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**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Alex Lundry, Redbud Consulting  
**Date:** August 11, 2026  
**Re:** New National Survey

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## **THE BOTTOM LINE**

The second wave of the Centerline Tracker, a monthly national survey of registered voters, finds a country that knows it is coming apart socially and has strong opinions about why. Two-thirds of American voters showed at least one sign of social isolation in the past week - and a third showed every sign we measured.

But it also finds an electorate that is skeptical that fixing it is the government's job. 66% say doing something about social isolation is mainly up to individuals, families and communities. Despite this, voters of every party backed each of the policy solutions we tested to address it, by margins running from 65% to 88%.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

**Isolation is not a fringe condition.** 67% of voters reported either lacking companionship, feeling left out, or feeling isolated from others in the past week. 36% reported all three. Just a third reported none of them.

**The isolated skew young, not old.** 78% of voters under 45 show at least one sign of isolation, and nearly half show all three. Among voters 65 and older only 43% show one sign and 23% all three. The stereotype of the lonely senior has it exactly backwards. Living alone matters too - it adds about seven points of loneliness even after controlling for age, income, education and everything else we measured.

**But disconnected is not the same as discarded.** Despite these significant isolation numbers, 84% of voters say they mattered to the people in their life this past week; only 16% hardly ever felt that way. People feel cut off, but they don't feel worthless. That distinction matters enormously for anyone trying to talk to them.

**It shows up in behavior, not just feelings.** 36% of voters have not had a single guest in their home in the past month, and another 10% can't remember the last time. Among voters showing all three signs of isolation, only 40% hosted anyone in the past month - against 67% of the fully connected.

**A quarter of voters have turned to AI for company - but most Americans think it's a bad idea.** 27% have used an AI chatbot for conversation, emotional support or companionship; 46% say they or someone they know has. That is a striking number for a behavior that barely existed two years ago. But asked about a lonely person with few people to talk to, 57% say an AI chatbot hurts more than it helps. And here is the surprise: AI companionship use is essentially flat across

every level of isolation - 27% among voters showing no signs, 29% among those showing all three. The intuitive story, that lonely people are turning to chatbots, is not what the data shows.

**Voters blame screens - and they have a blind spot about distance.** Asked what makes it hardest for them personally to see friends and family, the top answer was "it's easier to stay home with TV, streaming, or my phone" (29%); asked what keeps the country apart, it was smartphones and social media (39%). Screens lead both lists.

But how voters diagnose themselves versus how they diagnose the country is very revealing. Distance is essentially tied for the biggest obstacle in voters' own lives, with 28% saying the people they'd want to see live too far away, but it is among the smallest causes they name for the country (24%). Nearly every other cause is given more weight at the national level than at the personal one.

The starkest case is institutional decline: just 5% say not belonging to a church, club or league is what keeps *them* from seeing people - dead last on the personal list - while 14% name it as a cause of the country's disconnection. Americans feel geography in their own lives and discount it in the country's, and they see the collapse of community institutions everywhere except in their own home.

**Connection is a supply problem, not a quality problem.** We asked voters whether six different things - their neighborhood, workplace, congregation, a club, an online group, their kids' school - helped them feel more connected this year. The published ranking runs from 55% down to 28%, which looks like a ranking of what works. It isn't. Each item let people say "this isn't part of my life," and the share who did ranges from 14% to 57%. Count only the people who actually have each one, and all six perform almost identically: between 65% and 69%. There is no magic institution. Neighborhoods, churches, clubs, workplaces and online communities all work at about the same rate. What differs is how many people have one.

**Government has a permission problem when it comes to increasing connectedness.** Only 34% of voters say government has a real role in helping Americans be less isolated; 66% say it's mainly up to individuals, families and communities. Even among the most isolated voters, government support only rises to 39%. And yet: school phone bans win 88% support, funding for parks and libraries 86%, public transportation 84%, social media age verification 82%, a voluntary national service program 81%, insurance coverage for social-connection referrals 77%, and even tax incentives to bring remote workers back 65%. Every party is net-positive on every one of them.

**Digital limits draw intense support.** While all of the proposals have broad support, there are meaningful differences when it comes to depth of feeling. Two of them command majority *strong* support, and both are about kids and screens - keeping phones out of schools (56% strong support) and barring under-16s from social media (54%). Everything that asks something of adults' own lives or wallets is broadly acceptable but not deeply felt.

## **BEYOND CONNECTION: AN ELECTORATE UNDER STRAIN**

**Money is still forcing tradeoffs.** 43% of voter households went without something this year for financial reasons, led by 27% who delayed medical care or skipped filling a prescription - nearly double the next most common sacrifice. Cost is also the third-ranked personal barrier to seeing people (25%) and the second-ranked national one (32%).

**Enthusiasm for AI is cooling.** The share of voters with "a great deal" of hope that AI could improve their daily life fell eight points in a single month, from 31% in July to 23% in August. Overall optimism held roughly steady - what thinned out was the enthusiastic wing.

**Political division is real, but it isn't the barrier.** 45% of voters had a friendly, respectful conversation with someone of differing political views in the past week - the most common past-week behavior we measure - and a quarter show no signs of political acrimony at all. Politics ranks eighth of eleven as a personal obstacle to seeing people, named by just 11%. Whatever is keeping Americans home, it isn't each other's politics.

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

There is a ready-made agenda here, and it is not a partisan one. Phones out of schools, parks and libraries funded, transit for people who can't drive, a year of paid service for young Americans - these are 80-plus percent issues in an era when almost nothing is. The catch is the framing. Voters who will enthusiastically fund a library will tell you in the same breath that loneliness is not Washington's problem to solve. Lead with the park, the library, the phone-free classroom. Don't lead with a federal role in social connection.

And the deeper finding should reframe the whole conversation. If every institution works about equally well and the only thing that varies is how many people have one, then the work isn't building better communities. It's building more of them, in reach of more people. The Centerline Tracker will be back in the field every month to measure whether anyone does.

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*Methodology: The Centerline Tracker Wave 2 survey was conducted online August 4-6, 2026 by Redbud Consulting on behalf of Centerline Liberties, among N=400 nationally representative registered voters. Results are weighted to national registered-voter targets; the margin of error is approximately  $\pm 5$  points. Full question wording, toplines, and charts available on request.*