Common Sense Diagrams: The US Two-Party System in *Magruder's American Government*, 1917–2023

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Abstract • This article investigates how the two-party system is analysed in text and diagrams in US government textbooks. The diagrams are analysed with the help of theories from the cognitive sciences. *Magruder's American Government* has dominated the US civics textbook market since its first edition in 1917. That year, the textbook referred to "the four leading parties," and the two-party system concept first appeared in a diagram in 1930. From 1939, the two-party system was considered a trait of English-speaking countries and was contrasted to the chaotic multiparty systems in Europe, which could end up in dictatorship. From the 1950s, the two-party system was explained as an effect of the electoral system and as a reflection of the lack of divisions in US society. Diagrams of the party system were gradually simplified until the 1990s, when they implied that Democrats and Republicans had unbroken roots in the late 1700s. From the 2010s, more critical explanations of the two-party system appeared, such as that the major parties issue legislation that hinder the formation of new parties.

Keywords • civic education, common sense, diagrams, textbook research, two-party system

The US two-party system is not a natural condition stemming from the Constitution, the mentality of the US electorate, or even from the single-member districts in the election system. Rather, it is a perception that has gradually been institutionalised in a historical process. Lisa Disch has pointed out the role of political science in establishing the concept "two-party system" as a catchphrase that seems as an inevitable law.[1] The aim of this article is to investigate the role of school textbooks in transforming the idea of the United States as a two-party system into common-sense knowledge. In particular, it strives to reveal how textbook diagrams have contributed to giving the two-party system a tangible spatial form into the minds of the public. Thereby, it combines the established tradition of conceptual history with cognitive history studies of diagrams, a comparatively new field.[2]

Our ability for abstract thinking rests on spatial thinking, which is revealed by how we use spatial metaphors in language to describe, for example, time, feelings, or logical operations. By directly visualising these spatial analogies, diagrams have an ability to affect us, cognitively and emotionally, at a profound but subconscious level.[3] However, so far, the ability to think critically about the composition of diagrams has received much less attention among researchers, including textbook research, than critical

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1 Lisa Disch, *The Tyranny of the Two-Party System* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

2 For an overview of conceptual history see Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global Conceptual History: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); for cognitive history studies of diagrams see the section "Earlier research" in this article.

3 See the section "Catchphrases and diagrams as common sense" in this article.

methods for textual analysis. This article's most important theoretical and method-ological contribution is to correct this imbalance.

In order to achieve this, the article investigates 1) when and how the two-party system concept was introduced in textbooks, 2) the reasons given for why the United States has a two-party system, 3) how the minor parties and their political role have been portrayed, and, most importantly, (4) how questions 1–3 are related to how the two-party system has been given spatial form in textbook diagrams with the help of cognitive principles such as primary metaphors and spatial agency bias.

These questions are answered by an analysis of the most influential and long-run-ning US high school government textbook, *Magruder's American Government*, which was first published in 1917 and still dominates the market.

Much of the US political and governance system is regulated by the Constitution, and therefore the Constitution is a natural starting point for textbook chapters describ-ing, for example, the presidency or Congress. However, the party system is an exception since it is not mentioned at all in the Constitution. This means that textbook authors need to find alternative explanations for why the current party system is in place, explanations that vary with time. Textbooks are therefore good indicators of chang-ing attitudes toward the two-party system. In addition, since the party system is not firmly rooted in constitutional law but has been formed through political practices, the system is sensitive to how it is portrayed in, for example, mass education. Thus, textbooks can be expected to not only reflect common attitudes toward the system but also to be actively involved in forming conceptions of the system.

Catchphrases and diagrams as common sense

The most important theoretical concepts used in this investigation are catchphrases, common sense, and diagrams. In his study of the political culture of the early US republic, Ronald Formisano used the concept of a catchphrase to describe "shared illusions" or "unresearched hypotheses," which set limits for what can be explained, known, and acted upon.[4] Disch has argued that in the 1900s, "the two-party system" became a catchphrase in the field of US political science.[5] If such catchphrases spread to wide circles of the population, they might form part of the *common sense* that Stuart Hall and Allan O'Shea have defined as

> a form of "everyday thinking" which offers us frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the world. It is a form of popular, easily-available knowledge which contains no complicated ideas, requires no sophisticated argument and does not depend on deep thought or wide reading. It works intuitively, without forethought or reflection. It is pragmatic and empirical, giving the illusion of arising directly from experience, reflecting only the realities of daily life and answering the needs of "the common people" for practical guidance and advice.[6]

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4   Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789–1840," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974), 473.

5   Disch (2002), 59–60.

6   Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea, "Common-Sense Neoliberalism: The Battle over Common Sense is a Central Part of Our Political Life," *Soundings* 55 (2013), 8–9.

Since common sense "is not the property of the rich, the well-educated or the power-ful, but is shared to some extent by everybody, regardless of class, status, creed, income or wealth," it is to a greater extent shaped by widely distributed publications, such as school textbooks, than by narrower academical treatises.[7]

In Charles Sander Peirce's semiotics, diagrams are distinct from symbols, such as writing and numbers, as well as from images. Symbols have an agreed upon meaning, while images mimic the spatial relations between the parts of the represented object. Because of this iconicity, similarity to their object, images can be understood without learning. As images, diagrams use spatial relations to convey meaning, and they are both described as icons by Peirce. However, what diagrams represent is decided not by direct mimicking, as in images, but through spatial analogies: spatial relations in the diagram represent abstract relationships between some selected properties of the object.[8] The diagram's focus on specific properties contributes to making it valuable in educational settings. Its iconicity, ability to be intuitively understood without learning of symbols, also contribute to its usefulness in teaching.

It can be argued that spatial analogies and diagrams have the potential to create shared illusions of common sense that exceed those of verbal catchphrases. The diagrams underlying our thought process seem even more natural and common than words, which both researchers and the general public are relatively familiar with decon-structing. Therefore, diagrams have remained even less researched than catchphrases.

This lack of research is unfortunate considering the importance that diagrams have in human thought. Peirce argued that we reason by drawing inferences from diagrams that we observe and manipulate in our minds.[9] This is consistent with a recent trend in the cognitive sciences that gives spatial cognition a fundamental role in abstract think-ing. Human cognition makes ample use of analogies and metaphors. This enables us to use knowledge from a familiar source domain to draw conclusions about a novel target domain.[10] Many of our analogies use space as a source domain. Even abstract concepts such as love, happiness, and social status are comprehended with the help of spatial metaphors. You can be in love, feel down, or rise on the social ladder.[11] In the realm of politics, a common spatial analogy is the left–right scale, where position on the hori-zontal axis is analogous to political position on a scale from reformist to conservative.[12]

As with all powerful tools, diagrams can also be used for manipulation and control and might be just as misleading as verbal communication.[13] Bruno Latour claims that diagrams are powerful inscriptions that corners dissenters into conformity through

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7 Hall and O'Shea (2013), 9.

8 See, for example, Frederik Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phe-nomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (London: Springer, 2007), 90.

9 Stjernfelt (2007), xiii.

10 Dedre Gentner, "Structure-Mapping: A Theoretical Framework for Analogy," *Cognitive Science* 7, no. 2 (1983), 155–70.

11 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

12 Jean A. Laponce, *Left and Right: The Topography of Political Perceptions* (Toronto: University of To-ronto Press, 1981).

13 Matei Candea, "On Visual Coherence and Visual Excess: Writing, Diagrams, and Anthropological Form," *Social Analysis* 63, no. 4 (2019), 63–88; Nurit Bird-David, "Dis/working with Diagrams: How Genealogies and Maps Obscure Nanoscale Worlds (a Hunter-Gatherer Case)," *Social Analysis* 63, no. 4 (2019), 43–62.

ever more dramatic visual effects.[14] Therefore, it is not surprising that diagrams have been used in school textbooks for civic education. The supposedly neutral spatial form of a diagram might lend it an air of objectivity and common sense that a verbal description of the same phenomenon could not match.

