

Embracing Peace: Path to Cross-Party Collaboration in US Politics

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"A house divided against itself cannot stand." — Abraham Lincoln

Abstract

In light of the pivotal 2024 US elections, this comprehensive study delves into the imperative of cross-party collaboration within American politics. Amidst a backdrop of heightened partisan divisions, this paper argues for a paradigm shift towards a more synergistic political atmosphere that transcends mere party affiliations. It articulates the essentiality of fostering transparency, mutual respect, tolerance, and proactive dialogue as foundational pillars for bridging ideological divides. This study not only accentuates the pivotal roles of accountability and equitable representation in cultivating mutual respect and cooperation across party lines but also spotlights the influential role of the electorate. It posits that a robust civic education is crucial for equipping citizens with the tools necessary to engage thoughtfully and critically in political discourse. By championing these core principles, this paper envisions a trajectory towards a more conciliatory and democratic political landscape, poised to invigorate the democratic spirit as the nation approaches the critical juncture of the 2024 elections. Through a combination of theoretical insights and empirical analysis, this study seeks to ignite a renewed commitment to collaborative governance, essential for the flourishing of democracy and the betterment of society at large.

Keywords: Cross-Party Collaboration, Political Polarization, Civic Engagement, Transparency in Government, Electoral Reforms, Constructive Political Discourse

1. Introduction

As we navigate deeper into the 21st century, the United States stands at a critical juncture, facing a challenge that has progressively intensified—political polarization. This ideological schism between political factions has not only captured the attention of public discourse but has also stirred substantial apprehension concerning the nation's future trajectory. The growing chasm of diverging viewpoints necessitates a renewed focus on unity amid diversity, advocating for peace and understanding through effective cross-party collaboration.

Throughout its history, the United States has oscillated between periods of severe ideological conflict and epochs marked by significant bipartisan cooperation. Such phases underscore the fact that bipartisanship, far from an elusive ideal, has been instrumental in achieving some of the nation's most transformative milestones. Iconic legislation like the Social Security Act of 1935, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 exemplify the power of effective bipartisan collaboration

(Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). However, recent decades have seen a noticeable decline in these collaborative successes, giving way to a landscape dominated by polarization and legislative stalemates (Theriault, 2008).

This paper embarks on a rigorous exploration into rekindling the spirit of cross-party collaboration within the complex milieu of U.S. politics. We explore the factors that historically facilitated bipartisan success, aiming to distill key elements that can foster effective collaboration today (Mann & Ornstein, 2013). Concurrently, we critically assess the current political environment, examining both the challenges and opportunities it presents for fostering future cross-party dialogue and cooperation (Garrett, 2021).

Our investigation is not limited to diagnosing the prevailing issues but extends to proposing practical, evidence-backed solutions. Leveraging insights from political science, we dissect the intricate dynamics that have catalyzed the current state of intense

partisanship (McCarty, 2019). In this light, we propose strategies designed to mitigate divisiveness, fostering a more collaborative and less confrontational political future (Binder, 2015).

In subsequent sections, we delve into the origins and evolution of political polarization in the United States, analyzing its extensive impact on governance, policy-making, and societal cohesion. We also outline potential strategies to enhance cooperation among the nation's political factions. By integrating historical evidence, contemporary data, and innovative approaches, this paper aims to contribute significantly to the dialogue on the future of bipartisanship in America. By emphasizing the critical value and necessity of collaboration in the political sphere, we highlight its indispensable role in advancing the national interest (Nisbet et al., 2018).

Ultimately, we posit that while the path to fostering peace in politics is fraught with complexity, it remains a surmountable challenge. Armed with a profound understanding of our historical context, a thorough analysis of current conditions, and a visionary outlook for the future, we can steer towards a more harmonious and collaborative political landscape in the United States.

2. Transparency and Mutual Respect: Foundations of Democratic Trust

In the fabric of democratic societies, transparency and mutual respect serve as foundational elements that underpin not only governance but also the overall health of public discourse. The current political landscape, however, is often characterized by tactics that focus more on highlighting the opposition's flaws rather than promoting constructive policy discussions. This trend has been particularly evident in the behavior of political figures in the media age, where communication strategies that emphasize sensationalism over substance can distort the public's perception and engagement.

2.1 The Role of Media in Shaping Political Perceptions

Media platforms have transformed the way political information is conveyed and perceived, playing a pivotal role in either fostering informed discussions or deepening divides. The sensationalist coverage of political figures like Donald Trump and Joe Biden illustrates how media can contribute to a mob mentality that exacerbates division rather than informing the electorate. This phenomenon is not confined to extremist groups but seeps into the mainstream, affecting the broader populace's ability to engage in reasoned political debate.

