

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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**Political polarization in the United States of
America**

**Politična polarizacija v Združenih državah
Amerike**

Master thesis

Ljubljana, 2015

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To my family of choice and my safety net: Damjan, Damjana, Nika and Tina.

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Abstract: Political polarization is a growing problem in contemporary American politics. There have been disagreements between the two major parties since the Federalists and Jeffersonian-Republicans, but the disagreements were never as vicious as they are today. Parties disagree on almost all domestic and foreign politics and they are both intraparty homogenous and interparty heterogeneous. In such an environment, bipartisan coalitions have little or no chance to succeed while party's disagreements are likely to produce a gridlock rather than an agreement. Ideological separations have been increasing since the 1970s and do not seem to be slowing down in the future. While congressional redistricting and incumbency advantage are both contributors of growing polarization, there is no evidence that suggests they are solely to blame for this trend. Some of the blame should be placed on voters, who are the ones selecting these extreme candidates, but even they are not the prime cause of it. Studies show that voter's preferences, or beliefs, have not changed over recent decades, but their choices have changed. Most partisan voters are adopting extreme positions from their selected parties and they make an effort to vote while the moderate voters, faced with no moderate alternative, are compelled to select between two ideologically extreme sides. Partisan polarization is not predicted to stop anytime soon, even though future trends suggest that both parties would benefit from positions that are more moderate.

Key words: party polarization, United States of America, Congress, power struggle.

Politična polarizacija v Združenih državah Amerike

Povzetek: Politična polarizacija je pereč problem sodobne ameriške politike. Močna razhajanja med dvema dominantnima političnima strankama, republikansko in demokratsko, so se pojavila v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja in od takrat naprej samo še naraščajo. Kljub različnim načelom in prepričanjem obeh strank, ki je značilno za vso zgodovino ameriške politike, pa stranki še nikoli nista bili na tako različnih bregovih. Razloge za razhajanje najdeta praktično na vseh področjih, od pravic za istospolne pare do vprašanja priseljevanja, kar onemogoča sklepanje kompromisov ter hkrati povečuje ideološki prepad med strankama. Nezmožnost sklepanja kompromisov vodi v politični zastoj in otežuje normalen delovni proces zakonodajne veje oblasti. Ankete kažejo, da volivci niso enako ideološko opredeljeni kot njihovi predstavniki, kljub temu pa s svojimi odločitvami pomembno prispevajo k politični polarizaciji. Poraja se torej vprašanje, ali volivci delijo ekstremna prepričanja svojih političnih predstavnikov ali le izberejo eno oziroma drugo skrajnost, ker sredinske izbire preprosto nimajo. Goreči podporniki ene ali druge stranke so v svojih stališčih najbolj skrajni in na te pravzaprav ciljajo politični predstavniki. Kljub temu da sodobni družbeni trendi (priseljevanje in socialna neenakost) spodbujajo sklepanje kompromisov, ki bi lahko koristili obema strankama, ni nobena stran pripravljena popustiti. Politično polarizacijo bi lahko končala tretja, sredinska stranka ali vsaj bolj sredinska usmerjenost obstoječih strank. A dokler obe strani ne vidita prednosti kompromisa, ostaja politična polarizacija edini možen izid volilne tekme.

Ključne besede: politična polarizacija, ameriške politične stranke, zakonodajna togost.

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INTRODUCTION

Political polarization is something many modern students of American political studies find problematic. This phenomenon is not new in American politics, but it was not until the last few decades that it drew so much attention, not just from politicians and the public itself, but also from the media. There is no doubt that Democrats and Republicans have always disagreed, but during the Clinton era, and even before his presidency, the increase in party conflict became even more apparent (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 1; Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007, 535). Back in the 1970s, or as far as the 1960s, the American electorate was ideologically heterogeneous with a mix of liberal conservatives and conservative democrats (Levendusky 2009). If any divisions were made, they would be more likely to come within each party, than between the parties (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 59). Today however, finding a liberal Republican or conservative Democrat is like finding a needle in a haystack. The parties are diverging in terms of voting as well as ideology and American voters are much better sorted than they were fifty or even forty years ago (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 8–11; Herherington and Keefe 2007, 41–43; Masket 2009). Policy agendas, such as social welfare, racial, and cultural issues seem to be the number one cause for recent polarization between the two main players in the American government (Layman and Carsey 2002, 786; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 243). The parties themselves are not making it any easier for voters; with Republicans consistently taking more conservative positions on all of the major domestic and foreign issues and Democrats consistently taking more liberal positions on the same concerns, thus making it difficult for the average voter to stay in the middle of the debate (Layman and Carsey 2002, 788).

It is important to note, that the average citizen is not particularly interested in everyday issues and does not pay much attention to policy agendas. The ones that do are usually political partisans, who are more keen to respond to their parties' stands and who follow the path of polarization set by the political elites (Fiorina *et al.* 2005; Layman and Carsey 2002; Masket 2009). It would seem that parties' efforts to keep the public polarized are short lived, but we should not underestimate the power of a partisan voters. Even though they are small in numbers, their will to

support the policy agendas presented to them by their party will go a long way. But is the public just an innocent bystander in the polarization process? Some authors would agree, while others are not convinced. Abramowitz and Saunders(2008, 542–555) agree that polarization has its roots in the elite level, but they are not convinced by authors such as Fiorina (Fiorina *et al.* 2005), claiming that polarization is solely the problem of the elites and does not reflect the mass public.

Authors have different ideas on who is responsible for these decade long shifts, but what they all agree upon is there seems to be a trend of pulling away from the middle and migrating more toward the extremes. The list of reasons for polarization is as about long as there are theories about who started this trend. Authors like Fiorina (2005) suggest that, in fact, the elites first started this trend and the general public, or voters, are just following because they have no other choice. His theory may have a point. If the elites take more extreme positions and there is no median position for voters to choose from, they are given no choice but to select one-way or the other and, by doing so, contribute to the polarization (Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 26). In his book, Fiorina (Fiorina *et al.* 2005) shows that voters have the same preferences as they did in the 1970s and 1980s and their positions do not match the positions of the elites. He argues, that ordinary citizens do not know much about politics, are not well informed, and most of all, are not ideological (Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 19). These are the people that seek the middle ground. As for the people who do care about politics, who hold strong positions, and are ideological; these are the ones that will most likely choose one party over the other, and these are the ones that will be there on Election Day.

By constantly emphasizing issues on which parties disagree most, the media contributes to the polarization by exaggerating the size and effect of it simply because it enhances news value (Abramowitz 2013; Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 22). In the 1990s, Congress noticeably changed its tone of the debate that sometimes escalated to shouting matches and even personal insults(Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 1). This kind of behavior is likely to attract the media's attention and makes for a good news value and media outlets waste no time to make the debates as scandalous as possible (Smith in Kernell and Smith 2007, 256). By doing so, people view their representatives as two opposing players in the ring and maybe perceive them as more polarized than they might be. Even more, the battles on Capitol Hill make

the legislative process and the representatives in general easy to dislike and appear untrustworthy.

Why is party polarization even a problem? For some, it may not be. After all, it presents voters with a clear choice: either you are pro abortion or against it, either you are pro gay marriage or against it, etc. The problem with one party constantly rejecting the other parties' proposals is the inability of "government to enact significant proposals on the policy agenda" or creating a so-called gridlock (Jones 2001, 126). Although many authors blame party polarization for this trend, authors such as Jones(2001, 125–141) and Binder (1999, 519–533) found that unified government is not necessarily a polarization free government and that a gridlock can easily occur in a unified government as well.

1 METHODOLOGICAL LAYOUT

1.1 HYPOTHESES, THESIS OR RESEARCH QUESTION BASED ON SELECTED LITERATURE AND SOURCES

In my thesis, I will focus on political polarization in the United States of America. American plurality election system tends to produce only two dominant parties. Long before the formation of Democratic Party and the Republican Party known today, there were the Federalists and the Jeffersonian-Republicans fighting over economic regulation, taxes and tariffs. However, they were more internally divided than anything else and reasonable compromise was still the best way to get things done. Today, both parties persist in their own opinion, bipartisan cooperation is rare and party divide wide. In the case of unified party governance, members of Congress have a better chance to produce a legislation based on compromise, and such legislation has a better chance to actually see the light of day. The problem is, unified party governance is not frequent and parties would rather lose the chance of their legislature passing than accommodate to meet the needs of the other side. This kind

of stubbornness is a bad recipe for successful legislative process, it leads to political stalemate and most of all, is not fulfilling the needs of voters. There is no dispute among students of political studies that political elites are polarized, what remains a question is whether the public shares the same level of polarization and what is the main cause of growing distance between the parties.

My hypotheses will therefore be as such:

H1: Political polarization is a growing problem in contemporary American politics and it is interfering with normal work processes on Capitol Hill. Throughout American history, there have been numerous displays of how unwilling the representatives are to put aside their differences, most recently, with the government shutdown in 2013.

H2: Rising political polarization in American politics consolidated party loyalty within the two major parties in the United States of America. By examining the roll-call votes of both parties, I will try to confirm that the contemporary representatives are more compliant to vote in accordance with their party, as were their predecessors, thus contributing to the growing left versus right extremism.

1.2 METHODS OF STUDY

My research questions will be answered through evaluation of other political scientists' work. By examining roll-call history of representatives, I will get a clearer idea of their party loyalty. I will focus mainly on topics such as immigration, taxes, gay marriage, etc., since these topics are most likely to produce a strong reaction and compliance with a particular party.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In preface, I will briefly present the issues argued in the paper. My first task will be to present American political system with the emphasis on the legislative branch. I will discuss the selection of representatives, the election process, and the evolution of both parties. I will show that political polarization is not attached to the legislative

branch, and it is indeed the problem that affects all branches of government, especially the executive branch, since the successful legislation is dependent on the cooperation of both of them. Understanding how it evolved will require going back in history and pin pointing the time when this trend became more evident and, as time goes by, more problematic. If this is a serious problem that we should be more careful about, I will learn through researching many other authors, who have already studied political polarization.

2 POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Founding Fathers, who wrote the Constitution of the United States in 1789, believed that the protection of individual liberties was crucial, but in order to protect them, they first had to create a government (Fenno Jr. in Kernell and Smith 2007, 222). The power of government cannot be trusted and it has to be controlled, “first through the electoral process and second by dividing authority among and within political institutions” (Fenno Jr. in Kernell and Smith 2007, 222). Framers agreed upon three different branches of government, all with different modes of election and all with different principles of action (Fenno Jr. in Kernell and Smith 2007, 222–223). The Senate and the House of Representatives are structurally different in size, with varying lengths of their terms and their policy prerogatives (Fenno Jr. in Kernell and Smith 2007, 222–223). The initial idea of bicameralism was to establish two dissimilar institutions that would check one another. “The framers did not so much create one precipitate chamber and one stabilizing chamber as they did force decision making to move across two separate chambers, however those chambers might be constituted” (Fenno Jr. in Kernell and Smith 2007, 225). In order to avoid tyranny, founders decided to draw a system of separated powers, with checks and balances and divided government into three separate branches, each with its own

responsibilities and each dependent on the others to carry out their duties (Smith *et al.* 2005, 32). Power was not just dispersed between the three branches, but also between the national and sub-national levels of government (Smith *et al.* 2005, 32).

In federalism, the national and regional governments are considered independent equals and share powers. A decentralized approach can actually work against popular presidential candidates, because the winner is not decided on how many people vote for him, but rather how many states vote for him (Smith *et al.* 2005, 26). “Each state gets a number of electoral college delegates equal to the size of its congressional delegation” (Smith *et al.* 2005, 26). In a sense, American voters do not vote for their presidential leader directly, but through the state’s popular vote the party’s representative in the Electoral College is decided (Smith *et al.* 2005, 26).

