Abstract: The purpose of this research is to determine the state of American Democracy, especially in light of the 2016 Presidential Election. The first half of this report focuses on the “Virtues Index” which is a systematic breakdown of respondents’ answers to reflect the American electorate’s virtuous composition. The second half of the report is centered on “Political Crosstalk” which is an examination of how, and in what instances, members of the different political parties interact with each other. Some important findings include that the strongest virtues amongst the American electorate is “Patriotism” and the lowest virtue score was “Generosity”. 53% of young people think that political crosstalk is worthwhile, yet only 59% of young people felt comfortable having dinner with someone from the opposing political party. Additionally, females have a higher average virtue, there is no correlation between religious attendance and virtue and Republicans were less likely to find common ground on opposing viewpoints.
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The 2016 Presidential election was what some would argue to be the most partisan and divisive election since the civil war. Candidates were accused of illegal activity, crude behavior, corruption, and ignorance. Criticism of the media skyrocketed and rhetoric attacked the character of those with opposing ideologies. Through the divisiveness emerged the victory of a surprise candidate and the loss of a Washington insider. In examining the aftermath, the question remains: what does this mean for our democracy?

This report is unique in that examines the health of American democracy through the lens of young people—a team of undergraduates at the University of Notre Dame. In the summer of 2017, a national survey was conducted by researchers with the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy and with assistance from the Fox Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. The survey, known as the Notre Dame Study of Democratic Virtues, seeks to understand Americans’ underlying democratic attitudes, particularly in the wake of the 2016 presidential election. Specifically, the survey gauges the health of American democracy by measuring seven democratic virtues: (1) trustworthiness, (2) egalitarianism, (3) patriotism, (4) tolerance, (5) common good, (6) generosity, and (7) political justice. Together, they comprise the Virtues Index. How well do Americans live up to each individual virtue? How democratically virtuous are Americans? As the first in a multi-year series, the Notre Dame Study of Democratic Virtues will provide an annual check-up on the nation’s democratic health, as measured by individuals’ attitudes, beliefs, and values—is it getting stronger or weaker?

The second half of this report, “Political Crosstalk”, examines an issue of particular concern to the state of American democracy today, the depth of partisan divisions. The survey asked a
detailed set of questions about how Republicans and Democrats feel about each other, as well as how often they interact. In future years, there will be comparable “deep dives” into specific issues related to the nation’s democratic health.¹

The Virtues Index

Overview

To identify the specific virtues to be included in the Virtues Index, student researchers read widely on the subject of democracy, taking inspiration from classic works by such thinkers as Benjamin Franklin and Alexis de Tocqueville, as well as contemporary theorists of democracy. After this extensive analysis, they settled on seven virtues that they felt were fundamental to a healthy democracy: (1) Trustworthiness, (2) Egalitarianism, (3) Patriotism, (4) Tolerance, (5) Care for the Common Good, (6) Generosity, and (7) Political Justice.

The metric used throughout this report is intuitive – with democratic answers given higher positive point values and undemocratic answers receiving negative point values. The highest possible score for each virtue was 100 and the lowest possible was 0.

The virtues were judged on a six-point scale ranging from “Sick” at one end to “Flourishing” at the other. These measurements were chosen to reflect a medical diagnosis consistent with studying the health of a patient. Four of the virtues were judged to be “Stable” and there were

¹ The study was conducted by the Rooney Center for American Democracy at the University of Notre Dame with assistance from the Fox Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. The results of this study come from a survey that was administered nationally. The survey was administered by YouGov to a nationally-representative online sample of 2,130 respondents, which was matched down to a final sample size of 2,000. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame based on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology and political interest. It was conducted from July 5-18, 2017. Special thanks to Adam Henderson for his research assistance, and to Andre Audette for his work on the survey.
judged to be “Well”. Overall, the *Virtues Study* found that the nation’s democratic health is in relatively good condition. More specifically, the **state of America’s democratic health** registered a 65.7 out of 100, putting it in the “**Stable**” category. The virtues that merit a stable distinction are egalitarianism, trustworthiness, common good, and generosity. Patriotism, tolerance, and political justice are ranked slightly higher than the others and are in the well category. Americans score lowest on generosity and highest on patriotism.

