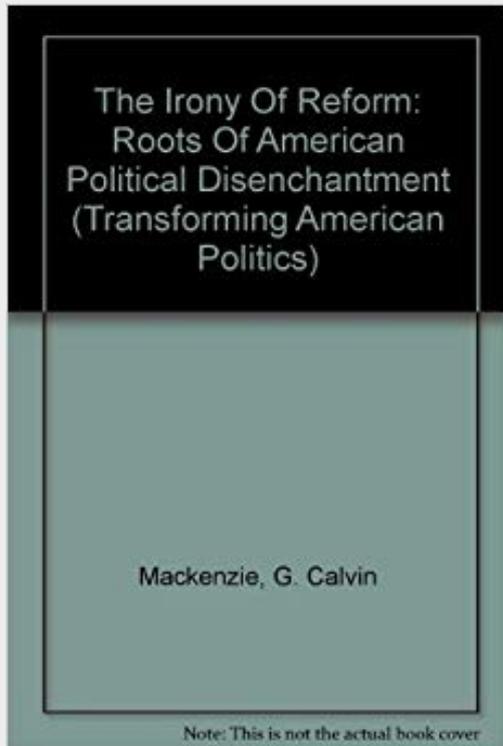


The Irony Of Reform: Roots Of American Political Disenchantment (Transforming American Politics) by G. Calvin Mackenzie



ISBN: 0813328381

ISBN13: 978-0813328386

Author: G. Calvin Mackenzie

Book title: The Irony Of Reform: Roots Of American Political Disenchantment (Transforming American Politics)

Pages: 240

Publisher: Westview Press (April 18, 1996)

Language: English

Category: Humanities

Size PDF version: 1870 kb

Size ePUB version: 1256 kb

Size FB2 version: 1358 kb

Other formats: azw mbr lrf txt

Americans are disenchanting with politics, their government, and their leaders. For evidence, we don't have to look very far: the elections of 1994 turned over control of Congress for the first time in 40 years, and the new House Republicans' Contract with America was the biggest single anti-government initiative since the Boston Tea Party, with term limits, campaign finance reform, and a balanced budget amendment high on its list of priorities. But before Americans climb again on a new bandwagon of government restructuring, they would do well to listen to Cal Mackenzie's admonitions in *The Irony of Reform*. The trouble with contemporary government, he explains, is not a lack of change or "restructuring" over the years, but rather the disjointed, inadvertent, and unpredictable pattern of reform we have followed since World War II. Mackenzie traces the roots of our current distress, noting that more tinkering will only lead to more—though perhaps different—problems. Something much bolder is needed—a new approach that enables leadership, facilitates coalition building, and enhances accountability. Mackenzie proposes a cure for the political ills diagnosed here—a hard and painful cure for a very crippled body politic.



Reviews of the **The Irony Of Reform: Roots Of American Political Disenchantment (Transforming American Politics)** by G. Calvin Mackenzie

1. Gann

Lately, I have been reading books like this for fun, like it is a relief to think that Americans as recently as ten years ago were concerned about a situation that might take some digging to figure out precisely how particular problems had developed, and what alternatives might be. This book fails to live up to any comic potential that might be created by the title, THE IRONY OF REFORM. Our past is presented as merely a small episode in an almost unpopulated nation having a federal government with a tiny budget and few domestic programs just a century ago, suddenly pushed into the position of a global superpower whose economic potential seems to strip meaning from the activity of anyone who would dare to become part of its political system. Along the way, a few court decisions were considered significant, but the number of cases has grown so drastically that even the judges can't keep up. Though the federal judiciary was only 262 in 1945, "The number of judges then grew to more than 500 in the early 1970s, to 657 by the end of that decade, and 875 by 1990," (p. 142) most of the opinions are produced largely by those at a lower level. "Judges now do little of their own research, and many judges do little original writing." (p. 143). Putting words on paper has become a chore best assigned to "people who have less political and practical experience than even the judges themselves. . . . In some instances, it is to be feared, they are indeed invisible judges, for there are appellate judges whose literary style appears to change annually." (p. 144). With life tenure, federal judges don't have to worry about the constant running for re-election that House members with two-year terms face. "With terms so short, every vote a legislator casts becomes a kind of minireferendum on her or his electability--or at least fundability. There is virtually no latitude for representatives to think in broad national terms." (p. 187).

