EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IN REPUBLICAN POLITICS

WITH REGARDS TO THE CANDIDACY OF DONALD TRUMP

AND WHITE SUPREMACY

By

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

Exploring the impact of Evangelical Christians in Republican politics with regards to the candidacy of Donald Trump and white supremacy

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The U.S. Constitution guarantees citizens the freedom to practice religion, but it also prevents the government from promoting or encouraging the establishment of any religion. The government must be unbiased to support the citizen's right to religious liberty. When predominantly white evangelical Christians engage in extensive politicking and court Republican politicians, Christian values are pushed onto every facet in society. At this early stage, it is important to state from the outset that Evangelical Christians as used in this capstone represents the many denominations such as Charismatics, Pentecostals, Evangelical and even Adventists and some subset of individuals and communities that may identify as Evangelical Roman Catholics that have common religious beliefs and vote for politicians according to those strongly held beliefs. The evangelical movement went from the protestant reformation to a modern movement with varied degree of links with entities and individuals who profess the faith, and are at the same time immersed in the world of white supremacy – Michael Sparks of Kentucky who was charged by the F.B.I for entering into the capitol building through a broken-down window, actually wrote on Facebook which the bureau accessed, “Trump will be your president four more years in Jesus name”. He went further and remarked that,” we’re getting ready to live through something of biblical proportions, be prayed up and ready to defend your country and your family”. There is no direct evidence that Mr. Sparks goes to church every Sunday and is a good practicing evangelical Christians, however this and many more circumstantial evidence of some of these men and women of faith, point to the clarity that they were in the majority in a bid to halt the certification of electoral votes on that riotous day on January 6th ,2021.

For most Evangelicals religion is a way of life and it reflects in their politics. After influencing the 2016 election, the result was some evangelical Christians were in total support of the Trump presidency. The Trump win emboldened many white nationalist groups who operated in the shadows to come out in the open and espouse their beliefs. Such was the Unite the Right rally in Charlotteville, Virginia that turned violent with one young woman killed when a man drove into a crowd of protesters and counter protesters. Some of these events do not have links to the faith-based communities on the right, however many of the actors and people associated with them have over the years been identified as Christians and people that want to reclaim the Judeo-Christian foundations of the country, granted it does not identify them as Evangelicals. Hateful rhetoric by individuals and politicians has led to crimes against minorities and ethnic groups. When mail in balloting was expanded for the 2020 general elections due to the coronavirus pandemic, some politicians and commentators on the right complained about it, not so much as it was a wrong policy, but the truth was mail in balloting would enfranchise more voters and African Americans who ordinary may be disinclined to participate in the elections. This assertion was evident in the attempt by lawmakers in the state of Georgia to limit early voting on Sundays this past summer in the new voting law they passed, HB 531. The provision was only revised from pressures from black businesses, black churches involvement and Souls to the Poll’s alliances. Many in the African meeting community utilize the Sunday gatherings as a major opportunity to organize for political participation, this stretched back to times before the civil war. This anti- democratic attitude was largely expressed by Mr. Trump and he claimed that if he were to lose the election, that mail in ballot would constitute a reason. No wonder when he lost, his supporters were mad enough to try and disrupt the proceeding to count the vote in congress, thereby leading to the attack on the Capitol Building.

What this Capstone sets out to achieve, is to assert that by abandoning their moral convictions and supporting Donald Trump, evangelicals of all stripes black and white, with active participation of the Republican party has periled the long-time viability of our democracy. Nations look to America for leadership, now we are synonymous with election squabbles, that we condemn other nations for carrying out. For our democracy to stand, we need common sets of facts agreeable to all parties. Now what we have is election result deniers, ginned up by support from the base of their party refusing to accept the legitimacy of an election. This base is made of some evangelical Christians who champion politicians that represent their values and the actions they take to preserve same. These actions have been taken in what can be considered good faith nature to secure rights and values that certain segment of society deeply hold; however, my contention is that the continued rise in stature and impact of evangelical Christians steeped in total support of the then Trump presidency does not bode well for US body politics in the long run.

What has occurred as a byproduct of these efforts over the years is the evolution of advocacy of policy preferences from efforts to roll back Roe v Wade [[1]](#footnote-1), LGBTQ rights and a fight to remake the supreme court to have an ideological bent tilted to the right, which ultimately and consciously the Republican party achieved during the stewardship of Donald J Trump as the 45th United states president.

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IN REPUBLICAN POLITICS WITH REGARD TO THE CANDIDACY OF DONALD TRUMP AND WHITE SUPREMACY**

In 2016, evangelical Christians voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump. Trump became the 45th president in the United States largely due to the influence of evangelical Christians. During the election and his four years in the presidency, there was no connection between evangelical values and Trump’s behavior. Most believed in the magnanimity of a higher cause or being, whereas the president’s demeanor was almost the opposite. Never in America’s history has a candidate with such a known reputation of Trump risen in power to claim the office of president. The president did not display the values of evangelical Christians with his two divorces, accusations of adultery, and sexual harassment charges. Instead, he agreed to push the goals and values of the evangelical church to gain their vote.

Trump's willingness to publicize and uphold the political issues the religion holds dear gained him the vote of the majority of Evangelicals. At his second election try, Trump did not lose the support of eighty-one percent majority of evangelical Christians, especially after some of his supporters and elements in extremist entities attacked the Capital building. Some believed their actions to be righteous and in the name of God.

