

# CIVILITY IN AMERICA VII: THE STATE OF CIVILITY



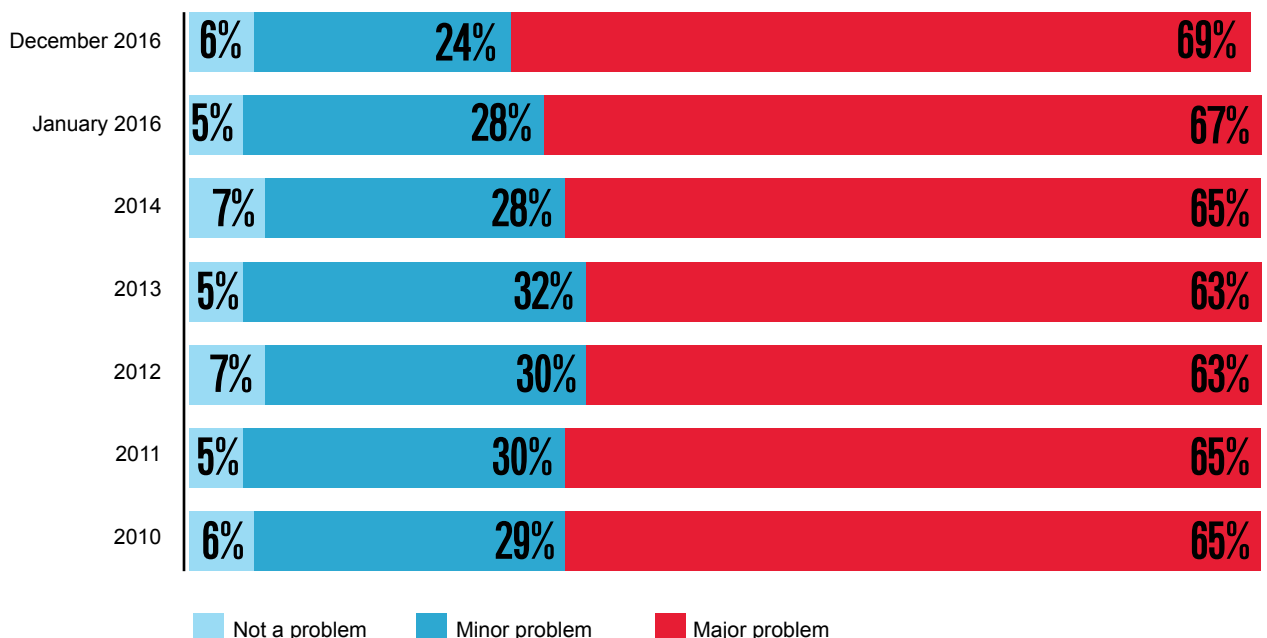
“ CIVILITY DOES NOT...MEAN THE MERE OUTWARD GENTLENESS OF SPEECH CULTIVATED FOR THE OCCASION, BUT AN INBORN GENTLENESS AND DESIRE TO DO THE OPPONENT GOOD.

Mahatma Gandhi

# INTRODUCTION

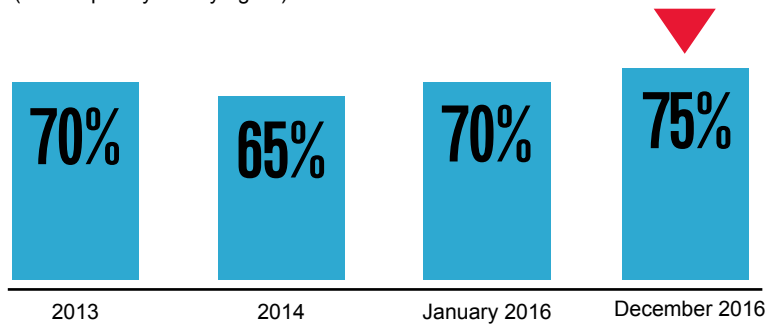
Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate, in partnership with KRC Research, have conducted **Civility in America: A Nationwide Survey** annually since 2010. In this latest installment, we find Americans continuing to report a severe civility deficit in our nation, one that shows no signs of letting up. The belief that the U.S. has a major civility problem has even reached a record high (69%). Three-quarters of Americans believe that incivility has risen to crisis levels, a rate that has significantly increased since January 2016. The same proportion feels that the U.S. is losing stature as a civil nation (73%). These statistics, consistently high year after year, are a sobering commentary on the state of civility in our country.

## PROBLEM WITH CIVILITY IN AMERICA TODAY



## “INCIVILITY IN AMERICA HAS RISEN TO CRISIS LEVELS”

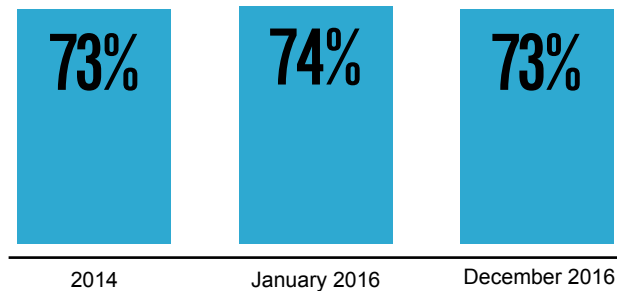
(% Completely/mostly agree)



▼ Significantly higher than January 2016

## “THE U.S. IS LOSING STATURE AS A CIVIL NATION”

(% Completely/mostly agree)

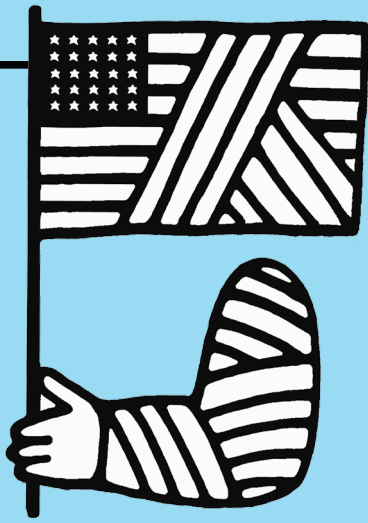


In this edition — our seventh wave of **Civility in America** conducted online among 1,126 U.S. adults in December 2016 — we identify the root causes and negative consequences of incivility and evaluate ideas that might inspire citizens to be more respectful and charitable toward one another. Obviously, it will not be easy to reverse this spreading incivility epidemic, but perhaps if Americans can commit to small-step solutions, we may find the beginnings of a cure for what ails us.



**We have been tracking how civility impacts our nation’s social fabric since 2010, and we have seen a steady increase over that time in the recognition of how civility is a major problem facing Americans. Without a doubt, public discourse was challenged in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and the public is divided about whether we will see an improving environment for thoughtful dialogue in the public sphere. We need to find common ground to ease our civility crisis.**

**Andy Polansky, Chief Executive Officer, Weber Shandwick**



# CIVILITY IN AMERICA BY THE NUMBERS

## INCIVILITY EXPERIENCES

6.7 = average number of times Americans encounter incivility in a 7-day week

*Of Americans surveyed...*

- **84%** have personally experienced incivility
- **59%** quit paying attention to politics because of incivility
- **53%** have stopped buying from a company because of uncivil representatives
- **34%** have experienced incivility at work
- **25%** have experienced cyberbullying or incivility online, up nearly **3x** from 2011
- **22%** of parents have transferred children to different schools because of incivility

## INCIVILITY PERCEPTIONS

*Of Americans surveyed...*

- **9 in 10** say that incivility leads to intimidation and threats (**89%**), harassment (**89%**), discrimination (**88%**), violence (**88%**) and cyberbullying (**87%**)
- **1 in 2 or more** blame politicians (**75%**), the Internet/social media (**69%**) and the news media (**59%**) for the erosion of civility
- **79%** say that uncivil comments by political leaders encourage greater incivility in society
- **78%** feel that excessive media coverage of uncivil comments by politicians encourages more incivility in society
- **75%** say incivility in America has risen to crisis levels
- **63%** believe that people are more civil at work than outside of work
- **59%** say that incivility in politics deters people from going into public service
- **56%** expect civility to worsen over the next few years, while **22%** expect civility to improve

