

The Changing Religiosity of the Democratic Party

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The Democratic Party won sweeping victories in the 1932, 1934, and 1936 elections. These victories brought their numbers to an all-time high in the US House of Representatives—333. After 1936, however, the New Deal programs of liberal Democrats saw no further advancement until 1965 (Polsby 2004). Winning came at a cost. The Democrats increased their majority by increasing the proportion of Southern Democrats. Most of these Southern Democrats would help form what would become known as the “conservative coalition” with Republicans to prevent the advancement of the New Deal. Over time, this conservative coalition has largely disappeared as Southern Democrats were replaced by Republicans, or, in a few cases, switched to the Republican Party.

We may be witnessing a return of a new type of conservative coalition. Democrats have increased their numbers in the House and Senate for the last two election cycles, but they have done so, in part, by recruiting conservative Democrats in majority Republican districts. This recruitment pattern has been aimed at Democrats who are able to compete with Republicans on cultural conflict issues, such as, abortion, homosexuality, and obscenity.

Since the rise of the Christian Right, the Republican Party has been successful at defeating Democrats on cultural conflict issues by reaching out to voters with high levels of religiosity. Since 1980, when it backed Ronald Reagan for President, the Christian Right has been an important player in the Republican Party. It helped bring white evangelicals into the Republican fold, a demographic that previously voted in low numbers, and when they did vote, mostly voted for Democrats. This partial realignment of voters helped Reagan win the presidency in 1980, and helped Republicans gain control of Congress in 1994. With the inclusion of the Christian Right, new issues were brought into the Republican platform. Especially, the Christian Right’s core issues of abortion and homosexuality. The Christian Right

has obviously had a tremendous impact on the Republican Party. Less discussed, however, is how the Christian Right has influenced the Democratic Party. Even though the Christian Right has pursued a strategy of backing one political party, the Republicans, its success has moved the Democratic Party more in the direction of the Christian Right as well.

The Democratic Party was perceived as hostile to religion in the minds of many. This perception was due partly to the efforts of the Christian Right, and partly because activists who are hostile to religion found a home in the Democratic Party. Democrats, therefore, had been losing elections for about 25 years over cultural conflict issues and their perceived lack of sensitivity to highly religious voters. Only recently, Democratic Party strategists have sought remedy this problem by recruiting candidates with high levels of religiosity who could speak to similar voters. This new strategy, therefore, is a reaction to the successes of the Christian Right. When turning to this strategy, Democrats could look to their past to find how religion had previously informed a Democratic agenda.

A History of Religion in the Democratic Party

The early decades of the 1900s saw a split in evangelicalism between the modernists and the fundamentalists. The modernists began to doubt or deny many orthodox, or commonly held, Christian beliefs, such as biblical miracles, the resurrection of Christ, the authority of scripture and salvation through Christ alone. Their new approach to understanding their faith was dubbed “higher biblical criticism”. The modernists also wanted to reconcile the differences they found in their faith and new scientific research (Marsden 1980; Woodberry and Smith 1998). Some of these modernists would lead the Social Gospel Movement, which argued the society’s ills were the responsibility of all and emphasized societal sin over personal sin. This movement became a

foundation of the New Deal, the Great Society, labor reforms, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Women's Movement (Fogel 2000).

The Civil Rights Movement would transition black voters from the Republican to the Democratic Party, particularly after the 1964 election. In 1964, Democratic President Lyndon Johnson would help usher the 1964 Civil Rights Act through Congress and campaign on its behalf during his reelection bid that same year. Republicans would nominate Senator Barry Goldwater to run against him. Goldwater was one of the few Republicans to vote against the 1964 Civil Rights Act in the Senate. As a result, Johnson was endorsed by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the most visible leader of the Civil Rights Movement.

The Civil Rights Movement relied heavily upon resources provided by the black churches. Also, blacks had, and continue to have, the highest levels of religiosity of any race or ethnic group in the country. Black voters, therefore, represent an exception to the general rule that voters with high levels of religiosity are more likely to vote Republican.

A new wave of social movements emerged during the 1960s and became active in the Democratic Party. The Civil Rights Movement, the Gay Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, and the Anti-war Movement all became part of the Democratic coalition. These new Democrats did not always get along well with the old Democrats, however. Tension between the two sides erupted in the summer of 1968 during the Democratic National Committee's convention in Chicago.

