



The Associated Press-NORC  
Center for Public Affairs Research

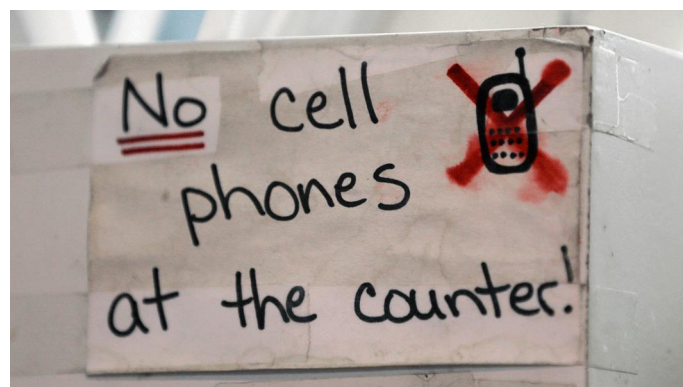
# RUDE BEHAVIOR IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

The behavior and speech of Americans has deteriorated in the last few decades, according to a recent poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. However, most Americans feel the disrespectful tone of political campaigns these days surpasses the level of rudeness in everyday life.

In general, the public disapproves of behavior ranging from using cellphones in restaurants to making sexist statements in public. At the same time, a large majority say political leaders should be held to a higher standard than average Americans, and many think candidates should be sensitive to the possibility of upsetting people while on the campaign trail.

Prominent politicians from both parties, including President Obama and House Speaker Paul Ryan, have criticized the rancorous character of the Republican campaign this year, and the public agrees. But the public perceives different levels of rudeness for the two major parties. The Republican campaign is viewed as rude and disrespectful by nearly twice as many Americans as characterize the fight for the Democratic nomination in that way (78 percent vs. 41 percent). About a third of Americans consider both campaigns to be at least somewhat ill-mannered.

The nationwide poll of 1,004 adults used AmeriSpeak, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted between March 17 and 21, 2016, online and using landlines and cellphones.



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## Three Things You Should

**Know** about The AP-NORC Poll on rudeness in the United States:

- 1) **While 74 percent of Americans** feel that, overall, people have become more ill-mannered in the past 20 or 30 years, 68 percent say the disrespectful tone of political campaigns these days surpasses the rudeness of everyday life.
- 2) **Most people consider vulgar language and bigoted comments inappropriate.** However younger adults are more inclined to admit to this type of behavior than older Americans.
- 3) **The Republican campaign is seen as rude and disrespectful** by 78 percent of Americans; 41 percent say the same about the Democratic campaign. Thirty-five percent say both campaigns are rude and disrespectful.

Some of the poll's key findings are:

- Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of Americans say people are more rude these days than they were 20 or 30 years ago, a finding similar to one seen in an Associated Press/Ipsos poll taken in 2005.<sup>1</sup>
- Even so, two-thirds (68 percent) see political campaigns this year as outdoing the public in levels of rudeness.
- Most people consider vulgar language and bigoted comments inappropriate. More than 80 percent say remarks and jokes about race or about gender and sexuality are unacceptable. There is less condemnation for these types of comments made in private, but still more than 6 in 10 regard them as improper as well.
- Few people admit to committing any of these offensive behaviors personally, although some conduct is acknowledged more than others. For example, only 7 percent say they sometimes or frequently make remarks about someone's gender or sexuality in public. But 34 percent own up to using profanity in public at least occasionally.
- Specifically, the F-word, considered by most to be improper, has increasingly crept into casual use. A quarter of the public admits to daily use, up from 15 percent in an Associated Press/Ipsos poll conducted in 2006.<sup>2</sup>
- Half of Americans regard the use of cellphones in restaurants as unacceptable and 35 percent do not see the behavior as problematic. As usual with newer technology, there is a deep divide between the views of younger and older Americans. Seventy percent of people aged 60 and older object to the use of cellphones in restaurants; nearly half (48 percent) of those under 30 have no complaint.
- Half the public sees this year's campaign for the Republican nomination as mostly rude and disrespectful, and another 29 percent consider it as somewhat rude and disrespectful. Even 8 in 10 Republicans (79 percent) regard their party's process to determine a nominee for president as ill-mannered.
- In contrast, only 16 percent say the campaign between the Democratic candidates for president is mostly rude and disrespectful, with another 25 percent who consider it somewhat rude and disrespectful.
- Eighty percent of Americans say political leaders should be held to a higher standard of behavior than other people. Only 15 percent believe that candidates should not be sensitive to the possibility of upsetting other people while they are campaigning.

