

A GENERATIONAL SHIFT IN EVANGELICAL  
CHRISTIAN PARTISANSHIP

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A Thesis  
Presented  
to the Faculty of  
California State University, Chico

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Political Science

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by  
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Fall 2014

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CHRISTIAN PARTISANSHIP

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Fall 2014

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Phyllis and Jim, whose unwavering support and enthusiasm for my educational endeavors kept me going on days where I felt like this project would never see completion. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to chase my dreams.

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## ABSTRACT

### A GENERATIONAL SHIFT IN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN PARTISANSHIP

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Since the 1980s, evangelical Christians have been a steady and reliable voting bloc for the Republican Party. Since around 2004, however, the media began to take notice of a trend occurring among evangelical youth (between 18 and 30 years old) – namely the rise of the young evangelical Democrat. It is alleged that younger generations of evangelicals are shifting their policy preferences to include an increased concern for social justice issues like poverty, and environmentalism which is what is driving this shift towards the Democratic Party. This thesis analyzes data from the General Social Survey from 2000 through 2012 and shows that a shift in partisanship towards the Democratic Party among evangelical youth is occurring. However, increased support for environmental sustainability and assistance to the poor over time are shown to have less conclusive results.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On June 21, 2008, *The Washington Post* reported that Senator Barack Obama was making a “full-throttle push for centrist evangelicals” in his quest for the Democratic presidential nomination (Burke 2008). Part of this push involved the creation of a grass-roots project called the Joshua Generation, which included plans to hold concerts and house meetings to specifically target young evangelicals (*Ibid.*). A source close to the Obama campaign told *Christian Broadcast News* that “There is unprecedented energy and excitement for Obama among young evangelicals. The Joshua Generation project will tap into that excitement and provide young people of faith opportunities to stand up for their values and move the campaign forward” (Mazyck 2008, 1). The choice to name the project the Joshua Generation was intentional, as the phrase is often used as a mobilization phrase within evangelical church youth groups and refers to the biblical story of Joshua, who did what Moses (a generation before him) could not, and led his people into the Promised Land (Burke 2008).

In 2007, a year prior to the presidential election, various journalists began reporting on a change occurring among evangelical youth (18 to 30 years old). These journalists suggested that a shift in policy preferences that included an increased concern for the environment and for reducing poverty was taking place among evangelical youth (Goodstein 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007; Wehner 2007). It is unclear whether or not the

Obama campaign was aware of this speculated shift in policy preferences among evangelical youth, but the effort by the Obama campaign to target the evangelical youth vote seems to have been successful. John Green, a Senior Fellow in Religion and American Politics at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, noted that Obama was able to gain approximately three percentage points more of the evangelical vote than John Kerry had in 2004 (24% to 21%), and it is highly likely that this three percent shift was due to evangelical youth (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008, 10). It appears that the Democrats were able to tap into a trend of young evangelicals moving to the left.

In this thesis, I investigate whether there has indeed been a shift to the left among young evangelicals, and whether this shift might be due to a change in issue preference. Specifically, I investigate whether young evangelicals (18 to 30 years old) are increasing their support for government action on issues such as poverty and the environment. I also investigate whether these younger evangelicals are becoming increasingly more likely to identify with the Democratic Party.

### Who Are the Evangelicals?

To fully understand Senator Obama's 2008 strategy to target the evangelical youth vote and to understand the importance of speculation by the media that younger evangelicals are changing their policy preferences, it is first necessary to know who evangelicals are as individuals and to have a historical perspective of evangelicals in politics. A research note worth mentioning is that most scholars of religion and politics often make a distinction between so-called white evangelicals and black evangelicals, as black evangelicals are said to place emphasis on different elements of the Christian

doctrine than white evangelicals, such as the importance for freedom and the quest for justice (Hacket and Lindsay 2008). Black evangelicals also differ from white evangelicals in blacks' more liberal stance on most economic issues, such as the redistribution of wealth (Steensland et al., 2000). As such, throughout this thesis when talking about evangelicals and Evangelicalism, I am referring to white evangelicals specifically. The scholars that I draw upon also make this distinction in their own research.

Evangelicalism is a theologically conservative branch of Protestant Christianity. Evangelicalism can typically be identified and differentiated from mainline Protestantism by a few distinct characteristics. First, evangelicals consider themselves to be born-again Christians and when asked in surveys if they have ever had a born-again experience, the answer is "yes." This born-again experience is something that happens in adult life and is something that must happen during a true conversion experience. After the born-again experience, evangelicals feel that they have been saved, and it is at that moment that they fully commit themselves to God. Essentially, in the born-again experience they shed their old selves and are reborn as a child of God (Fowler, Hertzke and Olson 1999; Smidt 2008; Brint and Abrutyn 2010). Another distinguishing feature of evangelicals is their high level of religiosity, which can be expressed both as frequency of attendance at church and frequency of Bible reading (Brint and Abrutyn 2010). Another characteristic of evangelicals is their belief in biblical literalism, and when asked in survey questions if they believe The Bible to be the true and authoritative word of God, the answer is typically "yes" (Gold and Russell 2007). Finally, evangelicals tend to hold very conservative moral stances on hot button social issues, such as abortion and gay marriage (Fowler, Hertzke and Olson 1999; Smidt 2008).

## Evangelicals in American Politics

Although the history of evangelicalism dates back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was not until the 1970s that evangelicals in the United States began to be noticed by both politicians and the general public as they slowly emerged onto the political scene (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 206). One reason for the emergence of evangelicals onto the political scene during this time period is that evangelicals were responding to a number of developments that occurred in the 1960s, including the spread of drugs, the women's rights movement, and the practice of free love which encouraged premarital and extramarital sex (Ramet 2005, 431). Other scholars argue that it was three particular grassroots, local movements that took place in the 1970s that led to the emergence of evangelicals as a political force: a textbook controversy in West Virginia, a gay rights referendum in Dade County, Florida, and a campaign to defeat the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011).

In the mid-1970s in a small mining valley of West Virginia, a group of evangelical parents banded together to protest the English textbooks their children were using in the classroom (*Ibid.*, 205). The parents viewed these textbooks as disrespectful of traditional authority and religion, destructive of social and cultural values, obscene, and unpatriotic. As a result, they decided the best course of action to get the textbooks removed from the classroom would be to boycott the school entirely (*Ibid.*, 206). The boycott and protest spread throughout the community and led to mass picketing as well as a temporary closure of the schools in the county. Eventually, the school superintendent resigned and in his place a new superintendent stepped in and assured the parents that a

new textbook adoption procedure would be put into place to make sure that future so-called “obscenities” never made it into the classrooms (Ibid.).

In 1977 in Dade County, Florida, a gay rights ordinance was being considered. The gay community had persuaded the county commission to pass an ordinance that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in housing and employment (Ibid., 207). This ordinance again prompted local Christian parent groups (including evangelicals) to stage a protest titled “Save our Children” in which they argued that if the law passed, it would require private and religious schools to hire homosexuals as teachers, and these teachers would then corrupt the youth attending those schools (Ibid.). The protest was successful and the ordinance never passed. This particular protest was again seen as an example of the power of conservative evangelicals to voice a political position on a controversial issue and win.

The final grassroots movement that led to the emergence of evangelicals as a political force was a campaign in the 1970s that successfully defeated the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. This amendment would have prohibited sex discrimination by the states and the federal government. After its approval by Congress in 1972 it went through swift ratification in twenty-two states and needed only sixteen more states to approve the amendment for formal adoption (Ibid.). In part because of the formation of Stop ERA, Concerned Women for America, and other anti-ERA efforts, the final sixteen states stalled in approving the amendment and it ultimately died three states short of formal approval (Ibid.). Stop ERA and Concerned Women for America were both led by religiously conservative women who lobbied for their cause to keep traditional gender roles in states with a large base of conservative religious voters.

Each of the grassroots evangelical political movements (the West Virginia textbook boycott, the Dade County, Florida gay rights protest, and the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment) was viewed by evangelical Protestants as “a crusade in defense of traditional Christian values and institutions” (Ibid., 208). The three campaigns were tied together by the belief that a godless society was on the rise and something needed to be done about it (Ibid.). The fact that all three campaigns were successful helped to raise the status of evangelicals as a strong political force that could bring about change.

The political successes of grassroots evangelicalism did not go unnoticed by what Wald and Calhoun-Brown call “secular conservative activists” (Ibid., 209). These conservative activists attempted to capitalize on the political energy, enthusiasm, and success displayed by the evangelical movement in order to restore the Republican Party which had faced consecutive defeats in the 1974 midterm elections and the 1976 presidential elections (Ibid.). According to Wald and Calhoun-Brown, the secular conservative activists wanted to transfer the evangelical enthusiasm from a local political arena to the national arena. The activists encouraged evangelical political figures who were the most vocal leaders to make an attack on “big government” as standing in the way of traditional moral, religious, and economic values (Ibid.).

Evangelical religious leaders started to form political organizations, such as the Moral Majority, which focused on advancing conservative positions on the issues that they saw at the heart of cultural conflict within society (Layman and Hussey 2007). Evangelical political organizations focused on issues such as abortion, women’s rights, and homosexual rights, and evangelical leaders started to mobilize ordinary evangelical citizens to support their positions on these issues and to vote for the political candidates

who agreed with them. Since electoral victories depend on voter turnout, religiously conservative political organizations such as the Moral Majority have found that the way to encourage evangelical Protestants to participate is to raise cultural issues and to use rhetoric and language that has a conservative, traditional message (Wilcox and Robinson 2011, 17).

