



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 19, 2022

RECORD Set: More Americans Than Ever Say U.S. Has “Poor” Moral Values

A new study finds that a record number of Americans say “moral values” in the United States are “poor” and getting worse. The study makes clear as well, however, that Americans also don’t agree on what constitutes “moral values” and generally don’t know what “morality” is.

As Gallup [reports](#):

A record-high 50% of Americans rate the overall state of moral values in the U.S. as “poor,” and another 37% say it is “only fair.” Just 1% think the state of moral values is “excellent” and 12% “good.”

Although negative views of the nation’s moral values have been the norm throughout Gallup’s 20-year trend, the current poor rating is the highest on record by one percentage point.

These findings, from Gallup’s May 2-22 Values and Beliefs poll, are generally in line with perceptions since 2017 except for a slight improvement in views in 2020 when Donald Trump was running for reelection. On average since 2002, 43% of U.S. adults have rated moral values in the U.S. as poor, 38% as fair and 18% as excellent or good.

Republicans’ increasingly negative assessment of the state of moral values is largely responsible for the record-high overall poor rating. At 72%, Republicans’ poor rating of moral values is at its highest point since the inception of the trend and up sharply since Trump left office.

At the same time, 36% of Democrats



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say the state of moral values is poor, while a 48% plurality rate it as only fair and 15% as excellent or good. Independents' view of the current state of moral values is relatively stable and closer to Democrats' than Republicans' rating, with 44% saying it is poor, 40% only fair and 16% excellent or good.

What's more, 78 percent of respondents say moral values are worsening. Adding perspective, Gallup points out that this number has averaged 74 percent since 2002, but was down to 67 percent and 68 percent the last two years, respectively.

There is much to unpack here. First, people have for 20 years (and far longer, actually) lamented a perceived declining moral state for a simple reason:

We've been in steep moral decline.

This relates to a battle that's a constant in civilization, as things move toward disorder (as when you let a house sit and don't perform upkeep) without a continual application of energy directed toward maintenance or improvement. But there's the sticking point:

What constitutes improvement?

That Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all have different perceptions of our moral state and prospects gives away the game: Clearly, people are defining "moral values" very differently. And the problem is that "values" are generally all they perceive.

This is not surprising. I've often cited Barna Group research showing that in 2002 already, and by a three-to-one margin (64 percent vs. 22 percent), "adults said truth is always relative to the person and their situation," as Barna [related it](#). "The perspective was even more lopsided among teenagers, 83% of whom said moral truth depends on the circumstances, and only 6% of whom said moral truth is absolute."

Given this, here's what Americans are now stating, translated: We say that America is getting worse in her "morality."

But we're not sure what that is.

To analogize it, it's much as when many people don't feel physically well, but, not being wise physicians, don't know what ails them. They have different opinions on the perceived disease's cause, with some saying it could be a virus, others claiming bad nutrition or environmental chemicals, and yet others suggesting different theories.

Worse still, people can't agree on what constitutes ideal health. They disagree over optimal blood pressure figures, blood work numbers, heart rate, and the like, and often respond to expressed certitude in this area with, "That's your health truth; someone else's may be different," and, "Don't impose your physiological-values preferences on me!"

This may sound ridiculous, but it's essentially today's reality regarding moral health. The problem is reflected in our language, too, with the term "values" (used by Gallup) being here Exhibit A.



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Consider: Have you ever heard someone described as “valuous”? And what would be the opposite of “values”? Note that [FreeThesaurus.com](#) *does not provide even one antonym for the term.*

And for good reason. Mother Teresa had values, but so did Adolf Hitler. Values aren’t good by definition; they’re just things people value by definition. A serial killer might value others’ submission, agony, and death. So, saying “We have to have values” is the same as stating “We have to have opinions” or “We must have tastes.” It’s a pointless assertion — we have such things as a matter of course.

Cutting Through the Confusion

Lifting the veil requires first understanding that Truth is not “relative”; if it’s relative, it ain’t Truth, but preferences. Space constraints preclude further elaboration, but such can be found [here](#) or in my essay [“The Acceptance Con,” starting with the third paragraph below the section “Controlling or Losing a Culture.”](#) As for now, suffice it to say that if everything is relative, then your statements are relative, too, and thus meaningless. So let’s talk about what’s meaningful.

Thankfully, confusion is not necessary because not only is morality objective and absolute, but it has been defined. To put it simply, if morality came in a jar (if only!), on the ingredients label would be “virtues.”

Virtues are by definition “good moral habits,” which is why we can call someone “virtuous” and why “virtue” [has a precise opposite](#): vice. Examples of virtues, discerned (not invented) by great thinkers throughout the ages, are courage, faith, hope, honesty, charity, justice, temperance, prudence, chastity, diligence, patience, kindness, forgiveness, humility, and love.

Knowing such enables us to be that wise physician, as it provides a perfect diagnostic tool with which to determine the moral state of our society — or our friends, children, or selves. Virtue also provides the ultimate model for improving that state.

There’s another beauty to having knowledge of virtue as well, though it’s often an unwelcome beauty. We come to have the most important realization of all: It isn’t just the other guy who’s sick.



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