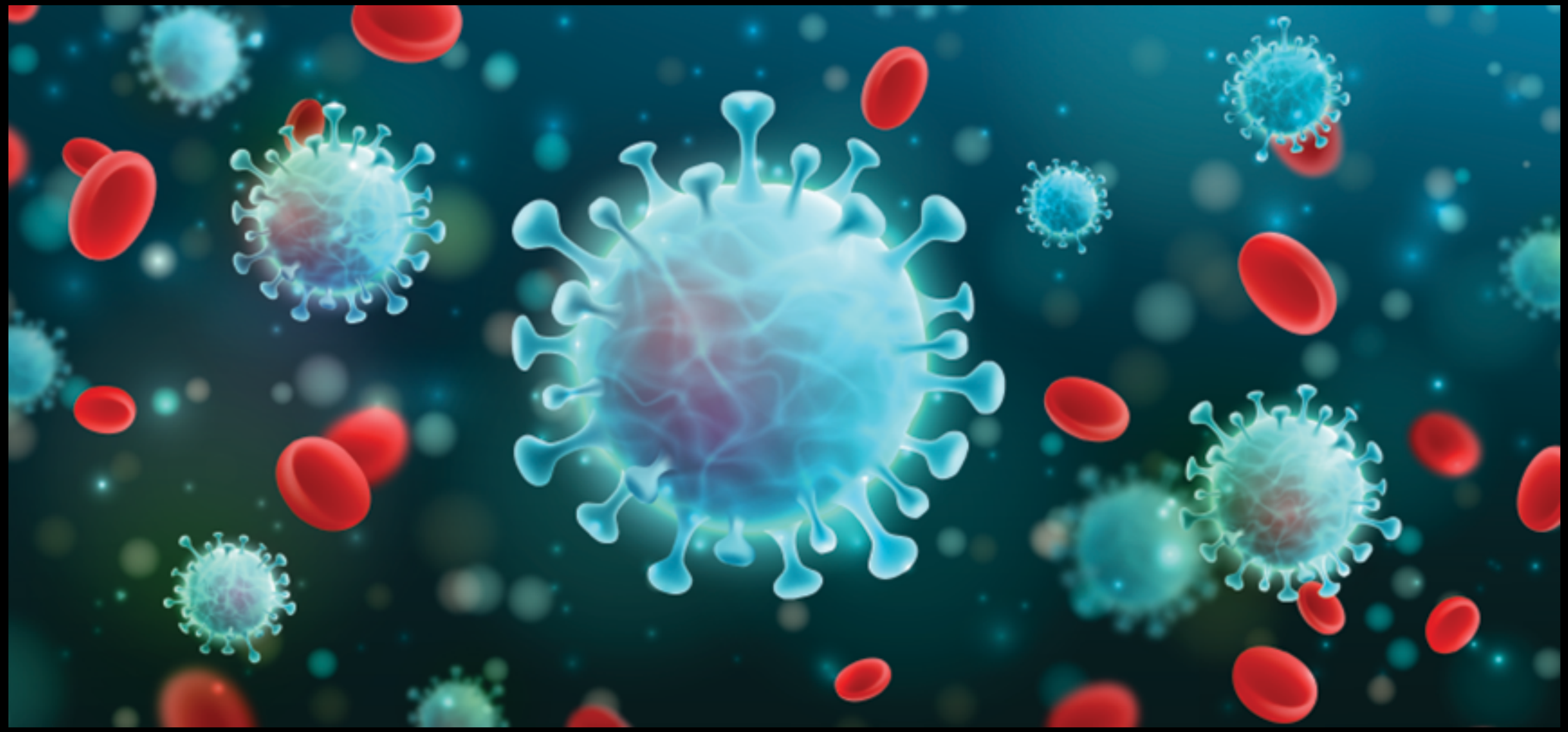
Fragility	Consequences	Toward Democracy
Truth Rules of the game Common good	Illegitimate politics Political violence Inability to solve existential problems	Good information sphere Common socio-political spaces Beyond two parties Equal & responsive politics

Can We Preserve America's Democracy?

Wiener Conference Call
Harvard Kennedy School

Archon Fung
Winthrop Laflin McCormack Professor of Citizenship & Self-Government
September 15, 2021



Democracy in COVID Times

Socio-Political Division in COVID times

Socio-Political Division in COVID times

January 6 Capitol Insurrection

Fragility
Consequences
More Democracy

Fragility

Consequences

Democracy

Fragility & Democratic Norms

First Norm: Truth

Big Lies (advance self interest)

The 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump

Noble lies? (advance policy agenda)

Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction

Masks won’t help you with COVID (CDC / WHO)

Dis- / Mis- information

COVID cures

many, many others

First Norm: Seek Truth

Big Lies (advance self interest)

The 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump

Noble lies? (advance policy agenda)

Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction

Masks won’t help you with COVID (CDC / WHO)

Dis- / Mis- information

COVID cures

many, many others

Stronger incentives / weaker checks

* Weakened journalism
* Polarization & confirmation bias
* Social media
  * Discursive polarization
  * Filter bubbles / algorithms
  * Business models

Second Norm:
Play Within Institutional Rules of the Game

Right

Election security

Voting accessibility / regulation

Redistricting: legislative gerrymandering

Election oversight: admin -> legislature

Second Norm:
Play Within Institutions & Rules of the Game

Left

Filibuster reform

Everyone votes

Redistricting: legislatures -> commissions

Electoral college reform

Supreme Court reform

Make Senate majoritarian

Right

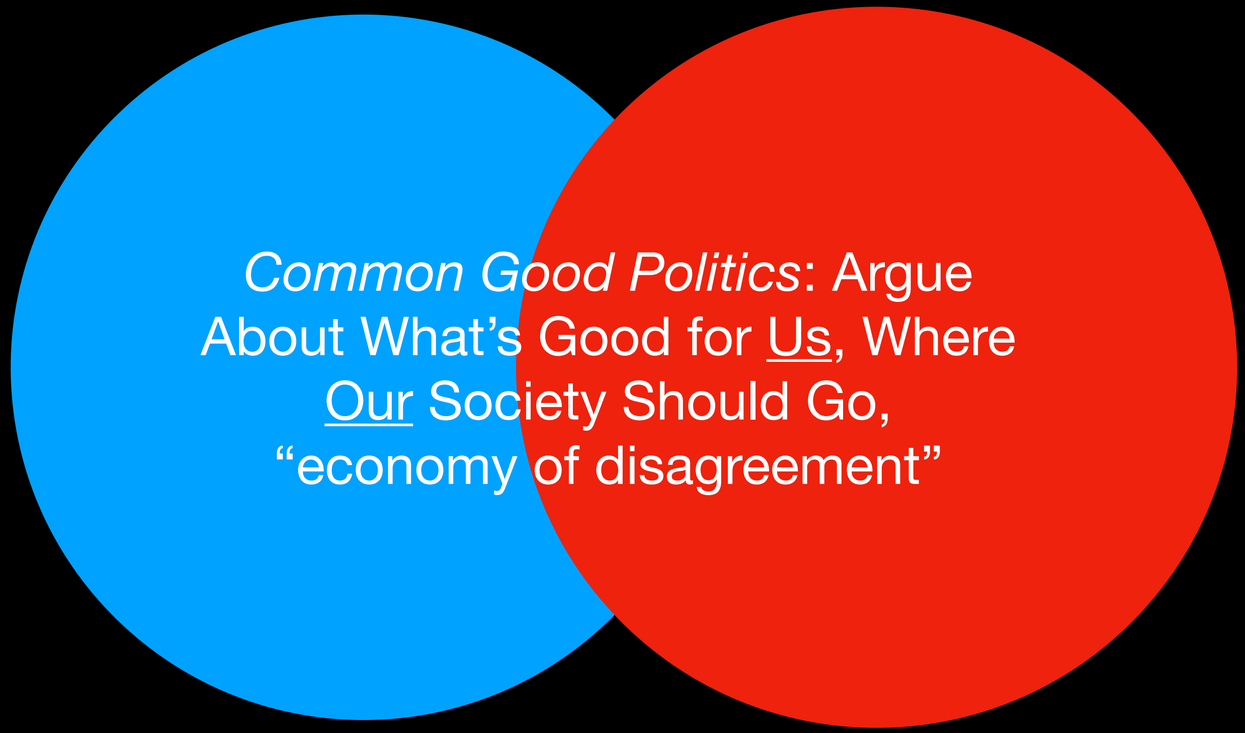
Election security

Voting accessibility / regulation

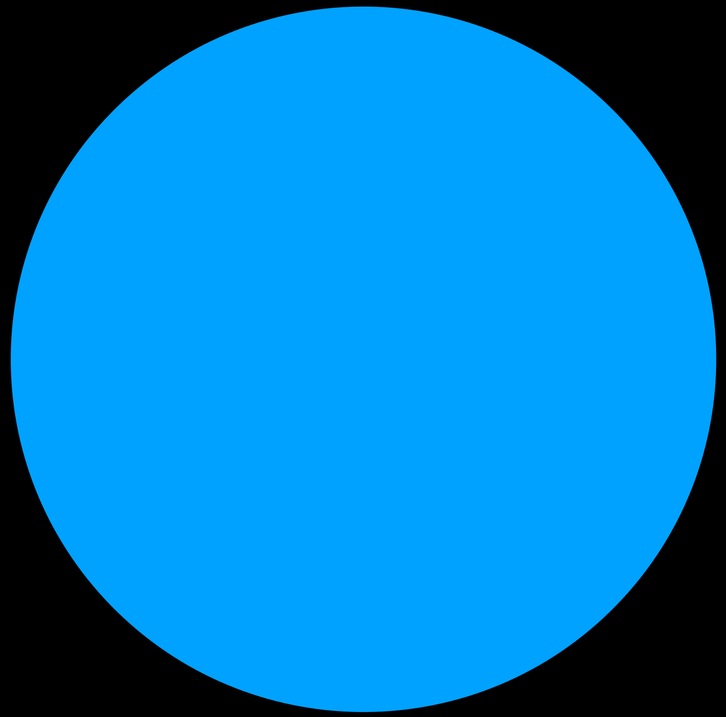
Redistricting: legislative gerrymandering

Election oversight: admin -> legislature

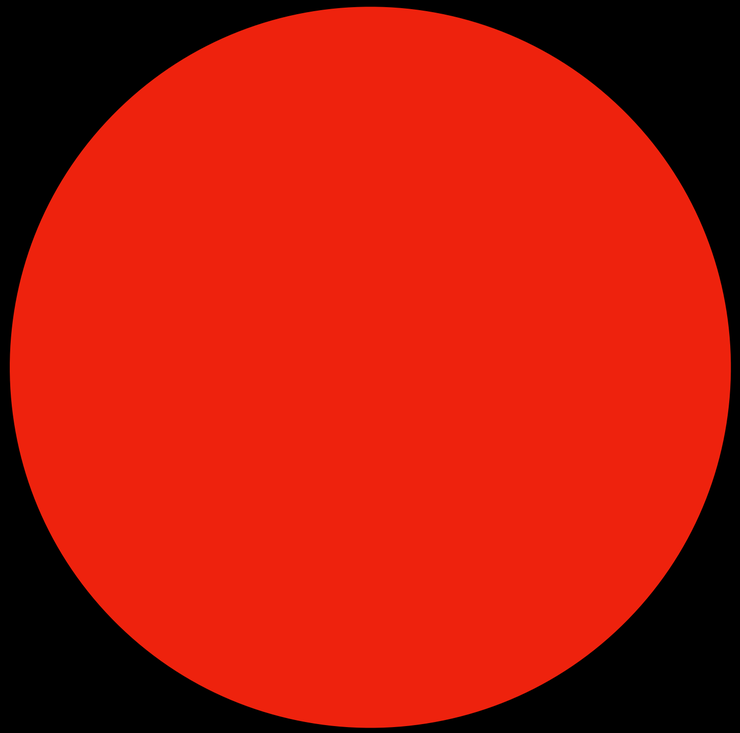
Third Norm:
Appeal to Common Good & Interests



