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JUNE 12, 2014



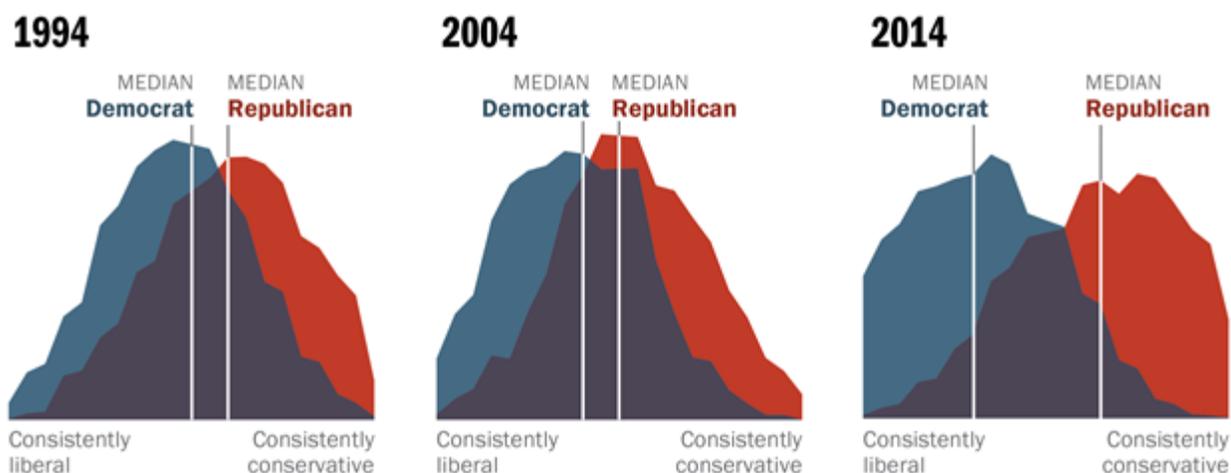
Political Polarization in the American Public

How Increasing Ideological Uniformity and Partisan Antipathy Affect Politics, Compromise and Everyday Life

Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades. These trends manifest themselves in myriad ways, both in politics and in everyday life. And a new survey of 10,000 adults nationwide finds that these divisions are greatest among those who are the most engaged and active in the political process.

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).

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[Explore interactive version of this data](#)

The overall share of Americans who express consistently conservative or consistently liberal opinions has doubled over the past two decades from 10% to 21%. And ideological thinking is now much more closely aligned with partisanship than in the past. As a result, ideological overlap between the two parties has diminished: Today, 92% of Republicans are to the right of the median Democrat, and 94% of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican.

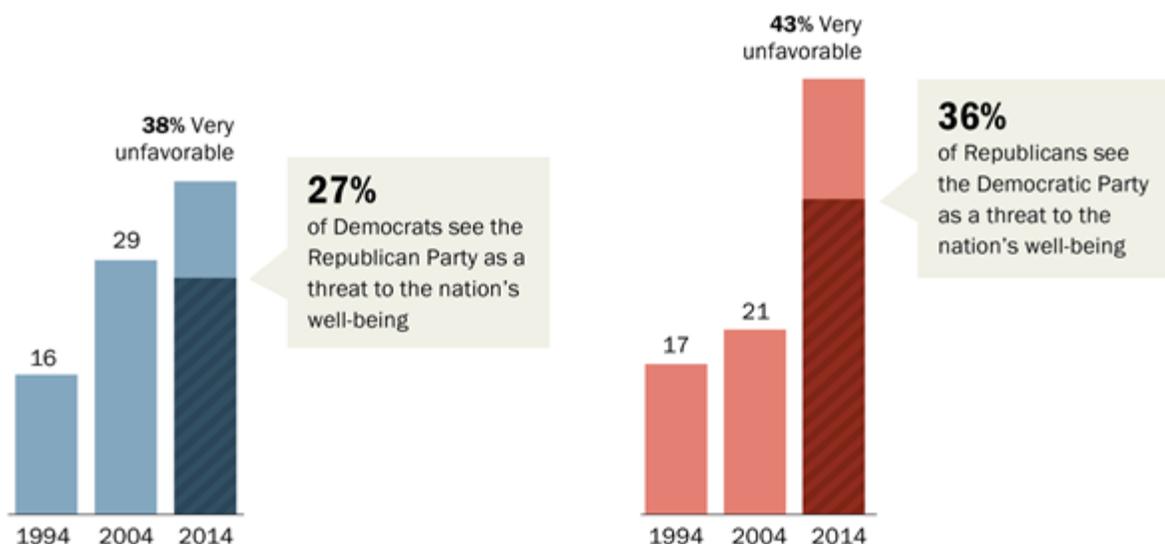
Partisan animosity has increased substantially over the same period. In each party, the share with a highly negative view of the opposing party has more than doubled since 1994. Most of these intense partisans believe the opposing party's policies "are so misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being."

Today 92% of Republicans are to the right of the median Democrat, and 94% of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican [🐦](#)

Beyond Dislike: Viewing the Other Party as a 'Threat to the Nation's Well-Being'

Democratic attitudes about the Republican Party

Republican attitudes about the Democratic Party



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Questions about whether the Republican and Democratic Parties are a threat to the nation's well being asked only in 2014. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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More on Growing Partisan Antipathy

“Ideological silos” are now common on both the left and right. People with down-the-line ideological positions – especially conservatives – are more likely than others to say that most of their close friends share their political views. Liberals and conservatives disagree over where they want to live, the kind of people they want to live around and even whom they would welcome into their families.

And at a time of increasing gridlock on Capitol Hill, many on both the left and the right think the outcome of political negotiations between Obama and Republican leaders should be that their side gets more of what it wants.

These sentiments are not shared by all – or even most – Americans. The majority do not have uniformly conservative or liberal views. Most do not see either party as a threat to the nation. And more believe their representatives in government should meet halfway to resolve contentious disputes rather than hold out for more of what they want.

Yet many of those in the center remain on the edges of the political playing field, relatively distant and disengaged, while the most ideologically oriented and politically rancorous Americans make their voices heard through greater participation in every stage of the political process.

The rise of ideological uniformity has been much more pronounced among those who are

Many of those in the center remain on

the most politically active. Today, almost four-in-ten (38%) politically engaged Democrats are consistent liberals, up from just 8% in 1994. The change among Republicans since then appears less dramatic – 33% express consistently conservative views, up from 23% in the midst of the 1994 “Republican Revolution.” But a decade ago, just 10% of politically engaged Republicans had across-the-board conservative attitudes.

the edges of the political playing field ... while the most ideologically oriented and politically rancorous Americans make their voices heard 🐦

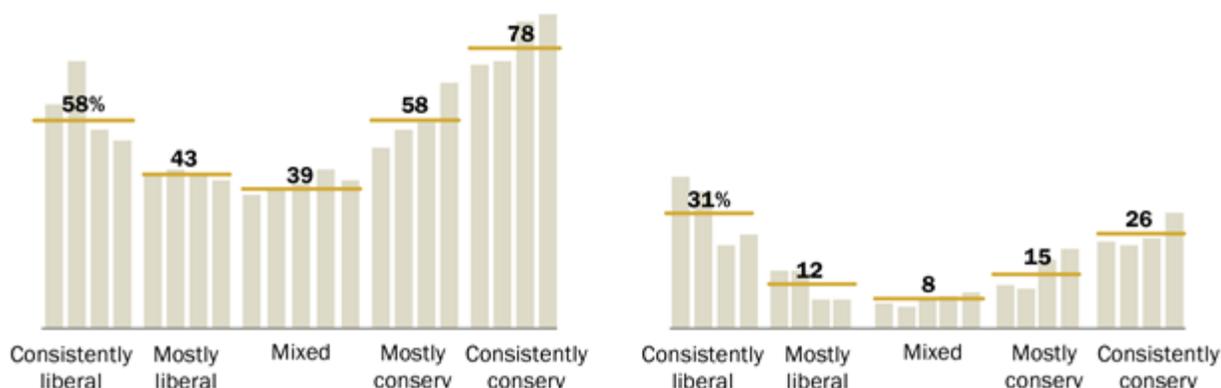
Political Activism Gap: Right and Left More Likely to Vote, Donate to Campaigns



Percent who always vote



Percent who contributed to a political candidate or group in the past two years



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Note: Bars represent the level of participation at each point on an ideological consistency scale of 10 political values questions. Figures are reported on the five ideological consistency groups used throughout the report (see Appendix A).

