

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The United States remains engaged in a war unlike anything it has ever experienced before. “It’s a war for the absolute soul of this country” (Privitera 2010). In order to restore the United States to the ideals and values that many Christians believe it to be founded on, a conservative Christian movement known as the Christian Right formed in the late 1970s among religious groups all across the country. While the Christian Right represents a large and diverse range of beliefs, the movement ultimately seeks to mobilize and represent conservative Evangelical Christians in politics (Wilcox 2003). One of the most apparent ways that the Christian Right has tried to use politics to promote their policy agenda is by running their own candidates for public office. The purpose of this study is to determine how the campaign strategies used by Christian Right candidates differ from non-Christian Right candidates in competitive elections, and to analyze how these strategies have changed over time.

While the “corrupt,” secular world of politics was a place that few conservative religious groups sought involvement in following the infamous Scopes Trial and the failure of Prohibition, recent decades have seen a substantial increase in the efforts taken by conservative religious groups to impact public policies in their favor. Where political action was once taboo, it is now considered essential (Dowland 2009). Even though religious activists are most often grouped in the broader category of interest groups, recent scholarship has suggested that the contradictory goals that religious activists must try and balance make them distinct from other activists. Because religious activists have the responsibility to impact politics while at the same time remaining faithful to their religious tradition, their involvement in politics manifests itself differently from their

secular counterparts. The purpose of the first section of my study is to investigate these differences specifically in Christian Right campaigns. Specifically, *how does a Christian Right orientation affect a candidate's campaign strategies in competitive elections?* I predict that having a Christian Right orientation will cause candidates to have specific campaign strategies that are distinct to religious activists and differ sharply from the strategies employed by non-Christian Right candidates.

The Christian Right is one of the most recent religious political players that formed in the late 1970s due to what was thought to be a decline in traditional values and morality that had occurred in the 1960s and 1970s (Moen 1992). Almost immediately following its formation though, the Christian Right encountered barriers and limitations that largely limited the movement's effectiveness. Many scholars attributed these limitations to inherent weaknesses within the movement itself (Wald & Corey 2002). While early scholars suggested that the movement was an altogether failure (Cromartie 1993), a more recent body of scholarship has suggested that the Christian Right has learned to overcome its previous impediments to political effectiveness and has become a viable player in the political realm (Wald & Corey 2002, Atwood 1990, Rosin 2000, Rozell & Wilcox 1996). Because of this recent evolution of the movement, the second section of my study examines *how the political maturation of the Christian Right movement affects the campaign strategies used by Christian Right candidates*. I predict that although the strategies used by Christian Right and non-Christian Right campaigns will differ, these strategies will begin to converge as the movement becomes more politically mature over time.

While a lot of previous research has focused on the strategies of interest groups in elections, there has been a limited amount of literature comparing religious activists to non-religious activists. My study will help to add to this limited body of literature, and will significantly contribute to the emerging research agenda on the Christian Right. Understanding the strategies employed by the Christian Right in competitive elections, and how these strategies are shifting over time is important for understanding how the Christian Right approaches political life, and how this in turn affects its legitimacy and influence over time.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *What Makes Religious Activists Unique*

Throughout United States history, social movements have had the ability to bring about large-scale changes in the American political system. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone, major policy changes came as a result of the civil rights movement, women's movement, and the various environmental movements, just to name a few. While many different factors contribute to the formation and success of American social movements, religion can be argued to be one of the most important forms of political activism in our nation's history. Dating back to before the colonial era, religious activists have had a significant impact on United States policy making. As a political phenomenon, religion is most often studied as part of the general category of public interest groups in order to gauge its impact and defining moments of success in United States politics. When religion is studied independently, it is often in its relation to more well known theories of social movements (Fleischmann & Moyer 2009, Wald, Silverman, & Fridy 2005). For example, in one particular study, scholars were asked to approach religiously engaged

social movements “with the same theoretical frameworks used to understand secular political forces” (Wald, Silverman, & Fridy 2005).

There have been many similarities found between religious activists and non-religious activists, but according to Hofrenning (1995), religious activists have a unique goal that makes them distinct. While all social activists share the goal of impacting politics, religious activists have the unique responsibility to remain faithful to their religious tradition. Throughout history, many religious groups have remained isolated from political life, seeing politics as a corrupt system that they should have no part in. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religion was relegated to the private sphere; and it is only within the past three decades that we have really seen religious activists returning to public life wanting to impact and shape policy (Lindsay 2007). This recent mobilization of religious groups in the political realm, particularly conservative religious groups, has been brought about in part by the view that their religious values and morals have come under attack by an increasingly secular society. Moen (1992) described this push into the political realm as a desire to be a part of God’s work. The secular world of politics gives religious groups a clear opening into following God’s will and fulfilling their religious duties. Hofrenning (1995) sees this desire to affect politics in the name of God as behaving similarly to how an ancient biblical prophet would. Prophets in bible times were called on by God to give His message and truth to the world. Similarly, religious groups have this same prophetic outlook on the truth that they have been mandated by God to spread to the entire world. They have made a covenant with God to create His kingdom on earth, and they have chosen the political realm as their means to do it.

Along with this prophetic goal that religious groups feel they must remain faithful to, they also have the goal of impacting policy. In order to do this, they must make the jump into the secular world of politics, and in a sense, start to play the ‘game’ of politics. This means that a religious group may find itself fundraising, lobbying Congress, writing out the details of a proposed bill, campaigning, or involved in many other forms of political participation that religious groups do not normally take part in. While balancing the goal of political impact with the prophetic goal described above can cause a significant amount of stress and conflict for religious groups, it is also what makes them unique. According to Hofrenning (1995), it is because of their contradictory goals that religious activists have developed a type of activism that is distinct from non-religious activists.

#### *Different Approaches to Political Life*

In 1964, Barry Goldwater won the Republican nomination despite his limited chances of winning in the general presidential election of 1965. One of the biggest mysteries of this nomination for scholars has been why a candidate would be nominated if he or she was perceived by many as unelectable. In an attempt to answer this question, Wildavsky (1965) created a clear distinction between “politician” delegates and “purist” delegates based on their characteristic modes of approaching political life. Wildavsky found that although many delegates knew that Goldwater did not have a chance of winning the presidential election, they were far more interested in his consistency, honesty, integrity, and willingness to stand by his values. These delegates were defined by Wildavsky as purists, caring more about sticking to their principles than about the political game of winning. While purist delegates will stand by their individual

consciences, politician delegates are willing to make as many allowances as needed in order to gain the public's support. Politicians believe in public responsibilities rather than remaining true to a private conscience. While the politician may believe in compromise, bargaining, exceptions, modifications, and inconsistencies, the purist only sees these tactics as part of the messy world of politics that they want no part in (Wildavsky 1965).

