

Who Still Believes In The American Dream?

The USA at 250

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC
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Lord Ashcroft Polls

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Methodological note

10,138 adults in the US were interviewed online between 28 April and 17 May 2026. Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in each country. Full data tables are available at LordAshcroftPolls.com

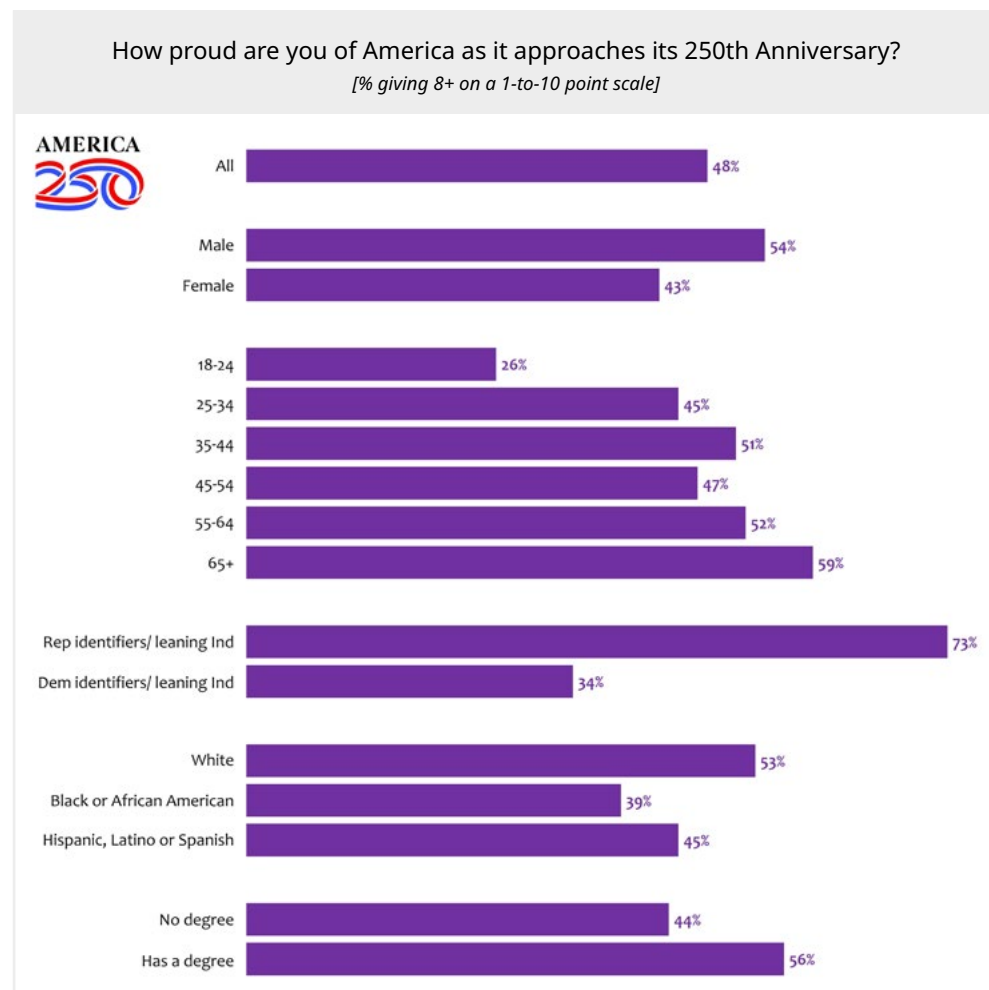
12 focus groups were held between 4 and 12 May 2026 in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Kansas City, Missouri, and New York City, New York. Separate groups were held of 2024 Trump and Harris voters. Participants were drawn from a wide range of social, economic and political backgrounds and the groups comprised equal numbers of men and women overall.

In this report, quotes are labelled ABQ, KC or NY according to where they were recorded.



The USA at 250

Pride in America



We asked our respondents **how proud they were of the United States** as it approaches its 250th anniversary, on a scale from zero to ten. Just under a quarter (23%) said they were extremely proud (10/10), while 5% said they were not proud at all (0/10). Overall, just under half gave a high score of between 8 and 10, but there were significant differences between groups. Men were more likely to give a high score than women, and those aged 65 or over were more than twice as likely to do so as 18-24-year-olds, who were more likely to give a score of 0 than 10. However, men in this age group were more than twice as likely as 18-24-year-old women to give a high score (36% to 17%). Nearly three quarters of Republicans said they were very proud, compared to just over a third of Democrats. A majority of white Americans gave a high score, compared to just under a half of Hispanics and fewer than 4 in 10 African Americans.

In our focus groups, participants often said that 4 July was “just another holiday” and several said they had not registered that this year marked 250 years of the US. However, **some spoke about their pride in America or the benefits of living in the US**, especially those who had come from other countries or whose parents had done so.

“It’s a place of independence for people to create a life that we can choose for ourselves as Americans. There’s a lot of freedom.” [M, ABQ]

“As an immigrant who had to give up my citizenship elsewhere and choose this country, it’s significant in terms of learning the history, what the laws are about and so on, an education that gets missed by a lot of folks who don’t go through it. I tend to appreciate the freedoms that I have. My parents were in a war-torn country where they had to move around. So there’s a sense of appreciation for what this country affords us.” [M, KC]

“If you think about our history, it’s a grand experiment that somehow worked.” [M, ABQ]

“I don’t think any country has achieved so much and had such incredible growth in such a short period of time. America is one of the youngest countries, but it just exploded in success.” [M, NY]

“It’s an opportunity to celebrate the values of our country, our democracy, the ideals of everyone being able to have their say.” [F, KC]

“I love to travel, but we’re number one. That’s why other countries envy us, want to blow us up.” [M, KC]

Others felt that political and social division, inequality and stagnant or declining living standards meant there was **little to celebrate**. Some felt the same about America’s history or even its founding.

“It hits a little different for African Americans, especially with how we’ve been treated in the past. But at the same time, I believe this is the greatest country. We have the opportunity to leave if we wanted to, but we’re still here. But we haven’t been treated the best. So it’s bittersweet.” [M, KC]

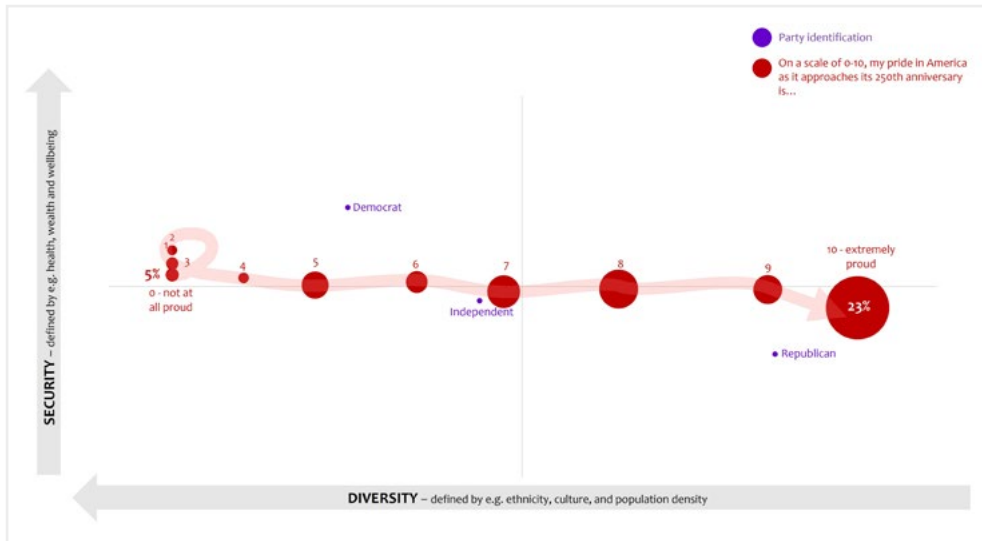
“I think the younger generations are becoming less patriotic due to the rising cost of living, not being able to potentially own a home. They have to work two jobs to make ends meet. Whenever I speak to a bartender, a waitress, they’re always telling me this is their second job, they need it to pay the rent.” [M, KC]

“How can you discover a land that has indigenous people on it? You didn’t discover it, you took it over.” [M, ABQ]

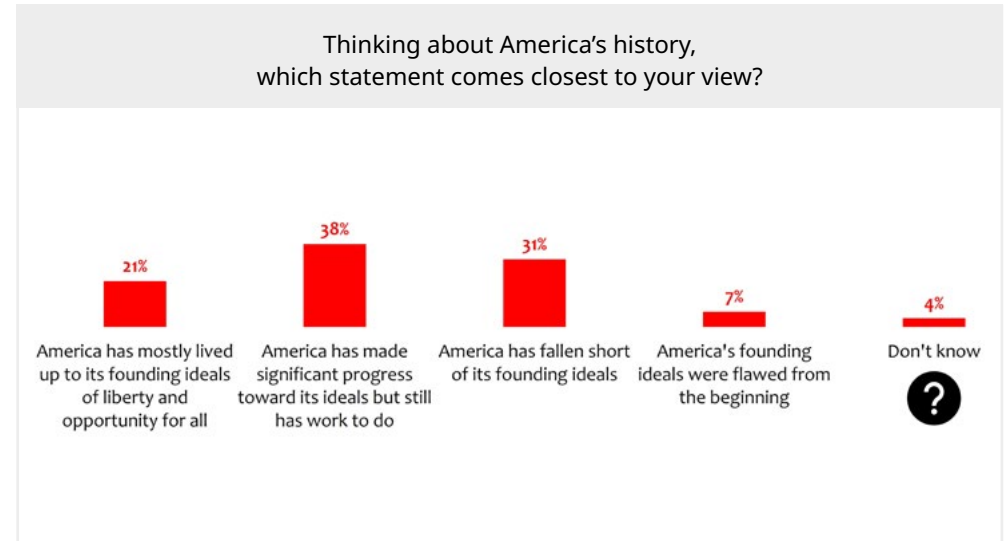
“The disappointment I feel in my country at this point hinders by ability to really celebrate the day. I’ll probably go up to the World War Two museum and listen to some music and watch the fireworks. But there’s not that excitement anymore, because a lot of us are struggling.” [F, KC]

“The Pledge of Allegiance says ‘one nation under God, indivisible’, but there’s so much division going on in this country that that promise is just not there.” [F, KC]

“For me the 250th anniversary is a little embarrassing. You’d think we’d be further on and have more to be proud of. It’s as bad as it was, just in a different way.” [M, NY]

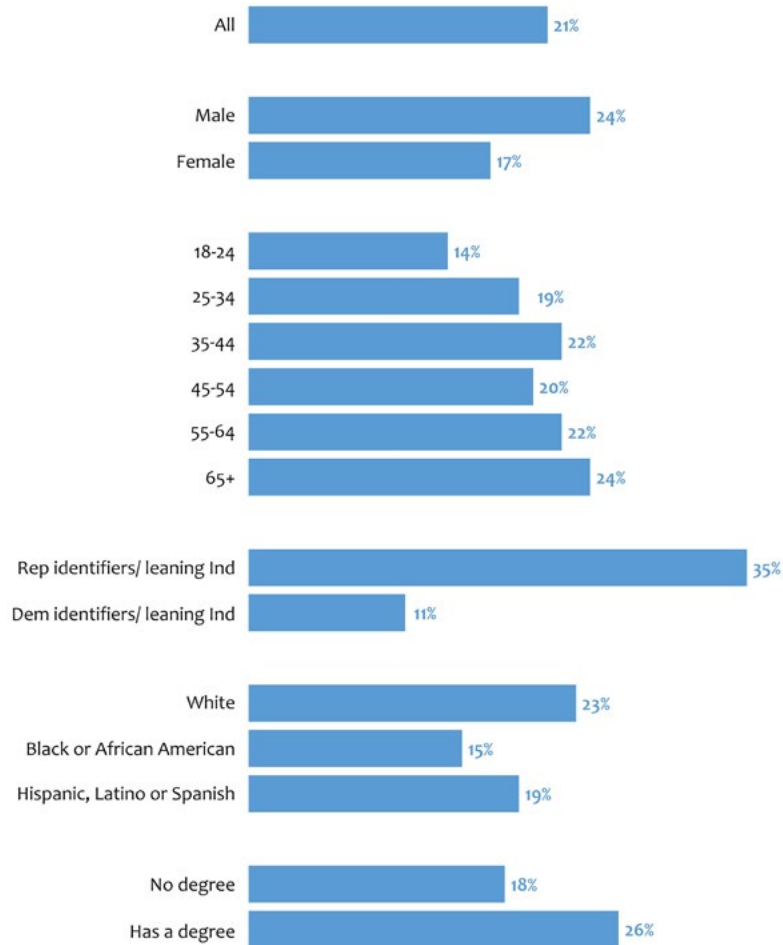


Our political map shows how these views are distributed among the population. The map shows how different issues, attributes, personalities and opinions interact with one another. Each point shows where we are most likely to find people with that characteristic or opinion; the closer the plot points are to each other the more closely related they are. Here we see how pride in America is inversely related to the diversity and population density of respondents' community.



