

# TIME TO THROW THE PAYDAY MLENDERS OUT OF THE CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVE TEMPLES



I can't vouch for their underlying research, but two professors just completed a study showing a strong correlation between the number of payday lenders in localities in the US and the prominence of Christian Conservatives (h/t The Consumerist).

Payday lenders, creditors that charge interest rates averaging about 450 percent, are more prevalent in Conservative Christian states, according to a new study coauthored by University of Utah law professor Christopher Peterson. The study, which is based on the most comprehensive database of payday lender locations yet compiled, maps a surprising relationship between populations of Christian conservatives and the proliferation of payday lenders.

"We started this project hoping to find out more about the spatial location of payday lenders and were surprised when a pattern reflecting a correlation with the American Bible Belt and Mormon Mountain West emerged," said Peterson, who conducted the research and coauthored the article with Steven M. Graves, an associate professor of geography at California State University, Northridge. "The natural hypothesis would be to assume that given Biblical condemnation of usury there

would be aggressive regulation and less demand for payday loans in these states, but ironically, the numbers show the opposite is true. It's sad that states with a pious and honorable religious heritage now disproportionately host predatory lenders."

Peterson and Graves' article, titled "Usury Law and the Christian Right," is forthcoming this Spring in the Catholic University Law Review. It profiles states all around the nation examining the unprecedented spread of payday lenders during a time of growing Christian engagement in the political process. **"A generation ago, populist Christian leaders were among the most aggressive opponents of usurious lending. But today many Christian leaders take large campaign contributions from the credit industry and no longer support the Biblical injunction against usury in public life,"** Peterson said. [my emphasis]

In the context of primary discussions about how President Hillary or President Obama will fix Bush's clusterfuck economy without turning the US into Argentina, I find this detail really fascinating. The people preying on the financial insecurity of working people are also some of the people bank-rolling the preachers who give Republicans moral cover for their immoral ways.

All the more reason to make this kind of predatory lending illegal.

Update: Here's what PastorDan has to say about this (see his h/t to selise, too):

Now, correlation is not causation, of course. Even if it were, none of these are perfect correlations. But my hunch is that with a little investigation, we'll discover this study describes the cultural creep of Southern mores hitting

a roadblock in the Northeast and in a few other places with effective usury laws on the books.

To the "faith and politics" point, though, it seems to me that the best use of these maps might be to suggest places for local reform of lending practices. There's no reason why states like Michigan or Wisconsin should have anywhere near as many payday operations as they do. We have the political *and* religious resources to put an end to that form of predation. It's the right thing to do, and it's a great springboard into a broader progressive economic agenda.

Speaking from MI (and PastorDan is speaking from WI), I'd love to see us have the resources to put an end to predatory lending...