While Wildavsky's study focused on the distinction between purists and politicians on a very general level of political campaigns, Hofrenning (1995) makes a similar distinction focused specifically on religious activists. Instead of using the terms purist and politician, Hofrenning borrows Lowi's (1988) terms of radical versus mainstream approaches to political life. A radical philosophy here focuses on ideological and moral values (Lowi 1988). Just as with Wildavsky's politician distinction, a mainstream approach will have victory as the primary goal, while a radical approach seeks only to remain allegiant to a set of moral principles and policy positions. One of the main distinctions that comes out of these differences that Wildavsky, Hofrenning, and Lowi all mention is the willingness to compromise versus holding steadfast to one's beliefs. It is in this area that religious activists really start to see conflict arising from their contradictory roles. By remaining faithful to their religious values, religious groups must give up the key political tactic of compromising. This strategy towards attack and combat rather than bargaining and compromise has been identified by several scholars in previous studies (Hertzke 1988, Hofrenning 1995, Lienesch 1982) as a distinguishing attribute in religious activism. Other key attributes that distinguish a radical approach from a mainstream approach include broad agendas versus narrow agendas and speaking

in long term versus short term success (Hofrenning 1995). By using the different tactics common to a radical approach, religious groups are able to focus on their prophetic goal and can use secular politics as only a means towards establishing their vision of God's kingdom on earth.

### *The Christian Right*

Although religious activism is not a new phenomenon in the United States, one of the most recent religious political players is the Christian Right. The Christian Right is not a monolithic organization by any means, but is a Christian political movement that seeks to structure society around a conservative interpretation of Christian biblical principles (Texas Freedom Network 2006). The movement draws its support primarily from White, Republican, Evangelical Protestants who support socially conservative issues. An ABC poll found that in 2012, 37 percent of all Christians identified themselves as born-again or Evangelical (Langer 2012), and a separate poll found that 12 percent of the 2000 electorate self-identified as members of the Christian Right (Berlet 2003). In early studies, Christian Right members were often identified by their membership in an Evangelical Protestant denomination, their belief in the Bible as the literal word of God, and their acknowledgment of having undergone a "born again" experience (Deckman 2004). While these indicators can prove helpful in identifying Christian Right members, they can sometimes fall short of encompassing the entire movement. Many studies have therefore turned to issue positions as an indicator for identifying Christian Right membership.

The Christian Right movement arose in the late 1970s due to what was thought to be a decline of traditional values and morality that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s

(Moen 1992). Hertzke (1988) attributed the movement's rise to feeling "threatened by cultural change, loose morality, and the undermining of traditional values." It was the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 legalizing abortion that finally sent conservative Christians over the edge and compelled them to stand up for their beliefs within the public spotlight. In order to combat the secular threat that religious men and women were feeling, a call to strengthen the traditional family structure and traditional morality became a rallying point for the faithful. Suddenly, conservative Protestant religious leaders were no longer confined to their churches, but were actively mobilizing their members to fight against this secular takeover that was threatening their very way of life. Jerry Falwell, founder of the Evangelical political lobbying group the Moral Majority, decided in the 1970s "that this time preaching would not be enough," and that it was now his "duty as a Christian to apply the truths of Scripture to every act of government" (Dowland 2009). Not only was the Christian Right, as they later came to be called by the media and public, trying to impact the political structure, but they were launching an all out war on secular society. As Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Coalition, said in a 1991 gathering, "It's going to be a spiritual battle. There will be Satanic forces... We are not going to be coming up just against human beings, to beat them in elections. We're going to be coming up against spiritual warfare" (Theocracy Watch).

While the Christian Right existed largely on the margins of American society in its beginnings (Hopson and Smith 1999), by the mid 1980s it had gained considerable influence within social and political spheres. In order to remain faithful to their higher calling to rid the world of evil and usher in God's kingdom, the movement focused most of its attention on individual morality issues. While the movement originally focused its

attention on the issues of abortion, feminism, and homosexuality, it later included issues such as school prayer, textbook censorship, sex education, stem cell research, and pornography. Although these issues are extremely varied, they all fit into the Christian Right's rhetoric of defending the family. The Christian Right views the family structure as the central unit of America, and it claims that the family is under direct attack by secular society (Dowland 2009). With the Christian Right's entry onto the national scene, these moral issues have been brought to the forefront of political debate. While many topics such as school prayer and traditional family structures can be traced back to the nineteenth century, the Christian Right has been able to bring these issues back out into the public spotlight as important topics for the political agenda (Cromartie 1993). By choosing to remain faithful to the issues that were important to them, the Christian Right has been largely successful in creating a religiously aware America.

Although the Christian Right has been undoubtedly successful at framing the political agenda around its own issues, it has had a much more difficult time influencing actual policy, particularly at the national and state levels. While the movement talked up its positions on issues such as abortion and school prayer early on, the legal status of these issues has remained unchanged (Hopson and Smith 1999). Because the ultimate goal in politics is to impact policy, many early scholars considered the Christian Right to be a failed movement by the end of the 1980s (Bruce 1993, Cromartie 1993). Many attributed this failure to inherent weaknesses within the movement itself. Hertzke (1988) pointed out that early Christian Right candidates often had a problem focusing, had a significant lack of experience, refused to compromise, and were poor at details of legislation. Wald and Corey (2002) compared the early movement to an unruly

adolescent; a movement that often overestimated its own strength, refused to engage in coalition building, expected too much too fast (Atwood 1990), and defended its policies with ‘because the Bible says so’ arguments (Bruce 1993).

*The Political Maturation of the Christian Right*

While some scholars still believe that the Christian Right is a marginal political force at best and an altogether failure at worst, a growing body of scholarship has emerged suggesting that the Christian Right has indeed overcome its inherent weaknesses described above and has learned the strategies and political maturity necessary for successfully impacting policy. Hopson and Smith (1999) maintain that anyone who sees the Christian Right movement as a failure by the end of the 1990s has not fully considered the ever evolving nature of the movement itself. Indeed, Rozell and Wilcox (1996) suggest that the “amateur tactics of the first wave of Christian Right activism has given way to greater professionalism.” That is to say that after its so called defeat in the 1980s, the Christian Right analyzed its mistakes and made the conscious decision to actually start playing the game of politics.

