

Religion in American Politics: A Case Study of the 2016 Presidential Elections

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Abstract

There are many dividing factors in the U.S. society including sex, race, economic capacity, politics etc. Apart from these components, religion is another indispensable variable essential in understanding U.S. society. In the U.S., religious influence is not limited to personal lives; it plays a significant role in U.S. politics at all levels ranging from state politics to Presidential Elections. Predominantly, the U.S. society is divided between believers and non-believers wherein the former have had a greater share in societal composition, but over time this ratio has been tilting in favor of non-believers. Hence, the changing dynamics and statistics of believers and non-believers in the U.S. will, this essay argues, certainly have an impact on future politics, especially Presidential Elections. This article, therefore, evaluates the role of religion in shaping political and civic life in the U.S., especially its contribution to the US Presidential Elections. More specifically, the article studies the role of religion in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections to argue that Christian Nationalism and faith-based organizations contributed to the victory of President Donald Trump in the 2016 elections.

Keywords: Christian Nationalism, Conservative, Abortion, Marriage Equality, Nones, Republican, Denominations

Introduction

Politics in the United States is influenced by many factors such as race, gender, class, social protection, and other constitutional issues including foreign policy, tax etc. Apart from these, religion has a significant place in shaping political outcomes.

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There are mainly two religious groups in the U.S.: believers who have faith in God and attend church and religious festivals and non-believers (Nones) who do not have an active affiliation with any religion. Recently, a considerable decline in believers has been witnessed in the U.S. Currently, only 65% of Americans (U.S. Citizens) are believers as compared to 78% in 2007 (America's Changing Religious Landscape, 2015), who adhere to their belief in God as well as attend church and religious festivals. Voting choices in the U.S., especially among believers, are influenced by their faith and religious doctrines, which ultimately generate an impact on electoral politics and outcomes (Robyn, Elizabeth, Larry, 2008).

Contrarily, the 2018 General Social Survey (GSS) report claimed a slight uptick in Evangelical Christians despite an increase in Nones. (Ryan, 2019). Similar findings were generated in the past by Pew Research Center (Religious Landscape Study, 2014).

Unaffiliated Make Big Gains Through Religious Switching; Catholics and Mainline Protestants Suffer Large Losses

Share of U.S. adults ...

	Raised in group %	Left group %	Entered group %	Currently in group %	NET change
Christian	85.6	-19.2	+4.2	70.6	-15.0
Protestant	50.2	-13.0	+9.4	46.5	-3.7
Evangelical	23.9	-8.4	+9.8	25.4	+1.5
Mainline	19.0	-10.4	+6.1	14.7	-4.3
Historically black	7.3	-2.2	+1.4	6.5	-0.8
Catholic	31.7	-12.9	+2.0	20.8	-10.9
Unaffiliated	9.2	-4.3	+18.0	22.8	+13.6

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

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Figure 1: Religious and Denominational Changes in the US

The figures in the 2018 GSS and Religious Landscape Study are correct, but analyzing Christians as a single group (without denominations) gives us a more accurate picture of the changing dynamics of believers and non-believers in the U.S.

Moreover, this helps in concluding that the numbers of believers are declining and non-believers are growing. The above data by Pew Research Center depicts the same results that except Evangelicals, all other Christian denominations are facing a negative net change, which implies fewer individuals are joining the denominations compared to those who are leaving the group and probably entering the Nones camp, which is at +13 net change. Similarly, contrary to 2018 GSS claims, from a broader historical perspective Evangelical Christians have also been following a downward trend since 1993. Therefore, we can deduce that Christianity as a whole is declining in the US.