American political system adopted English style plurality election system which tends to produce two dominant parties (Poole 2008). “These electoral characteristics coupled with the emergence of mass based political parties in the 1820s and the colonial legacy of private property rights formed the basis of the U.S. political-economic system that has survived into the 21st Century” (Poole 2008). The representatives were required to live in the districts they represented and because of that, parties were usually internally divided due to regional and economic interests (Poole 2008).

2.1 THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT

The legislative branch of government is made up of two houses of government, collectively known as Congress, and composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. There are 535 members of Congress; 435 of those are members of the House of Representatives and the other 100 are members of the Senate (The White House 2015). To reflect changes in the distribution of the nation’s population across the states, the 435 seats in the House are reapportioned every ten years (Smith in Kernell and Smith 2007, 266). The Census Bureau is guided by a formula in the election laws that allows it to calculate the number of districts for each state after every decennial census (Smith in Kernell and Smith 2007, 266). Powered by the

Constitution, Congress has the authority to enact legislation, declare war, and confirm or reject many Presidential appointments (The White House 2015). Congress is the only body that can introduce legislation, make new laws, and change existing laws. Also in its power, is the ability to establish an annual budget for the government, and furthermore, it has substantial investigative powers (The White House 2015). Representatives are elected every two years and there are no limits on the number of terms they can serve. Once elected, the representative can make a career out of it. In the U.S., incumbency is extremely popular and unless the representative is involved in a major scandal or exceedingly disliked by the constituency or the party, the representative is in it for the long run.

Each state has two seats in the Senate that serve as the upper chamber. Senators were originally chosen by the state legislators¹, and they served as a brake on the influence of changing popular majorities (Abramowitz 2010, 163). Members of Senate have a six-year term and every year one-third of them are up for reelection (Abramowitz 2010, 163). The framers of the Constitution intended the Senate to be relatively isolated from public opinion (Abramowitz 2010, 163). Its antimajoritarian rules, overrepresentation of small states, and severe malapportionment are another potential obstacle that effectives party governance (Abramowitz 2010, 163). “The nine most populous states include more than half of the entire U.S. population but elect only 18 percent of the members of the Senate. Meanwhile, the twenty least populous states include less than 10 percent of the U.S. population, but elect 40 percent of the members of the Senate” (Abramowitz 2010, 164). Small states are usually disproportionately conservative and Republican and because of that, “Democrats can gain votes in Senate elections nationwide and still be unable to dislodge enough Republicans to gain a Senate majority” (Smith in Kernell and Smith 2007, 269).

There have been many periods in American political history where one or both houses of legislature were in the hands of one party, and the executive power was in the hands of another at both the federal and state level (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 32). In this case of divided party control, the lines between the parties become clearer and party clashes become more frequent (Hetherington and Keefe 2007,

¹Today, members of Senate are elected directly by the people.

32).After the Civil War, the Republican Party was the party to beat, just like the Democratic Party was following the Great Depression. Today however, both parties have equal chances in winning the presidential election and one or both houses of Congress (Black and Black 2007, 247–249). The relatively close partisan division of the U.S. electorate is likely to prevent any party to dominate (Abramowitz 2010, 162–163). “No matter which party controls the White House, midterm elections generally result in gains for the opposition party, and in an era of narrow partisan majorities, those gains may frequently be large enough to result in a shift in party control of one or both chambers of Congress” (Abramowitz 2010, 162–163).Because every election provides both parties a chance to dominate, party conflicts tend to intensify.“When control of national institutions hangs in the balance, no party wants to grant political legitimacy to its opposition by voting for the measures it champions” (Lee 2014).In competitive environment, parties tend to enlarge the differences between them to indicate voters their clear policy positions (Lee 2014). In the case of unified party governance seen in the years following the New Deal, Republicans were forced to bargain and compromise in order to achieve their goals, and Democrats were keener to listen as they did not fear party overturn.

3 POLITICAL PARTIES

A political party, in short, is any organization that sponsors and supports candidates for an office under its label, (Heineman *et al.* 1995, 88; Epstein 1967 in Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 1) or an organized group whose intent is to gain power (Schattschneider 1942 in Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 1).

The United States of America has a two-party system that differs from the systems in most European countries. The method of electing officials in the United States works against smaller parties, and this is true for both House and presidential elections (Heineman *et al.* 1995, 89; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 9). It is not just the plurality system that favors big parties, but also the nature of the election laws, single-member

districts, first-past-the-post election system, and campaign finance laws that enable smaller parties a breakthrough on the ballot list (Heineman *et al.* 1995, 90; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 9 and 57). House members are elected from single-member districts by plurality vote, which means that only the candidate who receives the majority of the vote is elected in each district (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 9). With that being said, not many political candidates are willing to stand against the two dominant parties and not many Americans are willing to throw away their vote to them. “/T/he American political system is hardwired to produce two dominant parties” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 2). Should the American political system resemble a European one, a third party would have a better chance at representation; instead, their proposals are left at the curb. “Major party nominees are automatically given access to the general election ballot. Minor, new party, and independent candidates have to qualify for the ballot by establishing a certain level of support, which is set by state law” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 64).

Almost all candidates run as a member of either the Democratic or Republican Party and this has been the case since the 1850s (Smith *et al.* 2005, 133). The Federalists, which were close to what we now call Republicans, were led by Alexander Hamilton and they “favored a strong central government with power rooted in the industrial north” (Smith *et al.* 2005, 133). Their opponents were the Democratic Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson (Smith *et al.* 2005, 133). They represented the farmers, craftspeople and shopkeepers and their rights against the aristocratic rule (Smith *et al.* 2005, 133). Although history recalls quite a few parties such as the Whigs, Know-Nothings, Barnburners, Softshells, Hunkers, and Free Soilers, they were never as successful as the two dominant parties, who are still in control today (Smith *et al.* 2005, 133).

American parties are focused on winning the elections above all else and, because of that, one would assume they are motivated to stay moderate and inclusive to gather as much support as possible, in order to achieve their goals (Abramowitz 2013; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 32). In the past, American parties have had strong incentives to be moderate and inclusive in an attempt to knit together as large a coalition as possible. This was especially true on the national level, since the pressure is bigger there, but with parties being consistently more distinct and congressional elections becoming less competitive, parties have become notably

more ideological and partisan than perhaps thirty or even fifty years ago (Abramowitz 2013; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 32). “Modern legislators look to their party first and to their district second. The continuation of these trends to the present day is what has created modern legislative gridlock, with each party pleasing its activists and neither side much interested in voters” (Masket 2009, 93).

Since neither party is strong enough to prevail, parties have to be on constant look out for new constituencies, and they have their chance every time new social and economic conditions emerge (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 9). When it does emerge, parties must make a decision and adopt a clear position. The combination of party action and voters’ reactions to the action determines “the direction and amount of partisan change that ultimately comes to pass” (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 18). How parties respond, or do not respond, to these conditions determines the future of the party. It may open the door for a whole new group of voters and it may also lose some of their old members. No matter the consequence, parties have to make these leaps of faith in order to stay one-step in front of their opponents. Let us not forget how the Democratic Party lost their members to the Republican camp when they welcomed the African American constituents in the 1960s and 1970s, or how the Republican Party lost their moderates when the party took a strong antiabortion and anti-gay stand (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 10). In words of George Herbert: “You must lose a fly to catch a trout.” With welcoming African American constituencies in 1960s and in the 1970s, the Democratic Party was rewarded with one of the most loyal group of voters to this day.

3.1 THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties play a significant role, not just in bringing the government closer to the citizens, but also in recruiting new members previously voted for by the people and, in return, working for the people who elect them. Besides that, political parties also play important role in organizing opposition, moderating political conflict, “organizing the machinery of government, promoting political consensus and legitimacy, and bridging the separation of powers” (Sorauf in Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 26). Not all candidates are recruited by one of the dominant parties and, even

if they are, this does not assure them a win. But, in an environment dominated by two parties, sponsorship can be a huge advantage. Two main characteristics in the strategy of American parties are compromising and bargaining between private organizations and parties (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 4). “The legitimacy of government itself depends in part on the capacity of the parties to represent diverse interests and to integrate the claims of competing groups into a broad program of public policy. Their ability to do so is certain to bear on their electoral success” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 5).

The main focus of a political party is to recruit candidates, to do whatever it takes to get them in the office, and to take control of the government (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 5). When it comes to parties, the politicians’ chase is far more important than the actual prey, and they care more about winning the election than about the idea of a responsible party government (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 7). Controlling the government though is easier said than done. In the case of divided party control, (that we have seen a lot of throughout American political history) it is hard to identify the culprit for this failure. Is it a president that did not accomplish what he promised in an election campaign, or is it Congress’ fault for vetoing his proposals? And even if everything sets into place, and the government is party unified, a party might still encounter a problem of party disloyalty or a thin margin of seats, which enables it to govern effectively (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 6).

One of the parties’ main jobs is to interpret complicated political processes to the masses, but since the majority of Americans still believe that the parties actually do a better job in complicating and confusing issues than to clarify them, they do not seem to do their job properly (Fiorina *et al.* 2005; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 12). In the past, many voters did not see the difference between the two dominant parties, but since then, it is clear, that the differences can no longer be ignored. Evidence that this is indeed the case is seen in a drop of split-ticket voting and the rise of a partisan sorting among voters in the last 50 years. “The rule is that every administration party faces a balancing act in representing its multiple interests and in shaping public policy; how well anyone succeeds in this balancing effort determines whether a party can keep its coalition intact or not” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 57).

3.2 NOMINATION PROCESS

Political parties stand for different and distinct principles (more so today than in the past) and, by doing so, they present voters with a clear choice. But before parties can control the political environment of the country, they first have to be elected. In order to win elections, parties must first assemble a winning electoral coalition. However, intraparty conflicts can occur. Once a party gains power and enacts new policies, it is almost immediately challenged and critiqued by the other party whose goal is to discredit the other party and gain power for themselves. This kind of debate and disagreement between the parties is "central to the vigorous public dialogue" and it is exactly what a healthy representative democracy requires (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 2). Voters vote for the principles (party) they believe in and, by doing so, they show in what direction they want their country to go.

The oldest device for making nominations in the United States is the caucus (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 67). Through this informal meeting of political leaders candidates, strategies, and policies are decided and one true candidate is chosen to represent the party (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 67). Everyone elected in Congress is automatically a member of their party's caucus (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 157). The party convention emerged as an alternative to legislative caucus and, with the rise of the convention method, they also raised the importance of party organizations (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 68). Both the caucus and the party convention were highly criticized, and the direct primary was introduced as a new alternative. The direct primary shifts control of nominations from the party to the voters, and from the party organizations to the state, however, this tool is not praised among party organizations (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 69).

Lately, there have been numerous attempts to alter the rules of participation in order to make it easier for moderates to win nominations (Barber and McCarty 2015, 29). The idea is to move from closed to open primaries, in order to enable the participation of independents, or go even further with nonpartisan "top-two" primary, as was the case in California (Barber and McCarty 2015, 29). All of these changes are made in order to reduce the recent spread of political polarization, although it was never proven that changes of primary type have anything to do with increased polarization (Barber and McCarty 2015, 29).

Among those who submit their candidacy, the ones who get the support from their party are the most successful. Because of that, candidates frequently seek their party's nomination, and they usually become serious candidates in the general election (Aldrich 1995, 14–27). When it comes to ideology, partisan candidates seem to have the best luck. Choosing more partisan candidates may reduce the chances for swapping parties, and it ameliorates party loyalty. Informal party organizations will usually support a candidate willing to enact a certain ideological agenda, favored by the organization (Masket 2009, 52). Once in office, candidates have two choices: both obey and do what they were elected to do, or slide down the ideological ladder to get closer to the median voter, who can keep them in office in the long run. Candidates are known to stray from the positions of their national party in order to appeal to their state's constituency (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 241). If they choose to appeal to the middle instead of their organizations, they risk being de-nominated or recalled, which is why most of the officeholders, at least at the beginning of their careers, choose to comply (Masket 2009, 53 and 129; Theriault 2008, 4). Parties today would rather risk losing median voters in their districts and put their political careers on the line than risk offending their party. This kind of behavior reinforces the power of legislative parties, their ideological preferences, and amplifies political polarization.

