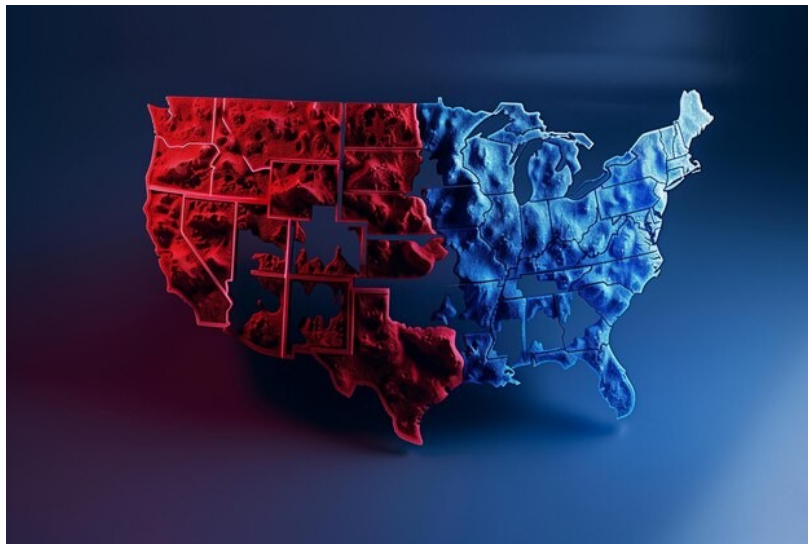


The Divided States of America



In 2004, future President Barack Obama said, “There is not a liberal America and a Conservative America, there is the United States of America”. Twenty-one years on, this hasn’t aged well as the US is more divided than ever. There has been increasing political division on a global scale, but no country is currently as polarised as the US. As the past few elections have shown, the US is becoming more divided than ever – but why is this happening?

Two party state



The US operates under a two-party state, meaning that in US elections, the winner will always be from one of two parties, the Republicans (far-right) or the Democrats (centre-right). This makes it unusual among developed democracies as most of its peers operate as multi-party states.

The UK's elections are always dominated by the two main parties, Labour and the Conservative party due to its FPTP electoral system. Despite this, it is now considered to be a multi-party state as it has five main parties, with the main two, as well as the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party and Reform UK, all gaining increasing support. Although elections are dominated by the two main parties due to FPTP and tactical voting, citizens are still provided with a wider choice of parties to associate themselves with across the political spectrum. Left-leaning voters have a choice between Labour, Liberal Democrats and Green and right-leaning voters have a choice between Conservatives and Reform. Although there is political divide in the UK and other countries, it is moderate due to the presence of multiple parties, allowing a broader range of views instead of constant binary conflict.

As a two-party state, US voters only have a choice between Republicans or Democrats, with no third option, which creates a culture of “us versus them”, making compromise difficult, and increasing the amount of political gridlock in Congress. Instead of trying to understand different views, each side appeals only to its own base, making the other side seem like the enemy instead of their peers on a different side. Over time, this has reinforced political polarisation, as voters are constantly told that the other party's victory would be a disaster, instead of simply a different approach.

Broadcasting Media



In the UK, there are strict rules on broadcasting impartiality. Ofcom's Broadcasting Code legally requires TV and radio news such as the BBC, ITV, Sky News etc to be accurate and impartial, especially on matters of political controversy. This means they can't openly take sides in news coverage, regardless of their personal political opinion. The US has no equivalent of this, meaning networks like Fox News (right leaning) and MSNBC (left leaning) can legally present heavily partisan coverage. This allows broadcasting media to skew news stories or even completely manipulate them in order to fit with a particular political agenda. This leads audiences to receive very different version of the same story depending on which channel they watch. This contributes to political division, as one half of the country is exposed to one narrative while the other is exposed to a different one, preventing them from ever seeing eye to eye.

The US has always prided itself as a symbol democracy, but its strength comes from working together despite differences, not fighting over them. Until Americans start listening to each other again and find some middle ground, a 'United States of America' will remain a thing of the past. Obama's words may not ring true today, but they can again.