DRAFT

Understanding the Determinants of Christian Right Strength in State Republican Parties*

John Michael McTague

Abstract:

This paper offers an explanation for why the Christian Right enjoys a position of dominance in the Republican Party in some states, but is markedly weaker in others. Much of the literature on the political strength of the Christian Right observes that the starting point for a successful organizational presence in a state is a large evangelical Christian population, referred to as the "target population" of the movement (Wilcox 2000). Because the development of the Christian Right has been characterized as a "defensive" political movement, I hypothesize that the Christian Right is also likely to flourish in states in which the Democratic Party is especially resistant to their agenda. I find that the power of the Christian Right is influenced by only two variables: the size of the state's evangelical population and the secularism of the state's Democratic elite. I conclude that such variation in the causes of Christian Right strength has important implications for a wider research agenda.

* Paper prepared for presentation at the American Politics Workshop, University of Maryland, College Park, February 23, 2007. I would like to thank Geoff Layman and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz for their generous help with this draft. A previous version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, January 3-7, 2007, New Orleans, LA.

What causes the Christian Right to enjoy a position of dominance in the Republican parties of some states, while its influence is minor in the Republican parties of other states (Persinos 1994; Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998; Conger and Green 2002; Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2003)? Essential to the continuing scholarly interest in religion and politics is an understanding of the rise of the Christian Right in American politics, and in particular, its institutionalization within the Republican Party (Green, Guth, and Hill 1993; Hadden, Shupe, Hawdon, and Martin 1987; Leege 1992; Moen 1992, 1996; Rozell and Wilcox 1996; Rozell, Wilcox, and Green 1998; Wilcox 2000). In the larger context of the increased importance of religious cleavages in American politics (Campbell 2006; Davis and Robinson 1996; Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999; Green, Guth, Smidt, and Kellstedt 1996; Hunter 1991, 1994; Kohut, Green, Keeter, and Toth 2000; Layman 2001; Layman and Green 2006; Leege and Kellstedt 1993; Wald 2003; Wuthnow 1988, 1989), the Christian Right is understood to be crucial to the mobilization of evangelical Christians and other religious traditionalists on behalf of Republican candidates sympathetic to socially conservative causes. Here, one of my goals is to empirically identify those contexts in which we should expect the Christian Right to develop most fully. A second, related goal is to develop a theoretical framework within which future research might more systematically approach questions dealing with the causes and consequences of the Christian Right's uneven influence in American politics.

It is no secret that, over time, the Christian Right has sought to employ a more dynamic and politically shrewd set of tactics than characterized its days as a fledgling social movement in search of roots within the Republican Party during the 1980s. In 1995, Christian Coalition founder and former presidential candidate Pat Robertson spoke

at a convention for the organization in which he laid out ambitious goals for the devolution of the movement's resources to state and local levels. As summarized by Wilcox (2000, 3), the Christian Coalition desired "substantial influence in GOP party organizations in all fifty states and ten trained workers in every one of the 175,000 precincts in the United States" (see Edsall 1995).

True to Robertson's goal, the Christian Right has undertaken a strategy of organizing within state party apparatuses in an effort to control the nomination of sympathetic candidates and to develop a grassroots network of activists (Green 1995; Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998; Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2003; Moen 1992, 1996; Rozell and Wilcox 1996; Wilcox 2000). Given that this approach has been in place for over a decade now, it is surprising that there remains a fairly small literature on the Christian Right's variable influence across the distinct political contexts of the American states. Aside from the importance of the Christian Right's organizational strategy of "devolution" (Moen 1996) for an understanding of national electoral outcomes and policy outputs, a number of important issues are determined under the auspices of states' constitutional police powers with a great deal of Christian Right lobbying effort. Such policies include abortion, school prayer, school voucher programs, the debate between teaching evolution or creationism in science classes (Bruce 1995), and most recently, the debates over same-sex marriage and the ethics of stem cell research. As a major player in these policy debates both at the national *and* the state level, it is incumbent upon political scientists to understand why the Christian Right's strength varies so considerably (Persinos 1994; Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998; Conger and Green 2002; Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2003). Such research, important in its own right, could also serve to

enlighten us as to the consequences of the movement's fragmented sphere of power over a range of other important topics of research.

Much of the literature that addresses the question of how successfully the Christian Right has influenced politics at the state level consists of focused case studies of one state (Rozell and Wilcox 1996), a selection of several states (Bendyna, Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000; Green 1997; Rozell and Wilcox 1995; Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2003), or studies of one state following the particularly watershed 1994 elections (Bednar and Hertzke 1995; Guth 1995; Gilbert 1995; Nesmith 1995; Wilcox, Rozell, and Coker 1995). Within this literature, the tendency is to focus on states in which the Christian Right is especially active, thus begging the question as to why it has failed to establish itself as a force to be reckoned with in many other states. To my knowledge, there is only one published study that systematically explains variation in Christian Right strength across all states (Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998). This lacuna leaves us with little evidence to support much beyond the unsatisfying conclusion that the Christian Right is simply strong where it is strong, and weak where it is weak.

What Makes the Christian Right Thrive at the State Level?

Despite a lack of systematic inquiry into this puzzle, the extant literature does offer at least three insights as to why the Christian Right enjoys greater prominence in some Republican parties than in others. First, a *structural opportunities* hypothesis suggests that institutional rules and the prior strength of the Republican Party in a state should influence how easily the Christian Right can become a dominant voice within the party (McAdam 1982; Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998). American political parties are famously permeable to outsiders (Epstein 1986). As such, the process by which

candidates, platforms, and delegates to the national convention are chosen influences the degree to which the Christian Right can successfully gain access to power within the Republican Party in a state (Layman 2001, 279; Usher 2000; Wilcox 2000, 76). Republican state parties with caucuses and conventions as a means for intraparty nominations are better suited to Christian Right dominance because they require greater effort than voting in a primary election (Usher 2000; Wilcox 2001, 76). In addition to demanding greater organizational effort and political fervor, caucuses and conventions are less majoritarian than primaries. A minority faction such as the Christian Right may be simply outnumbered by the preferences of more socially moderate party activists in states with primaries (Usher 2000; Wilcox 2000, 76). Based on the theory that the Christian Right will thrive in states in which nomination procedures are subject to dominance by a passionate faction within the party, I test the hypothesis:

H1) A state in which Republican party nominations are determined by caucuses and conventions will have a stronger Christian Right than a state in which party nominations are determined by primaries.

