Forthcoming, *Dædalus* (Spring 2005)

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on the 2004 Presidential election

To many observers, the outcome of the recent American election was a shock. Prior to the election, unemployment had been stubbornly high, economic growth was faltering, the chief justification for invading Iraq had been discredited, the occupation itself was increasingly troubled, and the President's approval ratings were consistently low. Under these conditions the prospects for defeating the incumbent seemed good.

Instead, as we all know, George W. Bush was returned to office by a narrow margin.

In the post-mortems that followed, the role of cultural differences seemed to loom large. Many pundits characterized red and blue states as homogeneous territories advocating distinctive -- and opposing -- moral values. Somehow, issues like gay marriage, abortion and religion trumped naked economic interest in many voters' eyes.

This was a surprise, because political analysts have long viewed elections as a democratic expression of class struggle. The extension of universal male suffrage in mid-nineteenth century Britain was damned by conservatives -- and praised by radicals -- for empowering the working classes. The rise of socialist parties in Western Europe seemed consistent with the view that workers voted with their economic interests very much in

mind. Likewise, conservative parties like the British Tories received disproportionate support from the upper classes.

The rationale for the primacy of class voting owes to more than historical evidence, however. The spatial models used by many post-war political scientists have flowed from a very similar assumption – that voters' preferences for policies like government intervention in the economy can be arrayed from left to right on a single dimension. Presumably the poorer that voters are, the more they will prefer government intervention in the economy (especially transfers and entitlements), and vice versa. Since monetary resources are fungible, and can be put to any number of discrete ends, voters should be inclined to vote on the basis of their economic interests.

Although the cultural interpretation of the 2004 election is simplistic, like many clichés it contains more than a grain of truth. Over a decade ago scholars began to observe that since about 1965 voters' preferences in the advanced democracies could not be adequately modeled as emanating from a single left-right dimension (ostensibly associated with social class); rather, at least two distinct dimensions were now needed to model accurately the behavior of voters. The new dimension of political cleavage was variably named by different writers – Inglehart described a 'materialist/postmaterialist' divide, Kitschelt a 'libertarian/authoritarian' divide, Miller and Schofield a 'socially liberal/socially conservative' divide, and Fiorina a 'moral/amoral' divide. Despite this difference in terminology, in each case the new dimension of political cleavage represented cultural interests that were at least partially orthogonal to those of economic interests.

Why has cultural voting gained at the expense of class voting? One explanation is that these trends ultimately flow from shifting moral attitudes in the advanced democracies. According to this view, the historically unprecedented high levels of prosperity that have arisen since the end of World War II made voting for one's economic interest less important than it once had been. Prosperity encouraged people to put aside traditional concerns for their material welfare in favor of 'postmaterial' concerns revolving around moral values and cultural issues. The evidence for this explanation, however, is vanishingly thin. In the United States, for instance, there has been no significant change in attitudes about abortion, homosexuality, and other hot-button moral issues from the early 1970s to the present day.

If changing moral attitudes cannot explain the shift from class to cultural politics, what can? In recently published research I suggest that changes in the nature of governance in the advanced societies – especially the growth of direct rule -- play an important role.

Individuals in advanced societies have multiple social attributes, each of which may influence their vote in a given election: everyone simultaneously has a class position, a gender, an ethnicity and a religious orientation. Which of these various attributes has the greatest salience for their voting behavior? On the one hand, voting *intentions* are influenced by the ideas that are promulgated in key social groups. Whereas the talk in unions is likely to revolve around issues of class, no doubt the emphasis in churches is more spiritual. On the other hand, voting *turnout* is affected by these groups' capacity to mobilize their membership. Indeed, the day after the election one leading Democrat, Richard Gephardt, argued that the Republican victory grew out of the ability of religious

and pro-gun groups to get their members to vote. In a society with effective trade unions and class-based political parties, class voting will tend to come to the fore. The converse will tend to occur in a society where trade unions are relatively weak, and cultural groups relatively strong.

The prevalence of these two types of groups, in turn, is decisively affected by the directness of a state's rule. In states characterized by direct rule, the central government takes principal responsibility for the provision of public goods. In the wake of the French Revolution, which marked the first important instance of direct rule in modern history, direct rule spread throughout Western Europe in the 19th century, with Bismarck in Germany as a key innovator. Industrial workers in these countries left behind the agrarian institutions that supplied them with insurance and welfare benefits. To replace these benefits, the urban workers formed mutual benefit societies, fraternal organizations and trade unions.

Direct rule was established , in part, to control the emergent class-based organizations of the proletariat. In this respect, its most fundamental institution was the welfare state, which developed in one form or another in all of the industrial societies. By weaning industrial workers from their dependence on trade unions and left-wing political parties, the welfare state – and its subsequently enacted entitlements – sharply reduced the incentives for membership in working-class organizations.

Not surprisingly, the proportion of workers in unions is at an all-time low in most of the advanced democracies. Since membership in class-based organizations promotes

class voting, however, the decline of unions has undercut the political salience of class in the United States and elsewhere.

At the same time, the growth of direct rule makes ever more politically salient a variety of moral values and cultural concerns. The direct-rule state is relentlessly activist; it penetrates into previously sovereign realms of private life. It has the power to set educational and legal standards for all within its boundaries, to take children away from parents it deems abusive, and to charge husbands with spousal rape.

Even in the United States, which has a federal constitution that delegates the primary power to regulate morality to the individual states, direct rule has played a growing role. Thus, President Truman desegregated the military in 1948, and the Supreme Court subsequently struck down state laws that had regulated school segregation, abortion and pornography. In the U.S., too, the direct-rule state since World War II has extended its largesse in novel ways. A striking increase in national legislative enactments began in the 1950s, and the increased power of the federal government led to the formation of a host of new organizations representing the national interests of previously marginalized groups, from blacks in the 1950s to women in the 1960s to gays and lesbians more recently.

When it is responsive to the demands pressed by such new social movements, the direct-rule state may inadvertently spur cultural conflict. Thus, the provision of bilingual education may be resisted by the linguistic majority; the enforcement of federal civil rights may spawn racist resistance; and the legalization of abortion raises the political salience of religious and moral values. Much as Reconstruction fractured the Republican

Party after the Civil War, these by-products of post-war direct rule in the U.S. split the Democratic Party, allowing the Republicans to consolidate their southern strategy.

From this perspective, the outcome of the 2004 election is not so much an example of American exceptionalism or -- as the London *Daily Mirror* famously claimed on November 3rd -- the stupidity of 59 million voters.

Rather, the increasing influence of moral values and cultural politics is part of a secular trend sweeping all of the advanced democracies.

The extension of direct rule provides individuals with a greater incentive to form and sustain cultural groups as against those based on class. This ensures the continued salience of cultural voting.

By contrast, the politics of class is only likely to regain its former importance if direct rule – and the safety net provided by its various welfare regimes -- is dismantled.

But in the U.S., this, too, may yet come to pass.

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