



# THE STATE OF PUBLIC TRUST IN GOVERNMENT 2023

While trust in the government as a whole is low, civil servants and federal agencies are viewed more positively

Our government is operating in an era of threats to our democracy, increased partisanship and diminishing public trust. Only about one-third of Americans say they trust the federal government, compared with 46% who do not. This lack of trust is harmful to our country's ability to solve national problems, including protecting the country from security threats and implementing investments in infrastructure, climate resiliency and equitable economic recovery.

The Partnership for Public Service set out to study the public's views of the federal government and why people hold those views. We conducted our first nationally representative survey in 2021 and published a major report on its findings in [March 2022](#). We conducted a second survey in late 2022, and the main findings are included here.

These surveys sought to understand how people in the United States feel about their federal government beyond the politics of the day and the leaders in Washington, D.C. They focused on the parts of government that are often out of the political limelight: federal agencies and the more than 2 million civil servants who work across the country. While the public's views about the federal government as a whole are negative, respondents rated specific parts of the government and points of interaction much more positively—such as their personal experiences with government services and with federal agencies and civil servants.

These findings are a cause for hope and offer a unique opportunity to reset the relationship between our government and the communities it serves. The federal government is uniquely positioned to help address historic inequities, seed innovation and solve problems, particularly in this time of significant investment and major policy implementation. Without shifting the negative and pervasive narrative, the rift between government and the public will remain, and government cannot be as effective as it needs to be.

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The Partnership for Public Service conducted a nationally representative survey of 800 Americans from Nov. 29 to Dec. 6, 2022. Surveys were conducted in English and Spanish and had a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points.

Unless otherwise noted, all data here comes from that 2022 survey.

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# The level of trust in the federal government as a whole remains low.

Only 35% of Americans said they trust the federal government compared with 46% who say they do not and 16% who are neutral.

Democrats are far more likely to trust the government than Republicans and Independents.

## HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

Overall



	Trust	Neutral	Do not trust
Overall	35%	16%	46%
Democrats	52%	18%	28%
Republicans	23%	14%	63%
Independents/DK	28%	16%	52%

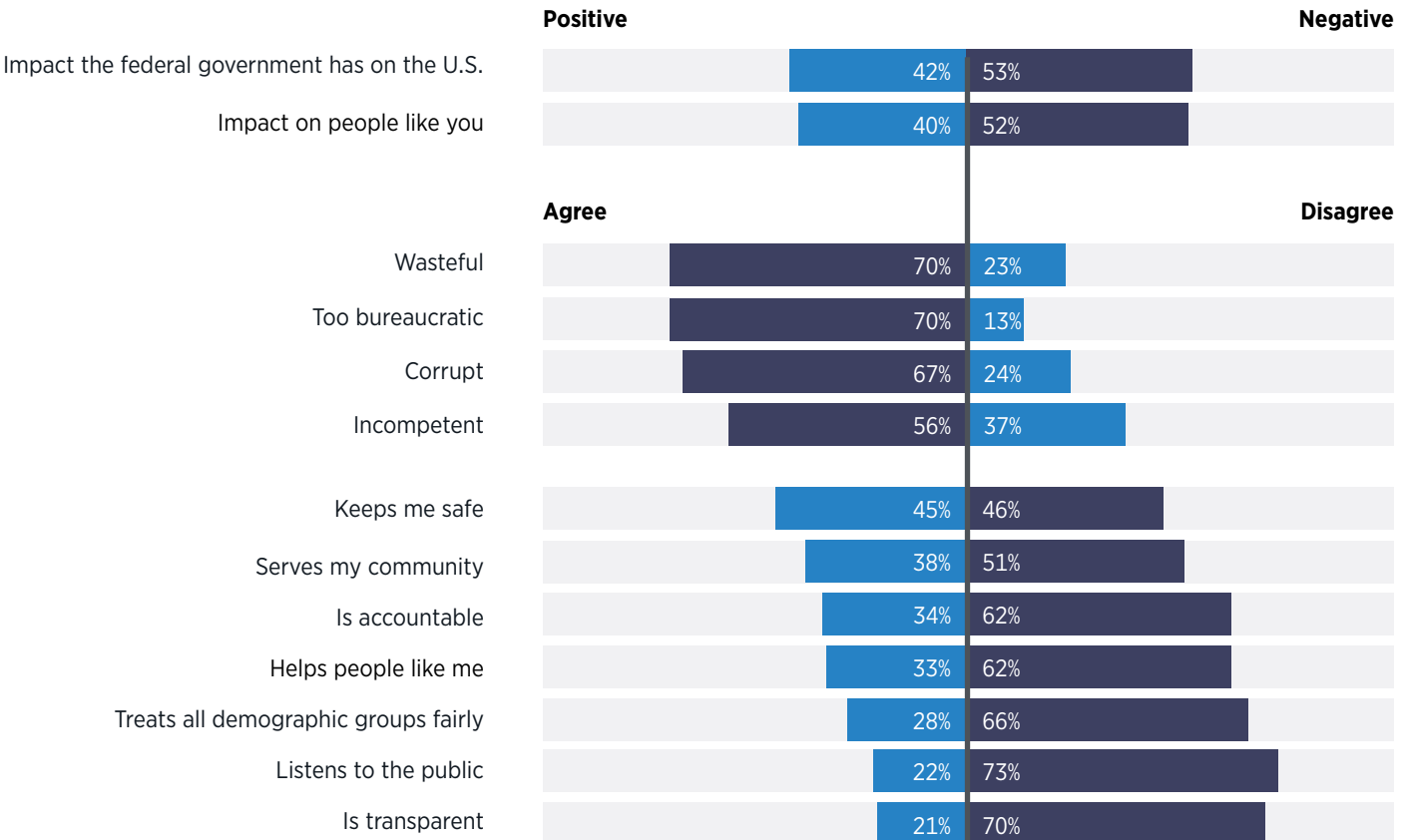
Question was asked on a scale of 0 to 10. "Do not trust" includes answers from 0 to 4. "Neutral" includes answers of 5. "Trust" includes answers from 6 to 10.

