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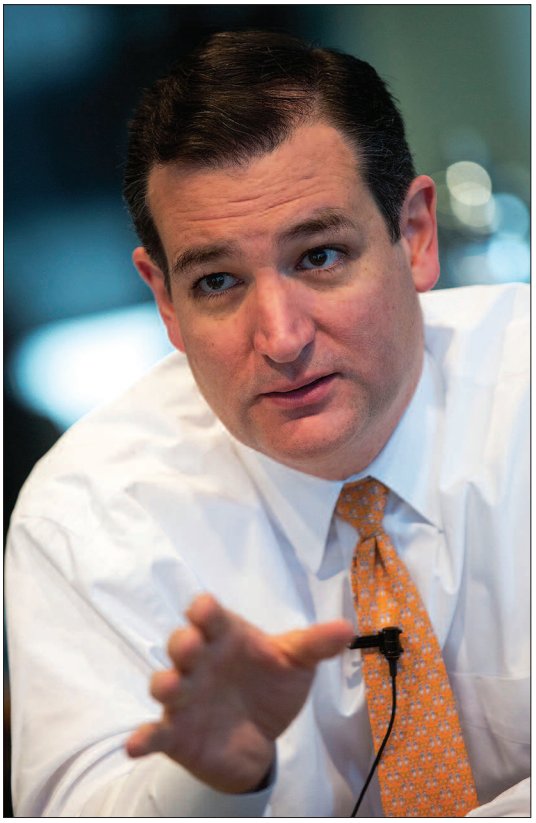
Polarization in America

Does partisan conflict threaten democracy?

Americans have become familiar with the kind of high-decibel, no-compromise political warfare between Republican and Democratic officeholders that led to a government shutdown last fall and threatened default on the national debt. While bitter partisanship is nothing new in American history, some social scientists fear the current wave is dangerously undermining national unity and the country's democratic traditions. Even the two main political parties are embroiled in infighting, with Republicans increasingly engaged in conflicts between traditional conservatives and those further to the right, and some liberal Democrats trying to push their party further to the left. Polarization in America is not limited to politics, either. People are moving into neighborhoods populated by others with like-minded views. And market researchers, pollsters and political scientists are discovering left/right preferences about what to drink, where to shop, how to be entertained and whom to marry.



Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas symbolizes, for many Americans, not only the bitter partisanship that has stalled action in Congress but also the disagreements over cultural values and beliefs that separate liberal and conservative Americans. A Tea Party favorite, Cruz helped lead last year's government shutdown and threat to default on the national debt.

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MANAGING EDITOR: Thomas J. Billitteri
tjb@sagepub.com

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR: Kathy Koch,
kathy.koch@sagepub.com

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR:
Thomas J. Colin
tom.colin@sagepub.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS: Brian Beary, Marcia Clemmitt, Sarah Glazer, Kenneth Jost, Reed Karaim, Peter Katel, Robert Kiener, Barbara Mantel, Tom Price, Jennifer Weeks

SENIOR PROJECT EDITOR: Olu B. Davis

FACT CHECKERS: Michelle Harris, Nancie Majkowski

INTERN: Kaya Yurieff

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VICE PRESIDENT AND EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, HIGHER EDUCATION GROUP:
Michele Sordi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ONLINE LIBRARY AND REFERENCE PUBLISHING:
Todd Baldwin

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Polarization in America

BY TOM PRICE

THE ISSUES

For decades, Dick Metcalf wrote columns for *Guns & Ammo* magazine, starred in a television show about guns and was considered one of America's top firearms journalists. Then, late last year, he wrote a piece titled "Let's Talk Limits."

"All constitutional rights are regulated," he told his readers, and some gun regulations are justified. [1]

Reaction from gun enthusiasts and the gun industry was swift, heated and devastatingly effective.

Gun manufacturers threatened to pull their ads unless Metcalf was fired. Readers canceled subscriptions while leaving comments such as "I refuse to support/read a magazine that espouses views that are contrary to the 2nd Amendment." Richard Venola, a former *Guns & Ammo* editor, said Metcalf needed to recognize that "we are locked in a struggle with powerful forces in this country who will do anything to destroy the Second Amendment [and that] the time for ceding some rational points is gone." [2]

Metcalf was fired. The editor who approved the column resigned. And anti-gun-control absolutists carved another notch into their firearms.

"Compromise is a bad word these days," Metcalf laments. "People think it means giving up your principles." [3]

On a wide range of issues — not just gun control — more and more Americans seem to be separated by an unbridgeable chasm of beliefs, values and habits, from politics and religion to culture and entertainment.

Getty Images/Bloomberg/Victor J. Blue

Police arrest a protester during an Occupy Wall Street demonstration in New York City on Sept. 17, 2012. The Occupy movement drew worldwide attention to the growing divide between the rich and the poor, or what Harvard University government professor Michael Sandel called the "skyboxification" of American life, where wealthy football fans sit in warm skyboxes while others shiver in outdoor seats.

In the political arena polarization is tearing at the fabric of national unity and even the country's democratic traditions, many social scientists contend.

And a monsoon of independent spending — allowed by several Supreme Court rulings that toppled spending restrictions — exacerbates the conflicts by supporting candidates and causes that would not have found the financial wherewithal to dominate public debate in the past.

"America is splitting apart without going through all the trouble of a civil war," said Robert Reich, a public policy professor at the University of California-Berkeley and former Labor secretary in the Democratic Clinton administration. [4]

Indeed, today's compromise-free government gridlock leads some to worry about the future of American democracy, according to former Maine Republican Sen. Olympia Snowe, who retired from the Senate last year in frustration over the rise of obstructionism in Congress. "One man said to me: 'What's going to become of the country?' " she recalls from recent travels to promote bipartisanship. "That's the type of questions people pose."

Within the GOP, traditional conservatives fend off attacks from far more conservative activists while moderates are pushed to the side. The great divide has shut down the federal government and taken the nation to the brink of defaulting on its national debt. Congress finds it nearly impossible to legislate on any complicated issue.

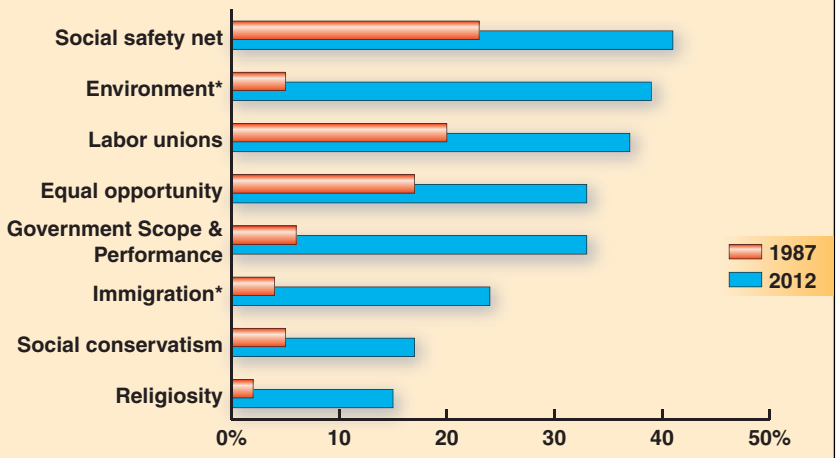
The breakdown in Washington is especially troubling because "we have no precedent — we're operating in uncharted territory," says Smith College government professor Howard Gold. "There have been divided governments in the past in the United States that have been fairly productive. The problem is divided government coupled with severe polarization."

Outside of Washington, so-called red (conservative) states and blue (liberal) states move in opposite directions on such hot-button issues as abortion, gay marriage and voting rights. And beyond the government, Americans live increasingly divergent lives. Liberals tend to live among liberals and con-

Partisan Divisions on Values Have Widened

Americans' values and basic beliefs are more polarized along partisan lines than at any time in the past 25 years, according to the Pew Research Center's Values Survey. The gap between Republicans and Democrats on issues such as the social safety net, equal opportunity and the environment has grown over the past quarter-century, with the widest occurring in attitudes on the environment and government.

Average Percentage-Point Difference Between Democrats and Republicans, 1987 and 2012



** Attitudes on the environment were measured starting in 1992, on immigration since 2002.*

Source: "2012 American Values Survey," Pew Research Center, 2012, http://bit.ly/1gWA28M

servatives among conservatives. Some communities are becoming more white as others become more diverse.

As a result, "we have fewer and fewer civic spaces where citizens from different walks of life encounter one another," said Harvard University government professor Michael Sandel. [5] And that isolation, according to Washington-based political analyst Charlie Cook, "makes opposing points of view seem more alien, suspicious, even threatening." [6]

The divide can be cultural as well as political. Market researchers, pollsters and political scientists have found that liberals and conservatives differ in what they drink, where they shop and what they choose for entertainment. Democrats like vodka, Republicans whiskey — or so the research suggests. Republicans drink Kendall-Jackson wines, Democrats Columbia Crest. Democrats shop at Whole Foods, Republicans at Walmart. Republicans watched Leno. Democrats prefer Letterman. [7]

Even love and parenting have acquired a political dimension, which has intensified over the past 50 years. In a 2010 YouGov Poll, about half of Republicans and one-third of Democrats said they would be unhappy if their child married someone from the opposite party. Fifty years earlier, only 5 percent of Republicans and 4 percent of Democrats responding to a Gallup Poll expressed such feelings. [8]

Some divisions, such as where to live, can be wealth-based and drive ever-thicker wedges between the affluent and poor. Heather Kimmel, a neuropharmacologist for the Environmental Protection Agency, worries her children could grow up not understanding how most of the world lives. "We talk to them a lot about it," she said, "that not everyone has a college degree and a big house."