Cass Sunstein's exploration of "group polarization" highlights a critical dynamic where individuals, increasingly reliant on homogeneous news sources, become insulated from diverse perspectives. This isolation is magnified on social media platforms, where algorithms tailor content that reinforces existing beliefs, thus escalating confirmation bias and entrenching ideological divides. The echo chamber effect not only narrows the information landscape but also amplifies extremism by continuously feeding

users content that aligns with their preconceived notions.

2.2 Consequences of Polarization and Misinformation

The insidious spread of misinformation is a direct outcome of these echo chambers. Misinformation can significantly skew public understanding of key political issues and figures, leading to misinterpretations that impact voter behavior and public trust. For instance, the rhetoric surrounding the 2020 election results, particularly the unfounded claims of election fraud propagated by Donald Trump, fueled widespread belief in these inaccuracies, culminating in the event of January 6, 2021.

This scenario underscores the dangers of a hyper-polarized environment where political leaders use digital platforms to disseminate divisive content, exploiting emotional triggers rather than fostering rational discourse. According to Harton, Gunderson, and Bourgeois (2022), such strategies not only provoke immediate social unrest but also long-term distrust in democratic processes.

2.3 Strategies for Enhancing Democratic Engagement

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes transparency and respect across all levels of political communication. Media companies, in collaboration with policymakers, need to adopt more stringent measures in curating and disseminating information to ensure it promotes balanced views and counters the proliferation of fake news.

- **Promoting Cross-Cutting Discourse:** Diane Mutz's research emphasizes the value of exposure to diverse viewpoints. Integrating cross-cutting conversations in media programming can help mitigate polarization by exposing audiences to a broader range of perspectives, thereby enhancing understanding and tolerance across ideological divides.
- **Regulating Social Media:** As digital platforms increasingly become the mainstay of political discourse, there is a pressing need to regulate the spread of misinformation. While this poses challenges to free speech, the implementation of clearer guidelines on hate speech and fake news could help balance these concerns with the need for a healthy democratic environment.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Enhancing civic education to include critical thinking and media literacy can empower citizens to better navigate the complex media landscape. By fostering an informed electorate, societies can build resilience against misinformation and polarization.
- **Fostering a Culture of Respect:** Politicians and media outlets should lead by example, prioritizing respect and constructive engagement over divisive rhetoric. Encouraging political figures to engage in debates that focus on policies rather than personal attacks could help restore civility in political discourse.

The journey towards a more collaborative and respectful political environment is fraught with challenges but is crucial for the sustainability of democratic societies. By fostering transparency and mutual respect, and by strategically utilizing media platforms to promote informed and balanced discourse, we can hope to diminish the polarization that currently characterizes American politics and lay the groundwork for a more unified future. This

comprehensive approach not only addresses the immediate issues of misinformation and polarization but also cultivates a political culture that values democratic engagement and the principles upon which it stands.

3. Shared Goals and Common Good: Beyond Party Lines

In contemporary political discourse, discussions often gravitate towards divisive issues such as gun control, healthcare, or military spending. These topics, while seemingly factional, represent shared objectives that hold the potential for bipartisan agreement and legislative action. Political parties, fundamentally, are created to serve the populace and the nation. Despite distinct ideological foundations, the overarching objective should converge on the common good. This pursuit does not necessitate the dissolution of individual beliefs into a monolithic perspective, nor does it require unconditional acceptance of opposing views. Instead, it emphasizes the acknowledgement and respect for the legitimacy and rights of divergent opinions, fostering a pluralistic dialogue that enriches democratic governance.

3.1 Recognizing Shared Democratic Values

The essence of democracy lies in its capacity to accommodate a multiplicity of views, facilitating the free expression of diverse beliefs. This system is designed not only to reflect the will of the majority but also to safeguard the rights of the minority. In this light, democracy thrives on the dynamic interplay of varied perspectives, each contributing to the holistic governance of society.

3.2 The Misconception of Polarization

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace highlights a critical misunderstanding in the perception of ideological polarization within the United States. While there has indeed been a rise in ideological divisions, particularly in the 21st century, the extent of these divisions is often exaggerated by the electorate. Voters frequently overestimate the disparity between their views and those of individuals from opposing parties. There exists a significant overlap in policy preferences that is generally overlooked, obscured by the heightened visibility and vocal presence of extreme elements within each ideological spectrum.

