Trust, Facts, Democracy
How libraries fit into the biggest issues of the day

Lee Rainie
Director, Internet and Technology Research
Study: 90% Of Americans Strongly Opposed To Each Other

“The vast majority of respondents signaled they were dead set against the U.S. populace, condemning in forceful terms the way others have handled things over the past year...,” said Pew Research Center polling analyst Babette Randolph, noting that the rate of opposition remained consistent across all 50 states and virtually every demographic regardless of age, gender, race, religion, or political identification.
“Wow, I can’t believe I’m included in Pew findings!”

RORY TAGGART • CRADLE SANDER
“Yeah, but Pew’s a bunch of stoners.”

PEGGY GONNEAU • FOOD TRUCK OPERATOR
Trust
Public trust in the federal government remains at historic low

% who say they trust the federal government to do what is right just about always/most of the time

Americans think their distrust of the federal government and each other is a problem that gets in the way of solving issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of U.S. adults who believe ...</th>
<th>The federal government</th>
<th>Each other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... Americans’ trust in ___ has been shrinking</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... it is very important that the U.S. improve the level of confidence Americans have in ___</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... low trust in ___ makes it harder to solve problems</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal trust ranges across a spectrum – differences tied to race/ethnicity, education, household income

% of U.S. adults who say

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or most people can’t be trusted?

52% Most can be trusted 47% Most can’t be trusted

Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance or would try to be fair no matter what?

41% Try to be fair 58% Try to take advantage

Would you say that most of the time people try to help others or just look out for themselves?

37% Try to help others 62% Just look out for themselves

Most think key institutional actors behave unethically at least a little of the time

% of U.S. adults who think _____ act unethically ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All or most of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>Only a little of the time</th>
<th>None of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members of Congress</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders of technology companies</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police officers</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military leaders</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local elected officials</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 public school principals</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consistent Liberals & Conservatives Often Live in Different Media Worlds

Consistent liberals...
- name an array of main news sources

- 15% CNN
- 13% NPR
- 12% MSNBC
- 10% NYT

- trust more than distrust 28 of the 36 news sources surveyed

Consistent conservatives...
- are tightly clustered around one main news source

- 47% Fox News

- distrust more than trust 24 of the 36 news sources
Little Overlap in the Sources Trusted for Political News

Within each ideological group, source is overall...

- More trusted than distrusted
- About equally trusted as distrusted
- More distrusted than trusted

Source names in bold have been “heard of” by at least 40% of web respondents.

http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/
Most Americans say political debate has become less respectful, fact-based, substantive

% of U.S. adults who say over the last several years the tone and nature of political debate in this country has become...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More negative</th>
<th>Not changed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

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<th></th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact-based</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on issues</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41% have personally experience online harassment
(66% have witnessed it)

Less severe behaviors

Offensive name-calling 27%
Purposeful embarrassment 22%

Physical threats 10%
Sustained harassment 7%
Stalking 7%
Sexual harassment 6%

Any harassment: 41%

Only less severe behaviors: 22%
Any of the more severe behaviors: 18%
Most Americans say political debate has become less respectful, fact-based, substantive

% of U.S. adults who say over the last several years the tone and nature of political debate in this country has become...

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<td>35</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How important?

Library to community

- The military: 43% Great deal, 32% Quite a lot
- Small business: 30% Great deal, 33% Quite a lot
- The police: 26% Great deal, 30% Quite a lot
- The church or organized religion: 25% Great deal, 19% Quite a lot
- The medical system: 20% Great deal, 21% Quite a lot
- The presidency: 17% Great deal, 20% Quite a lot
- The U.S. Supreme Court: 15% Great deal, 22% Quite a lot
- The public schools: 11% Great deal, 18% Quite a lot
- The criminal justice system: 11% Great deal, 18% Quite a lot
- Newspapers: 10% Great deal, 15% Quite a lot
- Television news: 11% Great deal, 10% Quite a lot
- Organized labor: 11% Great deal, 10% Quite a lot
- Banks: 9% Great deal, 12% Quite a lot
- Big business: 9% Great deal, 12% Quite a lot
- Health maintenance organizations (HMOs): 8% Great deal, 11% Quite a lot
- Congress: 6% Great deal, 7% Quite a lot
People’s trust in various sources of information

- Information from local public library: 40% a lot, 38% some
- Info from health care providers: 39% a lot, 44% some
- Info from family and friends: 24% a lot, 58% some
- Info from government sources: 18% a lot, 43% some
- Info from local news organizations: 18% a lot, 54% some
- Info from national news organizations: 17% a lot, 48% some
- Info from financial institutions: 14% a lot, 54% some
- Info on social media: 3% a lot, 31% some
Facts
Americans see made-up news as a bigger problem than other key issues

% of U.S. adults who say ___ is a very big problem in the country today

Drug addiction 70%
Affordability of health care 67%
U.S. political system 52%
Gap between rich & poor 51%
**Made-up news/info** 50%
Violent crime 49%
Climate change 46%
Racism 40%
Illegal immigration 38%
Terrorism 34%
Sexism 26%

“Many Americans Say Made-Up News is a Critical Problem That Needs to be Fixed”
Americans see made up news as detrimental to the country’s democratic system

% of U.S. adults who say made-up news and information has a **big impact** on ...

- **68%** Americans’ confidence in government
- **54%** Americans’ confidence in each other
- **51%** Political leaders’ ability to get work done


“Many Americans Say Made-Up News is a Critical Problem That Needs to be Fixed”
Republicans and Democrats say they can’t agree on ‘basic facts’

On important issues facing the country, most Republican and Democratic voters ... (%)
Republicans and Democrats more likely to see opinion statements as factual when they favor their side

% who classified each factual statement as factual

Note: Independents not shown. Republicans and Democrats significantly differ on all statements.
“Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News”
Republicans and Democrats more likely to see opinion statements as factual when they favor their side

% who classified each *opinion statement* as *factual*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>+9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy is the greatest form of government</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion should be legal in most cases</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Independents not shown. Republicans and Democrats significantly differ on all statements except for “Democracy is the greatest form of government.”


“Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News”
26% of Americans have had false information posted about them

% of U.S. adults who have had untrue information about them posted online

- All adults: 26%
- Ages 18–29: 46%
- 30–49: 29%
- 50–64: 17%
- 65+: 9%

Character or reputation: 17%
Relationship or sexual history: 9%
Political views: 6%
Job performance or skills: 4%
Religion: 3%
Health or medical history: 3%
Sexual identity: 3%
Gender identity: 2%

Critical posts get more likes, comments, and shares than other posts

Average number of likes, comments, and shares per Facebook post containing ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Likes</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>Number of Shares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indignant disagreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No disagreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Lines indicate the standard error, an attempt to quantify the uncertainty surrounding each estimate. The “disagreement” and “indignant disagreement” categories are not mutually exclusive: statements that contain indignant disagreement are a subset of those that contain disagreement more broadly.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of data from Facebook OpenGraph API. See Methodology section for details. “Partisan Conflict and Congressional Outreach”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Most say the issue of made-up news will get worse

% of U.S. adults who say the issue of made-up news and information will ___ in the next five years

- Get worse 56%
- Get better 10%
- Stay the same 33%
- No answer 1%

“Many Americans Say Made-Up News is a Critical Problem That Needs to be Fixed”
How much have libraries contributed to their communities?

% of those ages 16+

A lot  Somewhat  A little  Not at all

Helping people decide what information they can trust
- A lot: 37
- Somewhat: 37
- A little: 15
- Not at all: 7

Helping people when they seek health information
- A lot: 36
- Somewhat: 37
- A little: 14
- Not at all: 6

Helping people learn how to use new technologies
- A lot: 31
- Somewhat: 39
- A little: 14
- Not at all: 8

Helping people learn about local events and resources that are available in your community
- A lot: 29
- Somewhat: 39
- A little: 19
- Not at all: 8

Helping people find out about volunteer opportunities and other ways people can make contributions to your...  
- A lot: 24
- Somewhat: 39
- A little: 19
- Not at all: 10

Helping people find jobs or pursue job training
- A lot: 22
- Somewhat: 34
- A little: 21
- Not at all: 14

Helping people when a natural disaster or major problem strikes the community
- A lot: 19
- Somewhat: 37
- A little: 17
- Not at all: 17
How well, if at all, do your local public libraries serve the learning and educational needs of your local community – not just children at schools, but all those of any age who want to learn?

% of those ages 18+

- Very well: 37
- Pretty well: 39
- Not too well: 6
- Not well at all: 4
- Don't know: 12
How well, if at all, do your local public libraries serve the learning and educational needs of you and your family? (% of those ages 18+)

- Very well: 34%
- Pretty well: 36%
- Not too well: 9%
- Not well at all: 12%
- Don't know: 8%
Democracy
Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

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

Less overlap in the political values of Republicans and Democrats than in the past

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

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.
## Country viewed as falling short on a range of widely supported democratic values

% who say each is very important for the U.S. and describes the country very/somewhat well …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>NET Very/Somewhat well</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reps and Dems work together on issues</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected officials face serious consequences for misconduct</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign contributions do not lead to greater political influence</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. is open and transparent</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News organizations do not favor a party</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judges are not influenced by political parties</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights and freedoms of all people are respected</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of political debate is respectful</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>NET Very/Somewhat well</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News organizations are independent of government</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People agree on basic facts even if disagree on politics</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. policies reflect views of most Americans</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views of those not in the majority on issues are respected</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance of power between govt. branches</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are free to peacefully protest</td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military leadership does not publicly support a party</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Party now far exceeds other social divisions

Average divide across 10 political values, by key demographics

Rising ‘antipathy’ toward other political side

Republican attitudes about the Democratic party

Democratic attitudes about the Republican party

Source: Yearly averages

February 2017
Most partisans view the other side as closed minded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Republicans who say Democrats are more ____ than other Americans</th>
<th>% of Democrats who say Republicans are more ____ than other Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed-minded</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpatriotic</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immoral</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintelligent</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://www.people-press.org/2019/10/10/partisan-antipathy-more-intense-more-personal/
More Americans expect partisan relations to get worse than did so after three prior midterms

% who say relations between Republicans and Democrats in Washington will ___ in the coming year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Get better</th>
<th>Stay about the same</th>
<th>Get worse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2018</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2014</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2010</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2006</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most have little or no confidence in political wisdom of the American people

% saying they have ___ of trust and confidence in the wisdom of American people in making political decisions

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 7-14, 2018.
Public is broadly pessimistic about the future of America

When the public looks to the future of the U.S. over the next 30 years, they see...

A country declining in stature on the world stage
- The U.S. will be LESS important in the world: 60%
- The U.S. will be MORE important in the world: 31%

A widening gap between the haves and the have-nots
- Gap between rich and poor will GROW: 73%
- Gap between rich and poor will GET SMALLER: 19%

Growing political polarization
- Country will be MORE politically divided: 65%
- Country will be LESS politically divided: 26%

And they are worried that the country’s political leaders are not up to the challenge
- NOT TOO worried: 10%
- FAIRLY worried: 39%
- VERY worried about the ability of political leaders to solve the country’s biggest problems: 48%
What people say they want/need

Smart allies (diversity really helps)
Improved curators
Proof of authenticity
Transparency
More confidence they can learn and grow
Just-in-time help in decision making
More training on tech use and information literacy
Organizations that will help and protect them
Thank you!

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@pewresearch