Politics in the City of Churches:  
The Beliefs, Attitudes, and Influence of Lynchburg’s Politically Engaged Congregations

By Laurel Watts  
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With the November presidential election looming in the near future, it is likely that many are wondering the role Christian communities will play at the polls. With Jerry Falwell, evangelical Liberty University, or the Moral Majority Online dominating results from any library or online search for Lynchburg, Virginia, undoubtedly, there has been concern among area residents and others about the political power coming from Lynchburg’s churches—particularly conservative political power. It would seem obvious that churches would have an influence over the political behavior of their members, the direction of that influence, however, deserves a more in-depth examination than it has previously been granted. A belief that the political influence coming from Lynchburg’s churches is conservative, however, would assume that the majority of politically engaged congregations are also conservative. This is not necessarily the case.

In Lynchburg, Thomas Road Baptist Church continues its efforts to exert maximum political influence with the recent addition of a law school and the 2004 revival of the Moral Majority, now the Moral Majority Coalition, a lobbying group located in the city (2008). The four-pronged platform of the organization includes an intensive "Voter Registration Campaign" to take place through America's conservative churches and other religious organizations, a 2008, “Get-Out-The-Vote Campaign, “the massive recruitment and mobilization of social conservatives through television, radio, direct mail (U.S.P.S. and Internet) and public rallies,” and “the promotion of continuous private and corporate prayer for America's moral renaissance,” according to the Moral Majority Coalition website (2008). In the letter posted on the site, Falwell urges followers to “diligently work to multiply [representing voter] turnout for the 2006 and 2008 elections” (2008).

Though this conservative political organization deserves attention and should be
considered a major force, the collective influence of Lynchburg’s politically engaged churches proves to be far more complex than the aligned and consistently conservative stand of Thomas Road Baptist Church. Firstly, churches like Thomas Road are not necessarily representative of the majority of churches in the city. Roughly 48% of churches in Lynchburg listed “liberal” or “mainline” in describing their religious identity:

Also, traditional conservative viewpoints were not necessarily dominant among politically engaged churches, as many of these congregations responded with what are considered to be liberal responses to questions theological, political, and social in nature. Lynchburg has been referred to as “The City of Churches (Elson 2004),” but never “The City of Conservative Churches,” and reasonably so. The relationship between the Christian faith and political beliefs and attitudes is not revealed here as unidirectional, conservative or liberal, but rather a mixture and combination of both forces that deserves to be explored in-depth, as opposed to constructed by generalizations. Not all churches in Lynchburg are comparable to Thomas Road Baptist Church, and neither will they vote that way.

Previous studies conducted in an effort to assess political engagement of religious groups have assumed both political engagement and conservatism among evangelical congregations, and with good reason. In addition to the local example of Thomas Road, many evangelical
congregations across the U.S. are both politically engaged and conservative. Christian Smith, who conducted a national religious identity survey of individuals, found self-identified evangelicals to respond more conservatively to questions that were social or political in nature (1998). He referred, in his study, to the 1940s counter movement of evangelicalism as “engaged orthodoxy,” because of reformers’ desire to be socially and politically active in the community while still adhering to the fundamentals of the faith which were paramount to conservative congregations (Smith 1998).

While this pattern of conservatism can be observed in many self-identified evangelical congregations in Lynchburg, this way of identifying churches with the highest levels of political engagement fails to accurately represent the multifaceted evangelical movement or the counter movements which have evolved from it in recent years, including a more liberal evangelicalism, perhaps indicated by survey respondents listing both “evangelical” and “liberal” for question 67. Also problematic is assuming evangelical churches as being more politically active. In Lynchburg, 21% of responding churches that were not politically engaged according to survey responses to politically focused questions identified themselves as evangelical in nature, demonstrating the need for a new tool of assessing political engagement among churches.

In this paper I will offer a new tool for identifying politically engaged congregations. Applying this tool to findings from research done on congregations in Lynchburg, Virginia, I will attempt to identify those most engaged and influential congregations in the city, outline their beliefs, and determine their level of influence based on responses to a questionnaire sent to head pastors of all churches listed in the yellow pages for the area during the summer of 2008. Group responses varying from very conservative to very liberal will emphasize the diversity of those politically engaged congregations and allow for a better understanding of the level and type of influence present in the city at this time.

