

Progressivism and Contemporary Political Parties

In this paper I address the question of whether it makes sense, from a Progressive point of view, to support both Republicans and Democrats at the same time. In other words, are ticket-splitting and the divided government that results from it, both of which are so very common in recent years,¹ consistent with Progressive principles? My answer, in brief, is yes. It is quite reasonable, on the basis of such principles, for the American people to support both parties. Indeed, I concur with those who say that there is a “pervasive influence of progressivism on contemporary politics and government” (Milkis 1999, p. 11). I only add that, despite its critics, today’s party system, including the continued sharing of power between the two major parties, is an integral and significant element of this new Progressive order.

In one sense, my answer seems easy: divided government is consistent with Progressive principles because divided government means weak parties and Progressivism is anti-party (e.g., Croly 1988). But this conclusion is not so obvious for two reasons. First, there was a significant branch of Progressivism, most often identified with Woodrow Wilson, that advocated a system of party government (Wilson 1908, 1913, 1925a-b; see Ranney 1954). This view was later expanded and clarified by many scholars, most notably E.E. Schattschneider (1942, 1960). He chaired the American Political Science Association (APSA) Committee on Political Parties, which called for a “responsible two-party system” (1950). Second, there is a growing body of research arguing that the political parties, once thought to be in steep decline, are now actually resurgent in various ways (Green and Shea 1999; Cohen, Fleisher, and Kantor 2001). This is particularly true with regard to the ideological differences between the parties (Fleisher and Bond 2001). While American parties today may or may not be as cohesive and strong as those in parliamentary systems, they are nonetheless much closer to the responsible party model than any in American history (Pomper 2001; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994).

Given these two points, divided party control would seem to be especially at odds with the party government strand of Progressivism. If the parties were actually very weak, then divided control might not be such a problem because then the party differences could be overcome. But because the parties today are actually rather vibrant, especially in ideological terms, the tendency toward “gridlock” presumably should be intensified with divided control. Divided government with significant parties would seem to usher in the opposite of responsible party government. In its “most ideal form” (Ranney 1954, p. 12), the party government model holds that one ideologically and programatically coherent party at a time should control all of the elective branches of government. This is so that, as in a parliamentary system, one party can be held responsible for what the government does. If the party in power loses favor with the people, then the opposition party can be voted in to assume the reigns of power. But if the two parties share power, as they have done almost continuously for the last 35 years, then no one party clearly can be held responsible for what the government does.

However, I suggest that we need not adhere to the “most ideal form” of the responsible party theory when evaluating the current party system. The Progressive aims of the responsible party school are realizable, if not already fully realized, without unified party government. Indeed, even though responsible party advocates have criticized the constitutional system of

¹ The phenomenon of persistent divided government is rather recent in American history. For the period from 1969 to 2003, the national government will have been divided for all but just six years (82% of the time). Prior to this period, divided government occurred about 25% of the time, depending upon how one determines partisan affiliation in some of the early Congresses.

separated powers and bicameralism (Schattschneider 1942, pp. 124-26; Burns 1963), such a system has actually proven to be compatible with their aims. The responsible party school, unlike the anti-party strand of Progressivism, was correct to foresee the role of two-party competition within a Progressive system. Even though there is today rarely unified party control of government, there is a “coherence of partisan cleavages” in the political system (Aldrich 1995, p. 160). This observation is consistent with Schattschneider’s view that the two parties “reflect the great cleavage” in American politics, together forming a coherent and essentially Progressive system (1958, p. 16). In effect, split-ticket voting and divided government are not really at odds with the responsible party idea, or at least we see this once we recognize the Progressive roots of that idea. Divided control amounts to a form of coalition government largely compatible with the aims of the responsible party school (cf. Sundquist 1988-1989).

Indeed, the cleavage between the liberal Democratic party and the conservative Republican party reflects the two connected but distinct principles found in Progressivism itself: the commitment to “social justice” and the cultivation of a “national interest” (Hamby 1999, p. 49). There are, in a sense, “two majorities” (Shafer and Claggett 1995) in America distinguished by the ideological imperatives articulated in the Progressive Era. Social justice has come to be associated with securing the particular interests of vulnerable individuals and groups in society. The Democratic party today clearly emphasizes this concern for social welfare. The Republican party, on the other hand, is more attentive to the concern for the general interests of the country. This is seen most clearly in the public’s greater trust in the Republicans with respect to national defense; its more important manifestation is in the tendency of most Americans to identify with Republicans on questions of culture and heritage. Liberalism and conservatism, then, while distinct points of view, function together to bring a certain coherence to public life in America, and they do so through the agency of the Democratic and Republican parties.

In what follows, I review the reforms of the party system and examine the causes of divided government, explain the roots of conservatism and liberalism in Progressive thought, and evaluate the development and performance of divided government in the current party system. I conclude with a few thoughts on future prospects for the parties.

Responsible Parties, the New Party System, and Divided Government

First, we should recognize the extent to which the institutional arrangements of the current party system conform to the responsible party model. Gerald Pomper (2001) has recently shown that the current parties largely approximate the system envisioned in the APSA Committee’s Report, with 77% of its specific provisions having been adopted. This is up from only 43% a quarter of a century earlier (Ranney 1975). For example, the central party organizations are perhaps as strong as they have ever been. They are more effective, in particular, at raising money for candidates. And many of the Committee’s specific recommendations for the internal organization of the parties have been adopted. More generally, despite the occasional third party or independent candidate, almost all elective offices in America are held by either Democrats or Republicans. Every major legislature in the country is organized along party lines; and party voting in those legislatures is generally as robust as ever. Some scholars even argue that a “conditional party government” exists today in Congress (Aldrich and Rohde 2000). Finally, there is a clear ideological distinction between the parties. This distinction is well understood by voters, and the polarization of liberals and conservatives, among politicians and voters alike, may actually be intensifying (Fleisher and Bond 2001). Indeed, some scholars suggest that the “United States need not seek ‘a more responsible two-party system.’ It already has one” (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994, p. 154).

According to Woodrow Wilson, the 19th century parties were “irresponsible” mainly because the unelected party bosses acted at the behest of powerful interests. This problem would be solved by two means: the elimination of the spoils through the creation of neutral administration (Wilson 1925c) and the adoption of direct primaries (Wilson 1913, p. 230; APSA 1950, pp. 70-71). Civil service reforms, begun in the late 1800s and greatly accelerated during the New Deal, indeed eliminated the ability of party leaders to use the patronage. Party workers in the old system, who largely were motivated by private gain, were eventually replaced by “amateur” activists (Wilson 1962), who were more motivated by the policy goals of the parties. Party leaders could no longer buy loyalty from their supporters.

