

of US economic power will be. Indeed, as the crisis unfolded, the United States was not in a position to stop the collapse unilaterally, but had to engage in multilateral fiscal and monetary interventions that may well presage a period of multipolar international political and economic power.

**The State of Disunion: Regional Sources of Modern American Partisanship.** By Nicole Mellow. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 240p. \$55.00 cloth, \$27.00 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592711000193

— Seth C. McKee, *University of South Florida St. Petersburg*

In *The State of Disunion*, Nicole Mellow makes use of congressional party votes over a long time series, investigates three specific policy domains, and provides a rich account of the historical record to demonstrate the fundamental role that sectionalism plays in the evolution of the American party system. This account of partisan change in contemporary American politics examines the changing regional bases of support for Democrats and Republicans serving in the US House of Representatives. Placing an emphasis on geography, Mellow contends that the unique mixture of shared cultures and political economies tied to place shape elites' political stances on issues and are fundamental factors driving alterations to the major parties' locations of electoral support.

The dynamism of party politics rests within the interplay between section and elite positioning on salient political issues. Place and political actors' responses to it, in the form of position taking on major policies, not only reveals commonalities within certain regions of the United States but also shows how sectional differences provide an opening to realign the parties because of the dominant concerns voters share within these places.

Mellow partitions the United States into four separate sections: (1) North, (2) Pacific Coast, (3) West, and (4) South (state classifications are on p. 196). With these four sections serving as critical variables interacting with elite positioning on the issues of trade, welfare, and abortion, case studies evaluating each of these policy domains highlight region-based realignments and increased polarization in the US House. Not only are the aforementioned issues prominent and important to representatives and their constituents, but they are proxies for deeper sentiments concerning economics (trade), race (welfare), and morality (abortion).

With respect to the issues of trade and welfare, the in-depth case studies on these policies consider three distinct time periods when major legislation is considered (early 1960, early 1970, and the mid- to late 1990s) and the coalitions of partisan support shift according to changes occurring in the four major sections of the country. As Mellow contends, a New Deal regime consensus manifests itself in the sectional and partisan support of trade

and welfare. With the cultural differences between North and South representing the most severe potential fault line, even into the early 1960s, major legislation on trade and welfare indicate the successful compromise brokered within the Democratic Party on these issues. Economic expansion reinforced the North's advocacy of free trade (a position long held by southerners) and the flexibility associated with welfare policy, particularly with respect to local control, appeased southern Democrats.

But the North's subsequent deindustrialization and its attendant rising costs for funding social welfare programs caused northern representatives, especially Democrats, to pivot in favor of "fair" trade and the federalization of welfare policy in order to care for a swelling number of displaced workers and a growing population of African Americans who migrated to the North only to find themselves trapped in poverty-ridden inner cities. By the 1970s, the Rust Belt proved to be a net loser in a changing global economy (also true of many manufacturing-based cities on the Pacific Coast, like Oakland, CA), whereas the more prosperous and expanding Sun Belt economies of the South and West took flight, and these sectional changes fostered new alignments between the political parties and their policy stances. For instance, the export-based economies in the South and West forged a new alignment between these regions, and given their economic growth, social welfare programs were not only less important, but prevailing cultural attitudes exhibited considerable disdain toward government assistance. For example, northern Democratic coalition-building that used welfare policy to attract the support of needy African Americans racialized social assistance programs and further deepened the opposition of whites residing in the southern Cotton Belt.

These economic changes across different sections led to a reorganization of party coalitions and the accompanying regional strongholds of Democrats and Republicans. Growing sectional commonalities in the North and Pacific Coast with respect to their economies and cultural milieus advantaged Democrats. By contrast, the generally more conservative and free-enterprise philosophy of southerners and westerners meshed better with the Republican Party and hence propelled its electoral gains in these regions.