The Old Left, sometimes referred to as New Deal Democrats, supported Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. The New Left supported Bobby Kennedy, who was assassinated before the convention, Eugene McCarthy, and George McGovern. The New Left's disarray and disorganization helped Humphrey easily win the nomination without winning a primary state. In

response, New Left protesters outside the convention clashed with the police force of old guard Democratic Mayor Richard Daley. The chaos in Chicago contributed to the Republicans victory with Richard Nixon in November.

In response to the disaster in 1968, the DNC would rewrite its nominating rules to create a more open system in which the activist New Left would have more of a say in the eventual nominee (Crotty 1978). And, in 1972, the New Left would successfully nominate George McGovern.

The greater degree of openness would allow more liberal activists to have a greater role in the Democratic Party. In addition to making the party more pro-choice, pro-gay rights, and high-wall separationist, activists who were hostile to religion played a greater role in the party and helped to drive the party's conservatives further away (Layman 2001). After this, Democrats would only be successful at the presidential level when they nominate candidates who outwardly display their religiosity.

In 1976, Democrats are victorious after nominating Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist who talked openly of his evangelical faith. His election would initially energize white evangelical voters. But the newly forming Christian Right would be disappointed in his presidency. Carter would do little to aid the entry of white evangelicals into the party. Sixteen years later, another Southern Baptist would show how Democrats could win by reaching out to religious voters, but his party would fail to learn from his example.

Despite the animosity between the Christian Right and Bill Clinton, it would be wrong to assume that there was no collaboration. The Christian Right found some success despite having a Democrat in the White House. Its agenda was advanced in the areas of religious freedom, violence in the media, child tax credits, welfare reform, and homosexual marriage.

In 1993, Clinton supported, and gave strong rhetorical support for, the Religious Freedom Reconciliation Act, which was lobbied for by many Christian Right groups. Also, in 1995, Clinton released federal guidelines regarding religious discrimination in the schools. While these guidelines did not go as far as some in the Christian Right may have liked, such as allowing school-sponsored prayer, they were largely supported by the Christian Right. In 1997, Clinton released similar guidelines regarding religious freedom in the workplace. They would only apply to federal workers, though they were expected to be a model for the private sector. Clinton considered the views of a broad range of interest groups when compiling these guidelines, including the Christian Legal Society. The Clinton administration received praise from some Christian Right groups for this move (Marquand 1997). Lastly, in 1999, Clinton gave his “strong support” to the Religious Land Use Protection Act. After the Religious Freedom Reconciliation Act was struck down by the Supreme Court, this bill was designed to achieve much of the same while considering the Court’s objections. It was also heavily lobbied for by the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council (Grunwald & Rosin 1999).

Clinton also found some common ground with the Christian Right on the issue of media violence. In 1995, Clinton came out in support of the “V-chip”. This would require television manufacturers to put a computer chip in all televisions that would enable parents to block out programs that contained too much violence. In explaining his support for the V-chip, Clinton stated, “if we’re going to change the American culture, we have to somehow change the media culture, and we have to do it without finger-pointing” (Clinton, quoted in Purdum 1995). Clinton sounded some of the same themes of the Christian Right in suggesting that violence is a “cultural” problem.

Additionally, Christian Right leaders had long been promoting the idea of a \$500 per child tax credit for parents. While Clinton disagreed with certain bills containing a \$500 per child tax credit, Clinton proposed a \$500 per child tax credit for middle-income families in his nomination acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention in 1996. Also, in that speech, he made several other proposals that had been championed by the Christian Right, such as tax-free education savings accounts, reducing out-of-wedlock teen births, tax credits for parents who adopt children, and tougher enforcement of drug related crime. In addition, Clinton praised one of the most significant victories of the Christian Right in the 1990s—the Welfare Reform Bill of 1996, which he had signed a week earlier.

Not only did Clinton find some common ground on particular issues, but Clinton also displayed in public a certain kinship with evangelicals. He frequently used religious language in his political speeches. His 1992 campaign theme was “A New Covenant,” a term borrowed from the Bible. Jesus was referred to as the “New Covenant” (Luke 22:20, Hebrews 8:13). Clinton is a Southern Baptist, a denomination that is heavily evangelical and leans conservative.

