

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

The Future is Faction

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IN RECENT YEARS, there has emerged a broadly shared sense that political moderation is dying. Joe Biden's victory in the Democratic primary has been widely interpreted as the last gasp of an exhausted tradition, after which he will hand over the reins to the party's left. Meanwhile, moderates have been an endangered species in the Republican Party for going on two decades now.

The decline of political moderates lies at the root of many of our fundamental governing problems. As American political parties have become increasingly captured by their ideological extremes in recent decades, the space for cross-party coalition-building has shrunk. Where moderates were once critical to establishing coalitions across party lines, both parties' leaders today have established a hammerlock over the agenda in Congress, allowing only single-party alliances to form except under very unusual conditions.

The absence of cross-party coalitions means that members of Congress no longer see their colleagues across the aisle as potential resources for advancing their political and policy goals. This is even true of the few remaining moderates in both parties, who, in a less centralized, more entrepreneurial legislative environment, would be allies in creative lawmaking. Negative partisanship — that is, party attachment driven by fear and loathing of the other side more than a positive attachment to one's own party program — has abetted this dynamic, creating

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a climate in which building bipartisan coalitions is seen as equivalent to trading with the enemy. Because our political institutions make it difficult to pass major policy reforms without support from both parties, the absence of moderates to bridge the divide has generated legislative gridlock.

These now-familiar patterns have led ideological moderates to search for the bug in American institutions responsible for such extreme systemic dysfunction. Some have identified party primaries as the culprit and embrace reforms like California's jungle primary or, more recently, ranked-choice voting. Others blame the ideologically imbalanced structure of legislative districts and call for non-partisan redistricting or judicial supervision of the redistricting process. Whatever desirable effects institutional reforms may bring, they have failed to produce a much higher number of moderate legislators. Our optimism about their potential to do so in the future should thus be limited.

The failure of reform mechanisms to spark a rebirth of moderation has led some to conclude that the real problem lies with the Democratic and Republican parties themselves. Calling for a pox on both their houses, disenchanted moderates have fallen under the sway of one of the great chimeras of American politics: the exciting but ultimately Pollyanna-ish hope of creating a centrist third party to take on the two-party oligopoly.

If we lived in a different country, a third party might be well worth exploring. But as political scientist Patrick Dunleavy has argued, America appears to be the only country in which Duverger's Law—that a single-member-district, first-past-the-post electoral system stymies the creation of third parties—actually holds. Since the two-party system is baked into the cake of the American political system, the pursuit of a third party, whatever sense of smug satisfaction it may generate, is guaranteed to be a sinkhole for money and energy.

Thankfully, an alternative to the false hope of rules changes and third-party fantasies exists. But it will require moderates to get their hands dirty by participating more vigorously in party politics.

THE DILEMMA OF MODERATION

All prominent ideas for reform in our politics today presume that the way to elect more moderate legislators—and hence generate more moderate governance—is to change the rules of the game. To be sure,

there is clearly something to the idea that the design of American institutions may be exacerbating political polarization and that changing them would make it easier for moderates to compete. But the cold, hard truth is that moderates face a difficult, if not intractable, problem that institutional reforms will never be able to fully remedy: Even under optimal institutional rules, political outcomes are not determined by the mystical, disembodied median voter so much as they are by the blood, sweat, and tears of committed partisan actors. In the American political system, there are no shortcuts around the hard work of organization, mobilization, and engagement in the sometimes unseemly business of party politics. To put it more bluntly, moderates lose out to the “wingnuts” because those on the ideological extremes, to their credit, actually do the difficult, long-term labor that democratic politics rewards: showing up, organizing, and devoting themselves to building durable institutions for political and intellectual combat.

Moderates, by contrast, have largely abandoned the field. Perhaps because they believe the broader public is already on their side, they tend to think control of politics by those mobilized at the ideological poles is illegitimate. Hence, they look for ways to redesign rules to allow the sensible but unmobilized middle to have its preferences govern without needing to do the hard work of organizing for action within the two major parties.