Kimmel's husband is a nuclear physicist for the Defense Department. Their neighbors tend to be well-educated professionals, many with degrees from prestigious universities. They live in a Northern Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C., that qualifies as a "super zip" neighborhood, according to calculations by *The Washington Post*. Super zips — a term coined by Charles Murray, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank in Washington — are the 5 percent of U.S. zip codes with the highest median household income and highest percentage of adults with college degrees. Nationwide, super zips average more than $120,000 in annual household income, and two-thirds of their adult residents are college graduates. In the rest of the country, median income is just under $54,000, and only about a quarter of adults have college degrees. [9]

Most U.S. neighborhoods are predominantly middle class or contain families with varied incomes. But the rich and poor increasingly are congregating in separate communities that make interaction among the different economic classes unlikely. The percentage of wealthy families living in upper-income neighborhoods doubled to 18 percent between 1980 and 2010, according to the Pew Research Center. The percentage of lower-income families living in poorer neighborhoods increased to 28 from 23. [10]

Sandel calls this divide the "skyboxification" of American life, referring to the rich sitting in warm skyboxes during December professional football games while most fans shiver in the outdoor seats below. [11]

And the rich-poor divide is growing. From 1979 to 2007, for instance, the inflation-adjusted after-tax income of the top 1 percent of Americans increased

275 percent, but only by 18 percent for the lowest fifth, according to the Congressional Budget Office. [12] Income is closely related to education, and studies show that the children of the well-educated are the most likely to become well-educated themselves. [13]

"People increasingly are moving into places where they are surrounded by like-minded individuals," says Norman Ornstein, a prominent political analyst at the American Enterprise Institute.

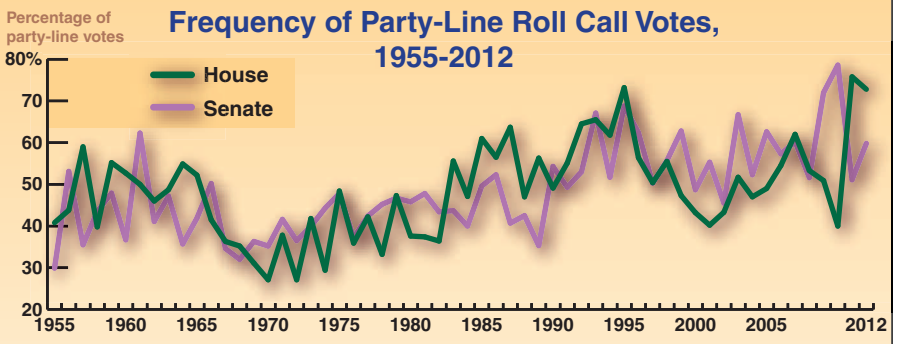
A glance at an election map underscores his point. In Democratic President Barack Obama's 2012 re-election bid, he carried the Northeast and upper Midwest from Maine to Minnesota (except Indiana), along with Virginia, Florida, Nevada and the West Coast. The rest of the country, except for New Mexico and Colorado, voted for Republican challenger Mitt Romney (Hawaiians voted for Obama, Alaskans for Romney.) County-by-county results showed Democrats concentrated in urban areas and Republicans spread across the more rural parts of the country.

Romney won 59 percent of the votes cast by whites in 2012, Obama 93 percent of the votes by blacks and 71 percent by Latinos. [14] And more whites are migrating to Republican-dominated states. While the white population declined in the Northeast and Midwest between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, it rose in the South and West, increasing most steeply in six states that went for Romney — Arizona, Idaho, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah and Wyoming — as well as in two that voted for Obama: Hawaii and Nevada. [15]

People don't choose where to live because of their politics, says Gary Jacobson, who studies polarization as a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego. Rather, "there are cultural divisions that map onto political divisions these days. People are making lifestyle choices that are based on what kinds of places they want to live in, their jobs, their activities, and it turns out there are political manifestations as well.

Party Opposition Reaches Record High

Congressional polarization is often measured by how often the two main parties oppose each other in roll call votes. Such party unity broke modern-day records in 2011 in the House, when the parties opposed each other in 76 percent of the votes, and in 2010 in the Senate, in 79 percent of the votes. Members of Congress tended to cross party lines more often in the 1960s and '70s.



Source: "Party Unity History," CQ Almanac, *2012, p. B-19*

As liberal and conservative Americans continue to drift apart, here are some questions that political activists and scholars are pondering:

Will political polarization inevitably increase across America?

The extent and intensity of polarization around the country indicate that U.S. political life won't get more peaceful anytime soon, many political activists and scholars have concluded.

In fact, Smith College's Gold says, "essentially, it needs to get worse before it gets better. I think we're very likely to have a status quo [midterm] election in 2014. Beyond 2014, I'm not very optimistic."

Similarly, Jacobson of UC-San Diego predicts that "you'll get rid of partisan polarization when partisans in Congress start to lose elections." But that doesn't seem likely anytime soon, he says, because "as long as they see political advantages in taking strongly ideological positions, they're going to take them."

Gold also points to the "segregated bubbles" in which a growing number of Americans live. "If they are less exposed to other points of view, that may work to create more polarization," he says. If children grow up in those bubbles, "we're imparting polarization to the next generation."

When she retired in 2013, Sen. Snowe expressed deep frustration at what she saw as Congress's inability to act. She says she worries about "the institutionalization of this culture" in Washington. "You have more than half the Senate and the House having served less than six years," she says. "Ultimately, that creates a generation of lawmakers who know no legislative environment other than the current one."

Snowe's pessimism about changing the culture stems in part from the dearth of competitive congressional and state legislative districts and the growing polarization between liberal and conservative states. Most House members face serious competition only in primaries, which ideological voters tend to dominate. That has driven Democrats to the left and Republicans to the right. And Senate and gubernatorial general elections have become less competitive as the country polarizes geographically.

Only 62 of 435 U.S. House general elections were decided by less than a 10 percent margin in 2012, and political analyst Stuart Rothenberg puts the number of truly competitive House districts at just 51. In two-thirds, the margin was 20 percent or more. Thirty-one winners ran without a major party opponent or with no opposition at all. [16]

Competition has declined substantially, according to Cook, who created the Cook Political Report Partisan Voter Index to distinguish between safe and competitive districts. Following the 2012 elections, he identified 90 "swing districts," where neither party would be entering the 2014 campaign with more than a 5 percent advantage. In 1998, there were 164. [17]

Getty Images (both)

Critics say that commentators like conservative Ann Coulter and liberal Rachel Maddow foster polarization by reinforcing their audiences' biases. Fox and MSNBC revolutionized the tone of cable news when they went on the air in 1996. Fox's conservative orientation attracted the largest cable audience, and MSNBC attempted to copy that success by becoming the liberal alternative.

Presidential election results reveal declining competition at the state level as well. In 20 states in 1976, the margin between Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican incumbent Gerald Ford was less than 5 percent, but only five states were that close in 2012. [18]

In all but 14 states, one party controls both legislative houses and the governor's mansion. "A lot of states are going to have one-party government for a long time," predicts Rob Richie, executive director of the Takoma Park, Md.-based Center for Voting and Democracy, which advocates election reforms to boost competition. [19] Once called "laboratories of democracy" for their willingness to try new governing ideas that might later spread across the country, states now can more accurately be called "laboratories of polarization," he says.

Because of one-party rule, states are rapidly pushing further apart from one another. In the last few years, Democratic-run states have enthusiastically marketed "Obamacare" through state-run insurance exchanges; expanded Medicaid roles; legalized gay marriage and the use of marijuana for medicinal and recreational purposes; made union organizing easier; eased access to abortion; stiffened gun-control laws; allowed illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and obtain driver's licenses; raised taxes; increased government spending; and adopted tougher environmental regulations.

Meanwhile, Republican-governed states have refused to open "Obamacare" exchanges or to expand Medicaid; opposed gay marriage; made it harder for unions to organize; trimmed the powers of public-employee unions; increased the number of places where guns can be carried; cut taxes and spending; and stiffened abortion restrictions beyond what the Supreme Court has permitted in past rulings in hopes the court will reverse *Roe v. Wade*. [20]

Both parties are moving to lock in their supremacy by changing voting laws to favor their candidates: In many states, Republican-controlled governments, vowing to prevent fraud, are requiring voters to show identification before they can cast a ballot. But Democratic officials are trying to make it easier to vote by extending hours and allowing simpler registration. [21]

The widening rift between the parties' leaders contributes to polarization of all Americans, some political analysts say. "It's easier to figure out which side you belong to" when the Senate has no liberal Republicans or conservative Democrats, says Matthew Levendusky, associate professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *The Partisan Sort* and *How Partisan Media Polarize America*. "Once people are sorted onto the correct team, they are much more likely to vote for their party and less likely to split a ticket. They are more likely to become devoted cheerleaders."

Republicans also complain that Democrats are uncompromising.

Perpetual polarization is not inevitable, however, some contend. Congress's recent passage of the 2014 budget was "a nice moment," says Jason Grumet, president of the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington-based think tank that advocates consensus building among lawmakers. (*See sidebar, p. 206.*)

"We've heard from some members who went home after that agreement who felt some palpable change in the mood" of their constituents, he says. "I remain bullish on the basic arc of our democracy — this notion that what makes the United States unique is the capacity to repair mistakes."

"In the long term," Levendusky says, reduced polarization "almost necessarily has to happen. We know that no party system will last forever, so something will happen to change the nature of the political debate. We don't have Federalists and anti-Federalists and Whigs any longer, because new dimensions were introduced into the political debate, new parties formed and new alliances came into existence."

Does a no-compromise stance threaten U.S. democracy?

Michael Gerson, a senior White House adviser during Republican George W. Bush's presidency, finds it preposterous that political activists who call themselves "constitutional conservatives" refuse to compromise.