Moreover, direct primaries for nominating candidates have been instituted almost everywhere in America. This has made the candidates themselves the new “bosses” of the parties, responsible to the people in their partisan capacity. In addition, modern communications technology has greatly enabled candidates to address voters directly (Aldrich 1995). The result is today’s candidate-centered campaigns and parties (Wattenberg 1991). In elections, the parties have largely become service organizations, providing assistance to the candidates in their more personalized campaigns (Schlesinger 1985, 1991; Aldrich 1995). But this is actually consistent with Wilson’s emphasis upon the need for charismatic and vital leadership. The party--constituted by candidates and activists wedded together by shared ideological beliefs and electoral imperatives--was always thought by Wilson to be a platform for such leaders. Leaders are precisely necessary to create parties with “unifying and vitalizing principles.” The “degradation” of the parties, Wilson thought, was caused by a lack of leaders that could infuse them with such principles: “*No leaders, no principles; no principles, no parties*” (1925a, pp. 36-37, emphasis original). Moreover, Wilson did not see a vote for the man as a vote against the party (1925d, p. 355; Zentner 1996). That candidates are the central focus of party organizations today is quite consistent with the original sentiment favoring responsible parties.

If the responsible party theorists agreed on anything, they agreed that a new party system should be much more democratic than the old party machines. In particular, they emphasized the need for meaningful choice in elections provided by ideologically distinct parties. Wilson, for example, lamented that voters usually could only choose between “Tweedledum or Tweedledee” (Wilson 1913, p. 229). The party bosses, more concerned with power than with policy, were wary of offending general election voters with unnecessarily extreme candidates. Wilson believed that the turn to primaries, as well as an emphasis upon policy rather than privilege, would open up the nominations process, thus allowing for a greater variety of candidates to emerge. He was right: the combination of primaries and amateur activists has led to greater ideological polarization between the parties. Despite their need and desire to appeal to general election voters, today’s candidates cannot ignore the pull to the left or right demanded by their policy-motivated supporters and more ideological primary voters (Aldrich 1995, ch. 6). Thus, we find liberals concentrated in one party and conservatives in the other, and an apparently more genuine choice of alternatives at the general election.

Finally, according to the responsible party theory, not only should all of the voters be presented with distinct alternatives, but many of those voters should refrain from strict loyalty to any one party. In fact, contrary to some other responsible party theorists, Schattschneider suggested that voters really are not party members at all. Voters are to parties, he said, as “customers” are to “merchants,” mere choosers among competing alternatives in the electoral market place (1942, pp. 53, 60). In this he sought a “more realistic theory” of parties than some of his fellow travelers (1942, p. 59; see Schlesinger 1985, p. 1152). Indeed, the performance of

contemporary voters conforms to this view. One of the most documented and discussed aspects of modern American parties has been the measured decline in party identification among voters (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996; cf. Lawrence 2001). We see that this corresponds to Schattschneider's idea, which precisely calls for a segment of voters possessing what could be called "looser" party identification. This segment would alternate its choice of party from one election to the next, depending upon the performance of the party in power. Such vote switchers are, by definition, not very loyal to any party. So the responsible party theory assumes a certain eclecticism in the electorate.² As John Aldrich (1995) has noted, while the "party-in-the-electorate" has declined, the "party-in-elections" is still quite important. Again, this is broadly consistent with the party government argument.

The institutional arrangements of the contemporary party system, especially with regard to the relationship between the voters and the parties, are much closer to the responsible party model than has been the case at any other time in American history. This is not to say that the changes in the party system came about because of the advocacy of such party government scholars and activists. The point is that the country has gone a long way toward achieving a system of responsible parties, whatever the causes of the change. Of course, the anomaly in the current system, from the strict party government point of view, is the absence of sustained unified party control of government. As Pomper suggests, the "great flaw" of the APSA Committee's "logic was its expectation . . . that a single party would, and should, control all of the national government. This premise can no longer be accepted" (2001, p. 176).

The premise of unified government, however, was a "great flaw" in the party government school's assumptions because, even with the reforms of the party system, the voters choose to support both parties at once through divided government. I suggest that a plausible reason for this is to be found in the substance, not necessarily in the institutional arrangements, of today's party system. Support of both parties through divided government is more or less consistent with this substantive concern. The statistical and survey research on this topic tends to support this claim.³ More importantly, we will see that the support of both parties is consistent with Progressive principles.

We begin with the argument that ticket-splitting does not, in fact, represent any kind of mixing or balancing of ideological views. The idea is that some voters, usually conservatives, vote according to their perceptions of the ideological views of the candidates, regardless of party affiliation (Frymer 1994; Frymer, Kim, and Bimes 1997). That is, they vote consistently with respect to ideology, not party. The typical example is the conservative Southerner who votes for the Republican presidential candidate and the conservative Democratic congressman. This theory, however, depends upon the existence of such conservative Democratic office-seekers or, conversely, liberal Republicans. Yet it is generally thought that "liberal (or even moderate) Republicans and conservative Democrats have become endangered species in contemporary American politics" (Carmines and Layman 1997, p. 121). Indeed, the "growth of two-party

² Vote switchers are today about 20% of the electorate, about the number at the time of the APSA Committee report. The difference is that these voters today often "switch" their votes in the very same election year, i.e., they split their tickets.

³ We can dismiss certain explanations of the cause of ticket-splitting. For example, one might argue that the Australian ballot has enabled modern voters to split their tickets in a way that voters in earlier times could not. This is not a plausible explanation, however, because the Australian ballot came into wide use in America by 1890, yet divided government did not become more prevalent until more than 60 years later. Use of the Australian ballot, however, is consistent with the idea of voter freedom suggested in the responsible party model.

competition in the South . . . is perhaps the most substantial factor explaining the rise of party as a voting coalition in Congress” (Aldrich 1995, p. 290). Yet, there still seems to be a significant tendency toward ticket-splitting.

Some scholars (e.g., Fiorina 1994, 1996) precisely argue against the claim of ideological consistency in ticket-splitting. Instead, this theory contends, voters actually engage in an explicit and conscious balancing strategy when splitting their tickets. Unfortunately, the empirical evidence supporting this theory is rather weak (Born 1994a, 1994b, 2000; Mattei and Howes 2000). Still another account of ticket-splitting argues that voters specifically prefer Democratic congressmembers and Republican presidents (Jacobson 1991). The Clinton years, however, established a new division between a Democratic president and a Republican Congress, calling into question this particular interpretation (Jacobson 1996). Nevertheless, while not entirely accurate, these latter two theories are consistent with the notion that supporting both parties is in some sense reasonable, that the voters sense or assume a kind of compatibility between liberalism and conservatism.

Other researchers offer related but more subtle accounts of the variations in partisan voting, accounts that I suspect are closer to the reality of what occurs. One theory stresses the ability of parties at times to “own” certain issues in campaigns for particular offices at particular times (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik and Doherty 1996). For example, if Republicans are perceived as more committed to national defense than the Democrats, as they often have been in recent decades, then they are more likely to win those offices where such issues are significant. Indeed, this was the case in the post-Vietnam period during the Cold War. At the same time, Democrats were able to remain competitive for other offices, such as Congress, where circumstances and public opinion were not pitted against them so clearly.