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press/Ipsos Rudeness Study, August 2005.

[http://surveys.ap.org/data/Ipsos/national/2005/2005-08-24%20AP%20Topline%20results%20\\_rudeness\\_.pdf](http://surveys.ap.org/data/Ipsos/national/2005/2005-08-24%20AP%20Topline%20results%20_rudeness_.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Associated Press/Ipsos Profanity Study, March 2006.

<http://surveys.ap.org/data/Ipsos/national/2006/2006-03-28%20AP%20Profanity%20topline.pdf>

## REMARKS ABOUT RACE OR GENDER AND SEXUALITY ARE CONSIDERED OFF-LIMITS FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

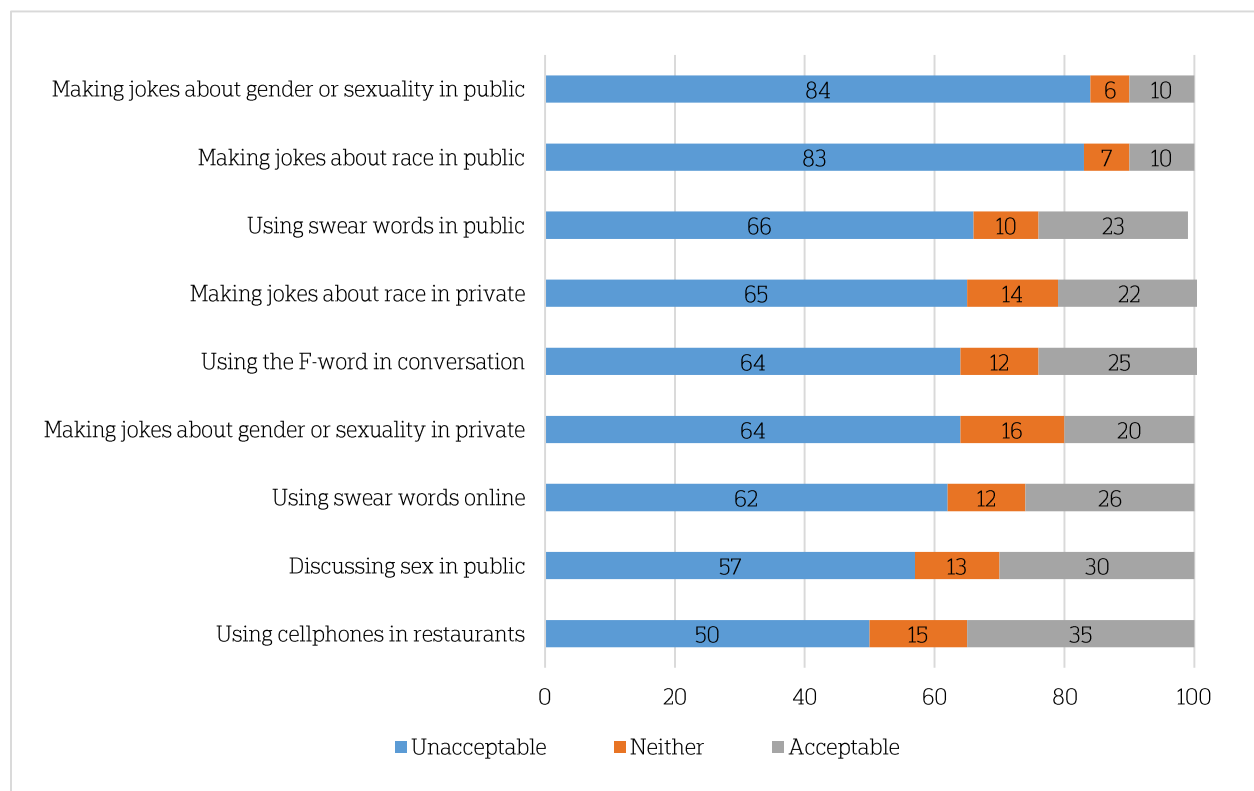
More than 8 in 10 Americans say that making jokes or comments about race or a person’s gender or sexual orientation in public is unacceptable behavior and few admit to doing it more than rarely.

