BRIDGING THE GAP YEARS 1969-2019

HISTORY MUSEUM AT THE CASTLE

Introduction

THE GAPS

Bridging the GAP Years, 1969-2019 is designed to explore growing divisions in our society. Over the past 50 years political polarization, income inequality, and feelings of social isolation have increased while our collective empathy has declined. *Bridging the GAP* presents that data and challenges citizens to creatively address those "gaps." Most importantly, the exhibit provides space for visitors to congregate, reflect, and engage with one another.

THE GOAL

The goal of *Bridging the GAP* is to inspire a greater sense of community cohesion by highlighting the historical context for what presently divides us. After exploring the exhibit, we invite you to sit and engage in thoughtful Living Room Conversations. We hope that through conversation participants build relationships that increase understanding, reveal common ground, and lead to collaborative problem solving.

THANK YOU

Helping Donors Share Community Foundation FOR THE FOX VALLEY REGION, INC.

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

If your organization is interested in hosting this exhibit for free, please contact Chief Curator Dustin Mack at dustin@myhistorymuseum.org.

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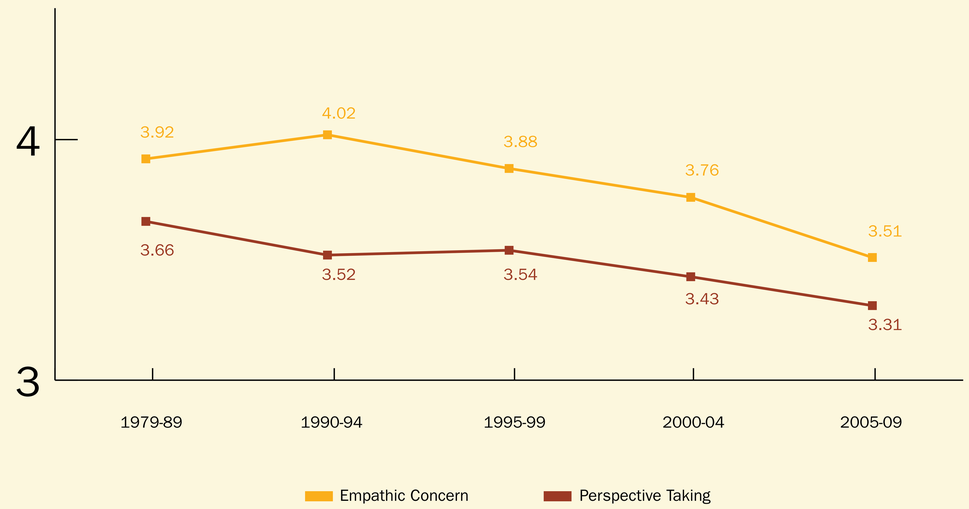
Decline of Empathy

EMPATHY IN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Source: Personality and Social Psychology Review, "Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time," 2011.



GENEROSITY IN SELECT WISCONSIN CITIES

Source: The Chronicle of Philanthropy, "Generosity in America's Cities," August 2012.

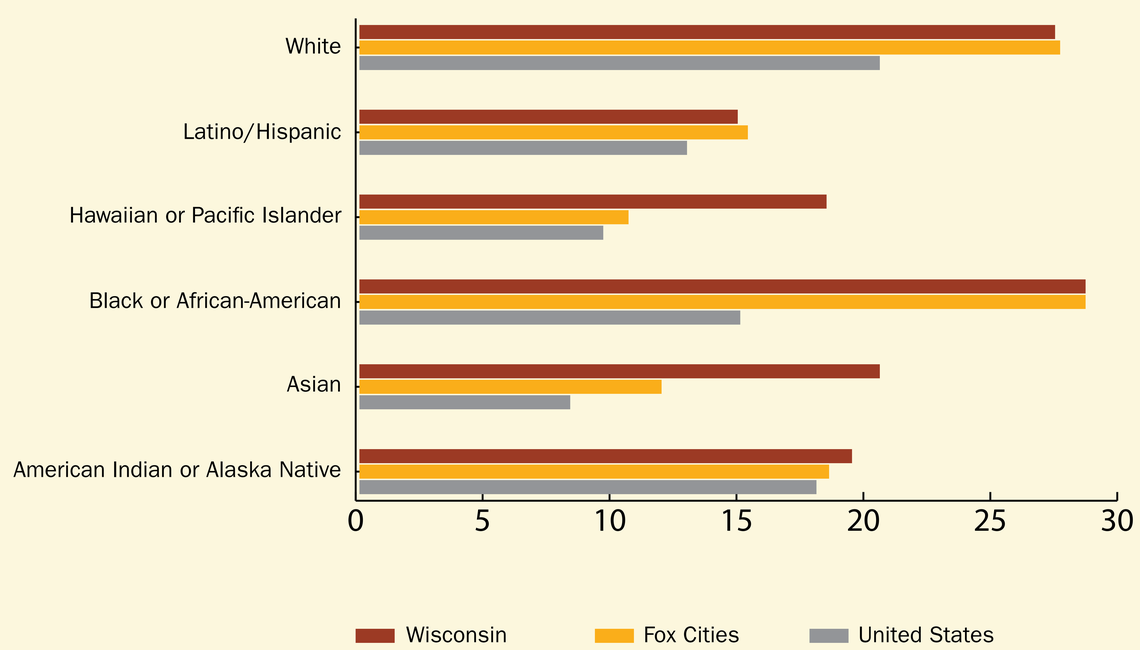
	National Rank*	Median Contribution	Median Percent Given
Appleton	339	$1,721	3.30%
Oshkosh	347	$1,583	3.20%
Green Bay	353	$1,507	3.00%
Madison	354	$1,733	3.00%

