

What Happened To The Vital Center?

TABLE #3

Ideological composition of the Democratic Presidential Vote⁷

	2008	2004
Liberal share of the electorate	22	21
Democratic share of liberals	89	85
Moderate share of the electorate	44	45
Democratic share of moderates	60	54
Conservative share of the electorate	34	34
Democratic share of conservatives	20	15

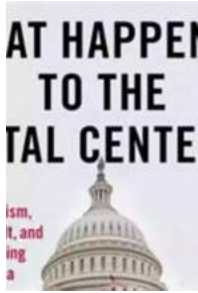
Over the years, the concept of the "vital center" has played a crucial role in shaping political landscapes and maintaining a balanced society. The vital center represents the moderate approach, encompassing ideas and policies that bridge the gap between extreme ideologies.

However, in recent times, we have witnessed a concerning shift away from this vital center. The disappearance of moderate voices has led to polarization and an echo chamber effect. But what exactly happened to the vital center?

What Happened to the Vital Center?: Presidentialism, Populist Revolt, and the Fracturing of America

by Nicholas Jacobs(Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5



Language	: English
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Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 372 pages
Lending	: Enabled

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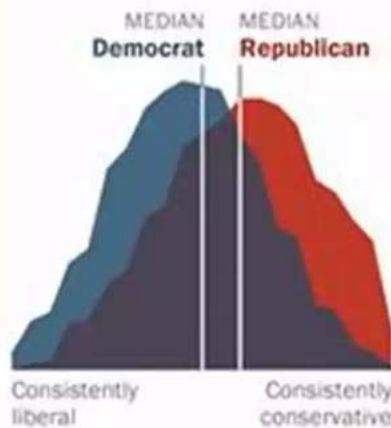


The Rise of Extremism

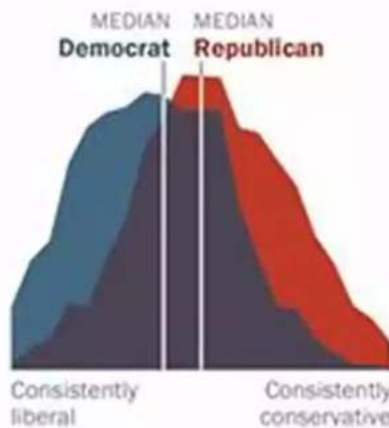
Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

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

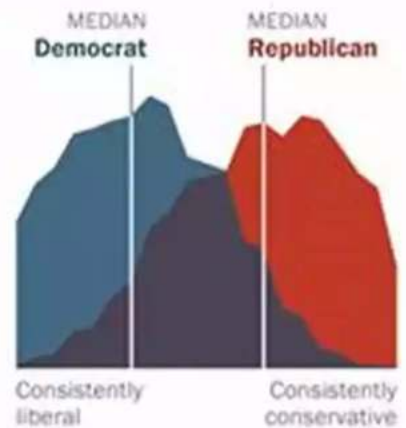
1994



2004



2014



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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One of the main reasons for the decline of the vital center can be attributed to the rise of extremism. In an era of rapid information flow and social media echo chambers, people are more inclined to align themselves with

extreme positions. Public discourse has shifted towards the loudest voices on either side, leaving little room for moderation.

The significance of compromise and finding common ground has been overshadowed by the allure of "us vs. them" mentalities. As a result, the political arena has become highly polarized, leaving the once-powerful vital center marginalized.

The Populist Movement



Another factor contributing to the decline of the vital center is the rise of populist movements around the world. Populist leaders often rely on extreme rhetoric, promising simple and radical solutions to complex problems. This appeals to segments of the population who feel neglected by mainstream politics.

In their pursuit of power, populist leaders exploit emotions, perpetuating division and creating a narrative that blames others for societal challenges. The result is a shift away from rational, moderate policies towards populist agendas that prioritize short-term gains over long-term stability.

