

Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans?

Party Activists, Party Capture, and the “God Gap”

Do Evangelical activists control the Republican Party? Do Secular activists control the Democratic Party? In *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans*, Ryan Claassen carefully assesses the way campaign activists represent religious and nonreligious groups in American political parties dating back to the 1960s. By providing a new theoretical framework for investigating the connections between macro social and political trends, the results challenge a conventional wisdom in which recently mobilized religious and Secular extremists captured the parties and created a God gap.

The new approach reveals that very basic social and demographic trends matter far more than previously recognized and that mobilization matters far less. The God gap in voting is real, but it was not created by Christian Right mobilization efforts and a Secular backlash. Where others see culture wars and captured parties, Claassen finds many religious divisions in American politics are artifacts of basic social changes. This very basic insight leads to many profoundly different conclusions about the motivations of religious and nonreligious activists and voters.

Ryan L. Claassen is Associate Professor of Political Science at Kent State University. His research investigates political engagement – especially the role of engagement shaping the capacity of individuals and groups of individuals in the American public to effectively contribute to public opinion and compete democratically. His work has appeared in *American Politics Research*, the *Journal of Politics*, *Political Behavior*, *Political Research Quarterly*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

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The most enduring and illuminating bodies of late-nineteenth-century social theory – by Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and others – emphasized the integration of religion, polity, and economy through time and place. Once a staple of classic social theory, however, religion gradually lost the interest of many social scientists during the twentieth century. The recent emergence of phenomena such as Solidarity in Poland, the dissolution of the Soviet empire, various South American, Southern African, and South Asian liberation movements, the Christian Right in the United States, and Al Qaeda have reawakened scholarly interest in religiously based political conflict. At the same time, fundamental questions are once again being asked about the role of religion in stable political regimes, public policies, and constitutional orders. The series Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion, and Politics will produce volumes that study religion and politics by drawing on classic social theory and more recent social scientific research traditions. Books in the series offer theoretically grounded, comparative, empirical studies that raise “big” questions about a timely subject that has long engaged the best minds in social science.

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To Amy, Grace, and Amelia

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