## INCIVILITY SOLUTIONS

*Of Americans surveyed...*

- **75%** would be willing to set a good example by practicing civility
- **58%** favor elimination of fake news from the Internet to improve civility
- **49%** recommend civility training in schools and colleges

## PRESIDENTIAL CIVILITY

*Of Americans surveyed...*

- **97%** believe that it is important for the U.S. president to be civil
- **86%** agree a president's tone and level of civility impacts the reputation of the U.S.
- **79%** think the 2016 presidential election was uncivil
- **59%** of people who did not vote for president in 2016 said that incivility played a role in that decision



# THE MEANING OF CIVILITY

Although Americans recognize a shortage of civility in their daily lives, they easily agree on what it is and what it means to them. To kick off our survey each year, we ask respondents to write in what civility means to them personally. Top responses focus primarily on being nice or polite to others (29%) and treating others with respect (17%). Examples of civility definitions provided by respondents include:

**“Being civil — thoughtful, kind, sympathetic, able to get along with others, understanding in thought and word.”**

**“Respect and honor people as you would like to be treated.”**

**“Observing the rules of social etiquette, even when one disagrees.”**

**“Treating one another with mutual respect.”**

**“The act of being civil. Remaining polite, even if you don’t necessarily want to.”**

**“Tolerating people and things you don’t like for the sake of peace within a group.”**

To ensure that all respondents completed the survey with a mutual understanding of civility, we presented this definition once they had written in their own: “By civility, we mean polite and respectful conduct and expression.” We have been presenting this definition since the survey was first implemented in 2010.



**The first step in solving a problem is admitting you have one. So we can draw some hope from knowing the American people recognize the incivility in our midst and see appealing ways to tackle this seemingly intractable problem.**

**Pam Jenkins, President, Global Public Affairs, Weber Shandwick**



**Americans are worried about the consequences of the incivility that has infected all aspects of our society. We all know what living in harmony should mean, but for a number of reasons explored by our research, we can’t seem to achieve it. The purpose of this wave of our study is to explore solutions to achieving a higher level of civility in America.**

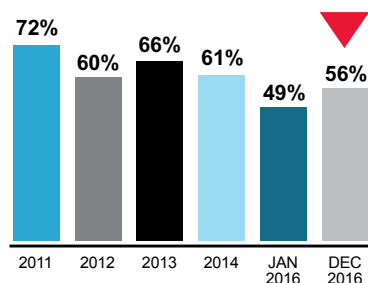
**Jack Leslie, Chairman,  
Weber Shandwick**

# EXPERIENCING INCIVILITY— FEW ARE IMMUNE

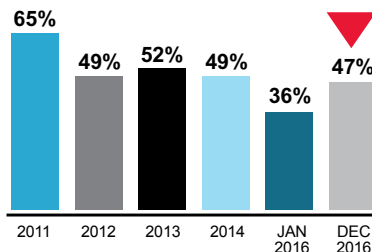
Incivility is a common affliction among Americans. The vast majority of us — 84% — report having personally experienced incivility, much of which occurs on the road (56%) and while shopping (47%). These two experiences are significantly higher than those from January 2016, but they are trending lower compared to levels prior to 2016.

Today, one-quarter of Americans (25%) report they have experienced incivility online or through cyberbullying, compared to a mere 9% in 2011. More likely than the average American to experience incivility online are Millennials (35%) and Americans who live in urban areas (31%).

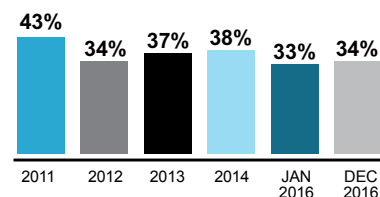
## AMERICANS PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED...



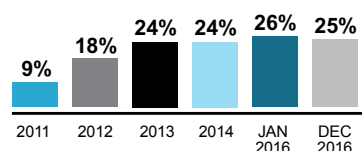
Incivility on the road



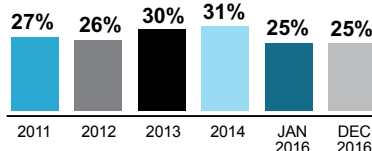
Incivility while shopping



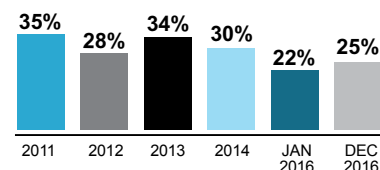
Incivility at work



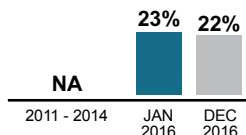
Incivility online or cyberbullying



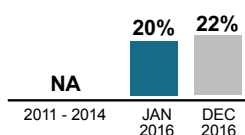
Incivility at school



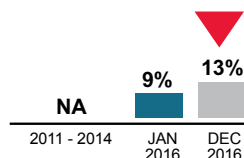
Incivility in the neighborhood



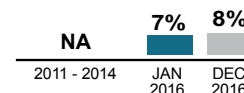
Incivility at a social event



Incivility on public transportation



Incivility at a political event or rally



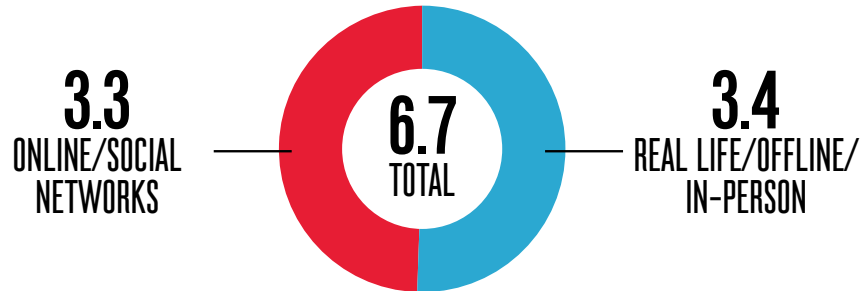
Incivility at a house of worship

▼ Significantly higher than January 2016

Only one in six Americans (16%) reports he or she has not experienced incivility. The Silent/Greatest Generation, those Americans born before 1946, seems to be the luckiest group, or perhaps the group with the highest threshold for tolerating incivility, with more than one-quarter (27%) reporting having not experienced incivility.

