

National Public Opinion Poll

America250



June 2026

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Reflecting on Democracy at America's 250th Anniversary



As the United States observes the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, our nation finds itself in a moment of both celebration and strain. Americans remain deeply connected to the ideals of liberty, equality and self-government, yet increasingly divided over how those ideals should be interpreted, protected and advanced. The tone of public life has become more divisive, more confrontational and less anchored in shared facts or mutual respect.

This report from the Elon University Poll examines how Americans are thinking about democracy, citizenship and the nation's future at this pivotal moment in its history.

Since its founding in 1889, Elon University has prepared students not only for careers, but for lives of consequence. Civic engagement has long been central to that mission. Elon was founded in an era when American higher education increasingly saw democracy itself as dependent on an informed and engaged citizenry. That conviction remains central to the university today.

At Elon, civic learning is not confined to a single classroom or discipline. Students are challenged to examine evidence critically, engage perspectives different from their own, and wrestle with the difficult realities of public life in a pluralistic society.

For more than two decades, the Elon University Poll has contributed to public understanding by examining the attitudes and experiences of citizens across North Carolina and the nation. In undertaking this project connected to America's semiquincentennial, the Poll continues its mission of fostering informed public discourse and encouraging reflection about the condition and future of American democracy.

The Declaration of Independence was not simply a statement of ideals; it was a declaration of responsibility. Two hundred and fifty years later, the work of democracy remains unfinished and demands the continued participation of informed, thoughtful and engaged citizens. We hope this report contributes, in some small but meaningful way, to that ongoing national conversation.

Connie Ledoux Book
Elon University President



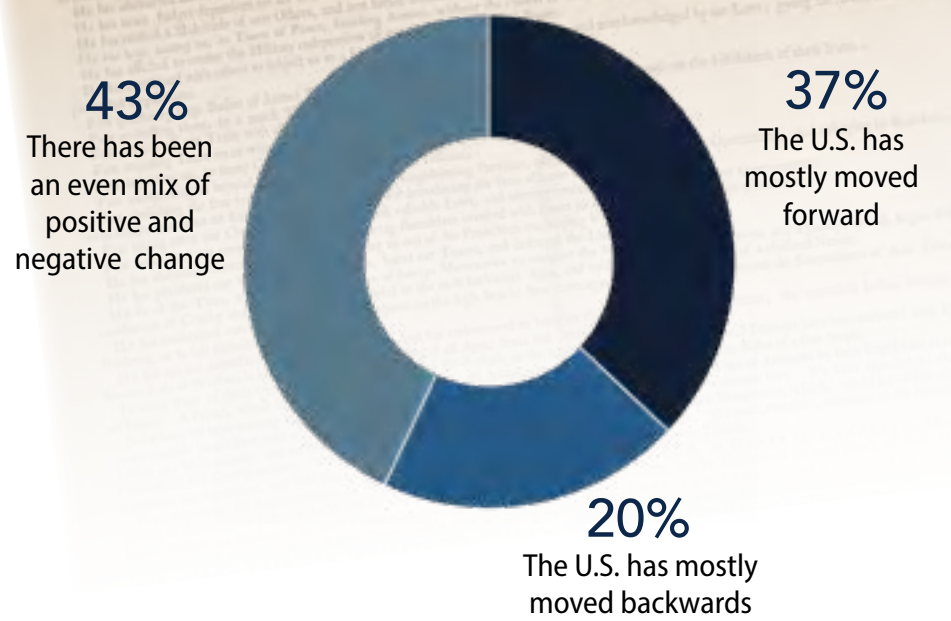
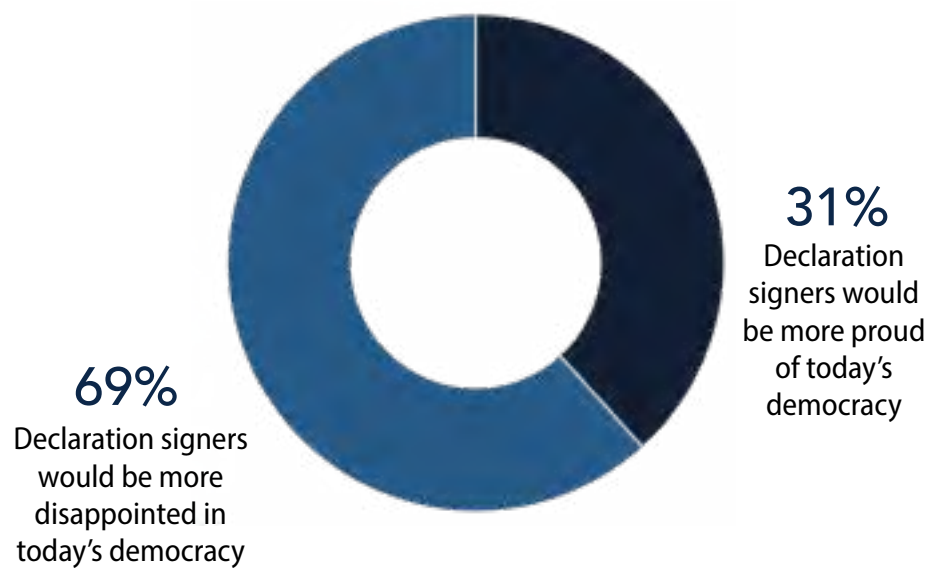
Reflections on America's Past

