

CHAPTER 1:

HOW DID WE GET INTO THIS MESS?

When Barack Obama captured the White House in 2008 there were many who heralded his victory as marking the long overdue onset of color blind politics in America. As NPR reported, “The Economist called it a post-racial triumph... [and] the New Yorker wrote of a post-racial generation...”¹ Even John McCain, just after his presidential loss to Obama, declared that: “America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of [a century ago]. There is no better evidence of this than the election of an African-American to the presidency of the United States.”² Sadly, the widely advertised post-racial society never quite materialized. Indeed, a growing body of evidence suggests that, if anything, the influence of what Tesler calls “old fashioned racism” has grown considerably since Obama took office.³

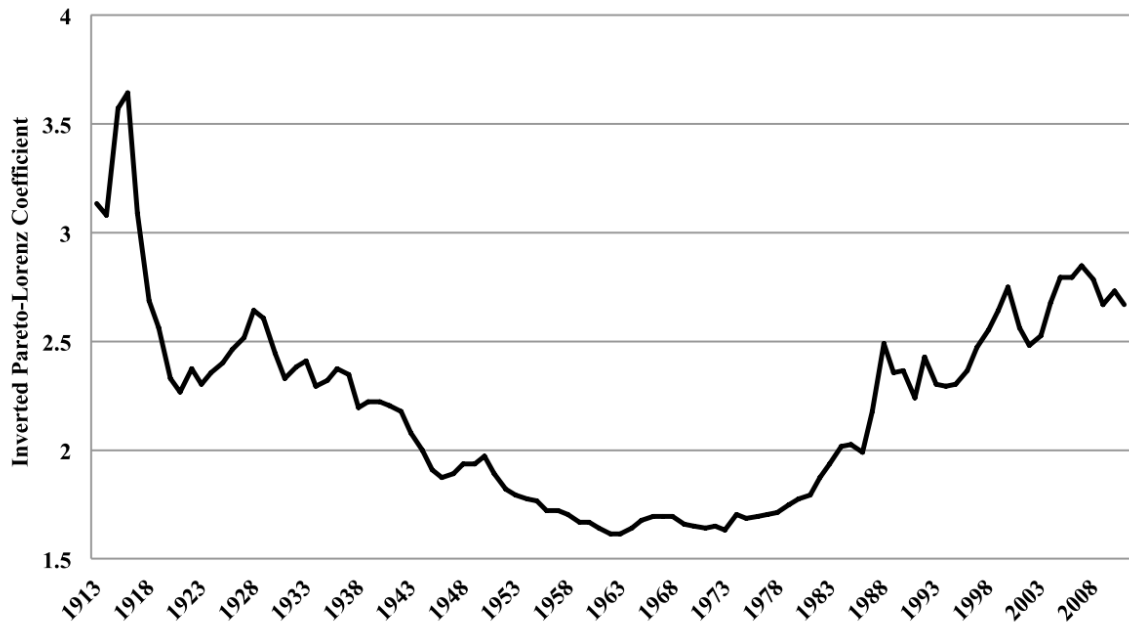
Furthermore, those hoping that Obama’s presidency would begin to moderate the extreme partisan tensions of the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush years and perhaps even bring about greater economic equality have once again been disappointed. The harsh reality is that for all its historic significance, Obama’s presidency has done little to reduce the country’s underlying racial, political and economic divisions. America’s racial politics—its history no less than its contemporary manifestations—will come in for a great deal of attention in this book. We begin, however, by considering these other two central features: the extreme economic inequality and unprecedented partisan polarization that mark contemporary America. As we show below, the country is now more starkly divided in political terms than at any time since the end of Reconstruction and more unequal in material terms than roughly a century ago and greater, even, than on the eve of the Great Depression.

¹ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18489466>

² <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15301.html>

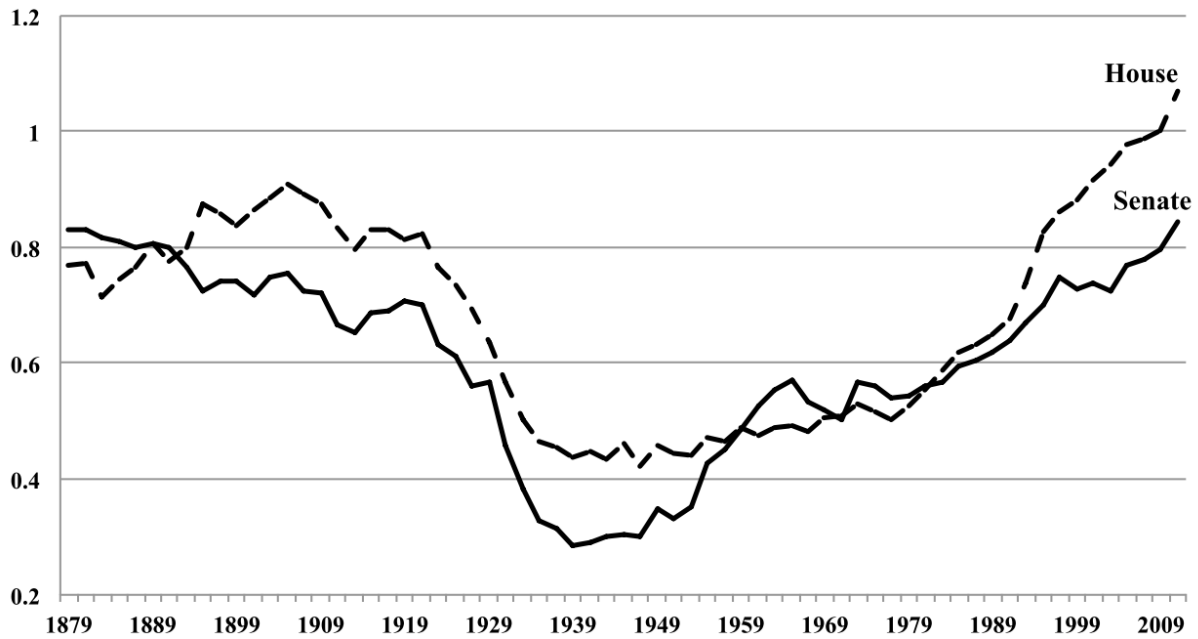
³ Parker and Barreto 2013; Pasek et al. *forthcoming*; Tesler *forthcoming*; Tesler and Sears 2010

Figure 1.1 Income Inequality, 1913-2012



Source: *The World Top Incomes Database; Piketty and Saez (2007)*

Figure 1.2 Political Polarization, 1879-2012



Source: *Polarized America / voteview.com*

In Figure 1.1 we use research by two economists, Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, on income inequality to map fluctuations in the economic gap between America's haves and have

