

# How an Orthodox Christian should approach politics

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From two years ago. I still believe this:

As a priest, I'm always reluctant to speak publicly about my political views because I don't want to be seen as speaking in an official capacity on behalf of the Church. (I will, however, gladly talk in private over a beer). There are some moral issues on which the Church has clear views, but then there are a lot of other issues on which Christians can reasonably disagree. That having been said, it occurs to me that there are a few general guidelines when it comes to how we, as Christians, should approach politics, that we need to consider before we get to considering candidates and policy.

- 1) Whether we like our leaders or not, we must always pray for them. In Timothy, St. Paul tells us: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions... be made... for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."
- 2) While we can and should discuss policy, we should avoid speaking badly of our leaders as people. We shouldn't make fun of them, ridicule them, call them names, etc. St. Peter tells us to "honor the emperor," even though at the time that he was writing, the emperor was likely a psychopathic adolescent who killed Christians for sport. Likewise, St. Jude in his epistle makes clear that we should not mock and make fun of even the worst leaders.
- 3) We should avoid idolizing our leaders. In order to get elected, politicians almost inevitably cultivate minor personality cults around themselves, convincing people that only they have the wisdom and knowledge to "save" our country. Almost all of them have legions of devoted followers who think they can do no wrong. And yet, no matter how good the politician, all of them are mortal and fallible. They can and do make mistakes, they don't know everything, and they can't predict the future. We should always remind ourselves of what the Psalmist says: "Put not your trust in princes and sons of men."
- 4) We should assume good will on the part of those who disagree with us. We should be willing to listen to what they have to say and be committed to explaining our own views, and the reasons that we hold them, calmly, rationally, and without bitterness or mocking. We should avoid assuming that if someone disagrees with us that it's because they're either evil or stupid.
- 5) We should remember that we have a natural tendency to be quick to excuse the mistakes and scandals of "our side" and to magnify and exaggerate those of the "other side." We should work to do the opposite -- hold ourselves to a higher standard and be forgiving of the mistakes of others, giving them more of a benefit of the doubt than we give ourselves.
- 6) Before deciding whom to vote for, we should approach the decision seriously and pray to God for wisdom, since, despite what we each secretly think about ourselves, we're not always as smart as we think that we are and if we want to use our responsibilities as citizens well, we need to ask God for wisdom and guidance.