

Partisan Antipathy And Political Polarization In America: The Two-Party System In Perspective

الكرهية الحزبية والاستقطاب السياسي في الولايات المتحدة:

قراءة في النظام ثنائي الحزب

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الملخص:

يعتمد النظام السياسي الأمريكي على نظام الحزبين المعمول به منذ تسعينيات القرن الثامن عشر. ويرتكز النظام الحالي على الاحتكار الثنائي الديمقراطي-الجمهوري منذ خمسينيات القرن التاسع عشر. إلا أن العداء الحزبي ازداد مؤخرًا بين الجمهوريين والديمقراطيين، مما عقّد الحياة السياسية وأثر سلبًا على أداء الحكومة الفيدرالية والمؤسسات السياسية. تناقش هذه المقالة سمات العداء الحزبي والاستقطاب السياسي، كما تناقش مستقبل نظام الحزبين. ولتحقيق ذلك، اتبعت هذه الورقة منهجًا وصفيًا يُفصّل الحقائق ويُحلّلها بدقة، مُسلّطًا الضوء على خصائصه الرئيسية للوصول إلى استنتاجات تُساعد على فهمها. أظهرت النتائج أن نظام الحزبين الأمريكي منقسم بشكل واضح، وأن الحزبين متميزان بوضوح دون أي قاعدة مشتركة بينهما، مما يُؤثر سلبًا على الأداء الجيد للحكومة الفيدرالية والمؤسسات السياسية، وهذا ما يدفع إلى مناقشة إمكانية استبداله بنظام متعدد الأحزاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

نظام الحزبين، نظام التعدد الحزبي، العداء الحزبي، الاستقطاب السياسي

Abstract:

The U.S. political system rests on the two-party system that has been in place since the 1790s. The current system has hinged on the Democratic-Republican duopoly since the 1850s. Recently, however, partisan antipathy increased among Republicans and Democrats, which complicated the political life and negatively affected the performance of the federal government and political institutions. This article discusses the features of partisan antipathy and political polarization, and the future of the current bipartisan system. To achieve this, this paper followed a descriptive approach in which the facts are well described and analyzed by bringing to light their main characteristics to reach conclusions that help understand them. The findings showed that the U.S. two-party system is clearly divided and the two parties are clearly distinct with no overlap between them, which threatens the good performance and functioning of the federal government and political institutions, suggesting replacing it with a multiparty system.

Keywords:

Two-party system; Multiparty system; Partisan antipathy; Political polarization

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the American Civil War (1861-1865), the United States' political scene has been dominated by two major political parties, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, which are recognized in the fifty American states as well as Washington, D.C. Therefore, the majority of American Presidents came from these two major political parties, thereby incarnating the two-party system where political competition lies essentially between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. However, many other political parties do exist in the country, but their influence is minor compared to that of the aforesaid political parties, the Democratic and Republican Parties. In plain English, other than the two major political parties, the U.S. political scene comprises many other political parties that are recognized in several states. In this respect, the United States counted at least 55 different ballot-qualified political parties as of January 2025, while 238 political parties were registered at the state level. This great number of political parties reflects the pluralistic nature of the American political scene that incarnates the political freedom guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and allows politicians to voice, propagate, and defend their ideas related to different spheres that obsess the American public.

1.1 The Problem of the Study

The problem of this study is stated as follows:

- What are the features of partisan antipathy in America?
- Could a multipartisan system be a good substitute for the current bipartisan system?

1.2 The Purpose of the Study

This study brings to light the features of the partisan aversion and antipathy that prevailed in the American political scene. It also seeks to explore its bad impacts on the performance of the federal government and political institutions. Furthermore, this paper sheds light on the derogatory and scornful language used by members and candidate of the two political parties and their role in broadening the gap between Republicans and Democrats. Lastly, this paper discusses substituting the current bipartisan system with a multipartisan one to guarantee the good functioning of the federal institutions and avoid deadlocks.

1.3 The Study Methodology

This study employed a descriptive approach, wherein the phenomenon is thoroughly described and analyzed, focusing on its most important characteristics to draw conclusions that help understand its nature. Furthermore, this approach stands on incorporating certain tools and auxiliary approaches, such as historical curriculum, by evoking the historical developments of the phenomenon that have impacted its current nature.

