The State of American Citizenship 2023

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We are troubled but unsurprised by fresh evidence of American civic decline, evidence that comes from an August 2023 survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Working Group on Good American Citizenship (GoodAmCiv), based at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.[1] At the same time, we're heartened by several rays of hope that penetrate the gloom.

There can be no doubt—it's clear from these data—that large majorities of Americans, regardless of party affiliation, harbor deep distrust regarding the nation's present direction[2] and have little use for its government,[3] its elected officials,[4] or its politics.[5] We also see, once again, that most know very little about the structures and functions of government itself.[6] And—heading into a key national election—we find fresh evidence of partisan differences, sometimes sizable, on a host of issues.

These findings certainly seem to augur poorly for the future and to work against a renewal of good citizenship. Yet at the same time, most Americans are reasonably content with their own lives,[7] the communities in which they live,[8] even the governments of those communities.[9] What's more, many claim to be well-informed about public affairs,[10] to participate in community matters,[11] to believe they have (or could have) influence on important local decisions, and to discuss issues respectfully,

[1] The working group is part of Hoover's new Center for the Revitalization of American Institutions.
[2] Q1
[3] Q52-53
[4] Q49
[5] Q18, 19
[6] Evidence of this "ignorance problem" abounds, including National Assessment data (for school-kids, primarily 8th graders) and a recent survey by the Institute for Citizens and Scholars (for "Gen Z"): https://citizensandscholars.org/focus-areas/accelerate/civic-outlook-of-young-adults/
[7] Q2
[8] Q3
[9] Q54-55
[10] Q15-17, 20, 21
[11] Q4, 7, 14

even when they disagree.[12] Many traditional American values continue to be widely held.[13] Though the term "patriotism" has become contentious among "culture warriors," over four-fifths of survey respondents consider themselves patriotic.[14] And 70% of Americans trust their fellow citizens to make the most important decisions regarding their lives and the nation (though this is in the context of *not* trusting "elected officials" with such important matters.)[15]

Also notable: some of these findings, both worrisome and reassuring, turn out to be stable over time. Designers of the 2023 Hoover/YouGov survey were able to pose several questions that matched (or closely resembled) questions posed to American respondents in the mid-20th Century by Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba and Samuel Stouffer as part of their protracted examinations of civic culture in the U.S. and other countries.[16] Comparing results from beginning to end of that protracted period is often illuminating and sometimes encouraging— matters have generally not worsened and in some cases have improved.

The new (2023) findings come from a representative sample (1642 respondents) of the adult population with a 3 percent margin of error. Demographic crosstabs display gender, age, race, party affiliation,[17] voter registration status and the region in which respondents live.

[12] Q23-25
[13] Q28, 63
[14] Q58
[15] Q49b
[16] Almond and Verba and their colleagues reported their findings in multiple formats over a number of years. We have drawn on those published in 1968 and 1974, but the data hail from 1960 and 1954 respectively. Almond, Gabriel & Verba, Sidney, *The Five Nation Study*. Inter-University Consortium for Political Science Research. 1968; Stouffer, Samuel, *The Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties Study*. Ann Arbor, Michigan. American Institute of Public Opinion Research Center. 1974.
[17] Q 77 asked respondents if "generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a -- Democrat? Republican? Independent? Other? Not Sure?" Only the first three received partisan crosstabs.

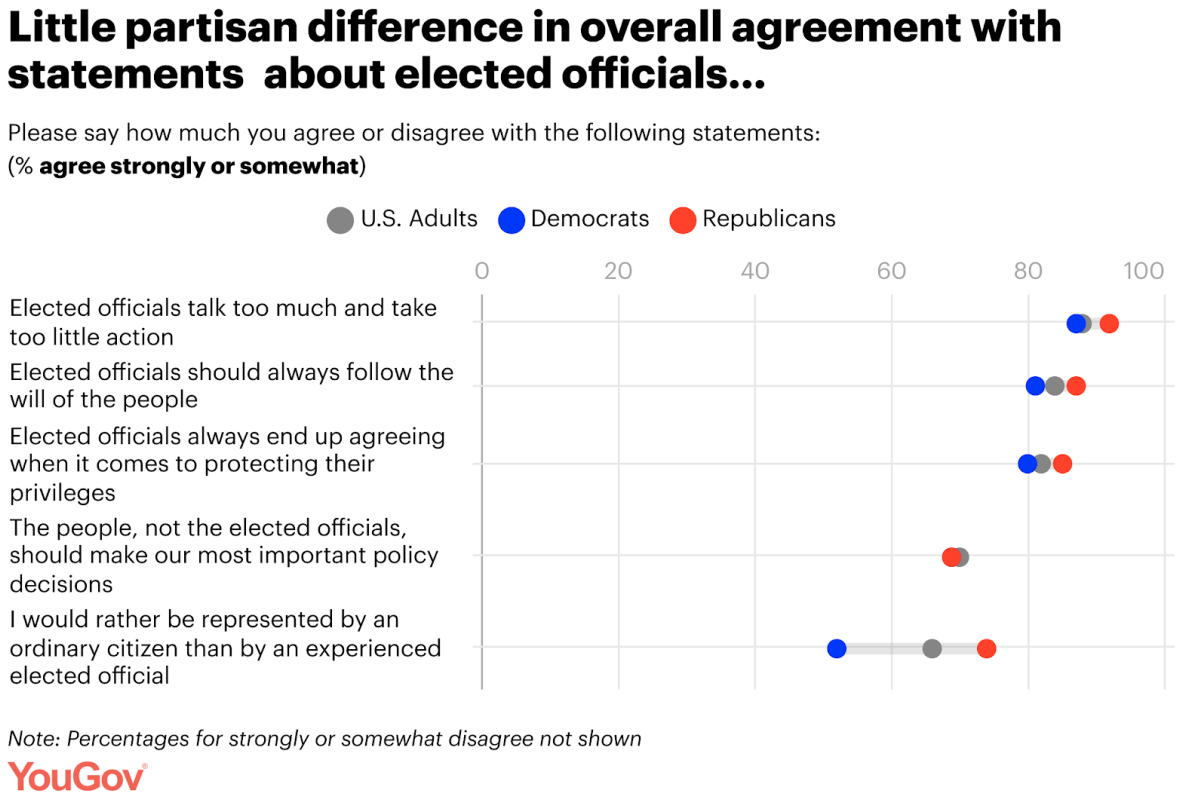
Worrisome Signs

Much of what we learned about present attitudes and understandings must be termed gloomy. Fewer than a quarter of respondents (24%) say the country is moving in the right direction.[18] Barely half (56%) of respondents feel that "law and order" can "describe America today."[19] Only 64% believe that democracy can "describe America today well" — and just 19% said it describes America "very well."[20] More than half (55%) said "politics and government are so complicated that the average person cannot really understand what is going on."[21]

