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**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast that is provided for you by the Department of Government at Minnesota State University, Mankato located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson the chairperson of the Government Department. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics about government. Some may be surprising to you and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to episode three of the Let's Talk Government Podcast. Today we're going to discuss Democrats and Republicans. What is the difference? I'm joined by Dr. Kevin Parson now and Dr. Fred Slocomb from the political science program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Dr. Kevin Parsneau is in his 14th year as a professor of the political science at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He focuses on the presidency, executive branch, and elections in his research. Dr. Fred Slocum is in his 23rd year as an associate professor of political science at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Dr. Slocum focuses on southern politics, and race ethnicity, and politics in his research. Thank you for joining me today. So, I'm going to turn it over to Kevin to start off our conversation here.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Alright. Thanks. I appreciate it. I asked to do a disclaimer at the beginning of this because probably both Dr. Solcum and I will make some. We will be using the terms Republican and Democrat, and sometimes these can mean different things. And, in some cases it could be talking about Republicans or Democrats. People who vote for or generally vote for either the party might be talking about Republicans or Democrats in terms of the actual officials and so forth. Where members of the DFL and work as precinct committee people all the way up to the chair of the DNC or the chair of the RNC, and sometimes we might be talking about Democrats and Republicans in terms of people who actually hold office. These are all different terms. But we just say Republicans so if there's some confusion, I apologize. But It's just a general thing. Who are Democrats? Well, all those groups. Who are Republicans? during all those groups and we just use the term interchangeably. I hope there's not too much confusion. I appreciate it.

**Dr. Nelson:** Alright. Well, we're going to start off this conversation kind of talking about some geographic realignment of both parties over time. Fred do you wanna start us off with that?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Yeah, certainly. Thank you Pat. You know, historically, you know, the parties have had the Democratic and Republican parties have had very different geographic coalitions in the US. In the middle decades of the 20th century the Democrats were generally the dominant party in national politics, and the Republicans relatively stronger areas where in the mostly the rural northeastern states and parts of the Midwest. And the Democrats tended to be dominant elsewhere in the country. Particularly, in the south and the border states. And all the Democrats also, evidence very, you know, great strength and the nation's larger cities and such as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and so on. In parts due to the strength of urban political machines that ran those cities which tended to be Democratic machines for the most part. The beginning in the 1960s there was a market sea change. The biggest change, I think was the was the steady erosion of the Democratic party's strength in the South. Particularly among white southerners. Many white southerners were honestly speaking enraged at the passage of federal civil rights legislation. In 1964 IE the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the passage of the civil rights laws as well as fair housing legislation in 1968 was bipartisan in Congress. It was a coalition of northern Republicans and northern Democrats that was able to pass those pieces of civil rights legislation. Southern Democrats, who were numerous in Congress at the time in fact the occupying most of South congressional seats were generally lined up in fierce opposition to the civil rights laws including even a 24 hour plus filibuster by senator Strom Thurmond oven early 1957 civil rights bill. Filibusters of these Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were able to be overcome by relation of northern Republicans and northern Democrats.

**Dr Nelson:** So, have there been any more recent demographics shifts. You were talking about the 1960s or how about more recent?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** There have been. There have been but the three has been a study erosion of the Democratic party's support among white southerners. It did not take place all at once, but it took place in various stages. But there were kind of waves or surges of Republican advancement in the South. Most notably the 1980 election when Reagan was first elected. The 1994 midterm election in which Bill Clinton and the Democrats got a tremendous repudiation in the national anthem midterm elections that year in the house and the Senate. In 1994, most the House and Senate delegations of the southern states flipped from Democratic to Republican controlled and the Republicans have never relinquished their southern congressional majorities sense and other chamber. The 2000, and 2002, and 2004 elections reinforced white southern support for the Republicans under George W Bush and the War on Terror era. And then finally backlash against Barack Obama and most of the South outside of some of the Atlantic coastal southern states like Virginia, and Florida. Pushed white southerners further into the Republican Party. And then another change is the rise of the religious right and the Republican Party attracted nationwide support, but it attracted especially strong support in the South. And conservative white Protestant evangelicals are now thoroughly a lopsidedly Republican constituency.

**Dr. Nelson:** That is a lot of change definitely overtime here. So, Kevin would you like to start us off talking about, you know, who are the Democrats? What are their ideologies?

