

EVANGELIZING THE VOTE: FAMILY VALUES
RHETORIC IN THE 2018
ELECTION

by

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ABSTRACT

“Make America Great Again!” The slogan rings of a brighter past, a dark present, and hope for a better tomorrow. Embedded in this exclamation is a mission to return a morally-lost state from the clutches of progressive liberalism, civil rights, rampant feminism, and an epidemic of secularism to its former glory. For many, this simple slogan evokes nostalgic dreams of an America not seen since the 1950s. For others, the slogan represents a dangerous nationalist agenda that propagates archaic values at the expense of progress made during the Obama presidency. On either side of the divide, aspiring political leaders invoke the family as the fundamental building block of American society. Both sides characterize the platforms of their opponents as antithetical to interests of the family. Moving past this binary, I propose since the 2016 election, models of candidate behavior have deviated from the pre-Trump era but still emphasize family.

In this essay, I seek to the role of family values in political campaigning, particularly in the midterm elections. First, though, I will present the history of family values as a political movement begun by the Christian Right. Second, and key to my argument, I will use the rhetoric created during the height of the Christian Right of the as a lens through which to examine current political candidates of the 2018 elections and determine what survived the years following the movement. I will assess the way “caregivers,” “moms’ moms,” “old-school Democrats,” “Trump men,” “anti-feminist women,” and “pater familias” candidates use family values in vastly different ways to work toward the same goal: establishing credibility with their voter base. Together, these cases will present insight to how the Christian Right continues to influence American politics through its social agenda to return American families to their former glory, while also provoking those on the other side of the issue to militate against this social order.

Red, white, and blue ordains the crowded hall. A loud speaker blasts the hymns of patriotism. Cheers and shouts ring from tear-stained lips to echo around the stage. Banners wave. Hands reach into the air. A confident face smiles bravely from the podium surrounded by a loving family. The eyes of the visionary scan the assembled disciples clamoring for the attention of their fearless presidential nominee. The nominee can do little to be heard over the noise and only mouths, “thank you.” Over the deafening applause, a resolute voice calls out appreciation and grateful thanks.

In the minutes that follow, the presidential nominee makes a promise to the nation. Governor Mitt Romney invited the gathered Republicans in 2012 to “...join me to walk together to a better future.”¹ President Barack Obama similarly called the Democrats assembled in Charlotte to “mov[e] forward, America.”² Four years later, after the end of President Obama’s second term in office, two new candidates vied for the trust of the American nation. Secretary Hillary Clinton challenged that Americans would have to “decide whether we all will work together so we all can rise together.”³ The Republicans gathered in Cleveland heard Mr. Donald Trump declare: “Together, we will lead our party back to the White House, and we will lead our country back to safety, prosperity, and peace.”⁴ Each leader standing before the cheering crowd made promises of a better future. They understood that their parties elected them to be the voice of change and progress, to represent the best their party had to offer the American people. These leaders were selected to lead a nation of families. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, step-parents, adopted children, and loved ones—these leaders would be the guiding voice for all Americans. It was to these families the leaders, like all political leaders, direct their attention.

Governor Romney continued, “All the laws and legislation in the world will never heal this world like the loving hearts and arms of mothers and fathers. If every child could drift to sleep feeling wrapped in the love of their family—and God’s love—this world would be a far more gentle and better place.”⁵ President Obama advised that “Over the next few years big decisions will be made in Washington... decisions that will have a huge impact on our lives and on our children’s lives for decades to come.”⁶ Four years later, Mr. Trump promised: “So to every parent who dreams for their child, and every child who dreams for their future, I say these words to you tonight: I’m With You, and I will fight for you, and I will win for you.”⁷ Secretary Clinton illustrated for her supporters “a country where all our children can dream, and those dreams are within reach. Where families are strong...”⁸ These proud representatives of their respective parties all know the same thing: families are the most basic unit of American society. Since the 1970s, more than partisanship, religion, soda-brand, or nationality, family matters most to the American people. No matter what platforms or rhetoric emerge during their speeches, politicians must respect and promise to protect families.

Questions

This essay reflects my academic interest in the intersection of political science and religious studies, or more specifically as a scholar of religious studies and a professional in the political field. I began my research with several questions pertaining to traditional family values as informed by conservative Christian culture: First, after World War II, why did the evangelical movement become such a political powerhouse? Second, how do candidates of both major parties, Democratic and Republican, speak to the defense of families with respect the traditional family values platform of the Christian Right? Third, thinking about how both the criticism of President Donald Trump and his support among evangelicals in the recent presidential election,

how have political candidates continued or shifted rhetoric on families to more effectively engage their voter base?

Methodology

I began by considering the extensive body of research that exists on the nature of traditional family values in Christian life and the influence those values have held on American politics. I drew from primary and secondary sources to thoroughly develop a survey of family values in contemporary politics. In effort to construct compelling case studies, I found it crucial to predicate the studies with an acknowledgement for how family values rhetoric has evolved. No historical event exists in a vacuum, and though it would be prudent to incorporate an exhaustive history of family values to reinforce the suggestions of this essay, I have limited the historical context to what helps the reader gain a general sense for what rhetoric existed and what events shaped that rhetoric. Seth Dowland and Stephen Prothero contributed insightful additions to the corpus of research on the history of family values, and I primarily drew from their work to frame my own study.

Then, I turn to look at recent candidates who ran for various levels of elected positions in the 2018 elections. From June 2017 – November 2018, I looked through Tweets, Facebook posts, official campaign videos, candidates' websites, radio interviews, and debate responses as an extensive body of rhetoric on key issues related to traditional family values: the family, abortion, LGBTQ rights, and women's rights. After the election, several candidates emerged as representatives of shifts and trends around family.

I selected six candidates for this study based upon their ability to represent common trends in contemporary politics. For the purposes of this study, I use the term "model" to signify

a strong exemplar of a particular set of behavior. Though the candidates may not initiate perfect copies of themselves in the years to follow, I believe their principle rhetorical traits will persist. From the Republican party, I selected Brian Kemp from Georgia, the elected governor of Georgia; Ralph Norman, the incumbent representative from South Carolina's 5th congressional district; and Marsha Blackburn, who moved from the House of Representatives to serve as the junior Senator from Tennessee. Of the Democratic candidates, I selected Tabitha Isner, an ordained minister of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ in Alabama; Beto O'Rourke the Democratic challenger to incumbent Senator Ted Cruz in Texas; and Stacey Abrams, a long-time Georgia state legislator. The rhetoric used by these candidates fulfilling expected behavior of their model indicates what priorities exist for the different political identities in contemporary politics. The term "family values" has come to signify a plethora of prominent issues, and I strive to tease out how candidates are using the language of family values to create support for their platform issues.

