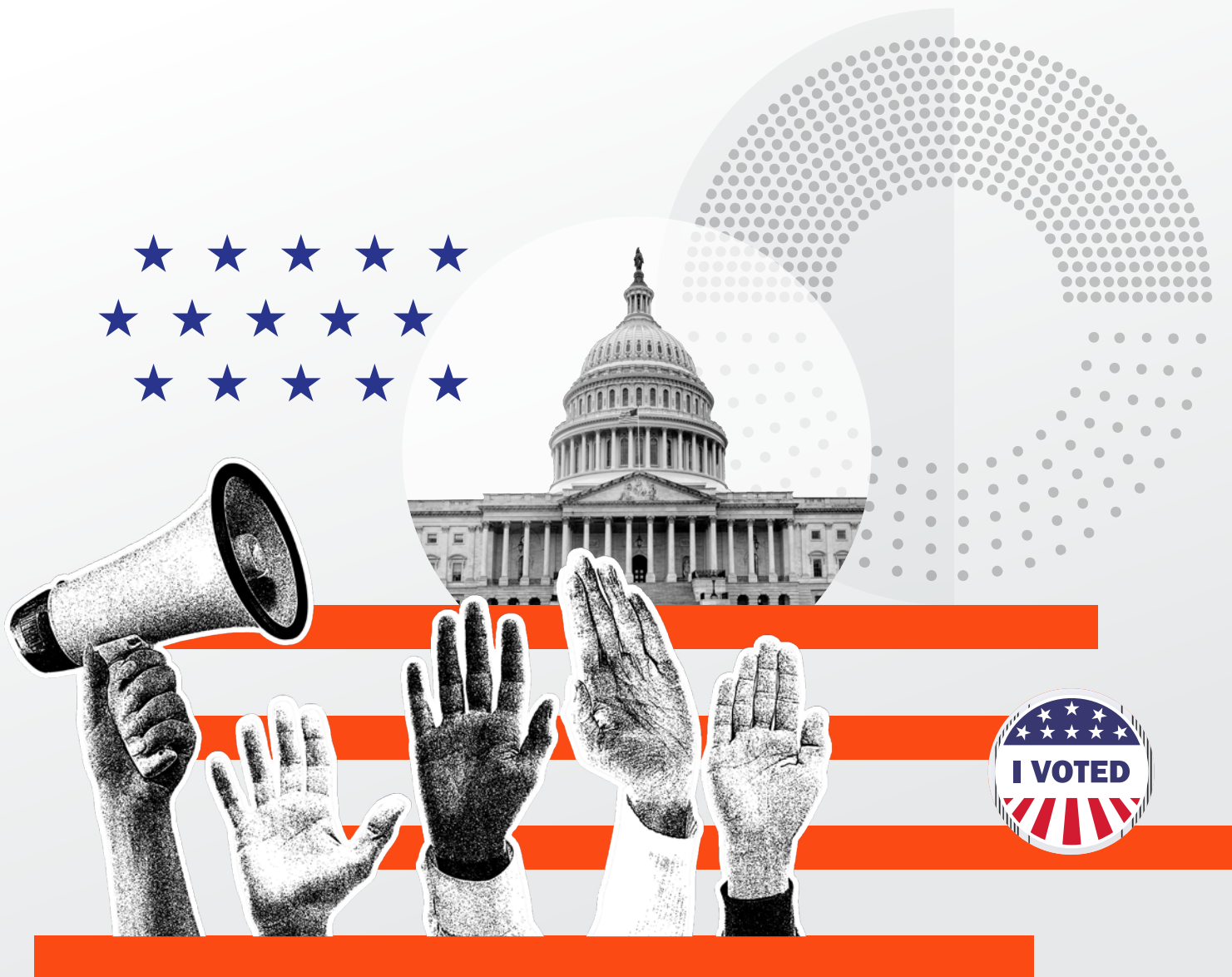


Democracy for All Project

Is Democracy Working?

NOVEMBER 2025



COPYRIGHT STANDARDS

The views and opinions expressed by contributors to our communications are made independent of their affiliation with the Charles F. Kettering Foundation and without the foundation's warranty of accuracy, authenticity, or completeness. Such statements do not reflect the views and opinions of the foundation, which hereby disclaims liability to any party for direct, indirect, implied, punitive, special, incidental, or other consequential damages that may arise in connection with statements made by a contributor during their association with the foundation or independently.

This document contains proprietary research, copyrighted and trademarked materials of Gallup, Inc. Accordingly, international and domestic laws and penalties guaranteeing patent, copyright, trademark and trade secret protection safeguard the ideas, concepts and recommendations related within this document.

The materials contained in this document and/or the document itself may be downloaded and/or copied provided that all copies retain the copyright, trademark and any other proprietary notices contained on the materials and/or document. No changes may be made to this document without the express written permission of Gallup, Inc. and the Charles F. Kettering Foundation.

Any reference whatsoever to this document, in whole or in part, on any web page must provide a link back to the original document in its entirety. Except as expressly provided herein, the transmission of this material shall not be construed to grant a license of any type under any patents, copyright or trademarks owned or controlled by Gallup, Inc. or the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. Gallup® is a trademark of Gallup, Inc.

All other trademarks and copyrights are property of their respective owners.

Table of Contents

2 Introduction

4 The Current State of American Democracy: Commitment and Institutional Performance

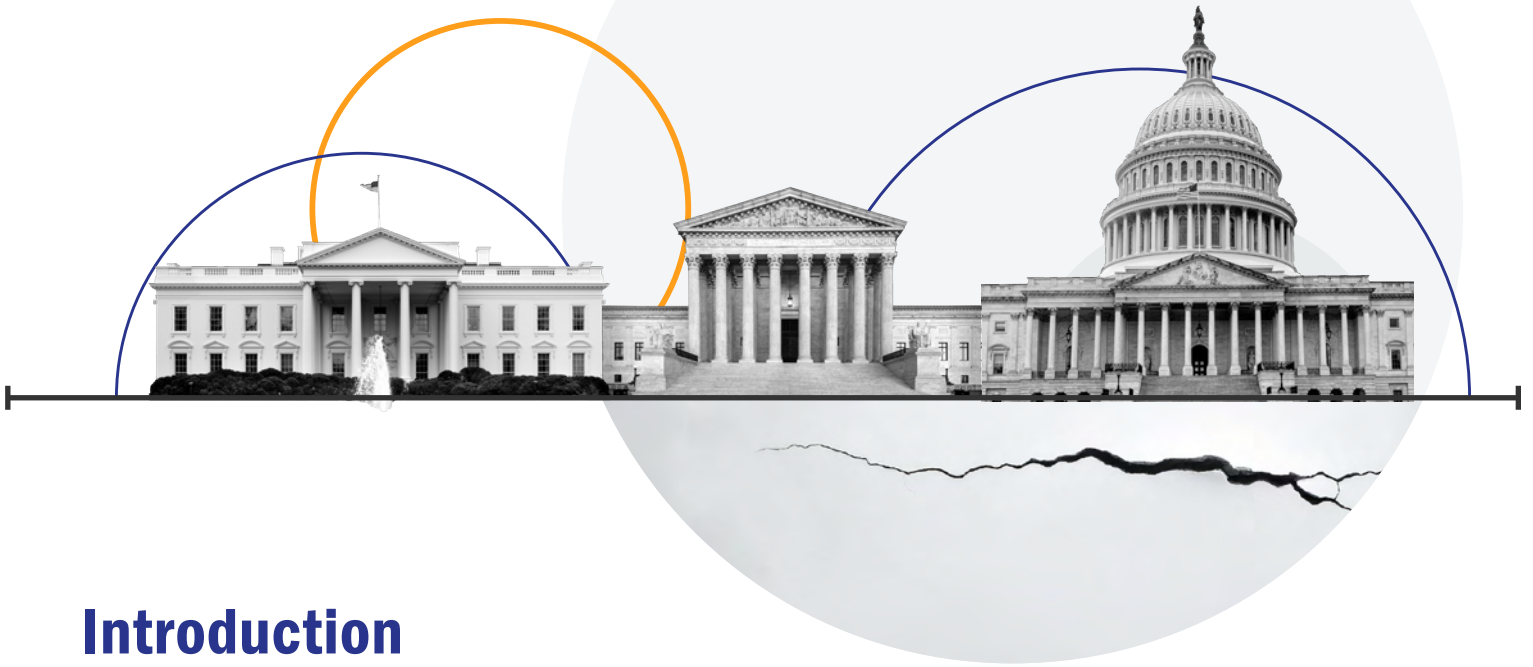
12 Democratic Participation

16 Democratic Representation

20 Consensus and Disagreement

24 Conclusion

25 Survey Methodology



Introduction

Nearly 250 years after “The Great Experiment” in U.S. democracy began, most Americans still agree on core democratic principles. However, Americans’ satisfaction with U.S. democracy is about half the level it was four decades ago.

