just 34 percent Democratic in 1994, to a slight Democratic edge, 49 percent to 46 percent Republican in 2017. Second, the percentage of white voters with a high school diploma or less moved from a slight Republican advantage, 47 percent versus 46 percent support for Democrats in 1994, to a strong Republican advantage, 58 percent to just 35 percent support for Democrats in 2017. There were no noteworthy partisan trends among whites with some college experience but no degree.

The broader causes of these shifts remain unclear. One possibility is that college socializes students into holding liberal attitudes (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Dey 1996) that later guide them towards supporting the Democratic Party. However, the political attitudes that studies show students adopt during college are not wholly consistent with issue positions traditionally held by the Democratic Party. While individuals tend to adopt more liberal positions during college on cultural issues, such as civil liberties and gender egalitarianism (Campbell and Horowitz 2016), higher educational attainment also seems to engender more conservative positions on issues of the economy or redistribution (Bullock 2020). Attitude changes during college depend in part on which institution a student attends. Students who attend liberal arts colleges tend to acquire more liberal views during their undergraduate years (Hanson et al. 2012), but students at elite colleges take on more conservative economic views (Mendelberg et al. 2017). A student's field of study can also have some independent effect on their political views. Completing an economics or business degree, for example, appears to move student preferences toward more conservative economic positions (Fischer et al. 2017, Mendelberg et al. 2017). Moreover, the socialization effects of college on attitudes are attenuated after taking into account students' self-selection into different institutions and fields of study, choices that are based on their pre-college attitudes. Students from liberal families are more likely to attend liberal arts colleges in the first place (Hanson et al. 2012), while students with more conservative or religious views are more likely to attend schools with conservative faculty (Mariani and Hewitt 2008). Self-selection also explains some, if not most, of the differences in political attitudes across students who completed different fields of study; liberal students are more likely to pursue social science or humanities degrees while conservative students are more likely to pursue economics or business degrees (Elchardus and

Spruyt 2009; Fischer et al. 2017). Therefore, it is unlikely the case that college attendance systematically socializes students to adopt more liberal views and align themselves with the Democratic Party. In any case, socialization theory alone would not explain why Democratic partisan identification among the college-educated would rise so sharply in the last 25 years when scholars have conjectured that colleges socialize students into liberal attitudes for a much longer period of time (Newcomb 1943).

Another possibility is that self-selection into college might manifest in partisan differences between college graduates and non-graduates over time. Growing numbers of women and non-whites – both Democratic-leaning demographic groups – have attended college in larger numbers in recent decades (Hussar et al. 2020). It is also possible, given cultural narratives surrounding liberal dominance of the academy (see Gross 2013), that students from liberal or Democratic families opt to attend college and students from conservative or Republican families opt out. However, there is little systematic evidence to suggest that college-age members of conservative or Republican families are deciding not to go to college – particularly when the income boost students receive from completing a four-year degree is well-established (e.g., Heckman et al. 2018).

A third possibility is that shifts in issues or values among partisan elites creates new political divisions in public discourse, exposing latent rifts between college graduates and their fellow citizens. For example, Sides et al. (2018) contend that the election of Barack Obama made divisions on racial issues between the Democratic and Republican parties obvious to the public. While white college-educated Americans often recognized Democrats accurately to be the more liberal party on racial issues before Obama's election, white Americans without college degrees often did not. After 2008, more white Americans without college degrees learned about Democrats' positions on issues of race, and slowly switched their allegiances to the Republican Party. Similar cleavages have emerged along educational attainment lines when party elites change and distinguish their issue positions (see Achen and Bartels 2016 on cleavages among women over abortion in the U.S.) or values (see Stubager 2013 on cleavages over authoritarian vs. libertarian values in Denmark). However, partisan realignment tends to create only marginal shifts in a population's partisanship between election cycles. It is unclear which set of issues or values may have created large shifts in partisanship among college-educated Americans observed in recent decades. Regardless of the mechanism, the empirical evidence is clear that holding a college degree increasingly predicts a likelihood of voting or identifying Democratic.

How Age and Education Could Divide within Religious Traditions

If age and education are increasingly associated with greater attachment to, and support for the Democratic Party among Americans at large, we might also expect to see this trend emerge among religious Americans in particular. Different sets of socializing experiences should produce variation in partisan attachments, even among people embedded within similar religious institutions. Because socializing influences associated with age and education tend to occur at the moment in the life cycle when religious influence is at its weakest, it seems plausible that political differences around these factors could emerge.

