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Profession of Faith: Congressional Websites and Religious Expression in the 112th Congress

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PROFESSION OF FAITH:

CONGRESSIONAL WEBSITES AND

RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN THE 112TH CONGRESS

by

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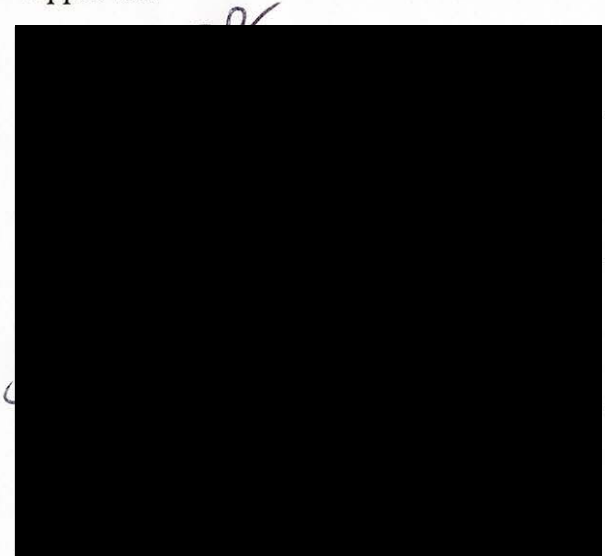

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ABSTRACT

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The idea of culture wars in politics suggests that American voters have polarized according to their positions on moral issues, and a religious gap in the electorate also contends that voters are polarized on these issues according to their religious beliefs and practices. Research shows that members of Congress send cues about their faith to their constituents, who in turn use the information to assess their representatives and determine their members' position on these moral issues. To determine how these cues are delivered and who delivers the information, I combed 100 Senators' and 435 Representatives' from the 112th Congress online biographies and recorded any of six different types of religious reference or mention of faith. However, only one-third of the members mentioned religion in their biographies. The only significant determinants of which members would use religion were the members' party, region, and percentage of adherents. Republican members, members from the South, and members who represent districts with a high percentage of religious adherents are more likely to reference religion in their biographies. My results suggest that members of Congress may not be willing to express their faiths on the internet. The low number of members who mention religion also suggests that moral issues may not be as important to the American electorate—or at least to the political elites—as some researchers contend.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The culture war in American politics is based on the documented division over moral issues such as family values, abortion, and same-sex marriage. Politicians and their constituents have polarized according to their positions on these issues, with moral conservatives supporting the Republican Party and those with liberal cultural views supporting the Democratic Party. Consequently, a religious gap has emerged.

Religion's influence on politics is not new. Historically, early Americans were divided by religious tradition, with Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish ideals pitted against one another. By the late 19th century, however, industrialization and modernization morphed this inter-faith division into an intra-faith division. New liberal, modernist sects arose from each faith and opposed the conservative traditionalists, who also grew in strength. This religious gap, therefore, was defined by the level of traditionalism or orthodoxy of the denomination. More recently, research suggests that the religious gap is based more on a level of religious commitment. Heavily committed Catholics, Jews, and Protestants are voting alike, while secularists and the least committed of each faith are voting alike. Politicians are aware of the impact of culture wars, and they send cues to their constituents to appeal to voters that share their religious social identity.

Politicians are not immune from religious influence. Research suggests that members of Congress (MCs) roll call voting patterns are influenced by religion. Similarly, MCs reflect the characteristics of the districts. MCs' roll call voting records are also directly related to their district's level of religious commitment.

While a candidate's stances on moral issues are not the primary positions that voters consider when making decisions at the ballot box, religion is still significant to the most religiously committed voters. If MCs' faith (or lack thereof) is indicative of their political stance on these issues, and representative of their constituencies, then they could benefit by choosing to express or choosing not to express their religion to voters. Which MCs publicly express their faith? If an MC does choose to express his or her faith, how does he or she send these religious cues?

In this research, I examine members' of Congress use of religious references and expressions of faith on government-issued websites. Although religion has a significant influence on political behavior, I find that only about one-third of MCs mention religion at all. Additionally, I compare religious adherence at the district level to the probability that an MC will reference religion on his or her website. This research adds to the relatively nascent discussion of MCs' self-presentation on the internet, and supports home-style self-presentation. Although the MCs are distanced from their districts, they can use the internet to present themselves as they would in person. In order to identify with their constituents at home, MCs choose to present themselves as compatible with their constituencies. My results suggest that this is also true in the way MCs present themselves online; the more religiously homogenous a district is the more likely MCs are to express their faiths on the website biographies. On the other hand, the more religiously heterogeneous a district is, the less likely MCs are to publicly present their faiths.

CHAPTER II

RELIGION AND POLITICS

The beginning of modern cultural conflict began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Previously, communities were centered upon shared beliefs, such as a religion. However, increased industrialization forced once-homogenous cultures to become exposed to a variety of different cultures and communities. Factory workers from all types of backgrounds worked together and lived together, so intermingling was inevitable. These developments were not exclusive to urban areas—even rural areas experienced at least some societal change. The onset of modernization further weakened homogenous societies. New scientific theories that undermined religious beliefs were introduced and widely circulated. Religious division by individual denomination—seen in the interfaith conflicts between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—also disintegrated (Layman 6; Green, *Faith Factor* 22-24).

As interfaith conflict weakened, intra-faith divisions emerged. Within Protestantism, fundamentalists appeared to defy the new theology and social gospel sects that grew out of modernization. Similarly, the Catholic Church experienced an Americanism movement that tested the more traditional Roman Catholics. Reformist Jews focused on ethical idealism and bucked the traditional Jews. However, the *traditionalist* side of each denomination strengthened to face the challenge from the *modernist* sect, and withstood the changes.

The political effects of these internal conflicts have become increasingly apparent since the late 1960s. While the previous decade was the apex of religious and traditional values, the liberalism of the 1960s pushed Americans' moral tolerance to the brink, and

brought moral and cultural issues to the forefront. The 1950s marked religious traditionalism ("God" was printed on money and recited in classrooms), but the 1960s marked the outbreak of political groups that protested the war and rallied for homosexuals and feminists. As a result, by the 1970s, secularism quadrupled (Layman 9). Simultaneously, the secular, liberal movement began to identify with the Democratic Party.

The rise of secularism's influence on politics, the liberal turn of the media and entertainment industries, and a series of Supreme Court decisions removing prayer in public schools put religious traditionalists on the defensive in the 1980s. As the traditionalists re-entered the sphere of politics, they were supported by the conservatives in the Republican Party. As a result, the internal battles within religions became a battle within politics: liberal secularists supported the Democrats, and the conservative traditionalists embraced the Republican platform (Layman 11-12). Accordingly, this conflict—American voters' polarization on moral issues—has come to be known as the culture wars.

However, Green refers to this religious gap theory—based on traditionalists against modernists, conservatives against liberals—as an *old* religious gap explanation (Green, *Faith Factor* 22-44). More recently, the religious gap has become defined by level of commitment, of "behaving and believing" instead of just "belonging" (Green, *Faith Factor* 45). Since the 1980s, when moral issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage became more salient to Americans, voters began to divide especially according to their religious commitment (Abramowitz 78). In essence, the level of belief and type of religious behavior that a voter of any faith exhibits is a determinant of their political

behavior. Church attendance, for example, is strongly related with religious salience, preserving tradition, and religious relevance to politics (Green, *Faith Factor* 51). The level of religious commitment serves as a vote predictor; researchers Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders found that the correlation between church attendance and presidential choice rose from .02 in the 1950s to .29 in the 1990s (11). A high frequency of church attendance is associated with high religious influence on politics. However, the new religious gap—based mostly on this attendance gap—does not replace the old religious gap, because high commitment levels are also strongly associated with high levels of traditionalism. While the former theory may explain why traditional Catholics vote like traditional Jews, the new religious gap theory could also explain why highly committed Catholics also vote similarly to their highly committed Jewish counterparts.

In *The Great Divide*, Geoffrey Layman further explores the religious commitment gap, and finds that the commitment gap exists both within religions and between parties. The more committed religious traditionalists in any of the major denominations are more conservative towards cultural issues than their less committed counterparts of the same denomination. Secular political activists tend to be more liberal on cultural issues than activists that belong to a denomination. However, he notes that by the 1990s, the gap within religious groups was much smaller than the gap between the parties. The more religiously committed—regardless of the denomination—tend to be conservative and Republican, while the less committed and secular activists are more likely to be liberal and Democratic (Layman 162).