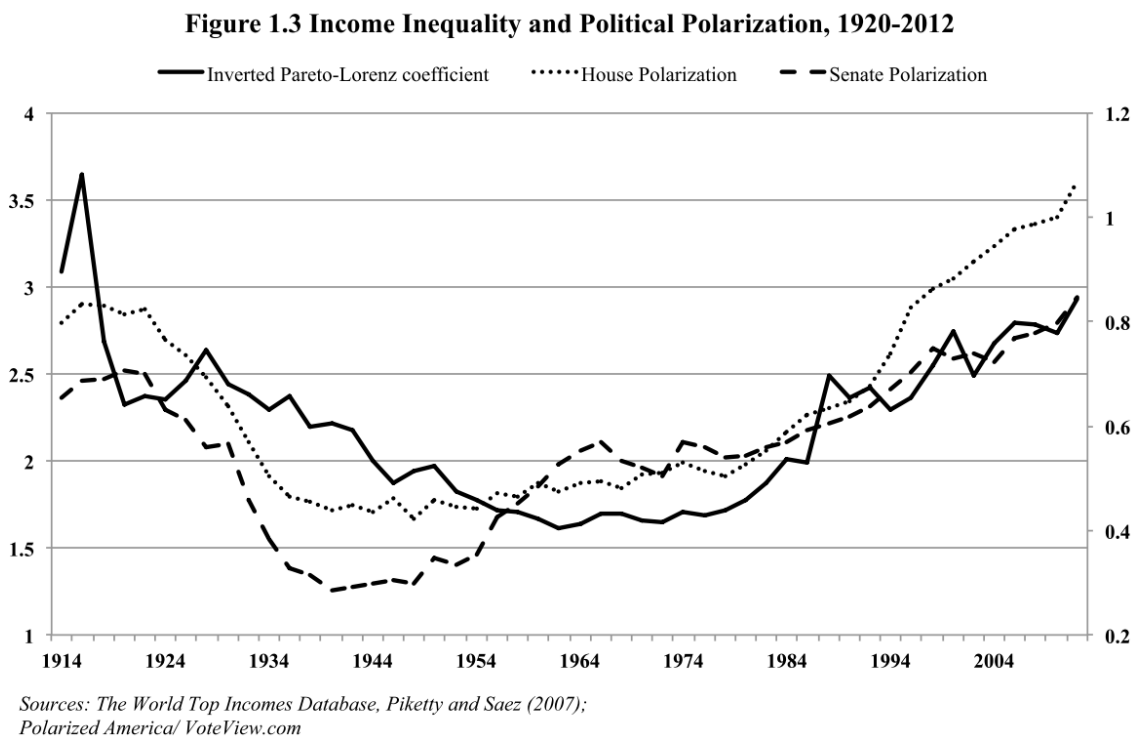
nots since 1913, as far as the data go back. Figure 1.2 shifts the focus from economics to politics. For better than 30 years, political scientists, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal have refined the analysis of Congressional voting into something of an art. Using their spatial model of voting, they have been able for the entire history of Congress to map the left/right oscillations in both the House and Senate and to assess just how ideologically close or far apart the two parties have been at any point in our history. Using the Poole and Rosenthal data, Figure 1.2 maps partisan polarization in Congress since 1879, again the earliest period for which there is comparable data.

This latter figure confirms the deep political divisions that characterize the present-day U.S. In truth, we probably didn't need the Poole-Rosenthal data to know that. The events of the past four years—serial budget crises, government shutdown, willful sabotage of presidential appointments, etc.—have told us all we need to know about escalating paralysis and government dysfunction. Just how bad has it gotten? Consider that, as of October 2013, one in three Americans identified government dysfunction as the “most important problem” confronting the country.⁴ While the percent of subjects concurring in this judgment had increased steadily over the course of the Obama presidency, never before had a plurality of respondents identified “government/Congress, politicians” as the country's most pressing problem. This finding coupled with a close examination of the last few years of the Poole-Rosenthal time series highlight the sad reality: far from diminishing, partisan polarization has escalated sharply since

⁴ Gallup Poll on “Most Important Problem” (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/165302/dysfunctional-gov-surpasses-economy-top-problem.aspx>)

Obama took office. The same is true for economic inequality. A growing body of studies now confirms that income inequality has also jumped significantly on Obama’s watch.⁵

There is another important point to be made as well. The two trend lines closely mirror each other. If it looks like the two trends are related, it’s because, as shown in figure 1.3, they are.⁶ The growing partisan divide has, we will argue, been one of the principal engines of rising economic inequality over the past 3-4 decades.



We will devote a great deal of attention to these two defining features—political division and economic inequality—of the contemporary American political economy, documenting both and assessing the links between them. As the title of the chapter suggests, however, the central question that motivates the book is about *origins* and the complex history of American politics

⁵ Emerging from the Piketty and Saez World Top Incomes Database, see “Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States” by Saez first published in *Pathways Magazine* at Stanford’s Center on Poverty and Inequality, and the September 3, 2013 update (<http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-USstopincomes-2012.pdf>).

⁶ McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006

since roughly the onset of World War II. How did we go from the strong bipartisan consensus and relative economic equality of the war years and postwar period—clearly reflected in the above figures—to the extreme inequality and savage partisan divisions of today? We offer a stylized answer to this question in this first chapter, devoting the balance of the book to a detailed historical narrative designed to document and elaborate the broad-brush stroke account offered here.

On Parties, Movements and the Rise and Fall of the Median Voter

In recent years, a growing chorus of political commentators has lamented the absence of anything resembling a bi-partisan “middle” in American politics. What a difference a few decades make. While it is now commonplace for political analysts and observers to celebrate the strong, bipartisan consensus that prevailed in the postwar period, there were those at the time who saw the dominance of moderates in both parties as a kind of tyranny of the middle. In 1950, the American Political Science Association issued a report entitled “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System,” that identified the ideological sameness of the two parties as the central problem of American democracy.⁷ More colorfully, George Wallace explained his third party challenge to Nixon and Humphrey in 1968 in very similar terms. Said Wallace: “there is not a dime’s worth of difference between the Democrat and Republican parties!”

Whatever one’s normative take on the centrist tendencies of the era, the received wisdom among contemporary scholars was that the two party, winner-take-all structure of the American system virtually compelled candidates—especially presidential nominees—to hue to the center if

⁷ Lepore 2013

they hoped to be elected. In his influential 1957 book, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Anthony Downs argued that in a two-party system candidates could be expected to “rapidly converge” on the center of the ideological spectrum “so that parties closely resemble one another.” Introduced a year later, Duncan Black’s Median Voter Theorem, represented a highly compatible, if more formalized, version of Downs’ “convergence” theory. For several decades thereafter this general model of voting was thought of as akin to a natural law when it came to U.S. politics, especially in elections involving large numbers of voters. Since the ideological preferences of voters were assumed to be distributed normally around a moderate midpoint, any candidate adopting a comparatively extreme position on the liberal to conservative continuum would seem to be easy prey for a more centrist candidate. Not only was the theory appealingly parsimonious, but it also seemed to accord with real world “data.” When Downs and Black offered their versions of the theory, Eisenhower—the quintessential moderate Republican—was in office. Both candidates in the 1960 race—Kennedy and Nixon—were moderates within their respective parties. The same was true in 1968, when, as Wallace complained, the general ideological positions of the nominees of the two major parties seemed largely indistinguishable. But perhaps the most powerful affirmations of the theory came in 1964 and 1972 when the decidedly conservative and liberal candidates, Barry Goldwater and George McGovern respectively, were soundly trounced by their more moderate opponents (LBJ in ‘64 and Nixon in ’72). In short, the theory seemed pretty nigh incontrovertible: the median voter could be counted on to punish any candidate crazy enough to assume an extreme partisan position. Or to use Cox’s useful distinction, “centripetal” pressures seemed to be far more influential to the workings of the U.S. electoral system than “centrifugal.”⁸

⁸ Cox 1990

Reagan's victory in 1980, however, was much harder to square with this view, as was the growing body of empirical evidence attesting to increasing polarization between party elites during the 1980s and even more so, the 1990s. By the mid to late-1990s, campaign strategists and political journalists were routinely acknowledging the brave new world of extreme partisan politics.⁹ Consider the following representative comments of election analysts in advance of the 1998 mid-term elections:

As they gear up for the election, Republicans and Democrats are operating on the premise that turnout will be low and the outcome will be determined by partisan activists. Consequently, GOP leaders intent on revving up the party's conservative base are about to serve up as much red meat as a Kansas City steak house.¹⁰

Even if there is a backlash against [Paul] Starr, Republicans don't really care. They are not focused on swing voters or fence-sitters. Their strategy for the fall is clear and calculating: appeal to the hard-core Republican base. Get them as outraged as possible. Make sure they give money and vote heavily.¹¹

Scholars too acknowledged just how far we had come from the reassuring centrist logic of the "median voter theorem." Fiorina captured the emerging consensus when he asked:

⁹ Burden 2001; Cohen et al. 2008; Fiorina 1999; Fiorina et al. 2005

¹⁰ Doherty 1998

¹¹ Roberts and Roberts 1998

“Whatever happened to the median voter? Rather than attempt to move her ‘off the fence’ or ‘swing’ her from one party to another, today’s campaigners seem to be ignoring her. Instead, they see their task as making sure that strong partisans and ideologues don’t pout and stay home. Why has a model of centrist, politics that seemed like an appropriate description of American politics in the 1950s and even the 1960s become an inappropriate model by the 1990s?”¹²

The central puzzle for us is how did we get from the seeming “natural law” of the median voter theorem to the decisive power wielded by ideological extremists, as exemplified by today’s Republican Party? There is now a substantial literature—rooted in scholarship, but much of it written for a popular audience—that purports to answer this question. The problem is the literature focuses almost all of its attention on the shifting fortunes of the two major parties and the vagaries of electoral politics. Its main story lines include the loss of the white South by the Democrats in the 1960s, Nixon’s “southern strategy” in wooing disaffected Dixiecrats, and the thunder on the right of the Reagan Revolution of the 1980s. These are critically important chapters of the broader story and, as such, will come in for a great deal of attention in later chapters. The lacuna is not what the literature focuses on, but what it almost always omits. The omission reflects a longstanding, if unfortunate, disciplinary division of labor when it comes to the analysis of American politics. In general, the otherwise impressive literature on the development of today’s distinctive U.S. political economy has been impoverished by its almost total neglect of social movement dynamics. Yes, the electoral realignment of the South

¹² Fiorina 1999, p.3

occasioned a tectonic shift in American politics and moved both parties substantially off center politically. And yes, Reagan's two-term presidency not only deepened partisan divisions, but also encouraged the economic trends that have left us so fundamentally unequal today. But to represent these features of the present-day political economy as byproducts of party politics alone—which is what most scholarly accounts tend to do—is to badly distort the more complicated origins of the mess in which we find ourselves. All of these features of contemporary U.S. politics have been—and continue to be—powerfully shaped by the interaction of movements, parties, and governmental institutions. The best scholarly work on contemporary American politics continues to be done by political scientists, but reflecting the aforementioned disciplinary divide, political scientists tend to focus their attention exclusively on political parties and institutions and leave the study of social movements or other forms of non-institutionalized politics to sociologists. This means that the crucial role played by social movements in the evolution of the American political economy since the 1960s has been almost completely neglected in even the best work on the topic.¹³ This book is our attempt to at least partially redress this glaring omission. Besides fashioning a fuller account of the origins of today's divided America, we also hope this perspective will aid in understanding the challenges we will need to confront to overcome these divisions.

¹³ One important exception to the disciplinary divide described here is conceptual and empirical work by John Zaller and a number of colleagues that at least implicitly acknowledges the important role that movements often play in shaping party politics (Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008). In an interesting 2012 conceptual article, Bawn et al. (p. 571) “. . . propose a theory of political parties in which interest groups and activists are the key actors, and coalitions of groups develop common agendas and screen candidates for party nominations based on loyalty to their agendas. This theoretical stance contrasts with currently dominant theories, which view parties as controlled by election-minded politicians.” This conception is very similar to our argument that party politics in the U.S. is typically shaped by an ongoing tug of war between more party and movement-oriented coalitions of actors. “Election-minded politicians” tend to be more oriented to party and inclined to appeal to the moderate center of the ideological continuum. But parties, as the authors note, are also home to more ideologically extreme elements. Bawn et al. call these elements “extreme policy demanders.” Among the most important of these extreme policy demanders are movement groups and activists, who exert significant centrifugal force on the parties, even as “election-minded politicians” and their allies seek to respond to the centripetal incentives represented by the “medium voter.”

We begin with a stark theoretical claim: the convergence theory of Downs and Black holds only under conditions of general social movement quiescence. If we are right in this claim, it carries with it important empirical implications for an understanding of the extent of bipartisan consensus in the postwar period as well as the collapse of that consensus and the increasing polarization which has followed. Owing in large part to the “chilling effect” of the Cold War and McCarthyism, the immediate postwar period was uniquely devoid of significant social movement activity. This spared the two parties the centrifugal pressures that *can* follow when mobilized movement elements seek to occupy their ideological flanks. We have highlighted the word “can” in the previous sentence to call attention to an important caveat. In arguing that social movements *can* push parties off center, we are certainly not saying they will. The vast majority of social movements exert little or no effect on parties. In truth, most movements have no interest in engaging with parties or national politics more generally. And the great majority of those that do, fail to achieve the kind of standing or sustained presence on the national scene necessary to exercise influence over either or both of the two major parties. But there are movements that do, and when they do, they greatly complicate the relatively straightforward strategic calculus articulated by the likes of Downs and Black. The Tea Party movement affords a clear contemporary example of the phenomenon. Much as Mitt Romney and his advisers might have wanted to hew to the moderate center of the ideological distribution during the 2012 presidential race, the threat of the mobilized Tea Party wing of the GOP—coupled with the low voter turnout characteristic of the current primary system—effectively denied them this option. When challenged by sustained, national movements attuned to electoral politics, “playing to the base” can come to be seen as more important strategically than courting the “median voter.”

By revitalizing and legitimating the social movement form, the civil rights movement of the early 1960s reintroduced these centrifugal pressures to American politics. Or more accurately, it was one movement—civil rights—and one powerful *countermovement*—white resistance or as we prefer, “white backlash”—that began to force the parties to weigh the costs and benefits of appealing to the median voter against the strategic imperative of responding to mobilized movement elements at their ideological margins. Owing in part to the tight control they exercised over national conventions and the selection of presidential candidates, the parties were able to manage these pressures for a while, but this became increasingly more difficult with the convention and primary reforms of the early 1970s. To fully appreciate the difficulties the two parties have had in managing these pressures is to begin to understand just how we got from the centripetal pressure of the median voter to the centrifugal force of today’s extreme partisanship. A full accounting of that story is the task we set for ourselves in the book. We begin, however, with an important, extended aside regarding the relatively narrow face of polarization in the contemporary U.S. to support our claim regarding the decisive imprint of the social movement form on electoral politics and governance in today’s America. Quite simply, as we will document in the next section, the deep partisan divide that characterizes Congress and other political elites today is decidedly *not* mirrored in the general public. Quite the opposite: the general public has remained largely centrist in its views, while the parties—especially the GOP—and their candidates have been pushed off center. It is the dynamic interaction of movements and parties, in our view, that has been doing the “pushing.”

The Narrow Face of Partisan Polarization

Scholars first began to report evidence of growing political polarization in the U.S. in the 1980s. This research, however, focused exclusively on growing divisions among political elites and party activists. So, for example, in 1984 Poole and Rosenthal offered compelling evidence of increasing partisan polarization in both houses of Congress. Around the same time, scholars began to take note of the more extreme ideological character of party activists compared to the general public and primary voters relative to all registered voters.¹⁴ Systematic empirical work on the topic of *mass* polarization, however, took much longer to appear. And when it did, it offered a stark contrast to the work on elite polarization. Given the preoccupation of political scientists with political institutions, it is perhaps not surprising that sociologists were the first to call attention to the disconnect between elite and mass trends in this regard. Writing in 1996, sociologists Paul DiMaggio, John Evans and Bethany Bryson sought to answer the stark question posed in the title of their article: “Have Americans’ Social Attitudes become more Polarized?” Based on exhaustive analyses of General Social Survey (GSS) and American National Election Studies (ANES) data, their conclusion was unequivocal: “we find no support for the proposition that the United States has experienced a dramatic polarization in public opinion on social issues since the 1970s.”¹⁵ Seven years later, Evans extended the analysis using the 2002 GSS and ANES data, and reached the same general conclusion. Even after the divisive and controversial 2000 election that brought George W. Bush to power, Evans found no evidence of increasing *mass* polarization in the U.S.

¹⁴ Crotty and Jackson 1985; Polsby 1983; Walker 1988

¹⁵ DiMaggio et al. 1996, p.738

If political scientists were slow to research the topic, they have made up for lost time in the last decade or so.¹⁶ Morris Fiorina was among the first to take up the issue and, from our assessment of the empirical evidence, has produced—with several colleagues—what we see as the most convincing body of work on the topic.¹⁷ In their 2008 review, Fiorina and Abrams summarize the various strands of empirical evidence that have been adduced regarding the matter. Regardless of whether one looks at changes over time in the response of the general public to particular issues or more global ideological positions, the conclusion remains the same. As Fiorina and Abrams put it: “the most direct evidence. . . . shows little or no indication of increased mass polarization over the past two or three decades.”¹⁸ We turn now to a brief review of research on these two topics.

Issue Polarization - Abramowitz documents remarkable stability in public opinion on six issues about which the ANES has regularly questioned survey respondents since 1984: health insurance, government spending, aid to blacks, defense spending, jobs/standard of living, and abortion.¹⁹ Three aspects of his results are worth highlighting. First, regardless of the issue, ANES respondents have consistently favored moderate, centrist positions over more extreme responses (e.g. liberal or conservative). Second, there was remarkably little change in the aggregate positions of the respondents on all six issues over time. And third, the ideological direction of what little change did occur was not consistent. Of the four issues that showed any directionality, two—government spending and health insurance—shifted leftward, while two

¹⁶ Abramowitz 2013; Abramowitz and Saunders 2005, 2008; Hetherington 2001, 2009; 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Niemi, Weisberg, and Kimball 2011

¹⁷ Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Fiorina and Abrams 2008

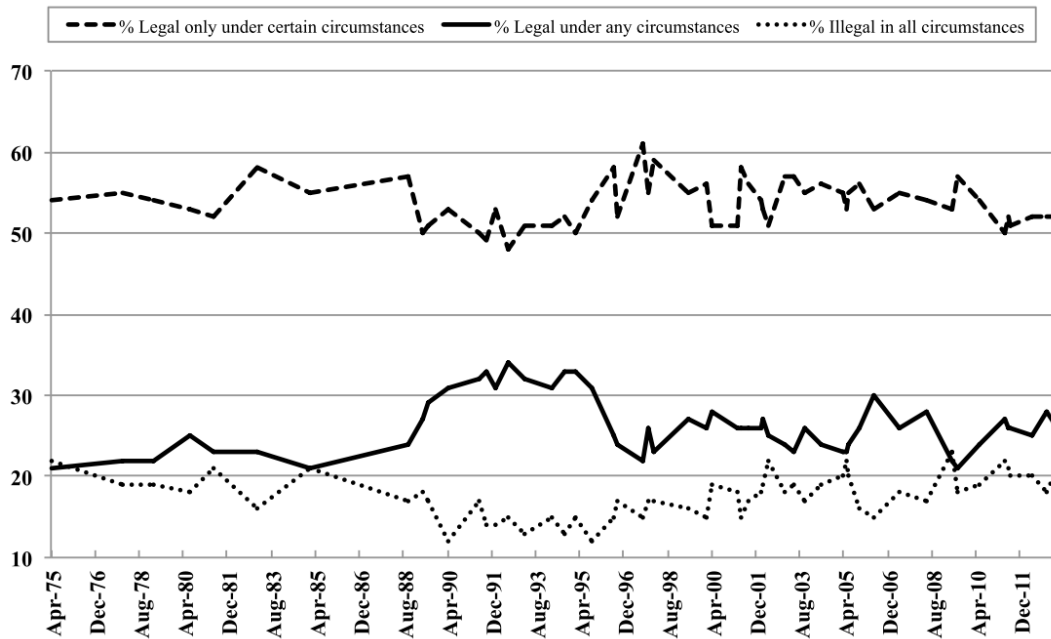
¹⁸ Fiorina and Abrams 2008, p.563

¹⁹ Abramowitz 2006

others—aid to blacks and defense spending—yielded slightly more conservative responses over time. It is worth noting that the six issues included in the analysis have been among the most divisive in American public life over the past few decades. In short, the absence of over time polarization cannot be attributed to any lack of controversy when it comes to the issues included in the analysis.

The time series data on the abortion issue affords perhaps the most surprising and, as such, powerful refutation of the idea that the American public has become dramatically more polarized over the last few decades. Figure 1.4 shows the aggregate trend in public opinion on the issue from 1975 to 2013.

Figure 1.4 Public Opinion on Abortion, 1975-2013



Source: Gallup

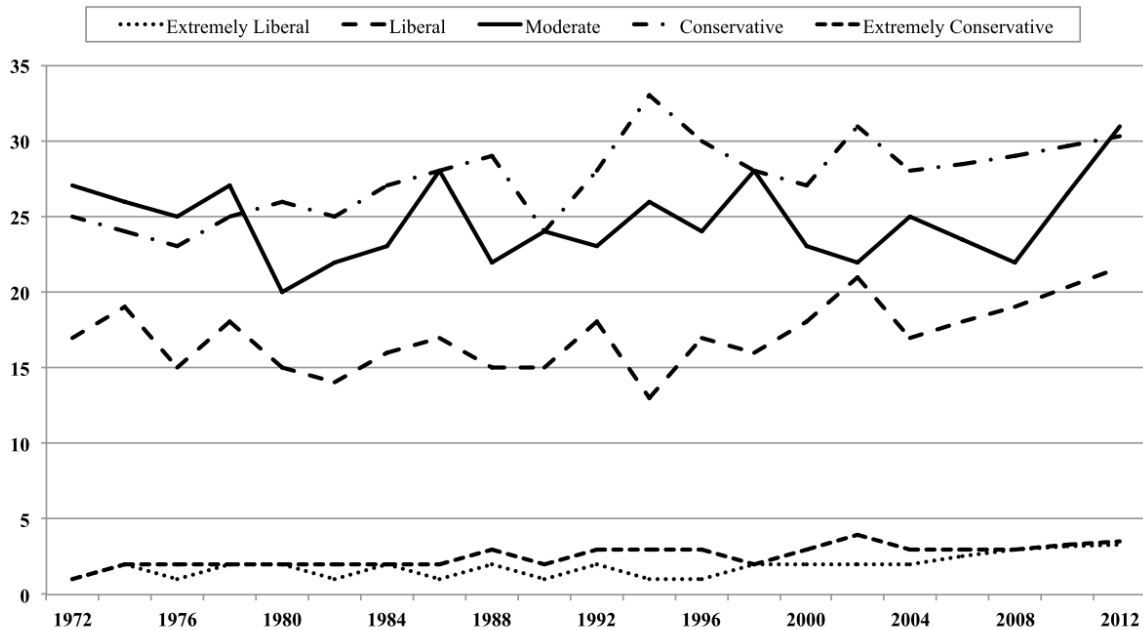
No issue has generated anywhere nears the vitriol and strong passions as abortion since *Roe v. Wade* was issued in 1973. And yet, despite the strong emotions, notwithstanding the rising tide of violence directed at abortion providers and clinics and the trend toward ever more restrictive

state and local legislation, the aggregate views of the American public on the issue have remained essentially unchanged for 30 years. What's more, as the figure shows, the clear modal response to the issue has remained the moderate one; that is, "legal under some circumstances," with somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of survey respondents favoring this option. The two more extreme, or polarized, positions—legal or illegal "in all circumstances"—have typically been favored by no more than a quarter of all respondents.