How Americans interpret their history shapes how they see the nation today. These questions examine which eras, leaders, and events define the country's past—and whether that history is viewed primarily as progress, failure or a complex mix of both.



More than two-thirds of Americans say the signers of the Declaration of Independence would be disappointed in modern U.S. democracy.

Evaluating U.S. social change throughout the past 250 years:



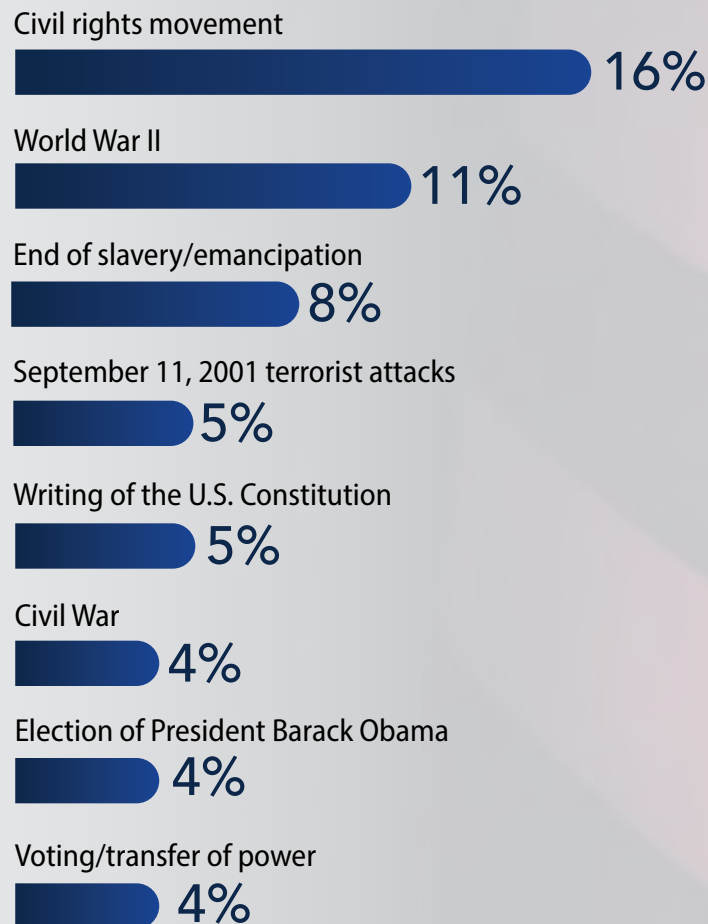


Americans of all ages agree that the United States plays a uniquely important role in world history

