No Church in the Wild

The Politics of American Nonreligion

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of Minnesota

By Evan Stewart

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Prof. Penny Edgell - Advisor

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For my family, Carol, John, and Shay,

and

For Sofia,
whose unwavering support means everything

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously. I know no better stance to adopt from within the secular/religious, evangelical traditions of U.S. politics.
-Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"

This is a hymn for the hymnless, kids with no religion
Yeah, we keep on sinning, yeah, we keep on singing
-Kesha, "Hymn"

For better or worse, religion has been a driving force in the United States since the founding era. Classic works like Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* treat it as the soul of citizenship—both a moral vision that keeps people attuned to the public good and a moral community that sanctions excessive self-interest or deviance (also see Erikson 1966). Others emphasize more pragmatic benefits, like how religious texts informed arguments about statecraft, or how stable church networks laid the foundation for institutions dedicated to education and public safety in the frontier society (e.g. Heclo 2007; Wuthnow 2011).

Today, religion is also a deeply ambiguous force in U.S. politics. Faith-based networks provide both ideological motivations and an organizational infrastructure for social movements, spurring engagement on the left and the right (e.g. Bean 2014; Braunstein 2017; Delehanty 2016; Markofski 2015). Religious commitments can foster an inclusive vision of the political community dedicated to the wellbeing of all citizens, but they can also foster social exclusion by raising the stakes of political conflict, especially when people link their policy positions to deeply-held religious identities and moral worldviews (Appleby 2000; Brubaker 2015; Stewart et al. 2018; Williams 1996,

2013). Religious commitments are like a nuclear reaction at the center of political culture, offering seemingly boundless energy and an elevated risk of serious accidents. Social science research helps us better understand how political actors harness—or weaponize—that power.

But the religious landscape of the country is also changing, and many people are now opting out of religious organizations altogether. Since the 1990s, the number of religiously-unaffiliated people in the U.S. has steadily grown from about ten percent of the population to twenty-three percent in 2018—now equal in size to evangelical Protestants. Just under forty percent of Americans under the age of thirty have no affiliation, either. Figure 1.1 shows the magnitude of this change over the last forty years of the General Social Survey. Disaffiliation from religious groups is a rapid cultural change for a nation that maintained deep historical ties to religious institutions, even as it remained formally separate from them in law.

Research offers two explanations for the rise of the unaffiliated (often called "the nones" in popular media). The first explanation is that religious disaffiliation is primarily an act of political backlash. In this theory, people holding liberal and progressive political views and moderate religious commitments see the close relationship between conservative politics and conservative faith forged by the Religious Right through the 1980s and 1990s and decide that religion simply is not for them (Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014; Margolis 2018; Putnam and Campbell 2012; Schnabel and Bock 2017; Sherkat 2014; Zuckerman 2011). The backlash theory sees disaffiliation as a symptom of stronger

political alignment where social identities are increasingly falling in line with partisan preferences—a change that is similar to other trends in affective polarization and partisan sorting (e.g. Baldassari and Gelman 2014; DellaPosta et al. 2015; Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Mason 2018). Figure 1.2 illustrates the potential for the backlash hypothesis; trends in party affiliation among unaffiliated respondents in the GSS over the last forty years show this group become more strongly affiliated with the Democratic Party.

The second explanation focuses on drift from social institutions. While many people make the choice to leave religious groups, a growing number of people simply stop attending or never join them in the first place. For some scholars, religious disengagement is a symptom of a broader trend toward reduced civic engagement as people spend less time in community groups as they adapt to other structural changes in social life, such as precarious labor and solitary living (Kalleberg 2018; Klinenberg 2013; Putnam 2001; Pugh 2015). For others, the drift account is more about socialization. More people in the U.S. are being raised outside of religious groups and growing up with more secular peers, such that each birth cohort appears less religious than the last (Manning 2015; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; Voas and Chaves 2016). These cohort changes are slowly bringing the U.S. closer to trends in secularization over time similar to Western Europe (Voas and Chaves 2016 *cf.* Schnabel and Bock 2017). Across both of these sets of literature, the drift theory sees religious disaffiliation as an outcome of social-structural changes in institutions like the market and the family, rather than ideological changes in the population.

This dissertation focuses on the relationship between religious engagement and political life in this changing social context. *In a nation where religion has historically been central to public life, what are the political implications of religious disaffiliation?* Answering this question highlights how the backlash and drift theories are in tension with each other. Backlash theories see disaffiliation as part of a trend toward political investment and polarization, while drift theories see it as a symptom of disengagement. Is the cultural power of religion at the center of U.S. politics waning, perhaps passing a half-life, or is a new coalition in the electorate—a new isotope—emerging? The answer is not a simple either/or proposition as the backlash and drift theories would suggest. Both explanations have insights to offer, but alone they are incomplete. I develop a new theory that synthesizes these perspectives in order to better explain how and why different expressions of nonreligion have a divergent relationship with political engagement.

My argument is based on the fact that people leave religious groups for many different reasons (Zuckerman 2011), and so the traits that support either backlash or drift accounts often overlap for any given person. Research has identified many different nonreligious experiences, including staunchly committed atheists who stand against religion in the public sphere (LeDrew 2015), nonbelievers who prefer to call themselves "spiritual but not religious" (Edgell et al. 2017; McClure 2017), "unchurched believers" who still think about god, but leave religious groups (Baker and Smith 2015; Hout and Fischer 2002), and even people who "belong without believing" in religious groups as

they seek community (Kasselstrand 2015). People express their religious commitments in many different ways, and researchers make sense of this complexity using theories from cultural sociology that explain how people take a variety of religious expressions and package them together into different *repertoires* of religious engagement (e.g. Chaves 2010, Edgell 2012, Wilcox 2009; Wilde and Glassman 2016). More work is necessary to explain how people develop different *repertoires of nonreligion* from these varied experiences and map those repertoires onto different kinds of political engagement.

Repertoires are collections of available beliefs, identities, and practices that people use to make sense of social life and perform for others across different social contexts. Using the language of repertoires provides a better framework to understand religious disaffiliation more accurately, because it leads research to focus on how people access many different combinations of nonreligious expressions in social life. People express different kinds of nonreligion in their personal lives through beliefs, affinities, and practices, and they express different kinds of nonreligion in their public lives through assumptions about community, citizenship, and political authority. My empirical work in this project supports two claims. First, we can distinguish different personal and public repertoires of nonreligion and measure them separately. Second, while research is used to focusing on measures of personal nonreligion, public repertoires of nonreligion are doing most of the work in political matters. The specific personal and public repertoires that I measure here have a divergent relationship with political behavior; a public repertoire focused on secular authority in the public sphere associates with stronger political

engagement, while a personal repertoire focused on autonomy from religious groups and practices associates with weaker political engagement.

These divergent repertoires show up in many different aspects of political life. In terms of political behavior, I find patterns in voter turnout among the nonreligious that run counter to the classic expectation that lower religious engagement corresponds with lower political engagement. In public opinion, I demonstrate how a public nonreligious repertoire provides a stronger source of attitudinal constraint on a variety of policy issues than a personal nonreligious repertoire. Finally, in terms of lobbying and advocacy work, I show how strict adherence to a personal nonreligious repertoire, rather than a cultivation of multiple repertoires, limits the political efficacy of many nonreligious organizations.

This case study of nonreligion has important implications for the way we think about many aspects of political life across the social sciences. For researchers interested in civic engagement, this work advances our understanding about the nature of disengagement, especially how opting out of one set of institutions does not necessarily lead people to opt out of others. For researchers interested in public opinion and ideology, these findings show the importance of taking culture seriously in the study of public opinion. They also demonstrate how we can improve our theories and measurement strategies to assess the specific role of cultural repertories in attitudinal constraint. For scholars interested in culture and organizations, my results illustrate how choosing different cultural repertoires is not only an individual process, but also one that can produce distinct advantages and challenges at the organizational level as well. Finally, for

scholars of religion, these patterns illustrate the importance of considering publicly-oriented religious expression as a key factor in religious experience—one that cannot be explained simply by focusing on personal religious commitments alone.

What is Nonreligion?

Religious dissent has long been a part of social life in the United States, especially among the educated elite. But religious dissent means different things to different people. Since the founding era, skepticism and freethought have informed a range of social groups, political coalitions, and artistic movements across the country. For every well-known polemical figure like Madelyn Murray O'Hair spearheading American Atheists, history also finds a surrealist painter or a deist founder who takes that same religious doubt and connects it to a different set of activities and affinities. Public anxiety about salvation and sustained prejudice against nonreligious groups often led doubters and apostates to join different civil society groups such as interfaith organizations, artistic movements, or philosophical and spiritual discussion groups like the Ethical Culture movement, rather than organize solely around their shared religious skepticism alone (Fuller 1995; Gin Lum 2014; Schmidt 2016; Turner 1987; Porterfield 2012).

What is new today is the thirty-year shift in religious affiliation across the United States. Many more Americans now feel comfortable openly claiming no religious affiliation on surveys. Amid declining religiosity across birth cohorts (Voas and Chaves 2016 *cf.* Schnabel and Bock 2017), the combined number of self-identified atheists (now

about four percent of the U.S. population[1]), agnostics (also about four percent), and people who say they are "nothing in particular" has grown to a total of twenty-three percent of the general population, twenty percent of registered voters, and thirty-seven percent of individuals under 30.[2] Emerging nonreligious interest groups such as The Secular Coalition, the Center for Inquiry, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and the American Humanist Association have also achieved public visibility through the early 2000s as a result of renewed organizing and advocacy efforts, online and in-person social outreach, and advertising campaigns (Baker and Smith 2015; Blankholm 2014; Cimino and Smith 2014; García and Blackholm 2016; LeDrew 2015; Kettell 2014, 2013).

These demographic and institutional changes accompany a variety of notable cultural changes as well, and these show the varied roles that religious dissent can play in political culture. In 2006, Richard Dawkins publishes *The God Delusion* and Sam Harris publishes *Letter to a Christian Nation*. These are popular polemics, the first a direct challenge to arguments for the existence of god and the second an indictment of the George W. Bush-era political agenda of the early 2000s stemming from conservative Christianity. Both books argue that a central cause of many contemporary social problems is irrational religious belief. These bestsellers lead the authors, along with other public

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[1] See Chapter Two for a detailed account of why the substantive differences between self-identified atheism and non-belief in god matter for studies of nonreligion. Briefly, persistent social stigma toward atheist identification (Edgell, Hartmann, Stewart, and Gerteis 2016) introduces social desirability bias that depresses rates of atheist self-identification relative to reported non-belief in god, especially for already-marginalized groups (e.g. Edgell, Frost, and Stewart 2017; Gervais and Najle 2018).

[2] Current estimates of the aggregated group with "no religion" drawn from the first release of the 2018 General Social Survey. Estimates of unaffiliated registered voters are drawn from the Public Religion Research Institute.

intellectuals such as Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Michael Schermer, to return critical accounts of religion and religiosity to the mainstream public sphere in a trend known as "New Atheism."

New Atheism is perhaps the most well known recent example of nonreligion in popular culture, but it is not the only example of nonreligious repertoires at work. In 2011, Kanye West and Jay-Z release the single "No Church in the Wild." Against a backdrop of protestors in the accompanying music video, a lone figure hurls a molotov cocktail at a wall of riot gear as Frank Ocean sings:

> Human beings in a mob,
> What's a mob to a king?
> What's a king to a god?
> What's a god to a non-believer?

In 2015, with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, Ta-Nehisi Coates publishes *Between The World and Me*, a letter to his son reflecting on race relations in the context of Coates' own autobiographical experience.

> But some time ago I rejected magic in all its forms. This rejection was a gift from your grandparents, who never tried to console me with ideas of an afterlife and were skeptical of preordained American glory…how do I live free in this black body? It is a profound question because America understands itself as God's handiwork, but the black body is the clearest evidence that America is the work of men…I could not retreat, as did so many, into the church and its mysteries… and so I had no sense that any just God was on my side (2015:12, 28).

Later in 2015, following a mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, amid a chorus of public figures offering throughs and prayers to the victims, *The New York Daily News* runs a cover emblazoned with the headline: GOD ISN'T FIXING THIS. Politicians

on social media suddenly drew the ire of pundits and constituents for offering these condolences in the absence of tangible gun control policies.

In 2018, four members of the U.S. House of Representatives launch the Congressional Freethought Caucus dedicated to "science and reason-based policy solutions" and protecting the separation of church and state.[3] Later that year, Kyrsten Sinema—the first House Representative with no stated religious affiliation—is elected to the Senate to fill the seat vacated by the late John McCain.

The sentiments across these events are not all the same. New Atheism often concerns itself with "culture wars" questions about the proper relationship between science and public policy, the place of religion in the public sphere, and tolerance for extremist views in society (Kettell 2014; LeDrew 2015). Openly identified atheists tend to be white, male, well educated, and wealthy—often taking on that stigmatized identity against a backdrop of robust social privilege (Baker and Smith 2009; Hout and Fischer 2002; Stewart 2016; *cf.* Baker and Whitehead 2016; Edgell et al. 2017). The Black Lives Matter movement and accompanying public intellectual discourse about racial inequality speaks from a different social standpoint. Organizers and activists dealing with racial inequality *also* engage nonreligious perspectives, even though this engagement is often missed when research focuses on predominately white secular groups (for important exceptions, see, e.g. Cameron 2019; Hutchinson In Press; Pinn 2012). What is notable

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[3] For more information, see (2018) "Reps. Huffman, Raskin, McNerney, & Kildee Launch Congressional Freethought Caucus." *Congressman Jared Huffman*. Retrieved January 28, 2019 (https://huffman.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/reps-huffman-raskin-mcnerney-kildee-launch-congressional-freethought).

here is the salience of religious skepticism to political discourse across each of these perspectives. We often assume that nonreligion is defined by a lack of beliefs in the supernatural. In each of the above cases, nonreligion is not *just* the absence of a belief; it is defined by the way people leverage claims about religious skepticism to make a different, more substantive claim about some part of public life, linking that skepticism to a broader statement about community, authority, or politics.

Scholars studying secularization often emphasize that one of the defining features of late modernity is cultural pluralism, especially as fewer social institutions have a monopoly on fundamental questions of purpose, ethics, community, and authority in society. They hold the United States up as an interesting counter-example to strong secularization theories, one that could simultaneously keep pluralistic values while maintaining a robust commitment to a wide variety of religious belief systems (Putnam and Campbell 2012; *cf.* Schnabel and Bock 2017; Voas and Chaves 2016). As more people disaffiliate from religious institutions, we can now evaluate whether these demographic changes also yield cultural changes in how the electorate considers political questions once shaped by religious engagement. We can also account for the rich variety in how people understand themselves outside of religious institutions. If nonreligion provides a different set of cultural frameworks for thinking about political issues, we may be on the cusp of a dramatic restructuring in fundamental assumptions about the cultural conditions that encourage civic engagement, opinion formation, and policy advocacy. On

the other hand, religious disaffiliation could also just be another example of people drifting away from strong institutional commitments in late modern life.

Throughout this work, I use the specific terms "nonreligion" and "nonreligious," rather than the more general "secular." While a bit cumbersome, these terms draw attention to the fact that a defining feature of nonreligion is how people make sense of their position in relation to religious institutions and belief systems. Following Lee (2012, 2015), Quack (2014), Sumerau and Cragun (2016), LeDrew (2015), and others, this approach highlights the distinctly sociological way that people construct their beliefs and identities in reference to others in society, rather than assuming that nonreligious people simply have a lack of cultural engagement with religion altogether.

This definition has an important advantage for researchers interested in the full range of nonreligious beliefs and perspectives: it does not force us to treat nonreligion as a single identity category, but rather as a package of beliefs and behaviors in both personal and public life. As we have seen so far, the structural conditions that ultimately produce religious disaffiliation pull in two different directions. For some, nonreligion is *active*; it produces a coherent set of beliefs, practices, and affinities that structure how people engage in the social world. For others, nonreligion is *anomic*; it is a product of institutional "drift" in which people generally distrust, and disaffiliate from, longstanding institutions in American civic life. As I detail in Chapter Two, much of the existing research on nonreligion treats it as a single identity category. Treating the nonreligious as a single demographic group alone, the way researchers are used to treating Catholics,

evangelicals, or other religious denominations, risks obscuring this difference and masking important differences in political outcomes within this group.

The left panel of Figure 1.3 illustrates the stakes of this problem by plotting the self-reported strength of belief in god and church attendance for all of the individuals with no religious affiliation in the cumulative General Social Survey. There is a discernible pattern of low or infrequent church attendance across this group, but also substantive variation in how much the nonreligious report believing in god. Many unaffiliated respondents actually look substantively similar to low-attending affiliated respondents, and it is also possible that many affiliated respondents are substantively nonreligious themselves. This preliminary descriptive look illustrates the merit of investigating variation *within* the nonreligious to explain the presence of different religious commitments and orientations, rather than simply comparing the affiliated and the unaffiliated alone.

Using only these three measures of identification, attendance, and beliefs, we can already see that the unaffiliated have a variety of potential repertoires of nonreligion when it comes to personal expressions. In addition to the conventional expectation that the unaffiliated would report low scores on each measure, a sizable proportion "belong without believing" (Davie 1990), and others "believe without belonging" (Kasselstrand 2015) The preceding examples also show that there are a also a variety of public nonreligious repertoires available to people, ranging form New Atheism to a broader progressive vision for secular social justice. This variation produces different contexts for

how nonreligious individuals understand themselves in relation to others in the public sphere. In Chapter Two, I demonstrate how we can distinguish two examples of these different cultural repertoires of nonreligion: a personal repertoire primarily concerned with low individual engagement with religion (Pearce and Denton 2011), and a public repertoire concerned with beliefs about the role religion should play in the public sphere (Delehanty et al. 2019). Measuring these repertoires separately captures substantive variation in nonreligious beliefs and behaviors without relying on respondents' self identification alone. It also allows us to parse out the aspects of political life where religious disaffiliation is likely to have the greatest impact.

The Political Stakes of Nonreligion

Social scientists have an aversion to studying "nothing." We want to see people developing movements and working together to forge communities. Much of the political action in the U.S. over the past fifty years has come from movements tied to identity politics. Civil rights, women's rights, the New Christian Right, the LGBTQ movement, and Black Lives Matter are all illustrative examples of organized demands for political change in the interests of people who share a particular social location (e.g. McAdam 1986, Taylor 1989, Fetner 2008, Milkman 2017). In response to these movements, scholars often turn to demographic change as a leading indicator for political analysis, forecasting changes based on which groups are gaining and losing in the population and, therefore, stand to become key players in new coalitions (e.g. Jang 2009; Jones 2016,

Leighley and Nagler 2013; Ramakrishnan 2005). The rise of nonreligion raises questions about whether unaffiliated people will cohere into a similar voting bloc—a secular left to compliment the religious right. To do so, most research expects that nonreligious Americans would need to show up consistently, express coherent interests on political issues, and generate a sufficient institutional infrastructure to sustain that activity. In short, we would need to see coordinated trends in their *political engagement, opinion formation,* and *organized advocacy.*

Research on each of these fronts for nonreligious people shows mixed results that I discuss in detail in each of the following chapters. Briefly, current work suggests that nonreligious people are less engaged than their religious counterparts, consistently liberal in their opinion formation, and looking primarily to challenge religious policymaking in their advocacy. These trends provide mixed evidence for the backlash and drift hypotheses. Studies of voting and volunteering suggest that religious disaffiliation generally correlates with other kinds of civic disengagement, supporting drift theories of disaffiliation. Conversely, studies of public opinion find nonreligious respondents are consistently more liberal across a variety of political issues, supporting the backlash theory. Finally, research on the organizing and advocacy practices of secular groups in the U.S. finds that these organizations are closely tied to the presence of religious advocacy —many of these groups' stated missions focus on maintaining the separation of church and state and reducing the political influence of interest groups on the Religious Right. These findings beg the question of whether such groups have developed a sufficient

nonreligious policy agenda of their own, or are merely seeking to influence a narrow range of issues in specific, local contexts and court battles.

Both the backlash and the drift theories share a common assumption about nonreligion: they assume that the choice to leave religious institutions is an outcome of other structural considerations. For the backlash theory, religious affiliation is endogenous to political identities such that disaffiliation follows from progressive political affinities (Hout and Fischer 2014; Margolis 2018; Putnam and Campbell 2012). For drift theories, religious disaffiliation is endogenous to economic considerations such that increased time pressures, precarious labor, and the disruption of small communal living all produce environments in which bonds to religious communities are weaker and more difficult to maintain (Putnam 2001). Because both of these accounts treat disaffiliation as an outcome of other social forces, they minimize the relevance of nonreligion to future political concerns after a person disaffiliates. But this leaves mixed findings about engagement, opinion, and advocacy unexplained—we do not necessarily understand the deciding mechanism for which social force ultimately "wins out" for nonreligious people in political life. What explains the hold of the backlash theory in some cases and the drift theory in others?

The right panel of Figure 1.3 shows why this question is important. Like the left-hand panel, this plot looks at the distribution of unaffiliated respondents on measures of self-reported political ideology and party identification. The thick black square in the bottom left is expected by current research in the backlash theory. However, it is also

important to note the sizable number of unaffiliated respondents who identify as moderate and politically independent, trends that we would expect to fit the drift theory. The political variation within the unaffiliated is not explored as often in this literature, and it provides a starting point to justify updating current theories of religious disaffiliation.

Research in political sociology warns us that demography is not destiny. Demographic changes are filtered through institutional cultures—powerful social forces that shape everything from who can vote (e.g. Manza and Uggen 2008; Wang 2012), to who is motivated to vote by a compelling story that links their beliefs to political behavior (e.g. Bean 2014), to who ultimately has their voices heard in the public sphere and by policymakers (Bartels 2009; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Perrin 2014). The political beliefs of demographic groups are not uniform, as we can see in political subcultures like Black Republicans, Log Cabin Republicans, and leftist evangelical monastic groups (Fields 2016; Markofski 2015; Rogers and Lott 2016). Without attention to these institutional and cultural mechanisms, theories that see religion only as endogenous risk missing the fact that interest groups have to do a lot of work to maintain a shared sense of identity, and that institutions can exploit identity categories to stymie reform efforts (Gamson 1995; Giddens; 1991; Goldstein and Rayner 1994; Massengil 2008).

Most importantly, the work that goes into maintaining an identity-based movement or community organization can fail, because perfectly normal people do a whole lot of nothing. They don't care about politics all the time, they don't always join

formal organizations, and they don't always worry about whether or not they have a rich sense of community in their lives. This reality means the political culture of non-activists often gets the short shrift in research, because the average citizen often falls short on measures of engagement, opinion formation, and organized advocacy. First, the average citizen does not seem to show up very often, and low rates of voter turnout, volunteering, and other forms of civic engagement raise questions about the viability of new political movements (Brady et al. 1995; Putnam 2001; Smets and Van Ham 2013). Second, the average citizen does not necessarily express consistent, ideologically sophisticated, and informed opinions on specific issues (e.g. Converse 1962; Fiorina et al. 2005; Kinder 1983). Third, the rise of moneyed interest in politics leads institutional-level analysis to focus on more immediate, material concerns as the primary structuring forces of political life (e.g. Domhoff 1967; Walker and Rea 2014). This assumes that questions about where the money and power lie pre-determine who will wield cultural influence. Culture, especially mass culture, is often seen as endogenous to political systems—a superstructure that the economic or institutional base will control (e.g. Aldrich 2011; Carsey and Layman 2006; Knight 1992).

The problem with these theories is that they rely on what Lizardo (2017) calls the "declarative" aspects of culture, expecting it to produce conscious, agenda-driven narratives that spur political engagement and that respondents can talk about in a sophisticated way. They also expect a particular kind of declarative statement: specific affinities that people link directly and consistently to policy interests. In the case of

religion and politics, these theories take a “belief-centered” approach to religion that expects citizens and activists to directly translate their view of religious doctrine to policy prescriptions, aided by the elite influence of religious institutions and leaders (e.g. Chaves 2010; Edgell 2012). This risks missing other declarative political statements that might be relevant to respondents’ political engagement, such as their substantive understanding of who can legitimately participate in public life as a citizen (e.g. Alexander and Smith 1993; Smith 2003) or their inferred knowledge about what policies actually do (Martin and Desmond 2010). It also risks missing the way culture shapes non-declarative aspects of political engagement, such as feelings of political efficacy or latent evaluations of candidates or policies that are driven more by implicit “snap" judgements than deliberative cognition (e.g. Lizardo et al. 2016; Vaisey 2009).

In the study of engagement, opinion, and advocacy, recent work across the social sciences is challenging our conventional assumptions about the nature of political activity. For example, where some scholars argue that civic engagement is declining, others ask “what kind of civic engagement are we talking about?” As Patricia Hill Collins (2010) argues, concern about declining participation in formal community organizations may miss a whole range of informal organizing practices in poor communities and communities of color. Political apathy is not just the absence of awareness, mobilization, or activity; it takes a substantive amount of collective cultural work to maintain an apathetic stance toward politics. Nina Eliasoph’s research with local community and volunteer groups (1990, 1998) shows how apathy about politics is a distinct style of

political engagement that requires actors to police non-partisan spaces in their church or around the dinner table, and they nonetheless still produce ways of thinking about politics. In this work, patterns of civic action are much more variable and context-dependent, rather than simply declining (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014).

On the opinion front, research is demonstrating that people who are not necessarily experts on the intricacies of public policy are nonetheless able to express views that are coherent and consistent with their broader assumptions about the nature of community and authority in public life. Political ideology serves existential, epistemic, and relational needs (Jost et al. 2009, 2013), and people are capable of giving answers to survey questions that express their identities, elective affinities, and received assumptions about the nature of the political world (Perrin *et al.* 2014; Perrin and McFarland 2011). Recent work demonstrates how culture is influential in shaping how elites and everyday citizens engage in politics and express their interests, rather than just providing them with a common list of preferred policies to achieve (e.g. Becker 1998; Bean 2014; Binder and Wood 2013; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Bonikowski and Gidron 2016; Eliasoph 1990; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Lichterman 2008; Smilde and Zubrycki 2016). In short, understanding public opinion as the expression of different cultural affinities opens up the possibility to identify useful and coherent trends in opinion formation, even if those trends are limited by respondents' factual knowledge of any given issue.

Finally, at the institutional level, work on social fields and networks shows how cultural and emotional considerations diffuse into institutional arrangements, structuring

how actors operate in relation to one another (e.g. Bourdieu 1991; Dromi 2016; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Kucinskas 2014; Medvetz 2012; Small and Sukhu 2016) and how practices from the fringes of fields can come to dominate the mainstream (e.g. Bail 2014). Material resources do structure these relationships, but the development of a field is fundamentally one of struggle across multiple fronts—both material and cultural—where socially skilled actors can also forge new cultural strategies for advantage, organizations copy one another, and once obscure or fringe interpretations of the social world can quickly become mainstream.

These three bodies of research converge on a key insight: since social life is about relationships, it is a dramaturgical process as people perform their roles for others. Social actors forge performances for others in different contexts, according to different repertoires, and with varied levels of success (Alexander 2004, 2013; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Studies of political life that emphasize these dramaturgical processes are distinctly sociological and represent a place to bring culture back into our analysis. For identity politics, this insight helps explain why the link between identity and interests is slippery, and not every group can successfully forge a shared repertoire of action (Gamson 1995; Goldstein and Rayner 1994). For religion, this pushes us past a belief-centered understanding of religion as a set of ideological commitments to focus on how religion produces multifaceted repertoires through which people use beliefs, identities, and relationships with others to make sense of everyday life (Edgell 2012).

By integrating insights from cultural sociology, social psychology, and political science, we find that an absence of declarative activism does not necessarily indicate an absence of coherent cultural repertoires that people can use to make sense of politics. There is more work to be done for researchers to map both instances of political engagement *and* non-engagement across different groups to better explain the institutional and cultural forces that shape those choices. In cases of apathy or inconsistency, just like physicists studying dark matter, social scientists can delve into the "nothing," interrogate the assumptions behind that nothing, and often find something noteworthy that can help us better understand the reality of social life. Because nonreligion means different things to different people, a theory that is sensitive to different cultural repertoires of nonreligion can help to explain divergent outcomes across engagement, opinion, and advocacy across this group.

Outline of the Project

This dissertation uses nonreligion as a case to advance our understanding of the role of cultural change in American politics at the micro level among individuals and at the meso level among organizations and advocacy groups. One of the key insights of a cultural approach for this work is that being nonreligious does not necessarily indicate a lack of substantive beliefs or preferences. Those without religious beliefs or identities are not lacking culture; they have their own sets of cultural repertoires that they use to make sense of the social world. There are also different repertories of nonreligion—not every

unaffiliated individual agrees on the nature of community, religious authority, or religious practice. Unlike other, more well established movements, however, nonreligious Americans are rarely targeted by political elites as a key coalition to mobilize in the electorate (Domke and Coe 2008). The field of nonreligious organizations is still nascent, showing the most dramatic growth over the past fifteen years (Cimino and Smith 2014; García and Blankholm 2016). This means that nonreligious repertoires are still emergent and less coordinated by elite signaling than other religious repertoires and ideologies (e.g. Massengil 2008).

As a result, I argue that nonreligious Americans provide a key boundary case to study how substantive cultural differences can create divergent political trends from the same demographic group, and how scholars can take a better approach to studying the political culture of non-activists. Many popular observations and predictions about the political impact of this group are still, at best, conjecture. By rigorously evaluating empirical patterns in political engagement, public opinion, and collective organizing, we can better understand how emerging coalitions develop political ideologies. By focusing on different nonreligious repertoires of political engagement, we can find a renewed role for culture in studies of identity politics and mobilization.

Chapter Two reviews the research to date on religious disaffiliation, explains why we need a new approach to studying it, and outlines a method for that approach. While many Americans do leave religious institutions for political reasons, those are only one set of possible motivations. Many more are also being raised entirely outside religious

institutions and growing up with more secular social networks. Additionally, nonreligion is not necessarily a stable identity category in the U.S. population. Because of both stigma and social drift, many "nones" change their religious affiliation over time. All of these factors create an important measurement problem for the study of nonreligion: misclassification. Since much of the research to date considers nonreligion a discrete identity category much like a religious denomination, this work risks missing a sizable portion of respondents who are substantively nonreligious, but identify as something else. Instead, Chapter Two argues that we need to move past the typical survey categories to substantively define and measure different aspects of nonreligion using as wide a variety of measures as possible. I define and validate two distinct cultural repertoires of nonreligion, one focused on personal affinities and one focused on public life, and I empirically validate those repertoires in three survey data sets.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five then take the insights of this measurement approach and apply them to three questions at three different points of the political process. Each chapter uses nonreligion as a specific empirical case study to address a broader questions of interest to the study of political culture. In Chapter Three, I examine whether civic disengagement "spills over" across different institutional domains, or whether people who opt out of one kind of institution can renew their participation in another. This theoretical question begins with a simple empirical question: are nonreligious Americans more or less likely to vote than their religiously affiliated counterparts? Rather than simply comparing categories of respondents, however, I use an

approach that can examine the effects of different kinds of religious non-affiliation and non-identification on validated measures of voter turnout. Doing so raises important findings that challenge existing theories of religion and political participation.

Chapter Four examines public opinion, and investigates whether the increased partisanship of religious identification corresponds with alignment on policy views (Baldassari and Gelaman 2008). Do people simply lean on non-religious identities for political signals, or do their group identifications provide cultural repertoires that constrain issue preferences? This chapter uses the personal and public nonreligious repertoires developed in Chapter Two to examine whether respondents in two nationally-representative surveys comport their policy views on three core issue domains in line with these repertoires. Doing so allows me to map substantive differences in how respondents evaluate questions about the social safety net, racial inequality, and immigration policy, and provides new insight into how cultural repertoires of nonreligion may influence each of these core policy domains, even in the absence of targeted elite framing efforts.

Chapter Five turns to examine the political work of nonreligious advocacy groups. While we are used to observing the role of the Religious Right as a contentious social movement operating at the "front stage" of political life, recent research suggests that it has had the most success at policy reform through "back stage" processes of conventional lobbying in what Kucinskas (2014) calls "unobtrusive organizing" (Sager and Bentele 2016). Past research has also examined the front stage of secular political organizing (e.g.

Blankholm 2014; García and Blankholm 2017; Kettell 2014; LeDrew 2015). Using a mixed method analysis of lobbying data and tax records from 40 nonreligious advocacy groups, I trace the back stage development of a national network committed to advancing particular cultural repertories of nonreligion. The relationships in this organizational network illustrate how many groups have cultivated a focus on identities through personal repertoires of nonreligion. However, this focus closes off connections to larger organizations that focus on a broader agenda of public nonreligion committed to lobbying on a range of issues related to the separation of church and state. As a result, new nonreligious organizations often fall short in shaping policy as they currently lack the back stage institutional infrastructure of their religious counterparts.

Moving Forward

Together, these chapters show how focusing on cultural repertories of nonreligion can illuminate distinct trends in contemporary political life. Research on nonreligious organizations and advocacy groups suggests that trends in public opinion are *not* necessarily the result of elite organizers pushing a political agenda—in fact many of these organizations analyzed in Chapter Five never touch the core issues in Chapter Four. As a result, studying nonreligious Americans provides us with a unique case study to examine how political changes emerge from cultural changes independently of the efforts of movement leaders and partisan elites. This has implications for scholars interested in

culture and public opinion, civic engagement, religion and non-religion, and organizing efforts to spur political movements.

For scholars of culture and political psychology, this study synthesizes recent insights across both fields to advocate for a more culturally sophisticated approach to the study of public opinion. Rather than narrowly considering policy preferences and political interests, this approach understands survey response as respondents' stylistic expression of identities and affinities (e.g. Goren 2013; Goren and Chapp 2017; Federico, et al. 2013; Perrin and McFarland 2011; Perrin et al. 2014). Taking such an approach improves our understanding of how political preferences align with respondents' moral foundations, but also how different social arrangements condition variation in the expression of those moral foundations.

