

# Needed: A Political Theory for the New Era of Coalition Government in the United States

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On 8 November 1988, when the American voters decreed that Republican George Bush would succeed Ronald Reagan in the White House but the opposition Democratic Party would control both houses of the Congress, it was the sixth time in the last nine presidential elections that the electorate chose to split the government between the parties. As in 1988, so in the earlier elections of 1956, 1968, 1972, 1980, and 1984, the people placed their faith in Republican presidential leadership but voted to retain Democratic majorities in the House of Representatives and in the first three of those elections (as well as in 1988), Democratic majorities in the Senate also.

This is something new in American politics. When Dwight D. Eisenhower took his second oath of office in 1957, he was the first chief executive in seventy-two years — since Grover Cleveland in 1885 — to confront on Inauguration Day a Congress of which even one house was controlled by the opposition party. Sometimes the opposition would win majorities in the House or the Senate, or both, at the midterm election, but even such occasions were relatively rare. In the fifty-eight years from 1897 through 1954, the country experienced divided government during only eight years — all in the last half of a presidential term — or 14 percent of the time. Yet in the thirty-six years from 1955 through 1990, the government will have

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been divided between the parties for twenty-four years — exactly two-thirds of that period.

A generation ago, then, the country passed from a long era of party government, when either the Republican or the Democratic Party controlled both the presidency and the Congress almost all of the time, to an era when the government was divided between the parties most of the time. Under these circumstances, the United States has its own unique version of coalition government — not a coalition voluntarily entered into by the parties but one forced upon them by the accidents of the electoral process.

It is the argument of this article that the advent of the new era has rendered obsolete much of the theory developed by political scientists, from the day of Woodrow Wilson to the 1950s, to explain how the United States government can and should work. That theory identified the political party as the indispensable instrument that brought cohesion and unity, and hence effectiveness, to the government as a whole by linking the executive and legislative branches in a bond of common interest. And, as a corollary, the party made it possible for the president to succeed in his indispensable role as leader and energizer of the governmental process; it accomplished that end because the congressional majorities, while they would not accept the president's leadership by virtue of his constitutional position as chief executive — institutional rivalry would bar that — would accept it in his alternate capacity as head of the political party to which the majorities adhered.

The generations of political scientists who expounded this theory paid little attention to how the government would and should function when the president and the Senate and House majorities were not all of the same party. They could in good conscience disregard that question because intervals of divided government in their experience had been infrequent and short-lived. Whenever the midterm election brought a division of the government, anyone concerned about that could take a deep breath and wait confidently for the next presidential election to put the system back into its proper alignment. As late as 1952 it had always done so in the memory of everybody writing on the subject. But since 1956, that has no longer been a certainty. It has not even been the probability. And that represents a momentous change in the American governmental system, for institutional processes and relationships are profoundly altered when the unifying bond of party disappears.

This article briefly reviews the antiparty doctrine that the Framers wrote into the Constitution but promptly abandoned. Then it presents the theory of party government and presidential leadership as it was explicated by authoritative and influential political scientists in the era that ended in the mid-1950s, and finally discusses the implications of the obsolescence of that theory since the transformation of the governmental system during the past three decades.

#### THE ANTIPARTY THEORY AND ITS ABANDONMENT

Party government was, of course, not the intent of the Framers who met in Philadelphia in 1787. Quite the opposite. Their views — which are well known and need

not be set forth at length here—were, in a word, antiparty. The word “party” appears only rarely in James Madison’s account of the proceedings of the 1787 convention. The preferred terms were “faction” and “cabal,” and they were used only for purposes of condemnation. No more powerful diatribe against political parties has ever been penned than *The Federalist*, particularly Madison’s No. 10, in which he denounced “the violence of faction” as “this dangerous vice” that introduces “the instability, injustice, and confusion” that have “been the mortal diseases under which popular governments have everywhere perished.” If a majority party can win the whole of governmental power, Madison reasoned, what is to prevent it from oppressing the minority? As Madison saw it, the natural party division would be between “those who hold and those who are without property,” between “those who are creditors, and those who are debtors.” He feared that a majority party made up of the propertyless would exhibit “a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property.”

In *The Federalist*, particularly in No. 10 but also in Nos. 47, 48 and 62, Madison saw the whole constitutional design as a defense against the danger that any “interested and overbearing majority” or “sinister combinations” could gain control of the entire government. Raising decisions to the national level would place them in the hands of men who had risen above the factionalism of the states, and factions would be more difficult to organize on a national scale. The separation of powers among the branches—and within the legislature between two bodies—would further guard against the threat that majority rule might lead to “tyranny” and “oppression.” And so would the method devised for selecting the president. Rejecting the two obvious ways of making that choice—either election by the people directly or election by the Congress—the Framers conceived that peculiar institution, the electoral college, as a nonpartisan, antiparty apparatus, a kind of search committee, not unlike those that corporations and universities and city councils set up nowadays to select a new executive. The college would be made up of men mostly unknown to each other, who would not meet as a body, who would not even be in communication across state lines. As Madison put it at the Convention, “there would be little opportunity for cabal, or corruption.”<sup>1</sup>

George Washington, who presided over both the convention and the newly-formed government, tried to lead in the nonpartisan manner that the Constitution contemplated. But before the end of his first term, he witnessed the rise of factionalism not only in the Congress but also within his own cabinet. Washington expressed his dismay in his celebrated farewell address in which—echoing *Federalist* No. 10—he warned his countrymen “in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally.” That spirit, the “worst enemy” of democratic governments everywhere, said Washington, serves to “distract the public councils . . . enfeeble the public administration . . . agitates the community with ill founded jealousies and false alarms . . . foment occasional riots and in-

<sup>1</sup> Max Farrands, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, rev. ed., 4 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), 2, 29, proceedings of July 17, notes of James Madison.

surrection . . . opens the door to foreign influence and corruption," can lead to "frightful despotism," and all the rest.<sup>2</sup> And Washington's successor, John Adams, concurred in his inaugural address that the "spirit of party" is one of the "natural enemies" of the Constitution.<sup>3</sup>

But by the end of his term, the spirit of party was flourishing. In the election of 1800, a fledgling two-party system — reflecting to a degree the cleavages between the propertied and the landless, between creditors and debtors, which Madison had identified as fundamental — was in operation, with two slates of candidates running nationally. The electoral college was hardly formed when it ceased to be the intended body of nonpartisan statesmen with complete discretion and independent judgment and became what it has since remained — a body of faceless partisans that merely registers the choice of the voters between or among national party candidates. "The election of a President of the United States is no longer that process which the Constitution contemplated," one of the Framers, Rufus King, told the Senate in 1816.<sup>4</sup> In his retirement years, James Madison himself acknowledged that parties are "a natural offspring of Freedom."<sup>5</sup> By that time of course, Madison had been elected and reelected president as a party nominee.