A few words about this selection are worth noting. First, each candidate represents a different character-type of current public officials. While the candidates may demonstrate similar tendencies as other models in this study, each model provides unique insight into a particular trend present in the 2018 elections. Second, they are all candidates of the 2018 election. When they speak to the issues, they do so with the contemporary landscape in mind; their rhetoric involves current political attitudes. Third, each of these candidates ran races in the South and Southeast. I consciously chose the Southern United States for this project because the conservative Christian movement that largely founded the family values campaign originated in the South. The conservative Christian movement found great success in the region and developed the "Bible Belt." Admittedly, my selection of candidates favors Georgia figures; however, this

selection reflects my own heritage as a Georgian and my expertise as a former intern for a Georgia member of the United States Senate. This essay engages a qualitative study of campaign rhetoric. Thorough and well-established understanding of context stands essential to effective rhetorical studies. I find that my knowledge of Georgia politics lends a great deal to the strength of this argument. Further, in recent elections (2016, special election of 2017, and 2018) Georgia has become more of a swing-state in the Deep South. Boasting 16 electoral votes in the Electoral College, Georgia has suddenly become the recipient of substantial national attention as races are no longer as easily predetermined. Additionally, the candidates I have selected ran in state and national elections. Regardless of the level of race, candidates for public office must appeal to the same constituents: voters concerned about their family's safety, well-being, and opportunity for a better life in the United States. It should be noted that this essay does not intend to act as the final word on the way family values shapes the political arena. In fact, this essay, as a qualitative analysis of rhetoric, stands to serve as an invitation for other scholars to pick up the mantle and pursue quantitative studies of family values and candidacy.

Personal Interest

I first became interested in the subject of religion and families during my youth in Georgia. Throughout my life, both of my parents have worked in both careers they have loved and jobs they have been excited to quit. Some of my friends in middle and high school had mothers who did not work—their fathers were the sole breadwinners for the family. I quickly recognized that many of these women tied their ability to stay at home to not only their fortunate economic situation, but as their religious duty as devout Christian women. As a lifelong member of a liberal, Disciples of Christ church in the suburbs of Atlanta, I struggled to understand why the mother was expected to stay home. My mother was certainly a follower of Christ (her father

is even an ordained minister), so why did these women find that they were called to stay at home, submissive to their husbands?

I had a close friend in those years whose mother particularly embodied that traditional stay-at-home-mom culture. She is a brilliant woman with a college education, and her generosity knows no bounds. She is the mother of three, well-mannered, bright children, and her husband's graciousness rivals her own. Yet, she finds that her duty as a Christian woman confines her to the domestic sphere: taking care of the house, running errands, cooking, and the occasional PTA meeting or class field trip. It was not until I attended church one Sunday with my friend's family that I began to understand why her home culture was the way it was. The pastor at this non-denominational church, where many of my schoolmates attended on Sunday mornings, explained that the wife's role was to faithfully serve the husband. Citing the Apostle Paul, the pastor spoke of how the husband was to love the wife as Christ loved the church.⁹ The women were to follow their husbands' leadership as he sought to embody the Savior in his own faith journey. The pastor certainly demonstrated an extensive understanding of the literal Biblical text and selected verses from throughout the sixty-six books of the canon to justify his understanding of marriage and the family.

Despite the well-rehearsed and compelling nature of the pastor's pitch, I still found myself resisting his understanding of the family. I wanted to understand why these well-educated women were so willing to forfeit careers or public lives to serve their husbands in the home. Later, as I developed awareness for political attitudes, I came to wonder why the Republican party was so popular amongst these same women. These women consistently voted for a party that I understood to value personal liberty above all else—something I did not readily identify in these women's lives. However, it was their value of how conservative candidates spoke of family

and the importance of strong, nuclear families that attracted the interest of these Christian women.

In my higher education studies, I have continued to pursue this combination of study: political life and religion. I remain interested in political theory surrounding the secularization thesis, and the counter-examples of religion dominating state action. I study case law focused on the questions of religious liberties and the persecution of minority religious sects at the behest of the majoritarian Protestant movement. The various courses and projects that helped refine my academic interest in the subject of religion in political life have brought me to the pursuant study.

Looking ahead, this essay will examine the historical tradition of family values and, coupled with case studies, demonstrate the current status of family values in contemporary political life. Through a dual lens of political science and American religion, I will unpack the influence family values continues to play in public elections as manifest in rhetoric surrounding some of the same political issues the original movement sought to address. I will focus on six case studies that exemplify common political characters in contemporary politics to shed light on how contemporary candidates are engaging the family values issues. I argue that despite the new appearance of rhetoric around family values and the issues those values encompass, the importance of family values persists in contemporary politics. Almost fifty years removed from the initial catalyst of *Roe v. Wade*, candidates still rely upon messaging either catering to, or recasting constituents' perceptions of the family.

HISTORY OF THE FAMILY

Evangelical movement

The term “evangelical” has been difficult for scholars to define. The key difficulty with developing a definition is the sheer diversity of members within the movement. In fact, some might argue that the movement at large is really an overgeneralization of a multitude of individual movements. Scholars prioritize different aspects of the evangelical movement when attempting a definition. First, there are those who prioritize theological belief, namely Christocentric in nature. Timothy George offers a definition emphasizing theological common ground between the different streams of evangelicals: “Evangelicals are a worldwide family of Bible believing Christians committed to sharing with everyone everywhere the transforming good news of a new life in Jesus Christ, an utterly free gift that comes through faith alone in the crucified and risen Savior.”¹⁰ Some scholars stress practices such as revivals and gospel worship, with charismatic-style preaching and altar calls. Still others use institutions and history to craft their definitions of the evangelical movement and attend to organizations like the Southern Baptist Convention or the National Association of Evangelicals.

I believe that the persisting challenge with defining the evangelicalism movement is vital to understanding the movement. Thus, the evangelical movement, as I will analyze it in the Southern United States, has and continues to demonstrate a conflicting identity with multiple tensions. The movement, largely populist in nature, still values the structure of institutions and social hierarchy. Despite the theological call for adherents to find agency in their own path with God, members of the movement abide by social institutions such as systematic racism and gender inequality. While believers passionately testify to their unique faith journey, they submit to the directives of charismatic preachers to accept absolutist doctrine. Finally, even as numbers in the evangelical movement climb in a period when nationwide church attendance dwindles, evangelicals position themselves as a besieged minority. As Donald Dayton describes the

movement, it is “theologically incoherent, sociologically confusing, and ecumenically harmful.”¹¹ While I disagree with Dayton’s stern condemnation of the evangelical movement, I echo his attention to how confusing and contradictory the movement can be. The evangelical movement exists within the contradiction, and, although democratic and populist in nature, this evangelicalism still prioritizes tradition and hierarchy. Nowhere does evangelicalism demonstrate tradition and hierarchy more strongly than it does in the American South.

Southern Traditional Hierarchy

The Deep South has long been identified with a strong sense of tradition; one might say the region has a “tradition of traditions.” Perhaps stemming from their agrarian economy, cultural traditions associated with religion helped farmers to make sense of their world. Religion explained those things that seem to escape explanation, and tradition ordered the chaos of the world. Tradition, as used by white Southern culture, dictates practice. For many, tradition is as binding as law in the land of “Dixie.”¹²

The origin of the South’s tradition of traditions has been debated; however, in terms of social structure, white Dixie culture has always assumed some form of social hierarchy predicated on race and gender. Looking at the former, the presence of Africans in the United States began with their introduction to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Slaves brought to the Southern United States from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade were meant to act as biological machines to fuel the agrarian economy of the South. Initially, since white slaveowners labeled blacks as sub-human, it was seen as pointless to convert African slaves because they did not possess the same Christian divinity that their white captors held. Under growing criticism of slavery, Southern evangelicals and slave owners justified the institution of slavery through a plethora of theological defenses, backed by law such as Dred Scot and the Fugitive Slave Act. A

common Biblical defense came from the ordering of Creation in the second chapter of Genesis.¹³ Blacks were understood by their white counterparts to be of lower created status, and thus a responsibility for white caretaking. After the Civil War and introduction of the “Reconstruction amendments,” the Southern tradition of racial hierarchy would persist through the Jim Crow era, which rested on legal segregation. Even following the rapid dismantling of Jim Crow and legal segregation, the tradition of racism would culturally persist.

