

OTDK Thesis

**Unanchored Democracy: Crisis and the Contestation of the Core Concept of
Democracy in the United States**

Jelige: V775UQ

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Abstract

The history of the United States, like any society's, is riddled with conflicts, except in the case of the U.S., these conflicts were framed in a democratic framework from the beginning. This paper will explore how a democratic polity organizes society and how it relates to conflict and contestation by comparing the Populist-Progressive and post-2008 Tea Party eras. The paper introduces the concepts of unanchoring and unanchored democracy as an analytical framework for conflicts directed against the core concept of democracy which is intersubjectively shared between the whole society and the fundament of the organization of a democratic society. The implicit aim is to establish a diachronic-synchronic framework for analyzing conflict in democratic societies and its transformative effect on the political system and historical events, thus creating a new type of periodization of U.S. history based upon the interdisciplinary framework that synthesis Political Theory with History.

Keywords: The United States, unanchored democracy, democratic theory, Populist Party, Tea Party, Theodore Roosevelt, William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson, conflict and contestation

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1. Introduction

On the night of the 15th of July, 1979, President Jimmy Carter delivered his grim “crisis of confidence” speech¹. The speech was urgent not just from the standpoint of political strategy but to prevent panic and social disorder, as everyday struggles and discontent of the American people bled into their perceptions of the United States as a country and society, an often-observed phenomenon during times of severe crisis. Carter spoke about “deeper” problems than the immediate policy questions the nation was facing during that time; he pointed at a “nearly invisible enemy.” An enemy that affects the metaphysical dimensions of a – democratic – society, entities such as the “soul, spirit, national will, meaning, and purpose,” ultimately the American government and the American Dream. The narrative fit into Carter’s populist and down-to-the-people approach to politics; nevertheless, he had to address the energy crisis and policy questions too. The unorthodox speech resulted in one of the swiftest and most significant boosts in a president’s approval rating². Still, due to domestic and foreign policy failures, this sudden impetus came to a similarly premature end with Ronald Reagan’s sweeping victory. In many senses, the United States of America changed forever from that point on, from the reinforced claim to global hegemony rise to domestic policy stance changes (taxation, social policy, relation to religion...) American politics and society alternated. In other ways, Carter fit into a long line of populist-progressive tradition that emerged at the turning of the 20th century, a specter of a different social shift from the past. Nevertheless, one other thing has also always loomed in the back ever since, this “invisible enemy” threatening democracy’s core. Current Americans face this threat just as much as Populists and Progressives did.

This crisis of the shared core conceptions of democracy will be the main object of this paper. Carter and many scholars of democratic theory in the academic field, political philosophy, and history tangentially identified and worked around this shared understanding and basic social construction of the democratic experience. However, most works that will be discussed later focus on defining democracy or establishing its dynamics (democratization, democratic governance, democratic erosion, etc.); these macro theories mainly approach their inquiry holistically and, as such, often will not focus on some underlying assumptions. Another

¹ *The New York Times*, “*Transcript of President’s Address to Country on Energy Problems*,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 1979, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/07/16/archives/transcript-of-presidents-address-to-country-on-energy-problems.html>.

² Adam Clymer, “*Speech Lifts Carter Rating to 37%; Public Agrees on Confidence Crisis*,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 1979, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/07/18/archives/speech-lifts-carter-rating-to-37-public-agrees-on-confidence-crisis.html>.

approach tries to establish a typology, which usually results in ever-growing democracy types with epithets³ that abandon macro theories and focus on individual countries, events, and periods. This paper does not develop a new subtype for democratic regimes. Instead, it seeks to refine macrotheoretical perspectives in examining a unique malfunction in democracy within a framework relying on the “floating but anchored” concept⁴ of Laurence Whitehead, bridging the theoretical and historical approaches. This malfunction is unanchoring, defined by the significant divergence between competing understandings of core democratic principles in a – democratic – society, which results in extraordinary social disorder by causing a rift between institutionalized notions and popular expectations that have become detached from these – hence the term “unanchoring.”

The core of the paper is divided into two larger chapters. The first part, Chapter 2, will discuss the problematics of defining and understanding democracy and the structural concept of unanchoring. Also, this chapter aims to establish a framework for understanding the process of unanchoring in a diachronic-synchronic framework. A crucial element will be the clarification of how democracy functions and is perceived currently and how this can change temporally and spatially; this will result in the separation of core and extra values of democracy which can serve well as a basis for comparative analysis.

In Chapter 3, the theory will be applied in the context of U.S. history, comparing two similar eras from a structural standpoint, the turning of the 20th and 21st centuries. The beginning of the 1900s brought unprecedented reforms in the function and values of American democracy and government, supported by the first modern mass movements, including agrarian, worker, franchise expansion, and temperance interests and demands. This pluralism was initiated by the Populist movement and partially peaked in the Progressive movement. The landscape of party structure and demand for change is a reasonable basis for analyzing and demonstrating changes in democratic perception. The 21st century, the time period of the second case study, offers a different direction in history, where conflict and contestation are strongly tied to one bloc of society and results in a regression to anachronic debates. The lopsided implementation of conservative doctrines, paired with the return to the foundational debates of the Republic, put the current contestation in a more antagonistic place by questioning the long line of changes that had happened since and diverting the discourse to the origins of the country itself,

³ Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Bertrand Badie, and Leonardo Morlino, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Political Science, 1st ed* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Inc, 2020), 731–34.

⁴ Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience, Reprinted, Oxford Studies in Democratization* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 6–26.

conceptualizing differently not just democracy, but the origin of the American society. Nevertheless, this paper's primary focus is not to point at "bad" and "good" events or actors but to examine the outcome and management of conflict and how different new perceptions integrate into the social and political system or break it. The theoretical blueprint outlined in Chapter 2 will be a suitable thread to narrate these societal changes. However, the comparison in this paper looks for the question of "Why?". Why do events play out in similar contexts differently in the 20th and *en route* to playing out quite differently in the 21st? This paper's aim is not to point at a single cause or person but to examine a phenomenon and its outcomes in a similar historical environment. More practically, this peeking from our past to our present offers a different understanding of our current possibilities.

2. Democratic society and conflicts

Understanding and especially defining democracy is a cumbersome and seemingly never-ending project of the discipline of political science. Some would say there are "as many theories about why democracies exist as there are definitions of what it is."⁵ As a result, temporarily hegemonic narratives and paradigms can emerge (in the case of democracy, this is closely synonymous with Robert Dahl and his work⁶), but a holistic and widely accepted definition has not been proposed thus far. Giovanni Sartori answers this conundrum by identifying the inner duality of the term and labeling democracy as a deontological entity affected by the "pull of an ought, and the resistance of an is."⁷ This phrasing highlights how often a term can not be separated from what it should be, and even scholars have to combat this dynamic. Thus, a normative and empirical framework emerges around defining democracy, as Sartori designates⁸ "bad realism" and "bad idealism," trying to balance out the more analytical and desired notions of democracy. This paper would like to strike a balance between the two "bads," similar to Sartori; however, another problem arises the pressure on scholars to designate democracy as a dichotomic or gradual term. As rightfully suggested by Collier and Adcock,⁹ the choice depends

⁵ Berg-Schlosser, Badie, and Morlino, *The Sage Handbook of Political Science*, 735.

⁶ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, *Political Science* (New Haven: Yale university press, 1971); Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁷ Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited Part One: The Contemporary Debate* (Chatham, N.J: Chatham House Publishers, 1987), 8.

⁸ Sartori, 39–85.

⁹ David Collier and Robert Adcock, "Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices About Concepts," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 537–65, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.537>.

on the research aims of the scholar. Nevertheless, the paper applies a mixture of a dichotomic and gradual approach to democracy to satisfy my research aim, which is to identify changes in democratic conceptualization on par with the contestation of the core principles of a democratic society. This paper's notion is somewhat in line with Sartori's assertion regarding gradualism and dichotomy: "deciding which logical treatment is appropriate for what purpose,"¹⁰ as cited by Collier and Adcock. Separating the core and contestable elements can establish a threshold and gradual development within democracies. However, examining this internal contestation, the processes of transformation, and the conflicts surrounding specific object(s) of contestation, this paper examines not just a linear interaction between events that may provide a new look at our existing democracies (polyarchies), how the internal continuities of these democracies are not just artificial but formulated by a multiplicity of actors who have the power to formulate it. Thus, this paper not solely looks at democratization as a process as Laurence Whitehead intended¹¹ but as a complex interaction between actors, events, and processes.

This chapter aims to establish the antagonistic negation of Whitehead's "floating but anchored" concept, which makes it possible to develop a dichotomous "anchored" threshold and a gradual, highly diverse "floating" element of democracy; this will be discussed in the subchapter 2.1. Secondly, it must be shown how conflict relates to this anchored concept of democracy and differentiate how democracy handles conflict as a social and organizational framework, elaborated in subchapters 2.2. The third part concerns contesting the core concept of democracy, which is "unanchoring." Unanchoring and unanchored democracy will be the framework for analyzing the second part of this paper. To operationalize it more adequately, an establishment of the exact outlines, boundaries, and caveats of this phenomenon is examined and described in subchapters 2.3. and 2.4.

¹⁰ Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited Part One: The Contemporary Debate*, 185.

¹¹ Whitehead, *Democratization*, 26–35.

2.1. Democracy, time and space: anchoring as a concept

This subchapter will briefly dive into the “floating but anchored” concept of democracy. Democratization theory usually uses a gradual approach to democracy¹² because democratization as a process covers the route a country takes and how it achieves (or not) a terminus of evolution. While this does not exclude a threshold of democracy, the emphasis is usually on the journey itself. However, Laurence Whitehead reformulated this argument to reflect on history and geographical changes while acknowledging core principles that are accepted widely. For him, the main concern is to make sense of the different routes countries took to democratize; whereby a continuity must be established between the current polyarchies and their predecessors, where suffrage was not universal and minorities were discriminated for example. The focus is on how these ideas, like universal suffrage, fundamental rights, and free and fair elections, were incorporated as core principles today into the democratic praxis. The utility of this dynamic, diachronic approach for Whitehead demonstrates that democracy’s definition is “open-ended, value-laden and transgressive,”¹³ thus democratization is validated as a project, and he can study it as such. Moreover, as this paper asserts, democracy’s transgressiveness implies internal transformation, reformulation, challenge, contestation, and conflict through the constant conceptualization of the word and the process. Minimalist definitions of democracy¹⁴ are “at once too precise and too incomplete” for Whitehead because democracy (democratization) is a “long-term process of social construction,” and such definitions are “demanding in procedural matters and too restrictive on questions of substantive content.”¹⁵ These constraints prevent historical continuity; by today’s standards, many countries will not be regarded as long-standing democracies due to suffrage restrictions and constitutional inadequacy. Also, establishing permanent rules and definitions goes against the essential mechanism of debate and contestation within a democratic society and the academic research around it. However, a contestable term is easily relativizable, which makes it very hard to grasp it, a problem that is the primary concern of this paper. A differentiation must be made between the traits that “anchor” the term democracy and many others that are actively contested, thus

¹² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, *The Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lecture Series*, v. 4 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Dahl, Polyarchy.

