

Does Religion Play a Part in U.S. Environmental Policymaking?

The Effect of Religiously Motivated Campaign Contributions on Congressional Environmental Voting Patterns

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Abstract—Beginning in 1967 with Lynn White’s seminal paper, religious leaders, environmentalists, and scholars have debated whether religion plays a positive or negative role in the environmental crisis. While existing literature presents several philosophical and theological rationales for both sides, the sheer scope of this question has hindered the development of empirical research. Focusing on a specific aspect of the issue, however, allows for the formulation of a meaningful observational analysis. Using a fixed-effects model, this study examines how religiously motivated campaign contributions influence environmental voting patterns in the U.S. Congress over a 20-year period (1990-2010). While they seem to hold no bearing in the Senate, results indicate that donations from religious organizations lead to a statistically significant albeit relatively small decrease in a Representative’s propensity to vote in favor of environmental legislation. So while religion is not the only piece of the puzzle, it does exert some influence over environmental policymaking in the U.S. These findings support Lynn White’s hypothesis that, at least in the political realm, religion has a negative impact on environmentalism.

Keywords: religion, environment, policy, political science, Congress, behavior

1. Introduction

In his seminal article, Lynn White (1967) considers the role religion plays in our relationship with the environment. He argues that the religious roots of the United States shaped the way in which the country values nature. According to White, the unrestrained exploitation of the earth is a result of the Judeo-Christian belief that the Bible gives humans the right to have dominion over nature and use it to their advantage.

Since then, religious leaders, environmentalists, and scholars have debated the legitimacy of White’s thesis. Some members of the religious community refute his arguments by using mostly historical or theological rationales in order to characterize religion as a powerful motivator for environmentalism (Kearns, 1996; Wenski, 2009; Wilkinson, 2010). The analyses using empirical research, however, are substantially more polarized. Consisting mostly of studies utilizing survey data, the existing literature has a range of conflicting findings. Some gather evidence supporting White’s claims (Eckberg and Blocker, 1989; Guth et al., 1995; Hand and Van Liere, 1984) while others cast serious doubt (Kanagy and Nelsen, 1995; Kanagy and Willits, 1993; Woodrum and Hoban, 1994) or have ambiguous results (Hunter and Toney, 2005; Shaiko, 1987; Sherkat and Ellison, 2007).

Previous research has depended almost exclusively on theory or survey data because observing behavior that exhibits a connection between religion and environmentalism is

understandably difficult. It becomes much easier, however, if one narrows the scope of this question and focuses on a specific link between religion and the environment. This study concentrates on how religion affects environmental policymaking in the United States.

Like other special interests, the means by which religious groups can attempt to influence legislation is through lobbying. Although lobbying helps shape policy through many different channels, the most easily quantifiable and readily observed channel is monetary donations to Congress members. Using publicly available data on campaign contributions to Representatives and Senators since 1991, a fixed-effects model predicts their effect on Congressional environmental voting patterns in the United States as measured by the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) Scorecard.

Part 2 discusses the concepts and issues central to the debate on religion's role in environmentalism. A review of the current literature concerning Congressional decision-making is also included. Part 3 will introduce the model and methodology that supports the empirical analysis. Finally, Part 4 presents the results of the analysis and considers their implications.

2. Background

In order to give this empirical analysis the requisite context, a fair amount of discussion concerning the link between religion and the environment must take place. Furthermore, understanding Congressional behavior in relation to special interest groups and campaign contributions is essential to developing a meaningful and valid model. Using current literature, both of these topics are discussed thoroughly in the following two sections.

2.1. Religion and the Environment

As previously mentioned, several religious leaders, environmentalists, and scholars with diverse viewpoints have contributed to the discussion on religion's role in the environmental crisis. Johnson (2009), for example, argues that while other researchers focus on command-and-control techniques to facilitate attitude shifts, churches and religious organizations have already begun to activate personal norms and promote environmentally conscious behavior. Although no consensus has been reached, there is no question that religion and environment are inescapably coupled (Hecl, 2001). Religious teachings often dictate what believers should think about their relationship with the environment, which in turn determines how they choose to protect it (Fisher-Ogden, 2009).

