

that certain notions prevalent in the literature deserve further contemplation. In particular, when the authors consider the effect of individual characteristics on information processing, memory, and the quality of the vote, age is the only variable negatively related to each of these, whereas political sophistication is the only variable positively related to each of these factors. Consistently, researchers have found that both age and sophistication are positively related to greater voter turnout, yet the findings in this book suggest that the two groups of voters might be similar in their levels of turnout but not in the extent to which the vote choices they make are correct. More fully exploring such individual-level differences would certainly be a fruitful avenue for future research.

Further, this book finds that memory plays an important role in candidate evaluation, the vote choice, and the quality of the decision. While Lau and Redlawsk conclude that these findings can coexist with previous experimental research attributing a negligible role to memory (given that the latter is concerned with candidate evaluation in a “nonchoice” situation), at the very least these findings should give us pause in constructing models of *both* candidate evaluation and vote choice that attribute no or a limited role to memory. Additionally, these findings raise an interesting theoretical question: Why might memory affect evaluation in an experiment with an electoral context, but not in an experiment without such a choice?

The authors also examine a question raised by recent research on heuristics: Can the American public, found wanting in terms of political knowledge, make decisions *as if* they were fully informed about politics? By focusing on the ways that individuals can make decisions, Lau and Redlawsk argue that we can determine whether individuals vote correctly or make electoral choices that they would make had they been fully informed. Using two different measures of correct voting, the authors find that correct voting varies substantially with the number of candidates in a race—70% with only two candidates and 31% with four candidates. This finding is interesting in light of many of the criticisms of a two-party system: providing less choice. These findings suggest that one might need to trade off choice for quality.

Perhaps even more significant are the findings that voters using a rational decision strategy recall less information and make worse decisions than voters using any of the other three strategies. In fact, the rational strategy performs worse than chance under the more difficult electoral conditions (four candidates) and no better than chance under simpler conditions (two candidates). Why does the rational strategy perform so poorly? The authors argue that in a presidential election, voters are overwhelmed by information and incapable of processing the information according to a rational model in a way that would yield a correct choice. Could it be that the rational model is sim-

ply too difficult for most voters to use in such a context? In part, the authors find this to be true as Model 1 sophisticates vote correctly more often than the baseline, whereas Model 1 novices do substantially worse. Such findings run counter to previous research suggesting that a rational strategy should be useful in exactly those situations that the authors find it to be least useful—complex decision-making environments. An important question remains though: Can rational strategies prove more useful to voters in less information-rich elections like House and Senate races with and without incumbents?

In sum, *How Voters Decide* makes three critical contributions: proposing a process-oriented framework, testing this framework using a dynamic information environment, and outlining a variety of findings that raise critical questions for future research.

Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches. By Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. 240p. \$35.00.

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— Samuel J Abrams, *Harvard University*

Hyperbole was rampant in the aftermath of the 2000 elections. Pundits, politicians, and journalists asserted that the United States was in the midst of a culture war. The country appeared to be polarized to many, and this polarization reached a crescendo in 2000, with the now “classic” red/blue map of the continental United States serving as the iconic image of this divide and with blabocrats and politicians alike all pronouncing the end of centrism. Notably absent in all this discussion, though, was actual empirical evidence, a sense of historical perspective, and a meaningful explanation for this apparent polarization beyond sophomoric cries of cultural wars and diverging beliefs about morality. While political science as a discipline had considerable expertise to bear on this “cultural divide,” the discipline had remained fairly quiet on this polarization.

Fortunately, Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal’s *Polarized America* has remedied this problem, and the authors do so with a groundbreaking work that presents a compelling story showing that the increased elite polarization in the United States—defined as “a separation of politics into liberal and conservative camps” (p. 3)—correlates strongly with increasing income inequality. Taking into account the changes in immigration, partisan positioning with particular emphasis on redistributive policy, the composition of the electorate, and the ever-widening divide among the elite over the past three decades, the authors provide an empirically grounded, multifaceted story behind the polarization of American politics.