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More on Political Engagement and Activism

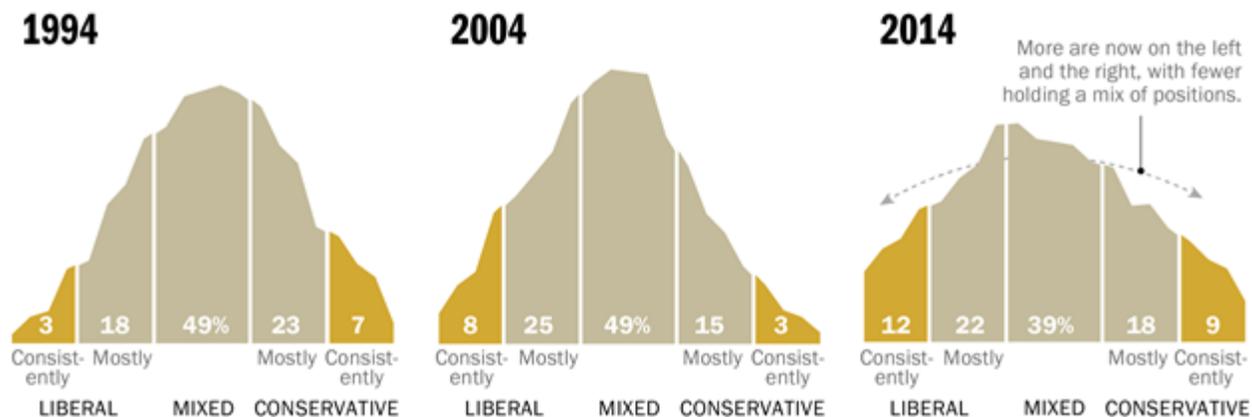
On measure after measure – whether primary voting, writing letters to officials, volunteering for or donating to a campaign – the most politically polarized are more actively involved in politics, amplifying the voices that are the least willing to see the parties meet each other halfway.

These are among the findings of the largest study of U.S. political attitudes ever undertaken by the Pew Research Center. Data are drawn from a national telephone survey of 10,013 adults, conducted from January through March of this year, and an ongoing series of follow-up surveys. This rich dataset, coupled with trends and insights from two decades of Pew Research Center polling, reveals a complex picture of partisan polarization and how it manifests itself in political behaviors, policy debates, election dynamics and everyday life.

What Polarization Looks Like

Growing Minority Holds Consistent Ideological Views

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



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.)

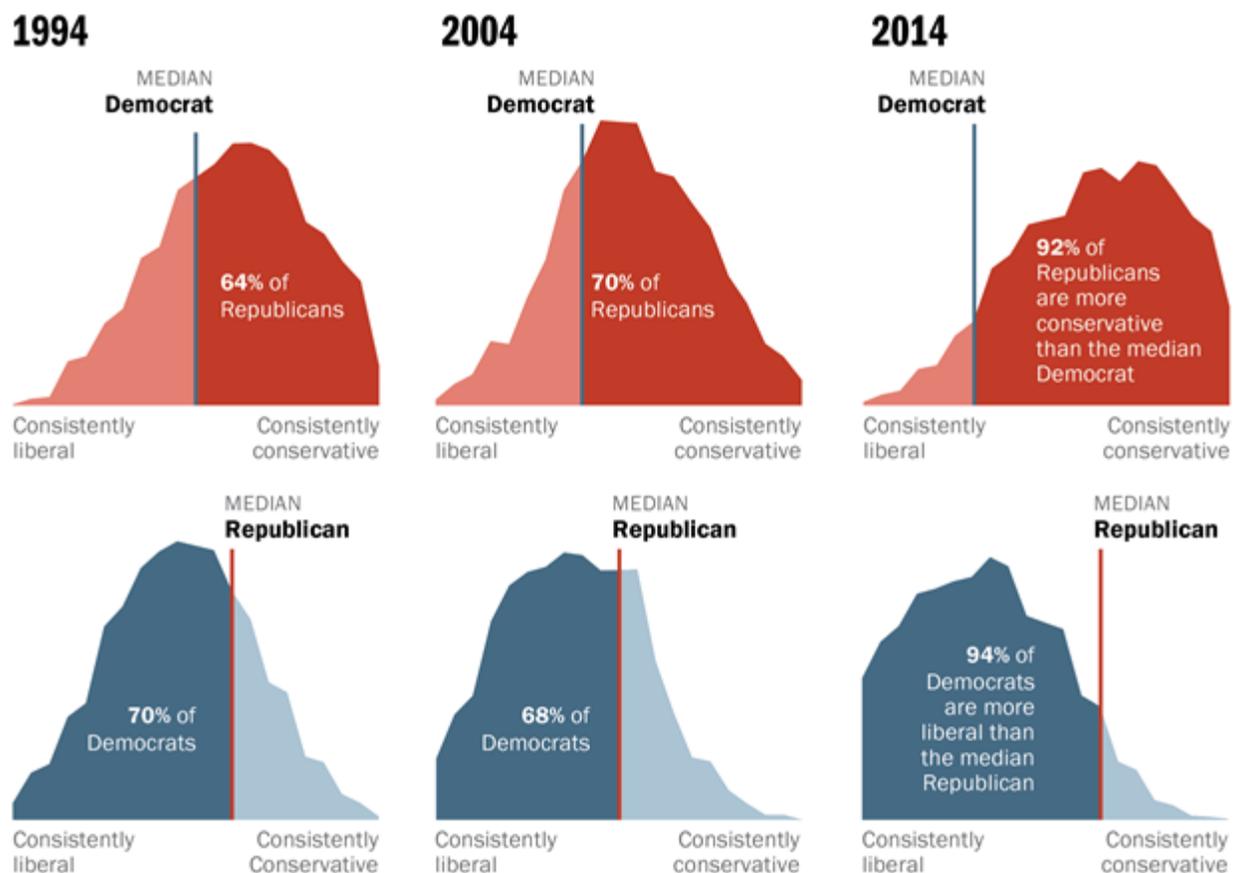
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To chart the progression of ideological thinking, responses to 10 political values questions asked on multiple Pew Research surveys since 1994 have been combined to create **a measure of ideological consistency**. Over the past twenty years, the number of Americans in the “tails” of this ideological distribution has doubled from 10% to 21%. Meanwhile, the center has shrunk: 39% currently take a roughly equal number of liberal and conservative positions. That is down from about half (49%) of the public in surveys conducted in 1994 and 2004.

And this shift represents both Democrats moving to the left and Republicans moving to the right, with less and less overlap between the parties. Today, 92% of Republicans are to the right of the median (middle) Democrat, compared with 64% twenty years ago. And 94% of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican, up from 70% in 1994.

Republicans Shift to the Right, Democrats to the Left

Distribution of Republicans and Democrats 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). Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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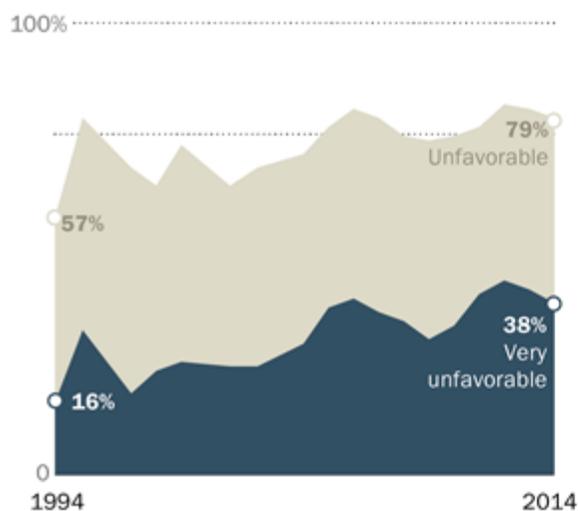
More Negative Views of the Opposing Party

Beyond the rise in ideological consistency, another major element in polarization has been the growing contempt that many Republicans and Democrats have for the opposing party. To be sure, disliking the other party is nothing new in politics. But today, these sentiments are broader and deeper than in the recent past.

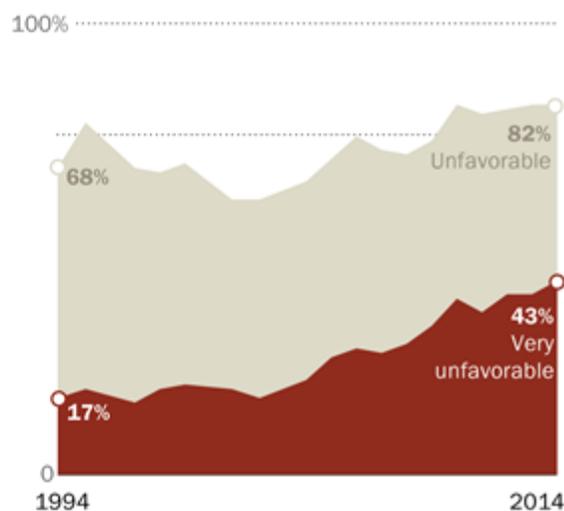
In 1994, hardly a time of amicable partisan relations, a majority of Republicans had unfavorable impressions of the Democratic Party, but just 17% had *very* unfavorable opinions. Similarly, while most Democrats viewed the GOP unfavorably, just 16% had *very* unfavorable views. Since then, highly negative views have more than doubled: 43% of Republicans and 38% of Democrats now view the opposite party in strongly negative terms.