¹³ Whitehead, *Democratization*, 27.

¹⁴ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, ed. Richard Swedberg, *Transferred to digital print* (London: Routledge, 2005), 269–83; Philippe C Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not,” *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1991): 75–88, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0033>.

¹⁵ Whitehead, *Democratization*, 8, 13.

“floating.” According to Whitehead, the distinction mentioned above must not depend on contestation but on context, current academic orthodoxy, and somewhat social cognition, where “more than one alternative and overlapping meaning can be sustained with equal validity.”¹⁶

Ultimately, “democratization could be both open-ended and still guided by some overall sense of direction,” thus, the author accepts the current orthodoxy as a starting point for analysis but admits that it lacks the comprehensive substance for broader historical analysis, so he adopts Dahls basic seven institutional points amended by Schmitter and Karl’s additional two:

- 1. Control of government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in public officials.
- 2. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
- 3. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
- 4. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government.
- 5. Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined.
- 6. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law.
- 7. Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.
- 8. Popularly elected officials must be able to exercise their constitutional power without being subjected to overriding (albeit informal) opposition from unelected officials.
- 9. The polity must be self-governing; it must be able to act independently of constraints imposed by some other overarching political system.¹⁷

Some important blind spot follows from this process-based approach, as established democracies’ inner processes are not examined. Furthermore, Whitehead refers to academic “hegemony” (or the *episteme*¹⁸) of democracy definitions but does not equally count in the social and structural agency and restricts examination to a transitological context. This paper

¹⁶ Whitehead, 14.

¹⁷ Whitehead, 10–11. See the plus two points in Schmitter and Karl, “What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not.” as cited by Whitehead.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002). Under *episteme* Foucault means an established system to gain knowledge, in his later work he extended this notion to formulate truth, regimes of truth within society, a liturgy of truth within society, an *alethurgy*.

aims to fill this vacuum in the theory by arguing that the separation between current and past core concepts and values of democracy can be extended and adjusted to evaluate the inner conflict of democratic societies, not just in the field of the intellectual elite but on the level of the polity. Whitehead's hegemony has a different meaning from its Gramscian use, like the one used by Chantal Mouffe or Michel Foucault, both discussed later. As mentioned, he refers to academic orthodoxy and ultimately somewhat abides by it, adopting the 9 points. However, he asserts that hegemonic conceptions are up for challenge, following the open-endedness of democratization, and can even be challenged by the citizenry.¹⁹ The agency of citizenry, or at least their potential to exercise criticism and contestation on prevailing narratives, is an important addition, similar to cognitive processes; however, this paper goes beyond the transitological analysis of Whitehead and repurposes, as it were, the functionality and analytical added value these nine points can provide. A frequent accusation against the institutional and transitological approach that they pair core values with liberalism (thus they exclude agency for actors, or at least constrain them within an ideological framework) deriving it from our current understanding and ethical and moral superiority (see an example for this pairing from John Rawls in 2.3.). Critics of the liberal democratic approach point to the paradoxical relationship between the two terms rendering liberalism and democratic popular rule "incompatible" (see Chantal Mouffe in 2.3.). Whitehead works from Dahl's concept, which distinguishes between ideal democracy and existing "polyarchies," and sees his original 7 points as ideal goals that can only be approximated, completed with other points reflecting the eminence of transitology and regime consolidation. Dahl demonstrates this dynamic approach's utility in a historical context by examining the American Constitution's undemocratic nature and political practice and comparing it with his contemporary democracy concept²⁰. In short, even Dahl questions the practical implementation of his points and ideal theory; nevertheless, he implies a teleological endpoint for democratic development, which may be approximated, and thus fits into the liberal narratives mentioned here.

This resentment against liberal democratic hegemony resulted in theoretical polemics and the revival of counter-schools manifesting in new subfields in Political Sciences, like the American Political Development (APD) emerged in the 1980s and gained momentum after the failed democratic transitions of the post-bipolar world, stressing the historical development and

¹⁹ Whitehead, *Democratization*, 18–19.

²⁰ Robert Alan Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*, *The Castle Lectures in Ethics, Politics, and Economics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

logic against the institutional transitological approaches focusing on the present. APD scholars try to establish some trends and patterns in American history, usually in a Historical framework; this subfield evolved from the development and cultural deterministic tradition of 1960s comparative politics²¹. APD provides tremendous supporting material as a great synthesizer of the role of history in Political Sciences, and many works of APD scholars like Stephen Skowronek's or Theda Skocpol's works are used in this paper later as a great bridge between history and theory. However, when it comes to establishing logic and deterministic patterns, it falls not just into the trap of plunking something else in the place of liberalism as an overarching narrative but risking the fallacy of historicism²² by trying to introduce strict logic and deterministic outcomes to historical analysis. Thus, APD can easily fall into the trap of the "End of History" history narrative usually criticized by development theorists and assess historical processes as a track leading to pre-determined – future – outcomes. Determinism is usually avoided amongst historians, and, in keeping with this caveat from the discipline of history, this paper tries to avoid referencing putative *unfalsifiable* historical rules that guide progress or change. The paper examines how this relationship between anchored, floating, and unanchored elements of democracy came to be not just a function of separate elite or mass participation but as a motive to achieve the power to influence the transformations of the core concept of democracy. Whitehead's "floating but anchored" concept is relevant because it assumes and calculates the change; in theory, this paper argues that it can be extended to practice. Grasping the concept from the standpoint of contestation and conflict yields the synthesis of the dynamism of Whitehead's theory and the historical analytical framework from the APD project. In sum, APD projects may just establish a "mirrored," not liberal, continuity of democracy. This paper emphasizes that such continuities may "cover up" important layers of past changes and transformations and ignore the objects of contestations, especially those which fall outside a liberal or "anti-liberal" framework.

The following chapters will take a deeper look at contestation and conflict by some assertions. First, conflict and contestation are present in these democratic societies²³;

²¹ See a summary: Laurence Whitehead, "Comparative Politics: Democratization Studies," in *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Robert E. Goodin, Reprinted (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 353–71.

²² Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1957). For this paper and Popper's historicism is with the assertion of iron rules and absolute outcomes inferred from past events and usually projected as a predestined future outcome. This paper tries to apply a more observation-based approach with a model counting in change and infer limited trends regarding our present.

²³ Robert A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States: Conflict and Consent* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), 3–25.

secondly, this contestation, although it extends to core principles of democracy, mainly revolves around policy questions; thirdly, when contestation extends to core principles and threatens the institutionalized form of society, an antagonistic “unanchoring” happens. Nevertheless, the stress here is not on contestation *per se*, but on what form contestation has to take, what subject has to be contested to topple and drag previous anchor points of democracy and transform it into something that is reconceptualized from top to bottom differently. In the next three subchapters, the theoretical framework will be explored and reformulated from the “floating but anchored” concept through these three main points. This theory will serve as a benchmark or threshold for democracies and a framework based on agency, structural interactions, and intersubjective normative understanding of democratic concepts developed for a diachronic-synchronic, process-event-based method.

2.2. Society in the democratic framework: social order, structure, and contract

Organizing society and establishing social order is theorized by political theorists from Ancient Greece to the Enlightenment and many contemporary scholars. This subchapter will explain how these main interpretations apply to democratic societies and unanchoring as an analytical concept. From the standpoint of unanchored democracy, an outline is needed of the basic structures and institutions of democracy as a societal organization force as currently understood, and the breach of it can lead to the antagonistic phenomenon captured by a prolongedly unanchored democracy.

Historically democracy as a political system was not a well-regarded framework for organizing societies until the 19th-20th century; nonetheless, it did exist as a form of government and as a tool in scientific analysis from the works of Plato and Aristotle²⁴. However, the most significant milestone for modern state organization was the theoretical framework of the social contract by Hobbes, centered around the transfer from the “state of mere nature”²⁵ to a structured

²⁴ See in John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019). Where Dunn regards the use of the term democracy as a “winner” despite its idealization started after WWII. Similar examination in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., “Demokratie,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon Zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 1. Aufl, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1972), 821–99. The authors argue that the immediate practical use is mainly connected to the French Revolution, where it emerged in the discourse as a possible, non-textbook form of governmental organization for the newly created states with a more significant population. Although determining a clear continuum of democracy as a term is nearly impossible, both studies of the term’s evolution agree that as an analytical framework, in the Aristotelian and Platonian sense (three forms of government) existed with different normative valuations.

²⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, ed. Michael Oakeshott, 1st Touchstone ed (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 123.

and organized society. Hobbes somewhat follows the classification of Plato and Aristotle with governmental forms (monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy) and regards each of those as possible “Commonwealths.”²⁶ However, Hobbes's normative evaluation of these types of governments differs, and the labels like oligarchy and anarchy emerged from theories preceding his. However, the democratic form of government immensely differs in its core structure. In a democratic society: (1) Social organization is about the minimalization of conflicts (elimination of the state of nature), (2) Democratic societies establish this order by “popular sovereignty” and institutionalize conflict resolution, and (3) the institutions of this society are captured by their core conception of democracy and the expectations developed around them.

Point (1) is paramount as a goal of social organization. The state of nature resembles endless and unburdened conflict and the lack of comprehensible cooperation, which hinders the organization of society. Democratic societies, like others, can backslide to the state of nature but develop a different structural framework to tackle this possibility. Nevertheless, the minimization of conflict takes a different shape in different forms of government. Point (2) is the specific way democracies approach the problem of social organization. In a democratic society, conflict is neither repressed nor managed by a group in an *ad hoc* way but institutionalized. Parliaments, elections, parties, and interest groups lobby public debates are the primary conduits of conflict; on a deeper level, within these institutions, all acts are heavily ritualized (like parliamentary debates and voting procedures). However, as Whitehead pointed out, contestation is an inherent process in democracies; debating about every aspect of society levies a different burden on these conflict management institutions because they have to channel contestation, thus producing a change in the whole system to accommodate inputs coming from conflict. This paper will examine the agents of social change and the first institutional line of change, parties and pressure groups (movements), which try to collect and transform social conflict into political aims and, ultimately, political action within these institutions in order to mitigate conflict and gain support for their political goals. From a technical standpoint, the relevance of institutional manipulation and access to transformative power in institutions is unequal. For example, a legislator has a more significant effect on institutions than an “ordinary” citizen. However, this paper examines aggregates and conceptions and *constructive pressure*, which means a push for change that manifests in institutions, the intentions of different actors (for example, popularity for politicians) are part of the complex channels of institutions and structures. The agency relies on the common conception, which is more

²⁶ Hobbes, 113–22.

noticeable when this intersubjective meaning is disappeared, and institutional manipulation is dwarfed by institutional collapse due to insufficient functionality. These institutions, however, are not just constrained by function; they capture some ground rules which determine the way of contestation and some hardly contested elements regarding the processes and values of the system, like the “floating but anchored” concept. Some vulnerabilities follow from this structure of the social organization; by extending the contestability to the elements in (3), the structures can erode in point (2) and impede the primary function of point (1); however, to facilitate system-level change contesting core values are just as much as a necessity as other conflicts, these papers argue that even more significance can be attributed to the contestation of core principles because either the lack of change or unorganized large-scale change can bring the whole system down. The soft spot is hard to find, and the rigidity of the core principle and the mode of contestation is essential. The following subchapter will examine the relationship between core values, contestation, and conflict.