2. The Early Appearance of Political Parties in the USA

Many studies were conducted by historians to ascertain and assess the exact date that marked the rise of the political parties in the United States, yielding different results. However, the date of development of the political parties in America was approximately placed between the early years of George Washington's national government in the 1790s and the 1830s, when the Jacksonian Democrats were competing with Whigs for political power (Hoadley, 1986, p. 3).

To illustrate, Beard (1915) conducted a research entitled *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* in which he posited that partisan behaviors emerged with the establishment of the First Congress owing to the argument between the Northern and Southern states over their different economic interests, arguing that these political parties, the Federalist Party and the Anti-Federalist Party, represented the same groups who disagreed over the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. However, Risjord (1978, as cited in Hoadley, 1986) disagreed with Beard, maintaining that there was a discontinuity between the groups who disagreed over the ratification of the Constitution and the two political parties that emerged and dominated the political scene during the 1790s. Similarly, Ryan (1971), who conducted a study by following a different approach based on cluster analysis of Congressional votes, supported Beard's idea, stressing that partisan behaviors emerged with the First Congress, relating them to the division of groups over Alexander Hamilton's financial program. This presumption was critiqued by Henderson (1973), who maintained that alignments in the First Congress could be better described as factional groups, placing the real emergence of political parties in the Third Congress.

Other scholars believed that political parties in the USA emerged with the John Jay Treaty signed between the United States and Great Britain, thereby placing the date at around 1795. Others, however, pointed to the crucial events that took place in the one-term presidency of President John Adams (1735-1826; served from 1797 to 1801), thus placing the date to about 1800. In this respect, Libby (1912) pointed to the Alien and Sedition Acts as being the first clear sign of partisan life in the United States. This presumption was based on the results of his survey, in which he analyzed the records of the legislative votes, where he noticed that votes were not clearly or sufficiently polarized before Adam's presidency to be called party voting. In other words, party voting in Congress has to be clear enough to reflect political poles in Congress based on the divergence in voters' ideas, beliefs, interests, and stances. In like manner, Dauer (1953) shared the same presumption regarding the date of political parties' emergence in the USA, placing the date at about 1797-89 with the enactment of the notorious Alien and Sedition Acts.

Other scholars disagreed with the abovementioned presumptions, believing that political parties did not develop in the 1790s, suggesting instead that they emerged after 1830. In this regard, Hofstadter (1969) posited that the idea of political parties was not widely accepted among people till the Jacksonian Era. This presumption aligns with that of Nichols (1967, as cited in Hoadley, 1986), who pointed out that the real development of political parties coincided with the rise of the Whig Party. Similarly, Formisano (1974, 1981, as cited in Hoadley, 1986) rebutted the idea that political parties emerged early in the 1790s, denying the assumption that the groups of the 1790s represented political parties on the grounds that Congress voting patterns were not sufficiently accompanied by well-structured parties that meet his definitional criteria and standards he set for well-structured political parties. He argued that historians were misled by the bitter argument of the time between the Northerners and Southerners over the ratification of the Constitution, thus confusing partisan emotion with party structure. Accordingly, the gap between scholars over tracing the emergence of political parties back to an agreed-upon date leads to another pivotal point, which is the definition or the concept of a political party, in addition to the criteria and standards to meet to be called so.

3. Stages of Party Development

Political scientists identified four stages a political party has to go through. The first stage is *factionalism*, where groups of individuals gather around some beliefs, ideas, and demands. However, at this stage, factions and groups of people are rarely organized and thus last for a short time. More importantly, this stage is characterized by the lack of leaders, or rather, the absence of the leader-follower relationship (Hoadley, 1986). The second stage is *polarization*, at which factions of people develop into more permanent legislative groups that oppose one another over their hot issues. In the third stage, which is *expansion*, the party broadens its electoral base by winning more supporters across the national territory, thereby creating electoral committees. At this stage, electoral procedures are likely to be put in place to prepare for elections where considerable party membership is paramount to advance its agenda and place its representatives in government positions. *Institutionalization* is the last stage at which a linkage between the adherents of the political party and its local electoral committees is established. At this level, some types of national organizations would start organizing and directing the party's activities. By reaching this stage, the political party deserves its label and designation, its ideology and agenda are formed and clearly shaped, and its name and symbols are designated.

