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POL 113-B

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A Series of Proposals in Response to Depolarization

Introduction

"United we stand, divided we fall", quoted Abraham Lincoln. This is a quote of simply six words. This catches the essence of polarization because it encapsulates the basic principle that unity is key in addressing harsh challenges. This quote resonates universally across various notions and cultures. This is because unity is equal to progress, while division is equal to failure in all aspects of life. Furthermore, what better way to begin this essay than with a quote by one of America's most remembered presidents? By quoting Lincoln, the essay immediately connects to the exceptional legacy of a leader who steered his way through an immensely divided era, the Civil War.

a)The growing partisan behavior in Congressional policymaking

Diagnosis:

"Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call/ Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall"(Dylan, 1964). These are lyrics from the Bob Dylan song, "The Times They Are A-Changin" (Dylan, 1964). These lines reflect the frustration Bob Dylan felt with political leaders and institutions when they would resist progress and instead rally behind injustice. Looking back at these lyrics now, I wonder what caused such a hatred for progress. I realized that the root cause for it is within Congress in itself. Recently, Democrats and Republicans have

been more divided ideologically than ever before. The rising differences between both parties result from numerous trends that have made their course over the years. Democrats and Republicans have cohesively drifted away from the traditional and ideological median of the early days. Democrats have cinched more towards a liberal outlook, while Republicans have shifted towards the farther end of conservative views. The differences however are not limited to only such levels. They are also present within the geographic and democratic backgrounds of these individuals. About 50% or more of the Republicans are native to the nation's Southern states (DeSilver, 2022). Whereas, a majority of the Democrats identify as Hispanic, Black or Asian, and Pacific Islander (DeSilver, 2022). Thus, it is not surprising that both sides are tirelessly trying to get their arguments and needs across.

This is seen through various behaviors, laws, and speeches delivered within the congress. One prevalent behavior within Congress is the attitude of obstructionism. This is the deliberate action where a party obstructs legislative decisions brought about by the opposing party. Furthermore, on a behavioral level, legislators often make public statements to singularise and negatively portray the opposing party. In terms of law, growing partisanship leads to a failure to pass federal budgets, which may lead to extreme cases such as government shutdowns.

Proposal:

A proposal to deal with this diagnosis can be structured upon the re-implementation of a Bipartisan Commission for the Congress itself. This commission would need to have an equal number of members representing both majority conflicting sides, as well as independent and non-partisan members. This will ensure that the legislative processes are done fairly and equally to all parties involved. The commission would aim to prioritize competitiveness along with

community representation. The ultimate goal is to create a diplomatic zone and committee that will mitigate any possible forms of gerrymandering and eventually reduce the domination of partisan interests in congressional policymaking.

Evaluation:

Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	6/10	Public support is expected to vary in a solution such as this. Stakeholders who prioritize fair representation and accountability within the government are likely to rally behind this proposal. However, groups who recognize that this means a loss in relative power, will oppose the proposal.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	4/10	The short-term implications are dependent on an array of factors. At first, several political members would need to agree to such a commission. The commission in itself would need to be foolproof and well-executed. Governmental figures would need to have the political will and need for significant reform.
Ability to overcome structural hurdles	6/10	This is a solution that had been previously adopted. Therefore, there should not be many structural hurdles. However, many members of Congress may take offense to the formation of such a commission and may act out.
Feasibility of the reform (Cost)	8/10	Costs would include the establishment and the operation itself. However, funding for staffing, resources, and administrative expenses would not be necessary, given that those are already available.

b) **The spiraling tendency for the executive branch (president/or bureaucracy) to decide in isolation and a partisan fashion**

Diagnosis:

The president and their bureaucratic representatives often issue executive orders to relay certain policy changes. This has been evident through various presidents over the years. In 2017, President Donald Trump established the order to impose a travel ban on citizens from several Muslim-majority countries. This sparked a series of controversies, legal challenges as well as disagreements. On the other hand, Presidents may also stock the executive branch with selective individuals based on political loyalty rather than merit. This is a matter of concern on whether the government and political agencies prioritize partisan agendas over the interests of the public. Last but not least, some US administrations over the last few years have also been condemned for disregarding and being selective over certain laws. An example of this is the incident where the Obama administration had decided to delay specific provisions of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. This sparked numerous accusations against the executive branch engaging in overreach.