A Rising Tide of Mutual Antipathy

Democratic attitudes about the Republican Party



Republican attitudes about the Democratic Party



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Note: Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents.

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Even these numbers tell only part of the story. Those who have a very unfavorable impression of each party were asked: “Would you say the party’s policies are so misguided that they threaten the nation’s well-being, or wouldn’t you go that far?” Most who were asked the question said yes, they would go that far. Among all Democrats, 27% say the GOP is a threat to the well-being of the country. That figure is even higher among Republicans, 36% of whom think Democratic policies threaten the nation.

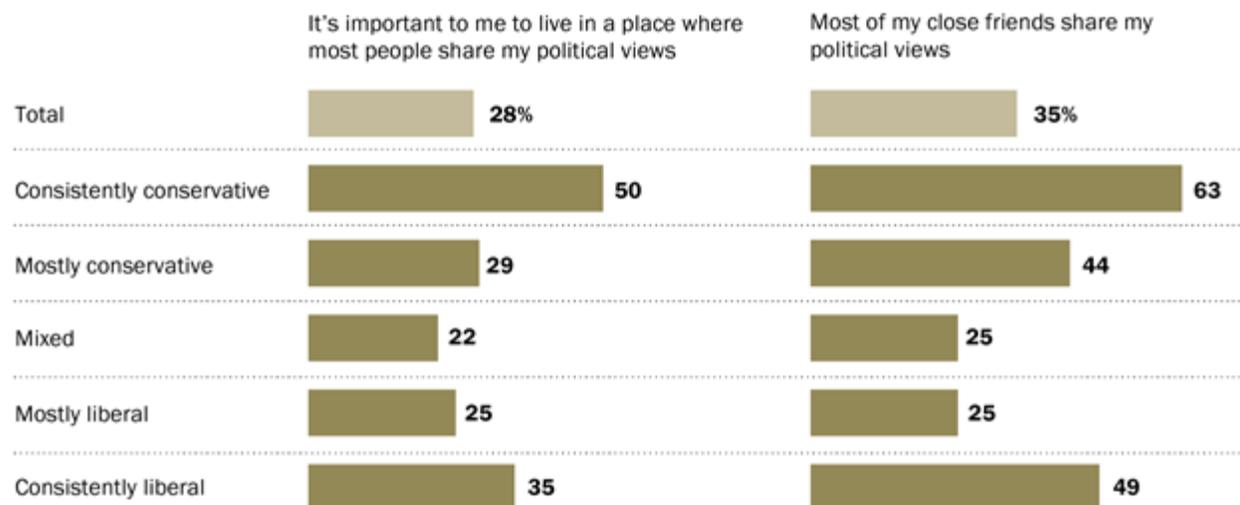
Among all Democrats, 27% say GOP policies are a threat to the well-being of the country; among all Republicans, more than a third (36%) think Democratic policies threaten the nation. [🐦](#)

Politics Gets Personal

Liberals and conservatives share a passion for politics. They are far more likely than those with more mixed ideological views to discuss politics on a weekly or daily basis. But for many, particularly on the right, those conversations may not include much in the way of opposing opinions.

Ideological Echo Chambers

% who say ...



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Note: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A).

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Nearly two-thirds (63%) of consistent conservatives and about half (49%) of consistent liberals say most of their close friends share their political views. Among those with mixed ideological values, just 25% say the same. People on the right and left also are more likely to say it is important to them to live in a place where most people share their political views, though again, that desire is more widespread on the right (50%) than on the left (35%).

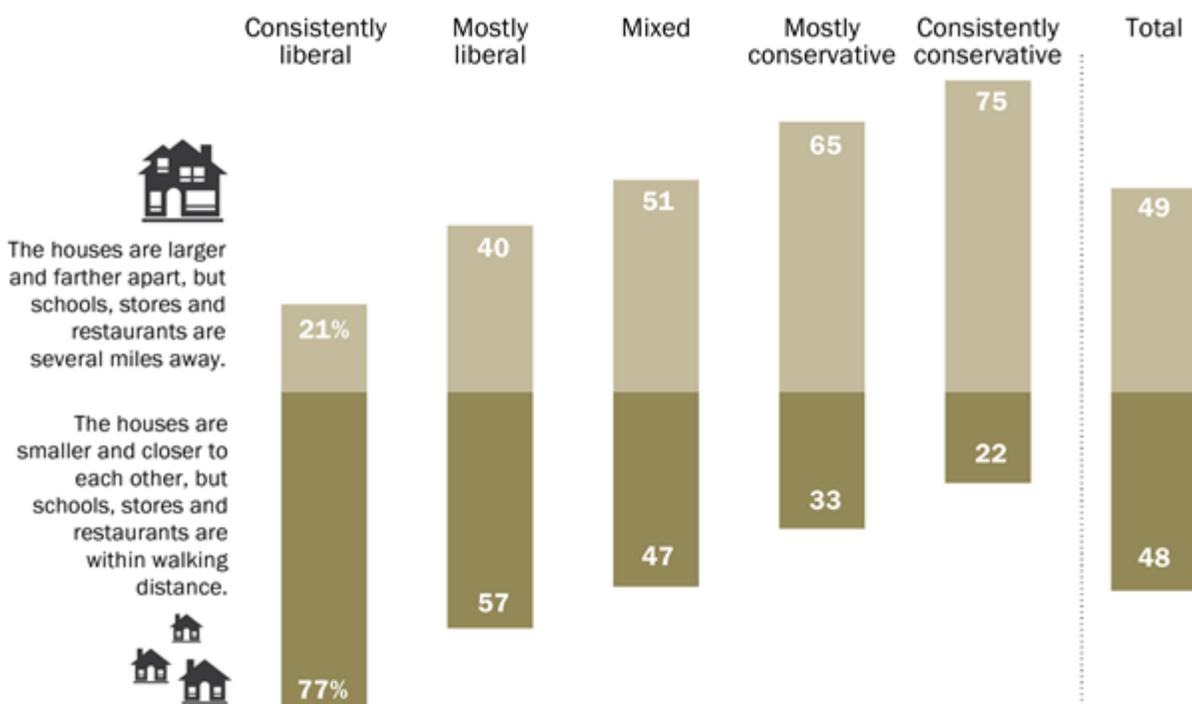
People on the right and left are more likely to say it is important to them to live in a place where most people share their political views 

And while few Americans overall go so far as to voice disappointment with the prospect of a family member marrying a Democrat (8%) or a Republican (9%), that sentiment is not uncommon on the left or the right. Three-out-of-ten (30%) consistent conservatives say they would be unhappy if an immediate family member married a Democrat and about a quarter (23%) of across-the-board liberals say the same about the prospect of a Republican in-law.

To be sure, there are areas of consensus. Most Americans, regardless of their ideological preferences, value communities in which they would live close to extended family and high-quality schools. But far more liberals than conservatives think it is important that a community have racial and ethnic diversity (76% vs. 20%). At the same time, conservatives are more likely than liberals to attach importance to living in a place where many people share their religious faith (57% vs. 17% of liberals).

Liberals Want Walkable Communities, Conservatives Prefer More Room

Would you prefer to live in a community where...



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). "Don't know" responses not shown.

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More on Political Polarization and Personal Life