A second and related account, and perhaps more important with regard to the actual dynamics of campaigning, focuses upon the use of “issue frames” by candidates when presenting themselves to the public (Jacoby 2000). The idea here is that parties and candidates (with perhaps the aid of the media, interest groups, etc.) attempt to frame the issues in campaigns better than their opponents. The successful party or candidate will frame an issue in such a way as to cohere with the already well-regarded issue position of the party or candidate. For example, it is common today for Democrats to criticize Republican tax-cutting plans as attacks upon cherished entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare. Instead of defending high taxation that adversely affects middle class voters, Democrats emphasize their concern for the weak and disadvantaged that will potentially (or not) be harmed by the tax cuts. Some candidates may successfully frame issues to their advantage, but others may not, resulting in different parties controlling different parts of the government.

Of course, these two general factors--issue ownership and issue framing--are hardly new in American politics, or electoral politics generally; politicians everywhere obviously play to their own strengths and highlight their opponents’ weaknesses. The new factor is the precise character of those strengths and weaknesses. More specifically, the Democrats emphasize *particular* benefits to purportedly disadvantaged groups. Democrats are generally viewed by the electorate as better suited to provide aid to the poor; and such aid is considered a legitimate endeavor by the American people. Republicans, on the other hand, emphasize *general* benefits (like national defense) to the whole of the society. The American people likewise view the Republicans as better able to serve those needs, indeed, as better representatives of the overall culture and heritage of the country. This alignment of public preferences and party ideologies is well documented in empirical research (Shafer and Claggett 1995; Jacoby 2000; Jacobson 1991).

There are, in effect, “two majorities” in the electorate as a whole, one which emphasizes issues of cultural uniformity and nationalism, and the other which emphasizes issues of social welfare and economic security (Shafer and Claggett 1995).

It appears that the precise practical distinction between Republicans and Democrats is the different judgment that each makes about the point at which the government can and should legitimately exercise power for the benefit of particular groups. That is, the cleavage between right and left stems from divergent interpretations of the relative culpability of society for the harm done to particular individuals or groups. For example, in the case of unemployment, the question is the extent to which the essentially *capitalist* society serves to harm some people such as to justify government welfare programs. In the case of abortion, on the other hand, the question is the extent to which a *patriarchal* society has oppressed women to the point of justifying government grants of special rights. But the question in each case is not one of rights or interests *per se*, but rather one of *social* justice, i.e., the question of whether society itself is responsible for some wrong done to some individual or group. We shall see that this characterization of public debate is consistent with, if not a consequence of, Progressivism.

However, the difference between the parties is in degree, not in kind. That is, Democrats and Republicans differ as to the judgment concerning which injuries are to be remedied by society through the agency of government. The American people are patriotic and believe that the country’s culture and traditions are worth preserving. At the same time, they believe that, through no fault of their own, some Americans can be disadvantaged. It is quite rational for the electorate, then, *from this point of view*, to support both parties at once. On the other hand, each party may go too far once it is in power. Hence, even though the typical voter does not consciously balance his or her ticket, the electorate as a whole adjusts the relative influences of liberalism and conservatism to suit its desires.⁴ As we shall see, this adjustment amounts to a kind of technical fine-tuning of public policy and administration. Instead of alternating from one party to the other, as called for in the responsible party model, the electorate, consciously or not, achieves the same end by mixing party control of the government. Again, this is consistent with Progressive principles.

Progressivism, Liberalism, and Conservatism

Today’s party system is the product of a succession of larger social and political movements in the 20th century. As we have seen, for example, the initial call for direct primaries came from the Progressive reformers at the beginning of the century; the final adoption of primaries came about as a result of the reform movements that emerged in the 1960s. Indeed, as Alonzo Hamby (1999) has noted, there was an “evolutionary continuity” from the Progressive Era to the Great Society. The great practical leap in that evolution was the New Deal, which marked a virtual refounding of the social and political order of America (Milkis 1993; Lowi 1979). The hallmark of that refounding, of course, was the creation of the centralized administrative state. Franklin Roosevelt captured the essence of this refounding when he remarked that, “The day of enlightened administration has come” (1938-1950, 1:752). Indeed, he suggested that, “The future lies with those leaders who realize that the great public is interested more in government than in politics” (9:28). He meant that through administrative and technical means government would find ways to overcome the age-old scarcities at the root of

⁴ On the general distinction between “micro” and “macro” levels of electoral performance, see Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002). In brief, a minority of voters (about 20%) accounts for the shift from Democratic to Republican from election to election. As we have seen, this is consistent with Schattschneider’s view, which suggests that a smaller group of “swing” voters will change party loyalties.

political conflict (see Marini 1992, p. 102ff). Administrative and technical questions were to replace, in a sense, specifically political questions in the public arena. The compatibility of today's parties, I suggest, largely stems from the agreement between them on the legitimacy of this change. The conflict between them stems from disagreements about just what scarcities or problems are to be ameliorated.

This shift from political to administrative questions was anticipated by Wilson, the first great proponent of responsible parties. He captures succinctly the difference between the earlier party struggles and those of today:

Up to our own day all the political writers whom we now read had thought, argued, dogmatized only about the *constitution* of government; about the nature of the state, the essence and seat of sovereignty, popular power and kingly prerogative; about the greatest meaning lying at the heart of government, and the high ends set before the purpose of government by man's nature and man's aims. The central field of controversy was that great field of theory in which monarchy rode tilt against democracy, in which oligarchy would have built for itself strongholds of privilege, and in which tyranny sought opportunity to make good its claim to receive submission from all competitors. Amidst this high warfare of principles, administration could command no pause for its own consideration. (1925c, pp. 131-35, emphasis original).

Administration, Wilson says, was formerly "put aside as 'practical detail' which clerks could arrange after doctors had agreed upon principles" (1925c, p. 132). The larger question had always centered on defining the constitutional republic. Indeed, American political parties had quarreled not so much over administrative questions, but questions of constitutional interpretation (see Kesler 1993; Mansfield 1993; Milkis 1999). "The question," Wilson notes, "was always: Who shall make law, and what shall that law be?" The issues of constitutional interpretation--reflected, for example, in controversies over the Alien and Sedition Acts or the Kansas-Nebraska Acts--had the effect of returning the country to debates over first principles, to the core questions of politics.

Wilson's description of the earlier American politics reminds us of the party conflicts described by Aristotle (1984). Aristotle believed that political communities naturally were made up of competing elements, with one usually ruling and the others ruled. These elements roughly corresponded to social classes (democrats, oligarchs, etc.), but they formed themselves into distinct voices in the city. Sometimes more than one element would share in rule, resulting in what came to be known as the mixed regime. But generally the offices of government and the very way of life in the city as a whole would be guided or determined by a particular party or class. This resolution into one point of view, one orthodox opinion, was inherent in the idea of partisanship itself. The very need for parties derived from a lack of complete knowledge of all things; opinions, as opposed to knowledge, were the stuff of political life. Scarcity of not only material things, but of knowledge itself was the source of the competing ideas about justice and the good. In this way, partisanship was simply a manifestation of political life, a natural consequence of the limited nature of human beings.

