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What Americans Want From Government Reform

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PREFACE

PAUL LIGHT, THE DISTINGUISHED Paulette Goddard Professor of Public Service at New York University, is widely known for his scholarship, analyses, and writings in the field of public management.

Long before the recent presidential election, the Volcker Alliance agreed to support a review by Professor Light of the evidence about public attitudes toward government in general and the federal government in particular.

Delving deeply into data gathered over the past twenty years by the Pew Research Center and others, his analysis reveals the deep-seated and growing lack of confidence in government generally, cutting across traditional attitudes of the established political parties.

The analysis and specific conclusions of this report are those of Professor Light. However, the broad challenge to our political system that the evidence presents is directly relevant to the mission of the Alliance. In the end, the success of our democratic society rests on effective and trusted government.

PAUL A. VOLCKER

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DONALD TRUMP'S ONLY HOPE for bringing the nation together after the bitter 2016 campaign is to craft an agenda that satisfies the base of angry, frustrated Americans who elected him yet engenders support from former secretary of state Hillary Clinton's base of angry, frustrated Americans who rejected him. He cannot succeed in doing so without a compromise between the competing philosophies that gave the electoral vote to him and the popular vote to Mrs. Clinton.

The 2016 election was framed in red and blue, a contest between two one-party nations separated by geography and reinforced by careful redistricting that favors one party over the other.[1] Most campaign coverage favors the red or blue candidate, most campaign spending favors the red or blue incumbent, and most election results provide a comfortable red or blue victory. In 2016, for example, all but a handful of congressional seats were deemed safe for the red or blue slate, and more than 90 percent of incumbents were easily reelected to office.[2]

Even within these two one-party nations, there are sharp disagreements between Americans on the four philosophies of what the federal government should deliver and how much reform it needs:

Dismantlers, who believe in both smaller government and very major reform, and gave Mr. Trump a fierce base.

Priority setters, who favor bigger government and very major reform, and gave Mrs. Clinton an equally intense base.

Streamliners, who support smaller government and only some reform, and appear to have split between the two candidates.

Reinventors, who favor bigger government and only some reform, and were Mrs. Clinton's most loyal supporters.

These philosophical groups may cluster in red and blue nations, but there appears to be enough competition among the four to explain close elections while changing more durable party identification and policy positions over time. According to my August 2016 survey of 1,000 randomly selected Americans, the four philosophies of reform help explain why Mr. Trump struggled to break a support level of 45 percent en route to his electoral vote victory and why Mrs. Clinton was able to win 47 percent of the popular vote.

This report asks what the dismantlers, streamliners, priority setters, and reinventors believe, how their influence has changed over the past twenty years, how they decided what they want from government reform, how each group aligns with others in shared distrust and political support, and what the next administration might do to close the sharp divisions

expressed in the 2016 outcome. The answers are based on responses in eight public opinion surveys between August 1997 and August 2016. It includes a particularly deep review of underlying patterns in the Pew Research Center's 2015 report *Beyond Distrust*: *How Americans View Their Government*.[3] Though this paper is based on my analysis alone, my findings fit the 2016 campaign narrative. They also portend further battles as the four philosophical groups fight for majorities in the voting booth and court of public opinion.

THE FOUR PHILOSOPHIES OF REFORM

THE FOUR PHILOSOPHIES OF REFORM reflect the public's assessment of the federal government's performance. According to the Pew Research Center's *Beyond Distrust* survey, majorities of the dismantlers and priority setters said the federal government is somewhat bad or very bad at running its programs, while majorities of streamliners and reinventors said it is somewhat good or somewhat bad.

Despite this broad consensus that government could do a better job, Americans are divided on how Congress and the president might restore their confidence. They are also divided by party, policies, and political ideology. According to my analysis of the Pew Research Center's 2015 data, Americans expect the federal government to take a major role in a long list of pressing issues, including strengthening the economy, keeping the nation safe from terrorism, ensuring safe food and drugs, protecting the environment, and managing the immigration system.

The four philosophical groups may have very different positions on policies such as building a wall between the United States and Mexico, but they generally agree that government reform must be on the national agenda. Although such reform would have to address stubborn problems such as campaign finance, ethics reform, and government reorganization, it could provide the greatest opportunity for bipartisan agreement between the dismantlers and priority setters. The streamliners and reinventors will have their say, but the dismantlers and priority setters will determine the majority.

Absent noticeable improvements in government performance, the four groups are likely to remain unified almost exclusively by anger and frustration. As the Pew Research Center's 2015 survey shows, three-fifths of Americans said the federal government is almost always wasteful and inefficient, deserves the criticism it receives, and cannot be trusted to do the right thing just about always or even most of the time. Three-quarters also said that their political officials would say and do almost anything to get elected before abandoning constituents for powerful interests. And slightly more than half of Americans said ordinary citizens could do a better job than elected officials of solving the nation's problems.

These doubts are particularly troubling given the reported civic engagement among all four philosophical groups. More than half of all respondents in the four groups said they follow what is going on in government most of the time. More than half also said they almost always vote. Finally, more than half said ordinary citizens can do a lot to influence the government in Washington, with the streamliners and priority setters aligned at about 60 percent and

the dismantlers and priority setters aligned at about 45 percent.

However, all four groups also said they were losing more than winning on issues they care about. As could be expected, 85 percent of the dismantlers said their side was losing more than winning on the issues they cared about, while the reinventors were split almost equally on the question.