Politically Engaged Congregations

While it is interesting and valuable to understand the beliefs and influence of Lynchburg’s churches as a whole, those congregations who are most engaged in social and political endeavors are also those potentially equipped and motivated to make changes. For this
reason, it seems necessary to focus on these particular churches. For the purposes of identifying and analyzing them, then, Politically Engaged Congregations, or “PECs,” as they will be referred to in the remainder of this paper, must meet five criteria: These congregations must:

1. Believe that religion is not a private matter to be kept out of public debates over social and political issues,
2. Believe that Christians should be trying to change American society to better reflect God’s will,
3. Believe that it is important that Christians work for political reforms in order to change U.S. society,
4. Have been engaged in some political activity as a church in the past two years, and
5. Have made an effort to educate the congregation about social and political issues in the past two years.

Of the 39 responding churches, 15, or 38% met the criteria for Politically Engaged Congregations, while 24, or 62% of responding churches did not. While the initial response rate was modest, proportions of denomination groups are were similar, with the yellow pages listing Baptists, United Methodists, and Non-Denominational churches as representing 31, 12, and 10 percent of Lynchburg’s church population, respectively, and 32, 17, and 12 percent in survey responses. Having isolated a particularly political group of churches in the city, interest is directed to how they identify themselves, what they believe and their level of influence.

Who are They?

Perhaps the broadest way to identify PECs is with their self-identified religious grouping. As mentioned, categories such as “Fundamentalist” or “Evangelical” cannot necessarily be used as indicators of political polarity, but they do offer some insight regarding how churches identify themselves theologically and socially. Question 67 of the survey questionnaire asked head pastors, “Which of the following best represents the identity of your church?” Table 1 reveals

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1 Criteria for PECs were drawn from survey questions 4, 23, 33, and 46-50 (see Appendix B). Respondents were not eliminated from the group if they responded “I Don’t Know” to one or more of the questions or as a result of missing data.
evangelical respondents in the majority, followed by mainline congregations. Fundamentalists who are typically conservative, as well as liberal Christians, however, are not unrepresented in the group, each making up 7% of responses.

|               | PECs | | Non PECs | |%
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<tr>
<td>Fundamentalist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of These</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
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Denomination is another way of more precisely identifying PECs, though it may not be useful in distinguishing Politically Engaged Congregations from those who are not. Twenty-seven percent of PECs belonged to the United Methodist denomination, 21% were Baptists, making up the majority, while non PECs responded as Baptists at a rate of 38%, Non-Denominational at 17%, and United Methodists at 13%. Based on responses on denomination, it seems that the major denominations present in the city of Lynchburg exist at varying levels of political engagement, as opposed to operating consistently at a certain level of political engagement.

The age of the church is another variable of interest in examining Politically Engaged Congregations. Responses to question 63: “How old is your church,” seem to indicate that PECs are younger than non PECs with 47% of PECs responding “Less Than 50 Years Old” compared 29% for non PECs. Non PECs responded at a rate of 71% as being “Over 50 Years Old”, compared to only 54% for Politically Engaged Congregations.

Politically Engaged Congregations also appear to be slightly less ethnically diverse than non PECs, with 87% responding that the majority of their congregation is white and 13%
responding as black congregations. Only 7% of respondents selected multiple categories for the question, indicating a mixed congregation of whites and blacks. Comparatively, with 71% responding as white congregations, and 21% responding as black congregations, Non PECs seem slightly more distributed among ethnic categories.

Membership, shown in Table 2, was extremely varied, revealing a very weak, if any relationship between political engagement and size of congregation. Non PECs appeared to be slightly smaller in size with 42% of responding churches identifying themselves as having membership between 50 and 100 members.

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<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-100</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-300</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-500</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;500</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Though there appears to be some slight relationships between identification variables and a congregation’s level of political engagement, it is not likely that Politically Engaged Congregations will be identifiable based on denomination or by the size of the congregation. The most effective assessment requires an analysis of a congregation’s activity and attitudes about the influence of churches on society.