This overlap is particularly noteworthy among progressive activists and radical conservatives, who, despite their vocal positions, represent only the fringes of broader, more moderate populations. The fallacy that opponents are ideologically homogenous and equally polarized contributes to a "perception gap." This gap is a formidable barrier to fostering unity and mutual understanding, crucial for the peaceful conduct and outcomes of elections, including the impending 2024 presidential race.

3.3. Bridging the Perception Gap

To bridge this perception gap, it is vital to cultivate a political culture that prioritizes understanding and the identification of common grounds. Public discourse and media representation play pivotal roles in this process. By emphasizing the areas of policy

agreement and the shared values that underpin different political ideologies, media can help reduce misconceptions and promote a more nuanced understanding of political diversity.

Moreover, initiatives aimed at bipartisan dialogue and cooperation can further diminish polarization. For example, bipartisan panels, community forums, and legislative workshops that focus on collaborative problem-solving can demonstrate the practicality of working across party lines, highlighting the shared goals rather than the differences.

3.4 Breaking the Cycle of Polarization

The persistent cycle of polarization can indeed be disrupted. A critical first step in this endeavor is to recognize that the prevailing ideological polarization is more entrenched within political parties than among the general electorate. This disconnect often results in legislative and judicial outcomes that do not necessarily reflect the broader public interest. A poignant example of this is the 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision, revoking the federally guaranteed right to an abortion. Many analysts suggest that this shift was less a reflection of public consensus and more a culmination of prolonged efforts by highly conservative factions within the judiciary and associated political entities. This case illustrates how decision-makers can become increasingly isolated from the electorate, often catering more to specific interest groups than to the majority of citizens. Such actions not only contribute to the demonization of perceived adversaries but also erode trust in key institutions. Following the *Dobbs* decision, the Annenberg Public Policy Center reported a significant 22% drop in public trust towards the Supreme Court's impartiality, underscoring a critical area of concern as the nation approaches another election cycle.

3.5 Enhancing Communication and Representation

To mend the growing rift between representatives and their constituencies, new mechanisms for communication and feedback must be established. Representatives need to actively engage with the communities they serve to truly understand and reflect their constituents' desires and needs in their legislative efforts. This approach not only helps in reducing both affective and ideological polarization but also realigns political incentives towards more pluralistic and goal-oriented legislative work. Recognizing the middle ground in disputes and focusing on mutual goals can significantly enhance productive civic engagement and collaboration.

3.6 Constructive Engagement Over Vilification

The tendency to vilify opposition can be counterproductive. A more constructive approach involves identifying and expanding upon common ground in debates on divisive issues. For instance, the increasing public awareness and concern regarding political corruption have galvanized bipartisan support for robust anti-corruption and accountability measures. The proposed American Anti-Corruption Act, which includes provisions for ranked-choice

voting, lobbying restrictions, and transparent campaign finance disclosures, exemplifies legislation that could unite disparate political factions. This act demonstrates the potential for cross-party collaboration to forge comprehensive policies that enjoy widespread support, thereby enhancing the integrity of electoral and governmental processes.

3.7 Ranked-Choice Voting as a Solution

Among various reformative strategies, ranked-choice voting emerges as a particularly effective method to diminish negative campaigning and enhance electoral civility. This voting system, already implemented in several U.S. districts and other countries, allows voters to rank candidates by preference rather than selecting just one. Such a system dilutes the impact of extreme partisanship by providing a platform for more moderate and consensus-based candidates to succeed. Political scientists advocate for the expansion of ranked-choice voting, predicting that it could revitalize third-party participation and offer a viable alternative to voters dissatisfied with the binary choices typically presented in American elections. This change could be pivotal for the 2024 elections, potentially reducing polarization and fostering a more representative and balanced political discourse.

To significantly mitigate polarization by the 2024 elections, a multifaceted approach is required—one that not only introduces practical electoral reforms like ranked-choice voting but also revitalizes the spirit of democratic engagement through enhanced communication and representation. By addressing the root causes of polarization and creating legislative environments that encourage consensus-building over conflict, the United States can hope to achieve a more united and less divided future. This proactive stance is essential not only for the health of American democracy but also for ensuring that governance truly reflects the will and welfare of the people.

4. Accountability and Fair Representation: Upholding Democratic Values

Over recent decades, public confidence in U.S. governmental institutions has seen a sharp decline. Data from Pew Research indicates that while in 1960, approximately 75% of Americans trusted the government to act rightly, this figure plummeted to just 20% by 2022. This erosion of trust underscores a critical need for heightened accountability within the democratic process, where the priority for politicians should ideally be service to the populace rather than the pursuit of power. The paradox, however, is that those who have the most significant impact on reducing polarization often benefit the most from its perpetuation. It is imperative that political parties be held accountable, taking responsibility for their actions and rhetoric.