Although less violent and publicly fervent, gender discrimination in the South exhibited some parallelism to Southern racism. The traditional mechanisms swaddling the South’s tradition of sexism mirrored those shielding racism. A tradition of Southern chivalry prescribed rigid gender roles and expectations. A gentleman would be courteous, patient, and logical. A lady would be quiet, attentive, and privately emotional. Such expectations flourished under the care of traditional protection and Biblical ordinance. Further, Southern chivalry laid the foundation for the traditional American dream family. Racism and sexism permeated the tradition of Southern hierarchy, and one cannot fully be understood without the other. However, for the purposes of this analysis, I will prioritize my attention to the gender hierarchy as it more readily relates to issues of family. I trust other scholars, more studied than myself in issues of race and ethnic studies, to expand this study to explain the impact of Southern racial institutions on traditional family values in families of color.

The New Postwar South and the American Dream Family

For many years following Reconstruction, the South lagged behind the rest of the country economically, socially, and scholastically. After World War II, things began to change, and the South caught up with the rest of the nation almost overnight. Underpinning the South’s rapid development were key changes in the Southern economy.¹⁴ Although no longer able to enlist the

support of slave labor in the fields, advancements in agricultural technology improved crop yields and expedited the harvesting process.¹⁵ As a part of American fear of imminent war against the Soviets, investment from the government created new military industrial complexes in the South. Cheap land, a new interstate system, and a lack of organized labor all led to a new urban Southern economy, with jobs and opportunities for the Southern economy to diversify from its primary agricultural sector.¹⁶ With more money in the pockets of the average white Southerner, they were more able to emulate the cultural values propagated in the media. Thus, as more Southerners were financially able to have a sole-breadwinner and epitomize the quintessential American family, the deeper such a family model became entrenched in the tradition of the South.

The American dream family modeled a suburban life of abundance. TV shows like *Leave It to Beaver* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* broadcast this ideal on the silver screen as a model to American families. The dream was often depicted in popular culture and media as a suburban house surrounded by a white-picket fence and two children running around outside playing with the family dog while the mother busied herself inside cleaning and preparing supper for the family's evening meal after the father returned from a long day at work. The father was in charge of earning a salary sufficient enough to care for his family. The mother's primary responsibility was the home and the children. Children were to mind the directives of their mothers and fathers with respectful obedience. Overall, the tradition of the American dream family became a construct of middle-class, white Southerners and a key device for the Southern evangelical movement, who sanctified and clothed it in traditional, then biblical language. Biblical language and the American dream family became inseparable: one informed and validated the other.

This idea of family imprinted on the tradition of the American South, and, much like the tradition of racial inequality, the evangelical movement came to the defense of the traditional American dream family and its values. In terms of gender roles, the father was meant to go out into the world and make a name for himself on behalf of his family with sons following in the footsteps of their father and carry the family name. In contrast, the mothers and daughters were to remain in the domestic sphere, their chief responsibility to submit to the directives of their male relatives. Evangelical leaders crafted compelling Biblical arguments to suggest the innate inferiority of the female sex thus positioning males as the superior.¹⁷ The Bible dictated that wives should submit to their husbands while husbands cared for and protected the family.¹⁸ Parents taught children to fulfill their gender role as a responsibility to uphold the sanctity of the Christian family.

Many scholars, far more researched in the dismantling of racial segregation of the South, write histories of the demise of Jim Crow and persisting racism in the South. Important to my argument, however, is that while racism continued after the 1960s, Christian Right leaders could not continue to justify racism with the gospel: the theological arguments for racism were founded on sandy ground. Thus, with new attention to the traditional family, evangelicals turned to elevate gender-based social hierarchy. Brewing national feminist movements threatened the gender hierarchy leaving the evangelical movement to enter the new decade with a heightened sense of fear.

In the 1970s, the feminist movement found its stride after the Equal Rights Amendment, the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and gay rights find prominent roles on political agendas. The three issues quickly merged into one liberal platform as an antithesis to the gender hierarchy and traditional family.¹⁹ Despite the burgeoning power of the feminist movement, countervailing

forces rose to oppose the liberalization by reasserting conservative values as the protectorate of the family. Evangelicals found themselves at the helm of these counter-movements to offer theological providence to protecting the family and espousing conservative ideology.

ERA

As the 1960s concluded with the winds of change stirring the South, the 1970s introduced full-scale assaults on the traditional American dream family. The feminist movement began to rally behind a unifying purpose: the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The ERA would give teeth to liberal feminists seeking equal-footing with their male counterparts in every aspect of human life. The ERA increased in traction due to the efforts of the feminist movement only to abruptly stop as Phyllis Schlafly and others from the evangelical movement challenged with STOP-ERA.²⁰ STOP-ERA intended to advocate for those women who sought to protect their livelihood as mothers and recruited women willing to stand up for their position in the family. They understood the ERA as a legislative mandate to dissolve the traditional family against Biblical guidance.²¹

Some of the most stringent opposition of women to the ERA came from the South, with Georgia as one of the first battlegrounds for Schlafly's forces. These women, known as "suburban warriors," led lives in accordance with traditional family values in the suburbs of Atlanta.²² Atlanta serves as the economic center of the South, and, along with distributing goods, disseminated ideas to the rest of the South. As the conduit to the South, "Terminus" could spread change and resistance movements to the rest of Dixie. During the Goldwater presidential campaign in 1964, these women baked cookies and held home meetings to offer their support for the Republican candidate.²³ Though Goldwater lost to Johnson, the suburban warrior organization remained intact, ready to fight the next threat that might disrupt their American

dream. Thus, when the ERA rose to prominence, the suburban warriors united under the leadership of Lee Ague to join Schlafly's STOP-ERA campaign.

Abortion

One of Schlafly's strategies was to connect the ERA to abortion. Other evangelicals like Francis Shaeffer and Jerry Falwell followed her direction in the proxy fight against feminism.²⁴ The 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* communicated the government's intention to support the issue. In 1975, with a unified enemy acting under the protection of the SCOTUS opinion, the evangelical movement went to work on its opposition to organized abortion. They convinced other evangelicals that abortion was an affront to motherhood and the American dream family. Francis Schaefer championed the evangelical response to abortion and joined forces with Catholics like Schlafly. Together, they formed the Christian Right.²⁵

Sexuality

I will offer a quick note on the ERA and abortion to help explain the magnitude of the Gay Rights movement joining the feminist movement. Not all evangelicals were anti-ERA. In fact, Schlafly represented only a small contingent of evangelical women opposed to legislation promoting equity of men and women in the public sphere. The language of the ERA did not necessarily infringe upon the relationship between men and women in the domestic sphere. It only protected women in public. Nevertheless, Schlafly's effort carried the day, and the ERA was defeated. Similarly, after the *Roe* decision, the evangelical resistance to abortion did not take shape until a few years after the decision. The language of Justice Blackmun posited the issue of abortion as a case of individual rights. The democratic populist evangelicals had little reason to object to an opinion upholding the right for citizens to make decisions for themselves. Thus, the

anti-abortion movement within evangelicalism came only after Francis Schaefer made his pitch to oppose abortion and did not enter mainstream evangelicalism until Jerry Falwell demonstrated support for Schaefer's anti-abortion stance.²⁶ However, gay rights did not receive such indifference from the evangelical movement. Evangelicals almost uniformly held that homosexuality violated the principles of created order and made both naturalist and Biblical arguments to defend their opposition to homosexuality.²⁷ Consequentially, in 1977 when the National Women's Conference formalized its support of the gay rights movement, evangelicals unified against the feminist movement.²⁸

White House Council on Families

Returning back a year to 1976, evangelicals found an opportunity to enact change in the American government. For the past decade and a half, evangelicals fought a multi-front war against forces seeking to undermine the traditional family. Although the evangelical movement could deploy defenses to members in church pews, it sought a demonstration of support for the family by the federal government. So, when Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist from Georgia, announced his intention to run for president, evangelicals jumped to his support. During Carter's campaign, he pledged that an Executive conference would investigate and study ways that the government could better support the family.²⁹ Evangelicals heard Carter's promise as an angelic hymn that would lead to institutional change to protect the traditional family. In actuality, Carter's White House Conference on Families in 1980 would enrage evangelicals and end evangelical support for Democratic candidates.

