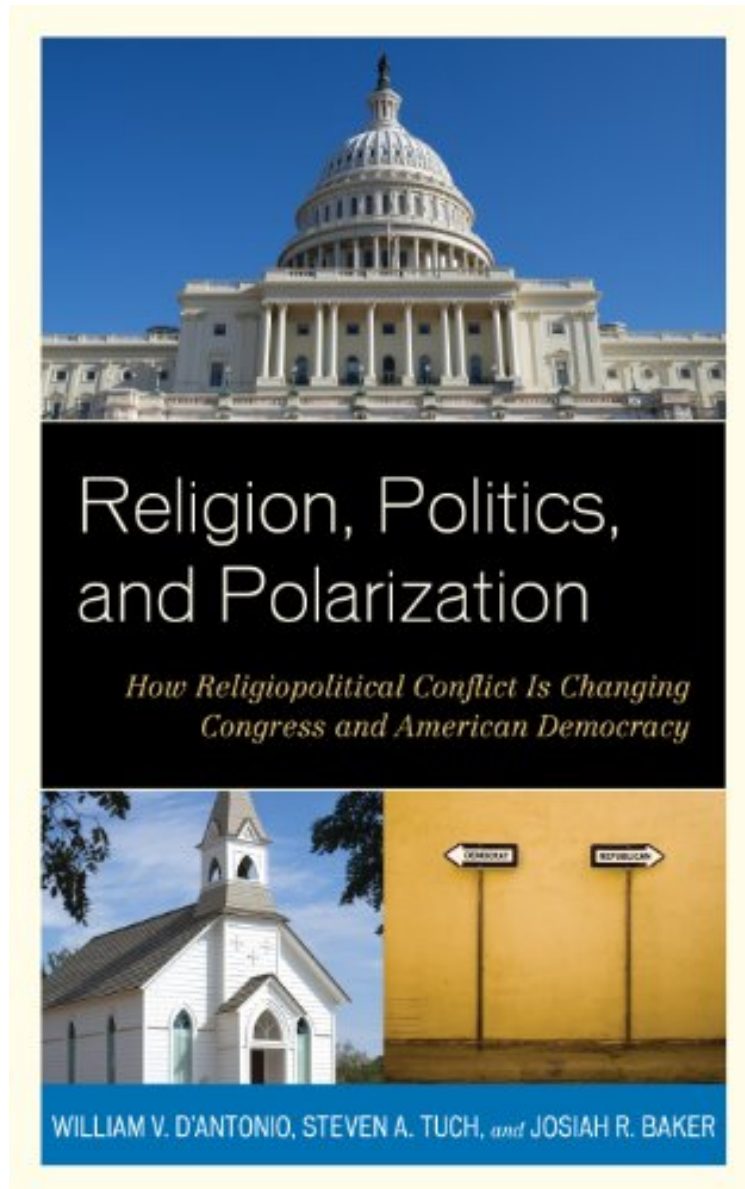


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Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religiopolitical Conflict Is Changing Congress and American Democracy

William V. D'Antonio, Steven A. Tuch, Josiah R. Baker
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William V. D'Antonio, Steven A. Tuch, Josiah R. Baker : Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religiopolitical Conflict Is Changing Congress and American Democracy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religiopolitical

