BOOK REVIEWS

Ryan L. Claassen. *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the “God Gap.”* New York: Cambridge University Press. 2015. 208 pp. \$29.99 (paper).

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Ryan Claassen's *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans* is a consequential work that serves as an important corrective to the overly simplistic understandings of religion and politics that many of us have accepted over the years. The caricature of both parties' activist core as being out of step with their membership is a dramatic miscomprehension of what is going on in each of them. Moreover, the author shows that the parties are more diverse than the typical sound bites would lead us to believe. This is a book that should inform our understanding of the intersection of religion and politics. Any scholar of religion, voting behavior, public opinion, or political elites should read this book so as to have a deeper comprehension of American politics. Moreover, those in journalism who cover these topics should review the manuscript before they start spouting off about the nature and beliefs of various groups in the political arena.

Instead of simply relying on what each side has said about themselves or their opposition, Claassen actually looks at the data concerning both mass and elite behavior. Moreover, for the most part, this analysis is reasonably accessible. There are some parts where the author gets very technical in a way that is beyond the ken of non-specialists, but those who are thrown by the more difficult statistics will still profit from a thorough reading of the prose. This work has already informed my research and will influence how I teach about this topic in the coming years.

Instead of assuming the pools from which political activists are pulled are static or stagnant, Claassen investigates the possibility that the demographic groups from which the political activists come have changed. He finds that this accounts for a great deal of the change in the composition of the activist core of each of the parties. He also takes on the capture thesis quite strongly. Just because a group is strong within a party does not mean that there has been a hostile takeover of the group by a disproportionately powerful cadre within the group. The groups that come to power within a political party may well have done so because they have grown in number over the years. Consequently, we

should not be surprised that there have been shifts within the parties. Different groups are ascendant because they have grown in number, not because they have usurped power rightly held by others.

Claassen also speaks to arguments concerning political polarization at the mass and elite levels. He shows how the activist pools within each of the parties and the overall population can move in contrary directions. Consequently, the activists can simultaneously become less like the overall population and become more accurate representations of their own groups. We can see what looks like an increased polarization of politics at the elite level that is not reflective of any changes at the level of the masses.

Claassen also serves as a needed corrective to the large-scale casting aside of the religious left. Claassen shows how religiosity and the attendant behavior we expect from the religious can push in opposite directions depending on the nature of the religious group. As we would expect from all that has been done to this point, we should not be surprised that the more frequently one attends an evangelical church, the more politically conservative one is. Similarly, but perhaps a little surprisingly given the leadership of the churches, mainline Protestants who attend frequently are also more conservative. Frequent attendance pushes to the left for both Jews and black Protestants. This is an area that is worthy of greater investigation in subsequent work. We should look at the messages transmitted in the churches to see if the elites are leading this or if the people gathering together are influencing one another. Or whether, of course, it is some combination of both.

This is a book that should be on the shelf of every scholar of religion and politics. Moreover, it ought to be in our hands being devoured and digested.

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Stanley Feldman, Leonie Huddy, and George E. Marcus. *Going to War in Iraq: When Citizens and the Press Matter*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 2015. 248 pp. \$27.50 (paper).

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Stanley Feldman, Leonie Huddy, and George E. Marcus have written an important book that improves our understanding of how Americans form opinions during debates over military intervention. In clear and engaging prose, the authors contend that critical newspaper coverage of the Iraq War debate turned Democrats and Independents against the invasion, despite mixed and tepid signals from Democratic Party elites. Their careful empirical analysis grounds a strong argument about the broader need to complicate theories of partisan elite influence on public attitudes related to national security. In focusing on news