

Our Divided Nation

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America's divided mindset is displayed in an article from Gallup, by Jeffrey M. Jones. The article states: "A record-high 80% of U.S. adults believe Americans are greatly divided on the most important values, while 18% believe the country is united. The nation's percentage as divided has ticked up from 77% the last time Gallup asked the question in 2016." Different surveys produced by Gallup and others that date back to the 1990s, tell us that Americans have mostly seen the nation divided on key values.¹ We must engage to move from utter disagreement to agree to disagree and move forward if we want any chance at changing these statistics, upholding the constitutional promise, and displaying a truly united nation, where people of different political backgrounds, religious beliefs, and other ideas can come together for the greater good.

America was founded on the social contract theory of John Locke and the colonists' beliefs in political liberty, religious freedom, and economic opportunity. The social contract states that all men are created equal and entitled to natural rights to life, liberty, and property.² Yet, these ideas of personal freedoms such as religion, and political stance, have been lost to hatred; especially in the past few years. This hatred towards each other's beliefs has demolished our nation's ability to set aside our differences for the common good. For Locke, this meant above all that the government ought to respect and protect people's inalienable rights to life,

¹ Jones, By Jeffrey M. "Americans agree nation is divided on key values." Gallup.com, 15 Nov. 2024, news.gallup.com/poll/650828/americans-agree-nation-divided-key-values.aspx.

² Locke's Political Philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). 6 Oct. 2020, plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political.

liberty, and private property. We have to use our freedoms for the common good rather than our own selfish interests. But if we examine the key arguments our nation has, we will find that society has largely failed in the sense of peacefully and respectfully disagreeing. We as Americans have the fundamental right to disagree, but we must appropriately differ from each other and be able to set aside our differences when it comes to the common good. Much like the nature utilitarianism provides; to maximize happiness or pleasure and to minimize unhappiness or pain for the greatest good of the greatest number.

An example of this failure is the January 6, 2021, U.S. capitol attack, launched by a mob of MAGA supporters of Donald J. Trump. The attack was a result of Trump losing the 2020 presidential election to his democratic opponent, Joe Biden, and was classified by the FBI and other agencies as domestic terrorism, due to the fact that Trump had given a speech where he exhorted his supporters to violently storm the capital. This ambush led to the death and injuries of many innocent people, all because people could not peacefully disagree with each other. The rioters misused their First Amendment right of peaceful protest, as they used weapons such as stun guns, pepper spray, firearms, knives, baseball bats, and other attacking tactics.³ This brings up the argument of gun control in the United States and the Second Amendment. The Second Amendment states: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." This statement is often misunderstood, much like the freedom of speech. The Second Amendment was written to ensure the protection of Americans' right to organize militias to defend themselves, not to authorize individual American citizens to own guns. Thus, gun-control laws and limitations do not violate

³ Duignan, Brian. "January 6 U.S. Capitol Attack| Background, Events, Criminal Charges, and Facts." Encyclopedia Britannica, 18 Dec. 2024, www.britannica.com/event/January-6-U-S-Capitol-attack.

the Second Amendment.⁴ This is just an example of a political disagreement, but the arguments are vast, such as the topics of abortion, the environment, gun control, religion, and other basic rights.

If we look at the environmental debates, more specifically the global warming issue, it is evident that even though science backs up the reality that humans-induced climate-related natural disasters are continuously increasing, climate change is not completely accepted as true in the United States. Our increasing numbers of greenhouse gases not only warm the air but also the ocean. Research has shown that 90 percent of excessive heat from global warming is being consumed by the ocean, thus melting ice sheets and glaciers as sea levels rise. Yet as these evident dangers multiply,⁵ an online published study in the journal Scientific Reports shows that key influencers such as Trump, implant and spread misinformation about climate change in the public of the country. And as social media increases in popularity, so does the rate of spreading misinformation.⁶ Another study displayed that Americans were least likely to verify information they heard on television news. One in five people said they never double-checked information from television news, which can be heavily biased.⁷ This is an example of our nation not being able to use their freedoms for the common good instead of their own self-centered ethics; as

⁴ Gun Control Is Constitutional (From Gun Control, P 83-86, 1992, Charles P Cozic, ed. -- See NCJ-160164) | Office of Justice Programs.
www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/gun-control-constitutional-gun-control-p-83-86-1992-charles-p-cozic#:~:text=The%20Second%20Amendment%20was%20written.not%20violate%20the%20U.S.%20Constitution.