# When asked about the federal government as a whole, Americans tended to express mostly negative views.

Only 42% said the federal government has a positive impact on the country. About 70% said the federal government is "wasteful," "too bureaucratic" and "corrupt."

Only about 1 in 5 said the government "listens to the public" or is "transparent."

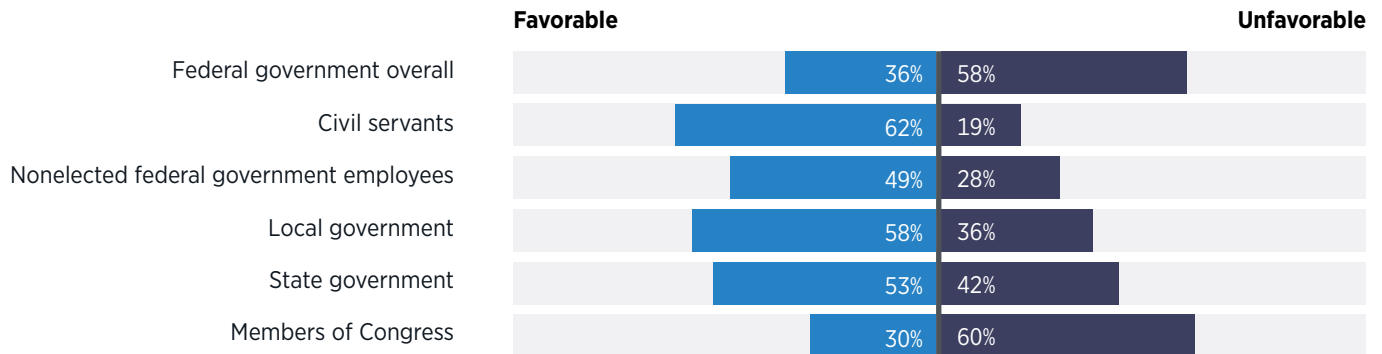
## VIEWS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



## Many Americans equate the federal government with Congress.

[Previous research by the Partnership](#) suggests that most people think of Congress when they are asked about the federal government in general. At the same time, only 30% of Americans say they approve of members of Congress.