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Well, I mean generally speaking when you talk about aitiology somebody who's what might be referred to as a liberal or an American liberal is going to generally line up with the Democratic Party. And somebody who's a conservative or American conservative I don't want to confuse with European Conservatives here, but they would generally line up Republican Party. Although, to some degree you might argue that some of the ideas that Donald Trump is brought in whether they're more conservative or something else. Gets argued among Republicans right now. So, that more less gets to more or less gets to the idea that there are Republicans who are sort of different prior to Trump and after Trump. But, generally speaking I think that the consistent pattern throughout that whole era at least in the modern time period after the realignment is Republicans are very much aligned with the evangelical or religious right. They are very anti-choice or pro-abortion depending on how you want to word that. They support ideas of traditional marriage, you know, one man one woman and sort of oppose LGBTQ rights, favoring those sorts of issues. And another consistent thing for the last at least 30 years or so have been the alignment between the Republican Party, and pro-gun groups like the NRA such that you used to have a lot of Democrats and Republicans on both sides of these issues and increasingly if you if a candidate is Republican, you can pretty much count on him being pro-life and pro Second Amendment Anna Democrat is probably almost certainly pro-choice. And then depending upon regionally they would be either supportive of this of gun control or less strongly opposed to control. I think on other issues, Republicans have generally been more opposed to regulation of trade, regulation of business, environmental laws. On the other hand, Democrats are more supportive of regulations of businesses whether you're talking banking or environmental laws. Let's see, I guess

**Dr. Nelson:** What about social issues. Yeah, like social issues like civil rights and

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Civil rights as Fred mentioned, civil rights used to divide the Republican and Democratic Party because the Democrats had a lot of people who are pro civil rights Kennedy Johnson, govern, these guys. And, they also had a lot of people who opposed civil rights, but now civil rights have gone pretty strongly in the direction of the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. Republicans had a lot of very strong civil rights advocates for a long time, but they are less so now. Perhaps the argument is, you know, voting rights ,civil rights have been established well enough that they're not under debate as many Republicans and Democrats disagree on this.

**De. Nelson:** So what about the issue of immigration? That seems to be one that divides between the two parties.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Well, I mean immigration from long time immigration was to some degree of bipartisan issue. If they could have just found a solution, that made enough of the voters in enough one of the regions because both Democrats and Republicans were looking for sort of solutions to undocumented workers and this situation because there was a need for employees, there was a need for I guess relatively located labor in the add community. And even as recently as George W Bush, a Republican president tried to find ways as had Clinton to get people who have immigrated illegally into the workforce. And I guess the terminology now is passed the citizenship of course Trump when he ran, he essentially announced in his very first speech he's gonna not go along with that route. Where the Republican Party was at the Democratic Party, and he's been very strongly anti-immigration it should be added that Obama was pretty strict on immigration for a Democrat.

**Dr. Nelson:** Fred, do you have any thoughts on this?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Absolutely. I think the immigration issue is a clear cut issue where there has been there have been differences emerging between the Republican base. What cabin referred to as the party of the Republican Party in the electorate and Republican officeholders which were evident, I think during the Bush presidencies, and at least the first half of the Bush presidency in at least the first half of the Obama presidency. During that era, you know, president then President George W Bush and a number of congressional Republicans including senator now the late Senator John McCain of Arizona, and some other Republicans abdicated comprehensive immigration reform which generally entails a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants already in the country plus enhanced border security measures and possibly other measures like verify. And the prent even during the Bush and Obama presidencies, there was some congressional support. Even among Republicans, for comprehensive immigration reform as I've just described. However, they faced Republican Congress members particularly in the House of Representatives, who were newly empowered after the 2010 Republican tidal wave that brought in 63 new House members, and also, the Tea Party. The Republican House members got ferocious pushback from their constituents. Who regularly denounced but, you know, what they called amnesty for illegal immigrants? And, so, the pushback from Republicans in mostly Republican held congressional districts was no amnesty for illegals. And that pressure was enough to scuttle comprehensive immigration reform in the house. Fast forward to 2012 and after Mitt Romney lost his real lost his bid to unseat Barack Obama, and Obama was elected to a second term. The Republicans produced an internal document called the growth and opportunity project. Which was an internal memo but although I'll be a widely publicized that urged Republicans to take a more accommodating stance on immigration, and also, make more concerted appeals to young people, to racial and ethnic minorities because the party risk becoming too disproportionately old white and angry. And as one senator, I believe it was Lindsey Graham who said we there aren't enough angry old white guys are angry white guys to make us as a majority party in the long term future. He said something like that I don't have the exact quote in front of me, but it was very close to that.

