

terrain to administrative law scholars. Melnick's criticism of the OCR aligns with broader, increasingly ascendant critiques of unaccountable agencies. But far from a lack of democratic accountability, the trajectory of OCR enforcement reveals an agency highly responsive to electoral politics. The OCR may have succeeded in operating below the public radar and dodging congressional oversight, as Melnick contends, but it has proven quick to respond to presidential politics (witness both the stepped-up enforcement under Barack Obama and the Trump administration reversals). Perhaps the OCR's transformation of Title IX was not so much antidemocratic as dynamic—the product of competing social movements and national constituencies—with the law evolving to both shape and reflect contested norms about sex and gender.

*The Transformation of Title IX* is a thought-provoking argument about agency overreach into the heart of the gender culture wars. Melnick is certainly correct that the culture wars run hot around Title IX. Whether Title IX has needlessly inflamed them, as he suggests, or whether they are endemic to a country deeply divided in its views about gender is a question that this polemical book does not resolve.

**Unstable Majorities: Polarization, Party Sorting, and Political Stalemate.** By Morris P. Fiorina. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2017. 239p. \$24.95 paper.

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— Devin Caughey, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Morris Fiorina's new book is brisk, timely, and insightful. Consisting mainly of essays originally published on the Website of Stanford's Hoover Institution, it revisits the themes of partisan sorting and polarization explored in the author's previous work (Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2004) and considers their implications for our understanding of politics in the era of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Grounded in academic scholarship yet accessible and engaging, *Unstable Majorities* should interest scholars in other fields and even layreaders as much it does specialists on American politics. I therefore recommend it to a wide audience, ranging from college freshmen to Ph.D. students to professors of political science.

As its preface (p. xvi) explains, the goal of this book is to summarize and synthesize research published in the wake of *Culture War*, to rebut various lingering "misunderstandings" related to that work, and to comment on the contemporary political landscape. Taken as a whole, the book is less a coherent argument than it is a collection of essays linked by a common theme (partisan sorting) and a common sensibility (antielitism). To the extent that it has a single thesis, it is that many of the most salient features of contemporary U.S. politics—the consistency of

voters' choices across offices and elections, mass disaffection from the parties, the appeal of populist insurgents, the tendency of parties to "overreach" once in office—are the consequence of the growing alignment between partisanship and ideology over the past half century (pp. 15–16). Echoing a long-standing Fiorinian theme, *Unstable Majorities* attributes these (largely negative) developments not to the shifting attitudes of ordinary citizens but to changes in the choices that elites offer them. In the end, then, Fiorina blames our current predicament primarily on the "political class" of politicians and journalists, and more generally on the smug "protected" who populate America's liberal, cosmopolitan enclaves—including, one suspects, many of his fellow academics (pp. 204, 207).

The first nine chapters, originally composed in the months preceding the 2016 presidential election, use the ideas developed in *Culture War* as a lens for analyzing the Obama years and the Clinton–Trump campaign. Chapters 2 and 3 recapitulate Fiorina's argument that ordinary Americans, unlike elites, have not polarized but, rather, have sorted into the ideologically "correct" party. Chapter 4 discusses the (mostly negative) consequences of partisan polarization and sorting, such as incivility and gridlock, and Chapter 5 considers the concomitant tendency for Democrats and Republicans to "overreach" once they achieve control of government (thus triggering a predictable counterreaction from voters). Chapter 6, disputing the common decision to classify partisan "leaners" as closet partisans, interprets the rise of Independents as a sign of the public's dissatisfaction with the parties. Chapter 7 considers the "renationalization" of congressional elections, arguing that this return to the historical norm reflects changes in the electoral choices presented to voters by the parties, rather than changes in voters' attitudes.

The following two chapters provide comparative and historical context for contemporary American politics. In Chapter 8, the author reviews the ambiguous literature on polarization and populism in European politics, ultimately finding few transportable lessons for the U.S. case other than that elite partisan polarization is not an inevitable feature of contemporary politics. Chapter 9 comes to firmer conclusions, highlighting the multiple parallels (some of which, such as "population movement" and "crony capitalism," are somewhat forced in my view) between the early twenty-first century and the late nineteenth, which Fiorina labels as "the Era of Indecision" for its partisan instability and gridlock.

