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Where have all the reinventors gone? How government reform will shape the 2016 election

by Paul C. Light

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INTRODUCTION

The 2016 presidential election is almost certain to feature two tough questions about government reform. First, should the next president cut federal programs to reduce the power of government, or maintain existing programs to deal with important problems? Second, should the next president winnow the federal agenda to a smaller set of priorities, or accept the current priorities and focus on reducing federal inefficiency?

The answers will shape the votes and turnout of four groups of voters: (1) the "reinventors" who want to maintain government programs and focus on inefficiency, (2) the "streamliners" who want to cut government programs and also focus on inefficiency, (3) the "priority-setters" who want to maintain government programs but winnow the federal agenda to their liking, and (4) the "dismantlers" who want to cut government programs and also winnow the agenda to their very different liking.[1]

As Table 1 shows, each group shares a direct boundary with two other reform philosophies that might yield a "sweet spot" for an electoral victory. The candidate who becomes the champion of a much more focused, less powerful federal government might just be able to build a winning coalition of dismantlers and streamliners, while the candidate who becomes the voice of a somewhat more focused, but still aggressive federal government might be able to forge an equally formidable coalition of reinventors and priority-setters. If the campaign becomes a contest between these two agendas, the dismantlers will have the edge. As this paper will show, the number of reinventors has been sliced in half since 2002, while the number of dismantlers has tripled.

TABLE 1: THE FOUR GOVERNMENT-REFORM PHILOSOPHIES

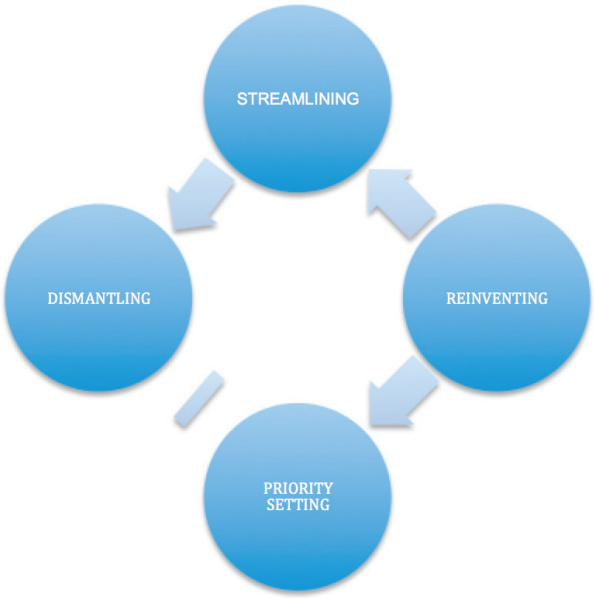
WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH FEDERAL PROGRAMS?	WHAT IS THE BIGGER PROBLEM WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?	
	WRONG PRIORITIES	RIGHT PRIORITIES BUT INEFFICIENT
CUT BACK PROGRAMS	DISMANTLERS	STREAMLINERS
MAINTAIN PROGRAMS	PRIORITY-SETTERS	REINVENTORS

However, the dismantlers would be well advised not to ignore the priority-setters who want to maintain programs and reset priorities. Although the number of dismantlers grew 20 percent between 2010 and 2014, the number of priority-setters grew almost 60 percent, in part because so many reinventors decided that a fight over priorities was more important than continued apologies about inefficiency.

Given these numbers, the priority-setters are likely to tip the balance in 2016. The dismantlers will inevitably support the Republican candidate or stay home, while the reinventors will rally around the Democrat or also stay home, but the priority-setters are girding for a referendum on the future of government. Add every priority-setter to the reinventors, and the Democratic candidate would start the campaign with a 53 percent majority; add every streamliner to the dismantlers, and the Republican would start with a 47 percent majority.

Alongside the recent movement toward dismantling, there has also been a significant movement toward priority setting. The gains may be much smaller in percentage terms, but priority setting is clearly growing, in part because the philosophy is absorbing many of the former reinventors. Streamlining may also be absorbing some of the departures as their own supporters move toward dismantling. Figure 1 shows this hypothetical path.

FIGURE 1. THE TRIP TO DISMANTLING



The streamliners, priority-setters, and reinventors may not share the same political ideology or party loyalties, but they do agree that the federal bureaucracy is in trouble. By 2010, for example, three-quarters of the dismantlers had concluded the federal government needed major reform, as had roughly half of the streamliners and priority-setters, and two-fifths of the reinventors. Each group almost certainly had its own definition of what the term "very major reform" might mean in terms of cutbacks and maintaining, but all four groups had enough anger and frustration toward how government runs its programs to create a "sweet spot" for building an electoral coalition.

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES?

Americans have long held seemingly irreconcilable opinions about the federal government in Washington.

On the one hand, Americans generally believe the worst about government performance as a whole. Except during rally-round-the-flag events such as the September 11th terrorist attacks or the start of war, roughly two-thirds of Americans say they are angry or frustrated with the federal government, while three-quarters say they no longer trust government to do what is right.

On the other hand, Americans are favorable toward federal employees and their departments and agencies. In 2013, for example, the Centers for Disease Control, Department of Defense, and NASA all topped 70 percent in favorability, while the FDA, EPA, and the departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice all topped 60 percent. Even the long-beleaguered Internal Revenue Service has lingered at or just below 50 percent for almost a quarter century.[2]

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TWO DECADES TO DIVISION

This paper is based on the notion that these apparent contradictions are not contradictions at all, but the product of two different sets of public opinions about government performance. One sets focuses on government's "vision" for addressing problems such as inequality, climate change, immigration, and foreign policy, while the other centers on the faithful "delivery" of those policies at the lowest cost and highest performance.[3]

VISION

Start with public opinion about the appropriate balance between (1) cutting government programs to reduce government power, or (2) maintaining programs to deal with important problems. Asked in 1997 to make that choice on a six-point scale, 40 percent of Americans chose cutting back (the first three points on the scale), while almost 60 percent chose maintaining programs (the last three points on the scale).

In yet another expression of rising polarization, this majority for maintaining programs was completely gone by 2010. Asked the cut-or-maintain question again in March of that year, 49 percent of Americans said government programs should be cut back greatly, up 8 percentage points from 1997, while 51 percent said government programs should be maintained, down by the same margin.

The split was nearly identical in 2014. Asked the cut-or-maintain question in July of that year, 47 percent of Americans said government programs should be cut back greatly, while 53 percent said government programs should be maintained.

The polarization is particularly visible along the 1–6 scale. In 1997, 47 percent of Americans picked points 3 or 4 to describe their choice, while 26 percent picked points 1 or 6. By 2010, 43 percent picked at the middle, while 34 percent picked at the ends. And by 2014, 35 percent picked at the middle, while 35 percent picked at the ends. These choices are yet another sign of increasing political polarization, as fewer and fewer Americans stand at the center (47 percent → 43 percent → 35 percent) and more and more have moved toward the extremes (26 percent → 34 percent → 35 percent).

DELIVERY

Turn next to public opinion about government delivery. Asked in 1997 to identify the bigger problem with government, just 33 percent of Americans said government had the wrong priorities, while 67 percent said government had the right priorities but ran its programs inefficiently. Many Americans seemed quite comfortable with relatively small-scale bureaucratic reform that would leave the government vision alone.

Asked to identify the bigger problem again in 2010, however, 44 percent of Americans said government had the wrong priorities, which was up 11 percentage points from 1997. In turn, 56 percent said government had the right priorities but ran its programs inefficiently, which was down 11 percentage points from 1997. Many Americans seemed increasingly convinced that government needed major reform.

Americans are not just thinking about priorities when they say they do not trust government. They are also thinking about the federal government's inability to faithfully execute the laws, and the candidates will have to promise more than another war on waste (Ronald Reagan) or the most transparent administration in history (Barack Obama).

