

INCLUSION OF RELIGION IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN THE US AND INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The whole concept as to separate religion and politics is easy written down rather than the actual implementation of the plans. India and the US have a diverse population of citizens coming from various groups and cultures. There is no single race or an official religion that is included in the constitution for both the countries which brings in a mix of communication and culture in the countries. In India, Hindus make up 79.8% of the population and the central government is run by a party which has connections to Hindu nationalist groups. In the US, Christians make up 65% of the population which includes protestants, Catholics and Mormons and the President, Donald Trump had openly made religious promises in the rallies and speeches during his presidential campaigns in 2016 and 2020. There is a clear connection and similarity as to how religion plays major role in politics even though it goes against the principles of the country. Why do these politicians use religion in their campaigns? As stated earlier, there are certain people who belong to the community with most of the population. Getting their votes is a serious boost to their political race and these politicians play the religion card to obtain their votes. These absolutists and extremists believe in the religious promises made by these politicians and would vote for them in the respective elections. This politics in the name of religion scheme is done in both, the US and India. The BJP have openly promoted Hindu nationalism and criticised other religions which caught the votes of majority of the Hindus which helped them set up the government in 2014 and till day. President Trump had openly made religious promises capturing the votes of the Christiannationalists and had promoted religion in the name of politics. This essay delves deeper into how such scheme exists and explains it's existence over the years.

INTRODUCTION

Religion and politics are two poles that are meant to be separated to maintain the smooth governance of the state, however, these two factors play a part in a person and a voter's life which makes it harder to separate both the factors. The whole idea of secularism can be

interpreted in two ways. It can either be described as a tool from separating the church from the state or to allow people of the respective country to practise any religion of their choice. To gain votes of the people, the political campaigners must promise to satisfy all the needs of the voters and to be re elected, they must do it again. Several charismatic leaders across the globe have included religious matters as a factor in their political agenda and as much separation of church from state is required, there are several instances till day to show the underlying connection between religion and state in both the countries. The supreme court of India in a recent judgement has stated that the political parties must separate religion from their campaigns, however, these parties continue to bring in religion as an aspect in their speeches and actions. Similarly, there are several evidences as to the campaigns in the US including religion as a factor to capture the votes of the voters. This leads to the question; **how does religion play a part in political campaigns in the US and India?**

INDIA

According to Section 123 (3A) of the representation of the people Act, it has been clearly stated that no candidate shall promote hatred towards citizens on the grounds of religion and caste. This law had been given wider scope by the Supreme Court when the Court had given an order banning the involvement of religion in political campaigns. Even though such laws can be made, politicians continue to involve religion and caste into their campaigns for ensuring votes. As stated earlier, India has population of 79.8% Hindu citizens where 94% of Hindus in the world are situated in India. Political parties are aware that if they capture the votes of the Hindu community, they will have a fair chance of being victorious in the elections. To understand the entire scheme, we must be familiar with the term, Vote bank. It was coined by M.N Srinivas in his essay, the social structure of the Mysore village. Vote banks are a group of people who can be relied upon to vote together in support of the same party. Parties target such groups to convince themselves a certain percentage of votes are secured. Groups differ based on multiple criteria and there are certain group of people who are more religiously inclined and motivated. How do they get such votes? The answer is to involve religion into the politics they practice. Even though religious sentiments are to be

separated from politics, this is used extensively in India by politicians and a few examples to understand this is taken.

YOGI ADITYANATH'S CONSTANT INVOLVEMENT OF RELIGION IN HIS CAMPAIGNS

Modi had been described as the Divider in chief of India but one of the most notorious leaders in playing a part of dividing India since religion is UP's current CM, Yogi Adityanath. He had focused his political power into communal divide leading to several violent outbreaks across the state. He had entered the spotlight when he had openly preached Hindutva politics and had set himself as a Hindu extremist which explains the organisation he had created, Hindu YuvaVahini which focuses on Hindu nationalism and consists of Hindu extremists. When it had come to the 2019 general elections, he had openly bashed other religious beliefs and hurt the sentiments of people outside the Hindu religion. In one of his rallies, he has stated that "You might have seen Rahul Gandhi's nomination rally at one of the seats in Kerala, there was only greenery visible there. Congress flag was nowhere to be seen. Congress is suffering from this green virus; it has got infected by it". Later, on social media he had stated that "Muslim League is a virus. If someone is affected by this virus, he cannot survive and today Congress is affected by it. Think, if they win what will happen?". These examples are only the tip of the iceberg. There were several statements made by him in rallies hurting religious sentiments which often landed in trouble but there is yet to be stringent action taken.

