



Building Confidence

August 10, 2022

Rachel Yates

The survey results are in, and this headline captured the conclusions: [“Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low.”](#) A Gallup poll during the month of June tracked public confidence in a variety of key US institutions, updating results from similar tracking since 1993. Before 2006, averages for some institutions were commonly above 40%, but have steadily declined since then.

In 2020, confidence in several specific institutions actually increased, including business and societal sectors most affected by public health and financial effects of the COVID pandemic. The medical system, public schools, small business, and banks, for example, all received increased trust in 2020. No longer. Eleven of sixteen institutions that were tested for their trustworthiness showed significant declines, and no institution showed improvement.

We place our greatest trust in small business, followed by the military and the police, but all showed an erosion of confidence. At the bottom of the list are television news (though I wonder if we only distrust the news channels that other people are watching) and Congress. They, too, received a decline in confidence, but with only 11% and 7% confidence levels respectively, they didn't have much farther to drop.

Thank goodness organized religion stands the test of time, filling not only its members but society at large with confidence: NOT. Coming in at a 31% trust rating, we do rank in the top five, just under the medical system and before public schools, but we're down from last year.

It makes me wonder about what underlies confidence. What are the expectations of trust that get broken? Perhaps if we can name the values that build trust and the actions that erode it, we can begin to change these statistics.

Two early impressions come to mind. The first is that our public statement of Christian values in response to God's grace offers great hope. However, it can challenge other institutions. It will make us examine whether our small businesses and corporations are acting ethically or out of motives of greed. It will challenge the premises that guns make us safer and that building the military or the police are the way of Christ's peace. It will speak out against governments that do not pursue the common good. Our faith does not insist on the destruction of other institutions, but it requires our active involvement and rigorous accountability.

Second, I question whether authenticity and its counterpart of hypocrisy have something to do with the erosion of confidence in organized religion – or any institution. When we say one thing, but do another, people lose trust in us. As we hold up our Christian values as the gold standard, do we demonstrate those values in our relationships with one another? If we claim that all people are made in the image of God, do we show that inclusivity? When we proclaim love of God and love of neighbor, how is that lived out day-by-day? Do we extend the grace and forgiveness that Jesus opened for all of us? If our Christian faith and stated values are inconsistent with our actions, then confidence in organized religion might wane.

As you look at this report, I'm curious about your thoughts. Maybe you see eroding trust as a good thing – a path to greater accountability? I'm always grateful for your reflections. May this report help us see the need for reformation, the hallmark of our faith tradition.