This approach is misguided. The reality is that deep, self-reinforcing dynamics help maintain the disproportionate political influence of those at the ideological extremes. Politics rewards participation and preference intensity, both at the mass and elite levels. The desire of core Democratic Party constituencies to moderate their claims in order to win has, as political scientist Matt Grossman argues, served to constrain the Democrats from becoming as ideologically pure as the Republicans, as Biden’s nomination demonstrates. Yet there has been an upsurge in mobilization on the party’s progressive wing that has yielded tangible results: Socialist Bernie Sanders (who has always resisted membership in the party itself) was a serious presidential contender in 2016 and 2020, the party has clearly moved left in its core policy positions, and more than a few Democratic incumbents have been knocked out by challengers from their left.

In the past, moderates have relied on three alternatives to durable partisan organization. First, they’ve looked to the financial resources

of moderate donors to pull the parties to the center. This strategy disappeared among Republicans with the death of Nelson Rockefeller and is increasingly running out of steam among Democrats, as indicated by the stigma on high-dollar fundraisers in the presidential primary and the increasing reliance on—and pious rhetoric attached to—small donations.

Second, moderates have counted on their control of relatively insulated parts of government, such as the Federal Reserve and the foreign-policy establishment, to maintain influence. However, the power of both parties' moderate professionals—acutely in the Republican Party and incrementally among Democrats—appears to be diminishing. Strategies for further insulating various domains of government from partisan pressure seem extremely unlikely to succeed in our populist age.

Third, moderates have taken advantage of the power of incumbency, drawing strength from members first elected in a less-polarized era. But with each election cycle, these moderate incumbents are gradually replaced by new, more extreme members. Especially on the Republican side, the absence of collective organization means moderates lack an ability to draw on a recognized national brand distinct from their party's dominant, more extreme brand. As a result, they have to either quit—as most moderates have—or join the herd.

This declining influence has led moderates to search frantically for institutional reforms to amplify the voices of moderate voters. The most desperate indulge the Hail Mary scheme of forming a new, moderate third party. While this search has paid the salary of many an otherwise unemployed political consultant, the dream of a third party is futile. There may exist a large number of voters whose positions on social and economic issues do not line up, but only a small minority of them fit into the Michael Bloomberg/Howard Schultz quadrant of socially liberal and fiscally conservative. In fact, the largest group of cross-pressured voters are in the opposite quadrant, combining support for social insurance and interventionist economic policy with modest social conservatism. That's bad news for dreams of a moderate third party, as no single party could conceivably hold both sets of voters.

OUR FACTIONAL FUTURE

Given the futility of forming a third party, moderates of all sorts can only counter those on the ideological poles by finding leverage *within*

the two major parties. To accomplish this, moderates will need to organize as a coherent bloc, recruit attractive candidates, mobilize moderate voters in each party to participate in partisan politics, and develop ideas to inspire their bases. Without strong, durable, organizationally dense factions, individual moderates or even entire state parties will not be able to distinguish themselves from their respective national brands or fight for leverage in national politics.

But how can they do this when the two parties have been captured so thoroughly by their activist poles? Could moderate factions in the Democratic and Republican parties actually have any significant influence?

The dynamics of contemporary American politics suggest that yes, moderates will have new opportunities to carve footholds within the party system and shape the country's future. That opening will come from deep forces at work within American society that will cause the two parties to become increasingly less cohesive in the coming years than they have been of late.

Polarization is commonly understood as a dynamic in which the two parties move further apart. However, another important feature of polarization is increasing homogeneity within each party's cohort of elected officials. This pattern stifles demand for the kind of intra-party factions that used to provide necessary outlets for the much more varied preferences of elected politicians. Understanding the last two decades through this lens helps explain why there has been such a decline in cross-party lawmaking.

