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The Rebuilder's Dilemma

CHARTING THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT REFORM
ON THE 2020 ELECTION

Paul C. Light



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DEDICATION TO PAUL A. VOLCKER (1927-2019)

I DEDICATE THIS REPORT to Paul A. Volcker for his lifelong commitment to the highest standards of public service and his unwavering devotion to making government work. My thirty-year working relationship with Mr. Volcker began when I helped draft the 1988 report of the National Commission on the Public Service, known as the Volcker Report. It continued through the years, including with Mr. Volcker's second report for the commission, in 2003, and on reports on government reform for the Volcker Alliance. I celebrate Mr. Volcker's effort to restore the field of public administration to its rightful place in higher education and call the nation's best and brightest to public service, as well as his commitment to bipartisan government reform. I am especially grateful for Mr. Volcker's wise counsel over the years, his faith in the American system of government, his gift for turning turgid academic prose into soaring calls to action, and his belief in the American people. I also thank Mr. Volcker for his insights on the trends presented in this report.

PAUL C. LIGHT

FOREWORD

GOVERNMENT REFORM IS A TOPIC that was often top of mind for the Volcker Alliance's founding chairman, Paul A. Volcker. Indeed, it is poignant to me that one of the first reports the Volcker Alliance is publishing since Mr. Volcker passed away last December shows that the public demand for very major government reform is near a twenty-year high. The share of Americans who believe the federal government needs very major reform rose from 37 percent in 1997 to 61 percent in November 2019. This is a sea change and attests to the need for greater attention to the management of government that Mr. Volcker believed was so essential for the future of our democracy and that motivated him to launch the Volcker Alliance.

The Volcker Alliance is and will remain a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with a mission to advance effective management of government to achieve results that matter to citizens. Yet in this report, Paul Light shows that a passion for effective government could also offer a path to political victory in 2020. The issue of government reform increasingly unites Americans. Professor Light warns that this trend should be an alert for presidential candidates to take seriously Americans' desire for government to work better by proposing concrete plans to improve its effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability.

Mr. Volcker and Professor Light worked closely for many years on issues relating to government reform, dating back to the National Commission on the Public Service, in 1988 and 2003, which were chaired by Mr. Volcker and on which Professor Light served as a senior adviser. He remained a trusted adviser to Mr. Volcker on public service issues and maintains a record of excellence in scholarship on government and public service that is matched by few.

The two shared a common belief that for government to work well, it must have in place the right people and administrative systems to remain agile and dynamic, ready to adapt to the needs of a changing nation. In *The Rebuilder's Dilemma*, Professor Light details a bipartisan plan for government reform, with seven areas of recommendation including improving campaign spending laws, streamlining the bureaucracy, and—of special importance to Mr. Volcker and the Volcker Alliance—rebuilding the public service.

Regardless of how the 2020 election plays out, Professor Light's recommended reforms should not go ignored. These issues are important to the electorate and to the future and unity of our country. The American people want a government that delivers with excellence. Our elected leaders should heed their call.

THOMAS W. ROSS

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INTRODUCTION

THE 2020 DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES rarely miss an opportunity to endorse a bigger federal government that provides more benefits and services. *Politico* recently divided the list of campaign promises into fifty-five categories that included capping prescription drug prices, providing Medicare for all who want it, closing the gender pay gap, imposing an ultra-millionaire's tax, tackling the global climate crisis, decriminalizing the border, guaranteeing a minimum monthly income and tuition-free college, and rebuilding the nation's roads and bridges.

The candidates have also embraced a growing list of what New York University's Brennan Center for Justice calls "democracy reforms." According to a *Washington Post* survey published December 3, 2019, all thirteen Democratic candidates on that date favored automatic voter registration at age 18, twelve agreed that Election Day should be a national holiday, ten said they would consider limits on the Senate filibuster, nine supported abolishing the electoral college, eight were open to creating term limits for Supreme Court justices, and six said they would consider adding justices to dilute the court's current conservative majority.

Despite these promises to increase what government provides, the Democratic field has yet to embrace a reform agenda that might appeal to the 41 percent of Democrats who told the Pew Research Center in 2015 that the federal government was almost always wasteful or inefficient; the 42 percent who said the federal government was doing a very or somewhat bad job protecting the environment; the 47 percent who said the same about maintaining the nation's roads, bridges, and other infrastructure; the 67 percent who said the same about helping people out of poverty; the 70 percent who said the same about running its programs, "all in all"; and the 71 percent who said they felt either angry or frustrated with the federal government.¹

Neither have the candidates confronted the recent acceleration of government breakdowns that began in the early 2000s with the 9/11 terrorist attacks and continued into Donald Trump's presidency with the federal government's sluggish response to Hurricane Maria, the web of regulatory failures that may have contributed to the Boeing 737 Max groundings in 2019, and the bureaucratic indifference that provoked the spike in veteran suicides.

WHY GOVERNMENT REFORM MATTERS

THE 2020 CANDIDATES KNOW THAT many Democrats doubt the federal government's ability to deliver on the bigger-government promises they have made, but the presidential hopefuls continue to give the concerns short shrift. The candidates seem to think that modest action to tighten federal ethics and lobbying laws and strengthen whistle-blower protections will reassure their skeptical supporters.² They also appear convinced that the government will quickly regain its bureaucratic bearings once President Donald Trump and his band of “kleptocrats” are removed from office.³

This report argues that the candidates are wrong—the public demand for major reform is too high and trust in government is too low to expect support for significantly expanding the federal agenda. Former vice president Joe Biden has claimed that there will be an “epiphany of bipartisanship” when Trump is defeated. Even if that is true and, for example, Congress were to create the Department of Economic Development promised by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), trust in government will not rise until major government reform is enacted and faithful execution of the laws restored. As Democratic strategist Ed Kilgore recently warned in *New York* magazine, progressive candidates ignore the need for deeper bureaucratic reform at their peril:

Democrats would be wise to remember that a majority of voters don't inherently trust government any more than they do big corporations. The political power of “populism”—in both its left- and right-wing expressions—derives from a perpetual national craving for leaders who will bend government to the popular will and force it to address genuine needs. This by no means requires hostility to public employees or any reluctance to expand government where it's needed. But it does mean boldly taking issue with government as it exists.⁴

Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg made the same point in 2015 when he released his “Average Joe's Proviso” with the boldface news that “surprising numbers of white working-class voters will support the Democratic agenda—if Democrats promise to reform the government that would carry it out.” According to Greenberg, “downscale voters” would not listen to broad party promises of economic reform until Democratic candidates embraced those voters' “deeply held belief that politics has been corrupted and government has failed.” Clean

government is part of the story, Greenberg wrote, but so is a government that works better and costs less:

What really strengthens and empowers the progressive narrative, however, is a commitment to reform politics and government. That may seem ironic or contradictory, since the narrative calls for a period of government activism. But, of course, it does make sense: Why would you expect government to act on behalf of the ordinary citizen when it is clearly dominated by special interests? Why would you expect people who are financially on the edge, earning flat or falling wages and paying a fair amount of taxes and fees, not to be upset about tax money being wasted or channeled to individuals and corporations vastly more wealthy and powerful than themselves?⁵

Hillary Clinton might be president today if she had taken the advice.

THE REBUILDER'S DILEMMA

THE DEMAND FOR VERY MAJOR GOVERNMENT REFORM is especially important among Democrats who favor a bigger government that provides more services and very major government reform.⁶ As of November 2019, these “rebuilders” represented nearly half of self-identified Democrats—far outweighing the party’s heavily courted “expanders,” who support a bigger government but believe the federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform.⁷

Unless the Democratic standard-bearer presents a strong reform agenda, the party’s rebuilders could face a choice between (1) a Republican president who rarely misses an opportunity to criticize the federal government and favors a smaller government, and (2) a Democratic candidate who promises a much bigger government that provides more services but has little to say about making government and its programs work. Given these options, the Democratic rebuilders may conclude that Trump is the safer choice for better government. This is the builder’s dilemma in choosing the next president.⁸

An Introduction to the Four Reform Goals

For now, Democrats and Republicans are deeply divided on what they want from government reform. When preferences on the size of government and the level of demand for reform are

SURVEY SOURCES

This report is anchored by a November 2019 survey of more than 1,000 randomly selected Americans contacted by SSRS and interviewed by cellphone and landline in English or Spanish. The November survey is only the latest in a seven-survey set, however, starting with Pew Research Center surveys in 1997, 2010, and 2015; a Princeton Survey Research Associates survey conducted just before the 2016 presidential election; and SSRS surveys conducted in October 2018 and April 2019. The Pew Research Center’s 2015 report *Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government* is central to the analysis of the rising pressure for reform discussed in the first section of this report, while the SSRS survey in April 2019 survey provides the particularly deep inventory of demographic measures used in the appendix.

combined, Democrats and Republicans split into four reform groups:

1. **Dismantlers**, who support both a smaller government that provides fewer services and very major reform, and who lean Republican.
2. **Rebuilders**, who support both a bigger government that provides more services and very major reform, and who lean Democratic.
3. **Streamliners**, who support a smaller government and think the federal government is basically sound, and who lean Republican.
4. **Expanders**, who support a bigger government and think the federal government is basically sound, and who lean Democratic.

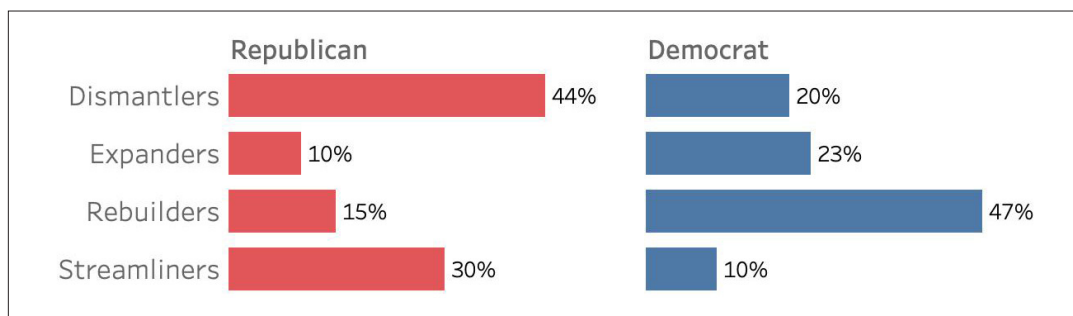
Figure 1 shows the distribution of Democrats and Republicans across the four reform positions as of late 2019. This distribution is the result of a twenty-year party realignment that was first visible in the Pew Research Center's 1997 *Deconstructing Distrust* report.⁹

Among Democrats, expanders held a 50 percent share of support in 1997 before tumbling to 23 percent in November 2019. Meanwhile, the share of Democratic rebuilders increased from 19 percent to 55 percent and that of dismantlers from 14 percent to 20 percent.

Among Republicans, dismantlers held a 29 percent share of support in 1997 before surging to 70 percent in 2016, then dropping back to 44 percent with their standard-bearer in office. Meanwhile, the share of Republican streamliners dropped from 24 percent in 1997 to 11 percent in 2016 before rebounding to 30 percent in November 2019 as they emerged as a potential force in the 2020 election.

Republican streamliners are far from regaining a plurality but may yet become a threat to

FIGURE 1 Reform groups within each party, November 2019 (all survey respondents)



SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

Trump's 2020 election. Streamliners are less conservative than dismantlers, and are less angry about and distrusting of the federal government. They are also less likely than dismantlers to say the federal government is almost always wasteful and inefficient, cannot be trusted to do the right thing, and is doing a poor job running its programs. Finally, they are less likely to say that ordinary Americans would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials, that elected officials lose touch with the people quickly, and that their side has been losing more than winning lately on issues that matter to them. In sum, they are not as likely as dismantlers to embrace Trump's antigovernment rhetoric.¹⁰

These shifts reflect more than ordinary in- and out-party reactions to White House control. As noted later in this report, the demand for reform was rising well before President Barack Obama left office in 2017 and hit its recent peak just before the 2018 midterm elections. In contrast to the decline in the share of Republican dismantlers, the share of Democratic dismantlers has increased as the party addresses what Mayor Pete Buttigieg called the "burn-the-house-down" voting that helped Trump win the White House.

The Basic Argument

This report argues that the rebuilder's dilemma is a key to Democratic success in the 2020 election: No Democratic candidate can win the nomination without embracing the party's appetite for almost everything the federal government provides. Nor can the party's nominee defeat Trump without also embracing its high demand for very major government reform. If Democrats go too far in courting expanders, they could lose the rebuilders; if they move too far toward rebuilders, they could turn off expanders.

Given recent increases in the number of Democratic dismantlers who may be reluctant to support a progressive candidate, the party's nominee cannot win without uniting its big-government expanders and reform-oriented rebuilders. Democratic expanders cannot elect the next president on their own. At this point, however, the candidates are speaking almost exclusively to them, leaving Trump free to recruit disaffected Democratic rebuilders and dismantlers to his cause.