Beginning with a presentation showing that their “measure of political polarization closely parallels measures of economic inequality and of immigration for much of the

twentieth century” (p. 6), the authors assert that there are no simple institutional explanations for these strong relationships and argue that the aforementioned sociopolitical changes in the United States in confluence produced the current political climate. In fact, they do not explicitly specify a particular causal chain for the increasing political polarization, arguing instead for a constant give-and-take among these factors, which they describe as a “dance” such that “on the one hand, economic inequality might feed directly into political polarization [and] on the other hand, [it] might generate policies that increase inequality” (p. 3).

McCarty et al. lay out all of the steps in this dance and tell two powerful stories regarding congressional and elite-level polarization and the role of economics in shaping partisan identification. They first use the extensive NOMINATE database to clearly document polarization among politicians, with particular emphasis on the Congress. They argue that polarization has increased in Congress because “Republicans in the North and South have moved sharply to the right” and “moderate Democrats in the South have been replaced by Republicans. The remaining, largely northern, Democrats are somewhat more liberal than the Democratic Party of the 1960s” (p. 11). Keeping in mind this powerful finding, the authors move onto the mass electorate and present another finding—economic interests (i.e., income, redistribution policy) are driving the positions and nature of the American party system: “High-income Americans have consistently, over the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, been more prone to identify with and vote for the Republican Party than have low-income Americans, who have sided with the Democrats” (p. 107). Given the many presumed culture war debates, the authors note that this finding is key, as it “helps to explain the conflicts over taxation of estates and dividends in an era presumed to be dominated by ‘hot-button’ social issues like abortion and guns” (p. 107). The remaining chapters elucidate more of the give-and-take nature of this “dance” and reciprocal causality by focusing on the interrelated issues of immigration, income, and redistributive preference, as well as issues of campaign finance.

One key idea that the authors take up is immigration and the fact that the proportion of noncitizens—persons ineligible to vote and generally concentrated toward the bottom of the income distribution scale—has increased over the past three decades. Accordingly, there is less pressure from the bottom, which wants redistribution, than from the top, and this has led to a move to the right on the part of Republicans and away from redistributive policies and income inequality reduction. With respect to campaign finance, the authors demonstrate that campaign and soft-money contributions are dominated by those on the ideological extremes. Of course, expectations accompany donations, and all of this only further reinforces the ideo-

logical extremism of parties, candidates, and elected officials.

The authors conclude on a somber note where they argue that this ever-increasing elite polarization creates “policy paralysis” such that it is now difficult—due to various institutional systems of checks and balances—to shift policy away from the status quo, which argues against redistribution: “[P]olarization in the context of American political institutions now means that the political process cannot be used to redress inequality” (p. 3). Simply put, ever-increasing polarization diminishes the potential for policy changes that would reduce inequality in the United States, and America finds itself in somewhat of an absorbing state (barring some powerful exogenous shock) where polarization on the elite level appears to be increasing and all of these factors are mutually reinforcing and exacerbating the ever-growing political divide.

McCarty et al. marshal a substantial amount of empirical evidence and present their individual chapter findings and logic in an erudite manner. However, there are some concerns with their framework. Certainly various social, economic, demographic, and institutional changes have occurred over the past 30 years, and they are all interrelated and mutually reinforcing. A dynamic model that captures all of these streams would be helpful, especially when looking at the future of polarization and the political system, and in trying to measure the effect that one finding has compared to another finding. By assigning no causal priority, the work has an atheoretical character wherein the reader is presented with many findings and trends that do not always collectively merge into a coherent, theoretical story.

Moreover, McCarty et al. make a strong case for *elite* polarization but a weak case for *mass* polarization. The authors frame their study as an inquiry into polarized American and its polarized politics. In my view, their study should have been more explicit in that it was an examination of the continuously polarizing elite and *not* the masses—masses that are very much centrist in their orientation and have become more so in the last three decades, as my collaborators and I show in *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (2005). We agree that the elite have become more polarized over time and argue that this has led to a system where the average, moderate American is forced to choose between two extremes and work within a political world that is red and blue—when the world, politics, and American public opinion is in reality nuanced, highly conditional, centrist, and purple.

