

The Christian Right and Public Policy:
Testing the Second Generation Thesis

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May, 2000

Abstract

The social movement known as the Christian Right, once considered a noisy but ultimately ineffective political force, reinvented itself in the late 1980s. Under the sophisticated leaders who replaced the clergy founders, the transformed movement supposedly adopted a more pragmatic political style yielding greater political influence. We test the "second generation" thesis by a case study of Christian Right activists who served on Florida's Constitutional Revision Commission from 1997-1998. While these activists resembled their Republican and Democratic counterparts in several respects, the commissioners with Christian Right ties were not particularly effective and failed to create a working alliance with the mainstream Republicans on the commission. The core of the problem was the maintenance by the social conservatives of an "outsider" perspective that reinforced their "purist" orientation to public affairs.

In a pattern familiar to students of interest groups and identity politics, the social movement known as the Christian Right has achieved significant representation in American public life. Although such representation may have offered important symbolic benefits, the drive to secure public office was justified as the means to an end. The goal of the Christian Right, broadly speaking, has been to transform American public policy in the direction of what are called family or traditional values. But how effective are the supporters and sympathizers of the Christian Right when they move from protest to power? While scholars have compiled extensive data on the social and electoral base of the movement, they have provided very little information about its impact on public policy. This study utilizes a case study of Christian conservatives in Florida's constitutional revision process to explore the behavior of movement activists in policy-making positions. The underlying question is whether Christian Right elites have made a successful transition from outsider to insider politics, as suggested by one line of research, or if they remain purists who have yet to adjust fully to the ways of politics.

The Problem

In one of the first published essays about the movement then known as the "New Christian Right," Michael Lienesch likened Christian conservatism to "a fixed star in our heavens."¹ Contrary to prevailing scholarly wisdom, which portrayed the movement as a meteor that would "streak across our skies" and then fall to earth "cold and exhausted," Lienesch perceived right-wing religion "as a permanent feature of the political scene." The alliance between right-wing religion and conservative politics had a long pedigree in American political life, he contended, and the coalition would flourish so long as it continued to serve the interests of both participants.

That forecast seemed spectacularly off the mark just a few years after it appeared in this journal. Following a string of policy defeats during the presidency of its erstwhile supporter, Ronald Reagan, the movement seemed to disintegrate in the 1988 campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. Pat Robertson's spectacular self-destruction was followed by the nomination and eventual election of George Bush, perceived by most movement activists as at best a lukewarm fellow-traveller rather than a true believer. As many of the original entrepreneurs who had led the movement dropped out of politics, several scholars were quick to write obituaries about this latest victim of America's resolutely incremental political system.² Perhaps Lienesch was mistaken to reject what he called the "meteor theory" of the Christian Right.

Subsequent events sustained Lienesch's claim that Christian conservatism was a durable fixture of public life in the United States. What first appeared as the death of the movement was soon reinterpreted by scholars as a rebirth and regeneration.³ Following the 1988 debacle, the movement engaged in an intense self-analysis, identified the weaknesses that had limited its appeal, and emerged with renewed commitment to shape American political life. The pioneers that had blazed the trail, organizations like the Moral Majority and Religious Roundtable, gave way to a new generation of advocacy groups such as Christian Coalition and Concerned Women for America. While these new actors retained the same political agenda as their forebears, they differed in several crucial respects. According to the protagonists of what we have called the "second-generation thesis," the organizations that made up the Christian Right in the post-Reagan era had a more sophisticated understanding of the demands of American politics. They adopted a new set of tactics in the service of the same policy goals that animated the first

generation of the Christian Right. The impulse persisted although it was clothed and channeled by a new set of organizations.

This paper offers an empirical test of the second-generation thesis, the claim that the contemporary Christian Right has embraced an accommodationist political style that promises to pay immediate political dividends. To do so, we examine the behavior of a group of Christian conservatives who were members of Florida's Constitutional Revision Commission from 1997 to 1998. Because our data cover only a single moment, we cannot conduct a full test of what is essentially a thesis about change over time. The study is also limited to appointive officials on a special commission rather than elected officials involved in routine policy-making. Nonetheless, the study of this particular group of political actors will enable us to determine if the movement has indeed produced a new generation of activists who have internalized the norms of effective political action. Specifically, we will examine how movement activists responded to an opportunity to restructure the policy-making environment in a large American state.

The Second-Generation Thesis

At base, the transformation of the Christian Right described by advocates of the second-generation thesis involved the movement's embrace of pluralism. Under the pluralist theory of American politics, the sheer diversity of groups at work in the political system largely precludes radical change. In the pluralist perspective, the system moves in small steps, driven largely by pressure from groups that can attract enough allies through logrolling and vote trading to construct transient majority blocs. Confronted with this brutal reality, movements that enter politics seeking revolutionary transformation have to settle instead for incremental change by adopting "the principles of coalition-building and compromise."⁴ For that to happen, non-

negotiable demands have to be replaced by bargaining and consideration of trade-offs. The alternative is marginalization and the political wilderness.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Lienesch doubted it would happen.⁵ At its core, he argued, the Christian Right was a movement of moral restoration that perceived compromise as a sell-out. Its leaders were "uneasy pluralists" who saw overt conflict as the best strategy and were "more comfortable with attack and compromise" than bargaining and negotiation. They preferred to demonize opponents and half-hearted allies rather than work with them to obtain concessions. As true believers, certain that God was on their side, the leaders of Christian conservatism were simply unwilling to play the political game by its accepted rules. In adopting this style, they resembled the shock troops of other ideological movements, right and left-wing, that have periodically enlivened American political life.

