**SPA 460 FINAL POLICY MEMO**

**Dr. Manuel**

**APPENDIX: How do we solve political division in the United States?**

**To: Political Leaders**

**From:** Alexa Glozheni
**Date:** April 30th, 2021
**Re:** Political division in the United States \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Executive Summary**

Within the past few years we, citizens of the United States, have witnessed a major shift in our political affiliations, our political parties, our passion for important issues, and the way we approach disagreements. At one point, there was disagreement, but people continued their daily life and their friendships. Today, we witness families, friendships, and opportunities are shattered all due to the political division that is taking place in our country. Where does all of this stem from and where does it start? I argue that it starts with the rhetoric and the leadership of our politicians and media networks. Republicans and Democrats within the past few years have shifted into a major divide. This not only affects US citizens, but it also plays a huge negative impact on things getting accomplished in the country. With constant disagreement and weak leadership comes a weak economy, weak security, and a weak overall government system. In today’s society, we have insulted and cancel culture that has become draining for the country. Leadership within our two major political parties is not one to use as an example or look up to. What will it take for the country to unite? Can these divisions come to an end or is this just the beginning? What can a good leader do to put an end to this? What leadership skills have our leaders so far lacked that have caused this mess to take control? These are all questions and concerns that I plan to discuss within this policy memo. In addition, I believe that two solutions can ultimately begin a journey towards solving the issue of the political divide. First, when it comes to government division and our politicians, there needs to be system reform within our government, donors, lobbyists, etc. Second, when it comes to citizen division and societal divisions, there needs to be a demand for more education on civil discourse.

**Current issues & statistics**

First, we will discuss the current state of the political division since the recent November 2020 elections. President Biden has made a promise to unify the country once again and end this gap, but what will it take? If our politicians, leaders, and representatives cannot come together and get policies done, then neither will their followers and ultimately reaching a solution will continue to become more difficult. The division has always existed between the two major political parties, but recently it has stretched much farther than just policy issues. According to a pew research article, “A month before the election, roughly eight-in-ten registered voters in both camps said their differences with the other side were about core American values, and roughly nine-in-ten – again in both camps – worried that a victory by the other would lead to “lasting harm” to the United States” (Dimock & Wike). This reaffirms the idea that the political divide has become a much larger issue than in previous years. An important point to keep in mind is that many of the issues that the two parties disagree on are placed strictly into Democrat or Republican and this “singular battle line can make our differences appear even larger than they may actually be” (Dimock & Wike).

On the bright side of this leadership problem, individuals from both sides want a leader who will unify the country. Pew Research stated that “Overwhelming majorities of both Trump (86%) and Biden (89%) supporters surveyed this fall said that their preferred candidate if elected, should focus on addressing the needs of all Americans, “even if it means disappointing some of his supporters”” (Dimock & Wike). While this is a good step in the right direction, it falls in the hands of our leaders. Although many of our leaders preach political unification, “good intentions on the part of our leaders and ourselves face serious headwinds in a political system that reinforces a two-party political battleground at nearly every level” (Dimock & Wike). With that in mind, next, we will discuss the issues that arise from these political divisions and how this has affected policy change, legislation, and proposals for problems the country is currently facing.

**Associated leadership challenges created by the problem**

 The division of the political parties and extreme partisanship that we are currently experiencing has caused a divide in our government which has caused a divide in our Senate and Congress and this ultimately affects problems from being solved, legislation from being passed, and new beneficial policies from being enacted. In addition, this also causes division in society and hateful rhetoric.

 Partisan gridlock is an issue that will result in nothing getting done in Congress and the Senate (Drutman). With an equal division in the Senate, disagreement amongst the two parties is bound to happen and this is very dangerous for the future of our democracy and the future of the country. In addition, we have leaders that are not exemplifying what a successful and inspiring leader should look like. On both sides of the aisle, some of our leaders are spewing hateful rhetoric and not making an effort to work with the other side. For example, in Congress, we have Maxine Waters representing the democratic party and Matt Gaetz, representing the Republican party. Both of these leaders have proven to be extremely partisan and divisive with their rhetoric to the public. This kind of behavior will only motivate followers to believe that this is okay and will feed partisan views and biases in their already existing opinions about the opposing side.

