

More Republic, Less Cowbell

RENEWING THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT
THROUGH INSTITUTIONS, NOT NOISE



David L. Page, Ph.D.

Warped Minds Press

Knoxville, Tennessee

More Republic, Less Cowbell

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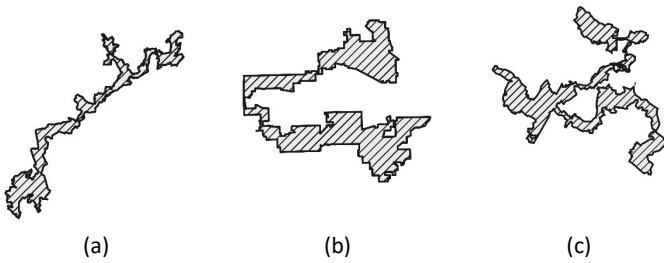
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(a) (b) (c)
Figure 1. Three emblematic gerrymanders from the 113th Congress. North Carolina's 12th (the "I-85 snake"), Illinois's 4th (the "earmuffs"), and Maryland's 3rd (the "pterodactyl"). Maps rendered from U.S. Census congressional district boundaries (TIGER/Line 2013 for the 113th).

Further Reading

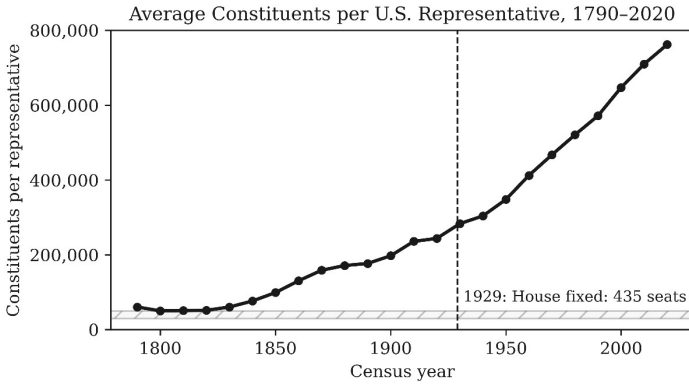


Figure 2. Growth of Constituents per U.S. Representative, 1790–2020. The line traces the historical increase in the average number of constituents represented by each member of the House of Representatives from the first census to the present. The shaded band between 30,000 and 50,000 marks the cognitive and constitutional range envisioned by the Founders—a scale within which trust and reciprocity remain humanly manageable. The sharp rise after 1929 reflects the permanent cap of 435 seats, driving today’s ratio to roughly 760,000 constituents per representative.

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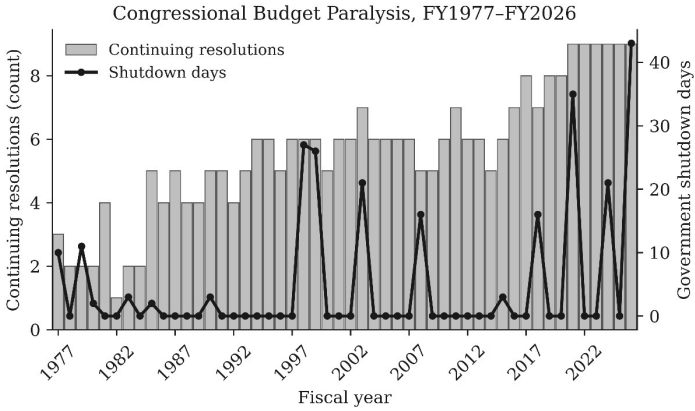


Figure 3. Congressional Budget Paralysis, FY 1977–2026. Number of continuing resolutions enacted per fiscal year (bars) and total days of federal government shutdowns (line) following implementation of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974. Continuing resolutions and shutdown days are allocated by fiscal year; partial and full shutdowns are counted uniformly. Sources: Congressional Research Service; Office of Management and Budget.