Yet by the end of the decade, most of the leaders had seen the political futility of a "purist" strategy. Impatience with the limited gains achieved during the Reagan era provoked many in the movement to develop new organizations with different repertoires of political action. In what way does this second generation of the Christian Right differ from the organizations of the early 1980s? Advocates of the second-generation thesis have identified five central traits that differentiate the contemporary movement from the pioneer organizations.⁶

(1) **Organizational Development:** The New Christian Right of the 1980s was dominated by paper organizations that were essentially the mailing lists of a handful of politicized ministers. Such organizations were better at issuing press releases than doing the hard work of political mobilization and advocacy. By contrast, the movement of the 1990s has generated a plethora of grass-roots organizations that allocate meaningful responsibilities to individual members. The goal is to create an army of grass-roots activists who know how to stimulate political change.

(2) **Leadership:** The first incarnation of the Christian Right was led by members of the clergy, specifically by pastors from conservative religious denominations in the evangelical Protestant tradition. Although skilled in entrepreneurship and recruitment, they often lacked much political experience, prudence, or the ability to appeal across sectarian lines. In the second generation, the dominant groups have recruited leaders with considerable political and organizational skills. Most of the new leaders, exemplified by Ralph Reed and Gary Bauer, are political conservatives who acquired extensive experience in political mobilization in secular realms. Compared to their clergy predecessors, they are less prone to embrace the rigid sectarian distinctions that inhibit cooperation across religious lines.

(3) **Language:** Given its religious base in the world of evangelical Protestantism, it was not surprising that the rhetoric of the "first" Christian Right was harsh and uncompromising to the ears of people outside that world. As a movement that thought it was doing God's work, the Christian Right made no apologies for its fervor and was hostile to its doubters and opponents. The second generation recognized the political liability of this approach and foreswore the use of religious language and imagery. Rather than use sectarian appeals, the new leaders attempted to frame Christian Right arguments in the rights-based language of liberalism, the predominant political discourse of the modern era. "Mainstreaming the message" entailed both avoiding religious language and, if necessary, downplaying divisive issues during election campaigns.

(4) **Pragmatism:** The original Christian Right evinced very little interest in compromise or negotiation. Rather, it wanted to impose its vision with little room for discussion and debate. Compromise was seen as moral weakness and cowardice. The second-generation leadership, schooled in the ways of American politics, has evinced a much more pragmatic style. Rather than demand all-or-nothing, the stance of its predecessors, the contemporary Christian Right is

willing to engage in horse-trading by shaving back its proposals, supporting suboptimal candidates for strategic reasons, and deferring its claims to the interests of coalition partners.

(5) **Incrementalism:** In the first generation, the goal of the movement was wholesale social and cultural transformation. Small, incremental victories were too little given the magnitude of America's moral decay. Since 1988, the new leaders have recognized that incrementalism is the surest path to success in political competition. The current movement is committed to securing small victories now, postponing for the long-term more fundamental changes in society and politics.

According to many analysts of contemporary movement, these changes have generated a much more potent and politically savvy operation. Beyond symbolism and reliable electoral support, the Christian Right now counts for something in American political life. Its leaders know how to play the game, to use power intelligently. The goals remain nothing less than fundamental cultural change but the tactics employed today are much more likely to lead to real victories.

Despite the appeal of this thesis, scholars have not provided much beyond anecdote to confirm or deny it. As it has since the early 1980s, most research on the Christian Right utilizes survey data to explore the level and nature of mass support for the movement and its policy goals. A recent study in this genre compares the social profile of the Christian Right in 1984 and 1996.⁷ Finding greater mass support and a less religiously particularistic profile in 1996, the authors attribute the political transformation of the electoral base to the savvy political professionals who have taken over leadership of Christian Right organizations. Even the best of mass surveys cannot do much to establish the validity of the second-generation thesis because that premise is fundamentally about the behavior of political elites. Testing the second-

generation thesis requires detailed information about the behavior of the Christian Right activists who participate directly in the policy-making process.

The only available case study does not offer a clear verdict on the thesis. In their analysis of Christian Right activism in Virginia through the mid-1990s, Rozell and Wilcox found compelling evidence of the structural changes associated with the second-generation thesis.⁸ Some organizations within the Christian Right had clearly "matured" politically by avoiding the abrasive political style that once characterized the movement. As a consequence, the movement could claim real strength in the Virginia GOP and in the choice of public officials in the Old Dominion. Yet Rozell and Wilcox were also quick to acknowledge numerous instances of self-defeating behavior by other elements of the Christian Right. In these cases, the operational code of the movement appeared unchanged from the 1980s and the result was polarization, needless conflict, and political self-destruction. These same tendencies have been seen at the national level in the past few years.

With such a limited supply of evidence, there is clearly room for another study of how Christian Right activists fare when they obtain positions of public authority. We report on one such case from the state of Florida.