The Christian Right at its inception had a distinctively religious character about it that one could either agree with or not. Because of the culturally plural society that the Christian Right found itself in though, the movement eventually understood the need to “attenuate the specifically religious elements in their program and to offer their agenda in ‘secular’ form” (Bruce 1993) if they were to ever succeed at impacting policy. Some of the different strategies that the Christian Right has learned to use to help them blur into the mainstream (Rosin 2000) and appeal to a greater number of people have been using secular arguments to support the same positions they had taken before, paying attention

to the audience that they are addressing, emphasizing secular issues while downplaying the more controversial issues, focusing on broadening their coalition, and most importantly, compromising on issues. Many have said that compromising is the name of the game in politics, and the Christian Right has learned that it may be better for them to get a piece of what they want instead of nothing at all through compromise. The movement has also framed their issues in a way as to make them seem absolutely crucial for the survival of the family and this country (Dowland 2009). While many Americans do not agree with the theological perspective that the Christian Right has, they can easily understand the value and need of keeping their country moral and family oriented.

As Hofrenning (1995) predicted, the Christian Right has clearly endured internal tension over their contradictory goals of remaining faithful to their call from God while at the same time impacting policy. It is almost as if they were asked to become involved in politics because of their religion, and then in order to be a viable player in politics, asked to leave their religion behind (Bruce 1993). As Wald and Corey (2002) point out, the Christian Right may be able to succeed in their policy goals, but this often comes at the expense of their original goals of remaining completely faithful to what they believe and what God had called them to do. In order to succeed in politics, the Christian Right had to make the important decision to prioritize their goal of impacting policy over their given prophetic goal of remaining faithful to their character and beliefs.

Because of what is known about this constantly evolving movement, I expect the Christian Right to fall into the purist style of approaching political life in its early years,

going back to the distinction that Wildavsky made between purists and politicians<sup>1</sup>. A purist, according to Wildavsky, focuses on “what they believe ‘deep down inside,’” and is not concerned with taking extreme positions, even if it could cost them the vote. I expect this purist style to be reflected in Christian Right campaign strategies as well. Within a purist campaign, I expect to find the stressing of controversial issues, religious themes, religious rhetoric, and scriptural references. Even though these different elements could severely weaken the appeal of the candidate to a vast majority of the American people, this is not a concern for a purist candidate. Above all, the candidate is concerned with remaining true to what they believe in, even if that could mean losing the election. A lack of compromise will also always be present in a purist campaign since giving in is seen as letting go of what one knows to be true.

When considering the political maturation that the Christian Right has undergone overtime, I expect its later approaches to political life to fall under a more politician style. This politician style should be reflected in their political campaigns as well in their later years. The important elements of politician campaigns contrast sharply with those of the purist campaigns. These campaigns avoid the controversial issues and maintain secular rhetoric in an attempt to broaden their coalition as much as possible. Their main focus is always to win, and they will usually have a very narrow agenda that is concentrated on the exact goals that they want to accomplish if and when they are elected to office. Politician campaigns also have no shame in their willingness to compromise. If

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<sup>1</sup> While similar distinctions to Wildavsky’s 1965 description of purist and politician approaches to political life have been made in more recent years, I choose to use his terms because I believe that the term purist gives a more positive connotation to religious activists than similar labels such as radical (Hofrenning 1995) or amateurs (Hitlin 1977).

compromising on an issue can garner them more votes, then that is the option that they are willing to take.

Based on what is known about religious activists and their prophetic goal to remain faithful to their religious tradition, I expect that *the greater a candidate's commitment to Christian Right principles, the more likely the candidate will be to use a purist approach in campaign strategies*. Acknowledging the evolving nature of the Christian Right though and its sudden shift in its desire to impact policy above all else, I expect that *as the Christian Right politically matures over time, the less likely a Christian Right candidate will be to use a purist approach in campaign strategies*.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to determine how a Christian Right orientation affects a candidate's campaign strategies, and how these strategies have changed over time, I employ the comparative case study method. Specifically, I use the combination of across-case and over-time case comparisons, allowing me to study the Christian Right both qualitatively and chronologically. Recently, there has been a growing push towards the use of statistical methods for research study, but many scholars (Bennett 2004, Gerring 2004, Levy 2008) still argue for the inherent worth of the case study method. A case study allows for a single unit to be studied in great depth, and can therefore help contribute to the theoretical progress of religiously oriented activism in significant ways. Specifically, because a case study allows me to examine my variables of interest in detail, I am better able to identify how religious orientation and political maturation connect to campaign strategies, and whether there is indeed a causal explanation.

Within my study, I focus on campaign strategies used in elections to the Texas State Board of Education. The Texas State Board of Education consists of a fifteen member body that is elected regionally through competitive, partisan elections. As a governing body, the board's mission includes writing statewide curriculum standards, reviewing and approving textbooks, and overseeing the state's permanent school fund (Michels 2012). While the board has not always been a focus for the Christian Right, the past two decades have seen a shift in Christian Right focus from the Texas Legislature to the state board due to a strategic decision made by the movement. The state board has now become what is described by many as a political battleground where Christian Right members are intentionally seeking seats in order to push their policy objectives. The proceedings of the board have increasingly become a focal point for the media both regionally and nationally. Consequently, the Texas State Board of Education gives me the ability to easily identify and differentiate Christian Right candidates from non-Christian Right candidates, and the ability to find considerable media coverage on my identified cases.

To test the theory that religiously oriented candidates have a prophetic role and will therefore use more purist strategies in their campaigns for elected public offices, I use a cross-case comparison of a Christian Right candidate's campaign strategies to a non-Christian Right candidate's campaign strategies. I specifically analyze the 2006 race between Don McLeroy (R) and Maggie Charleton (D) for district nine's seat to the Texas State Board of Education. Because this particular cross-case study holds the type of election, the make-up of the district, and the time of the campaigns constant, I am more

able to focus on my variable of interest, the possession (or not) of a Christian Right orientation, and how this in turn affects a candidate's campaign strategies.

