



RICE UNIVERSITY
OpenRICE
Powered by the Glasscock School

After the elections: What changed, what did not change and what lies ahead?

Robert M. Stein
Rice University

December 11, 2020



THE RESULTS: A SPLIT DECISION

Democrats Capture the White House & Gain in the Senate
Republicans Gain in the House & States

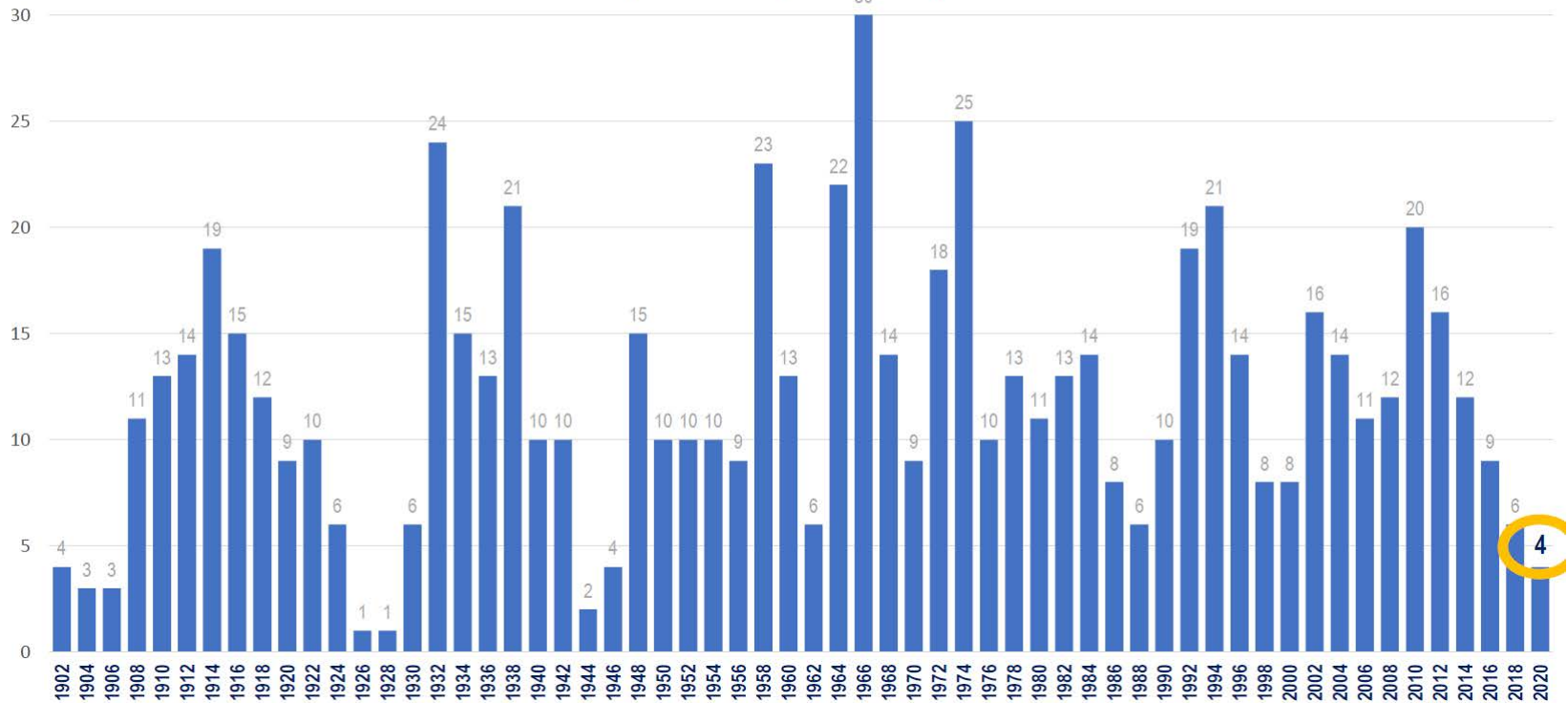


	WHITE HOUSE	U.S. SENATE	U.S. HOUSE	STATE LEG. CHAMBERS	GOVS
LAST ELECTION	Republican	53R – 47D	236D – 199R	59R – 39D	26R – 24D
AFTER <i>(So Far)</i>	Democratic	50R* – 48D	225D – 210R	61R – 37D	27R – 23D
NET GAIN	FLIP	D+1	R+11	R+2	R+1