The Case Study

Every twenty years, the Florida Constitution mandates a self-study of the state's fundamental document by an appointive commission. The Constitutional Revision Commission (CRC) meets as a body, takes testimony from interested citizens and organizations, and provides a set of recommended changes that appear on the general election ballot. That process generated the data for this study.⁹

The 37-person Commission is composed members named by the governor, State Senate president, State House president, and chief justice.¹⁰ In 1997, the governor was a Democrat and the chief justice was a gubernatorial appointee. Accordingly, eighteen of the seats were filled by Democrats.¹¹ The Senate president, Toni Jennings of Orlando, had a reputation as a mainstream Republican who was sympathetic to the needs of business but also knowledgeable about the problems of metropolitan areas.¹² She appointed nine commissioners, mostly recruited from the ranks of the GOP's business wing. In line with the term used by the press, we will refer to the Jennings appointees as mainstream Republicans.

That left nine seats to be filled by House Speaker Dan Webster, a Republican from suburban Orlando. Webster, who has since moved on to the State Senate, was the highest-ranking elected official in the state with close ties to the Christian Right. A strong social conservative, he has worked closely with Christian Right organizations and made the state coordinator of Christian Coalition a de facto staff member during legislative sessions.¹³ His appointees were recruited from the ranks of social conservatism, people with histories of activism on behalf of the pro-life movement, home schooling, anti-gay initiatives, and similar causes. They were reported to have met in caucus with the Speaker throughout the deliberations

In November, 1999, we contacted by mail the thirty-six individuals who had served as voting members of the Constitutional Revision Commission. They received a survey questionnaire along with a cover letter indicating our general research interests and containing a pledge of anonymity. Following standard protocols for mail surveys, respondents received a follow-up postcard reminder ten days after the initial mailout and non-respondents were sent two subsequent mailings containing fresh questionnaires. Further efforts were undertaken to reach

respondents by telephone and to address any concerns that had discouraged them from participating.

These efforts yielded positive responses from 24 of the 36 voting members of the Commission. Of the remainder, six Commission members indicated by telephone that they did not wish to participate and another six did not communicate with us. The response rate, exactly two-thirds of eligible participants, does not seem to have produced any notable patterns of sample bias. The participants strongly resemble the entire Commission in terms of party, regional distribution, and educational attainment. Because our key independent variable is appointing agency, it is important to note that the sample is almost an exact replica of the entire CRC. We obtained surveys from two-thirds of the Webster and Chief Justice appointees and were off from this ratio by only one Commissioner apiece for the Chiles and Jennings appointees. The telephone calls elicited the possibility of some sample bias among the Webster appointees. Two of the three non-respondents from that category indicated they had bad feelings about the experience and didn't want to relive it via the questionnaire. We heard no such expressions of discontent from the other non-respondents. If the study does exclude the unhappiest Christian Right commissioners, that would probably slightly increase the chances of confirming the second-generation thesis. Those who were least happy with the experience are probably likely to fit the "true believer" profile and their exclusion diminishes the prospect of finding significant differences between the Webster and other appointees.

The survey data were supplemented by comments recorded on the questionnaires in response to open-ended questions, telephone conversations with three commissioners, a review of the Commission's deliberations, and newspaper accounts of the process. These qualitative data were used to elaborate the survey findings.

Hypotheses

In this paper, we are choosing between two rival perspectives about the attitudes and behavior of the CRC delegates who came from Christian Right backgrounds. The two perspectives part company in expectations about the background traits, mode of operation, and behavior of the Webster appointees and their fellow commissioners.

The second-generation thesis leads us to expect minimal differences between the Webster and non-Webster factions on the CRC. Consistent with notions about the maturation of the movement, we should find that the Christian Right officials were of similar social standing and political experience as their counterparts. Having learned the rules of the political game, so the second-generation thesis tells us, they should evince similar attitudes about the value of compromise and be regarded by their fellow commissioners as productive members of the CRC. Whatever differences do separate the Webster appointees from other commissioners should be the same traits that distinguish Republicans from Democrats generally. By virtue of their experiences and background, this perspective suggests, the Webster appointees should be well-placed to achieve their policy goals on the Commission.

The alternative perspective on the Christian Right members of the CRC emphasizes their continuing distinctiveness and distance from the rules of the game. As a protest movement, the Christian Right began with a strong sense of its estrangement from the political establishment. In classic studies of the operating style of "outsider" political activists, James Q. Wilson, Aaron Wildavsky and others have found that activists from protest movements retain a distinctive political orientation called "purism" that often puts them at odds with more "professional" politicians.¹⁴ The outsiders elevate principle over all other considerations even in the face of clear defeat for their cherished objects. Their style, confrontational and implacable, is almost

guaranteed to fail. This description seems tailor made to the first generation of Christian Right leaders and it is plausible that this orientation persists even after the movement has attained a position of some importance in the political universe. If so, we anticipate finding the Webster appointees fundamentally different from the other blocs on the CRC in their ideas and operating style. As outsiders who emphasize their differences, they should constitute a relatively ineffective force on the CRC.

Findings

If the second-generation thesis is correct, we should find that the Christian Right members of the Commission come from similar social backgrounds and share common levels of political experience as their peers. They should differ only in their social and religious values. If, on the other hand, the Webster appointees resemble their mass supporters in the electorate, they should be sociologically and politically distinct. That is, they should be predominantly older, female, less educated, hold lower status positions, live in rural areas, and display lower levels of political and governmental experience. The "purists" discovered in other studies also tended to be self-socialized and to have become politically involved at a later age. Table 1 provides the information to test these arguments.

