

# H-Net Reviews

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**J. Richard Piper.** *Ideologies and Institutions: American Conservative and Liberal Governance Prescriptions Since 1933.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997. ix + 451 pp. \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8459-5; \$116.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8458-8.



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## Political History Redivivus

Over the last fifteen years, scholars in political science, historical sociology, and a slowly reviving political history have called for renewed attention to the role of the state, political parties, ideology, and institutions in different societies.[1] Yet an inherent tension between the synchronic snapshot of the social scientist and the diachronic tapestry of the historian has oftentimes hindered this rebirth of interest in the state side of the state and society nexus. While the social scientist looks to test a hypothesis or build a model, the historian usually looks for the particulars to explain the context and changes over time. The two approaches do not always work in concert. In this ambitious, but repetitious work, University of Tampa political scientist J. Richard Piper attempts to synthesize the last generation of work by the new institutionalists in order to understand the changing relationship between political ideologies and state institutions over time. This thoroughly researched, unevenly written account might be taken as a good example of the renaissance of political history that traces the changes in liberal and conservative ideologies, policies, and governmental institutions between the emergence of New Deal liberalism after 1933 and the fragmentation of Reagan

conservatism by 1993.

The implicit assumption behind Piper's approach is that there has been an ongoing ideological debate between liberals and conservatives vying for capture of the presidency, control of Congress, activist use of the federal court system, and maneuvering through the institutions in a system that Theodore Lowi has called "interest-group liberalism." [2] Piper seeks to test two major theses. Have liberal and conservative coalitions used ideological values and prescriptions to create theories of governance, to propose principled policies, to use institutions to implement programs, and to rely on established and new institutional power bases to reflect those assumptions? Second, have ideologically based recommendations by liberals and conservatives had real consequences (even if unintended ones) on government institutions and operations? Moving beyond a traditional focus on the presidential synthesis, Piper identifies five areas for study including constitutional interpretation, the administrative state, federalism, presidential-congressional relations, and the role of the judiciary to test these two hypotheses.

Rather than providing a synchronic methodology aimed at confirming a social science theory or model, Piper recognizes the value of longitudinal historical study as the best way of making sense of continuity and change over time. In four parts, each dealing with a specific time period, he tracks changes in values and programmatic policies, power bases, theories of governance, and the instrumental origins and impact of theories of governance. During the 1933-1945 period, the New Deal system of interest-group liberalism emerged based on a flexible interpretation of the Constitution, expansion of the administrative state, coexistence with a federalist polity, presidential leadership of a strong executive branch and a weak Congress, and a bifurcated attitude of judicial activism in socioeconomic matters and judicial restraint in civil liberties. In the following period of 1945-1966, liberal Democratic presidents and Eisenhower via Modern Republicanism consolidated this liberal ideology which culminated in the revival of domestic reform and an ongoing activist Cold War foreign policy under Kennedy and Johnson. Yet already by the mid-1960s, Piper argues, this liberal-dominated ideology based in the presidency and Democratic interest groups was being challenged by conservatives in Congress and the postwar emergence of new conservative intellectuals, journals, and think tanks that modified and revived the old right ideology. In a period of flux from 1966 to 1981, conservatives—bolstered by the addition of former New Dealers turned neo-conservatives, the New Right, and the religious right—articulated their ideology based in part on the old right's values of an immutable Constitution, resistance to the administrative state, a highly decentralized federal system, a conservative coalition in Congress to check the power of the New Deal presidency and state, and a conservative judicial activism that between 1890 and 1937 had forestalled the development of the welfare state. By the 1981-1993 period, conservative ideology had replaced liberalism as the regnant set of values, policies, programs, and power bases. Post-Goldwater conservatism under Ronald Reagan became possible due to the fusion of traditional and libertarian ideas, newfound religious faith, corporate financing, trust in a charismatic president, distrust of liberals in Congress, and market-oriented policies in the guise of privatizing reforms. Conservatism had become the new ruling ideology, in rhetoric, if not always in practice.

