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Book Review: Polarization and the Presidency: From FDR to Barack Obama, by Robert C. Smith.

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Smith, Robert C. **Polarization and the presidency: from FDR to Barack Obama**, by Robert C. Smith and Richard A. Seltzer. L. Rienner, 2015. 321p bibl index afp ISBN 9781626372283, \$68.50.

One malady affecting politics in the contemporary United States is the hyper-polarization of parties and politicians. Smith (San Francisco State Univ.) and Seltzer (Howard Univ.) note that most of the research on polarization focuses on Congress. The authors turn their attention to the presidency, arguing that "presidents and presidential candidates in their ideologies, rhetoric, and policies have played a far greater role in polarizing US politics than the literature suggests." They support this counterintuitive view with systematic and convincing research that proves their point. FDR established the modern regime of a regulatory welfare system. Subsequent presidents and congresses reacted to that regime. In the 1960s, race began to redefine partisan loyalties, as efforts to promote racial equality became "central to our understanding of the development of partisan and ideological polarization." Reagan presented a conservative alternative to the FDR regime, in which the fight against racial equality found a home. This led to greater polarization as the parties moved further apart and politics became more divided. This excellent and judicious book helps explain why US politics has become dysfunctional.

—M. A. Genovese, *Loyola Marymount University*

Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduate, graduate, and research collections.