

E. E. Schattschneider and the Development of a National Party System, 1935-1969
Formerly titled: “An Intellectual History of Polarization”

By Ethan Winter

I used the support of Peter and Mary G. O’Connell Research Award, to further an honors project I completed this year titled, “E. E Schattschneider and the Making of a National Party System, 1935-1969,” for the Department of Government and Legal Studies. The paper is an intellectual history of the political science of E. E. Schattschneider, a professor whose career stretched from the 1930s into the 1960s. Schattschneider is a ‘minor deity’ within the discipline and is known as a fierce advocate for the role of political parties within modern democracy and is often depicted as an advocate for polarization.

Despite Schattschneider’s reputation, extensive interpretation of his work is limited. As a figure, he has long been overshadowed by two of his contemporaries, V. O. Key and Robert Dahl. My paper sought to remedy this. I worked to both historicize Schattschneider’s scholarship, illuminating the ways in which his work was a product of the time in which he lived, while also pointing to the possible implications for our own time. What I hoped to highlight is that while Schattschneider is in many ways an artifact of the postwar, he does posit a theory of parties and critique of power that possesses lasting resonance.

A substantial portion of my funding was used to complete archival research which I conducted at Wesleyan University. The ability to conduct archival research is an invaluable tool when conducting this kind of historical research. By examining drafts of published works, private correspondence, and personal notes, scholars can reconstruct how the figures being studied arrived at the conclusions they did. The information I gathered sheds light on how temporal considerations shaped Schattschneider’s thought, how geostrategic conditions pushed him towards specific recommendations. Letters in particular are valuable because they provide a venue where scholars may reveal their personal feelings, feelings that are often concealed within published work.

The ability to complete extensive primary source research has also aided in the development of my skills as a researcher. First, I hope to continue this research and turn my project into an article-length treatment that I could possibly submit for publication to an academic journal. Second, more generally, this provided me an opportunity to sharpen my own research skills; skills I hope to continue to hone as part of a Ph.D. program which I am in the beginning stages of applying for.

My honors project has been the most formative academic experience during my time at Bowdoin College. I am extraordinarily fortunate for the support I have received from my faculty advisor, Professor Jeffrey Selinger, from Bowdoin College as an institution, and from the Grua-O’Connell Research Award.

Faculty Advisor: Professor Jeffrey Selinger

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