Although the days of party bosses selecting party's nominees behind closed doors are long gone, today's practice is still similar. Once the party leaders agree upon a candidate, they publicly endorse him, which in response raises public support for the candidate and his or her fund-raising power increases accordingly (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 230–231). Usually the party's choice wins, despite how the public or the media feel about the other presidential candidates (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 231). Party affiliation can be helpful in the early stages of campaigning, but once in office it is every man for himself. Most of the campaigning today is made by the candidates themselves, but the road to victory comes with huge expenses, massive personnel, and help from the media. For House members, campaigning never stops. Contrary to the Senate's six-year term, House members have only two years in office, and they have to make it count in order to stay there. However, luck is on their side as around 90 percent of House members are incumbents.

3.3 ELECTIONS

“One-party areas remove some of the mystery that surrounds American elections. Each major party owes something to them, counts on them, and is not often disappointed” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 59).

When it comes to elections, states have the authority to determine the time, the place and the manner of holding elections (Smith *et al.* 2005, 106).

What ballots look like, what voters must do to indicate their preferences, and how election officials tally those preferences differs enormously from state to state. Talk about a difference that can make a difference. Eliminate the butterfly ballot and the hanging chads in a handful of Florida counties and President Al Gore would have had to deal with the recession and 9/11 (Kettl in Smith *et al.* 2005, 107).

It seems that presidential elections have become extremely predictable in the last couple of terms, and the congressional elections even more so. Nowadays, most of the states are set on one party or another, and there is no use in trying to changing voters' mind by campaigning in a 'hostile' environment. By examining the average margin of victory state by state, we can predict with certainty which states are safe and which states are battlegrounds. It is safe to say that Democrats dominate the Northeast and the Pacific Coast, while Republicans are more set on the South, the Mountains, and the Plains, while the Midwest is up for grabs (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 47; Black and Black 2002; Black and Black 2007, 1). This Electoral College map is by no means set in stone and a great deal of competitive variation still exists under the surface (Fiorina *et al.* 2005; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 47). The safest bet for both Republicans and Democrats would be to present policies that are more moderate in order to appeal to the swing states. Why they choose not to be more central is a mystery to many students of political polarization.

Starting in the 1990s, the congressional elections had become extremely predictable, with only about 20 to 25 percent marginal outcomes (Abramowitz 2013; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 50). Since then, there have been less marginal outcomes and drastically more predictable election outcomes. “Both parties thrive on safe-district politics and in most elections fewer than a dozen House seats switch party hands” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 50). Incumbency is also a huge factor in limiting turnover of congressional seats (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 50). It is not unusual

that a district is won by a vote of 60 percent or more, and both parties flourish in the districts in which the party's candidate faces no opposition (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 144). Congressional district lines are drawn to create as many safe districts as possible, and candidates in those districts have no pressure to stay moderate. "Although congressional districts are now generally drawn to protect incumbents of both parties, which has often reduced the size of recent midterm losses for the president's party, very few events are as predictable in American elections or as dispiriting for administrations as the chilly midterm verdict of the voters" (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 6).

3.4 INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE

When it comes to the election of Congress members, incumbency and party affiliation are the two most prominent factors; two other prominent factors are the economic performance and the popularity of the president (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 144). Incumbents have a great advantage in elections. They have a strong staff, a recognizable name, and they usually have substantial campaign funds compared to their challengers (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 132; Black and Black 2002). With a reelection rate around 90 percent or higher, incumbents should not be nervous on Election Day (Masket 2009, 23). While in office, they built up their visibility and they "are able to survive even while the nature of presidential outcomes in their district is changing" (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 21). Moreover, when it comes to keeping a job, no other position is more desirable as one of a congressman.

Incumbents contribute greatly to the growing polarization in American politics as they have little incentive to appeal to the middle voter. The Senate seems to be headed in the same predictable direction as the House with one exception: Senate races are often close, but not close enough to predict a party winner (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 52). The state-level elections are much more competitive, which are reflected in the growing number of divided state governments (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 54). This suggests quite a different picture than what is painted at the national level. Even the strongest 'red' states have experienced some competition at the state level, with more than one state leaning democratic at the state level, but in the recent

years, even this case appears more of an anomaly than an example (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 54–55).

The replacement of Southern Democrats with Republicans is a great example of how frustrating incumbency really is. Before the South was ‘solid red,’ it was dominated by Southern Democrats for decades. There were no Southern Republicans in office at that time and even though Southern Democrats were more like Republicans in their core, no one was willing to switch sides at the risk of losing their place in Congress. It took decades of open seat battles, retirements, and even deaths of Southern Democrats for Republicans to finally make a breakthrough.

3.5 RED VERSUS BLUE DIVIDE

“Congress is an institution of individuals, and when the number of bridge builders in it declines, so does the number of bridges that are built” (Brownstein 2007, 214).

The Democratic Republican party, preferred by Thomas Jefferson, dominated politics throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and it became so widespread that it eventually split into fractions, “with Northern and Southern Democrats arguing over the expansion of slavery” (Smith *et al.* 2005, 134). Their feud opened the doors for a new major party, the Republican Party, formed in 1854 (Smith *et al.* 2005, 134). The GOP (Grand Old Party), which is another name for the Republicans, was a strong opponent of slavery and they quickly picked up the pace of their antagonists. After the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, they stayed the dominant force in the White House for the next couple of decades (Smith *et al.* 2005, 134). Their antislavery stance was not popular in the South and, because of that, they were practically nonexistent there until the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s. The Republican Party was a northern enterprise and, with control of the biggest region in the nation, they could easily write off the South (Black and Black 2007, 33). Keeping the North united while attacking the South seemed to be a great strategy, put forward by Lincoln, and it held up for seventy years (Black and Black 2007, 33). The Great Depression took a toll on the Republican Party and they were forced to give way to the Democrats’ New Deal, who then dominated politics for the next 30 years (Smith

et al. 2005, 134; Black and Black 2007, 33). After that, both parties enjoyed both success and failure at the congressional and state level.

Political parties in the U.S. today are best described as intraparty homogenous, which means the differences within the party are small; and interparty heterogenic, which means members of one party strongly differ from the members of the other party (Abramowitz 2013; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 155). At their core, parties are selfish. Their sole reward is winning the office and keeping it. In order to do so, representatives must accommodate the needs of their constituencies, follow the path designed by their own party, and follow their policy preferences (Mayhew 2008, 21). If they successfully navigate through this, they have a prosperous career at the end of the tunnel.

4 VOTERS

“A nation such as the United States is far too large and it is far too complex for most citizens to become actively involved in its decision-making processes. But this fact does not rule out popular control over government” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 220).

When choosing a party, voters are usually looking to sort out which party best represents their concerns and which one does not (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 30). If the parties would have relatively similar positions, like in the 1970s, choosing between the two would be a challenging task. Today, parties have clear and opposing policies, which makes it easy for voters to choose a side. So if a voter has a strong opinion on topics such as the war in Iraq, abortion, tax cuts, and government involvement, then there will be no difficulty trying to fit into one of the parties.

The reality is that the typical American voter does not know much about politics, nor is he or she interested enough to find out. It is safe to say that at least one third of Americans do not know the name of their vice president and, when it comes to local politicians, the knowledge is even scarcer. The elderly are usually the ones who vote the most and are high on the persuasion list of both parties in Election years. Parties use all sorts of instruments to encourage them to vote, for example providing prescription drugs through Medicare (Smith *et al.* 2005, 154). It is quite the opposite with young voters, who cast very few votes. Over the decades, voters have sorted themselves into camps that best defend their values. Married white men with children, churchgoers, big business, the better educated, the rich, and those living in suburban or rural communities feel more at home in the Republican Party, while urban working class, the poor, single, secular, gay, nonwhite voters living in racial and ethnically diverse urban cities, are best fit into the Democratic Party (Brownstein 2007, 197–198; Abramowitz 2013; Smith *et al.* 2005, 135). It is important to emphasize that there are still millions of people who do differ from these stereotypes and choose to vote for the unpredicted side.

Race and religion also play important role and it was race that alienated the South from the Democratic Party and drove them into the open hands of the GOP. Party conflict in Congress is definitely higher today than generations ago. Democrats support “labor-endorsed legislation, measures to provide for governmental regulation of business, social welfare bills of great variety, civil rights legislation, federal aid to education, and limitations on defense expenditures,” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 243) while the Republicans favor “business over labor, social welfare programs of more modest proportions, private action rather than government involvement, state rather than federal responsibility for domestic programs, the interests of higher-income groups over those of lower income groups, and a greater emphasis on national defense” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 243). The parties are both heading to their own end of the liberal-conservative spectrum.

Minorities also play a huge role, especially when they disproportionately vote democratic. This can present a problem for the Republican Party, since immigration in America is increasing every day. However, it is still the white population that casts most of the votes, while the Latinos, who are at one time the fastest growing ethnic group in America, cast only about thirty percent of the votes (Hetherington and Keefe

2007, 38). But no matter the current condition, parties must continue to look ahead. In George W. Bush's presidency, the Republicans made some gains in both Latino and African American communities with policies that appeal to these specific groups. If they continue to invite both of these racial and ethnic groups with open hands, Democrats could suffer significant losses in their corner. Until then however, both of these groups are strongly set in the liberal end of the scale. How is it then that Republicans are doing so well in the elections? Hetherington and Keefe (2007, 192–193) suggest that the reason is that Republican voters are more loyal to their candidates, so they are more likely to vote. Income also plays a significant role in determining whether voters will choose one party or another. While the African American population is loyally voting for the Democratic Party no matter the gender, income, or religion, the same cannot be said for other minorities, especially Latinos. With rising income also comes rising support for the party of the wealthy.

In urban districts in which there are 20 percent or more non-whites, Democratic chances to gain support increase dramatically. While rural areas are more likely to vote conservative, the South has become increasingly urbanized and districts with more than 20 percent of non-whites now represent almost 50 percent of the Southern districts (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 95). Taking lower income into account, the future of the Southern Republican stronghold is no longer looking bright. Immigration changed the electoral map decades ago and it is set to change it again. While most of the immigrants in the 1960s and before that were white Europeans, today's immigrants are predominately racially and/or ethnically distinct from the white majority of American population (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 60–61). While most new immigrants settle around their social equals in the urban areas, whites seem to move away from it, which produces so called geographical segregation by race and ethnicity resulting in diminishing heterogeneous communities in which moderate stances would be more likely to thrive (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 62; Abramowitz 2013, 98–99). With a changing society, there also comes a change in electoral bases, mostly in favor of the Democratic Party. But the Democrats have to wait before putting on a party hat. Most new immigrants are children, under voting age, or are poor, uneducated, undocumented aliens, which makes them impossible or at least highly unlikely to vote.

Both parties still have to appeal to a wide range of audiences and, in order to do so, they need to present more moderate and central policies. But this is usually a double-edged sword as it can also alienate most of the partisan voters in the ranks by being too sympathetic to the other side. Nowadays, candidates are much more concerned about their own preferences and the preferences of their party instead of their districts' voters. Congressional district lines are carved in a way to create either solidly liberal or solidly conservative districts, making them safe for the preferred party. Ideologically extreme candidates have little to worry about on Election Day, and therefore have no pressure to stay moderate.

“Politicians must perform a neat trick of motivating the true believers within party ranks to support their candidacy during a primary election without pinning themselves down so much that they do not appeal to members of the other party and independents during the general election” (Smith *et al.* 2005, 154). Political parties have a better chance at winning if their base is larger than the base of their opponents. To make sure their crowd of supporters is bigger, they must always be on the lookout for new members. Incorporating new members can be risky and can drive away other members. The more the party dips into a minority, the bigger risks it has to take to climb back on top (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 6). In the past few decades, parties have chosen to reinforce their core supporters rather than extend their arms to the middle.

