

# Economic and Political Impacts of Evangelical Christianity\*

Maxim Ananyev<sup>†</sup>

Michael Poyker<sup>‡</sup>

November, 2024

## Abstract

In recent years with the rise of Evangelical Christianity in developed and developing countries and better data availability, a growing literature emerged. In this paper, we review the wealth of multidisciplinary evidence of the Evangelical movement with a focus on facts, concepts, ideas, and findings that might be of interest to economists. Then we provided a discussion of the frontiers of the study of the economic effects of evangelical Christianity to help understand how it affects economic growth, economic development, norms, as well as other economic and political outcomes.

**Keywords:** Religion, Evangelical Christianity, Pentecostalism, Literature Review

**JEL codes:** J1, J2, P00, Z13.

---

\*First draft: October 2024; Current version: November, 2024.

We thank Vladimir Maltsev, Nirvikar Singh, and Alexander Yarkin for their valuable comments and suggestions. All errors are ours. Correspondence at: LBJ School of Public Affairs SRH 3.224, 2315 Red River St., 78712, Austin, TX, USA.

<sup>†</sup>Ananyev: University of Melbourne; e-mail address: [maxim.ananyev@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:maxim.ananyev@unimelb.edu.au).

<sup>‡</sup>Poyker: University of Texas at Austin and IZA; e-mail address: [mikhail.poyker@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:mikhail.poyker@austin.utexas.edu).

# 1 Introduction

The rise of Evangelical Christianity represents one of the most significant religious developments of recent decades, with profound implications for economic and social development across the globe. Comprising approximately one-tenth of the world's population and representing the second-largest Christian group after Catholics in many parts of the world, Evangelical Christianity has emerged as a powerful force shaping political outcomes, economic behavior, and social norms in both developed and developing nations.

This paper provides a review of the growing multidisciplinary literature on the economic and political impacts of Evangelical Christianity. We synthesize evidence from economics, sociology, political science, and anthropology to examine how Evangelical beliefs and institutions influence various societal outcomes. Our review spans multiple geographical contexts, from the United States, where Evangelical Christianity has become deeply intertwined with political movements, to rapidly evolving religious landscapes in Africa and Latin America, where Pentecostal denominations have seen particular growth.

We start our review by examining the historical development and defining characteristics of Evangelical Christianity, providing context for understanding its contemporary influence. Second, we analyze demographic patterns and social beliefs among Evangelicals, with particular attention to how these shape economic and political behavior. Third, we review empirical evidence on the causal impacts of Evangelical Christianity on economic outcomes, human capital formation, political participation, and health behaviors. Throughout our analysis, we pay special attention to methodologically rigorous studies that attempt to establish causal relationships rather than mere correlations.

By synthesizing this diverse body of research, we aim to provide scholars with a clearer understanding of how religious institutions and beliefs influence economic and political outcomes. This understanding is particularly crucial given the continued growth of Evangelical movements in the developing world and their evolving role in shaping public policy and economic development.

The field of economics of religion has grown rapidly in recent years, and many new papers have been reviewed by the [Iannaccone and Hull \(1998\)](#), [McCleary and Barro \(2006\)](#), and [Iyer \(2016\)](#). In this paper, we narrow the discussion to only literature on Evangelical Christianity. We include non-economic literature from the fields of political science, sociology,

and anthropology. This paper complements Iyer (2016) by exploring a specific subset of religious influences, providing a case study of how one religious group can affect broader economic and social outcomes. We help position Evangelical Christianity not only as a cultural and spiritual phenomenon but also as an influential economic and social force that may have a multidimensional impact on society.

The rest of the paper is as follows. In Section 2 we discuss the history and definitions of Evangelical Christianity. Section 3 describes the demographics and beliefs of Evangelical adherents. Section 4 describes Evangelical movements in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. Section 5 reviews the economic literature on the effects of Evangelical Christianity. Section 6 concludes.

## 2 Evangelical Movement: History and Definitions

Comprising up to 1/10th of the world population, and being the second largest Christian Group, second only to the Catholics, the Evangelical movement proved to have a global reach and remarkable resilience as well as influence on politics, economy, and society (Wolffe, 2015). In this section, we review the wealth of multidisciplinary evidence of the Evangelical movement with a focus on facts, concepts, ideas, and findings that might be of interest to economists.

The term "Evangelical" comes from the Greek word "evangelion" which means the good news. Historically, it has been used to describe the content of the gospels — the New Testament texts devoted to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. However, by the beginning of the 19th century, Evangelicalism emerged as a recognizable religious movement. The movement itself was rooted in the Protestant Reformation, but in the first half of the 18th century, a cohort of energetic theologians in England, Wales, and Ireland. Central Europe and North America started to preach the Gospels in a way that was perceived as more personal and dynamic than previously. The ideas themselves could be traced to Pietism and Puritanism, and yet the emphasis was different. These new preachers, like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Charles Wesley, emphasized personal experience, repentance, and the importance of following Christian principles.

The early Evangelical movements — which constituted what would be later called The First Great Awakening — became known not necessarily for the new concepts and ideas

but for the religious zeal and intense focus on personal experiences of faith (Kidd, 2008). Even in these early days, the movement showed the features that would become signature features of the Evangelical movements later: big gatherings, charismatic preachers, and mass conversions. They became particularly influential in England in the second half of the 18th century, shaping political debates and influencing legislation on labor reforms and poverty relief. In particular, Evangelical abolitionist James Stephen was instrumental in the prohibition of the slave trade (Burton, 2022).