The reinventors may have felt more successful because slightly more than half were satisfed with the way things were going in the country, while 92 percent of the dismantlers were dissatisfied. The dismantlers clearly derived no comfort from the Republican victories in the 2010 and 2014 congressional elections, nor did they find solace in the Tea Party revolt that forced Rep. John Boehner (R-OH) from the House Speaker's chair in 2015.

Despite this wide variation in their sense of impact, the four philosophical groups share a belief that the federal government fails to honor the promises of elected officials. Indeed, their skepticism has bordered on irreparable cynicism. As former Federal Reserve Board chairman Paul A. Volcker told the 2012 graduating class at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy, "Americans are skeptical that government can do much of anything right these days, and it is a skepticism that affects every sector involved in the design and delivery of public services. Although the vast majority of this nation's public servants are deeply committed to their mission, the scandals and breakdowns continue apace."

This skepticism was baked into the Constitution through the checks and balances that help create gridlock, but it has reached new highs in recent years as government and its leaders have been unable to reach agreement on a host of issues. Except for a brief rally after September 11, 2001, frustration and anger toward the federal government has risen steadily for almost two decades, from 68 percent in 1997 to 79 percent in 2015, while the percentage of Americans who trust the federal government just about always or most of the time has fallen from 39 percent in 1997 to 19 percent in 2015. Although the dismantlers and priority setters were always less trusting than the streamliners and reinventors, all four groups drifted ever lower in trust over the years.

The paradox in this skepticism is the public's favorable view of most federal departments and agencies. In 2015, for example, the US Postal Service was at the top of the ranking (84 percent), followed by the National Park Service (75 percent), Centers for Disease Control (71 percent), NASA (70 percent), the FBI (68 percent), the Department of Homeland Security (64 percent), the Defense Department (63 percent), the CIA (57 percent), the Social Security Administration (55 percent), and the Environmental Protection Agency (52). The Department

of Veterans Affairs proved that favorability is linked to performance after its ratings plunged 30 percentage points in the wake of the Phoenix waiting list scandal, but most departments and agencies have remained highly rated for decades. The Internal Revenue Service always resides at the bottom of the favorability scale, but even it hovers above 40 percent year after year.

Favorability toward careers in government is also surprisingly high. Although only a third of Americans said they would want a son or daughter to pursue a career in politics, more than half would support a career in government. Although only 30 percent of the dismantlers would endorse a government career, even that is a remarkably strong recommendation from such an angry and distrustful group. After all, 95 percent of the dismantlers said they trust government only some of the time or never, while 96 percent said they were frustrated or angry about government.

Simply put, many Americans distrust the federal government as a whole but look favorably upon the departments, agencies, and employees who deliver the goods and services they value. They feel the same way about Congress and the judiciary—they distrust the institutions as a whole but not the members who represent their districts and bring home the benefits.

Sorting Reforms

This report is based on public attitudes on what government delivers (bigger government that delivers more services, versus smaller government that delivers fewer services) and how much reform it needs (very major reform or not too much reform).[5] Although the trend lines presented are built on eight surveys taken between 1997 and 2016, most of the findings come from my analysis of the Pew Research Center's 2015 survey.

The analysis of what Americans want from reform involves the combination of the two "what" and "how" questions that have been asked in slightly different forms since 1997: (1) "If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services or a bigger government providing more services?" and (2) "Which of these statements comes closest to your view? The federal government needs very major reform OR The federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform." According to my August 2016 survey, 47 percent of Americans favor a bigger government providing more services, and 40 percent favor a smaller government providing fewer services.[6] In turn, 56 percent say the federal government needs major reform, while 37 percent say the federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform.[7]

When combined in a cross-tabulation, these two "what" and "how" questions create

four distinct philosophies of reform. As Figure 1 shows, the dismantlers and priority setters disagree on the optimal size of government but share the demand for very major reform; the streamliners and reinventors also disagree on the desirable size of government but believe it is basically sound and needs only some reform. Described through presidential promises, the dismantlers want what Ronald Reagan called "a devolution revolution," while the streamliners want what Al Gore called "a government that works better and costs less," the priority setters want what Jimmy Carter called "a government as good as the people," and the reinventors want what Barack Obama called a "smarter, better government."

FIGURE 1: The Four Approaches to Government Reform

WHAT AMERICANS WANT FROM REFORM	GOVERNMENT NEEDS VERY MAJOR REFORM	GOVERNMENT IS BASICALLY SOUND AND NEEDS ONLY SOME REFORM
SMALLER GOVERNMENT AND FEWER SERVICES	Dismantlers	Streamliners
BIGGER GOVERNMENT AND MORE SERVICES	Priority Setters	Reinventors

As discussed below, the percentage of dismantlers has more than doubled over the past eighteen years, to a near majority who favor smaller government and very major reform; the percentage of reinventors, who favor bigger government and only some reform, has plunged by almost as much. It is impossible to pinpoint the turning points in these shifts given the lack of surveys between 2002 and 2010, but the movement was clearly visible in the Republican takeover of the House in 2010, the Senate in 2014, and the presidency in 2016.

The nation changed as a whole, too. Although Americans remained closely divided on bigger versus smaller government, the percentage who said the federal government was basically sound and needed only some repair fell sharply, while the percentage who demand very much reform soared. As the demand for reform increased, so did the percentage of dismantlers and priority setters.