Survey respondents overwhelmingly displayed contempt for elected officials. As shown in Figure 1, almost nine in ten of them (89%), with little variation across party lines, believe that "elected officials talk too much and take too little action." 82% endorsed the statement "elected officials always end up agreeing when it comes to protecting their own privileges." 70% believe "the people, not the elected officials, should make our most important policy decisions." 66% concurred with the statement, "I would rather be represented by an ordinary citizen than by an experienced elected official." On that one, however, we observe a wide partisan spread: just half (51%) of Democrats agreed with that statement compared to three-quarters (74%) of Republicans and 72% of independents.[22]

[18] Black respondents showed less discontent with the direction of the nation than Caucasian or Hispanic respondents. The 33% that said the country was "generally headed in the right direction" substantially exceeded the 23% of White respondents and 27% of Hispanic respondents that agreed. Perhaps more significantly, only 48% of Black respondents said the country was "off on the wrong track" versus 56% of Hispanic respondents and 68% of White respondents.
[19] Q64f
[20] Q64b
[21] Q19
[22] Q49

Figure 1



Asked about their faith in the federal government, only 36% of respondents said it "improves conditions in the United States," though 57% of Democratic respondents agreed with this statement in contrast to 27% of Republicans and 30% of independents. 31% of respondents said "we would be better off without" the federal government, within which we find 13% of Democrats concurring alongside 45% of Republicans and 38% of independents.[23] But that seems not to matter much for many Americans, considering that just 37% of respondents believe the federal government has "a big effect" on "day-to-day life."[24]

44% of respondents said "people say that they have trouble understanding political and governmental affairs" because "those in power don't help people to

[23] Q53
[24] Q52

understand." Yet 39% said people have trouble understanding because they "don't care and don't try" and just 18% said it's because "the problems are too complex."[25]

In line with findings from many other surveys and assessments, YouGov and Hoover found widespread ignorance about basic civics and American history. Barely half of respondents (52%) knew the term length of a U.S. Senator[26] and not quite half (48%) correctly identified the president who led the country through World War I.[27] While a robust 79% correctly chose that the "rule of law" means "no one is above the law," younger respondents identified this less than older ones: only 66% of respondents ages 18-29 answered correctly versus 96% of respondents 65+ who did.[28]

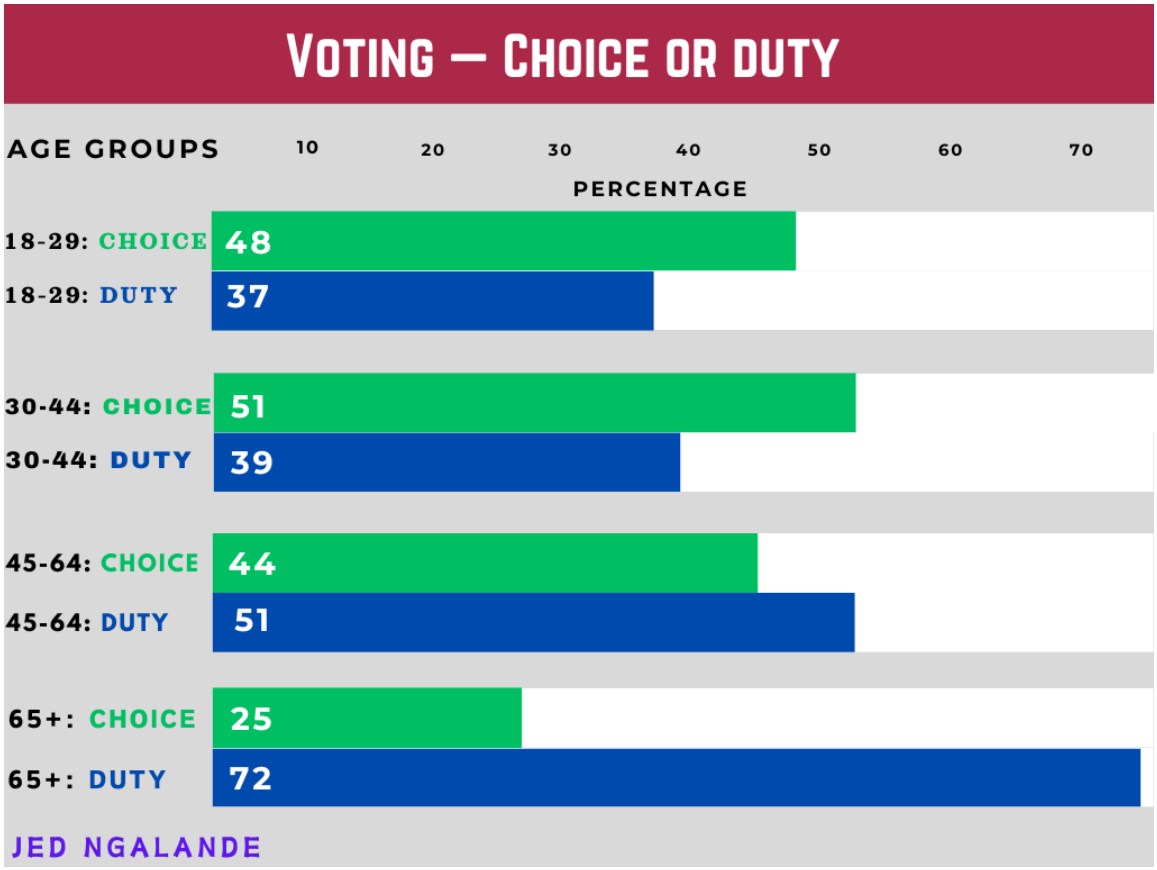
Age Differences

Similar age discrepancies arise throughout the survey data. The older Americans are, the more they seem to know, whether that additional knowledge dates back to their formal schooling or has been acquired from life experience. By sizable margins, respondents aged 65 and older correctly answered every civics-and-history knowledge question more often than younger respondents. Signs of generational decline also emerged in answers to whether their "school prepared [them] to be a good citizen." 72% of 65+ respondents said yes to that question, but only 50% of 18-29 year-olds concurred.[29] As for personally following national, international and local affairs,[30] 18-29 year-olds were least likely to do so. That's the only age group where a majority (52%) say they do not "follow politics and public affairs" much or at all.[31] This, however, is consistent with the durable fact that younger Americans tend to be less politically involved—and less apt to vote. In the present survey, as we see in Figure 2, a strong plurality of 18-29 year-olds (48%) and an outright majority of 30-44 year-olds (51%) said voting is a choice rather than a duty. Only 37% of 18-29 year-olds and 39% of 30-

[25] Q22
[26] Q74
[27] Q72
[28] Q73
[29] Q65
[30] Q16,17,20,21
[31] Q15

44 year-olds termed voting a duty, compared with 51% of 45-64 year-olds and a 72% supermajority of 65+ year-olds who view it that way.[32]

