

Christianity in Democratic Party Politics:
A Comparison of Jimmy Carter's 1976 Campaign & Pete Buttigieg's 2020 Campaign

Mitchel Traer

Course Professor: Dr. Kimberly Cowell-Meyers

Capstone Advisor: Dr. Paul Manuel

School of Public Affairs Honors Program Capstone

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Abstract: Decades apart from each other, Jimmy Carter and Pete Buttigieg campaigned to win the Democratic nomination for president. Both presented themselves as deeply religious individuals whose Christian faith directed their political positions. Despite sharing many similarities, including starting the campaign as relatively unknown candidates in a crowded Democratic primary field and facing challenges from their political left, the two did not see the same connection with voters. Using polling data, campaign actions, candidates' statements, and news coverage of the campaigns, this project contends that Carter and Buttigieg's Christian faith led them to positions on abortion and homosexuality that resonated differently with the available primary voters at the time of their campaigns. This project provides insight into the role of religion in the lives of Americans, the relationship between church and state, the impact of a candidate's faith on a campaign, and the influence of religion within political parties.

I. Introduction

When someone believes that their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20, NRSV), that “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:19-20, NIV), and that they are an “ambassador from another realm in this troubled nation” (Smith 2017), they are going to take those things into consideration with every move they make. These ideas only begin to scratch the surface of how the Christian faith can influence a Christian’s political activity. This poses many questions when exploring the combination of religion and politics including: What happens when voters have this perspective? What is the significance of presidential candidates discussing their faith on the campaign trail? What role do political parties play in this area? The 2020 Democratic primary saw the challenges of combining faith and politics through the candidacy of former Mayor Pete Buttigieg. In a way that recent Democratic candidates had not done, Buttigieg discussed his understanding of faith and its influence on his life and politics. He discussed his personal faith with the nation and utilized it on the campaign trail, working to bring religion (specifically Christianity) into the discourse of the Democratic Party. This was not the first time a Democrat tried to bring their faith into their run for President. In 1976 a little-known governor from Georgia entered a crowded Democratic Primary field and won the hearts of voters across the nation and eventually the presidency, Jimmy Carter. He was open about his faith and 1976 would even be declared the “year of the evangelical” (Williams 2020, 55-56). With decades between them, both candidates would bring their faith into their campaigns and political positions, but they would not see the same connection with voters.

This paper will explore what, if anything, can be learned through a comparison of Jimmy Carter’s campaign in 1976 and Pete Buttigieg’s campaign in 2020. The analysis will add to ongoing discussions about the changes in America’s religious makeup, the relationship between

church and state, the impact of a candidate's faith on a campaign, and the influence of religion within political parties. As will be seen, these identities and relationships evolved during the decades between Carter and Buttigieg. While Carter and Buttigieg shared an understanding of the relationship between church and state, their faith would lead them to different positions on abortion and homosexuality that voters did not respond to in the same way.

II. Literature Review

The Significance of Religion in Political Life

Religion, specifically Christianity, has always been a part of the American story in some way. Thomas Kidd details how the original colonies in North America were founded for religious reasons (Kidd 2019, 59). For example, Massachusetts took inspiration from Acts 16:9 with a seal saying, "Come over and help us" solidifying "their colonizing enterprise as evangelistic to the core" (Kidd 2019, 13). In fact, the Bible was the basis for all of the "religious and political discourse" for the colonies (Goldman in Dreisbach 2017, 24). While the founding fathers would see the Bible in different ways, the Bible influenced their world by being the main source for religion, and "a primary textbook for education, letters, law, and civil government" (Dreisbach 2017, 29-48). This relationship did not stop after America's founding and the creation of the First Amendment. Espinosa notes that "virtually every president has injected, invoked, or utilized religion in one way or another" (Espinosa 2009, 2). Jefferson's creation of the *Jefferson Bible*, Kennedy's need to balance Catholic teaching with the Presidency, Reagan's heavy reliance on religious language, and George W. Bush invoking faith following 9/11 are just some of the significant ways that religion has influenced American history (Espinosa 2009, 30-

40). As Kidd, Dreisbach, and Espinosa reveal, religion has influenced life in America from before the founding and continues to impact political behavior today.

Beyond an historical significance, religion has also been shown to have an impact on voting behavior. Religion influences both the public and private life of individuals as the places of worship that a voter attends “inculcate beliefs and shape worldviews” (Leege in Leege and Kellstedt 1993, 3-8). Using data from Pew Research’s *Religious Landscape Study, 2014* Wald revealed “pronounced partisan differences among religious groups” and a “correlation between religious tradition and political party affiliation” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 32-33, 141). Generally speaking, African American Protestants, Jews, and nonaffiliated voters identified with Democrats, Catholics leaned towards the Democratic Party, and Evangelical Protestants and Mainline Protestants were more closely aligned with the Republican Party (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 32). This was not always the case as Evangelical Protestants were “strongly Democratic” in the 1940s (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 34). Additionally, “there is a correlation between religious tradition and presidential vote choice” (Green in Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 141). The diversity in political affiliation, both among religions and across time, reveals that “voters are likely to incorporate religious and partisan elements in their self-concept to create a unique religious-partisan group label” (Patrikios in Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 36). Religious tradition can be significant because of what might be said during a service. Through analyzing believing, behaving, and belonging, Friesen and Wagner found that “attitudes regarding the broad intersection of faith and politics are perhaps best understood via the presence (or absence) of denominational guidance on questions of the role of religion in society” (Friesen and Wagner 2012, 224). Significantly, the relationship between religion and politics is not just about individual faith. In 2009 Monika McDermott used “hypothetical

evangelical Christian candidates and an original experimental data set” to explore the impact of a candidate’s religion in elections (McDermott 2009, 340). She found that “voters stereotype evangelical candidates as significantly more conservative than other candidates – a belief stereotype – as well as more trustworthy and competent – trait stereotypes” (McDermott 2009, 352). This relationship will be important to consider when assessing the impact that candidates can have when they discuss their religion. Overall, the long history of religion influencing politics in America combined with its well-established relationship with party ID and candidate opinions, makes it evident that this is an important relationship that warrants further exploration.

Religion in America in the 1970s

The 1970s represents a time in American history when the relationship between religion and politics was on the cusp of significant transformation that would define political activity for decades to come. In the early 1970s the Jesus Movement was pushing Christian perspectives into popular culture with works like *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell* (Miller 2014, 16-18). The movement was short-lived and left an impact on secular and religious circles alike as it was seen as novel or a way to translate the gospel “into hipster speak” (Miller 2014, 17). On the heels of the Jesus Movement was “evangelical chic” and the rise of identifying as a “born-again” Christian (Miller 2014, 19). This terminology took the spotlight as a reaction to the critical and public moral failure of President Nixon in the Watergate scandal (Miller 2014, 12-13). George Gallup Jr. began polling on born-again Christians in 1976 and “declared 1976 the ‘Year of the Evangelical’” (Miller 2014, 19). At the time, the terms “evangelical” and “born-again” were seen as overlapping and included conservative Protestants as well (Miller 2014, 19). Faith continued to influence pop culture through figures such as Bob Dylan and sports teams like the Dallas

Cowboys who had “a Christian coach (Tom Landry, a Methodist) and quarterback (Roger Staubach, an outspoken Catholic...)” who converted many within the NFL (Miller 2014, 20).

Leading up to the 1976 election there are two critical points to understand. The first is that “born-again Christianity came to occupy a prominent place in discussions about the direction of America” (Miller 2014, 30). The second is that how evangelicals would influence politics “remained uncertain” (Miller 2014, 31). The nation was at a critical juncture on the influence of faith when Carter was elected in 1976.

The best way to assess religion in the late 1970s is through the extensive research on Jimmy Carter’s campaign and presidency. Carter was “an outspoken progressive Southern Baptist from rural Georgia” and was able to appeal to a range of conservative and progressive evangelicals during his campaign (Swartz 2012, 213-214). He frequently discussed his faith on the campaign trail, and this connected with his supporters who were printing signs such as “J.C. Will Save America” (a nod to Carter’s initials and Jesus Christ) (Swartz 2012, 216-17). Carter continued “pressing the religious envelope” by doing an interview with *Playboy* in 1976 where he “admitted to having ‘lusted in his heart’ for women besides his wife” (Morris in Espinosa 2009, 322). Morris notes that this level of religious language and discussion in a campaign had not been seen since William Jennings Bryan failed to win the election in 1896 (Morris in Espinosa 2009, 322). In general, Carter’s “view of religion centered on personal piety, not public morality” and he was able to avoid discussing topics that would become critical during his presidency such as homosexuality (Williams 2010, 133, 146). Carter’s active use of scripture was not damaging to his campaign and actually resulted in widespread support. At the time the evangelical left had a conservative theology and supported Carter (Swartz 2012, 214). Alongside that support, figures such as Pat Robertson, who would become a major figure of the Christian

Right in 1980s, also were behind his candidacy (Williams 2010, 132). Swartz notes that “the bulk of [Carter’s] evangelical support [... came from] those evangelicals delighted that an outspoken, born-again believer was running for president” (Swartz 2012, 215). Through his conversation about faith Lambert notes “in the words of one scholar, ‘President Jimmy Carter helped make it respectable to be ‘born-again’” (Lambert 2008, 192). In the end, Carter limited Ford to only 51% of the evangelical vote and gained 56% of the Baptist vote (Williams 2010, 132). This was a significant amount of evangelical support for a Democratic candidate and resulted in Carter being unprepared for the unexpected battle he would have with evangelicals during his presidency (Williams 2010, 133). While his faith would help propel him to the White House in 1976, it would be part of his downfall in 1980 as a Religious Right solidified itself against a Religious Left.

Understanding Religion in Politics: The Religious Right

The final critical aspect to understanding the place of my research within the larger field is defining what is meant by the Religious Right and Religious Left. The current form of each of these groups developed following the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976. The Religious Right (or Christian Right) is generally made up of “Missouri Synod Lutheran[s], [the] Southern Baptist Convention, [the] Churches of Christ, and [the] Assemblies of God” (Lambert 2008, 185). They are broadly concerned with moral issues with a focus on “family, education, and sexuality” (Lambert 2008, 185). The basic goal of the Religious Right is “to restore America’s status as a Christian nation,” something they feel is being challenged (Lambert 2008, 204). The Religious Right has been successful at using modern media to present a consistent and understandable message to a large audience (Lambert 2008, 187-88). One way this has manifested itself is

through megachurches as a tool for mass evangelism, something done by Billy Graham and other conservative faith leaders (Lambert 2008, 216). The Christian Right “found ethical absolutes grounded in biblical revelation” and knew how to spread that message (Lambert 2008, 192). After losing the election in 1976, the Republican Party was looking for a way to address “the country’s moral drift” and they “found many evangelicals receptive to the idea of joining with secular conservatives to oppose liberal policies” (Lambert 2008, 196). Part of the reason evangelicals were willing to explore options outside of the newly elected born-again Christian President was a series of liberal policies from Carter that they did not agree with including adding the Department of Education to the cabinet, defining family in a more inclusive way than the traditional biblical conception, and only providing vague answers about abortion and the number of evangelicals in his administration (Lambert 2008, 200-03). While Carter had a lot of support from evangelicals in his campaign, he quickly began to lose them and the Republican Party became their new and lasting home.

Over the decades following President Carter, the Religious Right was able to elect candidates who continued to combine their Christian faith with political action. In 1980 Ronald Reagan leaned on his “own conservative religious upbringing along with his avowed hatred for ‘godless communism’ to decisively beat Carter” (Espinosa 2009, 37). Reagan received the support of the Moral Majority (led by Jerry Falwell) and the growing and unified Christian Right for many reasons including continued public embrace of Christianity in political life and public positions on abortion, school prayer, and other issues in line with the Christian Right’s agenda (Miller 2014, 60-67). Over the years the Christian Right was able to support candidates who were even more devoted to their vision for America. Lambert notes that “far more than Reagan or George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush believed that religious groups should participate

actively in public life and should receive their fair share of public funds,” both critical to the Christian Right’s mission (Lambert 2008, 205). Some of the ways George W. Bush was able to fulfill their goals was through “‘faith-based’ domestic programs,” a foreign policy approached through a religious lens, and the continued push for a judicial system that shared their values (Lambert 2008, 205-09). Between losing the election in 1976 and winning the election in 2016 Republicans were able to make it so that “For most white evangelicals, participating in politics and voting Republican have now become second nature” (Smith and Walker in Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 205). Beginning with an unclear political position in the 1970s, the Christian Right folded itself into the Republican Party and has been able to continue to elect individuals who meet their vision for the influence of faith in politics for decades.

Alongside the growth in electing religious candidates was a development in what religious voters were looking for in a candidate. Most recently, this resulted in what would become known as “value voters” during the 2004 election (Thomson-DeVeaux 2017). These were religious voters who put more focus on the policies of candidates instead of the behavior or practices of an individual candidate (Thomson-DeVeaux 2017). Following the 2004 election, Pew Research found that of “value voters,” “forty-four percent mentioned specific issues like abortion or gay marriage, while 23 percent referenced personal characteristics of the candidates” (Thomson-DeVeaux 2017). Nearly twice as many voters who were focused on values concentrated on political issues over the specific candidate. The idea of being a “values voter” had come from “influential Christian conservative leaders like Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed [in the 1980s and 1990s who] urged politicians to protect ‘family values’” (Thomson-DeVeaux 2017). This focus on candidates’ political positions would help explain how candidates like Roy Moore and Donald Trump would receive evangelical support despite their personal histories

(Thomson-DeVeaux 2017). The Religious Right is focused on their common goal of achieving certain policy positions for the nation, regardless of who might be able to make that a reality.