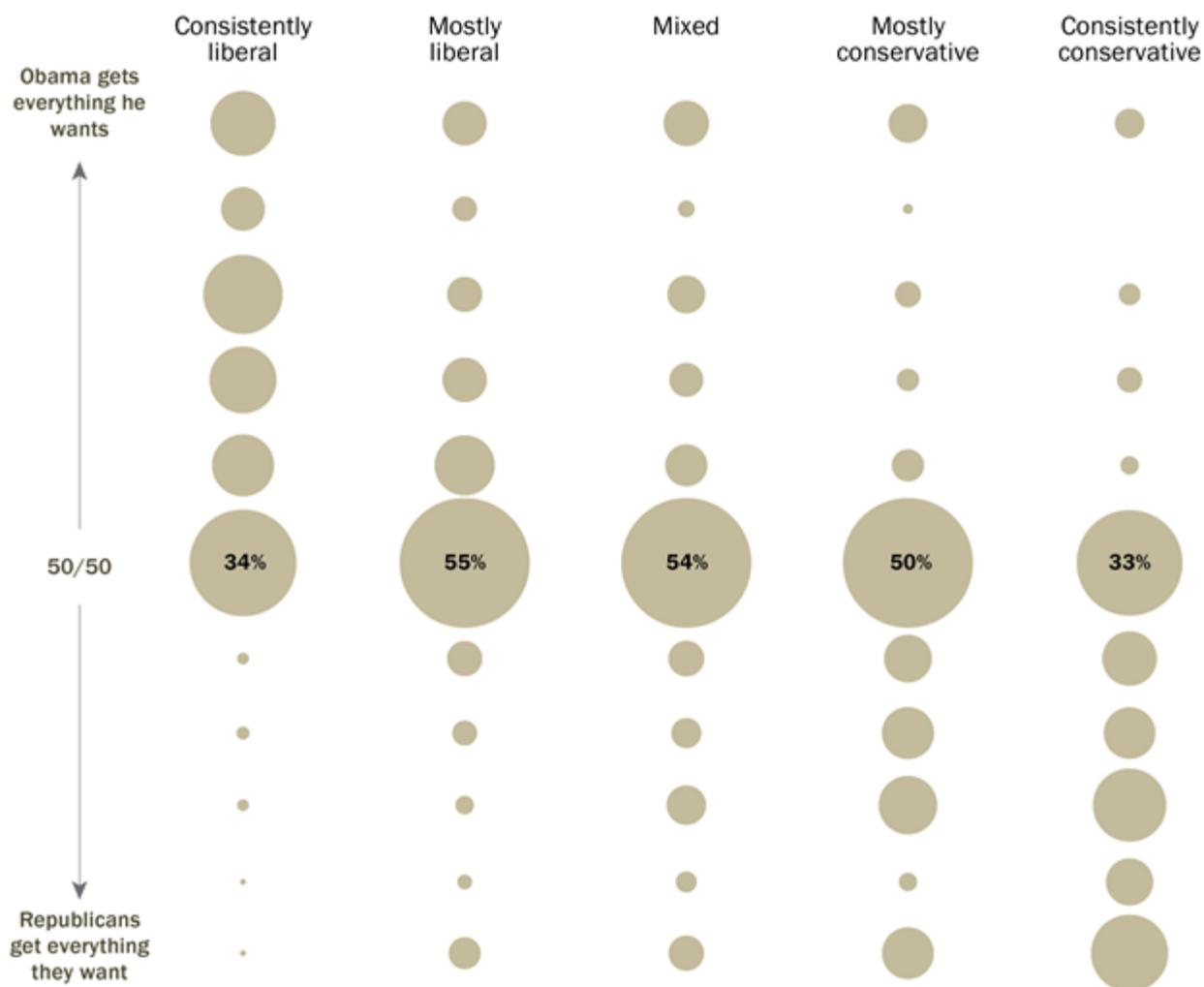
And the differences between right and left go beyond disagreements over politics, friends and neighbors. If they could choose anywhere to live, three-quarters of consistent conservatives prefer a community where “the houses are larger and farther apart, but schools, stores, and restaurants are several miles away.” The preferences of consistent liberals are almost the exact inverse, with 77% saying they’d chose to live where “the houses are smaller and closer to each other, but schools, stores, and restaurants are within walking distance.”

Polarization’s Consequences

When they look at a political system in which little seems to get done, most Americans in the center of the electorate think that Obama and Republican leaders should simply meet each other halfway in addressing the issues facing the nation.

Compromise in the Eye of the Beholder

When Barack Obama and Republican leaders differ over the most important issues facing the country, where should things end up?



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public
Notes: Question asks respondents where, on a scale of zero to 100, Obama and Republican leaders should end up when addressing the most important issues facing the country. See topline for complete question wording. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political questions (see Appendix A).

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More on Political Compromise and Divisive Policy Debates

Yet an equitable deal is in the eye of the beholder, as both liberals and conservatives define the optimal political outcome as one in which their side gets more of what it wants. A majority of consistent conservatives (57%) say the ideal agreement between President Obama and congressional Republicans is one in which GOP leaders hold out for more of their goals. Consistent liberals take the opposite view: Their preferred terms (favored by 62%) end up closer to Obama's position than the GOP's.

Consistent liberals and conservatives define ideal political compromise as one in which their side gets more of what it wants [🐦](#)

Polarization in Red and Blue

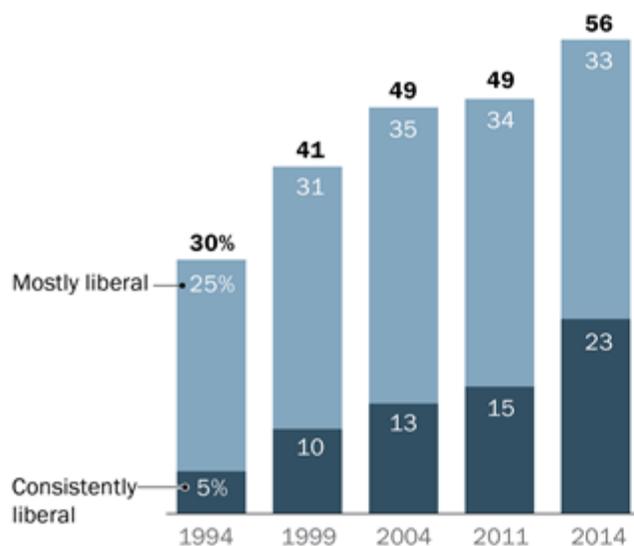
The signs of political polarization are evident on both ends of the political spectrum, though the trajectory, nature and extent differ from left to right.

With Barack Obama in the White House, partisan antipathy is more pronounced among Republicans, especially consistently conservative Republicans. Overall, more Republicans than Democrats see the opposing party's policies as a threat and the differences are even greater when ideology is taken into account. Fully 66% of consistently conservative Republicans think the Democrats' policies threaten the nation's well-being. By comparison, half (50%) of consistently liberal Democrats say Republican policies jeopardize the nation's well-being. Conservatives also exhibit more partisan behavior in their personal lives; they are the most likely to have friends and prefer communities of like-minded people.

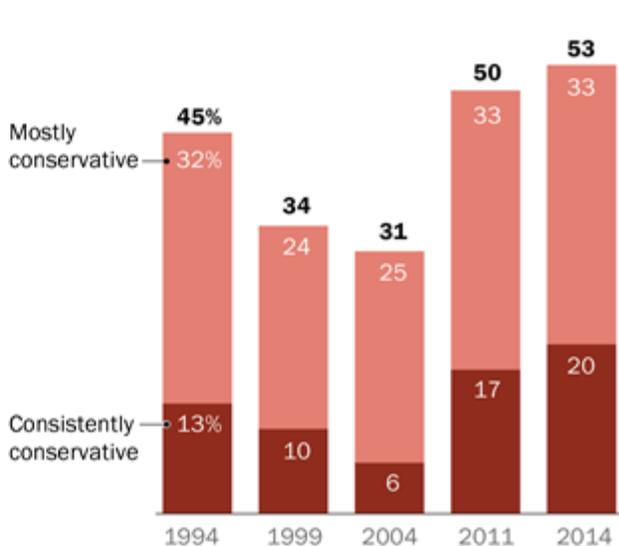
However, there is as much ideological uniformity on the left as the right. The share of Democrats holding consistently liberal views has grown steadily over the past 20 years, quadrupling from 5% in 1994 to 23% today. Social issues like homosexuality and immigration that once drove deep divides within the Democratic Party are now areas of relative consensus. And Democrats have become more uniformly critical of business and more supportive of government.

More Democrats Take Liberal Positions, More Republicans Take Conservative Positions

Percent of Democrats with political values that are...



Percent of Republicans with political values that are...



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).

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Changes in ideological consistency on the right have followed a different course. In 1994, during the “Republican Revolution,” 13% of Republicans were consistent conservatives. That figure *fell* to 6% a decade later during George W. Bush’s presidency, before rebounding to 20% today. This increase has come despite more moderate views among Republicans on issues like homosexuality and immigration, as GOP thinking on issues related to government and the economy has veered sharply to the right.

About the Study

This is the first report of a multi-part series based on a national survey of 10,013 adults nationwide, conducted January 23-March 16, 2014 by the Pew Research Center. The survey, funded in part through grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and supported by the generosity of Don C. and Jeane M. Bertsch, is aimed at understanding the nature and scope of political polarization in the American public, and how it interrelates with government, society and people’s personal lives.

The second report, coming in a few weeks, is the new Pew Research Center *Political Typology*. The typology – the sixth such study since 1987 – looks beyond Red vs. Blue divisions to gain a clearer understanding of the dynamic nature of the “center” of the American electorate, and the internal divides

on both the left and the right.

Later, the project will explore the various factors that contribute to political polarization, or stem from it. A September report will examine how political polarization is linked to people's information environments: Their news sources, social media habits and interpersonal communication networks. Other reports will look at how political polarization relates to where people live, to their political environments, to how they view themselves and others around them, to their socioeconomic circumstances, to generational changes and to broader sociological and psychological personality traits.

The current report is divided into five parts: The first two focus on measuring the *nature and scope* of political polarization, emphasizing the difference between growing ideological consistency and rising partisan antipathy. The third looks closely at how polarization manifests itself in people's *personal lives*. The fourth looks at the relationship between polarization and *practical policymaking*, and the fifth digs deeper into how *political participation* both amplifies and reflects polarization.