Figure 2



This is consistent with, for example, a recent survey of "Gen Z" by the Institute of Citizens and Scholars) on which two-thirds of young respondents said they're registered to vote but not quite half intend to vote in 2024, a far smaller proportion than in the population as a whole.[33]

[32] Q12

[33] https://citizensandscholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Citizens-Scholars-Civic-Outlook-of-Young-Adults-in-America-Executive-Summary.pdf

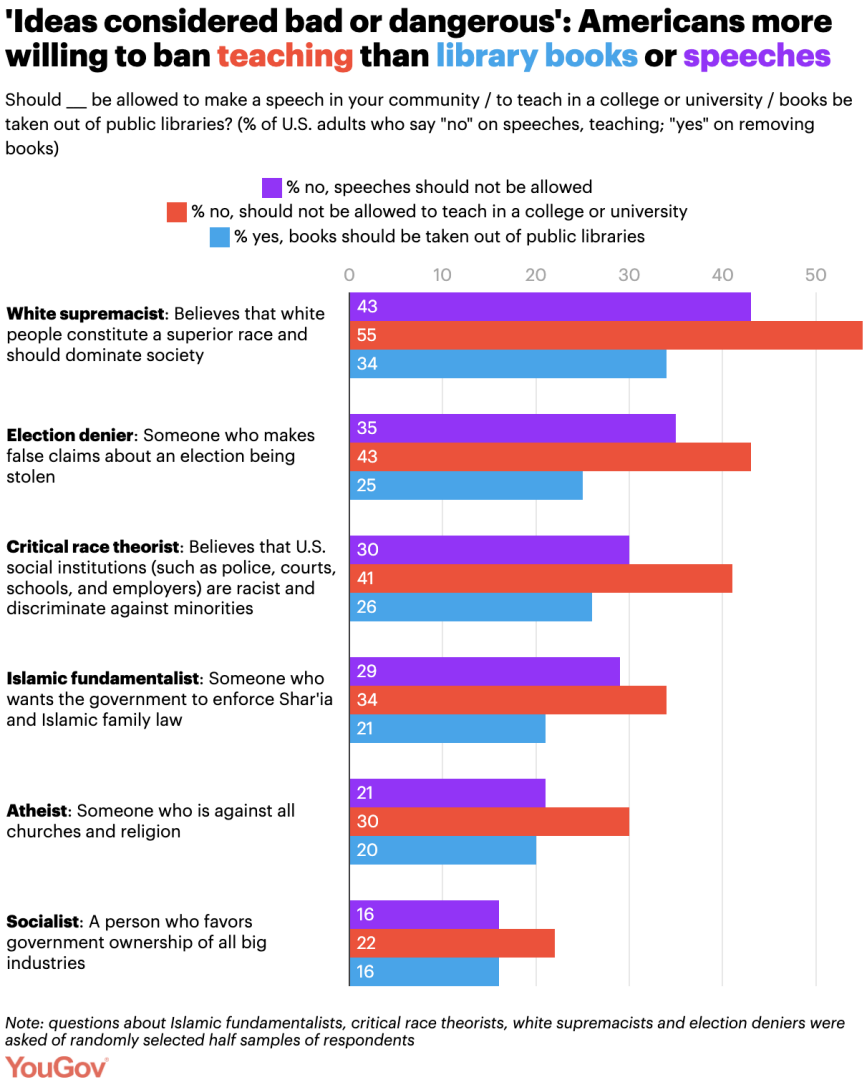
Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression—a hot topic these days--was the focus of several survey questions. We learned that 70% of respondents believe that "some people do not feel as free to say what they think as they used to" or "hardly anybody feels as free to say what they think as they used to" with little variation across demographic lines.[34] 45% of respondents personally feel "less free" to "speak their mind than they used to."[35]

At the same time, many appear comfortable with limiting the expression of others, at least others who espouse controversial views. The survey asked whether such individuals should be banned from making speeches in the community or teaching at a university and whether their books should be removed from a library. Figure 3 displays the responses.[36]

[34] Q26
[35] Q27
[36] Q30-47

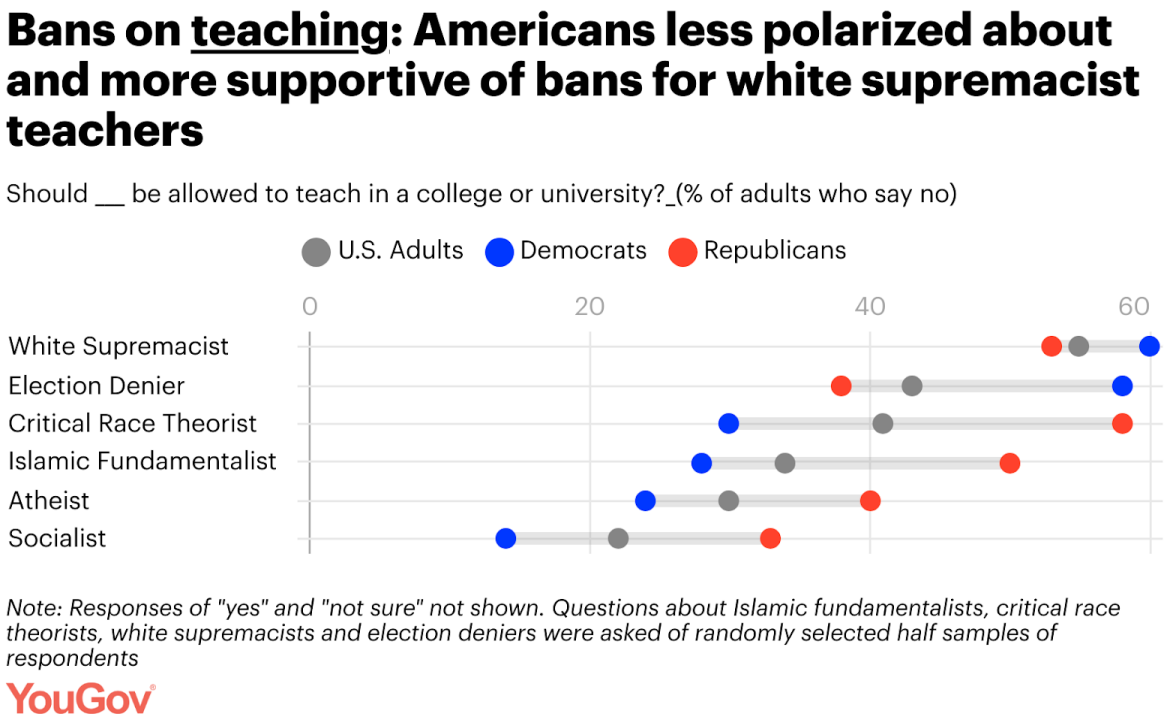
Figure 3



Older Americans (65+) proved the most tolerant of controversy, with "willingness to ban" rising as age levels declined: 18-29 year-olds appear to be least tolerant.