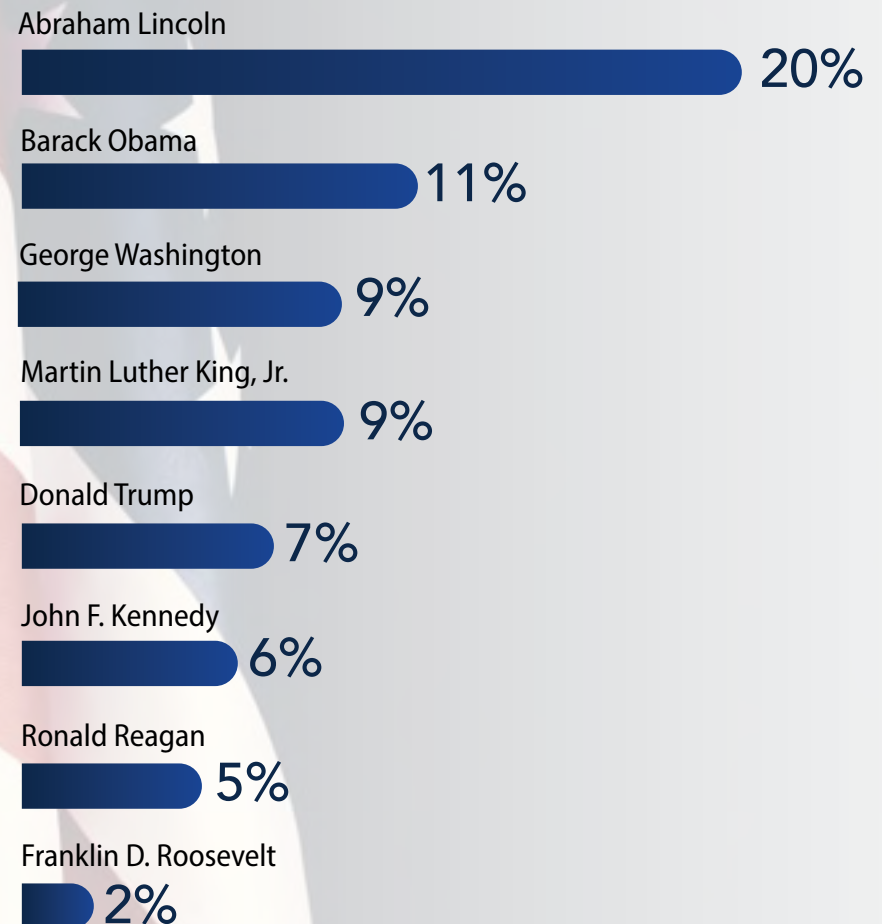


Across 250 years of American history...

In which single event did American democracy best live up to its highest ideals?



Which single individual best exemplifies American democracy's highest ideals?



Who has been the best president in U.S. history?



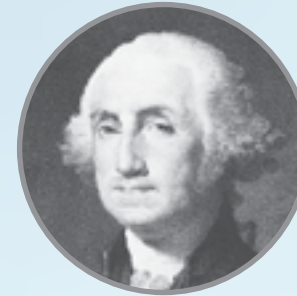
Abraham Lincoln

26%



Barack Obama

17%



George Washington

12%



Donald Trump

11%



Franklin D. Roosevelt

10%



Ronald Reagan

9%



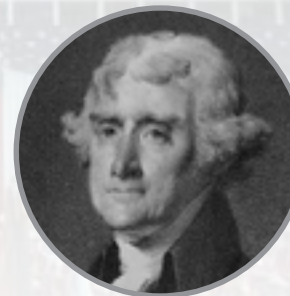
John F. Kennedy

6%



Theodore Roosevelt

2%



Thomas Jefferson

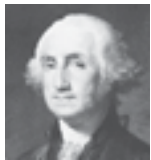
1%
each



Bill Clinton

Agree or Disagree?

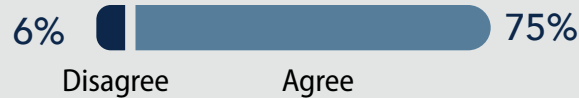
Poll respondents were asked if they agreed with the overall meaning of some famous presidential quotes — without being told who said them.



"Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all."
- George Washington



"Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."
- Abraham Lincoln



"This is a republic of proud citizens who are united by our common conviction that America is the greatest nation in all of history."
- Donald Trump



"Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."
- John F. Kennedy



"Let each of us ask not what government will do for me, but what can I do for myself."
- Richard M. Nixon



"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."
- Franklin D. Roosevelt



"Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."
- Ronald Reagan



"We don't think government can solve all our problems. But we don't think that government is the source of all our problems."
- Barack Obama



"Without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life."
- Dwight D. Eisenhower

