

Morris Fiorina's *Culture War?* explores this question: is there a culture war in the United States? He defines "culture war" as "a displacement of the classic economic conflicts that animated twentieth-century politics in the advanced democracies by newly emergent moral and religious ones" (Fiorina 2007, p. 2) He equates polarization to the kinds of conflict that are high in news value. (Fiorina 2007, p. 3) The thesis of his book is that the American mass public is *not* polarized, although the media and elected officials *are* polarized. Fiorina (2007) argues that "the myth of a culture war rests on misinterpretation of election returns... ..and selective coverage by an uncritical media..." (p. 8). Fiorina discusses several possible reforms that could mitigate the challenge of elected officials' polarization. Redistricting reform seems the most helpful in my mind. The culture war myth is coming from the buildup of Congress' power to draw districts down party lines, so redistricting should help get rid of the culture war in Congress.

Fiorina turns to an enormous number of survey results from various studies over the years to back up his argument. All of this data is empirical evidence. The studies he chooses to examine are those that explore some of the issues most often defined as polarizing in America, abortion and homosexuality among them. For abortion he examines data that shows that there is a near 50:50 split between those who think abortion is an act of murder and those who don't (Fiorina 2007, p. 81). Perhaps most interesting, and arguably the reason Fiorina can suggest there is not a "culture war" is that not everyone who considers it murder wants it illegal (Fiorina 2007, p. 81).

On the "culture war" issue of homosexuality Fiorina presents numerous tables and charts that all point to one conclusion: Americans aren't split on the issue at all. One

study has shown that between 1973 and 2004 the numbers of those who think homosexuality is always wrong have dropped to near 50% while those thinking that it is never wrong have increased to near 50% (Fiorina 2007, p. 114). Other studies show that support for equal rights in employment has risen over time (Fiorina 2007, p. 116) and that the number of people saying that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal has risen over time as well (Fiorina 2007, p. 117).

Reforming the way redistricting occurs seems like the most viable option Fiorina gives. The way the districts are laid out right now means that in recent elections for the House of Representatives the parties have split the aggregate vote nearly evenly and as such control of the House has been up in the air every election (Fiorina 2007, p. 214). Fiorina suggests two hypothetical redistricting plans based on assuming that 2/5 of a state is republican, 2/5 democrat, and 1/5 independent. As is shown in a diagram on page 216, a districting plan with same-sized districts for each fifth will result in two safe districts for each major party and one competitive district (Fiorina 2007, p. 216). A second redistricting plan results in all the districts being competitive (Fiorina 2007, p. 217). This reform may work better than some of Fiorina's other reforms (primary elections and another major party) because redistricting directly affects the makeup of Congress. The myth of a culture war is partly coming from the stark polarization in Congress, so effectively changing who gets elected by redistricting has a chance of helping eliminate what culture war exists.

Morris Fiorina disproves the common myth of a culture war by simply laying out concrete empirical evidence regarding views on the very issues that we consider to be forming this divide known as a "culture war". At the same time Fiorina says that the

media and our elected politicians are polarized, and as such he suggests a few reforms, of which his redistricting reform seemed most helpful to me. It is also important to end in emphasizing that Fiorina's book is a question: *Culture War?* The title is not *There is no Culture War*. This distinction helps to explain how and why he wrote this book.

Works Cited

1. Fiorina, M. & Abrams, S. & Pope, J. (2007) *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education Inc.