From the theological perspective, the movement was diverse, but the core characteristics were shared among the majority of Evangelicals. Historians of the Evangelicals movement, following Bebbington (2003) usually find four definitive characteristics of early Evangelicals. These characteristics are conversionism (the belief in the necessity of spiritual rebirth, being “born again”), activism (the expression of the gospel through effort), biblicism (particular regard for the Bible), and crucicentrism (emphasis on Christ’s sacrifice on the cross). In simpler terms, Evangelicals tend to emphasize personal experiences with God (Luhmann, 2012).

American National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) closely follows the definition of Bebbington (2003). It outlines the following defining features of the movement: holding the Bible as the highest authority, the importance of preaching to non-Christians and actively promoting the idea that they should accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior, as well as the belief salvation, is given only to those who believe in Christ.

In the 20th century in the US, the Evangelical movement grew considerably thanks to the emergence of radio and television as the means of spreading the religious message. Charismatic leaders, including such influential figures as Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham used their new technologies to gain prominence and acquire more followers (Fogel, 2000). Evangelical movement does not constitute a unified church. Instead, it consists of many independent groups. The largest denominations in the U.S. include the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, Churches of Christ, and Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (Steensland et al., 2000). Evangelicals comprise around 19 percent of Latin America (Salinas, 2023) and about 23 percent of all Christians in Africa (Balcomb, 2016).

### 3 Who are the Evangelicals: Demographics, Social Beliefs, and Political Affiliation

While theological doctrine distinguishes Evangelical Christianity from other Christian denominations, understanding its broader societal influence requires examination of Evangelicals' views on social and political issues. While scholarship has documented Evangelical movements internationally research on Evangelical beliefs remains predominantly focused on the American context, presenting opportunities for future comparative studies.

**Demographic characteristics of U.S. Evangelicals** We start by providing a summary of demographic characteristics of the U.S. evangelicals following [Jones and Cox \(2016\)](#). According to this report, the Evangelicals in the U.S. are predominantly white (65 percent of Evangelicals are white), but younger Evangelicals are more racially diverse (only 50 percent of Evangelicals under 30 are white). In 2016, white evangelical Protestants accounted for 17 percent of the U.S. population, down from 23 percent in 2006. This group is aging: only 11 percent of them are under 30, while 62 percent are over 50.

Turning to education and income, only 25 percent of white Evangelicals have a four-year college degree, lower than other white Christian groups. Their income levels are lower compared to other Christian groups. White Evangelicals tend to have more children than other Christian religious groups, and they are also more likely to be married. Only 6 percent of American LGBTQ+ persons identify as Evangelical.

**Social and political beliefs of U.S. Evangelicals** A sociological study by [Smith \(2000\)](#) demonstrates a set of beliefs by Evangelicals in the United States. This study, along with others (e.g., [Luhmann, 2012](#)), highlights three key points. The first one is the belief in Christianity as the driving force of political, economic, and social life. Evangelicals tend to see secular political institutions as inspired by the Bible. If we compare Evangelicals to Mainland Protestants and Catholics<sup>1</sup>, we find that they see religion as a more significant part of their lives (see Figure 1). Evangelical groups have succeeded by differentiating themselves from mainline Protestant churches, often by emphasizing personal salvation, a literal interpretation of the Bible, and a close-knit, supportive community ([Iannaccone, 1994, 1998](#)).

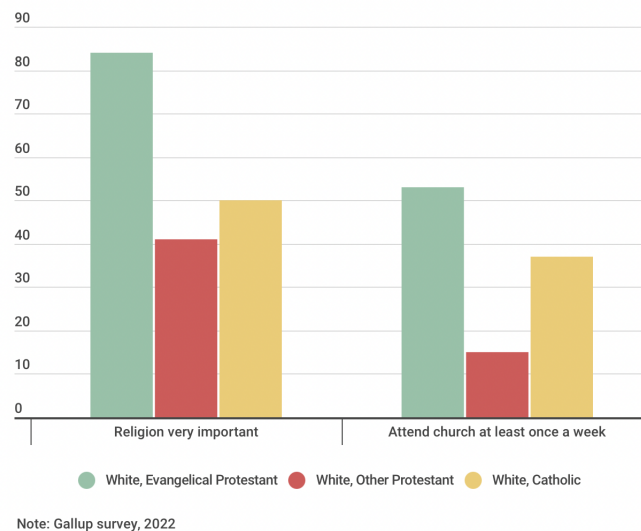
---

<sup>1</sup>Here instead of GSS, we use Gallup data, as they have appropriate questions.

The second feature of the Evangelical movement is the importance of taking part in politics. Many believe that their social, political, and economic views should be represented in politics and the public sphere more generally. Importantly, many Evangelicals believe that their opinions are not represented enough in the public education system. Finally, another widespread belief is the belief in the different roles of men and women. Many Evangelicals are concerned with what they see as the decline of the family. They see traditional families as threatened by the pressures of the modern economy.