(Table 1 About Here)

The data in Table 1 provide strong confirmation for that part of the second-generation thesis emphasizing the elite credentials of contemporary Christian activists. On the whole, the social profile of the Webster appointees is very close to the patterns for the other two categories of commissioners. There were no significant differences among the three groups in terms of age, gender, education, occupational status, or size of community. Where differences were observed, they generally ran counter to the image of the Christian Right as peripheral. The Christian Right

representatives had higher levels of education than moderate Republicans and were more likely to hold professional occupations than the other two categories of commissioners. They lived in somewhat larger metropolitan areas than the Democratic commissioners. These are hardly Pat Buchanan's peasants with pitchforks.

Another component of the second-generation thesis, the idea that contemporary movement elites are well-schooled in politics, was also sustained. As Table 1 demonstrates, the Christian Right commissioners were just as politically experienced as their peers on the Commission. In fact, they were more likely than other commissioners to have held membership in nonpolitical organizations like legal, medical, business or school groups, crucial training grounds for public service. All had held some kind of government position. While the Webster appointees had held fewer offices than their Democratic counterparts, they did not differ substantially from their fellow Republicans in elective experience or total number of public positions. In terms of political socialization, the Christian Right members of the Commission resembled their fellow Republicans in being somewhat more self-socialized and later to political awareness than Democrats. Considering that the Republican Party has only recently overcome decades of Democratic dominance in Florida, that finding is not surprising and suggests again how much the Webster appointees paralleled other Republicans on the Commission.

The final panel of Table 1 does show that the Webster appointees differed from the other commissioners in their religious traits. Compared to both moderate Republicans and Democrats, the Webster appointees attributed much more salience to their religion and attended church at much higher rates. They were much more likely to fit the evangelical profile in both beliefs and self-identification than other categories of commissioners and were appreciably more committed to traditionalist social values.¹⁵ They were much more likely to have been members in the

Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, the American Family Association, or the National Rifle Association. In greater or lesser degree on all of these measures, the Jennings Republicans from the party's moderate wing were actually closer to the Democratic appointees than to their erstwhile colleagues in the GOP. This set of findings does not speak to the conflicting perspectives about the Christian Right but does clearly confirm that Webster's appointees fit the profile of that social movement and deserved the label we have applied to them.

While the findings reported in the top two panels of Table 1 largely sustain certain components of the second-generation thesis, that is a very weak and partial test. The task of the Commission required participants with considerable cognitive skills and all three parties responsible for appointments undoubtedly took that into consideration. The elite nature of the Commission overwhelmed any differences among groups in social background or governmental experience. The more fundamental question that remains is whether the Webster appointees, so similar to their fellow commissioners in socioeconomic background and political experience, held their own in the CRC deliberations. We now turn to more demanding tests of that aspect of the second-generation thesis.

In classic works on politicians with "professional" and "amateur" orientations, scholars found that the two types differed significantly on their attitudes to the political process. Table 2 presents a comparison of responses to five such questions by the three categories of commissioners. On the two questions that dealt with willingness to compromise, one about support for a suboptimal party nominee and another explicitly about compromising principles, the Webster appointees clearly did not fit the "amateur" or purist profile. Although the Christian Right commissioners were less willing than the Democratic appointees to support a politically

incorrect party nominee, they were indistinguishable from their fellow Republicans on this measure. The Webster appointees were also similar to the two other categories of CRC members in their willingness to sacrifice personal belief in the making of public policy.

(Table 2 about here)

On the other three items, however, we get a sense of the particularity of the Webster appointees and how they seem much closer to the purist model than the Democrats or mainstream Republicans on the commission. They evinced much less confidence than the other commissioners in the capacity of the political process to protect moral rights. They were considerably more prone than their counterparts to regard a candidate's religious background as indicative of fitness for public office. The Webster appointees also exhibited strikingly high levels of populism in their preference for representativeness over experience when choosing policy makers. On all these items, it is noteworthy that the mainstream Republicans appointed by Senator Jennings were closer to the Democratic appointees than to their fellow Republicans appointed by Representative Webster.

Although the results are hardly definitive, the examination of responses to general questions about the political process does suggest some ways in which the Webster appointees partook of a purist mode and thus acted contrary to the second generation thesis. This continuing outsider status becomes even clearer when we move from general statements about the political process to specific assessments of the Constitutional Revision Commission. Most survey researchers express greater confidence in questions that tap responses to specific attitude objects than general statements of principle. As we shall see in Table 3, pointed questions about specific aspects of the CRC elicited substantial differences between the Webster appointees and the other commissioners.

Respondents were asked to evaluate both the Commission's deliberations and, more pointedly yet, the results of its efforts. In terms of the former, there were no discernible differences between the Webster appointees and the other commissioners. All three groups answered equivalently when asked about the utility of the revision process and the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's work. To the same degree as their counterparts, the Webster appointees were happy to have served and willing to do so again. Of course, the pattern might be different had we obtained interviews with the other three Webster commissioners, two of whom indicated their unhappiness with the experience when we tried to persuade them to complete the survey. With due caution about the possibility of sample bias, we conclude that the Webster appointees were not personally aggrieved by their experience on the Commission. In that sense, they fit the second-generation model.