The Conference illuminated a great disparity between the traditional American Dream family and the real American family. Quite pointedly, exemplary evidence of the American dream family proved almost non-existent. The traditional American family truly existed in a

dream much more so than in reality. Falwell rebuked the White House effort as the “Anti-Family Conference,”³⁰ and Carter’s last-ditch effort to fulfill a campaign promise to the Christian Right erupted almost as violently as the Iranian Hostage Crisis.

Traditional Family Values and Modern Politics

Following the Carter presidency, the Christian Right fully developed and asserted its force in the political sphere. As a burgeoning political power, it fleshed out and articulated a clear platform of issues for which it would advocate. These issues unified the tradition and hierarchy of the white, middle-class into a cogent slate of issues, simultaneously presenting feminism and feminist values as dangerous to the American dream family. The Equal Rights Amendment tore mothers from their families and should be defeated; abortion compromised the sanctity of motherhood and should be defeated; gay rights tarnished the heterosexual parental partnership and should be defeated. The Christian Right’s success clothed these issues in the rhetoric of the American dream family, which gave them an unprecedented power. No politician would dare stand against the family, and the Christian Right clearly explained to evangelical Americans what legislative positions would protect the family. In fact, the success of the Christian Right to fuse traditional family values with American tradition created a nostalgic “Main Street USA” culture in the nation. Religious and political leaders alike spoke of the traditional American family as the bedrock for patriotic communities who served as the backbone of the country. And while postwar America constructed the traditional family, conservative evangelicals spoke of it in terms of biblical values.

Many of the personalities and institutions of the more conservative evangelical movement made their way into the Christian Right. Charismatic leaders such like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson instructed their followers to act independently for the movement. Falwell

published advocacy directives in the *Moral Majority Report*, and the flagship publication *Christianity Today* continued to proliferate political positions of notable evangelical leaders.

The Christian Right fully embraced an attitude of belligerence during the impeachment of President Bill Clinton. Clinton, a born-again Christian from Arkansas, found himself in front of congressional committees testifying about an extramarital sexual relationship with a White House intern. The Christian Right denounced the president whose public promiscuity and unfaithfulness insulted the Christian purity of America.³¹ President Clinton's behavior in no way represented the traditional family values of the Christian Right and undermined the image of America the movement fought to protect.

Clinton would not be the last president to disappoint the Christian Right. On both sides of the aisle, presidents neglected to become the heroic champion of the Christian Right agenda. Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush, despite receiving endorsement from the Christian Right, failed to realize a country the movement envisioned. Presidents refused to prioritize planks from the Christian Right platform, and they moved away from out-rightly advancing America as a Christian nation. Access to the White House seemed illusionary when it came to policy. The movement's continued disappointment further entrenched the Christian Right in its belligerent attitude of identifying as a besieged minority.

By the time of Obama's presidency, the Christian Right fully labeled itself as the victim of a liberal state that sought to undermine American tradition. President Barack Hussein Obama militated against almost every normative expectation of the Christian Right.³² As a child of an interracial marriage reared in a predominately Muslim nation, many in the Christian Right signaled disapproval with physical characteristics of President Obama.³³ Further, the issues on which Obama campaigned stood antithetical to the Christian Right agenda protecting traditional

family values. Obama unapologetically supported legalized abortion, a more liberal stance than President Clinton.³⁴ Obama's Affordable Care Act infringed upon the Christian Right's defense of individual liberty.³⁵ Lastly, Obama's support for gay marriage during his second term rebuked the Christian Right's long-standing opposition to gay rights.³⁶

Make America Great Again

As America prepared for a new president in 2016, after President Obama's constitutionally allotted second term, evangelicals found an opportunity to support an entirely new type of candidate. Since the Christian Right first turned to politics, its continued disappointment in "traditional" politicians informed the movement's decision to back a new face to the political domain: Donald Trump. In his speeches and debates, Trump promised to return America to her former greatness. No longer would America be second-fiddle in trade deals, Christianity would not take the back seat, nor would the traditional family be face attacks from liberals who sought to undermine the American dream.

To the surprise of many political scientists, Donald Trump effectively secured the presidency in a 304-227 victory in the electoral college.³⁷ The president-elect's rhetoric during his campaign galvanized evangelical voters to earn him the highest evangelical vote ever to any presidential candidate with 81%.³⁸ Trump's overwhelming support from the evangelical movement stem from his campaign's ability to recognize the traditional family values agenda as part of a lost-America in desperate need of salvation. His election baffled many political scientists who saw his chance at election against a political stalwart such as Hillary Clinton highly unlikely. He held no political experience and demonstrated a lack of genuine understanding for long-standing foreign and domestic policy. Further, he lacked the demeanor

traditional to presidential temperament. His outbursts and “politically incorrect speech” shocked many moderate and liberal voters but helped him gain clout with the besieged silent majority.

Political scientists, scrambling to make sense of Trump’s victory over Clinton created an air of uncertainty during the midterm elections of 2018. In place of clear-cut partisanship before 2016, candidates began to develop new identities either mimic or repudiate Trump’s image. The resultant personas are the focus of this next section of research. I have identified six models of different identity and behavior amongst candidates in the Southern United States. While candidates may seem to share similarities with one another, they each represent a larger model that, taken holistically, provides new insight on contemporary political culture. Despite their differing identities, each model demonstrates great concern with appealing to family as it is the fundamental unit of American society. Candidates either align themselves with President Trump’s embrace of the traditional family values agenda, or they create a new image that better suits their constituency and ideology.

CASE STUDIES

Stacey Abrams (D-GA)

In the scope of this study, Stacey Abrams (D-GA) models new progressive, non-mother female candidates. Though liberal in her politics, Abrams carefully committed herself to family and faith, particularly as an African-American, single, female candidate. Abrams’s dedication to the more progressive values of the Democratic platform make her a rising star in the Democratic party. Yet, she resolutely defended the family and touted her Christian faith as a devout Methodist. Her scholastic achievements, success in her career, and her economically-deficient childhood help her to present herself as the epitome of American idealism, or how hard work can

lead to success, no matter one's background. Although her family may have been economically unstable during her early years, she managed to overcome her economic situation and make a difference in her community through politics.

