

# The Politics of School Discipline: A Quantitative Analysis of Legalization and Use of Corporal Punishment in the United States

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*Corporal punishment in schools has been criticized for many reasons related to lower student achievement, delinquency, and mental health, but is still legal in 19 states. Attitudes towards corporal punishment have been linked to political leanings, fundamentalist religion, socioeconomic status, and rurality. In this study, I test whether political culture and voting patterns are predictive of the legality and frequency of corporal punishment use in schools, utilizing data from the Office for Civil Rights. Independent of median household income, educational attainment, state demographics, and the share of Evangelical Protestants, states with more Republican votes are more likely to legalize school corporal punishment. However, the main driver of the frequency of corporal punishment use is the prevalence of evangelical Protestants in the state.*

**C**orporal punishment is defined as “the intentional use of physical force upon a student as punishment for any alleged offense or behavior,” (DC Public Schools, in Arum 2003). In U.S. schools, corporal punishment tends to take the form of paddling across the buttocks. One way to define corporal punishment, however, takes a harsh stance: “any action taken to punish a child which, if directed at an adult, would constitute an unlawful assault” (Council of Europe 2007, p. 7). Some view corporal punishment as a violent act that many adults sugarcoat with labels such as “smacking” or “spanking” (Council of Europe 2007, p. 7), and its use in schools, juvenile facilities, child care nurseries, and other public or private institutions is opposed by the American Psychological Association (APA)(2015). The APA criticizes the use of corporal punishment for several reasons: there are other, less violent, solutions to corporal punishment; children learn to imitate the behavior of adults so corporal punishment might reinforce violent activity; and this practice can instill “hostility, rage, and a sense of powerlessness without reducing the undesirable behavior.”

In 1977, the Supreme Court ruled in *Ingraham v. Wright* that corporal punishment in schools was constitutional, concluding that the Eighth Amendment ban on cruel-and-unusual punishment did not apply to corporal punishment in public schools. Individual states have the power to ban corporal punishment in schools, but nineteen states still permit it (Strauss 2014). Interestingly, according to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) data collection, 48 states plus the District of Columbia reported at least one incident of corporal punishment in 2011-12, the last year for which OCR data is available (Civil Rights Data Collection). In many places, parents may request exemption from the use of corporal punishment (Farrell, 2015).

Corporal punishment has been under attack for many reasons, including bodily harm, isolation, social control, and disparate impacts on disadvantaged students (Arum 2003), but differences in opinion exist. Republicans, for example, have viewed these arguments as merely the “psychobabble of touchy-feely, feel-good” types (Arum, 2003, p. 29), indicating that legalization and widespread use is possibly related to the political leanings and political culture of the state and local community.

The use of corporal punishment in schools is often justified by the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, meaning literally “in the place of a parent.” Dating back to 1770, this doctrine was applied to educators who may be delegated the authority, by a student’s parent, to discipline that student (Zirkel and Reichner, 1986). A recent attempt to ban corporal punishment failed in Arkansas, with the state’s Department of Education taking a neutral stance, viewing this practice as primarily an issue of “local control” (Caputo, 2017). In addition, in many states where corporal punishment is legal, districts as well as parents within districts are allowed to opt-out, further reinforcing the ideas of both local control and *in loco parentis*. In other words, corporal punishment, in at least some cases, is used because it is desired by the community and/or parents.

In this paper, I do not attempt to examine the potential beneficial or harmful effects of corporal punishment. However, empirical research has suggested that corporal punishment and other strict disciplinary practices could lead to lower student achievement and higher rates of delinquency (Welsh et al. 1997, in Arum 2003). Further, corporal punishment has been linked to psychiatric symptoms and lower overall well-being (Bachar, et.al., 1997); depression (Turner & Finkelhor 1996); aggressive, violent, or antisocial behavior (DuRant, et.al.,1994; Flynn, 1999). At the time of writing, I am not aware of any literature indicating a positive impact of corporal punishment for students.

## Literature Review

This paper explores the intersection of politics, demographics, socioeconomic factors, and the use of corporal punishment in schools. Therefore, the literature reviewed for this paper focuses on how three main factors are related to corporal punishment: political culture and voting patterns, fundamentalist Christianity, and other socioeconomic or demographic factors.