Method and sources

Theories of spatial cognition can be used for diagram analysis.[15] For example, in the late 1990s, it was suggested that we learn a common set of primary metaphors from sensorimotor experience in early childhood. For example, by observing how the water rises in a glass when we pour it in, we conflate that "More is Up." According to the theory, these simple metaphors become established as permanent neural connections and form the building blocks from which we construct more complex metaphors later in life. The majority of these primary metaphors are spatial, such as Important is Big, Organisation is Physical Structure, Control is Up, Important is Central, and Similarity is Closeness.[16] Other primary metaphors, such as Good is Bright/Bad is Dark, are also relevant for diagrams, since they affect how different entities are contrasted to each other through shading.[17]

Spatial agency bias is also relevant in diagram analysis. In cultures writing from left to right, we internalise that action take place in this direction and tend to place more powerful actors to the left in diagrams and images.[18]

Regarding the textual analysis, the main challenge is the amount of source material. It has been narrowed down by focusing on the most important textbook. Still, Magruder's *American Government* is a voluminous textbook of 500 pages in the first edition and approximately 900 today. The preface to the 800-page 1967 edition claimed that "[i]f it is a 'large' one, it is because its subject is a large and important one."[19] However, the research is simplified by the fact that the book has always contained a fifteen- to twenty-page chapter on the political parties, which has maintained much of its original structure throughout its 106 years of existence. It begins by explaining what a party is, where after it states that no provisions are made for political parties in the Constitution, but that they are good to have anyway. Thereafter, the two largest parties are described, followed by the other parties.

Although the building blocks of the first edition are still visible in the latest edition, the chapter has undergone an important evolution that reflects how the view of the US party system has developed. Within this narrative frame, some themes have lived for

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14 Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands," *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Science, Past and Present 6* (1986), 1–40.

15 For a longer discussion of this, see for example chapter 2 of Janne Holmén et al., *Diagrams in Civic Education: Visuospatial Models of Society in Textbooks and Teaching* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).

16 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 46–54.

17 María J. Ortiz, "Primary Metaphors and Monomodal Visual Metaphors," *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, no. 6 (2011), 1568–80.

18 Anjan Chatterjee, "Directional Asymmetries in Cognition: What is Left to Write About?" in *Spatial Dimensions of Social Thought*, ed. Anne Maas and Thomas W. Schubert (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), 189–210.

19 Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1967), vi.

decades, after which they were changed or replaced by new ones, such as the causes of the two-party system and the role of minor parties. This article traces these changes in the text, in combination with an analysis of the accompanying diagrams. The long and uniform publication history of Magruder's book provides a homogeneous background against which relevant changes are easier to discern than if the same development had to be pieced together from dozens of heterogeneous short-lived textbooks. Since the textbook, particularly in its early history, often underwent revisions after election years, I have studied at least one, but often several, textbooks from each four-year election cycle since the 1916 elections, with the exception of 2017–2020, when no new editions seem to have been issued.

Earlier research

Research on the role of diagrams in education is mostly focused on teaching students to understand diagrams. There is plenty of research within the STEM subjects, for example regarding how to promote the understanding of geometrical diagrams or evolutionary trees.[20] Research on diagrams in social science education is also focused on the role of charts and graphs as didactical tools.[21]

Less research has been made regarding how politics is portrayed in diagrams, and also there, the focus has been on didactical usefulness. For example, in 1931 Frances N. Ahl suggested that teachers use graphic presentations to illustrate the evolution of the American two-party system.[22]

No earlier research exists regarding how textbooks have described the two-party system or how it has been represented in diagrams. However, we can find some studies on parties in textbooks. A 1979 study of four US high school textbooks in history and civics analysed the treatment of political parties and found that history textbooks were more critical of parties, while civics textbooks were more positive. It was also concluded that minor parties were generally ignored.[23]

Research that makes critical analyses of diagrams in textbooks, or other media, is also rare. Valentin Rauer's research on HIV infographics focuses on how images and numerical information are combined. His method of isotypical difference has also been used by Daniel Schumann in an analysis of how migration is portrayed in diagrams in German civics textbooks.[24]

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20 See, for example, Justin K. Dimmel and Patricio G. Herbst, "The Semiotic Structure of Geometry Diagrams: How Textbook Diagrams Convey Meaning," *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 46, no. 2 (2015), 147–95 or Kefyn M. Catley and Laura R. Novick, "Seeing the Wood for the Trees: An Analysis of Evolutionary Diagrams in Biology Textbooks," *BioScience* 58, no. 10 (2008), 976–87.

21 For example, Elchanan Cohn et al., "Do Graphs Promote Learning in Principles of Economics?" *The Journal of Economic Education* 32, no. 4 (2001), 299–310.

22 Frances N. Ahl, "Making Civics Graphic," *The Historical Outlook* 22, no. 1 (1931), 27–28; Henry E. Brady, "The Art of Political Science: Spatial Diagrams as Iconic and Revelatory," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (2011), 311–31.

23 Sue Tolleson Rinehart, "The Mischief of Factions: Political Parties in School Textbooks" (paper presented at the meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 31–August 3, 1979).

24 Valentin Rauer, "Isotypische Differenz: Eine serielle Analyse der symbolischen Formen von öffentlichen HIV-Statistiken (1983–2003)," in *Visuelle Stereotype,* ed. Thomas Petersen and Clemens Schwendner (Cologne: Halem Verlag, 2009), 124–40; Chapter 3 in Holmén et al. (2024).

I have conducted some earlier studies which, as this one, analysed diagrams with the help of theories from the cognitive sciences such as primary metaphors and spatial agency bias. One study investigated how the political spectrum has been portrayed diagrammatically in Swedish civics textbooks and how the horizontal left–right dimension has sometimes been complemented with a vertical dimension that represents the difference between, for example, economy and ecology or between Green/Alternative/Libertarian and Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist.[25] Another study compared how diagrams from civic education textbooks from ten countries are used for nation building by displaying unity in diversity.[26] The most comprehensive overview of the method is given in my book *A history of diagrams*, where it is also applied to a large number of diagrams used for various purposes in different cultures and time periods.[27]

Although textbook studies often focus on the conservatism and traditionality of the medium, school textbooks not only reproduce hegemonic ideologies but can also have a progressive function of inducing change, as is the case for civic education in general.[28] The establishment of common-sense notions with the help of spatial diagrams can be used for both of these purposes.

Magruder's American Government

Magruder's American Government might be the world's longest running textbook series, since it has appeared in new editions since 1917. No edition numbers have been included in the front matter, but, until the early 1950s, it was claimed that the book was updated at least once a year.[29] The preface of some editions has provided information on editions, sometimes based on contradictory attempts at actual counting and sometimes merely based on years since the first edition.[30] Nonetheless, the textbook was published in approximately 100 editions between 1917 and 1923.

American Government was revised by Frank Abbott Magruder until his death in 1949. Beginning in 1952, Magruder's friend and colleague from Oregon State University William McClenaghan oversaw the revisions, and since then, the name of the book has been *Magruder's American Government*. McClenaghan also helped with the revisions during the last years of Magruder's life[31] and updated the book for almost sixty years until he passed away in 2011, when Grant P. Wiggins from the publisher briefly

25 Janne Holmén, "Flipping the Political Scale: Spatial Cognition and Changes in Diagrammatic Representations of the Swedish Party System in Civics Textbooks, 1900–2020," *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 8, no: 1–2 (2024), 141–67.

26 Chapter 2 in Holmén et al. (2024).

27 Janne Holmén, *A History of Diagrams: Turning Points in the Spatial Representation of Ideas and Information* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

28 Tomas Englund, *Curriculum as a Political Problem: Changing Educational Conceptions, with Special Reference to Citizenship Education* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1986), 70.

29 For example, Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: A Study of Our Democracy at Work*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1951), ii.

30 Magruder (1967); Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1983); Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham Heights, MA: Prentice Hall, 1991); Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 1992).

31 Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1956), ii.

took over responsibility for the yearly revisions.[32] By 2016, Daniel M. Shea, professor of Government at Colby College, had taken over responsibility for revisions of the book.[33]

Magruder's American Government has been studied by several earlier researchers who have referred to the textbook's dominating position, without substantiating that claim.[34] James W. Mauch provided a more thorough description of the textbook's market position in his doctoral dissertation. He cited claims from the publisher that the book had held more than 70 percent of the market share since 1917 but noted that this was impossible to verify since not all publishers revealed their sales figures, and some exaggerate them for marketing purposes. However, Mauch believed the figures to be credible since the book was on reading lists in important school districts and states with statewide textbook standards, such as Los Angeles, Texas, and Florida. Los Angeles sets the tone for the rest of California, and these three states not only constitute a large share of the US textbook market but also influence other parts of the country where textbook decisions are made at the school district level.[35]

Most earlier studies have looked at single editions, either contemporary books or one of the earliest editions. A study of how the Bill of Rights concept has evolved, which utilised a broad range of texts by politicians and political scientists, also investigated the first edition of Magruder. It described Magruder's view on the Bill of Rights as conservative since it held that it limited only the federal power and not that of the states, which some political scientists and politicians had already argued at the time.[36] Ronald Stockton described the 1923 edition as an early example of a textbook that promoted civic engagement.[37] Arthur Foshay described the 1930 edition as interested in social matters and positive toward nonprofit government enterprises such as canals, railroads, and irrigation projects.[38] A 1974 study compared the view of citizenship across a number of contemporary US government textbooks, including Magruder's 1968 edition. The textbook, which the lead author himself used in high school in the 1920s, was categorised as "traditional," in contrast to the problem orientation or disci-

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32 Frank Abbott Magruder, William A. McClenaghan, and Pearson Education, *American Government* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2011), iii.

