

# New political survey finds US is increasingly 'two nations in one'

October 13 2016, by Jane Kelly

---

A new University of Virginia [survey](#), conducted by the Gallup organization, reveals Americans' deep dissatisfaction with the country's political culture, personified by the leading candidates for president, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

Commissioned by UVA's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, the "2016 Survey of American Political Culture" is based on 1,904 telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of American adults. It provides a granular picture of some of the underlying dynamics of American political culture today – dynamics researchers say are likely to shape democratic life through the early years of the 21st century.

Speaking Wednesday at Gallup headquarters in Washington, James Davison Hunter, the institute's executive director, said the unprecedented public disaffection exhibited during the election campaign season reflects a deep fault line between the general American electorate and the political establishment.

He said this chasm is marked by mistrust of government, cynicism toward leaders and personal alienation. Hunter cited survey findings that confirm these levels of disaffection:

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the American public has little to no confidence that the government in Washington will actually solve the problems it sets its mind to solve.

- Vast majorities of those polled believe that most politicians are more interested in winning elections than in doing what is right, and that while the system of government is good, the people running it are incompetent.
- Significant majorities agree most elected officials don't care what they think and that they don't have any say about what the government does.

In addition, two-thirds of those polled said they have little or no confidence that people in government will tell the truth. That is up six percentage points from a similar survey conducted by the institute in 1996.

The new poll also exposes deepening worries about the United States' two-party system. Sixty-four percent of those polled believe that what American really needs is a new political party, because the current two-party system isn't working. More than half of all Democrats (53 percent) and Republicans (56 percent) hold this view, but three out of four (74 percent) of the growing number of independents are especially adamant about this.

Hunter said this year's election brings into relief that America is, in some ways, two nations within one. "Each nation has its own values and visions of what the country represents," he said. "Trump and Clinton are highly symbolic, like flags around which each nation, or tribe, mobilizes."

To be sure, policy differences between supporters of one candidate and supporters of another exist in every election cycle. What is different this year, the institute's survey reveals, is the breadth and depth of those differences – the cultural chasm separating the Trump and Clinton nations.

Also appearing Wednesday at Gallup headquarters, Carl Desportes Bowman, the survey research director, enumerated several other findings of the poll.

- Seventy-three percent of all Americans believe the economic system is rigged in favor of the wealthiest Americans.
- Sixty-two percent of the American public agrees that the leaders in American corporations, media, universities and technology care little about the lives of most Americans.
- Nearly three out of four Americans (73 percent) believe that political correctness is a serious problem in our country, making it hard for people to say what they really think.

Bowman said that surprisingly, some of the disaffections enumerated in the survey results are less pronounced among minorities. For example, when asked to rate their confidence in the United States government, Bowman said both blacks and Hispanics exude greater confidence in government.

"In general, whites are twice as likely as blacks and Hispanics to be very distrustful of the government on a variety of measures," he writes in the poll analysis.

In the analysis conclusion, the researchers write, "The candidates in the 2016 election have become potent symbols of different dispositions toward the world and different aspirations for its future. These dramatic differences point to the decline of a shared civic culture that provided a basis for compromise, set limits on partisan disagreements and made possible the broad governing consensus that historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called the 'vital center.'"

Provided by University of Virginia

Citation: New political survey finds US is increasingly 'two nations in one' (2016, October 13)  
retrieved 25 April 2024 from  
<https://phys.org/news/2016-10-political-survey-increasingly-nations.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.