For political scientists and researchers interested in political institutions, this study offers a look into the emergence of a new advocacy network and the diffusion of culture across relationships and advocacy practices in nonreligious organizations. Building on research on religious advocacy work (e.g. Hofrenning 1995; Kucinskas 2014; Lindsay 2008; Sager 2011; Sager and Bentele 2016) and early explorations of nonreligious advocacy (e.g. Blankholm 2014; Kettell 2013; 2014), this comprehensive examination of the emerging national field of nonreligious organizations demonstrates how cultural factors—such as varied repertoires of nonreligion—affect the emergence of organizations drawing on multiple forms of social capital.

For scholars of religion, this work highlights the importance of a core theoretical distinction between private religious commitments and the expression of religion in public life, one that has important implications for the way research explains the relationship between religion and public opinion, prejudice and tolerance, and civic engagement (Whitehead and Perry 2015; Perry and Whitehead 2015; Stewart et al. 2018). Throughout this work, we will see that public religious repertoires offer improved explanatory power over considering private religious engagement alone. By drawing on a cultural sociology of religion (Edgell 2012), many of these findings about nonreligious Americans also provide generative insights that will improve measurement and theory for studying the role of religion in public life.

Chapter 2: Measuring Nonreligion

Personal & Public Repertoires

Religious disaffiliation has spurred interest across social science—in sociology (e.g Edgell et al. 2006, 2016; Hout and Fischer 2002; 2014; Manning 2015; Schnabel and Bock 2017; Smith and Cragun 2019; Sumerau and Cragun 2016; Zuckerman 2011), political science (e.g. Brockway 2018; Layman and Weaver 2016), psychology (e.g. Gervais and Najle 2018; Silver et al. 2014), and history (e.g. Schmidt 2016). This interest has produced a range of qualitative and quantitative work on the demographic characteristics and culture of people who are not religious, including their lived experiences, community and identity formation, and participation in social activism.

Social science benefits from this variety of methodological approaches and theoretical interpretations of what nonreligion means in different contexts—for debates about secularization and social change (e.g. Gorski and Altinordu 2008), for international comparative work (e.g. Voas and Chaves 2016; Wilkins-Laflame 2017), and for understanding how people piece together religious belief, belonging, and behavior in an increasingly pluralistic religious landscape (e.g. Ammerman 2014; Marshall 2002; Pearce and Denton 2011; Wilcox 2009).

In light of these benefits, however, the study of nonreligion also faces a methodological problem: do we define people who are not particularly religious as an

identity category (indicating a difference in kind) or focus on measuring their substantive beliefs and affinities (indicating a difference of degree)? In this chapter, I argue that much of the current research on religious disaffiliation treats the unaffiliated as a category. When research in this field innovates, it often does so by calling for data disaggregation —splitting the broad category of "none" or "nothing in particular" into more finely grained categories that can highlight atheists,"spiritual but not religious" respondents, and more.

This categorical approach creates useful knowledge about these subgroups, but it is also limited by two problems. First, it creates an increasingly complicated terrain of terminologies and typologies to categorize nonreligion that is not harmonized across subfields (Lee 2012). For example, some studies separate people who identify as atheists and agnostics from those who choose "nothing in particular" on a self-identification survey item. Others make similar distinctions, but use self-reported belief in god. These studies are using the same terminology to label different categories, and each can generate different results from studies that consider "nones" as a single group. Social science also benefits from research that synthesizes these fine-grained distinctions to provide clear concepts that can capture different kinds of nonreligion and apply those measurements coherently across disciplines (Guhin 2014; Steensland 2009).

Second, categorical approaches to studying nonreligion invite a classification problem. As we saw in Chapter One, nonreligion is not just the absence of religious culture or socialization. It means different things to different people, and so researchers'

decisions about identity categories are susceptible to three challenges that I detail below: social desirability bias where people underreport nonreligion, classification error where people are excluded from analysis because their identity categories contrast with researchers' categories, and respondent switching where people change their religious affiliation over time. All three of these problems create a situation in which people who are *substantively* nonreligious are excluded from analysis, potentially biasing results.

Researchers are used to treating religiosity as a spectrum of different beliefs, behaviors, and identities. To address these challenges, research on nonreligion also needs to capture substantive variation in beliefs and practices (Baker and Smith 2015). Cultural approaches to the study of religion help to address this problem, because they emphasize the way beliefs and practices intersect with each other and with broader assumptions about the role of religion in social life (Edgell 2012) to inform different repertoires of religious experience. By taking a cultural approach to nonreligion, this chapter provides a method that can help research across social science subfields. I argue that research needs to implement two changes: first, it need to supplement categorical analyses with continuous measures of substantive religious engagement whenever possible to address the challenges outlined above. It is perfectly fine to compare different categories of religion and nonreligion, but research also needs to address the robustness of those comparisons by using alternative measures that cut across these categories. Second, these continuous measures need to incorporate a key theoretical distinction: the difference between personal and public repertoires of nonreligion. Analysis below demonstrates that

public and personal nonreligious repertoires are related to one another, but also analytically distinct measures that capture different aspects of respondents' religious commitments.

First, I anchor a cultural approach in an interdisciplinary review of literature on nonreligion, arguing that many of the theoretical models currently offered hint at a broad distinction between different kinds of personal and public nonreligion. To address this theoretical possibility and evaluate it empirically, I modify a strategy from work in sociology and political science that distinguishes low religious engagement from respondents' active endorsement of secular beliefs (Delehanty et al. 2019; Layman and Weaver 2016; Stewart et al. 2018). Following work on the cultural turn in the sociology of religion, my approach treats nonreligion not as a *difference in kind* the way one would discuss denominational affiliation, but as a difference of *degree* across two different cultural repertoires: personal nonreligion focused on personal beliefs and practices and public nonreligion grounded in how respondents understand the role of religious authority in the public sphere (Caplow et al. 1983; Lee 2015; Sumerau and Cragun 2016; Quack 2014). Results from three survey data sets show that a distinction between public and personal nonreligion is present across different response patterns to different items, that there is substantive variation in each measure among both religiously affiliated and unaffiliated respondents, and that the personal repertoire is more closely associated with nonreligious identities while the public repertoire is more closely associated with a basic measure of political ideology. Attending to the public/personal distinction is one way to

harmonize findings about nonreligious populations and to advance social scientific research by clarifying measurement constructs and making them explicit. These results also caution researchers not to infer political positions directly from personal nonreligious repertoires.

Typologies of Nonreligion

Research offers different ways to measure religiosity as a spectrum, typically distinguishing certainty of religious beliefs, frequency of behaviors such as prayer and attendance at religious services, and strength of commitments through personal salience and religious belonging (Cornwall et al. 1986 Davidson and Knudsen 1977: Wimberley 1989; Marshall 2002; Pearce and Denton 2011). More recently, additional work on Christian Nationalism and the public expression of religiosity has also introduced a new measurement dimension that attends specifically to how people feel religion should be integrated into public life (Delehanty et al. 2019; Whitehead et al. 2017; Stewart et al. 2018).

With such a variety of measures to capture different aspects of religiosity, what defines nonreligion? Early work on the topic uses a simple definition with a categorical measure focused on the religiously unaffiliated who select “none” on survey items inviting religious identification. Prior to 2000, this number was smaller than fifteen percent of the U.S. population. While it has risen steadily since, the relatively small number of respondents in this category encouraged early research to move in one of three

directions: to compare affiliated and unaffiliated respondents on outcome measures of interest to assess the nature of religious disaffiliation alone (e.g. Hout and Fischer 2002, Vargas and Loveland 2011), to include nonreligious respondents along with other smaller religious minority groups in a catch-all categories for "other" religion, or to focus on smaller, more targeted subsamples of the unaffiliated, such as atheists (e.g. Cimino and Smith 2012; Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; LeDrew 2015).

More comprehensive studies of nonreligion include a variety of measures for belief, belonging, and behavior (e.g. Keysar 2014; Sherkat 2008). However, many of these approaches in survey research focus on using these measures to create more categorical distinctions for different "types" of nonreligion based on some combination of beliefs and practices. For example, Hout and Fischer's (2002, 2014) pioneering analysis of religious disaffiliation finds that many people who choose no religious affiliation nonetheless express belief in god or other religious commitments. In their approach, religious disaffiliation is primarily about leaving religious institutions, leading them to describe the group as "unchurched believers." Baker and Smith (2009, 2015) build on this category and demonstrate how research can find many substantive differences between unchurched believers, atheists, and agnostics. In contrast, Sherkat (2008) focuses on explicit distinctions in theistic certainty, rather than self-identification, comparing the demographic predictors of atheism, agnosticism, and doubting belief in god. The contrast between identification and beliefs also overlaps, as self-identified atheists exhibit different sociodemographic traits from non-believers who do not identify as atheists

(Stewart 2016). Most importantly for this project, such work finds that atheists and agnostics express stronger progressive political views that unchurched believers. These identity sub-categories within the unaffiliated as a whole have meaningful stakes for political research, as they may be proxies for other ideological considerations.

When research considers other measures outside of these conventional metrics for religiosity, it often finds good reason to further subdivide the unchurched believers. For example, researchers have also identified a growing number of people in the United States who self-identify as "spiritual, but not religious" (McClure 2017). While SBNRs and unchurched believers share a similar skepticism of religious institutions, SBNRs also pursue alternative practices and meaningful community ties that can provide comparable social goods to conventional religious communities (Besecke 2014; Mercadante 2014). Other work in political science interested in the mobilization of nonreligious people raises a distinction between "active" or "committed" seculars and "passive" seculars (Brockway 2018; Layman and Weaver 2016). In this typology, active seculars treat nonreligion as an "affirmative identification with and commitment to secular views of the world" (Layman and Weaver 2016:276), agreeing with survey items that emphasize the role of factual evidence, philosophy, science, and reason in making moral decisions. Passive seculars, on the other hand, exhibit low engagement on conventional measures of religious belief, belonging, or behavior without expressing these ideological affinities.

The Problem With Typologies

These typologies have been quite useful for scholarship that is interested in nonreligion as a new and growing set of identities outside of conventional religious institutions. However, they also invite challenges for researchers who are interested in the full range of people who choose not to affiliate with religious institutions for two reasons. First, not everyone who disaffiliates develops a coherent and salient personal identity around that disaffiliation. Second, identity-based claims are not the only mechanism through which religious considerations impact other aspects of social life. One important takeaway from the research reviewed here and in Chapter One is that the nonreligious are not a single, unified identity group, but a large and diverse body of people with a variety of religious experiences.

This variation is especially important when we start to try to harmonize findings across social science subfields. Lee (2012) outlines a number of problems for social science when these subfields do not use consistent terminology to refer to people without a religious affiliation. For example, survey items indicating "active secularism" for Layman and Weaver (2016:280) and Brockway (2018) include prompts such as "factual evidence from the natural world is the source of true beliefs," and "the great works of philosophy and science are the best source of truth, wisdom, and ethics." Other work on secular social movements (e.g. Cimino and Smith 2014; LeDrew 2015; Kettell 2014) supports this measurement strategy, but with one important caveat: these ideological statements emerge from the discourse of *movement atheism*. The organizations that advance these views integrate them into their construction of what it means to identify as

an atheist (Smith 2013), producing a distinct package of personal nonreligious beliefs, moral philosophy, social authority, and communal identity that is not widely shared among the majority of religiously unaffiliated respondents. If this operationalization is tied to the packaging efforts of movement atheism, "active secularism" can be a useful proxy for this kind of group affinity and ideology, but it does not necessarily capture the considerations that the majority of nonreligious respondents may bring to bear on their political decisions. Putting research on the nonreligious from sociology and political science into conversation shows us how using different measurement strategies risks capturing only a distinct and limited subset of the full range of nonreligious respondents.

In addition to the theoretical challenge of speaking across different fields and measurement approaches, a categorical approach to studying nonreligion creates three empirical challenges that can bias results. The first is social desirability bias, and research on atheism presents a classic example of this challenge at work. In the United States, anti-atheist sentiment is persistent and durable, and research demonstrates that negative attitudes toward atheists can also "spill over" and structure respondents' views about nonreligion more broadly (Edgell et al. 2016). Researchers have long suspected that many kind of nonreligious identification, especially atheism, are underreported. Basic descriptive statistics bear this out; approximately 10% of the U.S. population reports that they do not believe in god, while only about 4% of the population self identifies as an atheist (Pew 2014). Experimental studies assessing this possibility with unmatched count techniques demonstrate this underreporting and estimate that the actual proportion of

people who do not believe in god could be as high as 26% (Gervais and Najle 2018). Other observational studies indicate that women and people of color, for example, are more likely to take on a less-stigmatized nonreligious identity such as nothing in particular or spiritual but not religious than a more stigmatized identity like "atheist" (Edgell et al. 2017; Hutchinson In Press). Given this work, studies that rely on self-identification questions to establish their nonreligious categories risk missing or misclassifying a large number of respondents who do not feel comfortable identifying as such, even if their substantive religious beliefs or behaviors are more closely aligned with more stigmatized identity categories.

The second challenge for research is respondent misclassification due to the gap between categories that are researcher-defined (etic) and respondent-defined (emic). A core example here is scholarly debate about the validity of the category "spiritual, but not religious." Nancy Ammerman (2013, 2014) presents an empirical challenge to this category with interview data that demonstrates how people actually combine a wide variety of "spiritual" and "religious" considerations in different ways; some closely align the two in a conventional theistic package, while others focus on manifestations of spirituality in the natural world or in everyday compassion that are not necessarily replacing religious engagement. However, other work suggests that the defining feature of SBNRs is their skepticism of organized religious institutions, where respondents use the identity term itself to convey a very specific meaning about their relationship to those institutions (Besecke 2014; Mercadante 2014). Moreover, the belief systems and lived

experiences of respondents may be converging with their identities. McClure (2017) identifies coherent patterns in survey data in which SBNR-identified respondents exhibit unique views of god and moral authority that distinguish them from respondents with other religious identifications. Together, this work demonstrates how research can use the category SBNR meaningfully, but also that researchers need to carefully consider the use of this term for their specific analytic goals, rather than assuming both they and their respondents agree on what the term conveys.

The third and perhaps most important problem for categorical studies of nonreligion is religious switching and the presence of what researchers call "liminal nones" (Hout 2017; Lim et al. 2010). Liminal nones are people who change their identification back and forth from affiliated to unaffiliated over time and across waves of survey panel data. Using panel data from the General Social Survey, Hout (2017) estimates that liminals comprise up to 20% of the U.S. population. The presence of this group reduces the proportion of unaffiliated respondents that research can treat as a substantive identity group, because it raises the possibility of both actual religious switching (Sherkat 2014) and error in respondents' reporting of their religious identities. If many nonreligious individuals are indeed liminal and change their unaffiliated status over time, it may not always be appropriate to classify the nonreligious as a coherent group the way one would speak about Catholics or Mormons.

All three of these potential errors demonstrate the limitations of treating nonreligion as a category and relying on survey measures of religious identification that

offer "none" as an option. The core methodological problem across all of these examples is that research risks missing people who are substantively nonreligious in their beliefs or behaviors, but do not necessarily check the proper box on survey questions about *identity.* In Chapter One, we saw the potential stakes of this classification error by looking at the range in religious belief and attendance among people in the "none" category. Chapter Three will further highlight the empirical stakes of this problem in cases like voter turnout, where similar issues with selection bias in who gets labeled as a "voter" can change our understanding of patterns in civic engagement. Here, I present a solution to these classification problems. By focusing on a cultural approach to measuring nonreligion—one that can take the packaging of different beliefs, affinities, and behaviors seriously and foreground it analytically—we can alleviate this problem.

A Cultural Approach to Studying Nonreligion

The sociology of religion has been defined by different paradigms over the years, many of which concern what people believe and how they choose their religious communities. For example, the secularization paradigm concerned itself with whether people would lose their religious beliefs and commitments as societies became more wealthy and more highly educated (see Gorski and Altinordu (2008) for a comprehensive review), rational choice theories of religion focused more on the benefits of religious adherence and religious choice, including mutual social commitment and the existential benefits of "strict" religious communities (e.g. Finke and Stark 1989, Iannaconne 1994),

while other paradigms focus on the unique institutional flexibility of American religious groups to innovate and meet the needs of social change and individual religious seeking (Madsen 2009; Warner 1993).

The challenge for many of these paradigms is that they ultimately end up trying to adjudicate "authentic" religious commitments. The secularization paradigm, for example, becomes invested in empirically determining whether people are actually showing up at church (Hadaway et al. 1993) or whether sufficiently "strong" religious commitments are actually on the decline (see recent debates between Schnabel and Bock (2017, 2018) and Voas and Chaves (2016, 2018)). This problem drives the theoretical conflict outlined in Chapter One: scholars focused on religious disaffiliation have become very invested in two competing theories of breaking and drifting, and figuring out which one is correct requires establishing what people "really believe" about their religious commitments. Break theory proposes that people have substantive commitments that inform their choice to break from religious communities, while drift theory assumes that people lack sufficient and substantive commitments to remain tied to those communities.

In contrast to these authenticity questions, other work draws on perspectives in the sociology of culture that focus on how and when people use shared meanings in their lives (e.g. Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Sewell Jr. 1992; Swidler 1986). In this perspective, culture is not a static doctrine to which people adhere, but a set of available repertoires of action that they can apply in different social contexts. Research on lived religion, for example, takes as its analytic focus the way that people enact their religious

identities and perspectives in everyday life, sometimes inconsistently applying their beliefs, behaviors, and identities (e.g. Ammerman 2014; Riesebrodt 2010). Other research brings in work on culture and cognition to argue that this inconsistency in religious expression is the norm, and that to expect consistency and congruency between religious beliefs, affinities, and practice is a fallacy (Chaves 2010). Theories of religious complexity argue that religion intersects with other social locations—such as race and social class—and that these intersections substantively change religious expression in social life (Wilde and Glassman 2016; Yukich and Edgell 2019).

In a review of much of this work, Penny Edgell (2012) calls these approaches a "cultural sociology of religion"—one that foregrounds how both elites and everyday people package together different combinations of religious beliefs, affinities, and practices into repertories of action that fit the context of different institutions and different social locations. People use these different repertoires to make sense of the world around them, and their religious commitments are always in conversation with their other social locations. This paradigm expects inconsistency in religious expression, and it understands that the task of research is to map that complexity in a coherent way, rather than taking it as evidence of weak or inauthentic religious expression.

This approach is especially useful for the study of nonreligion, because it can advance a theoretical synthesis between the drift and break theories that research has traditionally used to make sense of religious disaffiliation. Rather than assuming disaffiliation indicates the presence of specific ideological traits or the lack of substantive

social ties, cultural approaches concerned with packaging invite us to map how people with low religious commitments bring together different aspects of identity, practice, and belief into different repertoires for social action (Becker 1999). Thinking about repertoires can help us map the cultural complexity of nonreligion outlined in Chapter One, get around the potential classification errors outlined above, and produce a more substantive understanding of the situations in which nonreligion can shape political action.

Qualitative research on nonreligion based on interviews or ethnographic work provides multiple examples of this kind of approach at work. This research focuses on different practices through which nonreligious individuals take on a variety of identities and act them out in social life (Beaman and Tomlins 2015; Cotter 2015; Lee 2015; LeDrew 2015; Smith 2011; Zuckerman 2011). For example, interviews and participant observations studies have identified multiple ways that nonreligious people perceive religious others (Guenther 2014; Guenther et al. 2013; LeDrew 2015; Sumerau and Cragun 2016), develop collective identities through in-group socialization (Cimino and Smith 2014; Smith 2011), and advocate for a secular public sphere (Blankholm 2014; Kettell 2014). Across all of this work, researchers have identified how some people fiercely advocate for nonreligious worldviews, preferring a confrontational or combative stance against religion in the public sphere. Other people are more accommodating of religious differences and view their nonreligion as secondary to other identities and social commitments.

Since people who are not particularly religious are also embedded in social relationships with other individuals and institutions that are, nonreligion is not just defined by non-belief, infrequent religious practice, or disaffiliation from institutions. It is also defined by how people live out these relationships with others. Much of the research on nonreligion, both qualitative and quantitive, implicitly suggests a distinction between these practices and relationships, or the public and the personal dimensions of nonreligion. By making that distinction explicit and mapping both personal and public nonreligious repertoires, research can begin to identify substantive differences in degree that may provide more explanatory power in the study of religion and politics and help to harmonize findings across research disciplines.

Personal and Public Repertoires

In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), C. Wright Mills famously draws a distinction between personal troubles and public issues to illustrate two ways of thinking about one's place in society. Personal troubles are the domain of individuals, where problems like the loss of a job are indicative of private struggles, while public issues like unemployment have social structural explanations that operate across different individual experiences. One of the core points in Mills' work is that the link between personal and public considerations is not inevitable—it takes cultural work to align these considerations. Researchers can run into trouble when they use measures for one consideration as a proxy for the other. Classic debates in the social sciences about

“irrational behavior” or “false consciousness” often arise when research expects an alignment between these considerations but does not observe it.

Religion in the United States has always had public dimensions. As a colonial and frontier society without the strong influence of a single, state-sanctioned church, and with a federated state system that relied primarily on state and local government action, historical sociological work emphasizes how local religious bodies were a key element in attending to problems of social order. Theological debate became a means of settling conflicts over local political authority (Erikson 1963), religious institutions offered early solutions for managing social problems (Porterfield 2012; Wuthnow 2011), and religiosity became associated with the virtues of good citizenship (Caplow et al.1983; Tocqueville 2003; Weber in Kalberg 2009; Williams 1999, 2013).

Religious identities can inform a vision of the proper role of religion in public life when these two considerations are packaged together by leaders or institutions using cultural repertoires. Americans have long associated certain kinds of religiosity with civic virtue while holding minority religious others and non-religious others as illegitimate (e.g. Edgell et al. 2016; Herberg 1983; Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009). Recent research on public religious expression (Delehanty et al. 2019; Stewart et al. 2018) and the role of Christian Nationalism and evangelical activism in politics (Whitehead et al. 2017) has drawn attention to the way religious and political leaders develop shared cultural frameworks to talk not only about personal religious commitments, but to link those commitments directly to propositions about community belonging, citizenship, and

political authority. While earlier research identified the process of "deprivatization," where religious leaders or advocacy groups enter the public sphere to advance their political interests or social preservation (e.g. Casanova 1994; Regnerus and Smith 1998), this research highlights how public considerations are also integrated into the cultural repertoires that make up the religious expression of attendees and lay leaders in the general population as well (Bean 2014).

A cultural sociology concerned with different repertoires for expressing nonreligion can help to advance research past the challenges outlined above by incorporating a similar distinction between personal and public nonreligion. Existing typologies of nonreligion capture the heterogeneity in *personal* definitions of non-religiosity based on beliefs and behaviors (e.g. Hout and Fischer 2002; 2014, Keysar 2014; Layman and Weaver 2016), but often talk around the distinction between those personal aspects and the public implications of a nonreligious perspective. This can miss a key dimension of nonreligion; a person may never outwardly self-identify as nonreligious, and yet may neither believe in any god or higher power nor accept the legitimacy of religious claims in the public sphere. Another may wish to maintain a degree of spirituality in her personal life and may welcome the government support of religious charities, but also strongly support the separation of church and state when it comes to legislation over issues such as school prayer. It is possible and necessary for research to map this complexity.

Identifying different repertoires of personal and public nonreligion can help

research move past the argument between the drift and break theories outlined in Chapter One. Drift theories treat nonreligion as one particular cultural repertoire defined by reduced engagement with religious institutions and individual autonomy. In other words, drift theories weight the personal dimensions of nonreligion. In contrast, break theories focused on conflict with the Religious Right place more weight on the public dimensions of nonreligion by focusing on how disaffiliation represents a rejection of the link between religion and political authority. If a theory and method that centers these different cultural repertoires is correct, then the tension between these two perspectives starts to disappear. Instead, research can measure these repertoires separately to explain how different kinds of nonreligion relate to other kinds of social and political behavior. First, we have to establish whether a method that distinguishes between personal and public repertoires is reliable and valid.

Testing the Method

Do substantive measures that capture personal and public nonreligion perform better than conventional measures that capture personal nonreligion alone? Below, I validate a measurement approach that can capture both personal and public nonreligion using parallel analysis in three survey data sets.

First is the 2014 Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey (BAM), fielded by the University of Minnesota American Mosaic Project in partnership with GfK with funding from the National Science Foundation (grants #s 1258926 and 1258933) and the

Edelstein Family Foundation. GfK's KnowledgePanel recruitment is based on online, probability-based sampling (Couper 2017), which assures that multiple sequential samples drawn from this rotating panel membership will each reliably represent the U.S. population (Callegaro and DiSogra 2008; Yeager et al. 2011). The BAM survey sample was drawn from panel members using a probability proportional to size (PPS) weighted sampling approach oversampled for African Americans and Hispanics. The response rate was 57.9%, a higher response rate than average comparable national surveys for a final N of 2,521 (Holbrook et al. 2007).

Second is a 2016 multi-investigator election panel study conducted by the University of Minnesota Center for the Study of Political Psychology (CSPP), fielded by Survey Sampling International (SSI). SSI employs a similar panel methodology to GfK, but recruits participants through online communities and social networks by focusing on demographic groups that are difficult to reach. The CSPP developed a survey weight to bring this sample in line with nationally representative benchmarks on race, age, ethnicity, income, gender, and educational attainment. Following other work using SSI data in political science, I treat this data set as a diverse national sample meant to supplement the representative probability sample drawn for the BAM 2014 survey (Kam 2012; Malhotra et al. 2013; Margolis 2016). SSI sampled 6,320 individuals to complete the study, with 3,557 successfully completing Wave One between July 1st and July 18th, 2016.

Third, I also use a convenience sample of respondents collected from Amazon's

Mechanical Turk Service in October of 2016 (N=743). Respondents to this survey completed the religion battery from the above surveys, as well as a range of questions about political issues and social-psychological metrics. Research on the composition of MTurk samples finds that these panels of paid respondents do differ from population samples, but that these differences are significantly reduced by controlling for a basic suite of sociodemographic measures (Levay et al. 2016). Moreover, samples of MTurk participants tend to skew non-religious (Lewis et al. 2015). While this would be a methodological issue for other analyses, it is an advantage for this research because it provides an additional sample comprised of more secular individuals to test these assumptions.

All three surveys include the same set of items designed to measure both personal and public nonreligion. To capture one possible personal nonreligious repertoire, I use Pearce and Denton's (2011) example of the "avoider" repertoire—a common example among religiously unaffiliated respondents in which respondents who disaffiliate from religion disengage from participating in religious groups and seeing religion as relevant to other spheres of their social lives. I use three items to capture this repertoire: personal religious salience ("how important is your religious identity to you"), attendance at religious services (" how often do you attend religious services?"), and belief in god (in BAM 2014: "do you believe in god or a universal spirit?" in CSPP and MTurk 2016: "which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about god?"). All of these items use Likert-type response scales, with the exception of the BAM 2014 belief in god

question, which used the Gallup's dichotomous question wording. To improve upon this wording and provide a measure that is easier to standardize, both 2016 surveys used the General Social Survey's six-point scale for certain belief in god.

To capture public nonreligion, I use three survey items adapted from Delehanty et al.'s (2019) study of public religious expression to capture whether respondents disagree that religion should play a role in fostering good political leadership, good citizenship, and good social interaction with others. Each of these items employed a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree for the following statements: "religion is important for being a good American," "a President should have strong religious beliefs," and "society's standards of right and wrong should be based on god's laws." All of these items are coded for analysis such that higher values indicate stronger *nonreligious* perspectives to assist interpretation alongside personal repertoire; respondents who prefer a secular public sphere by disagreeing with these items receive higher scores.

At issue is whether these items are all informed by the same latent construct—a general sense of religiosity—or whether they are better measured as two different latent constructs—one for personal and one for public nonreligion. To investigate this question, I first modify an analytic approach employed by Layman and Weaver (2016) to test differences between active and passive secularism using confirmatory factor analysis (Maruyama 1998). I test differences in fit between two CFA models: a counterfactual model in which all of these items are informed by one latent factor for nonreligion, and a

theoretical model with two correlated latent factors for personal and public nonreligion. Figure 2.1 illustrates these theoretical models.

After assessing differences in model fit, I turn to investigating whether these two measures together can do a better job mapping substantive differences across people who are religiously affiliated and unaffiliated. To do this, I use an additional categorical measure of religious identification that was included on all three surveys: "What is your current religious preference, if any?" Response options to this item included Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Some other religion, Spiritual but not Religious (SBNR), atheist, agnostic, or Nothing in Particular. The analyses presented below incorporate a measure for any nonreligious identification (SBNR, atheist, agnostic, and NIP combined), as well as a measure that disaggregates these categories following work that highlights substantive differences within the nonreligious (e.g. Baker and Smith 2015: Edgell et al. 2017; Frost and Edgell 2017). By comparing the predicted factor scores for each respondent's personal and public nonreligion across these identification categories, we can determine whether there is systemic and substantive variation on these measures within the nonreligious.

It is important to clarify that this analysis is not intended to establish causal direction as to whether nonreligious repertoires inform disaffiliation or whether people develop these repertoires after disaffiliation. The intention here is measurement validation —to establish whether these repertoires should be distinguished from each other and, given this distinction, whether they can do a better job describing differences in religious

disaffiliation.

Results

Table 2.1 provides descriptive statistics for each of the core nonreligion items across the three surveys. As expected, the MTurk sample does lean more secular than the representative surveys, with mean scores on each item that are higher than their counterparts. This convenience sample also has a higher proportion of self-identified atheists and agnostics than the representative samples, as expected by previous evaluations (Lewis et al. 2015). The core question is whether the first six items in Table 2.1 should be combined or treated separately as indicators for both personal and public nonreligion. Figure 2.1 illustrates these two possibilities as a set of confirmatory factor analysis models to test.

Table 2.2 summarizes the results of these tests in each data set. Two important points emerge from this table. First, the two-factor model that distinguishes public and private nonreligion provides a substantively better fit to the data in each survey. There are multiple methods to evaluate the fit of a confirmatory factor analysis model. These include the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)—which indicate improvements in model fit relative to a null model as they approach 1—and the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which should both decrease as model fit improves (Hooper et al. 2008). While the single-factor model provides a reasonable fit to the data according to

the CFI and SRMR, the two-factor model improves the TLI and the RMSEA past the threshold for what the literature considers an excellent model fit (CFI & TLI > .96, RMSEA & SRMR < .09). Together, these results suggest that conceptualizing religious commitments as two sets of personal and public factors offers a more comprehensive and accurate view of the structure of those commitments that is reliable across three data sets.

Second, the factor loadings across these models show how separating personal and public nonreligion provides improved internal consistency on each measure. In each single-factor model, standardizing to church attendance creates high factor loadings for the other personal items[4], but comparatively lower factor loading for public items. Once the two-factor model separates these items, however, factor loadings for the public items rise as they are standardized to religious citizenship—another public item. These results suggest that the public and private factors are internally consistent, and they provide evidence for concurrent and discriminant validity of the measurement structure.

How do these measures map onto religious disaffiliation? Figure 2.2 explores this category using jittered scatterplots. These plots place each respondent according to their predicted scores for the two-factor model, with personal nonreligion along the x-axis and public nonreligion along the y-axis. People who selected a religious affiliation are colored gray, while people who selected atheist, agnostic, spiritual but not religious, or "nothing in particular" are highlighted in black.

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[4] The one exception to this pattern is the belief in god item in the BAM 2014 survey, which appears to have lower factor loadings. This is due to the dichotomous coding of the item—a limitation of this particular survey data—and the general pattern holds for the likert-type items for belief in the CSPP and MTurk data.

If religious disaffiliation were closely tied to both personal and public nonreligion, we would expect to see a fairly clean break in the plots. Black points should be clustered in the upper-right hand corner among respondents who score highly on both factors, while gray points should be clustered in the lower-left. This is not entirely the case in Figure 2.2. Instead, we see substantive overlap in affiliation across these scores. The upper-right quadrant contains respondents who scored above the mean on both factors—those who appear to be substantively nonreligious in terms of their personal preferences and in the vision of the public sphere. It is important to note that many of the respondents in this quadrant maintain a religious affiliation, despite expressing preferences on the factor items that are ostensibly secular. It may be the case that these people maintain a religious affiliation that they were raised in, despite not practicing frequently. They could also be avoiding an explicitly nonreligious identity label due to the social desirability biases discussed above (e.g. Edgell et al. 2017). Or, they may exhibit a pattern of religious expression in which they "belong without believing" by maintaining religious ties for community reasons despite their own skepticism of religious authority or doctrine (Kasselstrand 2015).

Conversely, the bottom-left corner contains respondents who express stronger religious commitments on the factor scores, and here we see a smaller proportion of respondents who report no religious affiliation. For some people, this could be due to simple errors in question response. However, it may also indicate a pattern where people who express strong religious commitments, but prefer a non-denominational affiliation,

reject the available identity options in the survey item.

Additionally, in the upper-left hand corner, we see another important subgroup of respondents who report both affiliation and non-affiliation—those who score below the mean on personal nonreligion (indicating higher religious salience and practice), but above the mean on public nonreligion (indicating a stronger rejection of religious authority in the public sphere). This quadrant indicates the presence of people who appear to have strong personal religious commitments, but also support a stronger implicit separation of church and state in their views on religious authority.

While the unaffiliated are concentrated in the upper-right hand corner, as we would expect, they are much more evenly dispersed across these three quadrants than the literature typically expects. Overall, figure 2.2 provides preliminary evidence for the presence of different nonreligious repertoires within the unaffiliated *and within the affiliated,* as each option for identification contains respondents who combine their personal and their public views on religion in different ways. Analyses that focus only on the categorical difference between the affiliated and the unaffiliated risk missing this underlying variation.