Party identification is usually transferred from parents to their children although it can be subject to change. Once a voter chooses a party it is, in most cases, set for life. “Because ordinary Americans use partisan cues, public opinion typically follows elite opinion” (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 187). Whatever decisions are made by party leaders, the partisans are likely to follow, even if they sympathize with the other side on the specific issue (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 187). Party identification is important in shaping the opinions of its followers and party elites make sure their side is always seen in the best light possible, and most importantly, in a better light than their opponents.

Party affiliation is the most important single variable in predicting how members will respond to questions that come before them. Indeed, the key fact to be known about any member is the party to which he or she belongs – it influences the choice of friends; group memberships; relations with lobbies, other members, and the leadership; and, most important, policy orientations (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 149).

Most Americans are suspicious of Congress members and polls show that even though most voters appreciate the role of Congress as an institution, they do not believe they are as well represented as they should be (Smith in Kernell and Smith 2007, 255). In 2013, only one in six Americans approved of the job of Congress; sadly, this approval rate was actually a step up from 2014's rate of 10 percent (Barber and McCarty 2015, 19). Among all three branches of government, the legislative branch is always the least popular among voters. Because members of Congress are always involved in compromising and deal making, and are more open to the media and the public than the other two branches, the legislative process is easy to dislike (Smith in Kernell and Smith 2007, 256). Media and the public are drawn to scandal, and there seems to be a lot of them throughout the years, which only adds to the frustrations and disapproval of the public (Smith in Kernell and Smith 2007, 256).

Today two out of three citizens are sorted to one party or another. It is interesting that, while being frustrated with both sides, there is no movement toward establishing a strong third option. There were attempts of running as a third party candidate made by Ross Perot in 1992 (Smith *et al.* 2005, 157; Abramowitz 2013). His party, the Reform Party was successful with the first attempt, but unfortunately self-destructed before it could show any real progress. Another attempt was made by Ralph Nader, but again he did not come close to the dominant parties, and was viewed more as an annoyance, by stealing votes from the main parties, than a competitive player. Third parties have had better luck within a state or legislative district, but even here they are not a match for the Democrats or Republicans and we can almost count all elected independents on one hand.

5 THE SOUTH VERSUS THE NORTH

“The mobilization of blacks as committed Democrats and the Republicans’ permanent need to secure sizable white majorities lie at the heart of the two-party battle in southern politics” (Black and Black 2002, 22–23).

The Republican Party was established in 1850s and up until the 1960s, most of its supporters came from Northeast and upper Midwest (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 17; Black and Black 2002). Contrary to the Democratic Party, the GOP had supporters from both the urban and rural areas, at least in Northeast and Midwest (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 17). “As populations, affluence, and suburbs grew in the South and the Mountain West, the party found a new base in these areas among those who did not see a great need for government” (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 17). Today, the South is solid Republican, whereas the Northeast grew to a Democratic stronghold. Together with displeased farmers and mistreated laborers, Democrats added minorities and the less affluent urban residents to the mix, while the GOP had shifted their base to rural areas, the suburbs, and the areas of the Sunbelt where they seem to better appeal to free market and limited government defenders (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 20; Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007). This geographical shift was first put forward by presidential candidates looking for a wider audience willing to vote them into the White house, with congressional parties moving right behind. The process of transition did not come without consequences with the division of government occurring more now than ever before (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 21).

In the first 50 years of twentieth century, white Republicans had no seats in either the Senate or the House of Representatives. It was not until the 1970s that a Republican was able to seriously challenge his Democratic opponent in the South. Inexperienced in that region, Republicans had a hard time of winning and of holding onto their success for a longer period of time, mainly because the Democrats had a long-lasting tradition in this region, and because they were conservative themselves. Republicans had their breakthrough in the presidential elections in 1984 and again in 1988, carrying most of Southern congressional districts for the first time in history (Black

and Black 2002, 202). Offering lower tax rates, a stronger military force, and reduced government spending, President Reagan appealed to most Southern whites and he “successfully executed the Republican southern strategy of mobilizing landslide white support” (Black and Black 2002, 211). Democrat turned Republican; Reagan had an upper hand in Southern states, where a lot of whites were still struggling to abandon their ancestors’ party. The South has long been a battleground between the whites and African Americans, and was the most important partisan cleavage in the country (Black and Black 2002, 244). The Republican takeover of the South was a product of “Reagan realignment, congressional redistricting, Democratic vulnerability during the early Clinton presidency, and far more aggressive Republican efforts to fund and promote serious candidates than in the past” (Black and Black 2002, 330). Ronald Reagan’s efforts helped displace the Democratic Party in the South. His realignment of white conservatives made the GOP competitive in every Southern state (Black and Black 2002, 36). “The Republican advance among Southern whites is the most spectacular example of partisan realignment in modern American history” (Black and Black 2007, 35–36).

In order to keep and protect their new conquest, Republicans had to “take advantage of landslide presidential Republicanism, protect their own incumbents, effectively target the overwhelmingly white districts, and then use safe-seat Republican incumbency to turn the tables and discourage Democratic challenges” (Black and Black 2002, 365). Southern Republicans today constitute the majority of all the Republican representatives in the House and the Senate (Black and Black 2002, 3). However, they will never hold the majority of the region’s seats the same way the Democratic South used to (Black and Black 2002, 3). Economy expansion, population growth, obvious racial divisions, and the rise of the middle and upper-middle classes have played a huge role in transforming the South (Black and Black 2002, 4–5).

6PARTISANSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

“Not long ago, partisanship was a tool with which one accomplished a policy agenda. Now it’s a mechanism whereby one destroys the opponent, embarrasses his family and puts him in jail at the end of the day” (Clines in Stonecash et al. 2003, 1).

There was never any love lost between the two dominant parties in the United States, but since the 2000s, it is even more apparent that the two are unable to work together. Bitter congressional debates, ethnical charges, countercharges, rhetorical attacks, procedural delays, governmental shutdown, and finally the impeachment of President Clinton were all tools to slow down the opposing party’s agenda (Stonecash et al. 2003, 1). Every time legislative ‘moderation’ declines, deadlocks between the Congress and the President rise (Binder 2014). With rising party polarization also increases the frequency of legislative deadlock (Binder 2014). Ideological members of political parties make the lawmaking process more difficult and can even lead to policy stalemate (Theriault 2008, 8). “According to the DW-NOMINATE scores, the first decade of the twentieth century was the most polarized in post-Reconstruction American politics” (Theriault 2008, 23). The first signs of party polarization are dated back to the end of eighteenth and nineteenth century, lowering in the middle third of the twentieth century, and reaching its height in the 1970s and increasing ever since (Barber and McCarty 2015, 21; Theriault 2008, 30). While incumbents have become increasingly more extreme, they can never measure the ideological extremity of their replacements (Theriault 2008, 38). Member replacement does not occur over night, it takes decades for the real political polarization to occur. Around one-third of all party polarization is a result of gradual polarization of incumbents (Theriault 2008, 42).

The rise of party cohesion in Congress began in the 1970s with party realignment in the South (Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007, 523). Even though this process contributed to the growing ideological homogeneity of both parties, strong links between ideology and party identification outside the South suggest that there is a lot more to this story than just Southern realignment (Jacobson in Kernell and Smith

2007, 524). But the parties do not hold the sole blame for growing polarization. Over the years, voters have become increasingly well sorted as well with the rise of party loyalty and lesser ticket splitting (Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007, 526). Some would disagree. Evidence suggests that voters today are sorting themselves based on policy positions of their party and “position switching is more common than party switching” (Barber and McCarty 2015, 25). “Since voters seem to be responding to the positions of their party leaders, the causal arrow seems to run from elite polarization to partisan sorting. Whether partisan sorting has an additional feedback effect on elite polarization is less clear” (McCarty 2014). So who is really behind the polarization wheel: political parties or voters? Fiorina would suggest the first one, but one thing is for sure: parties always seek to win the election and it would be extremely unwise to alienate themselves from voters by choosing the side nobody is ready to defend. Republican Senator Barry Goldwater, who opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, met a huge crowd of supporters among the white Southern conservatives and, since the South is now a Republican stronghold, the choice to place the party’s opinion on the right end of the ideological scale was obviously the correct one. Democrats on the other hand made a decision to defend a woman’s right to abortion, a hot topic for many Americans. By doing so, they appealed not only to women who are known Democratic supporters, but also met the needs of well-educated and affluent voters who would otherwise most likely vote Republican. Looking at this perspective, it is not easy to blame polarization entirely on the parties while defending the voters as being innocent bystanders caught in the elite’s struggle for power. The relationship between the masses and the elites is therefore best described as interactive. Still, many Americans see themselves as moderates and are placing themselves in the middle of the ideological spectrum. That and the fact that most Americans are not trustworthy of their legislative power, one can assume that voters are not very keen of all the fights on Capitol Hill.

The more divergent the parties’ modal ideological positions, the more reason the remaining centrist voters have to welcome the moderating effect of divided government. But under divided government, the more divergent the parties, the more rancorous the conflict between the president and Congress, and rancorous political conflict is welcomed by almost no one (Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007, 535).

Party voting is increasing in American politics. The Democratic Party is voting together and against the Republican Party, while the moderates are slowly vanishing.

It is important to emphasize that while moderates are clearly vanishing in the Congress or even in the executive branch, the same cannot be said for the mass public. “While defining whether voters are entirely polarized is a matter of dispute it is clear that voters are steadily moving in the direction of being more divided about economic issues and the role of government in affecting social issues” (Brewer and Stonecash 2009, 14). Over the decades voters have not become more polarized but rather better sorted. Although both parties are to blame for growing polarization, the evidence shows that changing behavior of the parties is mostly driven by changes in the positioning of the Republican Party, and it has affected both the Southern and Non-Southern members (Barber and McCarty 2015, 21). The extent of how unwilling the representatives were to work with each other became even more apparent after the presidential election in 2004. A narrow victory put Bush in the White house yet again, and Democrats made no effort to hide their disappointment. To many political observers, this was a strong indicator of how serious the problem of polarization became and neither side was making an effort to play polite. The sharp divisions observed in the 2004 presidential election were a byproduct of growing ideological distance between the two and has made bipartisan cooperation and compromise much more difficult (Abramowitz 2010, 2). This decade’s long trend was by no means developed over night and it does not appear to be fading away anytime soon.

6.1 VOTER’S REALIGNMENT AND CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING

We may be stunned at the fact that Democrats and Republicans keep away from each other, but that seems to be a pattern followed not just by the Representatives, but also the public. Examining the migration patterns of the last few decades clearly shows the ideological realignment of voters. Affluent and educated Americans align their lifestyle preferences with their political attitudes (Abramowitz 2010, 10). What this does is create congressional districts and states dominated by one party and consequently diminishes politically competitive ones. This kind of partisan composition makes it easier for a candidate of the dominant party to win, and since it is not likely that a rival from an opposite party would even try to campaign in hostile territory, it creates conditions for an easy win. With an increasing number of solid states, it comes down to the few swing states that need to be convinced and the

strong ones to reinforce their views to win a presidential election. People's voting patterns can be easily predicted with the use of modern technology and both parties can, with most certainty, predict the likely winner. Congressional redistricting plans are designed to make districts safe for parties and winning the primary is the same as winning the elections (Black and Black 2007, 250; Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 12). Although redistricting contributed to polarization, there is no evidence that it has had anything to do with the decline in competitive elections for the House of Representatives (Theriault 2008, 4; Abramowitz 2010, 143; Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 219). If this was the case, there is no explanation for growing polarization in the Senate, which is not an issue of changing district maps (Abramowitz 2010, 142–143).

*P*olarization relates more to the difference in how Republicans and Democrats represent moderate districts than the increase in the number of extreme partisan districts. Therefore, an attempt to undo partisan gerrymandering with moderate, competitive districts still leads to a polarized legislature, due to the difference between rather than within the parties (Barber and McCarty 2015, 27–28).