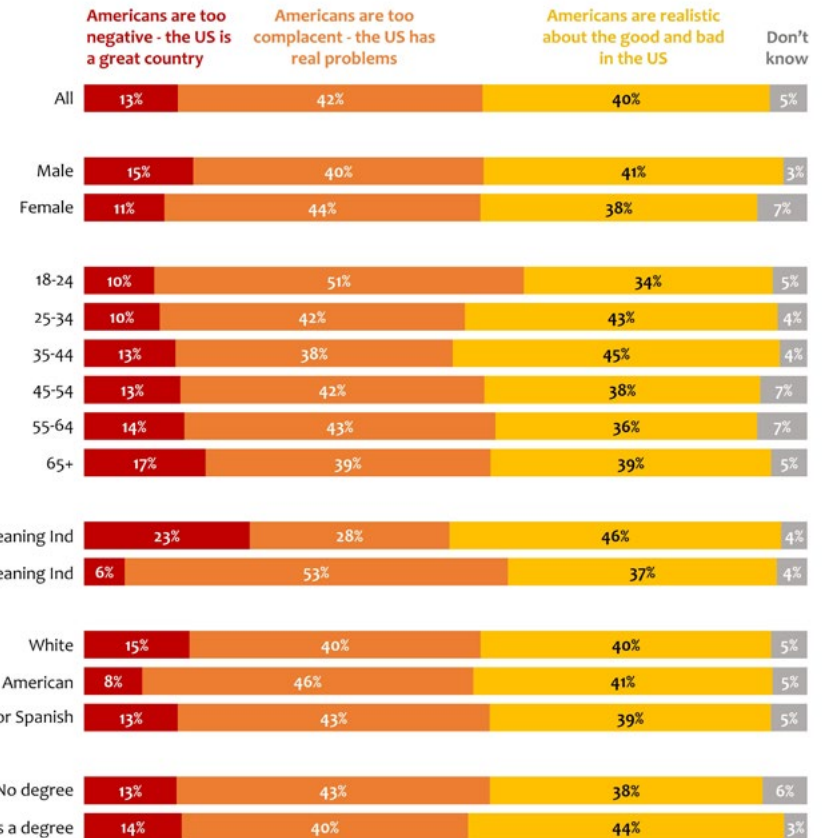
Most Americans say their country has mostly **lived up to its founding ideals of liberty and opportunity for all** or has made significant progress toward them. However, nearly four in ten say either that the US has fallen short of these ideals or that they were flawed from the beginning.

% who believe the statement "America has mostly lived up to its founding ideals of liberty and opportunity for all" comes closest to their view.



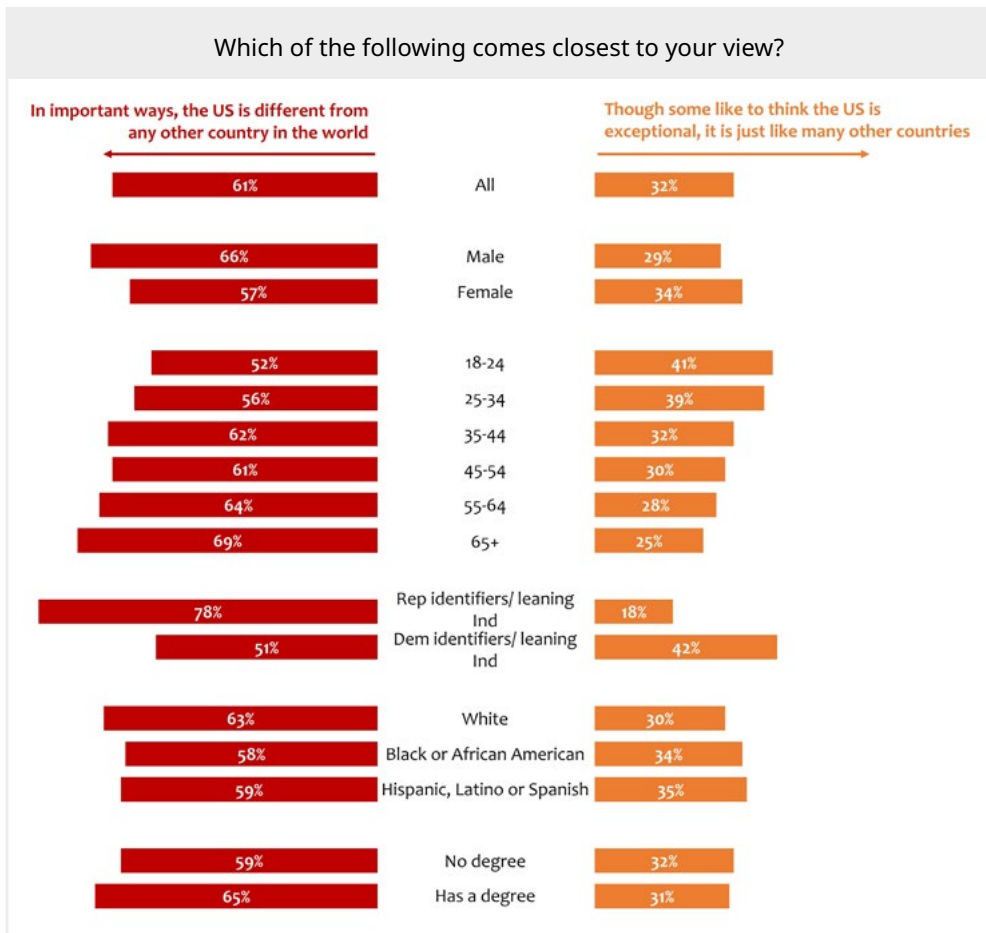
Again, there were wide differences of view between groups. Republican-identifying and Republican-leaning voters were more than three times as likely as Democrats to say America had lived up to its founding ideals, and older Americans were more likely to do so than their younger counterparts. Only 15 per cent of African Americans thought America had lived up to its ideals, compared to nearly a quarter of white respondents.

Which of the following comes closest to your own view?

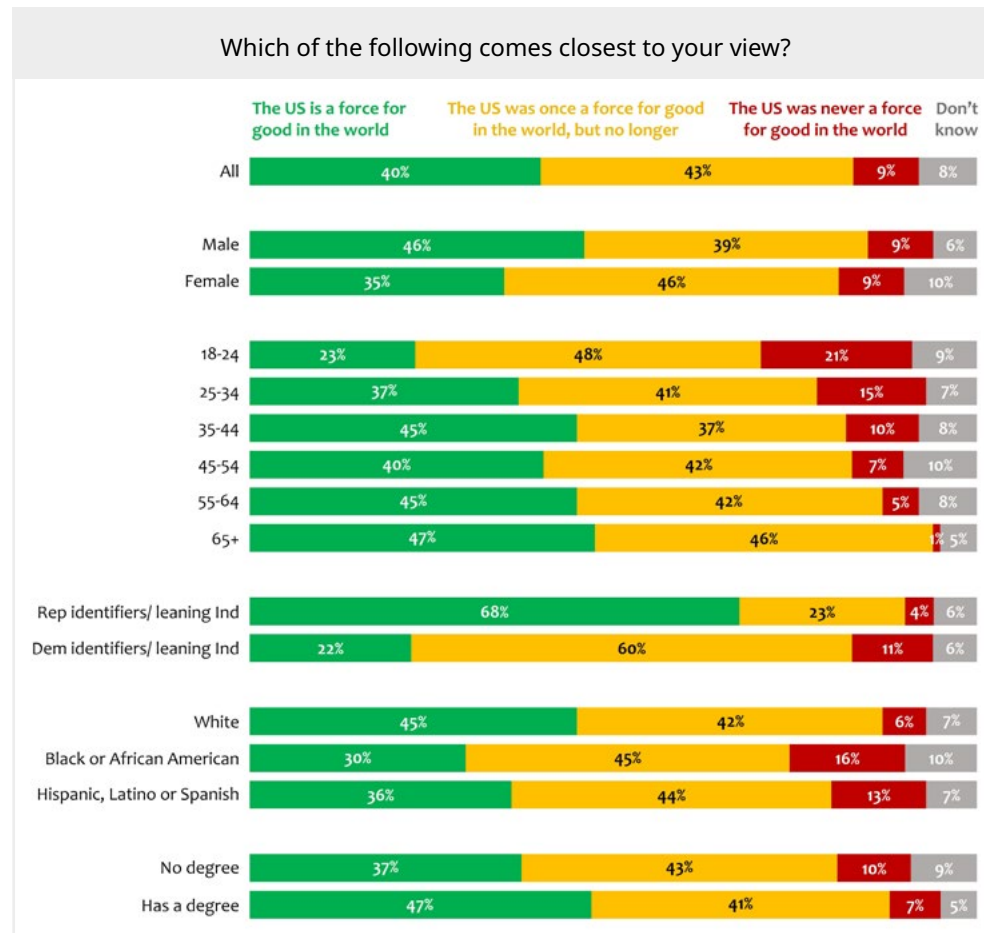


Americans were more likely to think their compatriots were **too complacent about the US and its problems** than too negative. A majority of younger respondents and Democrats thought Americans were too complacent about their country, while Republicans were by some way the most likely to think they were too negative.

America and the world



A majority of Americans, including majorities of all key groups, agreed that in important ways **the US is different from any other country in the world**. However, younger people and Democrats were much more closely divided on this question than older Americans and Republicans.



Only a minority of Americans agreed that **the US is a force for good in the world**. They were more likely to think that this had once been true but was no longer the case. Nearly one in ten – including more than one in five of those aged 18-24, said the country had never been a force for good. Republicans were the main exception, with more than two thirds believing the US was currently a force for good in the world.

