

# Social Conservatism: Dead or Alive?

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## Abstract

Social conservatism and classical liberalism are two legs of the three-legged stool that is modern conservatism. However, the two have not always existed amicably together within the movement, but instead fought for prominence, with social conservatism often being told to take a back seat to the more pertinent issues regarding the economy. This paper seeks to test the validity of the claim that social issues do not significantly impact elections. Three case studies were taken of the 1980, 1992 and 2004 elections. The effect of social and economic issues in mobilizing Republican and Independent voters to vote Republican in each election was then analyzed using polling data from those years. While there were mixed results regarding the impact of social issues as the primary motivation for voter choice, this study does support the assertion that social conservatives are the Republican Party's most loyal constituents and thereby should not be ignored.

## Introduction

“There is simply no scientific or mathematical formula that defines conservatism. Moreover, there are competing voices today claiming the mantle of ‘true conservatism’ ... To put it succinctly: Conservatism is a way of understanding life, society, and governance.”<sup>1</sup> First articulated by Barry Goldwater in his book *The Conscience of A Conservative* (1960)<sup>2</sup>, the conservative movement is a fusion of traditionalism, anti-communism, and classical liberalism that reveres the Constitution and the individual. In the 1970s, however, sub-sections of the original three components began to arise in the movement, one of the most influential being social conservatism or the New Right. This group and its leaders, while generally sharing the foreign policy and economic perspectives of other conservatives, became primarily known and concerned with social issues such as “abortion, school prayer, pornography, drug use, crime, sexual deviancy, the vulgarization of mass entertainment and more.”<sup>3</sup> Identifying with this subgroup are organizations such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition<sup>4</sup>. Since the rising influence of the New Right, however, there has been tension within the movement between the social conservatives and classical liberals for prominence. Most recently, many conservatives have argued that social issues are too divisive and therefore should be mitigated. Social conservatives, on the other hand, claim that they have the ability to motivate a powerful and necessary constituency and therefore should not be ignored.

This paper seeks to analyze the strength of social issues in mobilizing republican voters in elections. More specifically, data regarding social issues and voter turnout for the elections of 1980, 1992, and 2004 is analyzed to test the validity of claims that social issues were either

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<sup>1</sup> Mark R. Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2009); 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2008); 319-321.

<sup>3</sup> George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*; 558.

<sup>4</sup> George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*; 558.

significant or insignificant in affecting votes. In the case of the 1980 and 2004 election, many journalists, scholars and political analysts claimed that social issues were paramount in the election of the Republican presidents. In the case of the 1992 election, these same sources claimed that social issues were negligible and that economic issues primarily motivated the elections. In testing the validity of these claims, this paper seeks to determine whether a strong stance on social issues is in fact necessary for a Republican candidate to be successful in the presidential election. Is there some validity to the claims by classical liberals that social issues can be marginalized or are the social conservatives correct in asserting that the conservative movement cannot ignore social issues?

## **Background**

In 1975, Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips, John Dolan and Kevin Phillips began to actively mobilize the New Right<sup>5</sup>. Richard Viguerie, who raised most of the money for the movement, has been called the Godfather of the New Right<sup>6</sup>. Paul Weyrich was its chief strategist and Kevin Phillips was the first to label social conservatives as the New Right<sup>7</sup>. They were primarily motivated by outrage in reaction to President Ford's decision to appoint Nelson Rockefeller, archnemesis to conservatives, as his Vice President and the constant choice of Republicans to put party before principle<sup>8</sup>. Together, these men were ambitious and aggressive and they had four things in common:

“technical ability in practical politics, mass media, and direct mail; a willingness to work together; a commitment to put political philosophy before political party; and a conviction that ‘we had the ability to win and to lead America’.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); 184.

<sup>6</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 185.

<sup>7</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 184-185.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 183.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 184.

They also claimed to be more concerned with issues such as abortion, gun control, busing, ERA and other social issues rather than capital gains taxation or natural gas deregulation<sup>10</sup>. The movement was clearly religious in objective, language, and membership. In fact, one of its most powerful constituencies was the Christian Right, which consisted of fundamentalist Christians who had been alienated by Carter and his attacks on the tax-exempt status of Catholic schools<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, unlike past movements that were essentially rather elitist, they were focusing on mobilizing constituents of the middle class.

However, from the beginning, there were tensions between the New Right and the Old Right. The Old Right was more concerned with economic issues such as tax reform and balancing the budget as well as maintaining party cohesiveness. The New Right, conversely, even considered starting its own third party, the American Independent Party (AIP)<sup>12</sup>. However, when Reagan would not agree to run for the party and a 1976 convention in Chicago was a dismal failure, leaders of the movement abandoned that idea<sup>13</sup>. Ultimately, Reagan needed the manpower of the New Right, who had been immensely successful in its grassroots efforts and forming many new powerful organizations such as the National Conservative Political Action Committee, to win in 1980:

From the end of November 1979 through July 1980, the Moral Majority and other Christian organizations registered 2.5 million new voters. They would become to the Republican Party what blacks have been to the Democrats: an indispensable part of a winning coalition.”<sup>14</sup>

While the exact impact of the New Right on past elections has been somewhat debated and will be discussed in greater detail later on, a reluctance amongst Republican elites to address social issues began to manifest itself in the 1990s, as evidenced by the Contract with America.

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<sup>10</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 184.

<sup>11</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 197.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 190.

<sup>13</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 190.

<sup>14</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 199.

Newt Gingrich, who spearheaded the campaign, produced a platform that social conservatives such as Weyrich complained was primarily economic<sup>15</sup>. Social issues such as abortion, school prayer, parental choice, and others were purposely omitted so as not to polarize public reaction and support<sup>16</sup>. While social conservative organizations such as the Christian Coalition, Free Congress Foundation, and Moral Majority generally endorsed the document, some were rather unenthusiastic about it. The “dirty little secret,” claims Rob Patterson, “is that social conservatives can be fully trusted to be economically conservative as well, but economic conservatives are unreliable on social issues.”<sup>17</sup> Consequently, while conservatives had won the war against communism and made strides in economic policies, it was obvious that the movement had been losing the war for American culture. Some, such as Ramesh Ponnuru, have even asserted that the New Right, blamed for Bush’s defeat in 1992 and the loss of House seats in 1998, often serves as a scapegoat for the Republican Party<sup>18</sup>. Ultimately, the decision to omit many vital social issues from the Contract with America led to a fierce debate among economic and social conservatives regarding the proper role of government in reversing America’s moral decline<sup>19</sup>.

This debate on the importance of social issues has only intensified in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the rise of the Tea Party, which is primarily focused on economic issues although many of its members are also socially conservative<sup>20</sup>, as well as the reluctance of many Republican elites to discuss social issues, social conservatives have begun to feel neglected. “Even George W.

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<sup>15</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 297.

<sup>16</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 298.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Patterson, "Fiscal Conservatism Is Not Enough: What Social Conservatives Offer the Party of Lincoln," *The Family in America*, Spring 2010: 121.

<sup>18</sup> Ramesh Ponnuru, "Scapegoating the Social Right," *National Review Online*, 2011, <http://nrd.nationalreview.com/article/?q=YTk3NTUxY2IxYmJkNjhhZjMyYzhhYzg1YjU1ZTkWZTY=> (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 298.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Bell, "A Big Tent on the Right," *The Weekly Standard*, September 2010, 2010: 1-3.

Bush, the most influential and effective ally of social conservatives in national politics since Ronald Reagan, looks uncomfortable discussing such issues as abortion and same-sex marriage,” claims Jeffrey Bell<sup>21</sup>. Kristan Hawkins, a writer for *Human Events*, adds that even staunch pro-life politicians have publically supported a truce on social issues<sup>22</sup>. However, despite concerns by some over the future of social conservatism and the recent call by many politicians to avoid or marginalize social issues, Bell, Hawkins, Ponnuru, David Limbaugh and others all argue that doing so would be a grave error on behalf of the party. Limbaugh calls social conservatives the most motivated coalition within the movement<sup>23</sup>. Ponnuru, while not denying that social conservatism repels some voters and could benefit from better spokesmen, also asserts that the movement brings in more voters than it repels<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, he claims that the demographic the party may be attempting to attract by downplaying social issues would not vote Republican either way due to their proclivity towards government programs<sup>25</sup>. Finally, Jeff Bell asserts:

“Social conservatism is the only mass-based political persuasion that fully believes in the core ideas of the American founding. It has taken over that role from parties, professions, and ideologies that used to perform it, and as a result it is touching a deep chord with millions of American voters.”<sup>26</sup>

## Methodology

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Bell, "Alive and Kicking," *The Weekly Standard*, December 24, 2007: 1-3.

<sup>22</sup> Kristan Hawkins, "A Caution to the GOP," *Human Events*, November 5, 2010, <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?print=yes&id=39761> (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> David Limbaugh, "Potential GOP Fissures," *Human Events*, February 8, 2011, <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?print=yes&id=41674> (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Ramesh Ponnuru, "Scapegoating the Social Right," *National Review Online*, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Ramesh Ponnuru, "Scapegoating the Social Right," *National Review Online*, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Robert W. Patterson, "Fiscal Conservatism Is Not Enough: What Social Conservatives Offer the Party of Lincoln," *The Family in America*, Spring 2010: 121.

The cumulative American National Election Study (ANES) 1948-2004 was used as the primary source for all raw data<sup>27</sup>. This data consists of a large set of variables that measure the demographic, partisanship, ideology, voter turnout and more of respondents of the last half-century. The four questions regarding ideology that will be focused on are shown in Table 1. For the purpose of this study, abortion and religion will be focused on in regards to social issues and the economy and personal finance will be focused on in regards to economic issues.

