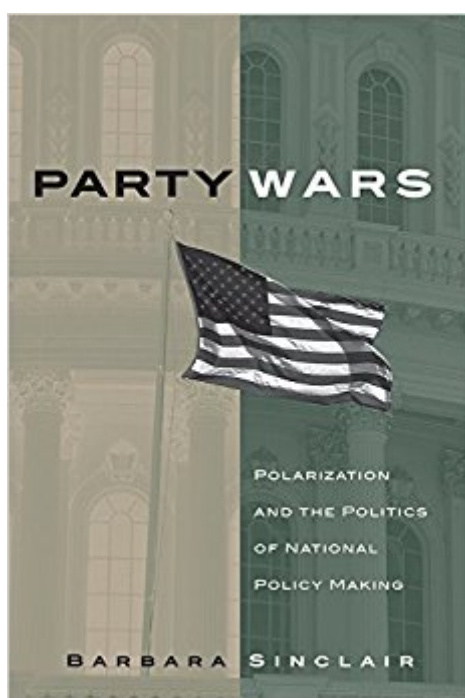


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Party Wars: Polarization And The Politics Of National Policy Making (The Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lecture Series)



Synopsis

Party Wars is the first book to describe how the ideological gulf now separating the two major parties developed and how today's fierce partisan competition affects the political process and national policy. Barbara Sinclair traces the current ideological divide to changes in the Republican party in the 1970s and 1980s, including the rise of neoconservatism and the Religious Right. Because of these historical developments, Democratic and Republican voters today differ substantially in what they consider good public policy, and so do the politicians they elect. Polarization has produced institutional consequences in the House of Representatives and in the Senate—witness the majority party's threat in 2004–2005 to use the "nuclear option" of abolishing the filibuster. The president's strategies for dealing with Congress have also been affected, raising the price of compromise with the opposing party and allowing a Republican president to govern largely from the ideological right. Other players in the national policy community—interest groups, think tanks, and the media—have also joined one or the other partisan team. Party Wars puts all the parts together to provide the first government-wide survey of the impact of polarization on national politics. Sinclair pinpoints weaknesses in the highly polarized system and offers several remedies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Barbara Sinclair was Marvin Hoffenberg Professor of American Politics at the University of

California, Los Angeles, and is the author of *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress*.

Students of Congress will well know the works of Barbara Sinclair. She has written some of the best work on changes in Congressional decision-making. In this book, she tackles a wider issue--the genesis and consequences of increasing partisan polarization in national policy making. Her analysis is right on the mark. She begins by noting the changes in Congress from the era of Sam Rayburn to the rise of Newt Gingrich as Speaker of the House. Congress moved from an era of bipartisanship, where Speaker of the House and Minority Leader worked together in a (more or less) bipartisan manner. Representative Bob Michel, the Republican Minority leader, for instance, learned to work with the parade of Democratic Speakers, so that Republicans at least had some role in the policy making process (even though clearly as junior partners). As time went on, this eroded, as Republicans, with Newt Gingrich as one spokesman, no longer being content to play "second fiddle." The combination of greater ideological differences between the parties, a certain degree of arrogance among Democratic leaders, the increased centralization of power in leaders as a result of the "revolution" of the 1970s all led to increasingly partisan and nasty infighting. In the Senate, the situation was less pronounced, but the evolution was along the same lines. As a further part of the picture has been the increasing differentiation of the parties' core supporters in the electorate by ideology and the increasing differences between party activists. The long and the short of it is that a variety of factors led to increasing partisanship. Currently, the atmosphere, as Sinclair notes it, is poisonous. Parties have gone, in her terms, from "fluid coalitions" to "armed camps." While there have been negatives to this process, such as the tendency to exclude the minority party from decision making and "ugly" politics, the picture is not without some positive aspects to it. More positively, she does note that we can no longer say that "there isn't a nickel's worth of difference between the parties." We have gone from "tweedledum-tweedledee" to real differences between the parties. We now have, as it were, "a choice and not an echo." This is not always to the good. While we do not have raw gridlock, Sinclair's evidence is that less important, major legislation has been passed, as a result of the partisan wars. All in all, a wonderful analysis of where we are in partisan politics and how we got here, with a few suggestions as to how the system might be able to work better in the future. Especially in light of the stunning results of the 2006 mid-term elections, this is an important work to take a look at and think about.

I agree with Professor Peterson's intelligent review and also believe people who have not read a

book should not review it as JohnB has tried to do. Barbara Sinclair is a terrific scholar and doesn't deserve to be attacked by such people. This is an excellent and under appreciated book. I create educational websites (nonprofit). Other good books and information on US history here: mwir-ushistory.blogspot.com/Midwest Independent Research

This provides an excellent overview of the polarization literature and provides new and interesting analysis. I should note also that the first review of this book was perhaps the most unprofessional review that I've ever seen. Entering a review of a book you've never read? Incredibly arrogant.

I have not read this book. However, using .com's feature for exploring the index of the hard cover edition I find no entry for 911, September 11, World Trade Center, Pentagon, or USA Patriot Act, hence nothing on the 911 Commission Report. So I am lead to think that from a reading of this book you would never know that an attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon ever took place, or had any political significance. No doubt this book is a useful study of Party Wars, but not useful enough for me to buy it.

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