Slightly fewer but still a majority (about 6 in 10) think making such jokes or comments in private is still unacceptable and an overwhelming majority (more than 8 in 10) say they make such jokes in private rarely or never.

More men say making jokes about race (27 percent) and gender or sexuality (28 percent) are acceptable compared to women (16 percent and 13 percent, respectively). Men are also more likely to say they sometimes or often make jokes or comments about race or gender and sexuality, either in private or in public.

According to the latest poll, men are more likely than women to say it is acceptable to use the F-word in conversation, swear in public, or swear online. They are also more likely to admit doing it.

### There is widespread agreement about what behavior is unacceptable.

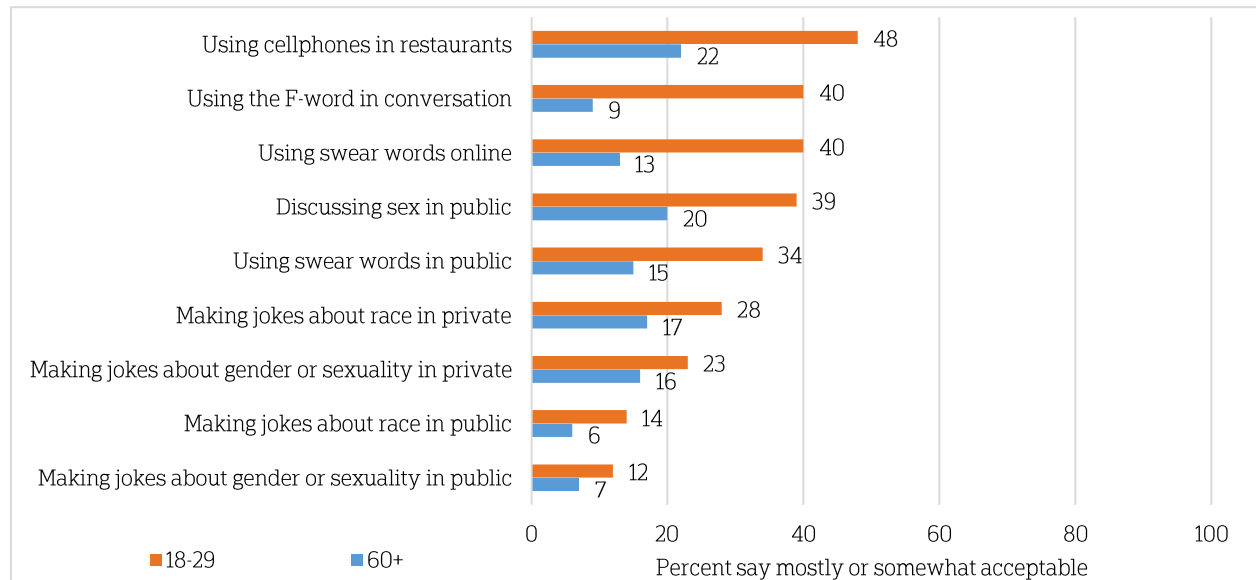


**Question: Here are some questions about some people’s behavior in this country—that is, the way they act and talk to each other. For each of the following, please say if you think this behavior is generally acceptable, unacceptable or neither acceptable nor unacceptable?**

Thirty-one percent of men, but just 16 percent of women say they use the F-word in conversation at least once a day.