**Leadership skills for our Leaders**

Three styles of leadership styles that could benefit our current political leaders and advise them to bring together the country and begin unification are transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, and servant leadership. All three styles of leadership include a component of working with others, serving others, and being an example to others. Ultimately, our leaders or politicians are there to serve us, the citizens of this country. As a result, we vote for them and elect or reelect them; it is a two-way process and at the moment it feels like our leaders are more worried about their side than they are about the issues that the American people are facing as a whole and as a country.

Transformational leadership “occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their self-interest for the good of the group” (Bass 21). In addition, transformational leaders not only inspire their followers but also lead by example. This can play a much-needed role in our political divisiveness today. As I mentioned previously, many of our current political leaders are not healthy examples to follow. This style of leadership can be beneficial because it can influence the public and the way they begin to perceive political differences while at the same continuing to stay passionate about their views and beliefs.

Charismatic leadership is a leader “who uses his or her communication skills, persuasiveness, and charm to influence others” (Lee). The main characteristics of this kind of leadership are communication skills and the ability to connect with followers. These are extremely important characteristics to have when it comes to politicians. Our politicians have been able to connect with their side, but have lost touch with trying to connect with those who may disagree. To be a successful charismatic leader, a politician must connect with all people, not just the ones who vote for him or her.

Lastly, Servant leadership “occurs when the leader’s main goal and responsibility is to provide service to their people” (Trait). Additionally, in servant leadership, the leader serves those below him or her to make sure that they are evolving. Our politicians and representatives are there to serve us as citizens and make sure that we are growing as a country as a result of their successful leadership.

**Policy Solution For The Problem**

 At the beginning of this policy memo, I described that there are two policy solutions for the problem of political division and partisanship in the United States and amongst our political leaders. First, a system reform. Second, education on civil discourse.

A system Reform :

 Political division, in a way, has become a profit for media outlets and social media outlets. Our political system and its hunger for profit need to come to an end and begin prioritizing civility and humanity. There needs to be donor reform, lobbyist reform, two-party system reform, media reform, electoral reform (voting must be more efficient, secure, and accessible to all), and the way our government functions as a whole. All of these aspects have played a vital role in motivating political polarization. An article by USA Today stated that “a majority of Americans want a functioning government and elected leaders who put “We, The People” over special interests and their political parties” (Altmire & Curbelo). In addition, Altmire and Curbelo also explain that there needs to be a change in partisan gerrymandering by “ensuring that voters choose their representatives rather than politicians choosing their voters” (Altmire & Curbelo). This is very important because it prioritizes the voice of the citizens and puts the people first. In addition, it is important to note that “ labeling policies as “Democrat” or “Republican” can influence policy support, depending on the implicit bias of participants towards each party” (De-Witt). In addition to the system reform, there also needs to be a solution to our strict two-party system. People should not be voting based on party, but rather based on policy. With so much restriction and pressure to choose one side or the other, people will ultimately divide themselves and defend their choice.

Education on Civil Discourse:

 A faster solution and one that can have long-term benefits is education in the classroom. The younger generations are the ones that will make a difference in our future and the future of policies and politics. To end this pattern of division within society and politics, we must start by teaching it. Teaching students to respect different opinions, think outside their comfort zones, be open-minded, and lead with empathy can make a big difference in our political future. We are taught to put ideas and views in two boxes, either Democrat or Republican, and we are fed stereotypes for both sides. If students are taught that it is okay to agree with one opinion and also with another opinion that may align with a different side, then political division can be avoided. It is also important to educate students on having healthy conversations about important topics in our society without insulting the other view or getting angry. If there was a course or curriculum that prioritized civil discourse about politics and other topics in our country, like race and religion, then there would be more understanding and ultimately less division in the future.

**Policy Implications**

 In conclusion, the political division is an issue that is going to continue hurting the country and the democracy of this country if we do not come together and find a solution. Differing of opinion and debate is not going to end, but the way that is executed must improve. People must understand the other side, communicate, and demand change from our leaders. As I mentioned previously, without good examples it will be difficult to begin enacting the solutions and solving the problem. In an article by the Brookings Institute, Darrell West states that “Unless people can bridge these divisions and forge a new path forward, it will be impossible to work together, maintain a functioning democracy, and solve the country’s pressing policy problems” (West).

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