People naturally tend to drift from the religion of their childhood in adolescence and early adulthood (Margolis 2018). Importantly, this waning period in religious participation typical

among the young occurs exactly at the time of life that individuals tend to form stable political views. A decision point on religion occurs later when individuals marry and have children; some will return to the religion of their childhood, others will return to religion but in a different faith tradition, and the rest will remain non-religious. After this decision point, religious affiliation is generally stable through the remainder of those individuals' lives.

This waning moment in religious influence could provide opportunities for distinctive political influences, even among the people who remain attached to religion during this time period. For young people, the events and issues of the day could have profound influences on their worldview and political affiliation, while older cohorts remain less affected by changes in the informational landscape. The subset of young people who attend college could similarly be socialized into holding more liberal cultural views than their peers who do not.

If cohort effects or educational attainment lead young people to hold more liberal cultural views, that socialization could have long-term consequences for political divisions among the religious. When people return to more regular religious practice later in adulthood, they carry with them the ideas and identities they accumulated during their time away (Wilson and Sherkat 1994). Moreover, people tend to pick and choose the religious beliefs they adopt in order to avoid cognitive dissonance (Arnett and Jensen 2002). This ability to reintegrate into religious practice but have some autonomy in political beliefs based on earlier socializing influences suggests some space for political heterogeneity to emerge with religious traditions along age or educational lines. Political differences might remain latent when individuals rejoin religion, only to emerge when political elites bring new issues into prominence in public discourse.

Then again, the ability to choose a new religious affiliation or opt out of religion altogether suggests that any partisan gaps within religious affiliations could be quite small. Once individuals are socialized and develop their own religious preferences, they may choose to leave the faith tradition of childhood for traditions that better match their views (Sherkat and Wilson 1995). Political views can also influence the extent of religious practice (Campbell et al. 2018). Margolis (2018) provides evidence that many people's political identities crystallize in young adulthood during their time away from religion. When they reach a point that they are ready to return to religious practice, they choose an affiliation and/or a level of religious commitment that aligns with their partisan identity. Interestingly, young adults who never stop attending church continue to espouse the same political views as they held in adolescence. If personal identities or ideas conflict with those espoused by religious leaders, individuals may prefer to leave religion altogether (Hout and Fischer 2014a; Hout and Fischer 2014b). With the option of religious exit available, it is possible that we will see no partisan gaps by age or education within religious traditions.

Data

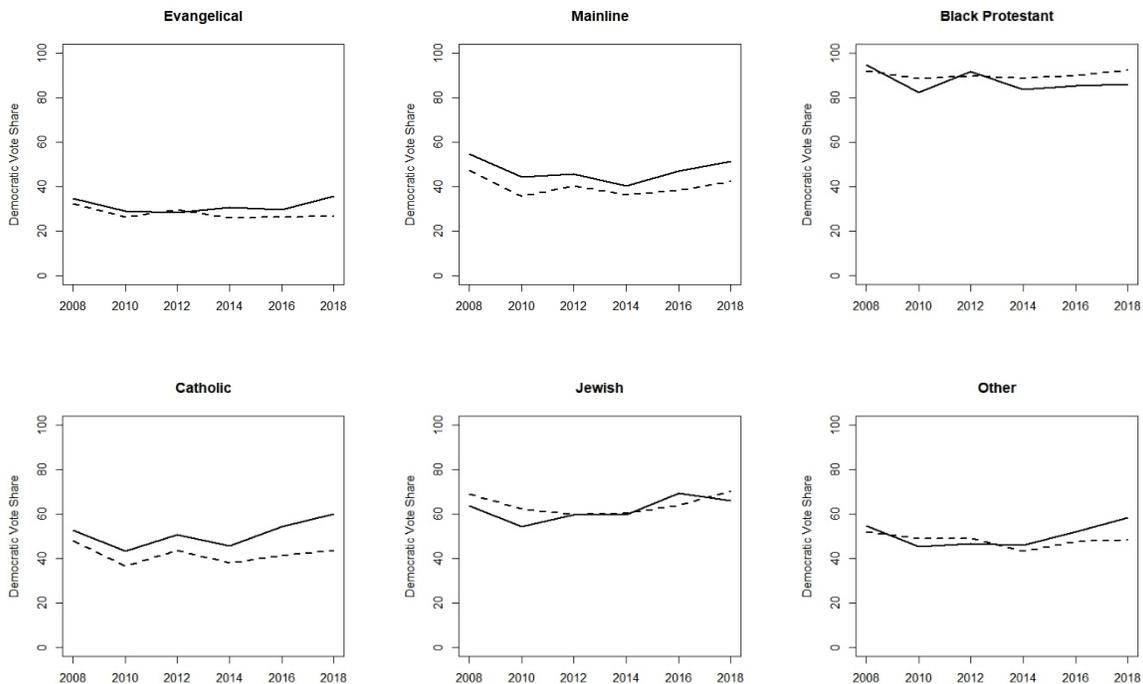
To assess how age and education condition vote choice among religious Americans, we turn to data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Studies. Fielded by the polling firm YouGov, CCES has surveyed a national stratified sample of Americans annually since 2006. Because the number of respondents is typically greater than 50,000, CCES data allow us to observe fine-grained distinctions in the voting choices among Americans within different religious traditions. We rely upon election-year data from six waves of the survey spanning