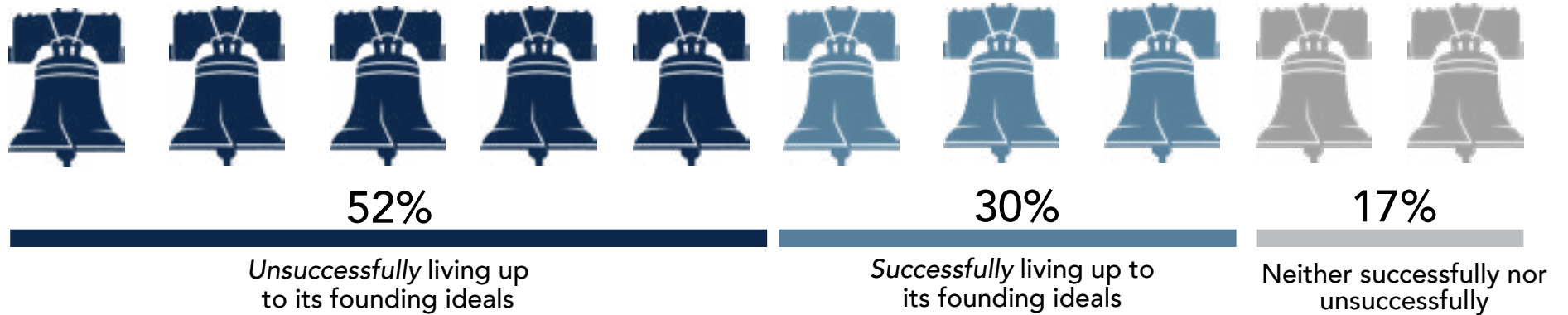




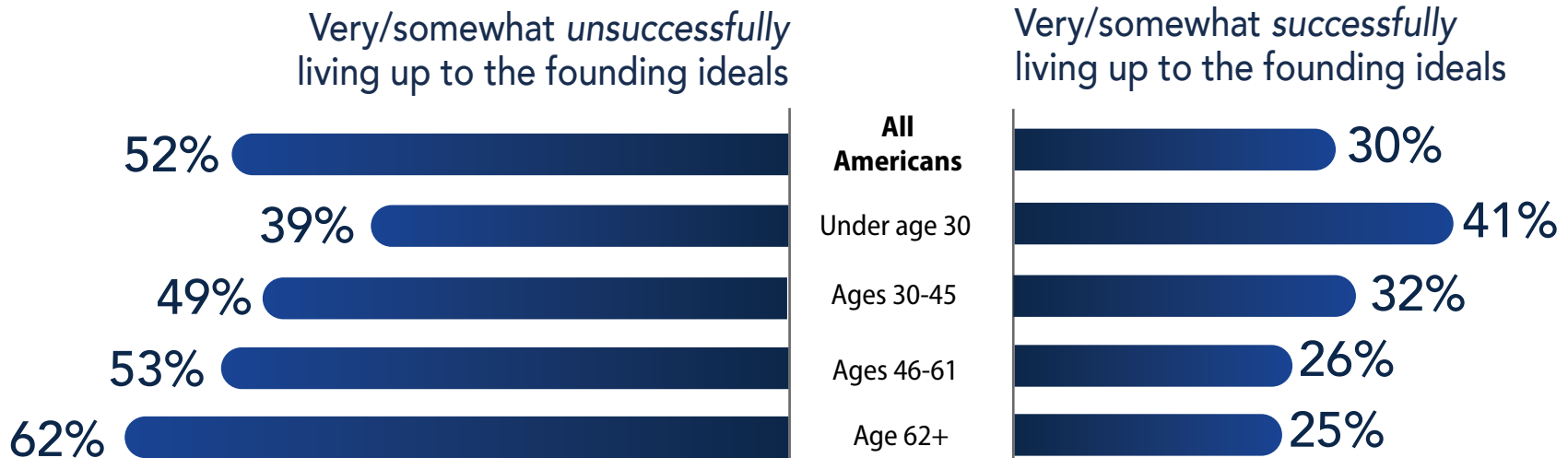
Assessment of America's Present

Views of the country's current condition vary widely. This section captures how Americans assess the state of the nation today, including the strength and stability of its democracy, and the level of pride people feel in their country.