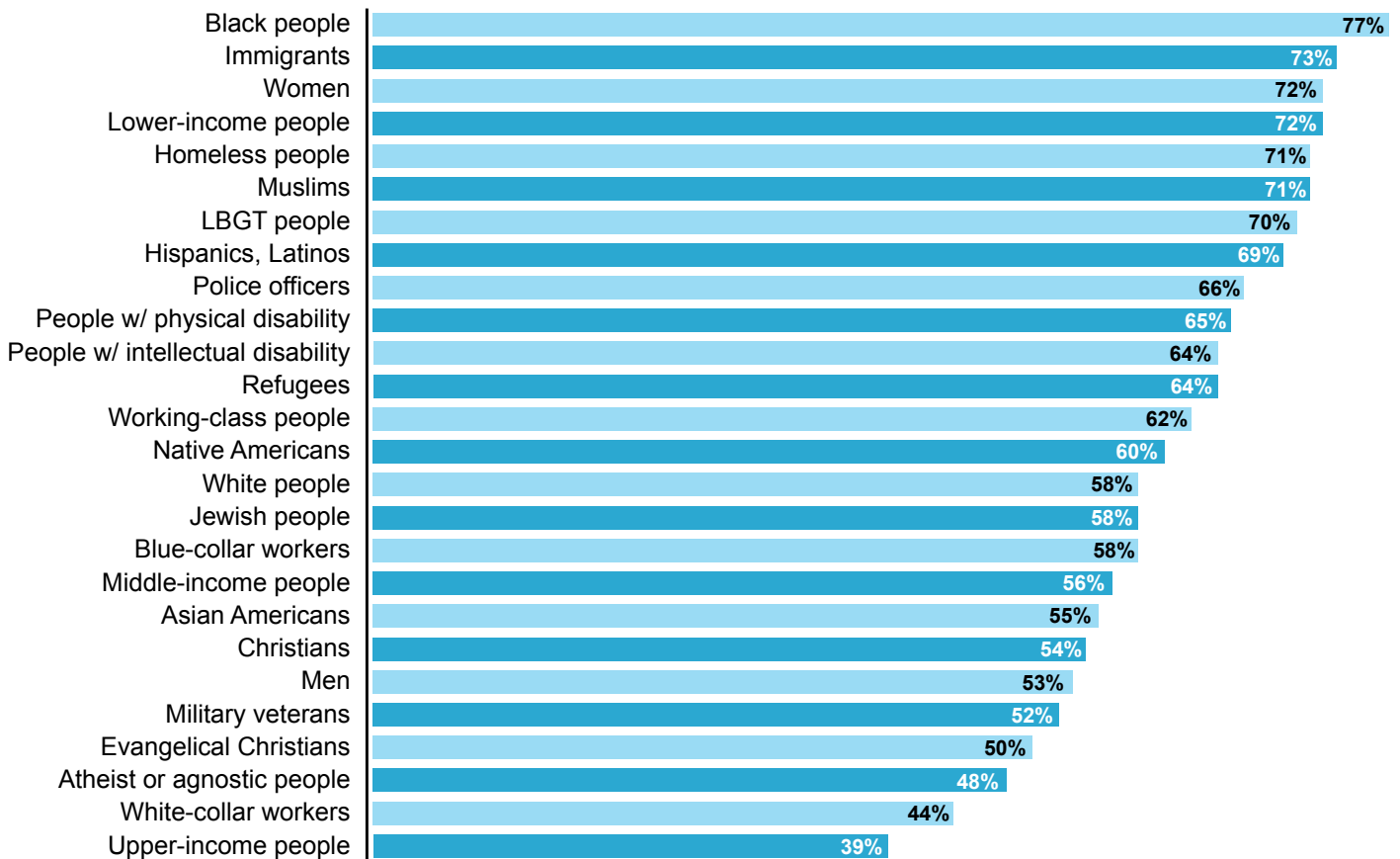
On average, Americans report that they encounter incivility nearly once a day: 3.4 times per week in real life/offline and 3.3 times per week online.

## AVERAGE # OF INCIVILITY ENCOUNTERS PER WEEK



Americans from all walks of life experience incivility. When asked who is the most likely group to experience incivility, Americans put black people (77%) at the top of their list, followed by immigrants (73%), lower-income people (72%), women (72%), Muslims (71%) and homeless people (71%). Upper-income people are the most likely to be shielded from incivility (39%).

## THE FOLLOWING GROUPS EXPERIENCE INCIVILITY OFTEN/SOMETIMES...



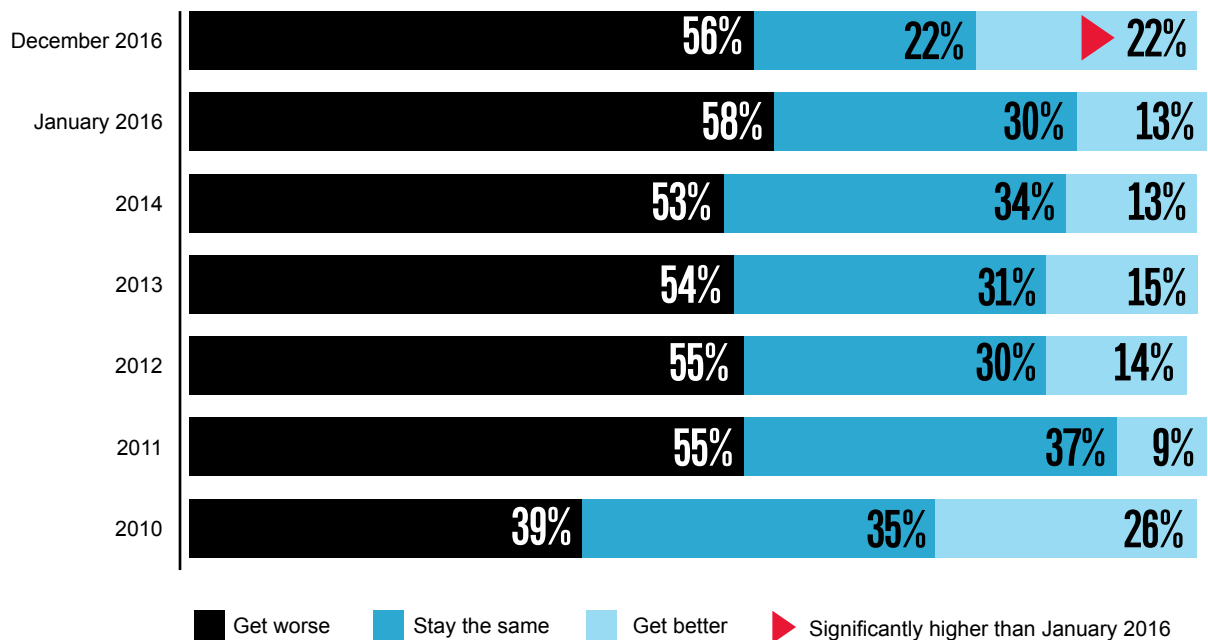
# INCIVILITY PERPETRATORS

One small piece of good news is that one in five Americans (22%) expects civility to get better in the next few years, which is the most optimistic Americans have been since 2010. However, a majority (56%) still thinks civility will get worse. Groups of people more likely to expect civility to get worse include Baby Boomers (60%), Democrats (67%) and Midwesterners (62%).

Those who predict a more uncivil future hold several parties responsible, but blame is focused primarily on politicians (75%), the Internet/social media (69%) and the news media (59%). Blame on the Internet and social media has increased over the years. Prior to January 2016, the rate of Americans blaming the Internet/social media did not reach 60%.

Despite only 18% of Americans having a lot of confidence in big business, a recent low,<sup>1</sup> Americans do not blame Corporate America for incivility when compared to other institutions.

