

# FDR, Al Smith, and the Unlikely Alliance That Created the Modern Democratic Party: A Historical Odyssey

In the annals of American politics, the alliance between Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and Al Smith stands as a testament to the power of unlikely partnerships. These two men, from vastly different backgrounds and political philosophies, came together to forge a formidable coalition that reshaped the Democratic Party and left an enduring legacy on American society.

## FDR: The Patrician Progressive

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was born into a wealthy family of Dutch ancestry in Hyde Park, New York. He attended Groton School and Harvard University before entering politics in the early 1900s. As a state senator and Assistant Secretary of the Navy, FDR exhibited a keen intellect and a progressive bent, supporting social welfare programs and labor unions.



## Frank and Al: FDR, Al Smith, and the Unlikely Alliance That Created the Modern Democratic Party by Terry Golway

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In 1920, Roosevelt was elected Vice President on the ticket of Democratic presidential candidate James M. Cox. However, the Cox-Roosevelt ticket was defeated by the Republican duo of Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge. Roosevelt's political career seemed to be over until he was diagnosed with polio in 1921. Despite being paralyzed from the waist down, Roosevelt refused to give up. He fought back against his disability and re-entered politics in 1928 as the Governor of New York.

### **Al Smith: The Irish Catholic Urbanite**

Al Smith was born in New York City to Irish Catholic immigrants. He rose from humble beginnings, working as a fishmonger and a truck driver before entering politics. Smith was a charismatic and popular figure in New York City, serving as the city's President of the Board of Aldermen and Governor.

Smith's political philosophy was rooted in the urban experience. He supported labor unions, social welfare programs, and public works projects. He was also a staunch defender of religious freedom and immigrant rights. Smith's progressive views and his ability to connect with ordinary voters made him a formidable force in the Democratic Party.

### **An Unlikely Alliance**

FDR and Smith were an unlikely pair. Roosevelt was a patrician progressive with a privileged upbringing, while Smith was an Irish Catholic urbanite with a working-class background. They had different political styles and priorities, but they shared a common goal: to reshape the Democratic Party and make it a force for social justice.

In 1928, Smith won the Democratic nomination for president. However, his candidacy was met with fierce opposition from conservative Democrats and Protestant voters. Smith's Catholicism and his urban background were seen as liabilities in the predominantly Protestant and rural United States. FDR, who was seeking re-election as Governor of New York, initially hesitated to endorse Smith.

However, Roosevelt realized that Smith's strength in urban areas could help him win the election. He agreed to endorse Smith and campaigned vigorously for him throughout New York. Despite Roosevelt's support, Smith was defeated by Republican candidate Herbert Hoover. However, Smith's strong showing in the election demonstrated the growing importance of urban voters in the Democratic Party.

### **The New Deal Coalition**

In 1932, FDR won the Democratic nomination for president. He chose Smith as his running mate, forming a powerful coalition of urban and rural voters. FDR and Smith campaigned on a platform of economic recovery and social reform, promising to create jobs, help the poor, and regulate the economy.

FDR and Smith's New Deal coalition proved to be unstoppable. They won the election in a landslide, and FDR embarked on a series of ambitious programs designed to pull the United States out of the Great Depression. The New Deal included programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Social Security Act, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. These programs provided jobs, relief, and hope to millions of Americans.

### **The Legacy of FDR and Smith**

The alliance between FDR and Al Smith had a profound impact on the Democratic Party and American society. Together, they forged a new coalition that brought together urban and rural voters, Catholics and Protestants, immigrants and native-born Americans. This coalition transformed the Democratic Party from a party of the South and the urban poor into a national party that represented a broad cross-section of American society.

FDR and Smith's New Deal programs helped to lift the United States out of the Great Depression and laid the foundation for the modern American welfare state. Their legacy continues to shape American politics and society today.

The alliance between FDR and Al Smith was an unlikely one, but it proved to be one of the most consequential in American history. Together, they reshaped the Democratic Party and created a new coalition that has endured for generations. Their vision for a more just and equitable society continues to inspire Americans today.



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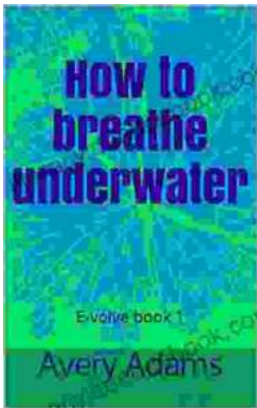
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