

# **Polarization & Incivility in American Politics: Local Government's Path Forward**

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# **Special Thanks**

**Nicholas P. Lovrich**

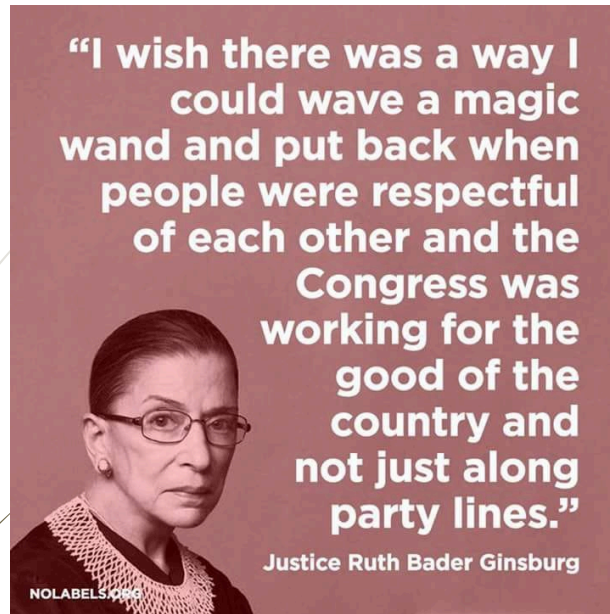
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Washington State University

# **Polarization & Incivility in American Politics: Local Government's Path Forward**

**Civility: Historical Trends and How We Got Here**

**Civility Research: Lessons Learned**

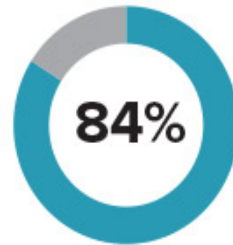
**Civility Interactions: Leadership Profiles**



# Bipartisan Agreement that Incivility in Politics is Problematic (2019)

## Of Americans Surveyed...

### INCIVILITY EXPERIENCES



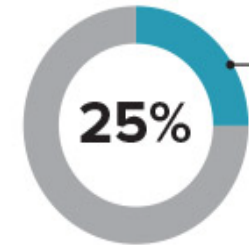
Experienced incivility



Quit paying attention to politics because of incivility



Stopped buying from a company because of uncivil representatives



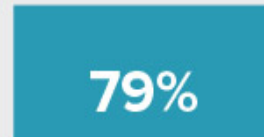
Experienced cyberbullying

Nearly **3X** increase since 2011

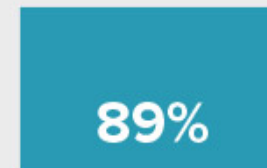
### INCIVILITY PERCEPTIONS



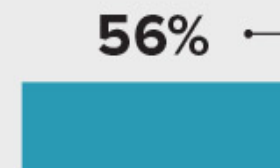
Think incivility has risen to crisis levels



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%

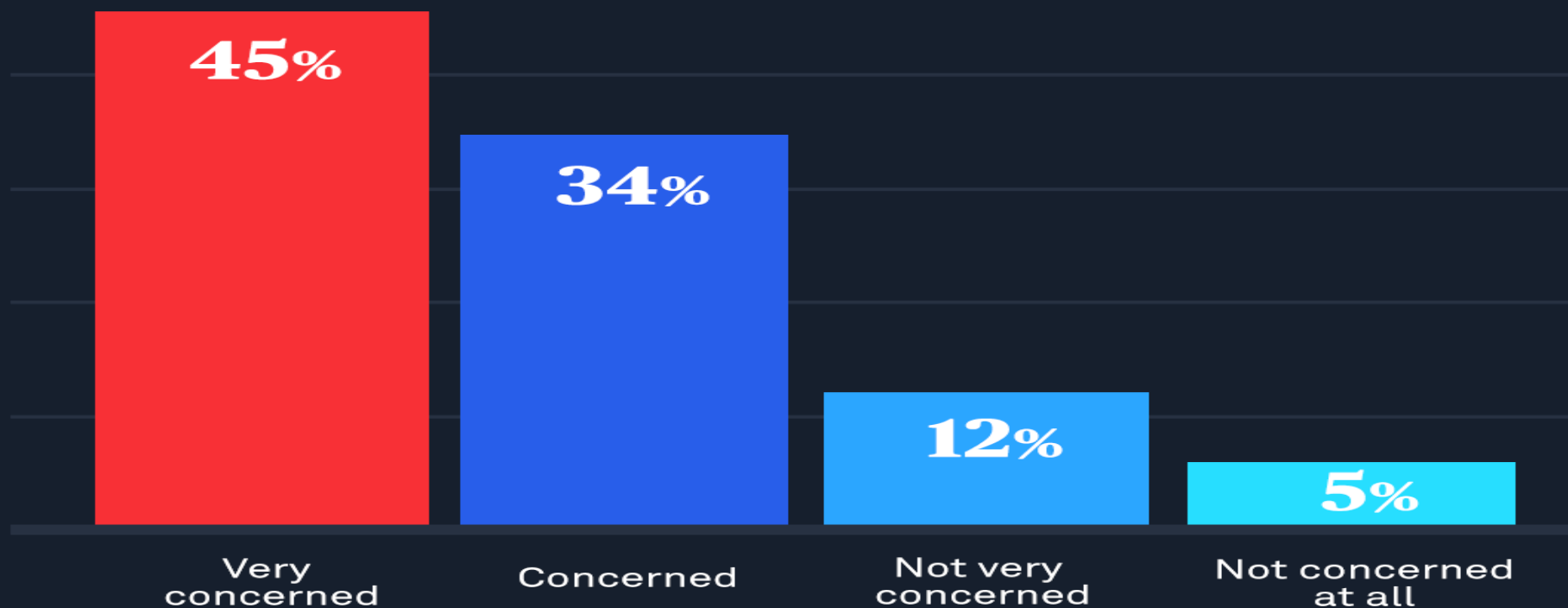
Source: National Institute for Civil Discourse, ICMA, Weber Shandwick, Powell Tate.



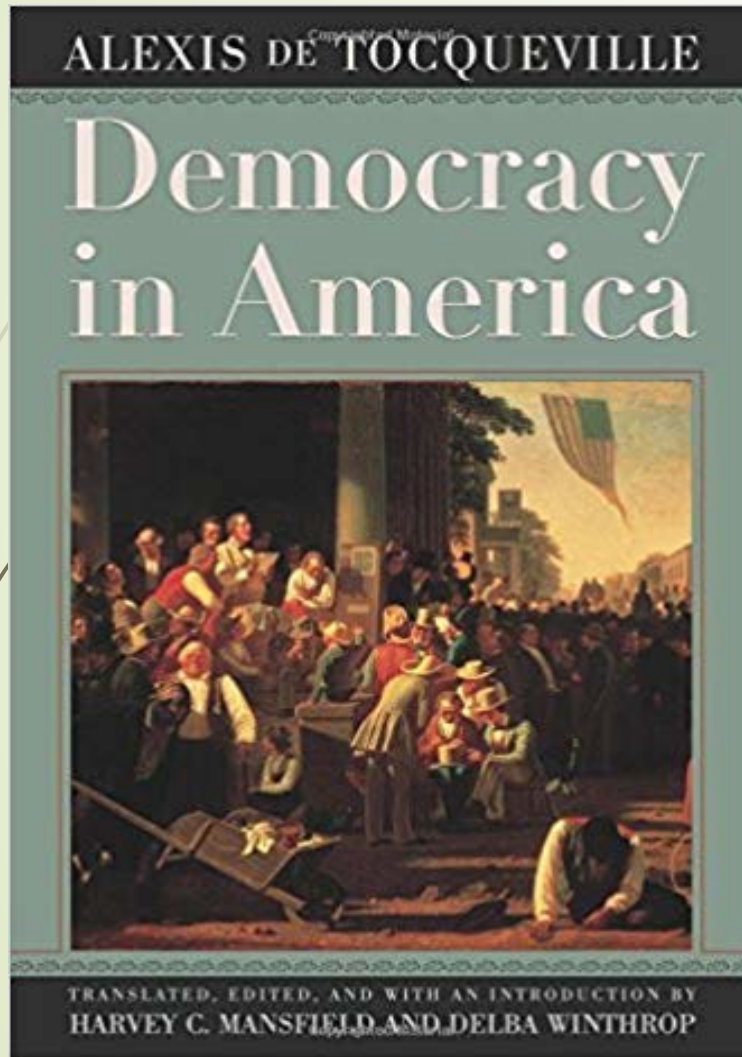
# **Poll:** How concerned are you that the negative tone and lack of civility in Washington will lead to violence or acts of terror:

**PBS**  
**NEWS**  
**HOUR**

Source: PBS NewsHour/NPR/Marist Survey of 924 national adults, Oct. 28-29, 2018



***Has Politics Ever Been Civil in the United States?  
Recurring 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**



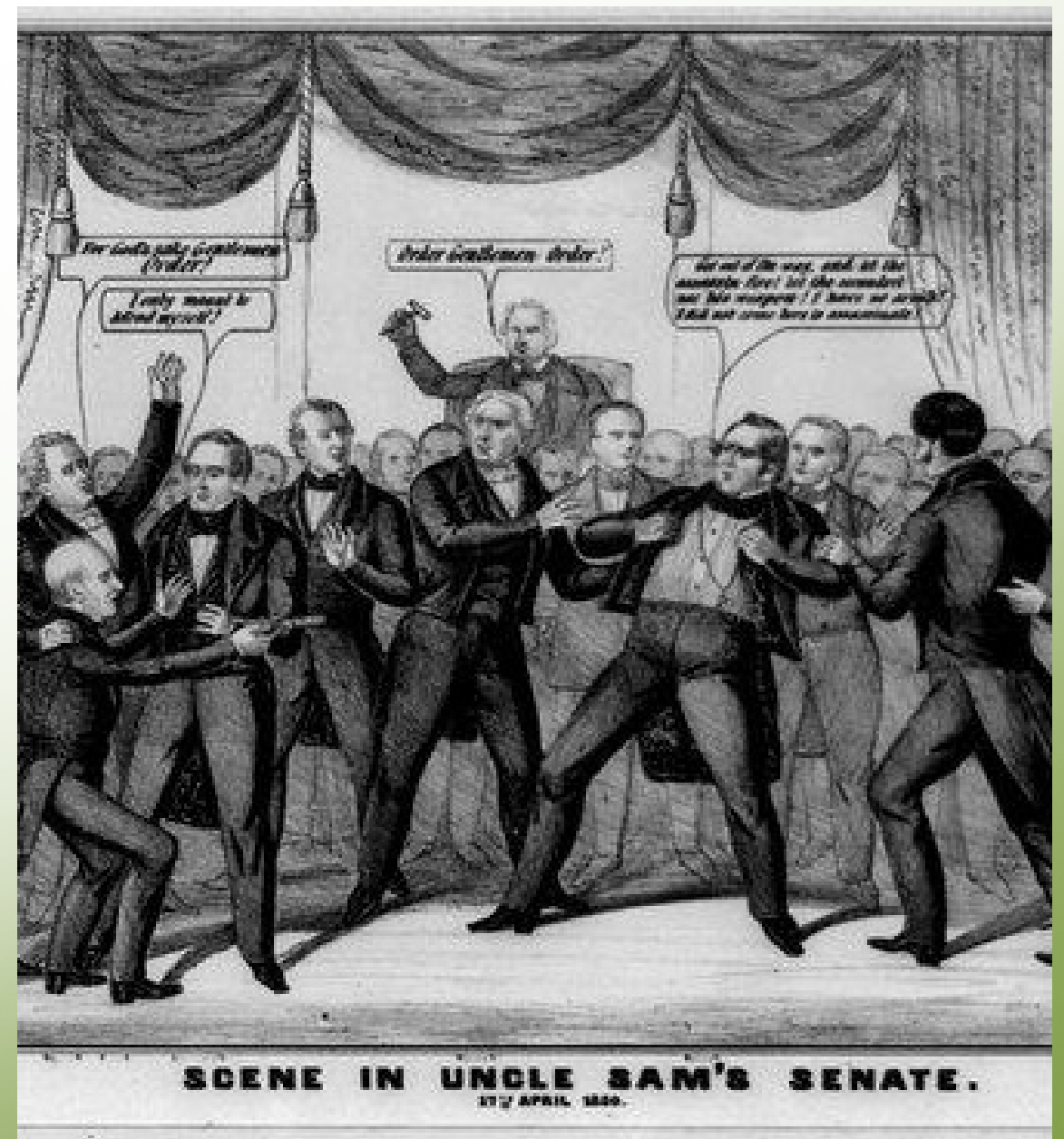


DUEL BETWEEN  
AARON BURR  
AND  
ALEXANDER  
HAMILTON,  
JULY 11, 1804



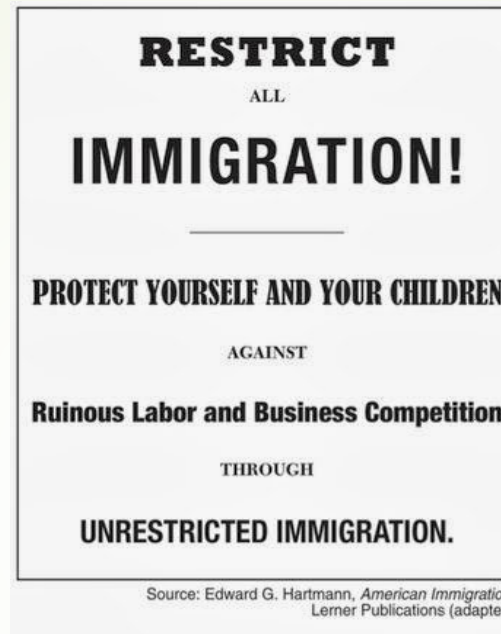
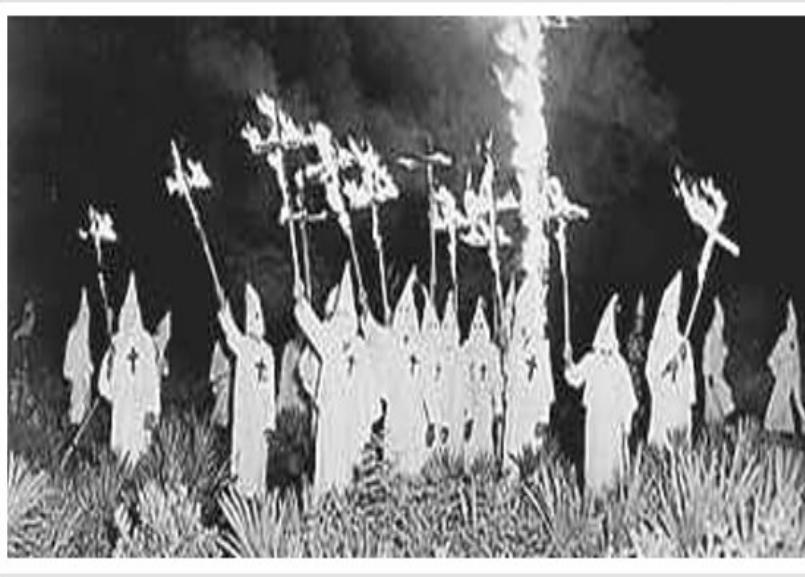