There are numerous examples of intrusion into politics by the Christian Right (Nelson, 2019). Before the establishment of the New Christian Right, religion was a central part of politics despite the command in the Bill of Rights to exclude religion from government. Fundamentalist political activism was focused on ridding the world of communism. Fred Schwartz led the Christian Anti- Communism Crusade to encourage other Christians to push politicians to take action (Nelson, 2019). Evangelicals were able to gain the support of Christians across the nation using their fear of communism.

Trump's politics fueled a Christian nationalist movement connecting God and country unlike has been observed since the 1980’s. He represented some views that Christians have long held dear and they were willing to forgo all his follies for their preferred policy outcomes.

This paper will discuss the history of the evangelical church, the connection of the Evangelical Church to politics, and the complications of evangelical Christians supporting Donald Trump as President.

**The History of the Evangelical Church**

The term evangelical stems from the Greek (Euangelion) – it means “good news” in Greek – related to the word for announcing good news or a messenger of good news and Latin (evangelium) (Fisher, 2018).The history of the Evangelical Church is debated but what is clear is the church has Protestant roots. The Protestant reformation is connected to the beginning of the Evangelical church. The Evangelical movement developed out of Protestant Christianity. Before this movement, Christians were Catholic and Orthodox. Martin Luther started the movement in 1517 (Fisher, 2018), he was a major founder of the movement but there were other protestants centuries before him, men like Arnold of Brescia and John Wycliffe. A German monk and a teacher, Luther published the *Disputation on the Power of Indulgence*. The document included 95 different ideas about Christianity that directly contradicted the Catholic religion (Hankins, 2008). One of the most significant challenges made by Luther was God did not want the Catholic Church to act as an intermediary.

Before the Protestant reformation, only Catholic priests were allowed to read from the Bible. He also challenged the indulgence system. The Catholic Church claimed for followers to be forgiven for their sins, they must pay a price to earn forgiveness (Fisher, 2018). It is agreeable that this interpretation of indulgences was very misleading to the extent that its actual meaning may have been lost on the Christian community at the time.

Luther's 95 theses were adopted by other scholars that also had complaints about the Catholic doctrine. John Calvin was a staunch Roman Catholic priest until he was converted by other scholars that opposed the Catholic school teachings (Muller, 2000). Calvin left the church and began publishing writings that opposed the teachings of the church.

Calvin did not oppose Christening children; on the contrary they actually opposed the Anabaptist movement that only recognized adult “believers” baptism.

Beginning in the 16th century, Martin Luther, and his followers, began preaching the scriptures to the public to teach the Bible and God's true expectations (Fisher, 2018). Luther’s approach of preaching directly to non- Christians was known as evangelism. Calvin adopted the Reformation approach. Many new Protestant Churches developed after Luther’s initial break with the Catholic Church. In America, evangelicalism encompasses Protestant Christians that believe in the need to be born again (Fisher, 2018). The church adopted the traditional Protestant teachings. However, Evangelicalism is not only connected to the Lutheran church, it is also a part of Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, nondenominational churches, Mennonite, and the Reformed (Fisher, 2018).

Revivalism influenced the beginnings and development of the United States. It was during the 18th Century when evangelical beliefs started to spread across the country (Fisher, 2018). The First Great Awakening started during this time. It was a time when the religious piety of the past was reintroduced to society. Between the 1730s and the 1770s, people across the United States began adopting the values of the evangelist (Quirion, 2016). The upsurge in the revivalist movement was also occurring in Germany, England, and Scotland at the same time.

The heavy influence of Protestant values led to the rise of the new Age of Faith. This new approach promoted following your heart when connecting with Christ. People can connect with God and make Biblical connections, through their personal faith and relationship. The revival of the evangelical faith changed the face of colonial society (Quirion, 2016). The introduction of the evangelical approach led to a nation of people that supported self-government and have political influence.

Revivalism supported autonomy in religion. This autonomy translated to freedom of religion and speech. The revival laid the seeds for the American Revolution and the creation of the first democratic nation. "Before the First Awakening, there had been a steady decline in church attendance and commitment to Christian values throughout the nation” (Quirion, 2016, p. 1). Religion was dying across the nation. People were negating immorality and rejecting the teachings of the church. The revivalist approach inspired Colonists to go to church and adopt the ways of the religion.

Ministers across the country began to call the public back to church to rid America of spiritual decay. At the same time, countries across Europe were going through the same awakening. Followers across the West had an apathetic attitude about religion (Quirion, 2016). The control and abuses by the Catholic and Protestant Churches made people wary of their corruption. New enlightened ideas about the church were introduced through evangelical supporters. Church leaders began praying for the souls of the masses and preaching God's word directly to followers.

Evangelicalism spread through the 13 colonies creating a united faith (Quirion, 2016). However, the Evangelical empire did not begin until the 19th Century (Quirion, 2016). The Second Awakening came after the American Revolution. While the Revolution was not a secular movement, it was influenced by the changing views of colonists about religion and freedom. Freedom of religion was an important right fought for by the forefathers.

The Second Great Awakening occurred between 1795 to 1835 (Irish, 2018). People that had given up going to church found it hypocritical or they did not attend because they needed to work to survive. Many people began to believe they would be judged for their actions on earth, not if they went to church. To inspire more people to attend church, different religions across the country sponsored religious revivals (Irish, 2018). This led to a new interest in the church. The Second Awakening occurred in three different phases. In the first phase, revivals occurred in frontier camp meetings. Preachers from Southern cities took their message to people in the West.

