

Are Democrats really ‘godless’? The numbers say mostly not, but the rap still sticks.

By Eugene Scott

In recent weeks, [presidential candidates](#) on the left have made it known that they aren’t afraid to invoke God on a range of topics.

“If you believe that God is watching as poison is being belched into the air of creation and people are being harmed by it, countries are at risk of vanishing in low-lying areas, what do you suppose God thinks of that?” South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg [asked](#) during Wednesday’s CNN climate change forum. He added: “At least one way of talking about this is that it’s a kind of sin.”

“Stay faithful,” Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) [told](#) the crowd at a church in Tulsa about fighting racism. “We have come this far by faith, and we will keep going.”

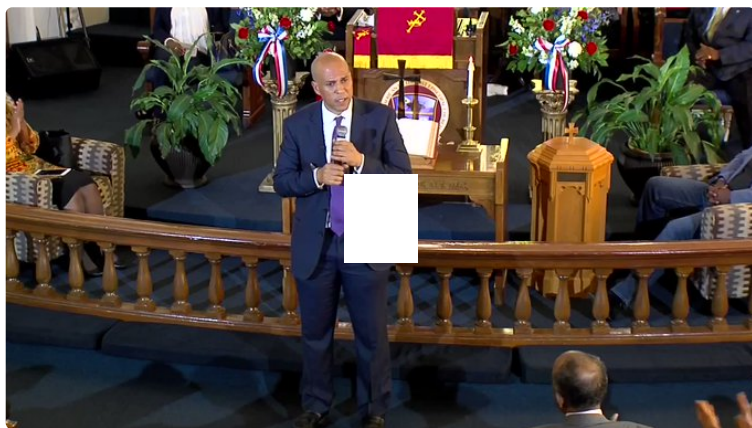


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Here are Sen. [@CoryBooker](#)'s closing remarks today at Tulsa's historic Vernon Chapel AME Church.

“Stay faithful,” he says. “We have come this far by faith, and we will keep going.”

More, including Booker's full speech, here:
ktul.com/news/local/cor...



5 1:04 PM - Aug 29, 2019

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“Prayers for the people of the Bahamas, Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas,” [tweeted](#) author Marianne Williamson. “May the peace of God be upon them and their hearts be comforted as they endure the storm.”

Contrast that with how Robert Jeffress, a Dallas pastor who advises President Trump on issues of faith, described the Democratic Party last month on Fox Business.



They are a godless party, Lou, and becoming more so. You remember back in 2012, when they had an argument on national television at their convention about removing God from their platform? Then, in 2016, at their convention, they had a pastor up there praying, and he gets heckled, and now, even this weekend, the Democrat Party passes a resolution saying ‘we enthusiastically support the values of the religiously unaffiliated in America.’ ‘Religiously unaffiliated’ is code for godless! They are truly becoming a godless party by their outreach, and certainly by their beliefs.

It is a criticism frequently directed at liberals by the religious right. In May, Vice President Pence [told](#) Liberty University graduates to be prepared to be attacked by “Hollywood liberals,” the media and the “secular left” for their Christian faith.

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“Some of the loudest voices for tolerance today have little tolerance for traditional Christian beliefs,” Pence said. “As you go about your daily life, just be ready, because you’re going to be asked not just to tolerate things that violate your faith, you’re going to be asked to endorse them. You’re going to be asked to bow down to the idols of the popular culture.”

But the assertion that Democrats as a whole are godless doesn’t make much sense. If that were true, the people vying to be their standard-bearer wouldn’t be frequently and publicly invoking a higher power. So which is correct? There’s some misrepresentation going on here, but there are also reasons the “godless” label proves effective when it comes to whipping up opposition to Democrats.

First, let’s look at the numbers. The data shows that belief in God and identification with a religion is actually pretty common in both parties.

Most Democrats — 76 percent — are absolutely certain or fairly certain about their belief in God, [according](#) to a 2018 study conducted by the Pew Research Center. That’s not a small number, although it is lower than the percentage — 90 percent — of Republicans who say they are absolutely certain or fairly certain about their belief in God.

More than 80 percent of Republicans and right-leaning voters said religion is very important or somewhat important in their lives, according to Pew. But so do a large majority — more than 70 percent — of Democrats and left-leaning voters.

But it is the subject of the religiously unaffiliated that has attracted widespread attention recently.

Most people — 54 percent — who identify as religiously unaffiliated identify as Democrats or left-leaning, according to Pew. About a quarter of the group claim to be Republicans or right-leaning.

Pew stated: “In the U.S., belief in a deity is common even among the religiously unaffiliated — a group composed of those who identify themselves, religiously, as atheist, agnostic or ‘nothing in particular,’ and sometimes referred to, collectively, as religious ‘nones.’ Indeed, nearly three-quarters of religious ‘nones’ (72%) believe in a higher power of some kind, even if not in God as described in the Bible.”

