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Religion in the Legislative Arena: Affiliation, Salience, Advocacy, and Public Policymaking

Religion is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that informs politics in various ways. This article examines the effects of religious affiliation, religious salience, and religious group advocacy on roll-call voting in the Wisconsin state legislature. Various studies have demonstrated the impact of religious affiliation on legislative politics, but our use of additional religious indicators allows us to model the religious effect in a more accurate and nuanced manner. Using data from an original survey of state legislators, we utilized structural equation modeling to measure the direct and indirect effects of these religious factors on both the general pattern of roll-call voting and voting on a high-salience issue, abortion. Ultimately, the findings indicate that, even when we control for political party affiliation, which is a dominant influence on roll-call voting, conservative Protestant religious affiliation and high religious salience influence legislative voting. We conclude with a discussion of the implications for future studies of religion in the legislative arena.

Scholarly interest in the nexus between religion and politics has grown tremendously in the post–World War II era. Indeed, what Legee and Kellstedt (1993) call the “rediscovery of the religious factor in American politics” has been quite dramatic. Much of the scholarship in this area focuses on aspects of mass behavior. For example, Lenski (1963) notes the relationship between religious affiliation and partisan affiliation, and subsequent scholarship reinforces his finding (see Kellstedt and Noll 1990). Additional scholarship elucidates the relationship between religion and U.S. presidential elections (Layman 1997; Manza and Brooks 1997). Other scholars explore the effect of clergy and religious elites on mass politics (Byrnes 1993; Guth et al. 1998). Still others explore the socializing impact of churches on the development of political attitudes and behaviors (Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988).

Yet a growing literature explores the effect of religion on institutional politics and, in particular, on legislative decision making. For example, Green and Guth (1991) and Oldmixon (2002) array religious denominations along an index of theological conservatism in order to measure the effect of Protestant orthodoxy on roll-call voting. Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph (1999), Haider-Markel (2001), and Tatalovich and Schier (1993) measure religion as a dummy variable to capture the effect of conservative versus liberal affiliation on roll-call voting. What these fine pieces have in common is that they limit their analyses to a single dimension of religion: religious affiliation. Also, their dependent variables are narrow in scope, with the exception of those in Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph's (1999) study. Green and Guth (1991) focus on ideology and the other authors focus on single issues.

Religion is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that can inform politics in various ways. As Benson and Williams (1982) find, religion affects decision making across an array of issues, not just a few high-profile issues. At a basic level, religions seek to instill a particular worldview in adherents, and it is reasonable to expect, then, that a religiously informed worldview will act as a filter across policy domains. After all, denominational preference encapsulates "differences in belief, practice, and commitment even for individuals with nominal religiosity" (Kellstedt and Green 1993, 55). At the same time, religion is more than just denominational preference. The intensity of denominational commitment and the ability of religiously motivated interest groups to marshal resources and lobby government should also inform legislative politics.

To explore these possibilities, this study uses structural equation modeling to measure the direct and indirect effects of three religious factors—salience, affiliation, and advocacy—on voting in the Wisconsin state legislature. The data come from an original survey of state legislators. The findings indicate that, even when we control for political party affiliation, which is a dominant influence on roll-call voting, conservative Protestant religious affiliation and high religious salience influence legislative voting. We will discuss the implications for future studies of religion in the legislative arena later in the article.

Religion and Legislative Decision Making

Scholars expect religion to affect politics because religious creeds and participation in religious communities inform individual political attitudes and behaviors (Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988). Some scholars have focused on reelection (Mayhew 1974) and power (Dodd 1977) as the prime

motivators for legislator behavior, but we proceed on the assumptions that legislators are also motivated by a desire to realize policy goals (Fenno 1973) and that religion informs policy goals in the same way it informs mass political attitudes and behaviors. The use of religious affiliation as an operationalization of a religious independent variable has, as indicated, been very useful in past and current scholarship. To fully understand the role of religion in legislative decision making, however, it is important to consider not only affiliation, but also salience and advocacy. The existing literature on each of these three factors is suggestive but incomplete.

Religious Affiliation

Early studies of religion and legislative politics operationalized religion by denominational preference, adopted Herberg's tripartite "Protestant-Catholic-Jew" religious economy, and sought to assess the effect of religious affiliation on voting. Although some scholars found few differences between denominations (Fenton 1960), others found significant voting differences across an array of issues (Rieselbach 1966; Warner 1968). Later studies focused more specifically on issues of special concern to religious groups. For example, in analyses of abortion politics at the state level, O'Neil (1970) and Richardson and Fox (1972, 1975) found significant differences in support for liberalization of abortion policy according to each legislator's religious affiliation: liberal Protestants and Jews supported liberalization, while Catholics and conservative Protestants opposed it. These early findings have, for the most part, been reaffirmed by more-recent studies of national and state-level legislative voting on abortion, which have employed even more sophisticated statistical techniques to control for various sources of influence on legislative voting other than personal religious affiliation (Chressanthi, Gilbert, and Grimes 1991; Gohmann and Ohsfeldt 1994a, 1994b; Granberg 1985; Page et al. 1984; Regens and Lockerbie 1993; Vinovkis 1979; Witt and Moncrief 1993).

As interesting and suggestive as these studies are, they represent only a beginning in understanding the relationship between religion and legislative voting. The tripartite (or fourfold) division of legislators into Protestants (liberal or conservative), Catholics, and Jews is increasingly problematic as the sole description of the religious divisions that characterize the American religious economy (Roof and McKinney 1987). As Wuthnow (1988) has argued, American religion has undergone a considerable "restructuring" since World War II, wherein traditional denominational divisions have lessened in importance in the political sphere compared to certain ideological differences.