4.1 The Impact of Presidential Influence on Legislation

A telling example of the challenges in legislative accountability is seen in the recent attempt at bipartisan immigration reform. After extensive negotiations, a comprehensive immigration bill aimed at bolstering border security and providing aid to Ukraine, Israel, and

Taiwan was drafted. This bill proposed stricter asylum laws and mechanisms for the Department of Homeland Security to manage border traffic effectively—measures long sought by Republicans. Yet, despite these provisions, the bill was thwarted in the House after former President Donald Trump voiced his opposition. Trump's disapproval was strategic, aimed at preserving a key issue from his 2016 campaign for potential leverage in the 2024 elections. Had the bill passed, it would have potentially credited President Biden with "fixing" the southern border, thereby bolstering his re-election prospects and diminishing Trump's campaign narrative.

4.2 Congressional Gridlock and Public Distrust

This scenario exemplifies the undue influence presidential candidates can exert over congressional policymaking, where representatives, rather than acting on behalf of their constituents and addressing timely issues, delay or derail legislation to support a political agenda. In a divided Congress, even when bipartisan agreements are reached, they can be nullified in the shadows of partisan conflicts. This persistent gridlock not only perpetuates polarization but also diminishes public confidence in the government's ability to represent and act for the people effectively.

4.3 Strategies for Enhancing Accountability and Representation

As we approach the 2024 elections, restoring public trust in political leadership is paramount. Creating an environment of mutual accountability and fair representation is crucial for fostering respect and cooperation among parties, which are essential for peaceful co-existence. Implementing stricter regulations on campaign finance is a pivotal first step. Enhancing transparency around the funding of lawmakers and setting limits on campaign expenditures can help curb the undue influence of money in politics. Specifically, the power of Super PACs, which can raise unlimited amounts for campaigns provided they do not coordinate directly with the candidates, needs to be curtailed. These groups, often backed by wealthy donors and special interests, wield considerable influence over political agendas, exacerbating polarization and undermining democratic processes.

4.4 Limiting Lobbying and Enhancing Legislative Integrity

By reducing the lobbying capabilities of these powerful groups, we can ensure that government officials prioritize the needs of the general populace over those of the ultra-wealthy. Measures such as public funding for campaigns, requiring detailed disclosure of all political donations, and enforcing stricter penalties for non-compliance could help achieve a more balanced political discourse. Additionally, fostering open, transparent legislative processes that encourage public participation and scrutiny may further enhance accountability.

The imperative to uphold democratic values through accountability and fair representation has never been more critical. By addressing the influence of money in politics, enforcing accountability, and ensuring that legislation truly reflects the will of the people, we can begin to restore faith in our political institutions. These reforms will not only help reduce polarization but also strengthen

the foundation of our democracy as we move towards the 2024 elections and beyond.

5. Civic Engagement and Education

From the inception of the United States, the democratic process has evolved significantly. Initially, voting rights were restricted to a small group of wealthy landowners, and the founding fathers expressed concerns about the risks of populist, mob rule stemming from an uninformed electorate. Today, while voting rights have been extended to all citizens over the age of 18, challenges persist, particularly in the realm of information access and its influence on voter behavior. A concerning trend has emerged where electoral participation and political awareness are strongly correlated with socio-economic status.

5.1 Socio-Economic Disparities in Voter Turnout

Research reveals a stark disparity in voter turnout linked to income levels. For instance, over 80% of individuals with an income of \$150,000 participated in the 2016 presidential election, compared to only 50% of those earning \$15,000 annually. This gap widens during midterm elections, underscoring an urgent crisis: lower-income individuals are less likely to vote and therefore, are underrepresented in governmental decisions. This underrepresentation fosters a cycle of disenchantment and disengagement, as these citizens feel their interests are not adequately addressed, perpetuating a sense of powerlessness and further reducing civic engagement (Putnam, 1993).

5.2 The Digital Divide and Information Access

Additionally, a "digital divide" contributes to polarization, especially among disadvantaged groups. Those with the skills and media literacy to navigate the digital landscape benefit from the abundance of available information. In contrast, those less familiar with the internet are more susceptible to misinformation. This divide not only affects voter knowledge but also impacts the overall quality of democratic participation.

