

Polarized America: Lessons from Sports

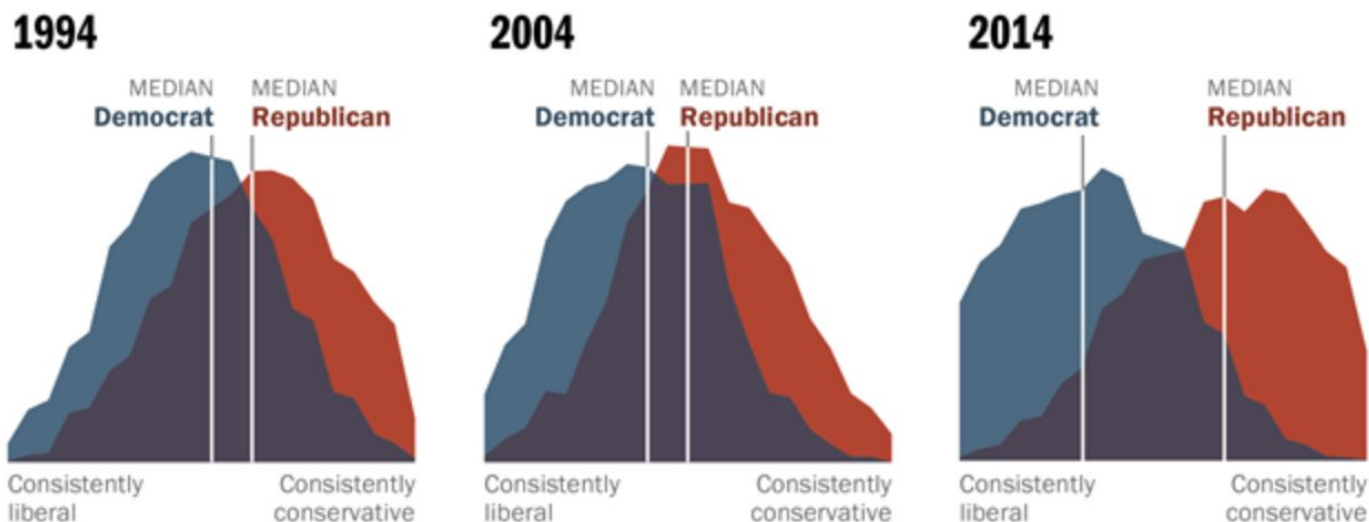
Or, “everything I know about
American politics is basically
kind of about sports”





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

Polarization can undermine community bonds and reshape how we see the world around us, a phenomenon Gallup's Frank Newport called "emotional polarization."

Emotional Partisanship Driving Views of Healthcare

BY FRANK NEWPORT

“One might think that Americans assess the economy based on what they hear and read about the stock market, unemployment and indications of business vitality. But a persistent finding is that Americans' views of the economy are substantially affected by their underlying political identity. When a president of a different political party takes over the White House, as has happened most recently in 2000, 2008 and 2016, Republicans' and Democrats' assessments of the economy change essentially overnight. In 2017, for example, it became cognitively inconsistent for Democrats to believe that the economy was getting better and in good shape with a Republican president in charge, so their positive views of the economy plummeted. Republicans suddenly became much more positive about the economy. As my colleague Andrew Dugan [noted](#) in his analysis of 2017 Gallup data, "Republicans' confidence in the economy stood at +46 in 2017, a 77-point improvement from 2016.”

Why everyone agrees that America is on 'the wrong track'

An NBC News poll shows Americans are pessimistic – but they can't agree what the right direction looks like.

Even Gallup's analysts see the disconnect between their respondents' answers and external stimuli. "As is almost always the case, Americans who identify with the party of the president are more likely than others to be satisfied with the way things are going," Gallup said in October 2018, when a recent high of [38 percent of Americans](#) were satisfied with the U.S.'s trajectory. "Specifically, 69 percent of Republicans in the latest poll report being satisfied, compared with 36 percent of independents and 12 percent of Democrats – similar to last month."

You can see that correlation more clearly in [Morning Consult's daily tracking](#) of the "right direction/wrong track" question. Sixty-two percent of Republicans were feeling good just ahead of the 2020 presidential election – by the time the election was called for President Joe Biden, that number had plummeted. Democrats, meanwhile, felt terrible about the country's direction ahead of the election but became much more confident about things soon after Biden's inauguration.

“Also, with the policy differences between the parties so stark, two respondents certain the country is going in the wrong direction can come to that conclusion for entirely different reasons. One may look at the Biden administration’s [lack of progress on immigration reform](#); another may be convinced that the administration is [too lenient toward undocumented immigrants and border crossers](#). These two people would want very different futures for the country. That’s just one example — and yet if one side was to actually feel satisfied, would a majority of the country be convinced that things were going well?”