



Wednesday, September 23, 2026 - Park 39

This Signature Event kicks off the 2026 Bridging Movement Summit co-hosted by American Public Square and the Listen First Project.

Trust is the foundation of a healthy democracy. Yet trust in our institutions, media, communities, and even one another has fallen to historic lows. How did we arrive at this moment? Who—or what—is responsible for the growing distrust that shapes American life? And most importantly, what can we do to rebuild it?

FEATURED PANELISTS



Mike Abrams

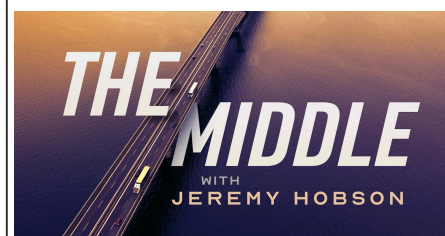
Mike Abrams is deputy editor for Trust at The New York Times, leading a team that helps readers understand the organization's journalism and values. Since joining The Times in 2004, he has also served on the Standards team and as director of journalism practices and principles. Previously an award-winning reporter and editor in Virginia and Pennsylvania, he is a Penn State graduate and former editor in chief of The Daily Collegian.



MODERATOR

Jeremy Hobson is creator, host, and executive producer of The Middle, heard weekly on nearly 500 NPR stations, SiriusXM, podcasts, and YouTube. The live call-in program creates unscripted conversations among Americans who often disagree but remain willing to engage.

Previously, Hobson hosted NPR's Here & Now and Marketplace Morning Report. He has reported from more than 25 states and abroad, and has anchored NPR special coverage of major national events. He began broadcasting at age nine in Urbana, Illinois.



TUNE IN TO
THE MIDDLE TOMORROW TO
LISTEN TO A BROADCAST OF
THIS CONVERSATION
NATIONALLY



Olajumoke "Jummy" Banjo

Olajumoke "Jummy" Banjo is Senior Director of the Alliance for Social Trust at the Aspen Institute, where she leads a national initiative connecting leaders and local efforts that strengthen trust. Her career spans education, law, public policy, and nonprofit leadership, including work at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and Georgetown Law. She earned degrees from Howard University, George Washington University Law School, and Georgetown University Law Center.



Rev. Dr. Branden S. Polk

Rev. Dr. Branden S. Polk is Director of Activations at Stand Together, building partnerships that address intolerance and division. A social worker, ordained minister, and artist, he leads Stand Together's investment in Realize the Dream, founded by Martin Luther King III, and helped launch the New Pluralists collaborative. He holds a Doctor of Social Work from Simmons University and an undergraduate degree in Theatre from William & Mary.

ROVING REPORTER - Mary Sanchez

FACT CHECKER - Allen Rostron and UMKC Law Students

APS CIVILITY TOOLS

During each program, American Public Square uses these tools to ensure conversations remain substantive, respectful, and based on facts.



MODERATED DISCUSSIONS

APS events are moderated by an objective facilitator who ensures each panelist is given due time to represent their position. Questions are tough, but fair and allow free flow of conversation.



NO APPLAUSE

APS has a rule that no applause is allowed during a program except at the beginning and end of the event. This is done so everyone can hear the conversation and helps encourage neutrality in the midst of the discussion.



CIVILITY BELLS

Civility Bells are made available for the audience to ring when panelists wade into false, overly dramatic or hyper-emotional territory. When a bell rings, the speaker must stop talking.



FACT SHEETS

APS compiles a fact sheet in advance of each Signature Program. This is reviewed beforehand by the panelists and distributed to the audience to ensure the discussion begins from a "common well" of information.



FACT CHECKERS

APS Programs feature real-time fact checkers to confirm the validity of comments made during the program. Audience members are encouraged to request specific fact checks throughout the discussion.



ROVING REPORTERS

The program's Roving Reporter is often from a local media outlet and engages with the audience to gather and curate questions, often identifying themes to ensure the most frequent questions are answered.



SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?

Panelists are given the opportunity to make closing statements in the form of answers to these questions. This allows them to restate their position on the topic at hand in a way that is actionable for the audience.