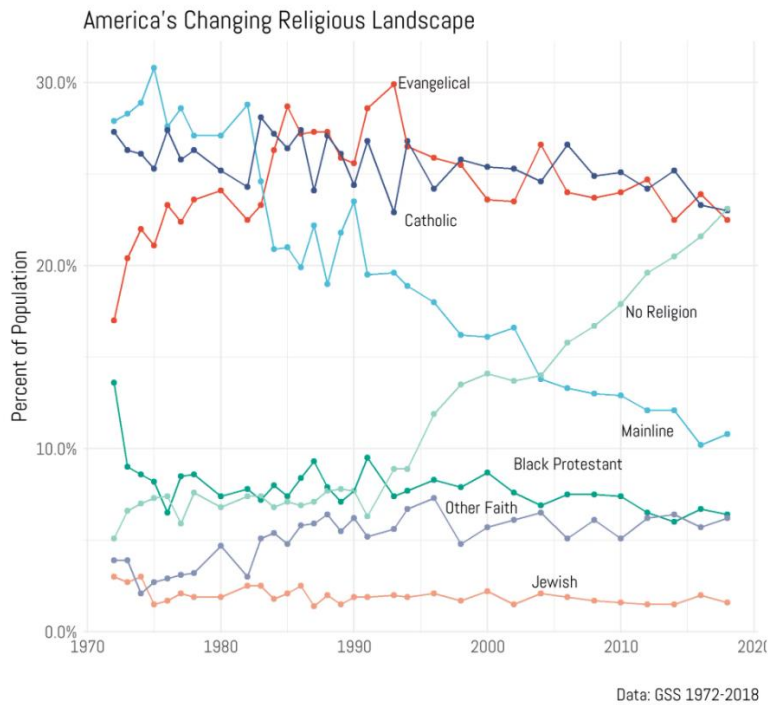


Figure 2: Change in Religious Landscape of the US

With a decline in believers, there is a surge in the opposite group (Nones). According to Cooperative Congressional Election Study, there is a 7.3% increase in Nones between 2008 and 2018 (Ryan, 2019). However, Tobin Grant, editor of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, pointed out: “The

“Nones,” may be growing faster because they pull from multiple faith groups not particularly from Christianity.” According to the Pew Research Center, Christian and Non-Christian faiths share 70.6% and 5.9% of the US population respectively (Pew Research Center). So even if Nones are coming from all religions, Christianity probably is the major affectee of increasing Nones. This can also affect the political campaigns based on Christian Nationalism and Christian votes.

In the past, the support of religious groups and voters brought multiple Presidential candidates, especially Republican, to the White House. Likewise, in the 2016 Presidential Elections, Donald Trump strategically used Christian Nationalism to attract votes from Evangelical Whites, Conservative Christians, and other Christian faith-based organizations which contributed immensely in bringing him to power. Thus, this article evaluates the role of religion in shaping political and civic life in the U.S., especially its contribution to the US Presidential Elections. More specifically, this article aims to study the role of religion in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections and the way Christian Nationalism and faith-based organizations contributed to the victory of President Donald Trump in the 2016 elections.

In pursuance of the objectives of the research, the following analytical approaches and methods have been used:

- ❖ Content analysis of Donald Trump’s speeches to capture how far and how frequently he used religious references in his speeches
- ❖ Content analysis of Donald Trump’s speeches to analyze how he expressed his faith publicly in his election campaign
- ❖ Analysis of the role of Christian Nationalism including faith-based organizations in the 2016 Presidential Elections
- ❖ Analysis of the religiously sensitive issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage during 2016 elections
- ❖ Voting data (outcomes) and other relevant data of the 2016 Presidential Election

Literature Review

In the United States, religion has been playing a significant role in determining the outcomes of elections at all levels. Since its inception particularly after the industrial revolution, there was an increase in church memberships, denominations, and religious activities in the US. People more often visited churches and religious festivals and believed in God (Second Great Awakening, n.d). But, in recent times, religious demographics of the U.S. are changing; non-believers (Nones) are increasing and believers are decreasing. According to the PEW Research Center, there has been a constant decline in the statistics of religious affiliations in the U.S. Similar research also highlighted that the percentage of people claiming affiliation to the Christian faith dropped from 78% to 70.6% between 2007 and 2014. There is a 5.9% increase in people practicing a religion other than Christianity (America's Changing Religious Landscape, 2015).