Although it is encouraging that, in spite of the political divisiveness and partisan rancor of recent times, Americans’ democratic attitudes are relatively healthy, the news is not all good. None of the virtues are “**Flourishing**” and the overall ranking is only “**Stable**”—indicating that there is room for improvement.
Above is a gauge of the overall health of American democracy, which is registered as “Stable”. This gauge will be applied to, and changed, based on the numbers of each of the seven virtues. Each subsequent section contains a brief description and analysis of the respective virtues, followed by a series of demographic comparisons.
Trustworthiness can be described as the ability to be relied on as honest or truthful. Trustworthiness can be demonstrated by doing the right thing when no one is looking. The following questions tested the respondents’ trustworthiness by providing scenarios where the individuals would knowingly and undeservedly benefit from another person’s mistake. After analysis of the responses, Trustworthiness registered a “Stable” status.

\[ Q1: \text{If I found an error that caused me to underpay my taxes, I would report it to the IRS} \]

\[ Q2: \text{If a cashier gave me too much change, I wouldn’t return it.} \]

**RESULTS:** Mean: 60.65; Status: **** Stable (50 – 66.67)

Egalitarianism is defined as “a belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs.” Egalitarianism represents an ideal of democracy because in this system of government every individual would theoretically have the chance to achieve their goals through hard work – the American dream. This trait can become a sensitive issue because many people oppose government hand-outs that others argue are necessary to ensure individuals an equal chance to achieve their goals. This desire to achieve the “American dream” was measured with these two questions:

\[ Q1: \text{Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.} \]

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2 Possible responses to each question in the Virtues Index were Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Since the two items for each virtue were worded in opposite directions, the one indicating a lack of virtue was reverse coded. Responses were then added and rescaled to produce a score between 0 and 100.
**Q2:** Not all people deserve the same opportunity to get ahead in life.

**RESULTS:** Mean: 63.5; Status: **** Stable (50 to 66.7)

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**Patriotism**

Patriotism, as has been studied here, is defined as “love or devotion to one’s country.” Although patriotism remains an important part of a democracy, this trait is not limited to those who live under a democratic regime. People in all types of government regimes can love their country and express this love through military service, displaying the country’s colors, or other means. The following questions measure the respondents’ level of patriotism.

**Q1:** Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to the U.S. always remains strong.

**Q2:** Working for the good of the country is not a priority for me.

**RESULTS:** Mean: 72.88; Status: ***** Well (66.67 to 83.33)

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**Tolerance**

Tolerance is defined as “sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one’s own.” Tolerance could be demonstrated by a willingness to respect differing opinions, while a lack of tolerance could be manifested as an unwillingness to cooperate with others. In today’s highly polarized political climate, tolerance may represent the democratic virtue that is most in danger of falling in the United States. This virtue was measured with these two items:

**Q1:** I often try to understand other people better by seeing things from their point of view.
Q2: I would prefer not to have to hear the opinions of people who disagree with me.

RESULTS: Mean: 68.60; Status: ***** Well (66.67 to 83.33)

The common good can be described as displaying actions that benefit everyone rather than actions that only benefit the individual. The common good can be displayed by sacrificing an individual’s time, comfort, and resources to help the community in general. The questions focused people’s opinions of their own actions relative to the common good:

Q1: I make a point to pick up litter when I see it.

Q2: People tend to pay more attention to the well-being of others than they should.

RESULTS: Mean: 64.03; Status: **** Stable (50 to 66.67)

Generosity, as studied here, is related to giving one’s own time, energy, and/or possessions to others. While the ideal democratic citizen would exhibit generosity, this virtue is not exclusive to individuals who live in a democracy. Although a healthy democracy does not necessarily require that all citizens exhibit generosity, it is important to have a vibrant civil society and thus a critical mass of people who voluntarily contribute their time and money to benefit others. The survey questions asked respondents about the ways in which they give of themselves to others:

Q1: I give a substantial amount of my own time or money to charitable causes.
*Q2: I don’t go out of my way to help those who are less fortunate than me.*

**RESULTS:** Mean: 56.21; Status: **** Stable (50 to 66.67)

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Political justice is the idea that both political figures and average citizens should act in a fair manner during the political process. This virtue solidifies the “bonds of civic friendship” that John Rawls argues comes with a shared conception of justice. Although this represents a broad virtue, the questions focused on how politicians represent their constituents and people’s opinion on other citizens’ political actions:

*Q1: Government officials should spend just as much time listening to people who didn’t vote for them as the people who did.*

*Q2: Things would be better if some people stopped voting.*

**RESULTS:** Mean: 71.68; Status: ***** Well (66.67 to 83.33)
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The following section evaluates the state of democratic virtue across different demographic categories, including age, gender, education, religious attendance, and party identification.

