



The Associated Press-NORC  
Center for Public Affairs Research

# CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS: TRENDS IN AMERICANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT, MEDIA, AND BUSINESS

Americans' confidence in the Supreme Court, the executive branch, and Congress has been declining over the last decade and each are at or near record lows in 2014, according to an analysis of the General Social Survey conducted by the AP-NORC Center and GSS. Fewer Americans report having a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court (23 percent) and Congress (5 percent) than at any other time in the last 40 years, and confidence in the executive branch is also near an all-time low (11 percent).



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Confidence in the media remains at an all-time low with 7 percent of adults saying they have a great deal of confidence in the press and 10 percent reporting a great deal of confidence in television.

## Four Things You Should Know

From the 2014 GSS Questions on Confidence in Institutions:

- 1) Americans' confidence in all three branches of government is at or near record lows.
- 2) Confidence in the press remains at an all-time low with only 7 percent of Americans saying they have a great deal of confidence in the press.
- 3) Americans' confidence in business and banks is rebounding, but more than 4 in 5 still lack much confidence.
- 4) Americans continue to show steady levels of confidence in the scientific community; 41 percent report a great deal of confidence.

A significant majority of Americans do not have a great deal of confidence in either banks or major companies, but confidence has rebounded slightly from all-time lows in 2010. Confidence in organized labor has changed little in the last decade, with only about 1 in 10 Americans reporting a great deal of confidence.

In comparison, confidence in the military remains high (50 percent report a great deal of confidence), and the percentages of Americans reporting a great deal of confidence in organized religion (19 percent), education (25 percent), medicine (38 percent), and the scientific community (41 percent) have been relatively stable over the last decade.

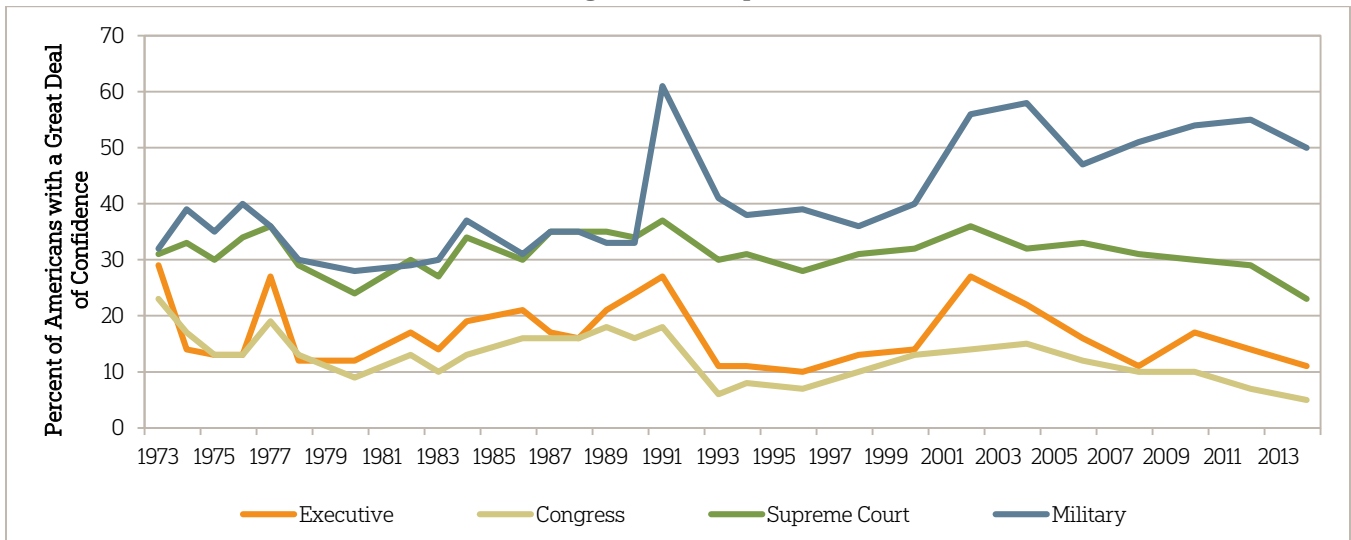


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### CONFIDENCE IN THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT NEAR ALL-TIME LOWS.

