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IDEOLOGY AND PARTISANSHIP IN AMERICAN POLITICS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In the literature, there have been different views and studies focusing on the changing notion of partisanship and the role of ideology in American politics. Scholars of American politics have been studying the concept of ideologies both empirically and theoretically. While some scholars argue that there has been a significant increase in partisanship, others claim the change in the polarization and partisanship has been exaggerated.

This study aims to explore the historical evolution of the concepts of ideology and partisanship since the 1950s in American politics. In doing so, in the first place, the main theoretical and empirical studies of the major scholars in the field will be discussed by focusing on the historical development of ideology and partisanship within the context of US. Second, a brief critical review of the existing studies will be provided, along with suggestions for future research.

The concepts have been debated both theoretically and empirically by many scholars in the field. Despite the variations in the analysis of mass polarization, the overall agreement is reached on elite level analyses in which scholars largely agreed upon the argument that partisanship has increased among the political elites. Among the political elites and/or the American public, we find that ideology and partisanship have experienced a substantial evolution since the 1950s and they continue to be the major defining elements of American politics in the future.

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

This study aims to review the historical evolution of the concepts of ideology and partisanship since the 1950s in American politics. In so doing, first, we will outline the main theoretical and empirical works of the major scholars in the field with a special focus on the development of ideology and partisanship within the context of the United States (US). Second, a brief critical review of the existing studies on partisanship and ideology will be provided, along with recommendations for future research.

The concepts of partisanship and ideology have been one of the most debated topics in American politics in recent years. Considering these discussions, we imply that, on one hand, there has been a scholarly agreement on the elite polarization within this historical trace. On the other hand, the relationship between the elite and the mass public on the topic of partisanship and polarization is still being debated with no overall agreement (Fiorina 1981). Based on the existing research that generally borrows a substantial amount of theoretical work mainly from the Michigan (Campbell et. al. 1960) and economic/rational choice tradition (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981), the concepts of partisanship and ideology have been debated both theoretically and empirically by many prominent scholars in the field. Despite variations in the analysis of mass polarization, the overall agreement is reached on the side of elite levels where scholars largely united on the argument that partisanship has increased among the political elites.

Historically, whether it is on the mass or elite level, partisanship can be best traced within the conceptual frameworks of conflict displacement, issue evolution, ideological realignment, conflict extension as well as party sorting. The traditional “conflict displacement” view of partisan change is one of the prominent perspectives in the literature (Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1983). According to this traditional realignment literature, party conflict is shaped by a single dimension of policy (Layman and Carsey 2006). Following this traditional view, an “issue evolution” occurred in the partisan change literature, addressing the issue associated with partisan change addressing civil rights topics on the 1960s and 1970s (Layman and Carsey 2006; Carmines and Stimson 1989). As some scholars claim, assuming that individuals will follow the political elite, citizens shift their views in response with the new issues as in the form of switching party, mobilizations of new partisans and/or replacement of older voters with the younger generations (Carmines and Stimson 1989).

A second viewpoint is the “ideological realignment” that has been characterized by several findings and assumptions (Layman and Carsey 2006; Abramowitz and Sanders 2004). First, the supporters of this realignment argument hold that parties have become more polarized in ideological lines (Carmines and Stanley 1990; Abramowitz and Saunders 2004). Second, as argued by Layman et. al. (2006), the realignment argument assumes that parties are structured along the classical liberal/conservative ideological lines that give meaning to the elite-level party cleavage. Third, individuals choose the parties in accordance with their ideological choices/preferences (Carmines and Stanley 1990;

Abramowitz and Sanders 2004). “Conflict extension” is the third argument that scholars in the field of ideology and partisanship focus. According to this view, attitudes toward social welfare, racial, and cultural issues have remained far from each other and they are crosscutting in a wider sense, unlike conflict displacement models (Layman et. al. 2006). In their study, Layman et. al. (2006) show that parties in the electorate become increasingly polarized in all three policy dimensions.