## DURING THE NEXT FEW YEARS, CIVILITY IN AMERICA WILL...

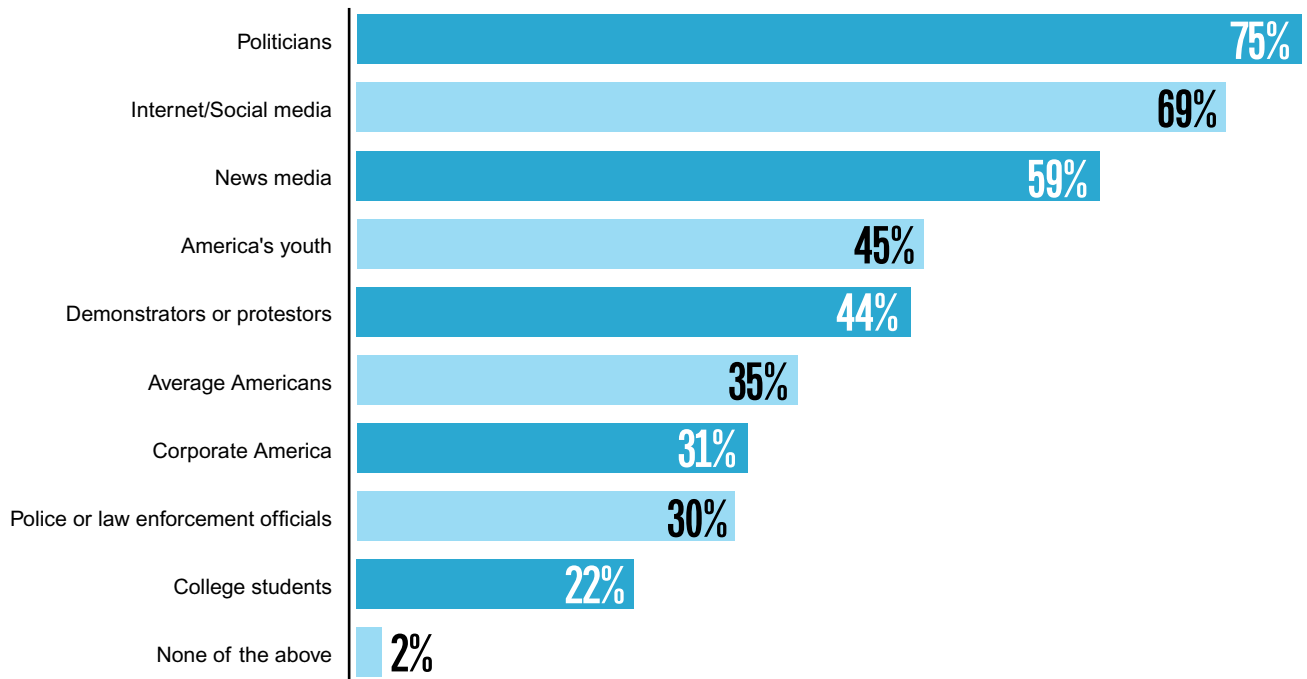


<sup>1</sup>“Big Business,” Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/5248/big-business.aspx>.



## WHAT IS MAKING CIVILITY WORSE?

(Among those who expect civility to worsen)



The feeling that politicians are at the root of our society's spreading incivility runs deep. Most Americans say that uncivil comments by politicians and other leaders encourage even greater incivility (79%). Most also describe the 2016 presidential election as uncivil (79%).

The Internet/social media, the second-ranked source of incivility, is described by some Americans in the following ways:

**"Social media is full of uncivil acts. Trying to remember what the most recent would be is difficult as it's in my feed pretty much all the time."**

**"In commenting on a social media question, I got blasted for not going along with everyone else."**

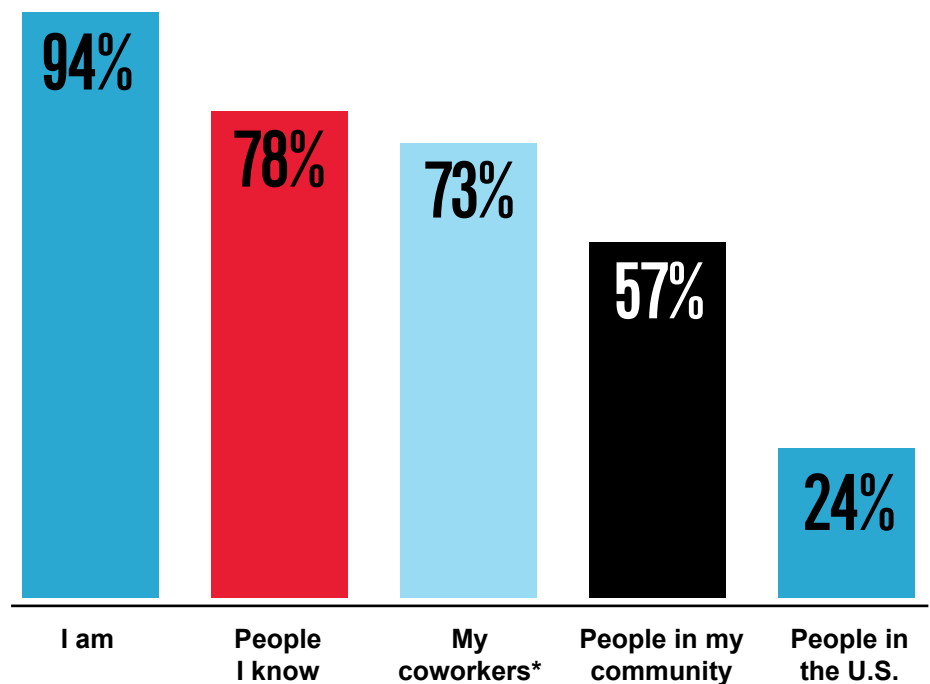
**"Usually social media is full of uncivil people. Sometimes you can't even comment on a status without someone trying to argue and prove points about something you don't care about."**



The media is also blamed for contributing to incivility. Many Americans feel the media excessively covers incivility, thereby perpetuating incivility. Nearly eight in 10 Americans (78%) feel that excessive media coverage of uncivil comments by politicians encourages more incivility in society and that the media reported excessively (76%) on uncivil candidate comments during the 2016 election. Nearly six in 10 (58%) feel that the media exaggerates the problem of incivility.

Despite the pervasive incivility in society, Americans seem unwilling to take responsibility. Individuals overwhelmingly believe they, themselves, are always or usually civil (94%), followed by people they know (78%), people they work with (73%) and people in their community (57%). Last and least civil are all other people in the U.S. (24%).

## ALWAYS/USUALLY POLITE AND RESPECTFUL TO OTHERS



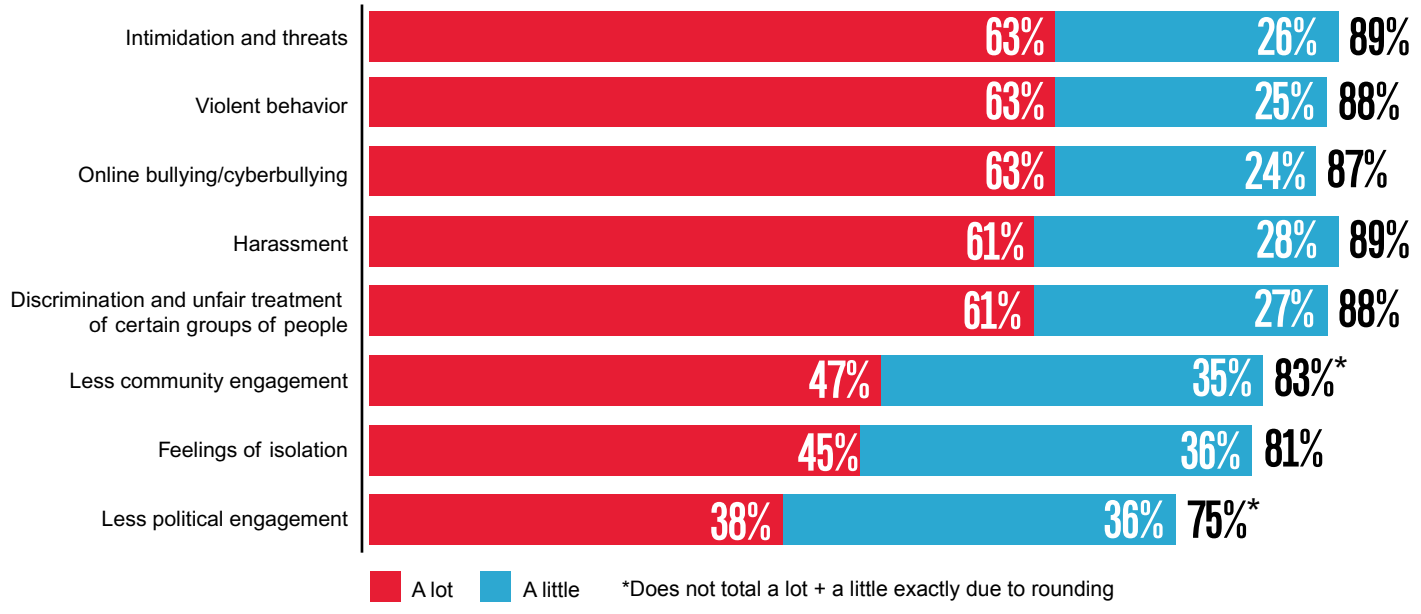
\*Among those employed with coworkers



# IMPLICATIONS OF INCIVILITY — DANGER AHEAD

The negative consequences of incivility are extensive. Nearly nine in 10 Americans say that incivility leads to intimidation and threats, violence, cyberbullying, and harassment. These are not just minor repercussions: Majorities say that incivility leads to “a lot” of these problems. Less community engagement and less involvement in politics are also outcomes mentioned by the majority of Americans, although less severe.