from 2008 to 2018, the years in which CCES used a standard set of items ascertaining the religious affiliation of respondents.

We calculate the percent of respondents within each tradition who reported voting for their local Democratic candidate for the U.S. House in each election year. We also calculated the percent of respondents within each tradition who reported voting for the Democratic candidate for President in 2008, 2012, and 2016. Though the two measures correlate highly within election years (for example, $r = 0.79$ for 2016), individual voting decisions vary based on the candidates on the ballot; a vote for a Democrat in one race is not a guarantee of a vote for a Democrat in the other. Using survey data in reference to both presidential and House elections allows us a greater number of observations of elections and greater confidence in our findings.

We define religious traditions following the widely-used RELTRAD coding scheme (Steensland et al. 2000; Stetzer and Burge 2016). Though scholars have criticized RELTRAD for its conflation of religious ideologies and its inattention to distinctions among Black Protestant denominations (Shelton 2018), others suggest RELTRAD performs well for analysis of political variables (Hackett et al. 2018). Using their self-reported religious affiliation, respondents are coded into six categories: Evangelical Protestants, Mainline Protestants, Black Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Other.

Figure 1. Democratic Vote Share in U.S. House Elections by Religious Affiliation and Age Group



Notes: Solid lines represent respondents age 45 and younger; dashed lines represent respondents over age 45. Data from Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Because we are interested in vote choice among religious voters, we set aside the vote choice of respondents claiming no religious affiliation in this analysis. We also condition respondents' inclusion in the analysis upon displaying minimal commitment to their self-identified religion, given that non-practicing religious voters behave politically similarly to secular voters (Layman 2001). To display minimal commitment and be included in the analysis, respondents must have reported one of the following: that religion is "somewhat important" or "very important" in their lives, or that they attend religious services at least once or twice a month, or that they pray more than once a week.

To measure age and education, we rely upon two binary variables to simplify the analysis. For age, younger voters are defined as age 45 or under, while older voters are defined as over 45. The median age of respondents falls around 47 across survey waves. For education, respondents are divided based on whether or not they hold a four-year college degree.

Results: Age

We begin the presentation of the results by comparing vote choice by age range for six religious groupings. Figure 1 displays the estimated percent of each group's vote that went to Democratic candidates in U.S. House races between 2008 and 2018. (Republican candidates can be assumed to have received most, though not all, of the remainder of the vote due to the presence of third-party candidates in some races.) Survey-weighted cross tabs are used to generate estimates. In line with previous analyses, we see a wide range of support for Democratic candidates across religious traditions. Black Protestants and Jews of any age tend to support Democrats at high rates; mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Americans of other faiths offer middling support to the party; and evangelical Protestants support Democratic candidates infrequently.

Though the trends are not linear, we see a gradual shift in Democratic support among most groups between 2008 and 2018. In House races, Democratic vote share *increased* among younger voters in all religious traditions except for Mainline Protestants, who returned to roughly 2008 levels, and Black Protestants, who remained above 90 percent support albeit at levels below that of 2008 and 2012, two elections with a Black candidate at the top of the ticket. Conversely, Democratic vote share *decreased* among voters older than 45 in all religious traditions except for black Protestants and Jews. In most cases, the shifts were marginal, often less than five percentage points. Nonetheless, the trends are apparent.