Scholars have rediscovered the internal divisions within denominations. Several studies point to the liberal/conservative or progressive/orthodox division that increasingly characterizes the Roman Catholic Church (D'Antonio et al. 1996; Weaver 1999; Weaver and Appleby 1995; Williams and Davidson 1996). To say that a legislator is "Catholic," therefore, may tell us less and less about the legislator's propensity to vote a particular way on various issues. For example, in the United States Senate, both conservative Rick Santorum (R-PA) and liberal Ted Kennedy (D-MA) are high-profile Catholics. Even a seemingly monolithic group such as "Evangelical Christians" proves to be heterogeneous upon closer inspection; Wilcox (1992a) argues that using the term *evangelical* synonymously with *fundamentalist* ignores the consistently more-conservative social and political views of fundamentalists compared to other evangelicals. Interestingly, Wilcox (1992a, 1992b) also notes that, although pentecostal and charismatic Christians were generally supportive of the presidential candidacy of Pat Robertson in 1988, the founder of the Christian Coalition was generally unsuccessful in broadening his appeal within the evangelical community, failing to garner significant support from fundamentalists and other nonpentecostal/charismatic evangelicals.

In light of these arguments and findings, the exclusive use of religious affiliation to predict legislative voting appears limited. How then should religion be operationalized in studies of legislative voting? Students of religion and politics can take their cue from those who have long recognized that religious affiliation is but one of the important dimensions of personal religiosity (see Stark and Glock 1968). Within any given religious tradition, there are consequential differences in religiosity, or religious *salience*. The more religious one is—the more salient religious identification is to an individual—the more influential religion should be on one's political attitudes and behaviors.

Religious Salience

Students of legislative voting can benefit from incorporating ideas from studies of mass political behavior, especially work on the importance of including broad measures of religiosity. Leege and Kellstedt's (1993) volume includes a host of additional, more-nuanced ways of measuring religiosity beyond religious affiliation, including devotionism (prayer, for example), participation (say, service attendance), orthodoxy, and biblical literalism, among others. The efficacy of such a conceptualization is evidenced in the work of Kellstedt et al. (1994), who document significant differences in political views and

voting behavior between all “affiliates” of particular traditions (evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic) and those members who regularly attend church.

Guth and Green (1993, 157) suggest that a general measure of religious salience, that is, the importance of religion to the individual, may be the core concept in understanding the sociopolitical impact of religion. These authors operationalize salience by creating a “religiosity index,” which combines standardized scores for a guidance scale (how much guidance religion provides in day-to-day life), church attendance, and devotional behavior (prayer and Bible reading). The index proves to be highly reliable ($\alpha = .84$) and predictive of attitudes on a variety of political issues, including abortion, school prayer, capital punishment, AIDS spending, environmental policy, child care, social security, and unions.

Unfortunately, with one important exception, no students of legislative decision making have operationalized the religious factor along these lines. This omission occurs because, unlike information on religious affiliation, data on legislators’ religiosity are not publicly available (see, for example, Duke and Johnson 1996). When scholars have attempted to quantify religiosity, however, the results have been quite suggestive. For example, Benson and Williams (1982) conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of 80 members of the U.S. House of Representatives in the early 1980s. They explored how legislators’ religious beliefs and experiences affected their voting. Of that sample, 24% of U.S. representatives claimed their personal religion had a major influence on their behavior as legislators, and another 56% claimed it had a moderate influence. Through a unique series of questions, Benson and Williams classified members of Congress into six distinct religious types or worldviews: legalistic, self-concerned, integrated, people-concerned, nontraditional, and nominal. Although not correlated with party or denomination, these different religious types did seem to vote differently: religiosity beyond nominal religious affiliation was predictive of voting. Benson and Williams’s findings suggest very strongly that looking beyond religious affiliation is a necessary next step in understanding the role of religion in legislative behavior.

Religious Advocacy

All of the studies reviewed thus far focus exclusively on religion at the level of the individual legislator. Unfortunately, the studies do not consider the potential importance of religious group influence, in particular, the influence of religious advocacy organizations. This

oversight is particularly problematic when we consider the proliferation of interest groups of all sorts in the legislative arena (Berry 1984; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Indeed, according to Burstein (1991, 346), "Public policy is influenced primarily by formal organizations and the relations among them, both informal and as structured by formal rules governing interorganizational relationships." Understanding the role of these organizations is key to understanding policymaking generally; understanding the role of religious advocacy in policymaking is no different.

Advocacy refers to "any organized effort to influence the direction of public policy" (Fowler and Hertzke 1995, 53). As Hertzke (1988) notes in his landmark study, *Representing God in Washington*, religious lobbying has increased markedly in the post-war period, along with the general interest-group explosion that has occurred in government. At the time of Ebersole's (1951) early study, there were 16 religious lobbies in Washington, DC. By 1985 there were more than 80. Fowler and Hertzke (1995) estimate that by the 1990s the number had grown to at least one hundred groups. Despite their substantial numbers, these groups have largely avoided scholarly attention. The study of religious lobbies is therefore in its infancy. Even so, there have been important studies of the religious lobby in Washington, DC, in addition to Hertzke's account (Hofrenning 1995; Moen 1989). None, however, despite their descriptive richness, offer a systematic assessment of the influence of religious advocacy on legislative decision making. This omission is not surprising, since students of interest groups have often noted that precise measurement of interest group influence is difficult to achieve (Fowler and Hertzke 1995, 80; Laumann and Knoke 1987, 152ff; Wilson 1990).

