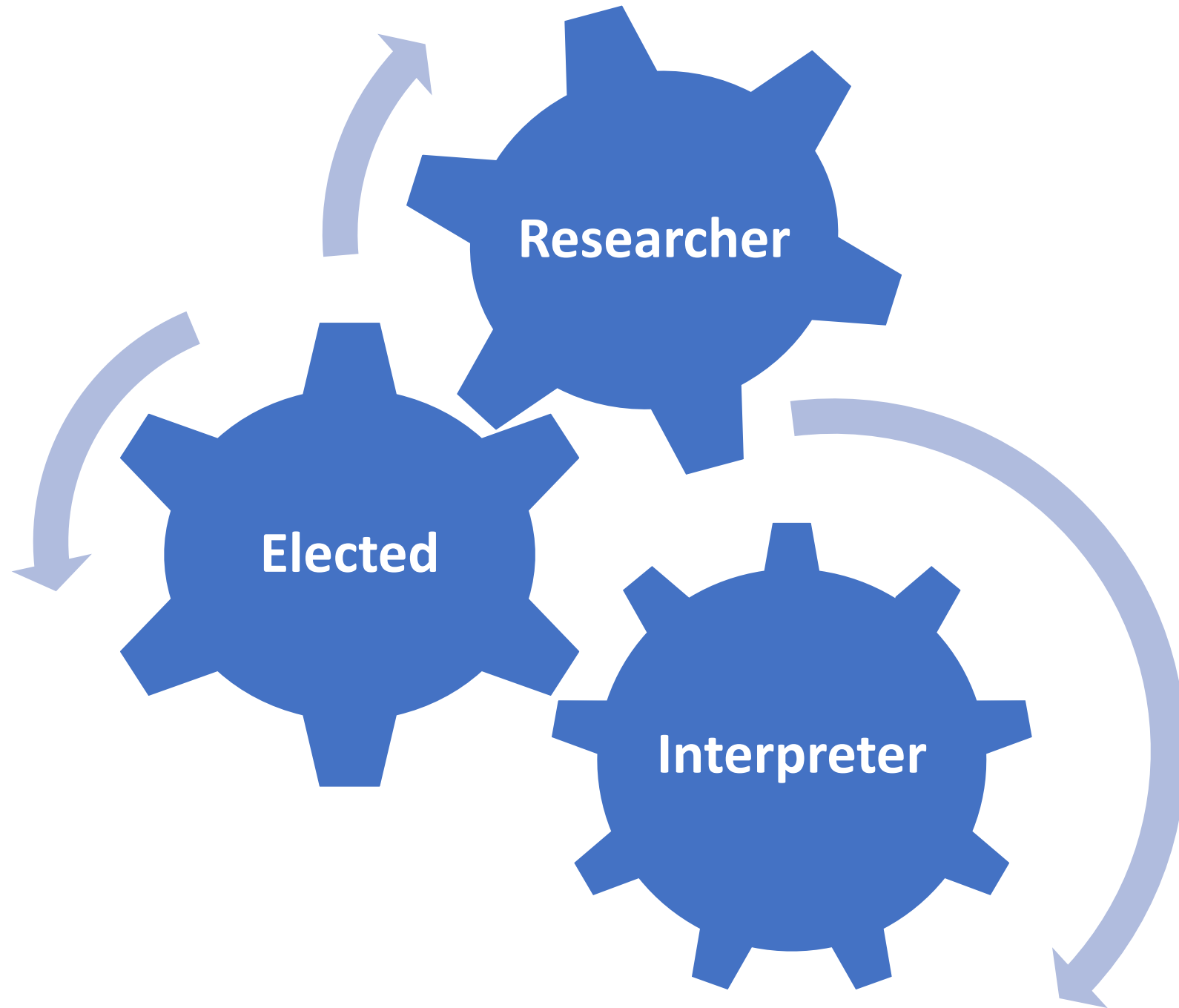


Polarization & Incivility in Politics: Local Government's Path Forward

Francis Benjamin

Director, WSU Political Interaction Lab
Washington State University
Councilmember, City of Pullman

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

Civility: Historical Trends and How We Got Here

Civility: Research - Lessons Learned

Civility: Path Forward

Civility: Historical Trends and How We Got Here

What does **HERE** look like?

"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

Go Back

Work to make a difference



Draw a Line in the Sand

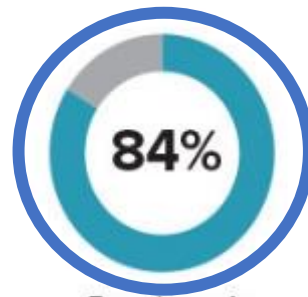


Avoid

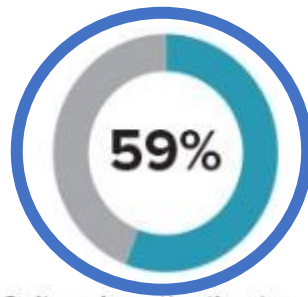
Bipartisan Agreement that Incivility in Politics is Problematic (2019)

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

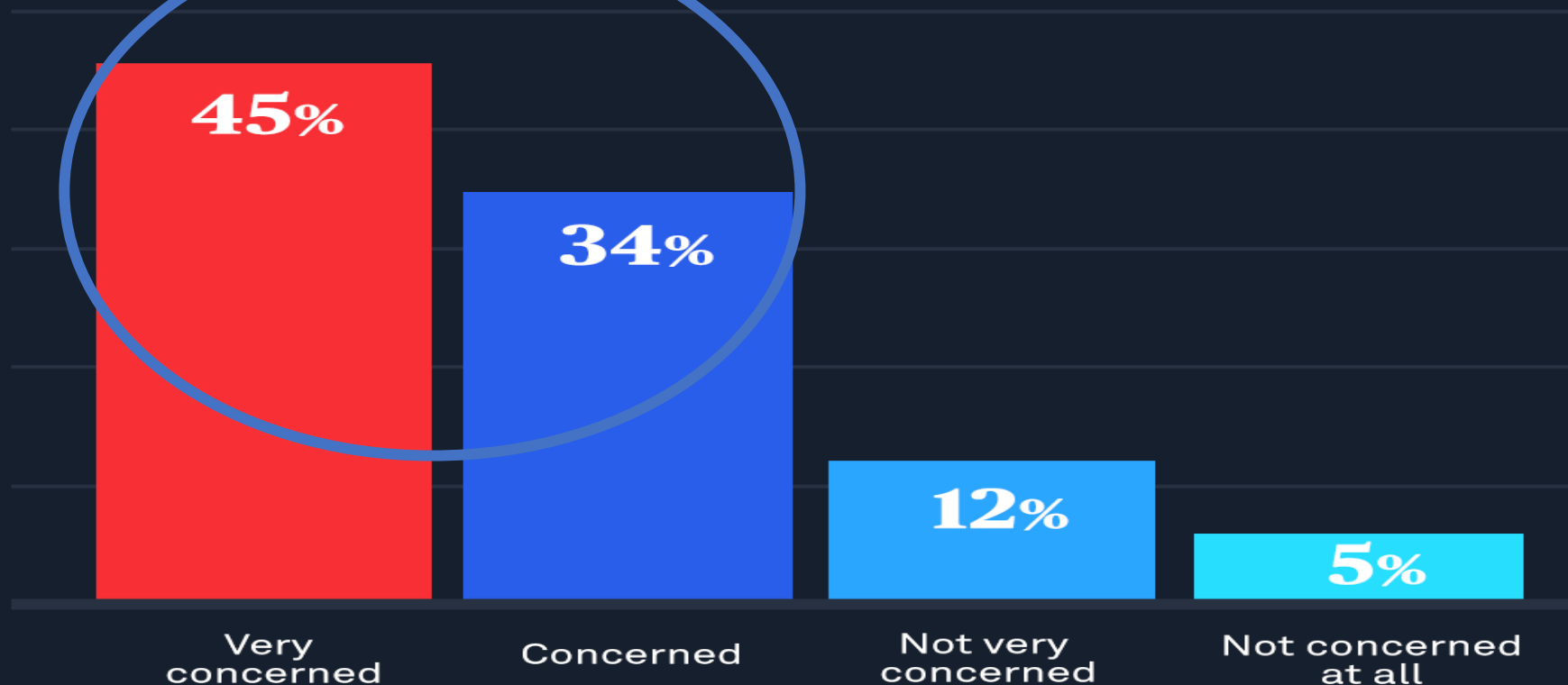
Why?
Politicians 75%
Internet and social media 69%
News media 59%

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:

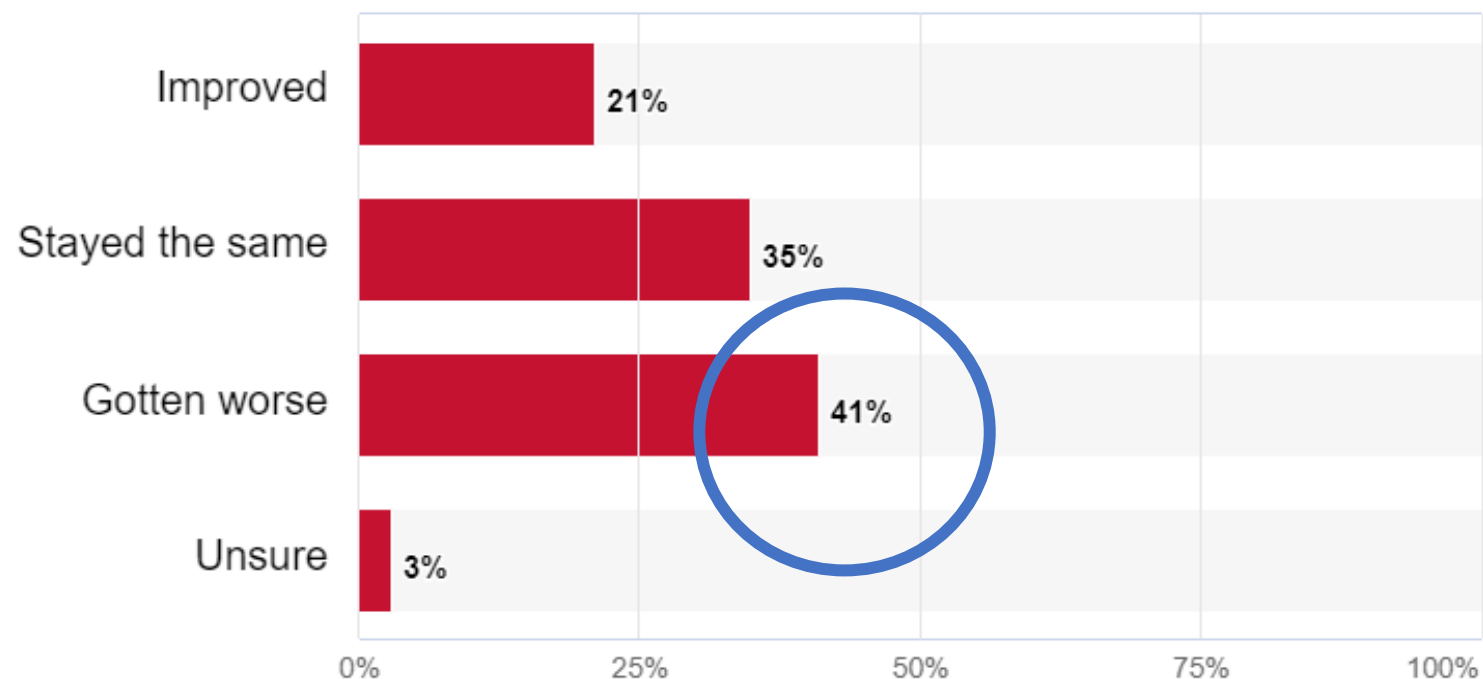
PBS
NEWS
HOUR

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



Since Joe Biden was elected president in 2020, do you think the overall tone and level of civility in Washington between Republicans and Democrats has improved, stayed the same, or gotten worse?