The rest of this report will examine this tension while offering insights on how rebuilders and expanders might unite to influence the 2020 outcome. Drawing on a set of charts from my ongoing research on public attitudes about government reform, this report covers four topics: (1) the rising demand for reform, (2) the reform realignment among the four groups, (3) what the Democratic rebuilders and expanders want, and (4) a bipartisan reform agenda

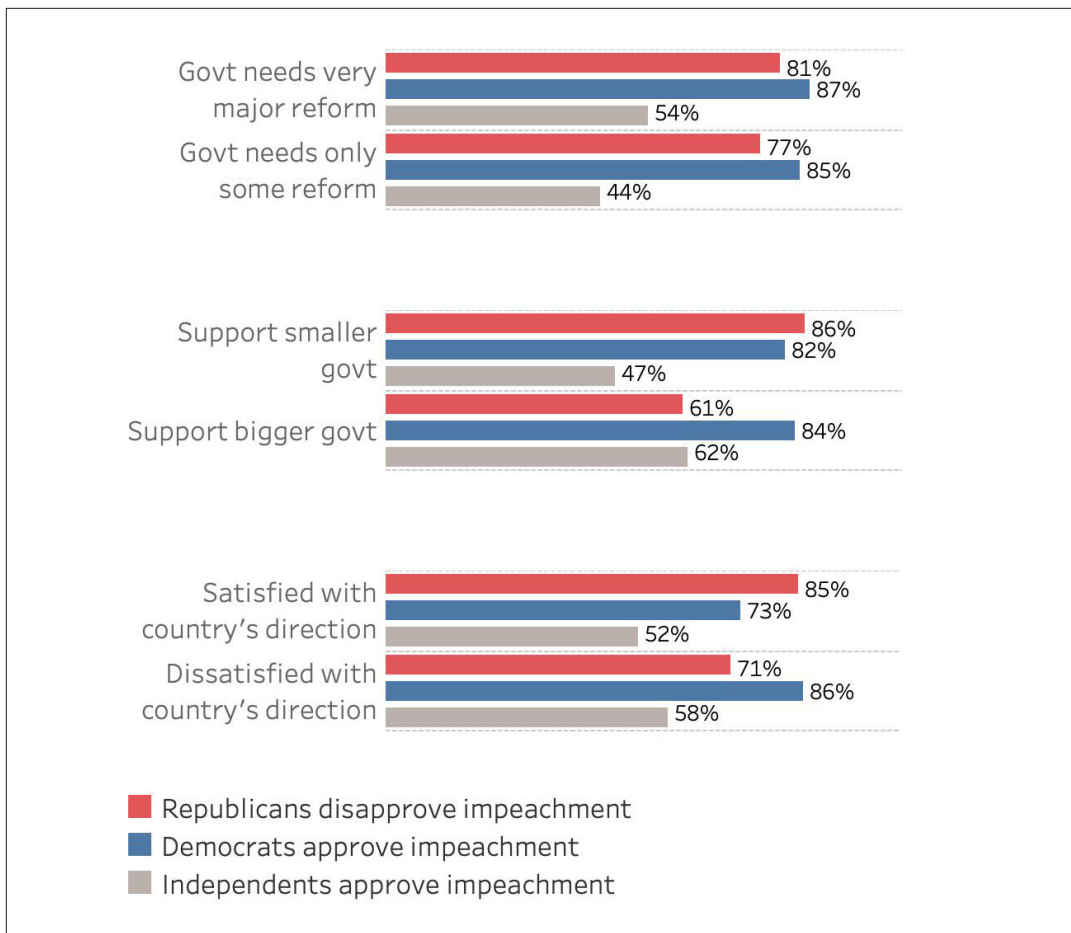
to address the demand for reform. Readers will find a short appendix on the demographic and ideological characteristics of the reform groups.

Will Impeachment Affect Demand?

The 2019 House decision to conduct an impeachment inquiry and the Senate's eventual decision to acquit the president are unlikely to have a lasting impact on the findings in this report. Asked about the inquiry in early November, only days before hearings began, 57 percent of respondents approved of the decision to proceed, 39 percent disapproved, and 5 percent did not answer the question. Party loyalties influenced these opinions significantly: 86 percent of Democrats approved of the inquiry, 79 percent of Republicans disapproved, and independents split almost two-to-one in favor (69 percent versus 31 percent).¹¹

As Figure 2 shows, these opinions did not vary with respondent demands for reform, support for bigger or smaller government, or satisfaction with the direction of the country. Democrats and Republicans will almost certainly continue to favor very major reform in the wake of the president's acquittal.

FIGURE 2 Attitudes on reform and impeachment, November 2019 (all survey respondents)



SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

THE DEMAND FOR REFORM

THIS REPORT ASKS WHAT AMERICANS WANT from government reform and how the answers might shape the 2020 election and beyond.¹² As such, it is important to ask what survey respondents might have been thinking when they said they wanted very major reform, only some reform, or not much reform at all. Did they understand the question? Did they think of a personal experience, news story, or campaign advertisement when they answered the question? Did they wonder how their friends or family would answer? Did they think about their political party, ideology, or a specific presidential candidate? Or did they rely on their experiences and beliefs related to age, education, ideology, income, race, sex, or personal history?

My analysis of the Pew Research Center's 2015 survey shows the relationship between poor government performance and rising demand for reform.¹³ Although these opinions were also shaped by respondent characteristics such as age, education, income, race, and sex, the following eight indicators were more powerful predictors of support for very major reform:

1. A belief that the federal government is almost always wasteful and inefficient.
2. A lack of trust in the federal government to do the right thing almost always or most of the time.
3. A belief that the federal government does a poor job running its programs.
4. A dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the country.
5. A belief that the federal government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.
6. A belief that ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials.
7. A feeling of anger or frustration with the federal government.
8. A belief that voting doesn't really affect how government runs things.¹⁴

Pew's 2015 survey data reveal a clear link between the demand for reform and doubts about federal government performance. Ninety-three percent of respondents who said the federal government needed very major reform also said the federal government was doing only a fair or a poor job running its programs, 92 percent said they were angry or frustrated with the federal government, 90 percent said the federal government was pretty much run

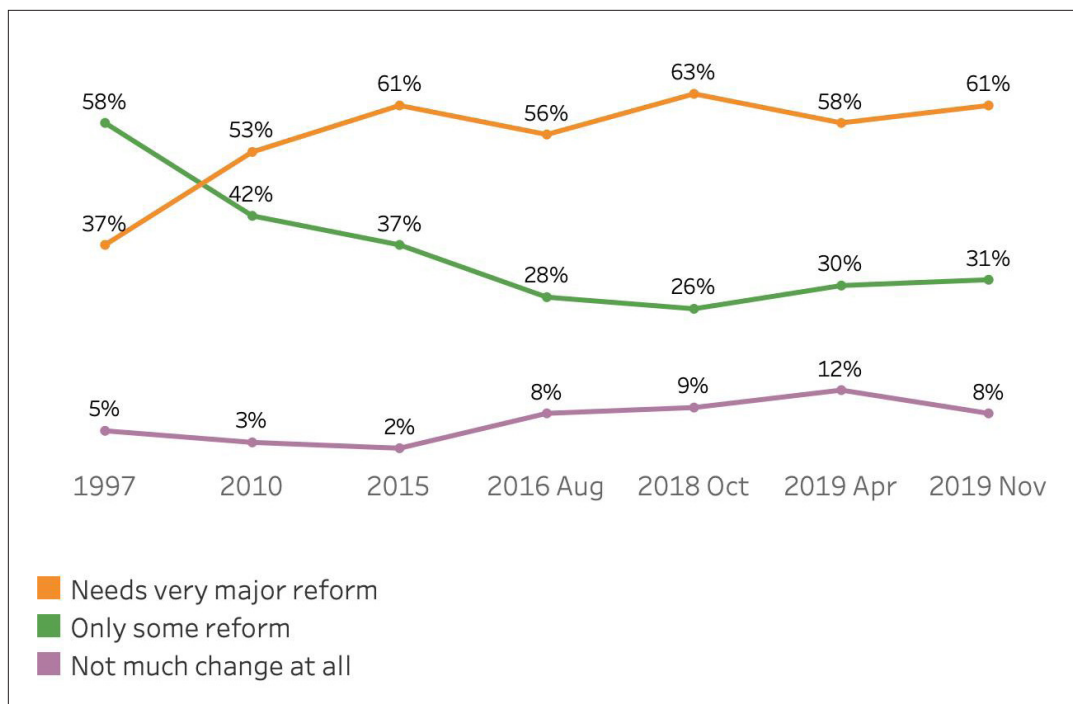
MEASURING PREDICTIVE POWER

Computer-assisted machine learning demonstrates the power of government performance for distinguishing among reform preferences. Further analysis using machine learning shows that the eight predictors combine to accurately identify 85 percent of dismantlers, 88 percent of rebuilders, 93 percent of expanders, and 90 percent of streamliners. These accuracy rates suggest that the predictors capture a significant amount of the variation across the four reform groups while reassuring readers that the typology is not merely an echo of other measures such as party identification or political ideology.

by a few big interests, 85 percent said they were dissatisfied with the way things were going in the country, 76 percent said they trusted the federal government in Washington only some of the time, 75 percent said the federal government is almost always wasteful and inefficient, 64 percent said ordinary Americans would do a better job solving problems than elected officials, and 50 percent said voting by people like themselves does not really affect how government runs things.

As much as these sharply negative ratings of federal performance shape the demand for reform, they do not appear to influence preferences for a smaller government that provides fewer services. According to a 2010 study by the liberal-leaning Center for American Progress (CAP), Americans wanted better, not smaller, government. As CAP scholars Guy Molyneux, Ruy Teixeira, and John Whaley argued, the sharp decline in public trust in government following the 2008 economic crisis was more closely related to perceptions of government performance than political party or ideology. “Government will not regain the public trust unless it earns it. And earning it means spending taxpayer money more carefully—and doing what works,” they wrote.¹⁵ Americans favored a bigger government that provides more services, but major reforms such as eliminating inefficient programs, performance measurement, and better management would have to be part of the package.

As Figure 3 shows, three-fifths of Americans currently share a demand for very major government reform. Democrats and Republicans are deeply divided over the problems that lead to poor performance and the inventory of reforms, but they have substantial common ground on the need for a strong federal role on priorities such as protecting the nation from

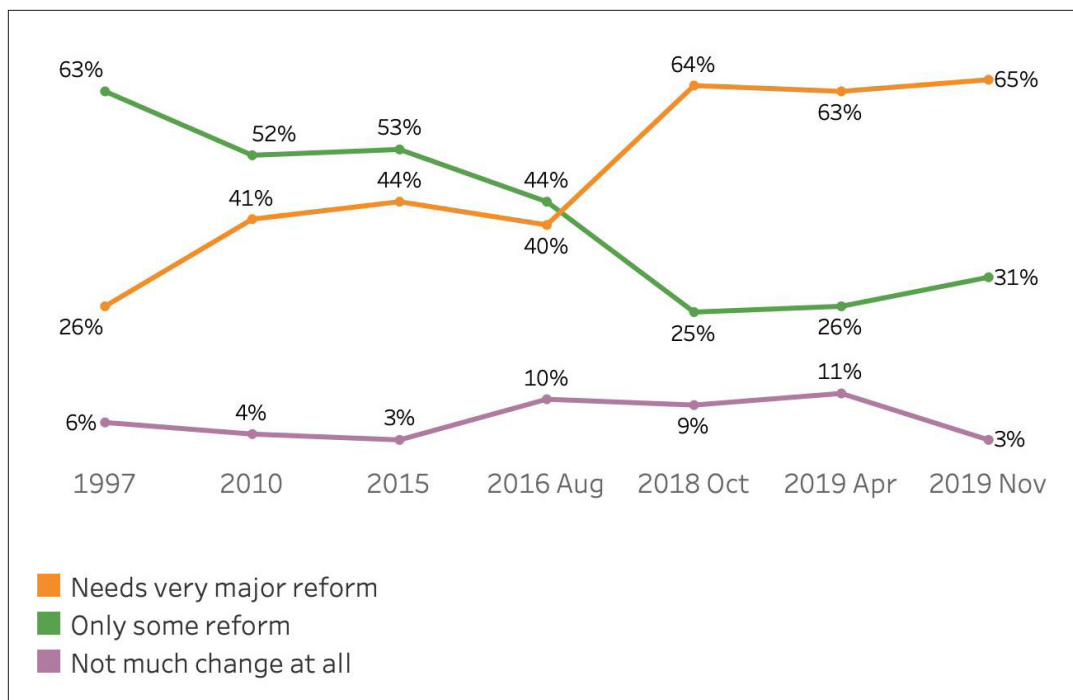
FIGURE 3 The demand for reform, 1997–2019 (all survey respondents)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

terrorism, responding to natural disasters, rebuilding infrastructure, and assuring safe food and drugs. As noted later, they also share some ideas for making government work more effectively—not the least of which is building a strong public service.

Figures 4 and 5 show rising demand for reform among Democrats and Republicans, respectively, between 1997 and 2010. Once past this marker, the demand for very major reform settled into more traditional in- and out-party patterns—that is, Democrats and Republicans were more likely to say the federal government needs very major reform when a president of the other party was in power. Republicans’ demand for very major reform was much higher than Democrats’ in 2010 and 2016, with Obama in the White House, but lower with Trump in office two years later. As the figures also indicate, Republicans were more likely to favor major reform after Trump’s first two years in office (54 percent) than Democrats were after Obama’s first two years (41 percent).