In this environment, Gallup and the Charles F. Kettering Foundation have initiated the Democracy for All Project. The project is the most extensive annual study of how Americans experience democracy. Unlike previous efforts that focus more narrowly on institutions or global comparisons, this study centers on the American public’s perspectives. The survey of more than 20,000 U.S. adults fills long-standing gaps in how the nation measures the health of its democracy by assessing Americans’ expectations for democracy, how well the system is meeting those expectations and how Americans participate in the democratic system, all while elevating voices that are often unheard in democratic practice.

The Democracy for All Project reflects the shared commitment of Gallup and the Kettering Foundation to advancing evidence-based approaches that build a thriving democracy that works for all. This report is the first in a series of two from the 2025 survey.

THE INITIAL FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- 1 Two-thirds of Americans agree that democracy is the best form of government, while 23% are neutral. One in 10 Americans disagree with the notion that democracy is the best form of government.
- 2 Still, Americans overwhelmingly share several democratic values and attitudes. These include concepts such as: That everyone, regardless of their views, has the right to free, non-violent expression, that having a mix of races, religions and cultures benefits the nation and that elected leaders should compromise to get things done.
- 3 In contrast to support for democracy and democratic principles, a majority of Americans (51%) say that U.S. democracy is performing poorly, twice the percentage who believe it is performing well (24%). Another 25% are muted in their response, saying democracy is performing just “okay.”
- 4 Dissatisfaction with democratic performance is especially apparent when Americans evaluate the various institutions, processes or systems that support U.S. democracy. No more than one-third say any of these are performing well, and majorities say Congress, the criminal justice system and equal protection under the law are doing poorly.
- 5 Evaluations of U.S. democracy are strongly linked to people’s assessments of their own financial situation. Also, people with weak attachments to the political system, the nation or their communities — as well as younger and less-educated Americans — tend to be more pessimistic about democracy.

To thrive, democracy needs four essential elements, which we consider the pillars of democracy. These include: Citizens who are committed to democratic ideals and principles, government and societal institutions that support democracy, opportunities for people to participate in the democratic process and government outcomes that ensure the people’s interests are heard and reflected in public policies.

Four key pillars of democracy:



DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENT

Do the American people value democracy and want to preserve it above all?



DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Do the people feel that the basic systems and processes of democracy are working?



DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Do the people feel that they have opportunities to be involved in democracy?



DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION

Do citizens feel the government represents the will and best interests of the people?

This report consists of four sections. The first covers the first two pillars of democracy, commitment and institutional performance. The second covers the democratic participation pillar. The third covers the democratic representation pillar. The fourth section identifies areas from across the various pillars where Americans show widespread agreement, and where they disagree most.



SECTION 1

The Current State of American Democracy: Commitment and Institutional Performance

This section covers two pillars, democratic commitment and institutional performance. Americans' views of democracy as a system of government and how it is operating today are not always aligned. The overlap — or lack thereof — in these attitudes indicates key tensions in society.



Do the American people value democracy and want to preserve it above all?



Do the people feel that the basic systems and processes of democracy are working?

Key Findings:

- Overall, two-thirds of Americans agree that democracy is the best form of government. Only one in 10 disagrees, while the remainder are neutral.
- However, half of Americans (51%) say that U.S. democracy is doing poorly or very poorly right now, compared with 24% who believe it is doing well.
- Americans' feelings about their current economic position are a key factor in their commitment to democracy and their perceptions of how it is doing. Education and age are also strongly linked to how people view U.S. democracy.
- Less than half of Americans believe that their fellow citizens are committed to having a strong democracy.
- Even fewer, a little over one-quarter (27%), agree that current political leaders are committed to having a strong democracy.
- Most Americans don't think the basic institutions of democracy, including government institutions, the people's role and equal justice for all, are working right now.

Democracy Resonates With Most Americans

Two in three Americans strongly agree (32%) or agree (35%) that democracy is the best form of government, indicating a personal commitment to maintaining democracy. Another 23% are ambivalent, saying they neither agree nor disagree. One in 10 says they strongly disagree (5%) or disagree (5%) democracy is the best form of government.

Democracy Gets a Poor Performance Review

The commitment to a democratic form of government exists even though Americans are critical of how the system is performing. Only 24% of U.S. adults say democracy is doing very well (8%) or moderately well (16%) right now, while 51% say it is doing very poorly (28%) or moderately poorly (23%). The remaining segment opt for a middling rating, saying U.S. democracy is doing “okay.” These poor evaluations are consistent with prior Gallup data finding [low satisfaction](#) with U.S. democracy in recent years, marking a departure from readings in the 1980s and 1990s when majorities were satisfied.

Party Affiliation Tied to More Positive Perceptions of Democracy

Party affiliation is closely associated with Americans’ orientation to democracy. Solid majorities of Americans who identify with a political party (strongly or not) or are independents with a party leaning believe democracy is the best form of government. Importantly, Americans who strongly identify with either party are the most likely to endorse a democratic form of government.

Those with no party ties — non-leaning independents — are less positive about democracy. Forty-three percent agree it is the best government system, but 43% are neutral and 13% reject the idea.

Perceptions of democratic performance are also related to party attachments, but in a different manner. These opinions are strongly influenced by the match between a person’s preferred party and the party in control of the government. Right now, with the Republican Party controlling the federal government, Republicans are more inclined than Democrats and independents to say U.S. democracy is performing well. However, partisanship has its limits, as only the staunchest Republicans give U.S. democracy an overall positive review. Other Republicans are about as likely to say democracy is performing poorly as to say it is performing well. Large majorities of Democrats believe democracy is doing poorly, as do 58% of non-leaning independents.

FIGURE 1
Democratic Commitment and Performance by Party Affiliation

	Democracy is best form of government			How democracy is performing		
	% Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree	% Well	% Okay	% Poorly
Strong Republican	73	17	10	57	26	15
Republican, not strong	65	25	10	28	38	32
Republican-leaning independent	62	21	16	34	38	28
Non-leaning independent	43	43	13	10	31	58
Democratic-leaning independent	70	23	7	4	14	81
Democrat, not strong	67	25	7	6	20	73
Strong Democrat	79	15	6	11	14	75

Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

Democracy Viewed Better by Those With Positive Financial, Life Situations

Views of U.S. democracy are also strongly linked to people's economic situation. Fifty-two percent of the most financially insecure Americans — those who are finding it very difficult to get by on their present income — believe democracy is the best form of government, and only 12% of those individuals think it is performing well. In contrast, those who report they are able to live comfortably on their present income have substantially more positive views of democracy as a form of government and its current performance.

These effects are seen across party lines and are more pronounced than those seen for a person's annual household income. This suggests that other factors beyond income such as household size, debt, local cost of living and other economic conditions influence how people think about their finances.

