Why Religion is at the Heart of America's Identity Crisis

PRRI

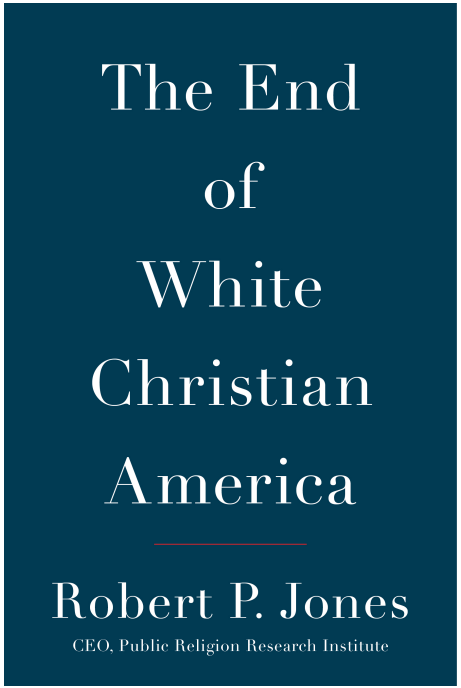
Robert P. Jones, Ph.D.

The End of an Era

White Christian America

A metaphor for:

- the cultural and political edifice
- built primarily by white Protestant Christians,
- which set the tone for our national conversations and shaped American ideals.



Vital Signs

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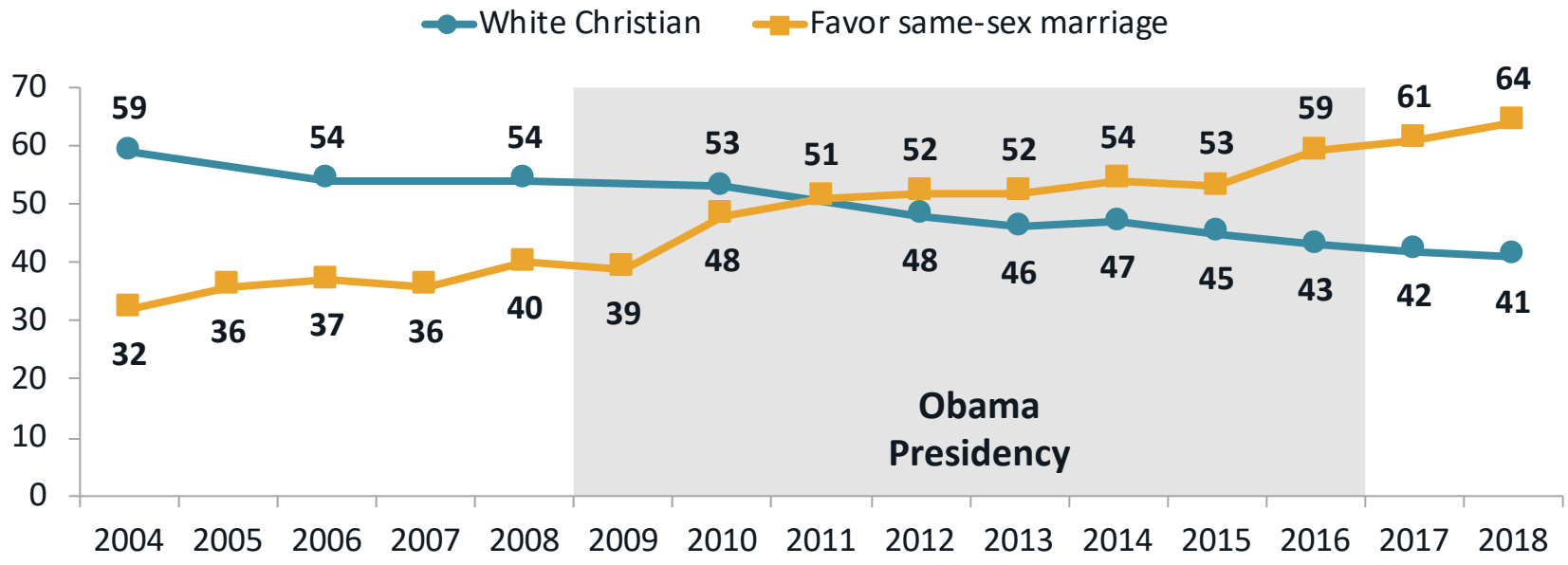
The One Chart:
White Christian Minority, Same-sex Marriage Majority

Percent of Americans who are white Christian vs. percent who favor same-sex marriage, 2004-2018



Sources: White Christian: General Social Survey, 2004-2012; PRRI Surveys, 2010-2016.
Same-sex Marriage: Pew Surveys, 2004-2009; PRRI Surveys, 2010-2018.