Further Reading

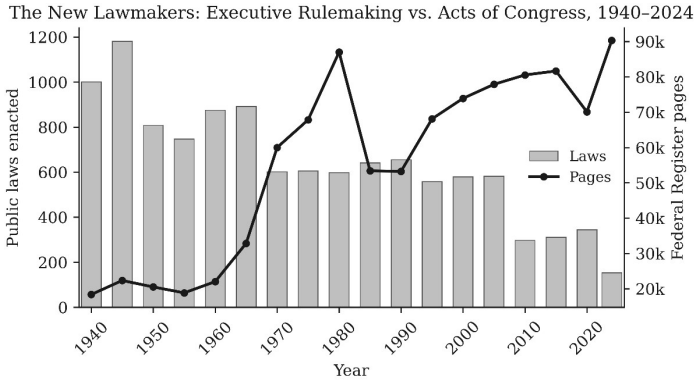


Figure 4. The New Lawmakers: Executive Rulemaking and Acts of Congress, 1940–2024. Annual public laws enacted by Congress in selected benchmark years (bars) compared with total pages published annually in the *Federal Register* (line), a commonly used proxy for administrative rulemaking activity. The figure illustrates the long-term divergence between declining legislative output and the growth of executive and administrative governance. Sources: Office of the Federal Register. *Federal Register Statistics*, various years. U.S. Congress. *Statutes at Large*; Congressional Research Service legislative summaries.

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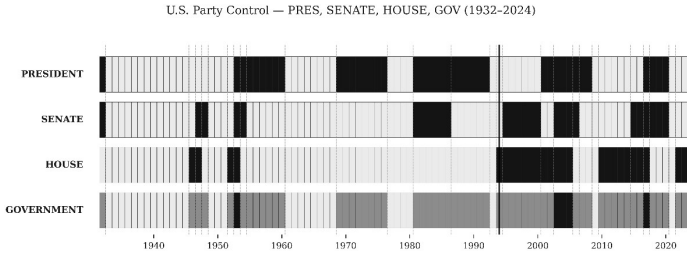


Figure 5. Party control of the presidency, Senate, House of Representatives, and unified versus divided government, 1932–2024. Each horizontal band shows party control in a given year: light gray denotes Democratic control, and dark gray denotes Republican control. The lowest band summarizes periods of unified and divided government—near white for unified Democratic control, near black for unified Republican control, and mid-gray for divided government. Vertical dashed lines mark years of party turnover. The timeline shows extended periods of single-party dominance before the mid-twentieth century, followed by increasingly frequent shifts after 1994 as partisan control across the branches grew more unstable.

Further Reading

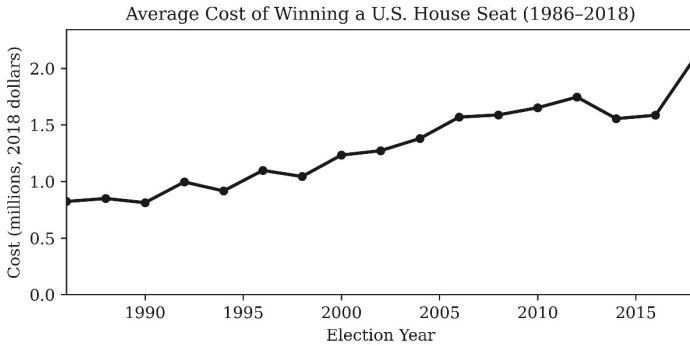


Figure 6. Average Cost of Winning a U.S. House Seat, 1986–2018 (2018 Dollars). Inflation-adjusted data from the Campaign Finance Institute and Brookings Institution show the steady rise in the financial burden of congressional campaigns. Values represent average spending by winning House candidates; independent expenditures are excluded (Campaign Finance Institute & Brookings Institution, 2019).

