



# (IN)VISIBLE

— VOICES FROM A POLARIZED AMERICA —



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## INTRODUCTION

The United States is fiercely divided along many lines – political, geographic, racial and socio-economic – but the political divisions run especially deep. Voters in the two major parties see the world differently.<sup>1</sup> This polarization has several causes, but it works hand in hand with a decreasingly competitive electoral system that encourages politicians to rally support from their bases instead of working across the aisle.

In the United States, both parties claim to champion individual freedoms, but they choose different rights as priorities. For example, Democrats, usually liberals, tend to favor abortion rights, civil rights and sexual freedoms, while Republicans, usually conservatives, defend the rights to bear arms and to practice religion as broadly as possible, even if in conflict with others' perceived rights.

Liberals, who dominate the coasts and urban areas, tend to favor government involvement to ensure that people's needs – from hunger to health care – are met and that civil rights are protected.

Conservatives, who dominate the areas between the coasts, the Southeast and more rural regions, oppose government overreach and over-regulation. They support tradition, established institutions, and law and order, and they tend to favor lower taxes.

In one reflection of partisanship, control of the White House, Senate and House of Representatives switches from one party to the other usually based on a relatively small number of votes because so few voters cross party lines. Most seats in Congress are “safe” from challengers – only eight of 387 members of the House of Representatives in contested races in 2016 were defeated – so it is the few “flippable” districts and “swing states” that can determine control of the legislature.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, of the more than 120 million votes cast in the 2016 presidential election, only about 107,000 votes in three states gave Donald Trump an Electoral College victory.<sup>3</sup> Currently, Republicans control both houses of Congress and the White House, giving them a golden opportunity to pass conservative legislation.

Since consensus and cooperation are not rewarded in this system, politicians often attempt to appeal to their bases with more extreme policies – and might even encourage system failure if they can blame the other side – instead of finding opportunities to compromise.

Frustration with this gridlock is likely responsible for an uptick in the number of independents, but because they vote at lower rates than committed partisans, and are not allowed to vote in many states' primary elections, the current process continues to feed entrenched divisions.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps even more than relying on increasingly partisan policies, however, successful American politicians become masters of crafting their personae. In the United States, political races are almost always popularity contests, with voters invested in candidates' personal stories and family life. Voters often search for candidates who appear to share their values – especially religious ones – although with their support of Trump, white evangelicals have more recently put less emphasis on a candidate's personal morality.<sup>5</sup>

Voting in the United States is a highly emotional endeavor for many, something that can be lost when looking at traditional polls and quantitative analysis.

In 2016, the nation faced one of its most emotional and contentious presidential elections in history. Americans of all political stripes were shocked by the results of the election, which seemed to defy every predictor and poll.

The results of the election revealed a deep divide in the country and shed light on pain felt by Americans on both the right and left, as well as racial anxiety among white voters in the era of Barack Obama.<sup>6</sup> Although economic indicators seem to show that the United States has recovered from its 2008 recession, many Americans feel left behind. The 2016 election became a perfect storm of that economic malaise, discontent with the status quo, fear of the future and polarizing political rhetoric.

(In)Divisible attempts to explore the causes of this polarization, the divisions felt along not only political but also socio-economic, geographic, racial and educational lines. In these pages, American voices from across the country and across the political spectrum will explain the very real challenges they face on a daily basis and the frustration they feel with the state of their country. This is not a quantitative survey. Instead, the goal of this publication is to allow Americans, in their own voices, to explain the issues that they care about and their way of thinking about them.

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## METHODOLOGY

This publication sets out to answer two basic but important questions: What issues do Americans care about? And why do they care about those issues?

To answer these questions, we selected five states across the country to focus on: Pennsylvania, Alabama, Texas, Colorado and Washington, traveling to each to conduct interviews. Each state faces its own challenges but also serves as a representative of its region.

In each state, we spoke with people from urban and rural regions and sought out different socio-economic, religious, racial/ethnic and political perspectives. In total, more than 125 people offered their perspectives for this publication.

Although the people interviewed represent a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds, they are not a random sample and therefore this study does not claim to provide concrete quantitative findings.

Participants were interviewed individually or as part of focus groups, ranging from 30 minutes to several hours. They were contacted in a variety of ways, including through their places of work, religious centers and schools. The majority of the interviewees were contacted through community centers, which hosted focus groups and facilitated access to regular participants in community center activities.

Chapter topics were selected based on the issues that came up most frequently as important to those being interviewed. For that reason, topics like foreign policy, which can dominate the debate in Washington, were not included. Although a handful of those surveyed referenced foreign policy, only two listed it as a central concern. Other topics, such as employment and immigration, came up frequently and therefore are central elements of the publication.

These interviews barely scratch the surface of the many perspectives that Americans, living in different circumstances, regions and towns, hold. So while we do not claim that this is an exhaustive survey, we hope this collection of voices from around the country can provide interesting and instructive qualitative information about the issues Americans care most about.

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# POLARIZATION

## 1 CHAPTER

POLARIZATION IN AMERICAN POLITICS IS NOTHING NEW, BUT CHANGES TO CAMPAIGN FINANCE RULES, PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING, THE RISE OF HYPER-PARTISAN MEDIA AND EVEN AMERICANS' INCREASING TENDENCY TO LIVE IN PLACES WHERE MOST PEOPLE SHARE THEIR VIEWS – DUBBED “THE BIG SORT” – EXACERBATE THE PROBLEM.

Whether virtual, social or geographic, many Americans find themselves in so-called echo chambers, surrounded by people and media who voice similar political beliefs.

“My social circle does not include [conservatives]. I don’t have family members, for the most part, who have those values. And if they do, we just agree to disagree,” says Jill Wildenberg, public policy director for the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado, a coalition of religious progressives in Denver. Her living room is peppered with Hillary Clinton memorabilia, a reminder of the disappointment she still feels about the 2016 election.



▲ Jill Wildenberg, Denver, Colorado

Much of this division is geographic. Left-leaning voters dominate both coasts and urban areas, while conservatives tend to live in between and in the Southeast, often in more rural areas. Clinton won well over 90 percent of

the ballots cast in Washington, D.C., for example, where Donald Trump got just 4 percent of the votes.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Trump won 87.8 percent of the votes in Cullman County, Alabama, a rural county in the South.<sup>2</sup> This divide means that many people living in Washington, D.C., rarely come into contact with conservatives who see the world differently than they do. It also means that residents of Cullman County are much more likely to speak to other conservatives than to liberals. As the country becomes more divided in this way, some Americans seek out cities, towns and even neighborhoods that have residents who think the same way they do.

These echo chambers are also a product of the information Americans consume. Speaking for many, Kay Lacona of Santa Teresa, New Mexico, laments that people, “only read things ... that they think [are] right

### FACTS AND FIGURES

- » A majority of Republicans and a plurality of Democrats see the opposing party as a threat to national well-being
- » 84 percent of Americans say money has too much influence in U.S. politics
- » The average margin of victory for House of Representatives races in 2016 was 37.1 percent



*“I discuss [politics] much more often with people who think like I do. And that’s probably one of the reasons that we have such a divide.”*

————— Dorcas Harris

and then they’ll latch on to that and then they’ll become more entrenched in those beliefs.”




 Kay Lacona, Santa Teresa, New Mexico

Although both liberals and conservatives live in their own echo chambers, the topic became a point of particular anxiety for liberals following the 2016 election. Conservatives were happy to gain control of the White House and maintain control of the Congress. Liberals, on the other hand, were made painfully aware of their bubble when they found themselves blindsided by the election results. Stephanie Monahon, who works for the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a Democrat and former field organizer for President Barack Obama’s campaign. Until recently, she acknowledges, “I don’t think I ever really thought about the liberal bubble that

my kids have been raised in, to be perfectly honest.” In recent months, however, she has been thinking a lot about it. Monahon says she is particularly passionate about gay and minority rights, and she has surrounded herself with others who feel similarly. Now, however, she is concerned that the progress made during the Obama administration may be lost. “All that my kids have known is that to discriminate is wrong,” she says. “They have heard it at home, they have heard it from our friends and family, they have heard it at the local-level politicians, they have heard it at the federal level. That is what they have heard.” Inside the comfortable walls of the echo chamber, many were unprepared for the political shock caused by the election.



 Stephanie Monahon, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*“I’ve been tuning in to Twitter for years, and Facebook, and I frankly was amazed at the partisanship expressed, especially on Facebook.”*

————— Jane Walsh Waitkus

“Sometimes you can feel pretty lonely,” says Dorcas Harris, a liberal living in Alabama, which a recent Gallup poll designated the country’s second-most conservative state.<sup>3</sup> Although conservatives abound in her region, Harris, like many political minorities, speaks about politics predominantly with other liberals. She has spoken candidly with one friend who planned to vote for Trump, but she acknowledges, “I discuss [politics] much more often with people who think like I do. And that’s probably one of the reasons that we have such a divide. ... Everybody that’s relatively close to you, you know where they stand. I do not bring up politics with someone that I know to be a fan of President Trump or even people that I know voted for him.”



 Beverly Peacock, El Paso, Texas

Beverly Peacock, a retired teacher in El Paso, Texas, says, “[At] most dinner parties ... the rule is no political talk, and there are a lot of men that leave with kicked shins and bruises because they want to start it. ... Right now, it’s a bad idea to have a political conversation.”

Bruce Bradley, an outspoken conservative, also of El Paso, agrees. He says his daughter recently called him to remind him not to bring up politics at a party she was throwing, to which he readily assented. “I don’t like to get mad at people,” he says.

Online, however, the rules are less polite. Karen Gann is

another Democrat in Alabama, “Living around here you kind of stay in the closet a little bit. Outside of my ‘bubble’ I really don’t talk to many other people. Facebook is probably the only place that I encounter other people’s opinions. ... People are ‘keyboard warriors.’ They say a lot of things that I don’t think they would say to my face or somebody else’s face.”



 Bruce Bradley, El Paso, Texas

Jane Walsh Waitkus, a Democrat on the Luzerne County Council in Pennsylvania, believes that online partisanship is at an all-time high. “I’ve been tuning in to Twitter for years, and Facebook, and I frankly was amazed at the partisanship expressed, especially on Facebook,” she says. “In your face. Boldness. Both sides. ... That kind of shocked me. It’s like torpedoes be damned, this is what’s happening, and sorry you don’t like it.”



 Carol Butler, Birmingham, Alabama

The political debate online has reached such a fever pitch that some have retreated.

“I was never a big Facebook fan, but I had to get off completely,” says Carol Butler, of Birmingham, Alabama.



*“The gift is that this election has engaged people like no other.”*

————— Polly Baca

## PROTEST AND ACTIVISM

In December 2015, only 20 people showed up to the annual meeting of the Seattle National Organization for Women (NOW). In 2016, more than 70 attended. Jhana Bach, one of the chapter’s leaders, is excited by this surge in activism. “People are not complacent anymore and people are really willing to step up and put their time in and do the grunt work,” she says.

*“Trump won the election so let him be the president.”*

————— Reid Leach

In her work for the City of Philadelphia, Monahan organizes volunteer efforts. “The response [to the election is to] volunteer, get involved, be a part of something, work in your community,” she says. “We saw a huge uptick in my office of people saying, ‘I want to do something, I want to be involved, I want to volunteer in my community, how can I help?’ That gives me a lot of hope.”

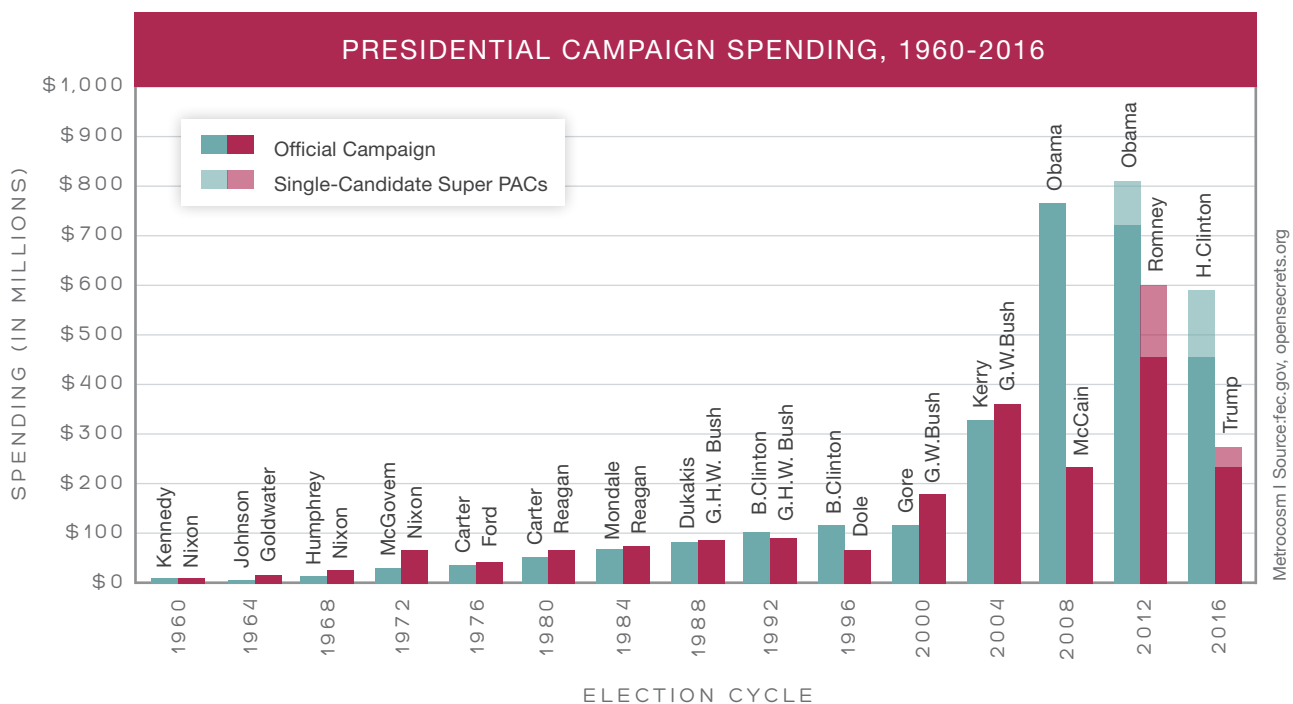
That new embrace of community involvement and political activism among the left had its most visible expressions in the women’s marches, which drew millions across the country, and the March for Science in Washington, D.C., in April 2017.

“The gift is that this election has engaged people like no other,” says Polly Baca, a former member of Colorado’s state senate. “I have been so impressed by the young people. [...] Because all of this energy that is now in the United States – it reminds me of the 1960s when I was young. ... I know that we can change things.”

From constituents jamming up the phone lines calling their senators to the well-attended rallies in Denver, Wildenberg, of the Interfaith Alliance, is also impressed. “[I’ve] never seen anything like it, except during the Vietnam War, when I was active in high school,” she says, “People are learning that they have a place in democracy, and that’s a beautiful thing.”

But not all agree. Dominik Salazar, an auto mechanic from El Paso, Texas, does not want his college-age daughter to go north to join major protests in North Dakota against an oil pipeline. He wants her to live, “in a more united [America],” not one divided by protest. Instead, he would rather see his daughter focus on her studies and her work. Perhaps by working hard as an engineer, he reasons, she can do something to benefit all Americans.

Some on the right dismiss the protesters as sore losers trying to obstruct the president.



“Trump won the election so let him be the president,” Reid Leach of Alamosa, Colorado, says.

## CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Adding to many Americans’ frustration with their political class is the growing influence of wealthy campaign donors.

In 2010, the Supreme Court’s landmark *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision drastically changed the campaign finance landscape in the United States. In a 5-to-4 ruling, the court overturned a federal law barring corporations from making independent expenditures – that is, not coordinated with a candidate’s campaign – in support of a candidate.<sup>4</sup> Although billions of dollars were already being spent on federal, state and local elections, the decision enabled corporations and other organizations to make uncapped donations to political action committees (PACs), which could run advertisements and advocate for their candidate of choice, also flooding the airwaves with negative ads.

In a New York Times poll in 2015, 84 percent of respondents said money had too much influence in U.S. politics, and 55 percent said politicians usually “promote policies that directly help the people and groups who donated money to their campaigns.”<sup>5</sup>

Politicians are “supposed to go and look out for the interests of the people that voted them in and I don’t see that. I think there’s too many special interests, too many lobbyists,” laments Martha Thompson of El Paso, Texas, who puts some of the blame on voters. “We’re the people that vote them in,” she admits. “We’re not informed when the elections come. ... I’ve been guilty of it. You go and you see a name you recognize. ... But it’s because of the money. If you’re the incumbent [you have] name recognition.”

*“[Politicians are] supposed to go and look out for the interests of the people that voted them in and I don’t see that. I think there’s too many special interests, too many lobbyists.”*

— Martha Thompson

In the 2016 presidential election, money in politics was a central concern for voters. Clinton’s long political career and private fundraising for her family’s foundation worried many voters on both the right and left. “God only knows who ... has [Hillary Clinton] in their pocket,” says Betty Wilkerson of Yakima, Washington. Both candidates

“have baggage” she acknowledges, but she says Clinton was particularly susceptible to special interests because billionaire Trump “didn’t owe anybody anything.”

## ELECTORAL COLLEGE

Vanessa S. did not vote in the 2016 election. “They always go by electoral votes ... so I feel like it doesn’t matter if we vote anyways,” she says. Vanessa lives in El Paso, Texas, a predominantly Democratic city in El Paso County, which voted overwhelmingly (69.1 percent) for Hillary Clinton.<sup>6</sup> The local member of Congress, Democrat Beto O’Rourke, was re-elected with a whopping 85.8 percent of the vote.<sup>7</sup> However, all of Texas’ 38 Electoral College votes went to Trump because he won most of the state’s votes.

Americans do not elect their president directly. Instead, the Electoral College system assigns a number of votes to each state based on the size of its congressional delegation. Wyoming, for example, has its two senators and one member of the House of Representatives, so gets three electoral votes. In contrast, California has its two senators and 53 representatives, yielding 55 electoral votes. The system is roughly based on population – because that is how states are allotted members of Congress – but is weighted somewhat in favor of less-populous states – because every state gets two senators regardless of population.

*“That’s exactly why they have the Electoral College, [because of] us poor people out here in the country. It gives us a better chance to get the person we voted for elected.”*

— Reid Leach

All states except for Maine and Nebraska award all of their electoral votes to the candidate who wins the state’s popular vote, regardless of the margin of victory. Many states have voted for the candidate from one particular party for decades. California has awarded its 55 votes to the Democratic candidate since 1992.

Alabama has awarded its nine Electoral College votes to the Republican candidate since 1980, and Democratic presidential candidates do not campaign there. “We’re not a swing state,” says Josh Carpenter of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. “We’re not going to be competitive at least in the next 20 or 30 years.”

Republican presidential candidates may vie for voters’ support in Alabama’s primary election, but they, too, focus their efforts in more contested states during the general election. “It’s a frustrating experience and it’s deadened the activism here,” Carpenter says. “I don’t mean activism as in protest, I mean activism as in accountability. I think that people feel that it is futile to hold politicians accountable right now.”

On the other hand, candidates spend lots of time in Florida, Pennsylvania and Ohio, vote-rich “swing states” that have shown no fixed political allegiance in contemporary national races.



Josh Carpenter, Birmingham, Alabama

Baca, the former Colorado state senator, has served as an elector in the Electoral College in the last three presidential elections, meaning that she cast one of her state’s nine votes when the Electoral College met to officially choose the president. She says she has opposed the institution for 20 years “because it’s wrong. But if they’re going to have it, I’m going to run for it.” Baca was involved in an effort to stop the Electoral College from selecting Trump.



Reid Leach, Alamosa, Colorado

## GERRYMANDERING IN NORTH CAROLINA

*Current Congressional Districts*



Source: Washington Post<sup>9</sup>

But some Americans in less-populous areas say the Electoral College ensures their voices are heard on the national level. “That’s exactly why they have the Electoral College, [because of] us poor people out here in the country,” Reid Leach of rural Alamosa, Colorado, says. “It gives us a better chance to get the person we voted for elected, [instead of] having people in California and New York and some of those big cities ... where they have all the popular vote.”


## GERRYMANDERING

States redraw lines for congressional districts after each census every 10 years. The process differs from state to state, with some using independent, nonpartisan commissions to draw the maps, but most allowing politicians to run the show. Unsurprisingly, whichever party controls the process tends to draw districts that favor its electoral chances, either by packing hostile voters into a few districts or, if possible, dividing them up to dilute their votes.

With the contest between the two major parties in congressional races lopsided by design, the real fight for these seats is in a party’s primary, which determines a party’s candidate in the general election. And because it is committed partisans who turn out for primary elections, the candidates must increasingly pander to the liberal or conservative bases. They may also vote less moderately once in office to fend off primary challeng-

ers at home. With safe seats, “you get the extremes,” Baca says.



 Polly Baca, Denver, Colorado

Partly because of this gerrymandering and partly because of the dominance of one party in some states, few congressional races are competitive. “In the 2016 elections for the House of Representatives, the average electoral margin of victory was 37.1 percent,” The Washington Post reports. “Last year, only 17 seats out of 435 races were decided by a margin of 5 percent or less.”<sup>8</sup>

Not only are the candidates farther right or left than they would be in a marginal district, but they are also lauded at home for obstructing the opposing party’s legislation. Baca herself used to support gerrymandering when she served in the state Senate, but she now sees the

damage it can do. “We have to be strong enough and brave enough as patriots and people who care about their country to allow for competition,” she says.

## THE ‘FORGOTTEN’ MIDDLE

Polarization in American politics is nothing new, but changes to campaign finance rules, partisan gerrymandering, the rise of hyper-partisan media and even Americans’ increasing tendency to live in places where most people share their views – dubbed “the Big Sort” – exacerbate the problem. Going far beyond disagreement on policy, a majority of Republicans and a plurality of Democrats viewed the other party as a threat to the country’s well-being in a 2014 nationwide survey.<sup>10</sup>

“By and large, I think we see the extremes,” says cattle farmer Ben Haynes, of Cullman, Alabama. “I still believe that there’s a really big group there in the middle who recognize the importance of getting things done.” According to that same 2014 study, Haynes is right, but centrists are less politically active, and therefore easier for politicians to ignore, than fierce partisans.

Some moderate Americans feel forgotten and bewildered. “I do think there are a whole lot of people who are like me, standing in middle going, ‘What is going on? Have you all lost your minds?’” says Carol Butler of the Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation, in Birmingham, Alabama, which provides community development grants. “You don’t get good legislation when you get only the rabid sides on both sides making that

happen. You have to have people in the middle who are looking out for the broader good.”

But you also have to have people in the middle who vote in equal numbers to those on the ends of the ideological spectrum. In the meantime, increasing polarization is dismayingly self-perpetuating: The same echo chambers that vilify the other party and encourage politicians to court extreme partisans become ideological traps, punishing legislators at the first sign of reaching out to the enemy. This, in turn, can lead to bad policy, when politicians withhold support for sensible solutions if they deem that their opponents will be blamed for some or another problem.

*“I do think there are a whole lot of people who are like me, standing in middle going, ‘What is going on? Have you all lost your minds?’”*

————— Carol Butler

Some obvious ways out of this bind are to reform the redistricting process and to pass campaign finance reform as a constitutional amendment, but those are long shots. The most fruitful efforts might lie in getting more Americans to vote, which is likely to bring more moderates to the ballot box and, in turn, to the political stage.



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# MEDIA

## 2

### CHAPTER

PARTISAN REPORTING, THE DELUGE OF FAKE NEWS AND EVEN THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS ON MEDIA TRUSTWORTHINESS HAVE CAST A SHADOW OVER THE ENTIRE U.S. MEDIA INDUSTRY. AMERICANS ARE INCREASINGLY SKEPTICAL OF ALL NEWS THEY READ AND INCREASINGLY RELY ON THEIR OWN IMPERFECT ABILITY TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES AND FIND THE TRUTH FOR THEMSELVES.

The 2016 election campaign is a case study in the political fractures across the American media landscape. As November 8, 2016 – Election Day – dawned, The New York Times predicted that Hillary Clinton had an 85 percent chance of winning.<sup>1</sup> Every major poll predicted Clinton would be the winner,<sup>2</sup> and, although news anchors attempted to maintain some suspense in their coverage, it was clear they believed Clinton would sail to victory.

As the results started coming in, the anchors struggled to hide their shock. Martha Raddatz shed tears on ABC, Wolf Blitzer seemed dumbfounded on CNN and even comedian Stephen Colbert's live show took a somber turn. "I think we can agree that this has been an absolutely exhausting, bruising election for everyone and it has come to an ending that I did not imagine," Colbert told his audience.<sup>3</sup>

After thousands of hours of election coverage and countless newspaper and magazine articles dissecting the campaigns, then-Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly said, "I think you'll never have a result this shocking, where people got it this shockingly wrong."<sup>4</sup>

### INFOTAINMENT

The American news landscape is changing rapidly. In 2013, 54 percent of Americans consumed their news online. Only three years later, that number had climbed to 72 percent.<sup>5</sup> With the accompanying proliferation of

news websites – some of which are bare-bones operations that thrive via social media shares – expensive, traditional news organizations are scrambling to hold on to their audience and advertisers. They have gone online, experimented with content and picked up the pace of coverage. But if the transition has been difficult for the major players, it has been brutal for many local and regional newspapers, which lack the resources to compete. Over the past 70 years, the number of newspapers in the United States fell by nearly one-fourth, from 1,749 in 1945 to 1,331 at the end of 2014.<sup>6</sup> Close to 100 of those closed in the past decade, leaving important gaps in local news coverage.



▲ Linda Shapley, Denver, Colorado

Linda Shapley, managing editor at the respected Denver Post in Colorado, says the paper is "constantly battling the push and pull between trying to make sure that



*“They’re focusing on the wrong thing because it’s good for ratings, and we’re not getting the real important story.”*

————— Stephanie Monahan

we’re doing our best for our print readers and yet still trying to grow our traffic.”

Television news has also changed in the past decade, with cable news channels such as CNN, MSNBC and Fox News gaining viewers and boosting profits.<sup>7</sup> Constant “breaking news” bulletins or panels of talking heads bickering over the latest headlines have become cable news staples.

“They’re focusing on the wrong thing because it’s good for ratings, and we’re not getting the real important story,” says Stephanie Monahan, who oversees Philadelphia’s volunteer programs. She cites as an example disagreement over the size of the crowd at President Donald Trump’s January 2017 inauguration. It was a trivial story, Monahan says, yet it dominated headlines for weeks because the president tweeted about it and Americans were eager to watch the drama unfold.

## ANXIETY

Trump’s victory was an emotional moment for his supporters and critics alike, exacerbating many Americans’ tribal approach to politics. Cable news has capitalized on and stokes the heightened anxiety, to the point of distressing some viewers.

