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Mark J. Rozell, Clyde Wilcox, eds. *God at the Grassroots, 1996: The Christian Right in the American Elections.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997. x + 285 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8611-7; $99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8610-0.

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The 1996 Elections and the Christian Right

Mark Rozell and Clyde Wilcox's *God at the Grassroots, 1996* is an exploration of the activities and impact of the Christian Right movement in the 1996 elections in fourteen states. In part it is a second installment of the story started in *God at the Grassroots*, which examined the Christian Right in eleven states (California, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) in the extraordinary 1994 midterm elections (Kansas, Maine, North Carolina, and West Virginia were added in 1996; Oklahoma was dropped). Certainly, though, the volume stands on its own as an invaluable resource for information about state politics and the Christian Right. The volume should not merely remain a resource, however, but should make it into your classrooms. The chapters on the whole are well written and examine and explain data in a way comprehensible by undergraduates. The work captures points that would enrich a variety of courses, such as religion and politics, electoral politics, party politics, interest group politics, and social movements. This reviewer has used the 1996 volume (and its predecessor, Rozell and Wilcox 1994) to good effect in courses on religion and politics and political parties in America.

As with the 1994 volume, the gem of the work is the introductory essay by John Green, a scholar of parties, interest groups, and religion and politics. Green presents a lucid, thoughtful treatment of the intersection of social movements, parties, and electorates. He catalogues the strengths (the organizational and psychological resources of evangelical Protestantism) and weaknesses (fragmentation of evangelicalism, and often extreme views of members) of the Christian Right in general, and places these in political context. These strengths and weaknesses are found in conjunction with different political cultures and electoral laws, which together significantly shape Christian Right success at the polls. Success at the polls means many different things, of course, ranging from publicizing issues to winning elections. And "success" at the polls also relates directly to the strategies the Christian Right employs in elections, whether choosing to field candidates, back declared candidates, mobilize supporters, support referenda, or to vie for the control of a party. For the Christian Right, it seems that success is a tradeoff between potential influence and actual outcomes. The critical challenge for the movement is to moderate its demands in order to accomplish at least part of its agenda. Of course, moderated demands do not effectively mobilize movement supporters. Such is the fate of movements (factions) in a diverse nation, as Madison suggested in Federalist 10, and is the principal story told in this volume.

Green also develops a useful typology to sort the states included in the volume. His framework sets the stage and raises questions that guide the discussion in the chapters, such as the opportunities and resources which assist the movement. According to Green, the Christian Right position in state Republican parties ranges from consolidation, where the movement is an established constituency (South Carolina and Texas), to confrontation, where the movement is resisted by party moderates (Minnesota and Kansas). The other ten states lie in the middle of that continuum. This is a more useful scheme, for example, than that used in the often cited Persinos article [1] that suggests the extent to which the Christian Right has taken over state Republican parties. In all, Green suggests that "the Christian Right has found a small but prominent niche in national politics" (p. 13).

The strengths of the state case studies are many and the weaknesses few. The strengths reside primarily in the quality of the observers assembled to produce the work (a credit to Rozell and Wilcox), the diversity of the states, and the detail presented about each electoral context. The weaknesses result from the diversity of the methodological approaches and data. While those approaches are

engaging, they do serve to confound comparison across states to an extent.

The major weakness of the volume is the uneven quality of the data. The data include aggregate, state-level exit polls, national exit polls, newspaper content analyses, and proprietary surveys. The various ways that religion is captured in the volume include adherence to a religion, religious attendance, specific denominations, specific religious beliefs and behaviors, and movement affiliations. The range of sources reveals the myriad ways to conceptualize the connections between religion and politics. However, this diversity is especially disturbing when attempting to measure the already slippery social movement. The authors rarely are able to cover the many facets that social scientists commonly use to define a movement (membership in a movement organization, identification with the movement, and beliefs and behavior in accord with the movement's ideals), and that have been successfully used in other work.[2] This is clearly not the fault of the authors, however. The quality of the religion measures in national and state exit polls, for instance, is severely lacking (exit polls commonly utilize religious categories of Protestant, Catholic, Jew, and Other). The relationships demonstrated with these inadequate data, therefore, attest to the strength of the actual ties between religion and electoral politics and cry out for more accurate and precise measurement. One might look for inspiration in this area to Green, Guth, Kellstedt and Smidt's *Religion and the Culture Wars* (1996; see also Leege and Kellstedt 1993), which devotes considerable space to clear presentation on the problem of measurement of religion.

Since most of the authors also participated in the 1994 volume, they are especially attentive to the shifts from 1994 to 1996–a definite strength. These shifts may take the form of changes in movement strength, some limited countermobilization, but also importantly the change of electoral context. The Christian Right was so effective in the 1994 elections because the elections were midterm, lower salience, lower turnout affairs (Rozell and Wilcox 1994: p. 256). One of the primary questions guiding the work deals with the ability of the movement to learn from its experiences in 1994 to be able to change strategy in a shifting partisan and electoral environment. Clearly, the movement is diverse, with activists in some states learning faster than others. For instance, though claiming that the Christian Right took over Florida in 1996 may be "more hyperbole than sober analysis" (Wald in Rozell and Wilcox 1996: p. 79), the movement did make considerable strides by gaining control of the state legislature. Thus, the movement shifted strategies from overtly fielding lieutenant governor Tom Feeney in 1994 to working behind the scenes and under the radar at the local level for established politicians sympathetic to its cause in 1996. Despite these successes, Florida appears to retain significant barriers, primarily rooted in the liberal/moderate political culture of the state, preventing the Christian Right from gaining regional and statewide office. It is this sort of nuanced story that is the main strength of the volume.

The diverse states included in the volume enable the comparison of the movement's choices of strategy between states. For instance, the authors of the Minnesota chapter, Gilbert and Peterson, suggest that the Christian Right can ascend to the top of a party's ticket in states with a caucus-type structure in place, where a dedicated and organized group can easily dominate a process in which perhaps one percent of the electorate participates (p. 190). In comparison, the California chapter authors, Fetzer and Soper, suggest that the Christian Right can have an impact disproportionate to their numbers in the electoral process when it is wide open with few barriers (p. 137). These two examples suggest a crucial lesson of movement strategy in electoral politics. Minnesota's Christian Right works primarily through the party apparatus, since it is a useful tool and is easily controlled. California's Christian Right works through PACs and movement organizations to achieve the same basic effect. Other states tend to work in the same basic ways; in states with strong parties, the movement tends to work through them, while the movement works through its own organizations in states where the party apparatus is not worth controlling (Oregon and Washington for example).

Rozell and Wilcox have again assembled a diverse and talented cast who produce a volume that makes a contribution to our understanding of the connections between social movements and electoral politics. It is a necessary addition for those interested in the Christian Right, and worthwhile for those interested in electoral politics, political parties, and social movements. The weaknesses are minor and again call out for consistently good measures of religion in electoral surveys. Students and scholars alike can take the work at face value, gaining valuable insights and learning crucial lessons.

Notes

[1]. Persinos, John F. 1994. "Has the Christian Right Taken Over the Republican Party?" *Campaigns and Elections* 21 September, 21-24.

[2]. See Green, John C., James L. Guth, Corwin E. Smidt, and Lyman A. Kellstedt. 1996. *Religion and the*

Culture Wars: Dispatches from the Front. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. and Leege, David C. and Lyman A. Kellstedt, eds. 1993. *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics.* Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

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