Proposal:

A proposal to deal with this diagnosis can be structured upon the establishment of a non-partisan advisory board meant solely for the decisions passed by the executive branch. This board will consist of scholars and experts ranging from a versatile array of fields relevant to executive policy boundaries. The board would be responsible for providing evidence-based recommendations and analysis to the executive branch. Through the leveraging of expertise from

beyond the political bubble, there will be a reduced tendency for the executive branch to make decisions in isolation and a partisan manner. Furthermore, I feel that the use of executive orders should only be restricted to specific times of crisis and emergencies. There should be a set of guidelines on what are the parameters that must be met for a situation to be labeled as a crisis. This should be the first analysis made by the advisory board.

Evaluation:

Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	7/10	For the most part, public support should be widespread. Particularly voters who identify as centrists or modernists would value the need for evidence and receipts within policymaking and would trust the formation of such an advisory board. However, ideological extremists who rigidly follow traditional and ideological principles would not want to compromise and adopt any sort of change.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	8/10	In my opinion, the main hurdle would be the acceptance and formation of such an advisory board. However, if the officials and experts and efficiently selected this could be a proper solution to the growing partisanship in the executive branch.
Ability to overcome structural hurdles	3/10	Structural hurdles may include legal considerations surrounding the authority of such a board to dictate and influence executive decision-making. There may be concerns for potential political interference or even manipulation to a great extent. Last but not least, there could be additional challenges related to the selection and

		composition of the board itself. There could be conflicts of interest as well as chances of bias between the members. This could ultimately hinder the the sole aim of this proposal, and add more to the issue of partisanship, rather than rectifying it.
Feasibility of the Reform (Cost)	6/10	Expenses would include recruiting expenses for finding and training these experts on certain procedures. There would also be costs for additional resources and other coordination efforts. However, the feasibility of this proposal may be enhanced as long as the board is a success.

c) The increasing relevance of partisanship in the rulings and attitudes of the Supreme Court

Diagnosis:

The rising concern in the past few years has been that is the Supreme Court just another political branch. Has polarization and partisanship infiltrated the branch completely? While the trust in US institutions and branches has decreased exponentially in recent years, the Supreme Court has always been trustworthy. In the public eyes, it has been more of a legal institution rather than a political institution. It is independent and follows its processes, norms, and regulations. Therefore, its legitimacy and trustworthiness were never of doubt. However, things have changed. Similar to most federal judges, Supreme Court justices are required to serve for a lifetime. However, if a vacancy occurs, the President of the United States has the authority, under Article II and Section II of the Constitution, to nominate a person (Alicia Bannon and Michael

Milov-Cordoba). A recent study showed that between the years of 2018 to 2019, as well as 2021 to 2022, several polarized partisan decisions were executed (Alicia Bannon and Michael Milov-Cordoba). A trend within these rulings was, that all justices who were nominated by Republican presidents voted as a cohert against justices nominated by Democrats. Therefore, the primary behavior observed in the Supreme Court is voting along party lines. Supreme court justices are often seen aligning with the political views of the presidents who put them in power. Republican-backed justices vote conservatively, and Democratic-backed justices vote liberally. For example, during Donald Trump's presidency, he often explicitly emphasized the importance and his want to appoint conservative judges to the federal judiciary, especially the Supreme Court. Trump based his arguments on issues such as abortion rights, gun control, and immigration. He felt that framing a judicial branch in his favor would be key in advancing his administrative priorities and agendas.

Proposal:

A proposal to deal with this diagnosis can be structured upon the implementation of term limits for the Supreme Court Justices. This should be done by adding an amendment to the Constitution of the country. This amendment would include proposing and approving a constitutional amendment that changes the terms and conditions already mentioned in Article III. Section 1 of the constitution, states that "The Judges, both of the supreme and inferior Courts, shall hold their Offices during good Behaviour, and shall, at stated Times, receive for their Services, a Compensation, which shall not be diminished during their Continuance in Office" (Alicia Bannon & Michael Milov-Cordoba, 2023). In my opinion, the term limit should be for a maximum of fifteen years with staggered appointments. This amendment would aim to

mitigate the increasing relevance of partisanship in the rulings and attitudes of the Supreme Court by promoting constant change and versatility among the justices

