Profess

By Bill Gilkeson
Staff Reporter

Dr. J. David Fairbanks, the new politics professor at Wake Forest University, takes the "science" part of "political science" seriously.

Fairbanks considers himself a scientist. He recently added the "Dr." to his name by doing a scientific study of the relationship between the way state governments regulate morality and the strength of different types of religious groups in the states' population.

He did the study at Ohio State University. He hopes to develop the scientific approach to politics into a useful tool for government. Perhaps, he said, he can try out the tool on the local governments in Winston-Salem.

In his study, Fairbanks found that the kinds of religious groups in a state often have a great deal to do with the way that state's government regulates birth control, divorce, gambling and liquor.

The strength of the correlations vary from one type of control to another, he said, but it is generally true that religious groups seem to have more to do with the way a state governs morality than the hopes of political parties the state has or how wealthy and well-educated the people are.

This conclusion may not be surprising to some people, particularly those who have watched Baptist preachers in North Carolina go into action against liquor by the drink. But Fairbanks said it should bring down to earth those people who think we live in a purely secular, rationalistic society.

The precursors of studies like his, Fairbanks said, were done in the 1950s. Political scientists sought to find relationships between the way governments spent money in their budgets and the types of political-party structures they had. Some studies showed that states with strong, competitive two-party systems tended to spend more for welfare and other liberal programs than states where one party dominated. The researchers speculated that in the two-party states, the minority groups that wanted the liberal programs tended to be "swing" groups on election day, so that each party needed
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or Uses Science to Study Religion

uses socio-economic indexes used in the earlier studies. He thought that, perhaps, states become less interested in regulating other peoples' behavior as their people become richer and better educated — more "sophisticated." But, again, there was not much relationship.

To study the effect of religious groups, Fairbanks used figures on percentages of four types of religious groups: Catholics, Protestants, conservative Protestants (members of those denominations that aren't in the National Council of Churches) and fundamentalists (members of those denominations that take a literal view of the Bible).

The correlations here were stronger than with political parties, or socio-economic indicators.

In general, not surprisingly, states that had a lot of Roman Catholics were tougher on birth control and divorce than other states. The Catholic Church has opposed both practices. And states with conservative Protestants and fundamentalists were tough on liquor and gambling, which those groups consider sinful.

The strongest correlation in the study, Fairbanks said, was between Protestants and gambling regulation: 36 per cent of the toughness on gambling could be accounted for by the size of the Protestant population in the states. Fairbanks speculated that the reason is that Protestants, until recently, have been more united in opposition to gambling than in opposition to liquor.

Twenty-five per cent of the variation in liquor laws could be attributed to the size of the fundamentalist population, he said.

Surprisingly, it was on birth control that religion was least clearly the most important factor. The northeastern states with heavy Catholic populations (Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey) had tough laws on birth control, but southwestern states with a lot of Catholics (New Mexico, for example) did not. Fairbanks speculated that the Irish and Italian Catholics of the
Northeast have had more political power than the Chicano Catholics of the Southwest.

Fairbanks said he now wants to move in another direction. Having studied what influence the society has on what kinds of laws are written, he now wants to study what influence the laws have on the society. Do areas that have tough drinking laws actually have less alcoholism? — that sort of thing.

Fairbanks, 29, is teaching a course this semester in "Urban Problems and Politics."