

# A Polarized Nation

Spencer Liechty, *Xavier University '14*

Polarization refers to making the differences between groups or ideas more clear cut and extreme and hardening the opposition between them. Over the last thirty-five to forty years, American politics has seen a trend in increasing polarization. The evidence shows a divergence in ideology toward a more extreme position by the two dominant political parties in the United States. In this paper I will explore why American politics has become so polarized and examine the possible causes of this phenomenon. I will also examine the consequences of this increased polarization and its impact on our democracy.

On a summer morning in 2003, the scene on Capitol Hill included shouting, police, and Democratic committee members locking themselves in a library. This situation was not a national security crisis, rather the result of a partisan dispute. The Republicans had released a long bill late the previous night and scheduled a vote the next morning. The Democrats, who were upset at not being able to analyze the bill, retreated to the committee library to plan strategy while the second ranking Democrat on the committee, Pete Stark was left to fend off the Republicans. When the Republicans tried to pass the bill and Stark protested, Republican Scott McInnis told him to “shut up,” to which Stark responded with, “You think you are big enough to make me, you little wimp? Come on, come over here and make me, I dare you, you little fruitcake! (Sinclair 2006, xv).” The altercation led Republicans to call the Capitol police in an attempt to get the Democrats out of the library.

What is most remarkable about the library lock-down incident is that the individuals involved were not school children on a playground, but the honorable representatives elected to run our government. Petty squabbles, both on and off the floor of the House, are just one example of the partisanship plaguing American politics. An even more frightening event -- also related to partisanship -- occurred in Washington a few months ago when the United States government came within hours of defaulting on its debt. The debt-limit crisis of 2011 threatened the stability of the country and left significant consequences, all because the two parties focused on their differences and refused to compromise in their partisan ideals (Brownstein 2011). Making groups or ideas more clear-cut and extreme and hardening the opposition between them is known as polarization.

Party polarization has become increasingly present in American politics over the last thirty years. In the 1960s and 1970s, the parties were divided within themselves, un-cohesive, and members frequently crossed party lines to vote in a bipartisan manner. Now the parties are divided between one another, with a big gap separating Republicans and Democrats. During the 91<sup>st</sup> congress (1969-1970) the majority of Republicans and Democrats voted on opposing sides just 30 percent of the time in the House and 36 percent of the time in the Senate (Sinclair 2006). Barbara Sinclair (2006) found that party-line voting in Congress steadily increased during the 1980s and 1990s, reaching 66 percent by the middle of the decade. Similarly, a study by Jeffrey Stonecash, Mark Brewer and Mack Mariani (2003) presented evidence of increased polarization in party voting as well as increased party unity over the last thirty years.

A study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that, in addition to becoming more polarized on votes, the rate of name calling and vulgarity usage on the floor of Congress

---

\* Spencer Liechty (*Class of 2014*) is a political science major and a native of Zionsville, Indiana.

skyrocketed (Sinclair 2006). The mounting evidence of polarization has led many observers to declare that we have the most partisan and divided Congress since the Civil War (Whitehouse 2011). The fact that members are loyal to their parties first is made clear by voting records, shouting matches, a government shutdown in the mid-1990s, and a virtually party-line presidential impeachment (Popp 2000).

Though Democrats are voting more liberally, and Republicans are voting more conservatively, studies show that the general population remains highly moderate (Fiorina 2004). The research question I will be exploring is two-fold: first, why has American politics become so polarized? Secondly, what are the causes of party polarization? The evidence suggests that polarization increased in American politics due to changes in district composition, the electorate reacting to social change, and institutional changes in the political arena leading to more powerful party leadership. In addition to these causes, the media also plays a role in fueling polarization. Finally, I examine the consequences of increased polarization and its impact on our democracy. Increased polarization decreases the efficiency of the United States government.