Likewise, the final case study on abortion illustrates an issue evolution whose trajectory is once again significantly shaped by sectionalism. With the debate over abortion cast in moral terms, greater numbers of conservative Christians, in the West and especially in the South, gave their allegiance to the GOP when Republican elites (perhaps most importantly, Ronald Reagan) took a clear stand against the *Roe v. Wade* (1973) decision. More so than the issues of trade and welfare, for Republicans, abortion was the most successful wedge for prying apart otherwise Democratic voters residing in the North (particularly in east north central states, typically referred to as the upper Midwest). Specifically, large numbers of working-class

northern Catholics who affiliated with the Democratic Party were cross-pressured by the GOP's prolife stance. Many of these voters were of course dubbed "Reagan Democrats"—pulled away from their class-based justification for preferring Democrats in order to vote for GOP candidates who framed abortion as a "sanctity of life" issue. Indeed, the abortion issue showed the Bible Belt's reach extended a good ways north of the Mason-Dixon Line. In the rest of the North and Pacific Coast, the postindustrial age arrived sooner. The modern woman was much more experienced in working outside the home, and postmaterialist values reinforced the framing of abortion as a reproductive issue.

The primary criticisms I harbor about this book are by no means deep or fatal, but nonetheless worth mentioning. First, there is no rigorous defense of how the four sections of the United States are divided. For instance, although it is not a stretch to include Kentucky and Oklahoma as part of the South (a fairly common practice among southern politics scholars), the inclusion of West Virginia seems odd since it seceded from Virginia because these mountaineers did not want to join the Confederacy. Similarly, the North is probably a too-encompassing region, especially if one considers how much more competitive the Midwest states are as compared to the Northeast, including New England (on this point, see the five sectional divisions used in Earl and Merle Black's *Divided America: The Ferocious Power Struggle in American Politics* [2007]). At minimum, a reordering of sections, depending on how this is done, will illustrate a somewhat different dynamic in the regional bases of contemporary partisanship.

Second, a dearth of mass-level data leaves the reader to suspect the electorate must be every bit as divided in their partisanship and sectional domiciles as those individuals who represent them. But the large and growing body of research on partisan polarization in contemporary American politics makes it abundantly clear that the mass electorate is not nearly as divided as Congress. It is true that the degree of elite polarization would not be possible if it was completely disconnected from the positioning of constituents. But the partisan sorting of the mass electorate pales beside the ideological gulf separating elected congressional Democrats and Republicans. There remains a very substantial moderate middle in American politics.

Criticisms aside, there is much to admire in Mellow's approach to explaining partisan change in modern American politics. For one, the mixed method of bringing together congressional voting data with detailed analysis of major legislation, and a rich accounting of the positions taken by key elites engaged in these policy debates, provides for a remarkably rich portrayal of issue-based political transformation in the US House. Further, the evidence marshaled by Mellow leaves little doubt that she is correct in recognizing that "[i]n a political system in

which parties are a primary means for organizing power and electoral rewards are based on geographic control, parties have an incentive to build regional coalitions" (p. 173).

**The View of the Courts from the Hill: Interactions between Congress and the Federal Judiciary.** By Mark C. Miller. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. 272p. \$45.00.

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Mark C. Miller's *The View of the Courts from the Hill* reminds readers that the role of the federal courts in the American political system has been a long-standing controversy since the founding of the country. In this study, he traces the evolution of interactions between the federal judiciary and Congress over the course of two centuries with special attention to recent efforts by members of the legislative branch to curb the power of the federal courts. While carefully documenting how decisions of the federal courts have generated a backlash in Congress at various points over the past two centuries, Miller expresses alarm that during the past decade, the threat to judicial independence from congressional intervention has reached dangerous new heights.

Miller attributes this emerging threat to efforts by the religious right and conservative members of Congress to retaliate against a liberal federal bench they deem hostile to traditional American values. Paying close attention to the House Judiciary Committee, Miller details a variety of actions initiated by interest groups affiliated with the Christian right and Republican members of the Committee to further their goal of a more conservative federal judiciary. Included among these efforts are bills to strip the courts of their authority to hear a variety of cases, especially when it comes to hot-button social issues. Additionally, high-profile threats from conservative leaders in Congress call for the impeachment of federal judges who have issued rulings contrary to the wishes of the religious right. From Miller's perspective, these attacks constitute a serious blow to the independence of the federal courts, one of the lynchpins of a healthy democratic system. While Miller concludes that some recent Supreme Court decisions have also drawn the ire of liberals, the response among Democratic members of Congress has been more muted because of their greater respect for the autonomy of the courts in the US political system. Miller lays blame for recent developments squarely at the feet of the conservative movement and envisions this war on the judiciary will continue for the foreseeable future until and unless the courts reflect a more rightward-leaning perspective.

Although Miller makes a compelling case for his underlying claims about conservative attacks on the federal