

**WHY CAN'T THE BAPTIST AND
THE NONDENOMINATIONAL BE FRIENDS:
THE EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS
IN OKLAHOMA**

DR. DAVID SEARCY
SOUTHWESTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

The study of the effect of religious belonging is a long history of evolution on how to best account for the diversity that exists within religious groups while also categorizing people into large enough groups for analysis. Importantly these schemes have almost entirely focused on religious belonging in a national context. This study begins the development of a scheme that categorizes religious organizations and identities based on who religious groups identify as allies within their own unique religious marketplace. Oklahoma is an interesting test case because its religious and political makeup are unique compared to nation. This creates and breaks alliances in interesting ways. After developing this scheme, the article uses data from the Cooperative Election Survey to compare between religious movements on political identity, support for prominent politicians, electoral activity, and support for immigration policy proposals. The article finds support for the validity of using religious movements as the basis for classification both in Oklahoma and in other states.

RELIGIOUS BELONGING

Any study of the effects of religion on politics must first decide exactly how the researcher classifies religion. While there are a lot of different aspects of religion in a person's daily life most studies focus on one of three different aspects that have been found to produce statistically significant effects (cite Guth et al); belief, behavior, and belonging. This study uses the last aspect, belonging.

The earliest forms of religious belonging classification did this very simply. Hedberg (1955) used three, Protestant, Catholic, Jew. As the study of religion grew social scientists saw the need for a classification scheme that was more comprehensive of the religious diversity that exists within some of these categories. Protestantism is a diverse category made up of religious families (like Baptists) and denominations (specific types of Baptists; American, Southern, and National Baptists to name a few). The problem with using denominations is that America's religious landscape is too diverse. There are literally hundreds of different groups in the United States. The PEW Religious Landscape Survey's (2015) questioning methodology is the basis for other surveys. It recognizes 75 unique kinds of Baptists. That does not include Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, etc. Studying the effect of religious belonging requires accounting for diversity while also having large enough categories to effectively analyze.

While there are classification schemes that minimize the denominational differences within families (Sherkat 2014) these schemes are more applicable in sociology than in political science. There is a long body of research that finds that intra-familial splits are almost always over politics (Wurthnow 1988). Niebhur wrote that the reasons that Christians split from one another is almost never about theology but politics (1929). The Southern Baptist Convention split with the other Baptists over slavery (Goen 1988), the Presbyterian Church in American split over integration (Dupont

2015), African Methodist Episcopalians were created because northern white Methodists did not want to worship with free African Americans (Morris 1984). The list goes on and on. Notice that none of these divisions happened because of theology. The divisions OFNurred because of a political issue. Denominations help us identify political divisions within theological families.

T.W. Smith's FUND measure (1990) classified denominations into groups based on how the denomination's support for fundamentalism. FUND fell out of favor for a few reasons. One problem was that it assumed that respondents would reflect the beliefs of their denomination. Future research revealed that this was frequently not the case. People end up in religious denominations for all sorts of reasons and their personal religious beliefs are not always a reflection of the teachings of their denomination. The second reason that it fell out of favor is that as Steensland et al (2000) noted; fundamentalism had become a political and a religious identity. People who did have fundamentalist beliefs would not identify as such because that term did not reflect their personal politics.

Today the dominant form of classification of religious belonging in the United States is RELTRAD. (Steensland et al 2000) RELTRAD stands for religious tradition. It uses the historical development of denominations in the United States as the basis for classification. RELTRAD breaks Christianity into six groups: Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, Historically Black Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Mainline Protestants reflect the dominant traditional forms of Christianity that developed after the Protestant Reformation. Evangelicals reflect the denominational splits that mostly began in the early to mid-20th century. Historically Black Protestantism were the denominations that were created because of segregation policies in America which led to an entirely different historical trajectory for these denominations even though they are in the same religious family.

RELTRAD is the dominant form of belonging classification, it is not without its critics. There is growing evidence that evangelical has become a political identity in the same way that fundamentalism had become a political identity in the 1980s and 1990s. We can see this in surveys that ask for both religious denomination and various religious identities. We can easily find “evangelical” Catholics, Mormons, and Episcopalians despite those religious groups not being part of the Evangelical tradition. Another criticism is that religious tradition was designed to explain the denominational breaks of the 20th Century and so it is poor at explaining denominational breaks of today. Denominations may feel stable, but they are in flux. The more modern splits over LGBT acceptance that have hit the ELCA, United Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Church are examples of this problem. Your denomination is not part of an Evangelical tradition if you were a Mainliner until 2021. Another problem is that religious tradition does not reflect how denominations order themselves. It particularly oversimplifies the diversity that exists in Evangelical Protestantism (Grant and Searcy 2019) and it completely misses the organizational ties that have developed between historically black Protestant denominations and their white counterparts.

The problem is systemic. RELTRAD is a good scheme at doing exactly what Steensland et al (2000) designed it to do. It reflects the denominational schisms that emerged in the mid-20th Century at the national level. It does that job very well. It does not necessarily reflect how religious groups organize themselves. It is also designed to reflect religion on a national level in the United States. For researchers who are interested in religion on the local, state, or even international level it may be insufficient.