One of the most obvious shifts has been the movement of secularists to the Democratic Party. Although the change can be attributed to the growing number of

secularists in America in general between 1960 and 1988, the number of Democrats that are secular has grown even larger post-1988. The Democrats' presidential electoral base has also grown less religious and more secular. The committed, religious traditionalists have grown more Republican, which can be explained by their attraction to the more culturally conservative Republican activists (Layman 187-89). Catholics that regularly attend church are also now more likely to support the Republican Party. No later than 1996, Catholics that attended church regularly constituted a larger portion of Republican voters than did mainline Protestants (Layman 189). In short, the religious commitment gap is a split between religious traditionalists and modernists, secularists and regular church goers, and the Republican and Democratic Parties.

In essence, the religious gap appears to occur within individual faiths as opposed to between different religious traditions. The gap can take two forms: a traditional gap—in which traditionalists tend to have conservative moral values and constitute an electoral base for the Republican Party and modernists and secularists hold liberal moral values and form an electoral base for the Democratic Party—or commitment gap—in which the most committed members of each faith hold conservative moral values and support the Republican party and the least committed members of a faith and secularists espouse liberal moral values and support the Democratic Party.

Culture Wars in Congress

Culture wars are not exclusive to the mass electorate; political elites are divided over moral issues as well. First Name Layman (210-224) researched MCs' cultural issue positions by analyzing all of the roll-call votes on cultural issues (abortion, homosexual rights, women's rights, Equal Rights Amendment, prayer and religious expression in

public schools and public places, Establishment Clause, and the National Endowment for the Arts funding of obscene or pornographic material) in the House and Senate between 1970 and 1996. He found that in the 1970s, the differences between both parties in both houses were "virtually indistinguishable" (Layman 211). By the 1980s, Senate and House Republicans began to vote conservatively on cultural issues and Senate and House Democrats voted liberally on cultural issues. The growth in the difference between votes from Senate Republicans and Senate Democrats and between votes from House Republicans and House Democrats has also grown in time (Layman 211-13).

The split over time regarding the separation of church and state is a significant indicator of the MCs division over cultural issues. Layman found that in 1970, 84% of Republican Senators and 61% of Democratic Senators voted to uphold the "right of persons lawfully assembled in any public building to participate in nondenominational prayer." Less than a decade later, 48% of Democrats in the Senate and 68% of Senate Republicans voted to restore prayer in public schools. By 1992, when the Senate voted on a "sense of the Senate" bill supporting prayer in public schools, it was overwhelmingly shot down by Senate Democrats (Layman 213-14). Greg Adams also demonstrates the growing polarization of Congress over cultural issues within the last four decades; Congress has now taken distinct positions—one extreme or the other—on abortion issues (727). The increase in cultural issues' salience over the same period of time, as well as an overall growth in party homogeneity also may have motivated MCs to take clearer positions and vote consistently.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION OF SELF

MCs must be constantly aware of both how they present themselves and how they appear to others. Politicians "believe that a great deal of their support is won by the kind of individual self they present to others, i.e., to their constituents" (Fenno 55). They understand, therefore, that when a constituent (the viewer) comes into contact with an MC (the presenter), the potential supporter can only use inferences to determine the relationship between himself and the MC. The "ultimate response" that an MC seeks is none other than political support (Fenno 56), and if David Mayhew is correct in asserting that MCs are "single-minded election seekers" (17), then support and contributions from voters in the district is of ultimate importance.

Although in 1978 Fenno stated that "presentation of self takes time" (56), Americans would argue that time is quite elusive now. Fortunately, recent technological advances allow information and communication to come from an infinite number of sources in various forms. During election years especially, voters are not immune to messages about candidates. However, there are also just as many ways to avoid the barrage of commercials, debates, internet ads, talk shows, and fundraising websites (Morris and Forgette 92). Even more, voters may not be interested in researching all of the relevant issues and candidates in an upcoming election, or may be too busy to take the time to examine all of the choices thoroughly (see Conover and Feldman; Graber; Keeter and Zukin). Nonetheless, despite the lack of political knowledge and interest that plagues a portion of the electorate, a majority of the electorate votes "correctly" or consistently with their personal beliefs (Lau and Redlawsk, *Voting* 587).

To do this, voters use cognitive heuristics—or shortcuts—to process small pieces of information and apply it to their decision-making at the polls. According to conventional theory, these clues allow the relatively politically uninterested populous to make "reasonably accurate political judgments" (Lau and Redlawsk 952) without the vast amount of knowledge of political experts. While it may be true that voters do not always use these shortcuts, or that heuristics are only one small part of a complex process, it is safe to assume that voters have the option to use heuristics in order to make inferences and decisions in an election, and usually will.

Before the advent of new media in the 1960s, Americans relied on political parties for information about candidates or updates on government officials' activity and progress. This information exchange usually took place in the form of local or state party chapter meetings, party conventions, and caucuses (Tolbert and McNeal 176).

Recently, however, the media—in all its forms—is able to provide this information in a quick, cheap, and easy manner. More specifically, Americans are increasingly turning to the internet in order to gain knowledge without expending the time, effort, and money to access the amount and quality of information they are seeking. The internet has become a portal for individuals to access information about the government. When MCs provide information on their official government websites, voters have access to a resource that comes directly from the source, rather than from a reporter. On these websites, MCs can provide details about their background, qualifications, voting records, issue positions, and personal beliefs, while voters can simultaneously avoid the media "horserace" (see Graber) and track down specific information rather than just select broadcasts. This is also true for campaign information;

in fact, the number of adults who locate the majority of their campaign information online has tripled in the past decade. 73% of adult internet users (or about half of all American adults) used internet sources to access information during the 2010 election, and 28% of online adults used the internet to research their representatives' voting records and issue positions (Smith, *Internet* 19-21). In essence, presentation of self is an inherent part of being an MC, and the internet has become a crucial medium for MCs to present themselves to their district.

Faith Cues

While standard background information, images, and a litany of legislative accomplishments are expected to appear on an MC's website, the MC's faith and religious values may not be as obvious. However, a politician's religion is a heuristic that affects voters' decisions (McDermott 352). Candidates, aware of the benefits of heuristics, frequently use heuristics to relay information about their faith to voters.

This cultural conflict affects politics because each party must identify, attract, and engage its respective electoral base. Although some political scientists have pointed out that Americans do not isolate cultural issues as the most important political issues (see Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode; Layman 14), cultural issues are still significant political factors. As previously mentioned, constituents and MCs alike weigh religious factors when casting votes. Although the direction of influence may be unclear, as the electorate splits, so do the political parties' platforms and candidates (Layman 201).

Religion is an important tool for the American electorate, and both voters' and members' of congress religious affiliations affect political behavior (Abramowitz and

Saunders 549). Established religious networks and endorsements from trusted religious leaders mobilize political participation and encourage voter turnout, and information about candidates' faith aids decision-making processes for the electorate.

MCs' religion can affect their constituents' behavior at the ballot box. Religious cues from candidates offer informational shortcuts that voters use to shape their decision-making process. A voter receives the cue from a candidate, stereotypes the candidate's beliefs and characteristics, and compares and contrasts these attributes with their own belief system (Conover and Feldman 936-38). Thus, offering these informational shortcuts to the electorate is useful for MCs so they can transfer information about themselves—present themselves—to their constituents.

Research suggests that MCs use a "code" to send cues about their faith to constituents. Robert Calfano and Paul Djupe argue that the "code" is first a heuristic used to infer a shared social identity (in their study, the social identity was the evangelicals), and then to provide that group with information when no other information is readily available. The cues delivered in the code can trigger a social identity—such as a faith, or the religious in general—and "if called to do so, those already cued may apply ample and available stereotypes to assess the politics of the newly perceived in-group member" (Calfano and Djupe 330).

According to the research, elections are "filled with uncertainty…where details about the candidate are quite vague. Thus, participants may search for any information, including a shared social identity, that may help reduce the uncertainty of what a candidate stands for and determine whether support should be granted to a candidate" (Calfano and Djupe 331). Most often in the case of evangelicals, a shared religious social

identity translates into a shared identification with the Republican Party. The results from Calfano's and Djupe's research suggest that white evangelicals recognize the codes delivered by the candidate, and in turn identify the candidate as Republican and increase support for the candidate. In essence, the code works to engage members of the "in-group" it is intended to target while having little to no effect on other groups or social identities. That way, a politician can present their faith to a voter, and depending on how salient religion is to that person, he or she can choose to use the information at the ballot box.

Sending faith cues to constituents may be beneficial. Traditionally, religion has been a powerful source of voter mobilization and political participation. David Campbell found that the close-knit associations and relationships that develop during church activities can spawn substantial political mobilization (162). For example, when an issue arises that is salient to a church's congregation, its members will respond by encouraging voter participation. Even more, endorsements from trusted religious leaders are highly respected and can also result in political action from a congregation. Voters who depend on these endorsements by the church defer the "tough cognitive effort to trusted others" (Lau and Redlawsk 953) to help them decide which candidate to support. On the other hand, public endorsement by controversial religious figures can cause negative reactions to candidates (Green, *Values Voter* 42), such as those experienced by both President Barack Obama and Senator John McCain during the 2008 campaign.