Finally, when asked to identify the bigger problem in 2014, 57 percent of Americans said government had the wrong priorities, which was up 13 percentage points from 2010 and 24 percentage points from 1997. In turn, 43 percent said government had the right priorities but ran its programs inefficiently, which was down 13 percentage points from 2010 and almost 25 percentage points from 1997. Although inefficiency was no doubt important to a significant minority, the vast majority of Americans seemed ready to fight about government priorities, inefficiency be damned.

This does not mean that the presidential candidates can simply ignore the public's disquiet regarding the federal government's job performance. Americans want a debate about priorities for sure, but many are also waiting to

hear whether and how the candidates will finally tackle bureaucratic reform. As I will argue later, Americans are not just thinking about priorities when they say they do not trust government. They are also thinking about the federal government's inability to faithfully execute the laws, and the candidates will have to promise more than another war on waste (Ronald Reagan) or the most transparent administration in history (Barack Obama).

THE TRIP TO DISMANTLING

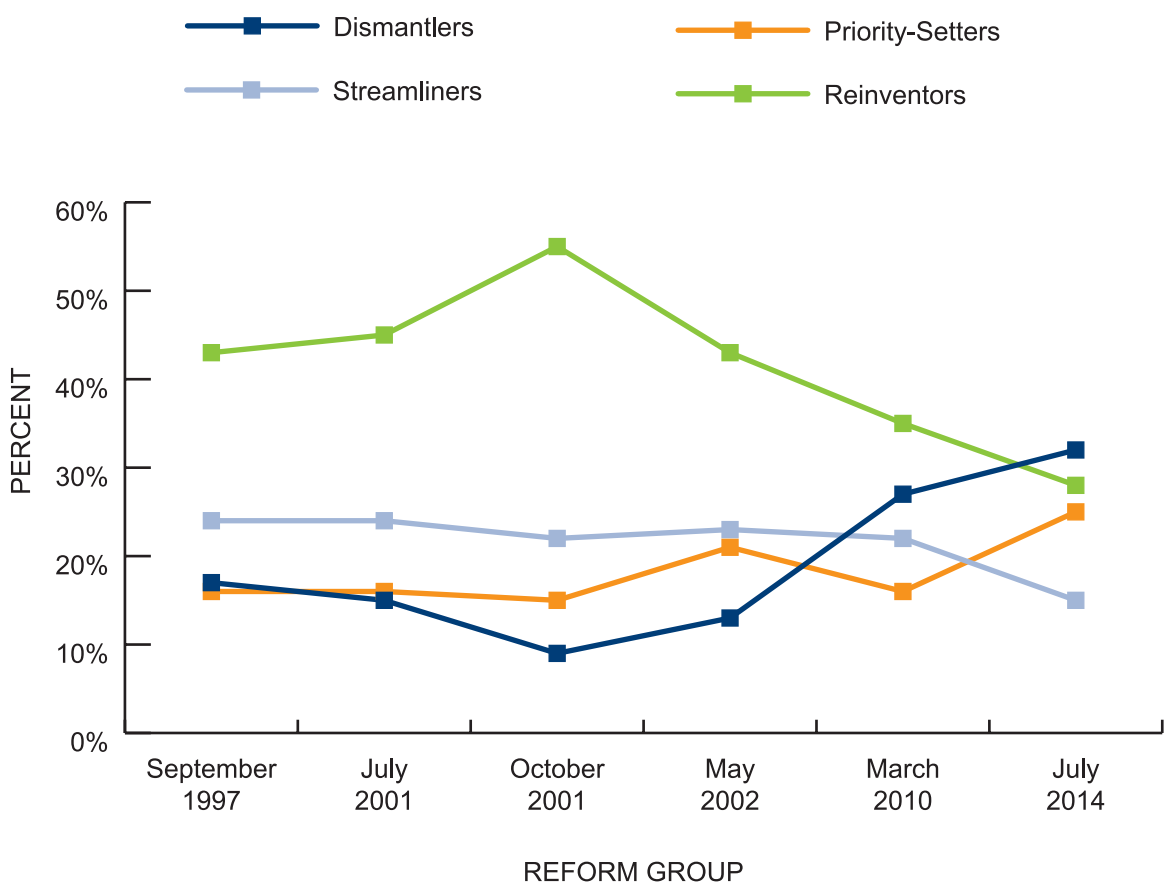
Every president since Thomas Jefferson has entered office promising to fix the federal bureaucracy, but most have failed or given up. Ronald Reagan mounted a war on waste and promised to close the departments of Education and Energy, but ended his term with a staggering budget deficit and one more department than he had inherited. In turn, Barack Obama promised the first government overhaul in 70 years, greater transparency, and fewer mistakes, but ended his first six years with a string of government breakdowns and almost no bureaucratic reform at all.

THE TREND

This record of over-promising and under-delivering may have set the stage for the emerging fight between reinventing and dismantling. Americans may have found common ground in their dismal ratings of government performance, but are now primed for a divisive fight over the appropriate fix.

As Figure 2 shows, reinventing started this journey to polarization with a 43 percent share of public support in 1997, gained 12 percent points to a 55 percent share immediately after September 11th, and faded to a 28 percent share by 2014. In turn, dismantling started the journey with a 17 percent share of public support, dropped to a 9 percent share after September 11th, but gained enough support to capture a 32 percent share by 2014. Finally, the percentages of streamliners and priority-setters remained relatively stable until 2014 when the priority-setters surged to a 25 percent share, while the streamliners fell to a 15 percent mark.[4] In sum, reinventing lost about half of its support over the years, while dismantling more than tripled in strength.

FIGURE 2: GOVERNMENT-REFORM TRENDS, 1997-2014



At first glance, streamlining and priority setting seem like restful destinations with minimal turnover. However, the data actually suggest that the two philosophies are best described as comfortable destinations for many former reinventors, as well as departure points for future dismantlers. The data also suggest that many of the former reinventors would happily return home if the next president were to reset federal priorities to deal with important problems and undertake a long-promised overhaul to modernize the federal government's error-prone bureaucracy.

THE SEPTEMBER 11TH EFFECT

September 11th may have been the spark for this speculative trend. Although the terrorist attacks clearly produced a rally-round-the-flag effect among Americans in general, and the reinventors in

particular, they also raised new issues about the future relevance of reinventing in a more dangerous world:

- First, the attacks led directly to the long and costly war in Iraq, which breached the federal debt ceiling, which led to the sequestration plan, hiring freezes, furloughs, and eventual government shutdown, which threatened programs to address what the reinventors saw as "important problems," which drove at least some reinventors toward a head-to-head confrontation over government priorities.