Finally, another point must be raised here regarding this framework (ground rules, constituting the anchored part of democracy). Social forces constantly threaten and sometimes damage or destroy these “anchors”; in this sense, unanchoring is very much the manifestation of this *power to dismantle*. When anchoring, a system, a “regime of truth,”²⁷ emerges, which is a function of power practice and nevertheless serves organizational principles. The keyword here is power in two senses, one, the power in modernity and especially in the case of liberal democracy, to operate as an *episteme*²⁸ for intellectual grounding of the concept; and two, the power to transform the core principles and administer them. In this sense, the structure is the function of power, an *episteme* or *paradigm*, a hierarchical manifestation of power, common will, and common action encapsulated in the formulation of the core concept of democracy within an equally fluid and formulated social order.

Foucault’s later works often discussed the enunciation and the formation of truth in a societal context (*alethurgy*²⁹). Chapter 3 makes it apparent that power to transform truth, or in this sense the anchored core concept, is a peculiar power struggle to formulate not just the term but the basis of democratic praxis too. Nevertheless, one must be cautious because a structure

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1979-1980*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 82.

²⁸ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

²⁹ Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 1–22. *Alethurgy or the liturgy of truth is an important notion of Foucault, that surpasses his notion on transformation by extending it not just to knowledge, but society. He examines how certain complexes of truth can be established as a principle of government. This paper takes a negative approach and examines how these regimes collapse and reformulate or morph into vehicles for maintaining preexistent notions of core concepts.*

such as a “regime of truth” can easily lose its analytical functionality when used as a constantly prevailing, omnipresent phenomenon that is thus hard to separate from the social world and subject to critical examination. To avoid this, the present paper focuses less on providing descriptions of such regimes. Instead, it examines how their transformations unfold through societal interactions, thus revealing the peripheries and the transgressions of such regimes described in the previous and this subchapter as much as the “insurrectionary power” that challenges them.

2.3. Democratic process and the natural conflict resolution

Within modern theorists, three hegemonic schools developed concerning the conflicts and legitimacy of democracy, a “consensus” school represented by John Rawls based on the ethical and moral superiority and framework of political liberalism. Chantal Mouffe and the “agonistic” school assert that conflict is an unavoidable part of the process and, in reality, a consensus is hardly achievable, especially in liberal democracies where the liberal and democratic elements are in a paradoxical relationship with each other. Jürgen Habermas, with his discursive (“deliberative”) approach, tries to bridge the liberal-republican³⁰ camps by pointing out inadequacies in Rawls’ theory and indirectly opposing Mouffe by not rejecting consensus and deliberative processes through his discursive model. These scholars regard conflict and its reduction in democratic societies differently; however, when reduced to the core, anchored principals of democracy, more intersections and the possibility of synthesis emerge between them. All of them relate their concepts as an alternative and criticism of Carl Schmitt’s criticism against parliamentary democracy³¹ and ethnopopulist sovereignty. Habermas mainly criticizes Schmitt’s constitutional reading and misreading of popular sovereignty.³² Rawls sees the lack of belief in the liberal democratic regime as the cause of the fall of the Weimar Republic, not elite interest in itself, and proposes his political liberalism as a basis for a just and well-ordered society³³. Mouffe criticizes the lack of engagement of Rawls in political liberalism, which sets up her argument trying to derive some utility from Schmitt’s

³⁰ Habermas uses these terms not in the political sense, but referring to different concepts of democracy. See further explanation later in this subchapter.

³¹ Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy, 3. printing, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

³² Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 129–54.

³³ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, *The John Dewey Essays in Philosophy*, no. 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), lix–lx.

argument. Mouffe infers that consensus and deliberation entail excluding some aspects of the polity. However, she would not go as far as Schmitt to assert that this pluralism is unattainable; she stresses the importance of conflict and the agonistic form of pluralism³⁴. Mouffe tries to separate liberalism from democracy and democratic practice asserting a paradoxical relationship between the two. Although all three of them recognize the significance and challenge of the fall of Weimar and the corresponding work of Schmitt, as well as the relevance of conflict management as a tool to avoid Weimarization, they view conflict and the solutions differently.

Debate and contestation are a part of the democratic social structure as established in subchapter 2.2., and the function of various actors of power and construction, but the contestation of core principles is a sensitive, nevertheless inherent process of democratization too. The 9 points listed in subchapter 2.1. are a product of this process and the development of a democratic society. Take, for example, the birth of the United States when these core principles were first laid down in the Constitution, meanwhile constantly debated in the Federalist and Ant-Federalist papers. The principles laid out by James Madison, for example, in Federalist no. 10, argued against a purely democratic form of government; he preferred the republican form of government³⁵, following Kant³⁶. This initial debate persisted in the federal-antifederal and democratic-republican nexuses and trickled down to the institutions through the established party and movement system, which consolidated these serious debates throughout U.S. history. However, today we refer to this form of government as representative democracy instead of participatory or, most frequently, direct democracy, which meant pure democracy for Madison; despite this synergy, the debate persists in American society around the ideas behind these old concepts, the core of American society from time-to-time comes under heavy questioning, the proper way of contestation, however, is just as much contested as the subject of it.

The anchored part of democracy is sometimes under *constructive pressure*, meaning the core concept is heavily contested, and reconstruction and rework are needed. Although this pressure is, in typical cases, much rarer than in the case of heavily contested floating concepts,

³⁴ Chantal Mouffe, "Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy," in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe, Phronesis (London: Verso, 1999), 38–53.

³⁵ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Lawrence Goldman, *Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 48–55.

³⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, *Rethinking the Western Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 67–109.

this would imply that a consensus is desirable around the formulation of it, but how to formulate a consensus and core principles of society? John Rawls developed his theory from Kantian roots and the liberal tradition of the Enlightenment. His “justice as fairness” concept stems from the “original position” he developed.³⁷ Justice as the logical sequent of human nature is both the core of democratic society and is universally applicable, echoing Immanuel Kant’s “categorical imperative.” In the real world, however, the “veil of ignorance” and justice are not necessarily overlapping concepts, so reformulation is essential. Political liberalism manifests this thought mainly in the “justice as fairness” concept and liberal constitutionalism. In an adjusted paper,³⁸ Rawls introduces the concept of “overlapping consensus,” which describes how within the framework of political liberalism, different “comprehensive doctrines” establish order in society. As a result, people with different religious and ideological frameworks come together to form a “well-ordered” society; by this, Rawls tries to give space for “reasonable disagreement” and some intersecting and intersubjective values within society; however, the universal liberal framework stays as an organizing force. This latest notion is quite similar to the sketch drawn of democratic social organization in subsequent chapters; however, in Rawls’s case, the “justice as fairness” doctrine bounds the concept to the current discourse³⁹ on democracy, and the formulation and significance of core principles are rather relying on ethics than a dynamic framework like the “floating but anchored” model. Nevertheless, there is relevance to this theory of Rawls because liberal democracies tried to approximate the values of political liberalism and became the idealized benchmark of modern representative liberal democracies. However, from the standpoint of this paper, they are too rigid and uncontestable; they imply a “path dependency” for democratic development, which impedes contestation and concentrates just on the moral core of democracy.

Jürgen Habermas criticized⁴⁰ Rawls’ approach by stressing the importance of communication through the “public spheres.” Habermas separates three different models of democracy.⁴¹ First, he distinguishes the liberal and republican models: “For republicans rights ultimately are nothing but determinations of the prevailing political will, while for liberals some

³⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Original ed* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2005).

³⁸ John Rawls, “The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus,” *New York University Law Review* 64, no. 2 (1989): 233–55.

³⁹ Here discourse is used the Foucauldian sense, which is not the way Habermas defines it as a perfect way of communication, but how discourse conceives different epistemes

⁴⁰ Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 49–73.

⁴¹ Jürgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, *Princeton Paperbacks* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), 21–30.

rights are always grounded in a 'higher law' of ... reason.”⁴² Second, he offers his discursive model where “a collectively acting citizenry but on the institutionalization of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication”⁴³ is the basis of the model. Third, Habermas stresses the importance of communication within society and the “constitution of political power.”⁴⁴ For Habermas, the main problem with Rawls’s “political liberalism” is the role of metaphysical justification; for him, “citizens must first be convinced by the proposed conception of justice before such a consensus can come about.”⁴⁵ For Habermas, “the democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communication.”⁴⁶ His priority is in the interaction between different actors of society; this concept better captures the change in democratic societies; however, the anchored point is missing here. Society is ruled within an ideal-typical communicative framework and a similarly utopian cohabitation within these well-functioning public spheres. For Habermas, the position of Rawls is insufficient; Rawls recognizes his theory’s deficiencies and reflects by adjusting but differentiating the two frameworks. Rawls says Habermas’s discursive approach is comprehensive, while political liberalism is free-standing and extends to the political realm. Rawls also points out that the original position is just a “tool of conjecture,” while Habermas relies on rational discourse to provide ideal discourse⁴⁷; thus, both frameworks have a basis in a non-monological citizen agency⁴⁸. Habermas tries to correct and extends the flaws of the republican and liberal concept of democracy by highlighting that exclusive appropriation of the term would lead to unresolvable conflicts via polarizing society along the two contending concepts; thus, neither one of two is sufficient to be a framework for the democratic process. Rawls tries to solve this problem by stressing the superiority of political liberalism as a possible force to encompass all comprehensive doctrines. By stressing discourse and communication, Habermas successfully brings the two sides closer by asserting a possible method – the ideal discourse – as the basis of coexistence. However, synthesizing them is impossible since the

⁴² Habermas, 23. cites: Frank I. Michelman, “Conceptions of Democracy in American Constitutional Argument: Voting Rights Concepts of Democracy: The Case of Voting Rights Dunwoody Distinguished Lecture in Law,” *Florida Law Review* 41, no. 3 (1989): 446f.

⁴³ Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” 27.

⁴⁴ Habermas, 28.

⁴⁵ Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 63.

⁴⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 304.

⁴⁷ Compare to Mouffe in next paragraphs.

⁴⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, ix, 373–85.

liberal and republican approaches do not oppose each other but resist Habermas's asserted idealism under the process of "reconstructive sociology"⁴⁹ of the democratic process. Habermas' narrative provides an interesting concept of conflict and contestation as communicative action; this is a point where the Rawlsian account lacks. However, a balance is struck between the two in this paper to establish different contestation between different elements of democracy. A more cautious contestation can protect overlapping consensus and fundamental moral values; however, they need to be contested somehow; an idealized communication would be suitable; however, the existence of this ideal social contestation through just mere contestation is yet to be manifested in reality and praxis.