The conditional-party-government theory associated with John Aldrich and David Rhode suggests that ideologically homogeneous members of Congress will support stronger leadership control of the political agenda and legislative procedure. This concentration of power occurs not only because factional structures are absent, but because members have neither the capacity nor the desire to constrain the leadership's power. The last 25 years have borne this out: Except under crisis conditions (such as the pandemic-related bills passed in the spring of 2020), Congress has been characterized by strong leadership that only takes up polarizing issues, which serve to unify the majority caucus and divide it from the opposition.

Conversely, conditional-party-government theory also holds that as party caucuses become more heterogeneous, they

transfer less control of the agenda to leaders, preferring instead to vest control in committees and committee chairs. Increasingly diverse members will also demand more organizational structures—that is, institutionalized factions—to coordinate that heterogeneity. Thus, while conditional-party-government theory predicts power flowing toward committees in a heterogeneous Congress, it should also imply that power in such circumstances flows toward organized factions that negotiate both with one another and with factions across party lines.

We may have grown accustomed to homogeneous parties and a leadership-driven system in recent decades, but this system is increasingly coming under strain. For one thing, though the public has become somewhat polarized over the same period, the degree of polarization in the general population is dwarfed by what has occurred within the parties' congressional caucuses. This divergence between the mass public and partisan elites has put increasing pressure on Capitol Hill's status quo, as the Congress the public sees does not reflect the country's actual distribution of opinion, especially for parts of the public that are cross pressured (e.g., those who are economically liberal and socially conservative).

Despite this disconnect and demand for more than two outlets for the country's diversity, we are likely stuck with just two major parties, as our institutions push strongly in that direction. So long as states use single-member, winner-take-all districts for Congress and state legislatures, gathering 10% of the vote translates to zero effective political power. It is thus no surprise that there has been no durable third party in the United States since the Republicans dislodged the Whigs in the 1850s. In systems like ours, third parties have a decent chance of representation only when their constituency is geographically concentrated—as it is for the Scottish National Party in the United Kingdom, for instance. A separatist Cascadian National Party based in the Northwest could be a very imposing force in American politics without changing its institutions, but that is hardly the sort of third party most reformers have in mind.

While durable third parties are impossible without major structural reforms (of the kind political scientist Lee Drutman has ably described in *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop*), our enormous population, vast geography, and demographic heterogeneity make it hard for our two parties, especially in Congress, to be internally coherent. As a consequence, the ideological and coalitional diversity that other systems

process through multiple parties has typically been institutionalized in the United States through durable factions within the two dominant political parties.

In fact, the relatively homogeneous Democratic and Republican parties we've had over the last few decades are an anomaly, not the norm. As political scientist Daniel DiSalvo has demonstrated, durable, organized factions operating inside the two major parties are a recurrent feature of our party system. Historically, Republicans have been divided between stalwarts and mugwumps, regulars and progressives, Rockefeller Republicans and conservatives. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party has endured internal struggles between liberal and segregationist factions as well as New Democrats and progressives. The emergence of these factions, the negotiations between them, and the bridges they build with factions in the other party are a natural outgrowth of how our party system is structured.

Despite this historic norm, both parties have been remarkably lacking in factional divisions in recent decades. The Republicans in particular have not dealt with organized intra-party groups with significantly different ideas, institutions, funders, and geographic bases. To be sure, the Freedom Caucus has made some noise in the House of Representatives, but its members disagree with the leadership not on first principles but primarily on tactics.

The Democrats are showing the first signs of renewed party factionalism. A surging leftist contingent has an increasingly large membership organization—the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—that funnels party participation through a factional structure. The Democrats' left wing also has its own information networks, focused primarily in social media. Increasingly, it has been developing its own think tanks—such as the Roosevelt Institute, Demos, New Consensus, and Data for Progress—as well as magazines like *N+1* and *Jacobin* to provide the cohort with ideas like the Green New Deal and Medicare For All. It even has its own ways to raise money, focused on large groups of small-dollar donors. Some members of this budding left faction, such as the Justice Democrats, are eager to openly challenge the party's leadership and will likely become even more aggressive as their ranks in the congressional caucus increase.

