

Polarization & Incivility in American Politics: Is Congressional Gridlock Affecting U.S. State Legislatures?

University of Utah, Nov. 19th 2019 (updated)

Host: Dr. Christopher Simon, Professor of Political Science

Forum: Hinckley Institute of Politics

**Nicholas P. Lovrich, Regents Professor Emeritus
Claudius O. & Mary W. Johnson Distinguished Professor of Political Science**

**Francis Benjamin, Psychology Department
Former President, Association of Washington Cities
Director, Department of Psychology Political Interaction Lab**

Washington State University

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

SAM REED

14TH SECRETARY OF STATE (3-TERM)

ORGANIZER OF MAINSTREAM REPUBLICANS OF WASHINGTON

[GOOD FRIEND OF PETE CENARRUSA, LONG-TIME SOS OF IDAHO]

STEVEN D. STEHR

SAM REED DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR IN CIVIC EDUCATION AND PUBLIC CIVILITY

THOMAS S. FOLEY INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY & PUBLIC SERVICE

ROB BOATRIGHT, CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, CLARK UNIVERSITY

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL DISCOURSE

American Politics



Image source: Atlantic

“I wish there was a way I could wave a magic wand and put back when people were respectful of each other and the Congress was working for the good of the country and not just along party lines.”



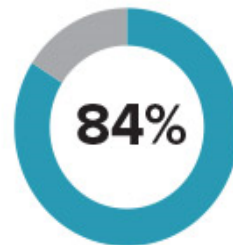
Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

NOLABELS.ORG

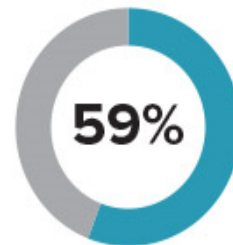
Bipartisan Agreement that Incivility in Politics is Problematic

Of Americans Surveyed...

INCIVILITY EXPERIENCES



Experienced incivility



Quit paying attention to politics because of incivility



Stopped buying from a company because of uncivil representatives



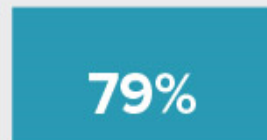
Experienced cyberbullying

Nearly **3X** increase since 2011

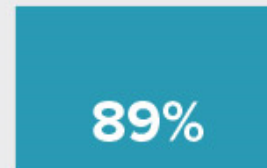
INCIVILITY PERCEPTIONS



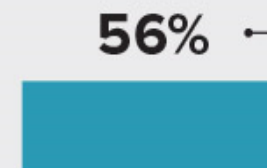
Think incivility has risen to crisis levels



Describe the 2016 presidential election as uncivil



Thinks incivility leads to intimidation and threats



Expect incivility to get worse

Why?
Politicians 75%
Internet and social media 69%
News media 59%

Source: National Institute for Civil Discourse, ICMA, Weber Shandwick, Powell Tate.



JUNE 19, 2019



Trust, Facts and Democracy



Public Highly Critical of State of Political Discourse in the U.S.

Reactions to Trump's rhetoric: Concern, confusion, embarrassment

The public renders a harsh judgment on the state of political discourse in this country. And for many Americans, their own conversations about politics have become stressful experiences that they prefer to avoid.

Large majorities say the tone and nature of political debate in the United States has become more negative in

Most Americans say political debate in the U.S. has become less respectful, fact-based, substantive

% who say over the last several years the tone and nature of political debate in this country has become ...

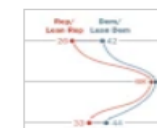
REPORT MATERIALS



Complete Report PDF



Topline



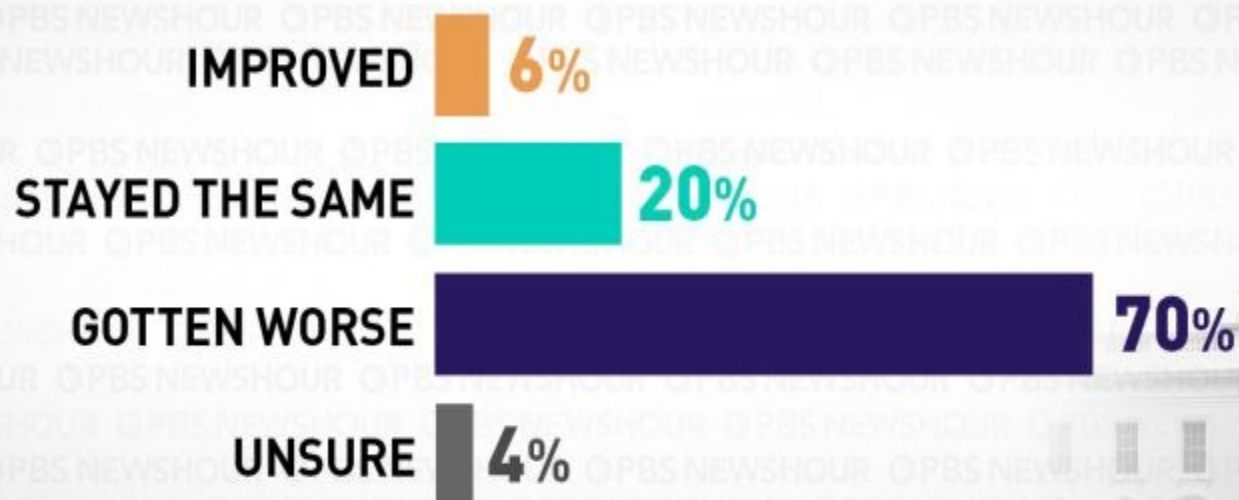
Interactive: Views about the acceptability of political insults

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Overview

What's OK – and off-limits – for political debates

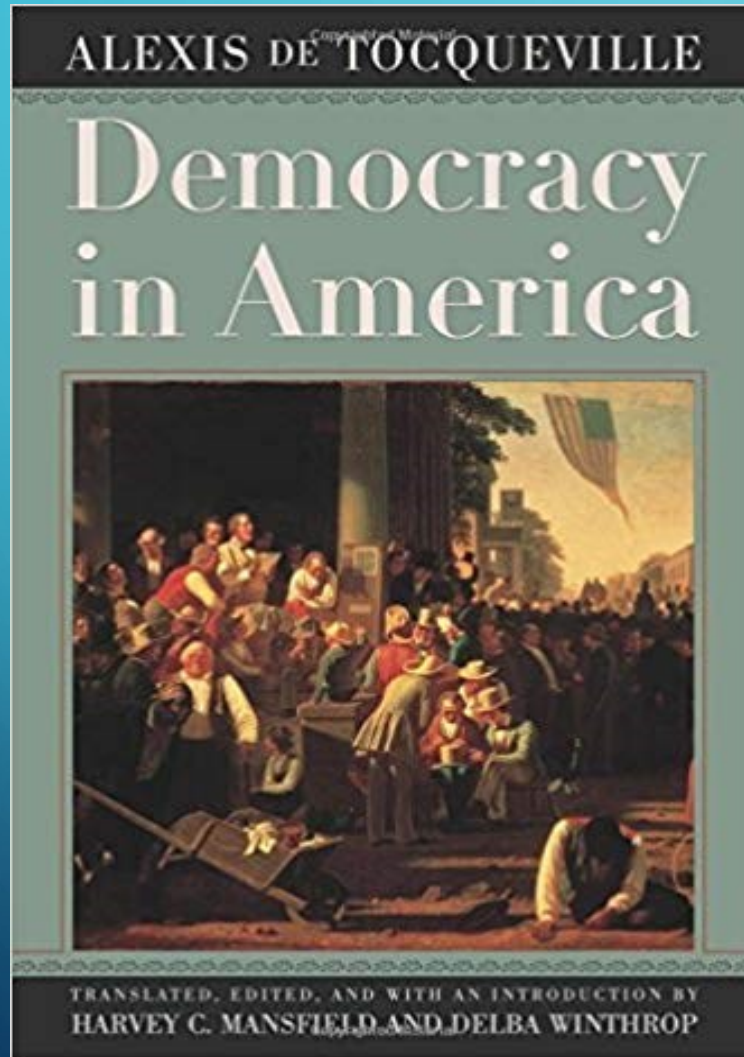
SINCE DONALD TRUMP WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT, HOW HAS THE OVERALL TONE AND LEVEL OF CIVILITY IN WASHINGTON CHANGED?



SOURCE: PBS NEWS HOUR/NPR/MARIST

THIS SURVEY OF 1,205 ADULTS WAS CONDUCTED JUNE 21ST THROUGH JUNE 25TH, 2017

Has Politics Ever Been Civil in the United States? Cycles of Civility and Incivility a Part of U.S. History



“There is still some memory of the strict code of politeness, but no one knows quite what it said or where to find it.”

Legacy derives from courtroom decorum **and the one-time high percent of legislators who were “lawyers” who crafted legislative rules, norms and traditions of respect, comity & civility reflective of courtrooms**