The economic changes which are deemed important in THE IRONY OF REFORM are fundamental to understanding how so many people can be involved in activities that depend so much on cash flow. Combining this consideration with the drop in popularity that most presidents have experienced since Roosevelt and Truman exceeded 75 percent approval in 1944, kind of hard to imagine since Johnson made the big slide from 1964 to 1968, as shown in Figure 5.3, Presidential Approval, Gallup Poll, 1938-1995, clearly supports the statement:

"The postwar presidents have typically lost support as their terms wore on. The majority of them, in fact, have lost so much support that they were forced from office--by resigning, declining to seek reelection, or losing to electoral challengers." (pp. 124). The difference in popularity on that chart between Kennedy and Clinton is astounding. Truman's drop after 1948 was almost as bad as Nixon's ratings after 1972. Eisenhower was popular, but Kennedy started so high people must have been thinking he was better than Eisenhower had ever been. Truman and Johnson were at the highest points on the chart when they took over after the deaths of Roosevelt and Kennedy, and hope must have been a major component of their approval, because nothing they ever did was capable of making them as popular as they were in the beginning. Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan all started so low that Clinton should not have to feel bad about barely being more popular than where the original President Bush ended up. I would blame Johnson, for getting votes in 1964 from people who would not even think about voting for anyone for president after what he did, and then letting people think that he would run for reelection in 1968, not announcing that he was not a candidate until March 31, 1968, and almost backing Nixon instead of Humphrey in the 1968 campaign. The outrage of Democrats who opposed that kind of political power caused the reform in "Presidential Nominations" covered on pages 44-50, and Congress after the 1958 election was already changing in that direction, as described in Chapter 4, The Congress We Love To Hate. (pp. 67-95). Control of Congress is such a second-order effect, possibly an issue for individual voters who know how parties make decisions in Washington, D.C., but rarely important enough to think that the American Constitution will ever be changed to produce a system in which "In each house, 20 percent of the members should be appointed on the sole authority of the president." (p. 185). Mackenzie thinks this might bring in a few "former presidents, former secretaries of state, distinguished former civil servants or ambassadors, policy experts, former governors, business leaders, intellectuals." (p. 186). I would not expect the intellectuals to be any higher on the president's list. How many days was it, after the special election October 7, 2003, in California, until the president had a public meeting with the movie star governor elect from Austria? Even if California needs money, that might be easier to manage than an intellectual.

Published in 1996, this book still maintains the possibility of some changes. For those of us who think things might be worse with a single

party in the White House, controlling the Senate, and having a strong majority in the House of Representatives, the biggest irony might be in considering whether this is a train wreck waiting to happen or already stalemated by the economic reality which uses weakness in the system of government to impose its bias in favor of uncontrolled economic growth whenever it is threatened, as when "Someone has to run the show, and in Congress, for most of the period since 1970, no one has." (p. 192). The word "caucus" does not appear in the index, but it would be between Jimmy Carter and Central Intelligence Agency. Somehow "clueless" would be between Bill Clinton and Coalitions.

2. Lynnak

Calvin MacKenzie feels that most good-will efforts to increase the power and influence of ordinary citizens in the electoral process have in fact empowered the special interests--thus the irony of reform. For all its corruption, the era of the strong party system--when legislatures selected US senators and presidential candidates were truly nominated by convention--produced a political system more in tune with American ideals, or so MacKenzie argues. The crux of his argument is that in order to win elections, the parties had to put together majority coalitions. This required them to hammer out mainstream platforms advantageous to ordinary citizens. As parties have declined, interests groups, who care not about broad-based platforms but about quirky, single-issue politics, have risen to take their place.

This is not the most exciting reading, but it provides great insight into perhaps why fewer Americans vote today and participatory democracy is otherwise on the decline. It is an ideal reference for a research paper on this subject, and political junkies in general will enjoy it.

Related PDF to [The Irony Of Reform: Roots Of American Political Disenchantment \(Transforming American Politics\)](#) by G. Calvin

Mackenzie

3. [Inside Local Government: A Case for Radical Reform](#)
4. [American Government: Roots and Reform, 2011 Edition \(Hardcover\) Plus MyPoliSciLab with eText -- Access Card Package \(11th Edition\)](#)
5. [The Reform spirit in America: A documentation of the pattern of reform in the American republic](#)
6. [Department of Energy: Contract Reform Is Progressing, but Full Implementation Will Take Years](#)
7. [Business interests and the reform of Canadian competition policy, 1971-1975 \(Methuen Canadian politics and government\)](#)
8. [Governance and Politics of China, Second Edition \(Comparative Government and Politics\)](#)
9. [Pension Reform In Central And Eastern Europe, Volume 1: Restructuring With Privatization, Case Studies Of Hungary And Poland](#)
10. [Grass roots government;: The county in American politics](#)
11. [American Government: Roots and Reform, 2009 Edition, Books a la Carte Plus MyPoliSciLab \(10th Edition\)](#)
12. [The government of London: The struggle for reform](#)