RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AMERICA:

AN EMPIRICAL TEST OF INDIVIDUALIST VERSUS SOCIAL MODELS

Thomas A. Hirschl (tah4@cornell.edu) is Professor of Development Sociology at Cornell University. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has published widely on social class and the life course. Fax: 607/254-2896; phone: 607-255-1688; address: Department of Development Sociology, Warren Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853.

James G. Booth (jb383@cornell.edu) is Professor of Statistics and Computational Biology at Cornell University. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Kentucky and is a fellow of American Statistical Association.

Leland L. Glenna (llg13@psu.edu) is Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology at Pennsylvania State University. He received a Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Missouri, and a Master of Divinity (MDiv) from Harvard University.

Brandn Q. Green (bqg103@psu.edu) is Ph.D. Candidate in Rural Sociology at Pennsylvania State University.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines empirical data on voting behavior in U.S. Presidential elections, and we interpret the findings using a social model. The analysis proceeds through three stages: (1) we review contemporary social science literature on U.S. Presidential voter choice, (2) we propose a social model of voter choice where religious effects on voter choice are contextualized by the individual's relationship to society, and (3) we empirically analyze 2008 Presidential election, building upon an earlier paper analyzing the 1980 - 2000 elections. The 2008 analysis presented here includes a new measure of religious identity that fits the data better and bolsters the case for the social model. In addition, the alternative measure is validated by a separate survey. The analysis finds that the affect of religious identity on voter choice encompasses a social dimension defined by the individual's relationship to society, and operationalized by race, class, and gender.

Key words: social class, voter choice, religion, ideology, and politics.

The role of religion in U.S. politics is a long-standing social science question that begins with the founding of the republic and ensuing debates about the separation of church and state.[1] This question re-surfaced in relation to the religious right's political partisanship that gathered momentum during the 1970s, and reached an apex in President GW Bush's 2000 and 2004 electoral victories. Attempts by Democratic Party activists to counter with a "religious left" appear to have been less than successful, perhaps because the Democratic coalition encompasses a secular element that views religion as a ruse to sway voters away from economic concerns.[2] This partisan context raises anew social science questions about the strength and character of religious influences within U.S. politics.

This paper analyzes the role of religious identity in U.S. Presidential voter choice in order to address the following two questions. First, is religious identity, in fact, an influence on voter choice? Second, to the extent influence is found, what is the character of said influence? Does the concept "voter preference" best define the influence, or is the influence more effectively conceptualized in some collective, or social, sense?

In answering these questions we update and build upon an earlier paper that compared the relative effectiveness of an individual-level voter preference model against a social model informed by classical theory.[3] In the previous paper, empirical tests were conducted for U.S. Presidential elections in a national sample covering the 1980 to 2000 elections. The current paper is based upon a separate national sample that recovers voter choice for the 2008 Presidential election, and includes an alternative measure of religious identity designed by the study authors.

The test results suggest that the alternative measure improves model fit. Finally, we validate the alternative measure in a separate survey of university undergraduates, and find that the measure has validity within this alternative context.

CURRENT RESEARCH ON RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND VOTER CHOICE

Much of the empirical work on religion and politics presumes that religious identity can be measured solely by individual variables. Such approaches tend to deploy one, or more, of three domains of religious identity: denominational affiliation, frequency of church attendance or "religious commitment," and religious beliefs.[4] Different researchers may emphasize one or more of these domains over the others. For example Manza and Brooks deploy a "multicategory denominational scheme"[5] to classify individuals' self-identified denomination, and then model the extent that these categories predict voter choice and partisanship. Much of their work is derived from analyzes of the National Election Studies, and among their findings are a post-1980 compositional shift of "evangelical Protestants" and Catholics toward the Republican Party, a shift of "mainline Protestants" toward the Democratic Party, but little, or no, net religious/political polarization. In their analyses Manza and Brooks regard the validity of denominational affiliation in much the same way that scholars analyzing social class regard occupational classification schemes. This is somewhat surprising given the symbolic/ideational character of religion in comparison to the relatively material character of work, and the functional division of labor in society.

Other researchers object to emphasizing denominational affiliation to measure religious identity, arguing that it fails to capture the full import of religious behavior, and in particular the effect of religious beliefs that "transcend denominational doctrine."[6] Studies by Layman utilizing the National Election Survey suggest that religious political cleavage has, in fact, widened considerably since 1980 around the axis of "doctrinal orthodoxy" defined by a composite score of beliefs about the Bible and whether respondents believe they are "born again."[7] In accord with Manza and Brooks, Layman finds little or no post-1980 political polarization in denominational affiliation, however individuals who espouse literal interpretations of the Bible, and/or believe they are "born again," have become stronger Republican voters in comparison to individuals espousing more liberal and secular beliefs who have become stronger Democratic voters.

Findings parallel to Layman's are articulated within an analysis of a national sample collected by Driskell, Embry and Lyon.[8] This study tests for the effects of religion on political participation, and the religious measures include denomination as well as beliefs, specifically questions about social justice and the worldly role of a deity. The test results suggest that when individuals believe that a deity intervenes in worldly affairs they are less likely to participate politically; when religious beliefs incorporate concerns about social justice, political participation is more likely. The multivariate test results are consistent with the proposition that the effect of belief is independent of the effect of denomination, and the study authors contend that relying solely upon denomination understates, and may even distort, the strength of the link between religious identity and political participation. When comparing

findings from the Driskell et al. study to Layman's studies and the Brooks/Manza studies, it is apparent that measurement decisions influence research findings about religious effects on politics.

There are additional approaches to modeling religion and politics, for example the "civil religion" model that fuses politics with religion, ascribing a transcendent goal to political leadership, especially with regard to the U.S. President as the highest elected official.[9] This approach can be operationalized using survey questions to identify civil religious voters who may be inclined to favor candidates espousing civil religious concerns. Wimberly's study of voters and public officials in Raleigh, North Carolina found evidence that this perspective explained a component of the 1972 Presidential vote (Richard Nixon was the putative "civil religion" candidate). [10] Yet another approach investigates reciprocal causation between religion and politics, and reports evidence that religious attendance is affected by political ideological conservativism/liberalism, and vice-versa, over time, in a cross-lagged, panel design utilizing the National Election Study.[11] This study suggests that religious attendance affects party identification, and that party identification affects religious attendance, raising the possibility that religious attendance results from the interaction of secular and sacred motivations and/or behaviors.