Sample: National adult (n=1115)



Source: NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll: June 2021 Coronavirus. June, 2021. Roper Center at Cornell University

Interview Dates: June 22, 2021 - June 29, 2021

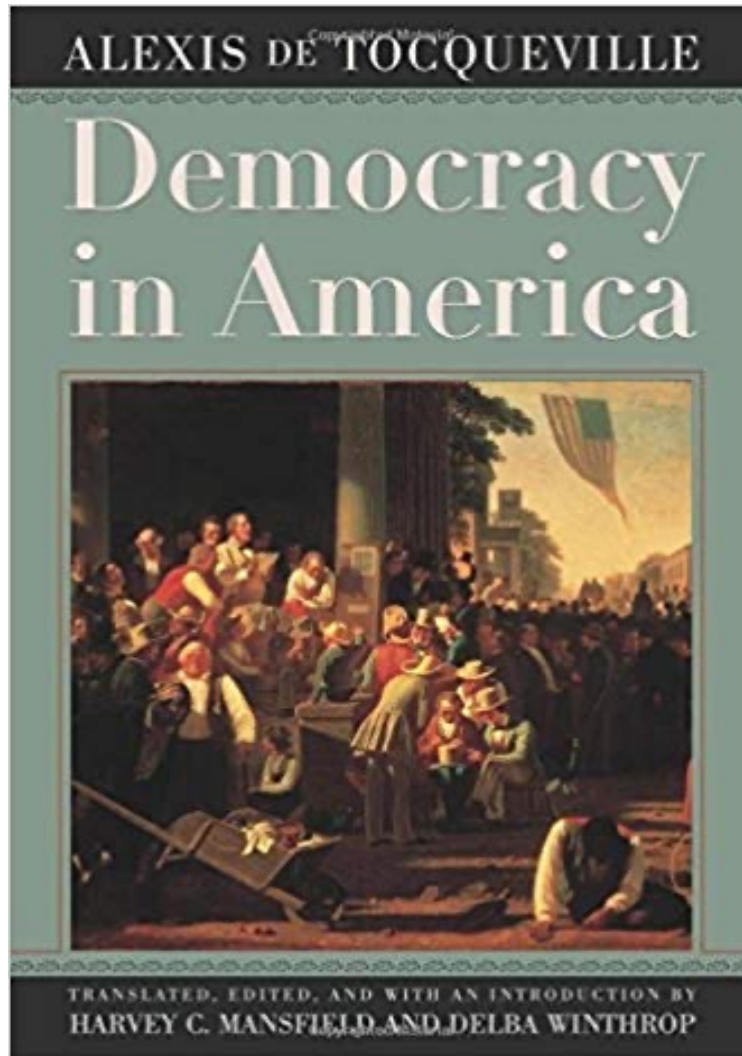
Geographic Coverage: United States

Survey Organization: Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

Sponsor: NPR; PBS NewsHour



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

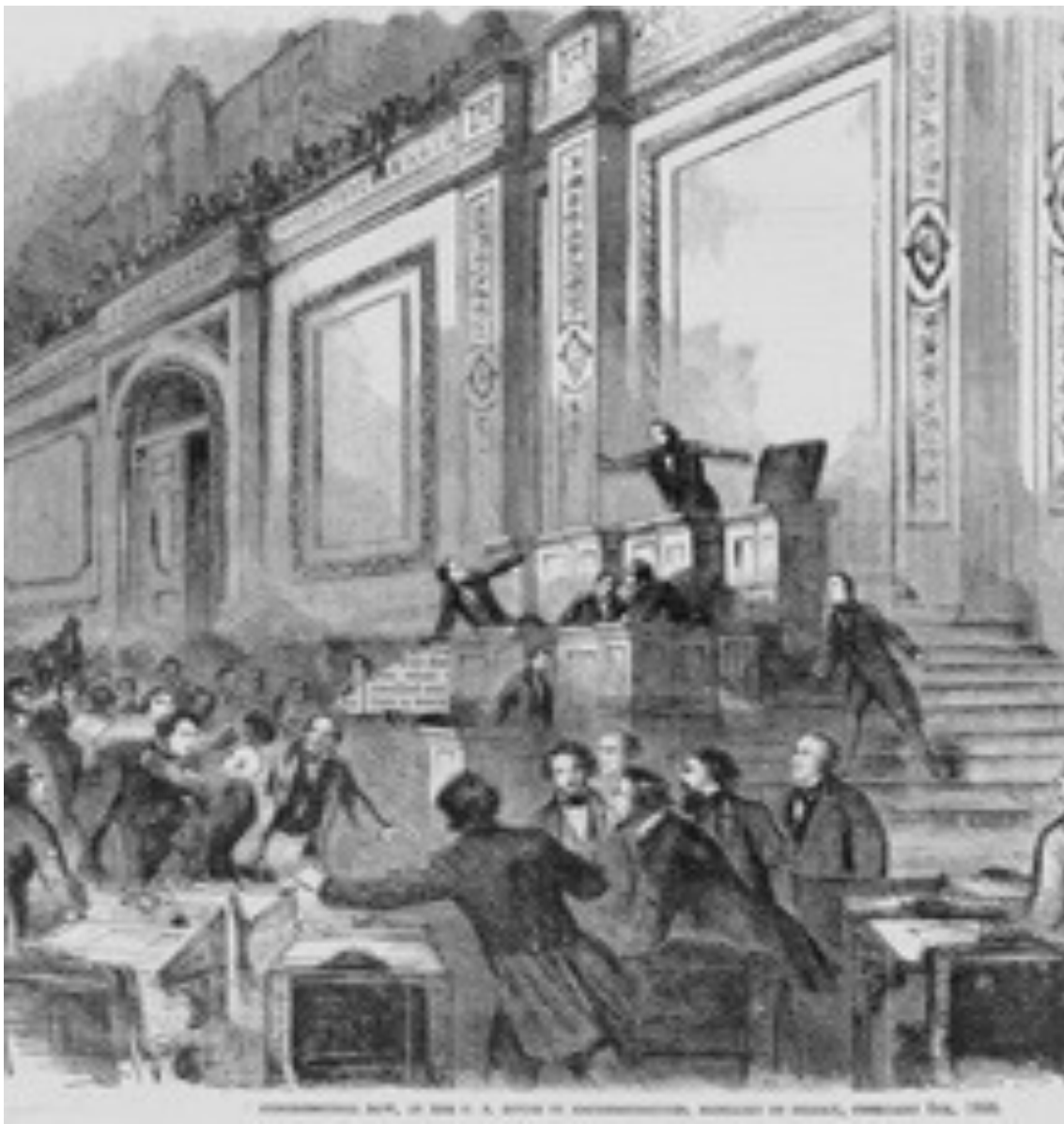


“There is still some memory of the **strict code of politeness**, but no one knows quite what it said or where to find it.”

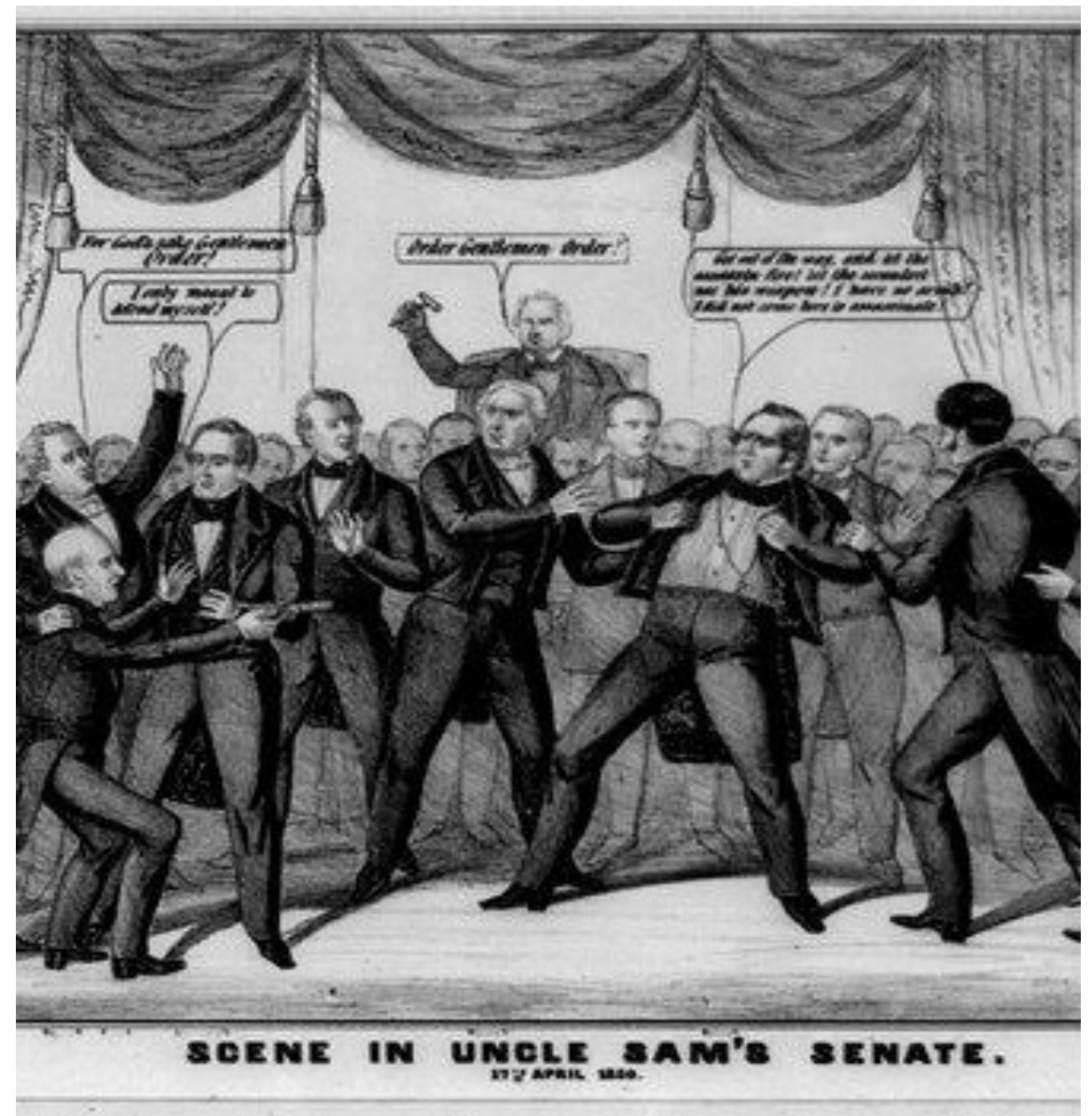
Legacy derives from courtroom decorum and the one-time high percent of legislators who were “lawyers” who crafted legislative **rules, norms** and traditions of **respect, comity & civility**



