



Source: YAD VASHEM The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, circa 1920

De Schuilplaats

Willem ten Boom, after years of apprenticeship as a watchmaker, opened his own store in Haarlem in 1837. His son, Casper, also became a watchmaker, and the trade was passed down to Casper's children. His youngest, Cornelia, named after her mother, was born in 1892. Corrie, as she was called, also studied watchmaking, and at the age of 30, became the first woman ever licensed as a watchmaker in the Netherlands.

The family were devout Calvinists in the very strict Dutch Reformed Church. Willem led weekly prayer meetings for congregants, and Casper continued the practice after Willem's death. These weekly sessions featured a prayer

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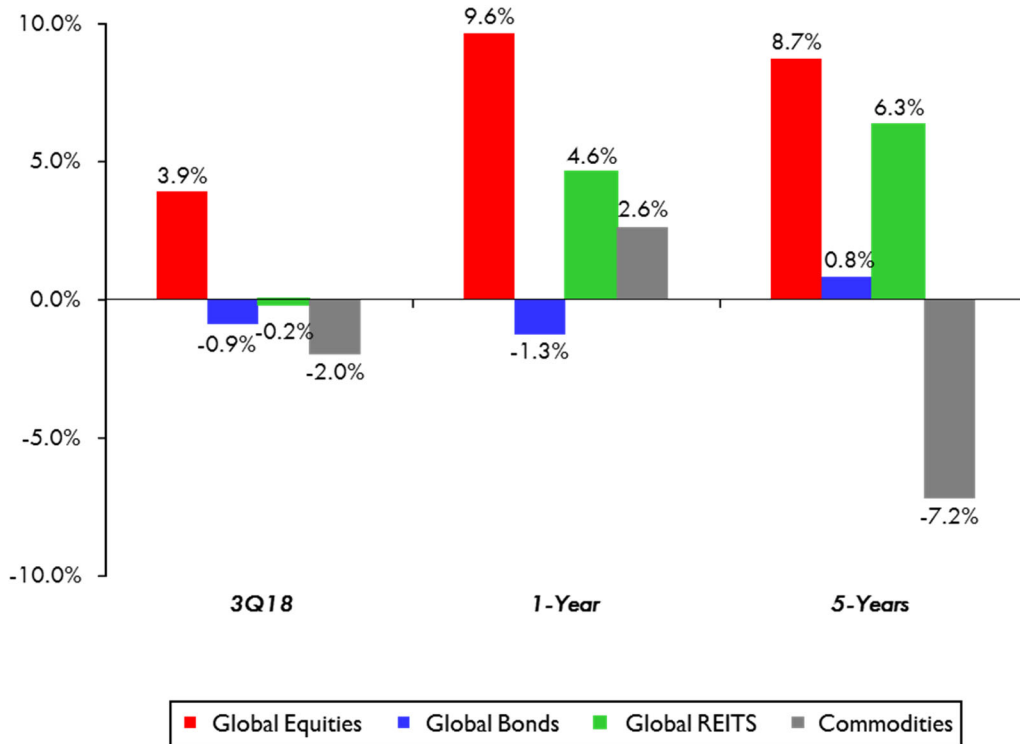
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Chart 1 Capital Market Performance



for the Jews and peace in Jerusalem, a core tenet of the Reformed Church,¹ and relevant to our story later. When Corrie wasn't working in her father's shop, she too led religious classes, started a youth club in town, and taught sewing and handicrafts to girls.

The ten Boom family achieved no special distinction, but was, over the course of a century, a pillar of the Dutch Reformed Church and of the Haarlem community. But their world was shattered in May 1940 when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. This solid, bourgeois family was confronted with impossible decisions: abandon their deeply-rooted belief in assisting all

those in need in exchange for the food ration cards that would enable them to survive the war, or hold true to their faith and place their own lives in peril.