Opposing the two consensus-oriented approaches, the one derived from the original position and the other from communicative action and interaction, is Chantal Mouffe's agonistic view; here, democracy is an "agonistic pluralism."⁵⁰ Out of the three, this is the simplest Mouffe argues that objectivity and power produce hegemony which guides the political arena. Mouffe extends the hegemony here not to the intellectual construction of democracy but to the theoretical hegemony of liberal democracy and its paradoxical relationship with democratic inclusion-exclusion⁵¹. Introducing a Gramscian approach (differing from Whitehead), Mouffe's hegemony means a "confluence between objectivity and power."⁵² Mouffe intends to transform the current paradoxical liberal democracy into a "radical" one⁵³. Mouffe and Laclau try to take part in the breaking of the hegemonic anchor of the intellectual democratic concept. According to her, liberalism contradicts democracy and popular sovereignty, but liberalism subverts conflicts and antagonism in democratic societies. Thus, the Habermasian model's blind spot is taped by Mouffe, namely the base assumptions of it, namely the ideal discourse, interest group power, and specific asymmetries. However, Habermas counts in the "institutionalization of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication,"⁵⁴ not just a collective action of the citizenry through excellent communication and a goal of a decentered society, which is similar to the "radical democracy" concept, but as Habermas points out even a "radical democracy" needs an anchor point. Mouffe's critique of Rawls is similar to Habermas's; she

⁴⁹ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 287.

⁵⁰ Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?," *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (1999): 745–58.

⁵¹ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London ; New York: Verso, 2000), 4–5.

⁵² Mouffe, 21.

⁵³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed (London ; New York: Verso, 2001).

⁵⁴ Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," 27.

highlights the restrictive nature of justice as the only guiding light of discourse and political practice. She proposes the concept of “agonistic pluralism.” This concept is essential because it reflects on the importance and the ineradicable nature of conflict in society, just like in subchapter 2.2. Mouffe stresses the importance of power and thus the antagonistic nature of democratic politics, a pressure of the “us versus them” dynamic within society which is inherent in social life. This “conflictual consensus”⁵⁵ will only be able to reduce antagonism and conflict, a more empirical and realist take on society. For Mouffe, this antagonism is an irreducible source of conflict; the best can be that this presupposes that the “other” is no longer seen as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an adversary.”⁵⁶ This view seems pessimistic, and that adversarial behavior is permissible within the institutional framework of democracy in the case of core concepts; nevertheless, this prolonged adversarial behavior can lead to polarization, leading to crisis. As will be discussed in subchapter 2.4. unanchoring is permissible as a process but not as a state of democracy; the lack of shared understanding and rules lead to persistent agnostic conflict and contestation on everything not desired by a democratic form of society.

By searching for the resultant of the organizational powers forming the democratic process, all three theorists tried to tackle the problem of conflict. Rawls, by adjusting his initial model according to it, Mouffe by basing hers on it, and Habermas tried some level of synthetization between the two to produce his own. Antagonism and conflict are present in all societies, and empirically it is hard to minimize them; thus, this conflict and contestation must be institutionalized on an intersubjective base around firmly accepted and widely accepted (supposedly in its goal just in the Rawlsian sense) principles. Finally, social and political change can be contested within a framework of somewhat well-regulated communication between the different public spheres so that the contestation stays within the institutions and conflicts at a minimum. Habermas gets close by introducing the concept of “reconstructive sociology,” which serves as a “legitimizing force of the democratic genesis of law.”⁵⁷ Moreover, this sociological reconstruction refers to similar processes to unanchoring under *constructive pressure*. The wall between norms and reality is melted by the “intuitive understanding of democracy,”⁵⁸ a process that defies empiricist claims on democratic construction. Although this paper builds on the empiricist benchmark (Dahl’s points), the processes and contestation have

⁵⁵ Mouffe, “*Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?*,” 756.

⁵⁶ Mouffe, 755.

⁵⁷ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 287–88.

⁵⁸ Habermas, 296.

a normative agency that entails a more norm-based approach which is the application of the discursive and normative approach of Habermas. Focusing on core values, the “noise” of the contestable elements of democracy, and more profound changes can be examined in democratic societies focusing on contestation and conflict. However, as the concept of “regimes of truth” asserted in 2.2. this way of contestation can be an agent of power, the power to reformulate democracy and establish ground rules. The following subchapter will focus on the prominent phenomenon of *unanchoring* examined in the case studies in this paper; unanchoring as a process is normative and construction based, however when it comes to the analysis of the empirical base of Whitehead and hegemonic concepts of liberal democracy – with some caveats – is an appropriate starting point.

2.4. Unanchoring as an antagonistic process in a democracy

Unanchoring can be an integral and antagonistic process; contestation and change are just as much part of democracy as core values. The previous chapter’s summary referred to the integrative traits of unanchoring as an engine for change, but in some cases, this process can lead to an “unanchored democracy,” which leads to a fragmented and possibly failed outcome. This subchapter will discuss the extent of contestation and conflict which can unanchor democracy.

The definition of unanchoring is shortly the process of contesting the core principles of democracy that anchor a society’s framework to organize a society democratically. Unanchored democracy is a democracy in which this process is prolonged, and the lack of intersubjective understanding leads to the contestation of the core principles and the debasement of the word democracy. This phenomenon is antagonistic because it distorts the natural flow between the elements of a democratic framework and ultimately leads to social disorder, which goes against the function of democracy as a form of government and a form of truth and knowledge (*alethurgy*); in short, it “tears up” the social contract and “reality.” The current anchor of democracy is generally associated with the hegemonic and most widely accepted traits. However, in different societies, additional points can be identified; Dahl even differentiated between traits that are favorable and inherent values.⁵⁹ For better analytical purposes beyond the current minimum nine points, only restricted minimal points in the case of respective countries are suggested to be added for more practical empirical and comparative (based on

⁵⁹ Dahl, *On Democracy*, 145–65.

norm change and construction of core values) purposes. Another relevant caveat is that due to democratic development being regarded as a very fluid and open-ended process, the scrutiny of unanchoring has to be very meticulous. However, we must assume that a re-anchoring is possible later and democracy will not become unanchored. Also, in itself, the process can produce development and regression toward the currently established core principles, and it is equally possible to make an analysis based on archaic core principles to compare democracies or democratic development in the past. This paper will use the nine points established, but before the case studies are examined, the cut point between unanchoring and an unanchored democracy must be examined more in-depth.

Nevertheless, the stress falls on these core values not as determinants of democracy but as a benchmark for comparison. Unanchoring is a process, and unanchored democracy is a state in history, not an iron law of political development or an endpoint. Thus this paper prefers not to establish past core values but to examine the processes of contestation and conflict in societies and the system changes following them. The normative differentiation between unanchoring and unanchored democracy only serves a demonstrative purpose but must not be taken as an unchangeable or unavoidable endpoint that would contradict the basic assumptions discussed above. The main focus of a well-ordered society is the institutions through which conflicts are handled and their capability to channel conflict within society. If the institutions are incapable of this, democracy fails to organize society, so first, the question of language must be addressed. Besides institutional signs, the most worrying aspect is the debasement of language and the development of a civil war-like state of social discussion. In Ancient Greece, Thucydides identified the public discourse's dual nature of stasis and plague (over- and under-politicization of a political society).⁶⁰ Thucydides describes the circumstances in Corcyra (Corfu today), "They reversed the usual evaluative force of words to suit their own assessment of actions. [...] The division into opposing ideological camps created widespread distrust. No words had the force, and no oath the deterrence, to put a stop to it. All parties with the upper hand reasoned that there was no hope of a secure settlement and, incapable of trusting the other side, looked instead to ensure their own immunity to attack."⁶¹ Stasis or civil strife is the over-politicization of life, in most extreme cases a physical civil war, where political alignment is more relevant than family and words lose their meaning because they solely depend on self-

⁶⁰ Clifford Orwin, "Stasis and Plague: Thucydides on the Dissolution of Society," *The Journal of Politics* 50, no. 4 (1988): 831–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2131381>.

⁶¹ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, ed. Martin Hammond and P. J. Rhodes, *Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 170–71.

interest; in Chantal Mouffe's terminology, this is the state when the other side is regarded as an enemy to kill. Orwin describes this as the destruction of the three fundamental institutions of Greek society kinship (family is less meaningful than political belonging), human law (the normative moderation of society and divine law (piety and oaths)).⁶² Stasis is no less than the disintegration of the intersubjective meaning behind the core principles of society; it is very fitting because although they could be codified in a constitution, they work only in reaction to social construction through the institutions that physically or immaterially preserve them. This lack of meaning is the ultimate signifier of the political system, so it ties back to the institutional and structural collapse of democracy. For example, resorting to civil war seizes the existence of the governmental function; in the case of the American Civil War, a re-anchoring happened with Reconstruction, but the process of reconciliation in some ways persists still today, attesting to the trauma that an unanchored democracy can experience from the unbounded conflict released through the broken social institutions.

If unanchored democracy is not a persistent state of a democratic society because the conflict is resolved or the given society seizes to exist, it is apt to question the term's utility as a classification. However, the purpose of this analytical model is not to amend the current typology and epithets before the word democracy. The utility of unanchoring and unanchored democracy is a humble contribution to a neglected, but now under terms like populism, APD, and democratic erosion renewed subfield of political science is the study of democratic decline. Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between fundamental threats and inherent processes of democracy. This effort needs new theoretical and methodological analysis, and this paper attempts to do that with this comparative diachronic-synchronic framework. This model consists of (1) the current nine core principles as a benchmark for historical and spatial comparison, (2) the structure and function of a government discussed in 2.2., and (3) the conflict (debate) directed towards the first two points. Conflict usually flows through the institutions created to settle them, but when either the institutions are evaded or the anchored concepts are contested, such as the institutions cannot handle the level of conflict, the functional capability of democracy is compromised. This reaction between the three points simplifies the historical analysis because it accommodates a procedural reading rather than measuring the individual points. For example, conflict is essential in this sense, not as a measurement but as an action directed towards voting rights, freedom of the press, and influence on institutions like political parties and constitutions differ from indexes measuring their adequacy. Of course, this does not

⁶² Orwin, "Stasis and Plague," 837.

render any heavily empirical studies useless; it fits the historical framework, thus this study better, as mentioned in the introduction.

This framework for understanding democratic contestation focuses on fundamentals; however, it can open gates for other subfields to analyze current phenomena like populism, democratic backsliding, and the overall global decline of democracies, which challenge our current, primarily liberal conception of democracy. The next chapter will discuss two examples, precisely two events, to demonstrate the practical use of the theory. The catalog of unanchoring events will signify the framework's horizontal historical potential, explained in 3.2. Finally, Chapter 3 and its remaining subchapters will test the hypothesis of this paper that prolonged conflict and contestation around the core values of democracy can lead to adverse outcomes. Although this is not predestined just by certain institutional factors, the level of conflict and the quality of the core principles or expectations surrounding these core principles can facilitate democratic malfunction and, in the worst-case scenario, render cohabitation impossible.