**Brawl on the Floor of House of Representatives, February 6, 1858**



**Gun Play in the U.S. Senate, April 1850**

# Polarized Politics in the 1920s in America



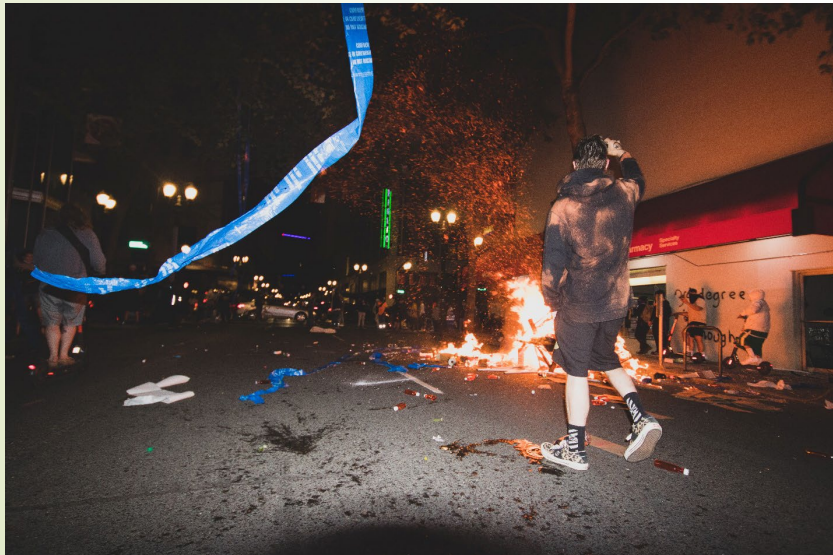


# Remember the 1960s?





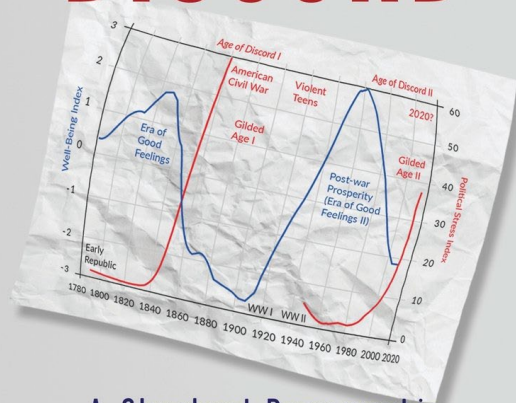
# The Last Few Years ...





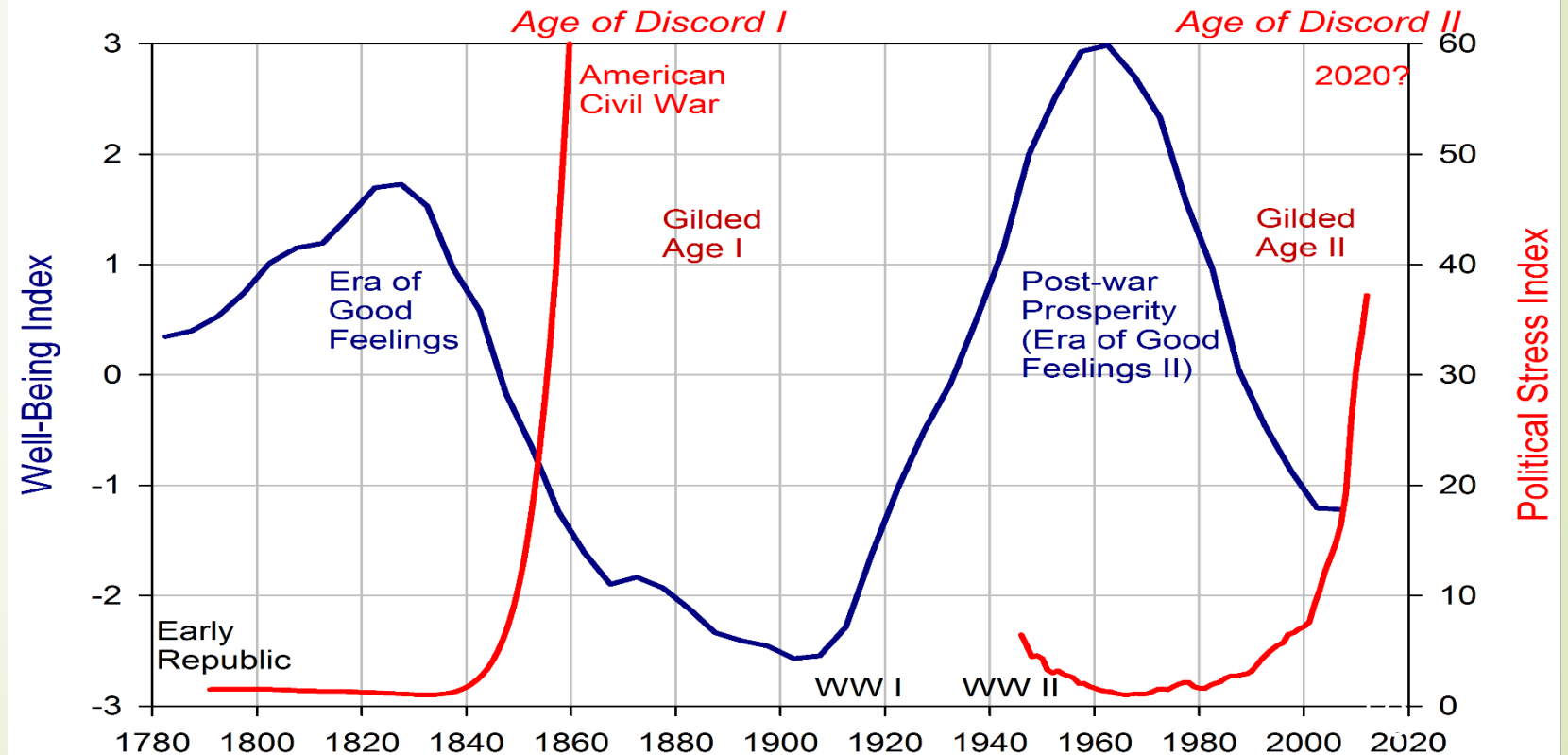
# The Cyclical Nature of Political Instability in the U.S.: A Very Well Documented Phenomenon