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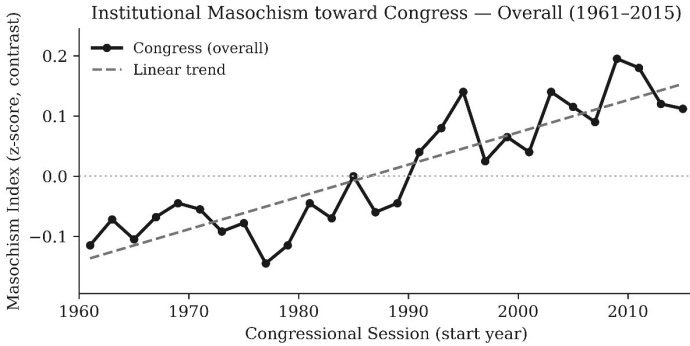


Figure 7. Congressional Self-Denigration, 1961–2015. The Masochism Index measures the degree to which members of Congress use self-critical language when referring to their own institution. The analysis draws on more than four million speeches from the *Congressional Record* (Gentzkow, 2018), comparing semantic proximity to dictionaries of esteem (“honorable,” “deliberative,” “responsible”) and contempt (“broken,” “corrupt,” “dysfunctional”). Values above zero indicate increasingly self-denigrating rhetoric. Values below zero reflect greater institutional pride. The steady upward trend reveals a decades-long shift from mild self-respect to habitual self-contempt, with the steepest rise beginning after the partisan realignment of the 1994 House revolution.

Further Reading

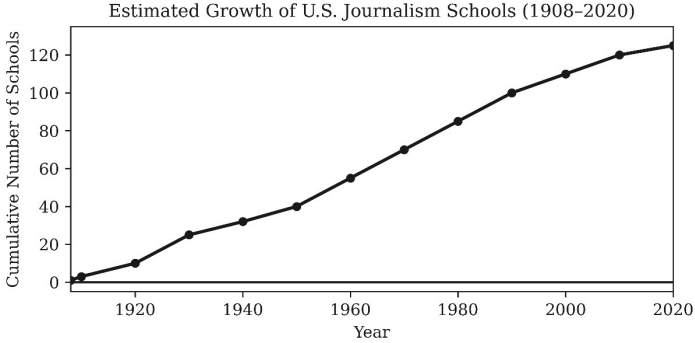


Figure 8. Growth of U.S. Journalism Schools, 1908–2020 (Estimated). The first formal school of journalism opened at the University of Missouri in 1908. Subsequent growth reflects the nationwide professionalization of reporting in the twentieth century. Values represent decade-level estimates based on documented program openings, ACEJMC accreditation records, and historical scholarship in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. Because no complete census exists for the full period, the plotted line uses conservative interpolation anchored to known institutional milestones.

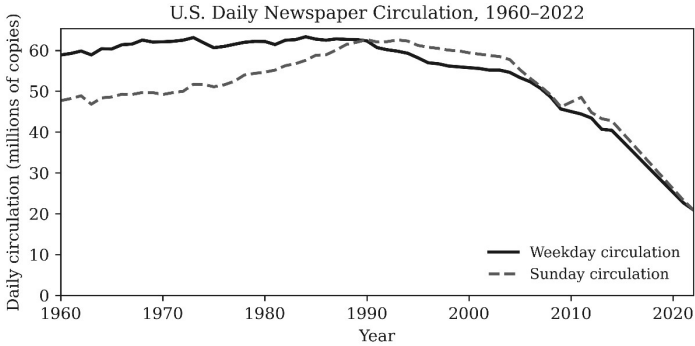


Figure 9. Decline of U.S. Daily Newspaper Circulation, 1960–2022. Total weekday and Sunday circulation fell from nearly 60 million copies in the mid-twentieth century to just over 20 million today. The contraction marks the transition from editor-driven press to decentralized, digitally mediated ecosystem. Data from Pew Research Center (2024).