#### Into the 1980s: Evangelical Political Mobilization on a National Scale

The Moral Majority was founded in 1979 by television evangelist Jerry Falwell and was concentrated mostly in the southeastern United States (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 209). Falwell was one of the main driving forces behind the defeat of the Dade County, Florida gay rights ordinance and was seen as a natural, strong vocal leader of the conservative Christian cause (Ramat 2005). The Moral Majority's success centered on direct-mail fundraising and campaigning, and Falwell was able to gain most of the names and addresses for direct-mail contacts from Southern Baptist church registries (*Ibid.*). The main message of the Moral Majority echoed the message of the earlier local protests in both West Virginia and Dade County, Florida, and as a result evangelical Christians were quick to open their checkbooks in support of political figures who were willing to stand up for traditional moral and religious values.

In 1980, evangelical Protestants, with the leadership of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, united around the candidacy of Ronald Reagan for president (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 211). Reagan embraced the political efforts of the conservative evangelical leaders and vowed to work for enactment of their agenda. The Republican Party began to stake out clearly conservative positions on cultural issues and evangelicals

and religious conservatives responded enthusiastically (Layman and Hussey 2007). For example, Republicans modified their party's platform and called for a constitutional amendment to ban abortion and to legalize prayer in public schools as a way to fully engage with evangelical leaders and voters (Ibid., 212). Leaders of the Republican Party granted considerable symbolic recognition to the emerging evangelical leaders by featuring them prominently at the Republican National Convention in 1980, which gave evangelical leaders the impression that they had a true place at the table in politics (Ibid.).

Yet towards the end of Reagan's second term as president, the Moral Majority began to weaken due to a lack of solid financial backing. The Moral Majority had a national headquarters in Virginia, but only "existed on paper in most states and many counties, but most were moribund" (Wilcox et al, 1999, 182). The Moral Majority officially folded in 1988 and in its place a new religiously conservative political organization known as the Christian Coalition emerged (Ramat 2005, 432). The Christian Coalition started in 1987 with the rise of another television evangelist, Pat Robertson, whose bid for the Republican presidential nomination attracted thousands of small contributions from conservative Christians from all across the United States. Robertson's campaign failed, however it energized a new set of conservative Christians and Robertson utilized this enthusiasm to help mobilize and organize support for the Republican Party (Wilcox et al. 1999, 182). Pat Robertson hired Ralph Reed, a conservative political activist with a PhD in history, to serve as the executive director of the Christian Coalition. Reed was able to work from the contributor list of Robertson's failed presidential bid to build up the new Christian Coalition organization, and, by 2005

the Christian Coalition had grown to include over 1,000 chapters located in all 50 states (Ramet 2005, 432).

Since the 1980 presidential election of Ronald Reagan, evangelical Christians have been an extremely reliable and loyal voting bloc of the Republican Party. For example, in the 2004 presidential election evangelicals made up “39.8 percent of the GOP electoral coalition, and a full 77.5 percent of evangelicals voted for George W. Bush” (Guth et al. 2006, 228). These numbers indicate a reliable and steady coalition for Republicans and are due in part to the mobilization efforts of the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition (*Ibid.*).

#### Evangelical Democrats: Young vs. Old Evangelicals

Since around 2004, scholars and the media have been noticing a trend among evangelical youth (18 to 30 year olds) – namely the rise of the young evangelical Democrat (Kirkpatrick 2007; Smith and Johnson 2010). These evangelical youth have become increasingly more interested in seeing their church move beyond controversial issues like gay marriage and abortion and instead would like to see their church and their political leaders moving towards a focus on issues such as reducing poverty and securing environmental sustainability (Goodstein 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007; Banerjee 2008). The older generation of evangelical pastors and the traditional voice of the evangelical cause are dying off or losing steam and a younger generation of leaders are taking their place with a new perspective about what the evangelical platform’s focus should be (Goodstein 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007; Luo and Goodstein 2007). Media observers have argued that the new generation is weary of the Republican Party, and as a consequence their allegiance to

the Republican Party is not as cozy as it has been in years past (Goodstein 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007).

Some journalists have noted that these evangelical youth became disenchanted during George W. Bush's presidency (Goodstein 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007). Bush targeted evangelicals on issues of traditional morality and family values while at the same time evangelical youth were becoming increasingly more interested in seeing their church move towards a greater focus on social justice issues such as reducing poverty and on environmental sustainability (Goodstein 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007; Wehner 2007; Banerjee 2008). Senator Barack Obama's campaign team was probably well aware of this shift occurring among evangelical youth, which is why in 2008 his team created the grass roots project, The Joshua Generation, to try and seize the evangelical youth vote as a way to win the election.

It turns out that the Obama campaign's targeting of the evangelical youth vote in 2008 may actually have been successful. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life held a conference on December 8, 2008 titled, "A Post-Election Look at Religious Voters in the 2008 Election," and nearly all panelists unanimously agreed that Obama did very well among evangelical youth voters. As stated earlier, John Green, a Senior Fellow in Religion and American Politics at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, noted that Obama was able to gain approximately three percentage points more of the evangelical vote than John Kerry had in 2004 (24% to 21%), and it is highly likely that this three percent shift was due to evangelical youth (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008, 10). Corwin Smidt notes that if the Democratic Party can "slice off three or four percent of all evangelical voters from supporting the Republican candidate, this would provide an

overall shift in vote totals of about two percent which could be the difference between victory or defeat in a close election" (2008, 25).

The data from the 2008 election suggest there might be a shift or schism occurring along generational lines in an evangelical voting bloc that has traditionally remained loyal to the Republican Party. If this schism in the evangelical voting bloc that splits young evangelicals and older evangelicals is indeed occurring, this could shake up traditional partisan politics and potentially force both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party to rethink their campaign rhetoric, their platform positions on important issues and their voter mobilization strategies. This shift within evangelical Christianity could have a great impact on politics, especially for the Republican Party. For more than 20 years, evangelical Christians have been an extremely reliable and loyal voting bloc for the Republican Party. If younger generations of evangelicals start to shift their policy preferences to include an increased concern for social justice issues like poverty and environmentalism, it is possible that a new alignment of partisan loyalties could take place and both the Republican and Democratic Parties could shift their campaign messages to appeal to this changing voting bloc, as was the Obama administration's strategy in 2008.

Therefore, my first research question concerns whether young evangelicals are increasing their support of policies that reduce poverty and secure environmental sustainability. My hypothesis is that young evangelicals have indeed become more supportive of government efforts to reduce poverty and to enhance environmental sustainability. My second research question concerns what impact, if any, a generational shift in the policy preferences of young evangelical Christians will have on electoral

politics, specifically with regard to the political party identification of young evangelicals. I hypothesize that a shift in the views of young evangelical Christians towards an increased support for reducing poverty and securing environmental sustainability will result in a decrease in loyalty to the Republican Party and the potential for an increase in loyalty to the Democratic Party.

My hypotheses are based on media speculation that this shift in generational preferences towards an increased interest in social justice issues such as poverty and environmentalism among younger evangelicals has been occurring since 2004 (Kirkpatrick 2007; Goodstein 2007; Banerjee 2008). My hypotheses are also based on media reports that in 2008 in particular, young evangelicals voted in higher numbers than their elders for Democrats (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008, 10). As such, I am most interested in looking at time series data comparing multiple years to see if this shift is indeed occurring over time.

First, I hypothesize that in comparing survey data from the year 2000 through 2012, younger evangelicals (between 18 and 30 years old) will show increased support for pro-environmental policies and anti-poverty policies. Second, I hypothesize that in comparing survey data from 2000 through 2012, younger evangelicals will show increased self-identification as Democrats.

### Overview of the Thesis

In chapter two, I provide a review of the scholarly literature relevant to my research questions, which will include a discussion of political socialization and what we would expect to find from the socialization of evangelical youth by their parents as well

as the influence of other socializing agents such as peers and the media. I also discuss “generational replacement” as a way of understanding why generational cohorts place importance on different salient issues than previous cohorts and what this means for policy and party preferences in politics (Putnam and Campbell 2010). I also discuss generational replacement as argued by Inglehart and Welzel, who connect changes among different generations to changes in different generations’ socioeconomic standing in society (2005). In chapter two, I also analyze the very few scholarly studies to date that examine political generational change among evangelicals. Lastly, I review the relevant literature on political coalitions, and I examine what percentage of the Republican Party coalition is comprised of evangelicals and speculate as to how this coalition might be affected if younger evangelicals begin to change their party identification towards increased support for the Democratic Party.

In chapter three, I explain the data set and methodology that I use to test my hypotheses. In particular, I discuss the difficulties that arise when trying to identify evangelicals within social survey data. I also explain the difficulties in finding variables in time series data that are phrased exactly the same way across multiple years of data collection.

In chapter four, I test my two hypotheses. First, I analyze survey data to determine if young evangelicals have changed their policy positions on poverty and environmental issues. Then, I use survey data to test my hypothesis that there has been a concurrent increase in the proportion of young evangelicals who identify as Democrats. I expect to find evidence that supports both of these hypotheses. I will discuss my findings at length.