## AGES OF DISCORD

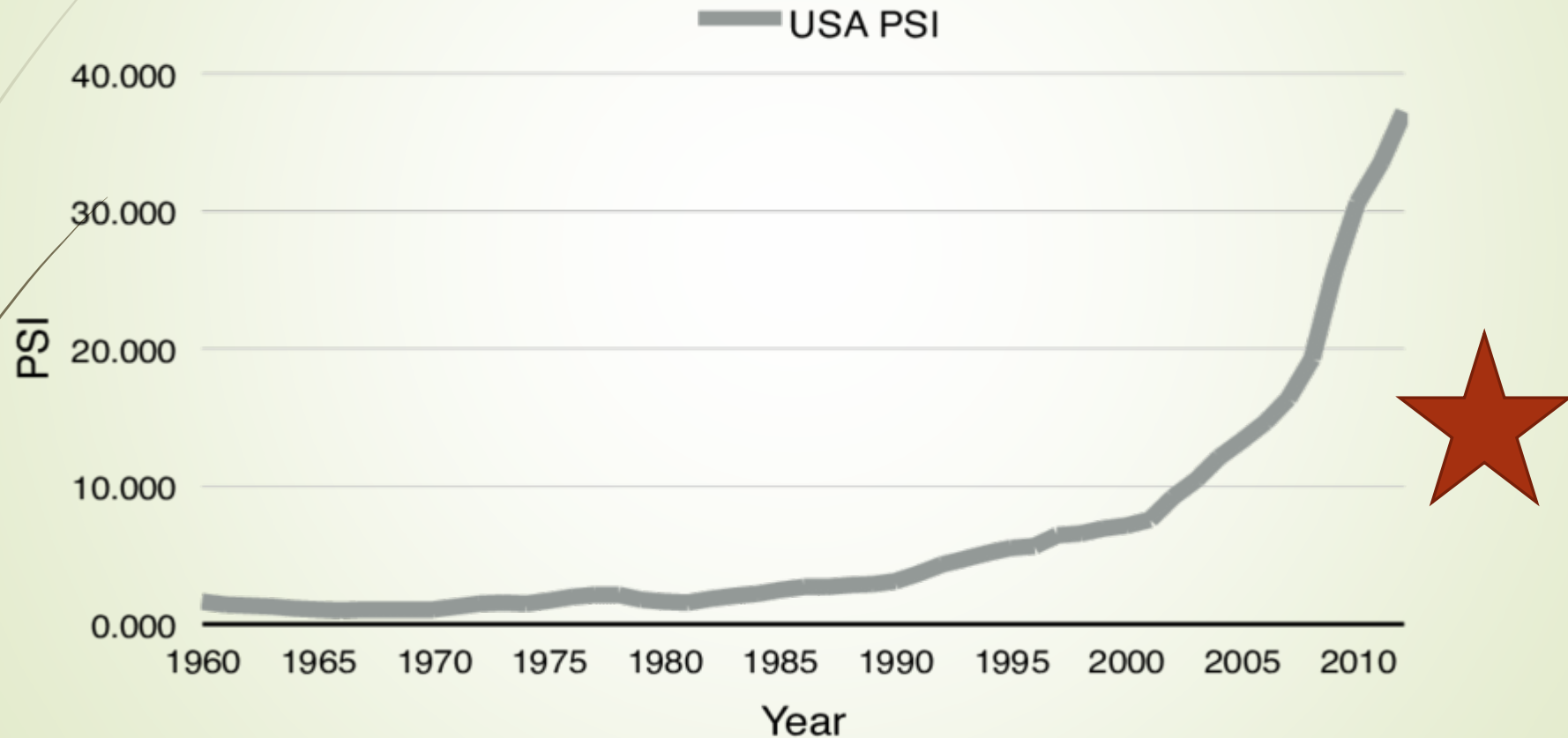


A Structural-Demographic  
Analysis of American History  
**PETER TURCHIN**

Source: Turchin, 2016



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



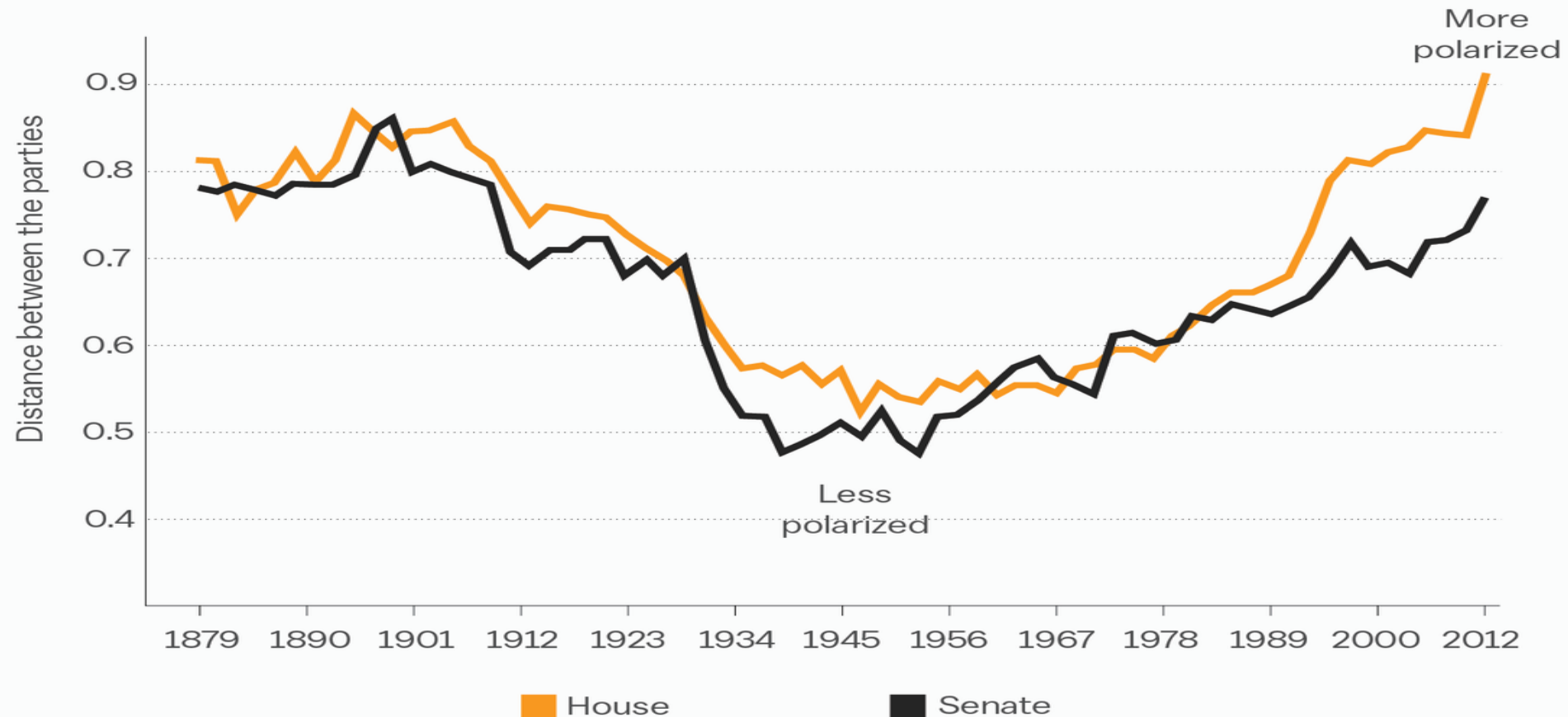
Source: Ortmans, et al., 2017 (data from Turchin)