Stacey Abrams was born in 1973 to a dockworker and a librarian.³⁹ She and her five siblings, situated at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy, did not know wealth.⁴⁰ Eventually her parents moved the family to Atlanta, GA where they both attended Emory University to become ordained United Methodist ministers.⁴¹ Abrams attended Spelman College for her undergraduate degree before continuing her education at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and Yale Law School.⁴² Since 2007, she has served as a representative in the Georgia House of Representatives.⁴³ Three years after being sworn into office, Abrams became the first female to lead either party in the Georgia General Assembly, and the first African American leader in the Georgia House of Representatives.⁴⁴

Abrams framed her campaign as a fight for the forgotten families and communities of Georgia. She demonstrated a respect for the family as the fundamental unit and promised to not only defend it but provide it opportunities to flourish. Her platform espoused the values of "faith, family and service."⁴⁵ During her campaign, Abrams often spoke of her early life and her family's low socio-economic status: "Although my family worked hard and played by the rules, we often went without health care & struggled to get by. Our story is not unique. As #GAGov, I'll fight for every family to have the freedom & opportunity to thrive..."⁴⁶ Abrams's focus on family shone through the most in one of her frequent sayings, "a state where every family has the freedom and opportunity to thrive."⁴⁷ Her rhetoric called attention to the economic hardship some face in Georgia, and she identified the disparity between economic status as a family issue. Moreover, she not only invoked the families of fellow Georgians, but she displayed her own

family-first orientation by first telling about her own family, then moving from her personal situation to her campaign pledge.

Within the space of the traditional family values issues, Abrams took the lead in defending the LGBTQIA community. In the sense of contemporary politics, the gay rights issue of the 1970s has evolved into disputes about the transgender and queer community as a whole. Prominent conflicts such as the bathroom bills and right for transgender persons to serve in the military have found their way to political center stage. In Georgia, the Religious Freedoms Restoration Act (RFRA) has been characterized by liberal Democrats as an attack on the LGBTQIA community. Abrams made her position of opposition to RFRA clear and used RFRA as a springboard to show her support for the LGBTQIA community: “My faith should never be used as a sword to strike down another community. It should always be a shield to protect. I am proud to stand as an ally of #LGBTQ Georgians, and together, we will fight against and defeat discriminatory bills like #RFRA.”⁴⁸ Importantly, Abrams not only grounded her defense of the LGBTQIA community in policy and general equality, but she couched her language as a religious obligation to defend them. Abrams modeled a shift in the Democratic Party wherein Democratic candidates are beginning to invoke their faith and spirituality in their rhetoric.⁴⁹

Abrams does not only invoke faith and spirituality when addressing her support for the LGBTQIA community, she also openly talks about her faith as informing her motivation to run for office and as the thrust for her progressive stances on most issues. In a video entitled “Faith in Georgia,” Abrams claims, “One of the reasons I am running as a Democrat, one of the reasons I consider myself a progressive is because my reading of the Bible says that Jesus Christ was a Progressive.”⁵⁰ Abrams shared her message in this video alongside a statement explaining “I am grounded in my faith. I have faith in Georgia because our values speak directly to the voiceless.

Folks in communities politicians often ignore. My faith tells me to reach out to everyone—because we can only move forward if we stand united.”⁵¹ Abrams links her progressive platform to the ministry of Jesus evoking a strong ethos in the religious South. Her use of Christianity to validate progressive politics subverts the traditional agenda of the Christian Right who used Christianity to support conservative issues. The “values” Abrams appeals to are those she outlined herself, “faith, family, and service.”

Abrams has a unique approach in her appeal to family. She is not a parent, so she does not make direct allusions to her role as a mother. However, she presents herself as a caregiver out of response to religious duty. Her caregiver policy positions, though they are not based in her personal experience as a mother, attempt to find approval from mothers.

In an election largely along partisan lines, Abrams failed to secure enough votes to win the governorship. She garnered most of her support from non-white, liberal voters regardless of gender.⁵² Her opponent, Brian Kemp, a white, conservative male won the support of traditional Republican voters accustomed to supporting leaders who portray themselves as strict, masculine fathers.

Still, Stacey Abrams understood the need to appeal to Georgia voters in the language of family. Despite her status as a non-mother, she demonstrated her capacity to be nurturing through religious rhetoric directly tied to her own family life. Her image as a caregiver satisfied the gendered expectation of Abrams as a mother, and she sought to mother the forgotten families and communities of Georgia. For Abrams, these families are the ones in need of the most care, and she targets through her rhetorical choices. She stood waving the flag of liberal innovation, yet she responded to the expectations created by the Christian Right with deliberate appeal family and faith.

Brian Kemp (R-GA)

In the 2018 gubernatorial election, Stacey Abrams was opposed by Republican Secretary of State Brian Kemp. Secretary Kemp ran on a platform in-line with Trump's America First policy. Further, Kemp modeled both his verbal and physical rhetoric after the Trump presidential campaign of 2016. Kemp's use of hyper-masculine belittlement proved successful against Abrams's caregiver persona when he won election in November 2018. His decision to emulate President Trump's persona casts Kemp as a representative model for Republicans who choose to mimic Trump on the campaign trail or "the Trump man."

Brian Kemp grew up in Athens, GA and graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in Agriculture.⁵³ His parents filed for divorce when he was 13, and Kemp and his sister would maintain a distant relationship with their father until his death in 2006.⁵⁴ Before serving in the Georgia Senate, Kemp prided himself as a successful entrepreneur of a construction company. He recalled at campaign rallies that he built his construction company up from "a pickup truck, a shovel and a toolbox."⁵⁵ Brian Kemp entered the political stage in 2003 after winning a seat in the Georgia Senate.⁵⁶ Seven years after his election to the Georgia Senate, Kemp was elected the Secretary of State in 2010.⁵⁷ Kemp married Marty Kemp, his childhood sweetheart, with whom he shares three daughters.⁵⁸ Kemp and Marty have been married for 24 years.⁵⁹ The family regularly attends Emmanuel Episcopal Church.⁶⁰

Kemp's campaign reinforced his image as a loving, strong father. His rhetoric often reaffirmed his status as a father and family man who sacrifices for the financial and relational prosperity of his family. Kemp summarizes his candidacy as "I'm a man of faith who loves my family and our Nation. I stand for the National Anthem, support those in uniform, & back @realDonaldTrump. If that offends you, then I'm not your guy. But if you are ready for a

politically incorrect conservative, I'm asking for your vote.”⁶¹ His familial devotion found support in his vocalized Christian values. Channeling his fatherly instinct, Kemp posited himself as a protector of families: “As governor, I'll stand with @realDonaldTrump to secure our borders and with law enforcement, prosecutors to stop and dismantle street gangs. I will work around the clock to keep your family and community safe.”⁶² His campaign site's biography ties his fatherhood and family values to his capacity to lead the state, “The couple raised their three daughters to love God, work hard, and serve others. Brian is running for governor to make sure that all Georgia families are safe and prosperous.”⁶³ Throughout the campaign, Kemp won endorsements characterizing him as a “rock” for his family and friends.⁶⁴ Within these two spheres, fatherhood and faithfulness, Kemp established credibility with conservative voters as a protector of traditional family values consistent with the Christian Right's agenda.

Kemp demonstrated his strength as a father boldly and frequently. One of his commercials caught national attention when he pointed a gun near the chest of a young man seeking to take one of his daughters on a date.⁶⁵ Kemp won endorsements from other prominent conservatives who attested to his devotion to family and his duty as a father: “'Brian was always there. He's a rock,' she said. 'Family is first. When his three girls were all in high school they were all playing basketball... He would make sure he was going to be back home in Athens to make that basketball game.’”⁶⁶ Kemp recognized the power of associating oneself with the family and continually reaffirmed his commitment to family. Further, Kemp understood that his duty as a father is to always support and protect his family. As a supportive father, he shows up for the basketball games to show that, despite his busyness as the bread-winner, he has time for his children. As a protectorate, Kemp asserts his guardianship over his daughters by threatening

those who might do them harm; boys need his fatherly blessing to take his beloved daughters on dates.

