

Civility in America

2013



Civility in America 2013

In 2010, Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate, in partnership with KRC Research, released their first annual **Civility in America: A Nationwide Survey** to gauge the American public's attitudes toward civility and self-reported experiences with incivility in a variety of areas of American society and daily life. We continue to track these attitudes and experiences annually to determine how, if at all, these perceptions change over time.

Without a doubt, America has a civility problem. Each wave of **Civility in America** reiterates the unfortunate fact that incivility is ubiquitous; no area of American society is untouched. Eroding civility is harmful to our country's future and takes a toll on how we interact with the people and institutions around us. The belief that America has a civility problem and that civility will get worse has not waned since the survey's inception. In fact, it has become our "new normal." Americans' experiences with incivility add a noticeably disturbing dimension, particularly as we see the Internet increasingly identified as a cause of incivility.

Despite this persistence of incivility in America, we uncovered a few signs of hope this year. Americans are more willing to take control of incivility in their own lives – half (50%) have ended a friendship because another person was uncivil, a significant increase from 2012 (44%). And perhaps due to incivility fatigue in all aspects of American life, the vast majority of Americans (87%) say they would be willing to take a national civility pledge on a national holiday such as July 4th.

Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate are committed to providing unique insights into helping Americans, businesses, government and its institutions take greater responsibility for their communications and engagement online and offline. We regularly conduct research on the effects of how people engage today and leverage our findings to inform strategies that address our clients' most pressing communications challenges. We are pleased to share the results of our fourth wave of **Civility in America**, conducted in May 2013 using an online survey of 1,000 U.S. adults.

"We hope that our ongoing investigation of this critically important issue can help in at least a small way to restore civility in public life and bring meaningful and long-lasting solutions to our ways of interacting and behaving in all aspects of American life. Incivility has become the default in too many of our interactions and it is affecting the very fabric of society."

Jack Leslie

Chairman, Weber Shandwick

Civility in America by the numbers

INCIVILITY EXPERIENCES

- 17.1 = average number of times Americans encounter incivility in a 7-day week, or 2.4 times per day
- 8.5 = average number of times Americans encounter incivility **in real life/offline** in a week
- 8.6 = average number of times Americans encounter incivility **online** in a week

Of Americans surveyed...

- 50% have ended a friendship because another person was uncivil
- 48% have defriended, blocked or hidden someone online because of uncivil behavior
- 43% expect to experience incivility in the next 24 hours
- 26% have quit a job because it was an uncivil workplace
- 24% have personally experienced cyberbullying (threefold increase since 2011)
- 19% of parents have transferred their child to a different school because of incivility at school

INCIVILITY PERCEPTIONS

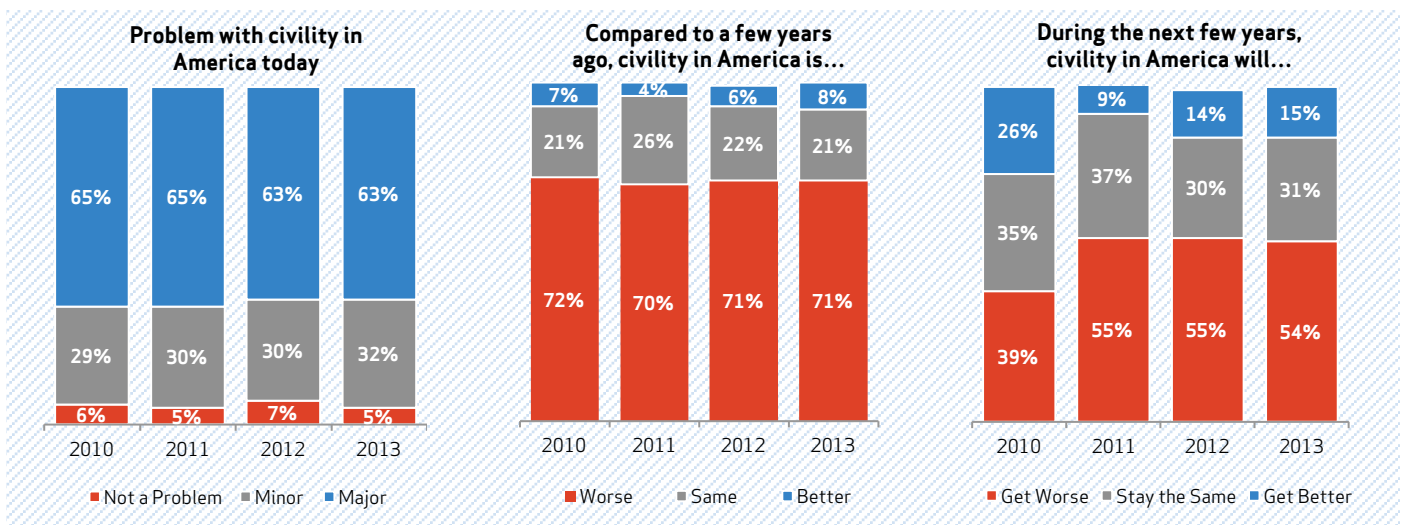
Of Americans surveyed...