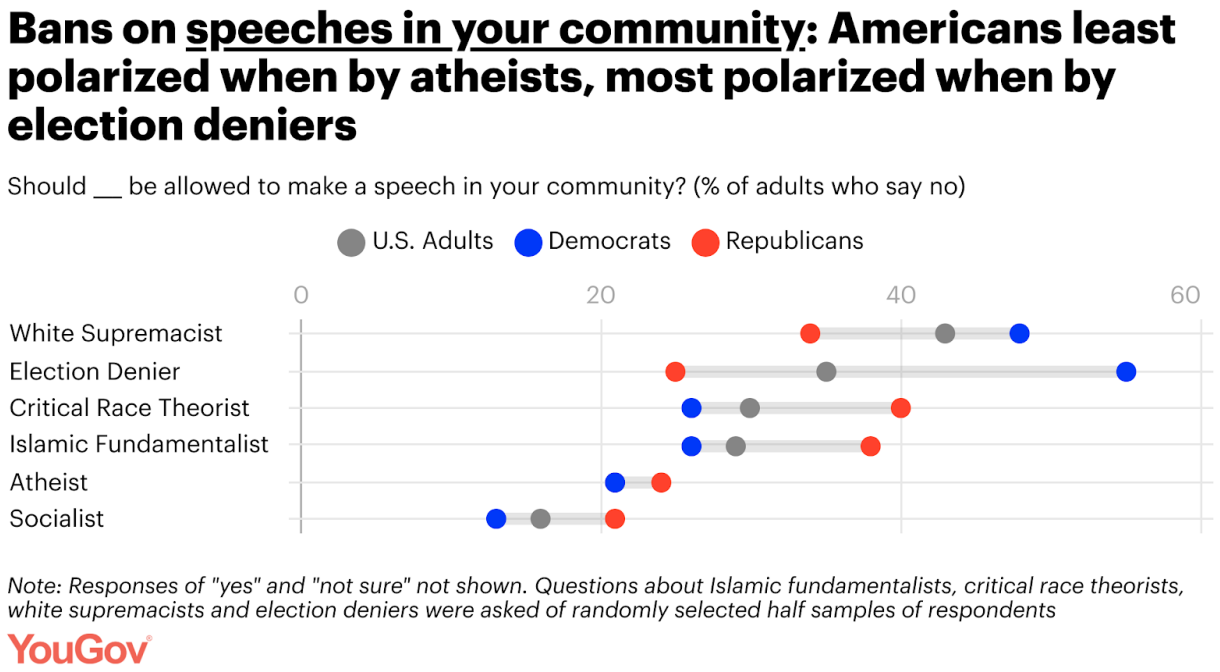
When these responses are tabulated by party affiliation, as we see in Figure 4, some differences appear. Asked about teaching in colleges and universities, Americans are generally most supportive (55%) of banning white supremacist teachers but on this one there's not a great difference between Democrats (60%) and Republicans (53%). Partisan gaps widen on the other examples, however, ranging from a 28-point difference on bans on teaching by critical race theorists to 16 points on teaching by atheists.

Figure 4



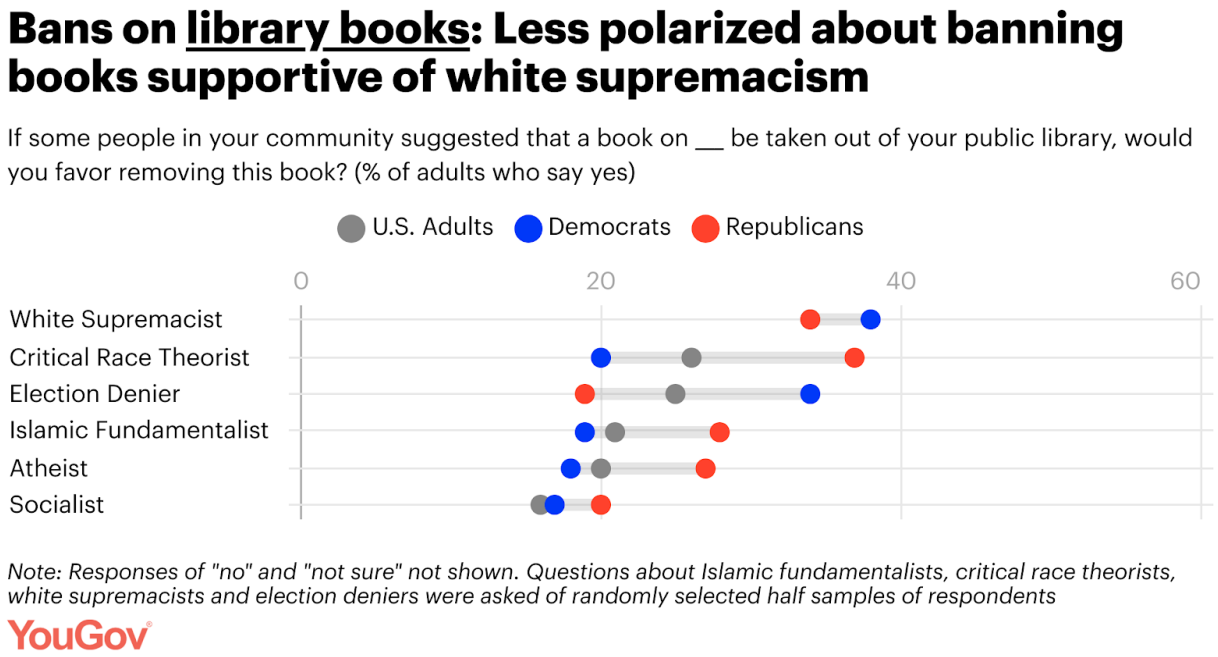
The pattern changes regarding potentially offensive speech "in your community." As shown in figure 5, we see the least polarization on banning such speeches by atheists (those who "are against all churches and religion). Just 21% of all adults support such a ban, with little difference between Republicans (24%) and Democrats (21%). At the other extreme, perhaps unsurprisingly, we see the greatest polarization regarding bans on speeches by election deniers (those who make "false claims about an election being stolen"): a 30-point gap between Democrats (55%) and Republicans (25%).

Figure 5



Turning to banning controversial books from libraries, we find less support than for suppressing other expressions of offensive speech. As shown in Figure 6, Americans are most inclined to remove from libraries books "saying that whites are superior to other races" (34% support), with relatively little difference between Democrats (38%), Republicans (34%) and independents (30%). By contrast, Americans are least disposed to remove books favoring "government ownership of all big industries" (16%). Here, again, we see relatively little difference between Democrats (17%), Republicans (20%) and independents (12%).