With such a lively discussion taking place, it is surprising that more empirical analyses concerning the effect of religion on environmentalism have not been done. It is even more troublesome that the few published studies exhibit very mixed results. A number of scholars maintain that religion is (or can be) a positive influence on the environmental movement, while others endorse White's thesis and blame the country's Judeo-Christian dominion ethic.

Some authors, however, offer various explanations for the multitude of conflicting findings. Djupe and Hunt (2009) claim that previous literature has focused too much on White's thesis by considering only the effects of theology on environmental concern. Their analysis of survey data concluded that social sources of information in the church tend to influence attitudes about the environment much more than doctrinal or religiosity measures.

They argue that religion is multifaceted and therefore future analyses must include the social dimensions of the religious experience.

Failure to account for the power of the clergy could also be a reason behind the inconsistent results among current literature. Studies have found the political leanings of clergy members to be a source of influence over the congregation's environmental attitudes (Djupe and Gilbert, 2002; Djupe and Grant, 2001). They observed church leaders putting forth a significant amount of normative judgments about politics during various types of public speeches.

Institutions outside the church could also exert influence over environmental attitudes. According to Huckfeldt et al. (1993), people make choices to locate themselves among various social institutions (neighborhoods, churches, workplaces, etc.), which define the dimensions of their entire social experience. This results in exposure to many different political preferences. Sometimes they can serve as independent bases of social experience, but sometimes they can interact and either offset or reinforce each other. Therefore, previous studies might have underestimated or overestimated the effect of religion on environmentalism if interactions with other social influences were not considered.

So how are religion and the environment related? Greeley (1993) put it best saying, "It depends...on the political and ethical correlations of a person's religious story." It is a very difficult question to answer not only because separating religion from political conservatism is a challenge, but also because each person's social experience is different.

2.2. Campaign Contributions and Congressional Behavior

Unlike the literature on religion and the environment, numerous scholarly articles have been published discussing Congressional behavior, in general. Much like the discussion in the previous section, however, the academic world has yet to reach a consensus on how exactly campaign contributions affect voting patterns. Some empirical studies find significant evidence of their power over Congressional decisions (Stratmann, 1991), while others maintain that nothing changes a Congress member's mind (Poole, 2007).

Congressional behavior is based on many factors including ideology, party lines, career advancement, the pursuit of power, a desire for reelection, and a general motivation to select "good" policies, just to name a few (Jackson and Kingdon, 1992; Chappell, 1982; Levitt, 1996). It seems fairly reasonable to conclude that campaign contributions would influence decision-making in Congress considering its effect on many of the factors in the previous list. Political scientists, however, have been unable to agree on the existence of such an effect.

Developing empirical models to predict the behavior of Congress members is understandably a challenge. Davidson et al. (2012) frames this concept well by saying, "As in so many aspects of human behavior, lawmakers' motivations can be judged fully only in light of specific cases." Congressional behavior modelers do, however, present explanations for why consensus among political scientists has not occurred. Many of them, for example, harp on the apparent endogeneity of campaign contributions and regard it as one of the biggest flaws in existing empirical analyses (Ansolabehere et al., 2003; Magee, 2002; Snyder, 1992; Stratmann, 1991). Do Congress members alter their voting patterns in response to campaign contributions or do contributors target legislators who already share their political and ideological preferences? There is a debate among the literature as to

whether individuals and interest groups give money to influence policy or to elect their preferred candidates (Grossman and Helpman, 1996).

Researchers have put forth many other theories as to why the exact effect of campaign contributions has eluded political scientists. Perhaps interest groups contribute money in order to achieve something other than altered Congressional voting patterns. The expected returns on their investment may be other political favors that are not readily observable (Ansolabehere et al., 2003; Magee, 2002). Other literature has discussed the ways in which interest groups influence policy beyond just campaign contributions. For example, some groups gather information to support their position and release it to powerful politicians or the general public (Grossman and Helpman, 1996). Another popular argument is that campaign contributions are just what interest groups do to buy access to Congress members (Ansolabehere et al., 2003; Davidson et al., 2012). Interest groups may just use contributions to compel a Senator or Representative to meet with them where the “real” lobbying can then take place.