# Increasing Polarization Among the Political Elites

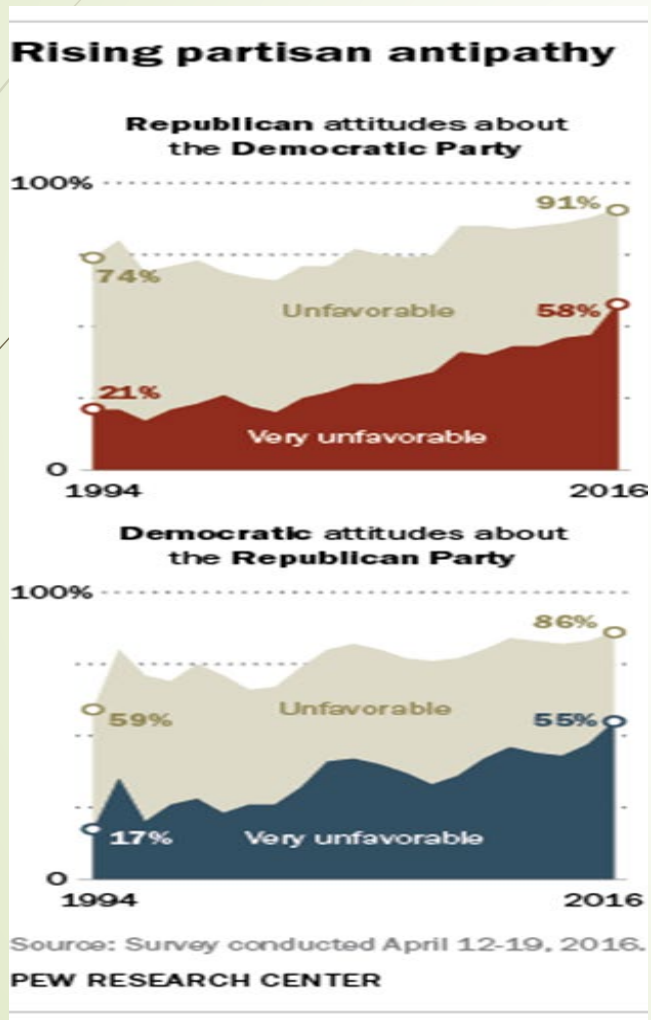
## Party polarization, 1879 - 2012

*The ideological gap between the Democratic and Republican caucuses*



SOURCE: Voteview.com and DW-NOMINATE scores

# Increasing Political Polarization Among the Public



## What Republicans and Democrats say about each other

% of Republicans who say Democrats are more \_\_\_ than other Americans

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

% of Democrats who say Republicans are more \_\_\_ than other Americans

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

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

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

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# Reaction to “Cavorting with the Enemy”