The Christian Right is also more likely to be strong in states in which the Republican Party was historically weak than in states with a historically strong Republican Party. Indeed, the Christian Right has been known to exploit weak Republican parties in nomination contests for the House of Representatives at the district level as well as at the state level (Green, Guth, and Hill 1993). Weak Republican state parties offered an opportunity for growth due to the appeal of cultivating a base of support from a new constituency (Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998; Oldfield 1996; Rozell and Wilcox 1996). In contrast, strong Republican state parties are more likely to have entrenched party elites who are unwilling to share power with new activists vying for

control over party platforms, candidate recruitment, and nominations (Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998). Hence, a second hypothesis:

H2) Historically strong Republican parties are less susceptible to dominance by the Christian Right than historically weak Republican parties. Thus, the weaker the Republican Party prior to the Christian Right's organization at the state level, the stronger the Christian Right subsequent to its organization at the state level.

In addition to structural opportunities that may allow activists of the Christian Right to become a dominant force within the Republican Party of some states, the Christian Right exercises greater influence where there are large evangelical populations. Specifically, white evangelical Christians are the most sought after "target population" of the Christian Right movement (Wilcox 2000, 45-57). This contention comports nicely with the observation that the Christian Right has been strongest in the South (Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2003), where evangelical Christians represent the majority of most of the southern states' populations. The notion that the Christian Right is strongest where there is a large white evangelical population is perhaps the most widely confirmed empirical observation in the literature on what makes the Christian Right flourish.

Furthermore, Christian Right *weakness* is often attributed to the inability of evangelicals to co-exist with conservative Christians from other faith traditions, or for distinct sects within evangelicalism to co-exist with each other (Hadden, Shupe, Hawdon, and Martin 1987; Jelen 1991; Moen 1992; Rozell and Wilcox 1996; Rozell, Wilcox, and Green 1998; Wilcox 2000). The problem of religious particularism in stunting the growth of the movement is a recurring question in the literature on the Christian Right, where the potential for recruitment of conservative mainline Protestants and Catholics

(Bendyna, Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000), and even black Protestants remains the subject of much of the discussion (see, e.g., Wilcox 2000, 53-4).

Perhaps the biggest roadblock for the Christian Right has been its inability to successfully recruit traditionalist Christians from non-evangelical faiths into the movement's fold. Though largely unsuccessful at recruiting large numbers of Mormons, mainline Protestants (Wilcox 2000, Ch. 5) and Catholics (Bendyna, Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000; Wilcox 2000, Ch. 5) into their ranks, the Christian Right has made a concerted effort to expand beyond their evangelical base to appeal to social conservatives within these other faith traditions, including traditionalist Jews (Wilcox 2000).[1] Despite their efforts, all evidence points to a continued majority evangelical base of support (Wilcox 2000). For this reason, only states with large, uniformly evangelical populations should have the strongest Christian Right representation within the Republican Party. Taken individually, I expect:

H3) As the evangelical Christian population of a state increases, Christian Right strength increases.

H4) As the secular and Jewish population of a state increases, Christian Right strength decreases.

H5) As the mainline Protestant population of a state increases, Christian Right strength decreases.

H6) As the Catholic population of a state increases, Christian Right strength decreases.

H7) As the Mormon population of a state increases, Christian Right strength decreases.

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[1] Despite some overtures to the Jewish community, the "Religious Right" is more accurately dubbed the "Christian Right."

Christian Right Strength: Supply and Demand

Here, I contribute a new perspective that conceptualizes the potential for Christian Right strength in a state's Republican Party in terms of a *supply and demand* dynamic. The *supply* side of the coin encompasses those explanations for Christian Right strength identified above: 1) where there is a supply of the "target population" of evangelical Christians, 2) where the institutional rules of game supply an opportunity for influencing the nomination of sympathetic candidates, and 3) where existing power structures within the Republican party supply room for the entrance of socially conservative elites, the Christian Right will assume a position of power. A fourth source of *supply* is the nature of the opposition.

The Christian Right should also mobilize most intensely where the opposition party, the Democrats, offers greatest resistance to their agenda. According to a pluralist view of American politics (Dahl 1961), I expect states with a Democratic Party that is led by secular elites should prompt a backlash of socially conservative mobilization within the umbrella organizations of the Christian Right, and consequently, the Republican Party. Where the Democratic Party is less averse to the policy goals of the Christian Right, there is less demand for these organizations to materialize and become especially dominant within the Republican Party. With four sources of *supply* identified here, the task becomes one of delineating how these factors might work in concert to shape Christian Right success in leading state Republican parties.

First, states in which there is a high degree of religious polarization should produce fertile ground for an active Christian Right movement. By "religious

polarization," I mean that there is a diversity of relatively sizable religious groups[2] with opposing sets of beliefs. This expectation is based on the rich "group threat" literature that traces its roots in the discipline to V.O. Key's *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949). Key observed that whites living in regions with higher black populations were more likely to support conservative candidates. The insights of the group threat literature (see Campbell 2006 for review), based mostly on relations between racial and ethnic groups, have recently been fruitfully applied to religious groups.

Campbell (2006) finds that evangelicals were more likely to vote Republican for president in 2000 and 2004 if they lived in communities with secular populations. "Religious threat" (Campbell 2006) is an especially apt framework in which to study Christian Right strength because the movement has been characterized as largely "defensive" in nature (see, e.g., Wilcox 2000). My approach borrows from Campbell in that "white evangelical Christians are a group for whom a sense of threat is likely to be operative" due to this group's self-awareness of its distinct cultural values from mainstream society (Campbell 2006, 106). Thus, evangelical Christians are generally more likely to become politically active "when people are forced to notice that the apparent consensus on religious and moral matters does not exist" (Jelen 1991, 137).[3] In short, a *defensive* social movement must be *offended* in the first place in order to react.