In 2014, Americans' confidence in each of the three branches of government hit near record lows.

#### Americans' confidence in Executive Branch, Congress, and Supreme Court reach near record lows in 2014.



Questions: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? [Executive Branch/Congress/Supreme Court/Military]

Eleven percent of adults express a great deal of confidence in the executive branch, which is lower than any time since 1996 (10 percent). Forty-three percent report having only some confidence in the executive branch, and a record-high 44 percent say they have hardly any confidence at all in it.

Confidence in Congress continues its downward trajectory, reaching a new low with only 5 percent of adults saying they have a great deal of confidence in 2014. Over half of Americans say they have hardly any confidence at all in Congress, and 40 percent report only having some confidence.

The Supreme Court also reached a new all-time low (23 percent with a great deal of confidence). Fifty-four percent report having only some confidence in the Supreme Court and 20 percent say they have hardly any confidence, which is an all-time high.

Although the percentage of Americans who say they have confidence in the military dipped 5 points from 2012, half of Americans still say they have a great deal of confidence in the armed forces in 2014, 39 percent report only some confidence, and 10 percent report having hardly any confidence at all. This continues a trend of relatively high confidence in the military following the September 11, 2001 attacks.



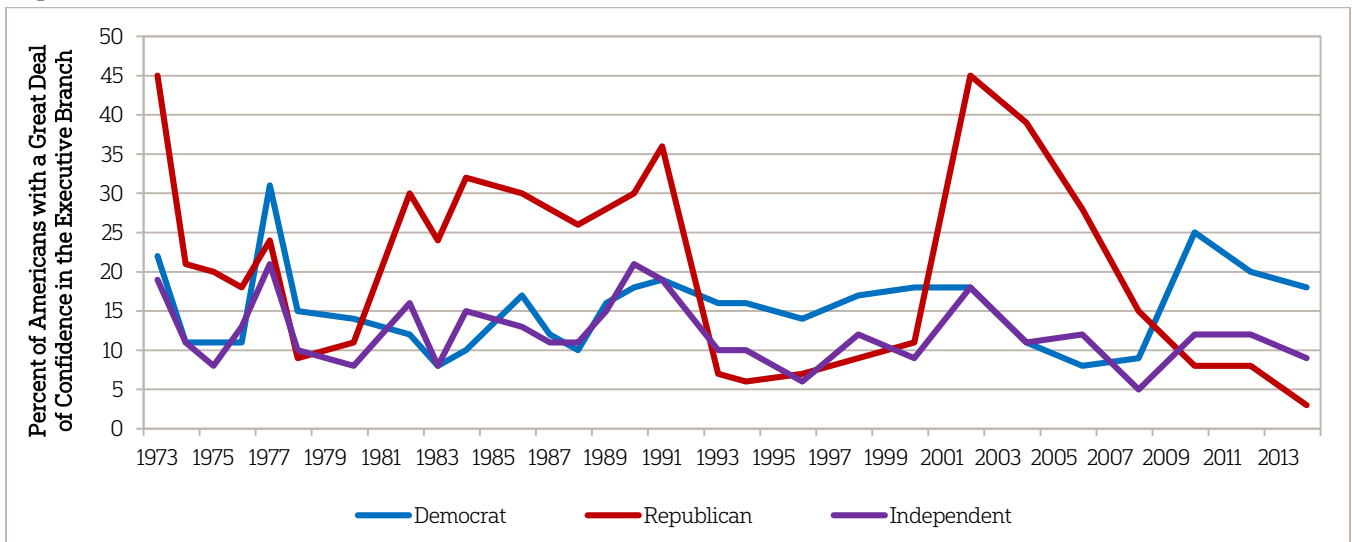
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**CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS VARIES BASED ON PARTISANSHIP, RACE, AGE, AND EDUCATION.**

Confidence in the executive branch differs considerably based on political party. With Democrat Barack Obama in the White House, confidence is six times higher among Democrats than Republicans. Eighteen percent of Democrats report having a great deal of confidence in the executive, compared to 9 percent of independents and 3 percent of Republicans. The percentage of Republicans expressing confidence in the executive branch in 2014 is the lowest any of the three groups has tallied for that branch of government since 1975. While confidence among Democrats has dipped 7 points since 2010 (the first year of the survey with President Obama in office), confidence remains at levels similar to the late 1970s and the 1990s when Democrats held the presidency. The latest data continues a trend in which the party of the President has more confidence in the executive branch than members of the opposing party.

