



# Nonpartisanship and the League in a time of political division & gridlock

Barbara Zia, former LWVCA & LWVSC President & LWVUS Board Director

Catherine Malloy & Brian Duffy, LWVCA Money in Politics Committee Co-Chairs

## *Nonpartisan:* Merriam Webster Dictionary definition

- Not partisan
- Free from party affiliation, bias, or designation
- Not supporting one political party or group over another

## Nonpartisanship in the LWV

- ✓ Our mission is to encourage **informed and active participation in government.**
- ✓ We encourage our members to be informed participants in political activity.

## Nonpartisanship in the LWV

- That doesn't preclude us from taking action on issues on which we have positions derived from member study and agreement.
- We are nonpartisan in our advocacy. Our only interest is the general welfare of our democracy and citizens.

## Nonpartisan policy for LWV board members

- To avoid any possible **perception** of partisanship, our most visible leaders are asked to refrain from partisan political activity and support during their terms in office.
- A ***nonpartisan policy*** is developed and implemented annually by each local, state and U.S. League.

## League messaging

- The term *nonpartisan* can be confusing and mean different things to different people. Many don't believe groups can truly be nonpartisan in such politically divisive times.
- So we say instead,

*The League neither supports nor opposes candidates or political parties.*

## Current state of political polarization

- Partisan polarization is undeniably the central and most problematic feature of contemporary American politics.
- Ideological schism extends from Congress to state and often local government, to party activists, to the public.

*Thomas Mann & Norman Ornstein, 2016  
"It's Even Worse Than It Looks"*

*The* **The War on Stupid People** | **Solving the Mystery of Jesus's Wife**  
*Atlantic*

**How  
American  
Politics  
Went  
Insane**

It didn't start with Trump.  
It's going to get worse.  
Is there a cure?

**By Jonathan Rauch**

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## Current state of political polarization

“...**Washington** has become deeply polarized and far less civil. Dysfunction has become the status quo.” *Former Senate Majority Leaders Tom Daschle & Trent Lott*  
“Crisis Point”

### In Congress,

- **Roll call voting patterns** show ideological gap between parties is greatest since 1879.
- Most conservative Democrat is slightly more liberal than most liberal Republican. That is, the **degree of overlap between parties is zero.**

## Current state of political polarization

### In Congress,

- **Members don't know one another** or communicate anymore, much less work together across party lines.
- There's **lack of shared determination** to get things done...to compromise.
- Members maintain a **short work week**.
- Members must run **permanent campaigns**.

*Lott & Daschle*



# Sinkhole Waiting to Happen

Tales

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THE OTHER DEFICIT.

8-14-13

## Current state of political polarization

### **In presidential politics ...**

In both parties, the candidates are demonstrating a new principle: The political parties no longer have either intelligible boundaries or enforceable norms, and, as a result, renegade political behavior pays.

*Jonathon Rauch, 2016*

# Current state of political polarization

## In the American electorate...

- **Partisan division and antipathy** are deeper and more extensive than in decades.
- The two parties look less alike today than at any point over the last quarter-century on characteristics like **race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, education.**
- **Critical elements of general public** are pulled in direction of political elites.

## Current state of political polarization

### In the American electorate...

- Most **ideologically oriented** are more likely to **vote, donate to campaigns, and make their voices heard.**
- **Partisans** view the other party as “**a threat to the nation’s well-being.**”
- **Partisans** are more likely than others to say their **friends share their political views.**
- Self-identifying **independents** are <10% of electorate.
- For **broad public**, the style and tone of partisan debate are often **unsettling.**

*Pew Research Center*

## Roots of political polarization

- Mismatch between parliamentary style parties and separation of powers system
- Gerrymandering
- Party fissures
- Party realignment in the South
- Changing migration patterns
- Residential sorting
- Rise of partisan press & social media
- Elections awash with money

## These developments brought...

- Vast ideological gulf and intensified war between the parties
- Internal homogeneity of parties
- Rough parity between parties
- More consistent party-line voting
- News outlets, platforms & outside groups that reinforce partisanship and ideological purity
- Hotly contested, never-ending battle to control White House & Congress
- Toss-up elections for party control



## A CNN/ORC post-2016 election poll of Americans finds:

- Over 8-in-10 say the U.S. is more deeply divided on major issues than in the past several years.
- Over half are dissatisfied with how U.S. democracy is working.
- A sizable minority personally agree with both parties on at least some issues.
- Nearly 8-in-10 want the GOP-controlled government to incorporate some Democratic policies into its agenda.

## How do we treat our ailing political system?

- Institutional fixes
- Strengthen campaign finance rules
- Expand the vote



## Near-term strategies to change the political culture

*...Voters have the capacity and bear the ultimate responsibility for healing a broken and very dysfunctional political system.*

*Mann & Ornstein*

- Restore public shame for distortions, lies and other actions that coarsen culture and discourse
- Recreate public square to ameliorate impact of partisan media

## *Some useful tools...*

- Transpartisanship
  - *Independent Voter Project/ivn.us*
  - *Reunited America Project/mediatorsfoundation.org*
- Intelligence<sup>2</sup> Debates—*intelligencesquaredus.org*
- Kettering Foundation Learning Exchanges/[kettering.org](http://kettering.org)
- Advocacy
  - *10 Actions for First 100 Days Campaign/womensmarch.com*
  - *Countable/Countable.us*
  - Nonpartisan advocacy groups, e.g., S.C. Conservation Voters; League of Women Voters/U.S., state, local

## How is the League viewed today?

- By public officials
- By LWV members/engagers and the general citizenry



# Attitudes toward the League of Women Voters

Findings from Focus Groups  
Conducted June 2015

*Celinda Lake--Lake Research Partners  
Lakeresearch.com*





- The anchors of the League of Women Voters brand are providing **fact-based election information and remaining unbiased**--rarer and rarer these days—and having a long history.
- **Voters primarily associate the League with voting rights and voter education.**
- **League voter information is trusted and reliable.**



## The intersection of information-sharing and neutrality is at the core of the League of Women Voters brand.

*“Yes, LWV offers much information to help equip voters.” –  
Female, Online Activist*

*“I think **people trust them because they put out information on so many diverse topics and they do so in a professional unbiased manner.** They simply supply the facts, which is what people are looking for.” –Female, Online Activist*

*“I think providing the fact-based information...it **makes me feel like if I really wanted to know what the issues were so I could figure out who I should vote for** that they could provide that information to me in a factual way so that I don’t have to feel like I am getting pushed one way or the other to make a decision.” – Female, Unfamiliar with LWV*



**The history of the League is a major asset.  
People like the longevity without scandal.**



**There is some resistance to expanding beyond the realm of non-partisan, unbiased voter information.**



Advocacy does not seem like as natural a fit for many especially when the League goes beyond voting or, to a lesser extent, women's issues.

*“No one knows what nonpartisan means anymore... Today people think nonpartisan means constitutionally unable to have an opinion about anything.”*

*Keesha Gaskins, Director of Democracy Practice,  
Rockefeller Brothers Foundation*

**LWV hasn't changed.  
Our political system  
has changed!**

# Let's discuss!