**National ranking of America's 366 major metropolitan areas.*

A comparison of college students between 1979 and 2009 revealed a sharp decrease in measurable empathy. The decline of both empathic concern (sympathy for the misfortune of others) and perspective taking (imagining another's point of view) suggests students became less likely to identify with the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of other people. Parallel trends in American society show an uptick in individualistic and aggressive behaviors. Since 2000 the percentage of households making charitable donations has dropped over 10% and online bullying has proliferated.

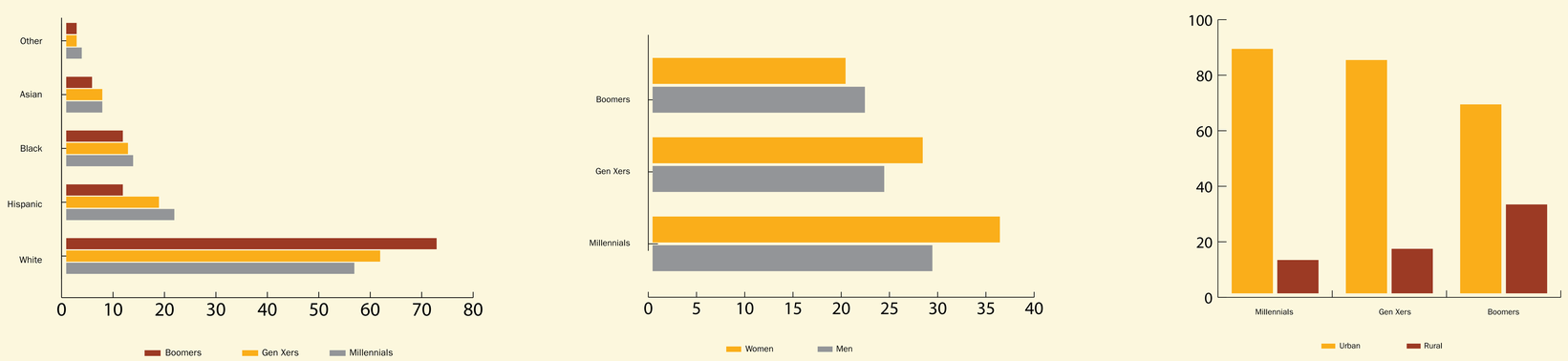
BULLYING ONLINE BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2013-2015

Source: Fox Cities LIFE Study, 2016.



MILLENNIALS, GEN-XERS AND BOOMERS COMPARED

Source: Pew Research Center, "How Millennials Today Compare with Their Grandparents 50 Years Ago," March 2018.



**Millennials (Born 1981-1996), Gen-Xers (Born 1965-1980), Boomers (Born 1946-1964)*

The decline of empathy has made it more difficult for many Americans to relate to a changing society. Over the past 50 years generational differences and demographic shifts have diversified the nation. Political and economic divisions have intensified cultural changes leaving a growing number of Americans feeling isolated.