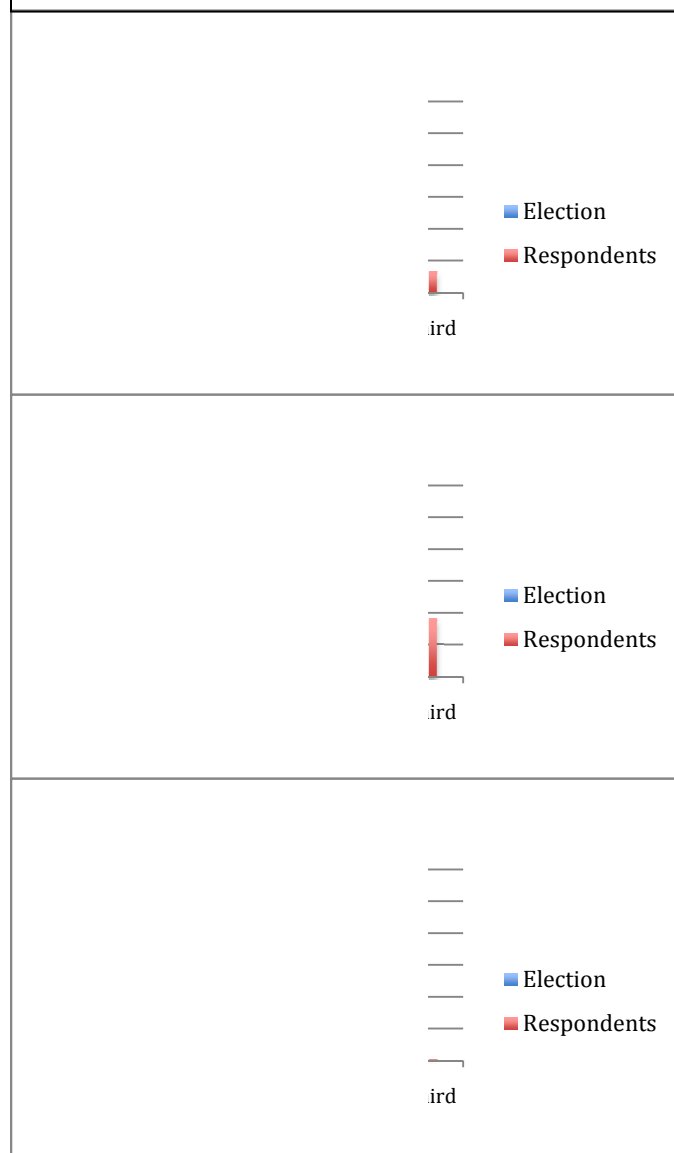
Table 1

| <b>ABORTION</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can just tell me the number of the opinion you choose.   |   |
| 1. By law, abortion should never be permitted  | 3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established. |
| 2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger.   | 4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice   |
| 9. DK; other   |   |
| <b>RELIGION</b>  |   |
| (If Religion is Important:) Would you say that (1996-LATER: Would you say your) religion provides some guidance in your day-to-day living, quite a bit of guidance, or a great deal of guidance in your day-to-day living (1996-LATER: "life")?  |   |
| 1. Some  | 3. A great deal   |
| 2. Quite a bit   | 5. Religion not important   |
| <b>ECONOMY</b>   |   |
| How about (1996-LATER: Now thinking about) the economy (1990,1994-later: in the country as a whole)? Would you say that over the past year the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed about the same or gotten worse? (IF BETTER:) Would you say much better or somewhat better? (IF WORSE:) Would you say much worse or somewhat worse? |   |
| 1. Much better   | 4. Somewhat worse   |
| 2. Somewhat better   | 5. Much worse   |
| 3. Stayed same   |   |
| <b>PERSONAL FINANCIAL WELL BEING</b>   |   |
| We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you [and your family living here] are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago?   |   |
| 1. Better Now  | 3. Worse Now  |
| 2. Same (2004: Volunteered)  |   |

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/series/3/studies/8475?archive=ICPSR&sortBy=7>



Figure 1: Comparison of actual election data &amp; study data



While these are not the only social and economic issues that influence voters, questions on the subjects were chosen because all of them had been asked, with exactly the same wording, for the 1980, 1992, and 2004 elections. The responses to these questions were analyzed using the SDA Frequencies/Cross-tabulation Program in compliance with excel<sup>28</sup>. The ANES series was chosen both for its breadth of data, which allows for accurate comparison of the same measurements in all three elections, as well as accuracy in representing voter turnout. As demonstrated in Figure 1<sup>29</sup>, the percentages of voters who voted for each

candidate in the 1980, 1992 and 2004 elections closely mirrors the outcome of the popular vote for the actual elections, although democratic voters tend to be slightly overrepresented.

For each case study, the goal is to determine the effect of social and economic issues on voter turnout and ultimately determine their significance in Republican presidential campaigns.

<sup>28</sup> <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin32/hsda?harcsta+nes2004c>

<sup>29</sup> actual election data from: <http://www.uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?f=0&year=1980>;  
<http://www.uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?f=0&year=1992>;  
<http://www.uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?f=0&year=2004>

In order to do so, first each question was measured for the responses of Republican and Independent voters. Democrat voters are omitted from this study because while some may at times defect to the opposing party in voting, this does not happen often enough to be considered statistically significant to analyze for the purposes of this study. Independents, on the other hand, are known to be swing voters, or voters that can fluctuate from party to party depending on their current standing on issues they consider important. In fact, because hard-line Democrats and Republicans are usually known to be dedicated to voting down party lines, Independents often make elections.

The positions of these two groups on each issue are then calculated utilizing SDA. Afterwards, those who took a stand that aligned with the position of the Republican candidate in that election, which will be identified separately in each case study, are analyzed to see if they voted for the candidate. The data retrieved by SDA is then also compared to the voting preferences of those who did not agree with the party or candidate position, which is also calculated through SDA manipulations. Ultimately, this method seeks to determine whether certain issues motivated voters to vote for the Republican candidate. If a group of respondents generally agreed with a policy or campaign platform of the candidate, but did not vote for them, then that indicates that this particular issue was not important in influencing voter turnout. Conversely, if agreement with an issue causes respondents to vote for the candidate, than that indicates that this issue is significant in affecting voter turnout.

Additionally, as a second step of analysis, issue prioritization polls, in which respondents determine the most important issue for the country during the time of the election, are presented and analyzed for all three elections. For the 1980 and 1992 election, this data is taken from the ANES comprehensive study 1948-2004, but for the 2004 election this data is taken from the

SETUPS: Voting Behavior: The 2004 election<sup>30</sup>. The questions that were asked are shown in Table 2. All data is analyzed using the same SDA program. In each case, the importance of issues was ranked by the percentage of respondents that felt each was most important. Next, the voter turnout for each of the top 3-4 issues was calculated using SDA. This serves as a complimentary test to the previous method, both of which are ultimately looking to determine the influence of certain issues on mobilizing voters to vote Republican in the respective presidential elections.

| Table 2. ISSUE PRIORITIZATION  |  |
|--|--|
| 1980   |  |
| Q: As you well know, the government faces many serious problems in this country and in other parts of the world. What do you personally feel are the most important problems, which the government in Washington should try to take care of? |  |
| 01. AGRICULTURAL   |  |
| 02. ECONOMICS; BUSINESS; CONSUMER ISSUES   | (Includes foreign investment, tariffs/protection of U.S. industries, international trade deficit/balance of payments, immigration, interstate commerce/transportation; does not include unemployment [09], defense spending [03], foreign [03] or government spending on domestic social welfare [09]) |
| 03. FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEFENSE   | (Includes: foreign aid, defense spending, the space program; does not include: international trade deficit [02])   |
| 04. GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONING   | (Not "the economy" [02])   |
| 05. LABOR ISSUES   | (Not unemployment [09])  |
| 06. NATURAL RESOURCES  |  |
| 07. PUBLIC ORDER   | (Includes: crime, drugs, civil liberties and non racial civil rights, women's rights, abortion rights, gun control, family/social/religious/moral 'decay,' church and state, etc.)   |
| 08. RACIAL PROBLEMS  | (Note: this primarily includes civil rights issues and racial equality; monetary assistance to minorities is primarily found in code 9, however there is a slight overlap: see Note 7 for specific codes; note especially 1988 code 300 and 1966-1972 codes 61-63)                                     |
| 09. SOCIAL WELFARE   | (Includes: population, childcare, aid to education, the elderly, health care, housing, poverty, unemployment, 'welfare' etc.)  |
| 97. Other problems   | (Incl. specific campaign issues)   |
| 1992   |  |
| Q: What do you think are the most important problems facing this country? (IF MORE THAN ONE PROBLEM:) Of all you've told me, what would you say is the single most important problem the country faces?                                      |  |
| 01. AGRICULTURAL   |  |
| 02. ECONOMICS; BUSINESS; CONSUMER ISSUES   | (Includes foreign investment, tariffs/protection of U.S. industries, international trade deficit/balance of payments, immigration, interstate commerce/transportation; does not include unemployment [09], defense spending [03], foreign [03] or government spending on domestic social welfare [09]) |
| 03. FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEFENSE   | (Includes: foreign aid, defense spending, the space program; does not include: international trade deficit [02])   |

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/series/50/studies/185?archive=ICPSR&sortBy=7>

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 04. GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONING  | (Not "the economy" [02])   |
| 05. LABOR ISSUES  | (Not unemployment [09])  |
| 06. NATURAL RESOURCES   |  |
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| 09. SOCIAL WELFARE  | (Includes: population, childcare, aid to education, the elderly, health care, housing, poverty, unemployment, 'welfare' etc.)  |
| 97. Other problems  | (Incl. specific campaign issues)   |
| <b>2004</b>   |  |
| Q: What do you think is the most important problem facing this country? |  |
| 1: Terrorism  | 4: Economy   |
| 2: Iraq War   | 5: Other domestic Issues   |
| 3: Other foreign or defensive issues                                    | 9: NA  |

## The 1980 Election

With the acquiescence of the Republican Party, conservative movement, and many journalists, the New Right attributed much of Reagan's success in the 1980 election to their efforts in voter mobilization. According to Arthur H. Miller and Martin P. Wattenberg:

"During a period of generally declining participation, the new Christian Right appears highly involved in electoral activity. Moreover, these people are not simply voting their conservative or Republican predispositions-their religiosity has provided the basis upon which a small but solid voting bloc is being forged"<sup>31</sup>

John H. Simpson also found that voter's orientations to socio-moral issues and the politicization of moral issues contributed to Reagan's victory. Reagan's identification with the New Christian Right agenda helped him at the polls, Simpson concludes, especially considering that a very small percentage difference can mean the difference between victory and defeat<sup>32</sup>. However, Simpson later went on to claim that in fact, the mood of America regarding socio-moral issues was a mixture of conservatism and ambivalence, and was no longer steadfastly

<sup>31</sup> Arthur H. Miller and Martin P. Wattenberg, "Politics From the Pulpit: Religiosity and the 1980 Elections," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 315.