4. The Concept of a Political Party

As aforementioned, it is quite important to reach a satisfactory definition of a political party to facilitate tracing back the emergence of political parties in the United States. In this respect, it is necessary to clearly distinguish between the two terms: faction and party. As a matter of fact, the term *faction* has a longer history than the term *party* does. Etymologically speaking, the word *faction* is rooted in the Latin language and stems from the Latin verb *facere*, which means to do or to act, and the Latin noun *factio* came soon to express the meaning of “a political group bent on a disruptive and harmful *facere*, on ‘dire doings’” (Sartori, 1976, p. 4). In other words, the word *faction* or *facere* was used to convey the meaning of ruthless, excessive, and harmful behavior (Hoadley, 1986, p. 8).

The term *party*, however, stems from the Latin verb *partire*, meaning divide. This term did not enter political vocabulary till the 17th century due to the availability of another word, ‘sect,’ which comes from the Latin word *secare* and expresses the same meaning: to cut, to sever, and thus divide (Sartori, 1976, p. 4). However, regardless of the two distinguished ideas conveyed by the word party, it had a less negative connotation compared to that of the word *faction*. In the 18th century, their definitions changed in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755, where the word party was defined as being “A number of persons confederated by similarity of designs or opinions in opposition to others,” while the word faction had two distinct definitions: “(1) A party in A state. (2) Tumult, discord, dissention” (Hoadley, 1986, p. 8). Accordingly, the two words express similar meanings, with the exception that the word *faction* has a more negative connotation.

At the time of the Constitutional Convention and its ratification, a clear and sufficient distinction between the words party and faction had not yet developed. At the time, the word *faction* referred to “a group of people involved in the political arena but working toward private ends”. The word party, however, was used to refer to “a new name for a new thing, and the name is new because the thing is new” (Sartori, 1976, p. 57). On the whole, people regarded parties with suspicion during the 18th century, partly due to mingling them with factions and partly due to the difficulty of practically differentiating between them. It was not until the 19th century that people started to clearly distinguish between a party and a faction, thereby welcoming the idea of political parties that became widely accepted as legitimate and essential organizations and instruments for democratic life and systems.

5. Modern Definition of Political Parties

Over time, and with the rise and development of several political parties, scholars gave a plethora of definitions to a political party. Broadly speaking, parties are defined in terms of their actors, activities, purposes, and domains; besides, parties can be defined in terms of their function, structure, or both (Sartori, 1976, p. 54). To illustrate, Janda (1970) defined political parties as being “organizations that pursue a goal of placing their avowed representatives in government positions” (p. 83). In his definition, Janda described political parties as organizations, implying that an interaction must exist between the members of political parties by voicing, discussing, and sharing their political beliefs, ideas, and goals. Besides, his definition suggested a pivotal criterion upon which all political parties are based, which is working on placing their representatives in government positions; in other words, political parties must target the political power to bring the desired change and concretize their political agenda. Furthermore, the process of placing parties’ representatives in government positions has to be generally interpreted by pursuing an electoral process or free competition when the party is competing with other political parties. However, placing parties’ representatives in government positions could be done through direct designation in the absence of political competition or pluralism.

Janda’s definition of a political party aligns with Sartori’s, who defined it by maintaining that: “A party is any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public office” (p. 56). Likewise, Sartori suggests that a political party must have its official label and advance its political agenda by placing its representatives in government positions through taking part in elections. Another definition that aligns with Janda’s and Sartori’s definitions is suggested by Anthony Downs, who defined a political party as “a coalition of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by legal means . . . [through] duly constituted elections or legitimate influence” (Downs, 1957, as cited in Hershey, 2015, p. 7). Downs stresses that the aim of all political parties is to gain political power, or rather, to control the government through legal means; that is, elections.

Aldrich (2011, as cited in Hershey, 2015, p. 7) stressed another property of political parties, which is durability and the quality of their members who represent the elite of society. He literally said that “Political parties can be seen as coalitions of elites to capture and use political office. . . (But) a political party is . . . more than a coalition. A major political party is an institutionalized coalition, one that has adopted rules, norms, and procedures”. These two characteristics are so important for the future of the political party and its capability to advance its political, economic, and social agenda by choosing well-qualified members and candidates able to defend and convince the audience of their convictions and views.

Another property of a political party is inspiring loyalty among its followers and voters. This could be achieved by cultivating a good relationship between its leaders, namely those in government and the party's followers. Therefore, Chambers (1967, as cited in Hershey, 2015, p. 7) defined a political party as the following:

[A] political party in the modern sense may be thought of as a relatively durable social formation which seeks offices or power in government, exhibits a structure or organization which links leaders at the centers of government to a significant popular following in the political arena and its local enclaves, and generates in-group perspectives or at least symbols of identification or loyalty.

