



America's Political Polarisation

Georgia Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene recently caused a stir when she called for a [national divorce](#) — a proposal that would see the US split up along red and blue state lines! The degree of polarisation in the US has reached such alarming levels that figures on both the Left and the Right have entertained the idea of some type of national dissolution. Until now the discord within the US has not reached a point where it impacted America's global position, but this may not be far off.

The US was created through the genocide of the indigenous people of North America who were already present on the North America continent as well as the continuation of slavery, something the Europeans brought to the continent. It was an extremely slow process by the US to address the inequalities and structural nature of racism against Africans who were brought to the US as subhuman. It took nearly a century after the end of the Civil War for the 1964 Civil Rights Act to get passed. But in the past few decades America has been addressing its legacy of slavery from anti-discrimination laws to bringing Black Americans towards a more even footing, which eventually paved the way for the US to elect its first Black president. But the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement shows there is still a long way to go.

All this 'special attention' to blacks has seen a backlash by another segment of the US populace. Many white, rural Americans see their position in the US as under threat. This has only added to the fears of "white replacement" stoked by Donald Trump and many of his followers. America's white population has now fallen to below 60% of the nation's total population and is continuing to decline and within around two decades white Americans may very well be a minority.

When the US was on the path to becoming a global power, its domestic economy played a central role in creating immense wealth. The American dream – any person who wanted to become rich, could do so in the US if they worked hard as this nation would provide the opportunities. But wealth inequality has always been a problem in the US and as the US economy grew, so has inequality. Global free trade after WW2, globalisation in the 1990s and rise of automation has seen US manufacturing shift abroad leaving the average US worker without much opportunity. The Rise of China has also seen many industries shift to the far East and this further decimated many communities who feel they have been left behind economically. It was here when Donald Trump entered the Republican nomination race that this segment of the US public finally got someone who recognised their plight. In his campaign for the 2016 Republican nomination for president, Trump listened to such people at a time when no one else did. He recognised the desperation of the White working class over the deteriorating industrial economy and to encourage their tendency to racialise that desperation and to blame outsiders. For many white, rural Americans, the economy has left them behind and doesn't even cater for them. For the nation that was sold the American dream, for many white Americans it's a nightmare and that's why they turned to a populist leader as no other leaders listened to them.

In his first speech as president-elect, Joe Biden made clear his intention to bridge the deep and bitter divisions in American society. He pledged to look beyond red and blue and to discard the harsh rhetoric that characterises America's political debates. It was always going to be a difficult struggle as Americans have rarely been as polarised as they are today.

But with the large wealth inequality in the US, politics has come to be captured by an extremely small segment of the public, from Wall Street to large corporations and a few billionaires. The fact that a presidential run requires billions in campaign donations, money has captured the US political system. This is why many in America have long felt the political system doesn't represent them. This is the prime reason why many working class, white Americans still support Donald Trump as all the other politicians are more interested in serving special interest groups or the 1%.

For Americans, politics was about either supporting the Republicans that supported big business and conservative elements of the population. Or it was the Democrats that represented minorities and the working class. But as these parties failed to look after their supporters and turned more and more to winning elections and representing the 1%, many turned to the right and unorthodox politicians. They also turned to more and more hard-line positions and now identify themselves well beyond the traditional two party system.

As fractious as American politics is in all likelihood it will take an enormous economic reversal or the US's fall from great power status to see the country start to divide. Many Americans believe the US is far too involved in the world and prefer isolation. It's a small minority that see the US being engaged in the world in great power competition as they directly benefit from it. So, US global power decline on its own will not necessarily see the decline of the nation. For the moment domestic polarisation has not impacted America's global position but the global powers future is not looking very strong in the short to medium term.

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