Lastly, Fiorina and Abrams (2008) use the term “party sorting” in their analysis. Party sorting emerges in the subpopulations while the overall population undergoes little or no change. As for the authors, “subpopulations can sort themselves out in ways that heighten their differences” (Fiorina and Abrams 2008). In this party sorting process, people may change their neighborhoods with the aim of matching their ideological and issue positions (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Putz 2002; Killian and Wilcox 2006).

The evolution of ideology can be traced back to the 1950s. Following World War II, the literature focuses on the increasing ideological differences around different issues. Anti-Communist foreign policy issues (the Cold War, admitting China to the United Nations, the Bricker Amendment) as well as the domestic economic issues (such as taxes, labor unions) and racial issues (federally enforced desegregation, The Fair Employment Practices Act, The Civil Rights Movement) were the most critical issues shaping the ideological sphere of 1950s (Noel 2012). While racial issues were crosscutting between Republicans and Democrats between the period of the 1950s and 1960s, Noel (2012) explores that economic issues were the main division between those coalitions. Although it has been always there, the race started to be the main dimension in the early 1970s, together with issues such as feminism and Vietnam War (Noel 2012). Race and economics became the first dimensional issues under the ideological divisions, influencing the partisanship ideological as a divisive factor during the 1990s. Accordingly, with their crucial role, they continue to shape the American political sphere of the contemporary era. Issues such as abortion and stem cell research are the other issues that dominate the ideological realignment processes today (Noel 2002).

Reviewing the existing research, we show that ideology and partisanship have witnessed a substantial evolution among both the political elites and public level since the 1950s. Likely, these essential elements of politics continue to be the major defining elements of American politics in the future. As for the recommendations, first, we argue that, like a chicken and egg question, the relation between the mass and political elites needs to be explored further as the extent to which they influence each other remains unclear and needs further empirical scrutiny. Second, a single, coherent model of partisan change is necessary with the aim of exploring the role of various actors such as party activists, elites, as well as citizens along with their connections with each other. Third, the potential consequences of party polarization and partisanship need further scholarly attention. How can the positive effects of partisanship be institutionalized? How can the negative sides be eliminated? In line with these, more micro-level empirical studies can be conducted that focus on the regional, state-level, subnational

perspectives with a comparative methodology that would pave the way for a more thorough and comprehensive analysis.

Keywords: Ideology, Partisanship, American Politics

AMERİKAN SİYASETİNDE İDEOLOJİ VE PARTİZANLIK: ELEŞTİREL BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

ÖZ

Literatürde, değişen partizanlık kavramına ve ideolojinin Amerikan siyasetindeki rolüne odaklanan farklı çalışmalara rastlamak mümkündür. İdeoloji hem ampirik hem de teorik olarak çalışılmıştır. Bazı bilim adamları, partizanlıkta önemli bir artış olduğunu iddia ederken, diğerleri kutuplaşmadaki değişimin ve partizanlığın abartıldığını iddia ediyor.

Bu çalışma, 1950'lerden bu yana Amerikan siyasetinde ideoloji ve partizanlık kavramlarının tarihsel gelişimini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yaparken, ideoloji ve partizanlığın ABD bağlamındaki gelişimine odaklanılarak, bu alanda çalışan başlıca siyaset bilimcileri bazı teorik ve ampirik çalışmaları ele alınmıştır. Ayrıca, mevcut çalışmaların kısa bir eleştirel incelemesi yapılarak, gelecekteki araştırmalar için birtakım öneriler geliştirilmiştir.

