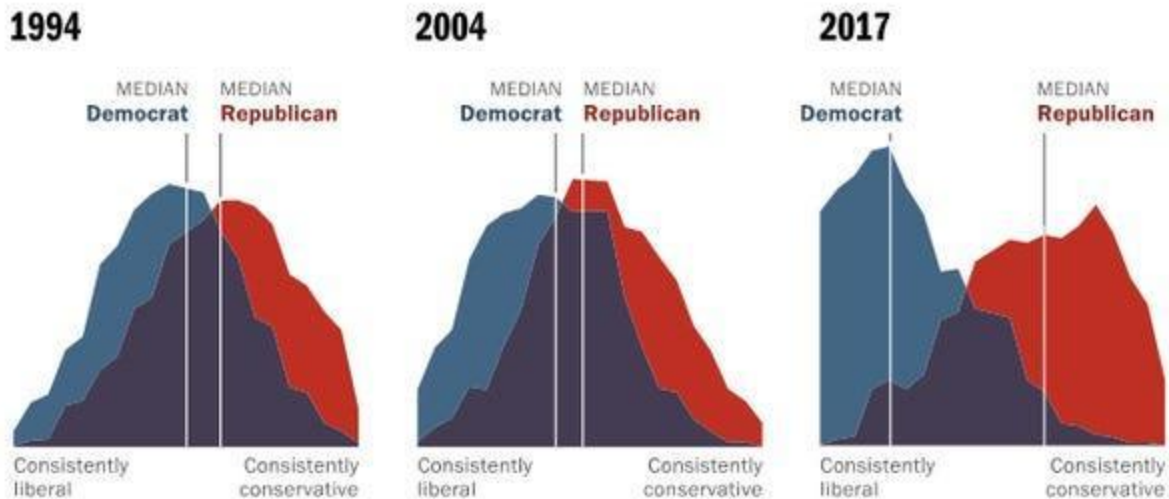<u>**Divided We Fall**</u>

Reconnecting the Left and Right into a Unified Front to Create Real Change:

We are seeing a lot of division in the United States today along political lines and in various Social aspects of everyday life. Do not get me wrong, politics have always been a divisive talking point. The thing is though, the division has gotten worse in recent years. Examine the graph below.

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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We are going to dissect these graphs to try and get a deeper understanding of the message the graphs are trying to convey. As a Data Analyst myself, my job is to take raw data and produce reports and interpretations for the Client to digest in order to help make business decisions. Now, we do not have the raw data that ties back to these graphs, but we can still make some clear inferences about this data.

One thing that we should notice is the lack of axis labels. There is no scale. This is due to the use of nominal data. This simply means that the scaling is irrelevant. These were likely multiple-choice question with A, B, C, D and possibly others. Also, could be where you fill in the bubble (Strongly agree, agree, neither…) A is not necessarily better than B or C. D is not the "best" so ranking them does not really make sense. The graphs are plots of how the people surveyed fall on the political spectrum. Thus, Liberals naturally ended up on one end, while conservatives gravitated towards the other. (Keep in mind, left and right on the graph has no bearing on the "Correctness" of the responses. It is just a visual model of their answers.)

The next part we will be focusing on is the Median. Many people believe that Median and Average (Mean) are the same and are interchangeable and that is simply not true. To be fair, many times the two will return the same number because of the data set itself but they still are providing two different insights. The average is a measure of what a typical result will look like given a set of criteria. It may be used to give insight as to how a group did on a test in school. Saying the class average was 65% would indicate that overall, the class performed poorly. An average of 90% on the other hand, would indicate that overall, the class performed very well. The Median is simply the 50th percentile and it divides the data set into two groups. If the Median was 65%, it is saying that 50% of students did better and 50% did worse than 65%.

There are 2 separate measurements on the graphs regarding ideological differences present in the two political parties. First is the Median, which we have already discussed, and the Purple portion of the graphs. This Purple area is considered shared or common ground. We can see that over time the medians are moving apart, and the purple portion is shrinking. Not only is the purple area getting smaller in size, but it is also making up a smaller percentage of the overall area covered by the datasets.

What does all this mean? There is a lot to unpack here. With the Median simply being the middle of the data set, we can see in 1994 and even in 2004, a lot of Democrats* held some conservative beliefs and many Republicans* exhibited some more liberal beliefs. The average American voter was fairly moderate as of 2004, based of course around the areas of Red, Blue and Purple. There were some topics that were pushing people strongly one way or the other evident in the presence of Red and Blue in the graphs. Overall, it appears that Americans were able to have meaningful and productive discussions about various political issues.

This is also evident in "Swing States". These states tend to have large populations of both Democrats and Republicans. Candidates typically already control the votes of the blue and red people respectively and are really fighting for the people that would fall into the purple. Democrats will probably be able to "steal" purple people to the left of their Median due to how "Liberal" these people self-Identified. The same could be said for Republicans going after Purple People to the Right of their Median.

In 2017, the medians are no longer next to one another which would indicate a larger portion of liberal and conservative responses, respectively. Meaning, Liberals are getting more liberal and Conservatives are getting more conservative. This leaves less room for Moderates and Split-Ticket voters.

As the Purple region Shrinks, we see the Number of Swing States are also shrinking. In 1992, there were 32 Swing States versus 14 in 2012. This relates their being fewer and fewer voters to sway as the typical Republican voter will tend to vote a straight ticket as will a Democrat. Over time, more states are becoming Red and Blue and this makes each Swing State that much more important.

From 1994 - 2017, we see that there is less common ground and American Politics have become very polarizing with many taking the "My way or the Highway" approach with family and friends. The problems we face are not simply Democrat or Republican Problems but American problems. We need to come together and find some common ground to create feasible long-term solutions to the problems of the 21st century.