

 **POLITICAL CONFLICT AND
DISAGREEMENT:
WHY IS COMPROMISE
DIFFICULT
EVEN IMPOSSIBLE?
IS IT INEVITABLE?**

Stephen L. Bakke  October 30, 2013



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There's one (more) thing I'm struggling with. I think it's fairly obvious why there is so much dissention and polarization in Washington these days. It's just too easy to assign blame to racism, economic inequality, or republican obstructionism. Take another crack at this question, SB, and get back to me! - Stefano Bachovich - obscure curmudgeon and wise political pundit - a prolific purveyor of opinions on just about everything - my primary "go to guy."

OK, Stefano, I've been through this with you before, so I'll try again to convince you I understand your position. And since last time, there have been many more events which cement the criticism of gridlock in Washington: lack of an official budget, sequester, shutdown, polarization from "fast and furious," Benghazi, and the NSA - I could go on!

Constant bickering and gridlock over issues? Perhaps for good reason!

Within this topic, Stefano, you might be surprised at what I too am tired of. It's not the gridlock - strange as that may seem. I'm tired of constantly hearing about how America has "deteriorated" into inflexible pockets of ideology. I'm tired of the shallow "pining" for the good old days when we always managed to "work things out." While I definitely see the advantages of achieving agreement on matters of policy and direction, I have come to understand (I think) why we seem to be more polarized now than in the past. **We have had very real cultural changes! And that has led to a different list of issues, or at least different perspectives on the old issues.**

No more wiggle room!

Certain issues come and go, solutions are debated, and legislation is actually passed. However, there are some other stubborn ones which seem to linger as non-compromised, unresolved issues which we hear about again and again - e.g. economic policies, military conflicts, health care reform, Social Security reform, immigration, voter identification, union card check vs. secret balloting, definition of marriage, Israeli/Palestinian conflict, economic solutions, and that pesky abortion issue.

In today's political climate, the issues are different and the economic and cultural environment magnifies the importance of making the right decision, **OR NONE AT ALL! (What? None at all?!!!)**

Face It - The U.S. has changed - arguably, not for the better! Consider the "Weiner angle"!

Extreme examples of cultural changes graphically demonstrate what has occurred in our society. I would argue that it wasn't many years ago that some characterizations and comments would never

have been made by prominent on-air media commentators. They would have been unacceptable to the public, or too radical to be taken seriously.

Then, a couple of years ago I found myself staring at glaring examples of changing attitudes regarding societal propriety. A really shocking disclosure and eventual admission by Representative Anthony Weiner brought this into focus for me. Following are two comments about “Weinergate” made by influential on-air personalities. While perhaps a bit cynical and “humorous” in nature, these were intended to provide serious commentary:

- Chris Matthews commented during a MSNBC “Hardball” program, that Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner could be in danger of being forced out of Congress by Blue Dog Democrats who face uphill battles in red states because, as he put it, *“people in the rural areas of this country who are Christian conservative culturally - you can say backward if you want ... don't like this kind of stuff.”*
- CNN gave Bill Maher a platform to deride one of the Left’s favorite targets: *“Dick Cheney used to go out and shoot birds by the hundreds that were like in a cage. To me, that's a lot more psychotic than anything Anthony Weiner ever did.”*

Can you believe that? There was a time when those statements would never have been made by main-stream commentators. There was a time when an often “sleazy” comedian would never have been enlisted to provide supposedly “serious” commentary. Examples abound! **What’s happening?**

It’s clear to me that this is symptomatic of a dramatic change/slide in our cultural rules and conventions. There is a significant percentage of liberals and progressives who truly have contempt for our culture and the legitimacy of our Founders’ concept of “Divine Providence.” You’ve got to admit, this demonstrates movement of one element of society, (NOT the “Right” in my opinion) to a **far different reference point for interpreting our culture and judging our leaders’ actions.** I’m no model citizen or intellect, **but this concerns me!**



Important liberal and conservative philosophical differences

Conservatives believe that the Left have more enthusiastically embraced this gradual evolution of culture than has the Right. Conservatives claim to have tried to hold on to a more traditional set of values. Following are some examples of what I believe to be dramatic cultural changes:

- Liberals have increased their resolve to prove that the federal government is the greatest tool for creating prosperity. Conservatives continue to believe the greatest threat to creating prosperity is government.
- Conservative philosophy, in its purest form, believes in government’s role as defined, or limited, by the U.S. Constitution. Liberals are for an ever-increasing government role.
- Liberals consider the Constitution a “living, breathing document” – to be used in the context of international law, moral relativism, and moral equivalence. Conservatives believe the Constitution stands on its own.