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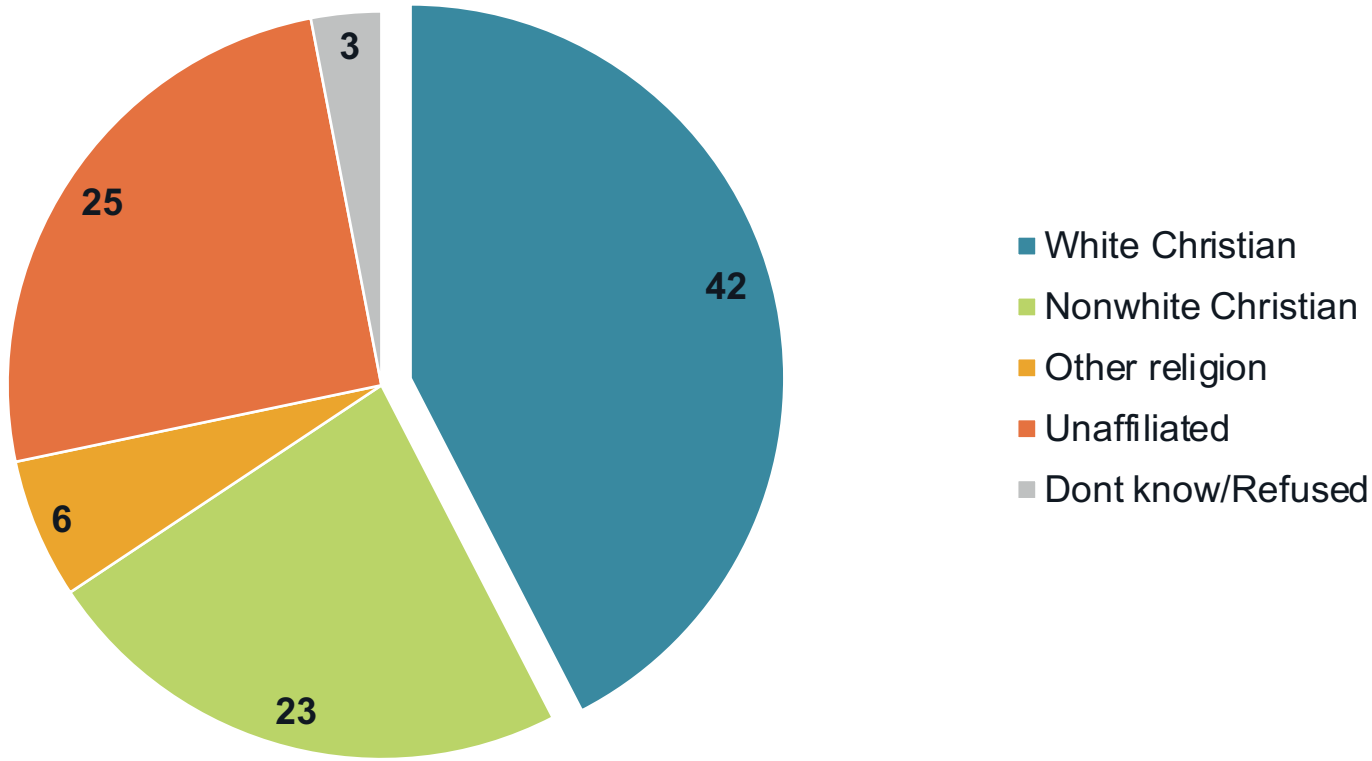
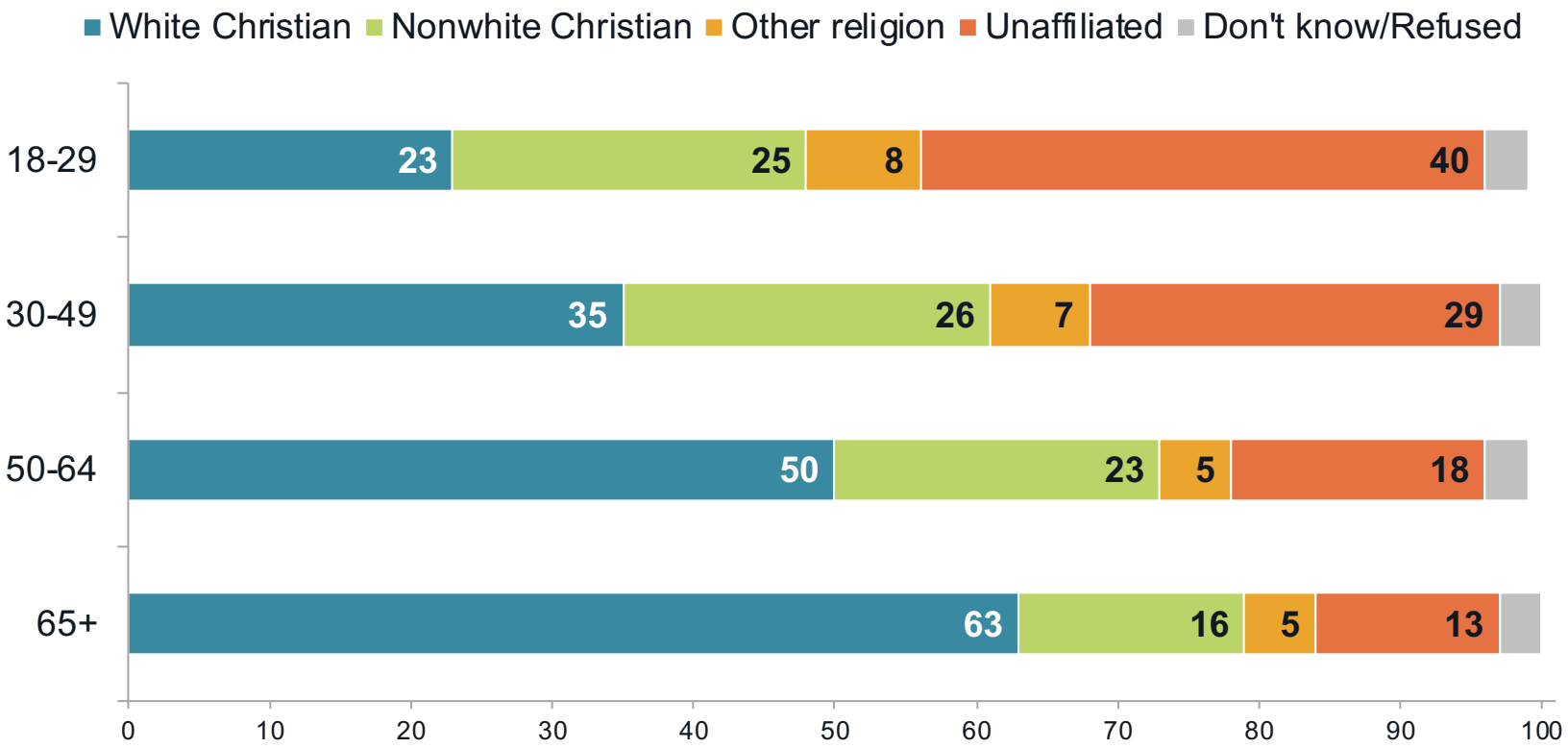
A Minority White Christian Country



Source: PRRI 2017 American Values Atlas.

The Decline of White Christians by Age



Source: PRRI 2017 American Values Atlas.

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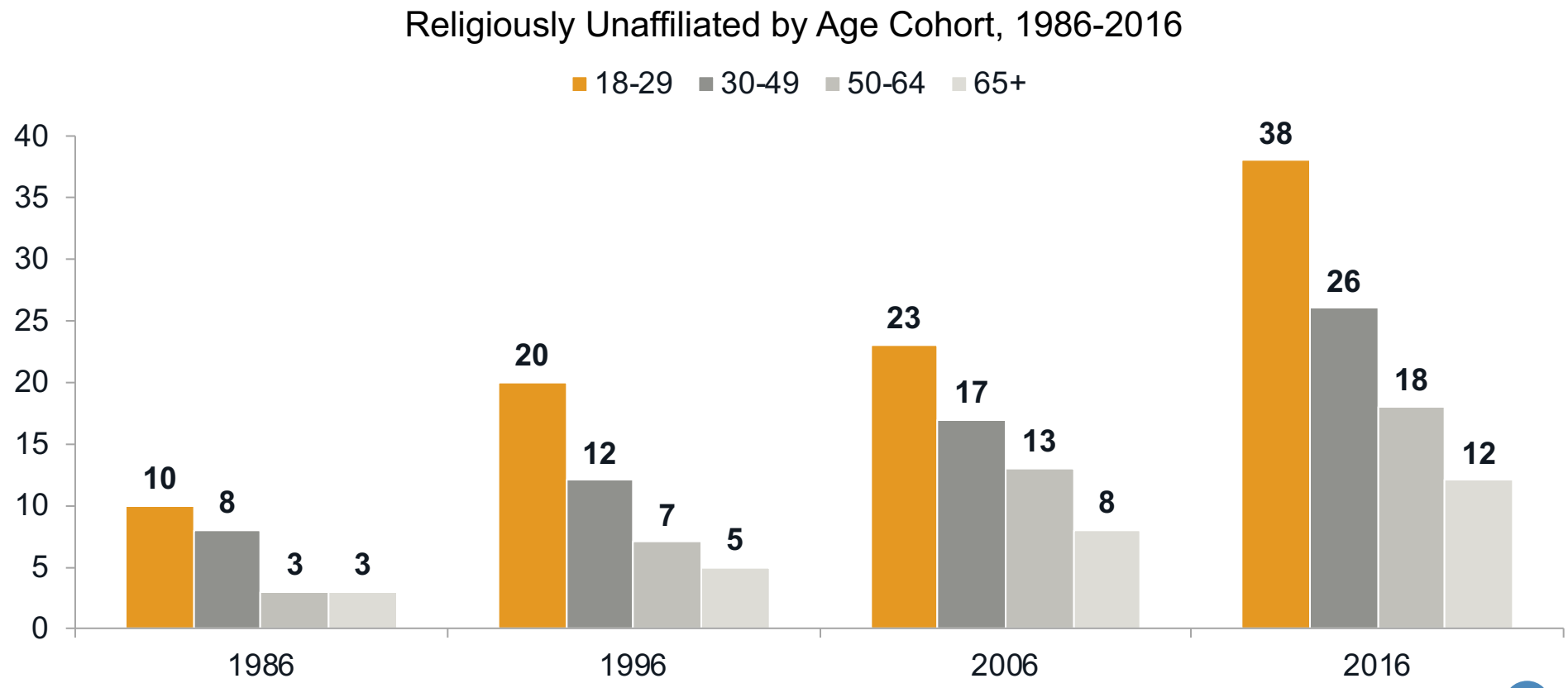
More Young Adults are Unaffiliated Today than in the Past