RELIGIOUS BELONGING ON THE STATE LEVEL

While there has been a great deal of research onto the religious make-up of the United States there has not been much that has focused on religious belonging on the state level. When religion is used as a variable in state level analyses researchers will typ-

ically use RELTRAD. This is despite each state having its own unique economy, racial make-up, immigrant population, and political culture to name a few differences (Gray et al 2018). States have unique religious make-up. The size and power of a religious denomination affect the likelihood that they will form alliances with other groups in the same way that it affects the likelihood that an alliance will form between two social movements (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). This is vitally important for religion on the state level because it is likely that each religious group is going to vary significantly in their power and influence depending on the state you want to analyze. Catholicism makes up a quarter of the United States' religious market on the national level but there are going to be variations of that on the state level. In some states they might make up more than 25%, in others they will make up less. In some states Catholicism will be dominated by different racial and ethnic backgrounds. If we want to analyze the effect of religious belonging on the state level then it is worth analyzing what religious belonging on the state level actually looks like.

The easiest, and most reflective method for this analysis, is to look at how religious groups organize themselves on a state-by-state basis. The challenging part of this is that while ecumenical relationships are common on the national level they are less common on the state level. At the National level there are groups like the National Council of Churches (NCC), the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), and the Council of National Black Churches (CNBC) among others. Of those three only one, the NCC, has state level affiliate organizations. While that limits the basis upon which we can make classifications it does not mean that the task is impossible.

The NCC affiliate organizations are a wonderful resource because despite being reflective of the national NCC they do not have identical membership. An example is the Arizona Faith Network. The Arizona Faith Network has denominational and "at large" partners. The Denominational Partners groups include the traditional

Mainline Protestant churches (Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, ELCA Lutherans, PCUSA, etc....) but it also includes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix (Catholic). I am not arguing that there are no historical or theological differences between these different religious groups. Clearly the Catholic church and LDS Mormons are not the same. What this reflects is that these differences are not so great that these different organizations, given the issues that they are all facing in Arizona, are unwilling to work together as partners.

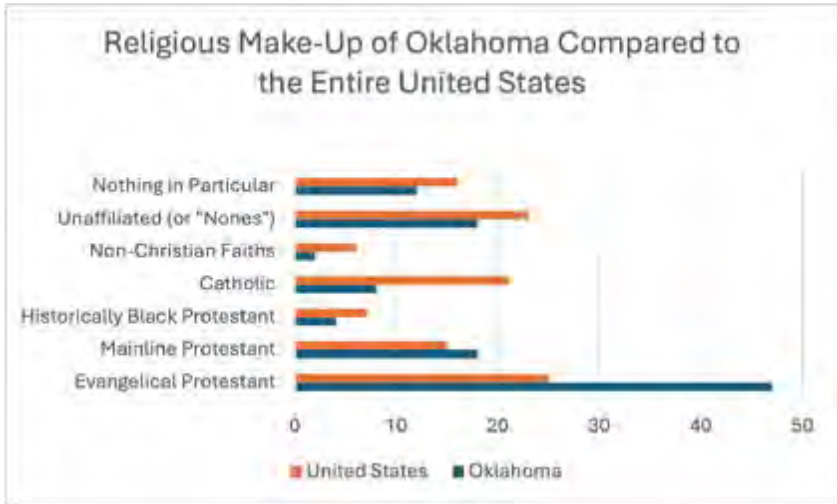
Another thing that is apparent when examining state and local religious organizations is that they are more likely to be interfaith as opposed to ecumenical. An ecumenical organization is one that is building closer relationships among Christian denominations. Interfaith organizations are groups that involve people of differing religious faiths. There are obvious differences in belief and practices across different religious faiths but in this case that does not matter. Political Scientists are interested primarily in the political policy goals of religious people. Interfaith organizations lobby for the shared goals of their members. By joining the interfaith organization, the denominations are uniting their political goals to the political goals of non-Christian religious faiths.

OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma is a good state to analyze because of the interesting differences within the state's religious landscape when compared to the religious landscape of the United States. Figure One presents the religious landscape of Oklahoma from the 2014 PEW Religious Landscape Survey.

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Figure One: Comparison of Oklahoma's Religious Landscape to the United States as a Whole



Oklahoma is a heavily Evangelical state. Almost half of the PEW Respondents were Evangelical which is far above the national average. Evangelicals make up almost 60% of self-identified Oklahoman Christians. The only other group who outpaces their national average in Oklahoma is another group of white Protestants; the Mainline. The Mainline percentage of Oklahoma is slightly ahead of their national average.

There is a population drop-off among all other historical traditions including Catholics, Historically Black Protestants, Non-Christian religious faiths, the “nones”, and people who identify as nothing. Some of these findings are due to state demographics. Historically Black Protestantism’s smaller percentage is compared to the nation partially because Oklahoma has a lower-than-national average number of African American residents. While Oklahoma is more racially diverse than many of its neighbors that is largely due to the state’s comparatively high Indigenous population.