AGE

As found in this study, older age groups had more virtue because they scored higher on the index than younger individuals. While each age group fell within the “Well” or “Stable” category, there are still differences between age groups. Individuals at and above the age of 60 have the highest average virtue followed by individuals between the ages of 45-59. The trend continues throughout the study: the younger the age group the lower the average virtue.

It is important to note that we cannot assume that democratic virtue increases with age. Rather, it is more plausible that higher scores may be attributed to the social and political climates of each generational group. Thus, when assessing the relationship between age and democratic virtue, it is necessary to consider generational differences in understanding how social and political climates may have impacted where these age groups fall on the index. How each age group views civic participation and democratic virtue could be linked to an increase in these values as life progresses or could instead point purely to generational differences.
**GENDER**

Males and females fall within different categories on the index. Men are categorized as “Stable” whereas women are categorized as “Well”. **Females have a higher average virtue**, largely due to their higher percentages in both the “Well” and “Flourishing” categories. The female average was a 68.2 while males, who ranked in the “Stable” category, had a mean score of 65.

**EDUCATION**

The three lowest levels of education, no high school, high school, and some college all fall into the “Stable” category. The highest three levels, 2 year (associate degree), 4 year (bachelor’s degree), and post graduate, all fall into the “Well” category. There is also a direct increase in mean-virtue for every increase in education level. **The greater the degree of education, the higher the average virtue score**. Post-graduate education averages 5.1 points higher than no high school. The two levels with the least difference between them are 2 year and 4 year college.
When evaluating virtue by education level, the data shows a distinct correlation between levels of education and levels of virtue. This could be due to the values taught in higher education or that the people seeking more education tend to be more virtuous. Family income did not have the same correlation that is present in education (that is to say higher income did not correlate with higher virtue). In fact, there was not a notable correlation whatsoever between income and virtue at all.

**RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE**

Religious attendance is particularly surprising because **there is no correlation between religious attendance and virtue**. Any deviation between how often one attends religious services and the virtue score is not statistically significant.

Religious attendance, of course, does not measure depth of religious belief but only the frequency of participation in one's faith. It seems intuitive that those who more are more religious would score higher on the virtues index because many of the democratic virtues seem in line with moral teachings of established religions. The common good, trustworthiness, and generosity in particular are virtues that seem to span religious text and doctrine. It is thus surprising that the data shows no trend between virtue and religious attendance.
There are relatively few differences between party identification. People who identify as Democrats have a slightly higher average score, falling into the “Well” category, followed by Independents at the very top of the “Stable” category, and then by Republicans who are also categorized as “Stable”. The gaps between the different groups are extremely small.

We do, however, see bigger partisan differences when examining the individual virtues. Looking at individual assessments of virtue, Democrats score best in equality, common good, giving, and justice. Independents have the highest level of tolerance and Republicans are the most trustworthy and express the highest level of patriotism.
Current political rhetoric would lead Americans to believe that the country is strongly divided across partisan lines, with both sides refusing to engage in any sort of dialogue with the other. This hypothesis is supported by The Pew Research Center which reports that “the level of antipathy that members of each party feel toward the opposing party has surged over the past two decades.” Further, “not only do greater numbers of those in both parties have negative views of the other side, those negative views are increasingly intense… many go so far as to say that the opposing party’s policies threaten the nation’s well-being.”

The results of this survey call into question this “divisive” rhetoric, painting a more nuanced and positive picture of political crosstalk in America. The majority of those surveyed reported being either “very comfortable” or “comfortable” living next to door to a member of the opposite party, working with a member of the opposite party at their place of employment, having dinner with a member of the opposite party and even having a child marry the member of the opposite party. This suggests that Americans are at least comfortable enough with interacting with members of the opposing party in myriad aspects of their life. The results from this survey begin to call into question the Pew Research Center’s claim that negative views of the opposite party are at a crisis point.