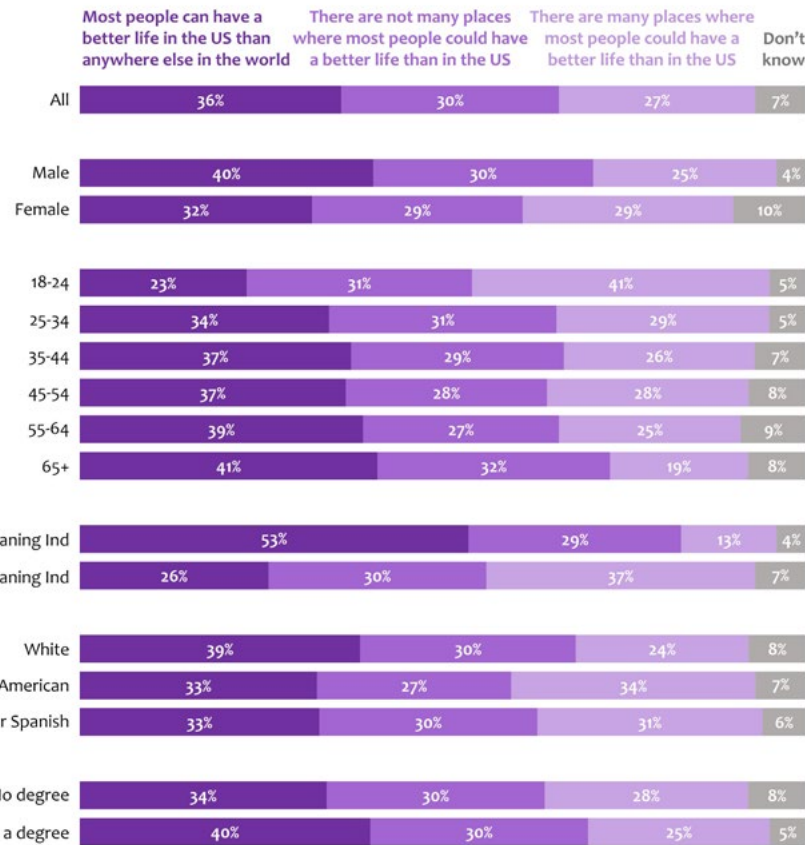
This was reflected in our focus groups. Several spoke of American efforts in areas like disaster relief, and the potential for positive global leadership. However, there was some resentment that the US seems to carry a disproportionate share of the burden of international security.

- “ America does so much charity. The amount of food and medicine America sends to these countries, the goodwill. When something happens, the ‘bad’ Americans are the first ones there. If there’s an earthquake or a tornado, an agency from America is the first to help.” [M, ABQ]
- “ I do think America still has an outsize presence on the global stage, whether good or bad, that affects other countries. If America is going to do things that are positive, that has an influence on other countries to follow suit.” [F, KC]
- “ We’re basically supporting Europe and NATO, even though they’re turning their backs on us with the war in Iran. And helping Ukraine with weapons money, and they’re stealing that money. The corruption is ridiculous. Why are we helping them? With the money they spend on Ukraine they could have solved all the homelessness in the United States.” [M, ABQ]
- “ I get angry that we’re expected to be the police of the world and stick our nose into everyone else’s business. I wish we would focus more on making things better here. I voted for Trump but when I heard he was doing the Iran stuff I got a little angry.” [F, ABQ]

Some argued that the US had lost moral authority and international respect in recent years. Some spoke about what they saw as the changing reaction to Americans when they travelled overseas.

- “ Globally, the United States has always been a bully. We’ve always been a superpower. And we’ve always been imposing what we feel is right.” [F, ABQ]
- “ Now we’ve got the war in Iran and we look like suckers on the world stage. We’re not respected, we look crazy.” [M, KC]
- “ We don’t have influence because we’ve alienated everyone. The US used to be something that was looked up to internationally, but now it’s more like feared.” [F, NY]
- “ There is a shame that goes along with that. I used to go to Europe a lot and they’d be like, ‘oh, you’re from Texas! You’re from the US!’ Yay, come on, rock and roll. Now it’s ‘oh, you’re from Texas?’ and then it was America – oh, you’re a stupid American, you’re going to be loud and arrogant.” [M, NY]

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



Republicans were twice as likely as Democrats to believe that most people can have a **better life in the US than anywhere else in the world**. They were the only group among whom a majority thought this. Just over a quarter of Americans, including more than 4 in 10 of those aged 18-24, said they thought there were many places where most people could have a better life than in the US.

Thinking about what **makes America different from other countries**, our focus groups often spoke of freedom, rights, prosperity, expertise and entrepreneurial spirit.

- “ The First and Second Amendments, basically. You have the right to criticise your government and defend yourself.” [M, ABQ]
- “ As a female, I can dress the way I want, go where I want, do what I want. I’m not going to be locked up by eight husbands or something.” [F, ABQ]
- “ You can criticise your leader with cuss words and everything else, and nobody thinks anything of it. In other countries when you do that, they might stick you in prison.” [F, KC]
- “ We’re the most innovative, definitely, when it comes to new products, technology and just building companies.” [M, KC]
- “ The idea that we can take on challenges and overcome them, that’s something positive I see that still exists in the people. Not in the government necessarily, but in the people.” [M, NY]
- “ I would say entrepreneurship. There’s a lot of red tape in other countries.” [M, NY]
- “ I think the US and maybe Japan have the most specialists in every healthcare category.” [M, NY]

Reflecting on **what other countries have that the US lacks**, people often spoke of free healthcare and education (though some pointed out that these were not free but paid for in taxes). Others spoke of state provision in other areas such as parental leave and higher food standards, or pointed out that other countries were catching up with American living standards.

- “ European countries, Denmark, Sweden, I believe they have socialist healthcare. They are happier people. They have a better work-life balance, I think, as well.” [F, NY]
- “ My friend lives in Vermont and he and his wife were expecting their first baby, and they were sitting next to a couple at a restaurant that were also pregnant. And they overheard them talking about how long they were going to have off after the baby was born. And they were like, what do you guys do? And they had pretty regular jobs but they were from Canada. A couple of hundred miles away but life is very different.” [F, NY]
- “ I feel like in England they have laws that are more in favour of people than companies. Like they don’t have corn fructose syrup in their food. Healthcare is better. In Germany, medical school is free.” [F, NY]
- “ The world is catching up. When I grew up in India we were the only ones who had a television in the whole building. A refrigerator was a luxury. Now when I go back, I’m like, wait a minute. You can have a big house with staff. I’m living in a dump compared to the opportunities people over there are having. They don’t want to come here anymore.” [M, NY]

The American Dream

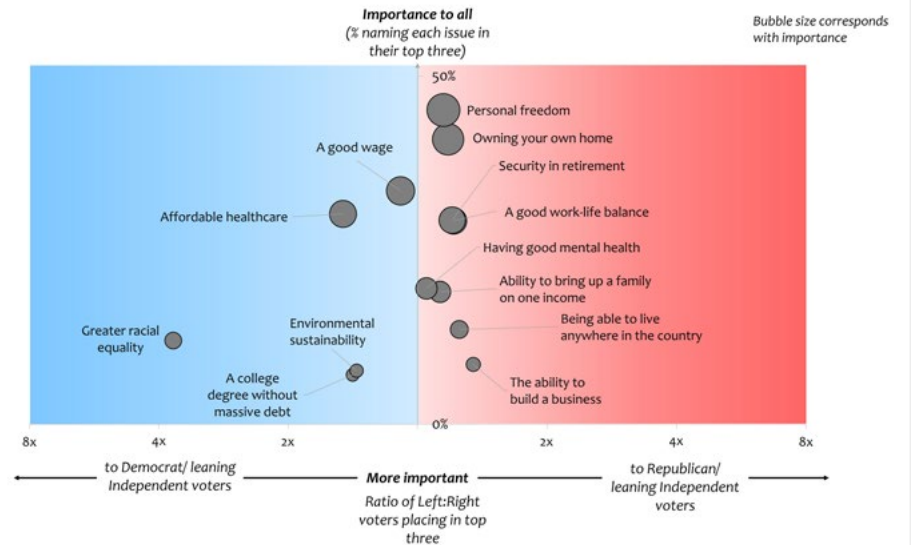
What makes up the American Dream?

For you personally which three of the elements below are the most essential to living out the American Dream in the 21st century?

	Personal freedom	45%
	Owning your own home	41%
	A good wage	33%
	Affordable healthcare	30%
	Security in retirement	29%
	A good work-life balance	29%
	Having good mental health	20%
	Ability to bring up a family on one income	19%
	Being able to live anywhere in the country	14%
	Greater racial equality	12%
	The ability to build a business	9%
	Environmental sustainability	8%
	A college degree without massive debt	7%

Presented with a list of things that might be **elements of the American Dream**, respondents were most likely to choose personal freedom. Home ownership and a good wage were the next most likely to be chosen, followed by affordable healthcare, security in retirement and a good work-life balance. Women were more likely to mention affordable healthcare (35%) than men (25%).

Essential elements to the American Dream

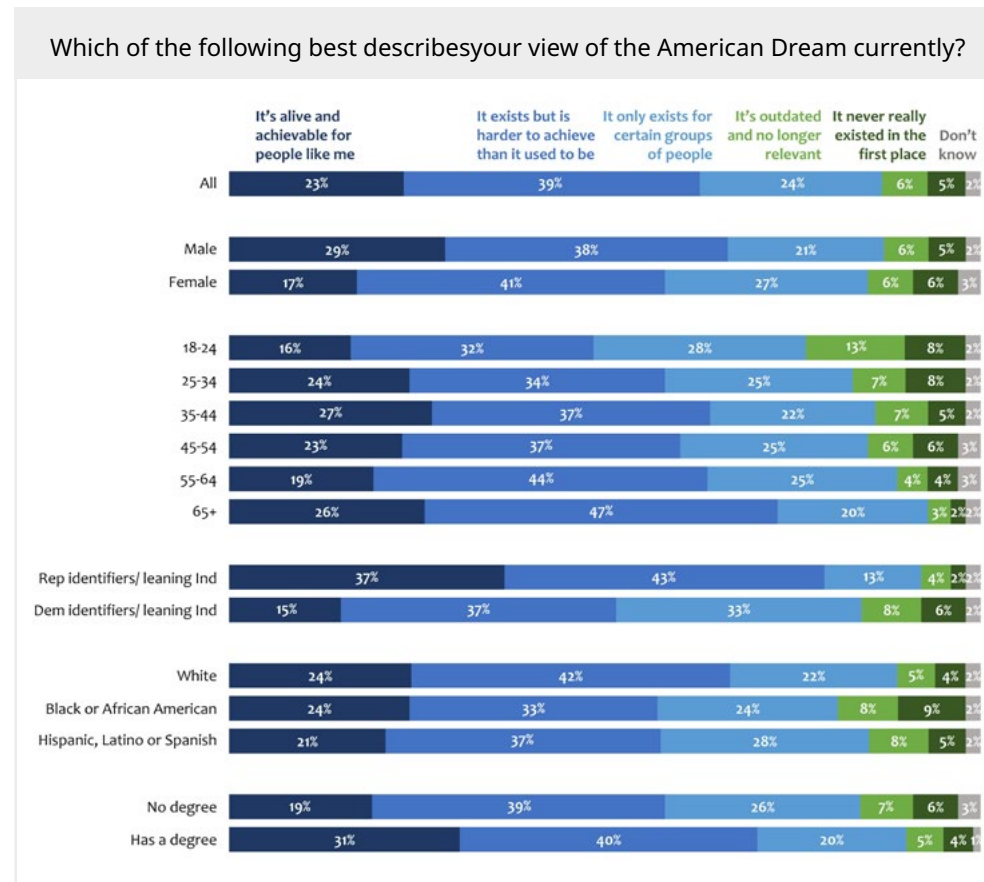


The importance of various elements of the American Dream varied by politics. Personal freedom, home ownership, security in retirement, work-life balance and ability to bring up a family on one income were marginally more important to Republican-leaning voters, but the difference was not significant. Democrats, however, were more likely to choose affordable healthcare, environmental sustainability and a college degree without massive debt as important elements of the American Dream, and much more likely to choose greater racial equality.