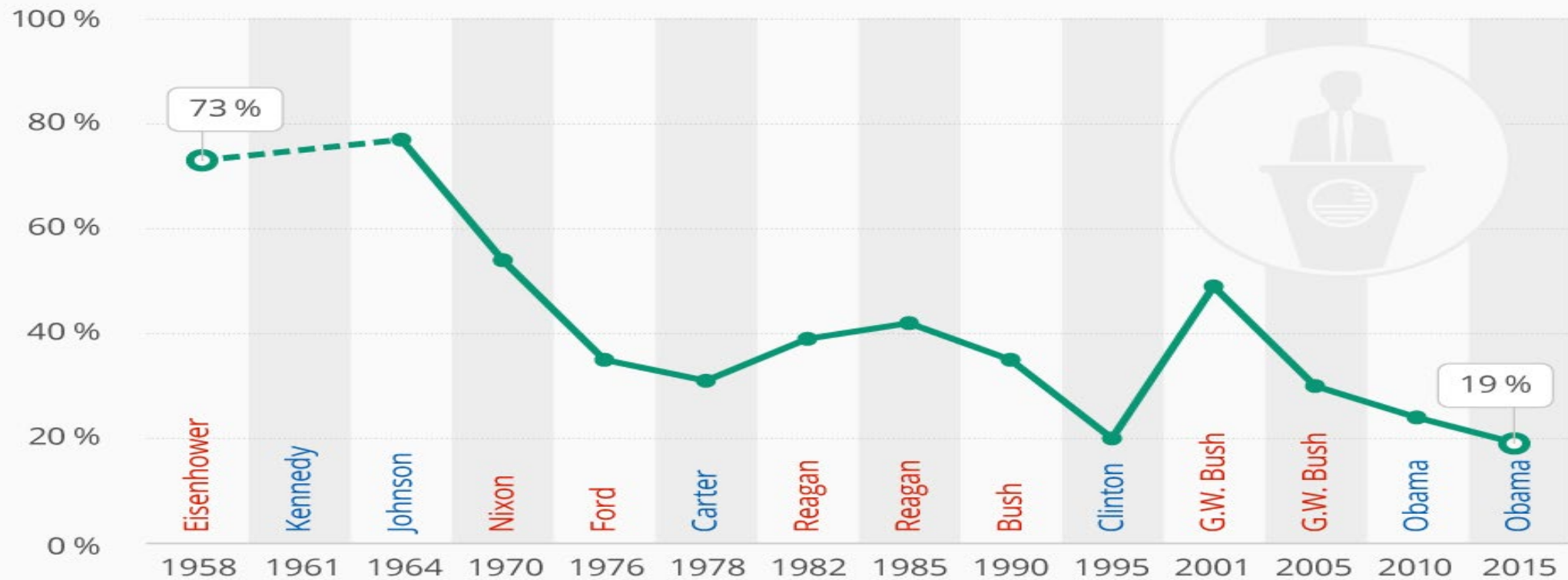




# Declining Trust in American Political Institutions

## Public Trust In The U.S. Government Has Plummeted

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



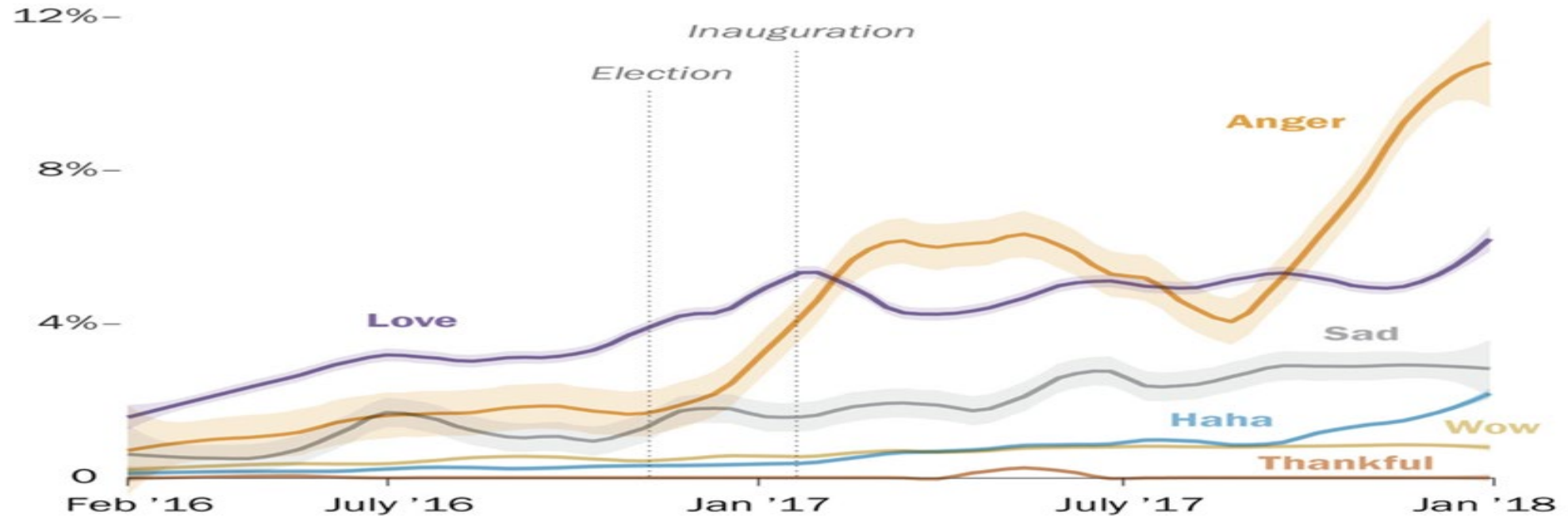
@StatistaCharts

Source: Pew Research Center

statista

## 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.

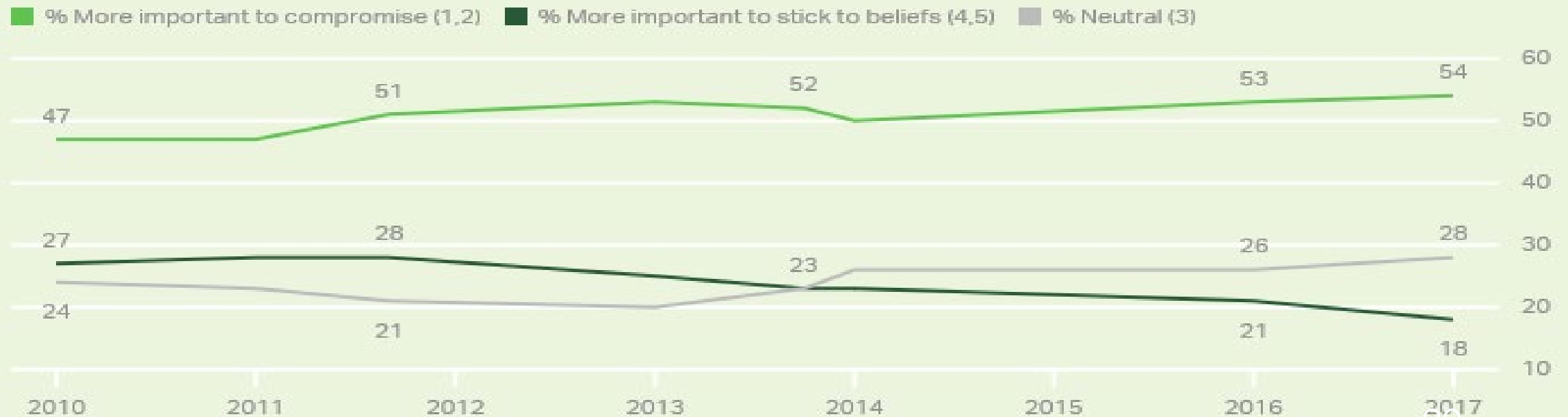
"Taking Sides on Facebook: How Congressional Outreach Changed Under President Trump"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

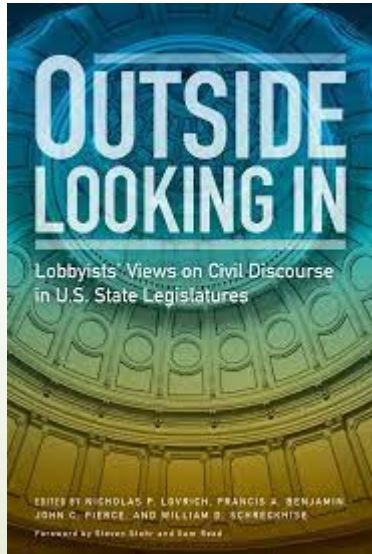
# Majority of Americans Favor Political Leaders who Compromise

## 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?







# Civility Research

# Lessons Learned

- **Collaboration & Treatment Projects**  
(2008 – 2021)
- **Washington State Legislative Service Projects**  
(2009, 2012, 2013)
- **Minority/Majority**  
(2011)
- **National Survey of State Legislative Lobbyists**  
(2018-2019)