Figure 6



Perhaps most notably, when asked "would there be anyone who you would ban from making a speech in your community," 61% of respondents said yes and another 17% answered with a "maybe." Only 22% said "no" — though 65+ year-olds again proved most tolerant, this time by a small margin. (26% said there is no speech they would ban.) And while—perhaps surprisingly—Democratic partisans proved more inclined to ban some form of controversial speech — with 70% saying there would be someone they "would ban from making a speech" — 60% of Republican partisans and 56% of independents also agreed with this sentiment.[37]

On the Brighter Side

Americans are more optimistic about their personal lives and communities than about the nation at large. 58% of survey respondents said they were "happy" with the way their lives are going, and an additional 14% said they were "very happy."[38] A 68%

[37] Q48
[38] Q2

supermajority rated their communities as "excellent" (18%) or "good" (50%) places to live, with only 7% calling them "poor."[39] Hearteningly, partisan differences proved minimal on these metrics.[40]

Many Americans also appear to feel empowered, at least potentially empowered, when it comes to influencing what goes on locally. 77% of respondents say they understand local issues "somewhat well" (49%) or "very well" (28%)[41] while 90% believe they can have an impact in "making their community a better place to live." 19% say they can make a "big impact," 39% a "moderate impact" and 32% a "small impact."[42]

63% of respondents said it was somewhat (43%) or very likely (20%) that they would attempt to influence a local law they considered "very unjust or harmful."[43] Furthermore, 36% of respondents reported having previously tried "to influence a local decision"[44] and the same percentage said they had "worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in (their) community" at least once.[45] An identical percentage said they have "attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs" at least once.[46] Yet only 6% of respondents reported having "run for or served in public office," with negligible differences between Democrats and Republicans or between white and black Americans.[47]

Values

Traditional values are fairly robust across the population as a whole. The YouGov survey asked how important "are the following values to you personally": "hard work,"

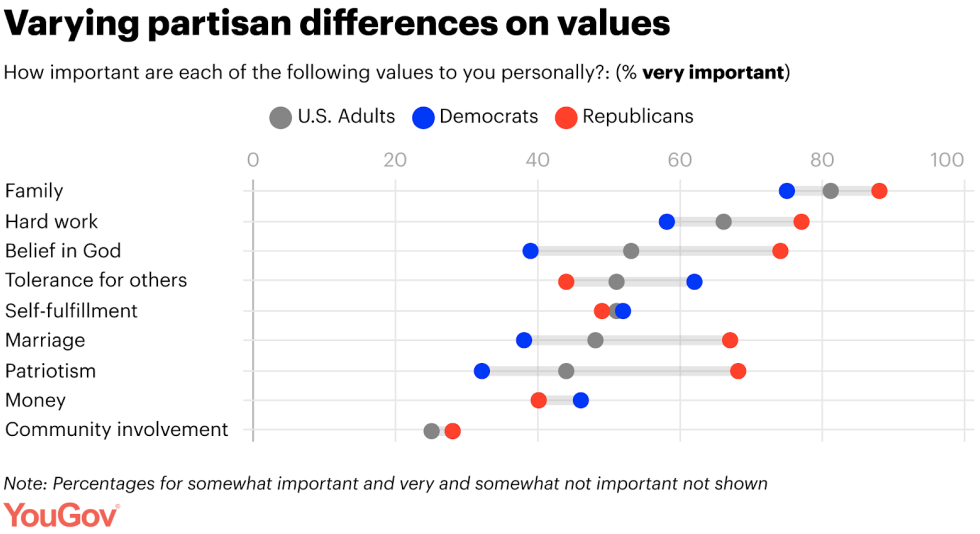
[39] Q3
[40] A number of community surveys by PolCo inquiring into people's "trust in government" show similar levels of satisfaction. https://info.polco.us/the-national-community-survey
[41] Q21 Asked a similar question (Q20) about their understanding of *national* issues, 22% of respondents said "very well" and 49% said "somewhat well," for a total of 71%.
[42] Q4
[43] Q5
[44] Q7
[45] Q14f
[46] Q14h
[47] Q14j

"tolerance," "marriage," "self-fulfillment," "community-involvement," "patriotism," "belief in God," "family" and "money." Family got top billing, with 81% of respondents terming it "very important." (As we see in Figure 7, community involvement came in last.) Note, though, that valuing family does not necessarily correlate with valuing marriage, which turns out to be less important a value across the board but particularly, it would seem, among Democrats.[48]

Partisanship does not loom large on some other general values. For example, Democrats and Republicans give nearly identical "very important" ratings to "self-fulfillment" (52% vs 49%) and the difference on the "very important' rating of "money" is only six points (46% for Democrats, 40% for Republicans).

But Republicans rate several values much higher than Democrats, such as "patriotism" (68% vs 32% very important), "belief in God" (74% vs 39%), and "hard work" (77% vs 58%), as well as marriage. On the flip side, Democrats rate "tolerance for others" as very important (62%) more often than Republicans (44%).

Figure 7



[48] Not shown in Figure 7 is also a wide discrepancy among younger Americans—18-29—74 percent of whom highly valued family versus 40 percent who have a similar view of marriage, as per the crosstabs displayed for 28H and 28C respectively.

Patriotism

Despite this term causing some activists and culture warriors to gird for battle, patriotism received solid support among survey respondents. When asked "how patriotic toward the United States would you consider yourself?" 43% reported themselves as "very patriotic" and an additional 40% said they were "somewhat patriotic."[49] Additionally, 23% of respondents said "the U.S. stands above all countries in the world," with another 57% believing "the U.S. is one of the greatest countries in the world."[50]

Asked how frequently they socialize with people holding different political opinions, almost half of respondents (49%) said they do this "very" or "somewhat often."[51]

An encouraging 44% of respondents say they discuss politics with people they disagree with.[52] Within that subgroup, 76% — that is, one third of all respondents — say these discussions are respectful rather than heated.[53] Moreover, Americans want to see this civility achieved in policy debates by elected officials. 65% of respondents believe "elected officials should compromise to get things done" rather than "stick to their principles no matter what."[54]

Characteristics of Good Citizens

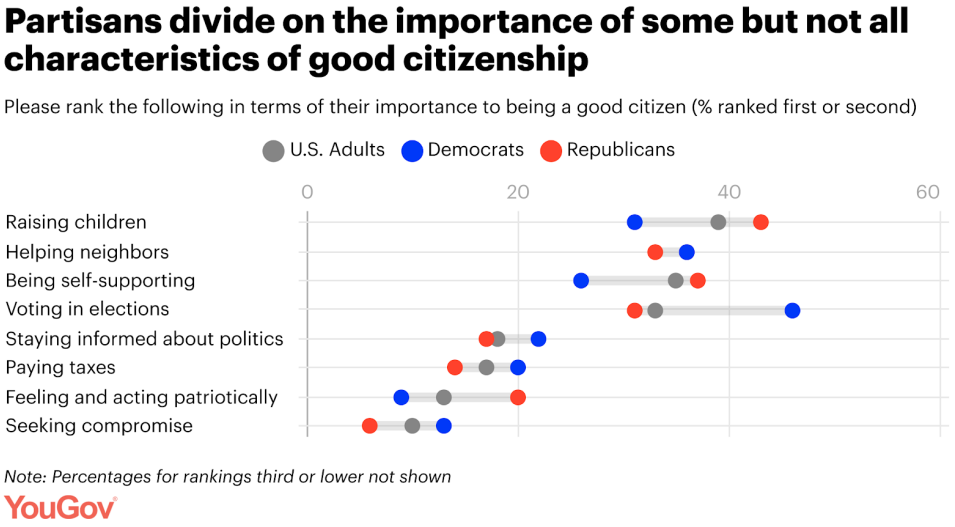
Asked what are the characteristics of "good citizens"—the Working Group's focus—55% of respondents rated "helping neighbors" as one of the three most important qualities of good citizens.[55] 64% of respondents believe it is "very" (19%) or "somewhat" (45%) important for Americans to attend town hall meetings.[56] 65%

