

Navigating the culture wars.

Å navigere i kulturkrigen.

Andrew McIntyre, Director, MHM.

NPU, Bergen, June 2025



The Vitals: MHM



44 creatives,
across 4 offices,
and 14 countries.

Australia, New Zealand, Germany,
Sweden, Norway, Denmark,
Netherlands, Singapore, China,
Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UK, USA & Canada.

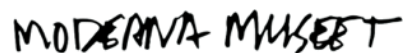
We illuminate every audience touchpoint.

Brand DNA, Cause, Equity, Social Capital,
Culture Segments, Motivations, Needs,
Behaviour, Responses, Outcomes, Impact,
Experience Design; User Journeys,
Formative and Summative Evaluation
Membership, Donors and Philanthropy

Insight, not just data.

Our clients are awash with data about
the who, what, where and when.
They constantly track the how
and the how much.
We help them to understand
the *why*.

Clients





 PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

RESTORING TRUTH AND SANITY TO AMERICAN HISTORY

Executive Orders

March 27, 2025



Smithsonian

Over the past decade, Americans have witnessed a concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation's history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative.



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“ We will eliminate improper, divisive or anti-American ideology.”

Donald J Trump, March 27 2025





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Public engagement requires **public trust, relevance** and **civic space** in which to operate.



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Public trust
Relevance
Civic space

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Smithsonian

The Smithsonian, like nearly all cultural institutions enjoys extraordinarily high levels of **public trust**.

Public trust

Relevance

Civic space



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Public trust
Relevance
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Unlike Norway, most countries have very **low trust** in government, political parties, religious organisations, media, and businesses.



Smithsonian

Relevance requires The Smithsonian
to address **topical issues**.

Public trust

Relevance

Civic space



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Topical issues are, by their very nature, **contested**.

They demand **multiple voices**, **discourse** and **critical thinking**.



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(improper, divisive or anti-American ideology)



Smithsonian

Public trust
Relevance
Civic space

The European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) definition:

"**Civic space** is the environment that enables people and groups to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social and cultural life in their societies. Vibrant civic space requires an open, secure and safe environment that is free from all acts of intimidation, harassment and reprisals, whether online or offline."



Smithsonian

Public trust
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Civic space

Civic space is under systematic and sustained attack from government legislation, commercial control, and, alarmingly, from self censorship.



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Cultural organisations are the stewards of increasingly valuable and important **civic space**.



Smithsonian

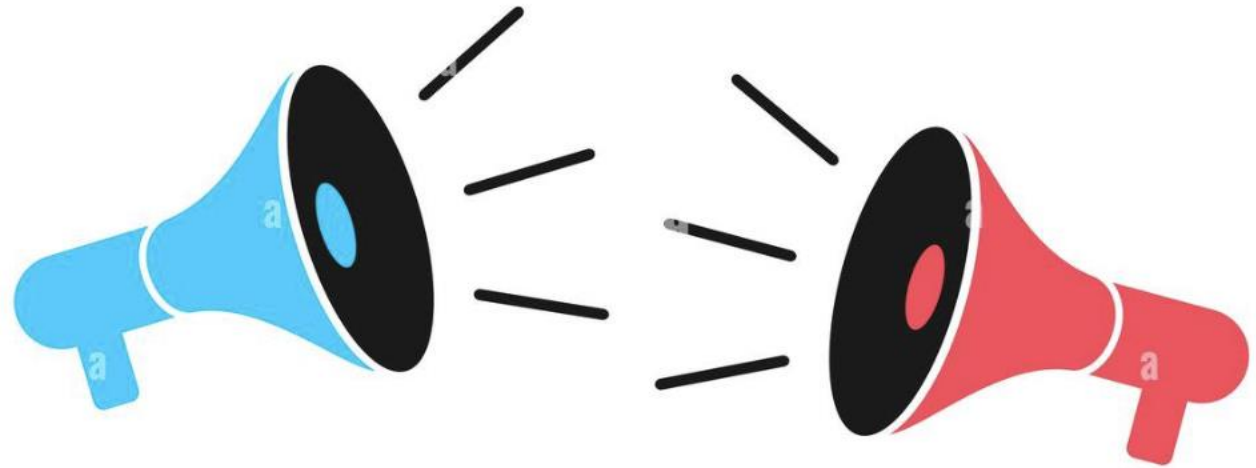
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Cultural organisations are the stewards of increasingly valuable and important **civic space**. **What we choose to do next will influence the fate of democracy.**

