

# Setting the Debate: Are Citizens Polarized Like Elites?

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# Teaching Agenda

- 1 Setting the Academic Debate: Are We Polarized?
- 2 Setting the Academic Debate: The Rebuttal
- 3 Polarization on Social “Non-Ideological” Issues?

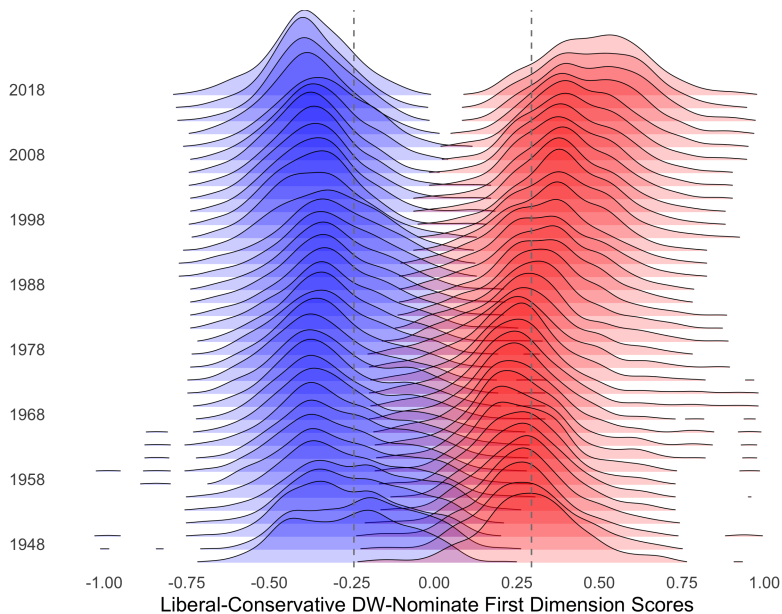
# How do citizens hold elites electorally accountable?



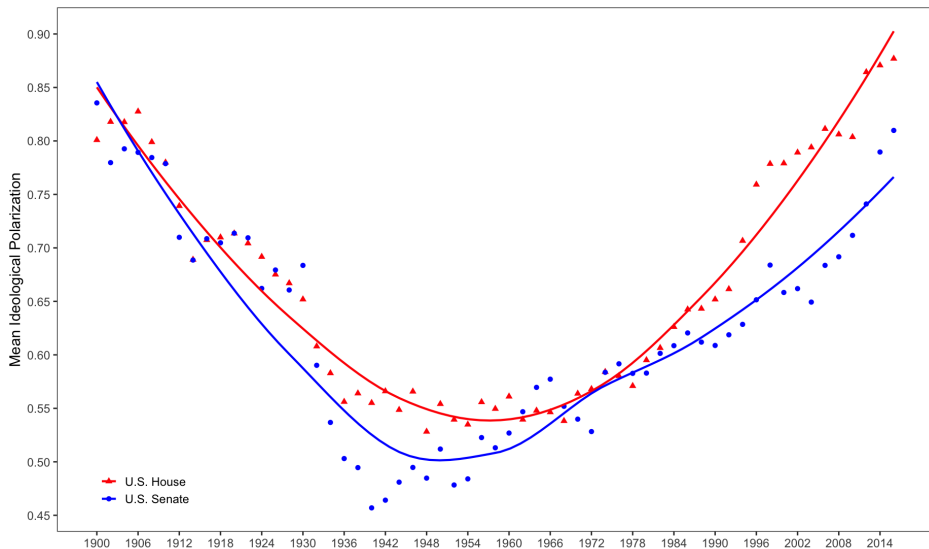
## Motivating Question

Do you think the American mass public are polarized on political issues? If so, what sorts of political issues? Do you think our political differences transcends “policy?”