James Madison echoed Aristotle's comments and anticipated Wilson's when he compared the party battles of the 1790s to both the Revolution and the Founding. He noted that the contest between Federalists and Republicans, like those earlier and seemingly more momentous events, amounted to a "state of parties" (1962, 14:370-71). Such a state is significantly different from the clash of multiple interests or factions that he described in

Federalist 10. Much like Tocqueville's (1969, pp. 174-79) moment of great parties and in keeping with the classical tradition, Madison's "state of parties" is a conflict over the very nature of the regime itself. He notes that this debate is marked by a fundamental division between those who are more and those who are less committed to the principles of republican government. That is, in Aristotelian terms, the division between the partisans raised the regime question itself or, at the very least, required the combatants to demonstrate their fealty to the chosen republican form. It was quite natural, therefore, for Madison to refer to his opponents as "monarchists" or "royalists" (and for his opponents to call him a "Jacobin," etc.). The various issues of the time--the national bank, relations with England and France, the Alien and Sedition Acts--all were understood in terms of the cause of constitutional republicanism.

Madison's fellow Republican, Thomas Jefferson, would tellingly describe the election of 1800 as a revolution in "principle," comparing it to the revolution in "form" of 1776 (Jefferson 1903-1905, 15:212). To split one's ticket in such circumstances (assuming that one had a ticket to split) would be tantamount to voting for both monarchy and republicanism at the same time. Of course, the choice in 1800 may or may not have really been that stark, but the candidates, activists, and voters tended to think that it was. The "Jacksonian Democracy," after all, which followed upon and adopted the legacy of the Jeffersonian Republicans, was obviously more than just the preferred party of the 1830s and 1840s. Rather, the entire period was defined by a certain ethos, emphasizing the limitation of government power and the affirmation of a kind of rugged, provincial spirit in the country (Silbey 1997, pp. 13-14; Maisel 2001, pp. 108-9). Indeed, the very structure of the party system established under Martin Van Buren's guidance, with its emphasis upon localism and limited government, effectively became a part or mirror of the constitutional system (Milkis 1999). That is, both the substance and institutional arrangements of party politics for an entire century leading up to the New Deal reflected the fundamental divisions implied in constitutional politics, and the collective judgment in favor of the regime of limited government.

The new party system that Wilson envisioned would be based upon different institutional arrangements and, more importantly, on different substantive concerns. The institutional arrangements, of course, would be those of a more democratic party system, a responsible party system. The substance of that system, however, would turn on the replacement of political questions with administrative questions. This replacement logically presupposed a certain uniformity of opinion and interest in modern society, what would amount to a kind of social and cultural conservatism. The purpose of administration in particular would be the reconciliation of the various interests in the society into that uniform culture, which would amount to the creation of a centralized, welfare state. Administration would, then, so to speak, complete the progressive process beyond the "great field of theory."

Like other Progressives, Wilson believed in history itself, especially its progressive tendency to remove differences in society. Modern democracy was the result of this long process. Such democracy, for Wilson, "is not the rule of the many," not in conflict with other legitimate claims in society, but is rather "the rule of the *whole*." It is "truly government by the whole--for the rule of the majority implies and is dependent upon the cooperation, be it active or passive, of the minority." This mature form of rule could come about only after sufficient historical progress, when the nation had "come to its majority, conscious of its authority, and in clear sight of its aims. . ." (Wilson 1966-, 5:76, emphasis original). Progressive history had obliterated the more permanent and intractable differences found among the older parties.

However much the majority and the minority in modern America may be opposed, Wilson claimed, they now implicitly were in harmony with one another. In this way, wittingly or unwittingly, he anticipated a new kind of party competition, one in which conflict might be intense, but also in which there would be no fundamental discord. He believed that, as a result of social progress, public opinion had become essentially homogeneous. In short, he assumed what was impossible for the Founding Fathers: that constitutional politics may be overcome by giving everyone the same or sufficiently similar opinions, passions, and interests (cf. Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1999, p. 46). For Wilson, historical development had resulted in a society of largely uniform sentiments. “[T]he Whole, too,” he wrote, “has become self-conscious, and by becoming self-directive has set out upon a new course of development” (Wilson 1898, p. 609). Parties were to be subsumed into a universal acceptance of a more direct democracy and an expanding administrative state. According to Wilson, there are no longer, as Madison once feared, those who harbor aristocratic or oligarchic designs.

Indeed, Madison and the other Founders had rejected more direct forms of democracy as threats against the ends of the regime, equal natural rights. It has been said that Wilson’s political view “remained in its essentials committed . . . to a natural rights understanding of the Constitution” (Milkis 2002, p. 36). But this is doubtful, given his historicism (cf. Wilson 1908, ch. 1). Indeed, Wilson Carey McWilliams has observed that the Progressives in general did not retain (from their forebears in the Moral Science movement) “the assurance that it is possible to derive morals from nature” (1999, p. 107). Instead, like Wilson, they interpreted society and government in evolutionary terms; morals were to be derived from history, not nature. This is consistent with the notion that “for Progressives, *democracy* became the great object of the nation--a new telos” (Mileur 1999, p. 264, emphasis original). Democracy replaced rights as the end of government because history had replaced nature as the standard by which human things were to be judged. The substantive concern of political life had been the protection of natural rights. The structure and institutional arrangements of politics (separation of powers, federalism, decentralized parties, etc.), which served to limit government, followed logically from that concern. The eclipse of the idea of natural law, the demise of the belief that morality could be derived from something other than history or fate, led to the embrace of democracy as the best way to express the new commitment to that history or fate. (One might think of this as a democratized variant of the themes of the “historical school.” Consider in this connection, Wilson’s obvious indebtedness to Walter Bagehot.)

By extension, this certain historicism could imply what one scholar has called an “exclusionist cultural nationalism” (Keller 2002, p. 317). Indeed, one could argue that the homogeneous vision of America evident within Progressivism was largely due to the homogeneity of the advocates who proposed it. Until 1912, Progressives were associated primarily with the Republican party, which was “preeminently the party of the old-stock middle class; ethnically and culturally it was relatively homogeneous” (Hamby 1999, p. 47). As we will see, under Wilson’s Democratic party this emphasis on cultural unity would begin to wane, but he himself stressed the salutary consequences of cultural uniformity. Some scholars point out the rather illiberal tendencies of the Progressive movement as a whole. This is seen, for example, with regard to race relations in the South and elsewhere:

Unlike modern liberals . . . Progressives were insensitive to issues of race or were pessimistic about the ability of the national government to deal with those issues. Some of them appear to have believed in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, as they would have called it (Derthick and Dinan 1999, pp. 94-95).

Instead of exhibiting concern for such particular problems, many Progressives often emphasized more general issues, including the existence of a “national ‘community,’ having in mind that the nation should have purposes both moral and public that all of its members shared.” Moreover, some Progressives manifested what might be called a “communitarian” sensibility, emphasizing the “overriding importance of shared social ideals,” even though this might result in a certain indifference to particular social ills like racism (pp. 89, 93, 91).