**Dr. Nelson:** Before you get too far along, can we go back for a second? Can you explain how the Tea Party is different from mainstream Republicans? I know you mentioned it and be a good one to bring up here.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** The Tea Party was an antigovernment offshoot of the Republican Party. Ostensibly, antigovernment desiring to cut the scope and reach of government and slash taxes. Further research into the Tea Party however, showed that it had considerable overlap with desire to curb immigration and also overlap with the religious right. And many tea party algin’s members of Congress and other elected officials. Such as Rick Murdock of Indiana who famously said that if a woman was raped and got pregnant from that rape, that the child that would be born was basically God's creation. He was a tea party stalwart. So was Michelle Bachman former US representative from Minnesota. Many tea party align's members of Congress also in strongly endorsed positions and the ideology of the religious right. The Tea Party I think represents a movement within the Republican Party that emphasize I think some degree of resentment towards racial and ethnic minorities, and also, resentment against young people a sense that young people are privileged and entitled then don't work hard enough. That was borne out by research out of Harvard University.

**Dr. Nelson:** Go ahead Kevin

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** I was just gonna say, I think there was also a side of it that there were a group of voters that maybe make up some of Trump's base a sort of populist base among the Republican Party voters who felt. That their votes were being used like they were voting for Republicans, and then they weren't getting the kinds of policies they wanted. So, it was passing I know nothing goes away on the Internet. I have not looked at YouTube but if anybody's ever wanna see some like some insane videos that are just really will tell you something about the party operations and internal changes within a party, go watch some of those town Hall meetings of Republicans going back to their districts. And some of the Democrats going back to their districts after the Tea Party was mobilized and the people are just confronting them. In a way I mean in a sense it was like a real civics lesson. Ordinary people telling their members of Congress I voted for you and you're not doing what I wanted. So it's really fast. I don't know if it's still on YouTube. Again, take a look.

**Dr. Nelson:** So is there a similar kind of splinter group within the Democratic Party that pushes an agenda like the Tea Party did it in the Republican Party.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** I mean I think to somebody

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Bernie Sanders supporters I think

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** yeah, I wouldn’t wanna compare the two in the sense of belief and other things, but I think the Democratic Socialists, Bernie Sanders, people are similar in the sense that they sort of alignment the party, but they don't they aren't as committed to it. And they're really saying the party leadership is not listening. We want this and you're giving us this. We want Bernie’s policies and you're giving us Hillary Clinton’s policies or the Clinton policies. I shouldn't say Hillary Clinton. She wasn't a president.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, before we kind of go into this specific here, how about foreign policy. What are the differences in between Democrats and Republicans in the ideas of foreign policy?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** That I think has evolved overtime. Historically, the Republicans long had branded themselves as the as the more stoutly anticommunist of the two parties, and this was during the Cold War era roughly 1945 to 1991 when communism fell in the former Soviet Union. And I think that foreign policy differences became somewhat more muted after the downfall of communism in most of the world. I'll be at, you know, still present in China and in North Korea today and in Cuba. But, you know, the old Cold War issues have are not as prominent now. And some analysis I've seen suggests that particularly on the American right they needed a new bugaboo, a new movement to line up against. Once communism became less prominent on the world stage, and that that movement was the environmentalist’s environmentalism. So, the Republican the Republican Party did in fact move well to the right on environmental issues as Kevin has insinuated. And that remains the case today the Republican Party today thoroughly is a very anti-environmental party in terms of hostility to environmental regulations and hostility towards government agencies that enforce environmental regulations most notably the EPA the Environmental Protection Agency. But, in another, you know, coming back to foreign policy generally, I think Republicans have advocated a more aggressive U.S. policy overseas, more willing to engage in wars overseas. The Republicans I think experienced a period of advantage on this issue after the September 11th attacks in 2001. George W Bush then launched the War on Terror, declared Iran Iraq and Libya at I'm sorry Iran Iraq and North Korea an axis of evil and then launched the Iraq war in 2003. The war of course became more controversial overtime and Bush's approval ratings slid significantly during his second term as the war became more and more unpopular and helped created a climate in which Barack Obama was rather comfortably elected in 2008. And then more recently I think during the during the Bush and even more so during the Trump presidency is Republicans and Democrats are have distinguished themselves in policy towards the Middle East. Particularly, towards Israel and during the Bush and Trump presidencies, Republican administrations have abandoned the usual status possession of the US being a neutral power broker between the Israelis and the Palestinians. And both the Bush and Trump presidencies have been markedly pro-Israeli and basically have been kicking the Palestinians in the teeth.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** There's also, I mean I guess in some sense is that the two parties have seemed to realign in terms of engaging in sort of more focus on diplomacy than the military in other countries. Whereas like as you look at it like working with our allies right, working with Germany, working with France, working with European allies from NATO which we don’t have to go back too far back. George Herbert Walker Bush put together this big coalition to go against Saddam Hussein. And he was very much into engaging the rest of the world and bringing everybody along. George W Bush did that but after as other allies sort of dropped out of that he wasn't as concerned. But Democrats throughout this time period have been pretty consistent about, OK we're about engaging with the other countries, it's working with our allies, negotiating with Iran instead of trying to apply military pressure or a trade pressure. Trade pressures seem like more of the means to get Iran to give up its nuclear policy rather than the way that the trump administration is used it to sort of punish them until they just submit to whatever apparently, they want. So, I guess the main thing here is that Republicans that had been both working with allies and being militarily more aggressive, but they've sort of dropped off that idea of working with allies, and they've stuck more with the idea of military aggression until Trump, right? Not that Trump doesn't use the military, but, you know, Trump has said he opposed the Iraq war. At the time he wasn't so clear about that, but he doesn't he know that was a dumb idea he's criticized George W Bush on it. And so, we're not really sure whether the Republican Party is on that whereas Democrats have been pretty consistent.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, let's talk about the last two terms of presidency here. So, President Barack Obama to serve two terms as a Democratic president. Were there really any changes in ideology or the focus of the Democratic Party before President Barack Obama was elected versus after?