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

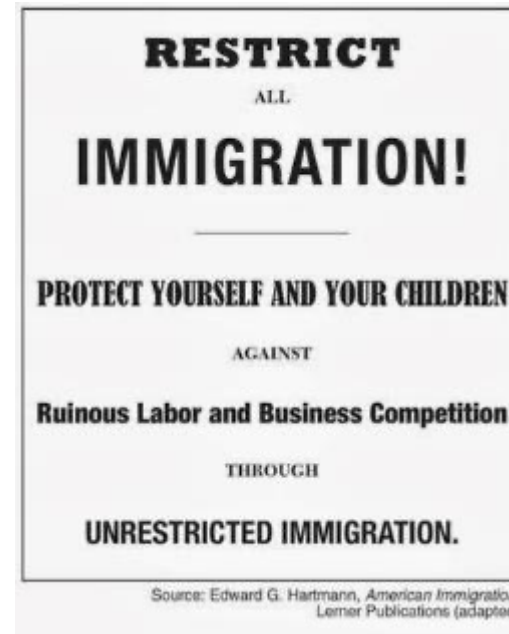
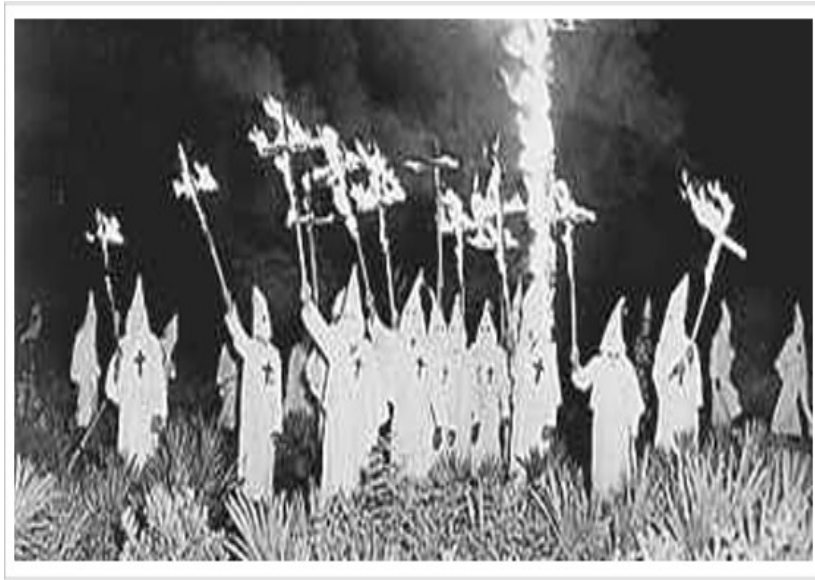


Brawl on the Floor of House of Representatives, February 6, 1858



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

Polarized Politics in the 1920s in America



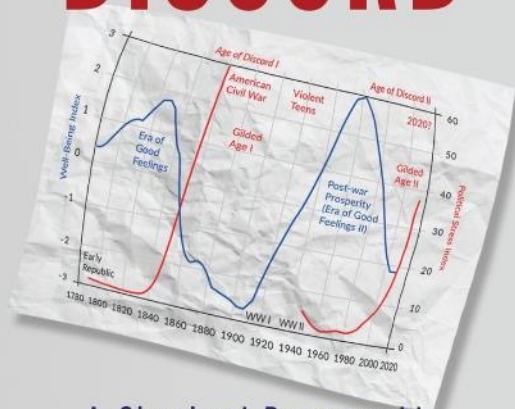
Remember the 1960s?



The Last Few Years ...



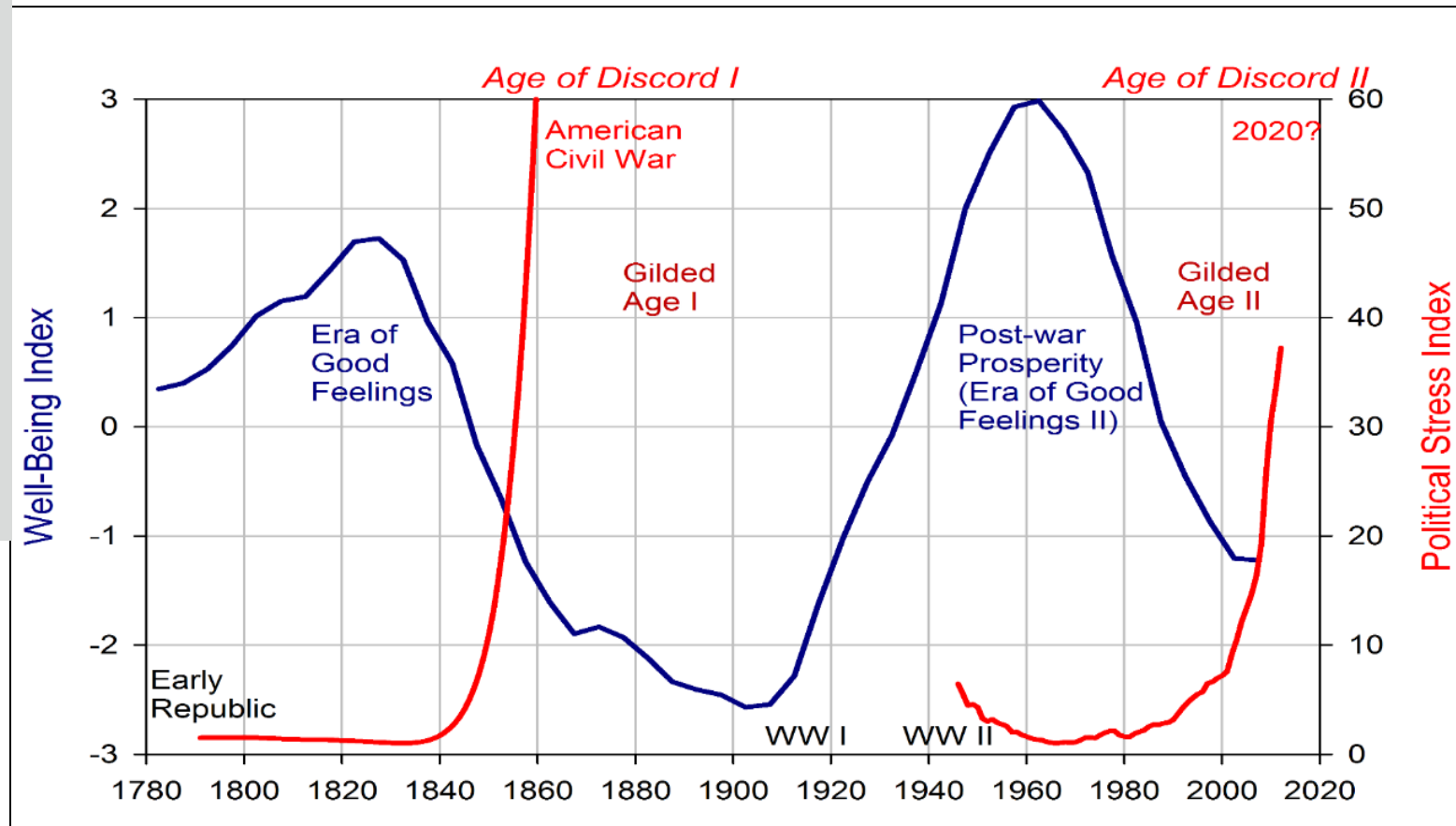
AGES OF DISCORD



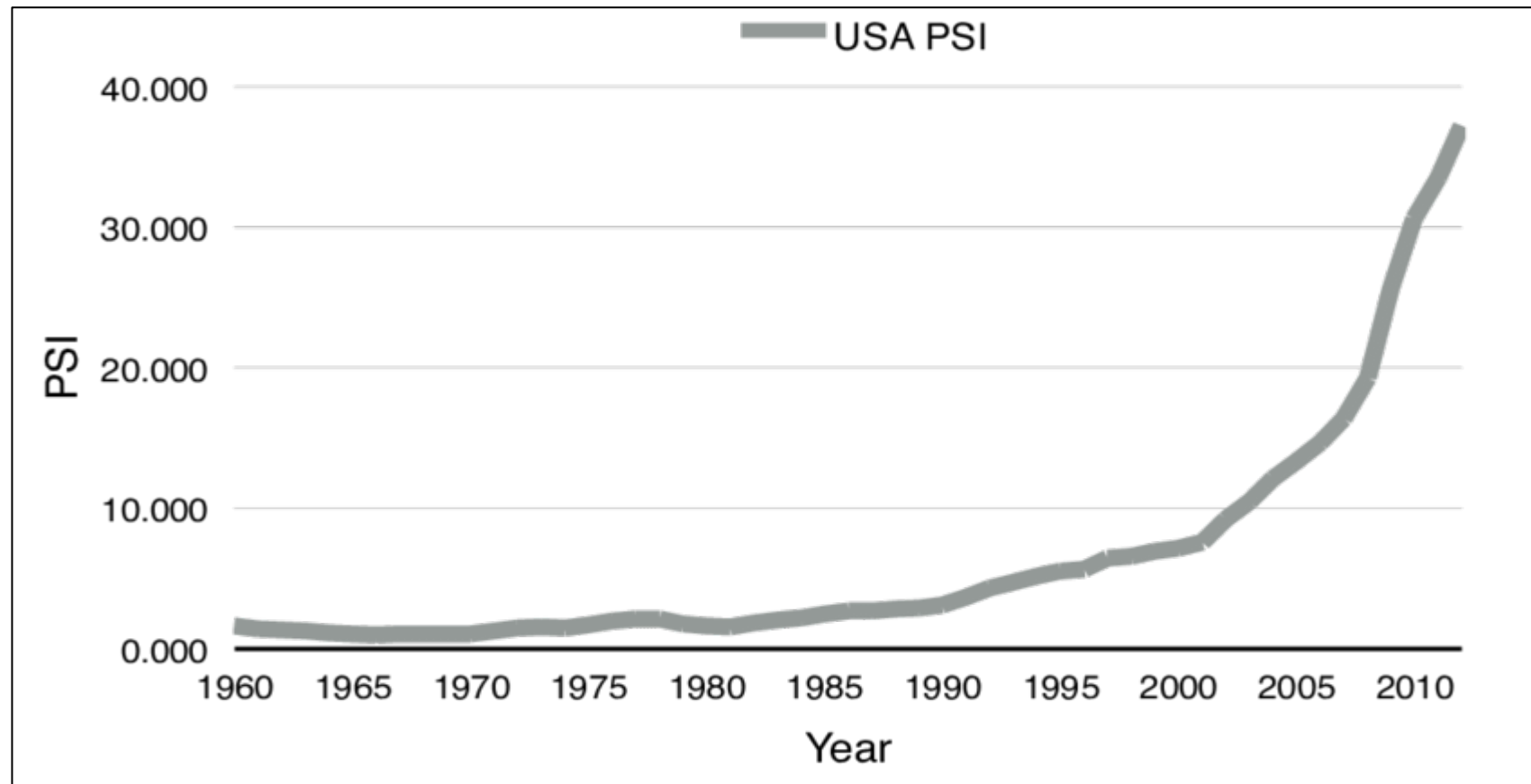
A Structural-Demographic
Analysis of American History
PETER TURCHIN