IN THE STATES: A “NO CHANGE” ELECTION

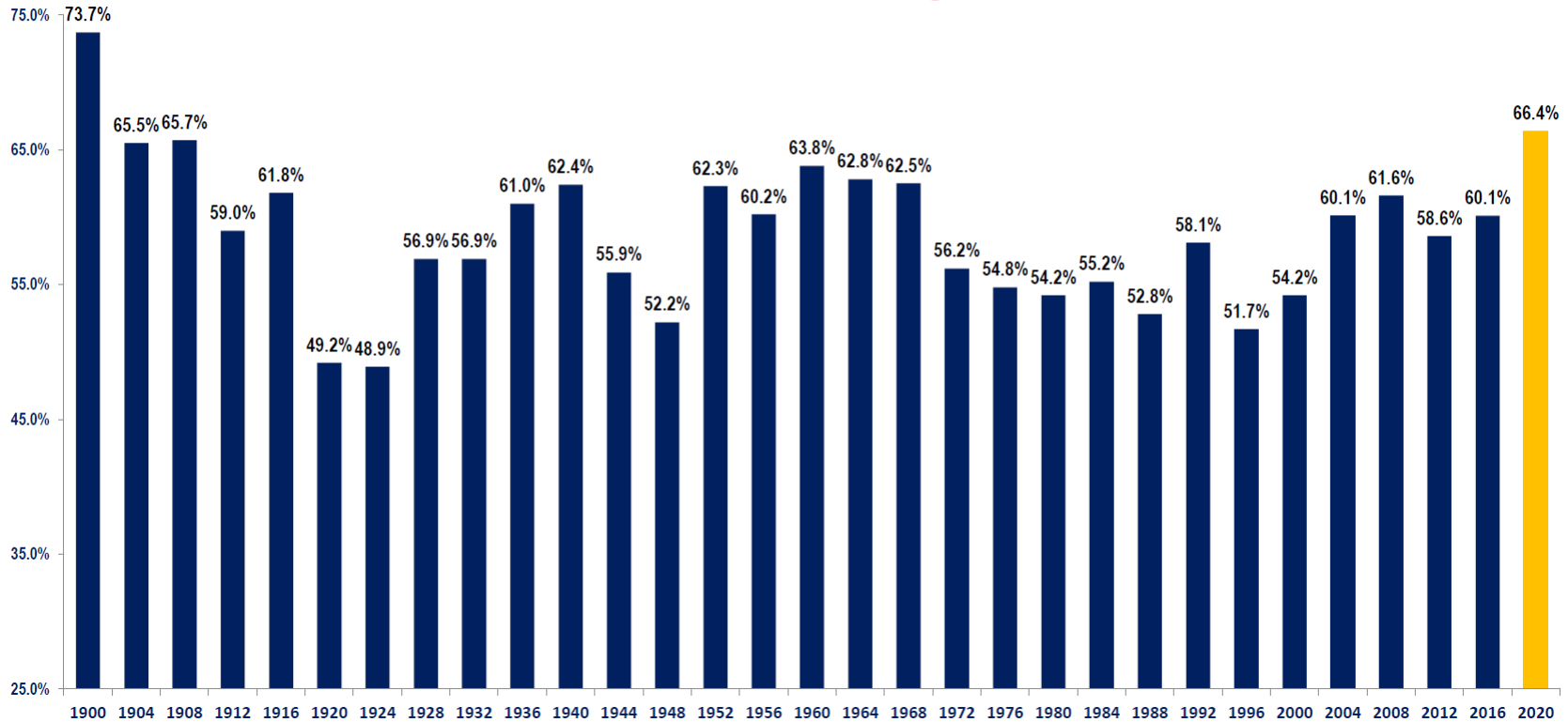
Fewest Legislative Chamber Switches Since 1946
(2 in 2020, 2 in 2019)





HIGHEST VOTER TURNOUT SINCE 1900

U.S. Voter Turnout as % of Eligible Voters

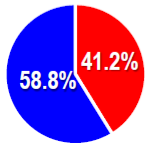
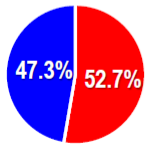
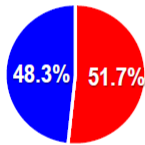
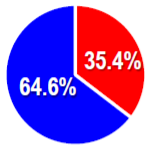