The main culprit for growing ideological polarization therefore seems to lie somewhere else. Also “district lines cannot be responsible for more polarized members if the same district lines at one point elected moderate members” (Theriault 2008, 76). However, the most obvious party polarization occurred in the 1970s, which is exactly a decade after the Supreme Court mandated regular line drawings. Theriault (2008, 65) also points out that, since the 1970s, technology has advanced, thus making the mapping of congressional lines more precise and more beneficiary to the selected party.

While the partisan polarization in the Senate is increasing, so are the manners in which members attempt to slow down the legislative process. Holds and filibusters make the legislative process extremely difficult (Theriault 2008, 54). What it comes down to, is a vicious cycle between voters, institutional change, and party polarization. Institutions, such as the presidential veto and Senate filibuster, contribute to the modern gridlock and allow polarization to impede the policy making process (Barber and McCarty 2015, 37). As long as the majority party is not big enough to meet the supermajority requirements, a gridlock can occur in the unified government as well (Barber and McCarty 2015, 38). Senate filibusters, or even the threat of one, are one of the most lethal weapons in the hands of the Senate

members and it is no surprise that many have tried to reform it (Barber and McCarty 2015, 38).

6.2 MEASURING THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION

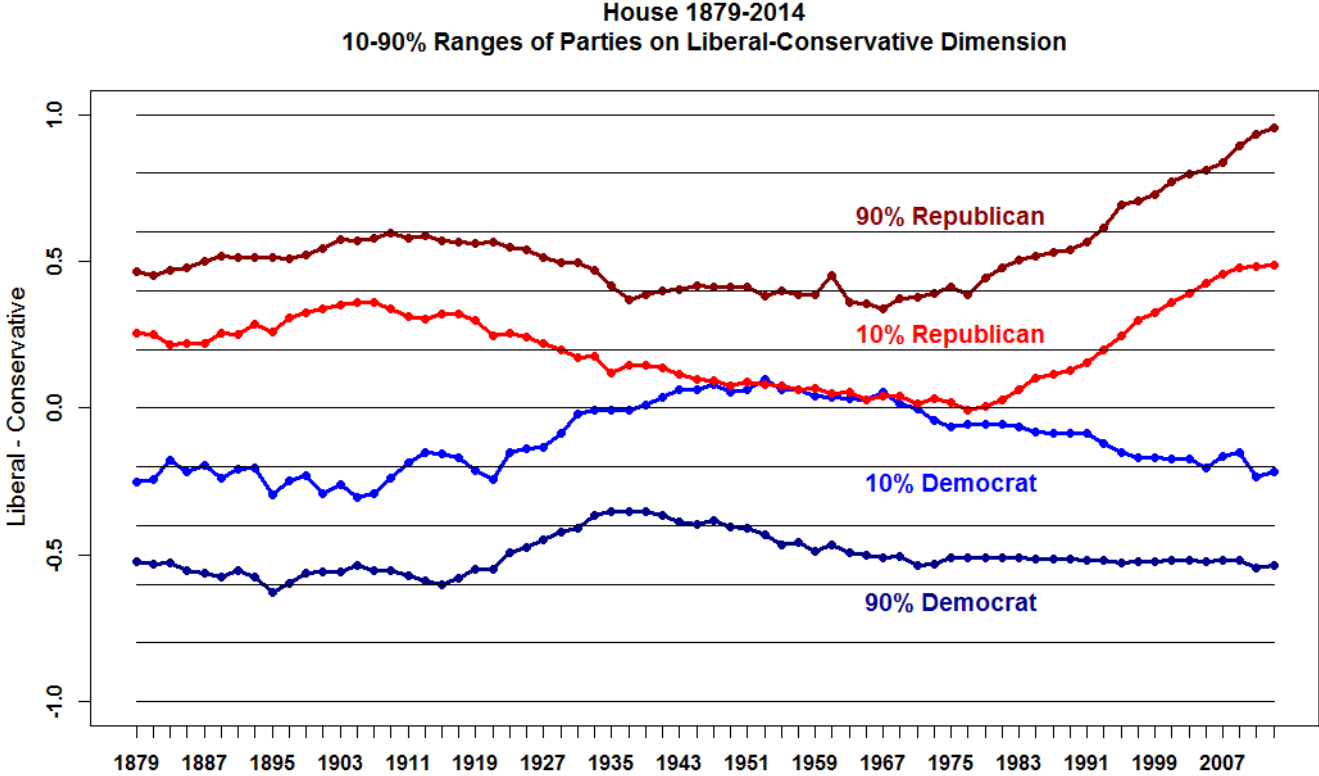
There is a wide range of issues that members of the opposing parties disagree about and these seem to increase with every year. Still on the top of the list are: tax issues, scope of government intervention, abortion rights, gun control, immigration, and, as of lately, gay rights. Comparison of roll call votes over the decades tracks party division rate, which can help us to observe party unity and measure party polarization over the years. Party loyalty scores were low in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but were substantially higher in the 1980s and 1990s, and are even higher today (Stonecashet *al.*2003, 7).

Political ideology can be measured using DW-NOMINATE scores, which are calculated from all non-unanimous roll-call votes cast in any Congress since the 80th Congress. “Each member’s pattern of roll-call votes locates him or her on a liberal-conservative dimension ranging from -1.0 (most liberal) to 1.0 (most conservative), allowing /researchers/ to compare the distribution of positions along the dimensions taken by Democrats and Republicans in different Congresses” (Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007, 521). DW-NOMINATE scores help determine the gap between the parties, which is a clear indicator of party polarization and at the same time serves as a good criterion of party loyalty (Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007, 522). But, voting in Congress is mainly one-dimensional, which means that regional divisions within the parties are becoming the primary focus of conflict or these divisions disappear altogether (Poole 2008, 5). This regional division caused the Civil War in the 1850s, re-emerged again in 1937, and lasted until the 1980s; since then however, American politics is purely one-dimensional with increasing polarization while the public opinion remains multi-dimensional (McCarty 2014; Poole 2008, 5). More than 90 percent of roll-call votes in the 113th Congress are politically ideological (Desilver 2014). With ideological and geographical sorting, the moderates of both parties are vanishing. Rather than aligning with a party that best represents one’s beliefs, voters today seem to change issue positions to match that of their party. Congress’ inability to

produce legislation, delays in appropriating funds, slow handling of executive and judicial appointments, and the decline in the quality of legislative deliberation are all by-products of the increasing party polarization.

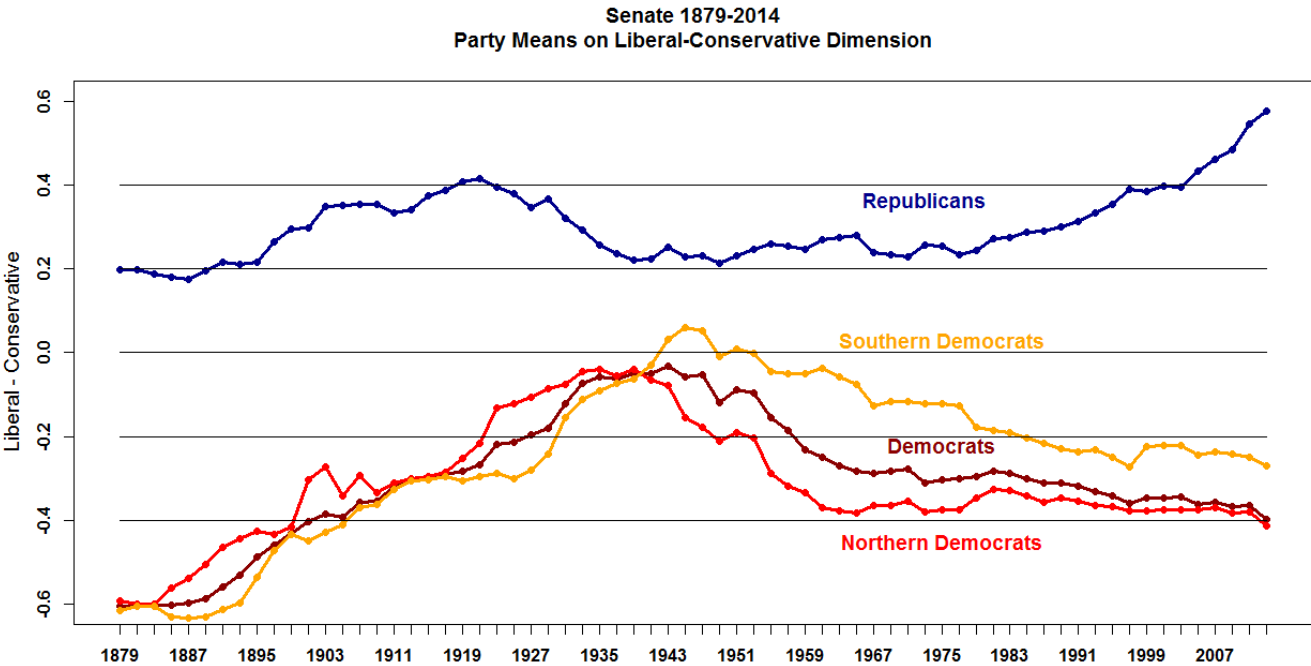
“The proportion of partisan roll call votes and party loyalty on these votes have been increasing in both houses of Congress since the 1970s, reflecting growing ideological polarization of the congressional parties” (Jacobson in Kernell and Smith 2007, 519). These graphs below represent a steady and long-standing separation of the two dominant parties in Congress. It can be observed that ideological polarization accelerated in the last forty years and, while both of the parties seem to withdraw to their end of ideological extreme, Republicans seem to move a little further than Democrats do. With no one occupying the middle, both parties seem to be heading to their own end of the liberal-conservative frontier, becoming more ideologically homogenous and more distant from one another. With this trend, bipartisan agreements are less likely to happen in the future as well. Elites are far more polarized than the public and one of the most significant reasons for this division seems to be immigration and income inequality (Poole 2008, 40).

Graph 6.1: Parties on liberal-conservative dimension (House of Representatives: 1879-2014)



Source: The Polarization of the Congressional Parties (2015).

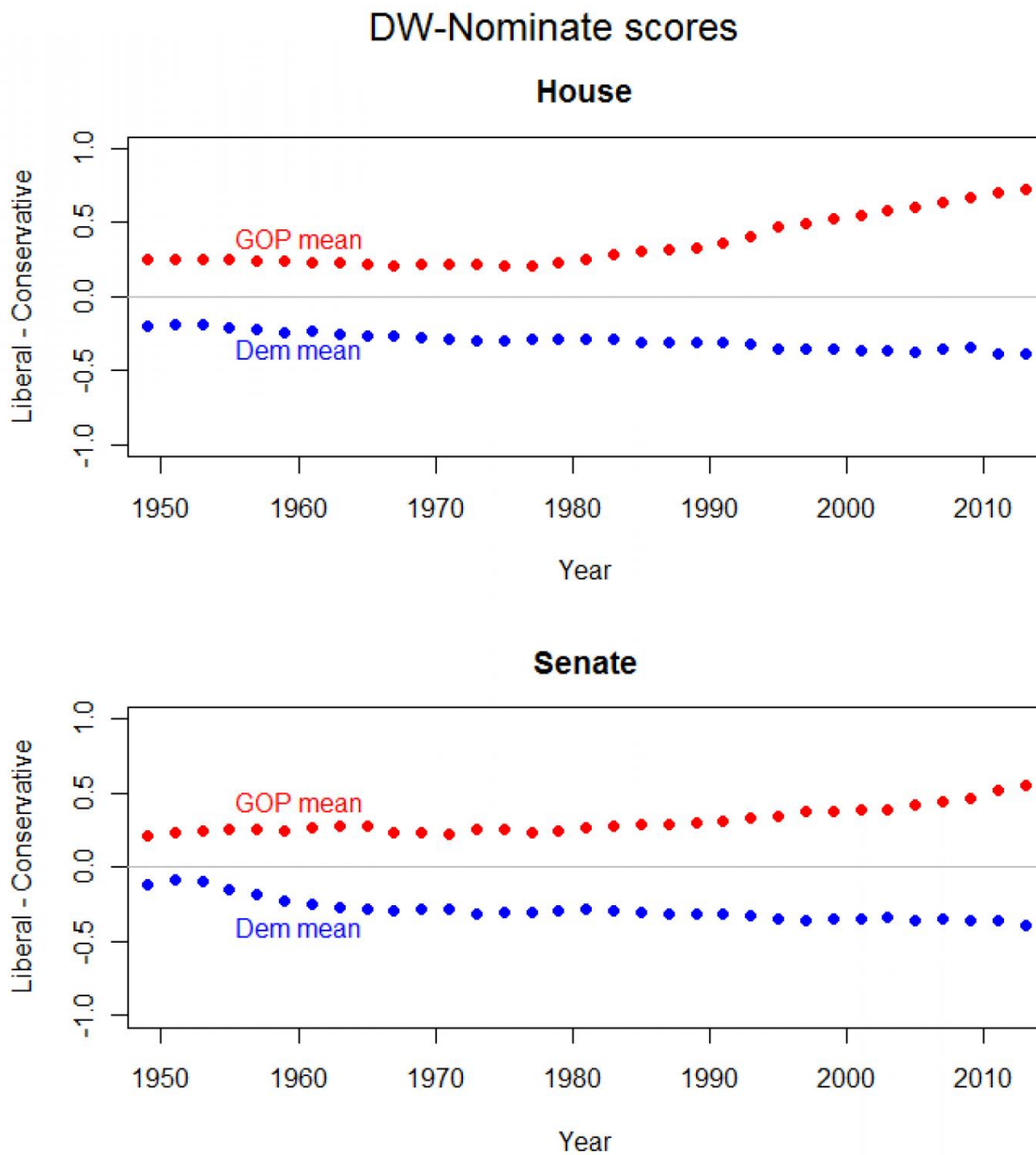
Graph 6.2: Parties on liberal-conservative dimension (Senate: 1979-2014)