### **The Causes of Polarization**

The roots of polarization start with district composition becoming more uniform through realignment of voters party preferences. In the 1900s, parties were made up of conflicting constituencies because the Democrats were based in the conservative South and the Republicans were based in the liberal North. Therefore, Democrats were restrained from becoming more liberal and Republicans restrained from becoming more conservative (Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). However, party cohesion and polarization began in 1970s because of change to this status quo and ensuing party realignment. Part of the reason this change occurred can be attributed to the south and civil rights. In the 1950s, very few Republican from the south were elected to the House and zero senators (Sinclair 2006). However in the mid 1960s, Republicans began to pick up seats because of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Republicans and Southerners were against this act while Democrats were for it, so Southerners abandoned their allegiance to the Democratic Party, and Republicans started replacing Democrats in the South. By losing their hold on the conservative South, the constituencies that elected Democrats became more like Democrat constituencies elsewhere. Since the party was more homogenous and the Democratic Party no longer relied on the support of the Southern conservatives, the result was a Democratic Party less conservative and a Republican Party more conservative, which are conditions for polarization. Professor of political science at the University of California Gary Jacobson writes, "Southern realignment left both parties with more politically homogeneous electoral conditions reducing internal dispute and making stronger party leadership tolerable" (Bond and Fleisher 2000).

Realignment was not isolated in the South and, moreover, there were other issues beyond civil rights that contributed to realignment. Former editor of the *American Journal for Political Science* David Rohde (1991) explains that issues like the Vietnam War and government expansion of civil services, along with civil rights created a sharp divide in preferences among Northern and Southern Democrats. These issues shifted what parties voters supported in the South and elsewhere like the Northeast where voters shifted to the right resulting in more difficulty for moderates to win in that region. As a consequence of this realignment, party preferences became similar across regions but different across parties (Rohde 1991). When party coalitions become similar as they did as a result of realignment, it allows the parties to become less concerned with the middle and more ideological. Therefore, realignment of party coalitions is one root cause of polarizing politics.

One of the reasons for this realignment and changing district composition is the electorate reacting to social and economic change. The parties now represent different types of districts when it comes to demographics. The rise of important district characteristics like income, race, and urbanization contributed to bigger differences in the parties (Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). At the same time realignment was taking place, Republicans experienced social and demographic change within their coalition. Education and income increased in the South, leading to more Republican votes. Economic changes resulted in people with exceedingly different needs. Income inequality increased during the 1970s which created more of a gap between the rich's needs and the poor's needs. It makes sense then that the parties representing these needs grew more divided as well. However sometimes social issues like abortion, school prayer, and gay marriage are more determinant of voting patterns than economics. Some people feel so strongly about these social issues that they changed their vote to Republican. In *What's the Matter with Kansas* (2004), Thomas Frank explains how conservatives were able to win over Kansas by adopting strong social stances into their platform. It does not make sense economically for blue collar, white, low income residents of Kansas to vote conservative because those policies don't benefit the majority of people in the state. However, the people of Kansas were pulled into the Republican coalition because of these social issues, thus realigning the voters.

Racial issues also contributed to realignment. In 1965 immigration rules changed to allow more people from more nations into the United States (Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). When population make ups changed, political change came with it because the House is elected from geographical districts. Immigration contributed to realignment because when Hispanic populations settled in Sunbelt states they voted Democrat in an area previously controlled by Republicans (Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). In addition to Hispanics entering the electorate, blacks also started voting in large numbers in the mid-1960s. Southern Democrats were responsive to white voters until blacks entered the electorate (Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). When social change occurs, parties must be responsive to voter's wants and needs, while shifting their stances, in order to gain new coalitions. Many social issues arose in the last thirty years such as civil rights, pacifism, women's rights, the sexual revolution, and rise of religious conservatism. Republicans have bundled together social issues that complement each other and made them part of their platform. Instead of mixing issues, they picked issues to add to their platform that go together so they would add all those types of people who support them, in order to be united and similar (Mann 2006). Republicans took common stances on social issues so their coalition is united and not divided. Homogenous coalitions and districts provide ideal conditions for polarization.