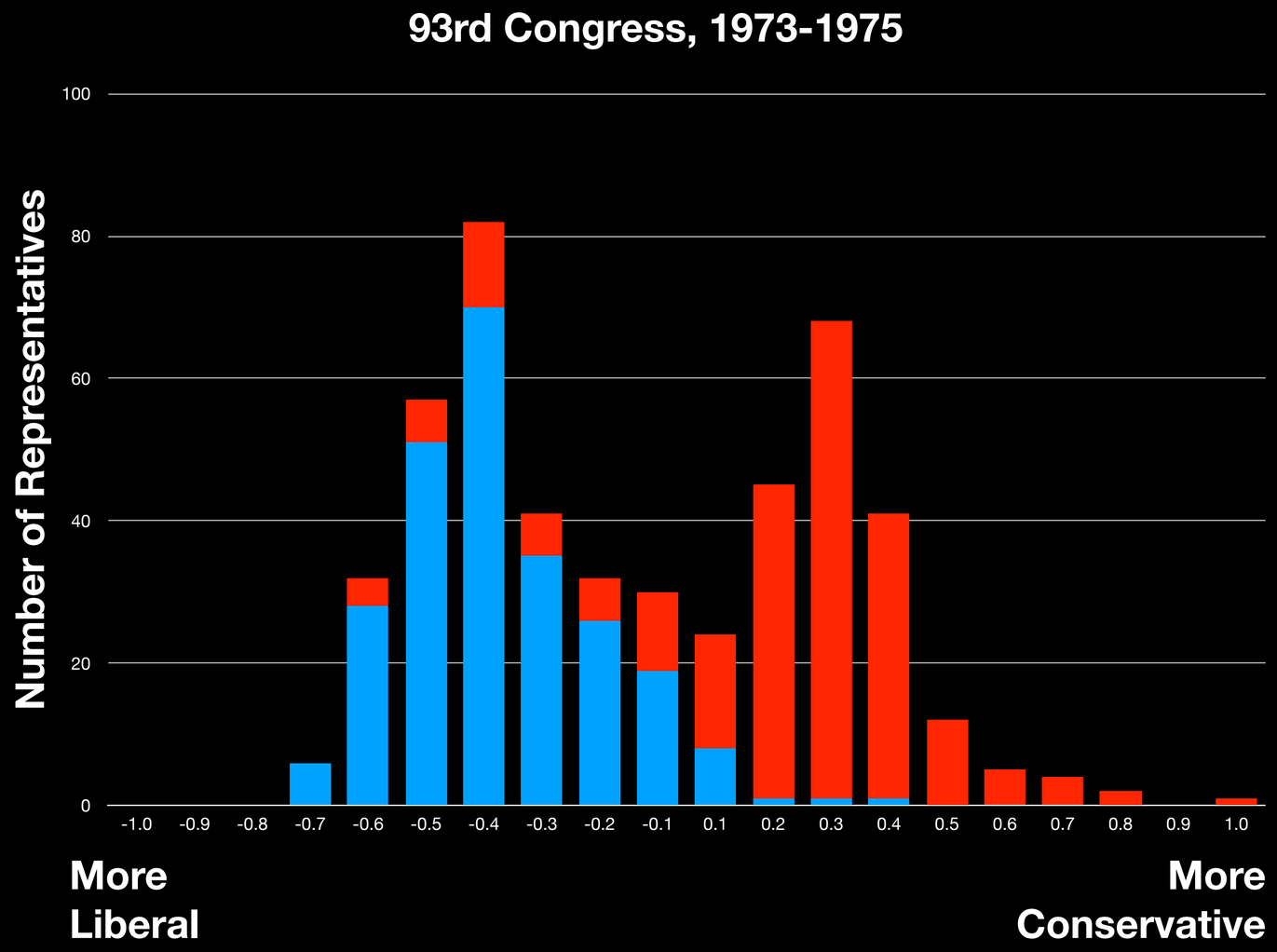
Third Norm:
Appeal to Common Good & Interests



Tribal Politics: Argue About What's Good for My People, Bad for Your People, maximize disagreement

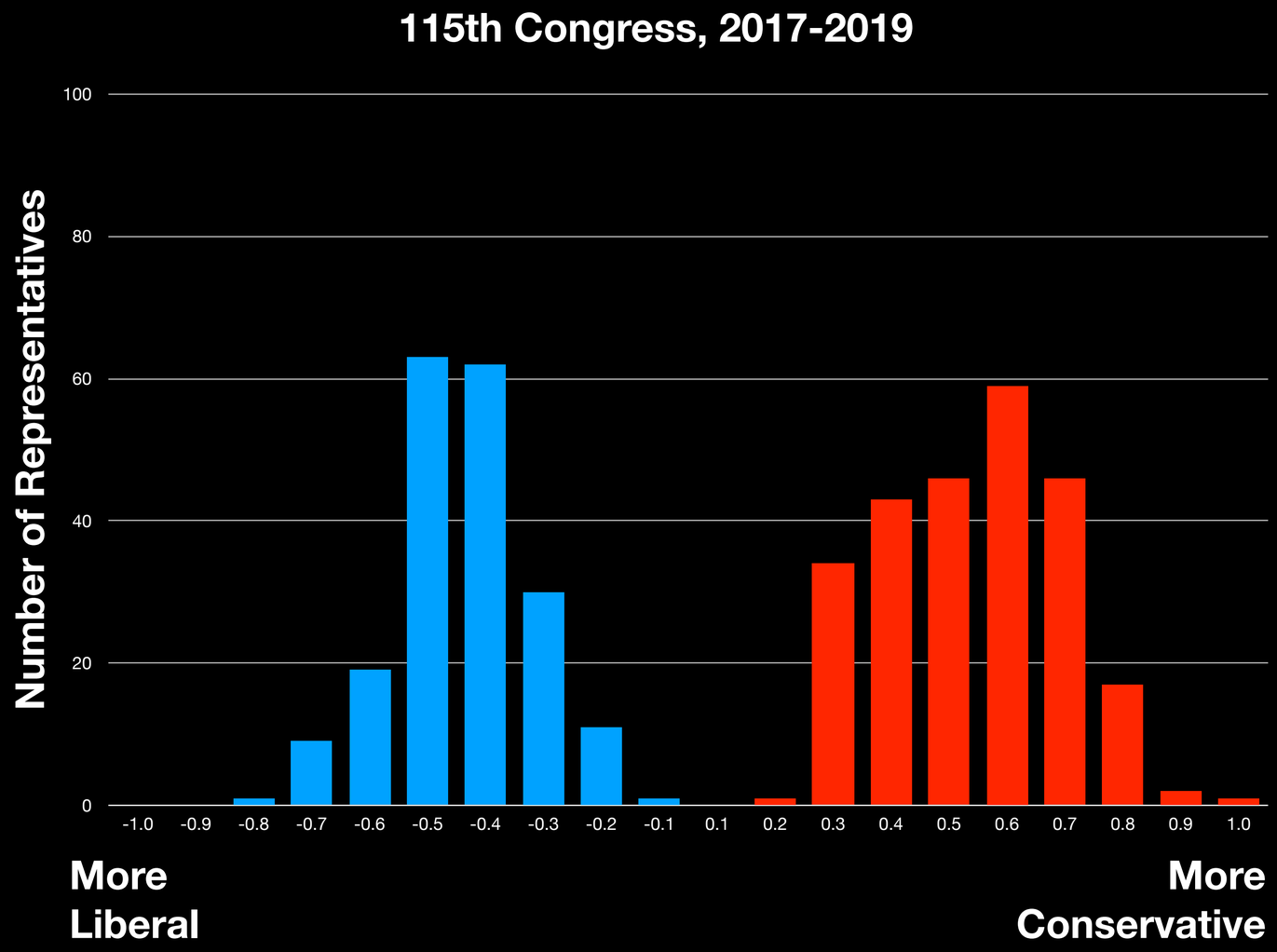


Polarization in Congress



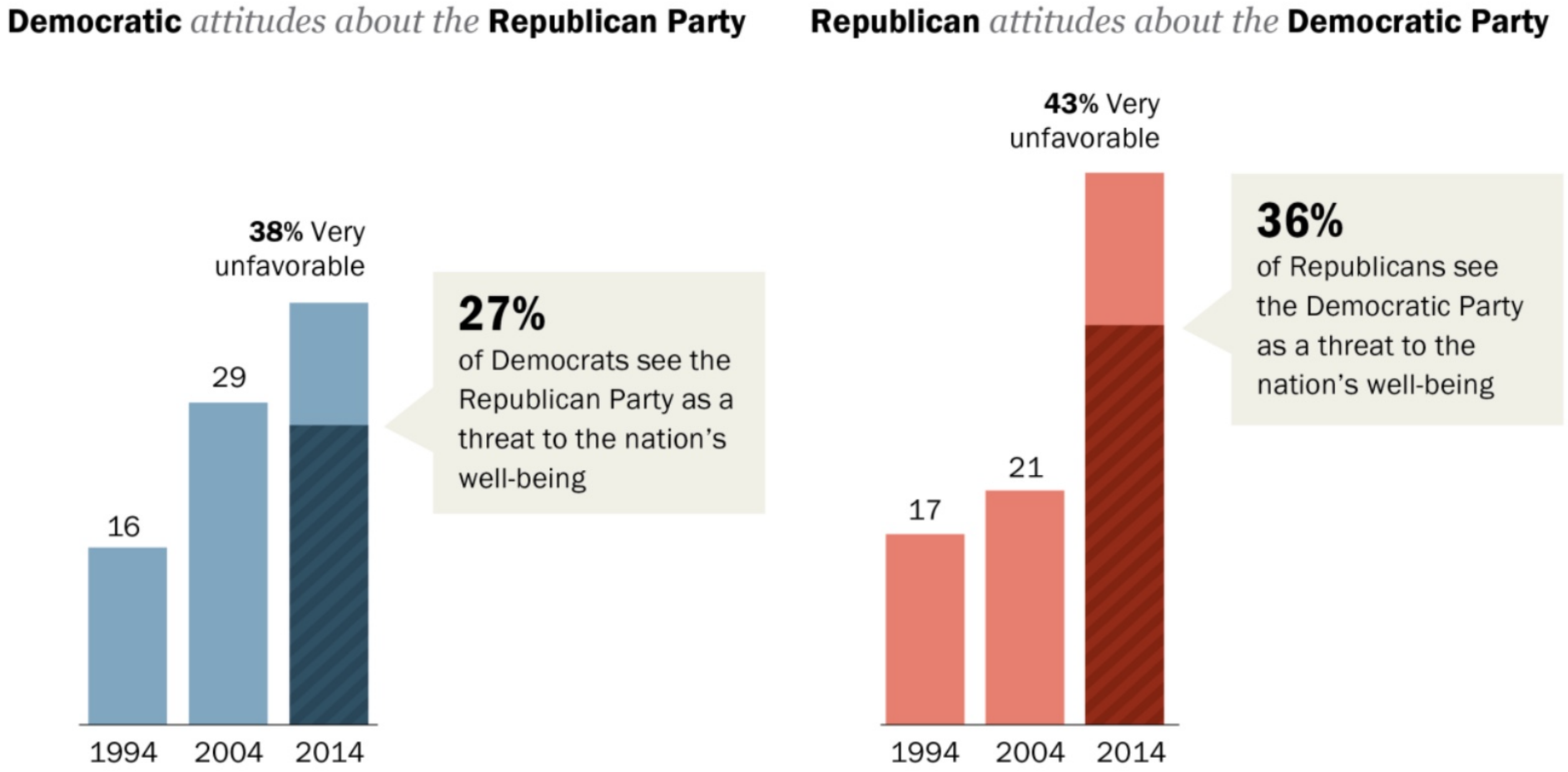
Sources: Pew Research (2014), VoteView.com

Polarization in Congress



Sources: Pew Research (2014), VoteView.com

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



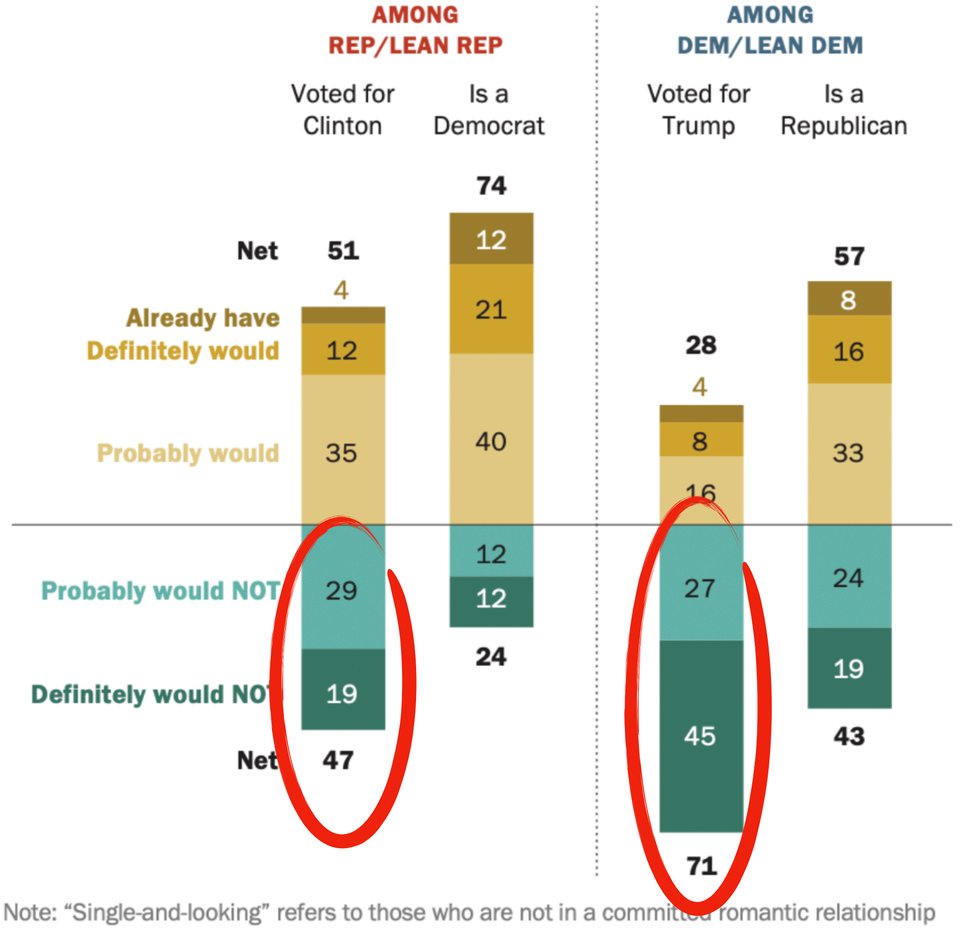
Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

