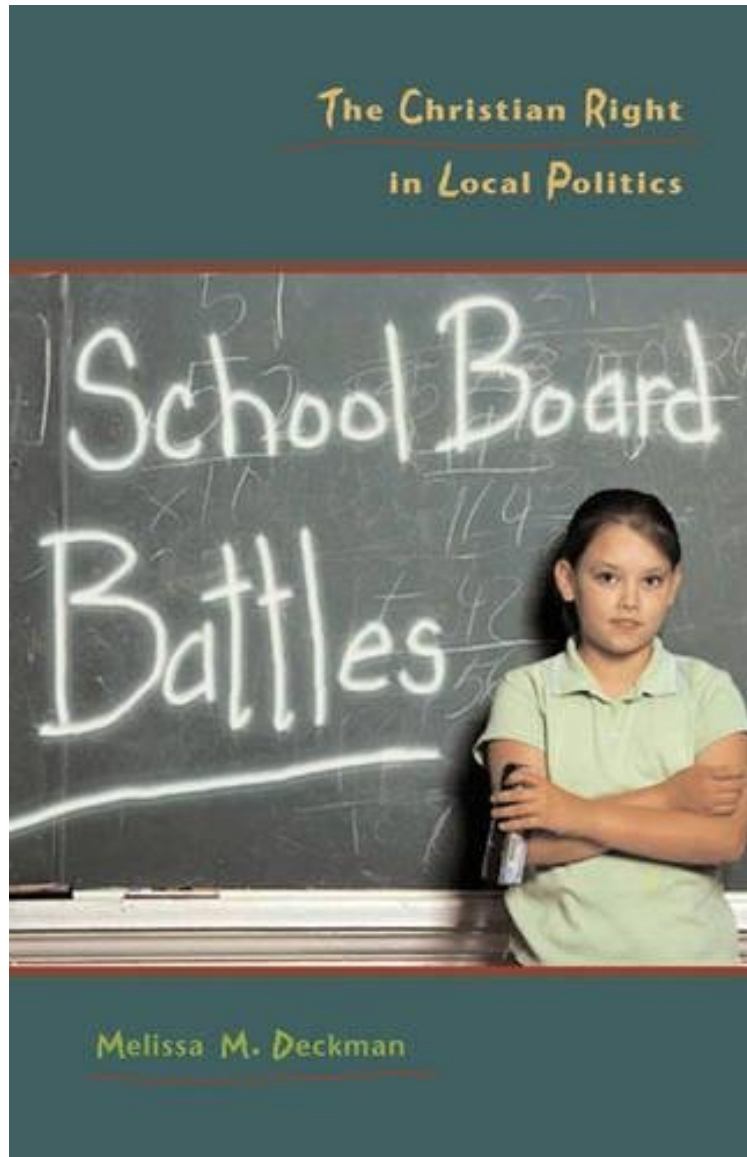


School Board Battles: The Christian Right in Local Politics (Religion and Politics)

Melissa M. Deckman

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before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised School Board Battles: The Christian Right in Local Politics (Religion and Politics):

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. School Board Battles: The Christian Right in Local PoliticsBy Glen