Blacks also show higher confidence in the executive branch (21 percent) than either Hispanics (16 percent) or whites (9 percent).

**Confidence in the executive branch is highest among Democrats and has reached record lows among Republicans.**



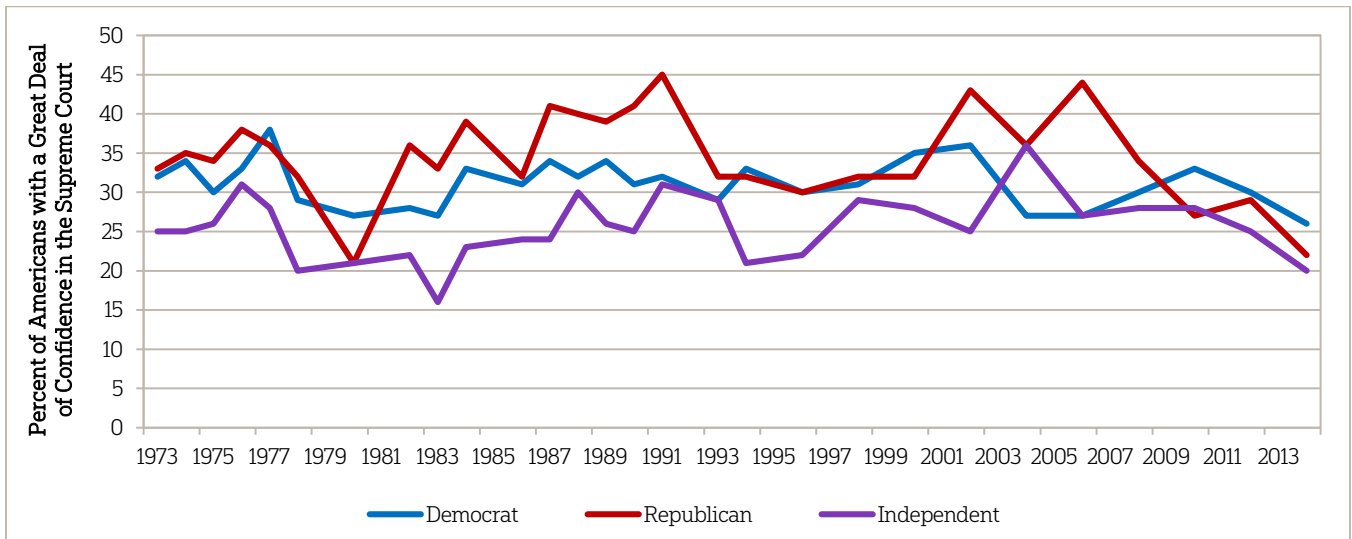
None of the three political groups express high levels of confidence in Congress, according to the survey conducted before the November 2014 midterm elections. Seven percent of Democrats, 5 percent of independents, and 3 percent of Republicans express a great deal of confidence in the legislature.

Young people age 18-34 are more than twice as likely as older adults to express a great deal of confidence in Congress (10 percent vs. 5 percent of those age 35-49, 2 percent of those age 50-64, and 4 percent of those age 65 or older).

Confidence in the Supreme Court has reached record or near-record lows for Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Twenty-six percent of Democrats, 22 percent of Republicans, and 20 percent of independents say they have a great deal of confidence in the Court, compared with 30 percent, 29 percent, and 25 percent in 2012, respectively. Independents have traditionally shown lower levels of confidence in the Court than either Democrats or Republicans with only occasional exceptions, and this trend continues.

In addition, education is associated with confidence in the Court. Adults with a college degree are more likely to express a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court (28 percent) than those with a high school degree (20 percent) and adults without a high school degree (23 percent). However, the overall confidence levels have dropped across all education levels.