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).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

About seven-in-ten Democratic daters would not consider being in a relationship with a Trump voter

*% of single-and-looking **Republicans**/**Democrats** who say they would/would NOT consider being in a committed relationship with someone who ...*



Note: "Single-and-looking" refers to those who are not in a committed romantic relationship but are looking for one. Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fragility

Consequences

Democracy

First consequence: Illegitimate politics

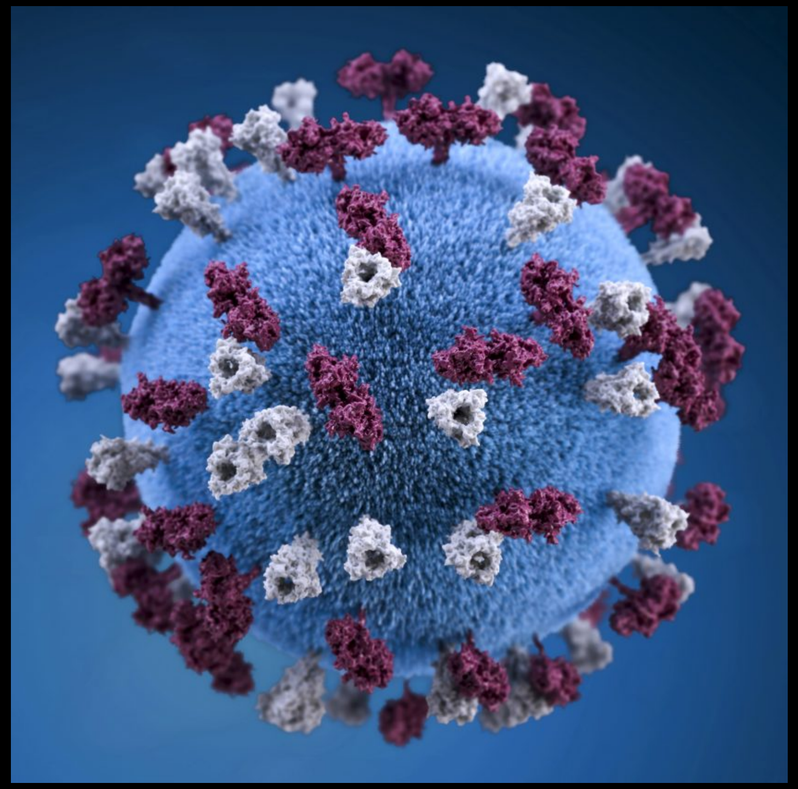
UFC
Reebok

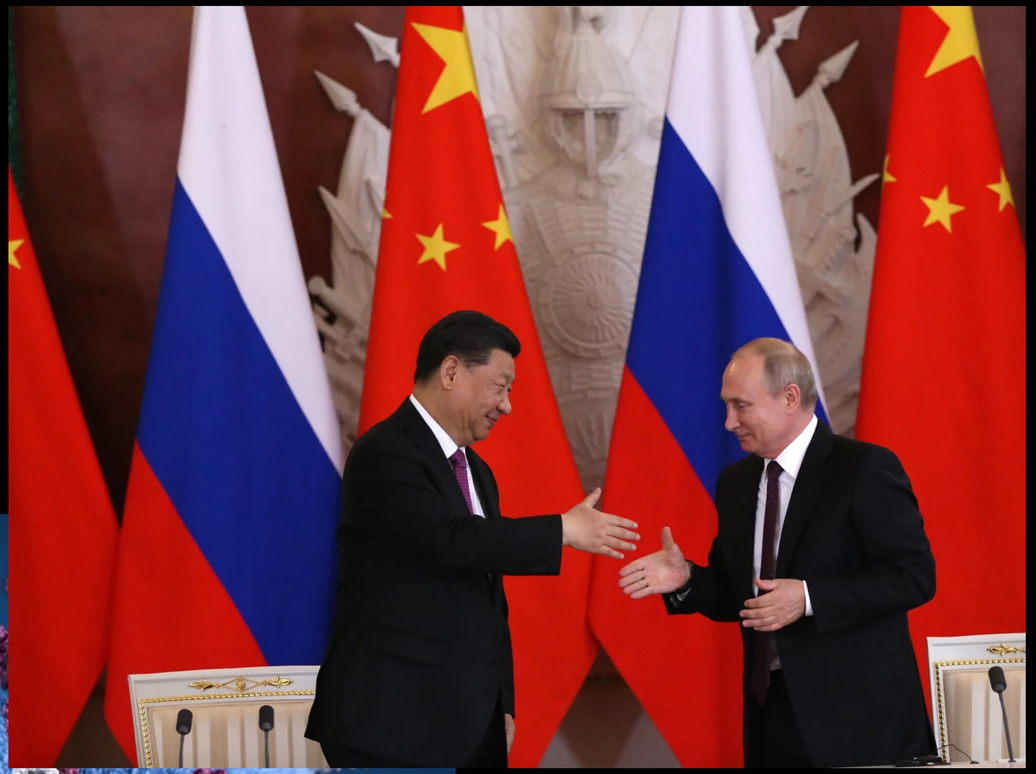
STOP THE STEAL
STOP THE STEAL
STEALING IS UN-AMERICAN!
LEGAL VOTES
STOP THE STEAL
#StopTheSteaL
#DemocratsRiot
#RepublicansRally

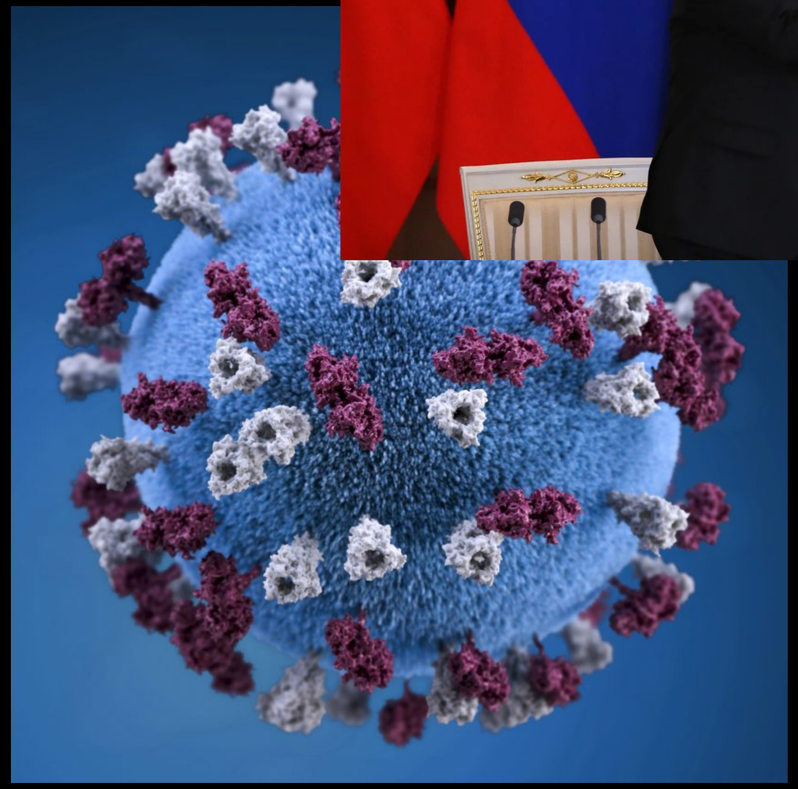
Second consequence:
Bullets, not ballots??

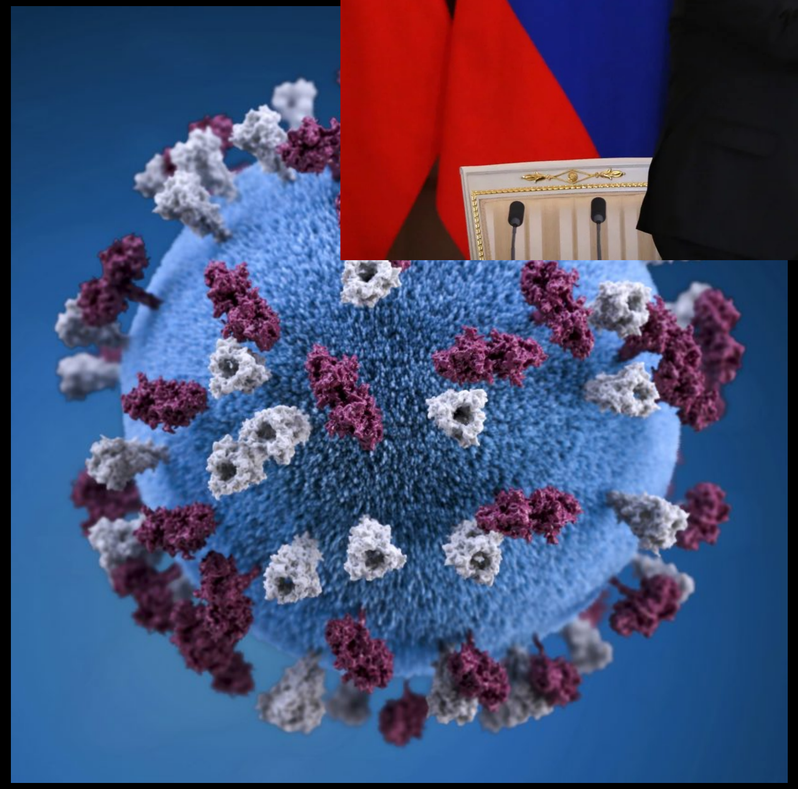
JAMES H. ANDERSON
LUTHER STRANGE
Republican
FOR STATE TREASURER
(Vote for One)

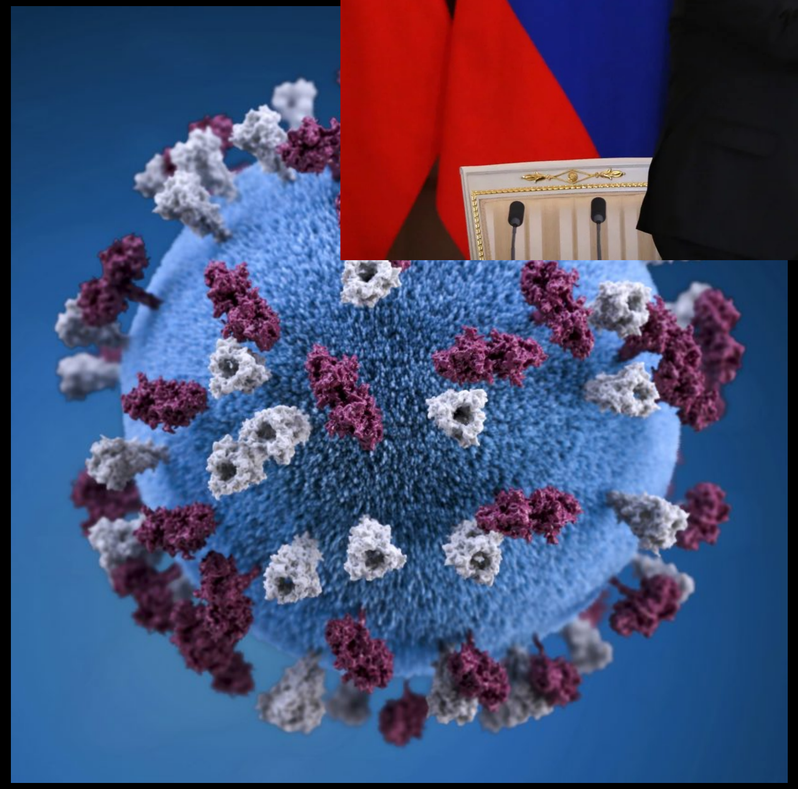
Third Consequence:
Can’t solve existential social challenges