To explain the variation in this Figure, Table 2.3 uses logistic regression to examine whether these factor scores can effectively explain the binary difference between religious affiliation and disaffiliation. As the models in this table illustrate, both the personal and public repertoires are significantly associated with the probability of a respondent saying they are unaffiliated at the bivariate level. However, controlling for

both at the same time demonstrates that personal nonreligion explains more of the variation in the probability of affiliation. Table 2.4 extends these models using multinomial logistic regression for a variety of nonreligious identification options. Each model in this table compares a nonreligious subgroup (atheists, agnostics, spiritual but not religious, and nothing in particular) to a baseline of affiliated respondents. In most cases, personal nonreligion again explains more of the variation in the probability of each response. The models in these tables suggest that while there is substantive variation in public nonreligion among the unaffiliated, that variation does not necessarily explain the choice to take on any particular nonreligious identity label. This choice is best explained by lower levels of personal nonreligion, such as less frequent attendance at services, lower personal salience, and lower belief in god.

However, this pattern is reversed when we examine the relationship between nonreligious repertoires and political views in Table 2.5. Here, linear regression models test the relationship between each repertoire and how respondents place themselves on a seven-point scale ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Again, both personal and public nonreligious repertoires are separately associated with stronger self-reported liberalism. In a model that controls for both, however, public nonreligion has a stronger bivariate relationship with political ideology, explains more of the variation in political ideology, and negates the effect of personal nonreligion on political ideology (even reversing the sign of the coefficient estimate in the BAM 2014 data).

Together, these preliminary models indicate that people who avoid their religion

in their personal lives are not necessarily developing a comparable repertoire of nonreligious perspectives on public life. These two constructs are related to one another, but they are theoretically and empirically distinct, and each can provide different information about respondents' identities and political considerations.

Moving Forward - Applying the Method

Research has identified a wide range of nonreligious identities, beliefs, and practices. If future work does not attend to this variation by focusing only on a categorical measure of religious disaffiliation, it risks misclassifying respondents due to respondent switching, social desirability bias, and measurement error. A cultural approach to the study of religion and nonreligion is helpful to map out this variation and to specify specific repertoires of nonreligion—packages of beliefs, practices, and affinities that people develop to express their commitments and apply them to their lives. It also reminds us that different religious and nonreligious repertoires are not necessarily interchangeable. People who are staunchly committed to their personal religious standpoints may not necessarily translate those views into support for religion in the public sphere, while moderately nonreligious partisans who do not attend church often may nonetheless show stronger support for a political candidate with strong religious commitments. Research needs to map repertoires in order to better parse the relationship between religion and political considerations and, in turn, to better infer and explain political trends among the growing nonreligious population in the United States.

To test the theoretical proposition that repertoires of nonreligion matter, and to assess the methodological approach that suggests we can and should measure them separately, I selected two main examples of a personal nonreligious repertoire of avoidant religion (Pearce and Denton 2011) and a public nonreligious repertoire of support for secular authority in the public sphere (Delehanty et al. 2019). There are of course other repertoires of personal and public religion and nonreligion present in the U.S. and around the world that suggest different combinations of beliefs and practices. Some examples include the cultural work in religious progressive movements (e.g. Braunstein 2017; Delehanty 2016), secular organizing for racial justice (e.g. Hutchinson in press), a trend toward mindfulness in personal spiritual practice (e.g. Kucinskas 2014, 2019) and a focus on the religious provision of social services that motivates religiously-affiliated political movements in Egypt and Turkey (e.g. Davis and Robinson 2012). Future research should focus on the conceptualization and measurement of these repertoires, but here the focus on avoidant nonreligion and secular public expression provides a measurement strategy for two of the most common nonreligious repertoires among the religiously unaffiliated in the U.S. identified by the literature. Measuring these example repertoires with multiple items across three survey samples highlights three points.

First, there is variation in both personal and public nonreligious repertoires among respondents who are both religiously affiliated and unaffiliated. This suggests that categorical comparisons of religious affiliation need to be supplemented by using continuous measures—where available—that cut across these identity groups and can

provide a robustness check for potential measurement error. Chapter Three uses this approach to better explain trends in voter turnout among the religiously unaffiliated.

Second, because of this variation, measures of public and personal nonreligious repertoires are empirically associated with one another, but also distinct measurement constructs. Chapter Four takes on this point in detail by using both the repertoire scales developed here to parse trends in public opinion formation on major policy issues.

Finally, the choice of a nonreligious identity category is most closely associated with a personal nonreligious repertoire, while a basic measure of political ideology is most closely associated with a public nonreligious repertoire. As in Mills' theory of private issues and public troubles, the gap between these two associations illustrates the cultural work that is necessarily to achieve a confluence between these cultural repertoires—one that should caution researchers and practitioners against inferring political considerations directly from measures of personal nonreligious practices or identities. Chapter Five shows the stakes of this assumption by investigating whether the field of nonreligious advocacy groups can effectively forge a connection between personal nonreligious identities and public nonreligious practices to advocate for secular policy reforms.

Chapter 3: Engagement

Nonreligion and Voting

Low and declining rates of civic engagement in the United States are a key concern for both researchers and the general public. There is good reason for scholars to study the behavioral trends that inform our normative expectations for a democratic society, and to better understand why people opt out of social institutions by declining to vote, volunteer, or participate other civic organizations. Research on this topic outlines a theoretical puzzle: is civic disengagement a cumulative process where changes occur across different institutions, or is it a domain-specific process where change is concentrated in specific institutions? When people opt out of participating in one social space, are they more likely to opt out of others?

One body of work supports a theory that civic disengagement is diffuse across institutions and driven by larger structural forces such as economic change (e.g. Putnam 2001) or the cultural conditions that foster a general civic spirit (e.g. Tocqueville 1835). Declining rates of voting, volunteering, and other communal activities all tend to correlate, and so civic disengagement in this view comes from broad social pressures that reduce both the motivation and the available resources that people need to engage with their communities.

On the other hand, additional work suggests this perspective may be too broad and too eager to highlight a crisis in declining civic engagement. This research argues we

cannot ignore the specific, contextual factors that foster engagement in a variety of organizations that may or may not typically be considered "civic groups" (e.g. Collins 2010; Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014; Klienenberg 2016; Pugh 2015; Joseph 2002). In the theoretical view supported by this work, civic engagement is a domain-specific process that requires unique considerations of different institutional spheres and interactional styles within those spheres. Disengagement in one domain does not necessarily invite disengagement in another.

There are stakes to this theoretical debate, because the answer can inform normative social policy aspirations about democratic socialization. If cumulative theories are correct, the answer is to target larger social forces that depress many different kinds of civic engagement, such as precarious employment or affective political polarization (Kalleberg 2018; Iyengar and Westwood 2015). If the domain-specific theories are correct, then the more appropriate solutions are specific reform efforts to address why people lose trust in particular institutions such as government services, educational institutions, or religious organizations.

This chapter addresses this theoretical debate with analysis of a particularly useful empirical case: the secular voting gap. In the United States, religious engagement and political engagement are tightly coupled (Putnam and Campbell 2012). However, the U.S. also has a growing number of religiously unaffiliated citizens who now comprise nearly a quarter of the population (Hout and Fischer 2014; Voas and Chaves 2016). Despite increased organizational efforts of secular advocacy groups (Blankholm 2014;

Cimino and Smith 2014; Kettell 2014), research highlights lower levels of political engagement among the unaffiliated. Surveys and exit polls find that voter registration and turnout rates among nonreligious Americans consistently lag behind the religiously affiliated by about ten percentage points (Baker and Smith 2015; Jones et. al 2016). This leads to the proposition that nonreligious Americans do not vote frequently enough to yield substantial political influence, and low levels of non-religious representation in the U.S. Congress support this view (Sandstrom 2017). If disengagement is cumulative across domains, disaffiliation from religious institutions may set the stage for other declines in civic participation, and it may mean that these civic skills are becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of an elite few. Investigating political participation among the unaffiliated addresses this theoretical puzzle and advances social scientific understanding of whether civic skills transfer across institutional domains (Perrin 2005).

However, we have to validate the basic social fact of lower civic engagement among the nonreligious. There are both methodological and substantive reasons to be skeptical of this gap. Methodologically, this conclusion is based on bivariate descriptive statistics from self-reports on public opinion surveys and exit polls. This is a problem because nonreligious individuals fit a particular demographic profile; as a whole they tend to be young, white, male, liberal, and skeptical of social institutions (Baker and Smith 2015; Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014; Kasselstrand et al. 2017). These factors also correlate with lower voter turnout and civic engagement (e.g. Groves et al. 1992; Silver et al. 1986), and it is possible that the secular voting gap is spurious to these demographic

traits. A diffuse theory of civic engagement world argue these demographic factors could motivate both disaffiliation from religious institutions and reduced participation in political institutions. Moreover, evidence from studies of validated voter turnout suggests that self-reports of voting may also exaggerate differences between voters and non-voters, leading to biased conclusions about substantive differences in voting behavior across demographic subgroups (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012).

Substantively, nonreligion is a multidimensional cultural construct (Keysar 2014), and not all unaffiliated respondents are the same. Research distinguishes ideologically-committed nonreligious respondents from "unchurched believers" and "liminal" respondents who change their religious affiliation across survey waves (Baker and Smith 2015; Hout 2017; Hout and Fischer 2002; 2014; Lim et al. 2010). In line with the domain-specific perspective outlined above, these substantive differences in beliefs and practices among the nonreligious matter for different social and political outcomes, including civic engagement (Stewart 2016; Frost and Edgell 2017; LeDrew 2015). If citizens who would otherwise be religious are simply leaving religious institutions, disaffiliation could be a symptom of a more general decline in civic engagement that reinforces lower political participation. If citizens are ideologically motivated by their nonreligion, however, low attendance is a sign of consistency and commitment, and they could therefore be more likely to participate as motivated partisans (Layman and Weaver 2016). If turnout varies within the unaffiliated, it would provide more support for the domain-specific theories of civic engagement which argue that these cultural

particularities matter.

This chapter addresses these substantive and methodological questions by investigating gaps in voter turnout in multiple data sets with measures that improve on exit polls and self-reporting. Using measures of validated voter turnout from five national elections (2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016) across five data sets, I present three findings that advance our understanding of the relationship between disengagement from religious institutions and disengagement from political institutions. First, the secular voting gap in validated turnout has shrunk in recent elections. At the descriptive level, this gap is smaller than previous research has reported. Second, because it is smaller, the gap largely disappears in later election years after controlling for basic sociodemographic measures suggested by the literature on voter turnout. Third, differences in turnout are explained not by the difference between religiously affiliated and unaffiliated respondents alone, but rather by variation within each group. Less frequent attendance at religious services—an indicator often associated with lower general civic engagement—actually associates with *higher* odds of turnout for unaffiliated respondents. These findings provide support for domain-specific theories of civic disengagement, and they suggest researchers should take into account substantive practices that different social institutions provide for political behavior.

Two Theories of Civic Engagement

Is civic engagement diffuse or domain-specific? Alexis de Tocqueville's classic

Democracy in America (1835) highlights the elements of a diffuse theory in reporting a unique civic mindset in the early United States—one where a frontier society and shared religious commitments fostered robust commitments to civic engagement. This perspective, supported by well-known research such as Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2001), emphasizes parallel declines in civic engagement across multiple institutional domains such as lower rates of volunteering, reduced political participation, and weaker social ties with neighbors. These parallel declines are driven by broader social and cultural changes that reach across these institutional domains, such as economic precarity (e.g. Kalleberg 2018), the rise of professionalized advocacy in politics (e.g. Medvetz 2012), and changes in trust and confidence in institutions (e.g. Twenge et al. 2014). This work suggests that participation in civic institutions is cumulative, such that engagement in one institutional domain supports engagement in another. For example, research highlights the particular role that participation in religious institutions can play in providing structural opportunities to develop skills for political mobilization (e.g. Bean 2014; Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Beyerlein and Vaisey 2013; Brady et a. 1995; Braunstein 2017; Brown and Brown 2003; Brubaker 2015; Djupe and Grant 2001; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Lichterman 2008; Manza and Brooks 1997; Smith 1998; Wald et al. 1988). In this account, disengagement should be correlated across institutions. People who opt out of one set of institutions should be more likely to opt out of others.

However, other work suggests this perspective is too broad, because civic engagement is not spurred by a general "spirit" or single set of resources that easily

transfers across institutions. In this work, civic engagement is a domain-specific process —a set of coordinated actions that come from specific styles of interaction within social groups (Becker 1999; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2015:809). For example, accounts of declining neighborhood engagement often overlook specific practices like voluntary childcare (Collins 2010). While we would expect people who live alone to be socially isolated, and therefore less engagement, this group is actually more likely to volunteer and spend time with friends (Klinenberg 2016, 2013). While we often expect to find variation in voting and volunteering *between* different demographic groups, often the most substantive variation *within* those groups (e.g. Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012; Berent et al. 2016; Frost and Edgell 2018). In this account, disengagement does not necessary happen across institutions. Instead, engagement and disengagement are both contingent on the material and cultural conditions of specific institutions.

The case of voting among religiously unaffiliated Americans presents a useful test of these two theories. If diffuse theories are correct, we would expect unaffiliated respondents to be generally less likely to vote than affiliated respondents as similar social forces encourage people to opt out of both religious and political institutions. If domain specific theories are correct, however, we would see more substantive variation in turnout *within* the unaffiliated, and research would need to specify a measurement approach for that variation that could parse out which unaffiliated respondents stay engaged in politics and which do not.

The Secular Voting Gap

Claims about the secular voting gap are based on two sources of evidence: exit polls and self-reported voting on surveys. Exit polls indicate 9% and 10% of voters were unaffiliated in the 2000 and 2004 elections, 12% were unaffiliated in 2008 and 2012, and 15% were in 2016 (Smith and Martinez 2016). Population estimates indicate that non-religious Americans were about 14% of the population in 2000 and grew to 22% by 2016 (Hout and Fischer 2014). Gaps in rates of self-reported voting between affiliated and unaffiliated respondents in the General Social Survey are of a similar magnitude, narrowing from nineteen percentage points in 1968 to ten percentage points since 2004 (Baker and Smith 2015, Jones et al. 2016).

This gap appears robust in both self-reporting and exit polling, but some skepticism is warranted in light of the fact that respondents tend to over-report voting on surveys (Anderson and Silver 1986; Granberg and Holmberg 1991; Katosh and Traugott 1981; Presser and Traugott 1992). Over-reporting is a motivated response, and those who misreport are often demographically similar to voters (Berent et al. 2016; Bernstein et al. 2001; Burden 2000; Silver et al. 1986). By combining actual voters with respondents with similar demographic profiles who did not vote, but say they did, self-report measures bias our analyses toward finding sharp demographic and cultural distinctions between "voters" and "non-voters" where they may not actually exist (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012). At the same time, other work raises concerns about non-response bias and the representation of minority populations in exit polling (e.g. Barretto et al. 2006;

Klofstad and Bishin 2012). It may be the case that religiously-affiliated voters are more likely to over-report, rather than more likely to vote, or it may be the case that exit polls are less likely to obtain a representative sample of nonreligious respondents. To properly assess the presence of a secular voting gap with a sufficiently conservative test, analysis requires both a sufficient number of nonreligious respondents and a valid measure of voting behavior in a dataset that allows for statistical controls.

I address these problems by using an improved measurement approach that cuts a middle path between exit polls and self-reports: vote validation. In validation, survey respondents are matched to known government records to confirm voting, voter registration, and/ or voting method. This can be done in person (as with the American National Election Survey's validation approach discontinued in 1990), or through database matching using commercial voter files (as in the data sets discussed in detail below) (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012; Granberg and Holmberg 1991; Katz and Katz 2010). These measures allow for the assessment of nonreligion in actual voting behavior with models that can address substantive and methodological concerns with existing accounts.

Religion, Nonreligion, and Voting

The key assumption that leads researchers to expect a secular voting gap is the theory that religious commitments go hand-in-hand with higher political engagement, and therefore that religious disaffiliation accompanies a broader decline in civic engagement.

There are two primary mechanisms through which religion can affect political participation: structural opportunities and ideological motivations. Structurally, participation in voluntary associations is linked to higher voter turnout (Olsen 1972). Religion plays a unique role here, as attendance at religious services is closely linked to voter turnout in numerous studies (e.g. Cassel 1999; Gerber et al. 2008; Smets and VanHam 2013; Strate et al. 1989; Wald et al. 1988). Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) argue that churches (and, following their logic, other houses of worship) provide a unique opportunity for people of different social classes to socialize and work together, and so opportunities to develop civic skills in church groups are not limited to populations with higher income, education, or socioeconomic status.

More broadly, this relationship between religious participation and structural opportunities for engagement is not simply about showing up to church. Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) demonstrate that social context and conduct both matter as well—religious traditions moderate the relationship between religious and civic engagement, and it is often religious engagement beyond attendance that matters most for fostering civic engagement. Similarly, Putnam and Campbell (2012) argue that the social ties fostered by both religious attendance and membership in religious social networks foster more robust civic behaviors including voting, volunteering, and charitable donations. Of course, congregations are stratified along racial and socioeconomic lines, and the interaction of these factors produces notable variation in civic engagement as well (Brown 2006; Brown and Brown 2003). The problem is that current bivariate treatments of the secular

voting gap have not yet investigated this context, and it is possible that there may be a different relationship between nonreligion and political engagement fostered by the unique experience of either making a clean break with organized religion or remaining a "liminal none" or an unchurched believer (Hout 2017; Hout and Fischer 2002).

Religion also provides ideological motivations that can spur political participation. As a system of shared understanding related to matters of deep moral concern, religious ideology can become a means of "charging" political affairs to secure citizens' commitment, engagement, or, in some cases, conflict (Brubaker 2015). Specifically, Christianity has also played a role in the historic development of civic engagement in the United States (e.g. Heclo 2007; Tocqueville 2003[1835]). For example, the rise of the New Christian Right spurred denominational effects on political engagement by mobilizing evangelical Christians into a powerful voting bloc and political subculture (Manza and Brooks 1997; Smith 1998). In politically active congregations, contact about particular issues spurs voter turnout (Djupe and Grant 2001; Wilcox and Sigelman 2001), and interactions between lay leaders and congregants can produce different styles of political engagement (Bean 2014; Braunstein 2017; Delehanty 2016; Lichterman 2008).

However, different measures of religious beliefs and behaviors can have divergent relationships with political participation (Driskell et al. 2008). Here too, the propensity for voting among the growing nonreligious population in the U.S. is also ambiguous. On the one hand, they may be less likely to vote than religious respondents. The majority of

nonreligious individuals are primarily defined by their disaffiliation with religious institutions rather than theological non-belief (Baker and Smith 2015; Hout and Fischer 2002). Most of this disaffiliation has come from moderate religious respondents, leaving a core of ideologically committed religious respondents holding steady in the U.S. population (Schnabel and Bock 2017). There is also evidence that the nonreligious tend to be skeptical of social institutions more broadly, a cynicism that may spill over into a lower sense of political efficacy and, in turn, a lower propensity to vote (Hout and Fischer 2014; Kasselstrand et al. 2017; cf. Baker and Smith 2015).

On the other hand, it is possible that ideologically-motivated nonreligious respondents are actually more likely to engage in political life (Layman and Weaver 2016). Research identifies a blossoming movement of nonreligious social organizations and advocacy groups that are working to mobilize members and shape social policy (Blankholm 2014; Cimino and Smith 2014; Kettell 2014), and one dominant explanation for religious disaffiliation is a political backlash to the Religious Right (Hout and Fischer 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2012). Moreover, involvement in a number of alternative community groups, such as arts organizations, can also foster civic engagement (Baggetta 2009). Committed nonreligious individuals in the United States, especially atheists, closely align themselves with pro-science advocacy, and concerns about religion in public life structure the choice to publicly self-identify as an atheist (Stewart 2016). Baker and Smith's (2015) close treatment of descriptive analyses of the voting gap also finds that the kind of nonreligion matters; in their analysis, agnostics were more likely to report

voting than atheists or the generally non-affiliated. The same is true for specific volunteering practices (Frost and Edgell 2017). It is possible that the classic measure of church attendance—often referenced in the literature as a key mechanism that bolsters other kinds of civic engagement—works differently for unaffiliated respondents. Unaffiliated respondents with lower church attendance, for example, may be more like the consistent and ideologically-motivated respondents who we would expect to be more likely to vote.

The challenge for current work on the voting gap is that most demographic analyses of exit polls or self-reported turnout rely not on measures of religious participation but on measures of religious identification, comparing respondents with no religious affiliation to other religiously affiliated groups. Nonreligious identification is more common among young men (but see Edgell et al. 2017 for important deviations from this trend), a group distinctly less likely to vote. It is also more common among and the well-off and the well-educated, two groups that are more likely to vote. These demographic factors are among the strongest and most common correlates of voting behavior (Smets and VanHam 2013), and so much of the voting gap may be explained by their influence alone. Moreover, combining respondents who simply do not participate in religious groups with respondents who have made a committed ideological choice to disaffiliate risks obscuring differences between the structural and the ideological implications of religious disaffiliation for voting.

In sum, research needs to consider different measures of nonreligion and a range

of sociodemographic controls to properly evaluate whether nonreligious respondents are more or less likely to vote than religiously affiliated respondents. It needs to do this because substantively different measures of nonreligion may have a divergent relationship with voting; nonreligion suggests the presence of both drift from institutions for some and specific ideological commitments for others. Diffuse theories of civic disengagement would expect religious disaffiliation to "spill over" into other institutions and associate with lower political engagement. Domain-specific theories of civic disengagement, in contrast, would expect a more complicated relationship between the two that invites the possibility of unaffiliated respondents who are equally or more likely to turn out to vote than affiliated respondents. This is because domain-specific theories are sensitive to the different cultural repertoires of action that are available within any given social group.

Chapter Two showed that we can distinguish different repertoires of nonreligion in the population. In the data discussed below, measures are not present that would allow for a direct test of those public and personal repertoires. However, we also saw in Chapter One that part of the evidence for these repertoires is the variation in religious affiliation and practices within general population. While the literature on political participation notes that less frequent church attendance associates with lower political engagement, it could be the case that this relationship works differently in the context of a nonreligious repertoire. By using a measure of religious non-affiliation and a measure of church attendance, then using an interaction term for the two, the following hypotheses allow me

to test the two theories of civic disengagement across different combinations of nonreligious experiences.

Diffuse Disengagement
H1a: Net of sociodemographic controls, religiously-unaffiliated respondents will have lower probability of validated turnout than affiliated respondents.
H2a: Net of sociodemographic controls, less frequent church attendance will be significantly and substantively associated with lower odds of validated turnout.
H3a: The relationship between low church attendance and lower odds of turnout is uniform for both affiliated and unaffiliated respondents.
Domain-Specific Disengagement
H1b: Net of sociodemographic controls, religiously-unaffiliated respondents will be no different from religiously affiliated respondents in their probability of validated turnout.
H2b: Net of sociodemographic controls, less frequent church attendance will not be significantly and substantively associated with lower odds of validated turnout.
H3b: The relationship between low church attendance and lower odds of turnout is **not** uniform for both affiliated and unaffiliated respondents, but instead will associate with a lower probability of turnout for affiliated respondents only.

The analysis below tests H1 and H2 in multivariate models, and then proceeds to test interactions between these two main effects to investigate H3 in different social contexts.

Data

Analysis tests these two hypothesis about the nonreligious voting gap using two data sets. The first data set employs four separate samples from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016) that each contain a validated measure of general election turnout. The 2008 and 2010 waves were included in the 2006-2012 cumulative CCES data set release, while the 2014 and 2016 waves were

each drawn from separate releases. The CCES is an annual survey study of Americans' views of Congress, electoral experiences, and political views conducted by YouGov/ Polimetrix with funding from the National Science Foundation. In addition to unique, contemporary measures of validated turnout, this data set is also useful for its range of measures of religiosity and sufficiently large sample sizes to disaggregate different nonreligious respondents and explore interaction effects.

The second data set is the 2016 release of the American National Election Survey (ANES), comprised of two independently drawn address-based probability samples—one for face-to-face interview administration (response rate 50%) and one for web administration (response rate 44%)—conducted by Westat, Inc. Following the guidelines provided by Enamorado et al. (2017), this data set includes a merged file of respondents' validated turnout in the 2016, 2014, and 2012 general elections.

Measures

Descriptive statistics for core measures are presented in Table 3.1. *Validated Turnout:* To measure validated turnout, analysis uses the CCES measure of validated general election participation in four general elections: the 2008 and 2016 presidential elections and the 2010 and 2014 midterms. These are the validated election years that are available in the CCES data along with necessary measures of religiosity, and they provide a balanced set of outcomes across different kinds of elections as turnout varies substantively during midterms. The 2016 ANES sample contains validation for

respondents' participation in the 2016 and 2012 presidential elections and the 2014 midterms

To obtain these measures, the CCES survey program collaborated with Catalist LLC—a private vendor of political data that regularly gathers state government voting records. Polimetrix provided Catalist with information about the respondents, which the firm used to match respondents to voting records using both government and consumer financial records. Polimetrix then de-identified the data, leaving indicator variables for respondents who were successfully matched to a record of having voted in a given election year. While this matching algorithm is proprietary (cf. Berent et al. 2016), Ansolabehere and Hersh (2012) provide a detailed account of the logic of the matching process and successful validations of the matched data. The ANES survey program collaborated with L2 Inc., a non-partisan firm supplying campaign voter data, to obtain a copy of the nationwide voter file. Enamorado et al. (2017) use a similar probabilistic record linkage model based on respondents names, ages, and addresses, along with a clerical review to remove potential false matches (also see Enamorado and Imai. 2018).

While these matching processes are similar, using both surveys provides a conceptual replication (Freese and Petersen 2017) that can serve as a robustness check for potential systemic differences in the matching processes. These measures are also particularly useful for providing a more conservative test of the existence of voting gaps across demographic groups, because they reduce the prevalence of respondents who match the demographic profile of voters and say they have voted when they have not

(Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012). Validated vote measures have been used in a number of influential studies in political science on core issues such as redistricting, turnout across racial and ethnic groups, and voter ID laws (e.g. Fraga 2015, 2016; Franko 2015; Hajnal et al. 2017).

All measures of validated turnout are dichotomous such that validated respondents receive a 1 and non-validated respondents receive a 0. No recoding processes were necessary for the ANES measures. In the 2014 and 2016 waves of the CCES, respondents received a 1 if they had a validated record of voting, regardless of method (absentee, early voting, by mail, at polling place, or "unknown") and a 0 if they had none of these conditions. In the 2008 and 2010 waves of the CCES, I recoded this measure so that respondents received a 1 if they had a validated record of voting and a 0 if they had a verified record of being unregistered, said they were unregistered, said they didn't vote, or had a verified record of not voting.[5] Respondents who were non-citizens, were missing a voter history file, or had "no evidence" regarding whether they voted in the survey codebook were dropped from analysis (11% of cases in 2008 and 13% in 2010).

Nonreligion: To measure nonreligion, I first employ a binary measure of nonreligious identification using the religious identification items in each survey. In the CCES data, respondents received a 0 for reporting any religious identification (Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Eastern or Greek Orthodox Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu,

[5] To ensure that additional non-voting classifications did not bias results, a supplemental logistic regression model for the 2008 wave used an alternative coding scheme for the dependent variable where 1= validated voting and 0 = verified record of non-voting only. This model produced substantively similar results to those presented here, and so these models employ the full coding scheme to include the maximum possible number of observations.

or “Something else”) and a 1 for reporting atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular.” In the ANES data, respondents received a 0 for reporting any religious identification (Fundamentalist, Charismatic/Pentecostal, Born again, Evangelical, Traditional, Mainline, Progressive, Non-traditional believer) and a 1 for reporting secular, agnostic, atheist, or spiritual but not religious. This coding scheme is similar to the approach employed in foundational research on the religiously unaffiliated (Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014), and it is also the measurement approach that underlies most reporting of the unaffiliated voting gap.

In addition to nonreligious identification, models also include a field-standard measure for attendance at religious services (a six-point likert type scale in the CCES and a five-point scale in the ANES). Each scale is coded such that higher values indicate *less* frequent attendance. This measure captures religious activity—the second key mechanism through which much of the literature expects religiosity to associate with civic engagement.

Finally, models incorporate a common suite of sociodemographic control variables for age, gender, race, marital status, education (highest degree attained), income, and political ideology. These are among the most common correlates of voter turnout (Smets and VanHam 2013; Wolfinger and Wolfinger 2008), and therefore provide a good test for whether the relationship between religious affiliation and voting is spurious.

Analytic Approach

With validated voting, analysis can offer a more conservative test of the presence of a secular voting gap net of controls. Analysis proceeds in three parts. First, I present descriptive visualizations of substantive differences in turnout over time and across religious affiliation. Second, I assess the robustness of these patterns net of sociodemographic controls using logistic regression models. I report fully specified models testing the relationship between turnout, nonreligious affiliation (H1), and low attendance at religious services (H2). Finally, to investigate the mechanisms behind these trends, I examine interaction effects between non-affiliation and low attendance in line with earlier approaches to studying religion and civic engagement (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006) and visualize those effects with predicted probabilities of turnout in the CCES data.[6] All models employ survey weights and robust standard errors.[7]

Descriptive Trends

Figure 3.1 presents weighted proportion estimates for turnout among religiously

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[6] The ANES sample is substantively smaller than the CCES sample. Identifying this interaction pattern requires a sizable number of respondents who are religiously unaffiliated, but nevertheless report higher levels of church attendance. In the ANES data, religiously unaffiliated respondents are more clustered at response option "4" on the five-point scale ("a few times a year"), with about half of unaffiliated respondents (n=222) choosing this category and smaller cell counts at the more extreme ends of the scale. In the CCES data, by contrast, respondents are more evenly distributed across categories with, at minimum, 109 unaffiliated respondents reporting the most frequent attendance. Thus, the ANES data is potentially underpowered to detect interactions effects properly.

[7] Analyses use list wise deletion for missing data. Checks for missing data on controls yielded issues with two independent variables: political ideology and income were each missing more than 1,000 cases in each wave of the CCES. Sensitivity analysis using multiple imputation with chained equations to estimate these values from non-missing control variables yielded substantively similar results to the models presented here. Results are available from the author upon request.

affiliated and unaffiliated respondents across each election. Two important descriptive points illustrate the benefits of using validated voting. First, a secular voting gap does exist in validated turnout, confirming gaps in self-reported turnout observed by earlier work. In the 2008 general election, the gap was about ten percentage points, and it widened to sixteen percentage points in the 2010 midterms. Second, however, this gap is closing in both data sets. By the 2016 presidential election, estimates of the secular voting gap narrow to about six percentage points—about half the gap reported in earlier literature and nearing confidence interval overlap. These results suggest that the secular voting gap is substantively smaller than originally reported, and may be less robust to control measures, especially in more recent elections.

Sociodemographic Controls

Is the secular voting gap robust to controls for other common predictors of voting? Table 3.2 presents the results from logistic regression models for validated voting in each election year sample of the CCES. Models in the first column of Table 3.2 examine use religious identification to measure the voting gap. Net of controls for age, racial identification, gender, marital status, parental status, income, education, and party identification, the secular voting gap is only significant and substantively large in 2008 turnout ($p<.01$, Odds Ratio: 0.85). Models in the second column examine church attendance—a core measure for literature that supports the diffuse theory of civic engagement. Net of these controls in separate models, the relationship between low

church attendance and lower odds of validated turnout is more robust in earlier election years (2008 $p<.001$, 2010 $p<.01$), but this relationship is also not statistically significant in later election years.

Table 3.3 reports the same models for the three validated turnout measures in the 2016 ANES data, and results are substantively similar. The only robust relationship in these models is an association between lower church attendance and lower odds of turnout in the 2016 presidential election ($p<.001$). These results provide provisional support for the domain-specific hypotheses H1b and H2b, suggesting that the relationship between low religious engagement and low voter turnout is neither as strong nor as robust as expected by the literature.

Interaction Effects: Nonreligious Repertoires and Turnout

Research on religion and political engagement suggests that less frequent religious participation and the absence of religious socialization would reduce the institutional and ideological motivations for political participation. However, this work also emphasizes that context matters—the relationship between religious engagement and civic engagement is also dependent on what kinds of religious engagement occur in different social contexts (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006). Chapters One and Two suggest that there are different repertoires of nonreligion. In this theory, reduced religious participation does not mean the same thing to every respondent. For a religiously-affiliated respondent, lower attendance may indicate a nonreligious repertoire grounded

in drift from institutions. For an unaffiliated respondent, however, low church attendance may be an indicator of *consistency* between affinity and practice—a trait we would normally attribute to engaged and active citizens. It is possible that nonreligious respondents who are more ambiguous in their identification and practice are less likely to turn out, while those who make a clear and distinct break from religious affiliation and practice exhibit the traits of motivated partisans. One approach employed by the literature to investigate this theory is to estimate interaction effects between religious affiliation and religious attendance.

The third column in Table 3.2 for the CCES data includes both religious identification and religious activity alongside sociodemographic controls, including an interaction term for both religion measures. Changes in the AIC and the log likelihood indicate that this measurement specification improves model fit, with some surprising results. Controlling for the interaction between affiliation and church attendance produces models in which the estimated direct effects of religious non-affiliation and low church attendance are both significantly and substantively associated with lower odds of validated turnout ($p<.001$ in each case except attendance in 2016). However, the interaction effect, which compares less-frequently attending unaffiliated respondents to a baseline of affiliated respondents, is significant and moves in the *opposite direction* of these direct effects ($p<.001$ in each case).

What does this interaction effect mean? By generating predicted probabilities for each model in the third column of Table 3.2, we can plot the relationship between less

frequent church attendance and the probability of turnout in Figure 3.2 for unaffiliated respondents (the solid lines) and affiliated respondents (the dashed lines). For religiously affiliated respondents, the relationship between church attendance and turnout behaves as the literature would expect—less frequent reported attendance corresponds with a flat or declining probability of turnout in each election year. However, this relationship is not the same for unaffiliated respondents in the CCES data. For unaffiliated respondents, the probability of turnout rises with less frequent church attendance. This pattern makes sense in the context of research on ideologically-motivated nonreligious respondents such as atheists, agnostics, and people who leave religious institutions as an expression of liberal political ideology (Hout and Fischer 2002; Layman and Weaver 2016).