**How Influential Are They?**

While membership is not necessarily effective in identifying Politically Engaged Congregations, it is an important variable to look at when considering the influence of such congregations. Naturally, churches grow and become stronger as they acquire more support and a higher membership, but those churches that desire to have an impact on politics, gain more than strength within the church. Churches endorsing political candidates or parties, whether publicly or privately, are able to influence and produce more voters as membership increases.
Characteristically, 87% of PECs reported that growth was important or very important, compared with only 60% for non PECs.

Similarly, PECs with higher rates of membership are more equipped to take on projects outside of the church such as the creation of Christian educational institutions or lobbying organizations, and with members encouraged and required by scripture to give 10% of their earnings to God\(^3\) (usually by giving it to church officials who decide how the money will best be used), higher membership means higher amounts of untaxed income for the church and its projects. For this reason, it should be assumed that PECs with higher levels of members or who are highly involved in programs or organizations outside of the congregation would have a stronger impact, socially and politically. It would appear, then, that Lynchburg PECs exert a considerable amount of influence, with 70% reporting congregations of over 100 members.

The influence of a church undoubtedly increases with a higher prevalence of services and activities. Politically Engaged Congregations in Lynchburg, then, are again revealed as having a substantial influence over members, with forty percent of responding Lynchburg PECs reporting that they hold regular services once a week, and 60% report having them two to three times weekly. Activities other than regular worship services were even more frequent: 73% responded that they hosted these types of activities three or more times weekly and all responded that the activities took place at least twice in a week. Seventy-four percent of PECs reported that they had created programs to serve the community in the past two years, furthering their influence.

Advertising and ministering to the community via media resources are important tools for heightening influence, because they allow for the recruitment of new members and a wider broadcast of the message. Eighty-six percent of PECs reported that advertising was important and 100% reported advertising or ministering to the community in some way in addition to the yellow pages where their listing was found. Table 3 shows a breakdown of PECs’ methods for advertising or ministering to the community:

\(^3\) 1 Samuel 8:15-17 and numerous other passages in the Bible refer to a tenth of everything owned or earned by an individual to belong to God and to be used for his purposes, and that the amount is to be given to his officials.
Table 3: Methods of Advertising and Ministering

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<th>PECs</th>
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<th>Non PECs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billboards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>240%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>238%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, Lynchburg’s PECs are well advertised and represented online as well as on the radio, and so, aim to exert a significant level of influence on the community.

Even though political activity of the church in the past two years is one of the criteria for identifying PECs, it necessary to examine the activity more closely to determine the level and frequency of activity—variables affecting the overall influence of the congregation. According to responses, 20% of PECs have given time or money to a Christian political candidate in the past two years. None, however, have given time or money to non-Christian political candidates during this time. Sixty-seven percent of PECs have written, called, or visited elected officials in the past two years, and 27% have engaged in public protests or demonstrations.

Twenty percent of the 100% of PECs who reported trying to educate their congregations about social or political issues responded that they engaged in this activity “A Lot.” Table 4, below, offers an illustration of this political activity:

Table 4: Political Activity

Q. 46: Given money or time to a political candidate

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<th>PECs</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Lot</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Don’t Know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
What do they believe?

Highlighting the diversity of Lynchburg’s PECs are responses to theological questions such as views of the Bible, human nature, and salvation. PECs report that the Bible is to be
taken literally at a significantly lower rate than Non PECs—7% compared to 42% (see Table 5). The majority of PECs (60%) responded that the Bible is true in all ways but not necessarily to be taken literally. 20% of PECs reported that the Bible contained errors about some things, deviating from traditional theological conservatism.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PECs</th>
<th>Non PECs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True and Literal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>True not Literal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Above</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In contrast, 100% of PECs reported that they believed human nature to be inherently sinful, however, 47% of those respondents listed multiple responses—that humans were good and sinful. None of the responses stated that human nature was good, only, characteristic of a more conservative theological viewpoint. Similarly, regarding the issue of salvation, 87% of PECs believe that Christ is the only way to salvation. Only 7% reported that there were other ways to gain salvation.

Question 61 of the questionnaire asked, “According to the beliefs of your church, homosexuality is:” PECs were much less likely to respond “Sinful” than non PECs at a rate of 53% compared to 75%, though only 7% responded that they believed homosexuality to be a lifestyle or preference (Table 6 illustrates PEC responses to questions 61, 17, 18, and 19). PECs were also less likely than other responding churches to report that the man should be the head of the family and the primary breadwinner. Most PECs, (60%), in fact, responded that men should not be the primary bread winners, unlike what would be expected from conservative congregations.