H8) The positive relationship between a large evangelical Christian population and the strength of the Christian Right in the Republican Party is conditional on the presence of a large secular and Jewish population. Thus, as the evangelical Christian population

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[2] Use of the term "religious groups" is meant to be inclusive of those without religious beliefs (seculars).

[3] It is important to note that my data are aggregated to the state as a unit of analysis, and thus we must exercise caution in inferring individual-level threat dynamics that cannot be directly tested with aggregate data.

increases, and the secular/Jewish population increases, Christian Right strength in a state increases.

Why would the constituency of the Christian Right feel threatened by seculars and Jews? How do seculars and Jews "offend" evangelical Christians? There are two ways in which seculars and Jews may pose a threat to evangelical Christians. First, there is a conflict of political preferences on the issues that are most salient to the Christian Right. Jews and seculars tend to be the most socially liberal in their policy preferences on issues such as abortion (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992; see also Jelen and Wilcox 2003), and also tend to overwhelmingly identify with the Democratic Party (see Layman 2001). Thus, in terms of simply having opposing views on issues that are most salient to the Christian Right constituency, Jews and seculars pose a serious political threat.

A second manner in which Jews and seculars may pose a threat to evangelical Christians is through negative out-group evaluations. Christian Right support at the mass level is in part predicated on negative feelings towards secular humanists, liberals, and atheists (Jelen 1991). In turn, support for the Democratic Party may be based on negative affect towards fundamentalist Christians (Bolce and De Maio 1999). Through either or both of these two mechanisms, it is plausible that evangelical Christians might find a substantial population of Jews and seculars threatening, thus provoking political activism.

The application of the "religious threat" theory in this study differs from Campbell in one important respect. Although Campbell assesses both the county and the state level[4], the theoretical approach in his study is developed for the county as a unit of

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[4] A "born again" Christian was more likely to vote Republican for president in 2000 and 2004 as the secular population in her state increased. Campbell uses an interaction term of *born again Christians x seculars* for state populations to verify his county-level data, which is based on the somewhat flawed Glenmary census measure of seculars at the

analysis. As with most of the "group threat" literature, physical proximity between evangelicals and seculars is thought to be important to the provocation of feelings of threat among evangelicals. I look instead at the state as a unit of analysis, and so the mechanisms through which evangelical Christians become aware of the "threat" posed by secular values most likely operate somewhat differently than via simple physical proximity. This is where elites, specifically party activists and officeholders, play a key role. Religious polarization within the state's population is not necessarily determinative of Christian Right strength in the state's Republican Party in the absence of polarized elite activists willing to champion the movement's cause (Layman 2001, 279-81).

In states in which there is a great deal of religious polarization within the population as a whole, there should also be fertile ground for religious polarization among political elites. The difference between states with homogeneous religious populations and states with heterogeneous religious populations is that states in the former category are likely to produce elites *in both parties* with similar religious beliefs. For example, the Republican and Democratic parties in Utah are probably both dominated by culturally conservative Mormons at the elite level. In contrast, there should be a great deal of variation in the religious beliefs of elites in states with a more religiously diverse population, such as Minnesota, and such elites should "sort" themselves into the appropriate party to some degree according to the party's cultural conservatism.

Thus, evangelical Christian activists should be as well represented in the Republican parties of states with diverse religious populations as they are in states with

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county level. However, he offers no theoretical account of how this dynamic unfolds at the state level.

religious homogeneity, while culturally liberal activists with more modernist and secular religious beliefs may be found in the elite ranks of state Democratic parties. The effect of such polarization on state politics should be a movement of religious conservatives into the elite ranks of the Republican Party and a counter-movement of religious liberals into the Democratic Party (or vice versa), with both sides *strengthening* their holds on their respective parties. States without a substantial population of evangelical Christians should have fairly weak Christian Right representation in their Republican parties, as neither the "target population" hypothesis, nor the "religious threat" hypothesis apply.

One way to gauge elite polarization is to hypothesize a mobilization/counter-mobilization process, as described above. This relationship may be conceived in two ways that are conceptually distinct, but most likely empirically intertwined. On one hand, it is possible that Christian Right strength in a state's Republican Party produces a counter-mobilization of secularists into the Democratic Party. It is also possible that the relationship works in the opposite direction, with the Christian Right reacting to the secularist values of Democratic elites, and in the process of mobilizing, strengthening their hold on the Republican Party. Most likely, this is a relationship that has operated recursively, with each group's mobilization working to exacerbate its effect on the other's. Although the relationship is most likely recursive, I offer a hypothesis that is consistent with the characterization of the Christian Right as a defensive, reactive political movement.

H9) As the secularism of a state's Democratic Party activists increases, Christian Right strength increases.

Data and Methods

Christian Right Strength

The dependent variable used in the only prior systematic study of Christian Right strength across Republican parties (Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998) is an ordinal measure coded "strong," "moderate," or "weak" based on interviews with campaign activists, political consultants, news reporters, university professors, and GOP officials in each of the fifty states in 1994 (Persinos 1994).[5] In a follow-up study, a similar methodology is employed assessing the Christian Right's influence in the year 2000 (Conger and Green 2002). The political observers in the Conger and Green study consist of a total of 395 informants in all fifty states, including Republican and Democratic state party officials, leaders of Christian Right organizations, political consultants, journalists, and academics (Conger and Green 2002, 58). Both Persinos and Conger and Green caution that their classification schemes are based on people's perceptions of Christian Right strength rather than on objective facts (see Conger and Green 2002, 59). Obviously, this is less than an ideal barometer of Christian Right strength. However, as Conger and Green persuasively argue, perceptions in politics often define reality (2002, 59).