These observations by [Smith \(2000\)](#) are corroborated by the survey data from the General Social Survey (GSS). It is a nationally representative survey conducted in the United States by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. In our analysis, we restrict the sample only to white Christians. In this sample, we observe no differences in age or gender between Evangelicals and other white Christians.

**Figure 1:** Evangelicals attach more significance to religion than Mainline Protestants or Catholics



Evangelicals tend to be socially conservative. They are 26 percentage points more than other white Christians likely to believe that homosexuality is always or almost always wrong, and 27 percentage points more likely to oppose the right to abortion. As for the gender norm, the social conservative tilt among Evangelicals is also pronounced. Evangelicals are 19 percentage points more likely to believe that men must work while women must tend home. Unsurprisingly, there’s a significant difference between men and women: this view is shared by 30 percent of Evangelical women and 48 percent of Evangelical men. Interestingly,

Evangelical women are more likely to share this attitude than non-Evangelical white Christian men.

While the conservatism of the Evangelicals in the U.S. is well-documented, [Bean \(2014\)](#) provides an important caveat. [Bean \(2014\)](#) documents that white Evangelical Christians in the United States tend to be more economically conservative and opposed to redistributive social policies compared to Evangelicals in Canada. While American and Canadian Evangelicals drew on the same theological concepts like individual accountability and compassion they used them differently when discussing poverty and social policy. American Evangelicals tended to frame government social programs negatively, seeing them as ineffective and morally corrupting compared to faith-based charity. They viewed poverty relief as an expression of "grace" toward undeserving individuals. Canadian Evangelicals were more likely to see government social programs positively, as an expression of national values and solidarity. They framed poverty relief in terms of social inclusion and extending cultural membership to poor Canadians.

There are also significant differences within the U.S. Evangelicals along the racial lines. For example, [Yi \(2022\)](#) shows divisions within Asian-American religious communities. Asian-American Evangelicals have high levels of religious commitment and social conservatism. However, they are not monolithic, with some aligning with socially progressive positions on immigration and civil rights. These factors create cross-pressures, especially among more educated Evangelicals. In a related contribution, [Gaskins \(2024\)](#) discusses differences between white and non-white Evangelical Christians and finds many differences.

**Partisan alignments of U.S. Evangelicals** If we look at the Evangelical movement today, we find that it's significantly aligned with the Republican party. According to [Jones and Cox \(2016\)](#), 49 percent identify as Republican and only 14 percent as Democrat. Importantly, white Evangelicals make up 35 percent of Republicans overall, by far the largest religious constituency in the party.

How did the Republican party become so strongly aligned with the Evangelical movement? Historical books like [Martin \(2005\)](#) and [Williams \(2010\)](#) argue that the alliance between Evangelicals and the GOP developed over decades. It was a result of a combination of factors. In the first half of the 20th century, Evangelical leaders engaged in politics to counter the influence of Darwin's evolution theory and modernist influences on culture.

Later, during the Cold War Evangelical anticommunism helped forge initial alliances with conservative politicians. In the 1960s, Evangelical leaders were crucial in connecting Evangelicals with Republican politicians, particularly Eisenhower and Nixon. The cultural changes of the 1960s, such as the sexual revolution and the rise of popular entertainment pushed more Evangelicals toward conservative politics

In the 1970s, issues like abortion, gay rights, and school prayer helped mobilize Evangelicals Leaders like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to build influential organizations. Later, Ronald Reagan successfully courted Evangelical voters by embracing their social agenda, and the Christian Right became firmly embedded in Republican Party structures. Organizations like the Moral Majority gained significant political influence. Evangelical churches in the U.S. have been particularly adept at media outreach, including television, and radio. Overall, Evangelicalism in the U.S. has grown by aligning itself with conservative social values. This process was in line with the theoretical predictions on how pluralism and competition can lead to higher levels of religious participation [Iannaccone \(1992\)](#).

During the past decades, two of the most salient issues became abortion and marriage equality of gay people. While the Evangelical movement is ideologically diverse, many Evangelicals oppose gay marriage and advocate restrictions to access to abortion. In particular, the emergence of the Evangelical opposition to abortion is an example of the gradual convergence of Evangelical beliefs and conservative ideology. In the 1970s, the Southern Baptist Organization (one of the largest organizations within the movement) generally supported abortion in certain cases, viewing opposition to it as primarily a "Catholic issue." However, this position changed dramatically in the 1980s when a more conservative faction gained control of the denomination. The Southern Baptist Community's resolutions began to strongly oppose abortion, eventually declaring it murder and calling for its immediate abolition without exceptions.

In sum, one of the major stories involving the Evangelical movements in the U.S. is its gradual embrace of Republican partisan politics and conservative ideology. An important caveat to this story, provided by [Jones and Cox \(2016\)](#), is that the younger generations of Evangelicals are more politically and racially diverse than the older generation.



## 4 Evangelicals in Asia, Africa and Latin America

Outside the West, Evangelical growth has been even more dramatic. In South America, Pentecostal church membership exploded from 1.16 million to 22.22 million between 1960 and 2000. In Korea, Evangelicals numbered 12.2 million at the turn of the millennium, comprising about a quarter of the total population (Wolfe, 2015). Similar rapid growth has occurred across sub-Saharan Africa, where Evangelicalism adapted to a wide variety of indigenous cultures. As the Pentecostal denomination of Evangelism is more prevalent in countries of Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, we mostly concentrate on the Pentecostals in this section.