The 2008 election is an example of how a voter's perception of an MC's faith can lead to stereotypes. The stereotypes could be positive, such as when a voter perceives that an MC who is highly involved in his church choir and Sunday school program is just as

involved in the community he represents. Too few clues can lead to unfitting stereotypes that backfire for the electorate and result in "incorrect" voting (Lau and Redlawsk 952; McDermott 342). Until the voters can gather complete information, they tend to make inferences about a political figure's issue positions based on information that they already know (Conover and Feldman 936-38). For example, a voter may use her knowledge of a candidate's denomination to determine his party, position on moral issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage, or as a reflection of his commitment to a group. If an MC is Catholic, the voter might perceive that he is pro-life, and thus a Republican; however, the voter could also perceive the MC to be a Democrat who is anti-death penalty. In these instances, a religious cue only benefits an MC if it is accompanied with an issue position. Since MCs do not always provide a clear stance on issues (see Page), other sources—such as their websites—make finding this information easier (Gulati 23-25).

However, a representative's faith may not necessarily matter to constituents. Although religion is a powerful tool for mobilizing the public and sending cues to voters about MCs' position on moral issues, economic issues such as job creation and balancing the budget are also factors that are influencing voters. Religious identity may only be important when moral issues are at the forefront of voters' concerns. While the 2004 election emphasized the issues of abortion and same-sex marriage, and the 2008 election featured religious motivators, moral issues are becoming less important than in the past. Focus is now shifting to issues such as the economy, immigration, and defense (Green, *Faith* 141). Morris Fiorina, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope contend that the public divide over economic issues is always a better predictor of voter preference than the

religious divide (35). Alternately, Abramowitz and Saunders (549-51) argue that religion is once again becoming increasingly at the forefront of voters' minds when they choose a candidate.

Even more, the mass electorate must be able to recognize the differences between the parties' stances on religious and moral matters, and identify these issues as important parts of their attraction to one party over the other. Layman used respondents' answers to NES surveys conducted between 1970 and 1996. Since 1970, the frequency in which voters cite religious, moral, and cultural reasons for why they like or dislike a party has increased (215-24). These results support the idea that cultural issues have become more salient recently. Voters have also become more likely to recognize the differences between the two parties' stances on these issues.

Research suggests that religious/moral issues are important enough that voters can identify the differences between each party's positions on moral issues, but they are still not the *most* important factors for decision-making (Layman 246). Cultural issues have certainly stood out in specific elections, and cultural political movements have risen and fizzled out along the way. However, mobilization behind the issues does not appear to dominate the political arena enough or to provoke an overwhelming political realignment. Cultural issues' effect on politics is not as serious as the effect that the economy and employment have on voters' political decisions.

In essence, the religious gap on cultural issues is "likely to have a significant political impact only in certain types of electoral contexts and only for certain types of voters" (Layman 246). If religion is more relevant in politics for those who are more committed to their religion, the voters that place more significance on religious issues

may use the MC's faith cue as a way to identify with the candidate, or better understand his viewpoint on those issues. If MCs' roll call record on moral issues is associated with the religious characteristics of their districts (Green and Guth 577), then publicly expressing their faith is a way for MCs to identify with their constituents and thus potential voters. The MCs present themselves—in the case present their faith—to their constituents through heuristics or faith cues, the constituents use this information about the MCs' faith to compare and contrast themselves with the candidate (McDermott 342), and then weigh this information in their assessment of the MCs.

On the other hand, since moral issues are less salient to the secular and least committed, voters that do not place much significance on cultural issues may just ignore the religious expression or not consider it when weighing factors in their decision-making process.

Do MCs present their faith on the internet? Fenno names three "ubiquitous" expressions that are most important to an MC's presentation of self: qualification, identification, and empathy (57). Similarly, Lau and Redlawsk classify five types of heuristics: ideology, party, endorsements, polls, and candidate appearance (953-54). My research focuses primarily on how the MC presents himself to appear—more specifically, how he presents his religious identity—to constituents via the World Wide Web. On the internet, MCs are able to appear not only in pictures, but in the words they choose to use to describe themselves. If MCs are trying to present themselves in a manner that will be compatible with their constituents, they should use words to describe their characteristics that are similar to those of their constituents in their respective districts. If an MC chooses to present his or her faith to the constituents, the MC can publicly express his or her

religion, and the constituents can use that information to assess the MC. MCs know that voters use faith cues, and MCs send them.

Religion is most salient to politics for the most religious voters, and matters less to the least religious voters. Moral issues in general are not the most important issues that voters are concerned with, yet they are still significant to at least one electoral base. Although an MC's religious beliefs and practices may not be the same as a constituent's, according to the religious gap theory based on commitment, it is just the fact that the MC is religious that should matter to the constituent. Since moral and religious issue positions are less relevant to politics for the least religious and seculars, an MC's religiosity should not matter, and an MC expressing religion should not run the risk of alienating or becoming "incompatible" with the MC.

The groups that have the highest level of religious influence on politics are the most likely to recognize these cues and most likely to let the information influence their political behavior. The modernists and secularists, who are least likely to let religion have a significant influence on their political behavior, should be the least likely to use faith cues to influence their political decisions. Since cultural issues are not the most salient to a majority of the electorate, and only the most committed religious are likely to let religion influence their political behavior, MCs face little apprehension and could possibly benefit from their electoral base by publicly expressing their faith. Therefore, I predict that most MCs will reference religion on their websites.

CHAPTER IV

HYPOTHESES

What factors determine which MCs will express religion on their websites? Culture war and religious gap literature agree that the mass electorate is divided over moral issues, and research, such as Layman's, contends that this polarization is partisan in nature. In *The Great Divide*, Layman empirically examines the link between religion and partisan politics. His research suggests that the two are significantly connected, and he lays out a model to explain the religious change in the party system. He argues that the religious gap has become aligned with party politics because it is "associated with a powerful, highly emotional set of political issues" that "appealed to the strategic calculations of party politicians and the passions of political activists" (Layman 23). Eventually, the party coalitions were restructured, and the parties and candidates took more extreme positions. At the same time, public perception of the parties' religious identity also changed, and the "public's perceptions of and affect toward the parties evolved into a change in the religious and cultural composition of the parties' electoral coalitions" (Layman 25).

Since the 1960s, traditionalists have converged around the Republican Party. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, has seen an influx in modernists and secular members (Layman 9). Additionally, over the past decade Americans have viewed the Republican Party as more friendly to religion than the Democratic Party (Pew, *Public Views*). Although the number of GOP supporters that believe political leaders' religious talk has increased over the past ten years, Republicans are still far less likely than Democrats and Independents to express concern that politicians reference religion and

prayer too frequently. I predict that Republican members of Congress are more likely than their Democratic counterparts to reference religion.

Religious Adherence

Layman, Abramowitz, Green and Guth, and Green argue that the current political divide over moral issues is not between individual denominations—it is between the religious and non-religious voters. For example, in the 2004 election, the religious commitment gap had grown so strong it was a better predictor for Bush support than socioeconomic status. Those who attended church regularly were more likely to support the Republican presidential candidate in both 2004 and 2008 than those who seldom or never attended church (Abramowitz 79-80).

Presentation of self is constituency driven (Fenno 1). MCs choose to highlight the attributes they have in common with their constituents, while downplaying their characteristics that would not be compatible with the voters in the district (Gulati 4). If religious commitment (measured by church attendance) is a predictor of voter preference, I expect that MCs who represent districts with high religious commitment will be more likely to reference religion in their biographies.

I predict that the percentage of religious adherents in a congressional district will be positively related to an MC's use of religion is his or her biography. Similar to Abramowitz, Layman contends that the differences between the levels of orthodoxy in different denominations are not responsible for the religious gap, noting that it "pales in comparison to the change associated with commitment" (Layman 198). It is not the specific faith; it is the adherence to any faith that is important to explaining the religious gap.

John Green and James Guth examine how the district's religious composition affects congressional voting behavior. While demographics of a district are not a new determinant of MCs voting behavior, how the denominational makeup of a district influenced MCs had not previously been explored. However, Peter Benson and Dorothy Williams examined the way MCs personal beliefs influenced their behavior, and found significant differences between religious conservatives and religious liberals. In fact, their research suggests that an MC's faith is as influential upon his voting behavior as party and constituency. In other words, both the faith characteristic of the MC and the faith characteristic of his district affect his voting behavior in the chamber.

Green and Guth used the 1980 edition of the Glenmary Research Center's congregational survey results to collapse all of the congregations into 111 denominations, and then into eight mutually exclusive families. The percentage of each family in a congressional district was then calculated and compared to the denomination of its corresponding MC. Each MC's voting record from the 96th Congress was measured by ADA scores.

