

# Fostering Civil Discourse: The Importance of Trust for Critical Thinking Development

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Course Focus: HON 2020: Civil Discourse

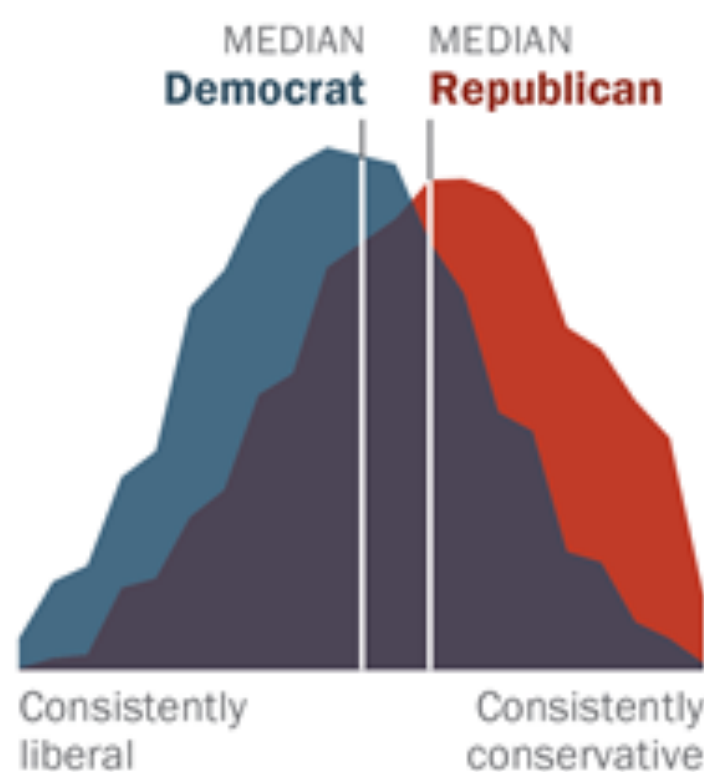
# How did we get here?

- ▶ Summer 2017: CT2 Workshop, COMM 3570
  - ▶ Updated, rebuilt course following CT2
  - ▶ Great success in student growth & development
- ▶ Spring 2018: HON 2020 Opportunity
  - ▶ Employed lessons from CT2
  - ▶ Sought to foster civil discourse in increasingly contentious political climate

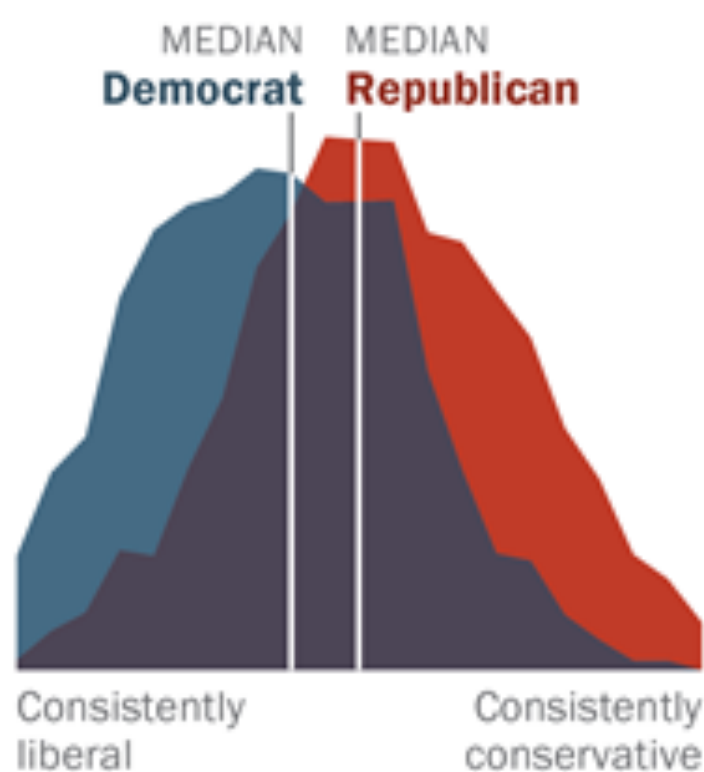
## Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