Lastly, researchers may be unable to reach a consensus because each study has examined Congressional decision-making on a variety of different issues when campaign contributions only lead to changes in behavior in certain situations. Scholars have hypothesized that campaign contributions only play a significant role in Congress members’ decisions when the benefits are concentrated on a specific group and the costs are distributed widely throughout the population (Davidson, 2012; Stratmann, 1995). These conditions create the greatest incentive for special interest groups to lobby because they receive the most benefit while costs are shared with the general public. Stratmann (1991) claims that many of the existing studies select inappropriate votes to analyze by examining public goods issues where the benefits are widespread (defense and the environment). Witko (2006), counters this argument stating that selecting issues with concentrated benefits and evenly distributed costs does not help because those types of issues have very little participation.

Whatever the case may be, political scientists have yet to agree upon how (and to what extent) campaign contributions affect Congressional voting behavior. In the following section, the model and its associated methodology are presented.

3. Methodology

The model used in this analysis features fixed-effects for each individual Congress member as well as year effects:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Average LCV Score}_{it} &= \text{Contributions}_{it}\beta_1 + z_{it}\beta_z + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_t + u_{it} \\ \text{for } t &= 10 \text{ two-year cycles (1991–2010)} \\ i &= \text{Congress members (1, 2, \dots, N)} \\ N &= \text{total number of Congress members} \\ z &= \text{other covariates} \end{aligned}$$

The average LCV score for Congress member i in cycle t is the variable of interest. Every year since 1970, the LCV has released a *National Environmental Scorecard*. It scores each Congress member using an index (from zero to 100), which reflects his or her

environmental voting patterns. A score of 100 indicates that the member voted “pro-environment” on each piece of environmental legislation proposed during that year. A score of zero means the member voted “anti-environment” on each one. Because the data for contributions is a total for each two-year Congressional cycle, this model uses an average of the LCV scores from each year as the dependent variable.

This measure of environmental voting patterns is useful in many ways. Previous research has used roll call voting on one piece of legislation as their dependent variable, but Stratmann (1991) criticizes this approach. He argues that the dichotomous nature of this type of variable will create bias in any empirical models. Furthermore, Davidson et al. (2012) discusses five ways in which a Congress member’s vote on a single piece of legislation may not be indicative of their actual political preferences. (1) Members sometimes vote against a bill that they actually support in the hopes that a better bill on the matter is on the horizon. (2) Members will often go along with legislation because, on the whole, they consider the bill a step forward even though they dislike specific portions of it. (3) Voting patterns may reflect a member’s deliberate attempt to obscure their position. (4) When they are certain that their individual vote will not affect the final outcome of a piece of legislation, members are tend to adopt the popular position because there is no fear of legislative consequences. And (5) Members can strategically support legislation because they are confident that it will fail in the other chamber or be vetoed by the President. Because the LCV score is a spectrum that considers votes on up to forty pieces of legislation per cycle, it minimizes these issues stemming from the use of a binary variable that only considers a single vote.

The main explanatory variable is the amount of contributions Congress member i receives in cycle t from religious organizations. Retrieved from the Center for Responsive Politics, data on contributions from religious organizations was collected for each cycle and deflated using the Consumer Price Index. In this model, the *Contributions* variable is a combination of donations from religious Political Action Committees (PACs) as well as private donations from religious organizations. Most of the previous literature only considers the influence of contributions from PACs, but Ansolabehere et al. (2003) argues that most campaign money, in general, comes from private donations. Furthermore, most religious groups do not tend to form PACs, nor are clergy normally in a position to make substantial individual contributions (Fowler et al., 2010). Therefore, the two sources were combined in order to get the full effect of contributions from religious organizations.