Religious revivals also offered an opportunity for people on the frontier to gather with their neighbors. Most people living in the West or rural communities lived miles from other people. The second phase was led by conservative Christian leaders, Timothy Dwight, Lyman Beecher, and Nathaniel W. Taylor (Irish, 2018). Evangelical leaders took advantage of the new interest in the church to spread their message. In the third phase, evangelist Charles Grandison Finney led revival meetings across American and New England in the 1820s (Irish, 2018). By the 1830s, the country was split into many different Christian denominations and practices (Irish, 2018). One thing they had in common was a deep evangelical emphasis.

Protestants made up the most significant portion of Evangelicals, but it had become the dominant form of spiritual expression (Irish, 2018). The approach supported a heavy reliance on the Bible (Smidt, 2008). One important distinction between Finney and other preachers of the Second Awakening was his belief that God gave people free will. People had to choose salvation by accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The acknowledgment that people have free will but can be forgiven for their sins led more people back to church and helped church membership flourish. Finney shifted religion from the religious leader to the follower.

Evangelical activism moved Christianity away from the Calvinist orientation and towards a more autonomous approach to religion. The Calvinist approach stressed the sinful nature of humans and their ability to speak directly with God to gain forgiveness (Irish, 2018). Charles Finney, Lyman Beecher, and Francis Asbury emphasized the sinfulness of humanity. The difference was sin could be forgiven if the follower made the right choices (Irish, 2018). According to these evangelists, all humans are sinners, but they can take moral actions to have their sins forgiven. The goal of the evangelists was to spread the religion to convert as many followers as possible.

By the end of the 19th Century, the traditional beliefs of the Protestant faith no longer dominated religion (Irish, 2018). Evangelicalism once again evolved after World War II. A new generation of conservative Protestants established a fundamentalist approach to religion beginning around 1910 (Irish, 2018). The National Association of Evangelicals was established in 1942 (Pally, 2011). It was founded by Harold Ockenga and J. Elwin Wright (Pally, 2011). The organization had 147 members that met to establish local churches, schools and convert people to the faith (Pally, 2011). The N.A.E is still in existence today; it was formed specifically to counter Fundamentalism and its negative approach to Christianity.

New Evangelicalism focused on the formation of cooperative evangelical ministries (Pally, 2011). In the 1950s, Evangelists initiated the Campus Crusade for Christ to convert students to the ministry. Billy Graham was the first evangelical leader that used the media to gain the support of followers. Graham told his followers how God spoke directly to him. He gained an immense following due to his strong vision and fundamentalist background and positive Evangelical approach. He was educated at Wheaton and was a member of Youth for Christ. His platform grew as he crusaded across the globe to convert more people to evangelicalism. Graham recognized the importance of cultural engagement to win over the public. Evangelical leaders, like Graham, dominated the 20th Century.

Televangelism was the next phase of the Evangelical movement. Ministers used television broadcasting to convert the public. Evangelicals, such as Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker and Pat Robertson captivated the public earning millions with each broadcast. Billy Graham was compensated at a much lower salary and he did not believe in mixing religion and politics, but on his death, his son took over The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He is a major supporter of Trump and used his influence and his millions of followers to help get him elected. Franklin Graham proclaimed Trump was appointed by God to see America through a troubled time. Here again not to surmise that he and others excused the life of the man, Trump. He, like many identified with their values that the candidate was willing to stand for and fight for on their behalf.

**The Connection of the Evangelical Church to Politics**

Starting in the 1970s, Evangelicals started playing a bigger role in politics (Berggren, 2007). When Jimmy Carter ran for president, he declared “the sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world” (Berggren, 2007, p. 38). Carter, an Evangelical and Southern Baptist declared he was a born-again Christian. His evangelical leanings influenced the tone of the nation. Carter's evangelical faith influenced his foreign policy and legislation. When he was governor, he began many of his messages with prayers. When he took the office of president, he continued to be vocal about his support for the Christian faith.

Carters’ faith was obvious to everyone in the nation. He was faithful, honest, and displayed religious conviction. He was deeply committed to Christianity. It showed in his every action. The opposite was true for Donald Trump. He relied on Evangelicals to obtain the office of the president, but he never upheld the values of Christianity. Trump is not a religious or moral man. When Carter ran for president, he did not make false promises or try to mislead the public (Berggren, 2007). Carter gained the trust of the American people because he did not try to divide the country nor did he ever betray the American public like Donald Trump. Carter was bold but honest (Berggren, 2007). At the same time, he pushed his Christian ideals onto the American public.

Carter believed politics is a legitimate forum for pushing the Christian faith. He believed the office of the presidency was the best place to voice doing what is right and moral (Berggren, 2007). His faith influenced the political actions he took while in office. This did not violate the separation of church and state, because during his single term in office, he did not promote one religion faith against other, but merely expressed his long-held views. His evangelical style of leadership is the main reason he was elected. America was and still is made up of a majority Christian, but many other faiths exist in the country. Carter's promise to push the Christian faith led to his election. The Christian religion continues to influence the opinions of the public. Carter pushed the Christian religion despite what was established in the Constitution.

The Separation of Church and State is also known as the Establishment Clause. It establishes the separation of religion and politics (Berggren, 2007). The Establishment Clause can be found in the first clause in the Bill of Rights. “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” (Berggren, 2007, 24)”.

