

Two Islands, Two Theories

I would like to propose an experiment that might finally settle the economic and social arguments that have divided America's two main political parties for decades. We should take two islands that are part of our country, exempt them from the laws of our land (including the Constitution), and allow each one to enact the economic and social theories of one political party. One island will embrace the beliefs of the Democrat party and codify those theories into law. The other will champion the beliefs of the Republican party and organize those theories into law. Let this experiment run for forty years and then compare the two island's economic status and social conditions.

First, let me state some pre-conditions.

The federal government will no longer have jurisdiction over the islands. I am not versed in the legalities here. Perhaps recognizing them as simply "territories" of the country would suffice. If not, the U.S. Congress can write legislation that prevents any future federal government intervention.

The islands must have similar geography and be of similar size. It would be unfair for one to have a rocky topography while the other consists of pristine beaches.

The islands also must be located near each other. This will ensure that climate will not be a determining factor. If a natural disaster strikes one it will also strike the other. In addition, any natural resources (such as fish, natural gas, or oil) will undoubtedly be available to both islands.

If such islands do not exist naturally, I have no doubt that they can be created.

The first island will write its own Constitution based on the beliefs of the Democrat party. There will be an emphasis on social and economic equality; a guaranteed living wage; comprehensive health care; redistribution of wealth; equality of race, religion, ethnic background, and gender; and a large social safety net funded primarily by the government. Taxation will be progressive and the island Constitution will be "living" and flexible and focus on the people's rights. There will be strict government regulation of the environment and businesses to protect the people; state control of primary education to assure equality; and decision-making in general will take place at the uppermost political level, to protect the civil rights of minorities from local prejudices.

The second island will base its constitution on the beliefs of the Republican party. There will be an emphasis on personal liberty, personal responsibility, free-market capitalism; a low or nonexistent minimum wage; health care will be the citizen's responsibility, funded through government health savings accounts; and a basic economic safety net, supplemented by personal charities. There will be a flat tax; a stricter interpretation of the island Constitution, which focuses on limiting government; basic environmental and business regulations; local control of primary education; school vouchers to allow parents to choose their children's schools; and in general an emphasis on local decision-making.

I will ignore social issues such as gun control, abortion, the death penalty and prostitution. It is tempting to believe that the "Republican" island will outlaw all abortions and the "Democrat" island will outlaw all gun ownership and the death penalty. I think that is unlikely, however, since a minority of people in those parties actually espouse those beliefs. All other matters, such as foreign affairs, the structure of political parties, the judicial system, and immigration policy will be left for the people of the islands to decide.

Theoretically, the residents of the islands will live out forty years of their own social, political, and economic beliefs, without the ability to blame the "other side" for their own failures. But human nature, being what it is, will manufacture a villain even when one does not exist. There will be social fractures and there will be victims. In addition, the diehards who espouse their party's theories will never be persuaded, regardless of the evidence.

Still, after forty years it would be interesting to compare the social and economic successes and failures of the two competing islands. While neither island will achieve utopia, maybe some consensus can be reached between the two sides. And perhaps the rest of the world will learn more effective means of raising people out of economic and social poverty.

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