Some scholars have characterized this emphasis upon culture and community as a kind of defensive posture the Progressives took against the forces of modernity. In this sense, there was a rather conservative element to the Progressive movement, an element not always evident to those who see the movement as merely a prelude to welfarism or socialism. “Progressives,” Sidney Milkis has written, “sought to sustain a sense of national identity in the face of the profound changes brought by the rise of the corporation and the expansion of immigration” (1999a, p. 5). Morton Keller goes further, suggesting that “the Progressive movement was the last gasp of a polity seeking to preserve what it could of a (rapidly receding) American past.” That is, the various policies advocated by the Progressives had the effect of furthering the interests of and politically empowering the white, Protestant middle class. Keller concludes that “the antitrust movement, conservation, prohibition, immigration restriction, and even woman’s suffrage [to expand the white, middle class vote] were the products of a powerful preservationist impulse more than of a forward-looking quest for social and economic change” (Keller 2002, pp. 317-18). In short, conservatism, especially with respect to the desire for cultural uniformity, is quite consistent with Progressivism.⁵

Yet, this interpretation perhaps goes too far, or is at least incomplete. However much the “deepest underlying intent” of the Progressive movement may have been “to restore an idealized American past” (Keller 2002, p. 316), we know that it was very critical of the principles informing that past. The Progressives rejected not only the theory of natural rights, they rejected the Founders’ idea of limited, constitutional government as no longer workable. They believed that the modern free market economy, with its corporations and concentrations of capital, had created conditions inimical to individual freedom. This had resulted, Progressives believed, from the Founders’ incorrect belief that society was an artificial association instituted to protect the pre-existing natural rights of individuals. Wilson argued instead that society is “an organic association of individuals for mutual aid [to] self-development” (1898, p. 633). Individuals are already part of an organic--that is, an historically given--association. From the Progressive point of view, society had actually failed. Because society is an organic whole, according to this argument, those individuals unable to compete in the game of life should not necessarily be blamed or held responsible for their own plight. Wilson suggests that the “case for society stands thus: the individual must be assured the best means, the best and fullest opportunities, for complete self-development” (1898, p. 633). One might say that Wilson and the Progressives generally raise sympathy or compassion to a public level.

Wilson’s answer to the problem was a new individuality, a “New Freedom,” one that still rested upon the “energies” of free individuals in society, but that also recognized the need for government to reign in the excesses of some of those individuals (primarily businessmen) who

⁵ I do not mean to suggest that conservatives, especially conservative intellectuals, generally understand themselves to be Progressives. They, of course, do not. Rather, I suggest that the manner in which conservatism is understood by most Americans is consistent with the conservative dimensions of Progressive thought, especially the emphasis upon culture and tradition.

threatened the self-development of other individuals in society (Wilson 1913). Only government could counter the excesses of society. “Government . . . is the organ of society,” Wilson argued, “its only potent and universal instrument: its objects must be the objects of society.” Government, he explains, “gives wide freedom to the individual for his self-development and yet guards that freedom against the competition that kills, and reduces the antagonism between self-development and social development to a minimum. . .” (1898, p. 633). It is only up to an enlightened administration to solve disputes between various interests, such as those between capital and labor. Indeed, the modern concepts of *social* welfare and *social* justice may be understood as developments of this Progressive idea: individuals are often the victims of society’s inequities and injustices, so society must supply the remedy.

As with his emphasis on cultural homogeneity, Wilson’s social welfare ideas were consistent with the wider Progressive movement. The mothers’ pension program, for example, which Milkis calls a “precursor to the New Deal’s Aid to Families with Dependent Children” (1999a, p. 9), was advocated by Theodore Roosevelt as part of this new idea that government must make amends for the failures of society. The program was, TR said, “the recognition, for the first time, that the State must make itself responsible for the plight of the mother who through no fault of her own is left unable without assistance to provide for the children she has borne” (quoted in Milkis 1999a, p. 9). The key is that the needy are such through no fault of their own. Indeed, through their leadership and example, “TR and the Progressive party thus played a critical part in transforming the American concept of charity into a public obligation, the seedbed of the contemporary concept of entitlement” (Milkis 1999a, p. 9). The emphasis upon compassion, so notable in today’s public life, has definite origins in Progressivism.

That concept of entitlement would emerge most clearly, of course, during the New Deal. In his 1932 Commonwealth Club Address, FDR asserted that the task of modern government is “to assist the development of an economic declaration of rights, an economic constitutional order” (Roosevelt 1938-1950, 1:752). That new order would largely be brought about by the New Deal transformation of government and enshrined in the Four Freedoms and the Second Bill of Rights articulated by Roosevelt (9:671-72, 13:40-41). Indeed, FDR eventually succeeded in transforming the traditional belief in natural rights into what has been called “programmatic rights” (Milkis 1993). Such rights, “positive” rights guaranteed by government, were thought necessary to counteract the consequences of a free market society. “Security,” Milkis suggests, “was to be the new self-evident truth of political life in the United States” (1999a, p. 35). Whereas the Founding Fathers aimed at, and largely succeeded in, preserving political rights, they had failed in preserving social welfare rights. The problem was social, not political.

Indeed, while human beings may be social beings, they are not necessarily, from the Progressive point of view, political beings. Even though government is society’s instrument to correct society’s ills, Progressives did not understand this as an essentially political matter. Again, despite outward appearances, the Progressive argument was not one of, say, democrats over oligarchs, as Aristotle might have understood it. For such an argument is a moral argument for the superiority of freedom over wealth. Wilson, for example, specifically rejected socialism (1913, p. 27). He was quick to point out that government support for individual self-development should not be understood as a claim against any particular class or group in society. Rather it was a claim against society itself. Government regulation of society, he explains, “is not interference: it is the equalization of conditions, so far as possible, in all branches of endeavor; and the equalization of conditions is the very opposite of interference” (1898, p. 633). Interference, as he understands it, would mean something like the use of government power for

classically democratic reasons, the benefit of the majority at the expense of the minority. The question for Wilson was not how to achieve the supremacy of democracy so conceived, for now democracy was “rule of the whole.” The question, rather, was how to deal with the failures of society while at the same time securing some measure of individual freedom. Wilson’s reference to an “equality of conditions” is instructive, reminding us of Tocqueville’s commentary (e.g., 1969, pp. 671-74). An equality of conditions, as opposed to an equality of natural rights, is a byproduct of history, a social construction. The free society that the Founders created had, according to Wilson, evolved into an order in which such equality was threatened. Therefore, the administrative state would have to be created to redress the problem. In this sense, Progressivism is at the root of modern liberalism.

Party Government, Divided Government, and Progressivism

For Progressives like Wilson, then, the aim was to manage society in order to maintain a certain equilibrium in its development. This would require effective techniques, exercised by the government, to reconcile the needs both of individuals and of society. Hence, Wilson argued, government

is a part of life, and, with life, it must change, alike in its objects and in its practices; only this principle must remain unaltered,—this principle of liberty, that there must be the freest right and opportunity of adjustment. Political liberty consists in the best practicable adjustment between the power of the government and the privilege of the individual; and the freedom to alter the adjustment is as important as the adjustment itself for the ease and progress of affairs and the contentment of the citizen (Wilson 1966-, 18:71-72).