### *The Politics of Corporal Punishment*

Political leanings are associated with views on school discipline. Richard Arum (2003) notes that Republicans sometimes view the criticisms of corporal punishment as the “psychobabble of touchy-feely, feel-good” types (p. 29). Previous studies have tested the link between political culture, “the particular pattern of orientation to political action in which each political system is imbedded” (Elazar 1966, p. 79) and the progressiveness of

state policy (Elazar, 1966, 1984; Lieske, 2011; Mondak and Canache, 2014; Sharkansky, 1969).

Elazar (1966) categorizes state political cultures as moralistic, individualistic, traditionalistic, or a combination thereof. Each culture represents different viewpoints on issues such as political participation, bureaucracy, the level of government intervention in the community, and the initiation of new programs (Sharkansky, 1969, p. 68-69). According to Sharkansky, moralists view political participation as a moral issue, something that should be done “for the sake of the commonwealth” (p. 68) and seek programs or policies for the good of the community. Traditionalists want to protect the status quo and the existing power structure. Individualists tend to seek opportunities to improve one’s own position or that of one’s group.

According to Elazar, Southern states are generally dominated by traditionalistic culture, which I hypothesize is correlated with the use of corporal punishment in schools. States in the Northeast and Pacific Coast tend toward moralistic cultures, and states in the Midwest tend toward individualistic cultures. Sharkansky (1969) updates Elazar’s measure of political culture to a numerical index on a 1-9 scale (where 1 = Moralistic and 9 = Traditionalistic), viewing them as opposites (p. 70). However, the explanation of why these are considered opposites is unclear, at best. Instead, it is helpful to group states based on their dominant political culture or explore other potential measures, such as voting patterns, as in the current study.

Is political culture related to the use of corporal punishment? Vandenbosch (1991) finds a link between Sharkansky’s political culture index and use of corporal punishment in elementary and secondary schools in different states. In fact, Vandenbosch claims that over half of the variation in the use of corporal punishment was associated with variations in political culture. This correlational study found a relationship even when controlling for region. In addition, seven of the eight states included in Vandenbosch’s study that prohibit corporal punishment were either moralistic or partly moralistic, by Sharkansky’s index. The current proposed study plans to build on this work by incorporating a measure of Christian fundamentalism, as well as updating the political cultures based on more recent voting patterns.

### *Christian Fundamentalism/Evangelical Protestantism and Corporal Punishment*

Christian fundamentalism began as a movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and affirms a set of core Christian beliefs, including “the historical accuracy of the Bible, the imminent and physical Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and Christ’s Virgin Birth, Resurrection, and Atonement (Sandeem 2016). Evangelical beliefs, which emphasize the “preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, personal conversion experiences, scripture as the sole basis for faith, and active evangelism (the winning of personal commitments to Christ),” emerged out of Protestantism (Melton 2016). Thus, I use these terms interchangeably throughout this study. Christian fundamentalism, or evangelical Protestantism, has been linked to favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment, both at home and at school, even after controlling for socioeconomic and demographic variables (Grasmick et al. 1991). This relationship may be driven by the belief in biblical literalness (Grasmick et al. 1991; Ellison and Sherkat 1993) and the belief that humans are inherently sinful and deserve punishment (Ellison and Sherkat 1993). Ellison & Bradshaw (2008) find that there is a relationship between religious conservatism and support for corporal punishment even after controlling for sociopolitical conservatism.

### *Other Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors*

Others have studied the link between racial/ethnic diversity and policy (Hero and Tolbert, 1996). Demographic factors may be associated with support for and use of corporal punishment, such as socioeconomic status (McClure and May, 2007), regional variation (Flynn, 1996; Owen, 2005; Straus and Stewart, 1999), and rurality (Grossman, Rauh, and Rivara, 1995).

McClure and May (2007) performed a multivariate regression including a variety of covariates, such as median household income, unemployment rates, population density, rurality, measures of religious and political leanings, and region. They found that median household income was the factor that best predicted the prevalence of corporal punishment in the country. Some have hypothesized that economically strained counties use corporal punishment as an attempt to cost-efficiently punish their students for misbehaviors (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001).