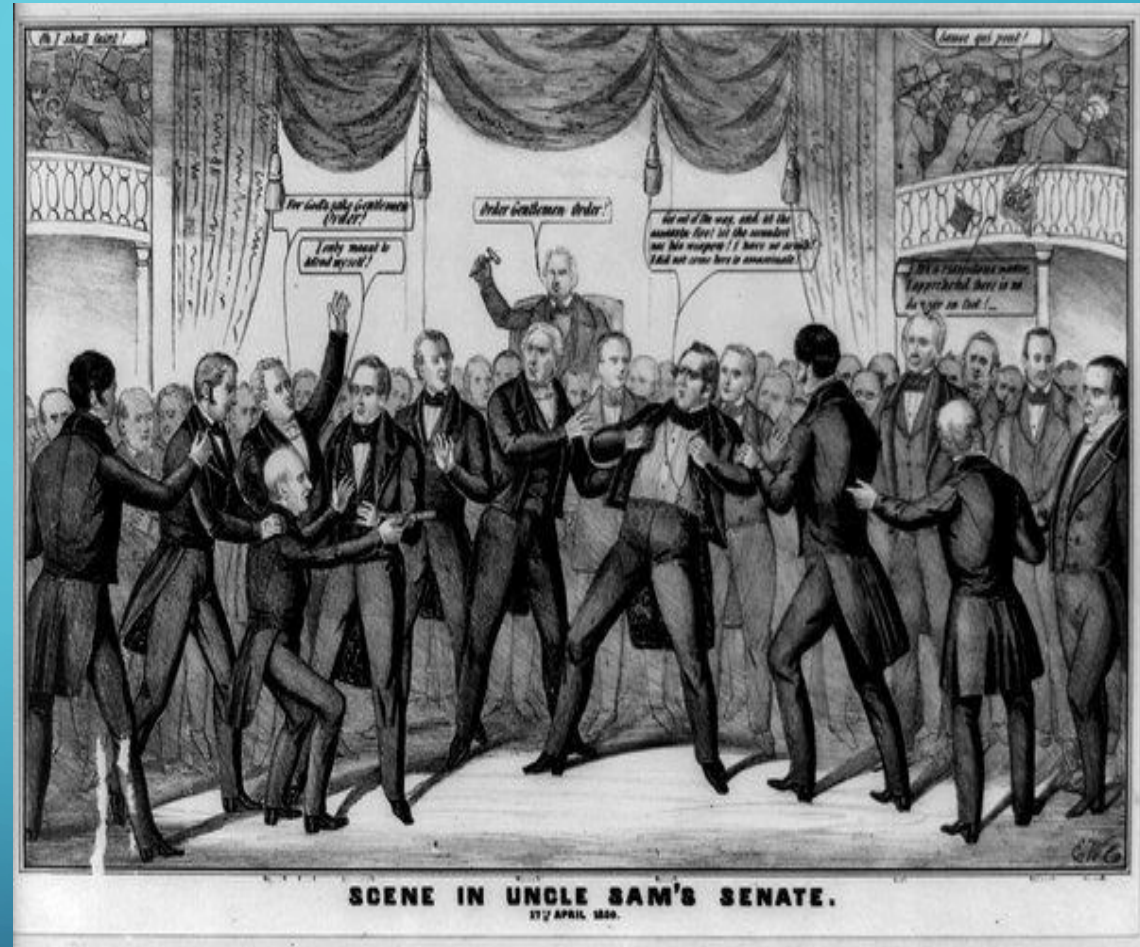
Duel Between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, July
11, 1804



The Caning of Senator Charles Sumner by Representative
Preston Brooks, May 22, 1856

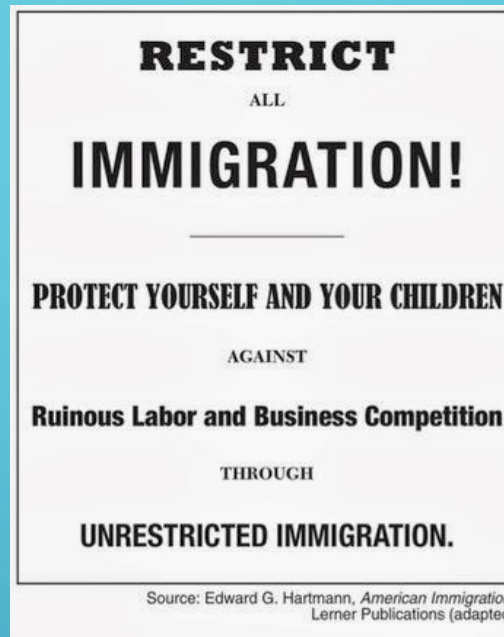
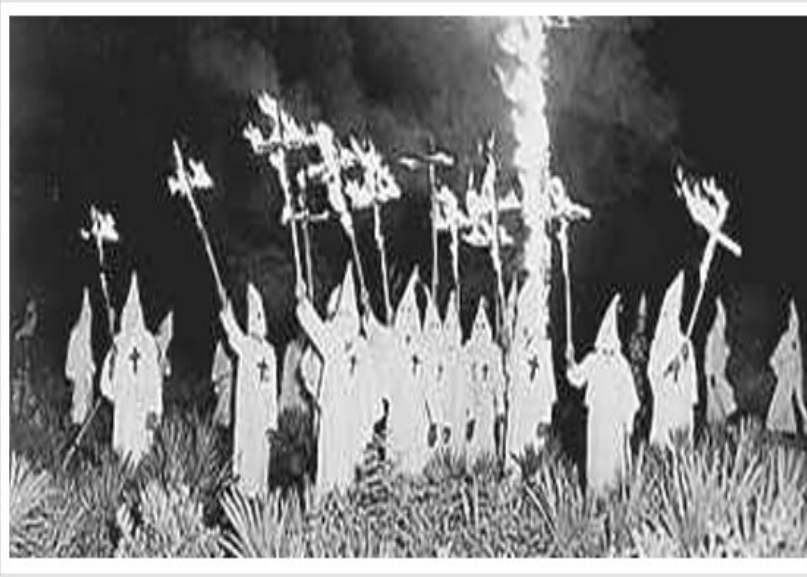


Brawl on the Floor of
House of Representative,
February 6, 1858



Gun play in the U.S. Senate, April 1850

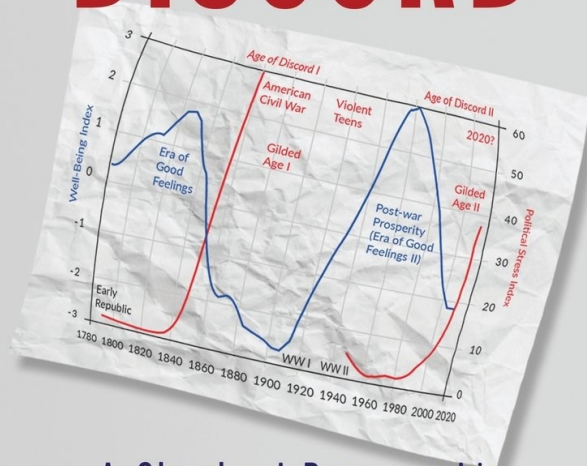
Polarized Politics in the 1920s in America



Remember the 1960s?