In order to test the theory that Christian Right candidates have politically matured over time and will therefore use more politician strategies in their campaigns for elected public offices, I use an over-time case comparison, comparing an early Christian Right candidate to a Christian Right candidate from the present. I specifically analyze Randy Stevenson's (R) 1994 campaign for district nine's seat to the Texas State Board of Education and compare it to Don McLeroy's 2006 campaign for the same district seat. By comparing these two campaigns, I have the ability to analyze the shift in campaign strategies across a twelve year span. Focusing on a Christian Right candidate in the early 1990s is especially significant since this is the time period when the Christian Right is thought to have begun maturing politically following their 'defeat' in the 1980s. The 1990s also mark when the Christian Right began its strategic attempts to gain control of the state board. Dan Quinn of the Texas Freedom Network described the Texas State Board of Education as the 'sleepy corner of government' before it was revolutionized by Christian Right leaders in the mid-'90s (Michels 2012). By comparing Stevenson's campaign to McLeroy's campaign, the type of election, district make-up, and religious orientation remain constant, allowing me to focus my analysis solely on the shift in campaign strategies over time.

#### *Operationalization of Variables*

In order to study the campaign strategies used by Stevenson, McLeroy and Charleton, I analyze local newspaper articles published in 1994 and 2006. As I have previously mentioned, the Texas State Board of Education has been widely covered in the

media due to the Christian Right's recent attempts to control the board. This wide coverage allows for the 9th district elections to the state board to have a wide range of data available, especially within local newspapers. In each article, I specifically look for the presence or absence of different indicators that are common in purist and politician approaches to political life. The presence of these indicators then allow me to estimate where on a scale between a strong purist approach and a strong politician approach a candidate's campaign falls. While it is possible for a candidate to use only indicators of a purist approach or only indicators of a politician approach, it is much more likely that a combination of the two different approaches to political life will be used, with some candidates favoring one approach over the other. I define my purist approach variable as stressing controversial issues, using religious themes and rhetoric, using scriptural references, having a broad agenda, lacking of focus on broadening the coalition, and refusing to compromise. I define my politician approach variable as just the opposite, stressing non-controversial issues, using secular rhetoric, having a narrow agenda, focusing on broadening the coalition, and compromising. It is through the presence or absence of these different strategy indicators that an estimation of whether a candidate is more purist or politician in their approach to political life is possible.

### THE CASES

#### *Randy Stevenson's 1994 Campaign*

Randy Stevenson is a financial advisor from Tyler, Texas who is the owner of Stevenson Capital Wealth Management, LLC. Stevenson first ran for the board in 1994 against Democratic incumbent Patsy Johnson, against whom he won with 51 percent of the vote. He continued to serve on the board until 1999 as what many considered to be

one of the board's most conservative members.<sup>2</sup> The race in 1994 is considered to be one of the most memorable races for the state board because it marked the beginning of the Christian Right's efforts to control the board. One journalist even described the race as the "Republican Revolution" of 1994 (Auten), where Republican candidates, backed by conservative and Christian groups, viciously fought for every Democratic seat that was up for reelection in the strongest challenge by the Republican Party seen yet. The outcome of the election resulted in Republicans gaining three more seats, and therefore securing a one seat majority on the board. While each of the Republican candidates claimed to be running independently, most observers could not help but notice the similarities between the campaigns, issues, political action committees, and supporters of the six Republicans running in contested races. Throughout the campaign season, and even well after, the six Republican candidates were accused of running as a Christian Right slate seeking to promote a conservative Christian agenda for the board (Arrillaga 1994, Roser & Baker 1994, Stutz 1994). Stevenson was considered by the media and public to be a part of this Christian Right slate, but like his fellow nominees, always denied the complaints and accusations that the GOP candidates were indeed running as a slate. It is interesting to note that although the Republican candidates denied running as a slate, they never actually denied their association with the Christian Right either. Their desire to not be affiliated with the Christian Right could have easily stemmed from the growing negativity with which the label had begun to be associated.

While Stevenson never self-identified as a member of the Christian Right, he never denied his affiliation either, and we can assume his membership based on his

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<sup>2</sup> Stevenson also ran for reelection to the Texas State Board of Education in 2012. He lost in the Republican Primary to incumbent Thomas Ratliff with 47.9 percent of the vote.

affiliations and issue positions. Stevenson's profile on the Texas Tribune identifies his religious preference as Christian. He is a member of the Rose Heights Church in Tyler, a Pentecostal church that emphasizes the conservative Christian Right notions of biblical inerrancy and the importance of a "born again" conversion experience. Stevenson is also a member of a leading Christian Right organization, the Eagle Forum, a conservative interest group whose motto is "Leading the pro-family movement since 1972." The group supports key Christian Right issues such as opposition to abortion, support for women's roles as 'fulltime homemakers,' and opposition to same-sex marriage.

Stevenson supported these issues in his own campaign along with other key Christian Right issues such as intelligent design theory and sex education. On a survey given by three Texas-based Christian Right groups, Stevenson scored a grade of an A based on his agreement to statements concerning such things as when human life begins, teaching about homosexuality in schools, and displaying the Ten Commandments in schools (Dan 2012). While serving on the state board, Stevenson was known as one of the board's most conservative members who consistently voted with the creationist bloc.

#### *Don McLeroy and Maggie Charleton's 2006 Race*

Don McLeroy is a dentist from Bryan, Texas, who first ran for the board in 1998. McLeroy is defined as a Christian Right candidate based on his affiliations, personal beliefs, and issue positions. When McLeroy first ran for a seat on the Texas State Board of Education, he was supported financially by businessman James Leininger (Heinauer 2009), the 'sugar daddy of the religious right' as described by the Texas Freedom Network (2006). Leininger has given millions in the past two decades to candidates that could help push his public policy agenda, and has been demonstrated as the largest

financial backer of Christian Right candidates in Texas (Texas Freedom Network 2006). McLeroy is also an elder at Grace Bible Church in College Station, a past board member of Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, a Christian non-profit organization promoting pro-life principles, and is a volunteer for Gideons International, an Evangelical Christian organization that promotes the distribution of Bibles all across the world. In an interview with ABC in 2010, McLeroy described his worldview as an orthodox biblical worldview. “I believe man’s created in the image of God, that man is fallen, and those things really impact my whole service.” In an article in the Austin-Statesman in 2009, McLeroy acknowledged that he was “totally convinced the biblical principles were right” (Heinauer). Clearly, McLeroy fits the criteria of a Protestant who believes that the Bible represents God’s literal word to mankind. McLeroy’s issue positions also align with a Christian Right orientation. He views abstinence as the only realistic approach to sex education (Pisano 2006), believes in the inherent “weaknesses of evolution,” (Elliot 2006), and views the United States as a “Christian nation founded on Christian principles” (Blake 2010).