VHP AND RSS's RELIGIOUSLY FUELLED CAMPAIGNS

Vinod Bansal who is the spokesperson of VHP had stated that VHP and RSS would begin to conduct door to door consultation to several people in order to check for people who have converted to Islam and Christianity and if they had, they would allegedly educate people about Hinduism and convert back to being Hindus.

The VHP leader had stated that they had been working with the state government in order to remove the SC and ST benefits that had they had been receiving from individuals who had

converted. They include food aid and scholarships which were given to the people belonging to the quota in order to improve economic state of the state.

VHP's campaign to stop the devout transformation will begin before long after completion of the raising money program for the Ram Mandir. A choice with respect to this will be taken by the soothsayers within the assembly of VHP's Central Direction Board (another month) said VHP representative Vinod Bansal. It was also stated that Devout transformation may be a frame of viciousness. It is rough since it estranges the individuals from their unique culture, conventions and their roots," said VHP central common secretary MilindParande. It was suggested that there must be a legislation that is to be drafted in order to criminalise religious conversion which shows their intolerance to other religions. Their speeches and campaigns have hurt sentiments of people belonging not only to other religions but also other castes.

RAM MANDIR CONSTRUCTION CAMPAIGN

In order to popularise and spread the information regarding the ram mandir construction, the Ram RathYatra had been conducted which had been organised by the BJP and LK Advani. The whole object of the campaign was to support the idea that a Temple must be built in the place if the babri masjid due to their belief that a temple had been demolished in order to build a mosque there. The rally involved leaders sprouting their Hindu propaganda across the country to Ayodhya which involved several volunteers which had been conducted for one month which had led to one of India's biggest public gatherings. The rally had ignited several violent outbreaks across several cities in North India which had led to bihar's CM ordering the arrest of Advani when he had crossed the state and several of the volunteers were arrested by the government of UP. This had led to people storming the babri masjid and vandalised the entire property leading to people being killed or injured during the process. This is a clear cut example on how bjp and Advani had played a part in spreading hate amongst the people via their campaigns which prohibited under the Indian law.

AMERICA

According to the first amendment of the US Constitution, Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The proposal on the entire ban on campaigns conducted by charities and churches had actually been put forth by the Congress several decades ago. It was the role of the IRS which is the Internal Revenue Service to regulate the tax laws and make sure several organisations are acting in accordance with the financial regulations. The proposal was put forth by sent. Lyndon Johnson where he had stated that s.501(c)(3) could exclude donations and financial aid given by churches and charities for political campaigns or providing financial support to politicians in rallies. After several years of implementation of the law, certain amendments had been made in order to clear confusions. So, what does s. 501(c)(3) of the Internal revenue code state? Currently, the law prohibits political campaign activity by charities and churches by defining a 501(c)(3) organization as one **"which does not participate in or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office."**