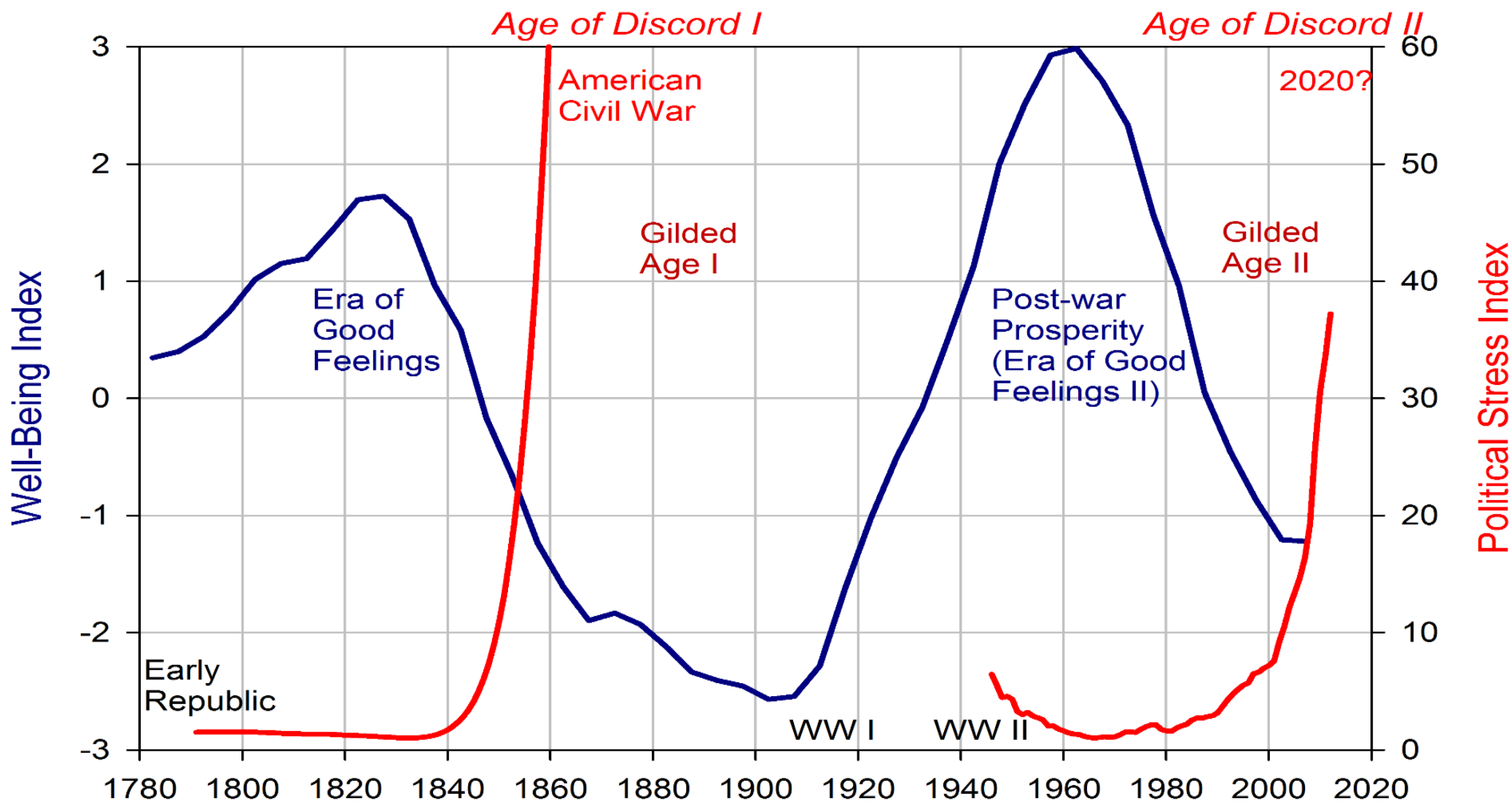
AGES OF DISCORD



A Structural-Demographic
Analysis of American History

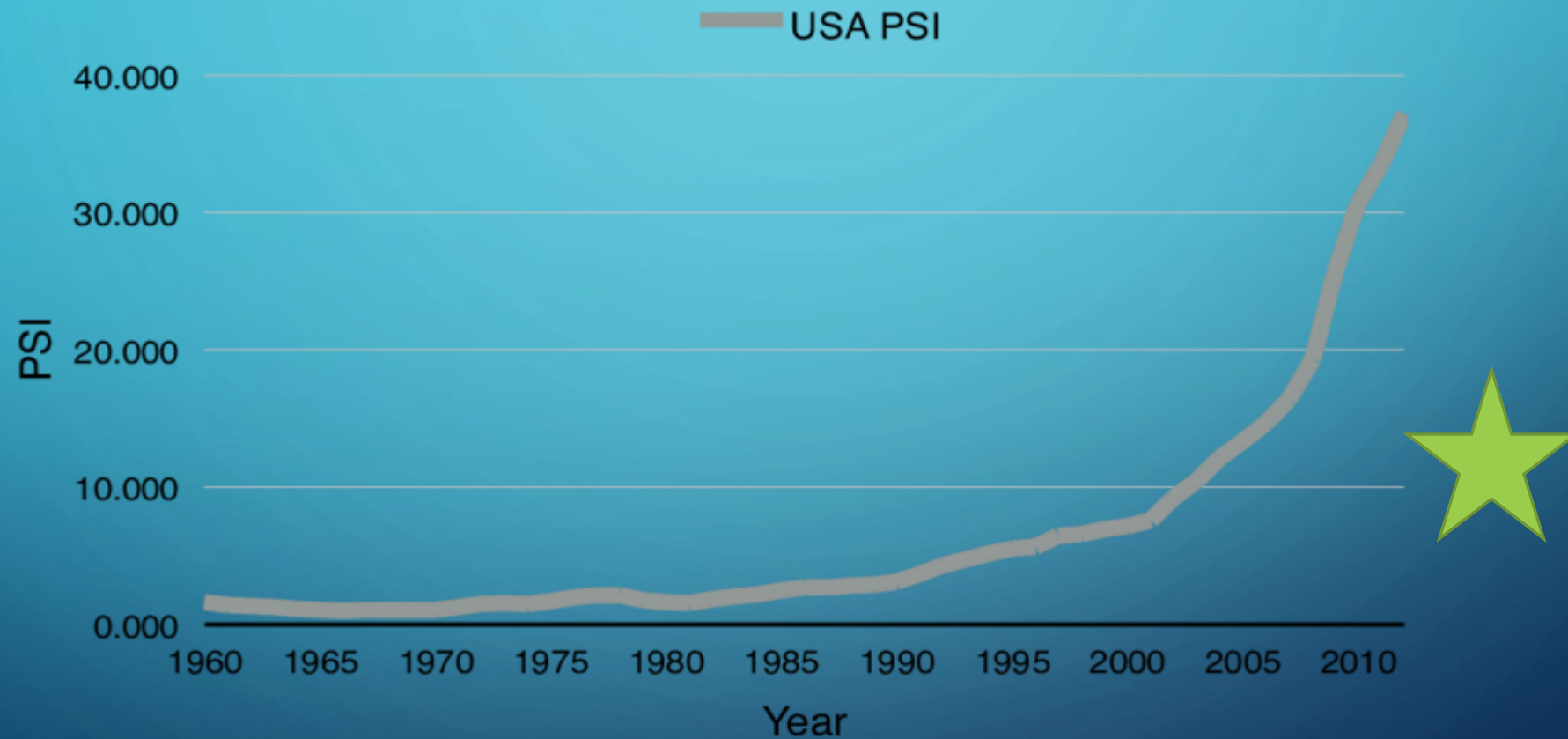
PETER TURCHIN

***The Cyclical Nature of
Political Instability in
the U.S.: Well
Documented***



Source: Turchin, 2016

Political Stress Index in the U.S., 1960-2010: Current Condition of High Stress Reflective of a New Cycle of Discord



Source: Ortmans, et al., 2017 (data from Turchin)



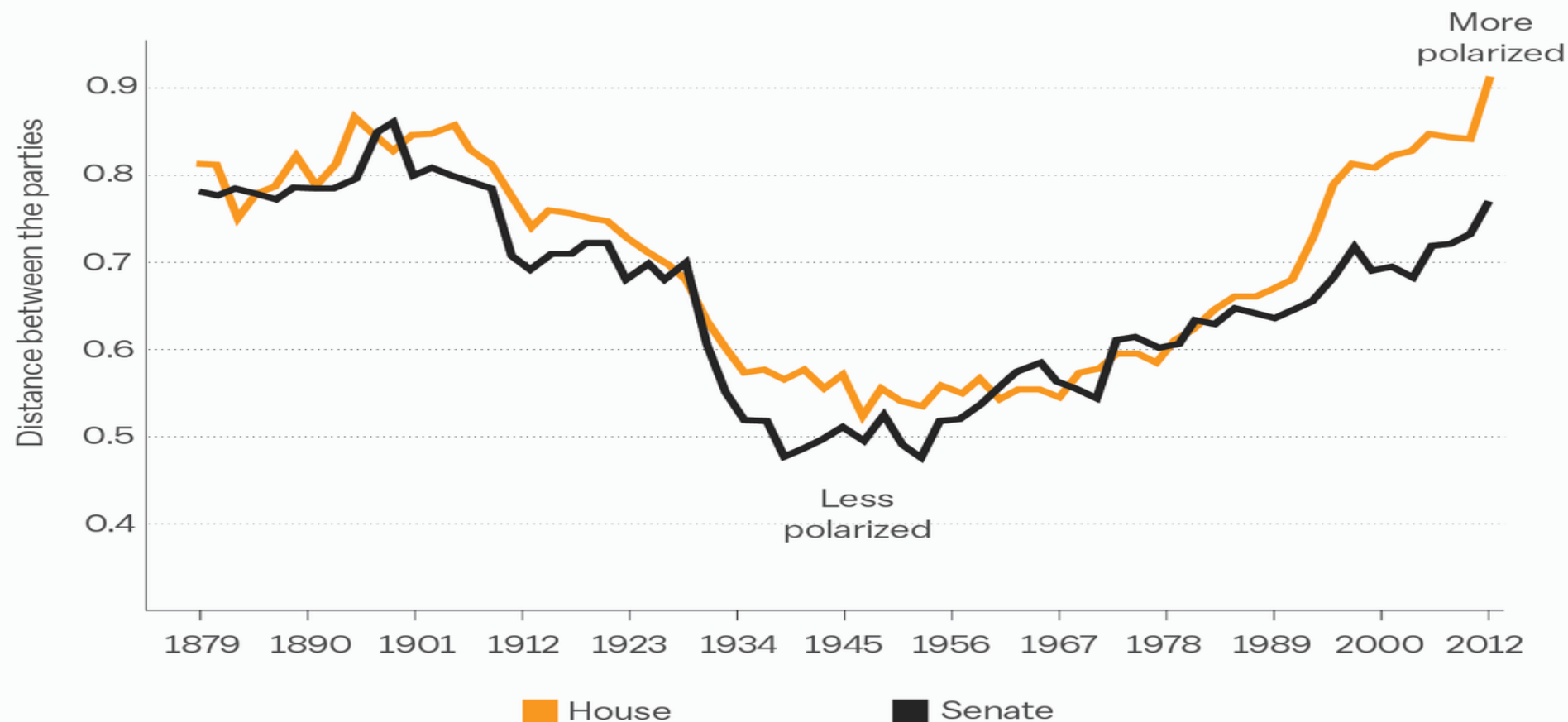
Central Stress-Inducing Factors in Contemporary U.S. Politics

**Partisan Polarization, Declining Trust in Public
Institutions, and Declining Economic Well-being –
all likely Contributing to an Increase in
Contemporary Public Incivility**

Increasing Polarization Among the Political Elites

Party polarization, 1879 - 2012

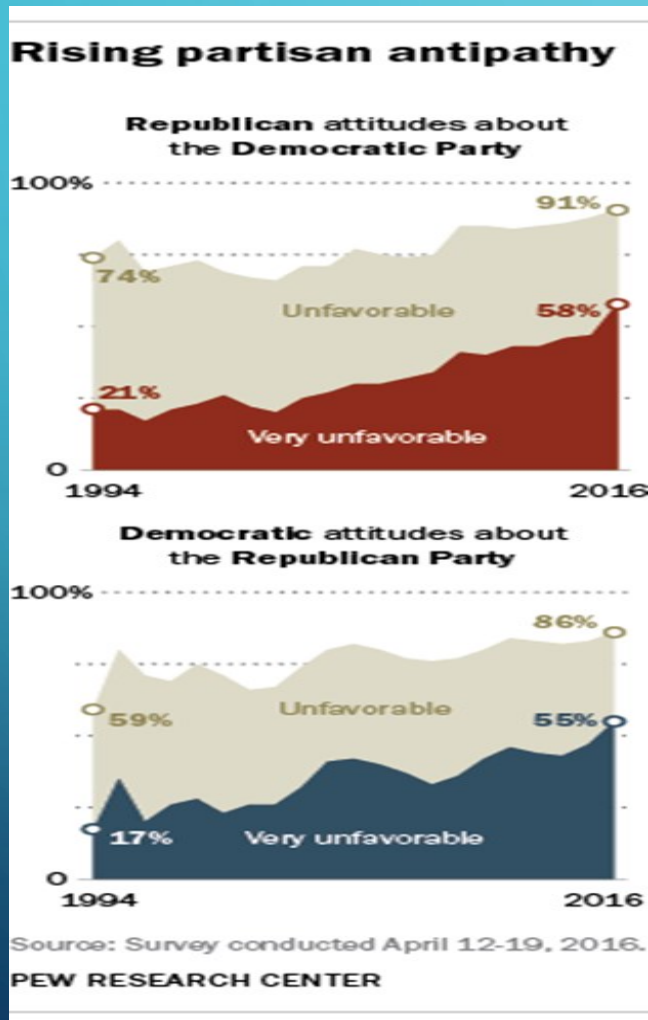
The ideological gap between the Democratic and Republican caucuses



SOURCE: Voteview.com and DW-NOMINATE scores

Vox

Increasing Political Polarization Among the Mass Publics



What Republicans and Democrats say about each other

% of Republicans who say Democrats are more ___ than other Americans

		About the same
Closed-minded	52%	35%
Open-minded	11%	
Immoral	47%	49%
Moral	3%	
Lazy	46%	50%
Hard-working	3%	
Dishonest	45%	52%
Honest	2%	
Unintelligent	32%	64%
Intelligent	3%	

% of Democrats who say Republicans are more ___ than other Americans

		About the same
Closed-minded	70%	23%
Open-minded	5%	
Dishonest	42%	51%
Honest	5%	
Immoral	35%	54%
Moral	9%	
Unintelligent	33%	58%
Intelligent	7%	
Lazy	18%	71%
Hard-working	9%	

Note: Don't know/No answer not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 2-28 and April 5-May 2, 2016.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Penetration of Incivility in US Churches – NICD Initiative: Definition of Civility



The institute is primarily working with Christian denominations in implementing its program from its Washington office.