[49] Q57
[50] Q59
[51] Q23
[52] Q24
[53] Q25
[54] Q50
[55] Q56
[56] Q29c

believe it to be "very" (20%) or "somewhat" (45%) important to participate in "politics beyond voting."[57] And 72% of respondents reported that it is "very" (29%) or "somewhat" (43%) important for Americans to express political beliefs in general.[58]

As we see in Figure 8, partisanship emerges on many but not all perceived characteristics of good citizenship. For example, Republicans assign greater importance than Democrats to "raising children" (43% vs 31% first or second most important) and "being self-supporting" (37% vs 26%) as well as "feeling and acting patriotically" (20% vs 9%). But Democrats rank voting in elections more highly than do Republicans (46% vs 31%).

Figure 8



Half full or half empty?

Some survey findings—arguably the most thought-provoking—can be viewed either as positive signs or as problems or—most likely—both at once.

As noted earlier, 65% of respondents said "elected officials should compromise to get things done" while 35% said they "should stick to their principles no matter what." However, while Democratic respondents chose the first option over the second

[57] Q29g
[58] Q29f

79-21, Republican respondents chose it only 53-47.[59] The partisan dynamic flipped when respondents were asked whether "government officials should follow constitutional limitations even if it stops them from doing what's good" or "....should do what's good even if it violates constitutional limits 37% of Democratic respondents said "government officials should do what's good" while just 29% of independents and 26% of Republicans agreed.[60]

Tucked away in those numbers, it seems to us, are important clues to major divisions in the land today as well as to much of the dysfunction we see in Washington. One third of the country seems not to regard "constitutional limitations" as a binding check on government officials—while another third (including almost half of Republicans) would have elected officials "stick to their principles no matter what" rather than compromise to get things done.

Additionally, the fact that just 11% oppose displaying the American flag causes one to breathe a sigh of relief regarding the vast majority but also to scratch one's head over those who would conceal the flag.[61] Similarly, while 69 percent of respondents feel that democracy is "very important" for America to have, almost a quarter (23%) view it only as "somewhat important" (23%). Observe, too, that the importance of democracy rises with age levels: Just 58% of 18-29-year-olds view it as "very important" compared with 83% in the over-65 population.[62]

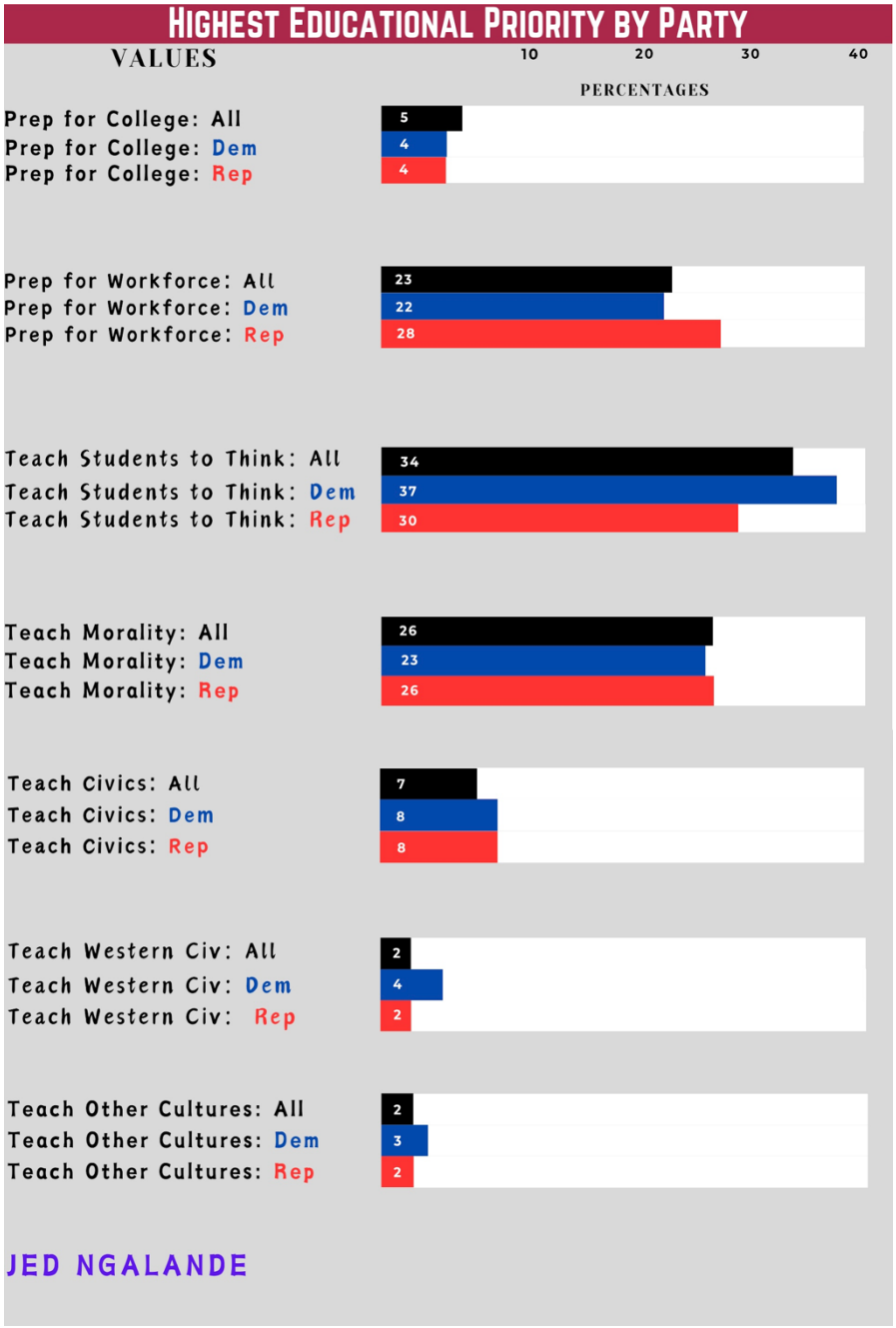
Schooling

We asked about curricular priorities for schools going forward, mindful of the weak foundation that many respondents–especially younger ones–have in civics and history. Given seven potential categories of what schools could prioritize, a plurality of 34% said they should give top billing to teaching students "how to reason and think