- 95% believe we have a civility problem in America
- 87% think it is uncivil to be on a phone while talking with someone else in person
- 81% think uncivil behavior is leading to an increase in violence
- 80% agree that the level of civility won't improve until our government leaders act more civilly
- 71% believe civility is worse compared to a few years ago
- 70% think the Internet encourages uncivil behavior
- 70% think that incivility has risen to crisis levels
- 34% who expect civility to worsen blame Twitter



Incivility is more than just a problem – it's a crisis

Attitudes about the state of civility in America have not changed since 2010. Approximately two-thirds of Americans (63%) believe that we have a major civility problem and seven in 10 (71%) believe that civility is worse compared to a few years ago. For the third year in a row, more than half (54%) believe that civility will worsen over the next several years.

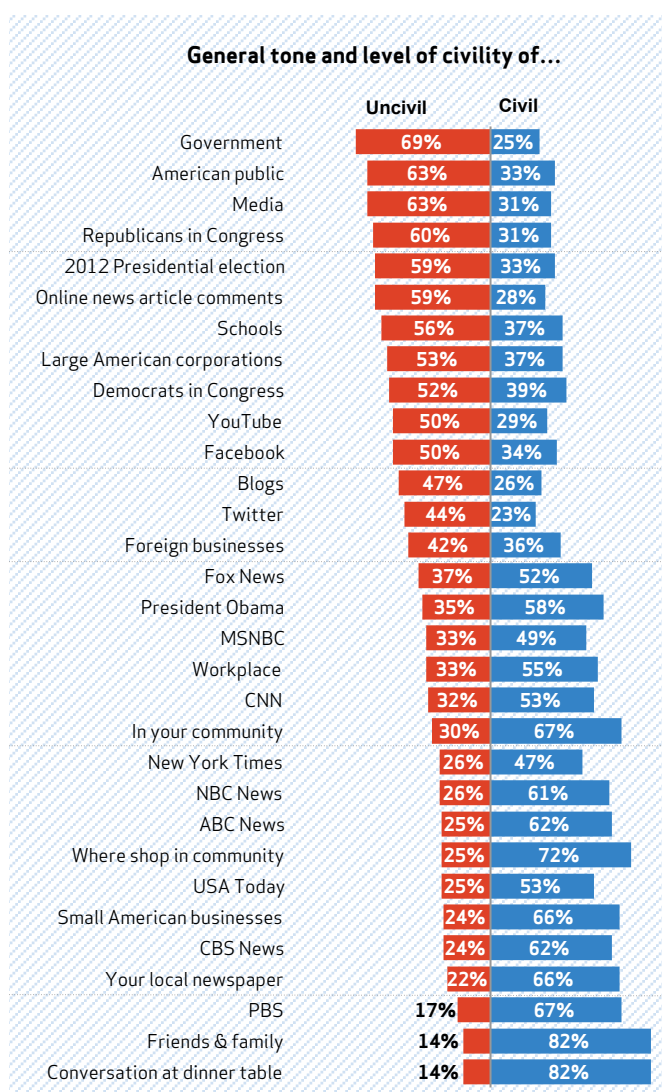


Not only is civility getting worse, but the majority of Americans (70%) agree that incivility in America has risen to crisis levels. This belief is held regardless of age, gender, political party affiliation and U.S. geographical region. **Even more alarming is that 81% believe uncivil behavior is leading to an increase in violence.**