Along with other dividing lines such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, religious affiliations. played a leading role in electoral alignments in the U.S. For instance, in the 1940s, during and after the New Deal era, Catholics and Jews favored Democrats while Protestant Christians supported Republicans (Manza, Brooks, 1997).

The first chapter, "Consternation and Surprise: Religion and the 2004 Presidential Election" of John Green's book, *The Faith Factor How American Religion Influences American Election*, highlights how religious values and religiously sensitive issues were used by George W. Bush during his re-election campaign. In 2004, members of conservative religious groups strongly supported George W. Bush as they favored the Republican Party. They believed Republicans were believers and favoured values and doctrines as opposed to the Democrats who are less inclined towards the promotion of Christian values. Therefore, most religious denominations and churchgoers voted for Republican Party and vice versa. A typical description of this phenomenon was the following: [If you] want to know how Americans will vote next Election Day? Watch what they do

the weekend before—if they attend religious services regularly, they will probably vote for Republican [candidate] by a 2-1 margin. If they never go, they will for Democrat [candidate] by a 2-1 margin. Except for Born Again Christian, people with traditional practices and traditional beliefs voted for George W. Bush, whereas people with less religiosity and Nones voted for John Kerry (Green, 2011, p.1-21).

Likewise, Bradberry highlights how religion influenced the Presidential candidate choices in the general election of 2008 and 2012. He suggests that election candidates influenced religious voters in two ways: (i) by explicitly talking about their Christian faith and (ii) by talking about the issues which are closely related to Christian principles, doctrines, and values. Bradberry argues that religious voters in the Presidential Elections of 2008 and 2012 were more tilted towards those candidates who attended church and had a religious perspective. Voters from all religious denominations of the U.S. did not favor Mitt Romney as he was a Mormon and, therefore, not considered Christian in the U.S. The U.S. Christians and believers supported Rick Santorum due to his explicit opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage (Bradberry, 2016).

A commentary of the Institute of International Political Studies by J. Matthew Wilson also highlights the relationship between religion, voting behavior, and voter choices in the U.S. It shows that the religious division in the U.S. is higher and more intense than division based on gender and racial identity. During the 2008 Presidential Elections, people who seldom or never attended religious services (42% of all Whites) gave Barack Obama 58% of their votes; by contrast, Whites who attended religious services once a week or more (33% of all Whites) voted 73% for the Republican John McCain. In the Presidential Elections of 2012, the position on abortion and same-sex marriage was as important as tax policy in driving voter choice. In the same elections, Mitt Romney was contesting from the Republicans party, however, despite belonging to the party that gained support from religious voters, he could not attract many religious votes because his Mormon faith barred religious

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groups and religious voters from voiting for him. Firstly, because Mormons are not accepted as Christians. Secondly, the polls highlighted that 20% of Americans did not favor the idea of having a Mormon President. Black churches overwhelmingly supported Barack Obama apparently due to the same racial background. Collectively, in the 2012 elections moral values played a significant role in voting choice. This is expected to continue to shape U.S. electoral politics even if none of the candidates talks about moral values (Wilson, 2012).

In the U.S. people who regularly go to the church and attend religious ceremonies develop relationships with other members of the congregation, which helps in developing similar voting choices and political views. Parishioners of religion converse and discuss their social values, which conveniently translates into political action. Church leadership, Clergy, and Pastors are also involved in mobilizing and influencing voting choices of the people who visit their churches and religious ceremonies, and the people who attend church regularly have more tendency towards casting votes in elections (Reed, 2016).