Common Ground

Before examining trends in the percentage of Americans supporting the four philosophies, it is important to note points of agreement between the dismantlers, streamliners, reinventors, and priority setters on the general state of government performance.[8] For example, majorities within all four philosophical groups said government does a poor or only a fair job of running its programs, trust the government in Washington to do the right thing none or only some of

the time, and agree that government is almost always wasteful and inefficient.

All four groups also said money has more influence on politics and elected officials now than in the past, that there should be limits on the amount individuals and organizations can spend in an election, and that the high cost of running a presidential campaign discourages many good candidates. All four groups also agreed that laws could be written to effectively reduce the role of money in politics.

They largely considered the nation's elected officials intelligent and patriotic but rated most of them dishonest, lazy, and selfish. At the same, they said the typical American was just as intelligent as the average elected official, was more honest and energetic, and slightly more patriotic.

All four groups saw a great deal of difference between the two major political parties in 2015, with priority setters and reinventors leaning Democratic and dismantlers and streamliners leaning Republican. The dismantlers were much more likely to see their side as losing more than winning (84 percent), followed by the priority setters (69 percent), the streamliners (60 percent), and the reinventors (47 percent).

Intensely angry and frustrated by their perceived lack of political influence, dismantlers and priority setters have believed that most elected officials do not care what people think. They also have been confident that ordinary Americans could do a better job than officials of solving the nation's problems. They have been less likely than streamliners and reinventors to say that voting gives people like them some input into how government operates. All four groups have tended to believe that most issues facing the country do not have clear solutions, but the streamliners and reinventors have been more hopeful about their elected officials—at least before the 2016 election.

Dismantlers and priority setters' anger and frustration toward government and its elected officials is directed toward different targets. The dismantlers focus on Democrats as the problem, while the priority setters are more likely to view Republicans that way. These competing views help explain why the Trump campaign talked about "draining the swamp" in Washington as a path to smaller government with fewer services, while the Clinton campaign was unable to speak to the demand for reform as a path to bigger government with more services.

Uncommon Anger

The common ground described does not extend to politics and campaigns. According to my August 2016 survey, the priority setters were leaning toward the Democrats as the campaigns

began in earnest, while the dismantlers were moving toward the Republicans. Both the dismantlers and priority setters were angry about the government and its elected officials, but they disagreed about the need for bigger or smaller government, more or fewer services. Much as the groups also agreed that the federal government should play a major role in strengthening the economy, keeping the nation safe from terrorism, and so forth, but split on their party identification with the dismantlers leaning Republican and the priority setters leaning Democrat. They were also angry and frustrated about officials, political parties, and presidential candidates but not about the need for government engagement in strengthening the economy, protecting the nation against terrorism, and fulfilling other federal missions.

This split between what government delivers and how much reform it needs is no doubt linked to demographic forces and party loyalties. In 2015, for example, half of the dismantlers held a favorable view of the Republican Party, compared with just 21 percent of priority setters. In comparison, just 13 percent of dismantlers had a favorable view of the Democratic Party, compared with 45 percent of the priority setters.

Again, both groups believed that the system is "rigged," just not by the same leaders, parties, and institutions.

For instance, the dismantlers may give government low ratings on helping people out of poverty because they think their leaders are too generous, while the priority setters do so because they think elected officials are too selfish and uncaring. The key to understanding the deep split between what different groups of Americans want from reform is not whether they are angry and frustrated, but whether their leaders are in power.

These divisions may explain why the Trump campaign focused on the need for a political revolution featuring the rise of the dismantlers. The divisions may also explain why Mrs. Clinton emphasized student debt, children's health, the minimum wage, and a more inclusive society. Although she occasionally spoke of campaign finance reform, she could not address ethics reform without provoking even harsher attacks on her emails, her speaking fees, and the pay-to-play allegations surrounding the Clinton Global Initiative.

CHANGES IN ATTITUDE

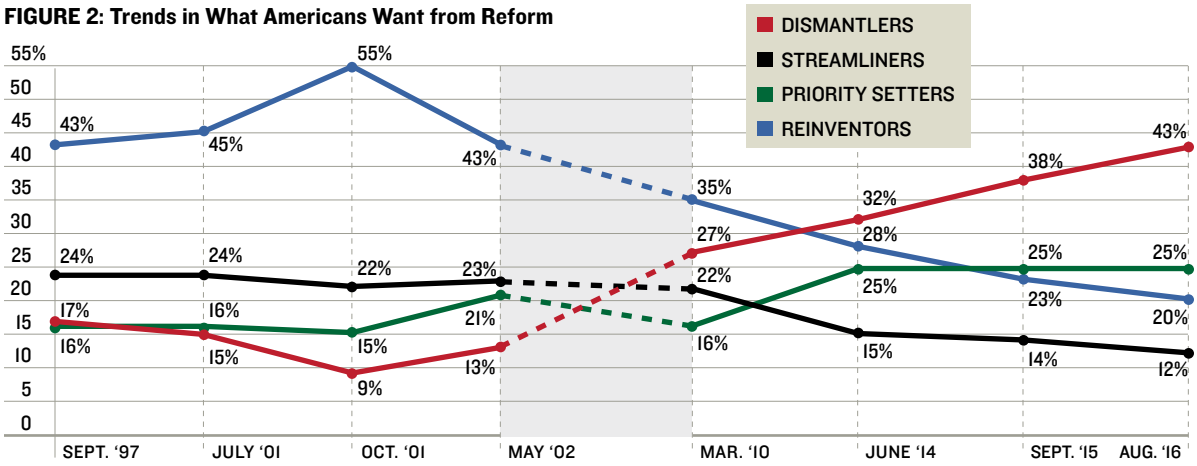
THE PAST TWO DECADES HAVE WITNESSED a dramatic change in how much government reform Americans expect. People have always been somewhat skeptical about government performance, but antigovernment sentiment began to rise after 2002 and reached full force in the 2010 midterm elections.