“Incivility is turning into a national epidemic. When seven out of ten citizens report that incivility has reached crisis proportions in this country, you know that we need new solutions and greater leadership accountability. We may have reached the tipping point.”

Pam Jenkins
President, Powell Tate

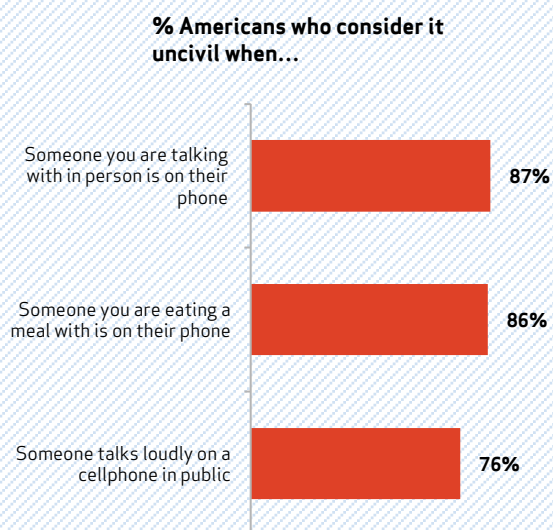
Americans assign negative tone and high levels of incivility to several groups. The government is considered the most uncivil aspect of American life (69%) followed by the American public (63%) and the media (63%). Half or more of Americans rate Congressional Republicans, the 2012 presidential election, online news article comments, schools, large American corporations, Congressional Democrats, YouTube and Facebook as uncivil. In contrast, friends, family and dinner table conversation are perceived as the most civil.



Incivility in American life: cellphones

One area we took a closer look at this year was cellphone incivility. About one-third of Americans who expect civility to worsen blame cellphones/smartphones (34%).

The majority of Americans consider rude cellphone behavior uncivil. These behaviors include using a phone while speaking with someone else (87%) or while having a meal (86%), and talking loudly on a cellphone in public (76%). Americans ages 50 years and older are significantly more likely than those under 50 to consider these behaviors uncivil.



Incivility is a way of life

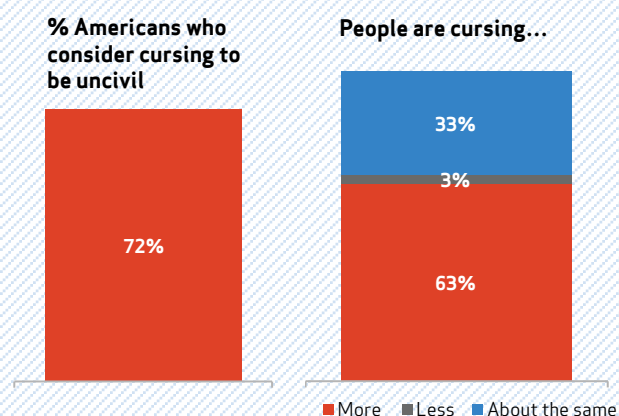
Americans don't just perceive incivility; they personally and frequently experience it in their everyday lives. Perception and reality are not that far apart. On average, Americans encounter incivility 17 times during the course of one week, or more than two times per day. Just over four in 10 (43%) expect to experience incivility during the next 24 hours. With 24/7 exposure to acts of incivility, it is not surprising that incivility has reached crisis levels.

# of times Americans encounter incivility in average 7-day week (average #)	17.1
In real life/offline	8.5
Online	8.6
% expect to experience incivility in next 24 hours	43%

A minority of Americans report having taken any action when they last encountered incivility (25%). They most typically removed themselves from the situation (35%) or ignored the person acting uncivilly (29%). Only 7% say they responded uncivilly.

