



Partisan animosity hits record highs

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October 5, 2017

Political partisanship has hit a new high in the U.S. after two decades of deeply polarizing presidential contests pitting Democrats and Republicans against each other, according to a study released Thursday.

The study from the Pew Research Center found 81 percent of Democrats and those who lean Democratic say they have unfavorable views of the Republican Party, with 44 percent saying their views are very unfavorable.

Among Republicans and GOP leaners, the numbers are virtually identical: 81 percent see the Democratic Party unfavorably, with 45 percent saying their views of the other party are very unfavorable

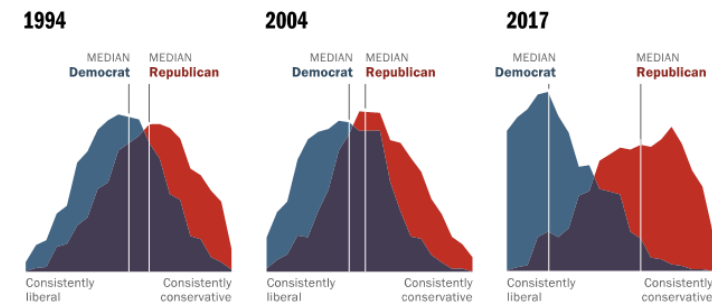
In 1994, smaller majorities of both sides viewed their rivals in such an unfavorable light, with just 16 percent of Democrats and 17 percent of Republicans viewing the other side deeply unfavorably.

“It appears that increasing numbers of partisans believe their political opponents are driven by nefarious intentions, not genuine political disagreements,” said Emily Ekins, director of polling at the Cato Institute. “Many worry that the other side doesn’t even share their goals or positive vision of the future.”

The gap between Democrats and Republicans has never been greater, according to the study, while President Trump's approval ratings are also at historic lows.

Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

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



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.
Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

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Just 8 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning voters approved of Trump’s job performance in Pew’s June survey, while 88 percent of Republicans and GOP-leaning voters approved.

That 80-point gap is the largest in a president’s first year of any president since Dwight Eisenhower. By comparison, during his first year in office, Barack Obama enjoyed an 85 percent approval rating among Democrats and a 23 percent rating among Republicans, a 62-point gap.

More than half of the other party’s voters approved of the jobs Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and George H.W. Bush were doing during their first year in office, a mark that is seemingly unfathomable in today’s polarized environment.

Today, four in 10 voters on both sides say they align with a party specifically because they are against what the other party represents.

Just 53 percent of Republicans and 56 percent of Democrats say they chose their side because they are overtly in favor of what their party stands for, another sign that voters may be motivated more by fear of and opposition to the other than by hope for their own side’s agenda.

And fewer Americans say they are likely to be friendly with members of the other party. Two-thirds of Democrats and 57 percent of Republicans say they have a lot of friends who align with their political views. Just 14 percent of Republicans and 9 percent of Democrats say they have a lot of friends who are members of the other party.

Rob Griffin, a demographer at the left-leaning Center for American Progress, argued that the partisan distrust has a negative impact on the American system of government because that system is uniquely suited to compromise and negotiation.

“Governing within the U.S. system is almost always based on compromise. Seems clear enough that these shifts have made things harder,” Griffin said. “For a member of Congress, most of whom inhabit relatively safe districts, what fear is there in saying, ‘I didn’t work with those people you hate?’”

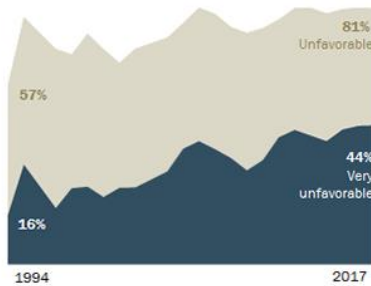
The Pew study found deepening political divides over questions of race, immigration and the role of government, divides that highlight the policy trenches in which the two parties have dug themselves.

Seven in 10 Democrats believe the government should do more to help those in need, while just under a quarter of Republicans feel the same, according to the study. Almost two-thirds of Democrats say racial discrimination is the main reason many African-Americans can't get ahead these days, while just 14 percent of Republicans say the same.

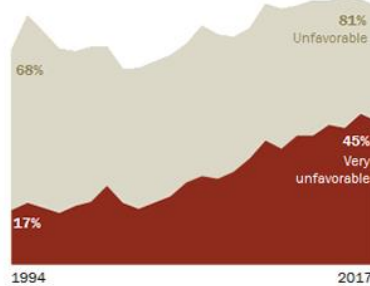
Nearly two-thirds of Republicans say poor people have it easy because they get government benefits without doing anything in return, something with which just 18 percent of Democrats agree. Just a third of Republicans, but 83 percent of Democrats, say diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace.

Rising tide of partisan antipathy

% of Democrats and Democratic leaners who have a _____ opinion of the Republican Party



% of Republicans and Republican leaners who have a _____ opinion of the Democratic Party



Note: Data shown are yearly averages. QA15.
Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

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Many of the issues at the forefront of the political debate today — including immigration, both from Central American and Middle Eastern countries, and the growing influence of minority populations — have to do with the very question of what it means to be an American. That, Ekins said, leads to distrust between two sides with completely different views.

“People assume policy ideas they view as offensive (e.g. deporting unauthorized immigrants, single payer health care, etc.) are driven by malicious motives and immoral goals,” Ekins said in an email. “Many people feel like they lack a set of shared values with their political opponents. Without that, it’s harder to forge trust.”

One of the few issues on which there is broad and growing consensus is on views of homosexuality, according to the study.

For the first time, majorities of both parties — 83 percent of Democrats and 54 percent of Republicans — say homosexuality should be accepted by society. In 1994, just 54 percent of Democrats and 38 percent of Republicans agreed.

The Pew Research Center study interviewed 2,504 adults, three-quarters of whom completed their surveys on cellphones, for a margin of error of plus or minus 2.3 percentage points.