This interaction effect presents stronger support for the domain-specific hypotheses outlined above, because it demonstrates how a core mechanism in the political participation literature (church attendance) works substantially differently for respondents who do not identify with any particular religious tradition. Rather than becoming less involved in voting as they reduce their religious participation, unaffiliated respondents appear either equally as likely or more likely to vote than their affiliated counterparts as their religious participation wanes.

In sum, results using validated voting measures provide three key takeaways that should motivate scholars to revisit the relationship between religion and political participation and account for different repertoires of religious and nonreligious engagement. First, the secular voting gap appears much more narrow in recent election

years than originally estimated. Second, much of this gap is spurious to common demographic controls. Third, contrary to expectations in the literature, the relationship between attendance at religious services and political participation works differently for unaffiliated respondents, and those who attended services less frequently are actually more likely to be politically engaged than their more frequently attending unaffiliated counterparts.

Discussion & Conclusion

The implicit assumption behind much of the current research on religion and political participation is that religious disaffiliation is a net loss for civic engagement because involvement in these institutions is cumulative and diffuse across institutional domains. Religious institutions provide both resources and ideological motivations to remain connected to one's community and society, and so religious disaffiliation is seen as one symptom of a broader decline in civic engagement and institutional trust in the United States (Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014; Kasselstrand et al. 2017; Putnam 2001; Putnam and Campbell 2012). One empirical example of this assumption at work is reporting on the secular voting gap; if religiously-unaffiliated citizens are less likely to turn out to vote, we should be concerned about the political implications of widespread declines in religious affiliation and practice.

However, this conclusion may be misleading. Substantive and methodological concerns about the quality of self-reported measures of voting and exit polling for

capturing differences across demographic subgroups suggest that the secular voting gap could be smaller than originally anticipated or even spurious to other basic controls. The mechanism that links participation in religious organizations to broader trends in civic engagement is also dependent on different social contexts (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Putnam and Campbell 2012), and it could be the case that tried and true measures of religious engagement in the literature work differently for respondents who have actively chosen to leave religious institutions than for those who are unaffiliated, but waver in their commitment to religious practices or affinities (e.g. Hout 2017).We should expect this kind of variation because nonreligion is not monolithic, and it does not necessarily represent a state of low civic engagement for all respondents who are not religiously affiliated (Baker and Smith 2015; Frost and Edgell 2017). For some, low religious participation is part of a broader drift from institutional affinities, but for others, it represents an ideological commitment to differentiate oneself from religious institutions, and we would expect this later group to behave more like motivated partisans.

The current study employed some of the latest approaches to measuring voter turnout to test whether the secular voting gap persists when we account for social context and variation among different kinds of nonreligious respondents. Analysis of validated voting gives good reason to reconsider reports of the bivariate relationship between disaffiliation and low voter turnout—whether in self-reports or exit polling. First, the secular gap in validated voting in the CCES and the ANES have converged substantively, especially in general elections since 2012. Second, multivariate analysis suggest that

other demographic factors such as age, education, and income explain most of this gap. Finally, while much of the literature demonstrates how high religious involvement associates with higher rates of civic engagement, interaction effects in this study demonstrate that less frequent attendance at religious services associates with higher odds of turnout among respondents who are already religiously unaffiliated. These results show that unaffiliated respondents with clear and consistent distinctions from religious institutions (either in identification or practice) show a greater propensity to turn out, while unaffiliated respondents who are inconsistent in their nonreligion (with more frequent service attendance) are less likely to turn out.

This finding has important implications for our understanding of the cultural conditions that promote civic engagement. They challenge the assumption that religious engagement is an unqualified good for civil society that will be eroded in the context of religious disaffiliation (Brady et al. 1995; Cassel 1999; Putnam 2001 Smets and VanHam 2013). Instead, they highlight that disengaging from one particular form of community life does not necessarily create the conditions for disengaging from other forms of community life. In terms of voting, at least, it appears that religious individuals who drift from institutions—what Hout and Fischer (2002) call "unchurched believers"—are slowly catching up to their affiliated counterparts.

Rather than viewing religious disaffiliation as part of a broader decline in civic life (e.g Putnam 2001; Skocpol 2003; Voas and Chaves 2016), it may be more appropriate to engage a theoretical perspective that treats civic disengagement as a domain-specific

process—one that is sensitive the cultural specificity of different institutional domains and able to articulate why some of core indicators work differently for different groups (e.g. Collins 2010; Frost and Edgell 2018; Klinenberg 2013). Such an approach invites future research to consider why people lose trust in *specific* institutions in detail, and how that distrust may not simply spill over to other domains without first interacting with respondents' substantive cultural and social standpoints (see, e.g. Pugh 2015; Wuthnow; 2010; Zuckerman 2011). It also may be more appropriate to view civic disengagement as the reorganization of interest groups and coalitions around different points of mobilization and motivation (e.g. Kettell 2013; Schnabel and Bock 2017). Such an approach requires returning to fundamental questions about how social scientific research is conceptualizing and measuring what "counts" as civic engagement (e,g. Collins 2010; Joseph 2002).

These results also affirm other research that calls for conceptualizing nonreligion as a multidimensional construct and paying attention to substantive cultural differences across nonreligious respondents (e.g. Baker and Smith 2015; Stewart 2016; Keysar 2014; Stewart et al. 2017). In line with emerging research on political elites (Layman and Weaver 2016), this finding suggests that scholars should distinguish ideologically-motivated nonreligious respondents in the general population when assessing the potential political impacts of religious change and disaffiliation. However, it also suggests that a categorical measurement approach to doing this is not always appropriate and may in fact elide a larger number of unaffiliated respondents with a higher propensity

for voting. In Chapter Two, we saw how cultural repertoires of nonreligion allow the same kinds of beliefs, identities, or practices to mean substantively different things as respondents combine them in different ways. These results from the CCES show how those repertoires can matter: people who are religiously unaffiliated but inconsistent in their behavior (i.e. attending religious services frequently) are less likely to turn out than their counterparts who are unaffiliated *and* never attend religious services. This variation *within* the religiously-unaffiliated is especially important to consider in light of claims of the secular voting gap that seek to make comparisons *between* the affiliated and the unaffiliated.

There are of course limitations to this analysis, especially that these data sets are fundamentally cross-sectional and cannot offer any insight as to whether ideological commitments to nonreligion are instrumental in respondents' decisions to vote or not (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). Other scholars are raise questions about the matching procedures used to generate validated vote data (Berent et al. 2016), and so replication in additional data sets using different voter-matching procedures will be necessary in the future. Given these limitations, however, the current study is especially important for establishing that the often-repeated observation of lower voting among religiously-unaffiliated Americans may not stand up to basic confirmatory tests beyond descriptive cross-tabulation and may be hiding more positive trends toward increased civic engagement.

Finally, this work also raises two questions for future research. First, as

nonreligion closely associates with age, we do not know whether the youngest cohort of Americans will age into higher religiosity or into more robust civic engagement later in life. If religious disaffiliation continues, these results illustrate a mechanism through which an increasing number of Americans who leave religious institutions could become more politically engaged as they develop alternative civic commitments and drift further from religious institutions. More work focusing on nonreligious organizations and advocacy groups (e,g, Blankholm 2014; Cimino and Smith 2014; García and Blankholm 2016; Kettell 2014), as well as additional qualitative work to address the mechanisms outlined above, can help to further establish the plausibility of a cultural infrastructure to motivate secular voters.

Second, given the low proportional representation of non-religious Americans in the U.S. Legislature (Sandstrom 2017), these findings also raise questions about the future of religion and political representation. Today, many visible nonreligious advocacy groups represent a minority of ideologically committed atheist, agnostic, and secular humanist groups among the broader disaffiliated population. However, if more unaffiliated individuals who do not identify with these groups do become politically engaged, new questions arise about how political leaders will respond to this trend. Will new strategies emerge to recruit this growing group of potential voters, given that appeals to religiosity are a dominant strategy among American politicians (Domke and Coe 2008)? If not, the answer may not lie in voting constituencies alone, but in cultural norms instantiated in American political institutions and networks (e.g. Heclo 2007; Lindsay

2008).

The American religious landscape is changing, and the political landscape is changing with it. To better understand the implications of these shifts, scholars will need to attend to the substantive cultural features of different demographic groups. Trends among non-religious Americans provide a key example in which such attention can yield surprising findings that advance our thinking about political engagement.

Chapter 4: Opinion

Nonreligious Repertoires & Attitude Constraint

How do people evaluate political issues? Classic research in political science holds that attitude constraint—the expression of consistent opinions across different issues—is conditioned by their information, attention, and ideology (e.g. Zaller 1992; Converse 1962). While the U.S. has undergone political polarization over the past thirty years, in which people may identify more strongly with political parties and hold stronger negative sentiments toward the opposition party (Iyengar and Westwood 2015), this has not necessarily produced more people with more consistent preferences on specific policy issues. "Partisans without constraint" (Baldassari and Gelman 2008) are quite common, because while people are more accurately sorting themselves into political groups, they have not necessarily begun to pay more attention to specific issue domains.

However, there is a case in which attitude constraint is more consistent than these theories would expect. Research has demonstrated that religious experiences can shape how people think about a variety of issues, including conventional "culture wars" topics like abortion and same-sex marriage (DiMaggio et al. 1996; Hunter 1991; Lakoff 2002; Hart-Brinson 2018; Schnabel and Sevell 2017; Whitehead and Perry 2015), but also broader issue domains including the social safety net (e.g Steensland 2006), racial inequality (e.g. Emerson and Smith 2000), and immigration (e.g. Fussell 2014). Much of this research highlights how stronger religious commitments have a *divergent*

relationship with issue preferences, fostering stronger conservative and progressive preferences depending on how respondents package their religious commitments with their political considerations in different repertoires of expression.

Does nonreligion have a similar relationship with attitude constraint? The answer to this question is not immediately clear, because different theories of religious disaffiliation suggest different outcomes. The backlash hypothesis holds that liberal political views eventually lead people to leave religious groups, especially in times and locations of intense partisan conflict (Djupe et al. 2018; Margolis 2018; Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014). If nonreligious people are motivated partisans, they may exhibit stronger attitude constraint with consistent liberal attitudes on a variety of issues. However, given trends in cohort change that support the drift hypotheses, and the fact that religious disaffiliation has been on the rise since the 1990s, it is also true that an increasing number of nonreligious people continue to evaluate new political issues long after they leave religious groups. While the initial choice to disaffiliate may be an outcome of partisanship, the different repertoires of nonreligion that people develop after they disaffiliate may not have a consistent relationship with their political views later on. As we saw in Chapter One, many unaffiliated respondents identify as independents or moderates. In Chapter Two, we saw that many affiliated respondents also look substantively similarly to unaffiliated respondents in terms of their repertoires of personal and public nonreligion. It is worth investigating in detail whether different cultural

repertoires that reach across these identity groups associate with trends in attitude constraint.

Evidence for the backlash hypothesis typically focuses on culture wars policy issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. These issues are useful for testing the relationship between elite framing and attitudinal constraint, because they focus on the coordinated messaging strategy of conservative religious and political leaders. We expect clergy, media figures, and other religious elites to package together different cultural repertoires and model them for the faithful (Domke and Coe 2008; Massengil 2008; Liebman and Wuthnow 1983). Studies then examine whether people observe conservative religious frames, reject them, and subsequently drop their religious affiliation (Djupe et al. 2018; Margolis 2018; Putnam and Campbell 2012). This approach focuses on the conventional model of public opinion as the taking up of explicit, declarative cultural messages (in this case, belief-centered religious appeals) to see whether respondents align their political and religious belief systems.

The cultural constraint of attitudes can also operate through an indirect pathway, in which people develop different, non-declarative evaluative frameworks to make decisions in the world. Religious socialization can provide people with a wide variety of cultural repertoires that they eventually use in political decision making transmitted by the efforts of lay leaders (e.g. Bean 2014) and interpersonal interactions with other congregants (Becker 1998; Delehanty 2016; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). This is important because there has not yet been a concerted framing effort among mainstream

political elites to reach unaffiliated voters. Research can also pursue a more conservative test of attitudinal constraint by assessing the relationship between religious commitments and ideological alignment on issues in the *absence* of a direct framing strategy.

This chapter argues that religious and nonreligious experiences provide different cultural repertoires can constrain policy attitudes. First, I review literature on these conventional and cultural approaches to the study of public opinion. Following literature in political psychology (e.g. Jost et al. 2009, Federico et al. 2014, 2013a, 2013b), and cultural sociology (Martin and Desmond 2010; Perrin & McFarland 2011; Perrin et al. 2014), I argue that the interpretative frameworks that different nonreligious repertoires provide align with different patterns in attitudinal constraint.

Second, I outline three broad issue domains —the social safety net, racial inequality, and immigration policy—that are among the most pressing issues of our time, but also outside the scope of conventional "culture wars" issues discussed in the literature on nonreligion. Across all three issue domains outlined here, the role of religion in attitudinal constraint is contingent on the specific repertoire of religious experience with which respondents engage these questions. In instances where respondents in religious communities develop repertoires of solidarity and care that package beliefs and practices with reconciliation and service, attitudinal trends suggest that people will be more likely to support progressive social policy across these issues. However, repertoires that package religious identities to assessments of individual moral worth and collective identity tend to reinforce conservative policy preferences.

Third, using the measures developed in Chapter Two for public and personal nonreligious repertoires, I demonstrate similar divergent patterns for nonreligion in two survey data sets. Controlling for both repertoires demonstrates that the public nonreligious repertoire—a preference for secular authority in the public sphere—is more closely aligned with issue preferences in these policy domains than the personal nonreligious repertoire of low religious engagement. Where the literature has focused on questions about religious beliefs or pious commitments in public opinion, this analysis shows that trends in attitude alignment are driven more by religious and nonreligious repertoires that concern religious authority and cultural membership.

Culture and Attitude Constraint

Conventional accounts of public opinion formation in political science and sociology highlight two analytical challenges for researchers interested in how people think about policy. The first challenge is that people are inconsistent in their issue preferences, because these preferences require more attention and prior knowledge than the average person has to devote to political life (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1962; Converse et al. 1965, Kinder 1983 provides an extended summary). The second challenge is that regular surveys, media coverage, and elite influence teach people how to have an opinion, so research focused on these inconsistent responses risks erroneously treating them as indicators of some underlying "real" preference when surveying itself manufactures those very preferences (Jeolmack and Kahn 2014; Bourdieu 1979; Blumer

1948). Trends toward political polarization in the U.S. would appear to challenge these assumptions, suggesting that more people are willing to "pick a side" in the debate. However, Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) emphasize that this trend may only create "partisans without constraint"—people who are better at labeling which political party shares their interests, but who do not necessarily show corresponding changes in their actual attitudes on political issues (also see DiMaggio et al. 1996). Given these challenges, studying nonreligion and public opinion formation could be a non-starter if political elites have not seen fit to explicitly appeal to nonreligious voters and foster attitudinal constraint based on secular identity claims (e.g. Chapp and Coe 2019).

However, the field of public opinion research has made several methodological advances that address the first challenge. By focusing on broad sets of issue domains that we would expect to influence multiple measures for different policy indicators (e.g. Goren 2004, 2013), and using multiple survey items that evaluate policy issues in aggregate (Achen 1975; Ansolabehere et al. 2008; Krosnick and Berent 1993), research can map underlying trends in how respondents evaluate policy questions that are less susceptible to varied information about any single policy issue. This approach takes gaps in respondent information seriously, but also gets closer to capturing the full range of information that people have received and sample from answer questions about these issue domains (Zaller 1992).

Research in political psychology and the sociology of culture helps to address the second problem. Rather than treating public opinion as merely the choice of issues

imposed by elites, this research pushes work to view public opinion as the expression of different elective affinities (Perrin and McFarland 2011; Jost et al. 2009). Policy views are performative; they are not necessarily indicative of what people want government to do in terms of specific or precise policy, but rather what they want government to *represent and support* with its policy endeavors.

This approach sets the unit of analysis at a person's performative attempt to convey their judgement in the social context of a survey, rather than evaluating response patterns as indicators of "correct" information. For example, people use responses to normative behavioral questions about topics such as exercise or church attendance to convey their intended identities to researchers, often providing inaccurate reports of the behaviors that are nonetheless accurate reflections of their commitment to religion or their intention to live a healthy lifestyle (Hadaway et al. 1993; Brenner and DeLamater 2016). By paying attention to this, the gap between talk and action becomes a useful analytic tool, rather than a source of error.

Political ideology provides people with existential resources to derive identities and meaning from political life, epistemic resources to understand the nature of the world and how it works, and relational resources to make senes of their group membership and relative social position to others (Jost et al. 2009, 2013, Martin and Desmond 2010, Perrin et al. 2014). These cultural repertoires provide a set of evaluative criteria that people can draw on to make both conscious, declarative, and reasoned judgements and intuitive, non-declarative, "snap" judgements (Lizardo 2017). Survey research using

policy issues can target the mediated relationship between ideological positions on specific issues and pre-conscious, ad-hoc judgments grounded in deeper socialization (Haidt 2001; Vaisey 2009). Researchers can use response pattens to policy issues to identify affinities between different cultural repertoires for thinking about a variety of political issues such as tolerance (Stewart et al. 2018), nationalism and populism (Albertson 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016, Bonikowski and Gidron 2016), or symbolic boundaries and cultural membership (Edgell and Tranby 2010) and to map the expression of these cultural repertoires to specific policy preferences (e.g Edgell et al. in press).

A cultural approach to public opinion suggests that people use coherent cultural repertoires to make sense of political issues. This process can be the result of specific elite framing and packaging, as movement leaders provide members with explicit, declarative "scripts" that link their identities to movement goals and outcomes (e.g. Massengil 2008, Delehanty 2016). However, the theory also implies that people draw on the non-declarative aspects of their repertoires to make decisions about issues that fall outside of those explicit scripts. A sufficiently conservative test of these cultural repertoires can target the non-declarative aspects by selecting issues that have not yet undergone an elite framing process. Here, I apply this theoretical approach to a review of the literature on religion and public opinion in three issue domains and discuss how we can leverage these domains to study attitudinal constraint among the nonreligious.

Religion & Social Issues

I focus on three major issue domains: support for the social safety net, evaluations of racial inequality, and immigration policy. I focus on these three issue domains because they are some of the most important contemporary issues in the political conversation at the time this survey data was collected—amid high profile stories including Black Lives Matter, political battles over the Affordable Care Act, and debates regarding the DREAM act and immigration policy in the 2016 Presidential campaign. As I discuss below, research shows that public opinion on three issue domains can be conditioned by religious considerations.

I also focus on these issues because they can provide a sufficiently conservative test of attitude alignment around religious and nonreligious repertoires for three reasons. First, all of these issues invoke moral considerations that provoke respondents to consider their moral commitment to others in society. Thus, they are likely to provoke respondents to invoke their cultural repertoires for moral evaluation—be they religious or nonreligious. Second, the kind of repertoire invoked matters for each of these outcomes, because research finds the relationship between religion and each of these issue domains is divergent. Both liberal and conservative attitudes on these issues can be strengthened by particular religious repertoires in concert with partisan interests, and the same should be true for nonreligious repertoires. Third, these issues are *not* the primary focus on nonreligious advocacy groups, and they are *not* issues that the backlash theory would predict to produce disaffiliation, such as attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Attitudinal

constraint on these issues is unlikely to have been primed by nonreligious mobilization efforts. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, organizers and movement leaders tend to pursue an agenda specifically tailored toward issues concerning the separation of church and state and religion in the public sphere, and as a result they tend to gravitate toward the "culture wars" issues such as religious expression in public, scientific authority in the crafting of public policy, and legal battles for the rights of secular minority groups (see Kettell 2013, 2014, LeDrew 2015, and Schultzke 2013 for a detailed discussion of secular movement agendas). Without a readymade script associating nonreligion and these issues from movement leaders, these analyses provide a stronger test for evidence of attitudinal constraint around nonreligious repertoires.

Research on religion and attitudes toward the social safety net, racial inequality, and immigration policy observes a divergent relationship between religious commitments and political views, one in which religious commitments can foster both stronger progressive and stronger conservative views on these issues. This is not a "goldilocks" or "just so" story where religion produces the effects researchers want to see (Martin 2015). Instead, this research illustrates how religious experiences provide a set of different cultural repertoires that interact with partisanship to produce stronger views. Researchers can map these different repertoires at work under different contexts and observe different effects.

The Social Safety Net

Attitudes toward government support for the poor are not merely driven by economic factors, but also prior heuristics and biases such as partisanship (Brooks and Manza 2013), ethnocentrism (Kinder and Kam 2009), moral evaluations of the poor (Skitka and Tetlock 1993), and preferences derived from core personal values about conformity and authority (Goren 2013; 2004). Attitudes toward the social safety net rely on cultural constructions of the "deserving poor," based on the assumption that poverty is the result of an immoral aversion to work (Gans 1995). Such categories are an example of the socially constructed moral classifications that undergird our thinking about inequality more broadly (Massey 2008). Studies of the U.S. welfare state trace its development as a conditional system designed to offer aid those deemed "more worthy" of support, such as veterans and mothers (Mohr 1994; Skocpol 1996). Political actors rely on these discursive constructions of moral worth to make decisions about safety net reforms (Steensland 2006), and much of the contemporary conversation about these policies focuses on defining who qualifies for services and how those services might instill particular attitudes toward work, the self, and family life (e.g. Soss et al. 2011; Gowan 2010; Wacquant 2009).

Religion is a key institutional arbiter of moral classifications in the United States (e.g. Caplow et al. 1983; Edgell et al. 2016). Moral classifications are often contested, creating an ambivalent context where religion can both strengthen and limit support for social services. For example, the U.S. welfare state relies heavily on the efforts of faith-

based groups working to improve social conditions, but also leans on these groups' ability to "bypass the state" in the era of devolution and welfare reform to justify cutting back on social safety net provisions. (Davis and Robinson 2012; Katz 2008).

This means that the effects of religiosity on respondents' policy heuristics can cut both ways, and denominational affiliation alone does not uniformly predict views on economic issues. Religious interpretations of the moral imperative to aid the poor can spur efforts for social reform (e.g. Markofski 2015; Regnerus and Smith 1998), and religiosity can prime altruistic behavior (Saroglou et al. 2005). Religious commitments can also reinforce ethnocentric distinctions, political intolerance, and conflicts over moral categories that can limit support for aiding the poor if respondents feel they are not sufficiently reformed (Wilson 2009; Froese et al. 2008; Rowatt et al. 2005; Barker and Carman 2000; Gusfield 1986). Malka et al. (2011) find both effects; high religiosity directly associates with higher support for social services, but also has a strong indirect effect through conservative political ideology that lowers support for social services.

A similar pattern may hold for nonreligious repertoires. For some people, lower engagement with religious groups is an individualistic experience that is grounded in autonomy from institutions, or even skepticism of institutions (Hout and Fischer 2002, Kasselstrand et al. 2017). It would not be surprising if these nonreligious respondents were less concerned with the role of these social policies, and it is possible that they would even be more skeptical of such efforts. On the other hand, other people who are more concerned with the moral authority of religion in the public sphere may also be

more skeptical of the conventional moral claims of "deservingness" that tend to follow the conversation about these policies. If a repertoire of nonreligion that focuses on this moral authority is more salient to those respondents, we might expect them to be more supportive of a stronger social safety net.

Racial Inequality

A wealth of research finds that different aspects of religiosity structure attitudes about race and racial inequality (e.g. Becker 1998; Emerson and Smith 2000; Hinojosa and Park 2004; Martí 2005, 2009; Tranby and Hartmann 2008; Johnson et al. 2010; Todd et al. 2015). One of the best known applications of this theory argues that Protestant theological systems and local church cultures intersect to bolster individualistic perspectives that limit the way congregations engage with racial and economic inequality (Becker 1998; Chaves 2004; Wuthnow 1988; 2012). For example, Emerson and Smith argue that the individualistic theological perspective advanced by evangelical Protestantism encourages believers to frame racial equality as "spiritually and individually based, not temporally and socially based" (2000: 58). This frame casts racial reconciliation as an outcome of individual and group commitments to religious engagement, rather than social systemic change. The individualism fostered by evangelical Protestantism thus limits the scope of explanations for racial inequality and, in turn, limits congregations' capacity and desire to challenge the status quo.

Other work extends this account with three points. First, religious toolkits for making sense of race are defined by more than doctrine alone (Brown 2009; Todd et al. 2015; Edgell and Tranby 2007). Mainline Protestant and Catholic respondents can also obtain similar individualistic frames, (Eitle and Steffens 2009; Hinojosa and Park 2004), and controlling for congregants' sociodemographic backgrounds can attenuate the effect of denomination on racial attitudes (Taylor and Merino 2011). Frost and Edgell (2017) demonstrate that it is the interaction of sociodemographic factors with religious beliefs that drives racial attitudes. Religious orthodoxy, involvement in a congregation, and personal religious salience all matter when interacted with these demographic factors.

Second, shared religious experiences can also build cultural toolkits that foster mutual understanding across racial and ethnic groups (Martí 2005, 2009). Research also highlights the centrality of religious experiences and institutions to movements for racial justice in the United States (e.g. Smith 2014; Morris 1986). Leaders of faith-based community organizing groups, especially liberal Protestant groups, use shared theological commitments both to challenge individualism (Braunstein 2012; Braunstein et al. 2014; Wood 1999) and reframe individualism (Delehanty 2016), in order to build coalitions committed to justice and equity.

Finally, certain religious toolkits do more than just reinforce a benign individualism; they can also bolster negative attitudes toward racial minority groups. Research employing critical whiteness theories finds that religious individualism can also covary with "laissez faire" racism (Bobo and Smith 1998; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Kinder and

Sanders 1998; Tranby and Hartmann 2008), and survey manipulations meant to prime Christian religiosity can raise the reporting of covert racial prejudice and general negative affect toward African Americans (Johnson et al. 2010). This work raises the possibility that certain common religious toolkits may not only make structural solutions to racial inequality less plausible to respondents—they may also strengthen racial inequality as the status quo by morally legitimizing racial boundaries.

The larger conclusion from this work is that religion is not monolithic and does not shape racial attitudes in a single way. Instead, religious groups' local cultures and belief systems intersect to produce different cultural toolkits that respondents can use to make sense of their stances on various issues, including race (e.g. Bean 2014; Bracey and Moore 2017; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2012; Lichterman 2008; Noll 2008; Wright et al. 2015).

Since laissez-faire racism is grounded in assumptions about the moral worth of individuals' efforts to overcome inequality (Bobo and Smith 1998; Kinder and Sanders 1998), a respondents' propensity to moral pluralism or individualism, made salient through different nonreligious repertoires, may also associate with their tendency to evaluate other racial groups as deserving or undeserving of equitable treatment. For example, research has noted the centrality of white experiences and identities to movement atheism and how this racialized framework does not resonate with the experiences of secular activists of color (Hutchinson 2019; LeDrew 2015). Racial inequality is an issue domain with the potential to highlight variation in attitudes among

the nonreligious and to sharpen our understanding of the cultural frameworks that implicitly link religious experiences to other policy topics.

Immigration

While views toward the social safety net and racial inequality use public policy to tap moral commitments to fellow citizens, immigration policy issues also act as a proxy for assumptions about who belongs as a citizen. While public opinion on immigration policy is often conditioned by material conditions, such as economic health and the demand for immigrant labor, it is also conditioned by cultural effects such nationalism, collective identity, and perceived group position and status (Fussell 2014). Here again, the effects of different combinations of religious beliefs, practices, and institutional efforts can pull in opposite directions on public opinion, because religion can provide different sets of repertoires through which people can make sense of these questions about cultural membership.

For example, religion is often instrumental to the acceptance and integration of immigrants into their new communities. Religious organizations often provide necessary social services to immigrant groups (Cadge and Ecklund 2007), even proving instrumental in the sanctuary movement to support undocumented immigrants (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991). There is evidence that exposure to information about these services and a faith-based commitment to help others may foster more accepting attitudes toward immigrants, as more frequent attendance at religious services associates with more

progressive views on immigration policy, especially among white congregants (Brown and Brown 2017; Knoll 2009).

On the other hand, religious commitments can also make religious identities more salient to respondents (Bail 2014; Brubaker 2015), and here there is evidence that strong symbolic boundaries can reinforce religious *differences* around immigrant groups and contribute to preferences for more strict immigration policy. Religion and national identity, especially Christian Nationalism, are associated with more strict opposition to immigration policy (Fussell 2014; McDaniel et al. 2011). Sherkat and Lehman (2018) find a similar pattern, as well as one in which respondents who adhere to a literal view of the bible and belong to sectarian Protestant denominations are more likely to express hostile views of immigrants. Support for religious authority can also foster a specific notion of citizenship, creating a situation in which immigrants from different religious backgrounds, especially Muslims, are more likely to face prejudice and intolerance (Gerteis et al. in press; Kalkan et al. 2009).

Here too, nonreligion can provide varied repertoires to make sense of immigration. It is possible that a similar skepticism of moral authority that drives inclusive attitudes toward social welfare and racial reconciliation may also undermine a strict adherence to the notions of "imagined community" that support exclusive definitions of citizenship and national belonging (Anderson 2006; Smith 2003). However, there is also evidence that a narrow vision of secular authority among some religious subgroups fosters a distrust of minority groups perceived to cling too closely to religious

commitments (LeDrew 2015). It is also possible that particular kinds of nonreligious experience foster attitudes that are ambivalent or even less accepting toward immigration.

Why Nonreligious Repertoires Matter

Chapter Two outlined two different cultural repertoires of nonreligion—one grounded in personal commitments such as low attendance at religious services, low religious salience, and less-certain belief in god, and one grounded in public commitments such as a secular vision for the public sphere in which people disagree that good leaders or good policy should adhere to religious tenets. Both of these repertoires capture different dimensions of social experience. Each repertoire includes a different set of evaluative criteria for policy issues, and measures for one repertoire are not necessarily an effective proxy for the other.

Personal nonreligion is about low religious engagement. It is more closely aligned with the drift hypothesis of religious disaffiliation, and this helps to explain Hout and Fischer's (2014) finding that unaffiliated respondents are higher in individualism and Kasselstrand et al.'s (2017) finding that they express stronger skepticism of social institutions. Nonreligion, manifested in one's private life, is primarily about individualism and personal autonomy—a lack of committed ties to religious groups, a lack of adherence to theological systems, and a lack of investment in religious identities.

Not every unaffiliated individual experiences their nonreligion solely as a lack. The backlash theory draws our attention to how nonreligion is also substantively

ideological for some respondents, containing a set of tangible beliefs about community and authority in the modern world (e.g. Layman and Weaver 2016). The key difference demonstrated in Chapter Two is that these ideological commitments primarily have to do with the role of community and religious *authority*, public concerns about leadership and policymaking, and public issues rather than private troubles. Here, nonreligion is more about respondents' tendency to affirm or reject certain core assumptions about authority rather than simply affirming their individualism, and it provides a set of tools to answer questions about the proper moral order of political life.

The issue domains outlined above all hinge on respondents' conceptualization of moral authority—claims about deservingness and cultural membership. In each of these cases, we would expect respondents' willingness to express skepticism of religious moral authority, fostered by a their adherence to public repertoires of nonreligion, to load on more progressive views on each of these issues. On the other hand, research has also highlighted how individualistic thinking can also load on more conservative views on each of these issues. Net of the effect of public repertoires, it is possible that private nonreligious repertoires associated with this individualism may only explain why some nonreligious respondents appear more politically centrist—people without a strong sense of attitudinal constraint from the public repertoires may be left only with the weaker attachments to social institutions fostered by private repertoires. If research does not control for both of these repertoires, it may miss this underlying variation in the cultural toolkits that respondents have at their disposal for evaluating political questions. In the

absence of controls for one set of repertoires, it is possible that the other may be misinterpreted.

In Chapter Two, preliminary analysis showed how respondents' choice of nonreligious identification was most closely associated with a personal nonreligion repertoire comprised of low belief, behavior, and salience. Self-reported political ideology, however, was more closely associated with a repertoire of public nonreligion, net of controls for the private repertoire. The following analysis builds on these preliminary patterns to assess the role of these repertoires in attitudinal constraint, testing whether attitudes on these contemporary issues are more closely bundled with personal or with public nonreligion. The research outlined above suggests two expectations for the study:

1. Because public nonreligion is a repertoire concerned with questions about religious authority and community, it will have a stronger and more robust positive relationship with progressive political views than private nonreligion.
2. Because personal nonreligion is a repertoire concerned with individualism and autonomy from institutions, it will have a negative or null relationship with progressive political views, net of controls for public nonreligion.

Because most research on the nonreligious employs measures of the personal repertoire —relying on measures of identity or private religious practice—evidence that supports these expectations provide an important corrective to the literature. It would suggest that an approach using personal religious commitments as a proxy for public religious commitments provides less explanatory power for attitude constraint than one focused on public repertoires.

Core Measures

The following analysis uses the two nationally representative data sets from Chapter Two—the Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey (BAM 2014) and the Center for the Study of Political Psychology election survey (CSPP 2016). To measure personal and public nonreligious repertoires, I use the same predicted factor scores for each respondent validated in Chapter Two.

Attitudes on the three core issue dimensions are measured by standardized composite scales from each survey data set, summarized in Table 4.1. To measure attitudes toward the social safety net, the BAM survey asked respondents about their government spending preferences—whether they sought to (1) fully fund, (2) fund at reduced levels, or (3) eliminate funding for four policies: social security, SNAP (food stamps), welfare, and public education (a = 0.78). The CSPP survey asked respondents four likert-type policy items ranging from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support) on four policy proposals: raising taxes on the wealthy to maintain support for Social Security and Medicare, raising taxes on the wealthy to help reduce income inequality, raising the federal minimum wage to $12.50 an hour, and requiring employers to offer paid family leave for new parents and caretakers (a=0.84).