More than half say the U.S. is not living up to its founding ideals



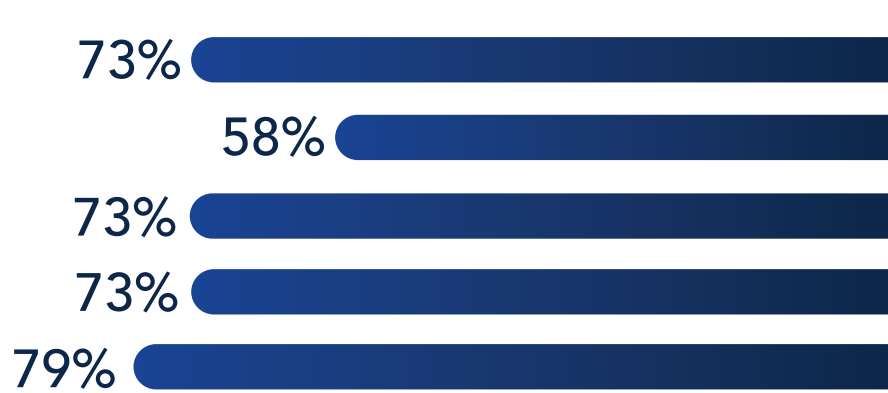
Younger Americans are more likely to say the U.S. is living up to its founding ideals



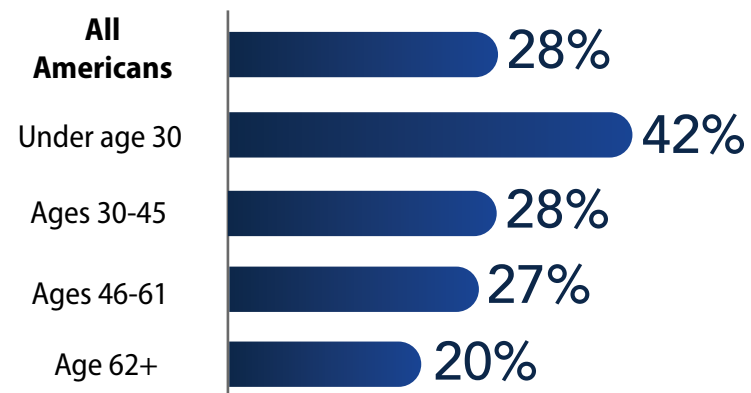
Rating the overall health of American democracy



