Despite appeals to evangelicals, Moore loses Alabama Senate race

# Roy Moore—known for controversial stances on God and government—was defeated by Doug Jones, an attorney who prosecuted a civil rights era church bombing case.

News in the January 3, 2018 issue

Doug Jones and his wife, Louise, on December 12, 2017, at a U.S. Senate race watch-party in Birmingham, Alabama. AP Photo/John Bazemore.

When voters went to the polls December 12 in Alabama's high-stakes Senate race, many observers had their eyes on two crucial groups: Republican women and African Americans.

GOP candidate Roy Moore, who was controversial even before women came forward with accounts of Moore's predatory behavior toward them when they were teenagers and he was in his thirties, called for a recount when results showed that Jones won with 49.9 percent to Moore's 48.4.

Commenting before the election, Gerald Johnson, a longtime observer of Alabama politics and former director of the Capital Survey Research Center, believed "the urban-suburban vote," especially suburban women, would be a decisive factor.

Normally, Alabama is reliably Republican. Donald Trump won the state by 28 points last year. But this was not a normal election. And voters headed to the polls at a time when many were busy preparing for Christmas.

Moore's campaign highlighted his views on God and the size of government, as well as his opposition to abortion rights and same-sex marriage. That campaign was bolstered by President Trump's endorsement, along with resources from the Republican National Committee (which had previously pulled its support for him) and a rally with former Trump strategist Steve Bannon.

In Mountain Brook, a traditionally Republican suburb of Birmingham, numerous signs for Democrat Doug Jones could be seen on the lawns sweeping up to Tudor mansions and plantation-style homes, with a noticeable absence of any Moore placards.

Mountain Brook is home to Jones, a former U.S. attorney who successfully prosecuted Klansmen for killing four black girls in the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Jones has belonged to Canterbury United Methodist Church in Mountain Brook for 33 years. He regularly attends worship and has taught Sunday school.

In interviews with Republican women in the Birmingham suburbs before the election, most older women said they would vote for Moore or stay home. Younger women tended to find the accounts of Moore's behavior credible and said they would vote for Jones or a write-in candidate.

Pam Segars-Morris, a realtor and longtime Republican, didn't initially support Moore. She remembered that he was twice removed from the bench as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court for refusing to obey court orders that differed with his religious views. But she called the sexual allegations against Moore "a political hit job."

She also said she could never vote for Jones because he supports abortion rights—a key issue for many conservative evangelical voters. Some said they didn't approve of Moore but were going to back him anyway because Republicans needed to hold the Senate seat to ensure conservative judicial appointments, including possibly to the Supreme Court.

Sarah, a thirtysomething who did not want her last name used, said she planned to write in a candidate. She did not accept the claims some conservatives—including some evangelical leaders—made that an older man dating teenagers was acceptable in the 1970s.

"Moore did not marry these girls, he messed with them," she said. "I don't think it's OK."

In mid-November Moore had admitted that he "dated a lot of young ladies" 40 years ago with the permission of their mothers. One of the women who was interviewed in a *Washington Post* investigation described how Moore offered to take care of her when she was 14 and later initiated unwanted genital contact at his home.

The accounts about Moore and the justifications by some conservative Christians roiled the ranks of many evangelicals. Condemnations were in many cases unequivocal.

Yet for some Moore supporters, analysts said, his actions were acceptable because of a deeply ingrained notion of "biblical manhood."

"These moments, both around Trump and Roy Moore, are so revealing," said Kristin Kobes Du Mez, a professor of history at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, referring to the 11 women who publicly gave accounts of sexual harassment and assault by Trump before the 2016 election. Du Mez recounted the rhetoric she had heard within the evangelical subculture about a male obligation to provide and protect women and girls.

“Patriarchal authority is much easier to come by if there’s a big age difference,” Du Mez said.

Kathryn Brightbill, legislative policy analyst at the Coalition for Responsible Home Education, which advocates for homeschooled children, described how ideas of “early courtship” encouraged men to take over headship from a girl’s father and shape her role as a “helpmate.”

“Roy Moore is a symptom of a larger problem in conservative fundamentalist and evangelical circles,” she wrote on social media. “It’s not a southern problem, it’s a fundamentalist problem.”

Among African Americans, who are 27 percent of Alabama’s population, a major concern was that Moore might have been bent on returning the state to its segregationist past.

At 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Jones is a regular visitor and has led tours there to help law enforcement understand how he collected evidence in the case against the two surviving Ku Klux Klan members who participated in the 1963 church bombing.

Arthur Price Jr., the church’s pastor, did not shy away from stating his personal preference for Jones, although, like several of his colleagues among local black clergy, his view is that “it’s not in the church’s best interest to give an endorsement.”

African Americans in Alabama have long memories of Moore’s resistance to integration.

As recently as 2004, when a bipartisan coalition of Alabama leaders moved to strike sections of the state constitution mandating school segregation and poll taxes—a symbolic measure since those laws were no longer in effect—Moore’s fierce opposition killed the measure.

“There is a section of people in the South who believe in the old ways and that’s what he represents,” said Horace Huntley, a retired University of Alabama professor and member of another iconic church in Birmingham, Sixth Avenue Baptist. “That’s anti-black, anti-urban, anti-Jewish, anti-women. That’s what he stands for, that old legacy.” —*Christian Century* staff from reports by *The Christian Science Monitor* and

Religion News Service

*A version of this article, which was edited on December 20, appears in the January 3 print edition under the title “Despite appeals to evangelicals, Moore loses Senate race in Alabama.”*