33 Frank Abbott Magruder and Daniel M. Shea, *Magruder's American Government* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2016), iii.

34 Arthur W. Foshay and William W. Burton, "Citizenship as the Aim of the Social Studies," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 4, no. 2 (1976), 1–22; Arthur W. Foshay, "Textbooks and the Curriculum During the Progressive Era: 1930–1950," in *Textbooks and Schooling in the United States: Eighty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*: Part I, ed. David L. Elliott and Arthur Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 23–41; Ronald A. Banaszak, "What Happened to *Magruder's American Government*? The Evolution of a Popular Textbook, 1970–1992" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, Nashville, TN, November 1993); Michael J. Douma, "How the First Ten Amendments Became the Bill of Rights," *Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy* 15, no. 2 (2017), 593–614.

35 James W. Mauch, *Social Mathematics in the Curriculum of American Civics: An Analysis of Selected National and State Standards and of Magruder's American Government* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University, 2005), 72–80.

36 Douma (2017).

37 Ronald Stockton, "The Magruder Textbook of 1923 on American Government: An Early Version of Civic Engagement" (paper presented at APSA 2010 Teaching & Learning Conference, Washington, DC, February 5, 2010), http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1548585).

38 Foshay (1990).

pline orientation of some of its newer competitors.[39] Richard Neumann studied how contemporary textbooks from several subjects treated socialism and corporate influence on the government and chose Magruder to represent US government textbooks. He found Magruder's portrayal of socialism more nuanced than that of history textbooks, which he attributed to differences between the subjects.[40]

Several studies have also investigated the development of Magruder's textbook over time. Ronald Banaszak concluded that the book did not change much between the 1970 and 1992 editions, while Mark Mraz covered an even greater timespan by comparing the 1917 and 1993 editions. He claimed that after seventy-six editions, the landmark textbook still held true to Magruder's intention to portray the fluid and dynamic nature of US democracy.[41]

Taken together, these earlier studies show that the textbook displays a great deal of continuity during its publication history and can be described as politically moderate. It seems to view government as a positive force in society, a standpoint possibly left of centre in the US political landscape. However, this bias might be due to self-selection among authors prepared to write 900-page books on the details of government. I have been unable to find any investigation that has looked at more than two editions of the around 100 published thus far. Only a few percent of the approximately 80,000 pages hitherto published under the name *Magruder's American Government* have been the object of research, and none of the earlier studies have approached the US two-party system.

The US two-party system

The concept of a two-party system was used already in the late nineteenth century. One of the first examples was the English philosopher Henry Sidgwick's discussion of the pros and cons of the two-party system in his 1891 *The Elements of Politics*. Approximately a decade later, the concept emerged in discussions on US politics, such as when William P. Trent criticised the two-party system in an 1899 address.[42]

However, until the 1920s, US political scientists did not study parties on a regular basis. According to Disch, "[t]he institutionalization of political parties that made them respectable objects of academic inquiry relied in turn upon objective scholarly opinion to render that institutionalization legitimate." In the 1920s, "two-party system" had not yet come to dominate as a description of this system. Although it was occasionally used, it competed with other concepts and was not viewed as superior to other systems.[43]

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39 Foshay and Burton (1976).

40 Richard Neumann, "Socialism in High School Social Studies Textbooks," *The Social Studies* 103, no. 1 (2012), 31–38; Richard Neumann, "An Analysis of the Treatment of Corporate Influence on Government by United States History and American Government High School Textbooks," *The Social Studies* 105, no. 2 (2014), 57–68.

41 Banaszak (1993); Mark Mraz, "*Magruder's American Government*: The 1917 and 1993 Editions Compared—A Case Study in Civic Education," *Social Studies Journal* 26 (1997), 48–51.

42 Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 598–601; William P. Trent, *War and Civilization* (New York: T.Y. Crowell & Co., 1901).

43 Disch (2002), 64–67, quote on 64.

The idea that multiparty systems caused fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany was first put forward in 1935. Thereafter, the two-party system saw its breakthrough in a wave of "party patriotism," which viewed it as a superior safeguard for democracy.[44]

In the mid-twentieth century, "the two-party system" became established as a catchphrase synonymous with US democracy. In 1954, Duverger's Law, the proposition that simple majority single-ballot elections favour two-party systems, lent an aura of scientific credibility to the concept.[45] Similar ideas had been commonplace since the 1880s; for example, it was discussed in a widely spread work by H. G. Wells. However, Duverger's formulation of a testable hypothesis opened up the field for quantitative empirical studies.[46]

Anthony Downs' *Economic Theory of Democracy* further strengthened "the two-party system" as a catchphrase and introduced the idea that votes for third parties were wasted.[47] Thus, it is only through a long multistep process that the idea of the United States as a two-party state has become common-sense knowledge.
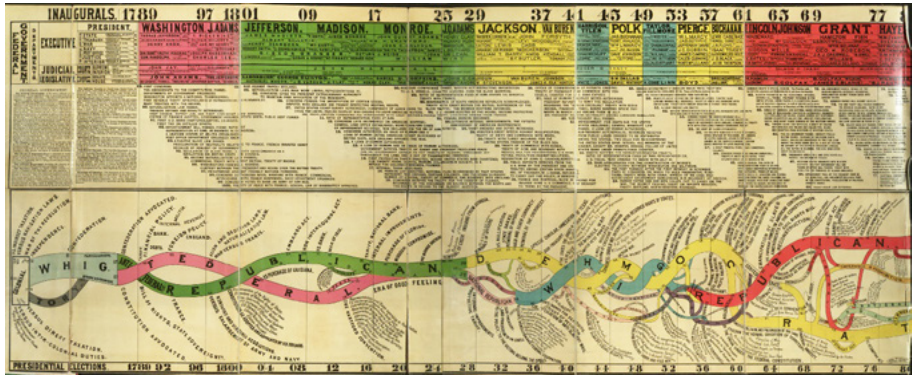
Early diagrams of the US parties

Figure 1. Conspectus of the History of Political Parties. Source: Walter R. Houghton, *Conspectus of the History of Political Parties and the Federal Government* (Indianapolis: Granger, 1880).

In 1880, Walter R. Houghton published an overview of the history of US political parties. It was accompanied by the diagram "Conspectus of the History of Political Parties" (Figure 1) that visualised this development and was also printed separately to market the book. Houghton assigned a line to each party and measured its support with comparatively thicker or thinner lines, with the party in the White House on top.[48] The pattern of placing the dominating power on top recurs in visual representations

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44 William H. Riker, "The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 4 (1982): 753–66; Disch (2002), 67–69.

45 Disch (2002), 73–75.

46 Riker (1982); Herbert George Wells, *An Englishman Looks at the World* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1914), 251–54.

47 Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); Disch (2002), 77–79.

48 Susan Schulten, "Charting the Flow of Political Power," *Mapping the Nation*, July 5, 2012, http://www.mappingthenation.com/blog/charting-the-flow-of-political-power/.

of social order across cultures and epochs. It has its foundation in the primary meta-phor Control is Up.[49]

Houghton's conspectus has little resemblance to the more orderly diagrams that were later used in textbooks to represent the two-party system. The diagram was produced after the chaotic 1876 elections, which were tainted by accusations of fraud and had to be decided by a committee. It is not an orderly and well-functioning system that it is attempting to visualise.