Conflict Is Changing Congress and American Democracy:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Important Research: "Religion, Politics, and Polarization" comments by Jacqueline SchererBy Ralph SchererIn spite of their overlong title, Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religiopolitical Conflict is Changing Congress and American Democracy, D'Antonio, Tuch, and Baker do an excellent job of making their point. The religious views of elected officials are important factors in their political choices. Based upon a critical examination of Congressional voting records and other data viewed over thirty years, they document the increase in rigid voting patterns. Republicans have not supported social welfare measures except those related to abortion and reproductive rights. Democrats, in contrast, have promoted programs to reduce inequality, reflecting more dynamic views of change. The researchers then argue that religious values as reflected in different denominations are important components in this mix. Conservative churches have a powerful impact on Republican legislators. In this sobering analysis they illustrate how religion has played a significant role in the rise of political polarization and will continue to be a key factor in the decisions of Congress in the future.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. Praise for "Religion, Politics, and Polarization"By Charles N. DavisReview of the book: "Religion, Politics, and Polarization" If you have wondered why our Congress is gridlocked - and will likely to remain so for the foreseeable future - this book shows why. The authors point out that it goes back to a split in the country as to a religious worldview. "Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the polarization resulting from the culture wars that presumably wracked the country during the latter part of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century. According to proponents of the culture wars thesis, conflict over such moral issues as abortion, homosexuality, affirmative action, and school prayer have become so divisive and intractable that compromise between factions was rendered difficult, if not impossible to achieve" [p.8]. They quote James Davison Hunter's 1991 book "Culture Wars: the Struggle to define America." Hunter argued that the divisions caused by issues like abortion reflected opposing ideological visions of the "good society." "On the one hand, the good society was seen as grounded in an orthodox, transcendent understanding of the world, based on God-ordained fundamental beliefs, values, and norms. People simply have to obey the laws God has given them, found in the books like the Bible, where God's words are to be understood literally and accepted as inerrant." "On the other hand, a progressive view of the good society sees life as unfolding and truth to be sought through science and reason. This view does not necessarily deny the existence of God so much as it affirms the capacity of human beings to create their own moral codes based on reason and lived experience as well as scripture, tradition and history" [p.8]. All of this carries over to those who are elected to Congress. The authors quote John Danforth who, in his 2006 book, wrote: "Christian conservatives believe that God's will can be reduced to a political program, and that they have done so. In their own minds, there is indeed a Christian agenda for America, and in recent years, they have succeeded in pressing it on the Republican Party. It is an agenda composed of wedge issues which hammered relentlessly in political forums, divide the American people." The authors break down the religious beliefs of the members of Congress and show that most Democrats are white Catholics and Jews - who have been the most liberal in their voting ideology -- as well as blacks and Hispanics. On the other hand, while there used to be a strong contingent of moderate white Republicans, the party is now primarily conservative white Protestants as they have replaced moderates with pro-life candidates. The main issues separating the parties are taxes, defense spending, and welfare but the defining one is abortion - and "it was this polarization in Congress that led to polarization within the general public" [p. 125]. The authors say their findings suggest: "that as long as the Republican Party in the House [of Representatives] is dominated by Evangelicals, Conservative Catholics, and Mormons, polarization will exceed that of the general public. . . the Republicans have managed to selectively pick candidates that reflect their ideological positions rather than those of the general public" [p. 128]. In my view this was all in play in the 2013 effort to shut down the government over the Affordable Care Act and will continue to play out for the near future. Charles N. Davis² of 2 people found the following review helpful. The values of the Democrats are also rooted in a religious tradition. By Steve Buff, Ph.D. The received wisdom is that America is largely secularized and religion, therefore, has had little effect on politics but William D'Antonio, Steven Tuch and Josiah Baker fill a gaping hole in the literature and clearly put this notion to rest. In a model of social science inquiry, they rigorously confirm studies that religion is, indeed, a significant cause of polarization among politicians, in Congress and among the voting public. The authors first provide a concise history of the beliefs, values, and attitudes of religious groups that have dominated the U.S. Congress for two centuries. They then systematically follow the voting patterns of four major groups: Mainline (Moderate and Liberal) Protestants, Conservative Protestants, Catholics (both Moderate and Conservative) and Jews and their changing composition in Congress since 1959-60. Mainline Protestants (with their moderate orientations) declined in numbers from 64 seats in 1959-60 to 38 seats in 2010, and this decline was matched by an increase in the representation of Catholics, Baptists, and Jews. By 2010, the ranks of Conservative Protestant and Catholic Republicans were a significant part of the Republican caucus. The authors devote an incisive chapter to abortion: an iconic issue in the culture wars. In the tumultuous debate over the Affordable Care Act, insurance to cover abortions was banned by the Bart Stupak (D-MI) Amendment and while this forced compromise paved the way for the eventual passage of the Act, this battle magnified the Act's significant unpopularity. As is well-known, the Catholic