The methodological problem of assessing interest group influence is exemplified in some existing studies of state policy outcomes, especially studies on abortion. Meier and McFarlane (1993), for example, sought to assess the effect of "advocacy groups," such as the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), on the politics of publicly funded abortions in the American states. As opposed to some scholars, who have used measures such as testimony at public hearings (cf. Segal, Cameron, and Cover 1992) or PAC contributions (cf. Langbein 1993), Meier and McFarlane used a measure of "interest group strength," which they calculated as the number of members in the state per one thousand citizens. Meier and McFarlane were not able to obtain state membership information for pro-life groups and consequently substituted the percentage of the state population that was Catholic and the percentage that belonged to Christian fundamentalist

churches. These measures may indicate an opportunity structure, but they do not capture activity. Nevertheless, Meier and McFarlane (1993, 98) concluded that their analysis of abortion funding showed “pronounced effects from advocacy groups.”

In a later study of state abortion policy, O’Connor and Berkman (1995) made a similar interpretive leap. Assessing the influence of Catholic and conservative Protestant churches on abortion policy, they used the percentage of the state population who were participants in evangelical churches and Catholic churches as explanans. When they found state Catholic population to be significantly related to abortion policy, they concluded that “pro-life impacts of the Catholic factor come through lobbying” (1995, 457). Yet, by O’Connor and Berkman’s own admission, “we have only limited case study evidence of successful lobbying by the Catholic Church in states with more Catholics” (457). What is needed is some more or less direct measurement of the influence of religious advocacy organizations on legislative decision making.

Data and Methods

In order to address some of these limitations and build on the previous research, we analyzed survey data collected from Wisconsin state legislators. This approach allows for a more-complex understanding of individual religious salience and advocacy, in addition to nominal religious affiliation. The core analyses presented here employ structural equation modeling (SEM) to predict roll-call voting in the Wisconsin state legislature in the 1995–96 biennium. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a statistical technique for cross-sectional data that estimates a covariance matrix for a hypothesized set of measures in a population, then compares that matrix to one derived from the sample data in question (Bollen 1989). If these two matrices are congruent, then the hypothesized model can be considered a plausible explanation of the relationships observed in the data.

Although some scholars employ SEM in an exploratory fashion—elaborating models and mining the data until the best model is “found”—we believe that SEM is more appropriately employed as a confirmatory statistical technique, determining whether or not a hypothesized model fits the data. Admittedly, our small sample size constrained the number of parameters we were able to estimate, but we hope that other researchers will be encouraged by our findings and collect further data so that more complex models can be fit. As Bielby and Hauser (1977, 141) note in their early summary of the use of SEMs in the social sciences, “successful applications often involved the initial

specification of a basic model, followed by conceptual and empirical developments that encouraged the elaboration of that model.” In this pioneering study of the various ways that religion influences legislative voting, our models are necessarily basic.

Yamane collected the data via a closed-ended survey delivered to all members of the Wisconsin state legislature (N = 131) in July 1996. Since the goal was to take a census of the state legislature, one important concern is whether the 62% of legislators who responded differ significantly from the legislature as a whole. A demographic overview of the 81 respondents revealed them to be highly representative of the population as a whole on many variables, including party affiliation, gender, age, level of education, and year first elected.¹ We used these data to explore the role of religion in a central public policymaking event: roll-call voting on the floor of a state legislature.

Dependent Variables

We modeled two different dependent variables: a general-voting measure and a single-issue vote (on abortion).

General Voting. We constructed a general-voting measure for this analysis in several steps. First, we asked legislators to name the five most important issues considered by the legislature in the 1995–96 biennium. We then tallied these responses to generate a list of the sixteen top issues. After consultation with relevant interest groups and legislative staff informants, we selected specific bills to represent these issues. The bills had to meet two criteria in order to be included: they needed to have a roll-call vote recorded in both the Assembly and Senate, and they needed to pass or fail by less than a 95% majority. Fourteen bills met both criteria.

In order to create one general-voting measure out of the 14 sampled votes in this analysis, we had to establish that the roll calls collectively represented a single dimension of voting. To ensure this uniformity was the case, we conducted a principal-components analysis and computed a scale reliability statistic. The principal-components analysis suggested that 1 of the 14 votes did not scale with the others. After dropping this vote—on S.B. 501, a child protective services code revision—the scale reliability statistic (alpha) was .934, strongly supporting the treatment of the 13 remaining bills as measuring a single dimension of voting. The 13 bills finally included in the scale are profiled in the Appendix.

A review of the bills suggests that the single dimension being tapped is a variant of the general liberal/conservative ideological divide

that typically constitutes the primary dimension of legislative voting (Poole 1988; Poole and Rosenthal 1986). In the context of Wisconsin, the top issues in the 1995–96 biennium tap support for or opposition to the “new progressivism,” then-Governor Tommy Thompson’s label for his ambitious conservative legislative agenda (see Thompson 1996). The first analyses presented here will therefore model this general measure of roll-call voting.

Abortion Policy. Of the top issues named by legislators, one received considerable attention from religious groups: abortion. The Supreme Court’s 1989 decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* shifted responsibility for the regulation of abortion back to the states, which had had little to say outside of negotiating funding issues in the 16 years following *Roe v. Wade*. The 1992 Supreme Court decision in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* reaffirmed *Webster*, allowing states to pass laws restricting abortion so long as no “undue burden” was imposed (Shapiro 2001). According to Berkman and O’Connor (1993, 112), “Responding to the *Webster* decision, state legislators introduced over 400 abortion-related bills in the 40 state legislatures that were still in session in July 1989 [when the decision was handed down] or met in 1990.” Clearly, state legislatures take the devolution of authority on abortion policy quite seriously. The dependent variable in this single-issue analysis is the roll-call vote for final passage of Assembly Bill 441 (yes = 1), which imposed a 24-hour waiting period on women seeking abortions and required abortion providers to supply women with certain information prior to the procedure. We interpreted support for the bill as a pro-life vote.

