

# [***Actually, Partisanship Is Good—When the Other Side Is Today's Insane GOP | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BB2-J5N1-JBR6-900F-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** U.S. political dysfunction is the product of bad system design that has empowered a set of extremists in the GOP to grind problem-solving to a halt.

**Body**

As Americans slowly start tuning in to a re-match between President Biden and former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) that [*few seem to desire*](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/americans-dismayed-by-biden-trump-2024-rematch-reutersipsos-poll-finds-2024-01-25/) but even fewer are trying seriously to stop, U.S. political institutions have never been held in lower regard. Is the problem Trump and his MAGA movement? The elderly president and his party? Or is it, as so many wrongly believe, the much-maligned concept of "partisanship"?

The answer is none of the above: U.S. political dysfunction is the product of bad system design that has empowered a set of extremists in one political party, the GOP, to grind problem-solving to a halt.

Partisanship is merely dedication to the goals and ideals of a political party. There is nothing unusual or toxic about it at all. While the architects of the Constitution were famously hostile to parties, they turned out to be comprehensively wrong about the role these organizations would play, not only in American ***politics*** moving forward but in every democracy on the planet. Political scientists Russel Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum [*recently referred to*](https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041916-020727) partisanship as a "defining element of good citizenship" that includes things like "a commitment to pluralism, recognizing the legitimacy of opposition" and "complying with the rules of regulated rivalry."

The problem in the United States, the one that is on display virtually every single day and which has justifiably earned [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) an almost unfathomably low approval rating ([*currently*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx) 15 percent), is *hyper*-partisanship. Partisans work toward implementing the ideas and policies that they believe in, but they also understand that especially in the American system of government, compromise is necessary to getting almost anything done. Hyper-partisans put their party first, always, even when it means walking away from painstakingly negotiated compromises that would be in the public interest.

Hyper-partisanship is not the exclusive domain of one party, but most analysts who have studied the question believe that the Republican Party is a much more intransigent organization more dominated by the hyper-partisans in its midst than Democrats. In t[*he prophetic words*](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/lets-just-say-it-the-republicans-are-the-problem/), now more than a decade old, of congressional scholars Thomas Mann and Norm Ornstein, the contemporary GOP is "an insurgent outlier—ideologically extreme; contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime; scornful of compromise; unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

Two episodes from recent American history highlight what Mann and Ornstein were getting at. On Dec. 19, 2019, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives [*passed*](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/19/house-passes-trumps-usmca-trade-agreement.html#:~:text=The%20House%20passed%20a%20new,an%20overwhelming%20385%2D41%20vote.) the revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement that then-President Trump insisted on calling the "U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement" or USMCA. The vote was 385-41, and it passed over the howls of a small number of Democrats who believed it gave Trump a crucial victory on the heels of his first impeachment [*by that same House*](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/18/us/politics/trump-impeached.html). It also resolved a diplomatic standoff that threatened to undermine Trump's re-election campaign.

Fast forward a little over four years to 2024. As the presence of migrants on the streets of major cities brought the dysfunction of our current immigration regime into sharp relief even for big city liberals who had been content to largely ignore the problem, moderate Democrats, [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), and Independents [*hammered out*](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-collapse-of-bipartisan-immigration-reform-a-guide-for-the-perplexed/) a piece of compromise legislation that sought to address some of these problems by tightening asylum laws and bulking up the human and physical infrastructure needed to humanely deal with the massive numbers of people arriving at the southern border.

Most Democrats hated this legislation. It did nothing for the "Dreamers," offered no path to citizenship for most long-term, undocumented immigrants, and would effectively shut the door to large numbers of desperate people. Yet Democratic leadership backed the bill, and [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) promised to sign it. Even if it was only to shore up his re-election campaign, the reality was that Democratic partisans were willing to stomach what amounted to a giant L on the ugly, long-term struggle over immigration.

But the bill is dead, because former President Trump, the likely GOP presidential nominee, served as de facto party whip and issued his typical threats against any Republican who supported it.

It was almost immediately DOA in the House, where Speaker [*Mike Johnson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mike-johnson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*said that*](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/house-speaker-declares-senate-border-and-ukraine-deal-dead-on-arrival) the bill was "even worse than expected." Too many hyper-partisan Republicans believe that keeping the issue alive will help Trump beat Biden in the fall, even at the cost of turning down the most GOP-friendly immigration deal they likely will ever see.

What is the cause of this most recent and destructive bout of hyper-partisanship? Here the answers aren't so simple, but there are a number of plausible causes.

Gerrymandering and geographic sorting have led to the creation of more and more "[*landslide districts*](https://www.cookpolitical.com/cook-pvi/realignment-more-redistricting-has-decimated-swing-house-seats#:~:text=The%20Incredible%20Shrinking%20Swing%20Seat,of%20164%20back%20in%201999.)" in the House, where incumbents fear only their own primary voters, who tend to be somewhat more ideologically minded. America's insane operating system [*puts*](https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/09/20/why-is-the-electoral-cycle-of-americas-congress-so-short) the entire House of Representatives up for election every two years, creating a permanent campaign that leaves little time or space for compromise and often results in the kind of divided government we have now, made worse by clout-chasers who are more interested in building social media empires than meaningful careers in Congress. Those institutional features have proved to be the perfect vehicle for the kind of extremists who have taken over the Republican Party.

Solutions to these problems are difficult but achievable. Railing against partisanship, on the other hand, will only breed more cynicism and inaction and will perversely stigmatize the most idealistic and public-minded Americans.

*David Faris is an associate professor of political science at Roosevelt University and the author of* It's Time to Fight Dirty: How [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Can Build a Lasting Majority in American ***Politics***. *His writing has appeared in* The Week*,* The Washington Post*,* The New Republic*,* Washington Monthly *and more. You can find him on Twitter @davidmfaris.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2348520/donald-trump-not-attending-fani-willis-hearing.jpg)

**Graphic**

Donald Trump not attending Fani Willis hearing

Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Former President Donald Trump speaks at the National Rifle Association presidential forum at the Great American Outdoor Show on February 09, 2024 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Trump will not be attending a hearing into whether Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis should be disqualified from his Georgia prosecution, and will instead attend court in New York on Thursday.

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