Aaron Fallon presents investigative reporting of the attack by fundamentalist religion on our public school system at the ground level. Among other issues, the book well presents how the teaching of critical and independent thinking is being undermined in the public school system across the nation by a well funded and organized ideology. 1 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Good info, hard to read format By Sharon Ashley Russell I had to use the book for a Political Science project in college, and I found it to be completely boring and hard to read. The chapters and the information contained within each does not flow very well and is very confusing. I attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and I found this book to be a chore to read and repetitive. To make the best of this book, just read the bold and larger titles and don't waste your time reading the monotonous details. 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Educate yourself about the religious right with this book By Robin Orłowski Washington College Assistant Professor Melissa M. Deckman delivers readers a fresh new portrait of the Christian right which, although still critical of their ultimate end goals, wants to understand how they were able to achieve their successes or not. Differing from the organizational research reports and partisan titles which already flood the market, Deckman's book has readers instead consider why the religious right enjoys so much electoral success even if a majority of American voters do not formally appear to support their ideas. She then wants us to consider how waging a campaign/counter campaign against these candidates and public officials is literally impossible when we actually do not know about the people who we want to run against. The thesis of Deckman's book is that both sides in a community demonize each other in the process of school board and local elections in an attempt to win support from undecided voters. The Christian right is at once both more similar and more complex than previous attack campaigns/counter-responses publicly have conceded. Articulating this complex nature will then enable myself and others to win more campaigns and more effectively sell our own policies to that swing public. Starting out with wanting to make major change, the Christian right candidates and/or elected officials subsequently are required to alter their grand world views in order to be a part of the system which they ultimately seek to change. Built on compromise, the American political system is subsequently not receptive to radical changes which these people (and other candidates) would like to make. Our campaign portrayals of these people might therefore indicate what they would like to do, but it does not actually acknowledge what they are permitted to do; held in check by the American government's system of checks and balances. Deckman's data includes case studies of elections held in Fairfax County Virginia and Garret County Maryland. These case studies prove that although they share some important group characteristics and goals, not all Christian right campaigns and then the candidates who run them are virtual 'carbon copies' of each other. A vulnerability to internal dissent among various religious right candidates and office holders further lessens their being the 'mighty boogeyman' of political jargon. She also suggests that both the 'far right' candidates and my beloved liberal counterparts are much more alike than we actually are different. The research in this book uncovers that non-religious right school board candidates are also likely to be religiously affiliated and also are more likely to come from the community elite---who can afford to run in an election and hold public office. We have more in common with each other than we have previously thought and/or let on in campaigns and debates. Although I also read the more conventional broadsides against the right, and tend to agree with the left, Deckman's book is a critical step for defeating Christian right candidates.

If there is a "culture war" taking place in the United States, one of the most interesting, if under-the-radar, battlegrounds is in local school board elections. Rarely does the pitch of this battle reach national attention, as it did in Kansas when the state school board led by several outspoken conservative Christians voted to delete evolution from the state's science curriculum and its standardized tests in August 1999. That action rattled not only the educational and scientific communities, but concerned citizens around the nation as well. While the movement of the Christian Right into national and state politics has been well documented, this is the first book to examine their impact on local school board politics. While the Kansas decision was short-lived, during the past decade in school districts around the country, conservative Christian majorities have voted to place limits on sex education, to restrict library books, to remove references to gays and lesbians in the classroom, and to promote American culture as superior to other cultures. *School Board Battles* studies the motivation, strategies, and electoral success of Christian Right school board candidates. Based on interviews, and using an extensive national survey of candidates as well as case studies of two school districts in which conservative Christians ran and served on local boards, Melissa M. Deckman gives us a surprisingly complex picture of these candidates. She reveals weaker ties to national Christian Right organizations and more similarities between these conservative candidates and their more secular counterparts than might be expected. Deckman examines important questions: Why do conservative Christians run for school boards? How much influence has the Christian Right actually had on school boards? How do conservative Christians govern? *School Board Battles* is an in-depth and in-the-trenches look at an important encounter in the "culture war" one that may well determine the future of our nation's youth.

"This is one of those pioneering efforts in the political science field that deserves wide readership and notice. A job well done!" Voice of Reason "Using both case study and survey research methodologies, Professor Deckman addresses

this important but understudied topic with sensitivity and skill. In so doing, she makes an important contribution to our understanding of Christian Right candidates in school board politics."Corwin Smidt, director of The Henry Institute, Department of Political Science, Calvin College" This pathbreaking work explores one of the most significant manifestations of religio-political activism in the United States today: the school board candidacies of Christian Right identifiers. Deckman is substantively and methodologically authoritative in her study of these candidates and their motivations."Laura R. Olson, associate professor of political science, Clemson University About the Author Melissa M. Deckman is assistant professor of political science at Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland.