

politics in the great depression

Politics in the Great Depression: How Economic Crisis Reshaped Governance and Society

politics in the great depression was a defining aspect of one of the most tumultuous periods in modern history. As the world grappled with unprecedented economic collapse following the 1929 stock market crash, political landscapes shifted dramatically across countries. The Great Depression not only devastated economies but also catalyzed profound changes in government policies, ideologies, and citizen-state relationships. Exploring the political dynamics during this era reveals much about how crises influence leadership decisions, public sentiment, and the evolution of democracy and authoritarianism alike.

The Political Climate Before the Great Depression

Before the economic downturn, many countries enjoyed relative prosperity and political stability during the 1920s, often referred to as the "Roaring Twenties." However, this period was marked by underlying weaknesses such as unequal wealth distribution, excessive stock speculation, and fragile banking systems. Politically, many governments embraced laissez-faire economic policies, favoring minimal intervention in markets.

In the United States, Republican administrations, particularly under Presidents Harding and Coolidge, focused on pro-business policies. Meanwhile, European powers were still recovering from World War I and dealing with complex treaty obligations, reparations, and political fragmentation. This backdrop set the stage for how governments would respond once the Depression hit.

The Impact of the Great Depression on Political Systems

Rise of Populism and Political Extremism

One of the most striking political consequences of the Great Depression was the surge in populist and extremist movements. As unemployment soared and poverty spread, many citizens lost faith in traditional parties and democratic institutions. This disillusionment created fertile ground for radical ideologies to gain traction.

In Germany, the economic devastation fueled support for the Nazi Party, which promised national revival, economic recovery, and scapegoated minorities. Similarly, Italy under Mussolini had already embraced fascism, and the Depression reinforced authoritarian control. Elsewhere, leftist movements, including

communism and socialism, gained momentum as alternatives to capitalist failures.

Government Intervention and New Economic Policies

Contrasting with the earlier laissez-faire approach, many nations shifted toward more interventionist policies. The crisis necessitated innovative responses to stabilize economies and support struggling populations. This change is particularly evident in the United States with the advent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

The New Deal represented a dramatic expansion of federal government power, introducing social safety nets, banking reforms, and public works programs. These initiatives aimed to provide immediate relief, promote recovery, and prevent future depressions. Similar interventionist policies emerged in other countries, though with varying degrees of success and acceptance.

Politics in the Great Depression: The United States Experience

Hoover's Response and Public Perception

When the Depression began, Herbert Hoover was president and initially believed in limited government interference. He encouraged voluntary cooperation between businesses and charities rather than direct aid. However, as conditions worsened, public frustration grew, and Hoover's reluctance to implement aggressive relief measures damaged his political standing.

His administration did eventually pass some reforms, like the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, aimed at stabilizing banks and industries. Still, many Americans viewed these efforts as too little, too late. The widespread hardship led to protests, hunger marches, and a demand for more decisive leadership.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Political Transformation

The 1932 election brought Franklin D. Roosevelt to power, signaling a clear political shift. Roosevelt's New Deal policies marked a new era in American governance, emphasizing government responsibility for economic welfare. Programs like Social Security, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Tennessee Valley Authority had lasting impacts.

Roosevelt's approach also changed the relationship between the federal government and the American people, fostering a sense of hope and engagement. His leadership style and communication skills, such as

the famous "fireside chats," helped restore public confidence.

The Global Political Ramifications of the Great Depression

Europe's Struggles and Shifts

Across Europe, the Great Depression intensified political instability. Countries like France and Britain faced high unemployment and social unrest, prompting governments to adopt austerity measures or welfare reforms. Political polarization increased, with left-wing and right-wing factions clashing frequently.

In Eastern Europe, the economic crisis accelerated authoritarian trends, with many countries abandoning parliamentary democracy in favor of military or single-party rule. The inability of democratic governments to effectively address the Depression's challenges contributed to these shifts.

Colonial Impacts and Political Tensions

The economic downturn also affected colonial empires. Reduced demand for raw materials and goods hurt colonies economically, leading to increased political agitation and calls for independence. Nationalist movements gained momentum as colonial subjects demanded better governance and economic opportunities.

These tensions laid the groundwork for post-war decolonization, but during the Depression, they often resulted in political repression and conflicts between colonial powers and local populations.

Lessons from Politics in the Great Depression

Understanding the political responses to the Great Depression offers valuable insights into crisis management and governance. Several key lessons emerge:

- **The necessity of adaptive leadership:** Leaders who recognized the need for active intervention and innovative policies were better able to restore stability.
- **The dangers of political polarization:** Economic hardship can exacerbate ideological divides, sometimes leading to authoritarianism or extremism.

- **The importance of social safety nets:** Programs designed to support vulnerable populations can mitigate suffering and maintain social cohesion.
- **The role of communication:** Transparent and empathetic communication from leaders helps build trust during uncertain times.

These lessons remain relevant today as governments face economic uncertainties and global challenges.

The Lasting Influence of the Great Depression on Political Thought

The Great Depression reshaped how societies view the role of government in economic affairs. It challenged classical economic theories that favored minimal state involvement and inspired the development of Keynesian economics, which argues for government spending to counteract downturns.

This shift influenced policy-making for decades, embedding ideas of welfare states and regulatory frameworks into many democracies. Additionally, the political upheavals during the Depression underscored the fragility of democratic institutions in times of crisis and the need for vigilance in preserving them.

Politics in the Great Depression thus stands as a testament to how economic crises can transform political ideologies, government structures, and citizen expectations. The era's legacy continues to inform contemporary debates on economic policy and political responsibility.

Frequently Asked Questions

How did the Great Depression influence political ideologies in the United States?

The Great Depression led to a significant shift in political ideologies in the United States, with increased support for government intervention in the economy and the rise of progressive and New Deal policies under Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration.

What role did Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal play in American

politics during the Great Depression?

Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal introduced a series of programs and reforms aimed at economic recovery, social welfare, and financial reform, fundamentally reshaping American politics by expanding the federal government's role and support for the disadvantaged.

How did the Great Depression affect political parties in Europe?

The Great Depression caused political instability in Europe, leading to the rise of extremist parties such as fascists and communists, as traditional parties struggled to address economic hardships and social unrest.

What was the political impact of the Great Depression on Germany?

The Great Depression intensified economic hardship in Germany, weakening the Weimar Republic and contributing to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, who promised economic revival and national restoration.

How did the Great Depression influence labor movements and political activism?

The economic challenges of the Great Depression galvanized labor movements and increased political activism, leading to stronger unions, protests, and demands for workers' rights and social safety nets.

In what ways did the Great Depression change the relationship between citizens and government?

The Great Depression shifted the relationship between citizens and government by increasing expectations for government responsibility in economic stability, social welfare, and direct support, leading to expanded social programs and regulatory policies.

How did the Great Depression affect political leadership styles globally?

During the Great Depression, many political leaders adopted more interventionist and authoritarian approaches, centralizing power to address economic crises, while some democracies expanded social welfare policies to maintain stability.

What was the impact of the Great Depression on colonial politics?

The Great Depression weakened colonial economies and intensified demands for independence and political reform in many colonies, as economic hardships exposed inequalities and fueled nationalist movements.

How did the Great Depression influence political discourse about **capitalism and socialism**?

The Great Depression sparked intense political debate about capitalism and socialism, with increased support for socialist policies and critiques of unregulated capitalism, influencing the development of welfare states and mixed economies.

What role did international political organizations play during the Great Depression?

International political organizations like the League of Nations struggled to address the global economic crisis of the Great Depression, highlighting limitations in international cooperation and contributing to the conditions that led to World War II.

Additional Resources

Politics in the Great Depression: An Analytical Review of Political Responses and Transformations

politics in the great depression represents a complex and pivotal chapter in 20th-century history, characterized by dramatic shifts in governance, ideology, and public policy. As the global economic downturn of the 1930s wreaked havoc on millions of lives, political institutions and leaders faced unprecedented challenges, prompting a reevaluation of economic theories, social contracts, and governmental roles. This article delves into the political landscape shaped by the Great Depression, examining how various nations responded, the ideological battles that ensued, and the lasting impact on political systems worldwide.

Contextualizing Politics in the Great Depression

The Great Depression, beginning with the stock market crash of 1929, triggered an economic crisis that rippled across continents. Unemployment soared, industrial output plummeted, and financial institutions collapsed, shaking public confidence in traditional economic and political models. The politics in the Great Depression era did not exist in a vacuum; rather, it was deeply intertwined with the socioeconomic realities that demanded urgent solutions.

Governments confronted the challenge of balancing austerity with relief, and orthodoxy with innovation. The prevailing laissez-faire attitudes of the 1920s gave way to calls for more interventionist policies. This shift was not uniform globally but reflected a spectrum of political ideologies adapting to unprecedented circumstances.

The United States: From Hoover's Conservatism to Roosevelt's New Deal

In the United States, the initial political response under President Herbert Hoover was marked by a commitment to limited government intervention, reflecting conservative economic principles. Hoover's administration believed in voluntary cooperation between businesses and charities to alleviate suffering. However, as unemployment reached nearly 25% and banks failed, public dissatisfaction grew.

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 marked a turning point. Roosevelt's New Deal represented a radical reimagining of the federal government's role, emphasizing direct relief, economic recovery, and reforms to prevent future depressions. Key programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), and the Social Security Act introduced unprecedented federal involvement in economic and social welfare.

The politics in the Great Depression United States were thus defined by a clash between traditional conservatism and emerging Keynesian-inspired interventionism. Roosevelt's approach expanded the social safety net and regulatory frameworks, fundamentally altering American political and economic landscapes.

Europe's Political Turmoil and the Rise of Extremism

Meanwhile, in Europe, the economic devastation intensified political instability. Many countries experienced sharp declines in industrial production and soaring unemployment rates, which exacerbated existing political divisions. The Weimar Republic in Germany, already fragile, faced mounting pressure from extremist parties.

The Great Depression's political impact in Germany was profound. The National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party), led by Adolf Hitler, capitalized on economic despair and nationalist sentiment to gain popular support. Their promise to restore economic stability and national pride resonated with a populace disillusioned by traditional political elites. By 1933, Hitler's appointment as Chancellor signaled a catastrophic shift toward totalitarianism.

Similarly, in Italy, Benito Mussolini's fascist regime exploited economic grievances to consolidate power, while in Spain, the Depression deepened conflicts that would culminate in the Spanish Civil War. Across Eastern Europe, authoritarian regimes gained traction, leveraging economic crises to justify suppression of dissent.

Political Responses in Britain and France

In Britain, the politics of the Great Depression involved a coalition government known as the National Government, initially led by Ramsay MacDonald. Emphasizing austerity measures to maintain the gold

standard, the government's policies were controversial and often criticized for exacerbating economic hardships. Nonetheless, Britain's democratic institutions remained intact, and gradual recovery efforts unfolded throughout the 1930s.

France experienced political fragmentation and social unrest during this period. The Depression intensified divisions between leftist and right-wing factions. The Popular Front, a coalition of left-wing parties, emerged in 1936, implementing social reforms and workers' rights legislation. However, political instability persisted, foreshadowing the challenges France would face during World War II.

Key Themes in Politics During the Great Depression

Government Intervention vs. Market Orthodoxy

One of the defining political debates during the Depression centered on the appropriate level of government intervention. While some leaders clung to classical economic doctrines advocating minimal interference, others embraced emergent Keynesian ideas promoting active fiscal policies to stimulate demand.

This ideological division influenced policy decisions and electoral outcomes. The contrast between Hoover's limited approach and Roosevelt's New Deal illustrates the broader global contest between economic orthodoxy and innovative interventionism.

Social Welfare and the Expansion of the State

The politics in the Great Depression also accelerated the growth of social welfare programs. Governments increasingly recognized the necessity of direct support for unemployed and impoverished citizens. The institutionalization of unemployment insurance, public works programs, and social security marked a fundamental redefinition of state responsibilities.

This expansion of the welfare state varied by country but shared a common theme: the acceptance that economic crises required collective action and social protection beyond traditional charity or market solutions.

The Rise of Political Extremism

Economic hardship fed political radicalization. The failure of democratic governments to effectively address

the depression's impact disillusioned many voters, creating fertile ground for extremist movements. Fascism and communism both gained followers, advocating diametrically opposed solutions but united in their rejection of liberal democracy.

The political polarization of the era underscored the fragility of democratic institutions under severe socioeconomic stress, a lesson that reverberates in political analyses today.

International Relations and Protectionism

Globally, politics in the Great Depression were also shaped by protectionist trade policies. Nations imposed tariffs and quotas to shield domestic industries, exacerbating international economic tensions. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 in the United States, for example, raised tariffs significantly, leading to retaliatory measures and a contraction in global trade.

These protectionist policies fueled nationalist sentiments and complicated diplomatic relations, contributing to the geopolitical instability that preceded World War II.

Comparative Political Outcomes of the Great Depression

Examining different national responses reveals varied political trajectories shaped by the Great Depression:

- **United States:** Emergence of a welfare-oriented state and strengthened federal government through New Deal reforms.
- **Germany:** Collapse of democratic governance and rise of totalitarian Nazism.
- **United Kingdom:** Temporary coalition government with mixed austerity and recovery policies preserving democratic stability.
- **Soviet Union:** Although less affected by the global market crash due to its planned economy, Stalin used the era to intensify authoritarian control.
- **France:** Political fragmentation with leftist Popular Front reforms amid ongoing instability.

This comparative perspective highlights how politics in the Great Depression varied widely, influenced by pre-existing political cultures, economic structures, and leadership choices.

Legacy and Lessons for Contemporary Politics

The political transformations during the Great Depression era left enduring legacies that continue to inform contemporary governance. The crisis demonstrated the critical role of government in economic stabilization and social welfare, principles that underpin modern democratic capitalism.

Furthermore, the period serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of political extremism born from economic despair. The fragility of democratic institutions when faced with systemic crises remains a relevant concern in today's volatile global environment.

Understanding the nuanced politics in the Great Depression is essential for scholars, policymakers, and citizens aiming to navigate complex economic and social challenges without repeating past mistakes.

As nations around the world grapple with economic uncertainties, the political lessons from the 1930s remain a vital reference point, underscoring the interplay between economic forces and political decision-making in shaping societies.

Politics In The Great Depression

politics in the great depression: People, Poverty, and Politics Thomas H. Coode, John F. Bauman, 1981 This book examines the impact of the Great Depression on Pennsylvania, covering, in addition to politics, such topics as social and physical deprivation, black housing, labor conflict, relief, and the revival of the United Mine Workers of America. Illustrated.

politics in the great depression: The Defining Moment Michael D. Bordo, Claudia Goldin, Eugene N. White, 2007-12-01 In contemporary American political discourse, issues related to the scope, authority, and the cost of the federal government are perennially at the center of discussion. Any historical analysis of this topic points directly to the Great Depression, the moment to which most historians and economists connect the origins of the fiscal, monetary, and social policies that have characterized American government in the second half of the twentieth century. In the most comprehensive collection of essays available on these topics, *The Defining Moment* poses the question directly: to what extent, if any, was the Depression a watershed period in the history of the American economy? This volume organizes twelve scholars' responses into four categories: fiscal and monetary policies, the economic expansion of government, the innovation and extension of social programs, and the changing international economy. The central focus across the chapters is the well-known alternations to national government during the 1930s. *The Defining Moment* attempts to evaluate the significance of the past half-century to the American economy, while not omitting reference to the 1930s. The essays consider whether New Deal-style legislation continues to operate today as originally envisioned, whether it altered government and the economy as substantially as did policies inaugurated during World War II, the 1950s, and the 1960s, and whether the legislation had important precedents before the Depression, specifically during World War I. Some chapters find that, surprisingly, in certain areas such as labor organization, the 1930s responses to the Depression contributed less to lasting change in the economy than a traditional view of the time would suggest. On the whole, however, these essays offer testimony to the Depression's legacy as a defining moment. The large role of today's government and its methods of

intervention—from the pursuit of a more active monetary policy to the maintenance and extension of a wide range of insurance for labor and business—derive from the crisis years of the 1930s.

politics in the great depression: Beyond the New Deal Order Gary Gerstle, Nelson Lichtenstein, Alice O'Connor, 2019-12-27 Ever since introducing the concept in the late 1980s, historians have been debating the origins, nature, scope, and limitations of the New Deal order—the combination of ideas, electoral and governing strategies, redistributive social policies, and full employment economics that became the standard-bearer for political liberalism in the wake of the Great Depression and commanded Democratic majorities for decades. In the decline and break-up of the New Deal coalition historians found keys to understanding the transformations that, by the late twentieth century, were shifting American politics to the right. In *Beyond the New Deal Order*, contributors bring fresh perspective to the historic meaning and significance of New Deal liberalism while identifying the elements of a distinctively neoliberal politics that emerged in its wake. Part I offers contemporary interpretations of the New Deal with essays that focus on its approach to economic security and inequality, its view of participatory governance, and its impact on the Republican party as well as Congressional politics. Part II features essays that examine how intersectional inequities of class, race, and gender were embedded in New Deal labor law, labor standards, and economic policy and brought demands for employment, economic justice, and collective bargaining protections to the forefront of civil rights and social movement agendas throughout the postwar decades. Part III considers the precepts and defining narratives of a post New Deal political structure, while the closing essay contemplates the extent to which we may now be witnessing the end of a neoliberal system anchored in free-market ideology, neo-Victorian moral aspirations, and post-Communist global politics. Contributors: Eileen Boris, Angus Burgin, Gary Gerstle, Romain Huret, Meg Jacobs, Michael Kazin, Sophia Lee, Nelson Lichtenstein, Joe McCartin, Alice O'Connor, Paul Sabin, Reuel Schiller, Kit Smemo, David Stein, Jean-Christian Vinel, Julian Zelizer.

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political conflicts and, when these two factors come together, political conflicts are less likely to be controlled effectively. These situations can evolve into serious political crises and eventually lead to the collapse of democratic regimes. The empirical research of this book is based on a comparative historical analysis of Germany, Nigeria, Chile, and India. Examining democratic collapses from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, this book will be of interest to those engaged in the study of democracy, Political Science, Comparative Politics, and Political Theory.

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politics in the great depression: Politics and Violence in Central America and the Caribbean Hannes Warnecke-Berger, 2018-05-23 This book develops a comparative study on violence in Jamaica, El Salvador, and Belize based on a theoretical approach, extensive field research, and in-depth empirical research. It combines the Caribbean and Central America into a single comparative research that explores the historical (from the conquista onwards) as well as contemporary causes of violence in these societies. The volume focuses on forms of violence such as gang violence, police violence, every day forms of violence, vigilantism, and organized crime. The analysis provides a theoretical perspective that bridges political economy as well as cultural approaches in violence research. As such, it will be of interest to readers studying development, violence, political, Central American, and Caribbean studies.

politics in the great depression: Governing the Golden State: Politics and Policy in California Pasquale De Marco, California, the Golden State, is a land of contrasts and contradictions. It is home to some of the most iconic landmarks in the world, from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Hollywood sign. It is also a state with a rich and complex political history, shaped by its unique geography, diverse population, and dynamic political culture. In ***Governing the Golden State***, we take a deep dive into California's political landscape, exploring the institutions, processes, and forces that shape its governance. We examine the state's unique political identity, its diverse population and its impact on politics, and the role of geography in shaping California's political culture. We also trace the historical influences that have shaped California's political development, from the Gold Rush to the Progressive Era to the present day. We delve into the structure of California government, examining the three branches of power - the executive, legislative, and judicial - and their respective roles and responsibilities. We also explore the electoral process, analyzing voter registration and participation, the role of political parties and interest groups, campaign finance, and election laws. We examine key policy areas such as education, healthcare, the environment, and criminal justice, exploring the policymaking process, the role of the governor and legislature, and the impact of public policy on the lives of Californians. We also explore California's unique political culture, a blend of progressivism,

environmentalism, populism, and direct democracy, and its impact on the state's politics.

****Governing the Golden State**** is an essential resource for anyone interested in California politics and policy. It is a comprehensive and accessible guide to the institutions, processes, and forces that shape the Golden State's political landscape. If you like this book, write a review!

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politics in the great depression: Economic Crises and Global Politics in the 20th Century Alexander Nützenadel, Cornelius Torp, 2016-04-08 This book analyses the history of economic crises from the angle of international politics and its transformation throughout the 20th century. While political and economic debates in the wake of the present financial crisis are revolving around the question of how to create effective forms of global governance, historians have discovered a long tradition of international economic regulation that can be traced back to the late 19th century. In the global economy, sovereign defaults, banking crises and currency crashes have been recurrent phenomena. At the same time, alongside the growing globalization of commodity and capital markets, nation-states have introduced new forms of regulation both on the national and international level. The experience of economic crises has been an important driver behind numerous initiatives to foster global politics. The purpose of the book is to reconnect economic history with the perspectives of political economy and the history of international relations. It forms a dialogue between the disciplines that have been increasingly separated throughout the past decades. With first-rate economic historians and political economists writing for a wider audience, it simultaneously makes public debates and methods of recent cutting-edge research in economic history within a wider academic community. This book was originally published as a special issue of the European Review of History.