Their results show that the percentage of theologically conservative members in a district is negatively related to liberal roll-call voting by the district's representative, with the correlation the strongest for Republican MCs. Expectedly, the percentage of theologically liberal members in a district is positively related to the MC's liberal roll-call voting record. These relationships are strongest for Democratic members. Green and Guth find the strongest relationship where a religious denomination is more closely connected to a specific party, and MC's denominations are positively correlated to their districts' denominations. Green and Guth note that their findings "may reflect a

congruence of values and/or a greater attention to constituents of similar religious backgrounds" (577).

What Green and Guth were missing, however, is a measure of the level of religious commitment. They were concentrating on the *old* religious gap, based on the level of theological conservatism (traditionalism), rather than the *new* religious gap, defined by the level of religious commitment. In effect, my research explores the extent of the new religious gap because I examine the relationship between MCs who are willing to express their faiths on websites with the religiosity of their districts.

If districts elect members that reflect their values, districts with higher levels of religious adherence should elect MCs that mention religion to present their compatibility with their constituencies. According to literature about the religious gap, I predict that the MCs that mention religion are more likely to be Republican and represent a district with a higher percentage of religious commitment.

Region

Geography is important to all politicians, because it is within these geographic lines that they campaign and are elected. Senators are elected by an entire state, and Representatives by a region in a state. It would be hard to believe that MCs did not consider the location of their constituency in roll-call votes as well as campaign stops.

On the other hand, it is hard to ignore the fact that the religious traditionalism gap and commitment gap can be attributed to the concentration of evangelicals in the South. Republicans and Evangelicals are heavily concentrated in the South. Evangelicals tend to be highly traditional and attend church at high frequencies—both of which suggest that Evangelicals place more religious relevance on politics. Since religion is an important

factor for these groups, I predict that Southern MCs will be more likely to reference religion in their biographies.

The differences of partisan ties between denominations—such as the Mainline Protestants with the Republican Party and Catholics and Jews with the Democratic Party—have previously been attributed to differences in the socioeconomic status and the geographic region where they are concentrated (Parenti 261). White evangelical Protestants are heavily concentrated in the South, a region known for its "one-party politics" and recently heavy support for the Republican Party (Layman 178; Perman 2-23). Additionally, Layman found that evangelical Southerners of all ages have made a transition towards the Republican Party within the last two decades (Layman 181). Older, committed, non-Southern evangelicals have also turned towards the GOP. Conversely, Layman's results also suggest that it may be the high concentration of evangelicals in the South that has motivated the region's realignment with the Republican Party. Either way, however, there is a high concentration of evangelicals and Republicans—both of which identify with conservative cultural positions, traditional morals, and are more likely to attend church (see Layman; Green *Faith*). Therefore, I predict that MCs who represent Southern states will be more likely to express religion than non-Southern MCs.

Gender Gap

Culturally, men and women have different religious and political behaviors. Religion has long been intertwined with gender. Most significantly, females have historically been and continue to be more active in religion than males (Green, *Faith* 92). Consequently, there should be a difference in religious expression between women and men. Green's 2007 examination of religion's influence in the 2004 election suggests that

women made up more than half of the voters that attended church weekly (92). Males made up the majority of voters that seldom attended church or were unaffiliated with a religion. The gender gap was also apparent: religious females were more likely to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate and men were more likely to vote for the Republican presidential candidate in 2004.

On the other hand, research on the difference between male and female MCs' presentation style suggests that the two genders actually present themselves similarly. David Niven and Jeremy Zibler examined 388 representatives' website biographies and recorded all mentions of issues and how much space each issue was accorded. The words each MC used to present background information, experience, and accomplishments were also coded. The results show that women in the House do not present themselves differently than men. While they devote less space to family details and more space to legislative experience, women are just as likely as men to take credit for their work and highlight economic issues. In general, the researchers found that male and female MC's use their biographies to present similar messages to constituents.

However, traditional gender roles cannot be ignored. Men have historically dominated the political arena, and as a result, women are underrepresented in politics. While men are expected to be found in areas of authority, women are expected to balance household chores and parenting duties. Not only is it less likely that a woman can find the ability to make room for a successful career, it is rare that this career will be in politics. In general, women have less ambition to enter the world of politics, and once they do, they spend more time defending their ability to fulfill that role (Lawless and Fox 10-27).

Therefore, women behave differently in office. Gulati finds that women are not more likely to portray the "insider" type that can successfully maneuver in a field overwhelmingly dominated by men (32). Rather, they present themselves as district-oriented more often than men; women more often than not chose to present themselves as compatible with their constituents. Democratic women presented themselves as district oriented at a significantly higher rate than Republican women, who chose to use national images to present themselves. GOP women, he argues, probably represent conservative districts with traditional values. Therefore, female Republican MCs feel the need to show that they can successfully maneuver in a field historically dominated by men, and would highlight legislative experience and accomplishments over religious values.

According to the gender gap that suggests females vote differently than men down partisan lines, and because voters have different expectations of men and women in the political arena, I predict that male MCs will be more likely than female MCs to mention religion in their biographies.

Marriage Status

Notably, the gender gap is negatively related to the level of religious traditionalism. The gender gap is most evident when religious traditionalism—or attendance—is lowest, and smallest when religious traditionalism is the highest (Green, *Faith* 96). Although, Green does point out that this could be attributed to marriage status. A "marriage gap" exists between married voters and their single counterparts; married voters are more likely to vote Republican and single voters are more likely to vote for the Democratic Party (Green, *Faith* 196).

Abramowitz finds that marriage status is a stronger predictor of political choices than both gender and socioeconomic status (78). Over the past four decades, the gap between single white voters and married white voters has been steadily widening. Although the population of married white Christians is decreasing, the percent of married white Christians who support the GOP is rising. Married white Christians are the primary voting bloc for the Republican Party. I expect that married MCs are more likely to mention religion than their single counterparts.

Race

While Calfano and Djupe's research only touched upon the subject briefly, the study suggests that African Americans, especially black evangelicals, benefit from using religious heuristics. In their research on the impacts of faith cues, they found that the race of a candidate did not alter a respondent's perception of the candidate when only purely biographical information was provided. However, when faith cues were included, the black candidate received more support from the respondents than the white candidate. These results are especially true amongst evangelicals

Blacks have historically been linked with religion, especially in the South, and continue to have a significant presence in their faiths. Just this year, the Southern Baptist Convention—founded because of differences between Southern slaveholders and Northern abolitionists—elected Fred Luter, its first black president (McGregor 1).

Length of Tenure

The religious gap in Congress may be Congress' response to the more polarized and extreme stances each party's platform has taken. If this is true, incumbents may become more extreme with each election that they face, and candidates may come into

elections with already extreme positions on cultural issues. These arguments also support my prediction that longer-serving MCs will be less likely to express religion on their websites.

Layman's theory of conversion and replacement of political activists also supports this hypothesis. Republican activists eventually adopt more conservative cultural values, and Democratic activists convert to more liberal cultural positions. Additionally, new Republican activists with conservative cultural values are replacing older Republican activists (in the same denomination) with less conservative cultural positions. The same is true for Democrats: new Democratic activists with more liberal cultural viewpoints are replacing older Democratic activists with less liberal cultural positions (Layman 162). Although Layman's 2001 research focused on the behavior of political activists—not elites—it should also apply to MCs because political elites are often picked from the party activists (Layman 94). Therefore, I predict that newer Republican MCs and longer-serving Democrats will be more likely to express religion, while newly-elected Democrats and Republicans with longer tenure will be less likely to express religion.

CHAPTER V

DATA AND METHODS

I collected data from the biographies of 100 senators and 435 representatives from their congressional websites found on senate.gov and house.gov. This included 444 male and 91 female MCs; 471 white and 64 non-white MCs; 153 MCs from Southern states and 382 from outside the region; 244 Democrats, 290 Republicans, and one Independent; and 459 married and 76 single MCs.

Table 1

112th Congress

Variable	House	Senate	Congress
Male	361	83	444
Female	74	17	91
Republican	242	48	290
Democrat	193	51	244
Independent	0	1	1
White	373	98	471
Non-white	62	2	64
Southern	131	22	153
Non-Southern	304	78	382
Single	68	8	76
Married	367	92	459
N	435	100	535

In 1995, Speaker Newt Gingrich launched a massive effort to transform the paper-based House of Representatives into a tech-savvy institution, mainly to encourage MC's to become more transparent and accessible to their constituents (Dreier 3). By 1997, the THOMAS website made legislation available on the internet, committees began requiring testimony in electronic format, and the first internet-related rules change was passed on the House floor. A decade later, all committees and MC's have made their own websites available. Member websites include pictures, real-time streaming video, links to government or district-based resources, as well as a link to e-mail the MC. A visitor to any MC's website can also find information about legislation that the MC is connected to as well as explanations of the MC's position on specific policy and issues. Additionally, each website contains a biography, a tool in which MC's can "highlight," "advocate," and "promote" their service, agenda, experience, and background details, according to a report from the House Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier.