Broader measures of life evaluation are also strongly linked to attitudes about democracy. However, the connection is slightly weaker than the link seen with people's financial perceptions.

Among most key subgroups, disagreement that democracy is the best form of government is similar to the 10% national average. However, more than one in four adults who are very dissatisfied with the quality of local conditions and services in their area (including housing, schools, healthcare, food and childcare) hold this dim view of democratic government. This emphasizes the importance of quality of life considerations and the meeting of basic needs to how people view government systems.

FIGURE 2

Democratic Commitment and Performance by Financial and Life Situation

		Democracy is best form of government			How democracy is performing		
		% Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree	% Well	% Okay	% Poorly
FINANCIAL SITUATION EVALUATION	Living comfortably on present income	76	16	8	32	22	45
	Getting by on present income	65	25	10	22	27	50
	Finding it difficult on present income	56	32	11	14	26	59
	Finding it very difficult on present income	52	33	14	12	23	63
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$120,000+	76	16	7	29	21	50
	\$60,000-\$119,999	69	21	10	25	24	50
	\$36,000-\$59,999	61	28	11	20	27	52
	Less than \$36,000	54	33	12	16	29	53
LIFE EVALUATION	Positive/"Thriving"	73	18	8	33	25	41
	Neutral/"Struggling"	62	27	10	17	25	56
	Negative/"Suffering"	58	27	14	10	19	69
SATISFACTION WITH LOCAL SERVICES	Very satisfied	79	14	7	38	22	39
	Satisfied	67	24	9	22	28	49
	Dissatisfied	55	31	13	12	20	67
	Very dissatisfied	46	28	26	12	18	68

Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

Democratic Commitment Higher Among Americans With More Education

Americans at each increasing level of educational attainment are more likely to endorse democracy as being the best governmental system. Less than half of Americans without a high school diploma say this, compared with 75% of those with a bachelor’s degree and 80% of those with a graduate degree. Education is less strongly related to ratings of democratic performance, but graduate degree holders are still 11 percentage points more likely than high school non-graduates to believe the system is performing well.

FIGURE 3
Democratic Commitment and Performance by Educational Attainment

	Democracy is best form of government			How democracy is performing		
	% Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree	% Well	% Okay	% Poorly
Less than high school diploma	48	39	13	17	27	52
High school graduate	56	31	12	22	31	44
Some college	67	24	9	23	24	52
Four-year college degree	75	16	8	24	21	55
Graduate degree	80	13	6	28	19	53

Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

Young Adults Less Committed to Democracy

Evaluations of democracy also vary by age, particularly younger U.S. adults – those aged 18 to 29. Just 53% of young adults believe democracy is the best form of government, while 35% are neutral and 12% disagree. The percentage of young adults who say that democracy is the best type of government is far lower than for other age groups, particularly the oldest Americans who are at 80% agreement. The age groups differ less in their views on whether democracy is performing well right now, though young adults are slightly less positive than older adults.

FIGURE 4
Democratic Commitment and Performance by Age

	Democracy is best form of government			How democracy is performing		
	% Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree	% Well	% Okay	% Poorly
18-29 years old	53	35	12	19	29	52
30-49 years old	63	27	10	24	25	50
50-64 years old	71	20	9	26	24	49
65+ years old	80	12	7	25	21	52

Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

The following figure shows how a larger selection of subgroups evaluate U.S. democracy. Other subgroups that are especially pessimistic about democracy are non-registered voters, those who do not strongly self-identify as “an American,” those who often experience loneliness and those who have neutral views of both political parties – all groups that are detached from the political process. People with positive views of both political parties (about 6% of the population) are among the most inclined to have positive views of democracy.

FIGURE 5
Democratic Commitment and Performance Among Key Subgroups

		% Agree democracy is the best form of government	% Believe U.S. democracy is performing well
TOTAL	All U.S. adults	67	24
GENDER	Men	71	29
	Women	64	19
RACE/ETHNICITY	Asian adults	65	17
	Black adults	63	15
	Hispanic adults	60	22
	Native American/Alaska Native adults	60	25
	White adults	57	26
LGBT STATUS	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender	60	10
VOTER REGISTRY STATUS	Registered to vote	70	25
	Not registered to vote	40	13
VIEWS OF THE DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN PARTIES	Positive toward both parties	81	55
	Highly positive toward one party	76	40
	Moderately positive toward one party	74	24
	Neutral toward both parties	31	9
	Negative toward both parties	59	7
STRENGTH OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION	Strongly identify with a party	76	34
	Do not strongly identify with a party	60	16
IDENTIFY AS AN AMERICAN	Strongly	69	28
	Not strongly	57	4
IDENTIFY AS A MEMBER OF YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY	Strongly	72	30
	Not strongly	60	15
FEEL VALUED AND RESPECTED	Agree	76	39
	Neutral	60	17
	Disagree	64	12
HOW OFTEN FEEL LONELY	Rarely/Never	73	28
	Sometimes	64	20
	Always/Often	58	17

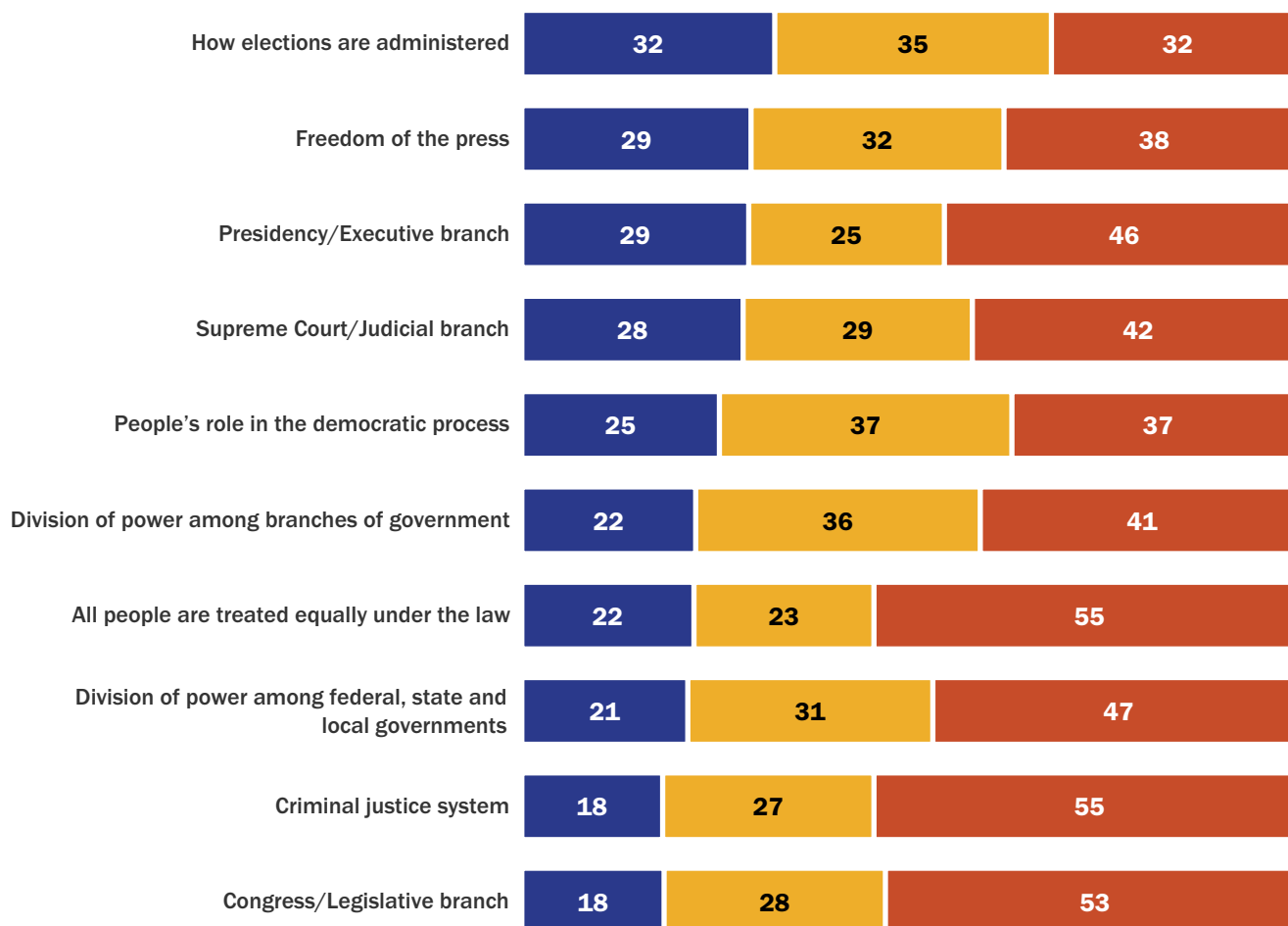
Americans' Evaluations of Democratic Institutions Critically Low