"The Constitution itself resulted from an extraordinary series of compromises," Gerson, now a *Washington Post* columnist, noted, adding that the government it created can't function without compromise. [22]

The Constitution's checks and balances were designed to limit the power of the central government, said Jonathan Rauch, a fellow at the Brookings Institution, a centrist Washington think tank, but not to prevent government from acting at all. The Constitution "does not require or desire that individuals should all be moderates," he said. But it does require compromise by "creating competing power centers and depriving any of them of the power to impose its will on the others." [23]

Tea Party activists — and the lawmakers and organizations supporting them — contend that compromise is what produced the problems they perceive in the government.

"Congress worked really well for decades, and it got our nation $17 trillion in debt," says Dan Holler, communications director at Heritage Action for America, the activist arm of the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank. "People could say it was wrong that we didn't compromise" on the bipartisan budget agreement that avoided another government shutdown in December. "But the facts are it was a spending increase and a deficit increase, not something a conservative political organization will ever support."

South Carolina Republican Jim DeMint — who left the Senate last year to become Heritage's president — explained his no-compromise stance while still a senator in 2010 by saying that "I cannot recall any bipartisan bill that did not increase spending, expand government and increase our debt." [24]

Ornstein, of the American Enterprise Institute, argues that conservatives' no-compromise posture makes it "extremely difficult to enact policies responsive to the country's most pressing challenges."

Democrats, also, have become less willing to compromise. Obama refused to negotiate concessions in return for Republican votes to lift the debt ceiling, a battle he won when the ceiling was suspended earlier this month, for example. And he recently has been promoting policies designed to mobilize the Democratic base rather than to strike deals with the GOP — proposing a minimum-wage increase and abandoning plans to cut Social Security benefits in order to reduce the deficit, for instance.

Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, top Democrat on the House Budget Committee, attributed the president's posture to "Republicans' refusal to work with the president and move the country forward." But Michael Steele, House Speaker John Boehner's spokesman, charged that Obama is "unwilling to show leadership and take on his party on any issue of substance." [25]

Snowe laments that the federal government has "become all about ideology and absolutes rather than trying to develop practical solutions to the problems. It's abundantly evident how we have lost years that could have contributed to the prosperity of the country if we had concentrated on the issues that matter. If we have perpetual ideological warfare, how are we going to advance the interests of the country?"

Political scientists Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless warn that polarization and gridlock threaten democracy's future by turning young people away from serving in government. Fox, chair of the Loyola Marymount University Political Science Department, and Lawless, an American University government professor, surveyed 4,200 high school and college students in 2012 and found that 85 percent didn't think elected officials want to help people, 79 percent didn't consider politicians smart or hard-working and nearly 60 percent believed politicians are dishonest. Only 11 percent said they might consider running for political office some day.

"This political profile of the next generation should sound alarm bells about the long-term, deeply embedded damage contemporary politics has wrought on U.S. democracy and its youngest citizens," Fox and Lawless wrote. "But if the best and brightest of future generations neither hear nor heed the call to public service, then the quality of U.S. democracy may be compromised." [26]

Smith College's Gold finds it "hard to imagine a crisis of legitimacy such that our entire system of government would unravel." But he notes that Latin American democracies have fallen to military coups and that recurring political crises led France to trade its parliamentary system for a hybrid parliamentary-presidential structure and elected Charles de Gaulle as president in 1958.

If polarization and dysfunctional government aren't dealt with soon, Ornstein warns, "the nature of the tribal media [his term for highly partisan cable and social media] and the amplification of divisions by social media could create a much greater gulf in the country as a whole. If, say, 40 percent of Americans on either side believe the other side is evil and is trying to undermine our way of life —

not people who simply feel a different way — you could end up with a kind of sectarianism that would be deeply dangerous."

Others expect the country to muddle through.

"Things that have to get done will get done because the consequences of not doing them for everybody involved are just too politically awful," says Jacobson of the University of California at San Diego. "It's very ugly and it's very contentious, and then eventually they get around to cutting a deal."

Democratic Sen. Richard Durbin of Illinois said he hoped Congress' recent passage of the 2014 budget and suspending of the federal debt ceiling indicate "a new bipartisan spirit." [27] But House GOP leaders subsequently announced that passing major legislation — such as comprehensive immigration or tax reform — was unlikely before next fall's midterm elections. [28]

"It is an acknowledgment of where they stand, where nothing can happen in divided government," said Frank Luntz, a leading Republican pollster, "so we may essentially have the status quo." [29]

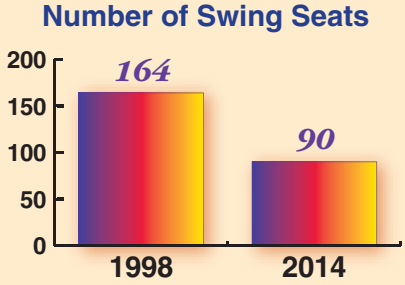
"I don't think it's the end of the world yet," says Dan Glickman, a former U.S. representative and Agriculture secretary and current executive director of the congressional education program at the Aspen Institute, a Washington think tank. "We have great resilience in our society. We're like a person who has some chronic illnesses and ought to deal with them, but we haven't reached a point where they're terminal."

Similarly, Lawrence Summers, a former Treasury secretary in the Democratic Clinton administration and current professor of business and government at Harvard, said that "anyone prone to pessimism about the United States would do well to ponder the alarm with which it viewed the Soviet Union after the launch of the *Sputnik* satellite or Japan's economic rise in the 1980s and the early 1990s.

"One of America's greatest strengths is its ability to defy its own prophecies of doom," said Summers. [30]

Decline in Swing Seats Erodes Bipartisanship

In the last 15 years, the number of House congressional districts up for grabs by either party — called swing or competitive districts — has plummeted, reducing the number of districts in which the incumbents have an incentive to work on a bipartisan basis. In 1998, there were 164 swing districts, representing a third of the House membership. By 2014, the number had fallen to 90.



Source: David Wasserman, "Introducing the 2014 Cook Political Report Partisan Voter Index," The Cook Political Report, *April 4, 2013, http://bit.ly/1fnqKCV*

Should the United States shift to a parliamentary system of government?

One thing America's warring politicians seem to agree on is their reverence for the Constitution.

"It's often noted that the United States is governed by the world's oldest written constitution that is still in use," legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin wrote recently. "This is usually stated as praise, though most other products of the 18th century, like horse-borne travel and leech-based medical treatment, have been replaced by improved models." [31]

Now — as polarization-fueled gridlock has forced government shutdowns and carried America to the brink of defaulting on its national debt — proposals for some 21st-century constitutional updates are commanding increasing attention.

The most radical suggestion for a complete overhaul would mean replacing the nation's checks-and-balances system, in which Congress, the president and Supreme Court share equal power, with a parliamentary structure used by nearly all other advanced democracies. In that system, voters choose the legislature, which in turn picks the prime minister, who is both the chief executive and a legislator. If the legislature and executive disagree, the legislators can pick a new prime minister.

The American system creates a "vetocracy," that "empowers a wide variety of political players representing minority positions to block action by the majority and prevent the government from doing anything," according to Stanford University political scientist Francis Fukuyama. The president, the high court and both houses of Congress — even the minority in the Senate — can thwart the majority's will, he wrote. When they fail to get their way, he added, minorities still can wreak havoc, as Republicans did last fall by shutting down the government and threatening default in futile attempts to repeal or alter the Affordable Care Act, President Obama's signature legislative achievement. [32]

In less wealthy and less stable countries, presidential government has produced worse outcomes, according Bruce Ackerman, a professor of political science and law at Yale. "There are about 30 countries, mostly in Latin America, that have adopted American-style systems," he said. "All of them, without exception," eventually collapsed. [33]

Even Americans, when helping to establish democratic governments in Japan and West Germany after World War II, turned to European parlia-

mentary models, not their own presidential system. [34] Arend Lijphart, political science professor emeritus at the University of California-San Diego, and a specialist on democratic institutions, says parliamentary systems are superior. (*See "At Issue," p. 209.*)

"In a parliamentary system, you don't have [gridlock] because the executive and cabinet are creatures of parliament, and they have to see eye to eye," he says. When they don't, parliament can replace the executive or call an election to select a new government. In America's system, legislators and the president answer to different constituencies, he says. "They reach a conflict, and you get to deadlock and both sides can claim to represent the people."

In addition, Lijphart says, America's two-party system promotes polarization by limiting voters' access to more options on the ideological spectrum. If he could design a new U.S. government, Lijphart would choose a parliamentary system. Five to 10 legislators would be elected in each district, with members chosen according to their parties' proportion of the vote. He thinks four main parties and several smaller ones would evolve. Centrists usually would form the governing coalitions, eliminating or limiting polarization and gridlock, he says.

Critics raise ideological and practical objections to such a plan.

Conservatives say liberals object to the current U.S. system because they want a more activist government. But a slow-moving government is a good thing, according to Rich Mitchell, senior managing editor of *Conservative Daily News*.

"Checks and balances are mechanisms to prevent tyranny," he writes. "Imagine if we'd had a parliamentary system in 2009. The health care law would certainly have been single payer, destroying an entire segment of the U.S. economy." [35]

Gene Healy, vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute, acknowledges the shortcomings of presidential government demonstrated in many Latin American countries, but he still prefers the U.S. system. "American-style separation of powers has its advantages, after all," he said. "Without it, for example, there's little doubt we'd have had socialized medicine long ago." [36]

A parliamentary system might make sense "if we could start from scratch, but we're not building from scratch," says Richie of the Center for Voting and Democracy, which also calls itself FairVote. "No state has a parliamentary system," he says. "Very few cities have one. Every state has a directly elected governor. The trend of cities is to go to directly elected mayors."

Polarization and gridlock are not inevitable in the American system, nor is the parliamentary system perfect, says John Fortier, director of the Democracy Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center.

