# The Non-Religious Political Identity

## Rhetoric & Policies of the Secular Caucuses in the United States

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# CHAPTER 1:

# INTRODUCTION: THE LANDSCAPE OF U.S. POLITICAL SECULARISM

Since the ratification of the Bill of Rights that declared freedom of religion to be a fundamental right of citizens of the United States, "Separation of Church and State" and the purpose of American political secularism have been the center of many debates regarding legislative policy and judicial decisions. In this preponderance of historical dialogue, there has emerged a tension between how theorists, secular organizers, and religious organizers define political secularism. Since secularism is continuously reshaped discursively by these populations as they attempt to categorize policies, demographics, and legislation into secular or religious, the definition has remained constantly in flux. This project looks at the current political moment to see how one population in particular, secular organizers, are determining what initiatives fall within their domain.

A useful set of case studies for interrogating this definition are the modern secular and freethought political caucuses that have been rising in prominence over the last 10 years both on the state and national level in the United States. Currently, secular caucuses officially recognized by the Democratic Party exist in Texas, Nebraska, and Arizona.[1] In 2018, U.S. House of Representatives also founded the Congressional Freethought Caucus (CFC) – the first caucus devoted to representation of the non-religious to exist in the United States Congress. The CFC was

1. There was also an attempt to start a caucus in Utah that was ultimately unsuccessful, according to Utah Democratic Party Chair Daisy Thomas.

established by Congressman Jared Huffman (CA) – the second congressman to ever openly admit to having no religion. Additionally, at its 2018 National Convention, the Libertarian Party founded the Libertarian Secular Caucus, making it the first political party in United States history to establish a secular caucus at its national convention. All but one of these groups were founded with assistance and lobbying from the Secular Coalition for America – a national organization founded in 2002 and based in Washington D.C. whose website states that its purpose is to protect "religious freedom for all faiths and none".[2]

This project will consist of an analysis of interviews with nine individuals who have been involved in the founding of these secular caucuses. This investigation will be split into two parts. The first will look at the overarching patterns of all six secular caucuses. In Chapter 2, I will use the principals of critical discourse analysis to analyze the ways that the men and women of these caucuses define the relevant vocabulary of their secular projects and how their vocabulary aligns with prior debate about the role of secularism in the U.S. In Chapter 3, I will explore the initiatives and policies that these organizations are prioritizing in order to consider in greater depth how the definitions espoused are related to the movement's tangible effects. In Part II, I will dive into the specifics of each of the caucuses in order to do a comparative analysis between the definitions and policy proposals of each individual caucus that, while aligned in many ways, also differ in approach – highlighting the complexity of the issues faced by "secular" organizers in varying spaces. In Chapter 4, I will elucidate the similarities and differences between the state and federal democratic caucuses, as well as how each of the state caucuses differ from one another. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 will elaborate on the Libertarian Secular caucus in contrast to its Democratic associates to highlight differences in priorities in these two parties when it comes to secular organizing and consider the places where multi-party organizing could be successful.

This project focuses on secular caucuses in order to highlight several distinguishing, and in many cases surprising, features of our particular moment's political secularism in the United States. The most interesting finding is the movement's characterization of the non-religious as an "oppressed" or

2. "Secular Coalition for America, About."

disenfranchised demographic. As we will see especially in Chapters 2 and 3, visibility for the non-religious is one of the main tenets of the secular caucuses. Understanding this self-conceptualization is key to interpreting as well as problematizing the discourse of the secular organizers. Another key finding is the movement's preference for "freedom to" rather than "freedom from" religion. While organizations that are often cited as integral voices of the secularism movement, such as the Freedom From Religion Foundation, are focused on promoting non-theism rather than encouraging interfaith (both religious and non-religious) collaboration,[3] the latter is the goal of the majority of the secular organizers. In fact, most envision a future that involves not only collaboration across believing and non-believing populations, but also that bridges party lines. The anticipation of a bi- and multi-partisan secular movement upends the "godless Democrats" and "pious Republicans" dichotomy that currently prevails in the media[4] and will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

The remainder of this chapter looks at the landscape within which this study is located in order to help us understand the context in which the cast of this study operate. I will first delve into our increasingly non-religiously-identifying political landscape and the research that indicates that there is growing disenchantment with the religious institutions that have, for so long, been entrenched in the lives of the American population. Next, I will explore the academic landscape of secularism and how scholars approach the secular political movement. I will elaborate on how scholars define both secularism in the abstract and political secularism in particular, as well as introduce the debates surrounding the so-called "secularization thesis" and "critical secular theory." I will end by introducing the specifics of this project by giving background to the caucuses and organizations in this study, as well as the methodology that I followed when conducting and analyzing interviews with the organizers.

3. "Home Page, Freedom From Religion Foundation."
4. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*.

## 1.1 Secularism, Atheism, Freethinkers, & the Changing U.S. Political Landscape

The distinguishing feature of the U.S. political landscape for this study is the rise of the category of "nones" – or the "non-affiliated" with any religion – in the U.S. population. As Robert Putnam and David Campbell write in their book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, "The third largest 'religious' group in the United States is actually defined by the absence of a religious affiliation – the 'nones.' There are more nones (17%) than mainline Protestants (14%), a striking fact given that the mainline wing of Protestantism once represented the heart and soul of American religion and society".[5] This growth has also been seen in the electorate, which has had an increase of 55% in non-religiously identifying people between the 2006 and 2018 elections.[6] Interestingly, while those who identify as "nones" are, by definition, not explicitly associated with a particular religion, most shirk from the terms "atheist" or "agnostic." Political science and secularism scholar Ryan Claassen writes, "Some of the Seculars identify themselves as atheists, but the majority of Seculars simply express no association with organized religion – which does not mean they do not recognize a higher, divine power".[7] Based on their significant research into the "nones" population, Putnam and Campbell deduce six conclusions about the growing demographic:

> (1) Except that they are heavily drawn from post-boomer cohorts, the new nones do not differ much from the rest of the U.S. population in terms of education or social standing, and even racial and gender differences are modest.
>
> (2) Men, whites, and non-Southerners are modestly more likely to be nones than women, nonwhites, and Southerners. However, ... men, whites, and non-Southerners in America have long been less attached to religion ... [so] it is not clear that these specific gender and racial imbalances are significant, beyond the fact that the new nones are drawn from groups traditionally less predisposed to religious commitment.
>
> (3) The new nones are not uniformly unbelievers, and few of them claim to be atheists or agnostics. Indeed, most of them express some belief in God and even in the afterlife, and many of them say religion is important in their lives. ... They do not seem to have discarded all religious beliefs or predilections. ...

5. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 17.
6. Seidel, "Politicians, Take Note: Secular Voters Are a Powerful, and Growing, Part of the Population."
7. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 21-22.

> (4) The nones were disproportionately raised in nonreligious backgrounds, so some of them are the children of boomers who had discarded formal religious affiliations a generation ago. ... On the other hand, the rise of nones is apparent even among young people whose parents were religiously observant. The 2007 Pew survey of the American religious landscape found that 16 percent of American adults say they are currently unaffiliated with any particular religion, compared with only 7 percent who were raised unaffiliated, so most of the nones must have been raised as 'somethings.' ... Inheritance clearly accounts for only a fraction of the recent increase in nones.
>
> (5) Because the rise of the new nones was so abrupt, this increase seems unlikely to reflect secularization in any ordinary sense, since theories of secularization refer to developments that transpire over decades or even centuries, not just a few years.
>
> (6) The new nones are heavily drawn from the center and left of the political spectrum.[8]

Scholars have tried to explain the emergence of the "none" population. Putnam and Campbell argue that the rise of the non-religious is in part due to a backlash against conservative religious politics. However, Claassen discards this hypothesis since "politically conservative churches are improving retention over time ... [indicating that] the worry that political activity is endangering future membership may be unfounded".[9] Claassen argues that the growth is primarily tied to changes in the ages at which people are marrying and starting families. He argues that since "no other life experiences inspire greater church involvement than marriage and having children, ... if fewer people are marrying, and those that do are doing it later, church involvement will suffer".[10] Thus, the rise of the non-religious is tied to an "ideological movement reinforced over multiple generations" as non-religious parents raise their children in growing extremes of religious or non-religious involvement.[11]

These changing demographics have also manifested themselves in unique ways throughout the arena of politics. Putnam and Campbell write, "Americans are increasingly concentrated at opposite ends of the religious spectrum – the highly religious at one pole, and the avowedly secular at the other. The moderate religious middle is shrinking." Also fascinating is the change between who is engaged in debates about religion: "In the past, there were religious tensions, but they were largely

8. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 127.
9. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 46.
10. Ibid., 62.
11. Ibid., 46.

between religions (Catholic vs. Protestant most notably), rather than between the religious and irreligious".[12] While most prevalent on the left side of the aisle, secular voices in politics have been increasing overall over the course of the last 10 years.[13] The introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism* written by Phil Zuckerman and John Shook examines the growing presence of secular organizing groups: "Over two thousand local groups and meetups now dot practically every county of every state, and national-level associations such as the Secular Coalition and the Student Secular Alliance have joined older thriving organizations such as the Freedom from Religion Foundation and the American Humanist Association".[14] Not only are these groups more common, but they have also changed their strategies to more closely affiliate themselves with the growing non-religious demographic. The secularisms that these groups employ also vary based on the context within which they operate. Zuckerman and Shook argue, "Like religious allies, secularists will pick and choose their own priorities. ... What is manifested as secularism and secularist activism on the ground will vary greatly from one country to another and even from one small territory to another. ... Any kind of secularism offers a characteristic view with a point that makes sense in its proper context, but *no formulaic method to advancing secularism should be abstractly sought in advance*".[15] With this perspective in mind, we turn to the academics who are attempting to find that "formulaic method" before looking at the secular organizations themselves.

## 1.2 The Academic Landscape of Political Secularism

### 1.2.1 Definitions of Abstract Secularism & Political Secularism

George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) was the first person to be credited with coining the term "secularism." An English newspaper editor, he contrived of the term in 1851 as a way to describe his philosophy that "encouraged people to reject received wisdom and authoritarian politics and instead

12. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 3.
13. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 7.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 10-11, italics added.

to examine all claims in the light of reason and science and with an eye to human progress".[16] While both "atheist" and "humanist" existed at the time, Holyoake rejected "atheist" as "too negative" and appeared to ignore "humanist" in its entirety (although it was used by many of his contemporaries and successors). However, the original work he intended the term "secularist" to describe ("non-religious philosophies, morals, and personal world views") is now more in line with the roles played by "atheist" and "humanist" in today's political context.[17]

Later, French scholar of secularism Jean Bauberot (1941-), broke the term "secularism" into three parts:

> (1) separation of religious institutions from the institutions of the state and no domination of the political sphere by religious institutions;
> (2) freedom of thought, conscience, and religion for all, with everyone free to change their beliefs and manifest their beliefs within the limits of public order and the rights of others;
> (3) no state discrimination against anyone on grounds of their religion or non-religious world view, with everyone receiving equal treatment on equal grounds.[18]

Secular theorist Andrew Copson takes an even larger approach, arguing that "secularism" is just "an approach to the ordering of communities, nations, and states"[19] with so many definitions that it is impossible to define which one is being used without the appropriate context. Zuckerman and Shook call this the phenomena of "polysecularity", writing that "secularists agree in their secularity but do not necessarily agree about why religion should be avoided or about specific agendas for resisting religion".[20] They argue that the need to define *secularisms* rather than secularism is unsuprising, as "most words, terms, and labels that seek to capture something that is simultaneously social, philosophical, legal, democratic, historical, and cultural are typically difficult to adequately define".[21] Thus, we turn to the particular secularism of relevance to our study: secularism in the United States political sphere.

Copson defines U.S. secularism "more as a guarantee of freedom of religion than as a civic

16. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 1.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 2.
19. Ibid., 1.
20. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 11.
21. Ibid., 6.

identity to replace religious affiliation. Separation of church and state is simply the mechanism by which that freedom is secured." Compared to, for example, the French political secularism, Americans "feel no attachment to 'secularism,' – it is 'religious freedom' that they value".[22] Within even the specific category of Western political secularism, Copson cites US political scientist Elizabeth Shakman Hurd who identifies two forms: "Judeo-Christian secularism" and "laicism." Copson writes:

> Laicism is anticlerical in character: state antipathy to religion forged in opposition to religious domination. Giving priority to the state and to common national identity over religion, it is focused on protecting citizens' freedom from religion as much as on guaranteeing freedom of religion. Judeo-Christian secularism by contrast draws inspiration from the theology that emphasizes freedom of conscience and from Enlightenment ideas of human dignity. This secularism is established to preserve the liberties of citizens to think, organize, and worship (or not) as they wish. ... It's an implicit rather than an explicit secularism.[23]

According to Copson, "Laicism" or "freedom from religion" is best represented by the French version of political secularism, whereas "Judeo-Christian secularism" or "freedom of religion" prevails in the United States. However, both forms can be found to varying degrees within U.S. secular organizing.

### 1.2.2 Debunking the Secularization Thesis & the Emergence of Critical Secular Theory

The secularization thesis was originally proposed by Peter Berger in his book *The Sacred Canopy*, in which he argues that secularization is "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols".[24] Berger originally argued that the world is undergoing the process of secularization, and this has "resulted in a widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definitions of reality".[25] Examples he gives to prove the existence of this phenomena include: "the evacuation by the Christian churches of areas previously under their control or influence"; "emancipation of education from ecclesiastical

22. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 32-33.
23. Ibid., 92.
24. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 107.
25. Ibid., 126.

authority"; "decline of religious contents in the arts, in philosophy, in literature"; "the rise of science as an autonomous, thoroughly secular perspective on the world"; and, even, the "secularization of consciousness" that has led to "an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and view their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations".[26]

Originally proposed in 1990, Berger has since redacted his claim that society as a whole is becoming more secular. He writes in his 2014 book *The Many Alters of Modernity*, "Secularization theory, based on the idea that modernity necessarily brings about a decline of religion, ... can no longer be maintained in the face of the empirical evidence".[27] Instead, he now argues that "pluralism," which was before seen as merely a subset of the secularization process, is actually "*the* major change brought about by modernity for the place of religion both in the minds of individuals and in the institutional order. It does indeed constitute a challenge to religious faith, but it is a different challenge from that of secularity".[28] Berger's definition of pluralism relies not only on the co-existence of religious faiths, but also the co-existence of the religious and the secular. He writes, "In the experience of most individuals, secularity and religion are not mutually contradictory. Rather, they co-exist, each pertaining to a specific form of attention to reality".[29] Through this lens, he argues that "the modern individual can develop, and in many cases has indeed developed, the capacity to manage both religious and secular definitions of reality, depending on which is directly relevant to the issue at hand".[30]

However, the debunking of the secularization thesis has not devalued the academic study of the process of secularization, and varying reformulations of the secularization thesis have been proposed to rival Berger's pluralism thesis. In particular, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart take an economics-based approach, arguing that whether or not a society has "secularized" is tied to the predominance within that society of "a sense of existential security – that is, the feeling that survival is secure enough that it can be taken for granted".[31] By looking at multiple quantitative

26. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 107.
27. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, IX.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 53.
30. Ibid., 57.
31. Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 4.

studies, the researchers conclude that "religious participation was twice as strong in poorer than in richer societies. The contrasts were even more marked when it came to the importance of religious values in people's lives: two-thirds of those living in poorer societies regarded religion as 'very important' compared with only one-third of those living in industrial nations, and only one-fifth of those in postindustrial societies".[32] Their conclusion is that "vulnerable populations experiencing considerable uncertainty and risk in their lives, and in the lives of their family and community, regard religion as far more important, and therefore participate far more keenly in spiritual activities, than those living without such threats".[33] While the U.S. is one of the few outliers of this thesis (its high religiosity stands in contrast to its post-industrial standing), the authors conclude that this is because the U.S. is:

> one of the most unequal postindustrial societies under comparison. Relatively high levels of economic insecurity are experienced by many sectors of U.S. society, despite American affluence. ... Many American families, even in the professional middle classes, face risks of unemployment, the dangers of sudden ill health without adequate private medical insurance, vulnerability to becoming a victim of crime, and the problems of paying for long-term care of the elderly. Americans face greater anxieties than citizens in other advanced industrialized countries about whether they will be covered by medical insurance, whether they will be fired arbitrarily, or whether they will be forced to choose between losing their job and devoting themselves to their newborn child. The entrepreneurial spirit and the emphasis on personal responsibility has delivered overall prosperity but one trade-off is that the United States has greater income inequality than any other advanced industrial democracy.[34]

Norris and and Inglehart conclude that even though the secularization thesis as it was originally conceived is no longer valid, it is still possible to predict where secularization is occurring since the process of secularization "is still one that is largely predictable, based on knowing just a few facts about levels of human development and socioeconomic equality in each country".[35]

Others have problematized the idea that secularism should be something that societies strive to achieve in an emerging field known as "Critical Secular Theory." This field of study was spearheaded by William Connelly's 1999 work, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, and Talal Asad's 2003, *Formations*

32. Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 58-59.
33. Ibid., 79.
34. Ibid., 108.
35. Ibid., 109.

*of the Secular*. These scholars predominantly deal with questions that arise about the relation of secularism and "the secular" to the nation-state, suffering, Christianity, and citizenry-formation. Their main contribution has been the extension of discussions about secularism beyond questions of separation of church and state, and to argue that secularism should actually be understood as an expansive ideology – making it malleable to outside influences as well as having potential utilitarian purposes for nation-states. The field as a whole takes the study of secularism and historicizes it, thus bringing it into the field of anthropology for the purpose of studying how the secular shapes, and is shaped by, the societies in which it is located.[36]

This study aims to add to the academic dialogue of secularism in the era post-secularization-thesis. Specifically, by engaging in dialogue with Asad, I hope to continue the work of problematizing aspects of the secular movement while simultaneously acknowledging the ways that the organizers in these groups operate with best intentions in mind when trying to achieve their political goals. I hope to provide conclusions that are fair in their critique while acknowledging the populations that are harmed by some forms of secular rhetoric and nation-state building.