No more than one-third of Americans say any of the basic institutions, systems or processes of U.S. democracy are working right now, with the legislative branch and the criminal justice system receiving the worst reviews. While still low, the way elections are administered receives the best rating, with 32% saying it is working well.

FIGURE 6

Regardless of who is in power, how well do you think each of these institutions or processes is generally working in our democracy?

■ % Very/Moderately well ■ % Okay ■ % Very/Moderately poorly



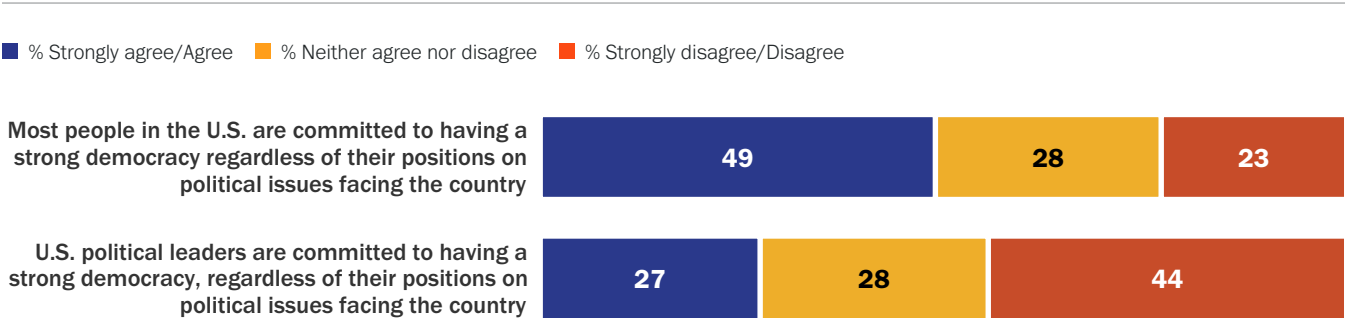
Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

As would be expected given the current balance of power across the three branches of government in Washington, D.C., Republicans are generally more positive about how most of these democratic institutions are performing. However, only the presidency (65%) and Supreme Court (52%) earn majority positive ratings from Republicans.

Americans Question Each Others' Democratic Commitment

Although most Americans are personally committed to the idea of democracy, many doubt the rest of the U.S. public is willing to put politics aside to have a strong democracy. Forty-nine percent strongly agree or agree that most Americans are committed to having a strong democracy. Americans are even more skeptical about the democratic commitment of U.S. political leaders; just 27% strongly agree or agree that their leaders are committed to a strong democracy.

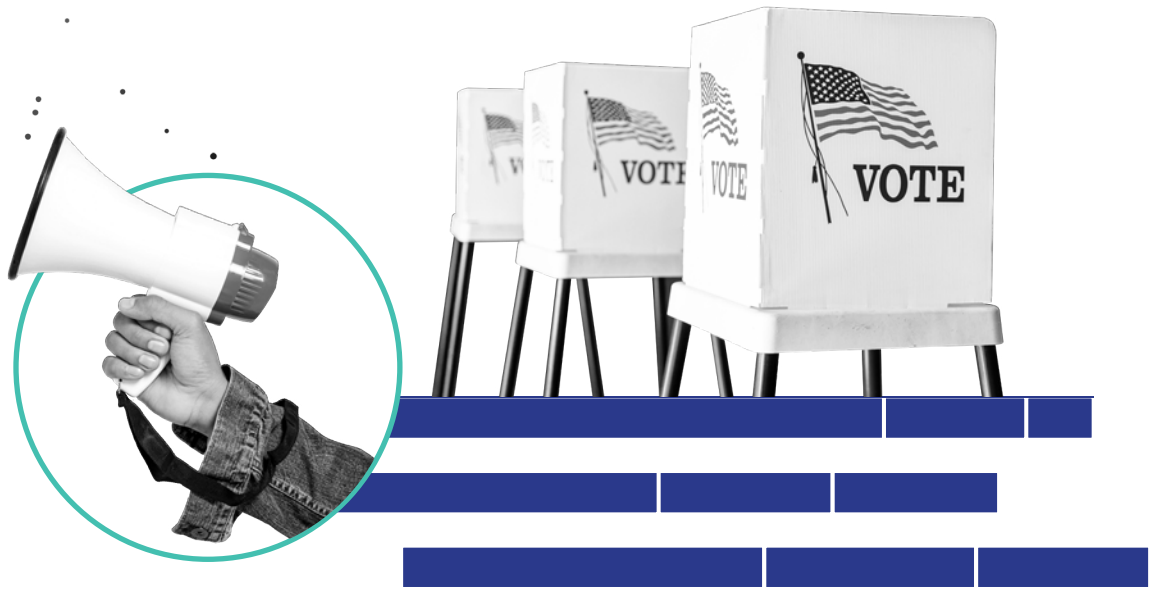
FIGURE 7
Perceived Commitment to Democracy



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

U.S. adults who personally believe that democracy is the best form of government are more inclined to think their fellow Americans are committed to it. Sixty percent of U.S. adults who think that democracy is the best form of government believe that most people in the U.S. are committed to a strong democracy.

Also, those who agree that most Americans are committed to a strong democracy are much more likely to believe that U.S. democracy is performing well right now (34%) compared with those who don't see that same level of commitment from other Americans (14%). As such, boosting Americans' perceptions of democratic performance may require convincing more Americans that their fellow citizens share a commitment to a strong democracy.



SECTION 2

Democratic Participation

This section covers the pillar of democratic participation and how people view their opportunities for making their voices heard, and how that influences their views of democracy more generally.



Do the people feel that they have opportunities to be involved in democracy?

Key Findings:

- Americans are more confident in local procedures making it easy for them to vote and in the effectiveness of voting to influence policy than they are about other forms of democratic participation.
- There are substantial demographic and socioeconomic differences in perceptions of opportunities for democratic participation. People who are younger, less educated, racial and ethnic minorities, those struggling financially and those who are socially isolated express less confidence in their ability to participate.
- Americans who do not perceive clear paths to participate in democratic processes tend to hold less favorable views of democracy — both as a system of government and in terms of its current performance.

