

Has the U.S. Become a Single-Party Regime?

Written by Patricia Sohn

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PATRICIA SOHN, APR 20 2017

In all seriousness, has the U.S. become a single-party regime?

Drawing upon the www.politicalcompass.org model for mapping us as individuals on a systematized political spectrum, it appears that there is no real left in the United States. There is no significant social democratic party. There is, for obvious historical reasons, no communist party. There are no truly left-wing parties in the U.S., or, at least, not with any significant following. Europe, by contrast, has more leftist political parties available for the voting population to consider. The Green Party, and Bernie Sanders as an individual, are the only leftists that really stand out in the U.S. political system at the national level.

But what does this really mean? It means that the U.S. today may increasingly resemble the single-party, single-coalition or dominant party regimes of yesteryear. These included regimes such as the last years of Pahlavi Iran as well as MAPAI/MAPAM Israel. We were allies with both of these regimes. Freedoms and broad social participation did not come with the former, although they did appear to greater degrees with reformists of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and to diminish with the conservative wins of the 2005 Iranian election. An allowance for ethnic pluralism and civil society free of state intervention within the majority population did not come with the latter. Israel now has one of the notably vibrant civil societies in the world. Iran continues to dissuade dissent. Is this really the way that we want to go? Do we really want to risk a coin-toss on those two options?

Single-party, single-coalition or dominant party regimes share a number of traits in common. All of these regime types have a tendency to: (1) buy off the opposition with money or significant, nationally-proffered services; (2) monopolize the political system so that other party options are not viable, or, in the extreme case of single-party states, to ban opposition parties entirely; (3) not allow a functioning civil society, or, if there is political discourse, it is mediated exclusively through the state and/or the political party; and (4) many include some degree of corruption (cronyism, clientelism, patron-client relations, or outright political violence) in their efforts to keep alternative parties from either appearing, or, if they do exist, from becoming viable.

I have defined myself in previous blog posts as a Trotskyite-Libertarian. In politicalcompass.org's schema, I fall within the bottom-left quadrant, four points south of Bernie Sanders on social freedoms (e.g., libertarianism versus state intrusion), and three points west of him on economic policy (e.g., socialism versus neoliberalism). As such, I cannot help but notice that there is almost no one in the national or state political leaderships of this country available to represent *me*.

In defining myself in this way, it may be important to note that Trotsky – ultimately assassinated by Stalin – was against an intrusive state and differed from Lenin and Stalin in this way. Trotsky defined himself as a social democrat. Indeed, the “soft and kind” social democracies of the world today may, well, best reflect his outlook on the appropriate relationship between politics, society, and individual freedoms. In saying this, I am in no way claiming to be a Trotsky expert – only a devotee.

Notably, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela both fall in the bottom-left quadrant of the politicalcompass.org schema we well. In addition to other associations, one might be able to call it the quadrant of liberal religion. That is, roughly, in Comparative Religion terms, people who believe in God and practice their faith – *and* believe that humans

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should not be about the business of ruling each other in coercive ways without some pretty darned good reasons, in cosmic terms, for doing so (individual power would not count as a sufficient reason for coercive rule within this framework).

I do not believe that this is lack of representation in the U.S. is because there is not at least a significant plurality of Americans who would like to be able to vote meaningfully within this quadrant – that is, without their votes being functionally thrown away. To the contrary.

Having the two main parties of the United States of America grounded strongly in the same quadrant – the upper-right quadrant – means, in fact, that we function as a single-coalition dominant regime. So, to answer my initial question: no, we are not a single-party regime. We are a single-coalition regime (not unlike Israel in its early years). In our case, two parties are in place; they work together, pretend to fight, really fight, and they trade-off power intermittently through elections that ostensibly offer voters substantively different choices.

From my little spot on the politicalcompass.org's chart, just about *everyone* in the U.S. Congress looks like a right-winger. So, when they sit and moan and belly-ache about not getting their way, my eyes glaze over and my ears turn to – well, most often, they turn to Joaquin Rodrigo, Sergei Rachmoninoff, or Antonio Vivaldi. That is, I care less and less about which party is in power. There really is very little difference between them. We are not being offered substantive choices in our elections.

When the Democrats used recently expanded national security laws to monitor U.S. citizens, and to “unmask” them before individuals and political bodies – I could not care less whether it is wiretapping, or secondary wiretapping, or tertiary wiretapping. I want them out of office. Moreover, as a citizen, I want them in jail. My position stands whether the ultimate culprits are politicians, intelligence officers, or other civil servants.

Unmasking is one step away from Blacklisting. And Blacklisting went out with Watergate and McCarthy. Or, so we say. It is time for the so-called left to stand up and take responsibility for this travesty instead of using spin that would make Pontius Pilate proud in order to avoid accountability on this issue.

It caused controversy when Congressmen and Congresswomen were unmasked in this way. We know about the unmasking of Donald Trump because he is our President. How many every-day U.S. citizens have been harmed by this illegal practice? Just think about the extent of the damages caused by such cases at the local level. I, for one, hope that justice will be served for any of us who may, unknowingly, fall in this category. Anyone with international ties – including, say, Middle East experts – could easily fall into this category.

Incidentally-collected intelligence is one thing if it stays within the intelligence community. It is quite another thing if it gets into the hands of politicians, or, God forbid, individual citizens. Like it or not, it appears in the current brouhaha that this unmasked, incidental intelligence was used to collect information on an opposition political candidate. That is *bad news* for our political system. Whatever political party you are registered for, as law-abiding American citizens, we should *all* be demanding criminal prosecutions. Or, who knows, maybe next time it will be the Russia experts, or the Africa experts, or the Latin America experts, or even – who knows under what eventuality – the EU experts who are unmasked...

We do not live in a time period of the Divine Right of Kings in which Congressmen and Congresswomen – and even former Presidents – are not subject the Laws of the Land. This is not *The Wild Wild West*.

On both counts: at least not yet.

About the author:

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