An issue encountered by researchers attempting to specify religious effects on politics is that these effects may not be uniform across individuals. For example, in a study using the General Social Survey, Greeley and Hout report evidence that:[12]

Literal interpretations of the Bible and frequent religious practice

push African Americans toward the Democrats and whites toward the

Republicans. Literalism intensifies the diametrically opposed political

orientations in the two groups; it pulls them further apart politically.

In this instance African Americans and whites providing the same responses to

General Social Survey questions regarding beliefs about the Bible, and frequency of

church attendance, have opposed political partisanship. Here religion appears as a

force that unites individuals of the same race in partisanship, while simultaneously

dividing the races against one another.

All of the studies cited in this literature review model the effect of religion on

politics using, implicitly or explicitly, rational choice theories of individual behavior

and beliefs. To the extent that structures are theorized, they are treated as the

unintended consequences of individual actors. Religion as a social structure is

conceptualized as an aggregation of individual preferences that serves as a resource

that enables people to act on their beliefs.[13] In contrast to this perspective, classical

theorists posit a social theory of religion and politics that is beyond the realm of

individual preferences.

DURKHEIM AND MARX ON RELIGION, IDEOLOGY, AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim analyzed

hunter/gatherer archival records and concluded that society is the "source" of

religion, and that religious beliefs and rituals serve to idealize the material and

mental dependency of individuals upon society.[14] Far from being the aggregation of individual preferences for Durkheim, religion provides the shared categories of thought that sustains social cohesion.

Durkheim's definition of religion extends beyond the boundaries of formal religious organizations, and is related to Marx's conception of ideology and social reproduction. Marx viewed formal religion as an indicator of negative social conditions, a belief system that oppressed people turn to the way sick individuals turn to opium.[15] Nevertheless Durkheim shares Marx's materialistic ontological assumption, and acknowledges this in his statement that the "material substrate" sets parameters for intellectual life.[16]

Marx and Engel's theory of society[17] (i.e., "historical materialism") directly implies social dependency of individuals, and their various writings demonstrate that individuals tend to experience this dependency in ideological or religious terms.[17] Volume 1 of *Capital* is replete with religious references and metaphors. For example, the theory of commodity fetishism is introduced with the following sentences: "A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[18] This passage reflects Marx's theme that religious and ideological understandings animate popular conceptions about society, and in this instance facilitate the fetishism of commodities where social relationships are transposed onto relationships between objects.

Marx's theory of commodity fetishism is theoretically parallel to Durkheim's treatment of the totem in hunter/gatherer society. In both instances social relations

intrinsic to social reproduction are transposed onto things. This theoretical parallel illustrates their common proposition that religion and/or ideology represent idealized, popular knowledge systems that facilitate social reproduction. For Marx, religion and ideology obscure the material interests of social relationships, and impede the transformation of capitalist social relations. For Durkheim, religious beliefs and rituals perpetuate social cohesion. Both Marx and Durkheim define religion and/or ideology as knowledge systems that reflect and idealize the dependence of individuals upon society.

Recognizing the social dimension of religion offers a stark contrast to rational choice theories, which tend to attribute religious motivation to individual-level preferences, and fail to consider how "religious capital" may be apportioned unevenly and independently of individual preferences. However, a wholesale adoption of a social theory of religion is not without pitfalls. Durkheim's and Marx's theories of religion treat individual behavior as the mere expression of the social structure. What is called for is a theory that incorporates the individual's dependency on society while still recognizing that religious expression and its political consequences are not predetermined.

A SOCIAL THEORY OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND VOTER CHOICE

The model we propose bears a relationship to Bourdieu's concept of social capital that is linked to the unequal distribution of power. For example, Bourdieu describes how language becomes a marker of class, since it is an indicator of a social group's ability to engage in collective action to achieve social reform.[19] Similarly, we

will argue, a voter's religious belief may be linked to a particular partisan preference, contingent upon the location of that voter within the stratification order. Social class, race, gender represent differential material and ideological influences on how individuals experience society, and differentially pattern religious influences on political partisanship.

Several implications follow from our proposed social theory of religion, ideology, politics, and society. First, religious/ideological behavior reflects individual and collective agency in the context of social dependency, a relationship that individuals will tend to apprehend in symbolic terms. Hence the standard measurement approach that attributes religious motivation solely to individual-level preferences is misguided. Some social construct that represents this dependency is called for to model the social character of religion/ideology. Second, to the extent that religious effects are theorized solely in terms of individual preferences, the classical model is obviated. Research that deploys a theory of individual preferences to integrate contextual measures with individual measures of religious behavior is theoretically incongruous with the social theory outlined in prior paragraphs.[20]

In an earlier analysis we modeled religious identity in terms of its differential expression across the stratification order defined by race, class, and gender. Our rationale is that individuals experience society differentially, depending upon their social location, and that these three dimensions represent a reasonable first approximation of the American peoples' stratification experience.[21] Second, that politics allocates real, as well as the symbolic, resources, and that an individual's

ability to forward claims on politically distributed resources is related to his/her location in the stratification order. Hence the individual's religious identity in relation to politics and will tend to be related to his/her position within the stratification order. This leads us to hypothesize that the effect of religious identity on voter choice is contingent on social location. In standard individualist models, conversely, religious identity is hypothesized have an independent effect on voter choice, and this independent effect is believed not to be contingent on race, gender, or social class. To the extent that religious identity effects on voter choice are independent of race, class, and gender, the individualist model is supported, and the proposed social model is not supported.

DATA SOURCES AND MEASUREMENT RATIONALE

In this paper we extend and build upon analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative, repeat cross-section sample of the English speaking, non-institutional population age 18 and over.[22] The GSS study analyzed voter choice for the six Presidential elections during the period 1980 to 2000, and the data were derived from 17 annual waves of data comprising 5,543 respondents with complete sets of independent and dependent variables.