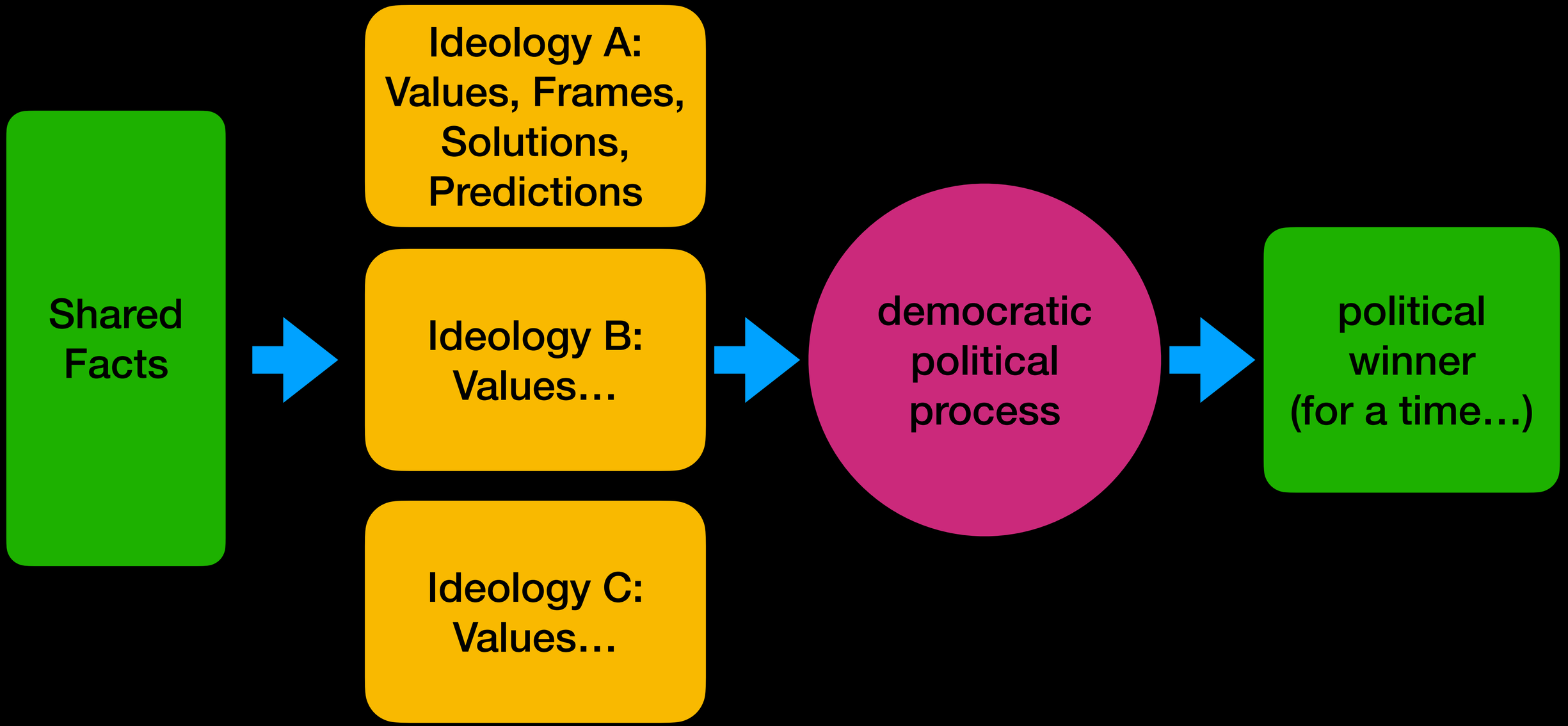


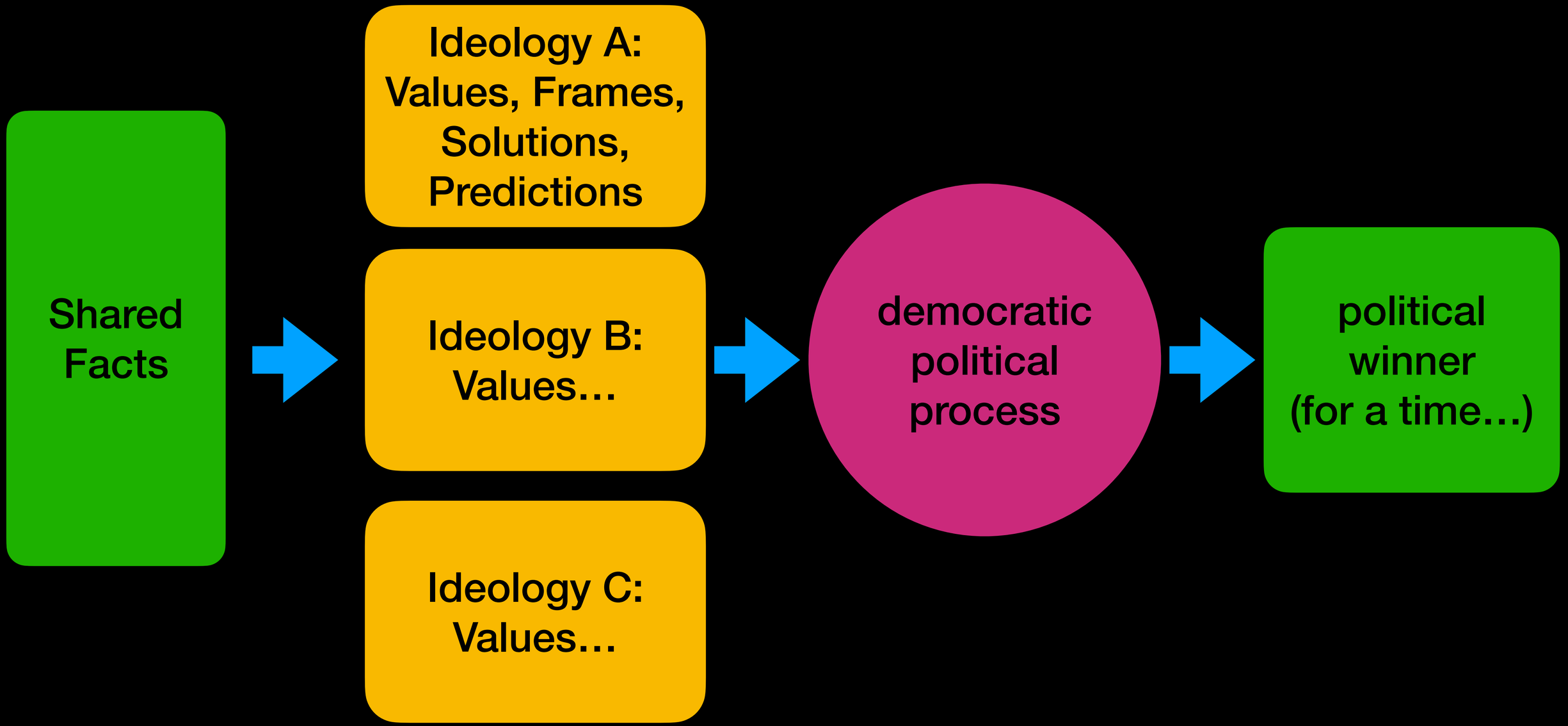









Shared Facts
Ideology A: Values, Frames, Solutions, Predictions
Ideology B: Values…
Ideology C: Values…
democratic political process
political winner (for a time…)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Fragility

Consequences

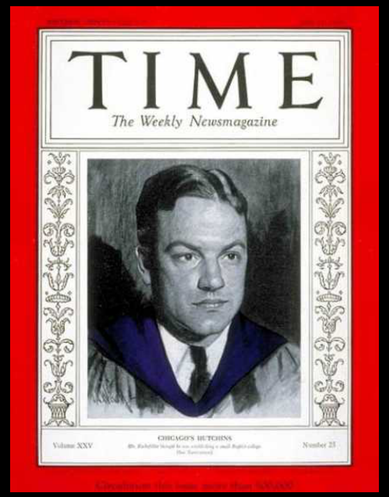
Democracy

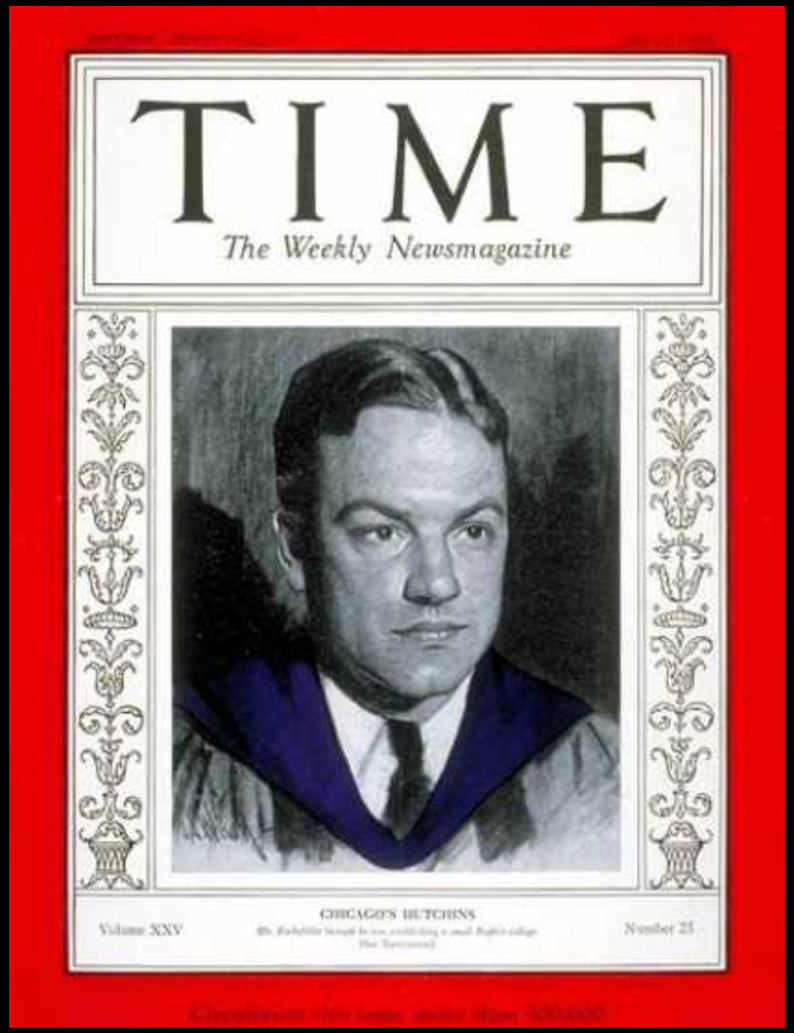
An Agenda, not Solutions

Restore or Reinvent?

Restore or Reinvent?

