

# CSD

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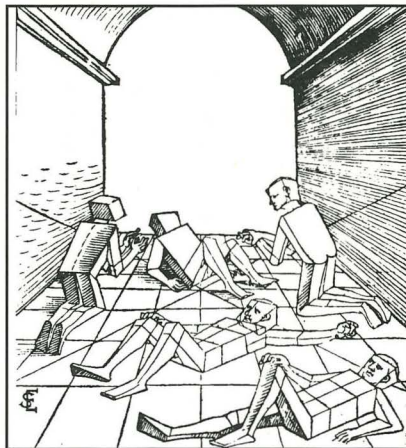
## Globalisation and Tradition

by Anthony Giddens

Partly as a direct result of globalisation, we can speak today of the emergence of a *post-traditional order*. A post-traditional order is not one in which tradition disappears - far from it. It is one in which tradition changes its status. Traditions have to explain themselves, to become open to interrogation or discourse. At first sight, such a statement might seem odd. For haven't modernity and traditions always been in collision? Wasn't overcoming tradition the main impetus of Enlightenment thought in the first place?

As expressed in the expansion of modernity, Enlightenment thought did destabilise traditions of all sorts. Yet the influence of tradition remained strong: more than this, in earlier phases of the development of modern societies a refocussing of tradition played a major part in consolidating the social order. Grand traditions were invented or reinvented, such as those of nationalism or religion. No less important were reconstructed traditions of a more down-to-earth kind, to do with, among other areas of social life, the family, gender and sexuality. Rather than being dissolved, these became reformed in such a way as to plant women firmly in the home, reinforce divisions between the sexes and stabilise certain 'normal' canons of sexual behaviour. Even science itself, seemingly so wholly opposed

to traditional modes of thought, became a sort of tradition. Science became an 'authority' which could be turned to in a relatively unquestioning way to confront dilemmas or cope with problems. In a globalising, culturally cosmopolitan society, however, traditions are forced into open view: reasons or justifications have to be offered for them.



The rise of *fundamentalism* has to be seen against the backdrop of the emergence of the post-traditional society. The term 'fundamentalism' has only come into wide currency quite recently - as late as 1950 there was no entry for the word in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In this case, as elsewhere, the appearance of a new concept signals the emergence of new social forces. What is fundamentalism? It is nothing other than tradition defended in the traditional way - but where that mode of defence has become widely called into question. The point about traditions is that you don't really have to justify them: they contain their own truth, a ritual truth, asserted as correct by

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the believer. In a globally cosmopolitan order, however, such a stance becomes dangerous, because essentially it is a refusal of dialogue. Fundamentalism tends to accentuate the purity of a given set of doctrines, not only because it wishes to set them off from other traditions, but because it is a rejection of a model of truth linked to the dialogic engagement of ideas in a public space. It is dangerous because it is edged with a potential for violence. Fundamentalisms can arise in all domains of social life where tradition becomes something that has to be *decided about* rather than just taken for granted. There arise not only fundamentalisms of religion but of ethnicity, the family and gender, among other forms.

*This is an abstract of a paper presented at CSD on 22 November 1994. Anthony Giddens is Professor of Sociology and Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.*



## A Mid-Term Message

by John E. Owens

In the 1994 US mid-term elections, an electoral earthquake shook the American political landscape. After forty years as a seemingly permanent minority party, the Republicans won control of both houses of Congress with a 27-seat majority in the House of Representatives and a majority of six in the Senate.

Democratic losses in the House were the heaviest for any party in a mid-term election since 1946. Majority Democrats lost fifty-three seats, including that of the Speaker of the House (the first holder of the office to be defeated since 1862), a number of committee chairmen, and thirty-four incumbents. For the first time since 1952, the Democrats percentage of the congressional vote fell below fifty percent. While Democratic losses in the Senate were not as great, Democrats nevertheless lost eight seats, including the candidate favoured to become Senate Democratic leader.

Democrat losses in the House were expected. Regardless of whether the president is Democratic or Republican, in every mid-term House election since 1934 and in all but four sets of Senate elections, the president's party has lost seats. *Surge and decline theory*, as articulated by Campbell in 1960, suggests that mid-term losses by the president's party are a consequence of the previous presidential election because short-term political forces stimulate support for the president's party in a presidential election year, but two years later when there is no presidential contest these factors are much weaker.

In 1992, there was no presidential 'surge' - largely because of redistricting which made many Democratic House seats vulnerable. Certain executive appointments and the role of the First Lady resulted in the alienation of certain 'swing' constituencies, notably the so-called 'Reagan Democrats' and Ross

Perot's supporters.

In keeping with previous elections, state and local issues and the character and experience of candidates were more important. Although they benefited the Republican's net, national issues like health care, crime, economic issues, taxes and the budget deficit were less important. Overall,



however, as in previous congressional elections most Americans did not regard the 1994 contests as very important - only 35% of the voting age population participated.

Republicans were helped by the improved quality of their candidates and by better funding, as predicted by Gary Jacobson and Samuel Kernell's *strategic politician theory*. So-called quality candidates - people who have already invested heavily in their political careers, as state legislators or local officials, for example, who wish to move up the political ladder to a seat in Congress - were persuaded to run. They received both campaign workers' enthusiastic support and the required financial support.

But, even more important than these factors was the greater capacity of Republicans to galvanise swing constituencies, particularly white men in the South, who were most concerned about higher taxation, gun control, and social issues like abortion and gay rights. Whereas in recent elections these voters supported congressional Democrats (while voting Republican in presidential elections), for the first time since 1980, Republicans held on to their own supporters, received

the support of a majority of independents (who now account for about one-third of voters), and between a quarter and a third of Ross Perot's voters.

While Republicans mobilised their voters, Democrats were much less successful with theirs. Democrat voters stayed at home, including black southerners. In Tennessee, for

example, where Democrats usually turn out to vote more than Republicans, exit polls showed that thirty-nine percent of voters were Republicans and only thirty-five, Democrats.

However, whether these results represent a major partisan electoral realignment, as Republicans claim, is extremely doubtful. Not only is the realignment concept dubious in an era of candidate-centred politics, weak political parties, and weak mass partisan loyalties, its relation to large gains for Republicans is tenuous. There is one qualification to this: in the South an apparent regional realignment did occur. For the first time since the 1870's and after decades of presidential victories in the region, Republicans now hold a majority of House and Senate seats. While there is little prospect of Democrats regaining many of these southern seats, we cannot rule out another bout of dramatic change in 1996 and 1998. The last time Republicans made gains of this magnitude - in 1946 - they subsequently lost the next presidential election and control of Congress.

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