

IDAHO ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

FALL COUNTY OFFICIALS INSTITUTE

Courthouse Civility

Leading with respect when trust is low and tensions are high.

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SECTION ONE

The trust landscape

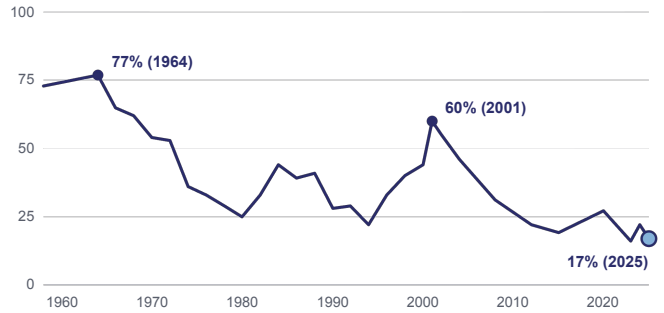
THE TRUST LANDSCAPE

Trust in the federal government

17%

of Americans trust the federal government to do what is right just about always or most of the time.

Down from 77% in 1964.

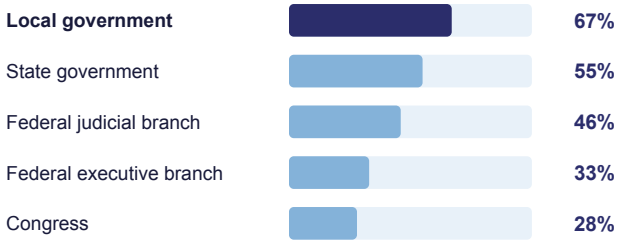


Source: Pew Research Center, “Public Trust in Government: 1958–2025,” Dec. 2025

THE TRUST LANDSCAPE

Trust in levels of government

Share with a great deal or fair amount of trust, September 2026



Local government is the most trusted level

It was the only level to gain trust this year, rising from 65% to 67%.

Source: Gallup Governance poll, Sept. 1–17, 2026 (1,000 U.S. adults)

THE TRUST LANDSCAPE

What builds trust in government

Humanity
Showing empathy and kindness, and treating people fairly

Transparency
Sharing information openly, in plain language

Capability
Delivering quality services

Reliability
Delivering consistently and dependably

Composite trust score (−100 to +100)	+14	+6	−26
	Local	State	Federal

Source: Deloitte Insights, “Improving trust in state and local government,” 2021 (6,152 U.S. adults)

SECTION TWO

Harassment and local government

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES, 2024

Harassment is now part of the job

73%
of local officials report personally experiencing harassment in their work

23%
report harassment of their family or loved ones

~60%
feel political harassment has gotten worse since they entered office

Source: National League of Cities survey of 256 local officials, August 2024

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HARASSMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Where harassment occurs



⚠

Is your county prepared?

60% have no plan to address political harassment but say they need one.

20% have a plan in place.

Source: National League of Cities survey of 256 local officials, August 2024

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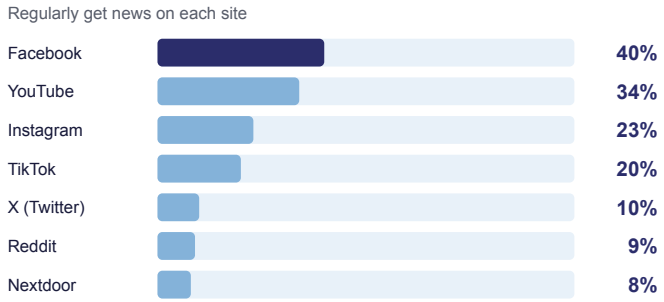
HARASSMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Social media as a news source

59%

of U.S. adults get news from social media at least sometimes

26% often · 33% sometimes



Source: Pew Research Center, Social Media and News Fact Sheet, survey Aug. 24–30, 2026

SECTION THREE

Working together in the courthouse

WORKING TOGETHER

County responsibility vs. authority

- Three county commissioners
- Six independently elected “row” officers
- Responsibility vs. authority
- “Intra”-county relationships
- “Inter”-county relationships

132

people in Idaho know what it’s like to be a county commissioner

44

people in Idaho know what it’s like to hold each county row office

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A CAUTIONARY TALE

A very bad example: Crooks v. Maynard

The players

John H. Maynard, Second District judge
Donna Crooks, Nez Perce County clerk

The issue

- Disagreement over who appoints court clerks
- Maynard did not like who Crooks appointed
- Maynard ordered Crooks barred from court chambers
- Crooks defied the order and was arrested
- The case went to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

THE OUTCOME

“The court notes that since this suit was filed, both Judge Maynard and Clerk Crooks have been voted out of office. Ultimately the ballot box is the preferred place to resolve disputes such as that which gave rise to this suit.”

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WORKING TOGETHER

What works

- **Openness** and transparency
- **Regular** communication
- It’s OK to disagree — it’s **not OK to be disagreeable**
- **Positive** public engagement

GEORGE WASHINGTON’S RULES OF CIVILITY AND DECENT BEHAVIOR

Timeless rules of civility

1 Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect.

9 Being to advise or reprehend any one, consider whether it ought to be in public or in private, and presently or at some other time; in what terms to do it; and in reproving show no signs of color but do it with all sweetness and mildness.

12 Be not hasty to believe flying reports to the disparagement of any.

20 Be friendly and courteous.

24 Think before you speak, pronounce not imperfectly, nor bring out your words too hastily, but orderly and distinctly.

25 When another speaks, be attentive yourself and disturb not the audience. If any hesitate in his words, help him not nor prompt him without desired. Interrupt him not, nor answer him till his speech be ended.

32 Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.

SECTION FOUR

Board relationships

BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

Strong boards

- Connect with each other before offering perspectives
- Acknowledge the positions of fellow board members
- Use **“I” statements**: “This is where I stand” — with your reasons, data and sources
- Focus on what the board **can** do, not what individual members won’t or can’t do

AVOID “TRUTH” STATEMENTS

“This is just how it is going to be.”

“You are wrong.”

BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

Listen

- Separate **people** from **problems**
- Obtain the facts
- Understand opposing viewpoints
- Use a **fair process** to make decisions
- Be willing to both **persuade and be persuaded**: explain your position and stay open to others'

BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

Overcoming disagreements

Differ respectfully, compromise, and focus on what is best for the county.

If you do…

County employees and community members will be more likely to follow your lead.

If you get mired in blame and division…

Employees — and the community — will follow your example. Operations can grind to a standstill, and the county can fracture.

BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

Leading

- Lead the way your employees and constituents expect you to lead
- Focus on the future and the common interests that bind you
- Elected officials will have different opinions — and that's OK

The sign of true leaders is the ability to work through differences in ways that advance the needs of the county, build trust, and create a culture of respect.

BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

A couple of tips

Check your ego at the door

Focus on what is best for the county, not you.

Keep calm under pressure

Take a deep breath and think about your response.

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No matter what you do, no matter how good you think you are, no matter what you say, public perception will become your legacy.

Remember one thing
Courthouse Civility

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Thank you.

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