<sup>32</sup> John H. Simpson, "Socio-Moral Issues and Recent Presidential Elections," *Review of Religious Research* 27, no. 2 (December 1985): 115-123.

convinced in the efforts of the Christian Right<sup>33</sup>. Others, such as Jerome L. Himmelstein and James A. McRae, Jr., for example, have been harshly critical of the assertions made by the New Right. In their study, they attack the established image of voters that shifted to Reagan in 1980 as well as the relevance of the New Right's political strategy. They claim that their results demonstrate that these voters were overall more conservative than previous Republican voters, but not primarily motivated by social issues, that they were neither more religious nor less likely to trust government, and that they were more affluent than the targeted "lower to middle strata."<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Himmelstein and McRae, in addition to other studies on the same topic, conclude:

Since the actual New Republican constituency was not especially socially conservative, angry at government, or from the lower to middle strata, we must conclude that the New Right's strategy was wrong-headed, that its efforts were irrelevant to Reagan's success in 1980, and that contrary to its own self-concept (Whitaker, 1982), it is not the vanguard of a new and qualitatively different social movement of "neopopulist" or "Middle American Radicals."<sup>35</sup> (603)

During the 1980 election cycle, presidential hopeful Ronald Reagan ran on the following platform:

"... a conservative platform that called for a 30 percent tax cut in accord with the Kemp-Roth plan; the systematic reduction of federal rules of regulations over business and industry; the decentralization of social welfare and public assistance programs; free enterprise zones in the inner cities to attract capital, entrepreneurs, and jobs...; a constitutional amendment banning abortion on demand; the support of equal rights for women but not the Equal Rights Amendment; the building of new weapons systems to help the United States achieve military superiority over the Soviet Union; strong support for Israel and the Republic of China on Taiwan; and a North American economic accord among the United States, Canada and Mexico."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John H. Simpson, "The Mood of America in the 1980s: Some Further Observations on Sociomoral Issues," *Sociology of Religion* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 291-305.

<sup>34</sup> Jerome L. Himmelstein and James A. McRae Jr., "Social Conservatism, New Republicans, and the 1980 Election," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 592-605.

<sup>35</sup> Jerome L. Himmelstein and James A. McRae Jr., "Social Conservatism, New Republicans, and the 1980 Election," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 603.

<sup>36</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement That Remade America*; 211.

Reagan took a strong stance on abortion, he adopted the platform of the New Right and had always been a religious man, and he wanted to implement several economic policies that

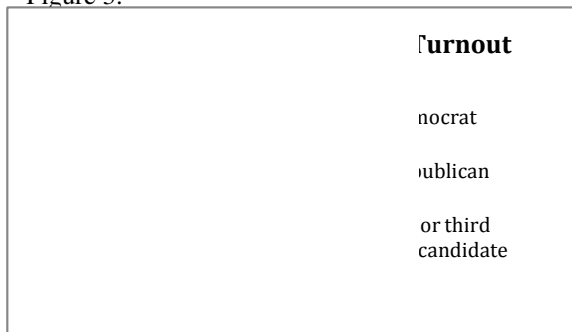
would bolster the economy along with the financial well being of all Americans. According to the data and calculations, social issues were overall not as influential in affecting voters as economic issues. Although

Figure 2.



Independent and Republican votes who agreed with Reagan's stance on abortion were significantly more likely to vote Republican than those who did not, the issue of religion was generally negligible and few considered social issues or public order as the most important issue during that election. Furthermore, Independents and Republicans who felt that either the economy or their financial well being had worsened were significantly more likely to vote Republican, although this issue was generally more of a motivator amongst Independents. Finally, the economy was ranked as the most important issue and the majority of those who felt that way voted Republican.

Figure 3.



In relation to the first issue of abortion,

Figure 4.

ANES data shows that 64.5% of Republicans and 56.6% of Independents felt that abortion should be either banned completely or only performed under special circumstances such as rape, incest,

endangerment of the mother's life, or other established circumstances. Of those Independents and Republicans who felt there should be restrictions or a complete ban on abortion, 68.9% of

Independents and 89.8% of Republicans voted for Reagan. Although even those Independents and Republicans who felt there should not be any restrictions on abortion still tended to vote for the Republican candidate over the Democratic candidate, those who agreed with Reagan's stance on abortion were significantly more likely to vote for him than those that did not. Religion, however, didn't seem to have an overwhelming influence. 69.6% of Independents and 77.4% of Republicans said that religion had at least some influence on the respondent's life. While 86.7% of those Republicans and 65.1% of those Independents voted for the Republican candidate in the 1980 election, 63.2% of Independents who thought religion wasn't important at all also voted for the Republican candidate, for example. Consequently, many Independents and Republicans still preferred Reagan over Carter just as much, if not only slightly less so, even if they were not religious.

### ro-Life

;

1: Democrat

2: Republican

3: Major third  
party candidate

### igion

ligious Republicans

n-Religious  
publicans

n- Religious  
ependents

ligious  
ependents

In terms of economic issues,  
both Republicans and Independents  
agreed that the economy had either  
gotten worse or much worse within  
the past year with 89.8% of  
Republicans saying so and 82.5% of  
Independents agreeing. Of those

Republicans who thought the economy had gotten



worse, 86.9% voted Republican in 1980. Further, of those Independents who thought the economy had gotten worse, 69.7% voted Republican. Meanwhile, while 47.1% of Independents still voted for the Republican candidate even if they

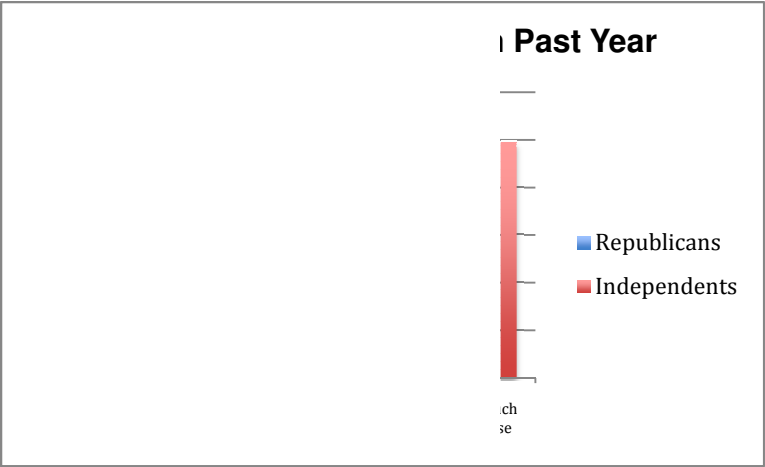
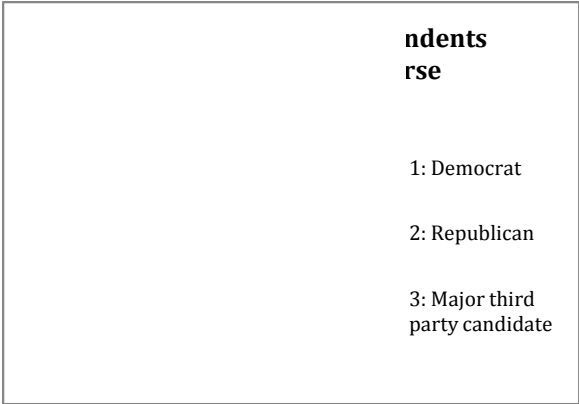
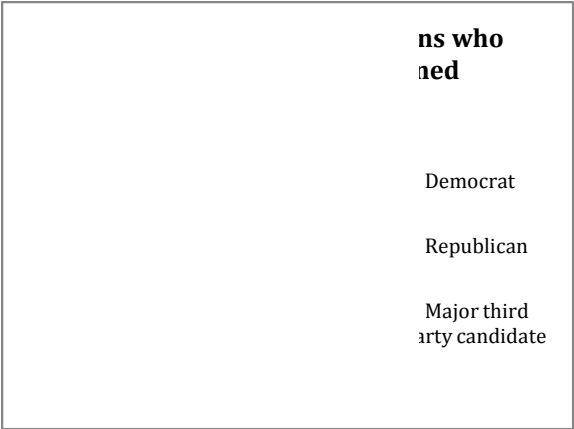


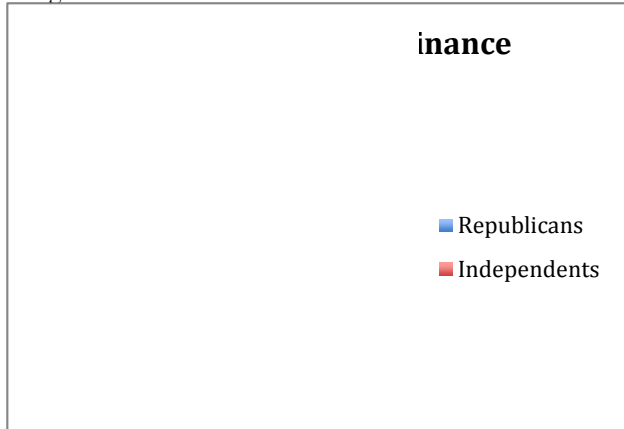
Figure 10 (above). Figure 11(to the left). Figure 12 (below).



thought that the economy had gotten better or

stayed the same, in comparison to 35.3% of Independents who voted for the Democratic candidate, clearly those who thought the economy had worsened were significantly more willing to vote Republican. Accordingly, more Republicans (44.3%) and Independents (41%) also

Figure 13.

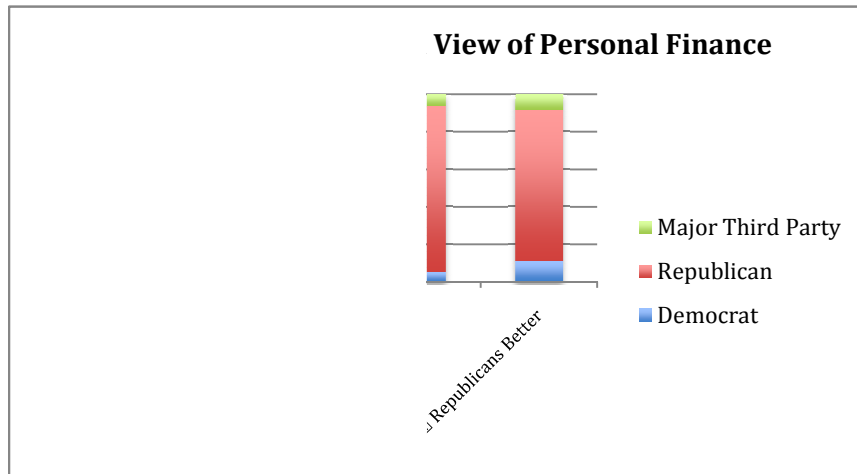


thought their personal financial situation had worsened in the past year than those that thought it had stayed the same or those that thought it had improved. The percentage of Republicans who felt that their financial situation had improved and voted Republican

and those who thought it had worsened and voted Republican was not as great or significant of a

difference, at 80.5% and 88.2% respectfully. On the other hand, 58.1% of Independents who thought that their financial situation had improved had voted Republican while 75% of

Independents who thought that their financial situation had worsened voted Republican, a