#### THE THEORY OF PARTY GOVERNMENT AND PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Madison did not expound a new theory to supplant the one that he had been so instrumental in embedding in the Constitution. But without benefit of much explicit doctrine, the nation's political leaders developed in practice the system of party government — as distinct from nonpartisan government — that settled into place in the Jacksonian era and prevailed throughout the next century and a quarter. In each presidential election two national parties sought exactly what the Madisonian theory written into the Constitution was supposed to forestall: the capture of all three of the policy-making elements of the government — the presidency, Senate and House — by the same faction or party, so that the party could carry out its program.

No major party has ever said, "We want only the presidency," or only the Senate or the House. They have always said, "give us *total* responsibility." Since early in the nineteenth century, they have presented their programs formally in official party platforms. Asking for total power in the two elected branches, they have been eager to accept the total responsibility and accountability that would accompany it.

<sup>2</sup> James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897), vol. 1, 210-11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>4</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 14 Cong. 1 sess., 216, reprinted in Farrand, *Records*, III, 422. King was a delegate from Massachusetts to the Constitutional Convention, but moved to New York during the following year.

<sup>5</sup> Note to his speech at the 1787 Convention on the right of suffrage, apparently written about 1821, when he was preparing his record of Convention proceedings for publication. *Ibid.*, 452.

That was the theory of party government; and not only the politicians, but the people accepted it. The parties lined up naturally on opposite sides of whatever were the great issues of the day — creating a national bank, opening the West with turnpikes and railroads and canals financed by the national government, prohibiting slavery in the western territories, raising or lowering tariffs, mobilizing the national government to help the victims of the Great Depression, and so on. The people listened to the arguments of the two parties and made their choices. And when they did, the party they elected had a full opportunity to carry out its mandate, because when the voters chose a president each four years they normally entrusted control of the Congress to the president's party, thus making it fully responsible. From Andrew Jackson's time until the second election of Dwight Eisenhower in 1956, only four presidents — Zachary Taylor elected in 1848, Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, James A. Garfield in 1880, and Grover Cleveland in 1884 — had to confront immediately upon inauguration either a House of Representatives or a Senate organized by the opposition. In the nineteenth century these results may have been largely an artifact of the election process itself. The parties printed separate ballots listing their slates, and the voter selected the ballot of the party he preferred, marked it, and dropped it in the box. Yet after the government-printed, secret ballot came into universal use early in this century, straight-ticket voting and the resultant single-party control of the government continued to prevail. The voters gave the Republican Party responsibility for the entire government in the 1900s, again in the 1920s, and finally in 1952; and they chose the Democratic Party in the 1910s, 1930s, and 1940s. No president in the first half of this century ever had to suffer divided government upon taking office, and few had the problem even after the normal setback to the president's party in the midterm election.

As soon as political science emerged as a scholarly discipline, its adherents began to pronounce and elaborate the theoretical foundation of the system of party government that was in being. Parties were not only natural, since people were bound to organize to advance their differing notions as to the goals and programs of government, but the scholars concluded that they were useful and necessary too. Among their uses was the one that is the concern of this paper: their utility in unifying a government of dispersed powers and thereby making it effective.

In his review of the literature on political parties in the late nineteenth century, Austin Ranney found that Woodrow Wilson "was perhaps the first American scholar in his period to attack the principle and deplore the effects of separation of powers, and to consider methods for by-passing it."<sup>6</sup> The primary method was to accept the political party as the unifier of the separate powers. "The organization of parties," wrote Wilson, "is, in a sense, indistinguishable from the legislature and executive themselves. The several active parts of the government are closely united in organization for a common purpose, because they are under a common

<sup>6</sup> Austin Ranney, *The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1954), 36, fn. 39.

direction and themselves constitute the machinery of party control.”<sup>7</sup> And they had to be united because, wrote Wilson, “our government is a living, organic thing, and must . . . work out a close synthesis of active parts which can exist only when leadership is lodged in some one man or group of men. You cannot compound a successful government out of antagonisms.”<sup>8</sup>

Ranney traces the evolution of these concepts through other members of what he calls the “party-government school”: A. Lawrence Lowell, who believed that the “almost unworkable” American governmental system “requires the services of the parties if it is to work at all” and Henry Jones Ford and Frank J. Goodnow, who agreed in their analysis of “the fallacious principle and harmful effects of the separation of powers” and joined “in arguing that parties are the only agency available in America for inducing some kind of coordination and harmony between the legislative and executive branches.”<sup>9</sup>

At the time these men were writing early in the twentieth century, party organizations had reached the nadir of corruption and bossism. Reformers sought to weaken them – and succeeded – through the introduction of direct primaries, non-partisan local elections, and other innovative measures. Yet the doctrine that political parties were indispensable at the national level lived on in political science literature and by the 1940s had clearly become the dominant theory. “[F]or the government to function,” wrote V. O. Key, Jr., in the first edition of his influential textbook on political parties, “the obstructions of the governmental structure must be overcome, and it is the party, through extra-constitutional expedients, that accomplishes this end.”<sup>10</sup> James MacGregor Burns took up the theme in his *Congress on Trial*: “If there is no way to harmonize the separated organs of government, sustained and effective action may be impossible. It is that vital function of integration that the majority party should fulfill. Operating through both branches of Congress and through the committees as well, having as its chief the occupant of the White House . . . the majority party should be the perfect instrument for carrying out a popular mandate.”<sup>11</sup>

By the time the Committee on Political parties of the American Political Science

<sup>7</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), 211–12, quoted by Ranney, *Doctrine*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, quoted by Ranney, *Doctrine*, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ranney, *Doctrine*. The quotations are from Ranney’s summations of their views, 62 and 97. Ranney also devotes chapters to two writers who distrusted parties as the “enemy of democracy” – M.I. Ostrogorski and Herbert Croly.

<sup>10</sup> V.O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Crowell, 1942), 495. By the third edition, published in 1952, Key had rephrased the sentence in the more eloquent form in which it remained in subsequent editions: “Yet, for government to function, the obstructions of the constitutional mechanism must be overcome, and it is the party that casts a web, at times weak, at times strong, over the dispersed organs of government and gives them a semblance of unity,” 693.

<sup>11</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Congress on Trial* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1949, republished by Gordian Press, 1966), 45.