Sözkonusu kavramlar, alandaki birçok bilim adamı tarafından hem teorik hem de ampirik olarak tartışılmıştır. Kitlesele kutuplaşma konusundaki görüş farklılıklarına rağmen, genel olarak, siyasi seçkinler arasında partizanlığın arttığı iddiası üzerine büyük ölçüde bilim adamlarının hemfikir oldukları görülmektedir. Siyasal seçkinler ve Amerikan halkı arasında, ideoloji ve partizanlığın 1950'lerden bu yana, tarihsel gelişim içinde, önemli bir gelişme yaşadığı ve gelecekte de Amerikan siyasetinin belirleyici unsurları arasında olmaya devam edecekleri söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İdeoloji, Partizanlık, Siyaset

Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center, 2016 US presidential campaign has been very remarkable as it points to more intense partisan division and animosity (2016). Pew Research Center's study of partisanship and political animosity (2016) shows that partisans' views of the opposing party are now more negative than at any point in nearly a quarter of a century. For the first time since 1992, voters in both Republican and Democrat parties express not only *unfavorable* but *very unfavorable* views of the other political party. Today, as the Pew Research Center finds, a majority of voters from both parties state that the other party stirs feelings of not just frustration, but fear and anger.¹

The study aims to explore the historical evolution of the concepts of ideology and partisanship since the 1950s in American politics. In doing so, the main theoretical and empirical works of the major scholars in the field will be discussed, focusing on the development of ideology and partisanship

¹ <http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/>

within the context of the US. In addition, a brief critical review of the existing studies will be provided, along with recommendations for future research.

To begin with, in order to better trace the evolution of partisanship and ideology issues, one needs to perceive the meanings of concepts. Partisanship is a representation of a person's connection with other people and a manifestation of ideological orientations that are directed toward a policy (Lloyd 1995). As a relevant concept, the definition of polarization focuses on "the simultaneous presence of opposing or conflicting principles, tendencies, or points of view" (Fiorina and Abrams 2008, p.566). As DiMaggio et al. (1996) state, it can be viewed both as a state and a process. As Lloyd maintains, both partisanship and ideology are "inextricably intertwined" (1995). In the literature, there have been different views and studies focusing on the changing notion of partisanship and the role of ideology in American politics. While some scholars argue that there has been a remarkable and significant increase in partisanship (Layman and Carsey), others claim the change in the polarization and partisanship has been exaggerated, especially in the mass levels (Fiorina et al, 2008).

Following the Michigan School, some of the scholars remark that party identification is a psychological phenomenon (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996) or social identity (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002) which plays the role in policy preferences. Others, within the Economic School focusing on the rational choice arguments, maintain that partisanship is an informational short-cut (Downs 1957) which involves "running tally" of the other varying political evaluations and attitudes (Huddy et. a. 2015, Achen 1992, Fiorina 1981). Michigan school scholars, largely outlined by Campbell et al. in their famous work *The American Voter* (1960), underlines "the prominent role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes towards political objects" (qt. in Layman and Carsey 2006). Party identification, in that sense, is a deeply held psychological attachment which is unchanging over time and a kind of filter through which the voters view and interpret a policy or formation (Layman and Carsey 2006).

This view has been challenged by the rational choice/economic school led by Downs (1957). In particular, Fiorina (1981) has developed this alternative perspective that it is not something unmoved, rather shaped by other political evaluations. In this portrayal of party identification, partisanship represents a summary of the political evaluations that have been shaped and formed by the citizens over time. These scholars focusing on rational choice argued that the party identification is subject to change over time, depending on the policy preferences, candidate and party performance evaluations and voting decisions (Fiorina 1981, Markus and Converse 1979). Fiorina outlines the characteristics of this revisionist view by stating that the revisionist view of party identification is "an evolving indicator of an individual's relationship to parties" (2002, p. 980).

As the critiques of the above mentioned revisionist view on partisanship and party identification, Green and his colleagues (2002) focused on the claim that party ties might be considered as a social identity like a religious identification. In this view following the Michigan school, they maintain to view the partisanship as a social identity which has been seen as independent of other political evaluations (Layman and Carsey 2006). In the literature, many follow the social identity conceptualization on the partisanship and party identity of the Michigan School, by focusing on the social identity side while interpreting the partisanship behavior as something like a sports fan, rather than like a banker choosing an investment (Mason 2015). As mentioned above, it can be said that Michigan School (Campbell 1960) and rational choice theorists led by Downs (1957) have contributed to the scholarly debates on partisanship and ideology. Keeping these theoretical frameworks in mind, it might be helpful to further analyze the existing qualitative and quantitative research in the field.