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

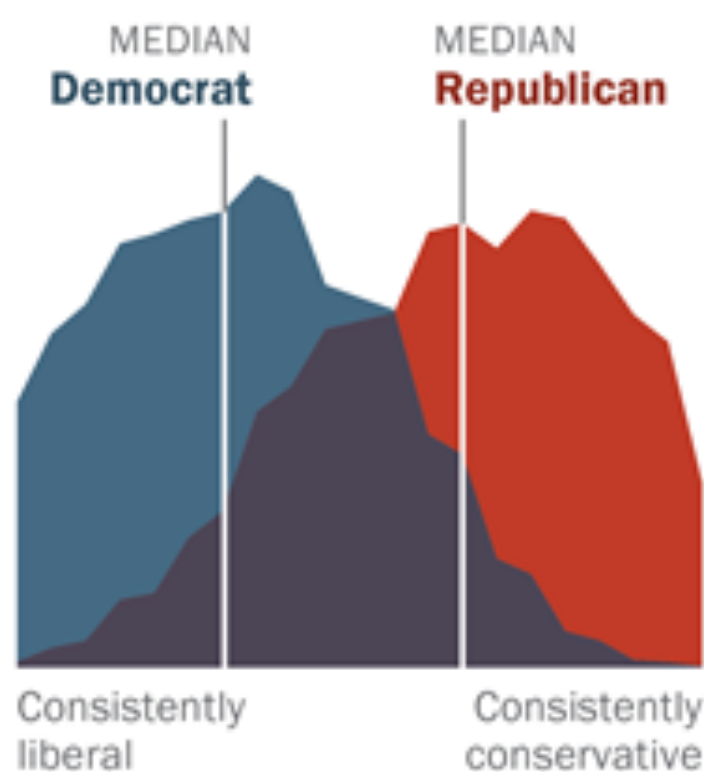
**1994**



**2004**



**2014**

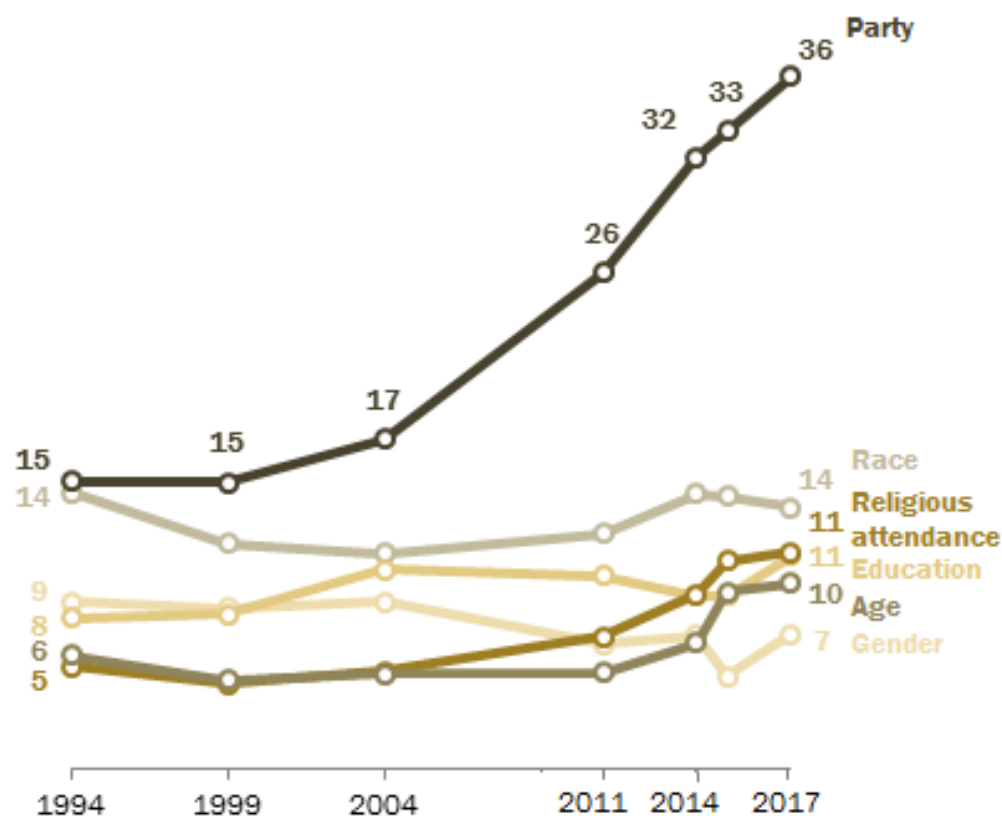


Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

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

## As partisan divides over political values widen, other gaps remain more modest

Average gap in the share taking a conservative position across 10 political values, by key demographics