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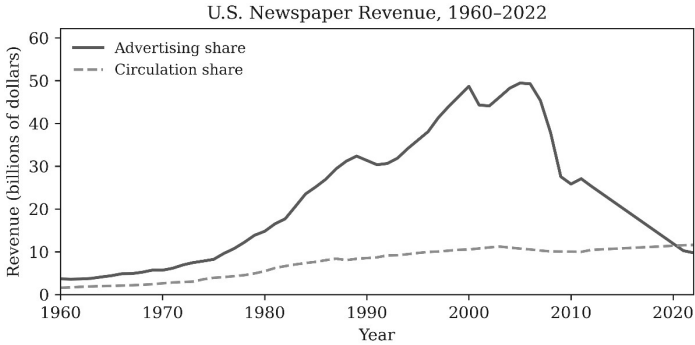


Figure 10. Advertising vs. Circulation Revenue Shares, 1960–2022. Advertising once accounted for the overwhelming majority of newspaper revenue. Since the early 2000s, that model has collapsed. As advertising shrank and subscription-based models expanded, the economic logic of news shifted away from broad public persuasion toward digital activation—an environment where anger outperforms accuracy. Data from Pew Research Center (2024).

Further Reading

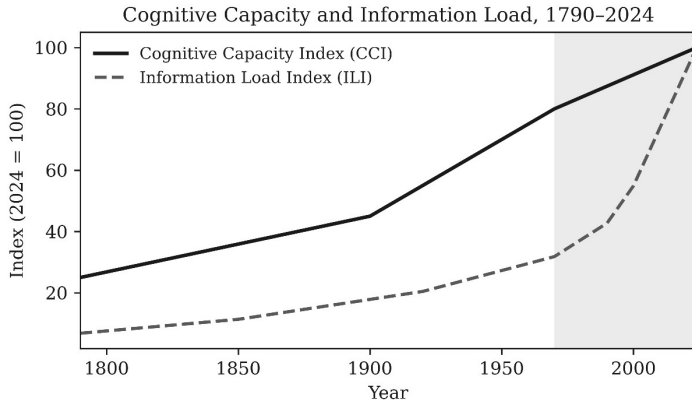


Figure 11. Cognitive Capacity and Information Load, 1790–2024. This graph compares two constructed indices normalized to a common baseline (2024 = 100).

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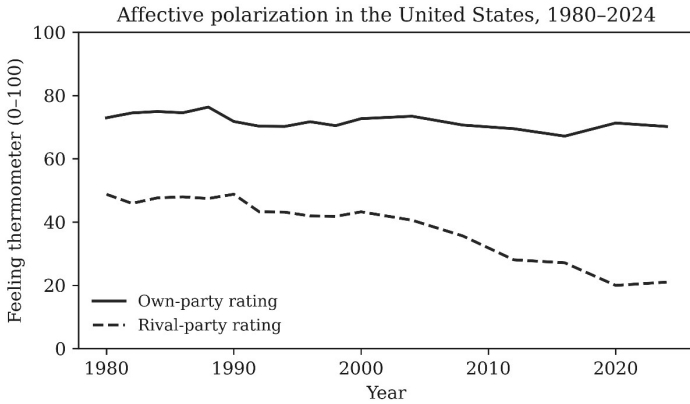


Figure 12. Affective Polarization in the United States, 1980–2024 (ANES Feeling Thermometer). Americans now rate their own party warmly while rating the rival party increasingly coldly. Rival-party feeling has fallen from the mid-40s to near 20 on the 0–100 scale. Own-party feeling has remained high and relatively stable. The widening gap between these measures reflects affective polarization—a growing emotional distance between partisans that complicates coalition-building and narrows the space for political compromise. Data Source: ANES, Feeling Thermometer Time Series, 1980–2024.