Two principal studies, in which the researcher analyzes the content of an MC's website to understand how and why an MC chooses to present him/herself to constituents, suggest that MCs do take advantage of this opportunity. David Niven and Jeremy Zilber recorded the types of issues, experience, and qualifications described on representatives' online biographies in an effort to determine if gender affected the way MCs chose to present themselves to their constituents. Their research suggests that in general, both genders send similar messages to the district. Similarly, Girish Gulati examined the types of pictures and symbols that appeared on MCs' websites. Gulati argues that MCs use images on their homepages to present themselves as "Washington

insiders" who are influential on the Hill or "Washington outsiders" that share many qualities and values with those in their district. The "insiders" most often do not share the same ideology as the majority of the district, so they choose to emphasize their legislative prowess in the Capitol by including pictures of the House floor, or the capitol building. The "outsiders" share many qualities with the majority of their district, so they are more likely to express and highlight information that is compatible with their district by displaying pictures of a local landmark or landscape. This idea syncs well with Fenno's theory that an MC's presentation is a way for voters to perceive their relationship with an MC. The more the voter believes he has in common with the MC, the stronger the voter's perceived relationship between them. The constituent is the voter, and self-presentation is a meticulous, particular way for an MC to foster his or her similarities and compatibilities to encourage voter support.

I choose to use the MC's biography as published on his or her website because the vast opportunity for creativity, space, and content allowed on a congressional website guarantees that the sites "represent the actual messages members circulate" (Niven and Zilber 397). Niven and Zilber found that the biographies provided details about the MC's background and often reinforced the MC's political agenda—sometimes even offering links to a more extensive delineation of the MC's stance on specific issues. The government-issued sites are a way to circumvent negative stereotypes or coverage by reporters; the biographies provide MC's the chance to present themselves directly to the constituents with information "unfiltered by the media" (Niven and Zilber 403). Additionally, there are rules concerning the use of congressional websites—senators'

sites cannot be changed 60 days before an election and representatives' sites cannot be used to fundraise for a campaign—that defer outside influence.

Although internet access to a candidate is not at all the same as contact in person, the information provided on the MC's website is meant to deliver the same experience. In essence, a constituent should get the same first impression, and the MC should present himself on his website consistent with the way he generally presents himself in public (Gulati 23-27). While it could be pointed out that the author of the biography may or may not be the actual MC, it is the impression that the viewer is left with that is most significant (Gulati 27).

On the other hand, the number of voters who use the biographies for information is probably low. A quick search of an MC on Google can produce hundreds if not thousands of news articles, images, and websites—only one of which is the biography I have chosen to use to collect the data. Furthermore, the biographies are not equal. Some members choose to provide extensive, detailed information about their past, present, and future, while others have simple websites with only one or two paragraphs for a biography. There are no requirements or standards for what must be included in the biography, so it is definitely true that not all MCs include anything more than their legislative background and political interests. However, there are some advantages to using the biographies. I found that most MCs include at least a few lines about their personal lives and families. I can also be confident that the information provided by the biographies is valid because it is unfiltered by outside sources and funded by the government, not a campaign or other political fund.

Even more, research also suggests that the "impact of religious traditionalism on electoral behavior should increase with political awareness" (Layman 250). If the more politically aware voters are the ones that would actually look up information about candidates by reading the MCs biographies, then religion has the most impact on these voters.

I searched for any of six different types of religious expression in each biography: church membership, religious affiliation, church activity, leadership role, religious language, and denominational school. If any expression was observed, I coded the type, not frequency, of expression used.

I recorded an expression of *church membership* if the member noted that he or she is a member of a specifically named church, or an active member of an unnamed church. For example, Senator Thad Cochran's biography states that he "is a member of Northminster Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi." Congressman Raul Labrador does not provide a name of a specific church, only noting that his family is "is actively involved in their church and community in Eagle, Idaho." Regardless, both MCs make it clear that they are members of a church.

An MC may also explicitly state that he or she is of a named denomination—coded as a *religious affiliation*—such as Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow's profession that she is a "lifelong United Methodist." MCs that simply use fact sheets as a biography usually fall into this category, such as Congressman Dale Kildee's single answer: "Religion: Roman Catholic." The denomination is not always as specific. Mike Pence, a representative from Indiana, declares that he is "a Christian, a Conservative, and a Republican, in that order."

Some members and their families participate in *church activities*, such as teaching Sunday school, being an usher, contributing to church charities, or singing in the choir. For example, Louisiana's Senator David Vitter, his wife, and their four children are lectors at St. Francis Xavier Church, while Senator Mike Lee served a two-year church mission in the Texas Rio Grande Valley. Others take part in a different—albeit just as important—manner, such as Congressman Rick Berg, whose family is "actively involved in their community, and support a number of organizations, including the American Red Cross, Fargo's Hope Lutheran Church, and NDSU's Farm House Fraternity." Similarly, Oklahoma's representative John Sullivan's family continues "their long and abiding history of volunteerism through active involvement in organizations such as Tulsa Catholic Charities and Bishop Kelley High School."

An MC may take participation a step further by holding *leadership roles* in their churches, or come from families who hold leadership positions in the church. Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions has "served as Chairman of his church's Administrative Board and has been selected as a delegate to the annual Alabama Methodist Conference," for example, and Senator Richard Burr explains that he was raised by his father—a minister. I include the MCs' families because regardless of who is doing the activity or holding the position, it was clearly important or influential enough to include in the biography, so I treat it as such.

Perhaps a bit more subtly, MCs use *religious language* or rhetoric to describe their character or beliefs. For example, Senator Max Baucus from Montana "understands the values of hard work, faith, family, and community." Sanford Bishop, Jr., a representative from Georgia, states that he "promotes the values and morals of Southwest

Georgians—God, country, work, family, and guns." Congressman Bobby Rush, from Illinois, declares that he "listens to his constituents with a pastor's ear and acts on their needs with a politician's skill," and that he "believes in the redemptive power of the human spirit." Similarly, Mississippi's Congressman Alan Nunnelee is not shy in stating that he "believes that the strength of America lies in its people, neighborhoods, churches and communities, not the Federal Government." These instances are usually accompanied by the MC's other beliefs, values, or personal mantras.

Others, however, are not as forthcoming. Congressman Mike Rogers from Alabama discreetly mentions that he is "most blessed" by his wife and children. Calfano and Djupe refer to these religious undertones as a "secret code" that allows MCs to engage with evangelical voters without turning away other voters. In essence, the code works to engage members of the "in-group" it is intended to target while having little to no effect on other groups or social identities.

Finally, I recorded a member's mention of attending a *denominational school*. While some note their attendance of public schools and state universities, others, such as Senator Olympia Snowe from Maine, make it very clear that they received religious education. Snowe's biography confirms that she "attended St. Basil's academy, a Greek Orthodox school in Garrison, New York…and is a member of the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Lewiston, Maine." On the other hand, some of the denominational school references are ambiguous, such as when a Senator attended a public high school, state university, and then Georgetown University Law School—a Jesuit institution. The general public is probably not very well aware of Georgetown's religious foundation, but they would recognize Notre Dame as a Catholic institution and Brigham Young's

affiliation with the Church of Latter Day Saints. In an effort to be conservative, only the most obvious uses of faith-based education were coded.

The independent variables were coded as dummy variables: gender (male 0, female 1), race (white 0, non-white 1), region (non-South 0, South AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA 1), party (Democrat 0, Republican 1), marriage status (not married 0, married 1). This data was collected from *Congress at Your Fingertips*. I recorded the number of terms each MC has been elected to (the equivalent of the number of elections each has faced), which was also listed in *Congress at Your Fingertips*. Additionally, I included the percent of each state that leans toward the Democratic Party and the percent that leans toward the Republican Party according to the "State of the States" Gallup poll on September 12, 2012. The poll is updated daily to gauge the political attitudes of each state.

To compare the "compatibility" of the MC and corresponding district, I replicated (and updated) the data collection used by John Green and James Guth in "Representatives, Roll Calls, and Religion." Two years after each national census, the Glenmary Research Center releases *Religious Congregations & Membership in the United States*, a collection of data from 149 religious institutions categorized by region, state, and county. The data includes information such as the types of denominations present in each county and the percentage of members, adherents, and service attendees of the denominations. The report also includes appendices that describe each denomination's definition and method of calculating the number of its members, adherents, and attendants, in addition to comments on the accuracy of the reported statistics.

