Creation Care and Stewardship: 
Strategies of Progressive Christian Organizations 
and the Climate Change Debate

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Abstract

While many studies have examined the organized “Christian Right,” this paper focuses on the evolving nature of faith-based activism in America by exploring the strategies of progressive Christian organizations around the recent climate change debate. Through a case study involving framing analysis and elite interviews, I examine the efforts of these organizations to re-frame climate change as a moral issue in order to shape how it is perceived by policymakers and people of faith. The findings suggest that the activities of these groups are indicative of the diversity that exists within the Christian community, as they promote more moderate and progressive policy positions. Also, it is clear that these organizations are becoming increasingly politically sophisticated, conducting innovative mobilization and grassroots lobbying campaigns and forming valuable collaborative relationships with progressive secular organizations.
Introduction: Climate Change and Christian Organizations

While scientists and religious leaders have sometimes been at odds with one another, especially concerning well-known issues like stem-cell research and evolution, progressive Christian organizations have become deeply engaged in environmental issues. These groups, along with secular activists, have been especially involved in urging elected officials to pass legislation that would mitigate the environmental and social effects of climate change. Seeing the environment as an issue related to strongly-held beliefs, their advocacy to limit the consequences of climate change is the result of a faith-based obligation to protect God’s creation and help disadvantaged communities. While some prominent conservative Christians have warned against the threats posed by the environmental movement, other faith leaders are waging campaigns that urge religious communities to act on behalf of comprehensive climate change policies.

What this case study will show is how the issue of climate change demonstrates that the variations in Christian attitudes can create opportunities for progressive faith organizations to expand their influence rather than acting as an obstacle, and spur groundbreaking collaborative efforts among religious and secular organizations. The trends surrounding climate change policy raise new questions about the consistency of the divisions between the well-established Christian Right and progressive Christians, and whether partnerships between religious and secular groups will further undermine our

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1 For example, the conservative Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation produced a video series in 2010 called “Resisting the Green Dragon,” which is an attempt to clarify mistaken beliefs about the environmental movement using a particular faith and ideological perspective. According to the website for the series, the environmental movement is “Without a doubt, one of the greatest threats to society and the church today” and is invading all aspects of life. According to Dr. James Tonkowich, Senior Fellow at the Cornwall Alliance, “What most Christians don’t understand is that environmentalism is a whole worldview that offers its own doctrines of God, of creation, of humanity, of sin and of redemption.” The series portrays environmentalism as its own ideology that pushes people to worship nature, at the expense of other humans and the authority of God. It is a “twisted view of the world [that] elevates nature above the needs of people, of even the poorest and the most helpless- with millions falling prey to its spiritual deception.” According to Dr. E Calvin Beisner, founder of the Cornwall Alliance, when religious and political beliefs are joined in the environmental movement, this is what he calls “the green dragon,” because it is such a serious threat “to society and the church in our day.” See: “Resisting the Green Dragon.” Cornwall Alliance. http://resistingthegreendragon.com/. (January 8, 2011).
assumptions about the political tendencies of faith groups or the openness of secular groups. Further, it is becoming clear that the secular left is beginning to understand the value that a religious and moral perspective can bring to their efforts, enhancing the substance they bring to political debates. Finally, the climate change case demonstrates the faith-infused processes that led these organizations to throw their support behind certain policies, sending a clear signal to people of faith that their positions arise out of a careful consideration of Christian values.

**Research Questions and Objectives**

While past research has provided numerous explanations for the growth of the Christian Right and the behavior of conservative Christians, there have been relatively few studies conducted recently on progressive religious organizations. Scholars have concluded that these groups simply do not have as much influence on the national level, primarily because they lack the strong fundraising base and unified constituency possessed by the Christian Right. However, progressive Christian groups have greatly increased their activity in the years since the 2008 election, and it is time to re-examine whether they now have the capability to organize effective issue campaigns that can appeal to diverse faith communities.

By building upon the current literature that examines interest groups, religious lobbying, and social movements, this paper will address the following questions. First, how do organizations pursue progressive policy objectives, and how do they frame these policies to people of faith and political leaders? It is important to understand that although religious organizations often have expansive goals

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that seek to fundamentally change society, these goals are not the same among groups. Religious activism has most recently been associated with conservative causes such as same-sex marriage and abortion, but these issues are not the only ones that spur activity from faith groups. Along with climate change policy, these organizations have begun stressing that health care and economic reforms are closely related to the values and beliefs of Christians, expanding what may be seen as a morality policy. Through the process of re-framing, these long-standing issues can be transformed into “new” issues over time.

The groups in this paper are seeking to expand how environmental problems are normally defined, and connect with people of faith who may not have felt represented by the Christian Right or who may be skeptical of taking up a “secular” issue. To put it another way, they are enlarging the scope of conflict, who is implicated in political debates, and who is available for mobilization. Like other interest groups, “Defining an issue over time and adapting those definitions to fit the changing political and social climate determines the activists’ ability to inspire and mobilize support for their policy campaigns.” As these emerging organizations try to differentiate themselves from a well-established political entity like the Christian Right, while also appealing to any alienated potential followers, their experiences will shed light on the ways groups balance efforts to establish an identity, draw supporters, and build political influence.

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4 According to Christopher Mooney (2001), morality policies are defined in the following way: “A policy is classified as a morality policy based on the perceptions of the actors involved and the terms of the debate among them. Perceptions of issues drive political behavior, and since it is the unique political behavior surrounding morality policy that scholars in this area are trying to explain, it is these perceptions that we should be concerned with when defining this policy category. If at least one advocacy coalition involved in the debate defines the issue as threatening one of its core values, its first principles, we have a morality policy” (4). Haider-Markel and Meier (1996) further explain morality policy as “similar to redistributive policy; but the redistributed good is not money or government programs but values.” Policy becomes “morality policy” when “one advocacy coalition (Sabatier 1988) involved has portrayed the issue as one of morality or sin and used moral arguments in its policy advocacy” (333).
While the first question seeks to determine the goals of these religious organizations, the second question addresses the strategies organizations use to mobilize members and form networks with secular and faith groups to engage in collaborative efforts. As has been demonstrated by other scholars, collaboration is a common activity for religious organizations, such as the strong advocacy coalitions formed by the Christian Right.\(^8\) We need to understand these collaborations better, and how they fit into their overall lobbying strategy. This paper will not only look at collective action strategies among progressive Christian groups, but also any collaboration that extends to secular groups as well. By looking at how faith groups are forming partnerships with secular organizations involved with environmental issues will shed some light into how they are fitting into larger progressive and environmental movements.