## 1.3 Caucus Background

The five organizations I focus on for this study are: the Texas Democratic Secular Caucus, the Nebraska Secular Democrats, the Arizona Secular Caucus, the Libertarian Secular Caucus, and the Congressional Freethought Caucus. While attempts have been made to found secular caucuses in other states – most notably Utah, which was approved for a caucus in December, 2016[37] but did not end up establishing one – these five organizations are the only secular organizing groups to be recognized as "caucuses." For the purposes of this study, I rely on groups' official designations as part of the state, party, or list of Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) to determine which organizations are "caucuses," rather than developing my own criteria. Typically, caucuses are defined as "a meeting of party members who convene to discuss policies, actions, or – as in the case

36. Scherer, "Landmarks in the critical study of secularism."
37. Dailey, "Utah Dems Approve Secular Caucus For Non-Religious People (VIDEO)."

of the Iowa caucuses – meet to nominate a presidential candidate".[38] While there are many groups in states, such as the Secular Coalition for Arizona, that are influential in the political secularism space but do not identify as caucuses, for the purpose of limiting scope, I chose to focus only on groups that are identified as accredited caucuses by either by their party or legislative body. The only organizations to have received this accolade as of March, 2020, are the five organizations in this project.

The Texas Democratic Secular Caucus originally began organizing in 2016. With the help of Sarah Levin at the Secular Coalition of America (SCA), secular organizers in the state hosted a caucus at the 2016 Texas Democratic Convention that had over 400 attendees.[39] After this initial meeting, the group proposed a list of resolutions that they wanted the Texas Democratic Party to endorse, three of which were later officially adopted: "a resolution to repeal religious exemptions to child protection laws", "a resolution to strike discriminatory language from the state Constitution that bars non-theists from holding elected office", and "a resolution supporting secular reproductive health care policies".[40] By the time of the next convention, Levin and others at SCA recruited a group of organizers to run for leadership positions in the Texas Democratic Secular Caucus in order to make the organization self-sustainable. As the first of its kind, the Texas caucus became the "model caucus" for Levin as she moved on to begin similar movements in other states.

The second state to officially establish a secular caucus was Arizona in May, 2017. The caucus only needed twenty members of the Arizona State Democratic committee to approve the caucus in order to be established, yet 96 voted to support the caucus – giving the Arizona Secular Caucus the power not only to exist but also to vote on party decisions in Arizona.[41] The Nebraska Secular Democrats was the next secular caucus to form. First launched in March, 2018, by Joseph Couch (a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard and 2020 candidate for Nebraska State Legislature[42]), the caucus was officially made a part of the Nebraska Democratic Party on March

38. Harrington, "What is a Caucus?"
39. "Texas Democratic Secular Caucus, About."
40. Mehta, "Texas Democrats Put Atheist Group's Proposals Into Party Platform."
41. Mehta, "The Arizona Democratic Party Has Approved the Formation of a Secular Caucus."
42. Young, "National Guard member to challenge incumbent for Lincoln legislative seat."

30, 2019.[43] The Libertarian Party has also established a secular caucus – making it the first political party to recognize a national caucus for the non-religious. With the help of Levin and SCA, the caucus was founded at the Libertarian National Convention in 2018 by then-state representative for New Hampshire Brandon Phinney.[44]

The Congressional Freethought Caucus (CFC) is the only secular caucus to not be directly affiliated with a party. While commonly referred to as caucuses, Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) are not to be confused with official party caucuses since – although they are not always bi-partisan – they are officially located within the House or the Senate (or across champers) rather than in a particular party. While CMOs in Congress can be dated back to the early 1800s,[45] the CFC is the first to be specifically focused on representation of the non-religious. Representative Jared Huffman of California and Jamie Raskin of Maryland (both of whom are professed humanists) were the founding chairs of the caucus, with an initial membership base of four representatives.[46] Now,at the time of this study's publication, the caucus has 16 declared members,[47] all of whom are registered Democrats. Since its founding, the CFC has been vocal on several issues that they feel fall under their purview, such as denouncing the nomination of Justice Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court of the United States in 2018.[48]

## 1.4 Methodology

### 1.4.1 Interviews

Through interviews with self-declared secular politicians and secular caucus organizers, this study explores the legislation and initiatives supported by members of these caucuses to attempt to determine how these lawmakers and their organizations define "secular" governance. The target

43. Mehta, "In Nebraska, Atheists Now Have Their Own Caucus in the Democratic Party."
44. Mehta, "The Libertarian Party Now Has a Secular Caucus Led by an Atheist State Rep."
45. Eckman, "Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) and Informal Member Groups: Their Purpose and Activities, History, and Formation."
46. Manchester, "Dem lawmakers launch 'Freethought' congressional caucus."
47. Secular Coalition for America, "Congressional Freethought Caucus."
48. "Congressional Freethought Caucus Tells Senate Judiciary Committee to Reject Kavanaugh Nomination."

population of this study is made up of politicians who are either members of secular caucuses (such as the CFC) or have been endorsed by a secular caucus or political organizing body (including but not limited to the SCA or the Freedom from Religion Foundation). Also included in the target population are leadership from within these secular political organizing groups, such as board members of the Libertarian Secular Caucus and Arizona Secular Caucus – whose board are prominent voices in politics but not all elected officials.

Subjects were identified using lists of endorsed politicians or political candidates by secular caucuses,[49] or through membership or leadership in a secular caucus (such as representatives in the CFC or the chair of the Nebraska Secular Democrats). This information is publicly available on the websites of these organizations. The 32 potential subjects collected from these sources were contacted using the emails available on either the caucus websites or the politician's personal website, or via the contact form on their personal website.[50]

Subjects were informed about the content of the study in the initial email. If they chose to participate by responding to the email, I began the process of scheduling a phone call and sent a link to a pre-interview questionnaire. These questionnaires were in the format of a Qualtrics[51] survey. There was a consent form on the first page with information about the study followed by multiple choice and open answer questions. The purpose of this pre-interview survey was to streamline the phone interview in order to be respectful of the time that these politicians were taking out of their schedules. Questions in the pre-interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix 8.2.1.

I completed a 20-30 minute phone interview with the nine participants who filled out the survey. At the beginning of the interview, I again introduced the study and asked for verbal consent before beginning to ask questions. The guide for the Semi-Structured Interviews can be found in Appendix 8.2.2. The results from the survey and phone interviews were not anonymous because the study relied on knowing the role the individuals held in their secular organizing groups, however

49. "Secular Elected Officials."

50. Since I was unable to contact members of the CFC using their websites due to restrictions on these sites about only allowing people in the representative's district to fill out the form, I reached out to my representative, Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL 9), whose Chief of Staff Robert Marcus was able to give me the contact information for the schedulers of the representatives in the CFC.

51. `https://www.qualtrics.com/core-xm/survey-software/`

participants were informed of this prior to participation and were given the opportunity to make corrections both to their pre-interview survey responses and to the interview transcripts prior to their inclusion in this report.

### 1.4.2 Methods of Analysis

I primarily relied on two methods of analysis when approaching the data collected from interviews. The first was the principal of Grounded Theory (GT). While GT is rarely used to study religion,[52] the method is considered most useful in three circumstances: "when there is little or no literature on relevantly similar cases; when existing concepts/theories seem inadequate for aspects of the material at hand; or when one wishes to explore the possibility of alternative modes of conceptualizing a case".[53] As discussed above (Section 1.1), the study of the definition of secularism is an example of a case where one must approach the topic without prior preconceptions of its meaning. Additionally, there is no prior academic research on United States secular caucuses. Finally, as Steven Engler argues in his essay on GT in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, "Because of its sensitivity to the context of specific elements of empirical materials, GT seems particularly useful to the study of religion, especially as researchers move away from rigid, preconceived notions of what constitutes 'religious' data".[54] Thus, GT is a useful method for approaching the topic of secular caucuses.

GT was originally proposed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967. They hypothesized that the reason many anthropologists ignore the development of new theories and concept categories and instead rely on attempts to validate or explain old hypotheses "is the result, in most instances, of believing that formal theories can be applied directly to the substantive area, and will supply most or all of the necessary concepts and hypotheses. The consequence is often a forcing of data, as well as a neglect of relevant concepts and hypotheses that may emerge." Thus, GT attempts to allow "substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on

52. Stausberg and Engler, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 267.
53. Ibid., 256.
54. Ibid., 269.

their own, enabl[ing] the analyst to ascertain which, if any, existing formal theory may help him generate his substantive theories. He can then be more faithful to his data, rather than forcing it to fit a theory".[55] The process of GT begins with the researcher labelling, or "coding", interview data according to common themes. Coding takes on three forms: "open coding organizes the empirical material with an eye to concept-building; selective coding elaborates the resulting core concepts; and theoretical coding connects these prior levels of codes in order to push the analysis to more abstract and general levels".[56] The intention is not to rely on prior assumptions of which categories or themes will emerge, but instead to derive these and new themes from examples in the material itself – which avoids the potential for an example to be "selectively chosen for its confirming power".[57] Once the new themes have been generated, evidence can be used for greater theoretical abstraction in order to either verify, expand upon, or debunk prior theories. GT research is considered complete once it has reached the moment of "theoretical saturation": when the researcher has gone through multiple iterations of generating theory and conducting interviews with newly tailored questions such that no new concepts are being produced. While I was unable to reach this point due to the timeline of my study, I hope that my work will contribute to further research using the method of GT on the topic of U.S. political secularism. The primary area of study that I was unable to draw conclusions about due to my inability to reach theoretical saturation was the topic of secular caucus demographics. When reaching out to interview subjects, I contacted a diverse set of candidates. However, the initial respondents to my emails soliciting participation were all white men. While eventually I was able to recruit a relatively even split of subjects by gender, I still only received responses from interview subjects who are white. Since I conducted interviews on a rolling basis, it was not until late in the interview process that I was aware of the demographic disparity of my interviewees. Thus, I was unable to follow-up with my participants about why it was that only white participants responded, or to ask about the demographic makeups of the caucuses and movement itself. In our interviews, we talked often about religious and partisan makeups of the caucuses,

55. Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 34.
56. Stausberg and Engler, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 259.
57. Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 5.

but never about race, ethnicity, or gender. Interestingly, the two most powerful atheists currently in office, Arizona State Senator Juan Mendez and Nebraska State Senator Ernie Chambers, are both politicians of color[58] – indicating that this is not an all-white movement, nor one led only by white politicians. I am curious how the trends I noticed, in particular the "oppressed population" rhetoric I will discuss in Section 3.1.5, have been perceived by non-white members of the secularism movement. This is a topic that I hope will be the object of future study.

The second method I followed in my analyses that I will expand upon in greater detail in the next chapter is the technique of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Introduced by Norman Fairclough in his 2015 book, *Language and Power*, the method "examines how actions are given meaning and how identities are produced in language use. Theoretically speaking, discourse analysts investigate processes of social construction".[59] I will explore what Fairclough calls the study of a "relational view of language"[60] in Chapter 2.

### 1.4.3 Scope & Limitations

Prior to diving into the results of my interviews, I want to take a moment to discuss the scope and limitations of this study. There are many forms that secularism takes throughout the world, and political secularism in particular looks very different depending on the country in which it is located. Secular organizing in Germany has existed for nearly a century[61] but looks very different from one of the most prominent "secular" parties in the world: the Congress party in India. The United Kingdom also has a humanist caucus-like organization in parliament with over 110 members, the "All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group," that focuses on promoting humanist-oriented policies.[62] While all of these variations of secular politics are worthwhile areas of study, this paper focuses specifically on the United States.

This project also does not attempt to summarize the overall U.S. population's perceptions of

58. Mehta, "An Atheist Member of the Arizona House of Representatives Delivered a Godless Invocation Today."
59. Stausberg and Engler, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 134.
60. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 7.
61. Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession*.
62. Humanist UK, "Humanists in Parliament."

secular organizing. Instead, I only interviewed the people in power in the secular movement, i.e. non-religious politicians and leaders of the secular organizations. My focus was on how the caucuses envision their own mission, not on how others perceive it.

The greatest limitation I had as a researcher was time – because this project was only one year long, I was forced to halt interviews while I was still in contact with several potential sources. I also struggled to manage my positionality in relation to the content and people I was studying. Positionality refers to "the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group." The position in which the researcher approaches the research project "affects every phase of the research process, from the way the question or problem is initially constructed, designed and conducted to how others are invited to participate, the ways in which knowledge is constructed and acted on and, finally, the ways in which outcomes are disseminated and published".[63] As a Democrat at a liberal university who generally believes that religion has no place in politics, I found myself often agreeing with those that I was interviewing and being sympathetic to their political viewpoints. This made it more difficult for me to apply critical secular theory to this project since by critiquing these individuals in a public setting, I inherently will be undermining aspects of their work. However, this project attempts to merge the sympathetic with the critical to demonstrate the ways that the U.S. secular caucuses are both making headway in removing overt Christian influences in politics while still acknowledging what I see as the negative aspects of their rhetoric and policy frameworks.

63. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, "Positionality."

# Part I:

# Definitions & Policies

## The Overarching Landscape of U.S. Secular Caucuses

# CHAPTER 2:

# RHETORIC

Talal Asad, in his book *Secular Translations*, writes that "words like ... 'religion,' 'politics,' 'secularism' and their associated, shifting vocabularies are intertwined with modes of life." These words, and the processes through which their meanings are defined, are critical for understanding the roles that the institutions of religion, politics, and secularism play in our constantly changing society. Asad claims, "It is attention to the particular character of that intertwining, to what opponents claim or reject as the proper meaning of these terms (as their 'essence') that should be our primary concern in trying to understand what people expect or demand from or dislike about 'the secular' or 'the religious'—and why they do so".[1]

This chapter takes up Asad's challenge to look at the rhetoric and power structures at play in the ever-changing vocabulary of secularism in order to draw conclusions about how "secularization may be seen as the fundamental change in the grammar of 'religion,' and of its associated vocabulary".[2] Since "language is interwoven into practice",[3] this analysis utilizes interview material with the people who are, in their roles as leaders on the forefront of secular political organizing, constantly applying and reshaping definitions of secularism when making decisions about what matters fall within the purview of their organizations. By applying the techniques of critical discourse analysis – a method of studying discourse that acknowledges the existence of a physical and social reality

1. Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*, 147-148.
2. Ibid., 25.
3. Ibid.

that is reproduced and changed discursively[4] – we can look at how the definitions and applications of the definitions espoused by secular caucuses are positioned to shape the external landscape of secularism in politics, and the waves of change already in motion.

## 2.1 Methodology of Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was first introduced by Norman Fairclough in his 1989 book *Language and Power*. The method emphasizes "the power behind discourse" rather than just the "power of discourse," putting major emphasis on the people with the discursive power to shape "order of discourse" both in the overall social order and within particular interactions (such as interviews and media statements). Rather than focusing on the rhetorical methods of discourse, such as mechanisms of persuasion or manipulation, Fairclough's method highlights the ways that ideology is expressed through what interviewees say – as well as through the topics on which they choose to remain silent.[5] Fairclough's form of discourse analysis in particular puts emphasis on the "critical." He argues, "When we do CDA, the point ... is to analyze and criticize, and ultimately to change, the existing social reality in which such discourse is related in particular ways to other social elements such as power relations, ideologies, economic and political strategies and policies".[6] While Fairclough was primarily focused on how those in power make use of discourse to shape the world to their advantage, CDA can also be used to illuminate the ways that oppressed peoples use discourse to uplift themselves and reclaim terms.

CDA is commonly applied in the fields of social scientific and humanistic research, however religious studies has yet to adopt it despite increasing academic interest in the discourse of religious groups.[7] By choosing to apply CDA to the realm of secular political organizing, I hope to demonstrate how this method can be applied to two new areas. First, I wish to illuminate how CDA can demonstrate the ways that demographics that are simultaneously powerful and stigmatized use

4. Stausberg and Engler, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 140.
5. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 3.
6. Ibid., 5.
7. Stausberg and Engler, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 134.

discourse to reclaim terms in the public sphere. The secular caucuses in this study are an excellent case study to interrogate this intersection: their power comes from their members and leaders holding prominent elected positions in government, yet the demographic of the non-religious and atheist is still associated with societal antagonisms and stereotypes. Second, I wish to take up the challenge posed by Titus Hjelm in his essay on CDA in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, where he encourages academics to apply CDA to the discipline of religious studies. Hjelm writes that "so far the focus in religious studies has been on discussing discourse as a (meta)theoretical concept, ... [rather than] the application of discourse analysis as a practical method".[8] Since CDA is designed as a technique for analyzing the construction of identity through language, the analysis of definitional discourse within an emerging non-religious movement also provides insight into the ongoing reconstruction of the meaning of the religious.

## 2.2 Self-Declared Definitions

Sarah Levin, who spearheaded the founding of the secular caucuses during her time at the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and chose the name "Texas Democratic Secular Caucus," explained, "The problem with this whole movement and issue is that there is no perfect word. All the ones ... are imperfect for a lot of reasons." Because there are so many words, when choosing the name for their caucuses, both Levin and Ron Millar – another organizer associated with the SCA who helped to found the Congressional Freethought Caucus(CFC) – emphasized the importance of choosing a word that could encompass all of the complex identities that they wished to represent in their movement. For Levin and the state and Libertarian caucuses, this was "secular," while for Millar and the two Congressmen who founded the CFC – representatives Jared Huffman and Jamie Raskin – the defining term was "freethought." During interviews, subjects were asked not only about the definitions of "secularism" and "freethought" but also "atheist," "humanist," "agnostic," "non-theist," "pluralist," and "areligious." However, this section focuses predominantly on why "secular" and "freethought" were chosen as *the* defining terms of the movement and as the names of

8. Stausberg and Engler, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 135.

the political organizations.

### 2.2.1 Discarded Terms

While not chosen as the terms to define the movement, words such as "atheist," "humanist," "agnostic," "non-theist,", "pluralist," and "areligious," were interesting to discuss with the organizers because, unlike secular and freethought, there was less continuity both in denotation and connotation for these words.[9] Some interviewees thought of "secular" or "freethought" as synonyms for these discarded terms, whereas others considered the former to be umbrella terms inclusive of the latter that encapsulated the wide range of varying perspectives in the movement, each represented by one of the more specific terms.

