

Palin, religion, the 2008 election

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Although Sarah Palin's entry into the 2008 presidential race has energized the religious right within the Republican Party, don't expect religion to be a major issue in this year's election, says University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) political communications expert Larry Powell, Ph.D. The move away from overt religious appeals may be due to an effort to avoid what Powell calls the "Pharisee Effect."

The Pharisee Effect is a phenomenon when religious appeals in politics go too far and cause a backlash and a rejection by voters. The term Pharisee Effect, is based on the biblical references to religious leaders known as the Pharisees. The Pharisees were rebuked by Jesus as hypocrites because of their use of public prayers to enhance their own image.

Powell, along with UAB Professor Eduardo Neiva, Ph.D., published a study on the Pharisee Effect in the recent issue of the *North American Journal of Psychology*. The article examined the unsuccessful bid for governor by Roy Moore, known as the "Ten Commandments Judge." Moore's reliance on religious appeals was the basis for his candidacy in the Republican Primary. The paper argues that Moore's religiosity was not an effective basis for a politically persuasive strategy.

Last month a Pew Research Institute survey reported a decline in the number of Americans who want churches and other houses of worship involved in political matters. The survey also found that most of the drop in the past four years comes among conservatives.

"Palin has been careful to avoid using religious arguments in her speeches or making overt religious appeals," says Powell, but she appeals to the religious right because of her stance on issues like abortion.

Source: University of Alabama at Birmingham

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