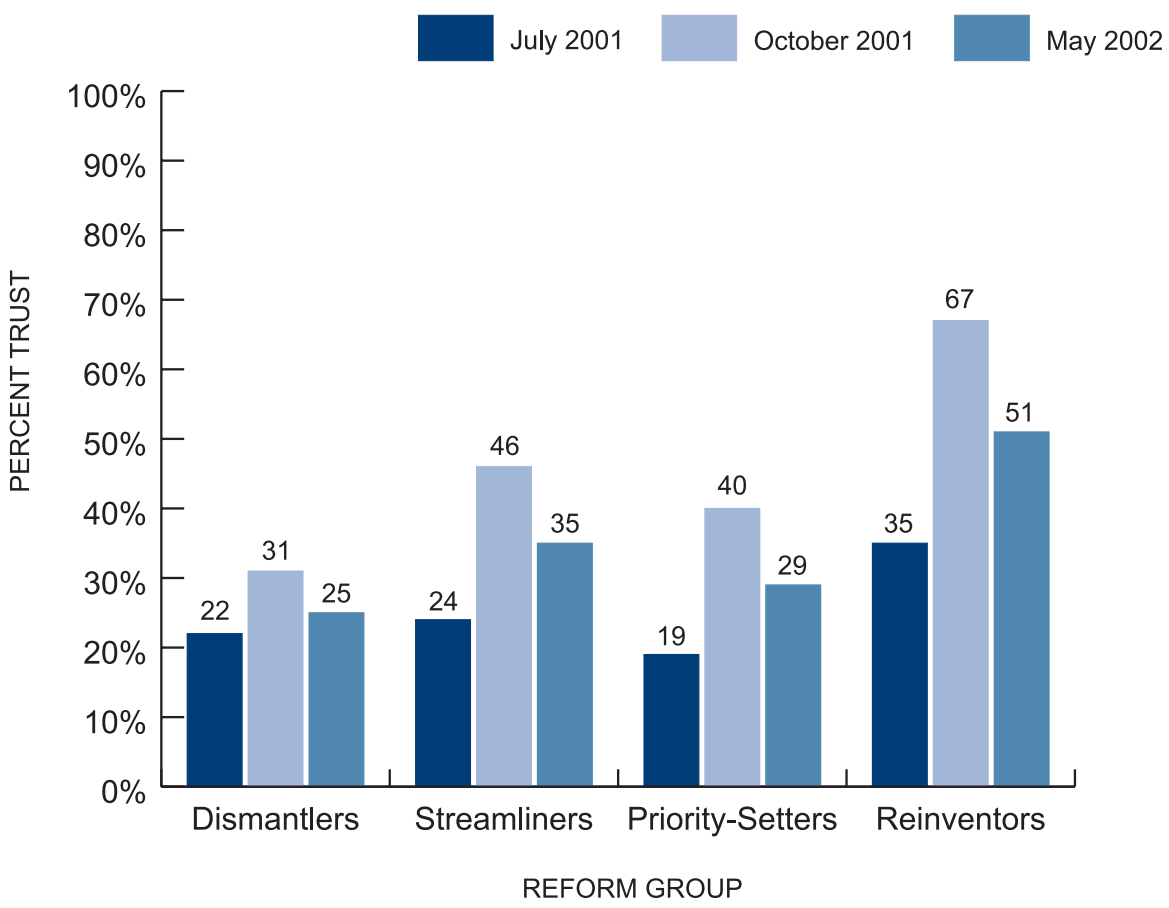
- Second, the attacks heralded a cascade of other highly visible government failures, which fanned the public's belief that criticism of the federal government's performance was justified, which fueled the belief that the federal bureaucracy needed "very major reform," not the minor tinkering generally associated with words such as "inefficiency."

The trend lines suggest that the reinventors eventually came to believe that the problem with government was no longer inefficiency, but the wrong priorities, and almost half also came to believe that the criticism of the way the federal government does its job was justified.

This is not to suggest that September 11th divided the nation. As Harvard University political scientist Robert Putnam argued in 2002, September 11th generated a sharp, albeit short-lived enthusiasm toward all things government. As Figure 3 shows, trust in government to do the right thing all or most of the time rose within all of the reform philosophies after the attacks.

At the same time, Figure 3 shows at least some of the polarization already discussed above. Although the dismantlers, streamliners, and priority-setters all moved up after the attacks, the reinventors started out with higher trust than the three other groups before the attacks, showed more trust in October, and retained higher trust in May; hence, the rally was short lived. As Putnam put it in the titles of his articles over the years, Americans went bowling together in 2001, but had returned to bowling alone by 2010.

FIGURE 3: TRUST IN GOVERNMENT PRE- AND POST-SEPTEMBER 11TH



For a brief moment, however, Americans were favorable toward every political and social institution, Democratic or Republican, liberal or conservative. And once again, the reinventors were the most favorable of all:

- The percentage of reinventors who said they were very or somewhat favorable toward business rose 16 percentage points between July and October 2001 to 77 percent, while the percentage of dismantlers who felt the same rose just 4 points to 60 percent.

- The percentage of reinventors who said they were very or somewhat favorable toward the media rose 11 points between August and October to hit 75 percent, while the percentage of dismantlers who felt the same dropped 5 points to 45 percent.

- The percentage of reinventors who said they were very or somewhat favorable toward the "federal officials the president selects" rose 26 points to 86 percent, while the percentage of dismantlers who felt the same rose 16 points to 71 percent.

- The percentage of reinventors who said they were very or somewhat favorable toward "federal government workers" rose 9 points to 85 percent, while the percentage of dismantlers who felt the same dropped 5 points to a still robust 56 percent.

The reinventors even blessed the Republican White House with surprisingly high favorability ratings for what could be easily described as the "out philosophy." The percentage of reinventors who said they were very or somewhat favorable toward George W. Bush rose 26 points to 87 percent after the attacks, while the percentage of dismantlers who felt the same rose 24 points to 78 percent.

Putnam was right: Almost all Americans showed a burst of enthusiasm after the terrorist attacks, but some—most notably the reinventors—were more enthusiastic than others.

Ironically, given his extraordinary influence during the Iraq War, the percentage of reinventors who said they were very or somewhat favorable to Dick Cheney rose 18 points to 76 percent after the attacks, while the percentage of dismantlers who felt the same also rose by 18 points to 74 percent. Putnam was right: Almost all Americans showed a burst of enthusiasm after the terrorist attacks, but some—most notably the reinventors—were more enthusiastic than others.

As if to underscore their support, the reinventors even became more favorable toward "elected federal officials such as members of Congress," which could have meant their own representative, Congress in general, or the other party. Despite this muddiness, the percentage of reinventors who said they were very or somewhat favorable toward Congress surged 17 points to 81 percent after the attacks, again demonstrating their broad support for the federal government.

MAPPING THE JOURNEY

My analysis of the movement out of reinventing and into dismantling suggests that demographics, government performance, party identification, and ideology are the most significant drivers of movement across the philosophical boundaries. And this movement has been toward greater polarization between dismantling on one end of the government-reform continuum and reinventing on the other. In the meantime, priority setting has gained strength as a destination of choice for many liberal and moderate reinventors who left their majority. In turn, streamlining appears to be a

stop along the journey of more conservative reinventors who are passing through on their way to dismantling.

Readers will soon discover that I have almost no information on these trends in 2014. The 1997 and 2010 results were only available due to the generosity of the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, while the limited 2014 results were only available due to the generosity of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center. Despite these constraints, I obviously have more than enough confidence in Pew and Annenberg to make the call on the recent movement across the four philosophies, and to strongly suggest that the measures discussed below are still driving the government-reform debate, and that the debate will drive the 2016 election.

1. THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF REFORM

Demographics provide a first explanation for the current distribution of the four government-reform philosophies. Although demography is not quite destiny for government reform, it helps frame the increasing conflict between the reinventors and dismantlers as both reached rough parity in support between 1997 and 2010. As the following summary suggests, demographic polarization swept through government-reform philosophies just as it did through virtually every aspect of American politics.

- Nine percent of men and 7 percent of women had left reinventing by 2010, while 10 percent of men and 11 percent of women had joined dismantling. Streamlining and priority setting had held steady.

- Fifteen percent of Americans over the age of 65 had left reinventing, as had 12 percent of those aged 55–64, and 11 percent of those aged 35–44. In turn, 20 percent of Americans over the age of 65 had joined dismantling, as had 11 percent of those aged 45–54, and 9 percent of those aged 35–44. Once again, streamlining and priority setting had held steady.

- Eight percent of Americans who ended their education with a high school degree had left reinventing, as had 9 percent with some college but no degree. Nine percent of Americans with some college had also left streamlining. In turn, 15 percent with some college but no final degree had joined dismantling. Streamlining also had lost strength among Americans with some college, while priority setting had held steady across all levels of educational attainment.