The final three chapters, written in early 2017, are Fiorina's effort to make sense of the 2016 election and the first days of the Trump administration. Chapter 10 presents his brief views on a number of election-related controversies, including whether Trump's victory indicated a major shift in public attitudes (not really), how someone as disliked as Trump could have won (because

public antipathy toward Clinton was almost as severe), and whether the media and various campaign events affected the outcome (not much, except perhaps for public backlash against Trump's overwhelmingly negative coverage in the mainstream media). Understandably, given the recentness of events covered, there is little academic scholarship for Fiorina to draw on in supporting these arguments, though they are, of course, grounded in a lifetime of political observation and research. Chapter 11 continues in a similar vein, considering the role that culture, class, and identity played in the 2016 election. Mostly downplaying the importance of race, gender, and ethnicity (and taking a swipe at the "rising American electorate" thesis along the way), the author instead emphasizes white working-class resentment against the corruption and impunity of economic elites and the condescension of cultural ones.

Chapter 12 concludes with Fiorina's thoughts on the likely trajectory of the Trump administration. Though hardly a Trump fan, he strikes a less alarmist tone than many commentators, academic and otherwise. The nation has been through worse and survived, he reminds us, and he reiterates that Trump's victory does not signal the moral bankruptcy of the American people. "Elites are the problem," Fiorina concludes, not ordinary Americans (p. 218).

In keeping with its broad intended audience, the book seems primarily concerned with engaging with the arguments of popular commentators such as Thomas Frank, Matt Bai, and Peggy Noonan rather than of fellow academics. The main political scientist to receive much critical engagement is Alan Abramowitz (e.g., *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy*, 2010), with whom Fiorina has enjoyed a long-running argument over whether the American public has truly polarized (Abramowitz's position) or merely sorted (Fiorina's). This is not to say that *Unstable Majorities* is unmoored from academic scholarship. While it presents little original research, the first nine chapters in particular provide a sure-footed tour of recent scholarship on American politics, and I suspect that professors and Ph.D. students alike will find the author's gloss on this literature edifying and provocative.

Although *Unstable Majorities* is at all points smart and reasonable, some of its claims are less compelling than others. I have no quarrel with Fiorina's well-known argument for sorting rather than polarization, but I think that he underplays the public's role in sustaining or even exacerbating elite polarization. As Gary Jacobson ("The Electoral Origins of Polarized Politics: Evidence From the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(12), 2010) argues, mass-level sorting has increased the ideological homogeneity of the primary electorates within each party, thus (through both electoral incentives and replacement) fostering extremism

among each party's nominees. (See also Devin Caughey, James Dunham, and Christopher Warshaw, "The Ideological Nationalization of Partisan Subconstituencies in the American States," *Public Choice* 176(1-2), 2018).

In its depiction of a moderate citizenry victimized by polarized elites, *Unstable Majorities* also neglects recent research showing that ordinary Americans are much more willing to endorse extreme issue positions than their representatives are (Douglas J. Ahler and David E. Broockman, "The Delegate Paradox: Why Polarized Politicians Can Represent Citizens Best," *Journal of Politics* 80(4), 2018). Finally, though the debate over the sources of Trump's support is far from settled, Fiorina's emphasis on economic class is hard to square with the evidence for the primacy of racial and especially immigration attitudes in explaining voters' shifts toward Trump (e.g., John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, "The 2016 U.S. Election: How Trump Lost and Won," *Journal of Democracy* 28(2), 2017).

These quibbles notwithstanding, my overall assessment of the book is extremely positive. Indeed, it has few peers as a brief but wide-ranging overview of contemporary American politics. As such, it is an invaluable contribution to our discipline's collective effort to make sense of the vexing and perplexing political landscape in which we find ourselves.

#### **Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became our Identity.**

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— Yphtach Lelkes, *University of Pennsylvania*.

American politics feels like it has become blood sport. Democrats and Republicans report hating each other, and Trump and his supporters have vocally called for the jailing (and perhaps worse) of their opponents. A number of studies have shown that partisans are increasingly prejudiced against their political opponents, which manifests as, for instance, avoidance and vitriolic rhetoric, or taking material losses in order to avoid helping the other side (for a review, see: Shanto Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* (Forthcoming)). Evidence for increasing hostility (or affective polarization as some call it) has stacked up over the past years. However, we have had far less evidence that explains how we got here. In *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became our Identity*, Lilliana Mason has offered the clearest and most convincing explanation for the current state of affairs.

Drawing on a rich bevy of literature from political science, psychology, and sociology, Mason blames the rise of affective polarization on changes in "social sorting," i.e., the decline of cross-cutting identities. In the