

# 2018 AMERICAN INSTITUTIONAL CONFIDENCE POLL



THE HEALTH OF  
AMERICAN DEMOCRACY  
IN AN ERA OF HYPER  
POLARIZATION

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The results of a new poll conducted this summer reveal that the central dynamic in American politics today is not so much a drift away from support for democracy as a drive toward a state of hyperpolarization. Americans' satisfaction with the current state of our democracy and confidence in our institutions is driven by party affiliation rather than race, education level, age or any other demographic characteristic.

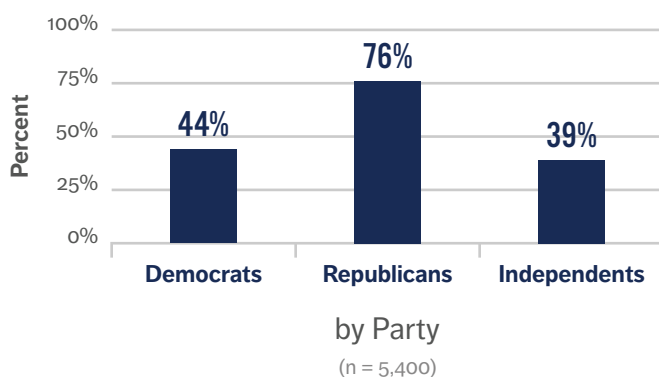
This summary highlights major findings from the 2018 American Institutional Confidence Poll, which was conducted online by the firm YouGov using a sample size of 5400 people from June 12 to July 19, 2018.

For more information, visit [bakercenter.georgetown.edu/AICPoll](http://bakercenter.georgetown.edu/AICPoll)

## KEY FINDING NO. 1

### Satisfaction with our democracy depends on political party

In our survey, far more Republicans (76%) report being “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with how democracy in the U.S. is working than Democrats (44%) or Independents (39%).



More than one-third of each party (38% of Democrats and 39% of Republicans) think the opposing party never has the best interests of the country at heart. And 35% of Democrats and 32% of Republicans perceive the other party as a very serious threat to the United States and its people.

**“People are voting based on their hatred of other groups rather than facts or competence. As a result they have elected people who are incompetent and extremely dangerous...”**

A 63-YEAR-OLD LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC  
WOMAN FROM PENNSYLVANIA

**“The Democrats ... hate Trump so much they support the country failing economically or hav[ing] a nuclear war rather than work with the Republicans to pass new immigration and health care legislation. In cases like this, President Trump should be able to force through legislation he supports ... as long as he has 51 votes.”**

A 53-YEAR-OLD CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN  
WOMAN FROM CONNECTICUT

## KEY FINDING NO. 2

### Confidence in our institutions is driven by party affiliation

Similar to satisfaction with democracy, the survey finds that confidence in institutions is largely driven by party affiliation. Republicans and Democrats express very different levels of confidence in some institutions.

The **executive branch** is the institution in which Democrats have the least confidence, while Republicans rank it the fourth highest.

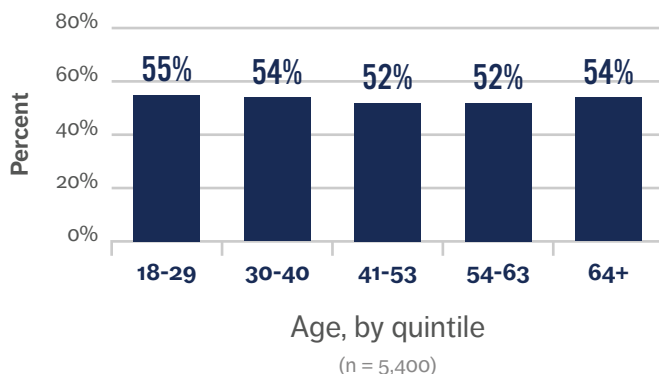
The **press** is the institution in which Republicans have the least confidence, while it is the seventh highest institution in which Democrats have confidence.

Democrats have much higher confidence in the **FBI** and in **colleges and universities** than Republicans.

### KEY FINDING NO. 3

## Demographic characteristics other than partisanship do not strongly correlate to satisfaction with democracy

Contrary to a common narrative in the media, there is no age gap in Americans' satisfaction with democracy. While young people (ages 18-29) are more open to alternatives to democracy and more pessimistic about who benefits from it than people of other age groups, they are no less satisfied with democracy.



Also, white Upper Midwesterners without a college degree, who were swing voters for Donald Trump in 2016, do not have less confidence in institutions. And they have only slightly less satisfaction with democracy than most other demographic groups or the nation overall.

### KEY FINDING NO. 4

## Social media use is not strongly associated with dissatisfaction with democracy and national institutions

The connection between how frequently Americans use social media and their levels of satisfaction with democracy or confidence in institutions is slight. To the extent that there is a relationship, it is non-users of social media who have the lowest level of satisfaction with democracy.

We also find that the connection between frequency of social media use and belief in disinformation about the 2016 election varies between the two major political parties.

Among **Democrats**, those who use social media most frequently were most likely to answer two true-or-false questions about the 2016 election incorrectly.

Among **Republicans**, greater frequency of social media use did not correlate to a greater likelihood of answering these questions incorrectly.

Yet while there is no correlation with social media usage, we do find a large partisan gap: 65% of Republicans, versus 11% of Democrats, incorrectly deny that “U.S. intelligence agencies agree that Russians attempted to sway the 2016 election in favor of Donald Trump.”