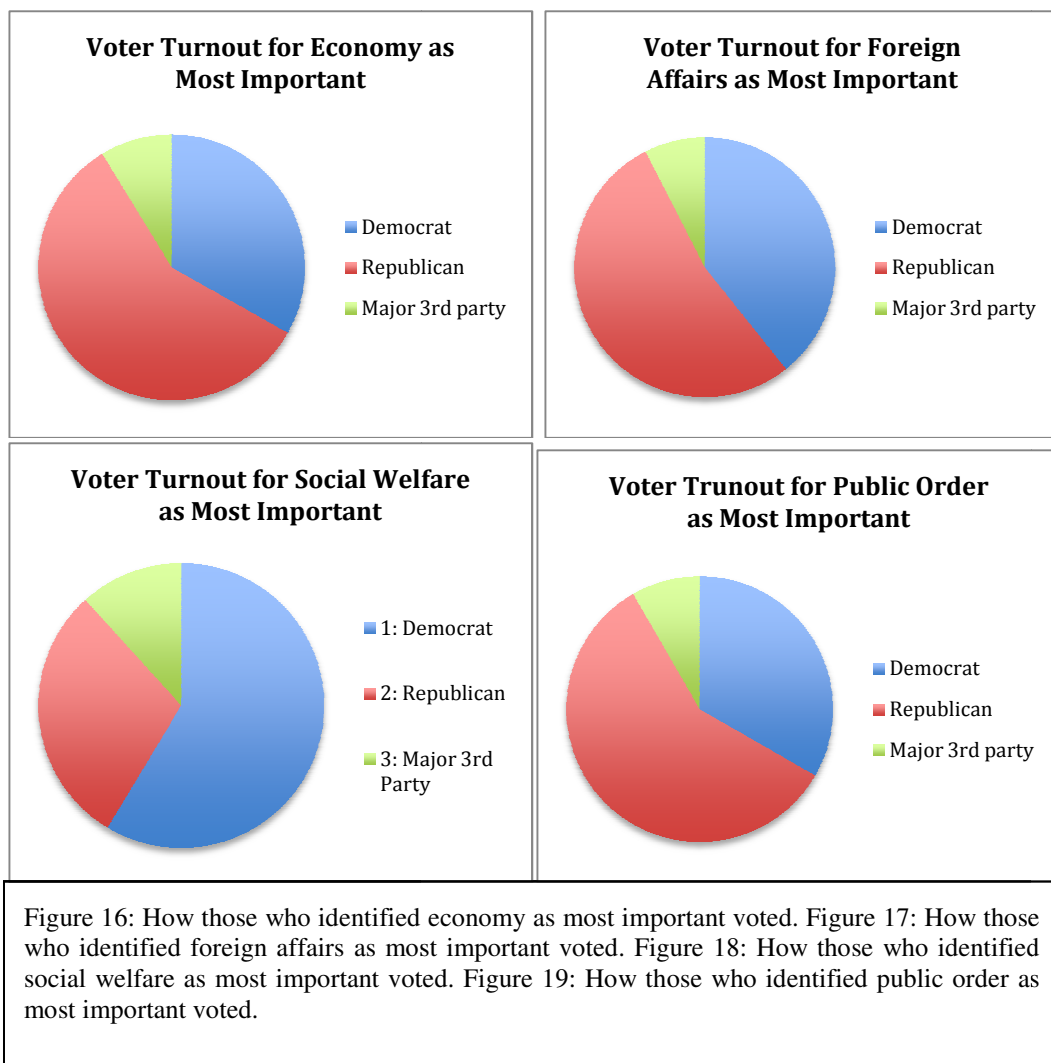
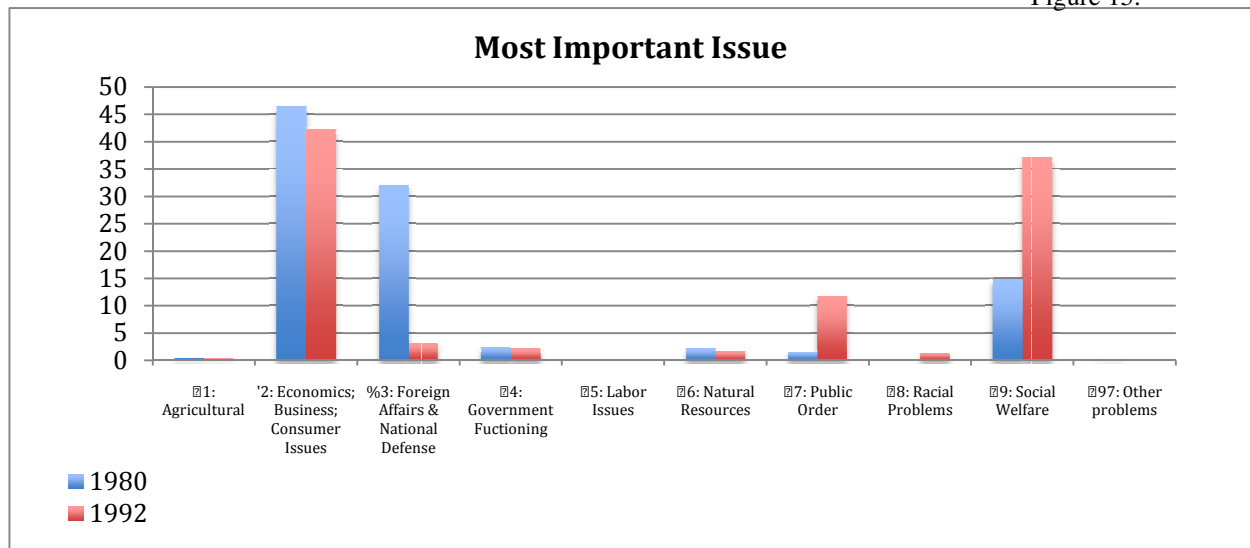
significantly greater amount.

Finally, in the 1980 election, 46.4% of voters claimed that economics, business, and consumer issues were the primary

reason for their vote, 32% thought Foreign Affairs and National Defense were most important, 14.8% said social welfare issues were most important, and only 1.5% said Public Order was most important. Of those who claimed that economic issues were most important, 58.1% voted Republican. Of those who identified foreign affairs as most important, 53.2% voted Republican. Of those who claimed social welfare was most important, only 29.7% voted Republican. Finally, of those that thought Public Order as most important, which is what social issues falls under, 58.3% voted Republican. Consequently, both economic and foreign affairs issues had a significant impact on the 1980 election and voter mobilization. However, it is important to note that although Public Order did not motivate as many voters as other issues, voters who identified

this issue as most important were also the most likely to vote Republican.

Figure 15.



## The 1992 Election

Bill Clinton's slogan for his campaign in the 1992 election, "It's the economy, stupid,"<sup>37</sup> excellently and succinctly sums up what most consider the central theme and pivotal issue of that election. Ray C. Fair agrees, "the economy clearly seemed to be a key issue in the 1992 election, probably the key issue."<sup>38</sup> Burton A. Abrams and James L. Butkiewicz even more boldly assert that "Economic conditions undoubtedly played a central rhetorical role in the 1992 U.S. presidential election."<sup>39</sup> They found that state-level economic performance was a significant factor that influenced votes in the 1992 presidential election<sup>40</sup>. However, they also acknowledged that it was not decisive and encouraged further testing<sup>41</sup>. Seymour Martin Lipset additionally offers a more nuanced approach to the effect of economic issues in the 1992 election. While he asserts that economic conditions were particularly important and Bush lost much of his popularity before the election by giving the impression that he was not taking the recession seriously, Lipset also acknowledges that Fair's equation based on economic data was grossly inaccurate in predicting the 1992 election although it had succeed impressively in 1988<sup>42</sup>. Further, he asserts that the emphasis on social and religious conservatism at the 1992 Republican convention antagonized several groups within the party, including women and the very well

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<sup>37</sup> Dean Lacy and Barry C. Burden, "The Vote-Stealing and Turnout Effects of Ross Perot in the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (January 1999): 243.

<sup>38</sup> Ray C. Fair, "The Effect of Economic Events on Votes for President: 1992 Update," *Political Behavior* 18, no. 2 (June 1996): 124.

<sup>39</sup> Burton A. Abrams and James L. Butkiewicz, "The Influence of State-Level Economic Conditions on the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election," *Public Choice* 85, no. 1/2 (October 1995): 1.

<sup>40</sup> Burton A. Abrams and James L. Butkiewicz, "The Influence of State-Level Economic Conditions on the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election," 8.

<sup>41</sup> Burton A. Abrams and James L. Butkiewicz, "The Influence of State-Level Economic Conditions on the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election," 9.

<sup>42</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Significance of the 1992 Election," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26, no. 1 (March 1993): 7-16.

educated, which left the party on the wrong side of the cultural divide<sup>43</sup>. Bush's move to the right to oppose abortion in fact contributed to the loss of the election, he claims<sup>44</sup>.

On the other hand, some maintain that the moral character of the president and other social issues did in fact influence the 1992 election. For example, Abramowitz concluded that abortion had a dramatic influence in the 1992 election<sup>45</sup>. Kathryn M. Doherty and James G. Gimpel also found that Clinton's character, while not the overriding issue in the contest, nearly outweighed the president's economic woes and was significant in affecting the presidential election<sup>46</sup>. In fact, without Perot's supporters on his side, Clinton may not have been able to overcome issues of morality and honesty concerning his character<sup>47</sup>. This observation also brings up the need to consider the effect of Ross Perot in the 1992 election. Out of the three elections, this is the only election in which a third party candidate was able to gain a significant amount of votes and effect the election. Dean Lacy and Barry C. Burden, for example, found that Perot reduced Clinton's margin of victory, increased turnout by nearly 3% and that one out of every five Perot supporters would not have voted had Perot not entered the race<sup>48</sup>. Others have claimed that Bush would have won, had Perot not been running<sup>49</sup>.

Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green, James L. Guth, Corwin E. Smidt go even further in defending the effect of social issues in their study and assert that cultural alignments come first

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<sup>43</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Significance of the 1992 Election," *PS: Political Science and Politics*: 7-16.

<sup>44</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Significance of the 1992 Election," *PS: Political Science and Politics*: 7-16.

<sup>45</sup> Dean Lacy and Barry C. Burden, "The Vote-Stealing and Turnout Effects of Ross Perot in the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election," 246.

<sup>46</sup> Kathryn M. Doherty and James G. Gimpel, "Candidate Character vs. the Economy in the 1992 Election," *Political Behavior* 19, no. 3 (September 1997): 177-196.

<sup>47</sup> Kathryn M. Doherty and James G. Gimpel, "Candidate Character vs. the Economy in the 1992 Election," 177-196.