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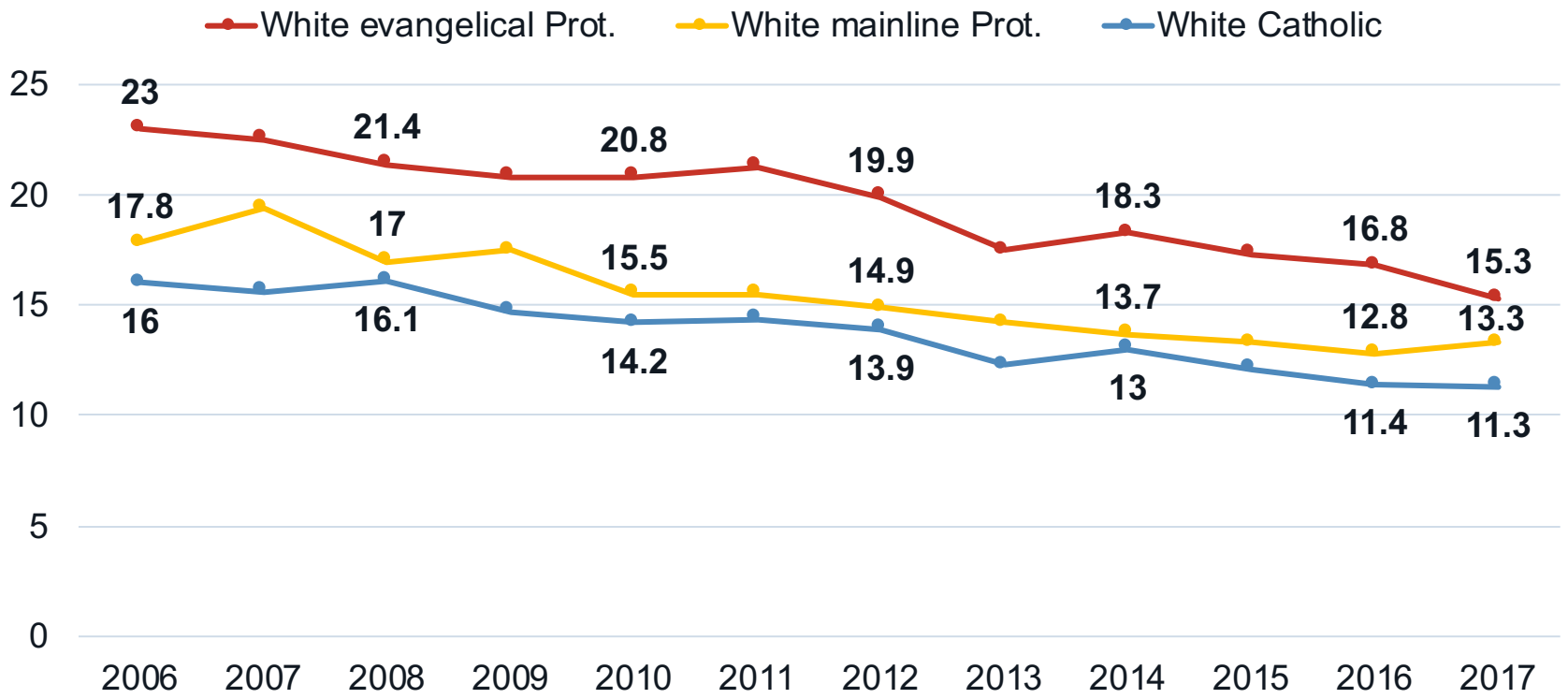
Sources: General Social Survey, 1986, 1996, 2006; PRRI 2016 American Values Atlas.

The Decline of White Christian Subgroups, 2006-2017



Source: Pew Religion and Public Life Survey, 2006-2009; PRRI, American Values Survey, 2010 and 2012; PRRI, Pluralism Survey, 2011; PRRI 2013-2017 American Values Atlas.

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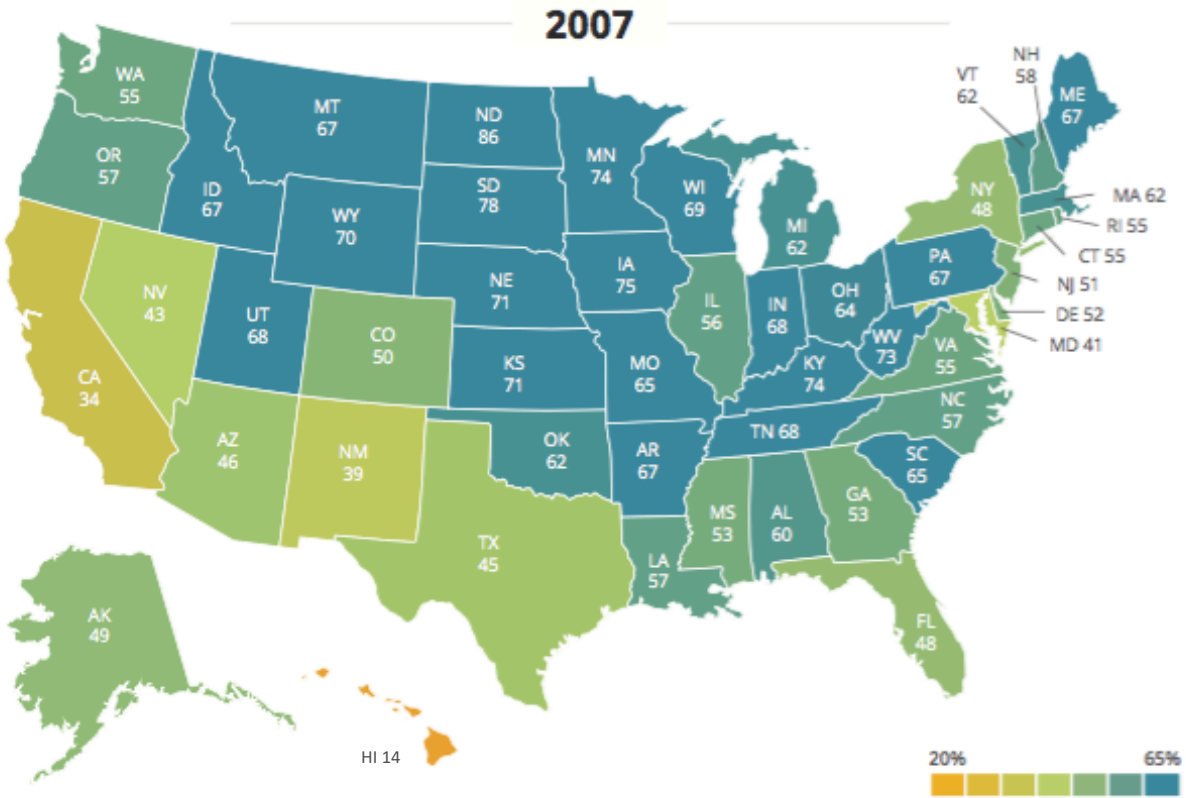
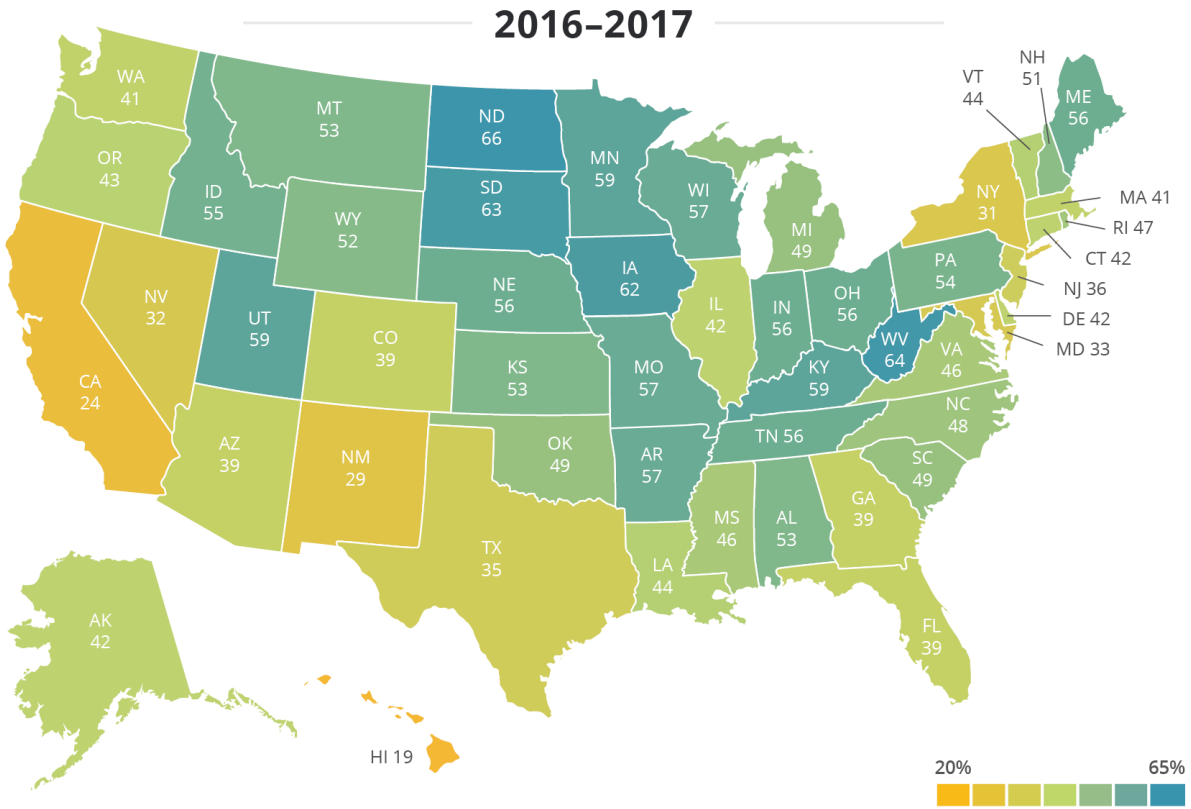
Decreasing Proportions of White Christians by State