"When President Obama took office in 2009, he came on the heels of [Democratic congressional victories in] 2006, and the Democrats had significant power," Fortier says. Before Republicans retook control of the House in 2010, the Democrats passed the Affordable Care Act and other Democratic priorities.

Noting that parliamentary elections usually produce a governing coalition or outright party majority that can begin enacting its priorities upon taking office, Fortier asks if Americans really want "a majority that is the one-day snap-judgment of the people." In the American system, "if you win a couple of elections you're going to have a lot of power. But if you win just one election, you're not necessarily going to have a real consensus of the American people."

In addition, he says, even in a multiparty parliament, parties usually group in left and right coalitions. And, many times, "parliaments won't do difficult things. It's the nature of politics that it's not easy to do hard things." ■

BACKGROUND

Bickering and Brawling

The Founding Fathers decried factions, then founded parties and set the stage for today's polarization and gridlock.

During the first half of the 19th century, partisan tempers sometimes turned into physical confrontations. Members of Congress threw punches at each other on the House floor. South Carolina Democratic Rep. Preston Brooks invaded the Senate chamber and beat Massachusetts Sen. Charles Sumner, a Republican, with a cane. In 1804 Vice President Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton, America's first Treasury secretary, in a duel. And, of course, Americans fought a Civil War over slavery and states' rights that resulted in more than 750,000 deaths. [37]

Partisan bickering and complaints about do-nothing Congresses aren't new, either.

In 1822, a *Saturday Evening Post* editorial described the 17th Congress' accomplishments as "Procrastination. Debate. . . . New committees. New Reports. New speeches . . . and, finally, indefinite postponements." [38]

Fourteen decades later, the magazine's political writer, Stewart Alsop, said Congress was inspiring public "indifference, amusement, and contempt," as Southern Democrats and some Republicans stalled President John F. Kennedy's proposed civil rights legislation in 1963. [39] "Never before in history has Congress talked so long to accomplish so little," Alsop wrote. [40]

Alsop was echoing Democratic President Harry S. Truman, who successfully ran for re-election in 1948 while bashing the "Republican, 80th do-nothing Congress" for rejecting his calls for price controls and a federal housing program. [41]

Political polarization has waxed and waned throughout U.S. history. Measured by differences in parties' congressional roll call votes, polarization was high in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, dipped to a low during the Great Depression and World War II, then slowly rose again to current levels. [42] (*See graph, p. 197.*)

Gulfs on basic values have widened among the rank and file as well. Differences in Democratic and Republican views on 48 values ranged from 2 to 23 percent in 1987, then jumped to between 5 and 41 percent in 2012, according to Pew Research Center surveys. [43] (*See graph, p. 196.*)

Partisans' attitudes toward the president also have changed drastically since the administration of Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s. Since 1953, nine of the 10 most polarized years occurred during the last two administrations. [44]

States and legislative districts also are becoming more polarized in their voting habits. In the 1976 presidential race, the margin between Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican incumbent Gerald Ford was less than 5 percent in 20 states. Only five states were that close in 2012. More than 180 U.S. House races were decided by less than five percentage points in 1976, compared with fewer than 60 in 2012. [45]

"The parties became more cohesive and consistent in their beliefs," says Jacobson of the University of California, San Diego. "So we have a Congress composed primarily of people who are elected by their own party stalwarts and not by people in the middle or people from the other party. It used to be Democrats could win Republican-leaning districts with Blue Dogs," he says, using the nickname for fiscally conservative Democrats. "That's no longer the case."

Despite the diminished competition within states and districts, enough House and Senate seats are competitive to put control of the government at stake in most elections. That, too, contributes to polarization, according to University of Maryland politics professor Frances Lee. "Competition fuels party conflict by raising the political stakes of every policy dispute," Lee said. "During the long years of Democratic dominance following the New Deal, politics was less contentious in part because the national political stakes were so much lower."

Democrats didn't worry about losing control of Congress, she said, and Republicans were willing to cooperate to achieve at least some legislative goals. [46]

Battles over civil rights played a key role in sorting Americans into the highly polarized factions witnessed today. During the century after the Civil War, white Southerners had formed the most dependable pillar of the Democratic Party. That began to change in 1948, when South Carolina Gov. Strom Thurmond led a walkout from the Democratic National Convention to protest Truman's support for civil rights measures. Thurmond became the presidential nominee of the rump States Rights' Democratic Party (nicknamed the Dixiecrats) and carried Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and his home state in the general election. [47]

The South's flip toward the GOP accelerated after the Democratic-controlled Congress passed civil rights legislation in 1964. While losing in a landslide to Lyndon B. Johnson in that year's presidential election, conservative Republican Barry Goldwater carried five Deep South states plus his home state of Arizona. Since then, the only Democratic presidential nominee to win a majority of Southern states was Georgian Jimmy Carter in 1976. [48]

The Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing most abortions spurred more polarization, Smith College's Gold says, because it energized religious conservatives and pushed them into the Republican Party, where candidates were more likely than Democrats to support abortion restrictions.

"Another really important factor was that the right wing became livid over [Republican President George] H. W. Bush's violation [in 1990] of his pledge about no new taxes," Gold says. "They then took the position that we can't compromise on these issues anymore."

The demonization of Congress by Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., also was a key factor, according to the American Enterprise Institute's Ornstein. "What Newt wanted to do was to nationalize the [1994 House] election and to make it all about the disgusting, awful, horrible, could-not-be-worse Congress, and get people to say 'Anything would be better than this,' " Ornstein says.

Gingrich, who became House minority whip in 1989, first attacked Republican congressional leaders for being too subservient to Democrats, then turned his rhetorical guns on the opposite party. Gingrich organized highly negative campaigns against Democratic incumbents in 1994, helping the GOP take the House majority for the first time since Eisenhower's landslide in 1952 and for only the second time since 1928. His colleagues then made him House speaker in 1995, a post held until 1999.

The personal attacks launched in the 1994 election helped to erode a tradition of friendship across party lines and a search for common ground. In the 1970s, for instance, liberal South Dakota Democrat George McGovern and conservative Kansas Republican Bob Dole had worked together in the Senate to create the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (commonly called WIC), and to expand availability of food stamps and school lunches.

When World Food Program USA last December presented Dole the "George McGovern and Bob Dole Leadership Award" for fighting hunger, Dole said of the late South Dakotan, "I used to argue [with him] about Vietnam all day, and then in the evening we would talk about food for poor people." [49]

The decline of such friendships — as lawmakers began to spend less time socializing and more time raising

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Chronology

1800s *Growing polarization culminates in Civil War.*

1806
Filibuster created accidently when Senate drops rule to limit debate.

1837
First filibuster conducted.

1843
"Nativist" movements opposing immigration of Catholics accelerate.

1848
Feminist convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., sparks campaign for women's suffrage and equal rights.

1861-1865
Civil War fought over slavery and states' rights.

1876
Post Civil War Reconstruction ends. Southern Jim Crow laws sustain white supremacy and segregation.

1900-1947 *Depression, wars inspire national unity.*

1904
Almost no one in U.S. House compiles a moderate voting record.

1907
Annual immigration from Europe peaks at more than 1 million.

1924
Legislation restricts immigration from Southern, Eastern Europe.

1939
Great Depression and threat of war produce near-record levels of congressional bipartisanship.

1948-2000 *Battles emerge over civil rights, social issues and taxes.*

1948
South Carolina Gov. Strom Thurmond leads walkout from Democratic National Convention to oppose civil rights.

1964
Democratic support for civil rights leads white Southerners to back conservative GOP presidential nominee Barry Goldwater.

1973
Roe v. Wade decision legalizing most abortions pushes religious conservatives toward GOP.

1976
Jimmy Carter becomes last Democratic presidential nominee to win majority of Southern states.

1986
Democrats and Republicans cooperate in adopting federal tax reform.

1990
Antitax conservatives blast Republican President George H. W. Bush for reneging on no-new-taxes campaign pledge.

1994
Following GOP House whip Newt Gingrich into negative campaigns, Republicans capture U.S. House majority for first time since 1952.

1996
Gingrich and Democratic President Bill Clinton cooperate on welfare reform, then pass three balanced budgets. . . . Fox News and MSNBC begin cablecasting, contributing to polarization as MSNBC moves to become liberal alternative to conservative Fox.

2000-Present *Controversies during Bush, Obama administrations heighten polarization.*

2004
Largest gap ever emerges between Democrats and Republicans in approval ratings of a president (George W. Bush), until Barack Obama spurs identical 76-percentage-point chasm in 2012.

2007
Former Senate majority leaders form Bipartisan Policy Center to fight disruptive partisanship in Congress.

2010
Lockstep party voting sets record in U.S. Senate; House sets record two years later. . . . YouGov poll finds sharp increase in parents who oppose their children marrying member of different political party.

2012
Margin between presidential candidates is below 5 percent in only five states, down from 20 states in 1976.

2013
Market researchers report liberal/conservative divides over what to drink, where to shop, how to be entertained. . . . Senate Democrats seek to stop 56 filibusters through Nov. 21, then change the rules to end filibusters with majority vote for most presidential nominees.

2014
Moderate and establishment Republicans organize to combat continuing right-wing efforts to oust less-conservative GOP office holders. Left-wing Democrats begin efforts to move their party more in their direction.

California Election Reforms Have Unintended Consequences

New rules meant to reduce polarization diminish state's clout in Congress.

In 2012 California implemented a revolutionary change in the state's election laws, a bid to spur electoral competition, empower more moderate candidates and reduce polarization and gridlock.

The reforms replaced party primaries with a single wide-open contest that sends the top two vote-getters to the general election. In the Eighth Congressional District, a Republican stronghold along the Nevada border, the primary's top vote-getter in 2012 was Tea Party conservative Gregg Imus, but the second-place finisher — the less-conservative Republican Paul Cook — went on to win the November general election. [1]

Along with the new nonpartisan primaries, the changes include legislative redistricting by a nonpartisan panel to reduce gerrymandering — political line-drawing for purely partisan purposes.