**So, here are my six insights
for cultural leaders trying to
navigate the culture wars...**

1 IT'S NOT REALLY A WAR
- SO STOP FIGHTING





**1 IT'S NOT REALLY A WAR
- SO STOP FIGHTING**

**2 IT'S REALLY A BATTLE
FOR CIVIC SPACE**

Waving Palestinian flag may be a criminal offence, Braverman tells police

Home secretary also suggests clampdown on pro-Arab chants in letter that will concern free speech advocates

Librarians in UK increasingly asked to remove books, as influence of US pressure groups spreads

Anecdotal evidence suggests a rise in requests to take books off shelves, particularly LGBTQ+ titles

National Gallery of Art Ends Diversity Programs

The museum says it is complying with an executive order signed by President Donald Trump.

Refugees risk being stripped of protection under 'draconian' Labor deportation bill, opponents say

Greens immigration spokesperson says bill expands ministerial power to reverse protection findings and deport people previously granted asylum

UK to strip migrants of the right to challenge deportation in High Court

Rights groups slammed the decision saying people seeking protection in the UK deserve their claims to be fairly assessed.

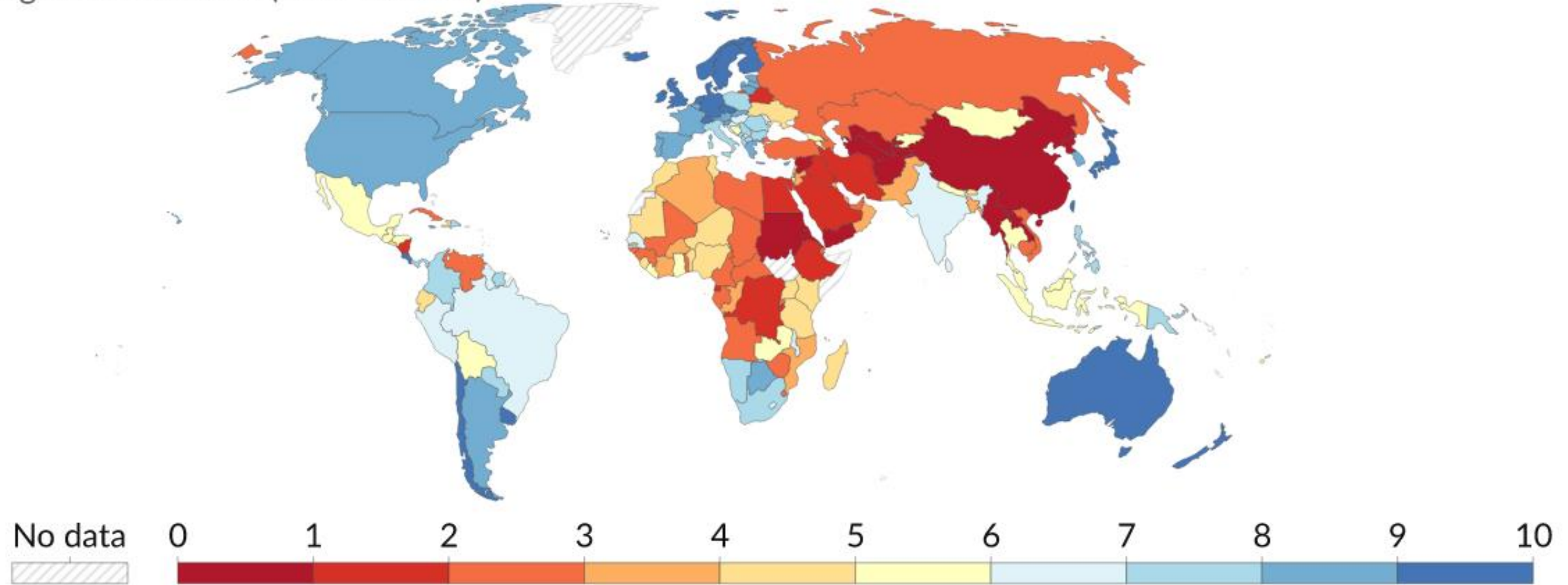
They're Burning Books in Tennessee

Greg Locke's zealots set fire to sacred millennial texts like *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*