The analysis reported in this paper is based upon two new data sources. First, the 2009 Cornell National Social Survey (CNSS) was conducted by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. The survey is a random sample of 1,000 households within the United States, selecting one household member age 18 years of age and older. The survey contains questions about Presidential voter choice in 2008, and repeats GSS

survey questions used to construct the independent and dependent variables in the GSS analysis. The third data source is a survey of students taking "Introduction to Sociology" at Cornell University during the spring, 2010, and represents an attempt to validate a new biblical authority scale described in following paragraphs.

The dependent variable for the GSS/CNSS analyses is the binary voting preference for the Republican versus Democratic Presidential candidate. We exclude nonvoters and third party candidates from the analysis in order to focus upon candidate choice for the two major political parties. Other variables on the right hand side include relative family income used to proxy the individual's social class. Although income is not the favored approach for measuring social class, it is widely acknowledged to be implicated in class position.[23] We recode family income into quartiles where quartile 1 is the bottom 25 percent. Other variables in the analysis are race (white versus black) and gender. In the GSS, blacks are the sole minority group sufficiently large for multivariate statistical analysis.

The GSS/CNSS independent variable religious identity is operationalized by cross-classifying two measures: biblical authority and religious tradition. Biblical authority is operationalized by the answer to this multiple-choice question in the GSS:[24]

> 1. Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?
> a. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
> b. The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word.
> c. The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.

It is not necessary that the respondent actually read the Bible or has direct textual knowledge of it. Rather, the variable measures whether the individual possesses "feelings" that the Bible is the "literal" word of God, versus the inspired word of God, or a book of fables. The biblical literalism response (a) in particular, is akin to Marx's commodity fetishism and Durkheim's totemism, insofar as it represents the projection of a belief system ("your feelings") onto an object, in this case the Christian Bible.

There are several reasons why biblical authority is an appropriate variable to operationalize religious identity. First, Riesebrodt's comparative study suggests that biblical authority is a key component of Christian fundamentalism in American society, and specifically identifies fundamentalism with biblical literalism.[25] Respondents who state that the Bible is the literal word of God are therefore in a leveraged position vis-à-vis the Republican Party's strategy of attracting fundamentalists and religious conservatives during the study period.[26]

Because the GSS analysis demonstrated that the social and political implications of biblical belief differ according to religious tradition, we include this variable in our CNSS measure of religious identity. The GSS/CNSS measure of religious tradition is derived from the GSS question, "What is your religious preference?"[27], and is used to create a measure that corresponds to the major two religious traditions in American society: Protestant and Catholic, versus all other religious traditions and non-religious individuals. In the GSS analysis we subdivided Baptists from other Protestants because Baptist is the largest denomination within the largest tradition; however we found no substantive differences between Baptists

and other Protestants, and therefore do not subdivide Protestants in the CNSS

analysis.

The GSS biblical belief scale performed as anticipated in the analysis,

however the study authors developed questions about its interpretation. In general

we are unsure how to interpret the various responses beyond hypotheses described

by the research literature. With the intention of creating a more accurate and

encompassing scale we scripted additional biblical authority questions that are

asked on the CNSS survey. These questions are described in following paragraphs.

ANALYSIS

Results from the General Social Survey

Hirschl, Booth, and Glenna use data from the GSS to investigate the link

between voter choice and religious identity in six Presidential elections from 1980

to 2000. They use logistic regression models to assess the association between the

choice of 4,754 white voters between Republican and Democratic Presidential

candidates and several predictors including their level of biblical authority as

measured by responses "a", "b," or "c" to the GSS biblical belief question described in

earlier paragraphs. Black voters were not modeled due to the roughly 9 to one odds

of blacks voting Democratic across each of independent variable categories.

Specifically, let π_{ijkl} denote the probability of voting Republican (versus

Democrat) for a person of sex i (female=1, male=2), religious tradition j (1=Baptist,

2=other Protestant, 3=Catholic, 4=other), and biblical authority level k (a=1, b=0, c=-

1), in income quartile l. One model considered by Hirschl et al. is

$$\ln \frac{\pi_{ijkl}}{1-\pi_{ijkl}} = \lambda + \lambda_i^S + \lambda_j^R + \beta^L L_k + \beta^I I_l + \beta^{LI} L_k I_l + \beta^{CL} 1_C L_k \qquad (1),$$

where "ln" denotes natural logarithm, $\lambda_1^S = \lambda_1^R = 0$ (category 1 is the "baseline"

category of each factor), and 1_C is an indicator for Catholics. The variables, L and I,

are integer "scores" that allow for (linear) trends in the log odds with increasing

levels of biblical authority and income. The two interaction terms in model (1) allow

the slope of the trend with increasing levels of biblical authority to vary

systematically with increasing income, and for the baseline slope (i.e. in the first

income quartile) to be different for Catholics. This is most parsimonious logistic

model considered by Hirschl et al. that is consistent with the GSS data in terms of

the model deviance or G^2 statistic.[28] There is a significant deterioration in the fit if

any of the model components are removed.

The model implies a constant gender difference regardless of the other

factors represented by the parameter λ_2^S. Hirschl et al. report an estimated

value, $\hat{\lambda}_2^S = 0.30$, which implies that the odds a male votes Republican are about 35%

higher than those for a female (since $e^{0.3} = 1.35$), controlling for religious tradition,

income, and biblical authority response. Differences between the religious tradition

categories are also constant with the exception of Catholics. In particular, Hirschl et

al. found that differences in the voting patterns of Baptists and other Protestants are

negligible.

The analysis of the GSS data in Hirschl et al. indicates that the biblical authority response is highly predictive of voting preference among Protestants, but much less so among Catholics. For example, they estimated the odds that a female Protestant, in the highest income quartile, voted Republican to be 0.97 if she gave response "c" (fables) to the biblical authority question. These odds essentially double to 1.90 if she gave response "b" (spiritual), and double again to 3.70 if she gave response "c" (literal).

Comparison with the Cornell National Social Survey

The CNSS is a survey of adults, aged 18 and over, who are residents of the continental United States, administered by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell. We analyzed responses of the 1,000 adults surveyed in 2009. This survey included five questions concerning biblical authority including question 1 from the GSS discussed in prior paragraphs (hereafter referred to as biblical authority question 1). Respondents were also asked whom they voted for in the 2008 Presidential election (McCain/Palin or Obama/Biden).