### **Data and Methods**

While political culture has been linked to the use of corporal punishment in schools (Vandenbosch, 1991), this work did not consider the share of evangelical Protestants in the state. Similarly, other studies on the use of corporal punishment as a function of socioeconomic and regional characteristics (Flynn, 1996; McClure and May, 2007; Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001; Owen, 2005; Straus and Stewart, 1999) did not explicitly incorporate evangelical Protestantism, which is associated with support for corporal punishment in surveys (Grasmick et al., 1991). Further, its relationship to legality or frequency of use of corporal punishment in schools is understudied. Thus, a key contribution of this work is combining multiple measures hypothesized to be related to a preference for corporal punishment to conduct a more careful *ceteris paribus* analysis of the key drivers of its legalization and use. This study tests two hypotheses related to the relationship between the use of corporal punishment and political culture, socioeconomic factors, and other cultural factors. The methods used to test each hypothesis are described separately.

### ***Hypothesis 1: States with traditionalistic political cultures will be more likely to legalize corporal punishment in schools, and will use it more frequently.***

I use logistic regression to predict the likelihood that a state has legalized corporal punishment in schools as of the 2011-12 school year. I also use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to predict the number of students in the state (per 100 enrolled) who received corporal punishment at least once during the 2011-12 school year, the most recent year for which OCR data is available. The OCR data includes the number of students who received corporal punishment at least once, so these data represent a lower bound on corporal punishment use to the extent that this type of disciplinary consequence is used repeatedly with the same students. In the OLS regressions, heteroskedastic-robust standard errors are obtained.

In the baseline model, only controls for the dominant political culture will be included (traditionalistic or moralistic, with individualistic as the baseline). Then, I will include the share of votes in the 2008 presidential election that were for the Republican candidate, John McCain. Originally, the intention was to continue to include additional control variables to assess whether political cultures independently predict the legalization and frequency of corporal punishment in schools, conditional on other factors. However,

given the collinearity between political culture and the share of 2008 votes for the Republican presidential candidate, as well as age and datedness of the political culture measure, I focus primarily on Hypothesis 2.

***Hypothesis 2: States with more Republican votes in the last presidential election will be more likely to legalize corporal punishment in schools, and will use it more frequently.***

*Related hypothesis:* This relationship will be maintained, even after controlling for other factors, such as demographic, economic, and religious characteristics.

In the baseline model, only controls for the percentage of 2008 presidential votes for a Republican candidate will be included. Then, I consecutively add more control variables to assess whether 2008 presidential voting patterns independently predict the legalization and frequency of corporal punishment in schools, conditional on other factors.

To answer Hypotheses 1 and 2, the following types of data are used:

School Environment/ Discipline Data:

- Number of students receiving corporal punishment during 2011-12 school year (OCR)
- Public school enrollment in 2011-12 school year (OCR)
- Percentage of students that are eligible for Federal Free- and Reduced- lunch (National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data), as a proxy for income of students' families

Political Culture Measures:

- Measures of dominant political culture, modified from Sharkansky's scale (1969)
- Voting patterns by political party (percent of votes for Democrats, Republicans, and other in 2008 presidential election (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

Demographic/Economic Data:

- Total state population and racial breakdowns (US Census Bureau 2010) to distinguish whether the political or cultural attributes of states are predictive of legalization and use of corporal punishment above and beyond simply demographic factors
- Median household income (3-year average from 2009-2011, US Census Bureau), as a proxy for the state's economic status
- Percent of certain religions: Christian, evangelical Protestant, and Catholic (Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study)
- Educational attainment, the percent of people 25 years or older in 2009 with a high school degree or higher (US Census Bureau)
- Percent of population in state or federal prison in 2010 (US Bureau of Justice Statistics), as a proxy for a state's propensity towards punitive behavior
- Percent of population that is foreign born (2009 American Community Survey) to further control for the demographic characteristics of the population

**Table 1 Number of Students Receiving Corporal Punishment in Schools, by state (2011-12 OCR data)**

	Students Per 100 Enrolled	Number of States	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Delaware & Hawaii	0	2	4%	4%
Other 39 States & DC	>0 and <=0.05	40	78%	82%
Missouri	0.54	1	2%	84%
Texas	0.57	1	2%	86%
Louisiana	0.65	1	2%	88%
Georgia	0.72	1	2%	90%
Tennessee	1.05	1	2%	92%
Oklahoma	1.49	1	2%	94%
Alabama	3.65	1	2%	96%
Arkansas	4.22	1	2%	98%
Mississippi	6.31	1	2%	100%

Table 1 lists some of the states in order of frequency. Unfortunately, the OCR data reports corporal punishment numbers in terms of the number of students receiving corporal punishment, not the number of instances. For this reason, since students may receive corporal punishment more than once, these numbers are just a lower bound on corporal punishment use. Two states (Delaware and Hawaii) reported zero students receiving corporal punishment, 39 states plus the District of Columbia reported less than 0.05 students per 100 students received corporal punishment at least once, and 9 states had more than 0.5 students per 100 students receive corporal punishment. Mississippi reportedly used corporal punishment most frequently in 2011-12 (6.31 students per 100 students), followed by Arkansas (4.22 students per 100 students).