In the final chapter, I review my major findings concerning the relationship between evangelical youth and their changing issue preferences and partisanship. In particular, I discuss how these findings might suggest a schism within the evangelical coalition of the Republican Party, and I speculate about what the results of my research might mean for the 2016 presidential election. Finally, I will make suggestions for future researchers who may want to build upon the analysis I have done in this thesis.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

To understand whether or not a generational shift in the policy preferences and partisan identification of evangelical youth is occurring, I review the relevant scholarly literature that addresses the generational differences in political values among citizens in the United States. First, I address the process of political socialization and how political values are transferred from one generation to the next. Next, I examine the theory of generational change as proposed by Putnam (2000) and Putnam and Campbell (2010). I also examine generational change as proposed by Inglehart and Welzel with a specific emphasis on what they call “post-material values,” or a focus on how different values become important to different generations depending on whether or not particular generations experience economic hardship (2005, 12). I also evaluate the very few empirical studies to date that look at the specifics of generational change among evangelicals. Lastly, I review the relevant literature on political coalitions and I examine what percentage of the Republican Party coalition is comprised of evangelicals and I speculate about how this coalition might be affected if younger evangelicals begin to change their party-identification towards increased support for the Democratic Party.

## Political Socialization

In what way are political values and political party identification transmitted within cultures, and more importantly, how are political values and party identification transmitted and shaped as we emerge into early adulthood? In the United States, young adults typically learn their political values and form associations with political parties in a process called political socialization (Abramowitz 2004, 88). In the process of political socialization, the fundamental beliefs and attitudes and so-called “appropriate and expected behaviors” of a particular culture are taught to the newest members of that society, the children (Flanigan and Zingale 2010, 25). Although parents are the primary agents of this socialization process, other agents such as peers, school, or even religion can also influence this process (*Ibid.*). In particular, Abramowitz notes that sometimes young adults will choose a political party based on the influence of important current events, and in those instances parental influence on which particular political party the child identifies with can be weakened (2004, 89). I expect that more evangelical youth are identifying with the Democratic Party based on an increased concern for current issues such as environmental sustainability and a reduction in poverty, and thus, the influence of their parents’ conservative stances on social morality issues and party identification as Republican is diminishing.

The scholarly literature on political socialization shows that there are mixed results when examining the level of transference of political values from parent to child over time. Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers argue that in a family in which the parents have strong political values and in which the parents often talk about those political values, the children are more likely to adopt the political beliefs of their parents (2009, 782). For

example, in a highly politicized evangelical family, we might expect to find that transmission of very conservative stances on social morality issues such as abortion, gay marriage, stem cell research, and traditional family values are very strong since these have been the salient issues among evangelicals since approximately the 1980s (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 220). However, media speculation suggests that these are not the salient issues for younger evangelicals and instead environmental sustainability and reducing poverty seem to be the salient issues for this younger generation (Kirkpatrick 2007; Goodstein 2007; Banerjee 2008).

Flanigan and Zingale note that in families where both parents share the same political party identification, we can expect that “more than two-thirds of the electorate” will adopt that same political party (2010, 95). However, again, media speculation suggests that younger generations of evangelicals are moving away from identification with the Republican Party, even though we would expect them to identify with the political party of their parents. Instead, they argue, younger evangelicals are moving towards identification with the Democratic Party (Kirkpatrick 2007).

Other scholars of political socialization argue that what we would normally expect from the transmission of political values between parent and child can vary drastically due to the role of additional socializing agents as well as so-called “attitude instabilities due to life cycle effects” (Jennings and Niemi 1968, 183). In other words, parental values can be diminished through the influence of other socializing agents such as peers or the media. Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers note that having a strong politicized family can transmit strong political values to a child, but it can also leave the child more attuned to outside political influences as well (2009, 796). They suggest that transmitting

strong political values onto children can backfire, because the child learns about other views on political issues through outside socializing agents such as peers, school, or the media that might actually be antithetical to the beliefs of that child's parents.

### Generational Replacement

As discussed in the previous section, political socialization is a process in which parents transmit their political values onto their children. However, parents are just one agent of political socialization and other agents of political socialization such as our peers, the media, school, and even the social environment itself can also influence our political values. Putnam and Campbell argue that it is the influence of the larger social environment contained within the political era in which we come of age that plays the greatest role in shaping our political values (2010).

Putnam distinguishes between what he calls a life-cycle effect and a generational effect. For example, a life-cycle effect might be two different generations of men whose eyesight begins to deteriorate at around the same age. A generational effect might be two different generations of men in which one of the generations was largely influenced by time spent in the military, and the other generation spent little to no time in the military (2000, 248). The life cycle effect means that the individual himself changes, but the entire generation does not, whereas generational effect means that the generation itself changes even if one individual within that generation does not (*Ibid.*). The generational effect is harder to identify, however Putnam claims that if one follows a given cohort over a period of time the effects become identifiable.

The generational effect that Putnam describes is important, because he argues that the formative years in which an individual comes of age can shape our political party preferences and our political values. For example, Putnam says that the generation born between 1910 and 1940 was largely influenced by the shared adversity of World War II and as such this generation has remained highly patriotic (*Ibid.*, 259). Additionally, the so-called Baby Boomer generation that came of age between 1946 and 1964 was marked by the Civil Rights movements in the 1960s (*Ibid.*). The X Generation born between 1965 and 1980 came of age in an era in which individualism and self-expression took precedence over shared public goals and concerns (*Ibid.*). Putnam does not mention the generation born after 1980. However, I would argue that this generation born between 1980 and 2010 is coming of age in an era in which environmental disasters have been at the forefront (such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989) and income disparities in society have been growing. As such, this may explain why younger generations of evangelicals (currently between 18 and 30 years old) are placing greater importance on the need for government to address these issues.

The way that these generational effects that Putnam identifies play into politics is through a process that Putnam and Campbell call generational replacement (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 377). Putnam and Campbell state that political alliances can be effected when a younger generation begins to replace an older generation (*Ibid.*). Change in the partisan landscape of the electorate requires that a large bloc of voters move from one political party to another, and Putnam and Campbell claim that this scenario is far more likely to happen among a group of voters who are “coming of political age” than among those who have had long standing partisan affiliations (*Ibid.*,

381). In other words, evangelical youth are still in the process of coming of political age and are still being influenced by the current issues of this era. As such, it is far more likely that this group of evangelicals can move from identification with the Republican Party to identification with the Democratic Party much easier than older generations of evangelicals who have had long standing partisan affiliation with the Republican Party.

### An Emerging Generation Gap in Politics

Some scholars have taken note of an emerging generation gap in politics in which younger voters are deviating from older voters along ideological and partisan preferences (Fisher 2008). For example, these younger voters are more in favor of an activist government and as such are increasingly more in favor of Democratic candidates (Ibid., 505). Additionally, these younger voters tend to place value on issues such as gay marriage, the environment, racial equality, and economic equality (Ibid., 509). Fisher says that this generational gap in politics is due in large part to the policy issues that have been important as this generation comes of age, which supports the generational change theory of Putnam and Campbell.

Abramowitz notes that in the 2008 election, “Obama carried voters under the age of thirty by a margin of 34 points versus only 9 points for Kerry” (2011, 299). This further supports the claim of Fisher (2008) that there is an emerging age gap in politics in which the younger generation is increasingly more in favor of the Democratic candidate. Abramowitz also notes that this age gap in candidate preference in 2008 was the largest since 1972 (2011, 299). This again provides evidence of a potential generation gap that is emerging in politics, and perhaps evangelical youth are part of this larger emerging trend.

Finally, a recent Pew Research Center study suggests that the Republican Party's problem with younger voters runs very deep (Kiley and Dimock 2014). In particular, the Pew Research Center study found that among all individuals that identify as Republican, younger Republicans are decidedly less conservative on issues such as homosexuality, immigration, the role of government, and the environment (Kiley and Dimick 2014, 2). It is possible that the media speculation about changes in evangelical youth policy preferences and evangelical youth partisan affiliation are representative of a larger generational divide that is currently taking place in the United States.

#### Post-Material Values and Generational Replacement

Like Putnam and Campbell, Inglehart and Welzel also discuss the phenomenon of generational replacement, but rather than connecting generational replacement to the partisan landscape in which a particular generation comes of age as Putnam and Campbell do, Inglehart and Welzel connect generational replacement to a change in the socioeconomic values of particular generations (2005, 2).

Inglehart and Welzel distinguish between what they call materialist values and post-materialist values. Materialist values are of the greatest concern to individuals or an entire generation of individuals who have experienced economic hardship or physical hardship. As such, Inglehart and Welzel argue that these individuals are more likely to give preference to public policies that involve order and stability in society. In contrast, post-materialist values are of the greatest concern to individuals or an entire generation of individuals who have experienced much greater economic security and as such give

preference to public policies that involve providing support to others and improving the quality of life (2005, 92-97).

Like Putnam and Campbell, Inglehart and Welzel argue that events that take place during one's formative years do matter for the political values on which one chooses to place importance. For example, they argue that the generations who came of age during World War I and the Great Depression were influenced by hunger and insecurity and as such placed emphasis on material values, whereas current generations, they argue, have come of age during an era of relative prosperity and peace and as such they place emphasis on post-material values (Ibid., 102). Inglehart and Welzel state that a shift in our current society towards an emphasis on so-called quality of life issues and environmental protection are proof that we are currently in a post-material era (Ibid.).

### Evangelical Youth Values

To date, there appears to only be three specific empirical studies that have tried to measure whether or not a generational shift among evangelical youth is occurring. Smith and Johnson found that evangelical youth are indeed significantly more likely than older evangelicals to think that more should be done to protect the environment, however on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and the war in Iraq, evangelical youth are in line with the conservative stance of older evangelicals (2010, 357). Farrell focused his analysis on young evangelical attitudes towards same-sex marriage, premarital sex, cohabitation, and pornography and found that evangelical youth are only slightly more liberal in attitudes towards these issues than older evangelicals (2011, 530). Farrell did not address whether or not young evangelicals are becoming more liberal on social

justice issues, which is what media speculation hints at. My analysis will help fill this gap in scholarly examination of the changing policy preferences of evangelical youth, especially with regard to policy preferences on social justice issues.