Source: Turchin, 2016

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

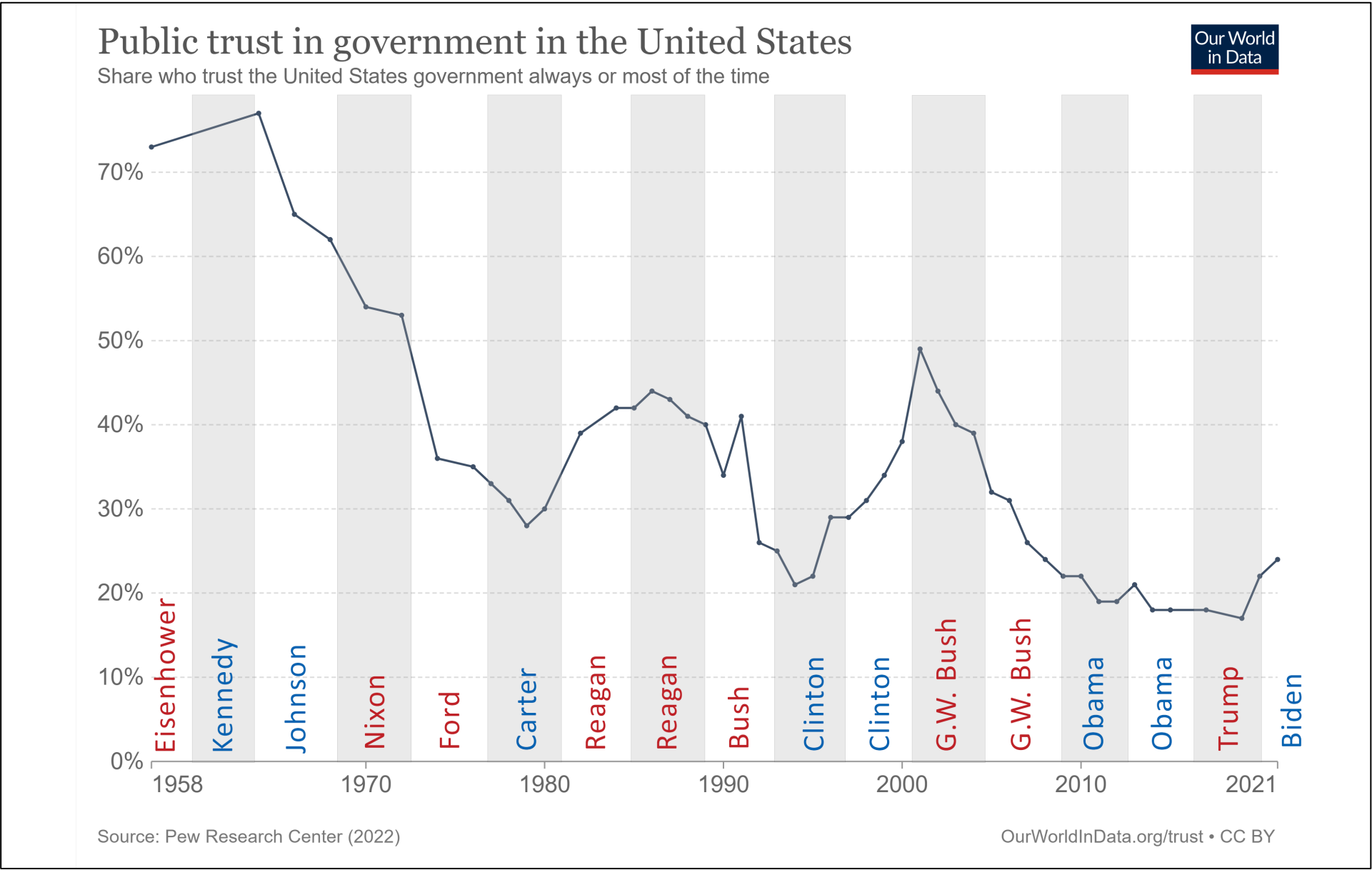


Political Stress Index in the U.S., 1960-2010: Current Condition of High Stress Reflective of a New Cycle of Discord

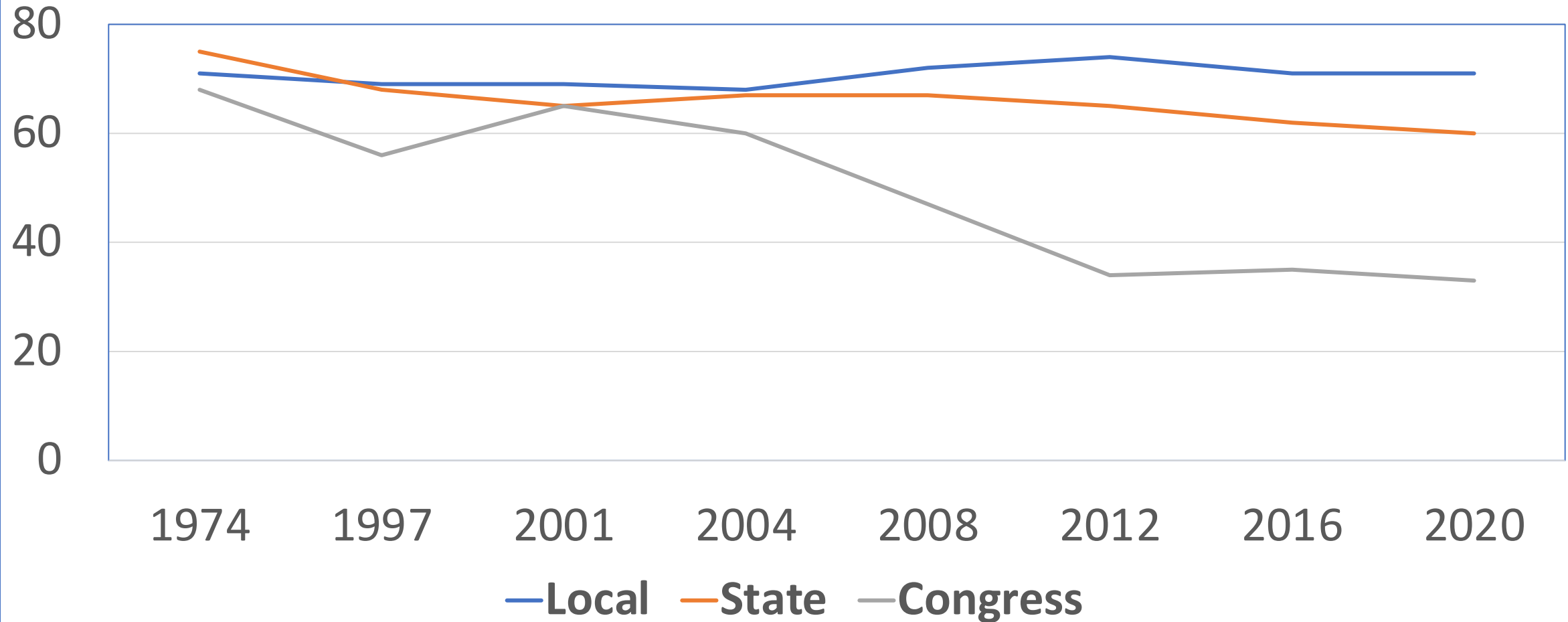


Source: Ortmans, et al., 2017 (data from Turchin)