SPENDING ON THE 2020 ELECTIONS CRUSHED ALL PRIOR RECORDS

Total Election Spending (Open Secrets)

Partisan Breakdown



■ Presidential

■ Congressional

2020



2016



2012



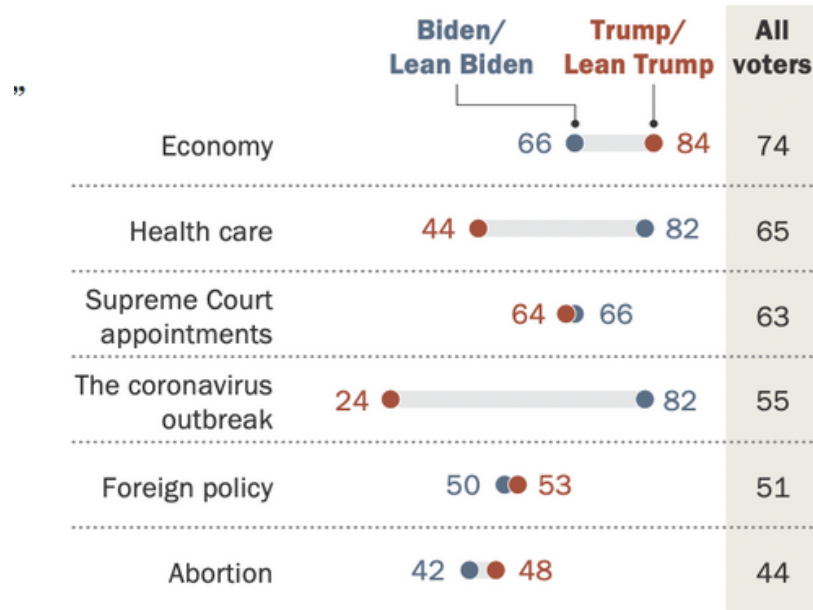
2008





Trump and Biden supporters differ over importance of the economy, health care – and particularly the coronavirus

% registered voters who say each is ‘very important’ to their vote in the 2020 presidential election



Note: Based on registered voters.

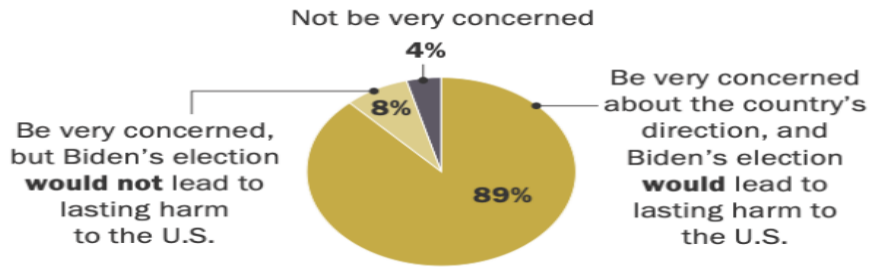
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 6-12, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

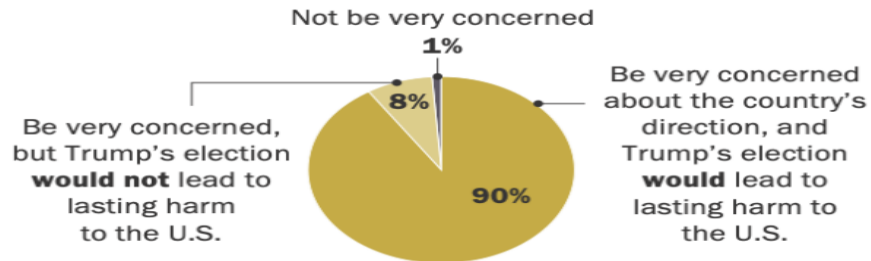


Both Trump and Biden supporters say if the other wins, it would result in lasting harm to the country

*% of **Trump supporters** who say they would ____ about the direction of the country if Joe Biden was elected president*



*% of **Biden supporters** who say they would ____ about the direction of the country if Donald Trump was reelected president*



