



## After the Fact | Bonus Episode: Reflections on Bridging Divides

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### TRANSCRIPT

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**Dan LeDuc, host, The Pew Charitable Trusts:** Over the past year, Pew’s “After the Fact” podcast has looked at some of the biggest questions facing America today.

Namely, during these highly polarized times, how are Americans restoring a sense of community?

And at a time when many historians say democracy is more fragile than it’s been since the Civil War, how are some people working to overcome what might otherwise divide us?

We visited communities across the country and spoke with experts, local leaders, and folks who sometimes work block by block, street by street to find ways for us to embrace each other, speak respectfully to each other, and find ways to disagree better. As we begin a new year, here’s some of their thoughts that you might want to keep in mind.

**Eboo Patel, founder and president, Interfaith America:** Community is a “respect, relate, cooperate” ethos amongst a group of people.

**Syda Segovia Taylor, founder and executive director, Organic Oneness:** Community to me means that it’s a place; it’s an ecosystem for everyone to thrive in, to learn how to love, and to practice patience and be of service.

**Steve Weisman, chair, Interfaith Coalition of Bowie, Maryland, and rabbi, Temple Solel:** Community is the place where the individual becomes comfortable, recognizes who they are uniquely, and feels connected to others.

**Vincent Noth, executive director, Kinship Community Food Center:** Community is about experiencing a “no matter what” love. It’s about being able to go to a place and being known and being received no matter what.

**Dan LeDuc:** Americans for sure feel a lot of distrust for each other and for the government today. But in our “Restoring Community” season, we also found signs of willingness of most people to be open to renewal.



Eighty-six percent of U.S. adults told Pew Research Center that they believe that it's possible to improve people's confidence in one another.

And that means we still have a great opportunity to solve problems if we can come together.

**Sister Mary Scullion, president and executive director, Project HOME:** I think that every single person can make a difference.

**Vincent Noth:** Anyone can go and build kinship, not to perform a duty or to fix someone or fix something, but just to go build a relationship to encounter someone.

**Frederick Riley, executive director, Weave: The Social Fabric Project, Aspen Institute:** The act of weaving is all these different pieces of yarn or thread coming together to make one big thing. And that's what communities look like to me.

**Tahija Vikalo, executive director, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom:** Start with ourselves. And remain hopeful. Remain connected to people that inspire hope.

**Dan LeDuc:** Despite that belief that we can rebuild our confidence in each other, we still have a long way to go to in our views of the government. Pew Research Center found that only 19% of Americans say they are satisfied with the current state of the nation.

A vibrant democracy, of course, depends on government being trustworthy and effective. In our "Strengthening Democracy in America" season, we featured conversations with leaders working to help government be more responsive, and we spoke with Pew Research Center experts about how they are using data to better understand Americans' feelings about the current political climate and where there may be common ground.

A big takeaway from those conversations? If we want to build bridges, we can take heart that there is already much that unites us.

**Andrew Daniller, research associate, Pew Research Center:** One of the interesting things about our data, I think, is that Americans have common ground, even though they might not realize it.

**Claudia Deane, executive vice president, Pew Research Center:** We still share a lot of common values.

**Jeffrey Rosen, president and CEO, National Constitution Center:** These are principles that unite Americans of every perspective.

**Dan LeDuc:** Time after time, we heard that finding common ground is possible if we're willing to hear other people's perspectives with a sense of curiosity and respect.



**Michael Caudell-Feagan, executive vice president and chief program officer, The Pew Charitable Trusts:** I think we need to turn down the temperature and talk to each other, because working together, we can solve the problems that confront us.

**Kil Huh, senior vice president, government performance, The Pew Charitable Trusts:** We need to do a better job listening to one another.

**Kathryn de Wit, project director, broadband access initiative, The Pew Charitable Trusts:** Ask people for their story. What are you interested in?

**Dan LeDuc:** And we heard that human stories based in facts and data can provide a common language that we all can share.

**Susan Urahn, president and CEO, The Pew Charitable Trusts:** The facts matter, and the more we can keep people focused on that, the more effective we can be at building consensus.

**Sara Dube, director, fiscal and economic policy, The Pew Charitable Trusts:** Because at the end of the day, even when we have differences of opinion on a variety of topics, we're looking at the heart of the matter, which is how it affects humans.

**Dan LeDuc:** There's no disputing the challenges and divisions facing the country today, but the experts we talked to remain optimistic about democracy—and the future.

**Michael Caudell-Feagan:** I see signs of hope every day in my work at Pew.

**Andrew Daniller:** People are looking to solve the same problems.

**Claudia Deane:** I think we talked a lot about American pessimism, but Americans are optimistic that they can trust each other more.

**Sara Dube:** I've seen lots of examples out in the states of folks coming together across the aisle to really focus on what matters most.

**Kil Huh:** What makes me hopeful is that I see a middle majority in our country that wants government to work and wants results, and that, I think, is a foundation to build on.

**Susan Urahn:** I believe that innovation is going to serve us very well in the years to come.

**Dan LeDuc:** Of course, Americans are divided—but they're getting tired of it. Pew Research Center reports that 65% of Americans say they always or often feel exhausted when thinking about politics.

So, in our final season, we looked at polarization and how to get beyond it.



**Hannah Hartig, senior researcher, Pew Research Center:** I think if we decide that we're not going to speak to one another, that's going to only make our problems worse.

**Utah Governor Spencer Cox:** The first step in troubling times like this is getting to know people who are different than you. Be curious. Don't treat others with contempt; treat them with respect.

**Peter T. Coleman, professor of psychology and education, Columbia University:** You want to first turn to your own political group and try to have more candid and tolerant conversations in that group.

**Mónica Guzmán, senior fellow for public practice, Braver Angels:** Ask how, not why. If you're tempted to ask someone you disagree with why they believe what they believe, ask how they came to believe what they believe.

**Dan LeDuc:** And beyond offering that advice, our guests said they're seeing those sentiments in action; that there are people seeking to ease our divisions. And you can find them and join them.

**Spencer Cox:** I've had so many stories of people over the past few weeks who have come to me and said, "This is changing my life." One in particular that I loved: A man said he had not talked to his father about politics for over three years. It was too divisive. And yet, they were able to get into a car together, they spent three hours together, they talked about politics, because they learned to listen to each other and not hate each other.

**Hannah Hartig:** There's broad agreement, actually, ironically, in the survey about the problems that our political system is facing, and I think it's incumbent upon elected officials to pay attention.

**Peter T. Coleman:** There are probably millions of examples of people across this country getting together and making connections across the divide; look for them.

**Heidi Hernandez Gatty, adviser, education initiatives, Dialectic:** I see our young people bridging divides every day. They do not carry our biases with them, and they are willing to see each other as people first and foremost every time.

**Mónica Guzmán:** When people have the courage to engage each other, even at a time when we judge each other this much, they learn a lot of things that they don't know, and the world becomes a little bit less of a scary place.

**Eli Tillemann, senior, Thomas Jefferson High School:** Through this better disagreement, I think that we'll be able to deal with the problems polarization causes in a more effective manner.



**Dan LeDuc:** As the saying goes, united we stand, divided we fall. It's up to each of us. And it's up to us here at "After the Fact" to begin work on a new season. In fact, we are, and you'll be hearing about it soon. Make sure you subscribe wherever you listen so you don't miss it. Thanks for listening. For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc, and this is "After the Fact."