1. Good information sphere

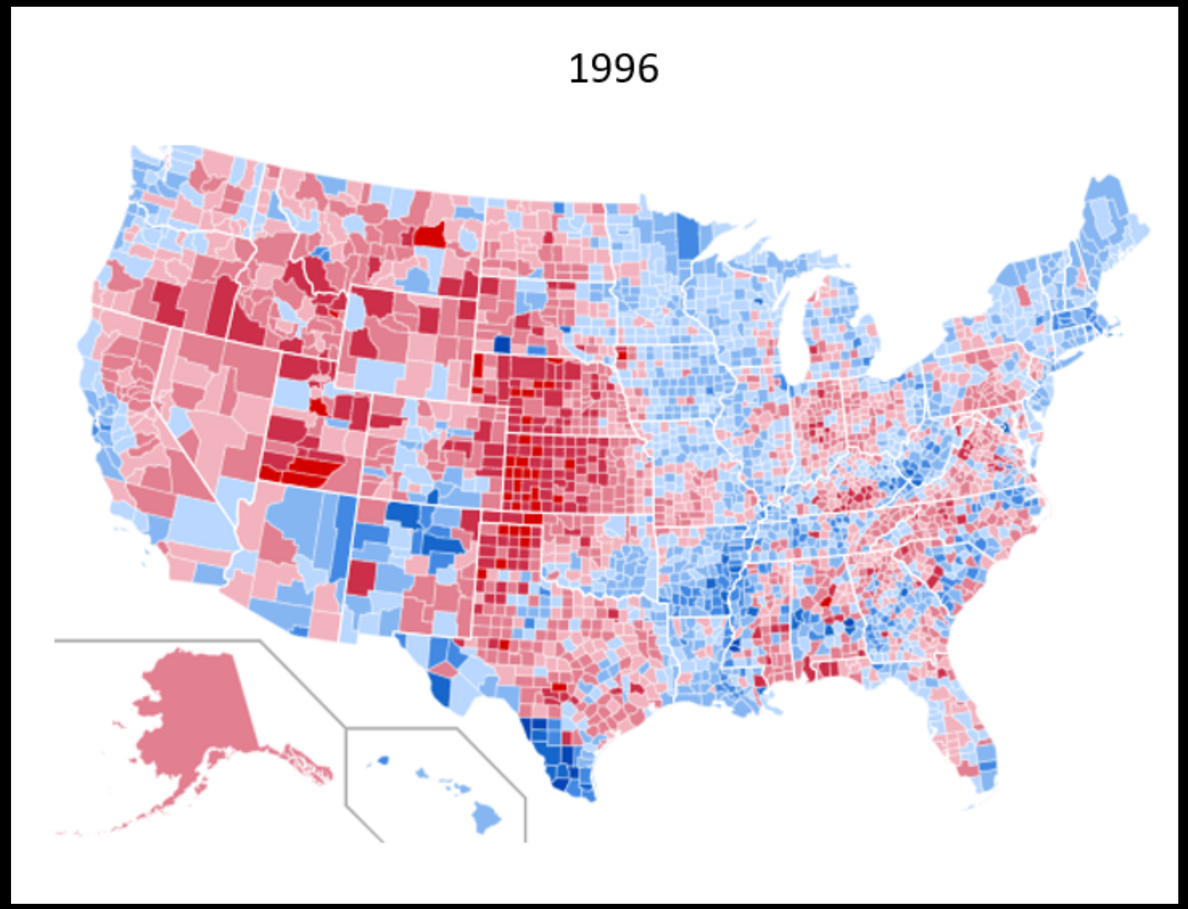




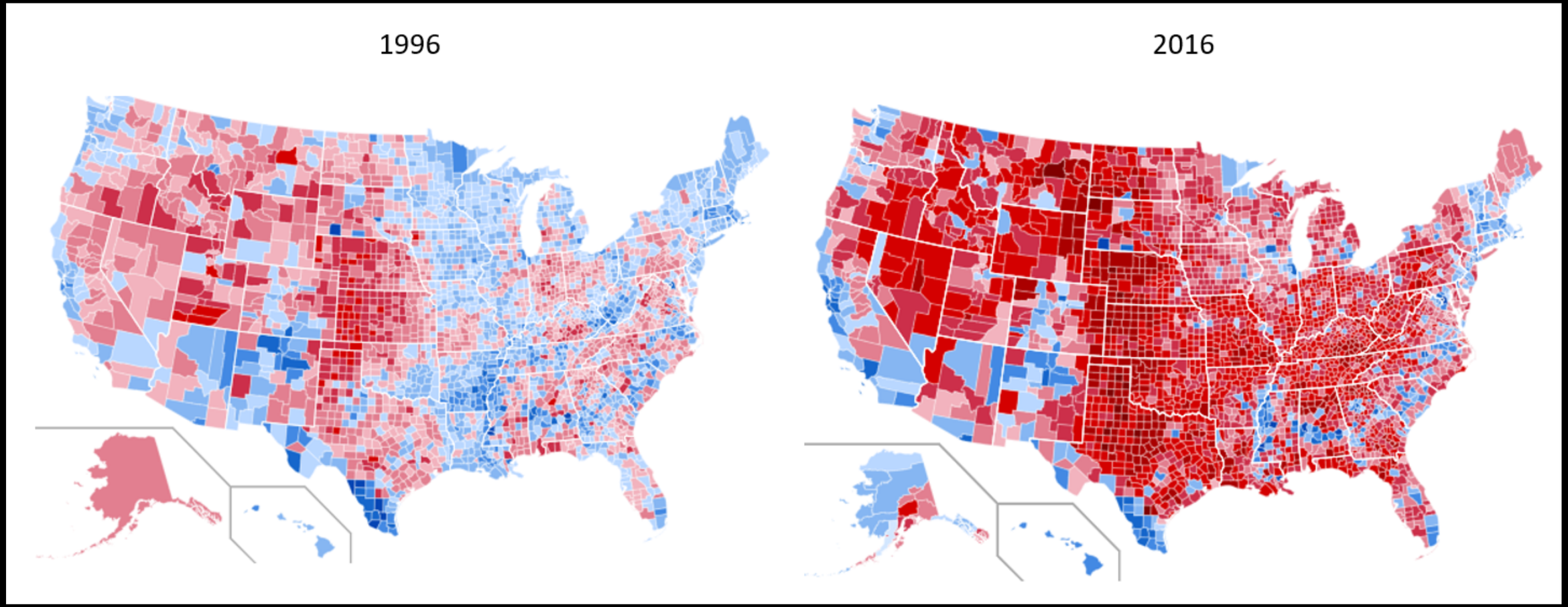
Hutchins Commission

2. Common socio-political spaces

Spatial Polarization

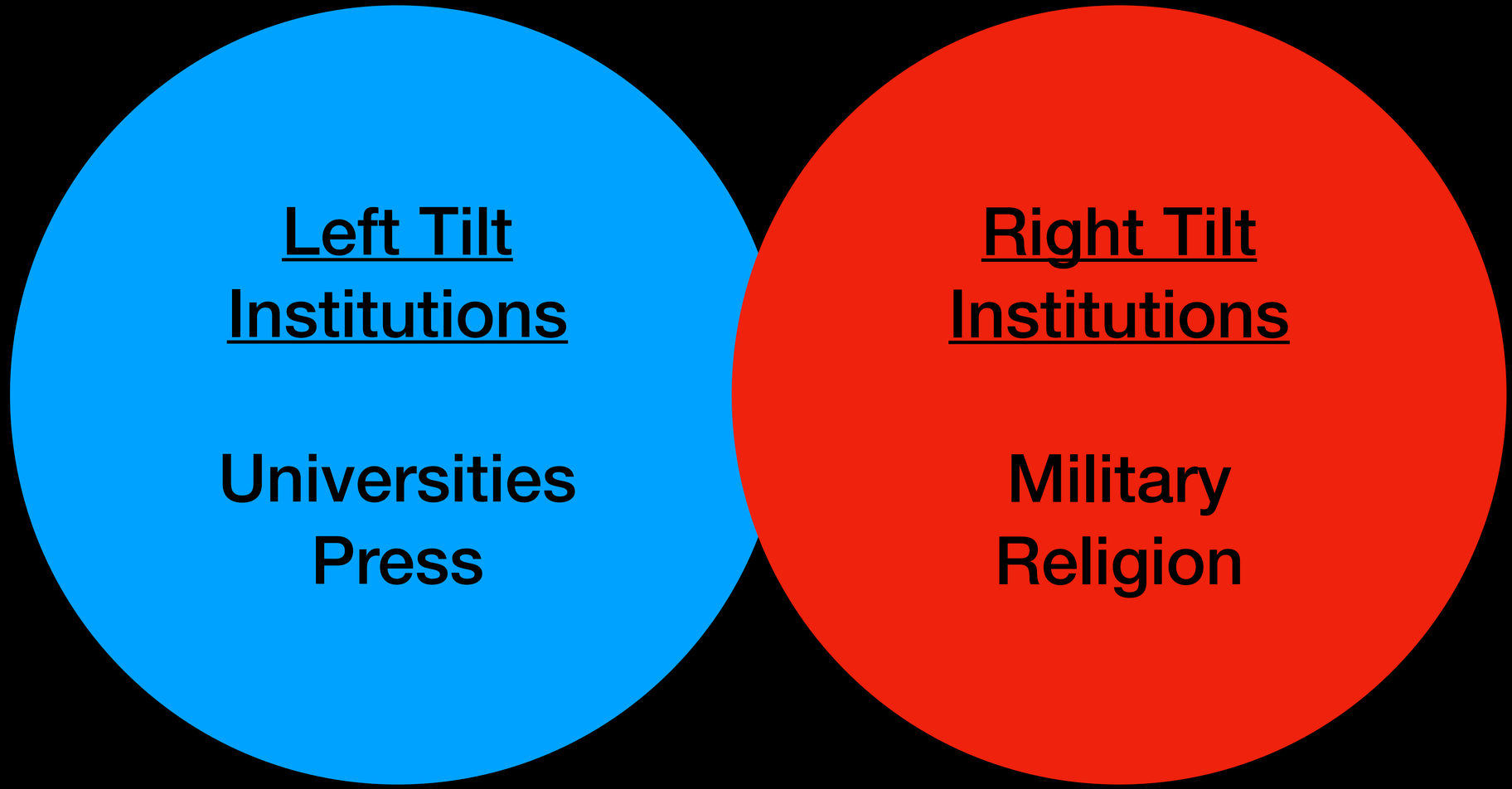


Spatial Polarization



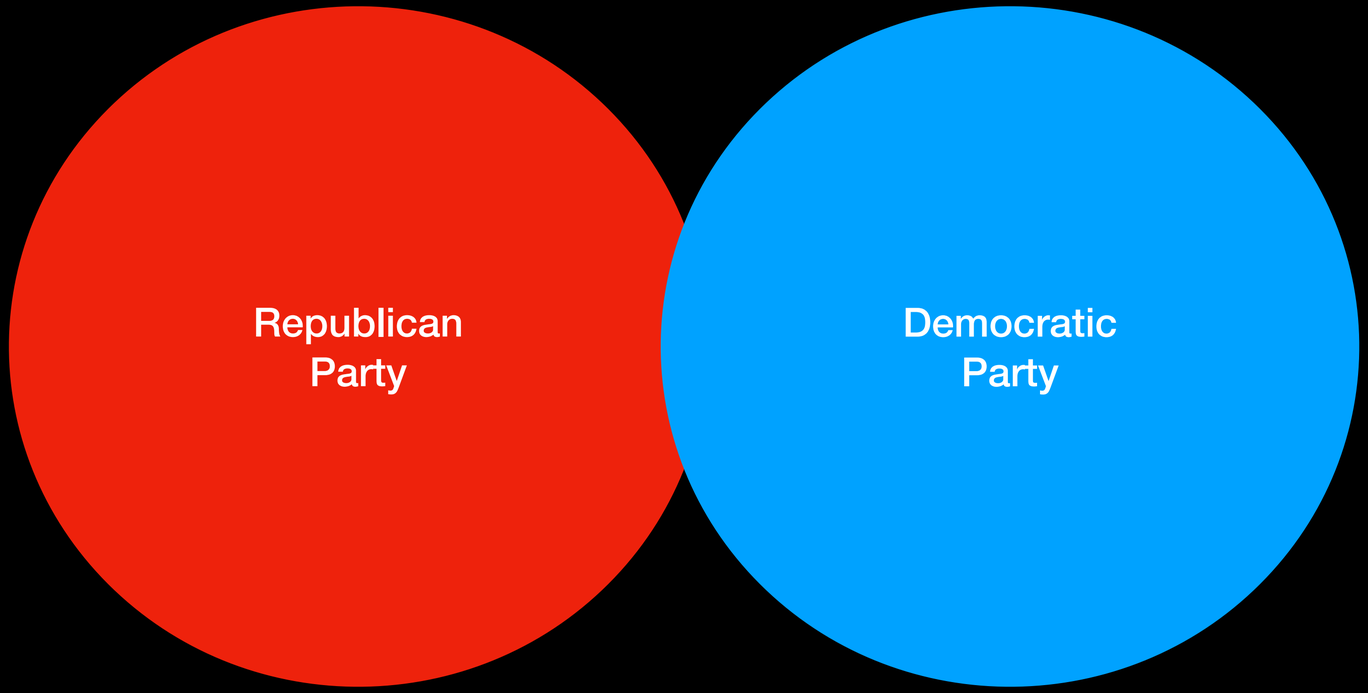
Institutional Polarization

Institutional Polarization



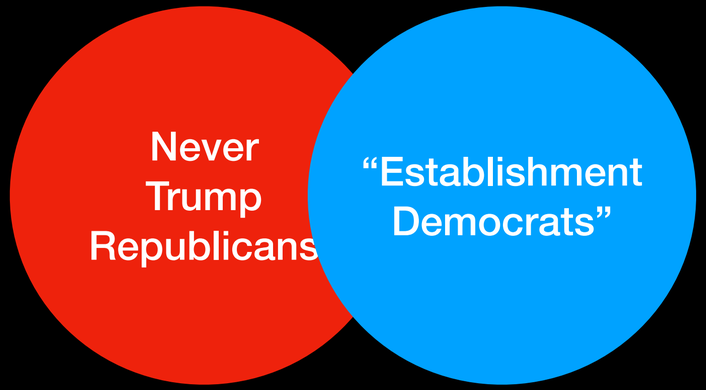
3. Beyond two parties

1976-2016 US Politics



2020+ Politics?

2020+ Politics?



2020+ Politics?