Declining Trust in American Political Institutions



Trust and Confidence in Government

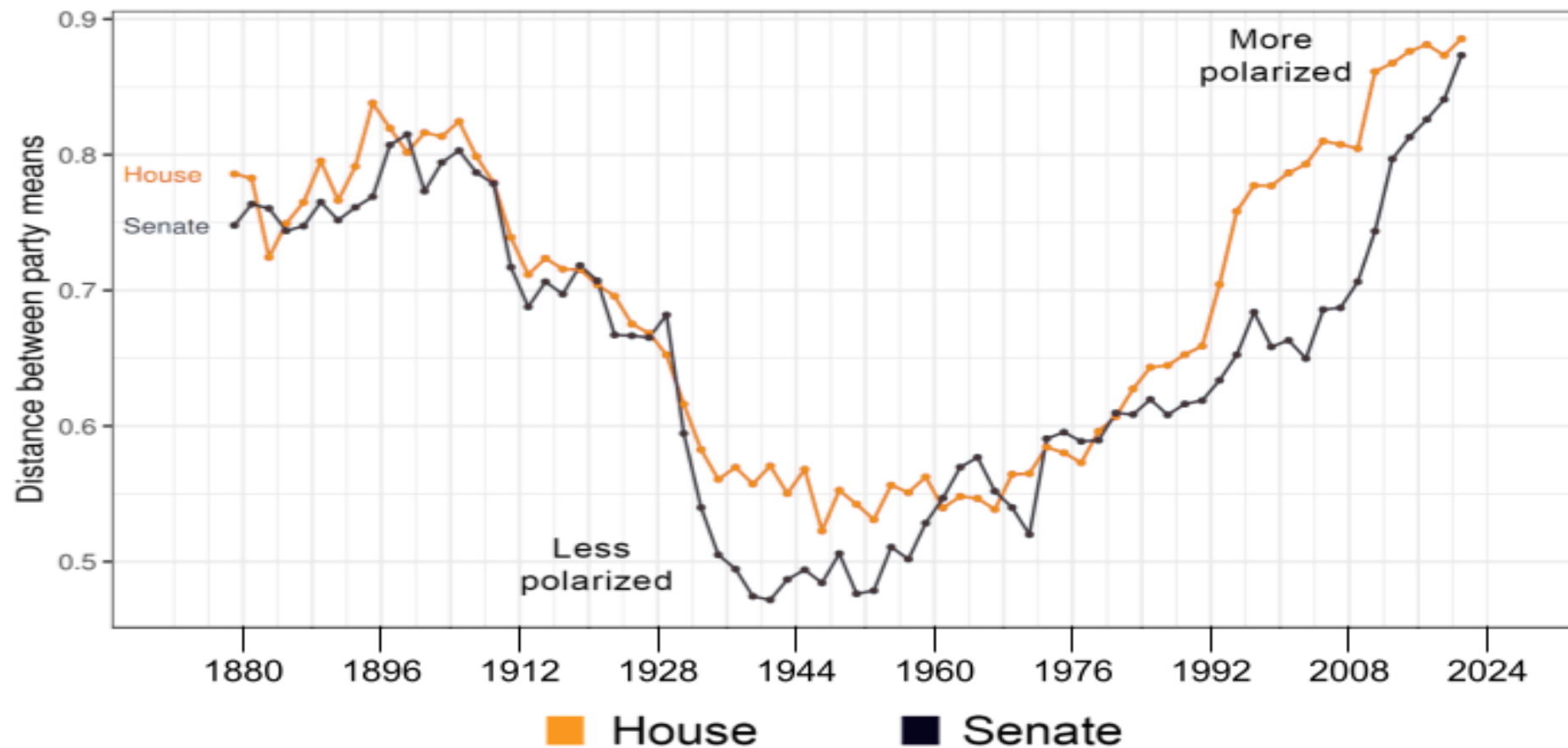


Gallup

Increasing Polarization Among the Political Elites

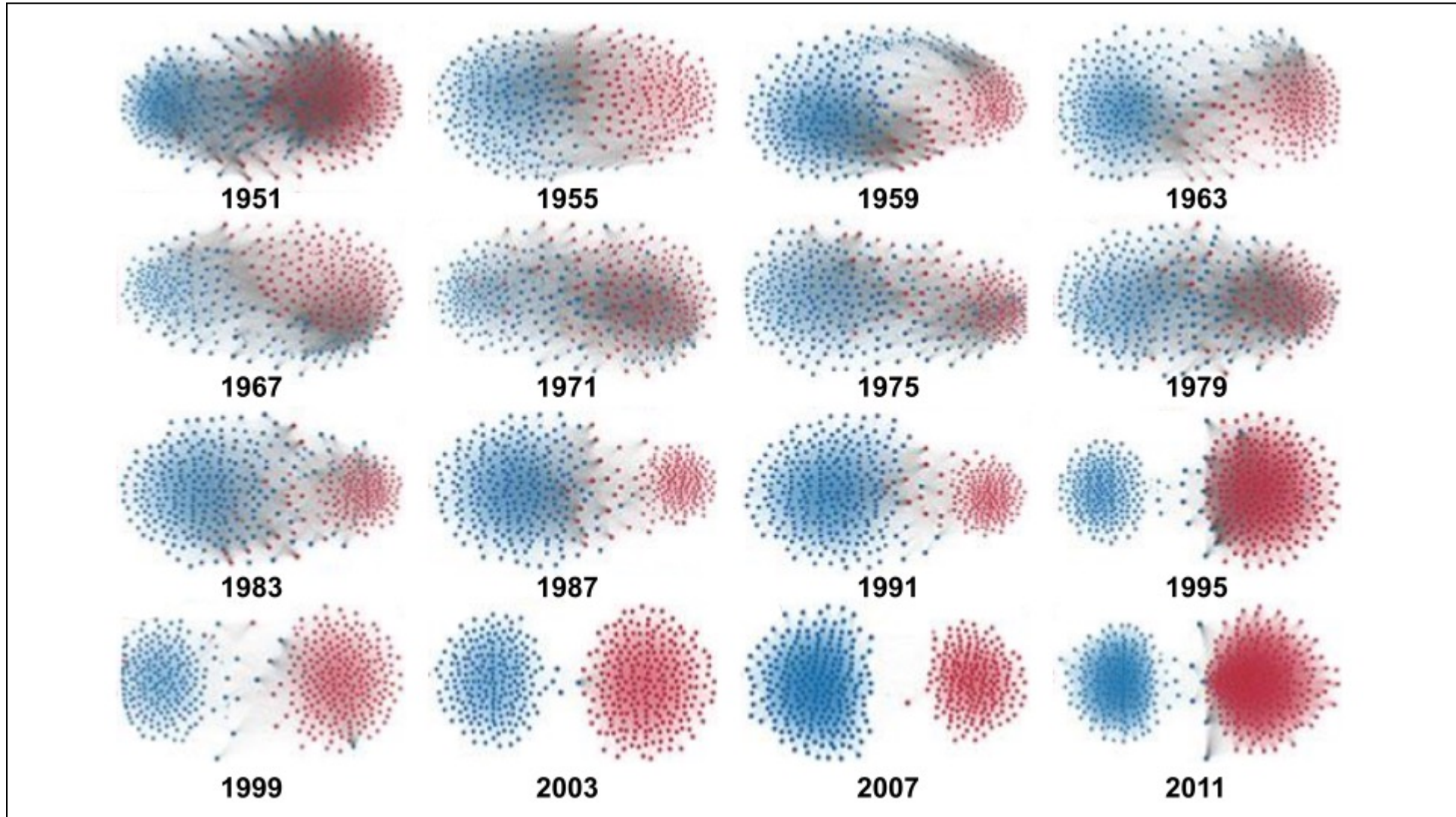
Party polarization, 1879 - 2021

The ideological gap between the Democratic and Republican caucuses



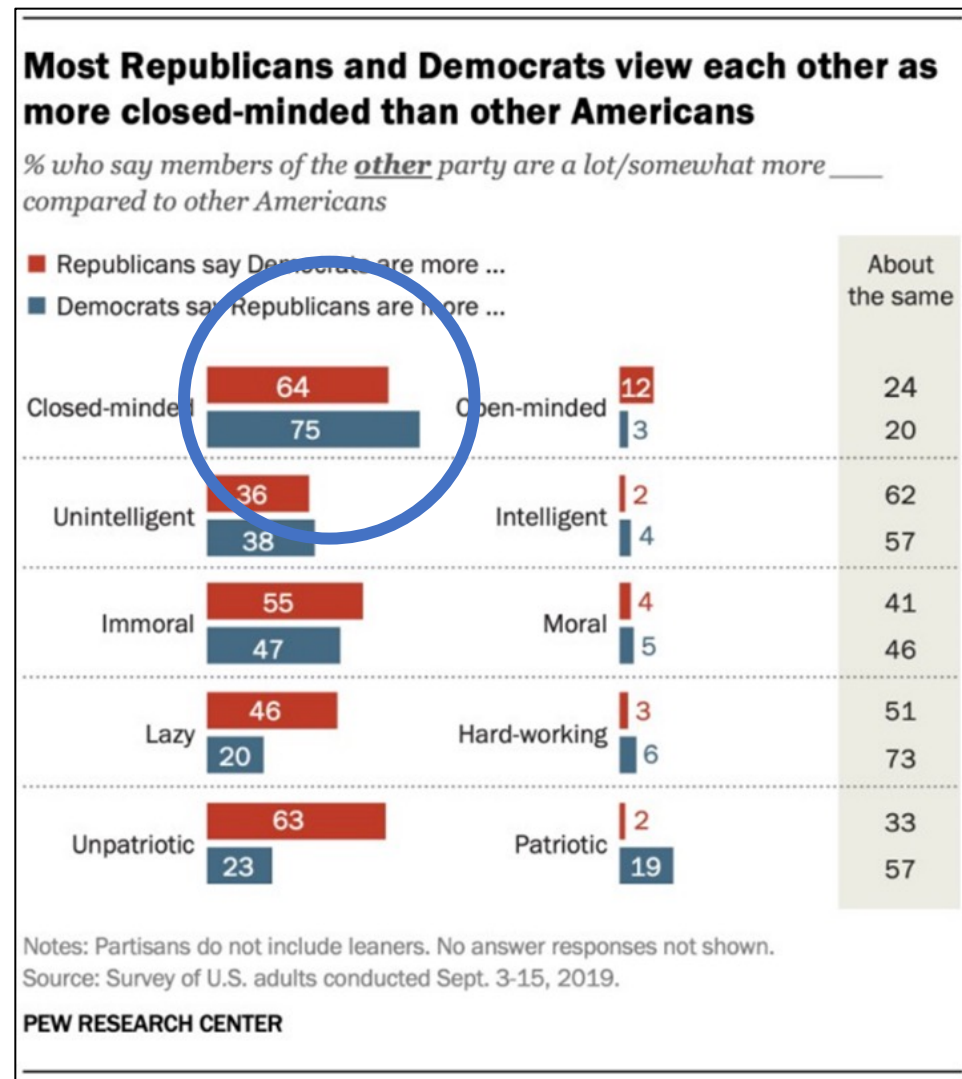
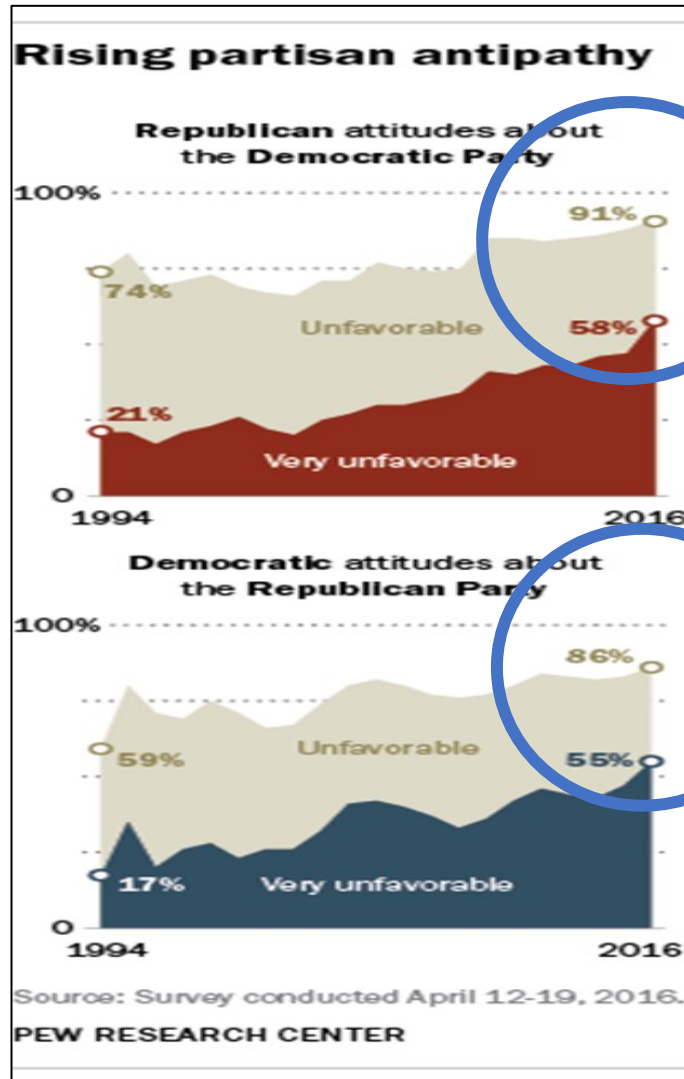
Source: Voteview.com