## INCIVILITY LEADS TO...



Given that politicians are considered the leading contributors of incivility, it's not surprising that six in 10 respondents (59%) feel that incivility in politics deters people from going into public service. The long-term consequences of fewer civil servants willing to serve in government are perilous for democracy.

In addition to dampening interest in political participation, incivility also played a harmful role by keeping some Americans from voting for president in the 2016 election. Two in 10 respondents in our study said that they did not vote for president and among those, six in 10 said that the incivility of the candidates played a role in that decision.

# TUNING OUT/ STAYING AWAY FROM INCIVILITY

Faced with incivility, Americans have made several changes to their lives. The most common behavioral change, based on a list presented to respondents, was to quit paying attention to politics, reported by nearly three in five people (59%).

More than half of all Americans said they had defended someone else who faced uncivil behavior (56%) and had declined to buy from a company because of incivility of its representatives (53%). Americans chose to tune out — they either looked the other way or “boycotted” companies that treated them poorly. Worth special mention is the rate of parents who report transferring children to different schools because of acts of incivility, which is at the highest level (22%) since we began tracking this behavior in 2012 (14%).



**Our research shows how people remove themselves from all kinds of situations when incivility comes into play. The time has never been better for organizations to speak out on behalf of civility by communicating their purpose and delivering on their values.**

**Paul Massey, President, Powell Tate & Global Lead, Social Impact, Weber Shandwick**

## HAVE YOU EVER...

**59%**

Quit paying attention to political conversations and debates because of negative tone or lack of civility

**56%**

Defended or spoken up for an individual or a group of people you thought was being treated in an uncivil way

**53%**

Decided not to buy from a company again because someone from that company was uncivil in the way they treated you

**39%**

Advised friends, family or coworkers not to buy products or services because you felt a company or representative was rude or uncivil

**31%**

Stopped going to an online site because you were uncomfortable with its lack of civility

**24%**

Quit a job because it was an uncivil workplace

**22%**

Transferred your child to a different school because he or she was treated uncivilly (% Among parents)

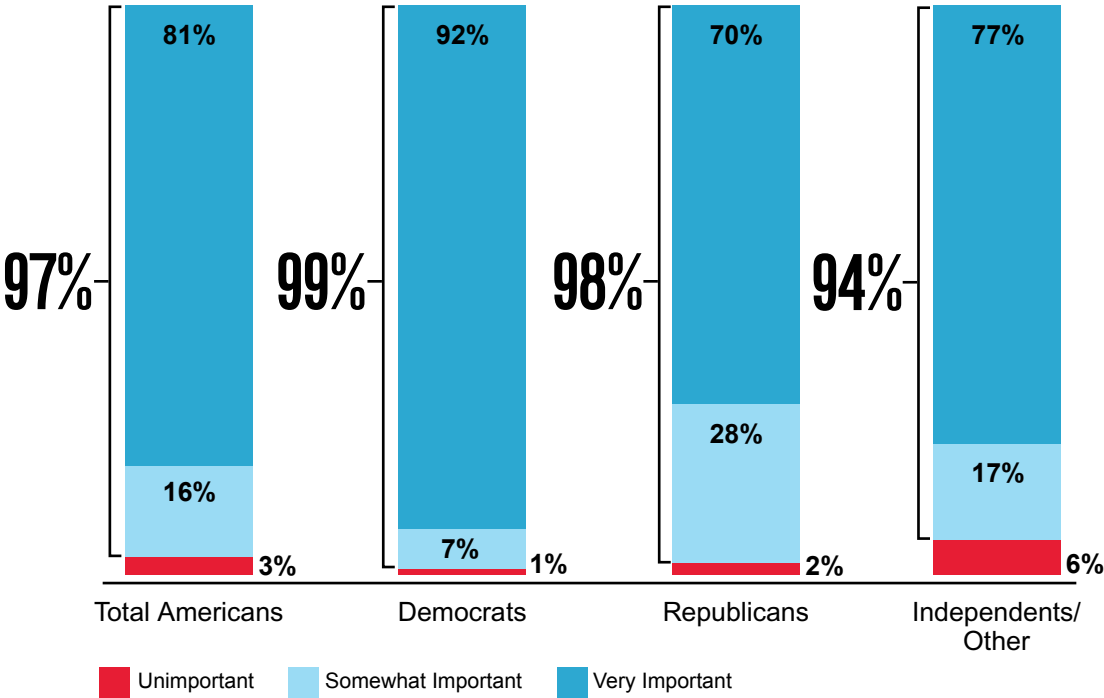
**14%**

Fired someone or threatened to fire someone because he or she was acting uncivil at work

# PRESIDENTIAL CIVILITY

Nearly everyone (97%) believes that it is important for the U.S. president to be civil. This sentiment crosses party lines, although Democrats are more likely than Republicans and Independents to say it is “very” important (92% vs. 70% and 77%, respectively).

## IT IS IMPORTANT FOR U.S. PRESIDENT TO BE CIVIL



Why does a president need to be civil? There are national reputation repercussions. Nearly nine in 10 Americans (86%) believe that a president’s tone and level of civility impacts the reputation of the U.S. around the world.

## A PRESIDENT’S TONE AND LEVEL OF CIVILITY IMPACT THE REPUTATION OF THE U.S. AROUND THE WORLD (% Completely/mostly agree)