Independent Variables

In addition to the independent variables that measure religion, we included an array of demographic control variables in the models.²

Religious Factors. Although this study seeks to transcend the limitation of using *Religious Affiliation* as the sole measure of religion, we cannot ignore the potential significance of the variable. We classified respondents’ religious affiliation according to the five major American religious traditions identified by Kellstedt and Green (1993): white evangelical Protestants (14.6% of the sample), white mainline Protestants (36.6%), black Protestants (1.2%), Roman Catholics (32.9%), and Jews (3.7%). In our sample, 11% of respondents classified themselves as religious “nones.” Some people who classify themselves as having no religious preference also have high levels of religiosity; Vernon (1968) called these individuals “independents” rather than

“nones.” But the low levels of religious belief and practice among the “nones” in our sample suggest that they can be counted as “seculars” in Layman’s (2001, 345) sense.³ In our analyses, we included dummy variables for Roman Catholics and white evangelical Protestants, the two most theologically distinct of the major religious families active on the contemporary American political scene.

We operationalized *Religious Salience* as the sum of legislators’ responses regarding three facets of religion in their lives: church attendance, prayer, and “importance of religion.” These three measures together constitute a highly reliable index ($\alpha = .84$). The range of values for this index is 0 to 14, with a mean of 9.57 and standard deviation of 3.62. As Guth and Green (1993, 169) note, in the general population “high religiosity [salience] produces more conservative responses [positions], most strongly on moral and social issues.”

We conceptualized *Religious Advocacy* in network terms (Laumann and Knoke 1987), as the extent of contact between religious groups and legislators. We asked legislators, “Would you please name up to five (5) groups or organizations that are most likely to contact you on legislation regarding *abortion*?” We then determined the number of conservative religious and Roman Catholic groups named by each legislator. Higher levels of contact indicate that the legislator was subject to higher levels of religious advocacy. To be sure, there are mainline Protestant and other “liberal” defenders of abortion rights (Evans 1997), but in Wisconsin during the 1990s these groups either did not advocate on abortion legislation (consider the Wisconsin Conference of Churches) or were not organized for advocacy in the state (for instance, the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights).

Political and Demographic Factors. Party membership and personal characteristics are among the most consistently useful explanatory variables included in legislative voting studies. It is widely agreed that party is “the single strongest correlate of members’ voting decisions” (Davidson and Oleszek 1994, 364). On cultural issues more specifically, Democrats and Republicans at the mass level have moved further apart in recent years, and this rift is reflected in institutional politics (Abramowitz 1995; Adams 1997; Campbell and Davidson 2000; Haider-Markel 2001; Norrander and Wilcox 2001; Oldmixon 2005). Consequently, we included party in this analysis as a key explanatory variable. We included legislator partisanship as a dummy variable (Democrat = 1, Republican = 0), with the expectation that Democratic partisanship would produce lower levels of conservative voting. We also expected that legislators would be responsive to their districts; we therefore included constituency partisanship in the models,

operationalized as the percentage of the vote for the Democratic presidential ticket, Clinton and Gore, in 1996.

Our analysis also includes an array of demographic factors, such as *Age*, *Gender*, and *Educational Attainment*. These phenomena typically are included in vote analyses as proxies for personal ideology. At the mass level, age is commonly found to be positively related to conservatism, but the strength of this relationship varies by policy domain (for an overview, see Erikson and Tedin 1995). While abortion attitudes tend not to vary with life cycle events, there is a pronounced generational pattern: older cohorts of men and women express lower levels of support for abortion rights than do younger cohorts. An exception to this pattern appears among the generation of whites who came of age during the Reagan presidency. They express somewhat lower levels of support for abortion than previous cohorts who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s. Still, the Reagan generation is far more supportive of abortion than the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s cohorts (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992; see also Cook 1997). We expected this basic dynamic to hold true in the legislative arena, with older legislators expressing lower levels of support for pro-choice policies and liberalism, more generally.

Women tend to adopt more-liberal opinions on an array of issues. On questions of use of force and aggression, social welfare, and some civil rights issues, women in the aggregate tend to be more left-leaning than men (Erikson and Tedin 1995). On questions of abortion, however, men are marginally more supportive of abortion rights than are women, although this relationship varies with age and employment status, among other things (Cook 1997; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992). An abundance of scholarship explores gender distinctions in the legislative arena. Women legislators have been found to be more liberal than their male colleagues, but this pattern may be narrowing and may be a function of constituency effects (Vega and Firestone 1995; Welch 1985). Regardless of overall ideological distinctiveness, female legislators exhibit distinctive policy priorities that center around feminist issues (or women's issues) (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Swers 1998; S. Thomas 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991; Vega and Firestone 1995; but see also Reingold 2000). Controlling for the usual suspects, researchers have found that female legislators are more supportive of abortion rights than are their male colleagues (Oldmixon 2002; Schecter 2002). This trend is a departure from the mass-level pattern, and we expected similar results in Wisconsin, that is, we expected men to vote more conservatively and be less supportive of abortion access than their female colleagues would be.