- Ten percent of Americans who worked full-time had left reinventing, as had 6 percent of those who worked part-time. In turn, 11 percent of full-time workers had joined

dismantling, as had 6 percent of part-time workers. Working status had not left a mark on streamlining or priority setting.

- Twelve percent of Americans who made $50,000–$74,000 or $100,000-plus respectively had left reinventing. In turn, 13 percent of Americans who made $50,000–$74,000, 15 percent who made $75,000–$99,000, and 10 percent who made $100,000 or more had joined dismantling. Income had not left a mark on streamlining or priority setting.

- Thirteen percent of Hispanics and 10 percent of whites had left reinventing, while the percentage of blacks had held steady. In turn, 12 percent of whites had joined dismantling, as had 6 percent of Hispanics, but the percentage of blacks had held steady. Race had not left a mark on streamlining or priority setting.

- Fourteen percent of married Americans had left reinventing, as had 8 percent of divorced Americans. Eight percent of divorced Americans had also left priority setting. In turn, 15 percent of married Americans had joined dismantling, as had 10 percent of divorced Americans. Marital status had not left a mark on streamlining.

- Eleven percent of homeowners had left reinventing, as had 4 percent of renters. In turn, 12 percent of homeowners had joined dismantling, as had 6 percent of renters. Neither home ownership nor renting had made a mark on streamlining or priority setting.

- Ten percent of Catholics and 10 percent of Protestants had left reinventing, while 7 percent of Jews had moved in. In turn, 14 percent of Catholics, 14 percent of Protestants, and 6 percent of Jews had joined dismantling. Religious affiliation had no effect streamlining or priority setting, but it is important to note that sample sizes were too small to measure the movement of other religions on any of the four philosophies.

Viewed in its entirety rather than parts, these shifts clearly altered the demographic character of the government-reform debate. Although some of the movement created more diversity within all four philosophies, in other ways it created ever deepening demographic divides. Thus, the movement of whites out of reinventing decreased their presence from 41 percent to 31 percent, while the movement of older Americans into dismantling increased their share from 12 percent to 32 percent.

As Figures 4A and 4B suggest, reinventing's losses concentrated its base among America's economic "havenots,"while dismantling's gains increased its share of the "haves." However, readers are urged not to read either figure as proof that the former reinventors became dismantlers. As noted earlier, my hunch is that the former reinventors can be found among the streamliners and priority-setters. Alas, I do not have the kind of survey data that could prove the point.

FIGURE 4A: REINVENTING'S LOSS, 1997-2010

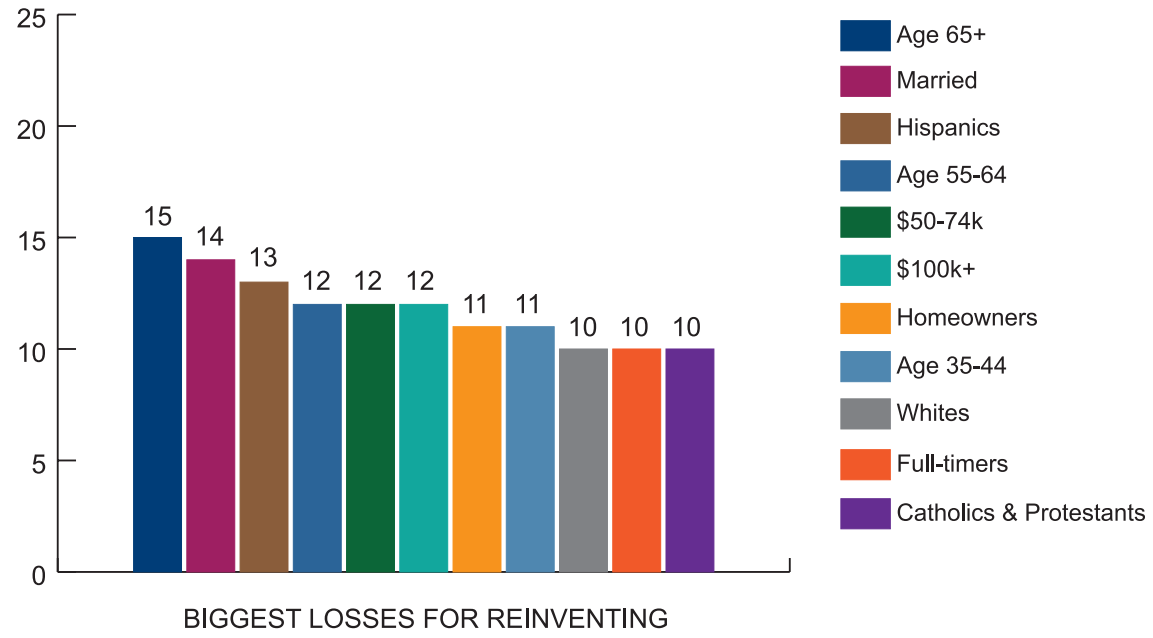
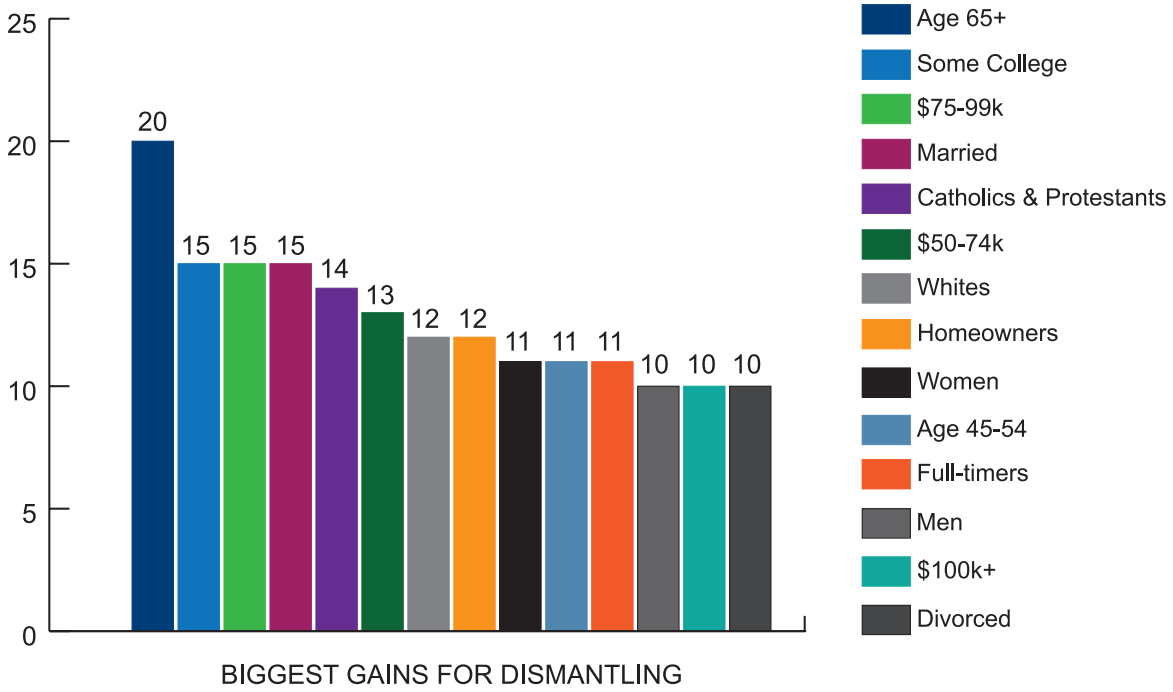