Question 19, “[…] should women be allowed to hold the position of head pastor or not?” is another question where PECs took a liberal stand on traditional gender roles. Sixty-seven percent agree that women should be allowed to hold the position of head pastor, with the
remainder of churches responding positively at a slightly lower rate—54%. Similarly 87% of PECs reported that the man and woman should be equal in marriage, revealing the 5% of Lynchburg’s churches who believe men and women should not be equal in marriage as not meeting the criteria for a politically engaged congregation.

Table 6

Q. 61: View of Homosexuality:

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<td>%</td>
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<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifestyle or Preference</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinful</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<td>0</td>
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Q. 17: Man head of family?

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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Don’t Know</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
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Q. 18: Man as bread winner?

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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Don’t Know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
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Q. 19: Woman as head Pastor

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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67%</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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15 100% 24 100%
Perhaps influencing their desire to have political influence, is the belief widely held by Lynchburg PECs, that a breakdown of U.S. society is occurring. Eighty percent of Politically Engaged Congregations answered positively to this statement, but they are less likely than other congregations to believe a Christian revival is likely to sweep the United States. Thirty-eight percent of Non PECs believe that such a revival is likely or very likely. PECs, however report this belief at a rate nearly 20% less than Non PECs. It seems that PECs believe changes in laws and policy are necessary in order to change U.S. society so that it better reflects God’s will, as a nation-wide revival of faith is not likely to happen. In relation to this, 20% of PECs reported that Christian morality should be the law of the land, while 67%, the majority, reported that it should not be.

Question 58 asked whether or not churches believed Lynchburg was in state of moral decline. As a group, PECs seem torn over the question. One third of PECs responded yes to this question and one third responded no. 40% responded that they were unsure about the answer to this question. Non PECs seemed slightly more sure that the city was not in a state of moral decline. Sixty-seven percent of PECs believe that Lynchburg's social problems would begin to naturally solve themselves if enough people became Christians. 20% report that this is not the case.

It has been established that Politically Engaged Congregations believe that a breakdown of U.S. society is occurring, that they should be trying to change U.S. Society to better reflect God’s will, and that a Christian revival is not likely to happen on its own. They also do not believe that Christian morality should be the law of the land. What, then, do they believe is the best way to influence society? Responses regarding methods for changing society help to answer this question: Ninety-three percent of PECs report that they believe churches and denominations should take stands on issues, and 73% believe that it is necessary to make changes to laws and institutions as opposed to just individuals. Eighty-seven percent believe giving money to charity is important in changing society, and Ninety-three percent believe that it is important for Christians to be well educated about secular worldviews for this reason.
How Will They Vote?

As observed, beliefs and attitudes of Politically Engaged Congregations range from conservative to liberal, theologically, socially, and politically. When looking at the strength and influence of these congregations, though, the implications of those beliefs become the main point of focus. Pastors of these Politically Engaged Congregations are concerned about political matters because they are concerned about the law, and they are likely to share that concern with members of their congregation and encourage them to use their votes in ways that reflect those beliefs. One PEC pastor included the following with his completed questionnaire:

“As a Christian, it matters to me what kind of legislation is passed. Not because I am trying to force my version of morality on others, but because the law does matter. Some laws have unintended impact on society. As a citizen, I believe it is my responsibility to be knowledgeable and thoughtful on those matters.”

The question that arises, then, is “how will they vote?”

Gay Marriage

Many of the questions asked in the questionnaire dealt particularly with contemporary political issues, and so, will be useful in predicting voting patterns among PECs. Question 27 of the survey deals specifically with the issue of gay marriage, asking whether the church agrees or disagrees with the statement that marriage should only be between a man and a woman (see Table 7). Eighty-seven percent of PECs agreed with this statement, and presumably will vote according to that belief.

