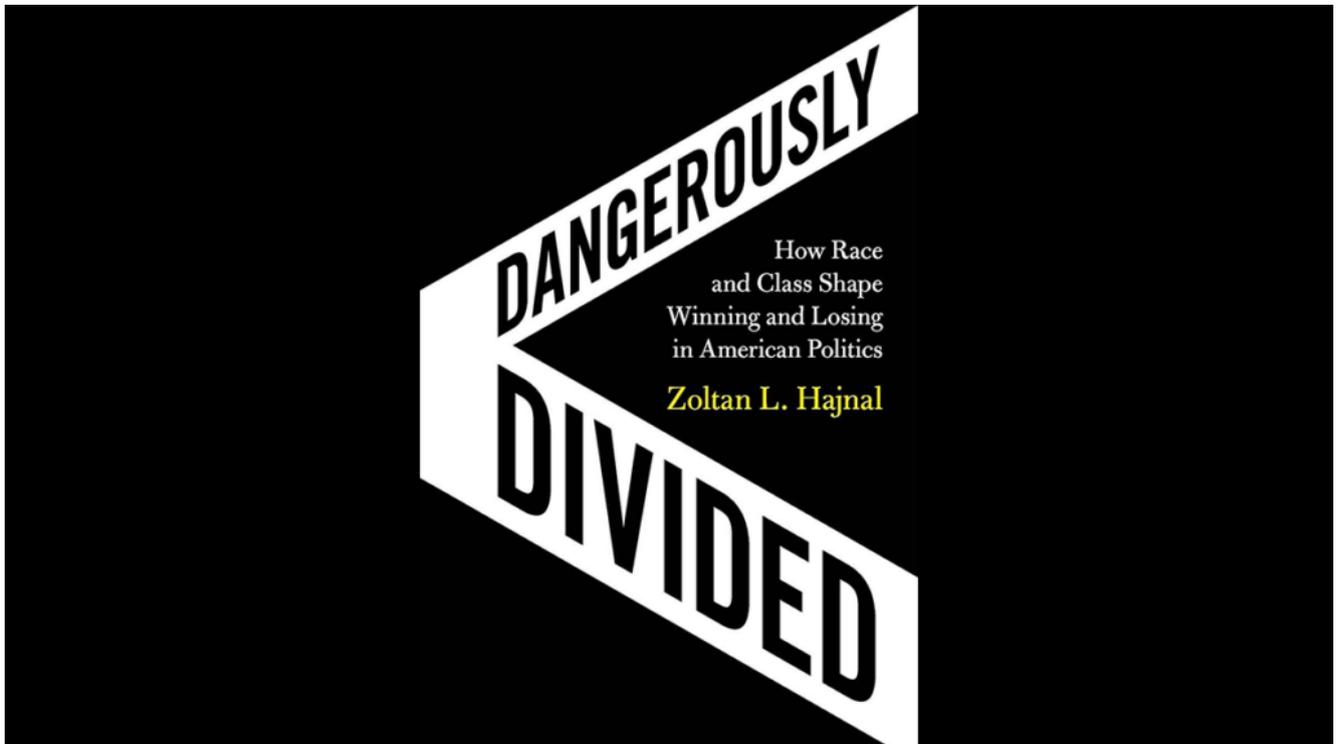


A Nation Dangerously Divided: Race Shapes Who Wins and Who Loses in U.S. Democracy



New book by Zoltan Hajnal reveals how preferences of African-American voters are ignored by federal government—and how to fix it

By Christine Clark | [UC San Diego News](#)

Race is shown to be the single most important factor in American democracy, determining which candidates win elections, which voters win at the polls, and who is on the losing end of policy. These conclusions are at the center of a new book entitled [Dangerously Divided: How Race and Class Shape Winning and Losing in American Politics](#),” by Zoltan Hajnal, professor of political science at UC San Diego’s School of Global Policy and Strategy.

“Arguably, we are now more divided by race than at any other time in modern American history,” Hajnal said. “Even those who are well aware of America’s racial divide may be shocked by the degree to which it is a force in virtually all U.S. elections.”