According to Chambers, political parties have to foster a relationship with their voters who favor the party's candidates and agenda over other parties; therefore, remaining loyal to its supporters is crucial for the credibility of the party and developing its militant base to prepare for future electoral entitlements. Defects of the American Two-Party System

In the two-party system, the electorate casts its ballots after examining the promises and the record of the political party in power and the promises of the political party out of power to weigh and choose the best candidate with the best policies for the country in different domains (Mayhew, 2008, p. 21). Also, in the two-party system, the loss of one party is the gain of the other one due to the winner-take-all rule (Drutman, 2020). However, much discussion and concern about the strength and stability of the American two-party system emerged and marked the political scene since the 1960s and 1970s, especially after David Broder's 1971 article entitled *The Party's Over* in which he examined the American political and electoral system in place, providing some measures to strengthen it (Collet, 1996). Broder posited that America's governmental system does not work properly because of the weakened political parties that failed to adapt to some technological and social changes taking place in the country. Moreover, they were weakened even more by the simple neglect of voters, public officials, and Presidents (Dennis, 1975).

The 2024 Presidential elections between Donald J. Trump and Kamala Harris triggered some questions about the quality of the candidates. "Are Kamala Harris and Donald Trump really the two best candidates for America's most demanding and important job?" asked Cooper (2024). Like many Americans, Cooper (2024) considered both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump to be unfit to hold the job of the US President. He believes that America deserves better candidates to avoid having an unfit president like Donald Trump and an aging one like Joe Biden. He therefore attributed the failure in presenting good and better presidential candidates to the two-party system that has been in place since the 1790s and the Democratic-Republican duopoly that has been in place since the 1850s.

Though nothing was mentioned about the political parties in the Constitution, the founding fathers, namely George Washington and John Adams, foresaw the dangers of the two-party system and thus cautioned Americans against its bad effects. In his farewell speech in 1796, President George Washington cautioned his fellow Americans against the two-party system that may divide the country into two rival divisions or parts, considering it as frightful despotism (Cooper, 2024). Likewise, taking into account the political context in the 1790s, President John Adams viewed the two-party system as a genuine threat to the republic, dreading it as the “great political evil” (Cooper, 2024). Effectively, bitter political debates over sensitive issues between the two major parties polarized the political scene for four score and almost led to cracking the nation into two parts in several cases before the Civil War (1861-1865) because each party wanted to impose its agenda, favoring the interests of its faction over the interests of the whole country. Hence, this partisan rivalry and polarization usually “amplifies bias, distorts the political debate, shunts policy platforms, stifles compromise and negotiation, and leads to subpar and underqualified government officials” (Cooper, 2024).

6. Origins of the American Two-Party Political System

During the Constitutional Convention in 1787, the farmers of the new Constitution maintained nothing about political parties because many of its framers distrusted them. Alexander Hamilton, for instance, perceived them as “the most fatal disease of popular governments” (Pruitt, 2025). Likewise, in his farewell speech in 1796, President George Washington cautioned his fellow Americans against political factions on the grounds that they lead to a “frightful despotism” (Pruitt, 2025). However, the 1790s witnessed the emergence of two political factions, Federalists under the leadership of Alexander Hamilton and Anti-Federalists (Democratic-Republicans) under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson. These two political factions sparred bitterly over several points, namely, whether to establish a national government with more powers than the state governments. Also, they disagreed on chartering a national bank, developing the country’s economy by relying more on agriculture or industry, and guaranteeing civil rights to American citizens.

Thereafter, in the 1800 presidential elections, Thomas Jefferson’s victory over President John Adams (1735-1826; served 1797-1801) marked the gradual eclipse of the Federalist Party, paving the way for the domination of the Democratic-Republican Party. However, the party would be split following the victory of Andrew Jackson in 1828, leading to the rise of two political factions: the National Republicans and Democratic-Republicans. Thus, the Democratic-Republicans would develop into the Democratic Party that would live till today, while the National Republicans, who opposed Jackson’s policies, would develop into the Whig Party in 1834 and would last till 1856. These two political parties were considered by some historians as the early embodiment of the two-party system in the United States.