Joseph Couch, founder of the Nebraska Secular Democrats, was especially vocal about secular being just a more agreeable version of atheist. He explained, "I call all those words 'areligious euphemism.' The point of a euphemism is to soften a harsh word." Couch interpreted secular to be a word, unlike the stigmatized "atheist," that has a less strong connotation associated with it but also is understood, at least on a high level, by the general population. For Couch, he would have preferred to have called the Nebraska Secular Democrats the "Atheist Caucus." He said, "I like the word atheist. I feel like it's the most honest because the word atheist generally means someone who doesn't believe in a God. ... Secular is one of many irreligious euphemisms which are easier to swallow than atheist. In terms of government, it is literally more honest, but can be misleading especially when associated with a secular interfaith effort." However, the process of founding the caucus forced him to change the name to "Secular" rather than "Atheist" because originally the caucus was considering merging with the Nebraska Catholic Caucus to form an interfaith caucus. According to Couch, the members of the foundling atheist caucus did not want to be the Nebraska Interfaith Caucus because they "didn't want anything to do with faith" so instead Couch suggested secular. While in the end the caucuses did not end up merging because the faith groups refused the

9. My prediction is that the definitional disparities between interviewees for what I call the "discarded terms" have remained because members of the movement have generally been asked to define them less.

name "secular caucus", "Nebraska Secular Democrats" stuck.[10] Despite the efforts to coordinate, Couch still insists that "secular interfaith seems to be an oxymoron to me," hence why he thinks the term "atheist" makes more sense for the movement.

Couch was also the most vocal about the atheist character of secularism. Others were much more open to people of faith as well as non-atheists (such as humanists, non-theists, agnostics, etc.) being included in the category of secularists. Millar's definition was the most broad of everyone I interviewed. He not only included within the "non-theist community" the traditional groups of atheists, humanists, agnostics, but also all "nones." He explained:

> A portion of the nones believe in God or a higher power, but they are not active in religious organizations and religion is not a very important element of their life. The idea of believing in a higher power is a gray area with regard to being a theist or a non-theist. Some people think of a higher power as mathematics, nature, or love. I include these people in the non-theist category because they don't hold supernatural beliefs.

Thus for Millar, to be included as a non-theist only presupposed a denial of what he called a "Sky God." This means his definition of non-theist also encapsulates a wide array of beliefs about the existence of a God.

Interviewees also had differing definitions for the subcategories of "humanist" and "agnostic." Couch thought of humanist as primarily a philosophy rather than a collective organizing identity, and Huffman referred to his "humanist values" as the basis for his morality framework – while also identifying as an agnostic. Meanwhile Millar, whose organization is an offshoot of the American Humanist Association, claimed that while many humanists were also atheists, the choice to use humanist was more of a branding than definitional choice, thus indicating that he equates these two terms. Similarly, Couch described someone who identifies as agnostic as "also an atheist generally" since they also do not have a positive belief in God. Thus, by putting Millar and Couch's interviews in conversation, it appears that what Millar considers to be a "non-theist" and what Couch conceives of as "atheist" are strikingly similar. This indicates that Couch's desire to name his caucus the Atheist Caucus may have been less exclusionary than it appears at first glance since that category

10. The Nebraska Interfaith Caucus is also now a part of the Nebraska Democratic Party, led by Edison McDonald ("NDP Leadership and Staff").

for him is broader than it is for others.

Another two words that were discarded from the organization names are "areligious" and "pluralist." Despite their definitional differences – areligious is defined as "unconcerned with or indifferent to religious matters" [11] wheras pluralist was defined by Peter Berger as "the co-existence of different worldviews and value systems in the same society"[12] – they were abandoned for similar reasons. Levin explained that for her, areligious simply means "not religious," so this was not enough for a movement that is about more than the absence of religion. Similarly, Levin said that pluralist was deemed too broad because it lacks any explicit reference to the emphasis on separation of church and state – or, "at least, you know, in people's minds it doesn't." Thus both of these terms were considered insufficient because they did not carry with them any political weight. In order for the secular caucuses to move beyond espousing an ideology of secularism and towards legislation and initiatives, they required terms that were both comprehensive of a diverse group of non-religious people and were directly coupled with a political agenda.

### 2.2.2 SECULAR

When looking for words that captured a wide range of theistic perspectives and also carried political weight, "secular" was the most common choice. Harriet Martineau, one of the first scholars to use the term "secularism" for collective action recruitment, wrote in her 1853 letter in the *Boston Liberator*:

> The adoption of the term Secularism is justified by its including a large number of person who are not Atheists, and uniting them for action which has Secularism for its object, not Atheism. On this ground, and because, by the adoption of a new term, a vast amount of impediment from prejudice is got rid of, the use of the name Secularism is found advantageous.[13]

166 years later, Arthur Thomas, founding secretary of the Libertarian Secular Caucus, also approved of the use of the term secularism because:

> Secular is a generic word ... [that] does include religious people. We recognize that people are

11. `https://www.dictionary.com/browse/areligious`
12. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, IX.
13. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 3-4, originally written by Martineau and published in the *Boston Liberator*.

> religious. Speaking directly for myself, I know that I don't like religion, but I also recognize they are really good people. ... The goal of it isn't to bash religious people or to stop religious people or to change their minds. It's to ensure that we have a government that treats religious and non-religious or people of different faiths equally. And that's ultimately the purpose, not to be a religious or anti-religious group.

Levin was the most vocal about the importance of the term "Secular" rather than any other term used to define the movement:

> It's not a perfect word because it's confusing. It's like, well, are you describing people? Are you describing your organization? And what does secular mean? But you can't say atheist because that's exclusive. It just doesn't include everybody who is not religious. You can't say agnostic, you can't say free thinker because it just doesn't encompass everybody. Secular is the broadest term that you can use to attribute, as imperfect as it is, to the non-religious, and no one is going to say the "nones" because it just sounds like nuns, and it's a very wonky, demographer type word that nobody is going to get. Non-religious is also maybe an option. But the other side of it is that there's two parts, right? There's the ... all-encompassing identity to merge these people together. But there's also the fact that these caucuses, while recognizing non-religious folks, they are open to anybody who believes that that representation matters because they're an ally. Muslims and Mormons and Christians should all care that these groups are equally represented and [secularism] encompasses the separation of church and state and all of the platform that comes with that. ... And just like you don't have to be LGBTQ to join a Stonewall caucus or an LGBTQ caucus, there's a lot of people out there who care about the issues who are allies. *So that's why secular, because secular describes two things: it can describe a person in their beliefs and it can also describe a philosophy of governance when it comes to the role of religion in policy. And we have to encompass both.*

This two part definition is critical to understanding these organizations and the fledgling movement of secular organizing. Secular is far more than just the absence of religious intent or preventing the institutionalization of religious dogma within the state, it is a term that also represents a movement of people, both religious and non-religious, who desire equality between theists and non-theists. While the political agenda of separation of church and state comes with the term, it is the inclusion of this equality-focused agenda in the denotation that makes the discursive formation of the term "secularism" within these organizations unique.

### 2.2.3 FREETHOUGHT

While "secular" is the most commonly used term for the names of the organizations in this study, the most publicly visible caucus in this movement instead chose to entitle itself "freethought." The Congressional Freethought Caucus (CFC) was founded by Huffman and Raskin with the assistance of Millar to be the voice of non-religious people in Congress. However, despite their partnerships with the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), they still chose to use a different term than secular. As Millar explained, "There has been some push-back using the term secular. We have a secular government. So, there are some people who don't want to conflate secular governance and the secular (atheist and humanist) community because it may cause confusion." Due to the term "secular" having multiple meanings, it was important to Millar and the other founders that the name of their organization did not combine two discrete (albeit complementary) political agendas – whereas this was the intention of the secular caucuses.

Yet the usage of "freethought" rather than "secular" as a mechanism for avoiding the association with "secular government" does not mean that the CFC's only purpose is to promote visibility for the non-religious. The CFC still has a two-part agenda that the chairs believe is captured by the term "freethought": (1) support for non-theists and (2) the insistence on rational discourse free from religious influence in politics. While all the caucuses in this study endorse these positions, as will be discussed in Section 3.2.2, the CFC is the only caucus to elevate the tenets of "rational policy" and "rational discourse" to the level of the name of the organization. Raskin explained, "I favored the freethinkers caucus ... and I think it pretty well captures our approach to things. We don't want to be bound by theology or ideology in our thinking about how to confront the problems of the country and the world. The only intellectual discipline we want to follow is logic, evidence and humanity." Similarly, Huffman argued that "freethought" was not just about freedom from policies with a religious basis but also a promotion of scientific reasoning. He claimed, "Supporting science and facts as the basis for public policy is a big part of why we exist as well. This administration not only presents a war on the secular character of our government, but it's a war on facts and science. ... And we think that freethought is a great way to characterize some of that." Despite Levin's

claim that Freethinkers is "too broad" because "everyone thinks they are a freethinker", Raskin and Huffman see the term as representing a different political ideology – one that focuses less on separation of church and *state* and more on separation of church and *reasoning*.

## 2.3 Defining Political Secularism

When coding the interviews using grounded theory, three main conclusions emerged on how one should define political secularism or determine what falls under the purview of secular issues: (1) there is consensus that the government should avoid religion entirely rather than attempt to incorporate all religions, (2) "freedom to" rather than "freedom from" religion is the focus of the movement, and (3) secularism is more comprehensive of a category than it is traditionally understood to be.

The first point is especially well articulated with what Couch termed the "sex as tea" metaphor. Couch connected this to separation of church and state by saying:

> It's really easy to understand the concept of consent if you think of sex as tea. If I asked you if you want a cup of tea, if you say, "No," I'm not going to pour tea on you. That's a terrible thing to do. If you say, "Yes" and I hand you a cup of tea and then you decide not to drink it, I shouldn't pour tea down your throat. That's the general metaphor. I like to apply that to government as well. So specifically, with religious displays that are a thing around the holidays at the Nebraska capital, we have rules that allow religious groups to set up a holiday display. I think in Iowa they have like eight slots and atheist groups actually got seven of the eight slots. So that's like the government putting out a tea platter and saying everyone can bring their own tea. They can bring earl grey, they can bring green, they can bring jasmine and whatnot, which is fine when they say you can bring all these things and you can bring coffee or whatever. But the real goal, I mean, the reason a lot of atheists put up these displays, is because if [the legislators] do this in the first place then we have to be represented – but we'd rather they not exist in the first place. So I would rather the government not have this selection of teas for us. It should instead just completely ignore tea and let people build their own tea shop elsewhere. It's going to happen anyway.

Thus the focus of these organizations is not to encourage more state capitals to allow atheists slots to create a holiday display, for example, but to remove the government spaces set aside for religious and non-religious groups in their entirety. Both Huffman and Gregory Alvord – an endorsed candidate

of the Texas Secular Caucus – called this idea the desire for government to be "blind to religion." Huffman elaborated that the state should "never [be] pro- or anti-religion, but always protective and respectful of individual faith choices so long as they do not seek to impose them on others."

This brings us to conclusion (2): that "freedom to" is more important than "freedom from" for these groups. The debate between these two components of the first amendment – the Establishment clause ("make no law respecting an establishment of religion") and Free Exercise Clause ("or prohibiting the free exercise thereof") – and when each takes priority has been ongoing since the 18th century.[14] One way to think about how to categorize the ways that governments have approached this distinction is through the "accomodationist" versus "separationist" secularism binary, proposed by Jacques Berlinerblau in his essay on "Political Secularism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*. "Accomodationist" secularism is exemplified by the state partnering with religious groups – even when they are working to achieve secular goals. Meanwhile, "separationist" secularists are firmly against any interaction between the state and religious organizations within it. Berlinerblau concludes that the United States currently holds an accomodationist stance, writing that this "approach is evident in the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives [created] by George W. Bush and enlarged by Barack Obama. In a shift away from separationism, the American government now partners with (i.e., accommodates) religious social-service agencies by providing them with federal funding." Importantly, Berlinerblau insists that, "The accommodationist state is anything but autonomous from religion. It is, however, troublingly autonomous from nonbelieving citizens, the implicit denigration of their equal standing as citizens being its fatal flaw".[15] Despite this caveat, the secular caucuses in this study tend to align with the U.S. government in their accomodationist stance – which is exemplified by their willingness to partner with religious allies (both organizations and individuals). Beyond working with religious groups, the leaders of the secular organizations were clear that political secularism, as Couch put it, "take[s] a pluralistic approach for the sake of efficacy." Huffman, in particular, acknowledged that remaining "blind to religion" while also "respect[ing] everybody's faith choices" was a "slippery slope." Thus the secular caucuses (just like

14. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 27.
15. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 95.

the government as a whole), have to "constantly be mindful of that balance." Still, all the organizers were clear that these caucuses were not designed to be anti-religious organizations nor is their goal to project atheism or non-theism onto the religious populace.

The final conclusion, that secularism is more comprehensive of a category than it is traditionally understood to be, addresses the question: what qualifies as a secular goal if it is not just removal of religion from the public sphere? For Levin, she views "secularism as the intersectionality conversation that hasn't become cool yet." Elaborating on this point, Millar articulated a list of possible realms that secular organizing could be employed: "When I think about secular issues, I include medical aid in dying, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ equality, integrity of science, and church-state separation issues. Opposition to these issues only comes from religious nationalists – there are no rational, evidence-based arguments against these issues." Margot Thomas, chair of the Arizona Secular Caucus, led her organization (in partnership with the Secular Coalition for Arizona) in protesting a sex education bill in the state legislature that would require opt-in by parents for students to receive non-abstinence-only sex education. For Thomas, this was a "secular kind of battle" because the benefits of abstinence-only sex education are primarily upheld only by faith-based groups that ignore studies to the contrary. Levin also brought up conversion therapy which she said is typically seen as an LGBT issue and yet holds relevance for the secular movement since the practice is "very much driven by a religious view on homosexuality that it's a choice and not something that you're born with and that it's a sin which, you know, seculars don't believe and don't think should be practiced, especially on minors." This wide slue of issues that fall under the domain of the secular agenda is why Levin thinks of secularism as a part of the intersectionality conversation. Through her work with the Texas Secular Democrats, Levin and the caucus successfully got the Texas Democratic Party to include reproductive rights and children's rights as part of the "religious freedom" section. She explained:

> It's not like the Texas Democratic platform never talked about reproductive rights or children's rights necessarily, but it was the first time that those issues were listed in the religious freedom section. And that's really important because part of what these caucuses are doing from a policy standpoint is connecting the dots between secularism and all of these other issues that tend to be viewed as separate and siloed. But we know if you look at the players, if we look at

> the arguments being made on the other side of these issues, whether it's choice or so-called parental rights that justify religious exemptions that put children in danger, they all come down to religious freedom arguments. And so, getting reproductive rights and children's welfare in the religious freedom section for the first time in the Texas Democratic platform re-framed the issue from a secularist perspective.

By bringing these three key themes together, we can conclude that political secularism is about far more than the establishment and free exercise clauses of the first amendment. For the secular and freethought caucuses, this movement is about imposing boundaries on religious thinking and biases in politics – but only at times when theistic reasoning and practices, by being exercised, encroach on the rights of those who are non-religious or not a member of the dominant religion. While accommodationist for its utility (building membership and allies), and pluralist for the sake of efficacy (preventing religious or non-religious discrimination), these groups are still at their core separationist in their perspectives on religion in government – as in they would rather government involved itself as little as possible in religious practices, discourse, and reasoning. This definition mirrors that of other demographic-oriented advocacy organizations that caucus for recognition and equality while simultaneously lobbying for eradication of targeted legislation. Similar to other stigmatized groups, the secular caucuses straddle the line between trying to achieve equality with the rest of the populace through supportive legislation that prevents further discrimination of non-theists while possessing an ultimate goal of an equality of religious and non-religious peoples so entrenched that all legislation in regards to religion will no longer be necessary.

## 2.4 Not an Atheist Caucus

By advocating for policies that fall under a wide-reaching definition and agenda of secularism, the caucuses with secular in their name are focused on reforming the secular movement to include not only separation of church and state but also the inclusion of non-religious people in politics. Similarly, while the CFC's choice to use "freethought" diminishes the organization's tie to a separation-of-church-and-state agenda, the members' promotion of scientific and non-theistic thinking as a core tenet (along with support of the non-religious) allows for a wider membership

base that extends to include religiously-identifying individuals. In fact, of the sixteen members of the CFC, only Huffman and Raskin have publicly professed to having no religious inclination. Creating an ally-inclusive identity cultivates an inclusive rather than abrasive movement with the intention of gaining acceptance from the greater American populace. As we will discover in the next chapter, the refusal of the identity of an atheist caucus is critical to the movement's chance of success when faced with the hostility of the anti-atheist masses.

# CHAPTER 3:

# LEGISLATION & SECULAR POLICIES

As introduced in Chapter 2, the secular and freethought caucuses define the terms "secular" and "freethought" in a political context primarily as including three objectives: inclusion of the non-religious, separation of church and state in policy, and separation of church and reasoning. This chapter takes the definitions that members of these organizations formed discursively and juxtaposes them with their proposed policies.

On a high level, the two-part definitions of both "secular" and "freethought" are evident in the mission statements of the caucuses. Ron Millar, Sarah Levin, Jamie Raskin, and Margot Thomas all listed as the top two agendas of their organizations the goals of increasing the visibility of the non-religious and separation of church and state. Thomas specifically called the mission "two-fold" since these two tenets, while distinct, still "go together" in practice. Interestingly, while the CFC chose "freethought" in a move that elevated their goal of removing theology-based rationality from public discourse over separation of church and state, when it came to policies promoted by the CFC in comparison to the secular caucuses, the goals of "separation of church and state" and "separation of church and rationality" synchronized much more than the differing definitions would imply. Thus while further exploration between the differences between the CFC and secular caucuses will be explored in Chapter 4, this chapter aims to draw conclusions about the larger trends of the movement as a whole and is thus split into two main policy points: "visibility for atheists and non-religious folk" and "separation of church, state, and rationality."