Smidt also takes note of a generational shift occurring among evangelicals and argues that there is evidence that shows that a new generation of evangelicals is emerging that is notably different than older evangelicals (2013, 219). In particular, Smidt notes that younger evangelicals are increasingly more likely than older evangelicals to support an activist government, especially when it comes to helping the poor (*Ibid.*). Smidt also notes that for environmental spending, younger evangelicals are “eight percent less likely than older evangelicals to believe that stricter environmental laws are too costly” (2013, 206). Smidt’s conclusions are based on survey data from the Pew Forum Religious Landscape Survey which was conducted in 2007, and his conclusions drawn from that survey match up with media speculation which makes the same suggestions about younger evangelicals and their changing policy perspectives. Smidt does not address changing partisan affiliation among different generations of evangelicals.

Although there have only been three specific empirical works to date examining the generational schism among evangelical policy preferences and partisanship, other scholars have also noticed this trend occurring. Wilcox and Robinson note the increased visibility of young pastors at theologically conservative mega-churches, such as Rick Warren and Joel Hunter, who are expressing concern for the environment, AIDS, and global poverty from the pulpit (2011, 5). Both of these pastors continue to remain opposed to same sex marriage and are also pro-life, which allows them to maintain credibility with the evangelical community while also working to

broaden the political agenda of the evangelical movement and perhaps even move it outside of Republican Party politics (*Ibid.*, 6). Wilcox and Robinson note that young evangelicals in particular appear to be open to this new message of politics from the pulpit and they are expressing far more concern for the environment, health care, and poverty than their parents ever did. Large portions of this new evangelical agenda and its nonpartisan style of politics are increasingly becoming more appealing to the next generation of evangelicals (*Ibid.*, 7).

### Coalitions

Another factor to consider if a change is occurring in the partisan affiliation of evangelical youth is how this change might affect the evangelical coalition within the Republican Party. Axelrod argues that the contribution that a particular group makes to a political party's coalition depends on three factors: "the size of the group, its turnout, and its loyalty to the given party" (1972, 11). Looking at one of these factors by itself does not tell the whole story. Instead, Axelrod argues that only when all three factors are taken into consideration as a whole can the full contribution of a particular group to a political party's coalition be truly measured (*Ibid.*, 12).

Regarding the specific contribution that evangelicals make to the Republican Party's coalition, Guth et al. state that in the 2004 General Election evangelicals represented approximately 25 percent of the total United States population and comprised 39.8 percent of the Republican Party's total electoral coalition with a turnout rate of 63.2 percent (2006, 231). In other words, in the 2004 General Election evangelicals represented approximately 40 percent of all votes cast for the Republican Party and

nearly two-thirds of all eligible evangelical voters in the United States turned out to vote. This is a huge coalition for the Republican Party and should this coalition be broken up along generational lines, it could affect the outcome of close elections. Smidt notes that if the Democratic Party can pull away even three or four percent of all evangelical voters from the Republican Party, that this might be the difference between winning or losing an election if that election was a very close one, such as the presidential election in 2000 (2008, 25).

In regard to the changing structure of a political party's specific electoral coalition, V.O. Key, Jr. argued that "the rate in the decline of the political homogeneity of the group may not be uniform ... yet the direction of the movement may be plain despite the fact that it is overlaid with short-term fluctuations which are the product of events or issues of the moment" (1959, 205). In other words, Key argued that specific issues may be a circumstantial factor that can lead to the decline of a group's contribution to a political party's coalition. When considering evangelical youth in particular, I hypothesize that if their identification with the Republican Party is declining, it is due to their increased support for environmental issues and reducing poverty, both of which are issues that the Democratic Party promotes.

In the next chapter I explain the methodology I will use to examine my research questions and hypotheses, and then in chapter four I analyze survey data across 12 years, from 2000 to 2012, to determine if there has been change in the policy positions and party identification of evangelical youth in recent years. Increased support among young evangelicals for governmental action to address poverty and environmental issues would suggest that Putnam and Campbell's generational replacement theory may be at

work. Indeed, income inequality and environmental sustainability have been major policy issues, particularly during the Obama Administration, and this might explain a partisan shift towards self-identification as Democratic among evangelical youth. Additionally, increased support among young evangelicals for governmental action to address poverty and environmental issues would suggest that Inglehart and Welzel's post-material values theory may be at work as well. Inglehart and Welzel theorize we are currently in a post-material era in which our society has shifted towards an emphasis on so-called quality of life issues and environmental protection, and the changing policy preferences on these issues among evangelical youth may be evidence of this shift.

## CHAPTER III

### DATA AND METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

In this chapter I explain the methodology for testing my hypotheses, including an explanation of why I am using the General Social Survey as my data set and why the General Social Survey is an important resource for studying evangelicals. I also introduce and explain my choice of variables and how I will use them to test my hypotheses.

To frame my hypotheses, I am using the generational replacement theory proposed by Putnam (2000) and Putnam and Campbell (2010). They argue that different generations have different policy preferences and partisan affiliations based on the formative years in which particular generations come of age. I argue that addressing environmental degradation and helping the poor are policy issues that were particularly important during the formative years of current generations of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals, and media speculation suggests this to be true as well (Kirkpatrick 2007; Goodstein 2007; Banerjee 2008). Additionally, Putnam (2000) and Putnam and Campbell (2010) state that generational change cannot be studied from a single point in time. Rather it can only be detected by examining data across a spectrum of time, which is why I will use data across multiple years to test my hypotheses.

My hypotheses are based more specifically on media speculation, which suggests that a shift in generational preferences towards an increased interest in social

justice issues such as poverty and environmentalism among younger evangelicals has been occurring since 2004 (Kirkpatrick 2007; Goodstein 2007; Banerjee 2008). My hypotheses are also based on media reports that in 2008 in particular, younger evangelicals voted in high numbers for Democrats (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008, 10). Therefore, I am most interested in looking at data to see if this shift is indeed occurring over time.

First, I hypothesize that in comparing survey data from the year 2000 through 2012, younger evangelicals (between 18 and 30 years old) will show increased support for pro-environmental policies and anti-poverty policies. Second, I hypothesize that in comparing survey data from 2000 through 2012, younger evangelicals will show increased self-identification as Democrats. I expect that these two hypotheses are related. That is, because of their increased support for pro-environmental policies and anti-poverty policies, younger evangelicals are showing increased self-identification as Democrats over time as they gravitate toward the party closest to their policy preferences on these issues.

### Data and Methodology

To test my hypotheses, I ideally needed to find data that were replicated in multiple years so that I could examine trends over time in the policy preferences for pro-environmental and anti-poverty policies and the political party identification of evangelicals between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. To do this I chose the General Social Survey (GSS), which is a survey regularly conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and funded by the Sociology Program of

the National Science Foundation. Since the GSS is conducted every other year, I decided to look at GSS data from seven specific years: 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012. Ideally, analyses of these data will show trends in environmental and poverty policy preferences and political party identification of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals from the year 2000 through 2012. Using seven years of survey data that span from 2000 to 2012 will allow me to detect changes in these variables over time. I also chose the General Social Survey because of the way in which evangelicals can be specifically identified within the survey data, which will be explained in greater detail in the next section. Moreover, the GSS asked the same questions about these topics over the entire time period that I am investigating.

### Independent Variable

To begin this study, I first had to accurately identify the population of evangelicals within the General Social Survey data. Evangelicals are hard to identify in surveys and there are conflicts among scholars about the most reliable method to use in identifying evangelicals. Some scholars argue that evangelical self-identification in surveys is the most reliable method because self-identification can more easily “contribute to our understanding of evangelicalism as a meaningful social movement,” regardless of the denomination with which an individual may affiliate him or herself (Lewis and DeBernardo 2010, 113). Other scholars argue that the best method to identify evangelicals in surveys is to look at measures of behavior, such as level of belief in biblical literalism, born again experiences, and frequency of church attendance, all of which are issues that have been of particular historical importance to evangelicals (Hackett and Lindsay 2008).

Finally, other scholars assert that the best method to identify evangelicals is to look at denominational affiliation, which is the measure I use for my analyses (Steensland et al. 2000). Steensland et al. argue that “denominations generate their own worldviews through symbols, pedagogy, and rituals. They shape members’ concrete views of political and economic issues through formal preaching from the pulpit and informal discussions among parishioners” (*Ibid.*, 292). In particular, the classification scheme used by Steensland et al. provides a foundation for explaining how one’s own religious denominational affiliation can have an effect on that individual’s attitudes and behaviors in the realm of politics (*Ibid.*). As mentioned in Chapter I, it is worth noting again that Steensland et al. and other scholars differentiate between black evangelicals and white evangelicals because of theological differences between the two groups. For example, black evangelicals are said to place emphasis on different elements of the Christian doctrine than white evangelicals, such as the importance for freedom and the quest for justice (Hacket and Lindsay 2008). Black evangelicals also differ from white evangelicals in blacks’ more liberal stance on most economic issues, such as the redistribution of wealth (Steensland et al., 2000). As such, throughout this thesis when talking about evangelicals and Evangelicalism, I am referring to white evangelicals specifically.