Further Reading

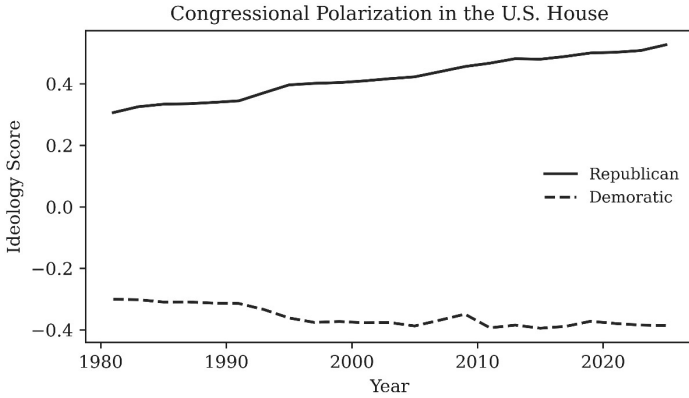


Figure 13. Congressional Polarization in the U.S. House, 1980–2026 (DW–NOMINATE Scores). The ideological distance between the parties in Congress has widened dramatically. Republican members have moved steadily rightward, while Democratic members have moved modestly leftward. The dotted line shows the resulting polarization gap, which has grown to levels that earlier Congresses never approached. The collapse of ideological overlap removes the bargaining space that once allowed legislators to negotiate amendments, trade concessions, and assemble cross-party coalitions. The graph shows how Congress has lost the structural habits required for compromise. Data in Lewis (2025).

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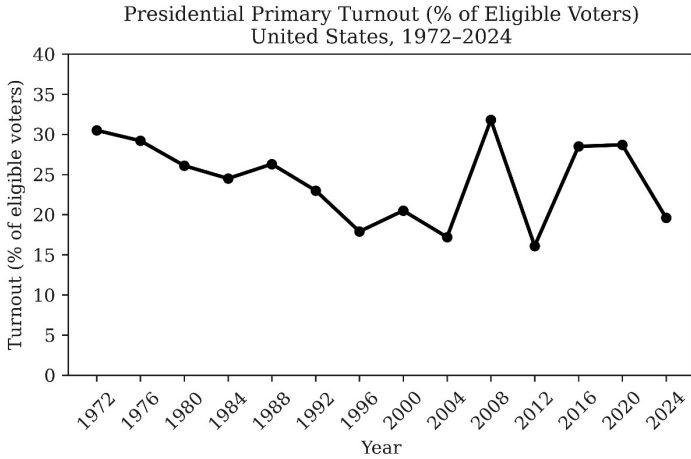


Figure 14. Presidential Primary Turnout as a Share of Eligible Voters, 1972–2024. Turnout in presidential primaries has swung sharply across the last half-century, with voting-eligible population participation ranging from lows near 16 percent to highs above 30 percent. These fluctuations suggest that nomination contests are disproportionately shaped by small, motivated electorates rather than broad, stable participation. Data compiled from Berrang (2012), Ferrer (2023), Geiger (2014), Desilver (2025), and aggregated state results for the 2024 cycle.

Further Reading

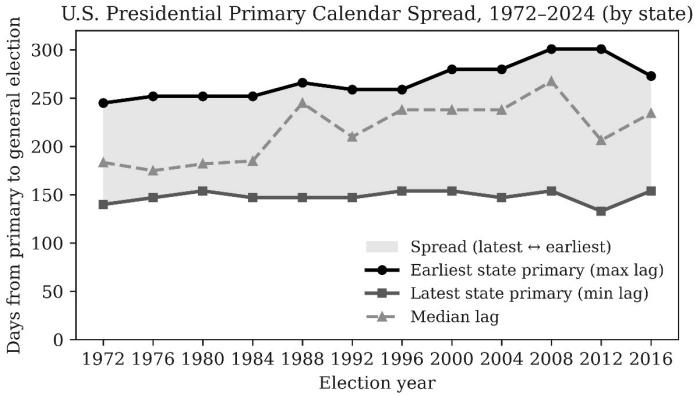


Figure 15. Presidential Primary Calendar Spread, 1972–2024. This figure traces the distance between state presidential primary dates and the November general election across the modern nomination era. The upper curve plots the earliest state primary in each cycle (the maximum lag in days before the general election). The lower curve plots the latest state primary (the minimum lag). The shaded band represents the full range of state-level timing. Data are drawn from *The Green Papers* historical compilation of presidential primary dates, which provides state-by-state records from the post-McGovern–Fraser period through 2024 (The Green Papers, n.d.).