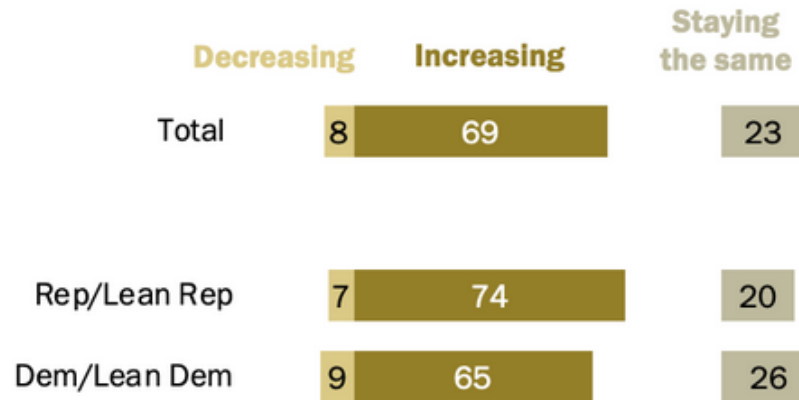
Note: Based on registered voters. No answer responses not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 30-Oct. 5, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Majorities in both parties say nation's partisan divisions are increasing

% who say divisions between Republicans and Democrats in this country today are ...



Note: No answer responses not shown.

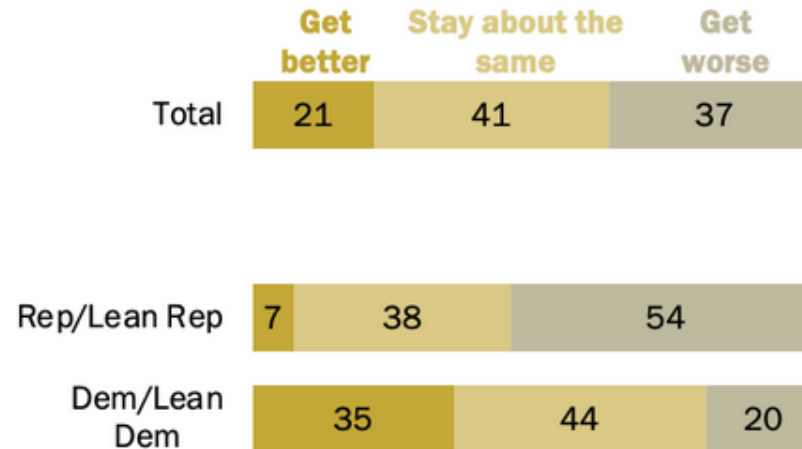
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Far more Democrats than Republicans expect partisan relations to get better

% who say relations between Republicans and Democrats in Washington will ...



Note: No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Trump, Biden supporters say their candidate should address concerns of *all* Americans if they win

% of registered voters who say if their preferred candidate is re/elected, they should primarily focus on addressing the concerns of ...

**Those who voted for him,
without worrying too much
about the concerns of those
who didn't vote for him**

**All Americans,
even if it means
disappointing some
of his supporters**

Among those who support ...

Trump/Lean Trump

13

86

Biden/Lean Biden

10

89

Note: Based on registered voters. No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 30-Oct. 5, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Republicans mention masks or mask wearing more often than Democrats when asked how COVID-19 pandemic has made their life difficult or challenging

In an open ended question, % in each group who mentioned the following words or terms

Dem/Lean Dem



31% of references to masks express concern that **others** are not wearing masks or taking the pandemic seriously (just 5% for Rep/Lean Rep)

Rep/Lean Rep



27% of references to masks express **skepticism** about masks and/or the severity of the pandemic in general (just 3% for Dem/Lean Dem)