The principal means by which this “adjustment” would take place was through the then-emerging system of centralized administration. Regulatory bureaus and agencies of all kinds would be created to counter the tendency of business to endanger the plight of the common person. In economic terms, especially after the New Deal, this would come to mean ensuring both economic growth and economic security. The “adjustment” Wilson anticipated would take the now-familiar shape of changing degrees and kinds of government involvement in the economy. Indeed, public life would no longer be defined by competing claims to political rule (democracy versus republicanism), but by competing claims to sound administration (liberalism versus conservatism).

Yet, consistent with the premises of the responsible party theory, such “adjustment” would manifest itself not only in the bureaucracies, but in the elective side of government as well. The parties came to represent before the people and in the government the competing ideological claims of liberalism and conservatism. As Schattschneider notes:

The Democratic and the Republican parties reflect the great cleavage in the regime, but they do something more than that. They are the hammer and the anvil on which American policy is beaten out. Both are democratic and capitalist; both operate within the political system, i.e., they compete for political power by democratic means. The focus of the Democratic party interest broadly is on the governmental side whereas the Republican party tends to be more greatly interested in the maintenance of the power and freedom of business. The *tendencies* of the parties differ, therefore, but both have loyalties that transcend their origins. It is difficult to imagine a system better calculated to serve the public interest in the equilibrium than the competition of the major parties in this context (Schattschneider 1958, p. 16, emphasis original).

Following the tone set by the New Deal, Schattschneider understood the matter principally in economic terms. The goal, he believed, was to sustain a “new equilibrium” between the powers of government and of business, thus ensuring the proper combination of growth and security. As he suggested, the “object of the game is not to destroy business power but to match it with governmental power.” Indeed, in a very telling comment, he remarked that “the public does not seem to be very much interested in a resolution of the conflict” between the two (Schattschneider 1960, pp. 126, 127, 122).

Although Schattschneider suggests that the “alternation of the parties in power” is the means for preserving the “equilibrium of government and business” (1958, p. 16), his larger point is that there is no fundamental division between the two parties. Despite their opposed “*tendencies*,” both parties share the same commitment to the larger system of which they are parts. As we have seen, Republicans tend to frame issues in general terms for the benefit of the whole society. They claim, for example, that government spending must be cut. Democrats claim, in response, that it is important to fund medical care for the elderly. That is, they tend to frame issues in narrow terms for the benefit of needy groups (Jacoby 2000, p. 750). Yet, this difference between the parties, seemingly incompatible on its face, makes sense from a Progressive point of view, as no less a conservative than Ronald Reagan famously argued: tax cuts stimulate economic growth, which in turn generates higher tax revenues that can be used for social programs. What Reagan did not argue, and what would have been argued a century ago, is that the taxes themselves are illegitimate because the programs are unconstitutional. In this sense, one can see a certain compatibility in principle between modern liberalism and conservatism. Shared power between Democrats and Republicans is likewise, then, quite consistent with Progressivism and, by extension, the responsible party theory. It is a short step from Schattschneider’s idea of equilibrium between parties *alternating* control of the government to the *sharing* of control between those same parties. It is a natural or logical outgrowth of the theory of responsible parties, despite the fact that unified government is required by the most ideal form of the theory. Since the people want the benefits of both liberalism and conservatism while avoiding the pitfalls of each, voting for both parties at once may be imminently rational. We recall that the responsible party theory does not call for every voter to be strictly loyal to any one party. And many voters today clearly are not.

However, the balance between the parties that we see today did not emerge immediately as a result of the Progressive movement or even of the New Deal. When Schattschneider wrote of the equilibrium between the Democrats and Republicans in 1958, the consequences of the transformation of the parties into liberal and conservative standard-bearers were only beginning to become apparent. For the most part, Schattschneider had actually favored liberalism over conservatism:

As a nation we have had little opportunity to prepare ourselves for the realization that it is now necessary for the government to act as it has never acted before

The central difficulty of the whole system--the difficulty which causes all of the difficulties--is the fact that the government characteristically suffers from a deficiency of the power to govern . . . (Schattschneider 1948, pp. 1-3).

Like most Americans of his time, Schattschneider supported the New Deal transformation of government. Everett Carl Ladd, in fact, wrote of the “underlying political agenda” of Schattschneider’s 1950 APSA Committee. That agenda reflected the political perspective of the “New Deal theory of governance--an outlook widely shared in liberal and Democratic circles in

the 1940s and 1950s” (1992, p. 32). But in this, Schattschneider was merely a good Progressive. Like Wilson and FDR, he had to emphasize the creation of the administrative state because what was missing from American society, he believed, was the governmental antidote to the excesses of society. In other words, the conservative dimension of Progressivism had faded into insignificance with the overwhelming economic troubles of the 1930s, which troubles largely brought the New Deal into being. To a great extent, then, the New Deal party system, lasting from the 1930s to the 1960s, appeared much like previous party systems (Milkis 1993). There was usually unified government (especially early in the system) and one party (the Democrats) was clearly dominant for most of the period.

But this would change in the 1960s, a period some scholars consider a “critical era” in American political history (Aldrich 1995; Carmines and Stimson 1989). I suggest that this occurred because, in a sense, the Democrats went too far. More specifically, the argument behind the cause of social justice--providing aid to those harmed by society through no fault of their own--did not play well when applied to areas unrelated to the economy. As long as social welfare issues dominated public debate, Democrats tended to have the advantage. This was a consequence of the fact that after the Great Depression economic security became a much more important concern. Regardless of the intellectual roots of Progressivism and the New Deal, it is likely that public support for the welfare state really grew out of the imminently practical concern to counteract the problems of the modern economy. The uplifting of compassion and charity to the level of governmental duty made sense to the public when it was obvious that vast numbers of Americans were out of work through no fault of their own; it was difficult to blame a man for being jobless when there simply were no jobs to be had. Again, no less a figure than Ronald Reagan proudly claimed to have voted for FDR, several times. But by the time of the counter-culture movement of the 1960s, the country began to swing away from the Democrats. Just as Reagan changed parties, so did Americans in general begin to change their view of the party. The Democrats became “positioned out of the mainstream” on issues important to many Americans, especially Southerners:

The genius of Nixon’s southern strategy in 1968 and later lay not in directly racial appeals, but in the complex of “social issues.” Early on, these included calls for “law and order,” such as stopping dissent against the Vietnam War, urban rioting, and the use of marijuana. These appeals tapped not just racial tensions, but patriotism and opposition to the lifestyles of “hippies and yuppies.” . . . George McGovern in 1972 was sometimes disparaged as the candidate of “acid, amnesty, and abortion” The rise of feminism, environmentalism, and gay activism, and its impact on national Democratic politics, further supported this position [out of the mainstream] (Aldrich 1995, pp. 264-65).