The shifts in public sentiment are presented in Figure 2. Although the trend lines were broken between 2002 and 2010—when measurements were not taken—the 1997–2002 and 2010–2016 patterns show a sharp rise in the percentage of dismantlers and priority setters and a steep decline in the percentage of reinventors. The percentage of dismantlers more than tripled between 1997 and 2016, the percentage of priority setters doubled, and the percentages of streamliners and reinventors were both cut by half.

The Shift to Dismantling

There are many explanations for the shift toward dismantling. The nation confronted a national tragedy on September 11, soon went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan, faced a massive financial collapse and the Great Recession that followed, elected the first black president in history, nominated the first woman for the presidency, and confronted a growing list of highly visible government failures.[9] The shift occurred nonetheless and is shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: Trends in What Americans Want from Reform



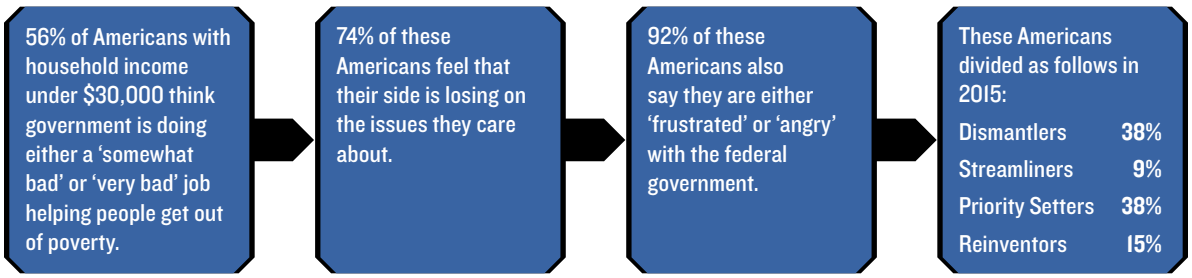
NOTE The gray space in the middle of the trend lines covers a period when surveys on the four philosophies were not conducted.
SOURCES *Deconstructing Distrust* survey, Pew Research Center, June 1997; *Presidential Appointee Initiative* surveys, Brookings Institution, August and October, 2001, and March 2002; *Distrust, Discontent, Anger, and Partisan Rancor* survey, Pew Research Center, September 2010; *Congressional Election* survey, the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center, June 26-July 1; *Beyond Distrust* survey, Pew Research Center, September 2015; *What Americans Want from Reform* survey, August 2016.

In other words, no single event explains the break. The shift toward dismantling began after 2002, which suggests that it was fed by the Iraq War, the financial crisis, Barack Obama's election, and the sluggish economic recovery.

Though the dismantlers gave Mr. Trump a highly activated base, they cannot reach an electoral majority without help from other philosophical groups. In theory, their enthusiasm for smaller government and fewer services would mostly appeal to streamliners, even as it might drive priority setters and reinventors toward a closer plurality alignment in response. However, the streamliners are much younger on average than the dismantlers, which might lead them to resist calls for major change from older generations.

The number of streamliners fell by half over the past decade, while the number of priority setters grew to include a large contingent of lower-income Americans who (1) believe that government is not doing enough to help people in poverty, (2) see their side as losing on issues that matter to them, and (3) are angry or frustrated with government. As Figure 3 shows, these Americans are equally divided between dismantling and priority setting, suggesting that the choice between the two philosophical groups is linked to life circumstances, disillusionment, and partisanship.

FIGURE 3: One of Many Paths to Dismantling and Priority Setting



SOURCE *Beyond Distrust* survey, Pew Research Center, September 2015.

Demographic Realities

Other possible paths to dismantling and priority setting can be linked to anger and distrust toward government. The dismantlers appear to believe the answer is a smaller government that delivers fewer services, while the priority setters believe the answer is a larger government that delivers more.

As Table 1 suggests, some of these opinions no doubt have been based on demographic differences. By 2015, dismantlers were the most likely of the four philosophical groups to

be white and over 45 years old, with at least some college and making more than $30,000 a year, which suggests a more conservative bent. Priority setters were the most likely to have a high school education or less and earn less than $30,000 a year, all of which implies a more liberal viewpoint. Streamliners were the most likely to be male and young, and to have higher incomes, which indicates a somewhat liberal view. Finally, the reinventors were more likely to be female, nonwhite, and more educated, a combination that creates a more liberal leaning. These demographic measures are also highly correlated with party identification.