About the Data

The data in this report are based on two independent survey administrations with the same randomly selected, nationally representative group of respondents. The first is the center's largest survey on domestic politics to date: the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, a national telephone survey of 10,013 adults, on landlines and cell phones, from January through March of this year. The second involved impaneling a subset of these respondents into the newly created American Trends Panel and following up with them via a survey conducted by web and telephone. The two surveys are described separately, in further detail, in the [About the Surveys](#) section of the report.

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For Further Reading

Appendix A: The Ideological Consistency Scale

Appendix B: Why We Include Leaners With Partisans

About the Surveys

Key Shareable Findings

Section 1: Growing Ideological Consistency

A decade ago, the public was less ideologically consistent than it is today. In 2004, only about one-in-ten Americans were uniformly liberal or conservative across most values. Today, the share who are ideologically consistent has doubled: 21% express either consistently liberal or conservative opinions across a range of issues – the size and scope of government, the environment, foreign policy and many others.

The new survey finds that as ideological consistency has become more common, it has become increasingly aligned with partisanship. Looking at 10 political values questions tracked since 1994, more Democrats now give uniformly liberal responses, and more Republicans give uniformly conservative responses than at any point in the last 20 years

Political Polarization, 1994-2014

The interactive below illustrates the shift since 1994, using data from five Pew Research Center surveys. In addition to viewing results both for the total population and by party, they can be filtered on just the share of Americans (about one-third of the public) who are most politically active.

Animate data from 1994-2014

Year shown: **2014**

View an individual year:

2014



**Median
Democrat**

**Median
Republican**





Consistently liberal

Mixed

Consistently conservative

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Total

Surveys conducted 1994, 1999, 2004, 2011 and 2014.

How We Define “Ideological Consistency”

Throughout this report we utilize a scale composed of 10 questions asked on Pew Research Center surveys going back to 1994 to gauge peoples’ ideological worldview. The questions cover a range of political values including attitudes about size and scope of government, the social safety net, immigration, homosexuality, business, the environment, foreign policy and racial discrimination. The individual items are discussed at the end of this section, and full details about the scale are in [Appendix A](#).

The scale is designed to measure how consistently liberal or conservative people’s responses are across these various dimensions of political thinking (what some refer to as ideological ‘constraint’). Other sections of the report look at people’s levels of partisanship, engagement and policy views. Where people fall on this scale does not always align with whether they think of themselves as liberal, moderate or conservative. See the discussion at the end of this section for this analysis.

To be sure, those with across-the-board liberal or conservative views remain in the minority; most Americans continue to express at least some mix of liberal and conservative attitudes. Yet those who express ideologically consistent views have disproportionate influence on the political process: They are more likely than those with mixed views to vote regularly and far more likely to donate to political campaigns and contact elected officials.

Moreover, consistent liberals and conservatives approach the give-and-take of politics very differently than do those with mixed ideological views. Ideologically consistent Americans generally believe the

other side – not their own – should do the giving. Those in the middle, by contrast, think both sides should give ground.

Why We Include “Leaners” in the Republican and Democratic Groups

Throughout most of this report, Republicans and Democrats include independents who lean toward the parties. In virtually all situations, these Republican and Democratic leaners have far more in common with their partisan counterparts than they do with each other if combined into a single “independent” group. See [Appendix B](#) for more detail.

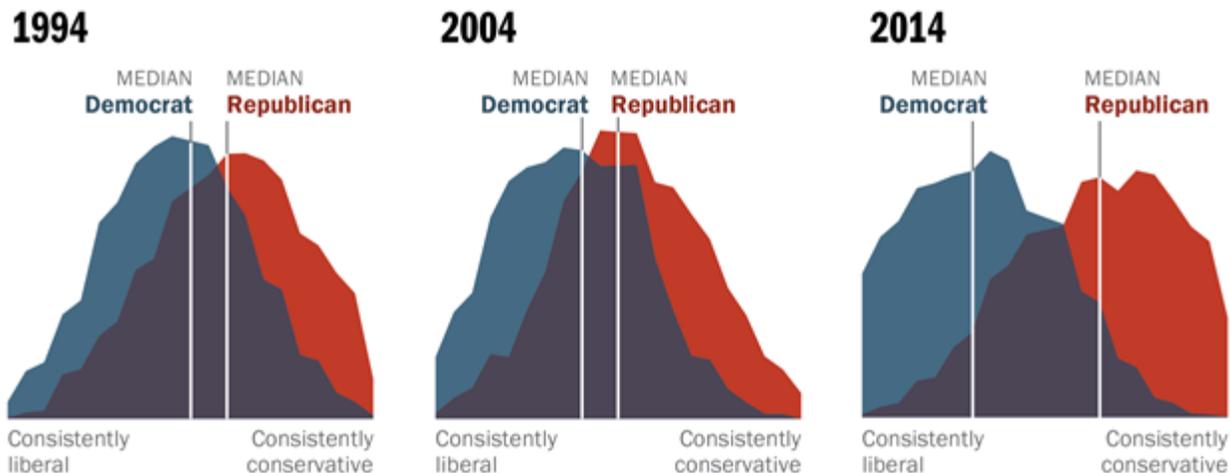
As Partisans Move Further Apart, the Middle Shrinks

In 2012, the Pew Research Center **updated its 25-year study of the public’s political values**, finding that the partisan gap in opinions on more than 40 separate political values had nearly doubled over the previous quarter century. The new study investigates whether there is greater ideological consistency than in the past; that is, whether more people now have straight-line liberal or conservative attitudes across a range of issues, from homosexuality and immigration to foreign policy, the environment, economic policy and the role of government.

The graphic below shows the extent to which members of both parties have become more ideologically consistent and, as a result, further from one another. When responses to 10 questions are scaled together to create a measure of ideological consistency, the median (middle) Republican is now more conservative than nearly all Democrats (94%), and the median Democrat is more liberal than 92% of Republicans.

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

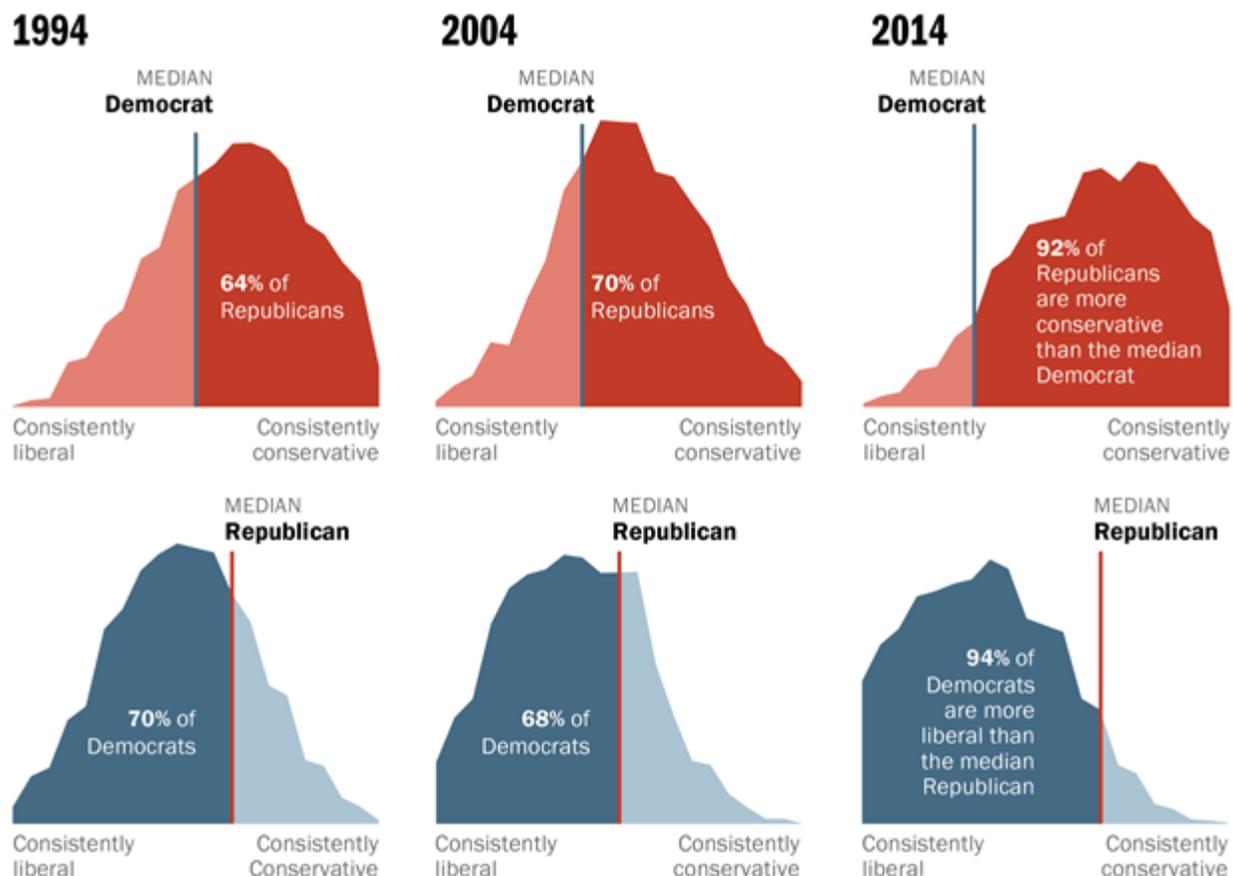
Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning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

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In 1994, the overlap was much greater than it is today. Twenty years ago, the median Democrat was to the left of 64% of Republicans, while the median Republican was to the right of 70% of Democrats. Put differently, in 1994 23% of Republicans were *more liberal* than the median Democrat; while 17% of Democrats were *more conservative* than the median Republican. Today, those numbers are just 4% and 5%, respectively.

