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Sounder Public Judgment Initiative Brings Fresh Thinking to a Fundamental Challenge Facing Democracy

*A new series of Working Papers from Public Agenda offers insights into how to help the public come to terms with tough issues in today’s world*

New York, NY -- Public Agenda, the nonpartisan research and public engagement organization, is releasing a series of papers on the challenge of fostering sounder judgment despite the challenges of today’s digital and divisive world. The papers draw on the thinking of leading researchers and practitioners in the fields of communications, public opinion, public engagement, digital technology, and social change.

In this time of endemic mistrust, fake news, extreme rhetoric and technology-enhanced manipulation of public opinion, it is increasingly difficult for the public to come to terms with issues in meaningful ways. Public Agenda’s *Sounder Public Judgment Working Paper Series* offers an insightful look at this profound challenge facing our democracy, and explores potential solutions.

The papers will be published weekly, beginning on Oct. 23. On that date, we'll release three papers:

* *The Problem of Public Judgment in a Digital and Divisive Age,*by Public Agenda President Will Friedman. It provides an overview of the issue and makes the argument for the series.
* *The Role of Social Movements in Fostering Sounder Public Judgment,*by Peter Levine of Tufts University. It delves into a relatively untapped topic that deserves much more attention considering the growing importance of movement politics today.
* *Meaningful Inefficiencies: Public Judgement About Novel Technologies Through Play and Ambiguity*by Eric Gordon of Emerson University. It explores how communities can navigate novel changes in public life and decision making.

The next releases, on Oct. 30, will include:

* *Communications for Sounder Public Judgment in a Complex World:*A Roundtable Conversation with Martín Carcasson, Will Friedman, Alan Jenkins, Míriam Juan-Torres and john a. powell.
* *Imagining the Robust Deliberative City: Elevating the Conversations We Need to Support Democracy*, by Martín Carcasson of Colorado State University.

Future releases, to take place later this year and early next, will examine the potential for artificial intelligence on social media to enhance, rather than undermine, wiser public judgment, as well as the light that recent public opinion research can shed on the topic.

“In the coming months, the public will help determine if and how impeachment proceeds, decide who will be president in 2021, and influence which issues rise to the top of the policy agenda,” said Public Agenda President Will Friedman. “Creating the conditions that help the public engage complex issues productively is more crucial to the fate of our democracy than at any point in my lifetime.”

The concept of “public judgment,” in contrast to raw, reactive and unstable “opinion,” derives from the work of Public Agenda co-founder Dan Yankelovich, the social scientist and one of the pioneers of public opinion research in America. It is a stage of public thinking at which people having moved beyond simplistic magic answers and developed relatively responsible, stable positions that take into account the tradeoffs inevitably embedded in thorny public problems.

The Series is supported by a lead grant from the Ford Foundation, and additional funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Rita Allen Foundation.

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**Public Agenda** is a nonpartisan research and public engagement organization dedicated to a healthy, just, and effective democracy. We support informed citizens, engaged communities, and responsive public institutions. We also elevate diverse voices, build common ground and foster equitable progress on the issues at the heart of the American Dream. These include K-12 education, higher education, healthcare, and housing. Find Public Agenda online at PublicAgenda.org, on Facebook at facebook.com/PublicAgenda and on Twitter at @PublicAgenda.