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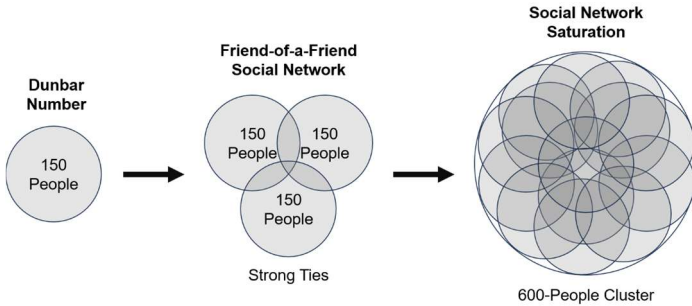


Figure 16. Modeled expansion of social reach as relationships move outward through successive degrees of separation, assuming a cognitive boundary of roughly 150 people as stable ties (Dunbar, 1992) and a 25 percent overlap among people's social networks, consistent with observed network clustering (Watts, 2004). The cluster saturates near 600 unique people, a limit grounded in human cognition.

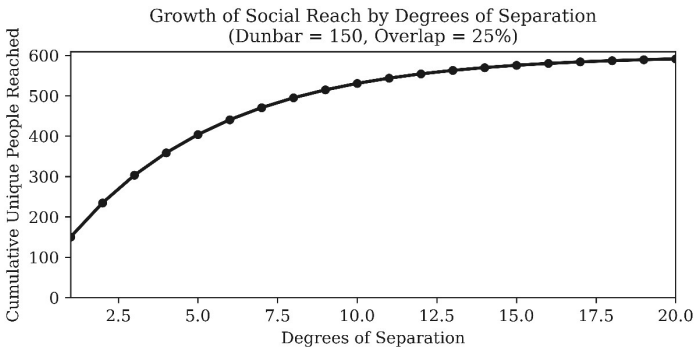


Figure 17. Geometric growth of a social network: overlap among friendship ties causes each degree of separation to add diminishing numbers of new individuals, producing a rapid approach to saturation. Empirical findings support this graph that reachable-but-not-meaningful ties plateau quickly and saturate. Here the assumption of 25% overlap in social networks a strong dominating assumption that can dramatically change the absolute numbers but not necessarily the plateauing and saturating curve.

Further Reading

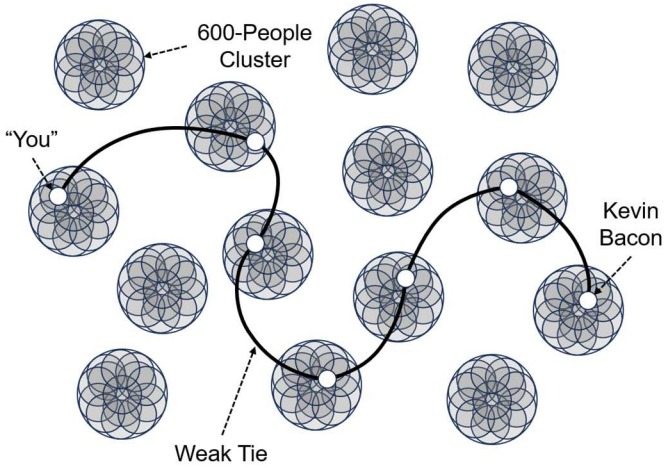


Figure 18. Illustration of “Six Degrees” connectivity. Strong-tie clusters of roughly 600 individuals link to distant clusters through a small number of weak ties. These long-range connectors bridge otherwise isolated social worlds and create the illusion of universal reach across network clusters. Individuals who perform this bridging role—often described as simply Connectors (Gladwell, 2006)—carry the weak ties that collapse social distance. In the diagram, the Connectors appear as white circles and the weak ties as the dark lines linking them.