TABLE I: Demographic Differences

	MALE			WHITE			UNDER 45 YEARS OLD			HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS			UNDER $30,000		
	1997	2010	2015	1997	2010	2015	1997	2010	2015	1997	2010	2015	1997	2010	2015
DISMANTLERS	58%	55%	56%	88%	84%	84%	59%	43%	32%	31%	29%	35%	33%	23%	20%
STREAMLINERS	49	52	62	88	81	76	56	62	61	29	36	40	36	29	23
PRIORITY-SETTERS	43	48	48	82	75	67	45	47	54	36	30	49	44	38	39
REINVENTORS	43	41	47	81	68	61	46	55	54	36	32	36	41	36	25

SOURCES *Deconstructing Distrust* survey, Pew Research Center, June 1997; *Distrust, Discontent, Anger, and Partisan Rancor* survey, Pew Research Center, September 2010; *Beyond Distrust* survey, Pew Research Center, September 2015.

As Table 1 also shows, these demographic differences changed over time as all four philosophical groups became slightly more concentrated. Between 1997 and 2015, the dismantlers grew older, and their incomes rose significantly. The streamliners remained relatively young, gained more men, and increased their incomes. The priority setters became much more diverse, older, and drew supporters who were less educated. Finally, the reinventors became older, much more diverse, and remained relatively well-educated with much higher incomes.

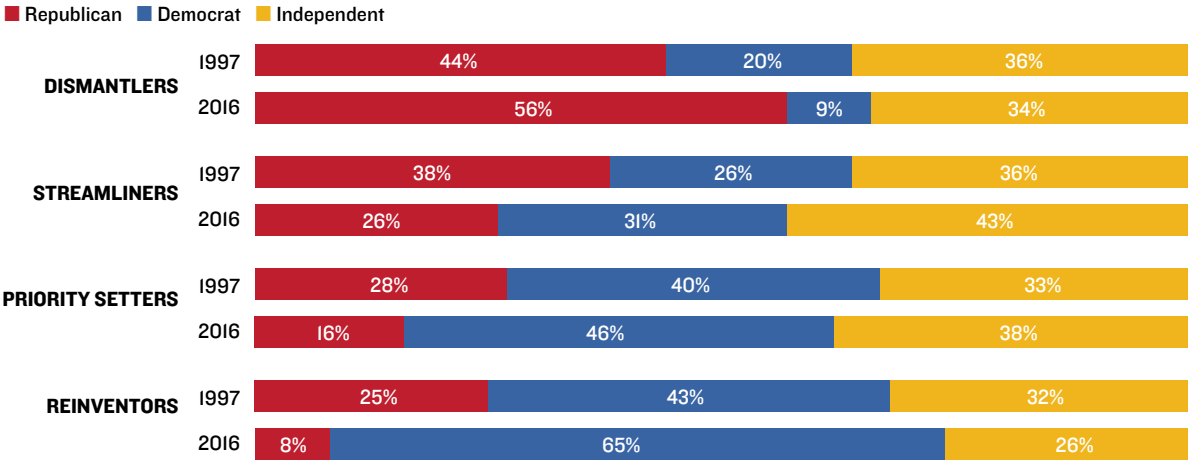
As noted above, it not entirely clear where the demographic migration of most dismantlers began, but it seems reasonable to suggest that some streamliners moved toward the dismantlers based on their demand for smaller government, while many reinventors moved toward priority setting based on their demand for government reform.

Party Loyalties

This migration is partially confirmed in the party identification of the four philosophical groups. Although today's distribution of Democrats, Republicans, and independents confirms expected loyalties, the movement of party identifiers shows a broad re-sorting over time. Between 1997 and 2016, the share of Republican dismantlers rose 12 percentage points,

from 44 percent to 56 percent; Republican streamliners dropped 12 points, from 38 percent to 26 percent; Republican priority setters dropped 12 points, from 28 percent to 16 percent; and Democratic reinventors jumped 22 points, from 43 percent to 65 percent. Republicans were obviously moving toward dismantling, while Democrats were migrating toward priority setting as they left reinventing and streamlining.

FIGURE 4: Party Identification



SOURCES *Deconstructing Distrust* survey, Pew Research Center, June 1997; *Distrust, Discontent, Anger, and Partisan Rancor* survey, Pew Research Center, September 2010; *What Americans Want from Reform* survey, August 2016.

There are many possible paths from one philosophy to another, but they are only speculative theories given the absence of follow-up surveys. Nevertheless, the distribution of party loyalties in 1997 and 2016 strongly points to the movement of many reinventors to priority setting as the nation became more polarized, while some of the streamliners moved toward dismantling.

CREATING ALIGNMENTS

THE DISMANTLERS AND PRIORITY SETTERS agree the system works against them and are dissatisfied with the way things are going, but they often disagree on social and policy issues. The dismantlers and streamliners align on conservative positions, while the priority setters and reinventors align on traditionally liberal positions.

On social issues, for example, priority setters and reinventors are more likely than dismantlers and streamliners to take the positions that (1) immigrants strengthen the country through their hard work, (2) racial discrimination is the main reason many black people cannot get ahead, (3) society should accept homosexuality, and (4) having people of many different races, ethnic groups, and nationalities makes the US a better place to live. The same alignment holds on policy issues, where priority setters and reinventors are more likely than dismantlers and streamliners to believe that (5) government should do more to help needy Americans, (6) corporations make too much profit, (7) strict environmental laws are necessary, and (8) the federal government should take a major role in helping people get out of poverty, strengthening the economy, and keeping the nation safe from terrorism.

As Table 2 shows, these alignments are part of the broad split between combinations across the four philosophical groups. As of 2015, dismantlers were isolated on many social and policy issues but united with priority setters on distrust in government, political efficacy, and government performance.