Understanding Religion in Politics: The Rise of Secularism in America

Before diving into the Religious Left in American politics, it is necessary to briefly note the evolution of secularism that has occurred in recent decades. Broadly speaking Kevin McCaffree reveals that, “like a slowly moving glacier, secularization continues nearly unimpeded, save for the occasional bouts of religious revival or religious apathy” (McCaffree 2017, 1). This would end up having significant political implications. In fact, declines in religious practice and identification in the 1960s is part of what fueled the push by “socially conservative, and avowedly Christian, pundits like Pat Robertson, Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell [... to] make critiques of premarital sex, abortion, divorce, mothers working outside the home and homosexuality key components of mainstream Republican Party politics” (McCaffree 2017, 4-5). While the Religious Right was deeply connected to Christianity, not every American held that same belief. McCaffree notes that in the 1990s “young Americans in their 20s and 30s came to view religion as judgmental, homophobic, and overly political” and following the attacks on 9/11 connections between religion and intolerance grew (McCaffree 2017, 5). In fact, “Americans born between 1971 and 1994 were 315% more likely to leave the religion of their parents compared to Americans born before 1925” (McCaffree 2017, 7). With the Republican Party eventually having a significant hold on the Christian faith, the Democratic Party has to look to Christians, other faiths, and those of no faith for support. This will be important when considering how the Left approaches religion and some of the challenges of bringing those with and without religion into a shared political party.

Understanding Religion in Politics: The Religious Left

While the Christian Right took over the political scene following Jimmy Carter's election, the Religious Left has also worked to make a name for itself during that same time period. It is necessary to note that some scholars, such as Kenneth Wald, approach studying the Religious Left through including a variety of groups (i.e. African-American Protestants, Latino Catholics and Protestants, Muslim Americans, American Jews, other faith traditions, and religious nones) (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 249-280). While this definition may be helpful in certain approaches to religion, Frank Lambert focuses in on the Christian aspect of the Religious Left. Generally speaking, the Religious Left operates within "a party reluctant to promote any religious movement that could be defined as exclusive" and is forced to figure out "how to reach a skeptical party as well as a skeptical public" (Lambert 2008, 218, 221). The Religious Right has so successfully claimed religion for their side, the Religious Left has to shape the Democratic Party into a "legitimate alternative to the Religious Right without scaring secular Democrats who either dismiss religion altogether or relegate it to the individual and the private sphere" (Lambert 2008, 226). As the Religious Left works itself into the politics of America post 1980, they "pursue 'peace and justice' agendas that include 'advocating human rights at home and abroad, working to preserve the environment, questioning U.S. use of military force, and above all else fighting for the disadvantaged'" (Lambert 2008, 236). Kimberly Conger found that across states in the 2008 election Christian Progressives were connected to "some combination of issues such as immigration, poverty/hunger, gay rights, the environment, health care, and pro-choice issues" (Conger 2014). Overall, the Religious Left faces more struggles with its political party than the Religious Right does, creating a relationship that "is a delicate one at best" (Lambert 2008, 244).

The activity on the Religious Left, including their political influence, has looked substantially different from the Religious Right, but it has not been totally absent. While the Religious Right took a commanding hold on national politics under Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, “mainline liberal clergy” have been engaged in politics on a smaller and more localized level (Lambert 2008, 236). At the same time, “the major mainline Protestant churches” have kept lobbying arms on Capitol Hill to advocate and push for liberal policies (Lambert 2008, 236). Using data published by the Public Religion Research Institute in 2009 Laura Olson revealed that a major challenge for the Religious Left today is finding ways to increase “favorable views of its [Social Movement Organizations]” (Olson 2016). She goes on to note that while “there may be willing activists on the ground” creating “prominent national-level organizations” is going to be critical if the Religious Left wants to make an impact (Olson 2016). President Obama discussed religion during his campaign saying, “I think we make a mistake when we fail to acknowledge the power of faith in the lives of the American people” (Obama in Lambert 2008, 238). Lambert goes on to note that Obama “called on secularists to approach discussions of religion and politics with a more open mind” (Lambert 2008, 238). During his Presidency Obama did incorporate religion at times. He famously sang “Amazing Grace” at a funeral (Obama 2015). Additionally, he appointed Joshua DuBois (whom *Time* would name “Obama’s Pastor-in-Chief”) to run the new White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (Altman 2009). However, “the symbolic cachet of taking God back from the Christian Right had diminished during his four years in office” and he did not seek out “moderate and progressive evangelicals” in 2012 (Miller 2014, 162). The 2016 election did not help prospects of a more religious Democratic Party. Wald notes the “God gap” held strong in 2016 with “close to 60 percent of voters who said that they attend church every week vot[ing] for

Donald Trump. Among those who never attend, over 60 percent cast their ballot for Hillary Clinton” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2018, 113). This shows a Religious Left struggling to draw in many Christian voters. Finding the appropriate way to incorporate religion into the politics of a diverse Democratic Party has been a challenge for decades and continues to pose a challenge to those running in the 2020 election.

Where 2020 Fits in the Evolution of Religion in Political Life

The current Democratic primaries have created the opportunity to explore the significance of religion in American political activity today. My research will place former 2020 presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg within this larger story of the Religious Left and Religious Right in America. Buttigieg talked frequently about his faith on the campaign trail and his conversations sparked comparisons from the media to President Jimmy Carter (Azari 2019 and Wilson 2019). Pete Buttigieg has even been to church with the former President while campaigning (Haltiwanger 2019). Then candidate Jimmy Carter was able to gain nearly half of the evangelical vote as part of his active discussion of faith (Williams 2010, 132). My research will analyze multiple aspects of both the campaigns and religious beliefs of Jimmy Carter and Pete Buttigieg. The questions that I will ask to reveal this relationship are: How do they use scripture in their comments? How is faith used in campaign ads? How does their faith translate to political positions? What does Buttigieg’s discussion of faith mean for the Religious Left and the Religious Right going forward? Religion is a significant aspect of American politics. The candidacy of Pete Buttigieg provides a great opportunity to examine the relationship with respect to the past and an eye for the future to better understand the impact that a Religious Left may have on politics today.

III. Study Design

As noted in the introduction, the overall goal of my research is to understand what, if anything, can be learned from a comparison between the role of religion in the life and campaigns of Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Pete Buttigieg in 2020. Below is a table that highlights the basic reasons for selecting Jimmy Carter and Pete Buttigieg for comparison:

Table 1: Case Selection Comparison

Variable	Case 1: Jimmy Carter	Case 2: Pete Buttigieg
Party Identification	Democrat	Democrat
Faith	Christian (Southern Baptist Convention)	Christian (The Episcopal Church)
Discuss Faith During a Campaign	Yes	Yes
Connect Faith to Their Politics	Yes	Yes
Separation of Church and State	Supports	Supports
Abortion	Personally: Against Law: Open to Restrictions	Personally: No Stated Position Law: Pro-Choice
Homosexuality	Personally: Viewed As A Sin Law: Open to LGBTQ Protections	Personally: Not A Sin Law: Supports LGBTQ Rights
Outcome		
Won a Large Amount of Christian Support	Yes	No

I will compare the two candidates on three different levels. The first will be a comparison of the religious makeup of America in years of their campaigns, Carter in 1976 and Buttigieg in 2020. The second comparison will be of the ways in which the campaigns used the faith of the candidates during the election. The third will be an analysis of how Carter and Buttigieg talk about their faith and its relationship with their political positions. The second and third sections have moments of similarity and difference between the candidates. After going through polling data, Christian mission statements, and newspaper articles past and present I will review the

results that Buttigieg and Carter saw when they ran for office. My hypothesis is that while both candidates were Christian and used faith as part of their campaigns, their different visions of Christianity did not translate into shared political positions during their respective campaigns, revealing important changes to the relationship between religion and the Democratic Party.

Section 1: America's Religious Makeup in 1976 and 2020

The most obvious difference between the candidacies of Jimmy Carter and Pete Buttigieg is the context in which they happened. Understanding the voters and religious makeup of America that each candidate was working with is necessary for assessing the support that each candidate got. For that reason, I will compare and contrast 1976 and 2020 using three different measures. The first comparison tool will be Gallup polling questions on religion that have been asked since the 1970s. Data is available on the following polling questions: (1) Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your views about the Bible -- the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally; or the Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man?, (2) What is your religious preference -- are you Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, another religion or no religion?, (3) How much confidence do you have in church or organized religion -- a great deal, quite a lot, some or very little?, and (4) Do you believe in God? ("Religion" n.d.). These questions not only provide a description of American voters in the 1970s and today, using the research methods outlined in sections two and three for finding candidate specific information, I will be able to place each candidate within their respective years on these questions throughout the course of the paper.

Continuing the voter-based analysis, the second measure that will be used is a comparison of the election results in 1976 and the most recent presidential election, 2016. I will use the Time Series Cumulative Data File that was developed by American National Election Studies. This file contains answers to their questions from 1948 – 2016 which will allow me to compare both Jimmy Carter versus Gerald Ford in 1976 and Hillary Clinton versus Donald Trump in 2016 (“Time Series Cumulative Data File” 2019). Finally, the third measure, which brings the analysis up to 2020, will be the results of a Pew Research survey done in January 2020 that assessed where different faiths stood on the 2020 candidates (Lipka and Smith 2020). The combination of Gallup, American National Election Studies, and Pew Research data provides a strong overview of the religious makeup of America that can serve as the base for a comparison between 1976 and 2020.

Section 2: The Role of the Candidate’s Faith in Campaign Actions

This section of the paper will be devoted to comparing ways in which the candidates make use of their faith in the campaign. I will compare two campaign decisions. The first is campaign ads that have a religious focus. One example of this is Jimmy Carter’s “J.C. Will Save America” (Swartz 2012, 216-17), which parallels Pete Buttigieg’s ad in South Carolina quoting a verse from the gospel of Matthew (Smith 2019). The second campaign practice I will look at is contrasting the candidate with the morals of the past. Jimmy Carter’s campaign positioned him as the moral choice following the Watergate Scandal (Miller 2014). Pete Buttigieg’s campaign has contrasted him to what he called “the porn star presidency” (Merica 2019). To discover more of these methods, and potentially examples where they deviate from each other, I will utilize two methods that will be used again later in the paper. The first is the ProQuest News & Newspaper

database, which includes newspaper articles from twenty-six different news sources during the 20th century. Some of the significant sources that will be a part of the research include *The Atlanta Constitution*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. By focusing on articles published specifically between 1974 and 1977 I will be able to use this database to find coverage of the Carter campaign and the ways faith was worked into ads. I will use the following keywords search in that database “Carter AND Campaign AND Ad AND (J.C. or Jesus or faith)”. This will provide me with a range of articles that discuss the Carter campaign and the ads that it used. In order to keep up with the Buttigieg campaign’s use of faith I have set up a Google News Alert that is emailed to me each day for “Pete Buttigieg’s Christian Faith”. I have also started following the “Pete Buttigieg” feed on the Apple News App. Both of these resources compile a wide range of news sources, from *Fox News* to *The Washington Post* and *CNN*, that have published articles that cover the terms I selected to be notified about. I selected Google News Alert and Apple News because they will both offer new information daily or as it is happening, which will be an efficient and effective way to stay up to date on an active presidential campaign. Overall, the research of this section will provide an assessment of how the campaigns made use of the candidate’s faith on the campaign trail.

Section 3: The Role of the Candidate’s Faith in Political Positions

The third section of the paper will be devoted to comparing the candidates’ faith and the role it plays in their politics, specifically their view of the role of the Bible in government, abortion, and homosexuality. The first step to this is comparing the denominations of Christianity that the two candidates belong to. At the time, Jimmy Carter was a member of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) (Swartz 2012, 213-214), although he subsequently split

from this group in 2000 (Wyatt 2000). Today, Pete Buttigieg is a member of the Episcopal Church (Odell 2019). As I will be comparing the candidate's discussion and use of faith, it is important to understand what their traditions believed. In order to understand the Southern Baptist Convention as it was for Jimmy Carter in the 1970s, I will use the ProQuest News & Newspaper database to find coverage of his faith. Using the search terms "Southern Baptist Convention AND Carter AND (Jesus OR faith OR campaign)" I am able to find multiple sources that explore what the SBC stood for and Jimmy Carter's relationship with it. It is necessary to take this approach because the Southern Baptist Convention has changed in the decades since Jimmy Carter was a member in 1976 and current mission statements and positions are not necessarily the same as they were in the 1970s. I will use a different research method for understanding Pete Buttigieg's Christian tradition. He is a member of the Episcopal Church and I will look at mission statements and position statements available on the Episcopal Church's website, episcopalchurch.org, to help provide the background for his faith. These resources will provide me with the data necessary to frame both traditions overall beliefs at the time of the candidacies.

Having established the different traditions beliefs and positions I will research what Jimmy Carter and Pete Buttigieg had to say on three significant topics: the relationship between the Bible and government, abortion, and homosexuality. The main sources for this comparison will be interviews about their faith that the candidates gave to different publications. Jimmy Carter gave an interview with *Playboy* in which he talked at length about this faith and how it translated to a range of policy issues (Scheer 1976). Pete Buttigieg also gave an interview where he talked extensively about his faith with *Rolling Stone* (Morris 2019). In order to supplement the comments made in these interviews I will use the same ProQuest News & Newspaper

database that I previously used for information on Jimmy Carter. This time I will use the search terms “Carter AND Campaign AND (faith OR Jesus OR abortion OR homosexuality)” to narrow the results. For information on Pete Buttigieg I will continue to follow both the google news alert and Apple news feed that I have set up. The research of this section will provide the basis for a comparison of how Carter and Buttigieg’s faiths lead them to different political positions.