Among those that developed **Golden Rule 2020** are the National Council of Churches, National Association of Evangelicals, Presbyterian Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Baptist Churches USA, Mormon Women for Ethical Government, and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Cheryl Graeve, national organizer for the institute, observes that the campaign's title is rooted in the widely held value among religious and non-religious people and Christians and non-Christians of "treating another person as you expect to be treated." See notes that our democracy thrives on the diversity of ideas, but that "We've got to have the will to engage in those different ideas... from a place of common respect and common listening to each other."

REACTION TO “CAVOURTING WITH THE ENEMY”



LEARNING FROM THE AUTO EMISSIONS TEST GUY

MIKE'S EMISSIONS TEST SHACK
STATE STREET, BOISE, IDAHO, MAY 2018

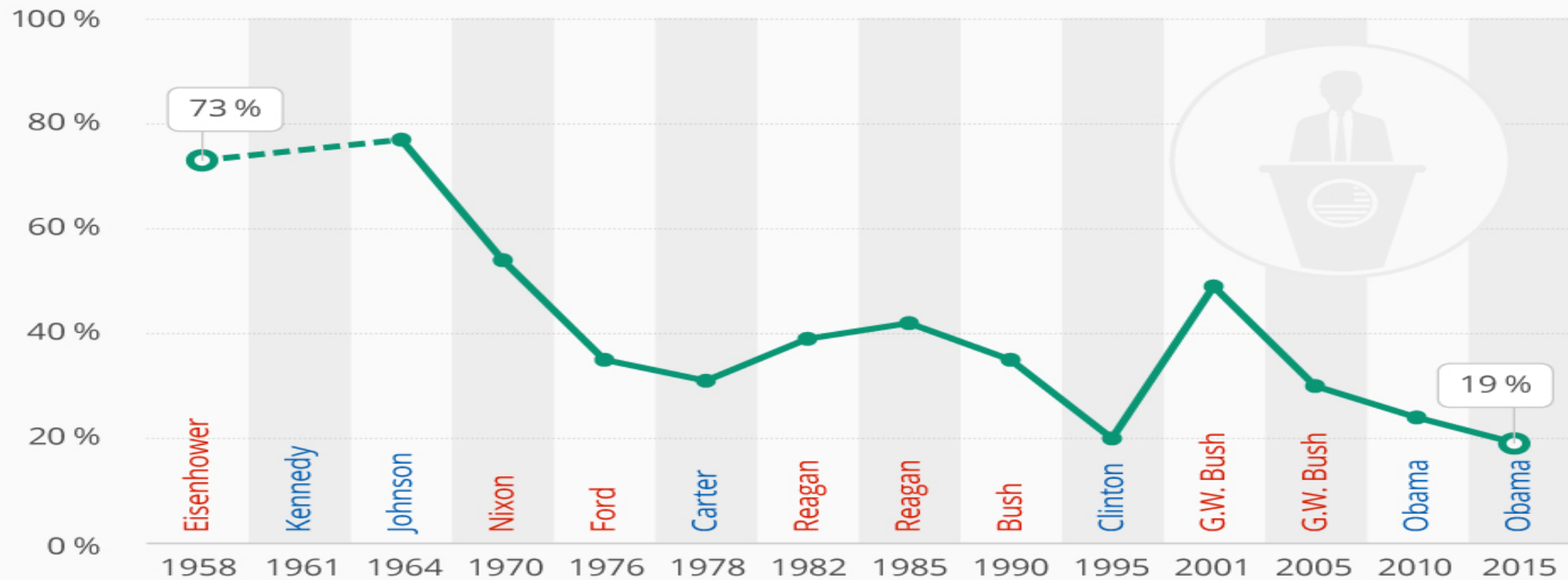
COMPLIMENTS OF GARY MONCRIEF, EMERITUS PROFESSOR, BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY



Declining Trust in American Political Institutions

Public Trust In The U.S. Government Has Plummeted

% of the U.S. public who trust the government always / most of the time

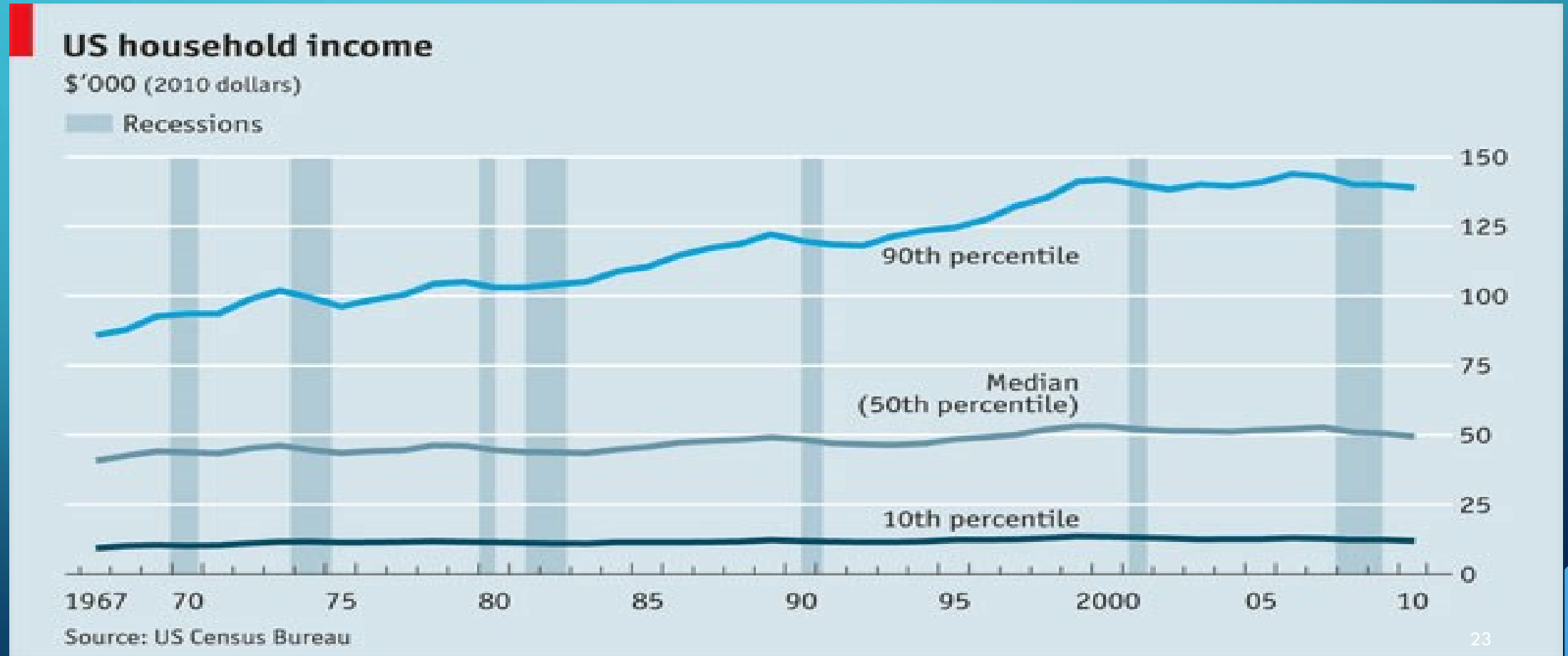


@StatistaCharts

Source: Pew Research Center

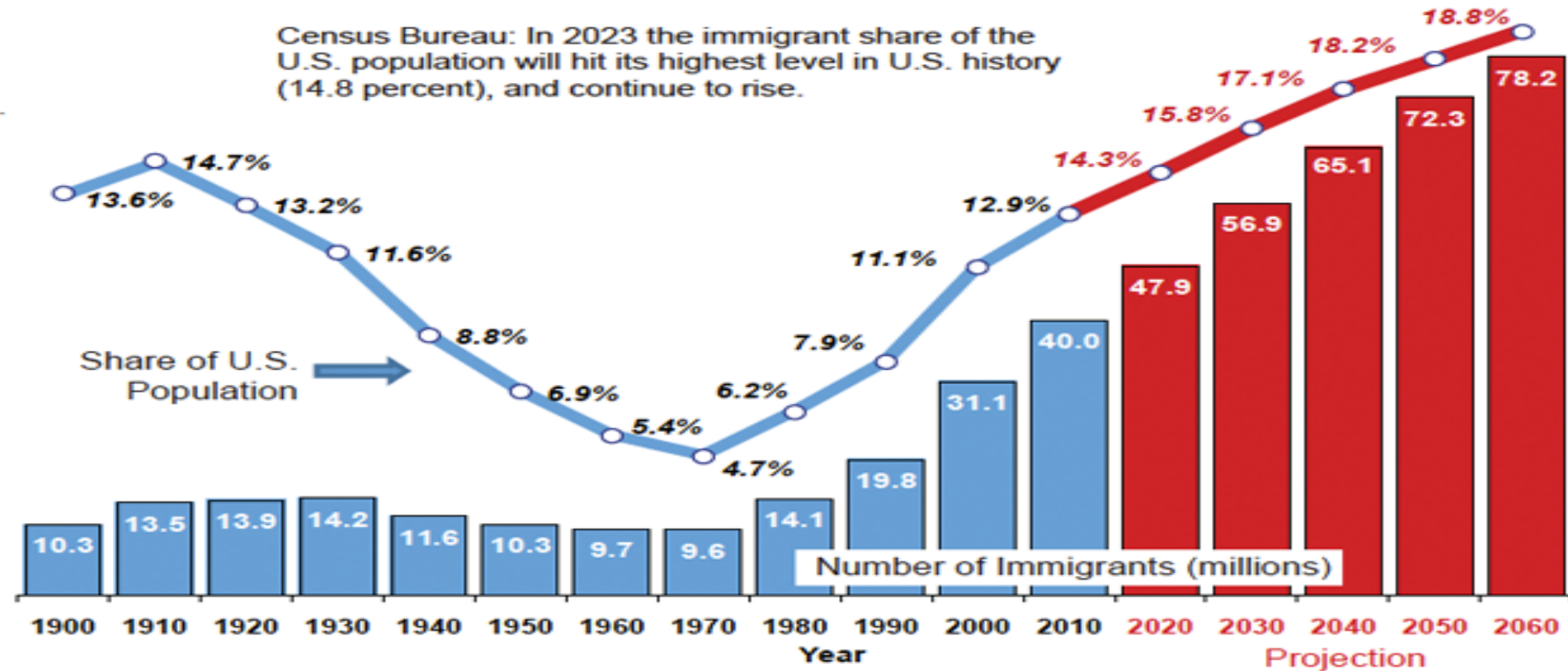
statista²²

Household Income Nearly Flat for Most American Families



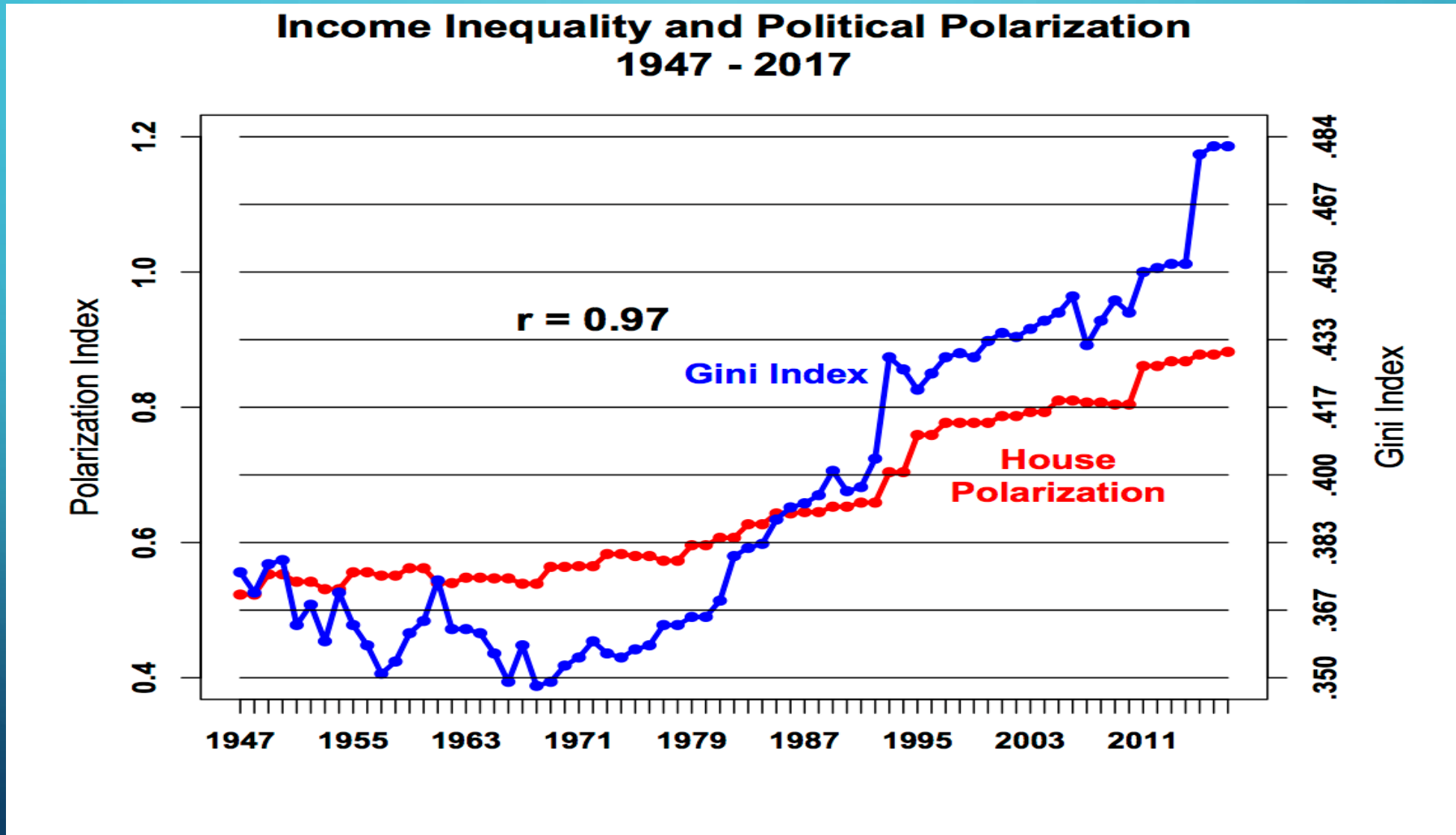
Fear of Increasing Immigration

Figure 1. Number and Percent of Immigrants in the U.S., 1900-2010; Plus Census Bureau Projections to 2060

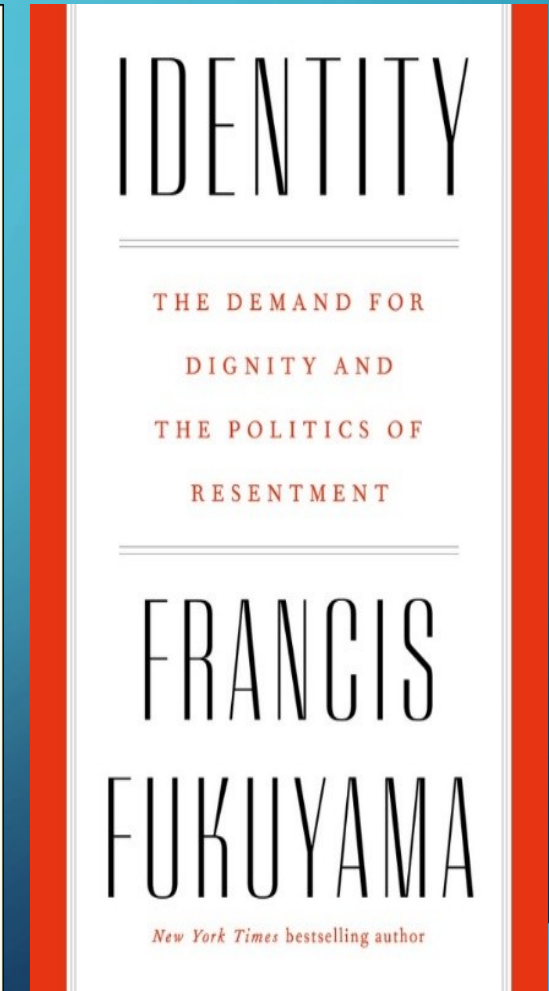
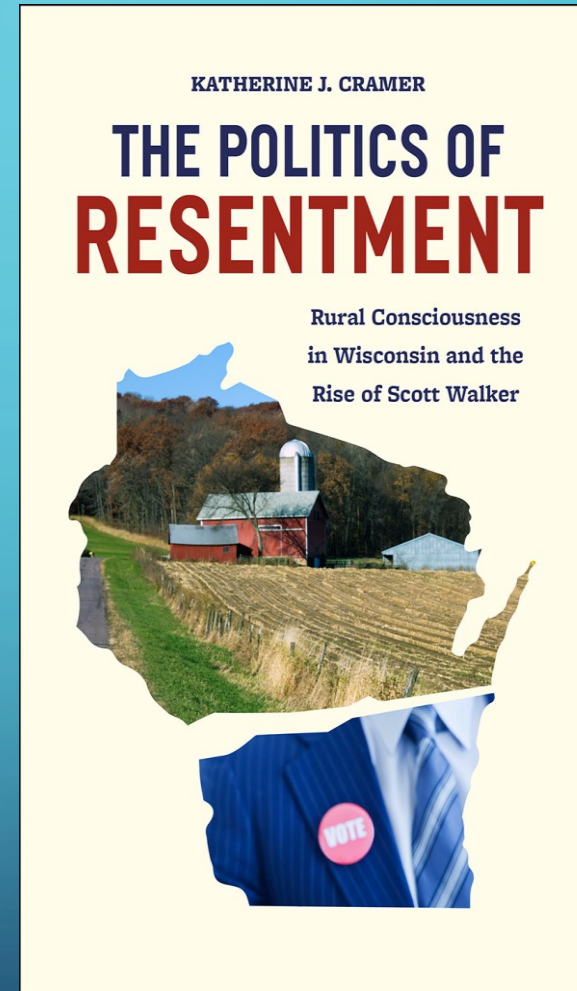
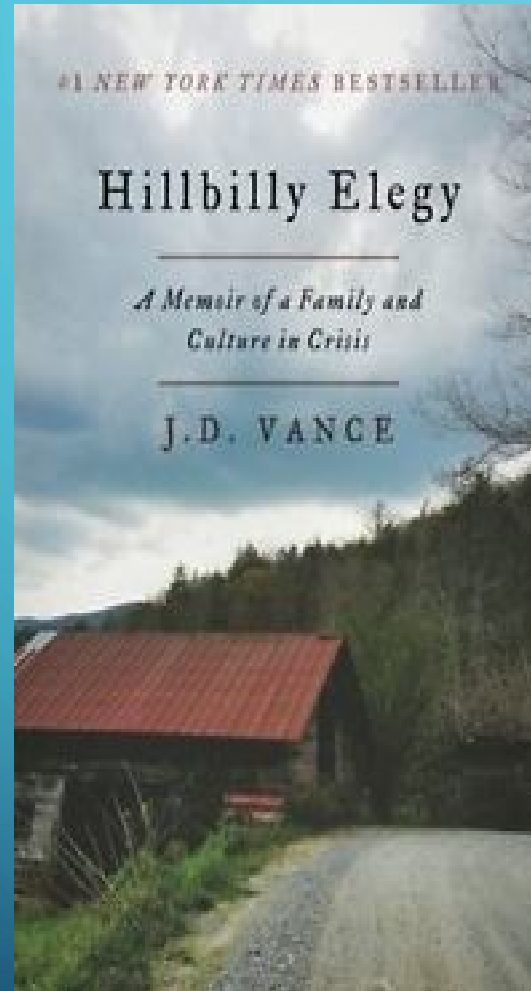
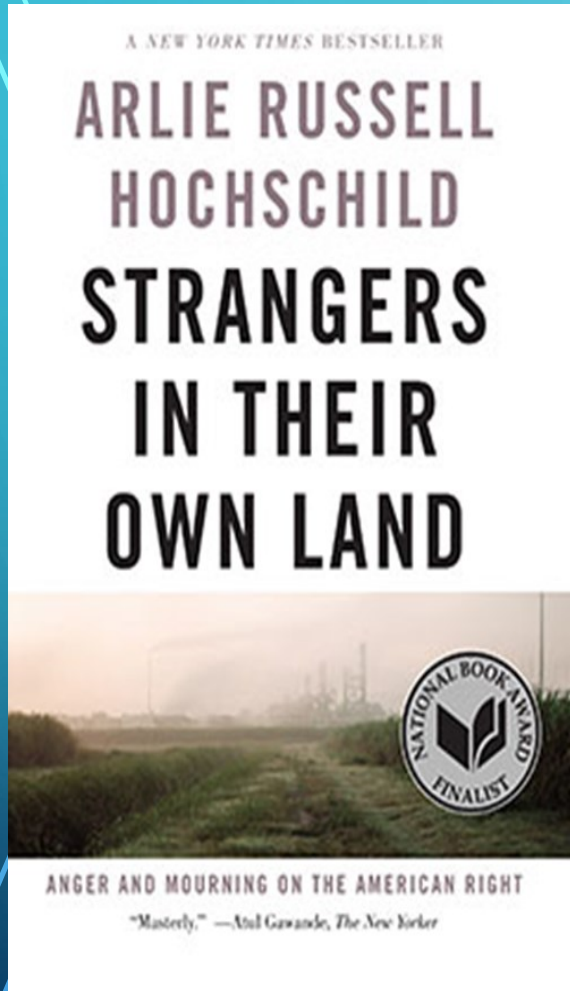