White voters interviewed by the CNSS favored McCain over Obama by 1.1 to one, and black voters favored Obama by 30 to one. This margin makes it impractical to model black voters, and represents and even higher margin than was found during the 1980 to 2000 elections where the Democratic margin among black voters was 9 to one. Consistent with the GSS data, biblical literalism within the CNSS was found to be higher among black voters compared to white voters: in both the CNSS

and the GSS, approximately one in three blacks and one in four whites answered "a"
to question 1.

We fit model (1) to the 449 white respondents with complete data on all
relevant questions, with the only modification being that Baptists were not
separately identified from other Protestants. The residual deviance for the fit to the
ungrouped data is 523.8 (df=441). After grouping the respondents into 72
categories formed by cross-classification by gender, religious tradition, income
quartile, and biblical authority level, the same model had a residual deviance of 78.9
(df=62). The model fits to the ungrouped and grouped data are identical in terms of
parameter estimates and standard errors. However, the fit to the grouped data can
be used to assess lack-of-fit, although admittedly some of the cell counts after cross-
classification are small and so the validity of the chi-squared test is somewhat
questionable. With this caveat the fit of model (1) to the CNSS data appears to be
reasonable. We further note that the two interaction terms in the model are only
borderline significant, presumably because of the smaller samples size in the CNSS.

The general patterns of association in the CNSS data (e.g. as measured by the
signs of the coefficients) are similar to those reported by Hirschl et al. based on the
GSS data. However, there are some striking differences in terms of the magnitudes
of the associations. For example, the estimated gender difference from the CNSS
data is $\hat{\lambda}_2^S = 0.84$ which translates into an odds-ratio comparing the odds of a male
voting Republican to those of a female, controlling for other factors, of 2.32.
Moreover, the response to the question on biblical authority is even more predictive
of voter preference (particularly among non-Catholics). The estimated odds that a

female Protestant, in the highest income quartile, voted Republican, is 0.53 to one if she gave response "c" (fables) to the biblical authority question. These odds are multiplied by a factor of five to 2.53 to one if she gave response "b" (spiritual), and by another factor of five to 12.15 to one if she gave response "a" (literal). In later paragraphs we provide interpretation about why the direction of the CNSS gender and biblical authority coefficients are the same as the GSS coefficients, however the slopes are amplified. We next consider how the new biblical authority questions inform the model.

A Composite Measure of Biblical Authority

In addition to biblical authority question 1, participants in the CNSS were asked whether they agreed (yes or no) with the following four statements about the Bible:

2. The Bible should help guide political decisions.
3. The Bible is to be read literally.
4. The Bible is without contradiction.
5. The Bible is an authoritative document which has moral rules I must follow.

Thus, the CNSS data contains five categorical responses relating to respondents' views of biblical authority.

In principle it is possible to extend model (1) by adding terms associated with dummy variables for each binary (yes/no) response, but with the possibility of multi-way interactions as well as multicollinearity, this approach is not very fruitful.

Instead we create a composite biblical authority index based on all five categorical variables relating to feelings/beliefs about the Bible that can be used in model (1) in place of the three level score based on Question 1 alone.

(Figure 1 about here.)

The composite index for each individual is defined as their 1st principle coordinate score from a multiple correspondence analysis of the five categorical variables. Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) can be thought of as the analog of principle components analysis for categorical variables.[29] The multiple correspondence map is a plot of the responses on the first two principle dimensions. This map is given in Figure 1 for the responses to the question and statements concerning views about the Bible. The map suggests an ordering of the responses on a 1-dimensional continuous scale, namely the 1st principle coordinate. Thus, for example, responses "a" and "c" to Question 1 are, respectively, at the positive and negative extremes, while response "b" is in the middle of the scale. A "no" response to Statement 5 is close to the response "c" for Question 1 at the negative end of the scale. On the other hand a "yes" response to Statement 5 is in the positive part of the scale, but some distance from the positive extreme.

As a validation experiment we asked students in "Introduction to Sociology" (DSOC 1101) at Cornell University during the spring of 2010 to rate each of the 11 responses to Question 1, and Statements 2-5, concerning biblical authority. The students were asked to use a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing a response

indicating the respondent is a "non-Christian/atheist/religious cynic," and 5 indicating an "evangelical Christian/biblical literalist" respondent. The average ratings given by the students of the eleven responses were remarkably consistent with the principle coordinate scores obtained by MCA. These averages are based on 108 students who gave logically coherent scores. For example, students who assigned a score of one to every response were eliminated.

(Table 1 about here.)

Table 1 shows how the students rated the eleven responses, sorted according to average Likert score.[1] This ordering is the same as that based on the MCA 1st principle coordinate with the exception that the order of responses 4.y and 3.y are switched. However, the scores for these two responses are almost identical both in the CNSS data and the student survey. In fact, the spacings of the scores from the two datasets are remarkably similar. The main difference is that the students rate response "b" to question 1 closer to the higher (biblical literalist) end of the scale.

Results for CNSS using the Composite Measure

Table 2 gives the parameter estimates and standard errors obtained by fitting model (1) to the CNSS (white voter) data using the simple measure of biblical authority based on the responses to biblical authority question 1 alone, and also using the composite measure discussed above based on responses to question 1 and

statements 2-5. The composite measure has been scaled so that -1 is the average score for participants who gave response "c" (fables) to question 1, and 1 is the average for those who gave response "a" (literal). This was done so that the scales are comparable in the two model fits. The parameter estimates are similar in the two fits, but key model components such as gender, and the two interactions terms involving the biblical authority score, are considerably more significant when the composite score is used. Moreover, the improvement in the model fit is quite dramatic with the composite score, the residual deviance being 479.7 (df=437), compared with 523.8 (df=441) with the simple score. The composite score effectively uses up four additional degrees of freedom because it is based on five responses rather than one.

(Table 2 and Figure 2 about here.)