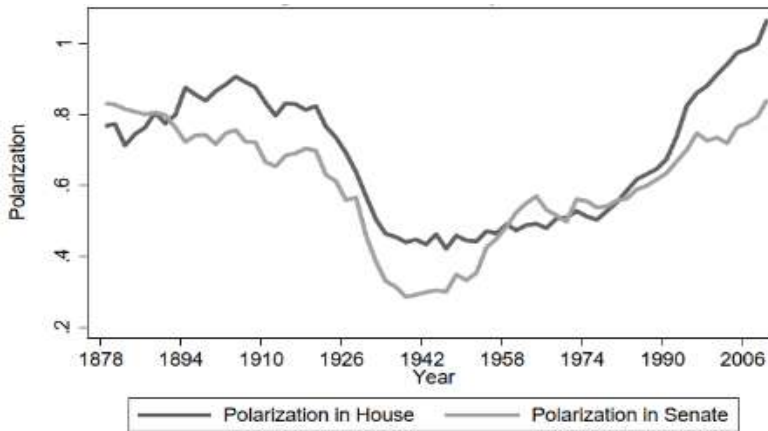
As political competition increased between the Democrats and the Whigs, the two parties worked on broadening their militant base by reaching out to large numbers of voters, particularly after the increase in the number of citizens eligible to vote. Furthermore, the competition intensified as opposition to the Jacksonian policies increased, thereby creating new organizations and tactics to reach out to the greatest number of voters (Hershey, 2021, p. 19). Effectively, the 1840 presidential election was regarded as a turning point in the American political scene, as it resulted in the victory of the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison, thereby putting an end to the domination of the Democrats and opening the doors to the alternation of power between the Whigs and Democrats. Moreover, in the 1840 presidential elections, the Whigs came up with a new and innovative campaign that pioneered ways and patterns of addressing and convincing voters that would dominate electoral campaigns ever since.

In the 1840s and 1850s, both Democrats and Whigs strived to steer clear of the controversial issue of slavery lest it might shutter and undermine their militant and supportive base. When the Whig Party addressed the issue of slavery, its supporters were divided on the issue, leading to its collapse in 1856. Afterwards, anti-slavery activists reunited and created the Republican Party that committed its agenda to the abolition of slavery and boosting the U.S. economy through reforming the banking system and establishing a government favorable to businesses (Hershey, 2021). The party nominated Abraham Lincoln in the 1860 presidential elections, who managed to defeat the candidates of the Democratic Party, leading to the division of the country and thus the American Civil War (1861-1865). Thenceforth, the Democratic Party, along with the Republican Party, became the pillars of the American two-party political system to this day.

7. Partisan Antipathy

Polarization continued to characterize the American political scene in the post-Reconstruction era and throughout the 20th century. Hot political issues over the nation's immigration policy, the two world wars, among other things, contributed to widening the gap between Republican and Democratic Congressmen. Figure 1 displays the average distance between party positions between 1878 and 2006.

Fig. 1. Polarization in Congress



Note. The y-axis shows the difference in mean positions between the two parties in both the House of Representatives and Senate from 1879 to 2011 using the DW-NOMINATE measures. Congress is more polarized than it has been in over 125 years. From *Solutions to political polarization in America* (p. 20) by Persily, N., 2015, Cambridge University Press.

As depicted in Figure 1, polarization measures were quite high between 1878 and the mid-1930s due to the hot issues tackled in Congress, such as immigration policy, social reform movements, women's suffrage, widespread corruption, tariffs, and currency reforms, financial panics, child labor, public health, to name a few. But from the mid-1930s to mid-1970s, the registered polarization measures were quite low. This was ascribed to the narrow differences between the two parties as well as to the rise of an important number of Democrats with conservative ideas and another important number of Republicans with liberal ideas (Barber & McCarthy, 2015). From the mid-1970s onward, however, Figure 1 shows a steep increase in polarization in both chambers of Congress. This increase in polarization was ascribed to the changes in the parties' behaviors, where the Republicans shifted to the right and the Democrats to the left, thereby widening the political gap between them.

The aforesaid findings aligned with the findings of a 2014 Pew Research Center study, which revealed an increase in ideological uniformity, which increases partisan antipathy. Besides, divisions among active and engaged politicians reached higher levels, as proved by a survey of 10,000 adults nationwide. The study found that the ideological overlap between Democrats and Republicans diminished, as 94% of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican, and 92% of Republicans are to the right median Democrats, as displayed in Figure 2. Also, the study found that the share of Americans who consistently express conservative or liberal attitudes doubled between 1994 and 2014, from 10% to 21% (Pew Research Center, 2014). These results reflect the change in the political agenda and behaviors of Democrats

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who adopted more liberal attitudes while Republicans adopted more conservative ones, thereby narrowing the area of ideological overlap.

