

Confidence in police is surging overall

November 7, 2016

Good news on the law and order front: Americans' respect for police is surging.

This information comes from the respected Gallup polling organization, which has asked this question nine times since 1965.

In just one year, overall respect for police has increased from 64 percent to 76 percent. This is just 1 percentage point below the record high of 77 percent in 1967.

The mark hit a 22-year low in 2015 but then a number of police officers were being ambushed, shot and killed.

This coincided with some controversial incidents of law enforcement officers shooting unarmed black men.

Thankfully, Americans are returning to a common-sense approach that supports and thanks the police for the hard work they do to keep us safe.

At the same time, there should be more transparency and accountability in those few cases of unacceptable police behavior. Without that, the rare exceptions take on a life of their own.

Some of our African-American citizens of all occupations and income levels have reported unfair targeting by police officers. That must be acknowledged.

In any case, 80 percent of whites say they have great respect for police in their area, Gallup reports, while 67 percent of nonwhites report great respect.

Actually, respect for police is up among all ages and political party groups.

In response to the attacks, Louisiana became the first state to pass a bill that treats acts targeted against police officers as hate crimes.

Hate law or not, any attacker of a police officer should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

questioning validity of VOTES

Our political divisions have even entered the legitimacy of our elections.

A total of 36 percent of Americans polled by Gallup say that voter fraud is likely to be a major problem while 41 percent see voter suppression as a bigger issue.

While there have been cases of voter fraud, there haven't been enough to swing major elections.

In contrast, voter suppression has a long history in the United States dating to the first poll tax passed by the state of Florida in 1889.

In fact, the Supreme Court in 2013 struck down a major provision of the Voting Rights Act and 14 states have passed restrictions on voting, reports the Brennan Center for Justice.

On a broader scale, voters see gerrymandered districts and campaign finance rules as reducing the value of their votes.

Just 43 percent have a great deal of confidence that their vote will be counted correctly. Independents are more likely to be worried, while young people have low confidence due to their distrust of institutions generally.

Gallup concludes that Americans are dispirited with the political process and three-quarters see the country going in the wrong direction.

POLITICAL TRENDS

In the midst of today's political fights it is helpful to step back and look at longer trends.

Time magazine notes one major trend, that since World War II only once has a political party won three elections in a row — Ronald Reagan's two terms followed by the single term of George H.W. Bush.

This is one of the checks and balances built into the bloodstream of the American body politic. A new administration comes into office full of new ideas and energy and gradually loses both.

Whether President Barack Obama is followed by Hillary Clinton will be determined at the polls today, a campaign that so far has stumped all conventional wisdom.

U.S. TAXES

Is the United States in danger of becoming a socialist country like those in Europe?

If so, we have a lot of catching up to do.

A chart produced by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, lists nations according to total government spending in 2015 as a percent of gross domestic product.

The United States is fifth from the bottom at 38 percent.

Korea is lowest at 33 percent and Finland is highest at 59 percent.

The U.S. debt is a serious concern for the future, however.

IMMIGRATION OPINIONS

Gallup polls find that most Americans are not overly concerned about immigration, but a segment of some Americans are highly concerned.

Some of the mixed findings:

- 7 in 10 Americans say immigration in a general sense is good for the country. This does not focus on illegal immigration, however. It also does not focus on the broken legal immigration system.

- 8 in 10 support tightened security at borders but 6 in 10 don't support a wall. In fact, there are areas on the U.S.-Mexico border where a wall will not work. And a wall without personnel will never work, either.

- 8 in 10 support some pathway to citizenship. In fact, 84 percent favor allowing immigrants living in the U.S. illegally to become citizens if they meet certain requirements and deadlines.

Also, 19 percent favor allowing them to remain and work for a limited time. Some form of limited work permits would help agriculture interests. Just 14 percent support deporting people to their home countries.

- On banning Muslims who aren't citizens from entering the country, 52 percent disagree, 31 percent agree and 17 percent have no opinion.

“Americans recognize that immigration is good for the country but have reservations about the number of immigrants coming into the country,” Gallup summarizes.

“Americans favor controls on who comes into the country legally but do not favor restricting whole groups of people based just on their religion.”