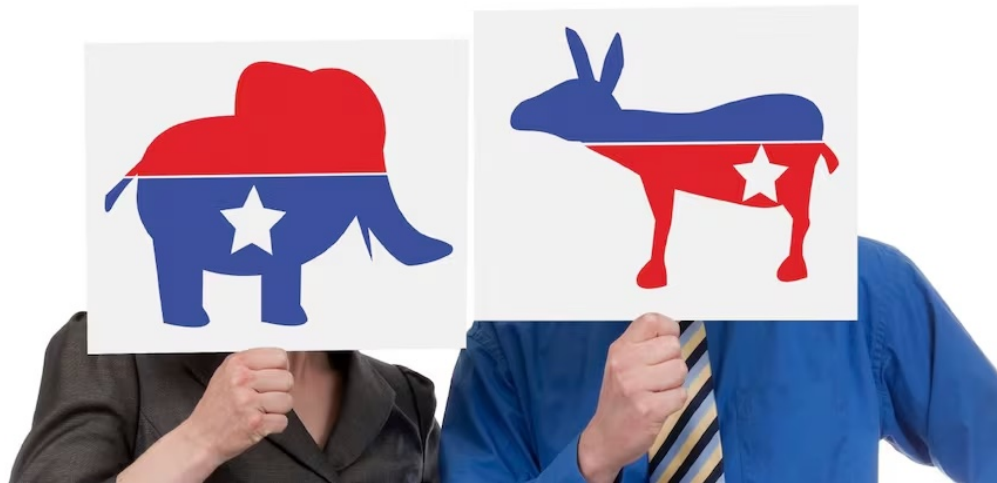




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## America united? A lot more than you might think

Despite coming from all along the political spectrum, Americans agree even on some of the big issues.



As Americans, we agree on many things, despite coming from opposing political groups. [ SHARON DOMINICK | iStockphoto.com ]

On a recent episode of “The Daily Show,” Jon Stewart expressed agreement with Bill O’Reilly’s contention that over 70% of Americans were “good people” who “don’t want acrimony” and “don’t want violence.” These influential commentators from the left and the right seem to agree that the vast majority does not view the opposing party as “the enemy” and does not want to see the opposition “destroyed.”

Stewart and O’Reilly are correct. There is significant evidence that American citizens from the left to the right are in agreement on some of the most consequential issues facing our country. The widespread discussion of political polarization, and a potential eruption of a new Civil War, neglects the ways in which we are united. We cannot let fanatics cause us to lose sight of the basic political and cultural unity that exists among the American people.

For example, in his insightful new book, “A Great Disorder: National Myth and the Battle for America,” historian Richard Slotkin points out that there is a high level of public agreement on the “essential rights important to being an American today.”

“These include ‘clean air and water’ (93%), ‘a quality education’ (92%), ‘affordable health care’ (89%), and ‘the right to a job’ (85%).” In addition, there is broad support among American citizens for economic and social rights, “including civil rights and equal opportunity (92-93%).” There is even a high level of agreement on controversial issues. For example, “a vast majority (90%) favors increased regulation of firearms,” while, according to current polls, 63% say abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

While cultural wars are being waged in our public schools regarding diversity, history, religion, mental health, birth control and artificial intelligence, there is actual agreement on core concerns between Republicans and Democrats on these issues. The widely respected Pew Research Center reported in June that 86% of Biden-Harris supporters and 56% of Trump supporters believed that “religion should be kept separate from government policies.” In addition, nearly identical shares of Biden-Harris (74%) and Trump supporters (71%) say it is “extremely or very important to have public discussions about the country’s historical successes and strengths.” And, 78% of Biden-Harris and 60% of Trump supporters say “it is

at least very important to have public discussions about the country's failures and flaws." By large majorities, both Biden-Harris (94%) and Trump supporters (79%) believe that open discussions of mental health and well-being are good for society. Concerning AI, there are only modest differences between Trump and Biden-Harris supporters, with both sides skeptical about the use of artificial intelligence in daily life. Fifty-nine percent of Trump supporters and 51% of Biden-Harris supporters believe AI is bad for society. In addition, large majorities of both candidates' supporters "overwhelmingly say the wide availability of birth control pills, condoms and other forms of contraception is good for society."

Concerning the U.S. economy, there is a broad common ground between Republicans and Democrats. Eight-five percent of Biden-Harris voters and 62% of Trump supporters believe that the economic system unfairly favors powerful interests. Eighty-four percent of Biden-Harris and 65% of Trump supporters believe that major corporations have too much power; with 82% of the Democrats and 48% of Republicans stating that these companies make too much profit.

Here is an encouraging example of the left and the right coming together to work on this economic common ground: Bob Lighthizer, Donald Trump's U.S. trade representative, and Lori Wallach, the director of the leftist ReThink Trade Program, joined together to focus on making sure trade policies are centered on the needs of American workers and not multinational corporations. This conservative trade lawyer and liberal progressive activist are both "free-trade skeptics" and worried that economic globalization is hurting the economic well-being of the American working class "at the altar of corporate profits." Lighthizer and Wallach set aside their political differences and joined forces to work on an economic program reflective of populist economic sentiment in both of our major political parties.

Unfortunately, despite shared values, partisan politics and cultural warfare too often intervene to prevent progress toward achieving common goals. A recent glaring example was the vote in Congress last October rejecting a bipartisan immigration reform bill negotiated by America First Republicans and progressive Democrats. The bill incorporated the major goal of tightening border security sought by the majority in both parties and would have overhauled immigration law for the first time in more than 30 years. Immigration is just one example. We

see similar gridlock regarding voting laws, abortion, gender and sexuality issues, gun rights and the use of fossil fuels. Instead of building on the underlying unity that exists among the American people in these areas, political opportunists seek to divide us and prevent compromise, agreement and forward-looking policies. With the government deadlocked on these key issues, cultural warriors seek to reshape the discussion for their empowerment alone.

In poll after poll, the majority of Americans express the desire to protect “public goods,” affirm the “common good” and unite around voting rights, racial justice, gun safety, workers’ rights, LGBTQ+ protections, women’s rights, poverty alleviation and climate change. Implicit in our upcoming election is a choice between a political party committed to building on this common agenda versus one committed to a program of disruption and cultural warfare. In my view, only one party’s program reflects the broad agreement among the American people on the central issues of our time. The choices we make in the coming election will be critical, not only to addressing our crisis of democracy, but will also determine whether we are able to confront the endemic problems we face today.



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