

New Survey Finds Vast Majority of Americans Think the Country Is Divided Over Values and Politics

Seven in 10 say the news media places too much emphasis on these differences

August 1, 2016, Chicago, IL. — Americans see their country as deeply divided over values and politics—a gap they do not expect to diminish any time soon, according to a new survey conducted by [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). But the survey also finds that most Americans report agreement on important values among members of their local communities.

While few Americans say they have much in common with people of different religions or ethnic backgrounds, most of the public believes the racial, ethnic, and religious diversity of the United States makes the country stronger. Consensus and disagreement over American exceptionalism, the media's role in accentuating the country's divisions, and future levels of conflicts are also explored in the survey.

“Political campaigns, especially the presidential campaigns, raise both the extent and intensity of public debate,” said [Trevor Thompson](#), director of The AP-NORC Center. “Surveys like the one we have done can reveal important insights that help explain the underlying causes of recent political events.”

The survey is part of AP's Divided America series, which explores the issues dividing American voters in this tumultuous presidential election year and what's driving them toward the decision they will make on November 8.

The nationwide poll of 1,008 adults utilized NORC's AmeriSpeak® Omnibus, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Interviews were conducted between June 23 and 27, 2016, online and using landlines and cell phones. The AmeriSpeak panel is notable for its representativeness and high rates of participation.

Some of the poll's key findings are:

- Eighty percent of Americans say the country is greatly divided when it comes to the most important values, and 85 percent say the United States is increasingly divided by politics.
- While few people think the country as a whole agrees on values, most say their neighbors do share important values. Six in 10 (62 percent) say members of their local community are in agreement about values.

- Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) say the news media puts too much focus on disagreements, and 63 percent say the same about politicians and elected officials. The entertainment industry is seen by 43 percent as overemphasizing splits within the country.
- Most Americans regard the country's diverse population as advantageous to the nation. More than half (56 percent) say diversity makes the country stronger, while 16 percent say it weakens the country. Twenty-eight percent say diversity has no effect one way or the other. Democrats, urbanites, and Hispanics are particularly inclined to see the variety of people in the country as a plus for the United States.
- Is the United States the best country on earth? Only 26 percent of the public agree that the United States "stands above all other countries in the world," while 55 percent of the public say the United States is "one of the greatest countries in the world along with some others." Just 19 percent think there are other countries that are better.
- The public is closely divided over whether the good times for the country have been left behind or are yet to come. Fifty-two percent say the country's best days are in the past, while 46 percent say they are ahead of us. Blacks and Hispanics tend to have a positive outlook about the future of the country, while most whites say the good times are in the past.
- While most people say they have a lot in common with other members of their community, few feel they share much in common with wealthier people or those with different political views.
- Neither the Democratic nor the Republican candidate for President is regarded as particularly capable of uniting the country. However, while 43 percent say Hillary Clinton's election would lead to a more divided nation, many more, 73 percent, say the country will be more separated if Donald Trump prevails in November.

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak® Omnibus, which is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

About the Survey

Interviews were conducted between June 23 and 27, 2016, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,008 completed the survey—773 via the web and 235 via telephone.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: www.apnorc.org.

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

About AmeriSpeak Omnibus

AmeriSpeak Omnibus is a once-a-month, multi-client survey using a probability sample of at least 1,000 nationally representative adults age 18 and older. Respondents are interviewed online and by phone from NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel—the most scientifically rigorous multi-client household panel in the United States. AmeriSpeak households are selected randomly from NORC's National Sample Frame, the industry leader in sample coverage. The National Frame is representative of over 99 percent of U.S. households and includes additional coverage of hard-to-survey population segments, such as rural and low-income households, that are underrepresented in other sample frames. More information about AmeriSpeak is available at AmeriSpeak.norc.org.

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