In the first cases involving the Establishment Clause, the Supreme Court upheld the clause. Since the mid-20th Century, the Supreme Court has shown by rulings that they accommodate some values that certain communities hold dear even when in the face of scrutiny such holdings may appear to infringe on individual rights and liberty. In the holdings in Little Sister of Poor *SS Peter Home v Penn* and hobby lobby *Burwell v Hobby Lobby*, these cases were about provision of reproductive treatment and contraptions by an employer as a right to an employee who gets employer provided health insurance, but the defendants went to court to challenge that provision of the Affordable Care Act as going against their deeply held opposition to abortion, the case went all the way to the supreme court where the prevailed against the plaintiffs in 2020 and 2014 respectively.

It is apparent that Christians in the United States enjoy some protection from the High court. The Supreme Court is made up of justices that favors the Christian faith. While the government is forbidden from favoring one religion over another in the U.S. Constitution, this does not apply to the office of the presidency. Carter is just one of many presidents that have used the Christian faith to gain the office of president.

The faith-inflected speeches of President Carter and other politicians with strong Christian convictions have influenced modern politics. While Carter was president, a new evangelical movement emerged. White evangelicalism was ignited in social conservatives that did support the religious leanings of Carter, but many did not agree with his social and political views and policies. Carter supported peace in the Middle East and rejected human rights abuses (Berggren, 2007). Carter lost the Presidency to Ronald Reagan because of his conservative approach to politics and his opposition to fighting Communism, but most importantly he lost because of the economic morose outlook of the United State during this time. From gas shortage and high inflation and increase in the misery index. When Carter refused to get involved in the politics of other countries, Reagan was willing to take action to oppose threats to the nation.

White evangelical voters helped secure the presidency. They supported Reagan's agenda of reducing governments involvement (Nelson, 2019). Similar to Trump, Evangelicals voted for Reagan despite the fact he had been married twice and was a movie actor with a dubious reputation. While Reagan was a good man who did not have the reputation of Trump, the message that was sent by Evangelicals was clear. Televangelist Jerry Falwell was a powerful leader of the white evangelical movement. Falwell used his following to influence the votes of followers.

When Reagan endorsed white Evangelicals, it led to the development of the Moral Majority (Nelson, 2019). This majority used its influences to push for social change, it is defunct at the moment. While Reagan was far more subtle than Trump in his acknowledgment of Evangelical Christians, the latter was the opposite. The New Christian Right emerged in the 1960s. By the 1980's they had control of politics. Right-wing Christian leaders, such as Jerry Falwell, called for religion in politics. According to Falwell, the government should never interfere in religious affairs, but he did believe Christians had the right to influence politics.

By the end of the 1970s, 80% of most Americans - this includes people that were not necessarily identifying as Evangelical Christians supported the evangelical religious approach (Nelson, 2019). Televangelists, including Pat Robertson, James Robinson, and Jerry Falwell, were persuaded by Republican political figures to adopt the political views of the Evangelists (Nelson, 2019). Their acceptance of the Christian right-wing movement led to greater public support. Falwell's Moral Majority was a useful tool for pushing the Evangelical agenda (Nelson, 2019). The main political positions adopted by Evangelicals included supporting the nuclear family, morality, and rejecting abortion. Falwell was able to use his powerful base of followers to push them to vote for conservative candidates. Falwell’s coalition was not just Evangelicals but also Roman Catholics, Mormons and some Orthodox Jews. It was a joining of these religious groups to advocate together.

Using his Moral Majority, Falwell was able to influence the social, religious, and political landscape (Nelson, 2019). He supported moral absolutism and pushed followers to adopt conservative ideals using scriptures from the Bible (Nelson, 2019). He did not blame the lack of morals on his followers but non-Christians. Falwell blamed non-Christians for the state of the nation. Falwell saw homosexuality, single motherhood, and sex outside of marriage as the fault of an immoral society. He taught his followers intolerance and encouraged conflict (Nelson, 2019). Falwell’s adoption of the principles of the New Christian Right corrupted the Evangelical movement.

The New Christian Right also supported Originalism. Originalism or Constructionists is defined as “the idea that we should follow the original intent of the Founding Fathers in interpreting the Constitution” (Nelson, 2019, p. 18). Based on this view, the constitution can only be evaluated in terms of its historical context, not modern interpretations.

During the 1980s, conservative Evangelicals supported the fundamentalist Evangelical ideals introduced by the New Christian Right (Gorski, 2017a). The power gained by the Evangelical movement was directly connected to Republican politicians that agreed to partner with the religious movement to advance their political careers. Reagan talked of God and expressed his support of conservative, Christian ideals. Reagan’s partnership with Evangelicals was a means to an end, in the sense that he was a conduit to advance the political goals. It is important to state also that he was a bona-fide Christian in his later years (Nelson, 2019). Reagan developed a strong relationship with Falwell and spoke glowing about his faith.

Reagan was popular with Christians because of his willingness to interact with conservative religious groups (Nelson, 2019). These groups approved of Reagan’s willingness to speak publicly about God and his anti-abortion stance. Reagan also supported prayer in school. Prayer in school was a controversial topic at the time. Another reason Reagan gained the support of Falwell and Evangelicals was his goal to restore America’s national morality (Nelson, 2019). Most importantly Reagan opposed homosexuality and believed liberals were the cause of immorality in the nation. The relationship between politics and Evangelicals was only strengthened by Reagan’s presidency.