Section 4: Results of Carter and Buttigieg’s Primaries

The final section of the paper compares the results that Carter saw in 1976 and what Buttigieg saw in 2020. The order of states that voted in the primaries has changed between 1976 and 2020. As a result, the best way to approach the comparison is by assessing approximately the first month of contests (the length of time Buttigieg was in the race). This section will include an analysis of the Democratic primaries in 1976 and 2020 and additional points of comparison between the two candidates. This will also be where I compare the margin of victory or defeat Buttigieg and Carter saw in the states that both candidates participated in. My initial thinking is that Buttigieg was not able to get the same support given certain political positions that Buttigieg has which he ties to his faith, and the lack of voter support for those positions.

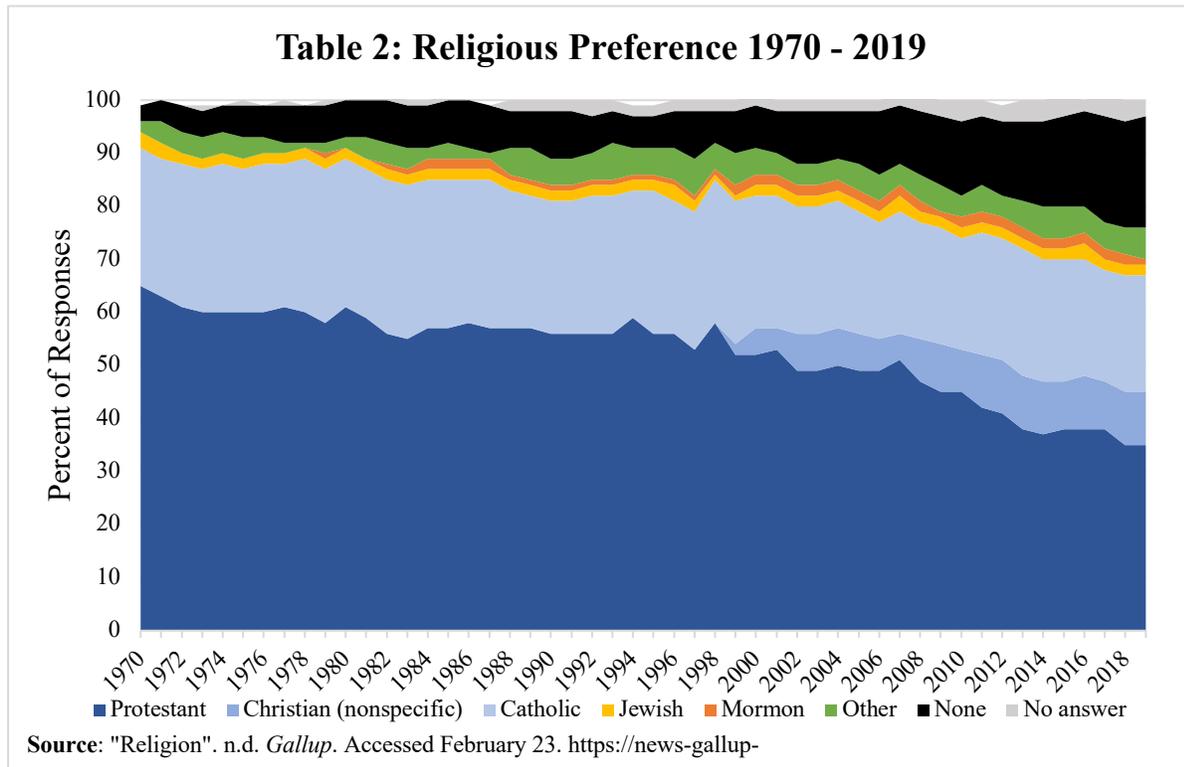
In the analysis section of the paper I will identify the key takeaways from all of the research outlined above. Given the religious makeup of America in 1976 and 2020, the way the campaigns use the candidates’ faith, and the way the candidate’s faith influences certain policy positions, I will assess what, if anything, can be learned through comparing the two candidates.

IV. Research

Section 1: America's Religious Makeup in 1976 and 2020

Before comparing the specific cases of Carter and Buttigieg it is important to explore the differences in the broader religious makeup of America in 1976 and in 2020. The first way I will do this is through Gallup polling data on Americans that goes from the 1970s to 2019. These results will provide the context in which the two case studies were operating in. The first question to examine is simply “Do you believe in God?”. Gallup asked this question in 1967 and a massive 98% of people said “Yes” they do believe in a God (“Religion” n.d.). Fifty years later, in 2017, Gallup asked the same question and this time only 87% answered “Yes” and 12% said “No” (“Religion” n.d.). Over the course of half a century there was an 11% decrease in those who believe in God (“Religion” n.d.). Zooming in a little further, Gallup has been asking Americans for their religious preference since the 1940s creating data on different types of faith in America. The chart below shows the evolution in answers to that question since 1970 with the

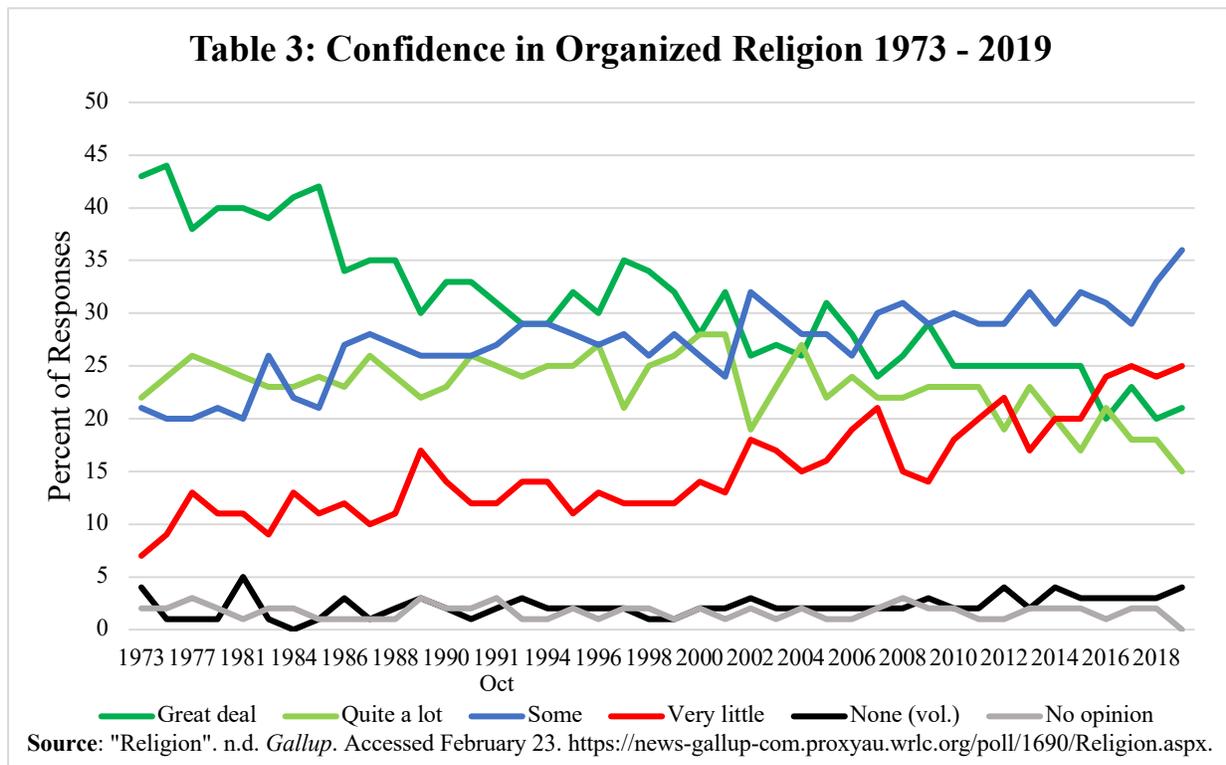
year on the year on the x-axis and response rate on the y-axis.



This reveals a notable decline in all branches of the Christian faith and a rise in those of no religion. In 1970 Protestants and Catholics made up 91% of Americans with only 3% saying that they had no religion (“Religion” n.d.). In 2019 Protestants, Catholics, and other Christians made up only 67% of Americans while the number of those who claimed no faith rose to 21% (“Religion” n.d.). Practically speaking, this means that Carter had more people that he was connecting with when he brought up his Christian faith in the 1970s than Buttigieg did in 2020. Religion, specifically Christianity, has declined since 1970.

Alongside the decline in religious Americans, there were also changes in how much confidence Americans have in organized religions. Since the 1970s Gallup has asked Americans how much confidence they have in organized religion, asking them to pick between a great deal, quite a lot, some, and very little (“Religion” n.d.). The graph below reveals the trend in how

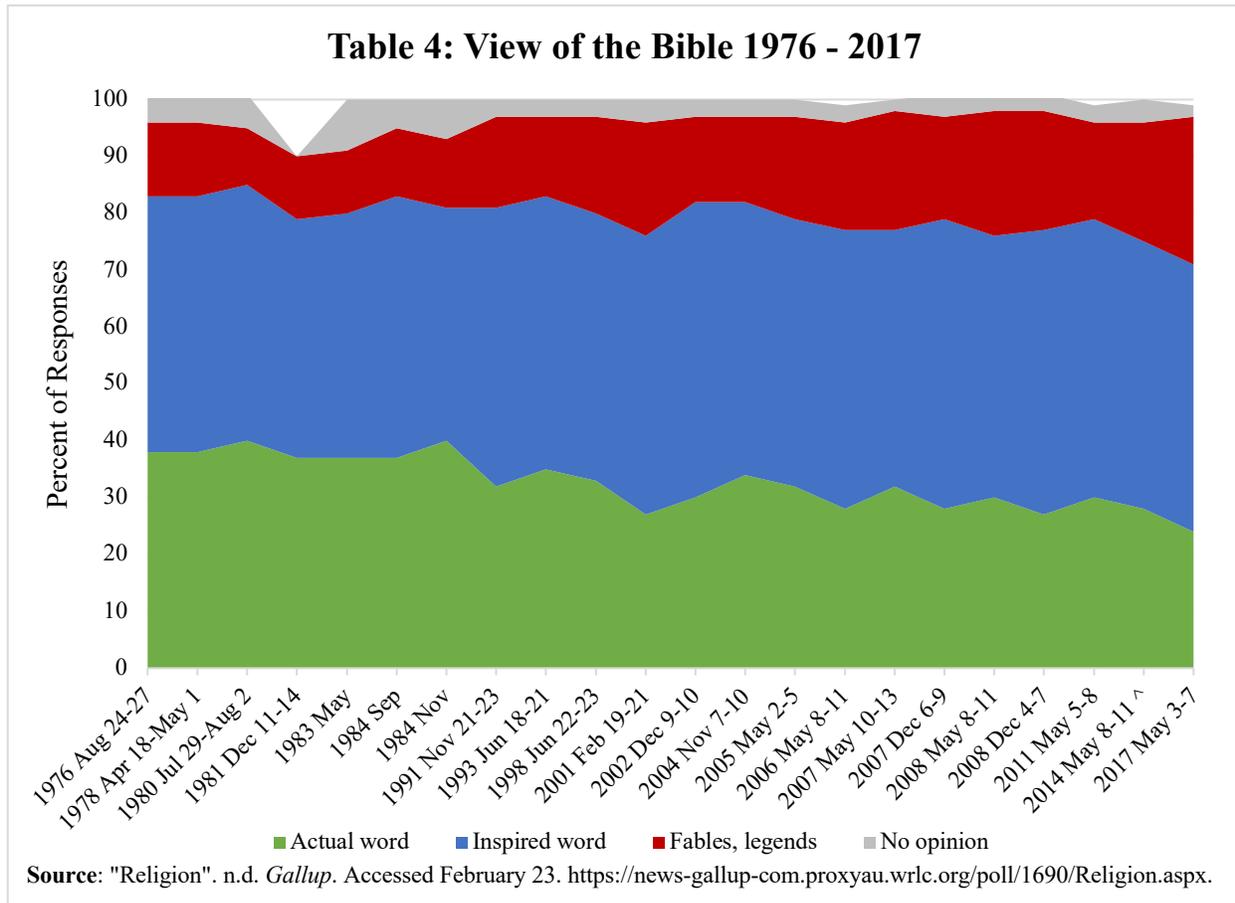
Americans feel about organized religion with the year on the x-axis and the response rate on the y-axis.



In 1973 65% of respondents had either “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in organized religion and only 7% had very little (“Religion” n.d.). In the forty-six years that would follow those numbers would change a lot. In 2019 only 36% of respondents had either “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in organized religion, a 29% decline (“Religion” n.d.). Those who have “very little” confidence in organized religion increased to 25% or by 18% in forty-six years (“Religion” n.d.). As fewer Americans believed in God or practiced Christianity or had any faith at all there was also a decline in confidence in organized religion.

Focusing in on Christianity, Gallup has asked Americans for decades what their view of the Bible is. They provided three different potential answers: (1) the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; (2) the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally; and (3) the Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends,

history, and moral precepts recorded by man (“Religion” n.d.). Below is a chart which shows the answers to this question from 1976 to 2017 with the year on the x-axis and response rate on the y-axis.



In 1976 when Carter was running for election 38% of Americans viewed the Bible as the actual word of God to be taken literally, 45% saw it as the inspired word of God not to be taken literally, and only 13% believe it was not the word of God (“Religion” n.d.). While those seeing the Bible as the inspired word of God not to be taken literally would only increase 2% to 47% in 2017 the other views would change in much more substantial ways (“Religion” n.d.). In 2017 24% of Americans viewed the Bible as the actual word of God to be taken literally, a 14% decrease over forty-one years (“Religion” n.d.). Those who view the Bible as not the word of God at all would double by 2017 going from 13% to 26% (“Religion” n.d.). Overall, the

religious makeup of America for Pete Buttigieg was not the same as the one that Jimmy Carter had, yet both democratic candidates made it a point to discuss their faith on the campaign trail.