Republicans Shift to the Right, Democrats to the Left

Distribution of Republicans and Democrats 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). Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

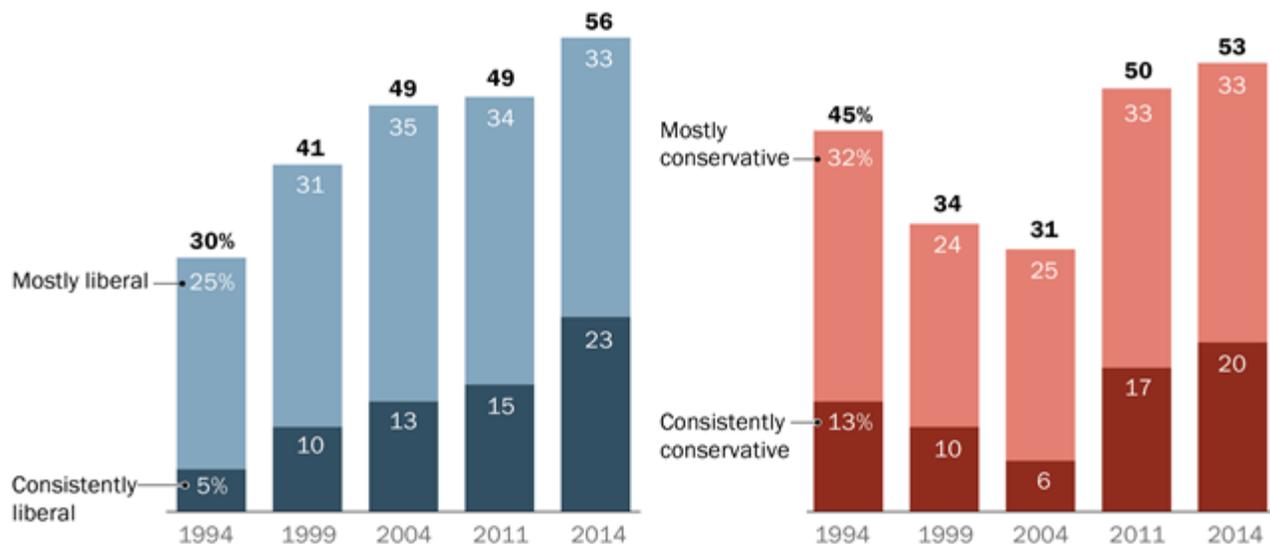
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As partisans have moved to the left and the right, the share of Americans with mixed views has declined. Across the 10 ideological values questions in the scale, 39% of Americans currently take a roughly equal number of liberal and conservative positions. That is down from nearly half (49%) of the public in surveys conducted in 1994 and 2004. As noted, the proportion of Americans who are now more uniformly ideological has doubled over the last decade: About one-in-five Americans (21%) are now either consistently liberal (12%) or consistently conservative (9%) in their political values, up from just one-in-ten in 2004 (11%) and 1994 (10%).

More Democrats Take Liberal Positions, More Republicans Take Conservative Positions

Percent of Democrats with political values that are...

Percent of Republicans with political values that are...



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).

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This translates into a growing number of Republicans and Democrats who are on completely opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, making it harder to find common ground in policy debates. The share of Democrats who hold consistently liberal positions has quadrupled over the course of the last 20 years, growing from just 5% in 1994 to 13% in 2004 to 23% today. And more Republicans are consistently conservative than in the past (20% today, up from 6% in 2004 and 13% in 1994), even as the country as a whole has shifted slightly to the left on the 10 item scale.

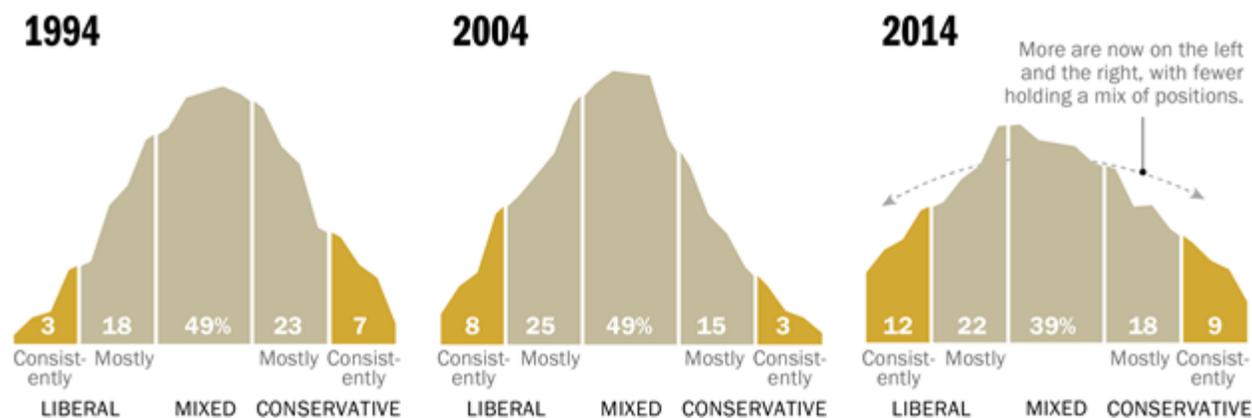
Are They “Ideologues?” Value Sorting vs. Extreme Views

Being ideologically consistent does not equate to being politically “extreme” — an important distinction in understanding polarization. This is one reason why we avoid using the term “ideologue” to describe those on the tails of the ideological consistency scale.

Another section of this report explores the relationship between being ideologically consistent and holding positions on the periphery of current policy debates—finding evidence that those who are ideologically mixed are often as likely to hold more “extreme” positions as those who are more ideologically consistent. Conversely, one can be uniformly liberal (or conservative) in one’s political values, but have a “moderate” approach to issues.

Growing Minority Holds Consistent Ideological Views

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



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.)

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Detailed Table: [Ideological Consistency](#)

Is Polarization Asymmetrical?

The ideological consolidation nationwide has happened on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, but the long-term shift among Democrats stands out as particularly noteworthy. The share of Democrats who are liberal on all or most value dimensions has nearly doubled from just 30% in 1994 to 56% today. The share who are *consistently* liberal has quadrupled from just 5% to 23% over the past 20 years.

In absolute terms, the ideological shift among Republicans has been more modest, in 1994, 45% of Republicans were right-of-center, with 13% consistently conservative. Those figures are up to 53% and 20% today.

The share of Democrats who are liberal on all or most value dimensions has nearly doubled from just 30% in 1994 to 56% today [🐦](#)

But there are two key considerations to keep in mind before concluding that the liberals are driving ideological polarization. First, 1994 was a relative high point in conservative political thinking among Republicans. In fact, between 1994 and 2004 the average Republican moved substantially toward the center ideologically, as concern about the deficit, government waste and abuses of social safety net that characterized the “Contract with America” era faded in the first term of the Bush administration.

But since 2004, Republicans have veered

sharply back to the right on all of these dimensions, and the GOP ideological shift over the past decade has matched, if not exceeded, the rate at which Democrats have become more liberal.

A second consideration is that the nation as a whole has moved slightly to the left over the past 20 years, mostly because of a broad societal shift toward acceptance of homosexuality and more positive views of immigrants. Twenty years ago, these two issues created significant cleavages within the Democratic Party, as many otherwise liberal Democrats expressed more conservative values in these realms. But today, as divisions over these issues have diminished on the left, they have emerged on the right, with a subset of otherwise conservative Republicans expressing more liberal values on these social issues.

However, on economic issues and the role of government, Republicans and Democrats are both substantially more consolidated than in the past: 37% of Republicans are consistently conservative and 36% of Democrats are consistently liberal on a five-item subset of the scale restricted to just the items about economic policy and the size of government. In 1994, those proportions were 23% and 21%, respectively.