Figure 2 provides a graphical description of model (1) deploying the composite biblical authority scale; the composite scale is also the x-axis in Figure 2. Note that the lines extends beyond -1 and +1 because these integer values are set to the average value of a respondent who answered "c" and "a," respectively, to biblical authority question 1. In fact there are respondents with more extreme scores than the average values for respondents answering "c" and "a," and hence the graph lines extend beyond -1 and +1. The graph lines represent Protestant (red), Catholic (green), and other (blue), and men are symbolized by squares, women by triangles. The density of squares and triangles represents sample density. The y-axis is the

natural log odds, and computed to be symmetrical about zero. Values of -1 and +1

represent 2.72 to one preference for the Democrats and Republicans, respectively;

values of -2 and +2 represent 7.39 to one preference the Democrats and

Republicans, respectively; and values of -4 and +4 represent 54.60 to one preference

for the Democrats and Republicans, respectively.

Several features of Figure 2 are noteworthy, in particular the extreme split

within the Protestant tradition. At low levels biblical authority (Mean = -1), and at

all income levels, Protestants lean toward the Democrats by an odds of

approximately two to one; however at high levels of biblical authority (Mean = +1)

Protestants are strong Republican partisans, and the partisanship odds intensify as

income increases. For example, Protestant men are 7 to one Republican voters at the

lowest income quartile, and 50 to one at the highest income quartile. Catholics

follow a different pattern. At the lowest income quartile Catholics are partisan

neutral at all levels of biblical authority; as income increases the slope becomes less

flat, and a partisan split emerges along the lines of biblical authority within the

third, and especially the fourth, income quartiles. Finally, the "other" group, which is

a residual collection of religious and nonreligious identities, display a biblical

authority polarization pattern similar to Protestants, but not as extreme. Thus we

surmise that income intensification of religious identity is general throughout the

sample: the slopes of the three lines increase across each of the income quartiles,

suggesting that the effect of religious identity on voter choice is contingent on

income, here taken as an indicator of social class.

(Figure 3 about here.)

ROC curves showing the predictive accuracy of model (1) with simple and composite scores respectively are plotted in Figure 3. The curves are plots of the (in-sample) sensitivity (the probability a person is correctly predicted to vote Republican) against one minus sensitivity (the probability a person is incorrectly predicted to vote Republican) as the classification cutoff varies between 1 and 0. (The model classifies a person as having voted Republican at cutoff δ if π>δ, where π is their fitted probability of having voted Republican.) The ROC curve for the composite measure lies almost uniformly above that for the simple measure indicating superior sensitivity and specificity at nearly all values of δ. Thus, it appears that the composite score is a much more refined measure in terms of capturing the association between biblical authority and voter choice.

Integrated Modeling Procedures

The statistical analysis described in the previous section involved two distinct stages. At the first stage we constructed an index of biblical authority using MCA. This index was then used as a predictor of voting preference in a logistic regression model. We also conducted a single stage, integrated, analysis in which an index was constructed as part of the model fitting process as follows. Define the index for a given subject as a weighted average, $S = \sum_{m=1}^{5} \alpha_m X_m$, of their 5 responses, where X_1 is the response to question 1, coded as 1 for response "a", 0 for "b" and -1 for "c", and where X_m is the response to Statements m=2, 3, 4 and 5,

coded -1 for "no" and 1 for "yes." The coefficients in the weighted average can be

estimated while simultaneously fitting model (1) by iteratively updating the two

sets of parameters. This process resulted in an even further improved fit

($G^2 = 469.1$, df=437), however the qualitative conclusions from the fitted

parameters are essentially unchanged. The raw data and R code for this model are

available from the authors.[30]

DISCUSSION

In this paper we set out to analyze the relationship between religious identity

and voter choice, and re-test a set of empirical findings identified by an earlier

analysis. The earlier analysis found that that the affect of religious identity on voter

choice is not independent, but rather is contingent on the individual's gender, class,

and race status. The present analysis is consistent with the earlier study, although

sample size limitations prevent a full exploration of the nuances of gender

dependency.[31] The present analysis deploys a new biblical authority scale that is

found to provide a better model fit in comparison to the scale used in the earlier

analysis.

Before interpreting the findings, we first delineate what we believe to be the

two most significant limitations of the present study. The first is that the study

sample size is 445 white voters and 62 black voters; all but two of the blacks report

voting for Obama. This limits the number of parameters that can be modeled for the

white sub-sample, and reiterates the strong Democratic leaning among blacks found

in the prior study of six Presidential elections. While the white sample size restricts

the complexity of the models that can be considered, it presents an opportunity for empirical testing focused on the revised biblical authority scale. Additionally the revised biblical authority scale is validated by a survey of university undergraduates.

A second limitation of the present study is that it measures one period of time and one Presidential election, and may not be representative of other time periods/Presidential elections. However because the 2008 model results are generally consistent with the previous study of six Presidential elections, we believe we are more or less justified in generalizing the 2008 findings to the longer, prior period of time.

In a prior study we deployed a biblical authority scale available in the GSS because it came the closest, among available constructs, to satisfying theoretical specifications identified by our theory of Christian fundamentalism and the ideological function of the Christian Bible within American society. In the present analysis we propose what we believe to be an improved biblical authority scale, and empirical analysis within a nationally representative survey suggests that it comprises a hierarchical, one-dimensional scale. The scale hierarchy is confirmed by a survey of university undergraduates, suggesting it has robust validity. Thus we find evidence that the scale is a socially valid measure of biblical authority.

A second feature of the new biblical authority scale is that it dramatically improves statistical fit within a model of Presidential voter choice, in comparison to the GSS scale. It better explains the relationship between religious identity and voter choice (see the ROC curves in Figure 3, and relative model deviances described in

prior paragraphs), and this improved fit suggests that biblical authority is a component of religious identity influencing large numbers of voters, and especially Protestant voters, when evaluating voter choice. Furthermore, when the scale is estimated as part of a single-stage fitting procedure, the model fit is further improved, providing additional evidence that biblical authority related religious identity predicts voter choice decisions in U.S. Presidential elections.

This set of empirical findings is consistent with the social model proposed by Durkheim and Marx where religion is a socially derived entity that facilitates social cohesion. Specifically, it is apparent that biblical belief serves to unite socially defined groups in political partisanship. This unity is not derived from sacred text, but rather is transposed onto the sacred text by social groups possessing shared experiences, ideologies, and material locations.