Personal safety is the paramount instinct for all of us. Corrie ten Boom was the rare exception. The exigencies of war revealed in her a selfless courage. She, and her family, paid an enormous price that pushed the bounds of human resiliency. Her heroism is inspiring, but the most remarkable part of her extraordinary life occurred years after the war. And it's this part of her story that most resonates for us today.

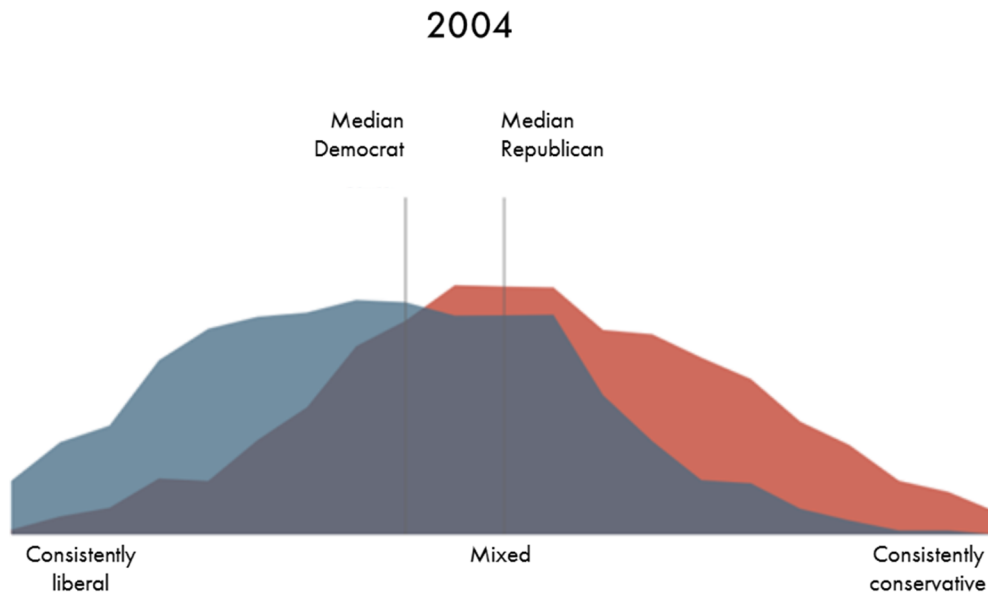
¹ Psalm 122:6: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

Global equities posted solid gains in the third quarter of 2018, but most asset classes lost ground. US stocks were among the best in the world, gaining 7%, with Greece and Turkey near the bottom, off 17% and 20%, respectively. The Turkish lira was clobbered, down 24% in the quarter, almost as bad as the 30% drop in the Argentine peso. The widest dispersion was found in the commodity sector, as uranium jumped 21% in the past three months (less supply, more demand), while lead dropped 18%. Breakfast should be cheaper with sugar and cocoa off more than 15%, and lean hogs (not an oxymoron) down 25% (a consequence of newly imposed tariffs).

Dispersion among commodity prices is the normal condition. Dispersion in political values is a more recent phenomenon, and with an election season upon us, it is an appropriate time to examine the data, which show a large, and growing, divide in political perspectives, and may be indicative of a deeper, more fundamental fissure in our society.

Pew Research has been surveying Americans on a series of political values for decades (see Chart 4, p. 5). In 2004, the typical Democratic and Republican held political views that were only modestly apart (Chart 2). There was a large bulge in the middle of the political spectrum, meaning that most Americans held moderate political views. It was not uncommon to find liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats. Nearly one-third of Republicans were more liberal than the median Democrat, and the same percentage of Democrats were more conservative than the median Republican back in 2004.