**Results**

*Hypothesis 1: States with traditionalistic political cultures will be more likely to have legal corporal punishment in schools, and will use it more frequently.*

I conduct logistic regression to assess whether political culture predicts the legality of corporal punishment in schools. When only the indicators of political culture are included, traditionalistic political culture does appear related to whether or not corporal punishment is legal in schools. As indicated in column 1 of Table 2, which reports marginal effects, a state with a traditionalistic-dominant political culture, relative to a state with an individualistic-dominant political culture, has a 40.4 percentage point higher chance of legal school corporal punishment (significant at the 95% confidence level).

**Table 2 Hypothesis 1 (Political culture as predictors of corporal punishment legality and frequency of use)**

	Logistic Regression of Likelihood of Legal Corporal Punishment in Schools (Marginal Effects)		OLS Regression, Predicting Students (Per 100) Receiving Corporal Punishment		OLS Regression, Predicting Students (Per 100) Receiving Corporal Punishment	
	All States		All States		States Where CP is Legal	
	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6
Moralis	-	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
t	0.2	0.2	15	58	13	49
	57	84	6	9	7	
	-	-	-	-	-	-
	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.6
	82	99	12	16	12	08
			2			
Traditio	0.4	* 0.2	1.0	* 0.8	* 1.4	* 1.4
nalist	04	* 8	66	* 59	* 72	* 99
	-	-	-	-	-	-
	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.6
	72	14	23	68	71	22
		0.0	*	0.0	*	0.0
% Republican		44	*	34	*	81
		9	*	8	*	
		-	-	-	-	-
		0.0		0.0		0.0
		14		14		42
Consta			0.0	* -	0.0	* -
nt			32	* 1.5	* 35	* 4.4
			1	* 75	* 5	* 9
			-	-	-	-
			0.0	-	-	-
			07	0.6	0.0	2.3
			9	45	11	04
Observ	48	48	48	48	19	19
ations						
Pseudo	0.2		0.1	0.1		0.0
R-	29	0.5	51	95	0.0	72
squared	8	2	9	7	55	9

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Percent Republican is republican share of votes in 2008 presidential election on a 0-100 point scale. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

However, once controls are added for the percentage of 2008 presidential votes for a Republican candidate, there is no relationship between the political culture measures and the likelihood of having legalized school corporal punishment (see column 2 of Table 2). Here, we see that voting patterns are associated with legal corporal punishment in schools, even conditional on political culture. These results should be interpreted as the following: a state with a one percentage point increase in Republican votes is associated with an increased likelihood of having legal school corporal punishment of 4.5 percentage points, all else equal.

Why does political culture no longer matter once voting patterns are controlled for? First of all, the Sharkansky (1969) political cultures are largely outdated. Hawaii and Alaska, newly formed states at the time, are not even included in the measures. In addition, changes over time, including an influx of immigrants, and social changes related to non-traditional lifestyles have culminated in a “new political culture” (Leckrone 2013).

Therefore, the 2008 presidential election outcomes may be a more relevant measure of political environments for predicting recent corporal punishment support and activity. While recent voting patterns are more relevant, they are also collinear with the dominant political cultures from Sharkansky (1969). An f-test of the joint significance of Moralistic and Traditionalist indicators reveals that they are jointly insignificant at the 95% confidence level, and therefore can be removed from the model. While columns 3-6 of Table 2 indicate that political culture may still have an influence on the frequency of corporal punishment use, even after accounting for voting patterns, these two factors (political culture and share Republican votes) are still highly correlated. Given that the 2008 measure is more timely and likely more relevant, I focus primarily on Hypothesis 2.