Part of the parties' reaction to social change is the emergence of the religious right. Religious commitment has joined race, income, and region as key determinates of how someone votes. A group of people known as the Christian right have adopted specific views on many of the social issues that arose in the last thirty years; which are the same ideological stances that the Republican Party worked into their platform. The mobilization of this Christian right helped boost conservatism and evangelical Christians contributed to Republican victories (Sinclair 2006). Since most of these evangelical Christians were located in the south, it enforced Republican trends in this region. The emergence of evangelicals into the Republican Party leads to polarization because when one party gains a new base they must accommodate the bases wants. The new coalition gained by the Republicans wanted the party to be more conservative on issues like abortion, homosexuality, and women's roles (Sinclair 2006). In order to keep this base and satisfy their needs, the Republican Party became more conservative. Religion plays a big role in polarization because of the strong divide between traditionalists and modernists and those who are highly observant and those who are not. Issues like abortion and school prayer that divide religious and non-religious views make religion an important factor in American politics. The divide on religious

issues causes polarization because the two parties take clear and extreme sides. According to a study done by EJ Dionne Jr. (2006), 61 percent of people who attend weekly religious services voted for Bush while only 47 percent of those who attended occasionally voted for him. Voters are motivated by religious concerns and parties have changed accordingly due to religiously related social issues. For example, Catholics used to vote Democrat, but now the abortion issue has made the majority Republican voters. Now with religious opponents of abortion in their coalition, in order to make them happy, the Republican Party got pushed strongly pro-life. On the opposite side, Democrats have adopted the pro-choice crowd which pushes them to be strongly pro-choice. As a result of passionately divided religious issues, the parties have become more polarized.

In order to construct districts that makeup constituents of similar demographics and views, a method known as gerrymandering is practiced. Gerrymandering is the political manipulation of legislative boundaries for partisan or incumbency purposes. Every ten years district lines are redrawn, normally by the state legislature, in a way that diminishes competition in elections and maximizes electoral security. Diminished competition in American elections is a reality. A study by Robert Cushing found that almost half of all Americans live in landslide counties in which one party received over 60 percent of the presidential vote (Sinclair 2006). This number rose from less than a third in the 1960s (Sinclair 2006). Decreasing competitiveness in elections relates to polarization because higher levels of competition pushes politicians toward moderation, and according to political scientist Thomas E. Mann (2006), competitive districts are represented by members with more moderate voting records. In Iowa, district lines are redrawn blind to incumbency and party and subsequently, it has the highest number of competitive races (Mann 2006). This data proves gerrymandering may attribute to decreased competitiveness, but not that it causes polarization. In fact, gerrymandering may be more of an effect of polarization than a cause. When parties are polarized they cannot compromise, so the only way to pass their legislation is to gain control through elections. Thomas Mann (2006) explains, "Gerrymandering provides a means for intensely competitive and ideologically polarized parties to maintain or achieve majority control" (red and blue). It cannot be the only cause of polarization because the Senate is as equally polarized as the House and gerrymandering has no effect on the Senate. Gerrymandering reinforces partisan tension set in motion by other forces and as a consequence, fuels further polarization, but cannot be considered a cause.

The causes of polarization extend beyond district composition and into institutional ways in which congress operates. Rule changes in how congress operates have influenced strength of party leadership, leading to more polarization. The period from 1920 to 1970, known as the era of committee government, was characterized by relatively weak parties (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). The Speaker lost power to appoint committee chairs in 1910 and so committees became independent from party influence. Committee chairs were chosen by seniority and they had no incentives to respond to the wishes of the party. However, the 1970s saw reform introduced and institutional changes adopted to strengthen parties and weaken committees. During this time the Democrats were in majority rule, but the conservative coalition on the rules committee often refused to permit liberal legislation from reaching the floor (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). In order to obtain more control over the passage of their agenda, Democrats made their party leadership stronger. When the party coalition is homogenous, strong party leadership is desirable based on a theory known as conditional party government. This theory takes into account that members of congress have two main goals: policy influence and reelection (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). Strong party leadership can help achieve both goals so it makes sense for congressmen to want their leadership to be strong if policy preferences are unified.