## 3.1 Visibility for Atheists & Non-Religious Folk

### 3.1.1 Background

"Being an atheist is one of the last taboos in American society," Ron Millar insisted during his interview. While not traditionally considered to be an oppressed or minority group (and in particular not one of the "last" oppressed groups in a society filled with many other forms of inequality), there is some validity to the argument that atheists and the non-religious have been excluded from positions of power – particularly in government. As early as the 17th century, fear of atheist legislators was prominent. John Locke believed that atheists should not be tolerated, even in a secular state because they "didn't believe in any transcendent source of morality that could guarantee their oath and so couldn't be trusted".[1] In the 18th century, opposition to Article Six of the Constitution (forbidding a religious test for office) in large part rested on fear over how non-Protestants would govern. Specifically, could the Protestants "be satisfied with the loyalty of atheists?".[2] Thus, despite Article Six, several states still developed religious tests for office, such as Pennsylvania's requirement for "its legislators to swear to a belief in one God ... and the divine inspiration of both the Old and New Testaments".[3] Prominent thinkers of the time supported this view. Chris Beneke writes in his book, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism*:

> Agreement on the menace of atheism (or anything resembling it) left nonbelievers and skeptics in an unenviable position. Even into our own time, men and women with reservations about organized religion have usually found it best to keep their contrarian sentiments to themselves. If a white man's particular brand of faith no longer proved a legal barrier to most public offices by 1787, unbelief almost always did.[4]

Beneke cites as an example the 1800 presidential election of Thomas Jefferson, whose campaign was viciously attacked with charges of atheism. He writes that Federalists asked the populace, "Could you put your faith in a man that did not put his faith in God? . . . Could you invest great

1. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 15.
2. Beneke, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism*, 168.
3. Ibid., 168-169.
4. Ibid., 196-197.

responsibility in a person so hostile to your own convictions? 'Thomas Jefferson differs from you'".[5] Fortunately for the Republicans of the day, Jefferson was able to pull through, but according to Beneke, "since then, countless political aspirants have been considerably less fortunate".[6]

The ostracism of the non-religious thrived in particular during the Cold War years of the 20th century. In their book, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Robert Putnam and David Campbell write that in 1952, 75% of Americans told Gallup[7] pollsters that "religion was 'very important' in their lives, an all-time record. ... It was so, in part, because in the era of the Cold War against 'atheistic communism,' religion represented patriotism, a central, unifying theme of national purpose".[8] This was the same time that "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance (1954) and "In God We Trust" was named the national motto by Congress (1956).[9] Arnaud Vincent, in his book *The Religious Rhetoric of U.S. Presidential Candidates: A Corpus Linguistics Approach to the Rhetorical God Gap*, applies a corpus linguistics method to the 1952-2008 Presidential Campaign Speeches corpus in order to analyze word relationships and frequency over time. Vincent found that during the years of 1952-1960, the pattern of usage of the words godless and atheistic was negligible among Democratic Party presidential candidates, but was frequent among Republican candidates, usually in connection with language against Communism.[10] Additionally, "Using the same multi-word query in the 1900-2008 National Party Platforms corpus (5 hits) confirms that the language around atheism is, to a very large extent, an early Cold War phenomenon directed against Communism and mostly produced by the Republican Party".[11]This "atheism gap" between the increasingly atheist-invoking GOP "and a statistically silent Democratic Party is an unexpected observation. The multi-word query athheis*/godless/nonbeliev*/non believ* in the 1952-2008 Presidential Campaign Speeches corpus shows that Democrats have not gone totally silent about

5. Beneke, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism*, 197.
6. Ibid.
7. Gallup is a management consulting company known for running polls and surveys around the globe (`https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx`).
8. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 87.
9. Ibid., 88.
10. Vincent, *The Religious Rhetoric of U.S. Presidential Candidates: A Corpus Linguistics Approach to the Rhetorical God Gap*, 22.
11. Ibid., 25.

atheism, although in the Democratic Party camp, the atheis* node has been used much later, and appears in the Obama file only".[12] This linguistics-based approach indicates that not only was overt anti-atheism common in politics as recently as the 1950s, it was actually revived and embellished such that the category of "atheist" took on not only the lack-of-morality stereotype propagated in the 1700s, but also was typecast as anti-patriotic. The specific co-optation of "godless Democrats" rhetoric by the Republican party will be elaborated on in Chapter 5.

The acceptance of atheists and non-religious people does appear to be on the rise. In the annual General Social Survey that began in 1972 and calculates the tolerance Americans have towards different demographics, researchers estimated that tolerance of atheists among the general population has increased from about 57% of those surveyed in 1972 to 70% in 2008.[14] Putnam and Campbell see this as a factor of the general trend towards greater religious acceptance across the U.S. populace. They write, "The high degree of religious acceptance within the United States is tied to Americans' high level of interreligious association, or 'bridging,' whereby most of us live by, are friends with, or are even married to people of other faiths. As Americans build bridges across religious divides in different domains of their lives, they become more likely to accept those with different beliefs".[15] However, atheists are still seen as fundamentally separate from the non-religious in the minds of the masses and identifying as an atheist still carries a large amount of stigma. This is because even though there are increasing numbers of "nones" (or religiously

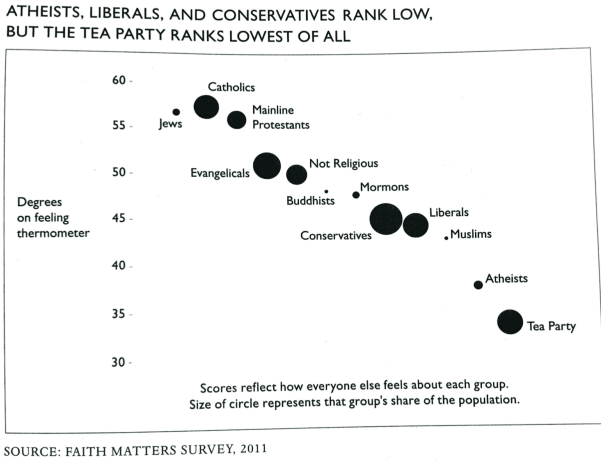



**Figure 3.1:** "Atheists, Liberals, and Conservatives rank low, but the Tea Party ranks lowest of all".[13]

12. Vincent, *The Religious Rhetoric of U.S. Presidential Candidates: A Corpus Linguistics Approach to the Rhetorical God Gap*, 24.
13. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 571
14. Ibid., 481.
15. Ibid., 495.

unaffiliated), "vanishingly few Americans identify themselves as 'atheists' or 'agnostic.'" In the 2006 Faith Matters survey, 47% of those identifying as "nones" said they were still "absolutely sure" of God's existence.[16] Found in *American Grace* and based on the 2011 Faith Matters survey, Figure 3.1 shows how people feel about political and religious affiliations. While the Tea Party is ranked the lowest, Atheists are not far behind and are considerably lower than the Non-religious. They are also lower than all religious groups. Going back to Putnam and Campbell's hypothesis that it is inter-religious and non-religious contact that builds acceptance, they explain that "while very few of our respondents will know someone who is an avowed atheist, odds are high that many (probably most) will have friends, neighbors, and family who are simply not religious",[17] thus explaining why non-religious folk are gaining acceptance while atheists are not. Additionally, since atheists are not seen as an oppressed demographic on par with other oppressed groups in the United States, it is seen as acceptable to be openly hostile to them. Maxine Najle and Will Gervais write in their chapter on "Nonreligious People in Religious Societies" in *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*:

> Though the general climate of modern social graces calls for political correctness and blatant and overt prejudices are seen as socially unacceptable, atheists are one of the few groups that it is generally considered acceptable to dislike. Atheists still score very unfavorably in public opinion polls, where historically disliked groups such as African Americans and homosexuals have gained considerable footing. For instance, people are much more willing to say they would not vote for a presidential candidate who, all else held constant, was an atheist than they are to say the same about a black, Muslim, gay, or Mormon candidate.[18]

However, acceptance of atheists is different by generation, most likely because younger people are more likely to know an atheist. Putnam and Campbell write, "bias against the concept of 'atheist,' as represented by the discrepancy between the ratings for 'nonreligious people' and for 'atheists,' is much reduced among the younger cohorts, even those who themselves remain believers".[19] Their conclusion thus holds again for atheists that "interreligious contact can lead to a redefined social boundary".[20] The legacy of this gradual change in acceptance of atheists and non-religious peoples

16. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 104.
17. Ibid., 506.
18. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 595.
19. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 564.
20. Ibid., 542.

can be seen in the changing understanding of the relationship between religion and patriotism. The 2006 Faith Matters survey determined that now "eighty-seven percent of Americans agree that people 'without a religious faith' can be 'good Americans.' So, in spite of Americans' own high degree of religiosity and the enduring legacy of America's civil religion, the nonreligious are welcomed as full members of the national community".[21]

It is with this context that we begin to interrogate the methods by which the secular caucuses in this study aim to increase positive visibility and recognition for both the non-religious and atheist demographic. The first three sections will look at specific policy proposals and initiatives that the movement is spearheading to increase access to political power for the non-theists. The last section will begin the process of problematizing the idea of the non-religious as "one of the last taboos in American society." Specifically, it will look at the ways that the movement relates itself to other oppressed groups and employs similar strategies to gain access to political power.

### 3.1.2 The "Morality" of Secularism

Representative Jared Huffman was the second member of Congress in known history to publicly declare that his morality was not God-based.[22] While the number of congressmen and women who have refused to offer a "description of their faith identity" has ranged from five to ten since the 1950s, Huffman is the first to openly declare that he is a humanist and agnostic. He decided to publicly announce his affiliation after becoming "alarmed" at the extent of the religious rhetoric under the Trump Administration.[23] In his interview, he explained that one of the reasons he chose this moment in his political career to come forward was "the continuous assault on our secular government ... by Republicans in Congress generally trying to drag evangelical Christianity or very conservative types of Christianity into our public policy and into our public discourse." Especially troubling was what he called the attempt by President Donald Trump to "weaponize religion."

21. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 541.

22. Former U.S. Representative Pete Stark, also of Northern California, was the first to "come out" as an atheist in 2007 (Schreck, "Congressman says he doesn't believe in God"). Current U.S. Representative Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) became the first member to identify as "unaffiliated" in 2013 (Boorstein, "This lawmaker isn't sure that God exists. Now, he's finally decided to tell people.").

23. Ibid.

Referencing the popular television show based on Margaret Atwood's book *The Handmaid's Tale* that depicts a post-apocalyptic world based on an extreme interpretation of the Bible, Huffman said, "You don't have to watch The Handmaid's Tale to have reason to worry that they are trying to drag us into a theocracy, and I'm passionately against that." Thus by choosing to come forward about his religious non-affiliation at this political moment in particular, Huffman's announcement was both a political statement and a protest against the Christian Right.

However, Huffman's decision to announce his humanist morality framework also came from a desire to tell his constituents about where he derives his values. Huffman explained:

> I think my constituents and most voters don't expect that their members of Congress will necessarily share their religious view, but they do want to understand the moral framework of the people they elect. And I think it is fair to ask about that. Where does it come from? What do you believe? What are your values? And often religion stands as a proxy for that. People say, well, I'm a Presbyterian, I'm a Catholic, whatever. In my case, it gets a little harder to explain to folks. But that coming out in that article in *The Washington Post* gave me a chance to do it, to explain that while I don't believe in a God, per say, I believe in all of these humanist values. Quite frankly, I think it's a really robust moral framework. And it's important that people understand that the lack of religion does not mean a lack of morality.

By approaching his identity-announcement as a value discussion rather than a theistic (or non-theistic) one, Huffman appears to be shaping the discourse around the non-religious to reformulate public perception of the new movement as the production of a new morality framework rather than as the absence (or the removal) of a traditionally-accepted one. The presumption of an absence of moral framework is what many scholars see as the biggest impediment to atheist acceptance by society as a whole. Najle and Gervais write that "the driving force behind anti-atheist sentiments ultimately seems to stem from a sense of distrust of those who do not believe in some form of a higher power".[24] Similarly, Chris Beneke argues that many believe the non-religious "could not ever constitute a legitimate religious society because they 'cannot agree on fundamentals'".[25] Thus, "religion is seen as a guarantor of civil culture and social morality",[26] which is critical for a politician.

24. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 595.
25. Beneke, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism*, 169.
26. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 81.

While Joseph Couch said in his interview that he does not tend to like "value discussions," he understands the benefit of specifying in the Nebraska Secular Democrat's mission statement the focus on "secular values" because it "makes sure that that's something that we talk about." The inclusion of ethics in the caucus platform creates a space for Couch and others to protest the entwining of religion and morality, and a platform on which to share the new ways that they have developed their alternative value systems. This reformulation of the discussion around the non-religious to include a focus on their morality framework also helps to destigmatize atheists and make them more understandable to the religious populace. Margot Thomas, chair of the Arizona Secular Democrats, explained that her decision to join the secular organizing movement came not only from being an openly-identified atheist, but also because she would "see polls that say people view atheists as heathens below pedophiles or ... [that] we're horrible, horrible people." Returning to Putnam and Campbell's conclusion that "bridging" or exposure to those of different religious views increases tolerance for that viewpoint, by coming forward as non-religious or atheist, Thomas, Huffman, and Couch help to normalize that identity. Representative Jamie Raskin said, "I think it's sent certainly a powerful message to the tens of millions of people in the country who don't want to be governed by other people's religious systems. ... What a caucus does is elevate a certain perspective and then create a sense of pride and purpose in the members who identify with the organizing principle. So, you are just giving moral and political force to the freethinkers." Just by nature of their existence and the members' insistence that their lack of a theistic moral framework does not mean they lack a moral framework entirely, the secular caucuses have begun discursively altering the public's perception of the non-religious.

### 3.1.3 Defining a New Demographic

While exploring partisan religious and secular rhetoric in his book, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, Ryan Claassen concludes that, in general, most researchers "emphasize the Secular bloc as the key Democratic constituency".[28]

27. KimS, "DemDaily: Recognizing Non-Religious Voters"
28. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 28.

However, while Claassen's book was published in 2015, it was not until 2019 that the Democratic National Committee (DNC) Resolutions Committee voted to recognize the "non-religious" as an official constituency for the party. With 17% of the Democratic Party electorate, the demographic is now the "largest religious group" within the party.[29] This recognition is directly the result of politicking by the Secular Coalition of America (SCA) and the Nebraska Secular Democrats.

Sarah Levin was one of the foremost leaders of the work to pass the DNC resolution. When she was looking for someone within Democratic Party leadership to sponsor the resolution to "explicitly welcome the religiously unaffiliated into the Democratic Party", she found unexpected support from a leader of the Nebraska Democratic Party who, while not themself an atheist, was well-versed in the issues behind the secular caucus movement due to participating in talks the previous year about establishing the Nebraska Secular Democrats. Since the Nebraska Democratic Party requires party leaders to deliberate and vote on whether a caucus can be established, the leadership was already well-versed on the agenda of its secular caucus and was prepared to assist Levin in her resolution without additional deliberation. The DNC member in Nebraska then went on to recruit other co-sponsors and push through the resolution within the year. Levin explained, "The Nebraska caucus and its existence are an example, a great example, of how far we can go with these caucuses.

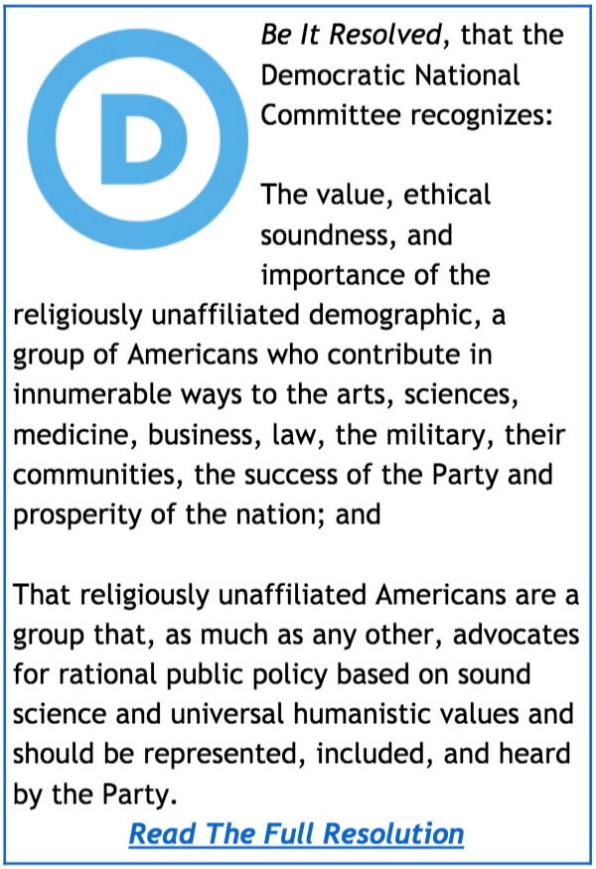



**Figure 3.2:** Statement from the DNC Resolutions Committee recognizing the inclusion of the nonreligious demographic in the party.[27]

29. KimS, "DemDaily: Recognizing Non-Religious Voters."

... That's only after less than a year as a secular caucus. That's influence."

Joseph Couch, the chair of the Nebraska Secular Democrats, was "immensely proud" of the work his caucus did, and saw this resolution as a first step towards greater acknowledgement of the secular voting bloc. Another tangible step that Couch sees emerging in the near future is the hiring of "atheist outreach directors" for campaigns. He explained in his interview that in October, 2019, an atheist organizer in Iowa asked Senator Elizabeth Warren at one of her 2020 Presidential Campaign rallies whether she would consider hiring an atheist outreach director for her campaign to supplement her interfaith outreach directors.[30] According to Couch, Warren said that was an incredibly interesting idea and put the man in touch with one of her staff members for future conversations. The prospect of this is incredibly exciting since, Couch said, "They've only courted religious voters. Never the atheist block. We've never had politicians interested in trying to get our vote."

Levin hopes that eventually the Democratic and Libertarian Party (the two parties with secular caucuses) will not be the only ones to acknowledge that "they have left votes on the table" and eventually all major parties will be reaching out to the non-religious constituency. First, however, the secular caucuses have to work on inspiring the non-religious themselves to become active in politics: "the purpose is to mobilize religiously unaffiliated voters, facilitate effective grassroots coalitions between secular and progressive interfaith leaders, and build the infrastructure for secularists to be influential within their political party" as well as "ensure that non-theists [have] a lobbyist and political voice." From there, the logical next step is not only to give the non-religious a voice in politics through organizations but also from the inside – by electing non-religious candidates and secular allies to office.

### 3.1.4 Electing Non-Religious Candidates

Unlike the other secular caucuses that were founded with encouragement and assistance from the SCA, Joseph Couch founded the Nebraska Secular Democrats by his own volition. He said he was

30. Mehta, "Elizabeth Warren Says She'll Consider Hiring a 'Secular Outreach Director'."

inspired to found the group "because I looked at ... polling data and realized that there was this huge disparity in how many secular people there were in the United States versus how many secular elected officials. And that to me felt like either the symptom or the cause of some of the culture issues I see where atheists and secular folks are often demonized or seen as non-American." Thus while the short-term goal of the caucuses is to encourage legislators to court the atheist vote, the long-term goal is to elect atheists to office.