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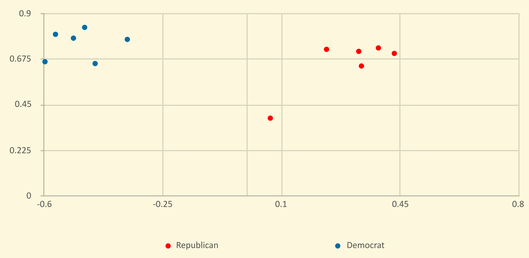
Political Polarization

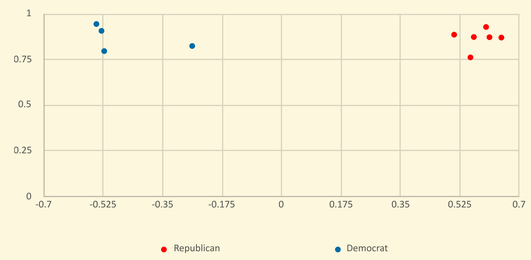
WISCONSIN'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

Source: Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database. https://voteview.com/ (accessed January 2019)

91ST CONGRESS 1969–1970



115TH CONGRESS 2017–2018



"WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WILL BE THE BIGGEST THREAT TO THE COUNTRY IN THE FUTURE: BIG BUSINESS, BIG LABOR, OR BIG GOVERNMENT?"

Source: Gallup, "Americans Still See Big Government as Top Threat," January 2017 and Gallup, "Long-Term Gallup Poll Trends," December 1999.

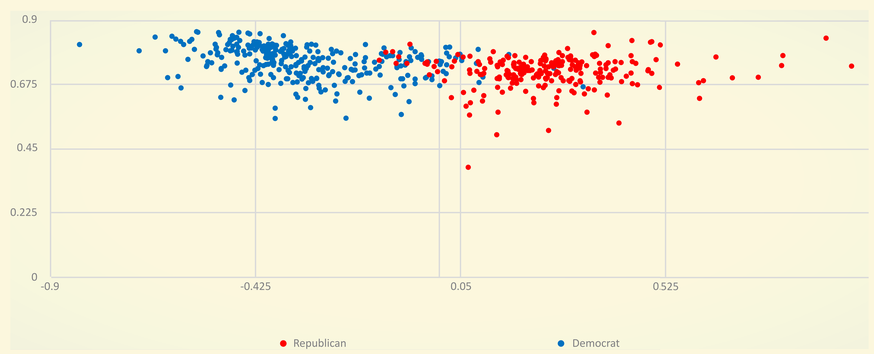
	1968	2016
Big Government	46%	67%
Big Business	26%	26%
Big Labor	12%	5%

Since the 1960s Gallup Polling has asked Americans whether they believe big business, big labor, or big government is the biggest threat to the country. The general public has consistently identified "big government" as the largest threat, a trend that has steadily increased by more than 20%. Meanwhile concerns about "big business" and "big labor" have fluctuated. Republicans have overwhelmingly identified big government as the chief threat in each survey. A small majority of Democrats have also seen big government as the dominate threat, followed closely by worries about big business.

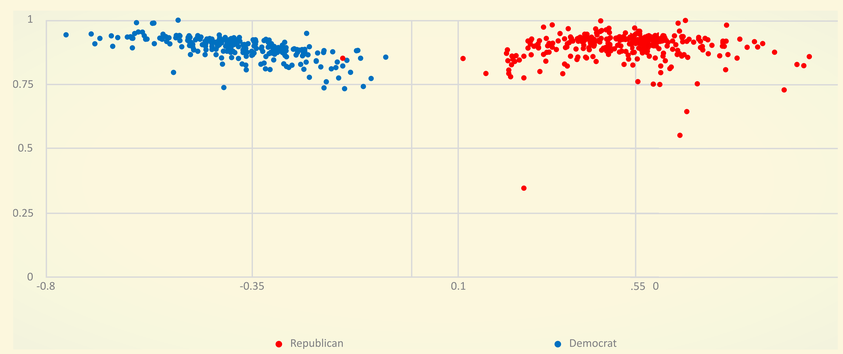
THE GROWING PARTISAN DIVIDE

Source: Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database. https://voteview.com/ (accessed January 2019)