In the 1970s, Democrats realized the benefits of strong party leadership and thus enacted reforms to make their leadership stronger by changing the rules within their own caucus. In order

to stop the conservative coalition from refusing to let their legislation reach the floor, Democrats sought to weaken the independence and power of committee leaders. They weakened this power by first, voting on committee chairmen, rather than the seniority system of appointment. Secondly, they adopted rules that restricted the power of those chosen chairs. These rules were known as the subcommittee bill of rights which limited the committee chair's influence over the subcommittees including not being able to appoint the chair of the subcommittee (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). In addition to these rule changes, Democrats gave more power to their party leader by granting the Speaker the right to appoint the chair and Democratic members of the rules committee. The rules committee is paramount in the legislation process because it controls what bills are brought to the House floor. Not only did the Speaker now control the flow of legislation, but he was also granted the power to appoint members to the newly created steering and policy committee which was in turn responsible for assigning all the Democrats to committees (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). Therefore, the party leader now controlled committee assignments.

With party leadership gaining more power, research shows that members dramatically increased their level of party support especially if they held or wanted to hold a committee chair position (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). For example, in the early 1970s, Democratic Representative Jamie Whitten's party unity score was thirty-eight points below the party average. When the chairmanship of the appropriations committee became vacant, in which he was ranked second, he began to change his behavior. By 1988, Whitten's party unity score was two points higher than the average Democrats (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). Committee chairs realized they could no longer act independently of party priorities, but in turn they expected party leaders to move bills to passage on the floor and promote their policy goals. The Democratic Party could follow through on this expectation as a result of their control over the rules committee. Political scientists Aldrich and Rohde explain, "The Democrats increasingly used the resolutions called special rules that set the terms for floor considerations of legislation to structure the agenda to the advantage of the party" (253).

Needless to say this strategy severely upset and angered the minority party. The Democrats had instituted reform within their caucus to strengthen party leadership and polarize its members, and the Republican response did the same. For example, they gave their minority leader the right to make Republican appointment to the rules committee and created a new committee assignment system in which leadership had more determining power (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). In addition, the Democratic reforms provoked the minority party to become more aggressive in their approach. Aldrich and Rohde write, "Republicans adopted progressively more confrontational tactics to protest their treatment and undermine the democratic majority" (254). This aggressive confrontation was brought forward by a new group of active hard line conservatives lead by Newt Gingrich. Previously, Republicans had for the most part, been forced to go along with the Democrats in congress in order to have some influence on legislation. Gingrich came on the scene in the late 1980s and argued that Republicans would always be in the minority until they stopped this complacency and instead conflict with the Democrats in order to emphasize their differences and let the public choose which they preferred (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). This need for unity within the caucus and deliberate confrontation between the majority and minority parties resulted in polarization. The Democratic majority party had incentive to be unified so they could have strong leaders which promoted their policy goals. However, since the majority party has power, the Republican minority party had to be unified in their opposition and more aggressively non-compromising in order to have influence and not remain the minority party. Therefore, both parties have incentives to have strong party leaders.

Strong party leadership results in polarization because party leaders reward members who are polarized. Party leaders use their resources to make members act more polarized by rewarding their party loyalty. For example, in 1979 nineteen incumbent members requested to

be on the Budget Committee. The mean party unity score of those selected was 81.8 percent while the score of those passed over was 72.8 percent (Sinclair 2006). Sinclair (2006) also gives evidence that in nominating speeches for exclusive committees, party loyalty scores were increasingly mentioned. Members want committee appointments in order to pursue their goals of policy and re-election. According to Aldrich and Rohde, "Members use committee service to identify themselves with issues that are important to constituents and to secure benefits for their district, thus enhancing their chance for reelection" (249). In addition, committee members are in the best position to influence policy within that area of specialization. Aside from committee appointment, party leaders can help with re-election efforts. They play a major role in raising campaign funds and the more loyal to the party, the more help the member gets with their campaign. Incentives to show party loyalty are tremendously high. Essentially, a member cannot stay in office if they defect from party lines. According to Sinclair (2006), in 1997 on average, only 4.7 Republicans defected from the party position on final passage votes in the House. Since the leadership controls desirable committee assignments and campaign cash, members have direct incentives to take positions that are more conservative or liberal, making each party more extreme and uncompromising.