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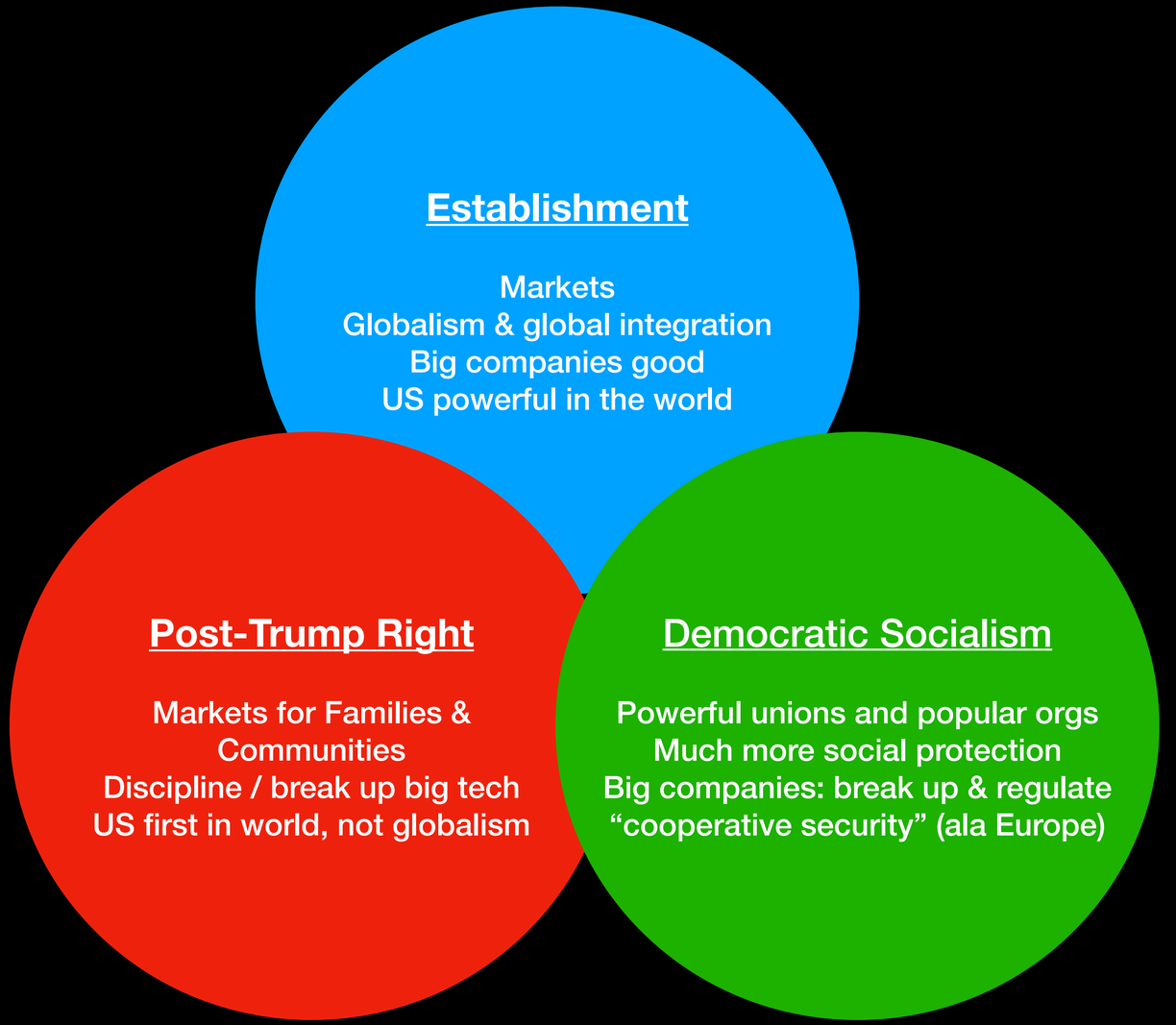
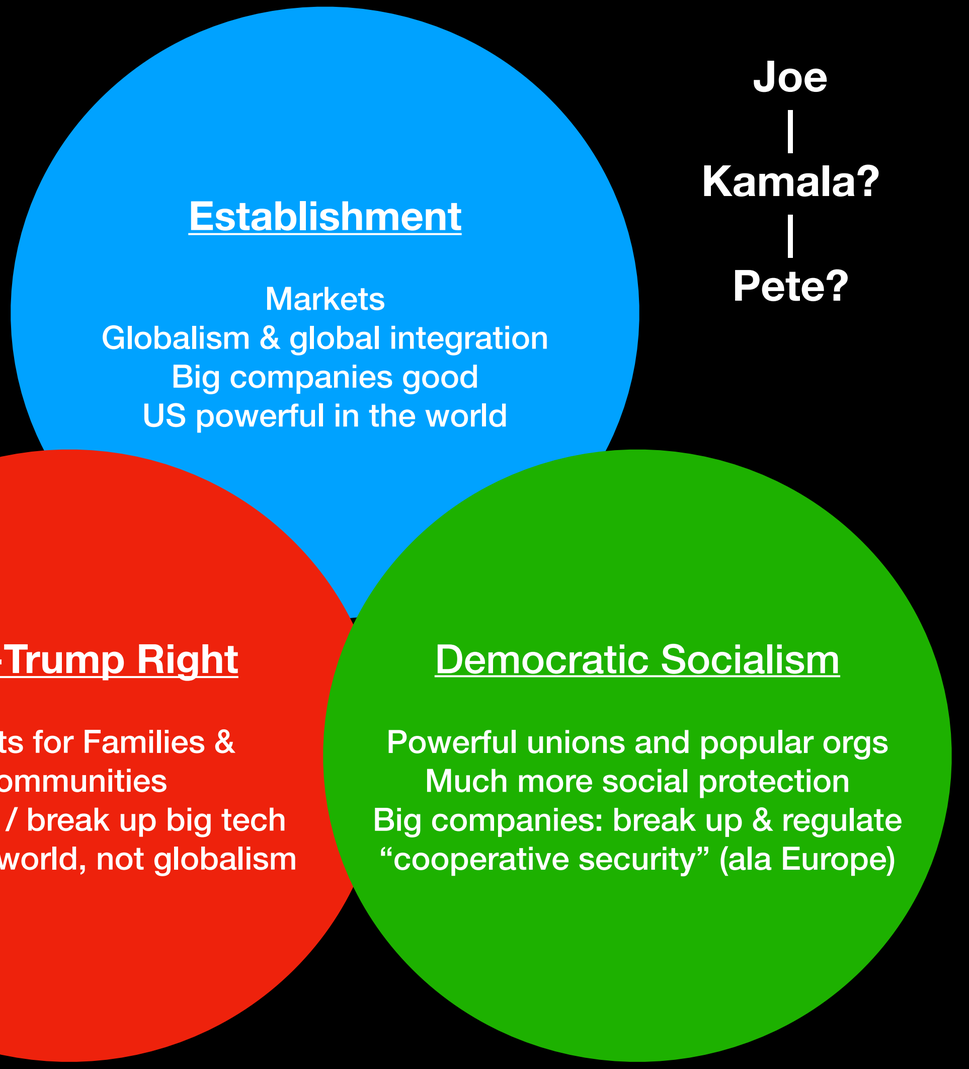


2020+ Politics?



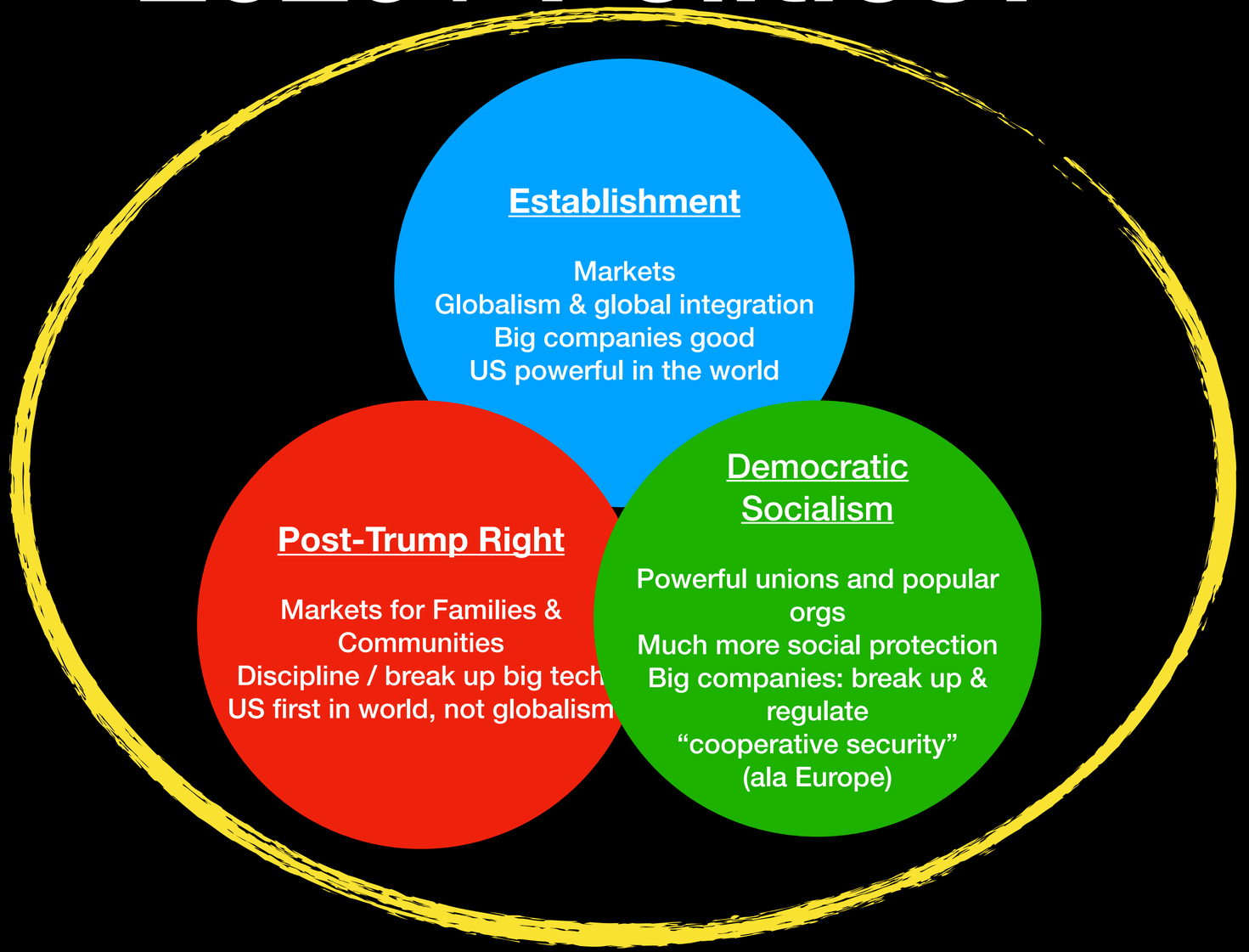
Joe
|
Kamala?
|
Pete?

Donald
|
Ron (DeSantis)/ Ted (Cruz)??

Bernie & Liz
|
AOC?

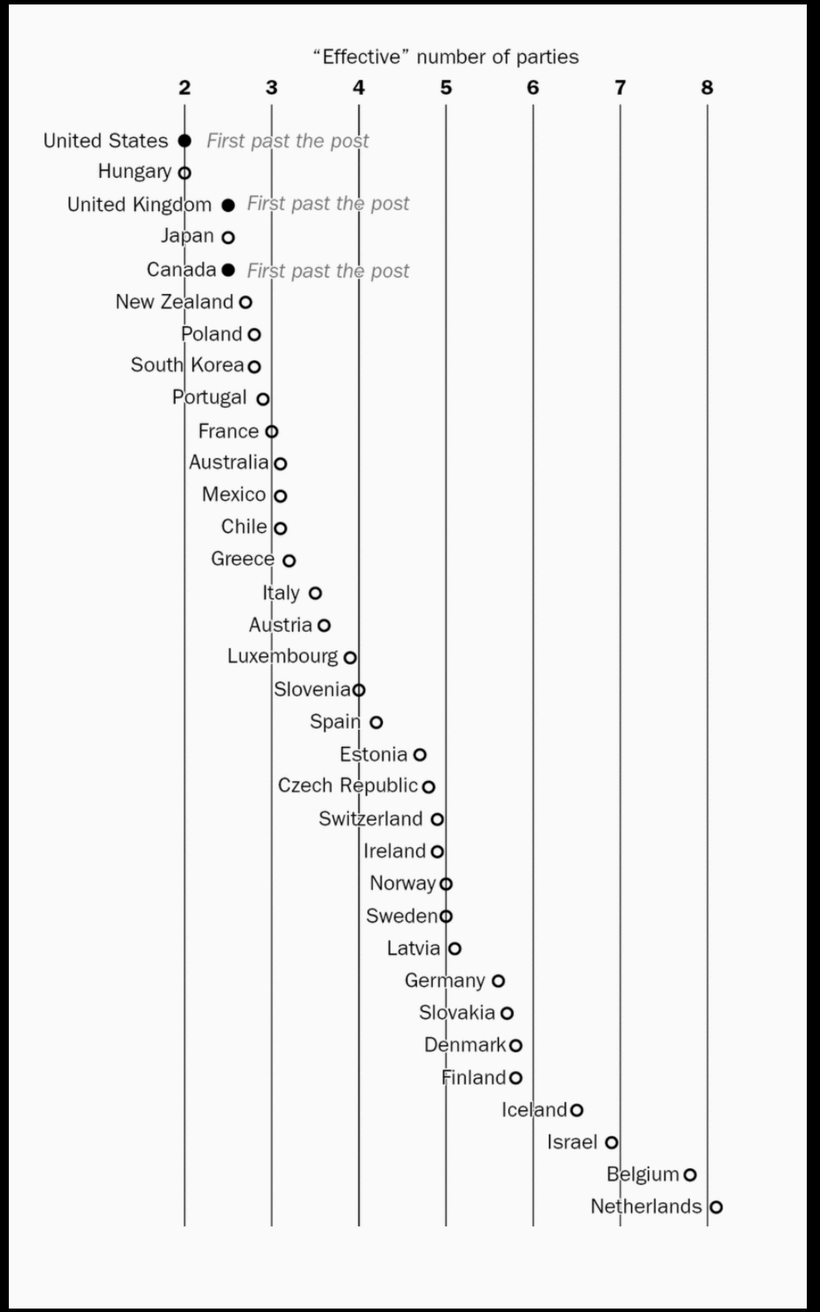
Josh Hawley (R - MO) + Bernie Sanders (D - VT) for
$1,200 COVID relief, December 10, 2020

2020+ Politics?