Through a case study that includes framing analysis and elite interviews,\(^9\) this paper will explore the Christian organizations that are advocating for government action to address environmental problems and the ways they use faith to re-frame the climate change debate and mobilize members. Although this paper is part of a larger project that compares religious interest groups’ strategies among three issue areas, including health care and the budget process, climate change was chosen to be a typical\(^10\) or representative case since the activity around this issue largely reveals how progressive Christian organizations have been operating. It is clear that influencing how the public, the media, and policymakers viewed climate change became a priority of these groups in the years following Obama’s election. Additionally, because climate change attracted attention from the Christian Right and secular groups as well, this issue will allow us to better understand how these organizations interacted and used

\(^8\) Hofrenning, *In Washington But Not Of It*

\(^9\) The interviews were conducted with six staff members of the organizations under study. These individuals worked in the areas of communications, mobilization, and policy advocacy.

\(^10\) A typical case “exemplifies what is considered to be a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon.” John Gerring. 2007. *Case Study Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
morality or faith-based arguments to promote a particular policy position. Given these characteristics, it is my hypothesis that progressive Christian organizations are becoming increasingly effective at shaping public debates through issue campaigns, grassroots lobbying, and collaborative strategies.

While the framing analysis will show the products of the decisions of group leaders, the elite interviews will allow us to understand the rationale behind their choices, thus providing a glimpse into the larger, long-term goals of these groups and hints to their future evolution. As religious groups become more active, it is evident that an important shift is occurring, which has been characterized by Rev. Jim Wallis as the rise of a “Post-Religious Right America.”11 This paper will investigate the features of this new environment as revealed in the climate change debate, and the emerging faith-based arguments used to promote a new set of political and policy goals.

**Interest Groups, Social Movements, and Framing**

Along with addressing issues related specifically to faith-based activism, this paper will also refine theories of interest group communication and mobilization strategies and evaluate how they apply to religious organizations. I will explore what characteristics they share with interest groups in general, and what behaviors fundamentally separate them from secular organizations. In order to represent their values in the political arena, religious organizations, like other interest groups, seek to achieve their goals by engaging in strategic communications with their members, political leaders, and the media. Since policy change may occur over a long period of time,12 emerging faith organizations are in a position to begin shaping enduring political debates in a way that may affect future policy decisions.

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In order to influence these debates, one of the key tactics that these organizations can use is presenting and framing issues in a way that reflects their values. Given that they lack other resources, framing is a tool that religious interest groups have at their disposal that allows them to affect how issues are understood and acted upon by faith communities and policymakers. As mentioned above, I will be using framing analysis to examine how faith organizations are attempting to re-frame issues that have not normally been tied to Christian political engagement. Framing analysis is a method that comes from discourse theories, which along with other methods like critical discourse analysis, examines “how language builds-rather than mirrors-social reality.” Any analysis of language or discourse involves looking at various forms of communication, including texts, pictures, and symbols to better understand why individuals or groups use certain language to describe reality. How these organizations frame issues and how elites talk about mobilization and collaborative strategies shapes and is shaped by the environment in which they exist. I will be looking at the ways these organizations frame an issue that may not be immediately recognized as having religious or spiritual implications in order to see how their presentation fits into the broader political discourse around climate change and possibly contribute to faith-based political engagement.

In a study that uses frame analysis, it is important to address the doubts that some scholars have raised about the efficacy of re-framing efforts. In their extensive study, Baumgartner et al. (2009) found that efforts to re-frame political issues are often unsuccessful because other less predictable factors are more likely to produce policy change. When policy does shift significantly from the status quo, it is usually because of some major event or change, and not through re-framing attempts. Simply put, re-framing is rarely an effective way to achieve policy goals because of the obstacles that advocates must

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face: political factors they cannot control (election outcomes, political salience of an issue), the crowded, competitive interest group environment, and the difficulty obtaining media attention. According to the authors, though, groups continue to engage in re-framing because “spin” is so much part of the culture in Washington. It is simply what happens, and to be part of the action means engaging in framing battles.

While framing may not be a good way to achieve policy change, which is the main task of most interest groups, religious organizations have some different goals than secular groups. What this paper will show is that even though these organizations are pursuing focused and strategic actions to build their influence like all interest groups in Washington, they still remain distinct entities because they do not have the same options as these other groups. If Baumgartner et al. found that the reason why so many groups engage in re-framing is because it is just part of the Washington culture, than the main reason why religious groups are trying to re-frame issues as faith/moral issues is because they have larger goals that go beyond passing legislation. Their identity as religious organizations that are unable to compromise on their foundational beliefs means they cannot concede framing battles and their commitment to representing people of faith compels them to engage in this behavior. The aim of progressive Christian organizations is not to simply alter the debate on a set of policy issues so they increase their chances of getting bills through Congress, but to completely “transform the values debate”15 as it currently exists. While it would be incorrect to say that these groups have no policy goals or no desire to see policy change (this study will examine some of these policy goals), it must be stressed that their true objective and motivation for political involvement is so they can reform the environment in which such policy change takes place.

15 Personal Interview, Staff Member, July 2011. Washington, D.C.
Another reason why the case of progressive Christian interest groups does not fit as well into Baumgartner et al.’s theory is that they are using collective action frames, which are different from the frames groups use to change policy. Collective action frames are used by social movement organizations\(^{16}\) to inform and mobilize a certain group—such as people of faith who have felt unrepresented in politics. Benford and Snow differentiate between frames and collective action frames:

Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action. Collective action frames also perform this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the ‘world out there,’ but in ways that are ‘intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists. Thus, collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimize the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO).\(^{17}\)

The frames in this analysis are collective action frames, since they are intended to go beyond forming a consensus among movement actors on how an issue should be understood to actually motivating action. Given their relatively recent re-emergence onto the political scene, progressive Christian organizations are still developing their identity as social movement organizations capable of using collective action frames, although it is clear that this is the direction in which they wish to move.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{16}\) Although the faith groups in this study are clearly interest groups that lobby for political change, they also see themselves as part of a larger social movement. According to Libby, social movement organizations are different from interest groups in that interest groups are more institutionalized and tend to have more resources. He notes that expressive interest groups do not fit neatly into the definitions of social movement organizations or interest groups, because they possess qualities of both. Like interest groups, they are organized, and possess the resources and the ability to execute issue campaigns intended to bring about some kind of policy shift. Like social movement organizations, they also seek to mobilize citizens to engage in populist methods to produce a change in the status quo. Yarnold goes on to specifically address the value of religious organizations to social movements, given that they “have been rather hospitable to social movements” by facilitating the communication process, and that they ultimately give a “measure of legitimacy” to the ideas of movements.