Faith presented as the second key ethos of the Kemp campaign. Kemp referred to his faith in Christianity as the driving force for his knowledge of right and wrong, especially when it came to governing and leading a family. In policy, Kemp pledged to “veto any legislation that veers from federal ‘religious liberty’ law,” in reference to the Religious Freedoms Restoration bill opposed by Stacey Abrams.⁶⁷ The bill gives businesses the ability to create policy around how they recognize gay and transgender persons. Kemp, however, crafted his support for the legislation as a protection of religious freedom. Rather than identify the LGBTQIA as the true target, Kemp wrapped his appeal to religious freedom with language of individual private choice. Kemp’s evangelical audience found comfort in Kemp’s double-edged promise: to support individual liberty and protect religious individualism. This position reflects the paradoxical nature of the evangelical movement: a decision to legislate around private choice to defend populism consistent with a central doctrine.

Kemp’s defense for religious freedoms (i.e. conservative Christian ideology) and image as a resolute father helped earn him 88% of the evangelical vote in the 2018 gubernatorial election.⁶⁸ Kemp spoke to his evangelical audience as a faithful father seeking to protect the traditional family through his behavior with his own family. Unlike President Trump, Kemp did not face the struggle to justify marital infidelity and the traditional family, but Kemp’s use of a hyper-masculine persona aligns perfectly with President Trump. Kemp’s rhetoric was similarly employed by candidates such as Corey Stewart (R-VA) and Henry McMaster (R-SC). Kemp was the quintessential “Trump man” during the 2018 elections.

Beto O’Rourke (D-TX)

Robert “Beto” O’Rourke galvanized thousands of voters in solid-red Texas and inspired a near upset victory of incumbent Senator Ted Cruz. Through an entirely grassroots-funded campaign, O’Rourke traveled Texas speaking with constituents in intimate townhall settings and sharing his experiences along the campaign trail on Facebook Live. O’Rourke garnered support amongst the millennial generation with some polls suggesting 66% approval amongst 18-34-year-olds.⁶⁹ Many have compared O’Rourke’s character to that of former President Barack Obama.⁷⁰ In his demeanor and ability to engage the younger generation, O’Rourke presents recognition for family as the fundamental unit of America; however, he devotes limited rhetoric in establishing himself as a family man. His rhetoric assumes the importance of family in policy and uses the image of broken family as an ill that must be rectified. In these ways, O’Rourke embodies an “old-school Democrat.”

O’Rourke does little to bring his own family image into the mainstage. From time to time, his wife would be featured on live streamed videos in the car, but primarily his focus attended to constituents’ families. O’Rourke positioned himself as a defender not of traditional families, but families whose lives were far from the American dream family. As was commonplace with O’Rourke’s campaign, he spoke of a constituent who “starts his shift at 4:30pm. When it ends at 3am, he makes the 3 hour trip back to the house he rents with his parents. Cuts into time with family, time to sleep, to be healthy, to do hobbies, to do the other things he’s meant to do.”⁷¹ He spotlights the inconsistency between this constituent and the promise of the American dream family’s abundance of both time and resources.

For O’Rourke, his messaging centered around progressive policy points that bore an assumed attention to family such as women’s rights and LGBTQIA Americans. “I don’t think you can be too gay to buy a cake. I don’t think you can be too gay too pen your caring family to

one of TX's 30,000 kids in the foster care system. Let's end this discrimination. Let's pass the Equality Act. Let's ensure equal justice under law for LGBTQ Americans."⁷²

Beyond these two obvious opposition points to the traditional family values agenda, O'Rourke spent much time talking about family separation at the US-Mexico border as the result from strict immigration policy from President Trump. O'Rourke called attention to unjust treatment of family, "The consequences of separating kids from their parents is traumatic for them. It is traumatic for us as a country. I'm working with other members of Congress to end the practice of family separation. We can keep America safe without sacrificing our values."⁷³

O'Rourke's politics, consistent with President Obama's opposition to conservative policy within the traditional family values agenda, should pose him as an enemy to the evangelical movement that largely supports traditional family values. However, O'Rourke gained nominal support from a contingent within the evangelical movement: suburban mothers. These mothers expressed their support for O'Rourke's defense of children at the border. In one instance, an evangelical mother in Dallas explained, "I care as much about babies at the border as I do about babies in the womb," in reference to her position as a pro-life voter.⁷⁴ Despite his limited attention to presenting himself as a family man, some voters connected O'Rourke's policy to his appreciation for family.

Tabitha Isner (D-AL)

As an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination, Rev. Tabitha Isner boasts familiarity with the biblical text and Christian tradition. As a mother, Isner knows of the struggles of parenting and the great lengths she would take to protect her family. Isner, a candidate for U.S. Congress in Alabama, used biblical language and reversals of the

traditional family values agenda to propagate her progressive policy positions. Isner's campaign demonstrated great appreciation and attention to the family, but in a new way. Rather than conform to former modern Democratic rhetoric largely devoid of religious language, Isner employs her knowledge of the Biblical text to gain credibility with evangelical voters in Alabama. Her use of religious language and status as a white, suburban mother help her project the image of a "moms' mom," a Christian mother seeking to improve her community for the betterment of other mothers' families.

Tabitha Isner, the daughter of church workers, holds two master's degrees from the University of Chicago, one in divinity and another in public policy.⁷⁵ Though she does not talk much about her early life, she recalls her parents' intention to teach her the values of working hard and serving others.⁷⁶ Leading up to the campaign, Isner worked with a software company designing computer applications to support early-childhood education.⁷⁷ Her husband, Shane, works as a congregational minister in Montgomery.⁷⁸ They first met in divinity school while at the University of Chicago.⁷⁹ Together, the couple parent an African-American son whom they first fostered before filing for permanent adoption.⁸⁰ When interviewed by *Salon* magazine, Isner described herself as "a pastor's wife... a foster and adoptive mom, and... an early childhood education policy wonk."⁸¹ At the forefront of how she identifies herself, she readily acknowledges her participation in family life. Though her family might not fit the traditional mold, she frames her family in a traditional way.

Alabama Democrats saw a clear path to victory after Doug Jones succeeded in his Senate race due to record turnout from the African-American community.⁸² A *New York Times* magazine article printed a few weeks before the election suggested that Isner embodied the ideal Democratic candidate for deep-red Alabama because she has a personal story that resonates with

Alabama voters.⁸³ She referenced her Christian upbringing and fluently spoke the evangelical language of gospel. Her faith informs her progressive positions and overall call to public service, and she readily names the association between her candidacy and her ministry. In her policy agenda, Isner identified her target audience and the constituency from which she seeks support. Her policy focus attended to paid family leave, affordable child care, and strong public education.⁸⁴ These policies primarily stand to serve working mothers, single-parent homes, and families of low-socioeconomic status that could all benefit from such support. Through a combination of her religious vernacular and targeted progressive agenda, Isner played to her “moms’ mom” image.