Meanwhile, an increasingly embattled Democratic establishment has suffered some intra-party defeats while still clinging to power, at least for

now. African-American politicians in the Democratic establishment, for example, have been put on notice that they are in the crosshairs of the party's left wing by activist Cori Bush's shocking defeat of Congressman William Clay. Primary challenges and defeats like this will send shock waves through remaining mainstream black politicians in the party, forcing them to engage in collective action to defend themselves. A similar dynamic will push the other key group in the mainstream of the Democratic Party—the Biden wing, if you like—to actively mobilize against the DSA. Accustomed to thinking of themselves as constituting the party *in toto*, these interests will have to recognize that they are an embattled majority faction and begin behaving accordingly. In other words, the rise of the DSA wing of the party will change the calculations of the party establishment, compelling them to behave in more factional ways moving forward.

A third faction—which we will call the “market-liberal” faction—is likely to solidify, building off members currently associated with the New Democrat Coalition (largely consisting of the remnants of the Democratic Leadership Council) in Congress. This faction has already made gains in the 2018 election, as Republicans' populist leanings in the Trump years have left GOP politicians vulnerable to moderate Democrats in suburban districts. Even greater incentives to develop a coherent factional brand will emerge in years to come, as pressure on market-liberals to distinguish themselves from the DSA wing—especially on issues like social order, education, and the scope of redistribution—becomes an existential necessity.

This faction will find a financial base in Silicon Valley, whose executives (as research by political scientists David Broockman, Gregory Ferenstein, and Neil Malhotra shows) combine an acute suspicion of regulation and organized labor with social liberalism, especially on issues like sexuality and immigration. While the market-liberal faction of the Democrats is unlikely to command an organized base that can match the zeal of the DSA wing, the resources it could deploy and the wide support it has among experts and intellectuals (especially economists) will give it substantial sway over candidates and could support a very broad base of think tanks and other organizations that have a powerful impact on the political agenda.

Each of these three factions within the Democratic Party is primed to expand in the future, forcing politicians, activists, donors, campaign

professionals, and intellectuals to pick a team. It remains to be seen which faction will become dominant. Whichever one gains the upper hand, the Democratic Party of the future will likely be a more deeply divided party than it has been since the fall of the conservative Southern Democrats in the mid-20th century.

The Republicans are likely to become more factionally divided in the coming years as well. Going forward, the dominant faction of the GOP will almost certainly be populist and nationalist, yet it will not have the party to itself. The populists will be forced to share the party with what we will call the “liberal-conservative” faction in recognition of its grounding in classical-liberal principles of free trade, pluralism, and constitutionalism. The Republican Party in most of the South and Mountain West, along with a good part of the Midwest, will be Trumpist in character. Yet that dominant faction will be all but uncompetitive in the Pacific Coast, New England, and the Acela Corridor as far down as Virginia. Notably, these are the same parts of the country where the left wing of the Democrats will be the strongest, possibly even dominant. That leftist tilt will make Democrats in these regions potentially beatable, especially in state and local races, by a Republican Party that embraces an individualist vision of racial and ethnic diversity, stands for economic competition and entrepreneurship, offers market mechanisms to protect the environment, promotes internationalism in foreign policy, and proposes aggressive measures to fight poverty and enhance economic mobility without increasing the public payroll or handing over power to public-sector unions.

The core voters for this liberal-conservative faction will be the middle class, the college educated, business managers and owners, and more upwardly mobile members of ethnic minority groups, especially in cities and states where Democratic governance begins pinching their core interests. The faction will find significant economic support in the financial sector, which is generally less socially liberal and more suspicious of increased taxation than the technology entrepreneurs of the West Coast while sharing with them a generally internationalist orientation that makes the nationalism of the populists and socialists anathema. It may also find increasing support among some mainstream business organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, which is already being pushed to the breaking point by the economic policies of the Trump administration. This faction will still be recognizably conservative—especially

on questions of social order like crime and homelessness—as well as suspicious of the regulatory agenda of both progressive Democrats and Republican populists.

