

# PERIODICALS

*Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad*

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## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

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### *The Revolt of the Republicrats*

"The Message of Proposition 13" by Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, in *Commentary* (Sept. 1978), 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

The victory of the Jarvis-Gann state constitutional amendment limiting property taxes in California represents something more complex than a triumph of voter selfishness and/or old-line conservatism.

The so-called taxpayers' revolt is not new, write Lipset, Stanford sociologist and political scientist, and Raab, head of the Jewish Community Relations Council in San Francisco. Polls show that the number of Americans who want their taxes cut has been rising steadily since the early 1960s. In 1969, 54 percent of Americans told the Harris survey they had "reached the breaking point" with respect to the amount of taxes they paid; by 1978, the figure was up to 66 percent.

Inflation and the rapid escalation of property taxes, when combined with California's \$5.7 billion tax-generated surplus, created a mood that was ripe for Proposition 13—which rolled back property taxes to 1 percent of market value as of 1975, prohibited local taxes from rising more than 2 percent a year, and put other restraints on tax increases.

Lipset and Raab argue that the Proposition 13 vote on June 6, 1978, was neither an expression of "mean-spiritedness" nor the harbinger of a conservative or racist backlash. Many voters with an apparent interest in defeating the measure nevertheless voted for it, including 44 percent of families of public employees, 47 percent of people who rent their homes, and 42 percent of blacks. While 82 percent of self-designated "conservatives" voted for the measure, so did 63 percent of self-described "moderates" and 45 percent of "liberals."

Surveys show that a growing number of Americans are labeling themselves "conservative" and that this self-designation is closely associated with a distaste for ever larger, cumbersome, inept, and wasteful government. At the same time, a majority of Americans (while

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opposing "welfare") continue to believe that government should do more for the poor and the elderly. They are "ideological conservatives" and "operational liberals," Lipset and Raab contend. These "neoliberals" continue to swell the ranks of Democratic voters but reject both the demands of liberal Democratic leaders for a bigger, more interventionist government, and the laissez-faire, small-government philosophy proposed by conservative Republicans.

### *The High Price of Fairness*

"Political Parties and Presidential Ambition" by James W. Ceaser, in *The Journal of Politics* (Aug. 1978), University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. 32611.

Political parties, long a central feature of America's form of government, are exercising a waning influence over both the selection of Presidents and their behavior once in office, thanks in part to recent party reforms instituted in the name of "direct democracy" and greater "fairness" to the electorate. Ceaser, a University of Virginia political scientist, argues that it is time to reconsider the wisdom of these reforms.

The founders of the republic opposed national parties and sought to establish a nonpartisan system of presidential selection. Later, while a U.S. Senator from New York, Martin Van Buren (1782-1862) encouraged vigorous two-party competition. He believed it could provide candidates with broad national followings, prevent intrigues associated with elections decided by the House of Representatives, help control presidential ambition, and give the electorate a voice in determining national policy. In 1913, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressives introduced the modern notion of a "plebiscitary" presidential selection process in which candidates built their own constituencies within the electorate and were chosen by national party primaries before the party conventions.

There is no evidence that the contemporary plebiscitary state primary selection process assures legitimacy, produces candidates of "greater competence or superior virtue," or restrains the harmful effects of campaigning, says Ceaser. If anything, it seems to encourage executive "imperialism" by removing the once-powerful restraint exercised by political parties.



*Martin Van Buren*