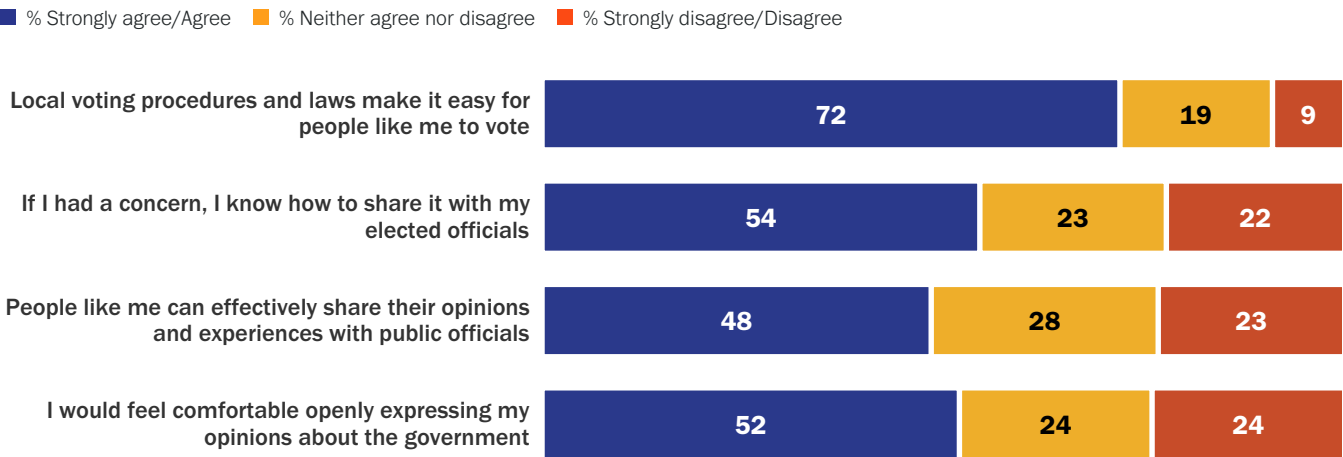
Americans Express Greater Access to Voting Than Other Civic Activities

As a cornerstone of a healthy democracy, voting provides every citizen with the opportunity to influence the policies and leaders that shape their lives. Broad access to the ballot box ensures that democracy remains accountable to the people it serves, fostering trust, engagement and representation across communities.

A majority of Americans (72%) believe that local voting laws and procedures make it easy for people like them to vote and 81% say it is very or moderately effective in influencing government action.

However, fewer Americans feel confident in their ability to engage with elected officials. Only 54% say they know how to share concerns with officials, 48% believe people like them can effectively communicate their views to leaders and 52% feel comfortable expressing opinions about the government or laws, even if those views are unpopular or controversial.

FIGURE 8
Perceived Opportunities for Democratic Participation



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

Some Groups See Less Opportunity for Democratic Participation

Significant demographic differences exist in how Americans perceive their opportunities for democratic participation. Certain groups — such as younger adults, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals without college degrees, those who are not registered to vote and people who do not strongly identify with a political party — are substantially less likely to see clear and accessible pathways to engage in democratic processes.

Socioeconomic divides also shape perceptions of democratic participation. Americans who are just getting by or struggling financially — a group that makes up 63% of the population — are significantly less likely than those living comfortably to agree that they can easily vote, share concerns or express political opinions.

Additionally, perceptions of democratic opportunity are closely tied to feelings of identity and respect. People who do not feel a strong connection to their community or the U.S., or who do not agree the experiences and beliefs of people like them are respected, are more likely to view democratic participation as inaccessible. This suggests a reinforcing cycle: Limited opportunities to participate may contribute to feeling disconnected, undervalued and omitted from the broader democratic process.

FIGURE 9
Perceptions of Democratic Participation Among Key Subgroups

% Strongly agree/Agree

		Local voting procedures and laws make it easy for people like me to vote	I would feel comfortable openly expressing my opinions about the government and laws in this country, even if they are unpopular or controversial
AGE	18-29 years old	59	45
	30-49 years old	70	52
	50-64 years old	76	54
	65+ years old	84	55
RACE/ ETHNICITY	Asian adults	68	40
	Black adults	59	50
	Hispanic adults	63	51
	Native American/Alaska Native adults	71	53
	White adults	78	54
COLLEGE DEGREE	College degree	81	55
	No college degree	68	50
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Living comfortably	82	59
	Getting by	71	49
	Finding it difficult	61	44
	Finding it very difficult	55	43
VOTER REGISTRY STATUS	Registered to vote	76	54
	Not registered to vote	40	34
STRENGTH OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION	Strongly identify with a party	79	60
	Do not strongly identify with a party	68	45
IDENTIFY AS AN AMERICAN	Strongly	76	55
	Not strongly	57	38
IDENTIFY AS A MEMBER OF YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY	Strongly	79	60
	Not strongly	64	41
FEEL VALUED AND RESPECTED	Agree	83	69
	Neutral	66	43
	Disagree	67	41

Perceived Barriers to Participation Impact Views of Democracy

Americans who perceive fewer opportunities to participate in democracy are significantly less likely to say that U.S. democracy is functioning very or moderately well. They are also less inclined to view democracy as the best form of government.

Notably, even those who are uncertain about their ability to participate — neither agreeing nor disagreeing — express similarly negative views as those who actively disagree that they have opportunities to engage. This suggests that perceptions of access to participation are critical to sustaining public confidence in democracy and that even ambiguity about participation can erode this confidence.

FIGURE 10
Democratic Commitment and Performance Based on Perceived Opportunities to Participate

Local voting procedures and laws make it easy for people like me to vote.

	Strongly agree/ Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
% Believe democracy is best form of government	75	44	50
% Believe U.S. democracy is performing well	29	12	8

If I had a concern, I know how to share it with my elected officials (local, state and federal).

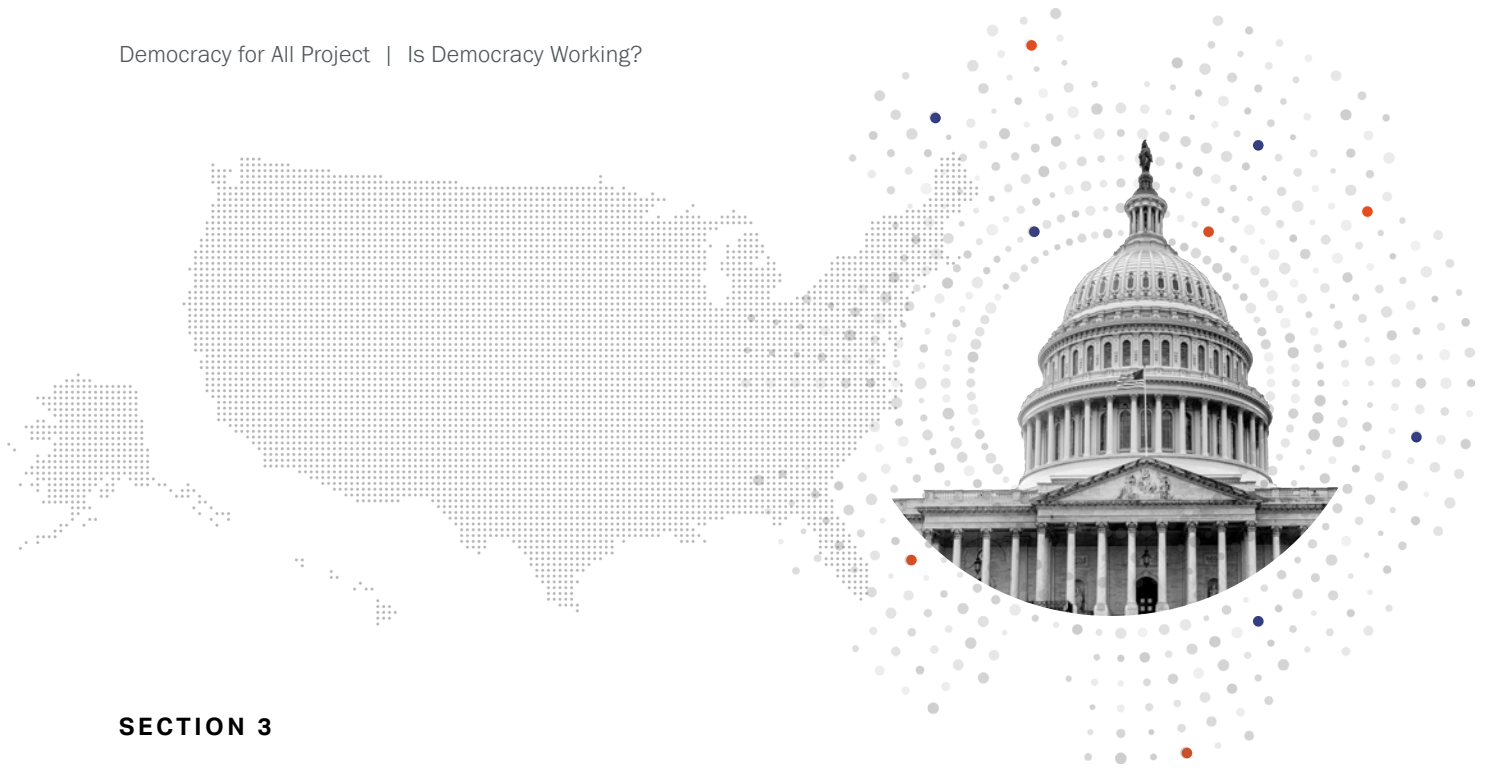
	Strongly agree/ Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
% Believe democracy is best form of government	77	53	58
% Believe U.S. democracy is performing well	31	19	12