If one disagrees with this interpretation, then a question posed by the obtained relationship between religious identity and voter choice is the character of an alternative interpretation. Does the obtained relationship solely reflect the agency of individual voter choice, or does a social element enter in? Second, if there is a social element, what is the character of this putative social element? In answering this question we rely upon the concept of social dependency implied by Durkheim's and Marx's analyses of religion, and reason that individuals' experience of social dependency will vary, depending upon their location in society. Specifically we propose that the partisan consequences of religious identity are contingent upon race, class, and gender.

Many social analysts view race as the widest divide within the American stratification order, and the voter choice analysis herein suggests it is also the widest divide in political partisanship linked to religious identity. Whereas social class, gender, and religious identity split white voter partisanship, the black vote is strongly Democratic across each of these dimensions. White biblical literalists are strong Republican voters, and black biblical literalists and are equally strong Democratic voters, not because these two groups read different Bibles, but because their experiences of society are different, and hence their religious identities and political partisanship are colored by the experience of race.

Social class is also a contingency in the relationship between religious identity and voter choice. As income rises, doctrinal polarization within religious traditions sharpens (see Figure 2). Thus the experience of social class leads to differing political consequences within the same religious traditions and biblical belief sets.

In this analysis we lack the sample size to explore gender nuances identified by the previous study where biblical belief and income were co-contingencies in the effect of gender on voter choice. The present analysis identifies a constant effect of gender on voter choice, and we note that this effect amplified in 2008, compared to the 1980 – 2000 Presidential elections. The magnitude of the 2008 gender effect overshadows the 7 percent gender gap reported by the exit polls[32] because the computed gender effect, unlike the exit poll margin, is net of other variables in model (1). Our results suggest that high-income, biblical literalist, Protestant women, voted Republican by a 12 to one margin. Thus biblical authority and social

class, in the context of a net effect that favored the Democratic candidate, split white women's partisanship in the 2008 Presidential elections.

In comparing the present paper with the previous one, several differences emerge, first that the 2008 election apparently amplified the black odds of voting Democratic. This is hardly surprising since the Democratic candidate was an African-American, and whose candidacy was generally hailed as symbolizing the forward march of civil rights. Second, the 2008 election amplified the odds among white men, among the white upper class, and among white biblical literalists, of voting Republican. Thus we surmise the 2008 election was polarizing across race, gender, social class, and religious lines, in comparison to the 1980 – 2000 Presidential elections.

Our finding regarding 2008 voter polarization is distinct from other research findings regarding religious polarization, for example the studies by Layman and Driskell et al. described in earlier paragraphs. In these other studies religious identity is treated as an independent influence on politics that derives from variation in individual voter preferences. In the present study religious identity is conceived as not only embedded within the individual; it is also embedded within society. Religious identity therefore serves as a marker for the partisan relationships of stratification groups within the social and political order, reflecting the efforts of these groups to obtain politically distributed resources, to seek redress for perceived, or real, injustices, etc.

The findings reported by this paper suggest that the affect of religious identity on voter choice encompasses a social dimension, and is not solely an

individual choice. The social dimension is defined by the individual's relationship to society, and can be operationalized using stratification categories. Thus a particular religious identity is found to trigger different voter choices, contingent on the individual's race, class, and gender status. Finally, the findings are consistent with the insights of Durkheim and Marx who characterize religion as a popular worldview related to social cohesion and to social reproduction.

Notes

1. Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).

2. Thomas Frank, *What's the matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America,* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); Geoffrey Layman, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*, (New York: Viking, 2006).

3. Thomas A. Hirschl, James G. Booth and Leland L. Glenna, "The Link Between Voter Choice and Religious Identity in Contemporary Society: Bringing Classical Theory Back In." *Social Science Quarterly* 90 no. 4 (2009): 927-944.

4. Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout, *The Truth About Conservative Christians*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006); David Knoke, "Religion, Stratification and Politics: American in the 1960s," *American Journal of Political Science* 18 no. 2 (1974): 331-345; Geoffrey Layman, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics*; Jeff Manza and Clem Brooks, "The Religious Factor in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1960-1992," *The American Journal of Sociology* 103 no. 1 (1997): 38-81; Stratos Patrikios, "American Republican Religion? Disentangling the Causal Link Between Religion and Politics in the US," *Political Behavior* 30 no. 3 (2008): 367-389; Darren E. Sherkat, and Christopher G. Ellison, "Recent Developments and Current Controversies in the Sociology of

Religion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 363-394; and Robert D. Woodberry and Christian S. Smith, "Fundamentalism Et Al: Conservative Protestants in America," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 25-56.

5. Manza and Brooks, "The Religious Factor in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1960-1992," p.40; see also Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza, "A Great Divide: Religion and Political Change in U.S. National Elections, 1972-2000," *The Sociological Quarterly* 45 no. 3 (2004): 421-450; ____, "Group Size, Turnout, and Political Alignments and the Development of U.S. Party Coalitions, 1960-1992," *European Sociological Review* 15 no. 4 (1999): 369-389;____, "The Gender Gap in U.S. Presidential Elections: When? Why? Implications?," *The American Journal of Sociology* 103 no. 5 (1998): 1235-1266.

6. Geoffrey Layman "Religion and Political Behavior in the United States: The Impact of Beliefs, Affiliations, and Commitment From 1980 to 1994." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 61 no. 2 (1997): 288-316, p. 310

7. ibid, p. 291; see also Layman, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics.*

8. Robyn Driskell, Elizabeth Embry, and Larry Lyon, "Faith and Politics: The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Political Participation," *Social Science Quarterly* 89 no. 2 (2008): 294-314.

9. Bellah, Robert N., "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 117 no. 3 (1988): 97-118.

10. Ronald C. Wimberly, "Civil Religion and the Choice for President: Nixon in '72." *Social Forces* 59 no. 1 (1980):44-61.

11. Stratos Patrikios, "American Republican Religion? Disentangling the Causal Link Between Religion and Politics in the US," *Political Behavior* 30 no. 3 (2008): 367-389.