On Partisanship

Regarding the ideology and partisanship, many scholars underline the changing nature of issues, while arguing that polarization and partisanship have been increasing for more than a half-

century in the US. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association underlined that “alternatives between the parties are defined so badly that it is often difficult to determine what the election has decided even in broadest terms,” (qt. in Layman and Carsey 2006; APSA 1950, p. 3-4). However, partisanship and ideology have been one of the most debated topics in American Politics in recent years. A considerable amount of scholars underlined the empirical and theoretical claims in American society and politics that increasing partisanship became more salient and visible both among the mass and elites whereas some others, such as Fiorina (1981) underlined, although the phenomena are observable, its existence among the mass public has been exaggerated. Considering these discussions, it can be stated that, on one hand, there has been general scholarly attention and agreement on the elite polarization within this historical trace. On the other hand, the relationship between elite and mass public, on the topic of partisanship and polarization, is still being debated with no overall agreement (Fiorina 1981).

As part of the historical evolution of the issues of partisanship and ideology, we outline some theoretical perspectives. The traditional “conflict displacement” view of partisan change is one of the traditional perspectives in the literature (Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1983). According to this traditional realignment literature, party conflict is shaped by a single dimension of policy (Layman and Carsey 2006). In this period of conflict displacement process, we observe an emerging cross-cutting issue dimension where the parties get increasingly polarized and converge on the previously dominant sphere of conflict (Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1983). Under this shift- from the old alignment to the new one, the old cleavage must be played down with the aim of exploiting the new (Schattschneider 1960).

Following this traditional view of partisanship and ideology change that focuses on party polarization and reorganization of party coalitions along the new lines, an “issue evolution” occurred in the partisan change literature, addressing the issue associated with partisan change addressing civil rights topics on 1960s and 1970s (Layman and Carsey 2006; Carmines and Stimson 1989). As some scholars claim, assuming that individuals will follow the political elite, citizens shift their views in response with the new issues as in the form of switching party, mobilizations of new partisans and/or replacement of older voters with the younger generations (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Under this view, party coalitions had been even more polarized on racial concerns in which the evolution of the racial stands of Democratic and Republican parties resulted in a long-term movement of white southerners from the Democratic party coalition (Sundquist 1983) and the movement of African-Americans into the Democratic Party (Abramowitz 1994). As the second issue evolution, parties, within the historical process, has become increasingly polarized on religious and cultural issues where the cultural division emerged along the issues of abortion, school prayer, homosexual rights whereas religious division became more salient along the lines of “traditional” Republicans and “modern” Democrats (Layman and Carsey 2006), or along “secular” and “non-religious” groups (Hunter 1991). As further argued by Hunter (1991) and Fiorina et. al (2005), “culture war” has been emerging among the American society and politics where it is rooted in different understandings of moral systems, orthodoxy, and progressivism (Hunter 1991).

A second viewpoint in analyzing the ideology and partisanship is the “ideological realignment” that has been characterized by several findings and assumptions (Layman and Carsey 2006; Abramowitz and Sanders 2004). First, the supporters of this realignment argument hold that parties have become more polarized in ideological lines (Carmines and Stanley 1990; Abramowitz and Sanders 2004). Second, as argued by Layman et. al. (2006), the realignment argument assumes that parties are structured along the classical liberal/conservative ideological lines that give meaning to the elite-level party cleavage. That is to say, the elite partisanship is being shaped along the spectrum of classical liberal and conservative lines. Third, focusing on the role of ideology, individuals choose the parties in accordance with their ideological choices/preferences (Carmines and Stanley 1990; Abramowitz and Sanders 2004). In this view, Abramowitz, and Sanders (1998) underline that

ideological polarization emerges as a result of the ideology-driven partisan change, rather than the process of party-driven ideology change.