Polarized America / voteview.com

Source: The Polarization of the Congressional Parties (2015).

Graph 6.3: DW-NOMINATE scores for Congress (1945-2015)



Source: Voteview.com. 2014. The Polarization of the Congressional Parties. Retrieved from: http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp.

Source: The Polarization of the Congressional Parties (2015).

This era of hyper-partisanship encourages confrontation over compromise, and ideology over pragmatism, and produces greater party unity and intense conflicts between them (Brownstein 2007, 12–13). Breaking that cycle “will require elected

officials – almost certainly beginning with a future president – to take a leap of faith that a constituency for reasonable compromise still exists in America” (Brownstein 2007, 23).

The growing partisan polarization has affected everything from voter turnout and the composition of the electorate, to campaign strategies and party loyalty, thus affecting every aspect of the electoral process in the U.S. (Abramowitz 2010, 84). Abramowitz (2010, 124–125) believes that partisan-ideological conflict is not likely to slow down and may even intensify in the future. With rising education levels, partisan-ideological consistency in the American electoral system is likely to increase. College graduates are more politically active, better informed about candidates, and more ideologically aware than decades ago (Abramowitz 2010, 122–125). Political polarization is not an artifact of any single voting score or ideology measure; it is equally present in both houses of Congress, in the South as much as in the North, and new members are as ideological as the ones staying in office (Theriault 2008, 44).

6.3 THE POLARIZED PUBLIC

There is a belief among students of public opinion that a large percentage of the public is not interested in the government and politics in general. In reality, chances are that an ordinary person would know more about the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal than know the name of the vice president during the Clinton administration. However, studies from recent decades have shown that the politically engaged public is actually quite large (Abramowitz 2010, 16). If nothing else, the majority of Americans can at least accurately distinguish the political positions of the two leading political parties and can sort themselves accordingly (Abramowitz 2010, 17). Those who go beyond just voting are a small number of political activists, although American National Election Studies (ANES) studies have shown that the number of people involved in political engagement among the public has been increasing (Abramowitz 2010, 18). “Voter turnout in 2008 reflected the extraordinary level of interest measured by the polls. Almost 60 million voters participated in the presidential primaries and caucuses, far more than in any previous election” (Abramowitz 2010, 20). The increase in public engagement corresponds with the most ideologically

active, while the level of political interest among moderates and independents is much lower than it was previously (Abramowitz 2010, 31). Many political commentators today claim that political polarization is discouraging people from political participation; however, many other surveys suggest quite the opposite. Growing partisan-ideological polarization among political elites may be to blame for an increase in the size of the engaged public (Abramowitz 2010, 21). Americans perceive voting as a fundamental responsibility of citizenship. With increasing differences between the two major parties, this civic duty becomes even more meaningful. It is not just about fulfilling duties as it is about supporting the team, or at least preventing the other one from winning.

Electoral partisanship today is quite noticeable, unlike if we trace it back to the presidential election of 1960, when the lines were not as clearly drawn. But over time, the alignment of voters started to show more obviously. Ethnic and racial groups, Catholics, whites and so on, all started to show exactly what side of the liberal-conservative scale they belonged to and these differences are growing with every passing election. The most impressive of all is the African American's loyalty toward Democratic Party after the passing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Since then, Democrats became the go to team for African Americans, and Republicans found a growing support team among white Southerners. Since the 1984 presidential elections, Reagan's realignment of whites changed the partisan map of the U.S. forever. White voters became major Republican supporters, while the racial and ethnic minority groups now account for "30 percent of Southern voters and 20 percent of Northern /Democratic/ voters" (Black and Black 2007, 39).

White voters today are no longer the biggest group of voters in America, but they are the most likely to vote and they seem to lean to the right, in favor of Republican Party. We already know African Americans are solidly Democratic; however, other minorities (Asian Americans and Latinos) are not as devoted. Still together with African Americans and non-Christian whites, they make up the biggest Democratic supporters (Black and Black 2007, 25–26). As for the Republican Party, they can count on white religious voters, especially white Christians, but they are not as cohesive a block of voters as African Americans are for the Democratic Party. As the group composition in the two major parties changes, the power struggle between the partisans within each party is increasing (Black and Black 2007, 27).

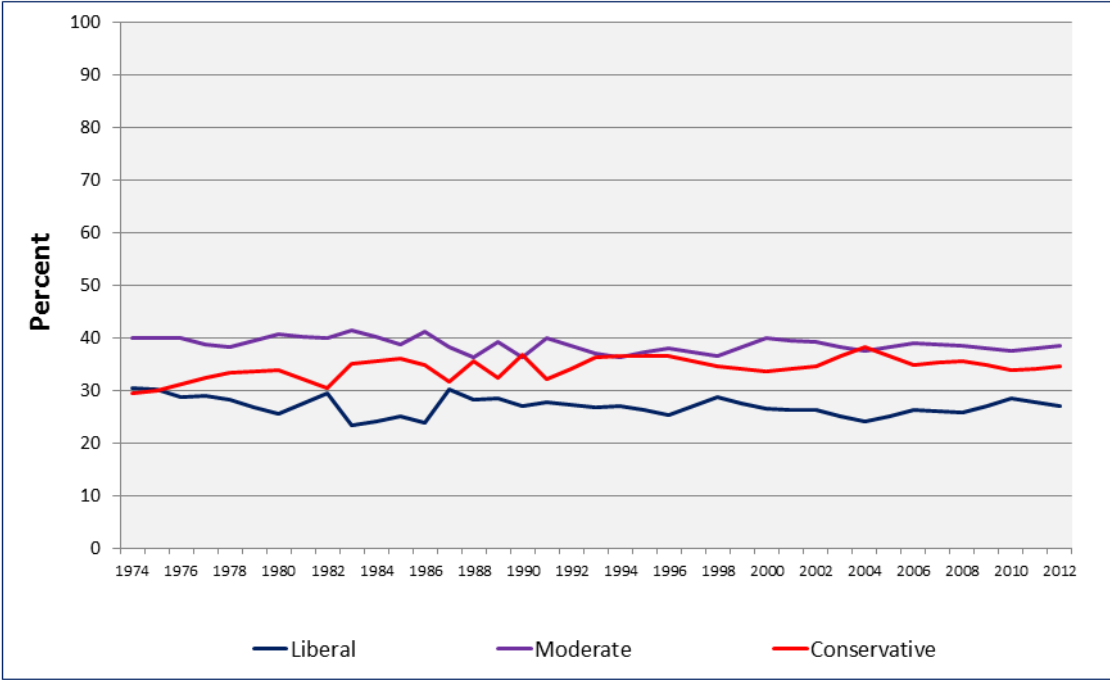
If voters are not the culprits behind the recent increase in polarization, why is it that even in last surviving marginal districts they elect ideologically polarized members? “Only when the changes within the constituency interact with the legislative process does the complete picture of party polarization in the U.S. Congress come into clearer focus” (Theriault 2008, 7). Fiorina, Abrams and Pope suggest that most Americans are “somewhat like the unfortunate citizens of some third-world countries who try to stay out of the crossfire while left-wing guerillas and right-wing death squads shoot at each other” (2005, 8). In recent decades, the percentage of popular votes for the president is not as close apart as the media portrays it. Rather than just assume this means that Americans are living in a 50:50 country, one can conclude it also means that Americans are indifferent (Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 14). Nobody questions whether or not the political elite is polarized, and both sides have their share of zealots, but for most of the country, people are not so enthusiastic about politics and are by no means ideological (Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 19). In fact, studies show, that majority of voters believe that their party is not representing their views as well as they would like (Fiorina and Abrams 2014).

The insistence on ideological purity, disdain for pragmatism, and the considerable influence over the resources necessary to win nomination are some of the tools in the hands of activists to discourage moderate candidates and encourage partisan extremism (Masket 2009, 143). With increasing political polarization between the representatives and rising party sorting of voters, the chances of a more moderate candidate winning elections are rapidly decreasing. Even the most moderate voters are forced to choose between one extreme and the other and thus intensify political polarization. Moderates can just opt out of voting process altogether, but seeing how voter turnout is the same or higher than it was fifty years ago, this can only mean two things: either there are not as many independents left or they do vote and select a side. Interestingly, when asked about political orientation, the majority of citizens still claim to be moderates, but when presented with choices, they tend to lean towards partisan orientation (Abramowitz 2010, 51). “/T/he larger the proportion of leaders or citizens taking consistently liberal or conservative positions on issues, the higher the level of polarization” (Abramowitz 2010, 35). The more engaged the public becomes, the more likely it is to be polarized, while the uninformed and uninterested public is more likely to choose the middle (Abramowitz 2010, 43). The politically uninterested

public is not the primary target of candidates and elected officials because they are not the ones who pay attention to their political positions, distribute campaign signs and bumper stickers, try to convince their friends and neighbors to vote for their chosen candidate, and are not zealously voting in primaries and general elections. This is also the prime reason why candidates today spend more time appealing to their core supporters and less time trying to convince the moderate supporters. “The greater the degree of partisan-ideological polarization in a society, the greater the likelihood that ideological differences will be expressed in the political arena and therefore the greater the intensity of political conflict in that society” (Abramowitz 2010, 44). Barack Obama promised to change the tone in Washington and to try to get Democrats and Republicans to cooperate more. His efforts however, were short lived and no one, not even the public, was enthusiastic about this move. If the public was as moderate as Fiorina suggests, his approval gap would not be as big as it was (90 percent approval rating among Democrats, but only 29 percent among Republicans). Partisan-ideological polarization is so deeply imbedded in modern American politics that one man pushing for bipartisan cooperation has little or no chance of changing it anytime soon.

Graph 6.4: Voter ideology since the 1970s

Little Change in Voter Ideology Since the 1970s



Source: GSS

Source: Fiorina and Abrams(2014).

