



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 26, 2016

## Federal Government Continues to Lose Trust of Its Citizens

[The latest study by Pew Research](#) shows that the average American increasingly distrusts the federal government, declining from a high of 77 percent in 1964 to 19 percent. Pew's results, which are derived from a survey on 12 issues of more than 6,000 citizens, show "the American public ... deeply cynical about government, politics and the nation's elected leaders ... [with] just 19 percent say[ing] they can trust the government always, or most of the time, among the lowest levels in the past half-century."



Pew's results were confirmed by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which concluded that Americans' satisfaction level in dealing with federal agencies has fallen for the third straight year, reaching an eight-year low.

Not surprisingly, Americans' ire is concentrated at the Treasury Department, which oversees the Internal Revenue Service. Explained Forrest Morgeson, ACSI's director of research:

If you think about the most contacted government agency, it'll be the IRS. If you think about what the IRS does, which is take money from citizens, you'll have low satisfaction.

Even when averaged in with higher levels of satisfaction with agencies such as the Department of the Interior, which oversees public parks, the federal government scores well below "every private economic sector in user satisfaction," said Morgeson.

Another agency vying for the worst rating is the Department of Veterans Affairs. Its rating has declined precipitously from 70 percent positive in 2013 to just 39 percent presently. And when asked about Hollywood and the national media, 56 percent said the entertainment industry had "a negative impact" on the country, while nearly two in three said the same thing about the mainstream media.

The Pew study provided additional insights into how the average American views the government, Washington, and politics in general. Seventy-four percent of those polled think that most elected officials put their own interests ahead of their constituents, while 55 percent think that ordinary Americans could do a better job in solving problems than the government.

The political divide between Republicans and Democrats is very large, according to Pew, with 80 percent of Republicans saying they want a smaller and less intrusive government, while just 31 percent of Democrats agreed.

On specific issues such as government involvement in healthcare and helping poor people, the divide is equally wide. Only 34 percent of Republicans think the government should be involved in providing healthcare while 83 percent of Democrats think it's the proper role of government to do so. Concerning government's myriad anti-poverty programs, only 36 percent of Republicans support them while 72



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percent of Democrats do.

The divide also exists in terms of “strengthening the economy,” another of the dozen topics explored by Pew. Two-thirds of Republicans told Pew that government does a poor job while two-thirds of Democrats support federal efforts to stimulate the economy.

On immigration there is much closer agreement: Members of both parties think the government’s efforts to manage the immigration system are dismal, with just 15 percent of Republicans thinking the government is doing a good job, while 40 percent of Democrats agree.

On “government reform,” those polled by Pew find the government frustrating and badly managed, with just 20 percent saying the government runs its programs well, while nearly 60 percent say it is in need of “very major reform,” up 22 percentage points since 1997.

Pew noted that during Obama’s reign,

13% of Republicans, on average, have said they can trust the government always or most of the time – the lowest level of average trust among either party during any administration dating back 40 years. During George W. Bush’s presidency, an average of 47% of Republicans said they could trust the government.

By contrast, the share of Democrats saying they can trust the government has been virtually unchanged over the two administrations (28% Bush, 29% Obama).

The survey gives no proof of a correlation between the growth of government and the average citizen’s view of it, but it should be noted that as the government’s debt has exploded, so has that citizen’s frustration with and distrust of it.

It should also be noted that when the government stayed largely within its bounds as demanded by the Constitution, the average citizen’s satisfaction with the federal government was much higher. It was only when government slipped its restraints that it started to cause the average American increasing concern.

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