

New Survey Shows Americans Believe Civility is on the Decline

Americans believe today's society is generally more ill-mannered than it was 30 years ago and that civility in politics is particularly lacking

April 15, 2016, Chicago—A recent survey by [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) finds that 74 percent of Americans think manners and behavior have deteriorated in the United States over the past several decades. A large majority of Americans believe that politicians should be held to a higher standard than the general public, but few think they are living up to that expectation. The Republican campaign is viewed as rude and disrespectful by nearly twice as many Americans as those who characterize the fight for the Democratic nomination in that way (78 percent vs. 41 percent).

The study finds that people are generally in agreement about what sort of behavior is unacceptable. Behavior ranging from use of cell phones in restaurants to swearing in public or online is universally considered to be ill-mannered, but differences in these opinions, and the likelihood of an individual personally engaging in such behavior, emerge based on age and gender. Remarks or jokes based on race, gender, or sexuality, however, are considered inappropriate by 8 in 10 Americans, and only a small percentage of Americans admit to doing so themselves.

“There are clear differences between what older Americans and younger Americans consider to be generally rude behavior,” said [Trevor Tompson](#), director of The AP-NORC Center. “In areas of technology, particularly, almost half of Americans age 18 to 29 feel it is perfectly acceptable to use cell phones in restaurants, for example, while only 22 percent of those over age 60 agree. This same sort of division is apparent in the use of profanity and even in discussions of sex in public.”

Key findings include:

- While most people feel that remarks or jokes about race, gender, and sexuality are unacceptable in public, there is slightly more acceptance of these types of comments made in private.
- Two-thirds (68 percent) see political campaigns this year as outdoing the public in levels of rudeness.
- Only 7 percent say they sometimes or frequently make remarks about someone's gender or sexuality in public. But 34 percent admit using profanity in public sometimes.
- A quarter of the American public admits to daily use of the f-word, an increase of 10 points since a similar survey conducted in 2006 by The Associated Press/Ipsos.
- Half the public sees this year's campaign for the Republican nomination as mostly rude and disrespectful, and another 29 percent consider it somewhat rude and disrespectful. Even

8 in 10 Republicans (79 percent) regard their party's process to determine a nominee for president as ill-mannered.

- In contrast, only 16 percent say the campaign between the Democratic candidates for president is mostly rude and disrespectful, while another 25 percent consider it somewhat rude and disrespectful.
- Eighty percent of Americans say political leaders should be held to a higher standard of behavior than other people. Only 15 percent believe that candidates should not be sensitive to the possibility of upsetting other people while they are campaigning.

Survey Methodology

Interviews for this survey were conducted between March 17 and 21, 2016, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from [AmeriSpeak®](#), and with 1,004 completing the survey—785 via the web and 219 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 29.2 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 36.9 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 93.9 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 10.1 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.8 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

About the Survey

The nationwide poll of 1,004 adults used [AmeriSpeak](#), the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted between March 17 and 21, 2016, online and using landlines and cell phones.

About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

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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.org.

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