Percentage of White Christians by State, 2007



Decreasing Proportions of White Christians by State

Percentage of White Christians by State, 2016-2017



A Caveat:
The Ballot Box as Time Machine

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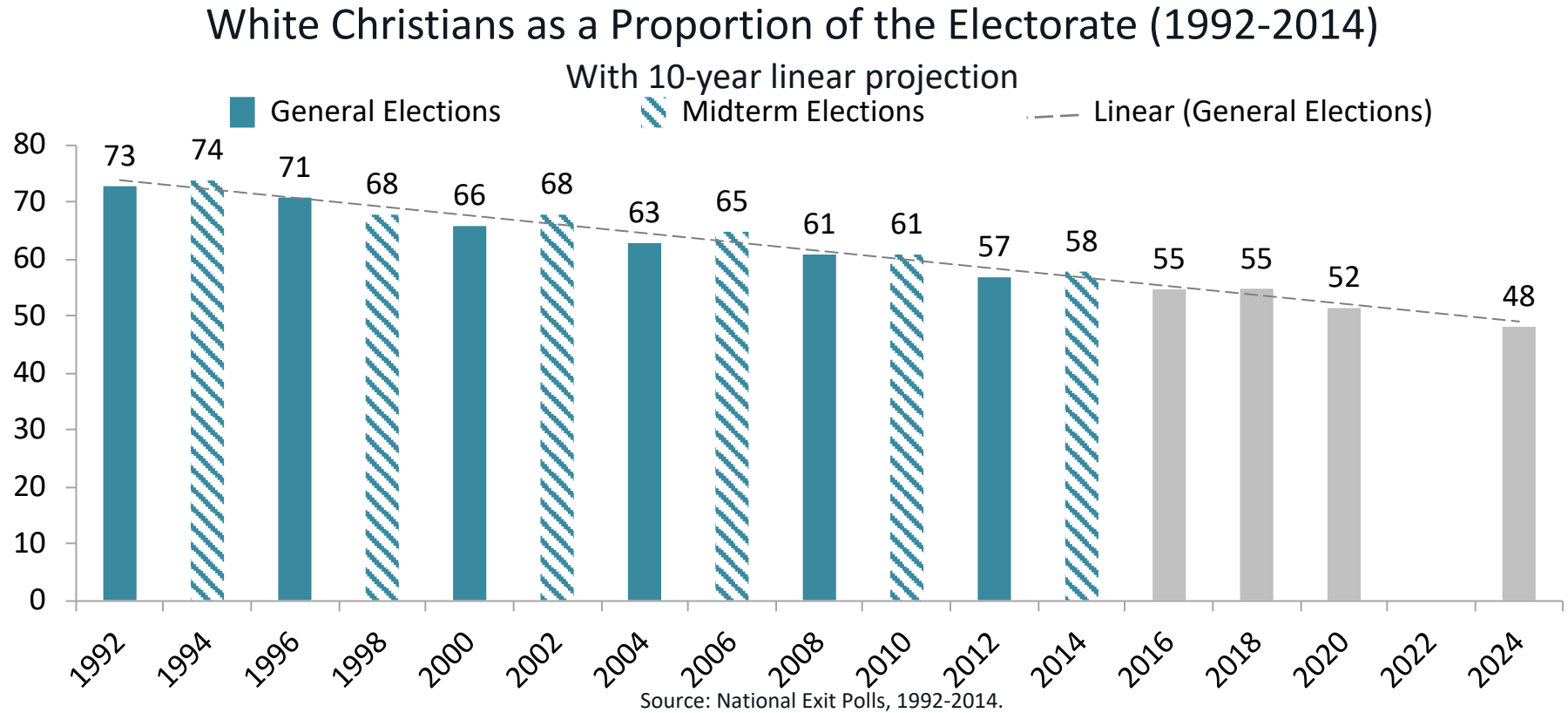
White Christians as a Proportion of the Electorate (1992-2014)



Source: National Exit Polls, 1992-2014.

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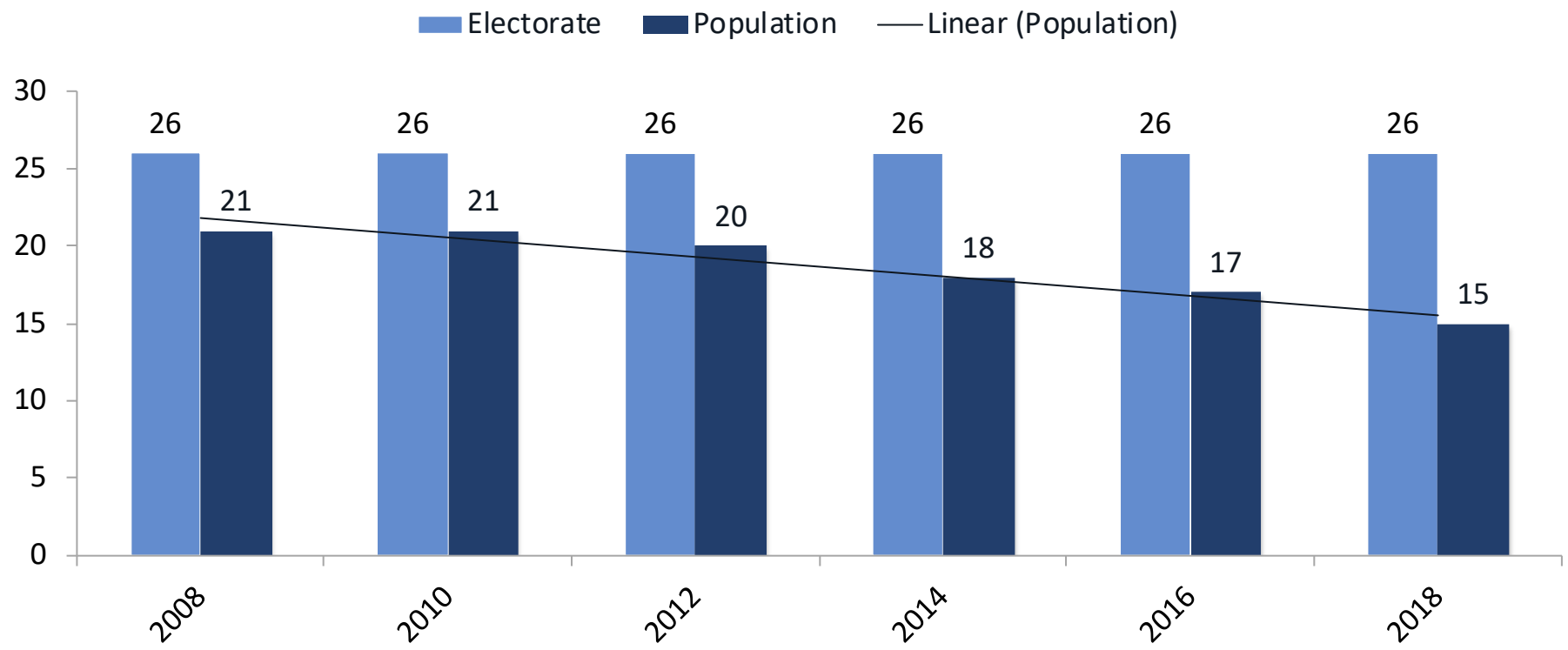
White Evangelicals, Proportion of Electorate vs. Population (2008-2018)



Source: National Exit Polls, 2008-2016; Pew Religion and Public Life Survey, 2008; PRRI, American Values Survey, 2010-2012; PRRI American Values Atlas, 2014-2018.