12. Greeley and Hout, *The Truth About Conservative Christians*, p.72.

13. See Andrew Greeley for a concise explanation of the rational choice perspective, "Coleman Revisited: Religious Structures as a Source of Social Capital," *American Behavioral Scientist* 40 no. 5 (1997): 587-594.

14. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.313.

15. Andrew M. McKinnon, "Reading Opium of the People: Expression, Protest, and the Dialectics of Religion," *Critical Sociology* 31 nos. 1-2 (2005): 15-38.

16. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp.318-319.

17. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.. "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," Pp.502-506 in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works, Volume 1*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969); ____, "Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialistic and Idealistic Outlooks," Pp.16-80 in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works, Volume 1*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969); see especially the description of French peasants in Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [electronic resource], (London: Electric Book Co, 2001).

18. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p.71.

19. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.127.

20. Mark D. Regenerus, David Sikkink and Christian S. Smith, "Voting and the Christian Right: Contextual and Individual Patterns of Electoral Influence," *Social Forces* 77 no. 4 (1999): 1375-1401.

21. David B. Grusky (ed.), *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003).

22. Hirschl, Booth and Glenna, "The Link Between Voter Choice and Religious Identity in Contemporary Society: Bringing Classical Theory Back In."

23. G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?: Power and Politics*, *4th Edition*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002); Robert Perrucci and Earl Wysong, *The New Class Society, 3rd Edition,* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Erik O. Wright, "The Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis – Comments," *Theory and Society* 25 no. 5 (1996): 693-716.

24. James A. Davis, Tom W. Smith and Peter V. Marsden, *General Social Surveys, 1972-2004 [Cumulative File]*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, retrieved December 12, 2005, http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR-SERIES/00028.xml), p.197

25. Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Peter L. Berger, "The Class Struggle in American Religion," *The Christian Century* 25 February (1981): 194-199.

26. John C. Danforth, "In the Name of Politics," *New York Times*, March 30, 2005; Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*.

27. Davis, Smith and Marsden, *General Social Surveys, 1972-2004 [Cumulative File]*, p.169.

28. Agresti, A., *Categorical Data Analysis*, (John Wiley & Sons, 1990), Section 3.3.2.

29. Michael Greenacre and Jörg Blasius, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis and Related Methods*, (Boca Raton, LA: Chapman & Hall/CRC, 2006).

30. R Development Core Team, *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing, R Foundation for Statistical Computing*, (Vienna, Austria: http://www.R-project.org, 2010).

31. Hirschl, Booth, and Glenna, "The Link Between Voter Choice and Religious Identity in Contemporary Society: Bringing Classical Theory Back In," see Model 2.

32. Center for American Women and Politics, *The Gender Gap: Voting Choices in Presidential Elections*, 2008, Downloaded from the Internet 4 August 2010, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/voters/gender_gap.php#Facts.

Table 1: Respondent Ratings of Biblical Authority Question 1 and Statements 2 – 5, 108 Students Enrolled in Introductory Sociology, Cornell University, Fall, 2009*

| Response	Q1.c	S5.n	S2.n	S3.n	S4.n	Q1.b	S5.y	S2.y	S4.y	S3.y	Q1.a
Average Score	1.37	1.48	1.70	1.96	2.34	3.56	4.41	4.51	4.73	4.75	4.89

*See article text for explanation of scores derived from Likert scale means.

Table 2: Fits of Model (1) to the CNSS Data Using a Simple Measure of Biblical Authority Based Solely on Question 1, and a Composite Measure Based on Responses to Question 1 and Statements 2 - 5.

	Simple Biblical Authority Score		Composite Biblical Authority Score	
Parameter	Estimate	Std.Error	Estimate	Std.Error
Intercept	0.674 *	0.306	0.435	0.325
Gender=female (male)	-0.840 ***	0.219	-0.923 ***	0.231
Rel=Catholic (Protestant)	-0.633 *	0.254	-0.636 *	0.283
Rel=Other (Protestant)	-0.871 **	0.287	-0.757 *	0.306
Biblical Authority (linear slope)	0.458	0.356	0.754 *	0.341
Income (linear slope)	0.064	0.098	0.245 *	0.114
Catholic X Biblical Authority	-0.771 #	0.405	-0.987 **	0.362
Income X Biblical Authority	0.278 #	0.142	0.318 *	0.143

***, **, *, and # indicate significance at the 0.001, 0.01, 0.05 and 0.1 levels respectively.

Figure 1: Multiple Correspondence Map of Responses to Question and Statements
Concerning Biblical Authority*
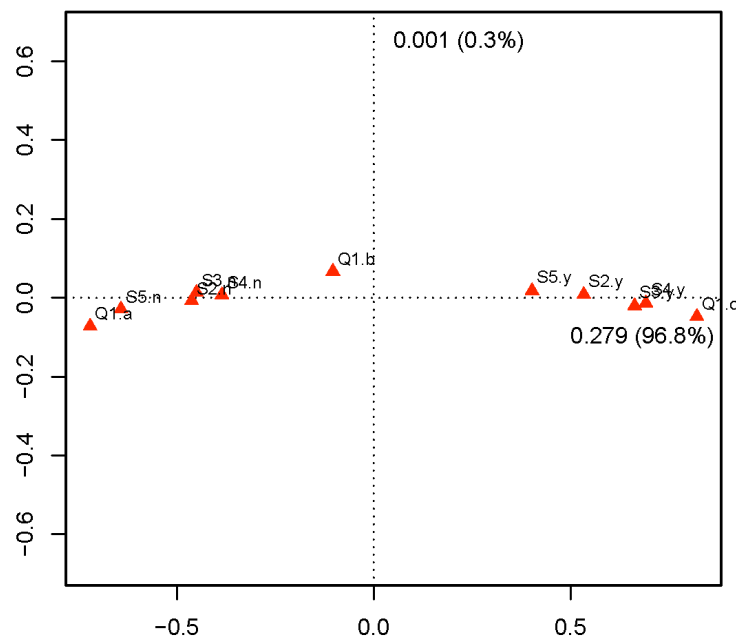
* The data labels correspond to responses to biblical authority question 1 and
statements 2 – 5, e.g., S5.n denotes a "no" response to statement 5, etc. The first
principle coordinate explains 96.8% of inertia.