<sup>48</sup> Dean Lacy and Barry C. Burden, "The Vote-Stealing and Turnout Effects of Ross Perot in the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election," 252.

<sup>49</sup> Dean Lacy and Barry C. Burden, "The Vote-Stealing and Turnout Effects of Ross Perot in the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (January 1999): 233-255.

in affecting votes and economics second<sup>50</sup>. They do not deny that economic issues and evaluations were indeed critical in 1992, but insist that voters' response is best understood against the baseline of fundamental cultural cleavages. Further, they assert that the respective strong support and comparatively weaker support for the Republican party between evangelicals and seculars, or more generally those more committed to religious traditions and those less committed, represents a developing cultural polarization that is being only further advanced by cultural elites, religious professionals, party contributors, and interest group activists<sup>51</sup>. "The new role of evangelicals and seculars as the cultural core of the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively, puts them in key positions to shape the ideological contours of those parties."<sup>52</sup> Some also claim that the role of certain religious groups, given their political views and strong support for the Republican candidate in 1992 despite economic factors, could become vital to the party:

"The distinguishing feature of conservative Protestants is that they seem to be a major source of support or a socially conservative political theme which could possibly rival the economy in future political battles, i.e., traditional family values... The conservative Protestant church could thus serve as an important organizational foundation for this new political social agenda."<sup>53</sup>

George H. W. Bush, Sr. was somewhat of a moderate, but his views shifted more to the right while he was Vice President under Reagan and then during his own presidency<sup>54</sup>. He took a conservative stance on economic, social and foreign policy issues consistent with the policies outlined by Reagan. In 1992, both abortion and religion were found to have a statistically

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<sup>50</sup> Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green, James L. Guth and Corwin E. Smidt, "Religious Voting Blocs in the 1992 Election: The Year of the Evangelical?," *Sociology of Religion* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 307-326.

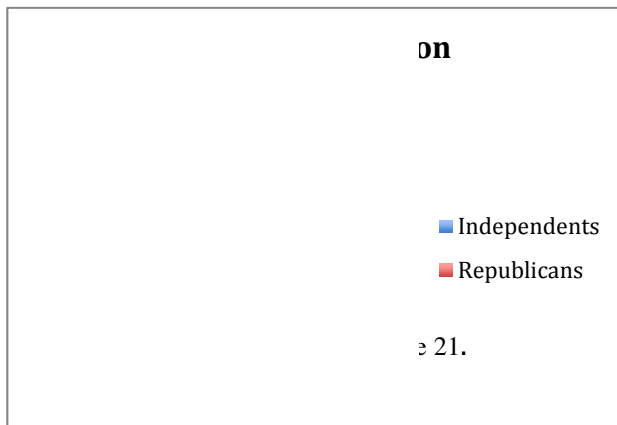
<sup>51</sup> Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green, James L. Guth and Corwin E. Smidt, "Religious Voting Blocs in the 1992 Election: The Year of the Evangelical?," 307-326.

<sup>52</sup> Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green, James L. Guth and Corwin E. Smidt, "Religious Voting Blocs in the 1992 Election: The Year of the Evangelical?," 323.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen D. Johnson, "What Relates to Vote for Three Religious Categories?," *Sociology of Religion* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 274.

<sup>54</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Significance of the 1992 Election," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26, no. 1 (March 1993): 7-16.

significant impact on the election, with Independents and Republicans who agreed with Bush's stance on abortion being dramatically more likely to vote Republican and those who were religious also being more likely to vote Republican. Conversely, in regards to economic issues, Independents tended to vote primarily Democrat despite their varying views on the economy. Furthermore, while some Republicans were deterred from voting with their party due to their stance on economic issues, the majority still voted Republican whether they believed the economy and their well being had improved or worsened over the last year. Therefore, economic



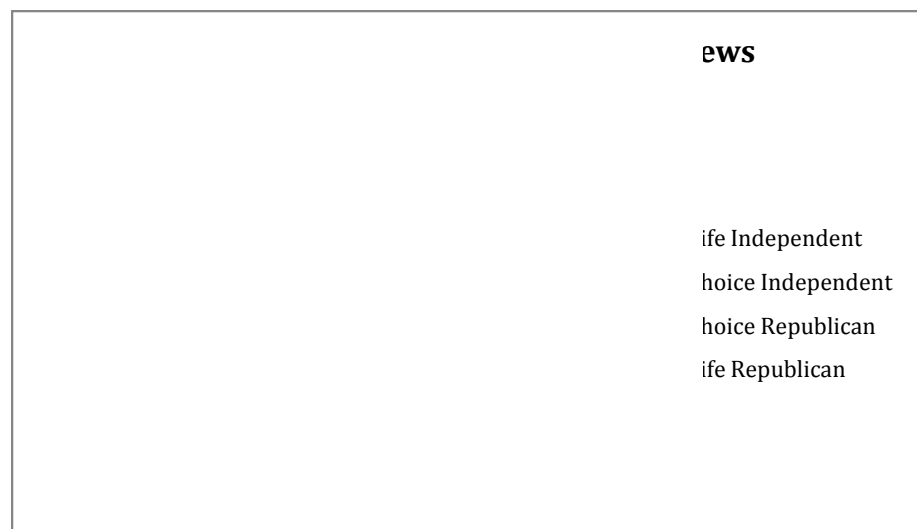
issues proved to be less statistically significant than social issues in motivating voters.

Furthermore, social issues were found to motivate the most Republican voters although they were considered third in the ranking of issues. Finally, it was found that the strong

third-party candidate, Ross Perot, influenced the election by taking away many of the majorities that could have been

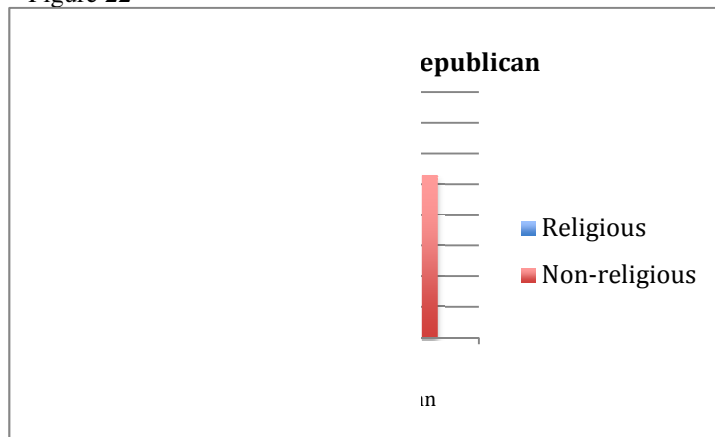
Bush's.

In 1992, 60.2% of Republicans felt that abortion should either be completely illegal or only allowed with restrictions while only 48.1% of Independents



felt the same. Of Independents who were against abortion or felt there should be restrictions, 40% voted Republican, which is a majority compared to votes for the Democratic candidate (34.3%) and the Major Third Party candidate (25.7%). Meanwhile, of those Independents who felt that there should be no restrictions on abortion, only 8.6% voted for the Republican candidate while 47.9% voted Democrat. Consequently, Independents who agreed with Bush's stance on abortion were overwhelmingly more likely to vote Republican than those who did not. Additionally, 75.5% of Republicans who were against abortion completely or only with restrictions voted Republican while 61.8% of Republicans for abortion being at the discretion of the mother voted Republican. Therefore, while Republicans who agreed with Bush's stance on abortion were significantly more likely to vote Republican, those who did not were also not wholly deterred from voting with their party.

Figure 22



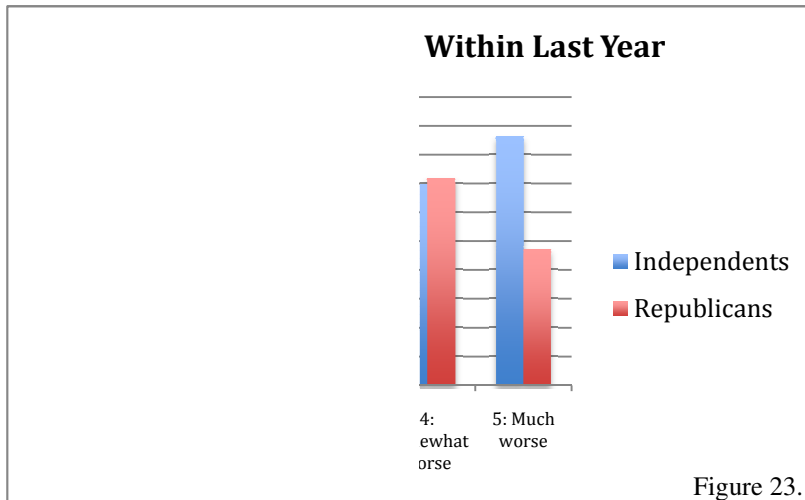
Additionally, religion also had a statistically significant impact on the 1992 election. Again, the majority of Independents and Republicans still indicated at least some impact of religion on their lives, 71.2% and

79.4% respectively. Also, Independents and Republicans who felt that way tended to vote Republican more so than those who felt that religion was not important. 27.1% of religious Independents voted Republican while only 16.7% of non-religious Independents voted Republican. Furthermore, 73.9% of religious Republicans, in comparison to 52.8% of non-religious Republican, voted Republican in 1992. Although religion was not likely to be the



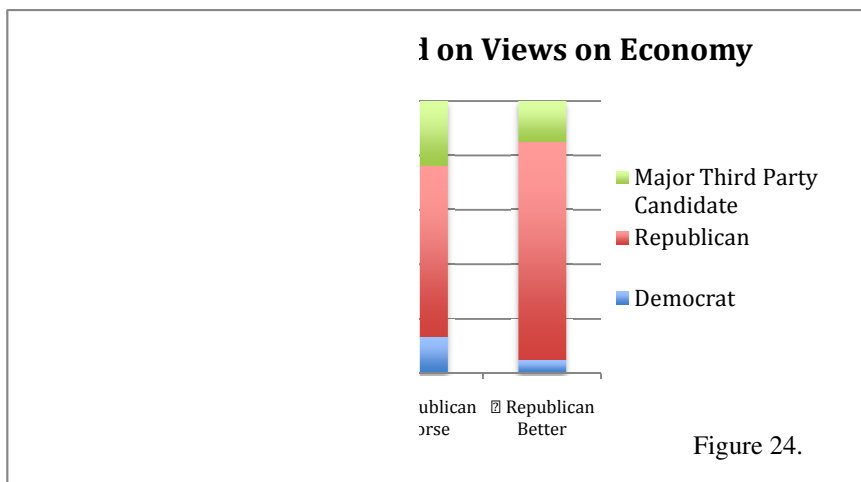
primary motivation for voter turnout amongst either Independents or Republicans, the data shows that it was a statistically significant issue.