Source: Decennial censuses for 1900 to 2000, American Community Survey for 2010. [Census Bureau population projections](#) released March 2015.

Link Between Rising Income Inequality and Polarization

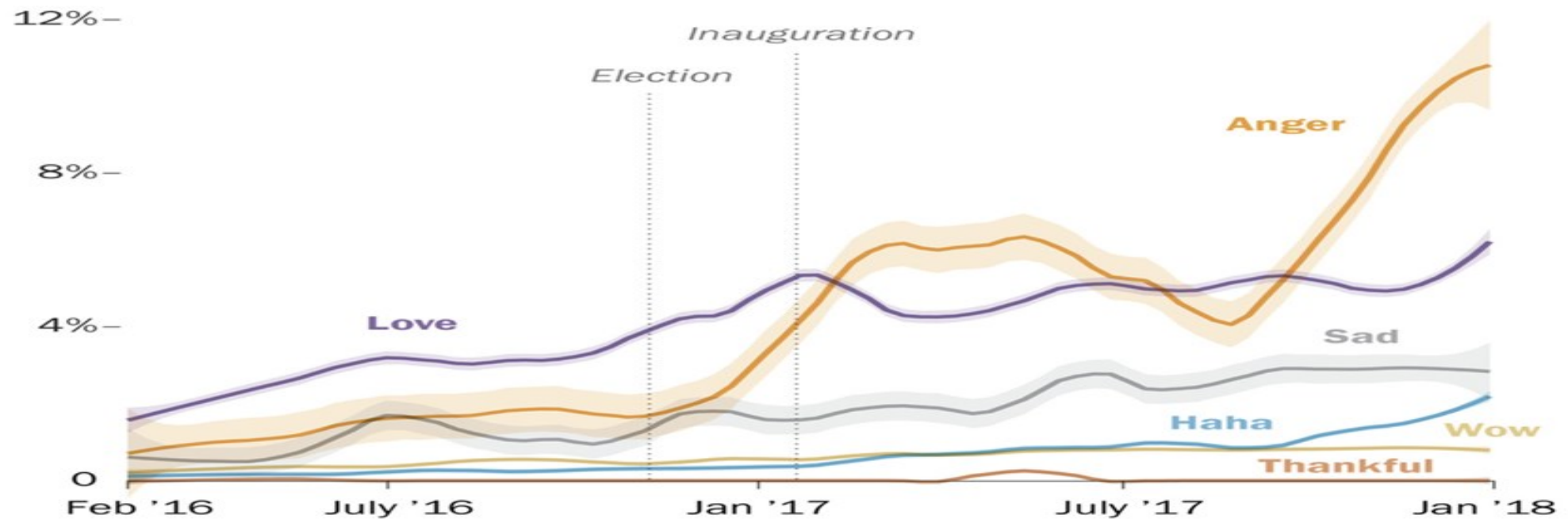


The Politics of Anger, Fear, and Resentment



After 2016 election, angry reactions overtook love reactions from the Facebook audience

% of reactions to posts that were ...



Note: The chart shows the composition of reactions to the average member's post over time, as a proportion of the total, including likes. Likes, the most common reaction, are excluded from the graph, but included in the calculation of each reaction's share of the total. The shaded regions are the 95% confidence band for the estimated trends.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Facebook posts created by members of Congress between Feb. 23, 2016 and Dec. 31, 2017.

"Taking Sides on Facebook: How Congressional Outreach Changed Under President Trump"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The slide features a blue gradient background with decorative white circuit-like lines in the corners. The word "GRIDLOCK" is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters, enclosed in quotation marks.

“GRIDLOCK”

***PUBLIC CONSENSUS ON
IMPORTANT PUBLIC POLICIES
NOT TRANSLATED INTO PUBLIC
POLICY IN CONGRESS***



AMONG AMERICANS...

CBS NEWS
NATION TRACKER
YouGov

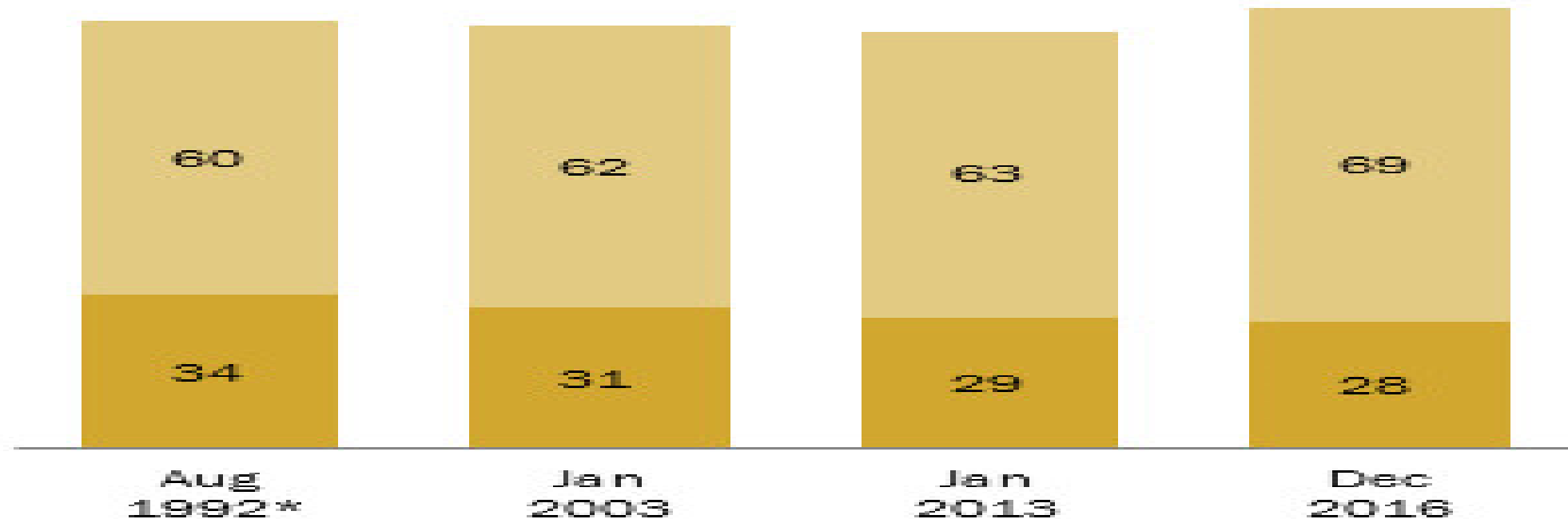
70%
support allowing
DREAMers to stay in U.S.

MARGIN OF ERROR: +/- 2.6%

Little public support for overturning Roe v. Wade

Would you like to see the Supreme Court completely overturn its Roe versus Wade decision, or not? (%)