The polarized stances that politicians take are supposed to represent their constituents. However studies have shown that in general, Americans are not highly polarized. According to Princeton sociologist Paul DiMaggio, the political views of Americans have become more similar, not more different (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). Morris Fiorina (2004) found that attitudinal differences between so called red and blue states have been greatly exaggerated. Fiorina (2004) concludes in his book *Culture Wars* that it's not the voters who have been polarized, it is the candidates they must choose from. If the general public is not becoming more polarized, why have their representatives? One factor can be contributed to another institutional process of the primary system. Primaries were instituted in order to take power out of political bosses and place it in the hands of the people. The problem is that voter turnout in America is already low for general elections and even lower for primaries. The people who do vote in primaries are party extremists and activists. Therefore, since the candidate must win the primary to even have a chance at general election, they will take extreme policy positions in order to satisfy the primary electorate (Hirano, Snyder, and Hansen 2008). One counterargument is that primaries began appearing in the 1930s and the polarization trend didn't start until the 1970s. However, according to research by political scientists, the effect of the system doesn't start until later because the parties' electorate in the primaries changed and sorted ideologically in the 1980s and 1990s and primary turnout declined over time (Hirano, Snyder, and Hansen 2008). The primary system sends the candidates who adopt extremist views to congress and weeds out the moderates. Members of congress nominated in closed primaries tend to have policy positions that are farther from the preference of the general electorate than those nominated in open primaries (Hirano, Snyder, and Hansen 2008). Primaries explain why politics are more polarized when the population isn't because in order to win a primary, they have to be responsive to activists who are more polarized than the general electorate.

While not a cause, the media also affects polarization in politics. The options people have when choosing their news source has increased dramatically in the past thirty years. According to a theory known as selective exposure, when people have these options, they will choose the news source that reinforces and intensifies preexisting views (Mutz 2006). Research shows that audiences select media that leans in the direction of their own views even when there is not great political difference (Mutz 2006). According to one study, when given a set of news stories to read from Fox News, NPR, CNN, and BBC, Republicans overwhelmingly preferred stories from Fox News while Democrats were divided between NPR and CNN (Mutz 2006). When people who have slight leanings read this biased news, their leanings become stronger and their views

polarize further because people develop similar views to the media they are exposed to. According to a study of Rush Limbaugh listeners, the audience developed an antipathy toward the talk show host's favorite targets (Mutz 2006). Regular citizens as well as politicians are susceptible to selective exposure.

More choices result in selective exposure of the news while also enabling people to choose from a greater variety of non-news programming. Television provided seven channels to the average household in 1970 but in 2005 over 85 percent of household had cable or satellite access and the average viewer had about a hundred channels to choose from (Mutz 2006). The rise of cable television has given people the option to not watch the news and lessened the president's ability to control national airways. According to political scientists Baum and Kernell, the average size of audiences watching prime time presidential addresses and news conferences has decreased steadily in the twentieth century (Mutz 2006). Television viewers no longer have to watch the state of the union or debates, and research by Princeton University professor Markus Prior shows that if given the option, they won't (Mutz 2006). This choice leads to polarization because not watching the news or political programs makes people less informed and more apathetic towards politics, which in turn makes them less likely to vote, which results in less moderate voters, which results in a more polarized electorate going to the polls. Partisan selectivity of the news as well as forgoing the news altogether widens the gap between the politically informed and those without interest leaving two more polar sides.

