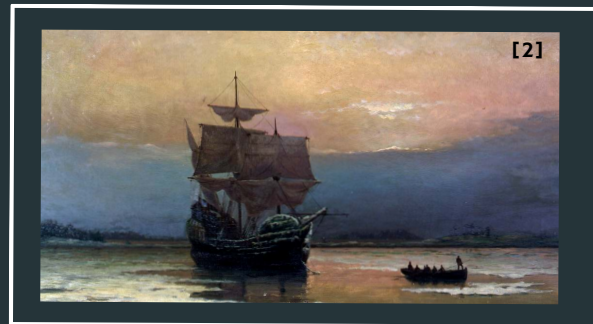


1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Historical roots



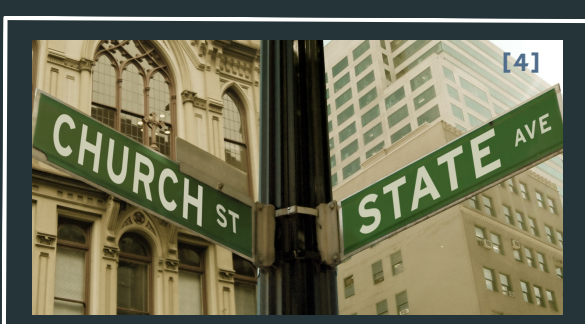
Evangelical Protestantism has been essential to the U.S. culture since colonial times. The idea of the U.S. as a chosen christian nation, rooted in the thinking of english puritans, gained prominence in the 19th century. [8]

2. The Great Awakening



The Great Awakening reacted to the Enlightenment Period's downplay of religion in the 1700s. Originating in Europe, the movement linked evangelicals in Europe and North America, resulting in a new sense of religious identity and gospel urgency. [9]

3. Secularization



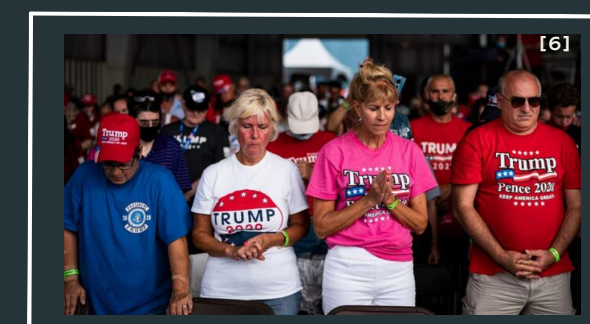
American constitution favoured secularization in the 19th century, resulting in the disestablishment of religion. This paved the way for a large market of religious offers [10]

4. Growth of the Megachurches



Megachurches already started growing before the 1950s [17] and currently host over 10.000 visitors weekly. Having to adapt to the American free-market ideology, churches advertized their faith by offering non-traditional services and emphasizing entertainment. [11]

5. Rise of Conservatism



Evangelicals' current political stance partly stems from their opposition to the sexual liberalization of the 1960s. Fearing a threat to their beliefs with growing support for sexual permissiveness gay and abortion rights, they uphold conservative positions on sexual morality. [13]

"How do you spell God? Many evangelicals believe it is spelled GOP (...) for God's Only Party." [3]

2. PARADOX

The Evangelical Paradox describes two contradicting forces within the group:

Evangelicalism has been deeply influenced by the American popular culture

Evangelicalism has also been a countercultural movement resisting strongly to certain moral trends

The movement upholds traditional religious values while embracing American ideals, leading to a *counterfeit culture*.

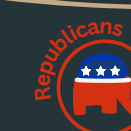
In order to succeed, churches had to appeal to the public by becoming culturally relevant, resulting in American Evangelicalism being absorbed by the broader culture. [1]

Understanding THE AMERICAN BIBLE BELT



The Bible Belt, a region located in the south-eastern U.S., is characterized by Evangelicalism, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, which follows a strict literal interpretation of the Bible [15]. Evangelicalism actively promotes its beliefs and holds conservative views on social issues. Its strength lies in preserving core beliefs while adapting to the secular world, making it a significant force in politics and academia [16].