After Reagan, the connection between the presidency and Christianity as loosely labeled continued. George H. Bush and Bill Clinton were also Evangelical Christians -- though both had different routes to it -- who did not shy away from identifying with the community and the both received significant voter support from it. The trend continued with George W. Bush. Bush also spoke of God to help capture the presidency. He sent the message; Christians are good fighting against evil (Gorski, 2017a). Bush established himself as the moral protector of the nation. His moral stance helped him capture the evangelical vote. The evangelical right represents a large portion of the Christian faith. When they come together to support a politician, they represent a powerful section of the public. To be reelected, Bush once again relied on the evangelical vote. “I Vote Values” was his campaign message (Nelson, 2019). Bush defeated John Kerry in 2004 and retained the presidency with the support of Evangelicals (Nelson, 2019).

Since the 1970s, the evangelical movement has gained major power in political arenas (Gorski, 2017a). Along with presidents, Evangelicals have supported the successful elections of Senators, Governors, Majors, and Representatives. The Christian Right was unified under Falwell and continues to be a significant presence in politics.

Diversity was excluded from the movement to prevent splintering based on race and conservative views. The exclusion of outsiders has led to a unified movement and a strong voting bloc (Gorski, 2017a). Politicians that gain the favor of Evangelicals have a good chance of taking office. The New Christian Right supports politicians that will advance its political goals. Most Evangelicals have different beliefs tied to their religious sect, but when it comes to voting, some of them align together. This was the case when they wanted Reagan to become president and the same was true for the 2016 election of Trump (Nelson, 2019). Not every Christian candidate fits the ideals of the evangelical movement. Only a select few are chosen to represent the movement.

**The Evangelical Movement and Donald Trump**

The question of how did the evangelicals come to identify with Donald trump has been a puzzling analysis ever since Mr. Trump declared his candidacy for president. The republican candidate field had credible individuals who were known Christians – Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Herman Cain and others. The question is how did voters look past all these contenders and go for a thrice divorced, non-church going businessman. And the answers lie in the authoritarian machismo that is in step with many long evangelical traditions of pastor over-lord, where congregants look towards the pastor as the embodiment of all that is truly divine and infallible, capable of making errors, mistake and sinning but one that can be forgiven and lifted even further higher.

In a way for evangelical Christians, the rest of the field was pristine and clean, nothing to tar them with or no major controversy to see in their lives. To some extent, their existence could have been boorish. On the contrary Trump presented as an overload, flaws and all bared for all to see and it became an allure instead of a stain. Other forms of Christianity, like Roman Catholicism and many strains of liberal Protestantism, feature formidable Church structures: diocesan councils and synods, hierarchies and protocols that help keep rogues and would-be autocrats in line. In the evangelical world, these institutions are generally much less powerful—or nonexistent. The next question is why? This question that typical follows the how – which is explained above, is it that Americans over the last decades or so have so far come to normalize political discord that is both clannish and nativist.

The election of Barack Obama gave birth to the Tea party-- a collection of faithful acolytes in Congress, outside the halls of Congress and in rural America who came to symbolize opposition to the first black president of America. Some of this opposition was policy differences, some also were racist in nature, promoted by a very small number within the group. Trump seized on it and accused Obama of being an impostor who did not qualify to be president because he was not an American. The right-wing media seized on it and the propaganda ran rife. Though Obama was a Christian and had gotten the support of evangelicals in both of his elections, his administration was taking flak for rising economic insecurities many Americans were enduring. His signature legislation, the Affordable Care Act underwent so much legislative blowback after the law was passed, with republicans devising legislation to repeal the law, and this made opportunities to work with congress on other pressing matters that effect Americans unfortunately unachieved.

Along comes Trump with his brand of messianic message, “I alone can fix this “. He latched on anxieties, fears and worries of an ever-changing demography. He maligned opponents, promised Christians that he would send only judges that would protect religious freedom and oppose abortion. I have articulated above why this same message could not have swayed or resonated to the base as much if presented by non-other than Trump. Ultimately voters were willing to throw caution to the wind for a return to normalcy of the past. And in that normalcy both real and imagined, it laid bare the tragedies of the America past that change and progress did not come on the platter.

Donald Trump was not a typical politician; he had spent almost all his adult life in the business world of New York real estate and the glitzy scenes of Hollywood. He would occasionally over the years opine on topical issues in the country. He was not a strong Christian that attended church and he did not show the values or morals of Evangelicals. Instead, he was a billionaire that owned real estate across the globe. He was also a reality television star. He had a reputation for underhanded business dealings. Even worse, he had the reputation of engaging in immoral actions with women, like Bill Clinton and Joe Biden who has been accused of sexual assault. Trump was divorced twice and on his third marriage. He was accused of sexually assaulting a teen girl. Similar to other candidates for president, Trump began to speak of God and the need to bring back old fashion values to gain the support of Evangelicals.