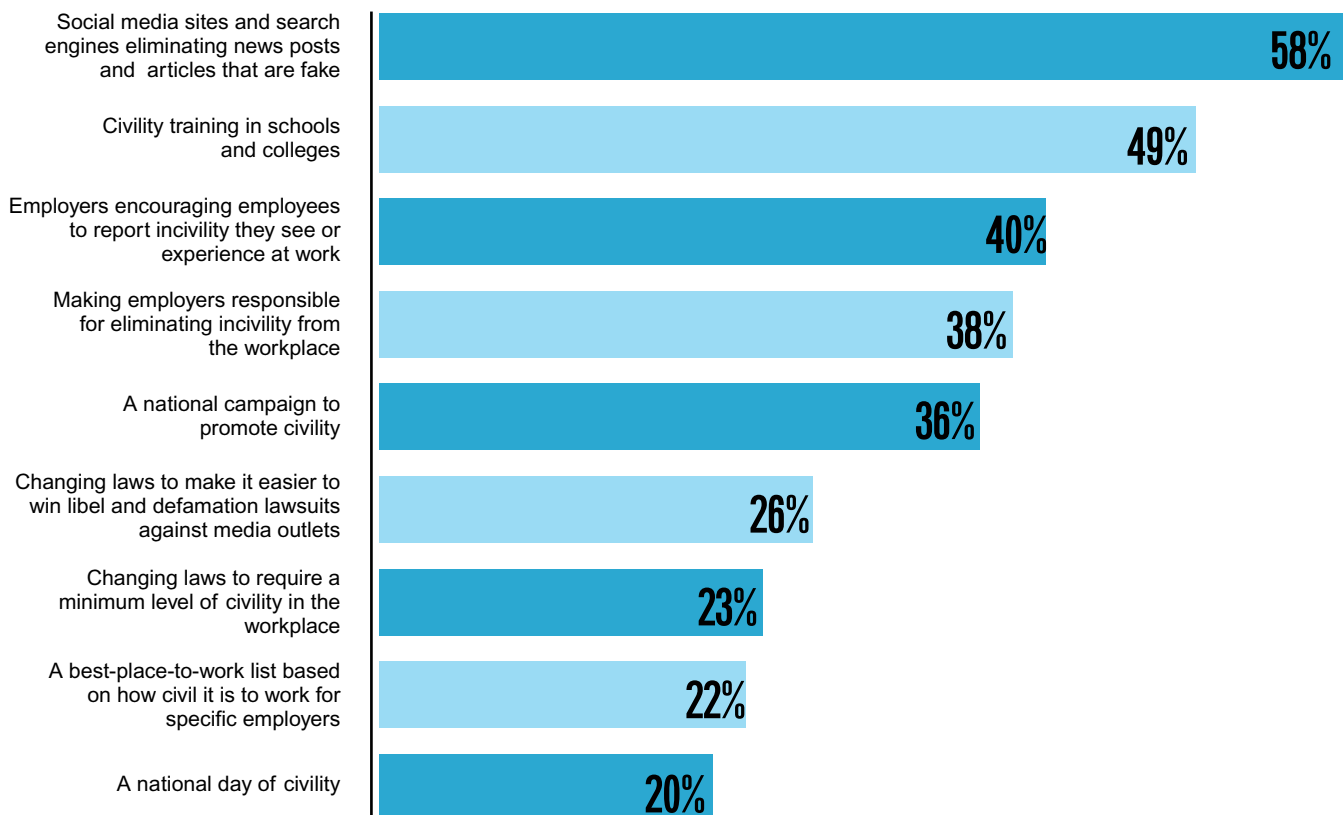


# SOLVING INCIVILITY — ACTION REQUIRED

There is a clear appetite among Americans to see some action taken to improve civility in America. They are most likely to choose a solution that puts the onus on social media sites and search engines to curb today's rampant onslaught of "fake news"<sup>2</sup> (58%), although other solutions are also of interest to at least one-third of people: civility training in schools (49%), employees reporting incivility at work to employers (40%), making employers responsible for eliminating incivility at work (38%) and a national campaign to promote civility (36%).

## ACTIONS TO IMPROVE CIVILITY

To improve the level of civility in our nation, indicate which, if any, of the following actions you are in favor of:



## “ THE VAST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS WANT OUR PUBLIC AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE TO BE CIVIL.

Unfortunately incivility, often led by media and our political leaders, is gaining a foothold as the social norm. Now is the time for action to revive civility and respect. We the people must hold those who exacerbate mean-spirited and disrespectful speech and behavior accountable. All of us together must commit to being civil and speaking up against incivility whenever and wherever we witness it.

[Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Executive Director, National Institute for Civil Discourse](#)

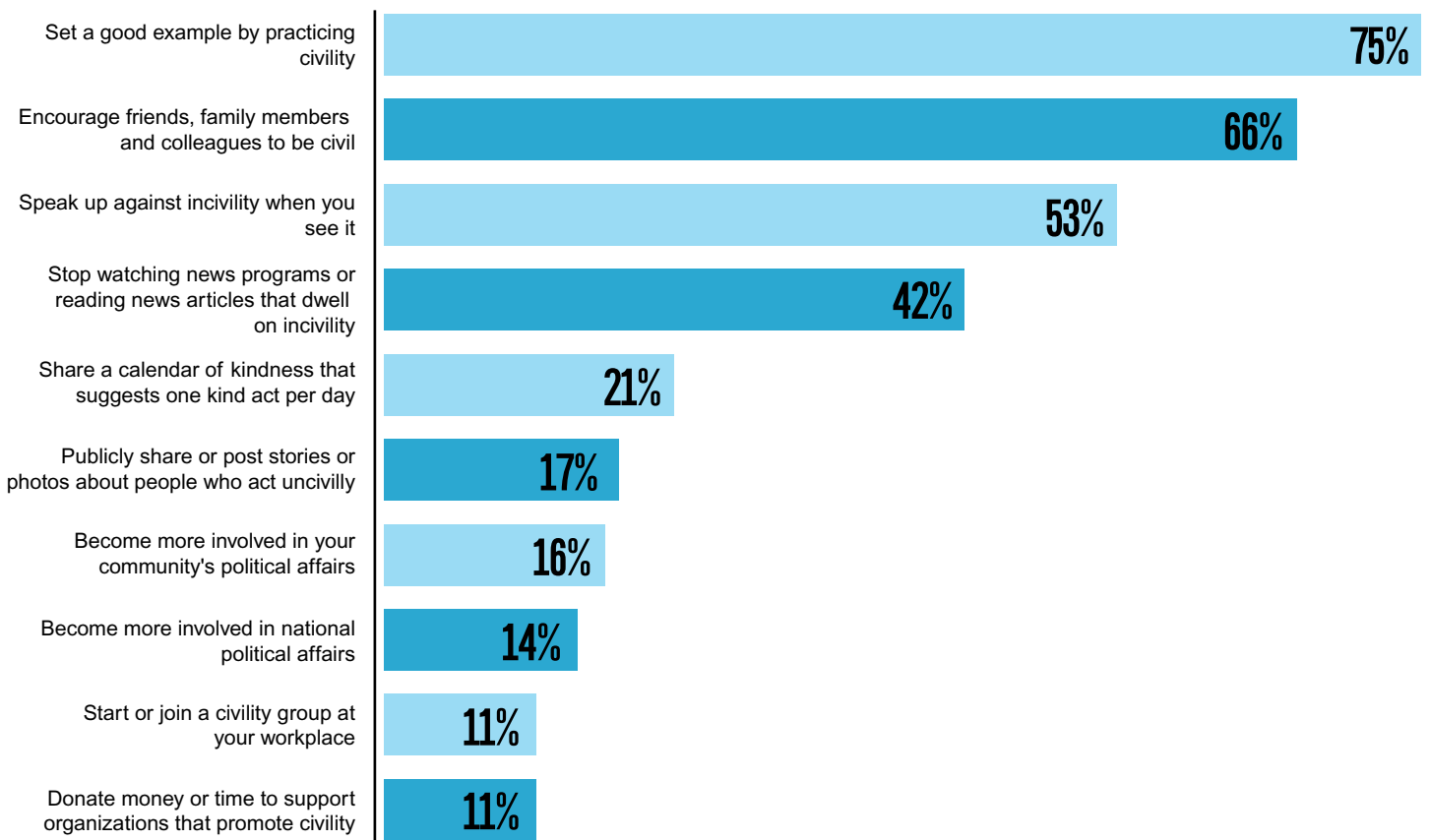
<sup>2</sup>A Real Plague: Fake News, Weber Shandwick, Powell Tate and KRC Research, 2017.



On a more personal level, three-quarters of Americans say they would be willing to set a good example by practicing civility (75%). More than half are willing to encourage friends, family members and colleagues to be civil (66%) and speak up against incivility when they see it (53%).