Table 2 also indicates future conflict between two potential coalitions: a conservative coalition based on intense anger toward the federal government and its leaders, and a liberal coalition, also built on that intense anger but supporting a strong federal role on many policy issues and with a broad embrace of diversity.

The two philosophical groups split on every social issue raised in the 2016 campaign. Priority setters are almost twice as likely as dismantlers to agree that immigrants strengthen the US (65 percent versus 35 percent), racial discrimination is the main reason black people cannot get ahead (41 percent versus 15 percent), government should do more to help needy people even if it means incurring more debt (59 percent versus 24 percent), and poor people have hard lives because government benefits are not sufficient to let them live decently (63 percent versus 24 percent).[10]

These alignments help explain the 2016 results. Both candidates held their respective bases, but Mr. Trump's base was almost a majority, while Mrs. Clinton's path to electoral victory involved appeals to three different philosophies. She needed every reinventor she

could harvest, a share of the relatively small percentage of streamliners, and enough priority setters to push her over the top. In contrast, Mr. Trump's dismantlers gave him 32 percent of the intended vote in August, but still needed a relatively large share of independents and undecided voters to break 40 percent in November.

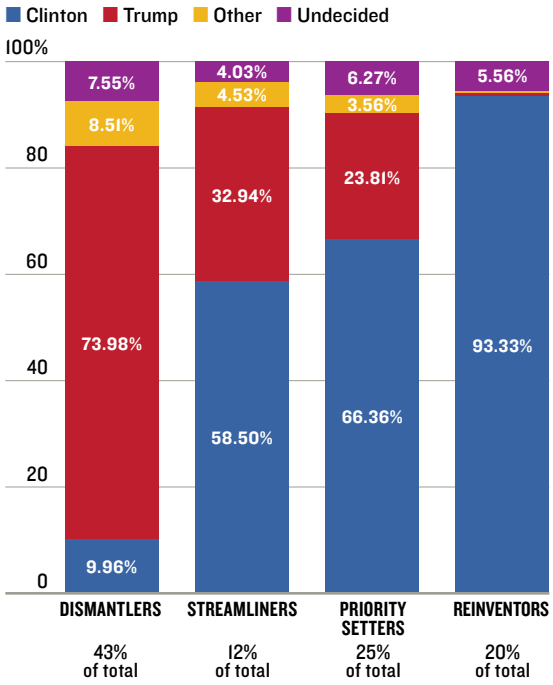
As Table 2 suggests, Mrs. Clinton had to do more stitching to build a coalition. The reinventors could have carried her to victory as late as October 2001 when their numbers reached 55 percent, but she needed help from the priority setters and streamliners by 2016 when the reinventors accounted for just 20 percent of potential voters.

A strong reform agenda might have pulled the priority setters to her side but not necessarily the streamliners; smaller government might have influenced the streamliners but not the priority setters; and bigger government alone appears to have been enough to keep the reinventors on her side.

Figure 5 confirms this broad analysis. Mr. Trump had a substantial advantage among the dismantlers in August and appeared to add enough priority setters and streamliners to achieve his electoral victory. Although Mr. Trump's reliance on a highly motivated base helps explain his difficulty getting higher than the 45 percent mark, Mrs. Clinton's effort to create a broad coalition of philosophical groups proved successful in raising her share of the popular vote.

It is reasonable to assume that Mr. Trump picked up almost all the dismantlers on Election Day and added enough streamliners to assure an electoral victory. It is also reasonable to suggest that Mrs. Clinton may have created the foundation of a future electoral majority by combining substantial shares of streamliners, priority setters, and reinventors into a popular vote majority. The question is whether her coalition can break the geographical concentration of dismantlers in enough battleground states to win the electoral vote.

FIGURE 5: Voting Intentions, August 2016



SOURCE *What Americans Want from Reform* survey, August 2016.