Evaluation:

Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	4/10	This will receive rather mixed reactions and feelings from the public. Some segments of the public may view it as favorable to the need to promote accountability, diversity, and fairness in the Court. Others will see it as a dispersal of established norms and traditions that have been in practice for over 200 years.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	3/10	I do not think this will have immediate effects or even a short-term impact. Such a change will only be gradual. A change might be seen within 50 years, as justices will rotate after every 15 years. A metric to assess the effectiveness may be the degree of ideological balance and diversity among newly appointed justices.
Ability to overcome structural hurdles	3/10	Some hurdles to overcome may include constitutional considerations regarding how the federal judges would be appointed every fifteen years. Furthermore, the appropriate term limit would also be a matter of discussion. Lastly, there may also be legal challenges surrounding the interpretation of the “good behavior” clause within the Constitution.
Feasibility of the Reform (Cost)	9	This would more or less be a feasible proposal, as the key cost would be around the operational costs of passing an amendment.

d) The preference given by media outlets and platforms to formats and/or content that fuel further division

Diagnosis:

A somewhat recent report from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and Robert F Kennedy Human Rights has shown that nearly three-quarters of American adults believe that the news media is liable for the increasing political polarization in the country. Moreover, a little under half of Americans do not trust the media to report fairly and justly. The media has been seen displaying only certain selective reporting. These are the reporting of stories and events that align with political beliefs as well as ideological thinking. Furthermore, sensationalism has been more of a trend recently than ever before. Sensational and inflammatory content increases readership as well as viewership. On a more mainstream level, social media content is even more so misleading. Social media platforms are based on algorithms meant to personalize content to the users' preferences (Arguedas et al., n.d.). This leads to the formation of echo chambers that reinstate existing perspectives and beliefs (Arguedas et al., n.d.).

Proposal:

A proposal to deal with this diagnosis can be structured upon the passing of legislation or a bill that enacts the promotion of media responsibility and accountability. This legislation would require all media platforms and outlets to follow a caliber of complete accuracy within the facts stated, as well as fairness within their system of reporting. This should follow strictly the principles and be guided by the outlined landmarks of court opinions as mentioned in documents

such as New York Times Co. v. Sullivan of 1964 (Justia, 2019). This specific document highlighted the consequences of defamation of public figures within society. This legislation would also create and impose a set of independent oversight bodies equipped to enforce accountability and the further monitoring of media content. These are implementations and guidelines similar to those of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for broadcast media. Furthermore, this legislation could also provide tax incentives as well as grants to media platforms and outlets if only they prioritize diverse and inclusive reporting.

Evaluation:

Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	4/10	This would be supported by those directly affected by media bias in a negative connotation. However, it would also be rejected by those on the opposite spectrum, as in people on the extremist side of the spectrum. People who work in the media and journaling business itself might also be against such legislation which includes a series of restrictions.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	8/10	This would be rather immediately effective because it has a feature of incentives for the media personnel. Therefore, it would also cause a drastic shift in what is being broadcast in the media daily. Therefore, people will be forced to consume far less media news that is rather polarized. Hence, the metric to assess its effectiveness would be the sheer change in media coverage and discourse. This includes a reduced rate of sensationalized and polarized content.

Ability to overcome structural hurdles	5/10	This would include legal implications such as a violation of the basic human right of freedom of speech also mentioned in the First Amendment, and press freedom, and increased concerns about government intervention within the media.
Feasibility of the Reform (Cost)	8/10	This would be the least cost solution as it would only include operational as well as the implementation cost of the legislation.

e) The rising polarization of the public on issues and preferences

Diagnosis:

The rising polarization of the public on various political topics and preferences has been the cause of a massive divide within society. This divide often leads to harsh and negative energy between sets of groups within society. Nowadays disagreement is seen across various sociopolitical topics. People disagree on abortion laws, immigration, student loans, gun control, healthcare, climate, racial justice and so much more. The list of disagreements is endless and understandable. It is key to understand that America is a massive country and people come from all social, financial as well as political backgrounds. These differences are growing and will only grow over time. Therefore, having a friendly conversation regarding any political topic within the status quo has become increasingly difficult. Certain behaviors, laws, and actions only cause the public to be further divided. For instance, a constant behavior observed yearly is partisan voting patterns. American voters often align with one political party and continue to consistently vote along those party lines. The devotion and loyalty towards those candidates are undisputed, regardless of any scandal or criticism involved with the candidate's image. This behavior

contributes to the polarization seen during election times. Furthermore, recently there has also been a rise in political activism and engagement, which prompts individuals to be more vocal and passionate about certain beliefs and causes. Last but not least, political rhetoric and campaign messaging also play a huge role in further dividing the public on issues and preferences. Speeches, public statements, and any form of polarizing messaging often cause issues and stroke fear and resentment within public groups.