The meanderings of Houghton's diagram seem to reflect this scepticism toward polit-ical parties. It has been noted that overcomplexity can be used in diagrams to discredit a phenomenon,[50] and this might be what Houghton was doing. Although the party in the White House was always placed on top, the knots and meanders performed by the parties below seem to serve no other purpose than to form a confusing labyrinth.
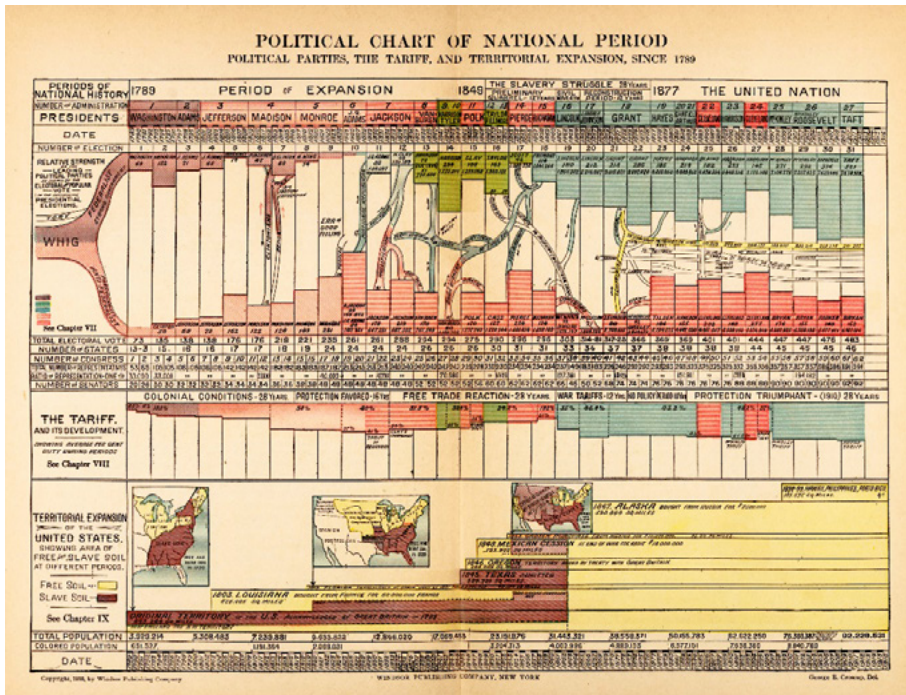

Figure 2. Political chart of national period. Source: George E. Croscup, *United States History with Synchronic Charts Maps and Statistical Diagrams* (New York: Cambridge Book Corporation, [1910] 1915). Cornell University – PJ Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography. https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:19343582.

A more direct forerunner to diagrams of the two-party system was produced by George E. Croscup in 1910 (Figure 2), as he gave visual preference to the two major parties, with smaller parties situated in between them. However, it would still take some time before diagrams of the party system found their way into textbooks.

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49 See chapter 30 in Holmén (forthcoming).

50 Holmén (forthcoming), chapter 37.

The two-party system in Magruder's American Government
The party system in the early editions, 1917–1920s

The first edition of *Magruder's American Government* from 1917 contained the chapter "Political Parties and Politics." It claimed that an old ruling party without a formidable opponent tends to outlive its moral justification, where after it faces collapse or splits, such as when the Progressive Party with Theodore Roosevelt broke out from the Republicans in 1912.[51] As a result of that split, Woodrow Wilson of the Democrats became president. From the Civil War until that point, Grover Cleveland was the only non-Republican to have been elected president. This explains why Magruder wrote about *the* ruling party rather than referring to a two-party system. The single-party dominance was even stronger at the state level. Among the questions for discussion at the end of the chapter, the students were asked whether their state was a one-party state and whether they believed that the government would be more efficient if there were two parties of equal strength.[52] Thus, if the idea of a two-party system can be said to exist at all in this first edition of the textbook, it was a vision rather than a description of contemporary reality.

The text revealed no major difference between the platforms of the Republicans and Democrats, as they agreed on foreign policy, rural banks, and women's suffrage by state action. Four parties were listed in the order of Republicans, Democrats, Prohibitionists, and Socialists. The radical socialist platform for the 1916 elections was given as much space as the other three parties combined.[53] This might be attributed to its length and level of detail, in contrast to the vague profiles of the Republicans and Democrats and the single-issue focus of the Prohibitionists. Apart from the fact that they were placed first, no distinction was made between the Republicans and Democrats and the other parties in the early editions of the book. In the end-of-chapter questions, the students were asked to discuss which platform among "the four leading parties" was most progressive.[54]

The view that there were no major differences between the Republicans and Democrats was backed by a long quote from a book on US parties by the historian P. Orman Ray, who in turn had quoted James Bryce, originally from 1888.[55] Thus, the image of the large parties as machines competing for government rather than as carriers of political ideology or group interests was established already in 1917. It has basically been maintained into the 2020s, although put under increasing amounts of stress from conflicting evidence.

In the next edition, the text was updated with the party platforms for the 1920 elections.[56] The Republican and Democrat platforms were given close to one page each,

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51 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: With a Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1917), 227–28.

52 Ibid., 239.

53 Ibid., 227–31.

54 Ibid., 239.

55 P. Orman Ray, *An Introduction to Political Parties and Practical Politics* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1913), 7; James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth, vol.2: Part III–VI. The Party System—Public Opinion—Illustrations and Reflections—Social Institutions*, rev. 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1889), 23.

56 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: With a Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1921), 227–31.

whereafter "the minor parties" were discussed in one subchapter. Of those, only the Socialist Party's program was described in detail, also with close to one page of text. The introduction of the concept of "the minor parties" was a first step in a development that distinguished the Republicans and Democrats from the other parties. The students were now also asked to describe the platforms of "the leading" instead of "the four leading" parties.[57] The context reveals that the Socialists were still considered a leading party, but not the Prohibitionists. No description was given of the Prohibitionist platform, and a question that had asked the students to describe the platforms of Republicans, Democrats, Prohibitionists, and Socialists now only listed Republicans, Democrats, and Socialists.[58] The introduction of prohibition in 1920 answered the Prohibitionists' main political question, after which they slid into political obscurity.

In 1927, only the platforms of what were now called "the major parties," Republicans and Democrats, were described in detail, and the "minor parties" were collectively treated in a short paragraph. Since the Socialist Party had supported the La Folette platform in the 1924 election, there was no longer a separate description of their platform.[59] Thus, throughout the 1920s, for every election cycle, the textbook increasingly focused on the two major parties. However, the concept of a "two-party system" was still not used.

Emergence of the two-party system as a concept and diagram: The 1930s

The first mention of the two-party system appeared in the 1930 edition. There, a diagram caption read: "In the above chart, note the persistence of the two-party system in the United States."[60] Houghton's diagram from 1880 was a data visualisation that represented voter support with thickness, displaying a relative, quantitative difference between major and minor parties. In contrast, the 1930 diagram indicated an absolute, qualitative difference by representing major parties as straight columns of equal width, regardless of the results of individual elections, with other parties placed around them (Figure 3). The pre-eminence of Democrats and Republicans was conveyed by a combination of the primary metaphors Important is Big and Important is Central. A remnant of the tradition of representing voter support in the diagram might be traced to the depiction of the Prohibitionist Party getting narrower over time. However, it is also possible that the Prohibitionists are simply squeezed to give room to Progressives in the diagram. The fact that Progressives are placed to the left of Republicans rather than to the right where there is plenty of room might be related to an ambition to use a left–right horizontal political scale, although this is not stated in the caption. In Europe, several parties had to form coalition governments, the caption stated, but in the US no other party had managed to seriously affect the two-party system.

The diagram suggested that the difference between Democrats and Republicans was that the former supported state rights and the latter centralisation. However, this difference was not mentioned in the text, which still emphasised the similarities

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57 Magruder (1921), 239.

58 Magruder (1917), 238; Magruder (1921), 238.

59 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: With a Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1927), 258–62.

60 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: A Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1930), 233.

between the parties. The diagram and the caption remained in the following editions. The only change to the chapter was that the Democratic platform was presented before the Republican, reflecting Franklin D. Roosevelt's victory in the 1932 elections, and his presidency was also added to the chart of the party system.[61] For the 1936 edition, a new but almost identical version of the party system diagram was drawn.[62] However, now the figure caption disappeared, and thereby the only mention of the two-party system. Updates of this diagram would remain in the book until the late 1940s (Figure 3).

A similar example can be found in a competing high school textbook from the same period. The two-party system was mentioned, but only in the short chapter on Canada, where it was stated that the country had a two-party system, as Britain and the United States did.[63] However, the concept was not used in the longer chapter on US parties. The inconsistent use of the "two-party system" in these examples reveals that although the concept was known in the early 1930s, it was neither a catchphrase nor part of common-sense knowledge.

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61 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: A Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1934), 405.

62 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: A Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1936), 405.