# **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**

# What is Civility?



**Mutual Respect**

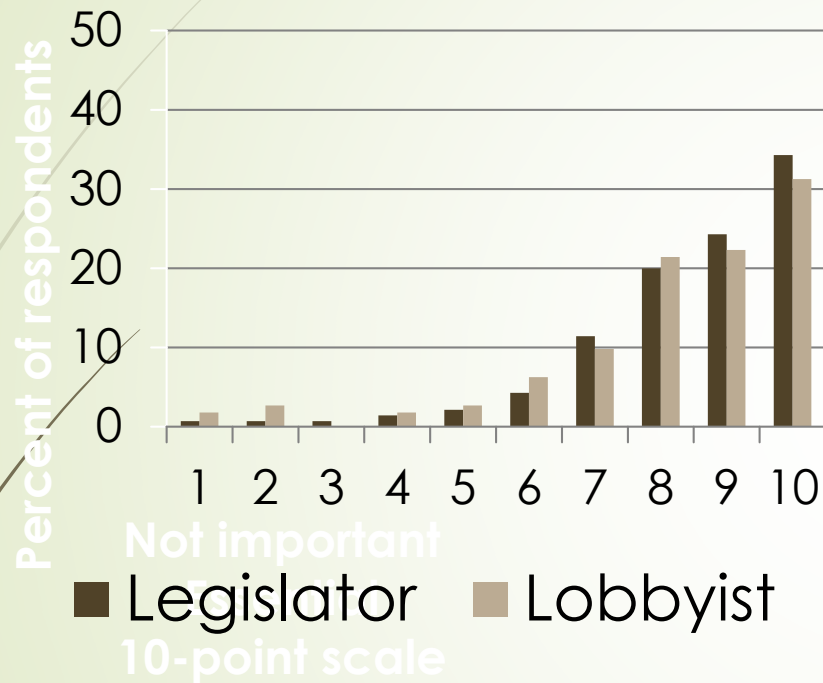
**Interest in Other's Perspective**

**Doesn't Require Agreement**

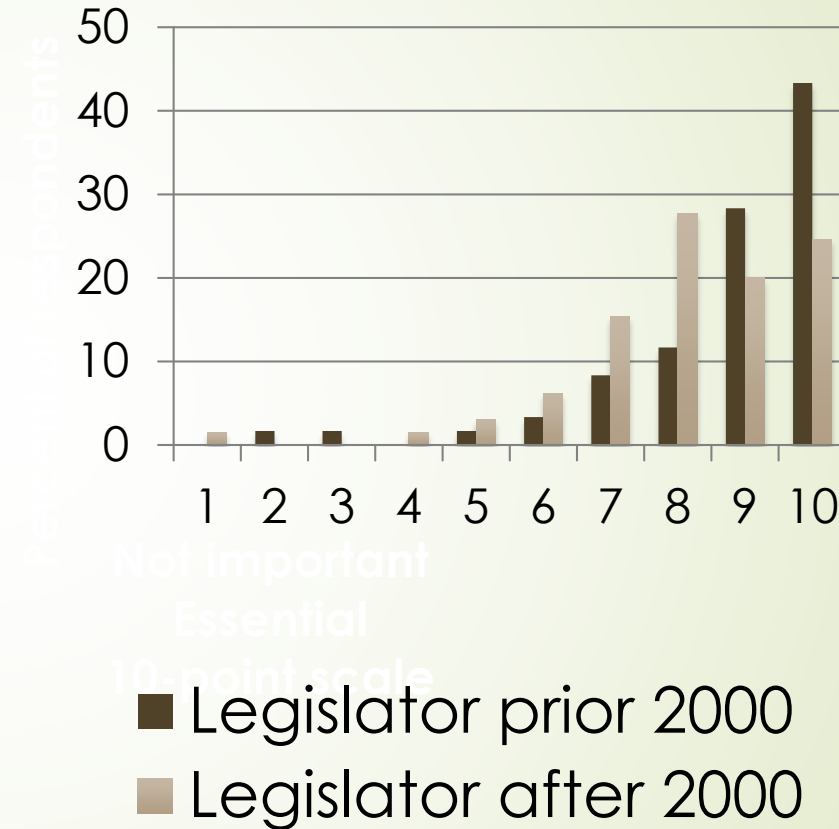
**Recognition That You May be Wrong**



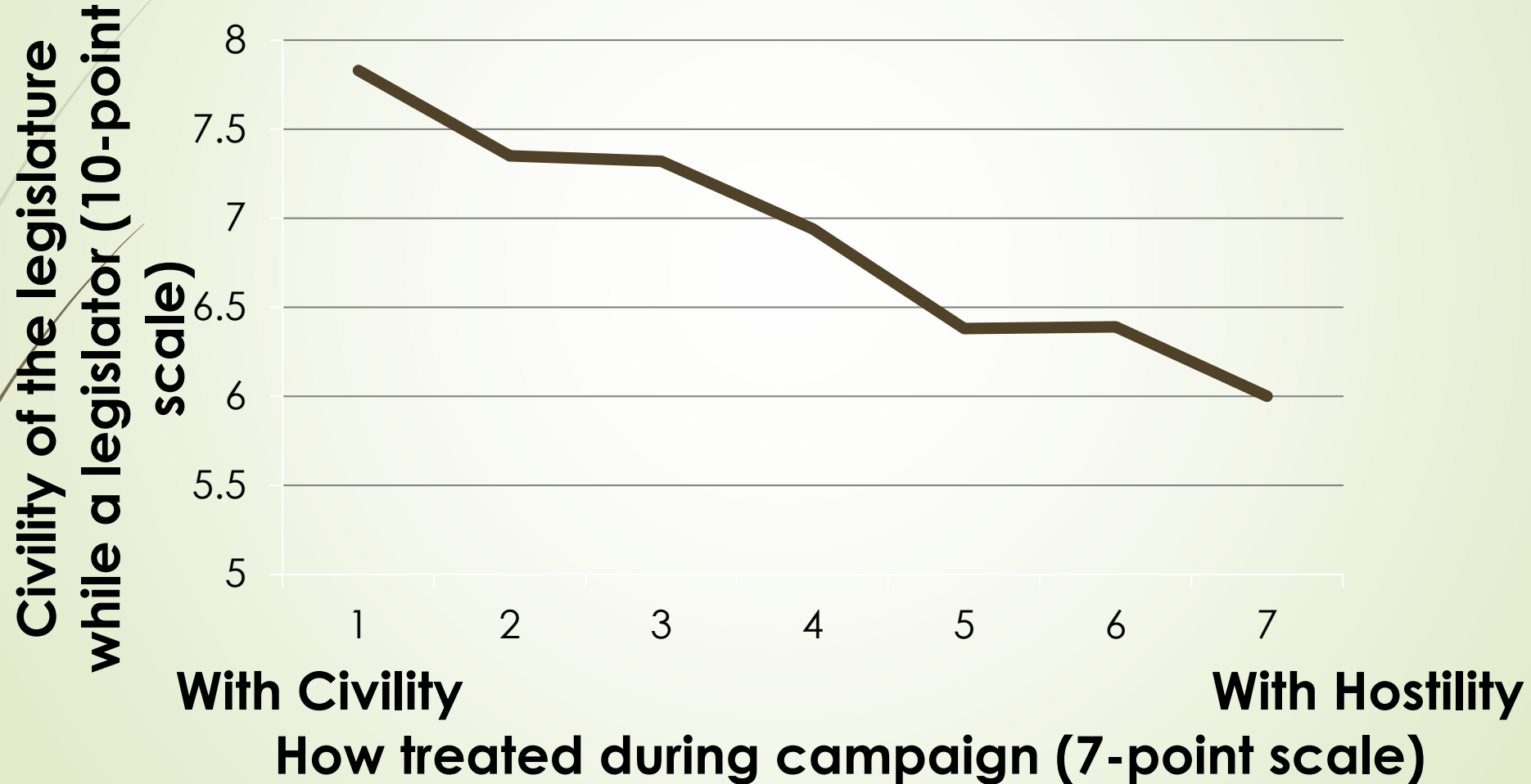
# How Important is Civility in Producing Good Policy Outcomes



National - 8.33  
 Washington - 8.35  
 Low - Wisconsin - 6.9  
 High - South Carolina - 9.7



# Campaign Incivility Carries Over to Legislative Sessions



## HAVE LEGISLATORS ... BECOME MORE PARTISAN OR MORE BIPARTISAN?

More partisan (1)		Uncertain (4)	more bipartisan (7)	
Natl. average		3.26		
Washington		2.78		
Nevada			Maryland	
2.2			4.7	

## COMPARED TO TEN YEARS AGO, ARE LEGISLATIVE LEADERS MORE OF LESS CIVIL?

less civil (1)		uncertain (5)	more civil (9)	
Natl. average		3.89		
Washington		3.45		
Maine			New Mexico	
2.7			5.2	



# “GRIDLOCK”

## Public consensus on important public policies not translated into public policy in Congress

**“LEGISLATORS REFLECT THE POLARIZED ENVIRONMENT OF THE U.S. CONGRESS”**

<b><i>strongly agree (1)</i></b>	<b><i>Agree (2)</i></b>	<b><i>Disagree (3)</i></b>	<b><i>strongly disagree (4)</i></b>
Natl. average	1.81		
Washington		2.06	
	Kentucky		Hawaii
	1.2		2.3

**In your state, are there fewer, the same, or more non-partisan areas today?**

<b><i>fewer (1)</i></b>	<b><i>same (2)</i></b>	<b><i>more (3)</i></b>
Natl. average	1.61	
Washington	1.54	
	Indiana	Minnesota
	1.3	2.1

## **Washington Lobbyists Comments**

**Legislators from "safe" districts occasionally behave too forcefully ...**

**Legislative testimony ... much more subjective and less based on fact now ... There is a considerable amount of "performing for the camera" ...**

**In the same way that the political parties have moved to the Left and to the Right nationally, that is happening in Washington too. There is less middle ground visible to both sides today ...**

**The "Statesman" is all but extinct; contemporary legislators seem much more concerned with pending elections and mere appearances than in crafting good public policy ...**