The appeal and competitiveness of this faction in the bluer parts of the country can already be seen in the re-election of Republican governors in Maryland and Massachusetts, who, in a somewhat inchoate form, already embrace such an approach. These examples of GOP success in Annapolis and on Beacon Hill are of the lone-wolf variety; fueling a durable faction with something more than charisma will require these leaders and their supporters to build a broader organization and forge connections with like-minded partisans elsewhere. As of yet, Governors Larry Hogan and Charlie Baker have not achieved anything of the sort. However, their success offers hope that building a liberal-conservative faction within the Republican Party is not a fantasy.

To be sure, this will be a minority faction; it will not be dominant in enough states to form a majority of Republicans in Congress or win one of its adherents the GOP presidential nomination. But if it is able to develop a genuinely distinctive, independent, factional brand such that voters don't think of themselves as supporting the dominant populist faction of the GOP with their vote in congressional elections, it could become powerful enough to force the majority faction to negotiate and share power with it.

FACTIONAL GOVERNANCE

Nationalizing trends in American politics have made creating a distinct factional brand challenging in ways it has not been in the past. Americans are already accustomed to voting in state and local elections on the basis of their national party preferences. Nonetheless, the liberal-conservative wing of the Republican Party in particular will have some impressive advantages with which to build a distinct brand. The nationalization of the media, for instance, will play into the hands of the liberal-conservatives, since their strongholds are in the country's media centers. Like the market liberals, the resources of the liberal-conservatives will allow them to fund institutions, support candidates, and engage in intra-partisan warfare for control of state parties. It also will be especially attractive to the kinds of thinkers who played a key role in the “Never Trump” phenomenon and thus will not lack for policies or well-developed public philosophies.

While the two will have real differences on social issues, the market-liberal Democrats and liberal-conservative Republicans will be close enough on economic issues to create shared institutions, policy ideas, and political and social networks, as well as durable legislative coalitions. In this, they will resemble the progressives of over a century ago who, while divided between the parties and separated by some important material, geographic, and ideological differences, were able to shape the political agenda and prevent either party from governing as a homogeneous, unified whole.

Establishing durable, organized factions along these lines would be a boon for moderates. If they succeed, Congress will look far different than the leadership-dominated institution to which we have become accustomed. In a world with more heterogeneous parties, neither party's majority leadership will be able to organize either chamber of Congress without reaching a bargain with its minority faction. In exchange for their support in organizing Congress, the minority factions will insist on institutional rules that significantly weaken the majority-party leadership's exclusive control of the legislative agenda.

This will be especially important because, particularly on issues of national security, trade, and immigration, the Republicans' liberal-conservative faction will have more in common with the Democrats' market-liberal faction than with its own party majority, and it will want the opportunity to legislate with its counterpart across the aisle. While frustrated with the liberal-conservatives in their caucus, the populist Republican majority will have no choice but to work with them, since they will be competitive in places the majority faction is not. If the liberal-conservatives are able to develop a sufficiently distinct brand that can avoid the toxicity of the populist-nationalist majority, they will be able to elect enough members of Congress to mean the difference between the GOP winning a congressional majority and suffering in the minority. While the GOP's factions will differ dramatically on policy, they will maintain a strong common interest in attaining institutional control. A similar dynamic will play out among the Democrats.

In fact, these forces have already created significant fissures within both parties that show no signs of abating. As these fissures widen, they will create an opportunity for organized and mobilized factions with different social and geographic bases to re-emerge as major forces in American politics.

Under a scenario in which intra-party factions return, party leadership's control of Congress will break down, as members will no longer consent to restrictive rules. When this occurs, the legislative agenda will become more chaotic, and the opportunity for legislative entrepreneurship will expand. Habits of cross-party coalition-building that have faded in recent years will be rediscovered, and the utility of constructing coalitions of strange bedfellows will become more prevalent.

