

STATES OF CONFUSION

WHY AMERICANS DON'T UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

KITE & KEY
MEDIA

[SCRIPT]

They're all around us.

You see them every day, without knowing who they really are.

They could be working in your office.

They could be teaching your children.

They could even be in your own home.

And by the time you find out, it might be too late to protect yourself from the...

...Floridians.

Or New Yorkers.

Or Texans.

Or Californians.

Whatever freaks you out.

Sounds ridiculous, right?
Well, it is.

Because when it comes to how we think about people from other parts of the country...we are being [BLEEP] children.

[OPENING SEQUENCE] Americans are a patriotic people. We love our country. Or at least we love parts of it.



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[CLIPS OF PEOPLE INSULTING TEXAS, NEW YORK, FLORIDA, AND CALIFORNIA.]

For the record, hating on those four states...is hating on 1/3 of the country's entire population.

The state that gets it the worst? New Jersey. According to an (unscientific) [2020 analysis](#), the Garden State generates the most hostility from the rest of the country and the least state pride from its residents. The least hated? Idaho.



But hang on. Are we sure we hate each other? And, if so, why? After all, how much do we really know about the rest of the country? Surprisingly, more than 1 in 10 Americans have never traveled outside of the state they were born in. And, more than half of Americans have been to 10 states or fewer.¹



Where do Americans go when they hit the road? The [most visited state](#) in the nation is Florida. The least visited? North Dakota. Interestingly, there is no state in the Union that more than 50% of Americans report having been to (Florida got 48%).

Ask most of us about a state that we've never visited and we likely won't be able to muster much more than a sentence.

Try saying something meaningful about Idaho without bringing up potatoes. Most of us wouldn't know to mention that it has a wider variety of gemstones than any place on earth except Africa.²

What about Iowa? Probably something about corn...not about it having **an entire city, complete with a university, all devoted to transcendental meditation**³—which you'd need too if your state was overrun with people who want to be president.

The town in question—Maharishi Vedic City—has both passionate supporters and dogged critics. It has generated tensions with the nearby town of Fairfield, Iowa and faced accusations of being a money-making scam.



The reality is that most of us have never seen most of these places or met most of these people, which means we may not understand our own country as well as we think.

And you can't just base your views on the nation on wherever you live, because **chances are the rest of America is not like where you live**. We are a wildly diverse country, by every measure.

In North Dakota, 40% of the jobs are in agriculture. In New Jersey, it's 2%.⁴

If you picked any two people in California at random, the odds that they'd be of different races would be 70%. If you ran the same experiment in Maine, the odds would be 18.5%.⁵

In Montana, more than 66% of households have a gun. In Massachusetts, it's about 14%.⁶



No matter who you are, there's probably a slice of America that's just right for you—and a slice that's just right for someone who's your total opposite. How many places in the world can you say that about? It's kind of amazing: We've let 50 different states fly their respective freak flags and it's all... kinda worked.

Or at least it used to kinda work. One of the reasons it's getting tougher: Research has shown that the more time we spend learning about people who aren't like us from the media—as opposed to learning about people who aren't like us from, you know, actually meeting those people—the more we tend to think they must be monsters. And, in a country full of red states and blue states, this is where those cultural judgments start bleeding into political ones.

The ironic corollary of this principle: The less attention you pay to current events, the more likely you are to have a realistic understanding of the political divisions in the country. Americans who "rarely or never" follow the news perform dramatically better than those who follow the news all the time at estimating what people who disagree with them actually believe.



A 2019 Pew Poll found that 63% of Republicans said that Democrats were less patriotic than other Americans. The same poll reported that 75% of Democrats said Republicans were more closed-minded than other Americans.⁸ Another study found that over 1/3 of people would be upset if their child married someone from the other party.⁹



How frequent are marriages across party lines? Perhaps more than you think, although they're on the decline. In 2016, 30% of married couples reported not sharing the same party identification. By 2020, it was down to 21%. One major caveat: Most of these marriages are a between a partisan and an independent, not a Democrat and a Republican.

Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, of course, but it's worth asking what those opinions are based on.

When researchers asked Republicans to guess how many Democrats would say they were proud to be an American, they guessed around half. The real number: around 80%.

When they asked Democrats what percentage of Republicans believe that immigration could be good for the country, they estimated that it was...about half. In reality, it was around 90%.

And by the way, we don't just misunderstand each other, we misunderstand the country. A 2018 study found that only about 1/3 of Americans could even pass the U.S. Citizenship exam.¹⁰



While there's a tendency to believe that modern Americans are uniquely lacking in civic literacy, it's not true. Polling from 2021 showed 56% of Americans could name the three branches of government. The number in 1952? 19%.



Regional and partisan differences aren't going to go away. But as the data shows, they look a little more modest when we start dealing with real people instead of caricatures.

America is a big, boisterous place with room for all kinds of beliefs and lifestyles. We all have our differences, of course, but there's probably even more that binds us all together.

Like hating on New Jersey.

[END OF SCRIPT]

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SOURCES:

- 1 [Percentage Of Americans Who Never Traveled Beyond The State Where They Were Born? A Surprise.](#) (Lea Lane) – One Poll, via *Forbes*
- 2 [Digital Atlas of Idaho](#) – Idaho State University
- 3 [Transcendental Meditation Thrives in Iowa](#) – ABC News
- 4 [Feeding the Economy: Agricultural Jobs by State](#) – American Farm Bureau Federation
- 5 [2020 Census: Racial and Ethnic Diversity Index by State](#) – U.S. Census Bureau
- 6 [State-Level Estimates of Household Firearm Ownership](#) – RAND Corporation
- 7 [The Perception Gap](#) – More in Common
- 8 [How Partisans View Each Other](#) – Pew Research Center
- 9 [How Republicans and Democrats Would Feel if Their Child Married Across the Political Aisle](#) – YouGovAmerica
- 10 [National Survey Finds Just 1 in 3 Americans Would Pass Citizenship Test](#) – The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

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