Multi-viewpoint Democracy

- Ranked-Choice Voting
- Cumulative Voting
- Party Fusion
- Multi-member districts
- 3rd, 4th Parties
- Top-Two Primaries
- Intra-party democracy



Multi-viewpoint Democracy

- ☑ Ranked-Choice Voting
- ☑ Cumulative Voting
- ☑ Party Fusion
- ☑ Multi-member districts
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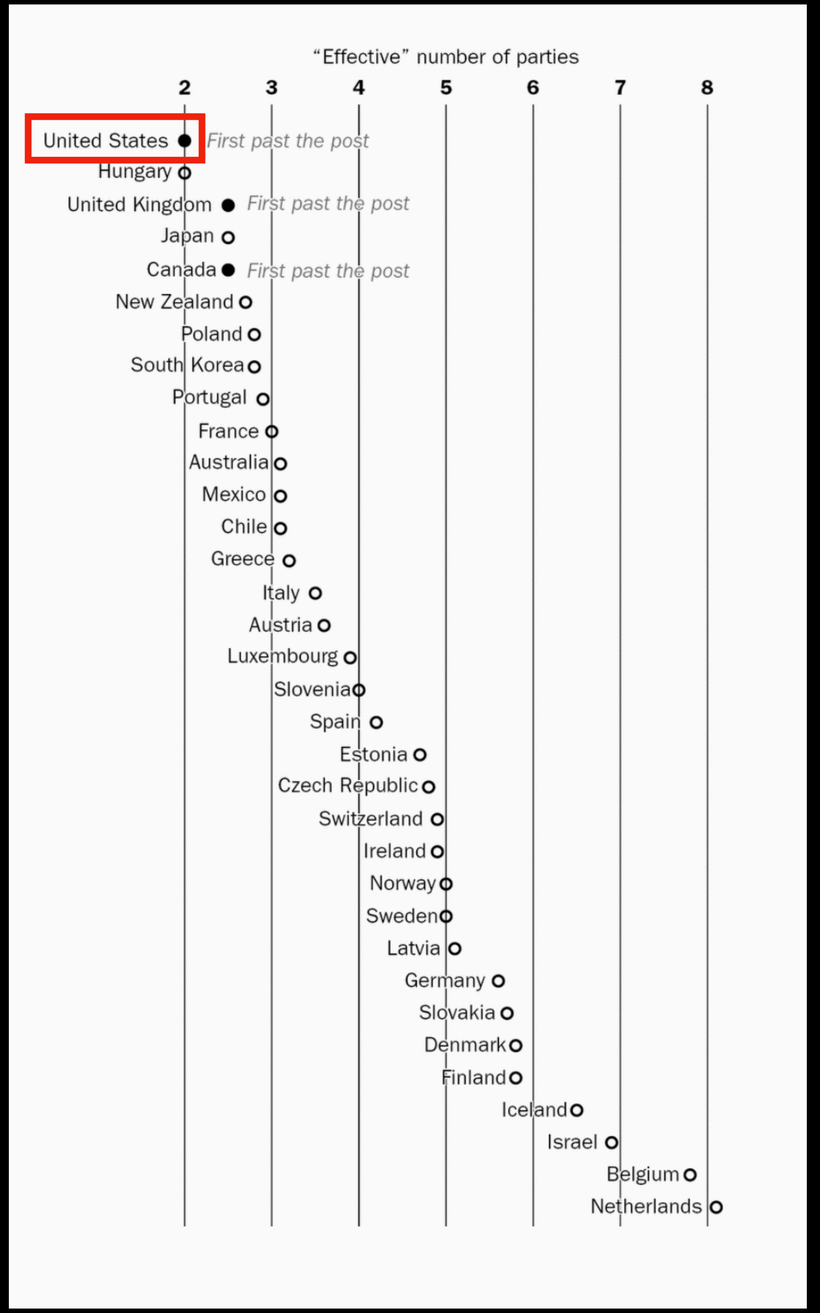
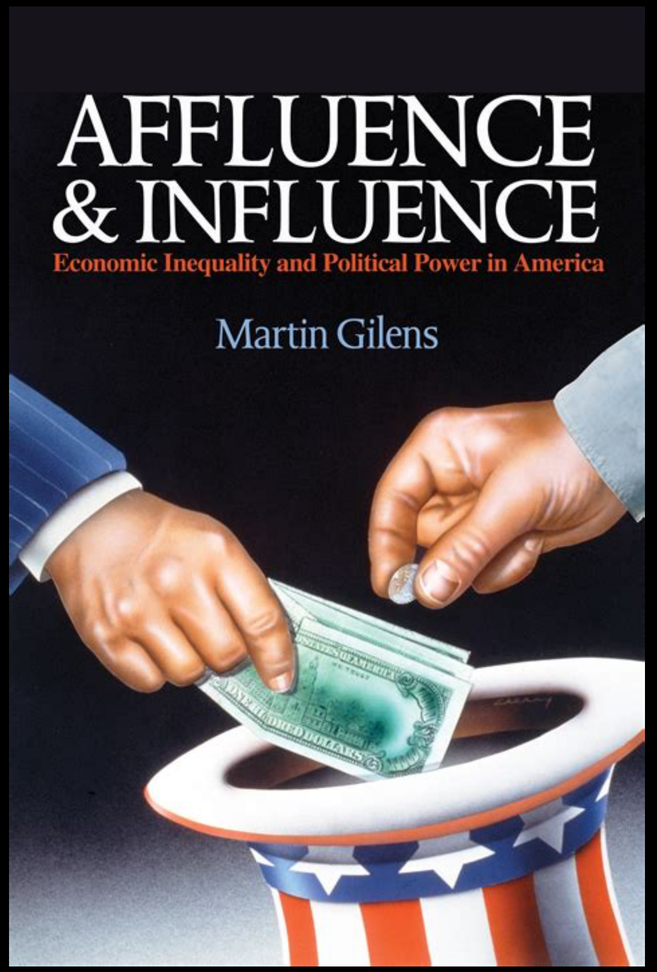
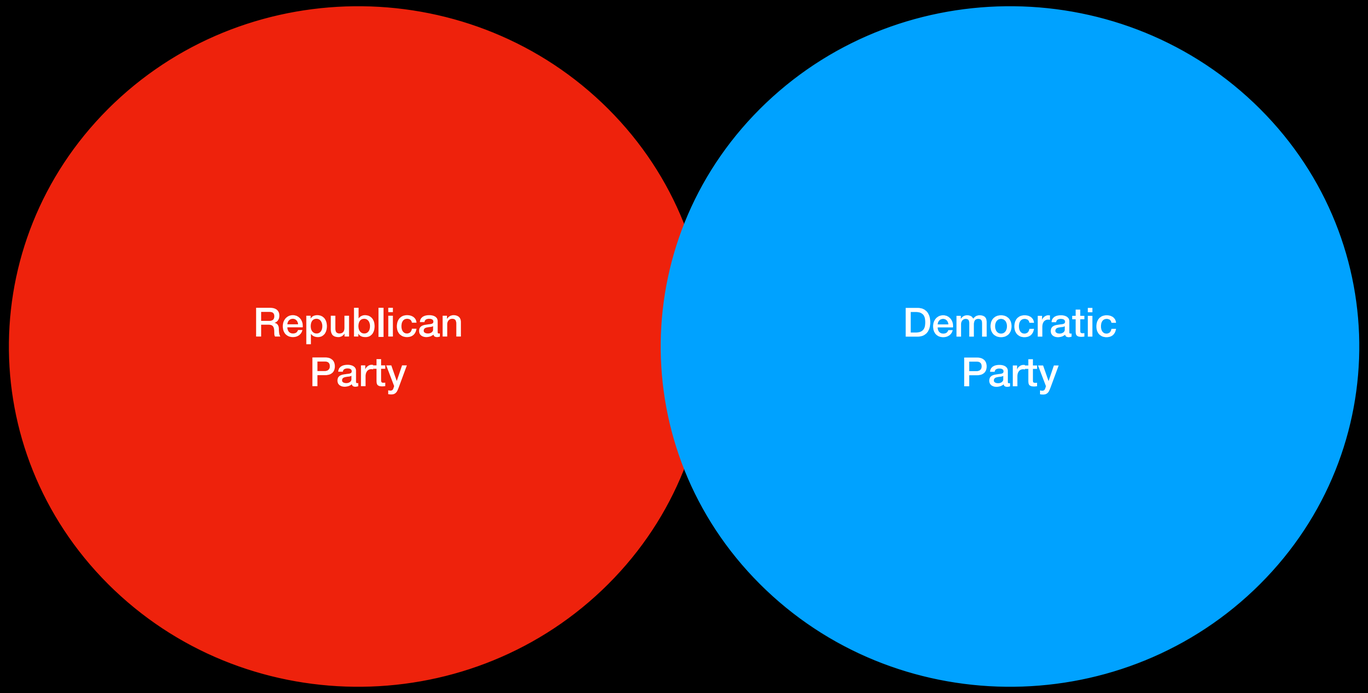


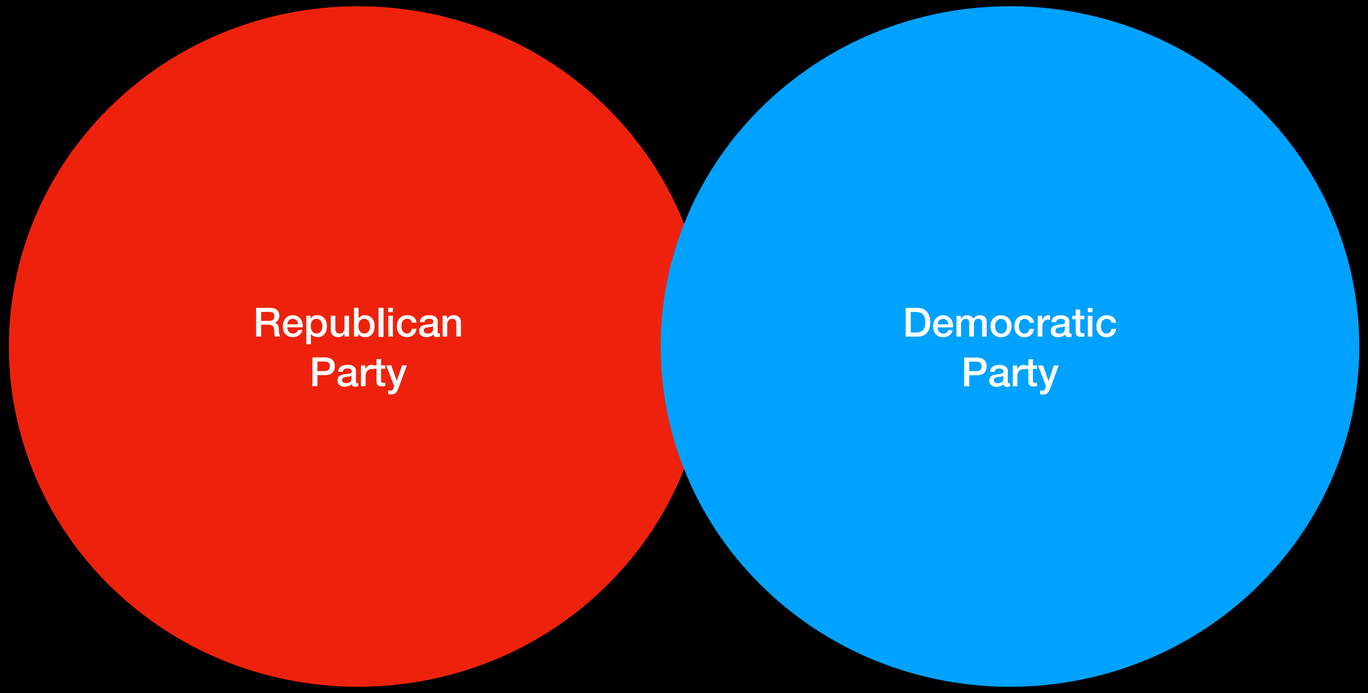
4. Political equality & responsiveness


AFFLUENCE
& INFLUENCE
Economic Inequality and Political Power in America
Martin Gilens