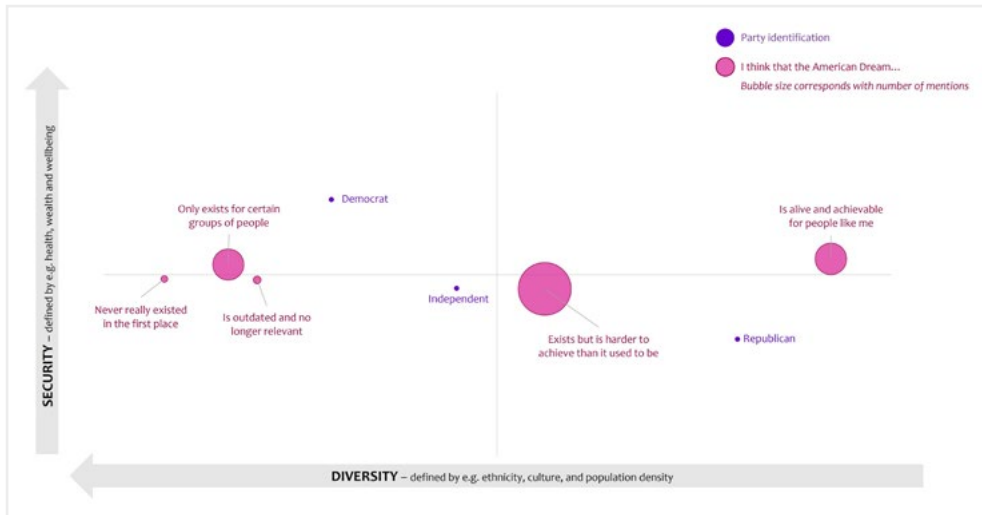
Our focus groups saw the American Dream in different ways – both materially and in terms of personal freedom.

- “It used to be a big house and a big family, but that’s not reality.” [M, ABQ]
- “I guess it’s something like freedom, to do what you want freely. That ties into finances too. In any aspect of your life, just making choices as you see fit.” [F, ABQ]
- “It could just be being able to excel. To get ahead in whatever you’re doing. It’s kind of personal. It could be house ownership, it could be having the opportunity to retire without having to work into your seventies.” [M, ABQ]
- “It’s being able to be what you want to be and how you want to be. And you put in the work to get it. That’s what it’s supposed to be.” [F, KC]
- “The ability to be upwardly mobile. My parents were refugees from Vietnam, uneducated, came here, both started businesses. And me and my siblings all got college educations. So it’s something I feel is still valuable.” [M, NY]
- “Being able to be your authentic self. It’s a bit iffy now, but we had all these civil rights movements, the gay pride movement. I think that’s an important part of it, especially here in New York.” [F, NY]
- “I grew up religious, and helping other people is how I maintain my own happiness and my American Dream. Money doesn’t make everybody happy.” [M, KC]
- “It could be coming from the bad part of town but having a home, food on the table, your kids are OK, everybody’s healthy. That’s the American Dream right there.” [F, ABQ]

Is the American Dream still real?



Only just under a quarter said they believe **the American Dream is alive and achievable** for people like them. The biggest group – just under 4 in 10 overall – said they thought it still exists but is harder to achieve than it used to be. Just under a quarter said it only exists for certain groups of people, while more than 1 in 10 thought either that the American Dream was outdated and no longer relevant or that it never really existed in the first place. Once again, Republicans were more than twice as likely as Democrats to say the American Dream was alive and achievable, and the youngest respondents were the least likely to think this was the case.



Our political map shows how views of the American Dream are distributed throughout the population. As with pride in America, those who thought the dream is only real for certain groups of people, is outdated or never existed in the first place are most likely to be found in more diverse urban centres.

Several in our focus groups felt that the American Dream was still alive and well, though they emphasised the importance of effort and hard work in making it a reality.

“ You have to work hard, starting when you’re really young. Get a good education, college, trade school or something like that. I think you can get the American Dream, but our society isn’t built to where everyone’s going to get everything. Without the hard work you’re not going to get anything, and some people are not going to get it no matter how hard they work.” [M, ABQ]

“ My parents’ dream for their four kids was for them to graduate high school. My dream was to start my own business. I did that by 24. Then my dream was for my kids to graduate college, and all three of them are going to have a degree. So I feel like the American Dream is still there, but it’s hard. But it’s always been hard.” [M, ABQ]

“ You have to go out and make it happen if that’s what you’re reaching for.” [M, ABQ]

“ I still believe in the American Dream. If you put some hard work into anything you can get ahead. You see these kids on the internet becoming millionaires. There aren’t a ton of these people, but you can put in effort and live a great life here.” [F, KC]

“ My partner grew up very poor in Ohio. He calls himself white trash. He went to school at age 40, got a college degree, is now a teacher. So yes, that dream is there for anyone.” [F, ABQ]

“ I don’t think my kids believe they’re going to do better than me and their mom, but I believe they have the opportunity. It’s just more of a struggle. They’ve got to work harder. Back in the day you could just ease through.” [M, KC]

Others argued that the American Dream as conceived by previous generations was either much harder to achieve today or completely unattainable for most ordinary people.

“ I’m a child of immigrant parents, and the American Dream was about coming to America and having the chance of a better life, starting from scratch and building something. But it’s hard to achieve because the rent is insane. To buy a house is not reachable. My dad used to drive a taxi and my mom was a manager at Hudson News, and together they were able to buy three houses.” [F, NY]

“ I think the American Dream my grandparents had, being able to buy their first home, have kids, live on one income. That isn’t the same American Dream that’s available to anyone now.” [F, ABQ]

“ I think the dream is to keep surviving.” [F, KC]

“ After World War Two, that was when the American Dream got advertised, and two generations got to enjoy that. Now Gen Z, millennials and Gen Alpha kinda got shafted with the mess older generations have made. And they’re still in office, too.” [M, NY]

“ My parents were able to help my grandparents take care of things like medical needs, and if we all went out to dinner, my parents are paying. But now if I go out to dinner with my parents, they’re still paying because I make way less than them. It’s a way to track if each generation is doing better.” [F, NY]

“ The American Dream has been narrowed. There’s a lot more luck and pluck. For people coming into the US, there’s a pathway up. But for people who were here and thought it was going to be a certain path, that has been transformed.” [M, KC]

“ Something that former generations had that we don’t have is security. Capitalism has changed. Wages have gone down. Pensions are declining.” [M, NY]

For a few, the American Dream was nothing more than an illusion, and had never been a reality for large numbers of people.

“ My friend’s make fun of it. The older generation speak about it, but the younger generation is just like, ‘what the hell is that?’” [F, KC]

“ It’s like a false ideology.” [F, KC]

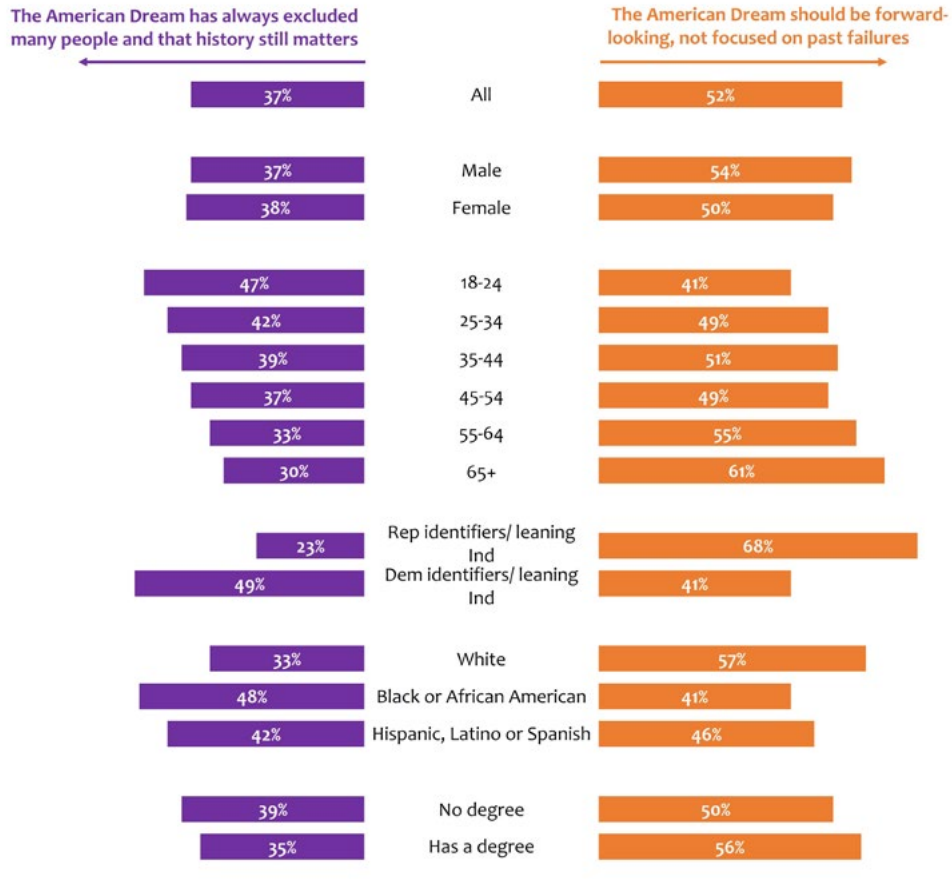
“ I don’t think it’s a dream, I think it’s a nightmare. In this day and age, it’s the haves and the have-nots. There’s no in-between, not even like a middle class.” [M, KC]

“ I think the American Dream was marketing for people who were coming here, not for people who were multi-generations living in America. I think it’s marketing for other people.” [M, NY]

“ From the start of this country, everybody wasn’t given the same opportunity. It was said that this country was built for everyone to be equal, but from the start you enslaved one population and decimated another.” [M, ABQ]

“ If you start with the promise of 40 acres and a mule for blacks who were freed, people got excited about it but it never happened. So whites continued to pass down generational wealth and blacks had to start at the very beginning. We still have a lot less generational wealth than even immigrants who come to this country. So I feel like they give you one thing, but it’s two steps back.” [M, NY]

Here are statements about the American Dream.
Please indicate where your view falls.