Changes in Ideological Orientation - So much for single issues; it could be argued, though, that the better way to look at the issue of polarization is with time series data on changes in the general ideological orientation of the American public. That, after all, is essentially how McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal have sought to document increasing polarization among members of Congress.²⁰ Rather than look at any single issue, they have used each members overall voting record, to locate him or her along a single left to right ideological continuum. ANES has measured the overall distribution of ideological orientations in the general public since the early 1970s. The scale runs from "extremely liberal" at one end of the continuum to "extremely conservative" on the other. Figure 1.5 maps the aggregate change in ideological identification since the early 1970s, using the ANES data.

²⁰ McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006

Figure 1.5 Political Identification, 1972-2012



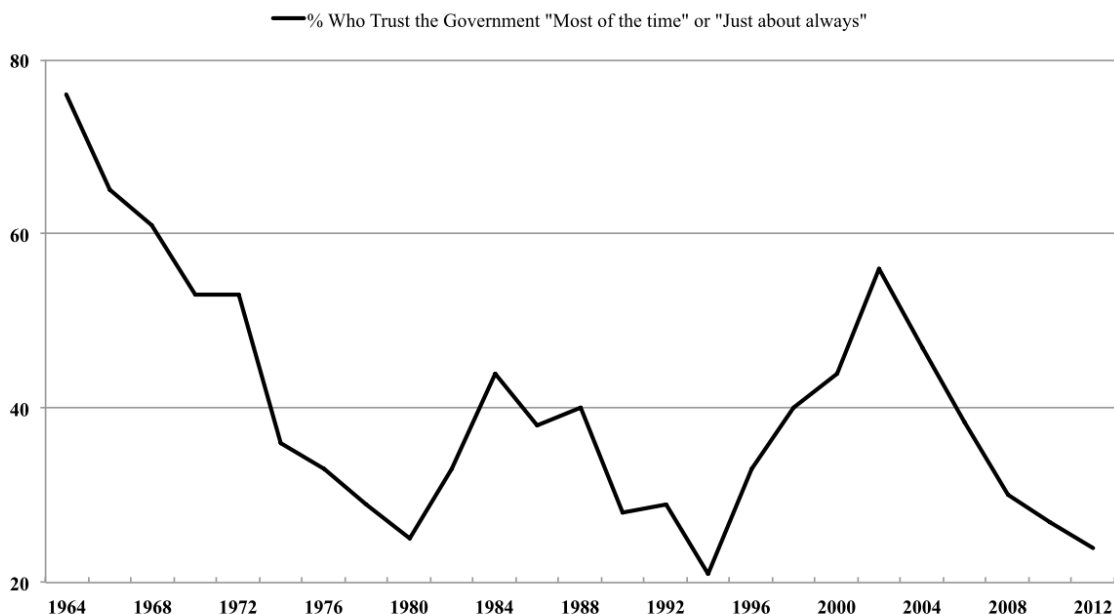
Source: American National Election Studies
 * Data for 2006 and 2010 are interpolated

Needless to say, the results reported above, stand in stark contrast to the trend toward increasing polarization among political elites. Indeed, the data are remarkable for the evidence they offer of no trend at all. In two key respects, these data mirror the time series data on abortion reported in figure 1.4. That is, the overall distribution of views has changed very little over the past 40 years, and the majority of Americans continue to embrace the moderate, centrist position when questioned about political matters. Bottom line: regardless of how one measures mass polarization, there is little evidence that it is occurring or at least not at anything like the rate it has been taking place among political elites and activists. Most Americans have remained remarkably consistent and generally moderate in their social and political views even as the partisan divide among political elites has widened dramatically.

There is, however, one broad category of survey items that *does* show significant change in the political views of the American public over the past 3-4 decades. We refer to the sharp

increase in public distrust of, and lack of confidence in, elected officials and specific governmental institutions in recent years. Figure 1.6 reports the results of yet another item that is fully consistent with the overall master trend.

Figure 1.6 Trust in Government, 1964-2012



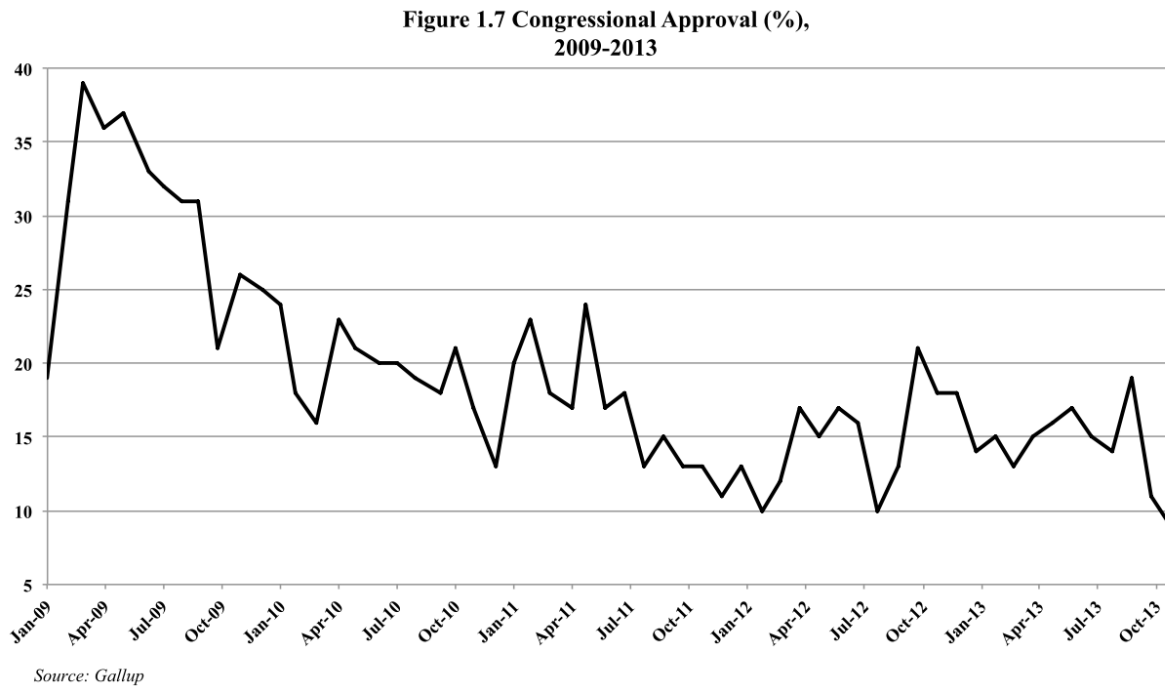
Source: American National Election Studies

* In 1958 73% reported high trust in the government; survey not conducted in 1960, 1962, 2006 and 2010; data for 2006 and 2010 are interpolated

Figure 1.6 shows just how much public “trust in the federal government” has declined since the early 60s. In 1964 better than three quarters of those surveyed reported that that they trusted the government to “do the right thing,” “just about always,” or “most of the time.” The comparable percentage for 2012 was just 24 percent.

It seems entirely reasonable to us to see the growing public distrust—indeed, disgust—of political elites and governmental institutions as driven, in large measure, by popular opposition to extreme partisanship and the toll it continues to take on effective, responsive governance. That is certainly how we interpret the Gallup “most important problem” survey finding reported above. Administered in early October, 2013, at the height of the government shutdown, the poll

results serve as a stark public rebuke of the crisis and the partisan politics that brought it about. The finding is just the latest in a series of opinion polls documenting the growing disconnect between political elites and the general public. None of these results are perhaps as telling as the time series data amassed by Gallup on the Congressional approval rating since Obama took office in January of 2009. Each month Gallup asks its respondents whether they “approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?” The results of these repeated inquiries are shown in figure 1.7.