Trump’s unrelenting attacks on the government he leads may help explain this Republican demand. He rarely misses an opportunity to attack the “deep state”; stoke White House

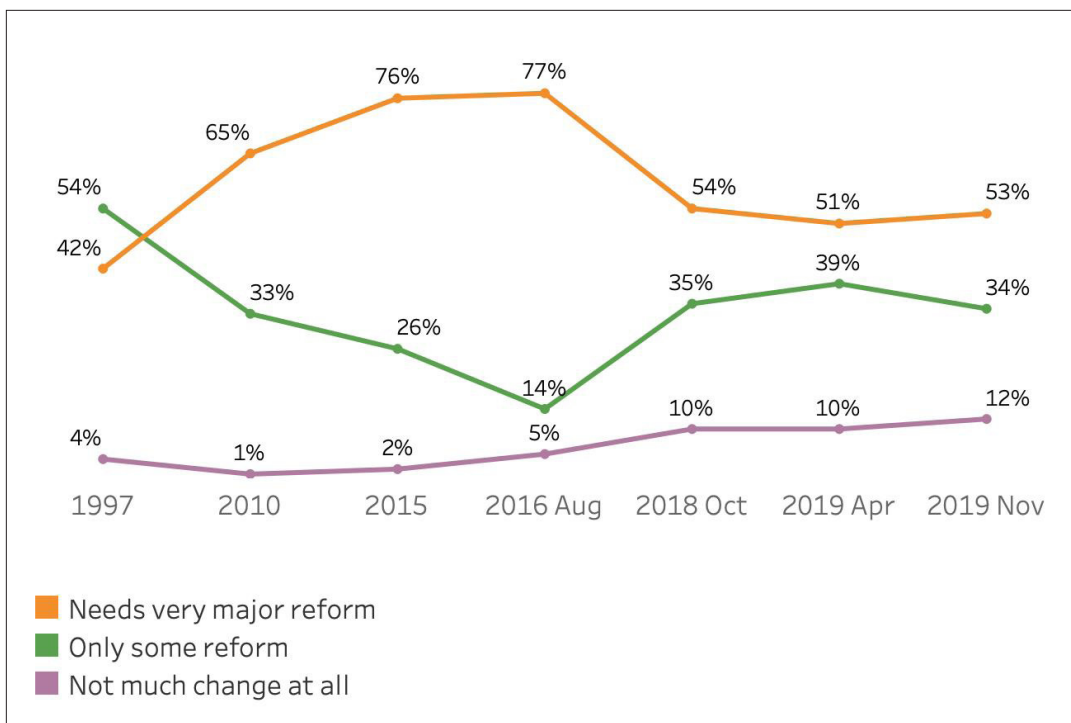
FIGURE 4 The demand for reform, 1997–2019 (Democratic respondents only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

chaos; and repeat a list of 2016 campaign promises to “drain the swamp,” “cut so much, it will make your heads spin,” cut the federal debt with “vigorous attacks on government waste, fraud, and abuse,” “stop ‘zombie’ funding on programs that are not authorized in law,” and “buy things for less money.”

Tempting as it might be to blame Trump for sparking the rise of the demand for dismantling, public concerns were visible well before he joined the 2016 race—in the rising number of Americans who said the federal government is almost always wasteful and inefficient, cannot be trusted to do the right thing, is doing a poor job running its programs, and is controlled by a few big interests. As such, the public’s demand for very major reform can be seen as the consequence of lost faith in overall federal performance rather than a specific shock such as the 2001 terrorist attacks or a longer-running government failure such as the opioid epidemic.

Nevertheless, Trump’s continued attacks on government may yet weaken his support among Republican moderates who believed he would actually drain the swamp, make government run like a business, and tame the national debt. After three full years in office, even

FIGURE 5 The demand for reform, 1997–2019 (Republican respondents only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

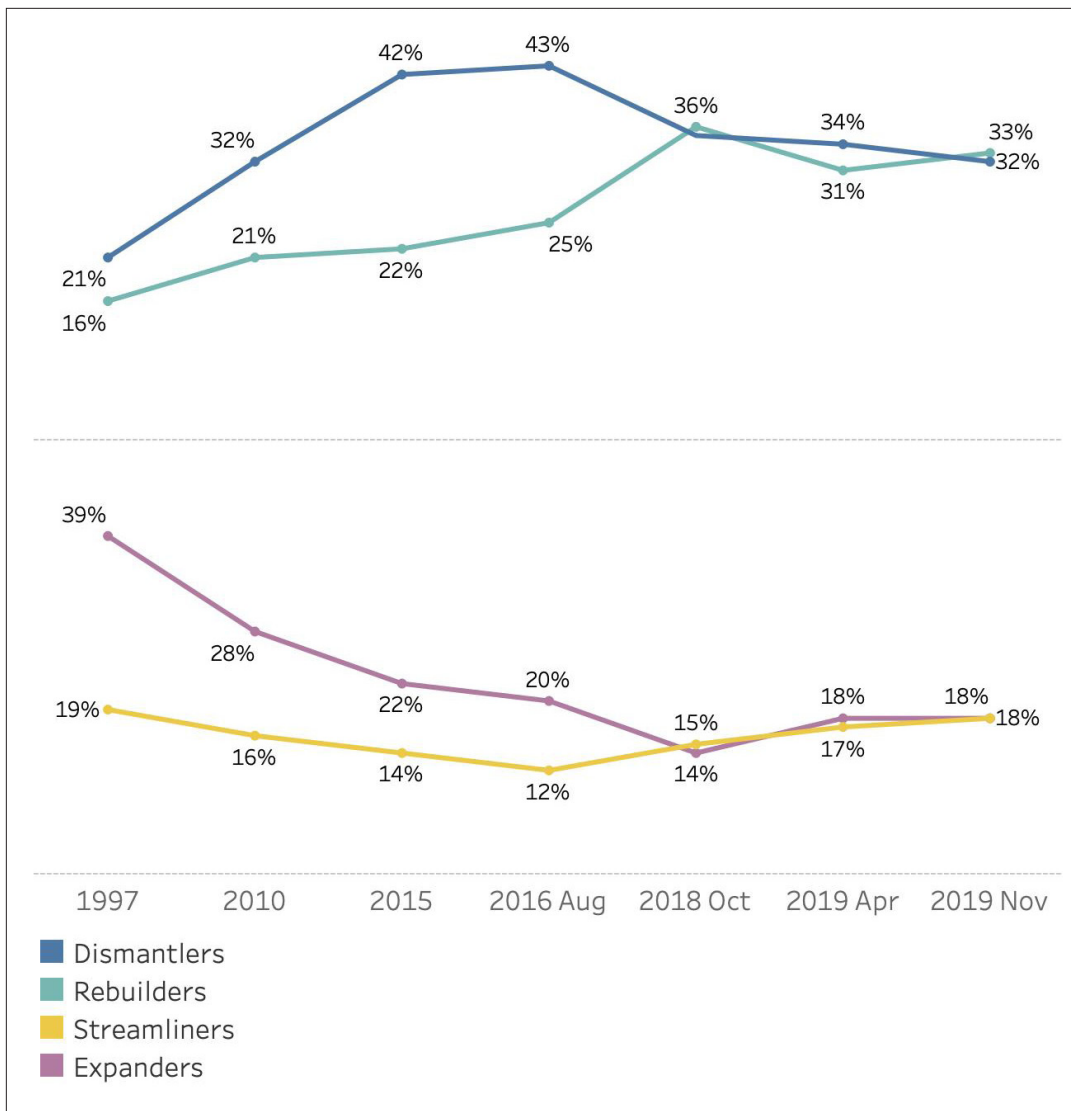
Trump seems to understand that the government is still broken. Hence, Trump’s own affection for 2016 campaign memes and bright-red “Make American Great Again” hats? “How do you give up the greatest theme of all time with a new theme?,” Trump recently said of the muted response to his 2020 “Keep America Great Always” slogan. Some of his supporters could soon decide that a more traditional Republican deserves a try.

THE REFORM REALIGNMENT

EVEN AS THE DEMAND FOR VERY MAJOR REFORM has increased among Democrats and Republicans, support for bigger or smaller government has remained relatively stable since the early 1970s, when the question was first asked.¹⁶ As of November 2019, 55 percent of Republicans supported smaller government, while 69 percent of Democrats supported bigger government.

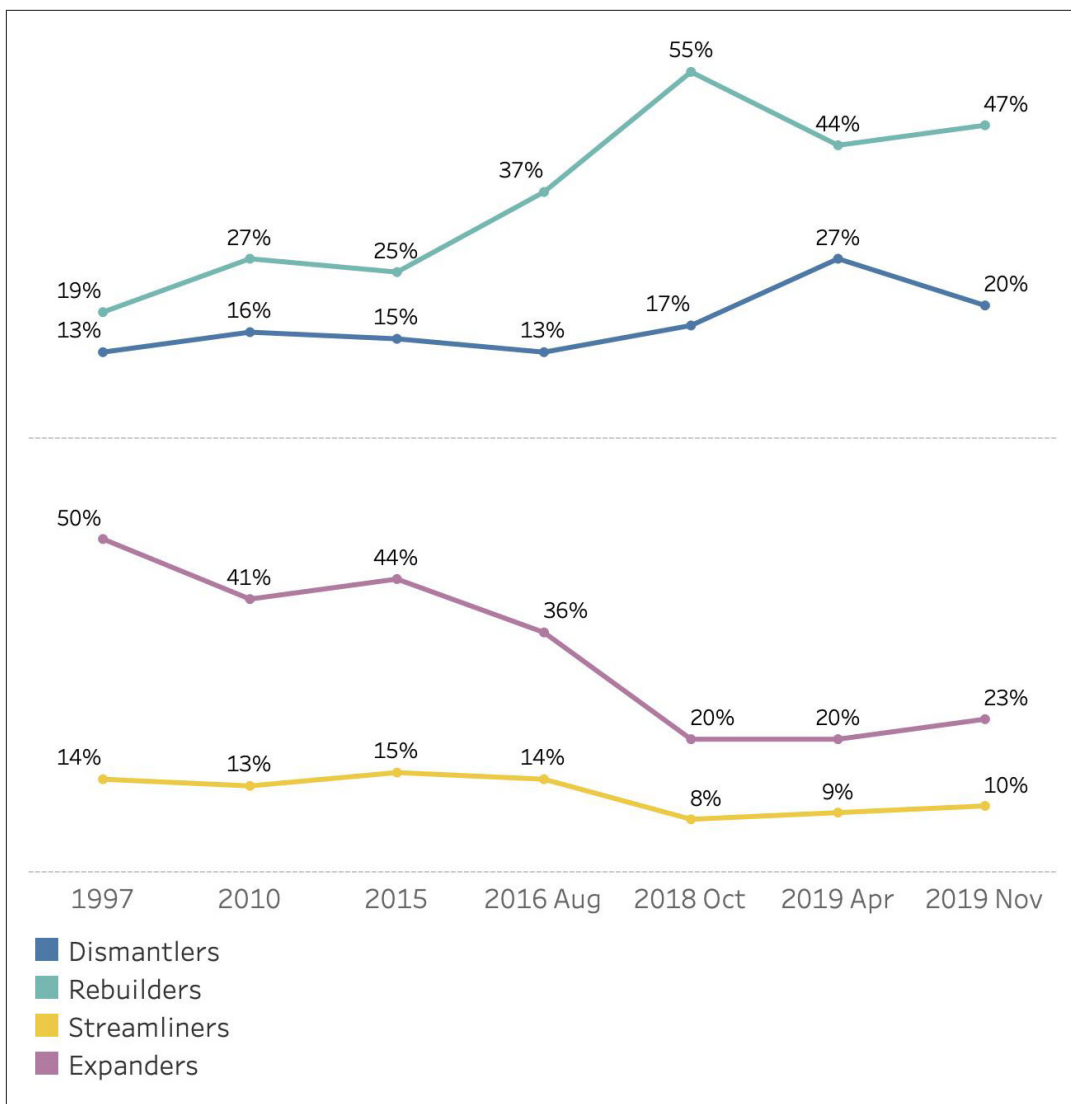
This difference between the parties narrowed somewhat during the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent recession, when Americans rallied for more spending for veterans, education, roads and highways, environmental protection, health care, and scientific research. But the Pew Research Center said the gap was “as wide as ever” in 2017, as the Trump administration pushed for lower taxes and Democrats fought for higher social spending.

Looking back over the past twenty years, opinions about bigger or smaller government combined with rising demand for very major reform to realign party support for dismantling and rebuilding. As Figure 6 shows, dismantlers and rebuilders surged between 1997 and November 2019, while expanders lost share and streamliners held steady. Although the share of dismantlers fell with Trump in the White House, the president’s 2020 reelection campaign is relying on its 2016 campaign playbook to assure maximum turnout in what promises to be a close election.