(Table 3 About Here)

The question about Commission outcomes tells a very different story. On all four items under this heading, the Webster appointees were far-removed from both the other Republican and Democratic commissioners. They judged the Commission less productive and much more partisan than the other members. Indeed, the differences between the Webster group and both the Democrats and Jennings Republicans exceeded conventional levels of statistical significance in post-hoc tests. The Webster appointees were also much more dissatisfied with the revisions that made it to the ballot and much less likely to believe that the Commission addressed the constitutional issues salient to Floridians. On this last item, the differences were striking: the Commission's Democrats were almost two and one-half times as likely and the other Republicans twice as likely to judge the Commission successful at gauging public opinion. We see in these items clear evidence of polarization between the Webster appointees, on the one

hand, and the Chiles and Jennings appointees on the other. The second-generation thesis would not predict such a pattern. Scholars who have written of the Christian Right's transformation emphasize the degree to which movement activists have become much more effectively integrated with their fellow partisans. The finding here, strong disagreement between the mainstream and conservative Christian elements of the Republican bloc, is much more compatible with the perspective of the Christian Right as an outsider movement.

The final set of statistical analyses, reported in Table 4, reaffirms the view of the Webster appointees as largely marginal to the operation of the Constitutional Revision Commission. Using a scale from 1 to 5, respondents were asked to rank the value to the Commission of each voting member.¹⁶ To help interpret the findings, the four entries in the column headed "Chiles" are the mean ranking that the Chiles appointees gave to four groups of commissioners. (The dark cells signify the self-ranking of the three groups who we have used for analysis and are added solely as a reference.)

(Table 4 About Here)

If Christian Right activists have learned to play the game of politics effectively, the implication of the second-generation thesis, one would not know it from Table 4. On this evaluative dimension, the Chiles and Jennings appointees formed a relatively cohesive bloc in sharp contradistinction to the Christian Right activists appointed by Speaker Webster. Democrats and mainstream Republicans had a common preference ordering, ranking the gubernatorial and judicial appointees as the most valuable Commission members, placing the Webster appointees at the opposite end of the scale, and positioning the Jennings Republicans in the middle position. For the Webster appointees, the Commission looked very different. They regarded themselves as clearly the most valuable members. Following them, close together, were the Chiles and

Jennings appointees. They were followed at some distance by the judicial appointees, whom the Webster appointees clearly regarded as the least productive on the Commission.

We get some sense of the meaning of these quantitative rankings from the written comments provided by the survey participants. Invited to identify any splits or divisions on what most perceived as a very harmonious group, a substantial number of the gubernatorial and senatorial appointees pointed directly to the Webster commissioners. In the words of one Jennings appointee, "the House appointees seemed to be 'instructed' by the Speaker," something that did not happen to the Senate group and happened seldom to the governor's appointees. Another Jennings Republican appointee claimed that the Speaker quizzed potential appointees and imposed a pro-life "litmus test," part of a larger effort to "control" his nine members of the CRC. Webster appointees who strayed from the party line were, according to this observer, "called to the Speaker's office."¹⁷ Moreover, a Democratic commissioner reported, the appointees from "the far end of the conservative spectrum tended to shy away from most others." In more pointed language, another Democratic commissioner characterized the Webster appointees as negative and isolated, singling them out as the only commissioners who did not want to work together for the common good.¹⁸ Owing to their single-minded focus on a specific issue agenda, a Jennings Republican argued, the Webster commissioners "were not able to look at the big picture" and routinely went down to defeat.¹⁹ Four other members independently referred to the Webster delegates as the only recognizable voting "bloc" on the Commission and the identification of religious differences by two other appointees surely referred to the same split.

These findings do not bode well for Republican harmony in the Sunshine State. Note from Table 4 that the Jennings appointees regarded their Republican counterparts from the Christian Right as the least productive members of the Commission. While the Webster

appointees didn't quite return the favor, reserving last place in their affections for the judicial appointees, the Christian Right activists ranked their fellow Republicans nearly a full point below their Democratic rivals--a huge distance on a 5 point scale. In the comments section, the Webster appointees often characterized the Jennings Republicans as moderates, hardly a term of praise under the circumstances, and saw them as closer in outlook to the governor's appointees than to the House Republicans. "You can work with them on their issues," said a bitter Webster appointee about her Republican colleagues, "but they won't work with you on yours."²⁰ We also call attention to the extremely positive self-assessment of the Webster appointees. That ranking was wildly at odds with the perceptions of the Christian Right commissioners from the Democratic and mainstream Republican camps. There is more than a hint of purism in these findings, a sense by the Christian conservatives that they--and they alone--were doing good (or God's) work.

A Tale of Two Commissions

This paper began with two perspectives on the Christian Right. Advocates of the second-generation thesis contend the movement has matured, foregoing the unproductive strategies and tactics that left it ineffectual in its first decade. In the second wave, movement leaders have taken their cue from mainstream activists and learned to play the game effectively. The alternative perspective views the Christian Right as a social movement that continues to cultivate its outsider status. While the movement has developed new ways to obtain public office, it has yet to learn how to convert representation into policy change.

We found strong support for only one component of the second-generation thesis, the idea that contemporary Christian Right activists are typical of activists in general in their social standing and political background. In that regard, the proponents of the second-generation thesis

are correct to assert that the second wave of leadership exhibits the same elite traits as their political competitors. Moreover, as we saw in Tables 2 and 3, the Webster appointees did not appear to differ from other Republicans on statements of general principle about the political process or in terms of the satisfaction they derived from service on the Commission. Beyond that, however, the results gave more support to the alternative perspective rooted in the "outsider" status of the Christian Right. The Webster appointees were more likely to judge candidate fitness by religious background and to believe that amateurs make the best public policy. The data in the bottom panel of Table 3 and in Table 4 argue strongly against the second generation thesis by showing that the Webster appointees were extremely ineffective in determining the outcome of the Commission and were perceived as demonstrably less valuable participants than commissioners appointed by the governor, Senate president, and chief justice. All these differences suggest the continuity between the first and second waves of the Christian Right and the continuing adherence of movement activists to perspectives and tactics that inhibit their effectiveness in the political arena.