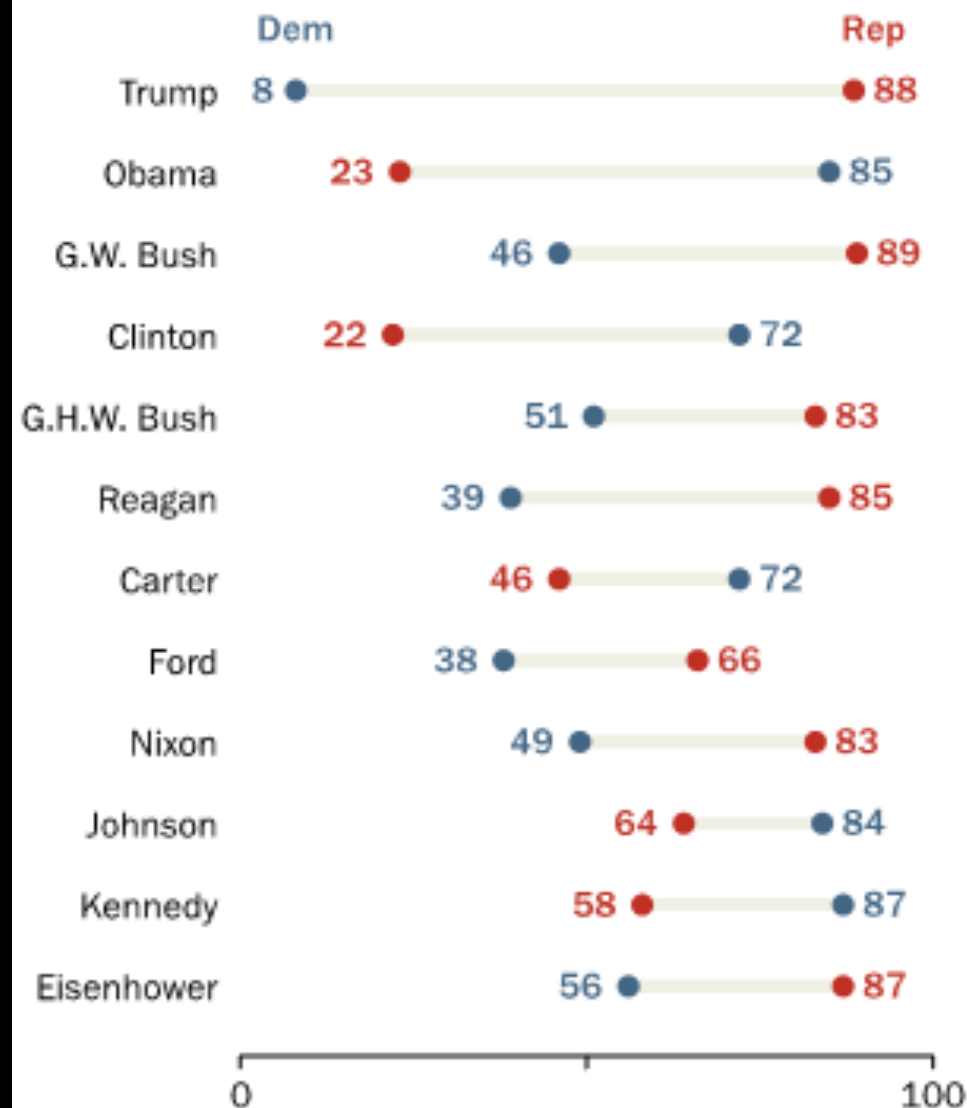


Notes: Indicates average gap between the share of two groups taking the conservative position across 10 values items. Party=difference between Rep/Lean Rep and Dem/Lean Dem. Race=white non-Hispanic/black non-Hispanic. Education=college grad/non-college grad. Age=18-49/50+. Religion=weekly+ religious service attenders/less often.  
Source: Survey conducted June 8-18 and June 27-July 9, 2017.

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## Wider partisan gap on Trump job rating than for any president in six decades

% approving of president's job during first year...



# How do we proceed?

- ▶ Course divided into three core segments
  - ▶ Civil Discourse Instruction (set ground rules/expectations)
  - ▶ Civil Discourse Practice (learn & grow together)
  - ▶ Civil Discourse in Community (exercise learning)
- ▶ Progressively more challenging topics
- ▶ Greater demonstration of CT over time

# Challenges: What didn't work?

- ▶ Early conflict - lack of trust & shared respect
  - ▶ Discussed & managed over time
- ▶ Early failure to think critically, support claims
  - ▶ Gentle, firm correction (each person empowered)
- ▶ Frustration with course ambiguity
  - ▶ Adjusted over time, found middle ground

# Successes: What worked well?

- ▶ Deep, meaningful discussions on tough topics
  - ▶ Students' views shifted based on classmates' CT/arguments
- ▶ Compelling writing based on clear evidence
- ▶ Shared, trust-based space to correct classmates led to greater self-regulation in the classroom
- ▶ Students reported greater openness to other perspectives