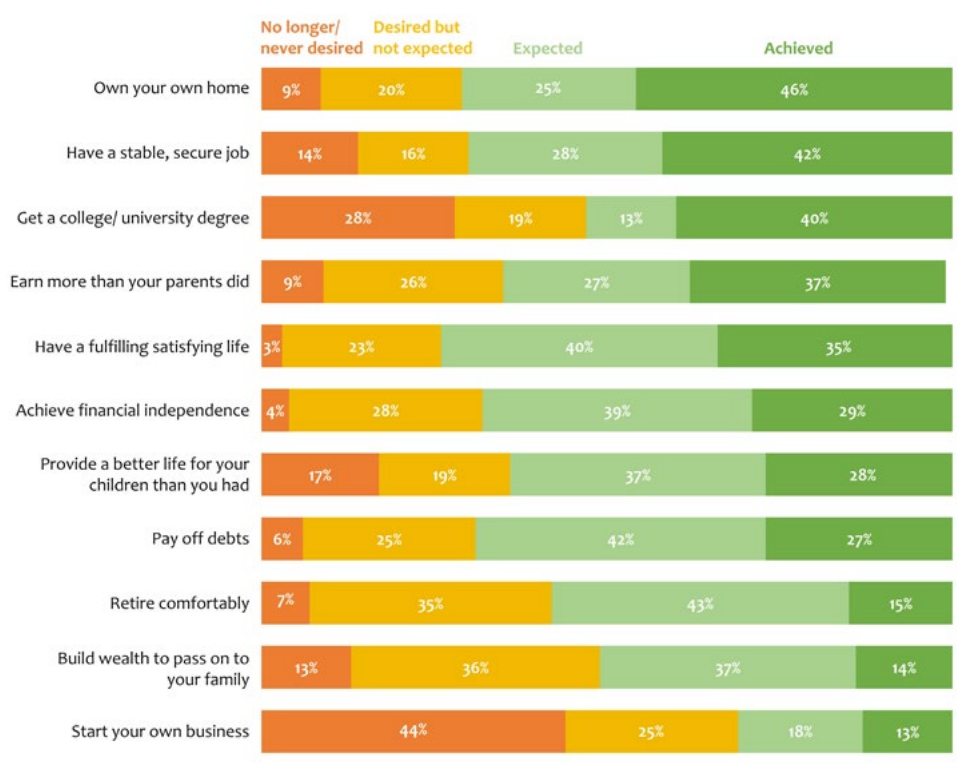


Overall, most Americans felt on balance that the American Dream should be forward-looking, but a significant minority said many people had been excluded and that this history still mattered. Younger Americans, African Americans and Democrats were more likely than not to take this latter view.

Those who believed the American Dream was harder to achieve than it used to be often cited the rising cost of living, especially in terms of housing relative to average incomes; the cost of education and the scale of student debt; a more uncertain job market with the decline of jobs for life and guaranteed pensions; and the changing nature of the marketplace, especially for small businesses.

- “ Back then they made like 20k a year, but a house was 80. Now you might make 60k a year, but the average is like 500.” [M, KC]
- “ Most of the blue collar are living check by check. It’s hard to put down a deposit with these skyrocketing prices. Your head’s barely above water and you’re losing hope for this American Dream that seemed attainable.” [M, KC]
- “ My sons now are trying to decide if college is even worth it. For me, that’s sad because I worked so hard to get my education and I wanted that for them. And now they’re like, mom, I don’t need it.” [F, KC]
- “ I’d be OK without the student loans. I always wanted to travel, to do music for work, to put on a show, but student loans are kicking my butt. I can’t live the way I want.” [F, KC]
- “ There are people I know who have made their own business and created a good product, but the big corporations come through and just slice them out because they undercut them in prices. There’s no such thing as the American Dream because the big corporations are ruining it for everybody.” [F, KC]

For each of the following milestones please say whether you have achieved them, whether you expect to achieve them, want to achieve them but don't expect to, are no longer or were never a goal for you?



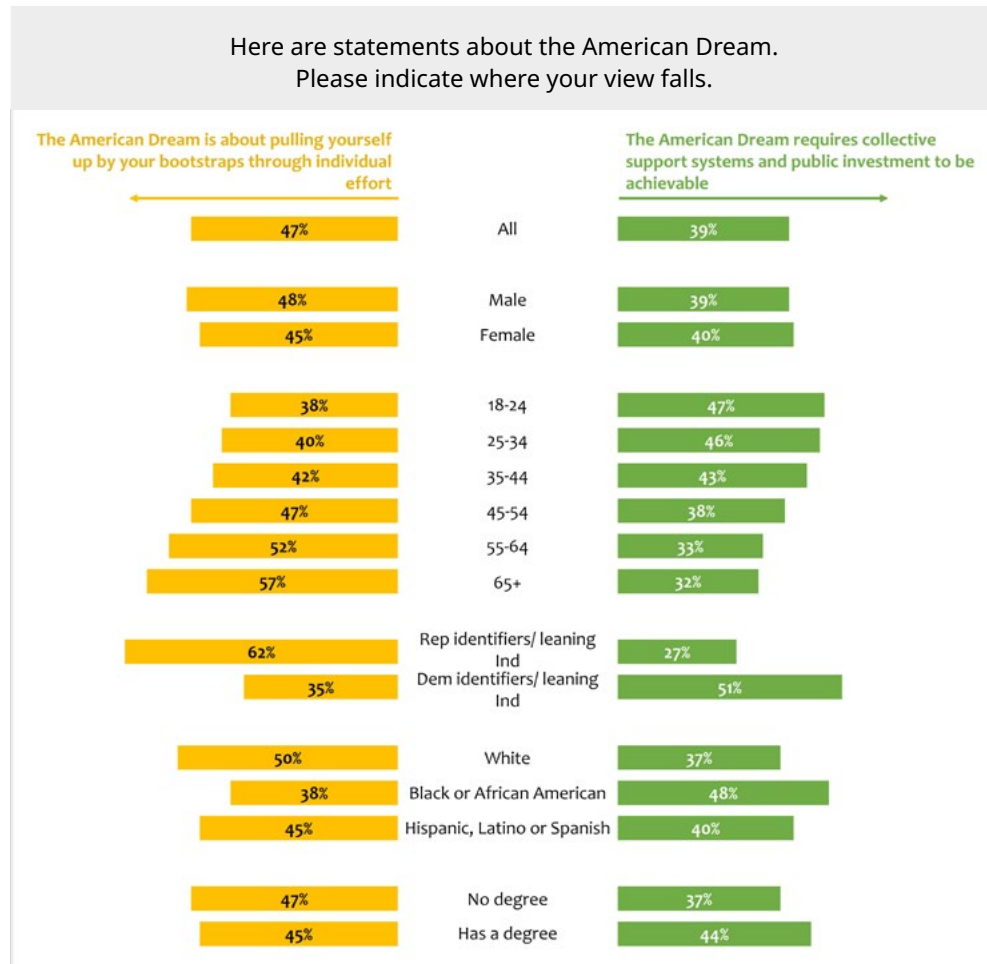
More than 7 in 10 Americans in our survey said they owned their own home or expected to do so one day. This fell to 64% among those aged 18-24, more than 3 in 10 of whom said this was something they desired but didn't expect to achieve. Only just over half (58%) of 18-24s said they earned more than their parents or expected to do so, compared to 68% of 35-44s and 75% of those aged 65 and over.

Some felt that those living the American Dream were largely older people, or those who had inherited wealth from parents or grandparents.

“My parents, the baby boomers. They can just sell a house and buy another house, while everyone else has to buy a \$400,000 home that they bought for \$100,000. They're out and about taking cruises while everyone else is working two jobs to live in a shitbox apartment.” [M, KC]

“In my mind, the people living the American Dream right now are at least second-generation wealth. Maybe only one party working, pet owners, maybe two kids. But you very rarely see people doing that now because college is ridiculous.” [F, KC]

Where does opportunity come from?



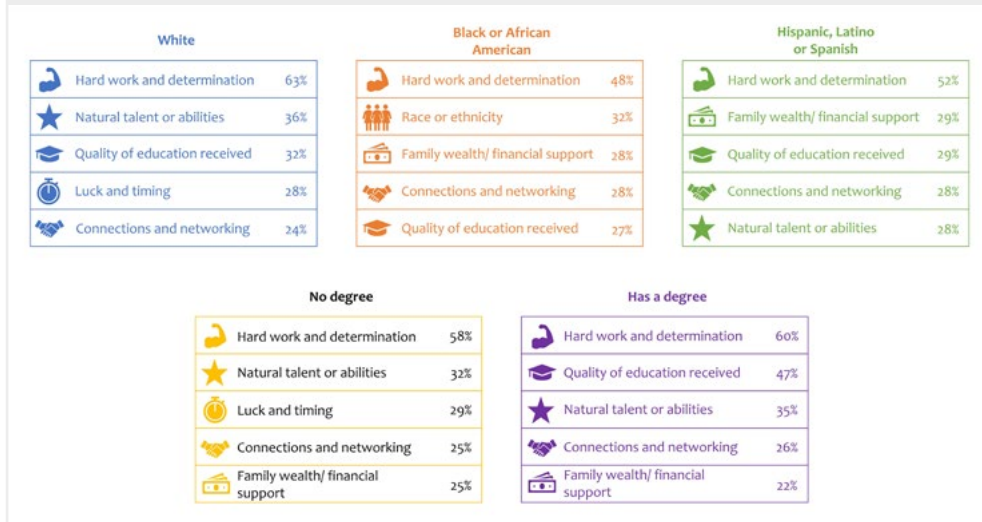
Americans were slightly more likely to believe that the **American Dream is about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps** through individual effort than that it requires collective support systems and public investment to be achievable. However, Democrats, African Americans and respondents up to the age of 44 were more likely to think the latter was true.



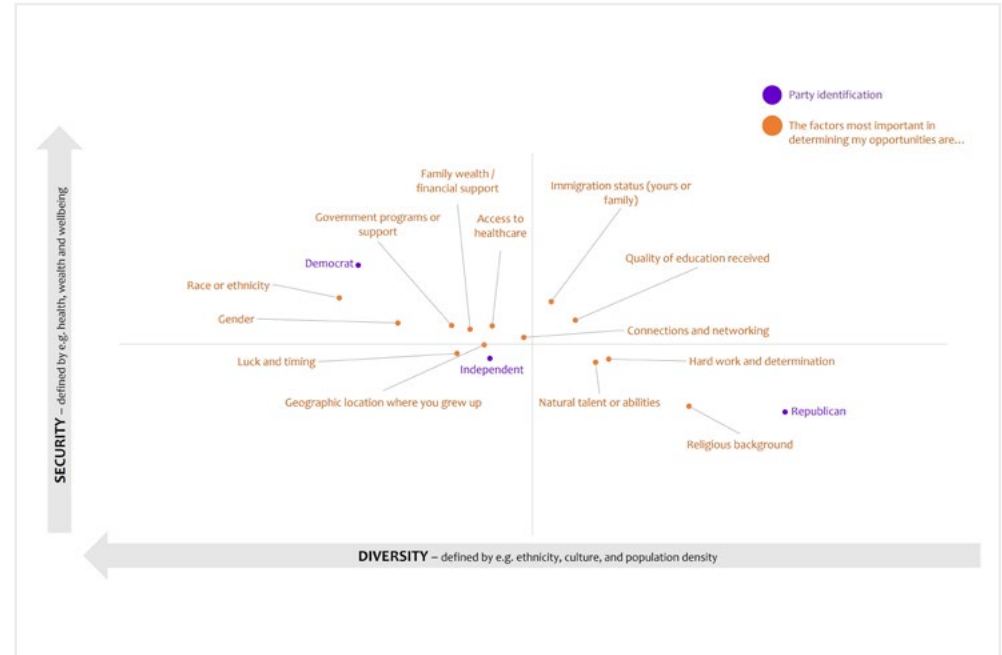
Most Americans said that hard work and determination had been one of the **most important factors in determining their opportunities** in life. Natural talent and ability were next, followed by the quality of their education, luck and timing, connections and networking, and family support.

Thinking about your own life, which three factors have been most important in determining your opportunities?