Table 7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. 27: Marriage--man and woman</th>
<th>PECs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non PECs</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agrees</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagrees</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Don't Know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abortion

Only 7% of PECs reported that abortion should be legal in all cases. Most of them, 27% and 47%, believe that it should be legal in "most cases" or "a few cases," respectively, and only 13% believe that it should be illegal in all cases. An illustration of these responses compared with the remainder of responding Lynchburg congregations is shown in Table 8 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PECs</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non PECs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Cases</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Cases</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Few Cases</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Don’t Know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Influencing the Public School System

It was the Non Politically Engaged congregations that reported that Christian views of science and history should be included in public school curriculum (63% compared to 13% who responded "no"). PECs were more likely to respond that the science and history alternatives did not have a place in the public school system, with 47% responding "no" to the question and 40% responding "yes." Question 44 assessed congregations’ attitudes about teaching morality in public schools. Only 7% of PECs responded that Christian morals should be taught in public schools. 73% reported that general morals should be taught and 33% reported that moral should not be taught in public schools at all.

PECs do, however, aim to be active in the public schools, even if they think Christian morals and worldviews are not appropriate in the setting. They responded to the question, “When it comes to educating children, which of the following should Christians focus on the most, according to the beliefs of your church,” positively for working with public schools at a rate of 73%, though 27% responded that building strong Christian schools was important and 13% responded that home-schooling children was necessary for bettering their education.
Beliefs about prayer in public schools were similar to PEC opinions about Christian morality within the system. The majority, 73%, of PECs responded that they believed prayer should not be sponsored by public schools but that it should be allowed. 20% responded that a moment of silence would be appropriate in the public school setting, and 13% responded that Christian prayers should be sponsored by public schools. Based on responses regarding the influence of churches in the public school system, it seems that while PECs aim to work within the public schools, they are respectful of the boundaries set by the separation of church and state and, for the most part, do not desire to see the schools transformed into institutions affiliated with Christianity.

While some survey questions were closely related contemporary social and political issues, and so, reveal ways in which PECs are likely to vote, many of the issues are not directly addressed in the questionnaire. A safe assumption is that congregations will vote on issues according to the candidate that is most closely aligned with their beliefs, and as has been illustrated in this paper, those beliefs are not necessarily consistent with one particular political view or party, and often reflect a combination of many different views. In an assessment of Politically Engaged Congregations, particularly in a city such as Lynchburg where one congregation seemingly dominates the political activity of the Christian community, it is imperative to effectively identify all Politically Engaged Congregations as well as acquire an accurate understanding of their views and voting inclinations.
APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODS

The information found in this report is based primarily on survey data, interviews, and research done on the denominations of 145 Christian churches listed in the October 2007 Verizon Yellow Pages for the area of Lynchburg, Virginia. Other sources for information and methods were derived from previous sociological studies done on American Evangelicalism, particularly one completed by Christian Smith in 1998. Research for this project took place over the course of two months during the summer of 2008 and was funded by the Honors Summer Research Program and the Sociology Department at Sweet Briar College.

**Mail Survey**

Of the original 165 listings under “Churches” in the directory, twenty were eliminated from the list for the following reasons: a) The church listed was affiliated with a religion other than Christianity, b) the church listed was not located within Lynchburg city limits or had moved to a location outside of Lynchburg city limits, c) the listing was for a religious institution other than an actual church, or d) the church listed did not offer an up-to-date mailing address or the address of the church was not listed. The fact that churches not listed in the directory were not included in the study, inevitably created a bias against intentionally separatist churches and smaller and perhaps poorer churches. However, in order to conduct such research, this bias is unavoidable and should have very little effect on the overall nature of Lynchburg’s churches.

In order to effectively gather accurate information on the nature of these congregations, surveys containing 67 questions about religious identity, beliefs, and practices were addressed and mailed to the head pastors of each of the remaining 146 churches, containing postage-paid, return envelopes. Pastors were informed in the cover letter that their responses would remain anonymous throughout the study and that it was not necessary or encouraged that they include their name or the name of their church anywhere on the survey.

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4 Several of the listings were for organizations or programs affiliated with a particular church or denomination such as community counseling services or prayer centers.
While many of the survey questions were specifically created and focused toward residents of Lynchburg, many of them were more general in nature and were adapted from Christian Smith’s telephone “Religious Identity and Influence” survey. See Appendix B the final survey questions.