In terms of the economy, both Independents and Republicans tended to generally agree



that the economy had worsened over the last year, although Independents thought so more than Republicans did. Of the 78% of Independents who thought that the economy had gotten worse 22% voted for the

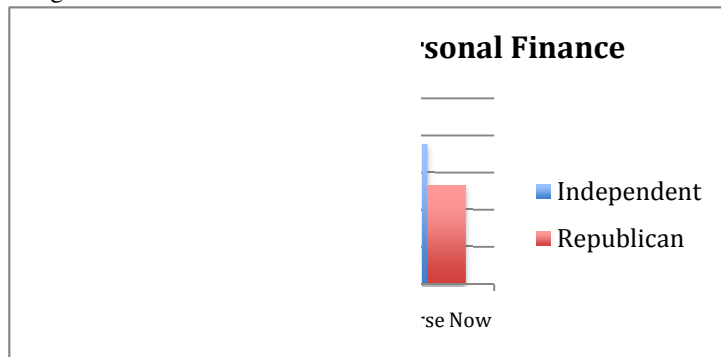
Republican, while only 28.7% of the 22% of Independents who felt that the economy had gotten better or stayed the same voted Republican. Furthermore, 63.1% of the 59.6% of Republicans



who felt that the economy had gotten worse still voted Republican, while 79.8% of the 40.4% of Republicans who felt that the economy had improved or stayed the same voted

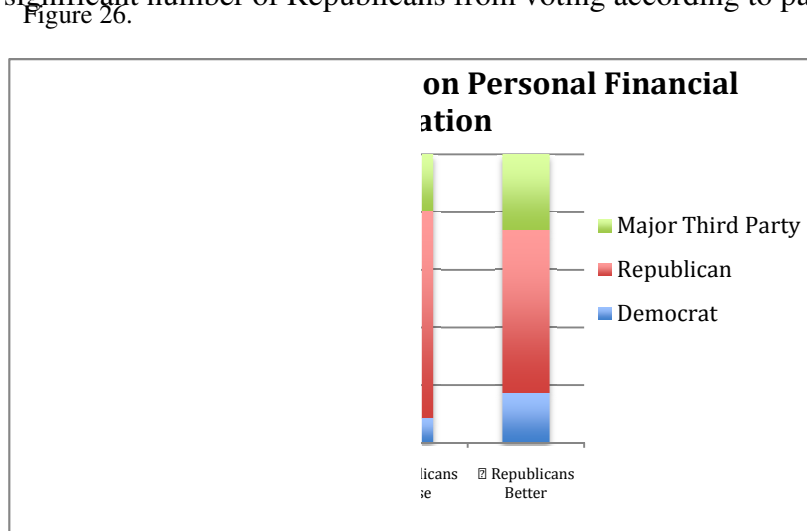
Republican. In the case of Republicans, the economy did not completely deter voters from remaining loyal to the party, although it has some effect. Furthermore, the economy did not have a significant effect on Independents, who voted overwhelmingly Democrat despite their varying views towards the economy.

As for the personal financial state of respondents, most Independents, 37.7%, felt that they were now worse off while most Republicans, 38.7%, felt that they were now better off. Overall, Independents who felt that their personal financial situation was better, same, or worse all voted Republican around the same percentage, from 20-25%. Consequently, Independents



tended to vote Democrat despite their opinions about their own financial well being. On the other hand, only 56.3% of Republicans who thought their economic situation had gotten

worse voted Republican while 71.9% of Republicans who thought their situation had gotten better voted Republican. This demonstrates two things: first, the majority of Republicans still voted Republican despite the fact that their economic situation may or may not have improved; second, and albeit somewhat contradictory, the worsening economic situation did deter a significant number of Republicans from voting according to party affiliation.

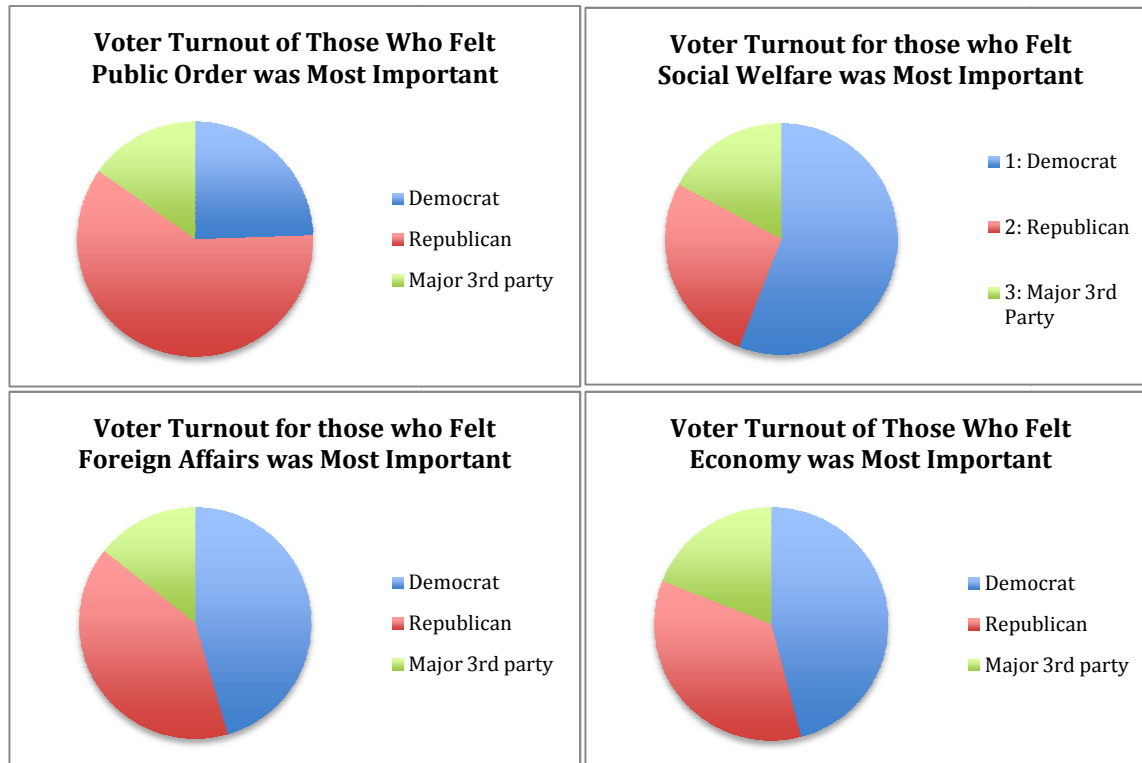


Additionally, according to respondents, economics, business and consumer issues were again identified as the most important issue in the 1992 election with 42.3% of votes, social welfare was

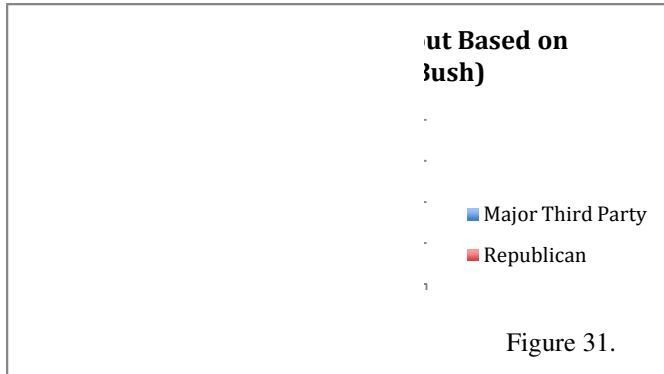
identified as the second most important at 37.1% and public order was identified as the third most important with 11.8% of votes (refer to Figure 15 above). Foreign affairs and national

defense shrank to only 3.1% of respondents identifying it as the most important issue. While only 35.1% of voters who identified economic issues as most important and 26.9% of voters who identified social welfare as most important voted for the Republican candidate, 60.4% of voters who identified public order as most important voted for the Republican candidate, 60.4% of voters who identified public order as most important voted Republican. Consequently, while social issues, under the title of public order, were only third in the prioritization of issues, they were clearly the most important in motivating Republican voters.

Figure 27: Top Left. Figure 28: Top Right. Figure 29: Bottom Left. Figure 30: Bottom Right.



Finally, there is no doubt that this data supports the assertion that Perot affected the election as a third party candidate, especially amongst Independents. For example, more pro-choice Independents voted for Perot (43.5%) than Bush (8%) and even a significant number of



pro-life Independents (25.7%) voted for Perot. Furthermore, both religious and non-religious Independents voted more for Perot than for Bush (shown in Figure 31). Additionally, Independents were also more

likely to vote for Perot than Bush if they felt that the economy of their own financial well being had worsened within the past year. Finally, on every issue other than social welfare, if Perot supporters had voted Republican than Bush would have had a majority (refer to Figures 27-30). Instead, since those votes went to Perot, Clinton had a majority amongst voters who felt either the economy, social welfare, or foreign affairs were most important. Bush only maintained a majority amongst voters who felt that public order was the most important issue.

## The 2004 Election

As summarized by the *Associated Press* on Election Day:

“President Bush’s victory, the approval of every anti-gay marriage amendment on statewide ballots and an emphasis on ‘moral values’ among voters showed the power of churchgoing Americans in this election and threw the nation’s religious divide into stark relief.”<sup>55</sup>

Exit polls reported that 22% of respondents believed moral values were the most important issue, with 80% of those people voting for George W. Bush<sup>56</sup>. Johnathan Knuckey

<sup>55</sup> D Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G Shields, "Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election," *PS, Political Science & Politics* 38, no. 2 (April 2005): 201.

<sup>56</sup> D Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G Shields, "Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election," 201.

claims that findings indicate that moral values exerted a statistically significant effect on vote choice:

“when the confounding effects of party identification and ideology were removed, moral values produced the greatest effect on vote choice of any variable. Thus, while some of the effects of moral values are indeed working through party identification and ideology, moral values still exerted an independent effect on vote choice.”<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, Kenneth Mulligan, who differentiates moral values (general beliefs about societal standards, the family, etc) from moral issues (abortion, gay marriage, etc), found that the former did in fact influence the election while the latter did not<sup>58</sup>. Ultimately, moral progressives and moral traditionalists were divided in the 2004 presidential election.