Our model also controls for legislator educational attainment. Education generally has a liberalizing effect on economic, social, and political views (Wuthnow 1988). It has been shown to expose people to “a diversity of ideas” and is often associated with support for “civil liberties and political tolerance” (Cook 1997, 139). Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox (1992) argue that, among social phenomena, educational attainment is the strongest predictor of abortion attitudes. The relationship between educational attainment and pro-life attitudes is negative, “with each increasing year of education leading to more-liberal beliefs about abortion” (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992, 48). In our analysis, then, higher levels of education among legislators should be associated with increasingly liberal roll-call voting across the board and on abortion questions in particular.

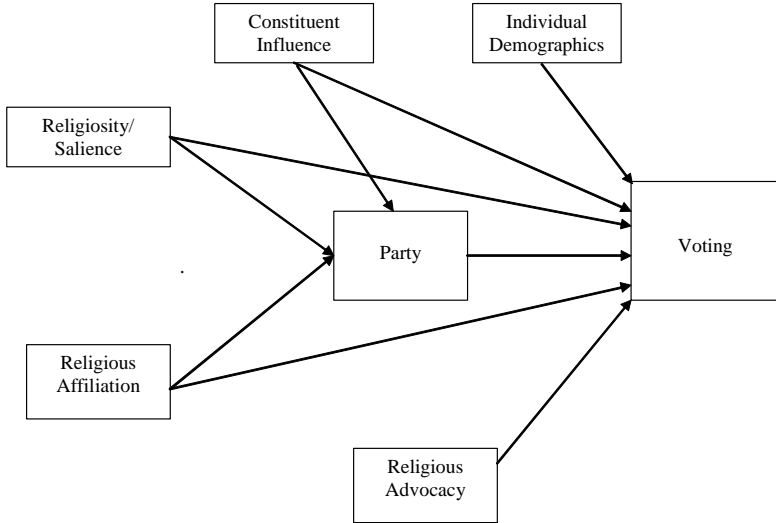
Socioeconomic variables are often included in analyses of economic policy because they approximate policy demand (Wald, Button, and Rienzo 2001). They make a useful proxy for constituency ideological orientations. We included *District Urbanism* in the models to tap socioeconomic status. In the model of ideological voting, we predicted urbanism to produce higher levels of liberal voting. Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox (1992) note that higher levels of socioeconomic status are associated with support for legalized abortions. What is more, because most abortion clinics, and therefore most abortions, are located in urban areas (Henshaw and Van Vort 1994), one might expect urban constituencies to be more supportive of permissive (or progressive, depending on one’s point of view) reproductive policies. Thus, we expected urbanism to produce legislator pro-choice voting. Urbanism data come from the *Wisconsin Legislative District Almanac* (Legislative Reference Bureau 1994).

Findings

Once we controlled for partisanship and personal demographics, we expected the more-nuanced measures of religion above and beyond affiliation to affect legislative voting. In particular, we expected conservative Protestants and those for whom religion is more salient to vote more conservatively, both directly and as mediated by Republican Party affiliation. We utilized linear structural models to test these expectations.

We estimated the following models using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS), an SEM program adopted by SPSS as an alternative to LISREL. Input to AMOS includes data and a hypothesized model; output includes individual parameter estimates as well as various fit indices. The hypothesized model for these analyses appears in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
Hypothesized Model



Note: All independent variables are assumed to be correlated.

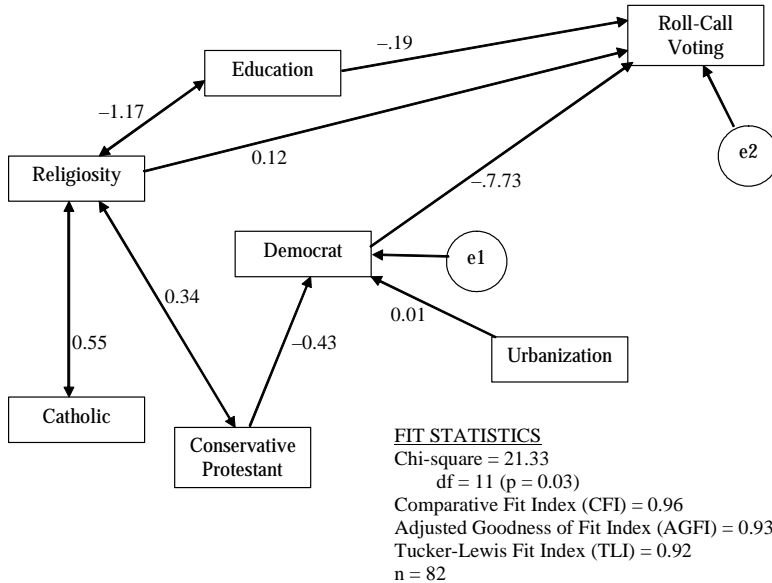
General-Voting Index

Figure 2 presents the standardized coefficients for the linear structural model that best fits the data on the general index of roll-call voting. Only significant relationships are included in the figure. The diagnostics indicate that the model performs robustly and that the independent variables significantly increase our ability to explain variation on the dependent variable.

Three phenomena exhibit significant and direct impacts on the ideological direction of roll-call voting. Among these phenomena, political party affiliation is the dominant influence. As expected, Democratic Party affiliation is negatively associated with conservative roll-call voting. Legislator education produces the second strongest direct influence on voting; legislators who are more highly educated vote more liberally, net of political party.