# Setting the Stage: Elite Polarization



# Polarization in the Historical Perspective



*Polarization measured as absolute difference between first dimension DW-NOMINATE party means.*

# Setting the Academic Debate: Are We Polarized?

Abramowitz & Saunders (2008) outline the thesis of a “politically moderate public” by Fiorina:

- 1 Americans are ideologically moderate, holding a mix of conservative and liberal positions—thus no increase in ideological polarization in the mass public (*Moderation Point*)
- 2 “Partisan polarization is largely an elite phenomenon—only a thin layer of elected officials and activists are truly polarized in their views.” (*Partisan Polarization Point*)
- 3 “Cultural and political differences between red states and blue states are actually fairly small.” (*Political Geography Point*)
- 4 “Divisions within the public based on social characteristics such as age, race, gender, and religious affiliation have been diminishing.” (*Social Cleavages Point*)

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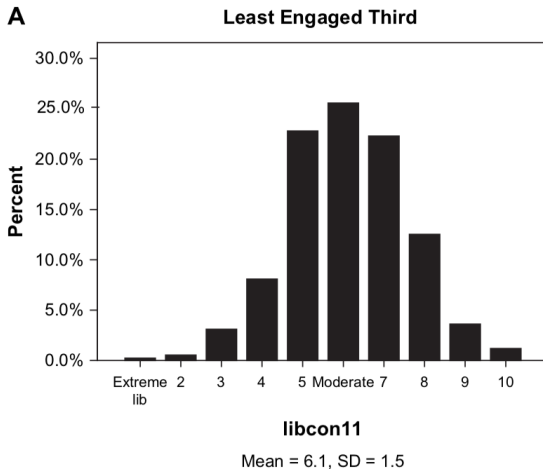
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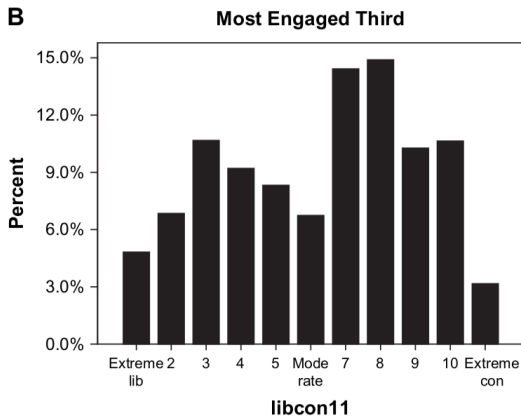
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# The Evidence: *Moderation?*

**FIGURE 1 Ideological Polarization of U.S. Electorate in 2004 by Level of Political Engagement**



# The Evidence: *Moderation?*

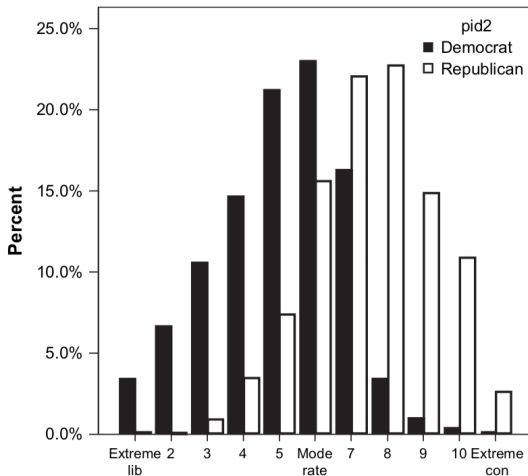


Mean = 6.2, SD = 2.8

Source: 2004 National Election Study

# The Evidence: *Partisan Polarization?*

**FIGURE 2 Liberal-Conservative Policy Preferences of Democratic and Republican Identifiers in 2004**



# The Evidence: *Partisan Polarization?*

**TABLE 3 Trends in Partisan Polarization on Issues, 1972-2004**

Issue	1972-1980	1984-1992	1996-2004
Aid to Blacks	.20	.27	.35
Abortion	-.03	.08	.18
Jobs/Living Standards	.28	.34	.40
Health Insurance	.25	.31	.39
Lib/Con Id	.42	.49	.62
Presidential Approval	.42	.56	.61
Average	.26	.34	.43

Note: Entries shown are average correlations (Kendall's tau) between issues and party identification (strong, weak, and independent Democrats vs. strong weak and independent Republicans).  
Source: American National Election Studies

# The Evidence: *Partisan Polarization?*

**TABLE 4   Policy Liberalism among Politically Engaged Partisans in 2004**

Issue	Democrats	Republicans
Abortion	67%	25%
Death Penalty	52%	10%
Diplomacy vs. Force	74%	15%
Environment vs. Jobs	74%	27%
Gay Marriage	69%	18%
Jobs/Living Standards	52%	9%
Health Insurance	66%	16%
Spending/Services	65%	18%