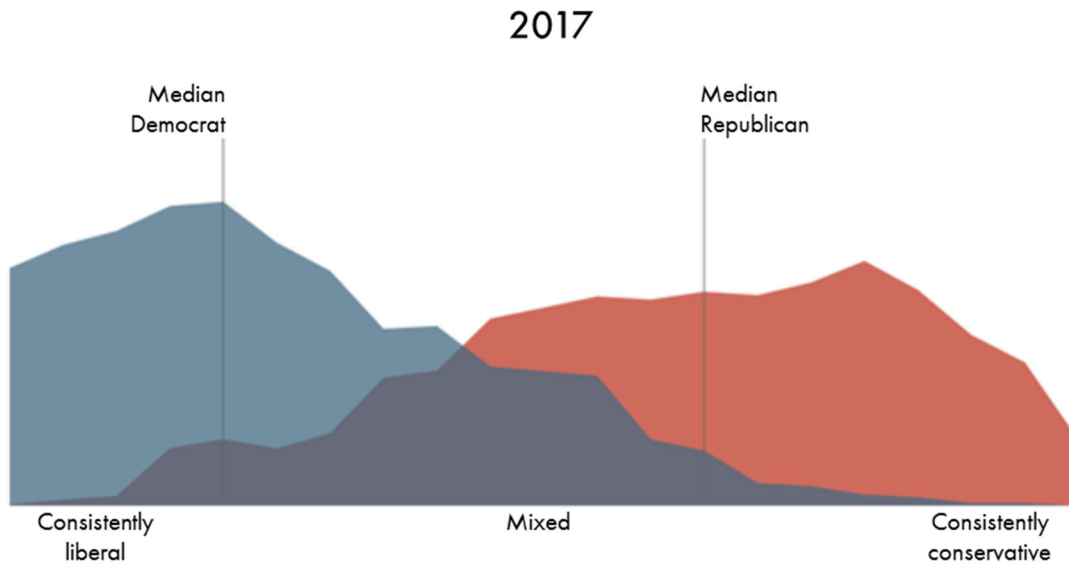
Chart 2 American Public's Political Values, 2004



Source: Surveys conducted in 1994, 1999, 2004, 2011, 2015 and 2017.

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Chart 3 American Public's Political Values, 2017



Source: Surveys conducted in 1994, 1999, 2004, 2011, 2015 and 2017.

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Today, political views have widened considerably and there is very little overlap between the parties (Chart 3). The bulge in the middle of the political spectrum has receded, replaced by growing extremes on the left and the right. Just 5% of Republicans today are more liberal than the

median Democrat, and a mere 3% of Democrats are more conservative than the median Republican. The center cannot hold, as William Butler Yeats wrote poignantly.²

² W.B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*, 1919:
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

On virtually every fundamental issue, the views of Democrats and Republicans has been growing wider (Chart 4). For example, in 1994, a minority of both Democrats and Republicans agreed with the statement that stricter environmental laws hurt the economy, and the difference between the parties was ten percentage points (39% versus 29%). A majority of Republicans now agree with that statement today, and the gap between parties has

widened to 38 percentage points. The most dramatic shift is seen in the statement: Blacks who can't get ahead are mostly responsible for their own condition. Majorities of both parties agreed with that in 1994, Republicans by 13 percentage points over Democrats. Today, just 28% of Democrats agree with that statement, but an even greater percentage of Republicans, 75%, concur, a 47% difference in opinion between parties.

Chart 4 Growing gaps between Republicans and Democrats across domains

% who say...