Political Engagement Increasingly Linked to Polarization

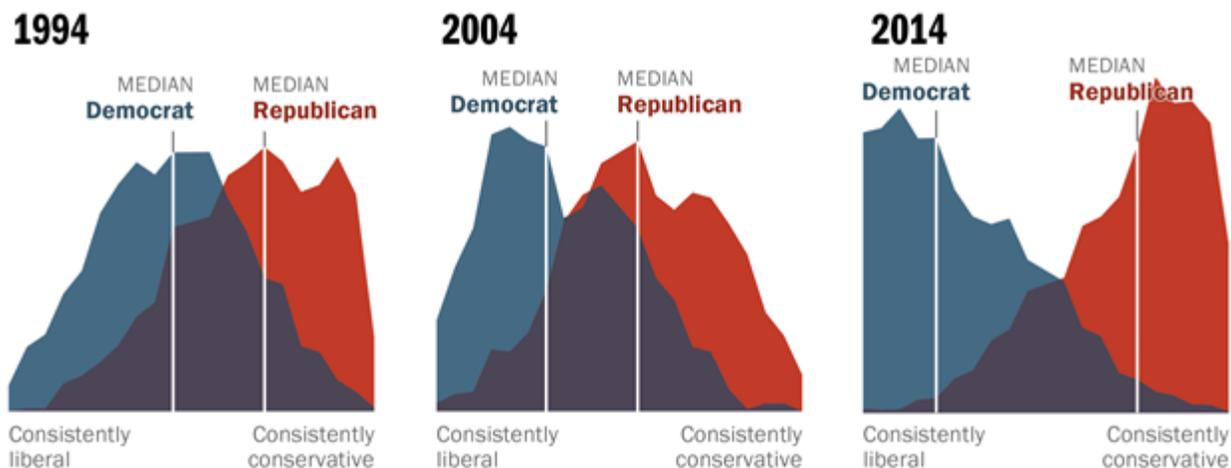
In today's political environment, party (and partisan leaning) predicts ideological consistency more than ever before, and this is particularly the case among the politically attentive. Among Americans who keep up with politics and government and who regularly vote, fully 99% of Republicans are now more conservative than the median Democrat, while 98% of Democrats are more liberal than the median Republican. While engaged partisans have always been ideologically divided, there was more overlap in the recent past; just 10 years ago these numbers were 88% and 84%, respectively.

The GOP ideological shift over the past decade has matched, if not exceeded, the rate at which Democrats have become more liberal 

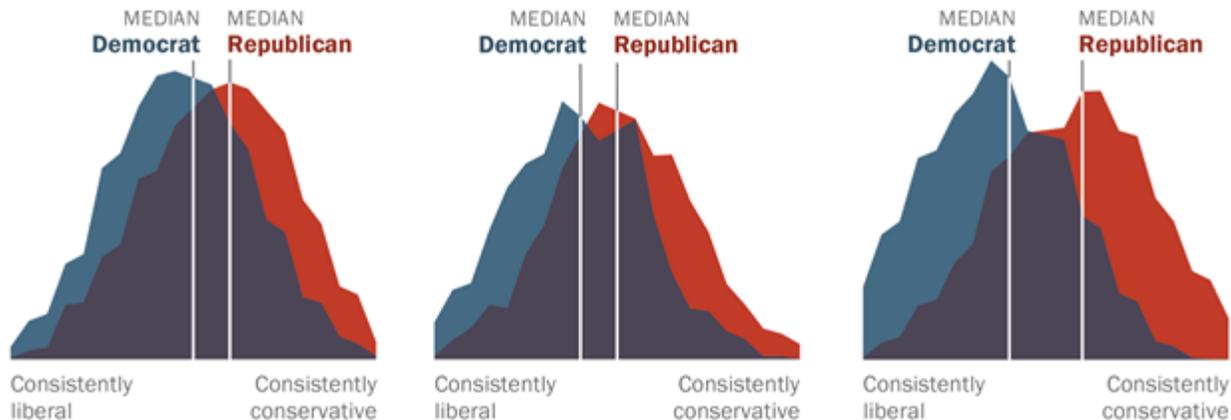
Polarization Surges Among the Politically Engaged

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.

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Defining Political Engagement

Participation in politics is one of the key correlates of polarization, and is measured in greater detail in a separate section of this report. Because the analysis here is making comparisons over time, we are limited to using three questions that were asked consistently in Pew Research surveys since 1994. To be classified as “highly engaged,” a respondent must say they are registered to vote, always or nearly always vote, and follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time. In each year of the study, this represents roughly a third of the public, while the other two-thirds are classified as “less engaged.”

The 2014 survey goes into far greater detail on various forms of political participation and engagement, with more detail [here](#).

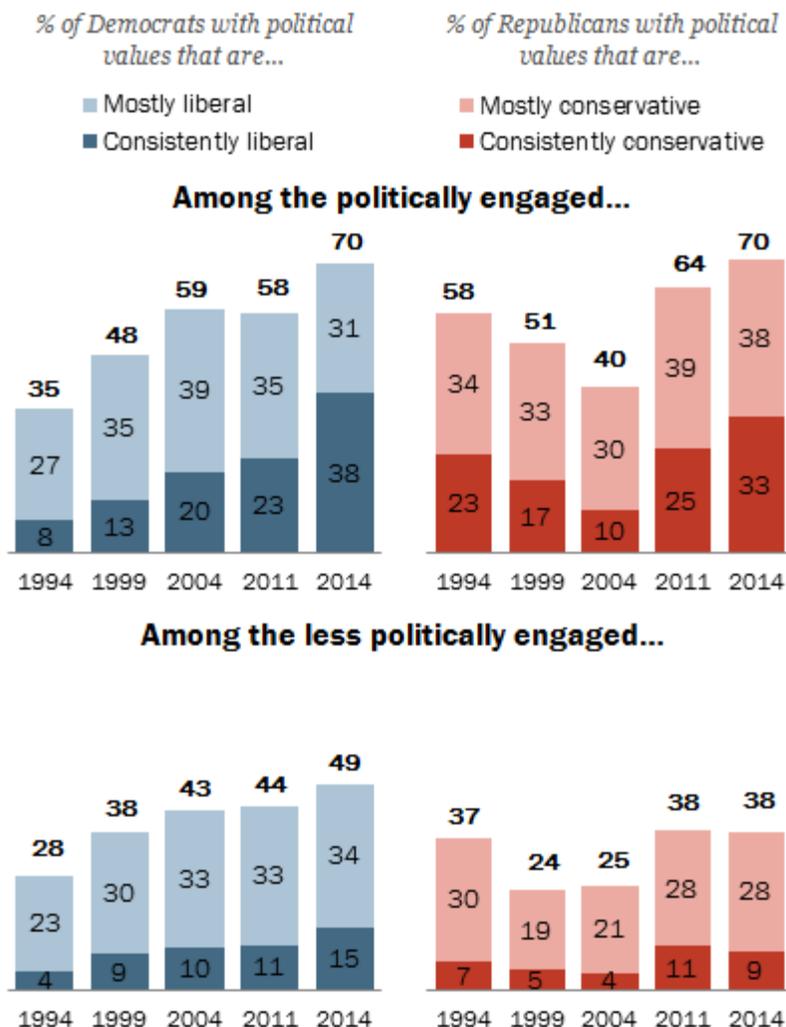
Today, almost four-in-ten (38%) politically engaged Democrats are consistent liberals, up from only 8% in 1994 and 20% in 2004. And the rise is also evident on the right: 33% of politically engaged Republicans are consistent conservatives, up from 23% in 1994, and just 10% in 2004.

Within both parties, 70% of the politically engaged now take positions that are mostly or consistently in line with the ideological bent of their party. By comparison, the equivalent positions were held by 58% of Republicans and 35% of Democrats in 1994 and 40% of Republicans and 59% of Democrats in 2004.

Engaged citizens have always tended to be more ideologically oriented, but the correlation has increased in recent years, particularly among Democrats. Today, 70% of highly engaged Democrats are mostly or consistently liberal in their views, compared with about half (49%) of less engaged Democrats (the other half are either ideologically mixed or conservative). Twenty years ago, there was far less of an engagement gap in ideological thinking, as 35% of highly engaged and 28% of less engaged Democrats were left of center.

The shift in ideology among Republicans is more complex. Between 1994 and 2004 Republicans actually became *less* ideologically oriented, as support for government programs and more positive views about the effectiveness of government grew during George W. Bush's first term. But over the past decade, the GOP has moved solidly to the right – particularly those who are more politically engaged. Today, 70% of highly engaged Republicans are either consistently or mostly conservative, up from 40% in 2004. By comparison, just 38% of less engaged Republicans are right of center (the majority offer a mix of liberal and conservative views).

Growth in Ideological Polarization Sharper among Politically 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).
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Polarization among Elected Officials

This movement among the public, and particularly the engaged public, tracks with increasingly polarized voting patterns in Congress, though to a far lesser extent. As many congressional scholars have documented, Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill are now further apart from one another than at any point in modern history, and that rising polarization among elected officials is asymmetrical, **with much of the widening gap between the two parties attributable to a rightward shift among Republicans**. As a result, **using a widely accepted metric of ideological positioning**, there is now no overlap between the two parties; in the last full session of Congress (the 112th Congress, which ran from 2011-12), every Republican senator and representative was more conservative than the most conservative Democrat (or, putting it another way, every Democrat was more liberal than the most liberal Republican).