Association made its landmark report in 1950, it could simply assert, without feeling obliged to argue the case, that political parties are "indispensable instruments of government," necessary "to furnish a general kind of direction over the government as a whole" and for "integration of all of the far-flung activities of modern government." It then offered a series of reforms that would make the parties better organized, more tightly disciplined, and hence "more responsible."<sup>12</sup>

The report stirred up a storm of criticism in political science journals and textbooks that continued into the next decade and even longer, culminating in the recantation and devastating critique by one of its members, Evron M. Kirkpatrick. He found the report guilty of "lack of clarification, justification, or analysis of the norms," of "both normative slovenliness and empirical inaccuracy."<sup>13</sup> But his and the earlier criticisms were directed not at the concept of the party government as such but at the realism and the desirability of the committee's proposed reforms, which sought to enable parties to impose a greater measure of discipline on their elected officials in the government. The debate was joined on whether party government should and could be made *more* responsible, not whether it should exist at all. Nobody argued that the parties as they existed in 1950 were too tightly disciplined, and that the need was that they be made *less* responsible. Nobody argued that the ideal system was the one that was to be ushered in a few years later: coalition government in which *no* party is or can be held responsible.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the concepts expressed by Wilson and his colleagues at the turn of the century and by Key and Burns in the 1940s maintained their hold long after the era of party government had, scarcely noticed, come to its end.<sup>15</sup> These are excerpts from authoritative textbooks:

*Howard Penniman, 1952*—But far more important is their [the parties'] service in neutralizing the effect of the check-and-balance system. . . . [S]ince the constitution provides no means of combining the dispersed and disconnected organs of government, the parties, in seeking to control them all and bind them to a common purpose, discharge an essential function. . . . A party, once put in command of the various agencies of the

<sup>12</sup> Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsive Two-Party System*, supplement to the *American Political Science Review* 44 (September 1950), also published by Rinehart & Co., 1950. Quotation from Rinehart ed., 15, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Evron M. Kirkpatrick, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: Political Science, Policy Science, or Pseudo-Science," *American Political Science Review* 65 (December 1971): 965-90.

<sup>14</sup> Thus a theme of one of the earliest critical responses to the Report was that the Committee "underestimated present party responsibility," that parties do in fact present clear alternatives to the voter, and that "most of the majority program is carried into effect." Julius Turner, "Responsible Parties: A Dissent from the Floor," *American Political Science Review* 45 (March 1951): 143-52.

<sup>15</sup> The remarkable failure of political scientists to recognize the significance of the transition from the era of party government to a new era of coalition government is evident, for example, in a book entitled *The New American Political System*, Anthony King, ed., (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), which in ten chapters by eminent writers does not even mention divided government as an element of the new system.

government, will make them respond to a common impulse and work in harmony. Such power carries with it responsibility; and the voters can in some measure enforce that responsibility by transferring power to the rival party.<sup>16</sup>

*Clinton Rossiter, 1960*—It has not been an easy constitution with which to make policy quickly and to govern efficiently, which is exactly the kind of constitution the framers intended it to be. The gaps that separate the executive from the legislature . . . have often been as discouraging to men of good will as to men of corrupt intent. . . . For this reason we need more, and more easily traveled, bridges across the gaps, and our major parties provide two that we could hardly afford to be without.<sup>17</sup>

*Frank J. Sorauf, 1968*— . . . the American parties contribute to the functioning of the American political system by providing a unifying focus in a system of dispersed political authority . . . To the fragmentation of the nation and the fifty states multiplied by the three-fold separation of powers in each, the two great national political parties bring a unifying force . . . which helps to hold the disparate fragments together.<sup>18</sup>

*David B. Truman, 1971*—It is as appropriate to observe today as it was at the turn of the century . . . when Henry Jones Ford was producing his studies of American politics, that the national political party is the "sole efficient means" of producing "union between the executive and legislative branches of the government."<sup>19</sup>

*Gerald Pomper, 1980*—The Constitution has served us well, but only because we have not adhered to its provisions rigorously . . . . Amendment of the Constitution, in practice rather than in law, has enabled the parties to bridge its gaps through such integrative institutions as the national nominating conventions, the joint meetings of the president and congressional party leadership, the House and Senate party caucuses. . . .<sup>20</sup>

*Milton C. Cummings, Jr. and David Wise, 1985*—Because political parties are involved in the governmental process, they serve to link different parts of the government: the president communicates with party leaders in Congress; the two houses of Congress communicate in part through party leaders . . . . In sum, political parties perform vital functions in the American political system. They . . . [as one function] link various branches and levels of government.<sup>21</sup>

Like the Committee on Political Parties, the later writers who saw political parties as the unifying instrument in the governmental system generally agreed that they often failed to perform that function satisfactorily. Decentralized and federal in their organization, without authoritative central institutions, and made up of diverse ideological and cultural elements, the parties lacked discipline. Yet even

<sup>16</sup> Howard Penniman, *American Parties and Elections*, 5th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), 164–65. (Penniman was a member of the Committee on Political Parties.)

<sup>17</sup> Clinton Rossiter, *Parties and Politics in America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), 62–63.

<sup>18</sup> Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), 18.

<sup>19</sup> David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 531–32.

<sup>20</sup> Gerald Pomper, "The Contribution of Political Parties to American Democracy" in Pomper, ed., *Party Renewal in America: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Milton C. Cummings and David Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure: An Introduction to the American Political System*, 5th ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 248.

without the reforms recommended by the committee, the political party was seen as nonetheless succeeding to some degree in bridging the gaps between the separated branches of the government.

Thus, Rossiter credits "the simple fact" that the president and roughly half of the Congress "are all brothers in the same political lodge" helping to close and bridge the "gaps" between the branches. The parties, he wrote, continue "to keep all our independent centers of power in touch with one another."<sup>22</sup> And Sorauf, while noting that party cohesion in the Congress and in state legislatures is "irregular, sporadic, and imperfect" on substantive issues, "in the aggregate an important measure of party discipline does exist." He continues:

Neither the American parties nor the voters can meet the demands which the classic model of party responsibility imposes on them. But binding the various sectors of the party together—despite all that divides them—is an inarticulate ideology, a commitment to a set of issue positions which sets the activists, candidates, and voters of one party apart from those of the other. In a loose, often distressingly imprecise sense, the two parties are distinct groups of "like-minded" men. Out of that tentative and limited agreement on issues comes enough cohesion to produce a modest, if variable, degree of responsibility. The American approximation of party government does indeed fall far short of the model of party responsibility and the hopes of the reformers, but the role of the political party in organizing government and the debate on public issues cannot be ignored.<sup>23</sup>

And how is that degree of party discipline and responsibility achieved? In the national government, political scientists proclaim with virtual unanimity that it is through presidential leadership. When the party serves its unifying function, it is because the members of the president's party in the Congress recognize the president as not merely the head of the executive branch but as the leader of the band of "brothers in the same political lodge." In enacting as well as in administering the laws, the government cannot move dynamically and prudently without a recognized and accepted prime mover, a leader. And that leader is logically and necessarily the man chosen by the whole national party to carry its standard, and who has done so successfully in the most recent presidential election. Besides, the president has the resources of the entire executive branch to help him to develop coordinated programs. "The President proposes and the Congress disposes" long ago became the catch phrase to describe the legislative process.