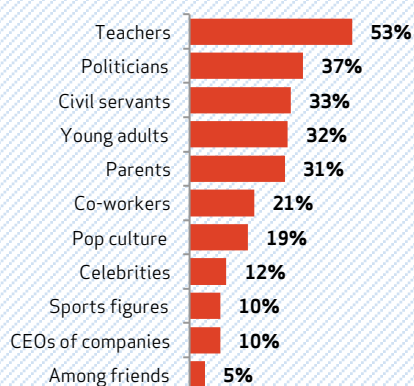
Incivility in American life: cursing

Just as we released Civility in America 2012, news spread of a Massachusetts town that approved a fine for cursing in public. We investigated perceptions of profanity this year to see if Americans overall hold this kind of language in similar contempt. Nearly three-quarters of Americans (72%) believe cursing is uncivil and nearly two-thirds (63%) find people cursing more today than in the past. Those 50 years and older are significantly more likely than those younger than 50 years old to consider cursing uncivil (81% vs. 68%).



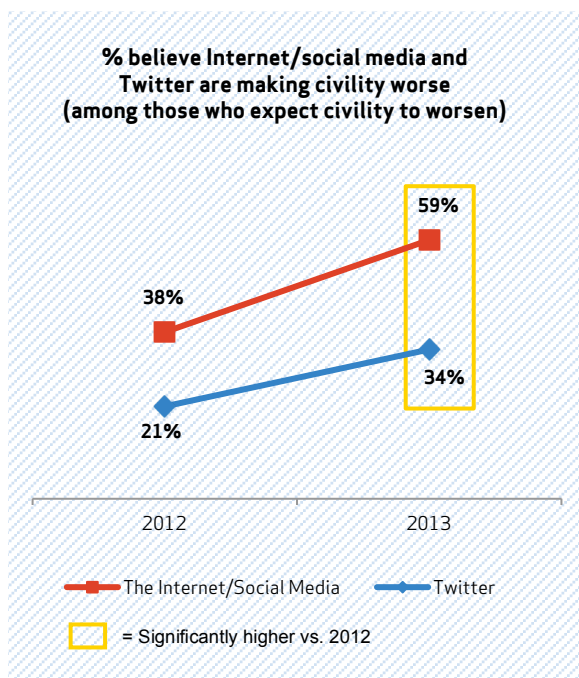
Regardless of age, Americans have the least tolerance for teachers cursing (53%) and the most for cursing among friends (5%). Cursing by politicians is also regarded negatively. Cursing by celebrities (12%) and sports figures (10%) appears to be taken for granted as the norm and is more widely accepted.

Cursing is most uncivil when it's done by...

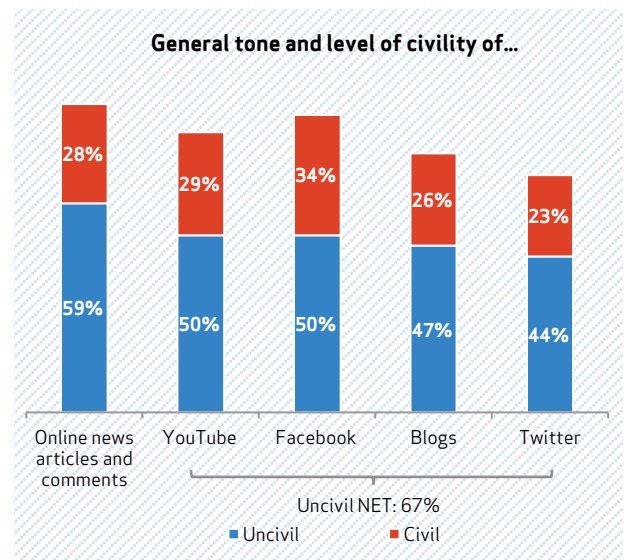


The internet and social media are now leading and rapidly growing causes of incivility

Americans who expect civility to worsen over the next several years now cite the Internet/social media as one of the leading causes (59%) after politics, American youth and the media. About one-third blame Twitter (34%), at statistically higher levels than in 2012 (21%). As more people use Twitter or hear about uncivil tweets, Twitter is becoming easier to blame for worsening civility in America. The Internet may be a leading cause of incivility because of how frequently Americans are experiencing incivility online, which is reaching an average of nearly nine times a week.