The literature on religion and attitudes toward racial inequality suggests two important outcome measures to test: respondents' positive or negative affect toward different racial groups and respondents' attitudes about racial inequality. The BAM survey measured affect through a series of four, four-point likest-type response options

asking respondents whether they felt members of different social groups shared their vision of American society (1-strongly agree - 4- not at all agree). The BAM racial affect measure combines attitudes toward African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Recent Immigrants[8] (a=0.84). The CSPP survey asked feeling thermometer questions in which respondents rated a series of groups on a scale of 0-100, and the racial affect measure for this survey combines attitudes toward African Americans, Hispanics, and Recent Immigrants as well (a=0.81). To measure attitudes toward policies aimed to alleviating racial inequality, the BAM survey asked a series of four-point likert-type items (1-strongly agree - 4-strongly disagree), evaluating whether respondents thought African Americans should "receive special consideration in job hiring and school admissions," "get economic assistance from the government," and should receive more aid from "charities and other nonprofit organizations" (a=0.85). The CSPP survey used a truncated form of Kinder and Sanders' (1996) racial resentment scale to tap attitudes toward racial equality and redistribution ("Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors," "Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve," "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites," and "Generations of slavery and discrimination have

[8] The decision to include immigrations in two of these measures is grounded in both theoretical and empirical patterns. Theoretically, a large body of research traces the history of U.S. immigration policy as a racialized process in which both the state and everyday citizens concerned themselves with the racial composition of the population (e.g. Jacobson 2002; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003). Empirically, attitudes toward immigrants in these scales tacked closely to attitudes toward other racial groups in PCA and do not substantially change Chronbach's Alphas when treated as an additive scale. Therefore, these questions allow the analysis to employ a diverse range of racial minority groups in order to tap generalized racial affect among respondents rather than relying on single, error-prone measures alone.

created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.") (a = 0.82).

Finally, the BAM survey measured three different attitudes toward immigration policy, rather than attitudes about recent immigrants themselves: preferences for federal spending on immigration enforcement, agreement for whether the U.S. should do more to limit immigration, and preferences for whether immigrants should have to learn english as a condition of citizenship (a = 0.61). The CSPP survey asked respondents whether they would favor an effort by the federal government to deport all undocumented immigrants, whether people immigrating to the U.S. legally is generally a good or bad thing for the country, and whether they favored automatically granting citizenship to children of undocumented immigrants if they are born in the U.S. (a = 0.65). These two composite measures are less internally consistent than the others, due to respondents' substantive differences in attitudes toward documented and undocumented immigration (Wright et al. 2016). I maintain these composite scales to examines attitudes in general, though future research can also interrogate the legal/illegal distinction as a salient cultural construct that may covary with religious repertoires.

Analytic Approach

Analysis proceeds in three parts. First, I present a descriptive overview of how these measures vary across conventional nonreligious identity groups: atheists, agnostics, "nothing in particular" respondents, and "spiritual but not religious" respondents. This

approach only provides minimal evidence of attitudinal constraint among nonreligious respondents, but, as discussed in Chapter Two, this also illustrates the limitations of using imprecise self-identification categories to infer nonreligious repertoires and political attitudes.

To formally test the expectations above, the second part of analysis moves to using a series of OLS models to test the relationship between personal and public nonreligious repertoires and the four attitude scales in each data set. I test these relationships both with and without a common set of controls across each survey for basic sociodemographic factors and political ideology: political party identification, gender, race, age, education (highest degree attained), and household income. While the use of these control variables is limited, it is intended to produce as close a replication across each of the data sets as possible.

Finally, I explore the mechanisms that underly these associations with a set of supplementary models in the third section of analysis. These include the possibility that each nonreligious repertoire acts as a proxy for other social psychological considerations such as authoritarianism or need for cognitive closure. While these data are fundamentally cross sectional and cannot provide the time-ordering necessary for causal inference, these supplemental analyses help to establish a conceptual ordering of personal factors, nonreligious repertoires, and issue preferences.

Descriptive Results - Nonreligious Identities

Figure 4.1 illustrates the distribution of each of the four core issue scales across the nonreligious identification measures in each survey. In each of these outcome measures, higher values indicate stronger progressive views, such as higher support for the safety net, more positive racial affect, stronger recognition of racial inequality, and lower support for restrictive immigration polices. Following previous research on attitude patterns among the nonreligious (e.g. Baker and Smith 2015; Hout and Fischer 2014; Stewart 2016), the most progressive distributions of attitudes appear among atheists and agnostics—the most distinct identity groups that clearly differentiate themselves from religious others. In many cases, "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) and "nothing in particular" (NIP) respondents show similar attitude preferences to religiously-affiliated respondents. In most cases, the widest difference between average attitude scores of these groups is about half a standard deviation higher for atheists.

However, there are also some unexpected trends for this literature. SBNR respondents appear more supportive of the social safety net across both surveys. In the 2014 BAM data, agnostics and NIP respondents express slightly lower positive racial affect than the other groups, expressing stronger social distance from racial minority groups. Overall, these descriptive differences suggest that there may be underlying heterogeneity within some of these nonreligious sub-groups, and they also help to illustrate how in the aggregate this group may appear more progressive on some issues, but also more centrist on others—NIP and SBNR respondents together far outnumber

self-identified atheists and agnostics, and their inclusion in an aggregate category may pull the average attitude score closer to the grand mean on some measures. To test whether nonreligion is significantly associated with attitude constrain net of controls, we also need to move beyond these identity-based patterns to include respondents who may be misclassified, but substantively nonreligious. To do this, formal tests for significance with control variables use the factor scores for personal and public nonreligious repertoires to assess how attitudes covary with these measures.

Multivariable Results - Nonreligious Repertoires

The models reported in Table 4.2 test each of the four attitude measures with public and personal repertoires, both with and without sociodemographic control variables. Figure 4.2 summarizes and visualizes these results for ease of interpretation, plotting the regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals to summarize the strength and direction of the estimated relationships. This figure also includes supplementary analysis using a seven point scale for party identification. As in Chapter Two, where basic models suggested public nonreligion is more closely associated with self-reports of liberal political ideology, public nonreligion is also more closely associated with Democratic party identification and progressive attitudinal constraint. Across each of the models without control variables (the lefthand panel of Figure 4.2), public nonreligion is significantly and positively associated with each outcome measure in each data set. Controlling for public nonreligion in each of these models produces

estimates in which personal nonreligion is negatively-signed and significant in most cases —in other words, respondents who are high in personal nonreligion but low on public nonreligion appear slightly less progressive across these issues. Wald tests for differences in the estimate of these coefficients were statistically significant in all cases ($p<.05$ for all cases, $p<.001$ in the majority of cases).

When control measures for common sociodemographic variables and party ID are introduced into each of the models (the right hand panel of Figure 4.2), these estimates begin to converge. Both public and personal nonreligion are rendered non-significant in some cases, such as in attitudes toward the social safety net and racial attitudes measured on the BAM survey. However, the general pattern in significance and direction of estimates persists across these models in Table 4.2. Wald tests for differences in the estimate of these coefficients also held in significance, especially for party ID in both data sets ($p<.001$), immigration views in both data sets ($p<.001$), and attitudes about racial inequality in the CSPP data ($p<.001$). Nonreligious repertoires are not necessarily the most important deciding factor in all cases of attitude constraint, but they do not necessarily need to be—the important pattern indicated by these results is that public nonreligion is more closely aligned with progressive attitudes then personal nonreligion. This finding helps to explain the patterns observed in Chapter One by demonstrating that personal nonreligion alone is not necessarily a sufficient condition for attitude alignment. While nonreligious respondents as a whole may appear more liberal, this is due more to a subset of respondents who have developed a secular vision of the public sphere. Without

the presence of this repertoire, respondents who are simply not religious in their personal lives are not *necessarily* any more progressive than their personally religious counterparts.

However, the two repertoires of personal and public nonrelgion are also correlated with one another, and this invites the possibility that these results are an artifact of multicollinearity. I assessed this possibility by examining the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) for the repertoire measures, which were 5.32 in the BAM data and 5.34 in the CSPP data. These VIF values approach the threshold at which multicollinearity becomes a concern, and they are due to the generation of factor scores from the CFA model in Chapter Two where the latent factors for each repertoire are allowed to correlate. To address this issue, I used an alternative model specification with simple additive composite indices for each repertoire. These indices employed the same measures, but were not allowed to correlate with one another as in the CFA specification. Models using these measures had substantively smaller VIFs (1.95 in the BAM data and 2.16 in the CSPP data), and they produced substantively similar results with the same pattern in divergent effects (results available upon request).

Supplemental Analyses

One limitation of the data at hand is that these surveys are cross-sectional, and the design of the CSPP panel study limited the religion measures to a single wave. As a result, this analysis cannot address time-ordering to see if these preferences for a secular

public sphere follow from partisanship or inform partisan ideas. Future research will need to address this issue directly. Here, the choice of issue preferences that are not directly linked to partisan identities through the work of nonreligious leaders provides some evidence for a unique effect, but supplemental analyses can do more to establish the mechanism through which attitudinal constraint on these measures occurs.

If a preference for a secular public sphere is the core nonreligious repertoire through which attitudinal constraint occurs, we would expect it to behave in a similar manner to other repertoires such as partisan identification. The relationship between public nonreligion and issue preferences should be stronger for respondents with higher levels of political interest. Figure 4.3 demonstrates that this is the case for the outcome measures that were most robust in previous models. Respondents in group 1 with the highest self-reported levels of political interest show a stronger relationship between public nonreligion and each outcome measure, and these associations level off as the categories move to group 5 with the lowest self-reported interest.

The theoretical work above also suggests that preferences for a secular public sphere are associated with a particular set of assumptions about community and authority, rather than individualism. To demonstrate the presence of this mechanism, we can also test the relationship between each nonreligious repertoire and a set of indicators for these core assumptions that the research would expect to develop *before* adult religious preferences solidify. A large body of research in social psychology finds that personality metrics such as the Big Five (Gerber et al. 2011), moral foundations (Graham et al. 2009;

Weber and Federico 2013), need for cognitive closure (Johnston et al. 2017), and authoritarianism (Hetherington and Weiler 2009) influence how people establish political identities and evaluate political questions. While these traits are not necessarily immutable over the life course, they are relatively stable, and thus present a useful proxy measure to determine if these public and private repertoires relate to other, more fundamental constructs in how respondents perceive political life.

Table 4.3 assesses the relationship between public and personal nonreligion and a battery of personality indicators included in the 2016 CSPP survey. Most predictors are the same across both constructs, but a few core differences do appear that serve to validate public nonreligion as a feasible mechanism for attitude constraint. Respondents who are high in public nonreligion tend to express lower rates of adherence to the loyalty dimension of moral foundations, lower need for cognitive closure, and lower populism. None of these factors are significantly associated with personal religious commitments in this data set.

The opinion outcomes discussed above all concern social membership, particularly policy obligations to address social inequality and citizenship. Respondents who are less likely to view clear symbolic boundaries between themselves and others are also less likely to endorse policies that would sustain social inequality (Edgell *et al.* In Press). The results in table 4.3. suggest a similar mechanism may be at work among those who endorse a secular public sphere, as s lower need for cognitive closure and a reduced emphasis on loyalty both suggest an elevated tolerance for uncertainty and a less

stringent reliance on group identities or group boundaries. Social interactions that encourage a vision of a secular public sphere, such as the advocacy work of nonreligious groups, can therefore create a potential cultural environment in which these personality traits are more salient and easier to bring to bear on political considerations. These results also further support the assertion that a link between personal and public nonreligion is possible and present, but not *inevitable,* a unique set of personality dispositions may encourage respondents to take up public repertoires of nonreligion in particular social contexts.

Discussion & Conclusion

Chapter Three suggested that nonreligious Americans may be more politically engaged than research would otherwise expect, because a core measure of low civic engagement (low church attendance), means something different to people who are religiously unaffiliated than it does to people who are affiliated. If this is the case, the next question is whether and how nonreligious Americans express coherent views on major political issues, because this determines whether political organizing efforts can mobilize the nonreligious as a coherent group. To provide a strong test for this question, I selected three issues in which we do see coherent patterns in religious commitments and attitudinal alignment, but have not seen explicit nonreligious mobilization: support for the social safety net, recognition of racial inequality, and attitudes about immigration enforcement.

These results indicate three important points for understanding attitudinal constraint among people with low religious engagement. First, the attitudinal differences across major nonreligious identity groups on these issues are relatively small. While atheists and agnostics, the strongest nonreligious identity groups, do exhibit more progressive attitudes, the majority of respondents who identify as "spiritual but not religious" or "nothing in particular" do not appear very different from their affiliated counterparts. Chapter Two demonstrated that these identity labels closely correspond to personal repertoires of nonreligion, and so it is possible that these personal repertoires are not as closely tied to political considerations as backlash hypothesis in the literature would expect. Second, this analysis demonstrated that most progressive opinion alignment on these topics coheres around a *public* repertoire of nonreligion. Respondents who disagree that religion is important for citizenship, leadership, and a strong public sphere do tend to express stronger progressive views on many of these issues, though this relationship is attenuated by sociodemographic controls. Finally, supplemental tests suggest that this public repertoire behaves like other sources of attitudinal constraint: it is conditional on political interest and it associates with personality traits that emphasize inclusive visions of public policy such as a reduced need for cognitive closure.

The divergent estimates for public and personal nonreligious repertoires make sense given the literature discussed in Chapters One and Two. If these cultural repertoires focus on different considerations in social life, they provide respondents with different sets of conceptual tools and affinities that would in turn structure how they evaluate

issues. Research focusing on the public repertoire suggests it would provide a more robust set of tools concerned with authority and community in public life that would provide more attitudinal constraint, while the focus on individualism and autonomy from institutions fostered by the personal repertoires would not necessarily provide the same kind of progressive political alignment once we isolate the effects of the public repertoire.

These results have three important implications for research on religion and opinion formation, especially research assessing the political impact of religious disaffiliation. First, these results show that attitude alignment around a vision of a secular public sphere identified by Layman and Weaver (2016) among secular activists in the Democratic party is also present in the general population, and that it may help to align issues even if they are not typically addressed by secular advocacy groups and movement leaders. Following the expectations of the backlash hypothesis that nonreligion associates with stronger progressive political views, respondents high in public nonreligion express both personality traits and cultural affinities that suggest they are more open to inclusive visions of citizenship and social authority. As a result, we can expect them to be more skeptical of the moral claims of worth and deservingness that often underly conservative attitudes toward redistributive policies, racial inequality, and strict immigration enforcement. This evidence of issue alignment suggests immense potential to build coalitions among religiously-unaffiliated and less religiously-engaged citizens with the proper messaging strategy and elite framing effects to build upon these initial relationships.

Second, however, this issue alignment is not inevitable. Instead, these results emphasize an important distinction between private nonreligious repertoires and public nonreligious repertoires. When we control for public nonreligion, the effects of private nonreligion disappear from these models of attitude constraint. This suggests that the social drift hypothesis—that low religious engagement is related to reduced civic engagement—also has a role to play. Personal nonreligion, measured by reduced engagement with religious beliefs and practices, captures the individualistic aspects of religious disengagement. Individual nonreligious identities are associated with this personal repertoire, and so measuring these error-prone identity categories alone does not capture both personal and public repertoires at work. Only measuring private repertoires, or comparing identity groups such as atheists and "nothing in particular" respondents, risks understating the political potential of lower religious engagement by limiting the respondents who are included in the analytic sample.

More broadly, these results demonstrate a core analytic problem in much of the current research on religion and public opinion. By measuring only religious practices, beliefs, or identities, much of the research is using personal religious repertoires as a proxy to infer their public religious repertoires. Many people are inconsistent in their expression of religious commitments (Chaves 2010), and so this approach is potentially understating the explanatory power of religion in their analyses. Public religious repertoires are now entering the literature as a strong explanatory mechanisms for a range of political attitudes (e.g. Delehanty et al. 2019; Stewart et al. 2018), and these results

demonstrate their worth for studying nonreligion as well. A cultural approach focused on different nonreligious repertoires points to a synthesis of the backlash and drift hypotheses: by controlling for measures that capture both dimensions of the nonreligious experience, we can more completely map the conditions under which either one has a stronger bearing on social and political life. In the next Chapter, a study of nonreligious organizations and lobbying efforts will assess whether the field of nonreligious advocacy groups has been able to draw upon this distinction and harness this political potential.

Chapter 5: Advocacy

The Field of Nonreligious Lobbying

Chapters Three and Four showed how different cultural repertoires of nonreligion matter for trends in the electorate. Once we account for these differences, we see that nonreligious respondents are more politically engaged than the literature would expect, and that different nonreligious repertoires can distinguish trends in opinion formation on several key political issues. These two findings suggest immense political potential among nonreligious Americans, but they also raise the question of whether and how that potential can translate into actual political influence.

Most political representation to elected officials is mediated by advocacy groups. Over the past twenty years, rising rates of religious disaffiliation in the U.S. have been accompanied by a steady growth in the number of organizations dedicated to representing different nonreligious groups in the public sphere (e.g. Blankholm 2014; Cimino and Smith 2014; Frost 2017). While many of these groups focus on maintaining a sense of social support and community for nonreligious individuals, an increasing number of them also take up the mission to defend the separation of church and state and to oppose the public influence of the Religious Right (García and Blankholm 2016; Kettell 2014; LeDrew 2015). These organizations advocate for a nonreligious policy agenda through media campaigns, legal advocacy, and formal lobbying activities. While this work has

brought visibility and influence to nonreligious coalitions at a local and state level, especially in the form of legal challenges to church and state violations, the national influence of these efforts pales in comparison to the political influence of the Religious Right. Nonreligious people remain severely underrepresented in Congress (Sandstrom 2017), religious appeals remain a dominant strategy among political representatives (Chapp and Coe 2019; Domke and Coe 2008), and, despite the recent founding of a Congressional Freethought Caucus, religious organizations have arguably had much more sustained influence in the creation of social policy and legislation over the last thirty years (e.g. Davis and Robinson 2012; Sager and Bentele 2016).

Why is this the case? We would expect that representatives of one of the fastest-growing minority groups in the country would be able to cultivate much more direct political influence than nonreligious organizations currently hold. In this chapter, I argue that cultural repertoires of nonreligion can help us understand the limited influence of these organizations, because repertoires can influence the operation of groups as well as the choices of individuals (Becker 1998; Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). The social fields in which organizations operate produce "rules of the game" that people use to generate different kinds of capital, be it economic, political, or cultural (e.g. Bourdieu 1990, 1997, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Fligstein and McAdam 2012), and the way that new groups situate themselves in a field can, in turn, determine the way their institutional relationships and organizational capacities develop to convert different kinds of capital (Medvetz 2012; Dromi 2015).

In this chapter, I argue that the success of the religious organizing in U.S. politics comes from a strategy that balances the work of making coalitions visible through public appeals (what I call "front stage" advocacy from movements, members, and media) and legislative influence and lobbying (what I call "back stage" advocacy). While these terms typically denote individual behavior in the way people present themselves to others (Goffman 1959), it is helpful to use them to talk about organizational work because they emphasize how groups have to make choices about how and when to prioritize different cultural repertoires. A coherent and clear identity-based repertoire can motivate people to join an organization and remain active, but organizations may also have to compromise that repertoire in order to achieve success in policy-making (Gamson 1995). While groups in the Religious Right have benefitted from front stage work in media, mobilization, and high profile legal battles though the culture wars, they have also developed a successful set of back stage advocacy practices in which they translate their shared cultural capital from religious identities into political capital through "unobtrusive organizing" (Kucinskas 2014).

I then argue that nonreligious organizations have been particularly good at observing and understanding the front stage work of the Religious Right as an oppositional player in the field and emulating it themselves. This front stage work leverages personal repertoires of nonreligion to grow the organizations' membership. However, this approach has only produced a secular simulacrum of the Religious Right, because nonreligious groups have neglected the back stage work of formal lobbying and

advocacy. Using an original relational data set of forty nonreligious nonprofit organizations and publicly available lobbying data, I demonstrate how these choices have produced a set of network ties and organizational practices that create unexpected boundaries which limit these groups' capacity to build political capital.

Frontstage and Backstage Advocacy

While Chapters Three and Four focused at the micro level by examining aggregate patterns in individual behavior and attitudes, this chapter uses networks and social fields to turn our attention to the meso-level by examining the relationships between organizations. Social fields are spaces where a set of actors, often nested inside multiple organizations or groups, share four traits: a common understanding of what is at stake in their relations, where they stand in relation to each other, common "rules of the game" for achieving success in the field, and a common interpretative framework for understanding each others' actions (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:11). By focusing on a field of organizations, such as the academic field, the media field, or the field of college athletics, researchers can pay attention to the intersection of institutional structures and individuals' agency to improvise within these structures. This identifies insider knowledge, patterns of habit, and moments of creative innovation and change that creating different kinds of social, economic, and moral capital (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Some fields are clearly defined, with a coherent and consistent set of practices that are rewarded with particular kinds of social capital. Academia is one

example, where the rules for publication, prestige, and the accumulation of academic capital are fairly clear to the actors involved and distinct from other fields such as banking or professional baseball.

Recent research suggests that political organizing and advocacy is different, however, because actors accumulate different kinds of capital from many fields to create political capital. Think tanks, for example, draw on media, academic, and economic capital, converting all three to foster political capital at different times (Medvetz 2012). While classic models of elite mobilization suggest corporations can simply create political change by directly paying lobbyists and making campaign contributions (e.g. Domhoff 2012), today we see organizations engaging in other kinds of advocacy, such as "astroturfing," to accumulate different social capital and legitimize their advocacy efforts (Walker 2009; Walker and Rea 2014). Groups that exist at the fringes of social fields can suddenly take their messaging to the mainstream, and integrate their agendas into mainstream policy networks, by cultivating different kinds of media capital and using emotionally charged messaging (Bail 2014).

One of the core challenges for social movement organizations concerned with "identity politics" is the way that those organizations have to balance authenticity and efficacy as they work in this social space (e.g. Gamson 1995). Groups have to present a consistent and coherent sense of shared identity to recruit members and keep them committed the movement, but the everyday practice of political work entails compromise and adaptation to the needs of any particular policy debate—practices that can often

undermine that sense of coherence and authenticity. When groups bring together diverse coalitions of members, they have to navigate the use of multiple cultural repertoires to coordinate a common group style that can maintain emotional commitments and solidarity (Becker 1998; Delehanty 2016), and this can be in tension with the more pragmatic expectations that the professionalization of social movement leadership creates (Han 2014; Lee 2015).

This tension in organizational activity is analogous to the distinction Erving Goffman (1959) draws between front stage and back stage work in the way individuals present themselves to the world, and applying this language at the meso-level draws our attention to the way organizations conduct impression management through advocacy work. When a group recruits new members and cultivates their shared identity as activists (Massengil 2008; Delehanty and Oyakawa 2018), administers press releases or engages in social media campaigns (Bail 2014), or holds a public demonstration or rally (Karakaya 2018), it is engaging in front stage activism work. This activity gains political capital from a public claim to a shared demand, and so it requires a clear, compelling, and consistent messaging strategy to secure the proper motivation for action (Alexander 2013). In contrast, back stage advocacy work gains political capital from the often inconsistent and potentially contradictory work of negotiation, compromise, and exchange that often defines policy creation within established political networks (e.g. Medvetz 2012; Villadsen 2011; White 2012).

The challenge for any given political organization, as for individuals, is how to maintain a separation between front stage and back stage work so that the necessary friction between the two does not undermine the success of collective action in either domain. Excessive front stage work can create a rigid moral narrative that limits the agility of organizations to effect policy change in opportune moments, especially if political adversaries see them as unwilling to compromise their shared values. On the other hand, excessive back stage work and professionalization can undermine an organization's claim to unconditionally represent their members' identities or interests and potentially undercut support from constituents. Effective organizations balance the two, creating both new moral frames and maintaining savvy political ties (for a core example, see Page (2013) on the California Correctional Peace Officers Association).

Both religious and nonreligious advocacy groups share a similar challenge: they each claim to represent groups of people who have a variety of cultural repertoires to express their affinities and interests. Representing these different cultural repertoires effectively in the political field requires a fine tuned combination of front stage and back stage activity, and the core cultural assumptions that movement leaders develop with their constituents can in turn affect the organizational structure of their relationships with other movement groups and with the larger poetical field (e.g. Dromi 2015). Before turning to examine how nonreligious advocacy groups have undergone this process, it is helpful to look at the Religious Right to illustrate this theory and observe what happens when organizations cultivate a working balance between front stage and back stage advocacy.

Religious Advocacy: Moral Crusaders & Institutional Players

The best known example of religious advocacy in the United States is the New Christian Right's work to forge connections between conservative Protestant and evangelical identities and Republican party politics (Liebman and Wuthnow 1983). This connection was not inevitable—it was the result of struggle and contestation within the field of evangelical organizations (Markofski 2015) and struggles in overlapping fields where political and business leaders sought a new framework for moral legitimacy (Kruse 2015). By providing a framework through which voters could align their religious commitments to tangible political agendas (e.g. Bean 2014), religious appeals from candidates became a dominant strategy to gain electoral support (Domke and Coe 2008).

This familiar process converts the cultural capital from a shared religious identity into political capital at the front stage of movement organizing and advocacy work. It relies heavily on audience characteristics and context (Chapp and Coe 2019), as movement leaders package together different understandings of religion and current events to spur political engagement and voting among their constituents (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Massengil 2008; Wilcox and Robinson 2010). It motivates political engagement by making a claim to a coherent, common moral imaginary that legitimizes leaders and spurs people to activism.

Because many religious advocacy groups operate as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, which can not spend a substantive amount of money on direct lobbying,

front stage advocacy through media campaigns, mailings, and other kinds of constituent mobilization is a common and highly visible strategy. As a public-facing appraoch to gain political capital, however, this strategy for religious advocacy also necessarily invites contestation and backlash. The resulting "culture wars" encapsulated a range of conflicts about fundamental moral questions in public life—conflicts that structured both public discourse (e.g. Alexander and Smith 1993; Hunter 1998) and personal political preferences (e.g. Haidt 2001; Lakoff 2002), and contributed to religious disaffiliation (Hout and Fischer 2014; Schnabel and Bock 2017). Strategies to center religious classification in political and legal systems invited high profile court cases, including *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), many of which did not decide in favor of conservative/religious aligned interests (though there are notable exceptions such as *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* 2014). Organizations on the "religious left" are now employing comparable movement strategies to foster a connection between religious commitments and progressive political interests (e.g. Braunstein 2017; Braunstein et al. 2017 Delehanty 2016; Delehanty and Oyakawa 2018).

In light these trends, the case for success in front stage political organizing as a singular, dominant strategy for conservative religious organizations in the U.S. is limited. In addition to this approach, these organizations have also developed a second strategy to convert religious capital into political capital through back stage political work. Kucinskas (2014) calls this "unobtrusive" organizing within the existing context of

institutions through research on how corporate networks adopt mediation and mindfulness practices. For example, Bates (1991) illustrates how a network of religious home-schooling organizations originally created to provide social support to members transitioned to a lobbying and advocacy-driven coalition pushing for home-schooling legislation at the state level. Lindsay (2008) has identified and interviewed a large network of conservative and evangelical Protestants among the elite, holding positions on corporate boards, in the entertainment industry, and in political office. Many of these interviewees seek to enact reform in their organizations in accord with their religious values, but also emphasize how they aim to do this work in the context of their professional responsibilities, rather than directly challenging the existing institutional structure through contentious social movement tactics. Davis and Robinson (2012) identify a range of religious organizations in multiple countries that aim to "bypass the state" by creating parallel networks for social service provision outside of government policy. In the U.S., Sager and Bentele (2016) show how social service provision has been a key route for religious organizations to gain political influence by operating through faith based initiatives. By providing these services, religious groups do not have to openly advocate for policy reform in their interests. Instead, they gain resources and legitimacy from the devolution of social services and, in turn, gain increased capacity to shape legislation and policy execution without direct public appeals.

This pattern in back stage organizing is an important and recent turn in political advocacy among religious groups. Earlier research on religious lobbying emphasized a

general ineffectiveness, as lobbyists were seen as Washington insiders disconnected with the interests of religious organizations (Hertzke 1998)—groups that were more interested in maintaining moral legitimacy than chalking up political "wins" in actual legislation (Hofrenning 1995). With the presence of both front stage and back stage advocacy, however, religious organizations have addressed this problem by cultivating multiple routes to convert their cultural capital into political capital. In front stage work, religious claims provide the moral capital and motivation to elect leaders and demand policy reform (e.g. Bourdieu 1991). In backstage work, religious claims provide social capital in the form of closer network ties among elites that produce political change through conventional institutional operations.

The Emerging Nonreligious Field

The rise of individual religious disaffiliation has been accompanied by a growing number of organizations devoted to representing and supporting nonreligious individuals. These include local atheist and freethought social groups (e.g. Smith 2013), alternative congregation movements seeking to provide secular community (e.g. Frost 2017), and political groups seeking to promote the separation of church and state and secular public policy (e.g. Blankholm 2014). Most research on nonreligious organizations and advocacy groups has focused on the front stage aspects of organizing in membership and messaging strategy.

Studies of these organizations find that local chapters are more likely be established and find a larger number of members in counties and states where

conservative religious groups are stronger and more publicly salient (Djupe et al. 2018; García and Blankholm 2016). These findings provide strong support for the backlash hypothesis in terms of movement organizing, not only in terms of personal religious disaffiliation. Qualitative studies with members of these groups focus on how they create a shared sense of nonreligious community and identity both on their own and in relation to religious others. Many of these studies focus exclusively on the cultivation of atheist identities in particular (e.g. Cimino and Smith 2014; LeDrew 2015; Smith 2011, 2013; Sumearu and Cragun 2016; Guenther et al. 2013). By participating actively in these organizations, people who share a common skeptical standpoint toward religious beliefs and institutions build a shared identity that they often define in terms of a skeptical or rationalist orientation—one that can in turn shape the way they think about many different social issues. However, this socialization is not necessarily uniform across groups. Different organizations and individuals can cultivate both a confrontational relationship toward religion and a more accommodating, tolerant view of interfaith acceptance, and both perspectives engage in active discussion and contestation within the field of nonreligious organizing (e.g. Hutchinson in press; Kettell 2013; LeDrew 2015).

In terms of public messaging, this contrast between adversarial and accommodationist views on religion within these groups creates an environment that encourages organizations to be multivocal. Broadly speaking, many groups advocate for upholding a strong separation of church and state, promoting the acceptance of atheism as an identity, and advocating for scientific authority in the formation of public policy

(Kettell 2014, 2015; Schulzke 2013). In practice, this invites a plurality of political messaging tactics and issue preferences. For example, in a study of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), the predominant political advocacy group representing nonreligious Americans, Blankholm (2014) observes how the organization switches between four separate definitions of the word "secular" in its Congressional briefings to focus on the separation of church and state, a distinctly secular public sphere, non-belief as a political ideology, and secular as an identity group. This approach to messaging and public image also helps small and growing nonreligious organizations, especially those that might be embedded in other institutional fields where support for religious minority groups may be limited. For example, Konieczny and Rogers (2016) demonstrate how a changing (and at times ambiguous) messaging strategy helped the U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet Freethinkers Group to maintain administrative support and clearance to continue operating.

This research shows how trends in front stage organizing have allowed the field of nonreligious organizations to grow their membership and cultivate a common sense of identity among their members that is able to pursue public visibility and potentially garner political capital. However, as we have seen in previous chapters, the majority of religiously unaffiliated respondents do not necessarily view their nonreligion as an identity category, and the cultural repertoires of nonreligion that coordinate with their political views are not necessarily tied to the identity categories commonly employed by these organizations. Therefore, an ambiguous messaging strategy that helps small and

growing organizations maintain a basic level of member commitment may also backfire by failing to coordinate a sufficient number of nonreligious people to build a coalition comparable in size to the quarter of Americans with no religious affiliation. Current research has focused more on this ambiguous front stage organizing, and less on the backstage political infrastructure of these organizations. What is the genesis and structure of the nonreligious field (cf. Bourdieu 1991), and do organizations in this field have a sufficient infrastructure to create political capital through back stage work, such as lobbying and political donations?

The Study

This analysis employs an original data set of nonreligious advocacy organizations designed to obtain a comprehensive sample of groups at the national level. Following Bail (2014), this approach aims to include a range of organizations—both those that are well established and those that hold limited influence in the field. I define nonreligious advocacy groups[9] broadly as two kinds of civil society organizations: those that claim to advocate for the separation of church and state and those that claim to represent populations of nonreligious Americans. As in earlier chapters, this broad definition treats nonreligion relationally to include groups that orient themselves in a specific way toward religious authority in the public sphere.

[9] As with the choice of the term "nonreligious" in earlier chapters, here nonreligious advocacy groups denotes a specific kind of organization. Nonreligious advocacy groups are different from "secular" advocacy groups that operate without a religious identification or agenda, which necessarily includes an inefficiently broad set of organizations ranging from Planned Parenthood to the Cato Institute.

Data collection employed a multi-stage sampling procedure to generate this comprehensive list of national organizations. First, I generated a pilot sample based on a known set of ten groups assembled by Kettell (2014) that explicitly claim to advocate for atheists and other non-religious groups in their mission statements. I then used the GuideStar database of nonprofit organizations to collect all publicly available IRS form 990s for each organization in the pilot sample and conducted a word frequency analysis on each group's mission statement to identify key terms and common language used across the organizations. I then broadened the sample by conducting five more searches in the GuideStar database using the most common key terms from this content analysis: "Atheis*" (to include Atheism, Atheist, and Atheists), "separation of church and state," "nonreligious," "non-religious," and "secular." New groups were added to the sample when they met the definitional criteria above during each search. As expected, each search was progressively more inclusive, with "secular" yielding the most results. This approach allowed me to capture groups that fall outside of the conventional public relations scope of the major organizations in the field, but nonetheless meet the criteria for inclusion. For example, Muslims for Progressive Values is included in the sample for their stated commitment to church/state separation. Though analysis will show that this group is isolated from the core network of nonreligious organizing, their inclusion in their sample helps to illustrate the relatively narrow scope of organizational affinities that defines this core network. In contrast, many listings for private religious schools and other faith-based organizations that arose from the search for "secular" did not merit

inclusion in the sample, and suggested I had reached a point of saturation for the field. Finally, I validated this list of groups against a list of umbrella organizations for local nonreligious groups assembled by García and Blankholm (2016), adding one additional organization not included in the search results. A lists of groups in full sample is available in Table 5.1, including abbreviations for each group used in this study and the range of years for which tax information was available and collected for these groups.