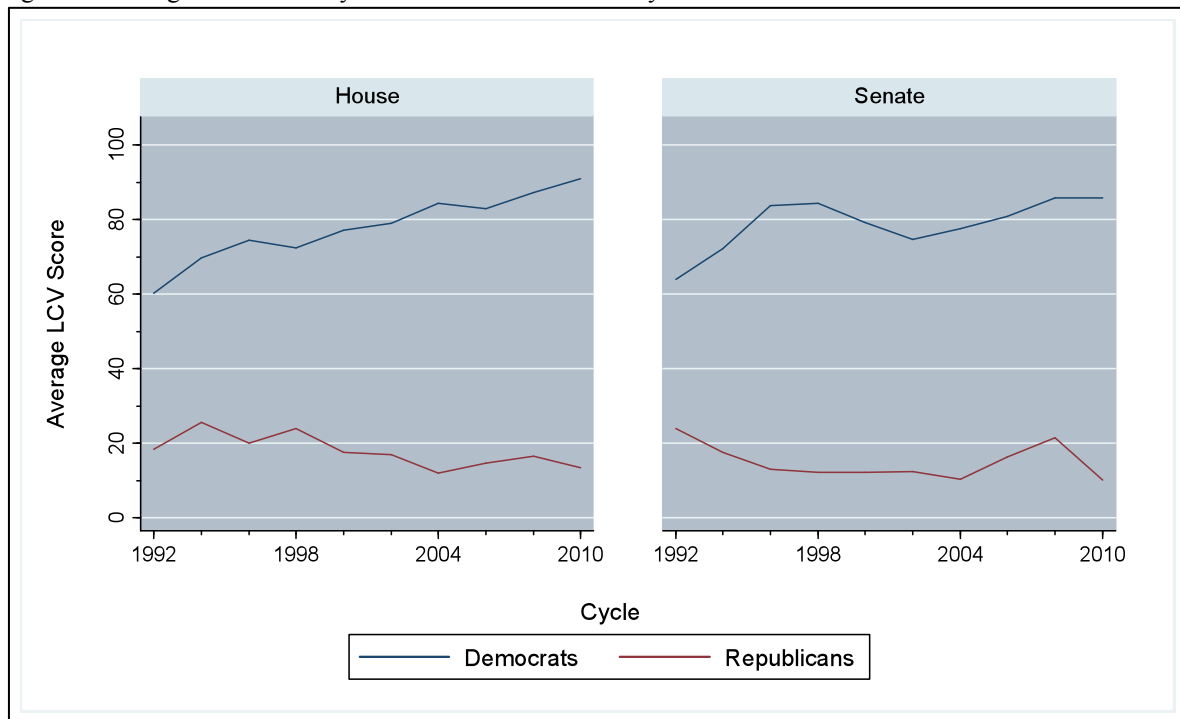
Although White’s thesis and subsequent literature focuses mainly on the relationship between Judeo-Christian religions and environmental attitudes, this model combines contributions from all religions. This was a characteristic of the available data and was unavoidable. Because the environmental ethics of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism differ greatly from that of Judeo-Christian traditions, this aggregation of contributions does present a problem. It is important to note, however, that less than four percent of American adults are affiliated with religions that are not Judeo-Christian (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life). Furthermore, a large majority of the contributions come from Judeo-Christian organizations.

Returning back to the model, z refers to all other explanatory variables. The fixed-effects for each Congress member controls for characteristics of each individual that remains constant throughout the 20-year period in question. Furthermore, the use of year effects in the model controls for all factors that affect Congressional behavior uniformly (e.g. influence of the executive branch). Other characteristics of the political realm, however, exert

influence differently for each Congress member and therefore must be included as covariates. The reasoning behind the inclusion of each variable as well as other aspects of the model's methodology are outlined below.

There is no question that political party plays a part in Congressional behavior (Snyder and Groseclose, 2000). Figure 1 displays the trends in average LCV score for both chambers of Congress by political party. As can be seen, the two parties have been diverging slowly in terms of environmental voting patterns over the past 20 years. Correcting for this trend in a fixed-effects model requires the use of a dummy variable interacting a Congress member's political party (1 if Republican, 0 otherwise) with the election cycle variable. Included as a covariate in the model, this variable is referred to as *Party Lines*.