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End of Life Bargaining:
From “Values Voters” to “Nostalgia Voters”

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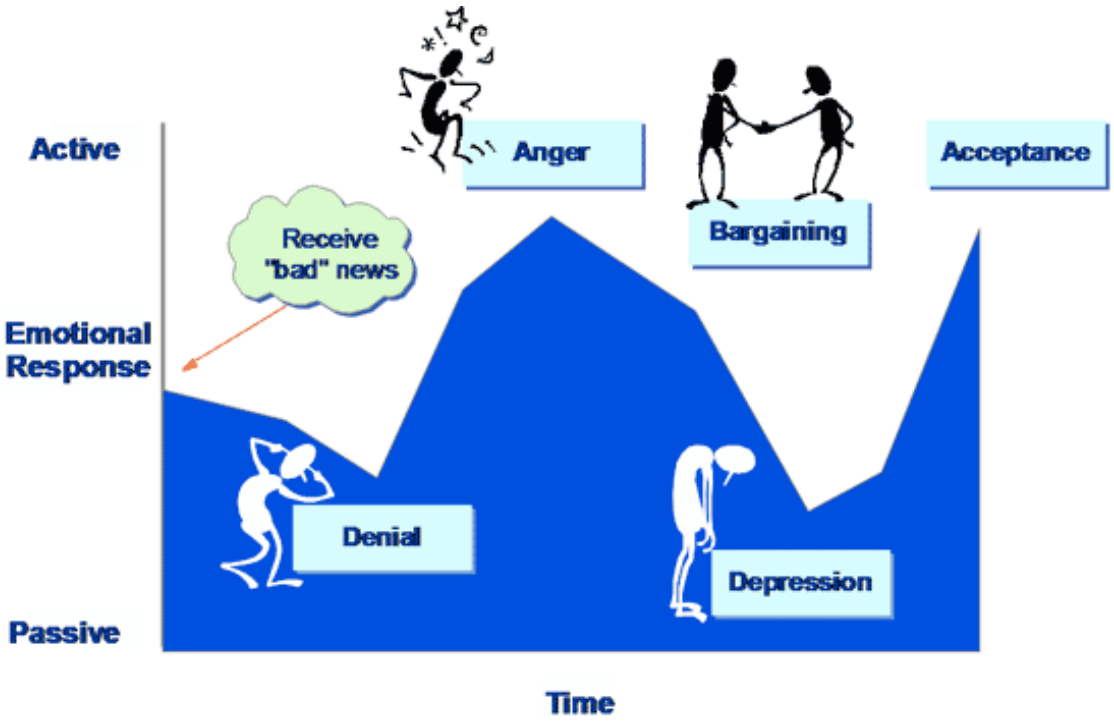
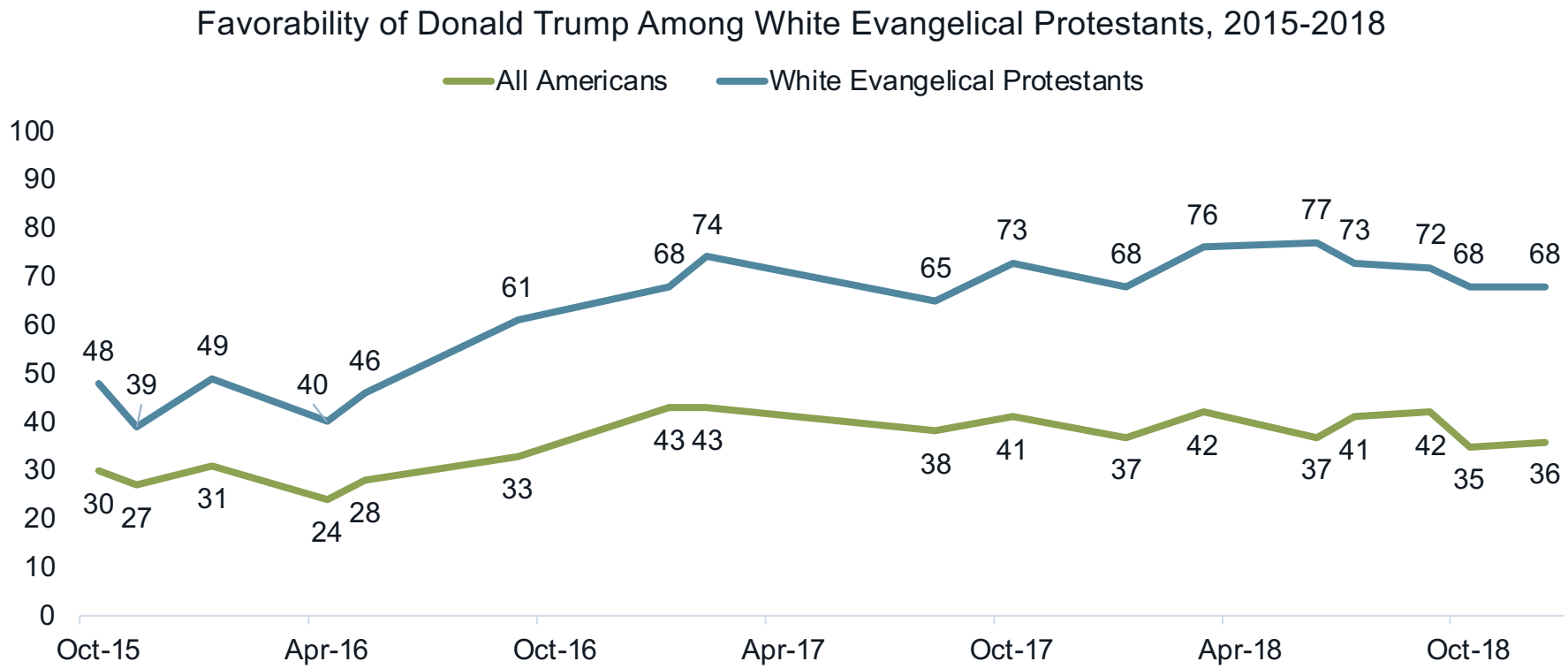
Stages of Grief