3. Contestation of the concept of democracy in the turning of the 20th and 21st centuries

This comparative case study will examine the “Populist-Progressive Era” and the “Tea Party and Post-2008 U.S. Era”; these eras of American politics were chosen because of the historical relevance of the first and the outright reaction to it by the second. On the one hand, the turning of the 20th century brought mass movements and politics to the scene of U.S. history and a potent reform mood in reaction to rapid industrialization and social changes. On the other hand, the turning of the 21st century brought a different mood and reaction to similar changes entailed by the 2008 depression. Outside movements and political parties pushed the two-party system in both eras; however, the way of contestation and relation to unanchoring encompassed a different project, respectively. On the one hand, the product of the progressive agenda was constitutional reform and the rethinking of both ever-present nexuses of American history; most of the reform ideas moved the U.S. political system towards Dahl’s points; on the other hand, the Tea Party project entails a revisionist and anti-institutional approach, which distorts the healthy contestation of democracy described in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will elaborate on the assertions mentioned above with a historical comparison strictly based on the core values proposed or contested in the two eras. Subchapter 3.1. will introduce the outline and core motif of U.S. political history 3.2. will briefly outline the party systems and “third party” contestation in the two eras, subchapters 3.2. and 3.3. will elaborate on the two eras and their relationship and contestation.

3.1. The historical horizon of unanchoring in the U.S. political history

U.S. history is filled with many unanchoring moments, Table 1. contains a brief outline of these main events, determined by two great debates or nodes, the Federalist-Anti-Federalist,⁶³ and the republic-democracy debate. This paper will extendedly examine two selected eras. Choosing the Populist-Progressive and the Tea Party Era was desirable because their comparison showcases direct links between their contestations and the party systems modernization and the emergence of mass movements; it is simpler to associate them. Table 1 is a brief list of events regarded as unanchoring moments. The table reflects that (1) there are conflicts that are present from the founding, (2) significant changes in U.S. democracy’s core

⁶³ This debate on the level of political politics often morphed into the “big” versus “small” government dichotomy.

were initiated by these moments, and (3) the changes in the party system and party changes followed these changes.

Before detailing the three points in the paragraph above, the question of periodization and historical analysis requires some further explanations. In subchapter 2.3. the project of American Political Development was mentioned. In the groundwork of the subfield, the establishment of American Political Development (APD) was the main aim to establish specific rules of political development.⁶⁴ APD is an exciting subfield of Political Science because it aspires to stress historical narrative trends in American political history. Its assumptions and conclusion walk on a fine line to avoid the fallacy of *historicism* but have many similarities with an analysis based on unanchoring. APD does provide an interesting perspective on American history Byron E. Shafer and Anthony J. Badger, in their 2001 book, try to establish a periodization of American history based on developmental milestones.⁶⁵ APD scholars tend to stress the founding act of the United States and derive many assertions from the initial debates.⁶⁶ The presence of federalist and anti-federalist divergence is an overarching debate and source of conflict, the introduction of Chapter 3 names this and the republic-democracy debate as the noteworthy nodes of conflict. APD scholars point to the idiosyncrasy of the American political system and its inception and formation; this paper tends to agree with that assertion and APD's focus on the phenomenon; however, some inferences diverge when it comes to the social agency.⁶⁷ The other issue is the role of unanchoring in the periodization of U.S. history. APD-type development narratives are intriguing challenges of biography and individual-focused historical narratives; by introducing unique political culture for each country, they have a development curve to tie into history (see Shafer and Badger). In his early work, Dahl examines the political development of the U.S. in a different light with a normative and

⁶⁴ Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ Byron E. Shafer and Anthony J. Badger, eds., *Contesting Democracy: Substance and Structure in American Political History, 1775-2000* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

⁶⁶ Elvin Lim, "Political Thought, Political Development, and America's Two Foundings," *American Political Thought* 3, no. 1 (March 2014): 146–56, <https://doi.org/10.1086/675650>.

⁶⁷ Ronald P. Formisano, in his chapter in Shafer and Badger, faces the problem that the party system was underdeveloped until the mid-1800s, and conflict manifested during the founding acts, which were about the fundamental characteristics of the U.S. as a political entity and community. Lim correctly asserts, "state and national identities are a matter of democratic construction, entwined in two distinct conceptions of union articulated at "Two Foundings" (See Lim 2014), however, a more norm-based approach is usually rejected because state formation and nation formation is separated. Formisano somewhat rejects national identity as an integral part of political development in the U.S.; however, he points out that American society is a "stake-in-society," which contradicts possible constructive agency from the citizenry. Lim falls into this trap involuntarily as the historical reading of APD is usually elite-centric, leading to similar problems.

taxonomical approach to pluralist democracy.⁶⁸ Before Dahl developed the term, he had made a likewise dynamic approach to American democracy by introducing similarly to this paper the role of conflict and highlighting the unique way democracies opposed to autocracies cope with change; Dahl's examination focused more on institutional development but focused of the role of conflict and views on democracy and forms of government. Pairing the more theoretical approach of Dahl with the historical notion of APD yielded a different reading of American history. Moreover, in Table 1, the question of periodization has a background role, strict dates are intentionally omitted because their main objective is to demonstrate events that may have a blurred timespan, but their relevance comes from their out- and input in the changes of American democracy.

The detailed discussion of the events of Table 1 would overstretch the scope of this paper, but a brief outline along the thread of the two debates (federalist-antifederalist, republic-

Name of era/event	Contested values	Main participants	Outcome
Federalist-Anti-Federalist debates	Founding values of the republic. Both nexuses present: federalist-anti-federalist and republic v democracy	James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, George Clinton, Patrick Henry, and James Monroe	Establishment of fundamental constitutional values for a federal republic. A loosely established two party system federalist v Democratic Republican
Jacksonian split	Concept of democracy. The concept of Jacksonian Democracy	Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, John Quincy Adams	Jacksonian reforms, second party system (Democrats and Whigs)
Civil War	Political membership, federalism (federal government and states relationship)	Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas	Civil War, failure of democratic framework. reconstruction as a compromise of re-anchoring. Foundation of the Republican Party
Populist-Progressive Era	Political framework of the federal government and primary procedures in the main parties. Extension of political membership, elements of direct democracy, size and role of the federal government	William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft	Electoral reform of the primary system and the federal (Senatorial) elections, women's suffrage, expansion of the federal government. Republican split in 1912, the progressive wing of the republican party diminishes.
New Deal and the Civil Rights Era	Expansion of the role of the federal government, universalisation of political rights and participation	Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Lyndon B. Johnson	Increase in the size of the federal government, de jure equal political rights. The beginning of geographical switch in the voting base of the two parties.
Reagan Revolution	Concept of small, passive government, individual rights, conservative fundamental values	Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter	The return of the initial two nexuses and the solidification of party roles (conservative v "liberal")
Tea party and post 2008 US	Role of government (taxation), popular rule (electoral process), elite structures of government, populist-progressive political achievements	Barack Obama, Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck, Rand Paul, (Donald Trump)	Integration into the Republican party and the solidification of the anti-establishment wing of the party.

Table 1: Unanchoring moments in U.S. history

democracy) would help to understand the two case studies. As APD and many scholars point out, the genesis of a (nation)state and the founding act holds particular relevance; in the case of the U.S. The Federalist debates are a unique display of the construction of the core of democracy, a step zero to forming a political community, shared understanding, and ground

⁶⁸ Dahl, Pluralist Democracy in the United States: Conflict and Consent.

rules. Furthermore, in the American case, the system and its coded change are enshrined in its constitutional tradition; inevitably, some motifs and conflicts were coded in it too. This notion is not a novelty; Tocqueville identified at least its first nodes in the early decades of the republic: “These opinions were as old as the world, and they are found under different forms and given various names in all free societies. One wanted to limit popular power; the other, to expand it indefinitely.”⁶⁹ The founding of the subsequently emerged contestations regarding the nature and structure of American democracy have seen these conflicts emerge and return as a specter of U.S. politics. From the standpoint of unanchoring, the stress is on the republic-democracy debate, where the conflict can spill over to the core meaning of democratic values. The relevance of party system changes as an analytical framework can press an analysis based on unanchoring events towards a more elite-centered reading of history. However, this paper suggests that elites, as a part of the institutions, respond to constructive pressure in this sense and produce corresponding outcomes. For example, in the case of Jacksonian democracy, the reforms resulted in the expansion of voting rights and a counter-reaction that failed to pull off a revision. Another point Table 1. stresses by not introducing strict chronological determination is that unanchoring is hard to tie into single events; the themes indicated in the table do encompass events that, when observed, signify unanchoring, but the identification of events in itself is insufficient. The diachronic-synchronic framework, which in this paper is shortened to a comparison, demands the establishment (in chronological order) of events; however, the stress is equally on the processes that happened between occurrences that followed and “interacted” with each other. This simplified archaeological work thus a combination of both synchronic and diachronic elements as Foucault puts it: “Archaeology, then, takes as its model neither a purely logical schema of simultaneities; nor a linear succession of events; but it tries to show the intersection between necessarily successive relations and others that are not so. It does not believe, therefore, that a system of positivity is a synchronic figure that one can perceive only by suspending the whole of the diachronic process. Far from being indifferent to succession, archaeology maps the *temporal vectors of derivation*.” Nevertheless, the equal importance of events and processes also implies the complex interaction between agents and the structure of a democratic society by including elites, masses, single actors, and institutions and tying it up with the intersubjective core contestation forming a comprehensive model for historical analysis.

⁶⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla and James T. Schleifer, English ed (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 282.

Table 1 is formulated in this fashion; the main events are not analyzed from the standpoint of political development, and the main focus is on conflicts about the nature and institutions of American democracy. The table examines and lists the contested values; eras must not be evaluated in a holistic sense but based on the values in question. The main actors here indicate some leadership in the implementation and making of the analysis; however, the stress is not on individual action but on the normative forces that pressured or animated them. The outcome column recounts the changes in the institutional and the constitutive core values; in the case of the U.S., the two-party system and the constitutional evolution make tracking easier. The two debates present from the beginning determine the dynamics in this contestation and the extent of the threat to developing democracy in an unanchored state.

3.2. Structure of party systems: A comparison

In both of our cases, the two-party structure of American politics was significantly pressured by new mass organized mass movements. Third parties and social movements reacted to tremendous social and economic changes and grievances. The role of movements in politics is a well-researched subfield of political science, and the role of third parties is an idiosyncrasy of the American political system; however, seldom changes occurred in the nominal party system, major third party success only occurred with the greatest re-anchoring of American history with the rise of the Republican Party on the ruins of the Whig Party⁷⁰.

Mass movements have a limited way to integrate into the party system; however, they are the leading suppliers of political novelty but lack the institutional power and financial resources to administer a government⁷¹. Therefore, a choice must be made for these movements between alternatives. Robert Dahl⁷² explains this by a trilemma between (1) organizing different political parties or joining forces with another group, (2) remaining somewhat neutral but acting as a pressure group for main parties, and (3) entering into an existing party. In a two-party system, reinforced by a single first-the-post system, a third party breakthrough is unlikely, if almost impossible, except if one of the significant parties' collapses. In both of our cases, the collapse of either the Republican or Democratic parties was not imminent; it is true that from an electoral

⁷⁰ John Herbert Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*, *American Politics and Political Economy Series* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁷¹ Valdimer Orlando Key, *Politics, Parties, & Pressure Groups*, 5th ed. (New York: Crowell, 1964), 154–65.