***Hypothesis 2: States with more republican votes in the last presidential election will be more likely to have legal corporal punishment in schools, and will use it more frequently.***

*Related hypothesis:* This relationship will be maintained, even after controlling for other factors such as demographic, economic, and religious characteristics.

Since the measures of political culture are outdated relative to recent voting patterns, I will discuss the results of Hypothesis 2 in more detail. I begin with the analysis predicting whether corporal punishment is legal in a state's schools. Table 3 indicates that voting patterns within a state (percent of Republican votes) are related to whether or not corporal punishment is legal in schools. Column 1 shows the results from a logistic regression, including only the percent of Republican votes as an independent variable. The results indicate that a ten percentage point increase in the share of votes for a Republican candidate is associated with a large, 41 percentage point increase in the likelihood that corporal punishment is legal.

The strength or magnitude of this relationship, as well as its statistical significance, is somewhat diminished when other covariates are included. However, it remains statistically significant. For example, when median household income (which has a negative relationship with the legality of corporal punishment in schools), a measure of educational attainment (the percent of 25 year olds with a high school degree or higher), and the percent of the population that is non-Hispanic white are included, the relationship between voting patterns and the legality of corporal punishment is roughly around 35 percentage points for each additional ten percentage point increase in the share of Republican votes (see Column 2). In Column 2, the negative coefficient on median household income, although only marginally significant, indicates that economic factors play a role in the legality of corporal punishment above and beyond political leanings, which is consistent with a study conducted in Kentucky (McClure & May 2007). In each column in Table 3, more covariates are added to further estimate whether the share of Republican votes is a consistent driver of the legalization of corporal punishment, and, in all seven columns of Table 3, this estimated relationship was significant and positive. Even in the fullest specification (Column 7), a ten percentage point increase in the share of votes for the Republican 2008 candidate was associated with a 27 percentage point increase in the likelihood of having legal corporal punishment in schools. In this fullest model, median household income remains negatively correlated with legalization, educational attainment is positively related with legalization, the percent of evangelical Protestantism is positively related with legalization, and the percent of the population that is foreign born is positively associated with legalization.



The second part of Hypothesis 2 relates to how voting patterns predict the *frequency* of corporal punishment. The results in Table 4 indicate that, on their own, and with minimal controls, voting patterns do predict the frequency of school corporal punishment use in schools (Columns 1 and 2). In Column 1, the results indicate that a ten percentage point increase in the Republican share of votes is associated with an additional 3.5 students out of 1000 who received corporal punishment at least once.

In Column 2 of Table 4, the estimated relationship between percent Republican votes and the frequency of corporal punishment use is smaller, and educational attainment (the percent of people 25 years or older with at least a high school degree) is negatively associated with frequency of use, indicating that more educated states use corporal punishment less frequently. Starting in Column 3, when the share of evangelical Protestants is included, the percent Republican is no longer significant. In fact, the remaining columns (except for Column 7, which is possibly over-specified and underpowered), indicate that evangelical Protestantism is the main driver of the frequency of corporal punishment use. For example, in Column 6, all else equal, a ten percentage point increase in the share of evangelical Protestants is associated with an additional 3.6 students out of 1000 students who received corporal punishment at least once.

It is useful to check whether the results are similar when limiting the sample to only the states where corporal punishment is actually legal. The results, in Table 5, are sensitive to this sample restriction. Given the low sample size (19 states) in this case, I do not include the full set of covariates, as in Table 4. Column 1 of Table 5 indicates that when I only include the states where corporal punishment is legal in schools, the relationship between the share of Republican votes and frequency of use is actually higher (about 8.6 extra students per 1000 for an additional 10 percent of Republican votes, compared to about 3.5 extra students per 1000 for an additional 10 percent of Republican votes in Table 4). The coefficient in Column 1 is only marginally significant, as a result of a small sample size ( $N = 19$ ). Further, the adjusted R-squared in this model is quite low (0.02), so this model does not have much predictive power.

In Columns 2-7, however, among states with legal corporal punishment in schools, the share of Republican votes is no longer correlated to the frequency of corporal punishment use, all else equal. Column 2 indicates that states with higher median incomes use corporal punishment less frequently, even holding constant the legality of this practice. States with an additional \$1,000 in median household income, conditional on the share of Republican votes, tend to have about 1.7 fewer students per 1000 receiving corporal punishment. And in Column 5, the share of the state that identifies as evangelical Protestant is positively associated with the frequency of use (and even larger than the estimated relationship in Table 4).