63 Herman Adolph Spindt and Frederick Lynne Ryan, *The Foundations of American Government: A Textbook in Civics* (Boston: Heath, 1929), 420.
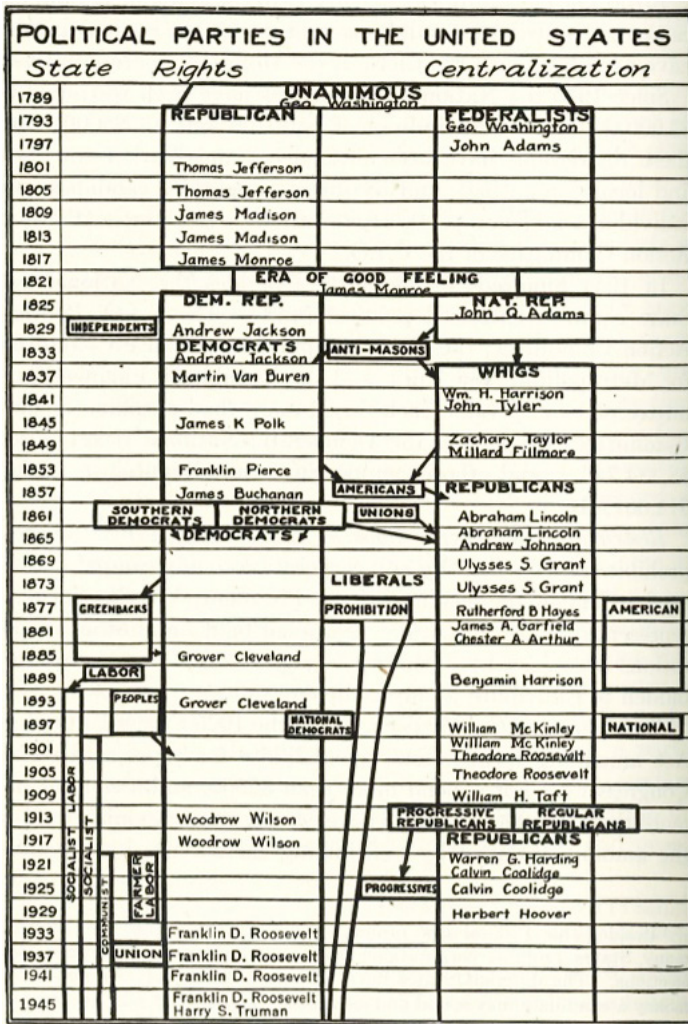
POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE UNITED STATES

	State Rights		Centralization	
1789		UNANIMOUS Geo. Washington		
1793	REPUBLICAN		FEDERALISTS Geo. Washington	
1797			John Adams	
1801	Thomas Jefferson			
1805	Thomas Jefferson			
1809	James Madison			
1813	James Madison			
1817	James Monroe			
1821	ERA OF GOOD FEELING James Monroe			
1825	DEM. REP.		NAT. REP. John Q. Adams	
1829	INDEPENDENTS Andrew Jackson			
1833	DEMOCRATS Andrew Jackson	ANTI-MASONS		
1837	Martin Van Buren		WHIGS	
1841			Wm. H. Harrison John Tyler	
1845	James K Polk			
1849			Zachary Taylor Millard Fillmore	
1853	Franklin Pierce			
1857	James Buchanan	AMERICANS	REPUBLICANS	
1861	SOUTHERN DEMOCRATS / NORTHERN DEMOCRATS	UNIONS	Abraham Lincoln	
1865	DEMOCRATS		Abraham Lincoln Andrew Johnson	
1869			Ulysses S. Grant	
1873		LIBERALS	Ulysses S. Grant	
1877	GREENBACKS	PROHIBITION	Rutherford B Hayes	AMERICAN
1881			James A. Garfield Chester A. Arthur	
1885	Grover Cleveland			
1889	LABOR		Benjamin Harrison	
1893	PEOPLES Grover Cleveland			
1897		NATIONAL DEMOCRATS	William McKinley	NATIONAL
1901			William McKinley Theodore Roosevelt	
1905	LABOR		Theodore Roosevelt	
1909			William H. Taft	
1913	SOCIALIST / SOCIALIST	Woodrow Wilson	PROGRESSIVE REPUBLICANS / REGULAR REPUBLICANS	
1917		Woodrow Wilson	REPUBLICANS	
1921	FARMER LABOR		Warren G. Harding Calvin Coolidge	
1925		PROGRESSIVES	Calvin Coolidge	
1929	COMMUNIST		Herbert Hoover	
1933	Franklin D. Roosevelt			
1937	UNION Franklin D. Roosevelt			
1941	Franklin D. Roosevelt			
1945	Franklin D. Roosevelt Harry S. Truman			

Figure 3. Political parties in the United States. Source: Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: A Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1946), 422.

The Anglo-Saxon two-party system and its antitheses, 1939–

In 1939, the two-party concept reappeared, as Magruder devoted an entire subchapter to it,[64] which has remained ever since. Although the diagram still defined the parties as supporting state rights or centralism, Magruder argued in the texts that the two parties were almost empty of issues, joking that they were like two bottles with different labels but equally empty of content. Generally, the major parties obtained their ideas from the minor parties or pressure groups. "Why form a new party when existing ones are looking for new issues made popular by a pressure group?" Magruder asked rhetorically.[65]

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64 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: A Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1939), 412–13.

65 Ibid., 411.

The US two-party system was contrasted with European politics: "European countries have been plagued with too many political parties—racial groups, dynastic groups, and whatnot. This results in instability, and France has a new government every nine months on average. The many parties worked so badly in Italy and Germany that the people reacted in favour of a dictator who permits only his one party."[66] On the other hand, the English-speaking peoples generally had two-party systems of conservatives and liberals under different names. At this point, language was Magruder's only explanation of why the United States had a two-party system.

The narrative established in 1939 remained throughout the 1940s, with the minor changes that economic differences were added to the factors that splintered the European party system, and that the one-party states in Germany and Italy were described in the past tense.[67] Thus, the idea of a US two-party system developed in contrast to the European multiparty systems, which, during the 1930s, began to be perceived as inferior and dangerous, as they could lead to dictatorship.

The association of two-party systems with Anglophone countries was not unique to Magruder but was common among political scientists at the time. For example, a book from 1939 by W. Reed West,[68] professor of Political Science at George Washington University, also contained a chapter on the two-party system, which was said to be characteristic for English-speaking countries.

The edition from 1956 no longer proposed that two-party systems were typical for English-speaking countries. However, it still contrasted an orderly US two-party system against European multiparty chaos. In addition to the lessons from Italy and Germany, from then, the text also noted that France had averaged a shift in government every five months since the end of World War II.[69]

By the 1964 edition, the references to the Italian and German dictatorships were removed, but multiparty systems were still associated with chaos: "France furnishes an excellent illustration of the instability produced by a multi-party system. Since the end of World War II, the French have had two new constitutions and been plagued with frequent shifts in party control."[70] By 1967, a footnote informed that France had achieved "a semblance of political stability" after De Gaulle instated the Fifth Republic in 1958.[71] In the editions from 1973 to 2007, Italy was used as the single example of frequent shift in government.[72] By 2009, the book claimed that several European countries have had frequent shifts in government without naming any.[73] However, in the

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66 Ibid., 412.

67 Frank Abbott Magruder, *American Government: A Consideration of the Problems of Democracy* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1946), 411.

68 W. Reed West, *American Government* (London: Pitman, 1939).

69 Magruder (1956), 410–11.

70 Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1964), 126–28.

71 Magruder (1967), 129.

72 For example, Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan & John S. Gibson (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1973), 137; Frank Abbott Magruder and William A. McClenaghan, *Magruder's American Government* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2006), 122.

73 Frank Abbott Magruder and William A. McClenaghan, *Magruder's American Government* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 128–29.

2009 edition, Canada was also used as an example of a multiparty system,[74] in contrast to the older explanation that English-speaking countries in general had two-party systems. The diagram of the Canadian system was not intended to illustrate the instability of the system but to explain how majorities were formed in multiparty systems. By 2016, the German Bundestag was instead used for the same purpose.[75]

By the 1956 edition, the textbook also began to discuss one-party systems. It claimed that, for example, in the Soviet dictatorship, opposition cannot be tolerated, and such a system should therefore be described as a "no party system."[76] By 1973, it was added that many US states and local governments were one-party systems.[77] This description of the one-party system was still maintained in the 2023 edition, although US one-partyism was described as a historical rather than a current phenomenon, as it has been since the 1983 edition.[78] Thus, even during the Cold War, the European multiparty system rather than the Soviet one-party system was portrayed as the antithesis of the US two-party system.