Isner touted her platform as “#seriousfamilyvalues,” which eventually became one of her principle slogans.⁸⁵ Her language invoked a theme of reclamation, declaring the traditional family values agenda at odds with her vision for the future of Alabama: “the idea of ‘family values’ has been used to defend discrimination for too long. It’s time for serious family values: affordable health care, affordable child care, and supports for foster and adoptive parents.”⁸⁶ Isner sought to upend the Christian Right’s values in favor of her values as a member of the “Christian Left.” On her campaign page, she referenced a Bible verse from Ephesians that motivated her decision to become a candidate.⁸⁷ Her rhetoric as she continued with her call to candidacy, her messaging sounds more like a sermon than a stump speech, weaving patriotism and religiosity together: “In these United States of America, we can all enjoy abundant life, but it’s going to require courage and faithfulness to our ideals.”⁸⁸

In family values policy, Isner took some moderate positions that might better resonate with more theologically conservative mothers. Despite her self-identification as a pro-choice candidate, Isner qualified her position with alternative policy points to temper her stance on

abortion; she advocated for comprehensive sexual education and easily accessible contraception, prenatal care, and child-care as ways to reduce the abortion rate.⁸⁹ Additionally, she conveyed her opposition to late-term abortions only with exceptions for rape, incest, and maternal health.⁹⁰

Although Isner seemingly exhibited all of the traits necessary for a successful Democratic candidate, she lost in the general election to Martha Roby. Isner cited the difference in fundraising as a key factor in the lost largely a byproduct of dismal national funding.⁹¹ As a moderate Democrat, Isner believed she alienated national Democratic donors who seek out more liberal candidates in line with the Party's traditional agenda.⁹² She also speculated that her reliance upon her faith to motivate her candidacy proved difficult for national donors to swallow.⁹³ Further, she competed against another female for the congressional seat. Thus, the effectiveness of her rhetoric as a mother might have been muddled by an oversaturation of maternal rhetoric in the race. While one may struggle to find pictures and references to her family on her campaign site, Roby boasted her reception of the Family Research Council Action's "True Blue" award for her "unwavering commitment and consistent support of faith, family, and freedom,"⁹⁴ and her family could be found through a quick survey of her Facebook page.⁹⁵ Isner might have moderated her policy enough to make herself competitive to moderate voters, but Roby's unabashedly conservative image played to the deep-red state.

Rev. Isner was not alone in the 2018 midterms as a "moms' mom" persona. Isner primarily sought the support of traditionally underserved communities in Alabama, but she represented a growing movement amongst Southern suburban women to identify a disconnect between their values and those of the Republican Party. Some of these women did not leave it to others to fill the void but chose to run themselves to bridge the gap. Other candidates of this model include Lucy McBath from Georgia and Kendra Horn from Oklahoma. These women

conveyed a sense of strength rooted in their families. Their experience with their families informed their positions on policy, and they sought support from other mothers whom might be sympathetic to a position predicated on protecting the family through progressive policy.

Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)

In Tennessee, Marsha Blackburn represented the Republican Party in a race against former governor Phil Bredesen for the open Senate seat. Blackburn ran a campaign grounded in Trump's America First policy, using policy rhetoric similar to the president. Unlike her leader, however, Blackburn is a woman, and the gender difference between the two presented a unique manifestation of Trump hyper-masculinity. In many ways, Blackburn reinforced traditional conservative definition of the traditional American dream family by defending policy designed to support conservative family values.

Importantly, Blackburn departed some from other female conservatives in her presentation of family. Sarah Palin formerly set the standard for Republican women running for office; they needed to demonstrate their responsibility as an attentive mother whose family would not suffer as she entered the political fray. Blackburn, however, entirely avoided her role as a mother, and attended to upholding Trump's policy. Nevertheless, she stands as a significant model for this study as she exemplifies the tense paradox conservative women must endure to satisfy expectations.

Blackburn was born and raised in Southeastern Mississippi, graduating from Mississippi State University in 1973.⁹⁶ Before Blackburn's election to the 108th U.S. Congress, she unsuccessfully campaigned for the House of Representatives in 1992.⁹⁷ After her loss, she found her way into the Tennessee state senate in 1998 as the first ever woman elected to the 23rd District Seat.⁹⁸ Marsha first entered Congress in 2003 and served as a representative for the state

until January 2019 when she took her seat in the U.S. Senate won during the 2018 election.⁹⁹ Prior to her to life in public service, Blackburn worked in event planning, at one point owning a promotion-event management firm called “Marketing Strategies.”¹⁰⁰ As for family, she met her husband, Chuck, in 1974.¹⁰¹ Chuck founded the International Bowtie Society and authored *The Bowtie Bible* after years working as a manufacturing representative.¹⁰² She and her husband have two children and two grandchildren.¹⁰³

Blackburn indifferently positioned her gender as a forefront consideration for her election; at times, she directly worked to mask her gender as a topic for discussion. While the Democratic women previously named in this study—Tabitha Isner and Stacey Abrams—spoke often to their roles as mothers and caregivers, Blackburn sought to shift conversation away from her womanhood and back towards her conservative ideology. She commented, “...I fully understand that Republican women do not fit the narrative that many in the media would like to construct. But I will tell you this: Most women, and you mentioned suburban moms, are very much like me.”¹⁰⁴ Blackburn suggested that female voters in Tennessee would be compelled not by her gender or her maternal status, but rather by her devotion to conservative policy positions. Since first joining the Tennessee congressional delegation, she has preferred the title “congressman” to “congresswoman.”¹⁰⁵ Such an appeal signals Blackburn’s complicity with the gendered norm of masculine leadership.

Blackburn cited five key values as the orientation of her life and platform: “faith, family, freedom, hope and opportunity.”¹⁰⁶ She earned her support from conservative voters and contempt of liberal voters based on her stringent opposition to LGBTQIA issues, the Violence Against Women act, and her vehement pro-life stance. When speaking to these issues, however, Blackburn did little to establish an ethos as a mother. Her positions instead found their

foundation on party platform and partisan opposition to the Democrats. Regarding abortion, the issue that Schlafly championed, Blackburn resorted to canned rhetoric like “I believe every life is precious and we must next stop fighting to put an end to abortion once and for all.”¹⁰⁷

Interestingly, despite her status as a mother, Blackburn invoked her family similarly to Abrams: opting to recall her relationship with her parents rather than her relationship with either her own children or her grandchildren. She recalled, “Growing up my family taught me to leave things in better shape than you found them & always give back more than you take. Those lessons have stayed with me to this day & I’m taking that same commitment to the U.S. Senate.”¹⁰⁸ She chose not to talk about how she parents or cares for her own children, but instead demonstrates her respect for family as a remembrance of the values from her rearing. Her choice could signal a desire to not be beholden to a maternal image, which proves consistent with her other rhetorical choices to avoid donning a feminist persona.

Blackburn embodied a movement: conservative women who deviate from a feminist platform for leadership. In and of itself, this movement demonstrates something of a paradox. Women’s political liberation came from the feminist movement, yet conservative female candidates must rebuke the feminist movement as antithetical to traditional family values. In Georgia, Karen Handel ran a strikingly similar campaign with an emphasis on battling the liberal Democrats on policy with little attention to her role in the family. Although Katie Arrington and Vicky Hartzler use more maternal rhetoric to defend their conservative positions, both appeal to their constituent bases through similar traditionally masculine issues such as abortion, gun rights, and individual liberty. Arrington of South Carolina beat Mark Sanford, an incumbent congressman, in the primary election with a pivot to more conservative values and an endorsement from President Trump.¹⁰⁹ Hartzler successfully found re-election to Missouri’s 4th

congressional district after a campaign much in line with President Trump's policy agenda. These women all chose to run for office on platforms consistent with President Trump rather than carving out space for themselves as more moderate. Their decision to play to the base might suggest some tensions between the norm of their female gender status and the expectations of the gendered hierarchy, but like the evangelical movement itself, they are comfortable living in the tension.