[Insert Table 1 About Here]

Table 1 presents the strength of the Christian Right in each state as coded by Persinos and Conger and Green. The first column in the table presents the results of the 1994 study (Persinos 1994). The second column is the strength of the Christian Right in 2000 (Conger and Green 2002). The third column denotes change from 1994 to 2000.[6] Although my analysis does not attempt to explain *change* in Christian Right strength over

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[5] Due to data limitations, Alaska and Hawaii are excluded from the present analysis.
[6] This is a re-presentation of Table 1 from Conger and Green 2002.

time, I present these data for two main reasons. First, the patterns of change document that the Christian Right from 1994 to 2000 was, as the title of Conger and Green's article put it, "spreading out and digging in." In 2000, the movement was "strong" in eighteen Republican parties, moderate in twenty-six, and weak in seven. This marked no change in the number of states with a strong Christian Right influence compared to 1994. However, the "moderate" category increased a great deal (doubling from thirteen in 1994 to twenty-six in 2000) as the number of "weak" Christian Right states declined from twenty in 1994 to seven in 2000. Seven states moved from moderate to strong, while eight states moved from strong to moderate. All seven of the weak states in 2000 are located in the Northeast.

The second reason why I include this column in Table 1 is because it demonstrates a fairly large amount of volatility in the measure of this dependent variable. It may be the case that the influence of the Christian Right is a volatile phenomenon. When the movement scores a key victory in one election cycle, it may be that its influence within the party is overestimated, as the basis of the coding scheme is perception. Similarly, when the movement suffers from a temporary setback, political observers may misperceive that the influence of the movement has waned. Take Georgia's "moderate" classification in 2000 as compared to its "strong" classification in 1994. As Conger and Green note, this result seems perplexing, as former Christian Coalition leader Ralph Reed was chosen as the state Republican chair in 2001. How can a state with Ralph Reed as the head of the Republican Party *not* be coded as strongly influenced by the Christian Right?

The answer may lie in the nature of political perceptions as a measure of reality. In 2000, Democrat Zell Miller won a special election to retain the Senate seat that had been vacated by the death of Republican Paul Coverdell. The other senator serving at the time was Democrat Max Cleland, who had won his seat two years earlier. The governor's race in 1998 was also won by a Democrat, Roy Barnes. Fast-forward four years to 2004, and both seats in the U.S. Senate and the governor's office are occupied by Republicans. One wonders if Georgia in 2004 would be coded as strong on the basis of a particularly successful election cycle, whereas in 2000, it seemed as if the influence of the Christian Right was not helping get Republicans elected. While certainly providing useful insights into one component of Christian Right strength, perception, the limitations of the measure demand further efforts to assess the movement's hold on the Republican Party.

Factor Score of Christian Right Strength

To address this point, I utilize the Convention Delegate Studies (CDS) surveys of Republican elites, broken down by state, to measure the degree to which the Christian Right is a force in each Republican party. The survey respondents are Republican state activists and officeholders who attended the Republican National Convention as delegates. Because the sample sizes by state are too small in any given year to allow for valid generalization, the CDS from 1988, 1992, and 2000 are pooled together.[7] Thus, my measures of Christian Right strength by state represent a rough measure of its power over a twelve-year period, from 1988-2000. I use three measures of Christian Right strength from the CDS, plus an average of the perception of Christian Right influence from 1994

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[7] The CDS was not conducted in 1996. Even after pooling three years of data together, some states suffer from unfortunately small samples (see Appendix Table A1).

and 2000 (Persinos 1994; Conger and Green 2002) to craft a final factor score as the dependent variable. Each component of the factor score is scaled from 0-1.

The first CDS measure employed in the factor score is the mean percentage of a state's delegation that self-identify as "Fundamentalist Christian," "Charismatic/Pentecostal," and "Evangelical." There is a bit of inconsistency across the three CDS studies in how this question was put forth to respondents. In 1988 and 1992, the CDS does not offer alternatives, such as "Charismatic/Pentecostal" and "Evangelical," whereas the 2000 CDS provides a wider range of self-identification options. In order to most accurately capture the percent of a state's delegation that views itself in terms consistent with the Christian Right's "target population" (Wilcox 2000), I use self-identification as a "Fundamentalist Christian" in 1988 and 1992, whereas the 2000 measure represents a combination of those who identify as "Fundamentalist Christian," "Charismatic/Pentecostal," and "Evangelical Christian." While this measure is less than ideal due to the inconsistency in the surveys, it appears to provide at least similar proportions of responses across all three years.[8]

The second component of the factor score is a measure of respondents' belonging and attendance in evangelical denominations. This is distinct from the first component in that it objectively measures the religious traditionalism of the respondent, whereas self-identification taps into the respondent's subjective self-image. For each state, the number of delegates belonging to an evangelical denomination is interacted with the frequency of their church attendance. The mean religious traditionalism, as measured by attendance, of evangelicals in each state represents the final measure of this element of the factor

[8] The resulting measure includes 11.4% of the sample in 1988, 10.5% in 1992, and 11.1% in 2000.

score. The variable ranges from low to high, with higher values representing the greatest proportion of evangelicals in the state's delegation with the highest levels of church attendance.[9]

The third factor from the CDS measures delegates' participation in religiously conservative political organizations.[10] Again, this measure is inconsistent across the three surveys pooled together. In 1988, the question asks if respondents are active in "politically concerned evangelical organizations." The options range from "not a member," to "member, but not active," to "active member." Representing 6.4% of the sample, only those who respond as "active members" are included in the analysis. In 1992, the question asks delegates if they are members of "the religious right." Responses range from "yes," to "no, but I agree with their agenda," to "no, and I disagree with their agenda," to "no, and I strongly disagree with their agenda." Representing 8.0% of the sample, only respondents answering "yes" are included in the analysis. Finally, in 2000, respondents are asked if they belong to "politically conservative religious groups." Ranging from "active member," to "member, but not active," to "not a member," only "active members" are included in the analysis. 12.0% of the sample identified themselves as "active members" of "politically conservative religious groups.

In sum, the factor score utilized as the dependent variable in subsequent analyses includes four components. Self-identification as "Fundamentalist Christian," "Charismatic/Pentecostal," and "Evangelical," along with the measure of religious traditionalism (evangelical denomination X attendance) are indicators of the Christian

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[9] I thank Geoff Layman for providing some of these data pre-coded.
[10] Green, Guth, and Wilcox (1998) use a similar measure, the number of Christian Right activists in a state, as a *predictor* of Christian Right strength. I argue that it is more appropriate to conceive of this measure as an *indicator* of Christian Right strength.