Political analysts say it's too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the state's reforms, which California voters approved in a 2010 ballot initiative over the objections of many political leaders. But the changes clearly have shaken up California politics.

During the previous decade, after Democratic legislators drew district maps to protect their incumbents, none of the state's 53 congressional districts was truly competitive and only one changed party hands. The gerrymandering legislation was so effective that David Wasserman, an analyst for the Washington-based *Cook Political Report*, dubbed it the "incumbent protection act."

Members of Congress and the state legislature knew "they would never lose a general election to a candidate from the other party," said Dan Schnur, director of the University of Southern California's Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics. So, to protect themselves from challenges from the more ideological candidates in their own party primaries, they "retreated from the middle . . . toward their respective ideological end zones," Schnur said. [2]

As a result, in the 2011-12 Congress, of the 19 members tied for the most liberal voting record in the U.S. House, seven were California Democrats, according to the *National Journal*. [3]

After the election reforms were implemented, no congressional incumbent was defeated in the state's 2012 primaries. But a fourth of the state's delegation did not return to Congress in 2013, either because they lost in the general election or because they retired. [4] Among those defeated were 80-year-old Democrat Pete Stark — a volatile partisan who spent half his life in the House and was among the 19 most liberal members — and 71-year-old Democrat Howard Berman, a three-decade House veteran.

Stark won his three-way primary but lost the general election to a 31-year-old suburban city council member who targeted Stark's combative style. [5]

After redistricting threw them into the same race, Berman lost to fellow Democratic Rep. Brad Sherman, 59. [6] The Berman-Sherman combat between two veteran incumbents of the same party highlighted some of the reforms' unintended consequences. The candidates spent millions in what *Politico* termed one of the "five ugliest member vs. member battles" of 2012. [7] Berman's loss cost California a highly respected legislator whom the *Los Angeles*

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funds and campaigning back home — has exacerbated polarization, many say. "Members spent more time together, and I think it was easier to find somebody from the other party to join with you in your legislative initiatives," says former Agriculture secretary Glickman, a House member from 1977 to 1995. "If you do that now, the fringe groups attack you for abandoning your principles or collaborating with the enemy."

Despite growing polarization in the 1980s and '90s — with multiple government shutdowns during the Reagan and Clinton administrations — Republicans and Democrats cooperated with one another more than they do today. In 1986, for example, Congress passed and Reagan signed the biggest reforms in federal tax policy in more than four decades. Two years of negotiations had produced significant concessions from the administration and both parties in Congress, where Democrats held the House majority and Republicans led the Senate. [50] Similarly — even as he was savaging Democrats and leading the House to impeach Clinton — Gingrich worked with the president to pass welfare-reform legislation in 1996 and to balance the budget three times at the end of the '90s. [51]

Bipartisanship was particularly noticeable at the state level during the '80s, according to David Osborne, whose book, *Laboratories of Democracy*, describes the innovative work of governors at that time. "They would communicate with each other across party lines, and when you'd go interview them, they would say things like, 'Governors from the different parties have more in common with each other than they do with colleagues from the same party in Washington,' " Osborne said.

Republican Tommy Thompson, Wisconsin governor from 1987 to 2001, said government officials now are "much more doctrinaire with our philosophies and much more locked into our positions," in part because many governors contemplate running for president. They know they can't get nominated if they stray too far from party orthodoxy, Thompson said. [52]

Impact of the Filibuster

The filibuster — unlimited debate used by a minority faction or an

Times termed a "Democratic lion" and *National Journal* described as "one of the most creative members of the House and one of the most clear-sighted operators in American politics." [8]

The new rules created "a great number of competitive districts" but also "a level of nastiness in campaigns that I have not seen before — and some of the most expensive races ever," according to University of Southern California political scientist Sherry Bebitch Jeffe. [9]

Probably the most devastating unintended consequence was the loss of senior legislators of both parties, which diminished California's clout in Washington. The state's power stemmed from both the size of the delegation and its seniority.

"The problem with a [nonpartisan redistricting] commission in one state and not the others is that the House of Representatives still relies to a great deal on a seniority system," said Democrat Henry Waxman, another senior representative from California, who won re-election in 2012 but is retiring after this year. [10]

The reforms did produce nonpartisan redistricting that was indifferent to incumbents' interests, says Gary Jacobson, a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego. Primary turnout remained low, however. And independent and third-party candidates had no impact on the general election. Moreover, polarization did not decline significantly.

A statewide survey found that "voters can't tell a moderate Republican from a conservative Republican or a moderate Democrat from a liberal Democrat in bottom-of-the-ticket races, including in the state legislature," says Thad Kousser, associate professor of political science at UC-San Diego.

Candidates still have to raise money, and "funds generally come from strongly partisan ideological sources," Jacobson notes.

Despite the skepticism about the California reforms, *Los Angeles Times* editors have declared them a success because "the political parties no longer pick their voters." [11]

— Tom Price

[1] Jean Merl, "New rules make it a new game," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 2012, p. A-21.

[2] Dan Schnur, "Good news from Tuesday's vote," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2012, p. A-23.

[3] Ryan Morris and Peter Bell, "Searchable Vote Ratings Tables: House," *National Journal*, Feb. 23, 2012, http://bit.ly/Nfq9bO.

[4] Michael B. Marois, "California Nonpartisan Districting Ousts Life Incumbents, Bloomberg," March 19, 2013, http://bloom.bg/1gmjcOI.

[5] "Pete Stark, veteran Calif. congressman, defeated by 31-year-old," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 7, 2012, http://lat.ms/1cvoBno.

[6] Jean Merl, "Democratic lion Howard Berman is leaving Congress, a casualty of California's new political landscape," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 7, 2012, p. AA-9.

[7] "Congress 2012: The 5 ugliest member vs. member battles," *Politico*, Feb. 27, 2012, www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/73347.html.

[8] Merl, "Democratic lion Howard Berman is leaving Congress . . .," *op. cit.*

[9] Jean Merl and Patrick McGreevy, "Democrats gain big in Legislature," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 7, 2012, p. 1.

[10] Adam Nagourney, "California Set to Send Many New Faces to Washington," *The New York Times*, Feb. 13, 2012, http://nyti.ms/1jNQMzp.

[11] "Lines of contention," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 22, 2011, p. A-10.

individual to tie up the Senate — was created by accident, according to George Washington University political science professor Sarah Binder. Cleaning up its rulebook in 1806, the Senate dropped a procedure by which a majority could cut off debate. For decades, no one noticed the implication. [53]

Beginning in 1841, various senators proposed rules for ending debate, but none passed until 1917, when a Republican filibuster blocked Democratic President Woodrow Wilson's plan to arm U.S. merchant ships to protect against German submarines in World War I. With backing from the press and the public on national security grounds, Wilson demanded a provision to break filibusters, and the Senate created "cloture." The process allowed two-thirds of senators voting to end debate on some measures. [54]

In 1949, the Senate expanded the circumstances under which cloture could be invoked and required votes from two-thirds of the entire Senate for passage. The supermajority was lowered to three-fifths in 1975. [55]

Filibusters were rare until the 1970s, with entire congresses going by without a single cloture motion. During the 1971-72 term, 24 cloture motions were filed. But the practice soared during President George W. Bush's last two years in office, when 139 motions were filed. During the first five years of Obama's presidency, 329 were filed. [56]

Conservative Democrats fueled the 1970s uptick, when they expanded their filibustering from civil rights legislation to measures unpopular with Republicans in order to discourage GOP opposition, according to Steven Smith, professor of social and political science at Washington University. Later, interest groups and party activists pressured lawmakers to use every available tool to advance their positions, he said. Then, as the parties became more homogeneous, "no longer is there that moderate Republican or moderate Democrat telling their own leaders, 'do not obstruct . . . I am going to get hurt.' " [57]

Recently, filibusters have been used most notably to block judicial nominees. Democrats filibustered 10 of Republican President George W. Bush's circuit court nominees. Eventually several were confirmed after a group of Democrats and Republicans in 2005

Bipartisan Policy Center Seeks to Bridge Partisan Divide

"Most people want the government to work."

Traveling the country in 2012, Maine Republican Sen. Olympia Snowe noted Americans' increasing alienation from the partisan warfare in Washington. They were observing at long distance what she was witnessing first-hand, and she found them as appalled as she was.

"Most people are in the middle," she concluded, "and they want the government to work." But Snowe says "policymaking has been virtually abandoned" in Congress, and debates are "all about ideology and absolutes, rather than trying to develop practical solutions to problems."

Figuring she could "serve the country more effectively from outside than within," Snowe announced in early 2012 that she would not run for another term. She wrote a book entitled *Fighting for Common Ground*, established "Olympia's List" to raise money and encourage grassroots support for centrist candidates, urged citizens to demand an end to government gridlock and became a senior fellow at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington think tank that promotes bipartisanship.

The center was established in 2007 by four former Senate majority leaders: Democrats Tom Daschle and George Mitchell and Republicans Bob Dole and Howard Baker. Partisan debate had "grown so hostile, . . . so raucous, that it has now had a corrosive effect on our ability to govern," Baker said at the time. [1] Snowe and others say damaging partisanship is worse today.

Begun with a staff of 20 and a $7 million annual budget — primarily from philanthropies such as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts — the center proposes bipartisan solutions to major policy problems by culling the ideas of political leaders, scholars, business executives, union officials and others from across the political spectrum.

While the center hasn't ended the polarization and gridlock that spurred its creation, it does get audiences on Capitol Hill and among policy advocates.

Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee said he turns to it for "competent, disinterested advice and specific information" about complex issues, such as how to reduce the national debt. Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia describes it as a "support network for those of us up here in the Senate who [believe] that the best policy solutions are found when you can find common ground." [2]

The center focuses on about 20 projects addressing such red-hot topics as immigration reform, Iran's nuclear ambitions and the partisan political divide. And it attracts prominent national figures to lead its endeavors.

Its immigration task force, for instance, is co-chaired by two Republicans — former Mississippi governor and GOP chairman Haley Barbour and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice — and two Democrats: former Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Rendell and Henry Cisneros, a former San Antonio mayor who served as secretary of Housing and Urban Development. The center's debt-reduction task force was led by former Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici, a Republican, and Alice Rivlin, the founding director of the Congressional Budget Office and head of the White House Office of Management and Budget for Democratic President Bill Clinton.

Center President Jason Grumet says it is "delightfully easy" to land big-name participants because most "have had profound careers solving big problems, and a lot of them miss that opportunity." They also "are pretty disgusted with what's happening in both parties and eager to be part of something that harkens back to the more productive experiences they've had in their careers."

Much of the center's work occurs behind closed doors, Grumet says, including with lawmakers who eschew bipartisanship in public. "It won't shock you that there's a tremendous amount of posturing in our nation's capital," Grumet says, "and we often have very productive experiences working privately to understand where people's bottom lines are. Often the gulf

arranged to break the logjam in exchange for a GOP pledge not to "go nuclear" by changing Senate rules to confirm judges by majority vote rather than the two-thirds traditionally required for major changes. [58]

Democrats finally did go nuclear, however, in November 2013 after repeated GOP filibusters of nominations ranging from secretary of Defense to relatively low-level posts. A Senate majority now can end filibusters of all presidential nominees except Supreme Court justices. [59]

Polarizing Media

Partisan media have savaged their political opponents since before the founding of the republic. During the first third of the 19th century, American newspapers published "scurrility," "vulgar attack on personal character," "vituperative political attack" and "vile innuendo," according to journalism historian Frank Luther Mott. [60]

Because of modern technology, however, what the American Enterprise Institute's Ornstein calls the tribal media exert much more influence today. "The immediacy of talk radio and cable TV, amplified by social media, gives them reach and powers significantly beyond what we had seen before," he says.

When Fox News Channel and MSNBC went on the air in 1996, they revolutionized the tone of cable news, which previously had been dominated by the traditional journalism of CNN. Fox's conservative orientation attracted the largest cable news audience,

between those bottom lines is much smaller in private than one would see in public."

Center staff members have briefed lawmakers privately, for example, on several occasions when the need to raise the federal debt ceiling loomed, Grumet says. "Our analysis hasn't told people what they should do," he says, "but has very carefully walked through what the world would look like if we were to default. We have yet to meet somebody who has told us [in private] that they think that would be an appropriate strategy for the United States."

Not everyone is enamored of the center's bipartisan posture. Some liberal critics question its ties to corporate donors, which include oil companies BP America and Chevron, pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and conglomerate General Electric. Still, philanthropic foundations contributed four times as much to the center as corporations did in 2012. [3]

Writing in the environmental publication *Grist*, liberal activist David Halperin said the center "often seems more like a voice for corporate interests in Washington." [4] And when a center task force released a health care plan in 2009, opponents of the proposal questioned the organization's donations from a pharmaceutical company and its other health care industry ties. Daschle and Dole, for example, have worked for legal and consulting firms with health care clients. [5]

Conversely, some conservatives say the center is too tolerant of big government. And Erick Erickson, editor of the conservative website *Red State*, described the organization as "left-of-center" because its task force reports support comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. [6]

When Snowe appeared on ABC's "This Week" last year to describe the center's goal of drawing more Americans into political action so they can hold government "accountable for reaching agreement," conservative columnist George Will said he wasn't sure he agreed with that goal.

Getty Images/*The Washington Post*/Matthew Cavanaugh

Republican Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine retired in 2013 over deep frustration at what she saw as Congress's inability to act. She is now a senior fellow at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington think tank.

"I think Sen. Snowe wishes the American people were less cynical about Washington and more trusting," Will said. "I wish Americans were less trusting of government than we are. We wouldn't have the largest, sprawling government, which by its very size guarantees the kind of [gridlock] that Sen. Snowe dislikes." [7]

— Tom Price

[1] David S. Broder, "Wily Senate veterans chart a path to common ground," *The Seattle Times*, March 8, 2007, http://bit.ly/1d6KINU.

[2] See "A Sense of Common Purpose," Bipartisan Policy Center, a video at http://bit.ly/1fe2gxi.

[3] Bipartisan Policy Center, "Annual Report," 2012, http://bit.ly/1jTjVfV.

[4] David Halperin, "Keystone Pipeline Not a Big Deal — Say Interests Supported By Oil and Gas Industry," *Grist*, May 12, 2013, http://bit.ly/1gmfULq.

[5] Sam Stein, "Daschle's Firm and Group Have Ties to Private Health Care Industry," *The Huffington Post*, July 19, 2009, http://huff.to/1jhG1FW.

[6] Erick Erickson, "The Fix Is In," *Red State*, Dec. 5, 2013, http://bit.ly/1fl0KYO.

[7] "Martha Raddatz Hosts ABC's This Week," *Political Transcript Wire*, May 13, 2013, http://abcn.ws/Og1Zir.

and MSNBC eventually attempted to copy that success by becoming the liberal alternative. Critics say that together they foster polarization by reinforcing their audiences' biases.

"People now can engage in selective exposure to left-wing and right-wing media," as Levendusky, of the University of Pennsylvania, puts it. Thus, "they are not exposed to debate to the extent they used to be," Smith College's Gold says. This results, Ornstein says, in "sets of people who do not share common sets of facts."

According to a Pew survey, 54 percent of staunch conservatives watch Fox regularly, while just 44 percent read a newspaper and 30 percent watch network broadcast news. [61] Staunch conservatives' reliance on partisan media is unusual, according to Pew Research Center founding director Andrew Kohut, because other Americans — whether on the right, left or center — tend to rely primarily on newspapers and broadcast television networks. [62] Only 19 percent of the staunchest liberals turn to MSNBC regularly, for instance, while 69 percent rely on newspapers and 38 percent on network news. [63]

Polarized news consumers may be intensely partisan and highly interested in politics, but they also are few in number, Levendusky says. "It's not the normal person who watches Fox or MSNBC."

Cable news programs exert outsized influence by reaching political activists and frequent voters. They're also influential, researchers say, because of people's tendency to believe what they want to believe and to cling

to their beliefs despite powerful evidence to the contrary.

Fox, for instance, is both the most and least trusted news source, according to a poll published Jan. 30. MSNBC was second as least trusted.

Polarization has created "belief communities," said Steven Strauss, a public policy lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School, "where people who want to believe patently untrue things (e.g., that President Obama was born in Kenya) are never challenged in their beliefs, and may even be encouraged in their fantasies." [64]

Some striking scientific experiments provide evidence that goes beyond observing the behavior of cable news fans. In one, Yale researchers asked mathematically skilled liberals and conservatives to conduct a mathematical analysis of fake data from a fake study of the effectiveness of a law banning private citizens from carrying concealed handguns in public. One data set showed that crime increased as a result of the law, the other that crime decreased.

Liberal Democrats were much more likely to solve the problem correctly when the correct answer indicated that crime was decreasing than they were when the right answer was that crime was increasing. The opposite was true for conservative Republicans. [65]

And the "belief communities" are strengthened by unlimited independent political spending that reinforces polarized beliefs through advertising and support of candidates who would have fallen by the wayside in the past. Wealthy casino operator Sheldon Adelson, for instance, spent between $98 million and $150 million in the last presidential election cycle, including at least $10 million to help keep former House Speaker Newt Gingrich's run for the 2012 GOP presidential nomination alive. Wealthy financier Tom Steyer plans to spend $50 million — and raise another $50 million — for candidates who support action on climate change. And Charles and David Koch — principal owners of the multibillion-dollar Koch Industries conglomerate — have donated hundreds of millions to conservative causes. [66]

And political scientists say the independent spending also has contributed to polarization by weakening the influence of parties.

Parties leaders want to procure "the broadest electoral appeal of the party brand," said constitutional law professor Richard Pilde of New York University. Conversely, said Richard Hasen, a law and political science professor at the University of California at Irvine, "ads funded by outside spending tend to be more inflammatory than party or candidate ads, because outside groups don't have to worry about their long-term reputations." [67] ■

Getty Images/T. J. Kirkpatrick

In a rare instance of compromise, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Patty Murray, D-Wash., and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis., announce last Dec. 10 that they had reached agreement on the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013. Some optimists hoped congressional budget approval would lead to future cooperation between the two parties. But House GOP leaders subsequently announced that passing major legislation was unlikely before next fall's midterm elections.

CURRENT SITUATION

Intraparty Conflicts

As candidates run their 2014 campaigns and many activists look ahead to the 2016 presidential race, both parties face internal struggles over whether they should be shifting more to the left or the right. Moderates and traditional conservatives are trying to beat back more extreme conservatives who have pulled the Republican Party far to the right, and some liberals are seeking to exercise more influence in a Democratic Party they believe has slipped too much toward the center.

In a late-January action that highlighted the GOP's party-shattering polarization, the Arizona Republican Party censured John McCain — the state's senior U.S. senator and the 2008 GOP presidential nominee — for insufficient conservatism.

"Only in times of great crisis or betrayal is it necessary to publicly censure

Continued on p. 210

Would a parliamentary system reduce political polarization?

AREND LIJPHART
RESEARCH PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, FEBRUARY 2014

My proposals for reducing the negative effects of polarization in the United States will sound radical to many Americans, but they are commonplace among modern industrial democracies. America would be better off in a parliamentary system with proportional representation and competition among several parties.