While the caucuses all have different mechanisms for increasing representation, the process essentially boils down to three key steps. The first, according to Ron Millar, is encouraging politicians already in elected office to publicly announce their non-theism. Through his work with the Freethought Equality Fund Political Action Committee, since 2016 he has seen a 900% increase in state legislators identifying with the non-religious community. He explained that in 2016, "we knew of five state legislators who identified with our community and now we have over 50. ... But since there are over 7,000 state and federal elected officials, we still have a lot of work to do to get parity with our proportion of the US population." Another huge milestone in this arena was the "overwhelmingly positive" response to Jared Huffman's public identification as humanist since "members of Congress congratulated him on his courage to make this announcement and wanted to be supportive" – which did not go unnoticed both by other politicians and by the general populace.

After getting politicians to be willing to openly identify as non-religious, the next step for the caucuses is to support them in their campaigns. While the Center for Freethought Equality currently endorses over 70 elected officials who identify with the atheist and humanist community,[31] the secular caucuses have also begun their own processes of endorsing candidates in their states. The Texas Democratic Secular Caucus currently endorses 12 candidates,[32] of which Gregory Alvord is one. In his race to represent District 14 in the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE), the caucus' endorsement came with the opportunity to attend one of their quarterly meetings and present to members about his platform. In the upcoming 2020 election cycle, Joseph Couch said that the Nebraska Secular Democrats also plan to endorse at least four candidates for office. However, these

31. "Secular Elected Officials."
32. Texas Democratic Secular Caucus, "Endorsements."

endorsements are still in the initial planning stages. Couch explained, "What we're working on right now in that respect is making sure that we have mechanisms for endorsing candidates in a fair way that respects the party as well as that our endorsement carries some weight, that we can either give candidates money [or] give them volunteers to knock doors and make calls." Sarah Levin agreed that this was the next step for all of the caucuses. According to her, the Texas caucus has just begun to fundraise in order to provide financial support to candidates. This monetary support is also critical to the goal of encouraging more politicians to come forward about their non-religious views. Levin explained:

> We have to build the institutions that play within the ecosystem of political influence. There is a misconception among some in our movement that just by virtue of increasing rapidly in numbers that that's somehow going to impact policy. But ... being a majority or having numbers means nothing in terms of influence. There are plenty of issues where the majority of Americans feel one way about a policy, but the policy is the opposite. And there are plenty of disenfranchised and marginalized constituencies that do not have as much influence as minorities that have just begun organizing themselves. ... We have to, as a community, provide a value-add in terms of what do you get for being openly non-religious besides being your authentic self. Because, you know, it might sound cynical, but the reality is that folks want to win. And if they see allying with our community as a political liability, then we need to do everything we can not just to change hearts and minds about why that shouldn't be, but also provide the infrastructure for them to win with volunteers, with financial support, with all the things that it takes to win elections.

Finally, once there is a contingent of non-religious folk in office, the caucuses aim to function as a forum for debate and solidification of perspectives. The CFC already serves this role for the non-religious and secular-affiliated members of Congress. Raskin spoke about the caucus as a "space for people to talk about their own moral and spiritual journeys" and Huffman said that a common topic of conversation was the members' "personal faith journeys." This forum also creates an arena where the non-religious can foster relationships with allies to their cause. Millar argued that although his primary focus is developing a space for the non-religious, in order to "make that space we need religious allies to defend our right to participate equally in society." Thus the third part of this plan relies on both interfaith and bi-partisan organizing.

### 3.1.5 Learning from Other Minority Groups

An interesting pattern that emerged out of the grounded theory approach to coding the interview material was how often Millar and Levin, in particular, related the secular and atheist movement to other minority movements – most commonly, the LGBTQ equality struggle. Millar said:

> When we look at what we want to build politically, we look at the LGBTQ community and the successes that they've had. I think they are a good model for what we're trying to do. ... They have been very successful in getting members of their community elected. They formed local, state, and national political groups to get members of their community engaged in the political arena. The Democratic Party recognizes them as an important constituency. Although there are only eight openly LGBTQ members of the House of Representatives, the Congressional LGBTQ Equality Caucus counts over 170 members of Congress in its membership. This is a successful model we would like to emulate.

The main way that LGBTQ caucus strategy is being utilized by the secular caucuses is through the idea that visibility of members of the constituency will help to normalize the demographic. By focusing on electing more non-religious people to office, Millar says that they are "just following a tradition that has helped many communities in the history of our country, most recently the LGBTQ community, ... [to] help people actually see the members of the stigmatized community as people." He told a similar thing to *The Washington Post* when he claimed that "we're only going to get rid of that stigma when more elected officials openly identify. ... It's similar to the LGBTQ community".[33] Similarly, Millar claimed that establishing the CFC was analogous to the establishment of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus since both serve to recognize on a national scale the existence of an oppressed demographic as a constituency.

By applying critical discourse analysis, it is also clear that the secular caucuses are doing more than just equating aspects of their cause with the LGBTQ caucus, they are also co-opting the rhetoric of queer organizers. Referring to religious or interfaith "allies" is extremely common, with Levin even making the direct connection between secular "allies" and LGBTQ allies, saying, "just like you don't have to be LGBTQ to join a Stonewall caucus or an LGBTQ caucus, ... there's a lot of people out there who care about the [non-religious] issues who are allies." Similarly, both *The*

33. Boorstein, "This lawmaker isn't sure that God exists. Now, he's finally decided to tell people."

*Washington Post* and Huffman referred to a public statement announcing non-religiosity as "coming out".[34]

However, while there is a great deal of parity between these two movements, the secular caucus' characterization of the LGBTQ struggle is a massive simplification. In particular, Millar and Levin only appear to recognize the portion of the queer liberation movement that focuses on the narrative that "we are just like you." While this strategy has been employed in particular in recent years to achieve successes such as legalization of same-sex marriage, the history of the LGBTQ movement has also included another strain of organizing that can be simplified to: "we are not like you, but that does not mean our ways should not be accepted." This strategy is much more radical than that acknowledged or espoused by the secular caucuses.[35] "Liberation" is not a word ever mentioned by these organizers, unlike almost all oppressed peoples movements.

What this indicates is that the secular caucus movement is not a liberation movement, and atheists are not an oppressed group. Rather, this is a movement to combat stigma. A third movement that helps to elucidate the difference between anti-oppression and anti-stigma political agendas is the issue of mental health. "Public Stigma" is the term given to what is harming people labeled as "mentally ill" who suffer the effects of prejudice or discrimination in response to stereotypes.[36] On the other hand, "Oppression refers to systemic processes and structures that inhibit the ability of members of less-powerful social groups to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings, preventing them from being more fully human".[37] While both stigma and oppression lead to discrimination, what distinguishes them is the "systematic processes" of that discrimination.[38] Anti-atheist sentiment falls far short of oppression, lacking the "institutional" and "systematic" characteristics that are required to satisfy the basic criteria of oppression. This does not discount the suffering of members of the non-religious demographic – there is still a large

34. Boorstein, "This lawmaker isn't sure that God exists. Now, he's finally decided to tell people."

35. Conrad, *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion*.

36. Corrigan, Larson, and Kuwabara, "Social psychology of the stigma of mental illness: Public and self-stigma models."

37. Holley, Stromwall, and Bashor, "Reconceptualizing Stigma: Toward a Critical Anti-Oppression Paradigm," 53.

38. There have been recent efforts to classify the discrimination of the mentally ill as "oppressed" rather than "stigmatized" ibid., but these arguments rest primarily on the legal barriers in place for mental health patients (hence the shift to usage of the term "ableism").

amount of cultural stigma that these caucuses are influential in combating. However, by co-opting the oppression narrative, the secular caucus movement is simplifying and minimizing the prior and ongoing struggles of oppressed peoples across the country.

## 3.2 Separation of Church, State, & Reasoning

Along with promoting visibility and acceptance of atheists and non-religious folk, the secular and freethought caucuses aim to promote policies based on "rational thinking" while removing policies clouded with religious ideology. This section explores how the members of these organizations categorize legislation into reason-based versus religiously-affiliated policies.

### 3.2.1 Background

Scholarly discourse around political secularism and the separation of church and state makes the claim that there is really no way to fully separate the two. As Jacques Berlinerblau writes in his essay on "Political Secularism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, "Political secularisms have rarely conceptualized the state's relation to religion(s) accurately. ... 'Separation,' though, is a misnomer. The statist quality of secular thought always implies an asymmetric relation of power. It is more accurate to speak of 'separation of the subordinate church and the superordinate state'".[39] Within the United States, Jonathan Fox argues that there are three distinct forms of political secularism in regards to separationism. He writes:

> Strict separationists argue that public policy should be decided on a secular basis and that religion should not be a standard by which a state is judged. ... Pluralist separationists accept that "religion may influence issues of civic government" but maintains an aversion to "a religiously generated cultural mandate employing the offices of government to achieve religious ends." Finally, institutional separatists permit religious moral traditions to influence political discussion and policy but oppose state support for religion and the use of government instruments to advantage a particular religion.[40]

As discussed in Chapter 2, the secular caucuses in this study tend to take on a more "accommoda-

39. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 94.
40. Ibid., 106.

tionist" rather than "separationist" approach to organizing – hence their willingness to work with allies on interfaith initiatives. However, when it comes to policy-making, the caucuses are strictly separationist. The Supreme Court has interpreted the establishment clause of the constitution to mean: "a law must (i) have a secular purpose, not a religious one, (ii) not have the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religious practice, and (iii) not give rise to 'excessive entanglement' of government and religion".[41] This third point was established in 1971, when the Supreme Court "ruled against the state funding of Catholic schools".[42] In the 1990s, the Court developed what was called "a test of 'coercion'" which functioned "as a way of determining whether the establishment clause was engaged, ruling unconstitutional anything that tended to force people into religious practice against their will".[43] However, there is still insufficient legal precedent to determine whether religious motivation when writing legislation can be seen as violating separation of church and state. The courts have tended to rule against religious motivations as grounds for breaking laws that apply to everyone else. In the Supreme Court case Reynolds v. United States (1879) when Mormons claimed that they should be allowed to practice polygamy, the Court ruled against them claiming that "although the clause protected beliefs, it did not extend to allowing all actions that might arise from those beliefs"[44] – in other words, religion was not an excuse for criminal indictment. A final important judicial test to note is what is called the "compelling interest" test. The Court mandated in the 1960s that "states wishing to apply laws that would even indirectly prevent free exercise needed to demonstrate a 'compelling interest' for doing so".[45] However, in the 1990s, the Court decided that "laws not intentionally directed at limiting free exercise but which did so only indirectly could now be upheld if the government had a 'rational basis for the laws.' Concern over this prompted Congress to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993, which attempted to reintroduce the 'compelling interest test'".[46]

While the tests of "coercion" and "compelling interest" are useful metrics, it is important to

41. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 31.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 31-32.
45. Ibid., 32.
46. Ibid.

note that secularists, and specifically the secular caucuses in this study, tend to take these tests one step further. Whereas "freedom to" is incredibly important to these groups (and specifically the "freedom to" be non-religious), when it comes to separation of church and state in decision making, "freedom from" is equally if not more important. Specifically, these organizers argue that "freedom from" should extend to freedom from religious justification for policies.

### 3.2.2 Rational Debate

The discussion about "rational debate" provides key insights into the ways that the organizers of the secular caucuses interact with their faith-driven peers. Roger Trigg writes in his essay on "Religious Freedom in a Secular Society," "Part of what is at stake here is an argument about the epistemological status of religion".[47] When Representative Raskin claims that "the only intellectual discipline we want to follow is logic, evidence, and humanity" and Millar says that "we are working to promote evidence-based policies," what both of them are saying is that religion and theology-oriented thinking are inherently irrational and thus do not have a place in politics. Copson writes, "The secular state actively supports and privileges certain values and interests over others: individualism, for example, and the idea of religion as something negative to be contained".[48] This boils down to questions about how religiously-oriented thinking aligns with modernity. Copson claims, "For the advocates of secularism, there is a long tradition of arguing that it is the only modern way to run a state – the only political system compatible with modernity, which will allow a society to benefit from modernity's advantages".[49] However, this idea promotes a particular conception of the relationship between religion and public versus private life. Copson writes, "The assumption that religion can be separated from other areas of life and made private is ... a Western imposition on the rest of the world. Critics of secularism ... argue it depends on an unshared view of politics. They say that the idea that there is a difference between public and private is a product of Western political thought".[50]

47. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 306.
48. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 85.
49. Ibid., 63.
50. Ibid., 84.

Talal Asad takes this perspective further by arguing that secularism as seen through the Western context produces an even stronger discriminatory system. He writes that "the secular as disenchantment is not to be seen simply as part of the move toward religious separation from political authority but as a vision of rational and therefore justified hierarchy".[51] Claiming that the resulting world of the secular is "rational" leads to the conclusion that it is immutable and judicious, thus beyond the point of critique. "Indeed," Asad writes, "as everyone involved in practical politics knows, the insistence on 'rational dialogue' and 'equal respect' is an important tactic of political power. Since time is of the essence for particular problems, the insistence on reasonable dialogue is a way of bypassing particular solutions".[52] Thus the claim to the rationality and neutrality of secular language is really an "attempt to neutralize challenges" by making the "claim that [the secular] is the *unique* carrier of reason".[53]

Of course, "secularism, even its most benign aspect in a democracy, can never achieve the neutrality to which [it] aspires".[54] Copson describes the perspective of secular critics, writing that they argue that secularism "implicitly favors non-religious ways of reasoning, living, and thinking over religious ones. Even worse, because of its Western origins, the non-religious ways it privileges are those of secularized Christianity – doubly incompatible with non-Christian religions".[55] According to Asad, not only is it not impartial nor "homogeneous," secularism is also "what reshapes, and what is therefore integral to, much contemporary religion".[56] Thus the dialogue invoking secular reasoning as the soul form of interlocution in policy is based on a fallacy that, through the secular caucuses, has been given the power to work discursively to discount all forms of religious ideology and make them gradually less coherent to the non-religious populace. Rather than establishing common ground by which the religious and non-religious can create policies that serve both equally, the distinction of the non-religious as the unique source of rationality promotes only greater bifurcation between the two populations.

51. Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*, 15.
52. Ibid., 45.
53. Ibid., 50, italics added.
54. Zuckerman and Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, 312.
55. Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom*, 83.
56. Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*, 150.

### 3.2.3 "Rationality" in Practice: Education & Scientific Reform

Despite these errors in their conceptions of the neutrality of rationality, the secular organizers tend to have a very clear definition of what irrationality means in practice: policies that are religiously motivated but lack scientific basis. To quote Levin, "secularism [is] the intersectionality conversation that hasn't become cool yet", and thus the organizers included policies under the umbrella of secular organizing that ranged from reproductive justice to conversion therapy to international relations (as discussed in Section 2.3). However, the two topics most often discussed in the context of requiring evidence-based or rational support are education reform and policies related to science.

Gregory Alvord, as a candidate for the Texas State Board of Education, had particularly strong views about when religion should or should not rear its head in the education space. He explained:

> I think it's perfectly all right to recognize the fact that the students in a particular classroom are different cultures and different religions and celebrate different festivals and events during the school year, and give all the students the opportunity to learn about that. I think that there's some good poetry in the Old Testament or in the Psalms that ought to be able to be studied as poetry. But there's also great poetry in the Bhagavad Gita. There's also great poetics in the writings of Black Elk. So just because it's a religious text shouldn't take it out of the realm of study of literature. It would be nearly impossible to do an art history class that didn't look at religious artifacts that were created – paintings and sculptures and build architectures around the world.

However, he drew the line at insertion of "right-wing religious philosophy" into the curriculum. For example, in Texas, according to Alvord, schools are required to teach creationism because "if we teach evolution, we must also teach creationism." He argued that this puts Texas students at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the country in terms of jobs in medical research since "if you don't understand at your core how evolution works and how DNA changes in order to accommodate to changes that it's exposed to, then you're not going to be a very good participant in this whole new research area of personalized medicine that is built specifically to match your DNA." This has economic impacts on both the individual students and on the Texas economy as a whole, since, as Alvord pointed out, "you will notice that there aren't an awful lot of health research companies that have come to Texas." Huffman also expressed his anger at the intrusion of religious institutions into public schools, saying, "When you see an administration that is so obviously trying to steer public

dollars to religious schools [or] ... the prayer in school guidance which is clearly another attempt to put a thumb on the scale for more religion in the public square, those are not close calls."

According to Alvord, Texas science classes are also not allowed to teach about climate change – the fault of which he locates in religious lobbying organizations. Millar lamented the religious infiltration into discussions of science that aim to discredit the work of climate experts. He explained, "The integrity of science is the most important issue facing our society and the world today. We have to stop arguing whether or not climate change is real and act on it before it is too late." While arguably a partisan more so than a religious issue, Huffman equates the two by arguing that the anti-climate change rhetoric is "a war on facts and science." Thus any perspective that goes against "facts" and "evidence" is a potential issue to be taken on by the secular caucuses.

Returning to the critique of the superiority of "secular rationality" in Section 3.2.2, I wish to make a clarification in light of the policy choices espoused by the caucuses. The criticism levied against secular rationality does not discount the validity of the proposed policy stances of the secular caucuses; most, if not all, of the charges of factlessness and irrationality imposed on the religious right's agenda are legitimate and substantive. The problem, however, is with the tangible effect of a discourse that denies credibility to *any* religious ideology – thus bulldozing in its wake not only dominant religious groups in the United States but also minority groups. By doing so, religions that are already on the margins and found to be incompatible with modernity are pushed into even greater realms of misunderstanding. Asad, in particular, uses as an example the banishment of political Islam from any semblance of utility in the age of modernity. He writes:

> According to many critics, political Islam has been unable to modernize their society or to provide viable alternatives to modernity. ... These critics are right in a sense but what they do not consider is whether, as promoters of 'secularity' and 'scientific knowledge' and 'progress,' they might not themselves be suffering from another failure: the failure to understand what human beings are capable and not capable of doing. The failure to understand the fatal consequences of how one acts, thinks, and feels in the world, the arrogance (hubris) in thinking one can act like a god.[57]

By discursively delegitimizing all religious viewpoints and systems of reasoning, not just the ones

57. Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*, 156.

that "coerce" or go beyond "compelling interest" when inserting themselves into politics, we risk losing alternate mechanisms of finding solutions to our modern problems. In her ethnographic study on charity and activism in Egypt, Amira Mittermaier concludes that "in secularist circles, religious possibilities for social justice are often dismissed by default".[58] While this is not necessarily the intention of the secular caucuses – several of the organizers talked about studying multiple religions in order to learn from them – the power of a discourse that rejects all forms of religious reasoning carries with it the potential to deprive religious minorities of the recognition of their validity.