Partisanship in voting patterns in the U.S. House of Representatives



Andris C, Lee D, Hamilton MJ, Martino M, Gunning CE, Selden JA (2015)

Increasing Political Polarization Among the Public

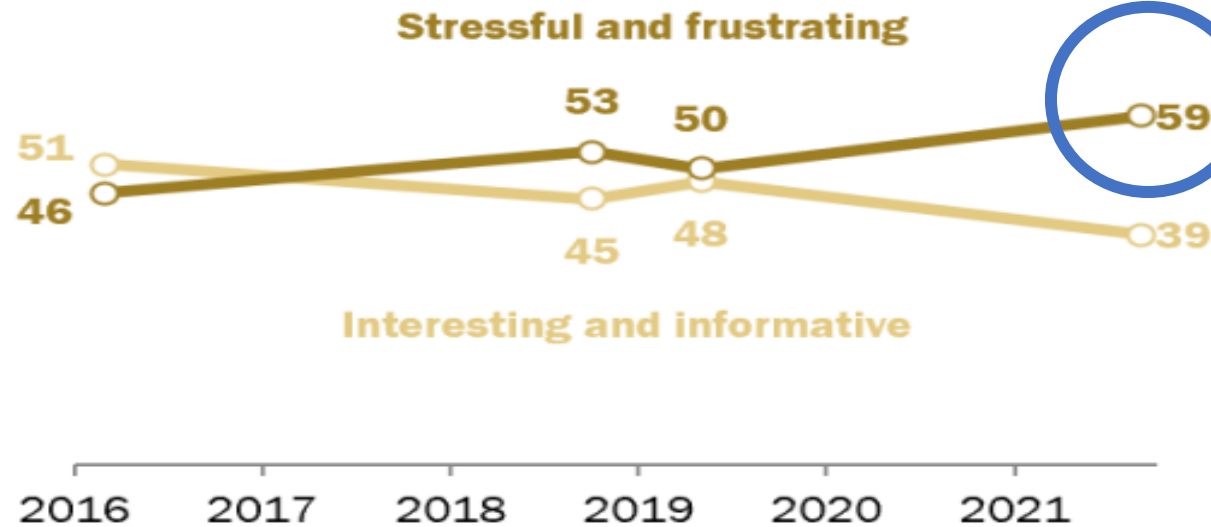


Reaction to “Cavorting with the Enemy”

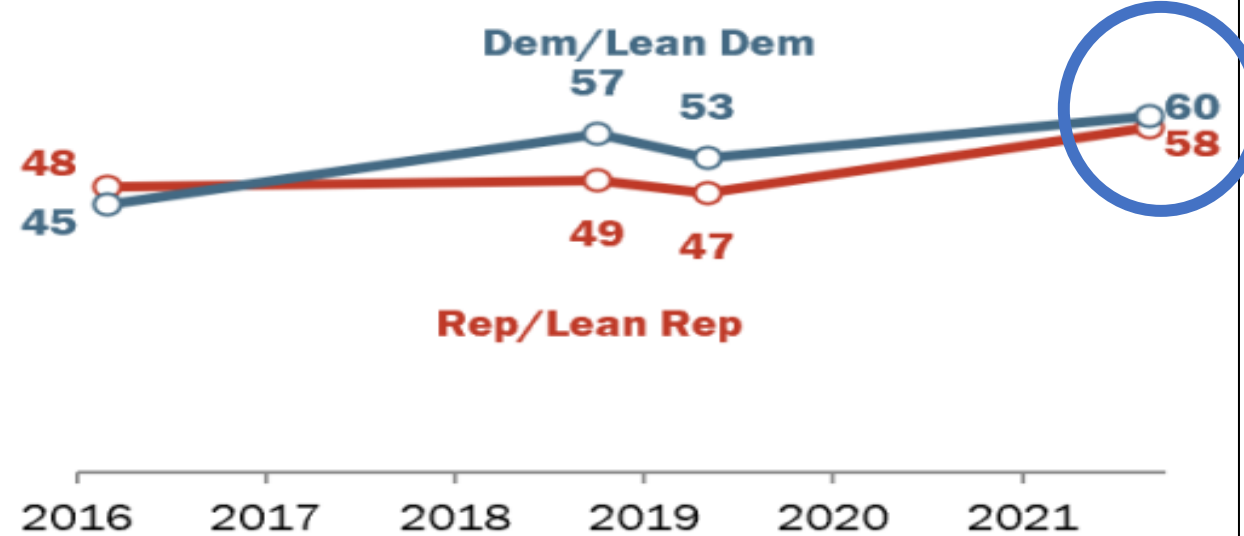


Americans increasingly find it stressful to talk politics with people who disagree with their views

% who say that talking about politics with people they disagree with is generally ...

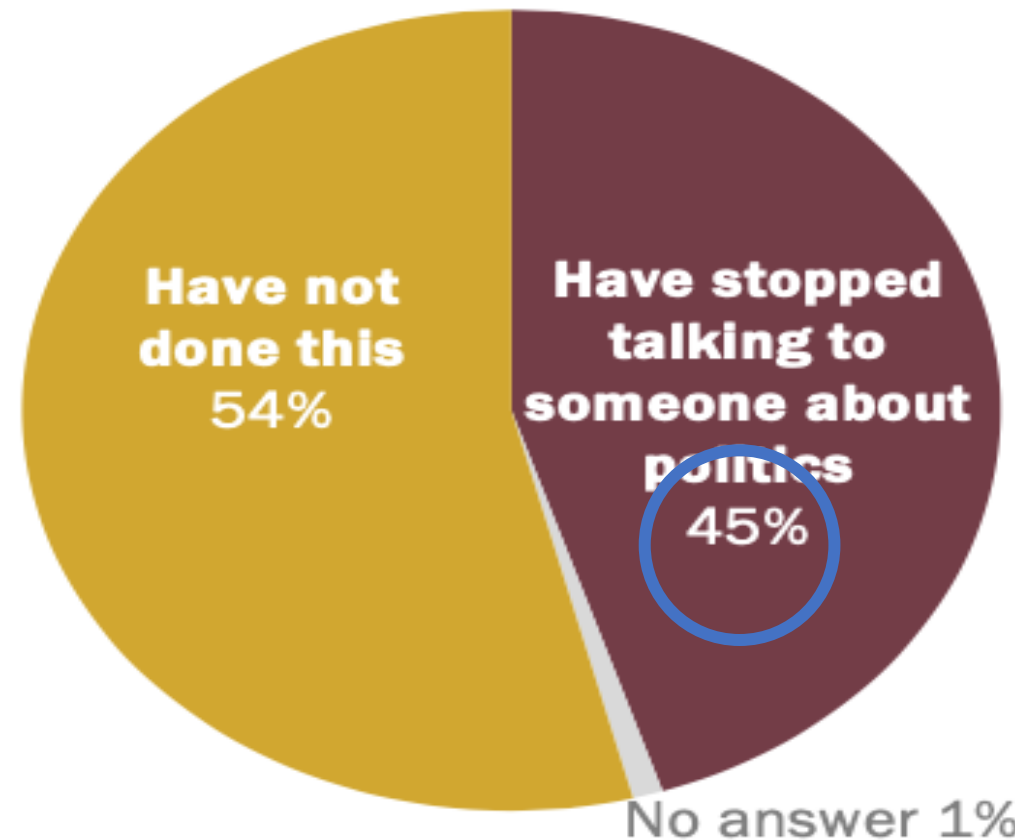


% who say that talking about politics with people they disagree with is generally **stressful and frustrating**



Nearly half of U.S. adults have stopped talking with someone about political news

% who say they have stopped talking to someone about political and election news because of something they said



Pew Research Center

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) passed the NCSL Civility Accord. (2011)

- **Respect the right of all Americans to hold different opinions.**
- **Avoid rhetoric intended to humiliate, de-legitimize or question the patriotism of those whose opinions are different from ours.**
- **Strive to understand differing perspective.;**
- **Choose words carefully;**
- **Speak truthfully without accusation, and avoid distortion.**
- **Speak out against violence, prejudice and incivility in all their forms, whenever and wherever they occur.**

ON THE FRONTLINES
OF TODAY'S CITIES:

TRAUMA, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

FIGURE 2. More than 8 in 10 surveyed local officials reported experiencing harassment, threats and violence



FIGURE 3. A vast majority of surveyed local officials have noticed changes in the levels of harassment, threats and violence during their time in office



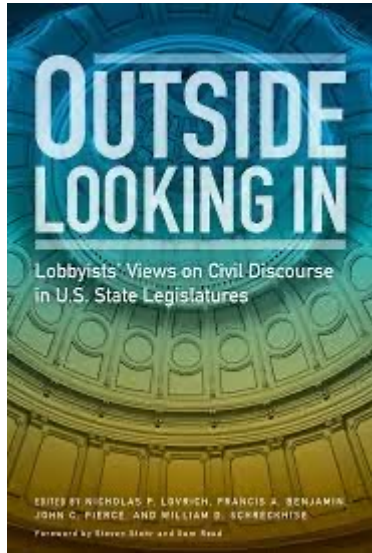
20% unlikely to serve out the rest of their term

Civility: Historical Trends and How We Got Here

- 1. Cycles: Happen – We are at the Worst of a Long Cycle**
- 2. Cycles: Can Be Broken**
- 3. Cycles: Local Government Is the Key**

Reflection Question:

Is civility increasing or declining in your county?