It is important to emphasize that these results are not a spurious function of partisanship or bloc size. On the items where we found major differences between the Webster appointees and the Democrats, the Speaker's commissioners were also estranged from their fellow Republicans. The mainstream Republicans had precisely the same number of representatives as the social conservatives and faced the same partisan disadvantage but they saw a very different reality. The Commission's self-imposed adoption of a 3/5 rule for sending revisions to the ballot seems to have bred an atmosphere which necessitated the crossing of party lines, an invitation to compromise accepted by the Senate appointees but often spurned by the Webster commissioners.

In a sense, borrowing from Dickens, this has been a tale of two commissions. In perusing the written comments and examining the transcripts of telephone interviews, we were struck by the contrasting reactions of the Chiles and Jennings appointees and the commissioners appointed by Speaker Webster. The gubernatorial and senatorial appointees often characterized the Commission in glowing terms. It was, said one Jennings appointee, "a collegial group who seemed to respect one another's opinions." Another Senate appointee described the commissioners as "mature, intelligent, experienced, and balanced." The Democrats similarly acclaimed the group for its "selflessness and sacrifice," praising members for routinely voting their consciences rather than party or interest. Those qualities made service on the Commission "the most intellectually stimulating, physically exhausting, and worthwhile experience in my professional life," said a veteran public official appointed by the governor. The virtues of the CRC seemed especially apparent to the commissioners who had served in the Florida legislature. Compared to that highly charged partisan environment, said one veteran of the State House, the Commission adopted a fair process that considered issues on their merits and not on their partisan implications.²¹ Citing the same atmosphere, a Democratic commissioner with years of experience in the state legislature concluded, "The group worked as well together as any public body I have been in or observed."

The Webster appointees came away from their experience with a very different impression of the proceedings. Far from being fair, two complained, the Commission and its committees were "stacked" so that "the liberals far outnumbered the conservatives."²² Far from being collegial, some commissioners were rude, intolerant, and deceitful and the feminists among them "misrepresented facts deliberately." The result was that good revisions were kept off the ballot and a number of bad proposals were sent to voters. "We did more to hurt the people of

this state than to help them," said one Webster appointee. Describing the Commission as a failure, reflected another, "I think we have really done harm."²³

While these contrasting images reflected honest disagreement, it seems that the root of the conflict was precisely the purist vs. professional orientation of the commissioners from different camps. Despite their partisan differences, the gubernatorial and Senatorial appointees appear to have regarded their job as fixing the mechanics of Florida's constitution. When they mentioned items that should have been on the ballot but were not forwarded to voters, they tended to concentrate on procedural issues about taxation, reapportionment, and allocation of lottery funds. Consistent with that perspective, they concentrated largely on process and avoided massive changes that might doom their efforts at the ballot box. In so doing, they were determined to avoid the fate of the 1978 Commission whose every revision was voted down by the electorate. That kind of results-oriented pragmatism is a hallmark of the "professional" disposition in politics.

The Webster appointees who participated in the survey seem to have perceived constitutional revision as an opportunity for ideological confrontation. In identifying issues that should have been put on the ballot, they focused on substantive issues such as affirmative action, abortion, and parental rights or procedural reforms intended to protect basic rights from what they saw as counter-majoritarian judicial tyranny. The failure to put these items on the ballot was attributed by one Webster appointee to the "cowardice" and obsession with consensus exhibited by the majority. Making that argument much more explicitly, another Webster appointee saw a clash of worldviews between the "secular humanist super-majority" on the commission and the minority of commissioners committed to "Biblical Judeo-Christian goals." When asked whether it was worthwhile to horse trade in order to win some concessions from the majority, an

articulate Webster appointee reported to us that "I personally did not believe that if I compromised my values that I would end up winning on the other end."²⁴ The constant battles left this commissioner "feeling battered" and "filthy," in desperate need of a shower. Reflecting broadly on the CRC experience, this commissioner concluded

I never wanted to engage in the dirty business [of politics]. If I can't go home with a clean conscience, then I'm just not going to do it. I don't know if I would make a good legislator. I don't intend to find out. You can't play the compromise game with the constitution.

That statement, the credo of the purist, came from only one Webster commissioner. Nonetheless, the formal survey responses and comments of the group suggest that the sentiments were widespread among the Speaker's appointees. That is also how it looked to the *Palm Beach Post* editorialist who opined that the Webster wing of the Republican Party had largely gone unheard "because it held its truths to be immutable--which is theology--and rejected accommodation--which is politics."²⁵

No single case study can resolve the differences in theoretical perspective that we reported at the outset of the paper. Nonetheless, when given a chance to participate in the crucial task of constitutional revision, the Christian conservatives in Florida do not seem to have made much of the opportunity.²⁶ We found in this case study a striking disparity between the performance of the movement in the electoral and policy-making realms. As a mass movement, the Christian Right has attained a place at the table in Florida politics but it does not seem yet to have converted that access into effective policy advocacy. These findings echo the conclusions Rozell and Wilcox drew from their Virginia case study. In that state, too, the Christian Right had effectively penetrated the political system and emerged as a potent faction within the Republican

Party. Some movement activists made an effective transition from outside agitators to political insiders with clout. Yet Rozell and Wilcox could also find numerous instances when other activists maintained or reverted to the politically self-defeating tactics of the 1980s. These mixed findings from two states suggest the need to qualify the second-generation thesis. We must distinguish between the transformation of the movement's electoral strategy, which appears to have been quite successful, and the much more problematic behavior of its activists when they obtain public office. There is no basis for assuming that changes in the organizational realm of the movement must necessarily translate into a more potent role in governance.