Steensland et al. developed a method for recoding the DENOM (denomination) variable in the General Social Survey into a new variable they label RELTRAD (religious tradition), which sorts individuals into categories of religious groups (e.g., Jewish, Catholic, Mainline Protestant, White Evangelical Protestant, Black Evangelical, Other) based on denominational affiliation (*Ibid.*, 296). Steensland et al. argue that the General Social Survey is ideally suited for their classification scheme

because “the GSS has a range of religious, political, economic, and social measures that allow us to demonstrate the differences between our religious classifications” (Ibid.).

Steensland et al. published their Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) code to recode DENOM into RELTRAD specifically for the GSS, and I use this code to accurately identify evangelicals as my population (Ibid.). I then recode the AGE variable in the GSS into nominal categories of 18 to 30, 31 to 54, and 55+, and these are my independent variables for the population of evangelicals I use to test my hypotheses.

### Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable for this thesis from the General Social Survey is NATENVIR (Improving and Protecting the Environment), which asks, “are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on improving the environment” (General Social Survey 1972-2012)? This question was asked in the exact same format across all seven years of GSS surveys that I use, which makes my analysis consistent over time. There were unfortunately no other environmental questions that were asked in the exact same way and replicated in all seven years of GSS data that I am using for this thesis. I measured *support* for pro-environmental policies as individuals who answered the question with the response of “too little.” That is, a response of “too little” to this question would indicate that an individual is supportive of *increasing* spending on improving the environment, indicating that the individual would support pro-environmental policies.

The second dependent variable I examine is NATFAREY (Assistance to the Poor), which asks, “are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on assistance for the poor” (Ibid.)? It is worth noting here that the variables in the GSS that

start with NAT are measuring NATional issues. This particular question for the variable NATFAREY, according to the GSS, is measuring opinions about welFARE spending, even though the question does not directly ask about welfare (*Ibid.*). Again, this question was asked in the exact same format across all seven years of GSS data. Like the NATENVIR variable, there were unfortunately no other questions about providing assistance to the poor that were asked in the exact same way and replicated in all seven years of GSS surveys. I measured *support* for anti-poverty policies as individuals who answered the question with the response of “too little.” A response of “too little” to this question indicates that an individual supports *increasing* spending on assistance to the poor, which suggests that the individual supports anti-poverty policies.

The third dependent variable for this thesis from the General Social Survey is political party identification (PARTYID). This variable was originally coded as: 0=strong Democrat, 1=Democrat, 2=independent near Democrat, 3=independent, 4=independent near Republican, 5=Republican, 6=strong Republican, 7=other party. I recoded this variable into Democrat (0 through 2), Independent (3), Republican (4 through 6), and Other Party (7). I borrow this recoding methodology for PARTYID from other scholars of religion and politics who have collapsed PARTYID in the same way using General Social Survey data (Brooks and Manza 2004; Bader, Mencken and Froese 2007). Rather than recoding “independent near Democrat” and “independent near Republican” into the Independent category, these scholars recode them into the respective Democrat or Republican categories. To remain consistent with other scholars of religion and politics, I follow this methodology. For the PARTYID variable, I am specifically measuring political party identification as Democrat to determine if there has been a shift over time

of the party identification of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals. I expect that there has indeed been an increase in the proportion of young evangelicals who identify as Democrats.

### Methodology

I examine my two hypotheses using crosstabulations for all seven years (2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012) of the GSS. Again, I am ultimately examining changes in environmental and poverty policy preferences and in political party identification of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals. In the next chapter, I test my hypotheses and discuss the results in detail.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I test my hypotheses and discuss the findings. I examine how preferences for pro-environmental policies and anti-poverty policies among 18 to 30 year old evangelicals have changed over time. I also examine how partisan self-identification among 18 to 30 year old evangelicals has changed over time. I expect to find that young evangelicals have become more supportive of pro-environmental and anti-poverty policies and are more likely to identify as Democrats since 2002.

#### Hypotheses

##### Hypothesis 1

I hypothesize that from the year 2000 to 2012, younger evangelicals have increased their support for pro-environmental policies and anti-poverty policies. This first hypothesis is based on media speculation that a generational shift in policy preferences among evangelical youth is occurring whereby young evangelicals are showing an increased interest in social justice issues such as poverty and environmentalism. Media reports speculate that this change among younger evangelicals has been occurring since 2004 (Kirkpatrick 2007; Goodstein 2007; Banerjee 2008). Thus, I examine survey data related to these issues before and after 2004 to determine if 2004 was indeed a pivotal year.

In Table 1, I provide descriptive statistics for the percent and total number of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals by year in the General Social Survey for the variables “Improving and Protecting the Environment” and “Assistance to the Poor” (i.e., a national welfare issue). For “Improving and Protecting the Environment,” the numbers fluctuate between a low of 109 in 2010 to a high of 200 in 2006. For “Assistance to the Poor,” the numbers fluctuate between a low of 141 in 2012, to a high of 237 in 2006.

Table 1. Percent and Total Number of 18 to 30 Year Old Evangelicals by Year for “Improving and Protecting the Environment” and “Assistance to the Poor”

<b>Year</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>
<u>Total for Improving and Protecting the Environment</u>							
<b>%</b>	7.1	5.5	7.5	5.5	6.6	6.1	6.9
<b>N</b>	186	137	196	200	122	109	119
<u>Total for Assistance to the Poor</u>							
<b>%</b>	6.5	7.7	8.7	6.0	8.0	8.0	8.1
<b>N</b>	172	192	227	237	164	149	141

*Source:* General Social Surveys, 1972-2012.

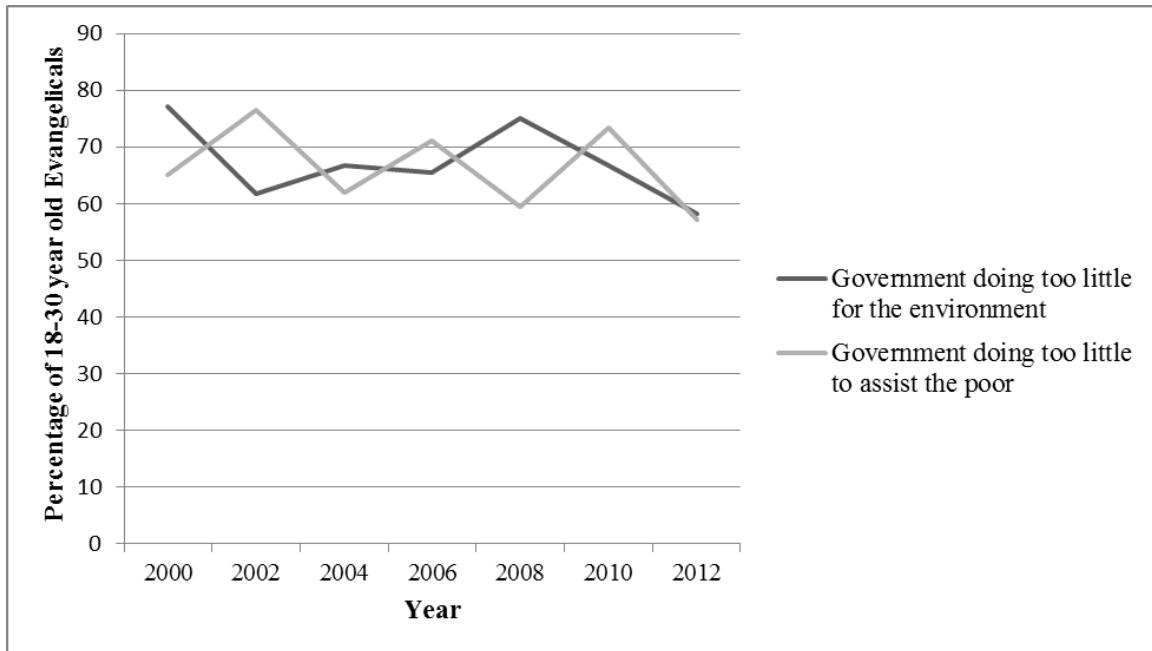
These numbers are to be expected since the number of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals that participate in the survey each year should vary. Moreover, evangelicals make up approximately 25 percent of the United States population, and of that 25 percent, approximately 26 percent are between the age of 18 and 34 (Smidt 2013, 73). For example, in the 2000 General Social Survey there were 2,610 total survey participants (General Social Survey 1971-2012). Twenty-five percent of 2,610 is 652, which represents the approximate number of evangelicals in that survey year, and 26 percent of 652 is 169 which represents the approximate number of 18 to 34 year old evangelicals in that survey year. This number of 169 closely matches what I show in

Table 1 for total for number of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals for the variables “Improving and Protecting the Environment” (N = 186) and “Assistance to the Poor” (N = 172) in 2000.

To test my first hypothesis, I measured *support* for assistance to the poor and for environmental sustainability with individuals who answered the question “Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on assistance for the poor/improving the environment” with a response of “too little.” A response of “too little” to these questions indicates that an individual is supportive of *increasing* spending on assistance to the poor and *increasing* spending to improve the environment, which suggests that the individual would support pro-environmental and anti-poverty policies.

Figure 1 shows that support for increasing spending to improve the environment among 18 to 30 year old evangelicals had mixed results for Hypothesis 1. First, the high point of support for government action on environmental matters was the year 2000, well *before* the media picked up on young evangelical interest in the issue. Then, there was a significant 15.5 percent decline in young evangelical support for more spending on the environment between 2000 and 2002 (2000 = 77.2%, 2002 = 61.7%). This declining support may be explained in part by the 9/11 attacks in 2001, which likely focused the public’s attention on national security issues more than other issues. Indeed, the high level of support among young evangelicals for action on environmental issues in 2000 may indicate the beginning of a trend toward pro-environmentalism among this cohort that was merely interrupted as the 9/11 terrorist attacks shifted attention away from many other issues.