**Confidence in the Supreme Court decreased across all political groups, with independents showing the least confidence in the Court.**



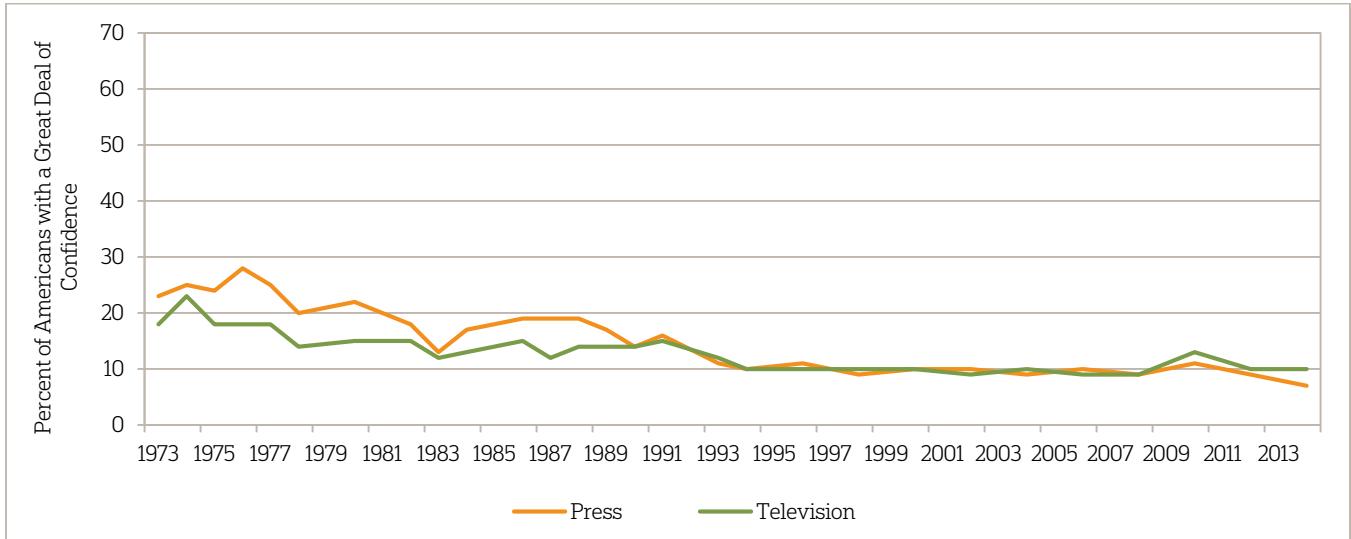
Education also relates to confidence in the military. Americans with a college degree are less likely to report a great deal of confidence in the military (44 percent) than those with a high school degree (54 percent) and adults without a high school degree (52 percent).

**AMERICANS' CONFIDENCE IN PRESS AND TELEVISION AT RECORD LOWS.**

Americans' confidence in the press and in television has trended downward during the past 40 years, and is at all-time lows. Seven percent of Americans express a great deal of confidence in the press, 47 percent express only some, and 44 percent say they have hardly any confidence in the press. Similarly, 10 percent of Americans express a great deal of confidence in television, 49 percent express only some, and 41 percent say they have hardly any confidence.

Americans have historically expressed little confidence in either the press or television. Confidence in the press has steadily declined since its peak at 28 percent in 1976 and confidence in television has steadily declined since its peak at 18 percent in 1977.