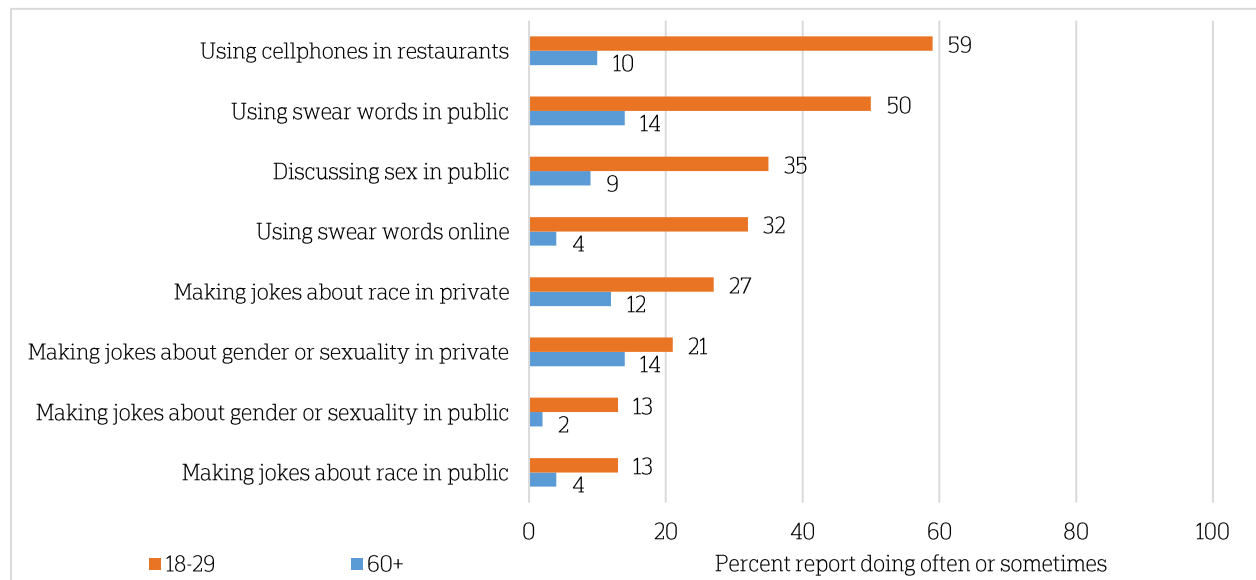
Half of the public says using cellphones in restaurants is unacceptable. Thirty-five percent say it is acceptable and a similar number (37 percent) admit to doing so sometimes or often. Young people age 18-29 are particularly likely to say it is acceptable versus 34 percent of those age 45-59 and 22 percent of those age 60 and older. They are also more likely to report doing so (59 percent vs. 37 percent and 10 percent, respectively). Similar age differences emerge on many other behaviors asked about.

**Stark age differences emerge on the acceptability of various behaviors.**



**Question: Here are some questions about some people’s behavior in this country—that is, the way they act and talk to each other. For each of the following, please say if you think this behavior is generally acceptable, unacceptable or neither acceptable nor unacceptable?**

**Young adults are much more likely than older adults to report these behaviors.**



**Question: How often do you personally do each of the following?**

## THE TONE OF THE 2016 POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IS ILL-MANNERED; AMERICANS WANT MORE CIVILITY FROM THEIR LEADERS.