[59] Q50
[60] Q51
[61] Q62
[62] Q63b

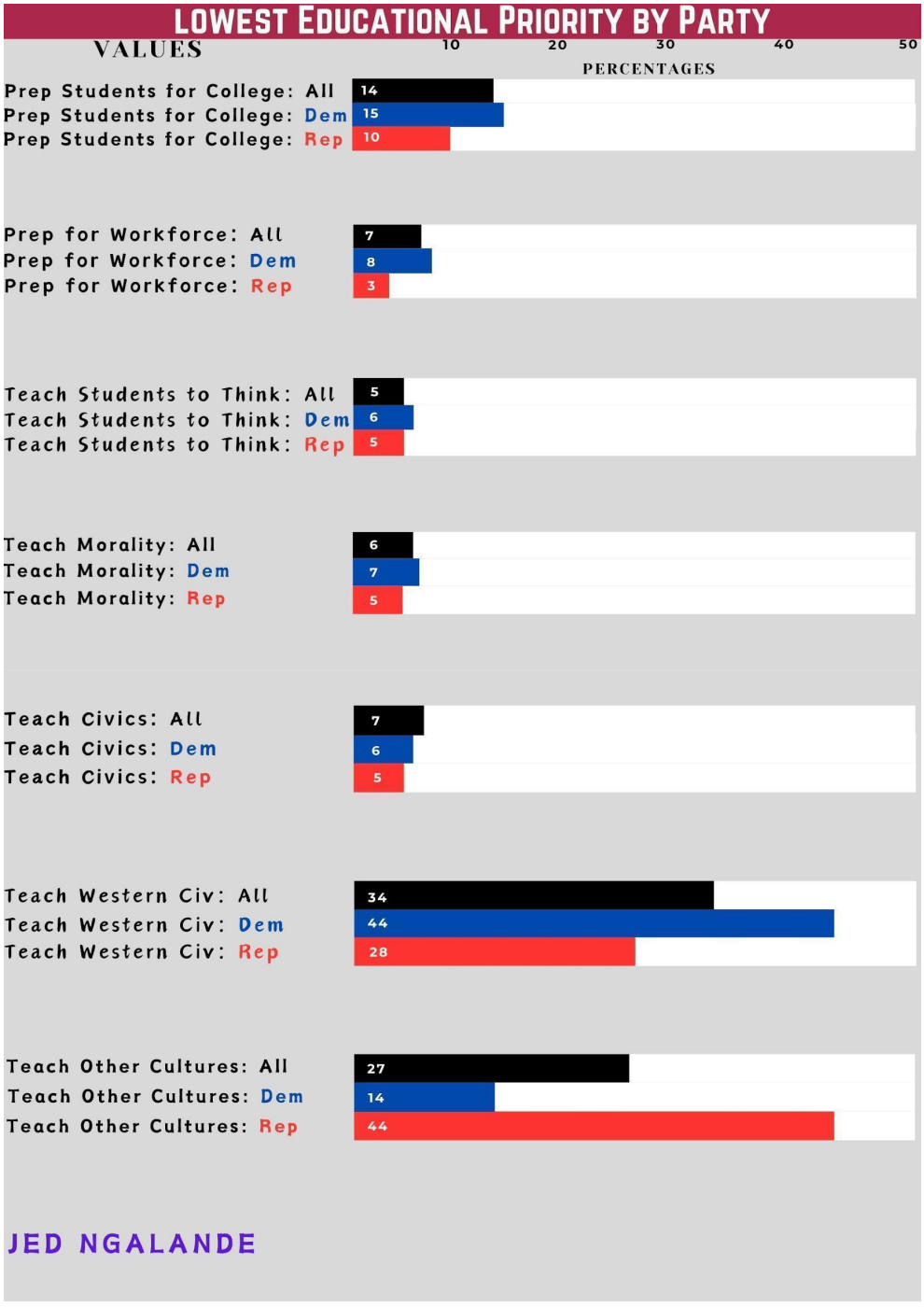
well."[63] As we see in Figures 9 and 10, partisan differences are small on most priorities. But perhaps reflective of today's politically charged "culture wars," when asked about the "lowest priority," 44% of Democratic respondents chose "leading ideas and great books of Western civilization" while 44% of Republicans chose "introduc(ing) students to other cultures."[64]

Figure 9



[63] Q67
[64] Q68

Figure 10


LOWEST EDUCATIONAL PRIORITY BY PARTY
VALUES
10
20
30
40
50
PERCENTAGES
Prep Students for College: All
Prep Students for College: Dem
Prep Students for College: Rep
14
15
10
Prep for Workforce: All
Prep for Workforce: Dem
Prep for Workforce: Rep
7
8
3
Teach Students to Think: All
Teach Students to Think: Dem
Teach Students to Think: Rep
5
6
5
Teach Morality: All
Teach Morality: Dem
Teach Morality: Rep
6
7
5
Teach Civics: All
Teach Civics: Dem
Teach Civics: Rep
7
6
5
Teach Western Civ: All
Teach Western Civ: Dem
Teach Western Civ: Rep
34
44
28
Teach Other Cultures: All
Teach Other Cultures: Dem
Teach Other Cultures: Rep
27
14
44
JED NGALANDE

Better or Worse Over Time?

As noted at the outset, certain questions on the 2023 Hoover/YouGov survey were identical or similar to questions posed by Stouffer in 1954 and Almond and Verba in 1960, creating an opportunity to compare Americans' views and attitudes today with those from more than half a century earlier.

When asked, for instance, how closely do they follow public affairs, we find little change. 27 percent of respondents in 1960 said they follow "political and governmental affairs" "regularly," 53% chose "from time to time," and 24 percent said "never." In 2023, 28 percent said they "follow politics and public affairs" "very closely," 37 percent opted for "somewhat closely," 24 percent for "not much" and ten percent for "not at all."

Identical questions on the two surveys asked: "Thinking of the important national and international issues facing the country—how well do you think you can understand these issues." In 1960, just seven percent said "very well," compared with 22 percent in 2023, and 15 percent back then said "not at all" versus just 5 percent on the recent survey. We've no way to know how deep or accurate is anyone's understanding, but at least in terms of believing that they do or don't understand current affairs, one can reasonably say there's been some progress.[65]

Faced with the assertion that politics and government are too complicated for the "average person"[66] to really understand, fewer than half (45 percent) of today's respondents disagreed ("somewhat" or "strongly"); in 1960, that was the case for 32 percent. We may reasonably infer, once again, that present-day Americans are more apt to think that they and their fellow citizens are capable of making sense of what's going on in the public square.