⁵ The Ocean and Climate Change - NASA Science.
science.nasa.gov/earth/explore/the-ocean-and-climate-change.

⁶ Nearly 15% of Americans deny climate change, study finds | The University Record.
record.umich.edu/articles/nearly-15-of-americans-deny-climate-change-study-finds.

⁷ Vigderman, Aliza. "90% of People Claim They Fact-Check News Stories As Trust in Media Plummet." Security.org, 26 Sept. 2024, www.security.org/digital-security/misinformation-disinformation-survey.

climate change clearly threatens the earth we call home, yet people will blatantly ignore the truth to fit their world whether it is religion-based or not.

Americans are stupendous about using their religion as their main reason for wanting to do things such as not believing the science of climate change and protesting for laws against abortion rights. However, we must recognize the reality that the colonists came to America for religious freedom in the first place and that the founding fathers were adamant that we not mix government with religion. If America was founded on religious freedom and the separation of the church and law, then why are we as a nation constantly mixing the two? One of the largest arguments that have boiled over the years because we have conjoined religion and government, is abortion rights. Many religions such as Baptist, Catholic, Hinduism, Luthren, Methadist and so many others claim similar ideas that abortion is a sin in mainly every circumstance.⁸ But just because these religions think abortion is sinful, does not mean that our country should ban this right. Consider religions such as conservative Judaism that believe abortion is a fundamental right. When we do mix religion and law, we are imposing the religious beliefs of one group on another and infringing upon the religious liberties of those who have different spiritual beliefs. Thus breaking the constitutional promise of religious freedom. Whether your stance on abortion is religion-based or not, you can not deny the science that showcases the truth that abortion is health care. Whether the women's influence to get an abortion is from things like contraceptive failure, rape, incest, fetal anomalies, partner violence, finances, and so many other reasons, or if the decision was made because of pregnancy complications. These complications can be and are life-threatening; examples of this are placental abruption, cardiac complications, internal

⁸ Masci, David. "Where major religious groups stand on abortion." Pew Research Center, 14 Apr. 2024, www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/06/21/where-major-religious-groups-stand-on-abortion.

bleeding, birth-giving issues, and other concerning factors. The purpose of government is to ensure the protection of these natural rights to life, liberty, health, and property. These rights are inalienable. But when laws are put in place to prevent abortion, women use unsafe measures to terminate the pregnancy on their own. According to AOCG, "Today, approximately 21 million women around the world obtain unsafe, illegal abortions each year, and complications from these unsafe procedures account for approximately 13% of all maternal deaths, nearly 50,000 annually."⁹ The best healthcare is healthcare with the absence of political and religious ideology. The argument for abortion rights is just another example of why it is so important that we as a nation respect each other's rights, religion, and political stance.

In conclusion, and to answer the prompt's original question, "Why is it essential for everyone to engage in civic life, and how does it help uphold the Constitution's promise?" I answer with the philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, utilitarianism. The nature of Utilitarianism is an effort to provide an answer to the practical question "What ought a person to do?" The answer is that a person ought to act so as to maximize happiness or pleasure and to minimize unhappiness or pain.¹⁰ We must also learn from our founding father's original ideas of separating government and religion, and John Locke's social contract. Whether we work together or not, when we are not divided we can achieve life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

⁹ "Abortion Is Healthcare." ACOG, www.acog.org/advocacy/facts-are-important/abortion-is-healthcare.

¹⁰ West, Henry R., and Brian Duignan. "Utilitarianism | Definition, Philosophy, Examples, Ethics, Philosophers, and Facts." Encyclopedia Britannica, 16 Dec. 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/utilitarianism-philosophy.