Pentecostalism has grown rapidly in Africa since the 1980s, with an estimated 126 million adherents as of 2002. Pentecostal churches rarely run explicit development projects, but impact development through changes instilled in believers. A set of articles published under the title "Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa" (edited by Freeman, 2012) discuss the relationship between Pentecostalism and economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa. They document the main trends in the spread of the Pentecostal denomination of Evangelical Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa and its relation to the local socio-economic trends and development policies.

They conclude that Pentecostalism brings about three transformations in followers: personal transformation and empowerment of the individual, shift in values providing moral legitimacy for behavior changes, and reconstruction of social and economic relationships. Pentecostalism is especially popular among the poorest population groups to whom it offers improved self-esteem and a sense of agency. Overall, the authors argue that Pentecostalism plays a similar role in contemporary Africa as Protestantism did in 16th-17th century Europe, as described by Weber — promoting an ethic conducive to economic development.

The sources of the appeal of the Evangelical movement in Africa are analyzed by Balcomb (2016). The study argues that African Evangelicalism is characterized by its ability to meet existential needs, provide empowerment, and serve as a bridge between traditional and modern worldviews. Its impacts are felt psychologically, socially, economically, and politically as it shapes adherents' behavior. Theoretically, the adaptability, appeal, and competitive nature of Evangelical churches in developing regions is best explained by Iannaccone (1994, 1998). In developing countries, economic hardship, inequality, and limited social mobility

make Evangelical churches attractive because they often offer a community, social support, and a sense of empowerment. These churches frequently promote prosperity theology, which promises economic blessings through faith and practice. Moreover, in regions with political instability or disillusionment with the state, evangelical churches offer an alternative source of stability and community. They provide personal hope and a sense of belonging, especially when other social institutions have weakened. Finally, Evangelical movements in Africa and Latin America often incorporate elements of local culture, rituals, and spiritual beliefs, creating a form of Christianity that feels authentic and relevant to local populations. This cultural flexibility has aided their rapid growth.

The diversity of Evangelical communities is explored by [Boas \(2023\)](#). The study argues that differences in religious practices, theological views, and perceived threats lead to varied political engagements rather than a single Evangelical approach. While traditional moral values unite different religious groups, the sense of threat triggers political mobilization around issues like abortion and same-sex marriage. This convergence among religious groups is driven more by shared traditionalist views than by denominational identity.

In Asia, Evangelical Christianity has also expanded significantly in recent years. [Lim \(2020\)](#) and [Qin \(2020\)](#) provide a discussion on the spread of Evangelical Christianity in China. Despite tighter state regulations and political suspicion, diverse Christian practices and organizational innovations have allowed the faith to adapt, grow, and contribute to broader social changes, with urban Christianity flourishing and rural communities facing decline due to migration. [Au \(2020\)](#) examines the development of Pentecostalism in Asia, focusing on its growth through megachurches and the prosperity gospel in liberal capitalist societies and its constrained presence in autocratic regimes. [Au \(2020\)](#) also discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Pentecostalism and the globalization of the Evangelical movement.

## 5 Effects of Evangelical Christianity

Scholars have explored the impact of religion on a variety of outcomes (e.g., [Barro and McCleary, 2003](#); [Iyer, 2010](#); [Esteban, Levy and Mayoral, 2019](#)).<sup>2</sup> In this section, we specifically discuss the effects of Evangelical Christianity or its denominations (e.g., Pentecostal)

---

<sup>2</sup>See literature review in [McCleary and Barro \(2006\)](#) and [Iyer \(2016\)](#).

on a set of economic and political economy outcomes.

**Economic outcomes** One of the most fundamental economic studies in this emerging literature is [Bryan, Choi and Karlan \(2021\)](#). The article examines the causal impact of religiosity on economic outcomes through a randomized evaluation of Evangelical Protestant Christian values and theology education programs delivered to poor households in the Philippines. The program, called Transform, was conducted by International Care Ministries and consisted of 15 weekly meetings covering Protestant theology, values, health behaviors, and livelihood skills.

The scholars found that six months after the program participants showed increased religiosity across multiple measures. Their monthly household income increased by 9.2% in the treatment group and perceived relative economic status decreased slightly. At the same time, they found no significant effects were found on consumption, food security, labor supply, or life satisfaction. However, thirty months after the program the effects on religiosity intensity had faded. There was also a shift in religious affiliation from Catholicism to Protestantism and mixed evidence on long-term economic effects — some positive impacts on consumption and perceived economic status when comparing treatment to control, but no significant effects in the pooled analysis.

[Bryan, Choi and Karlan \(2021\)](#) also discuss potential mechanisms behind these effects. They suggest that short-term effects may operate through increased grit and perseverance while the long-term effects may be related to increased optimism and social connections. The study demonstrates that randomized controlled trials can be used to study the effects of religious interventions. Results suggest church-based programs may be a way to build non-cognitive skills and reduce poverty in the short-term, but more research is needed on sustaining long-term impacts. Overall, the study provides causal evidence that intentional religious training can affect economic outcomes, at least in the short-term, though the long-term impacts are less clear. It highlights the potential for faith-based organizations to play a role in poverty alleviation efforts.