\(^{18}\) The idea that these groups were engaging in a broader movement was raised in several staff interviews, and is also reflected in the public documents that will be analyzed in the case study chapters. For instance, Jim Wallis had a series of blog posts entitled “We Need a Movement,” and in one such post he stated, “The kind of social movement we now need will not focus on Democratic or Republican victories in the next election cycle, but in finding allies wherever they can for a set of
In their explanation of collective action frames, Benford and Snow distinguish between these three different types of core framing tasks: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. Diagnostic frames define the problem and the cause of the problem. Even if there is consensus on the nature of the problem, attributing blame can become a contested matter. Prognostic frames outline possible plans of action and provide the rationale behind a particular solution, which studies have shown to be “one of the primary ways in which a movement's SMOs differ from one another.”19 When proposing a certain solution, it often means directly opposing the solutions posed by another organization or “counterframing.”20 Motivational frames intend to mobilize and give the reasons for collective action. All of these types of frames are evident in the public documents of progressive Christian organizations, as they begin building the organizational capacity and grassroots infrastructure to engage in large-scale mobilization and lobbying campaigns.

This paper will follow the four basic steps that other framing studies have outlined: identifying an issue or event, finding an “an initial set of frames for an issue” and using them “inductively to create a coding scheme,” and selecting sources for analysis.21 The initial frames were determined using Benford and Snow’s framing categories listed above, and the coding scheme was developed to identify language that depicted these frames. After reading through a random sample of documents, the coding scheme was constructed based on the major identifiable and consistent themes that existed within the organizations’ documents. The scheme was then applied to each document and a tally was kept of each instance of that language being used. This recurring language was then used to determine the set of arguments organizations used to construct their primary and secondary frames for each issue.


19 Benford and Snow, 2000, 617
20 Benford and Snow, 2000, 617
Given the unique circumstances of progressive Christian groups, this study examines how they engage in these core framing tasks in order to organize faith leaders, act on behalf of those who have felt left out of political discussions, and position themselves as a more inclusive option than the Christian Right. It is evident that they are re-framing climate change to be more explicitly grounded in faith values, and to bring attention to an issue that is not typically connected with faith communities. Once again, while this in and of itself may not produce significant policy change, what makes the contributions of these organizations noteworthy is how they are appealing to different faith constituencies, framing an issue in a way that causes their opposition to respond, and expanding how people of faith are represented.

Reaction of Faith Groups to the 2010 Gulf Oil Spill

In April of 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, spilling upwards of 200 million gallons into the ocean. The oil flowed for months before the well was successfully sealed in July. President Obama called the spill “the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced,” and prompted months of media speculation over what should be done to solve the environmental, social, and economic problems that resulted. Religious organizations entered the discussion, urging people of faith and political leaders to see the spill as a symptom of more serious issues, including the influence of corporations in policymaking and the United States’ harmful dependence on oil.

While some conservative Christians saw the oil spill as the result of too much government regulation of the oil industry, other Christians called it a warning that changes had to be made. In an AP story about the new “green religion movement,” it was reported that “Religious leaders who consider environmental protection a godly mission are making the Gulf of Mexico oil spill a rallying cry, hoping it inspires people of faith to support cleaner energy while changing their personal lives to consume less and contemplate more.” According to the story, Walt Grazer, head of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, saw the spill as a focusing event. He stated that “This is one of those rare moments when you can really focus people's attention on what's happening to God's creation.”

After the spill, both liberal and conservative religious groups were calling for an “ecological Great Awakening,” using similar language that was used to describe the revitalization of American religious life in the 18th century. Hoping to connect people of faith to the ideas of conservation and environmental activism, the Evangelical Environmental Network conducted an ad campaign dubbed “What Would Jesus Drive” urging people to buy fuel-efficient cars, while the Southern Baptist Convention called for energy policy that would safeguard creation. According to Russell Moore, dean of the Southern Baptist Seminary, “Caring for creation is an extension of loving your neighbor as yourself,” and there should be a plan to prevent such destruction so that “we may protect what God loves.” Other public commentators echoed the idea that a new Great Awakening began after the oil spill.

27 Flesher, “Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Will Win Converts”
28 Flesher, “Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Will Win Converts”
29 Flesher, “Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Will Win Converts”
Author Brenda Peterson made the following comments in the *Huffington Post* blog, suggesting that the new generation of Christian youth would be the participants in another Great Awakening:

> It does seem this Gulf ecological nightmare is now waking up evangelicals. Their revelation is not a burning bush, but a burning oil rig. Conservative evangelicals are praying with Gulf fishermen and trying to save oil-stained marshes as much as their souls. They are reconnecting the Creator with Creation. A new generation of eco-evangelicals could be a fourth Great Awakening in this country. The first Awakening coincided with the American Revolution, the second with the abolitionist movement, and the third with the social gospel of humanitarian activism. Could green religion be the next movement? Instead of evangelicals fixating on a Rapturous end-of-the-world Revelation, could we see a save-the-world green evolution?31

Also seeing the oil spill as an opportunity to make a difference, Rev. Jim Wallis of the Christian organization Sojourners stated that “it will take a purposeful commitment to a mission of change, of transformation in the way that our entire society and culture is energized and powered, to truly respond to the epiphany in the Gulf.”32 Bringing about cultural and spiritual changes is especially needed so that we can then modify our behavior in a way that prepares us for a “cleaner and renewable energy future.”33 Using this language of transformation and epiphany, it is evident that this event was a catalyst for the broad change religious organizations commonly seek.34

However, not every religious group was in favor of joining the environmental movement. As one news story reported, “For progressive believers, it's an easy sell. But many conservatives consider eco-theology a distraction from the church's primary mission of winning souls — or even a stalking horse for socialism or earth worship.”35 Some Christians see environmentalists as worshipping nature instead of God, a suspicion that is reflected in a document from the National Association of Evangelicals that

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33 Wallis, “It Takes a Mission.”
34 Hofrenning, *In Washington But Not Of It*.
35 Flesher, “Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Will Win Converts”.

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states “we reaffirm the important truth that we worship only the Creator and not the creation.” This rings particularly true in areas that depend on the oil industry for jobs and revenue, like the Gulf area. Gene Mills, director of the Louisiana Family Forum, reflected a perspective held by some conservative Christians, which is that man has dominion over the Earth. He said, "God put the oil there. He put it there for us to take dominion over and use responsibly."

Although there are divisions among Christians regarding their role in the environmental movement, it is clear that there is a segment that senses an opportunity to infuse faith values into environmental issues. The following section will detail how the relationship between Christian groups and environmentalists has evolved over the past few years to become more collaborative. The ways these organizations engage in collective strategies with secular groups, as opposed to acting alone or joining other faith groups, demonstrate Hula’s theory that groups often collaborate to enhance their status. As we will see, it seems that both Christian and secular groups have sought to demonstrate the breadth of support for their positions in order to broaden their appeal.