Without question, both elite and mass sorting has occurred in recent decades. Even if sociopolitical interests and partisan labels have aligned, this does not imply that the masses are polarized. Using the time frame of the book, partisan identification has remained relatively stable. The longer time series, from 1952 through 2004, reveals a different picture of strong and ever-growing centrism. The

percentage of the electorate identifying as strong partisans in the 1950s and 1960s was higher than the percentage identifying in the 2000s. Moreover, weak partisans have declined by almost 30% and independents/leaners have increased considerably in the last five decades—by 50%. These trends suggest that even if partisan identification and ideological labels are now unified, and even if their respective members are being polarized (which my colleagues and I argue is not the case sans a small fraction of elite electorate members), more and more Americans are choosing to take a centrist, nonparty label.

A final concern involves the authors' discussion of economic interests. Certainly pocketbook voting and economic concerns are always at the top of the list of important issues to Americans, but I wonder if McCarty et al. overstate the potency of economic interests and issues of redistribution to the electorate. While income levels may correlate and serve as strong predictors for partisan identification and voting patterns within the confines of their analysis, one can only wonder why a discussion of ideology, values, politics, and policy orientation was not more prominent—variables that have long been the backbone of political science's understanding of partisan choice and party systems and in shaping party identification and vote choice. One only needs to think of the Jewish vote and ideology, which remains solidly Democratic despite the community's affluence, or of the variance in ideology and behavior the Latino populations in Florida, Texas, and California. Their findings would be stronger if a clear statement as to why economic interests are so key here were articulated.

Despite these concerns and questions, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal have produced an incredibly important book that should be carefully and thoughtfully read by academics, pundits, politicians, and the interested public. The authors' examination of elite polarization—with particular focus on congressional polarization—is groundbreaking, and the associated implications of this elite polarization will no doubt influence and resonate in scholarly and, hopefully, public work in years to come. Of course, while not all of their conclusions are without controversy and alternative stories about polarization and the so-called culture war are prominent within the discipline, no discussion about polarization would be complete without considering and responding to the ideas set forth in this book.

Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation. By Suzanne Mettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 280p. \$30.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper. DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071885

— Andrew J. Polsky, *Hunter College and The Graduate Center, CUNY*

Americans are not very good citizens—they do not participate actively in civic life, follow public affairs closely,

or vote at a level comparable to other industrialized democracies. It has not always been this way, of course. A long line of commentators and scholars has celebrated the robust civic engagement demonstrated by Americans in the past; today, a cottage industry has developed to lament the sad state of contemporary citizenship and probe the causes of its decline. Scholars are not the only ones invested in explaining the downward trend in participation. The phenomenon has become a matter for ideological contestation, with conservatives (and some radicals) blaming the modern state for reducing citizens to passive dependents, while liberals insist the fault lies with other culprits such as the corporate media.

Into this debate steps Suzanne Mettler, with a welcome dose of empirical rigor in her excellent and stimulating new volume. It continues a line of inquiry she began in *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (1998), a study of how key New Deal programs treated their beneficiaries. She took particular note there of the messages about citizens' social worth that government programs communicate through their eligibility criteria and administration. In *Soldiers to Citizens*, Mettler extends her inquiry into how public policies shape citizenship, this time through the story of what was arguably the boldest and most successful piece of social legislation ever undertaken by the federal government, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights. *Dividing Citizens* pursued the impact of policies on citizenship only up to a certain point because scant information from beneficiaries themselves was available. Her new work explores more fully what the GI Bill meant to the veterans who participated in its various programs, thanks to an ambitious research program that involved surveys of veterans in selected units and follow-up interviews.

Mettler considers first the direct impact of GI Bill programs on the welfare and social status of the beneficiaries. Although the legislation contained other provisions, such as low-interest loans, the centerpiece was the educational component—programs designed to subsidize the participation of veterans in higher education and in noncollege training. All told, just over half of those who served in the military during the World War II, nearly eight million (mostly male) veterans, went to college or enrolled in other educational programs under the bill. Some would have gone to college or obtained vocational training even if the federal government were not picking up the tab, but not nearly so many and not so soon after the war. More than that, the consequences for veterans from families of modest means were profound: The GI Bill gave them an unprecedented boost up the social ladder and helped usher in an era of dramatically broadened membership in the middle class.

The direct effects of the bill, though important, are not Mettler's central concern. Rather, she seeks to examine