In another field-experiment paper by [Auriol et al. \(2020\)](#), the authors explore the role of insurance as a motive for religious donations, focusing on a Pentecostal church in Ghana where members were randomly enrolled in a commercial funeral insurance policy. Findings show that members with insurance give less to their church and other spiritual causes,

suggesting they view the church as a source of both spiritual and material insurance. Using a model to guide findings from their dictator games, [Auriol et al. \(2020\)](#) show that adherents' charitable giving is influenced by beliefs in an interventionist God and material support from the church. The experiment highlights how spiritual and material "insurance" may coexist, especially in settings with limited formal insurance. Trust in the insurance was high because the scheme was coordinated by the church, emphasizing religion's role in economic decisions and suggesting that formal insurance could complement rather than conflict with religious risk-coping strategies.

The impact of the initiatives promoting religion is explored in [Bentzen and Sperling \(2020\)](#). This paper studies the impact of faith-based initiatives implemented across US states starting in 1996. These initiatives reduced regulations for faith-based organizations and increased collaboration between state governments and religious organizations. These policies favored Evangelical churches. Using a difference-in-differences approach and data from the General Social Survey, the authors find that the initiatives strengthened religiosity and conservative religious social views. Specifically, they document increased church attendance, stronger religious beliefs, and more conservative attitudes on issues like homosexuality, gender roles, and abortion among Protestants. These changes in attitudes translated into real outcomes, including more restrictive laws on gay marriage and wider gender gaps in employment and education.

The economic impact of the expansion of Evangelical Christianity in the second half of the 20th century is investigated by [Ananyev, Poyker and Yarkin \(2024\)](#). The paper focuses on gender norms and labor market effects, using Liberty University's alumni network as a unique instrument. Founded by televangelist Jerry Falwell, Sr., Liberty University has long aimed to influence secular spaces with Evangelical values, and its graduates have dispersed across the U.S., enabling a causal examination of Evangelicalism's spread on local economies. The authors digitized Liberty's 1994 alumni directory and linked it with U.S. Census data, arguing that areas with more Liberty alumni saw significant growth in Evangelical church membership, and led to a reduction in female labor force participation. Further analysis showed that these counties tended to exhibit more restrictive gender norms, with lower support for female leadership.

**Human and social capital** The effect of human capital on religious identity is explored by [Alfonsi et al. \(2024\)](#). The study examines how human capital investments affect religious identity and practices in Kenya. Using data from a long-term randomized deworming program, the study shows that deworming treatment not only improved health, education, and economic outcomes, but reduced the likelihood of switching to Pentecostal churches and increased the likelihood of remaining in traditional churches. These effects were concentrated among older participants (above age 12 at baseline) who experienced the largest gains in education and income from the deworming program. The treatment effects emerged during adolescence and persisted into participants' mid-30s. While affecting religious denomination choice, the deworming treatment did not impact overall religiosity levels.

The role of church competition in higher education is explored by [Xiong and Zhao \(2023\)](#) who focus on the nineteenth-century United States. First, they built a database of nineteenth-century colleges and documented that nearly all private colleges were to some extent religious. Second, they show a robust positive relationship between the denominational fragmentation of the county and the number of colleges established. They argue that religious diversity softened the extent of tuition competition between institutions and precipitated an “excess” entry of schools. The authors use the institutional context of the Second Awakening to show in a fully dynamic differences-in-differences specification to estimate a causal effect of an increase in religious fractionalization (driven by exogenous shocks in the number of Evangelical Christians) on the number of U.S. universities and argue that horizontal differentiation along denominational affiliation helped these private colleges survive.

The formation of social capital in Evangelical communities is explored in an anthropological study by [Schwadel et al. \(2016\)](#). The study looks at how going to church creates friendships and can help people get more involved in their community. They interviewed over 600 people from two Protestant churches about their church friends and how active they are in their communities. The authors concur that the more friends people had at church, the more likely they were to feel confident about making a difference in their community. They were also more likely to volunteer for both religious and non-religious causes. Interestingly, the number of friends they had outside of church didn't seem to matter for these outcomes. Interestingly, for people who went to church a lot, having few friends at church made them much less likely to volunteer for non-religious causes.

Focusing on Western Kenya, [Murphy, Nourani and Lee \(2022\)](#) examines the role of re-

ligious institutions (mostly Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches) in promoting information sharing through social connections in western Kenya. Using spatial variation in triangular distances between peers and church locations within Kenyan villages as an instrument, the paper finds that shared attendance at church increases the likelihood of peers seeking and receiving advice by 33 percentage points. By fostering "weak ties" — connections that link social cliques and facilitate information diffusion — churches act as crucial channels for communication. This finding underscores the importance of churches in linking individuals who might not otherwise connect, thus supporting information diffusion within communities.

**Political behavior** The economic and political effects of Pentecostal expansion in Brazil are analyzed by [Costa, Marcantonio and Rocha \(2023\)](#). The study examines how economic downturns affected the expansion of Pentecostal Evangelicalism in Brazil and its political influence. They document that regions more exposed to economic distress from trade liberalization in the 1990s experienced a persistent rise in Pentecostal affiliation. A one standard deviation increase in tariff reductions led to a 6.1 percentage point increase in Pentecostal affiliation between 1991-2000. The growth in Pentecostalism came primarily from conversions from Catholicism and traditional Protestant denominations, not from non-religious individuals. The effects persisted over time, with significant impacts still visible in 2010. The paper suggests that supply-side factors (number of churches, pastors) did not respond immediately, suggesting demand-side factors drove the initial growth. Church infrastructure expanded more in the long-run. Demand-side mechanisms included (i) Pentecostal churches providing social support and informal insurance, (ii), religious coping with emotional struggles during economic hardship, and (iii) improvement in economic well-being for Pentecostal converts over time.