Perhaps reflecting the generalized optimism that accompanied Obama’s earliest days in office, or the legislative momentum that came with a unified Democratic Congress, nearly 40 percent of those surveyed in early 2009 “approved” of the way Congress was discharging its responsibilities. The numbers dropped quickly, however, as the partisan reality in Congress set in and declined even further after 2010 as the GOP’s capture of the House made legislative gridlock the norm in Washington. The nadir came on the heels of the government shutdown

when just nine percent of respondents gave Congress a passing grade, a historic low. From a 39 to 9 percent approval rating in less than five years, is it any wonder that Americans now regard the dysfunction in Washington as the nation's number one problem?

Solving the “Convergence” Puzzle: the Rise of Movement Politics and the Marginalization of the Medium Voter

The data reviewed in the previous section presents a serious puzzle, at least when viewed from the traditional convergence perspective. If the general public does not share the extreme partisan views of the political elite and, more to the point, is increasingly dismayed and disgusted by the resulting polarization and institutional paralysis that have followed from those views, how has the GOP managed to move so far to the right without being punished by the voters? Our answer—already telegraphed above—is that over the past half century social movements have increasingly challenged, and occasionally supplanted, parties as the dominant mobilizing logic and organizing vehicle of American politics. This is especially true today on the right, where the Republican Party and the policies of its House delegation largely reflect the views of its mobilized movement wing. In short, as movement politics has increasingly challenged the traditional pragmatic, centrist logic of electoral politics, the GOP has come to fear the Party's movement base much more than the increasingly irrelevant “median voter.” Indeed, another way to interpret the survey evidence of growing public distrust of government officials and institutions is as an expression of the feelings of anger and frustration that come from being ignored.

The question we take up in the balance of the book is: how did we get here? How did certain sustained national movements come to successfully challenge the monopolistic influence that parties had exercised over electoral politics in the postwar period? The detailed, empirically grounded answer occupies the remainder of the book.

We offer a brief sketch of the beginnings of the story that we will take up in earnest in the next chapter. Before we do so, however, we want to make clear that in arguing that movements have emerged in recent decades as a powerful, and sometimes decisive, force in American politics, we are not for a minute suggesting that this is a new development. It may appear this way, but only because we are comparing recent decades to the party-dominated wartime and postwar periods. It is the post-war era however, that is the anomaly. Sustained, national struggles have interacted with parties (and other actors) to powerfully shape politics throughout U.S. history. The list of significant cases is far too long to take up here. A few examples will have to suffice. None is more important than the case of the abolition movement and the founding of the Republican Party. Though opposed by radical abolitionists, the decision by moderates to pursue their anti-slavery agenda by electoral means led eventually to Lincoln's victory and the single most convulsive event—the Civil War—in the nation's history. It is worth noting that secession was also simultaneously a movement and a party.

Many other significant examples come to mind as well. The GOP is not the only major party with movement roots. The modern Democratic Party was born of the populist ferment of what would come to be known as Jacksonian Democracy. The movements of the Progressive Era powerfully shaped electoral politics at all levels, but perhaps none so much as in cities, where mostly Republican reformers sought to replace Democratic political machines with crusading mayors and/or progressive city managers. In the 1920s a resurgent Ku Klux Klan

developed into a powerful electoral force all over the country, shaping politics and policy, not just in the South, but in such unlikely locales as Detroit, Dayton, and Oakland, California.²¹ Finally, if Franklin Roosevelt's policies helped to empower organized labor, the labor movement, in turn, quickly emerged as arguably the key component of the New Deal electoral coalition. In this sense the New Deal Democrats and the labor movement were mutually constitutive. Indeed, in all of these cases, it distorts reality to represent movements and parties as distinct. Organized labor has been stitched into the very fabric of the Democratic Party since the New Deal. Labor leaders functioned simultaneously as movement activists and as key allies of FDR and subsequent Democratic presidents. In these, and many other examples, the line between movements, parties, and governmental institutions blurs, as is the case with today's GOP and the Tea Party movement.

What was so unusual about the immediate post-war period was the relative absence of this normal dynamic synergism between movements, parties and elected officials. Labor certainly remained central to the Democratic Party in the 1940s and '50s, but it functioned much less like a movement, than a pillar of the status quo, during this period. It is true that the first major campaign of the modern civil rights movement—the Montgomery Bus Boycott—took place during the mid-50s, but after the initial triumph in Montgomery, the movement lapsed into comparative inactivity in the late 1950s. In any case, as a grass roots struggle, the movement was very much confined to a handful of southern communities during the decade and not at all the force in national politics it was to become in the early 1960s.

For its part, the Republican Party was also largely devoid of a mobilized movement wing during the postwar period. There was, to be sure, no shortage of strident conservatives in the

²¹ McVeigh 2009; Rhomberg 2004

GOP during the era. Indeed, the efforts of GOP conservatives to secure the presidential nomination for their nominal leader, Ohio Senator, Robert Taft, exposed deep divisions within the party at its conventions in 1940, 1948 and 1952. There was, however, virtually no grass roots or true *movement* manifestation of conservative Republicanism during these years. The same was true for McCarthyism in the early 1950s. With his sensational charges of Communist infiltration of many institutions in American life, at the peak of his power, Joe McCarthy (R-Minnesota) certainly exercised great influence in American politics, but his was a power born of personal ambition and institutional position, not grass roots movement backing.

It would, in fact, be hard to think of another extended period in U.S. history that was as devoid of significant movement activity as the middle decades of the 20th Century. Under these unusual circumstances, parties were largely spared the grass roots movement pressures so typical of U.S. history and so salient in today's politics. It was the absence of these pressures, we believe, that "enabled" the electoral dynamics accurately depicted by Downs and Black in their respective theories. With no centrifugal movement pressures to push them off center, parties were free to hue to the middle and court the "median voter" with impunity. The absence of mobilized, movement wings probably also helps to explain the healthy ideological overlap in the two parties in the postwar period. Spared the need to move to the right or left to accommodate an extreme movement base, the two parties logically framed their policies to appeal to the moderate center of the ideological continuum, creating all sorts of possibilities for bipartisan cooperation in the process.

This unusual arrangement held for roughly two decades, from 1940 to 1960. The absence of significant movement activity during the war years was attributable, both to the pressure for national unity typical of any wartime emergency, and to the fact that the ideological inspiration

for most of the activism of the 1930s—Soviet communism—was now effectively joined to the patriotic war effort by virtue of the alliance between the U.S., Great Britain and the Soviet Union. If our alliance with the U.S.S.R. helped to mute movement activity during the War, it was the Soviet threat and the chilling effect of McCarthyism that severely constrained domestic dissent and activism during the immediate postwar era.

It took the revitalized civil rights struggle to restore the normal party-movement dynamism to American politics. And here is where we begin our story. We do so through a stylized recounting of three key “moments” between 1960 and 1972 that simultaneously speak to the return of the movement form *and* its decisive influence on some of the major political changes of the period; changes that are almost always represented in narrowly institutional terms as the work of parties and political elites. Instead these “moments” speak to the return of the normal tug of war between movements and parties, between grass roots insurgents and established elites that remain such a central feature of politics in contemporary America.

Besides the tug of war between parties and electorally attuned movements, our story turns centrally on the sustained significance and powerful structuring effect of race and region on American politics. More accurately, it is the *interaction* of these three forces—race, region, and movements—that have overwhelmingly shaped the evolution of American politics from 1960 to the present. We begin with race. Virtually all of the major movements that will take their turn center stage in our narrative—civil rights, white backlash, New Left, Tax Revolt, Christian Right, Tea Party—bear the very strong, if variable, imprint of race. So it is the shifting vagaries of American *racial* politics—channeled and expressed through a series of electorally attuned movements—that will drive much of our narrative forward.