**Collaboration between Secular Environmental and Religious Groups**

While the Gulf oils spill shows that the Christian community continues to grapple with the environment as a moral issue, secular environmental groups have begun including people of faith as they recognize the value of having a religious perspective attached to their efforts. In the aftermath of spill, groups of religious leaders toured the area and attended interfaith prayer services as part of an event coordinated by the Sierra Club. After the prominent environmental organization’s director announced in

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37 Flesher, “Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Will Win Converts”
39 Hula, *Lobbying Together*
1997 that the group “had erred by shunning such ties” with faith organizations, this event shows that it has been working to form new connections.⁴⁰ According to the Sierra Club’s Washington representative, Lindsey Moseley, the faith community is a natural ally in the fight against environmental degradation. Moseley stated that "Different people have credibility with different segments of the population. The oil spill is ultimately a matter of values, which for many people are rooted in deeply held religious beliefs."⁴¹ This belief that faith groups will benefit the environmental movement, adding depth and a new sense of ideals that was missing in the movement’s rhetoric, has been reflected repeatedly in the statements of environmental and religious leaders.

As is often said, “politics makes for strange bedfellows,” and the action around climate change policy is no exception. The Scientists and Evangelicals Initiative through Harvard Medical School’s Center for Health and the Global Environment seeks to bring together leading scientists and prominent evangelical Christians in a common effort to examine the consequences of environmental destruction and bring more attention to the issue. Understanding the unusual nature of their alliance, the organization comments that,

The idea of leading environmental scientists and evangelical Christians meeting and working together is initially often met with surprise and some anxiety as there are clear areas of disagreement between the two groups. However, both groups have come to understand that the devastating effects of climate change and biodiversity loss disproportionately affect people who are poor and lack the financial resources to adapt to a changing climate. This is at the heart of our groups’ shared sense of moral purpose.⁴²

While the environmental and religious communities have their disagreements, the collaboration is mutually beneficial. Evangelicals see the environment as a moral issue, and their actions are driven by a biblical call to be stewards of the Earth. Environmental groups seek to expand their influence in order

⁴⁰ Flesher, “Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Will Win Converts”
⁴¹ Flesher, “Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Will Win Converts”
to achieve policy goals that have not been obtainable. Through such collaboration, evangelicals get opportunities to engage in stewardship, and environmental groups have an opportunity to speak to a motivated constituency. While it seems that these entities have much to gain from working together, questions still exist about whether these relationships are worth the risk of alienating skeptical followers. After joining with religious leaders, “Officials with the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council said they welcomed the added muscle evangelicals could bring to their cause. But they agreed that it remained uncertain how much difference it could make.”

Given that Christian groups are not wholly united on the issue of climate change, it may have been risky for environmental activists to place themselves in a potentially hostile faith debate. But, environmental leaders likely saw evidence that the tide among evangelicals was turning in their favor, and were not willing to pass up the opportunity of gaining a valuable collaborator at a time when “going green” was so popular. Noting that a poll showed an increase in the percentage of evangelical Christians that supported environmental regulation (in 2000, it was 45 percent; in 2005 it was 52 percent) and the relatively high political engagement levels of evangelical Christians, the Washington Post reported that “the latest statements and polls have caught the eye of established environmental organizations.”

Environmental groups began capitalizing on Christians’ interest in environmental issues, and in 2006 a Sierra Club blog featured a post by their Director of Environmental Partnerships Melanie L. Griffin that commented on the growing connection between environmentalists and the faith community.

While the media was “abuzz about these strange bedfellows and unnatural allies,” Griffin argued that such a relationship is not as unexpected as some would believe. Citing a survey of Sierra Club members that found “nearly half attend worship services at least monthly,” she pointed out that these religious environmentalists “just don't necessarily talk about their spirituality at Club meetings.” So, a Christian-based environmental movement is natural, given the “themes of responsible stewardship, loving your neighbor (including future generations) and activism on behalf of the poor (who are most affected by polluting facilities) are age-old biblical principles.”

In order to publicize the involvement of faith communities in environmental issues, the Sierra Club issued a report titled *Faith in Action: Communities of Faith Bring Hope for the Planet.* The Sierra Club welcomed the growing engagement by the faith community and their ability to ground their actions in strongly-held faith values. They understood how it effective was to include people of faith since “lasting social change rarely takes place without the active engagement of communities of faith.”

According to this report, “67 percent of Americans say they care about the environment because it is ‘God's creation.’” The purpose of the *Faith in Action* report was to provide examples of how people from different religious traditions in each state were active in environmental issues. The range of involvement includes preserving wildlife, encouraging congregations to conserve water, and informing people of faith the steps they can take to combat global warming.

Interest groups will collaborate with one another if it will improve their chances of achieving desired goals. While environmental and religious groups are not joining formal coalitions, it is clear that

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47 Griffin, “Coming Together to Care for Creation.”
49 “Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships.”
50 “Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships.”
the dynamic between these two entities is transforming, and we can no longer assume a divide between secular progressives and faith groups. Now they are working together and publicizing their relationship as a way to enhance both their positions in the public sphere. We know that organizations see the benefits of such collective strategies, including access to decision-makers, resources, and the ability to have their own goals considered when particular policy actions are being pursued. Joining together often depends on whether groups can enhance their reputation, which Hula defines as “having a unique and recognized identity as a significant and legitimate voice in the policy process.” Standing out from other groups is especially important for the progressive Christian groups who are still in the process of defining their identity and differentiating themselves from the Christian Right. In terms of resources, progressive Christian groups also gain access to the significant grassroots following of liberal environmental organizations, which they lack. While secular progressives and Christians have maintained a complicated relationship, the emergence of environmentally-conscious Christian groups has shown these secular progressives a different faith perspective with which they can identify.

The idea that the faith community can be a vital participant in social movements is not new, although the prominent collaborations between religious groups and secular environmentalism raise other possibilities for secular-faith partnerships. Since studies have shown people of faith already have higher rates of participation, they could act as an easily-mobilized force that further enhances the already-strong grassroots nature of environmental activism. The foregoing analysis suggests that

52 A 2010 report for the Center for American Progressive characterized progressivism as having two distinct components, one secular and one religious: “There have historically been two primary strands of progressive thought concerning the proper relationship between faith and politics—one secular and the other emerging directly from religious social values.” [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/10/progressive_traditions6.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/10/progressive_traditions6.html) (September 24, 2011).
55 Personal Interview. Staff Member, July 2011. Washington, D.C.
56 Personal Interview. Staff Member, July 2011. Washington, D.C.
57 Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Also, early studies suggested that even though the religious left may be less numerous than the religious right, they are far more politically active (Guth and Green 1990).
progressive Christian groups are in a unique position to challenge the political status quo as they gain more legitimacy, presenting issues in new ways that speak to and engage religious citizens. The next section in this study will examine what these organizations have been doing to enhance their significance in political debates, including forming a narrative around climate change and the environment and using language that evokes a moral purpose and compels action by people of faith. Choosing a narrative that is salient to people of faith, which can vary based on whether the frame reflects the targets’ values and belief as well as their “personal, everyday experiences,” is important to the ultimate success of the framing strategy.⁵⁸