Civil liberties index, 2024

Based on the expert estimates and index by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2006-2024). It ranges from 0 to 10 (most liberties).



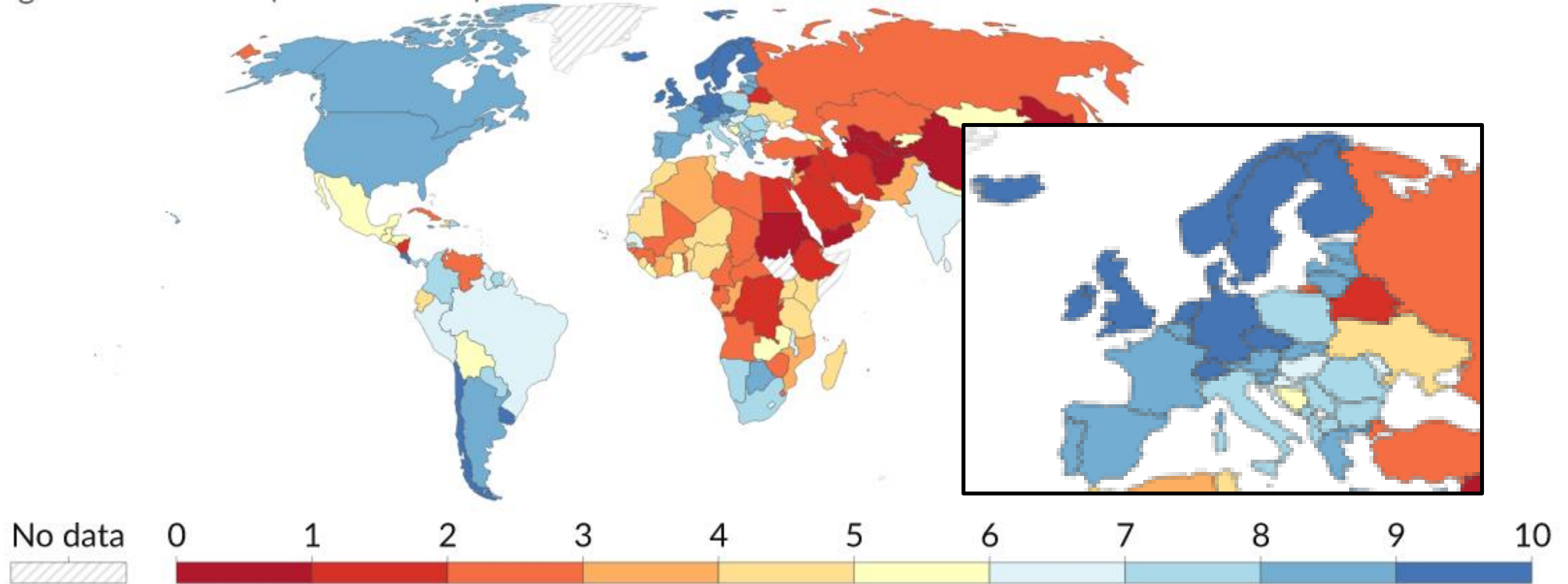
Data source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2006-2024)

CC BY

Civil liberties index, 2024

Our World
in Data

Based on the expert estimates and index by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2006-2024). It ranges from 0 to 10 (most liberties).



