

The Effect of Polarization on Public Policy and Opinion; in Two or Multiparty Systems

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The most prominent determinants of political actions in democracies are partisanship and polarization which influence party systems throughout the world. The United States two party system is not the only party system impacted by partisanship; multiparty systems are likewise affected. George Washington notified the public about the power of polarization in his farewell address "the alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism, but this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism" (Washington, 1796). President Washington's warnings have become true as partisanship now plays a significant role in government and politics. In modern society, how does partisanship affect public policy and opinion? What is the relationship between partisanship in two or multiparty systems?

Partisanship affects multiple facets of government, one of these being public opinion. Partisanship impacts public opinion as parties hold the ability to influence how citizens interpret new political information (Anderson & Just, 2012, p.307). Partisanship through the form of party cues may affect a constituent's political attitude and beliefs. This occurs when voters are unversed in politics and political issues. Uninformed partisans use party cues to form political decisions based on the beliefs of their political party (Arceneaux, 2007, p.140). Partisan public opinion, in turn, affects alternative political issues such as public policy and how electoral candidates are held accountable. Partisanship influences democracies all around the world, not just The United States' two-party system. A study conducted by Brader and Tucker in 2012 displays how partisanship determines electoral choices and often creates bias as it leads to selective exposure of political information (Brader & Tucker, 2012, p. 405). Voters cannot make informed judgments in regard to government policies, without complete unbiased information.

Partisanship influences citizens' outlook on public policy. Policy preference becomes an issue due to partisanship. Partisans are more likely to vote for policies that consist of values and cues signaled by their party, even if it does not consist of constituents' views, as they may be uninformed on the issue (Brader, Tucker & Duell, 2013, p.1486). Thus, partisans are more likely to vote in line with their affiliated party. Affiliated voting affects public policy such as environmental policies. A study conducted by Linde & Linde exhibits how partisanship in public policy affects environmental policies in Sweden. When a policy has a clear connection to a political party it is viewed in a partisan lens by the opposite party. Party members are more likely to vote for policy endorsed by their party (Linde & Linde, 2018, p. 232). This causes voters to react to policy in a hostile manner, as they defend and support the views cued by their party even if the facts are disagreeable (Huddy, Bankert & Davies, 2018, p.175). Policies that are typically represented as right-winged or left-winged are more difficult to pass as the policy shifts from an issue that requires a solution to a controversial exchange between parties. In the United States, health care is being negatively affected as partisanship has turned policy issues into controversial issues. A collaborative effort must be made by both parties for effective health policy to be passed in the United States (Noonan, 2017). Leaders are not being held responsible as relevant policies fail to be settled.

Accountability is a fundamental trait of democratic governments. Partisanship steers leaders to be held exempt from the actions and policies they create. Leaders must be held accountable by the people who gave them the position, their constituents. When an elected official is not assessed based on their performance in office, the concerns of citizens are not being adequately represented by their governments (Jung, 2018, p.168). If left unchecked leaders may become self-indulgent, isolated and even tyrannical (Reid, 2020). Unaccountable leaders

may worry about furthering their agenda, rather than furthering public policy and service. Leaders are not held accountable as many constituents vote for a party win. Numerous leaders appeal to the partisan vote because partisans greatly influence party nominations (McGhee, Masket, Shor, Rogers & McCarthy, 2014, p.337). Elected leaders are not being appointed because of their policy ideas and performance as incumbents, but rather are voted into office so their party wins (Huddy, Bankert & Davies, 2018, p.175). In the United States' current election, many American voters disapprove of the current candidates but would rather vote for any representative of their chosen party, which is known as "voting blue" or "voting red," rather than vote for other candidates. Thus, voters fail to evaluate candidates whose positions counter their parties (Arceneaux, 2017, p. 140). Party partisanship hurts electoral accountability as leaders are being elected due to their party affiliation.

It has been argued that partisanship positively affects public opinion, policy, and electoral accountability. In some cases, as polarization increases, individuals become more confident in their political opinions and beliefs as they follow party cues (Linde, 2017, p.231). This, in turn, leads to an increase in voter turnout and participation. Partisanship keeps citizens interested in their electoral systems (Huddy, Bankert & Davies, 2018 p.176). Some scholars believe that partisanship is beneficial to newly developed democracies. In new democracies partisanship creates voter participation, and structure (Brader & Tucker, 2012, p. 417). Partisanship also builds ties between citizens and newly elected leaders, helping create and institute electoral accountability. As democracies mature, partisans can weaken party performance and lead to an overly institutionalized party system. This would prevent leaders from being held accountable for their political actions and policies. (Jung, 2018, p.189). As political awareness increases, individuals start relying on their own opinion. Party cues hold the ability to lead constituents to

vote for candidates based on their party's view instead of forming their own judgement (Arceneaux, 2007, p.143). As partisans decrease and constituents become more politically acclimated, electoral accountability and informed voting increases.

Partisanship negatively impacts public opinion, policy, and electoral accountability. As party cues mold constituents' political opinion and political awareness decreases. Voters become less informed of the policies that are being put in place. Important policies are necessary for the advancement of society and have become unresolved issues. This in turn has caused elected political leaders to be held unaccountable, as leaders are not being elected due to their incumbent performance and policies. Partisans have created a "party wins" overall mentality throughout democracies in the world. Partisans need to decrease in order to have informed voters who hold political leaders accountable. Citizens in mature democracies should become weary of the effects of polarization as systems institutionalize. Voters need to become more actively involved and informed when it comes to politics. Citizens need to critically evaluate government policies, elected candidates, and the messages and cues leaders and political parties are trying to convey. Only when voters become further engaged and informed in politics will partisanship and its effects diminish.

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