[Showing top 5]

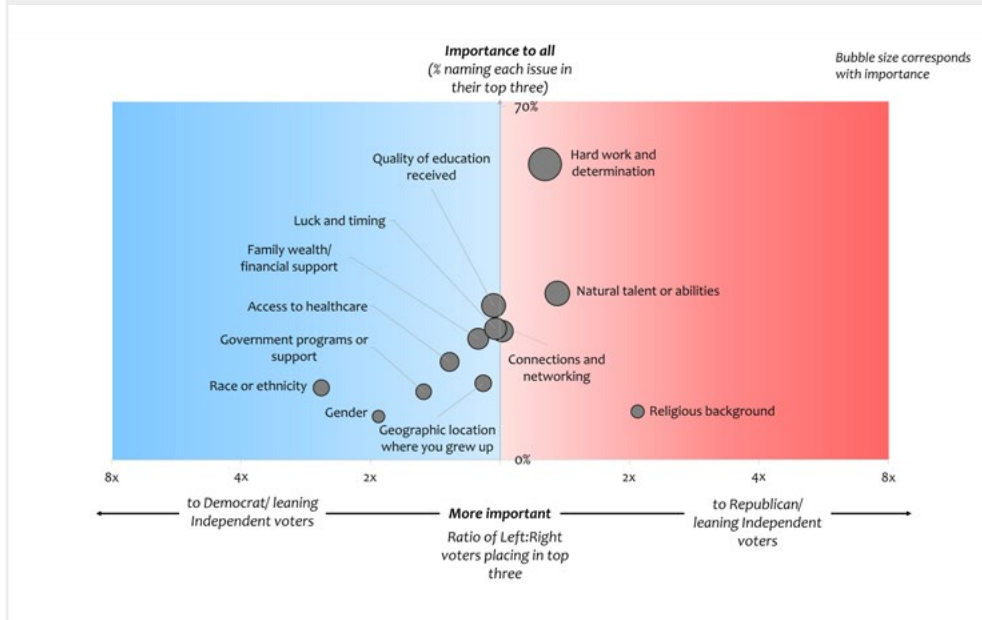


While most of these factors were mentioned across the board, African Americans were much more likely than most to say their race or ethnicity had been important in determining their opportunities. They were also more likely, along with Hispanics, to put family support ahead of other factors.



Our political map shows how different parts of the population see the determinants of their opportunities. Race, gender and ethnicity were most likely to be mentioned in the more diverse, Democrat-leaning top-left quadrant, while religion, natural talent and hard work were most likely to be named in the less diverse, less secure, Republican-leaning bottom right.

Most significant factors in determining opportunity.



While many across the board mention hard work and determination, Republicans are slightly more likely to do so than Democrats. Republicans are also more inclined to think name natural talent and religious background as important factors in determining opportunity. Democrats were more likely than Republicans to name geographic location and access to health care, and much more likely to name government programmes, gender, and race or ethnicity.

Our focus group participants often mentioned family as the most formative influence when it came to the opportunities they had enjoyed.

“ We sat at table and had dinner. If you wanted to go for ice cream, that was a treat. It wasn't an entitlement. You did what your parents said or you got your butt spanked.” [F, KC]

“ Growing up lower middle class, on a farm, seeing how hard my parents and grandpa had to work. That made me want to go to school and get an easier job.” [M, ABQ]

“ My parents each left different countries to come here. My dad worked his butt off, my mom cleaned houses, they never really asked for help. My brother is doing great, I'm doing OK, my nephews are at college. I learned from my parents – you got to work. You got to work. And things will get better if you put forth effort.” [F, ABQ]

Our groups debated the role of the state in providing opportunities and ensuring that people were able to take advantage of them. As discussed above, many mentioned health and education provision as areas in which government could take a bigger role. However, some were suspicious of state overreach or emphasised the importance of self-reliance.












“ I don't want to be Canada. The government has a role, but get your hand out of my pocket. Stay out of my way. Let me do what I need to do. Disaster relief, sure. But don't overregulate me.” [M, ABQ]

“ The government should be helping, but I also think it should be up to you because you want to be able to say that you did it. You need to be able to do your own responsibilities because no-one will do it for you.” [M, ABQ]

“ The government never stay out. The question is whether they're working for us or against us. The Republicans said they wanted hands-off government, but their hands were never off. They were just on the lever to help corporations and rich people.” [M, NY]

The next generation

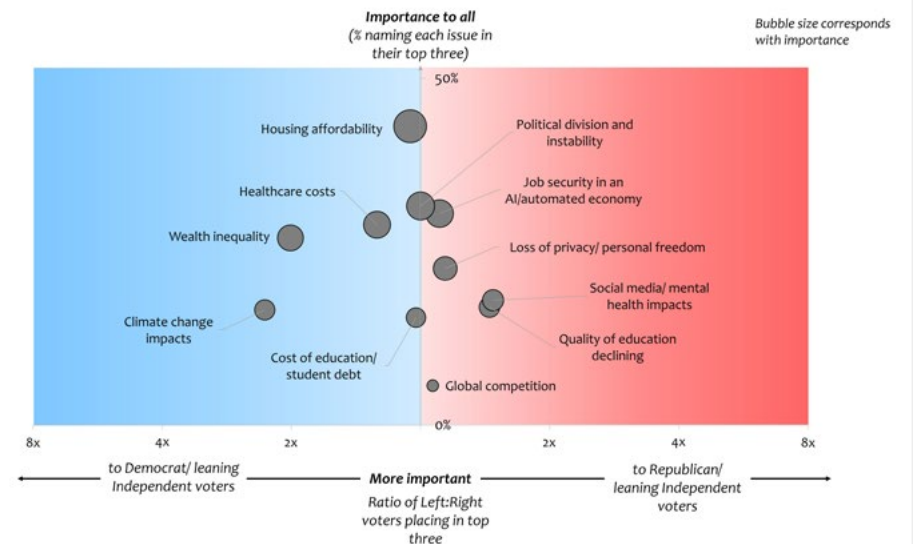
What worries you most about the American Dream for the next generation?

	Housing affordability	43%
	Political division and instability	32%
	Job security in an AI/ automated economy	31%
	Healthcare costs	29%
	Wealth inequality	27%
	Loss of privacy/ personal freedom	23%
	Social media/ mental health impacts	18%
	Climate change impacts	17%
	Quality of education declining	17%
	Cost of education/ student debt	15%
	Global competition	6%

4% selected nothing and feel optimistic about the next generation's future

Housing affordability was the biggest **concern about the next generation's ability to achieve the American Dream**, with political division, and job security in an AI/automated economy in close competition for second place. Healthcare costs and wealth inequality were close behind.

Concerns about the American Dream for the next generation



As with the American Dream's essential elements, people's worries about the future were related to their political outlook. Housing affordability, political division and the cost of education were mentioned across party lines, but loss of personal freedom and the mental health impact of social media were somewhat more likely to be mentioned by Republicans. Healthcare costs were slightly more likely, and wealth inequality and the impact of climate change much more likely, to be named by Democrats.

The groups talked at length about what they wanted for their children and the things they worried about for their futures. These included concerns about stability, security, home ownership, food safety, education opportunities, changing values and freedom of speech.

“ The younger generation are kind of stuck. They don't want to go to work. They're kind of afraid to go out. My son was recently working with a lot of people in their 20s and they were constantly on their phone playing games. They leave work early. They just want to go home and shut themselves off from the world.” [F, ABQ]

“ I want my children equipped with a lot more than I left school with. My four year-old has her Bill of Rights memorised. I want them to understand taxes, investments. I want them to be prepared for success. I had to figure it out for myself, but I want a stable foundation for them.” [F, ABQ]

“ I'm worried about the food they're eating, the stuff that's getting sprayed in our air. The agenda that's being pushed on them with this gender stuff.” [F, ABQ]

“ I worry about them being able to have a voice, a safe space to speak out against what I feel is a growing liberal mindset where everything is cancelled.” [F, ABQ]

“ I always tell my kids that they can do anything they want to. I didn't get my degree until I was 30 years old. If you put your mind to it, you can do it. But I want to be realistic with them. There are things going on in the world that while they're not fair, you have to just try to overcome those obstacles.” [M, ABQ]

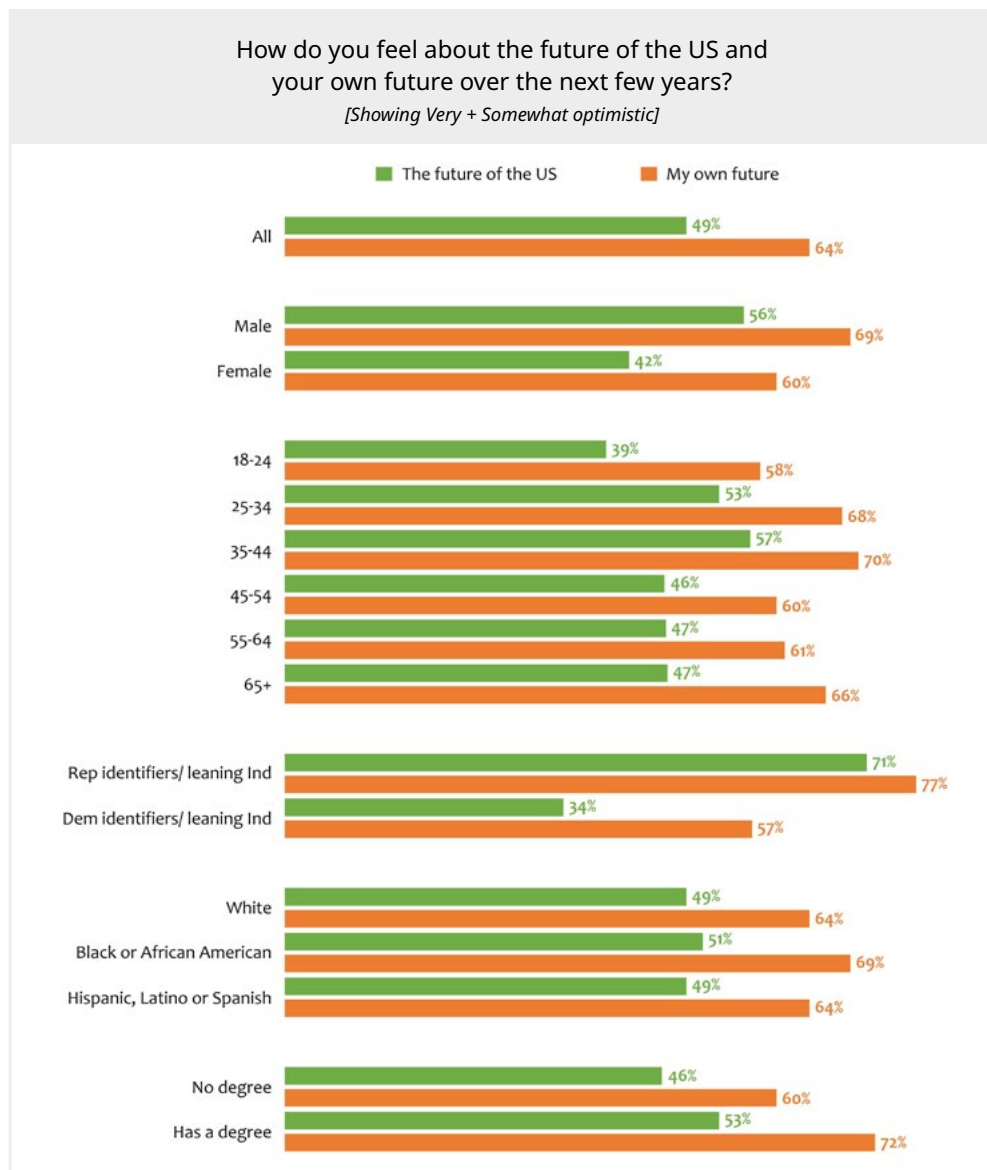
Several also spontaneously raised artificial intelligence and an increasingly automated economy as part of their concerns for the next generation.