People like me can effectively share their opinions and experiences with public officials (local, state and federal).

	Strongly agree/ Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
% Believe democracy is best form of government	78	57	57
% Believe U.S. democracy is performing well	34	17	11

I would feel comfortable openly expressing my opinions about the government and laws in this country, even if they are unpopular or controversial.

	Strongly agree/ Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
% Believe democracy is best form of government	75	55	62
% Believe U.S. democracy is performing well	32	18	12



SECTION 3

Democratic Representation

This section explores the democratic representation pillar. In a large nation, democratic wishes are filtered through elected representatives. Do people feel that their interests are being reflected in government policy?



Do citizens feel the government represents the will and best interests of the people?

Key Findings:

- Most Americans, particularly older adults, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) adults, those who are from Indigenous populations and those who are struggling economically, aren't confident that the decisions of the government reflect the will of the people or the needs or best interests of people like them.
- About one-quarter of Americans agree that elected leaders are reflective of their backgrounds and experiences. Women and non-religious Americans are among the groups less inclined to believe this.
- A majority of Americans do not agree that the laws and policies in our nation uphold the principle of freedom and justice for all.
- Americans who don't have a positive view of either major political party tend to be especially skeptical about whether the government truly represents people like them or acts in their best interests.

Majority of Americans Doubt Government Represents Their Will and Interests

Only about a quarter of Americans agree or strongly agree that government decisions generally reflect what the majority of people want done or attempt to serve the best interests of citizens. Even fewer, just one in five, agrees that the government is sensitive to the interests of people like them when making decisions.

Some subgroups of Americans are even more likely to feel that the government does not consider their interests when making decisions, including Native American and Alaska Native individuals (only 14% agree the government considers their interests), lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender adults (14%) and older adults, particularly older Black adults (15%) and older White adults (15%). Additionally, only 13% of those who find it very difficult to get by on their current income say they agree or strongly agree that the government is sensitive to the interests of people like them.

FIGURE 11
Perceptions of Government Responsiveness

	U.S. Adults % Strongly agree/Agree
Government decisions generally reflect what the majority of people want done.	26
Government is sensitive to the interests of people like me when making decisions.	21
Government decisions usually attempt to serve the best interests of citizens, even when I disagree with those decisions.	27

About One in Four Americans See Themselves Reflected in Government Leadership

Only 26% of Americans agree or strongly agree that the government includes many individuals with backgrounds and experiences similar to their own.

This perception is even lower among those facing economic hardship: Just 16% of individuals who report finding it very difficult to get by on their current income feel represented in this way, compared with 34% of those living comfortably. Gender and age disparities are also evident. Twenty-two percent of women versus 31% of men agree or strongly agree that the government reflects people like them, as do 22% of those aged 50 and older versus 30% of those under age 50. Religious identity may also play a part in these perceptions as 19% of non-religious Americans feel represented, versus 29% of those affiliated with a religious group.

While these differences reveal meaningful gaps in perceived representation, the larger takeaway is that no demographic group has a majority who feel well-represented in government. This suggests that respondents view their identities as multi-dimensional — encompassing race, ethnicity, gender, age, education and more. This makes it difficult for any single individual to feel that people like them are well-represented in government. Alternatively, people may look beyond demographic diversity when considering whether they are adequately represented. It may call for meaningful engagement with everyday Americans to truly understand their experiences, backgrounds and perspectives.

Public Skepticism About Fairness of U.S. Laws and Policies

Only 30% of Americans agree or strongly agree that the government’s laws and policies consistently uphold the ideal of “liberty and justice for all” promised in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the proportion is low across all societal groups.

Men are somewhat more likely than women to agree or strongly agree that the government’s laws and policies uphold the principle of freedom and justice for all (35% vs. 26%). Black adults (25%) and Native American/Alaska Native adults (27%) show lower levels of agreement compared with Hispanic (32%), White (31%) and Asian adults (31%). Within the Black community, endorsement is especially low among Black women (20%) and Black adults over age 55 (18%). Among those struggling financially, belief in the government’s commitment to this principle is even lower – just 19% agree – compared with 37% of those who say they are living comfortably.

Feeling Valued Matters: The Link Between Representation and Recognition

There is a strong link between how Americans feel about their place in society and how they view the job the government does representing them. People who don’t feel that their experiences and beliefs are respected or valued in this country are far less likely to believe the government reflects the public’s interests. In fact, confidence in the government’s representative role drops by 25 to 30 percentage points among those who feel underrecognized. This suggests that perceptions of democracy are not only just about policy – they’re also about whether people feel seen, heard and respected.

FIGURE 12

Feeling Valued Shapes Views of Government

	Feel valued and respected %	Do not feel valued and respected %
Agree that government decisions generally reflect what the majority of people want done.	44	16
Agree that government is sensitive to the interests of people like me when making decisions.	39	12
Agree that government decisions usually attempt to serve the best interests of citizens, even when I disagree with those decisions.	46	17
Agree that government includes many people who have similar backgrounds and experiences to my own.	44	16
Agree that our government’s laws and policies are careful to uphold freedom and justice for all.	49	20

People who feel valued and respected are those who strongly agree or agree that “the experiences and beliefs of people like me are valued and respected by other people in this country.” People who do not feel valued and respected strongly disagree, disagree or neither agree nor disagree with that statement.