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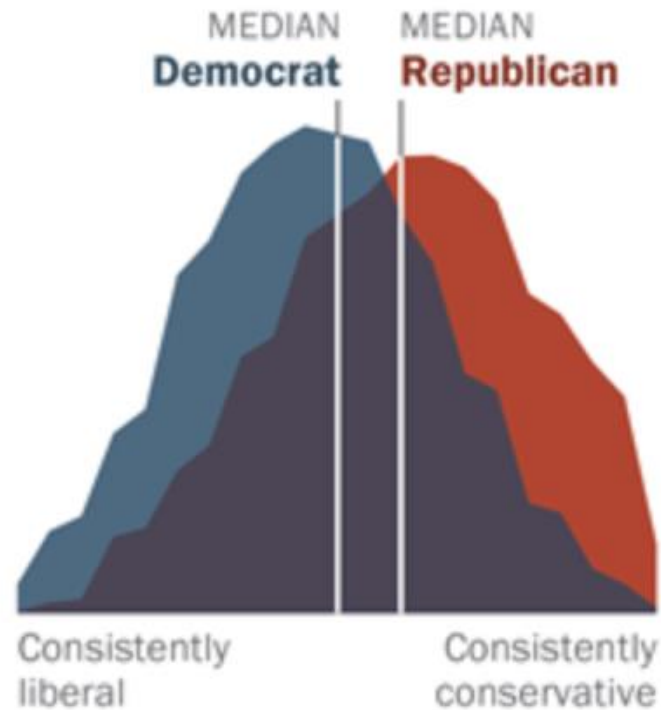
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Polarisation

Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values

1994

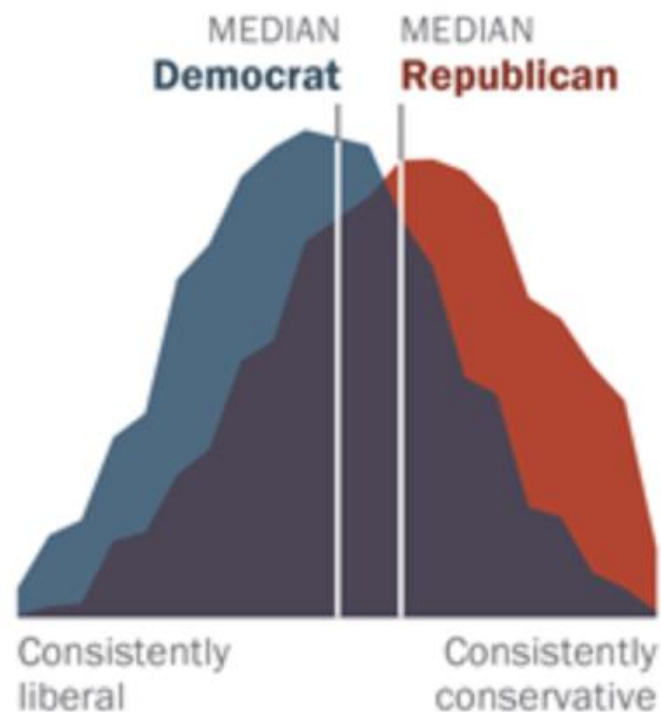


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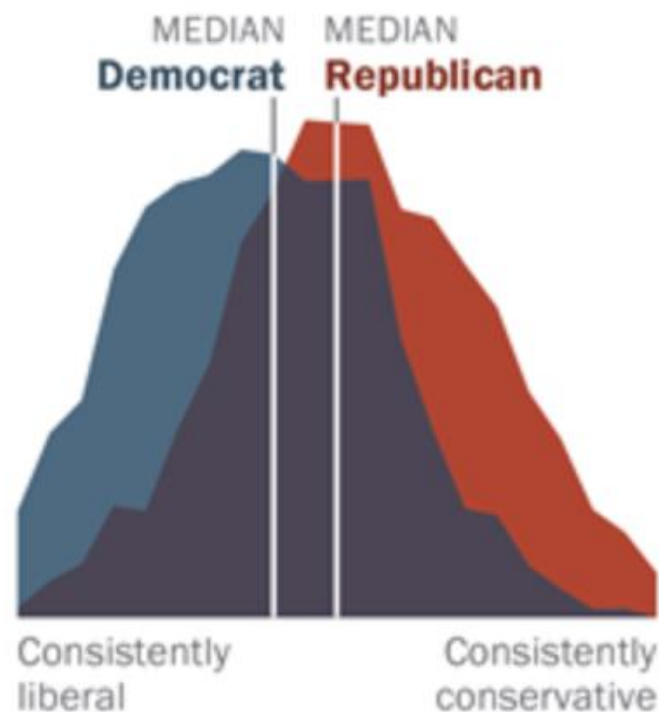
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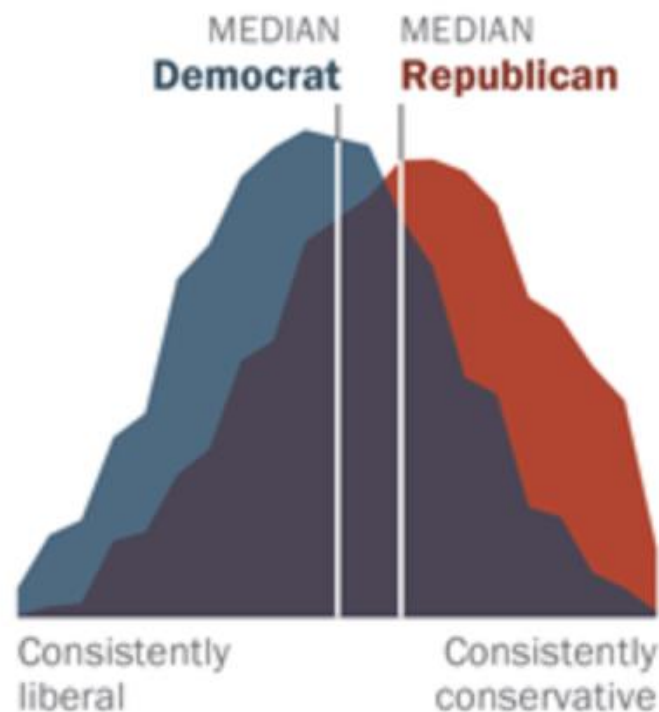


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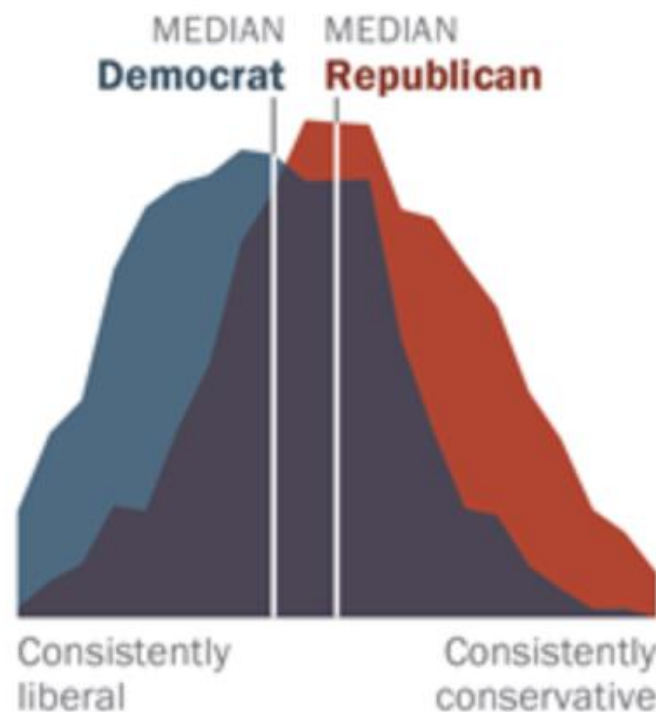
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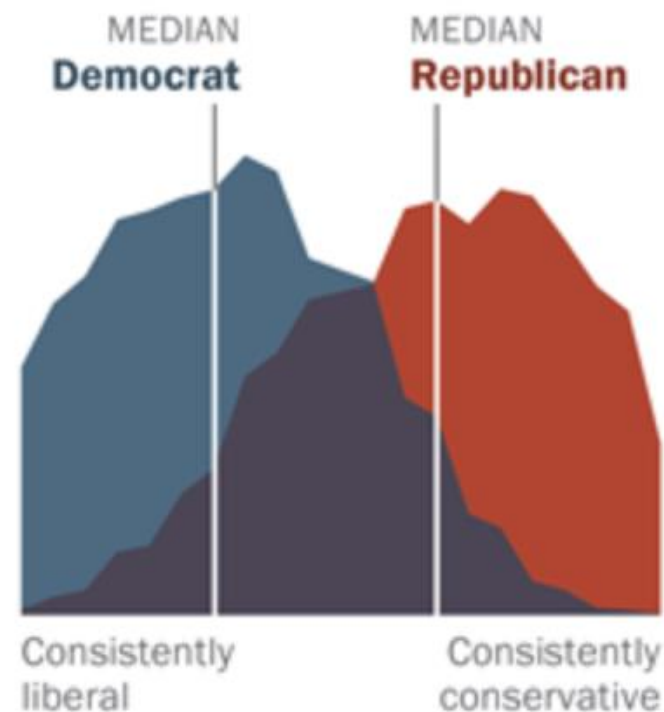
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2004