Table 1 displays the "age gap" between younger and older cohorts by religious traditions in both presidential elections and House elections over the last decade. The reported margins are calculated by subtracting the Democratic vote share among the old from the Democratic vote share among the young. For example, 32.53 percent of Evangelical Protestants age 45 and under voted for Barack Obama in 2008 compared to 29.35 percent of Evangelical Protestants over age 45, resulting in a margin of +3.18. Values greater than 0 mean that young voters are more supportive of Democratic candidates while values less than 0 mean that older voters are more supportive of Democratic candidates. Across all years in the data, Democrats received a greater share of the votes of young Catholics and mainline Protestants than their older counterparts, while the advantage was more mixed for respondents in the other traditions.

Table 1. Democratic Margin for Americans 45 & Under by Religious Affiliation

U.S. Presidential Elections			
	2008	2012	2016
Evangelical Protestant	+3.18	+3.95	+5.13
Mainline Protestant	+10.71	+8.4	+9.97
Black Protestant	+1.66	-0.72	-6.54
Catholic	+11.29	+12.53	+15.77
Jewish	-6	-5.69	+6.69
Other	+4.25	-3.2	+5.94

U.S. House Elections						
	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Evangelical Protestant	+2.41	+2.44	-1.17	+4.49	+3.41	+9
Mainline Protestant	+7.34	+8.45	+5.44	+4.14	+8.75	+9.3
Black Protestant	+2.62	-6.46	+1.9	-5.06	-4.67	-6.19
Catholic	+4.58	+6.62	+7.02	+7.61	+13.04	+16.58
Jewish	-5.41	-7.99	0	-0.62	+5.44	-4.36
Other	+2.67	-3.59	-2.27	+2.51	+4.24	+10.1

Notes: Figures represent the Democratic vote share of people 45 and younger minus the Democratic vote share of people over age 45. Data from Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

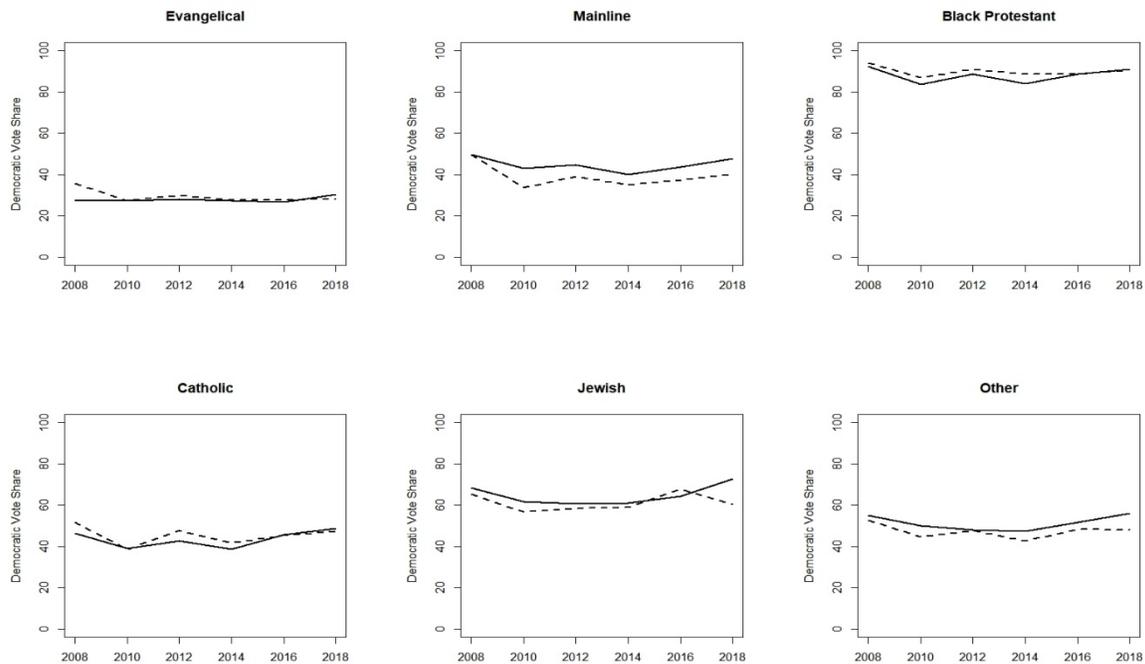
Overall, we see variation among religious traditions in the emergence of an age gap over time. In presidential elections, we see a growing age gap in partisan support most apparently among Catholics and Jews. Between 2008 and 2016, Democrats' advantage among young Catholics grew from approximately 11 to 16 points, and changed from a six-point disadvantage among younger Jews to a seven-point advantage. In the remaining traditions, the age gap held steady over time except among black Protestants, who saw a decrease in support of Democratic candidates among young voters relative to older voters. The decrease in support among young black Protestants over the years presented may be a reflection of higher than normal turnout for Barack Obama, the first African-American presidential candidate, in 2008. Later years may signal a return to a more normal level of support.