FIGURE 6 Changing reform positions, 1997–2019 (all survey respondents)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

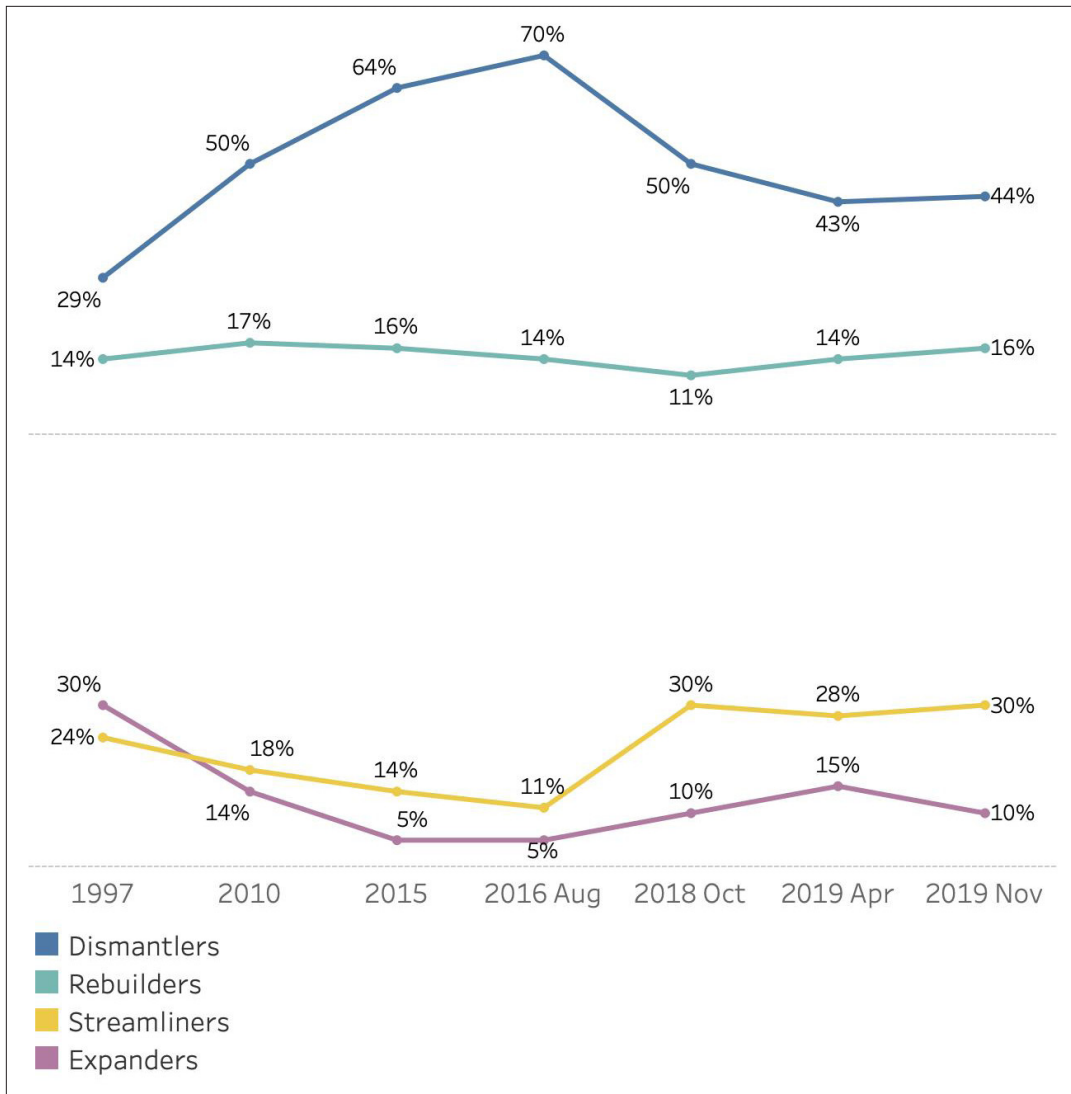
As noted earlier, both parties have realigned around government reform. Start with the Democrats. As Figure 7 shows, expanders represented 50 percent of the party in 1997 but just 23 percent in November 2019. Meanwhile, rebuilders rose from a 19 percent share in 1997 to a peak of 55 percent in October 2018 before dropping to 47 percent. Perhaps equally important for the 2020 election, the percentage of dismantlers remained in the low teens between 1997 and 2016, then rose from 17 percent in October 2018 to 27 percent in April 2019 before sliding

FIGURE 7 Changing reform positions, 1997–2019 (Democratic respondents only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

back to 20 percent in November. Despite the drop, the percentage of Democratic dismantlers suggests problems for the party’s eventual candidate.

Next turn to the Republicans. Figure 8 tracks the rising fortunes of Republican dismantlers during the Obama presidency. Although they lost ground after Trump won the White House, they have retained a solid—if perhaps imperiled—edge over streamliners. At the same time, the trend lines indicate the potential for defections if Republican expanders and streamlin-

FIGURE 8 Changing reform positions, 1997–2019 (Republican respondents only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

ers find common cause in opposing Trump’s reelection. Though it is difficult to imagine a Republican rebellion against Trump given his ability to create GOP unity out of chaos and deter credible challengers, streamliners may yet have a say on the president’s future by helping the Democrats win the White House.

These charts confirm rising public concerns about federal performance during a period of deep political, economic, and social disruption.¹⁷ The dismantlers and rebuilders may

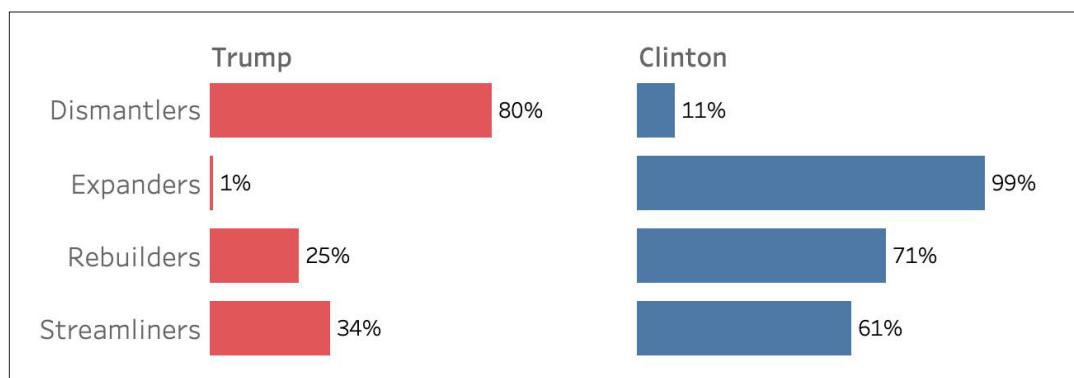
not be “estranged in their own country,” as some social scientists have argued, but the two groups seem to share many of the demographic, political, and ideological characteristics that the Pew Research Center examined in its 2014 polarization study. In a survey of 10,000 Americans, Pew discovered that ideological “silos” have become common within both parties as partisans seek confirmation of their positions in what the center calls “a rising tide of mutual antipathy.” Most Americans do not operate on the extremes, it argues, but “many of those in the center remain on the edges of the political playing field, relatively distant and disengaged, while the most ideologically oriented and politically rancorous Americans make their voices heard through greater participation in every stage of the political process.”

The 2016 Vote

As Figures 9–11 suggest, dismantlers and expanders expressed their strongest support in 2016 for the party candidates who shared their views on government reform. When asked in August 2016 whether they intended to vote for Trump or Clinton, expanders were by far the strongest Clinton supporters (99 percent), whereas dismantlers went for Trump (80 percent); rebuilders and streamliners also leaned toward Clinton. Figure 10 shows Clinton’s strong support from Democratic expanders, rebuilders, and streamliners but significant slippage among dismantlers, while Figure 11 indicates Trump’s unified support from Republican dismantlers, rebuilders, and streamliners but not from expanders.

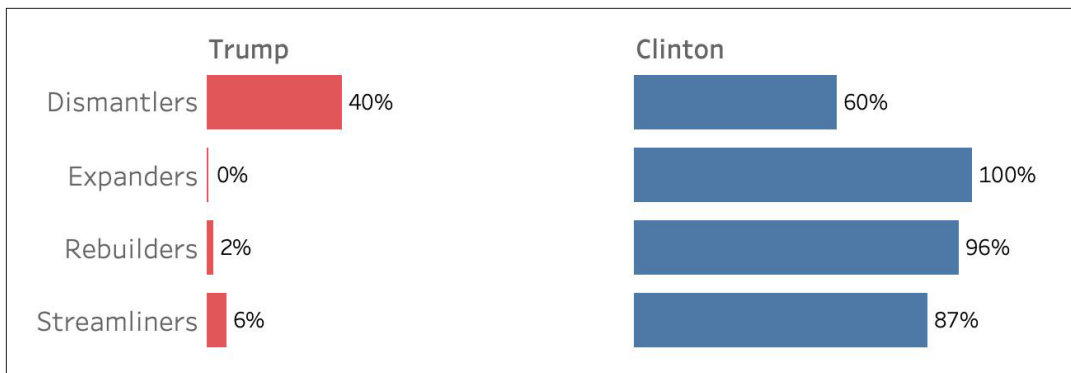
The November 2019 SSRS survey suggests that these preferences will hold in 2020. Asked about a hypothetical matchup between Trump and a Democratic candidate, Trump received

FIGURE 9 Vote intentions by reform position, 2016 (all survey respondents*)



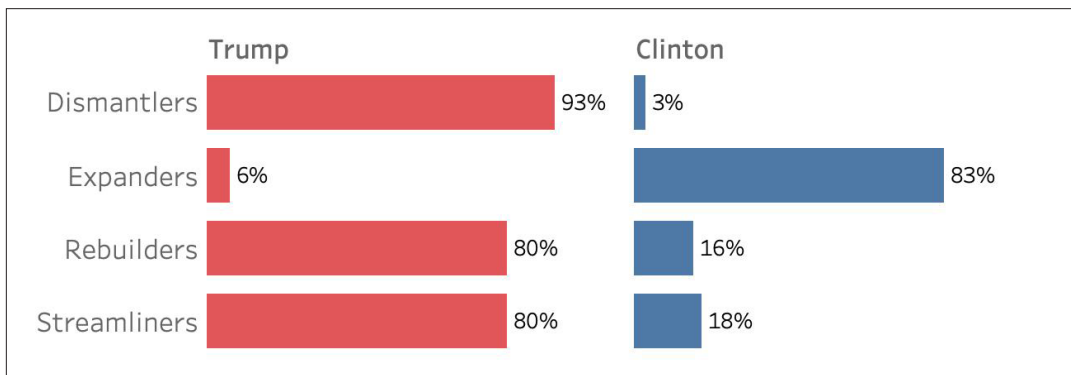
*Figure excludes respondents who answered “other” or “don’t know.”

SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

FIGURE 10 Vote intentions by reform position, 2016 (Democratic respondents only*)


*Figure excludes respondents who answered “other” or “don’t know.”

SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

FIGURE 11 Vote intentions by reform position, 2016 (Republican respondents only*)


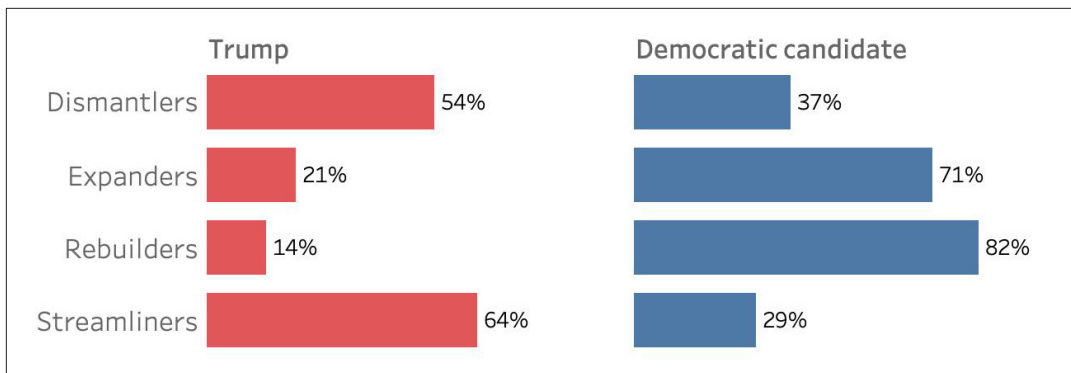
*Figure excludes respondents who answered “other” or “don’t know.”

SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

his highest level of support from Republican dismantlers, while the Democratic candidate received the highest level of support from Democratic rebuilders.

As Figure 12 suggests, these 2020 voting intentions suggest vulnerabilities for both parties. They win strong support from their core constituencies, but Trump loses a significant share of streamliners and dismantlers to the eventual Democratic candidate. These figures come far too early to hold predictive power but raise questions about potential erosion among Trump supporters.

FIGURE 12 Vote intentions by reform position, 2020 (all survey respondents*)



*Figure excludes respondents who answered “other” or “don’t know”

SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

WHAT THE DEMOCRATIC REBUILDERS AND EXPANDERS WANT

THE RISING DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT REFORM has divided both parties. As illustrated earlier, dismantlers and rebuilders were in a virtual tie for roughly a third of overall public support in November 2019, while expanders and streamliners were at less than a fifth. As also noted, Trump currently has the clearest path to victory by rallying Republican dismantlers, while Democrats have taken the more difficult route of appealing to the party's expanders.

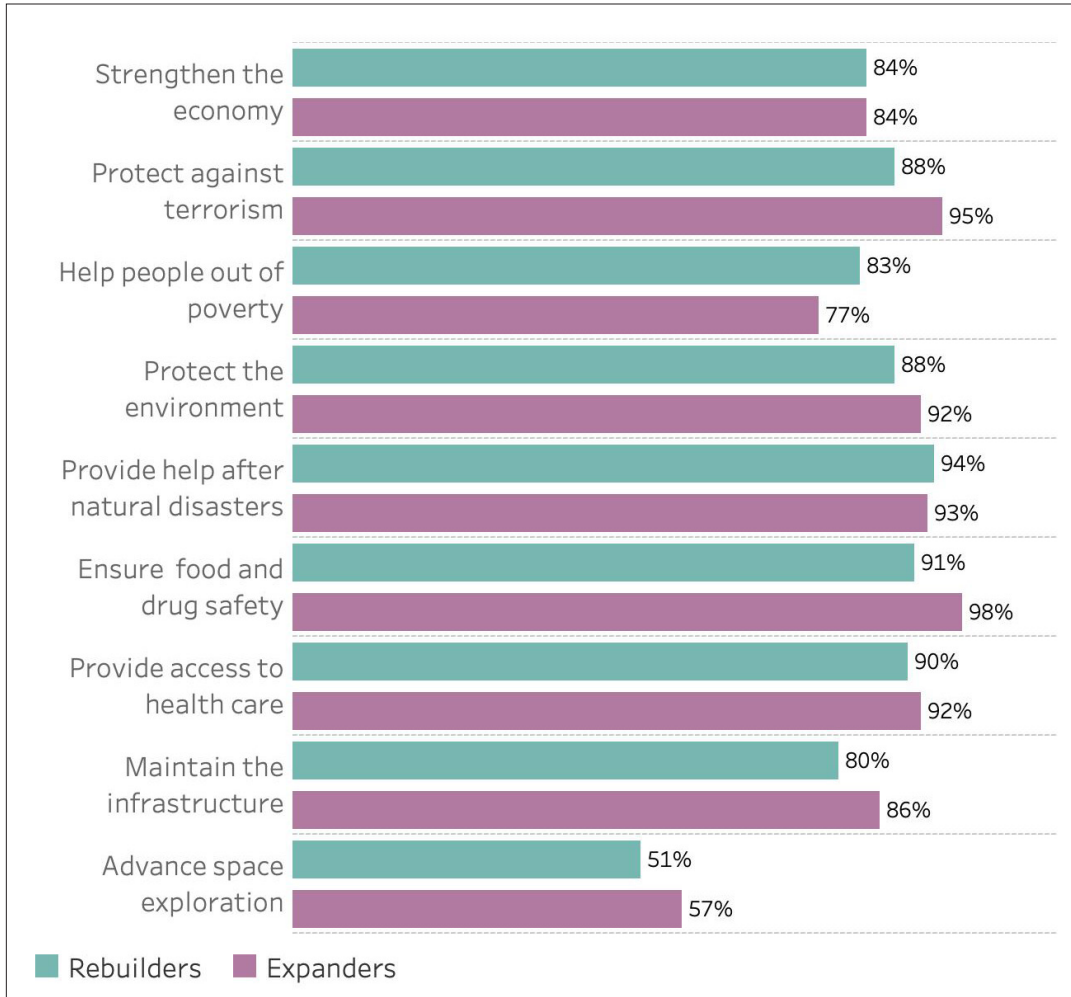
Democrats also face a serious threat from their dismantlers, which have more than doubled in strength since August 2016. As their numbers have grown, so has the risk of intra-party conflict between rebuilders and expanders. Dismantlers and streamliners will also have their say in the 2020 election, but rebuilders and expanders receive special attention in the following pages because of their larger numbers and potential impact on the outcome. This is not to argue that they are at war. On the contrary, these two dominant Democratic reform groups have significant areas of agreement, as shown in Figure 13.