Source: 2004 National Election Study

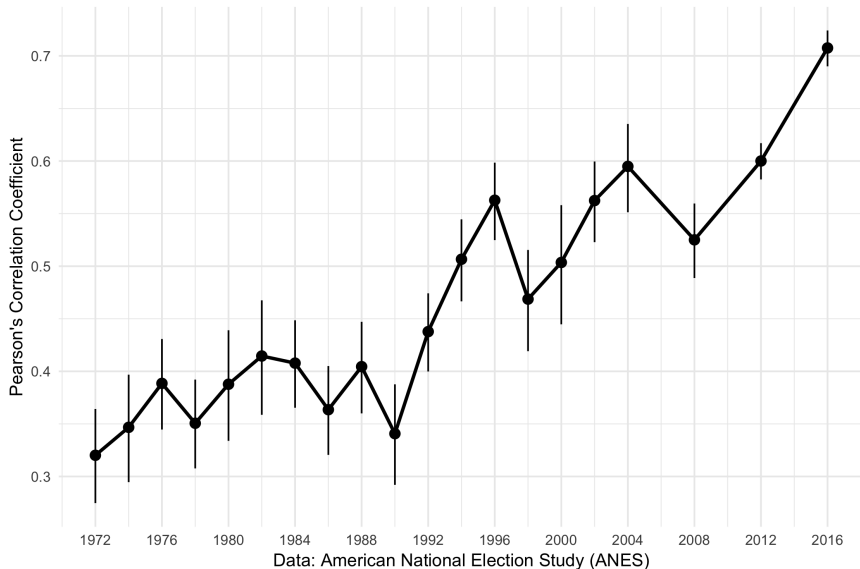
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# The Evidence: *Partisan Polarization?*





# The Evidence: *Political Geography?*

TABLE 6 A Comparison of Red State Voters and Blue State Voters in 2004

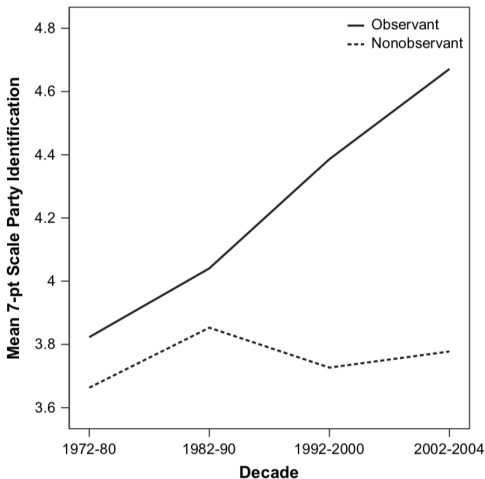
	Red State Voters	Blue State Voters	Difference
Religion:			
Protestant	69%	41%	+ 28%
Catholic	16%	35%	– 19%
Jewish, other, none	15%	24%	– 9%
Church Attendance:			
Weekly or more	54%	34%	+ 20%
Seldom, never	32%	53%	– 21%
Evangelical, born-again	51%	22%	+ 29%
Gun owning household	53%	28%	+ 25%
Union household	16%	31%	– 15%
Pro-choice on abortion	46%	69%	– 23%
Oppose gay marriage or civil unions	51%	26%	+ 25%
Approve of Bush's job performance	63%	45%	+ 18%
Approve of Iraq war	60%	45%	+ 15%
Conservative identification	41%	27%	+ 14%
Republican identification	44%	30%	+ 14%
Voted for Bush	60%	44%	+ 16%

Source: 2004 National Exit Poll

Note: Red states were carried by George Bush by a margin of at least 6 percentage points; blue states were carried by John Kerry by a margin of at least 6 percentage points.

# The Evidence: *Social Cleavages?*

**FIGURE 5** Mean Party Identification Score of  
Observant and Nonobservant Whites  
in National Election Study Surveys by  
Decade



# The Rebuttal by Fiorina, Abrams & Pope

“When *Abramowitz & Saunders* recode this raw data, aggregate it into an index, and recode again, they report a great deal of polarization, but the results clearly have little or no basis in the raw data.”