Turning to House races, we see an age gap steadily emerging between younger and older Catholics over time. While young Catholics were five percentage points more likely to vote for Democratic House candidates in 2008, they were almost 17 percentage points more likely

to vote Democratic in 2018. We also see increases in the age gap among evangelical Christians and Americans of other faiths, with Democratic House candidates enjoying roughly a two-point advantage among the young in 2008 but approximately a ten-point advantage among the young in 2018. The age gap among mainline Protestants remained largely the same over the time period. Among Jews and black Protestants, older cohorts were more likely to support Democratic candidates than younger cohorts by the end of the decade.

To summarize, the strongest evidence of a growing age gap can be seen among Catholics in both presidential and House races. While a gap may be growing among evangelical Protestants and Americans of other faiths, it remains small. Though an age gap emerged among Jews in the middle of the 2010s, the gap was closed as older Jews strongly boosted their support for Democratic House candidates in 2018. Finally, an age gap emerged among black Protestants, but in the opposite direction than expected. Older black Protestants became more likely to vote for Democrats over the last decade than their younger counterparts. Again, we view this cautiously given the presence of candidate, then President, Barack Obama on the Democratic ticket in 2008 and 2012.

Figure 2. Democratic Vote Share in U.S. House Elections by Religious Affiliation and Educational Attainment



Notes: Solid lines represent respondents with college degrees; dashed lines represent respondents without college degrees. Data from Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Results: Education

We shift our attention to the breakdowns in partisan support within religious traditions by level of education, focusing on differences between Americans with and without four-year

college degrees. Figure 2 displays the vote share of each group for the Democratic candidate in House races between 2008 and 2018. We continue to see strong support for Democrats among black Protestants and Jews, middling support among mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Americans of other faiths, and low support among evangelical Protestants, regardless of level of education.

After 2008, Democratic support fell among Americans without college degrees across all faith traditions. In contrast, Democratic vote share for House candidates *increased* among college-educated evangelical Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and adherents of other faiths in 2018 compared to 2008. However, the spike appears to be specific to the 2018 midterms; Democratic support fell or remained steady among all college-educated groups between 2008 and 2016.

Table 2. Democratic Margin for College Graduates by Religious Affiliation

U.S. Presidential Elections						
	2008		2012		2016	
Evangelical Protestant	-4.93		-1.77		+0.99	
Mainline Protestant	+0.78		+5.68		+9.41	
Black Protestant	-3.26		-0.31		+1.82	
Catholic	-2.53		-4.24		+3.58	
Jewish	+3.83		+11.8		-4.27	
Other	+1.85		+1.35		+8.27	

U.S. House Elections						
	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Evangelical Protestant	-7.77	-0.03	-1.83	-0.21	-1.27	+2.27
Mainline Protestant	+0.04	+9.45	+5.6	+4.89	+6.19	+7.23
Black Protestant	-1.37	-3.62	-2.48	-4.48	+0.04	+0.16
Catholic	-5.35	+0.25	-4.96	-2.8	+0.18	+1.28
Jewish	+3.04	+4.76	+2.35	+2.05	-3.42	+12.38
Other	+2.25	+5.34	+0.21	+4.87	+3.51	+7.71

Notes: Figures represent the Democratic vote share of college graduates minus the Democratic vote share of people without college degrees. Data from Cooperative Congressional Election Study.

Though Democratic support largely fell for people of all faith traditions over the 2010s, it fell farther for Americans without college degrees than those with college degrees. Table 2 displays the “college gap” in Democratic vote choice by faith tradition. As in Table 1, values greater than zero indicate a Democratic advantage among college-educated voters, while values less than zero indicate a Democratic advantage among non-college-educated voters.