The story gets more complex when examining who Americans choose to engage in political discussions with and how often they engage in these discussions. Not surprisingly, Americans are

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4 Suh, Michael. “Section 2: Growing Partisan Antipathy.”
more likely to talk politics face-to-face with a spouse at a significantly higher percentage than any other group of people (family, friends, coworkers and people at church). Fifty-three percent of Americans report talking politics face-to-face with a spouse more than once per week. However, only 25% of Americans report talking politics face-to-face with family more than once per week, 23% report talking politics face-to-face with friends more than once per week, 14% report talking politics face-to-face with coworkers more than once per week, and 5% report talking politics face-to-face with people at church more than once per week. Again, not surprisingly, political discussion is most common between people who share a close relationship as seen in the graph below:

The graph shows that Americans discuss politics with those that they are closest with. This rings true because Americans are most likely to share the same political beliefs with those that
they are closest to. The data shows that Americans report that they “more often agree” with those with whom they are closest with when discussing politics. For example, 75% of Americans report that when they talk politics with their spouse, they “more often agree than disagree” with them. This percentage of agreement drops to 52% when Americans are talking politics with family, 53% when Americans are talking politics with friends, 34% when Americans are talking politics with coworkers and 48.16% when talking politics with people at church.

It is interesting to note that 60% of Americans report that they do not talk politics online. However, of those that engage in online political discussions regularly (at least once a month) they are most likely to be having discussions with friends (65%), other people (54%), family members (48%), or a spouse (42%). Only 16% of people report talking politics online with other people “more than once a week.”

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

When comparing the two major political parties, it is not clear whether members of one party or the other are more likely to have a favorable view of the opposing party. From this study, it can be discerned that Democrats are less likely to be comfortable with interactions with people of a different ideology. Seventy-four percent of Republicans reported they were either “comfortable” or “very comfortable” living next door to a member of the opposite party. This compares to only 62% of Democrats. Independents reported being the most comfortable with 75%

5 These questions were worded as: “How comfortable would you be…
- living next door to a Republican/Democrat?
- working with a Republican/Democrat at your job?
- having dinner with a Republican/Democrat?
- with your child marrying a Republican/Democrat?”

Republicans were asked about Democrats and vice-versa. Independents were randomly assigned to be asked about either Republicans or Democrats.
responding they would be either “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with a neighbor who was either a Democrat or a Republican. It is interesting to note that there is only a 1% difference between the feelings of Independents and Republicans in regards to their comfort level living next to a member of a different party (or, in the case of Independents, either party). This trend continues to be reflected in the other survey questions regarding interactions with members of the opposite party. On average, about 84% of Democrats felt comfortable interacting with people of the opposite party in the ways listed above. This places them at a modestly lower level of comfortability than Republicans (90%) and Independents (92%).

Slightly more Republicans (75%) than Democrats (69%) would be “Comfortable” or “Very Comfortable” with having a child marry a member of the opposite party. Eighty-three percent of Independents felt comfortable with their children marrying someone of either party, continuing the trend of the Independents beating both parties. But perhaps the more telling result can be found in respondents that expressed discomfort with this scenario. Discomfort levels for Democrats nearly doubled when asked whether they were comfortable with their children marrying someone of the other party – it skyrocketed from 15% uncomfortable rate in other questions to a 31% uncomfortable rate for this question. Republicans also followed this trend increasing from an average of 10% “uncomfortable” rating in the previous three questions, to a 25% “uncomfortable” rating for the marriage question. Independents also doubled their average level of discomfort with regards to this scenario, about 8% to 17%. It appears that while people may be supportive of interacting with members of the other party for limited interactions, they are less comfortable having people with opposing political views as a member of their family.

Another set of questions contained within this survey related to perceptions about the intelligence, honesty, and value of attempts to find commonalities with members of the opposing viewpoint or party. Generally, many of the respondents felt that people who identified with the
opposing party were just as smart, honest, and it was worthwhile to attempt to find common ground with one another. The only stark difference that appeared in these responses is that Republicans on average were 10% less likely to agree with wanting to find common ground with people of an opposing viewpoint. The next section of this paper will go into further detail about this phenomenon. Following the noted trend, Independents tended to view people of the opposite party or ideology in a better light.