58. Mittermaier, *Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times*, 41.

# Part II:

# Comparisons & Complexities

## How Political Secularism Changes by State & Party

# CHAPTER 4:

# STATE & FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC SECULAR CAUCUSES

We are now entering the section of this project that focuses on comparisons between the individual caucuses, and we will begin by looking specifically at the Democratic caucuses (or caucuses with predominantly Democratic membership) in Texas, Nebraska, Arizona, and the United States Congress. This section focuses primarily on how interviewees answered the questions related to how the caucuses adapted to the state or legislative body in which they operated. Since definitions of secularism and secular organizing are inherently tied to the conditions within which the secularism operates, one of the most interesting topics during interviews was why each state approaches their secular organizing differently.

It may seem surprising that a movement that started in 2016 and has representation in Congress only has caucuses in three states. This is primarily due to the complexity of state procedures for caucus formation rather than on support within the state for secular policies. Sarah Levin explained that "in every state, how you form a caucus is completely different. In Texas, it was exceedingly easy. For other states, there's all kinds of rules ... [or] an unofficial process. Texas was a lot more informal, but in Nebraska there had to be ... deliberations among the Nebraska Democratic Party about why the Secular Caucus should exist." Levin explained that in states like Virginia where there are numerous rules for establishing a caucus, the hurdles to start one have made the process much

longer: “I have a group of people who are ready to start a secular caucus in Virginia, more people than I had in Texas, but they still don’t have one because the amount of rules is so cumbersome.” Meanwhile, the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) has stopped pursing a secular caucus in California because, according to Levin, the California Democratic party has a “moratorium” on new caucuses because “they have too many.” However, Levin maintained that “it’s not like we can’t do work in California, it just can’t be through a caucus, it has to be some other method of engaging with the party.”

Moving forward, Levin and the folks at SCA plan to take a more off-handed approach when guiding states interested in founding secular caucuses, such that the organizers who know better the rules for forming caucuses in their state can navigate those complicated processes themselves. Levin explained, “I hope we develop more resources for them down the road so that if you’re in Pennsylvania [and] you want to start a secular caucus, you have the by-laws ready to go. You have planks and resolutions ready to go. ... You have the playbook because Texas already did it, Nebraska already did it, and Arizona already did it.”

However, right now, while there has been some between-group collaboration, most of the caucuses have been organizing in isolation from one another. Thus, thinking about what types of policies these groups choose to prioritize is a window into how secularism functions in different state contexts. Levin emphasized, “The same message that we brought to galvanize folks to start the caucuses is the same, ... but I’ve always, always made clear, if you’re going to address issues, address something that either galvanizes your members, like what are your members excited about, or what’s relevant to your state.” So while many of the goals of these groups are the same, the unique choices the organizers make on what to focalize on is the purpose of this chapter.

For background on the states in this study, I rely on information from the 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study run by the Pew Research Center. This study is based on telephone interviews with more than 35,000 Americans from all 50 states. The researchers map the relationships between religious views and other social and demographic factors including political party, race, ethnicity, and gender. Since the data is split up by state, this study is useful for locating the statements made

**Table 4.1:** "Sources of guidance on right and wrong among democrats and Democratic leaners by state", according to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study. Table including all states can be found in Appendix 8.3, Table 8.1.[2]

| State | Religion | Philosophy/reason | Common sense | Science | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arizona | 21% | 12% | 48% | 17% | 2% |
| Nebraska | 28% | 18% | 44% | 10% | <1% |
| Texas | 33% | 12% | 42% | 11% | 2% |
| Utah | 16% | 10% | 62% | 13% | <1% |

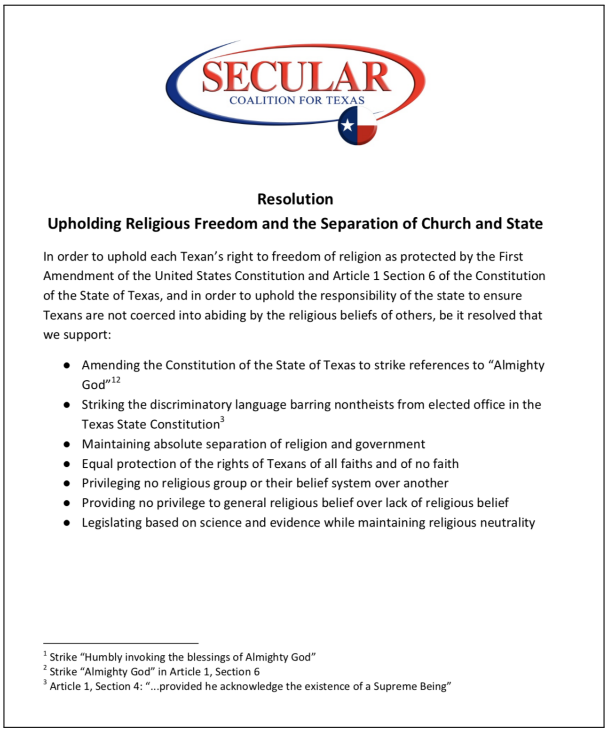
by the organizers I interviewed within a quantitative context.[1]

## 4.1 TEXAS

22% of the Democratic population in Texas told the 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study that they identified as part of the "nones" category. Of this group, only 2% identified as atheist and 4% as agnostic. Among those that said "Nothing in particular" (15%), the results were split equally between people who said religion was still an important factor in their lives versus those who answered that religion was not important to them (8% each). Thus belief in God is still very predominant throughout the Texas Democratic party: 84% of Texas Democrats answered that they are "absolutely" or "fairly" certain that God exists and 81% say that religion is "very" or "somewhat" important in their lives.[3] When looking at where Democrats and democratic leaners derive their sources of guidance on right and wrong, the emphasis on religion was also extremely prominent. As shown in Table 4.1, Texas' Democratic party ranked highest out of all states with secular caucuses for the percentage of their constituents who used religion to determine "right and wrong".[4] Another relevant statistic is that only 48% of "unaffiliated" people in Texas are Democrats (26% are Republican and 27% are "no lean" or independent). 40% consider themselves

1. "About the Religious Landscape Study."
2. "Sources of guidance on right and wrong among democrats and Democratic leaners by state"
3. "Religious composition of democrats and Democratic leaners who are in Texas."
4. "Sources of guidance on right and wrong among democrats and Democratic leaners by state."

to be "moderate" politically, rising above 21% identifying as "conservative" and 32% identifying as "liberal".[5]


SECULAR
COALITION FOR TEXAS

**Resolution**

**Upholding Religious Freedom and the Separation of Church and State**

In order to uphold each Texan's right to freedom of religion as protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article 1 Section 6 of the Constitution of the State of Texas, and in order to uphold the responsibility of the state to ensure Texans are not coerced into abiding by the religious beliefs of others, be it resolved that we support:

- Amending the Constitution of the State of Texas to strike references to "Almighty God"[1][2]
- Striking the discriminatory language barring nontheists from elected office in the Texas State Constitution[3]
- Maintaining absolute separation of religion and government
- Equal protection of the rights of Texans of all faiths and of no faith
- Privileging no religious group or their belief system over another
- Providing no privilege to general religious belief over lack of religious belief
- Legislating based on science and evidence while maintaining religious neutrality

[1] Strike "Humbly invoking the blessings of Almighty God"
[2] Strike "Almighty God" in Article 1, Section 6
[3] Article 1, Section 4: "...provided he acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being"

**Figure 4.1:** An original copy of a Texas Democratic Secular Caucus resolution proposed at the 2016 Texas Democratic Convention.[6]

The Texas Democratic Secular Caucus was founded at the 2016 Texas Democratic Convention with assistance from Sarah Levin and her co-workers at the SCA. Levin explained that her group went in with a two-part strategy: "One was to get a secular caucus on the schedule at the convention, and two was to make what they call planks that ... were very specific to Texas – or they [were] issues that are broader, but we made them specific to Texas by citing statutes." An example of one of the original resolutions for the caucus can be found in Figure 4.1. In order to relate the issues to Texas, the resolutions included references to specific Texas legislation, such as the "completely unconstitutional and unenforceable ... language in the state constitution that imposes a religious test for office." After the original caucus proposed the planks, a Senate district Democratic chapter approved three of them – moving them up for approval at the state level. Eventually, a version of all three became an official part of the Texas Democratic party platform.[7] The original caucus meeting itself was also a huge success with over 400 people in attendance. The following convention, the caucus voted in a leadership board, and in December, 2019, they held their first fundraiser in order to begin endorsing candidates.

Levin discussed in her interview that the biggest impediment to people in Texas being openly

5. "Adults in Texas who are Unaffiliated (religious nones)."
6. Original copies of these planks were provided to me by Sarah Levin.
7. Mehta, "Texas Democrats Put Atheist Group's Proposals Into Party Platform."

supportive of non-religious viewpoints is the "social stigma." Gregory Alvord, an endorsed candidate of the caucus, told me, "Everybody's perception ... living in Texas is that there is no such thing as a secular activity. You'd be surprised how many people we come across when we're campaigning that say, 'Oh, there are Democrats?'" However, he sees what he calls the "old guard" as "eroding," in large part due to the high number of people moving to Texas from other states – providing an opening for secular and democratic organizing. Alvord said in his interview, "Nobody, including the secular activists, LGBTQ activists, climate change activists, all of them are under the same big tent of the Democratic Party, none of them will get their way until there are more rational and open to discussion people in power. ... It used to be that you could find a rational person on either side of the aisle. But that's not true today." Thus, the most important goal for the secular caucus in Texas for Alvord is to get more Democrats in the Texas House and Senate so that they can address the foundational issues such as gerrymandering and "money in politics" that he says are preventing Democrats from having a voice.

According to Levin, the Texas caucus has also had a recent win. While originally predominantly focused on removing the religious test for office requirement from the state constitution, after little success on that front the secular activists chose to switch to the issue of LGBTQ conversion therapy – the practice that attempts to change a person's sexual or gender identity through therapeutic means. While traditionally seen as only an LGBTQ issue, Levin insisted that this, too, was a secular caucus issue because it was largely rooted in religiously-backed rhetoric and reasoning. In November, 2019, the Texas caucus, in partnership with the LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Commission, "got the Austin City Council to pass a resolution that effectively prohibits the city of Austin from doing business in any way, shape or form with organizations that do conversion therapy to ensure there's no state funding going towards those kinds of services." The ban also halted the inclusion of conversion therapy in city of Austin employee benefits.[8]

8. Jones, "Austin City Council approves ban on city funds used to support LGBTQ conversion therapy."

## 4.2 NEBRASKA

Nebraska has a slightly higher percentage of Democrats who identify as religiously unaffiliated (28%) than Texas. However, a much higher percentage of those who say that their religion is "Nothing in particular" say that religion is also "unimportant" to them. Whereas in Texas the "nones" were split 50/50 on whether religion was still an important part of their lives despite being religiously unaffiliated, in Nebraska the unaffiliated were about 1.6 times more likely to say that religion was unimportant to them. While 79% of all Nebraskan Democrats or democratic leaners still said they were "absolutely" or "fairly" certain that God exists, only 69% said that religion was "very" or "somewhat" important in their lives – in comparison with 84% and 81% in Texas, respectively. Similarly, while only 1% of Nebraskans identify as atheist, 6% identify as agnostic (in contrast to Texas which is 2% atheist and 4% agnostic).[9] In general, the Religious Landscape study indicates that apathy towards religion and religious practices is more common in Nebraska than Texas, even if belief in a God or God-concept is still strong.

Joseph Couch remarked on this phenomena when talking about his experience founding the Nebraska Secular Democrats. He said that "partisan politics really can be divisive, even more so than religion in some cases." He even declared that "in some places, the word Democrat carries a worse connotation than the word secular or even the word atheist." This may be, in part, due to representation of secular voters in politics. Nebraska State Senator Ernie Chambers is the longest-serving state senator in Nebraska state history, and is also an avowed atheist. His work to end state-supported chaplain legislative prayers took him all the way to the Supreme Court.[10] In 2006, he famously "sued God" just to "make a statement," and has also introduced legislation to remove tax exemptions for churches and led the fight to repeal Nebraska's death penalty.[11] Chambers is thus considered a "hero of the secular movement".[12] Since secularism is of higher esteem in Nebraska

9. "Religious composition of democrats and Democratic leaners who are in Nebraska."
10. Marsh v. Chambers (1983)
11. While his efforts were successful, a later poll of the Nebraska populace reinstated the penalty (Mehta, "Ernie Chambers, Openly Atheist Nebraska State Senator, Wins Re-Election Yet Again")
12. Ibid.

than the Democratic Party, the caucus originally considered the name Secular Nebraska in order to remove the potential stigma of "Democrat." However, due to reasons that will be elaborated on in the following chapter, they decided to stick with Nebraska Secular Democrats.

The major successes of the Nebraska caucus thus far have been on the national level rather than the state level, such as leading the effort for the religiously unaffiliated to become an official demographic designation at the Democratic National Convention, as discussed in Section 3.1.3. Levin said that she sees the Nebraska Caucus as the caucus that is best set up to reach the level that Texas is at right now: endorsing and fundraising for candidates. Couch said in his interview that this is what the caucus is currently working on accomplishing for the 2020 election cycle, and thus far three candidates (one of whom is Couch, himself) have been officially endorsed or have participated in one of the caucus events, according to the Nebraska Secular Democrats Facebook page[13].

## 4.3 Arizona

Arizona is by far the state in this study with the most religiously unaffiliated people in its Democratic party.[14] 37% of Arizona Democrats and democratic leaners identify as unaffiliated, with 6% and 8% declaring themselves atheists and agnostics, respectively. Among the unaffiliated, half as many respondents said that religion was still important in their lives compared to those that said religion was unimportant to them. Belief in God, by the same metrics as for other states, was found to be at 66% and only 63% of Democrats said religion was "very" or "somewhat" important in their lives.[15] The religiously unaffiliated in Arizona also lean more Democrat than in other states, with 54% of the unaffiliated marking themselves as Democrats, 25% as Republican, and 21% as "no lean" or

13. https://www.facebook.com/secularNEdems/

14. This statement excludes Utah which does have higher percentages of unaffiliated people ("Religious composition of democrats and Democratic leaners who are in Utah") and is the least reliant on religious reasoning ("Sources of guidance on right and wrong among democrats and Democratic leaners by state"). While a secular caucus was approved in Utah in December, 2016 (Haley, "New Utah Caucus Aims to Advance Secularism in Politics") which initially received support from many high-profile people in Utah (Mehta, "Utah Democratic Party Approves Formation of Secular Caucus"), according to their founder, Daisy Thomas, the organization was unable to gain traction and has since become inactive. I was unfortunately not able to schedule an interview with Thomas before I had to end interviews to begin analysis, although we were in communication.

15. "Religious composition of democrats and Democratic leaners who are in Arizona."

Independent.[16]

These statistics are tangibly seen in the already predominant representation of the non-religious in politics in Arizona. One of the most outspoken is atheist and state senator Juan Mendez. According to an article by Hemant Mehta, Mendez is one of the highest ranking openly-atheist politicians in the country, tied with Nebraska State Senator Ernie Chambers. From 2012-2016, he was a State representative, and delivered a "Godless invocation" based on his secular humanist viewpoints to the Republican-controlled Ariona House, where he is quoted as saying, "Let us root our policy-making process in these values that are relevant to all Arizonans regardless of religious belief or non-belief. In gratitude and in love, in reason and in compassion, let us work together for a better Arizona".[17]

Margot Thomas, chair of the Arizona Secular Caucus, said supporting the very vocal state-level secular politicians is currently the main focus of the caucus. During her interview, she discussed the possibility of a "letter-writing campaign" or other ways to express thanks to the politicians who are fighting religious policy groups. However, in general the Arizona caucus – while not the newest of the caucuses – is definitely behind its associates when it comes to planning and organizing. Thomas explained, "It's kind of been hard to figure out how to get movement, like trying to define within that sphere what kind of activities to do. I haven't organized something like this before. ... So, right now it's just a lot of ideas. And right now, it's just me." Of all of the groups in this study, the Arizona caucus seems most primed for (and most in need of) cross-caucus collaboration.

## 4.4 Congressional Freethought Caucus

The formation of the CFC stemmed from Representative Jared Huffman's announcement professing his humanist and agnostic identification in *The Washington Post* (as discussed in Section 3.1.2). According to Ron Millar, prior to Huffman's announcement, he had sat down for dinner with Roy Speckhardt, the executive director of the American Humanist Association. At the time, the

16. "Adults in Arizona who are Unaffiliated (religious nones)."
17. Mehta, "An Atheist Member of the Arizona House of Representatives Delivered a Godless Invocation Today."

formation of a secular caucus was floated, but Millar had been unsure whether there would be enough interest from other members of Congress. However, after the release of *The Washington Post* article, Millar said, "Because of the positive feedback [Huffman] got, we were able to have a meeting in his townhouse with several members of Congress who were interested in discussing what it means to be a non-theist, how to support the atheist and humanist community, and how to promote a secular policy agenda. During that meeting the members of Congress decided to form the caucus."

The distinguishing feature of the CFC is the national stage on which it operates – it is led by prominent politicians from across the United States. Representative Jamie Raskin said, "I think it's sent certainly a powerful message to the tens of millions of people in the country who don't want to be governed by other people's religious systems." Having secular organizing and non-religious viewpoints represented in the U.S. Congress is revolutionary, according to these representatives. Huffman explained:

> It's mainly the fact that we're here in the United States Congress where even broaching some of these subjects, much less associating yourself with something that is this directly committed to protecting our secular government, used to be third rails. And so some of it goes against conventional wisdom politically at the national level. But I think we're gradually disproving a lot of that. And that's one of our main contributions. This is a fledgling caucus. We, as I said, are just getting started. We don't have a lot of huge victories to brag about at this point. But the fact that we are up and running, that we have a growing number of members, that we're beginning to engage in ways that I think can provide impact over time, is really the story here.