In addition to the Gallup Poll data available on specific questions, comparing the elections of 1976 and 2016 can provide a sense of voter behavior and changes over time. Using the American National Election Studies' Time Series Cumulative Data File (1948-2016) I was able to compare how major religious groups voted in the 1976 and 2016 election. Variable VCF0704 is the vote for President based on Party for each year 1948-2016. Variable VCF0128 is made up of four major religion groups that have been asked since 1952: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Other/None. Below are the two tables that show the relationship between religious identity and vote choice in 1976 and 2016.

Table 5: Vote For President 1976

Candidate	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other and None
Carter	46.63	58.09	71.25	64.44
Ford	53.37	41.91	28.75	35.56

Source: "Time Series Cumulative Data File." 2019. *American National Election Studies*. Accessed March 2020, <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/anes-time-series-cumulative-data-file/>

Table 6: Vote For President 2016

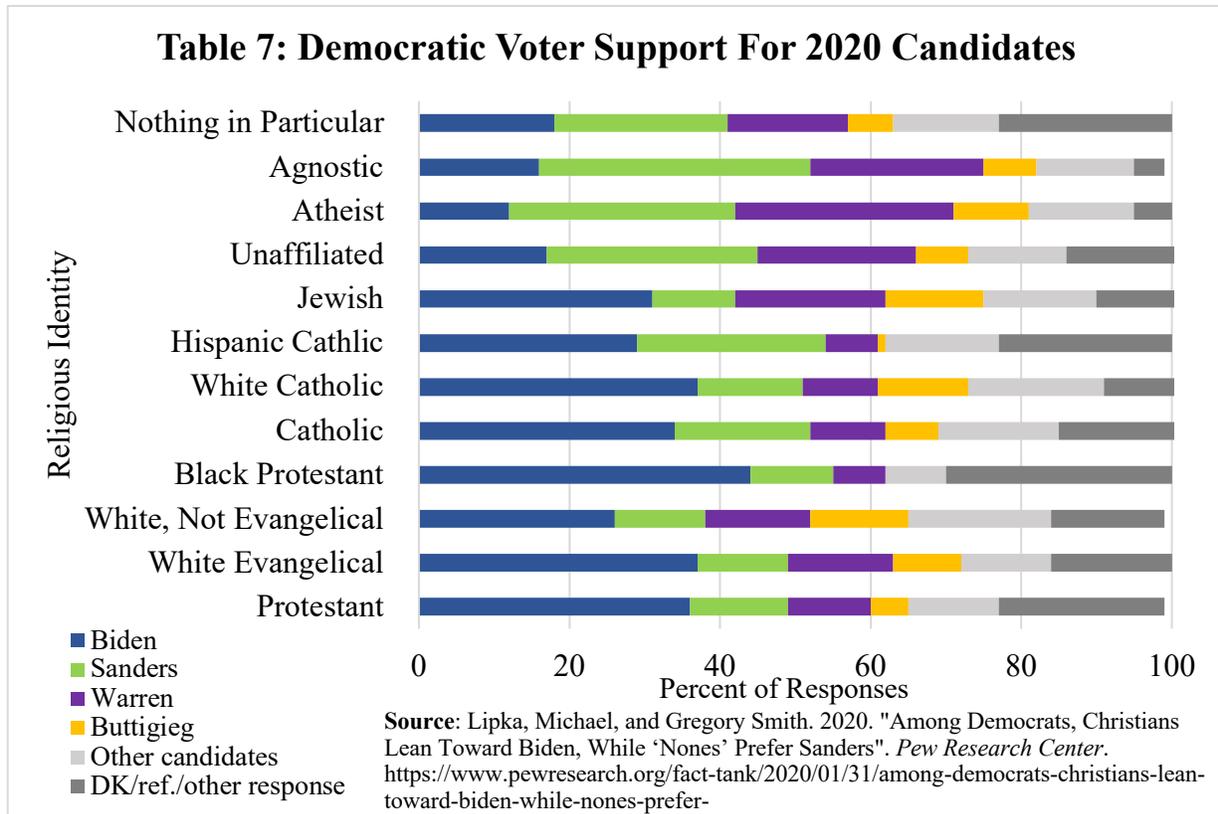
Candidate	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other and None
Clinton	43.19	51.79	77.66	67.55
Trump	56.81	48.21	22.34	32.45

Source: "Time Series Cumulative Data File." 2019. *American National Election Studies*. Accessed March 2020, <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/anes-time-series-cumulative-data-file/>

Based on the ANES data there was not a huge change in the relationship between religious preference and vote choice. There was about a 3% increase in Protestant voters supporting the Republican candidate in 2016 compared to 1976 ("Time Series..." 2019). There was a 7% increase in Catholics supporting the Republican candidate in 2016 compared to 1976 ("Time

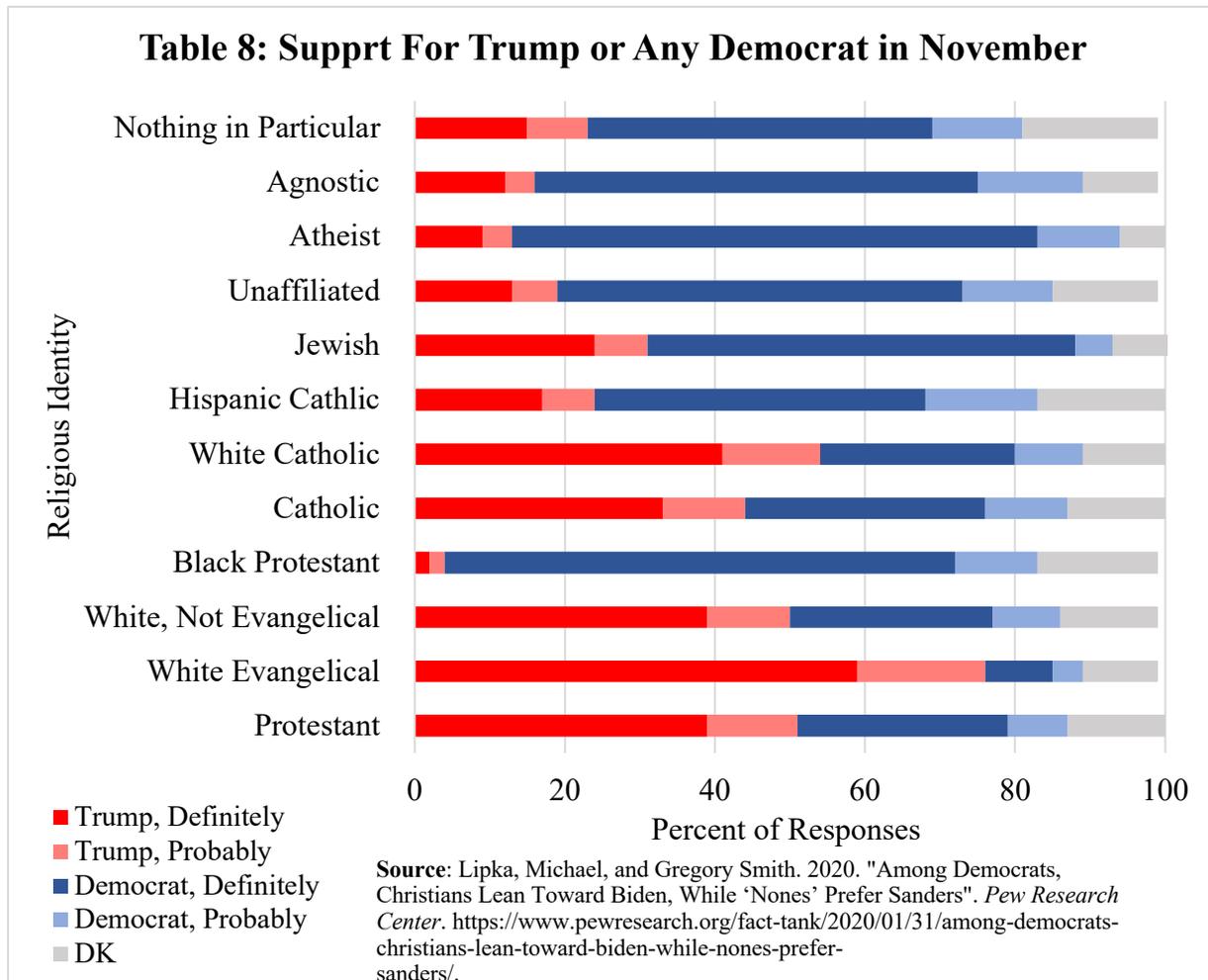
Series...” 2019). These tables also reveal that the Democratic candidate held a strong majority of the support from those of Jewish faith, other faiths, and no religion (“Time Series...” 2019). Protestant voters is the only faith that the Republican Party had a majority in either in 1976 or 2016. A potential explanation for the minimal change in support from Protestants between 1976 and 2020 is the range of views that fall into the Protestant category that ANES made for their Cumulative Timeseries Dataset. That Protestant category includes a range of denominations such as Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Baptist. These denominations have a wide range of beliefs that translate into different political activity. This data is still valuable because it provides a sense of where the basic religious traditions fall politically. Overall, this data provides a glimpse into what religious groups voted for which candidate in the 1976 and 2016 elections.

Finally, to round out the analysis of the status of Americans religion during the campaigns, Pew Research ran a poll in January of 2020 that revealed that status of different faiths support for candidates in the Democratic Primary (Lipka and Smith 2020). The following chart reveals how much support candidates were getting from different religions with religious identity on the y-axis and the percent of responses on the x-axis.



Those Democrats who identify with some religion generally supported Biden over other candidates (Lipka and Smith 2020). Sanders and Warren were doing best with those who were unaffiliated (Lipka and Smith 2020). Looking at Buttigieg’s results, he struggled both with people of faith and those of no faith at all (Lipka and Smith 2020). An important caveat to that is, at this point in January, Buttigieg was still working on gaining support overall and was about fourth in the polls as of January 2020 behind Biden, Sanders, and Warren (Lee et al. 2020). An interesting point to note now, to keep in mind for section four of the research, is that while Buttigieg had small numbers across the board, he had support from 1% of Hispanic Catholics and 0% of Black Protestants (Lipka and Smith 2020). Gaining support from minority communities is something that Buttigieg struggled with throughout his campaign as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *AP* all detailed (Scott 2019, Epstein 2019, and Beaumont 2020).

Beyond the specific candidates, Pew Research also gathered data on how Republicans and Democrats of faith and no faith at all might be voting in November. The chart below highlights what religious groups plan on supporting what party in fall, even without knowing who the democratic candidate will be with religious identity on the y-axis and the response rate on the x-axis.



This chart reveals multiple key points about where religion stands in the 2020 election. First, white evangelicals overwhelmingly plan on voting for Trump in November with 59% definitely planning to and 17% probably planning to (Lipka and Smith 2020). On the other hand, Black Protestants overwhelmingly plan on voting for the Democrat with 68% definitely planning to and

11% probably planning to (Lipka and Smith 2020). Catholics continue to be split between the Democratic and Republican nominee (Lipka and Smith 2020). About two thirds of Jewish voters are either definitely or probably voting for the democratic nominee (Lipka and Smith 2020). Finally, those who are unaffiliated, atheist, or agnostic are overwhelmingly set to vote for the Democratic nominee (Lipka and Smith 2020). This data provides the necessary background for what type of voters Buttigieg was likely to get as a Democrat.

All of this data leads to a few key conclusions about America's religious landscape in 1976 compared to 2020. Whether it is simply believing in God, Christianity in general, or organized religions overall, Americans became less religious between 1976 and 2020. These trends continued into 2020 as Pew Research revealed certain faiths clearly supporting either Democrats or Republicans. America's religious landscape has changed, but both Carter and Buttigieg talked about their faith on the campaign trail. The remainder of my research will examine the ways the campaigns and candidates utilized and discussed their faith on the campaign trail.

Section 2: The Role of the Candidate's Faith in Campaign Actions

Before focusing in on what the candidates say about their faith and how it influences policy, this section analyzes how the campaigns overall used their faith as part of the message. There are multiple great parallels between the Carter and Buttigieg campaigns that show them using the candidate's faith in a similar way. The first has to do with ads about the candidates. One of the most famous ads from Carter's run are the ones which read "J.C. Can Save America" (Swartz 2012, 216). During Carter's run for office the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Bailey Smith, "told a crowd of 15,000 that the nation needs 'a born-again man in

the White House ... and his initials are the same as our Lord's" (Swartz 2012, 216). This resulted in posters and buttons like the ones below being produced and handed out to supporters. Some posters even made Carter look like Jesus (Swartz 2012, 217).

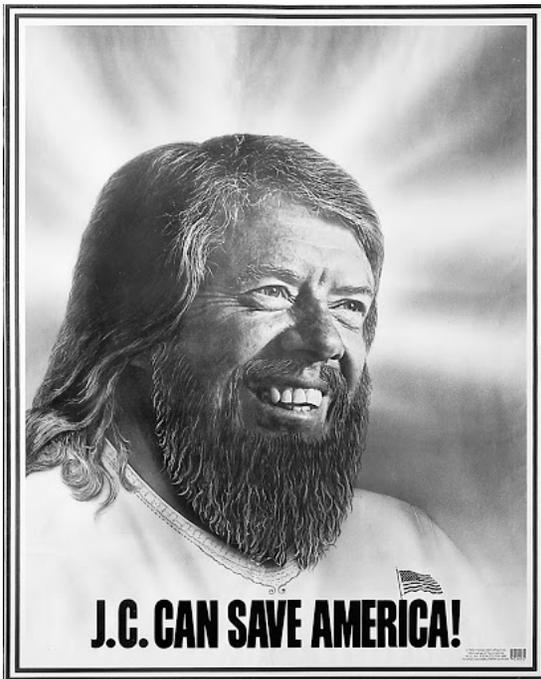


Image One: J.C. Can Save America Poster
(Swartz 2016)



Image Two: J.C. Can Save America Button
("J.C. Can Save America" n.d.)