If we want to see a clear picture of a polarized nation we must first know the difference between peoples’ positions, which seem to stay the same as they were decades ago, and the choices they face (Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 25; Barber and McCarty 2015). As graph 6.4 indicates, people's positions have not changed significantly in recent decades, certainly not as much as the elites have become polarized. Even the red button topics, such as abortion or the war in Iraq, do not seem to divide the nation in half anymore. There are still discrepancies between the voters of course, but they are certainly not significant enough to claim there is a war raging between pro-life Republican and pro-choice Democratic voters (Fiorina *et al.* 2005, 79). There is a difference between supporting abortion or supporting a women’s right to choose and supporting the decision to abort in case of rape or fetus’ defect or any other circumstance. The majority of people today support the right of choice, even if they

are pro-life and only the most extreme opposition would reject abortion at the expense of mother's life (Fiorina et al. 2005, 97). These few extremists do not represent the majority of Republican voters.

Gay marriage, or gay rights in general, for example, is one of the topics that was supposed to divide voters of both parties. If we examine a survey conducted in 2015 before the Supreme Court ruled same-sex couples marriage legal in all 50 U.S. states, it is clear that people, even when sorted by party affiliation, are not worlds apart. The majority of Democrats (76 percent) were, as expected, supportive of gay rights, Independents followed with 68 percent support, and Republicans were not far behind with 65 percent of citizens supportive of gay rights (Public Religion Research Institute 2015). If Americans truly differed based upon their political affiliation such a close margin would not be possible. Even more unexpected is the percentage of people who strongly oppose gay rights. There are 12 percent of Democrats who strongly opposing gay rights, only one percent difference from Republicans (at 13 percent) and the Independents had 11 percent against gay rights (Public Religion Research Institute 2015).

CONCLUSION

"We are so polarized today not because we face problems immune to agreement but because so many political incentives now discourage compromise" (Brownstein 2007, 413).

Immigration legislation is one of the hot topics in contemporary American politics. However, the latest legislation to pass successfully in Congress was adopted in 1986 (Barber and McCarty 2015, 39). Since then, immigration laws, even those made through bipartisan agreement, have faced a brick wall of polarization. Support for such legislation is accepted by no one, even if the bill is successful enough to pass the first approval chamber, it is likely to come to a complete stop at the second one. The polarization on this subject is not just producing a cleavage between the parties,

but also within the parties themselves. The Tea Party Caucus strongly opposes and frustrates the Republicans, who want to downplay their partisan beliefs in order to appeal to the Latino community (Barber and McCarty 2015, 40). On the other side, Democrats need successful immigration legislation in order to keep the same Latino community on track. If and when the Republican Party recognizes the need for a wider audience (like the Latino community), such compromise will be likely to emerge, until then, immigration continues to be on top of political polarization in the United States.

Divided party control is a major obstacle to party governance in the U.S. The first few decades after World War II, the differences between the dominant parties were not as opposing and bipartisan solutions were frequent (Abramowitz 2010, 161). Today, parties disagree on almost all domestic and foreign policies, with the chances of bipartisan solutions becoming slim, and divided party control is more likely to result in a gridlock rather than a bipartisan compromise (Abramowitz 2010, 161). Divided party control is far more likely to occur and, as such, both parties will have the difficult task of pushing through their proposals. Both parties choose to persist on their proposals as giving in would lead to successful legislative outcome and effective government. As long as the legislative deadlocks persist there is still hope that a next election will result in changing of party seats in favor of minority party in the Congress. While most polls show that Americans are frustrated with the inability to find a common ground on major issues, they are less enthusiastic about the true consequences bipartisan cooperation would bring. By definition, compromise means both sides should be willing to give in and meet in the middle. Even if representatives were willing to do that, they would face strong resistance from their base supporters and their party, thus forcing them to persist on the original proposal. Who could forget Bush's attempt at bipartisan immigration reform back in 2006, certainly not his party's activists who strongly and publically disapproved of his actions. The failed immigration reform, the most recent government shutdown in 2013 and a threat of another one in 2015, serve as a reminder that bipartisan compromise is nowhere in the foreseeable future "Given the current level of partisan-ideological polarization among political elites and engaged partisans, successful efforts at bipartisan cooperation and compromise are unlikely. That leaves partisan dominance as the only viable means of overcoming gridlock in Washington" (Abramowitz 2010, 170).

Intraparty agreement is usually measured using two indexes, the index of cohesion and the party-unity index (Rohde 1991, 9). Index of cohesion measures the degree to which a party's members vote together, while the party-unity index measures an individual's support of a party's position (Rohde 1991, 9). These measures help researchers to "describe and analyze changing patterns of partisanship in congressional voting" (Rohde 1991, 9). "Party voting will tend to be high when voters choose congressional candidates on the basis of their party affiliation, and when party leaders are granted strong institutional powers" (Rohde 1991, 9). In the 1970s, party loyalty was at its lowest with unity scores around and below 50 percent (Rohde 1991, 14). However, this phenomenon did not seem to stick and by the late 1970s, and into the 1980s there was a turnabout in partisanship history when party voting almost doubled from that of the 1970s (Rohde 1991, 14). This was the era of partisanship resurgence.

Modern American politics favor confrontation over compromise and it is no wonder that many political scholars today, call this era as age of 'hyper-partisanship' (Brownstein 2007, 13). Modern parties are more internally unified and strongly hostile toward each other. In this path to 'hyper-partisanship,' the Republican Party was definitely more progressive at the beginning with every conservative legislator more extreme than the one before him, but today this gap has diminished leaving both parties at the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. "In this environment, politicians who appeal for compromise often appear weak, naïve, enablers of the other side. Yet it is a dangerously self-fulfilling prophecy for politicians to view themselves as soldiers in an army whose only legitimate goal is to destroy the other" (Brownstein 2007, 22–23). It is not unusual for a country to be polarized, what is worrisome is the fact that the political system is more polarized than the country (Brownstein 2007, 25).

"Because most politicians are thoroughly convinced that their party can win or lose power in the next election, and because every institution can in fact change hands in the next election, full-throttle partisanship is always the order of the day" (Black and Black 2007, 252). According to exit polls, there are more conservatives in the U.S. than liberals, but they are both outnumbered by the moderates, which enables both parties to have full control over American politics (Black and Black 2007, 260). Strengthening their most loyal base is a start, but both parties have to appeal to both

minorities and non-Christian whites (Republican Party) or to white Christians (Democratic Party) if they want to stay ahead of their opponents. Secular realignment and social change in recent decades are both a reason why intraparty cohesion has grown and interparty conflict has increased. With increasing inequality and significant minority expansion, conflicts between parties are becoming more intense and increasingly more common than they used to be (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, xiv).

Parties derive their support from their constituencies with different needs and views about government (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 18). They cater to their constituencies' needs and as they "continue to oppose each other, the sense of differences increases, and party members pressure each other to join together, resulting in even greater polarization" (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 18). Decade's long changes of political realignment, composition of American society, and voters' preferences are all reasons why electoral bases are more uniform and parties more unified today (Stonecashet *al.* 2003, 18). If this trend continues into the future, political polarization is not likely to reduce any time soon. More distinct districts have the potential to reduce or at least control the growing polarization, but these are not likely to occur. Existing constituencies are not set in stone and they can change over time. Changing constituencies can in fact lead to a significant change in the electoral bases of the two parties and can cause an acceleration of party polarization.

People who vote in the primaries are better sorted and candidates are not faced with the pressure to position themselves more toward the middle of the ideological poles. In fact, it is quite the opposite. In presidential elections, each party has to build winning coalitions of core supporters and moderate voters. Campaign strategies in this case are trickier as it takes a lot of effort to simultaneously convince most of the partisan voters and the moderate voters (Black and Black 2007, 3). "Members guard their careers by taking frequent soundings within their constituencies and among their colleagues and by taking careful calculations of the consequences that are likely to flow from their decisions" (Hetherington and Keefe 2007, 168). Because of that, one would assume that they will be more willing to stay moderate or at least downplay their partisan views. But if their constituencies are polarized themselves, reflecting their needs is a good ticket to another term in the office.

Mainstream media could promote national unity, but their efforts are limited (Brownstein 2007, 370–371). With modern access to information, voters can choose a media provider who will best support their beliefs and shut out the other side. Political goals in this case are not to broaden prospective but to harden allegiances and this is quite the opposite of what the media is supposed to do (Brownstein 2007, 373).

Future trends are not favoring the Republican Party. Racial diversity in the U.S. is increasing, while marriage and religious beliefs are declining. Voters younger than thirty are more likely to be Democratic, less likely to be married, white, and Christian (Abramowitz 2010, 132–133). If they stay loyal to their party and these trends continue with future youth, the Republican Party may be on the shorter end of the stick. Seeing how the party is reaching out of their comfort zone lately is a clear indicator that they are well aware of this. Expanding their voter base would mean changing some of the party's longstanding commitments. Even though changing demographics seemed to benefit the Democratic Party, it is still the white members that cast most of the votes and are more likely to vote. Both parties have the incentive to move more to the middle of the ideological spectrum in order to capture a larger audience, if they will be willing to do so is another question entirely.

Nevertheless, a compromise will have to be reached in order to progress and the costs of hyper-partisanship vastly exceed the benefits (Brownstein 2007, 367). The problem with today politics in the U.S. is too much party rigidity and too little partisan discipline (Brownstein 2007, 368). A third option to the current two party system could mean the end of polarization in the U.S. Whether or not this is even a possibility is another question. In the twentieth century there were only four moderate alternatives that were relevant enough to mention: Roosevelt in 1912, La Follette in 1924, Wallace in 1968, and Perot in 1992 (Brownstein 2007, 385). None of them could hold a candle to the two dominant parties. If and when a viable third candidate is presented, Americans, weary of decades long bickering, are likely to consider it. As a sole political leader, the president is probably the first one to make a leap of faith and cross partisan borders. Why a president like this has yet to come forward is another question altogether. One reason may lie in voters themselves. If they are as tired of polarization as they claim in polls, then such an option is not far off. But as long as they choose to support the most liberal of the Democratic offers and the most

conservative of Republican offers, such a candidate is unlikely to appear and political polarization is unlikely to reduce.

POVZETEK V SLOVENSKEM JEZIKU

Politična polarizacija je pereč problem sodobne ameriške politike. V dvajsetih letih 19. stoletja, veliko pred nastankom republikanske in demokratske stranke, kakršni poznamo danes, sta se tedanji stranki (federalisti in demokratski republikanci) v glavnem razhajali v ekonomskih odločitvah glede davkov na sol in alkohol ter vzpostavitve nacionalne banke (Poole 2008). Federalisti, zbrani okoli Alexandra Hamiltona, so približek današnji republikanski stranki, medtem ko so demokratski republikanci, na čelu s Thomasom Jeffersonom, variacija današnje demokratske stranke. Kljub razhajanjem ti dve stranki nista bili nikoli tako razdvojeni kot njuni moderni različici. V šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja so bili kompromisi med dominantnima strankama redni, razlike med njihovimi politikami pa ne tako izrazite. Prve znake politične polarizacije zasledimo šele v drugi polovici 20. stoletja in od takrat naprej se razkol med strankama le povečuje. Današnja razhajanja zato bolj verjetno vodijo v zastoj zakonodajnega postopka kot v sklepanje kompromisov in s tem učinkovito vlado.

Kljub temu se mnogim politična polarizacija ne zdi problematična. Skrajna prepričanja političnih predstavnikov ljudem omogočajo jasne opredelitve, čisto možno pa je tudi, da prav ta nedvoumnost izbire kandidata vodi v večjo politično participacijo. Volivci, ki zagovarjajo omejitev obrambnih izdatkov, interese manjšin in socialno ogroženih ter spodbujajo programe socialne varnosti, se bodo bolj poistovetili z demokratsko stranko, vsi, ki se s tem ne strinjajo, pa z republikansko stranko. Izbira je očitna, interesi in prepričanja se ne prepletajo in volivci tik pred volitvami niso razdvojeni. Volivci s trdno oblikovanimi stališči torej nimajo težav pri izbiri, manj ekstremni volivci pa so prepuščeni dvema skrajnostnima in hkrati nobeni, ki bi prav zares delila njihova

prepričanja. Ti volivci so primorani izbirati med dvema nasprotnima ideološkima poloma ali med neudeležbo na volitvah, če niso pripravljene izbrati enega ali drugega.