Eight of the 146 surveys mailed (roughly five percent) were returned by the postal service before reaching their destination, leaving a total of 137 surveys known to have been received. Of those 138, 39 surveys completed and returned, allowing for only a 28% response rate. Returned surveys, however, offered not only answers to survey questions, but many comments, which were both informative and useful. Some answers were added to the original survey questions during the coding process in order to more accurately record respondents’ answers.

**Interviews**

Like the surveys, the interviews conducted were intended for the head pastors of Lynchburg’s Christian churches. Some respondents volunteered for interviews over telephone conversations in which they asked questions or gave comments concerning the survey, however, most agreed to an interview after they were contacted. Because respondents were not identified on the questionnaire, it was necessary to telephone area churches based on the religious identity offered on their church’s web page. Pastors were again informed of the anonymity of their responses within the report. The response rate for interviews was roughly 30%, with four of the 13 pastors contacted agreeing to an interview.

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5 No mail receptacle was found for two of the churches. The others were marked “Not deliverable as addressed.”

6 Many respondents drew in their own boxes for “both” or “other” categories. A fourth category, “both,” was added to questions 4 and 35, a fourth category, “other,” was added to question 27, and a 31st category, “other,” was added to question 16 (see Appendix B).

7 In order to ensure accurate representation, churches identifying themselves as Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Mainline, or Liberal, were contacted in equal proportions and interviewed in equal proportions.
APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How often does your church hold services?
   - 4-5 Times a Week
   - 2-3 Times a Week
   - Once a Week
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Once a Month

2. According to the beliefs of your church, how important should religious faith be in the lives of the members of the congregation?
   - Extremely Important
   - Very Important
   - Somewhat Important
   - Not Important
   - I Don’t Know

3. According to the beliefs of your church, is being devoted to raising a good family a big enough contribution to the world? Or should members do more than that?
   - Big Enough
   - Have to do more
   - I Don’t Know

4. According to the beliefs of your church, is religion a private matter that should be kept out of public debates over social and political issues, or not?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I Don’t Know

5. According to the beliefs of your church, is it necessary to change laws and institutions or just individuals in order to improve American society?
   - Laws and Institutions
   - Just Individuals
   - I Don’t Know

6. According to the beliefs of your church, should Christian morality be the law of the land, even though not all Americans are Christians, or not?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I Don’t Know

7. According to the beliefs of your church, are we seeing a serious breakdown of American society today, or not?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I Don’t Know

8. Which of the following best represents your church’s belief about prayer in public school:
   - Prayer should not be allowed in public schools.
   - Schools should not sponsor prayer, but kids should be allowed to pray together in groups.
   - Teachers should lead in a moment of silence for unspoken prayers.
   - Teachers should lead their classes in spoken Christian prayers.
   - None of These
   - I Don’t Know
9. According to the beliefs of your church, should abortion be legal in all cases, most cases, only a few cases, or illegal in all cases?
   □ All Cases  □ Illegal
   □ Most Cases  □ I Don’t Know
   □ A Few Cases

10. According to the beliefs of your church, should husbands and wives be equal partners in everything in marriage, or not?
    □ Yes  □ I Don’t Know
    □ No

11. About how many members are there in your congregation, currently?
    □ Less than 50
    □ 50-100
    □ 100-300
    □ 300-500
    □ More than 500

12. According to the beliefs of your church, are human beings basically good, basically sinful, or both good and sinful?
    □ Good
    □ Sinful
    □ Both Good and Sinful  □ I Don’t Know

13. Which of the following best reflects your church’s view of the Bible:
    □ The Bible is true in all ways, and to be read literally, word for word.
    □ The Bible is true in all ways, but not always to be read literally
    □ The Bible is true primarily about religious matters, but may contain errors about other things.
    □ None of the Above

14. According to the beliefs of your church, is the only hope for salvation through personal faith in Jesus Christ, or are there other ways to salvation?
    □ Yes, Christ is the Only Hope for Salvation.
    □ No, There are Other Ways to Gain Salvation.

