
Why are Republicans turning an easy win into a complicated one?

One political question about the Ground Zero Islamic complex/mosque/theater-space/swimming pool: Why are Republicans trumpeting this? And why, a week or two ago, did they start talking about the 14th amendment? Republicans are going to win a lot of seats this year. And they're going to do it on the backs of the economy. Getting into social issues -- particularly social issues that might anger minorities -- is a dangerous play. It loses them long-term votes that they just don't need to lose. It paints their party as intolerant and opportunistic. And it's unnecessary: It's not like they're hurting for things to talk about.

Gene Healy [thinks](#) he's got an answer: "The 'mosque' controversy isn't about property rights or religious freedom," he writes. "It's a bogus issue seized by the GOP establishment to distract the rank-and-file from the party's reluctance to shrink government." Will Wilkinson [disagrees](#). "This idiotic foofaraw could be a distraction only if the GOP rank-and-file actually cared more about the size of government than the cultural politics of American identity," he replies. "But they don't."

So what's the truth here? Is the mosque -- and the social issues more generally -- driven by elites? Or by rank-and-file? Does the GOP want to talk about the social issues because they prefer it to talking about the economy or because they don't feel like they have a choice?

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