It is important to recognize that moderate factions do not need to be dominant to force such changes. In fact, a relatively small but pivotal number of disciplined moderate dissenters in each party would be enough to provide the political leverage to demand rules changes conducive to greater cross-party agenda-setting. If that occurred—and if supportive institutions, like think tanks, started supplying policy ideas with appeal across party lines—it would produce a Congress that has more in common with those of the early 1970s than that of the last quarter-century.

Notably, a more factionalized party system would not only permit more opportunities for political moderates of various stripes, it would also facilitate a legislative system closer to the framers' design than the polarized, leader-dominated one we have seen for the last several decades. It would, for instance, re-invigorate the job of being an elected legislator. A Congress without factions has no mechanism to force leadership to share power with members, who, as a consequence, have little creative or productive to do with their time. As Yuval Levin has argued, members today are incentivized to simply vote however leadership tells them to while devoting their entrepreneurial energies to building their own personal brands through cable-television appearances and other individualistic activities. This inevitably stokes negative partisanship.

In a more factionalized environment that created organizational structures for more activism, members could potentially have meaningful roles beyond just being roll-call cannon fodder. Their factional membership would give them leverage to influence the agenda of Congress and work with shifting, issue-by-issue coalitions of members to alter bills on the floor. A more factional Congress would also be one less likely to bend the knee to the president, since factions would give dissenting members of the president's party in Congress a means to work together rather than being picked off one by one, which has been the fate of Republicans who criticize Donald Trump. A Congress

that worked like this would be attractive to the kinds of quirky, independent politicians who have either retired in frustration or avoided running altogether as of late. A Congress populated by factions may find it harder to actually pass legislation due to weaker leadership control of the agenda and the greater power of members to act collectively against their own party. But it would also be a Congress that is more creative and more open to a wider range of potential policy solutions than those that simply sustain single-party majorities.

A more factional party system would also change the way presidential nominating processes play out. The “invisible primary” that takes place before any votes are tallied will increasingly be conducted by factions as they choose who will carry their torch into battle for the nomination. With factions playing a regular, structured role in the nomination process, we may see more inconclusive primaries, leading to formal brokering between ideological groups. This could yield something closer to the balanced tickets and cabinets that characterized the pre-polarization era.

While the stage is set for factionalization in both parties, exploiting that opportunity will require creating durable institutions within each party designed to fight the battle for intra-party supremacy. Especially in the GOP, moderates can’t win such a battle in the sense of attaining dominance—at least in the foreseeable future. But again, they do not need to attain primacy in the party to achieve many of their goals; they just need to pick, and win, the right battles.

Crucially, while the opportunity to gain sufficient power to change the way legislative institutions operate is emerging, that power will not simply drop into moderates’ laps. If funders and activists devote their time to pointless democracy-reform do-goodism or quixotic third-partyism instead of building up a base of power within the two parties, moderates will miss their chance. Therefore all moderates, especially those with resources to devote to politics, should redirect their efforts to where they can actually do some good.

Ultimately, there is no non-partisan route to the kind of looser, more deliberative democracy that many moderate reformers desire. In the American political system, the only path to this end is through the political parties. Acknowledging this may be uncomfortable for moderate donors in particular, who often find partisan politics and the long, slow slog of political mobilization distasteful, preferring instead “practical

problem solving” and government by experts. But ultimately, improved democratic governance requires actually seizing power. If moderate votes, money, ideas, and organizational activism are not mobilized in the right places and over the long term, we will likely remain mired in hyperpolarized gridlock.

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

The return to factional political parties with the potential to reinvigorate moderates in the American political system is a scenario, not a certainty. It will not unfold purely on the basis of mechanical, structural forces; rather, its advent is contingent on creative, intelligent agency on the part of both organizations and individuals. A faction, after all, is composed of a network of organizations, and organizations do not emerge spontaneously. What’s more, there is no guarantee these institutions will be well-designed, well-led, sufficiently cunning, or endowed with enough resources flowing toward the right incentives.