As we break down religious alliances in the state of Oklahoma one thing to look for in the state is how the religious composition of

the state alters the behavior of the religious actors in the state. Do Catholics behave in a different way when they make up 8% of the population than when they make-up 21% of the population? Given the tiny number of non-Christian religious people in the state who do they turn to for political alliances? Oklahoma City and Tulsa are large metropolitan areas that do have a diverse religious landscape, and those religious minorities have political goals just like they do in the broader national context. How are they attempting to achieve those goals and who do they ally themselves with?

THE OKLAHOMA FAITH NETWORK AND ROMAN CATHOLICS

The largest Oklahoma based affiliate of the National Council of Churches in Oklahoma is the “Oklahoma Faith Network.” The OFN, an outgrowth of the Oklahoma Council of Churches, was founded in 1972 and has the stated goal of, “organizing disaster response solutions, cooperating with government agencies to educate people on specific needs, and hosting events designed to inform and promote understanding and unity.” (History, 2025)

Chart One: The Communion Members of the Oklahoma Faith Network

Communions	RELTRAD Code
African Methodist Episcopal Church	Historically Black Protestant
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church	Historically Black Protestant
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	Mainline Protestant
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church	Historically Black Protestant
Cooperating Baptist Fellowship	Mainline Protestant
Episcopal Church	Mainline Protestant
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Mainline Protestant
Evangelical Episcopal Church	Evangelical Protestant
Mennonite Church	Mainline Protestant
Presbyterian Church, USA	Mainline Protestant
Progressive Oklahoma Baptist State Convention	Historically Black Protestant
Reformed Church in America	Mainline Protestant
Religious Society of Friends	Mainline Protestant
United Church of Christ	Mainline Protestant
United Methodist Church	Mainline Protestant

The Oklahoma Faith Network (OFN) is primarily made up of a combination of Mainline Protestant denominations in their communion group. You can see that most of the traditionally large Mainline denominations are almost all present in that list. The ma-

For exception is that the American Baptists are completely absent. The only predominately white Baptist denomination in the OFN is the much smaller Cooperating Baptist Fellowship.

The other interesting thing to note in Chart One is that the historically black Protestant denominations have joined the OFN. The historically black denominations in Oklahoma that have joined the OFN are almost all Methodist; AME, AME Zion, and CME are all historically black Methodist denominations. The only non-Methodist historically black denomination is that affiliated with the Progressive Baptist Church. This is a much smaller denomination than the largest black Baptist denomination in the United States, the National Baptist Convention.

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Chart Two: The Congregational Members of the Oklahoma Faith Network

Congregation	Denominational Affiliation	RELTRAD Code
Crown Heights Christian Church	Disciples of Christ	Mainline
Edmond Trinity Christian Church	Disciples of Christ	Mainline
First Christian Church, Edmond	Disciples of Christ	Mainline
First Christian Church, Norman	Disciples of Christ	Mainline
Joy Mennonite Church	Mennonite Church USA	
Mayflower Congregation Church – UCC	United Church of Christ (UCC)	Mainline
Northhaven Church	Alliance of Baptists	Mainline
Oklahoma City First Church of the Nazarene	Church of the Nazarene	Evangelical
Parish of St. Bernard of Clairvaux	Catholic	Catholic
St. Augustine of Canterbury Episcopal Church	Episcopal Church	Mainline
St. Paul’s Cathedral	Episcopal Church	Mainline
Southern Hills Christian Church	Disciples of Christ	Mainline
Coffee Creek Church	Nondenominational	Varies*

The congregational OFN membership tells a slightly different story than the denominational data. We do see a lot of the same denominations replicated here. This could indicate that the congregation is especially committed to ecumenical and interfaith co-

operation.

More interesting are the congregations who are outliers. They belong to denominations that are not OFN members. Those churches are the Northhaven Church, the Oklahoma City First Church of the Nazarene, the Parish of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and Coffee Creek Church. The Northhaven Church is affiliated with the Baptist identity, but it is the only Baptist church in the entire state to affiliate with the OFN. This is also true of Coffee Creek Church. Baptist and Nondenominational churches have significant variation on whether they work with other churches. Some are more ecumenical, but many are insular. In both cases the congregations cannot be seen to represent the views of the religious identity but instead represent an outlier; an ecumenical congregation in an otherwise nonecumenical religious identity.

The St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish is interesting. It is the only Catholic parish who has joined the OFN. The St. Bernard parish is in the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma. The Diocese has dozens of members, but the St. Bernard parish is the only one to formally join the OFN. While the membership of St. Bernard should be noted it appears to be an outlier congregation. There are dozens of Catholic parishes across the state of Oklahoma and despite that none have joined the OFN. None of the Diocese in Oklahoma have joined. They are therefore not a representative of Catholics in the state. The scheme says this because the group is unwilling to join the OFN.