Figure 1. Average LCV Score by Chamber and Political Party



Unemployment is also a necessary variable to include in this model. If unemployment is high in a Congress member's state, they might vote down environmental legislation more often because they view it as impeding economic recovery and job growth. An *Unemployment* variable was included in the model to account for these possible effects. The average unemployment rate over each cycle in each member's state was retrieved from the United States Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Another characteristic of a Congress member that has been shown to affect voting patterns is seniority (Stratmann, 2000). Not only do more senior members hold higher seats in Congressional committees, but they also influence junior members as they learn the ropes. The online database *CQ Press Congress Collection* provided each member's first year in office, which helped to construct the *Seniority* variable for every cycle.

There are also important election variables to consider. Whether or not it is an election year could drastically change a member's environmental voting patterns. Also, there are several Congress members who ran for President during the 20-year period in question. These legislators behaved much differently in terms of LCV scores during the cycles in which they ran for president. To correct for the possible effects of these situations, two dummy variables were created called *Election Year* and *Ran for President*. Another dummy variable was generated to account for changes in voting patterns that occurred during a Congress member's last cycle in office (*Last Cycle*). This variable is meant to account for the "lame duck" actions of a Senator or Representative. Finally, one last dummy variable was included to account for when a member publicly announces that they are refusing to accept money from PACs (*No PACs*). The argument here is that a legislator who has made a point to steer clear of the influence of special interest groups will vote differently than a legislator who has not. All of these variables were taken from the data provided by the Center for Responsive Politics.

Using this model, a series of four regressions are used for the Senate and the House with a grand total of eight regressions. Regression (1) considers how contributions from religious organizations alone affect a Senator's LCV score. Because religion and general political conservatism tend to be so highly correlated, Regression (2) separates out contributions from conservatives as well as pro-gun and pro-choice organizations. This way, it can be determined if environmental voting patterns are just a result of political conservatism or religious motivations. Regressions (3) and (4) are the same regressions as (1) and (2), but for Representatives rather than Senators.

Regressions (5) – (8) are the same as Regressions (1) – (4) only the contribution variables are lagged by one cycle. This process is done to account for the endogeneity issues presented by Snyder (1992) and Stratmann (1995, 1991). It is difficult to determine whether or not contributions change a Congress member's voting patterns or if a Congress member's voting patterns reflect the contributions they are receiving. By running the same regression, but with lagged variables for donations, the direction of the effect can be clarified. The inclusion of this second stage of regressions also speaks to the role that the timing of contributions plays (Davidson et al., 2012; Stratmann, 1995).

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays the results from Regressions (1) – (4). As can be seen in Regressions (1) and (2), religious contributions have a significantly positive effect on environmental voting patterns for Senators. These results provide evidence that refutes White's thesis. It is important to note, however, that in both regressions, all remaining contributions are also significant. This means that sources of campaign finances that are floating around in the remaining contributions also play a significant role in predicting environmental voting patterns in the Senate. Regressions (3) and (4) show that religious contributions also exert significant influence on a Representative's LCV score. In the case of the House, however, it is a negative effect, which offers support for White's thesis. Also important to note is the fact that no other sources of donations play a significant part in determining a Representative's voting patterns.

Table 1. Results of Regressions on Average LCV Score

VARIABLES	(1) Senate	(2) Senate	(3) House	(4) House
Religious Contributions	0.0560* (0.0306)	0.108*** (0.0301)	-0.212* (0.110)	-0.222* (0.115)
Conservatives		0.0163** (0.00738)		-0.00183 (0.00549)
Pro-Guns		-0.119 (0.0877)		0.0402 (0.0566)
Pro-Choice		-0.113 (0.100)		0.0188 (0.0521)
Remaining Contributions	-0.000266*** (8.07e-05)	-0.000381*** (6.77e-05)	0.000197 (0.000164)	0.000204 (0.000247)
Unemployment	0.101 (0.513)	0.0890 (0.523)	-0.755** (0.308)	-0.755** (0.309)
Seniority	0.305 (0.189)	0.306 (0.192)	0.961*** (0.100)	0.961*** (0.101)
Election Year	1.914** (0.921)	2.438** (0.992)	2.302** (1.069)	2.307** (1.077)
Ran for President	-9.663 (11.45)	-13.03 (10.97)	-16.98** (6.907)	-17.13** (6.876)
Last Cycle	0.407 (1.970)	0.276 (2.045)	-1.754** (0.843)	-1.682* (0.867)
No PACs	6.048 (6.338)	5.898 (6.248)	-0.564 (4.071)	-0.501 (4.093)
Party Lines	-0.0108*** (0.00255)	-0.0109*** (0.00254)	-0.00852*** (0.00145)	-0.00856*** (0.00146)
Constant	51.07*** (4.853)	51.47*** (4.960)	51.37*** (2.979)	51.22*** (2.977)
Observations	1,015	1,015	4,382	4,382
R-squared	0.176	0.186	0.104	0.105
Number of Members	216	216	1,037	1,037