5.3 The Impact of Civic Education

The disparity in voter turnout can also be traced back to differences in civic education across socio-economic lines. Schools in economically disadvantaged areas often lack the resources to provide robust civic education, leading to lower levels of political activity and media literacy among their students. These educational disparities result in higher likelihoods of voting along strict party lines—if voting occurs at all—and a susceptibility to misinformation, which further exacerbates polarization. A study by Bartels (1996) suggests that the average deviation from an informed vote can be as much as 10.6 percent across six elections, a margin significant enough to influence election outcomes.

5.4 Enhancing Civic Education to Bridge Gaps

To address these issues, a substantial increase in funding for civic education in low-income areas is critical. Starting civics education early in school curricula can help familiarize children with the concept of political participation and activism, setting a

foundation for lifelong civic engagement. In an era marked by deep polarization and identity politics, the approach to civics education must be carefully strategized to avoid further divisiveness.

5.5 Promoting Constructive Dialogue and Media Literacy

Encouraging respectful and inclusive classroom discussions among students with diverse political viewpoints is essential. Instead of focusing on debate, the emphasis should be on discovering common ground and shared concerns, which can foster a more cooperative political environment. As adolescents begin to form their political identities, exposure to a variety of perspectives is crucial to prevent the entrenchment of blind loyalty to a single ideology.

Furthermore, as the digital age progresses, teaching media literacy becomes increasingly important. Adolescents must learn to discern credible news sources from biased or misleading ones. Integrating media literacy into civics education can equip young people to critically evaluate the information they encounter online, thus mitigating the impact of polarizing narratives and misinformation.

Enhancing civic engagement and education is pivotal for the health of democracy, particularly as we approach the 2024 elections. By investing in comprehensive civics education and addressing the digital divide, we can empower a broader and more diverse electorate. This approach not only enriches democratic participation but also strengthens the foundational principles of our society, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in the political process.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

As the United States approaches the pivotal 2024 elections, the imperative for cross-party collaboration becomes increasingly clear. Throughout this paper, we have explored the essential elements that are foundational to nurturing a cooperative political environment—transparency, mutual respect, accountability, and civic engagement. These are not merely aspirational ideals; they are practical necessities for revitalizing the way our political system functions. Historical instances of bipartisan success, such as the landmark legislations of the Social Security Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, provide compelling blueprints for today's political leaders, showing that transcending partisan divides is not only possible but also highly beneficial.

The journey toward diminishing polarization and enhancing bipartisanship involves complex challenges, both institutional and cultural, yet it is also fraught with opportunities for meaningful reform and unity. By promoting transparency and open dialogue, we can demystify the political process and enhance the electorate's engagement. Legislative transparency initiatives and regular open forums can clarify legislative intents and processes, making politics more accessible and understandable to the public. This increased clarity can foster a more informed and actively participating citizenry.

Moreover, fostering mutual respect goes beyond merely reducing negative rhetoric—it involves creating real opportunities for meaningful interactions across party lines. Workshops and retreats that bring together politicians from different backgrounds to build relationships and discuss common goals can help break down barriers of misunderstanding and mistrust. Media also plays a crucial role in this; by focusing more on issues rather than ideological differences, media can help shift public discussions toward a more issue-focused discourse rather than one rooted in partisan conflict.

Accountability and fair representation are critical to the integrity of our political system. Campaign finance reform is necessary to reduce the disproportionate influence of money in politics, and electoral reforms such as the introduction of ranked-choice voting can encourage the election of more moderate candidates, thereby reducing the effectiveness of extreme partisan tactics. These reforms not only enhance the democratic process but also help restore the public's trust in their governmental institutions.

Enhancing civic engagement is perhaps the most foundational element. Expanding funding for civic education in underserved communities ensures that all citizens are equipped with knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. Integrating media literacy into education curricula can empower future voters to critically assess the information they consume, making them less susceptible to misinformation and more capable of participating effectively in the democratic process.

The path to a collaborative political environment requires a shift in how we interact with our democratic institutions and with one another. It calls for an atmosphere where differing viewpoints are not just tolerated but valued as essential components of our democratic dialogue. This vision for a collaborative future is within our reach but requires a concerted effort from both political leaders and citizens alike.

As we move toward the 2024 elections, let us recommit to the principles of democracy that have guided generations of Americans. Embracing these challenges as opportunities, we can demonstrate our resilience and dedication to a more unified, respectful, and prosperous society. By undertaking deliberate actions and fostering a shared commitment to the common good, we can transform our political landscape into a model of democracy and cooperation, setting a standard not just for the present but for future generations to come. This comprehensive approach is not just a call to action for our leaders; it is a manifesto for every citizen who believes in the enduring promise of America. Together, through these strategic enhancements and reforms, we can overcome the barriers of partisanship and redefine what it means to engage in constructive political discourse in the United States.

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