Civility Research

Lessons Learned

- **Collaboration & Treatment Projects**
(2008 – 2022)
- **Washington State Legislative Service Projects**
(2009, 2012, 2013)
- **Minority/Majority**
(2011)
- **National Survey of State Legislative Lobbyists**
(2018-2019)

What is Civility?

Incivility



Civility

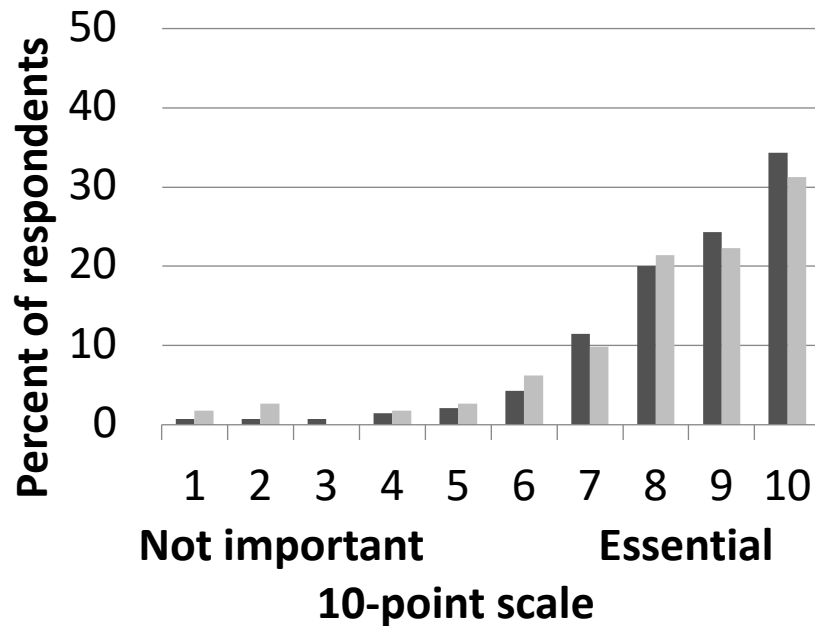
Doesn't Require Agreement

Interest in Other's Perspective

Recognize the Person's Dignity & Value

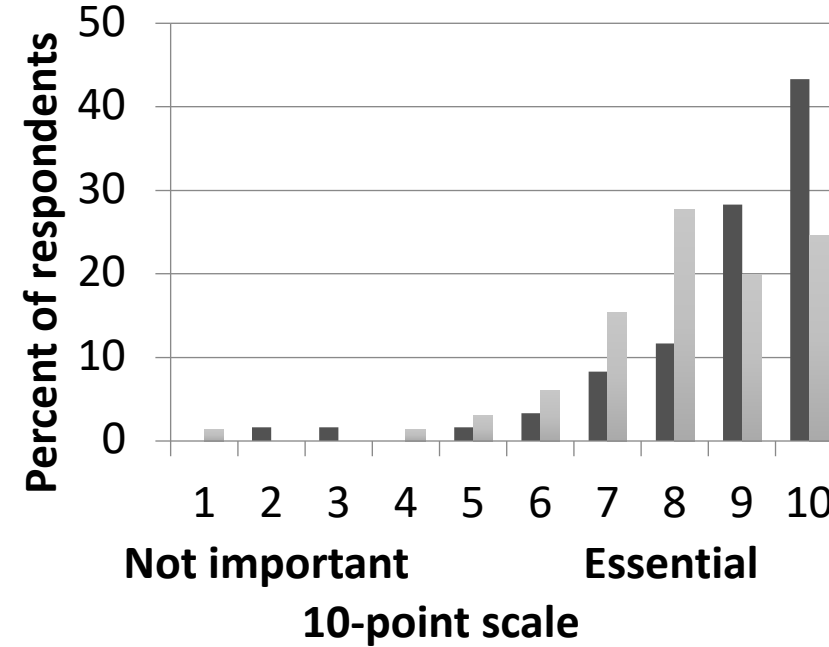
Recognition That You May be Wrong

How Important is Civility in Producing Good Policy Outcomes



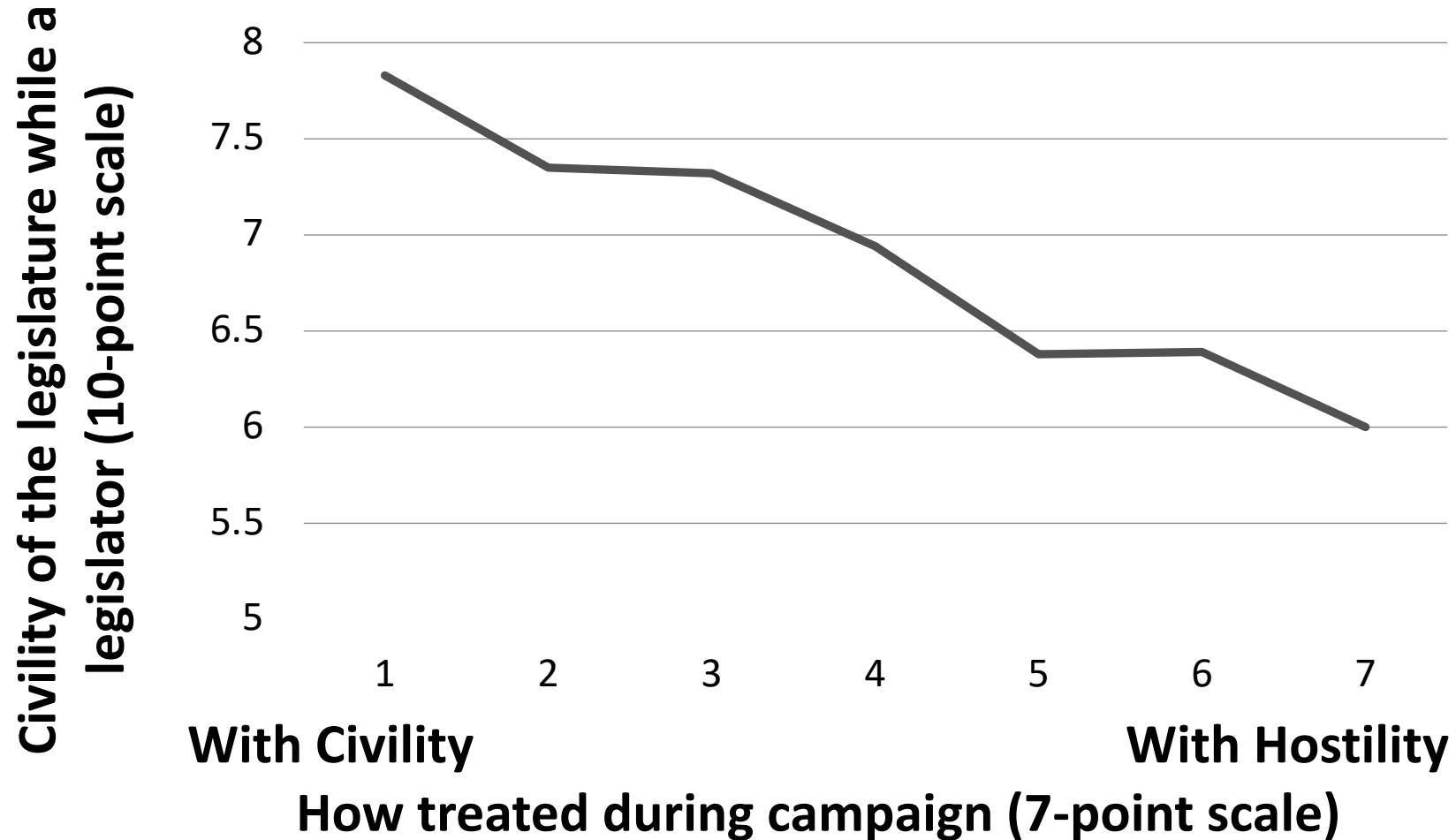
■ Legislator ■ Lobbyist

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



■ Legislator prior 2000
 ■ Legislator after 2000

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

2.2

Maryland

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

2.7

New Mexico

5.2

“GRIDLOCK”

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

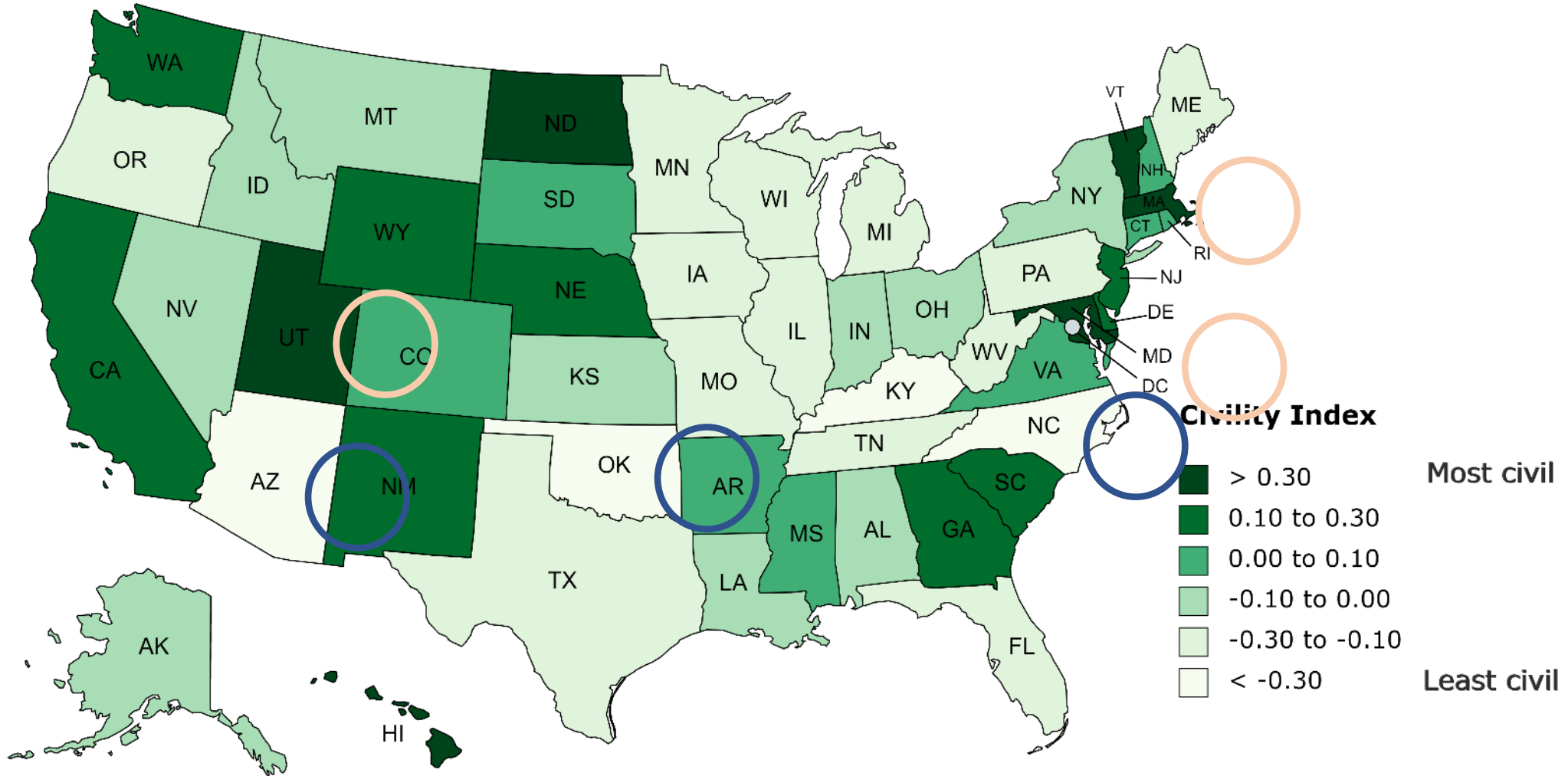
“LEGISLATORS REFLECT THE POLARIZED ENVIRONMENT OF THE U.S. CONGRESS”

	<i>strongly agree (1)</i>	<i>Agree (2)</i>	<i>Disagree (3)</i>	<i>strongly disagree (4)</i>
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?