91ST CONGRESS 1969–1970

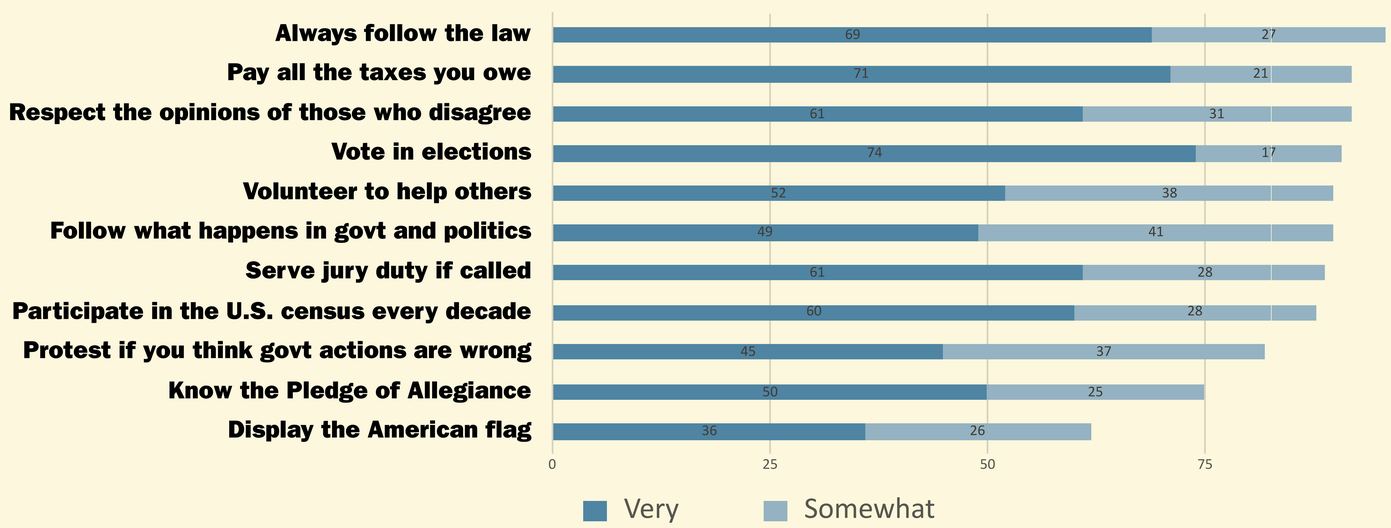


115TH CONGRESS 2018



WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO GOOD CITIZENSHIP?

Source: Pew Research Center, "The Public, the Political System and American Democracy," April 2018.



The partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans has varied over time. In 1969 ideological differences between the political parties existed, yet centrists shared overlapping beliefs and voted accordingly. This remained true until the 1990s when Democrats and Republicans began growing estranged. Members of Congress have become ideologically divided and more likely to vote with their own party. Despite this political polarization, Americans largely agree on basic democratic ideals and the responsibilities of being a US citizen.

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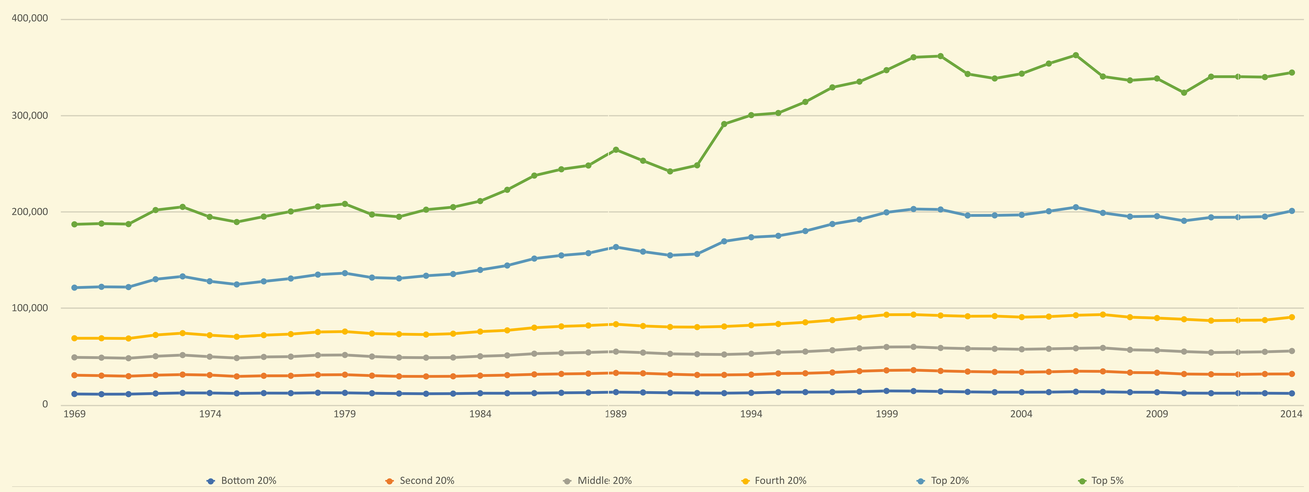
Income Inequality