Martha Thompson of El Paso, Texas, says she stopped watching CNN regularly because, “I put the channel on and my blood pressure goes up.”



 Martha Thompson, El Paso, Texas

Blood pressures are rising on the left in particular. Jhana Bach, an organizer for the Seattle chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), admits:

“Since the election I haven’t been able to deal with very much news. ... I listen to the news on NPR [public radio], but every time they actually play Trump’s quotes, I have to change the channel. And anytime they’re having a spokesperson, a mouthpiece for him that’s giving a point of view that’s just blatantly ridiculous, I have

to change the channel. So I've been doing a lot of trying to navigate my mental health with getting the best sources. So that's kind of where I've landed – strategic searches for things I want to know about.”

## POLARIZATION


When Americans go online to get their news, they typically need not even search for what interests them, as social media sites such as Facebook use algorithms that show them news stories that align with their political orientation and personal preferences. The resulting “information silos” are making it increasingly difficult for Americans of differing political views to agree even on basics.

*“I have really tried to be careful about not clinging just to all of my news from ... my social media feed because I recognize that there's a filter bubble.”*

————— Kimberly Larson

“I have really tried to be careful about not clinging just to all of my news from ... my social media feed because I recognize that there's a filter bubble,” says Kimberly Larson, communications director at Climate Solutions, an environmental group in Seattle. Larson knows the news she sees on her Facebook page is left-leaning, full of posts from fellow environmentalists, but says, “I definitely catch a lot of news from colleagues on social media that I would have missed otherwise.”



 Joe Wardy, El Paso, Texas

Joe Wardy, a former mayor of El Paso and president and chief executive of a startup incubator, says the media feed this polarization:

*“Everything's become more opinionated. It's all opinionated facts. Not really true facts.”*

————— Lou Jasikoff

“I think that true journalism requires balance. Looking to both sides of an issue. Looking to find alternative viewpoints, to let the readers decide what they think. Today that's been abandoned. It's about sensationalism, it's about ratings, about what sells what little newspapers there are. I have a great concern. I think that it finally culminated in the last presidential election. I think there's a huge distrust. I think that the media reporting – depending on what side you're on – is very biased. And I don't think it's healthy.”

Lou Jasikoff, a radio producer and newspaper founder in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, agrees. “Everything's become more opinionated. It's all opinionated facts. Not really true facts,” he says.

## CONSERVATIVE MEDIA

Fox News has dominated the conservative media landscape for more than two decades, with outspoken personalities such as Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly shaping many Americans' perspectives on important national and global issues. The network has long been accused by those on the left of shading the truth to fit its conservative bent, particularly on issues such as climate change.

More recently, online outlets including the Drudge Report and Breitbart have developed significant followings with their ultra-conservative and conspiratorial news coverage. Breitbart, a right-wing site known for incendiary stories of questionable veracity, was founded in 2007 but came into its own in the 2016 election with its outspoken support of Trump's candidacy. The site's former executive chairman, Steve Bannon, was an adviser on the Trump campaign and later became chief strategist in the Trump White House.

Few liberals take seriously claims made by the popular conservative media.

“My knee-jerk reaction [to conservative news] is, ‘This is crazy,’” says Karen Gann, a liberal stay-at-home mother in Huntsville, Alabama, one of the nation's most conservative states.



 Karen Gann, Huntsville, Alabama

The 2016 election brought home to many on the left that they did not understand how conservative Americans felt or thought. Gann says she has started reading conservative news sites because she wants to get out of her “bubble.” “I would really like to learn how people who are more conservative, how they are thinking. Where their brains are with all of this,” she says.

## “MAINSTREAM MEDIA”

On the other side of the political spectrum, conservatives have long complained that major news outlets such as The New York Times, The Washington Post and CNN have a liberal bias.



 Mayor Woody Jacobs, Cullman, Alabama

Some conservatives were particularly frustrated by the 2016 election coverage, which they said was unfairly critical of Trump under the guise of neutrality. “You get tired of an agenda from national news markets. And it was pretty obvious, watching it,” says Woody Jacobs, the mayor of Cullman, Alabama. Jacobs says he enjoyed watching the shocked newscasters on election night “because ... they showed their true colors of what they were thinking – where they thought it was going to go.”

Conservatives also deride mainstream and left-leaning media as elitist. Marty Connors, the former chairman of Alabama’s Republican Party, says journalists “think that they’re smarter than what they are.” Trump’s presidency, he argues, has in some ways rendered the media irrelevant. Although he says he doesn’t like the president’s notorious “3 a.m. tweets,” he appreciates that Trump has found a way to get around the media filter:

“The original fault of the media [is] that they [believe they] are superior to anyone. ... [They] feel that they are the ones that get to determine what is and is not news. Well, what happens when a president goes around you and ignores you? Well, that’s got to really [make you angry]. Because you’re no longer the arbiter of what’s important. So that’s why they’re all bent out of shape.”

*“You get tired of an agenda from national news markets.”*

————— Woody Jacobs

Beyond the mainstream media, conservatives also frequently criticize left-leaning networks such as MSNBC and websites such as Slate and The Huffington Post, which have been heavily critical of the president and Republican Congress.

## FAKE NEWS

Trump’s focus on the media made them a central preoccupation throughout his campaign and the first months of his presidency. “The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!”<sup>8</sup> he told his Twitter followers shortly after taking office. Trump has long lambasted critical journalists and media outlets, but now he has a powerful platform from which to attack them.

*“It’s a different thing entirely when unwelcome news... becomes labeled fake news.”*

————— Linda Shapley

The president’s use of the term “fake news” to describe those critical of him has sown confusion about the veracity of all news. He has tapped into Republican distrust of the mainstream media and fanned fears about

## RACE AND THE MEDIA

Although ethnic and racial minorities account for approximately 35 percent of the U.S. population, they make up only 13 percent of daily newspaper employees.<sup>16</sup> Minorities are also underrepresented in television news, particularly in local programming.<sup>17</sup> Much of the American news media landscape is dominated by white anchors, reporters and political pundits.

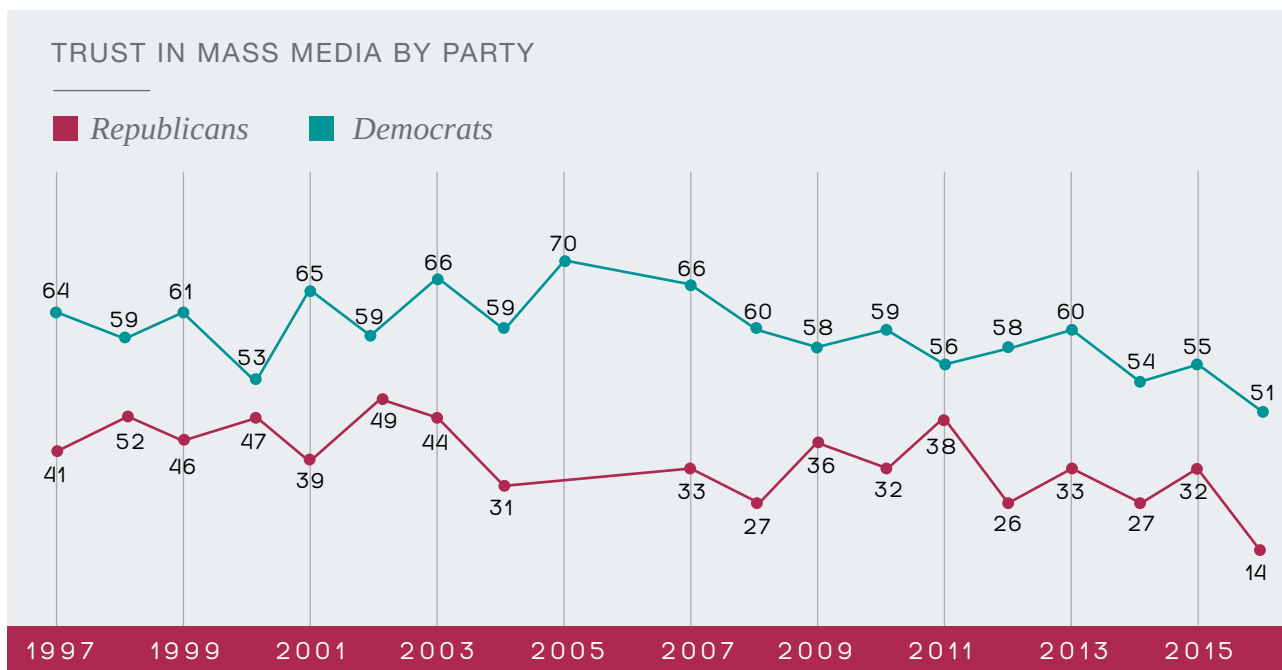
*“One feed that I’ve been paying attention to – it’s very much connected to my community – is TV One, because they cover stuff in the African-American community that other folks don’t.”*

————— LeDawn Sullivan

Many Hispanic-Americans turn to Spanish-language news sources, from local radio stations and newspapers to large national networks such as Univision, to get their news. Julie Patiño of the Denver Foundation in Colorado is an avid reader of The New York Times and other English-language publications, but she understands why Spanish-language programming is popular among the United States’ 56.6 million Hispanics.<sup>18</sup> “You have someone speaking your language. There are people that report on things that have credibility, and that’s where you get your news,” she says.

Small-business owner Blanca Gallego grew up in Mexico but for years has lived in Pecos, Texas, with her U.S.-born husband, who is white. She notices major differences between the news coverage she sees on Hispanic networks and what her husband sees on English-speaking ones, particularly on issues of importance to the Hispanic community, including Trump’s proposal to build a wall on the U.S. border with Mexico. “Our networks, Hispanic networks, say one thing, and the Anglo networks say another one,” she says. “Of course, each media covers what the people want to hear.”

Hispanic-Americans are not the only minority to seek out news that focuses on issues important to their communities. LeDawn Sullivan, director of community leadership at the Denver Foundation, is frustrated by television news coverage of Trump’s presidency and now consumes much of her news through online feeds. “One feed that I’ve been paying attention to – it’s very much connected to my community – is TV One, because they cover stuff in the African-American community that other folks don’t,” she says. “So if I want to know what’s going on nationally, I have to go there. Because otherwise I won’t know.” Sullivan cites as an example of this coverage gap a string of disappearances of young African-American women that was largely ignored by mainstream media.



Gallup

its agenda and bias. Shapley, of The Denver Post, concedes, “There’s no doubt that there’s more fake news,” but her definition – “When [you have] somebody who’s deliberately intending to mislead the public about a political thing” – is very different from Trump’s. “It’s a different thing entirely when unwelcome news ... becomes labeled fake news,” she says.

Shapley gives an example of fake news: In November 2016, days before the election, a site calling itself the Denver Guardian published a sensational story about a murder-suicide related to Hillary Clinton’s email scandal. The newspaper does not exist and the murder-suicide was fictional, but the article was shared thousands of times on Facebook. Shapley and her paper reacted swiftly, publishing an article that refuted the claims made by the so-called Denver Guardian. The Post provided readers with a bulleted list of evidence that the story and website were bogus and even included a Google Street View image of the alleged address of the fake newspaper, which turned out to be a parking lot.<sup>9</sup>

*“I think one of the main reasons you see a Trump presidency is the American people have lost faith that they were being told the truth, whether it’s by their own government or the media.”*

— Lou Jasikoff

Jasikoff, the radio producer from Pennsylvania, says, “I think one of the main reasons you see a Trump presidency is the American people have lost faith that they were being told the truth, whether it’s by their own government or the media.” Indeed, Americans’ trust in mainstream media is dwindling. In a 2016 Gallup poll, only 14 percent of Republican respondents said they had a “great deal” or “fair amount” of trust, compared with 51 percent of Democrats. In the previous year, 32 percent of Republicans and 55 percent of Democrats trusted the mainstream media.



▲ Lou Jasikoff, Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania

Shapley observed this mistrust during the 2016 election cycle:

“Every campaign it bubbles up. Where one side will say,

‘You’re treating the other side better than you’re treating my side.’ ... You know, any time that we would have something that was negative of Hillary Clinton we would get complaints from people who supported her. When we had things that were negative of Donald Trump, we would get complaints from people who supported Donald Trump. And so, it became a very divisive line.”

Shapley understands why people are frustrated but says, “Our newsroom does not have an agenda. ... We don’t sit at meetings and decide, ‘Oh, well this is really going to be embarrassing for the president, so this is what’s going to be on Page 1.’ We decide that this is a Page 1 story because it’s an important issue that everybody wants to know more about. ... Our editorial views are not held by everybody in the newsroom.”

To combat this growing mistrust of media, The Post has tried to be more transparent, publishing articles to explain its processes and decisions. When the paper’s editorial board endorsed Clinton for president in 2016, it provided readers with information about what that meant, Shapley says, explaining “Here’s what a presidential endorsement means. It doesn’t mean that this is how the newsroom feels. This is the view of the editorial page and this is a person who is separate from the newsroom and is not involved with the choosing of those decisions.”

## FINDING THE TRUTH

Alison, a retired educator in Huntsville, Alabama, who did not give her last name, says that in her years as a science teacher and in writing her doctoral thesis, she learned to consult primary sources. But she cannot always do that with news reports. “Most of the time when I’m trying to check these things out, either I don’t know what the primary source is or I have no access to it,” she says. The president may be cutting out the middleman by tweeting directly to the American people, but many sources, particularly government leaks and anonymous comments, are difficult to assess.

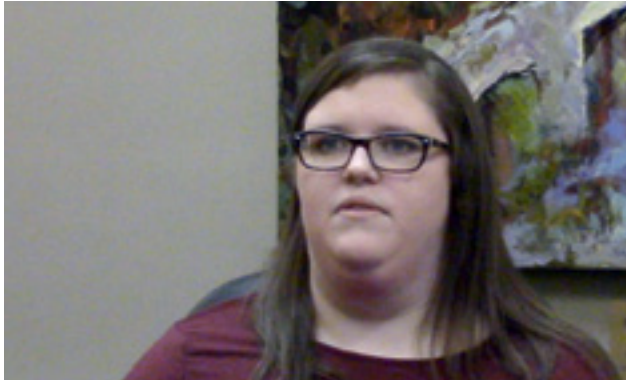
*“I’m more skeptical of what I read and what I see, and I probably require more sources of information that triangulate on an issue.”*


————— Richard Schulik

As trust in the media wanes, some Americans are consulting more news sources, often from different political perspectives. “I’m more skeptical of what I read and what I see, and I probably require more sources of information that triangulate on an issue,” Richard Schulik, a professor of medicine at the University of Colorado,



says. “[I] am more likely to form my own opinion now, rather than just take things at face value.” A 2013 Pew survey found that 34 percent of left-leaning MSNBC’s viewers also watch right-leaning Fox News,<sup>10</sup> and 28 percent of Fox News viewers also watch MSNBC’s liberal coverage. About half of the viewers of both channels also watched CNN, which is typically seen as centrist or center-left.<sup>11</sup>



 Sarah Emerson, Birmingham, Alabama

Sarah Emerson, a conservative law student in Birmingham, Alabama, also browses new sites from across the political spectrum. “I’ll look across the board and just try to fact-find that way. Because you really have to look at multiple sources to be able to see what’s going on in our country,” she says. “When it’s a more partisan site, you kind of have to read past the partisanship in it to see the truth.”

Many Americans feel confident in their ability to find the truth about an issue on their own, but recent studies suggest that most cannot. An Ipsos poll conducted for the BuzzFeed news website found that American adults are fooled by fake news headlines 75 percent of the time.<sup>12</sup> Further, more than 80 percent of middle school students taking part in a Stanford University study mistakenly believed that an advertisement they were shown was a real news story.<sup>13</sup> In the same study, most high school students were quick to believe a fake image and caption. Only 20 percent of the students questioned the source of the image or information.<sup>14</sup>

Fake news stories are also extremely prevalent: Top fake news stories leading up to the election outperformed legitimate ones on Facebook.<sup>15</sup>

Partisan reporting, the deluge of fake news and even the president’s comments on media trustworthiness have cast a shadow over the entire U.S. media industry. Americans are increasingly skeptical of all news they read and increasingly rely on their own imperfect ability to read between the lines and find the truth for themselves. In an increasingly politically divided media landscape, without improved media literacy, Americans are prone to misinterpret information or believe misinformation.

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# ECONOMY

## 3

### CHAPTER

IN THIS ERA OF GROWING INEQUALITY, THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN INDICATORS AND MANY PEOPLE'S REALITY IS STARK, AND HAS HELPED ROIL POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES AND ABROAD. PEOPLE ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT, INCLUDING TRUMP SUPPORTERS, INCREASINGLY AGREE ON THIS DIAGNOSIS, ALTHOUGH THEY DISAGREE ON THE TREATMENT.

"[The] stock market goes up and down, up and down, up and down. Well, that's truly not an indicator of what's affecting you and me. Do I have a million dollars in stock? Gosh I wish I did," reflects Hank, of Huntsville, Alabama. While economists and government officials use GDP, stock market indices or even interest rates to measure the health of an economy, most Americans are like Hank, fretting over more immediate indicators such as their bank accounts, jobs and the cost of living.

### THE DIVIDE

Key macro indicators show the U.S. economy rebounding nicely from the 2008 recession, but not everyone has shared in the recovery, as the gap between rich and poor continues to widen. With income inequality at

perhaps its highest point in U.S. history,<sup>1</sup> approximately 41.8 percent of the country's wealth is owned by the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans.<sup>2</sup> The top 10 percent own 77.2 percent of the wealth. By comparison, Germany's wealthiest 1 percent hold 24.5 percent of that country's wealth, and the top 10 percent hold 59.2 percent. Belgium's wealthiest own 12.6 and 44.1 percent, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Lindsay Reid, a retired educator from Bellingham, Washington, is one of many who are deeply concerned about the "big gap between the CEOs and the billionaires that can just invest their money and get bigger and bigger ... and the working class that gets nothing." Reid's criticism echoes a frequent liberal complaint that the rich's





*“This is the richest country in the world, and why people starve in this country is inexcusable.”*

—— Mike

already huge earnings are supplemented by a tax code that levies lower rates on investment income than on earned income, privileging investment over work.

“This is the richest country in the world, and why people starve in this country is inexcusable,” says Mike, a retired physicist from Huntsville, Alabama. He says when he started his career at the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation – later to become aerospace giant McDonnell Douglas – company founder James McDonnell “bragged that his salary was no more than 10 times that of the guy that swept the floor. That’s all gone away. I mean people that make hundreds of millions of dollars a year, while other people are barely scraping by and don’t have enough to live on. I think [that] is inexcusable in this country.”

#### FACTS AND FIGURES

- » The wealthiest 1 percent of Americans hold 41.8 percent of the country’s wealth
- » U.S. national debt is \$19 trillion and climbing
- » 50 percent of young adults earn more than their parents did at their age

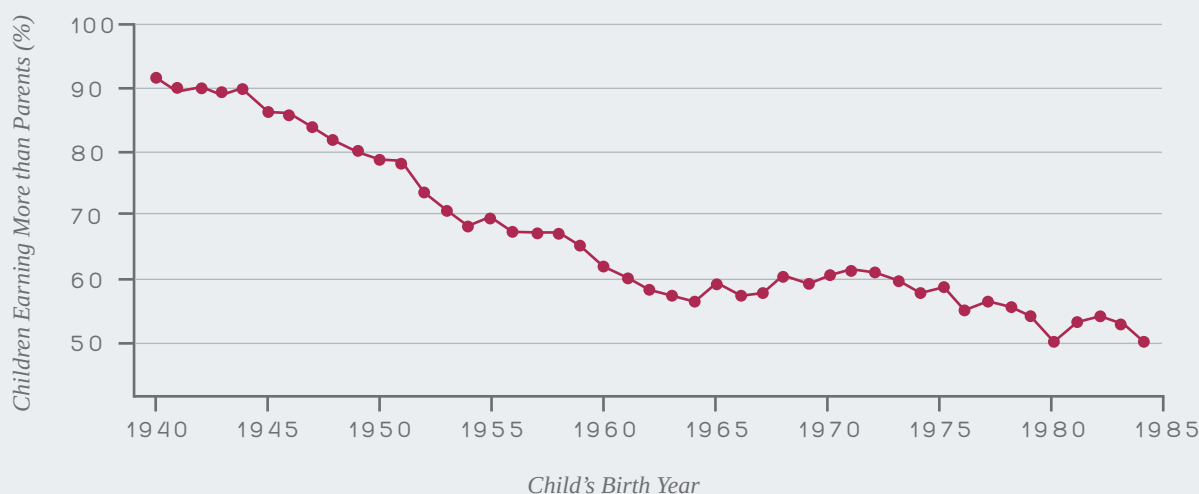
As the gulf between the rich and poor widens, the middle class in between is also shrinking. “From 2000 to 2014 the share of adults living in middle-income households fell in 203 of the 229 U.S. metropolitan areas,” according to a 2016 Pew Research Center study that defined middle income as two-thirds to double the national median, adjusted for household size.<sup>4</sup> For 2014, the study put the national middle-income range at roughly \$42,000 to \$125,000 annually for a household of three.<sup>5</sup>



 Mike, Huntsville, Alabama

“The middle class is disappearing. It’s going to the point where everybody is struggling, and yet there’s people that are making millions and millions and millions of dollars,” says Martha Thompson, a retiree from El Paso, Texas. “I don’t know if it’s legal ... or they play the system.”

## AMERICA'S FADING DREAM



Gallup

## GROWTH / COST OF LIVING

Adding to the squeeze on the working and middle classes is a spiraling cost of living, particularly in booming cities like Denver, Seattle and San Francisco. Between 2000 and 2015, the San Francisco area experienced a 78.4 percent Consumer Price Index increase, which measures the cost of living.<sup>6</sup> Education and health care expenses, too, can leave Americans in crippling debt, as discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

Housing is a major culprit. In Boulder, for instance, “Housing prices have been skyrocketing for the better part of a decade. And it’s become a very unaffordable place for many people,” says Greg Guibert, a top administrator in the city government. Guibert says many people have been forced out of the city, requiring them to make long commutes to work. “And then you have this unfortunate stratification around service provision from the outside and then people here [in Boulder] with a lot of money who are completely reliant on people who have to travel great distances to support their lifestyle.” City Hall has tried to address the issue by requiring developers to build affordable housing, he says.

In Seattle, Washington, it’s a similar story for the construction workers building the city’s glass high-rises. “You want to talk about the concern with our [union] members? It’s the commute,” says Dale Bright, an official with the Local 242 construction union. Bright him-

self spends an hour each way on the 30-mile drive to the city because he cannot afford to live in Seattle.

Julie Patiño, a program director at the Denver Foundation, says Denver’s economic boom has put housing out of reach not only for the city’s poorest but also for the middle class. “People who have your average medium-type jobs, there’s a paucity of housing there. Homeownership? Forget about it. ... So that issue is just endemic, even if you talk to someone who’s middle class here, all the way to someone [living] on the street,” Patiño says.

For many Americans, a central promise of the American Dream, that each generation can do better than the previous one, has become increasingly hollow. Over 90 percent of Americans born in 1940 earned more at age 30 than their parents did at the same age, compared with 50 percent of those born in 1980.<sup>7</sup> These direct contrasts can be particularly painful and disappointing as young people cannot give their children the same quality of life they enjoyed growing up.

## WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO FOR ME?

Amid this increasing stratification and backsliding, many Americans are asking what the government can do to help. Opinions vary wildly across the political spectrum, ranging from expanding welfare programs to cutting regulations.

## GOVERNMENT SPENDING

“The Republicans want to spend less money, the Democrats want to spend more money,” says Ken Isaksson, who works at a fish hatchery in Aberdeen, Washington. Isaksson says he sees this divide clearly in Olympia, Washington state’s capital, where he frequently talks with local lawmakers about fishing regulations.

Republicans often campaign on promises to curtail government waste, vowing to cut unnecessary programs and reduce the size of the bureaucracy. Although many economists question whether or not Republicans in Congress or the White House do actually reduce federal spending, even on the social programs they criticize,<sup>8</sup> most Americans believe the Republicans are the party of fiscal conservatism.

*“Our government is bigger than we can afford.”*

————— John

That is especially important to those who want to see the budget balanced. The United States has a national debt of over \$19 trillion,<sup>9</sup> which some argue is not sustainable. John, a physicist in Huntsville, Alabama, is a social liberal, but he says he worries about “the financial solvency of our government. ... Our government is bigger than we can afford.”

Kathy Dobash, a member of the Luzerne County Council in Pennsylvania, says, “I’m hoping that this new president [will] freeze hiring [and] track the waste. Citizens’ hard-working tax dollars should be ... scrutinized on how [they are] spent. .... We have an overspending problem in this country, and we need to get a handle on it.”

Other Americans, even conservatives, are more wary of the consequences of budget cuts. Sarah Emerson, an active Republican and law student in Birmingham, Alabama, voted for Donald Trump and is excited about his focus on employment, but she worries about his plans to reduce the size of the federal government. Emerson explains that in addition to her studies, she “works for a federal agency that has been hit. They can’t hire new people to come in for the people who’ve left.”

## REGULATION

Contemporary American capitalism has a strong libertarian streak, and basic arguments over regulations, such as protection and stability for the many versus freedom for entrepreneurs, rage fiercely in the United States.

Thompson of El Paso, Texas, says regulations helped rein in some of the excesses of the 2000s that led to the financial crash:

“When George [W.] Bush left the White House, eight years before Obama, the auto industry was fixing to go under. There were banks that were going under. Unemployment was out of this world. And slowly ... putting financial regulations in place, they were able to curb some of the abuses that were taking place in the financial [sector].”

After the collapse of major financial institutions such as Lehman Brothers and Bear Stearns, taxpayer-funded bailouts of failing banks and a reckoning with widespread subprime lending across the country, the government moved to regulate the industry. The Dodd-Frank landmark legislation stepped up oversight of financial institutions, cracked down on some practices by financial advisers and implemented new consumer protection measures. Although some on the left argue that the 2010 law did not go far enough, the Republican-controlled House and Senate are in the midst of rolling back its provisions.



▲ Ben Haynes, Cullman, Alabama

*“There’s just a lot of regulations that affect our ability to do business day-to-day that never seem to back up.”*

————— Ben Haynes

Regulation can prevent banking or even environmental catastrophes, but many Americans, particularly on the right, say much of it amounts to red tape tying up the economy. Ben Haynes, a cattle farmer in Cullman, Alabama, feels hamstrung:

“I think the ones that most often come to mind are maybe environmentally tied, but also economically and tax regulations and burdens. ... There’s just a lot of regulations that affect our ability to do business day-to-day that never seem to back up. They always just seem to accrue more and more and more. And those things add to the difficulty of doing business, add to the cost of doing business, and quite often those regulations are not shared by all of our competitors, globally.”