"There is a fine line between clever marketing and compromised spirituality" [12]



3. POLITICS



Since the 1960s, American evangelicals shifted from being predominantly Democrats to largely Republicans, becoming an influential force in conservative politics. [2]

This transition was driven by a desire for political power to challenge judicial decisions on issues like immigration and abortion. Even though they don't like government power violating individual rights, they paradoxically want the government to enforce Christian values to make the U.S.A. a Christian nation.

A Geographer's problem? Areal Definition

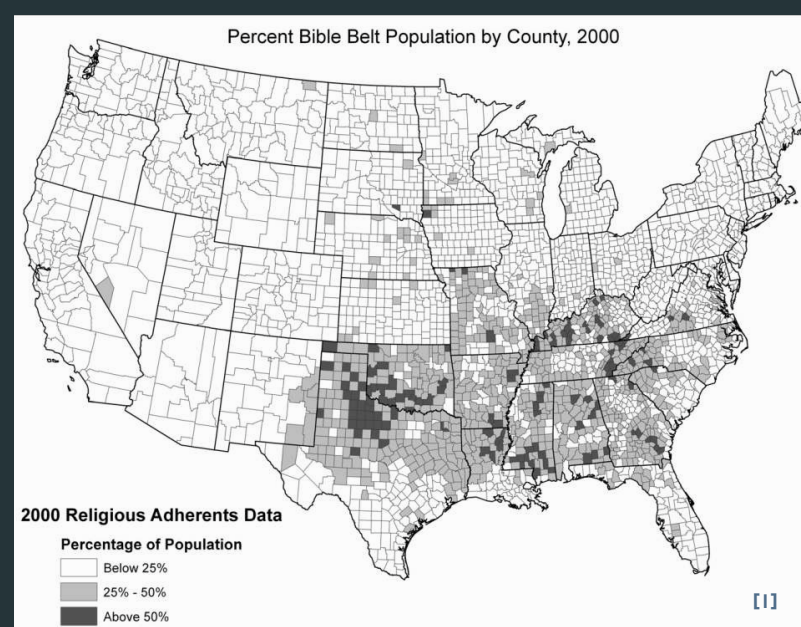
The label Bible Belt was first used in the 1920s and remains a popular term until this day, even though it is often used loosely without specific definitions of its features or location.

Results show that the location is constantly changing due to migration and shifts in the South. The "buckle" of the Bible Belt describes the epicentre of the region, which has moved west since the 1970s. [7]

4. DILEMMAS

Evangelicals in media - a popular topic?

Many articles and studies have examined the evangelical support for Trump despite their moral disagreements. However, it is important to note that political and theological views vary strongly within evangelicalism. Homogenizing the group poses a risk, and many evangelicals feel that media portrayals are unfair due to the repeated emphasis on negative traits. [18]



Around 1/4 of Americans identify as evangelicals [19]

81% of white evangelicals voted for Trump [18]

WHAT ABOUT THE SUNBELT?



Since the 1970s, "Sunbelt" in journalism depicts a politically conservative region in the warm southern U.S. However, the term lacks a clear geographical and characteristic definition, and many factors show discontinuity. Simpler alternatives like "south" or "west" might be just as informative. [14]

5. PERSPECTIVE

The embrace of conservative politics has led to internal criticism within the group, resulting in a distancing between evangelicals and political conservatism.

New divisions are currently appearing and growing within evangelicalism.

Younger and "emerging" evangelicals tend to hold more liberal political opinions while maintaining theological commitments.

Many evangelicals are currently focusing on issues such as poverty and the environment, reflecting a growing desire for a more holistic view of Christian engagement. [6]

"Mainstream evangelicalism is currently conservative, but evangelicalism itself is not essentially conservative" [5]