In contrast to McLeroy, Maggie Charleton’s 2006 run for the 9<sup>th</sup> district seat was her first time to run for the Texas State Board of Education. Charleton was previously an elementary and special education teacher for thirty years in public schools surrounding the College Station area, and was the past president of the College Station Education Association and the Texas Democratic Women of the Brazos Valley (Stone 2006). As the Democratic candidate for her district, Charleton described herself as the moderate voice that was needed to offset the ultra conservative Christian bloc within the board (Stone 2006). Because the Christian Right is currently associated with the Republican

Party in Texas, and because Charleton described herself as opposing the conservative Christian bloc on the state board that is made up of Christian Right members, she is defined as a non-Christian Right candidate.

The race between McLeroy and Charleton in 2006 was arguably the most important state board race covered that year. Many newspapers came to describe the 9th district seat in the 2006 race as the “swing seat” because however the race went would determine who controlled the Texas State Board of Education. With McLeroy’s win, the conservative Christian bloc would constitute the majority and would suffer far less barriers in pushing their Christian based agenda through the body. McLeroy won the race with 60 percent of the vote, and remained on the board until 2011 after losing in the Republican primary to the more moderate candidate, Thomas Ratliff.

### *The District*

The 9<sup>th</sup> Texas State Board of Education district in 2006 consisted of 28 counties that made up part of East Texas, stretching from Grimes County in the south to the Oklahoma border in the north, excluding the Dallas and Tyler areas. This information is unavailable for 1994. In 2011, the district was 70 percent Anglo with Republican candidates sweeping every election.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### *Campaign Themes and Focus*

As previously mentioned, a campaign theme and focus can be vital for determining what types of campaign strategies are being employed. While a purist campaign will be more likely to stress the controversial issues that are important to their principles, a politician campaign will shy away from these controversial issues as much as possible in order to ensure that they appeal to the majority of the voters. So while a

purist campaign may emphasize abortion and gay rights because these are the issue that they are interested in, a politician campaign will emphasize issues such as taxes or crime that almost all Americans show concern for (Rozell & Wilcox 1996). Even though a candidate who has a politician approach to political life will have certain views that are controversial, they will often attempt to downplay these views as much as possible (Rozell & Wilcox 1996). A religiously oriented candidate will also be more likely to use religious themes in their campaigns while a secular candidate will use them in modesty, if at all, since their goal is to attract as many voters as possible. Often, the more religious a campaign sounds, the more likely a candidate will be to isolate themselves from non-religious groups or even other religious groups who do not see eye to eye with that candidate's particular beliefs. Another common tactic for purist candidates is to focus their campaigns on a very broad agenda. Because religious activists see themselves as prophets working in the name of God, they will often create a broad agenda that encompasses all the work that God has for them to do on earth. Often though, this does not get to the heart of the legislative detail that is needed in a political office holder. For instance, a religiously oriented candidate may discuss in their campaign how they plan on bringing God's kingdom to earth instead of giving specific steps for how they are going to make that happen.

The 1994 election was one of the first times that the Christian Right had actively sought to gain control of the state board, and was therefore one of the first times that campaigns had a distinct religious flavor to them. One of the main themes that the Republican slate campaigned on in 1994 was the growing immorality in the public school system (Walt 1994), giving them a justification to the public for why immediate and

drastic changes to the school board needed to be made. A Democratic incumbent from District 8 stated that this election was the first time she had ever had her morals questioned (Walt 1994). Similarly, Stevenson's opponent told a newspaper that she had had her motives and even her faith questioned (Stutz 1994). For many of these candidates, it was the first time that religion had been brought into the electoral debate, and many were caught off guard when they were attacked by opponents on issues of their morality. In this election, a candidate's faith and character became major issues.

Some of the most common controversial issues to appear in school board elections include evolution, sex education, school prayer, textbook content, charter schools, and school vouchers. Christian Right members have especially latched on to these issues as important aspects of a child's education that they believe can either make or break a child's moral identity. Stevenson's campaign issues were an almost perfect example of what a Christian Right candidate tends to focus on in politics. One of Stevenson's main arguments against his Democratic opponent was that she had approved health textbooks for kindergarteners that were too graphic in discussions of sexuality and birth control. Stevenson viewed much of the content of these textbooks as "not suitable for the classroom" (Hankins 1994). Stevenson's campaign also spent a large majority of the time focusing on what the Republican slate called "a liberal sexual agenda" (Arrillaga 1994). One campaign flyer sent to Stevenson's district showed a white and black man kissing each other, with text claiming that the liberals on the state board wanted to teach schoolchildren about homosexuality, lesbian adoption, and condom usage (Stutz 1994). All six Republicans of the 1994 race were known for their desire to change education policies dealing with evolution, morality, homosexuality, and of course, sex education

(Roser 1994). There were only a few examples found of Stevenson campaigning on more secular issues such as the issue of standardized tests (Hankins 1994) and giving control back to the local government (Stutz 1994).

Unlike Stevenson, both McLeroy and Charleton seemed to avoid the controversial issues as much as possible. In an article featured in the Bryan-College Station newspaper (Huffman 2006), each candidate was evaluated on what their philosophies regarding education were. In the article, both McLeroy and Charleton emphasized the non-controversial issues in education such as state testing, critical thinking, and parent involvement. Both candidates even had similar views on the issue of states placing too much emphasis on state tests which they both agreed caused teachers to only ‘teach to the test.’ It was only on the issue of charter schools that McLeroy took a stand on a controversial issue that has been more directly attributed with the Christian Right in the past. While charter schools are often viewed as a Christian Right tactic to give parents more choice in where they send their children to school and a way to give children a more religious education, McLeroy did not give any mention of this in his reasoning on his position. Instead, McLeroy took the non-controversial stance that “charter schools provide competition for public schools-and competition makes everyone better” (Huffman 2006). What is especially interesting is that McLeroy mentioned charter schools in his campaign, but there was no mention that could be found over school vouchers, an important issue for the Christian Right in Texas. The idea of school vouchers is to use tax dollars to fund tuition at private and religious schools, and is a clear example of the Christian Right attempting to shape public policy, in this case education, around their religious agenda. While McLeroy tended to steer clear of the controversial

issues that are commonly taken up by the Christian Right, he described himself in a way that could not be described as anything but controversial. When asked why he should be elected, McLeroy replied with “I am conservative. I tell them I am pro-life- that tells you a lot about a person’s philosophy-and I’m for traditional, back to the basics” (Huffman 2006). Contrastingly, Charleton described herself as a communicator that would be a voice for educators (Madewell 2006).