“Conflict extension” is the third argument that scholars in the field of ideology and partisanship focus in the context of U.S. According to this view, attitudes toward social welfare, racial, and cultural issues have remained far from each other and they are crosscutting in a wider sense, unlike conflict displacement models (Layman et. al. 2006). In their study, Layman et. al. (2006) show that parties in the electorate become increasingly polarized in all three policy dimensions. Moreover, new issues, including race, gender, culture are becoming even so important in generations over time that the extension persists without supplanting traditional issue considerations (Stoker and Jennings 2008).

In addition to these, Fiorina and Abrams (2008) prefer to use the term “party sorting” in their analysis (2008). Party sorting emerges in the subpopulations while the overall population undergoes little or no change. As for the authors, “subpopulations can sort themselves out in ways that heighten their differences” (Fiorina and Abrams 2008). For example, in this party sorting process, people may change their neighborhoods with the aim of matching their ideological and issue positions (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Putz 2002; Killian and Wilcox 2006). With this sorting, it is claimed that population distributions remain unchanged while inter-item and inter-group correlations may change (Fiorina and Abrams 2008).

On Ideology

In addition to these discussions particularly on partisanship, a closer and more detailed discussion on the historical evolution of the ideology in the U.S. can shed light on the better understanding of its relationship with the partisanship. As outlined in his study, Noel (2012) states that, among many studies, ideology can be best explained as a dimension that provides the common choices of actors across particular issues. Ideology has emerged with the aim of binding together in similar positions that were previously adopted for other reasons (Downs 1957). Having been defined as “constraining” the groups of individuals to take similar positions (Converse 1964; Gerring 1997), ideology has been studied both empirically (Poole and Rosenthal 1997) and theoretically (Enelow and Hinich 1989; Hinich and Munger 1994) since the 1950s. In these models, an ideological spectrum has been used for most of the analyses in which those who tend to take liberal or conservative positions on many issues are being located along the liberal/conservative spectrum while those who are ideologically heterodox are in the “moderate” position (Noel 2012).

The evolution of ideology, starting from the 1950s can be best explained with the Civil Rights Movement. Following World War II, the literature focuses on the increasing ideological differences around different issues. Noel (2012) explains this historical process from the ideological realignment perspective. Anti Communist foreign policy issues (the Cold War, admitting China to the United Nations, the Bricker Amendment) as well as domestic economic issues (such as taxes, labor unions) and racial issues (federally enforced desegregation, The Fair Employment Practices Act, The Civil Rights Movement) were the most critical issues shaping the 1950s (Noel 2012).

The period between the 1950s and the 1960s can be considered as the lowest point in terms of race being linked to ideological issues. However, for liberals who were supporting Civil Rights Movement, segregationist and conservative southerners who were against these reforms with racial considerations needed to be told how to live, thus, their support for the federal government has emerged as a reaction to the Civil Rights Movement. While racial issues were crosscutting between Republicans and Democrats, Noel (2012) explores that economic issues were the main division between those coalitions. Although it has been there, the race started to be the main dimension in the early 1970s, together with issues such as feminism and Vietnam War (Noel 2012). Race and economics became the first dimensional issues under the ideological divisions, influencing the partisanship ideological as a divisive factor during the 1990s, continuing to have their places in

American politics today. Issues such as abortion and stem cell research are the other issues that dominate the ideological realignment processes today (Noel 2002).

On the one hand, in terms of its relationship with partisanship, there is a significant amount of empirical and theoretical studies in the literature supporting the claims that partisan polarization is on the rise among Democrats and Republicans in the electorate (Stoker and Jennings 2008). Scholars underline the change in partisanship by highlighting the importance of ideology. They state that the parties have become increasingly divided ideologically, parallel with the widening process of issue opinion differences between each other (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Fleisher and Bond 2001; Layman and Carsey 2002).