■ Yes, overturn Roe v. Wade ■ No, do not overturn



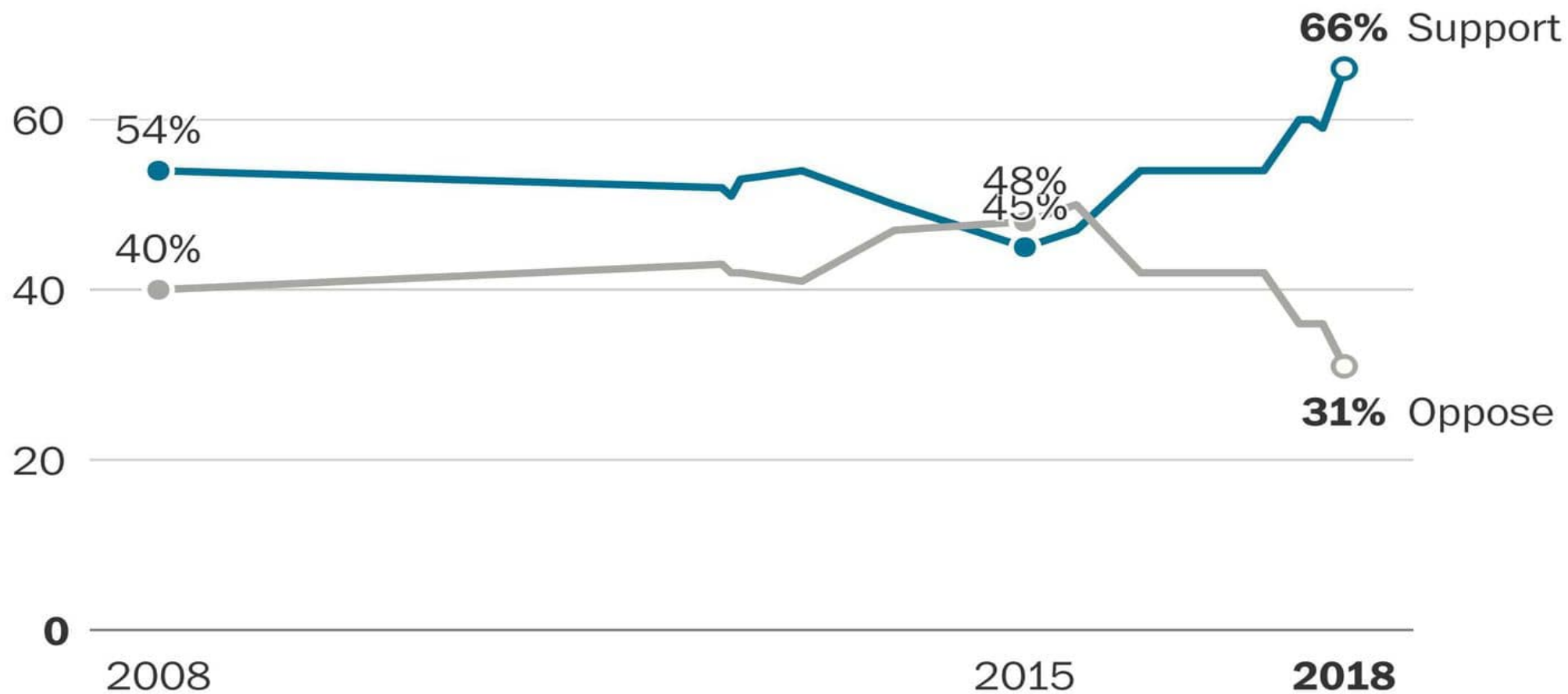
Notes: Don't know responses not shown.

*1992 data from Gallup and based on registered voters.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 30-Dec. 5, 2016.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Support for stricter gun laws hits 10-year high



Source: Quinnipiac University

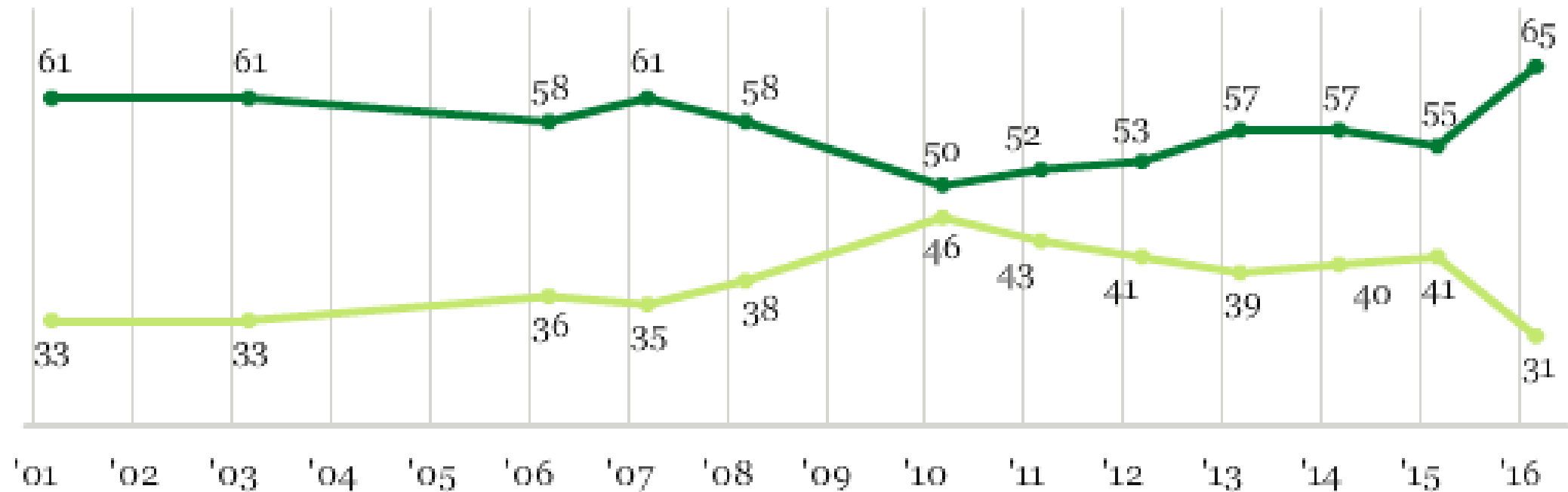
WASHINGTON POST

Perceived Cause of Global Warming

And from what you have heard or read, do you believe increases in the Earth's temperature over the last century are due more to -- [the effects of pollution from human activities (or) natural changes in the environment that are not due to human activities]?

■ % Human activities

■ % Natural causes

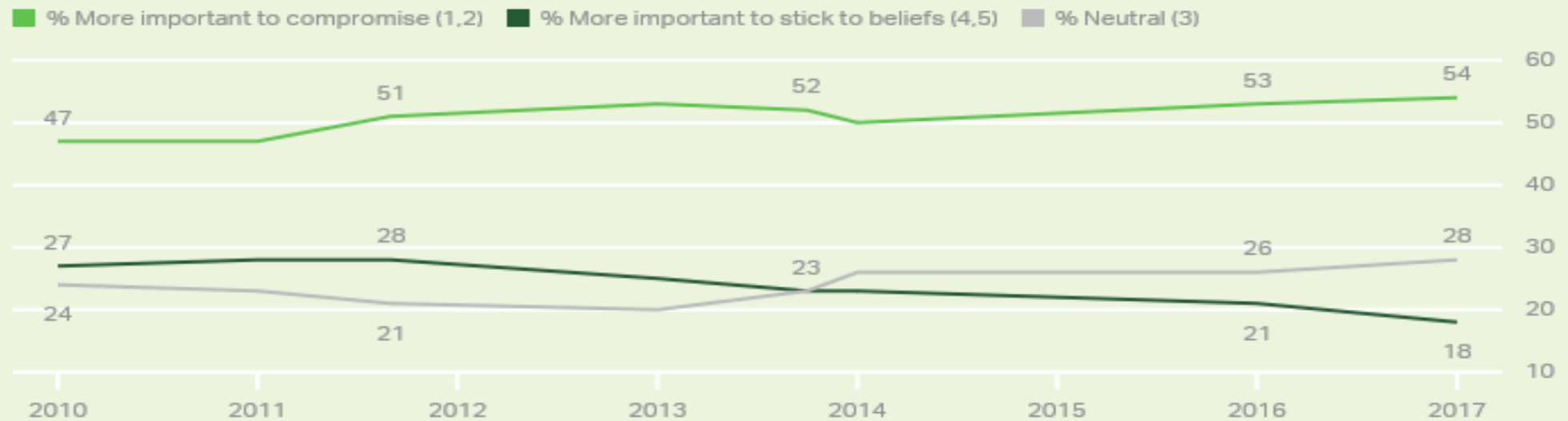


GALLUP®

Majority of Americans Favor Political Leaders who Compromise

More Important for Leaders in Washington to Stick to Their Beliefs or Compromise?

Next, we have a question about the best approach for political leaders to follow in Washington. Where would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means it is more important for political leaders to compromise in order to get things done and 5 means it is more important for political leaders to stick to their beliefs even if little gets done?



GALLUP



HAS GRIDLOCK TAKEN PLACE AT THE STATE LEVEL?

- **ALAN GREENBLATT'S JUNE, 2017 ARTICLE IN *GOVERNING* POSES CORE CONCERN**

“CHECKS AND IMBALANCES: WITH A CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS CONSUMING WASHINGTON, STATE LAWMAKERS ARE UPENDING THEIR OWN NORMS AS WELL.”

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR 50 STATE LEGISLATURES?

TWO HIGHLY NOTEWORTHY STUDIES:

- **NCSL 2015-2016 STUDY – SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATORS (N=1,620); 10 STATE CASE STUDIES**
- **WSU FOLEY INSTITUTE STUDY OF 2018-19 – SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATIVE LOBBYISTS (N=1,300+; 1,253 COMPLETE) ; 13 STATES “OVER-SAMPLE” CASES WITH 30+ RESPONDENTS**

THE NCSL STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

SETTING: 2015-16 LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS IN STATE LEGISLATURES

STUDY CONDUCTED PRIOR TO THE 2016 NATIONAL ELECTION

ELECTION ADDED TO THE ONGOING POLARIZATION OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND
HEIGHTENED PUBLIC POLITICAL DISCOURSE INCIVILITY

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. DISTINCTION BETWEEN **POLARIZATION**, **INCIVILITY** AND **RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING** IN STATE LEGISLATURES; PUBLIC INTEREST IS BEING SERVED
2. STATES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED, SOME MORE THAN OTHERS, BUT HAVE FOR THE MOST PART BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN THEIR TRADITION OF RESPONSIBLE COMPROMISE IN THE INTEREST OF THE PUBLIC INTEREST (hopefulness)
3. NOTE: GARY MONCRIEF AT BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY INVOLVED IN BOTH STUDIES



THE NICD- & WSU FOLEY INSTITUTE- SUPPORTED STUDY: 2018-19 NATIONAL SURVEY OF STATE LOBBYISTS

Multiple-institution effort by a team of scholars located at 11 universities supported with funding from the *National Institute for Civil Discourse* at the Univ. of Arizona and ongoing support from the *Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy & Public Service*, the *William D. Ruckelshaus Center*, and the *Division of Governmental Studies & Services* at Washington State University.