The revolutionary minor parties, 1950s to 1970s

Early editions of the book were generally positive toward minor parties, although they were ascribed less importance with each edition. Continuing this mildly positive tradition, the 1951 edition claimed that minor parties often introduced new ideas, which were then taken over by the major parties. "A minor party pays the price of rearing a promising child and, when it becomes popular, a major party marries or adopts it." However, by now the minor parties were also warranted a word of caution. The textbook claimed that new parties were usually more liberal or radical than older ones, and that some might not be satisfied with following democratic processes. "If radicals are not willing to wait for public opinion, and attempt to impose all new ideas overnight, reforms, good or bad, might have to be paid for by revolution or counter-revolution."[79] By following how this paragraph developed in later editions, it can be inferred that it was associated with the presidential campaign of the Progressive Party's Henry A. Wallace in the 1948 election, which was supported by the Communist Party. By 1956, it was claimed that Wallace did not understand the forces behind his party, and by 1967, it was specified that it was influenced by communists. That year, the sentence that linked minor parties to revolution was removed. However, the connections between radicalism and minor parties and between Wallace and communism still held in the 1977 edition. After that, the view of the minor parties became less negative, and they were still described as originators of ideas that can be transformed into policy by the major parties.[80]

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74 Magruder and McClenaghan (2009), 128.

75 Magruder and Shea (2016), 509.

76 Magruder (1956), 411.

77 Magruder (1973), 138.

78 Frank Abbott Magruder and Daniel M. Shea, *Magruder's American Government* (Paramus, NJ: Savvas Learning, 2023), 569; Magruder (1983), 171.

79 Magruder (1951), 426.

80 Magruder (1956), 415; Magruder (1967), 133; Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1977), 141; Magruder and Shea (2023), 570–71.

This scrutiny of the motives and methods of minor parties surfaced during the McCarthy era of the early Cold War, when suspicion could be directed against any actors outside of the mainstream, and it lived on in the textbook for almost three decades. Nevertheless, minor parties never ceased to be portrayed as valuable, and the idea that a vote for a minor party was wasted never appeared in the textbook.

The reasons for the US two-party system, 1956–

By 1956, the two-party system was described as even more common-sensical than before since "of course" was added to the sentence "There are, of course, two major parties in the United States." With this edition, the idea that English-speaking countries had two-party systems disappeared, but several other explanations were presented. For example, the theory that the election system with majority votes in single-member districts favours a two-party system was introduced.[81] It has remained in the textbook ever since.[82] Although the principle had been observed much earlier, in the 1950s, political scientists began to more closely study the relationship between election systems and party systems, what would become labelled Duverger's Law.[83] After abandoning language as an explanation, the textbook found a more scientific foundation for the US two-party system. However, other explanations were also given in the same 1956 edition.

The idea that the US political parties did not have any larger ideological differences was presented as a consequence of the two-party system but was simultaneously described as a cause of it. The textbook considered the similarity between the two major parties to reflect the absence of sharp economic, religious, national, ideological, linguistic, or other differences within the United States, which was dominated by the middle class. Therefore, it was a strength and not a weakness that the parties were difficult to distinguish from each other.[84] The absence of divisions among the American people would, up to the 2020s, remain a leading explanation for why the United States had a two-party system.[85]

However, by 1983, some cracks were beginning to appear in the argument that the parties' similarity reflected the homogeneity of their voters. It was added that Americans had far from always agreed on all matters and had in fact been deeply divided by the Civil War, the Great Depression, racial discrimination, and war in Southeast Asia. However, the textbook still concluded that "we have not seen long-standing bitter disputes based on factors such as economic class, social status, religious tenets or national origins."[86] These paragraphs held for decades with smaller changes. For example, by the 2002 edition, the Vietnam War was exchanged for abortion as a bone of contention. That year, it was claimed that both parties tended to be moderate, although Democrats were more likely to support social welfare programs, government regulation of business, and efforts to improve the status of minorities, and Republicans were

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81 Magruder (1956), 410.

82 Magruder and Shea (2023), 566–67.

83 Disch (2002), 73–75; Riker (1982).

84 Magruder (1956), 410–411.

85 Magruder and Shea (2016), 506–7; Magruder and Shea (2023), 569.

86 Magruder (1983), 170.

much more likely to favour free market forces and less extensive federal social welfare programs.[87]

By 1967, a subchapter on party membership had appeared in the book. In an argument similar to that in the subchapter on ideological consensus mentioned above, it claimed that the two major parties drew voters from all layers of the population. For brief periods, some groups could align more with one party than with the other, although these periods were never very long lasting.[88] In 1973, the statement that group alignment was never very long lasting was removed, and it was added that Blacks and organised labour had voted more for Democrats in recent years.[89]

By 1980, the textbook claimed that Blacks, Catholics, Jews, and organised labour voted more for Democrats, while White males, Protestants, and the business community voted more Republican. Nevertheless, the textbook attempted to convey a message of national unity by stating that "never have all of the members of one race, one creed, or one economic group attached themselves permanently, indivisibly, to one major party."[90] However, by then, the argument was so stretched that it could be applied to any political system since a total alignment between population groups and parties can hardly be found anywhere. Still, a version of this sentence remained in the subchapter as long as it remained in the textbook. The chapter was more or less unchanged until in 1996 it was added that people with higher incomes tend to be Republican and those with lower incomes tend to be Democrats.[91] The reference to income remained for some years but was removed by 2002.[92] The entire chapter on party membership disappeared from the textbook by 2009, but the chapter on ideological consensus remained.

Since 2009, a political spectrum has been used to discuss ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans.[93] Thus, a subchapter with the purpose to describe the ideological consensus of the parties was now illustrated with a diagram outlining their differences. By 2023, the subchapter "The American Ideological Consensus" was followed by "Ideology and Political Parties," which stated that "[o]f late, arguments between the two parties have been bitter and seemingly unresolvable. One of the most important trends in recent years, in fact, has been the increasing role played by those at the extreme ends of the political spectrum."[94] However, it was claimed that despite this trend, the two-party system has continued to push the policy agenda toward the middle. Thus, the two-party system was no longer viewed as a manifestation of American unity and consensus but as an antidote for ideological polarisation.

In 1980, "Force of Tradition" was launched as a new explanation for the two-party system: "Most Americans accept the idea of a two-party system simply because it has

87 Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 2002), 120–22.

88 Magruder (1967), 130.

89 Magruder (1973), 139; Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. by William A. McClenaghan and John S. Gibson. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1972), 130.

90 Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1980), 188.

91 Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 1996), 107.

92 Magruder (2002), 123.

93 Magruder and McClenaghan (2009), 126.

94 Magruder and Shea (2023), 569–70.

always been with us," and for the same reason, they reject third parties.[95] This explanation still remains in the very latest textbooks, by 2016 summated in the common-sensical phrase "America has a two-party system because America has a two-party system."[96] Common sense is used to create acceptance for ideas by claiming that everybody already agrees with them. Through this strategy, new ideas can also be presented as founded in tradition.[97] The force of tradition argument in Magruder's textbook follows this pattern. In the 1920s, the textbook had not been aware of the two-party system that it in the 1980s claimed had always been there.

In the latest editions, we find a more critical explanation for the persistence of the two-party system: "Much of American election law is purposely written to discourage non-major-party candidates."[98] According to the new author Daniel M. Shea, Democrats and Republicans work together to write legislation that makes it difficult for minor parties and independent candidates to win elected office.

Diagrams, 1950s–1990s

The older diagram of the party system from 1930, which had been revised to include new presidents, was, after the 1948 elections, replaced by a new one labelled "Major Political Parties in the United States."[99] Here Democrats and Republicans were portrayed as two columns, with time flowing downward, and no minor parties were included.

By 1956, the diagram of the major parties was complemented by a new diagram of "Major and Minor American Political Parties" (Figure 4).[100] It was tilted 90 degrees and ran as multiple timelines up along the page. In contrast to Houghton's horizontal diagram from 1880, the party in power was signified not through the primary metaphor Control is Up, but through Good is Bright/Bad is Dark. However, the distinction between the major and minor parties was conveyed both through spatial location (Control is Up) and size (Important is Big). The caption stated that all elections except 1820 had been contested by two major parties and that the number of minor parties had increased. In the 1961 edition, the older diagram of the two major parties was removed, and only the newer diagram of major and minor parties remained.[101]

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95 Magruder (1980), 185.

96 Magruder and Shea (2016), 506; Magruder and Shea (2023), 566
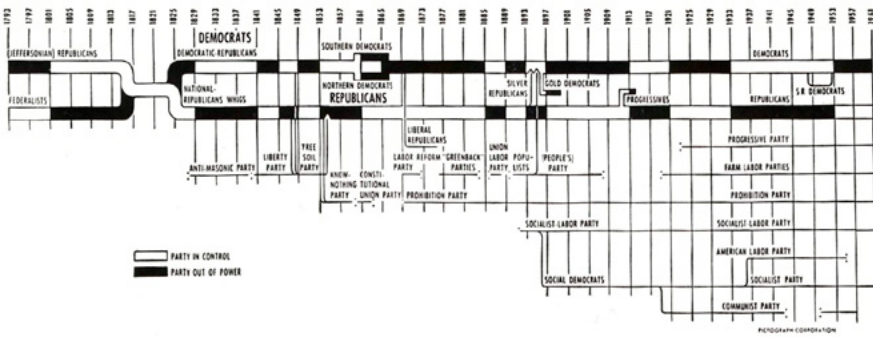
97 Hall and O'Shea (2013).