Throughout his presidency, the public saw televised images of Clinton attending church while carrying his Bible. Also, he talked publicly about his faith. For instance, in February 1995, on the heels of his defeats in 1994, the White House released a list of Psalms that Clinton found most important to him (Shribman 1995).

After the public humiliation of his sexual encounters with Monica Lewinsky, Clinton’s spiritual life became even more public. Clinton went through weekly counseling with three evangelical pastors. Also, Clinton used evangelical language to describe his healing process. After the Starr report was released, he promised to continue “on the path of repentance, seeking pastoral support” (Clinton, in Dunne 1998). He also added, “I must have God’s help to be the

person I want to be ...a willingness to give the very forgiveness I seek” (Clinton, in Dunne 1998). On the morning after the Senate vote, Clinton met with Rev. Jesse Jackson and they prayed together (Harris 1999). Later that year at a Washington prayer breakfast, Clinton spoke about the spiritual counseling that he was still receiving, “both to help me and to hold me accountable” (Clinton, in Kennedy 1999). He also stated, “I have been profoundly moved, as few people have, by the pure power of grace” (Clinton, in Kennedy 1999).

Then in August 2000, with only five months left in his presidency and shortly before Al Gore’s Presidential Nominating Convention, Clinton visited Willow Creek Community Church to discuss his spiritual life. Willow Creek’s pastor is Bill Hybels, a popular evangelical author and one of Clinton’s spiritual advisers. Referring to the Lewinsky incident, Clinton remarked, “I’m now in the second year of a process of trying to totally rebuild my life from a terrible mistake I made”, and “I feel much more at peace than I used to” (Tucker 2000). Responding to a question of whether or not his churchgoing is just an act, Clinton responded, “at least it’s a consistent act...I have given evidence that I need to be in Church” (Tucker 2000). Clinton also revealed that he became a Christian when he was nine and went to a Billy Graham crusade when he was 12.

These public displays probably did little to move the Christian Right. With their intense dislike of Clinton, they most likely viewed them as disingenuous. However, his public displays may have helped him with the general public and the Christian Right’s support base. The Christian Right is composed of elites and activists. It gains most of its support from evangelicals. Therefore, Clinton’s public displays may have been intended to reach out to evangelicals rather than Christian Right elites. Also, his public displays may have been intended to counteract the perception among the general public that he is immoral.

Speaking the language of evangelicalism was not the only way that Clinton reached out to the base of the Christian Right. He also found some common ground on policy, such as the issue of same-sex marriage. Clinton had received strong support from the gay rights community in 1992. He was the first Democrat to openly reach out to this social movement to include it in his coalition. Early in his presidency, he fought to change the military's policy against allowing homosexuals to serve in the military. After realizing that he did not have enough support in Congress to change this policy, he devised his "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Service members would not be asked their sexual preference, nor would they be expected to reveal it. This would allow homosexual members of the military to continue to serve, but they could still be discharged if it was discovered that they are homosexual. This compromise position was unacceptable to the activists on both sides of the issue. The Christian Right preferred the status quo. The Gay-rights Movement felt betrayed.

Clinton's policy on gays in the military would not, however, become the Gay-rights Movement's biggest disappointment. On September 21, 1996, as Clinton was battling Bob Dole for a second term as President, he signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). DOMA would allow states to not recognize homosexual marriages from other states, if their own laws did not allow homosexual marriages. It would also deny federal benefits to the partners of federal employees whose homosexual marriage is recognized in the state they reside. Though no state recognized same-sex marriages at the time, the impetus for the bill came after the Hawaii Supreme Court seemed to indicate that it would require it's state to recognize same-sex marriages (though, this would later turn out to not be the case).

Clinton's position was consistent with his campaign position; he was opposed to same-sex marriage. Additionally, the bill left the decision to the state-level governments, therefore, it

did not rule out the possibility of same-sex marriages. Even as he offered support and signed the bill, he criticized Republicans for raising the issue. Presidential Advisor George Stephanopoulos claimed, “It’s wrong for people to use this issue to demonize gays and lesbians and it’s pretty clear that that was the intent in trying to create a buzz on this issue” (Purdum 1996). Clinton signed the bill on the weekend in the middle of the night, which limited media coverage of the event. When questioned on the timing of the signing, a spokesperson responded that “that’s when it deserved to be signed;” because, “the reasons the bill was brought to a vote were dubious” (Baker 1996). Later, however, Clinton would use his support for the bill to reach out to evangelical voters.