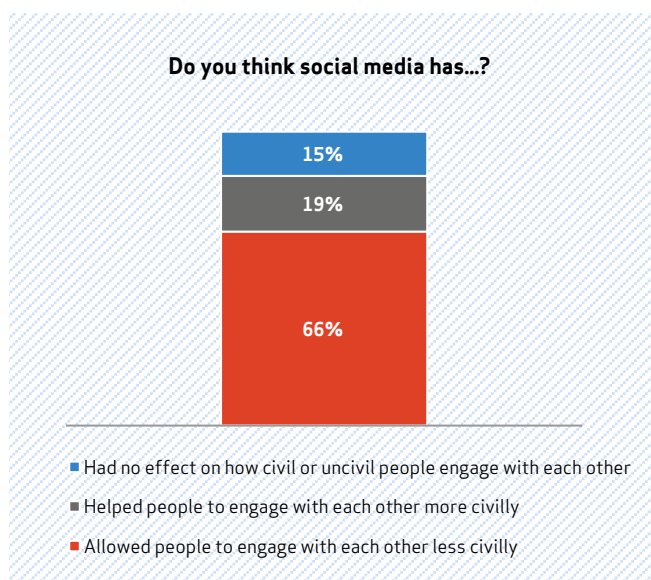
Six in ten Americans (59%) report incivility from what they read online in news articles and in comments associated with the articles. Two-thirds of Americans (67%) think that social media as a whole is uncivil. Facebook receives slightly higher civility ratings than the other social sites (34%) perhaps because users have control over what information they see and from whom.



Although they are just as likely as young Americans to blame the Internet/social media for worsening civility, Americans 65 years and older are much less likely than those ages 18-34 to perceive social media as a whole as uncivil (41% vs. 78%). It's possible that older Americans, who are less likely to be heavy social media users, have enough information to blame the Internet/social media but don't have enough experience with specific platforms to be able to rate their relative levels of civility.



Americans may perceive social media as uncivil and blame it for the erosion of civility because of the way it allows people to easily communicate with each other. Two-thirds of Americans (66%) agree that social media has allowed people to engage with each other less civilly. Those who use social media are more likely than those who don't to agree that social media has worsened civil discourse and behavior (67% vs. 59%), which surely stems from their direct experience using social networks.

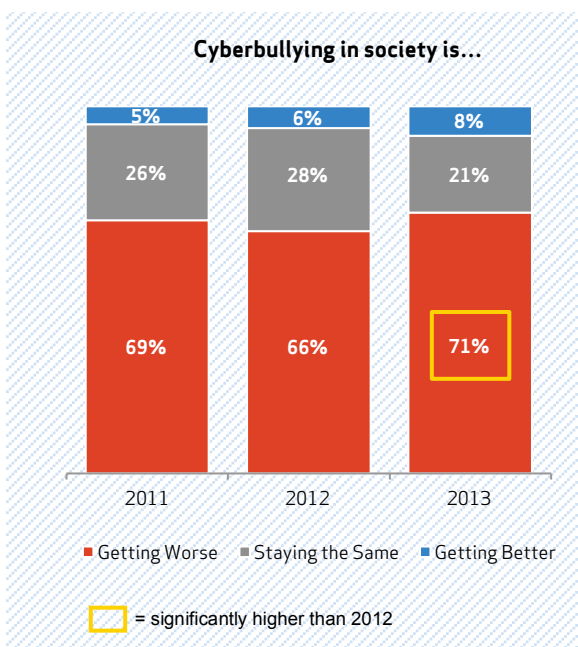


“From the start, uncivil discourse has been an element of web-based culture and online discussions. As social media becomes more mainstream, it’s not surprising to see the numbers on the rise. Enterprising businesses will figure out a way to separate uncivil from civil commentary, and as part, personalize conversation threads to deliver optimal value. The remarkable thing about the Internet is that it is the ultimate laboratory for problem-solving and ingenuity.”