For those participating in secular organizing outside of Congress, having a group of representatives to contact about secular issues is critical. Levin talked about how in February, 2020, leaders for SCA were able to attend one of the CFC's legislative planning meetings and talk with five members of the CFC and their staff "to discuss the future of the caucus and primarily their legislative priorities for the year." Levin, who I interviewed just one week after this meeting, was ecstatic about the opportunity to be in such close contact with representatives. She said, "We have now come to the point where we have a caucus that we can go to, that is very much engaged and interested in what our community's priorities are. And we have direct access to them." Levin sees collaboration

between the CFC, the SCA, and the state secular caucuses as “the cusp of what is to come.”

## 4.5 Cross-Caucus Collaboration

Thus far, collaboration between the caucuses has been minimal. According to Couch, some of the organizers have a Facebook group that they use to swap ideas: “Mostly just like bouncing ideas off of each other, [asking,] ‘What sort of events have guys been doing and have they been working and how do you keep your members engaged? What are some of your best practices for increasing membership?’” However, in general there seems to be a lot of space for future collaboration. Levin, in particular, wants to make starting new caucuses easier for organizers by using Texas as a model. Through providing plank templates and guidance on how to go about endorsing candidates and fundraising, caucuses that have small leadership boards or need more guidance, such as the Arizona caucus, have somewhere to turn.

While between-state collaboration is beneficial to the state caucuses due to its potential to provide organizational support, collaboration with the CFC is particularly exciting due to the caucus’ visibility. Policies promoted or statements made by the CFC will be seen as the goals of the American secularism movement as a whole, so further collaboration to make sure that objectives are aligned would be beneficial for everyone. Interestingly, none of the members of the CFC are from states with secular caucuses, so the state caucuses could also be useful mechanisms for recruiting CFC members, or CFC members could be influential in identifying potential organizers in their states to start new secular caucuses. Overall, cross-caucus collaboration as it currently stands seems to be inadequate, and thus represents an untapped resource for all of the secular organizations.

# CHAPTER 5:

# THE LIBERTARIAN SECULAR CAUCUS

While the majority of the secular caucus movement has been spearheaded by Democratic politicians and elected officials, liberals were not the only ones to take up the cause of political secularism. On July 2, 2018, the Libertarian Party (LP), with the assistance of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), became the first political party to establish a secular caucus at its National Convention. The organization was founded by outspoken atheist and then-State Representative Brandon Phinney of New Hampshire along with Elizabeth Van Horn (the Libertarian National Committee's Region 3 Representative) as Vice Chairman and Arthur Thomas (Executive Committee Member of the Texas Libertarian Party) as Secretary. Upon formation, Phinney announced that the purpose of the party would be to "promote the separation of church and state in government by offering practical policy solutions and protect against theocratic elements in government".[1]

The LP has a history of taking "secular" positions in politics, as well as appealing to the non-religious voter. In the 2016 presidential election, 5% of those who identified as a religious "none" voted for Libertarian Gary Johnson. Religious "nones" were also the religious and non-religious demographic group surveyed that had the highest percentage that supported Johnson.[2] Another survey done by the American Humanist Association of over 5,000 of their members found that their constituents, while predominately Clinton supporters, were more likely to vote for Johnson than

1. Brescia, "Nontheists Achieve Historic Visibility At Libertarian Convention."
2. "2016 Election exit polls."

Trump.[3]

In this chapter, I will focus on my interviews with Elizabeth Van Horn and Arthur Thomas – the founding Vice Chairman and Secretary of the Libertarian Secular Caucus, respectively. I will also incorporate material from the "Libertarian Secular Caucus" episode of the *Roads To Liberty* podcast's "Better Know a Caucus" series, in which the podcaster interviews Phinney about his perspectives on the importance of Libertarian secularism. I will begin looking at the definitions espoused and policies supported by members of the Libertarian Secular Caucus and will end by looking at the potential space for multi-partisan collaboration in secular organizing.

## 5.1 Definitions

As discussed in Chapter 3, the secular caucus movement has focused on initiatives that uphold the value of separation of church and state, in particular with regards to separation of church and reasoning. For most caucuses, this has meant avoiding legislation that derives from a particular religious ideology, and only writing legislation that targets a particular religious group when that populace is at risk of discrimination or harm. However, the LP secular caucus takes this definition a step further – making them the caucus that takes the most extreme areligious stance of all those included in this study.

Thomas was the most adamant of all those I interviewed about the importance of areligiosity in secularism. When asked what he meant by areligious, he responded:

> The problem is the First Amendment is "shall not establish," right? Well, what does that mean? That's vague. Some people take it to mean dictating, like putting into law, that "this is the religion." But establishment could also mean defining what's religious and what's not religious. And how would a government do that? How? We have no logical way to determine – or for a government to determine – if one God is real over another God or one belief system is better over another. So to me, logically, it would have to be blind to all of them and just be completely agnostic. ... The minute [the government] says, "Well, I'm not going to be blind to religious ideas," then it starts dictating what are valid and what are invalid religious ideas. And I know that pathway is one that I don't think we can go down without it essentially establishing a religion or religions that are valid in the country.

3. Miller, "Here's How Humanists Voted: Survey Results from the American Humanist Association."

For this reason, the LP secular caucus is also clear that their caucus is not a non-religious caucus or anti-religious caucus, nor is it made up of only non-religiously affiliated people. While all three leaders of the caucus do identify as non-religious, according to Van Horn there are "die-hard Christians", Muslims, and representatives of other religious affiliations in the membership of the caucus. This is also the reason why the caucus chose to use the word "secular" in their name rather than "freethought," "atheist," or other non-religious terms. Van Horn explains that while the religiously affiliated caucus members are "not going to say they're something when they're not, secular is a goal that they all agree with. ... The goal of secularism unites all of them because that is the separation of the government and religious groups."

This nomenclative choice that emphasizes the inclusion of both religious and non-religious individuals in the caucus parallels what we saw in Chapter 2 for other caucuses. However, what distinguishes the LP secular caucus from its companions in this space is from where it derives its definition. The Democratic caucuses primarily see secularism as part of the Democratic ideology only in a reactionary sense: they have recognized that there is an infringement by religious groups in politics especially coming from the Republican Party and feel it is their duty to counteract those movements. However, the Libertarians I interviewed, while concerned about the current state of religion in politics, talk about their definitions primarily in relation to the philosophy of libertarianism. Thomas explains, "Libertarianism is sort of inherently secular because we can agree to disagree, actually agree to disagree and walk away and it's okay." The "inherently secular" nature of the LP came up often in my interviews with Van Horn and Thomas, in contrast to Democrats I interviewed whose definitions did not derive from their political party.

Another priority in defining secularism for the LP caucus that was not discussed by Democratic caucus members was secularism as a form of "removal." Thomas insists that removing old legislation and policies, as well as gestures and language, that were originally derived from religious sources is a critical part of having a secular government. For Thomas, this is the only way to create a "government for everyone." Rather than defining their political secularism strategy in terms of writing non-religious or "rational" legislation, the LP caucus' political secularism strategy is defined

only by withdrawal of religious legislation.

## 5.2 POLICIES

Unlike the state caucuses and the CFC that have extremely active policy agendas aimed at improving the Democratic Party itself (such as by defining the non-religious as a constituency and raising money for non-religious candidates), the Libertarian Secular Caucus is not concerned with reforming the LP because its leadership believes that secularism is inherent to the definition of libertarianism itself. Thomas, Van Horn, and Phinney all emphasized in their interviews that the role of the LP secular caucus is not to make major changes in the platform of the LP – since they do not believe that their perspective on the importance of secularism differs from the party as a whole – but instead to ensure the continuity of current secular policies and positions. Rather than focusing on improving the LP's stance towards secularism or the non-religious, the LP caucus' policy goals are entirely focused on separation of church and state.

In their interviews, both Thomas and Van Horn insisted that secularism was an inherent part of the Libertarian cause. Van Horn says, "I can say this and I will say this without any doubt, just about everyone in the Libertarian Party thinks like this [that secularism is inherent to libertarianism]. ... You have some other people that are very religious and they all also believe in separation of church and state. This is the main type of libertarian thinking." Thus, when it comes to pushing particular legislation, Van Horn does not believe that it is necessary for the secular caucus to be the organization leading the lobbying for secular policy goals because the party as a whole is already on the forefront of the issues. Similarly, Phinney said in the "Libertarian Secular Caucus" podcast, "I didn't start this caucus because I thought there was a problem in the party that needed to be addressed. The whole point of the LP secular caucus was to say we're taking the platform of the Libertarian Party and presenting it to people outside of the party. ... The idea isn't to fix a problem in the party, the idea is to fix a problem in culture and in our government"[4] – that problem being the over-intrusion of religion into politics. As Van Horn concisely put it, no one in the caucus plans to

4. Roads To Liberty Podcasting Group, "Better Know A Caucus: The Libertarian Secular Caucus."

go out canvasing with a banner that reads "Libertarian Secular Party," since just saying they are Libertarians is enough to convey that secularism is one of their tenants.

While the Democratic Party is often considered to be the "secular party" when juxtaposed with the Republican Party,[5] what makes the LP unique according to Phinney is that supporters of secularism within libertarianism span both religious and non-religious demographics more so than in any other political party. He explains, "I don't think I know a single religious libertarian, even the very religious ones, who like the idea of religious law dictating everything because we know from history how terribly, terribly wrong something like that can be".[6] This is in contrast to the Democratic party whose religious constituents vary in their perspectives on the writing of theology-based legislation; while arriving at the same conclusions as their fellow non-religious party members, religious Democrats often attribute their liberal political ideas to theological underpinnings.[7] Thus, while secular Democratic organizations must include as part of their platform methods to move their own party in the direction of greater secularism, the Libertarian caucus will instead serve as a "watchdog" or "oversight monitoring" caucus[8].

Outside of the LP, the caucus plans to uphold secular views and secular values that are distinctly Libertarian by focusing on *removing* religious legislation, rather than on implementing secular legislation. On their Facebook page, the mission statement reads: "LP Secular Caucus fights against theocracy implemented through government legislation".[9] This emphasis on preventing legislation production is unique to this caucus. Van Horn explains, "Plenty of other people that might be humanist or atheist or agnostic or consider themselves secular, they don't mind having the government stick their nose into everything, if it's something they like. We don't want it doing it whether it's something we like or not. ... We don't play favorites." In her interview, she used the example of the American Christian populace as an example of people who are happy to have their views expressed in politics right now as they reign as the majority religion in the country, but

5. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*.
6. Roads To Liberty Podcasting Group, "Better Know A Caucus: The Libertarian Secular Caucus."
7. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 14.
8. Quoted from Van Horn and Thomas, respectively.
9. https://www.facebook.com/pg/LPSecularCaucus/about

would have "an absolute conniption fit" if another group took over dominance and tried to pass laws in their favor. For this reason, Libertarian secularism, according to Van Horn, should avoid legislation based on religious or non-religious ideas entirely. Phinney insists that, "We absolutely stand for religious freedom, but we don't stand for that religious freedom being promulgated by the government".[10] This stands in contrast to the Democratic caucuses that are focused on legislation as the mechanism for protecting religious and non-religious freedom and expression.

The most striking difference between the Libertarian and Democratic caucuses is actually something the Libertarians did not mention as part of their mission: visibility for non-religious people. Thus, this caucus is only focused on separation of church and state. Considering how critical the former tenet is to the other caucuses in this study, the LP secular caucus is unique in its complete disregard of a policy standpoint that is at least one of the two, if not *the* most important principle of the Democratic secular caucuses.

## 5.3 A Multi-Partisan Future for the Secular Caucuses

As was mentioned at the end of Chapter 4, plans are in the works for assuring that the secular caucuses can work together to achieve their mission of a more secular government, and these plans include the Libertarian Secular Caucus. Van Horn said in her interview, "I wouldn't mind seeing us work with some other secular caucuses in other political parties. That would be interesting, although we would probably end up disagreeing over plenty of things." One major point of contention between Libertarians and Democrats would be about the government's role in preventing religiously-oriented legislation. Sarah Levin explained:

> You may believe in separation of church and state as a Libertarian, but you don't believe that the government is the solution for most things. ... And so, they come out on the other side of a lot of issues. But, on the things that [they have] in common, Libertarians have a pro-choice platform and they don't want the government involved in your health care decisions. And so that's a really great issue to talk about because it's the first big separation thing and it also jibes with the Libertarian ethos of "the government shouldn't tell me what to do with my body." ... Democrats are much more amenable to the government providing the solution and regulating

10. Roads To Liberty Podcasting Group, "Better Know A Caucus: The Libertarian Secular Caucus."

> things than Libertarians. So, you might have a libertarian secularist and a democratic secularist who feel morally in agreement about the issue of say, you know, whether someone should be served if they're LGBTQ at a business or whether they should get vaccinated, for example. But they will have very different ideas about the government's role in that issue. And so, there's a lot of things that Libertarians would probably not be on board with that Democrats would, although they might agree on the social side effects.

Despite their differences, all organizers expressed a willingness for a future of multi-partisan secular organizing. Levin said explicitly, "I really do believe that secularism should be nonpartisan, although unfortunately, it's not." Representative Jamie Raskin of the CFC explained, "The problem is that the Republicans in the House are complete fraidy-cats about offending any of the Jerry Falwell people. ... Whereas none of us is afraid to work with people on the fundamentalist right-wing side, ... we're also not afraid to take them on when they're promoting ... agendas that are antithetical to the constitutional divide." This section will explore what multi-partisan secular organizing could look like by interrogating the "godless Democrats and pious Republicans" dichotomy and exploring what "secular conservatism" looks like in practice.

### 5.3.1 "Godless Democrats & Pious Republicans" Dichotomy

The "Godless Democrats" versus "Pious Republicans" dichotomy is a common trope spread by the Republican party in recent years that uses statistics about religious and secular demographics in the two parties to make claims about the atheistic nature of the Democratic Party. In Ryan Claasen's in depth study of this dynamic, he writes, "A major element of the 2012 U.S. presidential election involved allegations of a Democratic 'war on religion.' Most of the Republican candidates accused the Democrats of waging a war on religion at some point during the Republican Primary, and the eventual nominee, Mitt Romney, continued to use the 'war on religion' theme in the general election campaign." This phrase later became "enshrined" in the Republican Platform.[11] Meanwhile, on the left side of the aisle, the 2012 Democratic National Convention hosted a debate about whether the word "God" should remain in the party platform. Disturbed by the media coverage of this debate, Senator Dick Durban from Illinois told Fox news anchor Bret Baier, "'Those of us who believe

11. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 5.

in God and those of us who have dedicated our lives to helping others in the name of God don't want to take a second seat to anyone who is suggesting that one word out of the platform means the Democrats across America are Godless'".[12] While the word "God" was eventually restored to the platform, the "media frenzy" of this event contributed to the perpetuation of the idea of a "God Gap" between the two parties.[13]

However, Claassen denies the validity of the claim that Democrats are "captured" by secular activists, or that Republicans are "captured" by evangelical ones. He writes, "The rise of Evangelical activists on the right and the rise of Secular activists on the left may have more to do with those groups being fruitful and multiplying than with mobilization and culture wars".[15] As shown in Chapter 1, a large share of the increase in "nones" can be attributed to secular parents raising their children as non-religious, and Claassen argues that a similar trend can be found amongst evangelicals, claiming the growing secular and evangelical populations and their stark political divide is more due to population trends than other commonly accepted theories, such as the "Secular Backlash Theory" which argues that "the rise of Secular activists is a function of mobilization fueled by angst over the association of religion and conservative politics".[16]

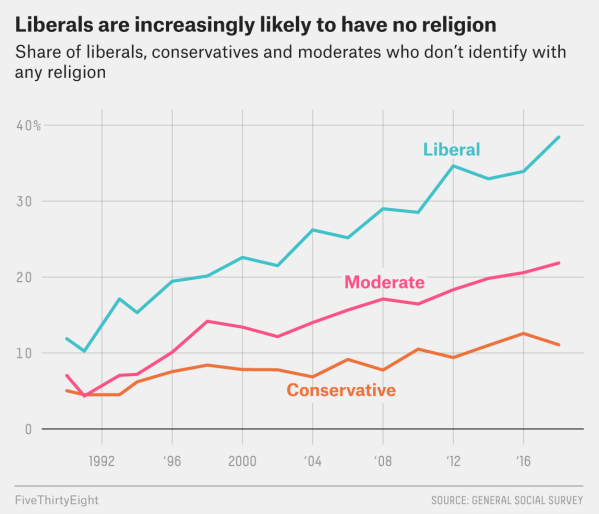



**Figure 5.1:** While most prominent among liberals, all political affiliations in the United States are becoming more secular.[14]

Additionally, Claassen determines in his research that the belief that religion is only tied to conservative politics is actually a fallacy. He writes, "Religion is not an unrelenting force for

12. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 5, quoting from the FoxNews Special Report with Bret Baier interview, 9/4/2012.
13. Ibid., 6.
14. Thomson-DeVeaux and Cox, "The Christian Right Is Helping Drive Liberals Away From Religion"
15. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 45.
16. Ibid., 3.

political conservatism as the God gap label implies. On the contrary, religion appears to help individuals make important connections between their political predispositions and the political world they inhabit".[17] The reason for statistical differences is due to "the near total absence of public opinion survey questions about religious beliefs that would enable religious liberals to answer in the affirmative. There are many survey questions about religious beliefs, but even the most devout political liberals appear irreligious because the questions fail to tap the theological underpinning of liberal political ideas".[18] Because of this, scholars end up dividing Americans into just two camps: "the Culture Warriors and the Secular Progressives. If one cares about opposing gay marriage, one is motivated by one's faith as a culture warrior. However, if one cares about the social safety net, one is motivated by Secular concerns. Never mind that Jesus spoke more about helping the poor than any other topic".[19]

Finally, Claassen uses results from the American National Election Study conducted from 1960 to 2008 to show that Evangelical representation among Republican activists "merely increased their representation [in the party] by a factor of 2.35 compared to a sevenfold increase among Secular [Republicans]," which concludes that the trend towards secularization is not just a Democratic trend. Similarly, while the percentage of Democratic activists, in particular, who are secular has increased by a factor of 11.5, most Democratic activists are not secular: "Fully 77 percent of Democratic activists fall into one of the major religious traditions".[20] The conclusion that can be drawn from Claassen's work is that Democrats do not have a monopoly on secular organizing, and that there is interest from within the party for Republicans to enter this domain – as well as an untapped population of potential activists through which Republicans can begin efforts.