Austin Ranney notes that, of the "various devices by which American presidents and other politicians have tried to join together, for purposes of getting the government to work, what the Constitution so successfully put asunder," most "fall under the general heading of 'presidential leadership of Congress.'" He summarizes:

The ideas underlying all of them are that America, like every other country, must some-

<sup>22</sup> Rossiter, *Parties and Politics*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Sorauf, *Party Politics*, 14, 393-94.

times take swift, coherent, and purposeful action . . . that Congress . . . cannot by itself initiate such action; the president . . . is the only official who can take the lead; and that the basic problem of American government is finding and perfecting institutions that will enable the president to lead Congress with maximum effectiveness.<sup>24</sup>

Political scientists played no small role in creating those devices of presidential leadership. They refined and embellished, if they did not originate, the concepts of the executive budget that were enacted in the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921. They dominated the task forces of the President's Committee on Administrative Management, whose report in 1937 laid the basis for expanding the executive office of the president and giving the chief executive the mechanisms for serving effectively as the general manager of the government. And they heartily acclaimed the assertion by the president of leadership in the legislative process. The identification of the president as chief legislator has been traced back to Howard Lee McBain's *The Living Constitution*, published in 1927. By the 1940s, no textbook on American government failed to highlight the president's legislative role, usually in a section carrying the phrase "chief legislator" in the title.

"The president is usually considered both chief administrator and chief legislator," wrote Pendleton Herring in 1940. "The public expects the president to lead Congress; Congress is unable to produce coherence of direction to rival his." And "to meet the demands of the hour," Herring continued, "Presidential leadership is the answer."<sup>25</sup>

These sentiments were echoed and reechoed in the political science literature of the next several decades, as these samples illustrate:

*V. O. Key, Jr., 1942*—The only common point about which leadership and direction of the party may be established for the conduct of the Government is the Presidency. It is the President who determines the major issues on which Congress acts; and it is the President who attempts, with or without success, to bring the party members in the House and Senate to the support of his policy.<sup>26</sup>

*Charles S. Hyneman, 1950*—It is imperative, as I see it, that the President take a lead in suggesting and formulating proposals which, when found acceptable by a majority in each house of Congress, will provide the legislative base for these programs of government . . . . There is every reason to believe that we will get effective legislative solutions for our toughest problems only if the President supplies vigorous leadership in legislation.<sup>27</sup>

*Clinton Rossiter, 1956*— . . . we may therefore consider [the President] to be the Chief Legislator. . . . [w]e may . . . consider him as *leader of Congress*. . . . [t]he complexity of the problems it is asked to solve . . . has made external leadership a requisite of effective operation.

<sup>24</sup> Ranney, "The President and His Party" in Anthony King, ed., *Both Ends of the Avenue* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1983), 131-32.

<sup>25</sup> Pendleton Herring, *Presidential Leadership* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1940), 12, 145-46.

<sup>26</sup> Key, *Politics, Parties*, 504-05.

<sup>27</sup> Charles S. Hyneman, *Bureaucracy in a Democracy* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1950), 565.

The President alone is in a political, constitutional, and practical position to provide such leadership, and he is therefore expected, within the limits of propriety . . . to guide Congress in much of its lawmaking activity. Indeed, since Congress is no longer minded or organized to guide itself, the refusal or inability of the President to serve as leader results in weak and disorganized government.<sup>28</sup>

*Richard E. Neustadt, 1960*—an expert search for presidential influence contributes to the energy of government and to the viability of public policy. . . . In a relative but real sense one can say of a President what Eisenhower's first Secretary of Defense once said of General Motors: what is good for the country is good for the President and *vice versa*.<sup>29</sup>

*Robert K. Carr, Marver H. Bernstein, and Walter F. Murphy, 1963*—A modern democracy must try to devise and carry into effect positive policies for the solution of its social problems. It is an inescapable fact of American politics that the President alone can supply the kind of intelligent and aggressive leadership that is essential if this is to be done in the United States. . . . The nature of the times in which we live makes it absolutely essential for the President to lead Congress.<sup>30</sup>

*Charles E. Lindblom, 1968*—Because leadership in Congress is fragmented through the committee system and because congressmen know that someone or some small group has to take responsibility for organizing a legislative program, congressmen have informally conferred on the President both the authority and the positive responsibility, to the near exclusion of any similar role for themselves, to propose major legislation. Clearly, presidential authority for legislative leadership is now well established.<sup>31</sup>

In his analysis of what he termed “the textbook presidency” of the 1950s and 1960s, Thomas E. Cronin found that the texts “[w]ith rare exceptions . . . not only devised and approved but openly celebrated an expansive theory of presidential power.” Among the more vivid of the many quotations he assembled were those terming the presidency “the great engine of democracy,” “the American people's one authentic trumpet,” “the central instrument of democracy,” and “a kind of magnificent lion who can roam widely and do great deeds. . . .” Cronin wrote at a time of reaction against the “imperial presidency” revealed by Vietnam and Watergate, and his purpose was to define a more realistic and accountable presidency. Yet he himself stopped well short of rejecting the doctrine of presidential leadership that had evolved in the earlier decades: “The promise of the American presidency may have been oversold, overstated, and stretched beyond reality, but denying the importance and the need for effective presidential leadership would be to overstate the case, as well as misleading.”<sup>32</sup>

Somewhat startling in retrospect is the absence in all pre-1970s literature of any noticeable fear that presidential leadership might be transmuted into presidential

<sup>28</sup> Rossiter, *The American Presidency* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1956), 14, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), 183–85.

<sup>30</sup> Robert K. Carr, Marver H. Bernstein, and Walter F. Murphy, *American Democracy in Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 372, 374.