**The percent of Americans who express a great deal of confidence in the press and television is at all-time lows.**

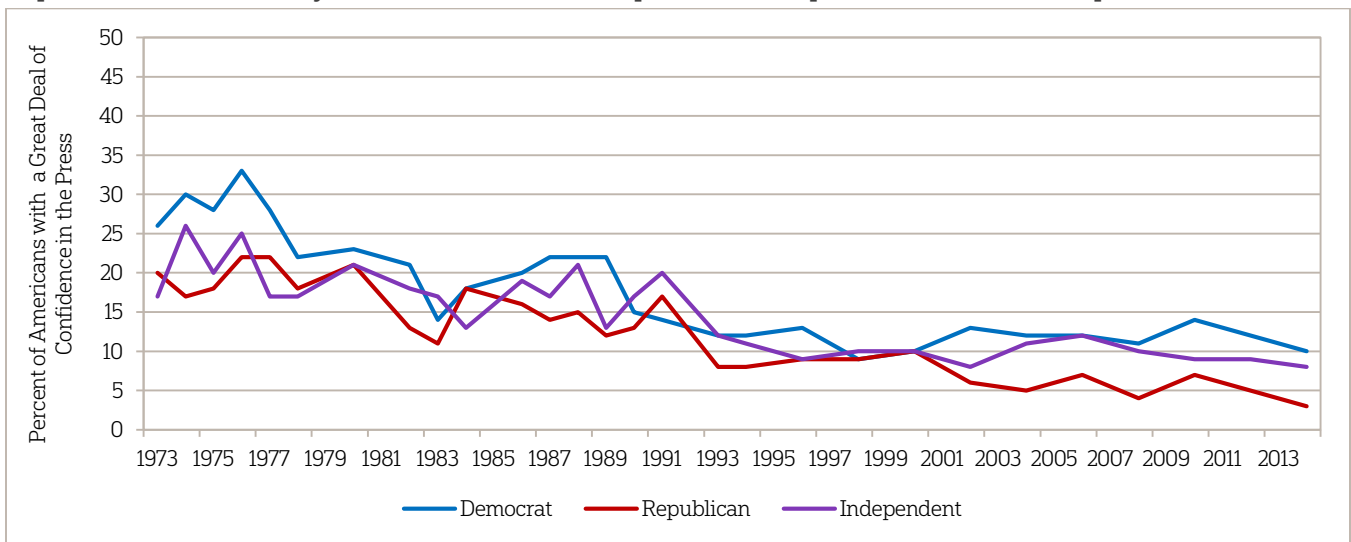


Questions: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? [Press/TV]

**REPUBLICANS ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESS THAN DEMOCRATS.**

While overall confidence in the press is low among all Americans, Republicans have expressed lower levels of confidence in the press than either Democrats or independents in the last decade. In 2014, just 3 percent of Republicans say they have a great deal of confidence in the press, compared with 10 percent of Democrats and 8 percent of independents.

**Republicans are less likely than Democrats and independents to express confidence in the press in 2014.**



**FEW AMERICANS HAVE CONFIDENCE IN EITHER BANKS, MAJOR COMPANIES, OR ORGANIZED LABOR.**

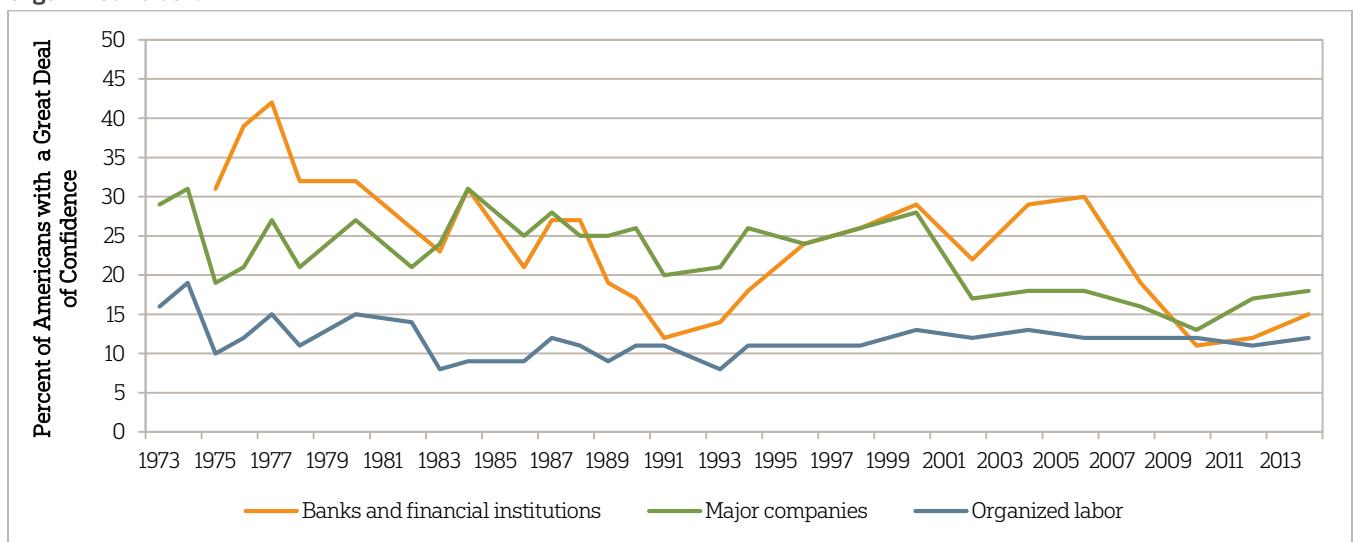
Americans' confidence in banks and financial institutions has declined by half over the past 40 years. Confidence in banks hit an all-time high in 1977 when 42 percent of Americans expressed a great deal of confidence, and it fell to an all-time low of 11 percent in 2010. Since then, confidence in banks and financial institutions has rebounded slightly to 15 percent with a great deal of confidence, 53 percent with only some