## PERSONAL ACTIONS TO IMPROVE CIVILITY

To improve the level of civility in our nation, indicate which, if any, of the following you are personally willing to do:



# THE WORKPLACE: A POSSIBLE CIVIL REFUGE

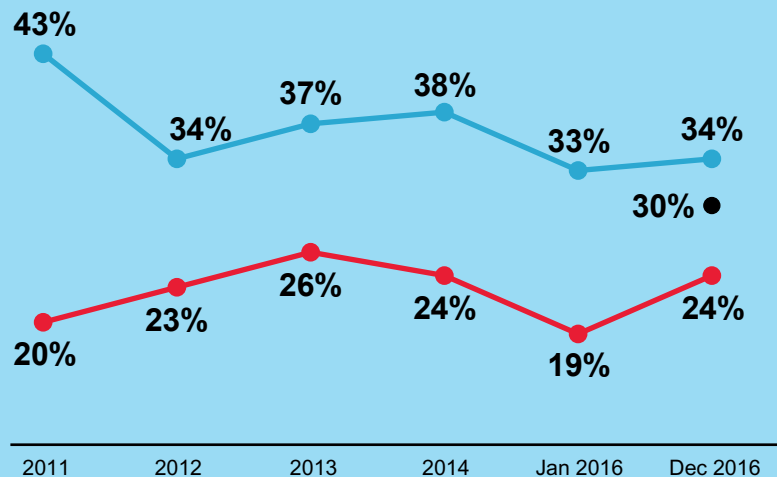


Consistently since 2012, the **Civility in America** survey has found that approximately one-third of Americans have, at one time or another, experienced incivility at work. This incivility has driven one-quarter to quit their jobs. In December 2016 we learned that three in 10 American managers or executives have fired or threatened to fire someone because of incivility in the workplace.

## CIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

% Of Americans who ever...

- Experienced incivility at work at a current or past job
- Quit a job because it was an uncivil workplace
- Fired/threatened to fire someone because of uncivil behavior at work (among those in executive or managerial roles)



We thought that these levels of incivility at work were high considering that our jobs consume so much of our lives. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employed Americans work an average of 7.6 hours on the days they work.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>"American Time Use Survey," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015.





Given the amount of time people spend at work, we decided to dig deeper into Americans' collective experiences and attitudes toward civility at work. Employee engagement is a challenging endeavor under even the best circumstances, but an uncivil work environment can have detrimental effects on the business and on the lives of employees. Managers in all businesses should strive to provide a civil workplace.

Kate Bullinger, EVP and Global Lead, Employee Engagement & Change Management, Weber Shandwick

## BELOW ARE EIGHT INSIGHTS ABOUT THE CIVILITY AND INCIVILITY OF OUR WORKPLACES:

# 1.

### Employees find themselves in civil workplaces today, for the most part.

The good news is that nearly nine in 10 employed Americans (86%) say that their place of employment is civil. Most (84%), not all, also agree that their industry or profession is civil. Sales/customer-facing employees are the least likely to consider their industry or profession to be civil (73%).

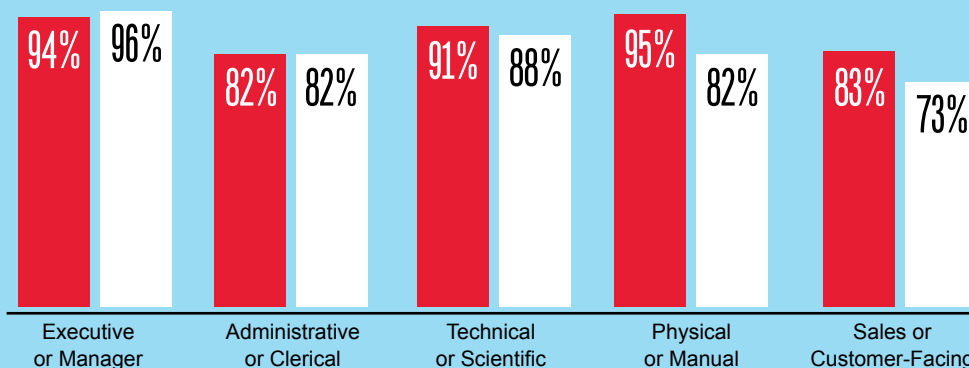
Considering that one-quarter of Americans have quit a job because of incivility, the level of civility reported currently is very high. We hypothesize that there is a self-selection process, in which after experiencing an uncivil job, people make a conscious decision to work in a more civil environment. Whatever the cause and effect may be, for many Americans, it seems that the workplace may be a refuge from societal incivility.

## CIVILITY AT PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRY/PROFESSION, BY PROFESSION

How would you describe the general tone and level of civility in...

■ Your place of employment ■ Your industry or profession

% Very/somewhat civil



# 2.

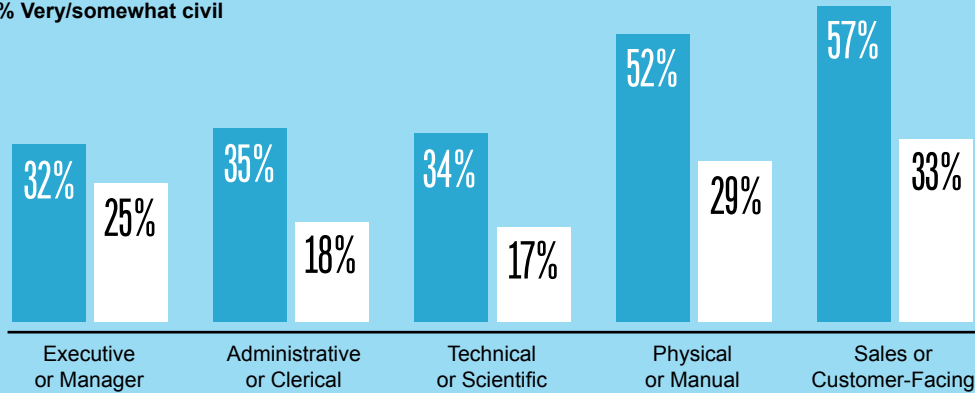
**Not all jobs are civility-equal.** Americans employed at physical/manual labor and in sales/customer-facing positions are the most likely to report experiencing incivility at work (52% and 57%, respectively) and having quit a job because of incivility (29% and 33%). The industries that drive the most uncivil reports are industrial/manufacturing and retail (49% and 50%). Notably, telecom/IT/technology workers report experiencing on-the-job incivility at a level well below the national average (20% vs 34%).

## CIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE, BY PROFESSION AND INDUSTRY

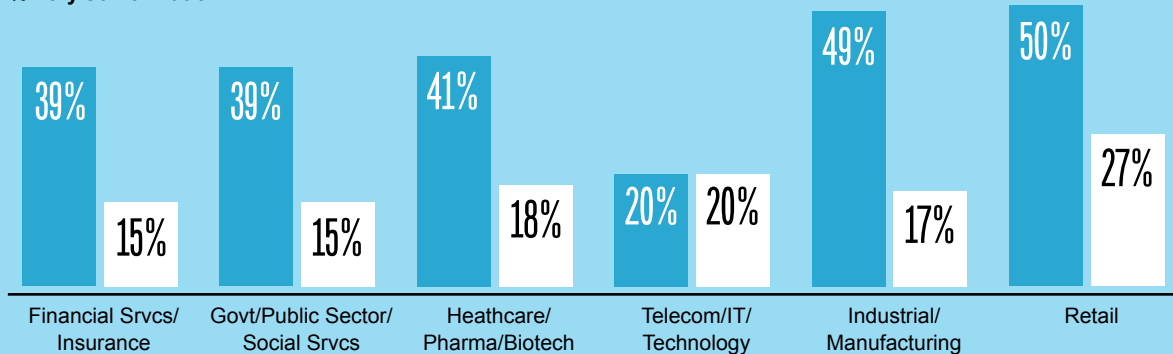
% Of Americans who have ever...