Religion in 2016 Presidential Elections

Religion has a tremendous impact on U.S. politics and civic life. Religiously, the population in the U.S. is segregated into two main groups, Believers and Non-Believers (Nones). The former favor the Republicans due to their religiously conservative policies and their inclination toward religious values whereas the latter favor Democrats due to their progressive and liberal policies. Thus, voters in the U.S. can be bifurcated into Believers and Non-Believers, where both groups shape their voting preference on the political agenda, policies, and rhetoric of political parties. Pew Research Center survey finds that being an atheist remains one of the consequential liabilities that a Presidential candidate can have; half of the U.S. adults say they would be less likely to vote for a hypothetical Presidential candidate who does not believe in God while just 6% say they would be more likely to vote for a nonbeliever (Faith and the 2016 Campaign, 2016). Religious division of voters impacts both the routine political activities

and the outcomes of U.S. elections. Sometimes Presidential candidates deliberately manipulate religious affiliations of Americans to attract more votes.

According to Michael J. Herbert, during the 2016 Presidential Elections, majority of Donald Trump's supporters were people who attended church more than once a week, were older in age, and had less education on a scale from "less than high school" to "postgraduate or professional degree." "Born Again" Evangelicals had a strong inclination towards Donald Trump and Republicans, in general, because Republicans have conservative attitudes, policies, and approaches towards public affairs and social issues. But during primaries, Donald Trump was favored less in comparison with fellow primary candidates, Ted Cruz and Ben Carson (Herbert, 2017). Indeed, religion had a substantial share in shaping the 2016 Presidential election outcomes. Presidential candidates used religious identity and religiously sensitive issues to attract the votes of believers. Post-election analysis ascertained that, unlike the previous Presidential Elections, Donald Trump attracted around 52% of Catholic votes which contributed immensely to his victory. However, in 2008 and 2012 Catholic votes were 9% and 2% respectively (Schmalz, 2016).

According to an exit poll survey conducted by CNN, 75% of survey respondents belonged to Christians including Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, and other Christian denominations. Out of these four denominations 59%, 50%, 56% and 54% respectively voted for Donald Trump. The rest of the voters were divided between Hillary Clinton and other candidates. These religious voters church visits and other religious ceremonies weekly and more often monthly. It explicitly highlights how significantly religious voters impacted the Presidential Elections and led to the victory of Donald Trump.

In recent years, there has been an increase in both Non-believers (Nones) and people from other religious in the U.S. Both these groups of populations are in favor of Democrats, probably because of their progressive, non-conservative, and

liberal policies. In the 2016 Presidential Election, non-Christians and people with no religion favored Hillary Clinton than Donald Trump. Out of 3% of Jew respondents, 71% voted for Hillary Clinton; other religions comprised 8% of respondents of which 62% voted for Hillary Clinton; and people with no religions were 15% of the respondents' population of which 67% voted for Hillary Clinton. Non-conservative policies and outlook of Hillary Clinton were probably the reason for these non-Christian votes (CNN Exit-Poll Survey, 2016).

religion				religion			
	clinton	trump	other/no answer		clinton	trump	other/no answer
protestant 27%	36%	59%	5%	protestant 52%	39%	56%	5%
catholic 23%	46%	50%	4%	catholic 23%	46%	50%	4%
mormon 1%	28%	56%	16%	jewish 3%	71%	23%	6%
other christian 24%	43%	54%	3%	another religion 8%	62%	29%	9%
jewish 3%	71%	23%	6%	no religion 15%	67%	25%	8%
muslim 1%	n/a	n/a	n/a	24558 respondents			
other religion 7%	58%	32%	10%				
no religion 15%	67%	25%	8%				
24558 respondents							

Figure 3: Religious Voters in 2016 Presidential Elections
Source: CNN Exit-Poll Survey, 2016

Indeed, survey showed that just before the 2016 Presidential Election, 40% of Protestant Pastors had not decided on a candidate; 32% planned to vote for Donald Trump, and 19% planned to vote for Hillary Clinton. 27% of Pastors highlighted that personal character was important for being a Presidential candidate. 9 out of 10 Pastors agreed that it was the Biblical responsibility of the Christians to cast vote in the elections. Another survey showed that Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (13%) were more likely to select as per the candidate's "position on abortion" than those with attendance of 50-99 (8%) and 250+ (6%). Based on these statistics, it can be assumed that Donald Trump's anti-abortion rhetoric, Christian conservative attitude, and favor of Christian

nationalism attracted support from Christian religious leaders (Pastors), believers and Christian conservative groups (Pastor Views on 2016 Presidential Election- Survey of Protestant Pastors, 2016).