In mid-October, less than a month before the November election, Clinton’s campaign ran an ad on Christian radio stations. The text of the ad read:

Protecting religious freedom. It’s the foundation of our nation. When the Justice Department went after a church to gather the parishioners’ tithing money, the government was stopped cold because President Clinton overturned the government’s policy and protected us. It’s not the only time he’s defended our values. President Clinton wants a complete ban on late-term abortions, except when the mother’s life is in danger or faces severe health risks, such as the inability to have another child. The president signed the Defense of Marriage Act, supports curfews and school uniforms to teach our children discipline. The president enacted the V-chip to block out violent TV programs. His crime bill expanded the death penalty for drug kingpins. Bob Dole opposed him and is resorting to untrue, negative attacks. President Clinton has fought for our values and America is better for it. (“Clinton has fought...” 1996)

In addition to advertising his support for DOMA, he claimed credit for many other Christian Right issues—religious freedom, abortion, discipline in public schools, violence in the media, and the death penalty.

Reforming welfare was one of the promises House Republicans made to their constituents in their “Contract with American”. While Republicans agreed on the need to reform welfare, there were many different ideas about how it should be reformed. These differences can

be thought of as four different groups: those who emphasized “workfare” or the requirement to work or go through job training in order to receive benefits, those who believe welfare was the cause of many social ills and want to tighten eligibility requirements, those who wanted devolution to the states in the form of block grants, and those who wanted to cut welfare in order to save money to reduce the deficit (Bryner 1998, 152). The eventual bill signed by Clinton in 1996 contained elements of all of these. The Christian Right was supportive of welfare reform for all four of these reasons, but mostly they focused on the social ill aspect and “workfare” aspect of welfare reform. House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich, a favorite of the Christian Right, opened the debate on the welfare reform plan by claiming it is “based on the Judeo-Christian ethic that people should help those in need but should not make them dependent on that help” (Shogren 1996). He continued to use Calvinistic language by claiming, “[i]t’s a sin to continue to help people who need to learn to help themselves” (Kasich quoted in Shogren 1996).

Clinton vetoed the Welfare Bill twice before signing it. Nonetheless, the final bill that passed in August 1996, held many of the ideas of the Christian Right. It ended welfare as an entitlement, limited benefits to five years, required work activities, gave states bonuses for reducing illegitimacy without increasing abortions, denied benefits to unwed minors not living with an adult and not attending school, gave states the option to deny benefits for additional children, included stronger enforcement of child support (Bryner 1998, 133-38), and made \$50 million available for abstinence education (Purnick 1996).

Clinton faced some difficult challenges in dealing with the Christian Right. The Christian Right had achieved much power in the 1990s through their electoral mobilization efforts and by helping the Republicans gain control of Congress. While speaking out against the

Christian Right only seemed to aid the already enthusiastic motivation of the Christian Right, Clinton was ultimately more successful with a three-pronged approach of staying quiet, reaching out, and a public display of religiosity. By staying quiet, when possible, on issues that the Christian Right was concerned about, Clinton avoided adding more fuel to the fire of the Christian Rights attacks. By reaching out to the Christian Right on some issues, Clinton was able to co-opt parts of the Christian Right agenda that was popular among the public. And by displaying his religiosity publicly, Clinton was able to counteract the perception that the Christian Right was attempting to convey; namely, that he is a scoundrel.

After Clinton, democratic outreach to voters with high levels of religiosity nearly disappeared. It would take back-to-back defeats in the 2000 and 2004 presidential races for party strategists to realize the need to recruit candidates with religious sensitivities and have a religious outreach program.