Comparing across Tables 3-5, it appears that the political leaning of a state, as measured by the share of 2008 presidential votes for the Republican candidate, is a consistent predictor of whether corporal punishment is legal, but that once a state has already decided to legalize corporal punishment in schools, this Republican share does not drive the frequency of use. While among all schools (Table 4), evangelical Protestantism is the most consistent driver of frequency of corporal punishment use in schools, there is less of a clear story in Table 5, perhaps due to the model being relatively underpowered. In addition, the lack of consistent findings in Table 5 could be due to a high degree of collinearity between the covariates in the model, or it could be that states that legalize corporal punishment already are similar enough in terms of observable characteristics that

there is not enough variation in these explanatory variables to further explain frequency of corporal punishment use.

**Table 3 Hypothesis 2 (Voting patterns as predictors of legal school corporal punishment)**

**Logistic Regression of Likelihood of Legal Corporal Punishment in Schools (Marginal Effects)**

	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7
% Republican	0.0406 ***	0.0353 ***	0.0347 **	0.034 **	0.034 **	0.036 **	0.027 *
Med. HH income (\$000s)	-0.012	0.0118	0.0135	-0.016	-0.016	-0.02	-0.02
% of 25-yos w/ H.S. +		-0.025 *	-0.017	-0.018	-0.017	-0.02	-0.03 **
% Non-Hispanic whites		0.0132	-0.015	-0.014	-0.018	-0.02	-0.01
% Evangelical Protestants		0.0174	0.0132	0.0038	0.0046	0.01	0.093 ***
% Catholic		0.0401	0.0351	-0.038	-0.035	-0.05	-0.03
% Other Christian		0.0086	-0.015 *	-0.014 **	-0.014 **	-0.01 **	1E-04
% Students FRL-eligible		0.0084	-0.008	-0.007	-0.007	-0.01	-0
% of Population in Prison			0.0266	0.013	0.0131	0.016	0.058 **
% Foreign Born			0.0176	-0.014	-0.014	-0.02	-0.02
Observations	51	51	51	51	51	50	50
Pseudo R-squared	0.37	0.561	0.622	0.646	0.646	0.644	0.696

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Percent Republican is republican share of votes in 2008 presidential election. Med. HH income = Median household income. Percent of 25-yos with H.S. + is the percent of people 25-years or older with a H.S. degree or higher. All percentage variables coded from 0-100.  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table 4 Hypothesis 2 (Voting patterns as predictors of frequency of school corporal punishment) All States**

OLS Regression, Predicting Students (Per 100) Receiving Corporal Punishment

	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7
% Republican	0.0353 **	0.022 **	0.009	0.0008	0.008	0.0082	0.0036
	-	-0.01	-0.01	-	-	-	-0.014
	0.0156			0.0084	0.011	0.0159	
Med. HH income (\$000s)		-0.03	-0.01	0.0046	0.024	0.0319	0.0382
		-0.02	-0.02	0.0193	0.024	-0.027	0.0304
% of 25-yos w/ H.S. +		-0.1 *	-0.08	0.0938	0.067	0.0448	-0.098
		-0.06	-0.05	-0.067	0.062	0.0549	-0.087
% Non-Hispanic whites		-0	-0	-0.002	0.008	0.0143	0.0006
		-0.01	-0.01	0.0096	0.013	0.0138	-0.018
% Evang. Protestants			0.036 **	0.0347 *	0.035 *	0.0361 **	0.0143
			-0.02	-0.018	0.019	-0.017	0.0292
% Catholic				0.0096	-8E-04	0.0009	0.0124
				0.0203	0.021	0.0219	0.0277
% Other Christian				0.0251	0.022	0.0289	0.0099
				0.0214	0.022	-0.026	0.0204
% of Students FRL					0.038	0.0506	0.0417
					0.028	0.0403	0.0358
% of Pop. in Prison						1.057	0.581
						-0.891	-1.06
% Foreign Born							0.0604
							0.0678
Constant	-1.243 *	10.03 *	6.393	7.617	0.757	-2.506	5.066
	-0.623	-5.1	-4.61	-6.191	5.409	-5.892	-9.193
Observations	51	51	51	51	51	50	50
Adjusted R-squared	0.0934	0.235	0.271	0.279	0.287	0.295	0.294

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Percent Republican is republican share of votes in 2008 presidential election. Med. HH income = Median household income. Percent of 25-yos with H.S. + is the percent of people 25 years or older with a H.S. degree or higher. All percentage variables coded from 0-100.