Proposal:

The rising polarization of the public on various issues is a problem that is not just limited to a set institution. Rather it is a problem that is deeply rooted within the minds of all Americans alike. Every single citizen within this nation has a belief or ideology that is indifferent to others. Therefore, such an issue demands a comprehensive and nationwide solution. To address the problem, the first and foremost solution that comes to mind is the establishment of Deliberative Democracy Forums. Deliberate democracy is a school of thought in political theory that reasons that political decisions should stem from reasonable and fair discussions as well as debates among citizens (Eagan, 2016). This should be a model that is framed around public assemblies and deliberative polling. However, to make this effective these forums could also incorporate scenario planning as well as predictive modeling techniques which provide a loophole into seeing what might happen if different paths were chosen. This helps people consider the immediate concerns as well as implications that may affect future generations. The concept of deliberate democracy is by no means new, however, through the implementation of advanced technology and predictive modeling there can be a newer approach to addressing the polarization of the public on issues and preferences.

Evaluation:

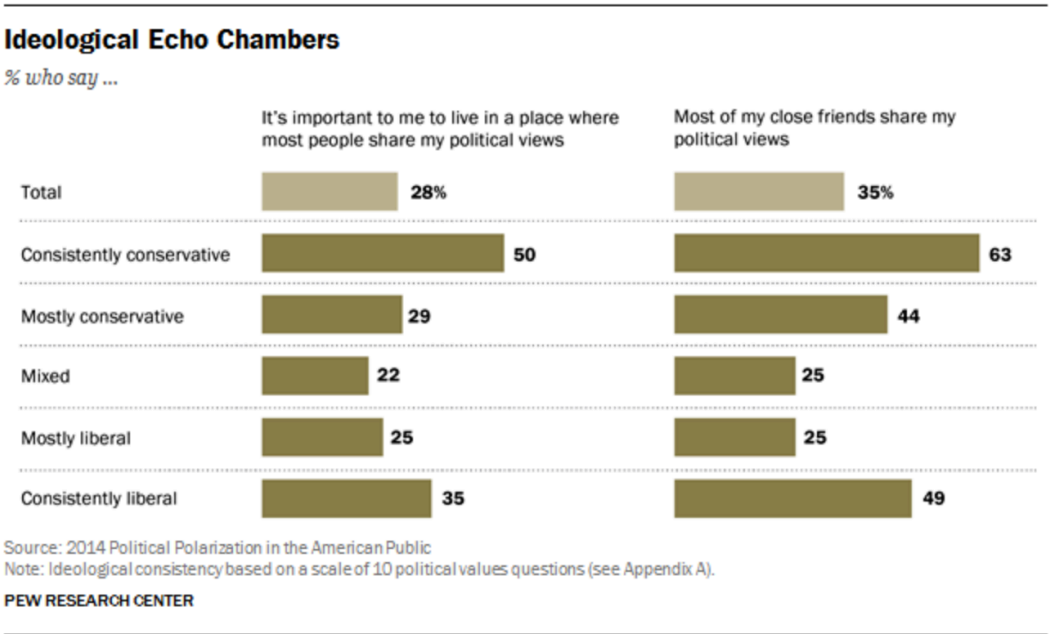
Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	5/10	This is a slightly elevated and out-of-the-ordinary proposal. Therefore, I feel that people who prefer finding common ground and truly want to work together through polarization would be in support of this proposal. However, people who benefit from the way things are currently progressing and strongly believe their views might be opposed to this proposal. These can be extreme ideological groups such as far-right or radical left-wing activists who may resist such a reform.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	3/10	This is something that will not bring change overnight. This would need to be established in all fifty states for there to even be an impact on a grassroots level. However, the change could come with enough participation and support. The effectiveness can be measured through the degree of change that occurs in people's attitudes towards people of different opinions. The metric can be a survey done a few years down the line, which asks how the participant's views might have changed.
Ability to overcome structural hurdles	6/10	Setting up this forum can and will face certain legal and political obstructions that could stop the establishment. For instance, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) notes, "State legislatures have the primary responsibility for drawing congressional and state legislative