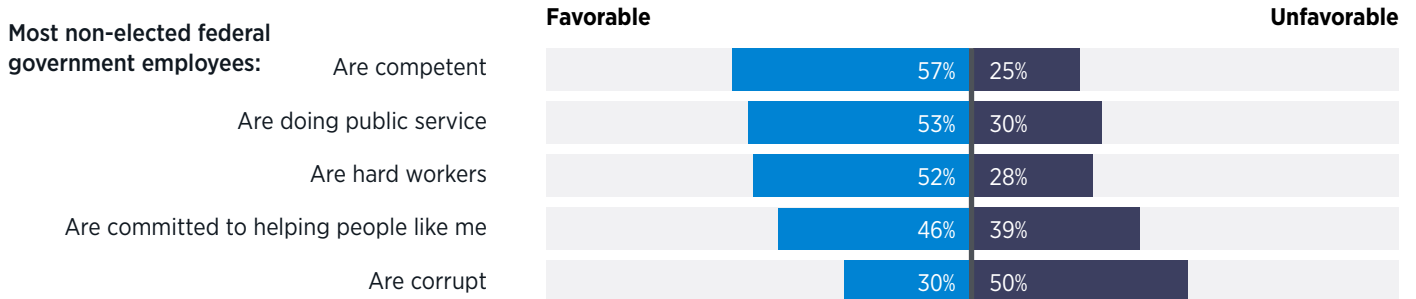
### FAVORABILITY OF PARTS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



## However, when asked about many specific components of the federal government, views are much more positive. For example, civil servants are generally seen positively.

Federal employees are seen as “competent” by a ratio of more than 2 to 1. Far more Americans agreed that civil servants are “doing public service” than disagreed and said they are “hard workers.”

### VIEWS OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES ARE GENERALLY POSITIVE



## Most well-known federal agencies are viewed favorably.

Of the 13 agencies the [Partnership asked respondents about in 2021](#), 12 of them were viewed more favorably than unfavorably, some by wide margins. The National Park Service, for example, was seen favorably by 84% of Americans, while the Social Security Administration was viewed favorably by 69%.

The only agency that received more unfavorable than favorable feedback was the Internal Revenue Service. Even in that case, however, 42% of Americans say they have a favorable view of the IRS.

### OPINIONS OF MANY FEDERAL AGENCIES ARE POSITIVE

	Very/somewhat favorable	Very/somewhat unfavorable
National Park Service	84%	5%
Social Security Administration	69%	23%
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	65%	29%
Department of Veterans Affairs	64%	24%
Census Bureau	62%	21%
Environmental Protection Agency	60%	26%
Health and Human Services	60%	26%
Department of Homeland Security	56%	30%
Transportation Security Administration	55%	27%
Department of Justice	52%	39%
Department of State	46%	34%
Immigration and Customs Enforcement	46%	41%
Internal Revenue Service	42%	51%

## Americans give high marks to many specific government services.

More than 70% of Americans who have interacted with specific federal services said they were satisfied with the interaction. This includes people who filed federal taxes, voted in federal elections, applied for Medicare or Medicaid, applied for a passport, signed up for an account on a government website and applied for federal student aid.

AMERICANS WHO HAVE INTERACTED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAVE GENERALLY BEEN SATISFIED



### Filed federal taxes

**74%** | **18%**  
Satisfied | Dissatisfied

93% of people have done activity



### Voted in federal election

**77%** | **15%**  
Satisfied | Dissatisfied

79% of people have done activity



### Applied for Medicare or Medicaid

**74%** | **19%**  
Satisfied | Dissatisfied

58% of people have done activity



### Applied for a passport

**88%** | **6%**  
Satisfied | Dissatisfied

52% of people have done activity



### Signed up for an account on a government website

**74%** | **15%**  
Satisfied | Dissatisfied

46% of people have done activity



### Applied for federal student aid

**73%** | **24%**  
Satisfied | Dissatisfied

33% of people have done activity

## THE OPPORTUNITY

While government is polarizing to many Americans, our research points to some promising ways the federal government can rebuild trust.

Highlight the government's role in protecting democracy and national security; reflecting on this unique role gives the public more favorable views of government.

Highlight specific federal agencies and their mission, and government services that receive high marks from the public.

Elevate the work of the nation's more than 2 million civil servants and call attention to the importance of a merit-based, nonpartisan civil service for our system of government and democracy.

Showcase personal stories of federal employees and the complicated problems they work to solve.



## WHAT'S NEXT

This research shows that while the federal government faces challenges in improving its public image, the fact that some of its significant components are viewed positively creates an opportunity.

By focusing on the elements of the government that may not receive as much attention as Congress—such as civil servants and the missions of federal agencies—an opportunity exists to increase the public's trust.

In the coming months, the Partnership for Public Service will continue to study these important issues and make recommendations on how federal leaders and other messengers can help focus public attention on positive aspects of the government.

**To stay informed about the progress of this work, subscribe to the Partnership's newsletter at [ourpublicservice.org](https://ourpublicservice.org).**



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