98 Magruder and Shea (2016), 507; Magruder and Shea (2023), 567.

99 Magruder (1951), 423.

100   Magruder (1956), 416.

101   Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1961), 416.

MAJOR AND MINOR AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES
With the exception of the election of 1820, every Presidential election has been contested by two major parties. Notice the growth of minor parties since their beginning in 1829.

Figure 4. American parties. Source: Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder´s American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1961), 416. Original tilted 90 degrees.

By 1964, the horizontal diagrams of the two-party system had disappeared, and a new type of diagram emerged (Figure 5). It included both major and minor parties, but in some aspects, the two-party system was portrayed as more self-evident than ever. The importance of the two major parties was conveyed visually not only through the primary metaphor Important is Big, but also through spatial agency bias by placing them to the left, where powerful actors are normally located. In addition, since Houghton in 1880, all diagrams of US parties had visualised the "Era of Good Feeling" in the 1820s, when there was only one party, by twisting or connecting the ribbons or columns representing the parties. However, the 1964 version merely portrayed it as a small gap in the column of what would later become the Republican Party, creating an image of the party histories as two chimney pipes leading straight from the 1790s to the present.[102] From the 1967 edition, the minor parties were removed from the actual diagram and placed in a small table to the right.[103]

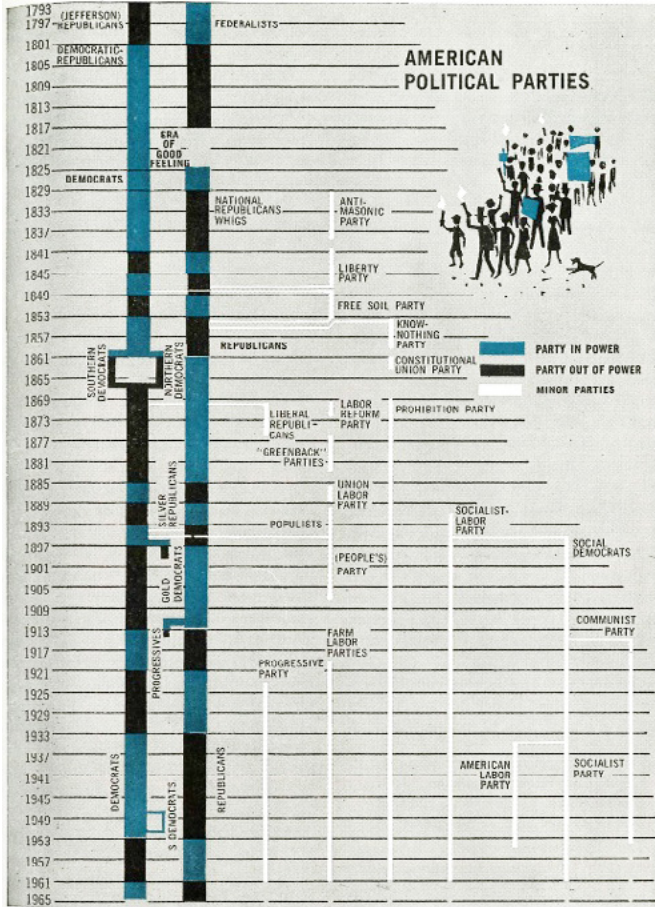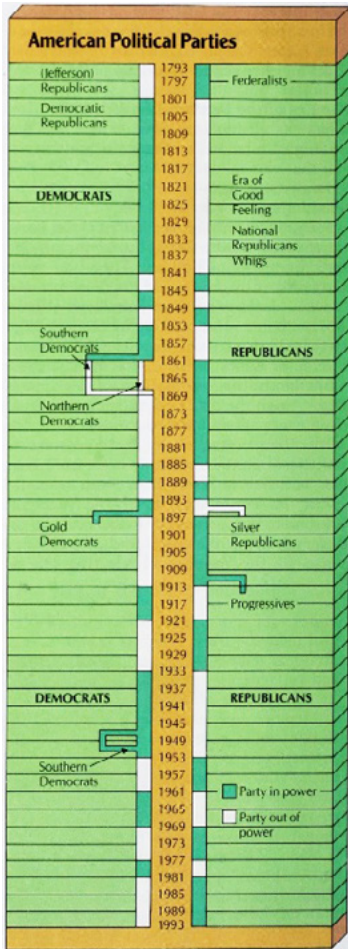102 Magruder (1964), 127.

103 Ibid.

Figure 5. American political parties. Source: Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder´s American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1964), 127.

This type of diagram remained in the textbook until the late 1980s. By 1991, it was succeeded by a new type of 3D block diagram (Figure 6). As its predecessor, it was labelled "American Political Parties," but in addition to some short offshoots from the stems of the two major parties, it did not contain any information about the minor parties. Additionally, although the one-party "Era of Good Feeling" was still written into the diagram in 1991, the uninterrupted columns gave the impression that there had been a continuity of two parties also in the 1820s. The "Era of Good Feeling" disappeared entirely in 1992 (Figure 7).[104] This was the peak of a development of spatial models that gradually established it as common sense that the United States has always had a two-party system. It also corresponded with the "force of tradition" explanation for why the US had a two-party system which had been introduced in the 1980s.

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104 Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1985), 176; Magruder (1991), 190; Magruder (1992), 111.

Figure 6. American political parties. Source: Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder´s American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 1991), 190.

The 1991 diagram was projected on a three-dimensional block, and the following year, each party occupied its own 3D block. In neither of these diagrams did the third dimension convey any information, and in 1992, the two blocks were oriented and shadowed in opposing directions, creating a confusing optical effect. A common principle of information visualisation is to display as much information as possible with as little ink as possible. In this respect, the 3D layout was a step backward. According to Tufte, the emergence of computerised publishing led to an increase in diagrams with unnecessary chart junk because it became much easier to produce. He claims that the journal *American Education* was particularly plagued by weird three-dimensional displays.[105] Apparently, American textbooks underwent similar development.

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105 Edward R. Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information,* 2nd ed. (Cheshire: Graphics Press, 2001), 116–20.

Another sign of the deteriorating quality of the diagrams was that they were no longer directly updated after new elections, as was the case from the first diagram in 1930 up until this time. For example, the double 3D-block diagram was not updated with the Clinton victory in the 1992 election but was an exact reprint of the first version of the diagram until an update was made after two elections in 1997.[106]
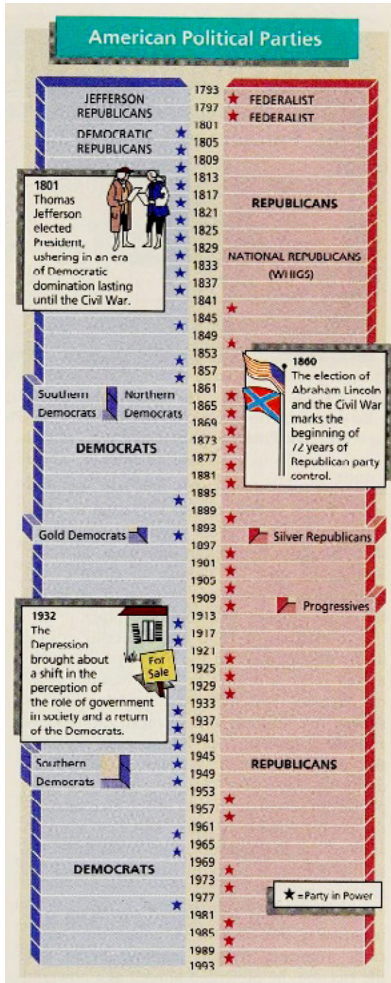

Figure 7. American political parties. Source: Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder´s American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 1992), 111.

The 1992 diagram also highlighted the years 1801, 1860, and 1932. These were associated with the beginning of new periods in the history of the party system.