⁷² Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States: Conflict and Consent*, 429–30. Cited and simplified in Daniel Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History*, *Princeton Studies in American Politics: Historical, International, and Comparative Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 16.

standpoint, the Progressive party split the Republican vote enough, but progressives later coalesced around the Democratic Party, and the success of 1912 was more connected to the personal campaign of Theodore Roosevelt rather than party organization⁷³.

Nevertheless, internal debates ensued in both the populist party about a merger with the Democratic Party and into the Republican Party in Northern and Midwestern, Western regions,⁷⁴ culminating in the bipartisan Progressive movement⁷⁵ of 1912. The Tea Party struggled with this trilemma, but “transforming the Republican Party” or “using” it ultimately was a more declared aim. So structurally, the first significant divergence is in the aim of political praxis and instruments of attaining influence and power.⁷⁶ The second difference is in the structure of the major parties and their reactions and inclusion of these movements. Despite the contested⁷⁷ efficiency of the People’s Party as a transformative element in the Democratic Party, the influence of populism on Progressive goals is omnipresent in both substantial parties manifested in legislative acts, which from the standpoint of raised issues can be regarded as a success for the agrarian movement. The Tea Party aimed exclusively at the Republican Party; this stemmed and formed the common roots of Reaganite economic and political doctrines; the Democratic party only had antagonist interaction with the Tea Party, thus opposed to the Progressive Era no Tea Party wing of the democratic party developed. The third structural element is probably the most important. Despite both Populism, Progressivism, and “Tea Partyism,” including some kind of anti-establishment attitude, the former two direct it toward the structure of early industrial society and draws initially from agrarian and worker discontent and morph into a middle-class-based movement. According to Michael McGerr, this “fierce discontent” stemmed from the rejection of class conflict and antagonism⁷⁸ the real roots are the in-between status of the American middle class pushed by labor and capital⁷⁹. However, the nature of the 2008 depression developed a dissonant contestation of institutions in the Tea Party.

⁷³ Sidney M. Milkis, Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy, *American Political Thought* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 252–98.

⁷⁴ Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 30–46; Arthur M. Schlesinger, ed., *History of U.S. Political Parties Volume II. 1860-1910 the Gilded Age of Politics, vol. 2* (New York: Chelsea House Publ, 1980), 987–1141, 1701–1807.

⁷⁵ Michael E. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 87–94. Peri E. Arnold, *Remaking the Presidency: Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson, 1901-1916* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 195–207.

⁷⁶ Key, *Politics, Parties, & Pressure Groups*, 1–22.

⁷⁷ Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties*, 10, 19, 29, 108–30.

⁷⁸ McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 54–59.

⁷⁹ Aldrich, *Why Parties?*, 268, 291.

On the one hand, the economic doctrines of the Reagan Era dictated a supply-side, business-friendly attitude. On the other hand, the handling of the crisis encouraged anti-establishment sentiments, but this, combined with the policy goals and the asymmetrical ideological and spiritual “lopsidedness” of the movement towards the Republican Party under a Democratic presidency, resulted in a wave of lopsided anger towards political institutions, culminating in the later Presidency of Donald Trump.

Subchapter 2.2. stressed the importance of the contestation of democratic values according to three factors: (1) Social organization is about the minimalization of conflicts (elimination of the state of nature), (2) Democratic societies establish this order by “popular sovereignty” and institutionalize conflict resolution, and (3) the institutions of this society are captured by their core conception of democracy and the expectations developed around them. In the following subchapter, the paper will closely examine how this structural contestation basis relates to the anchored part of democracy and how certain contestations directed towards these core values altered the social order in the United States. These structural and political incentives are examined from the model developed in Chapter 2. Although related to normative policy values, it examines and reinforces positive or negative outcomes from the standpoint of the structural framework of a democratic society and the benchmark points of Dahl.

3.3. People’s Party and the Progressive outcome: 1892-1912

Many monographs and ample data⁸⁰ suggest that the Populist and Progressive Era was American society's first mass political mobilization, prominently altering the organization of parties.⁸¹ However, the Populist initiation with the Progressive culmination brought long-lasting changes in the bipartisan ideological matrix by pushing the progressive agenda within the Democratic party culminating in the split Republican candidacy of 1912 and the Progressive showdown between Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Although the movement had an ambiguous effect on the interparty cleavages, it also brought one of the greatest recalibrations of the processes of the American political system pushing it more towards a polyarchy in the “Dahlian” sense.

⁸⁰ Besides the sources mentioned above more data and analytic centric accounts of the era: Daniel J. Tichenor and Richard A. Harris, “The Rise of Modern Interest Group Politics: Progressive Era Origins,” in *A History of the U.S. Political System: Ideas, Interests, and Institutions*, ed. Richard A. Harris and Daniel J. Tichenor, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 127–47; Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁸¹ Louis Sandy Maisel, ed., *The Parties Respond: Changes in the American Party System, Transforming American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 21, 42–45.

The points listed in subchapter 2.1. provide a broad academic concept of democracy, but substantially they open the door for many options. In Table 2⁸², data have been collected from party platforms between 1892 and 1912, which encompasses the substantial contestation of core concepts of American democracy from the People's Party through the Democratic and Republican parties up until Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive ("Bull Moose") Party. The Populist Party's Omaha Platform, adopted in July 1892, proposed a radical political agenda. The agrarian movement struggling with low food prices, droughts, increasing borrowing costs, and industrialization⁸³ channeled their discontent into reforming American institutions. A belief in popular rule and the extension of political rights stemmed from anti-trust and anti-established tendencies; their most significant proposals thus entailed "democratization" of institutions: direct senatorial elections, institutions of referendum and recall, term limits on federal offices (Senator, President), equal rights for women and the introduction of the secret (or Australian) ballot through all member states of the Union. However, one can assert that these radical proposals at the time were overshadowed by their economic agenda centered around silver coinage and an expansive monetary policy to decrease mortgage rates and increase agricultural prices. In the historiography of American populism⁸⁴, swings between its pure democratic interpretations and more tempered criticism towards the movement highlighted their misreading of economic processes, mainly debt and mortgage rate setting; however, their democratization proposals are widely viewed more positively, though the implementation of those policies came in the Progressive Era. It is undeniable that Populism lacked an integrative power within its rank, demonstrated in its geographic segmentation and internal debate on how to develop relationships with the Democratic and Republican Party and how to handle African American farmers; this segmentation led to the campaign of 1896 and the unification of the Democratic and Populist party under the candidacy of William Jennings Bryan. A closer look at Table 2 reveals the real legacy of the Omaha platform, later manifested in the election of 1912 and the three-way showdown of the Presidents of the Progressive Era. Before examining the Progressive's outcome, the evaluation of Populism is needed as the starting point of anchoring the issues listed above and examined in Table 2 indeed, revising political institutions

⁸² Data is collected from the comparison of two primary sources: , and the corresponding appendixes of Schlesinger, History of U.S. Political Parties Volume II. 1860-1910 the Gilded Age of Politics; Arthur M. Schlesinger, ed., History of U.S. Political Parties Volume III. 1910-1945 from Square Deal to New Deal, vol. 3, 4 vols. (New York: Chelsea House Publ, 1980).

⁸³ Canovan, Populism, 17–58; Schlesinger, History of U.S. Political Parties Volume II. 1860-1910 the Gilded Age of Politics, 2:1701–1807.

⁸⁴ For a comprehensive account see: Worth Robert Miller, "A Centennial Historiography of American Populism," Kansas History 16, no. 1 (1993): 54–69; Canovan, Populism, 46–51.

in a Jacksonian fashion by plans to expand suffrage to a nearly universal level and introducing the idea of a secret ballot, this touches on Dahl's point 2 and 3, electoral reforms of direct elections is closely connected to point 8 and the and to make primaries open for outside candidates and directly conducting them improves on point 4 and 8. Finally, the attempt to support organized labor is a vast movement toward point 7. To sum up, Dahl's expanded standard populist aim is to improve on five out of nine by only contesting regressively point 1 with the institution of the referendum and imitative, which in exchange can improve on point 9. However, of course, the relationship with Dahl's point does not signify anything more than how a contestation relates to the contemporary hegemonic view of democracy; it can only be understood by pairing it with the structural changes it inflicted and the way the contestation during anchoring was conducted. Inserting the People's Party's project into the map of unanchoring in the U.S. (Table 1), we find that its contestation is nearest to the "Jacksonian

	Women's equality	(Graduate) Income Tax	Railroad regulation (nationalization, legislative action)	Secret/Australian ballot (state level)	Initiative and referendum	Direct election of Senators	Direct election of the President and Vice-President	One Term limit for the President	Right to (organized) labor
1892									
People's Party	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Democratic Party									
Republican Party									
1896									
People's Party		X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Democratic Party		X							
Republican Party	X		(X)						
1900									
Democratic Party			X			X			
Republican Party									
1904									
Democratic Party			X			X			X
Republican Party									
1908									
Democratic Party		X	X			X			X
Republican Party			X						X
1912									
Progressive Party	X	X	X		X	X			X
Democratic Party		X	X			X		X	X
Republican Party									

Table 2: Party Platform and contestation 1892-1912
In the table, "X" marks the inclusion of specific agendas, and "(X)" means an ambiguous mention of the issue.

Democracy” and the re-anchoring after the Civil War, however with its attachment to the Democratic Party, it started a process which reverbs in today American politics too.

The nomination of William Jennings Bryan in 1896 settled the “integration” of the Populists into the “American political mainstream.” However, Bryan failed all of his presidential bids in 1896, 1900, and 1908; however, he developed a strong populist or later progressive wing for the Democratic Party. Although on the Populists’ demand, Bryan’s record is meager, not just in an electoral sense, the radical promises dwindled in party platforms (see Table 2), silver coinage, tariffs, and foreign policy dominated the Democratic agenda. Historians somewhat agree that the Democratic Party hijacked and “outplayed” the movement with Bryan’s nomination to solidify its positions in the South and limitedly penetrate the West and Midwest.⁸⁵ The reinvigoration of the Populist agenda came with the Roosevelt-Taft fallout during Taft’s first term (1908-1912) and the opening of the progressive wing of the Republican Party towards Bryan.⁸⁶ Bryan exploited the situation to his benefit and attended both parties’ national conventions as a journalist. Bryan accurately examined the power imbalance between the sitting President William Howard Taft and his predecessor Theodore Roosevelt. In his afternoon newspaper letter on the 17th of June, he corresponded about the significant differences between the conservative Taft and the progressive Roosevelt wing of the Party. Although he praised the personal affection of Roosevelt’s persona, his “third term controversy” was too big of baggage. He asserted that the former President should have “...espoused the cause of any other progressive [...] he could have controlled the convention and made himself master of the organization of the party.”⁸⁷ Bryan was not far from the truth, but the “third-term controversy” was not the main issue; Roosevelt struggled with party delegates and influence instead. Roosevelt tried to balance out the odds by introducing a direct primary system, which was partially achieved in some Western states, and although Roosevelt won the popular vote in the primary but lost in the party delegation race, Bryan rightly predicted in his 17th of June letter. Bryan himself did as he suggested for Roosevelt in his column and controlled the Democratic nomination from within with an intent to eliminate the “reactionary” wing of the Party

⁸⁵ Canovan, *Populism*, 17–58; Elisabeth Clemens, “Social Movements, Mobs, and Militias: Collective Action in American Political Development from the Revolution to the New Deal,” in *A History of the U.S. Political System: Ideas, Interests, and Institutions*, ed. Richard A. Harris and Daniel J. Tichenor, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 173–85; Ralph M. Goldman, *Search for Consensus: The Story of the Democratic Party* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 119–22; Key, *Politics, Parties, & Pressure Groups*, 256–59.