Problems with accuracy are inevitable when thousands of different churches are asked to provide reports with little direction. Although most comments in the appendices note that the statistics are accurate, church leaders may benefit from over- or underreporting the number of church members, attendants, and adherents. For example, Green and Guth used this data to calculate the percentage of church members in each district to determine how a district's constituency reflects its choice of congressional representation. However, the definition of "member" differed quite substantially between the denominations. For example, some churches include as members all persons in the church who have been baptized. This is problematic because different faiths baptize members at varying ages: Catholics are baptized as infants, but Southern Baptists may be in early adulthood before they are baptized. In other instances, denominations only report the number of members that have paid their dues. Therefore, the number of members is probably underreported. Stark emphasizes Glenmary's underreporting of specific groups, such as blacks and Jews (69-75). His research suggests that these groups are especially underreported in white churches. However, he examines Glenmary data from 1971 and 1980, and offers procedures for fixing the problem. No similar literature has highlighted these problems in the more recent Glenmary datasets, and it is reasonable to believe that the discrepancies have been corrected over the past three decades. Stark does, however, point out that in regions such as the West, there is a large amount of citizens that describe themselves as religious, but do not identify with a specific congregation (74). The self-described religious would, therefore, also be underreported. My research focuses on the religious commitment of the districts, so this factor should not affect my results.

On the other hand, the definition of church attendance seems to be fairly consistent throughout the denominations. Most report the average number of attendants during the most popular weekend service—usually Sunday morning. Unfortunately, however, too much of the data on church attendance was unreported or missing to attempt to correlate the percentage of church attendance in a district with the MC's expression of faith.

As a result, I chose to use the percentage of adherents in each congressional district. The definition of adherents usually includes all members of the household of a member, or all people baptized and unbaptized that comprise a congregation. In some cases, the number of baptized members was multiplied by 2, 3, 4, or 5, depending on the average size of a family in the congregation. While this method avoids the problem of underreporting, it could be overstating the actual number of adherents in a given denomination. The fact that the data was collected in the early 2000s also raises questions about the accuracy of the numbers. To my advantage, however, almost all churches reported the number of adherents, so there was very little missing data.

Because the Glenmary data is broken down by state and county, I translated the data from counties into congressional districts. To do this, I recorded each county's population, as provided by the 2000 U.S. census. I used the 2000 census data because at the time of collection, only the Glenmary data from 2000 was available. Also, at the time of the election of the 112th Congress, redistricting based on 2010 census data had not occurred—districts were still based on 2000 Census data.

Approximately 25% of counties in the United States are split between one or more separate districts. *Congressional Districts in the 2000s* provided the population of

each county in a district. Green and Guth provided the following guidelines when whole counties did not fall into a single district: If more than 75% of a county's population is in a district, the entire county was assigned to that district. If more than 25% of a county was divided into separate districts, the Glenmary data was apportioned equal to the proportion of the county in each district. For example, Hinds County lies in both MS-2 and MS-3. The total county population is 250, 800. 218,968 reside in MS-2, and 31, 832 in MS-3. I added the number of church adherents (or the proportion of church adherents) in each county in a congressional district, divide by the total population of each district, and multiply by 100 to arrive at the percentage of church adherents in a district. For each senator, I recorded the corresponding state's percentage of church adherents, as already calculated by the Glenmary Research Center.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS

A little more than one-third of Congress, 193 MCs, or 36.1%, expressed religion a total of 314 times. The most common use of religion was church membership, and the least common was a mention of a specific denomination.

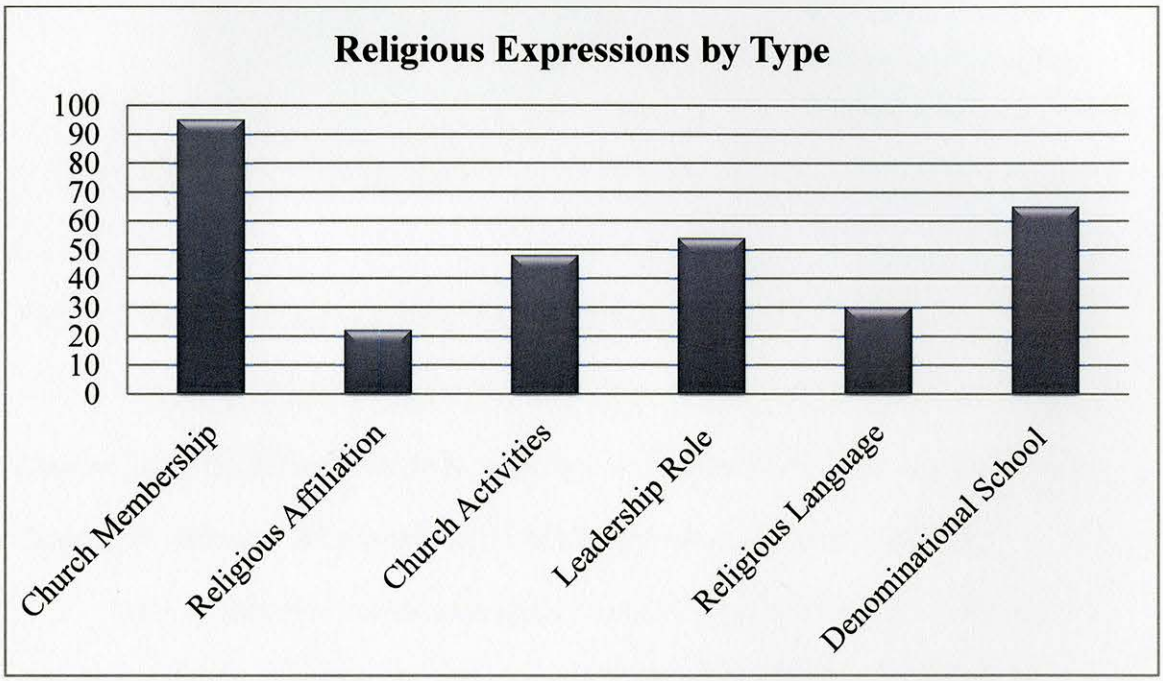

Figure 1. Religious Expression by Type for the 112th Congress.

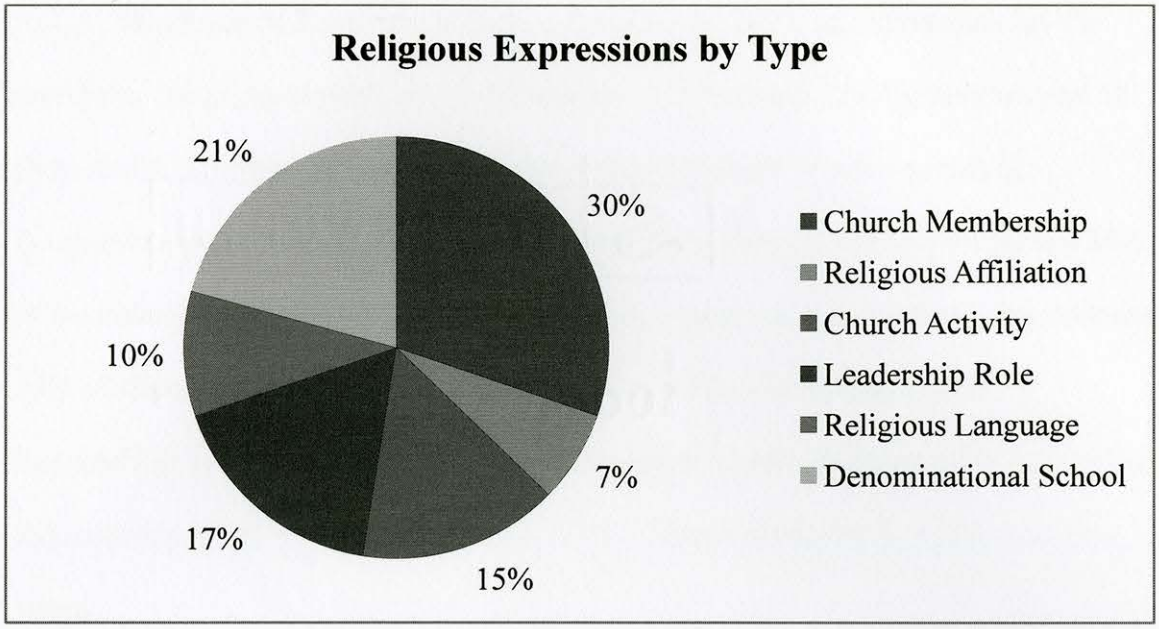

Figure 2. Religious Expression by Type, Percentage of the 112th Congress.