PLEASE SHARE YOUR RESPONSES AFTER THE EVENT

This feedback is very important to us. We value your time and want to design programming that helps you deepen your understanding of crucial issues as we build stronger, more connected communities. Take the post-event survey by using your smartphone to scan the QR code on the right or take the survey when we email it to you after the event.



TAKE THE SURVEY

GET READY FOR EVENING AT THE SQUARE 2026

Our end-of-year gala will be held on December 7, 2026 at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Learn more about our speakers and sponsorship opportunities at EveningattheSquare.org

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



**David & Cathi
Brain**





American Public Square is excited to begin a partnership with **AllSides**, a national leader in media bias analysis and balanced news coverage. Together we are launching curated fact sheets that draw from AllSides' expertise. We are sharing some immigration research from their Headline Roundup and Similarity Hub, a tool designed to highlight where credible sources across the political spectrum actually agree.

- **87% of Americans "have at least a fair amount of trust in voting in person on Election Day when it comes to ensuring free, fair, and secure elections."** *States United Democracy Center*
- **66% of U.S. adults "generally have a favorable opinion about working across party lines."** *Ipsos*
 - Republicans: 66%
 - Democrats: 69%
 - Independents: 70%
- **85% of Americans "think most elected officials don't care what people like them think."** *Pew Research*
- **84% of Americans "want both political parties to work together to solve problems for our country."** *More In Common*
 - Republicans: 83%
 - Democrats: 87%
 - Independents: 63%
- **84% of Americans "say members of Congress do a "very" or "somewhat bad" job of working with members of the opposing party."** *Pew Research*
 - Republicans: 85%
 - Democrats: 83%
- **78% "are at least somewhat interested in working to achieve a mutual goal that improves their community with someone from a different racial or ethnic background from them."** *More In Common*
- **75% "are at least somewhat interested in working to achieve a mutual goal that improves their community with someone from a different religious background from them."** *More In Common*
- **78% of Americans "think American society is less united than it was ten years ago."** *Ipsos*
 - Republicans: 85%
 - Democrats: 77%
- **78% of Americans "say there is too little attention paid to important issues facing the country."** *Pew Research*
 - Republicans: 81%
 - Democrats: 75%
- **63% of Americans "say that ordinary Americans care about making the political system work well."** *Pew Research Center*
 - Republicans: 67%
 - Democrats: 61%
- **79% "say news organizations tend to favor one side when presenting the news on political and social issues."** *Pew Research Center*
 - Republicans: 91%
 - Democrats: 69%

- **78% "say social media companies have too much power and influence in politics today."** *Pew Research Center*
 - Republicans: 84%
 - Democrats: 74%
- **76% "are of the opinion that news organizations are motivated by financial interests over serving the public interest."** *Gallup*
 - Republicans: 81%
 - Democrats: 69%
- **75% "say it is possible to improve the level of confidence Americans have in the media."** *Pew Research Center*
 - Republicans: 70%
 - Democrats: 80%
- **75% "say they have a lot or some trust in the information that comes from local news organizations."** *Pew Research Center*
 - Republicans: 66%
 - Democrats: 84%

See more statistics like this in [AllSides' Similarity Hub](#).

- **73% rate the overall health of U.S. democracy as only "fair" or "poor."**
Source: Elon University, 2025
- **53% say democracy in the United States is functioning poorly.**
Source: AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs
- **Only 30% believe democracy in the U.S. is functioning well.** *Source: AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs*
- **69% believe the signers of the Declaration of Independence would feel more disappointment than pride about modern American democracy.**
Source: Elon University, 2025
- **64% have little or no confidence that U.S. political institutions will make mostly good decisions over the next 50 years.**
Source: Elon University, 2025
- **80% say they sometimes feel that no political party or movement represents their views.**
Source: Elon University, 2025
- **74% believe most politicians are primarily interested in benefiting themselves.**
Source: American Enterprise Institute, Survey Center on American Life, 2025
- **68% believe elected officials today are worse than leaders of the past.** *Source: Elon University, 2025*
- **68% predict America will become more politically divided by 2076.** *Elon University*
- **70% believe the country is experiencing greater turbulence than is typical in American history.** *Elon University, 2025*