Since the initial exist poll, however, polling experts, columnists and political scientists have poked holes in the value voter theory claiming that the concept “moral values” was the most conceptually broad option and the difference was not appreciable in comparison to other issues. D. Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, accordingly, claim that the values voter explanation is flawed and explains only a very minor part of citizen’s voting calculus in 2004<sup>59</sup>. Instead, their research determined that party identification, ideology, attitudes toward the Iraq war, terrorism, and the economy were more important<sup>60</sup>. Gary Langer and Jon Cohen agree with these assertions. Their research also found that when controlling for other variables, “moral values” was behind terrorism, the economy and Iraq in terms of importance and tied with health care<sup>61</sup>. Langer and Cohen also refute assertions made by some that conservative Christians

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<sup>57</sup> Jonathan Knuckey, "Moral Values and Vote Choice in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election," *Politics & Policy* (Blackwell Publishing Inc.) 35, no. 2 (May 2007): 237.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Mulligan, "The "Myth" of Moral Values Voting in the 2004 Presidential Election," *PS, Political Science & Politics* 41, no. 1 (January 2008): 109-114.

<sup>59</sup> D Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G Shields, "Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election," 201-209.

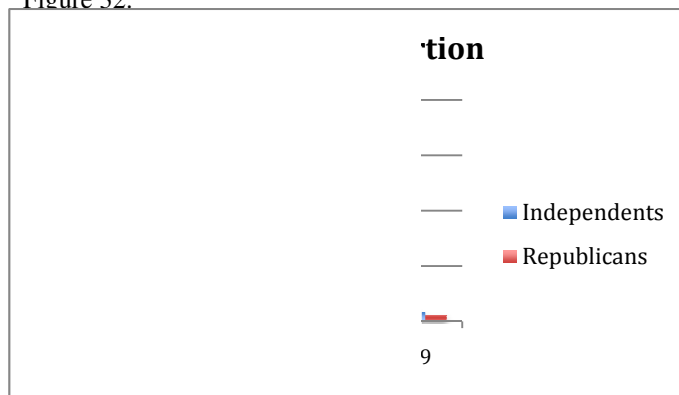
<sup>60</sup> D Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G Shields, "Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election," 208.

<sup>61</sup> Gary Langer and Jon Cohen, "Voters and Values in the 2004 Election," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 69, no. 5 (2005): 744-759.

helped Bush's popularity in the 2004 election<sup>62</sup>. Philip A. Klinkner further asserts that primarily foreign policy, and not moral values, influenced voter choice and increased the margin by which Bush won the election<sup>63</sup>. While Herbert F. Weisberg and Dino P. Christenson claim that "the cultural war allowed President Bush to retain some of the votes that he might otherwise have lost due to the unpopularity of the Iraq War," they also support the general assertion that the War on Terrorism was prominent in mobilizing support for President Bush long enough to win the election<sup>64</sup>. Overall, critics of this theory claim that the value voter theory undermined, rather than elucidated the understanding of the 2004 election.

George W. Bush, like Ronald Reagan and his father George H. W. Bush, Sr., adopted a conservative stance on social issues<sup>65</sup>. He also implemented tax cuts and free trade agreements as well as employed an aggressive neoconservative foreign policy<sup>66</sup>. In 2004, social issues had the opposite effect on Republican and Independent voters in the election, with Religious and anti-abortion Republicans being significantly more likely to vote Republican and non-religious and pro-abortion Independents being more likely to vote Republican. On the other hand, in terms of

Figure 32.



economic issues, Republican and Independent voters were more in agreement with those who felt the economy or their financial well being had improved voting primarily Republican.

<sup>62</sup> Gary Langer and Jon Cohen, "Voters and Values in the 2004 Election," 757.

<sup>63</sup> Philip A. Klinkner, "Mr. Bush's War: Foreign Policy in the 2004 Election," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (June 2006): 281-296.

<sup>64</sup> Herbert F. Weisberg and Dino P. Christenson, "Changing Horses in Wartime? The 2004 Presidential election," *Political Behavior* 29, no. 2 (June 2007): 279.

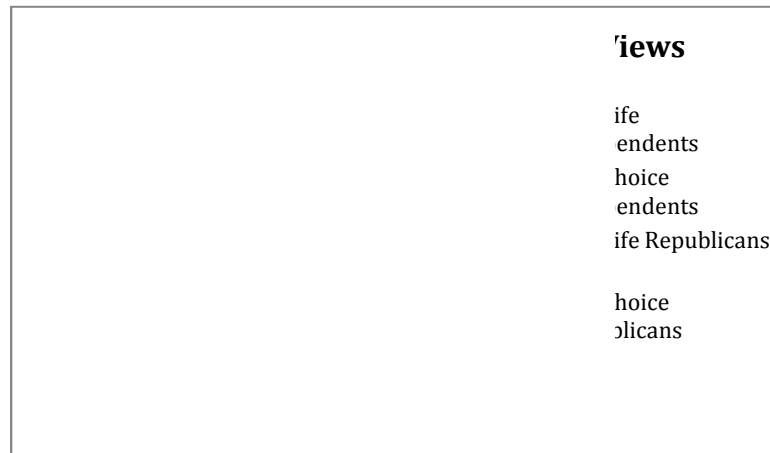
<sup>65</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg, "2004 Presidential Election: An Introduction," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (June 2006): 137-138.

<sup>66</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg, "2004 Presidential Election: An Introduction," 137.

However, economic issues had a greater impact on Independents, who were polarized by these issues. Finally, while the issue prioritization poll confirms the influence of economic issues on the election, it provides little information on how impactful social issues were in this election and somewhat contradictory data on voter turnout according to the issues.

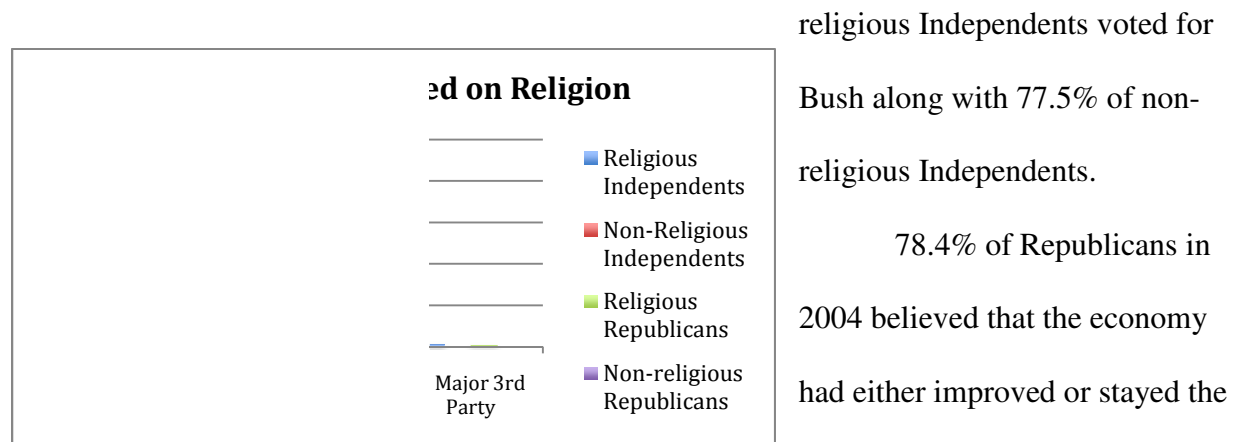
Figure 33.

In 2004, with respect to the first issue, 73.5% of Republicans and 62.6% of Independents believed that abortion should either be completely illegal or allowed only with certain restrictions.



Of these majorities, 93.3% of Republicans voted for George W. Bush while only 38.2% of Independents voted that way. In fact, more Independents, 44.5%, who felt that abortion should always be the woman's choice voted Republican. Additionally, 79.5% of Republicans and 80% of Independents said that religion had at least some impact in the respondent's life. 92.5% of these religious Republicans voted for Bush in 2004, in comparison to 86.5% of non-religious Republicans. The opposite result was true for Independents, however, in which case 36.6% of

Figure 34.



religious Independents voted for Bush along with 77.5% of non-religious Independents. 78.4% of Republicans in 2004 believed that the economy had either improved or stayed the

same in the past year, but

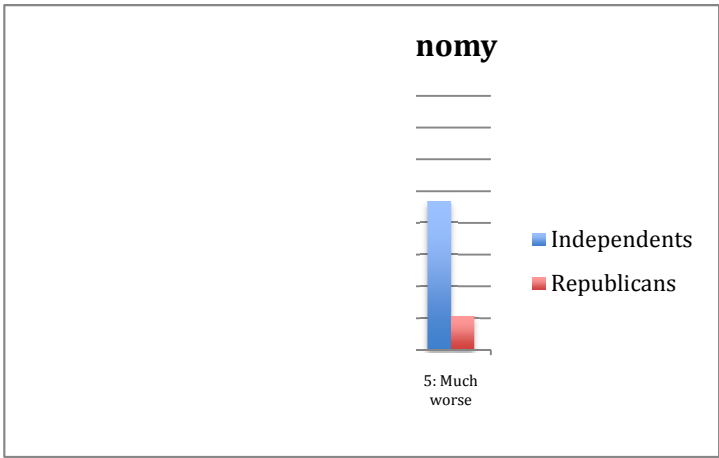
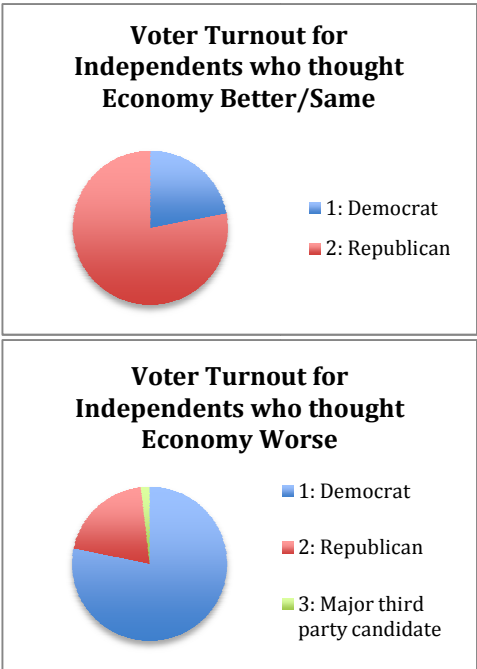
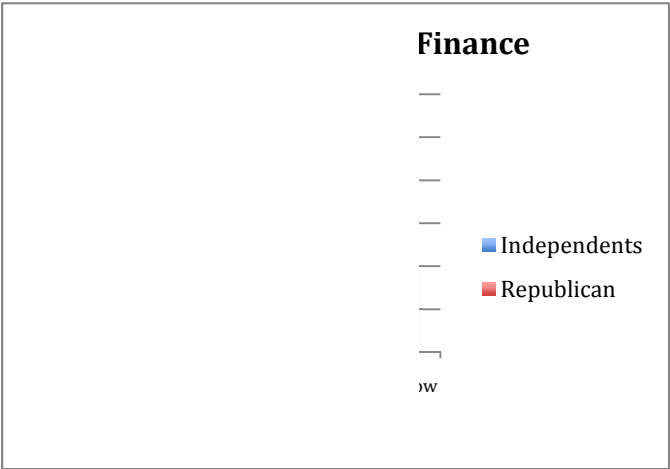


Figure 35: Above. Figure 36: Right Corner. Figure 37: Right. Independent data highlighted to show polarizing effect of issue.