Creation Care and Stewardship: Issue Campaigns on Climate Change

This section will examine the issue campaigns of three progressive faith-based organizations who have been involved in lobbying and advocacy activities around the issue of climate change, and present the results of the framing analysis. The purpose of these campaigns was to frame climate change as a moral issue that called for action by faith communities and political leaders to protect the poor and vulnerable. The organizations that implemented such campaigns included Sojourners, Faith in Public Life/Faithful America, and Interfaith Power and Light (IPL). While Sojourners and Faith in Public Life/Faithful America are progressive faith organizations that focus on a broad array of social justice issues, Interfaith Power and Light is a group that primarily focuses on climate change and the environment. IPL is an organization dedicated to being “faithful stewards of Creation by responding to global warming through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable

energy.” They also see themselves as inserting “the voice of the faith community into the policy-making arena” and “being advocates for vulnerable people and communities that are the most heavily impacted by climate change.”

In the spring of 2009, the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES) was introduced in the House, and religious groups began announcing their own climate policy priorities, providing feedback on legislation, and mobilizing people of faith to contact their representatives. Given the complexity of environmental policy, Sojourners decided to focus on one particular part of the broader issue by asking the questions, “Where can our voice make the biggest difference in the debate?” They concluded that the answer was promoting “international adaptation,” meaning that the U.S. (as a prime producer of greenhouse gases) would help developing countries adapt to climate change. Including international adaptation as a part of comprehensive climate legislation was non-negotiable, and it became a top policy priority for Sojourners and other progressive faith organizations (“Any U.S. climate change legislation should include resources to help less-developed countries ‘adapt’ to the consequences of global warming that we’ve helped cause”). They made a choice to prioritize a specific policy option, and focus their communications and political efforts on achieving that single goal. However, while progressive Christian groups do organize around those issues where they can have the greatest impact, staff members also noted that adhering to their faith values was still their number one consideration.

After the House passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act in June of 2009, Faithful America (an online community hosted by Faith in Public Life), revealed its new campaign in October, just as the bill was moving on to the Senate. The campaign was called “Day Six,” which is a “reference

60 “Mission and History,” Interfaith Power and Light.
61 Reaves, “Who Should Pay for Our Pollution?”
62 Reaves, “Who Should Pay for Our Pollution?”
63 Reaves, “Who Should Pay for Our Pollution?”
64 Personal Interview, Staff Member, July 2011. Washington, D.C.
to the creation story in Genesis, when God made human beings stewards of creation.”65 Part of the campaign included posting an online video that showed people around the world that were affected by climate change.66 The main message of the campaign was that any efforts to curb climate change should include providing these countries with resources that would allow them to preserve their communities and way of life. Viewers were then asked to go to the Day Six website to tell Congress to “stop climate change and its effects.”67

Interfaith Power and Light also implemented a campaign centered on the Senate that involved more direct grassroots action from faith activists and leaders. The campaign played on religious language, asking supporters to wear pins that said “Converted?” during a weekend on Capitol Hill. The thrust of the campaign was to encourage people of faith to identify themselves as “Climate Converts,” who support the move to a clean energy economy. The purpose of this action was to show Senators that the faith community supported climate legislation and was willing to act in Washington. The president of Interfaith Power and Light, the Rev. Canon Sally G. Bingham, reminded people of faith that by participating, “you’ll be helping to grow awareness of our movement, and to show our elected officials that there’s a growing community that understands the connection between our faith and our policies that impact the environment.”68

Although the campaigns described above do not reveal the full activity of these organizations around climate change, they are examples of the ways Christian organizations inserted themselves into the debate in an attempt to highlight the moral implications of policy decisions. The following analysis will provide a more detailed picture of the substance of these campaigns, and how faith organizations

6666 “Who We Are,” Faithful America.
67 67 “Who We Are,” Faithful America.
defined the problems associated with climate change, proposed solutions, and mobilized people of faith for collective action.

Results and Discussion

The frame analysis was conducted using 102 public documents of the three progressive Christian organizations discussed above, as well as 11 documents of the Christian Coalition. This analysis highlights the most common arguments and themes that were found in the organizations’ statements on climate change, and how these statements demonstrate the diagnostic, prognostic, and collective action frames disseminated by these groups.

Given the organizations’ focus on addressing poverty and justice, it follows that most of the documents contain a common set of diagnostic frames related to faith values. The largest portion of the documents (41 percent) centered on problem definition, which is the damaging effects climate change has on the poor and the inequality that existed between polluting countries and nations that were being the most affected (see Table 1). This was the key issue related to the concept of justice that organizations consistently raised- that those who have been most impacted by climate change are the least responsible for its causes. Explicitly connecting this issue with deeply held Christian beliefs, 34 percent of the documents referred to climate change as a moral issue, thus presenting the problem of climate change as something that required attention from people of faith.

As part of their rhetoric to define the problem and assign blame, these documents also portrayed the bias of political processes as a reason why the effects of climate change continued to have a negative impact (Table 2). It is clear that the organizations were somewhat distrustful of politics, doubting whether elected leaders would do what is right. Thirteen documents (13 percent) accused politicians of
Assisting the oil industry rather than those who truly needed help.\(^69\) These documents criticized the deals that were made, believing more had been done to protect corporations than protect nature or the poor (“Do the bottom lines of energy corporations mean more than providing a little justice to people who had no part in creating this global problem?”).\(^70\) The bill that was passed by the House in June of 2009 did not reflect the kind of priorities that the faith groups promoted (“not enough support for vulnerable countries adapting to climate change, too many give-aways to the energy industry”).\(^71\)

In a statement from Rev. Bingham from IPL, she criticized Senators for not acting even though polls showed that most Americans supported climate change legislation. She asked, “Where is the moral integrity of our elected officials? Is our representative democracy so broken? Are our elected representatives incapable of addressing the greatest environmental crisis of our generation?”\(^72\) She further stated that “Our Senators and President Obama have a responsibility not just to do what is easy, or what is politically expedient, but to do what is right. It is time for moral leadership.”\(^73\) This illustrates how these organizations are holding politicians accountable for their failure to act in the best interest of citizens, and without a change in their priorities, there will be no real efforts to help those affected by climate change.