Figure 1. Percentage of Support for Spending on the Environment and Assistance to the Poor among 18 to 30 Year Old Evangelicals



*Source:* General Social Surveys, 1972-2012.

In fact, there was a 13 percent increase among young evangelicals in support of spending on the environment between 2002 and 2008 (2002 = 61.7%, 2008 = 75%). This increase in support seems to support the media speculation that starting around 2004, 18 to 30 year old evangelicals began to show an increased concern for the environment. However, between 2008 and 2012, there was a 16.7 percent drop in support for spending on the environment (2008 = 75%, 2012 = 58.3%). This 16.7 percent drop in support between 2008 and 2012 is larger than the 13 percent increase between 2002 and 2008. This drop in support may be due to a new president taking office in 2008, or it may be due to the serious recession that began in 2007 and may have focused the public's attention on economic issues over environmental issues.

Figure 1 also shows the percentage of support for increased spending on assistance to the poor from 2000 to 2012. The percentages for this test did not show any sort of consistent pattern and largely fluctuated between each year. If anything, young evangelical support for increased assistance to the poor fell over time from its peak of 76.6 percent in 2002 to the lowest point of 59.5 percent in 2008. Interestingly, from 2004 to 2006, the percentage of support for increased spending on assistance to the poor increased by nearly 10 percent (2004 = 62%, 2006 = 71%), but between 2006 and 2008 the percentage of support decreased again by almost 12 percent (2006 = 71%, 2008 = 59.5%). This again may support media speculation that starting around 2004, 18 to 30 year old evangelicals began to show an increased concern for providing assistance to the poor, but perhaps by 2007 or 2008 that interest waned a bit due to other economic issues taking precedence or due to the inauguration of a new president.

### Hypothesis 2

I hypothesize that from 2000 to 2012, younger evangelicals between 18 and 30 years old increasingly self-identified as Democrats. This second hypothesis also is based on media speculation that younger evangelicals were showing increased support for the environment and assistance to the poor around the year 2004, and I expect that this increased support for these issues would also lead to increased support for the Democratic Party (Kirkpatrick 2007; Goodstein 2007; Banerjee 2008). This expectation also is based on media reports that in 2008 in particular, evangelical youth voted in high numbers for Democrats (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008, 10). I expect that the choice to vote for Democrats in 2008 followed an increase in self-identification with the Democratic Party over time among 18 to 30 year old evangelicals. So, I examine self-

reported party identification using data from the General Social Survey leading up to 2008 and after 2008 to test this hypothesis.

Table 2 shows the percent and total number of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals by year in the General Social Survey for the variable Party Identification. Again, these numbers are to be expected since the number of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals that participate in the General Social Survey each year varies, and these numbers reflect the percentage of young evangelicals in the population at large (Smidt 2013, 73).

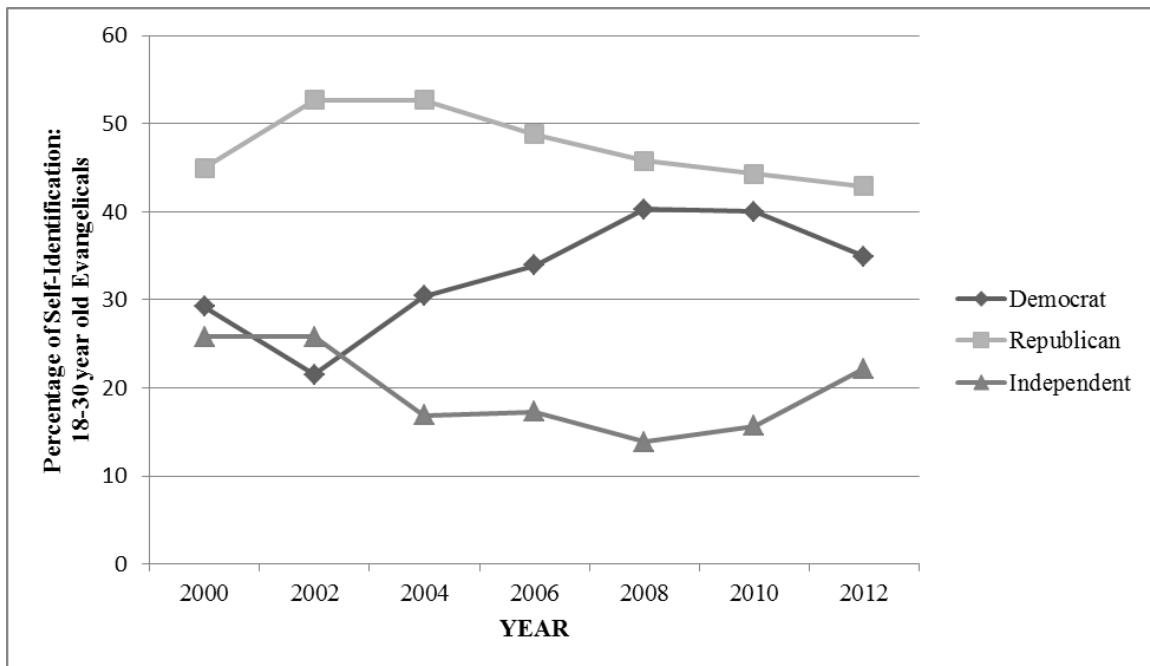
Table 2. Percent and Total Number of 18 to 30 Year Old Evangelicals by Year for Party Identification

<b>Year</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>%</b>	8.0	7.5	8.8	7.0	9.8	9.4	9.5
<b>N</b>	210	186	231	251	220	174	164

*Source:* General Social Surveys, 1972-2012

My prediction for Hypothesis 2 involves a change in self-identification with the Democratic Party among 18 to 30 year old evangelicals over time. However, I also include self-identification as Republican and Independent for comparison purposes. Figure 2 shows that the percentage of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals who identify as Democrats has indeed *increased* over time. Specifically, between 2002 and 2008, self-identification as Democratic by young evangelicals increased by nearly 20 percent (2002 = 21.5%, 2008 = 40.3%). This supports media reports that in 2008 in particular, young evangelicals voted in high numbers for Democrats.

Figure 2. Partisan Self-Identification by 18 to 30 Year Old Evangelicals by Percentage and Year



*Source:* General Social Surveys, 1972-2012

It is also worth noting that the percentage of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals who identified as Republicans decreased nearly 10 percent between 2002 and 2012 (2002 = 52.7%, 2012 = 42.9%). Figure 2 does show that young evangelicals still identify more with the Republican Party than the Democratic Party over time. However, the 20 percent increase in Democratic identification between 2002 and 2008 is of particular interest because it seems to suggest that there is a particular issue or a set of issues that might be driving younger evangelicals to shift to Democratic Party identification in such a large percentage. Although I did not find much support for Hypothesis 1, which examined young evangelical support for environmental sustainability and assistance to the poor, this does not exclude the possibility that there may be another issue or issues driving this

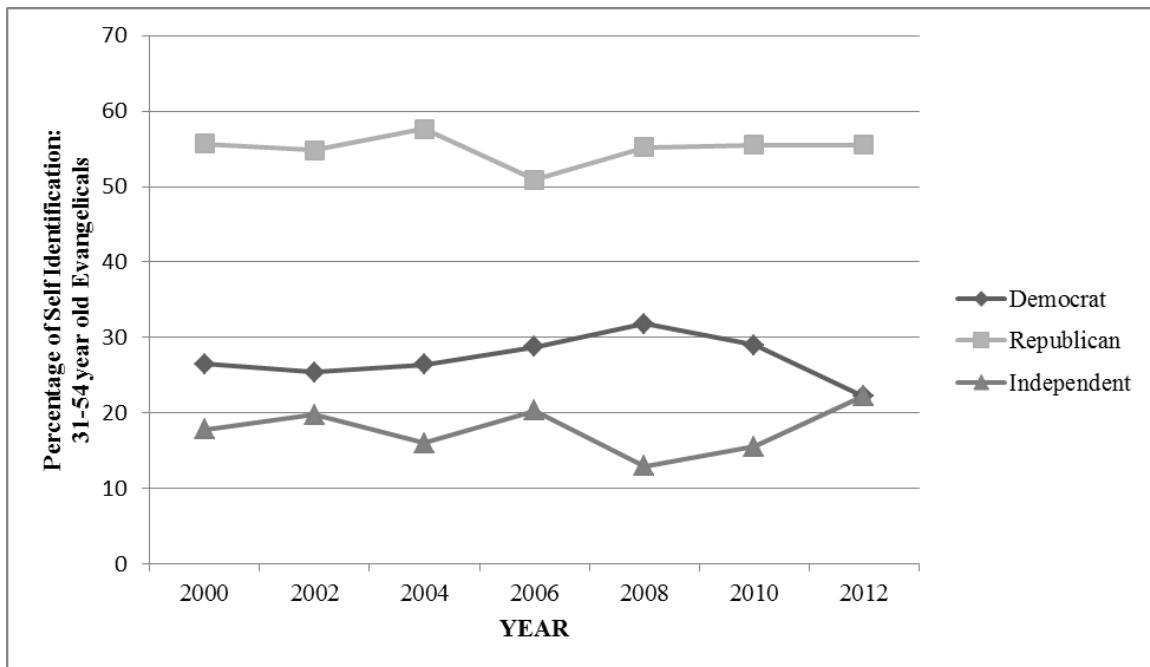
change in partisan affiliation. For example, the significant increase in identification with the Democratic Party between 2002 and 2008 might be due to issues of gay rights and gay marriage, both of which were salient issues during that time, and remain salient issues today.

