

Fluctuation of Congressional Approval Ratings Throughout the Years



Technology is socially limiting



Mackenzie McDermott

A small room is lit dimly by a floor lamp in the corner. It's nearly three in the morning and the building is quiet. Three of my best friends and I are sprawled out on couches and armchairs, only our long put-aside textbooks and folders in front of us. We talk emphatically with our hands about everything from childhood stories to last weekend's big party, only checking our phones every once in a while to be reminded of just how little time we have until class. There isn't any movie playing in the dark room, and there's no TV on in the background. No texting or Facebook or YouTube videos. Just a few friends sitting, talking and laughing. I've never had more fun.

So many of us are dependant on the technology which surrounds us. Interactions are made easier through a laptop and TV is something to focus on if conversation runs dry. We cling to the myriad of technological lifelines all around us.

I wouldn't exclude myself from the group of the addicted. I carry around a little touch screen computer in my pocket everywhere I go. If I'm bored or in an awkward situation, you better believe I'm going to be glued to that thing as if I'm typing in nuclear launch codes rather than scrolling through Twitter or texting about what time I'm going to lunch. I understand that I use technology too much. Admittance is the first step to recovery.

Ninety-nine percent of American households own at least one TV, according to csun.edu. Sixty-six percent have three or more, just in case you need to go to the bathroom and don't want to miss any commercials. Family rooms are no longer built around fireplaces and coffee tables, but around the big screen on the wall. Rather than the focus of our interaction being the people around us, it becomes the people on the screen. As a total TV junkie, it pains me to denounce television as a vice that creates a wall between friends and family, but that's what it often becomes when it is the centerpiece — the focus of attention. Like fast food and corn syrup, it must be used only in moderation. But if TV is a screen door, phones are soundproof steel.

A study at pewinternet.org showed that 88 percent of U.S. adults own a cell phone. Of these, more than half have smartphones. The numbers are higher among undergraduates than they are with those older than 25. Our generation is the most Internet-savvy yet, and these pocket-sized devices with Internet access are just too much for us to keep our hands off of. Eye contact and complete, undivided attention are difficult with someone involved in a long-winded conversation via text message or laughing to themselves about a funny tweet they just read. Usually the compulsion to grab for a phone is inadvertent, almost an involuntary reflex, but that doesn't make it feel any less rude.

We are all guilty of it. You just took it out to check the time, but you have a text and a Facebook notification and before you can stop yourself, 15 minutes have gone by. Not that you know this, because you probably never did get around to checking the time. You're probably late for class or your friend has been telling his hilarious story to utterly deaf ears. This behavior has become so commonplace that no one says anything about it. Instead of asking a friend for their attention, we're more likely to shrug it off and assume they're still listening. When this is the mindset, conversation is one-sided and dull.

Technology is amazing. It allows me to talk face-to-face with a sister who lives across an ocean, keeps family up to date, shares pictures and makes it so my mother can call and find out what I'm up to whenever her heart desires. I love TV, movies and music, but I'd much rather personally interact with those around me than stare at a screen full of people I don't know. Laughing with friends is much better than a laugh track, and conversation is much more stimulating than a sitcom. They say life is stranger than fiction, so unplug the TV, turn off the cell phone and sit in a dingy room with a few close friends. It might be more interesting than you think.

Mackenzie McDermott is a freshman English major from Springfield, Ill.

Political gridlock is unavoidable



Robert Overmann

Every time I hear a complaint about gridlock among politicians in Washington D.C., I want to throw up.

Words such as "bipartisanship" and "compromise" often are tossed around by politicians. As voters, we love to hear this. We become convinced that an individual candidate, if elected, can "fix" Washington. Not only will this broken Washington never be "fixed," the blame lies entirely with the American electorate.

We want a candidate who we think has integrity and is open to compromise. Let's examine what these terms really mean. Integrity is the quality of being honest and strongly adhering to one's moral principles. An individual who is open to compromise acknowledges that they won't get their way all of the time — they realize progress requires teamwork.

In the world of politics, though, it seems the two are polar opposites. If a lawmaker compromises on an issue, they're accused by their liberal or conservative base of lacking integrity. If they refuse to compromise, they're seen as promoting gridlock.

In a democratic society, lawmakers are at the mercy of their constituents. If they even occasionally support measures unpopular with their electorate — also known as compromise — they'll likely be voted out of office. What a candidate personally believes to be the best course of action is immaterial. What American voters actually want is not compromise — not by those who think the way they do, anyhow. They want their way, and only their way, 100 percent of the time.

Voting districts tend to become highly polarized, contributing to gridlock. Some of these polarized voting districts are undoubtedly due to gerrymandering, the process of drawing voting districts to favor a particular political party. The less obvious and more driving force behind this, however, is that people tend to self-sort themselves into polarized geographic areas — those of similar age, ethnicity and mindset tend to live in similar geographic areas, according to a Feb. 6 CNN article. These communities also tend to vote similarly.