TABLE 2: An Inventory of Alignments

QUESTIONS	STRONGEST ALIGNMENT	ADVANTAGE
NATION'S DIRECTION (1) satisfaction with the ways things are going in country	Dismantlers + Priority Setters	Lean conservative
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT (1) follow what's going on in politics, (2) always vote, (3) send or receive email at least occasionally	All groups at same levels	Neither
TRUST IN GOVERNMENT (1) trust federal government only some of the time or never, (2) frustrated and angry with the federal government, (3) ordinary Americans would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials, (4) most elected officials put their own interests ahead of the country's interests, (5) government is almost always wasteful and inefficient	Dismantlers + Priority Setters	Lean conservative
POLITICAL EFFICACY (1) elected officials in Washington lose touch with the people pretty quickly, (2) citizens cannot do a lot to influence the federal government in Washington, (2) government run by a few big interests, (3) most elected officials do not care what people like me think, (4) voting by people like me doesn't really affect how government runs things	Dismantlers + Priority Setters	Lean conservative
MONEY IN POLITICS (1) the high cost of running a presidential campaign discourages many good candidates from running, (2) there should be limits on the amount of money individuals and organizations can spend on political campaigns, (3) money has a greater influence on politics and elected officials today than in the past, (4) new laws could be written to effectively reduce the role of money in politics	All groups in a shared range, but with Reinventors at the higher level and Dismantlers at the lower levels.	None
GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE (1) government is doing only a fair or poor job running its programs, (2) government is almost always wasteful and inefficient, (3) government is doing a somewhat or very bad job strengthening the economy; keeping the country safe from terrorism; helping people out of poverty; protecting the environment; responding to natural disasters; ensuring that food and medicines are safe; ensuring access to health care; maintaining roads, bridges, and other infrastructure; and advancing space exploration	Dismantlers + Priority Setters	Lean conservative
LEADERS AND CITIZENS Negative ratings of elected leaders in Washington and positive ratings of the typical American: (1) intelligent, (2) honest, (3) energetic, (4) unselfish, and (5) patriotic, (6) not very much or no confidence in the wisdom of the American people	Dismantlers + Priority Setters	Lean conservative
POLITICAL IDEOLOGY (1) liberal or very liberal, (2) Democrat, (3) favorable opinion toward Democratic Party, (4) unfavorable opinion of Republican Party, (5) disagree with Tea Party movement	Priority Setters + Reinventors + Streamliners	Lean liberal
SOCIAL ISSUES (1) poor people have hard lives because government benefits don't go far enough, (2) the government should do more to help needy Americans, (3) racial discrimination is the main reason why many black people can't get ahead, (4) business corporations make too much profit, (5) government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest, (6) good diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace, (7) stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost, (8) immigrants today strengthen our country, (9) homosexuals should be accepted by society, (10) there are clear solutions to most big issues facing the country today, (11) the increasing number of people of many different races, ethnic groups, and nationalities make the country a better place to live on balance	Priority Setters + Reinventors	Lean liberal
POLICY ISSUES The federal government should play a major role in (1) strengthening the economy, (2) keeping the country safe from terrorism, (3) helping people out of poverty, (4) protecting the environment, (5) responding to natural disasters, (6) ensuring that food and medicines are safe, (7) ensuring access to health care, (8) maintaining roads, bridges, and other infrastructure, (9) advancing space exploration	Streamliners + Reinventors	Lean liberal

SOURCE *Beyond Distrust* survey, Pew Research Center, September 2015.

ATTACKING SKEPTICISM

THE 2016 ELECTION MAY HAVE BEEN SHAPED by dismantlers and priority setters, but neither candidate offered clear proposals to back their broader promises of change. As they battled over corruption, fitness for office, emails, and misogyny, they spent little time on how to help government faithfully execute the laws.

Their silence was not due to a lack of proposals, however. At least five proposals match public sentiment in the wake of Mr. Trump's victory.

First, the public clearly favors broad election reform, and it is time for Congress and Mr. Trump to deliver. All four philosophical groups are highly critical of the amount of money spent in national elections and believe that the high cost of campaigns discourages qualified candidates from running. They also believe that money has more influence on elections and government than in the past, but majorities in all four groups believe that laws can be written to solve the problem.

Second, the public wants significant ethics reform. Dismantlers and priority setters have described elected officials as generally patriotic and intelligent, but substantial majorities say the same officials are dishonest, selfish, and lazy. Moreover, all four of the philosophical groups describe the typical American as more intelligent and patriotic, and more honest, generous, and energetic than elected officials. As noted earlier, a vast majority of Americans believe most elected officials do not care what they think. Not surprisingly, dismantlers and priority setters are the most likely of the four philosophical groups to see the entire process as stacked against them and more likely to say that their side has been losing more than winning lately.

The dismantlers are not alone in their doubts about their voice in government. One way elected officials could show they can solve problems is by working with Mr. Trump to remove any hint that presidents might benefit financially from their decisions, while expanding the nepotism statutes to include family members who advise the president even as volunteers.

Third, the public desperately wants some sign that the federal government can control waste and inefficiency. The amount of collectable debt—loans, taxes, fees, and improper payments—on the government's books reached $300 billion in 2015 and is growing at $15 billion to $20 billion a year. Improper payments to contractors, grantees, hospitals and clinics, and even dead Social Security beneficiaries hit $150 billion. An aggressive debt collection program not only would help reduce the federal deficit but would provide the headlines to

start changing public perceptions about egregious government waste. Mr. Trump's budget should include strong provisions and needed resources to net this potential windfall even if it means launching more tax audits and and expanding the Treasury Department's Financial Management Service, which collects $55 in debt for every $1 spent.

Fourth, Congress and the president must address the public's concern about government failures. As I have argued many times, federal employees make miracles every day, but they often do so against the odds created by underfunding, poor leadership, bloated hierarchies, poorly crafted policies, and the lack of a modern personnel system.

Congress and Mr. Trump cannot fix these problems by imposing yet another federal hiring freeze. Freezes, caps, and ceilings have never prevented a single government breakdown. They merely increase the odds that the government will fail again—be it in delivering veterans health care, overseeing deepwater oil drilling, or preventing homegrown terrorism.

Congress and Mr. Trump would make more progress by creating a bipartisan national commission to conduct the long overdue and often-promised overhaul of how the federal government works. Armed with a fast-track approval process, such a commission could finally modernize the government's antiquated systems, rebuild the workforce to deliver on critical missions, and even downsize the government-industrial complex of more than seven million federal, contract, and grant employees. Doing so would do much more to honor Mr. Trump's promise to make heads spin than yet another wasteful freeze.

Finally, the federal government desperately needs a strong personnel system led by an effective Office of Personnel Management. Recent surveys show that the government's own senior executives rate the beleaguered office as one of the most influential agencies, as well as one of the most rigid and least talented. Mr. Trump must simultaneously address the agency's sagging reputation in the wake of data hacks and executive turnover, while supporting a new personnel system designed to produce a next-generation workforce that can fill the vacancies created as the federal government's baby boomers move into retirement.

