



Thirteen percent.

According to a 2014 CNN/ORC International Poll, this is the percentage of Americans who trust their government to do what is right always or most of the time.

This staggering statistic is indicative of a festering problem within America's government: trust. In a country built on principles of government "by the people and for the people," a vast majority of citizens do not feel as though they can trust their country to represent them according to basic just standards.

This is not the way a country should be run. This is not the way a community should be run.

So where does America's lack of trust originate?

In the past year, two events come to mind that capture the source of this mentality.

The first arrived on a national level in June 2013, when Edward Snowden released thousands of classified documents that, among other things, revealed frightening degrees of national surveillance by the NSA on American citizens.

Rather than being unanimously shunned as a traitor--as many sources of government leaks have been in the past--Snowden was heralded by many as a hero of his times. Millions of Americans were shocked at the evidence of surveillance that Snowden revealed; but beyond the facts themselves, there was an overwhelming sense of hurt and fear concerning the way the facts had been presented at all. Instead of being informed of growing surveillance methods--which perhaps might have been supported by some, especially in the years following 9/11--the American people learned of the NSA's policies only when someone dared to break the law.

This isn't to say that the federal government needs to disclose every detail of unfolding situations; sometimes, this could in fact endanger American citizens. However, they do always have a responsibility to American citizens to be open and honest about the context in which they make these decisions.

A similar lack of transparency--with even more catastrophic effects--is currently unfolding at a local and national level as the St. Louis and American communities await a decision on the indictment of Darren Wilson, a police officer who shot an unarmed African-American student, Michael Brown, in Ferguson three months ago.

Since the shooting, thousands of complaints have been directed against the Ferguson Police Department and the grand jury over the han-

dling of evidence and information concerning the case, including the release of video tapes of Brown minutes before his death and photographs of Wilson's alleged injuries after the altercation.

As the grand jury approaches a decision on the indictment, there have been several leaks of hints about which way the jury is leaning. Some have claimed that these leaks were designed to dissipate anger over the decision by preparing the public with fragments of facts.

This begs the question: why should this information have to come to the public through back doors and dark alleys? Why should it come cloaked in secrecy and doubt? If allowing the public to be privy to the proceedings of the grand jury trial--even to a limited extent--would help to reduce the violence, pain and destruction suffered by our city, why would our nation's legal proceedings forbid it?

Such withholding of facts and explanations by those in positions of authority and the lack of trust it results in can extend even to CHS, albeit to a lesser degree.

In the past few years, CHS has undergone a series of budget cuts and adaptations. Many of these have received heavy community frustration and opposition from faculty, students and families.

Again, the cuts or alterations to Clayton's functioning might not be so upsetting--or even so frightening--if they were ushered into the community accompanied by explanations and opportunities for opinions to be shared and taken into account.

It's when new policies and programs are forced onto the CHS community without any semblance of transparency that faculty, staff and students feel threatened.

When any institution chooses to withhold the entirety of a situation from the people they are meant to serve, they decide to create a hostile environment that does not need to exist, and to encourage an us vs. them mentality that only fosters further discord.

These trends of dishonesty and withheld information and the resulting mistrust are forces that threaten all of America's institutions, whether at the local, regional or national level, and they are part of what makes that 87 percent of Americans unable to say that they truly trust their own government.

An institution without the people's support is baseless. An institution that does not encourage mutual respect has no strength to effect change. And an institution lacking a foundation of trust--well, that is no true institution at all. 🌐