These processes led to changes in political representation. Regions with greater Pentecostal growth saw increased vote shares for Pentecostal political candidates in subsequent elections. Once elected, Pentecostal politicians were more likely to propose bills on religious-sensitive issues compared to other politicians. The rise of Pentecostalism appears to be driven by its appeal during economic hardship, not a rejection of Catholicism or incumbent politicians. Overall, while Pentecostals supported Bolsonaro strongly in 2018, they were not pivotal to his victory. However, they are becoming an increasingly important part of the

right-leaning electorate. In summary, economic downturns led to religious conversions to Pentecostalism, which in turn increased the political influence of Pentecostal leaders and religious-oriented policy agendas in Brazil. This demonstrates how economic shocks can shape religiosity and impact political outcomes in contemporary democracies.

One of the most significant events in the political history of the Evangelical movement is the emergence of the Moral Majority organization in the 1970s in the U.S. This event is analyzed in [Buccione and Knight \(2024\)](#). Led by televangelist Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority mobilized Evangelicals, who had supported Jimmy Carter in 1976, to back Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election. The paper first builds a theoretical model that suggests that single-issue Evangelical voters followed Falwell's lead on candidate endorsement, a trend confirmed by county-level voting data, exit polls, and surveys. There, the authors used quasi-exogenous variation in the irregular terrain model to measure each U.S. county's exposure to the radio signal. Furthermore, exposure to Falwell's televised ministry, Old Time Gospel Hour, reinforced this shift in counties with higher viewership. These findings highlight how religious leaders, through media influence and advocacy, can significantly impact voter behavior and potentially influence policy by promoting candidates aligned with their policy priorities.

The effect of natural disasters in the formation of religious identity explored by [Ager, Hansen and Lønstrup \(2014\)](#). The paper investigates how the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, which created a surge in demand for social insurance, affected church membership. Findings reveal that church membership increased significantly in flood-impacted counties, particularly where economic losses were severe and credit access was limited. Evangelical denominations saw the most growth, consistent with club good theory, which suggests that such communities effectively provide mutual insurance. The study highlights how economic hardship can drive individuals to join religious communities for support, although Evangelical denominations may restrict members' economic mobility over time. Additionally, the availability of credit reduced the flood's impact on church membership, supporting the theory that religious communities act as social insurance providers in times of crisis.

According to [Hasan, Manfredonia and Noth \(2024\)](#), religious identity also plays an important role in aiding economic recovery after natural disasters. Focusing on the 2005 hurricane season in the southeastern United States. the study shows that counties with higher religious adherence (both Mainline and Evangelical Protestantism and Catholicism) experienced



stronger productivity recovery from 2005 to 2010, with no single denomination driving this effect. Instead, multiple religious aspects — such as adherence, ancestral shared experiences, and institutional structures — collectively supported resilience. The findings highlight how cultural factors like religion can mitigate the adverse economic impacts of crises, as seen in less severe migration and economic downturns in religiously active countries. This underscores the importance of cultural characteristics in post-disaster recovery.

Another important aspect of political behavior is climate attitudes. Defoe (2024) examines skepticism toward climate change within U.S. Evangelical communities. The author argues that evangelical identity often conflicts with the scientific consensus on global warming. The climate change denial is reinforced by the conservative media. Despite this resistance, the study identifies emerging hope in younger evangelicals advocating for climate action.

**Health behavior** The responses of the communities of faith on health crisis is analyzed by Lee Rogers and Powe (2022). The study shows that Evangelical Christianity may lead to heterogeneous responses during times of public health crisis. Faith communities support a variety of public health initiatives as conduits of information and service distribution points. However, with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), there is concern that religious communities may be echo chambers for misinformation and conspiracy theories that are undercutting the adoption of precautions to prevent transmission and the use of COVID-19 vaccines. Lee Rogers and Powe (2022) identify the receptivity to and spread of misinformation about COVID-19 by faith communities and whether embracing these inaccuracies constitutes a uniquely religious effect. First, they scraped approximately 2.3 million posts from discussion forums noted for their conspiracism and extremism. Before the availability of vaccines, religious themes consistently appeared in 15–19% of COVID-19 social media posts and were higher in subsets of the discourse tied to misinformation. The framing of COVID-19 using religious language was associated with the Christian right in about half of the religiously-themed posts.

The effect of Evangelical beliefs on COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is also explored by Guidry et al. (2022). The authors surveyed 531 self-identified Evangelical adults in the United States to explore predictors of COVID-19 vaccine uptake in September 2021. A logistic regression showed that those reporting high perceived benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine were more likely to be vaccinated, while those reporting high perceived barriers were



less likely to be vaccinated. Those whose healthcare provider asked them about the vaccine were more likely to be vaccinated than those whose healthcare provider did not ask. Finally, while those who reported information seeking from religious leaders were less likely to be vaccinated, those who reported more faith-based support for vaccination were more likely to be vaccinated. In addition to beliefs about benefits and barriers to vaccination, the role of healthcare providers and clergy were important factors influencing vaccination status.