This is true of our other outlier, the Oklahoma City First Church of the Nazarene (OKCFCotN). The Church of the Nazarene is an Evangelical denomination. This is misleading. The OFN lists the denomination on its previous name. The church is currently known as OKC First. It changed its name after leaving the Nazarene denomination in 2025 due to its political stance in opposition to LGBTQIA+ people. (Hinton 2025)

Chart Three: Interfaith Members of the Oklahoma Faith Network

CAIR Oklahoma
First Unitarian Church of OKC
Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City
Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry

Chart Three includes a small selection of the community partners of the OFN. Community members include non-Christian organizations. These make the OFN interfaith as opposed to just ecumenical like the NCC. The most interesting takeaway is that Islamic organizations play an important role in the OFN. There are two Islamic affiliated with the OFN. CAIR is a state-level chapter of the national CAIR organization. CAIR stands for the Council on American-Islamic Relations. CAIR is an organization who defines its mission as, “to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.” (Vision, Mission, and Core Principles 2025) In addition to CAIR-OK we also see the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City. The ISGOC is the largest Islamic Center in the state.

The Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry is an interfaith organization which is trying to develop relationships and communities among religious organizations in the Tulsa area. We once again see some of the same groups we have seen up to this point. There are many Mainline and Historically Black Protestant congregations. We also, once again, see Unitarian/Universalists and Islamic society groups in Tulsa. The TMM also has multiple Jewish temples and organizations. These include B’Nai Emunah, Jewish Federation of Tulsa, and Temple Israel.

What an analysis of the OFN demonstrates is that given the reli-

gious and political make-up of the state that most Mainline and non-Christian denominations view each other as political allies. Regardless of the important theological differences between members they are willing to work together in the state.

The OFN represents an interfaith religious movement within the state. It is a formal tie between multiple Mainline denominations and non-Christians including Jews, Muslims, and Unitarians.

While there are linkages between the OFN and the Roman Catholic Church the ties are too weak to link them together. The Catholic Church has large Diocese operating within the state and none of them are willing to join in OFN. There are isolated congregations that will join either the OFN directly or indirectly through the Tulsa Metropolitan Ministries. Those congregations may represent the building of a coalition between the OFN and the Catholics but that coalition has not come together by the time of this article.

RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

The OFN is an alliance of Mainline Protestants, Historically Black Protestants, and non-Christians in the state. The remainder of the religious marketplace can be split into four religious movements; all of which use a collective religious identity to put them together.

Baptists

Figure One presented Oklahoma as a predominately Evangelical state. Evangelicalism tells only part of the story. Baptists dominate the religious landscape in Oklahoma. According to Pew (2015) Baptists make up roughly half of Oklahoma's Evangelicals, half of Oklahoma's Historically Black Protestants, and a third of its Mainline Protestants.

In the absence of contradictory information Baptists should be classified together because they hold similar theologies and have a share religious identity (Ammerman 1990, Brackney 2004). Bap-

tists are also unique because their congregational power structure allows local churches to associate with more than one denomination at a time. In Oklahoma it is entirely possible for a congregation to associate with both the American Baptist Church USA and the National Baptist Convention.

On the national level we have reason to separate Baptists into different traditions. The Southern Baptists exist independently from the others. In Oklahoma those differences are not there. Despite being a member of the NCC the American Baptist Church USA in Oklahoma is not a member of the OFN. The exact same thing is true of the National Baptist Convention. The only Baptist church that affiliates with the OFN is the much smaller Progressive Baptist church which is categorized alongside the OFN.

As far back as Olson (1965) social scientists have known that affiliation is based as much on power as it is in compatible goals. In the case of Baptists there numbers in Oklahoma are so great that they have no need or desire to affiliate with any other religious movement. They function as a movement unto themselves.

Nondenominational

The other explicitly religious identity that is large enough in Oklahoma to qualify as its own religious movement are Nondenominationalists. Nondenom are members of local congregations that are not connected to any denominational structure (Ammerman 2005).

The thing that binds Nondenominationalists together is the collective identity of nondenominational. It is a term they use that differentiates them from Baptists. Burge (2018) has argued that Nondenominationalists and Baptists are similar. While the data does back up Burge's argument the similarities this paper is using who the groups associate themselves with. Nondenominational churches could very easily be Baptists. As Burge (2018) points out the church governance and beliefs are incredibly similar. In Oklaho-

ma being a Baptist aligns you with a religious identity that is a plurality of the population. Despite the similarities that exist theologically Nondenominationalists are not doing that.

Atheists/Agnostics and Religious Nones

The final religious identities that are prominent enough in Oklahoma large enough to warrant their own religious category are the non-religious. The non-religious are largely made up of three groups: Atheists, Agnostics, and the Religious Nones. Some might be tempted to put all three of these groups into a single group but that overlooks the literature on the non-religious. As Campbell et al. (2018) put it,

“Just as religion is multidimensional (Kellstedt et al. 1996) so is secularism. Many secularists do not simply reject religion; they actively promote secular beliefs, such as the efficacy of reason and science, and human experience as a proper basis for ethical judgments. Moreover, to be actively secular does not preclude also being religious in some way. That is, someone can embrace a secular perspective while maintaining a religious identity and participating in religious activities. This is not a possibility when secularity is defined only as nonreligion, making it impossible to distinguish passive secularism, or the absence of religiosity, from active secularism, or the affirmation of secular identity and beliefs.” (Campbell et al. 2018, pg. 553)

Researchers have increasingly focused on the religious “nones” as they have grown (Baker and Smith 2009). People who identify as a religious none, or nothing in particular, do not identify with a specific religion. That does not mean that they lack religious beliefs (Drescher 2016). Most importantly, they are not willing to accept the identity of either Atheist or Agnostic. Religious Nones is a unique religious identity that separates itself not only from explicit religious identities like Christian, but it also separates itself

from explicitly non-religious identities like Atheist.