FIGURE 4B: DISMANTLING'S GAIN, 1997-2010

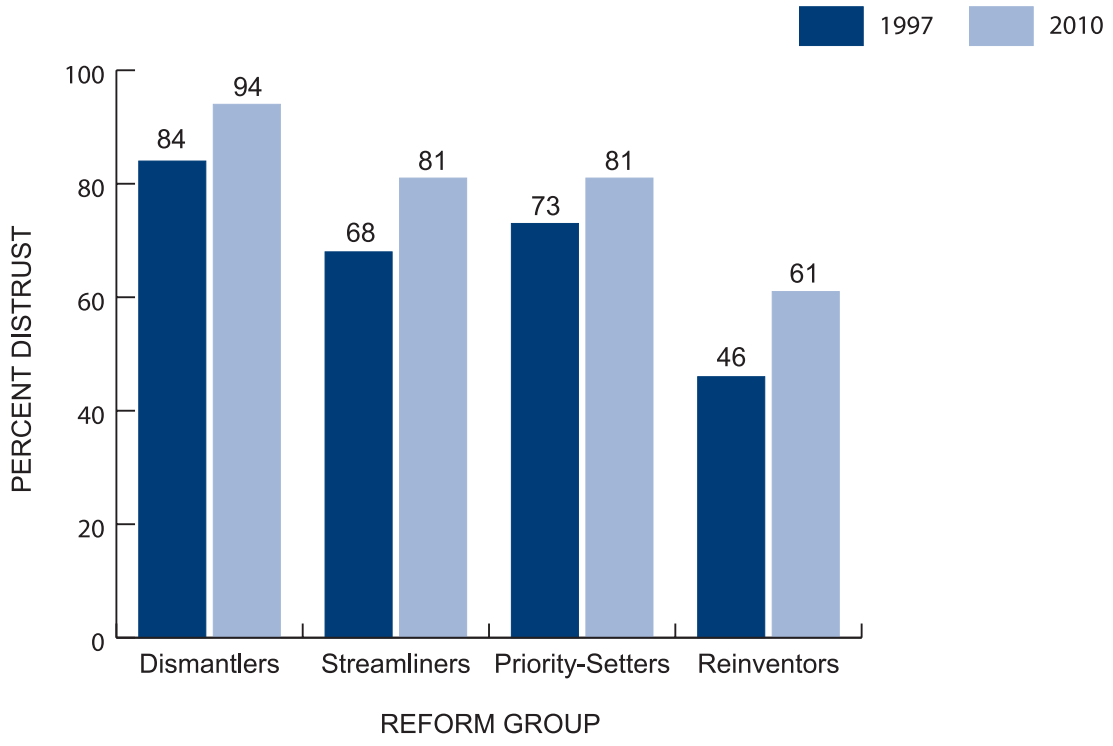


2. THE POLITICS OF REFORM

Government reform is political by nature, if only because it determines who gets what when and how from the democratic process. As such, Americans choose their reform philosophies based on their views of government and its performance. As the following analysis will suggest, the politics of reform has clearly polarized the debate about reform, especially given the steady erosion of trust in the federal government to do the right thing.

Figure 5 shows just how far distrust has increased among the dismantlers, streamliners, priority-setters, and even reinventors. However, even though all four groups lost trust in government between 1997 and 2010, most Americans who said they trust the federal government all, most, or even some of the time stayed with reinventing. At the same time, 13 percent of Americans who said they never trust government had left streamlining by 2010, while 16 percent of the "never-trusters" had moved into dismantling. Trust in government did not reshape streamlining one way or another.

FIGURE 5: DISTRUST IN GOVERNMENT, 1997 AND 2010



As the following inventory shows, distrust in government is not the only political measure that affected reinventing between 1997 and 2010. As already noted, reinventing began to collapse only months after September 11th as supporters of all four philosophies became less and less likely to give the benefit of the doubt to government. Consider the following inventory as one gauge of change.

- Seven percent of Americans who said the federal government was doing a "good job" in running programs had left reinventing by 2010, while 8 percent of Americans who rated the government's performance as "only fair" had joined dismantling, as had 15 percent who rated the government's performance as "poor." These ratings had only small effects on streamlining and priority setting.[5]

- Thirteen percent of Americans who said that criticism of government performance was justified had left reinventing by 2010 as well. In turn, 13 percent had joined dismantling. Americans who said that government was under-appreciated stayed in place.

- Nine percent of Americans who said they felt "angry" toward the federal government had left reinventing, as had 6 percent who had left priority setting, and 3 percent who had left streamlining. In turn, 18 percent of those who felt angry had moved to dismantling, as had 6 percent who felt frustrated.

- Eleven percent of Americans who agreed the federal government was "basically sound and only needed some reform" had unexpectedly left reinventing, while 4 percent had left streamlining. In turn, 10 percent had joined priority setting, while 6 percent had joined dismantling. In contrast, 8 percent of Americans who said the federal government needs "very major reform" had left streamlining, while 11 percent had joined dismantling.

- Eight percent of Americans who said government was a good place to work because of the pay had left reinventing, while 7 percent had left streamlining. In turn, 12 percent who said government was a good place to work because of the pay had joined dismantling.

Government advocates occasionally argue that Americans would never endorse government as a good place to work if they did not support the work itself, but this analysis suggests quite the opposite. It is entirely possible, perhaps even highly probable, that dismantlers could think government is a good place to work, but believe that the pay, security, hours, and challenging work go to the wrong priorities and excessive power. It is also quite possible, and highly probable, that reinventors could think government is a good place to work, and believe that the pay, security, hours, and challenging work go to the right priorities and important programs, albeit with a bit of inefficiency.

Leaving this debate for future investigation, the polarization of government reform is clear. Reinventing remains the destination of choice for the "always-trusters," while dismantling is the home of the "never-trusters." As the two philosophies have realigned themselves through demographics and distrust, they have no doubt become more adversarial. There are fewer and fewer "mostly-trusters" and "sometimes-trusters" to bridge the gap. The fact that so many Americans simultaneously rated the federal government's job performance as "good" and joined priority setting strongly suggests that the philosophy is a destination for battle, not comity.

3. THE PARTIES AND REFORM

Given the demographics and politics of reform, it is not surprising that party identification would leave its own mark on movement across the four reform philosophies. Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were all in motion as polarization worked its will on government reform. (Readers should note that the following bullets show movement in and out of the four philosophies between 1997 and 2010, and between 2010 and 2014, not the final party composition within each philosophy.)

- Seventeen percent of Republicans had left reinventing by 2010, and another 5 percent had moved out by 2014. In turn, 20 percent of Republicans had joined dismantling by 2010, and another 3 percent had joined by 2014. Republican strength within streamlining and priority setting held steady during the period.

- One percent of Democrats had left reinventing by 2010, while another 7 percent exited between 2010 and 2014. Just 3 percent of Democrats had left streamlining by 2010, but another 6 percent had moved out by 2014. In turn, only 2 percent of Democrats had joined priority setting by 2010, but 14 percent had joined by 2014. Democratic strength within dismantling held steady over the four years.

- Finally, 10 percent of Independents had left reinventing by 2010, and another 10 percent had moved out by 2014. About one percent of Independents had left streamlining and priority setting by 2010, while another 11 and 9 percent respectively had moved out by 2014.

As Figure 6 shows, these shifts *between* the four philosophies also changed the party control within each philosophy. Democrats had almost complete control of reinventing by 2014, while Democrats and Independents shared control of priority setting, and Republicans and Independents shared the surge in dismantling.