An important journalistic account of the division within the Evangelical movement is given in [Alberta \(2022\)](#). The article examines how politics has deeply divided Evangelical churches in America, particularly in the wake of Donald Trump's presidency and the COVID-19 pandemic. It profiles two pastors with contrasting approaches. The first is Bill Bolin of FloodGate Church in Michigan, who embraces right-wing politics and conspiracy theories from the pulpit. His congregation has grown rapidly as he defies COVID restrictions and attracts Christians seeking a more politically outspoken church. The second is Ken Brown of Community Bible Church, also in Michigan, who tries to combat misinformation and keep his congregation focused on scripture rather than politics. He has lost some members but believes he's protecting his flock from radicalization. The paper also argues that many Evangelicals becoming more politically radicalized, embracing misinformation. At the same time, pastors struggle to address political divisions without alienating members. Some churches avoid politics entirely but still lose members due to the sorting of Christians into ideologically aligned congregations.

## **6 Discussion and Avenues for Future Research**

This review has synthesized a growing body of literature on the economic and political impacts of Evangelical Christianity. Several key patterns emerge from our analysis. First, the economic effects of Evangelical Christianity appear to be context-dependent, with evidence of both positive and negative impacts on economic development. While some studies find that Evangelical beliefs can promote qualities conducive to economic success, such as perseverance and social capital formation, others suggest that certain denominational characteristics might constrain economic mobility or reinforce traditional gender roles that affect labor market participation.

Second, the political influence of Evangelical Christianity has proven substantial, partic-

ularly in the Americas. The movement has demonstrated remarkable capacity to mobilize voters, shape public policy debates, and influence electoral outcomes. However, this political engagement varies significantly across national contexts, as evidenced by the contrasting patterns of Evangelical political behavior in the United States and Canada.

Third, the social impact of Evangelical Christianity extends beyond formal political and economic institutions to affect health behaviors, educational choices, and community formation. The COVID-19 pandemic particularly highlighted how religious beliefs can interact with public health messaging and policy implementation, sometimes facilitating and other times hindering public health efforts.

Fourth, while there are many similarities across countries and continents, there are also important differences. In the United States, the Evangelical movement has become deeply intertwined with conservative politics, particularly through the Republican Party. African Evangelicalism has adapted to indigenous cultures and, according to scholars, may play a role similar to what Protestantism did in 16th-17th century Europe - promoting values conducive to economic development.

Several promising avenues for future research emerge from our review. The first one is causal identification. While recent studies have made progress in establishing causal relationships through innovative research designs, there remains a need for more rigorous causal identification strategies. Future research could exploit natural experiments, historical events, or policy changes to better isolate the causal effects of Evangelical Christianity on various outcomes.

The second important avenue is heterogeneous effects: More research is needed to understand how the impacts of Evangelical Christianity vary across different contexts and subpopulations. This includes examining variations across different denominations within Evangelical Christianity as well as various demographic groups and social classes.

The third one is mechanism investigation. Future studies should focus on better identifying the specific mechanisms through which Evangelical Christianity affects economic and political outcomes. This could include the role of social networks, social media, traditional media, and the transmission of values and beliefs across generations.

Finally, comparative research on Evangelical beliefs across different contexts remains limited. This presents several open questions for future research, including how the movement's economic and political effects vary across different cultural contexts, what mechanisms drive

these variations, and how different denominations within Evangelical Christianity adapt to local conditions.

These research directions would not only advance our academic understanding but also provide valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and religious organizations themselves. As Evangelical Christianity continues to evolve, particularly in the developing world, understanding its various impacts becomes increasingly important for effective policy design and implementation.

## References

- Ager, Philipp, Casper Worm Hansen, and Lars Lønstrup.** 2014. "Church membership and social insurance: Evidence from the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927." *Available at SSRN 2530868*.
- Alberta, Tim.** 2022. "How Politics Poisoned the Evangelical Church." *The Atlantic*, 10.
- Alfonsi, Livia, Michal Bauer, Julie Chytilová, and Edward Miguel.** 2024. "Human capital affects religious identity: Causal evidence from Kenya." *Journal of Development Economics*, 167: 103215.
- Ananyev, Maxim, Michael Poyker, and Alexander Yarkin.** 2024. "Personal Jesus: Economic Effects of Evangelical Christianity."
- Au, Connie.** 2020. "Globalization and Asian Pentecostalism in the twenty-first century." *Pneuma*, 42(3-4): 500–520.
- Auriol, Emmanuelle, Julie Lassebie, Amma Panin, Eva Raiber, and Paul Seabright.** 2020. "God insures those who pay? Formal insurance and religious offerings in Ghana." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 135(4): 1799–1848.
- Balcomb, Anthony O.** 2016. "Evangelicalism in Africa: What it is and what it does." *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies*, 44(2): 117–128.
- Barro, Robert, and Rachel McCleary.** 2003. "Religion and Economic Growth across Countries." *American Sociological Review*, 68(5): 760–781.
- Bean, Lydia.** 2014. "Compassionate conservatives? Evangelicals, economic conservatism, and national identity." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 53(1): 164–186.
- Bebbington, David W.** 2003. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. Routledge.
- Bentzen, Jeanet, and Lena Sperling.** 2020. "God politics."
- Boas, Taylor C.** 2023. *Evangelicals and electoral politics in Latin America: a kingdom of this world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bryan, Gharad, James J. Choi, and Dean Karlan.** 2021. "Randomizing Religion: The Impact of Protestant Evangelism on Economic Outcomes." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 293–380.
- Buccione, Giulia, and Brian G Knight.** 2024. "The Rise of the Religious Right: Evidence from the Moral Majority and the Jimmy Carter Presidency." National Bureau of Economic Research.