- Conservative writer Dennis Prager envisions a new “American Trinity” developing. According to him, the traditional conservative “trinity” is “E Pluribus Unum, Liberty, and In God We Trust”. He sees “E Pluribus Unum” being replaced by the concept of “Multiculturalism”; “Liberty” being replaced by “Equality”, and “In God We Trust” being replaced by “Secularism”. The familiar American motto “E Pluribus Unum” means “out of many, one”. It represents our unity and is based on recognition of our inherent diversity.
- Liberals have come to interpret “E Pluribus Unum” as unity of thought throughout a diverse culture. Conservatives always have interpreted this as celebrating a common unique culture, not blurred by such things as multiculturalism.
- The Left has increased their focus on equality of the result of economic policy, education, and other programs. Liberals now tend to assume unequal opportunities when observing unequal outcomes – i.e. they believe equal outcomes result if people truly have equal opportunity. Another name for this is egalitarianism. The definition of equality for a person on the Right would focus on the concept of equal opportunity.

Like I've always said, the three major differences between conservatives and liberals boils down to: the government's role in citizens' lives; the government's role in the international community; and the meaning of equality. – **Stefano Bachovich** – obscure curmudgeon and wise political pundit – a prolific purveyor of opinions on just about everything – my primary “go to guy.”

Compromise requires certain things

Getting back to the point of this report, when parties to negotiations find themselves far apart philosophically, compromise is often impossible. With some issues, there is no way to achieve “win/win.” Any result which is different from the ideological extremes may not give a satisfying result for either party. **In order to be an effective compromise, each party must gain something from the result, be able to brag about it, and come away with some feeling of satisfaction. Can you see how some things just don't lend themselves to that dynamic?**



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Some examples

Consider an example of a very contentious issue – abortion. Pro-life supporters commonly believe that a human life starts at conception and any termination of a pregnancy ends a human life. Pro-choice supporters argue against the certainty of that definition and support a women's right to choose whether or not to continue the pregnancy. They also argue that this right to choose (during the first two trimesters) is protected by the Constitution. That very complex argument was upheld in the infamous Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision.

The antagonists in this issue are both absolutely, sincerely adamant about the correctness of their position! The abortion opponents, quite simply, believe that terminating a pregnancy terminates a

life. What would be the suggested compromise on that belief? The abortion rights supporters dismiss the concept that a fetus is a human life. They hold that the fetus is part of the mother and therefore it's the mother's right to choose. How should they compromise? **There is no possible "common ground" that I can see! There is no way to create a "win/win" on this issue.**

That's an easy example to contrast and explain. Now you try to create a "win/win" on some other issues. **It's tough – sometimes just difficult, and sometimes impossible!** Try analyzing these issues and create a "win/win" satisfying compromise for both sides: war, health care reform, welfare reform, Social Security reform, immigration, voter identification, union card check vs. secret balloting, definition of marriage, Israeli/Palestinian conflict, budget, economic solutions, etc

Face it! It's not easy. Like I said before, we no longer have "wigggle room" that provides "bragging rights" for both sides!

The budget and related issues – is an attempt to achieve a "grand bargain" worth the effort?

Representative Paul Ryan (R - House Budget Committee Chairman) said it realistically in a recent Washington Post quote:

If we focus on some big, grand bargain then we're going to focus on our differences, and both sides are going to require that the other side compromises some core principle and then we'll get nothing done, so we aren't focusing on a grand bargain because I don't think in this divided government you'll get one.

A "grand bargain" is not possible because of the reasons discussed earlier. Therefore, looking for smaller achievements which the two parties can agree on, as Chairman Ryan recommends, is a reasonable way forward.

The Final Analysis

Traditions aren't just questioned or examined, they are being cast aside. And as a result there is an understandable polarization over some issues which are important to our society and culture. You don't have to agree with my opinion that "non-compromise" is understandable, and if you do agree you don't have to like it. I only ask that you understand what I am saying and consider this as you evaluate future political conflicts. I think it will help you understand the dynamics of each situation.

By George, I think he's got it! I have come to truly believe that it is too much to expect of conservatives (or liberals for that matter) to expect them to compromise on issues if they sincerely believe any compromise would be worse than no action. Like the song says, "call me irresponsible, call me unreliable....." – Stefano Bachovich – obscure curmudgeon and wise political pundit – a prolific purveyor of opinions on just about everything – my primary "go to guy."