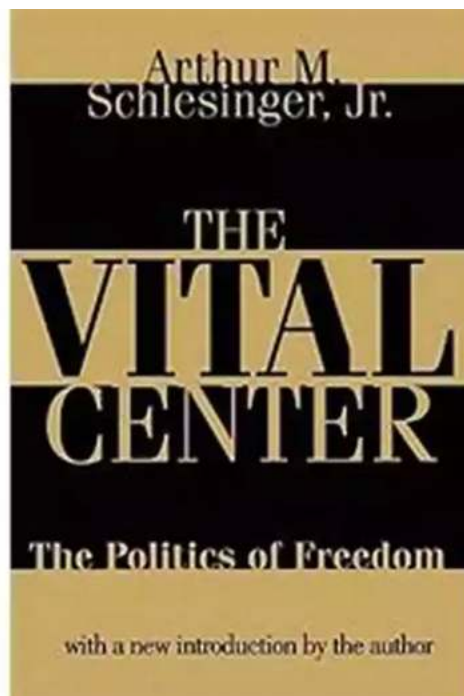
Media Fragmentation



The rise of media fragmentation has also played a significant role in the decline of the vital center. With the advent of social media, individuals have access to a plethora of news sources catering to their specific ideological leanings. This has led to the formation of information bubbles and an echo chamber effect, where people are rarely exposed to differing viewpoints.

The lack of exposure to diverse perspectives further reinforces existing beliefs and reduces the likelihood of engaging in constructive dialogue. As a result, individuals become more entrenched in their own ideologies, making it increasingly difficult to find common ground and revive the vital center.

The Importance of Reviving the Vital Center



It is crucial to revive the vital center to ensure the stability and progress of society. Moderation allows for a balance between competing interests and the development of pragmatic solutions to complex challenges. Without the

vital center, the political landscape becomes fragmented, leading to gridlock and an inability to address critical issues effectively.

To revive the vital center, it is essential to prioritize dialogue and empathy. Listening to opposing viewpoints and finding common ground is crucial in establishing a society that values compromise and inclusivity. Additionally, promoting critical thinking skills and media literacy can help combat the echo chamber effect and encourage the exploration of diverse perspectives.

While the vital center may have experienced a decline in recent years, it is not a lost cause. By acknowledging the factors that have contributed to its erosion and actively working towards reviving moderation, we can create a society that values inclusivity, compromise, and rationality. The vitality of the center lies in our collective ability to prioritize the greater good over short-term gains and divisive politics.



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Taking the reader through a long view of American history, *What Happened to the Vital Center?* offers a novel and important contribution to the ongoing scholarly and popular discussion of how America fell apart and what might be done to end the Cold Civil War that fractures the country and weakens the national resolve.

In *What Happened to the Vital Center?*, Nicholas Jacobs and Sidney Milkis tackle a foundational question within American political history: Is current partisan polarization, aggravated by populist disdain for constitutional principles and institutions, a novel development in American politics? Populism is not a new threat to the country's democratic experiment, but now insurgents intrude directly on elections and government. During previous periods of populist unrest, the US was governed by resilient parties that moderated extremist currents within the political system. This began to crumble during the 1960s, as anti-institutionalist incursions into the Democratic and Republican organizations gave rise to reforms that empowered activists at the expense of the median voter and shifted the controlling power over parties to the executive branch. Gradually, the moderating influence that parties played in structuring campaigns and the policy process eroded to the point where extreme polarization dominated and decision-making power migrated to the presidency. Weakened parties were increasingly dominated by presidents and their partnerships with social activists, leading to a gridlocked system characterized by the politics of demonization and demagoguery. Executive-centered parties more easily ignore the sorts of moderating voices that had prevailed in an earlier era. While the Republican Party is more susceptible to the dangers of populism than the Democrats, both parties are animated by a presidency-led, movement-centered vision of democracy. After tracing this history, the authors dismiss calls to return to some bygone era. Rather, the final section

highlights the ways in which the two parties can be revitalized as institutions of collective responsibility that can transform personal ambition and rancorous partisanship into principled conflict over the profound issues that now divide the country. The book will transform our understanding of how we ended up in our current state of extreme polarization and what we can do to fix it.



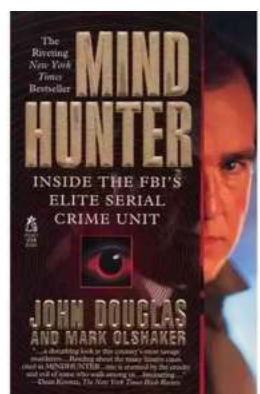
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