TABLE 1 No Polarization of Policy Views: 1984-2004 (*Percentage Point Changes in Seven-Point Scale Position, 1984 to 2004*)

Extremely Liberal————→Extremely Conservative

*Left Shift*

Health Insurance	6%	2	3	0(-9)*	0	-2	-2
Spending/Services	5	4	5	-3(-5)	-3	-3	-2

*Right Shift*

Aid to Blacks	0	-2	-5	-5(-7)	-1	6	8
Defense Spending	-5	-4	-3	-5(-4)	8	4	2

*Polarization*

Jobs/SoL	2	1	0	-2(-7)	0	1	3
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*No Change*

Abortion	1	-1			3	-1	
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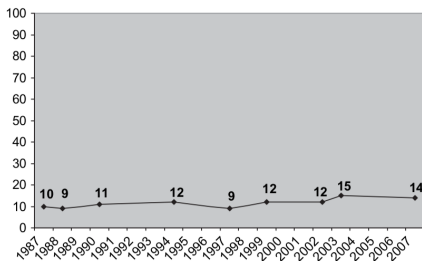
\*numbers in ( ) are changes when “don’t knows” are treated as moderates

# Very Little Evidence of Polarization

## No Partisan Polarization

“Party sorting has proceeded far on some issues, less on others, and on some issues one party has become more homogeneous, while the other has not changed. Moreover, party sorting has proceeded much less in the general public than among party elites. The abortion issue is a striking example of the limits of party sorting.”

FIGURE 1 Mass Party Differences Have Increased Slightly



# Asking the question again, are we polarized?



## Recapping Question

Do you think Americans are polarized on policy, why or why not? If they are not, in what sort of ways are Americans polarized? Social issues?

# Polarization in Democratic Beliefs

- ▶ Amy Smith (Iowa St.) asks if there are polarized cleavages on democratic values?
- ▶ Rich comparative literature suggests *fragile* nature of democratic values, such as political tolerance & support for institutions
- ▶ American civic attitudes **key** theoretical reason (Tocqueville, in particular) for robustness of American democracy
- ▶ However, America traditional outlier with respect to democratic attitudes, does this still hold up in the face of growing populism and rise of anti-democratic sentiments worldwide?
- ▶ Measuring “system support of democracy”: Do you think your country's courts guarantee a fair trial? Do you think political institutions protect citizens' basic rights? Questions on political tolerance ask whether political enemies, including “people who only say bad things about the system of government in your country,” should have basic political and civil rights,(voting & speech).

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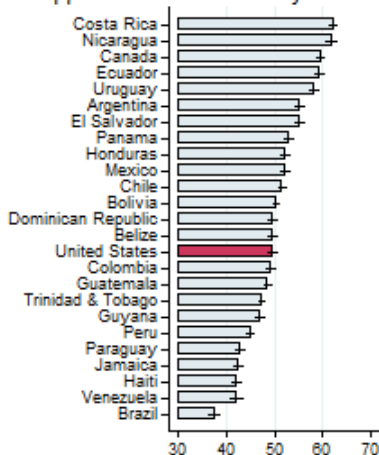
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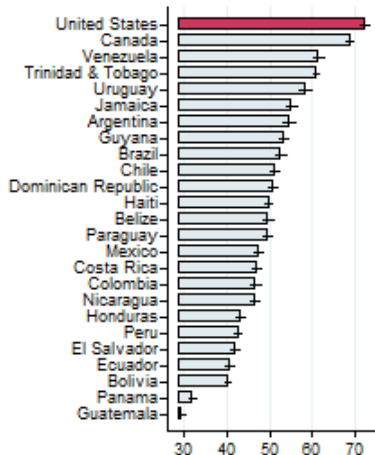
# Democratic Support in a Comparative Lens

## Democratic Attitudes in 2014

### Support for the Political System



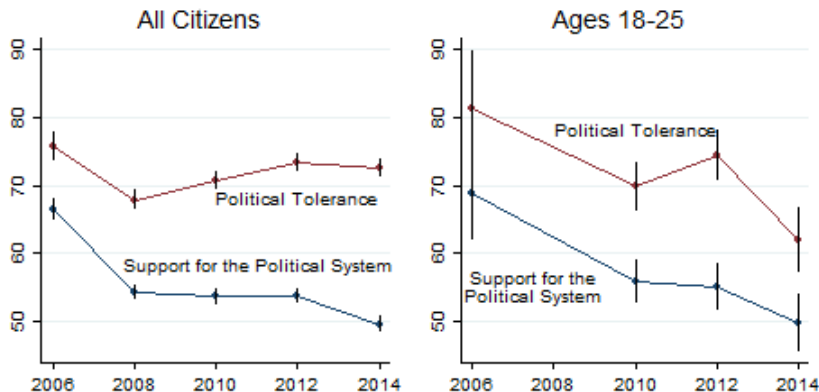
### Political Tolerance



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP  
Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals of estimates.