Then there is the matter of region or, more specifically, the disproportionate political and electoral significance of the “solid South” throughout most of the 20th Century. But here again, it is the interaction of these factors, not their independent effects, that is the key to our story. Region and race, after all, have long been inextricably linked in the structuring of American politics. Or put another way, it is race that has long accounted for the “solidity” of the South’s political/electoral loyalties. It was the white South’s hatred of the Republican Party—the despised “party of Lincoln”—that bound the region to the Democrats for a century following the close of the Civil War. And it was white southern anger at the Democratic Party’s embrace of civil rights reform that set in motion the slow, but steady, process of regional realignment that by the 1990s had made the South the clear geographic foundation of today’s GOP and, importantly, its Tea Party movement wing. In short, the complex interplay between region, race and movement-party dynamics will continually inform and structure the story we have to tell. To illustrate these themes, we offer brief sketches of three early “moments” in our story.

Moment 1: The Revitalized Civil Rights Struggle and the Collapse of the New Deal

Coalition – The standard textbook account of the civil rights struggle holds that it was “born” of Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her seat on that bus in Montgomery in December of 1955 and effectively “died” with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. Never mind that the Cold War had renationalized the “Negro question” well before Montgomery or that the black power phase of the struggle remained a powerful political and cultural force throughout the 1970s and beyond.²² But there is another fundamental problem with the canonical narrative other than its truncated beginning and ending dates. That is the implicit image of the movement

²² Bloom and Martin 2013

as a powerful, sustained force from Montgomery through at least the late 1960s. It wasn't. Following the high water mark of Montgomery, the movement largely collapsed in the late 1950s under the relentless assault of the segregationist counter-movement that developed in the South in response to the twin threats posed by Montgomery and the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. As the sixties dawned the movement was largely moribund. It was the 1960 sit-ins that revitalized the struggle and marked the beginning of the movement's heyday, nearly a decade of unrelenting pressure on all of America's institutions, but none so much as its legal and two-party electoral systems. Squarely in the crosshairs in this regard was the Democratic Party, which not only controlled Congress and the White House during most of this period, but which also had to try to balance the interests of its two exceedingly strange and antagonistic bedfellows: southern segregationists and African-Americans, both of which claimed the party as their home.

The textbook account also errs in generally depicting the Democrats as the movement's staunch allies. What is missed in this account is the lengths to which all Democratic presidents—at least from Roosevelt to Kennedy—went to placate the white South and accommodate the party's Dixiecrat wing. And indeed, prior to the resurgence of the movement in the early 1960s, the Democrats had been largely successful in this. While Congress did pass a weak Civil Rights Act in 1957, the measure relied much more on Republican than Democratic support. It was the confluence of the Cold War and the sustained pressure of the resurgent civil rights struggle that made the Democrats' grudging, cautious stance on the issue ultimately untenable. Occupying the White House during the first half of the 1960s, it was the Democrats who confronted the resurgent civil rights movement during an especially hot phase of the Cold War (think only of the Berlin Wall, the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis). Locked into

an intense ideological struggle with the Soviet Union for influence around the globe, America's racial "troubles" posed an enormous liability to its foreign policy aims during this period. It was the movement and its savvy ability to exploit this liability by provoking highly publicized instances of segregationist violence—via the Freedom Rides, Birmingham, Selma—that finally forced the Democrats to move decisively to the left in the early to mid-1960s and unambiguously embrace not just civil rights reform, but a broad array of liberal social programs. And it was this leftward shift that cost the party its southern wing and fractured the New Deal coalition that had kept the White House largely in Democratic hands since 1932.

Moment 2: Courting Segregationists: The GOP and its Southern Strategy – The threat posed by the revitalized civil rights struggle occasioned a dramatic upsurge in countermovement activity by segregationists in the South. Some of this activity took extra-legal form, with a resurgent Klan active in the Deep South, and countless instances of violence directed at civil rights workers throughout the region. But the countermovement had an electoral component as well. After he stood "in the school house door" in June of 1963 to block the admission of the first black students at the University of Alabama, Governor George Wallace became the leading symbol of racial resistance to integration in the U.S. While hailed as a hero by the white South, Wallace was reviled by opinion leaders and "responsible" politicians elsewhere in the country. So when he announced he would contend for the Democratic presidential nomination in the spring of 1964—against a popular sitting President from his own party—his candidacy was met with widespread disbelief and derision. The laughter, however, proved short-lived. Wallace shocked political pundits by capturing a third of the votes cast in the April Wisconsin Democratic primary. Wallace went on to claim 30 percent of the vote in Indiana, despite a

concerted effort by the national Democratic establishment to stop him in the state and then narrowly lost in Maryland, lamenting that “if it hadn’t been for the nigger bloc vote, we would have won it all!”²³

Those were the only three primaries Wallace entered, though heading into the convention, he also controlled slates of uncommitted delegates in both Mississippi and Alabama. Although there was never any question about whom the nominee would be—at the time Lyndon Johnson’s approval ratings were among the highest in presidential history—Wallace’s surprising showing sent shock waves through both parties. For its part, the Democratic establishment resolved to do what it could to mollify its southern wing in advance of the election. Meanwhile, some Republicans—including Barry Goldwater, the party’s surprise nominee in ’64 —began to openly call for a shift to the right to capture the Wallace vote and make in-roads in the no longer “solid South.”²⁴

In the end, LBJs popularity and the association of his candidacy with the memory of his martyred predecessor, John F. Kennedy, resulted in a landslide victory for the Democrats. Not lost on political strategists in both parties, however, was the fact that the GOP carried the Deep South for the first time in history. Among those taking note of the seismic shift in the electoral landscape was Richard Nixon who would emerge, four years later, as the Republican standard bearer. He would run on what he termed his “southern strategy,” betting that anger over the civil rights policies of the Democrats made the region ripe for the taking. But Wallace was back in 1968 too, this time running as a third party candidate. Wallace didn’t expect to win, of course, but he hoped to deny the victory to the two major candidates—Hubert Humphrey was the

²³ Carter 1995: 215

²⁴ Kabaservice 2012

Democratic standard bearer—thereby forcing the House of Representatives to resolve the deadlocked contest. By carrying the Deep South (save for South Carolina), Wallace almost pulled it off. In the end, though, Nixon claimed the rest of the South (except Texas) and emerged with one of the narrowest victories in the annals of presidential politics, edging Humphrey in the popular vote by just 43.4 to 42.7 percent.

Still the significance of Wallace's third party movement for the future electoral prospects of both Republicans and Democrats was clear on the face of the 1968 election returns. With the two parties evenly dividing 86 percent of the vote, the remaining 14 percent who supported Wallace clearly emerged as the balance of power looking to 1972. Much to the consternation of the GOP's once dominant liberal-moderate establishment, Nixon's narrow victory clearly suggested that the party's future lay not in the 43 percent of the popular vote he received, but in the 57 percent he shared with Wallace. Republican strategists believed that this total represented a dominant conservative majority that, if successfully tapped, would insure the electoral success of the party for years to come. "It suggested," Goldman noted at the time, "a course of strategy that could keep the Presidency Republican for a generation—precisely by isolating the Democrats as a party of the blacks and building the rickety Nixon coalition of 1968 into a true majority of the white center."²⁵ As we document in chapter 3, Nixon would spend much of his first term in office fashioning a conservative politics of racial reaction with the goal of cutting more deeply into Wallace's support heading into the 1972 race. So even as civil rights forces and the broader New Left were pushing the Democrats sharply to the left in the 1960s and early 70s, the GOP was shifting to the right in response to the Wallace movement and the broader nationwide "white backlash."