The erosion of ideological overlap had been accompanied by an increase in partisan animosity. There was a share in each party, 27% of Democrats and 36% of Republicans, that developed negative attitudes towards the ideas and political agenda of the opposing party, which had increased and more than doubled between 1994 and 2014. They regarded the opposing party's policies as being misguided and thus were a genuine threat to the well-being of the whole country (Pew Research Center, 2014). During Congressional debates, both liberals and rights think that their party had to get more than it wanted.

Nowadays, polarization has taken another dimension as a new approach dominates the political sphere, which lies in hating the other party even more than you love your own. This feature was confirmed by a study entitled *Political Sectarianism in America* which found that "Democrats and Republicans — the 85% of U.S. citizens who do not identify as pure independents — have grown more contemptuous of opposing partisans for decades, and at similar rates...only recently, however, this aversion exceeded their affection for co-partisans" (Finkel et al., 2020, p. 533). The study also confirmed that cold feelings towards the out-party exceeded warm feelings towards the in-party and that the out-party hate became stronger than in-party love (Finkel et al., 2020). This is because each political party seeks to seem powerful and out of touch by undermining and demonizing the opposition from the other party to make it look incompetent and weak, thereby leading to more bitter debates and a confrontational style of partisanship in Congress (Drutman, 2020).

At their first debate in Philadelphia on the 10th of September, both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump criticized each other and the policies of the opposing party. Donald Trump attempted to defend himself against Biden's attacks on him as he labelled him as "a threat to democracy" by calling Kamala Harris "a radical left" and a "Marxist" who was destroying America, maintaining that Americans will remember her as "the worst vice-president in the history of our country" (Zurcher, 2021). For her part, Kamala Harris kept goading Donald Trump during the debate, maintaining: "World leaders are laughing at Donald Trump. I have talked with military leaders, some of whom worked with you, and they say you are a disgrace" (Zurcher, 2024). Such declarations and scornful language widened antipathy among the supporters of each candidate, thereby increasing political polarization and eroding the common ground and the overlap necessary for the stability of the country and the good performance of the federal government and political institutions.

Political polarization in America has become stronger because the two parties, the Republicans and Democrats, have become clearly distinct. In other words, the U.S. two-party system became fully sorted with no overlap between the two major parties. For most of American history, there was always a certain overlap between the two parties where they agreed on a certain number of issues and principles. This overlap provided a common ground that guaranteed a certain stability to the American national politics, namely the nation's foreign policy. But recently, the two parties have been acting even more against each other and have barely agreed on a single issue. This appeared in several cases, such as the disagreement between the federal government led by the Democratic President, Joe Biden, and the Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott, who lobbied for closing the southern border with Mexico to stop the inflow of illegal immigrants. As the tension heated between the Democratic administration of President Biden and Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott, the latter made a declaration that mirrored the big animosity between the Democrats and Republicans, saying: "Biden is destroying America. Texas is trying to save it" (Gutierrez, 2024). In response, Democratic Representatives wrote in X that "Governor Greg Abbott is using the Texas National Guard to obstruct and create chaos at the border", calling on the Biden Administration to federalize the Texas guardsmen (Cabral, 2024). The disagreement almost developed into a Civil War (1861-1865) as President Biden called the National Guard to forcefully open the Texas border with Mexico to let in immigrants. This action pushed twenty-five Republican governors to support Abbott against Biden (Cabral, 2024). Similar action was taken by the rest of the Democratic governors who sided with Joe Biden. This fierce disagreement and political intransigence threatened the unity and stability of the country.

Another feature of disagreement between the two major parties is the ongoing war in Ukraine. The two parties adopted different approaches to handling the war. The Democrats favored supporting Ukraine against Russia by mobilizing NATO and supplying the Ukrainian army with more advanced weapons to guarantee its supremacy and victory over the Russian army. This policy was sharply criticized by Republican congressmen, who favored relying on diplomacy to reach a political solution to the ongoing war. Thus, disagreements between Democrats and Republicans became a prevailing feature in the last decade. Consequently, partisan polarization and sectarianism would certainly undermine the good performance of the government and prevent it from discharging its duties of representing the people and solving the country's problems (Finkel, 2020).