Yet, even as rebuilders and expanders shared broad sympathies for an activist federal government in 2015, with the economy rebounding from the 2008 financial crisis, they disagreed when assessing the federal government's job performance in trying to achieve its missions. According to the data presented in Figure 14, Democratic rebuilders gave the federal government lower ratings than expanders in every case. These ratings are particularly troubling for Democrats in that the survey was taken during the Obama administration.

MORE AGREEMENT THAN DISAGREEMENT

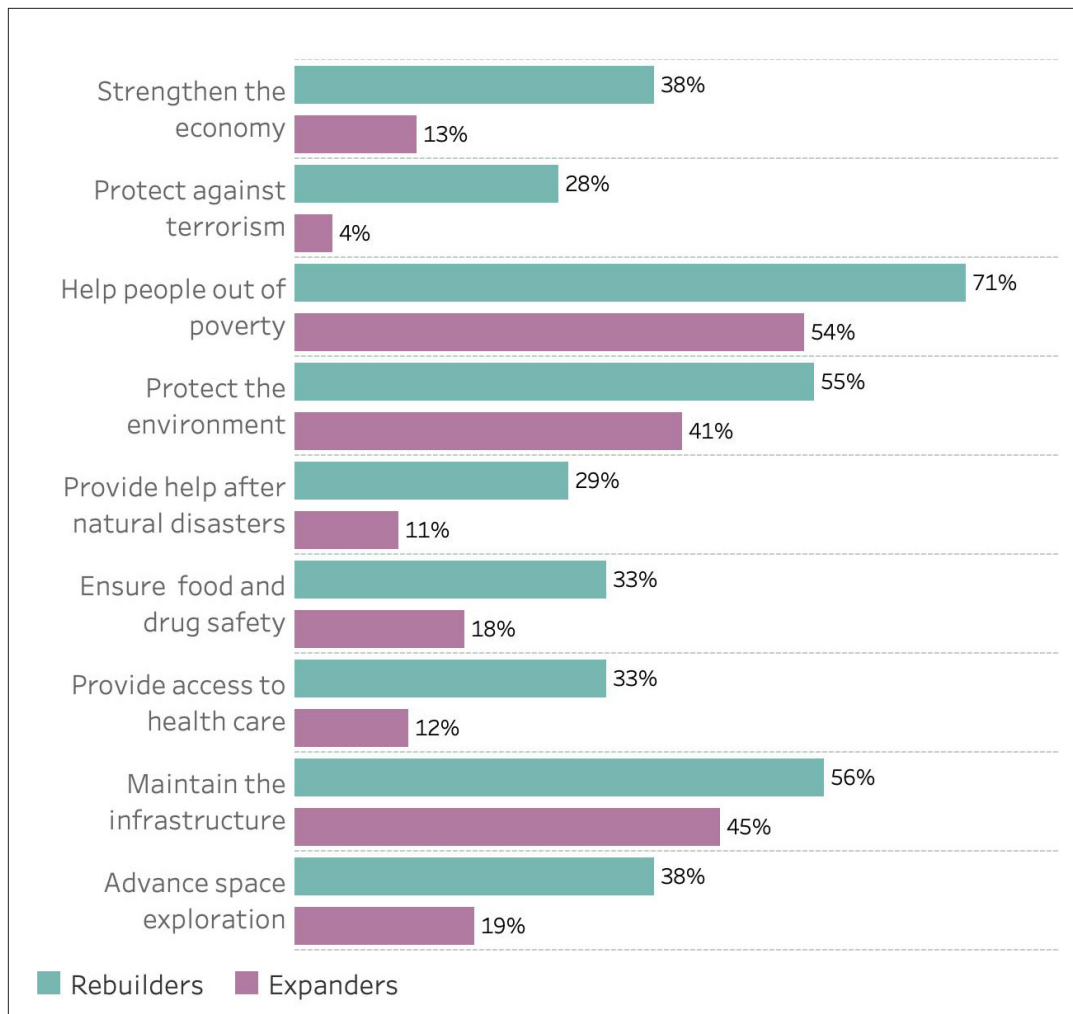
My ongoing research on reform demand shows significant intraparty agreement among Republicans and Democrats about most federal missions. In 2015, Republican dismantlers and streamliners were about as likely as Democratic rebuilders and expanders to say that the federal government should have a major role in keeping the nation safe from terrorism, responding to natural disasters, assuring safe food and drugs, and maintaining infrastructure. At the same time, the Republican dismantlers and streamliners were much less likely to endorse a federal role in protecting the environment, helping people out of poverty, and ensuring access to health care.

FIGURE 13 The federal government should play a major role by federal mission, 2015
(Democratic rebuilders and expanders only)



SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

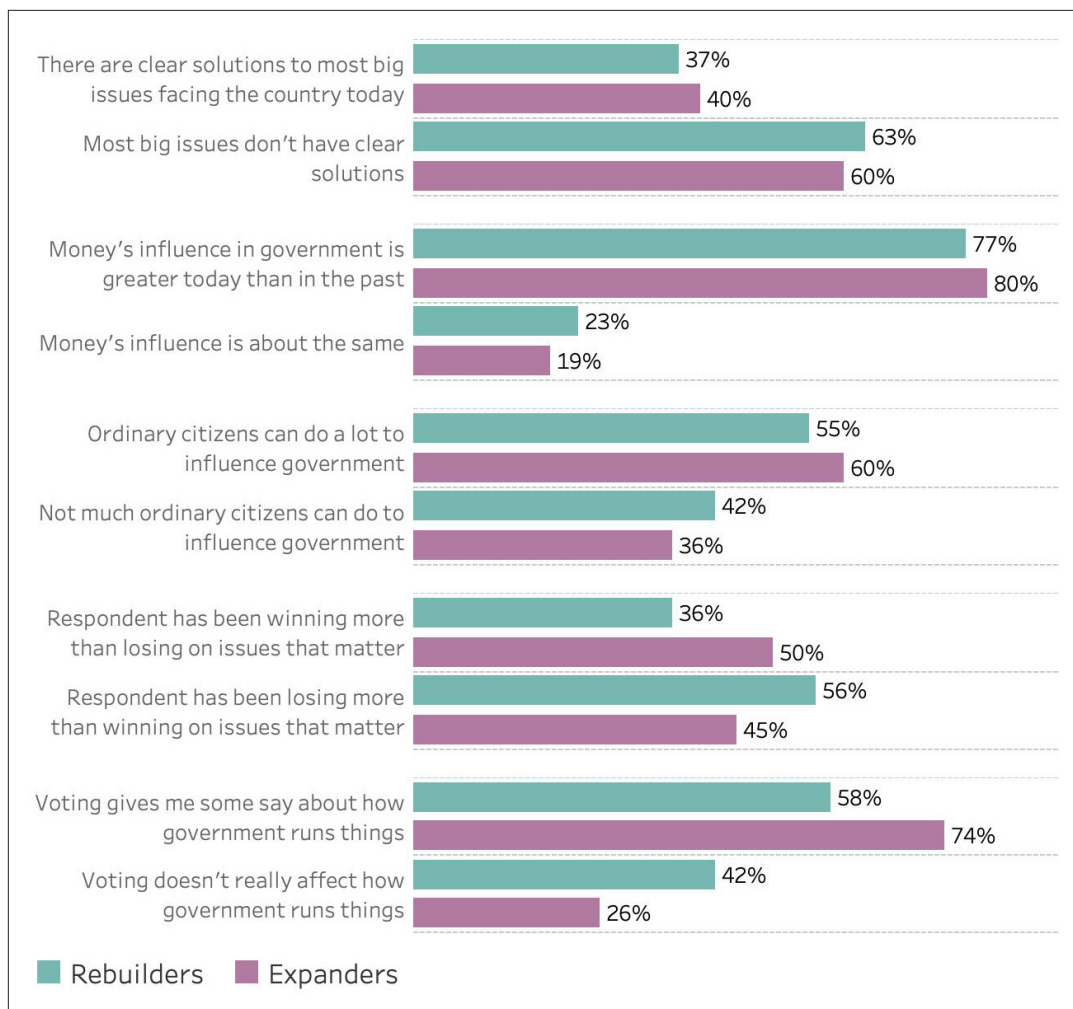
FIGURE 14 The federal government is doing a very or somewhat bad job by federal mission, 2015 (Democratic rebuilders and expanders only)



SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

Figure 15 suggests that rebuilders and expanders found common ground on political efficacy, including general agreement that ordinary citizens can do a lot to influence government if they try and that voting gives people like them a say in how the government runs things. But both groups strongly agreed that (1) money’s influence on politics and elected officials is greater than in the past, (2) they have been winning and losing at about the same rates on issues that matter to them, and (3) most elected officials put their own interests ahead of the country’s.

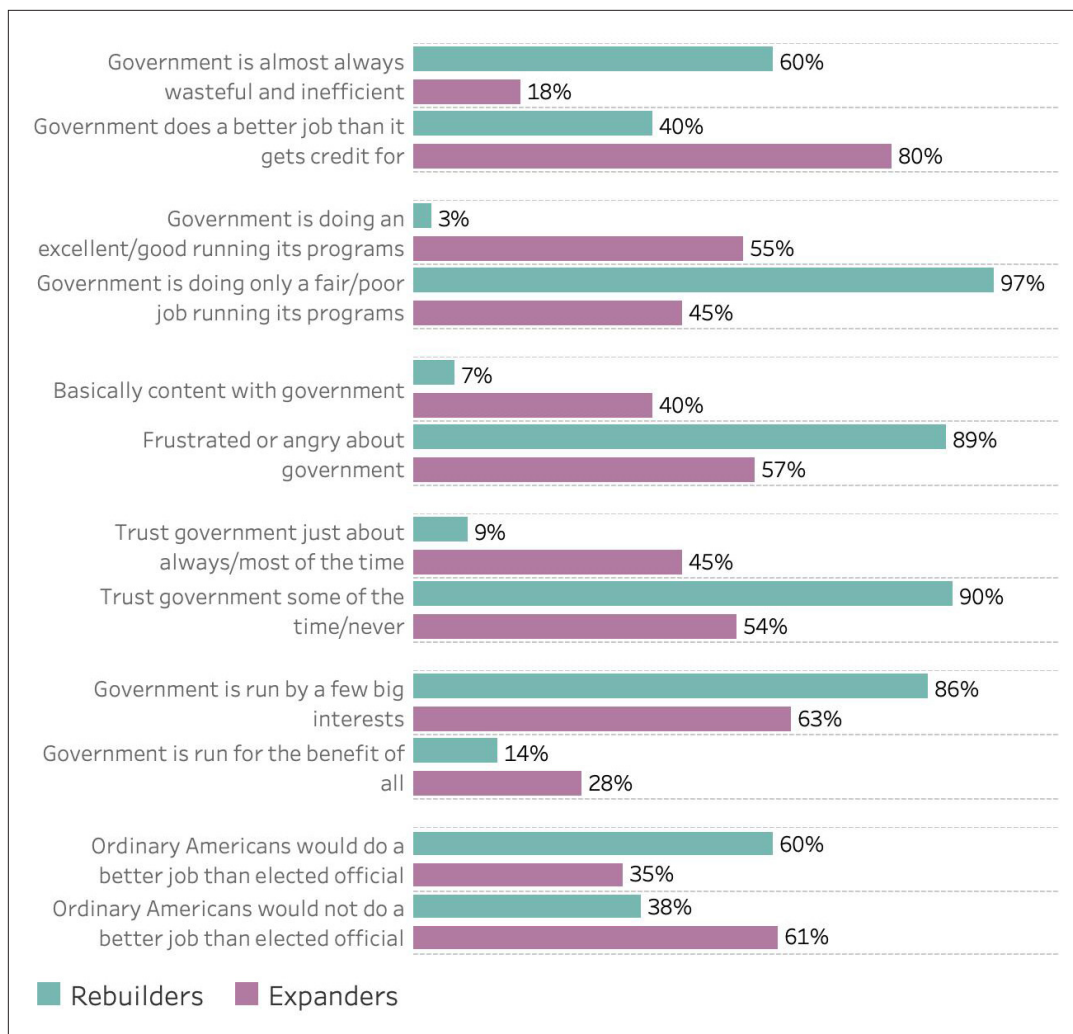
Figure 16 provides an inventory of disagreements that may undermine potential alli-

FIGURE 15 Agreements on government performance, 2015 (Democratic rebuilders and expanders only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

ances between Democratic rebuilders and expanders. Most notably, expanders were much less likely to see the federal government as wasteful and inefficient and more likely to express confidence in its job performance, report higher overall trust in government, and believe that government is run for the benefit of all.