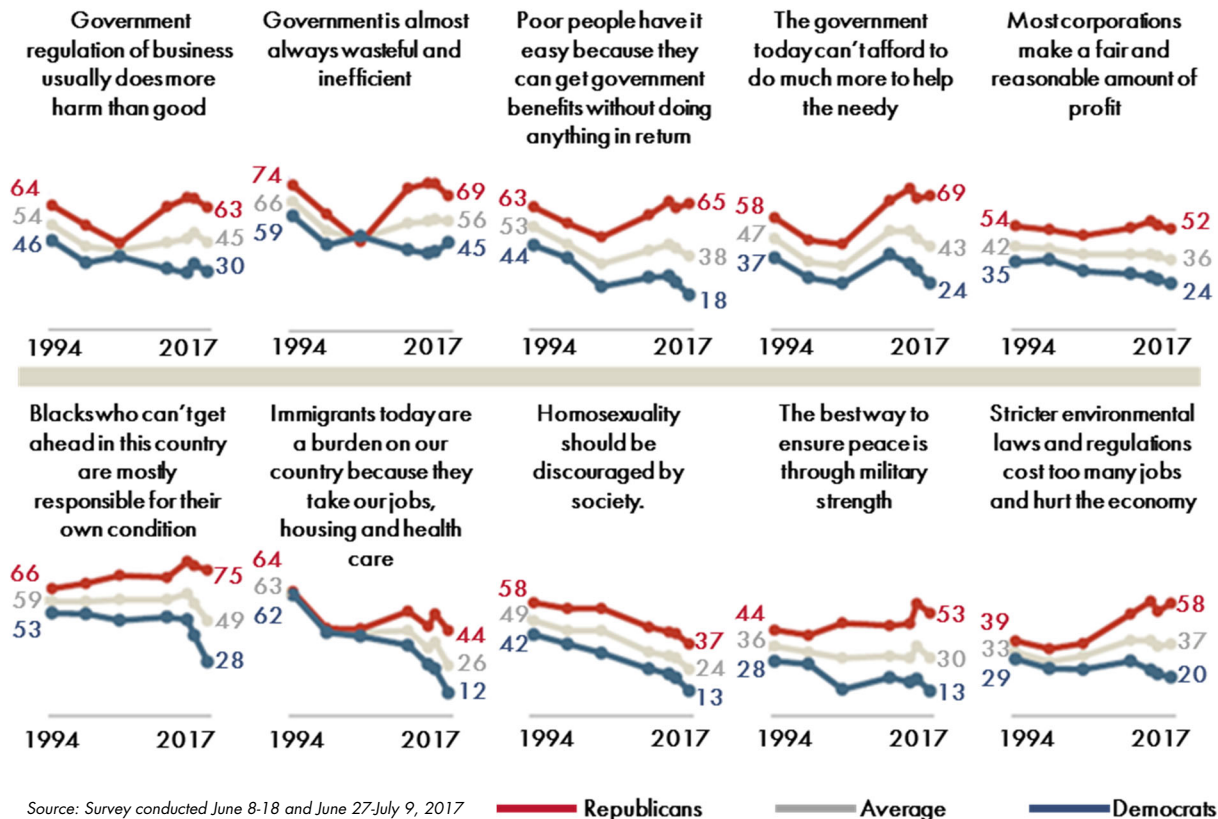


Chart 5 Average Confidence in Institutions Rating



Average of 14 institutions measured since 1993 includes all institutions measured in 2018, except for small business.

Average of seven institutions measured since 1973 includes the church or organized religion, public schools, the Supreme Court, Congress, newspapers, organized labor and big business.