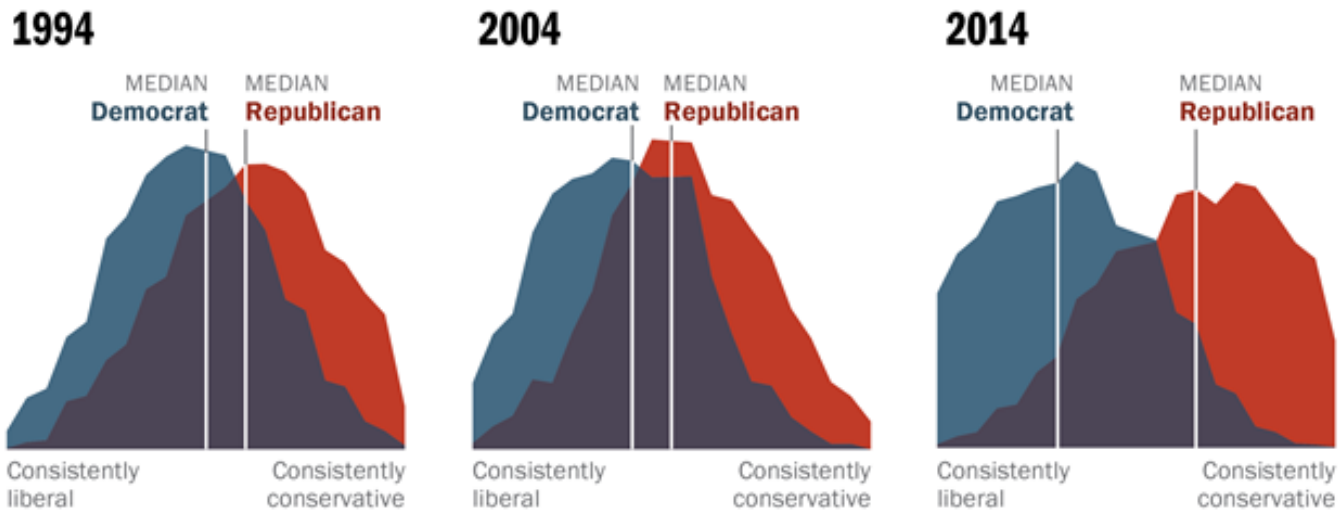
Note: Each list contains the 10 words or phrases that appeared in the most survey responses from members of each party. Terms have been reduced to their root form (e.g., "wearing masks" to "wear mask"), and 339 common English words (e.g., "and," "from") were excluded. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

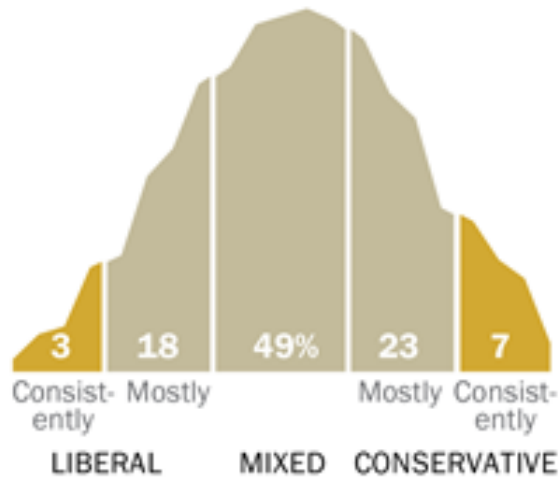
PEW RESEARCH CENTER



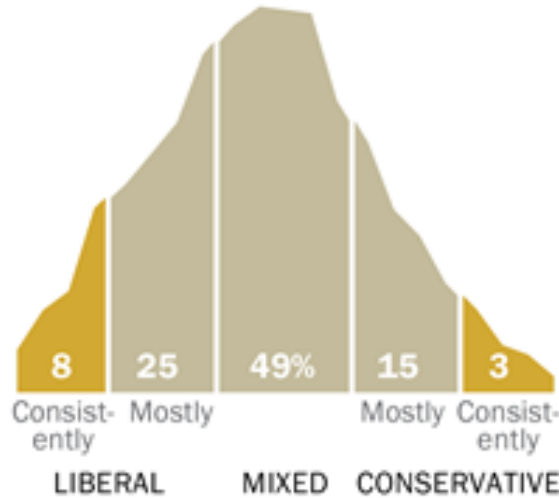
Growing Minority Holds Consistent Ideological Views

On a 10-item scale of political values, % who are...