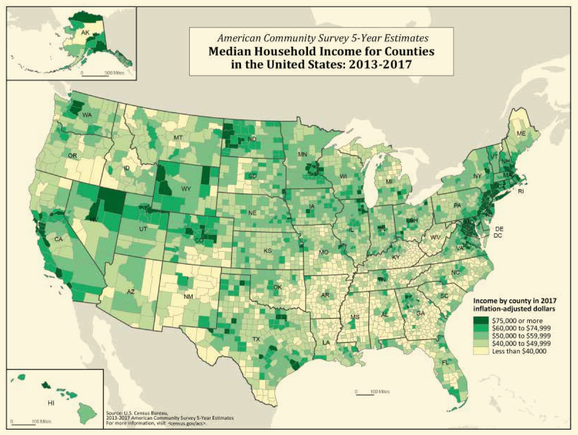
MEAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILES, 1969-2014

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1968 to 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME FOR COUNTIES IN THE UNITED STATES: 2013-2017

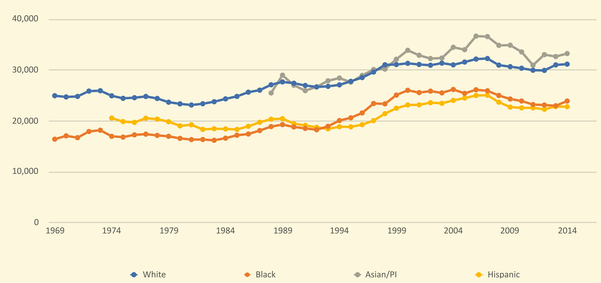
Source: US Census Bureau, "2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates" December 2018.



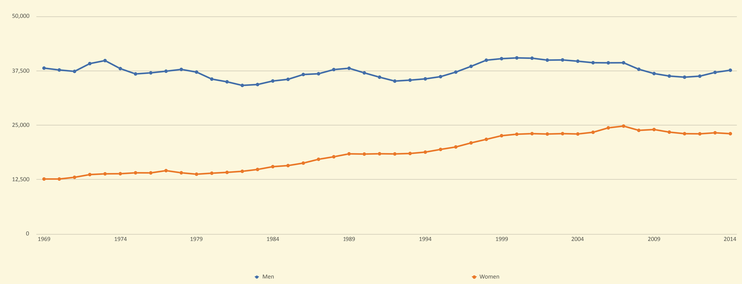
MEDIAN INDIVIDUAL INCOME 1969-2014

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2018 Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplements.