Just like Obama, Trump had support from constituents that were not a given at first sight. The Reverend Harry Jackson supported Trump, he was a prominent and early supporter of the then president. He defended his support as a real step in trying to do more for his community. He accused the democratic party of taking the black vote for granted assuming that it will be given regardless. He was conservative and identified with many values that anyone so labeled would accept. A common theme from evangelicals both black and white was that Trump was a vessel, not much about him but what can be delivered through him. In this case, political triumphs, judicial appointment to the bench for originalists judges, and an end to abortion. Alveda King – niece to the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, supported him as well and other black evangelicals who were his once rivals in the tussle for the republican presidential ticket, Herman Cain and Benjamin Carson respectively. These men represent faith people that looked past the baggage of a worldly Trump. Other than skin color, King held similar values and beliefs that ordinary everyday white evangelicals had. Her support for Trump is one of the enduring aspects of his presidency for the legacy that she bears and the scion of who she was. She clearly was disparaged by some in the African American community who accuse her that what she was doing did not align with the visions and mission of Dr Martin Luther King. It is important to highlight that Trump gained support of Christians who did not identify as white, and this number increased in the election of 2020. This was a head scratcher, for reasons that much of Americans were turning away from Trump, within the African and Latino communities, he was gaining traction with people who liked his brash, unvarnished way of speaking that many identified with as not being politically correct, and to some extent was reminiscent of everyday people living their lives.Both Herman Cain and Ben Carson saw themselves as agents of real change and impact within their communities that supporting Trump was an easy decision to arrive at, after they dropped out the race for president.

Contrasting this support of faith people with other faith-based entities was a publication named the Sojourners, who on their website pride themselves as,” Sojourners are Christians who follow Jesus, but who also sojourn with others in different faith traditions and all those who are on a spiritual journey. We are evangelicals, Catholics, Pentecostals and Protestants; progressives and conservatives; blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asians; women and men; young and old. We reach into traditional churches but also out to those who can't fit into them. Together we seek to discover the intersection of faith, politics, and culture”. The are, simply put, a left leaning, progressive organization though evangelical in nature. The idea here is to crystallize the landscape of evangelicalism, so it is apparent to see that Trump did not only enjoy support from white Christians to the detriment of other demographic subsets of the faith world.

Trump courted religious voters and rejected anyone that did not fit the mold. Even with all the negative press, Evangelicals saw Trump as the lesser of two evils (Gorski, 2017b). Trump pushed American exceptionalism while Clinton supported a liberal America (Gorski, 2017b). Trump was able to capture the evangelical vote by spreading lies about Clinton and appealing to older Americans that remember a time when America had strong Christin values. In addition, Trump appearance on the political stage appealed to white supremacists such as Richard Spencer and a former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke who so much proclaimed on TV that the election of Donald Trump emboldened his racist affiliates to be open and visible with their intolerance of other people by rejecting anyone that did not fit the ideals of white America. Words matter, the former president did not need to say explicitly what he meant, nowhere was this apparent than when he said to his supporters on January 6th, “march to the capitol and make your voice heard”, or “if you don’t fight like hell, you won’t have a country”. Those are largely understood as a call to protest at the very least and more, and at the worst a violent confrontation with law enforcement.

When Trump gained the position of presidency, he did not use this opportunity to unite the country but kept up his rhetoric to divide the nation (Gorski, 2017b). Instead, Trump used the fears and anxieties of Evangelicals to push his agenda. Other white Evangelicals supported Trump out of fear of the growing diversity of the American population (Gorski, 2017b).

White Evangelicals support a Christian United States (Gorski, 2017b). But they do not mean by such an idea that America should be a “theocracy” that is ruled by the Christian religion. They believe in freedom of religion. It’s a really important idea to their faith. They believe their values and beliefs should influence the way they vote. But they do not advocate that everyone in America should be forced to convert to Christianity or that Christianity should become the official state church of the U.S. government. Trump systematically enacted executive orders designed to undermine the protection of minority groups and rid the country of persons of color from different ethnic groups (Gorski, 2017b). One of his first acts was to ban the immigration of people from seven Muslim countries. His actions angered other world leaders and humanitarian groups.

White Christians supported Donald Trump because he embraced their values. According to (Gorski, 2017b), two-thirds of Evangelicals are white. White Christian nationalist issues dominated Trump's presidency. The desire of this section of the public was achieved through various nefarious and legitimate means (Nelson, 2019). Christian nationalists have ignored accusations launched at Trump by his victims and the Democratic party simply to achieve their goals (Gorski, 2017b). Overzealous supporters of the president emerged during his election campaign. Many were willing to show aggression toward people that did not agree with Trump becoming president or that did not fit the ideal of white America.

Donald Trump was calculated when he identified the agenda of white Christians during his campaign (Nelson, 2019). Trump painted a picture of America he knew Evangelicals would support. His campaign message was “Make America Great Again” (Nelson, 2019, p. 48). Americans that wanted to revert back to traditional America, some of it was nostalgia for a time when the demographics was more European and whiter, couple with anxiety that future demographic was becoming diluted with minorities and immigrants. On the hand some of it attributable to the past industrial age when factories were littered in the rust belt, and coal ruled in Appalachia. A time when working men could support families without the worry of having jobs shipped overseas for profit.

“Trumpism echoes all the traditional themes of blood purity, blood conquest, bloody apocalypses, and golden age nostalgia” albeit from his own secular perspective (Gorski, 2017b, p. 343). This political movement associated with Donald trump and his base of supporters had garnered prominence and support during his presidency The violence against minorities and other diverse groups increased when Trump became president. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a [30 percent increase](https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2019/year-hate-rage-against-change)  in hate groups and their associated violence roughly coincided with Trump’s campaign and presidency – following three consecutive years of decline near the end of the Obama administration. Instead of cautioning Republicans to stop the violence, Trump embraced and supported these acts by some of his utterances. Hate crimes grew dramatically while Trump was president. The entire world watched as people of color and members of the LGBTQ community were subjected to abuses.