2014



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BEHAVIOURS**

Exploring Contentious Narratives



7 June



Hereford

Herefordshire Museums invites local people to discuss how museums should respond to fake news, misinformation and contested histories.

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Yazmin Adile

How dare a museum try to teach critical thinking

1d Like Reply 3

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22h Like Reply

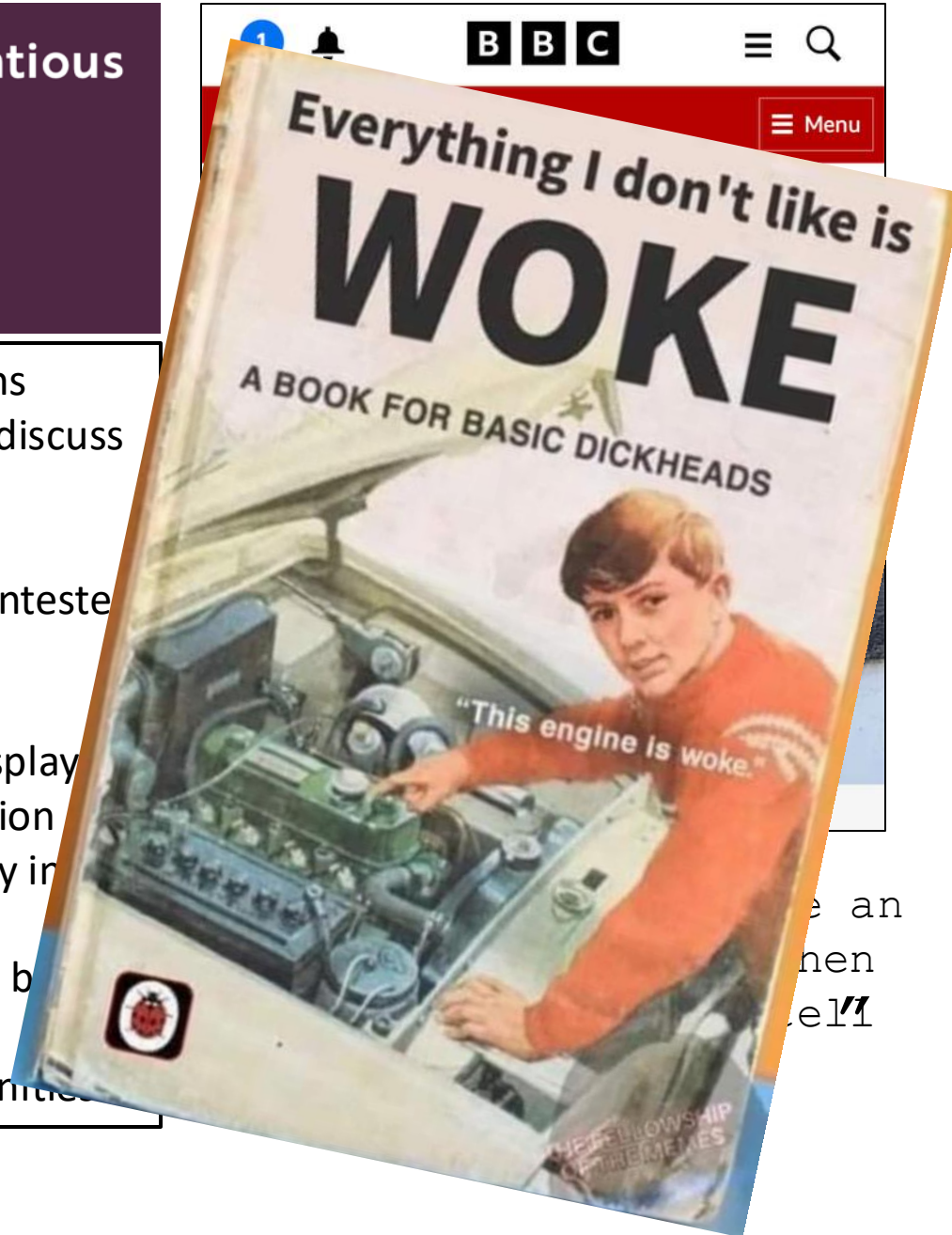
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**4 ENCOURAGE DESERTERS
TO CROSS OVER**