MEDIAN INDIVIDUAL INCOME BY RACE ETHNIC ORIGIN 1969–2014

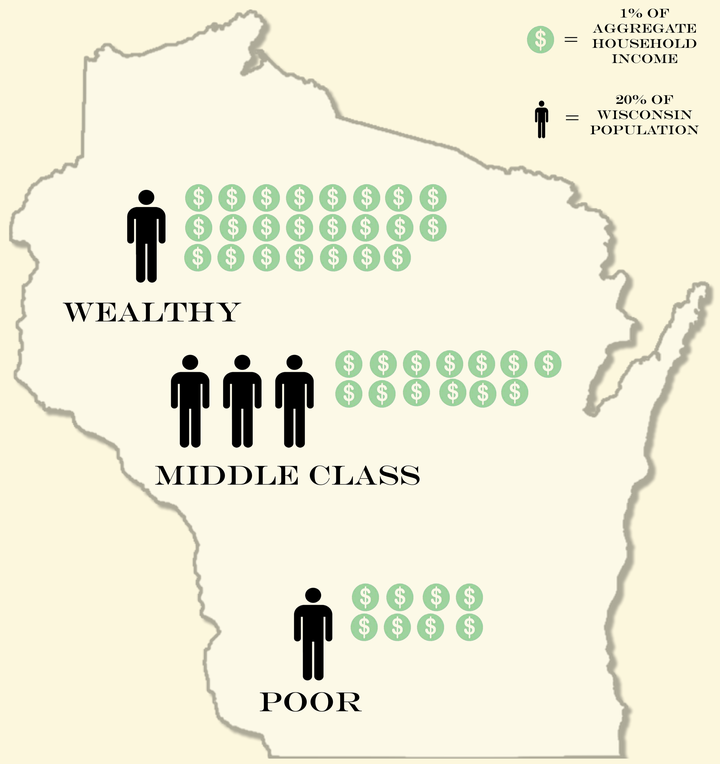


MEDIAN INDIVIDUAL INCOME BY SEX 1969-2014



MEDIAN INCOME GROWTH IN WISCONSIN, 2007-2016

Source: 24/7 Wall Street, "Economic Disparity: 10 States Where the Middle Class is Being Left Behind," March 2018.



Economic prosperity in the United States is not evenly distributed. Before 1980 income growth nationally was roughly equivalent. That has changed rapidly over the last 30 years. Urban economies on the coasts have prospered much faster than cities and rural communities in the heartland. The decline of blue-collar industries and population shifts have accelerated this trend.

Since the 1970s economic mobility in the United States has declined. After WWII 90% of children could expect to move up the income ladder. While the median household income has risen modestly, the distance between income levels has increased rapidly. This income inequality has made moving up the economic ladder more difficult. In 2012 children had about a 50% chance to earn more than their parents. A child's gender and race, as well as education and location, dramatically impact earning potential and economic mobility.

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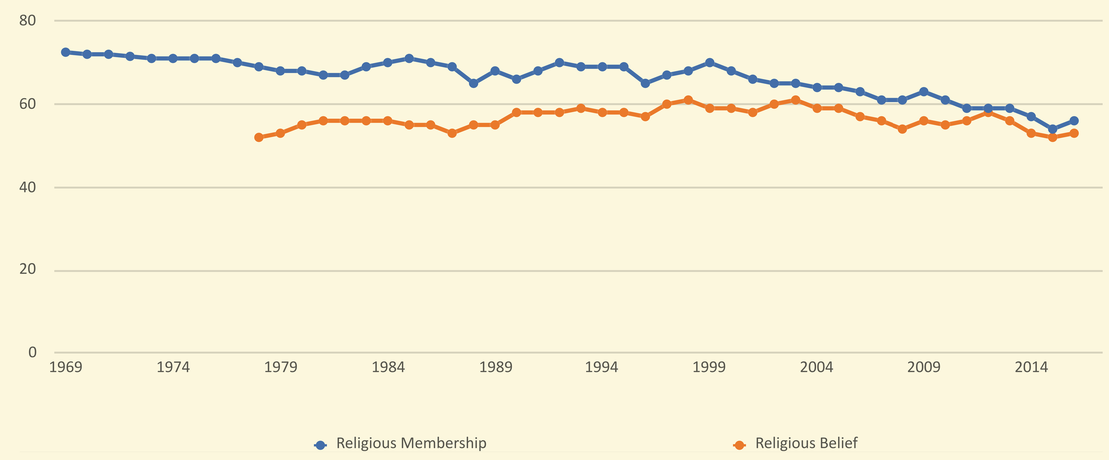
Social Isolation

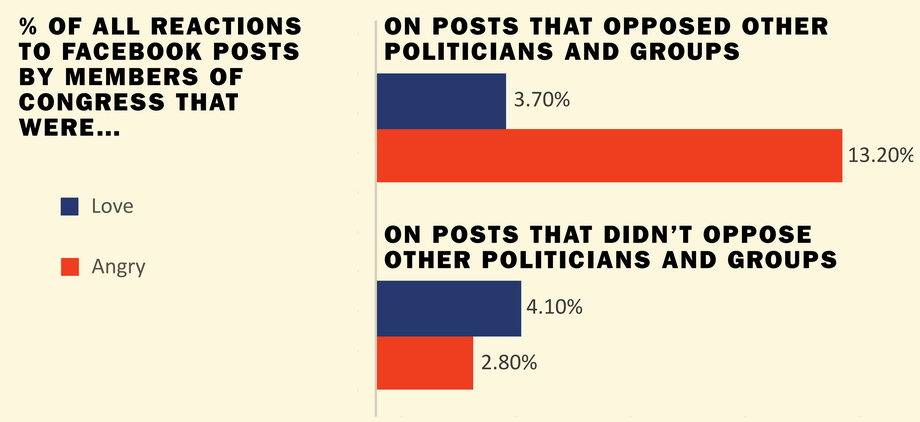
RELIGION IN AMERICA, 1969-2016

Source: Gallup, "Five Key Findings on Religion in the US," December 2016.