Trying to Close the God Gap

After the 2004 election, some Democrats saw a need to close the God Gap. Religious attendance had become a reliable predictor of vote choice, with Republicans receiving the votes of those who attend religious services most often. Howard Dean jumped to the forefront of this effort. After his failure to win the Democratic nomination for President, Dean used his newfound popularity within the Party to become the DNCs Chair. In this role, he has sought to bring back voters who felt that the Democrats had become hostile to their religious views. Known as the “Faith in Action” initiative, its stated purpose is “to develop and maintain an integrated strategic plan for communicating with and for organizing in communities of faith around our shared priorities, including eliminating poverty; protecting the environment; and

providing affordable healthcare to all” (“About Faith in Action” 2008). Leah Daughtry, a Pentecostal minister and Dean’s Chief of Staff, was put in charge of this effort.

The two years between the Democrats 2004 defeat and the 2006 midterm election win saw Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and James Clyburn (D-SC) visit mega-church Pastor Joel Osteen and Howard Dean appear on Pat Robertson’s TV show, The 700 Club (Marcus 2006). After his victories in the 2006 election, Dean also met with Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and at least four other prominent evangelicals (Conant 2007).

For the 2006 election, Dean actively recruited candidates with strong religious ties to run in conservative districts. The most obvious of these was Heath Shuler, a pro-life evangelical Christian from Western North Carolina. Shuler, a star football player from NC State, defeated eight term Republican Charles Taylor, a member of the powerful Appropriations Committee. Shuler was reluctant to run because he was worried that Democratic Party discipline would prevent him from casting pro-life votes. Dean assured him that Democratic leadership would want him to vote with the views of his district. The Family Research Council gave Shuler a 100% on its Vote Scorecard for the 1st session of the 110th Congress, testifying to Shuler’s congruence with Christian Right views.

In the 2006 elections, Democrats gained 31 seats in the House and won control. Of those 31 seats, Bush won 20 of them in 2004. Of those 20, the average FRC vote score was 24.75, of the 11 that Bush lost, the average FRC vote score was 2.73. (The average for all Democrats was 10.49.) Nine of the 20 joined the centrist New Democrat Coalition and eleven joined the Blue Dog Democrats. Five were pro-life. Of the other 11 freshman Democrats, 7 joined the New Democratic coalition and none joined the Blue Dogs, or were pro-life.

Of the 20 freshmen Democrats in the 110th Congress from districts that Bush carried in 2004, 16 voted in favor of stripping the Federal Communications Commission's authority to reinstitute the "Fairness Doctrine." While this amendment was favored by the Christian Right, and every Republican who voted, voted in favor; more Democrats were opposed (115) than in favor (113). Eight of those same freshmen Democrats voted in favor of denying the use of federal funds for domestic partner benefits for gay couples in the District of Columbia. In the entire chamber, only 40 Democrats voted in favor of this amendment, while only 12 Republicans voted against (see Figure 1).

During the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, both of the leading candidates, Senator's Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, had staffers devoted to outreach to voters with religious sensibilities. Additionally, they, along with the rest of the Democratic field, appeared at a Forum on Faith, hosted by CNN and Sojourners, a left-leaning evangelical organization headed by Jim Wallis.

As the nominee, Obama has continued this effort, and to reach out to the base of the Christian Right—white evangelicals. In June, 2008, Obama held a private meeting with many prominent evangelicals, including, Bishop T.D. Jakes, a black mega-church pastor, Franklin Graham, son and successor to Billy Graham, Rich Cizik, the National Association of Evangelicals VP of Government Affairs, and publisher Stephen Strang. Additionally, Rick Warren, best-selling author of *A Purpose-Driven Life*, hosted a "forum" for Obama and John McCain, the Republican nominee. (Since the candidates were not on stage at the same time, it was not considered a debate.) This event was televised on CNN and Fox News. Obama spoke to a national audience (and the white evangelicals in attendance at Saddleback Church) about his faith.

A political action committee (PAC), the Matthew 25 Network, was started to help mobilize Christians to vote Democrat. While most of its endorsers come from traditionally Democratic faith communities—mainline Protestants, Catholics, and black Protestants—it also features Brian McClaren, a popular evangelical author. McClaren was part of a TV campaign ad, paid for by the Matthew 25 PAC, endorsing Barack Obama and highlighting Obama’s religious faith.