Readers are reminded that these questions were asked in 2015, when Obama was still in office and the economy was rising. The fact that so many rebuilders and expanders had serious doubts about government performance implies lingering challenges for Democratic candidates who believe that promising a bigger government that delivers more services will mollify the

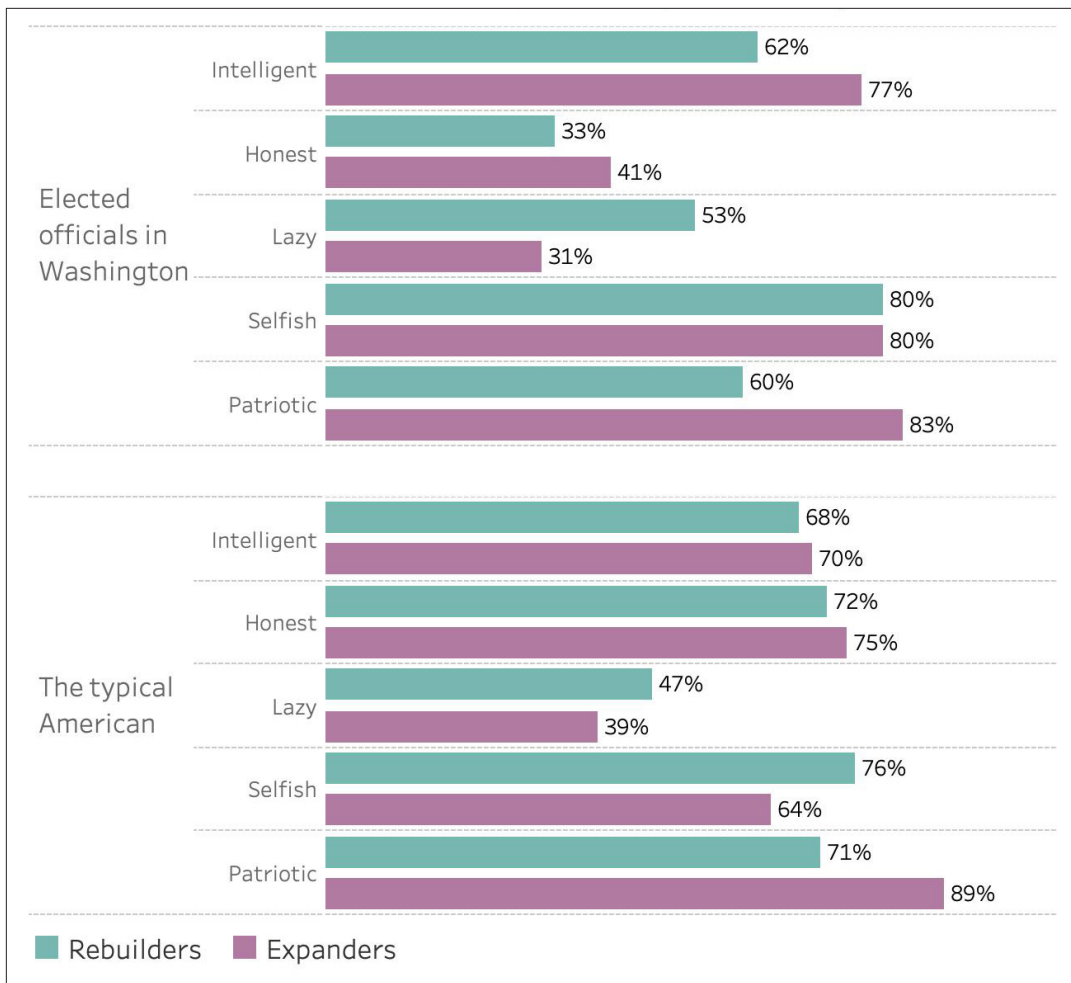
FIGURE 16 Disagreements on government reform, 2015 (Democratic rebuilders and expanders only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

rebuilders who believe government is already failing.

Figure 17 confirms differences in how Democratic rebuilders and expanders view elected officials and the typical American. Though Figure 16 shows that expanders were more positive than rebuilders about the government’s job performance and more willing to give the benefit of the doubt to elected officials, they were also more likely to describe officials as less honest and lazier than typical Americans.

As for government reform, rebuilders and expanders come together on broad assessments of the need for ethics reform and giving ordinary Americans a stronger voice against big

FIGURE 17: Characteristics of elected officials in Washington and the typical American, 2015 (Democratic rebuilders and expanders only)


*Percentage who say a term describes elected officials or typical Americans well or very well.

SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

interests. They believe that voting can make a difference and that ordinary citizens influence government, but they also think money and self-interest drive the decisions of the nation’s dishonest, isolated officials. Moreover, even as they find common cause with expanders on election and ethics reform, rebuilders are much more likely to question the federal government’s ability to deliver on the promises it makes.

A BIPARTISAN REFORM AGENDA

EVERY PRESIDENT SINCE FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT has entered office promising government reform, but none has quite succeeded at delivering it. Instead, the federal bureaucracy remains mired in organizational structures and strategies that were established in the 1930s and have been updated infrequently. As a result, the national government struggles to fulfill noble policy goals while dealing with continual threats to basic job performance that Americans expect. “If major financial, health, and education overhauls are indeed sorely needed to improve the quality of life of Americans, so too is a federal service reform that will equip the federal government with the tools that it needs to successfully implement reforms and carry out existing missions,” former Federal Reserve Board chairman Paul A. Volcker stated in 2011.¹⁸

If the federal government is to meet heightened public concerns about faithful execution, Congress and the president must take the following seven steps to high performance:¹⁹

I. Discipline Campaign Spending

Dismantlers and rebuilders decry the amount of money in politics and say the high cost of presidential campaigns discourages good candidates from running. They also support limits on election spending and believe that the system can be fixed. Asked in 2015 about new campaign finance laws, 57 percent of dismantlers and 63 percent of rebuilders said such laws would be effective in reducing the role of money in politics. Both groups also seem ready to endorse reforms giving citizens a stronger voice in important decisions such as congressional redistricting, campaign oversight, ethics, and public participation. After all, dismantlers and rebuilders are 15–20 percentage points more likely than streamliners and expanders to say ordinary Americans would do a better job solving the country’s problems.

2. Strengthen Government Ethics

Dismantlers and rebuilders are more likely than other Americans to believe that special interests run the country, and they favor action to address self-dealing by elected and appointed officers alike. They also know the legislative process is broken and want it fixed, and they broadly agree that government needs vigorous oversight agencies such as the Office of Government Ethics and Offices of Inspector General. They may not know how these offices work, but they want strong watchdogs.

3. Reinvent Government, Again

Though the 2020 Democratic candidates applauded the For the People Act, they have yet to develop a plan for addressing the large percentage of Democrats who believe the federal government is broken. They need only look back to the 1990s to find a nearly perfect approach to their base—a reinventing government reboot.

Though Vice President Al Gore's reinventing government campaign was often caricatured as an engineer's dream, it generated an impressive list of impacts. "We cut government the right way by eliminating what wasn't needed," says Gore's top reinventing aide, Elaine Kamarck, referring to the bloated hierarchies, duplication, obsolete field offices, needless regulations, and antiquated systems that strangle federal innovation and productivity.

Another round of reinventing could also complement the ethics and campaign reform contained in For the People. It would give Democrats a meaningful chance to highlight the federal government's \$1.2 trillion in improper payments since 2004, while featuring the opportunists and swindlers that sometimes profit from bad government. Reframed as such, making government work starts to sound very much like the ethics reform the 2020 Democrats already favor. Perhaps the same reframing would work for other seemingly boring issues such like civil service reform.

4. Flatten the Bureaucracy

Most presidential appointees take their posts committed to faithfully executing the laws, but their growing number creates opportunities for misconduct and inefficiency. Trump argued that the federal government's thousands of appointees clog the hierarchy with endless possibilities for meddling and variations on the childhood game of telephone. "You know we have so many people in government, even me," Trump told Fox News in February 2017. "I look at some of the jobs and it's people over people over people. ... There are hundreds and hundreds of jobs that are totally unnecessary jobs."

Trump was right to complain—he inherited the thickest federal hierarchy since 1961—but he has not reduced the layering. The next president would do well to swear off the traditional addiction to rewarding friends and donors with political plums, and it would be easy to do as part of For the People. Cutting layers would do more than improve accountability and service. It would reduce waste and inefficiency.

5. Rebuild the Public Service

The past year has been especially tough on the federal public service, and not just because of the shutdown in the winter of 2018–19. As both Mr. Volcker and I argued, the federal workforce needs immediate action as its members age and the competition for talent intensifies:

- Congress and the president must repair the federal government's outdated personnel system. The system has for decades been slow in hiring, misaligned in training, regimented in promoting, hesitant in disciplining, and inflexible in paying. It has been forty years since Congress and President Jimmy Carter inked the last major civil service reform, and the ossification is taking its toll on productivity and retention.
- Congress and the president must reassure young Americans that the federal government is a good place to work. Americans have long believed that, but young people want more than decent pay and empty promises of help with their college debt. They want opportunities to advance, the chance to make a difference, and faithful leadership. The millennials and Gen Zers—those born roughly between 1995 and 2010—are not saying “show me the money” but “show me the impact.” And they are right to ask whether government will honor its commitments.
- The federal government must rebuild its connections to the nation's leading schools of public administration and policy. The Volcker Alliance is already working on this issue through its Government-to-University Initiative (G2U). G2U focuses on advancing structured, regional partnerships between government practitioners and universities with the aim of responding to high-need areas for government, including access to top talent and workforce preparedness.
- Democrats and Republicans must work to restore “regular order” in the federal budgeting process. There will always be an element of brinksmanship and uncertainty associated with the appropriations process, but shutdown budgeting must end. Congress and the president could go a long way toward restoring sagging public confidence in government's ability to act simply by meeting their own deadlines. What is ultimately at stake is maintaining the confidence not only of American citizens but of other nations and markets that depend on reliability and consistency.
- Congress and the president must devote more attention to how government works as they design new programs. As long as they earn plaudits for launching initiatives than they receive for improving implementation, they will tend to concentrate on designing and enacting “high policy” like the Affordable Care Act and immigration reform instead

of assuring faithful execution of the complicated programs they create.²⁰

These reforms would address public concerns about government performance but must reach beyond the confines of the civil service to include the four million contractors and one million grantees who help government provide goods and services to the American public.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower introduced the nation to this blended workforce of contractors, government officers, and the military in his 1961 Farewell Address, when he highlighted “total influence—economic, political, even spiritual” of the military-industrial complex. Although he readily acknowledged the “imperative need” for the development, Eisenhower warned of its “grave implications” for democracy and urged the nation to “guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought by the military-industrial complex.”²¹

A half-century later, the true size of the federal government’s blended workforce has expanded far beyond the military-industrial complex to include millions of employees engaged in domestic programs such as environmental protection, housing, education, and increasingly complex research missions. As hard as the Obama administration worked to overhaul the movement of government jobs and responsibilities to the contract and grant sectors, Congress refused to act, thereby bequeathing the problem to future administrations. Trump has frequently complained about swollen defense contracts and Amazon’s relationship with the US Postal Service, but he has shown little interest in the shape of the federal workforce beyond criticizing the civil service and meddling in specific contracts, such as that for Boeing’s new Air Force One.

6. Stop the Cascade of Breakdowns

The rising demand for reform tracks the number of federal government breakdowns over the past two decades. According to my analysis of more than fifty failures dating back to July 1986, the federal government averaged one-and-a-half highly visible breakdowns per year in the administrations of Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton; and three and a half per year in the George W. Bush and Obama years. It has averaged four per year thus far in the Trump administration. Despite his promise to make government work, the federal government is lurching from breakdown to breakdown as White House turnover continues, executive vacancies rise, budget stalemates intensify, comity erodes, and programs unravel with shocking regularity.²²

Though Trump deserves much of the blame for undermining his own officers, many of

his failures were amplified by the outdated systems, failed policy design, resource shortages, ethical shortcuts, contracting mistakes, and pressure to do more with less that have exacerbated the government's vulnerability to breakdowns since 2001. Absent action to repair the underlying causes, the breakdowns will increase under Democrats and Republicans alike.

7. Try Common Sense

If vision without execution is hallucination, as Mr. Volcker argued, execution without vision is bureaucratic chaos. As public administration scholar Philip K. Howard contends, effective government flourishes with policies based on the human capacity to make appropriate decisions for the public good. Toward this end, Howard urges the federal government to embrace a “new operating philosophy built on the bedrock of individual responsibility and accountability.”²³

Howard also favors broad reform of federal management systems governing the civil service, administrative procedure, and bureaucratic layering and has argued for a “spring cleaning” of needless rulemaking delays. These proposals fit with my own writing on the tides of federal management reform: “Tighter control can create a thickening of the administrative arteries that prevents good ideas from flowing up and implementation orders from flowing down,” I wrote in recommending a “clean-out commission” for ridding the statute books of outdated reforms. “The war on waste can drive so much fear into agencies that they won’t take advantage of innovative ideas for cleaning up debt. And liberating managers from following antiquated rules may delude agencies into implementing the laws they like and ignoring the rest.”