Chris Perry
Global President, Digital Communications, Weber Shandwick

The internet: the modern-day playground for bullies

Online bullying – or “cyberbullying” – continues to be of great concern. As more Americans blame the Internet for rising incivility, more Americans report that cyberbullying is getting worse. Significantly more people believe cyberbullying in society is getting worse this year than in 2012 (71% vs. 66%) and concern over children being cyberbullied is at its highest level since we began our study in 2010 (43% saying they worry “a great deal”).



It is not just that cyberbullying has received more media attention and therefore more Americans are aware of it as a disturbing trend. Personal experience with online incivility is also on the rise. Reports of being a victim of cyberbullying have increased significantly since a year ago and nearly threefold between 2011 and 2013 (9% vs. 24%). Groups that experienced an increase in cyberbullying by five or more percentage points include those under 50 years old, women and those with children.

% personally experienced cyberbullying

	2012	2013
Total	18%	24%
Age 18-34	29%	39%
Age 35-49	17%	25%
Age 50-64	13%	11%
Age 65+	6%	12%
Men	21%	25%
Women	16%	24%
Parent	21%	32%
Non-parent	17%	20%

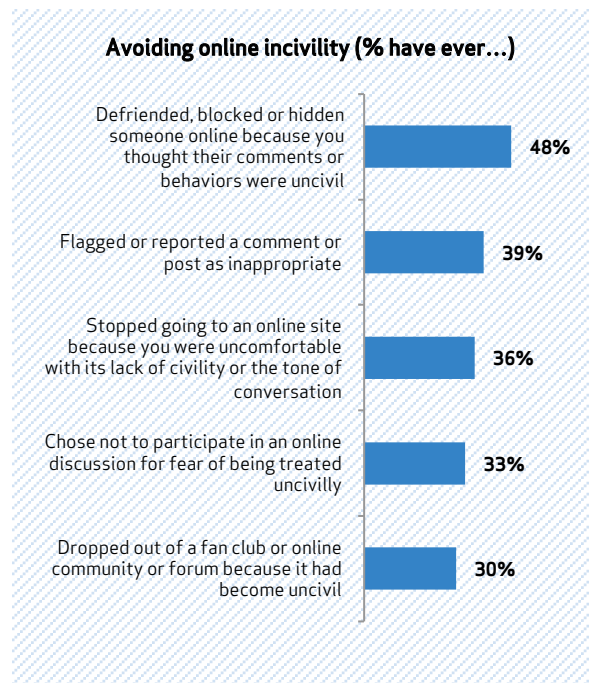
■ = significant increase vs. 2012

Parents this year are significantly more likely to say that their children have experienced cyberbullying than in 2012 (25% vs. 17%) and reports of cyberbullying against kids have grown nearly threefold since 2011 (8%).

Incivility changes online behavior

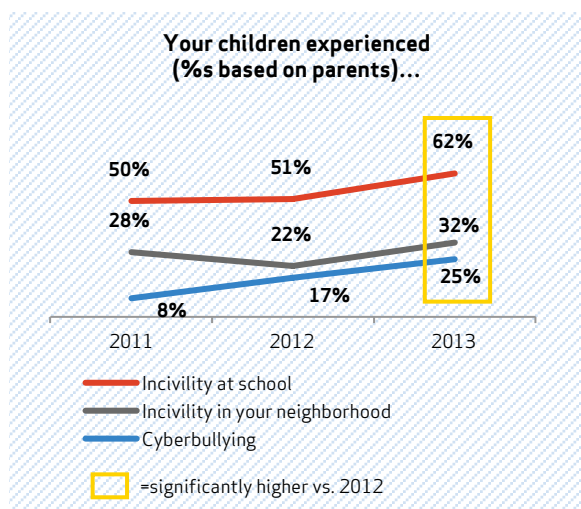
Our survey shows that incivility triggers changes in online behavior. Because of the lack of civility in behavior or tone of conversation, nearly half of Americans (48%) have defriended, blocked or hidden someone online because you thought their comments or behaviors were uncivil, nearly four in 10 have flagged or reported a comment or post as inappropriate (39%) or have stopped going to an online site because it made them uncomfortable (36%). One-third (33%) opted out of an online discussion altogether. Slightly fewer (30%) have dropped out of an uncivil fan club or online community.