While the diagnostic frames indicated the key problems at the heart of the climate change debate, the prognostic frames of these documents involved the rationale for their policy solutions. Many

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\(^69\) In some of the blogs that were critical of politics, there were also statements alluding to the fact that people of faith can fill in where elected officials are failing. For instance, a 2009 post stated that people of faith can join together because “while our leaders are inactive, our faith is not”. Good, Sheldon C. 2009. “As the Climate Change Clock Ticks Toward Copenhagen, Global Activists Take to the Streets.” 23 October. God’s Politics Blog. [http://blog.sojo.net/2009/10/23/as-the-climate-change-clock-ticks-toward-copenhagen-global-activists-take-to-the-streets/](http://blog.sojo.net/2009/10/23/as-the-climate-change-clock-ticks-toward-copenhagen-global-activists-take-to-the-streets/) (April 9, 2010).


\(^73\) “Senate has Moral Responsibility to Act On Climate Change,” [Interfaith Power and Light](http://interfaithpowerandlight.org/).
documents outlined the specific theological foundations for protecting the environment which should be the basis for Christian action (Table 3). The word “creation” was found in 26 percent of the documents, replacing the words “environment” or “nature” with a term that would be understood by people of faith. In 14 percent of the documents, there was reference to the need for Christians to be good stewards of the Earth, actively caring for creation, and ten percent of the documents mentioned a biblical call or mandate from God to respect nature and creation. A smaller percentage (11 percent) expressly mentioned the responsibility of wealthier nations to provide funding for the developing countries who were suffering since they were the largest contributors to global warming.

Along with suggesting broader solutions and ways to approach the problem of the injustice caused by climate change, the next type of documents concentrated on the policy proposals that would help achieve the organizations’ objectives (Table 4). Many of the documents (32 percent) mentioned a specific piece of legislation (e.g. the American Clean Energy and Security Act) or administrative decision (e.g. the president’s budget) that was being targeted for action. Among these policy-focused statements, there were frequent mentions of the policy solutions these groups supported to help vulnerable communities in the U.S. and abroad. Twenty percent of the documents included some kind of policy action the groups wanted to see—primarily emissions reductions, the distribution of carbon permits through an auction system, and increased funding for the poor. Ten percent of the documents, particularly those that were posted leading up to the congressional votes on the ACES bill, specifically mentioned adaptation assistance. While a more moderate proposal, like the one from Senators Kerry and Graham discussed above, addressed our dependence on foreign oil, faith groups largely supported a complete shift from our oil habits after the Deepwater Horizon spill (“This deepening disaster simply underscores the need for real energy and climate legislation that can begin to wean us from our addiction...
These organizations clearly presented the faith reasoning that led them to pursue this issue (and why other faith communities should do the same) as well the underlying principles of their proposed policy solutions.

The final set of prognostic frames that could be located in these documents reflects the organizations’ efforts to refute the frames that were communicated by their opponents (Table 5). Given the sharp divisions over this issue, they publicized statements that highlighted the differences between conservative and progressive Christians on climate change, emphasizing that the positions taken by the Christian Right are not representative of all Christians. There were fourteen of such documents, some of which were quite explicit in accusing conservative faith leaders of siding with the energy industry. In their campaign to have people of faith counted as supporters of clean air protections, IPL encouraged people to act in bringing attention to the deceptive comments made by some faith leaders:

Because if we don’t speak up, others will try to speak for us, even attempting to put a faith mantle on the arguments of the polluting industry. Yesterday, I read remarks from a leader of the Southern Baptist Convention calling the EPA’s proposed safeguards “foolhardy” and claiming, without any evidence, that they “would adversely affect every man, woman and child through job losses and higher costs for energy.” This kind of statement is not only misleading, but misrepresents the faith community as being more concerned about polluter profits than human health.

Faith in Public Life responded to Republican Senator’s Inhofe’s claims that “God's still up there. We're going through these cycles,” stating that “As the Senate prepares to take up the climate bill in the coming months, it's no time for people of faith to use flimsy theological arguments to shirk our responsibilities to care for our fellow human beings or this planet.” They also mentioned the comments of Richard Land, a lobbyist for the Southern Baptist Convention, who criticized cap-and-trade proposals

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saying. "It's called 'cap and trade,' and it's the tax that dares not speak its name... Politicians love cap and trade, because they can claim to be taxing polluters, not workers. But of course, that is never true." 

Faith in Public Life called Land’s arguments “stale,” accused him of using “the Republican talking point that cap-and-trade is an ‘energy tax,” and criticized his misleading defense of the poor. A blog from Sojourners expressed the sentiment that conservative Christians have been too focused on the culture wars, and there has been less attention paid to the “social sin” of allowing humans to suffer from environmental disasters:

Christian conservatives are particularly fond of railing against sexual sins and could barely contain themselves when Bill Clinton got into trouble in the Oval Office. But we hear much less indignation about “social sins” that include environmental exploitation or the humanitarian impact of war. Consider the potential for progress on some of our most urgent moral challenges if we could channel some of the anger fanning the flames of our ubiquitous “culture wars” into campaigns against global poverty, preventable diseases, and ecological disaster.

Not only have progressive Christian organizations been very explicit in connecting their own attempts to define the problem of climate change and offer potential solutions, they have also continued their intentional efforts to distance themselves from conservative Christians by showing how their rhetoric continues to be grounded in political rather than religious motives.

While the previous set of documents used frames that provided the foundations and goals for any potential Christian activism, the next set of documents used action mobilization frames that focused more overtly on encouraging the political engagement of faith communities (Table 6). Many of the documents (37 percent) stated that Christians had an obligation to act on behalf of those threatened by climate change, and to put pressure on global leaders to produce substantive policies that would protect these populations. As with the issue of health care, Rev. Wallis stated that people of faith should

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78 “Where Can We Find a Moral Response to the Climate Crisis,” Bold Faith Type Blog
“provide a leadership role both by example and prophetic witness and advocacy.” These organizations publicized their efforts to lobby members of Congress and act in their own communities, with 36 percent of the documents discussing the ways people of faith were uniting behind this issue to participate in shared efforts.

The framing of the climate change issue has presented a consistent set of arguments, in which faith groups called on Christians to speak on behalf of the vulnerable by advocating for legislation that would help those most affected by climate change. Overall, progressive Christian organizations focused most of their public statements on the same “primary frame,” which is that climate change is a moral issue. It follows that they would consistently bring attention to what they perceived as the greatest injustice caused by climate change- that poor people were suffering because of the actions of others. By advocating adaptation assistance as the best way to help vulnerable populations, they were focusing their efforts where they could have the greatest impact- pushing a solution that appealed to basic Christian notions of helping one’s neighbors. Additionally, these organizations are moving in a direction that some environmentalists see as being crucial to addressing climate change. Popular environmental blogs have raised the idea that the real solution to a complex problem like climate change is not simply reducing emissions, but rather a complete cultural overhaul in the U.S. By re-framing climate change as an issue that requires such a significant shift in perspective (seeing it as a human issue not just an environmental issue), Christian organizations are beginning the work of this necessary transformation.