FIGURE 6A: PARTY BALANCE WITHIN EACH PHILOSOPHY
DISMANTLERS

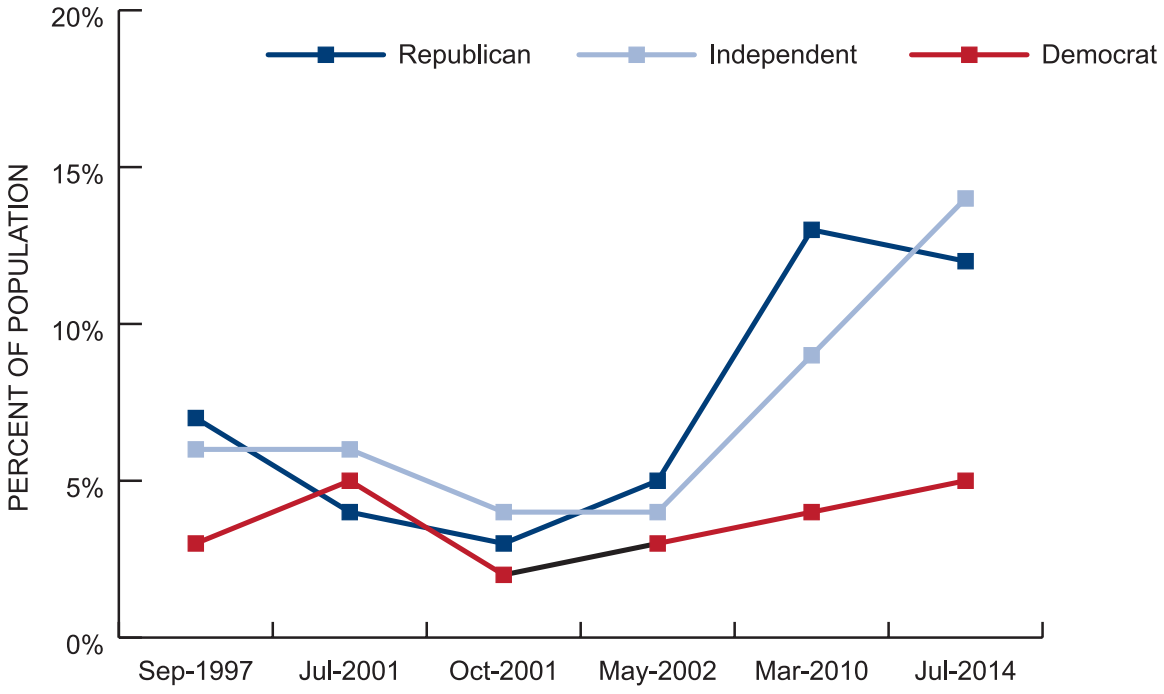


FIGURE 6B: PARTY BALANCE WITHIN EACH PHILOSOPHY
STREAMLINERS

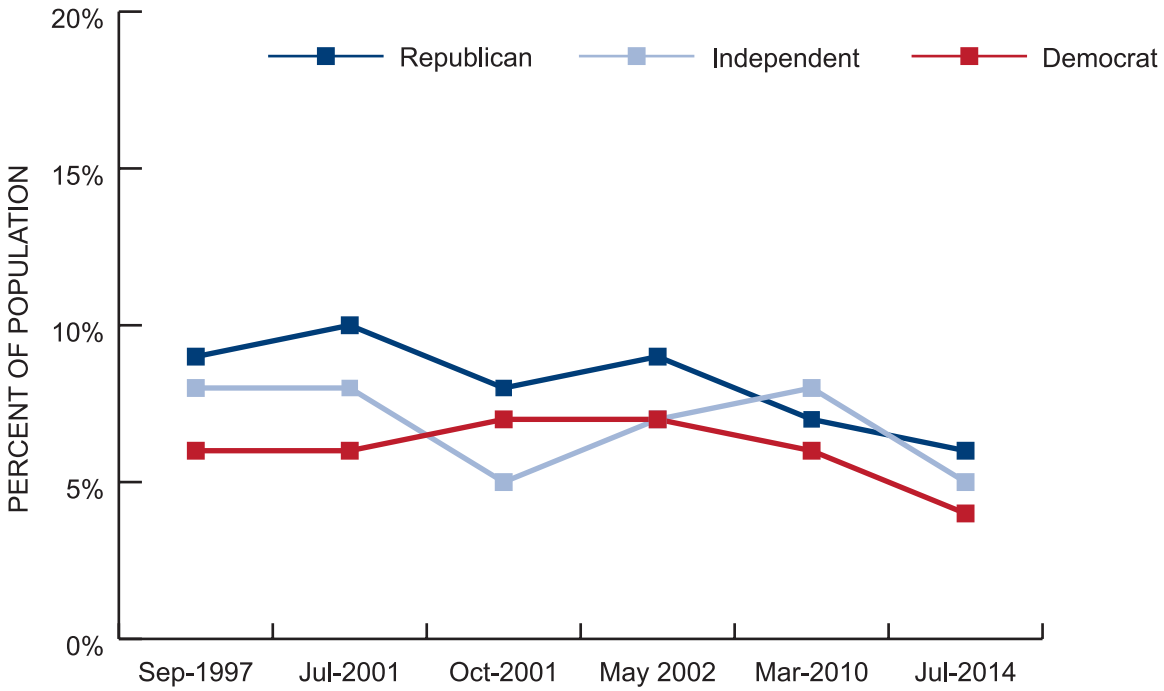


FIGURE 6C: PARTY BALANCE WITHIN EACH PHILOSOPHY
PRIORITY-SETTERS

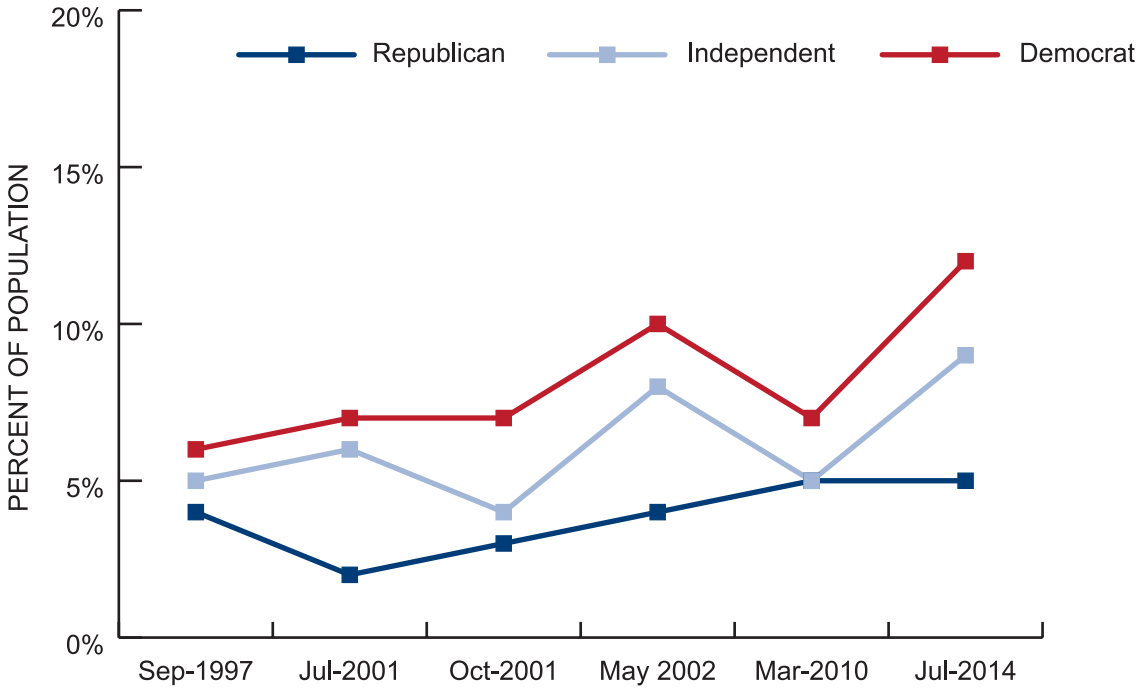
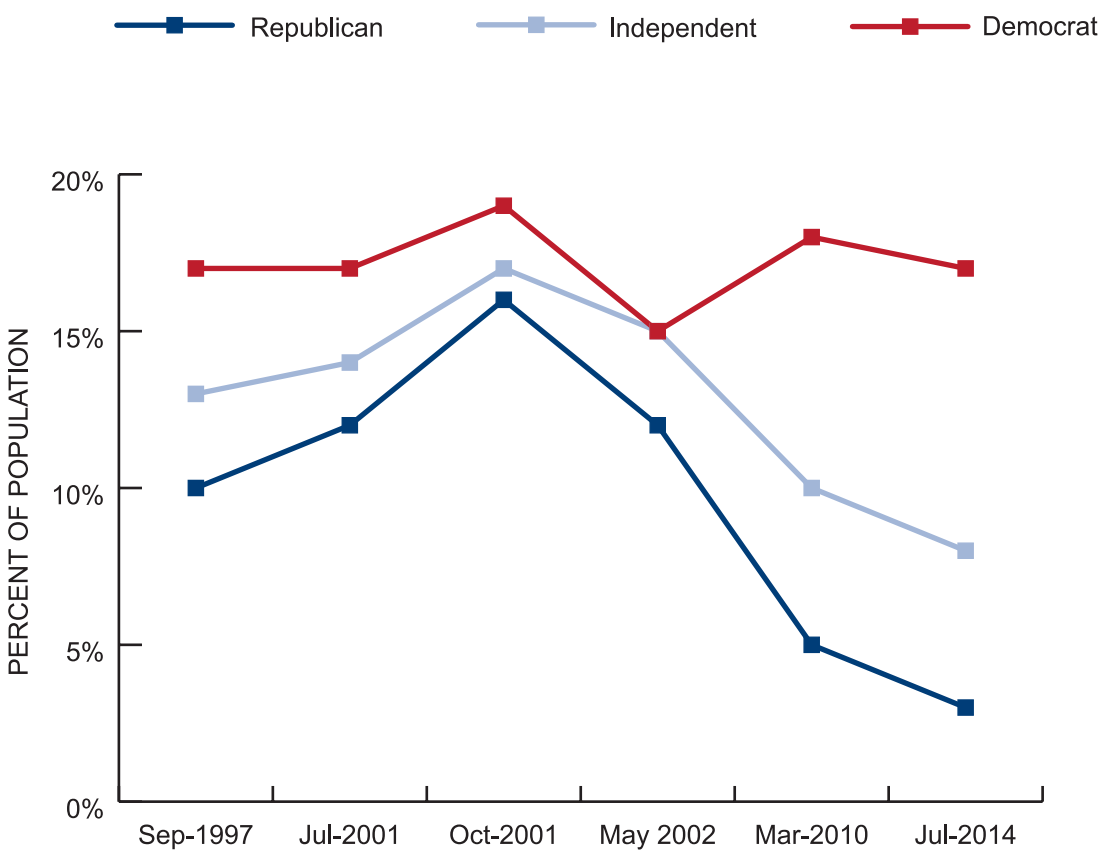


FIGURE 6D: PARTY BALANCE WITHIN EACH PHILOSOPHY
REINVENTORS



It is possible, though improbable, that most reinventors simply jumped over the streamliners and priority-setters to join the dismantlers. Such a jump, however, would have involved a dramatic break with a long-standing commitment to maintaining programs and fixing inefficiency, not to mention renunciation of a traditionally Democratic view of the world.

It is also possible, though again improbable, that the streamliners and priority-setters refused to leave their positions between 1997 and 2010. However, standing still would have involved great patience given the pull toward dismantling among Republicans and independents, especially as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan dragged on, the economy collapsed, and conservatives rallied after the nation elected its first black president.

Figure 1 has already suggested a more logical path: (1) Republican and Independent streamliners moved toward dismantling, (2) Democratic streamliners moved toward reinventing, and (3) Republican and Independent reinventors moved toward priority setting, and stayed put.

Readers may have noticed that I did not discuss political ideology in this section. Unfortunately, the 1997 Pew Research Center data set used in this report did not contain the measure. Luckily, the 2010 Pew survey and 2014 Annenberg survey provided plenty of insight on the movement of liberals and conservatives to their respective corners of the political arena.

- Eight percent of Americans who described themselves as very or somewhat conservative had left reinventing by 2014, while 7 percent had left streamlining. In turn, 10 percent of conservatives joined dismantling during the same period. Ideology had minimal effects on movement in and out of priority setting.

- Nine percent of Americans who described themselves as moderates had left reinventing by 2014, while 6 percent had left streamlining. In turn, 15 percent of moderates had joined priority setting by 2014. Ideology had no discernible effects on movement in or out of dismantling.

- Finally, 7 percent of Americans who described themselves as very or somewhat liberal had left streamlining by 2014, while 7 percent had joined priority setting. Ideology had minimal effects on movement in or out of dismantling and reinventing.