Aside from choosing what news to absorb, the media's presentation fuels polarization. A new type of presentation called game centered coverage of politics changes perspectives. Game centered coverage refers to journalists framing a speech or event in terms of why the politician is giving the speech, rather than the policy being discussed (Mutz 2006). This coverage makes the politicians real intentions evident and presents them as more manipulative. According to University of Pennsylvania professor Diana Mutz (2006), the problem is it suggests to the audience that being persuaded or listening to a politician is a bad thing and a sign of gullibility. This fear of persuasion makes people less likely to be open to new ideas and only stuck in their previously held one sided opinions. It also shifts the focus from what is being said to why it is being said. Mutz (2006) explains, "Citizens are therefore convinced by game centered coverage that elections are won and lost by the right choice of advertisements, a new haircut, the best speechwriters, or the cleverest consultants" (237). If supporters think their candidate lost due to a minor mishap rather than unpopular policy, they feel robbed and even more opposed to the opposite views which fuels polarization.

Another presentation factor fueling polarization is the increasing number of political talk shows and heated exchange. In 2004 Jon Stewart famously went on the show *Crossfire* and criticized this program and others like it for its "partisan hackery" which he said was hurting America (Mutz 2006). The type of uncivil discourse presented on these heated debate talk shows increases polarization by provoking partisans to think less of their opponent than they already did. According to research done by Diana Mutz (2006), people feel more opposition to the other side when debate is uncivil, as the media makes it. Instead of working through and solving problems, these shows are arenas for unproductive yelling and insults. This kind of incivility produces polarization.

### **The Consequences of Polarization**

The causes of polarization are evident, and they matter because of the resulting consequences. Polarization leads to stalemate and gridlock within the government and hinders Congress's ability to get productive legislation passed. According to Fleisher and Bond (2000), studies have shown that divided government holds back legislation. In addition, the rate of bills becoming law has

decreased from 81 percent in 1961 to 59 percent in 2003 (Sinclair 2006). Some would argue that gridlock is a good thing and the government was designed to thoroughly debate each bill to make sure only ones best for society became law. However there is a difference between thoughtful debate and the polarized gridlock characterizing congress today. Threats of government shutdown and verging on default are recent examples of why gridlock caused by polarization is harming the country. Instead of passing legislation, opposite parties spend a great deal time insulting each other. This partisan bickering is another consequence of polarization. Candidates are focusing their election appeals to partisan bases, and elections are increasingly negative. Over the past thirty years personal attacks and party hostility increased compared to previous decades (Sinclair 2006). In 1993 Republican Bob Michel labeled the House Republican membership as the most conservative and antagonistic to the other side that he had ever seen (Sinclair 2006). This hostility has led to increased use of the filibuster which has emerged as routine partisan strategy to hold up legislation.

In addition to affecting Congress, polarization affects the President as well. The president suffers when Congress is divided and as a consequence, his agenda does not get passed (Sinclair 2006). According to Sinclair (2006), "Relations between the president and congress have become more hostile which leads to more aggressive strategies to achieve policy goals" (357). As polarization increases, so does majority leader's agenda setting which is a direct challenge to the president when opposite parties are in power. This conflict results in tension and a strained relationship in addition to lack of either agendas getting passed.

Polarization at the committee level also contributes to inefficiency in the government. The institutional reforms and party leader's influence over committees have made them partisan and polarized because leadership can influence and control committee actions. Essentially, the reforms gave party leaders complete control over committees and the ability to impose extreme ideological goals. For example, the previously nonpartisan appropriations committee once strived for bipartisan support (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). However appropriations were essential to the Republican majority's agenda in 1994 because they wanted to cut federal spending and use appropriations bills for substantial legislative changes They added riders to appropriations bills which sharply increased partisan conflict within the committee (Aldrich and Rohde 2005). Thus, party polarization made the committee process less efficient, making passage of legislation increasingly difficult and contributing to the gridlock and stalemate that characterizes the modern Congress.