“ With technology doing everything for you, you trust it too much and stop thinking for yourself. AI has benefits, but it steals creativity because it enables them to slack. We need to encourage them to use their own creativity.” [F, KC]

“ A lot of jobs are going to change or be eliminated. It's going to be a huge shift in the next 20 years and completely different from what we knew. I don't know what it will look like.” [M, NY]

“ You either have labour jobs where AI can't take over or you get educated to the point where you have a high job. I feel like the middle is getting eliminated. The technology companies are the robber barons of this century.” [M, KC]

The future



Across the board, Americans are more optimistic for their own future than for the future of the US. Overall, nearly two thirds said they were personally optimistic, while just under half said the same for the country as a whole. The youngest Americans were the least optimistic of any age group, both for themselves and for the US. African Americans were slightly more optimistic, on both counts, than white or Hispanic Americans.

Our focus group participants reflected on whether they themselves were living the American Dream. Often the answers were positive, if qualified, or that they saw their lives as a work in progress.

“ I would say I have lived it, lost it, re-lived it. It hasn't been a straight line. I've lost careers, jobs, fortunes. And that doesn't feel like the American Dream, but when you work and gain that footing and get back on track, it feels like, oh, I can breathe again.” [M, ABQ]

“ I think 60% yes. It's harder to attain and there are more hurdles. I'll get it towards the end, but I don't want to be like 60 or 70 when I do. So that makes me sad.” [F, NY]

“ I'm free, I'm healthy, I'm here. I'm in reality right now. That's what I call it. My American reality.” [M, KC]

“ I'm working towards it. I'm not in it. I have goals I'm working towards that are going to help create generational wealth for my children. The picket fence and the house on the hill? I'm not tripping on that. It's for my children to witness greatness and to perform greatly.” [M, KC]

“ I've got kids, I've got a roof over my head, food in my refrigerator. Some people ain't got that. I got to look at it like that. I'm blessed.” [M, KC]

“ I'm not where I want to be, but I'm in the position to strive for that. I have the ability to work towards it. So I would say that I am living it, even though I'm not at my destination yet.” [M, KC]

Asked how optimistic they felt, many again gave qualified answers. They often drew a distinction between their own future and that of the country, or between their own lives and those of the next generation.

“ I'm pessimistic. I don't see the way the lifestyle we had in the past existing in the future.” [M, KC]

“ I'm optimistic in terms of what I can do for myself, but I'm pessimistic in terms of society.” [M, NY]

“ There's one road where we can come out relatively unscathed, and another one where there's going to be a lot of pain for possibly a generation or two. But I think America as a country, as an idea, will ultimately prevail. It's just, do we want it the easy way or the hard way?” [M, KC]

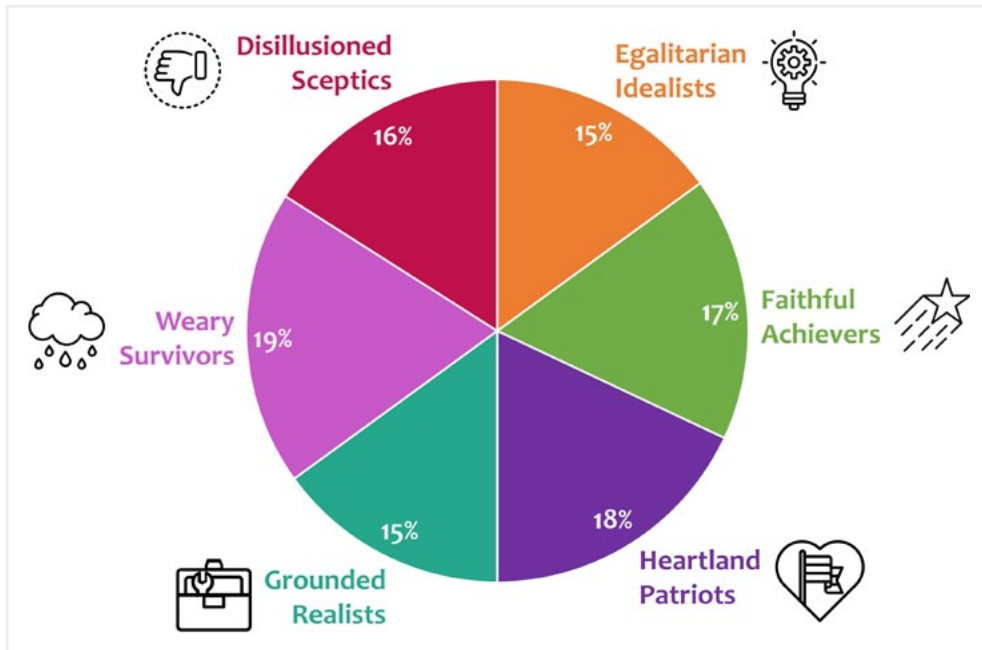
“ I'm pretty content. There really isn't anything out there that I can change personally. How I perceive my life and whether I'm going to be happy or not has nothing to do with the whole United States. It has to do with me.” [F, KC]

“ I've done the best I can with the cards I've been given. I don't really have the same optimism for my children. It boils down to what they're going to be growing up in. They're not going to grow up like I grew up.” [M, ABQ]

“ I don't know if I'll ever be able to achieve that sense of being secure. I want to have a roof over my head, to afford to go to the doctor and to feed myself. I don't want to have to pick one or the other.” [F, ABQ]

“ I'm more optimistic about my own future than the future of America, because we're creating our own future. We're not relying on someone else.” [M, NY]

Six Tribes



Our analysis of the poll findings enables us to break the total 10,000 sample into six distinct groups or tribes, each with a particular combination of opinions or attitudes.

Heartland Patriots

These are the strongest believers in the American Dream – the most likely to think it is alive and achievable for people like them. They are also the most likely to agree that America has mostly lived up to its founding ideals, and are by far the proudest of the US, with a majority scoring their level of pride at 10/10. They are also the most likely to think that Americans are too negative about their country. Most likely to consider personal freedom, the ability to build a business, and security in retirement as essential element of living out the American Dream; they also rate home ownership very highly. Heartland Patriots believe that opportunities are determined by hard work and natural

talent, and are the most likely to see political division, social media and declining quality of education as concerns. They hold socially conservative views, being the most likely to think abortion should be illegal, gun ownership should be protected, structural racism doesn't exist and climate change is overhyped. They are the oldest segment, the least ethnically diverse, and the most likely to be Christian. They voted for Donald Trump in 2024 by a margin of almost 4 to 1.

Faithful Achievers

Most members of this group think that America has made significant progress towards its founding ideals but still has work to do. Even so, a majority believe that the American Dream is alive and a realistic possibility for people like them. They are the most likely to see economic prosperity as the foundation of the American Dream, and to expect to retire comfortably and to pass on wealth to their family. They believe in the need for a shared definition of the American Dream to unite the country. Faithful Achievers are very proud of the US, second only to the Heartland Patriots, and very optimistic about the future of the US and the most optimistic for their own futures. They are the most likely to think Americans are realistic about the good and bad in the US, and to see global competition as a threat to the next generation's enjoyment of the American Dream. They are also more likely than members of other tribes to be married with children, have high incomes and attend church regularly. Though economically conservative, they tend to be moderately socially liberal. The Faithful Achievers largely backed Trump in 2024, but a substantial minority voted for Kamala Harris.

Grounded Realists

Members of this group are very positive about the American Dream, believing it gives hope to people struggling and is a major part of what makes the country special. However, they are the most likely to agree that while the American Dream exists, it is harder to achieve than it

used to be. They are generally proud of the US and say there are not many places where people could have better lives. Grounded Realists are also the most likely to agree that the American Dream is about self-reliance, and to consider home ownership and a good work life balance as key components. However, most of them do not expect to retire comfortably or pass on wealth to their family. They are the most likely to be worried about housing affordability, the impact of AI and loss of privacy or freedom. They tend to agree that the US has lost out from free trade agreements and are the least likely to support bigger government and higher taxes. They tend to be older, with grown-up children, and voted for Trump in 2024 by about a 2 to 1 margin.

Egalitarian Idealists

This group is the most likely to think the American Dream has excluded many people in the past, and that collective support systems are needed to achieve it. They are the most likely to consider affordable healthcare, a college degree without massive debt, racial equality and environmental sustainability to be key components of the American Dream, and are the most worried about climate change impacts. Though they are generally pessimistic about the US, they are optimistic about their own future, being the most likely to expect to achieve milestones like home ownership and the least worried about job security in an automated economy. They tend to be only slightly proud of the US, and show the strongest agreement that the country was once a force for good in the world, but no longer. They show the highest support for big government and more taxation, abolition of the death penalty and a liberal interpretation of the constitution. This tribe skews slightly female, is ethnically diverse, and has higher levels of education and income. Egalitarian Idealists are the most likely to consider themselves Democrats and voted for Kamala Harris by a 3 to 1 margin in 2024.

Weary Survivors

These are the most likely to desire, but not expect to achieve, various American Dream milestones. They are the most likely to say that a good

wage, being able to bring up a family on one income and good mental health are important to living out the American Dream, but are very pessimistic about the future of the US and their personal future. They are most likely to cite family wealth and financial support, luck and government programmes as determinants of opportunity, but don't tend to believe that the American Dream has always excluded people or have anywhere near the same levels of agreement that it gives people false hope. They are more likely than most to think the future will bring more threats than opportunities, and that life in America is worse than it was 30 years ago. While they are very doubtful about the American Dream and generally not proud of the US, they do not think life is likely to be better in other countries. Weary Survivors are largely middle-aged, with generally low levels of education, low incomes, and to be renting their home. They are the least likely to have voted in 2024; among those who did turn out, there was a moderate preference for Harris but a significant minority for Trump.