After the 2016 elections, many scholars tried to discern the motivation of Donald Trump voters. Many sociologists explained that economic anxieties or dissatisfaction, sexist attitudes toward women, anti-black prejudice, anti-Muslim and Islamophobic beliefs, concerns for “terrorism” or “refugees”, racist or xenophobic attitudes, concerns about Mexican immigrants, and support for a border wall with Mexico were the major motivators for Donald Trump's voters. These Christian Nationalist ideologies were the main reason for Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 elections.

Donald Trump in the 2016 election campaign had repeatedly enforced that the U.S. was losing its Christian heritage which attracted many votes from Christian denominations despite the fact that most of the Christian denominations were not in favor of Donald Trump due to his two divorces, investment in the casino business, and overall playboy character (Donald Trump at Liberty University, 2016). According to a survey by Pew Research Center, Donald Trump is the least religious among Republican Presidential candidates. The Republican Party itself recognized Donald Trump as its least religious candidate (Faith and the 2016 Campaign, 2016). Despite being labelled as the least Christian/religious person, Donald Trump successfully capitalized on Christian nationalist rhetoric for the 2016 elections (Whitehead, Perry & Baker, 2018). During the speech at Liberty University on January 18, 2016, Donald Trump emphasized that Americans needed to be united to protect Christians and Christianity. He also emphasized his Protestant faith and said that he was proud of it.

“But we are going to protect Christianity. And if you look at what’s going on throughout the world, you look at Syria where they’re, if you’re Christian, they’re chopping off heads. You look at the different places, and Christianity, it’s under siege. I’m a Protestant. I’m very proud of it.”

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Presbyterian to be exact. But I'm very proud of it, very, very proud of it. And we've gotta protect,

because bad things are happening, very bad things are happening, and we don't—I don't

know what it is—we don't band together, maybe. Other religions, frankly, they're banding

together and they're using it. And here we have, if you look at this country, it's gotta be 70 percent, 75 percent, some people say even more, the power we have, somehow, we have to

unify. We have to band together.... Our country has to do that around Christianity (applause)." (Donald Trump at Liberty University, 2016)

Moreover, at Oral Roberts University, Trump announced that,

"There is an assault on Christianity.... There is an assault on everything we stand for, and we're going to stop the assault" (Justice & Berglund 2016).

On August 11, 2016 Donald Trump during this meeting with Pastors in Florida said,

"You know that Christianity and everything we're talking about today has had a very, very tough

time. Very tough time.... We're going to bring [Christianity] back because it's a good thing. It's

a good thing. They treated you like it was a bad thing, but it's a great thing" (Donald Trump Remarks in Orlando, Florida, 2016).

Moreover, on September 3, 2016 during a visit to Great Faith Ministries International church (Detroit, MI) Donald Trump said that,

“Now, in these hard times for our country, let us turn again to our Christian heritage to lift up the soul of our nation” (Donald Trump Remarks in Detroit, 2016).

Apart from these statements, Donald Trump also criticized Hillary Clinton claiming that if she was elected as President, she would make America Godless, which would potentially lead to an apocalyptic future. Through these statements, Donald Trump successfully developed a strong relation with Christian religious groups and attracted many religious voters on the day of polling (Whitehead, Perry & Baker, 2018).

Using Christian Nationalism and faith-based rhetoric and statements, Donald Trump got 81% of the White Conservative Evangelical votes. In addition, the faith-based leaders, particularly Pastors of the American Renewal Project (ARP), strongly campaigned for Donald Trump in the 2016 elections. Right before the elections, ARP spent \$9 million in Florida, Ohio and North Carolina within 60 days to get votes for Donald Trump (Johnfea, 2019).