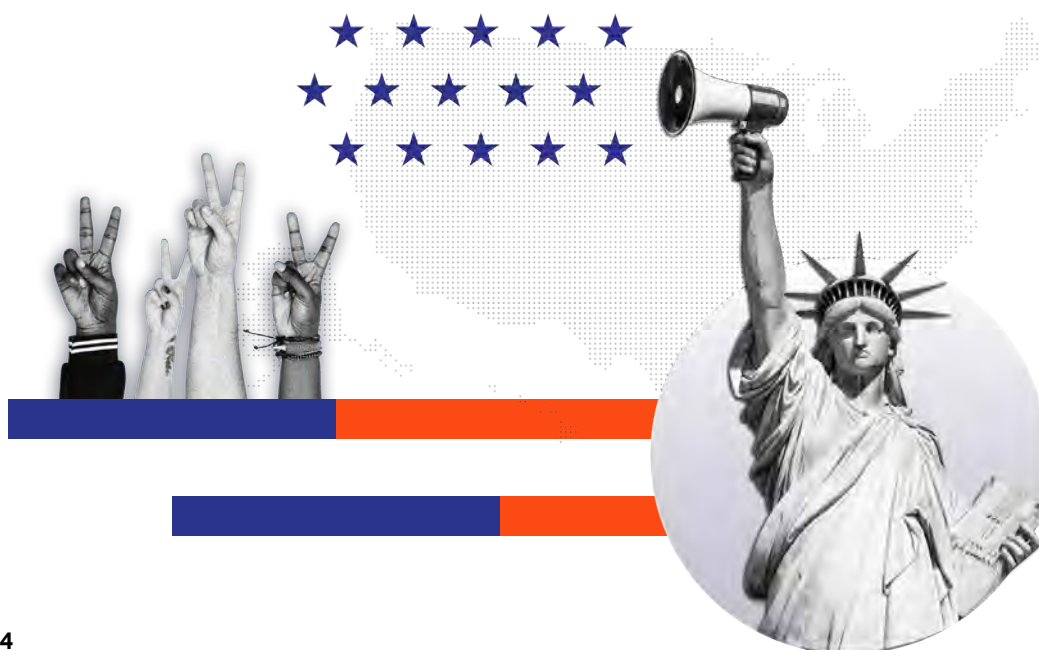
Older adults, LGBT individuals, Native American/Alaska Native adults, women, people facing financial hardship and those who aren’t registered to vote are less likely than other Americans to feel that people like them are respected or that their experiences and beliefs are valued in this country. Many of these same groups also feel underrepresented in both who makes up the government and the decisions the government makes.

Americans Unaligned With Major Parties Question Government’s Representativeness

Americans who don’t have a positive view of either the Republican or Democratic Party, regardless of their own party identification or leaning, tend to be more critical of democracy and how it functions. This is particularly the case when it comes to whether the government truly reflects the will and interests of the people. In contrast, those who have positive views of both parties — a relatively small segment of the population — are highly positive about how the government is functioning.

FIGURE 13
How Party Views Shape Perceptions of Government

	U.S. adults who are positive toward both parties	U.S. adults who are highly positive toward one party	U.S. adults who are moderately positive toward one party	U.S. adults who are neutral toward both parties	U.S. adults who are negative toward both parties
	%	%	%	%	%
Agree that government decisions generally reflect what the majority of people want done.	70	36	23	19	11
Agree that government is sensitive to the interests of people like me when making decisions.	65	28	18	15	10
Agree that government decisions usually attempt to serve the best interests of citizens, even when I disagree with those decisions.	70	36	25	19	12
Agree that government includes many people who have similar backgrounds and experiences to my own.	64	33	24	17	16
Agree that our government’s laws and policies are careful to uphold freedom and justice for all.	71	42	29	21	14



SECTION 4

Consensus and Disagreement

Across the four pillars of democracy, the survey identified key areas where Americans largely agree on key democratic beliefs, as well as areas where the public shows the sharpest disagreements.

Key Findings:

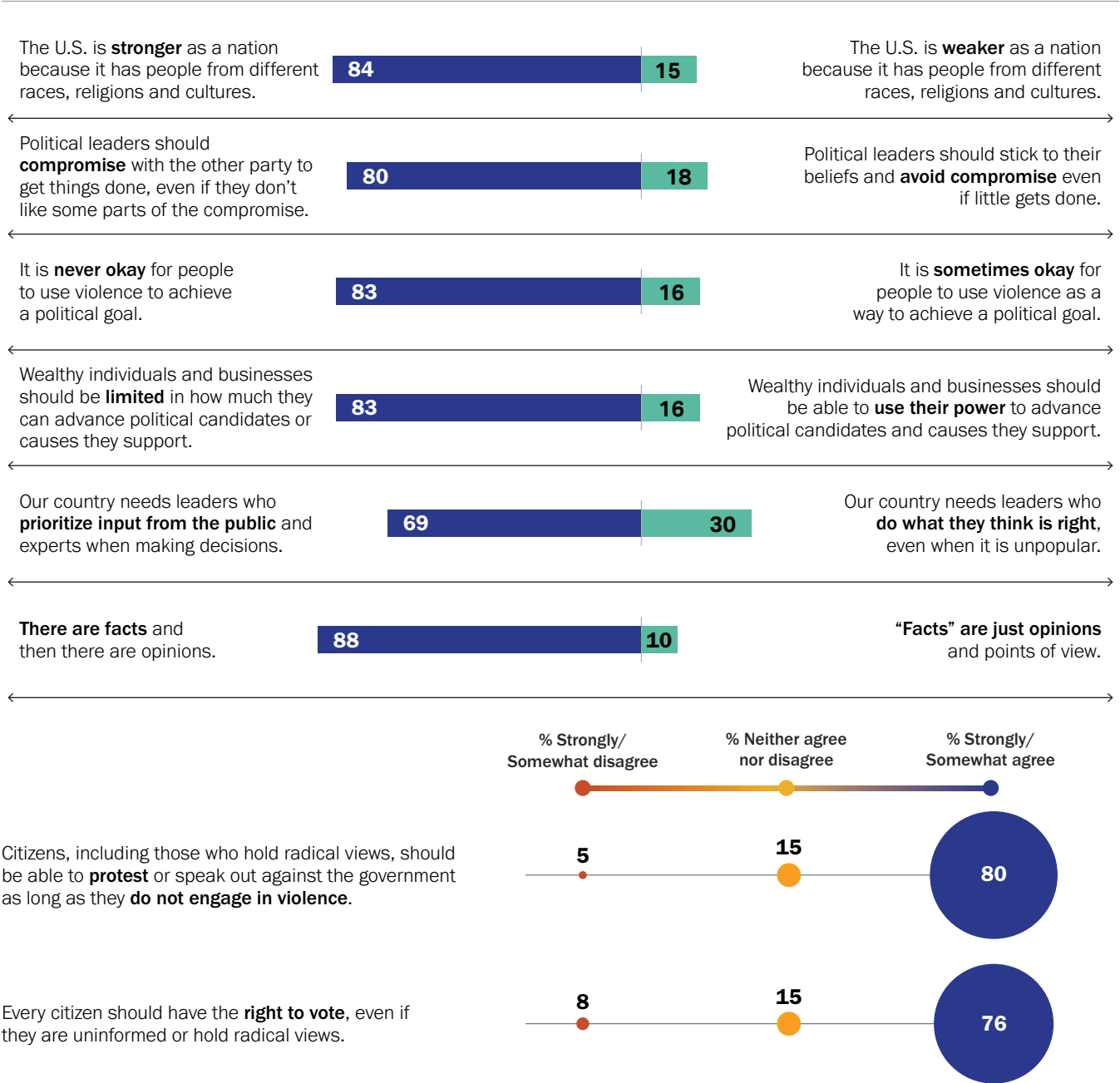
- Even as Americans express concerns about democratic functioning, large majorities share beliefs about democratic principles. These include an expectation that political leaders should compromise to get things done, a commitment to non-violent expression, a rejection of violence as a means of achieving political goals and the belief that varied cultures and racial, ethnic and religious groups is a U.S. strength rather than a weakness.
- At the same time, some beliefs on key issues related to governance and societal change closely divide Americans, including whether government should meet citizens' basic needs, whether laws should mainly benefit the majority of Americans and whether cultural change is occurring too fast in the U.S.
- Many of the disagreements fall along traditional Republican versus Democratic lines.

U.S. Consensus: Areas of Relative Alignment Among Americans

Americans see society and the role of the government differently in many respects, but there are some beliefs that they widely share. These include seeing different races, religions and cultures as a national strength, valuing compromise and input from the public and experts in making government decisions, the right to peaceful protest no matter a person’s views, limits on the influence of wealth in politics and a rejection of political violence.

While there is nearly a consensus on these views, in most cases between one in 10 and one in five Americans take an opposing view that runs counter to democratic principles.