On the other hand, there is remarkable research on the ideology and partisanship, claiming that, there is little indication of polarization while focusing on the analysis of either particular issues or general ideological categorizations (DiMaggio et al. 1996; Fiorina and Abrams 2008). Fiorina et. al. (2008) emphasize in their study that the “distribution of ideology in the American public has not changed for more than three decades” (Fiorina and Abrams 2008, p. 571). Based on the American National Election Studies data between 1972 and 2005, Fiorina and Abrams (2008) find that ideology has been used as one of the workhouse variables by the scholars of mass behavior, however, little change is evident in the empirical studies, regarding the ideological polarization between the party coalitions.

Critical Review

Existing empirical and theoretical studies provide comprehensive and thoughtful analyses from various perspectives. Whether they underline a mass/elite change in partisanship, polarization, and ideological elements, it is important to address a few critics on what we claim to know today. Despite the previous work, much more seem to remain in terms of different aspects of the concepts and their relevance to different actors within different scopes.

First, like a chicken and egg question, the relation between the mass and political elites needs to be explored further, while studying partisanship and ideology in American politics (Layman et. al. 2006). It makes sense to accept that they are inherently interactive (Jacobson 2000), however, the extent to which they influence each other remains unclear and needs further empirical scrutiny.

Second, though the multi-dimensional approach of contemporary studies on partisanship and polarization creates further complexity, in terms of the theoretical framework, a single, coherent model is necessary for the partisan change (Layman et. al. 2006). If one acknowledges an increase in polarization and partisanship, then recent literature still lacks in defining the role of different actors and their causal relationships in this process. As outlined by Layman et. al. (2006), more connections are needed to be explored between various actors such as party activists, elites and citizens.

Third, as a less controversial point, many scholars agreed on the elite polarization among the political coalitions, on popular attitudes and inclinations to participate in politics (Fiorina and Abrams 2008). However, its potential consequences (either positive or negative) are still as a matter of question. Although a few existing research focuses on the consequences of the party polarization and partisanship (Layman et. al. 2006), it entails further verification with causal links. How can the positive effects of partisanship be institutionalized? How can the negative sides be eliminated?

Last, existing research focuses too much on the macro-levels (i.e.national) and seems to veer away from a specific, micro-level analysis that can help to identify the consequences and effects of the partisanship and polarization debates. Instead of aggregate-levels, more micro-level empirical studies can be conducted that focus on the regional, state-level, subnational perspectives in a comparative way that will pave the way for a better analysis. For example, as also argued by Layman et. al. (2006),

comparative works can be done in subnational or cross-national levels focusing on variations of partisanship, policy, as well as institutional and cultural contexts.

Conclusion

In this study, concepts of partisanship and ideology have been discussed historically, within the American social and political history, since the 1950s. Basing the existing research on Michigan (Campbell et. al. 1960) and economic/rational choice tradition (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981), it can be posited that these concepts have been debated both theoretically and empirically by many scholars in the field. Despite variations in the analysis of mass polarization, the overall agreement is reached on the side of elite levels where scholars largely united on the argument that partisanship has increased among the political elites.

Historically, whether it is on the mass or elite level, partisanship can be traced within the theoretical frameworks of *conflict displacement*, *issue evolution*, *ideological realignment*, *conflict extension* as well as *party sorting* which have been conceptualized by various scholars since the 1950s. In addition, parallel with the studies on partisanship, ideology is being conceptualized in accordance with the social and political developments in the US. Beginning with the civil rights period until today, ideology has been a constitutive element in American politics that shaped and is being shaped by various issues of the past -such as race and economics- and the more recent issues of today -including abortion and LGBT issues.

Considering all these, among the political elites and/or the American public, it can be said that ideology and partisanship have witnessed a substantial evolution within the historical development since the 1950s and they continue to be the major defining elements of American politics in the future. With the potential contribution of future empirical studies, literature may be widened and detailed in understanding the changing dynamics of partisanship and ideology. More comparative, micro-level studies aiming to explore the causal links between different actors as well as to discover the empirical consequences of the changes related to partisanship and ideology may be the basis for potential empirical studies.

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