²⁵ Goldman 1970, p.102

Moment 3: Barbarians *inside* the Gate and the Primary Reforms of 1970 – So as the 1970s dawned both parties were shifting to accommodate the mobilized movement wings at their respective margins. The Democrats were contending with the increasingly radical movements of the New Left, while the GOP moved right to court racial conservatives and other disaffected elements of the former New Deal coalition. Still, control over party matters—and especially the all-important issue of selecting a presidential nominee—remained firmly under the control of party elites and other insiders. Within the Democratic Party, however, grassroots movement pressure had been building through two divisive national conventions to take control of the nominating process away from party bosses and, in the parlance of the New Left, “let the people decide.”

In 1964 the pressure came from the upstart Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which sent an interracial delegation to Atlantic City to challenge the seating of the lily-white party regulars from that state. Fearing the erosion of southern support, the Johnson forces were determined to do whatever was necessary to insure that the regular Mississippi delegation was seated:

In the end, the pressure worked. Support for the challenge evaporated in the Credentials Committee and the MFDP forces were left to consider a rather weak compromise proposal: two at-large convention seats and a promise that the whole matter of racial exclusion would be reviewed prior to the 1968 convention. . . . The delegates overwhelmingly rejected the compromise. [The head of the delegation] Fanny Lou Hamer summed up the feeling

of most when she said, “we didn’t come all this way for no two seats!”²⁶ That was not quite the end of it though. Using credentials borrowed from sympathetic delegates from other states, a contingent of MFDP members gained access to the convention floor and staged a sit-in in the Mississippi section. The sight of black Mississippians being carried from the convention floor by uniformed, white security officers was but the ultimate ironic denouement to [the convention].²⁷

For all the drama in Atlantic City, however, 1964 would pale in comparison to the violence and mayhem that marked the 1968 convention in Chicago. The New Left was at its peak in ’68 and movement forces were active inside and outside the convention hall. What everyone remembers about Chicago in 1968 were the pitched battles in the streets of Chicago between the police and anti-war demonstrators. Inside the hall, however, another ultimately much more consequential, if invisible, battle was being waged by New Left reformers and party regulars. We devote a lot of attention to this confrontation in chapter 4. Here we content ourselves with a brief summary of the controversy, the process it set in motion, and the critically important changes that resulted from that process.

The dispute centered on the arcane details of delegate selection. The bigger issue was control over the system by which the party nominated its presidential candidate. What the battles in the street had in common with the reform efforts inside the convention was Vietnam. Johnson had been forced to withdraw from the race as a result of the popular support granted to the antiwar candidacy of Democratic Senator, Eugene McCarthy. After Johnson’s withdrawal from

²⁶ Quoted in Carson 1981, p.126

²⁷ McAdam 1988, p.120

the race, Bobby Kennedy—also running as an antiwar candidate—threw his hat in the ring, gradually establishing himself as the front-runner in the race. His assassination in June of that year dealt the antiwar forces—and the country as a whole—a huge blow, but McCarthy remained in the race. What both of these candidates—McCarthy and Kennedy—had demonstrated were the depths of opposition to the war within the Democratic Party. And yet because of his support among the party establishment, Hubert Humphrey arrived in Chicago as the Democrat's presumptive nominee, even though he had not contested a single primary during the run up to the convention. Motivated by their anger over Vietnam and the injustice of a nominating process that allowed a candidate to claim the nomination without regard to the popular will of party regulars, the reformers inside the hall sought to democratize the nominating process. In the end, they failed to do so, at least at the convention itself. But they came away from the convention with something far more valuable than the reforms they had sought in Chicago. In a confused, chaotic, little remembered, voice vote toward the end of the convention, the Party had committed itself to creating a commission to review the nominating process and recommend needed reforms in advance of the 1972 gathering.

The main outlines of the story are as clear as they are critically important to an understanding of the close connection between movement and electoral politics in contemporary America. The New Left reformers seized control of the commission and, over roughly a two-year period, fashioned and implemented a sweeping set of institutional changes that effectively democratized delegate selection and the broader nomination process. Interestingly, while the proposed reforms did *not* specifically mandate the establishment of primaries as the principal vehicle of state delegate selection, the ultimate outcome of the reform process was the creation of our current system of binding popular primaries and caucuses. The numbers tell the story. In

1968, the Democrats held 17 non-binding primaries in advance of the convention. By 1980 that number had doubled. More surprising still, with no significant internal party demand for such reforms, the Republicans nonetheless adopted the same general institutional innovations as the Democrats. Indeed, the rate of increase in GOP primaries exceeded that of the Democrats, rising from just 15 in 1968 to 35 in 1980.

So what? The preeminent scholar of the reform process, Byron Shafer, minces no words in arguing for the significance of the resulting changes. Calling them “the greatest systematically planned. . . . shift in the institutions of delegate selection in all of American history,” Shafer gets to the real heart of the matter when he notes that as a result of the reforms “the official party had been *erased* from what was still nominally the party’s nomination system.”²⁸ But if parties—or more accurately, party elites—were no longer able to control the nominating process as they once had, where did control now reside? Answer: with those members of the party who choose to participate in the new primary (or caucus) process. What we have learned since the implementation of the new nominating system, however, is that only a small percentage of registered voters—and a much smaller fraction of all age eligible—actually take part in the primaries. *And* that this small minority tend to be more ideologically extreme in their views than the modal member of the party.²⁹ In short, while reformers had sought to democratize the nominating process, the resulting system has proven to be the perfect vehicle for empowering the movement wings of the two parties. Whether or not this is the same as democratizing the process, we leave for you to decide. For now, we mean only to underscore the cumulative significance of the three “moments” reviewed above. By the time of the 1972 election, both parties—but especially the Democrats—had moved sharply off center, relative to

²⁸ Shafer 1983, p.4; emphasis in original

²⁹ Aldrich 1995; Brady et al. 2001; Burden 2001; Fiorina et al. 2005

their ideological positions in 1960, to accommodate racially inflected movements on their margins; movements whose influence was greatly enhanced by that year's primary reforms. With those reforms, the tug of war between movements and parties in American politics was destined to become that much more intense.

Plan for the book

Everything that has come before can be thought of as a teaser. We have outlined the basic argument at the heart of the book and offered a stylized sketch of the beginnings of a very complicated story, stretching over many decades, about the growing influence of social movements in American politics. The balance of the book is given over to a very detailed retelling of that story, with chapters proceeding in chronological order. Chapter 2 focuses on the period from 1940 to 1960, when the absence of significant movement activity elevated the “median voter” to preeminent status and allowed for the development of the substantial bipartisan consensus and relative material equality that we remember as such distinctive features of the era. In chapter 3 we take up the crucial period of the 1960s, revisiting—in much more detail—the first two critical “moments” touched on above. Chapter 4 concerns the exceedingly strange, but highly consequential 1970s, with special emphasis on the way the reforms associated with the third “moment” reviewed here marginalized party elites and granted movement activists a decisive role in the nomination of presidential candidates. We go on to detail the clear impact that movements had in both the 1972 and 1976 presidential contests. Our focus in chapters 5 and 6 is on the Reagan presidency and the striking contrast between Reagan's rather modest achievements in office (chapter 5) and the surprising “slow release” Reagan Revolution that unfolds *after* he leaves office (chapter 6). The “revolution” had the effect of decisively remaking

the legitimate parameters of federal policymaking and transforming Reagan from the somewhat sad and spent political force of his last year in office into the iconic touchstone figure he is today. In chapter 7 we take up the Obama years and the deepening partisan divisions, growing governmental crises, and emerging warfare with the GOP occasioned by the rise of the Tea Party. Finally, chapter 8 is given over to a discussion of the badly frayed state of American democracy and a normative consideration of the current mess and what it would take to reverse the political and economic trends of the past 30-40 years.