The group of MCs that mentioned religion was comprised of 170 males and 23 females; 126 Republicans, 66 Democrats, and one Independent; 170 married and 23 single; 169 white and 24 non-white; 72 Southerners and 121 non-Southerners.

Only 37 Senators mentioned religion in their biographies. 37% of the upper chamber is similar to the 36.1% of the entire Congress and 36% of the House of Representatives. The 37 Senators were responsible for 67 total uses of religion, or 21% of all uses. The group was comprised of 32 males and 5 females; 22 Republicans, 14 Democrats, and one Independent; 36 whites and one non-whites; 32 married and 5 single; 10 Southerners and 27 non-Southerners. Put into perspective, the group that referenced religion made up 29% of Senate females, 43% of Senate males, 45% of Senate Republicans, 27% of Senate Democrats, 37% of white Senators, 50% of non-white Senators, 35% of married Senators, 63% of single Senators, 45% of Southern Senators, and 35% of the Senators representing non-Southern states.

The House of Representatives is responsible for 247 total expressions by 156 members. The group is made up of 138 males and 18 females; 124 Republicans and 52 Democrats; 133 whites and 23 non-whites; 138 married and 18 not married; 62 Southerners and 94 non-Southerners. The group that references religion consists of 38% of the male Representatives, 24% of female Representatives, 51% of House Republicans, 27% of House Democrats, 36% of white Representatives, 37% of non-white Representatives, 38% of married Representatives, 26% of single Representatives, 47% of Representatives from Southern states, and 31% of Representatives from non-Southern states.

Table 2

Congress' Use of Religious Expression by Chamber

Variable	Congress	House	Senate
Male	38%	38%	43%
Female	25%	24%	29%
Republican	43%	57%	45%
Democrat	27%	27%	27%
White	36%	36%	37%
Non-white	38%	37%	50%
Married	37%	38%	35%
Single	30%	23%	63%
Southern	47%	47%	45%

Non-Southern	32%	31%	35%

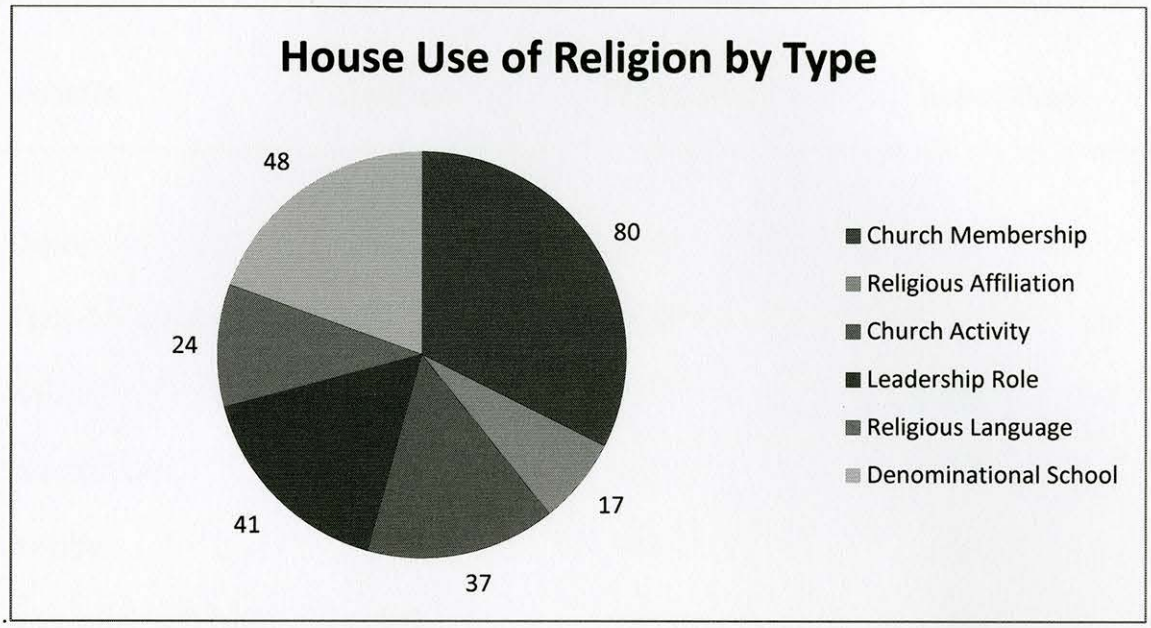

Figure 4. House Use of Religion by Type

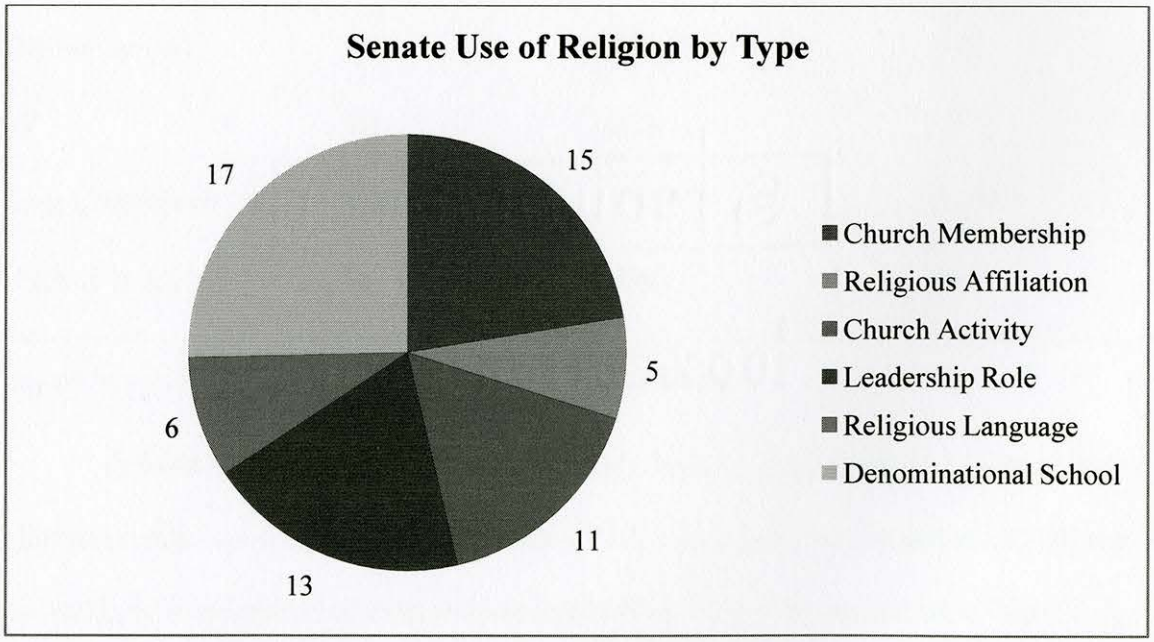

Figure 3. Senate Use of Religious Expression by Type.

Table 3

Determinants of Expression of Faith by Chamber

Variable	Congress	House Uses	Senate Uses
Gender	-.426	-.445	-.460
Party	.694**	.634**	1.084**
Race	.475	.498	1.026
Marital Status	.032	.260	-1.556*
Region	.385*	.365	.264
Adherents in District	1.465*	1.713*	1.234
State Republican Support	1.843	3.972*	-3.019
Terms Served	.017	.026	-.034
N	535	535	535
Log Likelihood	659.421	528.332	121.371
Pseudo R Squared	.08	.096	.135

Notes: *, **, *** denotes significance at the .10, .05, and .01 levels (two-tailed tests).

A binary logit regression found that party, region, and percent of adherents in a district or state were significant predictors of religious expression. Republican MCs are more likely to reference religion in their biographies than Democratic MCs. The

difference between the probability that a Democrat will use religion and a Republican will use religion is 16%.

MCs that represent Southern states are also more likely than MCs from outside the region to reference religion. The probability that a Southern Congressman will reference religion is 42%.

The percentage of a district that adheres to a religion is a significant determinant of whether or not an MC will choose to use religion. When the percentage of adherents in a district is the lowest (12%), the probability that a Congressman will reference religion is 24%. However, when the percentage of adherents in a district is the highest (79%), the probability that a Congressman will reference religion is 45%. These results are consistent with my predictions. Fenno's idea of home-style self-presentation—in which an MC makes himself appear compatible with his district—appears to also be true when MCs present their religion on the internet. Therefore, the more religiously homogenous a district is, the more likely an MC is to reference religion. In the more religiously heterogeneous districts, MCs are less likely express their faiths.

The gender, race, and marriage status of an MC are not statistically significant. However, this can be the result of the lack of diversity in Congress. In my sample, there are only 91 females, or 17% of all members; 64 or 12% of all MCs are not white; and 76 single members, or 14.2% of Congress.

The amount of elections and re-elections each MC has faced is also not a significant factor for determining religious expression. Since each chamber's terms are different, I isolated each chamber and repeated the regression.