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The statements made by staff members in the interviews support the results of this study - that the progressive faith community has seen success in framing issues as moral issues, even though there is still more work to be done. Climate change legislation was not signed into law after these campaigns ran their course, but these organizations were able to demonstrate that people of faith care about these issues “in a moral way.” In doing this, they also highlighted a different set of values that appealed to religious communities, produced faith-based activism, and ultimately presented “faith as a positive, unifying voice” rather than something that added to political polarization. Additionally, since past studies have shown that “framing is best conceptualized as a process that evolves over time,” this study is an initial look into how these organizations are making their first attempts to re-frame an established issue that has yet to be resolved.

The Unique Position of the Christian Coalition

In a move that surprised some in the religious and environmental communities, the Christian Coalition departed from some other Christian Right organizations by talking seriously about creation care, and advocating for some of the same policies as the Christian Left. In 2010, the Coalition threw its support behind the Senate’s climate change legislation, at first dubbed the “Kerry-Graham-Lieberman” climate bill. Supporters presented this bill as a bipartisan attempt to address climate change by reducing emissions, investing in renewable energy, and ending dependence on foreign oil. In one of their documents, the Christian Coalition noted the unusual position they were in as backers of this bill, acknowledging that they are mostly known for other issues. In their first event focusing on addressing

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83 Telephone Interview, Staff Member, July 2011. Washington, D.C.
84 Telephone Interview, Staff Member, July 2011. Washington, D.C.
85 Chong and Druckman, “Framing Theory.”
86 Billings, “A Greener Spirit: Evangelicals Embrace Creation Care.”
energy policy with legislators, they said that “The Christian Coalition of America came to Capitol Hill on Tuesday, not to proselytize or discuss issues like abortion or gay marriage, but to talk about the United States' energy policy and the need to end the country's dependence on foreign oil.” The Coalition justified their sponsoring this event, saying that “We believe that there needs to be a conservative discussion on a national energy policy that speaks to the values of energy independence, national security, prosperity, family and stewardship.”

Given that the position of the Christian Coalition was “unusual in the conservative community,” the president of the National Wildlife Federation praised the group, saying that “energy independence is a ‘family value as well as an issue of faith.’” In an interesting move that mirrors the Christian Left’s attempts to re-frame climate change as a morality issue, the NWF assisted the Christian Coalition in re-defining energy independence as another issue that fits under the umbrella of “family values.” In their platform, the Christian Coalition affirms this message: “The time is right for Christian Coalition supporters and allies to step forward to promote environmental and energy independence initiatives. Taking responsibility to care for God's creation and protecting the future of our children and grandchildren is a core family value.” While both the Christian Left and the Christian Coalition are making similar arguments about the place environmental issues should have in the values debate, they still assert that climate change solutions should reflect different faith values.

The Coalition explained their position to possible skeptics, asserting that concern for the environment and energy policy was both a conservative and Christian position. In their “America’s Path to Progress” campaign, they encouraged followers to sign a petition to implement a comprehensive

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88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 “America’s Path to Progress.” http://www.cc.org/america039s_path_progress_our_platform (September 7, 2011).
energy strategy. It states “As conservatives, we stand up for our country's national security and the health of our economy. And, as Christians, we recognize the Biblical mandate to care for God's creation and protect our children's future.”91 Once again, this statement echoes the language used by progressive Christian groups and refers to a biblical basis for the position, which is a significant departure from the secular language used during the health care debate. Yet, it still follows a political statement that emphasizes the conservative ideological values of economic freedom and national security.

Turning to the eleven documents released by the Christian Coalition that addressed climate change and energy policy, there were several instances in which their points were comparable to those made by the Christian Left. The frames they used primarily dealt with the rationale behind their support of climate change legislation (prognostic frames): the most frequently used frame was protecting the environment for future generations (6 documents), followed by the need to respect creation (4 documents), and the call to stewardship (4 documents). They also referred to the biblical mandate to care for the environment (3 documents), and the Christian responsibility to act (3 documents). Somewhat surprisingly, they conveyed a social justice perspective by calling for assistance to help the poor who did not have the resources to cope with the effects of global warming (2 documents), and even specifically supported adaptation assistance in a few instances (2 documents).

While some of these statements may reflect similar goals as the Christian Left, there are some significant differences. First, the Christian Coalition-backed legislation would implement a “market-based system” for “major emitters” that will give them a chance to make the needed changes “without hindering global competitiveness or driving more jobs overseas”.92 Thus, while the Christian Coalition showed concern for business interests, the Christian Left wanted to see carbon permits auctioned off and

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the revenue used to assist the poor with adjusting to rising energy costs. Second, one renewable energy source the Christian Coalition wanted to utilize was nuclear energy, which Interfaith Power and Light saw as unjust since nuclear waste had historically harmed indigenous people and would likely affect future generations (a “profound moral failure”\textsuperscript{93}). Third, the legislation called for more domestic drilling and exploration to make it safer, while Christian Left groups wanted to end our addiction to oil and invest in renewable sources, not just reduce our depending on foreign oil.

Even though they seemingly shared some positions with the Left, which is likely due to the growing acceptance of environmental issues among evangelicals, their priorities remained in line with the conservative ideology. In a commentary for the Christian Coalition, Sen. Graham said that he Waxman-Markey bill fell “short of the mark,” because there was a better way to “balance environmental protection with the needs of business.”\textsuperscript{94} The Christian Left was sharply focused on the needs of the poor, and while they saw job creation as an essential part of energy policy, there was little mention of how to protect businesses. Also, while the Christian Coalition did call creation care a “family value,” one of their other key arguments of the climate change issue was national security (i.e., by ending U.S. dependence on foreign oil, we can enhance our national security).\textsuperscript{95} The Left acknowledged that national security would be enhanced if we stopped importing oil, but they also did not support more drilling in America to compensate for the loss of foreign oil. They also heavily promoted the economic growth that would come from new energy policies and technology development, saying that “By building on current technologies, such as nuclear and natural gas, and developing new technologies, America can provide

\textsuperscript{93} “Public Policy.” Interfaith Power and Light. \url{http://interfaithpowerandlight.org/public-policy/} (April 28, 2011).
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
for its future energy independence and build its economy”. While the Christian Left championed the benefits that would come from investing in clean energy (which did not include nuclear or natural gas), it was not their primary argument.