The next important question was asking respondents about the importance of engaging politically with members of the opposite party. When asked if it is a waste of time to talk to a member of the opposite party, 47% of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed. People from the oldest age bracket were the least likely to think that this kind of political crosstalk is worthwhile, with only 42% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. While the difference between the responses of different age groups is relatively small, young people’s strong belief in the importance of crosstalk is a notable trend, particularly considering their general discomfort with engaging in any discussion with members of the opposite party. Some reasons for this opposing support may be that young people truly believe in the value of listening to “both sides”, however in practice is has proven to be visceral and unsuccessful, thus turning them away from actually engaging.
Both parties talk about politics in person in very similar ways. For example, 70% of Democrats report talking politics face-to-face with a spouse at least once per week compared to 69% of Republicans. The data shows similar trends for talking politics face-to-face with family at least once per week (43% of Democrats vs. 47% of Republicans), talking politics face-to-face with friends at least once per week (44% of Democrats vs. 41% of Republicans) and discussions that are face-to-face with co-workers (31% of Democrats vs. 30% of Republicans). The only area in which this trend does diverge a little is when people speak about politics face-to-face at church at least once a week - 15% of Republicans do while only 10% of Democrats do. Popular rhetoric surrounding the Republican party and the conservative ideology would suggest that they may be talking politics at church more often than those who are Democrat; however, the results show only a small difference. Both parties agree that when they do talk politics face-to-face at church they “more often agree” with the person they are talking to.

This data shows that political discussion is more common on the far political left than far right. While Democrats and Republicans are talking politics at about the same rate, 80% of “very
liberal” people report talking politics face-to-face with their spouse at least once per week, compared to only 68% of “very conservative” people. This trend holds true regardless of who the “very liberal” person is talking to, whether it be family members, friends, co-workers or people at church. This suggests that liberals may feel more comfortable talking about politics in public than conservatives. Future surveys will shed light on whether this level of discussion among liberals is because of the political climate of the U.S. in 2017, driven by an opposition to President Donald Trump and/or Republican control of both Congress and the White House.

When Americans discuss politics with the opposite party, 36% of Democrats and 43% of Republicans report that this discussion strengthens the opinion that they already held. However, the more extreme the respondents’ viewpoint, the more likely they are to be immobile in their views. For example, over 50% of both “very liberal” and “very conservative” people reported that when they discuss politics with those with whom they disagree, the discussion generally strengthens or confirms the opinion they originally held. Only 18% of Democrats and 14% of Republicans reported that this conversation made them find that issues are more complicated than they previously thought. Less than half of people, regardless of party identification, found these discussions to be informative or interesting, while a similar percentage also said that these conversations were not stressful. While this implies that most Americans do not find it upsetting to discuss politics with those who have a different perspective, it also suggests that Americans are set in their viewpoints and that such discussion does not change views.

AGE

Examining the perceptions of people of different ages toward engaging in political crosstalk yields clear differences among age groups, particularly in the disparities between young people, ages 18-29, and people age 60 years or older. The first set of questions ask how comfortable the
respondent would be interacting with someone from the opposite political party in various nonpolitical settings. Much like the results seen earlier in the virtues survey, people in the oldest age group were much more likely to be comfortable interacting with people of the opposite party in these nonpolitical settings than were those in the youngest age group.

When asked how comfortable young people would be having dinner with a member of the opposite party, only 59% answered that they felt “Comfortable” or “Very Comfortable” doing so. In contrast, 73% of people age 60 or older said that they would feel comfortable. This trend holds across the first set of questions, with young respondents scoring the lowest for each question.

Notably, respondents experience the drop in comfort level when asked about having one’s child marry someone from the opposite party fairly uniformly, showing a similar decrease in mean answer within each group.
While the trend for respondents from the youngest age group was to score the lowest in the first set of questions, this trend reverses itself in the second set of questions. This set asks respondents about the character of people from the opposite party as well as the importance of engaging politically with people with whom you disagree – the theoretical approach vs. the actual. When asked if people of the same political party are smarter than members of the opposite party, 30% of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed, slightly more than the 27% of people in the oldest age group did the same. Thus, young people overwhelmingly do not think that those of the other party lack intelligence. Interestingly the oldest respondents remained the most likely to poorly characterize the other party, not the younger respondents.
Respondents were asked about the importance of engaging politically with members of the opposite party. When asked if it is a waste of time to talk to a member of the opposite party, 47% of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed. People from the oldest age bracket were the least likely to think that crosstalk is worthwhile, with only 42% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. While the difference between the responses of different age groups is relatively small, young people’s strong belief in the importance of crosstalk is a notable trend, particularly in light of their general discomfort with engaging in any discussion with members of the opposite party. This speaks to the idea that Generation Z (“Gen Z”) places a high priority on tolerance—or at least aspires to it.
PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND AGE