Bishops and Evangelicals made abortion a non-negotiable issue and strongly supported Stupaks Amendment. However, staunch support by the Catholic Health Association, yeoman organizing by women religious nationwide, and support of Catholic Democrats helped turn the tide in favor the Affordable Care Act. Clearly, religion influenced political decision-making in this piece of legislation. This review can only touch on the range of resourceful methods by which the authors approach the influence of religion on politics. D'Antonio and colleagues analyze the degree of polarization in the most voted-on issues over 50 years—defense, welfare, and taxes—and find various forms of polarization involving numerous denominations. In another contribution, Steven Tuch and Alyx Marx aggregated all roll call votes between 1969-2010 to see if the impact of religion extends beyond the aforementioned contentious issues. According to their regression analysis, it does. They also note that over the last four decades, Conservative Protestant religious denominations increased their representation in the Republican Party while their numbers in the Democratic Party declined—a telling contributing factor to polarization between the parties. * * * * * The Democrats, when compared to the Republicans, are thought, incorrectly, to be a more secular Party. But the Democrats also have their values and world-view rooted in a religious tradition. In a jewel of an insight, D'Antonio and his colleagues explain that the Democrats are heirs to the Enlightenment, but, less known and acknowledged, are also influenced by the great Abrahamic tradition that spans and unites the beliefs and values of Jews, Christians and Muslims. This tradition teaches, for instance, that Abraham did not turn his back on the stranger. In the course of more than two thousand years, this precept has come to invite caring, healing, and reaching out to as well as thinking about the needs of others. The Abrahamic tradition also once existed within the Republican Party (in part due to the influence the Social Gospel teachings adhered to by many Mainline Protestants) but was eclipsed in the Reagan years by the doctrinal denial of any need for ameliorative social initiatives. The authors argue that the tradition is grounded so strongly in the Democratic Party that its influence does not depend on the degree to which people consciously think of it in those terms. (Thus, it helps explain why those Democrats with no stated religious commitment, or Hindus or Buddhists, are, nonetheless, also working within this grounded and pervasive tradition.) In a larger sense, it is part of a tradition that sees the social side of our being as much as or more than our individual side; and it also resonates with the Enlightenment and growth of scientific thinking. The Abrahamic tradition asks one to consider the needs of the other, and by extension, of the society and the nation. Indeed, this tradition contrasts strongly with the radical form of individualism that has risen among Republicans that denigrates the role of government, the quest for community, and even the common good. This concise, well-written and creative work clearly explicates the religious commitments of the two main political parties. Some of those commitments and traditions, however, exist beneath the surface. The Democrats hold the Abrahamic religious precepts discussed above, the values of reason and compromise, and a deep commitment to the commonweal. (The attenuation of similar qualities on the Republican side is notable.) Perhaps these appealing and vital Democratic values, that the authors reveal, should be acknowledged, disseminated and celebrated to aid in breaking the logjam of polarization. Stephen A. Buff, Ph.D.

Do the religious affiliations of elected officials shape the way they vote on such key issues as abortion, homosexuality, defense spending, taxes, and welfare spending? In *Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religiopolitical Conflict is Changing Congress and American Democracy*, William D'Antonio, Steven A. Tuch and Josiah R. Baker trace the influence of religion and party in the U.S. Congress over time. For almost four decades these key issues have competed for public attention with health care, war, terrorism, and the growing inequity between the incomes of the middle classes and those of corporate America. The authors examine several contemporary issues and trace the increasing polarization in Congress. They examine whether abortion, defense and welfare spending, and taxes are uniquely polarizing or, rather, models of a more general pattern of increasing ideological division in the U.S. Congress. By examining the impact of religion on these key issues the authors effectively address the question of how the various religious denominations have shaped the House and Senate. Throughout the book they draw on key roll call votes, survey data, and extensive background research to argue that the political ideologies of both parties have become grounded in distinctive religious visions of the good society, in turn influencing the voting patterns of elected officials.

Few social scientists have attempted to measure religion's influence on the U.S. Congress with the level of precision that William D'Antonio, Steven Tuch and Josiah Baker exercise in their fine new study. . . . In the end, the authors can show persuasively that Congress has polarized and that its members' religious affiliations have shifted away from mainline Protestantism and toward Catholicism and conservative Protestantism. (National Catholic Reporter) Anyone who has ever been interested in how religious affiliation affects decision-making in Congress will find this book a valuable source of information and insight. The authors focus on the last half century (1960-2010), noting how a changing religious demography has shaped the political culture. . . . This book deserves a very wide audience. (Voice of Reason) Readers will get a clear sense of the unique impact of religious affiliations on congressional decision-making in the multivariate regression models. (America: The National Catholic) There is endless discussion of partisan and ideological polarization and a great deal of talk about the role of religion in American politics. But