<sup>31</sup> Charles E. Lindblom, *The Policy-making Process* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), 72.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas E. Cronin, *The State of the Presidency* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 25–29.

imperialism and party cohesion into party docility and congressional subservience. A century and a half of experience had evidently convinced political scientists that the “frightful despotism” foreseen by Washington and the political “oppression” that haunted Madison were figments of an eighteenth-century imagination fevered by the struggle against George III. The preeminent instance in all that time of usurpation of power by a president – that of Abraham Lincoln at the outset of the Civil War – had turned out, after all, to be a necessary assertion of leadership in the noblest of causes. So too, it seemed, were the unilateral interventions of Franklin Roosevelt on the side of the Allies in the months before Pearl Harbor. In 1947, Louis Brownlow, of Roosevelt’s Committee on Administrative Management, could exult that “during the whole history of the thirty-two presidents, not one has been recreant to his high trust – not one has used his power to aggrandize himself at the expense of our settled institutions.”<sup>33</sup> The Committee on Political Parties even turned the argument around; it had the foresight to acknowledge the possibility of presidential excess but contended that disciplined parties would restrain an ambitious president by forcing major decisions into the context of a party’s collective leadership. Neustadt’s dictum that what is good for the president is good for the country would prevail until Vietnam and Watergate – and later Irangate – aroused scholars to an awareness that presidential power might be abused. Yet even after Vietnam and Watergate, Cronin appeared to speak for most political scientists in holding that “the importance and the need for presidential leadership” had not been invalidated by events. In the year of the Nixon resignation, a textbook writer could still reiterate the established doctrine:

... the President has become the primary source of initiative in the American political system. Domestic programs will lack consistent direction if he does not supply it. ... His need for a steady sense of direction is even greater where international and military affairs are concerned, because these decisions are generally made in the innermost circle ... and he is *the* indispensable member of any innovating group.<sup>34</sup>

By the 1960s, political science had developed a dominating theory as to how the American constitutional system should – and at its best, did – work. The political party was the institution that unified the separated branches of the government and brought coherence to the policymaking process. And because the president was the leader of his party, he was the chief policy maker of the entire government, presiding directly over the executive branch and indirectly working through and with his party’s congressional leadership over the legislative branch as well.

<sup>33</sup> Louis Brownlow, *The President and the Presidency* (Chicago: Public Administration Service, 1949), a compilation of lectures given in 1947.

<sup>34</sup> Dorothy Buckton James, *The Contemporary President*, 2d ed. (Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1974), 307–8.

## THE OLD THEORY IN A NEW ERA

This established theory presupposed one essential condition: there would in fact be a majority party in control of both branches of government. Rereading the literature of the midcentury, one is struck with how easily this condition was taken for granted. The writers could well do so, for in the twentieth century until 1955, the government had been divided between the parties only for four periods of two years each, and in each case in the last half of a presidential term — those of Taft, Wilson, Hoover, and Truman. A scholar who happened to be writing during or immediately after one of these intervals (or who was commenting on state governmental systems) might observe in parenthetical style that divided government could sometimes obscure responsibility, impede leadership, and thus thwart the fulfillment of the party government ideal. But the aberration was passed over quickly, without interrupting the flow of the basic argument. In the normal state of affairs, one party would have control of the policy-making branches of government; the other would be in opposition.

Thus, in the passage quoted earlier from the 1942 book by V. O. Key, Jr., such phrases as “the party in power,” “the President’s majority in Congress,” and “when it [the party] takes control of the Government” appear repeatedly. In the 1952 edition of the same book, Key inserted a paragraph on how the Republican majorities in the Congress behaved in the 1947–1948 period of divided government. But the earlier phrases — “the party in control of the government,” “the party in power,” “the President and his congressional majority” — survived in their original unqualified form.<sup>35</sup> Hyneman, in his 1950 book, distinguished between “the party that has control of the government” and “the party out of power” and declared: “it is in the nature of things that [the president] will call upon the Congress that goes into power with him to lay a base in law and appropriations for the program that he has sponsored.” Hyneman recognized the possibility of divided government, but saw it as the outcome only of midterm elections and accordingly found the remedy in a revision of terms of office so that presidential and congressional elections will coincide.<sup>36</sup> The report of the Committee on Political Parties confined its recognition of divided government to one subordinate clause of eight words; elsewhere it referred with casual ease to “the party in power,” “the majority party,” or “the dominant party,” and to “the opposition party” or “minority party.”<sup>37</sup> In contrast, Sorauf, writing in 1968, put considerable emphasis on divided government as an impediment to effective party government. Referring particularly to state governments, he termed the division of government between parties as “by far the most important institutional barrier to the coordination of legislative and executive decisionmaking under the aegis of a unifying political party. . . .”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Key, *Politics, Parties*, 3d ed., 702–03, 692, 711.

<sup>36</sup> Hyneman, *Bureaucracy*, 566, 573.

<sup>37</sup> Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 8, 1, 18, 34, 35, 41, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Sorauf, *Party Politics*, 361.

Divided government invalidates the entire theory of party government and presidential leadership, both elements of it. Divided government requires that the United States "construct a successful government out of antagonisms," which Wilson warned could not be done, and renders impossible the "close synthesis of active parts" that he found necessary. How can a party cast its web over the dispersed organs of government to bring a semblance of unity, in Key's phrase, if it controls but one of the branches? How can the majority party fulfill Burns's "vital function of integration," or rally the government's elements behind Penniman's "common purpose," or provide Rossiter's "bridges across the gaps," or Sorauf's "unifying force" if there is no majority party? How can the president lead the Congress if either or both houses are controlled by the party that fought to defeat him in the last election and has vowed to vanquish him, or his successor as his party's candidate, in the next one? But if the president cannot lead, Rossiter has told us, "weak and disorganized government" must follow. Our "toughest problems," Hyneman has admonished, will in that circumstance remain unsolved.<sup>39</sup>

The question at once arises: In our twenty-two years thus far of forced coalition government, have those gloomy forecasts been fulfilled? Eleven Congresses during the administrations of four presidents would appear to have given ample time for putting the established theory to the test. Unfortunately, however, the test results are bound to be uncertain and would still be so if another two score years of experience were added. There will not be agreement on whether, and to what extent,

<sup>39</sup> Fortunately for believers in party government, the problem of intra-party cohesion and discipline that so preoccupied the writers of the midcentury has to a large extent been solved by the events. The realignment of the party system since they wrote has produced Democratic and Republican parties that are more homogeneous than at any time within the memory of anyone now living; the minority wings that were once strong enough to disrupt the internal unity of both parties have withered. First to fade were the liberal Republicans, who until a couple of decades ago were potent enough to seriously contest for the presidential nomination; they are now ineffectual remnants that did not even put forward a candidate in 1988. Their mirror-image counterparts, the conservative Democrats, have been vanishing as well, although more slowly. Since the New Deal era, their wing of the party has been virtually confined to the South, and for thirty years its base there has been steadily eroding as conservatives find their political home in the burgeoning Republican Party. New Democratic senators from the South are no longer the Byrds, Robertsons, Eastlands, Russells, Thurmonds, and Hollands, who automatically voted with the Republicans on major issues and made life miserable for Democratic presidents, Senate majority leaders, and House speakers; for the most part they are people who fit quite comfortably into the moderate-to-liberal national party, such as Terry Sanford, Bob Graham, and Wyche Fowler. (Strom Thurmond himself became a Republican long ago, and the son of Democratic Senator A. Willis Robertson made his race for the presidency in the Republican, not the Democratic, caucuses and primaries.) The same transformation has taken place in the House.

