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Summary - Realignment and Party Factions:

Overview:

Political parties are the main organizations that coordinate and represent the political opinions of Americans. Because of the American voting system of first-past-the-post, there have always been two major political parties representing different sides of the political spectrum. The two main parties broadly encompass the political spectrum and are “big tent” parties that give rise to coalitions and factions within them. Party cohesion can determine how polarized the politics are. During periods of realignment, such as the 1960s and 1970s, there are plenty of strong factions that can have overlap and work with the other party’s factions. Since there is more ideological overlap there is less polarization. When the parties are cohesive, they tow the same ideological line, and political trench warfare leads to increased polarization. The realignment of parties has increased ideological divergence, and the structure of the parties and the controlling factions within them have increased ideological cohesion.

Ideological Factions:

It is the control of the parties by ideological coalitions that is new and that drives modern day polarization.

- “Today, the ideological coalitions are nestled comfortably inside the party coalitions. This transformation is behind most of what we observe as polarization” (Noel, 196).
- Once Democrats took on civil rights, the conservative democrats joined the republican party and the two parties became more ideologically coherent.
- Modern day, we can see that there are still factions within each of the parties. Moderate factions that used to drive compromise have lost strength, such as the Main Street Partnership and the Blue Dog Coalition.
- The Freedom Caucus is stronger than moderate factions. The Freedom Caucus has a strong and organized faction that is powerful and ideologically swings the Republican party further to the right causing more polarization.

Conditional Party Government:

Conditional party government is based on the idea that members want strong parties in order to more effectively run the government and use the power of the majority. As a result, more competitive and polarized parties IN control means significantly more political power.

- This came from frustration with Southern Democrats roadblocking liberal legislation.
- Committee chairs that were not fully towing the party line would be removed and replaced by, a vote in the caucus, with someone more likely in line with party values. This made the parties more powerful, than its individual members.
- The strengthening of party power within the Congress can be coupled with Frances Lee’s theory of insecure majorities. She states that the competitiveness of congress has increased and led to polarization.
- Competition has increased because both parties see themselves as majority parties, and the greater power of parties in congress makes winning elections more important.

Evolution of Party Alignment:

New alignment comes from new voters and new issues. The farther generations develop from the original alignment, the less attached they feel to it and the less likely the alignment is to stay. Edward G. Carmines cites the New Deal Alignment and the issues of government intervention in the economy, as voters got farther from that alignment, new issues shifted party ideology.

- Jennifer Victor speaks of realignment as clockwork, and the pattern of the realignment follows with the generational development laid out by Carmines. There have been six major realignments and possibly a seventh happening in the present day.
- The new realignment is more polarizing. Democrats are more liberal, and Republicans are more conservative. In a new age of party structure, more voters are constantly being brought in and new issues are constantly being introduced that increased the conflict dyads and increases the number of issues to pick a side on.
- This theory is influenced by both previous theories in multiple ways. Realignment can be caused by ideological factions taking over or can be caused by shifting party structure becoming more conducive for ideological cohesion.

Connection to Other Explanations:

Majority party control (Institutional Rules):

Majority party control changed when the ruling party began to use the more partisan purpose. Before the 1970s, the rules gave more power to committee chairs and less power to the leadership. This kept the Southern Democrats in power and more liberal leaders were still weak. When the majority party leadership began to have more power, cohesion began to take hold and ideologues on both sides took power. Competition was much more fierce because winning the majority meant that an ideology would take over and use the rules to partisan advantage.

Social Interactions (Norms & Practices):

As ideological divergence occurs within the congress, parties that have become ideologically cohesive are less likely to interact with ideologues of the other side of the issue. The polarity on these issues causes diminished social interactions with those seen as opponents. In this we have seen an increase of ideological social groups and congressional trips including members of mainly same ideology.

Central Disagreements:

There is mainly disagreement about how the parties have arrived at realignment. No political scientist has disagreed that the parties have changed political attitudes, however it is the cause of this change that is subject to debate. Hans Noel believes it is because the ideological factions took control and forced the parties to their political poles. Rodhe and Aldrich believe that the ideologues took control after the party structures changes. For them it was the organization changes that allowed in the partisans to gain influence. For Carmine, party alignment is cyclical, and is simply in a natural stage of realignment. The polarization aspect of the realignment could have resulted from many things: increased conflict dyads, new voters and new issues that are more polarizing than ones that previously. Realignment is a long and usually undetected process. Being able to write about realignment is hard because it is hard to detect when an actual realignment is occurring.

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Rohde, David, and John Aldrich. "Consequences of Electoral and Institutional Change: The Evolution of the Conditional Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives." In *New Directions in American Political Parties*, edited by JM Stonecash, 234–50. New York: Routledge, 2010.

In this article, David Rodhe and John Aldrich show how party structure changed the nature of how congress operated and how it led to stronger political parties with stronger ideologues with more power. This can be seen in light of the stronger ideological divide between the democrats and republicans stemming from a change in organization structure, that allowed for more liberal democrats and more conservative republicans to force their parties farther apart. When individuals had more power, they were more accustomed to the needs of their districts which allowed for more ideological overlap between members. Now members who do not tow the party line can be easily cut out of power. Aldrich and Rodhe's use the committee structures going back many years and measure the partisanship and its change overtime. They found that as the years progressed, partisanship rose. As time went on, party loyalists, or at least more partisan members were assigned to head more committees and committees with more importance (Ways and Means, etc.)

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