Both surveys asked similar "empowerment" questions, posing the hypothetical situation that one's local government was considering a law or regulation that the

[65] Between "very well" and "not at all," the two surveys differed in the choices given to respondents: 1968 had three "middle" answers ("moderately well," "depends on the issue," "not so well") while 2023 offered two (*somewhat well" and "not very well." Adding them together, 1968 found a whopping 77 percent of respondents "in the middle" compared with 69 percent in 2023.

[66] In 1968, it was "average man."

respondent viewed as unjust or harmful and therefore set out to change. How likely, in their own view, would they be to succeed in effecting such a change? In 1960, just over one quarter (27%) judged their prospects to be "very" or "moderately" likely. In 2023, the parallel question received "likely" responses from 44 percent of those surveyed.

Related questions inquired into the likelihood that, faced with such a situation, respondents would attempt to do something about it. Here, once again, we see progress—from 48 to 63 percent.

Asked whether they had, in fact, "ever done anything to try to influence a local decision", the earlier survey got affirmative answers from just 17 percent; the later one drew such a response from almost twice as many (36 percent).

Another pair of similar questions posed an analogous situation at the national level: Congress considering a law that the respondent viewed as unjust or harmful. "How likely is it you would actually try to do something about it?" Here the likelihood of action was somewhat lower but still greater than before. 1960 found 38 percent "very," "moderately," or "somewhat" likely to take action; 2023 found 57 percent "very" or "somewhat" likely.

In other realms, however, we see big declines. Perhaps the biggest emerges in responses to a question asking whether "the activities of the national government tend to improve conditions in this country or would we better off without them." Respondents in 1960 were bullish about Uncle Sam an impressive 92 percent of the time. In 2023, by contrast, just 36 percent opted for "they improve conditions" while a nearly equal number (31%) said "we would be better off without them"—and a full third (33%) said they didn't know.

We also see a sharp decline in replies to parallel questions about whether the activities of local government "tend to improve conditions in this area or would we better off without them." Here, too, a big majority (93 percent) chose improvement back in 1960; in 2023, not quite half (48 percent) thought likewise—more than found merit in the national government, to be sure, but no ringing endorsement.

The 1954 survey[67] asked similar questions about censorship as our 2023 survey—about respondents' willingness to hush controversial speakers or remove controversial books from libraries. Here, the over-time picture is somewhat blurry, but so too is the sense of what's controversial.

Asked about atheists ("somebody who is against all churches and religions") speaking in one's community, 34 percent of 1954 respondents said no, this should not be allowed, versus 21 percent in 2023. Should such a person be allowed "to teach in a college or university," the earlier survey found 70 percent saying no, compared with just 30 percent who would ban them in 2023. But is this a change in views about freedom of expression or a change in views about religion and atheism?

Similar questions about persons favoring government ownership of "all big industries" yielded a different result, with today's respondents less willing to have them give a speech in the community (63 percent vs. 84 percent) but also more likely to not be sure (21 percent "not sure" in 2023 compared with 2 percent "not know" in 1954.) Again, though, does this signify change in views regarding socialism or free expression—or both?

Gallup has tracked some of the same issues over half a century and several of its findings dovetail with ours. Most notably, while "trust and confidence" in the federal government has fluctuated between 1972 and 2023, when viewed from beginning to end over that period there's been a precipitous decline regarding all three branches and both domestic and international problems. A similar decline in trust and confidence—especially since about 2008—applies to respondents' view of politicians and public officials (the "men and women in political life in this country who either hold or are running for public office.") Sadly, such diminution of "trust and confidence" also afflicts Americans' view of their fellow citizens (in Gallup's phrasing, of "the American people as a whole when it comes to making judgments under our democratic system about the issues facing our country.") And yet—as we see in

[67] Though published in 1974, this survey was conducted in 1954. Stouffer, Samuel, *The Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties Study*. Ann Arbor, Michigan. American Institute of Public Opinion Research Center. 1974.

the YouGov survey—people continue to have a high level of trust in their local (and their state) governments.[68]

Takeaways

The Hoover-YouGov survey yields ample cause for concern about the present state of citizenship in the United States as well as clear evidence of tough challenges facing the nation and the polity, while also delivering some grounds for optimism about prospects for improving the situation. Our ability to make comparisons with Americans' views on a few of these issues half a century ago similarly produced both encouraging and worrying shifts. Five impressions appear most compelling to us.

- We're long accustomed to Americans being more bullish about that which is closer and more familiar than that which is more distant—"my Congressman, not Congress in general," "my child's school, not U.S. schools as a whole"—and that remains true today, though less so than in 1960. Compared with the national government, in particular, we're struck by the relative robustness of respondents' feelings about their own communities and their place within those communities, including what appears to be a reasonably strong sense of engagement and personal efficacy regarding the affairs of those communities. After all, much of good citizenship is local—one's neighborhood, one's local municipality, the institutions, organizations and relationships that one actually engages with from day to day—and to the extent that that part of American citizenship is reasonably strong, the country is not doomed—and there's a base to build on.
- Though Americans' weak grasp of U.S. history and the rudiments of civics is unquestionably a problem, it's not insoluble. A host of worthy efforts and organizations are now working hard to deal with it, and progress on this front can surely be made via the right combination of education policies, curricular improvements and accountability obligations for students, educators, schools and

[68] Gallup Organization. *The Gallup News Poll Social Series: Governance*. Washington, D.C.: Gallup Organization. September 2023.

colleges. We understand that some topics and issues in this realm are overheated and subject to political grandstanding but a number of surveys, including this one, reveal wide swaths of agreement across the polity regarding what kids should learn in school (and, we hope, in college) about civics and history.[69]

- A recurrent strand in our findings is that younger Americans are more turned off, less engaged, less patriotic and less knowledgeable than their parents' and grandparents' generations. That's a problem, to be sure, though one that appears to have existed for a long time, but it also suggests the possibility of "targeted" solutions, whether it's getting out the vote, encouraging participation in community affairs, sophisticated "messaging," perhaps enlisting the right role models and spokespersons. (It might also suggest a different crop of political candidates, men and women more likely to attract and inspire a younger generation.)
- Partisan differences turned out to be large on a number of survey questions but surprisingly small on others—and despite the quarrels that so often seem to divide us, many Americans socialize and (respectfully) discuss politics with people they don't necessarily agree with. Once again, what happens "locally" could turn out to be more influential than the yelling matches we see on television and in social media.
- Though we see little love for elected politicians, we find broad-based interest in those politicians finding ways to compromise in pursuit of the public interest. That's a lot to ask nowadays, but it does suggest a substantial reservoir of flexibility and common sense within the electorate itself.

[69]See for example, It's Time for a Ceasefire in the Civics Wars and The Need to Reboot and Reemphasize Civics Education Has Never Been Greater.