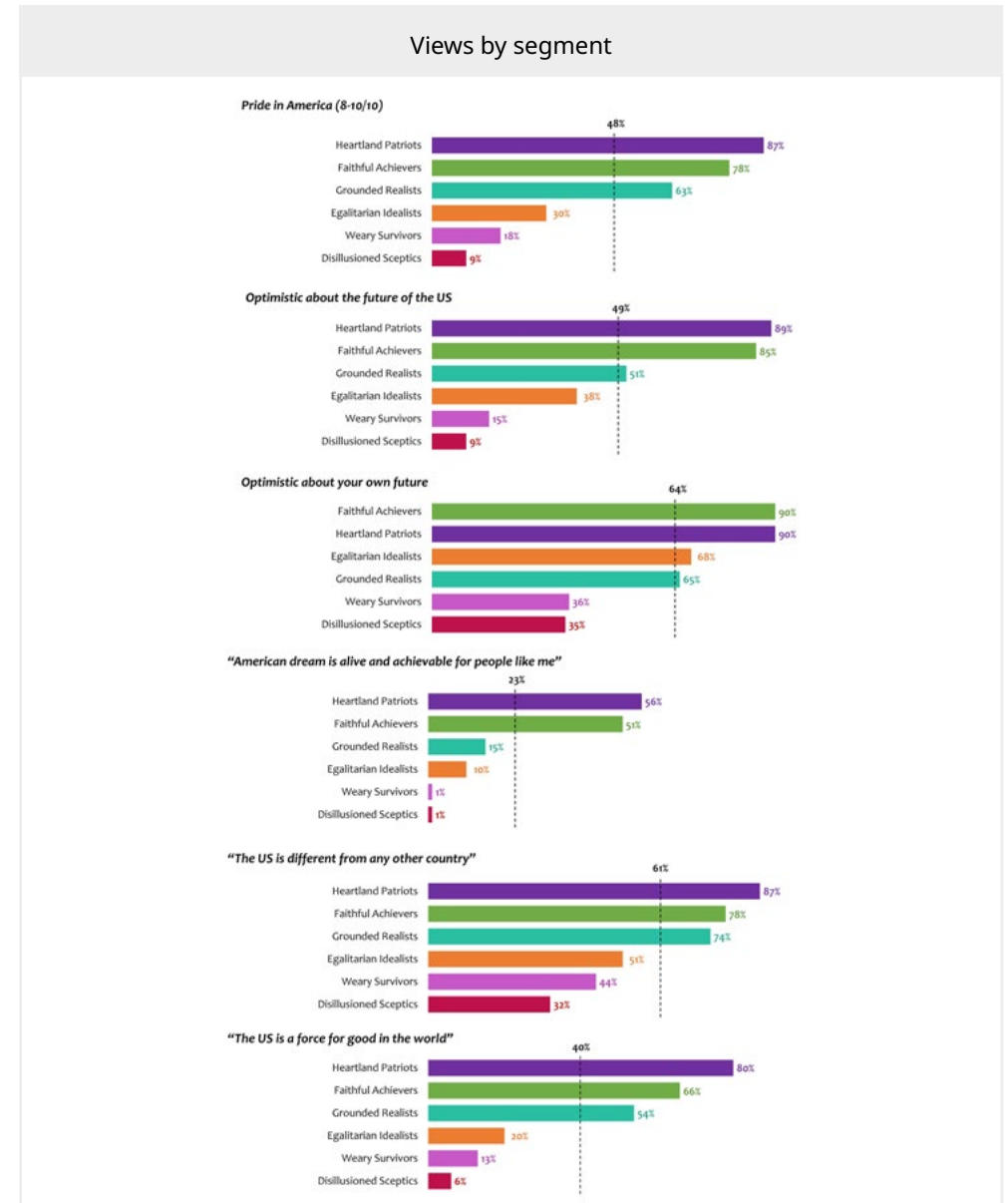
Disillusioned Sceptics

These are the most sceptical about the American Dream, being the most likely to believe it is outdated or that it never really existed, gives people false hope and has excluded many people in the past. They are also the most likely to say that stories about people achieving the American Dream rarely or never reflect realistic possibilities for people like them. They have by far the lowest levels of pride in the US today and are the most likely to say that America's founding ideals were flawed from the beginning. They are the most inclined to see gender, race and childhood location as important determinants of opportunity, and the least likely to mention natural talent and hard work. They are the most likely to cite wealth inequality as a worry for the next generation, and most believe there are many places where people can live a better life than in the US. Disillusioned Sceptics are the youngest and most ethnically diverse group, and is the least likely to be religious or attend church. In 2024 they voted for Harris over Trump by a margin of 5 to 1.



Here we see how the segments are located on the political map. Heartland Patriots and Grounded Realists are most likely to be found in the Republican-leaning bottom right, while Faithful Achievers are in the more prosperous, less diverse top right. Weary Survivors are most likely to be found in the more diverse, less secure bottom left, while Egalitarian Idealists are very close to the centre of gravity of Democrat support in the more secure, more diverse top right. Disillusioned Sceptics also appear in this quadrant, though somewhat further from the Democrats' core support.







The chart below shows how the six tribes respond to questions about pride in America, personal and national optimism, the achievability of the American Dream, US exceptionalism and whether the country is a force for good in the world.



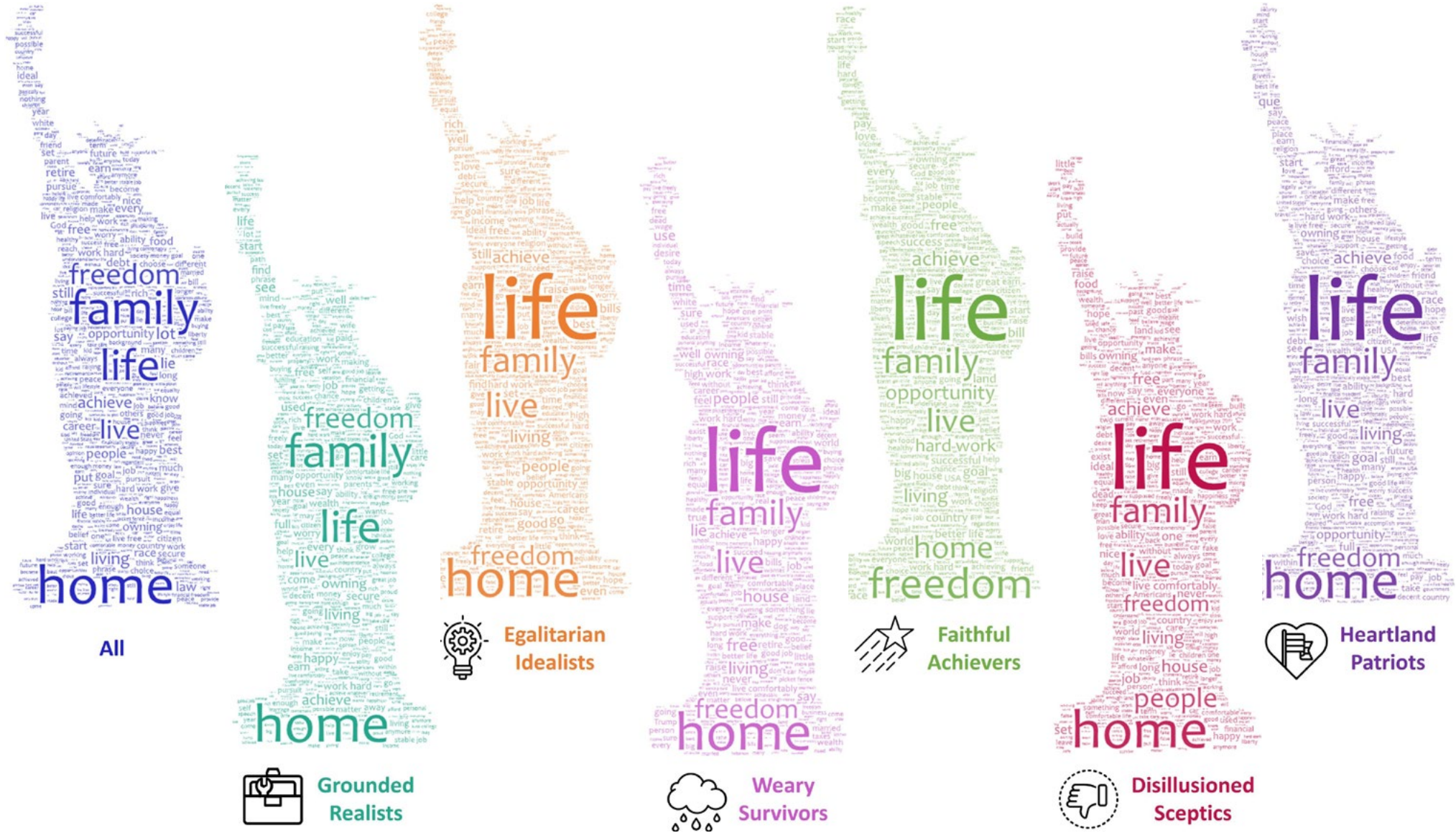
In an open-ended question, we asked respondents to sum up what they understood by “the American Dream”. The table opposite shows the broad themes represented by respondents’ answers, and how these themes ranked for each tribe. The Statue of Liberty word clouds on the next page show the words used by participants in each of the tribes – the relative size of each word shows how often they were used.

The results show that despite their different outlooks on important questions, their view about the elements of the American Dream are in many ways similar. Home ownership, freedom, success and achievement, family, and financial security or stability appear in different combinations the top three for all tribes, despite their varying outlooks on life. The biggest differences are over how achievable they believe them to be, whether for themselves or for the next generation.

Sum up in a word or phrase what you understand by the phrase ‘the American Dream’
[Showing theme by segment. Cell number is the rank of that theme within the segment]

	All	 Egalitarian Idealists	 Faithful Achievers	 Heartland Patriots	 Grounded Realists	 Weary Survivors	 Disillusioned Sceptics
Home / house ownership	1	3	3	3	1	1	1
Freedom & liberty	2	1	2	1	2	2	4
Success & achievement	3	2	1	2	4	5	3
Family & children	4	5	4	4	3	4	5
Financial security / stability	5	4	5	5	5	3	2
Happiness & fulfilment	6	6	8	6	6	8	8
Steady job / employment	7	8	11	8	7	7	10
Hard work / work ethic	8	10	6	7	8	10	11
Comfortable living	9	11	11	10	9	6	6
Equality & fairness	10	7	9	12	12	9	7
Opportunity	11	9	7	9	10	12	12
Freedom to pursue goals / do what you want	12	13	13	11	11	13	13
Better life / upward mobility	13	12	10	14	16	16	15
Dream no longer achievable / myth	14	15	26	25	19	10	9
Live a good / fulfilling life	15	17	15	13	13	14	15
Education	16	14	16	15	17	20	17
Government / politics	17	16	21	16	17	15	14
Retirement	18	19	17	17	14	19	18
Future / next generation	19	20	14	18	14	17	24
Health & healthcare	20	18	18	19	22	22	18
Car / vehicle ownership	20	21	19	19	19	18	18
Safety & security (physical)	22	22	20	21	23	21	21
Debt-free	23	24	23	23	19	22	23
Basic needs (food / shelter)	24	23	25	26	24	24	21
Owning a business	25	25	22	22	25	25	25
Travel & leisure	26	26	24	23	26	26	25

Sum up in a word or phrase what you understand by the phrase 'the American Dream'?



About Lord Ashcroft

LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. He is a former treasurer and deputy chairman of the UK Conservative Party. He is also honorary chairman and a former treasurer of the International Democracy Union. He is founder and chairman of the board of trustees of Crimestoppers, vice-patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, chairman of the trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy, a senior fellow of the International Strategic Studies Association, former chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University and a former trustee of Imperial War Museums.

His political books include:

- Smell the Coffee: A Wake-Up Call for the Conservative Party
- Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron
- Hopes and Fears: Trump, Clinton, the Voters and the Future
- Well, You Did Ask: Why the UK Voted to Leave the EU
- The Lost Majority: The 2017 Election, the Conservative Party, the Voters and the Future
- Jacob's Ladder: The Unauthorised Biography of Jacob Rees-Mogg
- Diagnosis of Defeat: Labour's Turn to Smell the Coffee
- Going for Broke: The Rise of Rishi Sunak
- Reunited Nation? American Politics Beyond the 2020 Election
- Red Knight: The Unauthorised Biography of Sir Keir Starmer
- First Lady: Intrigue at the Court of Carrie and Boris Johnson
- All To Play For: The Advance Of Rishi Sunak
- Red Queen? The Unauthorised Biography of Angela Rayner
- Red Flag: The Uneasy Advance of Sir Keir Starmer
- The Farage Factor: Reform UK and the Remaking of British Politics

His other books include:

- Victoria Cross Heroes, Volumes I and II
- Special Forces Heroes
- George Cross Heroes
- Special Ops Heroes
- Heroes of the Skies
- White Flag? An Examination of the UK's Defence Capability
- Unfair Game: An Exposé of South Africa's Captive-Bred Lion Industry
- Life Support: The State of the NHS in an Age of Pandemics
- In the Shadows: The Extraordinary Men and Women of the Intelligence Corps