In some ways, Blackburn's campaign greatly resembled that of anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly 40 years before. Blackburn effectively spoke against the feminist movement, pushing the issues before all else. Unlike Schlafly, however, she chose not to make a motherhood appeal. She did not reassure her constituents that her family was cared for, that she had fulfilled her responsibilities as a mother. Blackburn chose to operate in the tension by avoiding conversation about her family entirely, instead focusing on supporting Tennessee's families.

Ralph Norman (R-SC)

During the 2018 elections, Ralph Norman ran for re-election to South Carolina's 5th congressional district. Norman is a true to form, old-guard Republican who, for the purposes of this study, helps to set the standard for how Republicans functioned prior to Trump's election in 2016. Norman made intentional rhetorical choices to demonstrate both his loving fatherliness and devotion to the fundamental principles of traditional family values. As such, Norman can be labeled as a "pater familias," a traditional champion for the American dream family and a faithful country. The term pater familias points to a historical male head-of-household who makes all decisions for the family and, for contemporary use, signals a man who carries a sense of traditional gendered authority.

Norman is a proud son of South Carolina, raised in the Rock Hill area.¹¹⁰ For college, Norman attended Presbyterian College in Clinton, graduating in 1975 with a degree in business.¹¹¹ After graduation, Norman joined his father's construction company and it became one of the most successful commercial real estate developers in the state.¹¹² In 2004, Norman was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives and, after two years in office, ran unsuccessfully for the 5th congressional district seat against John Spratt.¹¹³ Norman continued to serve in the state assembly until 2017 when he ran for Mick Mulvaney's open seat in the 5th congressional district.¹¹⁴ Norman proved successful in the special election and ran as an incumbent during the 2018 cycle.¹¹⁵ Norman and his wife Elaine have four children and 16 grandchildren.¹¹⁶ The couple are members of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Rock Hill.¹¹⁷

It may be important to better elucidate what constitutes old-guard, pater familias Republicanism. I use this phrase to identify modern (pre-Trump) Republicans like former presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush who are typically older, white men who spent careers in public office. Their political efforts follow their conservative values; however, they come from an era where their partisanship can be put aside in the spirit of compromise for the greater good. Their private lives involve families who abide by the code of traditional family values, representative of the American dream family. Their faith plays a role in their values, and they speak effectively to evangelical audiences though at times indirectly. Importantly, pater familias politicians defer to hierarchy in many facets of their life. They abide by the hierarchy of traditional family at home, and they defend the hierarchy of public institutions and process while in office.

Norman's campaign site named his two most important values: "his faith and his family." In this way, Norman functioned as an effective model for a pater familias Republican whose

chief values were the protection of the American dream family and sanctification of the Christian state. Norman consistently reinforced his positions on family and faith through his policy choices and his messaging rhetoric as evident in an interview with a South Carolina political activism group called the Palmetto Family Council.

Palmetto Family Council champions its mission to “present biblical principles in the centers of influence on issues affecting the family through research, communication and networking” to work towards a vision where “God is honored, religious freedom flourishes, families thrive and life is cherished.”¹¹⁸ The group congruently defines family with the American dream family. In the interview, Norman rattled of a few Bible verses that motivate his public service including the Isaiah 6:8 call to serve and the “time and place” verse in Ecclesiastes 3.¹¹⁹ Norman recalled his childhood in a Christian family and being baptized and saved early in life.¹²⁰ When speaking about faith in America, Norman posited that the country was “founded on the religious principles taught by Christ,” and that “the faith community has got to weigh in to basically say Christ should be the center of their universe in Washington, D.C... it’s up to us to carry the torch.”¹²¹ More than anything else, Norman shared that he “pray[s] for a genuine revival in this country.”¹²² Norman’s language might more readily invoke more religiosity than other Republicans, but his ability to knowledgeably speak in the gospel tongue demonstrate his nativity with the evangelical community. Many pater familias Republicans bear the same talent. Whether or not they return to faith as often as Norman does, pater familias candidates respect the power of appealing to evangelical voters through gospel language, and they can rattle off Biblical support as necessary.

In policy, Norman upholds the values of the Christian Right agenda in traditional family values. Norman takes a typical pro-life stance on abortion citing, “With four children and sixteen

grandchildren, I strongly support the sanctity of life and believe that life begins at conception.”¹²³ When President Trump proposed a ban on transgendered persons serving in the military, Norman publicly agreed with the decision.¹²⁴ Other positions, such as his opposition to Obamacare and demand that education be determined by parents aided by state and local governments prove in line with the Christian Right’s value for individual liberty.¹²⁵

Though representative of a pater familias candidate, Norman at time shows signs of staunch partisanship that might prove at odds with some pater familias candidate behavior. The degree to which Norman’s involvement in partisan politics might signal a reality of the new political landscape stands outside the scope of the present study, but it should be noted that other pater familias like former Georgia Governor Nathan Deal or Senator Lindsey Graham earlier in his career were more apt to bargain with Democrats to produce bipartisan legislation. However, the success of bipartisan, moderate candidates may be coming to an end in the age of hyper-partisanship. Formerly, members such as Senator Jeff Flake portrayed the best of moderate, pater familias candidates, but pater familias candidates might better resemble Ralph Norman. Nevertheless, Norman’s devotion to family and faith suffice as adequate evidence of his role as a pater familias. Moreover, his familiarity with not only conservative policy saturated with Christian Right influence, but his ability to recognize and speak authentically to evangelical through gospel language prove his concern with evangelical voters and their political aims.

CONCLUSION

Family matters. When candidates make the decision to run for office, they must understand that America expects them to make a statement about families and issues important to families. Perhaps, even more importantly, candidates must understand that no clear path exists for performing up to family values. In the post-Trump era, candidates are reacting to Trump’s

success by positioning themselves in interesting ways related to family. Some, like Rev. Isner, choose to recast family values as a non-conservative idea. Others, like Governor Kemp, behave consistently with Trump's hyper-masculine, fatherly image. No matter who the candidates is, or how they choose to talk about family, they must overcome the innate paradoxical nature of family values. The evangelical movement, when it decided to clothe the American dream family in biblical language, imparted its own tensions into American dream family. Thus, in the same way that evangelicalism maybe difficult to define outside of its underlying paradoxical identity, the family values of the American dream family may best be described as paradoxical. Rev. Isner could be right that the best way to live into family values is to afford care to those who need it the most. Senator Blackburn could also be right that conservative values help families take care of themselves. Both speak to family values but on different sides of the issue. So, long as family matters and both parties maintain fundamentally different understandings of the family, candidates will struggle to make sense of how they need to represent family values in their campaigns.

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¹²³ Office of Representative Ralph Norman, “Key Issues,” accessed April 16, 2019, <https://norman.house.gov/legislation/key-issues.htm>.

¹²⁴ John Monk, “Rep. Norman says he supports Trump on transgender military stance,” The State, August 29, 2017, <https://www.thestate.com/news/local/crime/article169822422.html>.

¹²⁵ Ralph Norman for Congress, “Our Nation’s Issues,” accessed April 16, 2019, <https://www.electralphnorman.com/issues/>.