

Evangelical Christianity In American Politics

Introduction

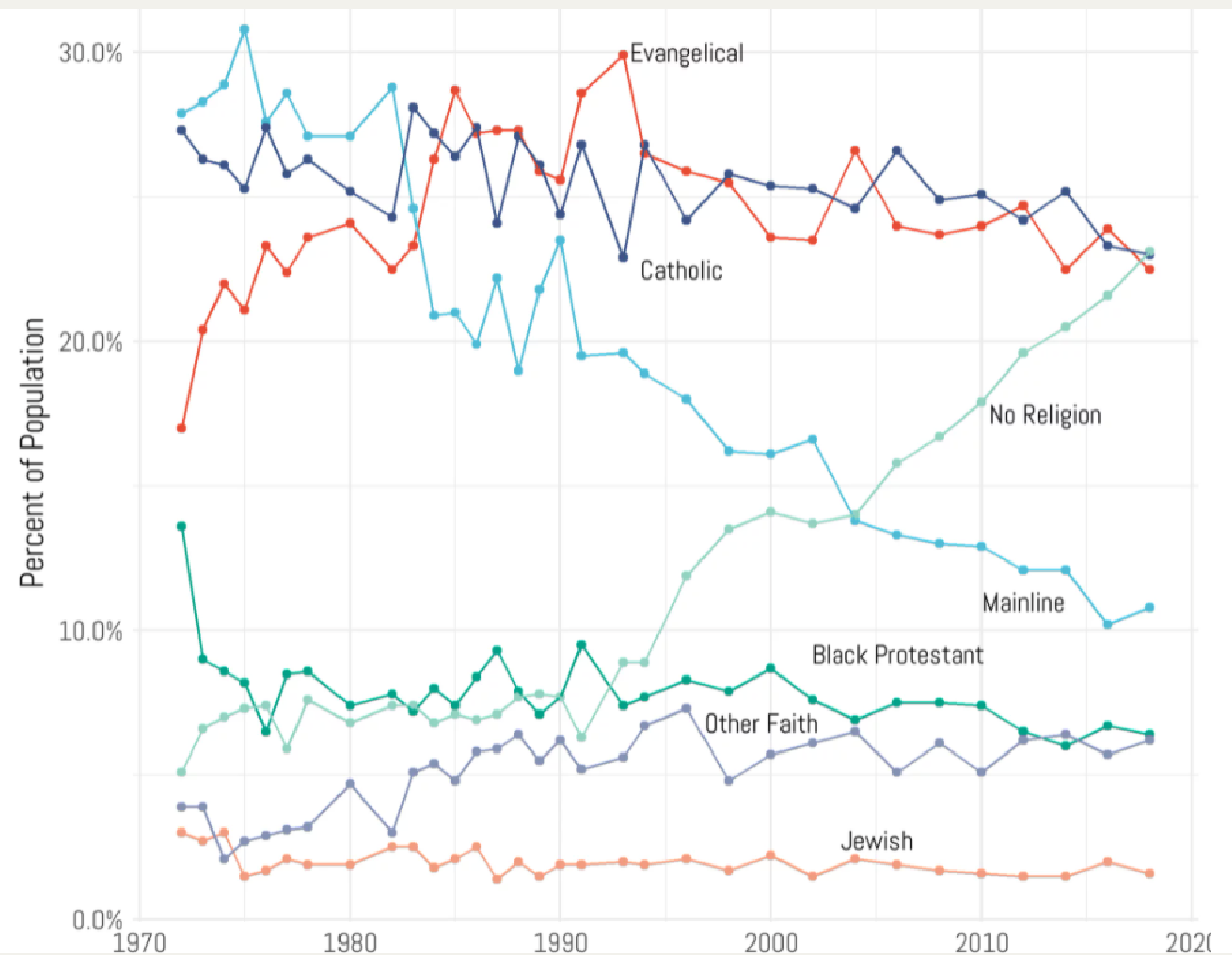
Evangelical Christianity has been growing over the last half-century, not only as a religious movement but also as a political force. Their growing support has impacted the course of American politics in a broad range of topics; the size of the federal government, abortion and LGBTQ rights, foreign policy, and much more. This growing religious movement has been a consequential force in American politics for decades but what is most important is the current status of the evangelical political force and its implications for the future.

What is Evangelical Christianity?

Evangelical Christianity isn't a specific denomination of Christianity, like Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, etc. Rather than being a specific denomination, Evangelical Christianity is more of a religious movement within the entirety of protestant, and to some degree catholic, Christianity. Members of this religious movement are loosely defined, but can typically claim to have had a "born again experience", having a personal relationship with God in some capacity which guides their moral code, and some more fundamentalist evangelicals believe in total historical and factual accuracy within the Bible.

Modern History of Evangelical Christianity In America

For a large part of the 20th century, Evangelical Christianity was relegated to the periphery of American cultural and political life. It was sometimes affiliated with the Scopes-Monkey Trial in a negative light, associating evangelicals with opposition to an American tradition of scientific rationality and advancement. However, over the course of the latter half of the 20th century, through largely charismatic leaders utilizing TV and radio to spread their message, evangelicalism spread. The rise of evangelicals coincided with the growing conservative movement in the United States and the movement's first major win in the political sphere was the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980.



The Reagan Era

The Reagan Era marked a major period of ascendance for Evangelical Christianity in the mainstream of American politics and life. President Reagan spoke directly to leaders in the Evangelical community, such as notable televangelists, and made appearances at major Evangelical events. Reagan's mutual relationship with the Evangelical community wasn't purely lip service, as his policy was often crafted in terms that appealed to the religious moral framing evangelists used. The claim was that America was at odds with an evil empire (the USSR) and that struggle was between basic forces of good and evil. Evangelical policy influences were seen in other spheres, such as abortion rights as during the Reagan administration there was a request to overturn Roe v Wade which narrowly failed. The emphasis on a small role of government was important too, as evangelicals saw that as allowing for them to more freely practice their faith in aspects of life such as home/private schooling, rights of choice to refuse to service to certain individuals, etc.



Evangelicalism to Current Times

Evangelical Christians continued to experience growth in their share of American Christians and political power after the Reagan era. Though in terms of televangelism, there was a decline due to scandal among some high profile figures, the political/cultural power of evangelicals was proliferating through congress as more members openly identified with the evangelical identity. President George W. Bush was the next presidential figure the evangelicals would support in the White House. Bush continued the use of moral language to define his foreign policy and push for a social agenda aligning with Evangelical interests such as restricting gay marriage. 8 years later, President Trump would be the next figure the Evangelicals would support in the White House. Though there were concerns with his personal conduct being opposed to Evangelical beliefs, it was generally agreed that Trump represented their interests best.



Evangelical Significance In American Politics

Evangelicals represent a significant force in American politics for a variety of reasons. They are a powerful voting group, with a starkly high voter turnout rate for a country with generally middling voter turnout. They're a highly vocal and public-facing movement, making their demands very prominent. They also are a large source of donations, funding the rise of their own movement, lining the pockets of their leaders, and creating institutions such as TV stations and universities. These factors make them an essential source of support for the Republican party and a major force for shaping policy.