In an event in June 2016 called “A Conversation with Donald Trump” in New York, Donald Trump met more than 1000 Pastors and above 500 conservative faith leaders. The meeting was organized to develop a cohesive relation between Evangelical Pastors and Donald Trump by answering the questions of Pastors and other faith leaders. During the meeting, he also asked Pastors and faith leaders to motivate people to vote in the upcoming election. Although Donald Trump did not push Pastors to vote for himself during the meeting, he developed a cordial relation with faith-based leaders and gained their support (Brim, 2016).

Voting and the Issues of Abortion and Same Sex Marriage

Donald Trump’s anti-abortion position also helped him in gaining popular support and votes in the 2016 elections. He explicitly manifested himself as an anti-abortion advocate by repeatedly speaking against abortion during election campaigns. Donald Trump said abortion is not acceptable

except in the case of rape, incest, or when a woman's health is in danger. By having abortion, women are endangering their health and giving themselves punishment. In addition, he intended to defund Planned Parenthood because it was also being used for abortion purposes. Republicans promoted the right of an unborn child and asked for non-infringement of these rights in any circumstances even in the case of incest, rape, or the health of the mother (David, 2016). However, on April 21, 2016, Trump said that he will change the Republican platform by opposing abortion with exceptions for rape, incest, and the life of the mother. On March 30, 2016, he said: "There has to be some form of punishment" for the women "if the abortion is [a] legal and criminal offence" (Donald Trump presidential campaign, 2016/Abortion, 2016). According to a Gallop survey, one in five Americans, say abortion is a key voting issue for them (Saad, 2016). Furthermore, the PEW research survey suggests that fewer than 45% of voters are sensitive to the issue of abortion, which is important for their voting choices (Top voting issues in 2016 election, 2016).

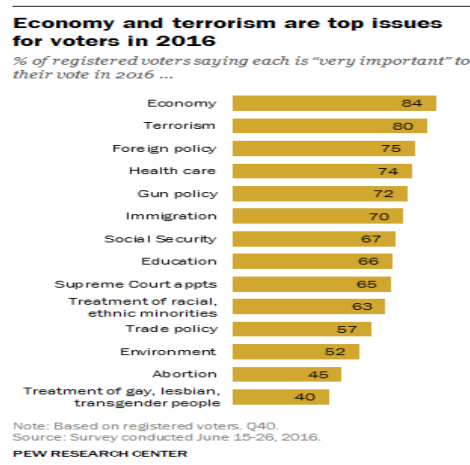


Figure 4: Preferential Issues in 2016 Presidential Elections

Source: Pew Research Center

Moreover, voting preferences are also guided by same-sex marriage and lesbian rights as a national issue. In the 2016

general elections, the issue of same-sex marriage influenced voter choices. Although it was not the main catalyst, it still influenced voters' choice. It is validated in the above graph which highlights that 40% of the voters say that the treatment of gays, lesbians, and transgenders does impact their voting choice. Donald Trump explicitly opposed same-sex marriage and showed the intention to invalidate the same-sex marriage decision. He said,

“Strongly Consider” Appointing Judges To Overturn Same-Sex Marriage Decision” (Donald Trump: Opposes Nationwide Marriage Equality, n.d).

Furthermore, in another statement Trump said,

“I Would Be Rescinding A Lot Of The Executive Orders [Obama’s] Done...The One Good About Executive Order, The New President, If He Comes In, Boom, First Day, First Hour, First Minute, You Can Rescind Them.”

Throughout the election campaign, Donald Trump overwhelmingly contended same-sex marriage. However, during an interview later in 2017, he stated that he had no intention and plan to reverse same-sex marriage or gay rights as those issues are settled by the Supreme Court whose decision he will accept (Wilstein, 2017). The Executive Order for legalizing same-sex marriage was passed by former President Barack Obama (Donald Trump: Opposes Nationwide Marriage Equality, n.d).

Christian Faith-Based Organizations

Christian faith-based organizations also played a significant role in mobilizing people for voting in the 2016 Presidential Elections. These organizations overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump in the elections and even mobilized people in favor of Donald Trump.