So the Republicans have become a solidly right-of-center party, very much in Ronald Reagan's image. If Republicans ever were to capture the Congress, they would have a little trouble attaining the unity necessary for true party government. And the Democrats, if and when they elect a president, will demonstrate a cohesion that will astound those who recall the schismatic party of thirty or even twenty years ago. Moreover, the reforms of congressional organization and procedures, which have strengthened the position of party leaders, party policy committees, and party caucuses, make it far more likely now that the cohesive Democratic majorities in the Congress would be able to overcome any obstruction that the truncated conservative wing might still attempt.

and during what periods the government has in fact been "weak and disorganized," or even on whether those characteristics are wholly undesirable. "That government is best which governs least" is still an aphorism of wide appeal, and the weaker and more disorganized the government the less governance it can inflict. Moreover, to rest a theoretical proposition on concrete examples from history is to invite debate on the merits of each example and to call forth counterexamples. And when the instances are so recent that they involve current personalities or groups — Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals — the debate is distorted by the emotional attachments of the debaters. Moreover, almost any failure or success can be ruled out of consideration as attributable to accidents of personality or to circumstances beyond the control of the institutions however organized. So, in the absence of proven and acceptable methodology for evaluating the performance and success of governments, any judgement about institutional structures will necessarily embody the biases and the values of whomever is the judge. But if that is the best that can be done, so be it. If there is any worth at all to the contention that a government cannot function without the unifying web of party, as Key held, the judgment must be made on whatever is the soundest basis that can be contrived.

My own conclusion is that the predictions of the sages of the earlier generation have been borne out in this modern era of divided or coalition government. True, in the administrations of the four Republican presidents who had to make their peace with House Democratic majorities — and usually Democratic Senate majorities as well — there were significant accomplishments. President Dwight D. Eisenhower achieved a successful bipartisan foreign policy, and President Ronald Reagan managed to carry enough Democrats with him to enact for better or worse the essentials of his economic program in 1981. In subsequent Reagan years, the Congress and the administration collaborated across party lines to enact measures to bring illegal immigration under control, rescue social security, and reform the tax code. But Eisenhower and the Democratic Congress were stalemated on domestic measures throughout his six years of coalition government; the Nixon-Ford period was one of almost unbroken conflict and deadlock on both domestic and foreign issues; and the last seven years of Reagan found the government immobilized on some of the central issues of the day, unwilling to follow the leadership of the President or anyone else and deferring those issues in hope that somehow the 1988 election would resolve matters and render the government functional again.

By common consent, the most conspicuous among the urgent but unresolved problems has been, of course, the federal budget deficit, which has been running at between \$150 billion and \$200 billion a year since the great tax cut of 1981 took effect. The national debt now stands at well over \$2 trillion, more than doubled in seven years of divided government. The United States has suffered the shock of falling from the status of a great creditor nation to the world's largest debtor nation, living on borrowing from abroad. The huge trade deficit, the shortfall in investment, and high interest rates are all blamed on the inability of the government to get the budget deficit under control. For all these reasons, virtually all

of the country's responsible leaders — the president, the congressional leaders, and members of both parties in both houses — have for nearly over half a dozen years been proclaiming loudly and in unison that the nation simply cannot go on this way. The experts from outside — in the academic world, the Federal Reserve System, on Wall Street, in foreign countries — likewise agree that these deficits are economically perilous, whether or not they can be termed morally outrageous as well.

But during all that time that the country has seen a virtual consensus on the urgency of this problem, its governmental institutions have floundered in trying to cope with it. President Reagan sent the Congress his program, but the Congress flatly rejected it. The legislators in their turn floated suggestions, but the President killed them by promising a veto if they were passed. The congressional leaders and others pleaded for a summit meeting between the executive and legislative branches to hammer out a common policy. Finally, in November 1986, the meeting took place. But it is a measure of the national predicament that it took a half-trillion-dollar collapse in the stock market — a five-hundred-billion-dollar panic — before the two branches of the U.S. government would even sit down together. It was easier for Mikhail Gorbachev to get a summit meeting with the President of the United States than it was for the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. And even the domestic summit that was finally held essentially papered over the problem rather than solved it.

Or we can draw examples of the failure of coalition government from international affairs. The country lost a war for the first time in history — in Vietnam — after another period of floundering in search of a policy, with the president pulling in one direction and the Congress in another. And the situation in Nicaragua was throughout the Reagan years almost a replica of Vietnam. The government could adopt no clear and effective policy at all; it could neither take measures strong enough to force the Sandinista government out of power, as the President and his administration wished to do, nor accept that government and make peace with it, as many in the Senate and the House would like. Then there is the Iran-contra debacle. President Reagan in his own summation of that episode spoke of the “failure” of his policy, of “a policy that went astray,” of “the damage that’s been done,” and he blamed it all on mistrust between the executive and legislative branches.<sup>40</sup>

But, some will argue, even if these or other instances can indeed be considered governmental failures attributable to mistrust between the unwilling partners of a forced coalition, the performance of recent unified government has been no better. The Kennedy and Carter years cannot claim overwhelming success, they will maintain, and while Lyndon Johnson proved to be a spectacular presidential leader of the Congress in the enactment of his Great Society measures in 1964 and 1965, he also led the country into the quagmire of Vietnam that in turn launched a

<sup>40</sup> Address to the nation, 12 August 1987, as reported in *New York Times*, 13 August 1987.

devastating spiral of inflation. That is the difficulty of arguing from cases, as I suggested earlier.

Nor is it any more profitable to look abroad for answers to the effectiveness of unified compared to coalition government. It is easy to demonstrate that Britain's unified governments have not always been successful, and that in continental countries coalition governments (which, it is important to note, are quite different from ours) have not always failed. For better or worse, the discussion of the relative merits of unified over divided government has to be pursued in abstract terms, as it was for the most part in the political science literature cited earlier.

The essence of the theoretical argument in favor of the unified government has been and is: For coherent and timely policies to be adopted and carried out—in short, for government to work effectively, as the established theory held—the president, the Senate, and the House must come into agreement. When the same party controls all three of these power centers, the incentive to reach such agreement is powerful despite the inevitable institutional rivalries and jealousies. The party *does* serve as the bridge or the web, in the metaphors of political science. But in divided government, it is not merely the separated institutions of government that must overcome their built-in rivalries but the opposing parties themselves. And that is bound to be a difficult, arduous process, characterized by conflict, delay, and indecision, and leading frequently to deadlock, inadequate and ineffective policies, or no policies at all.