confidence, and 32 percent with hardly any confidence at all in 2014. The financial crisis of 2008 had a similar effect on Americans' confidence in financial institutions as the savings and loan scandals did in the late 1980s.

Eighteen percent of Americans say they have a great deal of confidence in major companies, 62 percent report only some confidence, and 18 percent say they have hardly any confidence at all. Confidence in major companies reached an all-time high of 31 percent in 1984. The new century brought a steady decline in confidence in major companies, and confidence hit an all-time low in 2010, when just 13 percent of Americans said they had a great deal of confidence in major companies.

Confidence in organized labor has remained relatively low over the past 40 years, and 12 percent say they have a great deal of confidence in organized labor, 56 percent say only some confidence, and 29 percent say hardly any confidence at all in 2014.

**Few Americans express a great deal of confidence in banks and financial institutions, major companies, or organized labor.**



Questions: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? [Banks and Financial Institutions/Major Companies/Organized Labor]

Republicans have consistently expressed higher levels of confidence in major companies than either Democrats or independents. Twenty-four percent of Republicans report confidence in major companies in 2014, compared with 19 percent of independents and 14 percent of Democrats.

Americans with a college education are generally less likely to have confidence in organized labor than those with a high school degree or those with no degree, although confidence is relatively low for all three groups. Nine percent of those with a college degree report having a great deal of confidence in organized labor in 2014 compared with 13 percent of those with either a high school degree or no degree.

**AMERICANS' CONFIDENCE IN ORGANIZED RELIGION, EDUCATION, MEDICINE, AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY HAS BEEN STABLE IN RECENT YEARS.**

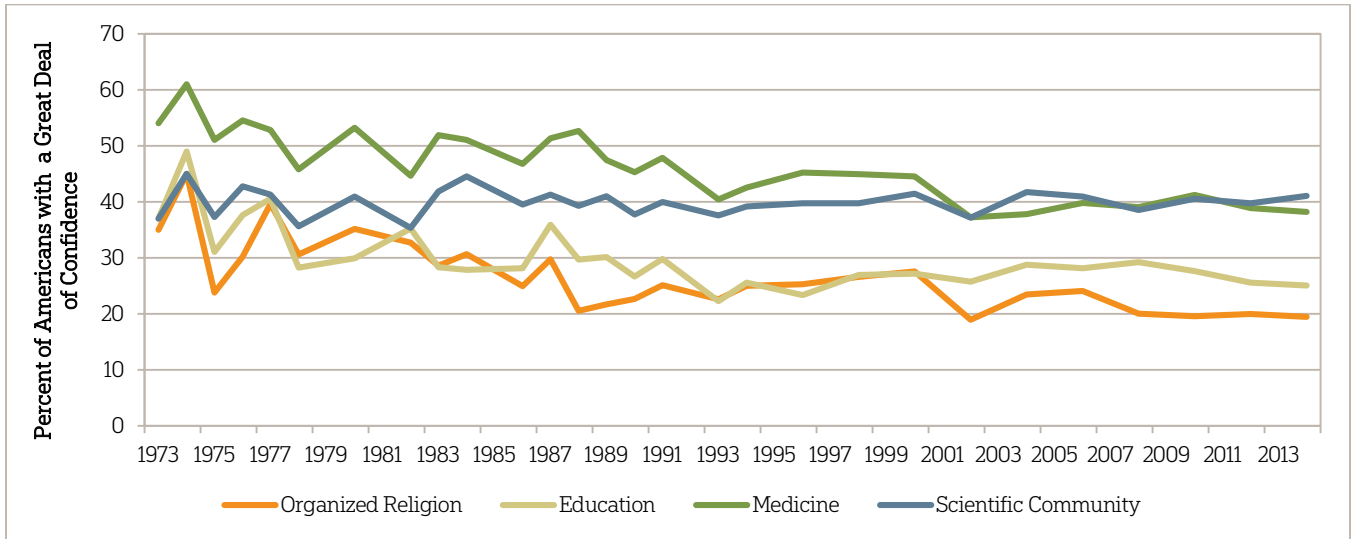
There has been little change in Americans' attitudes toward organized religion, education, medicine, and the scientific community in recent years.