If reports of the movement's demise were premature a decade ago, so too were claims about its transformation into an effective instrument of policy change

Notes

¹ Michael Lienesch, "Right-Wing Religion: Christian Conservatism as a Political Movement," *Political Science Quarterly* 97 (Fall, 1982): 425.

² Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right: Conservative Protestant Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Michael D'Antonio, *Fall From Grace: The Failed Crusade of the Christian Right* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989).

³ Mary E. Bendyna and Clyde Wilcox, "The Christian Right Old and New: A Comparison of the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition" in Corwin E. Smidt and James M. Penning, eds., *Sojourners in the Wilderness: The Christian Right in Comparative Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 41-56; Matthew C. Moen, *Transformation of the Christian Right* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Matthew C. Moen, "From Revolution to Evolution: The Changing Nature of the Christian Right," *Sociology of Religion* (Fall, 1994): 345-358; Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, *Second Coming: The New Christian Right in Virginia Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, "Second Coming: The Strategies of the New Christian Right," *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (Summer, 1996): 271-294; Hanna Rosin, "A 'Maturing' Christian Right," *Washington Post*, 7 April 2000; Clyde E. Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers: The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press).

⁴ Lienesch, "Right-Wing Religion," 422.

⁵ Lienesch, "Right-Wing Religion," 423-424.

⁶ The advocates of the second-generation thesis also contend that the movement changed its focus from Washington, DC to the local and state level of politics. With a state-level study, we cannot test this aspect of the revised conventional wisdom.

⁷ Clyde Wilcox, Matthew DeBell and Lee Sigelman, "The Second Coming of the New Christian Right: Patterns of Popular Support in 1984 and 1996," *Social Science Quarterly* 80 (March, 1999): 181-192. See also Mark J. Rozell, Clyde Wilcox and John C. Green, "Religious Constituencies and Support for the Christian Right in the 1990s," *Social Science Quarterly* 79 (December, 1998).

⁸ Rozell and Wilcox, *Second Coming*; Rozell and Wilcox, "Second Coming."

⁹ The process also generated nine separate constitutional revisions, eight of which were accepted by the electorate. This was a striking contrast to the previous Commission that had seen all of its revisions rejected by voters.

¹⁰ The Attorney General serves as an automatic member of the Commission. Because of our intent to focus on the appointees, we did not seek information from the Attorney General and will not refer to that position in our discussion of the Commission.

¹¹ Except for Table 4, where preliminary analysis showed it disguised some important distinctions, the 3 judicial appointees were combined with the gubernatorial appointees.

¹² Jennings was reported to be pro-choice in her personal orientation but never publicly acknowledged that sentiment.

¹³ For evidence on the fortunes of the Christian Right in Florida, see Kenneth D. Wald, "Florida: Running Globally and Winning Locally" in Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *God at the Grassroots: The Christian Right in the 1994 Elections* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995): 19-46; Kenneth D. Wald and Richard K. Scher, "Losing by Winning? The Odyssey of the Religious Right in Florida" in *God at the Grassroots 1996*, in Mark Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997): 79-98; Kenneth D. Wald, Maureen Tartaglione and Richard K. Scher, "Answered Prayers and Mixed Blessings: The Christian Right in Florida," in John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Prayers in the Precincts: The Christian Right in the 1998 Elections* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000): 115-144.

¹⁴ Aaron Wildavsky, "The Goldwater Phenomenon: Purists, Politicians, and the Two-Party System," in David W. Abbot and Edward T. Rogowski, eds., *Political Parties* (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1978); James Q. Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962); John W. Soule and James W. Clarke, "Amateurs and Professionals: A Study of Delegates to the 1968 Democratic National Convention," *American Political Science Review* 64 (September, 1970): 888-898.

¹⁵ Doctrinal evangelicals were operationalized as Protestants who (1) reported a born-again experience, (2) had tried to encourage someone to accept Jesus as savior, and (3) regarded the

Bible as either the actual or inspired word of God. The moral traditionalism scale, composed of three general items about modern lifestyles, traditional family ties, and tolerance, and three specific questions on school prayer, abortion, and gay marriage, had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

¹⁶ There are two qualifications associated with the measure. First, we decided to leave out the scores assigned to one Democratic commissioner who served briefly and then resigned well before the Commission began its deliberations. The fact that ten respondents assigned him the lowest value of 1 and another five left his ranking blank suggests he was evaluated based on his brief membership, not his contribution. In calculating the rankings by the appointing agency, we also omitted the scores reported by one Webster appointee. On a questionnaire that arrived months after we thought the study had closed, this respondent assigned all participants the maximum value of 5. While it is theoretically possible that respondent 24 felt all members were equally valuable, it's more plausible that the survey was completed hurriedly and without care. We gained that impression from the respondent's curious decision to assign the maximum value to the drop-out commissioner and the large number of items left blank on the questionnaire.

¹⁷ Telephone interview with Jennings appointee, 10 May 2000.

¹⁸ Telephone interview with Chiles appointee, 23 February 2000.

¹⁹ Telephone interview with Jennings appointee, 10 May 2000.