Right's "target population" (Wilcox 2000) within a state's activist elite. The measure of membership in religiously political organizations is the most direct indicator of the dependent variable, Christian Right strength, available in the CDS. Finally, the Persinos (1994) and Conger and Green (2002) three-point "weak," moderate," and "strong" perceptions of the movement's power in each state are averaged together to form a five-point scale here identified as "weak," "somewhat weak," "moderate," "somewhat strong," and "strong." Each factor is then scaled from 0-1. The mean values for these measures for each state, along with the N for the CDS measures, are included in Appendix Table A1.

Religious Populations

The data for the religious populations of states is from John C. Green's estimates for each state from 2004.[11] Although the dependent variable measures Christian Right strength from 1988-2000, religious populations tend to be more or less stable over short periods of time[12], so his estimates should serve as an able proxy for the time period under consideration. The alternative measure of state religious populations is the Glenmary Census data from 1990 and 2000. Although the Glenmary data tend to be the best estimates of religious populations available, the major flaw in this data source is that it drastically overestimates the number of seculars in the U.S. by virtue of its data collection method, which is based on voluntary survey responses of the leaders of religious denominations (see Campbell 2006). Those who do not wish to participate in the survey

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[11] www.beliefnet.com. Green's estimates are based on multiple sources, including Glenmary's 2000 census, the 2004 National Surveys of Religion and Politics, the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey, the 2000 U.S. Census, and 2002 Gallup polls.

[12] Glenmary data from 1990 correlates strongly for each religious tradition with Glenmary data from 2000 (ranging from r=.984 to r=.997).

are not counted, thereby bloating the estimates for seculars. For this reason, I prefer Green's data as a better estimate of secular populations.

Pre-existing Republican Strength

The Christian Right should be strongest where opportunities for their ascension within the Republican Party were greatest. If a state's Republican Party was weak during the formative years of the Christian Right movement in the 1980's, then by 1990's, previously weak Republican parties should be dominated by the Christian Right. To measure the pre-existing strength of the Republican Party for each state, I computed a Ranney Index of party strength (Ranney 1965) for each state using data from 1984-1992. The Ranney Index is a standard measure of party competition at the state level (see King 1989). It consists of four components:[13] (1) the proportion of Republican seats in the lower chamber of the state legislature, (2) the proportion of Republican seats in the upper chamber of the state legislature, (3) the Republican proportion of the gubernatorial vote, and (4) the proportion of terms of unified Republican control over both the governor's office and the legislature. The equation for the Ranney Index is

$$RanneyIndex = \frac{\sum X_i^{\ 2}}{N}$$

where X_i = each of the four components of the Ranney Index listed above, and $N = 4$. Lower scores on the Ranney Index indicate Republican party weakness, while higher scores represent strength.[14] Thus, I expect a negative relationship between pre-existing Republican dominance and Christian Right success.

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[13] See King 1989 for a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Ranney Index.
[14] Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, thereby making it impossible to compute a Ranney Index score. In order to salvage as many observations as possible, I assign

Democratic Elite Secularism

Consistent with "religious threat" (Campbell 2006), the Christian Right thrives where it has felt the need to mobilize in defense of its interpretation of traditional moral values. Much like the measure of pre-existing Republican entrenchment, I expect Christian Right strength in the 1990's to be a function of Democratic elite secularism during the formative years of the movement. For this reason, I use the mean secularism (based on religious self-identification) of Democratic national convention delegates for each state based on the Convention Delegate Study from 1988 and 1992.[15] The respondents to this survey are Democratic activists and officeholders who were active in the 1988 or the 1992 presidential campaigns and responded to one of the surveys. However, the 1988 data include panel responses from some activists who were delegates to the national convention in either 1980 or 1984 and are being surveyed again, despite not being a delegate in 1988. In sum, the secularism measure includes Democratic activists from 1980-1992. I expect a positive relationship between Democratic elite secularism and Christian Right strength.[16]

Republican Party Nomination Procedures

A dummy variable is used to measure the permeability of a state's Republican party nomination rules (Usher 2000). States in which there are caucuses, conventions, or some combination of procedures that includes caucuses or conventions are coded as 1.

Nebraska the mean Ranney Index score of the other states and include it in all of the subsequent analyses.

[15] This measure has been used in previous studies. See, e.g., Miller and Jennings, 1986; Layman 2001.

[16] Four states (DE, ND, RI, VT) contain secularism means based on a sample of less than 29.

States with primaries as the method for nominating candidates to statewide office are coded 0.[17] I use data on the year 2000 as the basis for my coding decisions.

Other Controls

Finally, I include a dummy variable for the South (1= former Confederate state), as the Christian Right has been noted to be strongest in the South (see Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998; Wilcox 2000). I also control for educational achievement in each state; states with higher levels of education are expected to negatively influence the success of the Christian Right (Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998). I use an average of the percent of the state's population with a bachelor's degree from 1990 and 2000 to measure this construct.

Results

Before I turn to a discussion of the results, two disclaimers are in order. First, Catholic population is dropped from the models because of its high and significant negative correlation with evangelical populations (r=-.79). If Catholic population is included in the model instead of evangelical population, the result is a significant negative relationship with Christian Right strength. That is, states with large Catholic populations, all else equal, are inhospitable to strong Christian Right influence in the Republican Party. This supports previous findings that Catholics remain a difficult constituency to recruit for the Christian Right (Bendyna, Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000; Wilcox 2000). The Christian Right is also very weak in the Northeast, where the majority of the population is Catholic.

[17] This coding scheme was utilized by Usher (2000). Data on nomination rules was obtained from *The Book of the States*.

Second, the interaction term for *evangelical X secular/Jewish* is presented as Model B in the forthcoming tables. Model A excludes the interaction term. Unfortunately, the results generated from the models with the interaction term are rife with unreliability due to the presence of multicollinearity in the models. The interaction term is highly and significantly correlated with evangelical population (r=.65). While this is to be expected in models with interaction terms, the results presented in the models without the interaction term are simply more convincing.[18] Upon further reflection, "religious threat" in the population is probably best measured with individual-level survey data, and thus should be explored more fully in future research. My discussion of the findings focuses only on models without the interaction term, Model A, but I present both sets of results so that readers may draw their own conclusions.