Even given these two strong influences, there are still interesting and significant relationships between the religious factors and voting. The model suggests that, although neither Catholic nor conservative Protestant affiliation directly affects the ideological direction of roll-

FIGURE 2
 AMOS Standardized Coefficients
 and Fit Indices for Roll-Call Voting



Note: Only statistically significant relationships are incorporated in the model and depicted above.

call voting, religious salience does have a direct, positive effect on conservative voting. When religion is salient—when it matters to a legislator on a personal level—religion may act as a filter through which the legislator views policy across domains. Religious affiliation indicates identification with a religiously informed worldview, but salience indicates a high level of commitment to that worldview. When legislators are committed to their religious worldview, they apply that worldview in their workplace, so to speak, and it informs their legislative decisions. Substantively, the effect is that salience produces higher levels of conservative roll-call voting.

Although neither of the indicators of religious affiliation are directly related to voting orientation, conservative Protestant affiliation has a mediated effect on voting through party affiliation. It is negatively related to Democratic partisanship, which is negatively related to conservative voting. Conservative Protestant identification, then, is

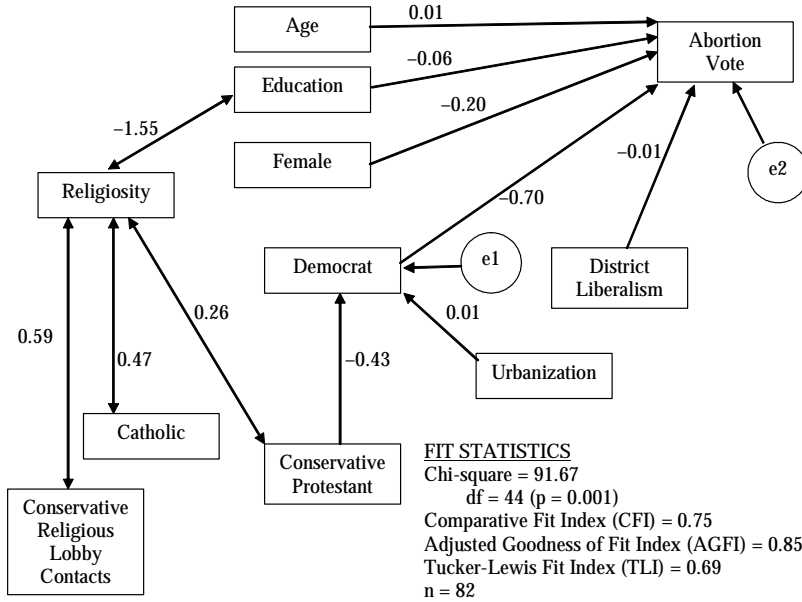
positively but indirectly related to policy conservatism. Moreover, the negative association with Democratic partisanship documents the conservative Protestant alignment with the Republican Party in the Wisconsin legislature. Indeed, this congruence reflects a national pattern of conservative Protestant alignment with the Republican Party that started with the Democratic Party's nomination of a Catholic for president in 1960, accelerated with the Democrats' embrace of a broad civil rights and social welfare agenda (Wald 1997, 220–22), and solidified with Republican nomination of Ronald Reagan for president in 1980. For its part, the Republican Party has gone out of its way to frame issues in a manner to attract conservative Christians to its base (Leege et al. 2002). The effect of Catholic identification on conservative roll-call voting is positive, although mediated by salience.

Abortion Voting

Abortion is one of the cultural issues that has a pride of place on conservative Protestant policy agendas. The issue has been at the center of religiously inspired political activism (O'Connor 1996), and abortion attitudes have been shown to affect popular voting (Abramowitz 1995). In the legislative arena, scholars have established the link between religious identification and abortion voting (Tatalovich and Schier 1993). Thus, one might reasonably expect the religious indicators to perform even better in the abortion model. Figure 3 addresses this expectation. It reports the results of the SEM analysis of roll-call voting on abortion issues. Here again, only significant relationships are included in the figure.⁴

Even more so than in the analysis of the general-voting index, political and demographic factors dominate the direct effects on abortion voting. Again, political party is the most significant influence, with Democratic partisanship negatively associated with pro-life voting. This finding is hardly a surprise. As Adams (1997) and Norrander and Wilcox (2001) point out, the gap between Republicans and Democrats on abortion is widening, not narrowing. And, at the mass level, voters who are pro-life tend to be Republican (Abramowitz 1995). The impact of partisanship on abortion voting is distantly followed by gender, education, and age. The directions of these relationships are as expected: women, as well as the more-educated and younger members of the legislature, are less likely to support restrictions on access to abortion. Furthermore, legislators from more-liberal districts (as measured by presidential voting) vote more liberally, reflecting the influence of their constituents.

FIGURE 3
 AMOS Standardized Coefficients
 and Fit Indices for Abortion Voting



Note: Only statistically significant relationships are incorporated in the model and depicted above.

None of the religious variables have a significant direct effect on abortion voting. Since the Catholic laity is divided over the issue of abortion, one should not necessarily expect Catholic legislators to be any more likely than other lawmakers to support restrictions on abortion. Conservative Protestant identification does have a mediated effect on abortion voting, by way of the conservative Protestants’ alignment with the Republican Party, an alignment once again evident in the model. Conservative Protestantism is negatively associated with Democratic partisanship, which is negatively associated with pro-life voting. Conservative Protestant identification, then, is positively (albeit indirectly) associated with pro-life voting.

The lack of a direct effect of any of the religion variables is the proverbial dog that didn’t bark, particularly when one considers that

salience exhibits a direct effect in the general model. The finding from the general-voting model suggests that religious salience produces a worldview that affects all kinds of attitudes among legislators, not only attitudes on hot-button moral issues. The finding in the abortion model, on the other hand, challenges the idea that abortion politics are primarily religious politics in the legislative arena. There are certainly religious undercurrents to this issue—the analysis bears this intuition out—but regardless of the religious undercurrents, abortion is an issue on which the Republican and Democratic parties have staked clear, opposing positions. This analysis suggests that, when abortion is considered in a majoritarian legislature, the issue is polarized along party lines. In this case, abortion-related roll-call voting appears to be more of a partisan issue than anything else.