Trump Remains Popular with White Evangelicals



Sources: PRRI Surveys, 2015-2018

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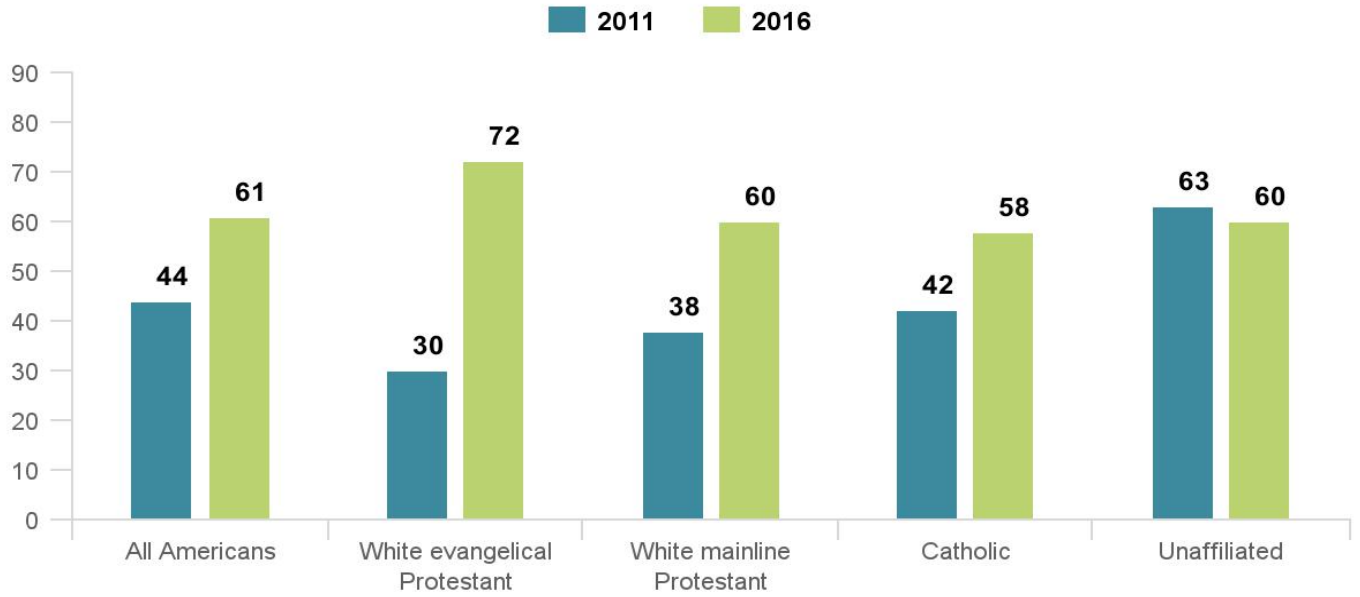
The Trump Effect on White Christian Political Ethics

White Evangelicals Grow More Accepting of Politicians' Personal Indiscretions

Percent who say an elected official who commits an immoral act in their personal life can still behave ethically and fulfill their duties in their public and professional life



Sources: PRRI/RNS June 2011 Survey; PRRI/Brookings October 2016 Survey.

Our Divided, Dysfunctional Nation: Partisanship and Tribal Identity

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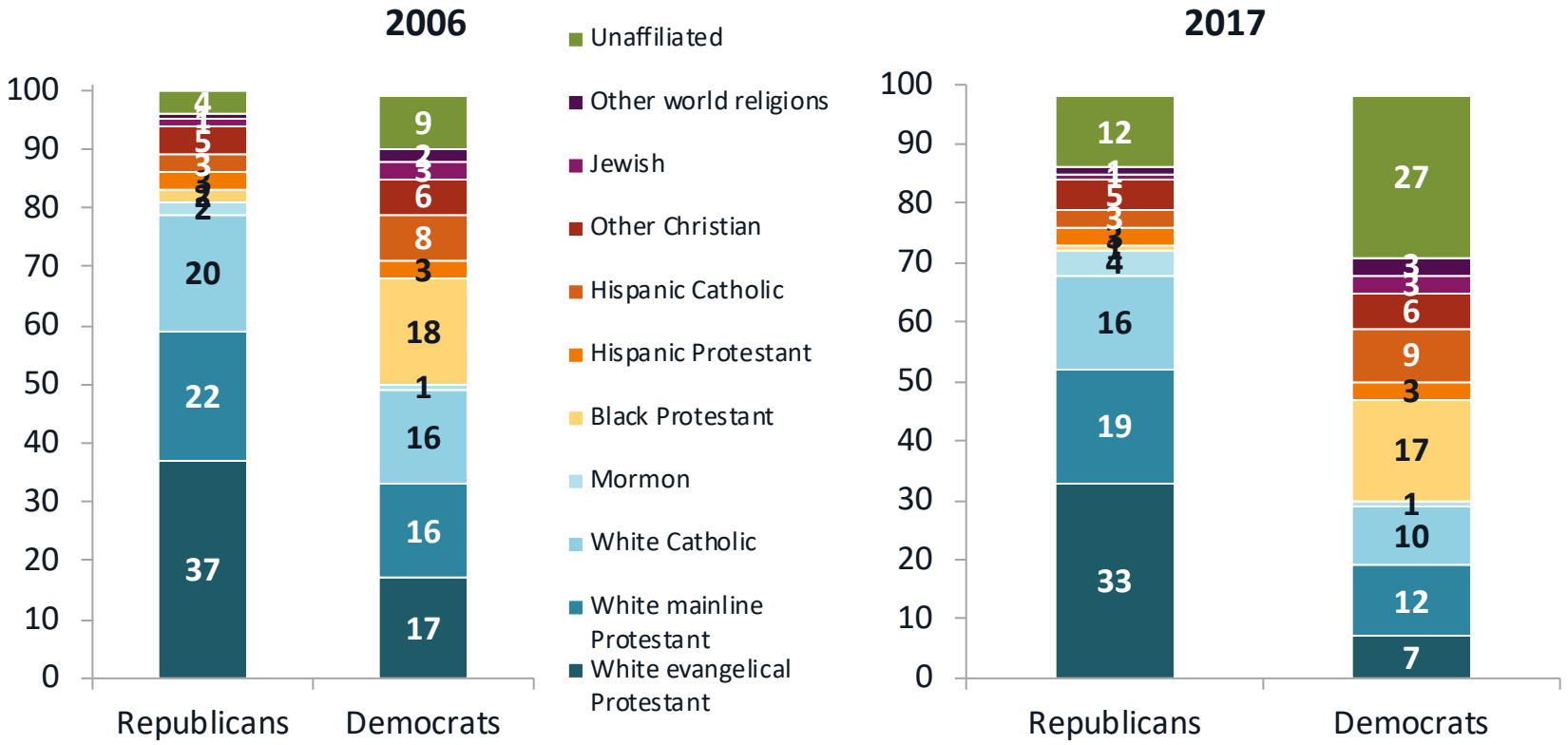
Widening Religion Gap between the Parties



Source: Pew Religion and Public Life Survey, 2006.

Source: PRRI 2017 American Values Atlas.

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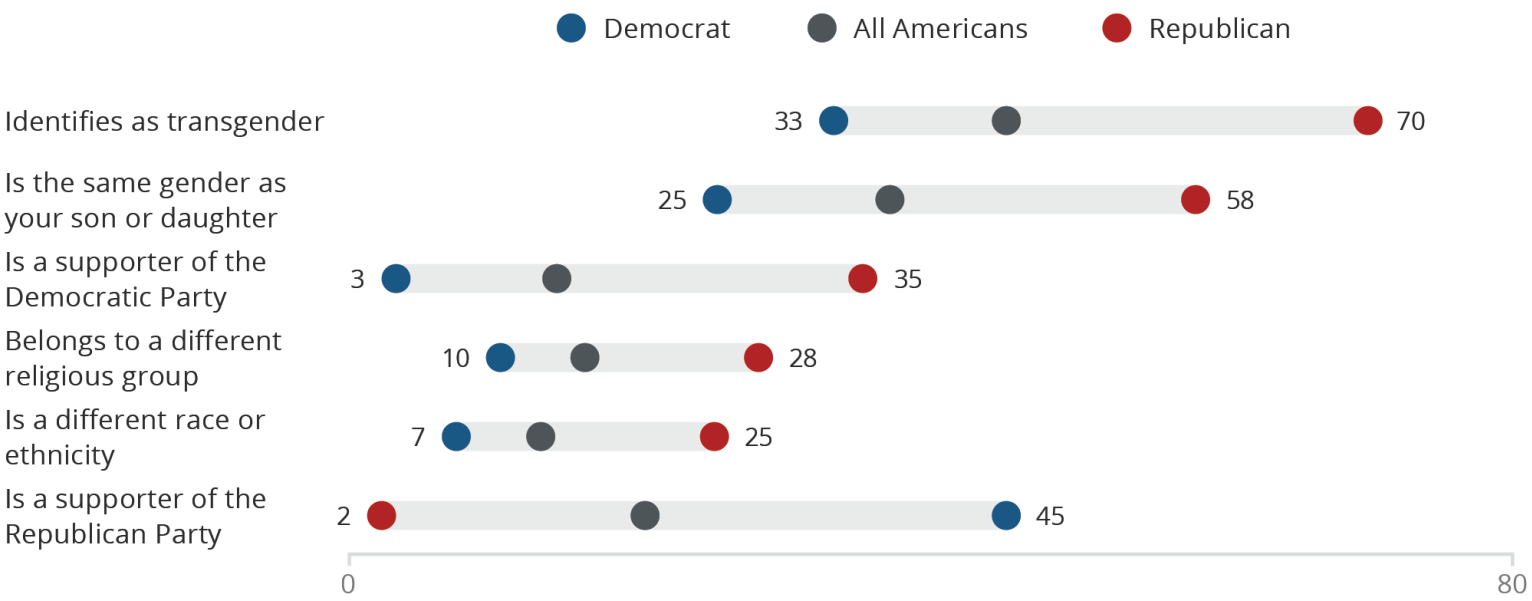
Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Partisanship in the Family