This sampling process yielded a data set of 40 organizations with available tax forms. With the help of a volunteer undergraduate research assistant, I coded the form 990s for the groups' basic financial characteristics and formally reported political spending. The unit of observation for the resulting data set was organization-years, yielding 397 observations. Basic financial data included the reported amounts (in U.S. dollars) of organizational revenue from contributions and donations, total revenue (including these contributions, services, membership dues, investment income, and sales of inventory), expenses for staff salaries, and total expenses (including staff salary). For organizations that reported any kind of political activity, I also coded the required Form 990 Schedule C for political spending. On this form, electing organizations that engage in lobbying report dollars spent on grassroots lobbying, direct lobbying, and total lobbying expenditures, which I recorded into each observation-year. Non-electing organizations that did not engage in lobbying, but did contribute to political causes, are required to specify their political activities, including the use of volunteers, paid staff, advertising, mailings, publications, grants to other organizations, direct contact with legislators,

demonstrations, or other activities. I coded each of these as dichotomous indicators and notated the amount spent in total on each activity.

While these reports provide a general summary of political activity, they do not specify the issue agendas on which organizations lobby. To capture these agendas and validate organization-reported lobbying expenditures, I also collected data for available organizations in the LobbyView database (Kim 2017, 2018). These data provide issue-specific lobbying disclosures including brief summaries of activities and issue codes established under the U.S. Lobbying Disclosure Act. Including this supplementary data allows me to compare the back stage issue agendas of different organizations within the field.

Analytic Approach

Analysis proceeds in three parts. First, I present basic descriptive patterns regarding the development of organizations in the field and trends in political expenditures. I then turn to examining the structure of the field over time using network visualization. This visualization uses the list of board members and highly paid employees required on each IRS Form 990 to establish network ties through shared board members. These direct ties are the best measure for relationships between these organizations, because early organizational developments in the field (including the establishment of American Atheists and the American Humanist Association) were often driven through the founding of spinoff groups with close staff ties to their organizations

of origin. Later developments in the field, discussed below, often have to do with the founding of coalition groups that bring together existing organizations for an explicit purpose, such as front stage political organizing. As a result, shared board members indicate direct ties between these organizations and an effort to coordinate activity between them.

I illustrate the development of the field over time using four snapshots from the data set, selected for both the availability of organizations and their substantive position in the history of nonreligious activism. First, I use the year 2000 to indicate the state of the field before the rise of "New Atheism" to public prominence and establish a baseline. Second, I use 2006 to illustrate the field at the emergence of "New Atheism," during which conversations about religious skepticism and social authority were particularly prominent in the media and among political pundits. 2006 was the year of publication of Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation* and Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion,* both of which were key texts for movement activists and played a role in membership and recruiting to many of these organizations. 2012 represents a "post-New Atheism" state for the field at the midpoint of the Obama Presidency—a time during which concern about conservative religious influence in politics is less salient than the movement's emergence during the George W. Bush administration. Finally, 2016 captures the field at the latest state for which comprehensive tax documents are available and at a time when the field faced a number of internal institutional challenges. From 2012 through 2016, stories of sexual harassment at secular conferences and controversial statements from New Atheist

leaders regarding Islam sparked debates among movement members about anti-Muslim sentiment, sexism, and other forms of inequality within organizational leadership. This unsettled period of internal conflict continues today, with recent accusations of harassment and financial malfeasance reported against some movement leaders, and this invites the potential for dramatic recent changes in the field for which analysis must account.

After examining the structure of the field over time, the third section of analysis uses patterns in network relationships to comparatively examine formal political activity among core and periphery organizations in the field using self-reported expenditures and the LobbyView data. These analysis demonstrate the stakes of the arrangement of the field and how cultural considerations can explain variation in backstage political organizing.

Basic Trends

The number of nonreligious advocacy groups in the United States has grown dramatically in the past fifteen years. Over the period of available financial data shown in Figure 5.1, filing organizations have doubled from less than ten organizations prior to 2000 to over twenty reporting for the 2015 fiscal year in 2016. During this period, total reported annual political spending across all organizations also rose dramatically, as shown in Figure 5.2. Among the forty organizations in total, eleven formally reported political expenditures. Six organizations reported lobbying expenditures: Americans

United for the Separation of Church and State (AUSCS), the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), The Center for Inquiry (CFI), the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), the Citizens Project (CP), and The Interdependence Project (IP). With the exception of CP and IP, four of these organizations reported the largest cumulative political expenditures over the period of data collection. Overall, this sample of nonreligious organizations is far smaller than the number of religious advocacy groups in the United States, but the proportion engaging in direct political spending is comparable. In 2010, for example, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life estimated a total of 215 religious advocacy organizations based in Washington D.C., but only 10 of those groups were registered 501(c)(4) organizations permitted to undertake substantial lobbying work (Hertzke 2011).

Five organizations reported only political expenditures for non-lobbying activities, such as mailing expenses for advocacy materials or cash transfers to other advocacy organizations like the SCA. These organizations included the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Atheist Alliance of America (AAA), the Secular Student Alliance (SSA), Internet Infidels (II), and the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF). Most of these eleven organizations in total reported less than 2% of their total expenses as political expenditures.

The Evolving Field of Nonreligious Advocacy

Figure 5.3 uses four network diagrams to illustrate the growth and development of the field of nonreligious advocacy groups over the period of the data set. Ties in these networks represent common board members and highly paid employees listed on each group's form 990. Triangular nodes represent organizations that reported any kind of political expenditure, and circular nodes represent organizations that did not report any political spending. Triangular nodes with darker shading represent organizations that report a higher proportion of their total expenditures on political work, because the AUSCS far outspends all other organizations in the field.

The period begins in 2000, six years before the movement known as "New Atheism" would bring many of these organizations into the public eye. During this time, network ties are limited to a set of four organizations that are all closely related to American Atheists (AA), founded by Madelyn Murray O'Hair. These include the Charles A Stevens American Atheist Library (CSA-an affiliate of AA with many common board members), The Society of Separationists (SoS-O'Hair's original organization that would eventually split from AA), and the United Secularists of America (USA—a third spinoff organization founded by O'Hair). This set of ties represents movement atheism specifically, and it is isolated from two other sets of ties: one between the Center for Inquiry (CFI) and its development fund (CFID), and one between Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (AUSCS[10]) and the Citizens' Project (CP). This later

[10] While the official abbreviation for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State is "AU," I use "AUSCS" throughout this chapter in order to clearly designate it from Atheists United (AU)—a smaller atheist advocacy organization that merited inclusion in the sample.

set is illustrative—Americans United is the the largest and most notable lobbying group for church and state separation, founded in 1947 as Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State and renamed to Americans United in 1972. AUSCS devotes a relatively large proportion of their expenditures to political work, while the movement atheism groups report spending none. Despite their presumed shared political interests—O'Hair was a plaintiff in *Murray v. Curlett* on school-sponsored bible reading that would be consolidated with *Abington School District v. Schempp*—these groups remain separate in the field and point to an early distinction between political lobbying for church-state separation and identity-based movement work for organized atheism.

By 2006, the launch of New Atheism, a new network of organizations has emerged. Founded in 2002, The Secular Coalition for America (SCA) reports its mission to "increase the visibility and respectability of non theistic viewpoints in the United States" and reports direct and grassroots lobbying "on issues affecting nontheists and the secular character of our government" as a core program service. As a self-identified political advocacy coalition for the secular movement, SCA sits at the center of a number of formerly-isolated organizations from 2000 including as the Secular Student Alliance (SSA) and the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), as well as organizations newer to the data such as the American Humanist Association (AHA). The SCA reports a substantive proportion of its budget as political spending relative to other groups and draws in contributions from its partners in the network. It is important to note here that

the movement atheism groups remain connected, but isolated from the SCA coalition, again with no reported political spending. Also notable is the isolation of AUSCS from this network despite mission overlap with the SCA. Instead, AUSCS developed shared connections with the Center for Inquiry (CFI) through one shared board member.

By 2012, the field has begun to coalesce. The SCA remains central and dominant in political expenditures, building connections with even more organizations, including the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), and the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), Most notably, the main network now includes American Atheists, which has severed ties with many of its sibling organizations. A new unifying group also emerges devoted to front stage organizing: the Reason Rally Coalition (RRC).

According to its 2012 990 mission statement, the RRC "is a movement-wide event sponsored by the country's major secular organizations. The intent is to unify, energize, and embolden secular people nationwide, while dispelling the negative opinions held by so much of American society." The RRC hosted two major rallies in Washington, DC, one in 2012 ("Atheists and Secularists Gather") and one in 2016 ("Speak Up for Reason"). According to the RRC website, both of these events were intended to illustrate the size of the nonreligious voting bloc and to advocate for "celebrating secularism" with speakers and entertainment to promote a positive message about "secular, atheist, agnostic, humanist, freethinking, and nonreligious identities." With prominent celebrity speakers including Bill Maher, Richard Dawkins, and Penn Jillette, the work of the RRC

represents the largest and most prominent effort for front stage political organizing on the part of nonreligious advocacy groups.

One of the most notable traits of the RRC is how this front stage organization had an additional unifying effect on the network, bringing together many more organizations and acting as a mediating link between those groups and the SCA. Because the RRC incorporated ties to the Center for Inquiry, AUSCS has also entered the central network by 2012. However, it remains on the periphery and not directly tied to the SCA. Connections between the two predominant organizations most likely to provide back stage influence through lobbying remain mediated through the work a front stage organization.

By 2016, despite internal strife addressing sexual harassment and anti-Muslim sentiment, the dominant network has stabilized in the field of nonreligious organizations. It now includes a few additional groups, including Camp Quest (CQ)—a secular summer camp for nonreligious youth. SCA and AUSCS remain separate from each other, with only mediated ties through the CFI and the RRC. Across 2012 and 2016, it is important to note the increasing number of organizations that report in the data set, but hold no direct network ties to the center of the field. While additional groups that meet the selection criteria for inclusion in the field proliferate in the early 2010s, these groups remain relatively isolated from one another. The most notable exception to this trend is the appearance of the Center for Freethought Equality (CFE) at the center of the network. CFE describes itself as "a sister organization of the American Humanist

Association dedicated to lobbying and political advocacy," however, this group did not report any expenditures on lobbying activity in any of the IRS form 990s for this time period. The following section returns to this group as a curious case study in the state of the field.

Overall, the structure of the field of nonreligious organizations and advocacy groups invites three key comparisons to better understand backstage political organizing. First, it suggests that we should examine differences in spending between the core and periphery of the network. Second, it suggests that we should examine differences in political spending patterns among the major lobbying organizations (AUSCS, SCA, FFRF, CFI, and CFE), and groups reporting non-lobbying political expenditures (AHA, MAAF, and SSA). Finally, the unique mediated relationship between the largest backstage political organizations in the field (AUSCS and SCA), suggests that comparing these two organizations directly may yield important insights into how the structure of the field may limit coordinated back stage political action.

Core vs. Periphery Organizations

The isolated periphery organizations in the field reporting political spending include the Citizens Project (CP), The Interdependence Project (IP), and, in later years, the Atheist Alliance of America (AAA) and Internet Infidels (II). AAA and II, both explicitly atheist identity groups, reported political spending in the form of cash transfers to the Secular Coalition for America (SCA). In contrast, Citizens Project—a Colorado

nonprofit promoting the separation of church and state tied to AUSCS in earlier years—reported regular lobbing expenditures throughout the duration of its financial data from 1999 to 2014. The Citizens Project website details a number of advocacy commitments, including education about religious freedom in public schools, civic education and engagement, and equality and diversity. For example, in their latest legislative report card,[11] CP states that they oppose the right to refuse service for religious considerations, tax credits for nonpublic schools, and limitations to sanctuary districts for immigration purposes. The Interdependence Project—a secular Buddhist center in New York—reported grassroots nontaxable lobbying expenditures in 2014, 2015, and 2016. These organizations demonstrate the power of a cultural affinity with nonreligious identities in the field. Groups on the periphery that explicitly identify with movement atheism coordinate their political spending with the center of the field by sending their money to the SCA, while groups primarily concerned with church & state issues do not.

Core Organizations - Non-Lobbying

The three core organizations in the field that report non-lobbying political expenditures are the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Secular Student Alliance (SSA), and the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF). Over the course of the financial data collected, the AHA reported political mailing and publication costs across 2004, 2005, and 2006 totaling $14,519 over the three years,

[11] Citizens Project. 2018. "2018 Legislator Report Card." Accessed April 1, 2019. (http://www.citizensproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018-Scorecard-FINAL.pdf)

which they categorized as using staff, mailing, publications and direct contact for political advocacy. Across 2012, 2015, and 2016, the group also reported transferring a total of $14,000 to the Secular Coalition for America. In 2015 and 2016, the AHA reported transferring $61,356 and $73,258, respectively, to the Center for Freethought Equality (CFE), which they registered as "grants to other organizations for lobbying purposes." In the supplemental information for this transfer, the AHA described CFE as "an affiliated 501(c)(4) organization." As stated previously, the CFE did not report spending any money on lobbying efforts in either 2015 or 2016. Both the SSA and the MAAF reported relatively smaller political contributions in the form of staff volunteer work and small cash transfers to the Secular Coalition for America. Here at the core of the field, organizations tend to follow the strategy of culturally-affiliated periphery organizations by channeling their money to CFE or the SCA for lobbying purposes, rather than AUSCS. Designations and supplementary information on these form 990s suggest that these organizations understand these cash transfers as contributions for backstage political advocacy through lobbying.

Core Organizations - Lobbying

The five major lobbying organizations in the field of nonreligious advocacy groups are Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (AUSCS), the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), the Center for Inquiry (CFI), the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF), and the Center for Freethought Equality (CFE). Curiously,

the two lobbying groups most central to the field—the SCA and the CFE—report almost no lobbying expenditures on the required Schedule C documents included with the Form 990. Despite receiving sizable cash transfers reported as grants to other organizations for lobbying purposes, both of these organizations have left their lobbying expenditure reports blank. This is especially concerning because the Form 990s include an item (Schedule A, Part IV, item 4) where organizations must indicate with a yes or no response whether they engage in lobbying activities to include Schedule C. In the case of the CFE, which received over $100,000 from the CFI across 2015 and 2016, both the corresponding 990 forms have this question left blank.

This gap could be due to an error in tax reporting. To investigate this possibility, I searched the LobbyView database to obtain issue-specific lobbying disclosure records for these groups to validate the 990 reports. Three organizations were registered in the database: AUSCS, SCA, and CFI. Figure 5.4 illustrates the Form 990 reported lobbying expenditures and the LobbyView recorded expenditures over the same period. While the self-reported expenditures for CFI and SCA do tend to under-report the actual amount disclosed in LobbyView, these records validate the fact that these groups spend far less comparatively on lobbying than their mission statements or cash transfers would suggest the field expects them to. AUSCS's lobbying expenses outpace all other organizations in the field. Again, the CFE did not have registered lobbying disclosures in either the LobbyView data or a supplemental search the U.S. House of Representatives Lobbying disclosure system.

Lobbying expenditures can vary widely from year to year. For comparative context, AUSCS's lobbying expenses are in line with other top-spending lobbying groups for religious interests. In 2008, for example, their total lobbying expenditures were $463,641. This is comparable to CitizenLink (a Focus on the Family affiliate spending $224,641 in 2008), PICO (Faith in Action, a progressive religious advocacy group spending $165,480 in 2009), and the Catholic Health Association (spending $821,634 in 2008) (Hertzke 2011). While other religious lobbying groups report expenditures as little as a few hundred dollars, the reported spending from CFI and the SCA places them on the lower end of the distribution in spending.

Lobbying Issues

What is the actual secular agenda among these groups? Table 5.2 summarizes the ten most common issues on which AUSCS, SCA, and CFI have disclosed lobbying efforts. While SCA and CFI each have a twelve year range of disclosures, AUSCS has a nineteen year range, producing a higher number of legislative issues addressed. Notice that the top five issues for each group are nearly identical, including Education, Civil Liberties, Religion, Health, and Civil Liberties/Constitutional Issues.

Investigating the specific legislative issues that comprise these codes, however, reveals important differences across these groups. Using the LobbyView database, I extracted the full list of legislative issues that comprised the education, civil liberties, and religion codes for AUSCS and SCA. In terms of education, SCA has lobbied in

opposition of vouchers for private schools, corporal punishment, and absence-only sex education. They have also advocated for expanding the definition of student protections to include atheist and non theistic students anti-bullying and harassment and after school extracurricular programming. While AUSCS has also opposed vouchers, they have targeted their educational lobbying toward religious liberty issues in a broader range of appropriations bills. They also directly lobbied to oppose the confirmation fo Betsy DeVos as secretary of education.

In terms of civil liberties, SCA has focused its efforts on discrimination against nonreligious minority groups, including advocating for global blasphemy protection laws and the protection of human rights in Bangladesh, and the inclusion of atheists and humanists in the military and non-discrimination acts. In one particularly interesting case, the SCA opposed the confirmation of Justice Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court, citing her weak support for church/state separation jurisprudence. While AUSCS also advocates for the rights of nonreligious minority groups, they do so on a much wider range of bills including the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, legislation providing social services to the people experiencing homelessness, and the workplace religious freedom act. They also explicitly opposed the confirmation of Jeff Sessions as attorney general.

Finally, in terms of explicitly religious issues, the SCA has lobbied on the explicitly religious-focused legislation such as the First Amendment Defense Act, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. They have also advocated against what they describe as “religious privileging in child abuse and child care laws.” In contrast, the AUSCS has

pursued issues pertaining to religious freedom in a much wider range of legislation, including the participation by religious organizations in USAID programs, health coverage under the Affordable Care Act, HUD regulations, and the National Defense Authorization Act.

To summarize, AUSCS and the SCA look similar in terms of broad lobbying agendas devoted to religion, education, and civil liberties, but they have pursued those agendas with varied strategies. SCA favors a narrow strategy, focusing on a tailored agenda specifically concerned with protections for nonreligious populations and identity groups. These are typically progressive issues associated with the Democratic party, but they have even crossed conventional party lines in pursuit of this agenda, in the case of Elena Kagan's nomination. In contrast, AUSCS pursues a much more general, and perhaps more professionalized and consistently partisan approach to defensing the separation of church and state across a broader range of issues, especially pursuing large, mainstream omnibus bills that often house the back stage aspects of policymaking in amendments and riders. By pursuing this broader strategy in line with a conventional progressive agenda, including the opposition of Republican nominees DeVos and Sessions, the AUSCS has arguably had a stronger aggregate political impact than the SCA.

These strategies mirror the structure of nonreligious advocacy groups in the United States. SCA and CFI are more central to the field of nonreligious advocacy groups given their identity-based claims to represent atheists, agnostics, and secular humanists.

In terms of institutional ties, these two organizations have more and stronger connections to the rest of the groups in the network and, in the case of the SCA, the network rewards those ties with contributions to put towards lobbying and advocacy. In terms of actual lobbying behavior, however, these organizations are more limited in their scope AUSCS.

Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of lobbying data in the context of the field offers two important conclusions. First, cultural issues, especially the conceptualization of nonreligious identities and front stage organizing efforts, are central to the relationships in the field of nonreligious organizing groups and how these groups go about back stage political organizing. The central organizations that provide the most institutional linkages in the field are the Secular Coalition for America - with a stated commitment to lobbying and backstage political advocacy to advance the interests of atheists, agnostics, and secular humanists, and the Reason Rally Coalition - with a stated commitment to front stage political advocacy for these groups through the Reason Rallies. The actions of other organizations support the SCA's mission in line with this commitment to nonreligious identities. Groups on the periphery of the field that are primarily concerned with nonreligious identities tend to engage in political work by sending money to the SCA. Organizations closer to the core of the field that are invested in secular identities tend to do the same, while periphery groups that are more concerned with the separation of church and state engage more with independent advocacy in limited cases.

Second, this emphasis on identity marginalizes Americans United for the Separation of Church and State among nonreligious advocacy groups, despite its status as the largest and most notable lobbying group for the separation of church and state. While the AUSCS may be central to the field of progressive organizations more broadly, and while the group clearly outspends all other nonreligious advocacy organizations in lobbying efforts, it is only marginally linked to this particular field through one shared board member with the CFI. No nonreligious advocacy group in this sample reported transferring money to the AUSCS.

This is particularly interesting because the lobbying work of the AUSCS, the SCA, and CFI as reported by LobbyView appears quite similar, though AUSCUS has lobbied on a much broader and more consistent set of legislation than the SCA's narrow efforts to lobby for nonreligious identity groups in particular. Instead of leveraging AUSCS's influence, These groups remain only tentatively connected, with mediated relationships in the case of the SCA. Instead of actively coordinating with AUSCS or sending money to this group, organizations in the field filter materials support to the SCA or the CFE, and the financial records in this sample indicate that they understand these transfers as contributions for the sake of lobbying and political advocacy. Despite this, financial records for the CFE and the SCA indicate that these receiving groups spend remarkably little on formal lobbying efforts.

The result is that the network of nonreligious advocacy groups has built little capacity in terms of back stage political influence on legislation, and therefore has

diminished capacity to convert the cultural capital of these shared identity groups into political capital. These shared cultural affinities for nonreligious identities shape the structure of the field and limit coordination with a long standing, influential backstage organization dedicated to the same substantive issues as many in the nonreligious movement.

Previous chapters illustrated how individuals who have different experiences with nonreligion, both through a personal cultural repertoire of behaviors, identities, and affinities, and through a public cultural repertoire emphasizing secular authority in the public sphere. However, these previous chapters have also shown that the connection between personal and public cultural repertoires is not inevitable, and people high in one repertoire of nonreligion are not necessarily high in the other. It takes cultural work to maintain a link between personal and public repertoires, and many of the progressive political views that research attributes to nonreligion are better explained by the public repertoire when controlling for both.

The findings presented here illustrate the stakes of this pattern at the organizational level, where organizations make assumptions about the link between public and personal repertoires without necessarily doing the work to coordinate the two. Much of the movement organizing among nonreligious groups has emphasized personal repertoires by building groups that focus on developing coherent nonreligious identities and fostering social support. This emphasis on identity and representation through front stage organizing has grown the field and led to a concentration of movement efforts.

However, this focus on identity has also led the field to establish a process of "do it yourself" representation by leaning on newer and less established organizations for political advocacy. Organizations in the field send their money to smaller and less impactful lobbying groups that explicitly claim to advocate for the nonreligious, as opposed to interfacing more closely with Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, a group that shares a similar public repertoire of secular authority but serves a much broader coalition of members.

The case of nonreligious organizing provides an important illustration for the sociology of emerging movements and advocacy in the political field. The commitment to front stage political organizing and the building of cultural capital represented by the Reason Rally Coalition, the Secular Coalition for America (Blankholm 2014; LeDrew 2015; Kettell 2013) and other groups clearly mirrors the advocacy work that organizations used to build the Religious Right with a strong, public facing message on issues of moral concern. This work to cultivate shared cultural capital from common religious identities is the result of concerted struggles in the field of religious organizing (Bourdieu 1991; Markofski 2015), and it demonstrates how the nonreligious movement is looking to established "rules of the game" from its movement counterparts. It could be possible that with the correct, emotionally resonant messaging strategy, future nonreligious mobilization efforts could enter the mainstream from the fringes, as other

groups have done (Bail 2014), and this fringe effect may eventually allow the movement to translate the shared cultural capital of nonreligious identities into political capital.

However, this analysis also illustrates the limitations of this movement strategy. The political influence of the Religious Right arguably comes from the translation of cultural capital into political capital through unobtrusive organizing in the political field (Kucinskas 2014; Sager and Bentele 2016). Like other organizations seeking to gain political capital, religious groups exist in a social space between legislators, nonprofit organizations, and religious groups (Medvetz 2015; Davis and Robinson 2016; Bourdieu 1991). This analysis shows how the field of nonreligious organizations is still primarily reliant on front stage organizing alone, reproducing only a part of the full range of practices employed by its rivals. The shared cultural capital of personal nonreligious repertoires drives the organization of the nonreligious field (Dromi 2015) to the detriment of lobbying ties that more directly express public repertoires focused on secular public authority.

This case shows how the "rules of the game" in any given social field can be double-sided, and how responding only in part to habits of practice in a social field can be detrimental to new and emerging players. If the field of political engagement is truly interstitial and requires multiple kinds of cultural, economic, and social capital, actors who adhere to only one style of play, even in a very skilled way, will be uniquely disadvantaged.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers…as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.
-President Barack Obama, 2008 Inaugural Address

I watched this inaugural address live from a college dorm room in between classes. The nod to non-believers had me giddy; it was only a few years after I read *The God Delusion* in a state of teen angst and still a bit before I would reckon with the global rise of anti-Muslim sentiment that often spoke the language of secularism. At the time, I felt a sense of validation at finally having "my team" recognized as legitimate participants in the political process. With September 11th, the war in Iraq, and the public religious repertoires of the second Bush administration, growing up and growing into political awareness during the early 2000s was a time to be deeply entrenched in the backlash theory of religious disaffiliation—when it felt like there were deep political stakes to my religious commitments.

Looking back a decade later, that inaugural moment feels like less of a victory for my team and more of a calm reassurance. I was watching a political leader who simply acknowledged a basic social fact about his country that had been true since the beginning, and even more so since 1990. I am also an example of the drift theory of religious disaffiliation: was raised in a family so religiously accepting that I ended up nonreligious mostly by accident. I did not set foot in a church service until high school, well after

many of my peers had learned to see them as a normal part of everyday life. In this way, my own experience with nonreligion was not a coherent identity so much as it was the outcome of basic socialization—an ingrained feature of how I saw the world and my place in it. I still volunteered regularly despite never attending church; I learned to prefer brunch instead.

My own nonreligious biography is a patchwork, and so when I set out to study the political implications of religious disaffiliation both the backlash and the drift theories always seemed incomplete. Pundits who lauded the rise of nonreligion as the harbinger of a liberal political shift or derided it as unhealthy polarization where people "replaced" their religion with identity politics seemed to make so much out of what is, for many people, just a preference for brunch. Other arguments sounding the alarm about general declines in civic engagement seemed to ignore the real and legitimate reasons people find specific institutions unsatisfying and decide to leave them. We need a new theory to think sociologically about religious disaffiliation that adds a bit more complexity than either the backlash or drift theories provide—not so much complexity that it prevents us from saying anything substantive about this trend (e.g. Healy 2017; Martin 2015), but enough that we can sufficiently map when and how it comes to matter in political life.

It can seem too simple to say that a social phenomenon means different things to different people, but this is the bread and butter of cultural sociology. People use different interpretive frameworks to make sense of where they are in social institutions, and these frameworks structure both their explicit, carefully considered actions and their implicit,

snap judgements about the world (Lizardo 2017; Sewell Jr. 1992; Swidler 1986). Just like people live out different cultural repertoires of religious experiences (Edgell 2012; Chaves 2010), focusing on how people engage repertoires of nonreligion gives us a theoretical language to bring the drift and break hypotheses together, to formalize these varied experiences, and to directly measure their availability to people. Seen through a cultural lens, conventional political questions about engagement, opinion formation, and advocacy take on a new dimension and yield some surprising findings. Each of the previous chapters highlighted how paying attention to the varied meanings of nonreligion shows immense political *potential* in religious disaffiliation, but also specific ways that such potential is limited.

Chapter Two demonstrated the most important limitation studies of nonreligion: the way researchers are measuring it. By relying on survey items that invite people to identify as different kinds of nonreligious, researchers invite classification errors where a substantive portion of people with low religious engagement never enter the proper category for analysis, and many who are inside those categories actually exhibit rather strong personal religious commitments. Following the insights of qualitative research and classic sociological theory on the relationship between personal and public thinking, I demonstrated that we can create better measures that capture multiple repertoires of nonreligion: personal repertoires reflect reduced religious engagement and belief in terms of personal practices, while public repertoires translate that standpoint into different secular visions for political community and authority. People mix and match these

repertoires, and, while they are correlated, high scores in one repertoire do not inevitably lead to higher scores on the other.

Personal and public repertoires of nonreligion do different things. The most common nonreligious identification categories are more closely associated with the personal repertoire, while basic measures of political ideology associate with the public repertoire. This highlights an important point for studying political culture: it is risky to assume that personal identities and affinities are necessarily a proxy for public considerations. While cultural affinities do often map onto political considerations (e.g. DellaPosta et al. 2015), research can do more to focus on the specific mechanisms through which this happens. In the case of nonreligion, the available identity categories are so slippery for respondents that using a simple measure of non-affiliation or low personal engagement alone risks obscuring when and where people bring nonreligious experiences to bear on their political considerations.

Chapter Three extended the logic of these repertoires into secondary data analysis of validated voter turnout to investigate the secular voting gap. When I use an improved set of measures that can account for bias in self-reporting and exit polling, I find that the gap in voter turnout between religiously affiliated and unaffiliated voters is smaller than originally estimated and closing over time. Trends in validated voter turnout also speak to a distinct cultural logic among religiously-unaffiliated respondents. While the literature traditionally expects higher church attendance to associate with higher rates of voter turnout, these results indicate that the opposite is true for respondents who are religiously

unaffiliated. For these respondents, lower church attendance is more consistent with a nonreligious affiliation, and models demonstrate the probability of turnout is *higher* for unaffiliated voters who attend services less frequently. This is good news for research on civic disengagement, and it demonstrates the limitations of the drift hypothesis. These results suggest that civic disengagement may be domain-specific—opting out of religious institutions does not necessarily mean people will be more likely to opt out of political institutions.

Chapter Four used measures for personal and public repertoires of nonreligion to study public opinion and assess whether either repertoire could produce attitudinal constraint. Rather than testing conventional "culture wars" issues, I pursed a more conservative test to see if either repertoire was associated with core issues that are not typically tied to religious disaffiliation: support for the social safety net, recognition of racial inequality, and attitudes about immigration policy. As expected by the break hypothesis, nonreligious repertoires did associate with progressive attitudes on these issues. However, this attitude alignment is explained by public nonreligion, not personal nonreligion. In line with he drift hypothesis, personal nonreligion can act as a proxy for public nonreligion in a pinch, but it offers reduced explanatory power. Given the findings in Chapter Two, researchers focusing primarily on nonreligious identities or measures of personal nonreligion (or, conversely, religion) are potentially understating the role that religious standpoints may play in many dimensions of political life. Religious commitments will not always be the most important factor in opinion formation or

political decision making, but these findings suggest that we are using an imperfect, limited measure for the most important dimension of religious experience: how people link their religious or nonreligious commitments to a vision of public life.

Chapter Five demonstrated the stakes of making this theoretical mistake in real-world practice. Using a sample of forty nonreligious community organizations and advocacy groups with lobbying and tax data, I demonstrated that the institutional arrangement of the field of nonreligious groups favors organizations that emphasize nonreligious identities first and foremost. Groups that publicly advocate for atheists, agnostics, and other nonreligious communities, such as the Secular Coalition for America, gain a dominant position in the network of organizations and draw cash transfers for political activity from a whole host of member groups based on the assumption that secular identities need explicit, public representation. However, just as we cannot assume that nonreligious identity categories are inevitably linked to a nonreligious vision of political authority at the individual level, these groups are not necessarily the best suited to advance their members' interests in terms of back stage political organizing. These groups have far less institutional longevity, spending capacity, and lobbying influence than organizations exclusively committed to a secular public sphere, like Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. The network of nonreligious organizations keeps identity-focused advocacy groups at the center based on a logic of shared cultural capital for institution-building, but marginalizes the group best suited to directly translate that cultural capital into political capital through back stage

political organizing. As a result, the current nonreligious movement is only mirroring the front stage activism of the Religious Right, and potentially limiting their ability to match the Right's capacity for back stage political influence.

Together, these results indicate great deal of political *potential* within the growing group of nonreligious Americans, more than literature engaging the drift hypothesis would expect. Nonreligious people actually do show up to vote, and they express coherent attitudes about a broad range of issues. However, the break hypothesis is not wholly correct either. At every turn, we see that it is not simply the state of being unaffiliated that shapes these political attitudes and behaviors. Nonreligion still requires a cohesive ideological system to engage with political life. Public repertoires of nonreligion provide this system—and the link between personal and public repertoires is not a given. The institutional structure of organizations that claim to represent nonreligious Americans, for example, has not yet cultivated ties that can effectively activate public repertoires and convert them into political capital. A focus on cultural repertoires of nonreligion explains how this political potential requires a specific set of framing strategies and movement infrastructure that has yet to coalesce in the electorate.