Table 2 contains the findings for Christian Right strength in state Republican parties when the dependent variable is the factor score described above.[19] All independent variables have been scaled from 0-1 to allow for easy comparison of the effects of each coefficient. As hypothesized, evangelical state populations predict strong Christian Right influence in a state's Republican Party. As evidenced by the nearly identical coefficients, the secularism of Democratic elites in a state is *equally as influential* in predicting an active Christian Right as is the presence of the movement's "target" evangelical population. The more secular the Democratic Party at the elite level, the more reason the Christian Right has to mobilize in response to opposition to its

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[18] For instance, inclusion of the interaction term *reduces* the Adj. R-squared and washes out all influence from the religious composition of a state's population.

[19] The four elements of the factor score all loaded impressively onto one factor: Self-ID (.92), Evangelical X Attendance (.92), Activity in religiously/politically conservative organizations (.87), and Perception of Christian Right strength (.81). Eigenvalue: 3.08. The factor score explains 77% of variance, and the reliability alpha = .89.

agenda. Strikingly, these are the only two variables that significantly predict a powerful Christian Right presence.

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

These results are substantiated by a second model that employs an average of the 1994 Persinos and the 2000 Conger and Green measures of the perception of the strength of the Christian Right in each state. Averaging the two three-point ordinal scales together produces a five-point scale, ranging from weak to strong. Table 3 shows the predicted probability of having a powerful Christian Right in each state on the basis of the same model run in Table 2. Once again, only evangelical population and Democratic elite secularism significantly impact the influence of the Christian Right. Moving from the minimum value of evangelical population to the highest value, holding all other variables constant at their means, increases the predicted probability of moving from a weak Christian Right to a strong Christian Right by .91 (from -.25 to .66). For Democratic elite secularism, the same interpretation reveals a staggering 1.13 increase in the predicted probability of moving from a weak Christian Right to a strong Christian Right (from -.32 to .81). These strong results serve to confirm the validity of the findings of the factor score model. Where the interests of the Christian Right are most intensely opposed, the movement mobilizes most fully within the Republican Party. I also ran these models with each of the other single components of the factor score as dependent variables. These results are presented in Appendix Table A2. Of note in these models is that evangelical population and Democratic elite secularism are the only significant predictors of the one component of the factor score that most directly measures activism in the Christian Right (see “CR Activism (R)” in Table A2).

Discussion

This paper sheds light on how and why the Christian Right flourishes in the social-political contexts of some states, while its influence is rather moribund in others. In short, strong Christian Right organizations are not created equally. The findings suggest that the Christian Right enjoys a position of prominence in some states due to relative *consensus* between the parties on cultural issues, whereas its power in other states is the result of sharp *discord* between the parties. This distinction has consequential implications for a number of promising empirical and theoretical extensions of the present study.

States in which the Republican Party features a powerful Christian Right due to dissention are also more likely to see more highly culturally charged campaigns and public policy debates than states in which the Christian Right is strong as a result of relative unanimity on the cultural issues agenda. For example, both South Carolina and Minnesota have a very active Christian Right presence in their respective Republican parties, but the causes and consequences of the movement's strength in these two states could not be more different. There is little demand for conflict over the politics of abortion and homosexual rights in South Carolina if both the Republican and Democratic parties largely agree that a fetus has the right to life and that government has an interest in discouraging homosexual relationships. In contrast, there is an ample supply of opinion incongruity in Minnesota where the Democratic Party is led by a more secular, more culturally liberal set of political actors and interests.

In state politics, Minnesota is likely to spend more time in their state legislature and court system dealing with morality policy than is South Carolina. The old saying

"less is more" comes to mind, however, as strongly Christian Right-influenced Republican parties in states with equally strong opposition are also more likely to see their agenda thwarted by their Democratic rivals. It also follows that campaigns for statewide offices in Minnesota may be more likely to condition its electorate to view cultural issues as more salient than in South Carolina. In effect, Minnesotans are exposed to the divisive nature of cultural conflict far more regularly than are South Carolinians; campaigns for statewide *and* national offices likely feature competition over this agenda. This calls into question the conventional wisdom of cultural conflict in national politics as a contest between red and blue states. Instead, research into the dynamics of red and blue constituencies *within* states may lead to a more fruitful discussion of how moral issues come to appear on the agendas of both individual states and the national government. The terms under which moral issues are contested in the intrastate context, and its relationship to national agenda-setting, have been largely ignored in research to date.

Speaking to this point, these results suggest the need to qualify the argument that policy-opinion congruence on cultural issues is best achieved through narrowing the scope of conflict from the national government to state governments (Mooney 2000). Christopher Mooney writes:

> The impact of federalism on morality policymaking is to allow for policy heterogeneity that better reflects opinion heterogeneity… When combined with the high levels of preference heterogeneity and religiosity in the United States, federal usurpation of state authority on morality policy can lead to extended, acrimonious and irreconcilable policy activity (Mooney 2000, 178).

While Mooney also acknowledges the varying levels of opinion heterogeneity in the American states in this particular essay, the notion that conflict is contained when it takes

place at the state level rather than at the national level is certainly arguable. After thirty-plus years of institutionalized cultural conflict in the party system (Layman 2001), religious conflict in state politics is difficult to isolate and contain from national politics. To the extent that national politics, including both policymaking and electoral processes, is an aggregation of local interests and preferences, cultural conflict at the state level will inevitably feed back to and shape the national discourse in all three branches of government. In this respect, the Christian Right's focus on the grassroots implies much more than a probable fragmentation of cultural conflict on a state-by-state basis. It also portends of *extending* the scope of conflict by *devolving* it.

States in which organized mobilization around cultural issues is the product of sharp contention rather than consensus may disproportionately contribute to an active phase of morality policymaking and "the politics of cultural differences" in campaigns (Leege, Wald, Krueger, and Mueller 2002) at both the state and national levels. Federal non-intervention in morality policy may defuse conflict to a point, but this effect is unevenly distributed across states, and ultimately, would prove unsuccessful at keeping morality policy off of the national agenda. The dynamic relationship between the mobilization of interests in the federal and state government is far too intertwined to substantiate the claim that such policy should simply be left to the states to decide for themselves.