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this research has been to identify, measure, and test the influence of three religious factors in legislative decision making and, in doing so, to render a more-complex understanding of the role of religion in the legislative arena. The results are mixed. In a general sense, it is clear that religion affects legislative decision making both directly and indirectly. This study allows us to ask, how? In the following discussion, we consider the comparative importance of each dimension of religion influence and offer some caveats about our work more generally.

Both the Meier and McFarlane (1993) and O'Connor and Berkman (1995) studies claim a direct, causal influence of organized religious advocacy on state abortion policy, but neither study directly measures the relationships between religious lobbying organizations and legislators. Following Laumann and Knoke (1987), we operationalized religious advocacy in network terms, as the extent of contact between religious groups and legislators. Using this more-direct measure, our analysis found no effect (direct or mediated) of religious advocacy group contact on abortion voting. The results of this analysis are therefore in line with recent studies that posit that interest group contact is more *reinforcing* than *forming* of legislators' voting (Wright 1996). That is, most interest group contact is with legislators who are already inclined to agree with the group's position. Interest groups do not expend their resources on stalwart opponents. And if they do, there appears to be little effect. More caution is in order, then, when discussing religious interest-group influence in the absence of direct measures of it.

With regard to the analysis of religious salience and religious affiliation, our findings are more equivocal and more interesting. Considering salience first, we note that the findings from the general-voting model suggest the power of Wuthnow's (1988) argument about the "restructuring of American religion." The model demonstrates that, independent of party or denominational affiliation, legislators for whom religion is more salient exhibit more-conservative voting patterns across policy domains. Stated differently, legislators who attend church and pray regularly and who acknowledge the importance of religion in their lives are more conservative than their colleagues who do not, or who do so at lower levels.

It is interesting to consider further the consequences of a situation in which religiosity is associated with political conservatism. In his address to the Democratic National Convention, then-Senate candidate Barack Obama asserted, "We worship an awesome God in the Blue States" (speech delivered at the Boston Fleet Center, July 27, 2004). We take no issue with that statement. But, in the current era, the religious world may be more and more divided between political conservatives who are conventionally religious and control the denominational hierarchies (cf. Ammerman 1990) and political liberals who opt out of conventional religiosity. Indeed, Hout and Fischer (2002) have documented that the percentage of political liberals and moderates who claim "no religion" in the General Social Survey has increased, while the percentage of political conservatives claiming "no religion" has not. This alignment may not be necessary, but it does appear to be the alignment embraced by the ideological bases of both parties.

Although salience is a more-important *direct* predictor of general roll-call voting, conservative Protestant affiliation works more consistently through political party affiliation (Layman 2001). Here one sees the great potential of the Christian Right's strategic reorientation to the state and local levels of politics as it bid "farewell to Capitol Hill" as the primary focus of its political advocacy (Moen 1992). Among the strategies pursued by the Christian Right to influence public policy at this level are the election of conservative Christians to influential decision-making positions and direct lobbying of policymakers. Party alignment may have become less important in the general population, but the two-party system remains deeply entrenched in legislative institutions. For example, D'Antonio and Tuch (1999) suggest that party affiliation has become *more* important in congressional voting over the past two decades. Aldrich and Rohde (2000, 2004) and Rohde (1991) argue that both partisanship and leadership strength within the House have solidified in the last decades, as the

Republican and Democratic parties have become internally homogeneous and externally polarized.⁵ Although there are tradeoffs in being beholden to one party—consider the common complaint of civil rights leaders that the Democratic Party takes them for granted—there may also be a political wisdom to the decision of the Christian Right leadership to seek the election of conservative Protestants to legislative office and to align themselves so closely with the Republican Party at lower levels of government.

Of course, some caveats and suggestions are in order. First, what can be made of the relatively modest influence of religious factors relative to political and demographic factors? Some observers might dismiss this influence as trivial, but any relationship between religious factors and legislative outcomes is noteworthy, since many of us would not expect to find such influence in a modern, complex, culturally pluralistic, and formally secular political organization. Also, the difference between legislation passing or failing is often a matter of a few votes. If religious factors can account for a few votes, then those factors can be socially significant indeed.

Second, isn't there more to public policymaking than roll-call voting? Although the roll-call vote is a definitive moment, it is still but one moment in the complex process by which public policy is formulated and implemented. An exhaustive analysis would obviously consider the drafting of legislation, committee work, revision, scheduling, and other legislative steps. Such an analysis might reveal that religious groups play a more-significant role before and after legislation is voted on.

Third, why concern ourselves with state-level politics? As society has grown more complex, so too have the political responsibilities of legislatures generally and state legislatures in particular. James Bryce's (1912, 545) comment in *The American Commonwealth* that state legislatures are "not high-toned bodies" is less true today than ever. The devolution of responsibility for issues such as welfare, health care, capital punishment, and abortion to the states under the "New Federalism" means that states will be legislating ever more important and complex issues into the future. Scholars must recognize this trend and take studies of the religious factors in the legislative arena beyond the federal government, which has been the focus of the few previous studies. This article seeks to contribute by example to this refocusing of attention.