8. Discussion

Having a fully divided and polarized two-party system with no overlap would probably be unfit for the American democracy and national politics. An overlap is paramount to guarantee the common ground necessary for the stability of the nation since representatives of both major parties hold offices in both federal and local governments. Moreover, the current two-party system does not suit American democracy as it creates irrational rivalry and increases otherness among Americans, thereby considering supporters of the other party as political enemies. This otherness increased contemptuous comments from both political parties, turning politics from being a forum to solve national issues and respond to the aspirations of Americans to a battlefield where one party has to win, and the other has to lose. Consequently, this split makes reaching compromises over sensitive issues more difficult or impossible, thereby posing a genuine threat to the country's well-being and the future of its democracy.

The nature of the American political institutions is another reason that makes the current divided two-party system unworkable in America. To say it differently, the American governing system is based on federalism, where the political power is divided between the federal government and state governments. Additionally, the framers of the U.S. Constitution designed a "separation-of-powers government to make narrow majority rule difficult to impossible" through winner-take-all rule; Yet, in the current two-party system, both political parties strive to impose on each other a narrow majority rule (Drutman, 2020).

Additionally, most of the reasons that increased partisan animosity still exist. Politically polarized media is still playing a key role in igniting partisan antipathy among partisans as they are surrounded by favorable political information environments. Greater internet access and social media have also contributed to increasing partisan antipathy owing to individuals' exposure to favorable content, leading them to develop a negative perception and attitudes towards the opposing political party and thus provoking more division among Americans (Lelkes et al., 2017, Boxell et al., 2017, as cited in Druckman & Levy, 2021).

Political campaigns, namely presidential elections, represent another key factor that exacerbates partisan tension in America. This tension continuously increases as the election day approaches. "Across recent election cycles, people were 50–150% more affectively polarized by election day than they were a year earlier" (Iyengar et al., 2018). Partisan tension, as a matter of fact, increases as candidates use derogatory and scornful language during their electoral campaigns and their comments. Both parties blamed and criticized each other for the inflammatory language they used in their rhetoric, and used their social media accounts to attack each other. For instance, in the last presidential elections of 2024, the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, used his Truth Social account to launch some of his

vitriolic declarations against his Democratic opponents, using scornful language. These inflammatory declarations electrified the electoral race between the two parties, thereby deepening antipathy between them. On June 28, 2024, President Joe Biden met his supporters in Raleigh, in North Carolina, and made a bitter declaration against Donald Trump, considering him as a genuine threat to America and its democracy: "Donald Trump is a genuine threat to this nation. He is a threat to our freedom. He is a threat to our democracy. He is literally a threat for everything America stands for" (Zurcher, 2024). This declaration reflects the degree of polarization between the two parties during the presidential campaign, turning political competition into a real political arena.

The level of mutual criticism did not decrease after replacing Joe Biden with Kamala Harris. When Joe Biden abandoned his re-election bid leaving the place for his vice President, Kamala Harris, the latter addressed sharp criticism to Donald Trump, considering him as an unserious man who would cause serious consequences to the nation if Americans put him back in the White House: "In many ways, Donald Trump is an unserious man. But the consequences of putting Donald Trump back in the White House are extremely serious" (Zurcher, 2024). In her nomination acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention, Harris bashed Donald Trump very severely to the point that she mentioned his name 17 times, lambasting his supporters' attack on the Capitol Hill in January 2021, his refusal to attend the inauguration ceremony of President Joe Biden on the 20th of January, 2021, his policies regarding abortion and tax cuts, his foreign policy during his first term, urging Americans not to forget the chaos and calamity that characterized his presidency, from 2017 to 2021.

Therefore, partisan animosity and affective polarization genuinely threaten American democracy, particularly the American democratic institutions, weaken American global leadership, and undermine its capacity to respond to international issues. Besides, the disinformation campaigns from foreign and rival countries such as Russia, China, and Iran heightened partisan polarization, thereby undermining Americans' faith in their democracy and encouraging other U.S. adversaries to do the same (Swanson, 2021). Additionally, the country's democratic institutions are badly affected by public and elite polarization, causing democratic backsliding and a decline in the country's rank among free countries. In this regard, the Freedom House reported a fall in America's rank from 94 in 2010 to 83 in 2020, preceded by Argentina and Mongolia and followed by Ghana and Poland (Repucci, 2021). This backsliding and decline in democratic practices occurred after Donald Trump's first term, when his supporters attacked Congress as congressmen met to officialize his defeat. Such an event proved that partisan animosity polarizes the electorate, pushing them to regard their opponents as enemies and thus can use anti-democratic means to vanquish them.