15. According to the beliefs of your church, how do believers know how God wants them to live their lives?
    □ From Church Teachings
    □ From the Bible
    □ Through Human Reason
    □ In their hearts through a personal walk with God
    □ None of the above  □ I Don’t Know

16. Which of the following best represents the identity of your church?
    □ Anglican
    □ Baptist- Independent
    □ Baptist- Mainline
    □ Baptist- Southern
    □ Church of the Brethren
    □ Catholic
    □ Charismatic
    □ Christian
    □ Church of Christ
    □ Church of God in Christ
    □ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
    □ Disciples of Christ
    □ Foursquare
    □ Gospel
    □ Independent
    □ Jehovah’s Witnesses
    □ Lutheran
    □ Methodist
    □ Methodist- United
    □ Nazarene
    □ Non-Denominational
    □ Inter-Denominational
    □ Orthodox
    □ Pentecostal
    □ Presbyterian
    □ Reformed
    □ Seventh Day Adventist
    □ Unitarian
    □ Unity
    □ Wesleyan
17. According to the beliefs of your church, should the husband be the head of the family, or not?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ I Don’t know

18. According to the beliefs of your church, should the husband be the primary breadwinner, or not?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ I Don’t Know

19. According to the beliefs of your church, should women be allowed to hold the position of head pastor, or not?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ I Don’t Know

20. In which ways does your church advertise itself or minister to the community? (check all that apply)
    □ Yellow Pages
    □ Internet
    □ Radio
    □ Television
    □ Billboards
    □ Newspaper
    □ Other: ________________

21. According to the beliefs of your church, would many of America’s social problems naturally begin to solve themselves if enough people became Christians?
    □ Yes
    □ No
    □ I Don’t Know

22. According to the beliefs of your church, should members of the congregation try hard not to offend people around them with their Christian views, or not?
    □ Yes, they should try not to be offensive
    □ No, they should not be concerned about offending anyone
    □ I Don’t Know

23. According to the beliefs of your church, should Christians be trying to change American society to better reflect God’s will, or not?
    □ Yes
    □ No
    □ I Don’t Know

24. According to the beliefs of your church, should the primary goal of Christians be saving souls?
    □ Yes
    □ No
    □ I Don’t Know

For questions 25-29, please indicate whether your church agrees or disagrees with the statement:
25. The Bible tells us that the world is destined to grow worse and worse and we cannot change that.
    □ Agrees
    □ Disagrees
    □ I Don’t Know

26. Christians should separate from the world and live radically different lifestyles:
    □ Agrees
    □ Disagrees
    □ I Don’t Know

27. Marriage should only be between a man and a woman:
    □ Agrees
    □ Disagrees
    □ I Don’t Know
28. Gays and lesbians can repent and become new creations of God:
☐ Agrees
☐ Disagrees
☐ I Don’t Know

29. The church should be flexible and able to adapt to a changing society:
☐ Agree
☐ Disagrees
☐ I Don’t Know

30. According to the beliefs of your church, how important is converting people to Jesus Christ, as a way to change American society?
☐ Very Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Important
☐ I Don’t Know

31. According to the beliefs of your church, how important is it for Christians to give money to charity, as a way to change American society?
☐ Very Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Important
☐ I Don’t Know

32. According to the beliefs of your church, how important is it that Christians volunteer for local community organizations, as a way to change American society?
☐ Very Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Important
☐ I Don’t Know

33. According to the beliefs of your church, how important is it that Christians work for political reforms, as a way to change American society?
☐ Very Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Important
☐ I Don’t Know

34. According to the beliefs of your church, how important is it that Christians defend a biblical worldview in intellectual circles, as a way to change American society?
☐ Very Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Important
☐ I Don’t Know

35. According to the beliefs of your church, should churches and denominations take stands on social, economic, and political issues? Or should taking stands always be left up to individual Christians?
☐ Churches and Denominations
☐ Individual Christians
☐ I Don’t Know

36. According to the beliefs of your church, is racism a top priority that Christians should be working to overcome, or not?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I Don’t Know

37. Are the members of your congregation encouraged to rely on conservative Christian leaders or political organizations, such as the Christian Coalition, to help them decide how to vote in an election?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I Don’t Know

38. In general, do you think the mass media is hostile toward the moral and spiritual values of your church or not?
☐ Yes
☐ No
39. In general, do you think feminists are hostile toward the moral and spiritual values of your church or not?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ I Don’t Know

40. In general, do you think that public schools are hostile toward the moral and spiritual values of your church or not?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ I Don’t Know