Without these kinds of reform, citizens will continue to feel estranged from their government, trust in government will continue to fall, and the political conflict will rise. Too many Americans have given up on the federal government as a source of positive action on great endeavors such as reversing global climate change. The states can do much to ameliorate these problems, but a strong federal government is essential to guaranteeing a vibrant future for younger Americans. Without action, this future will soon evaporate into one of despair and hopelessness. Mr. Trump must either act on this kind of broad reform agenda or face almost

certain defeat by an alliance of disaffected dismantlers and even angrier priority setters in 2018 and 2020. His opponents should also demand these kinds of reforms if they want to cultivate their own support among the priority setters and take a slice from the dismantlers. This alignment is the path to their own survival.

ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

THE VOLCKER ALLIANCE was launched in 2013 by former Federal Reserve Board chairman Paul A. Volcker to address the challenge of effective execution of public policies and to help rebuild public trust in government. The nonpartisan Alliance works toward that broad objective by partnering with other organizations—academic, business, governmental, and public interest—to strengthen professional education for public service, conduct needed research on government performance, and improve the efficiency and accountability of governmental organization at the federal, state, and local levels.

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PAUL C. LIGHT is Paulette Goddard Professor of Public Service at New York University's Wagner School of Public Service and special adviser to the chairman at the Volcker Alliance. He arrived at NYU after serving as vice president and director of governmental studies at the Brookings Institution. He also designed new initiatives for civic engagement as the director of the public policy program at the Pew Charitable Trusts, educated future public servants as professor and associate dean of the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute, strengthened public management as a senior adviser to US Senator John Glenn and the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, and oversaw the research agenda at the National Academy of Public Administration.

Professor Light was also a special consultant to the 1988 National Commission on the Public Service, which was chaired by former Federal Reserve Board chairman Paul A. Volcker, and has advised Mr. Volcker on public service issues ever since. He is a frequent commentator on public service, has testified on public service issues before 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. Professor Light is an internationally recognized expert on government reform, social innovation, and American national government.

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This publication is the product of the Volcker Alliance. It is an important goal of the Alliance to produce reports that contain ideas, proposals, and recommendations for dealing with persistent governance problems in new ways based on independent research and analysis supporting constructive solutions. To stimulate this process and maintain project independence to make such conclusions and recommendations as they deem to be appropriate, these Alliance projects are commissioned to proceed without the requirement of approval of their conclusions and recommendations by the board of directors collectively, or by individual members of the board of directors.

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ENDNOTES

1. Lee Drutman, "The Divided States of America," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/opinion/campaign-stops/the-divided-states-of-america.html?_r=0.

2. *Reelection Rates over the Years: 1962–2016*, Center for Responsive Politics, https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/reelect.php.

3. *Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government*, Pew Research Center, November 23, 2015, http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/beyond-distrust-how-americans-view-their-government/.

4. Paul A. Volcker (address to graduates of the University of Maryland School of Public Policy, May 20, 2012), 2.

5. I built the analysis with typology using somewhat different questions over time:

1997–2014: 1) "What do you personally feel is the bigger problem with government? Government has the wrong priorities, or government has the right priorities but runs programs inefficiently"; and 2) "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?"

2015: 1) "Which of these statements comes closest to your view? The federal government needs very major reform, or the federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform"; and 2) "Government should do more to solve problems, or government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals."

2016: 1) "Which of these statements comes closest to your view? The federal government needs very major reform, or the federal government is basically sound and needs only some reform"; and 2) "If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services or a bigger government providing more services?"

The change from the 1997–2014 questions in 2015 reflected an effort to develop more precise questions about what the federal government should do (vision) and whether it needed very major or only some reform (execution). The Pew Research Center stopped using the six-point-scale question in its 2015 survey, but the reform question was the same in 2015 and 2016.

Despite these question changes, statistical modeling shows a high concordance between the "bigger/smaller government" and "do more/do less" questions in 2015 and 2016. The author wishes to gratefully acknowledge Anubhav Gupta for his assistance in analyzing these patterns.

6. The other 13 percent said the choice "depends," did not know, or declined to answer.

7. The other 7 percent said they did not know or declined to answer.

8. Unless otherwise noted, all these comparisons are based on my analysis of the Pew Research Center's 2015 survey of 3,004 randomly selected Americans. The respondents were interviewed between August 7 and September 24, 2015. Respondents were interviewed on landline telephones and cellphones, and interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, according to the respondent's preference. The conclusions are mine alone and do not represent any endorsement from the Pew Research Center. The data are available to all researchers on the Pew Research Center's website at http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/beyond-distrust-how-americans-view-their-government/.

9. Paul C. Light, *Vision + Action = Faithful Execution: Why Government Daydreams and How to Stop the Cascade of Breakdowns that Now Haunts It*, Volcker Alliance (2015). There have been at least fifty-three highly visible breakdowns since 2012, some of them driven by a lack of funding and resources; others by poorly designed policy; and still others by basic corruption and mismanagement, both deep within government and at its highest levels. My lecture on the topic can be found at Paul C. Light, "Vision + Action = Faithful Execution: Why Government Daydreams and How to Stop the Cascade of Breakdowns That Now Haunts It," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, January 2016.

10. All these comparisons come from my analysis of the Pew Research Center 2015 *Beyond Distrust* survey data.

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