Wildlife and
Countryside



Conservative Party - Rebecca Pow, Nature Minister

Green Party - Adrian Ramsay, Co-Leader

Liberal Democrats - Lord Richard Newby, Leader

Labour Party - Toby Perkins, Shadow Nature Minister



The British
Museum

Whose history?

Can museums preserve the past
while addressing the present?

Margaret Casely-Hayford
Tom Holland
Grayson Perry
Simon Sebag-Montefiore
Chaired by Alice Thomson.

AUDIO ONLY



GUGGENHEIM

Kurt Bardella, columnist at Breitbart
Jehmu Greene, social-justice champion
Angela Nagle, author *Trump and the Alt-Right*
Suzanne Nossel, PEN America



CULTURE

April 6/7

and Its Discontents

CONV

GUGGENHEIM

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- TRUTH NEEDS HELP**

**"I disapprove of what you say,
but I will defend to the death
your right to say it."**

*"If you believe in freedom of
speech, you believe in freedom of
speech for views you don't like."*

**"The prime goal of censorship
is to promote ignorance."**

*"We welcome refugees, not
because they are American – but
because we are American."*

**"Would you like the
government to tell you what
you can and can't see or
read?"**

*"Everyone is entitled to his own
opinion, but not to his own facts."*

**"Freedom of speech gives us
the right to offend others,
whereas freedom of thought
gives them the choice as to
whether or not to be
offended."**