At the opening night of the DNC’s National Convention to officially nominate Obama, an “Interfaith Gathering” was held. At this event, speakers from various faith traditions spoke about the relationship between their faith and their support for the Democratic Party. One of the speakers even had a pro-life message for the group. Bishop Charles Blake, of the Church of God in Christ, remarked, “Surely we cannot be pleased with the routine administration of millions of surgically terminated pregnancies. Something in us must be calling for a better way. We know that our party will acknowledge the moral and spiritual pain because of this disregard for the unborn.” An observer “felt the room tense up” (Pulliam 2008).

One of the most telling features of how the Christian Right has changed the Democratic Party, however, is its invitation to Sen. Bob Casey, Jr. (D-PA) to speak at the convention. Casey was also one of Dean’s recruits. Casey’s father, Bob Casey, Sr., was a popular governor in Pennsylvania, and a pro-life Democrat. Bob Casey, Jr. was recruited to defeat staunch pro-life Republican Senator Rick Santorum. During the 1992 DNC Convention, Bob Casey, Sr. was not allowed a place at the podium because he was pro-life. Now, however, his son is a featured speaker because the party wants to highlight some of its more openly religious members and the diversity within the party.

At the congressional level, recruitment of conservative Democrats also continued in 2008. Of the 27 seats gained by House Democrats in 2008, Republican candidate John McCain received at least 50% of the vote in 11 of them. Of the remaining 16 seats gained by House Democrats in 2008 (those who won in districts carried by Barack Obama), five replaced pro-choice Republicans. There were previously 17 pro-choice Republicans in the House. After losing nearly 1/3 of these in the 2008 election, therefore, the House Republican caucus is less pro-choice.

Of the Democratic freshmen in the 111th Congress (2009-2011), 11 are not considered sufficiently pro-choice by NARAL: Bobby Bright (AL-2), Tom Perriello (VA-5), John Boccieri (OH-16), Kathy Dahlkemper (PA-3), Glenn Nye (VA-2), Larry Kissell (NC-8), Mary Jo Kilroy (OH-15), Steve Driehaus (OH-1), Dina Titus (NV-3), Gerald Connolly (VA-11), and Jim Himes (CT-4). Six of these are particularly notable:

- Bobby Bright is a pro-life, anti-gay marriage, Southern Baptist. As Mayor of Birmingham (a non-partisan post) he was courted by both parties to run for Congress. He decided to run as a Democrat after Democratic leaders promised him more independence than Republican leaders would offer (Skiba 2009).
- Tom Perriello, a Catholic, helped found two organizations, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Faithful America, aimed at the political mobilization of faith groups on issues such as the environment and poverty (Lithwick 2008).
- John Boccieri, a Catholic, is opposed to partial-birth abortions, public funding of abortions, and same-sex marriage.
- Kathy Dahlkemper, like the Republican she unseated (Phil English), is a pro-life, pro-gun, Catholic (Majors 2008).

- Steve Driehaus, a Catholic, is opposed to abortion and same-sex marriage.
- Dina Titus is opposed to same-sex marriage.

These members will add additional strength to the conservative Democrats in the House.

Why is this Happening and What Does it all Mean?

Two separate processes are taking place, led by electoral strategy and social forces. On the one hand, we continue to see liberal Republicans who represent Democratic leaning districts lose. In these cases, Democrats are picking off the low lying fruit, or defeating Republicans who are easiest to defeat because their districts favor Democrats. As this happens, the remaining Republican party becomes more cohesively conservative. As Republicans become less centrist, liberal Republicans have more difficulty winning election, thus exacerbating the effect.

In the second process, we see an upsurge in the number of Democrats running for election in majority Republican districts. There are four main reasons for this process. First, they are being heavily recruited by party leaders. If a potential candidate knows that they will be provided by the support of their party, they are more likely to run. Second, winning a Democratic primary in a Republican leaning district is easier than in a Democratic leaning district. These races have less competition. Indeed, these Democrats often find that they are the only ones willing to take on a Republican in these districts. Third, with the popularity of the Republican party in decline, more Democrats are willing to take advantage of Republican weakness. Most of the political scandals of the last two election cycles involved Republicans. The party's image was further eroded by an unpopular Republican president, George W. Bush. The public perception of Republicans as weak, ineffective, and corrupt would help Democrats even in Republican leaning districts. While mostly effecting swing voters, it can also dampen turnout among loyal Republicans and increase turnout among Democrats. Fourth, Democrats

may decide to run in Republican leaning districts because they are aware of the coattail effect. By late 2007, it would become obvious to many pundits and observers that 2008 would be a difficult year for Republicans. Congressional candidates of the whichever party wins the presidency have a better chance of winning. Democrats looking to run for election in 2008 could correctly surmise that they would have an advantage in a tight race due to their party's victorious presidential candidate.