Democracy health: Fair/Poor



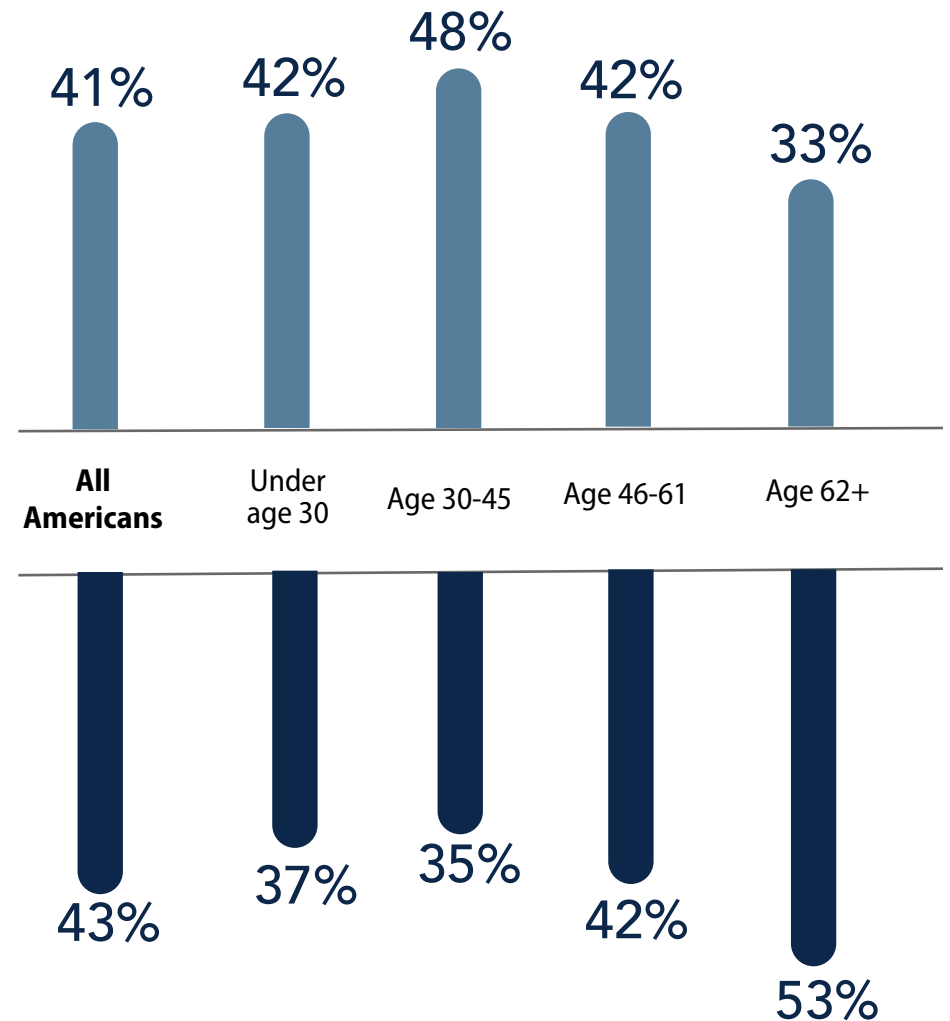
Democracy health: Good/Excellent



Americans are divided on the question of who has the most influence in our democracy. Older Americans tend to have more faith in the influence of ordinary people.