In twenty-one chapters packed with factual narrative and thought-provoking insights, Piper walks the reader through post-1933 American political history. Each of the four major parts includes chapters on values and

policies, liberal and conservative power bases, the liberal theory of governance, the conservative theory of governance, and the complex interplay of politics as ideology, power bases, and what can be done. Piper's footnotes read like a running historiography of the new political history drawing not only on such well known interpretations by Samuel Lubell, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and James MacGregor Burns, but also the more recent, broadened political history of Walter Dean Burnham, Alonzo Hamby, Steven M. Gillon, Barry Karl, William Leuchtenburg, Allan J. Matusow, Kim McQuaid, and Nicol C. Rae. Significantly, he also makes good use of wide reading on the history of modern American conservatism as found in key works by Gary Dean Best, Sidney Blumenthal, Sara Diamond, Paul Gottfried and Thomas Fleming, Jerome L. Himmelstein, Sidney Milkis, George H. Nash, James Patterson, A. James Reichley, Peter Steinfels, James L. Sundquist, and George Wolfskill. Readers of H-Pol could develop a useful bibliography of the new political history while familiarizing themselves with some of the best work among political scientists using the new institutional approach just by combing through Piper's notes and bibliography. Use of conservative and liberal commentators' articles and books as the narrative converges toward the present shows the tremendous amount of research in secondary and published primary sources that the author has done for this work.

Much of what Piper has to say is worth reading and thinking about, but there are serious flaws in organization and style. Piper could have combined alternating chapters on liberal and conservative ideology in each of the four chronological parts for a more focused, comparative, and analytically useful work that would have benefited from some careful editing. The writing style throughout leaves much to be desired. After reading the parts on 1933-1945 and 1945-1966, this reader is tired of the repeated use of terminology that begs for definition, explication, and analysis that never comes.

In the conclusion, Piper suggests that his research indicates considerable continuity over time on the ideological position of liberals and conservatives regarding constitutional interpretation, a federalist polity, and the positive role of the administrative state while attitudes about presidential-congressional relations and judicial interpretation changed dramatically. He leaves the reader wondering if more state-level case studies might clarify how once conservative, rural-dominated state governments came to become the "laboratories of democracy" heralded by the New Democrats of the 1990s. Finally, he suggests that future research might take up historical

comparisons, using Leonard D. White's classic studies as a takeoff point to consider how Jeffersonian/Hamiltonian and Progressive/New Deal ideological prescriptions may have been earlier examples of this ongoing debate, while cross-national studies inspired by the example of Samuel Beer's work on Great Britain may have a "range of interesting and fruitful possibilities ... even wider than in American history" (p. 404). Toward the end of this interesting work, Piper leaves the reader with a troubling comment that has implications worth discussing further in such venues as H-Pol:

As the United States nears the dawn of a new millennium, the conservative and liberal coalitions that have battled each other during the major part of the twentieth century are fragmented and more than a little exhausted by their struggles. Liberalism in particular has shown signs of possibly terminal illness since the late 1960s, and the end of the Cold War has recently removed a major source of unity in an increasingly divided conservative coalition. (p. 391)

Perhaps the most valuable attributes of this work include its broad historical scope, a large research base of secondary accounts by scholars as well as political memoirs and journal commentaries by participants and contemporary observers, and nine tables summarizing congressional roll call analyses to determine ideological divisions in Congress and how they changed over time. Piper's inclusion of liberal and conservative "wordsmiths" writing in *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *The National Review*, *Commentary*, *Modern Age*, *The Public Interest* and some newspapers suggests that his implicit assumption about the value and consequence of political ideas goes beyond the heavy number crunching statistical models of post-World War II American behavioral political science. In this account, liberalism and conservatism are not presented as simplistic caricatures but rather as serious, complicated ideologies involving debates not only between liberals and conservatives but also among diverse proponents within each camp. Piper appreciates the irony of unintended consequences over time as well. By the 1980s, Reagan and Bush conser-

vatives came to favor strong presidential leadership, an activist anti-Communist foreign policy, and executive branch use of the administrative state and judicial appointments for their own conservative ideological ends. During the same period, neo-liberals learned to appreciate and use congressional power, a principled foreign policy, increasingly professionalized state governments, and judicial review to stay in the debate. The parties of Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt had come a long way in just sixty years according to Piper. A reading of this sophisticated work suggests that political and neo-institutional history truly has been revived under the leadership of a new generation of political scientists and historical sociologists such as Theda Skocpol, while historians are only beginning to catch up.

Notes:

[1]. Key works in the new institutionalism include *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, Eng., 1985); William E. Leuchtenburg, "The Pertinence of Political History: Reflections on the Significance of the State in America," *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986): 585-600; Gabriel A. Almond, "The Return to the State," *American Political Science Review* 82 (September 1988): 853-874; Alan Brinkley, "The New Deal and the Idea of the State," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, 1989), pp. 85-121; David Brian Robertson, "The Return to History and the New Institutionalism in American Political Science," *Social Science History* 17 (1993): 1-36.

[2]. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (New York, 1969, 1979).

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