WHO IS LEFT?

At this point using religious movements has identified two formally organized groups; The Oklahoma Faith Network and Catholics. Each represents a large and formally organized religious movement. While there is some evidence of coalition building between the two groups this is very much at the embryonic stage of development. After the formal organizing I identified four prominent religious identities in Oklahoma: Baptist, Nondenominational, Atheist/Agnostic, and Religious Nones. None of these are formally organized but each represents a collective identity that each uses to distinguish itself from the others in the Oklahoman religious marketplace.

This leaves us with one final religious movement to discuss. In many discussions of religious belonging categorization this is where we would focus on non-Christian religions. In Oklahoma that is not the case. As demonstrated earlier, non-Christian faiths like Islam, Judaism, Unitarianism associate themselves with the OFN and are classified there. In the case of religious movements in Oklahoma the movement that is left are Christians who are in churches that do not fall into one of our previous categories.

Every categorization scheme is going to have a group that is the "Other" category. In the case of religious movements there is at least something binding these disparate Christian denominations together; they do have a collective identity. They all identify themselves as Christian. While there are differences of theology and practice between Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Mormons, etc... they all have the common identity of Christian. This movement is therefore expressed in a collective religious identity that has internal religious diversity.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses data from the 2022 Cooperative Election Study (Schaffner et al 2003). The Cooperative Election Study is a nationally representative sample of 60,000 American adults. To make it useful for this survey I used only the data from people who identified that they lived in Oklahoma. That left 686 respondents. This was more than sufficient to analyze quantitatively.

The first step, as described in detail above, was to implement the Religious Movement categorization scheme above. The Oklahoma Faith Network, Baptists, Nondenominational, Other Christians, Catholics, Atheists/Agnostics, and Religious Nones were created. The only remaining people left to categorize were respondents who reported that they were “Something Else.” Based on the question wording and the existing literature (Burge 2017) the assumption I went with was that most of the “Something Else” category represents predominately Christians who do not know what the word Protestant means. Luckily the “best practices” of existing schemes uses a religious identity to classify Christians who we cannot clearly identify, a “born-again” religious identity. (Steenland et al 2000, Smidt 2013, Woodberry et al 2012, Wuthnow 1988) Respondents who identified as “Something Else” but also claimed a “born-again” religious identity were classified with the Other Christians group. Respondents who identified as “Something Else” but did not claim a “born-again” religious identity were classified with the Oklahoma Faith Network.

I was interested in the effect on religious movements in a couple of different areas. The first was in partisan identification. In the interest of simplicity, I used a three-point scale of Democrat, Republican, and Independent. Religious movements were first examined to see if there were partisan differences between the religious movements. After that analysis partisanship was used as a control variable.

For religious movement support of political candidates, I selected the two most high-profile examples in the dataset for Oklahomans. The first was vote in the 2020 election. For that I focused on vote for Biden, vote for Trump, and non-voting. The data indicated an extremely low vote total for third party candidates. This is not surprising. Oklahoma features several laws that make third party support and ballot access very restrictive compared to other states (FairVote 2015). I also used Job Approval data for Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt. 2022 was a Governorship election year in Oklahoma and Governor Stitt was running for re-election. This makes him an ideal figure to use in this study.

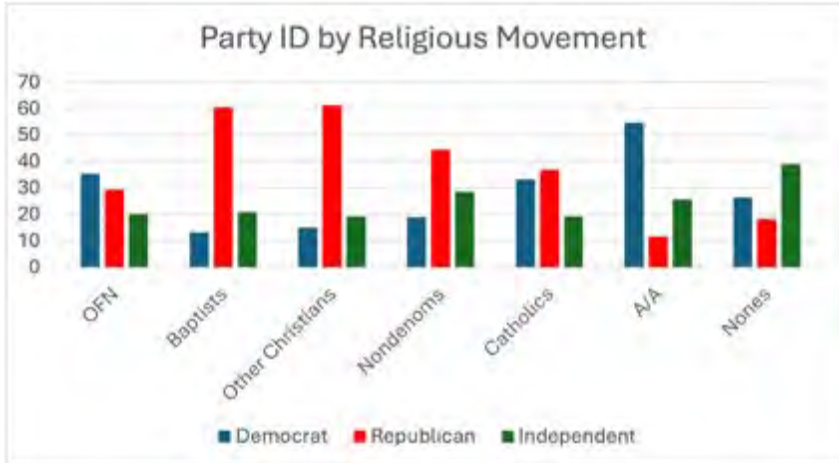
Beyond candidate support I selected on policy area, immigration, as a topic to analyze. The CES has four separate questions about immigration which made it an ideal place to look for differences. Immigration is also a good topic for studying the effect of a religious movement. Restricted immigration policies are often supported by Republicans but there are religious teachings about treating your neighbor are found throughout religious texts (Brown and Brown 2017).

