

# PUBLIC CONFIDENCE WANES ACROSS THE BOARD

It is important in a free country for its citizens to have faith in their leaders, their institutions and each other. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with challenging the policies and perspectives of elites, or our fellow citizens—it can be quite healthy—but when skepticism turns to cynicism, that is another thing altogether. Recent survey data should give us pause: public confidence is waning, and it is widespread.

In October, Gallup released the findings of three surveys: they sought to measure public trust in the media; public trust in politicians; and trust in the judgment of the American people. The results are disturbing. Likely causes are media bias, lying politicians, and polarization in society, respectively.

The public's trust in the media reached its second lowest point since Gallup started tracking this variable in 1972. Only 36% of respondents said they had a "great deal" or "fair amount" of trust in mass media. Eleven percent of Republicans and 31% of independents trust the media; by contrast, 68% of Democrats do.

Why do 64% of the American people not trust the media, but 68% of Democrats do? Clearly most Americans see a bias that Democrats do not detect. We know from many studies done on the media elite, dating back to Stanley Rothman's work in the early 1980s, that those in command of the major media are overwhelmingly liberal-left in their politics. As a result, what the Democrats see and read mostly confirms their own ideological leanings, so of course they don't see that as a bias. Almost everyone else does.

To cite one example, I ran a Lexis-Nexis search of the number

of times the media used the term “Trump falsely claims” during the past year. When the number tops 10,000 it says, “10,000+.” That was his figure. When Biden’s name was inserted, the figure dropped to 2,200. More likely this reflects the bias of journalists, not the veracity of these men.

Public confidence in politicians hit its lowest mark in 2021, garnering a mere 44%. No one is surprised to learn that politicians lie, but the extent and seriousness of the lies today are extraordinary. When candidates for public office are smeared, and the ones who are responsible for the smearing are lying—and then they get away with it—that hurts public confidence.

When congressmen vote for an infrastructure bill that is over 2,600 pages, and they don’t read it, that lowers public confidence. Worse is when the public learns that only 25% of the goodies in the bill have anything to do with infrastructure. Fighting climate change is one thing, but jamming it into an infrastructure bill is offensive. And why is the infrastructure bill paying for some of Canada’s bridges and highways?

When we are told by politicians that our border is secure, and are then presented with pictures that prove otherwise, that erodes confidence. Similarly, when we are told that trillions of dollars in new spending won’t cost us a dime, we are dealing with more than lies—we are dealing with insult.

When only 55% of the public trusts the judgment of the American people—another new low—that is not a good sign. But given the high degree of polarization in our society, it is to be expected.

We are divided not only along several demographic lines, we are also divided within families. Thanksgiving is a time when ideally family members come together in harmony, but too often these occasions devolve into spats about politics. Expressions

of jealousy among relatives are commonplace during the holidays, but when disagreements about core moral values get nasty, that's hard to mend.

Our society is so polarized that we can't seem to agree that males cannot become females, and vice versa. Yet from the medical profession to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, we are pretending otherwise. We are being told to speak about "pregnant persons," not "pregnant women," as if men can become pregnant. Next we will be told that we can no longer talk about "men who have prostate cancer," adopting instead, "persons who have prostate cancer."

We need to regain trust of the media, but that can't come from us. It must begin with them. The men and women who work in the media, especially in senior positions, have got to stop editorializing the news. We need to get back to the time when there was a clear line between hard news reporting and opinion.

Politicians are not going to stop lying, so voters have to make the first move to regain our trust in them. This means we should stop tolerating lies told by those whom we like, not just those we dislike.

To regain the trust in the judgment of the American people, we need to begin with ourselves. Sniping at family and friends via email, Facebook, and other social media, is a disaster. There is no substitute for in-person interaction when it comes to settling disagreements.

If we don't turn this around, we will find ourselves in a state of mortal distrust. A free society is held together by bonds, and when they fray, we all lose.