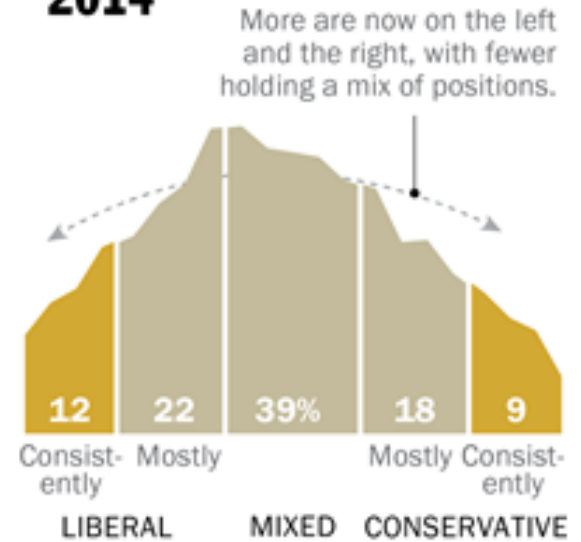
1994



2004



2014



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions. (See Appendix A for details on how the scale is constructed and how scores are grouped.)

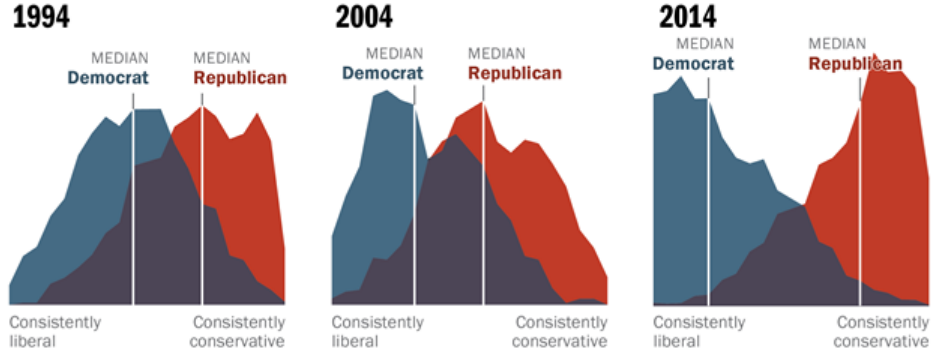
PEW RESEARCH CENTER



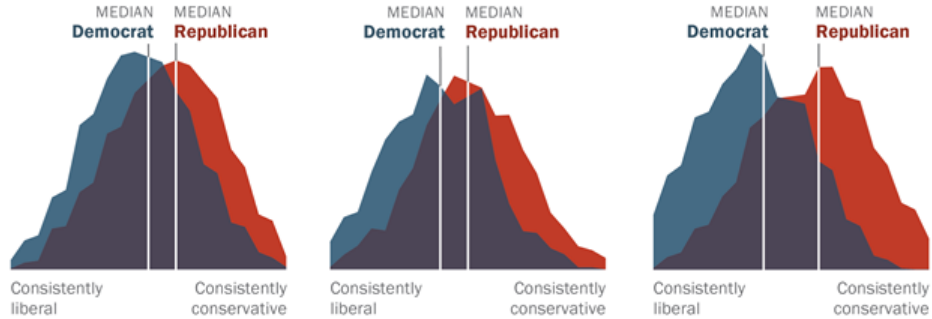
Polarization Surges Among the Politically Engaged

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values, by level of political engagement

Among the politically engaged



Among the less engaged



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B). Politically engaged are defined as those who are registered to vote, follow government and public affairs most of the time and say they vote always or nearly always.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Accepting the election results: Elections are for ‘losers’

- Research has shown that supporters of the winning candidate in an election consistently have more faith that the election was fair than supporters of the losing candidate.
 - This pattern is true of both Dems and Reps
 - When the parties’ fortunes flip in subsequent elections peoples answers flip, too.



Revision of state election laws

- Several battleground states, including Georgia are moving to restrict 'convenience' modes of voting e.g., mail-in voting and in-person early voting,
- Further enforcement of voter identification requirements e.g., photographic identification requirements
- Consequences of proposed changes:
 - Not obvious there are partisan advantages curtailing convenience voting.
 - Added cost to conducting elections
 - Long lines and waiting times to vote, lower rates of ballot completion.



Going forward: Biden Policy Agenda

- Executive orders
- COVID-19 stimulus, vaccine distribution
- Economic recovery
- Climate change
 - Spending on clean 'jobs'
- Infrastructure
 - Roads, rural broad band, state and local relief
- Taxes
- Health care
 - Public health Jobs Corps (e.g., vaccine distribution, testing)



Going forward: Redistricting

- Republicans control 67 of 99 state legislature chambers.
- Redistricting in 2020 will *not* be constrained by federal voting rights laws i.e., Shelby decision.
- Supreme Court is unlikely to restrain *politically* motivated redistricting plans.
- Expect the 2020 midterm Congressional election to be tilted heavily in favor of Republican candidates.