- Burton, Ann M.** 2022. "British Evangelicals, Economic Warfare and the Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1794-1810." In *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. 117–146. Routledge.
- Costa, Francisco, Angelo Marcantonio, and Rudi Rocha.** 2023. "Stop suffering! Economic downturns and Pentecostal upsurge." *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 21(1): 215–250.
- Defoe, Terry F.** 2024. "Evangelicals and global warming: A study in science denial." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*.
- Esteban, Joan, Gilat Levy, and Laura Mayoral.** 2019. "Personal liberties, religiosity, and effort." *European Economic Review*, 120: 103320.
- Fogel, Robert William.** 2000. *The fourth great awakening and the future of egalitarianism*. University of Chicago Press.
- Freeman, Dena.** 2012. *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*. Springer.
- Gaskins, Ben.** 2024. "Exceptional Times for an Exceptional People: How the Prosperity Gospel, Christian Nationalism, and Race Affect Americans' Economic Attitudes and Behavior." Vol. 21, 385–410, De Gruyter.
- Guidry, Jeanine PD, Carrie A Miller, Paul B Perrin, Linnea I Laestadius, Gina Zurlo, Matthew W Savage, Michael Stevens, Bernard F Fuemmeler, Candace W Burton, Thomas Gültzow, et al.** 2022. "Between healthcare practitioners and clergy: Evangelicals and COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(17): 11120.
- Hasan, Iftexhar, Stefano Manfredonia, and Felix Noth.** 2024. "Church Membership and Economic Recovery: Evidence from the 2005 Hurricane Season." *The Economic Journal*, ueae061.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R.** 1992. "Religious markets and the economics of religion." *Social compass*, 39(1): 123–131.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R.** 1994. "Why strict churches are strong." *American Journal of sociology*, 99(5): 1180–1211.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R.** 1998. "Introduction to the Economics of Religion." *Journal of economic literature*, 36(3): 1465–1495.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R, and Brooks B Hull.** 1998. "The economics of religion: A survey of recent work." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 36(3): 1465–1496.
- Iyer, Sriya.** 2010. "Religion and economic development." In *Economic Growth*. 222–228. Springer.
- Iyer, Sriya.** 2016. "The new economics of religion." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 54(2): 395–441.
- Jones, Robert P., and Daniel Cox.** 2016. "America's Changing Religious Identity: Findings from the 2016 American Values Atlas."
- Kidd, Thomas S.** 2008. *The great awakening: The roots of evangelical Christianity in colonial America*. Yale University Press.
- Lee Rogers, Richard, and Nicolette Powe.** 2022. "COVID-19 information sources and misinformation by faith community." *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 59: 00469580221081388.

- Lim, Francis KG.** 2020. “New Developments in Christianity in China.”
- Luhrmann, Tanya M.** 2012. *When God talks back: Understanding the American evangelical relationship with God.* Knopf.
- Martin, William Curtis.** 2005. *With God on our side: The rise of the religious right in America.* Broadway.
- McCleary, Rachel M, and Robert J Barro.** 2006. “Religion and economy.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(2): 49–72.
- Murphy, David MA, Vesall Nourani, and David R Lee.** 2022. “Chatting at church: Information diffusion through religious networks.” *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 104(3): 449–464.
- Qin, Daniel.** 2020. “Evolution of Evangelical socio-political approaches in contemporary China (1980s-2010s).”
- Salinas, Daniel.** 2023. “Taking Up the Mantle: Evangelicals in Latin America.” *Christianity Today.*
- Schwadel, Philip, Jacob E Cheadle, Sarah E Malone, and Michael Stout.** 2016. “Social Networks and Civic Participation and Efficacy in two Evangelical Protestant Churches.” *Review of Religious esearch*, 58(2): 305–317.
- Smith, Christian.** 2000. *Christian America?: What Evangelicals really want.* Univ of California Press.
- Steensland, Brian, Lynn D Robinson, W Bradford Wilcox, Jerry Z Park, Mark D Regnerus, and Robert D Woodberry.** 2000. “The measure of American religion: Toward improving the state of the art.” *Social Forces*, 79(1): 291–318.
- Williams, Daniel K.** 2010. *God’s own party: The making of the Christian right.* Oxford University Press.
- Wolfe, John.** 2015. “Who are evangelicals? A history.” *Evangelicals around the world: A global handbook for the 21st century*, 25–33.
- Xiong, Heyu, and Yiling Zhao.** 2023. “Sectarian competition and the market provision of human capital.” *The Journal of Economic History*, 83(1): 1–44.
- Yi, Joseph E.** 2022. “Asian-American Religiosity and Politics.” *Journal of Political Science Education*, 18(2): 228–241.