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drugs and alcohol, education, and civil rights trace the development and shifts in American policy history. This collection of essays by 29 distinguished scholars offers a comprehensive overview of American politics and policy.

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politics in the great depression: Hollywood and the Great Depression Iwan Morgan, 2016-10-27 Examines how Hollywood responded to and reflected the political and social changes that America experienced during the 1930s. In the popular imagination, 1930s Hollywood was a dream factory producing escapist movies to distract the American people from the greatest economic crisis in their nation's history. But while many films of the period conform to this stereotype, there were a significant number that promoted a message, either explicitly or implicitly, in support of the political, social and economic change broadly associated with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programme. At the same time, Hollywood was in the forefront of challenging traditional gender roles, both in terms of movie representations of women and the role of women within the studio system. With case studies of actors like Shirley Temple, Cary Grant and Fred Astaire, as well as a selection of films that reflect politics and society in the Depression decade, this fascinating book examines how the challenges of the Great Depression impacted on Hollywood and how it responded to them. Topics covered include: How Hollywood offered positive representations of working women; Congressional investigations of big-studio monopolization over movie distribution; How three different types of musical genres related in different ways to the Great Depression: the Warner Bros Great Depression Musicals of 1933, the Astaire/Rogers movies, and the MGM kid musicals of the late 1930s; The problems of independent production exemplified in King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread*; Cary Grant's success in developing a debonair screen persona amid Depression conditions. Contributors: Harvey G. Cohen, King's College London; Philip John Davies, British Library; David Eldridge, University of Hull; Peter William Evans, Queen Mary, University of London; Mark Glancy, Queen Mary University of London; Ina Rae Hark, University of South Carolina; Iwan Morgan, University College London; Brian Neve, University of Bath; Ian Scott, University of Manchester; Anna Siomopoulos, Bentley University; J. E. Smyth, University of Warwick; Melvyn Stokes, University College London; Mark Wheeler, London Metropolitan University.

politics in the great depression: The Two Majorities and the Puzzle of Modern American Politics Byron E. Shafer, 2003 Where did the Era of Divided Government come from? What sustains split partisan control of the institutions of American national government year after year? Why can it shift so easily from Democratic or Republican presidencies, coupled with Republican or Democratic Congresses? How can the vast array of issues and personalities that have surfaced in American politics over the last forty years fit so neatly within--indeed, reinforce--the sustaining political pattern of our time? These big questions constitute the puzzle of modern American politics. The old answer--a majority and a minority party, plus dominant and recessive public issues--will not work in the Era of Divided Government. Byron Shafer, a political scientist who is regarded as one of the most

comprehensive and original thinkers on American politics, provides a convincing new answer that has three major elements. These elements in combination, not divided government as a catch phrase, are the real story of politics in our time. The first element is comprised of two great sets of public preferences that manifest themselves at the ballot box as two majorities. The old cluster of economic and welfare issues has not so much been displaced as simply joined by a second cluster of cultural and national concerns. The second element can be seen in the behavior of political parties and party activists, whose own preferences don't match those of the general public. That public remains reliably left of the active Republican Party on economic and welfare issues and reliably right of the active Democratic Party on cultural and national concerns. The third crucial element is found in an institutional arrangement--the distinctively American matrix of governmental institutions, which converts those first two elements into a framework for policymaking, year in and year out. In the first half of the book, Shafer examines how dominant features of the Reagan, first Bush, Clinton, and second Bush administrations reflect the interplay of these three elements. Recent policy conflicts and institutional combatants, in Shafer's analysis, illuminate this new pattern of American politics. In the second half, he ranges across time and nations to put these modern elements and their composite pattern into a much larger historical and institutional framework. In this light, modern American politics appears not so much as new and different, but as a distinctive recombination of familiar elements of a political style, a political process, and a political conflict that has been running for a much, much longer time.

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