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by member of Congress

Note: Contributions are in thousands of dollars and deflated using the Consumer Price Index

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

It is also important to discuss the coefficient estimates for the covariates in Regression (1) – (4). The only two variables that were statistically significant in all four regressions were the *Election Year* and *Party Lines* variables. The positive coefficient estimates for the *Election Year* variable indicates that LCV scores are about two points higher during cycles where the legislator is up for reelection. This suggests that, on average, a Congress member will tend to support environmental legislation more often during years where they are concerned about reelection. As for the *Party Lines* variable, interpreting the magnitude of the coefficient estimates is difficult because it is an interaction between a binary variable and the cycle variable. The results do indicate, however, that party lines do play a significant role in determining a Congress members environmental voting patterns.

The only variable that was insignificant in all four regressions was the *No PACs* variable. Congress members who refuse campaign contributions from PACs may exhibit different environmental voting patterns than their fellow legislators because they do not want to play in to the politics “game.” The results of Regressions (1) – (4) indicate, however, that their

LCV scores do not differ in any statistically significant way from the LCV scores of their fellow Congress members.

As for the remaining covariates, none of them were significant in the Senate models (Regressions (1) and (2)), but were all significant in the House models (Regressions (3) and (4)). The coefficient on *Unemployment* had the predicted negative sign and suggests that an increase in a state's unemployment rate will decrease the LCV score of the House member(s) representing that state. How long a Representative has been in office also helps describe their environment voting patterns. The coefficient estimates on the *Seniority* variable indicate that a House member's LCV score increases by one point every year they are in office. The results for the *Ran for President* and *Last Cycle* variables were also significant in both House regressions. Both of these variables have a negative on a Representative's LCV score, which suggests that when a House member is running for President or it is their last cycle in office, they tend to vote against pieces of environmental legislation. The coefficient estimates indicate that a Representative who is running for president will, on average, reduce their LCV score by 17 points. Along those same lines, a Representative who is in their last cycle as a Congress member will, on average, reduce their LCV score by two points.

Table 2 presents the results from Regressions (5) – (8). The goal of these lagged regressions was to test for robustness of the results from Regressions (1) – (4) against potential endogeneity of campaign contributions. If the significance of the coefficients for religious contributions disappears, then this could indicate the presence of endogeneity. Although the significance drops from the Senate regressions, the significance for the House regressions remains intact. While it is possible that the effect of contributions on environmental voting patterns does not last more than one cycle in the Senate, these results indicate that the model for Senate behavior could suffer from endogeneity. Conversely, the results indicate that the model for House behavior is more robust against potential endogeneity.