Finally, Figure 2 also shows that the percentage of young evangelicals who self-identify as Independents increased by approximately 8 percent between 2008 and 2012 (2008 = 13.9%, 2012 = 22.2%). This increase in self-identification as Independent occurred at the same time that there was a 5.4% decrease in Democratic self-identification (2008 = 40.3%, 2012 = 34.9%) and a 2.9% decrease in Republican self-identification (2008 = 45.8%, 2012 = 42.9%). This may suggest that 18 to 30 year old evangelicals are becoming increasingly more likely to self-identify as Independents and are becoming less likely to self-identify with either the Democratic or Republican Party.

For comparative purposes, I also tested partisan self-identification by year for other generations of evangelicals (31 to 54 years old and 55+ years old) to see if similar changes in partisanship were taking place among these generations. The results of the test of partisan self-identification for 31 to 54 year old evangelicals are shown in Figure 3. The percentage of self-identification as Republican for this age group remains fairly steady over time, with fluctuation between 50 percent and 60 percent across all seven years of data. There is a slight increase in Democratic identification from 2004 to 2008; however between 2008 and 2012 there is a 9.6 percent decrease in Democratic self-identification (2008 = 31.8%, 2012 = 22.2%), while there is a simultaneous 9.3 percent increase in self-identification as Independent (2008 = 13%, 2012 = 22.3%). It seems as if the same number of individuals who decreased in self-identification as Democrats

increased in self-identification as Independents. This mirrors a similar trend that occurred among 18 to 30 year old evangelicals in the same years. Perhaps this is related to the election of a Democratic president during this time period, or perhaps this is related to larger issues in society such as the economy. This may suggest that like 18 to 30 year old evangelicals, 31 to 54 year old evangelicals are becoming increasingly more likely to self-identify as Independents and are becoming less likely to identify as either Democrats or Republicans.

Figure 3. Partisan Self-Identification by 31 to 54 Year Old Evangelicals by Percentage and Year

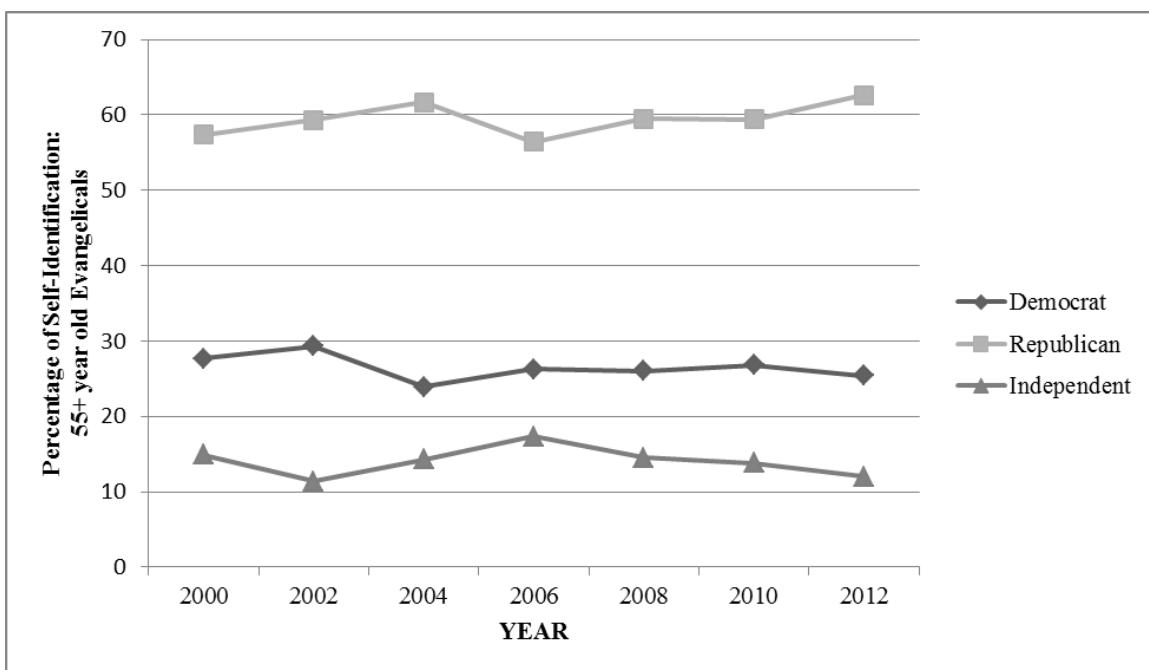


*Source:* General Social Surveys, 1972-2012

The results of the test of partisan self-identification for 55+ year old evangelicals are shown in Figure 4. For this age group, there is not much fluctuation or change at all in any of the three categories of partisanship. For example, self-

identification as Republican fluctuates between a low of 56.4 percent in 2006 to a high of 62.6 percent in 2012. Self-identification as Democratic fluctuates between a low of 23.9 percent in 2004 to a high of 29.3 percent in 2002. Self-identification as Independent fluctuates between a low of 11.4 percent in 2002 to a high of 14.9 percent in 2000. The data indicate that, as a whole, this generation of evangelicals has had more steady and consistent partisan affiliation over time than other generations of evangelicals. This may be due simply to age and life experience that indicate a more comfortable association with a particular political party.

Figure 4. Partisan Self-Identification by 55+ Year Old Evangelicals by Percentage and Year



Source: General Social Surveys, 1972 – 2012

## Discussion

In Hypothesis 1, I predicted that from 2000 to 2012, younger evangelicals increased their support for pro-environmental and anti-poverty policies. The data do not support my hypothesis that young evangelical support for anti-poverty policies increased after 2002. However, there was a slight increase in support for government action on environmental protection from 2002 to 2008, but that support never exceeded the high point of young evangelical support for pro-environmental policies in 2000 (see Figure 1). Neither of these issues appears to be driving the clear increase in young evangelical Democratic Party identification after 2002 documented in Figure 2.

In Hypothesis 2, I predicted that from 2000 to 2012, younger evangelicals between 18 and 30 years old would increasingly self-identify as Democrats. There is strong support for my hypothesis that young evangelicals increasingly identified with the Democratic Party since 2002 (see Figure 2). After 2010, there was also an uptick in identification as Independents, as the percentage of young evangelicals who identified with the GOP continued to decline since 2002. Older evangelicals shifted their party loyalties much less or not at all. Figure 3 shows that 31 to 54 year old evangelicals saw a slight increase in Democratic identification from 2002 to 2008, but then a sharp decline in 2010 and 2012, as more of this age group began to identify as Independents. There was very little change in party identification for evangelicals over 55 years old (see Figure 4), with a slight increase in Republican Party identification after 2006. These comparisons of different age groups of evangelicals highlights the dramatic changes in party identification among young evangelicals specifically, as they were the one group that had the strongest change in partisan affiliation over time.

Although support for environmental issues and support for assistance to the poor do not seem to be the issues that drove increased Democratic Party identification, there may have been some other issues that contributed to this move of young evangelicals toward the Democratic Party, as well as toward self-identification as Independents after 2008. Indeed, there were many other issues at the top of the national political agenda after 2002, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the severe recession that began in 2007. The wars and the recession were both issues that emerged under a Republican president, and dissatisfaction with the government's performance on these issues may have contributed to young evangelicals' move away from the GOP. At the state level, gay marriage became a prominent issue when Massachusetts became the first state to legalize it in 2004, and eleven other states had gay marriage initiatives on their ballots in 2004. Although gay marriage is typically an issue on which evangelicals take a conservative position, it is possible that the younger generation is taking a more liberal position on this issue. Thus support for gay marriage also may be pulling young evangelicals towards the Democratic Party, or toward identification as Independents.

Support for environmental sustainability and assistance to the poor did not turn out to be as important to young evangelicals as I had expected. However, I argue that Putnam and Campbell's theory of generational replacement is indeed applicable to the dramatic change in party ID that my analysis has revealed. My hypotheses were based on extensive media speculation that the environment and the poor were the issues about which young evangelicals were becoming increasingly concerned. However, maybe the media exaggerated these claims, and perhaps there are other issues to consider. For example, the generation I am analyzing was born between 1980 and 2010, so this

generation came of age in an era when other issues might have been more important, such as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, increasing problems with AIDS, global poverty, a severe economic recession, gay rights, and perhaps even immigration.

Putnam and Campbell argue that political generational replacement requires that “a large bloc of voters move from one political party to another,” and that this move is far more likely to happen among a group of voters who are “coming of age” (2010, 381). Figure 2 makes clear that after 2002 a large bloc of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals moved from identification as Republicans to identification as Democrats, and, to a lesser extent, as Independents. This shift in party identification supports Putnam and Campbell’s generational replacement theory, because we see “a large bloc of voters move from one political party to another” (*Ibid.*). The only thing that is missing is to identify the specific issues that would provide an explanation for *why* this shift in party identification happened. Testing hypotheses based on the issues discussed above may reveal the key issues at work here.

The fact that the data do not support my hypothesis that young evangelical support for anti-poverty and environmental policies increased over time also supports Inglehart and Welzel’s theories about materialist and post-materialist values. Inglehart and Welzel argue that an individual who came of age in an era of relative prosperity and peace will place an emphasis on post-material values, including supporting environmental protection and decreasing income inequalities (2005, 92-97). They argue that the era in which we currently find ourselves *is* such an era of prosperity and peace. However, they also argue that materialist and post-materialist values are not static, and an individual with post-materialist values *can* revert back to materialist values when faced

with unexpected economic or physical hardship (*Ibid.*). In other words, perhaps the reason why young evangelicals did not show increased support for the environment or for the poor, as would be expected for a generation that came of age in a time of relative prosperity and peace, is because of events such as 9/11, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and the recession of 2007-2009, all events that might cause individuals to revert back to materialist values for order and stability.