This case study of an interest group "in progress" highlights three important conclusions for the social science literature. First, demography is not destiny. As the rise of religious disaffiliation is primarily acting on personal repertoires of nonreligion, the growth of this demographic group will not inevitably or necessarily provide the political will for the Democratic Party or for progressive groups. As we saw in Chapter One, a

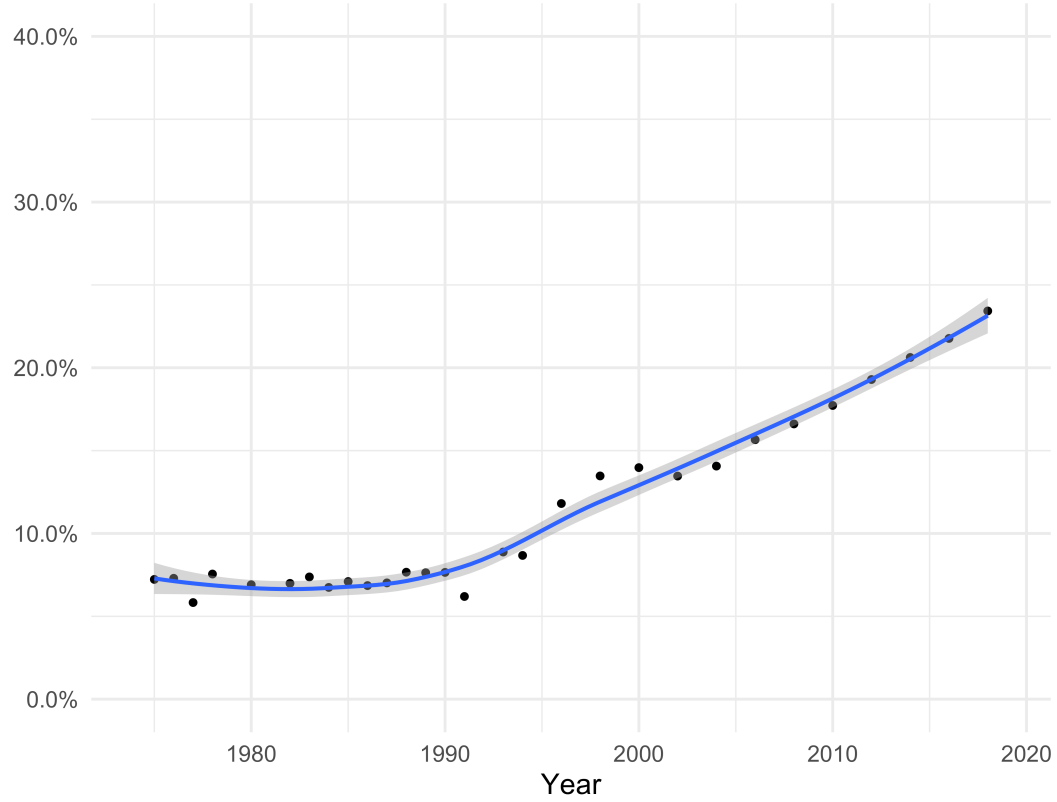
sizable number of the unaffiliated identify as political moderates and independents. Demographic changes have to be filtered through cultural narratives, as people have to make sense of where they are and what they want from the political process. While the phrase "identity politics" is a useful concept for making sense of how people engage with this meaning-making process, there is also a risk of over-simplifying a theory of identity politics and overstating the extent to which someone's sense of who they are will constrain whether and how they vote. Identity politics take cultural work to achieve and maintain, both from institutions and elites who can "package" identities with agendas and from individuals to who take up those packages and integrate them into their lives.

Second, cultural repertoires matter, especially repertoires that bring together the personal and the political. The relationship between personal nonreligion and liberal political views is a proxy for alignment is better explained by a vision of a secular public sphere—attitudes that do not inevitably follow from religious disaffiliation. By focusing on these repertoires in the general population, researchers can better explain why attitudes do not always coalesce or why social movements are sometimes limited. Rather than dismissing political shortcomings as the result of apathy or "low information," we can better specify the conditions that actually produce limited engagement. Periods of cultural disjuncture can provide an improved explanation for why people leave some institutions and remain committed to others.

Third, the nones might have it in the future. There is very little evidence that the current levels of religious disaffiliation will recede, and they are even higher among

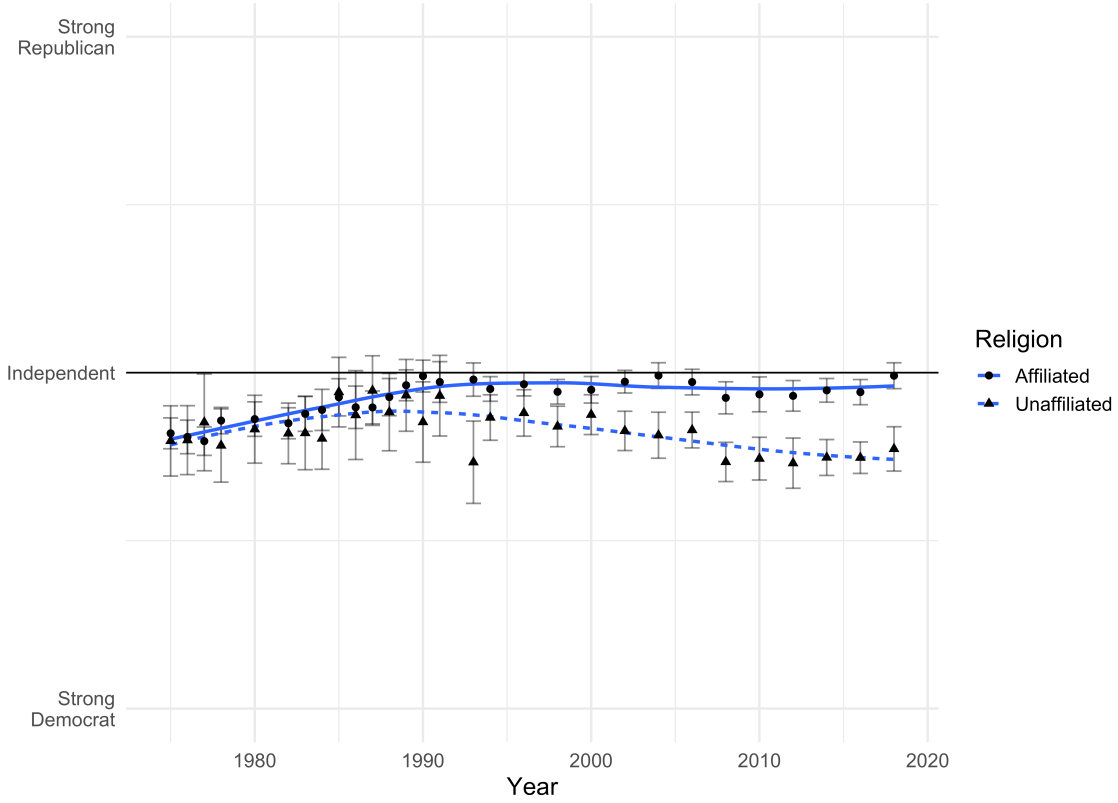
younger respondents. However, much of this disaffiliation comes from moderate religious respondents, and it shouldn't come as a surprise if the growing population of unaffiliated respondents continues to look more politically moderate. The structure of the field of nonreligious organizations suggests that there is much more room for political innovation, especially coalition building across interfaith efforts and within more established advocacy fields. There are smaller signs of these efforts emerging, such as the establishment of the Congressional Freethought Caucus and the presence of new religiously-unaffiliated representatives at the federal and state level. By understanding the specific cultural repertoires that underly the nonreligious experience, perhaps a future entrepreneurial candidate or movement will find a new message and reap the rewards of a rapidly growing potential coalition.

Figure 1.1 - The Rise of “No Religion” in the United States



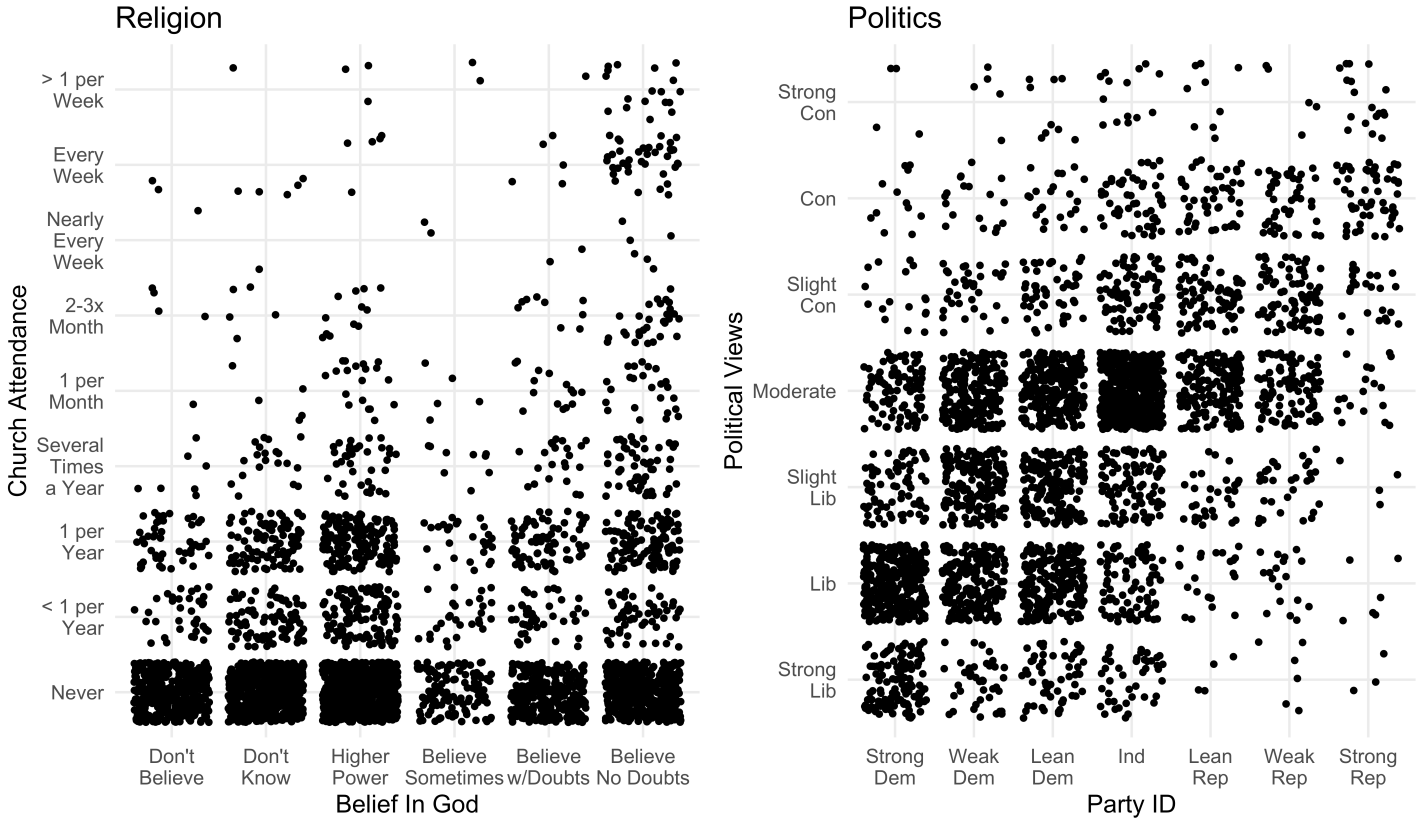
Source: General Social Survey Cumulative File 1975-2018
Notes: Weighted proportion estimates for the number of individuals selecting “none” on religious affiliation of choice. LOESS smoothing applied following the method of Hout and Fischer (2014).

Figure 1.2 - Political Polarization by Nonreligion



Source: General Social Survey Cumulative File 1975-2018
Notes: Trends indicate weighted averages and 95% CIs for a six-point party identification score across religiously affiliated respondents (solid trend line) and unaffiliated respondents (dashed trend line). LOESS smoothing is applied to trend lines. After 1990, these trends and CI separation indicate political divergence between the two groups, with unaffiliated respondents exhibiting stronger affiliation with the Democratic Party.

Figure 1.3 - The “Nones” Classification Problem



Source: General Social Survey Cumulative File 1975-2018
Notes: Jittered scatterplots indicate placement along religion and political ideology measures for all religiously-unaffiliated respondents in the cumulative file. Note the substantive variation in belief in god across the nonreligious, despite relatively low church attendance. Also note the presence of many more nones who identify as politically moderate than expected by the literature on political backlash.

Figure 2.1 - Nonreligious Repertoires

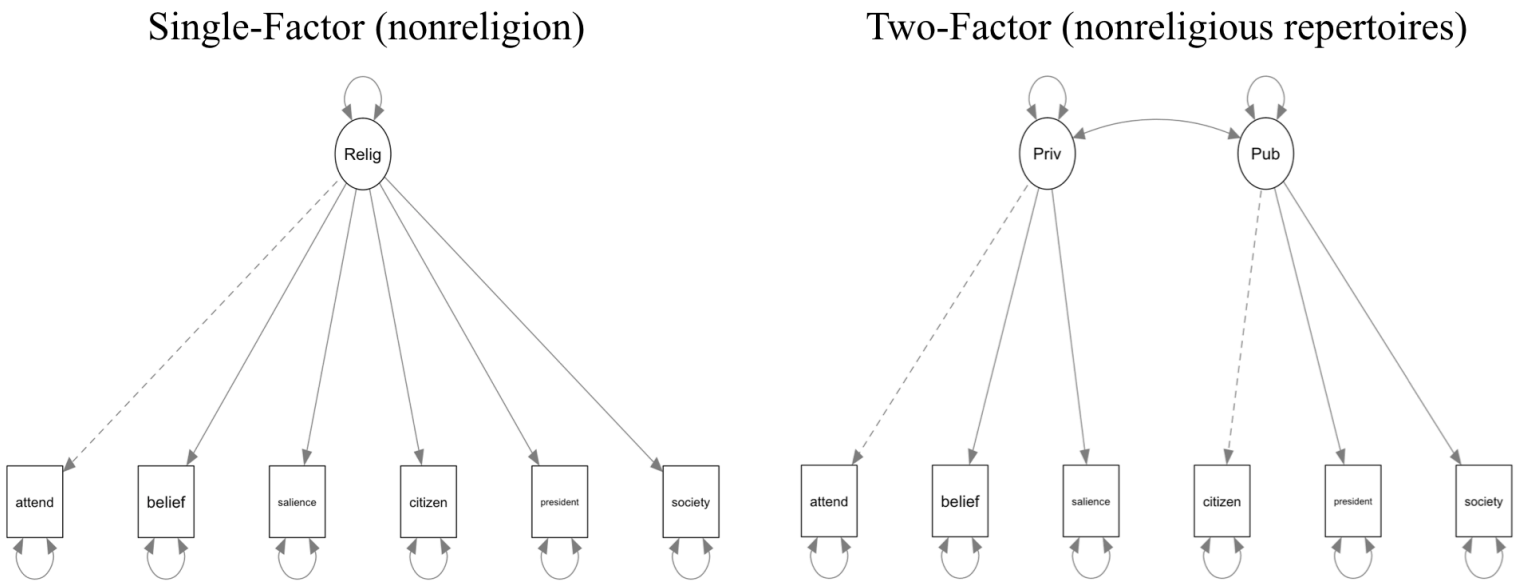


Table 2.1 - Nonreligion Measures

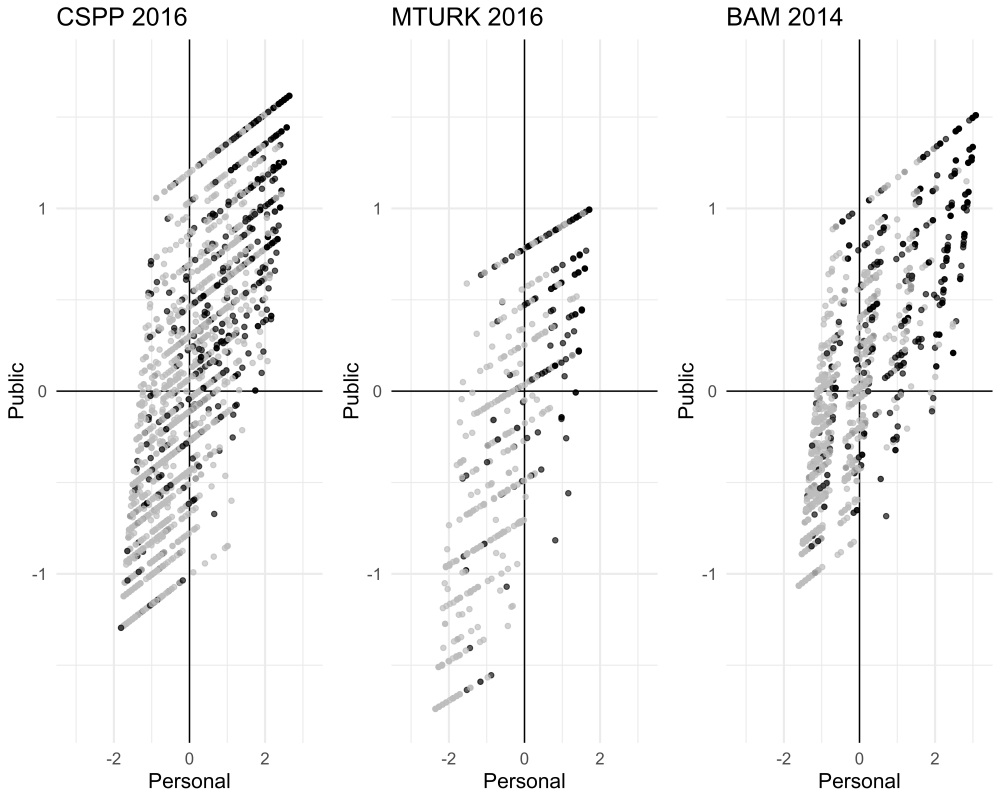
	CSPP 2016 N=3500				MTurk 2016 N=702				BAM 2016 N=2375			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Personal Nonreligion (Low)												
Church Attendance	1	7	4.72	2.15	1	7	5.50	1.92	1	7	4.50	2.21
Belief in God	1	6	2.19	1.66	1	6	3.08	1.97	0	1	0.11	0.32
Religious Salience	1	5	2.59	1.43	1	5	3.28	1.48	1	4	1.91	1.07
Public Nonreligion (Disagree)												
Important for being good American	1	4	2.50	1.09	1	4	3.11	1.03	1	4	2.41	1.03
A President should have strong religious beliefs	1	4	2.33	1.02	1	4	2.88	1.02	1	4	2.28	0.93
Society's standards of right and wrong should be	1	4	2.28	1.08	1	4	2.88	1.12	1	4	2.33	1.05
Religious Identification												
Affiliated			0.74				0.57				0.70	
Spiritual, but not Religious (SBNR)			0.06				0.07				0.08	
Atheist			0.04				0.12				0.03	
Agnostic			0.05				0.14				0.03	
Nothing in Particular (NIP)			0.11				0.11				0.16	

Table 2.2 - Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

	CSPP 2016 N=3500		MTurk 2016 N=702		BAM 2016 N=2375	
Model Fit Statistics	Single Factor	Two Factor	Single Factor	Two Factor	Single Factor	Two Factor
CFI	0.94	0.99	0.92	1.00	0.93	0.98
TLI	0.89	0.98	0.87	0.99	0.88	0.96
RMSEA	0.17	0.07	0.20	0.04	0.15	0.09
SRMR	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.03
Factor Loadings						
attend	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
belief	0.88	0.87	1.18	1.20	0.13	0.13
salience	0.88	0.92	0.94	0.99	0.61	0.66
citizen	0.68	1.00	0.69	1.00	0.53	1.00
president	0.65	0.97	0.71	1.03	0.49	0.96
society	0.64	0.92	0.77	1.10	0.57	1.10

Note: Two-factor model provides an improved model fit in each data set according to cutoffs proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999): CFI & TLI>0.96, RMSEA < 0.06, SRMR <.09.

Figure 2.2 - Factor Scores for Public and Personal Nonreligion by Religious Affiliation



Notes: Jittered scatterplots place each respondent in each data set according to their predicted factor scores using the two-factor CFA models summarized in Table 2.2. Respondents who report no religious affiliation are shaded black, while respondents reporting a religious affiliation are shaded in gray. Note the overlap in each of these categories across the plotted space, indicating how both categories contain substantive variation along each measurement dimension.

Table 2.3 - Odds of Non-Affiliation

	CSPP			MTURK			BAM		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Public Nonreligion	1.503***		0.049	2.249***		0.430	2.044***		0.220
	(0.058)		(0.121)	(0.165)		(0.261)	(0.089)		(0.170)
Personal Nonreligion		1.088***	1.060***		1.711***	1.483***		1.153***	1.058***
		(0.039)	(0.079)		(0.117)	(0.178)		(0.047)	(0.087)
Constant	-1.450***	-1.510***	-1.511***	-0.645***	-0.637***	-0.664***	-1.153***	-1.152***	-1.157***
	(0.052)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.112)	(0.116)	(0.119)	(0.059)	(0.060)	(0.061)
N	3,466	3,466	3,466	701	701	701	2,347	2,347	2,347
Log-Likelihood	-1,505.251	-1,404.777	-1,404.693	-312.646	-271.729	-270.377	-1,050.287	-965.769	-964.937
AIC	3,014.503	2,813.554	2,815.386	629.291	547.457	546.754	2,104.574	1,935.538	1,935.873

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Logistic regression models for any religious non-affiliation against an affiliated baseline. All models employ survey sampling and post-stratification weights.

Table 2.4 - Odds of Specific Non-Affiliation (Atheist, Agnostic, Nothing in Particular, Spiritual But Not Religious)

	CSPP-SBNR	CSPP-Atheist	CSPP-Agnostic	CSPP-NIP	MTURK-SBNR	MTURK-Atheist	MTURK-Agnostic	MTURK-NIP	BAM-SBNR	BAM-Atheist	BAM-Agnostic	BAM-NIP
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Public Nonreligion	0.195	0.127	0.057	-0.033	1.171**	0.362	0.151	-0.105	0.792***	1.682**	0.776	-0.234
	(0.185)	(0.465)	(0.278)	(0.155)	(0.366)	(0.618)	(0.417)	(0.393)	(0.239)	(0.633)	(0.482)	(0.206)
Personal Nonreligion	0.410***	4.122***	2.110***	1.040***	0.048	3.748***	2.205***	1.852***	0.483***	2.232***	1.594***	1.277***
	(0.123)	(0.486)	(0.203)	(0.103)	(0.250)	(0.520)	(0.299)	(0.282)	(0.121)	(0.354)	(0.243)	(0.106)
Constant	-2.515***	-9.844***	-4.834***	-2.225***	-1.997***	-4.711***	-2.277***	-1.973***	-2.184***	-7.416***	-4.823***	-1.744***
	(0.076)	(0.860)	(0.255)	(0.073)	(0.177)	(0.603)	(0.244)	(0.198)	(0.088)	(0.676)	(0.320)	(0.076)
N	3,466				701				2,347			
AIC	4,676.106				1,252.060				3,345.223			

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Multinomial regression models for specific non-affiliation options against an affiliated baseline. All models employ survey sampling and post-stratification weights.

Table 2.5 - Nonreligion and Political Ideology

	CSPP			MTURK			BAM		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Public Nonreligion	-0.280***		-0.302***	-0.269***		-0.330***	-0.346***		-0.530***
	(0.012)		(0.029)	(0.021)		(0.046)	(0.019)		(0.044)
Personal Nonreligion		-0.163***	0.016		-0.149***	0.046		-0.137***	0.105***
		(0.008)	(0.019)		(0.015)	(0.030)		(0.010)	(0.022)
Constant	0.042***	0.042***	0.042***	0.071***	0.071***	0.071***	0.005	0.005	0.005
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
N	3,466	3,466	3,466	701	701	701	2,347	2,347	2,347
R^2	0.133	0.106	0.133	0.186	0.128	0.188	0.119	0.072	0.127
F Statistic	532.384*** (df = 1; 3464)	408.796*** (df = 1; 3464)	266.554*** (df = 2; 3463)	159.591*** (df = 1; 699)	102.853*** (df = 1; 699)	81.059*** (df = 2; 698)	315.840*** (df = 1; 2345)	181.439*** (df = 1; 2345)	170.542*** (df = 2; 2344)

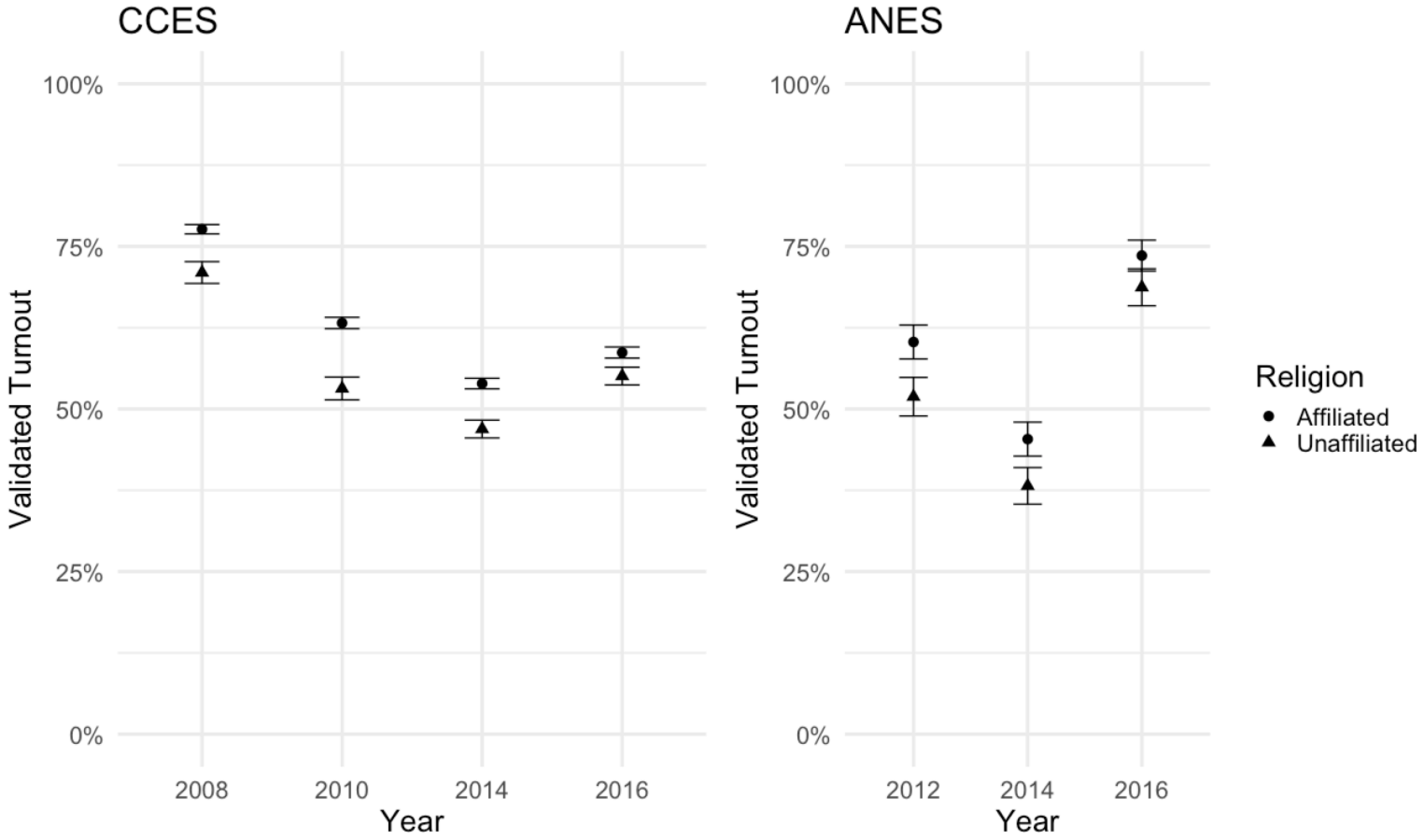
Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Linear regression models for self-reported political ideology along a seven point scale ranging from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative). All models employ survey sampling and post-stratification weights.

Table 3.1 - Descriptive Statistics for Core Measures

	CCES 2016	CCES 2014	CCES 2010	CCES 2008	ANES 2016
	N=44,175	N=44,907	N=39,900	N=25,368	N=1816
Average Church Attendance	4.07	3.94	3.93	3.71	2.5
(6 pt scale CCES, 5 pt scale ANES)					
Proportion Unaffilaited	0.29	0.27	0.22	0.20	0.24
Proportion with Validated Turnout					
2016	0.58				0.77
2014		0.52			0.49
2012					0.62
2010			0.61		
2008				0.76	

Notes: All proportion estimates incorporate respective surveys' sampling and post-stratification weights. Church attendance is coded such that higher values indicate lower reported attendance to ease interpretation of models in Table 2. Analytic N's account for list wise deletion for missing data.

Figure 3.1 - The Closing Secular Voting Gap



Notes: Figure indicates weighted proportion estimates and 95% CIs for validated turnout in each data set and election year by religious affiliation. In both data sets, the gap in turnout between affiliated and unaffiliated respondents closes in later election years, approaching confidence interval overlap in the 2016 general election.

Table 3.2 - Logistic Regression Results for Validated Turnout (CCES)

2008						
Unaffiliated	-0.157	** (0.049)			-0.868	*** (0.246)
Low Attendance			-0.063	*** (0.012)	-0.070	*** (0.014)
Unaff x Low Attend					0.155	*** (0.046)
N	25,368		25,368		25,368	
Log Likelihood	-14,949.800		-14,934.880		-14,923.440	
AIC	29,939.610		29,909.760		29,890.880	
2010						
Unaffiliated	-0.084	(0.046)			-1.128	*** (0.218)
Low Attendance			-0.036	** (0.012)	-0.058	*** (0.014)
Unaff x Low Attend					0.215	*** (0.042)
N	39,900		39,900		39,900	
Log Likelihood	-21,213.490		-21,208.380		-21,165.200	
AIC	42,466.990		42,456.760		42,374.400	
2014						
Unaffiliated	0.015	(0.039)			-0.895	*** (0.203)
Low Attendance			-0.017	(0.011)	-0.049	*** (0.012)
Unaff x Low Attend					0.187	*** (0.038)
N	44,907		44,907		44,907	
Log Likelihood	-25,748.100		-25,749.220		-25,704.510	
AIC	51,536.190		51,538.450		51,453.030	
2016						
Unaffiliated	0.005	(0.036)			-0.597	*** (0.172)
Low Attendance			0.005	(0.010)	-0.013	(0.012)
Unaff x Low Attend					0.118	*** (0.032)
N	44,175		44,175		44,175	
Log Likelihood	-28,455.520		-28,455.000		-28,435.760	

AIC	56,951.050	56,950.010	56,915.530

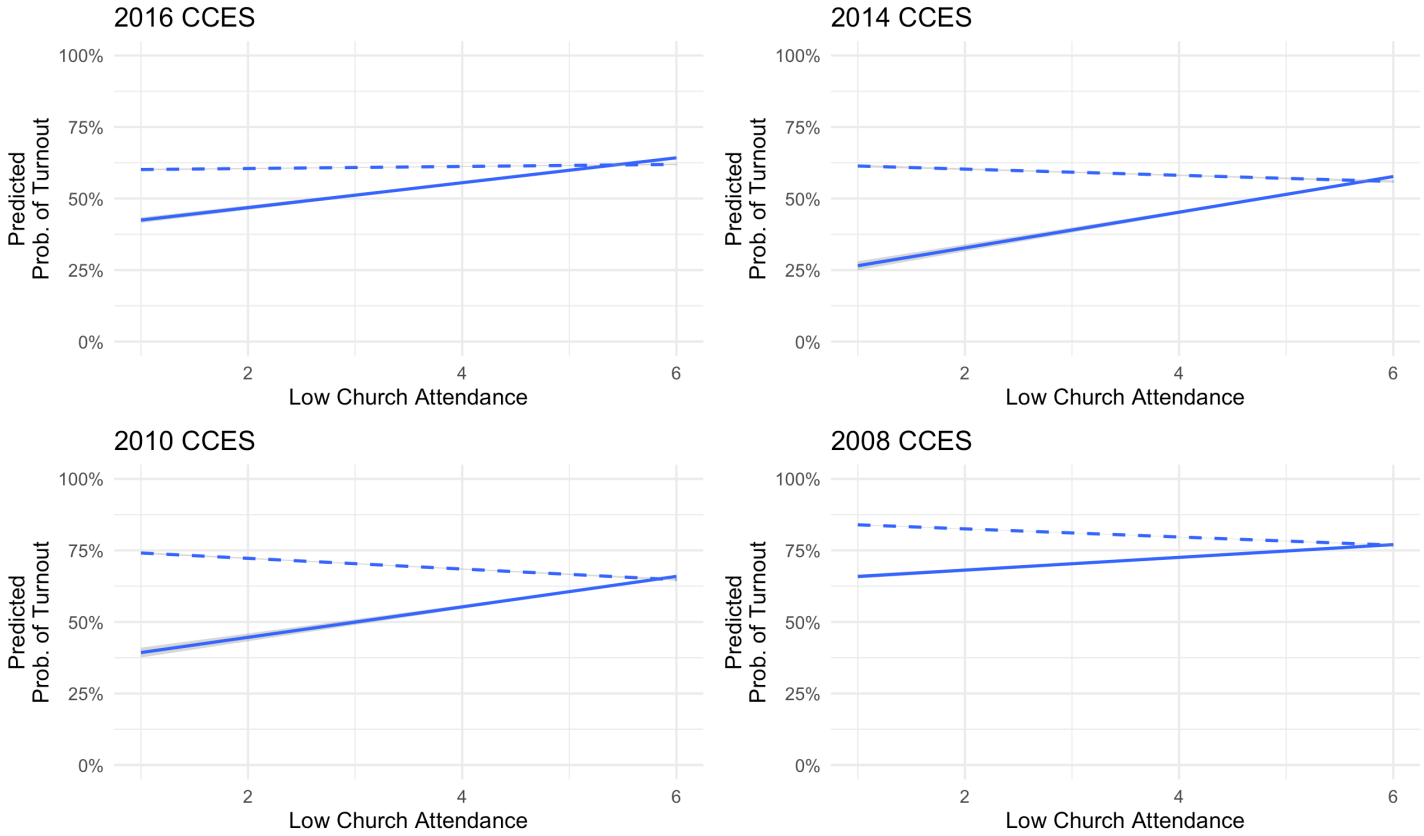
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. All models also control for age, race, gender, marital status, parental status, income, education, and party ID.

Table 3.3 - Logistic Regression Results for Validated Turnout (ANES)

		2012		
Unaffiliated	-0.190	(0.166)		
Low Attendance			0.033	(0.057)
N	1,816		1,816	
Log Likelihood	-994.445		-995.491	
AIC	2,032.889		2,034.983	
		2014		
Unaffiliated	-0.094	(0.164)		
Low Attendance			-0.201	(0.057)
Unaff x Low Attend				
N	1,816		1,816	
Log Likelihood	-992.057		-981.777	
AIC	2,028.115		2,007.554	
		2016		
Unaffiliated	-0.221	(0.175)		
Low Attendance			-0.147 ***	(0.063)
N	1,816		1,816	
Log Likelihood	-845.922		-844.905	
AIC	1,735.845		1,733.810	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. All models also control for age, race, gender, marital status, parental status, income, education, and party ID.