This movement reinforces the paths already illustrated in Figure 1. Streamlining appears to have become a stop along the journey of many conservative and at least some moderate reinventors to dismantling, while priority setting almost certainly became the final destination for a larger share of moderate reinventors and at least some liberals.

HOW GOVERNMENT REFORM WILL AFFECT 2016

The 2016 candidates have a range of targets for creating a winning coalition on government reform, but the numbers will be close. Republicans will need a tough message to win the nomination, but it cannot be so tough that the winner will alienate the streamliners and priority-setters that may seal the victory.

In turn, Democrats will need a tough message about attacking important problems with effective, efficient solutions. They must also address the bureaucratic failures that are giving the public plenty of reason to wonder whether the federal government can actually deliver its vision. After all, Obama has already presided over nineteen nationally visible bureaucratic breakdowns, including eleven since the 2014 election.

Neither party wants a major breakdown after Inauguration Day, although that is what I predict unless Congress and the president act soon to repair the federal government's broad vulnerability. However, nothing would please the next Republican candidate more than yet another breakdown before the next election—the veterans' waiting list scandal, ISIS, and Ebola clearly helped frame the case against Obama in 2014.

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So who has the votes needed for a winning coalition? Based on each philosophy's gains and losses between 2010 and 2014, my analysis suggests separate targets for each party for the primary and general elections.

1. The Republican candidate would do well to court the non-white male Republicans (+15 percent), white male independents (+14 percent), and white female Republicans (+13 percent) who moved to dismantling, and to give up on the non-white male Democrats (–13 percent) who left.

2. The Democratic candidate would do well to celebrate the only group that moved to reinventing, the non-white female independents (+22 percent), and to give up on the white female independents (–20 percent), non-white male Republicans (–18 percent), non-white male Democrats (–15 percent), and white female Republicans (–11 percent) who left.

3. Both candidates would do well to concentrate on the non-white male Democrats (+28 percent), non-white female Democrats (+25 percent), white female independents (+15 percent), white female Republicans (+10 percent), and white male Democrats (+9 percent) who moved to priority setting, and to give up on the non-white female Republicans (–13 percent) who left.