Both McLeroy and Charleton had many instances of the politician campaign strategy of focusing on a narrow agenda. Instead of just giving a broad picture of what they wanted to accomplish if elected, both candidates had specific steps that they planned on taking in order to accomplish the goals that they campaigned on. McLeroy, for instance, campaigned on the issue of increasing parental involvement, and came up with several different options that could provide for this, such as open enrollment and allowing parents to choose which assessment test their child would take (Huffman 2006).

Charleton also came up with specific ways to accomplish her goals. Instead of just saying that she wanted the school testing system to be more “kid friendly,” she went on to describe how to do this through emphasizing student growth rather than the passing rate (Huffman 2006). Charleton also came up with a seven campaign talking point list that described exactly where her focus would be if elected (Stone 2006).

In contrast to the narrow agendas that both McLeroy and Charleton campaigned on, Stevenson campaigned on a broad agenda to improve education and make Texas schools better for children (Hankins 1994), without giving specific concrete details on how he hoped to accomplish this. The Republican slate was recorded as wanting to “get Texas schools back to teaching the basics: reading, writing, math and science” (Bond

1994), but no legislative details on how they wished to accomplish this was ever given. Even when considering their most important campaign issues of sex education and morality, a clear explanation was never given by any of the Republican candidates on how they planned on making these state wide policy changes.

### *Campaign Rhetoric*

The language that a candidate chooses to use during a campaign can be a clear indicator as to whether that candidate adheres more to a purist approach or a politician approach to political life. Religiously oriented candidates will often lack a sharp boundary between their religious tradition and their political arguments. Consequently, they will quote biblical verses or principles as a way to explain their policy goals. Atwood (1990) found that religious activists, specifically Christian Right activists, would “use redemptive rhetoric to rally the troops, exhorting them to band together to ‘take America for Christ’ or ‘restore America to righteousness.” Many phrases such as ‘Christian America’ or ‘war on Christianity’ have become common rhetoric for religious activists, which has been found to severely limit their appeal to only a select group of conservative, religiously oriented people. Because the focus of a purist outlook is to remain true to one’s beliefs though and not on winning, this limited appeal is of little concern for most religious activists. Campaign rhetoric that follows the politician approach to political life is described by Rozell and Wilcox (1996) as ‘mainstreaming the message.’ Here, candidates will use secular arguments to support their policy goals, whether their goals have a religiously oriented intent or not. What is important here is that the candidate is focusing on the votes, and therefore will pay attention to the

audience that they are targeting and will modify their rhetoric as needed so that it has the greatest appeal possible to their given audience.

Although Stevenson was clearly a religiously oriented candidate, most of his campaign rhetoric did not reflect this. For instance, on defending his positions on key Christian Right issues such as sex education, evolution, and homosexuality, Stevenson made no mention of how his positions were based on what the Christian Right might consider acceptable to God. Instead, each member of the Christian Right slate in the race argued that the liberal Texas public school system embraced “anti-family doctrines” (Roser 1994), and that they alone had the prescription for creating a family friendly atmosphere. By simply describing issues such as homosexuality as anti-family instead of an abomination against God, the Christian Right candidates were able to broaden their appeal to a much larger portion of the public. Even if a voter had no concern over whether God remained in the classroom or not, they could surely relate to the need to keep a family oriented atmosphere for their children, an important value to many Americans. Indeed, religious scholar Seth Dowland (2009) acknowledged that the very genius of the Christian Right movement is its ability to frame its policy oppositions as “defense of the family,” therefore attracting a wide variety of religious perspectives. In a continued effort to appeal to as many voters as he could, Stevenson specifically said himself that he was not running because of his religion, but was instead running because of his opponent’s voting record (San Antonio Express-News 1994). Stevenson was able to paint himself as the candidate who was fighting against enemies of the family, and therefore a candidate that a wide variety of Americans could support.

McLeroy also chose in his 2006 campaign to focus on appealing to the general public and therefore used secular rhetoric whenever possible. Throughout McLeroy's time on the Texas State Board of Education, he was known as a vital part of the powerful bloc of Christian conservatives and was thought by many critics to be imposing his religious agenda into Texas curriculum. In a 2010 article, McLeroy was quoted saying "we are a Christian nation founded on Christian principles. The way I evaluate history textbooks is first I see how they cover Christianity and Israel" (Blake 2010). While his rhetoric here is a prime example of purist rhetoric, there was no evidence of similar rhetoric used during his campaign in 2006. Going back to McLeroy's positive stance on charter schools, McLeroy chose to explain his position in a purely secular argument. While he could have based his argument on Christian principles, he instead stated that he favored charter schools because "they help the disadvantaged and increase competition, forcing public schools to improve" (Huffman 2006). Every explanation that McLeroy had for a policy that he promoted was argued in a similar fashion. There was never mention of his religious views in any of his arguments, and all of his rhetoric used secular terms that were relatable to almost any Texas citizen.

As would be expected, Charleton also used only secular rhetoric in her arguments. In an opinion piece featured in the Paris News, author Phillip Hamilton (2006) explained how he was untrusting of Charleton because he saw her comments and arguments for her policy positions "as nothing more than political rhetoric to get elected."

### *Broadening the Coalition and Compromise*

One clear indicator of a purist campaign strategy is the lack of focus on broadening the coalition, or appealing to the majority of voters. In a purist campaign

where winning is not priority, who will come out to support a candidate on Election Day is never a top concern. As a purist candidate, one knows that they have stood by their principles, and that is their greatest concern. Many times, religious activists will only focus on building a coalition with those that specifically share their religious doctrine and faith. From a politician viewpoint, this can isolate a candidate from many different groups that could help them get elected, and leaves them without any political allies as they move into the policy making realm of politics. Candidates who are not focused on broadening their coalition are often candidates who are not willing to engage in any form of compromise. It is through the strategy of give-and-take that coalition building is even possible, and if a candidate refuses to budge on any issue position, building a broad coalition becomes nearly impossible. For instance, conservative religious activists have been known to dismiss all ideas developed by non-evangelicals and liberals, automatically attributing these different viewpoints as ungodly and therefore unworthy of any discussion (Atwood 1990). Because religious activists feel like they have a prophetic role, they have the attitude that their viewpoint is from God, and therefore have no reason to listen to anyone else. A politician orientation will also have particular viewpoints, but will instead focus on broadening their coalition as much as possible, focusing on the politically feasible. For instance, anti-abortion laws may not be possible, but getting a law passed requiring parental consent for girls under the age of 18 may in fact be a politically feasible option.