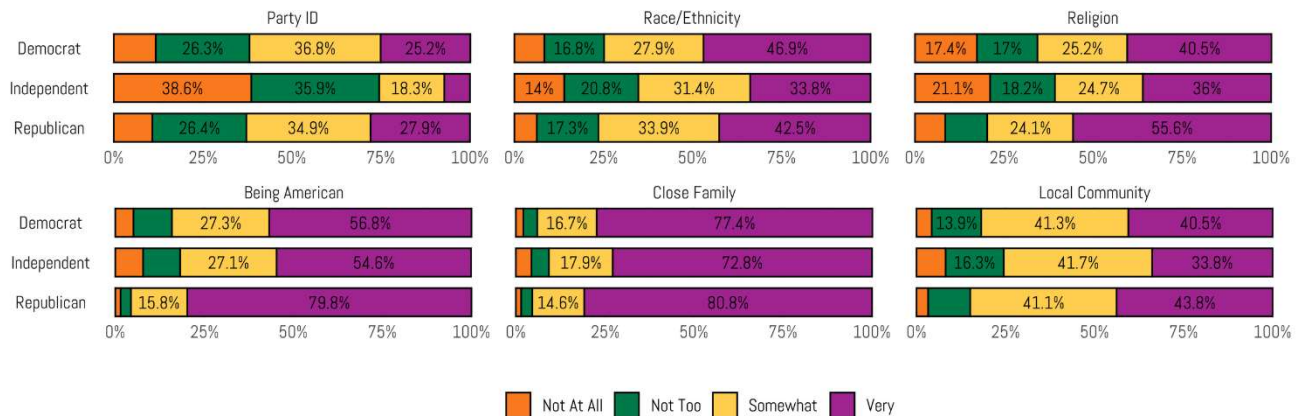
HOW DOES RELIGION PLAY A PART IN VOTING?

According to data put forth by the Pew Research Centre, the group that is more inclined towards voting for the republicans are Mormons where 70% of the Mormons present in the US are willing to identify themselves as republicans. 19% of Mormons are inclined towards voting for the democrats which shows a major difference in voting preference between them where 30 religious groups had been analysed where it had also consisted of other religious groups and people who are not affiliated to any religious group.

At the other end of the spectrum, an overwhelming majority of members of the AME Church (92%) identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party, while just 4% say they favor the Republican Party (an 88-point gap). Similarly, 87% of members of the National Baptist

Convention and 75% of members of the Church of God in Christ (another historically black denomination) identify as Democrats.

How important are each of the following to your identity?



@ryanburge
Data: Nationscape (July 2019-June 2020)

As you can see towards the right hand side of the graph, it clearly shows the percentage of the voters demanding religious transparency and shows a high percentage of them believing that religion plays a major role in determining their identity. The two major parties in the US are the republic and democratic party which contain the majority of the votes. It gives the politicians an idea that religion plays a major role in their campaigns and making certain religious remarks would lead them to political gain. One of the leaders to use such a trick is the former president of the USA, Mr. Donald Trump.

TRUMP'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Donald Trump has been notorious for making hurtful religious statements against Islam in many of his rallies and one of the promises he had made was the fact that he would shut down all the mosques in the US. These statements had been made shortly after the suicide

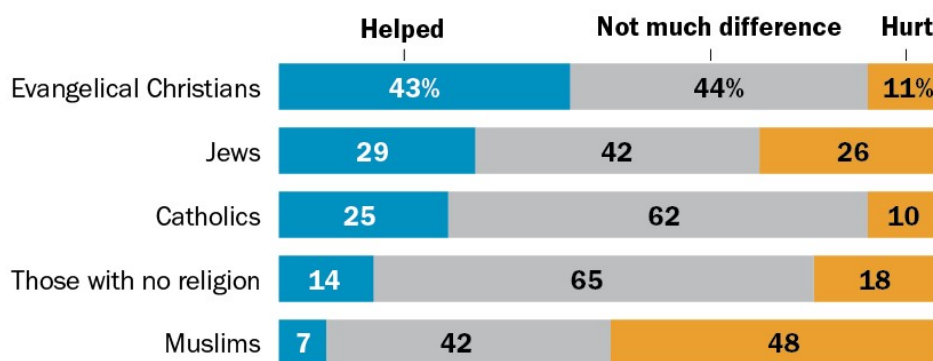
attacks executed by terrorists in Belgium which led to him coming to a conclusion that there must be CCTV cameras placed in mosques which seems to be a harsh move suggested as whether he likes it or not, the place is of religious interest and making statements had definitely hurt religious statements. Donald Trump said on March 9, 2016 that he thinks “Islam hates us,” drawing little distinction between the religion and radical terrorism by some misguided and angry Muslims. He had also continued to back the statement by claiming that certain data given by Pew Research Centre state that a certain percentage of Muslims would go to war against the US but when the Pew Research Centre was contacted, it said it has conducted no survey that asks such a question. “The Centre has not issued a survey saying that 27 percent of Muslims would go to war with the US, nor has the Centre asked a question of Muslims about ‘going to war’, Dana Page, a spokeswoman for the Pew Research Centre, said.