Združene države Amerike sestavljajo zvezne države z visoko stopnjo avtonomije in razpršeno močjo odločanja. Ameriški politični sistem sloni na načelih predstavniške demokracije, delitev oblasti na tri različne in med seboj enakovredne veje oblasti pa preprečuje zlorabo oblasti. Zaradi večinskega volilnega sistema, ki so ga Američani prevzeli od Angležev, ima tretja stranka omejeno, če sploh kakšno možnost za uspeh. Tudi če ji uspe do te mere, da se v javnosti veliko govori o njej, se volivci le redko odločijo zanjo, saj vedo, da nima realnih možnosti za zmago. Glas za to stranko bi bil torej izgubljen in ga po mnenju nekaterih volivcev ni vredno zapraviti. V ameriški zgodovini lahko naštejemo samo štiri take sredinske kandidate, od katerih je bil najbolj uspešen le Ross Perot leta 1992. Kljub začetni podpori njegovi stranki pa je tudi on kmalu podlegel dvostrankarskemu sistemu.

Kongres predstavlja zakonodajno vejo oblasti. Sestavljen je iz spodnjega doma (predstavniški dom) in zgornjega doma (senat). Senat in predstavniški dom imata enakovredno moč, kar je sicer nenavadno za dvodomne sisteme. Spodnji dom ima 435 predstavnikov, od katerih vsak predstavlja svoj okraj. Število predstavnikov je odvisno od velikosti prebivalstva posamezne države. Senat ima 100 članov, dva iz vsake zvezne države ne glede na njeno velikost. Člani spodnjega doma imajo dveletni mandat, odslužijo pa jih lahko neomejeno število, medtem ko imajo predstavniki senata šestletni mandat. Neomejeno število odsluženih mandatov ima velik vpliv na rast politične polarizacije. V Združenih državah Amerike kar 90 odstotkov predstavnikov kongresa na svojem položaju preživi tudi več zaporednih volitev. Zaradi priljubljenosti v svojem volilnem okraju, večje prepoznavnosti in izkušenosti, imajo boljše možnosti za zmago, zaradi česar so v svojih prepričanjih lahko bistveno bolj ideološki kot nekdo, ki šele vstopa v politično areno. Kljub temu da ti karierni kongresniki prispevajo k ideološki polariziranosti, pa ni nobenih dokazov, da so razlog zanjo, niti da bi reforma tega sistema vodila v spremembo politične polariziranosti. V zadnjih nekaj desetletjih so kongresne in predsedniške volitve postale izredno predvidljive. Strateško načrtovanje mej volilnih okrajev ali t. i. *gerrymandering* lahko z veliko gotovostjo napove zmagovalca, saj so meje načrtane tako, da so v prid ene ali druge stranke. V takih okrajih navadno kandidira samo ena stranka. Odsotnost političnega tekmovanja je eden od vzrokov ideološke

razdvojenosti, zagotovo pa ni edini. Polariziranost senata kaže na to, da manipulacija kongresnih okrajev ni kriva za nastali trend.

Od leta 1850 večina predstavnikov ameriškega političnega sistema pripada demokratski ali republikanski stranki, dva od treh volivcev pa sta podpornika ene ali druge stranke. Demokratsko republikanska stranka Thomasa Jeffersona je politični sceni vladala v prvi polovici 19. stoletja. Zaradi nesoglasij glede suženjstva je sčasoma razpadla na severne in južne demokrate, ohranila pa se je samo ena – demokratska stranka. Razkol je odprl vrata republikanski stranki, ustanovljeni leta 1854, ki je po izvolitvi Abrahama Lincolna kraljevala ameriški politiki naslednjih nekaj desetletij. Republikanci pa niso bili priljubljeni na ameriškem jugu, ker so močno nasprotovali suženjstvu. Popolni nadzor severnega dela države je omogočal, da so lahko brez posledic odpisali jug in še vedno enakovredno konkurirali demokratski stranki. Velika gospodarska kriza je močno oslabila republikansko stranko, zaradi česar so morali za skoraj trideset let vajeti oblasti prepustiti svojim nasprotnikom. Oster nastop za pravice temnopoltih je demokratski stranki prinesel do danes največjega podpornika – afroameriško skupnost. Vse od ukinitve rasne segregacije leta 1964 temnopolti ostajajo najbolj vdano volilno telo, saj se jih okoli 90 odstotkov identificira z demokratsko stranko. Sprejetje novega volilnega telesa pa ni bilo brez posledic. Konservativni južni demokrati so bili z odločitvijo svojih severnih somišljenikov izredno nezadovoljni in jug, ki je bil včasih dominantno demokratsko območje, je počasi izgubljal bitko s prihajajočimi republikanci. Danes južni republikanci tvorijo večino vseh republikancev v senatu in predstavniškemu domu, nikoli pa ne bodo temu predelu vladali s tako močjo, kot je to uspelo demokratom.

Jasno sliko polariziranosti dobimo, če pogledamo glasovanja vsakega predstavnika skozi daljše časovno obdobje. Program *NOMINATE* omogoča popoln pregled politične polariziranosti med posameznim kongresom ali med več kongresi zaporedoma. Glasovi predstavnikov se razvrščajo po ideološki lestvici; -1 (najbolj liberalen), +1 (najbolj konservativen), 0 (sredina). Podatki kažejo, da so ideološka razhajanja med strankama narastla v sedemdesetih letih 20. stoletja in se od takrat naprej samo še povečujejo. Strankarska lojalnost je več kot očitna, prav tako lahko opazimo, da republikanska stranka v svoji skrajnosti rahlo prekaša svoje nasprotnike.

Ni dvoma torej, da je razdvojena politična elita, kako pa je z volivci? Raziskave kažejo, da državljani v zadnjih desetletjih svojih prepričanj niso spremenili, spremenile pa so se njihove izbire. Kljub temu da je politična arena ideološko polarizirana, njeni volivci niso. Ko se torej pogovarjamo o naraščajoči problematiki politične polarizacije, je treba razločevati med povprečnimi volivci, ki ne sledijo vneto vsakodnevnemu političnemu dogajanju, in političnimi aktivisti. Slednji so primarna tarča političnih strank, saj so tisti, ki bodo najverjetneje ponotranjili politične preference in bodo svojo pripadnost potrdili na voliščih. Velika večina je namreč nezainteresirana za politiko, ne spremlja politike in zato ni na prednostnem seznamu političnih strank. Ravno zaradi tega današnje politične stranke več časa in sredstev namenijo utrjevanju svojih zaveznikov kot iskanju novih podpornikov. Obe ameriški stranki sta trdno zasidrani na svoji strani ideološke lestvice, medtem ko sredina počasi izginja. Zanimivo je, da večina Američanov meni, da izbrane stranke ne zastopajo učinkovito njihovih interesov. Obe stranki bijeta boj za nadvlado predstavniškega doma, senata in predsednika. Dokler ena drugi prepreči sprejetje zakonodaje, je vedno možnost, da bodo na naslednjih volitvah nezadovoljni volivci oblast predali drugi strani. Možnost sklepanja kompromisov je v tem primeru malo verjetna, predstavniki pa bodo raje vztrajali pri svojem kot da popustijo, zaradi česar veliko pomembnih politik ni sprejetih, posledično pa trpijo volivci obeh strank.

K polarizaciji seveda pomembno prispevajo mediji. Poudarek na senzacionalističnem poročanju je privedel do tega, da mediji bolj kot sklepanje kompromisov v ospredje postavljajo nesoglasja in škandale in to je tudi to, kar državljane najbolj zanima. V času Clintonovega predsedovanja je več Američanov vedelo, kdo je Monica Lewinsky, kot kdo je njegov podpredsednik. Današnja velika izbira medijev ljudem omogoča, da spremljajo le tiste, ki so enako ideološko opredeljeni (npr. Fox za republikance), zaradi česar lahko popolnoma izključijo argumente predstavnikov druge stranke. Poudarjanje nezmožnosti soglasja in stalno kritiziranje kongresa pa na volivcih pušča pečat. Med vsemi tremi vejami oblasti je zakonodajna v ZDA najmanj priljubljena, njihovi predstavniki pa nevredni zaupanja.

Urbani delavski razred, rasne in etnične manjšine ter socialno šibkejši so največji podporniki demokratske stranke, medtem ko republikanci vodijo med bolj izobraženimi, bogatimi in belimi moškimi. Rasne in etnične manjšine igrajo pomembno vlogo, predvsem zato, ker v veliki meri volijo za demokratsko stranko. V

urbanih okrožjih, v katerih živi več kot 20 odstotkov rasnih in/ali etničnih manjšin, ima demokratska stranka zagotovo prednost. Takih okrožij je zaradi večanja azijske in predvsem latinske skupnosti danes vse več. Tudi na jugu, ki je sicer pretežno republikanski, se število rasno in/ali etnično mešanih okrožij povečuje, kar bi lahko na dolgi rok zmanjšalo politično prevlado republikanske stranke v tem predelu. Za to stranko je namreč priseljevanje največja ovira na poti do politične nadvlade. Višji sloj in beli moški so veliki podporniki republikancev in so hkrati tudi bolj aktivni volivci, medtem ko veliko priseljencev ni tako zvestih volivcev oziroma zaradi določenih ovir (nelegalni priseljenci, neizobraženi, mladoletni itd.) niti niso zmožni voliti. To je verjetno tudi razlog, da republikanska stranka ne stori dovolj, da bi se bolj približala tej volilni skupini. Kljub temu da ima vsaka stranka svoje zveste podpornike, pa morata biti obe vendarle tudi na preži za morebitnimi novimi podporniki. Nobena od strank ni dovolj velika in močna, da bi prevzela oblast v izvršilni in zakonodajni oblasti hkrati. Pa tudi če bi jo, je ne bi zadržala za daljše časovno obdobje, kot je to uspelo demokratski stranki po sprejetju New Deala. V obdobju deljene vlade večina predlogov naleti na gluha ušesa in instrumenti ovir, kot so t. i. *filibuster* ali predsedniški veto, služijo kot orožje za blokado vseh predlogov, ki prihajajo iz nasprotne strani.

Politična polarizacija je pereč problem predvsem zato, ker mu ni videti konca. Obe stranki sta izrazito ideološko usmerjeni (z leti vedno bolj), pri čemer republikanska stranka rahlo vodi. Če se bo trend nadaljeval, bo primerov, kakršen je bil prekinitev dela vlade leta 2013, velika (iz)raba t. i. *filibusterja* in predsedniškega veta, vse več, uspešnih politik (sprejetih z dogovorom obeh strank) pa vse manj. Za obe stranki bi bilo verjetno bolje, če bi se skušali približati sredini; demokratska stranka belim moškim in vernikom, republikanska pa predvsem manjšinam. A ker trenutno nobena od njiju ne kaže interesa za tak premik, politični polarizaciji tudi v bodoče ni videti konca.

Rezultati anket kažejo, da se večina Američanov v svojih prepričanjih nagiba k sredini. Zakaj torej na volitvah vedno znova izberejo najbolj skrajnega kandidata? Morda zato, ker so tudi sami ideološko razdvojeni ali pa preprosto zato, ker druge izbire nimajo. V zadnjih nekaj desetletjih vse več predsedniških kandidatov sledi načelom svoje stranke namesto načelom svojih volivcev, volivci pa svoja prepričanja prilagajajo strankam in ne obratno. Začaran krog bi lahko prekinila tretja, sredinska

opcija, ki bi združevala interese vseh volivcev. Verjetnosti, da se bo taka stranka ali pa vsaj predsedniški kandidat pojavil, preстал kandidaturo in na koncu celo zmagal, pa je skoraj neznatna. Vajeti so torej v rokah obstoječih strank in njihovih bodočih, večinskih volivcev.

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