These types of campaign ads had a huge impact on Carter's support. Through advertising his born-again faith, he brought evangelicals into the Democratic Party (Swartz 2012, 217). For many evangelicals, Carter was the first vote that they ever cast and the first campaign that they had participated in (Swartz 2012, 217-18). This ad and other efforts by the campaign to work in the candidate's faith, that I will note later, helped to create the idea that "God and Carter [were] working in concert" (Swartz 2012, 216). Ultimately, Carter would benefit from combining his faith and major campaign actions and Buttigieg would try something similar.

After winning in Iowa, a delegate tie in New Hampshire, and a third-place finish in Nevada, Pete Buttigieg turned his attention to the South Carolina primary. In an effort to reach out to religious voters in that state, he made a thirty-second ad spot where he discussed the need to unify the country (Smith 2019). The ad opens with him saying, “In our White House you won’t have to shake your head and ask yourself: whatever happened to ‘I was hungry and you fed me. I was a stranger and you welcomed me?’” (Smith 2019). This is nearly a direct quote from a parable that Jesus tells in the Gospel of Matthew that reads, “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt. 25:35, NRSV). While Buttigieg’s initials are not J.C., his campaign wanted to use his quoting of scripture as a way to help voters connect what Buttigieg was saying on the campaign trail to what the Bible says. In fact, this is not the only time that Buttigieg worked scripture into his overall campaign message. During a debate, which campaigns spend hours preparing candidates for, Buttigieg quoted scripture when discussing the minimum wage (Smith 2019). Buttigieg said, “so-called conservative Christian senators right now in the Senate are blocking a bill to raise the minimum wage, when scripture says, ‘Whoever oppresses the poor taunts their maker.’” (“Pete Buttigieg Quotes Scripture...” 2019). While Jimmy Carter’s campaign had “J.C. Can Save America” at their disposal, Buttigieg turned to quoting scripture to connect with Christian voters and tie the campaign message to the life and work of Jesus.

In addition to those ads, both campaigns tried to position themselves in a similar way to what had come before them. For Jimmy Carter, this meant that he was going to be the best person to come in after the moral failure that surrounded Nixon and the Watergate scandal (Miller 2014). Ads appeared in *Christianity Today* that encouraged Christians to vote for Carter to help fix the country (Swartz 2012, 216). One group called “Citizens for Carter” took out an ad

asking, “Does a Dedicated Evangelical Belong in the White House?” with the answer being “Yes!” (Swartz 2012, 216). The ad suggested that “the White House needs its windows ‘thrown open’ to clear out Washington’s smoke-filled rooms” (Swartz 2012, 216). The argument for Carter became that a vote for him would “help restore the fundamental principles this country was founded on” (Swartz 2012, 216). As a man of faith, Carter offered voters a fresh change of pace from the challenges the country faced under the Nixon presidency.

In 2020 Pete Buttigieg worked hard to put himself in that same position, as the solution to the corrupt state of the country under the previous administration. In a CNN Town Hall Buttigieg was asked if Mike Pence would be a better president than Trump (Merica 2019). In his response Buttigieg contrasted his view of scripture from Pence’s saying, “My understanding of scripture is that it’s about protecting the stranger and the prisoner and the poor person and that idea” (Merica 2019). Calling out Pence, Buttigieg then said, “How could he allow himself to become the cheerleader of the porn star presidency?” (Merica 2019). Similar to what Carter had done, if his campaign could frame the previous administration as a moral failure, as broken, then they could position their candidate as the solution. Buttigieg’s team did this again in an ad that came out in January of 2020 titled “Turn the Page, Together”. In that ad Buttigieg says,

I want you to picture what it is going to be like in this country the first day the sun comes up after Donald Trump has been president. This particular brand of chaos will be over, but really think about where we will be. Vulnerable, even more torn apart by politics than we are right now. With so much on the line I am asking you to join me to help turn the page on our politics. It is up to us in 2020, this is our chance, that is what this election is about. (*Turn the Page, Together* 2020).

Buttigieg’s campaign was trying to present him as the person who would be the answer to the challenges of the previous administration, that it was time to turn the page. Carter’s campaign worked to present him as the answer to the challenges the country had faced with the moral

failings of Nixon and Watergate. Through ads and statements like the ones noted above, Buttigieg's campaign worked to position him as the moral answer to the immoral and broken administration before him. These ads highlight some of the ways in which both Carter and Buttigieg's campaign worked to capitalize on the candidate's faith. As the next section will reveal, Carter and Buttigieg may have both been talking about faith but their faith would lead them in very different directions.

Section 3: The Role of the Candidate's Faith in Political Positions

A. Jimmy Carter & The Southern Baptist Convention in 1976

As Carter made talking about his Baptist faith a common practice, multiple newspapers worked to define what Southern Baptist meant, providing insight into what the tradition believed and how popular it was. Foy Valentine, executive secretary of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, notes that in 1976 there were 13 million members in more than 35,000 churches in all fifty states (Valentine 1976). The millions of Americans represented "rich and poor, rural and urban, educated and uneducated, Republicans and Democrats, black and white, even Northern and Southern" (Valentine 1976). All members of the faith confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are baptized "as a symbol of our own burial by the grace of God to the old life and sin and our resurrection to walk in newness of life" (Valentine 1976). In terms of the structure and traditions of the faith Clarence Dobson, a deacon at Jimmy Carter's Plains Baptist Church, notes that "'each Southern Baptist church stands on its own' [... and] even within each church, faith rests on what Baptists call the 'priesthood of the believer' rather than on any interpretations handed down by church fathers" (Robison, 1976). The idea of the "priesthood of all believers" means that "each individual is given the responsibility to read the Bible and

interpret it for himself [...] the Bible, personally interpreted within broad guidelines, is the only creed, and an educated layperson has equal claim with the minister in staking out his beliefs” (Boles, 1976). Religion editor for the Chicago Tribune in 1976, James Robison writes, “it is a religious group without hierarchy for formal creed. The common bond seems to be a highly personal belief in Jesus Christ” (Robison, 1976). Valentine reaffirms this view by writing that, “in a Baptist church, deacons can speak or act for themselves but they may not properly speak or act for the church [...] no Baptist speaks for another” (Valentine 1976). The Southern Baptist Convention had millions of members, of all backgrounds, who believed Jesus Christ was their Lord, and that each individual made the choice to follow their understanding of faith.

With the individual being center in the Baptist tradition, it is necessary to note how Carter talked about how the Baptist tradition impacted him personally. While running for President Jimmy Carter was a deacon at the Plains Baptist Church in Georgia (King Nov. 1, 1976), taught Sunday school every few weeks, and was a member of the Southern Baptist Convention (Scheer 1976). For Carter, an important aspect of the Baptist tradition was autonomy (Scheer 1976). The Baptist Church did not have “domination of [his] life” and each “Baptist church is individual and autonomous,” not dominated by the Southern Baptist Convention (Scheer 1976). He would pass this onto his family as, once his kids grew up and could make their own decisions, he let them decide to go to church or not (Scheer 1976). Carter used Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector from Luke 18:9-14 to speak about what the Baptist tradition had taught him about pride and humility. The Pharisee thanked God he was “not like other people” and thought of himself as righteous (Luke 18:9-12, NRSV). The tax collector “was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13, NRSV). Jesus said that that tax collector “went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will

be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 18:14, NRSV). Carter took this parable and applied it to broader beliefs within his Baptist tradition saying,

the thing that’s drummed into us all the time is not to be proud, not to be better than anyone else, not to look down on people but to make ourselves acceptable in God’s eyes through our own actions and recognize the simple truth that we’re saved by grace. It’s just a free gift through faith in Christ. This gives us a mechanism by which we can relate permanently to God (Scheer 1976).

These themes of autonomy and humility were at the core of how Carter viewed his Baptist faith and are central to understanding Carter’s view of the role of faith in government, and his positions on abortion and homosexuality.

Being a member of the Baptist faith and the Southern Baptist Convention specifically would help Carter in multiple ways while running for office. The obvious one that Carter points out, and is supported by the data above, is that many people in the country shared his beliefs (Scheer 1976). This allowed Carter to connect with many voters on a factor that was not strictly political and therefore reached people across the political spectrum. In an article for *The New York Times* titled, “Southern Jews, and Baptists, and Jimmy Carter,” Eli Evans notes the many ways this would benefit Carter. It helped Carter reach out to African American voters as Evans notes, “One of the real secrets of Mr. Carter’s appeal to blacks lies in his native ability to communicate in the idiom of the black church” (Evans 1976). It also allowed him to build traction with other faiths. This was seen when Carter combined his faith to his position on Israel when he said, “I think God wants the Jews to have a place to live” (Evans 1976). Hearing this and knowing Carter’s deeply religious background resulted in voters seeing real hope in Carter. On the topic of Israel one voter commented, “But Carter’s support for Israel is biblical. It’s deep. He doesn’t have to be convinced there ought to be a Jewish state. He knows that in his heart” (Evans 1976). Across race and religion, Carter’s religious language and background was

connecting with voters. As Carter gained popularity, people went beyond whether they agreed with him to consider how Carter could be used to further the ideas they believed in. Evans writes, “Perhaps the more vital issue for Jews and Catholics is [...] the profound impact of Carter on the 34,902 Southern Baptist congregations. Some leaders may endorse Ford, but to the mass of Baptists Carter is becoming something of a church folk hero” (Evans 1976). From this perspective Carter became someone who not only agreed with a voter but was a real potential source for growth. Not only did his faith help gain him support from people who shared his faith or ideas, it was seen as a potential way to get more people to have the same vision.

However, Carter’s connection to his church and the Southern Baptist convention proved to be a challenge at times. On Sunday October 31, 1976, just days before the election, Carter’s church ended up in the center of a scandal that made national headlines. The *New York Times* reported that Carter’s church “Locked its doors and refused to hold services [...] rather than admit four blacks in violation of a resolution passed in 1965 barring [African Americans] and ‘civil rights agitators’” (King Nov. 1, 1976). When asked about it while campaigning in Texas, Carter responded saying, “The only thing I know is that our church for many years has accepted any worshiper who came there and my own belief is that anyone who lives in our vicinity who wants to be a member of the church, regardless of race, ought to be admitted” (King Nov. 1, 1976). Carter’s opposition to his church’s decision resulted “in a temporary boycott of his peanut business by townspeople” (King Nov. 1, 1976). Carter would have this struggle continue through the election. It was not until fifteen days later, twelve days after becoming the President-elect, that the issue at his church was resolved. In fact, with everything else going on, Carter was still “instrumental in behind-the-scenes efforts” to have the church “drop its 11-year old ban on attendance by blacks” (King Nov. 15, 1976). While many voters saw Carter’s faith as a positive

thing, moments like the one on October 31st showed the potential dangers of Carter having such a deep connection to faith. As will be seen in his political positions later, this was not the only time his faith had the potential to cause a disconnect between him and the voters.

B. Pete Buttigieg & The Episcopal Church in 2020

When Pete Buttigieg talked about his Christian faith, he was referring to a different type of Christianity from Carter's Baptist tradition, the Episcopal Church. Pete Buttigieg attends services at St. James in South Bend, which was founded in 1868 and is the oldest Episcopal congregation in the city. The Episcopal Church is a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion with over 1.6 million members in over 6,400 parishes and missions in the US ("Episcopal Domestic Fast Facts..." 2018). The Episcopal Church is governed by the General Convention, which is made up of a "bicameral legislature that includes the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops, composed of deputies and bishops from each diocese" ("The General Convention of the Episcopal Church" n.d.). The Episcopal Church's mission is found "in the Book of Common Prayer's catechism (p.855) [...] 'to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ'" ("About Us" n.d.). Beyond that their mission includes "following Jesus into loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, with each other and with the earth as the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement" ("About Us" n.d.). There are three priorities within the Jesus Movement including, evangelism ("listen for Jesus' movement in our lives and in the world. Give thanks. Proclaim and celebrate it! Invite the Spirit to do the rest."), reconciliation ("embody the loving, liberating, life-giving way of Jesus with each other"), and creation care ("encounter and honor the face of God in creation") ("About Us" n.d.). These basic

tenants and structures of the Episcopal Church give an overview of the religious tradition to which Buttigieg belongs.

Buttigieg landing in the Episcopal Church was a long journey that he has spent the majority of his life working through and helps provide context for his understanding and approach to religion. He did not grow up in a religious family (Burke, 2019) and he “didn’t have a ‘Road to Damascus’ moment, he said, referring to the Apostle Paul’s sudden conversion in the Bible” (Bailey 2019). As a child he learned about Christianity through members of the University of Notre Dame where both his parents were professors (Burke, 2019). He grew up in Catholic schools where, according to Buttigieg’s memoir, he was “brought up not only to learn Church doctrine on matters like sexuality and abortion, but also to understand the history of the Church as a voice for the oppressed and downtrodden” (Burke, 2019). While at Harvard University, Buttigieg studied under Sacvan Bercovitch, “an esteemed scholar of American Puritans” and Buttigieg notes that he “began to understand the range of Christian traditions beyond the Catholicism [he] was steeped in at South Bend” (Burke, 2019). His faith journey significantly evolved while studying economics, politics, and analytic philosophy at the University of Oxford (Burke, 2019). Buttigieg says that,

The more versed I became in analytical philosophy, the more I became aware of the limits of what you can access through analysis and reason, [...] and I think that’s what opened up a personal spiritual search that led me to a lot of chapels and churches around Oxford. [...] I found myself going to services at Christ Church, which happened to be across from my college [...] and found in that very simple liturgy a way to begin to organize my spirituality (Burke, 2019).