In the Senate, only a Senator's party and status are significant determinants for religious expression. In the House, a member's party, percent of religious adherents in his or her district, and the percent of his or her state that leans Republican are all significant factors that determine religious expression. However, it should be noted that gender, race, and region were only slightly insignificant.

The difference in significant variables in the Senate—party and status rather than party, adherents, and region—may be attributed to the large constituency that senators represent. Senators serve an entire state, which is probably much more religiously diverse than a single district. Instead of trying to appeal to all faiths that make up the state, senators appear less likely to mention religion at all.

Discussion

The type of religious expressions that Congress as a whole uses most often is an expression of church membership. Contrary to the idea that politicians will use subtle codes to send faith cues to their constituents, announcing church membership is not at all subtle. Furthermore, religious language makes up only 10% of all religious expressions. When the House and Senate are separated, House members use church membership and leadership roles most often. Not only are these MCs demonstrating a commitment to a faith, but also that they are involved or influential enough to hold high positions in their churches. Similarly, Senators mention church membership, leadership roles, and denominational school attendance most often. Very few actually mention their specific faith. Mentioning church membership more frequently than religious affiliation supports the idea that a religious gap exists based on behaving rather than belonging.

The small number of MCs who reference religion on their websites could mean that the bread-and-butter issues of the economy and employment are now much more important than cultural issues. While cultural issues have certainly risen in importance over the last three decades, their significance may once again be on the decline. With the economic recession and high unemployment rates in the United States today, this may not be an implausible explanation. MCs who are trying to transfer a clear, strong message to their constituents in a brief amount of time may only want to present their positions on the most pressing issues.

On the other hand, the electorate may be becoming less tolerant of religious expression by politicians. Recent social studies are documenting a shift in Americans' perception of faith expression in politics. In 2010, 37% of Americans believed there had been too little "expressions of religious faith by politicians," 29% said there had been too much, and 24% said the amount of expression was just right in the midterm campaign and election. Republicans have historically said that there was too little religious expression. 60% of conservative Republicans, 25% of moderate to liberal Republicans, 56% of white evangelical Protestants, and 51% of black evangelical Protestants also concur. As is expected, 53% of the religiously unaffiliated reported too much religious expression by political leaders (Kohut, *Too Much* 4).

The most recent poll conducted by the Pew Research Forum on Religion and Public Life suggests otherwise. The 2012 survey found that the percentage of Americans who believe that politicians use too many religious references—38—is the highest that has even been recorded. However, three out of ten Americans still think that there is too

little mention of religion, and one of every four believes that political leaders' use of religion is just the right amount.

The low number of MCs that reference religion could also be an effect of the level of elections I examined. According to previous research, moral issues receive the most attention at the presidential election level (Layman 198). However, congressional elections are much larger than local elections from mostly homogenous communities, so I would expect a more noticeable difference between local elections and presidential elections than between congressional elections and presidential elections. Furthermore, if congressional elections are taking place at the same time as the presidential elections, I would not expect much difference in the type of issues being discussed.

Because MCs' party and the percentage of adherents in a district are significant determinants of whether or not an MC will reference religion, the results suggest that a religious gap does exist, and Congress is also divided. Republicans are more likely to express their faith, and represent districts with high levels of religious adherence, while Democrats represent districts with the least percentage religious adherents and are less likely to express religion. The results suggest that the more religious electorate—regardless of the denomination—has similar political behavior, and the less religious electorate has similar political behavior. Although the importance of cultural issues may be waning, the religious gap remains to exist.

The results also explore self-presentation on the internet. Why are so few MCs willing to express their faiths on the internet? If the MCs are not referencing religion online, when and how are they sending faith cues to their constituents? The low number may be attributed to the audience that is most likely to use the internet to research

politicians. In 2008, the groups that used the internet to research politics were young, white males with high levels of education and income that tended to support Republican congressional candidates (Smith, *Internet* 10). Since party is a significant determinant of religious expression, it seems that MCs would be less hesitant to include their faiths on the websites. However, MCs may only be concerned with appealing to their respective districts rather than the online community as a whole.

Conclusion

More research should be done to determine why so few MCs choose to publicly express religion on their websites. Are moral issues no longer important to American voters, or are MCs just very specific about what information they do or do not divulge on the internet? MCs may be sending faith cues via other sources. Additionally, they may just be stating their positions on the moral issues rather than referencing religion in order to make their stance very clear to the viewer. This way, MCs avoid the risk of sending incorrect cues that could cause negative stereotypes about their faiths and positions on cultural issues. Therefore, a more in-depth review of the MCs websites that examines the MCs who reference a specific issue—such as abortion, gun control, or the death penalty—should be conducted to determine how MCs are sending this information to their constituencies.

Furthermore, a measure of how each MC votes should be added to understand more clearly which MCs choose to reference religion. Do the MCs that choose not to mention religion vote more liberally than the MCs that do mention religion? The age of the MC could also be a significant determinant of which MCs reference religion. Although I included the number of terms each MC has served, the variable does not

account for differences in age. It is very possible that an older MC is serving his first term while a younger MC has been re-elected numerous times.

While my research and others' research supports the existence of a religious gap, it would be beneficial to compare the religious gaps at each level of political activism. Religion may vary in influence and importance between political elites, activists, and the mass electorate.

Finally, more research needs to be done on the concept of MCs' self-presentation on the internet. Who do MCs perceive their online audience to be? What factors determine when and where an MC will send information to his or her district via the internet? Answering these questions and more will deepen the knowledge of MCs' behavior, as well as further explain their unwillingness to present their religious identity on their websites.

APPENDIX A

CODING SCHEME

Gender

0 Male
1 Female

Race

0 White
1 Non-white

Region

0 Not South
1 South (AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA)

Party

0 Democrat
1 Republican
2 Independent

Status

0 Unmarried
1 Married

Church Membership

0 No
1 Yes

Religion Affiliation

0 No
1 Yes

Church Activities

0 No
1 Yes

Leadership Role

0 No
1 Yes

Religious Language

0 No
1 Yes

Denominational School

0 No
1 Yes
2 Ambiguous

Terms: Range= 28 (minimum 21 maximum 29), M= 5.4355, SD= 4.86

Adherents: Range= .67 (minimum .12 maximum .79), M= .5, SD= .11

Percent Leaning Republican: Range= .28 (minimum .25 maximum .6), M= .4, SD= .06

Percent Leaning Democrat: Range .28 (minimum .26 maximum .54), M= .44, SD= .05

APPENDIX B

DEFINITIONS

Church Membership: (Listed as CM) Member of Congress states that he/she is a member of a specific named church, or an active member of an unnamed church.
Example: "Cochran is a member of Northminster Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi." http://www.cochran.senate.gov/biography.html
"Their family is actively involved in their church and community in Eagle, Idaho." http://labrador.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=63&sectiontree=2,63

Religious Affiliation: (Listed as RA) Member of Congress explicitly states that he/she is of a specific, named religion, not including a religion that may be a part of the name of a church.
Example: "Her home is in Lansing where she is a lifelong United Methodist and a member of Grace United Methodist Church."
http://www.stabenow.senate.gov/?p=about_senator

Church Activities: (Listed as CACT) Member of Congress states that he/she and/or family participates in a church-related activity, such as teaching Sunday school, being an usher, contributing to church charities, singing in choir.
Example: "Tim enjoys working in his church and remains involved as a lector and usher."
http://huelskamp.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3180&Itemid=300080
"During his time in Tulsa, Congressman Sullivan and his family continue their long and abiding history of volunteerism through active involvement in organizations such as Tulsa Catholic Charities and Bishop Kelley High School."
http://sullivan.house.gov/Biography/

Leadership Role: (Listed as LR) Member of Congress states that he/she and/or a family member holds a leadership position within the church, such as a minister, board member, or deacon, or has received an award from a religious institution.
Example: "He served as Chairman of his church's Administrative Board and has been selected as a delegate to the annual Alabama Methodist Conference."
http://sessions.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=AboutJeff.Biography
"The son of a minister, Richard and his family moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina when he was a young child."
http://burr.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=AboutSenatorBurr.Biography

Religious Language: (Listed as RL) Member of Congress uses religious verbiage to describe their character or beliefs.
Example: "Growing up in the country, Sessions was instilled with the core values – honesty, hard work, belief in God and parental respect – that define him today."
http://sessions.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=AboutJeff.Biography

Denominational School: (Listed as DS or DSAMB) Member of Congress states that he/she attended a religiously affiliated school, or received a degree in theology, divinity, or ministry.
Example: "She attended St. Basil's Academy, a Greek Orthodox school in Garrison, New York, and graduated from Edward Little High School in Auburn."
http://snowe.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/aboutolympia?p=biography

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