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS & THEIR UNIVERSITY AFFILIATIONS

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS (AR) – William Schreckhise

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS (KS) – John Pierce & Burdett Loomis

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY (ID) – Gary Moncrief, Stephanie Witt, Luke Fowler & Jaclyn Kettler

BRADLEY UNIVERSITY (IL) – Megan Remmel, R. Craig Curtis

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY (OR) – Brent Steel & Claire McMorris

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH (UT) – Christopher Simon


KENT STATE UNIVERSITY (OH) – Daniel Chand

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS and RENO (NV) – John Tennert and Robert Morin

SHIPPENSBURG UNIVERSITY (PA) – Michael Moltz

DUKE UNIVERSITY (NC) – Leslie Winner and John Hood

**WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY (WA) – Francis Benjamin, Steven Stehr, Christina Sanders,
& Nicholas Lovrich**



NATIONAL SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATIVE LOBBYISTS, 2018-19

HIGHLIGHT: MORE PESSIMISTIC VIEW THAN LEGISLATORS REGARDING PROSPECTS FOR GRIDLOCK AT THE LEVEL OF STATE LEGISLATURES IN EVIDENCE AMONG THOSE WHOSE JOB IT IS TO MOVE LEGISLATION THROUGH STATE LEGISLATURES

SURVEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- COMPLETED SURVEYS = 1,300+ (on-line Qualtrics + mail follow-up)
- RETURNS FROM ALL 50 STATES
- AVE. RESPONSES PER STATE = 25+
- OVERSAMPLES (30+) for ID, AR, KS, WA, UT, CA, NV, IL, IA, OH, PA, OR & NC
- MANY FORMER STATE LEGISLATORS; **DIVERSE** GROUP, INCLUDING AGENCY CONTRACT LOBBYISTS & FIRMS, LIAISON PERSONNEL, NON-PROFITS, PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS, ETC.
- RICH COLLECTION OF COMMENTS AND COMMENTARIES

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LOBBYISTS' SURVEY

QUESTION: HOW IMPORTANT ARE CIVILITY AND THE MAINTENANCE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE NORMS IN LEGISLATIVE DEBATE TO PRODUCING GOOD PUBLIC POLICY? [Mean Response]

NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT (1) UNCERTAIN (5-6) ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL (10)

Natl. average	8.34
UTAH (N=32)	8.69
WASHINGTON (N=59)	8.29

QUESTION: OVERALL, HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE THE GENERAL LEVEL OF CIVILITY AMONG MEMBERS OF YOUR STATE'S LEGISLATURE DURING THE TWO MOST RECENT LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS?

VERY UNCIVIL (1) UNCERTAIN (5-6) VERY CIVIL (10)

Natl. average	5.44	
UTAH		7.08
WASHINGTON	5.92	

HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

QUESTION: DO YOU THINK THAT NORMS OF FAIR PLAY ARE BREAKING DOWN IN THE STATE IN WHICH YOU LOBBY OR ADVOCATE FOR CLIENTS?

	NOT OCCURRING (1)	UNCERTAIN (2)	OCCURRING (3)
Natl. average			2.56
UTAH		2.16	
WASHINGTON			2.59

QUESTION: IN YOUR STATE, ARE THERE FEWER, THE SAME, OR MORE NON-PARTISAN AREAS TODAY THAN IN THE PAST?

	FEWER (1)	SAME (2)	MORE (3)
Natl. average		1.62	
UTAH		1.84	
WASHINGTON	1.54		

HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

QUESTION: COMPARED TO WHEN YOU FIRST BECAME INVOLVED IN LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY, HAVE LEGISLATORS WITH WHOM YOU WORK BECOME MORE PARTISAN OR MORE BIPARTISAN (i.e., WORK WITH LEGISLATORS IN THE OPPOSING PARTY ON SOME LEGISLATION OF COMMON INTEREST)?

	MORE PARTISAN (1)	UNCERTAIN (4)	MORE BIPARTISAN (7)
Natl. average		3.26	
UTAH		3.38	
WASHINGTON	2.78		

QUESTION: COMPARED TO TEN YEARS AGO, ARE LEGISLATIVE LEADERS MORE OR LESS CIVIL TODAY?

	LESS CIVIL (1)	UNCERTAIN (5)	MORE CIVIL (9)
Natl. average		3.89	
UTAH		4.27	
WASHINGTON	3.45		

HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

QUESTION: HOW DOES THE FOLLOWING TEND TO PLAY OUT IN YOUR STATE LEGISLATURE? “MORE LEGISLATORS REFLECTING THE POLARIZED ENVIRONMENT OF THE U.S. CONGRESS”

	STRONGLY AGREE (1)	AGREE (2)	DISAGREE (3)	STRONGLY DISAGREE (4)
Natl. average		1.81		
UTAH			2.24	
WASHINGTON		2.06		

QUESTION: COMPARED TO THE U.S. CONGRESS, TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FEEL PARTISAN POLARIZATION IS TAKING PLACE IN YOUR STATE LEGISLATURE?

	MUCH LESS POLARIZED (1)	SAME (3)	FAR MORE POLARIZED (5)
Natl. average		2.29	
UTAH	1.72		
WASHINGTON	1.94		

HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

QUESTION: HOW DOES THE FOLLOWING HYPOTHESIZED CAUSE OF INCIVILITY TEND TO PLAY OUT IN YOUR STATE LEGISLATURE? *“LEGISLATORS’ RESPECT FOR LEGISLATIVE TRADITIONS AND NORMS AND CUSTOMS IS LOW”* {Legislators respect for norms waning}

	STRONGLY AGREE (1)	AGREE (2)	DISAGREE (3)	STRONGLY DISAGREE (4)
Natl. average		2.24		
UTAH			2.52	
WASHINGTON			2.41	

QUESTION: “REACHING ACROSS THE AISLE (trust-building)”: FAVOR VISITING OTHER LEGISLATORS FROM THE OPPOSING PARTY IN THEIR LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

	POOR IDEA (1)	UNCERTAIN (3)	EXCELLENT IDEA (5)
Natl. average			3.69
UTAH			3.72
WASHINGTON			3.92

HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

ILLUSTRATIVE INSIGHTFUL COMMENTS REGISTERED BY UTAH LOBBYISTS

PARTY FACTORS

- UTAH'S LEGISLATURE IS OVERWHELMINGLY REPUBLICAN, SO HYPER-PARTISANSHIP DOESN'T REALLY IMPACT OUR STATE'S WORK IN A CLEAR WAY.
- WITH SO FEW DEMOCRATS IN THE LEGISLATURE, THIS IS A NON-FACTOR
- UTAH HAS FOUR POLITICAL PARTIES, AND THREE OF THEM EXIST WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN LEGISLATIVE COLLABORATION: MODERATE GOP, LIBERTARIAN, TEA PARTY/ANTI-GOVERNMENT, AND THE DEMOCRATS.
- THE WAY THE MEDIA (SOCIAL AND LEGACY) COVERS POLITICS. IT'S MUCH LESS ABOUT ISSUES AND MUCH MORE ABOUT TEAMS/OPPOSING IDEOLOGIES FIGHTING FOR UNILATERAL CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT.

HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

ILLUSTRATIVE INSIGHTFUL COMMENTS REGISTERED BY UTAH LOBBYISTS

NON-PARTY FACTORS

- ... THE QUANTITY OF BILLS INCREASES EVERY YEAR. AS A RESULT, THE QUALITY OF THE DELIBERATION DURING THE SESSION HAS DECREASED AND THERE IS LITTLE PUBLIC DISCOURSE. THE LEGISLATURE ALSO HAS OUTSOURCED SOME POLICY MAKING TO TASK FORCES AND COMMISSIONS.
- ... OFTEN VOTES ARE MADE BASED ON WHAT PARTY LEADERSHIP DICTATES.
- ... MANY DECISIONS ARE SOMEWHAT DRIVEN BY THIS (RELIGIOUS) CULTURE, SO GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER MAY OR MAY NOT AFFECT VOTING OR ISSUE OUTCOMES. ALTHOUGH, IT DOES SEEM TO HELP, IN GENERAL, TO KNOW PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS AND HAVE MORE CONTEXT FOR THE WAY THEY THINK.
- I THINK ANOTHER COMPLICATING FACTOR IS THE URBAN/RURAL DIVIDE THAT IS VERY EVIDENT - THE MOST CONSERVATIVE LEGISLATORS REPRESENT THE RURAL PARTS OF THE STATE, WHILE MORE MODERATES REPRESENT THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULOUS.

HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

ILLUSTRATIVE INSIGHTFUL COMMENTS REGISTERED BY UTAH LOBBYISTS

CIVILITY

- I TRY TO AVOID THE LEGISLATORS WHO TEND TO MAKE THINGS UNCIVIL
- JUST TRY TO MAINTAIN CIVILITY AND KEEP THE ISSUE DISCUSSION AS LIGHT AS POSSIBLE.
- IF ANYTHING THERE IS TOO MUCH DEFERENCE TO CIVILITY.
- THE LEGISLATORS IN UTAH TEND TO WORK TOGETHER ON MOST ISSUES AND CONTINUE TO DO SO.
- UTAH TENDS TO BE A VERY CONGENIAL STATE.

NEXT STEPS: DERIVING BENEFITS FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATIVE LOBBYISTS

- 1. UTAH FOLLOW-UP ANALYSES & PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
- 2. SIMILAR PRESENTATIONS IN THE “OVER-SAMPLE STATES” OF ARKANSAS, OREGON, KANSAS, IDAHO, NEVADA, CALIFORNIA, OHIO, ILLINOIS, PENNSYLVANIA, AND NORTH CAROLINA BY RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS
- 3. CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ON “PREDICTORS” OF STATE-LEVEL RESILIENCE TO GRIDLOCK – POTENTIAL FACTORS TO BE EXPLORED INCLUDE POLITICAL CULTURE, REGIONAL DIFFERENCES, DEGREE OF LEGISLATIVE PROFESSIONALISM, ESTABLISHED RULES FOR MINORITY PARTY INCLUSIVENESS, WOMEN IN LEGISLATIVE ROLES, GERRYMANDERING, ETC.
- 4. CONFERENCE PRESENTATION ON DIFFERENCES AMONG TYPES OF LOBBYISTS AND ANALYSIS OF SURVEY COMMENTS – NEPSA (April) & STATE POLITICS AND POLICY ANNUAL MEETING AT UCSD (March)

ONE MAJOR AREA OF CONCERN NOT FEATURED IN THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Insight from sharing survey results with group of Washington lobbyists

- Negative effects reported on collaborative public policy processes
 - ☐ Good faith bargaining actors more difficult to engage
 - ☐ Less inclination of legislative committees to accept negotiated legislation
 - ☐ Less deference to the process, and more “grand-standing” by legislators
 - ☐ Less reliance on legislative staff “institutional memory” for guidance

TRUE OF UTAH?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION
QUESTIONS?

CONTACT INFORMATION

n.lovrich@wsu.edu

benjamin@wsu.edu

stehr@wsu.edu