Finally, for control variables I selected four. Age, Educational Attainment, Race, and Gender. For Age I used Birth Year (from 1932 to 2002) as opposed to generational cohort. For Educational Attainment responses ranged from 1-6 and included No High School, High School Graduate, Some College, 2-Year Degree, 4-Year Degree, and a Post-Grad degree. Race included race and ethnicity so Hispanic was an option. Gender was scored on a four-point scale where 1=male, 2=female, and 3 and 4 represented nonbinary and gender conforming respondents.

RESULTS

Party Identification

Figure Two: Partisan Identification by Religious Movement



The first difference between the religious movements of the state of Oklahoma is on party identification. Oklahoma religious organizations fall into some broad categories. The movements that are overwhelmingly Republican (>50% identification) are Baptists and the Formal Conservative Christian groups. Each has >60% Republican party ID with Democratic party identification behind political independents. The Nondenominational movement does not have 50% Republican party identification but it, along with the Baptists and Other Christians, are significantly more likely to identify as Republican than the Religious Nones.

Oklahoma only has a single movement (Atheists/Agnostics) that is overwhelmingly Democratic. The Atheist/Agnostic group is significantly more likely to identify as a Democrat than the religious nones when our controls are used.

Table Four About Here

Finally, two groups are insignificantly different from the Nones: the OFN and Catholics. Despite the lack of significant differences on a party identification scale of Democrats to Republicans there is one interesting point in the data between the two groups. The OFN and Catholics, like the other religious movements, only has a between 20-25% political Independents. Only one religious movement, Nondenominational, has more than 30% of its movement identified as political Independents (31%). By contrast almost 50% of Religious Nones identify as Independent. Every religious movement was significantly more likely to identify with a political party than the Religious Nones¹. Like previous research (CITE), disconnect from religious organizations is correlated with disconnect from political parties as well.

Political Candidates

To look for religious movement differences in politics we will begin by focusing on two well-known Republican candidates in Oklahoma, President Trump and Governor Kevin Stitt. President Trump was initially elected President in 2016 and defeated by President Biden in 2020. Trump handily won Oklahoma in the 2020 elections. Trump won the majority vote in all 77 counties of Oklahoma. Kevin Stitt was elected Governor in 2018 and at the time of the 2022 CCES was running for re-election. He ultimately won but the race was significantly closer than Biden's challenge.

We see some differences between movements when respondents were asked for their job approval for Governor Stitt. There are only three groups with a net positive job approval of Governor Stitt: Baptists, Other Christians, and Catholics. There are three groups with net disapproval numbers for Governor Stitt: the OFN, Nondenominational, Atheists/Agnostics, and the Religious Nones.

¹ Nondenominational, the least collectively organized religious movement, is the only movement to only be significant at the 0.1 level.

Chart Four: The Effect of Religious Identification in Oklahoma

VARIABLES	Party Id (3-Point Scale)	2020 President	2020 Vote w/Non- Voters	Stitt Approval
OFN	-0.164	-0.0373	0.0751	-0.176
Baptists	-0.178	0.0649	-0.126	-0.180
Other Christians	-0.230*	0.0963**	-0.223***	-0.432**
Nondenomina- tional	-0.0974	0.0709	-0.149	-0.670***
Catholics	-0.271*	0.0717	-0.102	-0.538***
Atheist/ Agnostics	-0.558***	0.00808	0.0107	0.403**

CONTROL VARIABLES

Birth Year	0.0114***	0.000788	-0.000419	-0.00463
Education	-0.130***	-0.0262***	0.0501***	0.0896**
Race/Ethnicity	0.0312	-0.0103	0.0158	0.0558*
Gender	-0.0748	-0.0426	0.0868*	0.219**
Party ID		0.428***	-0.718***	-0.888***
Constant	-19.60***	-0.750	3.972	13.83**
Observations	686	452	581	611
R-squared	0.102	0.656	0.563	0.343
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1				

Chart Five: Support for a Legal Pathway for Working Illegal Immigrants – Baptists as the Control Group

VARIABLES	Legal Pathway for Workers
Baptists	
OFN	-0.222***
Other Christian	-0.141**
Nondenominational	0.0178
Catholics	-0.124
Atheist/Agnostic	-0.175**
Religious Nones	-0.105*
Birth Year	-0.00275**
Education	-0.00972
Race/Ethnicity	-0.0184*
Gender	-0.0525
Party ID	0.144***
Constant	6.703***
Observations	610
R-squared	0.144
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Interestingly when testing statistical significance, the OFN and Baptists are statistically insignificant from the Religious Nones. Three groups; the Other Christians, Nondenominational, and Catholics were significantly more likely to report approving of

Governor Stitt's job performance. Only one group, Atheists and Agnostics, were significantly more likely to report disapproving of Governor Stitt's job performance.

When looking at the 2020 vote for Trump there are more interesting differences between the religious movements in Oklahoma. If we use the OFN as our comparison group there are four religious movements; Baptists, Other Christians, and Catholics that were significantly more likely to vote for Trump over Biden in the 2020 Presidential election. No group, not even the Atheists/Agnostics reported significantly higher Biden voting once controls were in-putted.

