

Confidence in West Virginia Institutions

West Virginia Social Survey Report

WVSS-20-01

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Background

Social scientists and public commentators have raised concerns about Americans' declining confidence in social institutions, such as major companies and organized religion.

Indeed, surveys of the American population have shown a steady decline in the percentage of individuals expressing confidence in institutions at the national level, although confidence varies depending on the specific institution.

Because national surveys typically only include a few West Virginians, we know little about how residents in the state feel about major social institutions.

How confident are West Virginians in institutions in the state, such as major companies, medicine, and organized religion?

Highlights

- Of the institutions asked about in the West Virginia Social Survey, residents report greatest net confidence in the police and medicine, and the lowest net confidence in the press and organized labor.
- Women have more confidence in education and organized labor in the state compared to men.
- Political ideology affects respondents' confidence in certain WV institutions, with those identifying as liberal reporting more confidence in the press and medicine and reporting less confidence in major companies and organized religion compared to those identifying as conservative.

Table 1-Residents' Confidence in West Virginia Institutions

| Institution | Hardly any confidence | Some confidence | A great deal of confidence | Total | Net Positive (Great Deal – Hardly Any) |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-------|--|
| Police | 11.8% | 62.1% | 26.1% | 100% | 14.2% |
| Medicine | 15.3% | 58.1% | 26.6% | 100% | 11.4% |
| Organized religion | 18.1% | 58.8% | 23.1% | 100% | 5.2% |
| Education | 26.6% | 55.9% | 17.5% | 100% | -9.2% |
| Major companies | 21.3% | 68.4% | 10.3% | 100% | -10.9% |
| Organized labor | 26.9% | 62.4% | 10.7% | 100% | -16.2% |
| Press | 34.3% | 57.3% | 8.4% | 100% | -25.9% |

Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey (WVSS)

Rates of Confidence in WV Institutions

The West Virginia Social Survey (WVSS) asked respondents to rate their confidence regarding the following institutions in the state: major companies, education, organized labor, press, medicine, organized religion, and police.

Individuals could say that they have “a great deal of confidence,” “some confidence,” or “hardly any confidence” in each institution.

The majority of West Virginians say they have only “some confidence” in each institution they were asked about. This is similar to what is observed in national data, such as the General Social Survey.

More notable differences are seen in the percentages for the responses of “hardly any confidence” and “a great deal of confidence.

West Virginia residents were the most likely to express “a great deal of confidence” in medicine (26.6%), police (26.1%), and religion (23.3%).

In contrast, West Virginians were least likely to say they have a great deal of confidence in the press (8.4%), major companies (10.3%), and organized labor (10.7%). These institutions were also relatively high in receiving responses of “hardly any confidence.”

The institution of education also saw a relatively high percentage of West Virginians expressing “hardly any

confidence” (26.6%), but 17.5% of residents do express “a great deal of confidence” in education.

Net Positive Rating

We can assess the overall sentiment towards these institutions by considering the net positive level of confidence, represented by the difference between the “a great deal of confidence” and “hardly any confidence” categories.

Based on this net positive rating, West Virginia residents reported the greatest overall confidence in the police and medicine.

On the other hand, WV residents reported the lowest overall confidence in the press and organized labor.

Table 2- Net Positive Confidence in West Virginia Institutions by Residents' Gender

| Institution | Net Positive | Net Positive |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Males | Females |
| Police | 12.6% | 16.4% |
| Medicine | 11.5% | 12.0% |
| Organized religion | 4.7% | 5.4% |
| Education | -15.5% | -3.4% |
| Major companies | -12.4% | -9.7% |
| Organized labor | -25.7% | -6.8% |
| Press | -32.4% | -20.0% |

Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey (WVSS)

Differences by Gender

The West Virginia Social Survey indicates some differences in confidence in institutions by gender.

For example, 32.3% of men in West Virginia say that they have “hardly any confidence” in the institution of education in the state. This compares to 21.4% of women who report having hardly any confidence in the state’s educational institutions.

West Virginians’ confidence in the press and organized labor show similar gendered patterns. For example, 36.8% of men in the state say they have hardly any confidence in organized labor. This compares to 17.2% of women.

Similarly, 39.1% of men in West Virginia say they have hardly any confidence in the press. This compares to 30.0% of women in the state.

Differences by Political Ideology

The West Virginia Social Survey indicates that residents’ confidence in state institutions is strongly divided by political ideology.

For instance, 32.2% of individuals who describe themselves as politically conservative say they have “a great deal of confidence” in the police. This compares to 22.7% of those that describe themselves as moderate and

19.6% of those that identify as liberal.

Politically liberal West Virginians are also more likely to say they have “hardly any confidence” in major companies in the state. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of individuals in this group gave this rating to this institution, compared to 19.8% of political moderates and 16.2% of political conservatives.

Summary

The West Virginia Social Survey finds that the majority of respondents have at least some confidence in WV institutions, although no institution receives a majority of residents saying that they have a “great deal of confidence” in it.

Table 3-Net Positive Confidence in West Virginia Institutions by Residents' Political Ideology

| | Net Positive Liberals | Net Positive Moderates | Net Positive Conservatives |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Institution | | | |
| Police | 8.5% | 9.2% | 23.0% |
| Medicine | 23.4% | 10.4% | 9.7% |
| Organized religion | -24.9% | 2.5% | 22.3% |
| Education | -4.6% | -6.5% | -14.5% |
| Major companies | -27.5% | -8.6% | -6.1% |
| Organized labor | -12.2% | -11.9% | -22.3% |
| Press | 5.2% | -24.1% | -42.2% |

Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey (WVSS)

Overall, West Virginians report the least amount of confidence in the press and organized labor and the most confidence in the police and medicine.

However, confidence in the state's institutions varies by factors like the gender and political ideology of the resident.

Women in the state, for instance, report more confidence in education and organized labor relative to male residents.

West Virginians identifying as politically liberal are more likely to express confidence in medicine and the press compared to those identifying as politically conservative,

while the latter are more likely to express confidence in organized religion and major companies in the state.

Data Source

The WVSS is produced by the Survey Research Center at West Virginia University. The purpose of the WVSS is to gather information on the attitudes, concerns, and challenges facing WV residents.

The WVSS is a mail survey utilizing an address-based sample of nearly 5,000 households across the state.

The 2020 WVSS received nearly 1,900 responses for a response rate of 38.1% (American Association of Public Opinion Research Definition #3). Data

are weighted to be representative of the West Virginia adult population.

Suggested Citation

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