remarkably, there is not nearly enough work on how polarization and the faith-commitments of our citizens interact. Religion, Politics and Polarization fills that void with enormous care, using data in a creative but rigorous way to illuminate two central questions of our time. And it also helps to explain what is going on inside Congress. D'Antonio, Tuch, and Baker have performed a great service and deserve a wide audience. (E. J. Dionne Jr., syndicated columnist and author of *Our Divided Political Heart*) Religion, Politics, and Polarization fills a gaping hole in the burgeoning literature on political polarization. Revisiting questions about culture wars raised two decades ago by James Davison Hunter, the authors demonstrate how the changing religious affiliations of members of Congress and their visions of the good society have contributed to the striking increase in partisan polarization in congressional voting behavior. They also persuasively make the case that the public is as deeply implicated as political elites in this most important transformation in contemporary American politics. (Thomas E. Mann, The Brookings Institution) We hear it every day: 'Congress is mired in partisan polarization, gridlocked dysfunctional.' But how and why? Pundits offer superficial answers, but very few mention religion. This book says otherwise. Using hard data and sound analysis, scholars William D'Antonio, Steven A. Tuch and Josiah R. Baker use 40 years of data to show that 'the political ideologies of both political parties are rooted in religion.' It's a must read for those interested in the future of American politics. (Maureen Fiedler, host of NPR's *Interfaith Voices*) The ideological polarization of our political parties is one of the most important and defining characteristics of contemporary American politics, both in the mass public as well as within our elected institutions. In this concise volume, the authors provide an excellent analysis of the various ways in which religion interacts with partisan affiliation to influence the polarized voting behavior of members of Congress over the last three decades. This book is highly recommended for anyone seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection of religion and politics in modern American society. (Benjamin R. Knoll, Centre College) This book is an indispensable guide to the role religion has played, and is playing, in the U.S. Congress. In recent years, scholars have spent a lot of time and energy understanding the religion of voters, but far less research has been devoted to religion among lawmakers. D'Antonio, Tuch, and Baker fill in this gap demonstrating that making law is often a matter of faith. (David E. Campbell, University of Notre Dame; author (with Robert Putnam) of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*) This is an important study for understanding the effects of religious belief and affiliation on the oppositional dynamics and processes of American politics and political institutions and on the competing visions of the good society that underlie those conflicts. The authors show that some common understandings of conflictual American political phenomena articulated in such metaphors as culture war either have less empirical evidence to support them than might be imagined, or require tempering and nuancing to be useful for understanding significant aspects of those phenomena. It is in the relationship between party affiliation and religious affiliation that we find perhaps the most politically potent and divisive correlations. (Thomas Heilke) This book is a thorough treatment of a subject scholars have not studied enough. It appears at an especially timely moment, as the U.S. Congress is more polarized than ever thanks to seemingly intractable differences in worldviews. (Laura R. Olson, Clemson University) It has been over three decades since Benson and Williams published their seminal *Religion on Capitol Hill*, and more than twenty years since James Davison Hunter's influential *Culture Wars*. William D'Antonio and his colleagues bring these concerns together by examining roll-call votes in the House and Senate over the past 40 years, looking at how religion and political party identification interact to shape votes on several key issue-areas of American life. They find evidence of changes in the religious composition of both parties in Congress and increasing polarization in votes. Their argument that these reflect two distinct visions of what constitutes the 'good society' is one that scholars of religion and politics will now be engaging perhaps for another three decades! (Rhys H. Williams, University of Cincinnati, Editor, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*) In *Religion, Politics, and Polarization: How Religious and Political Conflict are Changing Congress and American Democracy*, three esteemed scholars trace the confluence of religion and party in the U.S. Congress over time. Drawing on forty years of congressional roll call votes as well as public opinion survey data, the book argues that the ideologies of both the Democratic and Republican parties are grounded in religious values and beliefs that strongly influence the voting patterns of party members. The authors examine several issues of contemporary relevance as they trace the increasing polarization in Congress over time.

About the Author William V. D'Antonio is research professor of sociology at The Catholic University of America and a fellow of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies. He is the co-author or co-editor of fifteen books, including *American Catholics Today* and *American Catholics in Transition*. Steven A. Tuch is professor of sociology and of public policy and public administration at The George Washington University. He is the author or co-author of several books, including *Race and Policing in America* and *The Other African Americans*. Josiah R. Baker is an assistant professor of financial economics at Methodist University and an adjunct associate professor of economics and geography at George Mason University. He is the author of *Macroeconomics: Theories, Principles, and Issues*.