Regulations’ effects on small businesses are a particularly sore spot for many. Sandra, a conservative retiree from Huntsville, Alabama, says they are a drag on her son’s construction business. “The regulations that are increasing on him have been ridiculous. ... It takes him twice as long to get a job done,” she complains.



 Paul Beveridge, Seattle, Washington

And Paul Beveridge, owner of Wilridge Winery in Washington state, says they give an unfair advantage to his larger and more established competitors, who can better afford them. For example, he says, one rule that requires wineries to work with outside distributors – prohibiting them from selling directly to retailers – imposes a huge cost on small operators. The “folks that are happy with the system” are “making money,” he says, so why “would they lower down the drawbridge and let anyone else compete with them?”

## TRADE

Traditionally, Republicans have championed free trade, while Democrats worry over its effects on the environ-

ment, labor standards and employment. Trump’s populist, anti-globalist campaign, however, scrambled that equation, at least temporarily. He took particular aim at the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which Hillary Clinton also came to oppose, even though she had praised it as secretary of state.

In their first debate, Trump argued, “You go to New England, Ohio, Pennsylvania, you go anywhere you want ... and you will see devastation where manufacturing is down 30, 40, sometimes 50 percent. NAFTA is the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere but certainly ever signed in this country.”<sup>10</sup> Actual losses in the manufacturing sector due to the North American Free Trade Agreement, signed by President Bill Clinton, are estimated to be closer to 1 to 2 percent,<sup>11</sup> but Trump’s criticism tapped into anxiety about losing jobs to overseas competitors, which will be explored in Chapter 5.

Trump is not against major trade deals because of some broader ideological belief. He is critical of these specific deals because he believes that he is a superior negotiator to his opponents, Hillary Clinton (and her husband President Bill Clinton) and President Barack Obama, who oversaw the TTIP and TPP negotiations. Trump’s business acumen, he argues, makes him a much better deal maker as president. Trump argues that past deals have lost Americans jobs, and promises to bring them back.

For most Americans, trade is an abstract concept. Certainly, they consume imports and are affected by the costs of those goods. Further, 41 million Americans have jobs that depend on trade.<sup>12</sup> But it’s difficult for most officials, let alone ordinary Americans, to assess the potential effects of trade deals on their lives. Trump’s focus on employment is powerful because it puts these agreements in terms that are personal and relevant to many Americans.

“I think that we had gotten a little too loose in our trade deals. I know that it’s kind of a world economy, you can’t necessarily change that, but I think we had [become] too loose with our policies and we just let too many jobs go,” says Woody Jacobs, mayor of Cullman, Alabama.

Others see Trump’s “America First” rhetoric as naive and counterproductive. “That’s one of the big problems ... that I have with this administration, is this talk about nationalism, and it’s all about us and to heck with the

rest of the world,” says Hank, a Huntsville, Alabama, resident. “It frustrates me to no end that any of us [thinks] that we can do this by ourselves and not accept the fact that we are very much a global economy, and this is happening fast for everyone.”



 Ruben Vogt, El Paso, Texas

*“What a lot of people might not think about, because they don’t live on the border, is how intertwined our two communities are.”*

————— Ruben Vogt

Living in El Paso, Texas, Ruben Vogt sees the daily back-and-forth of trade and traffic with the bustling Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez, just across the border:

“What a lot of people might not think about, because they don’t live on the border, is how intertwined our two communities are. Not only our families, but economically, how important it is that we have folks from Juarez

and all over Chihuahua come into El Paso and spend their money here. It really helps boost our economy, the state’s economy and the U.S. economy. ... What we have seen is that trade that comes in from Mexico helps provide jobs across the entire United States. So the relationship that we have with Mexico is critical to border communities, but I don’t know that people really understand how critical it is to the rest of the United States.”

In Alabama, Hilda Lockhart, director of the state Commerce Department’s international trade division, says trade with Mexico and Canada has been a huge boon to the local economy there as well. She would just like to “make it fair trade and make sure that everybody’s playing by the rules.”

## THE GROWING DIVIDE

To gauge Americans’ views on the economy takes a bit of amateur psychology and an ability to read past the latest financial bulletins. As politicians have long known, rising GDPs or stock markets do not necessarily ease people’s fears that they are losing ground, whether to imagined job losses overseas or to very real income stagnation.

In this era of growing inequality, that disconnect – between indicators and many people’s reality – is stark, and has helped roil politics in the United States and abroad. It seems as if left and right, including Trump supporters, increasingly agree on this diagnosis, although they disagree on the treatment. The economy is an arena in which national and local policymakers have a part to play, but if they cannot tackle immediate concerns, including the growing divide between rich and poor and the rising cost of living in many urban areas, it is difficult to imagine the waters being calmed anytime soon.

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# WELFARE

## 4

### CHAPTER

THE POPULATION IS GRAYING, PUTTING A STRAIN ON SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE, AND THE LABOR MARKET IS SHIFTING RAPIDLY, LEAVING MANY WORKERS BEHIND. LIBERALS ARGUE THAT TRUMP SUPPORTERS VOTED AGAINST THEIR OWN INTERESTS BY ELECTING SOMEONE WHO MIGHT CUT WELFARE PROGRAMS, BUT CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE TRUMP'S TALK OF LIMITING GOVERNMENT WASTE WILL HELP THEIR COMMUNITIES AND SAVE THEIR OWN TAX DOLLARS.

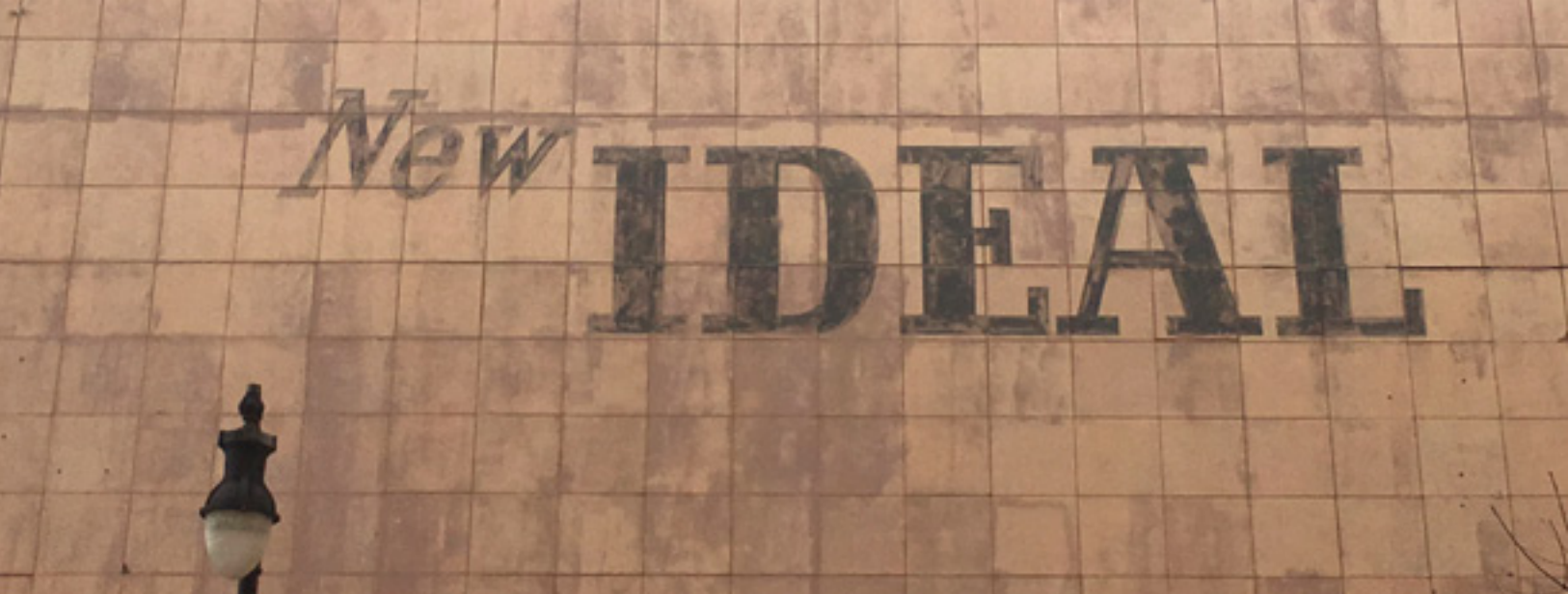
Why did Donald Trump's voters vote against their own interests? This question was splashed across the front pages and dominated the headlines of major newspapers and magazines following the November 2016 election. Many upper-middle class Democrats shook their heads. How, they wondered, could Trump voters have been so stupid?

The liberal logic went like this: Trump supporters, often poor and rural, benefit from government help and are most likely to be hurt by an economic downturn. Trump fooled his voters into thinking he cared about them and would bring back their jobs, when in fact he would make it the business of his presidency to cut the very pro-

grams upon which they relied. Meanwhile, financially secure urban liberals (as defined in the introduction) would be mostly shielded from Trump's promised cuts to government programs.

Trump supporters not only disagree with this perspective, but they are angered by it. Many reject the notion that those they view as "liberal elitists" know what is best for them. Where many liberals see a social welfare system stretched so thin it can barely provide for the basic needs of the nation's poorest citizens, conservatives (as defined in the introduction) see a bloated system awash in taxpayer dollars, benefiting shirkers instead of those in genuine need.





## THE SYSTEM

About 52.2 million of the poorest Americans – 21.3 percent of the country’s population – received assistance from the government each month in 2012, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s most recent comprehensive survey on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Most of the aid, which ranged from food stamps to day care and cash assistance, went to families, especially those headed by single mothers.

Much of the current U.S. welfare system is a product of the Great Depression, perhaps the greatest economic test the country has faced. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal was a series of reforms that offered a safety net for the country’s poorest and most vulnerable. It also established financial protections, including greater regulation of banks and lending. Part of the New Deal was the Social Security Act of 1935, which created a system of cash assistance for those in need, a national pension system and unemployment insurance.

Further legislation was passed first by President John F. Kennedy in 1962 and then by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and 1965 to expand benefits on the federal level.<sup>2</sup> Johnson’s so-called War on Poverty expanded Social Security, including benefits for retirees, the disabled and widows.<sup>3</sup> Johnson also established Medicare, which provides health insurance for the elderly and disabled, and Medicaid, which provides health insurance for the poor.

In 1996, Democratic President Bill Clinton made good on his campaign promise to “end welfare as we know it,” signing into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, authored by Republican Congressman E. Clay Shaw. The reforms

added work requirements for recipients of cash aid and gave significantly more control of these programs to state governments, meaning that assistance available varies significantly from state to state.

The U.S. government assistance system was created more than 80 years ago as a response to a national crisis and has been patched and amended over the following decades. States have significant control in selecting recipients, defining benefits and administering programs. This piecemeal approach leads to serious gaps in coverage for recipients.

## USERS AND ABUSERS

Conservatives have long complained that welfare programs are rife with abuse. While they support some social safety net for those whom they believe need – and deserve – it, they argue that the system allows many able-bodied people to stay at home when they should be working.

“I believe that [welfare is] very effective for the right people. For the right people, not for the people who make a career out of it,” says Blanca Gallego, a small business owner in Pecos, Texas.

Kathy Dobash, a Republican councilwoman in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, acknowledges that everyone goes through tough times at some point. “I myself have had my struggles and I’ve had to take care of my mother, and I even for a time in my life was on the welfare roll, and it was very minimal. I got \$80 a month. It was a very, very short time.” But like many conservatives, Dobash believes the system is being misused in her community as “a lifetime experience.”

"I know young individuals who've been on it and used the system since age 18, 19, as adults. And I don't think the system was ever intended for that," she says. "It was a hand up, not a handout." While she says she wants to see every child fed and every family housed, she says the way to provide for the community's basic needs is not through cash assistance but through jobs.



 Bruce Bradley, El Paso, Texas

*"I know young individuals who've been on it and used the system since age 18, 19, as adults. And I don't think the system was ever intended for that."*

————— Kathy Dobash

Bruce Bradley, a retiree in El Paso, Texas, voices a similar mix of compassion and skepticism, saying, "I got nothing against people who need the help ... but there's too many out there that expect it. ... If the government would get all the people who are abusing the system, if they would get them off the system first, we wouldn't be in as deep [a] hole as we're in," Bradley says. He blames the government for allowing people to shirk their own responsibilities by providing them with unnecessary support, further driving up the national debt.

But others say eradicating poverty will take not just jobs but also cultural and institutional changes. For most of his life, Mike Green has worked in manufacturing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he sees the cycle of poverty in his own neighborhood. "When you talk about the black kids, you have to talk about how they're being raised in the home, OK? There's no man in the home. They're on generations of welfare. The education is

poor, OK?" Green, an African-American himself, says he does not hold his neighbors wholly responsible for their plight, but he believes his able-bodied neighbors could get off the system.

## IMMIGRATION

Many conservatives see undocumented immigrants as particularly egregious abusers of government assistance programs, coming to the United States to take advantage of the education, health care and welfare systems. "I don't mind helping for a while, but there's too many out there right now that I'm worried about that are here for the freebies," Bradley says. "They never paid into it and they're getting too much out of it."



 Lou Jasikoff, Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania

*"If you're going to come here – come and work – but you can't just come here and take advantage of all the things that Americans have."*

————— Lou Jasikoff

Lou Jasikoff, a Libertarian radio personality and newspaper publisher in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, takes a similar view:

"You can't have open borders where people are going to come in and get free food and free medical – and free is only free because it's going into someone's pocket. And free is never free. Somebody's paying for it. Free education. But as long as that's still there, people are going to find their way to the United States and they're going to take advantage. It's human nature. ... I would say – wait a minute – if you're going to come here – come and

work – but you can't just come here and take advantage of all the things that Americans have. Or come here and expect free education, free medical, free health care or free schooling for your children. There has to be some sort of balance here. That's just the way it is."

Professor Josiah Heyman, director of the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso, says Jasikoff's concerns are unfounded.



 Josiah Heyman, El Paso, Texas

"There are two myths about unauthorized immigrants. One is that they take advantage of the welfare system and the other is that they have a high rate of criminality. And it's almost exactly the opposite. It's harder to get public benefits," he says. "There are some public benefits that unauthorized people can get, largely through their children. So mothers of U.S. citizen children can get things like women and infant nutrition programs, because there's a belief that it's worthwhile to invest in the children because of the long-term cost of having unhealthy children, uneducated children. But the vast majority of welfare programs are not available to the unauthorized themselves."

Unmentioned in this discussion are public schools and emergency room care, arguably forms of assistance available to undocumented migrants. But regardless of what constitutes assistance or how much of this assistance undocumented people actually take, there is a pervasive anxiety that immigrants, particularly undocumented ones, are taking advantage of the American system.

## GETTING YOUR FAIR SHARE

One point of deep concern for voters, especially conservatives, is how their tax dollars are being spent. This worry is particularly acute for working class citizens

struggling to pay their bills every month. Many make a direct connection between the money taken out of their own paycheck each month and the food stamps their chronically unemployed neighbor receives.

Dominik Salazar, an auto mechanic from El Paso, Texas, is frustrated to see apparently able-bodied men in his neighborhood walk around with no income and no place to live. After watching a group of men loiter by the home that he shares with his wife and daughter, he says, "Those gentlemen who just passed us, they're kinda homeless. We need to put those guys to work. Between you and me, I'm not going to give them any handouts. Because they're gonna go and buy liquor or something. ... That's what this town needs: a little affirmative action as to get people working."

Kathy Dobash, the Luzerne County councilwoman, is concerned as both a policymaker and a taxpayer that her community's tax money helps certain groups collecting benefits rather than the entire community that has paid the taxes. "Citizens' hard-working tax dollars should be utilized for everyone to protect everyone and scrutinized on how it is spent, and we have an overspending problem in this country, and we need to get a handle on it," she says.

Many see spending on assistance programs not just as a waste of government funds, but as a waste of their own money. This perception can lead to frustration within the community and resentment toward those receiving aid.

## TEACH A MAN TO FISH

One central cause of frustration is the belief that many receiving government assistance are not working but could be. Renee Chambers is a 35-year-old single mother in Yakima, Washington, who for years worked in an ophthalmologist's office. Now unemployed, she is learning computer skills in a program at a local nonprofit organization for dislocated workers and is considering going back to school to improve her chances on the job market. Chambers explains why she voted for Trump:

"What it came down to was jobs. My ability to function as a citizen of the States and – function for my family, for my kids. ... We're doing a shift [from] being given everything [to] having to work for everything. I've worked since I was 14. I had two jobs in high school ... And it didn't kill me one bit. But the kids nowadays,

they think that they're entitled to that, so they tend to be in more of the liberal mentality, because the liberal tends to be 'here, here, here, here, and here.' [I believe] that you have to work for what you get. Everything isn't handed to you. And the world doesn't owe you nothing. If you're not willing to get off your butt and go do it, then you're not going to have nothing to show for it."

*"Everything isn't handed to you.  
And the world doesn't owe you  
nothing."*

————— Renee Chambers

Betty Wilkerson is in the same program for dislocated workers as Chambers. She has long held mid-management positions in Yakima, but she now faces age discrimination in her job hunt. She says many employers are not willing to hire someone so close to retirement. Despite her own personal challenges, Betty still believes that government assistance is a barrier to success for people who are on it:

"I think part of what's going on is that for quite a few years we've – instead of teaching people how to fish, we've handed them the fish. And they've become [accustomed] to receiving the fish. ... Now [we are] teaching people how to fish. And people are going to struggle with that. ... There's people that are excited about that because they've been demoralized and down – I mean it is not a positive thing ... continually ... being on that handout. But ... because it's been that way for so long, that transition and that mentality ... is a really good thing. And we've got generations that have lived on the fish. ... And they're like, 'Well, the way it's supposed to be.' And it's like, well, that was then. This is now. So that change is not easy. It's not easy. But that's kind of what I'm seeing. And I see that as a very positive thing. Because then that does give you control of your own life."

Across the country, those who advocate for cutting benefits say it could nudge recipients to become more self-sufficient. "I have high hopes for those on our welfare rolls to gain the skills they need and get off them – not stay on forever," Kathy Dobash, the Luzerne County councilwoman, says. "I'm hoping that this new president, I'm hoping for someone to track – to freeze hiring, to track the waste."

## THROWING THEM TO THE WOLVES?

While many conservatives call for limiting government assistance, many liberals say the current system does not offer enough support for those in need. "Our safety net, ... it's not in very good shape. The U.S. tends to throw people to the wolves," says KC Golden, a senior policy adviser at the Climate Solutions Group in Seattle, Washington. Liberals, particularly in urban areas, tend to advocate expanded government assistance and universal access to resources such as health care, housing, food and education.



▲ Vicky Pettis, Colorado Springs, Colorado

*"The leaders don't know what the poor [are] going through, what the middle class is going through, because they've been born with a silver spoon in their mouth."*

————— Vicky Pettis

Vicky Pettis served in the military for 20 years before becoming the executive director of the Colorado Veterans Resource Coalition in Colorado Springs. She and her staff acknowledge that the veterans they serve need to work hard to bring themselves out of poverty or difficult times, but Pettis says policymakers do not appreciate the level of need for services.

"The leaders don't know what the poor [are] going through, what the middle class is going through, because they've been born with a silver spoon in their mouth. ... That's why they want to shut down so many social service agencies," Pettis says. Particularly, she

cites the need for Planned Parenthood, which provides reproductive health care and which is a perennial target of the Christian right, and Meals on Wheels, which provides meals to the homebound and was slated for deep cuts in the budget proposed by Trump.

## NAVIGATING THE BEAST

Government assistance helps many in need, but the benefits and regulations can be complicated to navigate. When Michaela C., a mother of four in El Paso, Texas, decided to escape the domestic violence that she faced at home, she had no place to go. She had not worked in five years and feared that she would not be able to support her family on her own. Michaela found her way to a women's shelter where staff members helped her master a complicated web of government assistance programs designed to help people like her get back on their feet. If she had known about the services, she says, she probably would have left the relationship much earlier.

The quality and availability of assistance varies drastically from state to state. Programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) offer cash assistance, subsidized employment and even day care for families in need. Although much of the funding for programs like TANF comes from the federal government, states administer the programs and make choices about the types of services available and the requirements for enrollment. For cash assistance, recipients are often required to work a minimum number of hours or be actively searching for a job.

After escaping to the shelter, Michaela quickly found a job at a local real estate office and started studying for her real estate license. For now, her salary at the office is subsidized through a government program. She also receives free day care for her children, Medicaid and food stamps. Although Michaela found assistance, adhering to the program's strict rules proved difficult when her child was hospitalized recently and she could not work the required minimum number of hours:

"I'm gonna lose my Medicaid ... benefits for me and the children at the end of the month because ... I wasn't able to meet my required hours last week because I was taking the kids to the doctor's appointments. ... One of my children ended up in the hospital and I had to meet with the counselors at school ... and I met with a lawyer because I had court on Friday. So all my week

was spent between doctors, the lawyer, court, ... and I didn't go to work except for two hours last week. And because of that, I lost the benefits. So it's just like you're put in a position where, like, what do you do?"



 Michaela C., El Paso, Texas

Many of the women in Michaela's shelter face similar challenges negotiating the government assistance system. Patricia C., a single mother of six, says the family lost an estimated \$200 in food stamps when her daughter went to college. "They want her to work," says Patricia, who nonetheless encourages her daughter to stay in school for the better career opportunities an education can bring.

## NONPROFITS

Although many Americans receive some assistance from the government, charities are a lifeline for those who fall through the cracks.

"Philanthropy in America fills in lots of gaps. Lots of gaps," says Christiano Sosa of the nonprofit Denver Foundation, in the Colorado city of that name.

*"Philanthropy in America fills in lots of gaps. Lots of gaps."*

————— Christiano Sosa

In 2015, Americans donated \$373 billion – roughly \$2,974 per household – to charitable causes.<sup>4</sup> According to the Charities and Aid Foundation World Giving Index, the United States is the second most "generous country" in the world, after Myanmar.<sup>5</sup> Although some of these dollars go to art museums and expensive private universities, a large proportion also goes to helping the needy. "There's constantly this sort of ebb and flow. In theory, we're part of a safety net. But at any given

time, that shrinks on the government level, expands on our level,” the Denver Foundation’s Julie Patiño says. Philanthropy cannot fill the gaps left by government, Patiño argues. “We simply cannot. I think the gaps that we’re already filling are enormous enough.”

One major gap, she says, is providing basic health care to undocumented immigrants, “who can’t get any iteration of health insurance in this country,” even though, “we’re completely reliant on undocumented individuals throughout this entire country to support our economy and the informal employment sector.” Organizations such as the Denver Foundation fund clinics that offer basic services – and do not ask to see ID cards.

Although nonprofits do fill in many gaps in government assistance, government grants also help power many of those nonprofits.



 John O'Lague, Aberdeen, Washington

“What happens ... within the federal government and within the state government is that the money funnels down,” John O'Lague, of the Coastal Community

Action Program in Aberdeen, Washington, explains. For his organization’s affordable housing programs, for instance, he says, “[T]he money trickles in from the federal government. So it comes from a federal block grant to our nonprofit agency and then we’re able to distribute those funds through our programs.”

Lecia Brooks, director of the Civil Rights Memorial Center in Montgomery, Alabama, says her conservative state relies too heavily on nonprofits instead of making policy changes to reduce poverty. “Alabamians are some of the most generous people that I’ve ever seen. But ... OK, you accept that people are poor and you should give them charity, but you don’t want to do the work to help people take care of themselves,” Brooks says. “They’ll take care of you. They’ll give you some food. But they’ll vote against an expansion of Medicare, or vote against an increase in the minimum wage.”


Some conservatives would prefer to see civil society, including nonprofits, take care of the needy. Sharon Dowd, a retiree originally from Canada who now lives in El Paso, Texas, advocates limited government. She praises welfare cuts that she witnessed while living in Michigan and that she says shifted responsibility for helping others from the government to the community:

“I think we could get government out of a few things. Or minimize it. Certainly Michigan ... they minimized and people had to go to work or go to school if they were on welfare, you know, unless there was a really good reason they should be on it, and it was fascinating. What really happened was that society started, instead of saying, ‘It’s the government’s job,’ society across so many



levels started taking responsibility, in so many ways. Feeding, housing, in churches, just all the things that weren't being done before that because it was the government's job. And I think it was good for us. I really do."



 Sharon Dowd, El Paso, Texas

A FINAL WORD

Regardless of political affiliation, liberals and conservatives can agree that the government assistance system is unsustainable. The population is graying, putting a

strain on Social Security and Medicare, and the labor market is shifting rapidly, leaving many workers behind (as discussed in Chapter 5).

Liberals may believe that Trump supporters are voting against their own interests, but conservatives believe Trump's talk of limiting government waste will help their communities and save their own tax dollars. As neither party is likely to change its position on government assistance, to address the myriad challenges that face the system they must focus on their shared goals.

Even if the parties could agree on some type of reform to welfare, it's very unlikely to be a more comprehensive system such as Hartz IV in Germany, which provides more generous benefits to the unemployed. A major expansion of cash benefits would be unpopular with many U.S. voters. American perspectives on work are so deeply entwined with the debate on welfare that it is unlikely that any sweeping changes could be made to the current system without a significant emphasis placed on work.

ASSISTANCE <sup>6</sup>	DESCRIPTION
TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)	Gives cash to poor households to meet the basic needs of dependents, including children and the elderly. Regulations vary by state, but heads of household are often required to work or obtain job training.
Child Support Program	Provides families with state-regulated child care placement assistance that enables parents and caretakers to pursue work or job training by paying for child care in part or in full.
SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)	Provides subsidies to help poor people and families buy food.
Medical Assistance (Medicare and Medicaid)	Medicare is a federal health-insurance program for the severely disabled or elderly. <sup>7</sup> Medicaid is a state and federal health-insurance program for the poor. <sup>8</sup>

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# EMPLOYMENT

## 5

### CHAPTER

AMERICANS OF ALL POLITICAL STRIPES – LIKE PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD – SEE JOBS AS THE ULTIMATE SELF-HELP, A WAY OUT OF POVERTY AND THE KEY TO A HEALTHY COMMUNITY WITH A STRONG TAX BASE THAT CAN FEED INVESTMENT IN BUSINESSES, INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES.

Asked what issue he cares most about, the former chairman of Alabama’s Republican Party does not skip a beat. “Jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, and then jobs,” Marty Connors says. “And then maybe a little bit more on jobs.” For Connors and millions of other Americans, employment is the holy grail – a cure for all of the country’s social and economic woes.

From across the political divide comes a similar answer. “We need more jobs, more employment,” says Terry Collins, second vice president of the Birmingham, Alabama, branch of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), the country’s foremost civil rights organization. “Because we believe that economics is the basis for a lot of problems in the community, [because] people may not have the funds they need to take care of their living expenses and certainly having an acceptable wage would facilitate that.”