		district line" This could be an incoming resistance from lawmakers who argue against certain reforms that may threaten their power and status quo.
Feasibility of the Reform (Cost)	2/10	There will be high costs given how the forum would need to run in at least several states for there to be change. The cost for the purchase and installment of certain technological equipment. There may also be training and staffing costs. All of these things need to be done before the forum starts running. Therefore, since there is no guarantee of success, this might just be a loss

f) The increasing polarization of social relationships in the American public

Diagnosis:

Increased polarization within the common American public will no doubt lead to an increased polarization of social relationships within the American public. The American population is at an alarming rate aggravating segregation within themselves along political lines. People of similar political beliefs congregate in schools, neighborhoods as well as social circles. At Wake Forest, I have seen students increasingly segregating themselves into friendships and social groups with individuals from like-minded political beliefs and outlooks. People are far less likely to interact with people of opposing beliefs and viewpoints in reality. This rising difference in views will continue to divide people emotionally, leading to a rather secluded society with constant disagreements.



Graph 1. Ideological echo-chambers

https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/

Accessed 19 April. 2024.

Proposal:

To deal with the increasing polarization of social relationships in the American public, I propose the implementation of a program that requires all educational institutions as well as places of employment. This would be a mandatory weekly gathering that aims at fostering effective discussions and possible connections with people opposing ideologies. This will, in my opinion, bridge the gap between local communities and diminish any hostilities that may be present between members of the community. If soon, this is implemented on a national level, then it would allow people to leave behind biases and be open to learning and if possible adopting a new and different perspective than they are used to.

Evaluation:

Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	5/10	Moderates and independents who understand the value of interpersonal relationships over political distinction are likely expected to be in support of this reform. However, extremist groups are more likely to be against such a program.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	3/10	This is a solution that will not have immediate results as the change in perspective must be measured in a few years after a few sessions have already taken place. Therefore, this can be done through a possible survey in the future.
Ability to overcome structural hurdles	7/10	It should be an implementable change in the sense that it is a change within the education and employment sectors. However, challenges may arise from further societal divisions.
Feasibility of the Reform (Cost)	8/10	Since this is a collaboration with existing community organizations that can help mitigate certain costs. However, there will be some costs, which I believe can be dealt with by possible investments and funding in general.

g) The polarization of our educational/academic system and teaching of history

In the United States of America, education as a construct has become rather distraught with polarization and ideological disagreements. Various topics and themes of discussion have been deemed inappropriate and banned across schools. Therefore, the adoption of curriculum materials and textbooks is rather selective and reflects only the desired beliefs. This selectiveness can rouse up disparities within the educational systems across various states. For instance, passages from Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" are not allowed in

certain schools of the South (Natanson, 2023). Excerpts from Christopher Collumbus's journal are banned because they verbalize his gruesome treatment of Indigenous people (Natanson, 2023). Parents are highly concerned that their children may fall into the claws of political indoctrination, and therefore collectively demand a ban on such scholarly items. Moreover, the spread of polarization does not merely stop at certain bans. In many states and areas of the States, school board elections mirror those of the real world. Students stand on partisan platforms and advocate for certain ideologies and agendas. This can build up a negative mindset and a non-conforming attitude from the very beginning.

Proposal:

The solution to the polarization of our educational/academic system is rather simple. This would be a reform that works to give the younger generation an inclusive and nuanced historical education. All governmental laws that ban certain books, theories, and any form of educational restriction must be reversed. This national and updated curriculum will ensure that students are provided with resources and a whole education that allows them to see a more holistic view of historical and recent events. This proposal is backed up by the First Amendment which is widely interpreted as a means that protects individuals and societies from attempts made by the government to suppress information and engage in the censorship of certain books, theories, newspapers, films, and more such materials (American Library Association, 2008).