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United in Purpose

United in Purpose (UiP) was established by Dallas in 2016 to mobilize churchgoers for voting in elections. Dallas has the support of thousands of conservative churches, pro-life, pro-family individuals, and government officials.

UiP's Pastor-focused initiative, Project 75, aimed at "mobilizing 75% of church members to vote. The program features a Church Voter Lookup tool, which promises to "run your church database all at once." It provides reports on what percentage of a congregation is registered to vote and what percentage voted in the last election. After each election, they provide follow-up reports to track progress. UiP was at the epicenter of a dense web of faith-based initiatives aimed at bringing out conservative Christians for Trump and Pence. United in Purpose helped organize a big meeting with around 1000 Evangelicals' Pastors in June 2016 by the Name of "A Conversation with Donald Trump and Ben Carson," which was attended by more than 500 conservative leaders.

Furthermore, under the Christian Nationalism rubric, Donald Trump used the slogan "Make America Great Again" against the notion that America had been disintegrated and had lost its values under the administration of Democratic Presidents, particularly Barak Obama. Issues like terrorism, violent extremism, and illegal immigration needed rectification to restore the dignity, values, and credibility of the American people, American land, and American culture. "Make America Great Again" was written and performed for President Trump at the "Celebrate Freedom" concert by the choir of the First Baptist Church of Dallas on July 1, 2017. It was registered immediately with Church Copyright Licensing International, a legal clearinghouse for worship music (Whitehead, Perry & Baker, 2018). During his interview with Christian Broadcasting Network, Donald Trump said it was the last chance for Republicans to win and for U.S. citizens to protect their Christian heritage. He stated,

“If we don’t win this election, you’ll never see another Republican and you’ll have a whole different church structure ... a whole different Supreme Court structure” (Pengelly, 2016).

My Faith Votes

My Faith Votes is a non-partisan movement that motivates, equips and activates Christians in the U.S. to vote in elections to transform their communities and influence their nation with Biblical truths. My Faith Votes highlights that for years Christians have been told a lie that faith is a private matter, and it should not influence the voting behaviour and priorities of the citizens. With this false conviction, 25 million Christians registered to vote, did not vote in Presidential Elections, and as many as 65 million Christians did not vote in local elections. My Faith Votes was engaged in mobilizing Christian voters to cast their votes for the Presidential Election of 2016. For this purpose, My Faith Votes had launched an extensive mobilization campaign of 23 public service announcements (PSAs) for television and a series of 12 radio PSAs. The television PSAs was broadcast in an estimated 110 million U.S. households between 40 to 60 times daily, whereas radio PSA was played by 205 stations in 29 states (TV and Radio Campaign to Mobilize the Christian Votes, 2016).

My Faith Votes and United in Purpose jointly organized an event in June 2016 named “Conversion with Donald Trump,” an indicator that this organization supported Donald Trump during the elections and developed a cordial relation between Donald Trump and Pastors to mobilize people to cast their votes for Donald Trump. In 2016, Ben Carson was selected as national chairman of My Faith Votes. Initially, he was not in favor of Republican candidates but later he explicitly turned in favor of Donald Trump. During the primaries, he said: “People who think Donald Trump would be the worst thing that ever happened ... you make a really big mistake by trying to thwart the will of the people” (Kopan, 2016).

American Renewal Project

American Renewal Project is a group of Pastors of around 100,000 working and training faith leaders to run for public office. During 2016 to 2018, ARP tried to train 1000 Pastors to run for public office (Conlin, 2015). ARP Pastors intended to contest for the elections themselves but later refrained from political participation and supported Donald Trump for the 2016 U.S. elections. During 60 days before the general elections, ARP spent \$9 million in six battleground states, including some big prizes like Florida, Ohio and North Carolina (Johnfea, 2019).