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

Map of State Civility Index



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 – Remove Power
Struggle - 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: Historical Trends and How We Got Here

1. Civility: Relationships are key –

**Do you view the person as an individual or as
representative of a group**

2. Civility: Declining

3. Civility: Affect Policy Outcomes

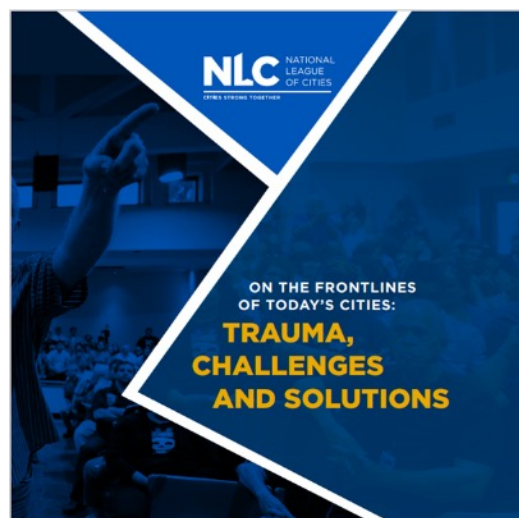
Reflection Question:

What factor is weakest in your county?

Local Government Path Forward



Path Forward



RECOMMENDATIONS

THE following recommendations outline some safety measures local leaders can take to address incidences of harassment, threats and violence.



Securing Physical Safety

These recommendations provide high-level guidance on how local leaders can better plan for and mitigate potentially tense public meetings and events.

PLAN IN ADVANCE AND FOCUS ON DE-ESCALATION:

Improve training for police and security offices focused on de-escalation. Train key staff on key principles and strategies for de-escalation. Where possible, connect with community groups and members to encourage de-escalation training. Work with local law enforcement and other key stakeholders to develop a plan should a violent incidence occur.

CONSIDER SECURITY PROTECTION:

Consider having protection such as local law enforcement or security present at council meetings and public city events. It is important to recognize that the presence of law enforcement may heighten tensions in some situations, particularly given the history of policing in some communities, so be prepared to consider alternative arrangements. If appropriate for your community, consider unarmed civilian protection. Alternatively, consider moving a potentially contentious meeting online, particularly if an appropriate protection plan is not in place.

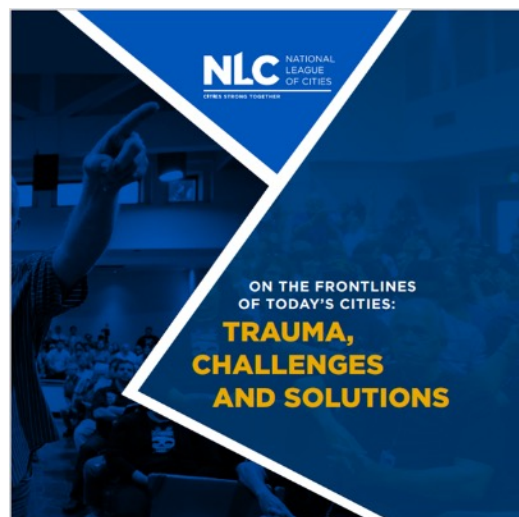
MAKE INFRASTRUCTURE ADJUSTMENTS:

Consider making infrastructure adjustments to meeting spaces to keep public officials and municipal staff safe. If there is likely to be a large showing, try keeping groups separate within the meeting space. Other infrastructure adjustments could include installing metal detectors or ballistic glass.

DEBRIEF AFTER EVENTS:

Following meetings, make sure that relevant stakeholders engage in debriefing conversations. Identify lessons learned from each meeting and incorporate these into existing plans of action. As necessary, liaise with local law enforcement or other appropriate groups to determine whether filing civil or criminal charges is appropriate. Regardless, local officials should report threats or perceived threats to law enforcement to examine further.

Path Forward



Promoting Mental Health and Well-being

These recommendations provide high-level guidance on how local leaders can better support the mental health and well-being of public officials and city staff who may experience incidences of harassment, abuse and violence.

INSTITUTE A TRAUMA MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:

Develop a workplace trauma management strategy if not already in place, with a specific focus on how public harassment, threats and violence may impact public officials and city staff.

PRIORITIZE MENTAL HEALTH:

Connect staff to mental health professionals and resources for individual treatment emphasizing the importance of prioritizing mental health and confidentiality of treatment.



Improving Civil Discourse

These recommendations provide high-level guidance on how local leaders can better model civil discourse online and in-person.

MODEL CIVIL DISCOURSE:

Local leaders and their staff should avoid offensive language and violent rhetoric and encourage civility both in-person and online engagement with the community. Where possible and safe to do so, condemn offensive language and highlight the importance of constructive and respectful discussion.

ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY:

Repairing civil discourse will require a whole community approach. The city should strategically work and correspond with community groups to begin to mend points of tension where and when safe to do so.

INSTITUTE A CODE OF CONDUCT:

Develop and clearly communicate a code of conduct outlining what is and is not allowable behavior by officials and constituents during public city meetings and events, emphasizing specific rules and norms for everyone. Frame the code of conduct as important to ensuring a comfortable and inclusive space for everyone.

DEVELOP SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES:

Develop a social media guideline or code of conduct for public officials to limit the spread of vitriolic language online and combat the spread of mis- and disinformation.

Path Forward: Model Civility

Recognize Human Dignity & Value

Interest in Other's Perspective

Build Relationships

Doesn't Require Agreement

Intellectual Humility



Path Forward: Code of Conduct

Code of Ethics vs Code of Conduct

**What is and is not allowable behavior
Officials and constituents
Public city meetings
Events**

**Ensure a comfortable and
inclusive space for everyone**

Remove the power struggle



Path Forward: Transition from Campaigns

Negative Campaigns

Proactively Break the Cycle

Newly Elected Training



Path Forward: Minority Perspective

Minority vs Majority
Majority: Rule Minority: Voice Heard

Who is in the Minority



Path Forward: Competing Perspectives

Strategic Incivility

Contempt

Preference for Political Dysfunction

Ideological Differences

Consensus – Compromise – Line in the Sand



Path Forward: Break Down Silos



Look for Silos to Breakdown

Experience New Groups

Head Off Rumors

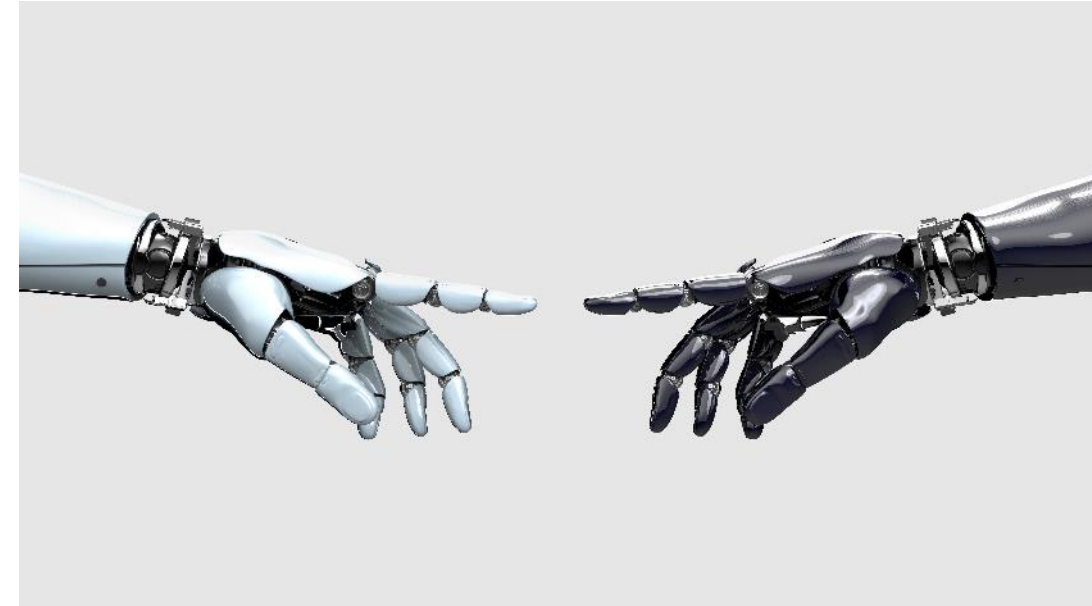
Build Liaison Relationships

Path Forward: Technology

Televising

Being Present in Meetings

Technology



Path Forward: Process



Process of Trust

Transparent – Voices heard – Fair

There will be Winners and Losers

Path Forward: Responding to Constituents

Leadership Sets the Civility Standard

The Lowest Leadership Standard Affects All Elected

Elected Standard Should be Higher Than Constituents



Local Government Path Forward

- 1. County Steps: Code of Conduct**
- 2. County Steps: Model Civility**
- 3. County Steps: Fair Consistent Process**

Open – Transparent – All voices heard
– Decisions made in public – Decisions
communicated

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

Civility: Historical Trends and How We Got Here

Civility: Research - Lessons Learned

Civility: Path Forward

Francis Benjamin

Director, WSU Political Interaction Lab

Washington State University

Councilmember, City of Pullman

benjamin@wsu.edu