■ Experienced incivility at work at a current or past job    ■ Quit a job because of an uncivil workplace

% Very/somewhat civil



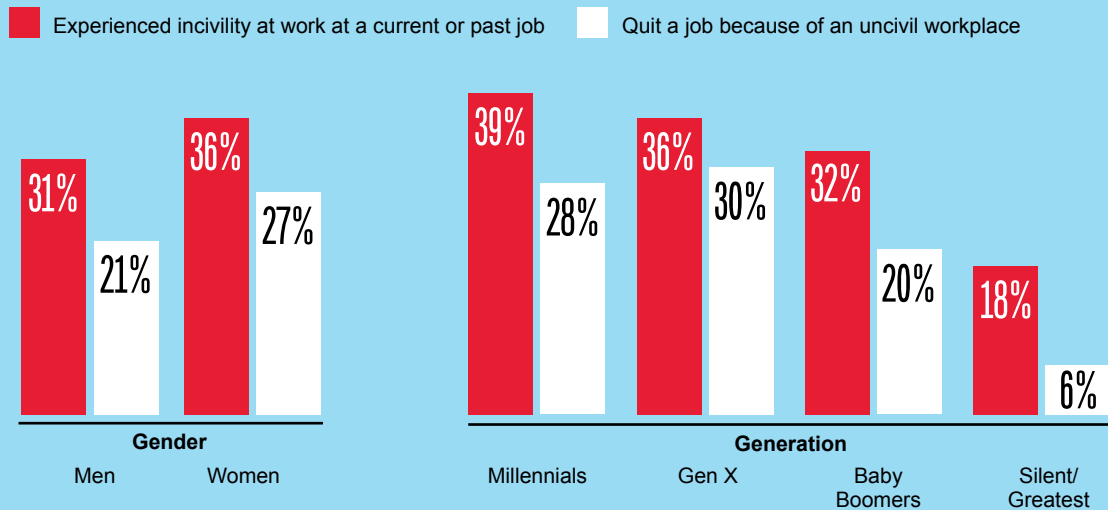
% Very/somewhat civil



**3. Incivility-at-work experience varies by demographics.** Women are more likely than men to say they have experienced incivility at work and to have quit a job because of incivility. Millennials are twice as likely as the Silent/Greatest Generation to say they have experienced incivility at work.

## CIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE, BY GENDER AND GENERATION

% Of Americans who have ever...



**4. Leadership could take a few civility lessons from staff.** Nearly three-quarters of Americans who work with others (73%) say their coworkers are always or usually civil. However, much fewer (57%) consider their leadership civil. In fact, approximately just one-quarter (27%) agree that the leaders of their workplaces are more civil than their average coworker.

## CIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

% Among those employed with coworkers

73%

People I work with are always or usually polite and respectful to other people

57%

The leadership where I work is civil

27%

The leadership where I work is more civil than the average worker in my organization

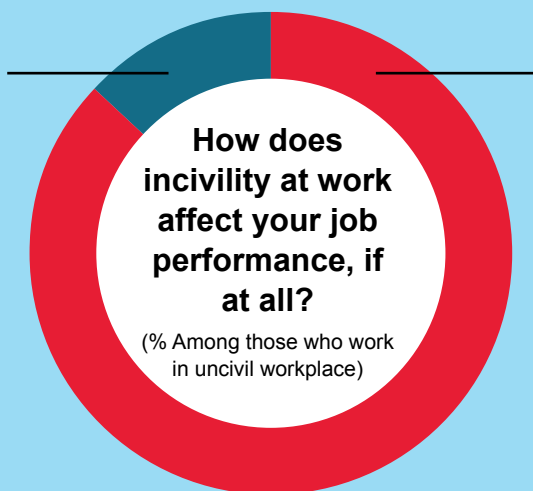
# 5.

**Incivility at work hurts business and employees' personal lives.** Nearly nine in 10 of Americans (87%) who work in uncivil environments report that incivility has negative consequences on the job or at home. Mostly, it hurts employees' on-the-job morale (55%), but there are numerous side effects that have direct financial impact on companies. These include turnover (45%), loss of collaboration (40%), reduced quality (36%) and fewer recommendations as a good place to work (33%). Nearly one-quarter (23%) call in sick because of the work-incivility they experience. In short, incivility in the workplace is costly.

## IMPACT OF INCIVILITY AT WORK

13%

Has no impact on my job performance



87%

Has an impact on job performance (net)

- Hurts my job morale **55%**
- Makes me want to quit **45%**
- Leads me to be less collaborative **40%**
- Causes me to feel anger toward my coworkers or employer **38%**
- Reduces the quality of my work **36%**
- Causes me to discourage others from joining where I work **33%**
- Has a negative effect on my personal time away from work **32%**
- Leads me to be less creative **26%**
- Leads me to call in sick **23%**
- In some other way not listed above **10%**

# 6.

**The incivility of the 2016 presidential campaign bodes poorly for the workplace.** American employees are twice as likely to believe that there will be less civility (35%) than more civility (18%) in the workplace as a result of the presidential campaign's civility levels. Those who are most optimistic for a more-civil-at-work future are executives/managers (29%), Millennials (25%) and those in the telecom/IT/technology sector (25%). Executives/managers are the only profession to be more optimistic than pessimistic (29% vs. 25%, respectively).

7.

**People are more civil at work.** Nearly two-thirds of Americans agree that people are more civil at work than outside of work (63%). Whether there is a financial motivation to act civilly on the job (uncivil behavior could prevent a promotion or lead to termination), or because they know civil collaboration gets the work done, it seems that the workplace has the potential to be largely an incivility-free zone.

8.

**Employers have some responsibility for improving civility in society.** When asked to identify ways that employers could promote civility, four in 10 Americans support employers encouraging their employees to report incivility (40%) and want to see employers responsible for eliminating workplace incivility (38%). The profession that experiences the most incivility at work — sales/customer facing — is the most likely to believe employers should encourage employees to be accountable for reducing incivility.

## WORK-BASED INCIVILITY SOLUTIONS

To improve the level of civility in our nation, indicate which, if any, of the following actions you are in favor of: (% Among total Americans)

Employers encouraging employees to report incivility they see or experience at work

40%

Making employers responsible for eliminating incivility from the workplace

38%

Changing laws to require a minimum level of civility in the workplace

23%

A best-place-to-work list based on how civil it is to work for specific employers

22%

Start or join a civility group at your workplace

11%

# IN CLOSING...

**Civility in America VII** shows that incivility continues to be pervasive in American life. However, Americans are willing to take some actions to prevent incivility from becoming further normalized. We suggest the following calls to action, based on our findings from this year's study:

**Let's take the "civility challenge."** Three-quarters of us report that we would be willing to personally set a good civility example. We should take that challenge on. As Americans, we collectively recognize we have a civility problem, even a crisis, on our hands. Yet, while we agree on what civility means, we don't see ourselves or even the people close to us as part of the problem. Each of us should take a closer look at our actions on a daily basis and evaluate if our own behavior may be having a deleterious impact on others.

**Refrain from posting or sharing uncivil material online.** While this is intuitive and perhaps simplistic, half of all incivility is encountered in search engines and on social media. What may seem civil to the poster/sharer, may be considered very uncivil to others. Through sharing and liking, our content often gets seen by people who aren't our direct social media contacts. If we want to set an example of civility, we need to be thoughtful about the implications of not just our real-life actions but our online actions as well.

**Leaders of workplaces can do more to root out incivility.** Our research shows that working in uncivil environments has an adverse impact on the bottom line and the personal lives of employees. Most Americans report working in civilized environments. Organizations should evaluate their workplace civility levels, understand which factors drive incivility experiences or perceptions — such as anger, low morale and isolation — and correct the behavior.

**Find common ground.** The political polarization in America that has only become worse applies to civility as well. Whereas some people think that our public squares are better because citizens say whatever is on our minds, others believe our public squares have become breeding places for hate and lies. If Americans could become more accepting of arguments on both sides of the political spectrum and listen more to each other, common ground could be rediscovered and our civility crisis eased.



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