Charleton seemed to be especially focused in her 2006 campaign on expanding her coalition to as many different types of people as she could. According to several different articles (Paris News 2006; Jacobs 2006; Madewell 2006), Charleton drove all

across her district, 29 counties in all, in order to speak with administrators, teachers, parents, and even students about her campaign. She noted to the Paris News that she was willing to talk with all of these different groups (Madewell 2006). In September, Charleton traveled to Plano in order to speak with the Plano West Young Democrats about issues that immediately affected them (De Los Santos 2006). “We need to listen to teachers and parents, and in some cases, the students themselves” (Charleton 2006), Charleton explained. While Charleton seemed to make clear efforts to communicate with every type of group present in her district, McLeroy was mentioned by the Paris News as only being heard from in his brief appearance at a Chamber of Commerce-sponsored forum (Paris News 2006). Although little is known of Stevenson’s appearances during his campaign, it is safe to assume by the issues that Stevenson focused on that broadening his coalition was not his number one priority during his campaign. By emphasizing issues that were specifically important to conservative Christians, Stevenson isolated his campaign from Texans who did not share the same viewpoints and beliefs.

An interesting point to consider about both Stevenson and McLeroy was their seemingly strategic decision to not mention their affiliations with the Christian Right or any other religious groups during their campaigns. This decision could have been based solely on the negative public perceptions that bringing religion into politics has recently received, or it could have been based on the fact that both candidates understood the political advantage that not mentioning their religious affiliations would have for them electorally. A recent criticism of the Christian Right is that their candidates have been running “stealth campaigns” in an effort to hide or downplay their religious affiliations while campaigning on more moderate platforms that can appeal to the majority of the

public (Deckman 2004). This covert strategy came to the public's attention in 1992 when Ralph Reed, the executive director of the Christian Coalition, the largest Christian Right organization at the time, openly advocated for a Christian Right policy of stealth politics. He explained to a reporter that Christian Right candidates were instructed by the coalition to remain invisible. "We've learned how to move under the radar in the cover of the night with shrubbery strapped to our helmets" (Thomas 1992), he reported. Besides being accused of running a Christian Right slate in 1994, the GOP candidates were also accused of running these stealth campaigns that have become popular for the Christian Right (Roser 1994, Stutz 1994, Walt 1994). By downplaying their religious affiliations and emphasizing their desire to represent all Texans citizens though, both Stevenson and McLeroy effectively opened up their campaigns to a broader group of people.

In the 2006 race, there was never mention in any of the articles looked at of either candidate compromising on their positions. Charleton came across as wanting to be a secular and moderate alternative to the conservative, religious bloc that McLeroy represented, and never seemed to stray from a secular, liberal viewpoint. Similarly, McLeroy stuck to the positions that he agreed with. This lack of compromise could in part be because both candidates were found to try and stay away from controversial issues. It is normally the controversial issues that large groups of the American public have differing views on where compromise is needed. For instance, in an article that came out in early 2006, McLeroy suggested that a solution to the polarizing issue of sex education could be to offer both comprehensive and abstinence-only classes, and allow the parents to choose which one they wanted to send their children to (Pisano 2006). From this example, it seems that when confronted with a controversial issue, McLeroy is

willing to work on a solution that could be acceptable to both sides, although no evidence can be found one way or the other of this occurring within his 2006 campaign.

Although Stevenson stood pretty adamant on most of his positions, he did show a slight willingness to compromise on his position on sex education. While the Christian Right slate advocated for sex education classes that did not hand out free birth control and taught the value of abstinence, Stevenson believed that the local districts should have the ability to decide for themselves what type of program they wanted (Stutz 1994). It is interesting that although Stevenson took some of the most controversial issue positions that school board elections had seen yet, he was still willing to allow a local district to choose a program that he personally may not have supported.

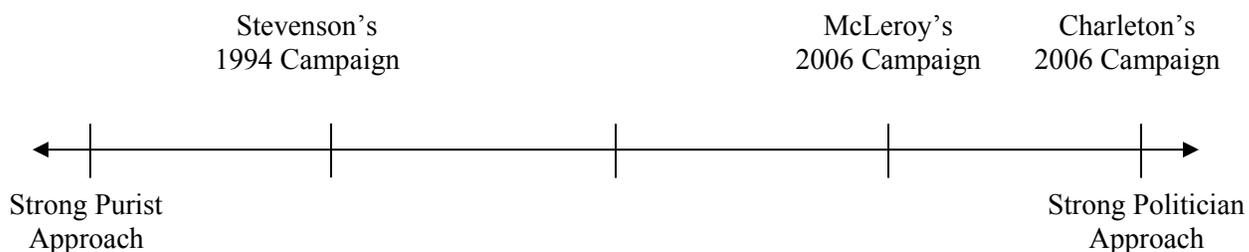
#### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In comparing a Christian Right candidate to a non-Christian Right candidate, my first hypothesis predicted that the greater a candidate's commitment to Christian Right principles, the more likely the candidate will be to use a purist approach in campaign strategies. While McLeroy clearly had a Christian Right orientation, he tended to use indicators of a politician strategy throughout most of his campaign. His most common use of purist strategies were his lack of focus on broadening his coalition and his tendency to focus on more controversial issues than his non-Christian Right opponent. Because most of his campaign strategies fell under a politician approach though, I classify McLeroy as using a moderate politician approach in his campaign strategies. Charleton on the other hand used only a politician approach in her campaign strategies, as my hypothesis predicted. Throughout my analysis, there was a complete

absence of indicators of a purist approach, allowing me to classify her as using a strong politician approach in her campaign strategies.

In comparing Christian Right campaign strategies over time, my second hypothesis predicted that as the Christian Right politically matures over time, the less likely a Christian Right candidate will be to use a purist approach in campaign strategies. Stevenson used indicators of a purist approach to campaign strategies the majority of the time. The only indicators that favored a politician approach were Stevenson's use of secular rhetoric and downplaying his religious affiliations. By choosing to keep religion out of his campaign as much as possible, Stevenson was much more effective at broadening his coalition to include a far greater number of Texas citizens. Because of this more politician strategy, I classify Stevenson as using a moderate purist approach in his campaign strategies. While McLeroy shared Stevenson's strategy of eliminating religious rhetoric and affiliations from his campaign, he also steered clear of the purist strategy indicators of focusing on controversial issues and having a broad agenda, classifying him as using a moderate politician approach in his campaign strategies.

