

## Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Partisanship 政党政治 in the USA

Terms related to party loyalty 政党忠诚/unity 党的团结, bias in favor of or against a particular party, and polarized 极化的 ideologies related to political parties or figures are fundamental to the study of U.S. politics today. Like most terms, however, considerable confusion exists about what these terms refer to and whether they can be applied in a manner that is not itself partisan.

**Partisanship** – A noun which refers to the presence or level of partisan views and party loyalty/unification. **Partisan 党派性的** – An adj. which describes a person, statement, or other object as favoring one party in particular. It can be considered as a special form of bias 偏见 in which the bias is directed not at an ideology or kind of people (though this is often a byproduct 副产品) but at a political party. **Bi-Partisan 两党一致的** – An adj. which describes something that both “major” parties in the U.S. agree about or are cooperating on. Any committee 委员会, organization, or other group may be bi-partisan if it contains members of both the Democratic (D) and Republican (R) parties. Many confuse this term with “neutral 中立的,” “objective 客观的,” or even “factual 真实的,” but the difference can be seen most clearly in the bi-partisan exclusion of third-party candidates from U.S. presidential election debates unless they receive a certain percentage of support in polls 民意调查. As the U.S. electorate 选民 has become increasingly polarized in recent decades, fewer and fewer political positions and policies have truly bi-partisan support. **Non-Partisan 无党派的** – This adj. is the standard for political neutrality in the U.S. When a non-partisan source comes to a conclusion, such as through an objective, neutral analysis which seems to support one party's position over others, it is not unusual for others to reject such conclusions and analysis, instead questioning the source's non-partisan credentials 资格.

Confusingly, issues which are considered to be pro-America (i.e. good) and rising above partisanship or membership in any party are often described as either bi-partisan or non-partisan, “something that every American can agree on.” 家喻户晓 Things which are bipartisan in the past several years include: support for term-limits 任期限制 in Congress; distrust of Congress; support for taking a “hard line” on 对…采取强硬态度 China, North Korea, ISIS/ISIL, Al Qaeda “基地” 组织, etc.; support for the U.S. Peace Corps 美国和平队; elite support for free trade (though this is lessening) and populist opposition to it; support for Israel, NATO 北约, etc.

Things which are highly partisan in the past several years include: abortion rights 堕胎权; tax cuts; progressive 累进税 VS. flat taxation 统一税; gun control; welfare benefits 社会福利. Things which resonate 引起共鸣 at the popular (non-elite) level are often called “wedge issues,” 制造分裂的议题 used strategically by politicians to separate “low-information” voters “理性无知” 选民 and “single-issue” voters 单一议题选民 from those with whom they would otherwise agree on larger issues such as class and economic policy. The most common example of this is former President Obama's highly controversial statement that some people “cling to their guns and their religion” amidst difficult times. This statement was used in part by Republicans to anger their supporters in lower socio-economic classes who vote for Republicans primarily based on opposition to gun control and/or abortion (which often is closely tied to religious beliefs that life begins at conception rather than at birth).

Polarization 极化 can refer both to ideological divergence 分歧 and the reduction in the number of “moderates” or “centrists” 中庸派 in the middle of the political spectrum. The “hollowing out” 空洞化 of the U.S. political center makes compromise 折衷 harder and rarer and could even threaten a bedrock concept of electoral strategy: the wisdom of candidates appealing to the “median voter” 中间选民 to win elections. Arguably, Hillary Clinton's platform was more centrist and should have appealed more to the “median” U.S. voter than Donald Trump's “America First” sloganeering 使用口号 and shift toward extreme populist rhetoric. Indeed, many analysts hear echoes in Trump's divisive platform of “blood and soil,” “鲜血与祖国” far right-wing ethno-nationalism which is supposed to be a European phenomenon (especially of the early 20th-century). U.S. civic nationalism is supposed to inoculate 注射 Americans against such beliefs, but in 2016, being an “outsider” against the Washington D.C. “establishment” proved to be more decisive in victory than moderation or a stable status quo.

Since at least the 1990s, partisanship and polarization have been rising, with less and less cooperation between Democrats and Republicans. When one party has a clear majority in Congress, the minority party now resorts far more frequently to the filibuster 阻挠议事的冗长演说 to block the agenda of the majority party than in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Critics of such partisanship complain that it has resulted in political gridlock in the legislative branch, necessitating that recent presidents issue constitutionally questionable “executive orders” 行政命令 to bypass 绕过 the legislature to implement the platforms on which they were elected. Pres. Trump has stated very clearly that reversing Obama's executive orders is a top priority.

Polarization can even occur *within* a party or group of people who hold the same basic, liberal or conservative beliefs, as when there is a split between populists and elites or “establishment” figures within a party or ideology. Calling for “ideological purity” 思想上的纯净 or creating a “poison pill” which disqualifies membership can easily divide a political party, as many Democrats want *all* party members and candidates to be “pro-choice,” 提倡堕胎合法 resulting in the expulsion 开除 of citizens who may agree on all issues other than their anti-abortion stance. Republicans, too, have a name for members of their party who don't adhere to a majority or popular position: RINO, or “Republican in Name Only.” 名义上的共和党人

An environment of partisanship prevails in the U.S. despite party membership among the population being lower than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While an increasing number of voters describe themselves as “independents,” often out of frustration with the major parties and a desire for more flexibility in primary elections, such voters tend to align strongly with one party or the other on the issues. Independents, whose votes are often assumed to be among the vital “undecideds” which swing elections, express their partisanship by saying that they “lean” towards one party or the other.

In a comparative perspective, note that in order to be significant, partisanship requires at least a competitive, two-party system. While one can be partisan toward or against “Third-Parties” in the U.S. or the “consultative parties” 参政党 in a one-party system like China's, one's partisanship doesn't matter much until the parties in question have significant political power. To be partisan in favor of the CCP in the PRC is quite close to the meaning of being patriotic, as the critical expression of anti-CCP partisanship can still get one in trouble (or a foreigner banned from the country). As liberal democracy retreats worldwide, the PRC is hardly unusual in this preference for national unity.

Whether a liberal democratic party system is two- or multi-party often varies by whether the structure is presidential or parliamentary and how representatives are voted into office (i.e. with “first-past-the-post, FPTP” 得票多者当选制 or proportional representation 比例代表制 in the legislature). The USA is a prime example of how Duverger's Law 迪韦尔热定律 (两党制) works: although many complain about limited options between the two major parties, its presidential structure and simple, single-vote FPTP procedures strongly supported the creation and maintenance of a fairly stable two-party system in which voters can be assured that a candidate from one party or the other will win almost every election. Combined with bi-partisanship itself, these factors appear to be more important than full representation across the political spectrum, as those who might belong to entirely different parties in a multi-party system must try to advance their agendas from “wings” or factions 分派 within the Democratic or Republican Parties.