FIGURE 14
Alignment on Democratic Principles

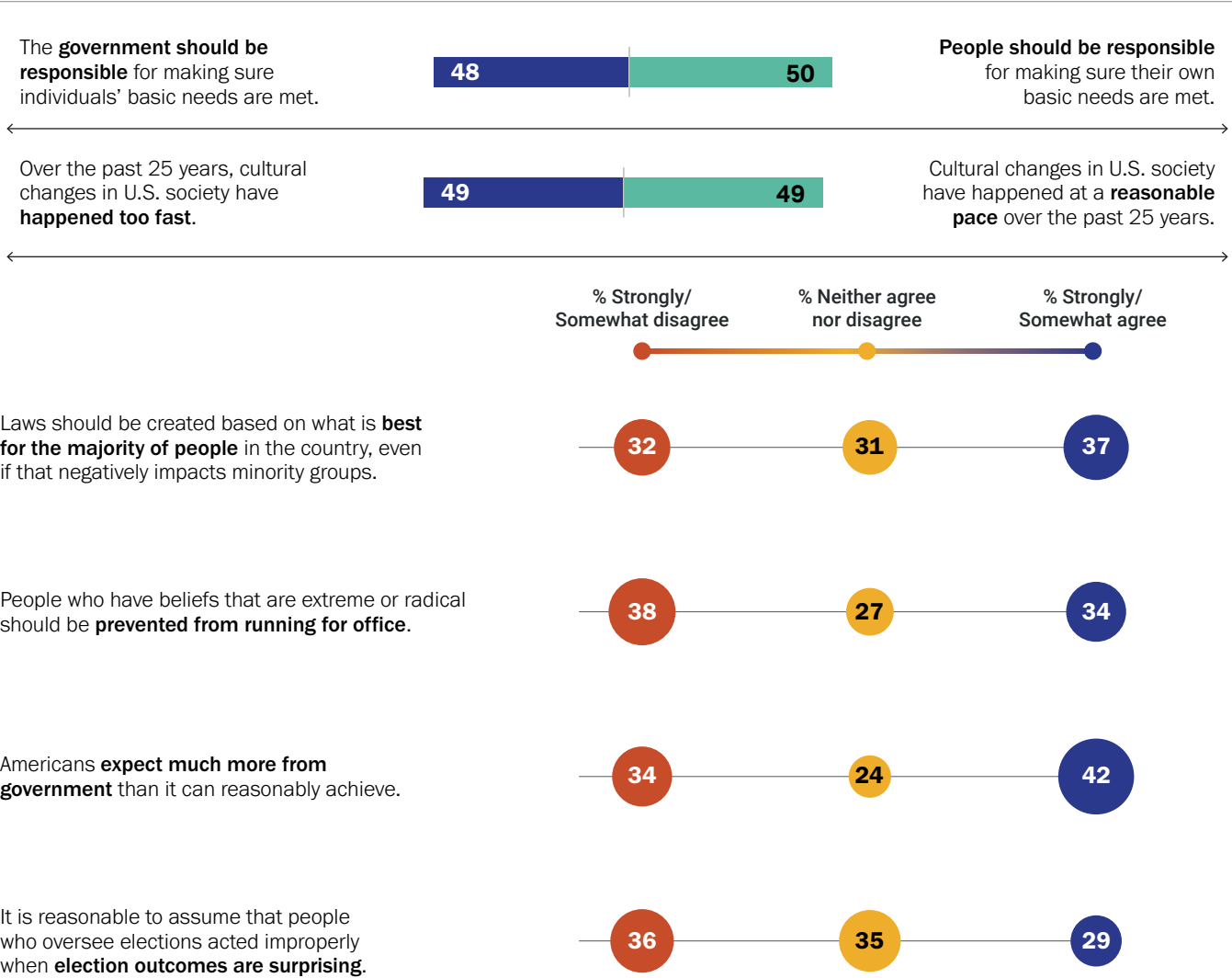


Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

Key Areas of Disagreement for Americans

Some of the foremost areas of disagreement concern whether people should meet their own basic needs or if the government should ensure their needs are met, whether cultural change is happening at an appropriate pace or too fast, whether laws should benefit the majority even at the expense of minority groups and whether people holding radical views should be allowed to run for elected office.

FIGURE 15
Disagreement Over Democratic Principles



Note: Values shown may not total 100% due to rounding and exclusion of DK/REF responses.

On these issues, the disagreements generally fall along party lines, according to the parties' usual policy platforms.

- Republicans believe individuals should be responsible for their own needs while Democrats believe the government should ensure basic needs are met.
- Republicans are inclined to think that people expect more from the government than it can achieve while Democrats are inclined to disagree with that idea.
- Republicans think cultural changes are occurring too fast and Democrats think those changes have happened at a reasonable pace.

However, partisans show similar differences of opinion on whether people with radical views should be prevented from running for office.

Conclusion

A majority of Americans continue to affirm democracy as the best form of government and there is widespread agreement on many core democratic principles. However, there is a profound disconnect between these ideals and the everyday experience of democratic governance in the U.S.

Disillusionment with democracy largely centers on the system's performance more than its principles. Currently, only the most ardent supporters of the incumbent political party believe democracy is performing well, suggesting that the increasing influence of partisanship in U.S. politics and governance is one cause of declining trust in democracy. What can leaders do to restore faith in democracy across the political spectrum? How can leaders ensure that democratic governance is perceived as fair, responsive and inclusive — regardless of who is in power?

Even amid this changing landscape, Americans across the political spectrum share a strong commitment to core democratic ideals such as compromise, free expression and disdain for political violence. This suggests that there is a solid foundation of shared values that could be harnessed to bridge divides and strengthen democratic institutions.

The report highlights that economic insecurity, weak social and political ties, lower levels of education and being a young adult are all associated with more negative views of democracy. Perhaps this is because these people do not see that democracy has delivered for them.

What structural changes are needed to ensure that democracy works for all, not just for the few? How can civic engagement be revitalized in communities where trust and opportunity are lacking?

Future reports will explore how Americans' experiences in their communities and interactions with social media and other information sources shape their views of and involvement with democracy. These reports will explore how Americans' experiences in their communities and social networks shape their views of democracy and willingness to engage. They will also examine what strategies can help young adults and other underrepresented groups feel more connected to — and empowered within — the U.S. democratic system.

Survey Methodology

These results are based on a survey completed by 20,338 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older. The survey was conducted in English. The Gallup Panel recruited 9,157 respondents for the study and supplemented them with 11,181 respondents from a third-party sample provider. In total, 19,092 respondents completed the survey as a web survey between July 7 and August 21, 2025, and 1,246 respondents completed the survey as a mail survey between July 7 and August 25, 2025.

The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using address-based sampling methods and random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Demographic targets were specified for the third-party sample provider to improve representativeness of the sample. Gallup uses a multistage weighting process to ensure samples are demographically representative of the U.S. adult population, using the most recent Current Population Survey figures. This process includes weighting data separately for each sample source before combining the sample.

For results based on this sample, the maximum margin of sampling error, which takes into account the design effect from weighting, is ± 0.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

ABOUT THE KETTERING FOUNDATION

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation is a nonpartisan, nonprofit operating foundation dedicated to advancing inclusive democracies. Through partnerships, research and strategic communications, the foundation fosters citizen engagement, promotes government accountability and counters authoritarianism.

ABOUT GALLUP

Gallup is a global analytics and advisory firm known for its expertise in public opinion research and data-driven insights. For over 80 years, Gallup has helped leaders worldwide address pressing challenges with actionable research and analysis.

GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.888.500.8282

www.gallup.com



Dayton Office

200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459

937.434.7300

800.221.3657

www.kettering.org

Washington Office

1299 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 1120
Washington, DC 20004

202.393.4478