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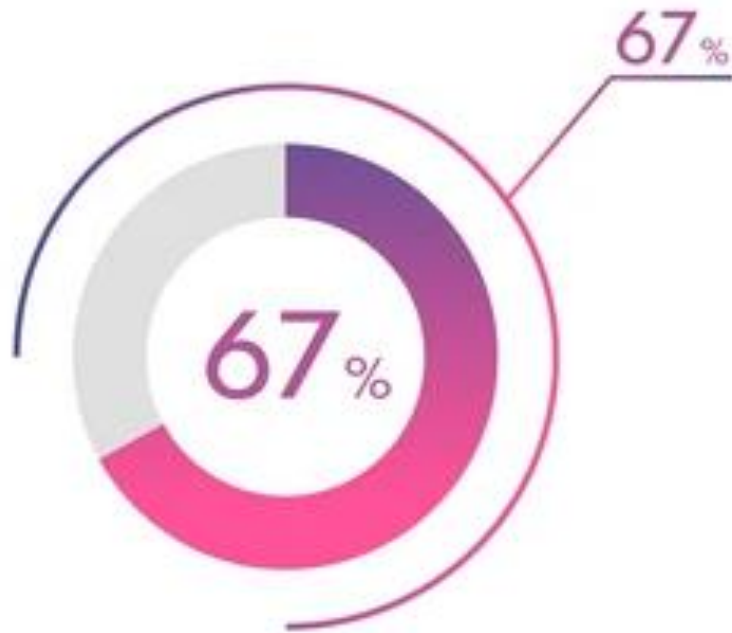
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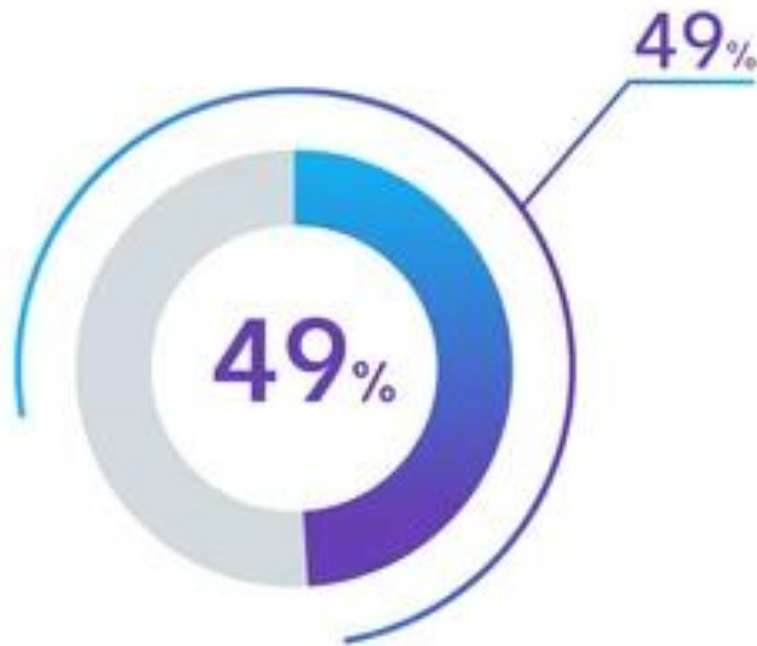
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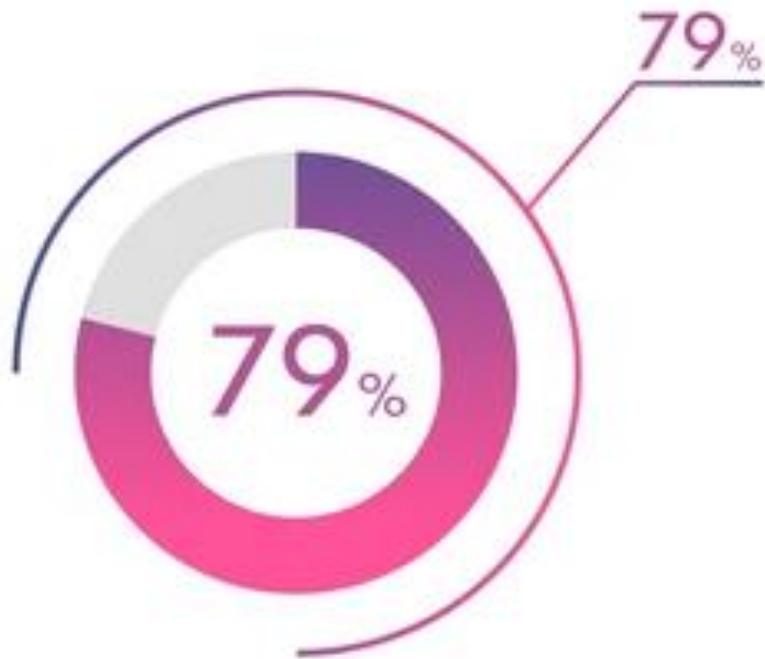
**6 POPULARITY BEATS
POPULISM**



**67% believe culture
deserves more funding from
the Swedish government.**



49% believe investing in culture would make them think more positively about the government.



The majority of US citizens do not have uniformly conservative or liberal views. Most do not see either party as a threat to the nation. And more believe politicians should meet halfway to resolve contentious disputes.

**Who do think should
make decisions about
which exhibitions you
can see in museums?**

- a) Politicians
- b) Curators

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- b) Curators

When attending an exhibition, which would you prefer?

- a) I can find out about lots of different viewpoints and then make up my own mind
- b) I want to be given only one viewpoint

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