*“We need more jobs, more employment ... because we believe that economics is the basis for a lot of problems in the community.”*

— Terry Collins

Americans of all political stripes – like people around the world – see jobs as the ultimate self-help, a way out of poverty and the key to a healthy community with a strong tax base that can feed investment in businesses, infrastructure and public services.

Given that view of work’s value to the community, many see it as the moral responsibility of those who are able to work to do so.

Attitudes about work are also rooted firmly in the notion of the “American Dream.”

“Everybody has the same opportunity. ... If they just go out and get it. The hard work is what it takes,” says Margie Diaz, a potato farmer from Alamosa, Colorado.

Blanca Gallego, who left Mexico decades ago to establish a small business in Pecos, Texas, sees herself as living proof that the American Dream is possible. “It’s not easy, but it can be possible for everybody,” she says. “That’s what I tell the ladies here in town: If I can do it, everybody else can do it. Because [I did it] with no English, no money and not many opportunities. Everybody else can do it.”



 Blanca Gallego, Pecos, Texas



*“When I was growing up, there were good-paying jobs here and those jobs seem to leave.”*

———— Stephen A. Urban

## CHANGING WORLD

Although many believe the American Dream is alive and well, changes in the job market have eliminated the types of positions that were once its foundation.

Stephen A. Urban, a Luzerne County councilman, has seen his corner of Pennsylvania change drastically over the past half-century. “When I was growing up, there were good-paying jobs here and those jobs seem to leave,” he says. Most of Urban’s family worked in dress factories when he was a child, and his grandfather worked in a coal mine. Those jobs are long gone. In their place, industries have come to the region that did not exist even a few decades ago. E-commerce companies

Amazon and Chewy.com, an online pet supply store, have opened facilities in the area, employing hundreds of locals to pack and ship orders. These companies may have brought jobs to the area, but there is limited diversity in these positions and little room for growth.

The changes have been felt across the country. In the midst of Alabama’s manufacturing boom, for instance, Mercedes-Benz and Hyundai have set up shop in the state, but the jobs they have brought are nothing like those Urban remembers from his childhood.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- » 126 million Americans work in the service industry
- » Half the hiring in the last seven years has been in industries that pay below \$52,000 per year
- » The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour, but some cities are instituting minimum wages of \$15 per hour



 Hilda Lockhart, Montgomery, Alabama

“Manufacturing has advanced so much. It’s not a dirty job,” says Hilda Lockhart, director of international trade for the Alabama Department of Commerce. “You go into these manufacturing facilities and they’re clean. You’re

pushing buttons. You've got to know computers and things like that. ... I think that those jobs are not the typical manufacturing as maybe my generation knew. They're gonna be very high-tech and I think we're going to all advance to that. ... All these jobs are really developing into something that takes more than a high school education even sometimes."

Agriculture is going through a similar revolution. Sandra Castillo, who recently moved to Yakima, Washington, from California, has worked on and off in warehouses, packing and sorting produce. She worries about the fate of her former colleagues at one warehouse, observing, "They're putting new machines to sort the apples and all that stuff. And all those sorters where I was working at, I guess they're going to be laid off."

Gabriel Muñoz, also of Yakima, teaches life skills at People for People, a local nonprofit. He has similar concerns for his students and for how the changing nature of agricultural work will affect the local economy:

"We have thousands of sorters ... in the Yakima County – and packers. They're not going to have a job anymore. ... Thriftway isn't going to have those customers. Walmart isn't going to have those customers. You're thinking about people who are buying homes? Well, real estate agencies aren't going to have a job because we are not going to have enough people to buy those homes and so ... they're going to be left out. So it's going to have this [domino] effect. ... We're going to have to do something about this or else we're going to be in a bad situation. We're going to have a lot more homelessness. We're going to have a lot more poverty. We're going to have a lot more crime. And that's just the reality of this new economy where it's all automated."

Though this technological change will likely leave behind low- and unskilled workers and their communities, it will give others a head start, Lockhart says. The new "quality jobs," which pay better than those in the textile mills that used to dot parts of Alabama, can change people's lives, she says:

"People who were never able to [go to] college, they're engaged in these automotive jobs, and now their children can go to universities. They can buy cars. ... Their standards of living have been raised. It's pretty evident when you start looking at the areas around where these facilities are located. It changes even the makeup of the town. You've got better restaurants, you've got more

shopping and so it improves the quality of life all around for everybody who is involved."

Although the unemployment rate has plunged since its 2010 peak, the recovery has not helped all Americans equally. The United States has seen a loss of mid-skill jobs,<sup>1</sup> and over half of the hiring in the past seven years has been in industries that pay below \$52,000 a year.<sup>2</sup> Manufacturing jobs have evaporated: the sector employs only 8 percent of the U.S. work force, compared with 24 percent in 1960 and 13 percent in 2000.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the number of service industry jobs has grown steadily, hitting a U.S. record of more than 126 million in April 2017, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>4</sup>

## SENDING JOBS OVERSEAS

Adding to workers' anxieties about being displaced by new technologies has been the perception of a parade of jobs headed overseas. Statistics on offshoring jobs are slippery and elusive: a U.S. government program to collate them was shut down in 2013, and it was prone to undercounting.<sup>5</sup> Other efforts to predict offshoring numbers have been wildly inconsistent, with the high estimates likely overcounting.<sup>6</sup>

*"[Clinton] wanted to keep the jobs abroad. She didn't want to bring them here. Where Trump wanted to bring them here – and that affected our everyday life here. That affected our ability to survive and our ability to function as a family. ... So for me it was about keeping the jobs here."*

————— Renee Chambers

Warranted or not, this fear was arguably a major factor in the 2016 presidential election. Renee Chambers of Yakima, Washington, is unemployed and hoping to go back to school to change careers. She says she voted for Donald Trump because "when it came down to this last election for me was the viewpoints that

Hillary had vs. Trump had. And she wanted to keep the jobs abroad. She didn't want to bring them here. Where Trump wanted to bring them here – and that affected our everyday life here. That affected our ability to survive and our ability to function as a family. ... So for me it was about keeping the jobs here.”

Trump's supporters were thrilled by the deal he cut with Carrier, an air conditioning, heating and refrigeration company in Indiana. He claimed to save 1,100 jobs at the Indianapolis plant from being sent to Mexico,<sup>7</sup> although the real number was 800, according to local news reports.<sup>8</sup> An estimated 550 jobs in another Carrier plant in Indiana, however, are still moving to Mexico and 700 workers will lose their jobs.<sup>9</sup>

Maria L., a retired teacher's aide in Alamosa, Colorado, is also worried about jobs, though not for herself. “You know, the jobs have, over the years, have gone overseas, they've gone to different countries. And the United States is kind of hurting for jobs. The economy's not so great here,” she says. And although she blames a Democratic administration for many of the job losses – “During the Clinton administration I heard that he had sent a lot of jobs overseas” – Maria was so put off by Trump's brash manner that she pulled the lever for Hillary Clinton.

## SENDING JOBS ACROSS STATE LINES

Jobs don't just move overseas – they also head across state lines. Stephen Mullin, president of the Econsult Solutions consulting firm in Philadelphia, says “a huge chunk” of the “hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs” the Philadelphia area has lost over the past 50 years has gone to southern and western states.



Stephen Mullin, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Republican lawmakers in southern and western states tend to attribute their success in attracting jobs in part to relaxed regulations. Alabama's Marty Connors, for instance, says so-called right-to-work laws, which allow employees in unionized workplaces to opt out of union membership, have helped bring his state into the modern era:

“[Right to work law has] benefitted us tremendously. For example, Alabama, which was basically purely an agricultural state, let's say, 40 years ago, is now, I think, fourth in automobile manufacturing, and our No. 1 employer is health care. ... Agriculture is still our biggest export. But generally speaking, we've had a major transformation. The No. 1 employer in the state of Alabama is the University of Alabama Birmingham medical research. It's a long way from cottonfields.”

Right-to-work laws tend to be clustered in southern and Midwestern states. They are heavily criticized on the left for weakening unions and limiting unions' ability to bargain collectively.

## THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

In Seattle, Washington, the tech sector is thriving, creating opportunities even for non-tech workers. Dale Bright, an official with a local construction workers union, says his members are busy: “We're having ... an unprecedented boom. We've attracted pretty much the largest companies in the world – we've got Amazon, we've got Microsoft, we've got Boeing, ... we've got manufacturing, we've got tech.” Bright and his union can barely keep up with the demand for labor in the construction industry, as high-rises and modern glass buildings pop up around the city. “There's over 55 cranes up in the city right now,” he proudly notes. The employment opportunities seem endless in the booming city of almost 670,000.

Just 140 miles to the east, in rural Yakima, Washington, the local economy is based primarily on agriculture, and people's prospects are bleaker. Yakima Valley is the country's largest grower of apples and hops.<sup>10</sup>

“We've got very few in-between jobs,” Yakima resident Debbie Evans says. “So you're either the low end or you're the lawyer or the doctor. [What about] all these people in the middle? Or who want to move up? Who don't want to sit there and pick apples all the time?”

For those in between, even those with skills and motivation, finding a fulfilling job can be a challenge, particularly in remote rural areas and small towns. Betty Wilkerson, also a Yakima resident, says she wants to work at least another decade before retiring, but she has few good choices:

"I'm kind of sitting there waiting for someone to retire, move up the food chain, move out, or decide to change careers so that there's an opening for me at one of the limited organizations that has the type of positions that best fit my skill base. And do I really want to move away from here to look somewhere else? ... I've lived here a lot of years. Do I really want to do that? Not so much."

*"We've got very few in-between jobs. ... So you're either the low end or you're the lawyer or the doctor. [What about] all these people in the middle? Or who want to move up?"*

——— Debbie Evans

Economic opportunities may abound elsewhere in the state, but that growth is not felt in Evans and Wilkerson's community. Many in rural areas feel left out and that policies enacted at the state and federal level do not have their best interests at heart.

## MINIMUM WAGE

Few debates on labor are as visible and heated as the one on minimum wage, which at the federal level is \$7.25 per hour, although more than half of the 50 states have set theirs higher. At \$11, Washington and Massachusetts' rates are the highest in the country.<sup>11</sup> Some expensive cities have gone beyond that: San Francisco, Seattle and New York all have plans to reach a \$15 minimum wage.

Many Americans, particularly Democrats, support a minimum wage. Lecia Brooks, director of the Civil Rights Memorial and Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, and outreach director at the Southern Poverty Law Center, is among them. She criticizes her state's legislature for nullifying the city of Birmingham's vote to raise its minimum wage – part of the emerging "Fight for 15" campaign that advocates a nationwide \$15 mini-

mum wage. "Ridiculous," Brooks says. "What do you want? For everyone to live in poverty?"

Advocates for a higher minimum wage argue that people earning the current nationwide rate, and even higher state minimum wages, cannot afford necessities such as health care and housing. Their movement has gained support across the country, with voters supporting ballot initiatives for higher minimum wages in Colorado, Washington, Arizona and Maine in 2016.

A higher minimum wage, however, can have unintended consequences, some warn. John O'Lague, program director for the nonprofit Coastal Community Action Program in Aberdeen, Washington, says that thanks to the state's new \$11 minimum wage, "Employers are starting to be more selective or they're not giving full-time hours because they have to meet their profit margins. And so, when they're not giving the full-time hours, guess what, I can't afford my bills."

O'Lague says he's worried that some businesses will decamp to states such as Alabama, where the minimum wage is almost \$4 lower than Washington state's, and he says the government needs to offer incentives, including tax breaks, to companies to come to Washington's rural areas.



▲ Debbie Evans, Yakima, Washington

Debbie Evans has a high school education and worked for the same company for 34 years. Although she continued to advance in title at the company, her wages were frozen for a decade. She felt frustrated when new, inexperienced employees were paid the state's \$11 an hour minimum wage. "I could see people coming in at a rate that it took me 20 years working there to get to," she says. "And it's like, 'Well in about three more years you'll be caught up to where I've been for the last 34 years.'"



*“To look for a job in today’s world with the minimum wage being so high, it’s so hard because employers are having to make cutbacks. ... They’re not apt to hire as many people now.”*

————— Renee Chambers

Renee Chambers acknowledges that the minimum wage can be a “blessing,” but says it also constrains employers from adding jobs:


“To look for a job in today’s world with the minimum wage being so high, it’s so hard because employers are having to make cutbacks. ... They’re not apt to hire as many people now. ... They’re leaning more toward the electronics to substitute customer service positions. And it’s made things really difficult, that I’ve seen. And people think the minimum wage is great because ... whether you’re flipping hamburgers or you’re working in a retail or you’re working in an office, ... you know, you have to make that amount. But in turn what’s happened is you don’t have the job opportunities out there because employers have cut back their hiring. A lot.”

Betty Wilkerson says the higher minimum wage is likely to make it harder for young, inexperienced workers to find jobs. “Why would you hire a youth that has not learned yet those soft skills and those basic employability skills? When you can hire somebody else who has several years of experience for the same amount of money. It doesn’t make sense. So that’s been very detrimental to our youth,” she says.

## TRAINING THE WORK FORCE

As industries transform at breakneck speed, some workers struggle to keep up. In Birmingham, for instance, about 5,300 IT jobs were posted in 2014 and 2015, a roughly 40 percent jump in demand, says Josh Carpenter, director of external affairs at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. But about 1,000 of those positions stayed unfilled at any given time, he says.



 Renee Chambers and Betty Wilkerson, Yakima, Washington

In response, Carpenter and representatives from private industry, government and academia started a local version of the work force development programs that

are springing up around the country to retrain workers. In Birmingham, they would focus on teaching young people IT skills.



 Josh Carpenter, Birmingham, Alabama

Many Americans believe high schools and community colleges are responsible for educating the work force to adapt to the changing needs to employers. Johnathan Austin, president of the Birmingham City Council, says basic technical skills should be taught in school to all young people, whether or not they attend college:

“Technology is taking over everything, so if we just give our students the basic skills when they graduate from high school, then they’ll at least be able to go into a company and learn everything else that they need to learn, like most people do anyway. ...The computer and the internet is the modern man’s version of the cave-man’s hammer and chisel. ... They’re not optional anymore. So we need to be able to provide that access and

training to those individuals so that they can be productive citizens.”

There is a growing realization that widespread pressure on students to attend college might be misplaced and that schools must do a better job of preparing those who do not attend college for the world of work.

“They’ve prepped most kids to go to college and we’ve trained a generation that’s looking to college and not to the trades,” says Dale Bright, the union official in Seattle. Unions such as Bright’s are starting to fund high school programs that teach students skills, including one that gives students the opportunity to build tiny houses, a construction trend in the area.

It’s not just students who need help, as many adults find themselves un- or underemployed as companies’ skills requirements change.

Renee Chambers, for example, found herself out of work, in part because she did not have the computer skills needed in her office. “It’s kind of sad because 20 years ago, not every industry was computer-based. ... Twenty years [ago] when we first started in the industry, we could pick industries that were not computer-based and so now ... you have to have computer skills,” she says.

Forced to adapt to a rapidly changing industry that looks nothing like it did when she started her career,



Chambers is enrolled in a computer training program for adults at People for People, a nonprofit. Many others in her situation lack either the time for or access to such programs. The rapidly changing labor market leaves many in the middle – and toward the end – of their careers in a difficult position.

*“The computer and the internet is the modern man’s version of the caveman’s hammer and chisel. ... They’re not optional anymore. So we need to be able to provide that access and training to those individuals so that they can be productive citizens.”*

————— Johnathan Austin

Despite government policies that encourage their hiring, veterans, too, are struggling with the shifting job market. Jerome Ford, program director at the Crawford House homeless shelter for veterans in Colorado Springs, Colorado, says one of the biggest challenges facing veterans returning to civilian life is skill translation:

“What are you going to do when you’ve been marching up and down the woods all your life killing people, defending America’s freedom? What are you going to do when you get out after two years, three years? They say you can’t re-enlist? Now they want you to come out here and find a job. ... ‘What have I done? I’ve been in the woods, I’ve been in the bush, I’ve been protecting my country. So what am I going to do?’”

## BIPARTISAN COOPERATION?

The political debate on employment is as much about messaging as about policy on the national level. Trump was extremely successful in rallying conservatives around his battle cry to save American industries, from mining to manufacturing, and protect American workers from the dangers of outsourcing and major international trade deals. Hillary Clinton, regardless of her concrete policy proposals, was less successful in presenting the Democratic Party as the voice of the working class.

Still, for a couple of reasons, the issue of work force development has not yet fallen prey to the United States’ hopelessly polarized politics: 1) it has not gained enough national attention to become a point of contention and 2) much of it is done on the state and local levels, which are traditionally less-partisan arenas. The Obama administration proposed making community college enrollment free nationwide, but some local governments are a few steps ahead. Both liberal (New York and Oregon) and conservative (Tennessee) states have proposed or are implementing free community college tuition for their residents. Even some rural, conservative regions in Virginia are providing “last dollar” scholarships that bridge the gap between financial aid and tuition costs to ensure that anyone can afford to attend.<sup>12</sup>

With the post-recession recovery having left behind many families – who worry that automation, outsourcing and even immigration are shaping a job market that no longer needs them – it is only wise and humane for politicians to take skills development seriously. Though voters tend to look to national elected officials to deal with their most pressing issues, observers of this issue might want to lower their gaze to America’s city councils and state capitals to see the future.

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# EDUCATION

## 6 CHAPTER

IN THE UNITED STATES, WHERE YOU LIVE MAY DETERMINE HOW MUCH YOU LEARN IN SCHOOL. BECAUSE OF FUNDING, PERSISTENT SEGREGATION, AND EVEN THE COUNTRY'S VAST SIZE, LOCATION – WHETHER ACROSS TOWN OR ACROSS THE COUNTRY – CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PUBLIC EDUCATION THAT SETS A CHILD UP FOR SUCCESS AND ONE THAT IS A PRELUDE TO FAILURE.

In the United States, where you live may determine how much you learn in school. In the fall of 2016, approximately 50.4 million students began the school year at public elementary and secondary schools in the United States.<sup>1</sup> An additional 5.2 million attended private schools<sup>2</sup> and over 1.5 million were home-schooled, meaning that their parents or a tutor taught them privately.<sup>3</sup>

Once in class, their experiences varied hugely depending in part on where they lived and how financially stable their family was. Some were blessed to live in school districts that showered money on them and had access to good teachers, while others disappeared into crowded classrooms or faced a succession of over-stretched teachers who would stay only a year or two at a time. Because of local autonomy and funding, persistent segregation, and even the country's vast size, location – whether across town or across the country – can make all the difference between a public education that sets a child up for success and one that is a prelude to failure.

That uncertainty continues even after high school, as Americans rethink some traditional pathways to upward mobility, including college or even a technical degree, that no longer seem to be guarantors of stability and advancement.

## FUNDING

The funding each public school receives varies significantly by state and even by school district. In part, this difference is due to how wealthy a district's residents are and how much taxes it can collect. Local and state governments also have considerable control over how they allocate their budgets, which can have a significant impact on funding. While some districts, like Clark County, Nevada, spend less than \$8,000 per student, others, like Ripley Center, New York, spend over \$30,000 per student.<sup>4</sup>

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- » 50.4 million students attend public elementary and secondary schools
- » 40 percent of Americans ages 18-24 are enrolled in college
- » College graduates earn an average of \$1,156 per week, compared with \$692 for those with only a high school degree
- » Close to 90 percent of students at four-year colleges receive financial aid
- » Student debt nationally is \$1.3 trillion



*“[In California,] my son was getting F’s and D’s and they didn’t really care to educate him. And here [in Texas] my son is getting A’s and B’s and he’s in college prep classes.”*

————— Vanessa S.



 Stephanie Monahan, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The resources available greatly affect the quality of education students receive. When the state of Pennsylvania made major funding cuts to schools in 2011, it “had pretty significant impacts on public school all across the state, and I think in Philadelphia you really feel the effects of that,” says Stephanie Monahan, who works in Philadelphia’s city government. One major consequence, she says, is overcrowding in the city’s schools.

Karen Gann of Huntsville, Alabama, made the difficult decision to home-school her children because she says her daughter needed extra attention that she was not likely to get in the local public school’s crowded class-

rooms. When Gann and her husband “went to talk to the school about it ... they kind of brushed us off. So we called the school board and the questions we asked them, we didn’t like the answers that we got.”



 Karen Gann, Huntsville, Alabama

The differences among school districts can lead to vastly different outcomes for students. After Vanessa S. moved from California to El Paso, Texas, with her children, she says her son got more attention in class and she watched him blossom. In California, she says, “My son was getting F’s and D’s and they didn’t really care to educate him. And here my son is getting A’s and B’s and he’s in college prep classes.”

## POVERTY

School districts' reliance on local tax revenue predictably leaves schools in poor neighborhoods strapped for resources, but the surrounding poverty itself also wreaks havoc on attempts to educate. "You can't focus on just education and then let people go home from school to really horrible places to live," says Carol Butler, executive director of the Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation in Birmingham, Alabama, an anti-poverty nonprofit group. Children living in poverty often face a multitude of other challenges at home, from hunger to abuse. "Our children bring so many issues to the school building that our teachers don't really have time to teach because they're having to address all these other issues," Butler says, echoing the frequent complaints of teachers who work in poorer districts. Among the initiatives Butler's foundation runs is one that places mental health counselors in local public schools to help students work through some of their challenges at home.

*"Our children bring so many issues to the school building that our teachers don't really have time to teach because they're having to address all these other issues."*

————— Carol Butler



▲ Carol Butler, Birmingham, Alabama

## DESEGREGATION

The divide in the quality of public schools is not just financial but is also tied to the United States' long history of racism and segregation (Chapter 9). In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision struck down state laws that established separate schools for African-American and white

children. African-American schools had been given fewer resources and poorer facilities, and paid teachers less. A further decision by the court, known as *Brown II*, says the process of integration should be done with, "all deliberate speed," sufficiently vague language that many states used it as an excuse to drag their feet.

As public schools began to integrate, many white families moved out of city centers – and took their tax dollars with them – to suburbs that were de facto segregated. Others sent their children to private schools, which were often slower to integrate. In Birmingham, for example, many white families moved south of the city, over Red Mountain, or "over the mountain," as locals say, to white suburbs, which developed strong school systems. The mountain shielded the suburbs from Birmingham's smoke and pollution and divided the suburban whites from the African-Americans in the city. Although de jure segregation ended more than half a century ago, schools in this area, like cities and towns across the country, are still shaped by its legacy. Public schools in Birmingham, with a population that is 73.4 percent African-American,<sup>5</sup> spend \$9,426 per student, 20 percent less than neighboring Homewood, which is 74.6 percent white and spends \$12,099 per student.<sup>6</sup>



▲ Wayne Heard, Birmingham, Alabama

Even as a child in the 1990s, Wayne Heard, who is African-American, saw white families leave Birmingham for leafy suburbs over the mountain, "Some of it was for better opportunity," he acknowledges, but "some of it was to get away from the increasingly integrated inner-city Birmingham. ... You have white flight, over the mountain."

Heard works with young high school graduates from Birmingham at a technology skills training program. He says that although the city has some good schools:

“[T]he biggest challenge is the ability to progress past high school. ... The expectation over the mountain is that you’re going to go to college. You’re going to probably get some kind of grad degree or doctorate and probably be in some sort of management capacity and salaried job. A lot of times in the inner city it’s, hopefully you graduate high school. So I think it’s more of a mindset barrier as well as ... funding. It’s lack of encouragement for the inner-city school systems.”

Heard says he is “the product of what’s called ‘black flight.’ I grew up in inner-city Birmingham, but for high school my parents got an apartment over the mountain so I could have access to a school over the mountain.” He is now pursuing a law degree at Birmingham Law School.

## RURAL CHALLENGES


Rural school districts face many of the same problems as their urban and suburban counterparts, but they can be compounded by geographical isolation, which complicates, for instance, efforts to hire and keep talented teachers or to get reliable broadband internet access.

*“A lot of times in the inner city it’s, hopefully you graduate high school. So I think it’s more of a mindset barrier as well as ... funding. It’s lack of encouragement for the inner-city school systems.”*

————— Wayne Heard

On the Quinault Reservation, a Native American reservation in Washington state, Tribal Council member Clarinda Underwood says teachers do not stay long in the schools. “We have a high turnover in our administration – over and over again due to we are so rural,” she says.



 Clarinda Underwood, Quinault Nation, Washington

The reservation used to provide housing for teachers, but no longer. Instead, many teachers commute hours each day to the rural coastal town of Taholah, where the schools are located. Some teachers come from Aberdeen, an hour south, or even the state’s capital, Olympia, a two-hour drive away, Underwood says. The district has sought to hire Quinault teachers or Quinault members with bachelor’s degrees, providing employment for educated tribal members and stability for students.

*“We have a high turnover in our administration – over and over again due to we are so rural.”*

————— Clarinda Underwood

In addition to being geographically isolated, rural schools often struggle to combat digital isolation. The U.S. government has invested in expanding internet coverage to rural areas, but some areas have not yet been reached. Many rural schools do not have broadband internet access. Slow internet connections and outdated technology make it harder for students to attend college-level Advanced Placement classes and remedial classes online, which may not be offered in their own schools.<sup>7</sup> The limited resources of the schools themselves are thus compounded by the lack of access to digital resources.

## CHANGING LEGISLATION

Amid concerns about U.S. schools’ international competitiveness, and with certain groups of students persistently falling behind their peers, Congress passed bipartisan educational reforms known as the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002.<sup>8</sup> The reforms, intended to track performance and hold schools more accountable to state and federal governments, required students to sit for standardized testing on a regular basis. Schools that did not meet targets were penalized and states could intervene. The reforms also instituted teacher evaluation based on student outcomes.

Although these measures were established to ensure that all students receive a quality education, the focus on testing has been a subject of criticism from parents, educators and students alike. No Child Left Behind’s teacher evaluations were particularly controversial, as they put immense pressure on teachers. Many teachers spent significant portions of the school year preparing students for the tests.



*“[Teachers] are so worried about the tests instead of teaching our kids. What is the main focus in teaching our kids? It’s either for them to learn or for them to pass a test. I don’t know. I don’t think it’s fair.”*

——— Blanca Gallego

“[Teachers] are so worried about the tests instead of teaching our kids,” says Blanca Gallego, a small-business owner in Pecos, Texas. She says she asked her 9-year-old’s fourth-grade teacher, “What is the main focus in teaching our kids? It’s either for them to learn or for them to pass a test. I don’t know. I don’t think it’s fair.” Similarly, Patricia C., a mother of six in El Paso, Texas, has seen a change in the way schools are teaching, “High school [is] more centered around their testing procedures and whether or not they will help the school meet their standards. Because if they don’t score [highly enough], their standards go down and they lose their ratings and they lose their funding.”

No Child Left Behind is being replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act for the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>9</sup> Although standardized testing will still be required, states can establish their own accountability goals. Teachers are no longer evaluated based on their students’ outcomes.