²⁰ Telephone interview with Webster appointee, 1 March 2000.

²¹ Telephone interview with Jennings appointee, 10 May 2000.

²² Telephone interview with Webster appointee, 1 March 2000.

²³ Telephone interview with Webster appointee, 1 March 2000.

²⁴ Telephone interview with Webster appointee, 1 March 2000.

²⁵ "Webster Picks Theocrats to Evaluate Constitution," *Palm Beach Post*, 10 June 1997.

²⁶ Indeed, one Webster appointee went on record in favor of abolishing the entire Commission.

Peter Wallsten, "Abolish Constitutional Panel, A Member Says," *St. Petersburg Times*, 29 January, 1998.

Table 1

Social and Political Backgrounds
by Source of Appointment

	Appointed by		
	Chiles (Democrats) (Max. N=13)	Jennings (Moderate Republicans) (Max. N=5)	Webster (Christian Conservatives) (Max. N=6)
Social & Demographic Traits			
mean age	55	62	52
% female	31	40	33
% with advanced degree*	85	40	100
% with professional occupation	58	60	80
mean population of SMSA (in thousands)	972	1,378	1,119
Political & Governmental Experience			
parental influence on political opinions (1=no influence, 5=great influence)	3.8	3.4	3.8
age when current political opinions were developed	18-22	Over 28	Over 28
% member of professional/business/civic organizations	46	20	67
% ever held government position	100	100	100
% ever held elective position	55	40	33
mean number of government jobs ever held	3.25	2.40	2.50
Religious Beliefs and Behavior			
% regard religion as "very important" in life	31	60	100
% attend church more than monthly*	25	60	100
% identify as evangelical/fundamentalist/charismatic*	8	20	67
% accept evangelical doctrine*	0	20	67
% belong to socially conservative organization**	0	20	83%
mean score on moral traditionalism scale (0-30)***	7.2	15.8	25.0

Asterisks refer to distributions which vary significantly by source of appointment using either Pearson X^2 or a t-test from an analysis of variance as appropriate. A single asterisk refers to a p value less than or equal to .05, two asterisks to .01, and three to .001.

Table 2

Assessment of the the Political Process
by Source of Appointment

Statement	Appointed by		
	Chiles (Max. N=13)	Jennings (Max. N=5)	Webster (Max N=6)
The political process cannot be trusted to protect American's basic moral rights. (1=Disagree strongly, 7=Agree strongly)	3.08	3.00	4.83
If my political party nominated someone for president whose opinions were not in agreement with some of my political beliefs, I would still probably support this candidate for the sake of my political party. . (1=Disagree strongly, 7=Agree strongly)	3.62	3.00	3.17
The religious background of a candidate is an important factor to consider when judging fitness for public office. (1=Disagree strongly, 7=Agree strongly)*	2.54	3.60	5.17
Policy makers should never/rarely be willing to sacrifice their personal beliefs for the sake of political compromise. (Percentage selecting this response option.)	46%	80%	60%
The policy making process is best served when policy makers are less experienced in formal politics, but are more aware of the opinions of the average person. (Percentage selecting this response option.)*	9%	0%	60%

Asterisks refer to distributions which vary significantly by source of appointment using either Pearson X^2 or a t-test from an analysis of variance as appropriate. A single asterisk refers to a p value less than or equal to .05, two asterisks to .01, and three to .001.

Table 3

Assessment of the CRC by Source of Appointment

	Appointed by:		
	Chiles (Max. N=13)	Jennings (Max N=5)	Webster (Max N=6)
Statements about Commission Process			
Does Florida's Constitutional Revision process satisfy the state's need for a systematic review of its constitution? (percent agreeing)	100%	100%	83%
Do you feel any regret regarding your decision to serve on the Commission? (1=great regret, 7=no regret)	6.77	7.00	6.83
Did you feel that your views were given adequate attention by the Commission? (percent saying Commission fairly gave attention)	100%	100%	83%
Would you serve on the Commission again? (percent yes)	85%	80%	83%
Statements about Commission Outcomes			
Overall, how would you rate the productiveness of the CRC? (1=very unproductive, 7=very productive)	6.15	6.00	5.00
Please rate the level of partisanship that you experienced on the Commission. (1=very partisan, 7=very nonpartisan)	4.77	5.20	3.33
Generally speaking, were you satisfied with the proposed revisions that were put on the ballot (1=very unsatisfied, 7=very satisfied)*	5.92	6.00	3.33
Did the Commission adequately address the constitutional issues of serious concern to Floridians? (percent agree)	77%	60%	33%

Asterisks refer to distributions which vary significantly by source of appointment using either Pearson X^2 or a t-test from an analysis of variance as appropriate. A single asterisk refers to a p value less than or equal to .05, two asterisks to .01, and three to .001.

Table 4

Evaluation of Commission Members
by Source of Appointment

On a scale of 1 (Very little value) to 5 (Great Value), mean value given to:	Appointed by:		
	Chiles (N=11)	Jennings (N=5)	Webster (N=3)
Chiles Appointees	4.19	4.05	3.09
Jennings Appointees	3.14	3.29	2.78
Webster Appointees**	2.38	3.18	3.67
Chief Justice Appointees	4.05	4.07	2.44

Asterisks refer to distributions which vary significantly by source of appointment using either Pearson X^2 or a t-test from an analysis of variance as appropriate. A single asterisk refers to a p value less than or equal to .05, two asterisks to .01, and three to .001.