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<01

**Table 5: Hypothesis 2 (Voting patterns as predictors of frequency of school corporal punishment), States where legal**

OLS Regression, Predicting Students (Per 100) Receiving Corporal Punishment

	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6
% Republican	0.0857 *	0.0503	0.0634	0.0668	0.0475	0.0326
	0.0471	0.0397	-0.037	0.0402	-0.042	-0.055
Med. HH income (\$000s)		-0.174 *	-0.099	-0.113	-0.109	0.0376
		0.0968	-0.101	-0.132	-0.122	0.0999
% of 25-yos w/ H.S. +			-0.157	-0.116	0.0296	-0.119
			-0.111	-0.196	-0.202	-0.194
% Non-Hispanic whites				0.0119	-0.041	0.0236
				0.0452	0.0468	0.0393
% Evangelical Protestants					0.0605 *	0.0219
					0.0334	0.0582
% Catholic						0.0814
						0.0777
% Other Christian						0.0506
						0.0763
Constant	-3.698	6.531	15.59*	13.42	1.794	11.76
	-2.365	-4.64	-8.767	-11.23	-12.74	-15.04
Observations	19	19	19	19	19	19
Adjusted R-squared	0.023	0.24	0.238	0.188	0.2	0.212

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Percent Republican is republican share of votes in 2008 presidential election. Med. HH income = Median household income. Percent of 25-yos with H.S. + is the percent of people 25 years or older with a H.S. degree or higher. All percentage variables coded from 0-100.

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<01

**Conclusion**

Voting patterns, as measured by the percent of votes for a Republican candidate in the 2008 election, predict whether a state has legal corporal punishment in schools, conditional on median household income, educational attainment, and a variety of demographic characteristics. Voting patterns help predict the frequency of corporal punishment in schools (as measured by the number of students receiving it at least once during the 2011-12 school year) in somewhat naïve models, but this factor loses its predictive power once the share of evangelicals in the state is controlled for.

Further, the results are dependent on whether the sample includes all states or only the states in which school corporal punishment is legal. For example, in the models in Table 5 including only the states where corporal punishment in schools is legal, there is less of a clear story about what drives the frequency of its use, perhaps due to collinearity between

the explanatory variables or a lack of variation in descriptive factors to further explain frequency of corporal punishment use. This low power is a key limitation of this study, and future work could focus on corporal punishment use at a more granular level, such as the school district level. In addition, incorporating a qualitative component to this analysis could improve the types of explanatory variables available. For example, whether or not a community uses the policy could also be driven by factors such as the political balance of the local school board, the state Board of Education, or the demographic characteristics of school leaders.

The primary conclusion is that, while states with more Republican votes are more likely to have legal corporal punishment in schools, the main driver of the frequency of use of corporal punishment is the share of the state that identifies as evangelical Protestant. How should state policy makers think about this relationship between religion and school discipline? The “separation of church and state” may arise as a concern, as religious beliefs outside the school building are related to policies that are being implemented within school walls. However, it is not a clear violation of any constitutional rights. The First Amendment prohibits the government from establishing an official religion, preferring one religion over others, or interfering with practice of one’s religion. Given that corporal punishment is not an explicitly religious issue, but rather one that may be supported more or less by people from different faiths, there is no First Amendment violation. Further, within states, districts sometimes have codes of conduct disallowing corporal punishment, and parents in some states are able to opt their children out of corporal punishment (Farrell 2015), so where corporal punishment remains in use, it may be viewed primarily as an issue of local control (Caputo 2017).

Discipline policies are not the only area in which religious groups have influenced school policies. Evangelical Protestants have attempted to influence the curriculum taught through arguments over creationism versus evolution (Berkman & Plutzer 2010) and sex education (Irvine 2004). Corporal punishment is just another area in which the community’s preferences or beliefs can influence what happens within school walls. As time goes on, I expect that states dominated by the religious right may continue to allow corporal punishment and defer to local communities to decide, but that demographic changes over time in some states may tip the scale towards opposing this practice and eventually banning it at the state level.

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