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** That might depend on how you look at some issues. I mean now, like I mentioned that the LGBTQ community and same sex marriage and so forth. If you go back to before Barack Obama was president, yes, the Democratic Party was more pro LGBTQ community protections for gay people. Barack Obama opposed same sex marriage and the don't ask don't tell was put in place by Bill Clinton, right. If you heard talk about it, that would sound like that was something that some Republican did, but no that was something a Democrat

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** It's important to recognize that don't ask don't tell what it replaces. When it replaced was a flat out ban on LGBTs in military service. So don't ask, don’t tell with the middle ground between you know between what the LGBT community wanted and what comes in a drama's in the 1992 campaign. And then on the other end of the spectrum you have the religious right and social Conservatives. And at that time military leaders who were saying no we want, you know, a maximum exclusion of LGBT people from the military and so don't ask don't tell was a middle ground.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, Kevin your microphone kind of went strange there. But what were you acknowledging about Fred's comment about don’t ask don't tell?

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Well, yeah. He's right that the don't ask don't tell replaced that gay people... My only point was to hear the discussion of that would have made one thing that that was some policy by Republican, or I should say Conservatives when it was actually it was actually Bill Clinton, and then the Defense of Marriage act right that was also during the Bill Clinton administration. The reason I'm making this point was those projections were seen as moderate or liberal 20-30 years ago. Whereas now those positions would not be seen that way. Right now, you'd expect that somebody would say, or the liberal position is every you know everybody should get to marry whomever they want and so I don't remember the original point.

**Dr. Nelson:** No, that’s alright. You actually brought us back around. Well, so I had asked about the presidency President Barack Obama. So, let's switch into our current presidency. Let's talk about has there been a change in the Republican Party before President Donald Trump and then after? And if so, what have you guys seen?

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Well, I think I might have mentioned some of that and in one sense. Donald Trump has been very critical of the Iraq war which most Republicans were very much on board for. And he has also pretty much changed to move away from some sort of compromise on immigration to very strict anti-immigration. Thirdly, the traditional role of the Republican Party has been to be very much in favor of free trade and doing trade deals and Donald Trump has called himself Mr. tariff or whatever he called himself. But he's come out very strongly the idea that I'm the president. I'm gonna put tariffs on anybody I don't like. And he doesn't seem to have a whole lot of commitment to the ideas of free trade. He thinks of trade, he seems to think of trade as a 0 sum game. If America of America is not making more money than China than China must be making more money at the expense of America. So, you gotta do something about it. I think those are probably some of the bigger differences between the Trump administration and the sort of divergent from previous Republicans. Can you think of any Fred? I'm sorry.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** During the 2016 campaign, Trump came out swinging against immigrants, came out swinging against Muslims, said “I think Islam hates us,” proposed a total ban on Muslims entering the country. You know, I think the party was already changing the Republican base was already changing in these directions and Trump just picked up on those currents. Cumulatively and collectively, you know, you have an overwhelmingly White Party who survey research shows a great deal of resentment against immigrants within and resentment also against Muslims gravitating towards Donald Trump. Not holding their nose and response to his rhetoric about Muslims and immigrants about Mexicans being criminals and rapists but because of it. Trump was saying exactly what large sections large sectors of the white Republican base wanted to hear. And so, I don't think. I think trump was kind of riding a wave of anti-immigrants, an anti-Mexican immigrant, especially an anti-Muslim resentment that already has been gathering in the Republican Party for a long time. So, and I think the party as a whole has continued to move in that direction.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, there's obviously some differences here and we see that currently at the national level we have a house that's controlled by Democrats, and the Senate that's controlled by Republicans. And we're dealing with the pandemic. We're dealing with an economic downturn because of the pandemic. What do you see the differences in the ideology? How would that control the house and the Senate because we know the president is one person in charge of the executive branch, but what about our congressional or legislative branch here? I know I kind of put you on the spot with that a little bit. Why don't they get along? Why don't they share policy ideas if it's going to help the American people?