⁸⁶ Schlesinger, *History of U.S. Political Parties Volume III. 1910-1945 from Square Deal to New Deal*, 3:987–1141.

⁸⁷ William Jennings Bryan, *A Tale of Two Conventions: Being an Account of the Republican and Democratic National Conventions of June 1912, with an Outline of the Progressive National Convention of August in the Same Year* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1912), 12.

represented by New York's delegate leader Charles F Murphy, so Bryan was the turning point of the convention on the 1st of July changed the Nebraska⁸⁸ delegation's vote to back Wilson.⁸⁹ In an unexpected turn of events, Theodore Roosevelt organized his own Progressive Party. On the 10th of August, Bryan published an article⁹⁰ on the new party; he reiterated his previous assessment that reforming the Republican Party would have been more desirable for the ex-President and contemplated that progressives may not hold enough transformative power within the ranks of the Republicans. Regarding the platforms, Bryan criticized the addition of Populist-Democratic proposals like direct senatorial elections, initiative, referendum, and even direct primaries and the inclusion of women's suffrage and recall, which Bryan describes as "state issues." Finally, Bryan described some new elements as "commendable," like changing the constitutional amending process to be quicker and simpler. Bryan is most alarmed by the proposed expansion of the federal government's power to the detriment of the states, which he regards as authoritative and unconstitutional. Bryan instead promotes the Democratic Party for progressive voters, alluding to the fact that the party advocated for most of these reforms for decades. The electoral campaign of 1912 brought the showdown awaited by Bryan between a conservative Republican Party and the Progressive and Democratic Parties as leading contenders. In the vigor of this progressive moment, the spirit of 1892 returned as both the Progressive and the Democratic Party adopted most proposals of the Omaha platform. Wilson's victory was almost guaranteed with the Democratic Party's "Solid South" base and the Republican split, so a solid Progressive victory in either way was expected. However, the task for Wilson and Roosevelt was to make a case for themselves who was the "real Progressive" candidate. When Roosevelt gave his "New Nationalism"⁹¹ speech, Wilson was under pressure, so he gave his own "New Freedom" speech⁹² as an answer. Both speeches agreed on the issues promoted by the Populists and later all Progressives (Table 2.), but the Federalist-Anti-Federalist nexus devolved into a Hamiltonian argument from Roosevelt's side⁹³ and a Jeffersonian one from Wilson's side.⁹⁴ The pureness of these two conceptions was

⁸⁸ *His home state.*

⁸⁹ *Bryan, A Tale of Two Conventions, 193–97.*

⁹⁰ *Bryan, 296–307.*

⁹¹ *Theodore Roosevelt, The Works of Theodore Roosevelt: Social Justice and Popular Rule Essays, Addresses, and Public Statements Relating to the Progressive Movement (1910–1916), vol. 17 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 5–22.*

⁹² *Woodrow Wilson, The New Freedom: A Call for the Emancipation of the Generous Energies of a People (London: Chapman and Hall, 1912).*

⁹³ *Milkis, Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy, 39.*

⁹⁴ *Key, Politics, Parties, & Pressure Groups, 178–81.*

miscellaneous; Wilson advocated for many expansionary institutions and new roles of government like a central bank and regulatory powers against trusts but wrapped his narrative into the framework of “individual liberty.” This style of political speech was an explicit strategy for Wilson to pose a more moderate stance on progressive issues, especially the federal government's role while maintaining the progressive image. Wilson posed as a more tempered actor as he said: “It [the American Electorate] resembles a great self-possessed power which takes possession, takes control of its own affairs. And I am willing to wait. I am among those who believe so in the essential doctrines of democracy that I am willing to wait on the convenience of this great sovereignty⁹⁵.” Roosevelt did advocate for a popular national government combining Hamilton with Lincoln, but also believed in a “meritocratic economy,” stressed individual rights, and, most importantly, under the “square deal” promoted “... not merely that I stand for fair play under the present rules of the game, but that I stand for having those rules changed...”, he noticed the dual threat of the “tyranny of majority and minority” and alluded to the cure of “self-restraint.”⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Roosevelt’s campaign strategy was different from Wilson’s. Roosevelt pushed progressivism to the extremes, signified by his stance on judicial recall, a practice that was not supported by the majority of the electorate and could be labeled as authoritarian tendencies⁹⁷. Roosevelt’s concept of nationalism was democratic at its core as he asserted it: “We must make this nation a real democracy; an economic as well as political democracy free from every taint of either sectional or sectarian hatred; a democracy of true brotherhood...”⁹⁸ This alignment and mutual respect of core American and democratic values were maintained despite the harsh criticism directed towards each other and unreformed political institutions combined with the tempered implementation of their political project where the common reforms guaranteed that both progressive wings would get some desired reforms. The evaluation of U.S. presidents is hard for Political Science and History too. Roosevelt’s and Wilson’s image has flaws, many misdeeds, and

⁹⁵ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 25 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 237. (*Campaign Speech on New Issues in Hartford, Connecticut September. 25, 1912*)

⁹⁶ Roosevelt, *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt: Social Justice and Popular Rule Essays, Addresses, and Public Statements Relating to the Progressive Movement (1910-1916)*, 17:151–71. (*The Right of People to Rule, Address at Carnegie Hall, New York City, March 20, 1912*)

⁹⁷ Milkis, Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy, 27–74. See also at Roosevelt’s *Charter of Democracy* speech February 21 1912 at the Ohio constitutional convention See: Roosevelt, *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt: Social Justice and Popular Rule Essays, Addresses, and Public Statements Relating to the Progressive Movement (1910-1916)*, 17:119–48.

⁹⁸ Roosevelt, *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt: Social Justice and Popular Rule Essays, Addresses, and Public Statements Relating to the Progressive Movement (1910-1916)*, 17:377. (*The Heirs of Abraham Lincoln pp 359-378 Speech at the Lincoln Day banquet, New York City , February 12th , 1913*)

contradictions⁹⁹. However, this paper asserts that intentions are in second to the pressures both candidates got from the American public, and the implementation of Populist reforms demonstrates the utility of this focused outcome-driven analysis.

Wilson went on to win the election. Under his tenure, direct senatorial elections, income tax, and women's suffrage were implemented and amended to the constitution; initiatives and referendums started to spread on the state level and, ironically, as a cause of World War I. As a result, the U.S. central government's power significantly increased. Although Wilson was painted as "The very antithesis of Roosevelt,"¹⁰⁰ he painted his opponent as an authoritative threat to state rights,¹⁰¹ and the main reforms remained constant between the two candidates. The progressive wings of the two main parties and the necessity of procedural reform and reasonable expansion of state power gave a common ground between the two parties on which the reforms could be administered. Indeed, 30 years elapsed between the Populist vision and its – partial – execution, but this gradualism is the price of a healthy unanchoring process that seeks to change the rules within the rules. The victory of Wilson, however, settled the "place" for progressives in the two-party system; while the Republican party survived the great defeat, purged from progressive elements, and gradually shifted to the conservative right, the Democratic party got more progressive. As Table 1 demonstrates, the process solidified in the Civil Rights Era, and from the Nixon shock and the appearance of Ronald Reagan, consolidated the new conservative right, which was a fertile ground for Tea Party conservatism.

3.4. The Tea Party: Lopsided contestation of the American political system: 2008-

The Tea Party movement, in a certain sense, initiated a return to the initial debates of the United States of America; from the standpoint of Table 1, it can be regarded as a complete circle. The naming of the party and its motives of anti-taxation borrow from revolutionary America. At the same time, its economic stances rely on Reaganomics, but a noticeable feature is the complete rejection of progressivism as examined by Lawrence Rosenthal, most

⁹⁹ See corresponding chapters in: James M. Banner, ed., *Presidential Misconduct: From George Washington to Today* (New York ; London: The New Press, 2019). Proving criminal misconduct in most presidents' direct involvement is hard to provide; in the case of Roosevelt, some myths are partially debunked, like the extent of trustbusting or stances on racial politics.

¹⁰⁰ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 23 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 613. (Article printed in the *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1911)

¹⁰¹ Wilson, 23:501. (An Address in Dallas at the Texas State Fair)

importantly specific Populist and Progressive reforms.¹⁰² The Tea Party contested and still somewhat contests the core principles of American democracy. On the first, structural level, it is anti-progressive and anti-liberal and calls¹⁰³ for the revocation of income tax¹⁰⁴ and the direct election of Senators¹⁰⁵ and advocates for a “small government” and market-based agenda, the “Contract from America,”¹⁰⁶ a callback to soon-to-be Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich’s “Contract with America.”¹⁰⁷ On the second, more immaterial level, it is anti-establishment sentiment paired with revision of American democracy and state to the times of the founding of the Republic. A project to make America a “republic again,” implying not just a form of government but an antithesis to democracy and the support of the Republican Party against the Democratic.

Regarding its anti-progressivism, the Tea Party somewhat followed the footsteps of the Populists, some would identify it as a populist movement, but it differs in three key features. First, its policy goals and goals regarding core democratic values regress to foundational debates and oppose progressive constitutional and core advancements; second, its relationship with major parties is asymmetrical (tilted towards the Republican Party); and third, it directs anti-establishment sentiment towards the institutions of democracy and opposition political actors. As Rosenthal and Trost point out in their book, Tea Party activism and resentment come from similar economic discontent as Populist and Progressive. However, as Skocpol and Williamson demonstrate¹⁰⁸, grassroots activism in the case of the Tea Party is combined with a business elite practice; Kabaservice identifies a similar lopsidedness; he asserts that the Tea Party fits into “the latest in a cycle of insurgencies on the Republican right.”¹⁰⁹ These works are relatively earlier interpretations of the movement and imbued with *zeitgeist*, but they point

¹⁰² Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost, eds., *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 28–29.

¹⁰³ Rosenthal and Trost, 28–29.

¹⁰⁴ Tea Party Patriots, “Repeal 16 - FAQ,” Tea Party Patriots (blog), accessed January 11, 2023, <https://www.teapartypatriots.org/archive/faq/>. and H.J.Res.104 — 113th Congress (2013-2014) of Rep. Jim, Bridenstine

¹⁰⁵ David Firestone, “So You Still Want to Choose Your Senator?,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2010, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/01/opinion/01tue4.html>.