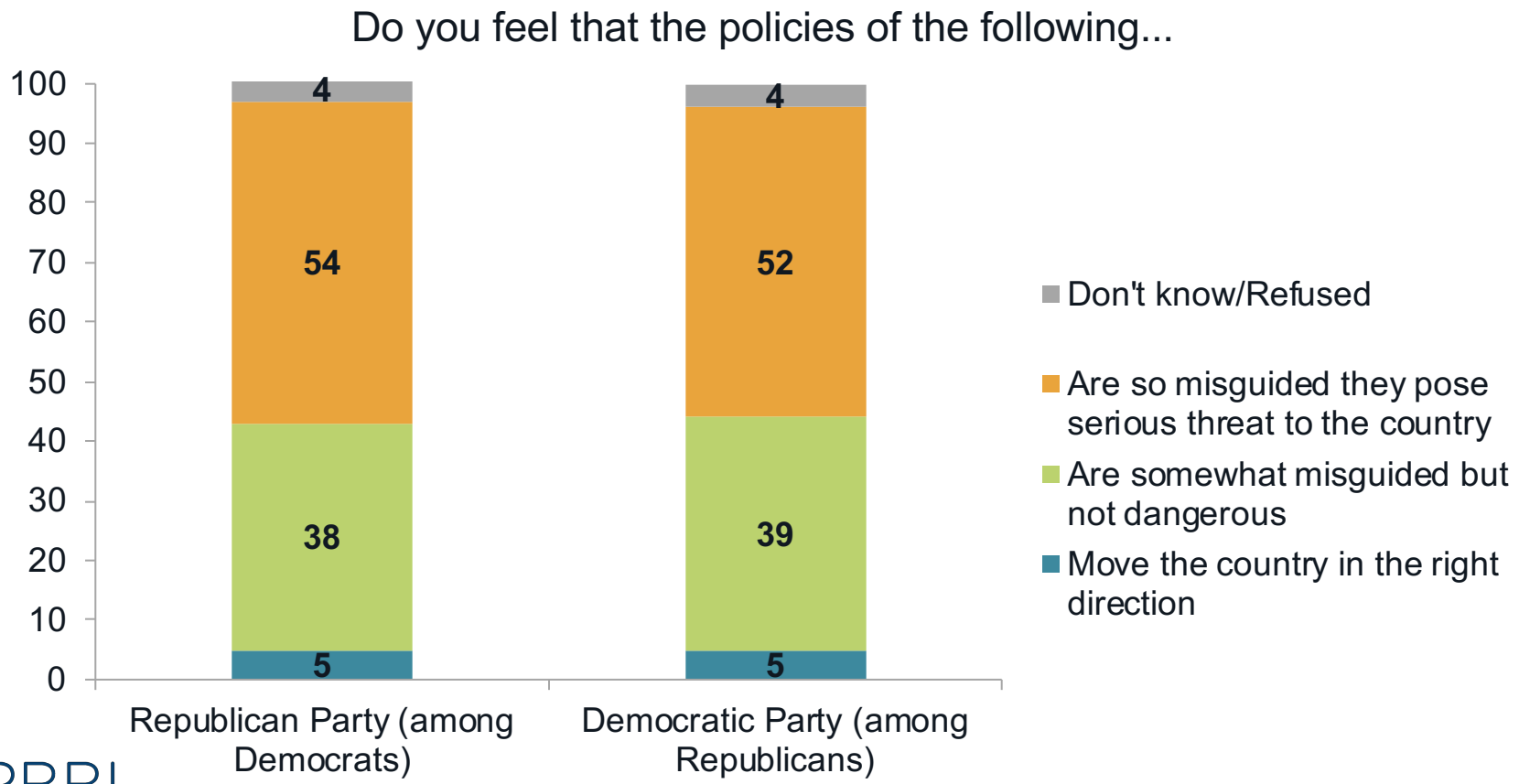
FIGURE 6. Sharp Partisan Divides Over Child Marriage Partner Choices

Percent who would be somewhat or very *unhappy* if their son or daughter married someone who...



Source: PRRI/The Atlantic 2019 Pluralism Survey.

Negative Views of the Other Party



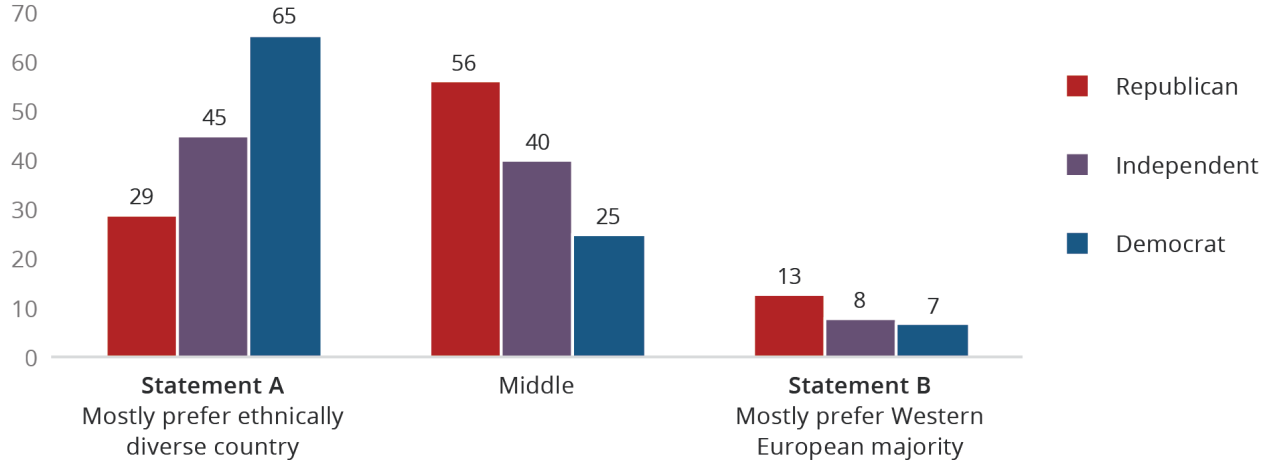
Source: PRRI 2017 American Values Survey.

Stark Partisan Divides on the Ideal of Racial Diversity

FIGURE 8. Preference for Racial and Ethnic Diversity vs. Western European Majority in the United States

Statement A: A nation made up of people from all over the world.

Statement B: I would prefer the U.S. to be a nation primarily made up of people from Western European heritage.