The illustrations of the Christian Right in this section reveal the growing strength of the Christian Left in two ways: 1) the fact that the Christian Coalition is adopting some similar frames and language as the Christian Left to publicize their positions on climate change and 2) the oppositional behavior of other Christian Right organizations targeting the Christian Left. The potential threat of the Christian Left is recognized by their political opponents and while their influence may be small, the effect they are having on the established Christian Right must be acknowledged, especially considering that these groups have only been around for a few years

**Conclusion**

Although progressive Christian groups have been hesitant to back specific policy solutions for issues such as health care, in which they sought simply to be participants in the debate, the case of climate change reveals a different approach. These organizations defined their priorities and determined where they could have the largest effect on the debate, and focused their efforts on advocating for legislation that included their top policy objective—adaptation assistance. By pursuing this issue, which was simply a small element of a much larger policy plan (comprehensive climate change legislation), these organizations increased their chances of actually shaping the debate. Instead of choosing to focus

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on an overhaul of U.S. environmental laws, getting this issue included in legislation was more feasible. In other words, by spending their energy on something important but relatively minor in the larger political scheme, they increased their chances of success as they defined it.

Additionally, this goal was consistent with the social justice values that pervade their mission statements, and was something that could easily be connected to widely-held Christian beliefs. It was also a policy that was supported by prominent secular environmental organizations and one of the most well-known conservative Christian organizations, making this issue something that could easily mobilize a large, diverse constituency. As a testament to their effectiveness, some news outlets even recognized Christian organizations as contributors to the success of ACES in the House, saying that “Christian environmentalists helped earn the passage of the House's climate bill in June.”

While the bill did not get much traction in the Senate, and the organizations were even somewhat disappointed with the bill’s final version, they did represent the interests of the poor by bringing adaptation assistance to the fore. Due to the reality of politics, they were probably not going to get the funding they wanted. But, the combination of budding relationships between secular and faith-based groups (and the attention that resulted from the unusual collaborations), and the window of opportunity afforded by the Gulf oil spill, gave these organizations a sense of authority and purpose that they may not have had otherwise. That they were able to quickly capitalize on this situation is another testament to their growing political sophistication and media savvy.

Indeed, the potential for further collaboration between religious and secular groups that was suggested above appears to be coming to fruition. In May of 2010, leaders from Sojourners, Oxfam

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99 The oil spill may have opened what Kingdon refers to as a “policy window,” where the timing of an event makes a policy solution more germane and thus more likely to succeed. See John W. Kingdon, 1995. Agenda, Alternatives and Public Policies. New York: Harper Collins.
America, the Nature Conservancy, and the American Security Project called on Congress “to improve the lack of immediate and significant investments for adaptation solutions in countries hardest hit by climate change.”¹⁰⁰ They argued that legislators needed to act in order to reduce the threat of climate change to America’s vulnerable communities, as well as assist the poorer nations to “help keep them strong enough to overcome the threats of our changing climate.”¹⁰¹ It is evident that secular and religious organizations continue to recognize their common ground on climate change, and the value added when allowing it to transcend the typical environmental/scientific arguments and ensuring a broader political impact. It seems as if the central frame of progressive Christian organizations (the morality frame) is applicable to others in the general progressive movement, suggesting that this particular frame may be becoming more resonant with the public.¹⁰²

Turning from the role of secular groups to the behavior of conservative Christian groups, the Christian Coalition maintained a more moderate position on climate change than what may have been expected. They blended stock conservative points about the economy and national security with some positions that reflected a social justice perspective and some of the same goals as the Christian Left. This contrasts with other Christian Right organizations and leaders, who espoused wholly conservative positions that were skeptical of the solutions proposed by environmentalists and the idea of addressing this issue in the first place.¹⁰³ Although the Christian Right may appear to be a cohesive movement, the statements from the Christian Coalition show that this may not be the case.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.
¹⁰² Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment.”
This analysis shows that divisions do exist within the Christian community, but it also demonstrates how fluid these divisions are – despite their inability to compromise, religious groups can still change their issue positions when new faith-based arguments emerge. They have the same incentives to stay politically relevant to their followers as secular groups, and as Christians grow more supportive of the environment, these groups can respond to these attitude shifts. Also, it indicates how unified these organizations can be when they do decide to back a specific policy objective, like adaptation assistance. As stated earlier, scholars have questioned whether a strong Christian Left can exist given the inherent difficulties in combining such diverse belief systems, but these organizations have been able to form connections through what faith communities have in common rather than emphasizing differences. As one staff member said, “faith is a powerful bridge-builder,” as it allows new relationships to “start from a common place”.

Finally, this case gives us insight into the reasons why a progressive secular organization would want to partner with a faith-based group: as a way to enhance their own messages with the weight of a moral argument. All of these factors shed new light on the behavior of religious organizations as policy advocates and increasingly accessible political allies. By emphasizing justice and the alleviation of poverty, these groups are helping to re-introduce a religious perspective into public debates that has been missing in national politics, and further solidifying their role as participants in the broader progressive movement.

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104 Telephone Interview, Staff Member, July 2011, Washington, D.C.
105 Studies have shown that secular interest groups often pay more attention to issues that affect their more well-to-do constituents, not the most marginalized groups. According to Berry, “For the most part, though, the agenda of citizen groups has focused largely on issues unconnected to problems of the poor, the disadvantaged or even the working class.” This finding was echoed by Baumgartner et al., whose study found that liberal citizen groups “display little interest in low-income Americans.” See: Dara Strolovitch. 2006. “Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender.” *The Journal of Politics*. November 68(4): 894-910; Jeffrey M. Berry. 1999. *The New Liberalism*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press; Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, Beth L. Leech. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Further research needs to be done to examine progressive Christian activism for other policy reforms, and if they are using similar arguments as in the climate change campaigns. They are becoming increasingly strategic in their decisions to foster partnerships and convey a consistent message, so it will be interesting to see how their efforts in other issue areas compare to those of conservative Christian and progressive secular organizations. By looking at how these campaigns compare to one another, and whether there is a coherent pattern in the groups’ policy framing and mobilization, we can receive some insight into their future evolution and the possibility of a cohesive Christian Left movement materializing.
Table 1. Diagnostic Frames: Faith Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Description</th>
<th>Occurrence (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effects of climate change on the poor and vulnerable around the world</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change is a moral issue</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Diagnostic Frames: Criticizing the Decision-Making Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Description</th>
<th>Occurrence (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mention of special interests/privileges of industry</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of politics to lead to adequate solutions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Prognostic Frames: Theological Foundations for Protecting Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Description</th>
<th>Occurrence (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being good stewards</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical mandate/mandate from God</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability of wealthier nations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Prognostic Frames: Policy Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Description</th>
<th>Occurrence (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific legislation, administrative decision targeted for action</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired policy action (emissions reduction, funding for poor)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation assistance</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

Table 5. Prognostic Frame: Contest Frames of Opponents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Description</th>
<th>Occurrence (percentage)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Highlighting distinctions between Christian Right and Christian Left</td>
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Table 6. Action Mobilization Frames: Mobilization of Faith Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Description</th>
<th>Occurrence (percentage)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian obligation to act</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of ways that Christians were acting</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>