On the international scale, partisan polarization undermines America's global leadership. Ever since WWII, America worked on promoting democracy, capitalism, and free trade. American voters increasingly pressure their representatives to concentrate on domestic issues and provide timely solutions to them, but congressional gridlock makes their task difficult, thereby leaving them unaddressed. For instance, the United States was in a shutdown for 42 days, from October 1, 2025 to November 2, 2025, due to Congress' inability to reach an agreement on a budget package. This gridlock undermines America's leadership in favor of its enemies, namely the Chinese (Swanson, 2021). In the absence of American leadership weakened by infighting and unrest strips American democracy from its credibility, pushing new governments to look for other credible models offered by China.

To preserve the American democracy from being crippled by the fully divided two-party system caused by the Democratic-Republican duopoly, Drutman (2020) posits that multipartyism or a multiparty democracy is a good idea and could be workable in the United States since it is workable in many countries around the world. Indeed, almost all democracies across the world are based on multipartyism, where the party that secures the majority holds political power with proportional representation. In this system, all votes are paramount to the parties because they will be taken into account to determine the number of seats for each political party, thereby determining the winner who gets the majority, which depends on the number of votes it got in the elections. In other words, each party maintains the number of votes it got in the election, upon which the number of its seats or representatives in parliament will be determined. As a result, citizens in these countries are more satisfied with their multipartyism and voting system's outcome as it engenders stable institutions and compromise-oriented policymaking (Drutman, 2020).

The American voting system, however, determines the single winner through the "first-past-the-post" rule, where the winner takes all votes, and the loser loses all votes (no proportional representation). This system disregards the votes of the minority of voters that could reach 49% of the electorate. Besides, the system makes all votes very important to the campaign of each candidate and each party to get the necessary majority to win (half of the electoral college plus one). Hence, each political party claims to represent the absolute majority, which is not the case in multiparty democracies, where none of the parties claims to represent the absolute majority of people. As a result, bargaining is necessary for all parties to form coalitions where enemies could become allies and allies could be enemies.

However, the two main issues the multiparty system would face in the United States are irrational partisanship and tribal rivalry. In plain English, the multiparty system is based on rational partisanship, where elections will be more about the candidates' merit rather than party loyalty. This leads voters to look for the best candidates with the best qualifications for holding the job, regardless of the political party they belong to, according to the phrase, the right person in the right place.

Thus, strong third parties are essential to break the binary partisanship of the current divided two-party system.

Additionally, to reduce partisan animosity, party leaders have to improve their discourse quality and avoid derogatory and inflammatory language; they ought to focus on explaining facts and defending their ideas rather than attacking and blaspheming their opponents. Also, both Republicans and Democrats have to establish and strengthen a common ground necessary to compromising and overcoming gridlock. Besides, the main stream media has to target objectivity through presenting authentic information and authentic analysis of the political discourses, speeches, and programs. Furthermore, as democracy is based on the rule of the majority, the minority has to accept and comply with the rules of the democratic game. To put it differently, uncivil and undemocratic behaviors have to be limited.

9. Conclusion

The American two-party system has been in place since the 1790s. It began with the binary bipartisanship of the Federalist Party and the Democratic-Republican Party till 1816, followed by the duopoly of the Democratic Party and the Whig Party, and ended with the current duopoly of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party since the 1850s. During the most of the American history, the bipartisan system worked well thanks to the overlap between the platforms of the both political parties; however, the divergence in political platforms and ideologies proved to be dangerous to national politics, the unity of the country, and the good performance of the federal government by thwarting its duties of responding to the aspirations of the citizens and solving their issues.

Recently, partisan antipathy increased considerably between the supporters of both political parties, the Republicans and Democrats, especially during the presidential campaigns, where candidates resorted to a scornful and derogatory language in their rally speeches, in their posts on social media, and in their declarations in the mass media. This antipathy negatively affected the good performance of the federal government due to the absence of an overlap necessary for compromise between the two parties. To overcome this issue, multipartisanship may be a good idea to avoid stalemate in federal institutions. It is more expressive as it depends on the proportional representation in the federal and local political institutions, like Congress, rather than the current winner-take-all system, which disregards the votes of the minority. Moreover, political life has to be refined by avoiding derogatory and inflammatory language, focusing on the ideas and facts rather than attacking the other party, emphasizing common ground that is paramount to compromising and overcoming disagreements, encouraging partisans' ambivalence about their political party, surrounding public with authentic means of media, and abiding by democracy's rules and traditions.

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