Further Reading

WHILE MANY BOOKS INFORMED the research and arguments in this volume, the works listed below extend its central claims beyond the page. These titles appear in the Works Cited section, yet merit repetition here for readers who wish to pursue the deeper structure of the argument—how republics endure conflict, why institutions matter more than intention, and where modern democratic systems have failed to mediate disagreement.

Some readers may recognize familiar authors from earlier work. The repetition is deliberate. The purpose has changed.

Structural Republicanism

The American Founders did not design a system to redeem human nature. They designed a system to survive it. These works examine the constitutional logic that assumes ambition, manages faction, and converts conflict into durability rather than collapse.

Ketcham, R. L. (1990). *James Madison: A biography*. University of Virginia Press.

Ricks, T. E. (2020). *First principles: What America's founders learned from the Greeks and Romans and how that shaped our country*. Harper Perennial.

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Wood, G. S. (2017). *Friends divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*. Penguin Press.

Rasmussen, D. C. (2021). *Fears of a setting sun: The disillusionment of America's founders*. Simon & Schuster.

The Chamber: Congress as an Institution

Democratic failure often emerges not from bad actors, but from hollowed structures. When institutional incentives reward spectacle over deliberation, even capable legislators struggle to govern. These works document how Congress lost its mediating function—and why restoring that function matters.

Mann, T. E., & Ornstein, N. J. (2006). *The Broken Branch: How Congress is failing America and how to get it back on track*. Oxford University Press.

Sinclair, B. (2016). *Unorthodox lawmaking: New legislative processes in the U.S. Congress* (5th ed.). CQ Press.

Golway, T. (2014). *Machine made: Tammany Hall and the creation of modern American politics*. W. W. Norton & Company.

The Pipeline: Parties, Primaries, and Selection Failure

Few structural reforms reshaped American politics as profoundly—and as quietly—as the post-1968 transformation of party nominations. Coalition-building gave way to sequential contests. Mediation gave way to momentum. These works explain how that shift altered incentives, rewarded extremity, and weakened democratic accountability.

Cohen, M., Karol, D., Noel, H., & Zaller, J. (2009). *The party decides: Presidential nominations before and after reform*. University of Chicago Press.

Rosenbluth, F., & Shapiro, I. (2018). *Responsible parties: Saving democracy from itself*. Yale University Press.

Shafer, B. E. (1983). *Quiet revolution: The struggle for the Democratic Party and the shaping of post-reform politics*. Russell Sage Foundation.

The Press: From Fourth Branch to Feedback Loop

A republic requires mediation. When journalism collapses into amplification, democratic noise overwhelms judgment. These works trace how economic pressure, technological change, and incentive misalignment transformed the press from gatekeeper to accelerant.

Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network propaganda: Manipulation, disinformation, and radicalization in American politics*. Oxford University Press.

Mir, A. (2020). *Post-journalism and the death of newspapers: The media after Trump*. Springer.

Postman, N. (2005). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. Viking Penguin.

Faction, Collapse, and Democratic Stress

The American Republic was not born in tranquility. Disorder, protest, and institutional strain have always tested its capacity to

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absorb dissent. These works examine how systems fail when mediation collapses—and what those failures reveal before the final break.

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Snyder, T. (2017). *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Ten Speed Press.

Zubok, V. M. (2021). *Collapse: The fall of the Soviet Union*. Yale University Press.

Ganz, J. (2024). *When the clock broke: Con men, conspiracists, and how America cracked up in the early 1990s*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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Akerlof, G. A. (1970). The Market for “Lemons”: Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism. In *Uncertainty in Economics* (pp. 235-251). Elsevier.

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More Republic, Less Cowbell

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