Table 2. Results of Lagged Regressions on Average LCV Score

VARIABLES	(5) Senate	(6) Senate	(7) House	(8) House
Religious Contributions (Lagged)	0.00979 (0.0889)	-0.0190 (0.103)	-0.422* (0.220)	-0.412* (0.212)
Conservatives (Lagged)		0.00322 (0.00643)		-0.0347** (0.0161)
Pro-Guns (Lagged)		-0.0755 (0.0875)		-0.0894 (0.0688)
Pro-Choice (Lagged)		-0.000382 (0.0907)		0.0251 (0.125)
Remaining Contributions (Lagged)	-4.46e-05 (0.000122)	1.91e-05 (0.000150)	0.000245 (0.000542)	0.000790 (0.000627)
Unemployment	-0.284 (0.580)	-0.254 (0.584)	-0.697** (0.352)	-0.666* (0.349)
Seniority	0.174 (0.206)	0.156 (0.206)	0.634*** (0.119)	0.614*** (0.119)
Election Year	0.947 (0.774)	0.909 (0.784)	2.735** (1.233)	2.678** (1.236)
Ran for President	-29.77*** (10.73)	-30.02*** (10.79)	-17.35** (8.059)	-17.32** (8.372)
Last Cycle	1.757 (1.844)	1.786 (1.852)	-1.796* (0.965)	-1.847* (0.964)
No PACs	16.20 (10.73)	16.18 (10.83)	2.242 (4.746)	2.137 (4.693)
Party Lines	-0.0118*** (0.00260)	-0.0118*** (0.00264)	-0.00669*** (0.00102)	-0.00661*** (0.000992)
Constant	56.10*** (4.390)	56.32*** (4.469)	54.69*** (2.934)	54.69*** (2.908)
Observations	835	835	3,330	3,330
R-squared	0.178	0.181	0.077	0.080
Number of Members	181	181	802	802

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by member of Congress

Note: Contributions are in thousands of dollars and deflated using the Consumer Price Index

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Based on these results, it can be concluded that contributions from religious organizations play a significant role in Congressional environmental voting patterns in the House. On average, a one-point reduction in a Representative's LCV score in the current cycle will cost a religious organization about \$4,500. Considering the fact that average contributions per cycle from religious organizations to Representatives rarely exceeded \$2,000 between 1990 and 2010, this amount seems fairly high. The influence of that \$4,500 contribution, however, can be felt in subsequent cycles as well. As indicated by the second set of regressions, the effect of religiously motivated contributions from the previous cycle is twice as strong as contributions made in the current cycle. So \$4,500 donated by a religious organization will buy a one-point reduction in a Representative's LCV score for the current cycle, but a two-point reduction for the following cycle. The highest amount a Representative received from religious organizations was over \$57,000 in the 2001-2002 cycle. This equates to an almost 13-point reduction in that Representative's LCV score for that cycle and a 26-point reduction in the following cycle (2003-2004).

Although the amount of money coming out of religious organizations over the past twenty years has not been sufficient to substantially alter environmental voting patterns in Congress, targeting members who are likely to be undecided on how to vote could change the outcome on a piece of environmental legislation. Results from empirical analyses on campaign contributions have accused interest groups of being irrational because they donate to Congress members who would have supported their interests anyway. Findings from other studies, however, indicate that contributors do act rationally and donate to legislators that tend to be neutral (Stratmann, 1992). This kind of strategic behavior can compel a Congress member who is on the fence to align with the group's particular interest. Therefore, if religious organizations offered their limited funds to legislators with LCV scores closer to 50, that one or two point change in their score could mean the difference between the passage or rejection of a piece of environmental legislation.