Once again there is an interesting detachment among Religious Nones in Oklahoma. With controls we see significantly higher non-voting among the Religious Nones than two groups: the Other Christians and Atheists/Agnostics.

Arguably the most interesting finding on the 2020 Presidential vote in Oklahoma came in the final test. Remember, Oklahoma is arguably the most conservative state in the country. Republicans have dominated Presidential election returns for decades and in 2022 there was only one Democrat who held a statewide office, Joy Hofmeister, and she was elected to her position as a Republican. For a final test the Presidential election was to pick one of more politically conservative religious movements as our comparison group. Baptists were set as our comparison group, and the Presidential vote choice was limited to a binary choice between Biden and Trump. The results are on Chart Five. Compared to Baptists there was one group that was significantly different. The OFN was significantly more likely to vote for Biden at the 0.1 level. If not voting was included as an option that same thing occurred; the OFN was significantly less likely to vote for Trump in 2020, this time at the 0.05 level. What this means is that when you expand the options of the OFN in include staying at home as opposed to voting for Trump the difference with the other groups increases.

Immigration

Rather than simply looking at partisanship it is also important to look at the attitudes on immigration policy. The CCES has four different immigration policies that it tests. The first question is whether immigrants who have held jobs in the United States for years should be granted legal status. When the Religious Nones are used as the comparison group we find statistically significant differences among three movements. The OFN and Catholics are significantly more supportive of granting legal status to these immigrants. Interestingly only one movement, Nondenominationalists, are significantly less supportive than the religious nones. When looking Baptists as the comparison group the most interesting takeaway is that the Other Christians movement is significantly more in favor of providing legal status to working immigrants. This is another place where we find differences within the broader religious tradition of Evangelicals.

Chart Six: Effect of Religious Movements in Oklahoma on Immigration Policies

VARIABLES	Creating a Legal Pathway for Workers	Increasing Border Security	Reducing Legal Immigration	Increasing Spending (including Wall)
OFN	-0.117**	-0.0397	0.0764	0.0184
Baptists	0.105*	-0.0599	0.00354	-0.147**
Other Christians	-0.0356	-0.0856	0.0447	-0.157***
Nondenominational	0.123*	-0.122**	0.0556	-0.121*
Catholics	-0.0182	-0.00650	0.171**	-0.118*
Atheists/ Agnostics	-0.0694	0.119**	0.177***	0.0684

CONTROLS

Birth Year	-0.00275**	0.00528***	0.00594***	0.00253**
Education	-0.00972	0.0188*	0.0313**	0.0331***
Race/ Ethnicity	-0.0184*	0.0164*	0.00914	0.0219**
Gender	-0.0525	0.0459	0.0264	0.0821**
Party ID	0.144***	-0.178***	-0.181***	-0.269***
Constant	6.597***	-8.920***	-10.05***	-3.195
Observations	610	611	610	610
R-squared	0.144	0.252	0.197	0.347

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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The second immigration question asks respondents if they support increasing border patrols along the US-Mexico border. Compared to Religious Nones we find significant differences among two groups; Nondenominationalists are once again significantly more conservative. They are the only group to be significantly more supportive of the proposal. One group, Atheists/Agnostics, are significantly less supportive of the proposal.

In the third immigration question respondents were asked whether they supported reducing legal immigration by 50% over the next ten years. Compared to the Religious Nones there was no group that had significantly higher approval for such a proposal. Two groups, Catholics and Atheists/Agnostics were significantly more opposed to the proposal.

The fourth immigration question asks for support for increasing spending on border security by \$25 billion dollars including a border wall. When using the Religious Nones as out comparison group there is significantly more support for the proposal in all the religious groups except the OFN and the Atheist/Agnostic groups where there is no significant difference at all. Two groups, Baptist and the Other Christians, are significant at the 0.05 level and two, Nondenominationalists and Catholics, are significant only at the 0.1 level.

This data gives us some interesting findings. The first is that while there are some movements that are less supportive of restrictive immigration policies, they are not consistent across the board. The OFN is significantly more in favor of granting legal status to working immigrants, but they were not significantly opposed when asked about reducing legal immigration. Catholics are significantly opposed to reducing legal immigration and they are opposed to increasing border spending by \$25 billion dollars but there was no significant differences on the question of increasing border patrols.

If there is one religious movement that is more in favor of restrictive immigration policies, then it is the Nondenominationalists. Nondenominationalists were significantly more in favor of restrictive policies on three of the four proposals. Reducing legal immigration was the only proposal where a statistically significant effect could be found.

The other thing to notice is that while there was broad consensus among the more Evangelical religious movements it was not uniform. One question, granting legal pathways for immigrants who are working, found statistically significant differences between the Evangelical religious movements with the Other Christians more in favor of granting legal status to working immigrants than either the Baptists or the Nondenominationalists. We also see numerous places where some movements in the Evangelical tradition are significantly different than Religious Nones and others are not. This demonstrates the value of this categorization scheme. It finds significant differences between religious movements that would be missed if we categorized religion based on a nationwide analysis of religious tradition.