As aforementioned, a popular opinion about the younger generation is that they are more accepting of others than older generations previously were. The data stands against this notion, showing that in a variety of situations the youngest generation is least comfortable in engaging with people who hold other ideologies. Only 51% of Democrats and 43% of Republicans ages 18-29 were “Very Comfortable” or “Comfortable” with living next to a person with opposing political viewpoints. The percentage of people who are 30-44, 45-59, and 60+ and said that they were “Very Comfortable” or “Comfortable” living next to someone from the opposing party ranged from 62% (60+ Democrats) to 76% (30-44 Republicans). All of the age groups over 30 had higher “Comfortable” responses to the question than the 18-29 age group of either party. This shows that young people may not be as comfortable physically acting on their views of tolerance and crosstalk.

This trend of young people from both parties being more unwilling to engage in political crosstalk than any other age group holds throughout other forms of political crosstalk. With questions regarding a child marrying a member of the opposite party and having dinner with a member of the opposite party, the results are the same. The percentages of Republicans and Democrats in the 18-29 age group who report being “Very Comfortable” or “Comfortable” interacting in these ways with the opposite party are lower than any other ideology and age group. This data seems to suggest that the youngest generation is in fact less willing to engage in political crosstalk, challenging the common notion that generations are becoming more accepting of others’ viewpoints. It may however be that due to the divisiveness and harmful rhetoric and reaction to the 2016 Presidential Election, young people are more hesitant to reach out to those from the opposite party.
All age groups and political parties are generally equal in the amount they talk face-to-face with their family and friends. However, both Republicans and Democrats in all age groups are most likely to “Never” talk face to face with coworkers. Additionally, Democrats and Republicans in all age categories are most likely to “never” engage in conversation face-to-face with fellow churchgoers. This suggests that people of both ideologies would rather not engage in conversation with those who they know less well and therefore are presumably less likely to agree with. The data may also suggest that people are deterred from engaging in conversation face-to-face in more professional settings; work and church.

Democrats and Republicans in all age groups unsurprisingly responded that they more often agree than disagree with both their spouses and their families. It has been noted before that Americans are most likely to share the same political views with those that they are closest with. One notable exception is among 18-29 year-olds as there is a sharp divide between Republicans and Democrats. While 67% of Democrats 18-29 reported more often agreeing with their friends, only 36% of Republicans 18-29 said they more often agreed with their friends. This finding no doubt reflects the fact that young people are more likely to identify with the Democratic than Republican Party, and so young Republicans are more likely to encounter someone of the other party. It is important to bear in mind the cultural context of the time that this survey was administered: the 2016 Presidential Election. The Republican candidates that ran, and the ultimate victor, are quite different than those that ran in 2012 and 2010. While there most likely is more homogeny amongst young Democrats and their friends, it is possible that the numbers for Republicans would have been hire in a different election year.
**COMPROMISE**

Conventional wisdom assumes that the more that people engage in political crosstalk, the more likely they would be to compromise. This logic follows because if you are engaged civically than you will most likely be more inclined to understand the political arguments from both sides. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Instead, Americans who are most likely to engage in political crosstalk are also more likely to prefer standing up for their beliefs over compromising with the other party. As people’s level of political crosstalk increases from low to medium to high, their preference for compromise decreases. Perhaps this is because as people learn more about issues while already having a strong political opinion, this knowledge gain only solidifies the faith that they have in their own party.
LEVEL OF POLITICAL CROSSTALK (TALKING WITH SUPPORTERS OF OPPOSITE PARTY)