The number of Americans reporting a great deal of confidence in organized religion is 19 percent, matching the all-time low set in 2002.

In 2014, confidence in education (25 percent) and medicine (38 percent) are lower than earlier decades, but neither has fluctuated much in the past 10 years.

Confidence in the scientific community has also remained stable over time. In 2014, 41 percent of adults express a great deal of confidence in the scientific community.

**Confidence in organized religion, education, medicine, and the scientific community has changed little in recent years.**

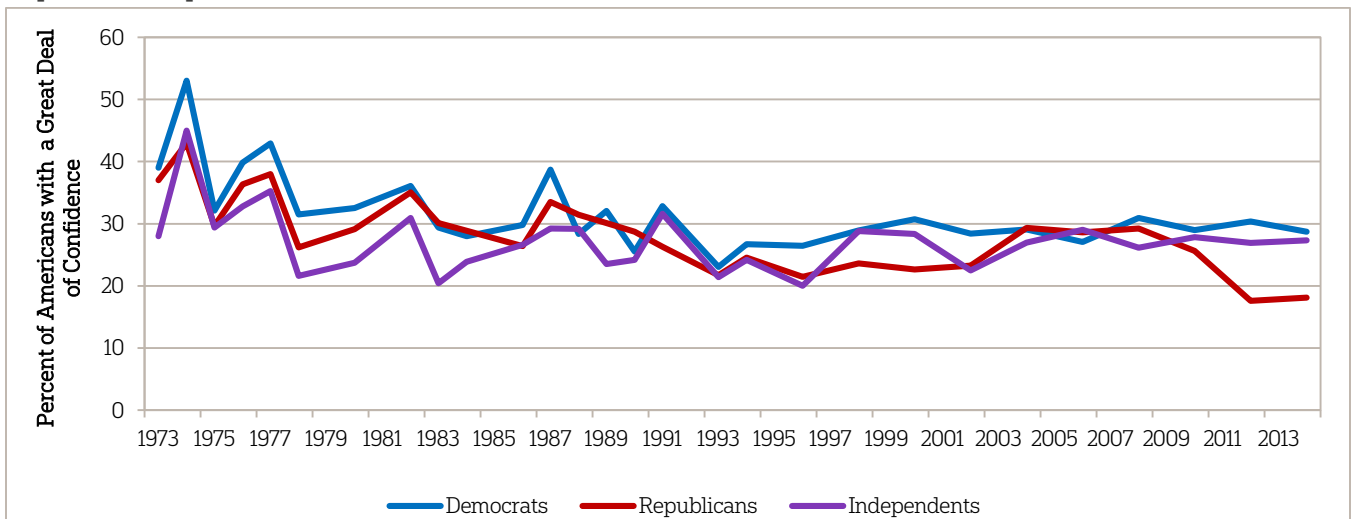


Questions: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? [Organized Religion/Education/Medicine/Scientific Community]

Americans' confidence in both organized religion and education are associated with partisanship. Republicans report more confidence in organized religion than Democrats, but less confidence about education than Democrats or independents.