Those who identify as “religiously unaffiliated” make up a larger share of the population than the number of Democrats who identify as Catholic, evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant or adherents of the historically black Protestant tradition.

As Pew said, it’s not safe to assume that all those in the religiously unaffiliated category don’t believe in God. But it’s certainly a sizable enough share — 13 percent — to help shape how the Democratic Party determines its values.

And that is tied to the resolution Jeffress spoke of as proof of Democrats’ godlessness.

Why did Democrats approve a resolution on ‘the religiously unaffiliated’? At its summer meeting last month, the Democratic National Committee passed a [measure](#) showing support for the values of the religiously unaffiliated — including Americans who are atheist, agnostic or mark “none” on surveys — and acknowledging the growth of that group in the party. As it has grown, party leaders felt the need to make sure that those individuals’ values were considered when shaping policy.

The measure also represented a response to what secular liberals have described as mistreatment, based on values and worldviews, by people of faith in a largely religious country. It stated that “religiously unaffiliated Americans are a group that, as much as any other, advocates for rational public policy based on sound science and universal humanistic values and should be represented, included, and heard by the Party.”

The resolution, which received quite a bit of pushback from social conservatives and some religious Democrats, also described the Democratic Party as “an inclusive organization that recognizes that morals, values, and patriotism are not unique to any particular religion, and are not necessarily reliant on having a religious worldview at all.”

Michael Wear, Obama’s 2012 faith outreach director, criticized the resolution and said it could make things more difficult for the left in 2020.

“I just want to be clear,” he [tweeted](#) after the measure passed. “This is both politically stupid, but also, just stupid on a fundamental level that transcends electoral politics.”

“Trump is absolutely going to run this into the ground, and not just with white evangelicals,” he added.



Michael Wear @MichaelRWear · Aug 29, 2019

Replying to @MichaelRWear

Oh and the Resolutions Committee that passed this resolution is the same one that shut down the climate debate



Michael Wear

@MichaelRWear

Trump is absolutely going to run this into the ground, and not just with white evangelicals.


147 9:11 PM - Aug 29, 2019

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Why the label sticks and is weaponized

Jeffress was speaking more broadly, though, with his charge that Democrats are “a godless party by their outreach, and certainly by their beliefs.”


Even some Democrats think some of the loudest voices on the left are detrimental to courting people of faith. Before posting the tweet we noted above, Marianne Williamson was the subject of a flurry of mockery for having tweeted to her followers to use the “power of the mind” to turn away Hurricane Dorian.



Daniel Dale @ddale8 · Sep 4, 2019

Going to go ahead and call this a false claim

[twitter.com/marwilliamson/...](#)



Daniel Dale

@ddale8

This was the tweet:



Marianne Williamson ✓
@marwilliamson



The Bahamas, Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas...may all be in our prayers now. Millions of us seeing Dorian turn away from land is not a wacky idea; it is a creative use of the power of the mind. Two minutes of prayer, visualization, meditation for those in the way of the storm

8:21 AM · 9/4/19 · [Twitter Web App](#)

892 7:35 AM - Sep 4, 2019

[553 people are talking about this](#)

Plenty of Twitter users rushed to her defense, but Williamson wound up deleting the tweet. She took the criticism as evidence that many of her critics don't understand prayer the way religious Americans do. She [told The Washington Post's Jacqueline Alemany](#):

People don't like to feel that their values are invalidated and people can feel when they're being condescended to . . . I was in South Carolina last weekend and Georgia. And you better believe that there were people there praying that the hurricane would turn around — that doesn't mean that they're stupid. That doesn't mean that they don't believe in science or climate change. The fact that you pray, the fact that you visualize, the fact that you meditate, doesn't mean you're stupid, or ignorant or uninformed.

. . .

There had been many within the Democratic Party who have tilted in a strangely, what I perceive to be, an overly secularized conversation.


There's a strand of argument on the left that one of the reasons Democrats lost the 2016 election is because Hillary Clinton made significantly less effort than Barack Obama had to connect with conservative Christian voters. Another frequent complaint is that too few people in leadership positions in the Democratic Party have a basic grasp of the contemporary religious landscape. Describing the religiously unaffiliated, a notably diverse bloc, as "the largest religious group in the Democratic Party" confirms that.

The rap that Democrats aren’t God-friendly certainly has resonance on the right. Republicans largely overestimate the percentage of liberals who do not believe in God, according to a 2017 [study](#) titled “The Parties in our Heads: Misperceptions About Party Composition and Their Consequences” by independent scholar Gaurav Sood and Douglas Ahler, a political science professor at Florida State University.

According to the YouGov data featured in the study, Republicans estimate 36 percent of Democrats are atheist or agnostic. The actual amount is 9 percent.

Democrats are certainly wrestling with demographic shifts within their party on multiple fronts, including religion. But the religious, including those identifying as Christian, are still a major force in the party, and one that no one seeking the White House thinks they can afford to alienate.

Eugene Scott

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