Upon returning to the US, he would eventually find a place at St. James in South Bend where the Very Rev. Brian Grantz serves as the cathedral’s rector (Burke, 2019). The Very Rev. Brian Grantz notes that “we don’t hang a rainbow flag out front, but we have always been a safe place

for people who need it” (Burke, 2019). When “asked if the Episcopal Church’s welcome of LGBT Christians was a factor in his decision to attend St. James, Buttigieg said he isn’t sure” (Burke, 2019). About eight years later Pete would marry his husband Chasten Glezman at St. James (Burke, 2019). Summarizing his journey Buttigieg notes, “it took me a while to discover that there was a place for me in the Episcopal faith, which is liturgically conservative and theologically a little more open. And that’s where I realized that I sit too” (Morris 2019). This journey to finding a balance between the traditional and the progressive aspects of faith influence how Buttigieg sees a relationship between faith and government and his positions on abortion and homosexuality, which I will cover later.

Buttigieg also spoke about his approach to understanding scripture in his faith. His explanation came in response to the question, “what about this charge that progressive Christians get of being cafeteria Christians, of picking and choosing the issues, disregarding what the Bible [...] could be interpreted to say...?” (Morris 2019). His answer is long but provides valuable insight into his thought process for how he approaches his faith. He said,

I think for a lot of us – certainly for me – any encounter with Scripture includes some process of sorting out what connects you with the God versus what simply tells you about the morals of the times when it was written, right? For example, the proposition that you should execute your sister by stoning if she commits adultery. I don’t believe that that was right once upon a time, and then the New Testament came and it was gone. I believe it was always wrong, but it was considered right once, and that found its way into Scripture. And to me that’s not so much cherry-picking as just being serious, because of course there’s so many things in Scripture that are inconsistent internally, and you’ve got to decide what sense to make of it. Jesus speaks so often in hyperbole and parable, in mysterious code, that in my experience, there’s simply no way that a literal understanding of Scripture can fit into the Bible that I find in my hands (Morris 2019).

There are two main things to take away from what Buttigieg said for the purposes of this study.

First, Buttigieg believes there are “inconsistencies” in Scripture and what a reader needs to do is

separate the teaching about God from certain moral teachings. Second, Buttigieg does not see that a literal understanding of scripture is possible. That would put Buttigieg in the “inspired word of God” category that makes up a little less than half of Americans and not in the “actual word of God to be taken literally” category that comprises about a quarter of Americans (“Religion” n.d.). These two points about how Buttigieg approaches Scripture and his understanding of faith will be critical in understanding his approach to combining his faith with specific political positions.

Throughout the campaign Buttigieg was consistent with what he hoped his faith would bring. He told *The Washington Post* that “I think there’s an opportunity hopefully for religion to be not so much used as a cudgel but invoked as a way of calling us to higher values” (Bailey, 2019). Speaking specifically about the Democrats he said, “it’s unfortunate [the Democratic Party] has lost touch with a religious tradition that I think can help explain and relate our values. [...] At least in my interpretation, it helps to root [in religion] a lot of what it is we do believe in, when it comes to protecting the sick and the stranger and the poor, as well as skepticism of the wealthy and the powerful and the established” (Bailey, 2019). The desire to fold religion back into the Democratic Party through talking about his faith would be something that runs through many of his comments about faith. Instead of using his faith to put others down, Buttigieg wanted to do something else. He said, “to me what’s more interesting is the way in which religious or nonreligious ethical motivations can overlap. [...] Those are the areas I’m going to point to any time I mention a religious commitment of my own in the context of this campaign process” (Bailey, 2019). Through highlighting his own personal faith, Buttigieg was hoping to attract people of many backgrounds to his campaign and the Democratic Party. This will be

evident in how he sees the relationship between faith and government as well as his political positions.

C. Role of Faith and Government

When Jimmy Carter began talking about his faith during the 1976 campaign, it raised a lot of questions that were not always asked of candidates at the time. One of those significant questions was the relationship that Carter saw between his faith and the government. A *New York Times* article from April 11th, 1976 made this point clear with the title: “Carter’s Evangelism Putting Religion into Politics for First Time Since ‘60” (Briggs 1976). Just as Kennedy was forced to address how his Roman Catholic faith would impact his ability to lead the government, Carter was going to have to explain to the public how his Baptist faith would relate to his ability to govern. In an effort to explain his position he relied on the history and traditions that were rooted in his understanding of the Baptist faith. He said,

The reason the Baptist Church was formed in this country was because of our belief in absolute and total separation of church and state. These basic tenets make us almost unique. We don’t believe in any hierarchy in church. We don’t have bishops. Any officers chosen by the church are defined as servants, not bosses. They’re supposed to do the dirty work, make sure the church is clean and painted and that sort of thing. So it’s a very good, democratic structure (Scheer 1976).

From this perspective, his faith would not hinder his ability to govern the nation, and instead, based on long-standing tradition, would enhance the separation of church and state within the government. Foy Valentine reiterated this point in *The New York Times* noting that Baptists had “a commitment to separation of church and state as the surest guarantee of religious liberty” (Valentine 1976). This is a view that Carter mentioned on the campaign trail before the *Playboy* interview saying, “I’ve never tried to use my position as public official to promote my belief and

I never would” (Robison 1976). A key part of Carter’s response is its roots in the history of the Baptist faith. Robinson notes that the separation of church and state is “a commitment dating back to the 1600s when Baptists first emerged in England from the Puritan and Separatist strands of the Reformation, calling for freedom to interpret Scripture without governmental or ecclesiastical interference” (Robinson 1976). Carter worked hard to show that his faith would not be a hinderance to his ability to govern. Instead, he framed it as something that encouraged him to separate church and state.

While Carter reiterated the separation of church and state throughout his campaign, he was not going to give up his vision of morality. Robert Scheer would push him for clarification on this relationship asking: “You say morality can’t be legislated, yet you support certain laws because they preserve old moral standards. How do you reconcile the two positions?” (Scheer 1976). Carter answered the question in two parts providing his general principle and then referenced a theologian’s work on the topic. First, Carter said, “I believe people should honor civil laws. If there is a conflict between God’s law and civil law, we should honor God’s law. But we should be willing to accept civil punishment. Most of Christ’s original followers were killed because of their belief in Christ; they violated the civil law in following God’s law” (Scheer 1976). Through this answer Carter worked to show how individuals could hold true to their faith and live within a government system, always keeping God’s law first. He worked to clarify further in the second part of his answer saying, “Reinhold Niebuhr, a theologian who has dealt with this problem at length, says that the framework of law is a balancing of forces in a society; the law itself tends to alleviate tensions brought about by these forces. But the laws on the books are not a measure of this balance nearly as much as the degree to which the laws are enforced. So, when a law is anachronistic and is carried over from a previous age, it’s just not

observed” (Scheer 1976). In this part of his response Carter reveals how development and changes can occur overtime. Holding onto his vision for Christian morals while balancing it with civil laws was something Carter had confidence he would be able to do and, as I will note later, he argued he had a history of doing. Ultimately, Carter “found a way to reaffirm his religious beliefs while reassuring Jews and secular voters that a strong commitment to church-state separation was a central tenet of his Baptist faith” (Williams 2020, 207). Carter’s vision for the relationship between his vision for morals within the Baptist faith and the general relationship between church and state will be important when considering his positions on abortion and homosexuality.

Pete Buttigieg also answered questions about what the relationship between church and state should be and, while it will be seen later that they come to different policy conclusions, Carter and Buttigieg had a similar approach to church and state. Alex Morris asked Buttigieg what the relationship between faith and politics should be in an interview for *The Rolling Stone*. First, Buttigieg explained the relationship in general saying, “a very important American principle is that when you’re in the public role or making a policy, it has to be done in a way that serves people of any religion and people with no religion equally. But I think that doesn’t have to exclude religious reasoning or religious ethics from being part of how we form our own conscience and even what we bring into public life” (Morris 2019). This recognizes a government that works for everyone, while still keeping an individual’s ability to follow their own faith. While Carter pointed back to the Baptist tradition of separation of church and state, Buttigieg points to the “American principle” but both come to the same conclusion of a separation of church and state.

After that general note, Buttigieg also explains how to convince people that this vision for separation of church and state is best. He stresses being “transparent about our motivations” and appealing to religious values even if they are different from his. Buttigieg said, “You never want to trick somebody about where you’re coming from, but I can say, ‘Here’s my religious convictions. I know yours are different, but based on my reading of my own faith, here’s why I think this is important,’ or, ‘Based on what I understand of yours, here’s why you might want to consider this idea’” (Morris 2019). Buttigieg saw a separation between church and state, but not a state that was devoid of religion and had to avoid it. Overall, Carter and Buttigieg were not that far apart on their understanding of how religion should relate to government. Both believed that there should be a separation between church and state while not removing religion from the conversation. However, despite this general similarity, their faith would lead them to different conclusions on political positions for both abortion and homosexuality that would show simply looking at the relationship between church and state is not enough.

D. Position on Abortion

While *Roe v. Wade* had been decided just a few years prior to 1976, it will become clear that Carter did not want abortion to be a central topic of his campaign. That being said, Carter still discussed his views on it, his policy position, and it did have an impact on some voters. Carter made his personal view of abortion clear: he was against it. In an interview he said, “I think abortion is wrong and I will do everything I can as President to minimize the need for abortions – within the framework of the decision of the Supreme Court, which I can’t change” (Scheer 1976). He would translate this belief into policy positions that were not very progressive. He referenced his previous time in office saying, “Georgia had a more conservative approach to

abortion, which I personally favored, but the Supreme Court ruling suits me all right. I signed a Georgia law as governor that was compatible with the Supreme Court decision” (Scheer 1976). In his initial proposal for the Democratic Party platform he left the issue of abortion out of it altogether so that there was no formal stance on the issue. This was part of a larger strategy, as Williams notes, to avoid “nearly all the polarizing social issues that had damaged George McGovern’s campaign four years earlier, and instead it focused more narrowly on economic uplift and government management” (Williams 2020, 224). However, there was pushback within the Democratic Party about dropping the issue entirely (Williams 2020, 226). As a result, the Carter campaign settled on the following language for the platform:

We fully recognize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of abortion. We feel, however, that it is undesirable to attempt to amend the U.S. Constitution [to] overturn the Supreme Court decision in this area (Williams 2020, 226).

While the party would adopt this position, Carter continued to challenge it on the campaign trail. Williams notes that, “he objected to the platform’s opposition to an antiabortion constitutional amendment and would have preferred neutrality on the issue” (Williams 2020, 289). He told the *National Catholic News* that “My own position on abortion is much more conservative than the opinion expressed in the platform” (Williams 2020, 289-90). For a Democratic Party nominee, he had a notably conservative stance on abortion.

Carter’s position on abortion would cause him problems with voters on both sides of the issue. With public statements against abortion and a party platform saying something different “the Albany, New York, diocesan paper accused him of having a ‘forked tongue’” and his conservative stance on abortion “failed to raise his poll numbers among Catholics” (Williams 2020, 290). From the opposite direction, pro-choice Democrats in Congress were “alarmed” by what he was saying and “urged Carter not to make his position on abortion any more

conservative” (Williams 2020, 290). Carter even went as far as to say that “If a woman’s major purpose in life is to have unrestricted abortions, then she ought *not* to vote for me. But she wouldn’t have anyone to vote for” (Scheer 1976). While he may have been right in the moment, there was general concern that voters were going to see him as “a political opportunist because he seems to be trying to come down on all sides of the issue” (Williams 2020, 290). Carter took issue with this view, “he had always intended to take a somewhat neutral stance on an antiabortion constitutional amendment, not supporting it personally but taking no direct action to block it” (Williams 2020, 290). This general approach of personally believing something, but not forcing others to have the same position is representative of the Baptist tradition of allowing individuals to make a determination about their beliefs without interference or direction. Despite these challenges, Williams notes that “the conflict over abortion was the exception rather than the rule that year” for the Democratic Party (Williams 2020, 227). Carter certainly had to talk about it on the campaign trail, but Carter wanted the campaign to focus on other topics.

Pete Buttigieg worked faith into his answers on his policy stance on abortion but was careful not to declare what his view of the abortion itself was. The General Convention of the Episcopal Church has outlined a fairly inclusive position on abortion based on its reading of Scripture. The Church itself “teaches that ‘all human life is sacred. Hence, it is sacred from its inception until death’” (“Summary of General Convention...” 2019). From that perspective, “the Church has declared that ‘we emphatically oppose abortion as a means of birth control, family planning, sex selection, or any reason of mere convenience’” (“Summary of General Convention...” 2019). They go on to note that, in addition to that position, “since 1976, The Episcopal Church has maintained its ‘unequivocal opposition to any legislation on the part of the national or state governments which would abridge or deny the right of individuals to reach

informed decisions [about the termination of pregnancy] and to act upon them” (“Summary of General Convention...” 2019). The General Convention has also noted that “legislating abortions will not address the root of the problem” and any legislation “must take special care to see that the individual conscience is respected, and that the responsibility of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter is acknowledged and honored as the position of this Church” (“Summary of General Convention...” 2019). This is a broad position that allows multiple perspectives to exist within the church by being against abortion in very specific cases, while ultimately letting individuals make the decision. Pieces of this perspective will come through in Buttigieg’s comments on abortion that centered around the policy position that the government should take instead of the issue itself.

Buttigieg supported letting women make the decision on having an abortion in every possible case and worked to move the conversation from when life begins to who gets to choose. Abortion came up in two revealing ways during Buttigieg’s campaign. One showed his desire to change the conversation around abortion. The second showed what that meant for voters and the democratic party. Focusing first on his desire to change the conversation, Buttigieg discussed abortion in a radio interview saying,

Now, right now, [Republicans] hold everybody in line with this one kind of piece of doctrine about abortion, right, which is obviously a tough issue for a lot of people to think through morally. Then again, you know, there’s a lot of parts of the Bible that talk about how life begins with breath, and so even that is something that we can interpret differently. No matter what you think about the kind of cosmic question of where life begins, most Americans can get on board with the idea of, alright, I might draw the line here, you might draw the line there, but the most important thing is the person who should be drawing the line is the woman making the decision (Douthat 2019).