Many think these reforms do a disservice to students. “I would not go into [teaching] as a profession today,” says Lindsay Reid, a retired teacher in Bellingham, Washington. “The public education system has been

eroded by people making policy for teachers who don’t understand what it’s like to be in a classroom or the art of education, the relationships between students and teacher, the relationships beyond whether you can pass a standardized test.”

Reid says focusing on tests gives the illusion that children are learning while neglecting “what really gets kids learning and excited, learning and critically thinking, and wanting to explore the universe.”

As the Every Student Succeeds Act comes into effect, new national debates are emerging about the public school system. Donald Trump’s secretary of education, businesswoman Betsy DeVos, advocates school voucher systems that would allow students to receive public funding to attend private schools. Democrats have been critical of DeVos, claiming that the policy would cause serious damage to the public-school system.

## COLLEGE

After graduating from high school, more students are pursuing higher education: The share of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college rose from 35.5 percent in 2000

to 40 percent in 2014.<sup>10</sup> Measured in absolute numbers, 17 million students enrolled in degree-granting, post-secondary institutions in 2015, up from 13.2 million in 2000.<sup>11</sup>

The lion's share of those institutions are colleges. In the United States, the term college typically refers to an institution of higher learning that confers a four-year bachelor's degree. These can be parts of larger universities or independent. Community colleges offer two-year associate's degrees, typically at a lower cost. Students then have the option to transfer to a four-year bachelor's program at another institution.

In 2006, 28 percent of the U.S. population over the age of 25 held a bachelor's degree or higher. Currently 33.4 percent do.<sup>12</sup> College graduates face an unemployment rate of only 2.5 percent, compared with those with only a high school degree (5.3 percent) and those who did not complete high school (7.7 percent).<sup>13</sup> Those with bachelor's degrees also earn significantly more. In 2016, college graduates earned an average of \$1,156 per week, compared with \$692 for those with only a high school degree.<sup>14</sup>

*“One of the great problems in the United States today is this notion that you have to go to college and spend four years getting some degree that’s unemployable.”*

————— *Marty Connors*

That might sound like good news, but some have started to question the trend.

Marty Connors, former chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, says too many colleges are churning out people ill-equipped for the job market.

“One of the great problems in the United States today is this notion that you have to go to college and spend four years getting some degree that’s unemployable,” he says. Taking aim at those with degrees in “soft” subjects such as philosophy or women’s studies, Connors says, “Nobody wants to hire that, except other schools. ... What do you do with a degree like that other than teach that to someone else?”

Instead, he says, “We need more people who know how to fix things, and build things, and do things, and we need people who are better at knowing how to finance things and, you know, understand corporate law, than we do philosophical, feel-good self-esteem degrees that are completely unemployable.”

For her part, Underwood disagrees that employment is the sole purpose of a college education. “It’s not always that you’re going to get the job that you want, but it sure opens your mind,” she says.

## ELITISTS

Some Americans see higher education as liberal, elitist and out of touch. Among conservative-leaning Americans, 58 percent believe that “colleges and universities have a negative effect on the way things are going in the country,” according to a recent Pew survey.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, 72 percent of Democrats or left-leaning Americans believe that they have a positive effect.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years many universities have been mocked by conservatives for creating environments that are hyper-politically correct, providing students with so-called ‘trigger warnings’ when reading material or class discussion could be upsetting to them. Conservatives claim that this is out of touch with reality.

Immediately following the 2016 election, for example, some universities set up so-called safe spaces for students to talk about the outcome.<sup>17</sup> At one prestigious college, Columbia University, in New York, some professors even cancelled midterm exams the day after the election.<sup>18</sup>

This protective attitude does not sit well with everyone. Huntsville, Alabama resident Sandra says, “One thing that bothers me [... is that] they’re not children anymore, they’re in college. ... I cannot believe that parents are paying money to Harvard and big schools like that and they allow cry rooms,” she says. Students, she complains, are “not being taught how to lose.”

## THE COST

Unlike in many European countries, U.S. students and their families are on the hook for massive college tuition bills, which can approach \$60,000 per year for an undergraduate program and even more for graduate studies at top private colleges.<sup>19</sup> Although public univer-

sities are often cheaper, costs can still reach \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year for state residents and top \$30,000 for out-of-state students.<sup>20</sup>



 Richard Schulik, Denver, Colorado

“The cost of education in this country is totally out of hand,” says Richard Schulik, a surgeon in Denver, Colorado.

Renee Chambers, an unemployed single mother of two teenage boys in Yakima, Washington, plans to return to higher education for a degree that she estimates will cost “a little over \$40,000.”

“How do I pay to get this new set of skills to fit into the market today? When my education cost me half of what my house does?” Chambers says. “I still have bills. I still have two boys that need to eat.”

Most universities offer some combination of grants and loans to students who could not afford to attend otherwise. Nearly 90 percent of students entering four-year, undergraduate degree programs in the 2014-2015 school year received financial aid.<sup>21</sup> At some of the nation’s most prestigious universities, scholarships cover the full cost of tuition. At Princeton University, for example, more than 60 percent of students qualify for aid. Undergraduate students whose families earn less than \$65,000 per year are given full scholarships and graduate debt free.<sup>22</sup>

Most universities, however, cannot afford to offer such comprehensive aid to their students. Outside organizations, from nonprofits to corporations, also offer scholarships to help students cover exorbitant tuition fees. The Quinault Nation, for example, provides scholarships to 100 Quinault students, including Clarinda Underwood’s son. Combined with other grants, she says, the

money allows him to attend Washington State University.

Life can be precarious for those dependent on financial aid, which is often complicated to navigate and comes with strings attached. Basilia C. received grants to cover her first semester of university in El Paso, Texas. But when her grades slipped, she lost some of her funding, which was contingent upon her academic performance. She now worries if she will be able to continue her studies.

Despite scholarships and financial aid, students can easily end up tens of thousands of dollars in debt, sometimes owing over \$100,000. In early 2017, student loan debt reached \$1.3 trillion nationally.<sup>23</sup>

Many Americans wonder if the cost of education is worth it. Monahan, the Philadelphia city official, says when young interns and staff members ask if they should pursue a master’s degree, she hesitates. “There have been a lot of times I’ve said to people, ‘You’re going to spend \$60,000 on a master’s right now. Do the math on that payment. Ask yourself how much of a raise you have to get for that to actually pay off.’ It’s a shame that we are living an environment right now where [we] are not investing in having a better educated, higher-performing work force.”

*“The cost of education in this country is totally out of hand.”*

————— Richard Schulik

Tuition is not the only cost that students must weigh when considering their choices. Many young people have family responsibilities pushing them straight into the work force. “A lot of [high school graduates] are coming from single-parent homes. ... They’re having to become immediately productive citizens for their households,” says Johnathan Austin, president of the Birmingham City Council. It’s a difficult decision made at the expense of an education that could boost their earning potential in the long run, he says.

## ALTERNATIVES

Even some degrees that once seemed bulletproof no longer offer the returns students had come to expect.



*“How do I pay to get this new set of skills to fit into the market today? When my education cost me half of what my house does? I still have bills. I still have two boys that need to eat.”*

— Renee Chambers

For instance, Atim Smith of El Paso, Texas, who currently does not work, has a degree in information technology but says, “Not once has my degree served me well. It’s a fancy piece of paperwork at this point.”



 Atim Smith, El Paso, Texas

Smith says the jobs are limited in El Paso, where the official unemployment rate was 4.8 percent in May 2017, slightly above the 4.1 percent national average.<sup>24</sup> He says colleges do not adequately prepare students for the labor market, so he does not “push the whole college agenda 100 percent.” Instead, he says, “I just

tell my children, ‘Hey – pursue something. Get some type of skill or passion and you’ll do all right.’”

Dale Bright, a union leader in Seattle, Washington, agrees. Bright points out that apprentices with his construction union often start out making 60 percent of a full wage, or almost \$21 per hour, plus \$11 in benefits. By contrast, he says, “I have a friend who’s making \$42,000 with a master’s degree. I looked at him when he told me that and I almost shed a tear for him and said, ‘I’ve got an apprenticeship program.’”

As discussed in Chapter 5, as jobs become more technical and university education becomes more expensive, perhaps some Americans will shift their attention to work force development programs, like apprenticeships and IT skills classes to help prepare the next generation of American workers. However, even if these programs expand and provide better alternatives to college for young high school graduates, elementary and secondary schools will need to adequately prepare students to participate. For those who do choose to study, universities will need to solve their cost problem in order to ensure that their students are able to afford it.

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# HEALTH CARE

## 7

### CHAPTER

THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT IS A WORK IN PROGRESS. CHANGES MUST BE MADE TO KEEP THE SYSTEM AFLOAT AND ENSURE THAT CARE REMAINS AFFORDABLE. IRONICALLY, DETERMINED CONSERVATIVE EFFORTS TO ROLL BACK THE ACA'S COVERAGE EXPANSION MAY BE RESPONSIBLE IN PART FOR AMERICANS' GROWING ACCEPTANCE OF THE IDEA OF UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE.

When Siobhán Lyons moved from Ireland to the United States, she was shocked to receive invitations for fundraisers for sick friends. “I had never been to a fundraiser for someone who had cancer before, and this is now a regular occurrence,” she says. “On the one hand, it’s wonderful. People in the United States are extremely generous and you can throw a fundraiser for a friend who has cancer and you might raise \$30,000 to \$50,000. That’s great, but it normalizes the lack of provision of affordable health care in the United States.”

Not only is health care in the United States hugely expensive, or even out of reach for many despite recent major expansions in coverage, it is also extremely complicated, even to highly educated and well-informed Americans.

Most people interviewed for this survey explained their positions on the current system by using the personal experiences they or those close to them had, or by echoing the language of politicians from their parties, much more so than on other issues.

Those who spoke of personal experiences tended to emphasize the cost of care. Like many others, Atim Smith of El Paso, Texas, blamed the Affordable Care Act, commonly referred to as “Obamacare” or the ACA, for rising insurance premiums. “[Obamacare] didn’t hurt me personally because of my job. I was getting coverage through my company,” he says. “However, I had

friends who had to pay a little more than they were actually making.”



 Martin, Birmingham, Alabama

In 2011, a year after the ACA took effect and shortly after Martin started attending the University of Alabama, he was diagnosed with leukemia. He did not have health insurance, but he says thanks to government programs, including Medicare and Medicaid, he got the care he needed and is now healthy. He counts himself lucky, “that health care has always been very in reach. I’ve never had too much of a hurdle to jump over in the chemotherapies, in my hospital therapies.” He worries that Republican lawmakers would do harm to many Americans if they follow through on their vows to repeal the legislation, “without having a visible sense of what [they] want to either replace it with or help these people out with.”



*“I had never been to a fundraiser for someone who had cancer before, and this is now a regular occurrence.”*

——— Siobhán Lyons

Outside of personal experience, many Americans make sense of the health care debate by listening to politicians – particularly of their own party. On both sides of the aisle, politicians cite statistics and stories of constituents to simplify – and sometimes oversimplify – this extremely complicated and partisan debate. A July 2017 survey found that 77 percent of Democrats support the ACA, whereas 50 percent of independents and 16 percent of Republicans do.<sup>1</sup> This is a significant shift for Democrats and independents: In 2015 only 61 percent of Democrats, 41 percent of independents and 17 percent of Republicans approved.<sup>2</sup>

## ACCESS TO CARE

Twenty-nine million Americans, just under 10 percent of the population, are without health insurance.<sup>3</sup> These are mostly people who do not get insurance through their employer and cannot afford to buy a plan outright, those unaware that they qualify for help or subsidies, or poor people who live in states with restrictive Medicaid coverage.<sup>4</sup> Their numbers have been shrinking, and they might shrink even further if Republican state officials who have resisted loosening eligibility requirements for Medicaid relent now that conservatives’ attempts in Congress to repeal the ACA – which funded an expansion of Medicaid coverage – have failed.

At the same time, health-care spending per capita in the United States far outpaces other developed countries,<sup>5</sup>

and over a quarter of American adults ages 18 to 64 say they or a member of their household struggled or failed to pay medical bills in the last 12 months.<sup>6</sup>

For many uninsured, an unexpected medical emergency can mean bankruptcy. Because hospitals are legally required to provide emergency care to anyone who needs it, whether or not they are insured,<sup>7</sup> uninsured people sometimes do not receive treatment until they are very sick, and emergency rooms are often crowded with people effectively forced to use them as their primary doctor’s office.<sup>8</sup> Although hospitals that treat many poor or uninsured people receive subsidies from the government, a Northwestern University study found that hospitals typically “are left to absorb at least two-thirds of the cost of all of this uncompensated care.”<sup>9</sup>

Even for those with insurance, access to affordable care varies significantly. For instance, those insured with Medicaid, a government program for the poor, have fewer choices of hospitals and doctors than some with private insurance.

Further, rural areas often suffer from a relative dearth of doctors and facilities, even though the government provides grants and subsidies to ensure that hospitals and clinics can operate there.

Venetta Seals, mayor of Pecos, Texas, is also the direc-

tor of public relations for Reeves County Hospital. She says that until a local clinic opened that offered kidney dialysis, residents who needed the treatment had to travel more than an hour each way three times a week. “And that was over 50,000 miles a year they were having to travel just for life-saving treatment,” she says.



 Mayor Venetta Seals, Pecos, Texas

Rural areas also tend to have fewer insurance companies selling plans through “marketplaces” created by the ACA for those without insurance through their job or a government program, so the premiums tend to be higher for a lack of competition.<sup>10</sup>

Both insured and uninsured Americans, particularly in the border regions, travel abroad for less expensive medical care. Professor Josiah Heyman of the University of Texas at El Paso estimates that 25 to 30 percent of El Paso’s residents travel to neighboring Juarez, Mexico, for care. Some Americans head in the opposite direction, to Canada, for procedures and prescriptions, which are often cheaper than in the United States. So-called medical tourism is also popular to India, Brazil and South Korea.

## THE MANDATE

The passage of the ACA was a cornerstone of President Barack Obama’s presidency, reshaping the U.S. health care landscape. Most controversially, it required all Americans to have health insurance or face a financial penalty, which for 2017 is either 2.5 percent of household income or \$695 per adult (\$347.50 per child), whichever is higher.<sup>11</sup>

Many Americans, particularly conservatives, see the mandate as government overreach.

“I think that ought to be the person’s prerogative,” says

Reid Leach, a retired postal worker from Alamosa, Colorado. “If they want to carry health insurance they ought to be able to, but I don’t think they should be fined just [because] they don’t.”

Coupled with the mandate was a ban on insurance companies’ practice of refusing coverage to those with pre-existing conditions, from diabetes to cancer, and even pregnancy. With the ACA, insurance companies were willing to accept such patients because their coverage costs were offset by the mandate, which brought healthier people into the insurance pool.

The Affordable Care Act provides subsidies for some people who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford insurance on their own. Still, many on the right and left say the plans are not affordable, making the steep penalty unreasonable. “I know people who cannot afford health insurance under the Affordable Care Act,” says Jane Walsh Waitkus, a Democratic member of the Luzerne County Council in Pennsylvania. They are “in the in-between land,” she says. “No health insurance even though they’re supposed to have it” but not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid or subsidies.

*“I think that ought to be the person’s prerogative. ... If they want to carry health insurance they ought to be able to, but I don’t think they should be fined just [because] they don’t.”*

————— Reid Leach

“If you don’t have money to pay for the insurance, you’re not going to have it no matter what,” says Seals. “If you have to choose between insurance and putting food on the table, chances are you’re going to put food on the table,” she says.

Although he concedes – as many of the law’s backers do – that the ACA has some serious problems, including affordability, surgeon Richard Schulik of Denver, Colorado, says the mandate is critical. “The way insurance works is that you pool people who don’t need it as much with people who do need it more. And you spread the cost. ... Hopefully over most people’s lives



*“I think you hit the jackpot if you put in a fair amount during your lifetime and you never require a lot of money spent on your health care. That’s a win.”*

————— Richard Schulik

there’s a period when you’re paying more into it than you get, and there are other periods when you’re taking out more than you’re putting in. I think you hit the jackpot if you put in a fair amount during your lifetime and you never require a lot of money spent on your health care. That’s a win.”

Although some see the mandate as an infringement of personal liberty, others believe universal health care is a fundamental right.

“It’s sort of out of control that we can’t as a country that’s considered as great as we are – that we can’t provide affordable health care to everyone. And [my husband and I] do believe that it’s a right, not a privilege,” Lindsay Reid of Bellingham, Washington, says.

## THE HEALTH INSURANCE MARKETPLACE

The ACA created marketplaces, or exchanges, which allow those not on Medicaid or Medicare and without work-based insurance to buy private insurance. Although only a small portion of Americans – 11 million as of March 2016 – get their insurance this way, the marketplaces have been the focus of much of the recent political debate over health care.<sup>12</sup>

Applicants can use the federally facilitated or the state-

based marketplaces, and the vast majority of those in this system – 83 percent – receive a health care tax credit that lowers the monthly premium cost.<sup>13</sup> Although many see the tax credits and subsidies as a waste of taxpayer dollars, others argue that they are insufficient and that more needs to be done to make the plans affordable.

## PRIVATE INSURANCE

Almost half of Americans receive health insurance through their employers, which typically means that their employer offers a plan or a selection of plans from which employees can choose. Employers typically pay a portion of the cost and employees pay the rest.

Employer-based insurance in the United States took off during World War II, when factory owners offered health insurance as a benefit to attract workers. In 1943, the Internal Revenue Service deemed that employers’ payments for health insurance were not subject to the same taxes as wages, and in 1954, further legislation offered additional tax advantages.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, work-based insurance became the norm: The share of the population covered by these plans skyrocketed from 9 percent in 1940 to 70 percent in the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Currently, 156 million Americans, nearly half of the U.S. population, receive insurance through an employer plan.<sup>16</sup>

The Affordable Care Act now requires larger employers to provide insurance for most of their full-time employees and provides tax incentives for smaller businesses to do so,<sup>17</sup> but these plans can be expensive. Dale Bright, an official with a construction workers union in Seattle, Washington, that provides health insurance for its members, says the “cost of health care is just destroying us.”

Renee Chambers, a job-seeker in Yakima, Washington, suspects that fewer places are hiring because of the law’s requirements that employers provide insurance. A 2016 study did not see significant changes in employer behavior based on the Affordable Care Act requirements,<sup>18</sup> but some critics of the ACA argue that any major changes in employer behavior would take some time to be felt.

## MEDICARE

Although a plurality of Americans procure their insurance through their employer, tens of millions are insured publicly through the Medicare and Medicaid programs established in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson.

Medicare provides insurance to more than 55 million Americans, including those 65 and older as well as younger people with disabilities and anyone with end-stage renal disease. It is funded primarily by payroll taxes but also by premiums paid by enrollees who do not qualify for free coverage.

*“I don’t consider [Medicare and Social Security] an entitlement. I consider it a promise, that somebody’s trying to take away.”*

————— Jim Peacock

Medicare typically covers 80 percent of health-care costs. For poor beneficiaries, Medicaid will sometimes step in to cover the rest, but other enrollees sometimes buy so-called “Medigap” policies to extend their coverage.

Those private Medigap plans can be expensive. “I’m really annoyed with what’s happening with health care,” says Maria L., a retiree from Alamosa, Colorado. “We’ve worked our butts off all our lives and then ... we don’t get a break in anything. ... The medical insurance is

sky high, even for us, that we’ve [paid into for] so many years. I don’t think that the government is supporting the seniors for all they’ve done.”



Jim Peacock, El Paso, Texas

Lawmakers worry that the payroll taxes that fund the system may not be able to sustain the nation’s aging population – demographers project that by 2030, one-fifth of Americans will be older than 65.<sup>19</sup> But many on both the right and left see these systems as a contract between citizens and the government. “[Lawmakers] say, ‘Oh, we’ve got to do something about Social Security and Medicare.’ ... I paid for that crap for 40 to 50 years! And I don’t consider it an entitlement. I consider it a promise, that somebody’s trying to take away,” says Jim Peacock, a retiree from El Paso, Texas.

## MEDICAID AND CHIP

Medicaid is public insurance funded jointly by the federal and state governments.<sup>20</sup> It covers low-income people and families, but coverage varies significantly by state. Some states have expanded Medicaid through the ACA to cover anyone with an income of up to 133 percent of the official poverty line, while other states have more restricted access.<sup>21</sup>

For poor people who need health care, where they live can make all the difference. Carmelita L., a single mother who lives in a homeless shelter with her sons, says her children received Medicaid coverage in New Mexico but lost it once they moved to El Paso, as Texas has not expanded coverage.

In addition to Medicaid, there is the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provides low-cost public insurance to children, typically from families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford private plans.<sup>22</sup>

## VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

The U.S. government offers health care to many military veterans through a system of hospitals and clinics. In recent years, these Veterans Administration facilities have come under fire for long waiting periods for appointments.



 Vicky Pettis, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Vicky Pettis, executive director of the Colorado Veterans Resource Coalition and Crawford House, a homeless shelter for veterans in Colorado Springs, sees this problem firsthand. She says veterans at the shelter, who often have serious health problems as a result of their military service, must wait months to see VA doctors. “They’re fine when they’re in [the military], but once you get injured or your time is up, it’s like ... you’re a third-class citizen,” Pettis says. “Like they don’t need you anymore. ... These ... guys and gals put their lives on the line to protect this country, and then this is how they get treated when they get out. I think they can do a better job at taking care of them.”

*“These ... guys and gals put their lives on the line to protect this country, and then this is how they get treated when they get out. I think they can do a better job at taking care of them.”*

————— Vicky Pettis

After media exposés of the delays, the VA has tried to reduce wait times. According to a new tracking tool, more than 90 percent of veterans’ health-care appointments were scheduled within 30 days of the requested date, at the time of writing.<sup>23</sup>

## THE INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

The Indian Health Service provides care to 2.2 million Native Americans under treaties signed with the tribes.<sup>24</sup> The IHS has an annual budget of \$5.1 billion and employs hundreds of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals.

Clarinda Underwood, a member of the Quinault Tribal Council in Washington state, says the system’s funding is inadequate. Quinault Nation, like many reservations, is rural, which Underwood says makes it difficult to retain medical professionals at the local clinic, so the tribe must offer incentives. “Sometimes we have to provide them the money that they would normally get in the city so that they are able to come here,” she says.

## THE \$3 TRILLION INDUSTRY

The health-care industry, from private hospitals and major research institutions to drug companies and insurance providers, is a significant chunk of the U.S. economy, employing more than 12 million people.<sup>25</sup> Health-care expenditures reached \$3.2 trillion in 2015, and they continue to climb, soaking up roughly 17.8 percent of the nation’s GDP.<sup>26</sup>

*“With an aging population and more effective technology, that sort of health-care growth has sort of buoyed the entire U.S. economy, not just the Birmingham economy.”*

————— Josh Carpenter

“Health care is a big industry here and the reason that business is booming isn’t always good,” says Josh Carpenter, director of external affairs at the University of Alabama Birmingham. “We have one of the highest rates of obesity and chronic illness – comorbidities. So there’s a need. But with an aging population and more effective technology, that sort of health-care growth has sort of buoyed the entire U.S. economy, not just the Birmingham economy.”

## OUTLOOK

The Affordable Care Act is a work in progress. Changes must be made to keep the system afloat

and ensure that care becomes affordable. Republican lawmakers have been working actively to repeal the ACA and make good on a campaign promise they have been making for the better part of a decade. Ironically, though, determined conservative efforts to roll back the ACA's coverage expansion may be responsible in part for Americans' growing acceptance of the idea of universal health care.<sup>27</sup>

Given the historic unpopularity of Republican health-care proposals in 2017, it seems the debate on this issue in the United States has shifted to the left.<sup>28</sup> As more Americans become insured and benefit from subsidies, access to care and coverage for pre-existing conditions, politicians find it increasingly perilous to push for a return to the pre-Obamacare days – just how perilous we will find out in the congressional elections of November 2018 when we witness the fate of those who voted to repeal the ACA.

THE PLAN	THE DETAILS	NUMBER ENROLLED	COST TO INSURED
Insurance Through Employment	<p>Most of the cost is paid for by employers, with employees paying premiums.</p> <p>Under the Affordable Care Act, employers with more than 50 employees are required to provide insurance that pays at least 60 percent of the cost of a list of medical services for a standard population and covers a substantial portion of physician and inpatient hospital costs for their workers, including those with pre-existing conditions.<sup>29</sup> Those with fewer employees might be eligible for a tax credit or can use the exchange (marketplace) to find the best option.</p>	156 million <sup>30</sup>	Varies by plan and state. Employers pay for part of the plan. On average employee contributes \$1,255 per year for single-person plan. <sup>31</sup>
Health Insurance Marketplace	The Health Insurance Marketplace is for people who do not have qualifying health coverage, whether through their job, Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP or another source. <sup>32</sup> Applicants can apply via the federally facilitated marketplace or the state-based marketplace. Many who sign up for insurance this way receive a health-care tax credit that lowers the monthly premium cost. <sup>33</sup>	11 million <sup>34</sup>	Varies by person and region. In 2017 a 40-year-old non-smoker earning \$30,000 per year pays about \$207 per month (\$2,484 per year) for a basic plan. <sup>35</sup>
Medicare	Medicare is a federal government health insurance program that covers people over 65 years old, disabled people under 65, or anyone with permanent kidney failure. <sup>36</sup> Medicare is paid for through two trust fund accounts held by the U.S. Treasury: the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund, which comes from workers' payroll taxes, and the Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Fund, whose funds are authorized by Congress. <sup>37</sup>	55.3 million <sup>38</sup>	Typically no cost to enrollees, but many buy supplemental insurance.

THE PLAN	THE DETAILS	NUMBER ENROLLED	COST TO INSURED
Medicaid and CHIP	Medicaid is a joint federal and state program that, with the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), provides health coverage to about 74.5 million Americans, including children, pregnant women, parents, the elderly and people with disabilities. Under the Affordable Care Act, eligibility for children has been extended to families earning up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (\$11,880 for an individual) in every state. Some states have expanded their Medicaid coverage to this same threshold. Eligibility varies by state and can be based on income alone or can include household size, disability, age and other factors. <sup>39</sup> The federal government pays states for a percentage of program expenditures based on criteria including per capita income. <sup>40</sup>	74.5 million <sup>41</sup>	No or low cost to enrollees.
Indian Health Service (IHS)	The Indian Health Service provides care through its own facilities or affiliated providers to federally recognized American Indians and Alaska Natives. <sup>42</sup> IHS serves about 2.2 million members of 567 tribes <sup>43</sup> and receives funding from Congress, with a 2017 budget of about \$5.1 billion. <sup>44</sup>	2.2 million <sup>45</sup>	No cost to enrollees.
Veterans Administration (VA)	People who served in the military for at least two years and were not dishonorably discharged may qualify for VA health-care benefits. <sup>46</sup> In addition, those discharged for disability or injury incurred in the line of duty or those who served prior to September 7, 1980, are automatically eligible.	9.1 million <sup>47</sup>	Typically no cost to enrollees.
Uninsured	People who can afford health insurance but choose not to buy it must pay a penalty. For the year 2017, this is either 2.5 percent of household income or \$695 per adult (\$347.50 per child), whichever is higher. For those uninsured for just a few months, the penalty is lower. <sup>48</sup>	29 million <sup>49</sup>	No insurance costs. All health-care costs paid out-of-pocket.