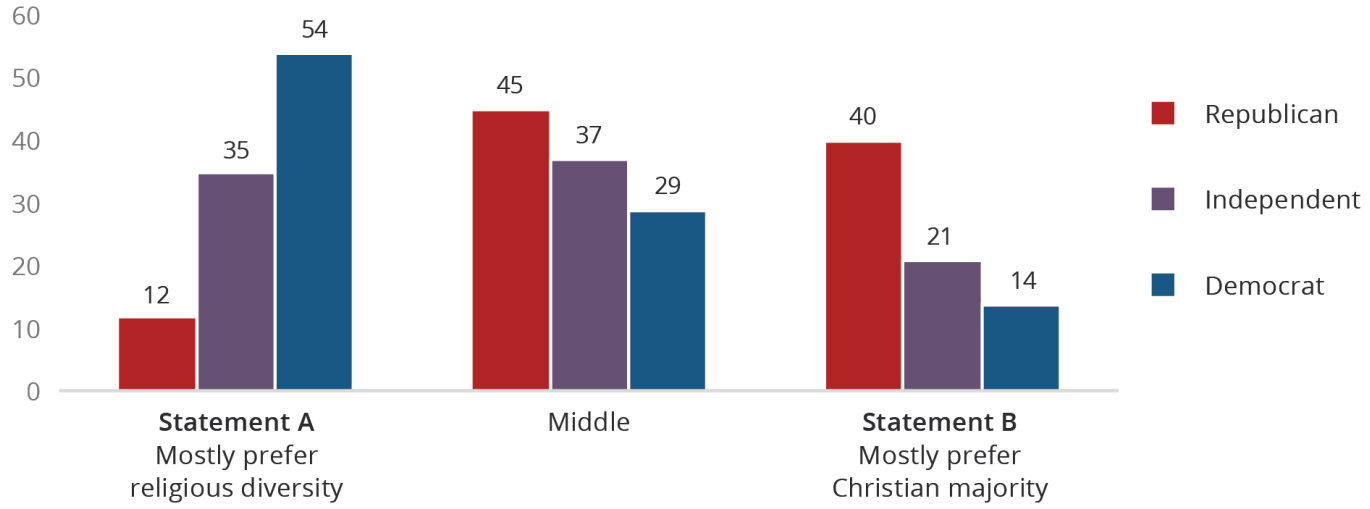
Source: PRRI/The Atlantic 2019 Pluralism Survey.

Stark Partisan Divides on the Ideal of Religious Diversity

FIGURE 7. Preference for Religious Diversity vs. Christian Majority in the United States

Statement A: A nation made up of people belonging to a wide variety of religions.

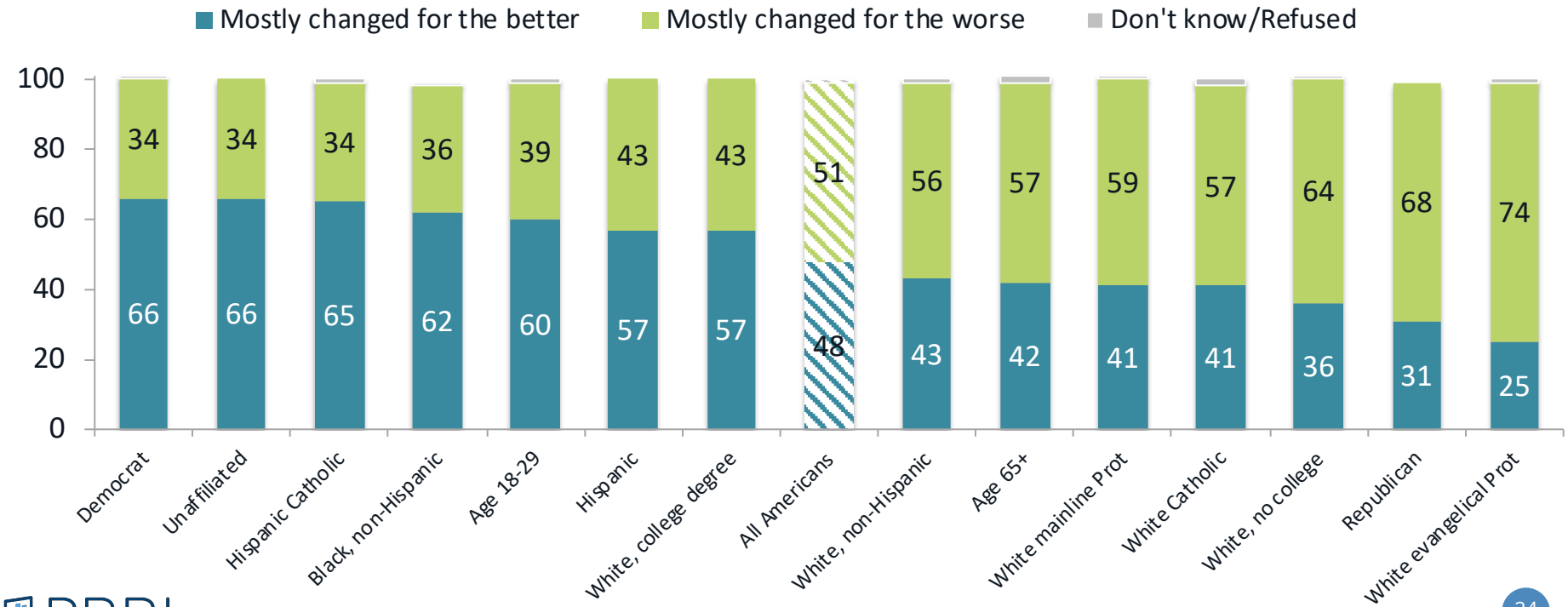
Statement B: A nation primarily made up of people who follow the Christian faith.



Source: PRRI/The Atlantic 2019 Pluralism Survey.

Nostalgia for the 1950s

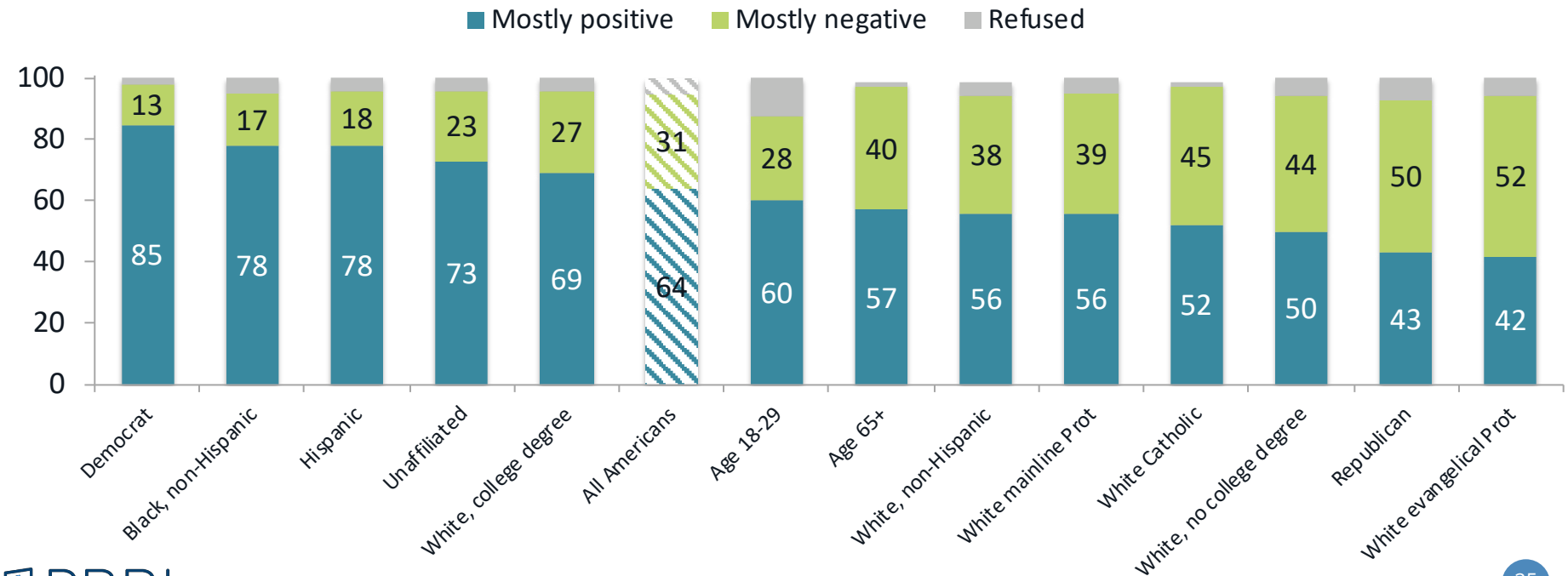
Since the 1950s, do you think American culture and way of life has mostly changed for the better, or has it mostly changed for the worse?



Source: PRRI 2016 American Values Survey.

Perceptions of Upcoming Demographic Change

U.S. Census projections show that by 2043, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and other mixed racial and ethnic groups will together be a majority of the population. Do you think the likely impact of this coming demographic change will be…



Source: PRRI/The Atlantic 2018 Voter Engagement Survey.

1950 or 2050? The Challenge of Re-Envisioning America

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