Think about the community of Truman State — its members tend to be relatively affluent, relatively intelligent, young and predominantly white. One reason we chose to attend school here is that we felt that we fit in. I bet, on the whole, we tend to exhibit similar political beliefs and voting tendencies.

There are two ways to "fix" politics in Washington. The first would eliminate gridlock, result in quick action on important issues, stop shameless pandering of politicians to voters with meaningless buzzwords and stop the waste of billions of dollars on election spending. Sounds great, right?

It's known as a dictatorship.

The second way the deadlock in Washington could be "fixed" is if human beings could be reprogrammed to stop crying "I want everything my way, right now!" and consider that other people with different perspectives also have reasonable positions about issues.

That's never going to happen.

I tend to doubt that most Americans have any idea what's good for themselves or their country, no matter how certain they are about the correctness of their own political views. This entire uproar over gridlock throughout our political system is a perfect illustration of that ignorance.

Perhaps we should begin viewing this slow and difficult process of change in a democracy, often characterized as gridlock, in a more positive light. Because we have such polarized views, we act as buffers to each others' extreme views. The slow, cumbersome process of change in a democracy ensures we don't rashly enact radical reforms which too steeply favor one demographic group over another.

A democracy isn't perfect. Change comes slowly, if at all. That change can be cumbersome, result in gridlock and come at a high financial cost. Unfair and discriminatory policies can take decades to eliminate. But, all things considered, a democracy is our best option when it comes to political systems. Though political gridlock can be incredibly frustrating, it's a necessary evil of democratic governance. And we're entirely to blame.

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What qualities define an effective mother?

"A good mother raises their child well and tries to make it so they can function well in society with good morals, and generally sets a good example."

Sam Blonstein
sophomore

"You have to have your children's interests in mind and always be looking out them."

Taylor Bronson
senior

"Motherhood can be expanded to include any gender. You just have to be patient, affectionate and have the physical means to take care of a child."

Mandi Brehm
freshman

"A good mother is nurturing, caring, understanding and slightly controlling. Women can be better at understanding and the finesse of such a special relationship."

Jake Hurst
sophomore



AROUND THE QUAD

New U.S. Postal Service delivery schedule is prudent



Jeremy Busch

When I was young, I always had to write personalized letters to thank family members for gifts. As I got older, however, sending the letters seemed so unnecessary. Why do I have to send a letter when an email or another form of communication is not only faster, but also easier and cheaper? It is with this mentality that the U.S. Postal Service has rapidly seen decline, ultimately concluding with a significant change.

The Postal Service announced Feb. 6 it would be cutting Saturday mail delivery services. Although the Postal Service still does have its place, removing Saturday service is a smart decision. The financial benefits outweigh the miniscule change in service no longer received.

The new five-day week is meeting heavy criticism from not only Postal Service workers but also the national government. Worker unions have been pressuring lawmakers regarding this change because the lawmakers have power with the Postal Service. Thus far however, the agency has been able to evade Congressional approval.

Congress claims the Postal Service does not have the power to change their schedule without Congressional consent, because this change marks an official change to a law, according to a Feb. 6 New York Times article. The legislation has been stalled in Congress for several months, but now is sure to be a larger topic of discussion. Congress first required the Postal Service to deliver mail six days a week during 1981, but

the service argues there is an ambiguity in wording allowing it to make changes without Congressional approval.

As for the reasoning behind the change, the Postal Service has continually lost money over the years. In fact, the New York Times reported a loss of \$15.9 billion during 2012. By removing Saturday mail services, the Postal Service will save roughly \$2 billion each year. This plan is just a part of a larger effort to return the Postal Service to making profits.

Many think this change is unnecessary. There are countless government agencies with tremendous losses that continue operating each year. These arguments are logical, as the Postal Service provides for every individual on a near-daily basis. However, we have seen the need for service diminish during the last few years. The Postal Service reported a total mail volume of 168 billion units during 2011, a massive drop from 202.8 billion units one decade earlier. As technology develops, we tend to minimize the amount of physical mail sent. Emails and text messages have rapidly decreased the need for the

mail service, at least in terms of letters.

Even though our nation's communication systems were founded on the transportation of mail, times have changed. Conveniences such as online taxes limit the need for mail delivery service.

Additionally, as college students, this has virtually no impact on us. I, for example, check my mailbox maybe once a week. The majority of communication I do is through email or text messaging, and I'm not 100 percent sure where the Post Office is in Kirksville. Mail to the typical college student is a rarity, and the removal of the service does not really mean much.

With the money saved from the Postal Service, our taxes can be better spent toward the growth of the nation rather than practicing an old habit. Even though mail is a tradition, some traditions change with time.

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