His two points here, that people will interpret Scripture in different ways and moving the question to who gets to make the decision, set off a media firestorm on the right. *Real Clear*

Politics wrote, “Make No Mistake: Buttigieg Is an Abortion Extremist” (McGuire 2020), *The Federalist* claimed that “Pete Buttigieg Cites Religion to Defend Late-Term Abortion of Disabled Children” (Zempel 2020), and *The Washington Examiner* declared that “Mayor Pete’s position on late-term abortion is based on a lie” (Mettler 2020). Ultimately, what Buttigieg’s position allowed him to do is not declare a formal position for himself on the abortion itself, but instead move it to allowing women to make the decision for themselves. These comments stuck with Buttigieg and Meghan McCain pushed Buttigieg to clarify his statements on *The View* (“Pete Buttigieg Explains Why...” 2020). Below is a transcript of the discussion between the two which shows Buttigieg’s commitment to not answering where he stands on the question of the abortion itself and instead trying to change the way the discussion is held:

Meghan McCain: “I saw an interview you did on a radio show about abortion. I think this got a lot of play in conservative media, conservative circles, where you were talking about and this is your quote, ‘there’s a lot of parts of the Bible that talk about how life begins with breath, and so even that is something that we can interpret differently.’ It obviously, in my circles, was passed around everywhere because I think the interpretation from pro-life people like me was that you meant a baby actually being born and possible, you know there is a lot of controversy with Governor Northam, and what it means and what time a woman should be able to have an abortion. I just wanted you to clarify because I found that statement to be pretty radical.”

Pete Buttigieg: “Well, I am just pointing to the fact that different people will interpret their own moral lights and for that matter interpret scripture differently but we live in a country where it is extremely important that no one person have to be subjected to some other person’s interpretation of their own religion. I know we are not going to agree on everything...”

Meghan McCain [over Buttigieg]: I think partial birth abortion is something that was coming up in, like I said Governor Northam, it was a huge controversy when he was running for governor and I think people even Democrats, and there are a lot of pro-life Democrats in the country, want to know exactly where your line is because you will be the President if you win.”

Pete Buttigieg: “Right, but my point is that it shouldn’t be up to a government official to draw the line, it should be up to the woman who’s confronted with the choice.” [*applause*]

Meghan McCain: “So if a woman wanted to, I don’t know, invoke infanticide after a baby was born you would be comfortable”

Pete Buttigieg [over McCain]: “But does anybody seriously think that’s what these cases are about? Think about the situation, if this is a late term situation then by definition it’s one where a woman was expecting to carry the pregnancy to term and then she gets the most perhaps devastating news of her life. We are talking about families that may have picked out a name, maybe assembling a crib, and they learn something excruciating and are faced with this terrible choice and I don’t know what to tell them, morally, about what they should do. I just know that I trust her and her decision medically or morally isn’t going to be any better because the government is commanding her to do it in a certain way.” [*applause*]

Meghan McCain: “I respect what you’re saying because you didn’t back down from it. This is gonna hurt you in the middle of the country with the Republicans you are trying to win over. People like me, this is a hard line and quite frankly that question, that answer is just pretty radical, you’re just as radical as I thought it was” (“Pete Buttigieg Explains Why...” 2020).

Buttigieg did not take a formal position on where he personally draws the line for when an abortion is acceptable and, as a result, appears to be okay with a woman making a decision to terminate her pregnancy at any point. He was committed to deferring to the woman’s own moral and medical decision. While Buttigieg appears to make it seem that his position on not letting the government decide is one that would get him widespread support, it was alienating to many voters.

Buttigieg’s position on abortion eliminated support from pro-life individuals, either Republican or Democrat, from his campaign and even the Democratic Party as he would essentially tell a voter during a town hall. Below are key sections of the exchange that reveal

Buttigieg’s understanding of the party, the voters he is looking for, and the implications of his position on abortion for pro-life voters (“Town Hall with Pete Buttigieg - Part 3” 2020):

Kristen Day, a pro-life Democrat, asked Buttigieg a two-part question: “Do you want the support of pro-life Democratic voters like me, there are about 21 million of us. If so, would you support a more moderate platform language in the Democratic Party to ensure that the party of diversity and inclusion really does include everybody?”

Pete Buttigieg: “I respect where you are coming from and I hope to earn your vote, but I am not going to try to earn your vote by tricking you. I am pro-choice and I believe that a woman ought to be able to make that decision. [*applause*] But I know that the difference of opinion that you and I have is one that we have come by honestly and the best that I can offer and it may win your vote and if not I understand, the best I can offer is that if we can’t agree on where to draw the line the next best thing that we can do is agree on who should draw the line and in my view it is the woman who is faced with that decision in her own life.”

Chris Wallace: “[...] I’m curious Kristen were you satisfied with the answer you got from the mayor.”

Kristen Day: “No I was not satisfied because he did not answer the second part of my question and the second part was the Democratic platform contains language that basically says that we don’t belong we have no part in the party because it says abortion should be legal up to nine months, the government should pay for it, and there’s nothing that says that people have a diversity of views on this issue should be included in the party. In 1996 and several years after that there was a language in the Democratic platform that said that we understand that people have very differing views on this issue but we are a big tent party that includes everybody and so therefore we welcome you, people like me, into the party so that we can work on issues that we agree on. Would you be open to language like that in the Democratic platform...?”

Pete Buttigieg: “I support the position of my party that this kind of medical care needs to be available to everyone and I support the *Roe vs. Wade* framework that holds that early in pregnancy there are very few restrictions and late in pregnancy there are very few exceptions. Again, the best I can offer is we may disagree on that very important issue and hopefully we will be able to partner on other issues” (“Town Hall with Pete Buttigieg - Part 3” 2020).

While Buttigieg hoped to get support from pro-life Democrats because of other issues, he was not willing to expand the Democratic Party's position on abortion in order to make that a reality. Carter was very concerned about the language of his party platform in 1976 on the topic of abortion and was able to lead the party even though he had a more conservative view than the party did. The Episcopal Church also recognized that there would be a range of views within their own churches. However, Buttigieg was committed to his position that a woman should be in charge of if and when they have an abortion, even if that was going to cost him voters. While Buttigieg's desire to incorporate many views through pushing the issue towards who makes the choice would work well with pro-choice Democrats, Buttigieg would end up alienating pro-life voters like Kristen Day.

E. Position on Homosexuality

In 1976 Jimmy Carter believed that his faith considered homosexuality to be a sin but was careful not to single it out. He did this by listing homosexuality as just one of many sins that a person may commit saying, "for us to hate one another, for us to have sexual intercourse outside marriage, for us to engage in homosexual activities, for us to steal, for us to lie – all these are sins" (Scheer 1976). Additionally, when discussing homosexuality, he pointed back to other aspects of his faith that were connected to this topic. He said that, "Jesus teaches us not to judge other people. We don't assume the role of judge and say to another human being, 'You're condemned because you commit sins.' All Christians, all of us, acknowledge that we are sinful and the judgement comes from God, not from another human being" (Scheer 1976). He even went as far as discussing his own sexuality immorality saying, "Christ said, 'I tell you that anyone who looks on a woman with lust has in his heart already committed adultery.' I've

looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times. [...] that doesn't mean that I condemn someone who not only looks on a woman with lust but who leaves his wife and shacks up with somebody out of wedlock" (Scheer 1976). For Carter, homosexuality was a sin, but he did not intend to treat it differently than any other sin that any person in the world may commit.

His personal position led him to relax some laws and take a more open stance on the issue at times. He pointed to his time as governor of Georgia as proof of this translating to policy as he "tried to shift the emphasis of law enforcement away from victimless crimes" (Scheer 1976). He would go on to say that, "Almost every state in the Union has laws against adultery and many of them have laws against homosexuality and sodomy. But they're often considered by police officers as not worthy of enforcing to the extent of disturbing consenting adults or breaking into a person's private home" (Scheer 1976). At a campaign stop in San Francisco "Carter had said he supported adding 'sexual persuasion' (today, the term would be 'sexual orientation') to the categories enumerated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, thus protecting gays from discrimination" (Williams 2020, 291-92). His position on homosexuality is summarized by saying, "he supported expanded legal protections, even though he had personal reservations about the sexual behavior in question" (Williams 2020, 292).

The topic of homosexuality would have little impact on Carter's 1976 campaign overall. The position that he took on homosexuality was similar to abortion and "the media were much more interested in covering the politically charged issue of abortion than gay rights, which was considered a narrowly focused, regionally specific issue" (Williams 2020, 292). Additionally, abortion was a topic that fought its way into the Democratic Party platform even if Carter took a more conservative position. Gay rights were a different story. Carter did not add it to the

platform that he proposed in 1976. When the Platform Committee considered the issue, it was one of many “cultural flash points” that they “avoided involvement in” (Williams 2020, 227). Williams notes that the committee “ignored the seven hundred gay rights demonstrators who lobbied for platform language supporting their cause” (Williams 2020, 227). Carter was able to take a somewhat inclusive policy position while holding conservative values that would identify with a range of voters, but the topic was not critical. That would be a different story in 2020 as Carter’s conservative personal view would not fit in as easily with a Democratic Party and legal system that has changed its attitude towards homosexuality.

Pete Buttigieg did not believe that his homosexual identity was a sin and saw no reason his faith would prevent him from getting married to his husband Chasten. He spoke against those who used their faith as a basis for anti-LGBTQ positions, such as Mike Pence, saying that “if you have a problem with who I am, your problem is not with me. Your quarrel, sir, is with my creator” (Graves-Fitzsimmons 2020). In a debate in November of 2019 he connected his faith and sexuality to “all forms of oppression” by saying,

I care about this because my faith teaches me that salvation has to do with how I make myself useful to those who have been excluded, marginalized, and cast aside and oppressed in society. Wearing this wedding ring in a way that couldn’t have happened two elections ago lets me know just how deep my obligation is to help those whose rights are on the line every day, even if they are nothing like me in their experience (Graves-Fitzsimmons 2020).

It is clear that Buttigieg did not fear connecting his faith to his sexuality and instead embraced it, showing how it framed his vision for other issues that he cares about. The Episcopal Church is behind him in his religious position. In 2015, a few days after the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples could legally be married, the “General Convention voted to amend the canons of The Episcopal Church that regulate marriage, permitting any couple the rite of Holy

Matrimony” (“LGBTQ in the Church...” n.d.). Additionally, the General Convention “also called for a name-change rite to honor an important moment in the lives of anyone claiming their true identity” (“LGBTQ in the Church...” n.d.). In general, “The Episcopal Church warmly welcomes our LGBTQ siblings” with some congregations “actively involved in LGBTQ ministry” (“LGBTQ in the Church...” n.d.). Pete Buttigieg did not see homosexuality as a sin and believed that living out his identity, getting married, brought him closer to God and impacted how he saw other issues.

This understanding of faith and homosexuality would influence how Buttigieg approached certain legal issues. During a CNN town hall Buttigieg discussed how he understood religious freedom and its impact on federal funding, adoption agencies, and colleges. An audience member at the town hall talked about a waiver that was granted by a governor “for faith-based foster and adoption programs that accept federal funding [...] to reject prospective parents if their sexual orientation or gender identity doesn’t align with the group’s religious values” (Bannister 2020). Buttigieg responded by saying that “I believe that federal funding should never be used to discriminate” (Bannister 2020). He then added to that saying, “like any other freedom, [religious] freedom ends where you begin to invoke it to harm other people. Just as the freedom of speech, or any other freedom, is constrained by that” (Bannister 2020). After taking that position, the CNN moderator asked a follow-up asking if Buttigieg believed that “other religious and non-profit institutions like colleges and homeless charities should lose federal funding if they refuse to hire and serve LGBTQ people” (Bannister 2020). Buttigieg responded by saying, “Yes, if they are discriminating then they should not be doing it with federal dollars” (Bannister 2020). Buttigieg supported policies that would work as a check on religious freedom so that the LGBTQ community was not discriminated against.

Combining faith and sexuality the way that Buttigieg did on the campaign connected with many voters but was also something that concerned voters. Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, a fellow at the Center for American Progress, noted that “what Pete did is show someone who is confidently secure in his marriage, active in his Episcopalian church and speaks eloquently about being a person of faith” (Bailey 2020). The positive impact on voters was seen in many headlines including *The Washington Post*’s article: “Buttigieg’s candidacy made being openly gay and Christian normal, LGBT activists say” (Bailey 2020) and personal pieces in *Vox* “Pete Buttigieg’s candidacy meant a lot to LGBT Christians like me” (Graves-Fitzsimmons 2020) and in *Independent* “As a Gay Christian, I’m so glad to see Pete Buttigieg reclaiming religion from the far right” (Baker-Jordan 2020). However, the reception was not the same from many conservative voters. Robert George, a professor at Princeton University, noted that “Pete Buttigieg identifying as gay was less troubling to social conservatives than his policy proposals” (Bailey 2020). George referenced Buttigieg’s suggestion that “religious institutions such as colleges should not be able to admit or hire according to their traditional religious standards” as one of those policy concerns (Bailey 2020). A pastor in San Diego noted a similar thing saying that “some conservatives were less inclined to be critical, in part because they knew that criticisms could backfire and become directed toward the personal life of President Trump” (Bailey 2020). Both of these points show conservatives who were unwilling to support Buttigieg as a result of his understanding of faith and sexuality and its impact on policy. While these sources note policy over personal issues, there were certainly voters who did not want to vote for him simply because of his sexuality. For example, one Iowa caucus voter asked to get her vote for Buttigieg back after she discovered he was gay (Fitzsimons 2020). While Buttigieg would

struggle to get support from some voters because of his position on sexuality, for many voters, it was incredibly meaningful and a positive thing.