As of 2014, 24 percent of Republicans report a great deal of confidence for organized religion compared to 19 percent of independents and 16 percent of Democrats.

**Republicans report lower confidence in education than Democrats.**

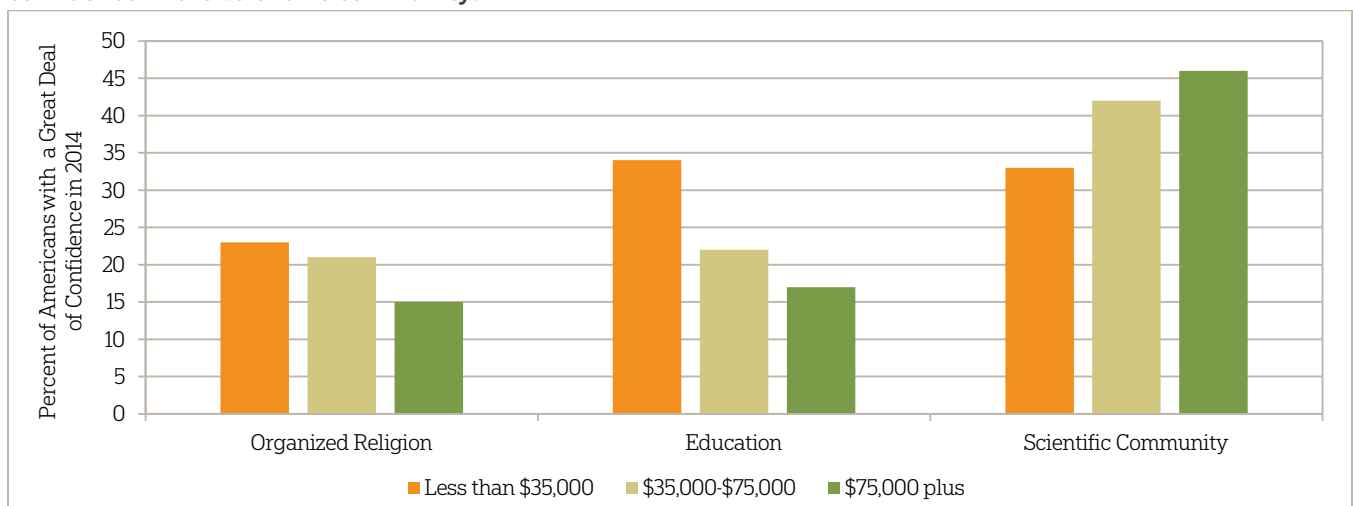


The number of Republicans who report a great deal of confidence in education dropped from 29 percent in 2008 to 18 percent in 2012, and Republicans' confidence in education remains at an all-time low. In comparison, 27 percent of independents and 29 percent of Democrats report a great deal of confidence in education in 2014, and the gap in confidence between Republicans and the other two groups has reached record highs during Obama's presidency.

Household income is also associated with confidence in education and the scientific community. In 2014, people with household incomes of less than \$35,000 a year are more likely to express confidence in education (34 percent) than people with incomes of more than \$75,000 a year (17 percent).

However, people with household incomes of more than \$75,000 a year are more likely to express confidence in the scientific community (46 percent) than those with incomes of less than \$35,000 a year (33 percent).

**Lower income levels are associated with higher confidence in organized religion and education, but lower confidence in the scientific community.**



**ABOUT THIS STUDY**

The GSS is administered by NORC at the University of Chicago, primarily using in-person interviewing. The GSS started in 1972 and completed its 30th round in 2014. For the last 40 years, the GSS has been monitoring societal change and the growing complexity of American society. The GSS is the largest project funded by the Sociology Program of the National Science Foundation. The typical sample size was 1,500 prior to 1994, but increased to 2,700-3,000 until 2008 and decreased to 2,000-2,500 for the most recent surveys. Resulting margins of error are between +/- 3.1 for the smaller sample sizes and +/- 2.2 percentage points for the larger sample sizes at the 95 percent confidence level. The GSS 1972-2014 Cumulative File was utilized to produce the statistics presented.