2017

Politicians clown around: When politics divide

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In today’s politics, there are extreme divisions between the political parties and with that there is a tendency to look at politics in black and white. People are either for or against policies. This trend has created harsh stereotypes between the parties that make it hard to believe that people in the opposing party think similarly.

People on the left often view people on the right as selfish, religious and money-hungry. People on the right often view people on the left as immature and naive. Viewing the opposite party in a negative light has caused turmoil but Americans can overcome it.

That issue has caused another chain-reaction in politics, politicians focusing on the issues that no one appears to agree on.

“It’s a way to fire up their base so they work as volunteers to give [raise] their campaign money and spread the word about your campaign or the issues you care about,” said Hilary Denk, an attorney and cochairperson of the Issues and Advocacy Committee for the League of Women Voters of Illinois. "It is also a way to differentiate yourself from the opposing candidate”.

This approach is a strategy to get voters emotionally involved with politician’s policies. They create the barrier by saying things like, I believe in this and the other candidate does not. It’s a way to gather a group of people using issues that are controversial, and evoke emotional support.

“Part of an election is to draw contrast, so they [the constituents] feel like they have a real choice,” said State Senator Herman Quirmbach.

Without focusing on the controversial issues, it may be harder for constituents to tell
the difference between candidates and where they stand. Although this approach gets voters passionate, it divides the people. Politicians create that illusion so that you can only see it one way or the other. That's not entirely true.

"Research shows that if you ask people about seemingly divisive issues in slightly different ways, you find a lot more middle ground than you might realize," said Tessa Ditonto, a Political Science professor at Iowa State. "Even issues like abortion and gun control or the 2nd Amendment--there is actually far more that a majority of people agree on than we are often led to believe".

It is the way the issues and policies are framed that lead to the division between parties. The difference between saying, all liberals are against guns versus liberals want safer gun policies is quite extreme. This is what creates the stereotypes that have been so deeply embedded in our society. These are dangerous because it worries people when the politicians in their party compromise. It makes politicians want to keep close to their party’s beliefs and ideas.

"If they get the message that compromise--on any kind of issue--is viewed negatively by their constituents, they are not likely to pursue the middle ground," said Tessa Ditonto, "This means that candidates and elected officials are often making promises on these kinds of issues that, when acted on, push the parties further apart".

This makes it harder for politicians to make any compromises, without risking the chances of reelection within their party. There have been times that policies and ideas have been widely shared between parties but they are rarely discussed. Core health care values, the veteran hospitals and prison reforms are just a few examples.

"A fair amount of things have been passed that people don’t hear of, like texting while driving, because things that are controversial make headlines", said Senator Quirmbach.

Voters have focused so heavily on controversial issues that a barrier is created between people that could have many common ideas. If voters were to focus more on these issues or policies, the presence of these stereotypes could lessen it’s hold on society.

In politics, we need to look at the grey area between parties and not be so against politicians when they are willing to compromise with others. Voters care deeply about the widely talked about, controversial issues without looking much into the other issues that could be just as impactful to their everyday lives.

To push past these stereotypes between the parties, people need to focus on which candidates are willing to put as much effort into getting those less controversial policies passed as they would a controversial one. Politicians could frame things in a different way that may appeal to other parties. There are ways to lessen the impact of these harsh stereotypes and we must work together to do so.