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** This might be something that Fred knows more about than me. I know on the one front; the parties are diverging, and they have been diverging along ideological lines. There is just no ideological overlap. Political science has a measure of this. It's called DW nominate scores and the division between the two parties is farther than ever before. And it used to be that there would be some moderate, or liberal Republicans that were more liberal than conservative democrats. Which gave a Democratic House Majority Leader, or Republican House Majority Leader, Senate Majority, or the president, some people on the other side to talk to and try and minimize, and those people are not there anymore. There's no overlap between the two parties. You look from the data from full and Rosenthal. They're just completely two separate blocks of people. And on the one hand everyone goes like “Why don't they work together? Like it is a lot easier to work together if you've got somebody you can talk to” right? Voters have not sent people to Congress that the other side can work with. So, on the one hand, the fact that they're both sort of more liberal and more conservative than ever before that makes it impossible to strike deals right. And so, if one party owns the house, and the other party control the house, and the other party controls the Senate, they're not going to work together. We're going to get Congress not doing anything with the flip side of this one of the causes that I think is probably the case is the nationalization of congressional elections. House Speaker tip O'Neill from back in the glory days of the 70s and 80s always said politics is local. But the politics are local anymore. Democrats and Republicans are voting on nationalized issues, about national things. It doesn't matter as much if your local member of Congress, got some good deals and met with you. He or she is probably voting with their party at the congressional level. So, if you're a Democrat, you're not going to vote for a Republican. If you're Republican, you're not going to vote for a Democrat. And so, we sent these two caucuses though. I mean I guess I'm little blame on the voters here. They both send caucuses to Congress that say, “compromise with the other side is giving him too things we can't possibly stand so you should never compromise.” And people who compromise are the ones that get thrown out. That's the weird thing because they live in districts where they're in the middle and the middle shifts. Anyway, I'm getting a little bit too much into this

**Dr. Nelson:** No, that’s perfect. Fred, how about you? Any ideas on this?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Sure, I was going to offer some insight into how this has happened. Generally speaking, just be brief about this, the once large contingent of southern Democrats in Congress has been systematically gutted out by election defeats, retirements, and Republican realignment among white southerners. And about the only Democrats outside of the more liberal southern states Virginia, and maybe Virginia is the only one these days. Outside of perhaps Virginia, the congressional delegations of southern states now consist of lopsided majorities of white, mostly male, very right wing Republicans in most districts. Often every district in some states except for one. And then generally black or of color Democrats there in the five deep south states. The last five deep south states are South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The last white Democrat lost his seat in 2014 to a white Republican, and I will have to double check, but I think there are either no or next to no white Democrats representing the Deep South anymore in Congress. The southern states mostly are representing, their districts their congressional districts are mostly represented either by generally black, sometimes Latino, Democrats in majority and minority districts or a heavily white districts generally white Republicans. Large majority of them ate white male Republicans. And the latter are extremely conservative and the former representatives representing majority minority districts are they generally themselves out of color and are fairly liberal.

**Dr. Nelson:** Thank you gentlemen. Thank you for letting me put you on the spot. I know we have 1000 other things we can discuss all. You'll be definitely coming back for more podcast, but I appreciate your time for talking about democrats and republicans, and here are some of the differences and I hope that our listeners do as well.

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Thank you for listening to this episode of Let's Talk Government. If you have suggestions for future episode topics or other areas, you'd like us to cover, please visit our website at link.msu.edu\let'stalkgov to submit your ideas. Join us every Tuesday for a new episode and thank you for listening.