Combined, these two processes mean that the Republican and Democratic congressional caucuses are both becoming more conservative. Ironically, while the Christian Right's preferred party has been losing, both parties have moved in the direction of the Christian Right. If these patterns continue to hold, we will see the return of the conservative coalition—conservative Democrats and conservative Republicans combining forces to prevent the passage of liberal legislation. While the old conservative coalition prevented passage of New Deal programs, the new conservative coalition would prevent passage of legislation that moves cultural conflict issues in a more liberal direction.

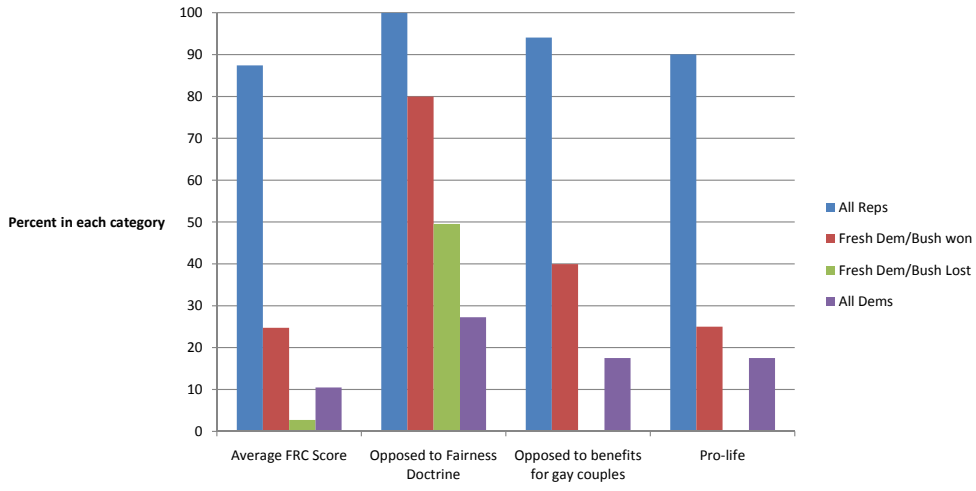
For some, separation of church and state, is more than a formula for the restricting disbursement of government funds to religious groups, it is a formula for how one should conduct oneself in the public square. One's religious views should not be allowed to influence one's political views, under this view. Those who hold this view have traditionally found their home and a platform for voicing this view in the Democratic Party. This is no more. In 1996, the Christian Right took a backseat at the Republican Convention. One could not find Christian Right speakers or their views being expressed from the stage. The Christian Right capitulated because, it was believed, their views were too extreme for the pivotal swing voters in the elections. This time, it is the secularists in the Democratic Party who are taking a backseat.

Those who have argued that religion and politics should not mix, and used this argument in their critique of the Christian Right, have essentially lost that debate.

While diversity may help win elections, it makes governing more difficult. If the Democrats are successful in broadening their base, they will be more limited in their ability to pass legislation. Issues will arise that will split the party. This will inevitably kill legislation, or create an opening for Republicans. On some issues, Republicans may be able to fashion a majority with conservative Democrats. We have already seen this in the 110th Congress with their attack on the Fairness Doctrine and federal benefits for gay couples.

When the Republican Party welcomed the Christian Right into its fold, it changed the Republican Party. In response, the Democratic Party has changed in order to win back some of those lost voters. Now that left-leaning white evangelicals are being welcomed into the Democratic Party, how, if they are successful, will it change the Democratic Party? It would be naïve to think that the party can recruit these voters and candidates without undergoing some fundamental changes of its own. The Republican Party today would not be the same if it had never sought the support of the Christian Right, the same can now be said of the Democratic Party's support of Democrats with high levels of religiosity.

**Figure 1:
Conservatism of Freshmen House Democrats in the 110th Congress**



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