Hajnal's research draws on sweeping data to assess the political impact of the two most significant demographic trends of last 50 years. While the U.S. has become more racially diverse, income inequality has increased. Yet, Hajnal argues that the country is still more divided by race, than class. "Ironically, as the nation has become more diverse, it has become more divided by the diversity," Hajnal writes.

The book provides insights into how immigration has become a major contributor in our deepening divide, as it has triggered a backlash that has increased white defections from the Democratic Party. Hajnal covered this topic extensively in his last book, [White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics](#), co-authored with Marisa Abrajano, professor of political science in the Division of Social Sciences at UC San Diego. Their 2015 study, which is the basis for the book, predicted the outcome of the 2016 election and was [voted among the top ten social science](#) studies of the last decade by Vox.com.

Winners and losers of elections defined by actions of the federal government

Hajnal used data from a range of public opinion surveys over the last half century that polled about half million Americans on their preferences on a wide range of policy issues. These surveys represent the thoughts of American voters on whether there should be increases or decreases in government spending across 11 different areas of public policy: military spending, healthcare, transportation, gun control, minimum wage, etc.



Hajnal (above) is professor of political science at UC San Diego's School of Global

Policy and Strategy and is director of the school's Master of Public Policy Program.

Hajnal then evaluated if federal government spending eventually reflected the preferences of the majority of Americans over four decades. While the data revealed that American democracy is fairly responsive to constituents; one variable stood out—black voters were 5 percent more likely than whites to have their policy preferences ignored by the federal government.

“Blacks are losing to whites significantly more than any other comparison group—men vs. women, rich vs. poor, liberal vs. conservative,” he said. “One could argue that white voters represent the majority so why wouldn't they have more of a say? However, when I dug deeper, the issue is more problematic because of the consistency at which the will of black voters is not enacted by the federal government in issue after issue, year after year.”

Hajnal does not have an explanation for this pattern; however, he points out that even when blacks have the same policy preferences as white voters, their preferences are weighed less heavily than that of whites, so there does appear to be some discrimination in the process.

Political parties are singularly the greatest determinant of the racial balance of power

Hajnal notes that there are some years where black voters do not lose that much in comparison to whites, and other years where election outcomes respond equally to the desires of both black and white constituents. He found the variation could be explained by which political party controls the levers of power, revealing that when there's a Republican president and congress, the gap is large. When there's a Democratic president and Republican congress, the gap is smaller but still exists; and when there's a Democratic president and congress, the gap disappears.

Additional data reveals that black incomes went up by an average of \$753 more per year under Democratic presidents than under Republican presidents. Black unemployment also fell substantially under Democratic control, while it grew significantly under Republicans. In 22 years under Democratic presidents, black unemployment fell 7.9 points. This is not the case under Republican presidents.

By contrast, in 35 years under Republican leadership, black unemployment grew 13.7 points.

“If we care about American democracy and want it to be as fair as it can be, there is in some sense, a pathway forward,” Hajnal said.

Making a difference by teaching future generations the power of public policy

A scholar of racial and ethnic politics, urban politics, immigration and political behavior, Hajnal directs the School of Global Policy and Strategy’s [Master of Public Policy](#) (MPP) program. The two-year, professional degree program prepares students for policymaking in an increasingly global business and legislative landscape.

Hajnal joined the school’s faculty in 2017 specifically to oversee the new MPP program. His previous appointment was in the UC San Diego Department of Political Science for more than 15 years.

“For me personally, it is important to be involved in a community that cares about and is engaged with policy and to be teaching students who are likely to have a real impact on the world moving forward,” said Hajnal. “All of us involved in the public policy realm wholeheartedly believe that policy is an important tool to improve the wellbeing of everyone in society,”

He added that the program trains students to study public policy in a rigorous and systematic way, allowing them to develop better solutions as well as more efficient and equitable policy that can improve outcomes for societies.

For more information, go to the [Master of Public Policy program webpage](#). Read more about [Zoltan Hajnal](#) on the School of Global Policy & Strategy website.