DISCUSSION

This article finds evidence to support its hypothesis; the categorization scheme described in this paper does find statistically significant differences within the context of the state of Oklahoma. Oklahoma's religious and political makeup is remarkably different than the makeup of the United States as a whole. The state's political make-up is heavily Republican which affects the policies, candidates, and decisions of voters in a way that does not exist in the United States as a whole. Additionally, the religious make-up of Oklahoma is different than exists across the country. Oklahoma features a smaller percentage of non-Christian religious faiths, a smaller percentage of the population who identify as Roman Catholic, and a much higher percentage of Baptists.

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As I have argued earlier, these differences affect the decisions of religious movements in who they are willing to work with. The American Baptist Church USA is a Mainline Religious Tradition. Nationally the ABCUSA is in the National Council of Churches. In Oklahoma however, the ABCUSA is not a member of the Oklahoma Faith Network. This most likely reflects the political and social context of ABCUSA churches in Oklahoma. The ABCUSA members in Oklahoma are more Republican than the average ABCUSA member nationwide. They are less comfortable, in a context where the label “Baptist” is the dominate form of Christianity in their local communities, in associating politically with the other churches in the Mainline religious tradition.

By categorizing Christianity with this methodology, we are also able to find differences within Evangelicalism. Evangelicals make up most Christians in the state of Oklahoma and therefore are dominate in influencing the state’s religious impact on state politics. Baptists, Nondenominational, and the Other Christians are not the same thing. There are differences between the three on political identification, support for candidates, and in their support for political and social issues.

This paper provides some interesting implications beyond the state of Oklahoma. The most important takeaway in this paper is that this is an effective method of identifying religious differences within a state context. Oklahoma is not just unique compared to the nation; Oklahoma is unique compared to the other 49 states. This is not unique to Oklahoma either. Each state has its own unique political and religious make-up. The states have their own unique demographics that differentiate them from one another. States in the Mountain West like Utah and Idaho famously have large populations of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. In the Midwest you would expect to find more Lutherans. In Alaska you would expect to find a higher percentage of Eastern Orthodox. Examples go on. Each of these differences is going to affect the decisions of religious movements on how they organize themselves politically.

Future researchers should take these differences seriously regardless of what state or region they are studying. Scholars of religion have long recognized that the division of religion into Protestant, Catholic, Jew (Hedberg 1955) is insufficient for analysis. What this paper indicates is that when researchers are interested in a specific state than religious tradition is not sufficient either. States have their own religious traditions. In Oklahoma we see that the separating the Mainline from non-Christian religions does not reflect the religious movements in state at all. This paper does not argue that Islam and Christian Mainline churches have the same beliefs. That would be absurd. Instead, this paper demonstrates that the Mainline and non-Christian faiths see natural partnership in Oklahoma because they are both religious minorities in the highly Evangelical and conservative state and are willing to work together.

As much as possible Political Scientists should take these movements seriously. We should not substitute our own judgments on what similarities and differences between movements are important. We should default on the judgement of the religious movements themselves. Obviously, we need some categorization scheme that is going to lump people together, but we should default to the categorizations that people create themselves. In Oklahoma there are three religious identities within Christianity that are sufficiently large to separate into their own movements: Baptists, Nondenominationalists, and Catholics. The OFN is a formal, statewide, organization that allows us to separate the other aspects of Christianity but even though it is associated with the National Council of Churches its membership is not identical to the NCC and so a statewide categorization scheme should reflect the OFN and not the NCC. The OFN is also interfaith and not ecumenical. Therefore, it makes sense to include non-Christian religions into its organization. For the non-religious Oklahoma features two clear divisions; Atheists/Agnostics and the Non-Religious.

This paper also gives us some things to consider when focusing on

religion in the United States as a whole. While the current Reltrad scheme is roughly reflected in national religious movements like the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals they are not identical. There are prominent denominations, like the Southern Baptist Convention, that are not members of the NAE. There are smaller organizations like the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA) that bring together the historically white and African American representations of a denominational family. These differences have significant social and political differences (Grant and Searcy 2018, Searcy 2019). More work should be done on the viability of refining a scheme of religious movements on the national level.

It is also important to say that this is the first cut and this categorization scheme, and more work should be done to refine it. In the interest of space, I have limited my analysis to a single state and a few high-profile political races and a couple of political issues. There is significantly more work to be done here. Future work should take these principles and apply them to other states. The different religious and political make-ups in each state would lead to different movements because the state's religious marketplace is going to be unique. While there is nothing in this paper that indicates that this is a uniquely Oklahoman phenomenon there is nothing here that proves it is not either. Expanding this research will require researchers to take the theoretical argument and apply it in other states to see if significant differences exist in those contexts as well.

With those weaknesses acknowledged I want to end with some encouraging thoughts. This paper finds evidence supporting the hypothesis that using religious movements as the basis for categorization is a valid methodology for researchers studying religion on a state-level. It gives researchers a powerful tool that reflects the diversity that exists in states across the country.

While the concept developed here is open to refinement and cri-

tique it proposes a consistent categorization methodology that is flexible enough to reflect the diversity that exists across the United States while also being able to reflect the development and changes that happen in the religious marketplace over time.

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