CONFRONTATIONAL REACTIONS, 2016-2017

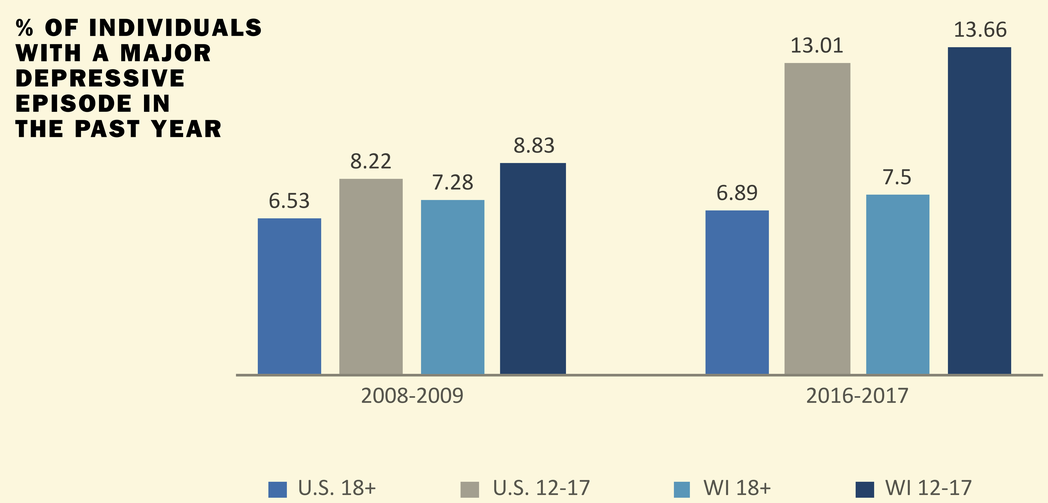
Source: Pew Research Center, "'Anger Topped 'Love' when Facebook Users Reacted to Lawmakers' Posts after 2016 Election," July 2018.



Americans are now more detached from major institutions – political parties, religion, the military, and marriage – than previous generations. Membership at places of worship, for example, has been on a steady decline since 2000, although Americans' report religion has not lost importance in their lives over that time. The lack of participation in these institutions has changed how Americans socialize and voice their opinions.

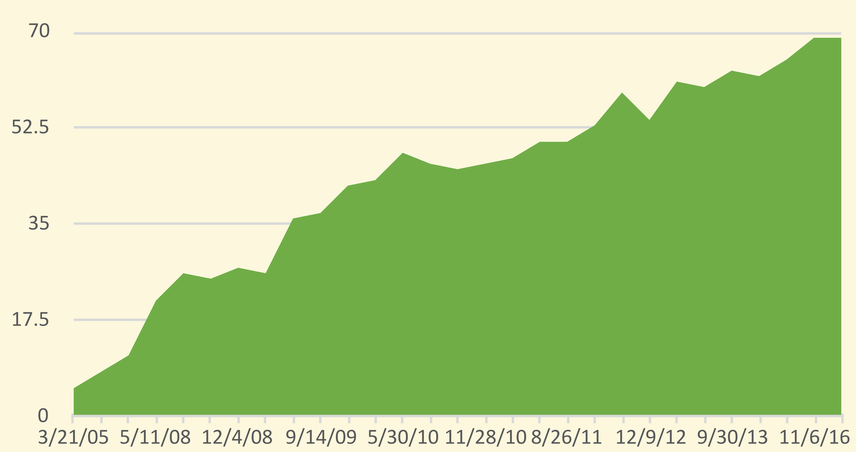
DEPRESSION ON THE RISE

Source: SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2017.



ADULTS WHO USE SOCIAL MEDIA, 2005-2018

Source: Pew Research Center, "Social Media Fact Sheet," February 2018.



As traditional institutions have fallen out of favor, Americans have adopted new ways to connect. 69% of adults now use social media including 88% of people 18-29 years old. This interconnectivity unites Americans throughout the country across political, economic, and racial demographics. Yet social media platforms have also contributed to the rise of online bullying, feelings of anger and social isolation, as well as a spike in depression rates.