\*Note that some people use a combination of these programs

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# IMMIGRATION

## 8

### CHAPTER

TRUMP'S CAMPAIGN RHETORIC ON IMMIGRATION APPEALED TO MANY VOTERS, BUT IF HIS ADMINISTRATION CONTINUES TO CRACK DOWN ON UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IT WILL FACE CHALLENGES ON BOTH THE LEFT AND RIGHT. THIS NATION OF IMMIGRANTS MUST NOW DETERMINE WHAT ROLE IT WANTS NEWCOMERS TO PLAY IN ITS CULTURE AND ECONOMY IN THE FUTURE.

When Donald Trump kicked off his 2016 election campaign, he told the crowd gathered at Trump Tower in New York City, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. ... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with [them]. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." Although many gasped at their televisions when they watched the candidate's brash remarks on the nightly news, others cheered, happy to hear the newly minted politician speaking his mind.

Trump's rhetoric sparked a heated national debate on immigration. Liberals have hurled accusations of racism at Trump and his supporters, while conservatives have blamed liberals for allowing too many undocumented immigrants – especially criminals – into the country.

### DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Every year approximately 1 million people move to the United States with a visa, adding to the country's foreign-born population of 43.3 million, 13.5 percent of the national population.<sup>1</sup>





In addition to those documented immigrants, approximately 11 million undocumented people live in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Their number rose significantly throughout the 1990s and early 2000s but tapered off with the financial crisis of 2008 and has remained stable for the past decade. They come primarily from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and other Central American countries, though a small but growing number are arriving from China.<sup>3</sup>

“Most people think that the problem with the border is unauthorized migration,” says Josiah Heyman, director of the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso. “Unauthorized migration is important, but not only is it going down, ... it is going down quite a lot. But also, it doesn’t compare to the volume of everyday legal authorized crossings.”

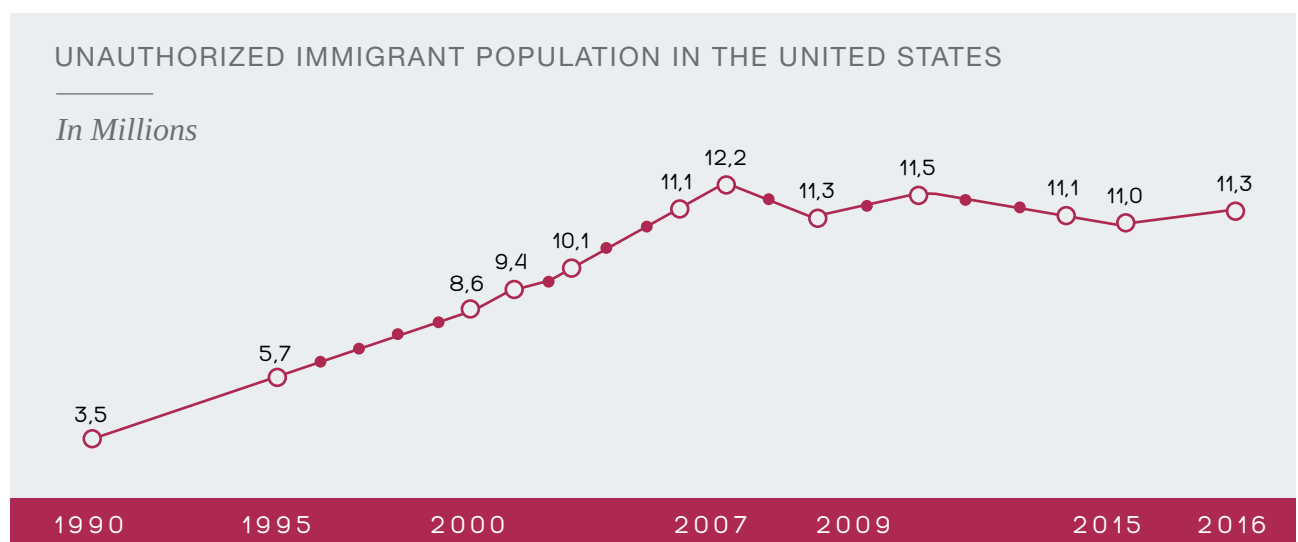
*“Unauthorized migration is important, but not only is it going down, ... it is going down quite a lot. But also, it doesn’t compare to the volume of everyday legal authorized crossings.”*

— Josiah Heyman

Although most immigration and border crossings to the United States are legal, for the purposes of family reunification and employment, undocumented immigration dominates the political discussion on the subject and will be the focus of this chapter.

## OPEN BORDERS

Many conservatives say the Obama administration was lenient in enforcing immigration laws, which in turn,



Pew Research Center.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- » 1 million people move to the United States each year with a visa
- » 13.5 percent of the U.S. population is foreign-born
- » 11 million undocumented people live in the United States
- » 3.1 million undocumented people pay Social Security taxes

Trump said, allowed many dangerous people to enter the United States. “Countless Americans who have died in recent years would be alive today if not for the open border policies of [Obama’s] administration,”<sup>4</sup> he declared in an August 2016 campaign speech. Conservatives’ perception that Obama’s negligence on border security endangered Americans has been fueled by coverage of the issue by right-leaning media such as Fox News.

In reality, undocumented immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born U.S. citizens. A study by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, found that the incarceration rate for undocumented immigrants is 0.85 percent, slightly more than half the 1.53 percent rate for U.S.-born Americans.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, many Americans see their neighborhoods and communities changing because of immigration and worry about the consequences.

Race plays an important part in the national dialogue about immigration and American identity, even beyond the president’s racially charged remarks on the campaign trail. Coastal urbanites have been quick to dismiss Trump supporters and citizens who want to curtail undocumented immigration as racists, leading some on the right to feel they cannot air legitimate concerns on the subject. This topic will be addressed in Chapter 9.

Council member Kathy Dobash in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, associates immigrants with unsettling changes in her hometown, although she does not blame them solely for a perceived uptick in local crime.

“I can’t blame it just on the immigrants coming to the

area, that would be unfair,” she says. “I don’t know what happened because that’s not the city I knew growing up. My mom had home invasions. These are big, big changes. I would never have imagined my city turning into this.” An epidemic of drug use, she acknowledges, is also a part of the problem.

## “DO IT RIGHT”

Although undocumented immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than the average American, many conservatives point out that crossing the border without a visa or overstaying a visa is a crime itself. Sarah Emerson, an active Republican and law student at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, says, “I am a strong believer in that, if you’re going to come into the country, do it right, go through the process.”

*“People say, ‘Well, why don’t these people come through the front door?’ There isn’t actually a front door.”*

——— Siobhán Lyons



Stephen A. Urban, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

Stephen A. Urban, a colleague of Dobash on the Luzerne County Council, sees undocumented immigration as a question of fairness and offers a qualified endorsement of one of Trump’s most controversial campaign promises:

“Come here legally. Submit your paperwork like everyone else. I have friends who have come from other countries that are here and they had to go through a rigorous process through the immigration service in order to get documented. ... Then we have others that simply

walk into the country and don't follow the same rules. I think the rules ought to apply equally to everyone. If people [obeyed] the rules we wouldn't need a wall. But if people don't obey the rules, then maybe we do need a wall."

Voices on the left argue that opportunities for legal migration are so limited that it's nearly impossible for immigrants to come or stay legally. Siobhán Lyons, president and chief executive of the nonprofit Citizens Diplomacy International in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, came to the United States from Ireland and has first-hand experience with the immigration process. "I think the American immigration system is so broken," she says. "People say, 'Well, why don't these people come through the front door?' There isn't actually a front door."



Siobhán Lyons, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Lyons worries that the country's strict immigration policies prevent even highly educated people from entering the United States legally. "People really believe that immigrants are trying to hammer their way in [but they are not]. Educated people aren't coming here anymore. It's a problem," she says.

## THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

The United States has often been described as a nation of immigrants. Imam Shafi of the Colorado Muslim Society argues that all Americans have their own immigration history. "America was built on refugees," he says. "Everybody has a history of how he got here." Originally from Kenya, Shafi has lived all over the world but considers the United States his home. He says when he hears people say Muslims should "go back to your country," he wonders, "Where do I go to? ... My wife was born in Texas, San Antonio. We have two children, twins, and another one is coming soon. ... So if you

want to kick me out of Denver, it's OK. I'm going to jump on a bus and I'm going to go to Texas."



Imam Shafi, Denver, Colorado

Perhaps because the immigrant story is at the center of so many people's American identities, many Americans believe there has been a deterioration in immigration standards since their ancestors arrived in the country. "Controlled immigration, that's fine. But when America was formed we had immigrants and they became Americans," says Woody Jacobs, mayor of Cullman, Alabama. "Now it seems that we have [immigrants] and they want to not assimilate into Americans." Cullman was founded by a German immigrant businessman in the 1870s as a settlement for other German expatriates. Although he acknowledges that the town's founder may not have encouraged settlers to speak English at the outset, he notes that immigrants' descendants no longer speak German. Jacobs says, "The heritage is still here, but everyone is American."

Many Americans think of their immigrant ancestors as more industrious and less coddled than those coming to the United States now. They see an immigration landscape that violates the unspoken contract – freedom and dignity in exchange for honesty and hard work – America has always had with its newcomers. Ken Isaksson, who works at a fish hatchery in Aberdeen, Washington, says he is not opposed to immigration but that newcomers should follow the same rules that his Swedish grandfather did:

"When he came in, people were required to have a job waiting for them or a sponsor. ... When he got here he started with nothing. He had to earn his money. ... The perception that I have of immigration now is if a person is able to get here, it seems that we have a lot of public programs, public assistance programs, and they're



*“[Americans] come and work, maybe a day or two, but they won’t complete the season. ... The comment that [people] make is that these people are coming and taking away jobs. That’s not true.”*

————— *Margie Diaz, Alamosa, Colorado*

automatically entered into it. I have no problem with immigration if people register as an immigrant and they go out and get a job and pay taxes into the system from which they benefit.”

## THE MATH

A major concern about undocumented immigration, especially among conservatives, is that, since many are paid informally, they are benefiting from social investments, such as education and infrastructure, without helping to pay for it via taxes.

“I think that might be unfair to the people who are here legally who are paying taxes, paying for the schools, paying for the roads, paying for the infrastructure. Then we have others that are working on a cash basis who are not paying into the system but are using the services,” says Urban.

Citing his stint on the county’s prison board, Urban estimates that millions of dollars are spent “every year for housing undocumented illegals in our jails. And we only get reimbursed from the federal government about \$120,000 a year for that cost. So our local taxpayers are paying for the cost of people who are in this country

illegally because the prior administration didn’t take firm action against preventing them from being in this county ... or in deporting them in a timely way.”

Dobash, his fellow council member, agrees. She says undocumented immigrants are a “drain on ... every educational and government system, and the health care system in the area.”

*“I think [undocumented immigration] might be unfair to the people who are here legally who are paying taxes, paying for the schools, paying for the roads, paying for the infrastructure.”*

————— *Stephen A. Urban*

In fact, some undocumented immigrants do pay taxes. In 2013, the Social Security Administration estimated that there were “3.1 million unauthorized immigrants working and paying Social Security taxes in 2010,” and it predicted that number would rise.<sup>6</sup> These unauthorized immigrants pay billions of dollars in taxes in a variety of ways, often buying fake Social Security numbers or documents in order to gain employment.

Whatever undocumented immigrants' tax status, both liberals and conservatives acknowledge that they fill important gaps in the U.S. labor market, doing low-wage jobs that Americans are often unwilling to do. Margie Diaz, a potato farmer in Alamosa, Colorado, struggles to find skilled and reliable workers. She uses a visa program that allows her to hire temporary agricultural workers from abroad but also requires her to employ U.S. citizens. American workers, she says, "come and work, maybe a day or two, but they won't complete the season. ... The comment that [people] make is that these people are coming and taking away jobs. That's not true. Because no one's taking away their job, a job that's available. Even in the warehouses, to just stand there and sort and stuff, [Americans are] not doing it."

With their meager wages, undocumented laborers have also been a boon to some employers and ultimately to U.S. consumers, helping to keep down the costs of food and countless other goods and services. Joie Meachem, a retiree in El Paso, Texas, sees her own community take advantage of the situation. "How many women just on my block hire illegals for their domestic use?" she says.

*"The workers that come across the border fill a big void and I worry personally on the price of my food if these people ... go away."*

————— *Hilda Lockhart*

Similarly, Hilda Lockhart, director of the International Trade Division at the Alabama Department of Commerce in Montgomery, Alabama, acknowledges that although she would like to see a shift toward legal immigration, she understands the value the undocumented immigrants add to the economy:

"I do know and realize that they ... do a lot of the labor and we also have food crops that are grown here that have to be picked and things like that. They fill a void in the construction industry. They fill a void in the food industry, the [agriculture] industry. ... The workers that come across the border fill a big void and I worry personally on the price of my food if these people ... go away. Somebody's got to do [these jobs]. And if we don't have someone to do that, the farmers will

suffer. It'll be a multiple effect on many industries and the consumer is going to suffer for it. That's just my personal opinion, but I also hear that from a lot of people I talk to."

## THE WALL

One of Trump's central campaign promises was to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border, a powerful symbol of his tough stance on undocumented immigration. Bruce Bradley, a conservative retiree from El Paso, Texas, is among the 35 percent of Americans who support the idea.<sup>7</sup> "The wall is not [there for] the legal people. There's a legal way to come across here. And a legal way to get our benefits," he says. "It's the illegal ones that it's going to keep out. If you're coming to this country legally, a wall's not going to make a difference. No difference whatsoever."




 Sandra, Huntsville, Alabama

Sandra, a conservative retiree from Huntsville, Alabama, who did not give her last name, has not made up her mind about the wall. "I'm not necessarily for a wall unless it is as effective as they think that it might be. I don't like walls, but if that's what it takes. ... I mean it's all the [drug] trafficking that is coming in, not just the people that are floating into this country," she says.

One major sticking point for conservatives is the wall's cost. A Department of Homeland Security report estimates it would cost \$21.6 billion, but Senate Democrats put the price tag at more than three times that, about \$70 billion.<sup>8</sup> Maintenance would eat up another \$150 million per year.<sup>9</sup> Trump has promised that he will make Mexico pay for the wall, threatening to levy taxes to ensure payment. Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, however, insists that Mexico will not fund the wall.

Both conservatives and liberals question the efficacy of such a wall.



 Sarah Emerson, Birmingham, Alabama

"I don't think the wall will stop people from coming into the country," conservative law student Sarah Emerson says. "I think [the idea of the wall] was a good try. I don't think that's going to be the fix."

Heyman, the University of Texas border studies expert, says, "As a practical measure, the wall doesn't do a darn thing." He calls it a "big ugly insulting symbol" that would make little headway against undocumented immigration, most of which results from people overstaying their visas, not crossing the border through the desert.

Fellow Texan Ruben Vogt, chief of staff to an El Paso County judge, is also critical of the president's plan, arguing that a barrier on the border already exists:

"We have a big hideous metal, rusting wall across our border, which used to be a beautiful landscape. So I don't know what the intent is, if it is to build a bigger wall, a taller wall. ... I think that our resources would be better spent in other avenues. Like ensuring that we have better technology in our ports, so that we can move people and goods in a safer manner, quicker manner, which helps our economy."



 Ruben Vogt, El Paso, Texas

Debate on the wall, of course, is less about its physical structure than about how open or restrictive, wise or unwise, the United States will be about controlling the flow of people coming in.

*"As a practical measure, the wall doesn't do a darn thing."*

————— Josiah Heyman



## CIVIC TRUST

Trump's emphasis on cracking down on undocumented immigrants has sent shockwaves through the undocumented community. One young mother in Yakima, Washington, says she never worried much that her partner "doesn't have any papers." With the recent election, however, his status has become a constant anxiety for her family. "All this stuff that the president now is saying that he wants to do, or he's willing to do. ... I mean it's gonna be hard. We gotta start opening our eyes that this is happening," she says.

As eyes open, undocumented immigrants have become less willing to trust local authorities. Yakima functions as a de facto sanctuary city, meaning that local law enforcement does not ask residents about their immigration status and does not report to national law enforcement about the status of residents, unless they commit a serious crime. After Trump took office, however, it became difficult for local officials, including within the witness protection program, to work with undocumented residents.



 Mayor Kathy Coffey, Yakima, Washington

"The comments and the nature of our newly elected president ... [have] done a tremendous disservice to this community," Yakima Mayor Kathy Coffey says. "[His] comments regarding the deportation, and I'm only speaking for myself, [have] been very hurtful, frightening and ... [caused a] very disturbing concern for many of our ... community."

Even local nonprofits are feeling the effect. Christiano Sosa of the Denver Foundation in Colorado says undocumented immigrants are no longer coming to health clinics supported by the foundation for fear that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents will be lying in wait to arrest them. "They're afraid to come in the doors," Sosa says.

*"All this stuff that the president now is saying that he wants to do, or he's willing to do. ... I mean it's gonna be hard. We gotta start opening our eyes that this is happening."*

————— Partner of undocumented immigrant,  
Yakima, Washington

Critics say this lack of civic trust threatens the safety and fabric of some communities, as undocumented immigrants may be reluctant to go to the emergency room to get necessary medical care, to report to the police when they are victims of or witness to a crime, even to send their children to school.

## SHOWDOWN AT THE BORDER

Trump's campaign rhetoric on immigration appealed to many voters, but if his administration continues to crack down on undocumented immigrants, ordering deportations and building a wall, it will face challenges on both the left and right.

From a humanitarian perspective, many worry that the uptick in deportations will prevent undocumented immigrants from living safely in the United States.

From an economic perspective, many question the efficacy and cost of Trump's proposals, particularly the construction of a wall. There is also bipartisan concern about a potential drought of undocumented workers, who fill an important role in the U.S. economy, from domestic help to agriculture. The Trump administration could address undocumented immigration by developing a system that either gives undocumented people a path to legal status or provides significantly more opportunities for legal immigration to the United States – although it has recently thrown its support behind a bill to reduce legal immigration.

Any significant overhaul of U.S. policy on undocumented immigration will need to address humanitarian as well as economic concerns in order to win widespread support. The debate on undocumented immigration should also take place as part of the larger debate on all immigration in the United States. This nation of immigrants must now determine what role it wants newcomers to play in its culture and economy in the future.

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# RACE

## 9

### CHAPTER

OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THE DEATHS OF UNARMED BLACK MEN AND BOYS, SOME AS YOUNG AS 12, HAVE SPARKED A NATIONAL DEBATE ON INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM. HOWEVER, RACIAL TENSIONS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE NOT JUST A BLACK AND WHITE ISSUE.

Terry Collins had just started the ninth grade in September 1963 when he walked out of his high school classroom to join thousands of young people in protest on the streets of Birmingham, Alabama. The city's 16th Street Baptist Church, which served as a meeting place for civil rights activists, had just been bombed by white supremacists. Four young girls were killed.

Collins says he was scared. "Sometimes, seeing injustice every day, you realize that it is better to live free. ... I realize it could have been live free or die," he says.



▲ Terry Collins, Birmingham, Alabama

At the time, Birmingham, like much of the country, was segregated: African-Americans were forced to attend separate schools, live in separate neighborhoods and even use separate bathrooms from their white peers.

Many government and law enforcement officials across the country were active supporters of these discrimina-

tory laws. Collins remembers seeing Birmingham's public safety commissioner, Eugene "Bull" Connor, use his infamously brutal tactics, such as fire hoses and police dogs, against peaceful protesters, including young students.

Despite the very real dangers, thousands of Americans protested the racist legislation and practices, and eventually the laws were changed. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin, and established that all people should have equal access to employment and public spaces.<sup>1</sup> Legislation that followed protected further rights, particularly voting rights, which had been under attack since African-American men were given the right to vote following the Civil War in 1870. Women in the United States did not receive the right to vote until 1920.

*"Some of the same things that were happening in the '50s and '60s [are] happening today. They're just kind of undercover."*

——— Terry Collins

"The Civil Rights Movement ... was nothing short of a revolution, where people came together, not just black folks who were marginalized, but all kinds of people came from the North and the South, the East and the West, to help ensure the civil rights for every person in



*“Sometimes, seeing injustice every day, you realize that it is better to live free. ... I realize it could have been live free or die.”*

————— Terry Collins

the United States,” says Lecia Brooks, director of the Civil Rights Memorial Center in Montgomery, Alabama.

## THE SCARS

For decades after the most violent episodes of the civil rights struggle, a quieter tension prevailed in the United States, interrupted by occasional spasms. Instead of marches, bombings and “whites only” signs, an argument arose, peppered with terms such as “affirmative action,” “racial profiling,” “white privilege” and “reparations.” Even though respondents typically told pollsters they held a reasonably favorable view of other ethnic or racial groups, surveys also repeatedly found that minorities perceived greater conflict among such groups than did whites.<sup>2</sup> In addition, one respected poll taken over the years found that whites are much less likely than blacks to believe that blacks are treated unfairly in many public situations.<sup>3</sup>

Those differing viewpoints are hardly surprising, given that minorities and whites seldom mix. The percentage of public schools with student bodies that are at least 75 percent poor and black or Hispanic is on the rise, and the country’s large metropolitan areas are still highly segregated.<sup>4</sup>

“Some of the same things that were happening in the ’50s and ’60s [are] happening today. They’re just kind

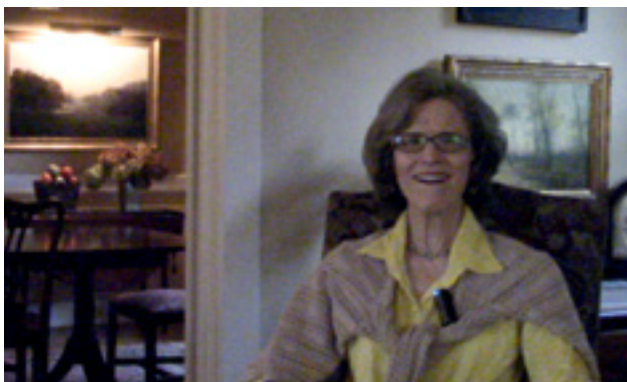
of undercover,” says Collins, second vice president of the Birmingham chapter of the NAACP, America’s most visible civil rights organization. He says employment and housing discrimination, for example, persist, even if signs are no longer openly posted forbidding African Americans from entering certain spaces.


Broadly speaking, relations between African-Americans and some white Americans have entered a stalemate, in which blacks want acknowledgement of the systems and institutional racism – slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, preferred university admissions for the children of alumni, predominantly white word-of-mouth hiring networks – that have helped cement an income and achievement gap between whites and blacks, while many whites protest that they are not racist and in at least one respected poll say racism against whites is more widespread than against blacks.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Muslims – or those perceived as Muslims – and immigrants are increasingly targets of violent attacks by the rising number of hate groups in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Dorcas Harris of Huntsville, in northern Alabama, also grew up among segregation, but is white. She has thought a lot about the scars that racism has left on her community and the vestiges of segregation that

remain. “A big part of my upbringing was to think of black people as separate and different and inferior,” she says. “And I’ve spent a large part of the last four, five decades trying to get past that. Because it’s really difficult to undo something you learned as a child. Not that my parents were wicked people, or that they were Klansmen, or that they ever had anything to do with ill-treatment of blacks. But in terms of attitude, it was very much ingrained in me.”



 Dorcas Harris, Huntsville, Alabama

*“A big part of my upbringing was to think of black people as separate and different and inferior. And I’ve spent a large part of the last four, five decades trying to get past that. Because it’s really difficult to undo something you learned as a child.”*

————— Dorcas Harris

Harris credits her daughter’s open-mindedness and commitment to equality with helping to change her perspective.



 Pastor Garry Brantley, Birmingham, Alabama

*“I’m a white guy, in my 50s, grew up in the South, to a conservative – religiously conservative – family, politically conservative. If that didn’t shape how I view the world, I’d be lying.”*

————— Pastor Garry Brantley

Pastor Garry Brantley of Birmingham’s Crossbridge Church teaches a college-level sociology course to students, most of whom are working throughout their studies and many of whom are African-American. He says he begins his course by telling his students, “I’m a white guy, in my 50s, grew up in the South, to a conservative – religiously conservative – family, politically conservative. If that didn’t shape how I view the world, I’d be lying.” He acknowledges that for him, particularly as a pastor, it is critical to “recognize the issues and the biases that we bring to any conversation. I think that’s the only way to get forward.”

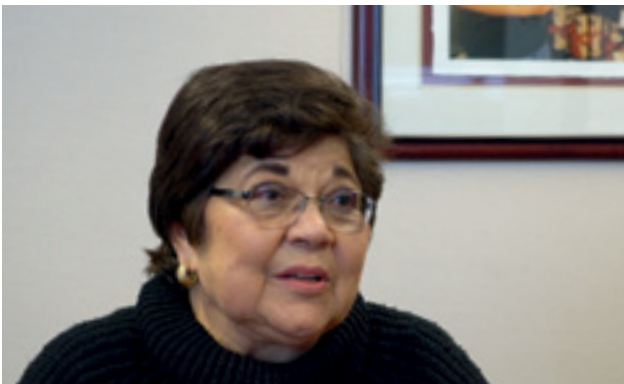
## NOT JUST BLACK AND WHITE

Although some of the nation’s most egregious sins, starting with slavery, have been committed against its African-American citizens, race in the United States is not simply a black and white issue. The country is also home to sizable Hispanic and Asian-American populations, as well as Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Each of these groups has faced its own challenges. Though it can be easy for those outside the country to assume that all racial tensions exist between white Americans and those of other races, this is certainly not the case. Race is an issue between and even within other groups. “The racial divide is not just black and white. It’s also black and brown, it’s also African-American – Asian-American. It’s also documented – undocumented. There’s a lot of stressors and a lot of fractures, even within communities of color,” explains LeDawn Sullivan of the Colorado nonprofit the Denver Foundation.

## HISPANICS

Hispanics have their own recent history of segregation. “The church where I went to church, we were not allowed to sit in the center aisles; we had to sit on the side aisles,” recalls former Colorado State Senator Polly Baca. “The theaters were segregated. We only could sit in the balconies, not the main floor. There were signs like, ‘no Mexicans or dogs allowed.’”