Trump normalized hate speech during his campaign for the presidency and during his presidency. His political rhetoric on different religions, minorities, ethnic groups, and women empowered his followers to engage in acts of violence. It also led to greater intolerance for anyone that did not fit the white Evangelicals ideal of the white, Christian American (Luqman, 2018). While America was established on liberty and equality, it was clear during the Trump election, a large portion of Americans view liberty and equality as something that only applies to people of European descent.

Trump went as far as to make statements supporting followers that engaged in acts of violence. When an African American man was attacked at a Black Lives Matter rally, Trump praised the attackers (Luqman, 2018). Trump used social media to reach his followers and spread his message of hate. On Twitter, he claimed the protestors deserved to be roughed up (Luqman, 2018). On February 23, 2016 during a rally in Las Vegas, Trump made the following remark about a protester that was being disruptive in his event, *“There’s a guy, totally disruptive, throwing punches. We’re not allowed to punch back anymore. I love the old days. You know what they used to do to guys like that when they were in a place like this? They’d be carried out on a stretcher, folks.”*

While America is diverse and liberals support freedom for all, Trump used the fears of white Americans to advance his political goals. In return, white Evangelicals used Trump to spread their message of a white, moral America.

While America is a melting pot that was founded on immigration, a minute portion of Americans does not support the immigration of different ethnic groups. While Trump was president many social issues rose to the surface. One issue was the killing of African Americans by police (Luqman, 2018). In a s much, having nothing directly to do with the president, in times like such tragedy presidents become consoler in chief. During his time in office this rarely happened. Instead of trying to influence positive change, Trump sent in police armed with military gear and tear gas to attack peaceful protestors. The president’s response to racial injustice was to favor aggression. When athletes protested racial injustice peacefully, he ordered the NFL and NBA to punish them.

Trump consistently showed leniency towards violent white nationals. Even after Neo-Nazi James Fields used a car to kill one protester while injuring 19 others. His language sometimes, very inartful did not help cool tension and tempers, like when he said “there were fine people on both sides” of the clashes in Charlottesville, Virginia. He obviously was not condoning the Unite the Right, but it came off as if that was the case. His silence conveyed the impression that he supported the violent actions of white supremacists. Trump refused to take accountability for his rhetoric or hold any whites responsible for their acts of hate. He took actions meant to divide the nation. White nationalists in Charlottesville engaged in numerous acts of violence. Trump's response was to ignore the violence. At the same time, when athletes peacefully took a knee, Trump was incensed.

Trump was able to take people who never believed they would be persuaded by him to adopt prejudicial beliefs against other nonwhite Americans. The president was obsessed with seeing African Americans and other minorities pay for protesting racial injustices (Luqman, 2018). When Trump became president, he failed to uphold the value of Christianity. Instead, he chose to adopt a right-wing extremist approach to his presidency.

Along with African Americans and Muslims, Trump attacked Hispanic Americans with some of his statements. Upon being elected, Trump reiterated his desire to limit and halt illegal migration from Mexico. He used his usual rhetoric to gain the support of his followers. Trump accused all Mexicans of being rapists, drug dealers, and criminals (Luqman, 2018). His actual quote was “when Mexico sends its people, they don’t send their best, they send rapist….”. He claimed he would build a wall at the southern US border to prevent Mexicans from coming into the country. Trump also claimed he would make Mexico pay for the wall. This never happened. Trump started the wall during his presidency, but it is yet to be completed because Democrats took of Congress and halted the construction.

Trump has been subjected to many different lawsuits. Most of them have to do with his business dealings. When a Mexican American judge, Judge Gonzalo Curiel, ruled against his university, Trump claimed it was because the man was Mexican (Luqman, 2018). He discounted the fact, Curiel was a well-respected appellate judge. “He’s a Mexican. We’re building a wall between here and Mexico” (Luqman, 2018, p. 15). The judge is American, but Trump labeled him as illegal.

Trump adopted a policy of separating children from their parents at the American border, Mexicans seeking citizenship or asylum were placed in jails while their children were placed in warehouses with people not equipped to care for children (Luqman, 2018). This has gotten worse under the Biden administration, who recently reinstated the Migrant Protection Protocols, loosely labeled the “Remain in Mexico policy” His zero-tolerance policy outraged people across the world. Children were traumatized when they were ripped from their parents and placed in what were basically jails. The damage done to the children did not concern Trump it was not until Republicans and Democrats across the nation protested his actions, that parents were reunited with at last one parent.

Along with minorities, Trump's presidency harmed women. Trump repeatedly objectified and victimized women during his Presidential Campaign and while he was president (Luqman, 2018). Trump made indecent comments against female politicians including Hilary Clinton and Carly Fiorina. He made comments about their looks and their inability to lead the country because they are women. Trump continued disparaging women by making comments on their weight and calling reporter Megyn Kelley a bimbo (Luqman, 2018). What Trump failed to acknowledge is women make up a large portion of the evangelical movement. His rhetoric about women isolated a large portion of a powerful voting bloc, however it is pertinent to state that irrespective of all these problems, Trump got a sizable number of women voting again for him in the election of 2020. It was just not enough to overcome suburban and college educated women that turned away from him. In addition, his treatment of minority and ethnic groups ensured they would come out in full force to vote against him.