Evaluation:

Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	6/10	This will have a divided support. Democrats and liberal individuals from the Northern states will be in support of such a reform. However, Republicans and conservatives from Southern states are more likely to be against such a reform. Furthermore, occupation will also play a role in the degree of support. Educators, Historians, as well as advocates of civil rights, and social justice are also likely to support these efforts as a way of a more inclusive understanding of the country.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	7/10	This reform would have a relatively quick impact. A metric to assess this effectiveness would be seen through the degree of change in students' attitudes and knowledge retention. This can be seen through in-class assignments and surveys.
Ability to overcome structural hurdles	7/10	No such structural hurdles pose any risk at a national level. However, there could be hurdles on a state level. It may be hard to move past certain preconceived educational standards posed by political officials.
Feasibility of the Reform (Cost)	8/10	It would mainly only include implementation costs regarding passing the bill. There may be costs for resources such as textbook costs but that should not be a problem.

h) The specific rhetorical atmosphere that we are currently witnessing on the 2024 campaign trail

Diagnosis:

In the majority of elections in the last ten or so years, candidates and their supporters have involved themselves in negative campaigning schemes. These include smear campaigns, attack ads, and as of recently social media engagements, mainly through negative tweets. Therefore, it is rather expected that the current political atmosphere on the 2024 campaign trail is negative and harsh. Both major Democratic and Republican leads are at each other's throats. Biden is constantly attacking Trump with social media attacks consisting of Trump's looks, age, inherited wealth as well as criminal records. Trump is also furiously attacking Biden on various fronts, such as migration laws, the handling of the bombings in Gaza, as well as his age. After Biden's response to Gaza's bombing, pro-Palestine protestors have labeled him as "genocide Joe". Even more so in Trump's campaign rally, many Trump supporters were seen addressing the current president with the same branding (LeVine & Abutaleb, 2024). Due to increased polarization both left and right-winged attacks are only getting more prevalent and extreme. Therefore, anger and indifference to the other side are very evident and only heating up day by day. Experts fear that as the 2024 elections progress, there may be rising politically motivated violence or acts of extremism (Swenson, 2023). Therefore, there needs to be an intervention that stops the constant chaos and gives way to mutual respect and understanding in American politics.

Proposal:

The proposal should be structured in a way that deals with mitigating the diagnosis, keeping the rise in popularity of social media platforms. I propose the enforcement of civil discourse standards concerning the discourse displayed on social media platforms. This initiative

would aim to join forces with social media platforms to establish a certain set of rules and guidelines that protect the decency of society. Any form or manner of personal attacks, defamation, misinformation, or inflammatory rhetoric should be subject to serious consequences. These can range from a variety of consequences. However, the utmost consequence should be the permanent deactivation of the account for life.

Evaluation:

Criteria	Grade	Justification
Expected Public Opinion Support	6/10	Moderates, independents, and democrats in general would be more in support of this enforcement. Furthermore, advocacy groups fighting for online safety, democracy, and digital rights may also support this as they rally for a safer and healthier space. However, conservatives and the far right are likely to be against such guidelines as this does go against the rules of freedom of speech.
Anticipated Short-term Impact	8/10	This should have an immediate impact on the tone and language of political discourse. A metric that can be used to assess the effectiveness could be changes in user engagement and sentiment. This can be achieved through certain user feedback surveys.
Ability to overcome structural hurdles	7/10	Platform policies are not always foolproof. Therefore, there can be concerns regarding glitches within the algorithm as well as users who use anonymous accounts to amplify divisive content that is against the guidelines. As mentioned before, this will also receive major pushback in terms of individual freedom.

Feasibility of the Reform (Cost)	4/10	There would be development and implementation costs for the moderated tools, algorithms, and community guidelines. Therefore, it would be expensive to implement such a change.

Conclusion

As seen throughout this paper, the implications of polarization within American politics have infiltrated the country as a whole. The polarization of the Democrats and Republicans has been at its all-time high since the Civil War. Modern polarization is a trend that has emerged rather gradually and has implications on mass political behavior as well as political policy outcomes. In the context of current American politics, it is a tough and rocky path but not impossible to pass. It is true that deeply entrenched partisan divides and profoundly rooted ideological dissimilarities present carious constrictions. However, eventually, with work and effort through constructive dialogue, reconciliation, and compromise, a change is always possible.

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