These changes in online behavior may have both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, Americans may be taking a stand against incivility by refusing to deal with inappropriate online behavior and declining to visit sites where they encounter incivility. But these actions also suggest that people who may have more balanced viewpoints are driven out of conversations and from sites they would otherwise take part in. Either way, Americans are developing coping mechanisms to deal with their online experiences of rude and uncivil discourse.

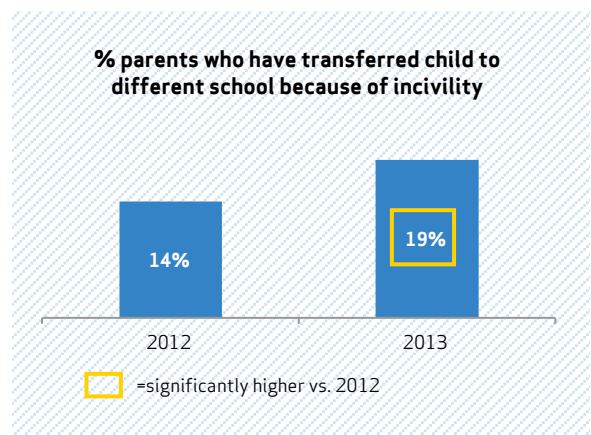


Incivility takes a seat in the classroom

Parents were significantly more likely this year than in 2011 and 2012 to report that their children experienced incivility in schools (62% vs. 50% and 51%). One-third of parents (32%) also say that their children experience incivility in their neighborhood.



Significantly more parents this year report transferring a child to a different school because they were treated uncivilly, either online or off (19% vs. 14% in 2012). With children experiencing incivility in their neighborhoods, at school and online, it is likely that incivility in the community as a whole moved parents to transfer their children.



Incivility goes to work

Positively, perceptions of the workplace as uncivil have only slightly risen over the past few years, though there is an upward trend nonetheless. The rate of Americans personally experiencing incivility at work dropped slightly after 2011 but still remains fairly high (37%).

“Since reputation is a company’s most competitive asset, workplace incivility cannot be taken for granted. Incivility can negatively impact retention and recruitment not to mention customer service. Ultimately, there’s a reputation cost.”

Leslie Gaines-Ross

Chief Reputation Strategist, Weber Shandwick

Workplace Incivility	2011	2012	2013
	%	%	%
Have personally experienced incivility at work	43	34	37
Believe general tone and level of civility of the workplace is uncivil	28	31	33
Have quit a job because it was an uncivil workplace	20	23	26

One of the more concerning workplace trends is the rise in Americans leaving their jobs because of incivility. From 2011 to 2013, there has been a 30% increase in Americans reporting they have quit a job because it was an uncivil workplace (20% vs. 26%). People who are more likely than the average American to have quit include those ages 18-34 (34%), parents (32%) and those with a household income under \$50K (31%). This willingness to quit a job creates a threat to company reputation and imposes extra costs due to worker turnover. Negative word of mouth and the spread of critical information about a workplace make it difficult for companies to hire top talent and maintain a loyal customer following. Because both current and former employees can help shape a company’s reputation, there is a need to maintain a civil workplace.

“Incivility can be the enemy of a collaborative culture. We know that the key to a positive, productive, engaging culture is listening, understanding and responding to concerns about behavior quickly and ensuring that leadership sets the tone for meaningful, respectful interaction.”