Competition is the very essence of democratic politics. It gives democracy its meaning, and its vitality. The parties are the instruments of that competition. They are and should be organized for combat, not for collaboration and compromise. They live to win elections in order to advance their philosophies and programs. Therefore, each party strives and must strive to defeat the opposing party. But in a divided government, this healthy competition is translated into an unhealthy, debilitating conflict between the institutions of government themselves. Then, the president and Congress are motivated to try to discredit and defeat each other. Yet these are the institutions that, for anything constructive to happen, simply have to get together.

The average citizen reacts by simply condemning all politicians as a class. "Why don't those people in Washington stop playing politics and just get together and do what's right?" But that is not in the nature of things. Political parties, as the textbooks have always told us, are organized because people have genuine, deep disagreements about the goals and the programs of their societies. If a coalition government is to work, the leaders of committed groups have to be willing to submerge or abandon the very philosophies that caused them to organize their parties in the first place. They have to set aside the principles that are their reason for seeking governmental power. And they will do that only under compulsion of clear and grave necessity—usually, in other words, after deadlock has deteriorated into crisis.

In the American form of coalition government, if the president sends a pro-

posal to Capitol Hill or takes a foreign policy stand, the opposition-controlled House or houses of Congress—unless they are overwhelmed by the president's popularity and standing in the country—simply *must* reject it. Otherwise they are saying the president is a wise and prudent leader. That would only strengthen him and his party for the next election, and how can the men and women of the congressional majority do that, when their whole object is to defeat him when that time arrives? By the same token, if the opposition party in control of Congress initiates a measure, the president has to veto it—or he is saying of his opponents that they are sound and statesmanlike, and so is building them up for the next election.

So when President Reagan sent his budgets to the Congress, the Democrats who controlled both houses had to pronounce them “dead on arrival,” as they did. And when they came up with their alternatives, the President had to condemn them and hurl them back. Eventually, when the stream of recrimination and vetoes ran dry each year, some kind of budget was necessarily adopted; but it did not reflect the views of either party, and in terms of the consensus objective of deficit reduction it was a pale and ineffective compromise. Neither party would take responsibility, neither could be held accountable, each could point the finger at the other when the things went wrong.

In such circumstances, the people in their one solemn, sovereign act of voting cannot render a clear verdict and thus set the course of government. Elections lose their purpose and their meaning. The President, all through 1988, was saying, “Don't blame me for the budget deficit. It's those Democrats in Congress.” And the Democrats were replying, “Don't blame us. Blame that man in the White House for not giving us the proper leadership.” In November, the voters were not able to hold anybody clearly responsible, because, in fact nobody had been.

Our struggles with coalition government have demonstrated also the truth of the established wisdom concerning presidential leadership: in the American system there is simply no substitute for it. The Congress has 535 voting members, organized in two houses and in innumerable committees and subcommittees; every member is in principle the equal of every other member, and nobody can give directions to anybody else and make them stick. Such a body is simply not well designed for making coherent, decisive, coordinated policy. As the old theory told us, the system works best when the president proposes and the Congress disposes, when the president sets the agenda and leads, as everyone expects him to.

But how can leaders lead if followers don't follow? In divided government, presidential leadership becomes all but impossible. The president is not the leader of the congressional majority. He is precisely the opposite—the leader of their opposition, the man they are most dedicated to discredit and defeat. With great fanfare and immense hope, the people elect a president each four years. But then, most of the time these days, they give him a Congress a majority of whose members tried their best to beat him in the last election and will do so again in the next. To lead in those circumstances would be beyond the capability of any mortal. No

one should blame presidents when they fail in a time of coalition government. It is the system that is at fault.

Nobody planned it this way. The country in no way made a conscious decision thirty years ago to abandon the responsible-party system that had served it well for almost the whole life of the nation. It was simply an accident of the electoral system. Almost unique in the world, the United States has an electoral process that permits people to split their tickets—to vote one way for president and the other way for Congress, if they so choose. And that is what enough of them have done to produce a divided outcome most of the time of late.

### RE-RECONCILING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Today there is a disjunction between theory and practice, between the long-accepted and not-yet-abandoned ideas about how the government of the United States should work and the way in which it is now compelled to try to work. How can theory and practice once again be synchronized?

First, can the practice be altered to fit the therapy? In other words, is there any way to restore party government as the normal, rather than abnormal, state of affairs? Theoretically, there is. But only by altering the electoral system that lets ticket-splitting determine the composition of the government. That would mean fundamental change in the Constitution, and it only takes a split second of reflection to convince anyone that politically and practically it cannot be done. It would take the utter collapse of government to make such change possible.

The constitutional amendment might take any of several forms, the simplest of which would be a revision of the ballot to make ticket splitting impossible in national elections. That would in effect return the country to the nineteenth-century mode, when straight-ticket ballots were printed and handed out by the parties—except that the ballots would now be government-printed and the secrecy of the vote protected. The voters would select one from among two or more party slates or “team tickets” that included each party’s candidates for president, vice president, Senate, and House. This is not a totally outlandish idea, because voters now choose between team tickets for president and vice president. If that principle were extended to Senate and House candidates as well, it would be almost a certainty that every incoming president would have a Congress of his own party to work with and to lead. A subtle variant of this scheme would be to require a party’s candidates for Congress to be its candidates for the electoral college also, so that a voter could cast a ballot for president only by casting it for the congressional candidate as the elector. A different approach would be to create bonus seats in the House and Senate, to be awarded to the president’s party in sufficient number to give it control of the Congress.

But any of those ideas would be anathema to the members of Congress, who under normal constitutional amendment procedures would have to initiate the change. Because the amendment process requires extraordinary majorities—two-

thirds of the House and Senate and three-fourths of the state legislatures — it demands in effect bipartisan agreement. Therefore, both parties would have to see benefit in the change. But since redistribution of power is a zero-sum game that creates both winners and losers, one party is bound to lose. In the current case it would be the Democrats, for any of these proposals would have given the Republicans control of the Congress during much or all of the time that they have held the presidency. The Democrats in the Congress would never take a second look at any team ticket scheme that would make them stand or fall with a George McGovern or a Walter Mondale, and that would convert their majorities into minorities every time their candidate for president was beaten. And the Republicans would not perceive the advantage for their party, however obvious that advantage may have been throughout the past twenty years. Faced with a team ticket proposal, they would remember how many seats they would have lost with Barry Goldwater back in 1964 and play it safe.

If practice cannot be changed to fit the established theory of party government, then what are the prospects for the development of new theory? If coalition government is what the United States must live with most of the time, can political leadership and political science produce an alternative theory that tells us how that kind of government can be made to work?

