THE FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS SOCIAL CAPITAL

Adam H. Reiser (Luke Garrott)
Department of Political Science

The election of President George W. Bush in 1999 introduced a new office to the White House: Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. President Bush has charged the office with strengthening the partnership between the Federal Government and those faith-based and community groups that provide compassionate care and produce impressive results. These faith-based and community groups, according to the President, transform the lives of struggling neighbors and inspire communal hope and success in ways that government never can.

On similar note, American religious community has declined in recent years. While some standards may prove that church attendance has actually increased, religious social capital, in terms of generalized communal reciprocity, has not. This paper scrutinizes a potential relationship between these themes: an onslaught by the Federal Government to promote and fund faith-based groups' communal efforts and a decline of religious community. Finally, the question is addressed of how great an influence the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is having on religious social capital, and if this influence is beneficial or detrimental for community improvement.