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NEW REPORT ON PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE CIVIL LEGAL SYSTEM

IAALS research uncovers critical areas that shape levels of trust in the legal system and what drives public perceptions and attitudes

DENVER, CO (June 29, 2020)— IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, released [*Public Perspectives on Trust & Confidence in the Courts*](#). The report reveals insights into how the public views court systems and processes, judges and the judiciary, and information about the legal system—and is the culmination of IAALS’ two-year *Public Trust and Confidence* project.

Public trust and confidence in the American legal system is too low, as evidenced by studies and polling done by IAALS and others over the last several decades. This new report set out to uncover the *why* behind this reality. Using a qualitative approach rather than the historically utilized surveys and polls, IAALS conducted dozens of one-on-one interviews with members of the public.

“This approach,” explains Logan Cornett, Senior Research Analyst at IAALS, “was designed to expand on the existing research, which is limited in the depth of information it can provide. Our study’s long-form interviews allowed us to dig deeper and, in the end, our findings challenged many long-held assumptions about what the public believes and knows.”

The report explores several facets of public trust and confidence in the civil legal system, including:

- Views on the value courts provide, what a well-functioning court system would look like, and concerns about the courts;
- Perceptions about levels of trust in judges and how judges should ideally behave; and
- Perspectives on knowledge of the process, how the media depicts the legal system, and the public’s desire for information about the legal system.

With so much work being done to improve our legal system, it is critical that the public is engaged in and part of the conversation. The justice system does not operate in a vacuum, separate from the people it serves, and understanding public perspectives is as important as ever, especially in the midst of a pandemic and at the height of racial unrest in our country.

“This is an opportunity for the courts to better serve the people who need them,” says Natalie Knowlton, Director of Special Projects at IAALS. “Courts are publicly funded, and not only does the public not trust the courts, many can’t even *access* the justice system they’ve been paying for. Our findings give the courts insight

that they haven't had before. It's imperative that we listen to what people are saying and take action—otherwise we're looking at an even deeper public confidence crisis.”

In addition to the report, as part of the *Public Trust and Confidence* project, IAALS solicited [papers from thought leaders across the country](#). They each explored what low public confidence in the legal system means and how concerned Americans should be about its potential effects. The results were three thoughtful—and often conflicting—papers:

- Benjamin H. Barton: [American \(Dis\)Trust of the Judiciary](#)
- James M. Lyons: [Trump and the Attack on the Rule of Law](#)
- Hon. Chase Rogers and Stacy Guillon: [Giving Up on Impartiality: The Threat of Public Capitulation to Contemporary Attacks on the Rule of Law](#)

IAALS' *Public Trust and Confidence* project provides new insights, and details high-level implications stemming from this research, including identifying areas ripe for further inquiry. Everything in our current environment points to an urgent and fundamental need for courts and court stakeholders to develop actionable strategies for earning the public's trust and confidence. They must act now, and they must not stop doing the important work needed to uphold and maintain that trust in the future.

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About IAALS

IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System at the University of Denver, is a national, independent research center dedicated to facilitating continuous improvement and advancing excellence in the American legal system. Our mission is to forge innovative and practical solutions to problems within the American legal system.