# Age-Based Cleavages in Democratic Support

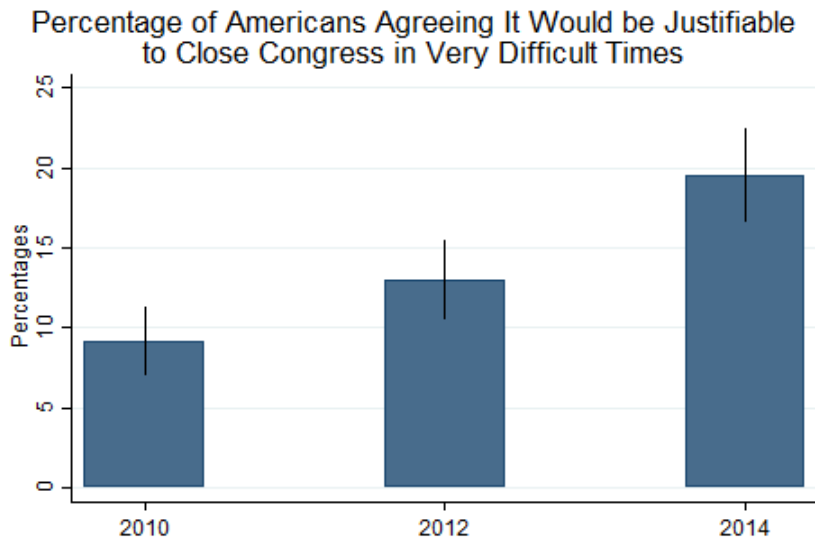
## Changes in Democratic Attitudes in the United States



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals of estimates.

## Democratic Values in the U.S.



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP  
Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals of estimates.

# Polarization in Free Speech Beliefs

- ▶ Other set of democratic values: ***free speech*** & civil liberties
- ▶ Fundamental set of democratic values: national debate over whether speech, especially that unhealthy to democracy should be allowed in the public square
- ▶ Correlated with other civil liberties, degree of political tolerance
- ▶ Are Americans fundamentally polarized on political tolerance? In other words, is there variation in the degree Americans support of fundamental civil liberties?

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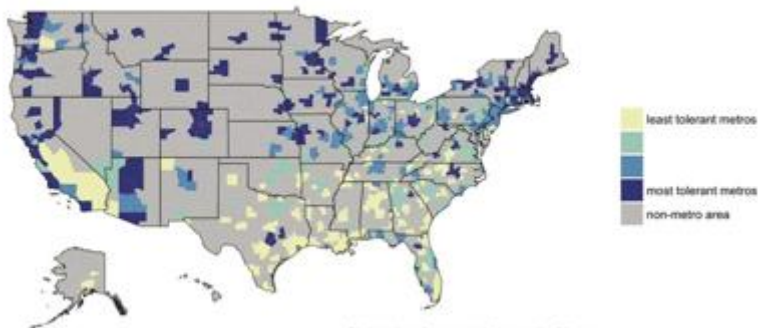
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# Variation Across U.S. Metro Areas

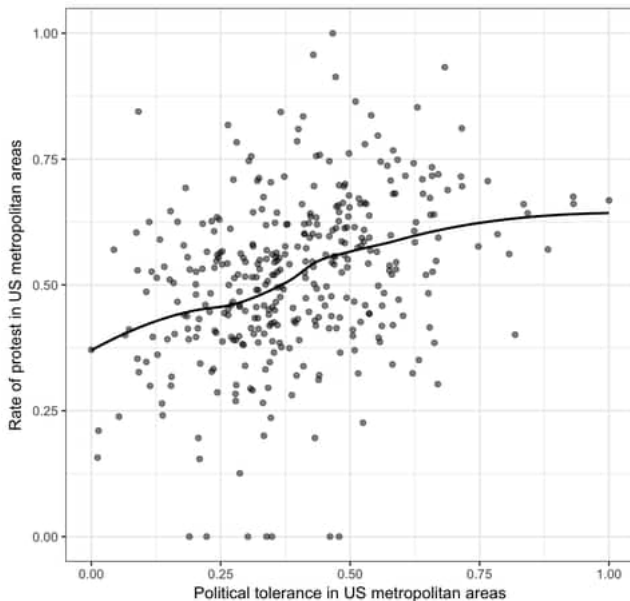
## Political Tolerance by US Metropolitan Area