In considering a scale where a strong purist approach falls on one end, and a strong politician approach falls on the opposite end, my results would look similar to the scale below:



Although McLeroy's campaign used more politician strategies that I had originally predicted, the results shown above still support my hypothesis that the greater a candidate's commitment to Christian Right principles, the more likely the candidate will be to use a purist approach in campaign strategies. The results above also support my second hypothesis that as the Christian Right politically matures over time, the less likely a Christian Right candidate will be to use a purist approach in campaign strategies. Although Stevenson's 1994 campaign used a combination of purist and politician approaches, his campaign still fell under a more purist approach than McLeroy's 2006 campaign, helping to prove my hypothesis true.

#### LIMITATIONS

Because my research study only analyzed local newspaper articles, my results are limited to what has been published and saved on the internet. This can especially be an issue for small local newspapers that do not tend to publish much of their articles on the internet. Although newspaper articles can give a fair account of school board campaigns, they are understandably unable to account for all that occurs within sometimes almost year long campaigns. Undoubtedly, there was a lot of information that I did not have access to because it was not accounted for within the local newspaper articles that I looked at.

Another important limitation to my study that must be taken into account is that I am studying specific people who do not represent an entire movement. For instance, while both Stevenson and McLeroy are classified in this study as members of the Christian Right, the difference in their campaigns could be based purely on the fact that they are two different individual candidates and not because their campaigns represent a

shift in the entire Christian Right movement. The Christian Right is a movement that spans across the entire United States, and could therefore look very different in the cases that I chose to study versus the rest of the country.

I chose my cases based on their relevance and accessibility to my research proposal, but as with any case study, there are important characteristics within these specific cases that must be taken into account. The 9<sup>th</sup> Texas State Board of Education district represents a region that is majority Republican, consequently giving Republican Christian Right candidates an immediate advantage upon entering a race. Political candidates will often campaign differently depending on the partisan make-up of the district they are seeking to represent, and I do not doubt that this was the case within my own case studies. An important follow up to my research is to study similar state board elections in districts across the state, and even across the country, that have a different regional and partisan make-up from the district that I chose to study. This additional research would allow me to conclude with more certainty that it is indeed the Christian Right orientation that causes candidates to use a more purist approach in their campaign strategies.

### CONCLUSION

There is no denying that religious activists have unique goals that they must adhere to that make them distinct from non-religious activists. While I predicted that desiring to remain faithful to one's religion's tradition would help shape how a Christian Right candidate approached political life, my study has helped to show that this is not always the case. My two 2006 cases showed little variation between the campaign strategies used by a Christian Right candidate and a non-Christian Right candidate,

pointing to the idea that although the Christian Right candidate had a distinct desire to remain faithful to his religious tradition, it did not fully dictate what his approach to political life would be. Clearly, there were other variables at work as well.

Because time was held constant in the two 2006 cases, adding in the 1994 case helped to show what effect the political maturation that comes with time has on how religiously oriented candidates approach political life. At the beginning of the Christian Right movement, conservative Evangelicals were choosing to enter the previously taboo world of politics because they felt like it was their duty as a Christian to restore the increasingly secular nation to what they believed was its Christian roots. In order to be successful in politics though, the Christian Right slowly began to learn that their religion and previous goal to remain faithful to their religious tradition had to be left behind. Comparing a 1994 Christian Right campaign to a 2006 Christian Right campaign helps to put this 'political maturation' into perspective. One of the best examples of this is to consider how the issues focused on in the Christian Right campaigns shifted over time from strongly controversial issues to secular issues that almost anyone could agree with. In comparing the issues that Stevenson focused on in his 1994 bid versus his 2012 bid, it is clear that an almost strategic decision was made to stop focusing on the issues that caused the most controversy. For instance, the four issues that Stevenson's 2012 campaign focused on were restoring conservative leadership, quality education, vocational training, and protecting the permanent school fund (Randy Stevenson), a complete 180 degree turnaround from his 1994 controversial issues of evolution and homosexuality.

While Stevenson's campaign transformation from 1994 to 2012 and the clear differences in campaign strategies used by Stevenson in 1994 and McLeroy in 2006 could point to the Christian Right politically maturing over time and learning to leave behind their religion in order to be politically effective, the recent accusations of Christian Right candidates running stealth campaigns cannot be dismissed. Although my findings do suggest that the Christian Right has politically matured over time, this could be a strategic tactic by the movement that candidates will leave behind once they have won the public's vote. Deckman (2004) noted that in a local school board race in 1992 in Vista, California, Christian Right candidates were elected to the board having given little to no indication of their conservative religious views and background while on the campaign trail. It was not until they were in office that the new board members began voting to include discussions of creationism in history classes and replacing the district's sex education classes with abstinence-only classes. While these board members had used a more politician approach to political life in their campaigns, they immediately switched to a purist approach once in office, indicating that they had not fully matured politically.

It is clear that much more research is needed to evaluate Christian Right stealth campaigns and whether the movement is truly evolving in how it approaches political life, or if it has just learned what it needs to do to win elections and promote its conservative biblical interpretation on society. Because this movement is constantly evolving though, it is important to consider whether it will completely do away with its religious roots in the future, or whether it will always have to contend with its competing goals of remaining faithful to a religious tradition while at the same time impacting policy. Whether the Christian Right will eventually change the face of our nation's

culture, or whether its contrasting goals will cause it to eventually fade into the background as it has historically are questions that only time will tell.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine how campaign strategies used by Christian Right candidates differ from non-Christian Right candidates in competitive elections, and to analyze how these strategies have changed over time. While the “corrupt,” secular world of politics used to be a place few Christian churches sought involvement in, recent decades have seen a substantial increase in the efforts taken by religious groups to impact public policies in their favor. Even though religious activists are most often grouped in the broader category of interest groups, recent scholarship has suggested that the contradictory goals that religious activists must try and balance make them distinct from other activists. Because religious activists have the responsibility to impact politics while at the same time remaining faithful to their religious tradition, their involvement in politics manifests itself differently from their secular counterparts. This study explores the Christian Right movement both qualitatively and chronologically, allowing me to better understand the impact of a Christian Right orientation on a political candidate, while also considering the impact of the political maturation of the movement itself.