In addition to legislating, four areas have suffered as a consequence of polarization according to William Galston and Pietro Nivola (2006). First, polarization harms America's foreign policy and national security strategy because of the two parties' extreme and opposite goals when it comes to national defense. The country's policy toward other nations is unstable and susceptible to significant change every four years. Secondly, it harms long range domestic policy with respect to fiscal policy and distribution of welfare benefits. The United States will not be able to sustain its social welfare programs forever. Major issues like updating or restructuring programs like social security or Medicare require bipartisan cooperation that polarization prevents (Galston and Nivola 2006). Thirdly, polarization damages the judiciary. Galston and Nivola (2006) write, "The grueling and often acrimonious process of confirming presidential appointments has increased vacancy rates in several judicial circuits" (38). In addition, partisan insults to judges have disrespected and blurred the lines of separate but equal. Finally, polarization is eroding public trust in government. Extreme views of politicians tend to alienate and exclude ordinary citizens. When people see politicians bicker and their congress gridlocked, they lose faith and trust in their government.

## **Conclusion**



American politics has become increasingly polarized over the last thirty years due to changes in district composition and institutional changes that give party leaders more power. This polarization has been amplified by the media and shouldn't be ignored. Serious consequences for our political system like gridlock, lack of stable policy, and diminishing public trust result from polarization. A 1998 national election study found that 84 percent of the public expressed the view that congress was too involved in partisan politics (Fleisher and Bond 2000). This widespread dissatisfaction continues today as the approval rating for congress is at 9 percent according to a New York Times poll conducted in October 2011 (Zeleny and Thee-Brenan 2011). Polarization has affected the health of America's democracy. Democracy is supposed to be representative, responsive, and accountable. However, congress is polarized, not the general public, so it isn't representative. It clearly is not responsive when it results in gridlock and verges on the brink of shutdown and default. It can't be considered accountable either when the two extreme parties can blame the problem on each other instead of cooperating to address them. The causes of polarization are evident, and this phenomenon is not conducive to American democracy.

### Works Cited

Aldrich, John H. and David W. Rohde. 2005. "Congressional Committees in a Partisan Era." Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, ed. *Congress Reconsidered* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (pp. 249-270). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Brownstein, Ronald. 2011, "The Debt Ceiling Crisis." *National Journal*, July 16, 1.

Dionne, E.J. 2006. "Polarized by God." Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, ed. *Red and Blue Nation* (pp. 175-205). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Fiorina, Morris. 2004. *Culture War*. San Francisco: Longman

Fleisher, Richard and Jon R. Bond. 2000. "Polarized Politics: Does it matter." Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, ed. *Polarized Politics* (pp. 186-200). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Frank, Thomas. 2004. *Whats the Matter with Kansas*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Galston, William A. and Pietro S. Nivola. 2006. "Delineating the Problem." Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, ed. *Red and Blue Nation* (pp. 1-48). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Hirano, Shigeo, James M. Snyder, & John M. Hansen. 2008. "Primary Competition and Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Senate." <http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/2982> (November 19, 2011).

Jacobson, Gary C. 2000. "Party Polarization in National Politics." Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, ed. *Polarized Politics* (pp. 9-30). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Mann, Thomas M. 2006. "Polarizing the House of Representatives: How much does gerrymandering matter." Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, ed. *Red and Blue Nation* (pp. 263-283). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Mutz, Diana C. 2006. "How the Mass Media Divide Us." Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, ed. *Red and Blue Nation* (pp. 223-248). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Popp, Karen A. 2000. "The Impeachment of President Clinton: An Ugly Mix of Three Powerful Forces." *Law and Contemporary Problems*. (2): 223-243

Rohde, David W. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sinclair, Barbara. 2006. *Party Wars*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Stonecash, Jeffrey M., Mark D. Brewer, & Mack Mariani. 2003. *Diverging Parties: social change, realignment, and party polarization*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Whitehouse, Mark. 2011. "Biggest Political Rift Since the Civil War." August 1.

Zeleny, Jeff and Megan Thee-Brenan. 2011. "New Poll Finds Deep Distrust of Government." *New York Times*, October 25. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/26/us/politics/poll-finds-anxiety-on-the-economy-fuels-volatility-in-the-2012-race.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/26/us/politics/poll-finds-anxiety-on-the-economy-fuels-volatility-in-the-2012-race.html?_r=1) (October 25, 2011).