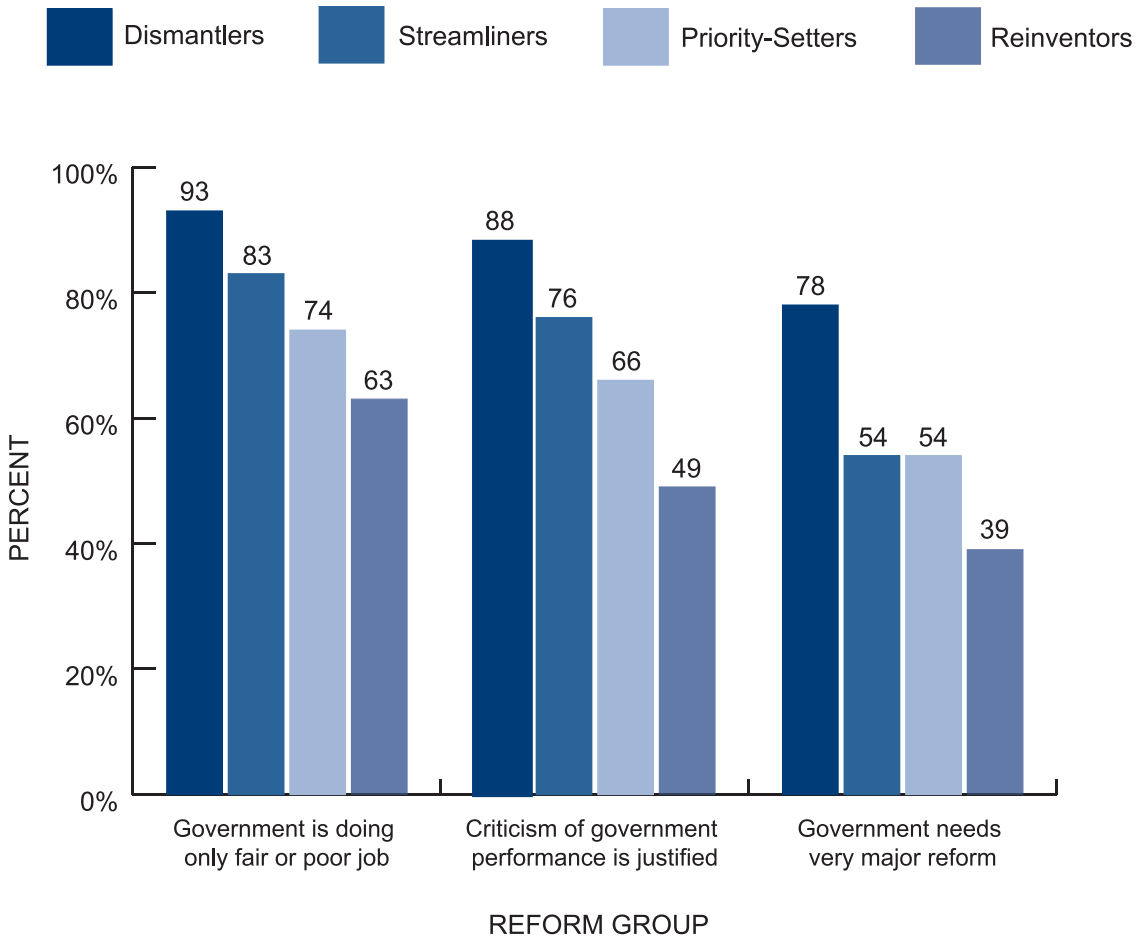
The Democratic candidate must also remember that reinventing still has many supporters. Although the philosophy lost half of its supporters between its peak in October 2001 and its nadir in 2014, it still draws enough support to matter in a tight election.

So noted, the Republican candidate does not bear the burden of doubt in recruiting distrusting Americans to the fold with a broad agenda of well-argued reforms. This burden belongs to the

Democratic candidate. “What’s the point of maintaining important programs,” the priority setters and reinventors might ask, “if they cannot be faithfully delivered à la healthcare.gov?”

As Figure 7 strongly suggests, even the reinventors must be given at least some reassurance that the next president will improve government performance. After all, the vast majority of Americans (1) rate the federal government’s job performance as neither excellent nor good, (2) think criticism of the government’s job is justified, and (3) believe that government needs “very major reform.” This may be a dream-come-true for a Republican presidential candidate, but it is a turnout depressor for the Democrat. Substantial majorities of Americans have lost confidence that the federal government can deliver on the promises it makes, even when the promises fit their reform philosophy.

FIGURE 7: PUBLIC VIEWS OF GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE, 2010



This toxic combination will not yield to tepid rhetoric such as Obama's 2011 call for "a government that's more competent and efficient." Even Hillary Clinton's once-dramatic 2008 promise to cut 500,000 contractor jobs from the federal payroll may now seem inadequate. The time for small-bore tinkering and unfulfilled promises is long over.

The Democratic candidate would do well to contact Jimmy Carter, who won the presidency in part by promising a government as good as the people, and followed up with the most aggressive bureaucratic reform package since Harry Truman. If the Democrat is to be the candidate of vision and execution, she or he will need a package to match.

Even Hillary Clinton's once-dramatic 2008 promise to cut 500,000 contractor jobs from the federal payroll may now seem inadequate. The time for small-bore tinkering and unfulfilled promises is long over.

ENDNOTES

1 These and other conclusions are based only on my reading of public opinion measured in six surveys fielded between 1997 and 2014:

1. A 1997 survey by the Pew Research Center on trust in government conducted from September to October 1997 with a random sample of 1,762 Americans;

2. A pre-September 11th survey by the Brookings Institution's Presidential Appointee Initiative conducted from June to July 2001 with a random sample of 1,003 Americans;

3. A post-September 11th survey by the Presidential Appointee Initiative conducted from late September to October 2001 with a random sample of 1,033 Americans;

4. A mid-2002 survey by the Presidential Appointee Initiative conducted in May 2002 with a random sample of 1,193 Americans;

5. A 2010 survey by the Pew Research Center on trust in government conducted in March 2010 with a random sample of 2,505 Americans; and

6. A very short survey by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center survey conducted in late June–July 2014 as part of its ongoing midterm election work with a random sample of 1,193 Americans.

I was the director of the three Presidential Appointee Initiative surveys, while Andrew Kohut and Kathleen Hall Jamieson directed the Pew Research Center and Annenberg Public Policy Center surveys, respectively. Although I am exceedingly grateful to Pew and Annenberg for access to their data, the findings in this paper reflect only my analysis and, therefore, do not represent the findings or interpretations of the research organizations that conducted these surveys.

2 Once beyond broad sentiments, however, Americans do pay attention to the latest breakdowns at departments and agencies. The Pew Research Center found that public approval for the Department of Veterans Affairs dropped 16 percentage points between October 2013 and January 2014, no doubt because of the waiting list scandal. See Pew Research Center, "Most View the CDC Favorably, VA's Image Slips," January 22, 2015, available at http://www.people-press.org/2015/01/22/most-view-the-cdc-favorably-vas-image-slips/. However, public approval for the Centers for Disease Control barely moved after stories about the agency's lax safety culture and sluggish response to Ebola.

3 This report uses two separate survey questions here to tap into the streams. Imperfect though they are, the questions separate public opinions by what government sets out to do (vision) and how it performs (delivery):

1. Imagine a scale from 1 to 6 where 1 represents someone who generally believes that federal government programs should be cut back greatly to reduce the power of government, and 6 represents someone who believes that federal government programs should be maintained to deal with important problems. Where on the scale of 1 to 6 would you place yourself?

2. 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?

Readers should note that the 1–6 scale actually requires two judgments before respondents choose. Respondents must not only decide whether programs should be cut back or maintained, but also explain their decision as a way to either "reduce government power" or "deal with important problems." As with many survey questions, the answers depend on just how each respondent defines both the means and ends. Do the words "cut back" and "maintained" refer to the budget, the bureaucracy, regulations, gridlock, foreign policy, or something else? Likewise, just what does "reduce government power" mean, and what are the "important programs" at risk?

4 These and other conclusions are based on my reading, and only my reading, of public opinion measured in six surveys fielded between 1997 and 2014 (see details in note 1). Although I am exceedingly grateful to Pew and Annenberg for access to their data, the findings in this paper reflect my analysis, and mine alone, and therefore do not represent the findings or interpretations of the research organizations that conducted these surveys.

5 Only 149 respondents in the survey rated the federal government's performance as "excellent," which was far too small a number to allow further analysis within the category.

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