Systems with a separated president and legislature contain flaws that are contributing to America's gridlocked government. The first problem is what the late Yale University political scientist Juan J. Linz called "dual democratic legitimacy."

In parliamentary systems, only the legislature is popularly elected and is the clear and legitimate representative of the people. But in presidential systems both president and legislature are popularly elected and can claim legitimacy. It is quite possible — even likely — that the president and the majority of legislators will have divergent political preferences. There is no democratic principle to resolve such disagreements. The result tends to be stalemate, as seen now in the United States.

The second problem is rigidity. Presidents are elected for fixed terms, which cannot be extended due to term limits even if a president is successful, and cannot be shortened even if a president proves incompetent. Impeachment is almost always time-consuming and unsuccessful because extraordinary majorities are required to impeach a president. If parliamentary systems run into major problems or crises, they can be resolved much more easily by calling new elections and forming a new government.

The third problem is the winner-take-all nature of presidential elections. The winner wins all executive power, leaving losing viewpoints with no voice in the executive office. As Linz noted, parliamentary elections can produce an absolute majority for a single party, but power-sharing, coalition-forming and attention to the interests of smaller parties are more common.

The United States likely would end up with four main parties — representing liberal Democrats, moderate Democrats, moderate Republicans and very conservative Republicans — and a few small parties. Governing coalitions probably would be formed by the centrists most of the time, eliminating gridlock and reducing the impact of extremists.

Some will say that parliamentary government would be impossible in the United States because of America's strong tradition of presidentialism. By that logic, should we tell nondemocratic countries to refrain from introducing democracy because of their nondemocratic traditions?

Presidentialist traditions may be a big obstacle to the adoption of parliamentarism, but they are not a valid argument against a switch to the healthier parliamentary system of government.

JASON GRUMET
PRESIDENT, BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, FEBRUARY 2014

Frustrated with gridlock? Get in line. Congress' inability to overcome differences is causing real damage today and saddling our kids with tremendous debt, a crumbling infrastructure and broadly diminished opportunities. Still, suggesting that we jettison a system that has served us well for 225 years is more a commentary on our desire for instant gratification than a reflection of fundamental flaws in our nation's Constitution.

Parliamentary systems may seem more efficient, but their outcomes are often neither stable nor resilient. For example, Australia enacted, repealed and re-enacted universal health care within a decade.

In contrast, while our Constitutional "checks and balances" and inclination toward divided government can be maddening, they're also the foundation of America's historic cohesion, stability and economic strength. Leaders with disparate constituencies and varying views are compelled to engage one another. The resulting policy outcomes are more thoughtful, measured and broadly accepted than in a majority-driven system, where the ruling party or coalition has no obligation to engage the opposition. In the current closely divided and polarized environment, does anyone really want Republicans or Democrats empowered to govern with no constraints?

And therein lies the real problem: Today's highly polarized atmosphere discourages the interaction our system needs to flourish. Instead of clamoring for an unlikely "do-over" of the Constitution, let's commit ourselves to pragmatic measures that restore engagement across party lines.

For example, greater transparency in political donations would loosen the grip of divisive activists. Wider primary participation would ensure more appealing — and reasonable — general-election candidates. Devolving power from Senate and House leadership back to congressional committees would hand the hard work of legislating back to members with greater incentive for substance than sound bites. And turning the cameras off for a few hours each week would allow frank and energetic exchanges of views free of anxiety that considering new ideas would unleash attacks from the far right or far left.

America has been here before. We have enjoyed periods of great legislative accomplishment and suffered through years of devastating dysfunction. People are mad. This is good. Public outrage is an essential driver of political change — but it needs to be directed toward practical solutions.

There is value to contemplating disruptive ideas — even bad ones. But when it comes to repairing our democracy, the best thinking will be found "inside the box."

Continued from p. 208

our leaders," the GOP state committee said in a resolution adopted by voice vote Jan. 25. "Today we are faced with both." The party leaders accused McCain of having "amassed a long and terrible record of drafting, cosponsoring and voting for legislation best associated with liberal Democrats," such as immigration reform and confirmation of the president's "liberal nominees." At the same time, the committee praised conservative GOP senators and Tea Party favorites Ted Cruz of Texas and Mike Lee of Utah, who led last year's government shutdown and threat to default on the national debt. [68]

In Texas, conservative Sen. John Cornyn is being challenged in the GOP primary by even more conservative Rep. Steve Stockman. Even though *National Journal* ranked Cornyn the second-most-conservative senator in the 2011-12 Congress and the 14th-most conservative last year, Stockman has attacked him as a "compromising liberal" and Democratic Senate Majority Leader "Harry Reid's Republican." [69]

Cornyn and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky are among seven GOP Senate incumbents — of 12 running for re-election — who face primary challenges from the right this year. [70]

However, unlike in recent years — when insurgent conservatives won GOP primaries, then lost general elections that Republicans had been favored to win — moderate, business-oriented and more-traditional Republicans are organizing to fight back.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce — which had tended to stay out of party primaries — spent more than $200,000 to help Bradley Byrne win a special election to fill an Alabama congressional seat late last year. The chamber backed Byrne in the November GOP primary runoff against Dean Young, who questioned President Obama's birthplace and advocated closing the government again to fight the Affordable Care Act. Byrne then easily won the December general election in the heavily Republican district.

The Chamber is making independent expenditures on behalf of McConnell as well. [71] The Main Street Advocacy Fund is also raising funds to support establishment Republicans. Led by moderate Ohio Republican Steve LaTourette, who left the U.S. House last year because he was frustrated by the extreme partisanship, the group aims to raise $8 million to defend moderates or oust extreme conservatives in eight to 10 races this year.

"We want our party back," LaTourette said. But he acknowledged that "we are behind the curve with our more conservative counterparts," referring to organizations such as the Club for Growth, Freedom Works and the Senate Conservatives Fund, which have been supporting staunchly conservative candidates for years. [72]

In addition to attacking the right-wing groups' policies and polarizing strategies, Main Street Advocacy accuses them of damaging the GOP. "If not for [those groups], the Republicans would control the Senate today," says David Hobson, a moderate former representative from Ohio and a Main Street member. "Because of nominating these narrow people in primaries, they give advantage to Democrats in general elections."

Tom Borelli, a senior fellow at Freedom Works, dismissed LaTourette's organization as a "RINO (Republican in Name Only) protection fund." [73] And Club for Growth spokesman Barney Keller said Main Street contributors are wasting their money. "We look forward to adding to the ranks of pro-growth conservatives in Congress," Keller said. [74]

Things are more peaceful among Democrats, but more liberal party members increasingly are complaining that both the Obama and Clinton administrations made too many concessions to the right, and they are talking about changing things in the 2014 and 2016 elections.

Some tout liberal Democrat Bill de Blasio's triumph in last year's New York mayoral race as a harbinger of a left-wing revival to come. Some promote Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren as a more liberal alternative to Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is widely expected to run for president in 2016.

As Obama embraced the need to rein in entitlement spending, Warren and some allies have proposed increasing Social Security benefits. They also want tougher regulation of large financial institutions. "The first Obama administration was focused too much on saving the banks and Wall Street," said liberal Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, who is retiring after this year. "There's going to be a big populist push on whoever's running for office to espouse these kinds of progressive policies." [75]

Redistricting Reforms

Outside of party conflicts, election-law reformers are promoting changes they say would reduce polarization, ease government gridlock, remove barriers to voting and cause more citizens to feel they have a real voice in running the country.

For instance, say reformers, recent election-law changes in California are making elections there less conducive to polarization. In 2012, California elected all of its federal and state legislators in nonpartisan elections conducted in districts designed by a nonpartisan citizens' commission. (*See sidebar, p. 204.*)

One of the most ambitious reform plans comes from FairVote, which advocates multimember legislative districts and rank-order voting. Under the plan, three to five legislators would be chosen from each district. Voters would select their first choice, as well as their second, third and additional picks. To be elected in a three-member district, for instance, a candidate would have to receive more than a quarter of the votes. If fewer than three candidates reached that goal, the secondary-choice

votes would be counted until three candidates were chosen.

In a multimember district with rank-order voting, victory likely would go to candidates who reach out to the broadest range of voters, and a larger proportion of voters would feel they had helped to select their public officials, FairVote's Richie says. In single-member districts, supporters of losing candidates get no representation, he says, even if they comprise nearly half the electorate.

Movements are underway in several states to combat polarization by establishing nonpartisan or bipartisan redistricting commissions that would not try to create uncompetitive districts.

Fortier, of the Bipartisan Policy Center, says that while he's intrigued by many of the proposals, researchers question how much polarization can be attributed to gerrymandering, or drawing districts to benefit the party in power. For instance, he points out, many statewide elections are polarized even though they can't be gerrymandered.

However, much evidence shows that gerrymandering can determine the outcome of many elections. After the 2010 census, for instance, Republicans redrew most congressional districts. Then, although Democratic House candidates outpolled GOP candidates by 1.4 million votes in 2012, Republicans won 234 seats to Democrats' 201. [76]

But the American Enterprise Institute's Ornstein warns that redistricting reforms alone won't end polarization and restore civility. To get a broader swath of the electorate voting, Ornstein advocates adopting Australia's requirement that citizens show up at the polls. Turnout has been 90 percent or greater since the measure was enacted. "Australian politicians will tell you that, if you know both sides' base will be there, you focus more on voters in the middle," he says. "You change the issues you talk about, the rhetoric you use."

In addition, "We have to do some things that change culture," he says. "If we can create a culture with a sense that, when you say outrageous things that divide people there's going to be a sense of shame, that would be helpful." ■

OUTLOOK

Proposed Solutions

FairVote's Richie says he's confident that his group's presidential reform proposal — that states cast their electoral votes for the winner of the national popular vote — will become reality in 2016 or 2020.

