

Alan Abramowitz trains his lens on the disappearing center in US politics. He surmises that the polarization in politics has long historical roots and has only increased under both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama Administrations. The divergence between parties is at historic highs according to Congressional vote tallies. It is largely due to ideological shifts to the right especially within the Republican Party. The Democratic Party is substantially the same but has lost the Southern wing of its support. The polarization is consistent among politicians, party activists, funders and the media. It reflects economic change, rising educational status, workforce composition and changes in the nature of families. He ends his talk by noting that the 2012 elections can be won by either party and this will have huge implications for public policy.

William Domhoff considers the historic background of the two-party system in national politics. He maintains that it is important to understand US politics within power structures and to focus in on how voters are mobilized and demobilized by rival interest groups. He describes the two primary interest groups today as corporate conservative versus liberal labor admitting that this is an oversimplification. In particular, the Democratic Party has been a coalition of out-groups since its formation by Southern planters in a dynamic modernizing free labor economy. The Republicans were the party of in-groups from their formation as an Anglophile Protestant industrializing faction. He considers how these parties changed in social composition over time but were blown apart by the election of 1964 which has resulted in the polarizing alignments that have taken root today. He concludes his narrative with a discussion of the electoral system noting the near impossibility of an enduring third party.