However, this had not been the first time he had made hurtful statements against Islam or other minorities. There are several instances of him making such statements in his campaign rallies where information had been spread without any factual checking and he had openly taken an anti Islam stance. Majority of the population are Christians which explains his strategy which involves gathering votes of the majority and flushing out most of the minority group’s votes.

The King Jesus International Ministry Church, a Hispanic megachurch, was filled with court evangelicals. Earlier to Trump’s discourse, a few of them laid their hands on the president and supplicated for him. Trump for the most part stuck to the teleprompter, but he did go off script each presently and after that. He painted himself as a president who was securing American evangelicals from the those on the “Left” who need to “punish” individuals of confidence and “destroy religion in America.” Amid this portion of the discourse one of the zealous Christians within the group of onlookers shouted “Pocohontas,” a reference to Massachusetts Representative and Law based president candidate Elizabeth Warren. Trump was obviously satisfied.

Nearly half of Americans say the Trump administration has hurt Muslims

% of U.S. adults who say the Trump administration has helped, hurt or not made much difference for ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-15, 2020, among U.S. adults.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The above graph shows how Evangelicals are in heavy support of Trump which is not surprising with the statements made by him regarding other religions indicating his support towards Christian nationalism. As you can see, only 7% of the Muslims had concluded that Trump's administration had helped and 48% had stated that the administration had hurt them. There is clear bias shown during his presidential term and the statements made by him have clearly hurt the sentiments of several Muslims and people belonging in various minority groups which shows how Trump had involved religion in most of the political plans implemented which goes against the statements made by President Kennedy where he had made it clear that religion should never play a part in politics and involving religion would make the leadership meaningless. In connection to the S.501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code that had been stated earlier, an atheist group, "The Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation ("FFRF"), had requested the IRS to investigate into the El Rey Jesus Church in Miami, which had hosted Friday's Evangelicals for Trump kickoff events as they believed that the organisation had been violating such legislation. There is a clear indication

that there is a bias shown towards religious minorities and as the President of the United states, attending such events hosted by “evangelicals for trump” suggests how religion had played a major part in his presidential term/ rallies and in order to capture the votes of the majority, he had only focused on tending to the majority and discarding the plea of several minorities which explains his illogical statements made that hurt religious sentiments of several people in his rallies.

CONCLUSION

The separation of state from the church is a crucial principle that must be followed by all the countries. However, politicians have completely rejected such rule and have constantly involved religion while implementing their political plans. A plethora of issues run round in a voter’s mind while Voting for a particular person or party and a person contesting for a public post will be aware of what the voters are expecting. There are times in which religious promises are made in such campaigns across the world mostly involving the religion which consists of the highest number of people in the respective place. In India, members of the BJP are notorious in conducting campaigns and rallies which constantly involved issues revolving religion and with the examples given above, it clearly shows how the politicians have made statements which have hurt several religious sentiments and indicates their intention to gather up the votes of the Hindu citizens which goes against Section 123 (3A) of the representation of the people Act as statements were made against Islam. Similarly, in the US, s.501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code prohibits donations and financial aid from religious institutions to political campaigns which is a step towards the separation of the church and state. However, Donald Trump had been notorious in making derogatory statements regarding Islam and his campaigns are open examples and the proof that he constantly uses religion as a tool before implementing his political plans. Politicians will never follow the principle of separation of church and state as their focus is to win the votes and satisfy the needs of the majority. If the majority demands such politicians to favour their religion, they will not hesitate and will continue to do so. Stricter legislations must be enacted to prevent such issues in the future and heavy penalties must be imposed if politicians involve religion in their campaigns or

make derogatory statements. India and the US require such legislations to prevent these problems in the future and the current laws are not enough to achieve such objective.

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