UNITED STATES RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS <sup>7</sup>	
White alone (non-Hispanic)	61.3%
Hispanic or Latino	17.8%
Black or African-American alone	13.3%
Asian alone	5.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	1.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.2%
Two or More Races	2.6%



 Polly Baca, Denver, Colorado

America's nearly 57 million Hispanics amount to almost 18 percent of the population, making them the country's largest minority group. By 2060, the Census Bureau projects they will make up nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population. With those numbers have come a fitful growth in political influence: more Hispanics are winning elective office at the local and national level, especially in the Southwest.<sup>8</sup>

*"The racial divide is not just black and white. ... There's a lot of stressors and a lot of fractures, even within communities of color."*

————— LeDawn Sullivan

In the late 2000s, it seemed as if Republicans, whose base of older white voters is shrinking, might start trying to woo Hispanic voters away from the Democrats. Some Republican senators and Republican President

George W. Bush tried unsuccessfully to create "a path to citizenship" for undocumented immigrants, most of whom are Hispanic. Later, after Mitt Romney lost the presidential race to Barack Obama in 2012, an internal Republican Party report urged Republicans to reach out to Hispanic voters.

But much of that was forgotten with the 2016 campaign, especially by supporters of Donald Trump, who made stopping the flow of immigrants to the country a central pillar of his platform. Thus Hispanics were driven further into the arms of the Democrats.<sup>9</sup> That dynamic is unlikely to change: The shifting demographics of the United States, of which Hispanic population growth is a key part, have helped ignite a cultural anxiety among white working-class voters that in turn inspired fervid support for Trump's backward-looking Make America Great Again campaign.<sup>10</sup>

## ASIAN-AMERICANS

Most of the 21 million Asian-Americans live in the Northeast or on the West Coast.<sup>11</sup> The country's fastest-growing ethnic group, they are better educated and enjoy a median income higher than the population at large.<sup>12</sup>

Asian-Americans lean heavily Democratic, and they registered a record number of new voters – more than 1.1 million – between the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections. In a major survey after the 2016 election, they identified their biggest concerns as the costs of college, health care and elder care, and the quality of their children's schools.<sup>13</sup> Few reported facing conventional

types of discrimination – at the workplace, in housing and the like – but majorities of almost every Asian group said people frequently assume they are good at math or science.

Trump's efforts to ban immigrants from majority-Muslim countries and anti-China rhetoric carry troubling echoes of late-19th century efforts to bar Chinese immigrants and of the World War II-era internment of more than 100,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans in camps. Only about 25 percent of Asian-Americans voted for Trump, according to the post-election survey.


## NATIVE AMERICANS

Census-takers lump American Indians into a category with Alaska Natives. Together, they number about 6.6 million, or about 1.3 percent of the population. More than half of American Indians live away from their tribal lands, which include 362 reservations. These various nations have never recovered from wholesale dispossession and the extermination campaigns waged against them by European settlers: American Indians and Alaska Natives are significantly poorer and less-educated, and they own homes and businesses at a lower rate than Americans as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

*“They cut our hair, they took our language, they took our culture, they took our traditions. ... When you tell people that everything you are was evil, ... it brings you to a shame. ... To come back from shame is a really hard. You have to heal.”*

———— Clarinda Underwood



 Clarinda Underwood, Quinault Nation, Washington

Clarinda Underwood, a Tribal Council member of the Quinault Nation in Washington state, says after her tribe

signed a treaty with the U.S. government in 1855, native ways were nearly extinguished, setting off a cycle of shame that continues.

“They cut our hair, they took our language, they took our culture, they took our traditions,” she says. “From what I remember growing up, one grandmother told me not to – not to sing our songs and not to dance our dances because it was evil. That’s kind of what was put on us. We were to be ashamed of who we were. And so that was really hard for me to go through a healing as an adult and to relearn who I was. ... When you tell people that everything you are was evil, ... it brings you to a shame. ... To come back from shame is a really hard. You have to heal.”

There is evidence that in 2016, counties where American Indians make up the majority voted for Hillary Clinton, although in fewer numbers than had supported Barack Obama.<sup>15</sup> The former president made an effort to improve health care for Native Indians, and his administration settled more than 100 lawsuits tribes had brought against the government over decades concerning management of their lands.<sup>16</sup>

## ISLAMOPHOBIA

An estimated 3.3 million Muslims live in the United States, and they – and those perceived as Muslim – are increasingly subject to violence or intimidation.<sup>17</sup> The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported more than 2,200 “anti-Muslim bias incidents” in 2016, up 57 percent from the previous year. These most often included harassment, workplace discrimination, denial of religious accommodations, hate crimes and generalized questioning by the FBI unrelated to specific cases.<sup>18</sup>

Maha Jahshan, who works in the city of Seattle’s Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, says Islamophobia is an issue in the region. “A lot of our folks in Washington state ... might not interact a lot with Muslim folks or people from the Middle East who are not Muslim. ... But to them, a Middle Easterner equals Muslim, equals terrorist, equals ‘I don’t want that person in my back yard.’”

It’s not only the people of Washington state. CAIR’s report documents outlandish statements about Muslims by public officials across the country, accusing them of plotting to convert or kill Americans, calling them “the enemy” and calling Islam “a death cult.”



*“A lot of our folks in Washington state ... might not interact a lot with Muslim folks or people from the Middle East who are not Muslim. ... But to them, a Middle Easterner equals Muslim, equals terrorist, equals ‘I don’t want that person in my back yard.’”*

————— Maha Jahshan

In making the link between the Middle East, Islam and terrorism, many Americans take their cue from the White House. After one week in office, Trump issued an executive order banning entry to the United States for people from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. The executive order, titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” referenced the September 11th attacks and suggested that there was a serious danger of Middle Eastern terrorists entering the United States – although none of the hijackers in that attack was from the affected countries.<sup>19</sup> The constitutionality of the order is under review by the Supreme Court.

## GEOGRAPHY

The country as a whole is diverse, but it contains many pockets of homogeneity. As mentioned, blacks and whites remain segregated in most major metropolitan areas. States in the Northeast tend to be heavily white, and some counties in Appalachia and the Midwest are near or at 100 percent white.<sup>20</sup> The most diverse counties form a crescent shape across the South and Southwest and they roughly coincide with the greatest concentrations of Hispanic and African-American residents.

## INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

One of the most diverse regions in the country is the South, partly because slavery left behind poor, black communities in the region. The effect is that whites and blacks in the South interact regularly and most of the time encounter little personal friction. Partly for this reason, sociologists who have spent time with Trump supporters in the South and the Midwest say these white voters reject the notion that they are racist but give little thought to how racism is embedded in American institutions.



⋈ Timothy Nelson, El Paso, Texas



*“They see that brown skin, they see those dreads and, boy, I pray to God he’s not the victim of, ‘Woah, show me your hands.’”*

————— Nathaniel Jones

But zooming out the lens shows it is widespread. White Americans – particularly white men – have long dominated the government, business world and much of academia, even as police forces, universities and board rooms slowly become more diverse. Systems and norms, often within institutions – such as unconscious, biased hiring practices, police tactics, college admissions requirements or criminal justice sentencing practices – may benefit certain types of people and discriminate against others. Some examples among many: the unemployment rate in 2013 for young college graduates who are black was more than twice the rate for young college graduates as a whole; in New Jersey, a study found that black drivers were much more likely to be stopped and even arrested by the police, although black and white drivers violate traffic laws at the same rate.<sup>21</sup>

“Racism is still here and you can see it wrapped in our institutions, and until we start understanding how institutions are supporting that racism we’re going to continue to have it,” Timothy Nelson, racial justice director at an El Paso nonprofit, says.

## THE POLICE

In 2015, police shot and killed 965 people.<sup>22</sup> Of the 875 who were armed, 564 – 64 percent – had guns. Of the

135 law enforcement officers who died on the job in 2016, 64 were killed by firearms.<sup>23</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 12, guns are prevalent in the United States, so the stakes can be especially high for police officers. But statistics suggest that white people get a bigger benefit of the doubt in contacts with police than minorities do. Although a plurality of those shot and killed by police in 2015 were white men who had pulled out guns or other weapons, “a hugely disproportionate number — 3 in 5 — of those killed after exhibiting less threatening behavior were black or Hispanic.”<sup>24</sup>

*“Racism is still here and you can see it wrapped in our institutions, and until we start understanding how institutions are supporting that racism we’re going to continue to have it.”*

————— Timothy Nelson

Over the past five years, the deaths of unarmed black men and boys, some as young as 12, have sparked a national debate on institutionalized racism in policing. Police brutality is not new, but a combination of factors, including the prevalence of video-equipped mobile phones and the founding of the Black Lives Matter protest movement, have put the issue in front of a larger public.

The 2014 death of Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager in Ferguson, Missouri, set off a wave of protests.<sup>25</sup> Brown was shot by a white officer, who was not indicted. Protests broke out again in April 2015 when Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old resident of Baltimore, Maryland, died of injuries sustained in the back of a police van after his arrest. Both men's encounters with police were at least partly caught on videotape, but no police have been convicted of wrongdoing, leaving many further disillusioned with the criminal justice system.

The deaths of unarmed African-American men are a reminder of the menace that people of color – especially African-American men – say they feel every day in situations that seem innocuous to white Americans.



 Nathaniel Jones, El Paso, Texas

Nelson says at least six law enforcement agencies patrol his 37-mile daily commute from Las Cruces, New Mexico, to his job in El Paso. He says all that law enforcement activity “is going to do is increase the anxiety ... for me, because I drive around with dreadlocks. There’s a reality that comes with wearing the dreads too.”

Nelson’s colleague Nathaniel Jones has a son who wears dreadlocks as well. At 15, he is excelling in high school and plans to study engineering. But Jones fears that the dreadlocks mark out his son as a potential troublemaker and could lead to a dangerous encounter with police.

“They see that brown skin, they see those dreads and, boy, I pray to God he’s not the victim of, ‘Woah, show me your hands.’ What I’m saying is I’ve got to fight those odds every day,” Jones says.

Philadelphia native Mike Green says that as an African-American he is extremely careful when he interacts with

any law enforcement, like when he was pulled over last month for a broken taillight on his car. “I’m going to break it down for you in white and black issue. I believe that the white police are ... scared of the black man,” he says. “We as blacks are taking the brunt of the white police fear or they just don’t care. I don’t know.”



 Mike Green, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## VOTER ID LAWS

In the past decade, Republican lawmakers across the country have pushed laws to require that voters have specific forms of identification in order to cast a ballot. Proponents of voter ID laws say they guard against voter fraud, but credible research has shown that voter fraud is extremely rare.<sup>26</sup>

These laws do, however, effectively make it harder for minorities and poor people – who favor the Democrats – to vote.

In the United States, residents are not required to have photo IDs that are valid nationwide. This comes as a surprise to many Europeans who are used to and expected to carry personal identification (Personalausweis in Germany) at all times. Many Americans feel that a mandatory ID card could give the government too much control. Most adults have photo identification in the form of a driver’s license or passport. However, many who do not drive or travel outside the country lack photo identification. Only 5 percent of white Americans do not have a photo ID, compared with 13 percent of African-Americans and 10 percent of Hispanics.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, only 2 percent of Americans in households that earn over \$150,000 a year do not have photo IDs, compared with 12 percent of Americans living in households that earn less than \$25,000 a year.<sup>28</sup>

Thirty-three of the 50 states have voter identification requirements. Eighteen of those states require voters to present a photo ID, while the other 15 accept other forms of identification, such as apartment leases and utility bills.<sup>29</sup>

*“Many times, people aren’t able to purchase the ID that’s required, again because of economics. Also, they may have to travel great distances. They might be incapacitated. How would you allow for a person in a nursing home, in a hospital, in some kind of an institution to vote, exercise their rights?”*

————— Terry Collins

Applying for identification can be too costly or complicated, or might require a trip to a local government agency, which can present serious barriers for the poor or those without easy access to transportation. In addition, sometimes government officials make it more difficult to obtain an ID card, including by limiting opening hours for the office that would issue it.<sup>30</sup>

“Many times, people aren’t able to purchase the ID that’s required, again because of economics,” Terry Collins says. “Also, they may have to travel great distances. They might be incapacitated. How would you allow for a person in a nursing home, in a hospital, in some kind of an institution to vote, exercise their rights?”

Given current political realities – and the Supreme Court’s 2013 decision weakening parts of the Voting Rights Act to effectively give states with a history of voter suppression more freedom in crafting their election-related laws – Lecia Brooks is pessimistic.<sup>31</sup>

“I think that what we’ll continue to see [is] a push to further suppress voting rights,” she says. “I don’t think we’ll ever see – in this administration anyway – a full restoration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which is a shame. [We’ll see] more voter ID laws, more ways to disenfranchise people from voting, as opposed to finding ways to ensure that everyone gets to vote.”

## HONESTY OR RACISM?

While concern over the state of race relations has inched upward among Americans in the last couple of years, Republicans view it much less urgently than Democrats,

according to a recent survey.<sup>32</sup> And some conservatives say right-wing populism should not be mistaken for racism.

Drawing a comparison with the election of Trump, Marty Connors, former chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, says, “Why did England leave the EU? Well it’s really pretty simple. ... They were tired of top-down, heavy-handed bureaucratic government, and they were tired of being force-fed immigration. ... It’s not racism, it’s just people want to have some sovereignty, and you’re seeing a rise around the Western world of nationalism and populism. Witness Donald Trump.”

For Connors and many Americans, particularly conservatives, Trump’s brash willingness to speak his mind on controversial topics was a breath of fresh air. Many say they feel constrained from doing the same, for fear of being labeled racists. They deride their opponents on the left as politically correct thought-police and say it has become more difficult to have honest conversations. On the other hand, a major survey designed to detect racial bias in respondents has over the years found that white respondents blame blacks’ perceived lack of ambition more than economic factors for continuing inequality and that more whites accept racist practices, although the gap is closing.<sup>33</sup>

*“They were tired of being force-fed immigration. ... It’s not racism, it’s just people want to have some sovereignty, and you’re seeing a rise around the Western world of nationalism and populism. Witness Donald Trump.”*

————— Marty Connors

A 2016 poll found that 59 percent of Americans, and 83 percent of Trump supporters, believe people are “too easily offended these days over language.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, 59 percent of Clinton supporters said they believed, “people need to be more careful with language to avoid offending people.”<sup>35</sup> The line between frankness and openness and offensive speech is becoming increasingly debated – and partisan.

## THE BACKLASH

To many minorities, Trump’s rise feels like a bull’s eye painted on their backs. “The African-American population and small Latino population in Alabama are



*“It really is a pushback on a lot of the advances we’ve made relative to civil and human rights.”*

————— *Lecia Brooks*

very concerned. I would say the same is true for folks of color, non-white, immigrant folks across the U.S. because it really feels like, it really is a pushback on a lot of the advances we’ve made relative to civil and human rights,” Brooks says. She posits that white anxiety over changing demographics is helping fuel Trump’s support. “This whole kind of movement toward ‘Make America Great Again’ is really in the minds of most civil rights or social justice folks, a cry to take the United States back to a place where there was a clear [white] majority. ... Good for some people, not good for some other people.”

Timothy Nelson in El Paso agrees. “[Trump] is a throwback to what America was. Making America great again is a reference to a very specific racialized, white supremacist, top-down understanding of what America is,” he says.

Layra Marivani, Nelson’s colleague at the El Paso non-profit, lived many years in her native Mexico before living in the states of Illinois, California and Washing-

ton. She says she “never felt the need to defend my Mexican-ness until right now. [I never needed to argue that] my Mexican-ness doesn’t define how smart I am or what I’m capable of, and I think that’s something that is really dangerous.”

Ana, a Hispanic college student from Alamosa, Colorado, says she has seen more racism from her peers since the election. “Once [some classmates] find out you’re Mexican or from a family of Mexicans. ... They’re really Trump-supportive. .... They call you names,” she says. “I was born here. ... I mean, just come on. Grow up.”

Terry Collins offers a realistic yet optimistic take on the implications of Trumpism: “The truth of the matter is [we] still have a long way to go. There’s still a fight to be won. The struggle continues. It is not hopeless. Because if it was hopeless, what reason would we have to try to continue? I think the distance that [we’ve] come is the indication of the many changes that are possible for this country.”

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# WOMEN

## 10 CHAPTER

BOTH CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT IN 2016 MADE WOMEN'S ISSUES A CENTRAL CONCERN FOR MANY VOTERS. HILLARY CLINTON CELEBRATED THE HISTORIC NATURE OF HER CANDIDACY AND WIDELY EXPECTED TRIUMPH WHILE EXTOLLING THE VALUE OF HAVING A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE ASCENDANT IN THE WHITE HOUSE. ON THE OTHER HAND, DONALD TRUMP'S BEHAVIOR, IN THE PAST AND ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL, BROUGHT HOME TO MANY HOW ENTRENCHED CERTAIN RETROGRADE ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN STILL ARE IN THE UNITED STATES.

With its first major-party female candidate, the 2016 presidential election campaign was a watershed. Based on Hillary Clinton's consistent lead in the polls, most people believed it would culminate in the election of America's first woman president. Instead, for many it was a wake-up call about progress not yet made and attitudes not yet changed.

"I'd say before the election, the average woman felt like things were pretty good and [there was] that 'We don't really need feminism anymore' kind of feeling," says Jhana Bach, an organizer for Seattle, Washington's National Organization for Women (NOW) chapter. "Seattle likes to think of itself as a bastion of liberal thinking. But the reality of the election sort of proved that wrong." Although the majority of Seattle's voters supported Clinton, Bach and many other Washingtonians were surprised by support that Donald Trump was able to win, especially in the suburbs.

Almost a century after women won the right to vote and decades after the women's rights protests of the 1960s and 1970s, feminism again became a topic of intense national debate during the election.

In her concession speech after losing her bid for the

Democratic nomination in 2008, Clinton vowed that the country would "someday launch a woman into the White House" and referred to the votes she had won as "18 million cracks" in the "highest, hardest glass ceiling."<sup>1</sup> Eight years later, at the Democratic National Convention in 2016, the audience watched a montage of the nation's first 44 presidents – all men – in black and white, before the video gave way to a beaming Hillary Clinton in vivid color, live via satellite. "I can't believe we just put the biggest crack in that glass ceiling yet," she declared.<sup>2</sup>

Arguably, Clinton's gender played an important role in the election, and Clinton and others say she endured sexist attacks from both the media and her opponent. Political pundits and journalists called her "shrill," and suggested that she smile more.<sup>3</sup> Trump called her a "such a nasty woman" in one debate and said, "I just don't think she has a presidential look. And you need a presidential look. You have to get the job done."<sup>4</sup>

But even as Trump was implicitly linking Clinton's gender to an alleged lack of ability, he accused her of using her gender to score political points. "Well, I think the only card she has is the woman's card," he said in April 2016.<sup>5</sup> "If Hillary Clinton were a man, I don't think



*“I’d say before the election, the average woman felt like things were pretty good and [there was] that ‘We don’t really need feminism anymore’ kind of feeling.”*

— Jhana Bach

she’d get 5 percent of the vote. The only thing she’s got going is the women’s vote. And the beautiful thing is that women don’t like her.”<sup>6</sup>

In a nationwide 2015 Gallup poll, 92 percent of respondents said they would vote for a well-qualified female candidate or a well-qualified African-American candidate.<sup>7</sup> But resistance to Clinton sometimes came from an unexpected quarter: young women who resented what they perceived as pressure to vote for Clinton because she was a woman. Sensitive to this, Clinton’s campaign tried to be inspirational and historic all the while not making too much of gender.

“Clearly, I’m not asking people to vote for me simply

because I’m a woman,” Clinton told a gathering in July 2015. “I’m asking people to vote for me on the merits. And I think one of the merits is I am a woman and I can bring those views and perspectives to the White House.”<sup>8</sup>

But that pitch was not enough to win over many women. Although 54 percent of women voters went for Clinton, Trump won 52 percent of white women’s votes, compared to Clinton’s 43 percent.<sup>9</sup>

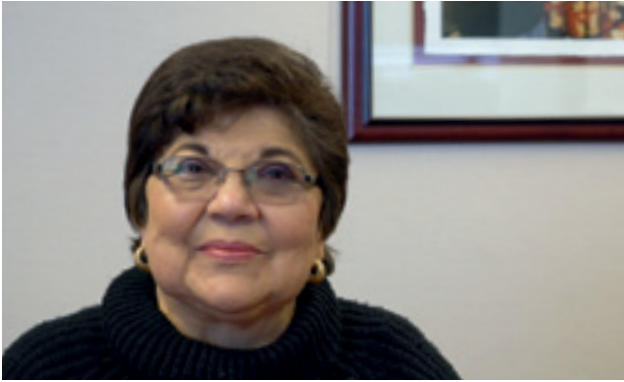
## SEXIST REMARKS

Many Americans saw the election results as a setback for women’s rights and progress, not only because a female candidate lost, but also because they saw Trump as a misogynist.

During the campaign, Trump made a series of demeaning remarks about women, often about their appearance. His targets went beyond Clinton to include Carly Fiorina, one of his competitors for the Republican nomination, female journalists and others. Most explosive was a 2005 recording in which Trump used vulgarities to describe grabbing women against their consent. When the so-called Access Hollywood tape surfaced a month before Election Day, political pundits and many others considered it a death knell for Trump’s campaign.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- » 54 percent of women voted for Hillary Clinton
- » Women make up 47 percent of the work force
- » Women make up 20.1 percent of the U.S. Congress
- » Women earn 81.5 percent as much as men do for the same work



 Polly Baca, Denver, Colorado

“It’s hard for me to even say [Trump’s] name,” says Polly Baca, an active Democrat and retired member of the Colorado state senate. “That’s how much it hurt me. First as a Mexican-American, and then as a woman. What he said about us, it’s very painful.”

Trump’s victory set off a backlash in defense of women’s issues and equality. Baca says it was important to her to go to Washington, D.C., and be among the hundreds of thousands who marched there to protest Trump’s presidency in January 2017.



 Pastor Garry Brantley, Birmingham, Alabama

Pastor Garry Brantley of Birmingham, Alabama’s Cross-bridge Church is also dismayed by Trump’s rhetoric. “I think some of the misogynist statements that Trump made is just ... indefensible. ... It would be hard to find someone who’s authentically trying to follow this Jesus to say, ‘OK, women, they’re just sex objects. You can objectify them and all that.’”

For some Americans, the future president’s comments were a clear sign that gender equality was not as close at hand as they had thought.

## WORKPLACE EQUALITY

One focus of this rejuvenated national discussion on sexism is women’s role in the workplace. “Women are such a big part of the population and yet it seems like ... we don’t count for much. ... How much does a woman earn in respect to a man? ... Is it 75 to 80 percent?” Martha Thompson, of El Paso, Texas, says. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that women make 81.5 percent of what their male peers do for the same work.<sup>10</sup>



 Martha Thompson, El Paso, Texas

*“Women are such a big part of the population and yet it seems like ... we don’t count for much. ... How much does a woman earn in respect to a man? ... Is it 75 to 80 percent?”*

————— Martha Thompson

That is not to say that progress has not been made. For instance, women are better educated than they were a generation ago: In 2012, 88 percent achieved a high school degree or higher, compared with 47.5 percent in 1963.<sup>11</sup> Also, women now make up 47 percent of the work force<sup>12</sup> and have a work force participation rate of 58 percent, up from 38 percent in 1963.<sup>13</sup> They are even breaking into male-dominated fields. “Our female apprenticeship numbers are [up to] 11 percent. May not sound like much, but that’s the highest in the industry,” says Dale Bright of the Local 242 construction union in Seattle. He says there were virtually no women in the industry just a few decades ago.



*“Our youngest came to us by way of adoption. Her birth mother chose life.”*

———— Pam Andrews

Equal pay is not the only challenge women face in the workplace. Ken Isaksson, who works at a fish hatchery in Aberdeen, Washington, says, “Sexual discrimination and sexual harassment [are] alive and well and it’s never going away. And it’s a sad state in this country, but it’s probably as prevalent as racism.” About one in four women in the United States experiences harassment in the workplace.<sup>14</sup> Although Isaksson’s team at the hatchery is all men, they have had female interns. He says he works hard to make sure they feel comfortable in the male-dominated industry, but many employers do not do the same.

Beyond harassment, women, particularly working mothers, still struggle to balance their work and home lives. The United States is the only one of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s 41 members – developed countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Oceania – without a paid family leave policy, meaning that many women must return to work almost immediately after giving birth.<sup>15</sup> The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 requires employers to offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to deal with family- and health-related issues, but the law does not apply to private companies with fewer than 50 employees or employees who work fewer than 1,250 hours – about half-time – per year.<sup>16</sup> Vanessa S. of El Paso, Texas, lives in a homeless

shelter with her sons. She says the biggest challenge is, “maintaining a job and being able to spend time with your children. Equaling it out.”

## ABORTION

Few debates related to women’s issues are as sensitive as that over abortion. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recorded 664,435 legal induced abortions in 2013, about 12.5 abortions per 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 44.<sup>17</sup> For comparison, Germany had approximately 5.7 abortions per 1,000 women in the same year.<sup>18</sup>

Although abortion was made legal in the United States by the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, some state, local and even national lawmakers continue to make access to the procedure more difficult.

In 2013, Texas legislation established requirements about the width of hallways in clinics that performed abortions, the distance clinics could be from the nearest hospital and even the type of air conditioning required. These new rules caused 22 of the state’s 41 clinics to close,<sup>19</sup> in a state with about 14 million women.<sup>20</sup> The legislation was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2016, but the state government is working on new rules to restrict abortion.



 Pam Andrews, Delaware

At the national level, Republican lawmakers have also worked to end government funding of Planned Parenthood, an independent network of more than 650 centers across the country that provides reproductive health-care services, including abortions.

In the United States, the debate on abortion is split into two camps. Those who oppose abortion, and describe themselves as “pro-life” make up about 40 percent of the population.<sup>21</sup> Those who support access to abortion and describe themselves as “pro-choice,” make up 57 percent of the population.

Slightly more women than men – 59 percent to 55 percent – say abortion should be legal in all or most cases. In general, younger people are more supportive of access to abortion: 65 percent of Americans 18 to 29 years old say it should be legal in all or most cases, compared with 53 percent of those 65 or older.<sup>22</sup> Although Democrats tend to support access to legal abortion, the debate does not fall neatly along party lines: 34 percent of Republicans and 75 percent of Democrats believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases.<sup>23</sup>

Pam Andrews travels to Washington, D.C., from her home in Delaware every year for the March for Life, an annual pro-life rally in the nation’s capital. “Some people are pro-abortion and they’ll cloak it in women’s health and women’s choice,” Andrews says. But she says she is concerned about the rights of unborn babies, and the debate is personal for her and her family. “Our youngest came to us by way of adoption. Her birth mother chose life,” she explains.