But this was not always the case. Forty years ago, in the 93rd Congress (1973-74), fully 240 representatives and 29 senators were in between the most liberal Republican and most conservative Democrat in their respective chambers. Twenty years ago (the 103rd Congress from 1993-94) had nine representatives and three senators in between the most liberal Republican and most conservative Democrat in their respective chambers. Today, there is no overlap. And while by this measure the pace of change may appear to have slowed in the past 20 years, the ideological distance between members of the two parties has continued to grow steadily over this period.

Growing Partisan Polarization Spans Domains

The growth in partisan polarization is evident across a range of political values, as nearly all of the traditional gaps between Republicans and Democrats have widened. The results of the current survey echo the findings in **the 2012 values study**.

The current survey tracks trends on a different set of questions going back to 1994, with parallel conclusions: Partisan divides have deepened across most core political domains, including on nearly every measure in the ideological consistency scale.

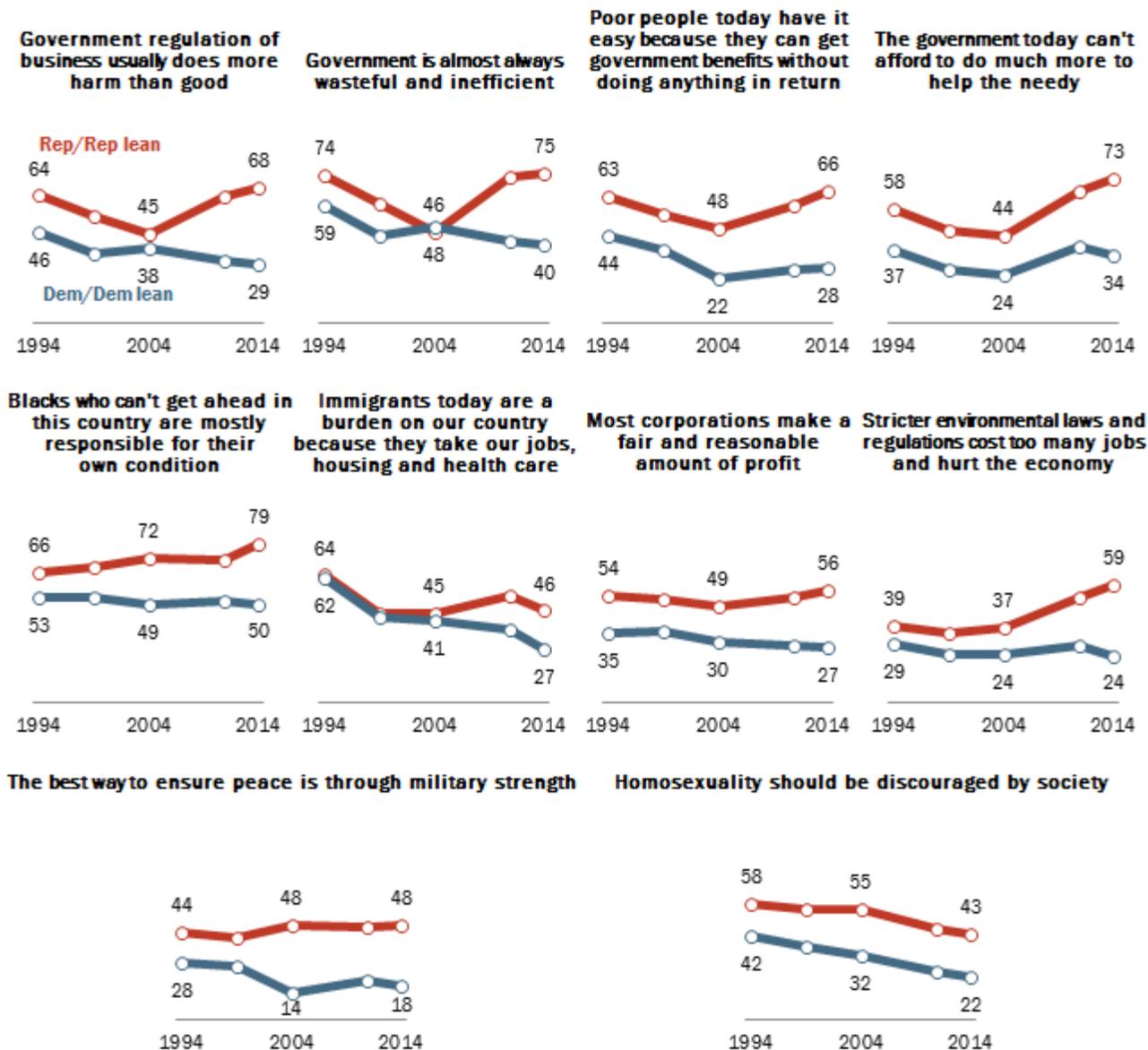
For instance, while Democrats have always been more supportive than Republicans of the social safety net, the partisan divide on these questions has increased substantially over the last 20 years. Two-thirds of Republicans (66%) believe that “poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return;” just 25% say “poor people have hard lives because government benefits don’t go far enough to help them live decently.” Among Democrats, just 28% believe the poor have it easy. The partisan gap on this measure is now 38 points, up from 19 points in 1994 and 26 points in 2004.

Similarly, in 1994, there was a relatively narrow 10-point partisan gap in views on environmental

regulation. Today, the gap is 35 points, as the proportion of Republicans who say that “stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy” has grown from 39% in 1994 to 59%, while Democratic opinion has shifted slightly in the other direction.

Growing Gaps between Republicans and Democrats

% who take the more conservative position on each question in the ideological consistency scale



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Line charts show the survey questions included in the 10-item ideological consistency scale. Questions are forced-choice questions with two options; only the conservative responses are shown here. See topline for the full question wording and trends for each question.

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And although immigration attitudes have shifted in a liberal direction among both Democrats and Republicans, a partisan gap has emerged where none was evident 20 years ago. In 1994, 64% of Republicans and 62% of Democrats viewed immigrants as a burden on the country; today 46% of

Republicans but just 27% of Democrats say this.

For nine of the 10 items in the ideological consistency scale, the partisan gap has grown wider over the last 20 years. The sole exception is in views of homosexuality: Both Democrats and Republicans have become more liberal on this question over the years, as fewer now say that “homosexuality should be discouraged (rather than accepted) by society.” However, the current 21-point partisan gap on this question is only slightly wider than the 16 point gap in 1994.

Ideological Self-Placement and Ideological Consistency

Where people fall on the scale of ideological consistency discussed throughout this report is strongly correlated with how people describe themselves. But for some, how they see their own ideology doesn't align with their expressed political values.

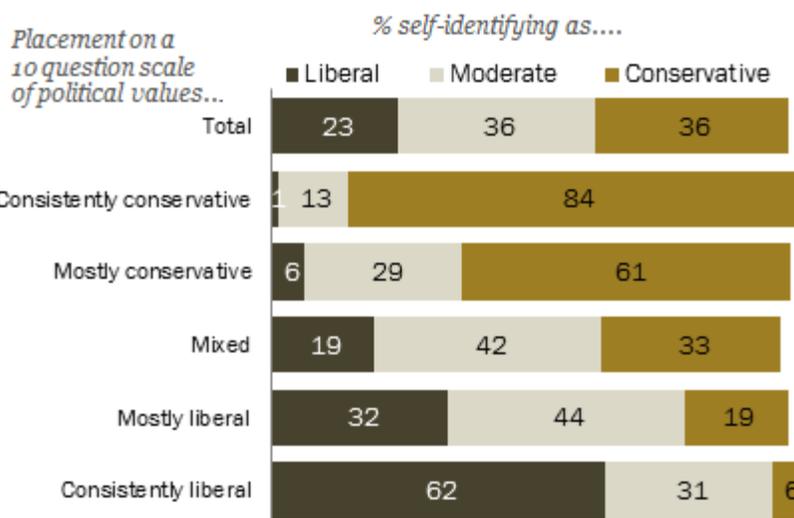
In recent years, Americans have consistently been **far more likely to self-identify as conservative than as liberal** – by a 36% to 23% margin in the current survey.

Fully 84% of those who are consistently conservative in their ideological positions call themselves conservative, as does a smaller majority (61%) of those who are “mostly conservative” on the scale.

But those who express consistently or mostly liberal values, are less likely to embrace the “liberal” label. About six-in-ten (62%) consistent liberals say they are liberal, with 31% saying they are moderate, and a handful (6%) calling themselves conservative. And among those who are mostly liberal on the ideological consistency scale, more (44%) say they are moderate than say they are liberal (32%).

While the plurality (42%) of those who are ideologically mixed label themselves as moderate, the remainder are more likely to say they are conservative (33%) than liberal (19%).

Ideological Self-Placement Mostly Corresponds to Political Values, With Some Exceptions



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public
 Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). Ideological self-placement based on one question with five response options.
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