

capacity to be tough on foreign enemies was at the center of the Kerry strategy. But whatever the impact of machismo in appealing to (the declining share) of working-class male voters—it appears to have been negligible—the campaign strategy did not work well with either women or Latinos, both of whom gave Kerry smaller shares than Gore received in 2000.

The challenges facing the Democrats in reconstructing a majority on the basis of such a coalition are daunting, but in the short term, the polarization induced by the Republican Party's radical policy initiatives may yet create some openings for a new Democratic coalition. The Bush administration's fusion of tax cuts for the rich and a growing federal deficit, coupled with what is likely to be a domestic agenda and

approach to foreign policy that isolates the United States from most democracies, may have negative consequences for economic performance and voters' policy evaluations. But any such developments will occur within the context of a Republican electoral advantage and control over both Congress and the presidency. In the longer term, the Democratic Party faces an uphill battle in the increasingly polarized fight for public policy and the future of the country.

Clem Brooks (professor of sociology at Indiana University, Bloomington) and Jeff Manza (professor of sociology at Northwestern University) are the authors of Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignments and U.S. Party Coalitions.

fdr in reverse?

edwin amenta

The presidential election was the bitterest in memory. The incumbent's opponents despised his policies and took solace from polls that suggested he would soon be evicted. The challenger attacked the incumbent's positions on Social Security and taxes. But to their shock and dismay, the president was not only reelected, but he also increased his party's majority in Congress. His opponents now feared that he would extend his loathed policies.

The election I'm referring to took place in 1936. President Franklin Roosevelt had just passed his Second New Deal, including an expensive public employment program; income support for the elderly, unemployed, and dependent children; and protections of workers' right to organize unions. Roosevelt's opponent, Governor Alf Landon of Kansas, ran against the New Deal, especially the old-age insurance program of the 1935 Social Security Act, and enraged business organizations were squarely behind him. Roosevelt was reelected despite their bitter opposition and a popular, if unscientific, poll taken by the *Literary Digest* that suggested otherwise. "That man" won an even greater margin than in 1932, and after 1936, northern Democrats outnumbered southern Democrats and Republicans in both houses of Congress.

In many ways, 2004 is a mirror image of 1936. In domestic policy, President George W. Bush favored privatizing Social Security and additional changes to the tax code to aid the wealthy, while his Democratic opponent, Senator John Kerry, favored shoring up Social Security and rescinding tax cuts for the rich to pay for health coverage for 28 million Americans.

Supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable, Bush not only confounded polls indicating he might lose, but saw his popular support increase by three percentage points and the Republican party's representation rise by five seats in the House and four in the Senate. The result dismayed all of us who thought Bush had lost the previous election, reneged on his pledge to serve as a compassionate conservative, misled the American people into war, and ran a reelection campaign so dirty that it outdid Richard Nixon's finest efforts.

So should we expect a second Bush administration to enact a kind of New Deal in reverse, ending Social Security as we know it and stripping any remaining semblance of progressiveness from the tax system? Does the second Roosevelt administration provide any clues to the future?

Roosevelt's second term is largely viewed as a missed opportunity. He is commonly seen as suffering from hubris, proposing legislation to "pack" the Supreme Court to advance his agenda and failing miserably. Later, Roosevelt was dogged by a conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats that made it impossible to enact health insurance, among other potential social initiatives. Only a few revisionist scholars refer to a "Third New Deal" of social policy reform.

Currently, hubris seems present and accounted for. Bush claimed a "mandate," asserting that he has "political capital" and "intends to spend it" by way of altering Social Security and tax policy. But like Roosevelt, whose Court proposal came as a surprise, Bush didn't go to the electorate with more than the vaguest



Photo by Peter Holderness

A New American Freedom Summer volunteer registering a potential voter in Douglas, Arizona.

applause lines about younger workers getting to invest in retirement accounts and making the tax code fairer. Public opinion is against privatization of Social Security. Exit polls suggested that President Bush was not the choice of voters whose main concerns were taxes, Social Security, or health care, but of those who cited terrorism or the confusing catchall “moral values.”

And Bush’s supposed mandate is far from Rooseveltian. The closest comparison is Jimmy Carter’s 1976 victory over Gerald Ford, which produced a similarly tiny popular vote majority and Electoral College margin. Bush gained less support than would be expected from the rates of inflation, economic growth, and unemployment during his term, even though he benefited from a terrorist attack and Americans’ unwillingness to cashier wartime presidents. As for Congress, the increase in seats in the House was due to the unprecedented mid-decade redistricting in Texas, and the fact that 90 percent of seats are uncompetitive. The Senate gains are largely explained by the vacating of five southern Democratic seats, and they still leave the Republicans five senators short of stopping a filibuster.

Another positive sign for proponents of social spending policy is Social Security itself. To alter it in the direction of personal investment accounts means either that the benefits of current or future recipients must be cut, or that new taxes must be introduced, to the tune of \$150 billion per year over ten years. Many Republicans will balk at that steep sum. Also,

retrenching programs is difficult, because identifiable groups are highly threatened by it. Given the 35 million current retirees and the fact that most baby boomers are over 50, significant cutbacks seem like an uphill climb.

But a second road to retrenchment, attacking the fiscal stability of the government, will not be as politically arduous for Bush. Bush’s tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 provided a bounty to his rich and corporate constituency, while placing pressure on the federal budget by transforming surpluses into massive deficits and making expensive domestic initiatives difficult to propose. Bush may be unable to flatten the income tax further or

significantly displace the income tax with regressive sales taxes—the proposals currently being discussed. But the second Bush administration should be able to make permanent the pro-rich tax cuts of the first one, many of which were scheduled to go out of existence, and remove for good any rescinding of its tax cuts from political consideration.

Unfortunately, too, for those who fear what might happen under Bush, Part Two, there was a Third New Deal. In his second term, Roosevelt was able to legislate minimum wages and maximum hours, reorganize the government, turn Social Security into a true social insurance program, and transform the income tax into a more progressive and productive source of revenue. His second term consolidated the gains of the first, and U.S. social spending was briefly the most in the world. After that, the terms of the debate had been so transformed it was unthinkable to undo most of his achievements.

The tax legislation in Bush’s second term, not to mention war expenditures, will produce even higher deficits and settle the debate over taxes. The next Democratic presidential candidate will not have the luxury of proposing to pay for health insurance by rescinding tax cuts for the rich.

Edwin Amenta is professor of sociology at New York University and the author of Bold Relief: Institutional Politics and the Origins of Modern American Social Policy.