Such social or cultural issues did not play well with many Americans. The claims of the leftist dissenters appeared less as compassion for the needy than indulgence in anti-social and anti-American behavior. In much the same way that the earlier Progressives had been motivated by a desire to maintain the social and cultural integrity of the country, so did many Americans turn away from the radicalism that seemed to tinge the Democrats in the 1960s. Indeed, with the chaos of the Democratic convention in Chicago and the rise of Richard Nixon’s “silent majority,” 1968 is perhaps the symbolic pivotal year in the creation of the new social and partisan system, which system had been developing at least since the New Deal (Aldrich 1995, pp. 262-63; Shafer 2001, pp. 236-37).

In fact, the problems of the Democrats that emerged in the 1960s can likely be traced, although not in a simple causal sense, to the original shift to Progressivism under Wilson in 1912. At that time, as mentioned above, Progressivism was largely a phenomenon among white, middle class Protestants, most of whom were Republicans. This may have accounted for much of the cultural conservatism within the movement. Since the Democrats were a “much more pluralistic” party, they strategically set themselves against the dominant culture represented in the Republican party. “Ethnically and culturally more diverse,” Alonzo Hamby notes, “their constituencies . . . possessed numerous conflicting economic interests and worldviews” (1999, p. 48). Early in the 20th century, as with the 21st, such diversity was a necessary element of Democratic party politics. Indeed, the Democrats really “could achieve political power in no other way” (p. 48).

Yet, the diversity of the coalition tended to move the party away from the cultural center of the country. While this did not become an outright electoral liability until later in the century, the tendency of Democrats to seek direct government benefits for particular groups would eventually become a problem for the party. As Hamby notes, the certain balkanization of the party “gave rise to what has become the most serious dilemma of postprogressive reformism. The drive to restore the ideal of democratic citizenship working for the common interest transmuted into the most fully elaborated system of pluralist coalition politics in American history” (1999, p. 48). This eventually would develop into what has come to be known as “interest group liberalism” (Lowi 1979). It became harder and harder to articulate a Democratic vision for America that did not call into question one basic element or another of American society itself. “In 1916,” Hamby notes, “Wilson foreshadowed the Roosevelt coalition of 1936. Then, as later, the question of whether unified purpose could be found in diversity was better finessed than addressed squarely” (1999, p. 49).

This became imminently clear after the 1960s as the focus of electoral competition continued to shift away from social welfare issues (Shafer 2001). Morton Keller notes that the New Dealers envisioned a “democratic cultural nationalism” that would be essentially “inclusive” (Keller 2002, p. 317). But this inclusiveness, exemplified most clearly in today’s “multiculturalism” movement, can also lead to a certain relativism. As one scholar has noted, the relativism implicit (and, at times, explicit) in the original Progressivism can lead to “drift” and, worse yet, a “happy nihilism” (McWilliams 1999, pp. 115-16). It is not difficult to see how this might actually undermine the possibility of a national and inclusive democracy. The phenomenon of “political correctness,” for example, is only one instance of this problem where the left, contrary to its Progressive roots, takes on an anti-majoritarian cast. This phenomenon is part of a “politics by other means” in which political conflict is centered not in the electorate, but in the courts and the bureaucracies (Ginsberg and Shefter 1990; Marini 1992). But this shift, of course, has not been complete; Congress and the president are obviously still vitally important. Conservative Republicans have, thus, reacted against liberalism in the electoral arena, stressing more and more the uniformity of a single American culture. The rise of the Religious Right and its alignment with the Republicans is only the most obvious example of such a reaction. If we consider conservatism to be a compatible corrective of liberalism within a larger Progressive system, then the apparent dominance of interest group liberalism becomes less apparent.

Of course, it has long been argued that conservatives of most stripes are too indifferent to the plight of the poor and weak in society. Hence, there has been no popular rejection of the basic tenets of the New Deal or the Great Society; there has been no change in the framework through which policy issues are viewed. It is true that the major Republican victory in the 1994

congressional elections was largely a repudiation of liberalism, especially with respect to President Clinton's proposed health care program (Jacobson 1996, p. 206). However, his and the Democrats' ability to rebound in the next election through use of the so-called "Mediscare" strategy points to the continuing force of liberalism in party politics (Quirk and Matheson 1997). It was quite easy for the Democrats to prevent a Republican follow-up victory in 1996 by turning to, among other things, a defense of the core entitlements of the welfare state still popular with most Americans. Indeed, even the welfare reform measure of that year, sometimes characterized (especially by liberals) as a shift away from New Deal principles, was always characterized by its proponents (primarily conservatives) as a necessary change precisely to help those that such programs were originally intended to help. That is, there has been no essential change in the consensus opinion in favor of the pursuit of social justice. Rather, current welfare and entitlement reforms are perhaps better understood as the kind of administrative adjustments that Wilson originally envisioned, adjustments sanctioned by an electoral process that largely balances the claims of culture and compassion. "Americans have," as Milkis says, "a love-hate relationship with the national state . . ." (1999a, p. 30). In keeping with that relationship, a general equilibrium between liberalism and conservatism, represented most clearly by continued sharing of power between Democrats and Republicans, seems finally to have appeared.

This sharing of power, of course, can be tumultuous. Schattschneider's characterization of the Democratic and Republican parties as the "hammer and the anvil on which American policy is beaten out" is apt. Even though the period of the 1960s was a "critical era" in American politics, it did not result in a conventional party realignment, with one party dominating the political system for a generation or so as had happened in previous critical eras (Aldrich 1995, ch. 8). Rather, the parties have been intensely competitive in the electoral arena. Partisanship in the policy making process has likewise intensified. Many observers both inside and outside of Washington object to the rancor. In fact, surveys often indicate that the American people, who obviously choose to divide control of the government in the first place, dislike such partisanship and want the parties in government to stop bickering (Jacobson 2000).

Given this state of affairs, many scholars and observers of the current system question whether divided government is really consistent with the doctrine of responsible parties or with healthy democracy in general. While there is a certain equilibrium between the parties, some still argue that divided government results in "gridlock" between the government branches, undermining "effective government" (e.g., Sundquist 1994). Consistent with the ideal party government model, these commentators argue that coherent policy making is possible only when one party controls all of the elective branches. Indeed, as mentioned at the outset, deadlock under divided control should be particularly acute if the parties are ideologically very opposed to one another. In particular, divided government with cohesive and ideological parties renders accountability to the people difficult. Each party blames the other for the failure of government, creating a system in which stalemate breeds further stalemate as voters are unable to assign clear responsibility for government performance (Fiorina 1996). It is therefore thought that the current system is more or less dysfunctional from a party government standpoint.

However, we should not miss two points. First, even from the point of view of the party government school, deadlock is bad only if it really prevents policy-making in accordance with the popular will. Second, superficial conflict may actually mask an underlying unity between the parties. I suggest that, even though divided government may at times somewhat hinder the

creation of public policies consistent with the popular will, the general effect is not contrary to the aims of the responsible party school.