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106 Magruder (1996), 111; Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 1997), 111

Redefining the Eras of the Party System, 1980–

By 1980, a chapter called "The Evolution of the Two-Party System" had been introduced. It divided the history of the US party system into three periods, "The Era of the Democrats, 1800–1860," "The Era of the Republicans, 1860–1932," and "The Return of the Democrats, 1932 to Date."[107] The victory of Jimmy Carter in 1976 was still in the 1980 edition taken as proof for the continuation of the Democratic era. However, later editions changed the name of the last era to "The Return of the Democrats, 1932 to ???" Reflecting the question marks, the textbook asked the rhetorical question whether the Republican Ronald Reagan's victory in 1980 was the beginning of a new era but concluded that it was too early to decide.[108]

After Reagan's re-election in 1984, the textbook again cautioned to wait and see if a new era had arrived. Still in 1991 there was a question mark at the end of the last era, but the text claimed that the re-election of Reagan in 1984 and election of Bush in 1988 supported the claim that the majority now favoured conservative rather than liberal stands on most public policy questions.[109]

In 1992, the textbook finally found an end year for "The Return of the Democrats:" 1968. The following period, named "The Start of a New Era," was characterised by divided government, with different parties in possession of the presidency and the majority in Congress. This period was, according to the textbook, unprecedented in US history, as victory in the presidential race had generally helped parties gain a majority in Congress.[110]

Divided government was hotly debated among political scientists around that time and was thoroughly investigated by Gary C. Jacobson. However, already after one year, the textbook claimed that Clinton's victory in 1992 ended the era of divided government since he was supported by a Democratic majority in Congress.[111]

This was again overturned by the Republican victory in the 1994 midterms. That divided government had returned was considered so important that it was printed on the very first page of the book, as well as in the chapter on the history of the two-party system. Thereafter, the period from 1968 was consistently described as one of divided government until the subchapter disappeared from the textbook.[112]

From 2002, a horizontal timeline of the four eras of political parties replaced the columns of the two parties (Figure 8). An updated version of this timeline was still in use until 2007.[113] However, from 2009, it ceased to be a detailed timeline and was transformed into a series of images that represented the four eras (Figure 9).

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107 Magruder (1980), 189–93.

108 Magruder (1983), 175–79.

109 Magruder (1985), 179; Magruder (1991), 191.

110 Magruder (1992), 112–14.

111 Gary C. Jacobson, *The Electoral Origins of Divided Government: Competition in U.S. House Elections, 1946–1988* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990); Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder's American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 1993), 110–14.

112 Magruder (1996), i, 112; Magruder, McClenaghan and Pearson Education (2011), 135.

113 Frank Abbott Magruder and William A. McClenaghan, *Magruder's American Government* (Boston, MA: Prentice Hall, 2007), 128–29.
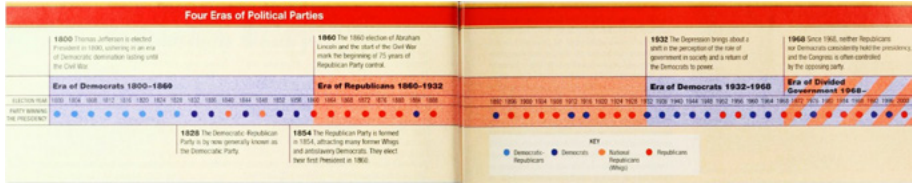
Figure 8. Four eras of political parties. Called a timeline in Frank Abbott Magruder, *Magruder´s American Government*, rev. William A. McClenaghan (Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 2002), 128–29.

Figure 9. Four eras of political parties. Source: Frank Abbott Magruder and William A. McClenaghan, *Magruder's American Government* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 134–35.

The replacement of the double timeline of the two major parties by a single in the 2000s took place after the idea that the US had always been a two-party system was cemented in the 1990s. Perhaps the two-party system was now so common sensical that a double timeline seemed superfluous. If it is self-evident that there are only two-party parties, you can conclude who is out of power by looking at who is in power. The double timeline originated in an era where many parties were still relevant, and it developed to give pre-eminence to the two most important of them. However, when the two-party system was firmly established as common sense knowledge and all minor parties were removed, a double timeline did no longer convey more information than a single timeline.

However, by 2016, the entire subchapter on the eras of the party system disappeared, and the image timeline of the party system was replaced by a link to an interactive timeline in the online material.[114] This development is probably linked to the increased scepticism towards the US party system revealed in the texts at the same time.

Conclusion

Textbook diagrams played a pivotal role in transforming the idea that the US is a "two-party system" into common-sense knowledge. They did so by providing the concept with a tangible spatial form: the double timeline. It took some time before the idea of a two-party system became a catchphrase in US textbooks. The first edition of Magruder's *American Government* from 1917 warned of one-party dominance and talked about the four leading parties. However, for each edition in the 1920s, increasing focus was placed on Republicans and Democrats, and what became described as the "minor parties" faded into the background. The concept "two-party system" first appeared in 1930, together with the first double timeline diagram. The explanations for why the US have a two-party system have varied. Beginning in 1939, the two-party system was described as particular to English-speaking countries, and it was contrasted

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114 Magruder and Shea (2016), 516.

with the chaotic multiparty systems in continental Europe, portrayed as fertile ground for populist dictators. Even after the beginning of the Cold War, European multiparty systems rather than the Soviet one-party system were described as antitheses of the US two-party system. Until the 1980s, the one-party system was also described as part of contemporary US government at the state level.

The link between the two-party system and the English language was replaced by other explanations in the mid-1950s. One, referring to the newly coined Duverger's Law, claimed that the two-party system was a result of the US election system. Another explanation claimed that the system with two more or less similar parties with small ideological differences reflected the homogeneity of the US electorate. With time, the two-party systems old roots also appeared as an explanation: It was there because it always had been. Only in the 2010s was a more critical explanation added: the major parties were issuing legislation that made it difficult for third parties to operate. With time, an increasing number of cracks also appeared in the argument that the US electorate and parties are homogeneous with few ideological differences. Although the 2023 edition of the textbook suggests that the extreme left and right might have taken over the parties, it still supposes that the two-party system will somehow work its magic and produce moderate policies. Thus, the two-party system is no longer seen as a manifestation of the unity of the American people but rather as a Band-Aid for its division.

The minor parties have generally been described positively, and the idea that votes for third parties are wasted never caught on in the textbook. Although not recognised as important political forces by themselves, minor parties have been seen as generators of ideas to be adopted by the major parties. However, after the 1948 election, where the Progressive Party's candidate was supported by communists, a quarter century followed when minor parties were also associated with radicalism and revolution.

In the earliest diagram of the US party system in 1880, Houghton represented it as a chaotic meandering of lines. It was clearly not a diagram of a two-party system or of any orderly system at all. The first diagram of the party system in *Magruder's American Government* appeared in 1930, and the first use of the concept "two-party system" occurred in the legend of that diagram. The diagrams of the two-party system in *Magruder's American Government* are much simpler than that of Houghton. The party histories were mostly represented by straight lines, and although some of the diagrams also followed the trajectories of the minor parties, a clear difference was made between them and the two major parties. This was done through a distinction between thin lines and broad columns, (appealing to the primary metaphor Important is Big), by central location, (Important is Central), by position on top (Control is Up), or through position to the left (where spatial agency bias make us perceive actors as powerful).

While Houghton's diagram was a quantitative data visualisation of voter support for different parties, the textbook diagrams were qualitative representations of the two-party system idea. The diagrams became simplified with time, a development that peaked in the 1990s. Then, no minor parties were represented, and in 1992 the single-party "Era of Good Feeling" in the 1820s was completely eradicated from the diagram.

This was the last step in a gradual establishment of a spatial model of the two-party system where two straight columns lead from the beginning of US history until the present. That this kind of model has for generations been presented in the most commonly used government textbook in the country is likely to have contributed to establishing the US two-party system as common-sense knowledge. In addition,

the spread of seemingly neutral and objective diagrams might have contributed to the establishment of the two-party system as a scientific truth. In this respect, they complemented Duverger's testable hypotheses and Downs's economic calculations.[115]

The disappearance of timelines of the party system from Magruder occurred in step with the decrease in confidence in the two-party system revealed by the text. Similar diagrams have survived longer in some competing books, such as that of Wilson, DiIulio, Bose, and Levendusky. However, that diagram is found in the chapter "The Rise and Decline of the Political Party," which also tells a story of polarisation and crisis.[116]

Earlier research on textbooks have mainly focused on texts, while diagrams have often been overlooked, or analysed without help of proper methods. This study has illustrated that conceptual changes are better understood through analysis of the spatial analogies provided by the accompanying diagrams. However, this method requires an understanding of the cognitive principles behind diagram construction.

Acknowledgements

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115 Disch (2002), 73–79.

116 James Q. Wilson et al., *American Government: Institutions and Policies* (Boston: Cengage, 2022), 197.

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