Figure 2: Fitted Natural Log Odds of Voting Republican Versus Democratic (y-axis), by Biblical Authority (composite scale; x-axis), Income, Gender, and Religious Tradition
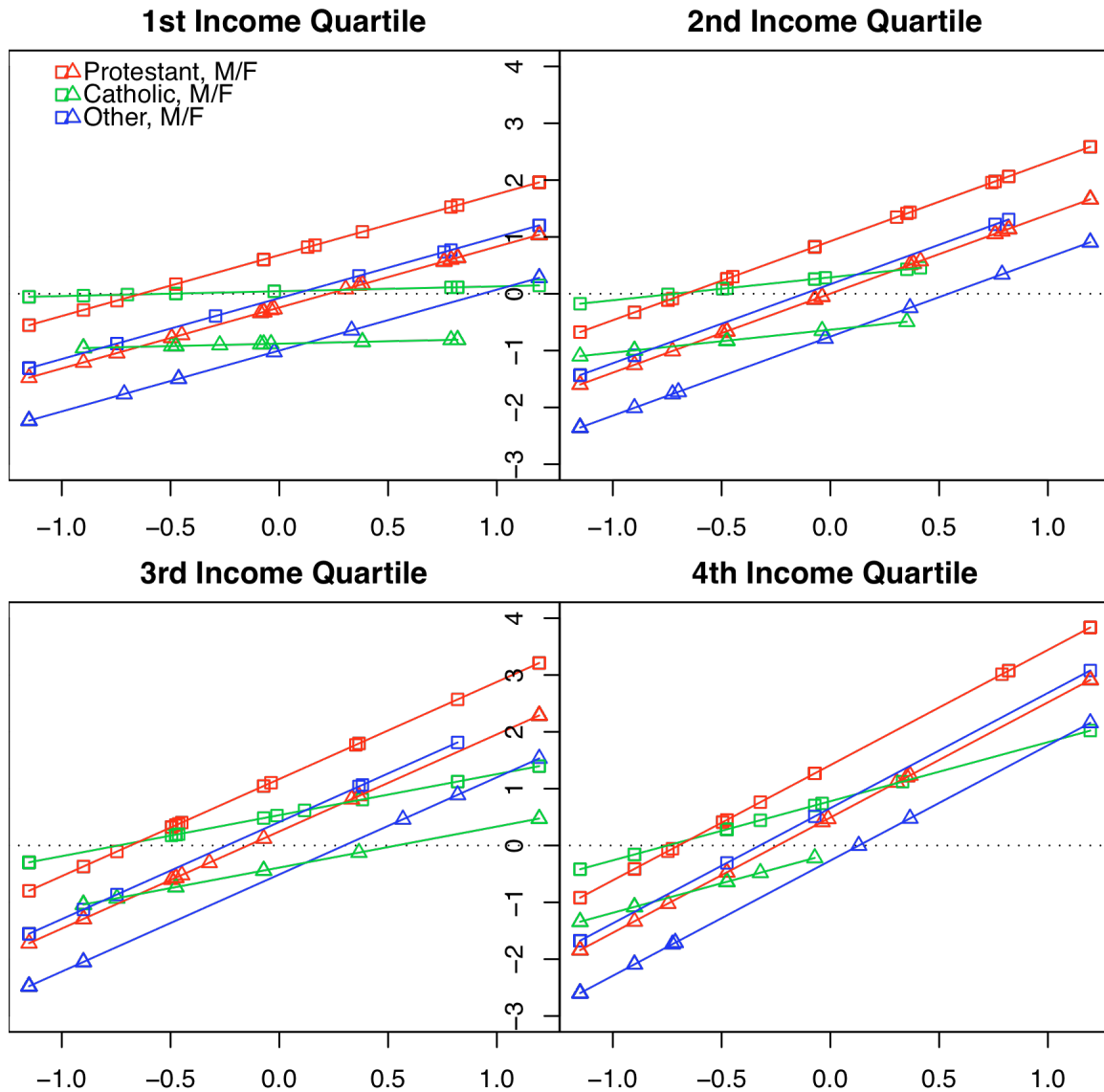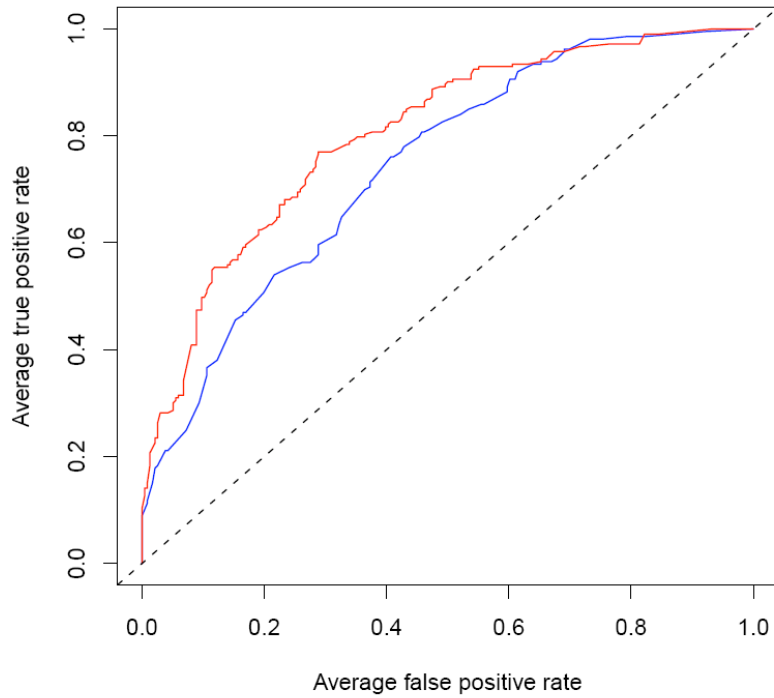
Figure 3: ROC curves Based on Prediction of Republican Vote Using Model (1)*

* The blue curve is for the model fit using the simple "biblical authority" score based on Question 1, and the red curve is for the model fit using the composite score based on Question 1 and Statements 2 - 5.