Blanca Gallego, a small-business owner in Pecos, Texas, has similar views. “I vote pro-life. I believe that

nobody has a right to take somebody else’s life,” she says. “Even if you feel [that the fetus is] growing inside of you and that you can decide on your body. It’s not your right.”

For many pro-life Americans, including Andrews and Gallego, abortion is often a deeply religious issue. The staunchest pro-life religious group is white evangelical Protestants, with only 29 percent believing that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, compared with 70 percent who believe it should be illegal.<sup>24</sup> In the United States, evangelical Christians differ from mainline Protestants in their belief in the “born again” experience, a moment of complete belief in God and spiritual rebirth, about which they feel called to spread the word, or “evangelize.” In the United States, evangelicals tend to be more conservative and live primarily in the Southeast. In contrast to evangelicals, 67 percent of white mainline Protestants believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases, as do 55 percent of black Protestants and 53 percent of Catholics.<sup>25</sup>

*“[What] if a pro-choice candidate’s policies actually would address some of the poverty that often is reflected in abortion and therefore overall reduce the number of abortions? Which one is the Christian thing to do?”*

————— Pastor Garry Brantley

Brantley, the Birmingham, Alabama, pastor, says, “[I]t’s very important for the unborn rights to be protected,” but he says he appreciates the complexity of the abortion debate.

“What about rape? What about incest? What about in those situations where there could not be the human flourishing?” he asks. Brantley says politicians and citizens alike must work to address the causes of abortion. On that score, he says he does not believe pro-life politicians have all the answers. “If a pro-choice candidate’s policies actually would address some of the poverty that often is reflected in abortion and therefore overall reduce the number of abortions? ... Which one is the Christian thing to do?”

But for those who support keeping abortion legal, the rights of the woman carrying the fetus are fundamental.

“I think whatever our religion is ... a woman has the right to determine what happens to her body,” Martha Thompson, of El Paso, says. “It’s the men that are making the decisions about what happens to a woman’s body when she is the one that’s going to have to bear whatever the effects are of having a child.” Women are underrepresented in Washington and in politics more broadly. They make up just 20.1 percent of Congress<sup>26</sup> and hold only 24 percent of statewide elective executive offices.<sup>27</sup>



 Jill Wildenberg, Denver, Colorado

“It’s older white Christian men, ... that’s who’s promoting this [anti-abortion] legislation,” says Jill Wildenberg, public policy director for the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado, a coalition of religious progressives in Denver. Wildenberg, who is Jewish, has testified against state legislators’ efforts to limit access to abortion. “[M]y religious beliefs are not in line with that,” she says she told lawmakers. “Life does not begin at conception according to my religious teachings. ... Who are you to tell me what your religious beliefs are?”

## A FINAL WORD

In their own ways, both candidates for president in 2016 made women’s issues a central concern for many voters. Hillary Clinton celebrated the historic nature of her candidacy and widely expected triumph while extolling the value of having a woman’s perspective ascendant in the White House. On the other hand, Donald Trump’s behavior, in the past and on the campaign trail, brought home to many how entrenched certain retrograde attitudes toward women still are in the United States.

If Trump’s presidency has created a new sense of urgency about women’s issues, it has also created an explosion of new leadership roles for women in the so-called “resistance,” who organize, call their members of Congress and march in greater numbers than men.<sup>28</sup> In January 2017, Emily’s List, a political action committee founded in 1985 to support pro-choice, Democratic women running for office, announced that it had broken its own fundraising record in the 2016 election cycle.<sup>29</sup>

The question, of course, is whether this momentum will last throughout and beyond Trump’s presidency and what role it could play in the 2018 congressional elections and the 2020 presidential campaign. If women stay engaged at the current level, and if Trump does nothing to change many women’s minds about him – his approval rating among women sits at 31 percent at this writing<sup>30</sup> – then the next few election cycles could see a renaissance for candidates who embrace such issues as pay equity for equal work, paid family leave and access to abortion, in addition to a host of other progressive priorities. If so, that will be a sea change from the conservative sweep of last year.

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# CLIMATE

## 11 CHAPTER

AS WITH SO MANY SEEMINGLY INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS IN THE UNITED STATES, SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE ARE LIKELY TO COME THANKS TO STATE AND LOCAL EFFORTS TO DRIVE INNOVATION AND ENGAGE ORDINARY PEOPLE BY MAKING CLIMATE CHANGE RELEVANT TO EVERYDAY LIFE – A TASK THAT BECOMES DISMAYINGLY EASIER AS CLIMATE CHANGE ADVANCES.

### THE BIG PROBLEM

“The earth is going to do what the earth is going to do,” declares Ken Isaksson, an employee at a fish hatchery in Aberdeen, Washington. “Climate change is real. It’s not going to go away. We’re not going to be able to stop it, and we’re not going to be able to reverse it. We just have to accept it and do the best we can,” he says.



 Ken Isaksson, Aberdeen, Washington


But despite his fatalism, Isaksson says he supports a global response to the problem.

Americans are divided about the causes of climate change. Forty-eight percent believe humans are the culprit, while 31 percent blame natural causes.<sup>1</sup>

Further complicating efforts to battle climate change is the fact that even those who believe it is man-made see themselves as powerless to stop it.

KC Golden, a senior policy adviser at the Climate Solutions environmental group in Seattle, says that after “An Inconvenient Truth,” Al Gore’s 2006 documentary, came out, “It was clear that people were scared, but not activated because ... they felt like it was too big, it wasn’t in their scope of effectiveness.” Since then, environmental groups have become more effective at helping people understand how they can make an impact. “Of course, nothing we can do within our individual sphere by itself is helpful or effective and so a lot of the key is what do we do together,” Golden says.



 Sasha Pollack, Seattle, Washington

Sasha Pollack, a program director at the Washington Environmental Council, also in Seattle, says it’s difficult to get people to see the urgency of an evolving problem like climate change. “Everybody’s got other things on their plate, so getting somebody engaged in fighting for a carbon tax, for example, or some other policy that will



*“Of course, nothing we can do within our individual sphere by itself is helpful or effective and so a lot of the key is what do we do together.”*

————— KC Golden

dramatically impact things in the long run, but may not have such a good benefit that they can see in the short run, is harder,” she says.

## THE LOCAL PROBLEM

Discrete, local issues are a much easier sell for environmentalists, Pollack says. “People are ... incredibly compelled to engage [with] something that they think will harm their way of life ... directly,” she asserts, citing the example of trains with oil tanks running by schools and through neighborhoods.

As climate change advances, however, effects that were once considered long-term are become more immediate and are affecting people’s daily lives.

*“I’m not sure that we understand it. I don’t think it’s all man-made.”*

————— Joe Wardy

Joe Wardy is the president of the Hub of Human Innovation, a startup incubator, and the former mayor of El Paso, Texas, where summer temperatures reached 108

degrees Fahrenheit in 2016.<sup>2</sup> The city is located deep in the Chihuahuan Desert, on the U.S. border with Mexico, and Wardy says officials have “taken good steps” to ensure an adequate supply of clean drinking water, including opening a desalination plant, but the risk of a crisis remains. Although he says he believes climate change is happening, he says, “I’m not sure that we understand it. I don’t think it’s all man-made.”



▲ Clarinda Underwood, Quinault Nation, Washington

Nearly 2,000 miles northwest of El Paso, on the Native American Quinault Reservation in Washington state, water is an issue too, although of a different sort. A major glacier that used to feed the Quinault River has

disappeared, leaving the river too warm for salmon to survive, explains Clarinda Underwood, a member of the Quinault Tribal Council.<sup>3</sup> As the summers get hotter, she explains, “our waters heat up ... and [the fish] can’t survive.” Not only is salmon fishing an important part of Quinault lifestyle, Underwood says her tribe relies on the profits it makes from selling its catch of coho and sockeye salmon, which have become scarce. The tribe has taken measures, including the construction of log jams, to stop the fish from dying off entirely.

*“We’re losing 4 inches of land every year as the ocean keeps approaching us, so that’s a little bit scary for me and knowing that there’s so much that we need to do.”*

————— Clarinda Underwood

Salmon are not the tribe’s only climate-related problem. Rising sea levels threaten the reservation’s central village, which sits on the Pacific coast. Although they have built a seawall to protect the village, Underwood says, “If you have 9-, 10-foot waves, it’s going to come over, no doubt about that. We have so much erosion. We’re losing 4 inches of land every year as the ocean keeps approaching us, so that’s a little bit scary for me and knowing that there’s so much that we need to do.” The tribe is petitioning the U.S. government for funds to help move the village to higher land.

## LOCAL SOLUTIONS



 Joseph DiChiaro III, Seattle, Washington

The federal government may be slow to adopt sweeping environmental protection legislation, but much of the policymaking is happening at the local and state level. Washington state, along with its neighbors on the Pacific coast, Oregon and California, has passed significant environmental legislation, for example limiting auto emissions. KC Golden explains:

“So much of the positive change that we’ve seen in the last five or six years on climate change in the U.S. and elsewhere has been citizen-led, has been community-led. For instance, he says, “All of the power being provided to this room and to every room in the city of Seattle is carbon-free. That was about citizens coming together and saying, ‘Not only am I going to change my lightbulb, but we [can also impact] public utility [companies].’”





*“Virtually all of the auto manufacturing companies have moved from Detroit to Alabama because ... there’s very little regulation relative to environmental issues.”*

————— Lecia Brooks

Washington is a particularly green state not only because its citizens are engaged but also because they are well-organized, observes Joseph DiChiaro III, executive director of EarthShare Washington. “We have a very vibrant nonprofit community, probably one of the most active and forward-thinking in the country,” he says. Those groups have a highly educated, receptive audience, putting the state “in a fortunate position to deal with very difficult issues,” DiChiaro says.

Nonprofits are not the only green champions in Seattle. Microsoft, for example, “has implemented an internal carbon tax,” Pollack explains, saying the company understands that “their employees want to work in a place that they can feel good about, and that’s consistently something that drives business.”

## REGULATION

A very different philosophy prevails in conservative states, especially in the South. Lecia Brooks, director of the Civil Rights Museum and Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, is frustrated that her state’s Republican governor “won’t talk about climate change.” She says many corporations take advantage of the state’s lax environmental regulations. “Virtually all of the auto manufacturing companies have moved from Detroit to Alabama

because ... there’s very little regulation relative to environmental issues.”



 Ben Haynes, Cullman, Alabama

While some state governors fight for more environmental regulation, others deny that climate change is a problem. This leaves significant room for corporations, particularly major polluters, to choose the regulatory environment that best suits their needs. Without a unified approach, Washington state’s efforts may be offset by the pollution in other states.

The playing field is uneven not only within the United States. Cattle farmer Ben Haynes in Cullman, Alabama,


does not oppose environmental regulation on agriculture, but says other nations are not “being held to the same standards as we are, environmentally [and] from a food-safety standpoint.”

“We see other countries that are able to use techniques and products that we’re not able to use,” Haynes says. “We’re OK not using those, most of the time, because we feel like there’s science and sound backing for not using some of those products. But we know that in other countries, maybe, those products are available.”

## THE COST

One widespread concern about environmental regulation and protection is its financial cost. El Paso resident Annie Beach would like to see residents of her city, nicknamed “Sun City,” install more solar panels, but she realizes that is out of reach for many. “It costs a lot of money to [install solar panels]. Once you get started then you can save money in the end, but I think that’s a hindrance for people trying [to do something better] for the environment because it costs them money.”



 Kimberly Larson, Seattle, Washington

Kimberly Larson, director of communications at Seattle’s Climate Solutions, says many Americans believe that environmentalism “is for the white liberal elite.” She asks, “Could the ... lower income single mom afford an electric car? [And go] where she needs to go to get her kids around and go to her job?” Larson notes that lower-income Americans often have longer commutes, making the range of an electric car a further concern. However, despite some green technology being expensive, she believes all can participate in the green movement in different ways. The movement, she explains, is relevant to all Americans.



 KC Golden, Seattle, Washington

KC Golden acknowledges that “any transition, even a great one like a transition to a clean energy future” can be a challenge for “people who struggle economically.” But he says, “You can make the case that the clean energy economy will produce far more and better share the prosperity than the fossil fuel economy ever could or would or did. I think that’s a very easy case to make. [However] it’s a big transition and this country [is] not great at bringing everybody along.”

In addition, environmentalists still struggle against the notion that environmental protections kill jobs. “The jobs versus the environment trope that has been around forever is something we always find ourselves having to fight against and push against,” Pollack says.

In Washington state, Larson says, the timber industry purposefully blames environmental regulations instead of mechanization for the loss of jobs. The industry has tried to “divert the attention away from the fact that they’re reducing jobs because they want to streamline costs and make more profit,” she says.

*“You can make the case that the clean energy economy will produce far more and better share the prosperity than the fossil fuel economy ever could or would or did ... [However] it’s a big transition and this country [is] not great at bringing everybody along.”*

————— KC Golden

New jobs in sectors like renewable energy may be able to offset losses in timber and fossil fuel industries, eas-

ing the transition. The trade-off between jobs and protecting the environment, both experts argue, is a fallacy.

## URBAN VS. RURAL

On climate change, the opinion divide is not just region vs. region, but also rural vs. urban. For instance, Seattle was the country's fastest-growing big city last year, fueling a debate about how the environmental effects of that growth should be handled.<sup>4</sup>

Many people move to Seattle to enjoy the state's natural beauty, Joseph DiChiaro says. But as the economy booms some worry that the increasing traffic and construction threaten air and water quality, and he says many residents are starting to ask, "Are we going to start having encroachment on surrounding green space and rural areas because we need to grow somewhere?" DiChiaro says the city has been slow to address these questions, "but they're rapidly trying to catch up."

Meanwhile, Isaksson, the fish hatchery worker in Aberdeen, says urban centers are eager to preserve the

state's beautiful coniferous forests and stunning coastal vistas but "don't want to ... tear up their pavement, tear down their house, plant native grasses and move away from the lakes and the streams. They would rather that the rural communities take the brunt of that. They'd rather point the finger at logging or other commercial industries. ... It's not fair. ... I understand why it sells, but it's not realistic."

## PARIS

Although the United States would be significantly more effective at mitigating the effects of climate change if it worked together as one nation and with the international community, President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement does not signal the end to progress on such issues in America. As with so many seemingly intractable problems in the United States, solutions are likely to come thanks to state and local efforts to drive innovation and engage ordinary people by making climate change relevant to everyday life – a task that becomes dismayingly easier as climate change advances.



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# GUNS

## 12 CHAPTER

ON AVERAGE, 33,800 PEOPLE DIE – 11,564 IN HOMICIDES AND 21,037 BY SUICIDE – IN THE UNITED STATES FROM GUN VIOLENCE EVERY YEAR. MORE THAN TWICE AS MANY ARE ESTIMATED TO BE INJURED BY FIREARMS ANNUALLY. GIVEN THE PREVALENCE OF GUN VIOLENCE, IT CAN BE DIFFICULT FOR THOSE IN COUNTRIES WITH MORE RESTRICTIVE GUN LAWS TO UNDERSTAND WHY AMERICANS ARE SO PROTECTIVE OF THEIR RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS.

As he drives by a cemetery in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mike Green stops talking to blow a kiss out the window of his minivan. It's his ritual to honor the daughter he lost nearly a decade ago. "In 2008 my daughter was murdered in this city. By whom? A guy that's been arrested several times," he says. Despite the perpetrator's criminal record, Green says, "He was smart enough to carry a gun. Kill two people. ... He had mental issues. But you can do that in America."



Mike Green, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*"He was smart enough to carry a gun. Kill two people. ... He had mental issues. But you can do that in America."*

Mike Green

Green is not alone in his heartbreak. On average, 33,800 people die – 11,564 in homicides and 21,037 by suicide – in the United States from gun violence every year.<sup>1</sup> More than twice as many are estimated to be injured by firearms annually.<sup>2</sup> Given the prevalence of gun violence, it can be difficult for those in countries with more restrictive gun laws to understand why Americans are so protective of their right to bear arms.

Gun ownership is relatively widespread in the United States. Approximately 31 percent of American households have guns, down from 50 percent in 1977,<sup>3</sup> but the number of firearms produced in the United States continues to increase. There are now 270 million to 310 million guns in this country of 321 million people.<sup>4</sup>

### THE LAW

The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects "the right of the people to keep and bear arms."<sup>5</sup> Looking all the way back to the Continental Army's fight against the British in the Revolutionary War, many Americans believe the right to own a weapon is critical to the United States' security and liberty.

"I think once we lose [the Second Amendment], we lose this country in many ways. Tyrants around the world, the first thing they do is disarm their own people," says Lou Jasikoff, a Libertarian radio personality and newspaper publisher in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, the state in which the Constitution was written and signed.



*“I think once we lose [the Second Amendment], we lose this country in many ways.”*


——— Lou Jasikoff

Although the Constitution ensures the right to bear arms, states are tasked with establishing their own gun laws. Texas, for example, allows gun owners to carry their weapons in public places, unless otherwise marked, or to keep a firearm in the glove compartment of their car. Other states and cities, including Washington, D.C., have far stricter gun control laws, although it is difficult for law enforcement agencies to control the flow of weapons across state lines.

A major force shaping legislation on the state and national levels is the National Rifle Association. With an annual operating budget of approximately \$250 million<sup>6</sup> and a highly mobilized membership, the NRA has an outsized voice in state and national debates on gun regulation, especially as there is no equivalent force on the other side of the issue.

Most Americans support some gun control. A 2016 Gallup poll found that 62 percent of Americans were dissatisfied with current gun laws, with 38 percent in favor of tighter laws versus 15 percent who wanted to loosen restrictions.<sup>7</sup>



 Wade Brody, El Paso, Texas

#### FACTS AND FIGURES

- » 31 percent of American households have a gun
- » 38 percent of Americans want tighter gun laws
- » 15 percent want looser gun laws
- » 33,800 people die each year in the U.S. from guns

Gun owners like Wade Brody, a veteran studying for a career in renewable energy in El Paso, Texas, say they do not object to gun laws per se. In fact, citing accidental shootings where guns were carelessly left accessible to children, he advocates laws requiring gun owners to keep the weapons locked up. But he and others worry about how far the regulations might go. “But, you know, regulation to the point where you ... tell me how many guns I can have [is a problem]. The problem with [regulation] would be, they’d have to come into your home and inspect, so that’s kind of an intrusion.”

Greg Guibert, a civil servant with the city of Boulder, Colorado, is less concerned about the erosion of rights than about the country's impasse on sensible gun laws.

"I think we have just really kind of lost our way at having a rational conversation about the role that firearms can play in our community and I could even see my way through to some measure of compromise on it," he says. "I'm not so strident that no one should have a gun. ... It's just amazing to me where we've landed on this."

In Philadelphia, Mike Green also struggles to understand why firearms are not better regulated, especially the sale of rapid-fire, high capacity weapons and unfettered "gun show" sales.

"These assault weapons are not necessary," he says. "The regulations are where you can go to a gun show and purchase a gun. ... It needs to be closely monitored more efficiently so that these types of people don't get their hands on guns. ... To me it has nothing to do with equal rights or 'It's my constitutional right to bear arms.' It has nothing to do with that."

## GEOGRAPHY

Many Second Amendment advocates are frustrated by national or state policies that they say are not relevant in their own town or region. Joe Wardy, a former mayor of El Paso, Texas, and chief executive of a local startup incubator, says, "I totally understand the problems that Baltimore and Philadelphia and Chicago have, but we don't have those problems here. So this one size fits all and this categorizing everybody in the same mold doesn't work, and that's what angers people."



 Joe Wardy, El Paso, Texas

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's latest statistics, El Paso, with a population of approximately

679,700, had 10 murders in 2015, compared with Baltimore, which had 233 murders for a population of 622,671.<sup>8</sup>

"You can't fix everything on a national level. I think we've reached the saturation point where we're finally realizing that doesn't work anymore. You've got to give the states much more latitude to do what works in their communities," Wardy says.

*"I totally understand the problems that Baltimore and Philadelphia and Chicago have, but we don't have those problems here. So this one size fits all ... doesn't work."*

————— Joe Wardy

In more rural areas, where the closest police officer might be 30 minutes away or more, many feel responsible for defending themselves, their family or community members from danger. These rural communities are often particularly defensive of their gun rights, because they believe that carrying a gun is critical to their safety.

## FAMILY TRADITIONS

Many gun owners feel a deep connection with guns because of their upbringing and fond memories of hunting or skeet shooting with their families. Jane Walsh Waitkus, a Democratic county councilwoman from Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, sees hunting as a special bonding activity in her family. "Two of my grandchildren – my boys – go hunting with their dad and their uncles and their cousins. And they're great sportsmen. And I just think that's wonderful," she says. "I support gun rights."

Similarly, Margie Diaz, a potato farmer from Alamosa, Colorado, grew up with guns. "My brother taught me how to shoot," she recalls, reminiscing about target practice and her brother's and father's frequent hunting trips. "So it was a natural thing."

Her husband did not grow up with guns, so she does not have any in her house. "But my [adult] sons, they learned from their grandpa, and they have them." She says people should be taught "a healthy respect" for guns.

Since many Americans first experience guns with their families, some gun owners believe the family is responsible for teaching proper gun use.

## NEIGHBORLY TRUST

Even though gun violence in the United States is often called an “epidemic,” most Americans have no personal experience with it. Perhaps for this reason, they assume their neighbors and community members behave responsibly with their firearms.

“I think enough gun owners – or legal gun owners – have enough sense,” El Paso resident Atim Smith says.



▲ Annie Beach, El Paso, Texas

But Annie Beach, a social worker in El Paso, supports gun control because she sees regular evidence that gun owners do not always exercise their common sense:

“As a social worker, I go into people’s homes and I have to look at where they’re storing their weapons – and people are woefully uneducated about proper weapon storage, which is scary. Especially when you have kids in the home. People are willing to leave out loaded weapons with no sort of guards whatsoever. ... There can be an accident.”

## KEEPING THE COUNTRY SAFE

The past decades have seen dozens of school shootings and cases of toddlers accidentally killing family members – or themselves – as well as devastating gang violence in cities across the country. Perhaps most notorious were the 2012 shooting deaths of 20 elementary school students and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. The nation was outraged and Congress was poised to pass gun regulations, but backed off when a particularly conservative faction of the NRA protested.



▲ Atim Smith, El Paso, Texas

*“I think enough gun owners – or legal gun owners – have enough sense.”*

————— Atim Smith

Most Americans, including gun owners, would like their communities to be safe, but in such a vast country perspectives vary wildly about the dangers that guns pose – and the potential safety they provide families, schools and communities. With the debate over gun control falling largely along partisan lines, and vocal gun owners tilting conservative, meaningful legislation would have to come from Republicans. That is unlikely, however, given how entwined gun rights have become with the very idea of liberty – and how much power pressure groups such as the NRA have amassed.

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## CONCLUSION

The chapters in this publication have explored the deep divisions – political, geographic, racial and socio-economic – among Americans that came crashing to the surface during the 2016 presidential election campaign. In surveying such misunderstanding and sense of grievance, the impulse is to put these fractious times into perspective by invoking the United States’ deeply embattled past.

Indeed, the country was born from a war that pitted pro-British loyalists against pro-independence colonists in a fierce battle over sovereignty and taxation. Since shortly after its founding, the United States has had a two-party system – though those parties have changed – that often has favored rivalry and competition over consensus-building.

The Civil War, of course, was the apotheosis of American division, and basic fundamental differences persist roughly between the North and West on the one hand and the South and Midwest on the other, in attitudes about race and religion, for instance, and in measures of stability and well-being such as household income and divorce.<sup>1</sup>

The nation stretches thousands of miles and encompasses people with a huge range of experiences, opinions and beliefs. Such diversity naturally creates challenges for any representative government to serve the interests of its people.

In the 1960s, more chasms began to emerge. As civil rights activists pushed for equality, some Americans worried their country was changing too rapidly, while others felt that it was not changing quickly enough. Added to this mix was growing frustration about the Vietnam War. The result was protests across the country.

This was yet another time of division that in some ways Americans are still arguing about. Was it a liberating period that held out a promise of opportunity to women and people of color? Or was it a time of societal breakdown that put undue stress on the institutions that keep us safe and cared for? “If you look back on the ’60s and think there was more good than harm, you’re probably a Democrat. If you think there was more harm than good, you’re probably a Republican,” former President Bill Clinton once remarked.

The current period of polarization, however, is different in important ways. First, Americans’ segregation, racially and philosophically, has grown, so that in day-to-day life more people in the United States can avoid meeting those who differ from them in certain ways. Second, the media environment is fragmented, ideologically charged and rife with lies and distortions, making it more difficult for Americans even to agree on basic reality, let alone reach consensus on major

issues. In place of respected and dispassionate news readers watched most nights by households across the country, the nation has niche websites and bloviating hotheads.

There is widespread economic malaise and disenchantment with government, and anger about money in politics and the power of special interests. It is the last of these that is likely the key to the first two. The problem of money in elections has grown since the 2010 Citizens United decision, giving corporate interests and wealthy individuals even more sway in Washington. Meanwhile, polarization has been good for those who make money from it – partisan media, especially – and for donors whose influence on policy can be obscured in the dust of fierce partisan battles. Serious campaign finance reform that can withstand constitutional challenges is an urgent need that continues to be ignored.

And many Americans themselves, particularly in rural areas between the coasts, feel overlooked and ignored. Some of this anxiety and rancor is due to economic issues, such as growing income inequality, and some of it is due to changing demographics. With their anti-immigrant rhetoric, Republicans have chosen to focus on demographics rather than tackling income inequality, and many Democrats have also been timid on income inequality. These Americans' legitimate concerns need to be addressed, from unemployment and underemployment to government waste, but until politicians are willing to alienate their corporate donors – who largely oppose unionization and minimum-wage hikes, for example – bold action is unlikely.

There is a partial roadmap for bringing American democracy closer to the true marketplace of ideas from which it has strayed. In addition to campaign finance reform, it includes taking politics out of the process of drawing legislative districts to the extent possible and restoring some version of the Fairness Doctrine, which before its elimination in 1987 mandated equal time for opposing political viewpoints on broadcast television.

But such measures do not account for the internet and cable television – and Americans' seeming eagerness to demonize one another. In the end, there is no substitute for good will and the courage to mix with others who are different – and politicians who encourage such qualities.

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**Irene Braam**

Executive Director  
Bertelsmann Foundation



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The Bertelsmann Foundation, established in 2008, is the North American arm of the Germany-based Bertelsmann Stiftung. It was created to promote and strengthen the transatlantic relationship. Through its research, debate forums and multimedia tools, the Foundation provides analysis and solutions to the most pressing economic, political and social challenges impacting the United States and Europe. As the analog era gives way to the digital revolution, the Foundation must also adapt to a changing environment. By looking at the Euro-Atlantic partnership through a digital lens, the Foundation will explore how technology is shaping the globe and will use innovative approaches to highlight developments in a rapidly changing world.



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