RICE UNIVERSITY
OpenRICE
Powered by the Glasscock School

Remedies for polarization



Is polarization the new normal or just the old normal?

- Mayhew, *The Imprint of Congress* (2017)
 - 1850s-1870 witnessed significant polarization of a sectional, racial and class orientation.
 - 1950 McCarthyism
 - 1960s-1970s Vietnam

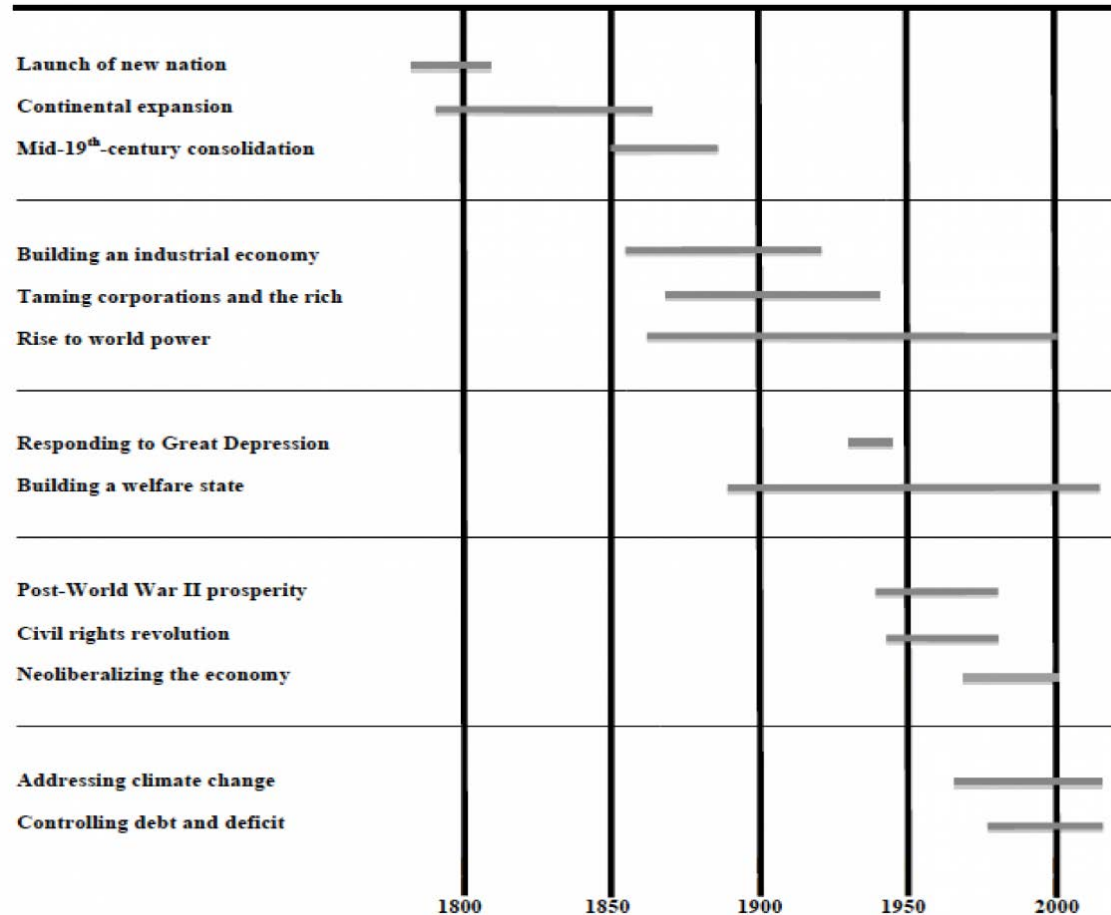


Congress as an inventive policymaker

- Northwest Ordinance Act (1787)
- Land Grant Colleges (Morrill Act 1862, 1890)
- The Highway Trust Fund (1956)
- Clean Water Act (1972)
- National Science Foundation (1950)
- St. Lawrence Seaway (1954)



Impulses in national policy making: 1800-200



From David R. Mayhew, *The Imprint of Congress* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 16
Figure prepared by John A. Dearborn.