¹⁰⁶ A. B. C. News, “Tea Party Activists Craft ‘Contract from America,’” *ABC News*, accessed January 11, 2023, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/tea-party-activists-craft-contract-america/story?id=9740705>.

¹⁰⁷ David E. Rosenbaum, “Republicans Offer Voters a Deal for Takeover of House,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 1994, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/09/28/us/republicans-offer-voters-a-deal-for-takeover-of-house.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 83–120.

¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey M. Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, from Eisenhower to the Tea Party*, *Studies in Postwar American Political Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 387.

out some reactionary relationships and a fit into American political history. While the Populists' legacy pushed both parties and had long-lasting effects on Republicans and Democrats, Tea Party conservatism is a recurring struggle specific to the post-World War II Republican Party, a struggle between moderates and prominent outsiders like Barry Goldwater, Joseph McCarthy, and Robert Welch.¹¹⁰ Now, this struggle is not as antagonistic as painted in Rosenthal and Trost or Kabaservice, but the direct consequence of the election of 1912, by winning Wilson unwillingly predestined the Democratic as the progressive party and Lyndon Johnson with the Civil Rights Act sealed it. Kabaservice suggests a similar trajectory for the Tea Party which pushed and kept pushing the party rightwards,¹¹¹ following the trail of a Reagan-type political agenda, determining the Tea Party as a home-grown project of the Republican Party. Populism in the Bryan Era can be regarded as a fairly similar phenomenon; however, the political circumstances incentivized the Tea Party differently. While Populists and Progressives aimed to address the structural problems of capitalism and industrial society, the Tea Party reacted to the policies of the Obama Administration and served a different role than either Populists or Progressives. The role of the Tea Party was to attack the establishment and the “servants” of the overexpanded federal government, thus both the Administration, the Democratic Party, and the moderate Republicans. This pressure-centric approach to politics manifests intensely in the decentralized nature of the movement and that, ultimately, it did not transform into a separate party but by common policy ground from the Regan Era integrated into the Republican Party. Without a single leader, it swept under the umbrella of the conservative party establishment of the Republican Party, and although contributed with Tea Party “style” politicians like Sarah Palin or Rand Paul, pledged many Republican politicians to the cause of the movement, established legislative groups namely the Tea Party and Freedom caucuses in Congress, it remained in the role of an inner pressure group. Although right-wing tendencies were present in the efforts of the Tea Party, the direct outcome of these efforts was indeed a party pushed rightwards by Tea Party affiliate candidates.¹¹² As a pressure group, this praxis in itself is not that harmful as different opinions, conflicts as mentioned in Chapter 2, are inherent in democracies, but when we dive into the philosophical approach and the everyday praxis, we

¹¹⁰ Rosenthal and Trost, *Steep*, 25–46.

¹¹¹ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 363–88.

¹¹² Pew Research Center, “What Is the House Freedom Caucus, and Who’s in It?,” Pew Research Center (*blog*), accessed January 11, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/20/house-freedom-caucus-what-is-it-and-whos-in-it/>.

can notice where the Tea Party inflicted considerably significant wounds in the fabric of American society and constituting the possibility of one of the most delicate of unanchoring.

From the standpoint of the contestation, the Tea Party choose a different route from the Populist's vision. Instead of renewing the core principles of democracy with new ideas, it tries to revise them back to the nation's birth; this does mean the erosion of certain Dahlian principles, like the elimination of Senators as directly elected officials, reducing the protective capacities of the state, but a more dangerous phenomenon of the contestation of democracy as a framework for society. Hence, the argument mentioned by Rosenthal and Trost, "United States is "a republic," where the properly suited represent the people and is not "a democracy" and the promotion of Madisonian remonstrance against the "fit of populist rage."¹¹³ The Tea Party initiated this antagonization by dragging the core contestation back to step zero (Table 1), contesting the core values of American democracy, and ignoring the long political development by opening up the Federalist-Anti-Federalist and democracy-republic debate the spirit is out of the bottle. Suppose that antagonization between the two sides leads to the mutual rejection of institutions like elections, party contests, election outcomes, and the legitimacy of the government of the other. In that case, that easily can lead to the rejection of democracy as a framework or, ultimately, the *modus vivendi* and the coherence of society, which can result in separatism or civil war. The Democratic side, in a counteraction, reinforces the core values of liberal democracies and labels Tea Party activism and the debasement of the word "democracy" as well-set as assessed by Thucydides in connection with the Peloponnesian war, communication is disrupted, and "public spheres" are insulated from each other, and antagonism ramps up to a level of enmity resulting in problems both Habermas and Mouffe have pointed out. Populism, on the other hand, integrated itself into the development of core values of democracy by introducing reforms and new ideas; first, they introduced these ideas by themselves, but they had to adapt to the political realities and melt them into the two-party system and pressure their agenda through both parties and then administering the reforms through Wilson. The Tea Party attempted something similar but forgot that reverting well-anchored core concepts and contesting institutions developed through the democratic process does not necessarily restore the stability of previous structures; thus, the circle to getting from the last moment in Table 2 to the first one is not possible to execute in one step. The comparison highlights that pushing an agenda unapologetically in the short run accrues political benefit, but these gains melt away if, in the long run, polarization, sectionalism, and differing concepts

¹¹³ Rosenthal and Trost, Steep.

along these core cleavages render social organization impossible. Change is the most crucial channel and minimizer of conflict in democratic societies; however, when administered lopsidedly, without the inclusion of other societal actors, at least on reasonable common ground. For William Jennings Bryan, this was Progressivism, a decades-long struggle to advocate change, for the Tea Party's hastiness and asymmetric advocacy brought a counter-reaction and resistance, which led to a self-reinforcing, spiraling polarized conflict between Democrats defending American Democracy and Republicans preserving the American Republic

Later the political environment facilitated by the Tea Party through the years came into fruition in 2016 and was perfect for Donald Trump to run for the Presidency as an outsider, Tea Party “styled” anti-establishment candidate, sharing agenda points with the movement and engaging in agendas like the “birther theory,” which questioned Barack Obama’s Americanism. Democrats painted Trump’s candidacy and the election’s integrity somewhat. However, on January 6, 2021, Trump questioned the results of the election, so both parties developed obscurity towards one of the main pillars of the core concept of American Democracy, the elections and one of the most crucial conflict mitigation institutions and rituals, the peaceful transfer of power deeply rooted in the nation’s history and established by George Washington’s resignation as commander in chief of the Continental Army in 1783 to the benefit of Congress. American democracy seems to lose its anchor point, or at least the American people and the political system got more polarized.¹¹⁴ The solutions, however, will not be fined within the conflict between the democratic and Republican Parties. However, only through a wholesale discussion about the American society’s democratic framework breaking the barriers is it inevitable to settle the core issues that serve society's everyday organization. If Americans insist on their democratic heritage, they should start by reassessing the anchor and avoiding the constant state of *unanchored democracy*.

¹¹⁴ Drew Desilver, “The Polarization in Today’s Congress Has Roots That Go Back Decades,” Pew Research Center (blog), accessed January 11, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/10/the-polarization-in-todays-congress-has-roots-that-go-back-decades/>.

4. Conclusion

This paper's primary aim was to broaden the analytical value of the concept of anchoring and unanchoring in democratic societies by connecting the theory with the comparative case study. The Populist-Progressive and Tea Party Era comparison served a purpose not just to demonstrate the utility of the theoretical framework and that of examination of conflicts and contestation in democratic societies but to embed political processes in modern and current history in a novel analytical frame. After the introduction, Chapter 2 established the crucial definitions regarding social what is anchoring, the social organization within a democratic society, and conflict and contestation in the framework of unanchoring process and the unanchored state of democracy. For the hypothesis, this standard, well-anchored and institutionalized benchmark complemented with the extended 9 points of Dahl as the anchor point served as the core reference point of the paper. The paper, building on this, examines what kind and level of contestation can distort the core and anchored values of democracy so much that it cannot organize society. Chapter 3 explored how the Populist-Progressive and the post-2008 Tea Party Era contested the core principles. The comparison enumerated their common roots in economic discontent while also highlighting the different integration of the movements into the two-party system (in a symmetric and unsymmetric way, respectively) and the different consequences of anti-establishment sentiments, one directed against social change and industrial society and the other against the whole political system. This, predictably, resulted in different outcomes: one where conflict was channeled through reform and one where antagonization and polarization impede re-anchoring.

Nevertheless, a question may linger in the reader: What is the ultimate utility of unanchoring and analyzing history through events that can be described as such? Static thinking about democracy impedes considering democracy and its possible future changes and past dynamics; boxing them into taxonomy and labels will not describe the process and experience of democracy sufficiently. Historical case studies, on the other hand, can lead to just cutting up the fabric of human history and rearranging it again and again; this can be arbitrary and self-serving. In introducing the unanchoring process and the unanchored state of democracy, this paper attempted to strike a point between the camps and criticize them in one breath, a similar dynamic observed between Rawls, Mouffe, and Habermas. Meaning, that history and transformation of democracy cannot be rendered under the umbrella of one (liberal) ideological framework but also cannot be rejected as an overtly fluid concept

subjected to constant uncertainty, as anchoring-unanchoring shows it is both; a set of events in the flow of processes which either stabilize or destabilize democracy. This paper tried to shed light on the democratic change and transformation, its possibilities, and the existence of democratic conceptions and, despite using a liberal democratic benchmark, stressed the importance of change, conflict, and perception; rather than trying to think through current orthodoxies. Democracy has resisted being pinned down by static concepts, and the observation of the U.S. political history serves as a crystalized representation of recurring societal struggle in a country where republicanism and democratism have been at odds virtually from the nation's birth.

The paper opens a possibility for the further use of this analytical framework. It must be admitted, however, that specificities of U.S. political history made the analysis itself easier relative to countries where political systems have been more diverse throughout history. The Populist and Progressive reform of American politics and society is “closed business” from the standpoint of history. Nevertheless, growing concerns around the current liberal understanding of democracy and polarization tell a different story about our present, a story which is rooted in these past changes, which imply that no form of democracy, even core concepts, are taken for granted; they transform, they are challenged and defended, disappear and emerge again. Nevertheless, our current environment of contestation may not serve as an ideal ground for contestation; the looming shadow of polarization may result in democracy in uncertainty in an unanchored state.

Jimmy Carter’s story was evoked in the Introduction. Although he was not a protagonist of the case studies, his words nevertheless offer an accurate diagnosis at a crossroads of history, which reached back to the Populist and Progressive sentiment at a time when American society tackled similar struggles as the ones discussed in the paper. Carter lost, and we will never know how he would have lived up to his closing pledge around that time, which very much proposed, using the terminology of this paper, the commitment to integrate dissent and discontent into existing democratic institutions to preserve – re-anchor – democracy itself. This was, ultimately, the message of his concluding words: “Let us commit ourselves together to a rebirth of the American spirit. Working together with our *common faith*, we cannot fail. Thank you, and good night.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ *The New York Times*, “Transcript of President’s Address to Country on Energy Problems.”

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