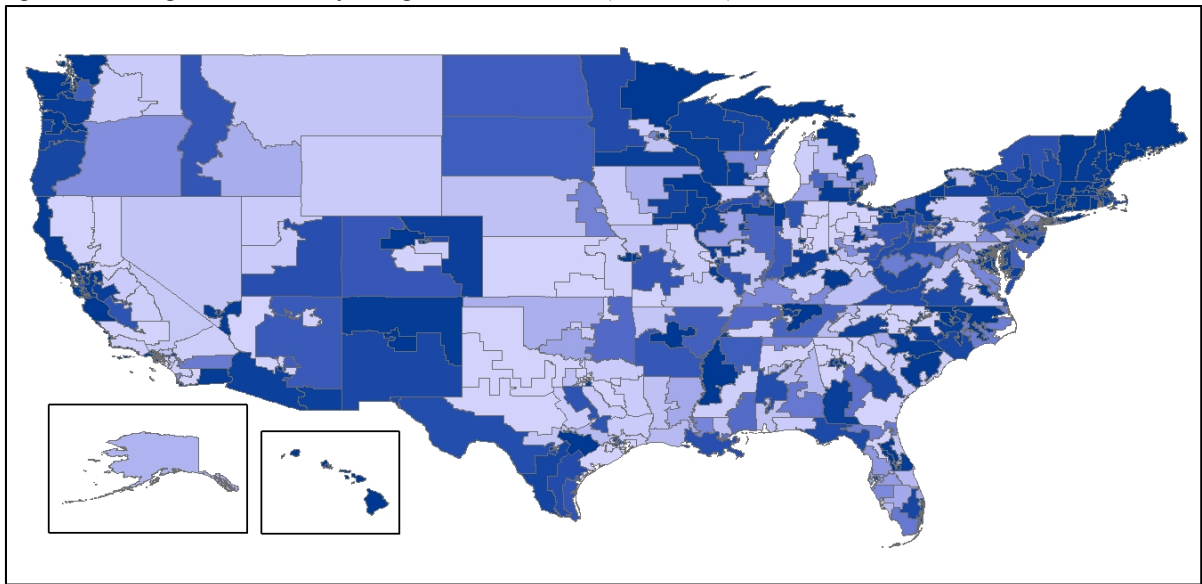
The tremendous amount of diversity among religious advocacy could shed light on why there is a relatively small negative effect of religiously motivated contributions on Congressional environmental voting patterns. More religious pluralism in the United States has provided an incentive for religious groups to organize and protect their common interests. A major study in 2009 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life estimated that more than 180 national religious organizations engage at least occasionally in public policy advocacy. While some religious groups may play the political game better than others, no religion or coalition has been politically dominant (Fowler et al., 2010). Many religious organizations with a multitude of ideologies and agendas are all attempting to exert their political influence at the same time. This could explain why the aggregate effect of religiously motivated contributions on Congressional environmental voting patterns is relatively small. Perhaps a certain subset of these religious groups has been slightly more effective at shaping environmental policy in the last twenty years, but increased effort from other groups could tip the scales in their favor.

The structural differences between the Senate and House of Representatives offer a possible explanation for the conflicting results of each chamber. The sheer number of members as well as the amount of political power granted to committees in the House provide incentives for Representatives to become specialists (Davidson et al., 2012; Kingdon, 1989). The rules established by the House give much of the agenda setting power on a particular issue to those members of the committees with jurisdiction over it (Grier et al., 1990; Roberts, 2010). So while Senators remain generalists, Representatives develop a reputation for leadership when it comes to certain political issues. This structure leads PACs to target members of the House more often, and especially those Representatives who are positioned to exert considerable political influence in the group's area of interest (Grier and Munger, 1991; Kroszner and Stratmann, 2005). With this in mind, the fact that contributions had a greater effect on environmental voting patterns in the House than the Senate makes sense and merely reflects the different rules and structure of each chamber.

There are several opportunities for future research following this analysis. As previously mentioned, committee assignment is a major factor in determining the effectiveness of campaign contributions. Which committees hold the most power over certain topics? Does seniority within a committee play an important role? Examining the power that certain committees have over various topics could provide an interesting expansion of the analysis presented here.

A common thread in the literature that was not included in this analysis was the fact that redistricting matters (Stratmann, 2000). Congress members might change their voting patterns not because they are receiving more or less campaign contributions, but because of a change in constituencies. Figure 2 displays the average LCV score for the 111th House of Representatives (2009-2010) by Congressional district. Redistricting could change a member's constituency drastically, especially in the southern states where there is an obvious diversity in environmental attitudes. Incorporating the effect of redistricting into an analysis like the one performed here could make for some interesting additions to the discussion on campaign contributions and Congressional decision-making.

Figure 2. Average LCV Score by Congressional District (2009-2010)



Note: A darker shade of blue equates to a higher average LCV score

5. Conclusion

The results presented in this study provide support for Lynn White's thesis with one major caveat. White maintains that the Judeo-Christian roots of our country are solely responsible for the environmental crisis, but this analysis finds it to be a significant, but relatively small, factor. According to these empirical findings, religion does not seem to be the major determinant of environmental policymaking in the U.S. Religiously motivated lobbying provides an incentive not to support environmental legislation, but contributions from religious organizations over the past twenty years have not been large enough to substantially alter Congress member's environmental voting patterns.

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