Already, the plan has been adopted by nine states that represent 25 percent of the electoral votes needed to win the presidency, he says. When states with 270 votes approve the plan, it will take effect because their votes would be enough to win, "so it's halfway to enactment."

He's optimistic about FairVote's other proposals, as well, because the country is "at such a level of crisis and dysfunction that some changes that need to happen are going to start happening," he says. "Reforms tend to come in bunches. The last big wave of constitutional change was direct election of senators in 1913, women's suffrage in 1920 and the income tax in 1913."

Bipartisan Policy Center President Grumet suggests voters will solve the problem eventually by rejecting polarizing candidates. "It's a question of time-frame, and it's not going to be geologic," he says.

The University of California at San Diego's Lijphart acknowledges that the United States is unlikely to shift to parliamentary government. Adoption of proportional representation is more likely, he says, because "it does not require a constitutional amendment."

"The positive news is the public is not satisfied," former Agriculture Secretary Glickman says. However, he warns, "if we can't solve basic problems like the national debt or repairing our national infrastructure or creating an educational system that works at high levels, we are in deep trouble as a society."

In addition, former Rep. Hobson says, "as long as anonymous people are able to fund these (polarizing campaigns) on both sides, in my opinion, it's only going to get worse."

Gridlock will end when one party seizes control of both congressional chambers and the White House at the same time, Heritage Action's Holler says. "You have two parties who should be offering very distinct visions for the proper role of the government. With the way the political parties are right now — and if they become increasingly clear about what they stand for and the direction they want to move — one of them eventually will have a mandate from the American people to move forward in that direction.

"Until one party does," Holler says, "we'll be stuck in the situation we are now, where there's not a lot of clarity about what direction to go." ■

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About the Author

Tom Price, a Washington-based freelance journalist and a contributing writer for *CQ Researcher*, focuses on politics, government, science, technology, education and business. Previously, Price was a correspondent in the Cox Newspapers Washington Bureau and chief politics writer for the *Dayton Daily News* and *The* (Dayton) *Journal Herald.* He is author or coauthor of five books, including *Changing The Face of Hunger* and, most recently, *Washington, DC, Free & Dirt Cheap* with his wife Susan Crites Price.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bipartisan Policy Center, 1225 I St. N.W., Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20005; 202-204-2400; www.bipartisanpolicy.org. Forms taskforces of political, business, labor and academic figures to develop bipartisan solutions to major national challenges.

Brookings Institution Governance Studies Program, 1775 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036; 202-797-6000; www.brookings.edu/about/programs/governance. Section of the centrist think tank that supports research into such topics as elections, partisanship, budgeting, presidential appointments and improving government performance.

Center for Voting and Democracy, 6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 610, Takoma Park, MD 20912; 301-270-4616; www.fairvote.org. Nonpartisan organization that researches elections and voting and advocates reforms, including multimember legislative districts and presidential election by popular vote.

Gallup Organization, 901 F St., N.W., Washington, DC 20004; 202-715-3030; www.gallup.com. Conducts surveys on a wide range of public issues.

Heritage Action for America, 214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20002; 202-548-5280; http://heritageaction.com. Advocacy arm of the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank; rates members of Congress according to their support for the organization's positions and is a key player in the effort to pull the Republican Party to the right.

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Selected Sources

Books

Abramowitz, Alan I., *The Polarized Public? Why American Government Is So Dysfunctional*, Pearson, 2013.

An Emory University political science professor argues that America's checks and balances — in an era defined by ultra-polarized political activists — almost guarantee a dysfunctional government.

Levendusky, Matthew, *How Partisan Media Polarize America*, University of Chicago Press, 2013.

A University of Pennsylvania political scientist concludes that cable news channels such as MSNBC and Fox harden their audiences' partisan views rather than creating them.

Mann, Thomas E., and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism*, Basic Books, 2013.

Two longtime political analysts blame the Republican Party's right wing for nearly destroying the federal government's ability to function.

Matthews, Chris, *Tip and the Gipper: When Politics Worked*, Simon & Schuster, 2013.

An MSNBC host writes about his years as an aide to Democratic House Speaker Tip O'Neill during Republican Ronald Reagan's administration, when political opposites forged compromises.

Articles

Brownstein, Ronald, and Stephanie Czekalinski, "How Washington Ruined Governors," *National Journal*, April 11, 2013, http://bit.ly/1kYF3Bv.

The authors outline the sharp differences in how today's Democratic and Republican governors approach problems compared to the past, when governors of both parties worked together to attack challenges.

Carr, David, "It's Not Just Political Districts. Our News Is Gerrymandered, Too," *The New York Times*, Oct. 11, 2013, http://nyti.ms/ObsvcV.

A columnist laments how the rise of polarized media enables even a Supreme Court justice to be exposed only to opinions he agrees with.

Kohut, Andrew, "The numbers prove it: The GOP is estranged from America," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2013, http://wapo.st/NbXrIU.

The founding director of the Pew Research Center contends that only once in his career as a pollster has he seen a political party as estranged from the American mainstream as the current GOP: In the late 1960s and early '70s, when left-wing activists pushed the Democratic Party away from the center over a variety of issues.

Rauch, Jonathan, "Rescuing Compromise," *National Affairs*, Fall 2013, http://bit.ly/1bmNnb8.

A senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank, contends that compromise is a conservative value and an essential component of the American system of government.

Strauss, Steven, "Six Reasons American Political Polarization Will Only Get Worse," *The Huffington Post*, Oct. 14, 2012, http://huff.to/1maWoFC.

A public policy lecturer at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government blames growing polarization on partisan media, people's tendency to ignore information that contradicts their beliefs, gerrymandered congressional districts, the rise of single-issue interest groups and the lack of common perspectives.

Reports and Studies

"The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration," Presidential Commission on Election Administration, January 2014, http://bit.ly/1g3EZN6.

A bipartisan presidential commission created by President Obama recommends reforms to make it easier for more Americans to vote.

"Partisan Polarization Surges in Bush, Obama Years," Pew Research Center, http://bit.ly/1eTsY8m.

A series of Pew surveys shows that Republicans' and Democrats' disagreements about basic values have been growing since 1987.

Olmstead, Kenneth, Mark Jurkowitz, Amy Mitchell and Jodi Enda, "How Americans Get TV News at Home," Pew Research Center, Oct. 11, 2013, http://bit.ly/1eTt282.

Broadcast news programs draw far more viewers than cable news, but cable viewers are more politically engaged than broadcast viewers.

Wolfensberger, Donald R., "Getting Back to Legislating," Bipartisan Policy Center and The Woodrow Wilson Center, Nov. 27, 2012, http://bit.ly/1bMT1nh.

A scholar at two Washington-based think tanks summarizes recommendations from scholars and former lawmakers and congressional aides on how to make Congress work better. The solutions include: Have legislators spend more time together in Washington, restore authority to congressional committees and give minorities a greater voice.

The Next Step:

Additional Articles from Current Periodicals

California Reforms

"If DC had California-style election reform, there might not be a shutdown: Editorial," *Los Angeles Daily News*, Oct. 8, 2013, http://tinyurl.com/l6emjec.

California's election reforms, designed to encourage moderation and compromise in politics, seem to be working, and a similar system in Washington could have prevented the potentially devastating shutdown of the federal government last fall.

Mahtesian, Charles, "Did California's election reforms work?" *Politico*, June 14, 2012, http://tinyurl.com/q3htt9r.

A study by the Public Policy Institute of California showed that reforms inconvenienced state legislative and congressional incumbents and led to closer elections, but a reporter says one election does not provide enough evidence to draw conclusions about the reforms' effects.

Nuttall, Tom, "Rewriting the rules," *The Economist*, Jan. 27, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/on8qe3a.

A reporter says California's reforms have empowered lawmakers and given insight into resolving gridlock and improving representation.

Democracy

Rettig, Jessica, "Why Political Polarization Might be Good for America," *U.S. News & World Report*, May 27, 2010, http://tinyurl.com/pqkyjuj.

Author Alan Abramowitz says a certain degree of political polarization is healthy for any democracy because it shows people have choices in elections, and parties are held accountable.

Zakaria, Fareed, "A way out of our dysfunctional politics," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2011, http://tinyurl.com/3nvemxs.

A journalist blames widespread polarization in the United States on the changing structure of politics, which he says encourages narrower, ideological interests, rather than broader national ones.

News Media

Arceneaux, Kevin, "Why you shouldn't blame polarization on partisan news," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 4, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/nxm38yj.

A professor of political science says polarization in the media is a result of existing polarization in Congress and that even without partisan media, people would interpret the news through a partisan lens.

Carville, James, "Opinion: Disturbing polarization in media worsens political partisanship," *The Hill*, Oct. 15, 2013, http://tinyurl.com/k8lgu5x.

A longtime Democratic political commentator says polarization in the media is exacerbating political polarization because people can get their news from partisan outlets, making it easier for them not to ever hear alternative viewpoints.

Separate Lifestyles

"Study: Democrats Drink Vodkas, Republicans Prefer Bourbon," CBS Local DC, Jan. 22, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/ofyf8ev.

Democrats prefer clear spirits, while Republicans like brown liquors, according to consumer data analyzed by the National Media Research Planning and Placement, an Alexandria, Va.-based Republican consulting firm.

Friedman, Amy, "Red and Blue Brands: How Democrats and Republicans Shop," *Time*, June 19, 2012, http://tinyurl.com/d9pfsg4.

A study by Buyology, a marketing research firm, showed distinct differences in consumer behavior between Republicans and Democrats.

Morello, Carol, and Ted Mellnik, "Washington: A world apart," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 9, 2013, http://tinyurl.com/lt2mgse.

Two reporters say Washington, D.C., neighborhoods are becoming more economically and educationally similar, resulting in a large area with a wealthy and highly educated population, called a Super Zip.

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