As his presidency began to go downhill, it was time for the 2020 election. When Trump realized he may not win the election, he ramped up his rhetoric. He used words he knew would incite his followers. When Trump lost the election, he encouraged his followers to storm the Capitol building in protest. He said “if you don’t fight like hell, you won’t happen a country anymore” Trump told his followers and the world that the election was rigged. Supporters of Trump gathered in Washington for "Stop the Steal" (Smith & Santiago, 2021). Trump claimed the Democrats had stolen the presidency using illegal voting methods. Trump ordered the state he lost in to recount their votes. The results were the same; Jo Biden won the presidency. Trump was angry he lost the presidency and wanted his followers to take immediate action. The irony is many of the protestors that stormed the Capital did not even vote in the 2020 election (Smith & Santiago, 2021). Along with individual supporters, self-styled militia organizations showed up at the Capitol.

On January 6, 2021, Trump encouraged his supporters to march on the Capitol Building (Smith & Santiago, 2021). U.S. Congress was in session to confirm the election of Biden. The violence that stemmed from Trump's political rhetoric and instructions to followers resulted in three deaths that consisted of two medical emergencies and a protester that was shot by a capitol police and about 140 capitol police officers receiving injuries (Smith & Santiago, 2021). Video cameras captured the faces of the mob. These images have become the new faces of white supremacy in the United States (Smith & Santiago, 2021). Among the protesters and rioters at the Capitol that day were members of the military, former and current police officers, and other upstanding members of society. In addition, rioters include white supremacists and entities designated by the government as hate groups.

Rallies in support of Trump were a common fixture during his campaign and presidency. Trump used these rallies to gain support and make inciting comments. His role in the insurrection is under investigation. Trump underlined his message using extremist values and cultural symbols designed to encourage his followers to act. He also used social media to call followers to take action against Congress for confirming Biden's presidency. After Trump supporters attacked the Capitol Building, he tweeted, “remember this day forever” (Smith & Santiago, 2021). He would later remove the text, but his role in the insurrection is clear.

**Conclusion**

The evangelical faith has a long history. Evangelicals have played a significant role in American society since its creation. It has also gone through many transformations. In the early days, the Evangelical movement was connected to the Protestant Reformation and shifting views about Christianity. Evangelicalism supported autonomy in religion. By the late 20th Century, Evangelicals were connected to the Christian right. Evangelicals began taking a greater role in politics starting with President Carter. Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump rose to the position of president by gaining the support of Evangelicals. Evangelicals have used their political power to influence the outcomes of political races at all levels of government.

The current evangelical movement embraces the Christian right. While the Establishment Clause forbids the involvement of religion in government, the evangelical church has had a strong foothold in politics. Evangelicals have been responsible for voting together to place politicians in positions of power, including Donald Trump. Trump used the values of the Evangelicals to win the election and to push his political rhetoric. During his term as president, he managed to discriminate against women, minorities, and the LGBTQ communities while inciting violence. When Trump lost the election in 2020, he incited his follower to attack the Capitol Building.

Future GOP candidates for office, up unto the presidency will try to emulate the divisiveness of Mr. Trump as a winning formula, thereby exacerbating the rancor in the body polity. The health of the US democracy has largely been the two-party system of democratic and republican party respectively. Rotating governance between each other in the executive and trading majority and minority in the legislature. Dominance by one party over a long period of time can breed complacency, abuse of office, corruption and other vices that are inimical to a true representative democracy.

With near total control of the Republican party and its voting base that is predominantly Christians, Trump has effectively mortgaged the viability of the two-party system in America. Politicians on the right have all but abandoned collaborative governance because they are all in fear that trump may accuse them of working with democrats and that signal a primary challenge which may end their careers. This worry is playing out daily in congress leadership are refusing to condemn or hold to account members that showing open hostility and intolerance to members of the democratic party. This disgraceful conduct is no were more apparent in that republicans in the senate refused to appoint a fact-finding committee to look into the riots at the capitol that in reality put their lives in danger, all in a bid to stay in the good books of the man that led that insurrection albeit not by himself. This encapsulates my thesis that Christians that throw their support more to the Republican party and in essence supports their positions are doing the nation a disservice by not disavowing the Mr. Trump so that politicians can have a free hand to operate and not fear the wrought of the former president.

These concerns are not wishful nightmares that may arise and dissipate, but are very worrying signs that one of the major parties in the US, in this case the GOP is largely embracing ideas and policies that will not enlarge its ranks, rather will thin it out significantly to a base of nativist and America first constituents capable of not wining national elections or attract moderates or independents to the party.

Mr. Trump did not begin this trend of nativism and populism, but rather latched onto it and rode it to the presidency. His raucous confrontational term in office gave politicians a playbook they can employ in the future. Suffice to say that Mr. Trump lost the election in 2020, and the Republican party lost two senate seats that handed unified government to the Democrats in the Senate and House. This control has, albeit marginal led democrats to assume a major mandate from the electorate as the try to pass major legislative agendas that by far is the most progressive and expensive in a generation.

Perhaps a divided government can be a check on a run-away government from the same party in all levels. Such is the consequence of a pivot to Trump and his antics and by extension a detriment for the US political experiment.

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1. Landmark Supreme court ruling in 1972 legalizing a woman right to terminate a pregnancy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)