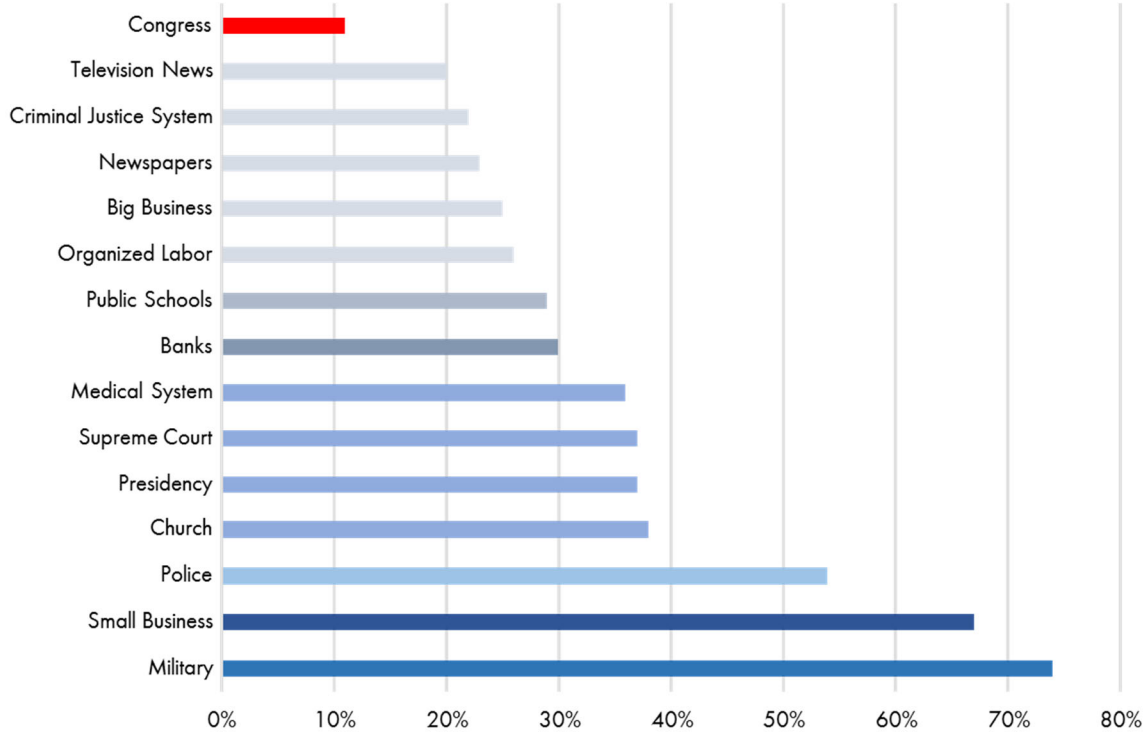
Source: GALLUP

Concurrent with this increasing political polarization is a rapid loss of trust in our institutions, to the lowest levels seen in the 45 years of Gallup polling (Chart 5). A solid majority trust our military and small businesses, but few have trust in the media, courts, religion or politicians. A mere 11% expressed trust in Congress (Chart 6).

There are likely many causes for the rapidly diminishing political consensus and the loss of trust in our institutions. It is no coincidence that many of the institutions that perceive the growing political gap to be in their favor are those that are held in the lowest esteem. Politicians and the media believe that political polarization

increases their electability and their ratings, respectively, and thus encourage our political division. Undermining the validity of our institutions confers political advantages, which is why we see the assertion of “fake news” and the outright denial of truths. Beyond the perceived self-interest in promulgating political division, there may be deeper forces in play that are widening the rifts we see.

Chart 6 Shares of U.S. Adults Trusting the Following Institutions, June 2018



Source: Gallup

Powerful social movements, notably civil rights and feminism, blossomed in the 1960s, demanding equal treatment under the law, which did not exist then, for racial and ethnic minorities and for women. These movements were largely successful in changing our laws, but legal equality did not translate to equality of outcomes, nor did it eliminate bigotry and prejudice.

There were some in these great social movements, perhaps Malcolm X most prominently, who opposed equality as impractical or impossible, and emphasized the separateness of the experiences of their groups. In a speech at Berkeley 55 years ago, doubting that racial integration and equality would ever be accomplished, Malcolm X concluded that, "...the only permanent solution is complete separation or some land of our own in a country of our own."

These two paths converged over time. Legal equality did not confer socioeconomic equality for many groups, who began agitating not for equal treatment but for special treatment or, at a minimum, for a validation of their separate "lived experiences."

It is undeniable that each one of us has a unique "lived experience." The problem comes when we insist that arguments are illegitimate unless they emanate from the speaker's personal experience. When an inextricable connection between the speech and the speaker is made, rational discourse becomes impossible. Without rational discourse, there can be no societal consensus.