41. According to the beliefs of your church, how likely or unlikely is it that a Christian revival will sweep America in the coming years?
   □ Very Likely  □ Unlikely
   □ Likely  □ Very Unlikely
   □ Somewhat Likely

42. According to the beliefs of your church, should public school instruction include Christian views of science and history, or not?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ I Don’t Know

43. Of the following two ways that Christian parents might choose to deal with moral issues in public schools, which one is the most similar to the views of your church?
   □ Elect people to school boards who will put morality and values back in schools
   □ Try through relationships to have a positive moral influence on students, teachers, and parents
   □ I Don’t Know

44. Which of the following views about teaching morality in public schools is the most similar to the views of your church?
   □ Public school teachers should teach Christian values and morality.
   □ Public school teachers should teach general morals, but not of a particular religion
   □ Morals school be taught in the home, not in public schools.
   □ I Don’t Know

45. When it comes to educating children, which of the following should Christians focus on the most, according to the beliefs of your church?
   □ Working with the public schools
   □ Building strong Christian schools  □ Home schooling their children
   □ I Don’t Know

For questions 46-54, please indicate whether your church has done the activity within the last two years A Lot, Some, or None:
46. Given money or time to a Christian political organization or candidate:
   □ A Lot  □ None  □ I Don’t Know
   □ Some

47. Given money or time to a non-Christian political organization or candidate:
   □ A Lot  □ None  □ I Don’t Know
   □ Some

48. Written, called, or visited elected officials:
49. Participated in public protests or demonstration:
   □ A Lot
   □ Some
   □ None
   □ I Don’t Know

50. Tried to educate the congregation about a political or social issue:
   □ A Lot
   □ Some
   □ None
   □ I Don’t Know

51. Created programs that serve the local community:
   □ A Lot
   □ Some
   □ None
   □ I Don’t Know

52. Volunteered for a local community organization not affiliated with a church:
   □ A Lot
   □ Some
   □ None
   □ I Don’t Know

53. Given money or time to a Christian organization to help spread the gospel in the U.S. or overseas:
   □ A Lot
   □ Some
   □ None
   □ I Don’t Know

54. Given money to an organization that helps poor and needy people:
   □ A Lot
   □ Some
   □ None
   □ I Don’t Know

55. How often does your church offer activities other than your Sunday morning worship service, such as potlucks, Bible studies, choir practice, small groups, etc.?
   □ 3 or more times a week
   □ Once a week
   □ 2-3 times a month
   □ Once a month
   □ Few times a year
   □ Never

56. What is the race or ethnicity of the majority of the members of your congregation?
   □ White
   □ Black
   □ Asian
   □ Hispanic
   □ Other:__________
   □ equal distribution of groups

57. Compared to other churches in the area, how diverse would you consider your congregation?
   □ Very Diverse
   □ Somewhat Diverse
   □ Not Very Diverse
   □ I Don’t Know

58. According to the beliefs of your church, is the city of Lynchburg in a state of moral decline?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ I Don’t Know

59. According to the beliefs of your church, would many of Lynchburg’s social problems naturally begin to solve themselves if enough people became Christians?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ I Don’t Know
60. According to the beliefs of your church, should people be able to become baptized regardless of their sexual preferences?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I Don’t Know

61. According to the beliefs of your church, homosexuality is:
☐ A lifestyle or preference
☐ Sinful
☐ Neither of these

62. How important is it to your church that the congregation of your church grows in number?
☐ Very Important
☐ Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Very Important
☐ Not Important

63. How old is your church?
☐ Less than 5 years old
☐ 5-10 years old
☐ 11-20 years old
☐ 21-50 years old
☐ 51-100 years old
☐ More than 100 years old

64. According to the beliefs of your church, should television and radio be censored more than it already is?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I Don’t’ Know

65. How important is it that your church is well advertised to the community?
☐ Very Important
☐ Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Very Important
☐ Not Important

66. According to the beliefs of your church, how important is it that Christians are well educated about secular world views as a way to influence American society?
☐ Very Important
☐ Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Not Very Important
☐ Not Important

67. Which of the following best represents the identity of your church?
☐ Fundamentalist
☐ Evangelical
☐ Mainline
☐ Liberal
☐ None of these
Bibliography:


Verizon Yellow Pages. 2007. Idearc Media Corp.