**... younger lobbyists, legislators and staff do not fully respect the "institution" of the legislature.**

# **Lessons Learned - Civility Factors: Between Elected Leaders**

## **Mutual Respect/ Trust**

Met → Respect → Interests → Values → Friend → Trust → Confide

## **Relationships**

Family – Meals – Visiting

## **Strategic Incivility**

Using incivility to get your way



# **Lessons Learned - Civility Factors: Leadership**

## **Majority/Minority Perspective**

Majority: Rule    Minority: Voice Heard

## **Vote Separation Between Groups**

Narrower separation requires more civility

## **Committee Structure**

As complexity grows → committees

## **Ideological Differences**

Consensus – Compromise – Line in the Sand

# **Lessons Learned - Civility Factors: Process**

## **Televising**

Being present in meetings

## **Process of Trust**

Transparent – Voices heard – Fair

## **Code of Conduct**

Sets boundaries – Disagreements – Transitions

## **Staff vs Elected Perspectives**

Long vs Short timelines

# **Lessons Learned - Civility Factors: External**

## **Technology Changes**

Reduction of relationships

## **Crisis/Disasters**

Changes the dynamics

## **Permanent Campaign Cycle**

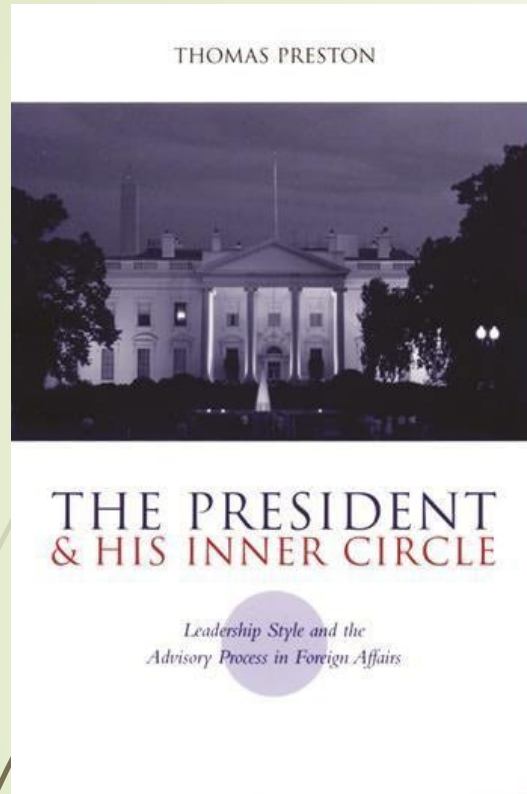
Plan work based on cycles

## **Negative campaigns**

Proactively break the cycle

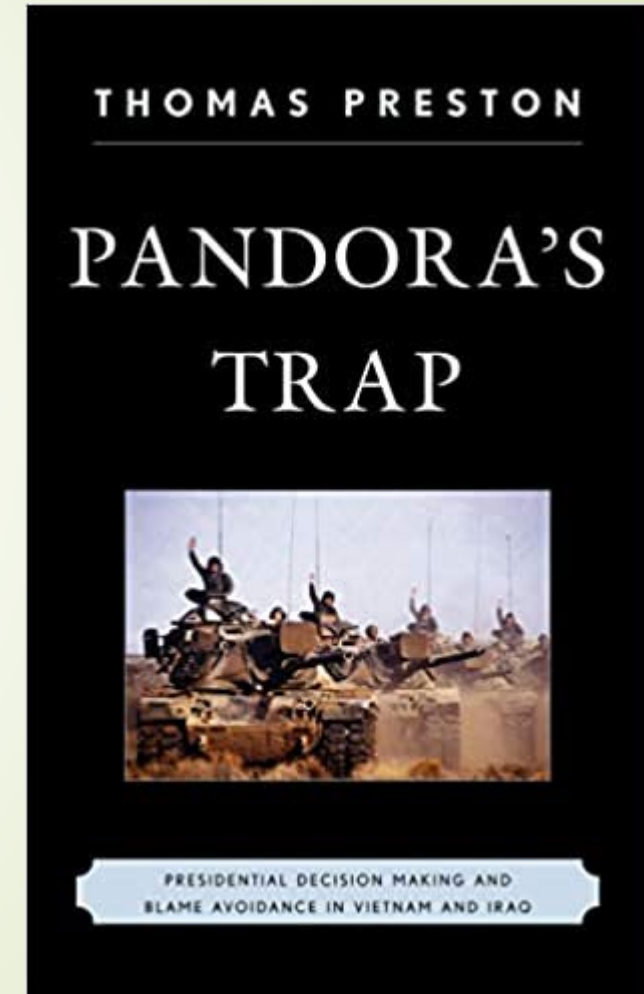
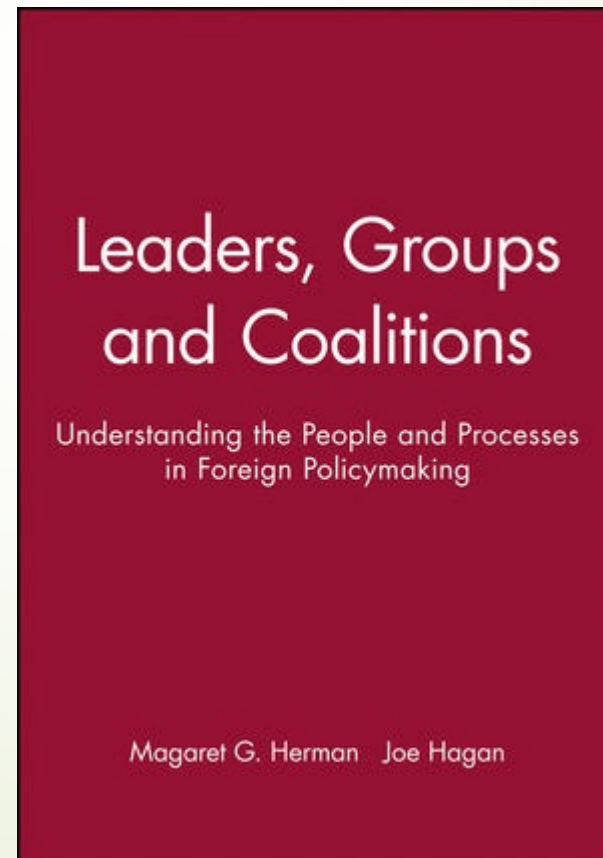


# Civility Interactions: Leadership Profiles



**Thomas Preston** has written numerous refereed journal articles and book chapters on leadership, international security, the use of active-learning simulations in the classroom, and foreign policy analysis.

**Margaret Hermann** has developed an empirical method for assessing the leadership styles of political elites that is employed by analysts around the globe, providing a way to anticipate how particular leaders are likely to lead and, in turn, what they are likely to urge their governments to do.



# Leadership Profile

## How the world is viewed

Nature of the world	Hostile	↔	Friendly
Expectation	Pessimistic	↔	Optimistic
Predictability	Low	↔	High

## What strategy produces the greatest impact

Strategy	Conflict	↔	Cooperation
Intensity	Conflict	↔	Cooperation
Risk Orientation	Averse	↔	Acceptant
Flexibility of Tactics	Low	↔	High
Focus of Tactic	Words	↔	Deeds

Conflict strategy	Punish	↔	Threaten	↔	Oppose
Cooperation strategy	Appeal	↔	Promise	↔	Reward

# **Leadership Traits**

**Belief Can Control Events**

**Need for Power**

**Conceptual Complexity**

**Self-confidence**

**Task Focus**

**Distrust**

**In-group Bias**



# Determining Openness to Information

**Scores on Conceptual Complexity  
& Self-Confidence**

**Openness to  
Contextual Information**

Conceptual Complexity > Self-Confidence

Open

Self-Confidence > Conceptual Complexity

Closed

Conceptual Complexity and Self-Confidence Both High

Open

Conceptual Complexity and Self-Confidence Both Low

Closed

# Leaders' Reaction to Constraints

## Belief Can Control Events

Need for Power

Low

High

Low

*Respect* constraints  
Compromise important  
Consensus building important

*Challenge* constraints  
Direct and open in use of power  
Less behind the scenes

High

*Challenge* constraints  
In an indirect fashion behind the scenes  
Good at being “power behind the throne”  
Pull strings but are less accountable for result

*Challenge* constraints  
Skillful in both direct and indirect influence  
Know what they want  
Take charge attitude

# Leadership Style as a Function of Responsiveness to Constraints, Openness to Information, and Motivation

Responsiveness to Constraints	Openness to Information	Motivation	
		Problem Focus	Relationship Focus
Challenges Constraints	Closed to Information	<i>Expansionistic</i> (Focus: expanding power and influence)	<i>Evangelistic</i> (Focus: persuading others to accept one's message and join one's cause)
Challenges Constraints	Open to Information	<i>Incremental</i> (Focus: maintaining maneuverability and flexibility while avoiding the obstacles that limit both)	<i>Charismatic</i> (Focus: achieving one's agenda by engaging others in the process and persuading them to act)
Respects Constraints	Closed to Information	<i>Directive</i> (Focus: guide policy along paths consistent with one's own views while still working within the norms and rules of one's position)	<i>Consultative</i> (Focus: monitor what others will support or not actively oppose that you want)
Respects Constraints	Open to Information	<i>Reactive</i> (Focus: assess what is possible in the situation given the nature of the problem and considering what important constituencies will allow)	<i>Accommodative</i> (Focus: reconciling differences and building consensus, empowering others and sharing accountability in the process)



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**Civility: Historical Trends and How We Got Here**

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