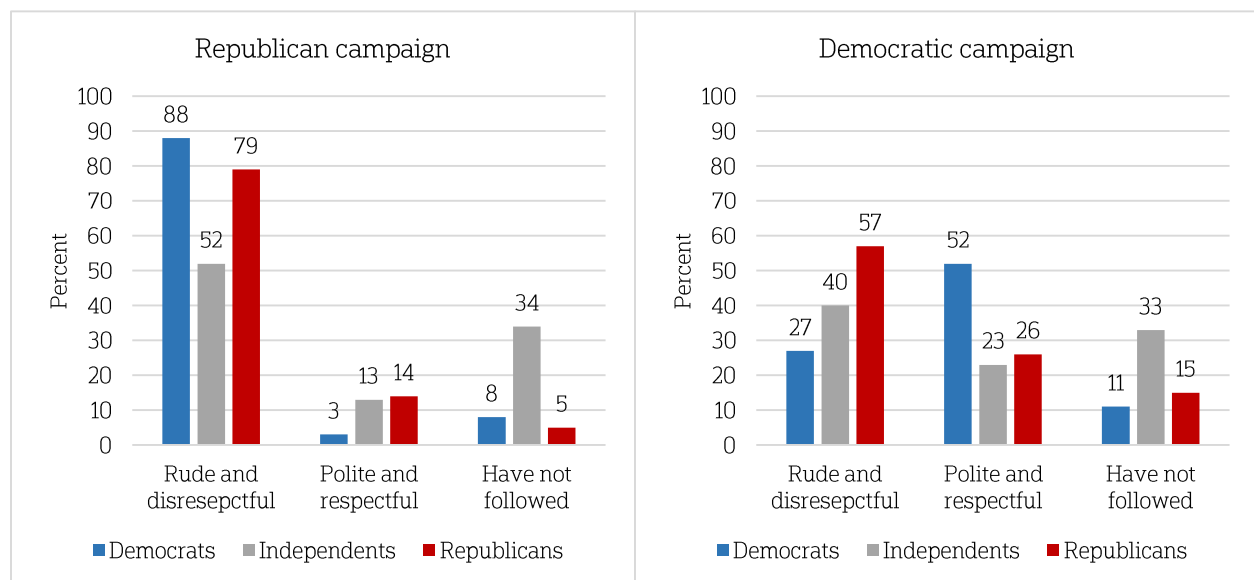
Nearly three-quarters of the public says that people are ruder today than 20 or 30 years ago. This is particularly true among those age 45 and older, where 80 percent say people are ruder today compared to 68 percent of those age 44 and younger. A 2005 Associated Press/Ipsos poll found similar attitudes about changes in manners, with 69 percent saying at the time that people were ruder then than they were 20 or 30 years ago.

Even with general rudeness perceived as being on the rise, most Americans find the discourse of the current political campaigns exceptionally rude even by comparison. Nearly 7 in 10 say that the tone of this year’s political campaigns are ruder than the tone of everyday life in the United States. Democrats (78 percent) are more likely than Republicans (65 percent) or independents (53 percent) to say the tone of the campaigns is particularly rude.

The Republican presidential campaign is seen by many as particularly discourteous. Nearly 8 in 10 say the tone of the Republicans’ primary campaign has been rude and disrespectful. The public is divided about the Democratic campaign: 4 in 10 say the Democratic campaign for president has been rude and disrespectful and just as many say the opposite. Just 1 in 10 say the Republican campaign has been polite and respectful.

Both Democrats and Republicans characterize the Republican race as rude, though Democrats are more likely to say so. Even deeper partisan divides emerge in regards to the Democratic race.

### Widespread agreement about the tone of the Republican campaign, but partisan divides emerge regarding the Democratic campaign.



Questions: How would you characterize the tone of the campaign for the [Republican/Democratic] nomination for president so far?

As Americans say that politicians are even ruder than what they see in everyday American life, a large majority (80 percent) says it is better if political leaders are held to a higher standard of behavior than other people. Just 18 percent say it is better if political leaders mostly behave the way regular people do. Most Americans (84 percent) say political candidates should be at least somewhat sensitive to the possibility of upsetting other people when they are campaigning.

When asked whether a leader should be more aware of the possibility of upsetting or offending people or unafraid to say things that might offend or upset some people, most Americans think leaders should be able to do both. Just 2 in 10 say being sensitive to the prospect of offending someone is more important. Just about the same number say not worrying about the possibility of giving offense is more important.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

### Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak®, which is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted between March 17 and 21, 2016, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak®, and 1,004 completed the survey—785 via the web and 219 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 29.2 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 36.9 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 93.9 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 10.1 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.8 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: [www.apnorc.org](http://www.apnorc.org).

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## ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS–NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.

NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.