Finally, the shift in young evangelical party identification suggests that the evangelical part of the Republican Party coalition may be changing along generational lines (see Figures 2 and 3). Corwin Smidt noted that if the Democratic Party can “slice off three or four percent of all evangelical voters from supporting the Republican candidate, this would provide an overall shift in vote totals of about two percent which could be the difference between victory or defeat in a close election” (2008, 25). Young evangelicals showed a significant increase in Democratic Party identification from 2002 to 2008. However, from 2008 to 2012, that identification waned somewhat as identification as Independents increased (see Figure 2).

Additionally, after a slight increase in Democratic Party identification, the generation of 31 to 54 year old evangelicals decreased their identification with the Democratic Party and increased identification as Independents from 2008 to 2012 (see Figure 3). Perhaps some members of the 18 to 30 year old age category that were included in 2006 survey data moved into the 31 to 54 year old age category in the 2008, 2010, and 2012 survey data. This is interesting to note because it suggests that these two generations may be increasingly leery of identifying with either of the major political parties. It may also suggest that their votes are up for grabs since they may identify as

ideologically more moderate rather than truly liberal or conservative. The important point is that all but the oldest evangelicals (those over 55) are moving away from the Republican Party, which could negatively impact the GOP's ability to win national elections.

In the next chapter, I discuss what my findings may mean for future elections in the United States, especially the upcoming 2016 presidential election. I conclude with suggestions for further research that can build on my analyses and findings and perhaps discover what is behind the shift of young evangelicals away from the Republican Party.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

#### Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to examine whether or not a generational change was occurring among evangelicals in the United States. More specifically, I examined media speculation that younger evangelicals were shifting towards an increased interest in environmental sustainability and decreasing poverty to determine whether this change was indeed taking place, and whether or not this change was leading younger evangelicals to increase identification with the Democratic Party.

Media speculation that younger evangelicals were shifting their policy priorities towards issues like environmental sustainability and reducing poverty seemed strange considering the long history of evangelicals in politics in the United States. History shows that since the 1980s, evangelicals had been strongly aligned with the Republican Party due to organizations such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, which helped mobilize evangelicals into politics through such issues as abortion, gay marriage, stem cell research, and family values. In fact, in the 2004 general election, evangelicals made up “39.8 percent of the GOP electoral coalition, and a full 77.5 percent of evangelicals voted for George W. Bush” (Guth et al. 2006, 228).

Media speculation that younger evangelicals were shifting their policy priorities towards issues like environmental sustainability and reducing poverty also

seemed strange because theories of political socialization suggest that in a family in which the parents have strong political values and in which the parents often talk about those political values, the children are more likely to adopt the political beliefs of their parents (Jennings, Stoker and Bowers 2009, 782). If the political socialization theory about transference of parental political beliefs and values to children held true, then we would expect younger generations of evangelicals to prioritize conservative issues such as gay marriage and abortion as most important and to be strongly aligned with the Republican Party.

The theories proposed by Putnam and Campbell (2010) help explain how generational change can occur in light of what we would normally expect from political socialization. They argue that the formative years in which an individual comes of age can shape that individual's political party preference and political values, even if their party identification and political values differ from their parents (Ibid., 381). Thus media speculation that younger evangelicals were showing increased support for environmental sustainability and reduction in poverty makes sense when considering that those issues were salient during the formative years that the current generation of 18 to 30 year old evangelicals came of age.

Additionally, Inglehart and Welzel also help explain how generational change can occur in light of what we would normally expect from political socialization. Like Putnam and Campbell, Inglehart and Welzel argue that the events that take place during one's formative years shape that individual's political values. More specifically, they argue that an individual's political values are dependent on whether that individual comes of age in an era of relative prosperity and peace or if that individual comes of age in an

era of economic and physical hardship. Coming of age in an era of economic and physical hardship leads an individual to place importance on values of order and stability, whereas coming of age in an era of relative prosperity and peace leads an individual to place importance on values that include providing support to others and improving the quality of life for all individuals (2005, 92-97).

My analysis revealed that evangelical youth did *not* demonstrate a strong, steady increase in support for environmental sustainability or in support for reducing poverty as the media had speculated (see Figure 1). However, my analysis of the party identification of evangelicals in various age groups did show changes in partisan affiliation among not just younger evangelicals (18 to 30 years old) but also in evangelicals between the age of 31 and 54. Specifically, Figure 2 shows that between 2002 and 2008, self-identification as Democratic by young evangelicals increased by nearly 20 percent and self-identification as Independents increased by approximately 8 percent between 2008 and 2012. Figure 3 shows that 31 to 54 year old evangelicals saw a slight increase in Democratic identification from 2002 to 2008, but then a sharp decline in 2010 and 2012, as more of this age group began to identify as Independents. Even though environmental sustainability and reduction in poverty do not seem to be the driving issues for this change in partisan affiliation among younger generations of evangelicals, there are still other issues that may be leading to this change, such as gay rights, immigration, foreign policy, or the economy.

Additionally, it is worth considering that changes in issue preference might not be the driving force for the change in partisanship among evangelical youth. Strong preferences for particular issues can fluctuate and fleet with time, especially when certain

issues are not at the top of the political agenda or at the top of the media's agenda. Instead, the change in partisanship among evangelical youth might be explained by different means of socialization that the current socialization literature is not capable of dealing with. For example, the change in party identification among evangelical youth may be due to this particular generation attending college at an increased rate when compared with their parents' or grandparents' generations. Perhaps exposure to new ideas in a college setting is driving the change in party identification. In addition, the influence of younger pastors in evangelical churches may be a driving force for changes in party identification, or perhaps other social functions aimed specifically at the youth of these evangelical churches (such as the Joshua Generation) is the driving force for this change. Finally, it is worth considering that younger generations in the United States as a whole are increasingly becoming "digitally" socialized through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It is possible that younger evangelicals are being socialized via these outside "digital" influences which are diminishing the influence of their parents as agents of socialization.

The 2016 presidential election will not feature an incumbent candidate. Perhaps the increase in identification as Democrats by 18 to 30 year old evangelicals between 2002 and 2008 will be good news for the Democratic Party nominee. However, young evangelical Democratic Party identification waned once a Democrat won the presidency, which might be good news for Republicans instead. Either way, this generation's votes may be up for grabs and perhaps both parties can learn from the mobilization strategies utilized by Obama's campaign team to target the evangelical

youth vote during his first run for president in 2008, which was also a presidential election that did not feature an incumbent candidate.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

While my analyses have shown trends in partisan affiliation and in policy preferences among younger evangelicals, I did not test for whether or not these individuals actually voted in the election years for which the data were gathered. Future research might take this into consideration by including a variable that measures actual participation in elections. For example, change in the party identification of young evangelicals toward the Democratic Party will not mean much for the outcome of elections if these individuals do not vote. As Axelrod argued, one of the most important factors to consider when looking at the contribution that a particular group makes to a political party's coalition is that group's turnout rate (1972, 11). Key argued that there is little that a political party can do to increase the size of a particular demographic group, but there is much that a political party can do to increase that group's turnout rate and loyalty (1972, 19).

Media reports suggested that young evangelicals had been steadily increasing their policy preferences for environmental protection and reducing poverty since approximately 2004 (Goodstein 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007; Banerjee 2008). However, I found fluctuations in preferences for environmental protection and reducing poverty and did not show any steady increases over time (see Figure 1). I expected that such a shift in policy positions might be driving younger evangelicals to increase their identification with the Democratic Party. However, there is little evidence that young evangelicals'

support for these issues has increased over time, and it is highly likely that other issue preferences have led to the clear change in party identification by some young evangelicals (see Figures 1 and 2). Therefore, future research should include examination of other issues that may be driving this change, such as gay rights, immigration, U.S. foreign policy, and the state of the economy. However, looking at other issues to test them as I did in this thesis may be difficult if survey questions about these topics were not asked consistently and with the same wording across several years of surveys. Future scholars might also utilize a scale that measures issue saliency or issue preferences across a period of time, and perhaps this scale would show shifts among the top five most important issues to young evangelicals that would be helpful in explaining why shifts in partisan self-identification occurred.

Future researchers might also take into consideration other socioeconomic factors and demographic data such as gender, income level, level of education, and region of residence to discover if any of these variables are significant in explaining the partisan shift among young evangelicals. It would be interesting to see if the change in party identification among evangelicals is only happening in a particular region of the United States, or if perhaps the change is only occurring among evangelicals with a particular level of education. This information might also be helpful for campaign managers so that they know toward which particular groups of evangelicals they should target their campaign strategies.

Future scholars also may consider utilizing other models of identifying evangelicals in survey data, such as the self-identification model proposed by Lewis and DeBernardo (2010) or the measures of behavior model proposed by Hackett and Lindsay

(2008) to determine if these models of identifying evangelicals produce results similar to or different from my findings. Finally, one could utilize the Steensland et al. (2000) model of identifying evangelicals that I used in this thesis to analyze survey data from other regular national surveys, such as the American National Election Studies surveys. If similar trends emerge from analysis of different survey questions, this would strengthen my conclusion that *something* is motivating young evangelicals to move away from the Republican Party and toward identification as Democrats or Independents, and perhaps these surveys might help discover what specific issues may be contributing to this shift.

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