The results of statistical studies on the responsiveness of government to the popular will under divided control are mixed, but that is to be expected given the nature of this competitive but cooperative system (cf. Tarrance, De Vries, and Mosher 1998). David Mayhew's *Divided We Govern* (1991; see also Mayhew 1993) is the seminal work in the area. Revising the conventional view that divided government causes deadlock, he argues instead that it is actually no less responsive than unified government. He concludes that the "public mood" in general determines policy despite the presence or absence of divided control. Some scholars have agreed with Mayhew on the relative unimportance of divided government (e.g., Jones 1994). Others, however, dispute his revisionist findings (e.g., Kelly 1993a, 1993b; Edwards, Barrett, and Peake 1997). Not surprisingly, much of the dispute in the literature centers upon methodological questions, i.e., how to measure what the people want and how to measure whether the government has lived up to those wishes (see the literature review in Coleman 1999, pp. 821-23).

John Coleman (1999) has provided perhaps the most elaborate and sophisticated statistical critique of Mayhew's study. He argues that, under the right circumstances, unified government is indeed more responsive to public opinion than is divided government. Part of his argument rests upon his use of a different measure of public opinion than the one used by Mayhew: James Stimson's (1991) survey index of public "mood." It is worth noting, however, that Stimson himself led a study using the same measure of public opinion, but concluded that each of the "electoral institutions translates immediately public opinion into public policy." In fact, "when electoral politicians sense a shift in public preferences, they act directly and effectively to shift the direction of public policy. We find no evidence of delay or hesitation" (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995, p. 560). Of course, this study does not mean that Coleman's findings are wrong, for he was measuring a somewhat different phenomenon. The point is that during the last 35 years of divided control, the government on the whole has been responsive to the popular will on the whole; that is, the "macro polity" is quite democratic (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). In fact, while he criticizes Mayhew's revisionist idea, Coleman himself nevertheless admits that his own findings do "not require one to make extreme claims about the inevitable 'stalemate' under divided government--the revisionist analysis is correct to argue that such dire claims are not supportable" (1999, p. 833). I suspect that Coleman is generally correct: divided government can hinder responsiveness to the popular will, but there is no reason to think that it has caused any kind of paralysis in government. It is safe to assume that the American people today *generally* get what they want from their government, even with both parties routinely sharing power.

Mayhew's approach is quite defensible. He suggests that the American people on the whole tended to favor more activist, liberal government in the 1960s and early 1970s--generally, the Great Society years--regardless of which party they placed in power. The Democrats, the ostensibly liberal party, did not control the government alone for much of that period. Yet, the liberal thrust of policy making swept along the Republican presidents Nixon and Ford. Conversely, the non-activist periods before and after this period were marked by a generally conservative mood. We should note an important element of Mayhew's commonsense approach to this history:

In short, at least in the instance of moods calling for change through government policy-making, interlocking political movements evidently play a major role by crystallizing favorable attitudes into citizen action, which in turn can bring results.

. . . Once going at full tilt, they are capable of permeating and animating the two parties--usually one more than the other, but to a substantial degree both (Mayhew 1991, p. 163).

The result is a coalition government with Democrats and Republicans sharing power. Despite their clear and perhaps growing differences, the two parties are able to reconcile their views in order to respond to public opinion. This observation is confirmed by others who also conclude that “[p]olarized parties in separate institutions *do* come together to pass needed legislation” (Fleisher and Bond 2000, p. 195). This reflects a compatibility between the contemporary parties that is unusual in American history. In Schattschneider’s words, the parties have shared “loyalties” despite their differences.

I suspect that the claim of stalemate caused by divided government largely stems from the nature of partisan rhetoric today, which even manifests itself as *intraparty* dissension (Groeling and Kernell 2000). But the rhetorical intensity in general is perhaps a consequence of personal frustration caused by a system in which the competition never really dies down. As has been said, if “*gridlock* does not accurately describe policy making in the U.S. government, another traffic metaphor, *road rage*, might be used to characterize the highly charged partisan environment of the recent period” (Fleisher and Bond 2000, p. 191). But even this is not necessarily inconsistent with the idea of responsible parties. It may be the case that divided government intensifies party cohesion and, therefore, responsiveness to the electorate. For example, it has been argued that divided government actually increases the popularity of presidents (Bailey 2002). Moreover, it has been shown that the “coherence” of party messages “is more achievable through negative commentary about the opposition,” especially in periods of divided control (Groeling and Kernell 2000, p. 95). That is, it may be the case that the polarization of the parties across the separated powers does, in fact, serve the purpose of responsible parties through a version of coalition government.

Conclusion

As for the chance that either of the two parties might end its frustration, the prospects are probably not good. That would require a party realignment like those of the past. This is unlikely to happen for three reasons. First, and most obvious, the constitutional system of separated powers prevents the emergence of conventional party government, which is much more likely in a parliamentary system. Second, the institutional circumstances (primaries, absence of patronage, television) render the new system much more competitive because much more candidate-centered. It is unlikely that today’s “party in service” will be replaced by the older form of “party in control” (Aldrich 1995). But the institutional constraints also make the new system more democratic because more competitive.

Third, and most important, the ideological framework of the party system is conducive to the Progressive view and, thus, a sharing of power between the parties. Democrats, of course, tend to embrace the terms and conditions of Progressive thinking more readily than do Republicans. But they are, as a consequence of the division and competition inherent in the institutional arrangements of the party system, relegated to being either the party of culture or the party of compassion. For historical and strategic reasons, they have become the latter. Elements within the party, such as the Democratic Leadership Council, have emerged to deal with the limitations of the narrowness of this message. But there is little evidence that the party has changed in its essentials. Many liberal intellectuals also recognize the problem and complain of the loss of community (Sandel 1996), indeed, of the lost promise of Progressivism (Eisenach 1994). But when concrete proposals for party renewal are put forward by Democrats, there is

almost always unease exhibited about any move to the right (e.g., Greenberg and Skocpol 1997). But this is simply to say that they are Democrats.

The situation of the Republican party is, in some respects, better than that of liberals, insofar as conservatives generally tend to reject the terms of Progressivism. In this way, at least, Republicans are more willing to jettison the language of “progress” altogether, allowing for the creation of a new political and party system conducive to their views. But therein lies their dilemma, shown no more clearly than in George W. Bush’s call for a “compassionate conservatism.” That he felt it even necessary to remind voters that conservatism is, in fact, compassionate speaks volumes about the rhetorical problems facing Republicans. Moreover, on a deeper level, mainstream conservatism today lacks a coherent set of principles that can undercut the orthodox Progressive view of history and culture. It is remarkable, for example, how the thought of major traditionalist and conservative writers is consistent with that view, particularly with regard to the centrality of history and culture as dimensions of meaning and significance. Indeed, one of the more striking aspects of certain strands of conservative political thought today (e.g., Kirk 1991) is the antagonism to the natural rights principles of the Founding Fathers, the most authoritative principles available to counter the current Progressive orthodoxy.

In sum, the new role of the parties is a logical consequence of the Progressive political order that has taken root in America since the New Deal and the Great Society. The era of divided government is really an era of coalition government, but one in which the two major parties form a Progressive partnership. The coalition between Democrats and Republicans finds its best theoretical explanation in the Progressive roots of the responsible party theory, however much such a coalition may seem antithetical to that theory on its face.

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