The opportunity to build factional parties depends on a core group of activists and donors emerging—one that will provide the leadership and resources to build the structures through which a mobilized faction can surface. Given this requirement, there is significant danger that the very spirit that characterizes moderates—a tendency to eschew party politics—will lead their organization-building and reformist efforts into third-party or non-partisan blind alleys.

Yet some raw materials for developing moderate factions within both parties already exist. Billionaire donors like Kathryn Murdoch and Seth Klarman have expressed interest in supporting moderates in both parties, although their strategy for doing so appears fairly rudimentary thus far. For their resources to have an impact, more donors in both parties will need to shift their political activity to consciously seeding the wide range of electoral, policy, and intellectual organizations that will allow moderates to gain leverage within institutions largely dominated by extremists. New magazines and think tanks catering to Democratic market-liberals and the liberal-conservative faction of the Republican Party will need to emerge, providing an outlet for academics, writers, and policy experts affiliated with moderate elements to develop and share their ideas.

Meanwhile activists, donors, and intellectuals alienated by the polarized direction of their respective parties will need to redirect their

activity toward finding a base of support to mobilize and creating organizations to facilitate their pursuit of power. In places where their respective national parties are weak, these moderate factions will have an opportunity to establish a power base for intra-party conflict. They will need to form new coalitions of elected officials — along the lines of what the Democratic Leadership Council established in the 1980s — to create a political identity distinct from that of the national parties for aspiring officeholders. Where they are successful, they will, at least on occasion, need to translate their custody of state government into the election of factional supporters to Congress and use their new institutions to coordinate their legislative efforts. The dominant populist faction of the Republican Party may not even resist the growth of a minority faction, since such a faction will operate in places where the party is nearly extinct; success in those places may be necessary for Republicans to control Congress in the future.

There is no question that on the Republican side, moderates are at a disadvantage in capturing state parties — even in places where the Trump brand is toxic — given that the president holds such a dominant position among members of the party's base. But this doesn't necessarily mean the effort to build a power structure for moderate Republicans in enough states to gain influence is hopeless. Republican governors in blue states have especially powerful sway over their state parties, which they can use to build a strong factional (as opposed to merely personal) base.

In Virginia, for instance, the Trump brand has almost single-handedly destroyed the Republican Party's power, making it uncompetitive in the middle-class suburbs that pave the way to control of Richmond. This suggests there could be demand from office-seekers for a rebranded party capable of differentiating itself from the increasingly toxic national brand by associating itself with a moderate faction. In Kansas, moderate Republicans have openly defected from their more extreme conservative counterparts to reverse the sweeping tax cuts that wrecked the state's finances. More could and should be done to build that group into a durable faction within the state legislature.

Even more broadly, moderate Republicans need to focus on organizing ordinary citizens who agree with them — which, in some places, will include Democrats defecting from a party increasingly controlled by the left — to compete for control of their state parties. This will

involve more than a year or two of work, but it is the kind of long-term effort that eventually gave conservatives the whip hand in the party.

This scenario is certainly not the only possibility. But it does suggest that, by cultivating factions within each party, moderates have at least some prospect of re-emerging as a power center in American politics. While they may seem like unicorns in our current polarized moment, intra-party factions used to be the norm in American politics, and the time is ripe for their renewal. For such factions to develop, moderates will have to summon the motivation and the discipline to engage in the kind of intra-party trench warfare they've too often considered unsavory and demeaning, but that their competitors have mastered and put to effective use.

Chasing non-partisan or anti-partisan fantasies may provide psychological comfort, but it won't generate much in the way of tangible results. The best investment of time, energy, and money for those who want a more deliberative, entrepreneurial, and productive political system is to dedicate themselves to the gritty work of building moderate factions within the two major parties.