On this question, today's political scientists, who would appear to have the primary obligation to make suggestions, fall into three groups. The first consists of those who are happy with the way the government works now. They simply reject the party-government and presidential-leadership theories of the preceding generation. They find divided government acceptable enough, and maybe even better than party government, for it more certainly safeguards individual liberties and assures that rash and impulsive actions can be forestalled — in domestic affairs, at least. This is the position of traditional conservatives who still echo the fears of government that dominated the eighteenth century, and is a wholly arguable and defensive position. But ironically, these conservatives are joined now by their exact opposites — the typical liberal Democrats, whose gut reaction is, "Thank God for divided government under President Reagan. It saved us from Judge Robert Bork, and war in Nicaragua, and all kinds of other follies." These liberals were *for* party government and presidential leadership when their man — FDR or John Kennedy or another Democrat — was in the White House, but they were against it when the President was Ronald Reagan.

The second group is made up of the intellectual heirs of the dominant school of the midcentury, still true believers in party government and presidential leadership. It includes such survivors of that school as James MacGregor Burns, who was a leader in the formation of two current reform organizations, the Committee on the Constitutional System and the Committee for Party Renewal, both of which attempt to bridge the separate worlds of academic science and practical politics. The Democrats in this group had to swallow hard in the Reagan era, but forced their reason to overcome their emotions so that they could say, "We're willing to let the Republicans have their day — even under Reagan — because they will be held

accountable, they will discredit themselves, and then we will have our day." The Democrats are now joined, too, by some of their exact opposites—the new breed of conservative activists who have found that divided government can frustrate them too, when the public mood swings their way. Those in this group in both parties believe that in the long run a government that is able to act, even if it makes mistakes, is less dangerous than one that is rendered impotent by deadlock and division. A government with the capability to act will also have the capability to correct its errors (or its successor can) but there is no recourse when a government is inert, lethargic, paralyzed. Accordingly, scholars in this group believe that reform measures are in order, but they are apt to put the question aside because of the hopelessness of advocating changes in the Constitution.

The third bloc of political scientists and apparently the largest, even among specialists in American national government, is made up of those who have not found it necessary to take a stand at all. This group can be charged with evading what is surely one of the most crucial intellectual questions facing students of American government—one that the previous generation of political scientists explicitly asked and answered.

There are many reasons that scholars of government might prefer to evade the question. One was mentioned earlier—methodology. How is the general performance of a government to be evaluated, anyway? How can the effects of divided government be separated from the effects of all the other factors that influence outcomes—the temperaments and capabilities of individual leaders, the economic and social circumstances of a given time, and the actions of the other peoples and nations that share the globe—so that one can render a quasi-scientific judgment as to whether unified or divided government is the superior model for America? These are daunting questions, but no one needs precise quantitative answers. Informed judgments are needed based on the best methods of analysis that are available, as rough as those may be.

Some of the other reasons for evading the issue are less respectable. It is not satisfactory to argue that an intellectual effort is unnecessary because the new era will shortly end and the country will return to party government of its own accord. A third of a century has already elapsed since 1955, and the tendency of the voters to elect Republican presidents and Democratic Senates most of the time, and Democratic Houses all of the time, appears to be as firmly fixed as anything in national politics, reinforced rather than weakened from election to election. Those who would rely on this argument should provide a convincing explanation for predicting an automatic restoration of the previous order.

Nor is it satisfactory to contend, as many do, that a basic principle of democracy forbids questioning the desirability of coalition government: that of majority rule. A majority of the people evidently want divided government, runs this argument, and therefore they are entitled to have it, whether it is good for them or not. After all, the people rule. But this argument assumes that divided government is the people's intent, more or less conscious, rather than the essentially chance outcome of the electoral system that was not designed by those who use it. Clearly

the latter is the case: divided government is a historical and procedural accident. The era of coalition government was not ushered in three decades ago by the sudden appearance of an overwhelming popular demand for that form of government as such. In 1956, the first presidential election year of the new era, a majority of voters liked Eisenhower and a majority wanted to retain their incumbent Democratic congressmen; but those were not the same majorities. In that year and in every one of the divided-government elections since, a large majority of the voters in fact voted a straight ballot, either Republican or Democratic, for national offices. It was the ticket-splitting *minority*, often a small minority, that gave the country its divided government. There is no evidence from electoral behavior that the public at large has deliberately rejected the long-accepted doctrine of party government; reliable public opinion polling data on the abstract question do not exist.

In short, fence straddling on this issue is not intellectually defensible. Either the dominant pre-1954 view of the desirability of party government and presidential leadership as the model and the ideal was right or it was wrong. That two systems so diametrically opposite as party government and coalition could serve the country equally well is a virtual mathematical impossibility, and that they could come close to equality is highly improbable. One or the other necessarily has to be the superior model for America, and political scientists have a responsibility to determine which it is and inform the country of their judgment.

Not that the discipline would ever speak with a single voice, of course, or even reach the level of agreement that prevailed in the 1940s and 1950s. But political scientists have the responsibility to grapple with the question individually, and by pooling their wisdom and debating opposing views to see whether a broad area of agreement might emerge.

Those who think that the model of party government and presidential leadership was wrong, and who would advance the post-1955 structure of coalition government as the new ideal, have an obligation to provide a new body of theory that will tell us what is the substitute for presidential leadership and congressional followership, how the partners in the American coalition government should relate to one another for that type of government to function well, and how those relationships can be brought about. What is the role of parties in such a system, and will strengthening them simply intensify the confrontation between the branches and render deadlocks more implacable? Should the agitation within the discipline for stronger parties be reversed and should weaker parties be made the goal? How would the weakening of congressional parties affect the efficiency of the Congress and its status vis-à-vis the presidency? Does the answer—or part of it, at least—lie in bipartisan mechanisms such as the one that resolved the social security issue and the National Economic Commission that was created in 1988 to grapple with the budget deficit? Can these be multiplied and regularized to anticipate and forestall crises rather than simply cope with them when they reach the desperation stage? If we are to accept coalition government as ideal, or even as satisfactory, we need a body of theory as fully developed as the one it superseded,

followed by institutional innovation based on the new theory. No such body of theory has even begun to emerge.

By the same token, those who still cherish the idea of party government have an obligation of equal gravity. They must come to grips with the question of how our election system, or the composition and powers of the branches of government, should be altered to restore unified government as the normal state of affairs. And if that means—as it surely does—that the Constitution itself should be changed, how can that be brought about? That question obviously is not one for the faint-hearted. But for any serious student of American government to contend that all of the issues raised by coalition government can simply be set aside, because whatever is best, is not an answer. The times demand a more responsible political science than that.\*

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