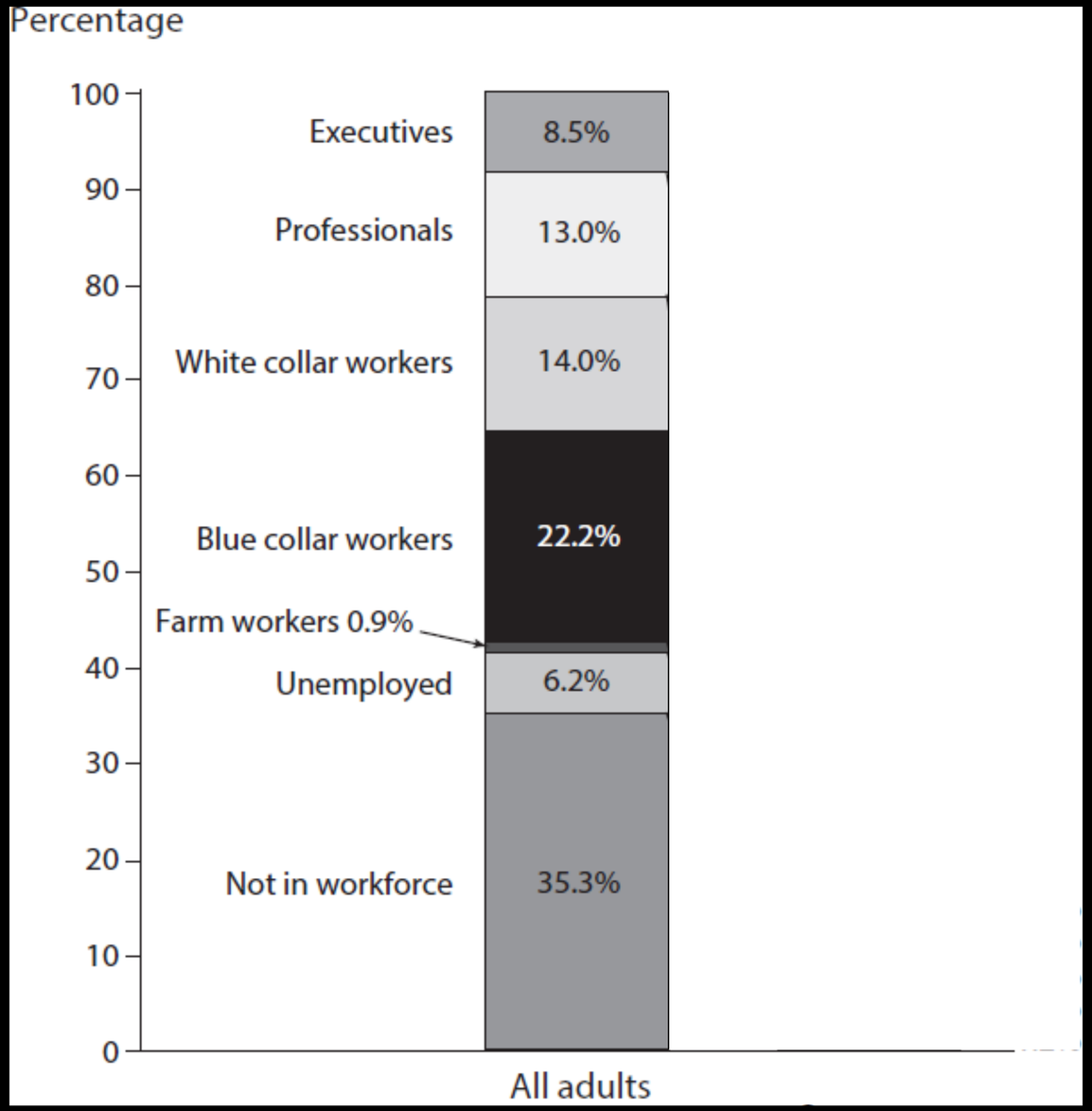
1976-2016 US Politics



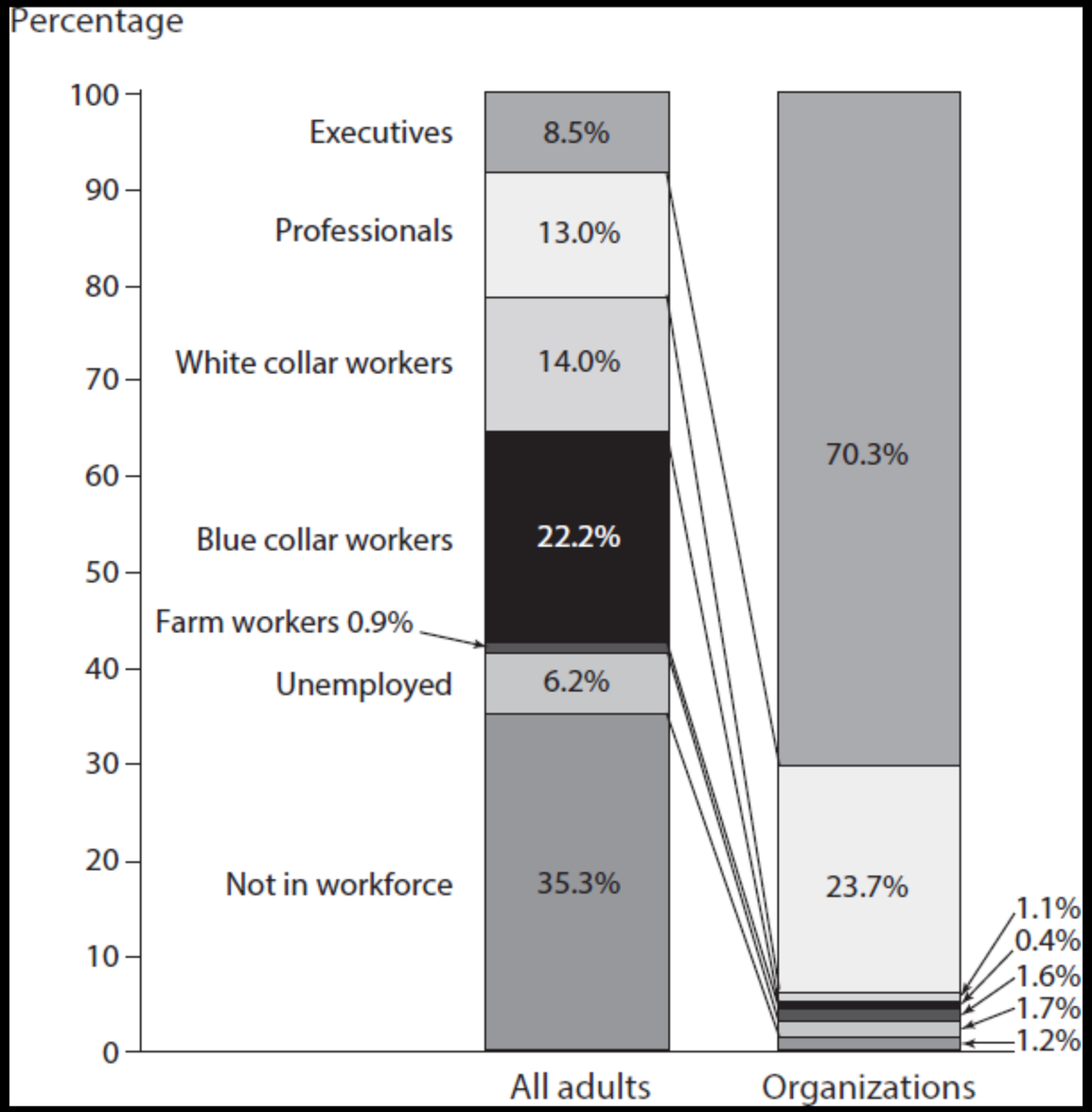
1976-2016 US Politics



But this was democracy for the top 10%, according to Affluence and Influence.

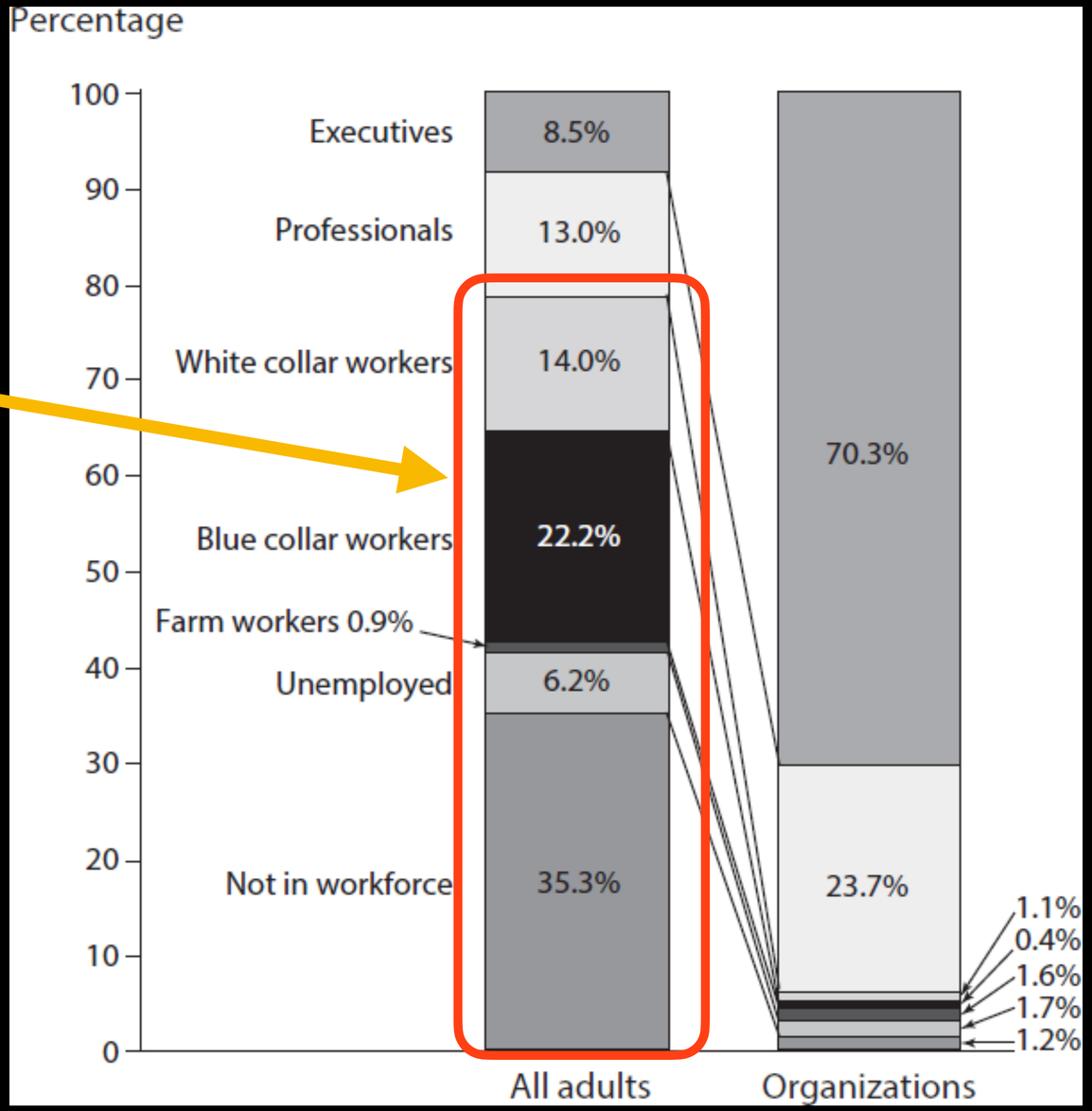


Source: *Unequal and Unrepresented* by Schlozman, Brady, and Verba (2018)



Source: *Unequal and Unrepresented* by Schlozman, Brady, and Verba (2018)

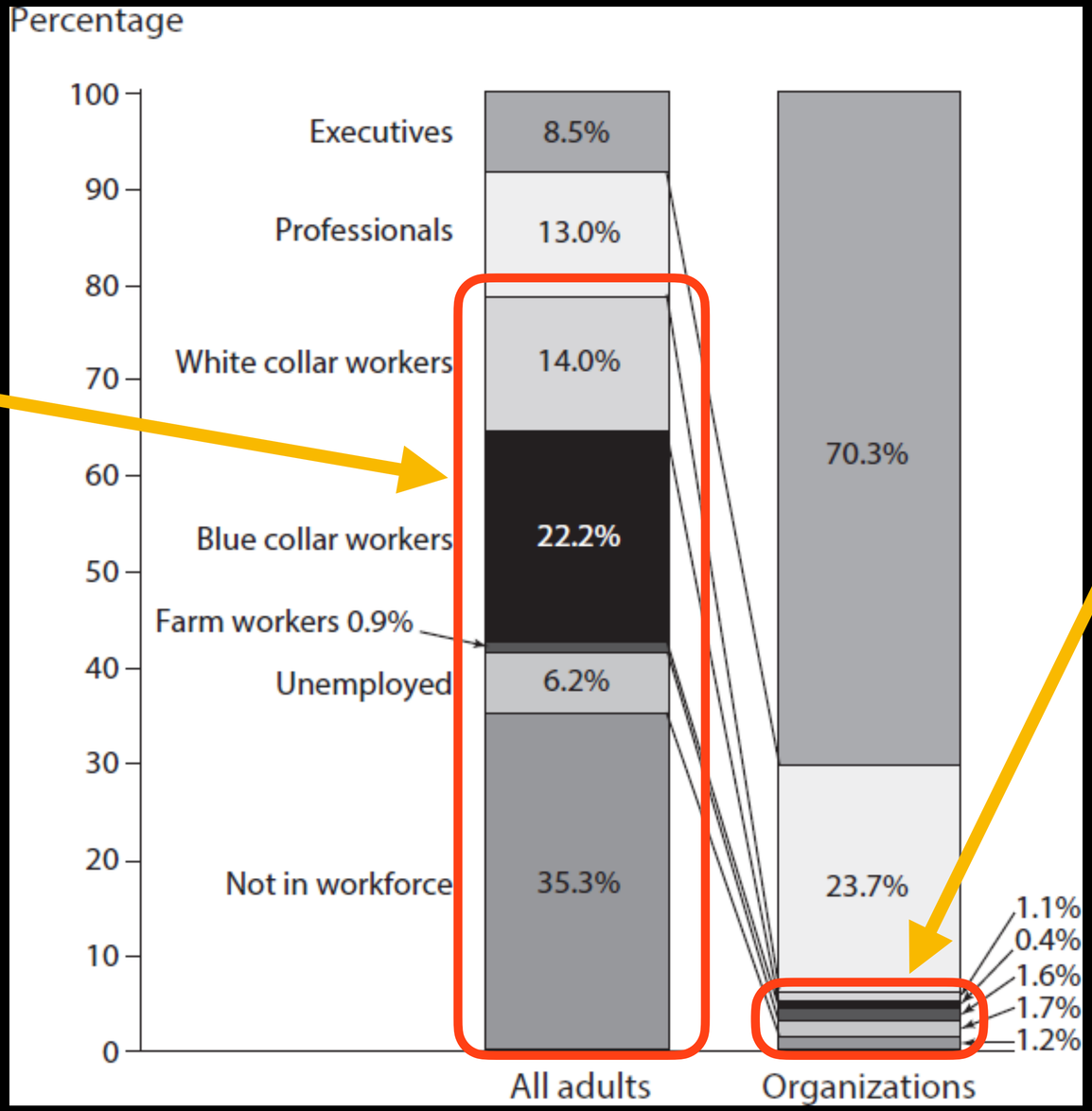
78% of People



Source: *Unequal and Unrepresented* by Schlozman, Brady, and Verba (2018)

78% of People

Get 6% of Groups (!)



Source: *Unequal and Unrepresented* by Schlozman, Brady, and Verba (2018)

An Agenda for American Democracy

1. Good information sphere
2. Common socio-political spaces
3. Beyond two parties
4. Political equality & responsiveness

Fragility	Consequences	Toward Democracy
Truth Rules of the game Common good	Illegitimate politics Political violence Inability to solve existential problems	Good information sphere Common socio-political spaces Beyond two parties Equal & responsive politics