Isaiah Berlin, the great 20th-century Oxford philosopher, warned that this is a path to tyranny. John Rawls, Berlin's contemporary at Harvard, wrote that societal stability rested on an "overlapping consensus" of accepted norms based on a shared rationality. Free soci-

ety depends on being able to distinguish between what is true and what we want to hear. When we deny facts, or the legitimacy of an argument because of the identity of the speaker, we erode our ability to build consensus around common values. Timothy Snyder of Yale, an expert in Russian and East European history, a region with a long history of fractured societies, notes that authoritarianism comes not because people demand it, but because they lose the ability to discern facts from desires.

All these forces³ have converged to exacerbate our divisions. Politicians across the spectrum have found success in pitting groups against each other and in challenging the legitimacy of our institutions. Growing socioeconomic inequality heightened the demands of marginalized groups for recognition of their separate experiences, linking the validity of an argument with the identity of its speaker, eliminating the possibility of civil discourse. In this environment, it is no wonder we grow further apart.

Two years into the Nazi occupation, a woman knocked on the door of the ten Boom family home. She was a Jew, her husband had been arrested, and she had hoped that the ten Booms might hide her from the Gestapo. The family welcomed her in. Soon, they were harboring half a dozen people at a time, some for hours, some for days, some for longer. Most were Jews, others were part of the Dutch Resistance movement. Corrie devoted herself to caring for these refugees, finding illicit food ration cards, and soliciting other Dutch families to join the Resistance. Over the course of nearly two years, the family saved the lives of an estimated 800 Jews, and protected many more Dutch Resistance fighters.

³ And many others not discussed.

In February 1944, an informant alerted the Gestapo, which promptly arrested the entire family. Remarkably, despite a thorough search, the six people they were hiding at the time were undiscovered, and all eventually made it safely to other houses. Four of the six survived the war. Corrie and her sister, Betsie, were first sent to prison, and then were transferred to the infamous Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany (see photo).



Source: hurriyet.com

Her four family members died during this time, including her sister Betsie, on 15 December 1944. On the last day of that year, a clerical error listed Corrie as a prisoner to be released. A week later, all the women in her age group were killed in the gas chambers.

The war ended a few months later, in May 1945. Corrie returned home to The Netherlands and established a rehabilitation home for survivors of the concentration camps. She traveled around the world, telling her story and promoting reconciliation.

One day in May 1947, she spoke at a church in Munich. At the end, as everyone was exiting, a man pushed his way toward the pulpit, toward Corrie. She froze when she saw him. He told her that he had been a guard at Ravensbrück, and while he did not remember her (how could he?), she remembered him as a particularly cruel tormenter.

Corrie had spoken of forgiveness in her talk, and now the guard put out his hand and asked her for her forgiveness. Her thoughts flashed back to the humiliation and torture she endured, and how her beloved sister perished in that camp. Many years later she wrote of that moment:⁴

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart....And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. “I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

⁴ Now “I’m Still Learning to Forgive” by Corrie ten Boom. Copyright © 1972 by Guideposts Associates, Inc.

It is impressive that Corrie ten Boom became the first woman licensed as a watchmaker in her country. We are in awe that she risked her life to save hundreds who were in desperate need. We are amazed that a clerical error spared her life a week before she was to be killed. But we are most inspired by her monumental act of forgiveness. Reconciliation is impossible without it.

Her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*, (De Schuilplaats in Dutch), was published in 1971.⁵ Corrie ten Boom

moved to Southern California in 1978. She died exactly on her 91st birthday, which seems appropriate. Jewish tradition holds that only the most righteous people are blessed by dying on the same day they were born.⁶

At the state capitol in Springfield, Illinois 160 years ago, Abraham Lincoln warned, presciently, that "A house divided against itself cannot stand." The question for us today is whether we resent each other's differences more than we cherish our shared values. Corrie ten Boom gave us the answer, if only we would listen.



Photo: Conde Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

⁵ It was made into an acclaimed movie of the same name in 1975, starring Jeannette Clift as Corrie.

⁶ The Talmud explains that God calculates and completes the lifespan of a righteous person, as we read in Exodus (23:21), "I will complete the number of your days."



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