

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

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