Beginning with Presidential contests, college-educated respondents grew relatively more likely to support Democrats between 2008 and 2016 relative to their non-college-educated counterparts in all traditions except Judaism. For evangelical Protestants, Catholics, and black Protestants, college-educated adherents were slightly more likely to vote against Democrats in 2008 than their non-college educated counterparts, but became slightly more likely to vote for Democrats in 2016. The college gap in Democratic support among mainline Protestants and Americans of other faiths grew from approximately one percentage point in 2008 to about nine percentage points in 2016. Though a college degree became a stronger predictor of a Democratic vote among Jews in 2012 compared to 2008, the gap collapsed in 2016 as non-college-educated Jews sharply increased their support for Hillary Clinton.

Self-reported votes in House contests tell a similar story between 2008 and 2018. Evangelical Protestants and Catholics with college degrees began the period of observation less likely to vote for Democrats than their fellow worshippers without college degrees, but supported Democratic candidates more strongly by 2018. Among black Protestants, virtually no gap appeared between people of different education levels at the beginning and end of the decade, though non-college-educated respondents in the group were more likely to vote Democratic in the middle of the decade. By 2018, college-educated mainline Protestants and Americans of other faiths were about seven points more likely to vote Democratic than their non-college-educated counterparts. Finally, the college gap among Jews shrank through most of the decade, but widened suddenly in 2018 as college-educated Jews strongly outpaced non-college-educated Jews in their support for Democratic House candidates.

To summarize, Democratic support generally trailed off among people of all religious traditions between 2008 and 2018. However, it fell off at a quicker pace among the non-college-educated than for the college-educated among most groups. As a result, a college gap in vote choice has grown in mainline Protestantism and in other religions, with college-educated adherents much more likely to vote Democratic. By 2018, there was virtually no difference in Democratic support among Catholics and evangelical Christians by level of education. Yet, this represents a notable departure from the 2000s, when non-college-educated people in these traditions supported Democrats by a higher margin. Few differences by education level have materialized among black Protestants, while educational differences in vote choice among Jews have fluctuated inconsistently from election to election.

Discussion

Do age and education condition the relationship between religious affiliation and partisan vote choice? Our analysis shows that the answer depends on the tradition. In four faith traditions (Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, Mainline Protestants, and Others), we observe an age gap in which the young lean more Democratic than the old. In two faith traditions (Mainline Protestants and Others) we see evidence of an analogous college gap. However, among Catholics and Evangelical Protestants, we see evidence of a Democratic shift among

the college-educated between 2008 and 2018. While college graduates in these traditions were *less* likely to vote Democratic early in the period, the gap closed by 2018 such that degree holders were *slightly more* likely to vote Democratic. No consistent patterns emerge along age and education lines among Jews. We saw no college gap among black Protestants, but a reverse trend for age; older black Protestants became more likely to vote Democratic than younger black Protestants over the period of observation.

Characterizing the findings more broadly, the results show that partisan vote choice does not vary systematically by age and education in faith traditions already supportive of the Democratic Party. Being younger or obtaining a college degree does not seem to make people in these traditions even more likely to vote Democrat. In the remaining traditions, either Republican-leaning or split between the parties, age and education indicates a greater likelihood to vote Democratic, at least in the two most recent election cycles.

Several notes of caution are in order. First, the findings are limited to individuals who demonstrate minimal commitment to a religious tradition, rather than all people who identify with a religion or who grew up in a specific tradition. Second, the behavior we observe is among people who have self-selected into their religious affiliation. Our results do not allow us to determine how prevalent it is for people to leave their religious tradition when their political views conflict with religious teachings. Third, we are relying on survey data in which respondents self-report the candidate they voted for in the election. Self-reports may not reflect respondents' true voting behavior. Finally, the results should not necessarily be viewed as predictive of future behavior. While the data capture trends in partisan vote choice over the period of observation, emerging gaps could well disappear in future election cycles.

Even as social scientists have improved upon an ethnoreligious model of the causes of partisan affiliation, religious affiliation remains an important and fairly stable correlate of partisan identification. Though the associations have remained largely stable since the 1990s, the stability masks underlying disparities within traditions. In particular, age and education seem to condition support for one of the two major parties within certain religious traditions. If trends continue, the effects of these younger voters as they become a larger share of the political space will mark the emergence of a new cohort in the American political system and may have lasting implications for the relationship between religion and partisanship.

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