Figure 3.2 - Interaction Effects for Religious Disaffiliation & Low Church Attendance



Notes: Each panel employs predicted probabilities of voter turnout estimated from the interaction models in Table Two. Linear fits indicate the relationship between lower church attendance and probability of turnout for religiously affiliated respondents (dashed lines) and unaffiliated respondents (solid lines). 95% CI's are shaded, but small due to the large number of respondents in each data set. For affiliated respondents, the relationship between less frequent church attendance and lower probability of validated turnout corresponds with the literature on religion and political participation. However, for unaffiliated respondents, less-frequent church attendance corresponds with a higher probability of turnout, contrary to the literature's expectations.

Table 4.1 - Description of Core Measures

	BAM 2014						CSPP 2016					
Attitude Scales	N	Alpha	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	N	Alpha	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Safety Net Scale	2,247	0.79	0.01	0.77	-2.49	0.88	3,108	0.82	0.01	0.81	-2.01	1.05
(Govt. spending on Education, ACA, SNAP, Welfare)							(Social security, reducing income inequality, raising minimum wage, requiring paid family leave)					
Racial Affect Scale	2,247	0.84	0.02	0.81	-1.55	2.02	3,108	0.81	0.01	0.85	-2.39	1.54
(Shared vision with African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Recent Immigrants)							(Feeling thermometers for African Americans, Hispanics, and Recent Immigrants)					
Racial Inequality Scale	2,247	0.85	0.01	0.87	-1.13	2.26	3,108	0.82	-0.00	0.82	-1.34	1.73
(Support for affirmative action, government aid, and charitable aid to alleviate racial inequality)							(Racial resentment: recognizing racial inequality, disagreement with individualistic solutions to inequality)					
Immigration Scale	2,247	0.61	-0.00	0.75	-0.94	2.35	3,108	0.65	0.00	0.78	-1.69	1.48
(Opposition to govt. funding immigration enforcement, govt. limiting immigration, immigrants having to learn english)							(Opposition to deporting undocumented immigrants, positive view of legal immigration, favor granting citizenship to undocumented children born in US)					

Figure 4.1. - Nonreligious Identities & Attitude Scores

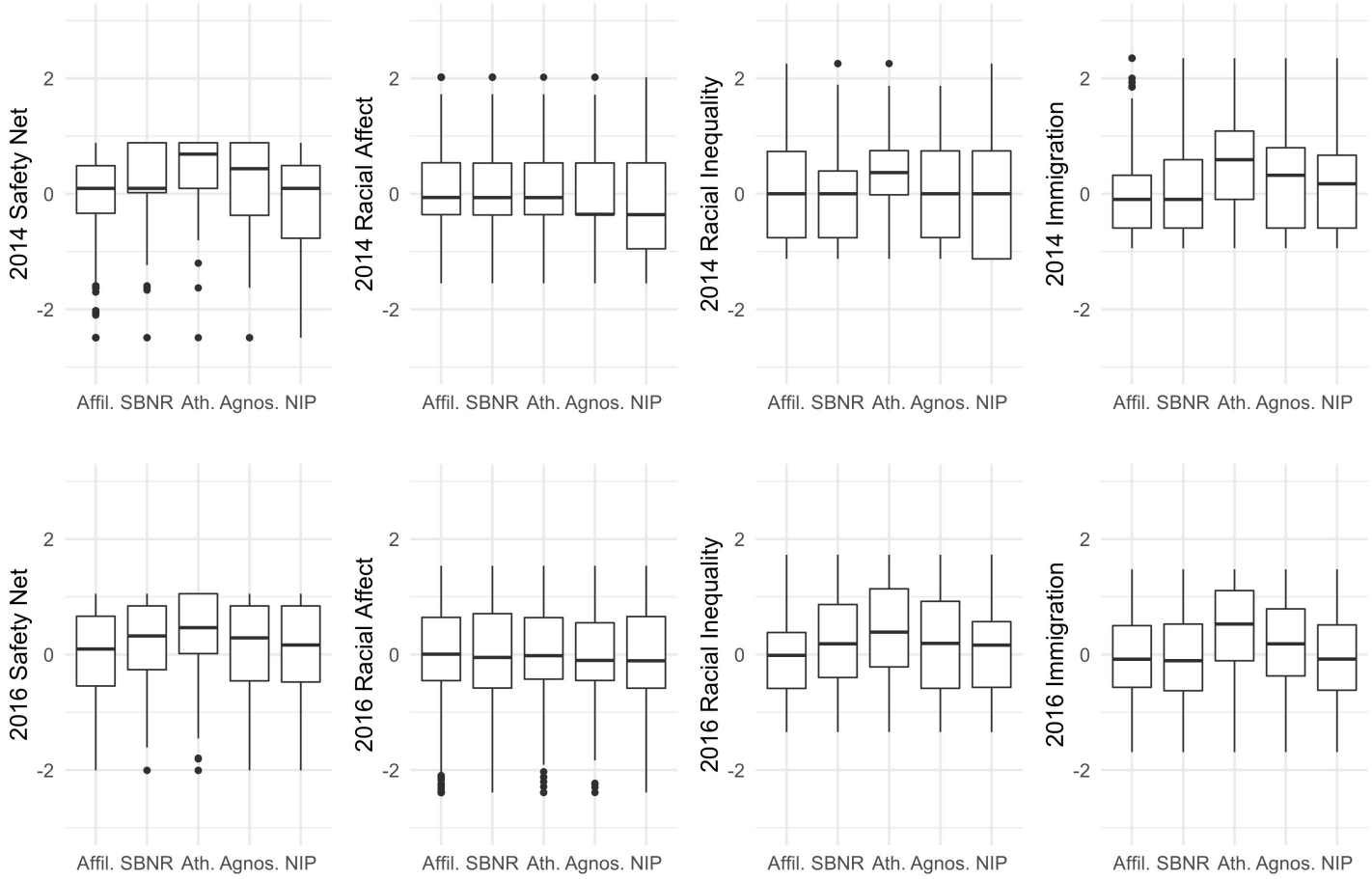
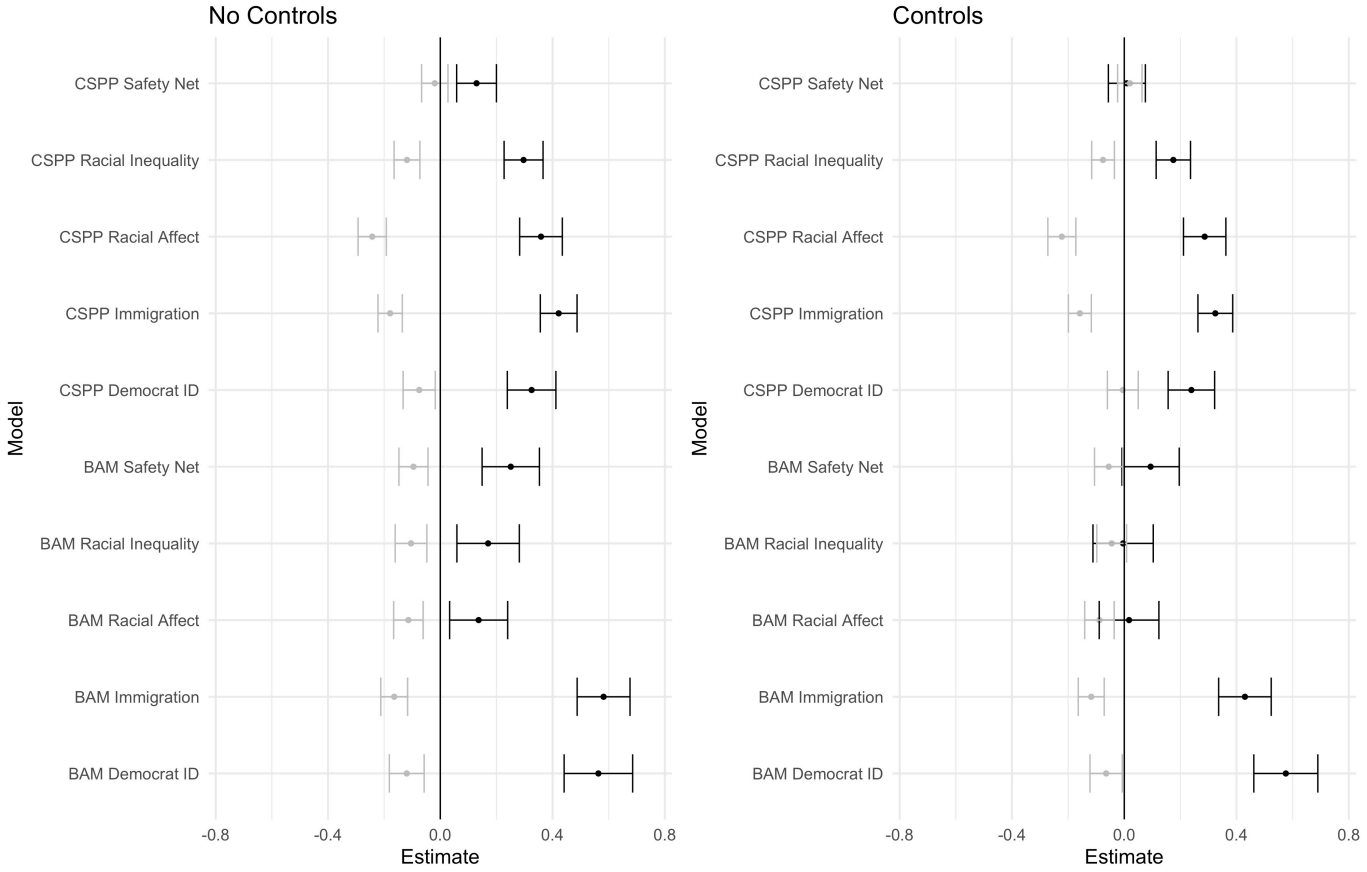


Figure 4.2 - Nonreligious Repertoires & Attitude Constraint



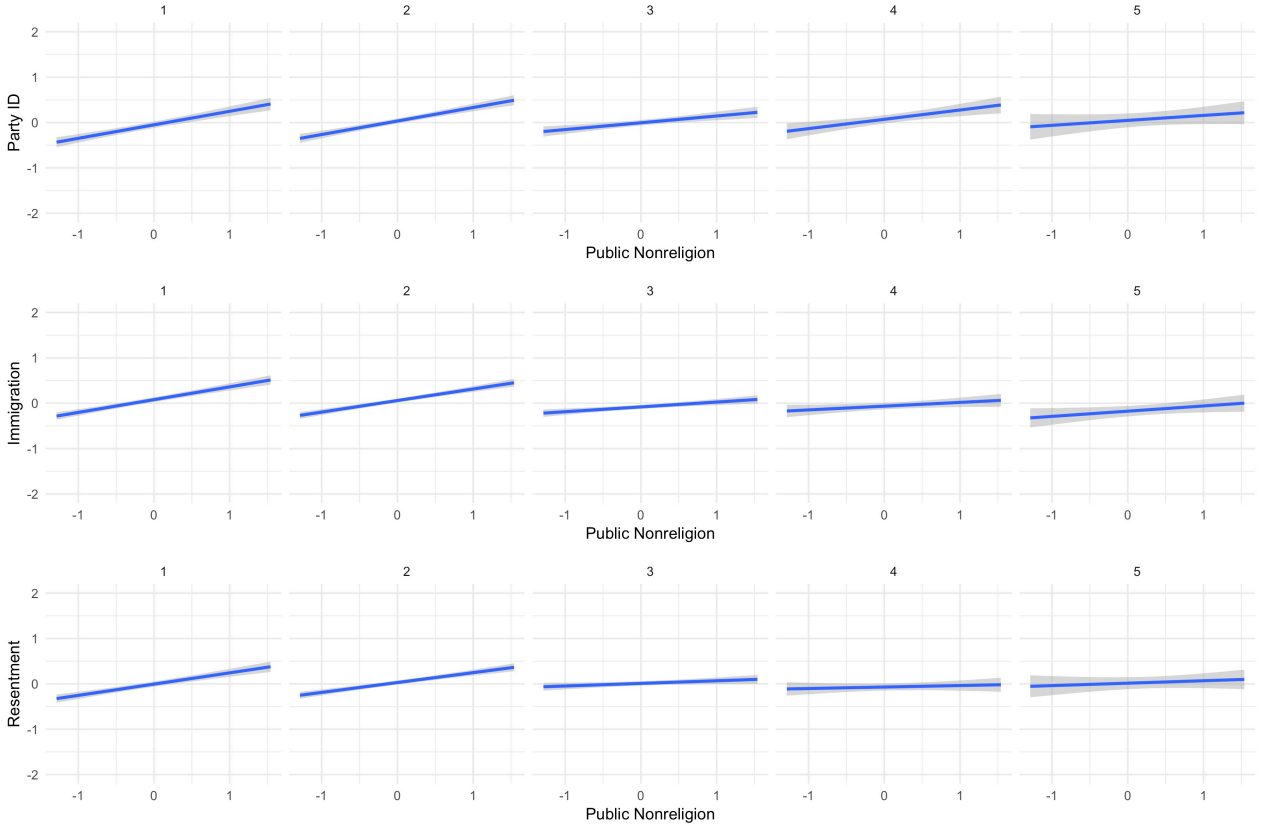
Notes: Plot indicates the coefficient estimates and 95% CIs for public nonreligion (black) and personal nonreligion (gray). In the left panel, Wald tests for difference in coefficient estimates are all significant at the p<.05 level or greater. In the right panel, coefficient estimates are significantly different for party identification in both data sets (p<.001), immigration in both data sets (p<.001), CSPP racial affect and inequality (p<.001), and BAM safety net (p<.05). Control measures include party ID, gender, race, age, education (highest degree attained), and household income.

Table 4.2 - Nonreligious Repertoires & Attitude Constraint

	BAM 2014							
	Safety Net		Racial Affect		Racial Inequality		Racial Affect	
	No Controls	Controls	No Controls	Controls	No Controls	Controls	No Controls	Controls
Public Nonreligion	0.251***	0.094	0.137**	0.017	0.170**	-0.004	0.582***	0.430***
	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.053)	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.055)	(0.048)	(0.048)
Private Nonreligion	-0.095***	-0.056*	-0.114***	-0.089***	-0.104***	-0.045	-0.164***	-0.118***
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Observations	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247	2,247
R^2	0.012	0.111	0.011	0.057	0.006	0.164	0.097	0.195
Adjusted R^2	0.011	0.105	0.011	0.052	0.005	0.159	0.096	0.190
F Statistic	13.063*** (df = 2; 2244)	21.363*** (df = 13; 2233)	13.033*** (df = 2; 2244)	10.412*** (df = 13; 2233)	6.733** (df = 2; 2244)	33.743*** (df = 13; 2233)	119.939*** (df = 2; 2244)	41.482*** (df = 13; 2233)
	CSPP 2016							
	Safety Net		Racial Affect		Racial Inequality		Racial Affect	
	No Controls	Controls	No Controls	Controls	No Controls	Controls	No Controls	Controls
Public Nonreligion	0.129***	0.009	0.359***	0.286***	0.297***	0.175***	0.422***	0.324***
	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.032)
Private Nonreligion	-0.020	0.020	-0.243***	-0.222***	-0.119***	-0.076***	-0.179***	-0.158***
	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Observations	3,108	3,108	3,108	3,108	3,108	3,108	3,108	3,108
R^2	0.014	0.195	0.029	0.094	0.032	0.288	0.066	0.209
Adjusted R^2	0.013	0.191	0.028	0.089	0.032	0.284	0.065	0.205
F Statistic	21.833*** (df = 2; 3105)	46.775*** (df = 16; 3091)	46.067*** (df = 2; 3105)	20.035*** (df = 16; 3091)	51.752*** (df = 2; 3105)	78.110*** (df = 16; 3091)	109.156*** (df = 2; 3105)	50.971*** (df = 16; 3091)

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Control measures include party ID, gender, race, age, education (highest degree attained), and household income.

Figure 4.3 Public Nonreligion & Political Interest



Notes: CSPP 2016 - Plot indicates the linear fit between public nonreligion and each outcome measure at levels of self-reported political interest ranging from group 1 (highest interest) to group 5 (lowest interest)

Table 4.3 - Nonreligious Repertoires & Political Predispositions

	Public			Personal		
Moral Foundations						
Harm	0.03		(0.020)	-0.00		(0.020)
Fairness	0.12	***	(0.019)	0.08	***	(0.020)
Loyalty	**-0.09**	***	**(0.019)**	**-0.01**		**(0.019)**
Authority	-0.08	***	(0.018)	-0.07	***	(0.019)
Purity	-0.32	***	(0.017)	-0.25	***	(0.018)
Big 5 (3 major indicators)						
Intellect	0.08	***	(0.020)	0.05	*	(0.021)
Conscientiousness	0.03		(0.021)	0.04		(0.021)
Agreeableness	-0.12	***	(0.021)	-0.18	***	(0.021)
Need for Cognitive Closure	**-0.11**	**	**(0.034)**	**-0.02**		**(0.035)**
Authoritarianism	-0.31	***	(0.022)	-0.27	***	(0.022)
Populism	**-0.12**	***	**(0.024)**	**0.00**		**(0.025)**
Cynicism	0.14	***	(0.022)	0.12	***	(0.023)
Threat	0.06	**	(0.020)	0.07	***	(0.020)
Constant	0.02		(0.013)	0.02		(0.014)
Observations	2,991			2,991		
R^2	0.363			0.244		
Adjusted R^2	0.360			0.240		
Residual Std. Error (df = 2977)	0.722			0.744		
F Statistic (df = 13; 2977)	130.647	***		73.788	***	

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Source - CSPP 2016

Table 5.1 - Nonreligious Advocacy and Community Organizations

Organization	ID	Year Start	Year End	Average Political Spending	Obs.
Americans United for the Separation of Church and State	AUSCS	1997	2016	$339,320.30	20
Secular Coalition for America	SCA	2004	2016	$102,259.77	13
Center for Inquiry	CFI	1999	2017	$29,011.42	19
Freedom from Religion Foundation	FFRF	1998	2017	$9,593.20	20
American Humanist Association	AHA	2003	2016	$11,720.36	14
Citizens Project	CP	1999	2014	$2,422.88	16
The Interdependence Project	IP	2008	2016	$2,627.56	9
Atheist Alliance of America	AAA	2006	2013	$880.75	8
Secular Student Alliance	SSA	2000	2016	$418.85	16
Internet Infidels	II	2001	2015	$166.67	15
Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers	MAAF	2011	2017	$352.86	7
American Atheists	AA	1997	2016		20
Atheist Alliance International	AAI	2006	2006		1
Atheists and Other Freethinkers	AOF	2006	2008		2
Atheists United	AU	1997	2015		14
Black Atheists of America	BAA	2011	2011		1
Camp Quest	CQ	2009	2017		9
Center for Freethought Equality	CFE	2013	2016		4
Center for Inquiry Development Fund	CFID	1999	2016		18
Charles E Stevens American Atheist Library and Archives Inc	CSA	1997	2009		13
Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty Inc	CPE	1997	2005		9
Council for Secular Humanism	CSH	2014	2014		1
Foundation Beyond Belief	FBB	2010	2016		7

Free Minds Inc	FM	1998	2012	15
International Federation of Secular Humanist Jews	IFSHJ	2004	2007	4
International Humanist and Ethical Union INC	IHEU	2003	2016	14
Muslims for progressive values	MPV	2014	2017	4
Partners for Secular Activism	PSA	2014	2016	3
Project Reason	PR	2008	2016	9
Reason Rally Coalition	RRC	2011	2017	6
Richard A Busemeyer Atheist Foundation Inc	RBA	1999	2017	19
Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science	RDF	2006	2015	9
Secular Coalition for America Education Fund	SCAF	2009	2016	8
Society of Separationists	SoS	1997	2009	13
The Brights Net	BN	2006	2012	7
The George Washington Institute for religious freedom	GWI	2010	2016	7
The Secular Society inc	TSS	2013	2017	5
United Coalition of Reason	UCR	2015	2017	3
United Secularists of America	USA	1997	2009	13
We are atheism inc	WAA	2012	2014	3

Figure 5.1 - Summary of Organizational Reports

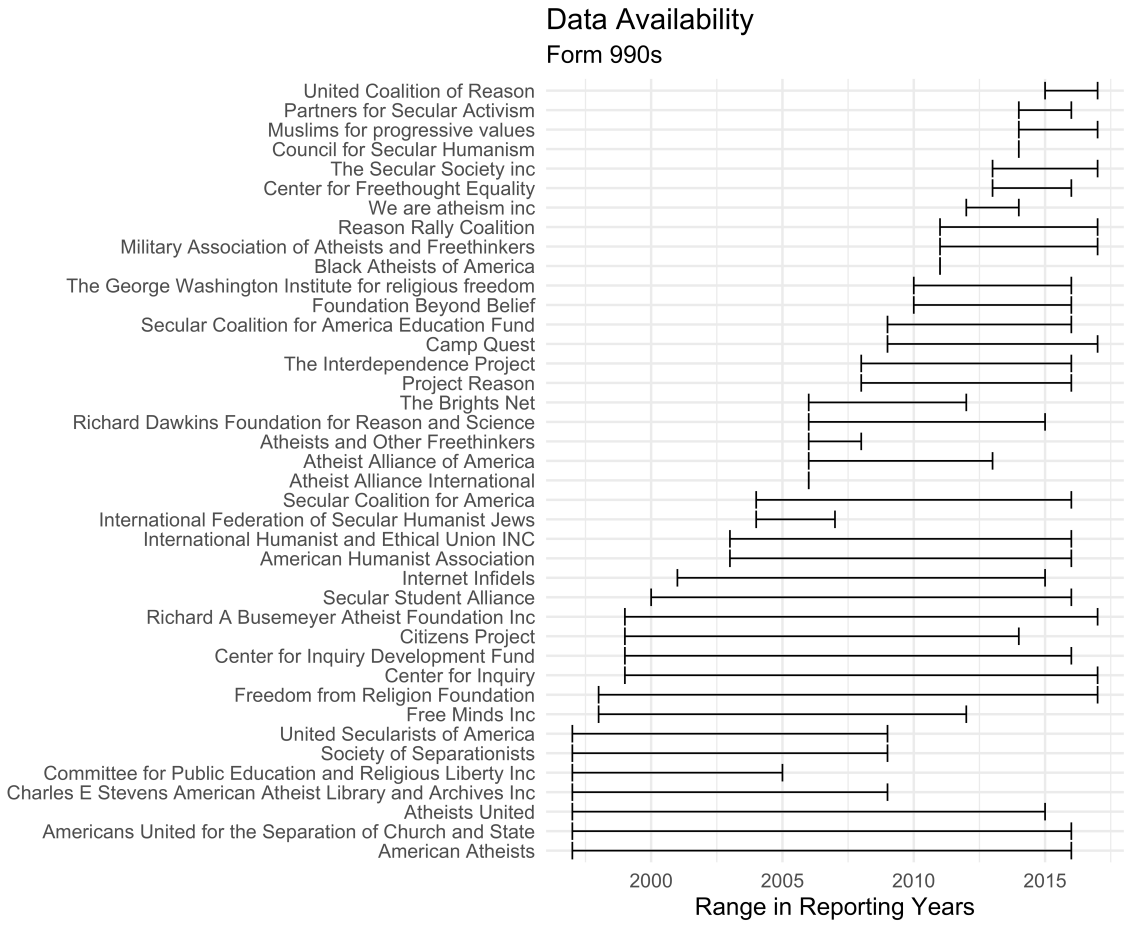


Figure 5.2 - Total Reported Political Expenditures

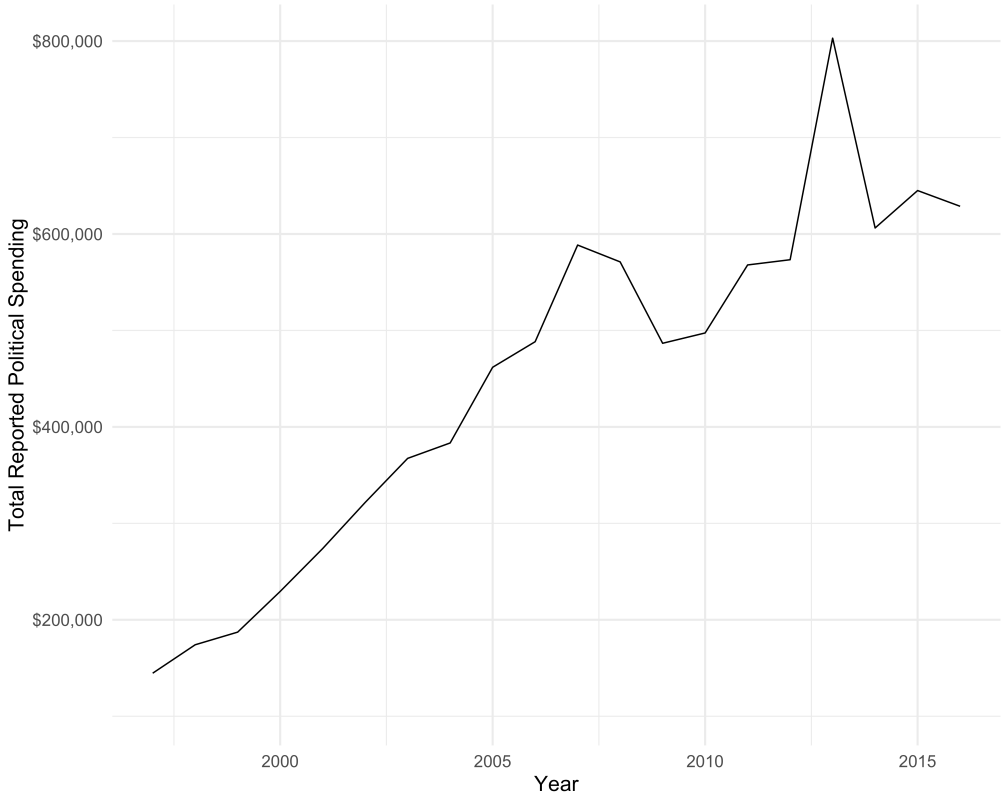
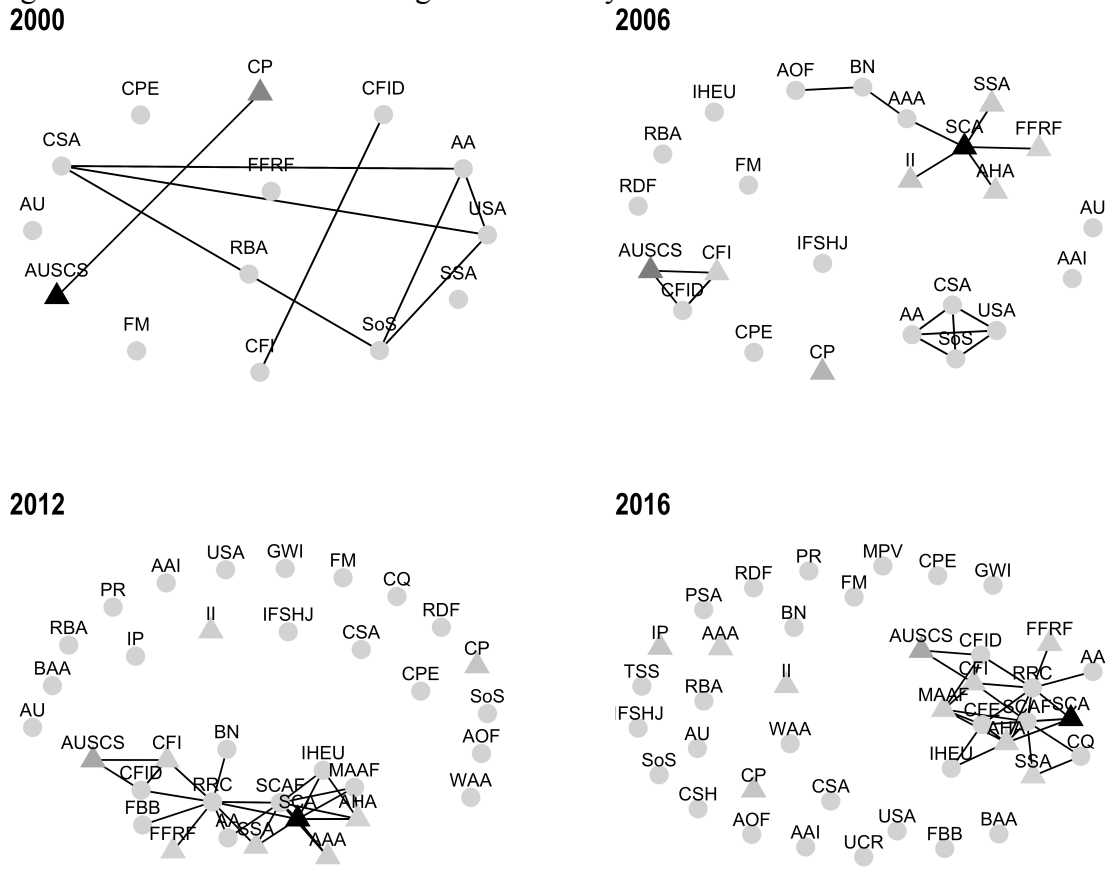


Figure 5.3 - The Field of Nonreligious Advocacy



Notes: Organization abbreviations correspond with list of IDs in Table 5.1. Organizations reporting any political expenditures are designated by triangular notes and shaded darker according to the proportion of their total operating expenditures spent on political work.

Figure 5.4 - Validation of Reported Lobbying Expenses via LobbyView

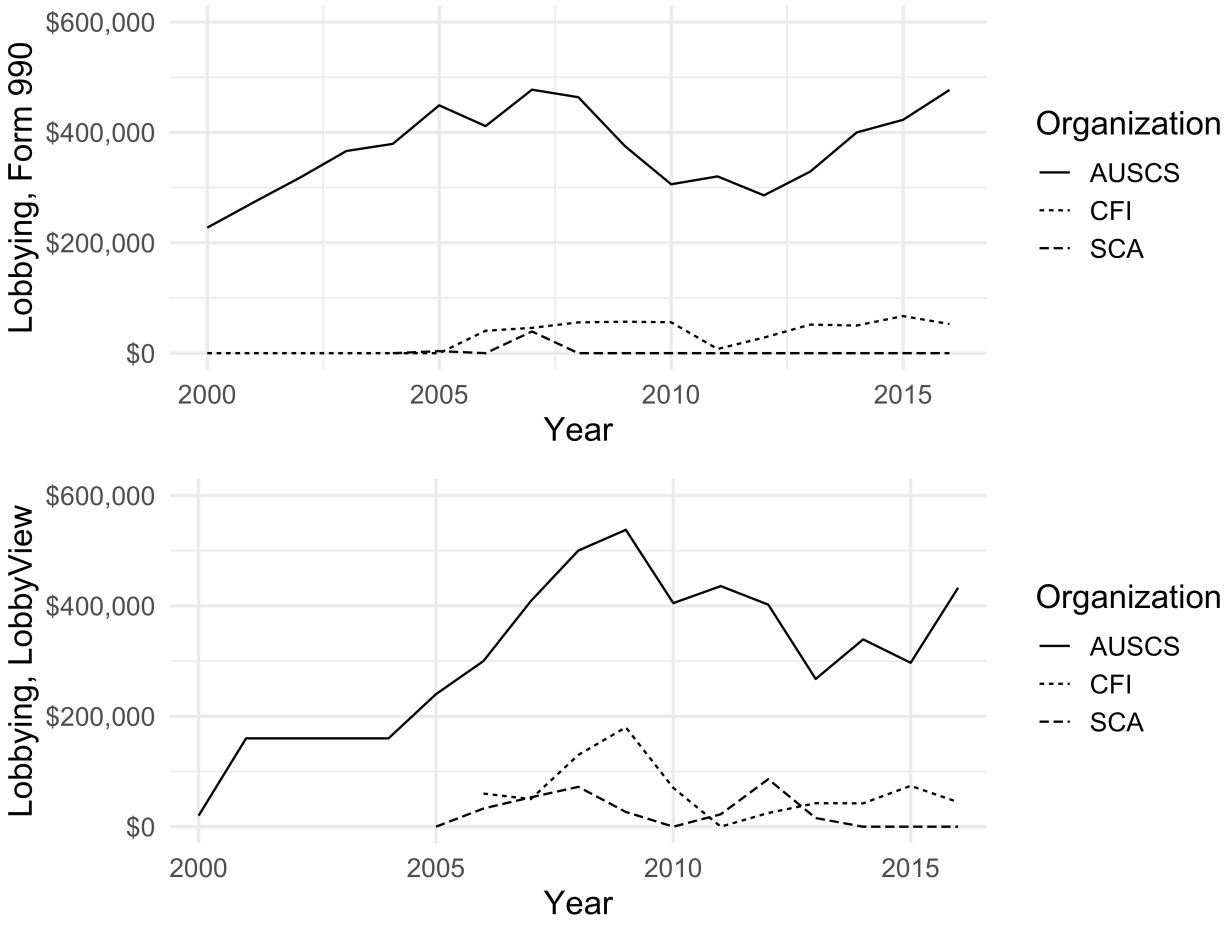


Table 5.2 - Summary of Lobbying Issues via LobbyView

AUSCS 1999-2018		SCA 2005-2017		CFI 2006-2018	
Issue Designation	Count	Issue Designation	Count	Issue Designation	Count
Education	57	Civil Liberties	43	Health	33
Civil Liberties	44	Education	33	Civil Liberties	31
Religion	43	Religion	18	Religion	27
Health	19	Constitutional Issues	17	Education	25
Tax Policy	8	Health	14	Constitutional Issues	19
Defense	6	Defense	11	Science/Technology	19
Disaster Planning	5	Foreign Relations	10	Budget	14
Alcohol & Drug Abuse	3	Tax Policy	9	Government Issues	14
Bankruptcy	2	Family Issues	8	Foreign Relations	11
District of Columbia	2	Science/Technology	6	Environment	10

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