Section 4: Results of Carter and Buttigieg's Primaries

A. Primary Comparison – Additional Points of Comparison

Before reviewing the results from the early primary contests that Carter and Buttigieg participated in, it is beneficial to note some of the ways that the candidates faced similar a struggle in the primary. Carter and Buttigieg had three main hurdles that they both had to overcome. The first was the size of their primary field. Gillian Brockell wrote an article in *The Washington Post* titled “The last time the Democratic field was so crowded, a peanut farmer won the White House” (Brockell 2019). Carter would face seventeen candidates over the course of the primary and who was in the race “was remarkably fluid right up until the last primary” (Brockell 2019). Carter was up against everyone from Morris Udall, who “came from a famous political dynasty” with four generations of service in offices to “antiabortion ‘housewife’ Ellen McCormack” (Brockell 2019). Pete Buttigieg’s primary crowd would also feature a large number of candidates with a range of political experience. As of April 12th, there is only one Democratic candidate left for President in what was a field of twenty-eight total candidates (Burns, et. al 2020). Pete Buttigieg was up against candidates ranging from Elizabeth Warren and Joe Biden, both with a long history of holding public office to Marianne Williamson, a self-help author and new age lecturer (Burns, et. al 2020). While the elections were decades apart, both Carter and Buttigieg had to overcome a record number of people in their battle to get the nomination.

The second shared trait of both Carter and Buttigieg's primary runs was the fact they were both relatively unknown going into the primary. Brockell notes that Carter "was so unknown that a Gallup poll that asked voters for their impressions of 31 possible candidates didn't even have Carter on the list" (Brockell 2019). Once he got in the campaign his internal polling numbers were not much better. After five months on the campaign trail, he was only polling 3% nationally (Williams 2020, 65). The unknown peanut farmer and governor from Georgia had a lot of work to do to get his name out there. Pete Buttigieg would face similar challenges when he first got in. As a mayor of South Bend, Indiana, he had certainly not developed nationwide recognition and when he launched his campaign, it was really just him and "Schmuhl, his high school buddy turned campaign manager, and Lis Smith, a New York operative who helped Buttigieg run his long-shot campaign for DNC chair" (Alter 2019). Getting his name out there would also prove to be a challenge because no one could pronounce "Buttigieg" (Lyll 2020). The campaign would end up printing "BOOT-edge-edge" T-shirts just so that people could learn the candidate's name, never mind his policy positions. He would poll less than 10% until November of 2019 (Lee et. al 2020). While they would have different results in the end, both had to start from behind as the country did not know who they were.

Both Carter and Buttigieg would also face challenges from their left in their very crowded primary fields. Carter faced attacks of not being liberal enough on many occasions. The first clear one would come following Carter's win in New Hampshire (Williams 2020, 148). One of his competitors, Bayh, held a press conference and said, "that Carter 'stands for the wrong things'" (Williams 2020, 148-49). Candidates claimed, "I believe in the principles of the Democratic Party and unfortunately Governor Carter has been found wanting [on them]" (Williams 2020, 149). If Carter was going to win, he was going to have to outlast attacks from

the left claiming he was not enough of a Democrat. Buttigieg would face similar challenges at times. One moment Buttigieg was challenged as not being in line with the Democratic Party's vision was during a debate over the issue of donor support. Warren called out Buttigieg for hosting a fundraiser in a wine cave with crystal and \$900 bottles of wine ("Democratic debate: Warren..." 2019). He came back with the comment he was the only one who was not a millionaire or billionaire running in the party, but the wine cave would stick with him ("Democratic debate: Warren..." 2019). He would also face challenges on healthcare as some in the party called for Medicare for all, he proposed "Medicare for all who want it" ("Just The Right Policy'..." 2019). While their primaries were happening decades apart from each other, Buttigieg and Carter would face similar hurdles to achieving the nomination.

B. Primary Comparison – Who Won What

Buttigieg was in the race for a total of four state contests: Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina. He came in first in the Iowa caucuses, just narrowly beating out Bernie Sanders in the final count ("Iowa Caucus Results..." 2020). Polls showed a close race between Biden, Buttigieg, Sanders, and Warren headed into the contest ("Iowa Caucus Results..." 2020). The caucuses had major technical challenges and results did not come in that night but Buttigieg still declared victory headed into New Hampshire, just not in the way he had hoped (Stewart and Nilsen 2020). Sanders would win the vote in New Hampshire, but Buttigieg and Sanders shared the same number of delegates following that contest ("New Hampshire..." 2020). Slipping further, Buttigieg came in a very distant third in the Nevada caucuses, only getting three delegates and 14.3% of the vote to Sanders' 24 delegates and 46.8% ("Nevada Caucuses..." 2020). The final contest Buttigieg participated in was South Carolina. He came in fourth place

with only 8.2% of the vote and zero delegates, compared to Biden's 38 delegates and 48.7% of the vote ("South Carolina..." 2020). Following this loss, Buttigieg ended his campaign, one that, for many reasons, "was, frankly, more successful than anyone first expected it to be" (Beauchamp 2020). After months of fundraising, shaking hands, debating, giving speeches, and everything else that goes along with a campaign, Buttigieg would fail to become the Democratic Party's nominee in 2020.

Carter's primary campaign experienced significantly different results from Buttigieg's as he would win the nomination and eventually the presidency. In the first contest, Iowa, he would secure a version of a win, "beat[ing] his rivals, but 'uncommitted' got the most votes" (Brockell 2019). This would be big for the campaign though as he was such an unknown going into the first contest. He would go on to win in New Hampshire, building momentum (Brockell 2019). However, he would then come in fourth in Massachusetts, hurting the momentum he worked so hard to build but not pushing him out of the race (Brockell 2019). As the primary contest progressed, candidates dropped out and got into the race throughout the contest resulting in Carter having the most delegates, but still not enough to secure the nomination (Brockell 2019). A month before the convention, two people running against Carter, Wallace and Jackson, dropped out of the race and gave their delegates to Carter, securing him the Democratic Party nomination for president in 1976. In the general election Carter would win 50.1% of the popular vote and 297 Electoral College votes, while Ford only received 48% of the popular vote and 240 Electoral College votes (Williams 2020, 345). The unknown former peanut farmer and governor from Georgia had won the presidency.

V. Analysis

Carter's campaign in 1976 and Buttigieg's campaign in 2020 hold many similarities and some important differences as two Christians sought to bring their faith into the Democratic Party. Religion is in no way the only thing that contributed to either Carter's win or Buttigieg's eventual dropping out of the race. There are many factors that contribute to a campaign including age and strength of challengers that likely had an impact. The 2020 election is still undecided at the time of writing this. I am not seeking to declare what Buttigieg needed to do to win the election. Instead, the results are included to give the reader a more complete picture of the 1976 and 2020 primaries. It will be for future researchers to fully unpack the specifics of what made Buttigieg lose.

The comparison of Jimmy Carter's campaign and Pete Buttigieg's campaign does result in five important conclusions. The first is that America's religious identity is changing. Religion in America was very different as a backdrop for the religious campaigns of Carter in 1976 and Buttigieg in 2020. More Americans are identifying with no religion at all, confidence in organized religion has plummeted, and twice as many people view the Bible as not the word of God today than when Carter ran in 1976 ("Religion" n.d.). Christians will likely be concerned about this, but how religions should respond to this new reality is the subject of a different essay. At the moment there is potential for change in this area as it remains to be seen how COVID-19 will impact both the 2020 election and religion in America. An article in *The Wall Street Journal* titled, "A Coronavirus Great Awakening?" discusses how the pandemic could lead to a religious revival in America (Nicholson 2020). For campaigns, this creates the reality that candidates who focus on their religion are going to connect with fewer voters today because religion is losing prominence in the lives of many Americans. As candidates continue to explore talking about

their own faith on the campaign trail, it will be important to understand who in America the candidate is hoping to connect with. Buttigieg talked about his faith on the campaign trail in 2020, will that prove to be the standard or the exception in future elections?

The second key takeaway is a similarity between the two candidates: their commitment to faith and how it led them to value a separation of church and state. Being a person of faith does not mean that the individual wants to force their faith upon others. A key tenant of Carter's Baptist tradition was the separation of church and state and individual autonomy, both things that Carter held onto. Buttigieg also spoke about a clear separation of church and state. Both deeply religious men were holding true to their understanding of the Christian faith while advocating for a separation of church and state. As candidates consider what it means to work their faith into a less religious America it may be beneficial for them to highlight this aspect of religious traditions.

The third point is that committed Christians will not come to the same conclusions and that will have an impact on the connections that a religious candidate can make with voters. Carter's faith would lead him to personally be against both abortion and homosexuality. However, his policy position left some room for not necessarily imposing his strict conservative view onto everyone. Buttigieg's Episcopal faith would lead him to be pro-choice and supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. Both his policies and faith tradition are more open than Carter's were in 1976. The diversity of denominations within the Christian faith will allow for a range of policy positions within the broad Christian faith. This means that a candidate discussing separation of church and state or simply being a Christian in general may not be enough to connect with religious voters. Voters will want to understand the candidate's policy positions and how they connect to their faith. Buttigieg's faith led him to certain stances on abortion and

homosexuality that would not connect with many conservative Christian voters. Not only do Christian presidential candidates need to consider how to use faith in a less religious America, they have to take into account the diversity within the Christian faith and that certain policy positions may connect or alienate them from voters.

The fourth point is one that Daniel Williams highlights, and comes through in this research, and that is the change in what conservative voters are looking for. Williams notes that, “in 1976 most evangelicals cared more about a presidential candidate’s personal faith and ethical behavior than his policy positions...” (Williams 2020, 205). This allowed Carter to get a lot of support through basing his campaign “on his moral character” (Williams 2020, 41). As was seen on both the issues of abortion and homosexuality, Carter’s policy stances were not necessarily clear, but voters were focused on who he was more, so it was okay. Buttigieg would face voters with different concerns. As noted earlier, leaders such as Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed in the 80s and 90s put a focus on family values which morphed into “values voters” following the 2004 election (Thomson-DeVeaux 2017). The strong support of Trump among the evangelical community shows just how much the focus has shifted from the moral character of the candidate to the candidate’s ability to deliver on certain policy issues, a point that I noted Robert George and a pastor made in 2020. Buttigieg would not shy away from talking about his faith which voters may be able to relate with on a basic level, but voters are worried about the policy that results from having faith. This reality was seen in the push back that Buttigieg saw from some voters as a result of his positions on abortion and homosexuality. Going forward, it will be important to see how a candidate’s individual faith is weighed against their policy positions. At the moment it appears campaigns are better off by highlighting their policy positions to connect with voters, rather than focus on the candidate’s character.

Finally, the fifth takeaway is that Buttigieg is young and his impact on bringing faith into the Democratic Party and establishing a strong, more united Religious Left remains to be seen. As Sarah Bailey notes, the hope for a stronger religious left is not new and “in 2019 with Trump in office, many see an opportunity to give Democratic policies moral language” (Bailey 2019). As Buttigieg talked about his faith, other candidates including Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker both were “quick to highlight their faith” (Bailey 2019). Buttigieg will likely play a role in Democratic Party politics for many years to come and it will be interesting to see how faith plays a role in that influence. Currently, religious candidates on the left need to balance a less religious America with a large bloc of religious voters who are more focused on policy than the person talking about the policy.

VI. Conclusion

A comparison of Carter and Buttigieg’s campaigns provides valuable insight into the role of religion in the lives of Americans, the relationship between church and state, the impact of a candidate’s faith on a campaign, and the influence of religion within political parties. Through polling data, campaign actions, candidates’ statements, and news coverage of the campaigns this project focused on major campaign actions such as “J.C. Can Save America” and quoting the Gospel of Matthew as well as the candidate’s positions on the separation of church and state, abortion, and homosexuality. There are three potential areas for improvement and continued research. First, the topics covered in this paper are not an exhaustive list of the ways that both candidates could be compared. Future research could be done by comparing the candidates’ economic plans as well as foreign policy plans. The topics in this project were chosen because of the stated relationship that they had with the candidates’ faith. Additionally, as I stated above,

this project does not seek to explain why Buttigieg dropped out of the race. In the months, years, and decades to come additional researchers will need to answer that question and explore what impact Buttigieg's 2020 candidacy had on American elections. Finally, future researchers will need to consider the theological developments that are occurring across denominations of the Christian faith at this moment on issues such as homosexuality. This paper does not take a stance what understanding of scripture is correct, that is for individuals and other researchers to determine and track. These areas for continued research and expansion on what has been covered here further shows the potential value of what a comparison of the two campaigns can bring and the benefit of doing this research.

This project contributes five key points to the understanding of religion in American politics. First, America's religious identity is changing; Americans are becoming less religious. Second, a candidate having a strong faith does not necessarily mean that candidate does not support a separation of church and state. Third, religious candidates may not be able to connect with voters simply because of their faith if it does not result in shared policy outcomes with the voters. Fourth, between the 1970s and 2020s a focus on policy outcomes changed the type of candidate that the Religious Right was willing to support. The fifth point is that there is a potential for a growing Religious Left, but Buttigieg's impact on that group and its ability to grow in an increasingly secular America remain to be seen. In Paul's letter to the Philippians he wrote "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, ESV). How Christians take that and the many other ways the Christian faith can influence a Christian's political activity impacts presidential campaigns, candidates, and potential voter support. This comparison between Carter's 1976 campaign and Buttigieg's 2020 campaign provides insight into that influence and the potential for change and continued research in that area.

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