MAKING THE CASE FOR GOOD GOVERNMENT

DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS ALIKE have often made the case for major government reform with broad attacks on waste and inefficiency. Reagan used his first State of the Union address to tell the nation that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” Clinton promised to show Americans that “we cannot only start things, that we can actually stop things,” and George W. Bush offered a government that would be “active but limited, engaged but not overbearing.” And in releasing his first budget, Obama reminded the nation, “We can no longer afford to spend as if deficits do not matter and waste is not our problem.”

Promises to slash government waste also abound in presidential campaigns. Not to be outdone by Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign vow to cut 500,000 federal contract jobs and “do the kind of analysis that would rebuild some confidence that we’re taking a hard look about what we have and what we don’t need anymore,” Senator Bernie Sanders (I-NH) told his supporters that “anyone who doesn’t think there is an enormous amount of waste and inefficiency and bureaucracy throughout government would be very, very mistaken. ... I believe in government, but I believe in efficient government, not wasteful government.”

Such messages play into standard political lore about the need to reduce government excess and broken programs, themes that political scientists contend limit the public’s ability to learn about public administration. Convinced by the candidates that government is riddled with failed initiatives, inefficiency, and what Trump has described as “massive fraud, waste, and abuse,” Americans get lost in discussions of the operational challenges discussed above. Their tendency to search for confirmation of the bias forged by decades of bureaucratic bashing by both parties makes discussions about reform nearly impossible without stoking further cynicism toward the candidates foolish enough to believe that government could work.

It is not clear that a rebuildder can win with a good-government message in today’s hyper-polarized, fact-challenged environment, but candidates can find at least one post-Watergate example of success in Carter’s 1976 long-shot campaign. Carter, who ran as a folksy Georgia peanut farmer who promised “a government as good as the people,” was the first modern rebuildder to win the White House. Even as he showed his commitment to a bigger government that provides more services by favoring energy independence, access to health care, welfare reform, expanded education programs, federal job guarantees, and progressive tax reform, Carter endorsed legislative action on ethics reform, civil service modernization, transparency,

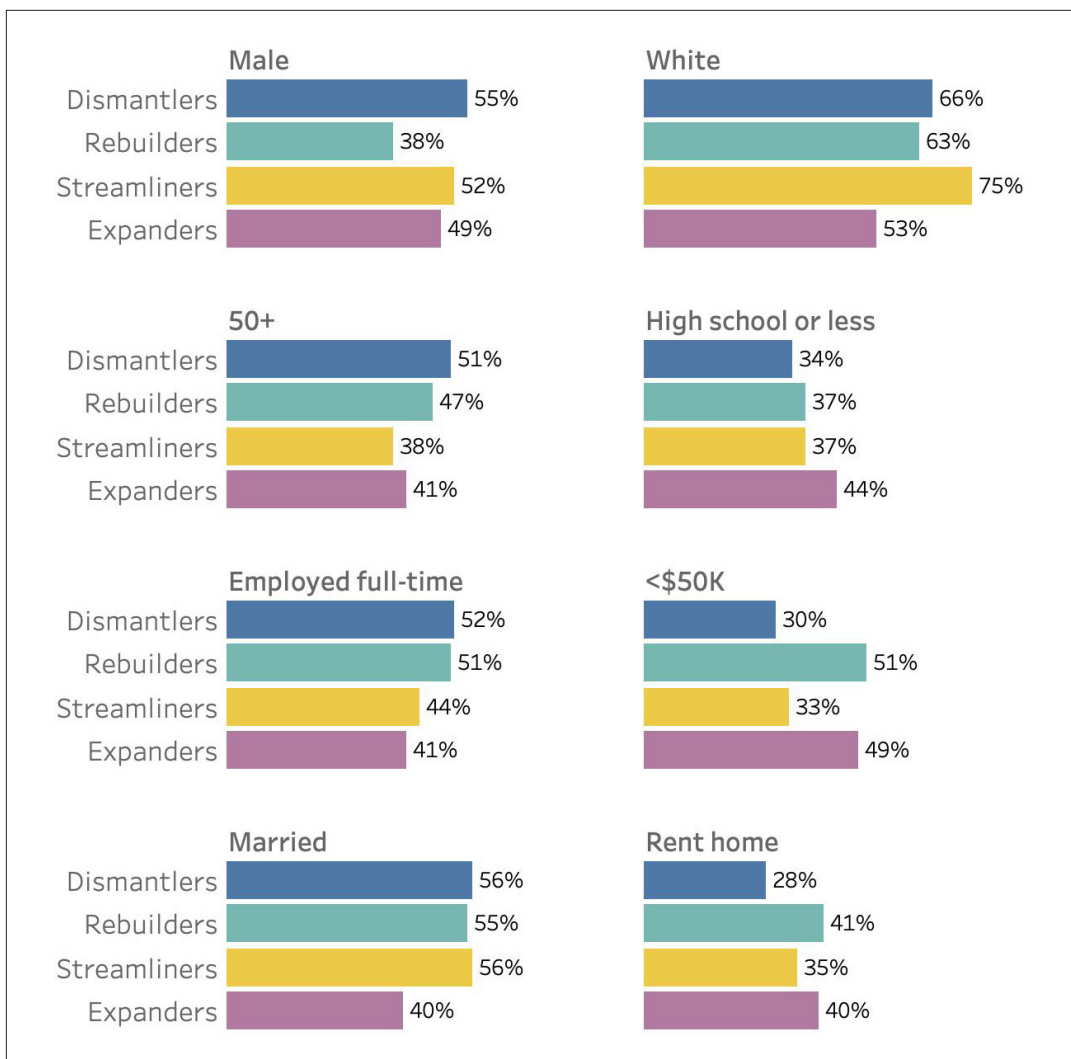
government waste, and federal reorganization. His policy agenda won just enough support from expanders to defeat his more liberal Democratic primary challengers, while his reform package satisfied rebuilders.

Along the way, Carter embraced a mix of policy aspiration and government repairs that addressed his party's longing for a president who would honor the "majesty of the Constitution," "lead without negativism," and tear down walls separating government from the people. The last five minutes of Carter's 1976 acceptance speech should be required listening for all Democratic candidates as they work to frame their agenda for dark times. Ultimately, the Iran hostage and economic crises obscured his legislative success on a long list of civil service, ethics, and bureaucratic reforms, but Carter proved that a campaign based on rebuilding could produce electoral victory. Democrats would do well to remember that Carter's success reflected a mix of popular policy proposals and government reform. His agenda provided the scaffolding for Bill Clinton's successful campaign twenty years later to reinvent government and has even found its way into Trump's occasional references to the honorable role that federal employees play in serving the American people.

Democrats have the edge in the battle over government reform but will need more than expanders to win the White House in 2020. The opposite of Trump's dismantling is not expanding but rebuilding. Democrats must do more than promise Medicare for All, a higher minimum wage, a job for every American, and immigration reform. They have to assuage concerns about the federal government's poor performance. Doing so means talking about what Americans want from reform—not just a bigger government that provides more services, but one that converts bold endeavors into lasting achievements and honors the pledges it makes.

APPENDIX: The Demographic and Ideological Anchors of Reform

DRAWING UPON AN ESPECIALLY DEEP INVENTORY of indicators contained in the April 2019 SSRS survey cited in this report, the demographic and ideological variety across the four reform groups suggests cleavages in both parties. Appendix Figure 1 shows that each group has a slightly different character. Dismantlers are older on average than the other three groups, while streamliners are younger; dismantlers have the highest percentage of males, while rebuilders have the highest percentage of females; expanders have the lowest percentages of white people and of married people; rebuilders and expanders are the most likely to earn less than \$50,000, while dismantlers and streamliners are the most likely to make at least \$50,000; all four groups have roughly equal education levels.

APPENDIX FIGURE 1: Reform group demographics, April 2019 (all survey respondents)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

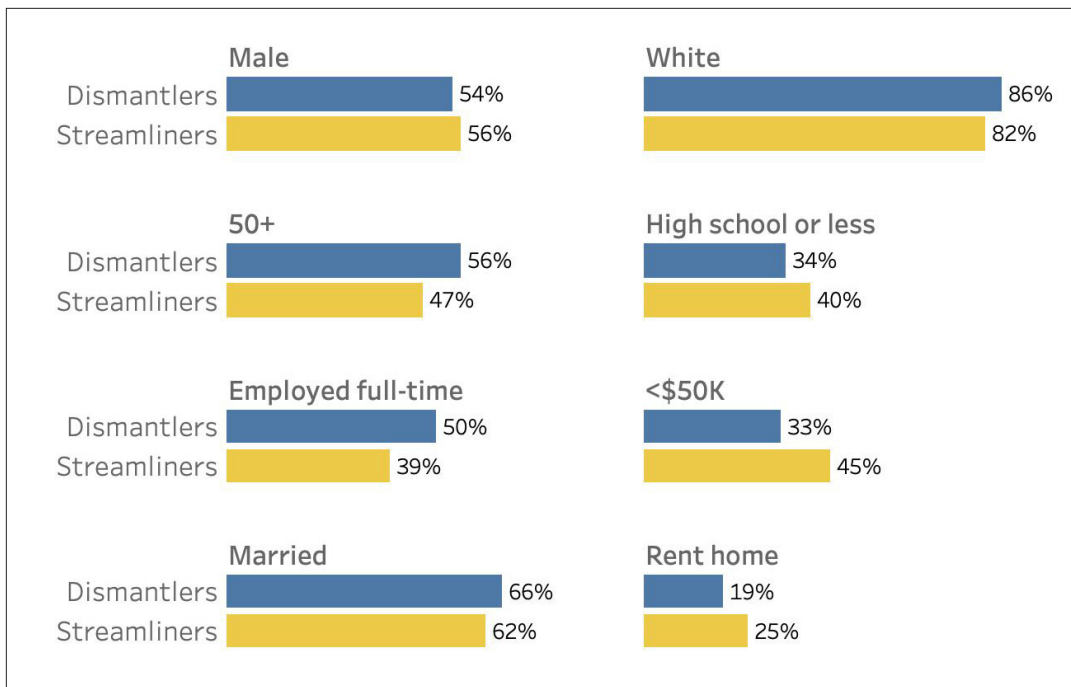
As Appendix Figure 2 shows, Democratic expanders are more likely than rebuilders to be male, 50 or older, and college educated, for example, while the party’s rebuilders are more likely be white, employed full time, and married.

Ideology follows a more predictable partisan path. Looking at all respondents in Figure 4, rebuilders had the highest percentage of liberals in April 2019, dismantlers and streamliners had the largest percentages of conservatives, and the expander group was composed of almost equal percentages of conservatives, moderates, and liberals.

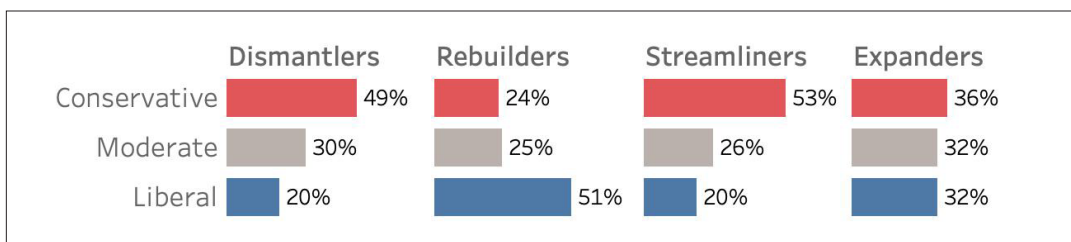
APPENDIX FIGURE 2: Reform group demographics, April 2019 (Democratic rebuilders and expanders only)



SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

APPENDIX FIGURE 3: The demographics of what Americans want from reform, April 2019 (Republican dismantlers and streamliners only)


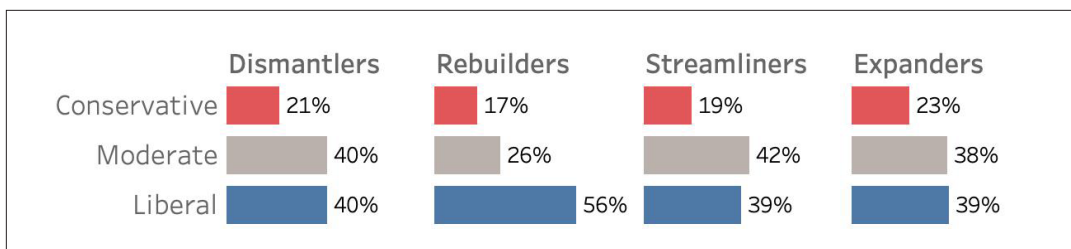
SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

APPENDIX FIGURE 4: The Ideology of reform, April 2019 (all survey respondents)


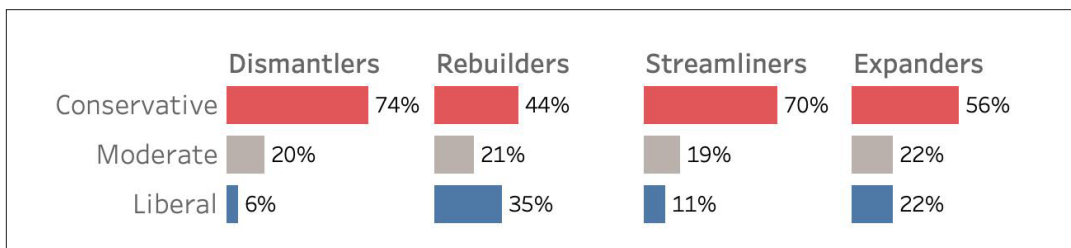
SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

As Figure 5 shows, liberals represented a large share of Democratic rebuilders, while accounting for about 40 percent of dismantlers and streamliners. The liberal strength among those two groups implies that significant numbers may view government reform as a way to reverse the Trump the administration’s defense, environmental, health, and tax policies.