Estimated using 2007-11 Freedom and Tolerance Survey Data



Christopher Claassen & James L. Gibson

# Tolerance & Protests



# Age-Based Polarization? The Case of Capitalism

## Oliver & Woods

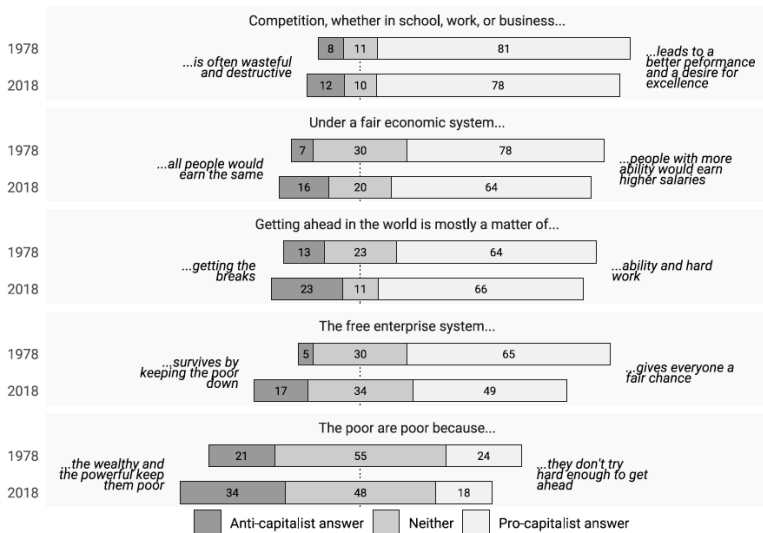
“Generation Z,” we are told, is intolerant of political dissent. They are hostile to capitalism. They have no respect for civil liberties and due process. They are preoccupied with identity and gender politics at the expense of tangible political goals.”

## David Brooks: “Political Pundit”

... the system itself is rotten and needs to be torn down. We live in a rape culture, with systemic racism and systems of oppression inextricably tied to our institutions. We live in a capitalist society, a neoliberal system of exploitation. . . Group identity is what matters. Society is a clash of oppressed and oppressor groups. People who are successful usually got that way through some form of group privilege and a legacy of oppression.

# Variation Across U.S. Metro Areas

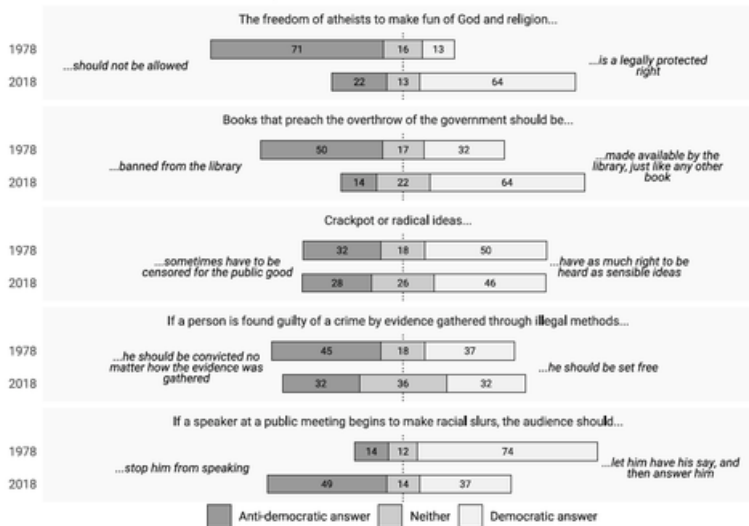
## Attitudes toward capitalism--1978 & 2018



Source: 2018 data from Lucid. 1978 data from McClosky & Zaller--American Ethos (1984).

# Tolerance & Protests

## Attitudes toward democracy--1978 & 2018



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# Key Points

- ❶ No debate as to whether American political elites are polarized—they are!
- ❷ Rich academic debate whether or not the mass public are polarized. With Fiorina arguing the public is polarized while Abramowitz & Saunders taking the contrary argument—know particulars about this!
- ❸ Inconclusive debate as to whether are polarized on policy, **but** clear evidence of growing congruence between ideology and partisanship
- ❹ Citizens not polarized on democratic beliefs (political tolerance) or support for capitalism
- ❺ Not much variation across age in terms of polarization on democratic values