Ku Klux Klan (KKK)

Ku Klux Klan is a White supremacist organization advocating for restoring White supremacy in the country. The organization was founded in the last quarter of the 19th century, and it is more active and prevalent in the Southern United States. KKK uses coercive means against other racial groups especially coloured Americans to promote and establish White supremacy. In the 2016 elections, KKK extended their support for Donald Trump because of his conservative religious policies. KKK endorsed their support to Donald Trump through the KKK newspaper by stating that America became great because it was a white, Christian republic. KKK former leader David Duke of Louisiana declared his support to Donald Trump. He said that White people were facing existential threats in America, and they should be protected from the native people of America. David Duke further stated that he heard echoes of his views in Donald Trump's rhetoric of "Making America Great Again". However, Donald Trump's campaign spokesman Steven Cheung rejected the support of KKK and said: "Mr. Trump and the campaign denounces hate in any form. This publication is repulsive, and their views do not represent the tens of millions of Americans who are uniting behind our campaign" (Zargham, 2016).

Project Blitz

Project Blitz is a coalition of Christian rights groups comprising the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, the National Legal Foundation, and the Wall Builders Pro-Family Legislators Conference. This coalition was formed by Randy Forbes to promote the free exercise of Judeo Christian values, to bring back Christianity into public affairs, and to make the U.S. a Christian nation. It operates by another name, "Freedom for All." During the 2016 election, the Project Blitz coalition extended their support to Donald Trump because of their shared goals of opposition to same-sex marriage and Donald Trump's intention to reverse the related laws to bring back the Christian ways of marriage. One of the objectives of this coalition was to undermine LGBTQ rights (Project Blitz, 2017).

Conclusion

Religion and Christianity, in particular, played a fundamental role in the 2016 Presidential Elections. It was one of the major factors which drove Donald Trump to victory. His entire political campaign and success in the 2016 elections were driven by Christian Nationalism which was used to gain Presidential office. Trump had frequent meetings with Pastors and Christian activists, and he visited many churches and attended various congregations to attract Evangelical voters. Religious voters voted for Donald Trump because they believed that U.S. Christian Nationalism and Christian identity were facing a threat and Donald Trump was a hope to revive Christian values and principles back in the society and state affairs. Other factors which contributed to the victory of Donald Trump were class-based anxieties, sexism, anti-black animus, xenophobia, and Islamophobia, but these factors were also empirically linked with Christian Nationalism and ideology. Many of Donald Trump's voters believed bringing him to the office was God's plan to revive Christianity in America. They also believed if he did not serve God's purpose, he will be dispensed by God.

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Like the 2016 elections, believers especially Evangelicals Christians supported Donald Trump in the 2020 elections, but it was not enough to make him victorious. In addition, religious and political landscape across the United States has been changing. People are moving from conservative religious views to more progressive thoughts and approaches. According to the PEW research center's survey between 2018 and 2019, there is a continuous decline in Christianity and religiosity in the United States. People are moving towards more liberal and progressive attitudes. This survey showed that 65% of American adults declared themselves Christians, which is much less than in 2007 when 77% of adults professed that they were Christian followed by 71% in 2014. It shows a continuous decline in Christianity in the U.S. and a rise in religiously unaffiliated people. Another survey highlighted that the religiously unaffiliated population is increasing gradually as per the following figures: 16% in 2007, 17% in 2009, 23% in 2014, and 26% in 2018/19 (In U.S Decline of Christianity, 2019).

Furthermore, in the 2016 elections, Donald Trump made it to the White House with the support of Evangelical Christians and Catholics, but in the 2020 elections, this support dropped significantly. It was verified in a study organized by the PEW research center in October 2020 which showed Evangelical support for Donald Trump reduced significantly (PEW Research Center October 2020). George Floyd incident might have further broken down Black Protestants' support for Donald Trump in 2020. Shift in Donald Trump's conservative views regarding same-sex marriage further fueled the fire and pushed Evangelical Christians to withdraw their support for Donald Trump. Discontinued support from Evangelicals, Catholics, conservative groups and other Christian denominations minimized Donald Trump's chances for reelection.

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