Independents were more divided with 47.3% thinking it had improved or stayed the same and 52.7% thinking it had gotten worse. However, out of those Independents who believed the economy had improved or stayed the same an overwhelming 78% voted Republican, while those who felt the economy had worsened voted an overwhelming 78.2% Democrat. Therefore, in this particular case, it is obvious that the state of the economy had an enormous effect on polarizing Independent voters. Additionally, 94.4% of Republicans who felt the economy had improved or stayed the same and 75.4% of Republicans who felt that it had worsened voted for the Republican candidate. Consequently, while a significant number of Republican voters were deterred from voting according to party lines because of their view on the state of the economy, the majority

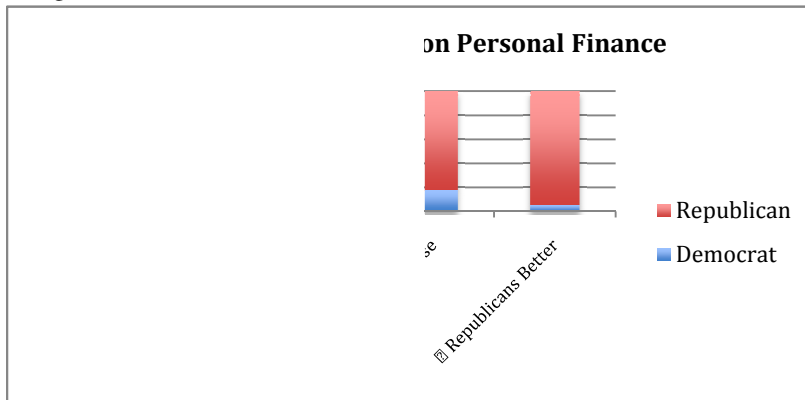




remained loyal to their party nonetheless.

The majority of Independents (43.6%) and Republican (55.7%) claimed that their personal financial well being had improved over the last year. Additionally, 93.5% of Republicans and 52.7% of Independents who felt their economic situation had improved voted for the Republican candidate in the presidential election of 2004. Republicans who thought that their economic well-being had stayed the same or worsened still overwhelmingly voted

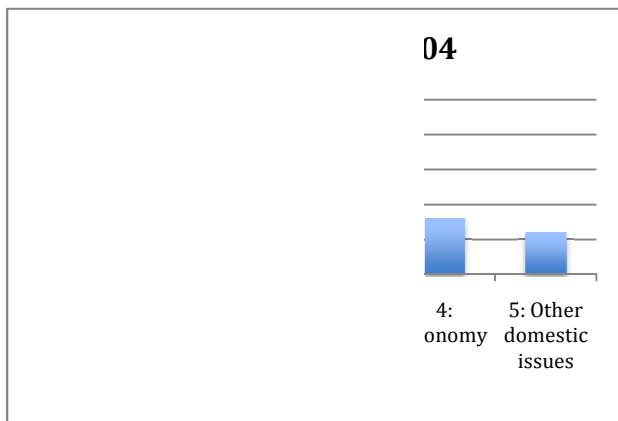
Figure 39.



Republican (92.1%; 82.7%), but to a slightly lesser extent, while Independents with the same opinion voted overwhelmingly Democrat (60.9%; 69.9%).

Consequently, the state of the respondent's finances within that past year affected Independent voters to a much greater extent than Republican ones.

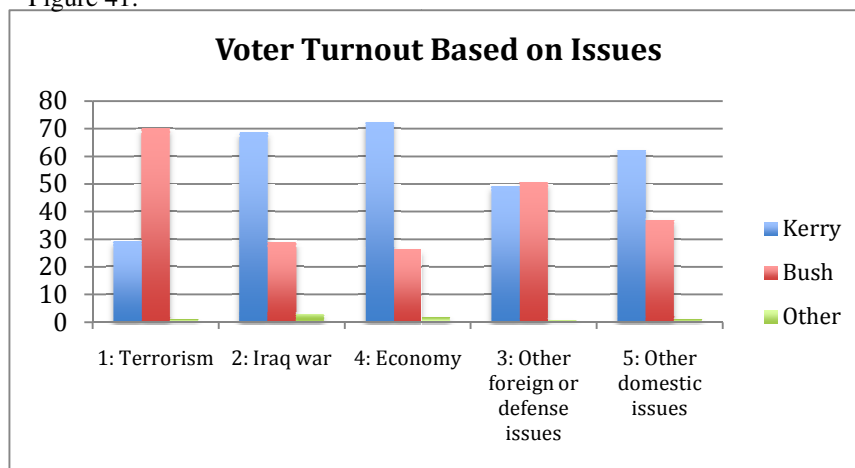
Finally, the SETUP survey for 2004 found that Terrorism was ranked as the most important problem facing the country with 42.9% of people saying so, the Iraq war was second with 19% of votes, the economy was third with 15.9% of people saying so, other domestic issues



came in fourth with 11.9% saying it was most important and other foreign issues came in fifth place with 10.3% saying that they were most important. Bush received the majority of votes from respondents who felt that Terrorism and other foreign issues were most important,

getting 70% and 50.5% of votes respectively. Kerry, however, was found to be more popular with voters who thought Iraq, the economy and other domestic issues were more important by receiving 68.5%, 72.1% and 62.1% of votes respectively. This data, however, while measuring the impact of economic and foreign policy issues, does not directly measure the impact of social issues because the term “other domestic issues” is incredibly broad. Furthermore, the pool of respondents may be skewed somewhat towards the liberal perspective and not as accurately representative of the general elections because respondents voted 49% Democrat and 49.4% Republican, while voters in the actual election voted 48.27% Democrat and 50.73% Republican.

Figure 41.



## Discussion of Data

The data provided for each case and described in detail above, with the help of graphs and charts, demonstrates several interesting patterns and observations that are worth noting. First of all, many of the elections seem to indicate that what actually motivated Republican and Independent voters in these elections is generally the opposite of what was asserted to be the primary motivation of voter mobilization in the mainstream media. In 1980, for example, it is clear that the majority of both Republicans and Independents believed that the economy and their personal financial situation had worsened and the majority of those respondents voted Republican. Furthermore, the majority of voters identified economic issues as most important

and the majority of those respondents also voted Republican. Simultaneously, while the impact of abortion on the 1980 election is there, the impact of religion is rather negligible. In 1992, on the other hand, the impact of religion and abortion on the election is rather evident. For example, a majority of Independents who felt that abortion should either be illegal or only allowed with restrictions voted for the Republican candidate, while less than 10% of Independents who felt that abortion should be allowed at the discretion of the mother voted Republican.

Simultaneously, the impact of economic issues was debatable. All independents, whether they felt that the economy had improved or worsened or whether their own financial situations had changed positively or negatively voted Republican at roughly the same mid-20s percentages, as an example. Lastly, in the 2004 election, the result was mixed because Republicans and Independents were affected in different ways. Economic issues completely polarized Independent voters and many pro-choice Independents and non-religious Independents were more likely to vote Republican than pro-life or religious Independents, respectively. However, pro-life Republicans and religious Republicans were more likely to vote Republican and not as affected by economic issues.

Secondly, it is important to point out the loyalty of social conservatives. Even though the data regarding issue prioritization does not rank social issues as the most important in any of the elections, in both the cases of 1980 and 1992, public order included the largest percentages of respondents that voted Republican. Furthermore, in 2004, over 90% of Republicans who agreed with the president's stance on abortion and over 80% of Republicans who considered themselves religious voted Republican. Consequently, although social issues may not always be the primary driving force for mobilizing all voters in general, the data does support the claim that they are

certainly significant in motivating Republican voters and that social conservatives least often defect from their party.

Thirdly, the data presented in this study also unintentionally demonstrates the strength of partisanship and party politics. There are several examples presented in each of the elections that demonstrate that even while a significant number of Republican voters may not wholly agree with the Republican platform, they will still vote Republican. For example, in 1980 Republicans who felt abortion should be the choice of the mother also voted overwhelmingly Republican, although to a significantly lesser extent than those who felt it should be restricted. In some cases, such as with the abortion issue in 1992 for example, the vote of Independents changed drastically amongst respondents with varying views towards abortion while Republicans tended to vote Republican even if they supported a pro-choice agenda, albeit to a lesser extent. Consequently, while some Republicans, most likely those who lean Republican or are weak Republicans, stray from their party line, the majority of Republicans demonstrated that even when they do not fully agree with their candidate on one or more issues, they are still willing to vote for their party's candidate.

There are, unfortunately, also some limitations to this study that must be adequately addressed. Firstly, Democratic voters are not taken into consideration in this study. While the reasoning for this was explained in the methodology, someone looking to study further voter mobilization of all voters would have to take that into consideration. Secondly, only one source of poll data is used for the majority of testing. While this was done for consistency, this choice also eliminates the possibility to compare and contrast results for other data sets and other poll sources. As the contradictory data results from two different data sets demonstrate in the 2004 case, the data pool utilized for the study is incredibly important and can significantly impact

results. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, there was a significant amount of limitation in the type of questions that could be analyzed for all three elections. Consequently, it is possible that the questions chosen for this study do not get to the heart of what truly motivates voters.

Furthermore, because useful questions involving feeling thermometers were not available for all of the years in question, they too could not be utilized in this study, although they could have provided a great indicator of the attitudes of voters to certain parties and issues.

## **Conclusion**

In some ways, both sides of the debate amongst classical liberals and social conservatives are correct. Social issues do not tend to be the driving force behind elections as evidenced in these cases, which somewhat supports the claim of classical liberals that there needs to be a focus on economic issues. However, social conservatives have also shown themselves to be the most loyal Republican supporters in these three elections, consequently supporting their claims that they should not be ignored. Ultimately, as with everything in life, there needs to be balance and moderation. The Republican Party and the conservative movement need to remember that they are a fusionist movement and that their principles rest on a three-legged stool. Each of these legs needs to be equal. If one of the legs is bigger than the rest, the stool might tip over. More importantly, if a leg is removed, then the stool will surely collapse and fall apart.

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