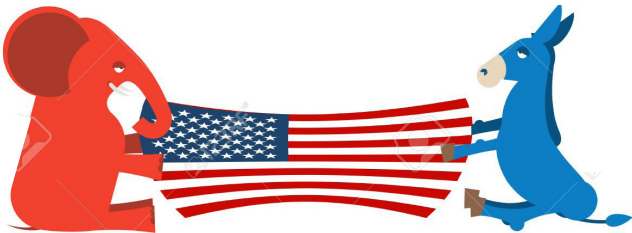


In the months leading up to the 2020 elections, there are deep divisions between political parties and the complex national issues. It is more important than ever to have a thoughtful debate and to offer solutions to help us come together as a nation. The divisive national debate over everything politics has convinced many that the country is heading in the wrong direction. The negative rhetoric and constant fighting have spilled over from our government officials to citizens in every corner of the United States.



A USA TODAY/Ipsos survey finds by overwhelming margins that national leaders, social media, and the news media have exacerbated and exaggerated those divisions, sometimes for their benefit and to the detriment of ordinary people. Figuring out how to have a constructive conversation with folks on the other side would be a good start, most said.

The Preamble and Domestic Tranquility

The Founding Fathers found a way to agree on the principles highlighted in the *Preamble to the Constitution*. One of the purposes listed in the Preamble is to “insure domestic Tranquility.” Why does politics today feel like the opposite of “domestic tranquility?” Are the political leaders that represent us advancing the interests of a political party over what is best for the citizens?

Literally, “domestic Tranquility” means *peace and quiet* at home in America. Tranquility for the Framers of the Constitution meant the absence of riots, rebellions, and similar symptoms of social disorder. It threatened the political stability of the country. While we have many different circumstances today, it is always a good idea to review the principles established by our Founding Fathers.

Fueling the Political Divide

There is a vast and growing gap between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, that is defining American politics. What is adding to the divide?

- **National Politicians** - use divisive rhetoric and debate for personal gain, and use negative political campaigning.
- **Disfunction in Washington D.C.** - we hear the toxic talk and lack of compromise by the legislative branch

(Congress) and executive branch (president) heightening our political stress.

- **Social Media** - indeed, Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter have all become sites of ferocious political argument.
- **News Media** - Voters consume a large amount of news that support their stance and use “fake news” to discount other viewpoints.
- **Differing Views** - Complex issues such as immigration and gun control are at the forefront of politics leading to heavy debate.
- **Social Class** - The perspective of people may be influenced by their income, wealth, education, and occupation. Real or perceived inequalities may heighten differences among citizens.

Healthy and civil debate led to the creation of the Constitution and our great country.

How to Find Common Ground

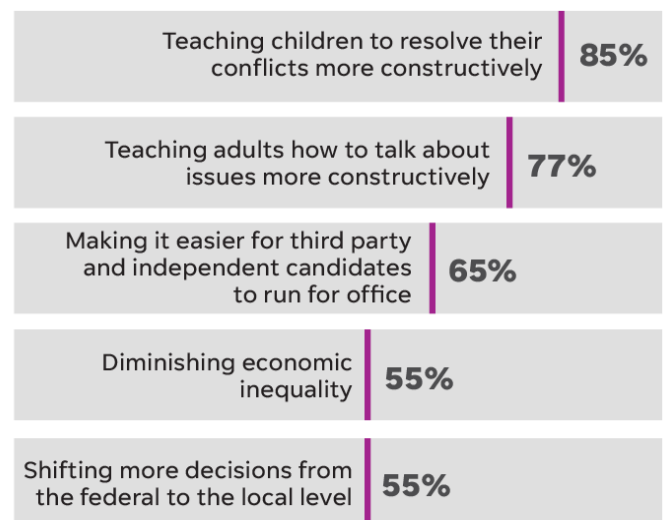
Based upon the earlier poll, more than 9 of 10 Americans surveyed said its essential for the United States to reduce divisiveness. Knowing that we need to find more common ground to unite our nation, is a good start in finding a compromise.

Also, 4 in 10 Republicans and nearly half of Democrats said they would be “tempted” to vote for the opposing party’s nominee if he or she had the best shot at unifying the country. Hopefully, candidates wanting to become our representatives will have a different approach.

Below are more suggestions from those adults surveyed on how to bridge the divide.

How we might bridge the divide

Percentage who supported these suggestions:



SOURCE USA TODAY/Public Agenda Hidden Common Ground Survey of 1,548 adults taken online by Ipsos Public Affairs Oct. 14-21. Margin of error +/- 2.6 percentage points.

Having Civil Conversations

It often appears that we cannot disagree without being disrespectful. Below are some tips for having a conversation while listening and understanding other points of view.

- **Give people the benefit of the doubt** - Open yourself up to another point of view, which allows you to engage productively.
- **Ask questions** - Questions help clarify a person's beliefs and avoids miscommunication. Ask questions that are genuinely empathetic and curious, and avoid stating your strong position on an issue. An example of a good question is, "What topics are most important to you in the upcoming election?"
- **Listen carefully** - Good listening avoids judgment, diversion, or interruption as much as possible. You should remain aware that alternative viewpoints and conclusions are possible.
- **Know when to end a heated discussion** - Even the best-intentioned conversations sometimes get tempers to flare. In this case, move on or choose another less divisive topic like the weather.

Take the Pledge

It can all start with a pledge. It may not be the Pledge of Allegiance, but it may be equally important in keeping the citizens of our great nation united in democracy. Teaching tolerance, a project of the *Southern Poverty Law Center*, has created the following pledge associated when discussing politics and presidential elections. While this is mostly intended for adults, it also has sound principles for students.

I pledge to discuss this election with civility, to treat people whose opinions differ from mine with respect, and to focus on ideas, policies, and values. I will encourage others to do the same. I will speak up when I hear name-calling, stereotypes, and slurs. I will do this because children are listening, and it is important that adults model good citizenship.

The Constitution and Democracy Unite

Hopefully, the one thing that will bring us all together is the **Constitution**. If you think Republicans and Democrats are divided today, you would be amazed by the dissension that separated delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Some of them were intent on a central government with much broader and all-encompassing executive power. Others wanted more power delegated to the states. Small states and large states were at odds over how much representation each should have in the federal government. So they did what our nation's leaders much too infrequently do

today: They got together and talked out the issues until they could come to a resolution.

We know that the Constitution was not a flawless document. It allowed for slavery. Women could not vote. It has been amended 27 times for a reason. However, its strength and endurance were that it was the product of negotiations among people who had very different views of what America should be and how it should be governed. It was a product of a series of compromises. This spirit of collaboration lacks in today's politics.

In his annual report on the state of the judiciary, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts made some poignant comments. Americans, Roberts said, have in the modern era come to "take democracy for granted," and the chief justice lamented the fact that civic education has "fallen by the wayside." Roberts continued to comment on our democracy by stating, "In our age, when social media can instantly spread rumor and false information on a grand scale, the public's need to understand our government, and the protections it provides, is ever more vital."

QUESTIONS

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. When is the next presidential election?

2. What are the first three words in the Preamble?

3. How many amendments have there been to the U.S. Constitution? _____
4. Who is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?

RANK YOUR TOP 3 CAUSES OF POLITICAL DIVIDE

(from the first page), from biggest impact to smallest.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DEFINE

1. tranquility _____
2. civility _____
3. collaboration _____

EXPRESS YOUR OPINION

From what you have learned, explain one action that politicians should take to calm the political divide in our country. _____