### 5.3.2 What is a Secular Conservative?

The relationship between liberalism and secularism has not always been as strong in the eye of the public as it is today. In his book on atheism, John Gray notes that "modern liberalism is a late flower

17. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans? Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap"*, 9.
18. Ibid., 14.
19. Ibid., 13.
20. Ibid., 21.

of Jewish and Christian religion, and in the past most atheists have not been liberals".[21] Thus, there is prior precedent for considering what a secular conservative constituency could look like. In his book titled, *The Secular Conservative*, Thomas Queen writes, "Secular conservatives today have much more in common with Libertarians than Republicans. The Libertarian party platform is one of social tolerance and fiscal responsibility. This is precisely what secular conservatives believe in".[22] The difference between secular libertarians and secular conservatives, Queen argues, comes down to policy creation – which mirrors what we saw when comparing the Libertarian secular caucus to its Democratic counterparts. Queen writes, "If there is one fundamental difference between secular conservatives and Libertarians it is in the area of foreign intervention. Libertarians promote a very passive foreign policy that would often prevent the United States from becoming actively involved in conflicts world wide *(sic)*.".[23]

While the "secular" and the "conservative" are not inherently contradictory, those I interviewed were very clear that, at least in this political moment, "secular" and "Republican" are. Ron Millar explained, "The Republican Party is not open to atheists and humanists. The Republican Party is currently directed by white Christian nationalists." However, he said that he thought the Libertarian secular caucus was a step in the right direction because "it offers some hope that economic conservatives, who don't hold a god belief, can overcome the forces of religious nationalism on issues like abortion, LGBTQ rights, and other civil liberty issues." Levin said that she has actively, though unsuccessfully, tried to recruit Republicans to work with her on secular issues. She explained that her lack of success was because "there are less of them, but also those that are non-religious in the context of 2016 and beyond, under the Trump administration where what it means to be a Republican is changing, I think it was even less encouraging of an environment for atheists and secular Republicans to be standing up to their party."

However, there is some hope for the anti-atheist and non-religious stance to change over time in the Republican party. In a study summarized by Millar in an article for the *Center for Freethought*

21. Gray, *Seven Types of Atheism*, 1.
22. Queen, *The Secular Conservative: Views Of The Non Religious Right*.
23. Ibid.

*Equality*, he writes, "Forty-eight percent of Republicans said they would be less likely to vote for an atheist candidate who shared their political positions; however, most younger Republicans (68% of those under 35 and 54% of those under 50) said that a candidate's atheism would make no difference to them".[24] This bolsters Putnam and Campbell's claim cited in Chapter 3 that anti-atheist and non-religious sentiment is decreasing as millennials move into the political sphere.

### 5.3.3 Multi-Partisan Organizing

While there are no Republican secular caucuses yet, there has been some bi-partisan organizing, especially in the CFC. Representative Jared Huffman talked about a meeting that they had with Republican Representative Jeff Fortenberry from Nebraska. While a "very religious, Catholic, conservative," Huffman explained that Fortenberry joined the CFC for a conversation about how the U.S. plans to make up for "the loss of community services provided by religion as our country grows more non-religious ... [since] churches are not the glue that they used to be in terms of holding communities together." Similarly, Raskin talked about a resolution he is co-sponsoring with Republican Representative Mark Meadows "to condemn blasphemy, heresy, apostasy, witchcraft and sorcery laws all over the world and to make it a commitment of U.S. foreign policy to stand up for freethought and religious freedom against state imposed religious orthodoxy." The CFC plans to help Raskin promote this resolution, and it currently has 36 co-sponsors – 18 from each party.

Thus despite no movement yet in terms of creating conservative secular organizing groups, the leaders of the secularism movement have made it clear that their work is still non-partisan. Levin said, "There might be a number of issues that we could disagree on. ... Secular Republicans and secular Libertarians may disagree with secular Democrats and secular Greenies, for example. But certainly, the basic principle of separation of church and state should be non-partisan." Joseph Couch specifically said that the decision to use the name "Nebraska Secular Democrats" rather than "Secular Nebraska" was so that they would not get in the way of the potential formation of a "Nebraska Secular Republicans" caucus, should one decide to form. He also insisted that he would

24. Millar, "Poll Finds Atheism Is No Longer a Political Taboo."

love to see a bi-partisan “Secular Nebraska” form in the future. Thus, while currently the secular movement is only located within the Democratic and Libertarian parties, there is still an opportunity for both bi- and multi-partisan secular organizing in the future with its primary focus being the separation of church and state more so than representation of the non-religious.

# CHAPTER 6:

# CONCLUSION

This project intervenes in the U.S. secular dialogue at a critical moment for the political secularism movement. The rise of the "religious right," led by the Tea Party and other similar groups, has, according to Elizabeth Van Horn, led not only to "the increased push by religious groups to tie government and religion together [and] have laws which have a basis in religious belief systems" but also the conviction among the conservative religious population that religion *should* be tied to politics. Meanwhile, the continuous growth of a religiously unaffiliated population (that still disproportionately believes in God) has produced growing questions about the relationship between religious institutions, religious and non-religious ethical frameworks, rationality, and the direction of policy. These highly practical questions complement the metaphysical ones emerging from the expanding academic field of critical secularism theory that challenges the endorsement of secularism as a societal good or essential aspect of modernity. In this academic and political moment, organizers hold a unique role as intelligent non-experts – while highly involved in the process of redefining discourse and both writing and enacting policy, their perspectives are rarely considered in academic settings.

This project adds a new set of voices to the academic study of the relationship of U.S. politics and secularism in the 21st century. By merging a review of existing literature on definitions of secularism and critical secularism with material from interviews with nine politicians and leaders on the forefront of secular organizing, I made clear that the perspectives of my interviewees do not

necessarily align with the academic definitions nor with the generally accepted public narrative of this movement. By doing so, I have shown many strengths and characteristics that could lead to future successes among the secular caucuses as well as limitations that, if allowed to persist, could have far-reaching harmful effects.

While primarily an expository project, I hope that the material I have synthesized in this study will have the potential to enhance the work of both populations that I converse with throughout this paper: the organizers as well as the academics. My suggestion (primarily found in Chapters 4 and 5) that the secular caucuses devote greater time and resources into religious and non-religious interfaith efforts, as well as cross-caucus and multi-party collaboration, I believe is critical to the movement's ability to gain traction and will contribute to an acceleration of future successes. Meanwhile, Chapter 3 critiques the ways that my interviewees describe their relationship to established oppressed peoples movements (in particular, the LGBTQ community) and their discursive effort to discredit all forms of religiously-motivated decision-making and policy formation. I hope that the leaders of the secular caucuses register these criticisms and utilize them to develop their nascent movement into one that is more inclusive and cognizant of the prior and ongoing struggles of oppressed groups.

As for academics, I hope that my methodological intervention of merging critical discourse analysis and grounded theory demonstrates how these two techniques can be applied in religious studies without losing theoretical rigor. By implementing these methodologies, I was able to generate new theories of secular discourse. In particular, I showed that organizers view the definitions of both "secular" and "freethought" as bipartite: Chapter 2 demonstrates that "secular" is viewed by the secular caucuses as a combination of "visibility for the non-religious" and "separation of church and state," while the Congressional Freethought Caucus defines "freethought" as retaining the former part of the "secular" definition, but changes the latter to "separation of church and reasoning." The material that emerged out of my interviews also helped to elucidate the reliance on both the "oppression" and "rationality" rhetoric that led to my earlier criticisms. The conclusion that this movement consists of, in large part, an effort to portray the non-religious as an oppressed population while not trying to force non-theism on those who are religious is novel in the field of secularism

studies and thus will require further research on how political secularism fixated on this goal.

The fortuitous timing of this project cannot be underestimated. The caucuses in this study are still in their early stages and have yet to consolidate across organizations their definitions and goals – which has added to both the puzzling and compelling nature of the material. However, the emergence of a "new demographic," of the "intersectionality conversation that hasn't become cool yet",[1] and the claim to the neutrality of secular rationality all help us to understand the constantly changing manners through which the secular relates to the religious, and how both relate to politics. At what point do conversations about religiosity convert into conversations about identity, and how do we determine which identities belong in politics? The secular and freethought caucuses are an emerging movement contributing to this discussion, and by doing so they are shaping what it means to identify as secular, and as religious, for all Americans.

1. Quote from Sarah Levin, elaborated on in Chapter 2.

# CHAPTER 7:

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# CHAPTER 8:

# APPENDIX

## 8.1 INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

For this study, I reached out to 34 individuals either via email or through contact forms on their websites. I have included the full list of individuals I contacted below. The ***bolded and italicized*** lines are the subjects who filled out the pre-interview questionnaire and completed a phone interview. *Italicized* lines are subjects who responded to my initial email but never filled out the survey or scheduled a phone interview. Subjects who are ~~struck out~~ declined to participate in the study. All others I received no response from.

### FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

California

- ***Jared Huffman, U.S. House of Representatives (D, San Rafael). Co-founder and co-chair of the Congressional Freethought Caucus***
- Jerry McNerney, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Stockton). Co-founder of the Congressional Freethought Caucus
- Zoe Lofgren, U.S. House of Representatives (D, San Jose). Member of Congressional Freethought Caucus

Maryland

- ***Jamie Raskin, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Takoma Park). Co-founder and co-chair of the Congressional Freethought Caucus***

District of Colombia

- Eleanor Holmes Norton, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Delegate of Washington D.C). Member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus

Georgia

- ~~Hank Johnson, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Decatur). Member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus~~

Michigan

- Dan Kildee, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Flint Township). Member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus

Tennessee

- Steve Cohen, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Memphis). Member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus

Washington

- Pramila Jayapal, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Seattle). Member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus

Wisconsin

- *Mark Pocan, U.S. House of Representatives (D, Madison). Member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus*

STATE ELECTED OFFICIALS & CANDIDATES

Texas

- ***Greg Alvord, 2020 Candidate for Texas State Board of Education, (District 14), Texas Secular Caucus endorsed politician***
- Jon Rosenthal, Texas House of Representatives (District 135), declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality
- Carol Iannuzzi, 2020 Candidate for U.S. House of Representatives (District 26), Texas Secular Caucus endorsed politician
- Jan McDowell, 2020 Candidate for U.S. House of Representatives (District 34), Texas Secular Caucus endorsed politician
- John Biggan, 2020 Candidate for U.S. House of Representatives (District 24), Texas Secular Caucus endorsed politician

- Paige Dixon, 2020 Candidate for U.S. House of Representatives (District 65), Texas Secular Caucus endorsed politician

Arizona

- Jennifer Jermaine, Arizona House of Representatives (District 18), declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality
- Juan Mendez, Arizona State Senate (District 26), declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality
- *Athena Salman, Arizona House of Representatives (District 26), declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality*

Nebraska

- ~~Megan Hunt, Nebraska State Senate (District 8), declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality~~

### Local Elected Officials & Candidates

Arizona

- Jeanne Casteen, Governing Board President, Creighton (AZ) School District, declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality
- Katie Paetz, President, Osborn School District Governing Board (Phoenix, Arizona), declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality
- *Carolyn Umphrey, Sierra Vista (AZ) City Council, declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality*
- Beth Weisser, Kingman Unified School District, declared non-religious or supportive of secular legislation according to Center for Freethought Equality

### Secular Organization Officials

Libertarian Party Secular Caucus

- Brandon Phinney, Founding Chairman
- ***Elizabeth Van Horn, Founding Vice Chair***
- ***Arthur M Thomas IV, Founding Secretary***

Secular Coalition for America

- ***Sarah Levin, Press contact, Influential in the forming of the CFC and state caucuses, Founder of Secular Strategies***

- ***Ron Millar, Coordinator of the Freethought Equality Fund Political Action Committee***

Nebraska Secular Caucus

- ***Joseph Couch, Founding chair of Nebraska Secular Caucus, stepped down in 2019 to run for Nebraska State Legislature***

Utah Secular Caucus

- *Daisy Thomas, Utah Democratic Chair and Caucus co-founder*

Arizona Secular Caucus

- ***Margot Thomas, Chair of Arizona Secular Caucus***

## 8.2 Semi-Structured Interview & Pre-Survey Questions

### 8.2.1 Pre-Interview Questionnaire

*Note of Explanation: the following questions were asked in a Qualtrics survey that participants took prior to the phone interview. (1) and (2) were text input, and (3) was multiple choice. Space was included after (3) for participants to elaborate on their answers.*

1. Pathway to Involvement in Secular Politics and Organization
    (a) What led to your interest in secular organizing/legislating/lobbying?
    (b) Did you work on any initiatives or pieces of legislation surrounding secularism, religion, or separation of church and state prior to joining your organization? If so, did your work on these initiatives impact your decision to join your current secular organization?
    (c) Why is it important to you to be involved in a secular political organizing group?
    (d) Who was most influential in the founding of your organization (ex. lobbying groups, politicians, activist groups)? What were their goals for the purpose of the group?
2. Personal Definition of Secularism
    (a) How do you define secular?
    (b) How does your organization define secular?
    (c) Do you think your definition aligns with the definition of your organization?
    (d) Do you think secularism in American politics should be pluralist or anti-religious?
3. Personal Political & Religious Views[1]
    (a) How would you define your religion on a demographics survey?
    (b) How would you define your political views or party affiliation?

### 8.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

*Note of explanation: these interviews were open-ended and semi-structured. Not all the questions listed were asked to every participant, and some questions required follow-up prompts or questions. This provided a degree of flexibility that allowed the interviewer to better follow the participant's line of thinking, while still collecting information in all of the italicized categories below. The set of questions also differed depending on the role that the participant had within their secular caucus or organizing body. For endorsed politicians rather than politicians directly involved in the organization itself, these questions were modified to focus on the state's secular organizing as a whole. All of these interviews occurred over the phone with the PI.*

1. Organization Policies and Initiatives

1. The options in the drop-down menu for religion were based off of the Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Survey's list of religious and non-religious affiliations in their document: "Appendix D: Question wording from each survey."

- Could you elaborate on the mission of your organization?
- How did/does your organization decide what counts as secular political goals?
- Which aspects of the mission of your organization are most meaningful to you? Why?
- In what ways do you feel as though your organization has succeeded at your goals and where do you see areas for improvement within your organization?

2. Organization Definition of Secularism

   (a) How did you decide the name of your organization?

      i. If includes secular in title: There are many choices for words that indicate separation of church and state (freethought, pluralist, anti-religious), why did you specifically decide to use secular?

      ii. If does not include secular in title: There are many choices for words that indicate separation of church and state (secular, freethought, pluralist, anti-religious), why did you specifically decide to use [WORD], unlike other groups, many of whom have chosen to use secular?

   (b) How does your organization define secular?

      i. If does not include secular in title: How does your organization define [WORD]?

   (c) Does your organization's secular policies differ from other secular political organizations? If so, how?

   (d) Do you and your colleagues in your organization disagree about the definition of secularism?

3. Is there anything else you would like to share?

## 8.3 TABLES & FIGURES

**Table 8.1:** Sources of guidance on right and wrong among Democrats and democratic leaners by state, according to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study.[2]

| State | Religion | Philosophy/reason | Common sense | Science | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 48% | 6% | 38% | 7% | 1% |
| Alaska | 7% | 10% | 53% | 22% | 8% |
| **Arizona** | **21%** | **12%** | **48%** | **17%** | **2%** |
| Arkansas | 41% | 7% | 44% | 8% | 1% |
| California | 23% | 16% | 44% | 14% | 2% |
| Colorado | 19% | 26% | 43% | 10% | 3% |
| Connecticut | 16% | 17% | 52% | 13% | 2% |
| Delaware | 27% | 12% | 51% | 8% | 2% |
| District of Columbia | 24% | 18% | 42% | 12% | 4% |
| Florida | 24% | 12% | 51% | 12% | 1% |
| Georgia | 37% | 13% | 40% | 8% | 2% |
| Hawaii | 20% | 16% | 50% | 11% | 3% |
| Idaho | 17% | 11% | 59% | 11% | 2% |
| Illinois | 19% | 14% | 52% | 13% | 2% |
| Indiana | 25% | 10% | 48% | 14% | 3% |
| Iowa | 23% | 16% | 51% | 7% | 2% |
| Kentucky | 29% | 17% | 44% | 7% | 3% |
| Louisiana | 38% | 9% | 44% | 8% | 1% |
| Maine | 8% | 16% | 59% | 14% | 3% |
| Maryland | 33% | 9% | 43% | 13% | 2% |
| Massachusetts | 13% | 13% | 55% | 17% | 2% |
| Michigan | 24% | 10% | 52% | 11% | 3% |
| Minnesota | 15% | 15% | 54% | 13% | 3% |
| Mississippi | 45% | 12% | 33% | 10% | $< 1\%$ |
| Missouri | 28% | 13% | 47% | 8% | 4% |
| Montana | 19% | 17% | 51% | 12% | 1% |
| **Nebraska** | **28%** | **18%** | **44%** | **10%** | $\mathbf{< 1\%}$ |
| Nevada | 23% | 15% | 49% | 11% | 2% |
| New Hampshire | 11% | 14% | 60% | 14% | 2% |
| New Jersey | 23% | 13% | 49% | 13% | 3% |
| New Mexico | 28% | 12% | 38% | 16% | 6% |
| New York | 19% | 16% | 51% | 11% | 3% |
| North Carolina | 31% | 11% | 47% | 11% | 1% |
| North Dakota | 22% | 9% | 49% | 19% | 1% |
| Ohio | 26% | 10% | 51% | 12% | 1% |
| Oklahoma | 32% | 12% | 43% | 11% | 2% |
| Oregon | 19% | 17% | 48% | 16% | 1% |

2. "Sources of guidance on right and wrong among democrats and Democratic leaners by state"

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pennsylvania | 24% | 12% | 48% | 14% | 2% |
| Rhode Island | 22% | 9% | 53% | 15% | 1% |
| South Carolina | 32% | 12% | 45% | 9% | 2% |
| South Dakota | 20% | 15% | 55% | 8% | 2% |
| Tennessee | 35% | 11% | 46% | 5% | 2% |
| **Texas** | **33%** | **12%** | **42%** | **11%** | **2%** |
| Utah | 16% | 10% | 62% | 13% | $< 1\%$ |
| Vermont | 11% | 17% | 55% | 16% | 1% |
| Virginia | 26% | 13% | 48% | 10% | 3% |
| Washington | 15% | 18% | 47% | 17% | 3% |
| West Virginia | 50% | 6% | 40% | 2% | 2% |
| Wisconsin | 22% | 17% | 46% | 15% | 1% |