Andy Polansky

CEO, Weber Shandwick



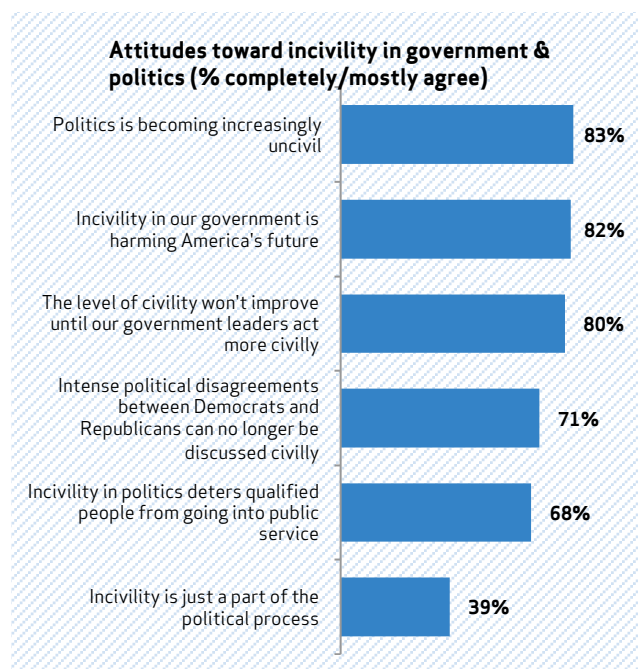
The paradox of political incivility

For the second year in a row, we found that seven in 10 Americans (69%) rate the government as uncivil. Regardless of political affiliation, Americans agree that incivility is a major problem today, that it has gotten worse over the past few years and that it is not likely to improve soon. Politicians are most frequently cited as the cause of worsening civility (62%) and the older Americans are, the more they blame political leaders.

General attitudes toward incivility in government and politics remain largely unchanged from previous years. The vast majority (83%) of Americans believes that politics is becoming increasingly uncivil and that incivility in government is harming our country's future (82%). These attitudes are shared by Americans regardless of political party affiliation.

Our nation's political process and the personal lives of Americans are both threatened by political incivility. Nearly seven in 10 Americans (68%) believe that political incivility deters qualified people from going into public service. On a personal level, approximately one-third of Americans report that uncivil expression of political views cost them a friendship, both online (37%) and offline (34%), at a significantly higher rate than in 2012.

Last year we hypothesized that political incivility may be approaching the "new normal," and this year's results provide more confirming evidence. Americans still seem resigned to the idea that incivility is just a part of the political process (39%) and that political disagreements between Democrats and Republicans can no longer be discussed civilly (71%). Unfortunately, 80% of Americans believe that our nation's civility problem won't improve until our government leaders act more civilly. Faced with a sort of paradox, American public life may be plagued by incivility for years to come.



In closing...

Civility in America 2013 found that incivility continues to plague American life. This year's study demonstrated that incivility is not just perception but reality as well. Although people believe that incivility is now ubiquitous, we also see that Americans encounter this type of behavior up close and personally. It is increasingly difficult to avoid incivility in most areas of society. Uncivil behavior takes a toll on friendships and online communications, and even has an effect on Americans' willingness to quit a job.

Of great concern is that the majority of Americans believe we have a civility crisis and that uncivil behavior is leading to an increase in violence.

When asked to define civility in their own words, survey respondents most frequently answered with variations of, "Treat others with respect." Following this Golden Rule when communicating and interacting with others is the first step toward improving our nation's civility crisis.



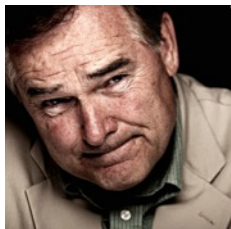
In the words of Americans



"Civility is treating others as you would want to be treated."



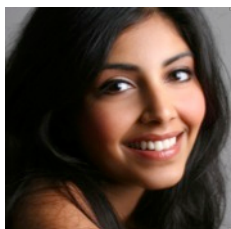
"Civility means respect, period. There is none in this country today."



"Civility is treating other people with respect even if you disagree."



"Incivility is rude, thoughtless words and actions."



"Incivility means being intentionally rude, disrespectful, and harmful or reckless with words."



"Incivility is being rude and saying or doing harmful things without considering the other person's feelings."

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