Further analysis of ideological change over time suggests that the impact on Democratic dismantling can be tracked back to 2015, when 26 percent of Democratic dismantlers were

APPENDIX FIGURE 5: The Ideology of reform, April 2019 (Democratic respondents only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

APPENDIX FIGURE 6: The Ideology of reform, April 2019 (Republican respondents only)


SOURCES Surveys and data collection by the Pew Research Center, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and by SSRS; Analysis and interpretation by Paul C. Light.

somewhat liberal or very liberal, 45 percent were moderate, and 26 percent were very or somewhat conservative. By April 2019, however, the share of somewhat or very liberal Democratic dismantlers had risen to 37 percent, while that of moderates had dropped to 37 percent and that of very or somewhat conservative dismantlers had fallen to 20 percent.

In turn, Appendix Figure 6 shows strong conservative support among Republican dismantlers and streamliners and higher levels of liberal support among expanders and rebuilders. The question is what kind of bigger government these liberal Republicans might want and whether Democrats can persuade them to support their 2020 presidential candidate.

Further analysis also shows Trump’s impact on conservatives. Between 2010 and April 2019, for example, the share of very conservative dismantlers grew from 21 percent to 38 percent, and that of conservative dismantlers dropped from 53 percent to 35 percent. Meanwhile, the share of moderate to very liberal Republican dismantlers held steady.

Trump’s own demand for absolute loyalty from his coalition, his vocal commitment to nationalism in all its forms, and his unshakable politics of derision, race-baiting, and victimhood explain the increase of very conservative Republican dismantlers. Trump has vilified Republican

Never Trumpers as “human scum” as he abandoned traditional conservative positions on the budget and foreign policy. Even his campaign rallies, with their mix of angry chants, occasional violence, and conformist pressure, may have taken a toll on moderate supporters.²⁴ It is too early to know whether this effort to discipline the party will drive “Joe Biden Republicans” out of it, but this report suggests that Trump may yet have to change his signature reaction to bad news from “we’ll see what happens” to “I didn’t see it coming.”

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ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

THE VOLCKER ALLIANCE advances effective management of government to achieve results that matter to citizens. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization is inspired by the legendary public service of our founder, Paul A. Volcker, former chairman of the Federal Reserve, and his vision of a public sector workforce with the experience, preparation, and commitment to ensure that government is accountable and delivers with excellence.

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He also served as a special consultant to the 1988 National Commission on the Public Service, chaired by former Federal Reserve Board chairman Paul A. Volcker, after which he advised Chairman Volcker on public service issues for many years. He is a frequent commentator on public service, has testified on public service issues before the US Congress three dozen times over the past two decades, and is the author of twenty-six books, four of which have won national book awards. His most recent book is *The Government-Industrial Complex: Tracking the True Size of Government, 1984–2019*.

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ENDNOTES

1. It is useful to note that 67 percent of Democrats said the federal government was doing a very good or somewhat good job strengthening the economy, 73 percent said the same about its job ensuring that food and medicine are safe, 81 percent said the same about its job responding to natural disasters, and 85 percent said the same about its job protecting the nation from terrorism.

These percentages are based on my independent analysis of the Pew Research Center survey data discussed in its 2015 report *Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government*. The database from Pew's survey of more than 6,000 respondents is available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/download-datasets/>. Pew has continued to monitor trust in government, but its recent surveys do not provide the depth of public opinion found in the 1997, 2010, and 2015 surveys used in this report. It is also notable that Pew conducted the survey with Obama still in the White House, the economy in recovery, unemployment falling, and the Iraq War troop drawdown ended.

2. See Senator Elizabeth Warren's 289-page Anti-Corruption and Public Integrity Act for proposed adjustments in existing government ethics and lobbying law.

3. This description comes from the American Enterprise Institute scholar Norman J. Ornstein in "American Kakistocracy," *The Atlantic*, October 9, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/10/american-kakistocracy/542391/>.

4. Ed Kilgore, "Democrats Are Reviving an Old Populist Tradition," *New York* magazine, June 7, 2019, <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/06/democrats-finally-pursuing-government-reform.html>. Kilgore cites my 2015 Brookings Institution analysis of the rising demand for reform.

5. Stanley Greenberg, "The Average Joe's Proviso," *Washington Monthly*, June/July/August 2015, <https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/junejulyaug-2015/the-average-joes-proviso/>.

6. The Pew Research Center has used the term "very major reform" as a way to measure the level of support for action since it first asked the question in 1997.

7. Analyses of party differences throughout this report are based on comparisons of respondents who (1) said they considered themselves to be a Democrat, Republican, or independent, and (2) respondents who said they were independent but leaned toward the Democratic or Republican party.

8. The findings and trend lines presented in this report are based on seven separate public opinion surveys conducted over the past two decades. Three of the surveys were designed and fielded by the Pew Research Center, in 1997, 2010, and 2015; one was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, in August 2016, with support from the Volcker Alliance; and three were conducted by SSRS, in October 2018, April 2019, and November 2019, also with support from the Volcker Alliance. Pew provides public access to most of its data upon request at pewresearch.org.

Readers should note that Pew refined several of the questions used in this report over time as follows:

The 1997 and 2010 readings of public demand for reform are based on two questions:

1. "Imagine a scale from one to six where one represents someone who generally believes that federal government programs should be cut back greatly to reduce the power of government, and six represents someone who feels that federal government programs should be maintained to deal with important problems. Where on the scale of one to six would you place yourself?" (Respondents who chose one, two, or three on the scale were classified in the analysis as supporters of a smaller government that provides fewer services, while respondents who chose four, five, or six were classified as supporters of a bigger government that provides more services.)
2. "Which of these statements comes closest to your view? The federal government needs very major reform, the federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform, or the federal government doesn't need much change at all."

The 2015 readings on demand for reform are based on the two following questions:

1. "Which of these statements comes closest to your view: Government should do more to solve programs, or government is doing too many things better left to business and individuals?" (Respondents who chose the first response were classified in the analysis as supporters of a bigger government that provides more services, while respondents who chose the second response were classified as supporters of a smaller government that provides fewer services. Pew asked its standard question about bigger or smaller government in a separate 2015 survey but did not integrate the question into its publicly available database. Pew's analysis of the question was therefore restricted to demographic measures and party identification.)
2. "Which of these statements comes closest to your view? The federal government needs very major reform, the federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform, or the federal government doesn't need much change at all."

The August 2016, October 2018, and April and November 2019 readings on demand for reform are based on two survey questions:

1. "If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services or a bigger government providing more services?"
2. "Which of these statements comes closest to your view? The federal government needs very major reform, the federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform, or the federal government doesn't need much change at all."

9. For past reports on the trends presented in this report, see Pew Research Center, *Deconstructing Distrust: How Americans View Government*, March 1998; Pew Research Center, *The People and Their Government: Distrust, Anger and Partisan Rancor*, April 2010; Pew Research Center, *Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government*, November 2015; Paul C. Light, *What Americans Want from Reform*, Volcker Alliance, December 2016; and Paul C. Light, *The Coming Showdown Over Government Reform*, Brookings Institution, April 2019.

10. I describe these differences between Republican streamliners and dismantlers in *The Coming Showdown Over Government Reform*, Brookings Institution, April 2019.

11. The question was worded: “Do you approve or disapprove of the House of Representatives’ decision to conduct an impeachment inquiry into Donald Trump?”

12. The April 2019 data point presented in this report is broadly confirmed in a March 2019 survey conducted by the Associated Press–NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and published as *The Link Between Government Performance and Attitudes Toward the U.S. Democratic System*. According to the center’s analysis, Americans who were the most critical toward the federal government’s performance were also the most likely to favor major changes in the system of government.

Readers should note differences between the two surveys. My long-running trend analysis is based on the Pew Research Center’s 1997 question asking respondents to think about “government reform,” while the AP–NORC report was based on a question about “the structure of the U.S. system of government” – arguably a more difficult concept for respondents.

The two surveys also offered respondents different answers. The Pew respondents were given three options: (1) “the federal government needs very major reform,” (2) “the federal government is basically sound and only needs some reform,” or (3) “the federal government doesn’t need much change at all. The AP–NORC offered four: (1) “it doesn’t need changes,” (2) “it needs minor changes,” (3) “it needs major changes,” and (4) “it needs to be completely replaced with a new system.”

Acknowledging these differences, the two surveys nonetheless confirm significant public demand for major government reform. In AP–NORC’s survey of 1,003 respondents, 6 percent said the US system of government doesn’t need changes, 26 percent said it needs minor changes, 54 percent said it needs major changes, and 12 percent said the system needs to be completely replaced. In my April 2–7, 2019, survey of 1,000 respondents, 58 percent said it needed very major reform, 30 percent said it was basically sound and needed only some reform, and 12 percent said it did not need much change at all. The findings are close enough to suggest broad confirmation of the current demand for reform.

13. The Pew Research Center’s 2015 survey involved an unusually large sample of 6,004 interviews between August 27 and October 4. The large sample size allowed maximum analytic freedom in the search for patterns in the demand for government reform, as well as room for more than 100 questions on public trust in government. The database is available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/download-datasets/>.

14. This ranking of predictors comes from an ordinary-least-squares linear regression of opinions recorded in Pew’s *Beyond Distrust* survey. The dataset containing the opinions is available upon request for further analysis through the center’s website. Combined with a short list of demographic variables, party identification, and political ideology, the eight predictors produced adjusted R-square of 0.401. The following table presents the regression results.

VARIABLES	COEFFICIENT
ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT	
1. A belief that the federal government is almost always wasteful and inefficient.	0.186
2. A lack of trust in the federal government to do the right thing almost always or most of the time.	0.167
3. A belief that the federal government does a poor job running its programs.	0.153
4. Dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the country.	0.161
5. A belief that the federal government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.	0.133
6. A belief that ordinary people would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials.	0.102
7. Feeling angry or frustrated with the federal government.	0.101
8. A belief that voting doesn’t really affect how government runs things.	0.070
DEMOGRAPHIC MEASURES	
9. Education (High school)	-0.069
10. Party identification (Republican)	0.058
11. Ideology (Conservative)	0.056
12. Race (White non-Hispanic)	0.038
13. Income	-0.002
14. Sex (Male)	0.002
15. Income	-0.002
16. Age	0.001
R-SQUARED	0.401

Adding respondent support for bigger or smaller government produced a negligible effect on explaining the demand for reform, strongly suggesting that the two measures are independent of each other.

15. Guy Molyneux, Ruy Teixeira, and John Whatley, *Better, Not Smaller: What Americans Want from Their Federal Government*, Center for American Progress, July 27, 2010, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2010/07/27/8109/better-not-smaller/>.

Other regressions tested the impact of age, education, income, political ideology, party identification, race, and sex. These analyses showed only modest impacts of party and ideology, but not demographics. It is likely that these measures are reflected in the summative measures of political attitudes.

16. The Pew Research Center reconfirmed the sharp party differences on bigger versus smaller government in April 2019, when it reported that 47 percent of Democrats favor bigger government and that 47 percent of Republicans favor a smaller one. Pew Research Center, *Little Public Support for Reductions in Federal Spending*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.people-press.org/2019/04/11/little-public-support-for-reductions-in-federal-spending/>.

17. Paul C. Light, “The Tides of Reform Revisited: Patterns in Making Government Work, 1945–2002,” *Public Administration Review* 66, January/February 2006: 6–19, provides an analysis of prevailing patterns of reform philosophies from the end of World War II. My recent update of the underlying government reform trend suggests that the amount of reform legislation has declined precipitously.

18. Quoted in Paul C. Light, “Federalist No. 85: Has the National Government Become an ‘Awful Spectacle’?” *Public Administration Review* 71, supplement 1, December 2011: S155.

19. This unpublished statement discussed was coauthored by Paul C. Light and Paul A. Volcker on March 15, 2019, “It’s Time to Get Serious About Broken Government.” For a discussion of presidential reform initiatives, see Paul C. Light, *The Government-Industrial Complex: The True Size of the Federal Government, 1984–2018* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

20. Americans seem ready to endorse action to restore the public service, especially given their visceral opposition to the government shutdown of 2018–19. Even before that, Americans saw government as a good place to work and often cited pay, job security, and the chance to make a difference as positives. Moreover, when asked whether they would like to see their child pursue a career in government, roughly half of Americans endorse the choice. Dismantlers have been the most likely to answer “no” to that question over the years, while streamliners, rebuilders, and expanders have been more favorable. In 2016, for example, 66 percent of dismantlers said “no,” while 45 percent of streamliners, 52 percent of rebuilders, and 65 percent of expanders said “yes.” For the recent trend line on this question, see the Pew Research Center’s *Beyond Distrust*, 42.

21. I have written extensively about Eisenhower’s warning and the federal government’s blended workforce in *The Government-Industrial Complex*.

22. The number of major government breakdowns was calculated based on the Pew Research Center’s News Interest Index, which was launched in July 1986 and which ended in November 2012. From 2013 to the present, the list of breakdowns has been based on public opinion surveys of issues in the news and is therefore based more on the interpretation of broad indicators such as the AP News poll of newspaper editors. The data produced through this collection were used in my 2015 Volcker Alliance report, *Vision + Execution = Faithful Execution: Why Government Daydreams and How to Stop the Cascade of Breakdowns That Now Haunts It*.

23. Philip K. Howard, *Try Common Sense: Replacing the Failed Ideologies of Right and Left*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019), 161.

24. Larry Bartels argues the opposite using data from an extensive YouGov survey conducted in 2017–18. He concludes that there was “no evidence in the survey data that Trump has alienated traditional Republicans—at least, not to the point of precipitating defections from the party. Indeed, there is more reason to believe that many of these Republican-to-Democrat shifts were inspired by enthusiasm for the Democratic presidential candidate.” For an empirical exploration of this issue, see Bartels, “Partisanship in the Trump Era,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (October 2018): 1483–94.

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