Conclusion

I began this study with two main goals in mind. First, I wanted to identify those contexts in which the Christian Right should thrive as a powerful force within a state's Republican Party. In order to accomplish this goal, it was necessary to improve upon the

dependent variable measuring Christian Right influence in state Republican parties that had been used previously. The results of my analysis indicate that I have identified a valid indicator of Christian Right strength over the period of 1988-2000. While the use of the CDS represents an improvement over previous efforts, it remains deficient in terms of explaining the ebbs and flows of Christian Right influence from year to year. Such a measure would enable us to tackle the question of what causes *change* in the power of the Christian Right. A pooled measure cannot shed much light on the variation in time that may have occurred during the 1990's. Nevertheless, I was able to demonstrate that there are two driving forces behind the successful institutionalization of the Christian Right in a state's Republican Party: a large evangelical population, and a strong opposition. The former predicts a politics of consensus, while the latter implies just the opposite. A second goal was to flesh out the theoretical implications of my findings to spark a renewed interest in assessing the consequences of the Christian Right's early 1990's shift in focus to a strategy of "devolution" to state and local levels. I conclude that future research into the relationship between religion, politics, and the party system needs to more systematically consider the dynamic, interactive relationship between state and local contexts and national politics.

Appendix

Table A1. Values of the Factor Score and the Individual Components of Christian Right Strength in State Republican Parties, 1988-2000*

State	N from CDS	Factor Score	Fundamentalist ID	Evangelical	CR Activity	Perception CR Strength
AL	54	.78	.73	.84	.43	1.00
AK	32	1.00	1.00	1.00	.81	.75
AZ	63	.35	.28	.26	.33	.75
AR	29	.58	.45	.66	.47	.75
CA	213	.24	.20	.19	.11	.75
CO	63	.54	.46	.45	.71	.50
CT	43	.04	.07	.03	.00	.00
DE	20	.06	.07	.00	.00	.25
FL	107	.23	.20	.17	.10	.75
GA	93	.46	.44	.43	.25	.75
HI	23	.69	.60	.64	.74	.75
ID	26	.20	.15	.11	.00	1.00
IL	94	.22	.23	.16	.19	.25
IN	64	.18	.20	.12	.05	.50
IA	42	.69	.52	.64	.78	1.00
KS	57	.18	.22	.08	.06	.50
KY	56	.60	.55	.83	.19	.50
LA	53	.36	.41	.14	.32	.75
ME	26	.14	.05	.19	.00	.50
MD	47	.11	.06	.11	.14	.25
MA	58	.14	.15	.14	.18	.00
MI	108	.32	.26	.19	.34	.75
MN	62	.81	.74	.80	.66	1.00
MS	45	.64	.61	.76	.22	.75
MO	53	.35	.39	.32	.12	.50
MT	35	.41	.46	.19	.39	.75
NE	42	.30	.27	.22	.33	.50
NV	22	.45	.57	.31	.29	.50
NH	21	.13	.18	.00	.15	.25
NJ	62	.13	.19	.10	.12	.00
NM	24	.16	.14	.16	.13	.25
NY	88	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
NC	75	.42	.37	.39	.27	.75
ND	25	.22	.36	.11	.00	.25
OH	87	.25	.23	.23	.16	.50
OK	48	.74	.85	.54	.50	1.00
OR	41	.70	.66	.49	.78	1.00
PA	92	.30	.33	.14	.34	.50
RI	29	.20	.20	.19	.25	.00
SC	41	.94	.84	1.00	.72	1.00
SD	28	.34	.25	.22	.59	.50
TN	47	.62	.81	.59	.28	.25
TX	160	.64	.57	.63	.41	1.00
UT	33	.19	.22	.09	.11	.50
VT	24	.12	.24	.07	.00	.00
VA	75	.60	.49	.61	.42	1.00
WA	43	.85	.89	.60	.99	.75
WV	15	.29	.10	.34	.43	.50
WI	51	.18	.26	.10	.06	.25
WY	39	.20	.12	.33	.08	.25

All values have been scaled from 0-1. Alaska and Hawaii are included in this table, but are excluded from other analyses. Entries note the mean value for each state. Sources: 1988, 1992, and 2000 Convention Delegate Studies used for the first four columns of data. Persinos (1994) and Conger and Green (2002) provide the last column of data.

Table A2: Results of Regression on Individual Components of Factor Score of Christian Right Strength Within State Republican Parties, 1988-2000*

	Self- ID (R)		Evangelical X Attendance (R)		CR Activism (R)		Perception of CR Strength	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
Evangelical	1.00*	2.33	1.20**	2.09	.92*	-1.02	15.00**	-32.17*
	(.40)	(1.34)	(.38)	(1.29)	(.45)	(1.50)	(4.51)	(16.15)
Secular/Jewish	.14	2.62	-.58	1.07	.34	-3.30	-25.21	-111.13**
	(1.23)	(2.69)	(1.18)	(2.58)	(1.38)	(2.99)	(13.83)	(34.68)
Evangelical X Secular/Jewish	--	-8.90	--	-5.92	--	13.03	--	319.55**
		(8.58)		(8.25)		(9.56)		(112.12)
Mormon	.16	.32	.12	.23	-.41	-.65	4.52	1.29
	(.49)	(.52)	(.47)	(.50)	(.55)	(.57)	(4.49)	(4.80)
White Mainline	.47	.82	.47	.71	.54	.03	9.19	.13
	(.77)	(.84)	(.74)	(.81)	(.87)	(.94)	(7.94)	(8.98)
Elite Secular. (D)	.81	.76	.87	.84	1.37*	1.44**	23.77***	26.02***
	(.51)	(.51)	(.49)	(.49)	(.58)	(.57)	(6.28)	(6.47)
Prior Rep. Strength	-.43	-.42	-.65*	-.65*	-.15	-.15	-1.55	-2.04
	(.34)	(.34)	(.33)	(.33)	(.39)	(.38)	(2.99)	(3.18)
Nomination Rules	.06	.03	.14	.12	.17	.22*	.83	1.68
	(.09)	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.11)	(1.03)	(1.11)
Education	-1.11	-1.10	-.61	-.60	-.91	-.93	-5.35	-7.95
	(1.19)	(1.19)	(1.13)	(1.14)	(1.34)	(1.32)	(10.97)	(11.67)
South	.15	.16	.15	.15	.08	.08	2.30	2.37
	(.13)	(.13)	(.12)	(.12)	(.14)	(.14)	(1.24)	(1.26)
Constant	.07	-.39	.05	-.26	-.16	.51	--	--
	(.34)	(.56)	(.32)	(.54)	(.38)	(.62)		
(N)	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
F-Test	3.03**	2.84**	5.48***	4.92***	1.85	1.89	--	--
LR Chi-square	--	--	--	--	--	--	44.53***	52.82***
Adj. R-square	.28	.28	.46	.46	.14	.16	.29	.35