PERCENTAGE WHO PREFER COMPROMISE BASED ON LEVEL OF POLITICAL CROSSTALK

PERCENTAGE WHO PREFER STANDING UP FOR THEIR BELIEFS BASED ON LEVEL OF POLITICAL CROSSTALK

LEVEL OF POLITICAL CROSSTALK (TALKING WITH SUPPORTERS OF OPPOSITE PARTY)
Even though these findings seem to contradict conventional wisdom, the reality is that only a minority of people find political discussions with those they disagree with informative or interesting, suggesting that they are more likely than not to stand up for their beliefs as opposed to compromising. Another explanation for the observed results is that strong party members are inherently more likely to prefer standing up for their beliefs, and are also the most likely to engage in crosstalk because of the strength of those beliefs. This turns out not to be the case. **Strength of partisanship does not predict attitudes on compromise vs. standing up for one’s beliefs.**

An additional explanation for a preference for standing up for one’s beliefs could be a result of widespread political polarization. Over the past few decades, political leaders have become increasingly more polarized in their beliefs, forcing the electorate to decide between one of two options on very convoluted debates such as immigration and reproductive rights. This polarization may be seeping into the electorate, causing people to prefer standing up for their beliefs because compromise is synonymous with giving into the other side. As people have moved further and further apart in their beliefs, they not only diminish the possibility for compromise, but they have begun to prefer standing up for their beliefs. People are beginning to feel comfortable only supporting their side in political issues. Through the continued and intense use of divisive rhetoric, it is quite possible that our politics have been transformed into a zero-sum game: any compromise is a win for your opponent and a loss for you.

**CONCLUSION**

From examining the responses to this national survey, the consensus is that the state of American democracy is “Stable”. While it is healthy to have a “Stable” government, we should be consistently striving for a “Well” and even “Flourishing” democracy. The strongest virtues amongst
the American electorate is “Patriotism” which was ranked as “Well” with a score of 72.88 out of 100. In comparison, the lowest virtue score was “Generosity” which registered as “Stable” with a score of 56.21 out of 100. There is quite a significant gap between these two categories. It is interesting to consider these findings in context of the questions asking. The patriotism questions asked respondents to comment on their commitment to the U.S. and their desire to work for the good of the country – theoretical manifestations of devotion’s to one countries. The generosity questions, however, asked respondents to reflect on if they give to charities or if they help the less fortunate – real manifestations of devotion to one’s fellow man. This marks a trend that is seen throughout the research: Americans are more supportive of the core tenets and values of tolerance and democracy but when push comes to shove they may be hesitant to act upon these feelings. The other most apparent area in which this trend is reflected is when examining the view of young people towards members of the opposing party. Young people fall into “Gen Z” and the “Millennials”, thought to be the most tolerant generations yet. In this survey, 53% of young people think that political crosstalk is worthwhile, a more positive reaction than that of the older generation. However, only 59% of young people felt comfortable having dinner with someone from the opposing political party but 73% of older Americans felt comfortable. This could be attributed to myriad reasons. The most obvious may be that young people today were entrenched in a nasty, divisive election in which lies were accepted as facts and egregious infractions of justice were swept aside. This may have deterred many young people from believing that political crosstalk would actually achieve something. A second reason may be that young people have not had as much “practice” with their political beliefs and values as the older generation has. For many young people, they are exploring college and a slew of new ideas and ideologies for the first time and additionally, this was the first election that they voted in. This statistic, while interesting, may not necessarily
mean that young people today are less tolerant than assumed. This may simply be a reflection on
the state of a fractured democratic system as a whole.

This report found that the state of American democracy is more united than divided, but still
has significant room for growth. Some of the most interesting finds aside from the ones
aforementioned were that a young age group correlated with a lower average virtue, females have a
higher average virtue, there is no correlation between religious attendance and virtue, Republicans
were less likely to find common ground on opposing viewpoints, and Democrats may be less likely
to be comfortable with interactions with people of the opposing party. Overall, these findings
represent an electorate that has their heart in the right place, however their actions do not always
reflect the way that they wish they saw the world – more tolerant, more generous, more open to
dialogue. In order to prevent against the increasing divisiveness in our nation, it is imperative that
members of both parties, old and young, Democrat and Republican, learn to communicate openly,
honestly, and respectfully with each other. There is no reason to allow partisan politics and vicious
rhetoric to divide a nation that was built on the premise of being more tolerant, more freeing, and a
place of more opportunities. To truly become more united and less divided, Americans must
recognize that they hold the same core values—as reflected in the Notre Dame Study of Democratic
Virtues.