Fourth and finally, why Wisconsin? The Wisconsin state legislature is but one of fifty state legislatures in the United States. Although every state clearly has its own political culture and traditions that shape

the making of public policy by the legislature, Wisconsin possesses some special characteristics that make it one of the better state legislatures to study if a scholar chooses to study only one. First of all, the Wisconsin legislature ranks twelfth out of fifty states in the level of professionalization, as measured by member's salary, staff, and time spent in session (Squire 1992). Second, the population of Wisconsin—its progressive heritage notwithstanding—is ideologically middling, ranking twenty-second out of forty-nine states in the extent of conservatism, as calculated from the percentage of the state's respondents who identified themselves as conservative in a series of surveys (Wright, Erikson, and McIver 1985). Finally, with regard to the overall impact of interest groups on public policy (as compared to the effects of other political institutions, such as the governor, political parties, and the bureaucracy), on a five-point scale ranging from dominant to subordinate, Wisconsin is one of eighteen states that falls in the middle (“complementary”) of the scale (Thomas and Hrebendar 1990). Thus, while we make no claim that the findings here are simply generalizable to other states, we feel comfortable that the findings are not heavily shaped by extremes of amateurism, ideology, or general interest-group strength or weakness.

In the end, we hope this research is suggestive enough to stimulate further research on other state legislatures and legislators, either individually or in comparison with one another. Furthermore, we hope more-extensive research will lead to the creation of larger datasets than the one analyzed in this article, thus allowing more-advanced statistical techniques to be applied when modeling these processes, rather than restricting the complexity of the models, as we have had to do here.

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APPENDIX
 Votes Included in the Dependent Variable:
 Index of Voting on Most Important Issues in 1995–96 Biennium

<i>Issue (Bill No.)</i>	<i>Description of Legislation</i>
State Budget (A.B. 150)	Authorization of the State's Biennial Budget, which includes such major policy initiatives as the reorganization of the Departments of Public Instruction and Natural Resources and the expansion of a school-choice pilot program to include religious schools.
Welfare Reform (A.B. 591)	Legislation overhauling Wisconsin's welfare system, implementing "Wisconsin Works" (W-2), a work-based, time-limited AFDC-replacement program.
Juvenile Justice (A.B. 130)	Revision of the juvenile justice code. Lowers the age of delinquency to age 10 and eliminates the right of juveniles to have a jury trial, among other reforms.
Tort Reform (A.B. 36)	Limits the amount someone can recover in a medical malpractice case for noneconomic damages caused by the negligence of a health care provider.
Stadium Financing (A.B. 1)	Creates a tax authority that has the power to tax five counties in Wisconsin in order to build a sports facility for the Milwaukee Brewers baseball club.
Crime: Chain Gangs (S.B. 563)	Authorizes the Department of Corrections to implement a "secure work program" (i.e., chain gangs).
Crime: Supermax Prison (A.B. 1018)	Increases bonding authority for a supermaximum security prison construction project by \$50 million.
Rural Issues (A.B. 13)	Strengthens the current trespass law. Under the bill, people are assumed to be trespassers unless they have the landowner's permission. Posting would no longer be required.
Abortion (A.B. 441)	Requires a 24-hour waiting period before a woman can obtain an abortion and requires abortion providers to provide the woman with certain information.
Transportation Budget (A.B. 557)	A comprehensive state transportation budget, which increases the gas tax by 3 cents per gallon, among other provisions.
Health Insurance (A.B. 545)	Authorizes tax-exempt individual employee medical savings accounts established by employers or self-employed persons with the difference between the cost of catastrophic and comprehensive health care coverage.
Mental Health (A.B. 244)	Expands the factors that are required to be considered in making protective placements ("involuntary commitment") to include cost-benefit analysis and recognition of limited funds.
Campaign Finance (A.B. 37)	Various changes to campaign finance law, including regulating "conduits."
Campaign Finance (S.B. 612)	Limits contributions to candidates for state or local office and limits independent expenditures.

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1. Two slight divergences are the underrepresentation of African Americans among the respondents (despite a special appeal to African American legislators) and the overrepresentation of legislators with graduate or professional degrees. African Americans composed 6.2% of the legislature when Yamane collected this data but made up only 2.5% of our sample. We would have liked to control for the effect of race on legislative voting, and even explore its significant connection to religiosity, but this development was not possible. Indeed, we do not believe it would have been possible even if all eight African American legislators had responded. This indicates a clear limitation of our data, but also of our focus on Wisconsin. As we will argue later, however, this research represents a first-ever attempt to employ multiple measures of religion in a statistical study of legislative decision making, and, as such, it is meant to offer basic models that can be elaborated both empirically and conceptually in future studies.

2. Some potentially relevant independent variables may have been excluded from the models. Unrestrained introduction of independent variables is impractical with the limited number of cases in our study and could present a problem for the estimator. Also, unreflective introduction of any and all possibly significant “control variables” into statistical models has the potential to generate more-biased (rather than less-biased) estimates (Lieberson 1985).

3. Adapting the National Election Study’s framework, Layman (2001) identifies ten religious traditions. In addition to the five named here plus seculars, Layman also creates categories for conservative nontraditionals (e.g., Mormons), liberal nontraditionals (e.g., Unitarian-Universalists), members of Eastern Orthodox churches, and members of other faiths (e.g., Muslim, Buddhist, Baha’i). None of these four categories are represented among the state legislators in our survey.

4. Although the fit statistics suggest that this model fits the data well, it does not perform as robustly as the model of voting on the general index. This weakness is likely due to the more-limited dependent variable.

5. We note, however, the debate among congressional scholars regarding the role of parties. See Krehbiel 1993 and Cox and McCubbins 1993.

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