* Notes: The first three dependent variables represent Convention Delegate Study measures of delegates to the Republican National Conventions pooled from 1988, 1992, and 2000. The coefficients are derived from OLS regression. The fourth dependent variable, *Perception of CR Strength*, is derived from an average of the 1994 Persinos measure and the 2002 Conger and Green measure across each state. The coefficients for this dependent variable are derived from logistic regression. Data on the secularism of Democratic elites were also obtained from the CDS and represent a sample of delegates to the Democratic National conventions from 1980-1992 Standard errors are in parentheses.
*** p<.001. ** p<.01. * p<.05 (two-tailed tests).

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Table 1. Christian Right Strength in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia

State	CR Strength 1994	CR Strength 2000	Change from 1994-2000
AL	Strong	Strong	No change
AK	Strong	Strong	No change
AZ	Strong	Moderate	-
AR	Moderate	Strong	+
CA	Strong	Moderate	-
CO	Weak	Strong	+
CT	Weak	Weak	No change
DE	Weak	Moderate	No change
DC	Weak	Weak	No change
FL	Strong	Moderate	-
GA	Strong	Moderate	-
HI	Strong	Moderate	-
ID	Strong	Strong	No change
IL	Weak	Moderate	+
IN	Moderate	Moderate	No change
IA	Strong	Strong	No change
KS	Moderate	Moderate	No change
KY	Moderate	Moderate	No change
LA	Strong	Moderate	-
ME	Moderate	Moderate	No change
MD	Weak	Moderate	+
MA	Weak	Weak	No change
MI	Moderate	Strong	+
MN	Strong	Strong	No change
MS	Moderate	Strong	+
MO	Weak	Strong	+
MT	Moderate	Strong	+
NE	Moderate	Moderate	No change
NV	Moderate	Moderate	No change
NH	Weak	Moderate	+
NJ	Weak	Weak	No change
NM	Weak	Moderate	+
NY	Weak	Weak	No change
NC	Strong	Moderate	-
ND	Weak	Moderate	+
OH	Moderate	Moderate	No change
OK	Strong	Strong	No change
OR	Strong	Strong	No change
PA	Moderate	Moderate	No change
RI	Weak	Weak	No change
SC	Strong	Strong	No change
SD	Weak	Strong	+
TN	Weak	Moderate	+
TX	Strong	Strong	No change
UT	Moderate	Moderate	No change
VT	Weak	Weak	No change
VA	Strong	Strong	No change
WA	Strong	Moderate	-
WV	Weak	Strong	+
WI	Weak	Moderate	No change
WY	Weak	Moderate	+

Source: Conger and Green 2002, 59.
Note: "+" indicates an increase in strength from 1994 to 2000, while "-" indicates a decrease in strength.

Table 2. OLS Regression on Christian Right Strength in State Republican Parties, 1988-2000*

	Factor Score	
	Model A	Model B
Evangelical	1.15**	1.19
	(.37)	(1.26)
Secular/Jewish	-.27	-.19
	(1.14)	(2.25)
Evangelical X Secular/Jewish	--	-.27
		(8.03)
Mormon	.08	.08
	(.45)	(.48)
White Mainline	.55	.56
	(.71)	(.79)
Elite Secular. (D)	1.13*	1.13*
	(.47)	(.48)
Prior Rep. Strength	-.46	-.45
	(.32)	(.32)
Nomination Rules	.11	.11
	(.08)	(.09)
Education	-.94	-.94
	(1.10)	(1.11)
South	.15	.15
	(.12)	(.12)
Constant	.03	.02
	(.31)	(.52)
(N)	48	48
F-Test	4.66***	4.08**
Adj. R-Squared	.41	.40

*Note: Entries denote OLS coefficients.
Sources: 1988, 1992, 2000 Convention Delegate Studies; Persinos 1994; Conger and Green 2002 supply data comprising factor score. John C. Green's data on state populations from 2004 used for state religious populations (beliefnet.com); Prior Rep. Strength and Nomination Rules obtained from *The Book of the States*.
*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05. (two-tailed tests) Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 3. Change In Predicted Probabilities of a State's Christian Right Exerting a Strong Influence within the Republican Party

	Weak	Somewhat Weak	Moderate	Somewhat Strong	Strong
Evangelical**	-.25	-.53	-.12	.24	.66
Secular/Jewish	.18	.52	.13	-.33	-.50
Mormon	-.02	-.16	-.35	.12	.41
White Mainline	-.06	-.32	-.16	.33	.20
Elite Secular. (D)***	-.32	-.52	-.11	.14	.81
Prior Rep. Strength	.02	.11	.04	-.12	-.05
Nomination Rules	.01	-.09	-.10	.13	.07
Education	.01	.09	.05	-.10	-.04
South	-.03	-.21	-.30	.25	.27
(N)	48				
Chi-Square	44.53***				
Pseudo R-square	.29				

*Note: Entries denote change in predicted probability of having a strong Christian Right in a state's Republican Party for a change in minimum to the maximum value for each independent variable.
Sources: 1988, 1992, 2000 Convention Delegate Studies; Persinos 1994; Conger and Green 2002 supply data comprising factor score. John C. Green's data on state populations from 2004 used for state religious populations (beliefnet.com); Prior Rep. Strength and Nomination Rules obtained from *The Book of the States*.
*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05. (two-tailed tests) Standard errors in parentheses.