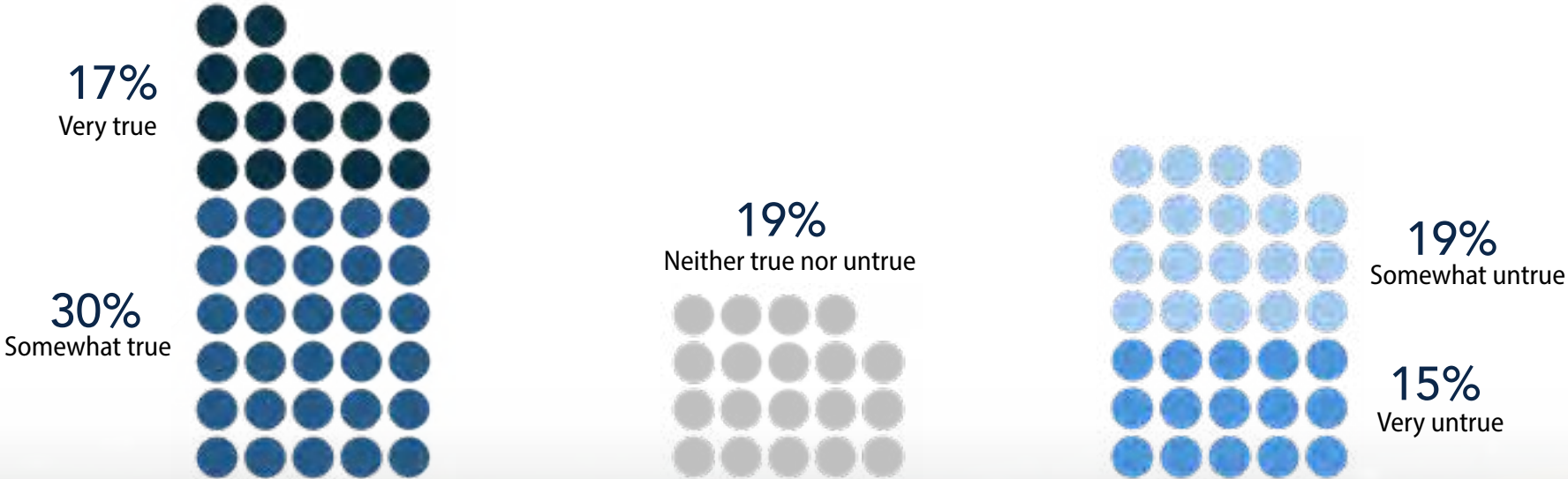
Those in power have more influence



Ordinary people have more influence

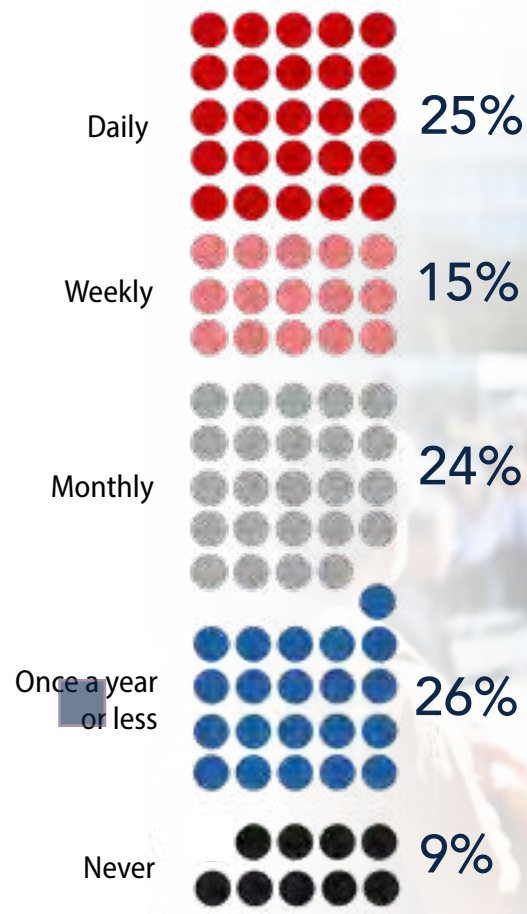
Is the American Dream still alive?

How true is this statement?: "In America today, people who work hard generally succeed, regardless of the circumstances they were born into."

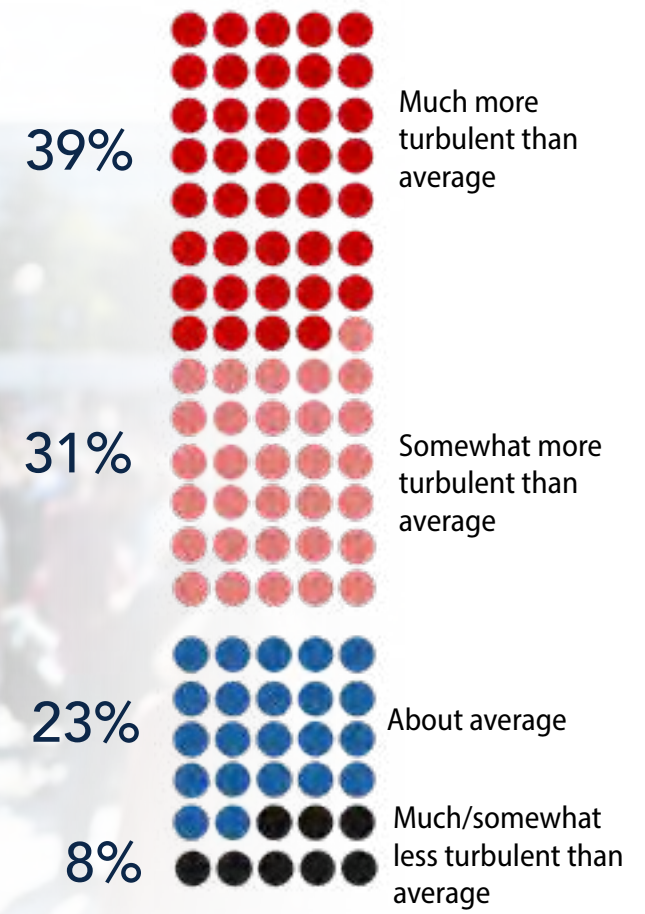


An era of turbulence and crisis

In the past five years, how often have you felt the U.S. is on the brink of a major crisis?



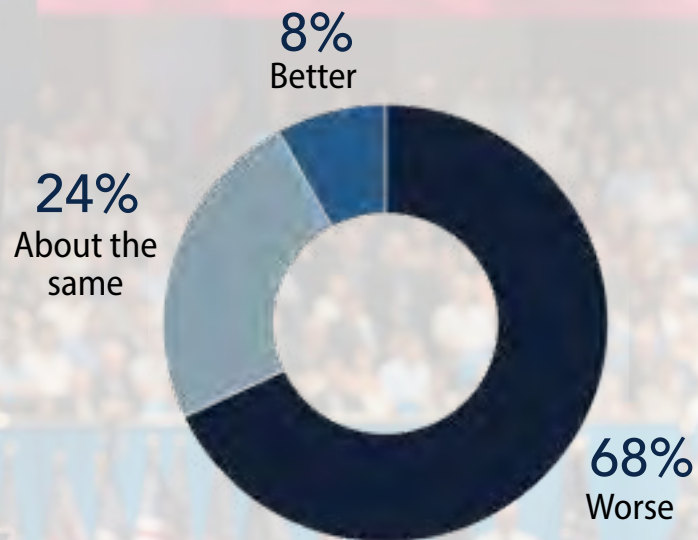
How turbulent and unstable are times today compared with other periods in U.S. history?



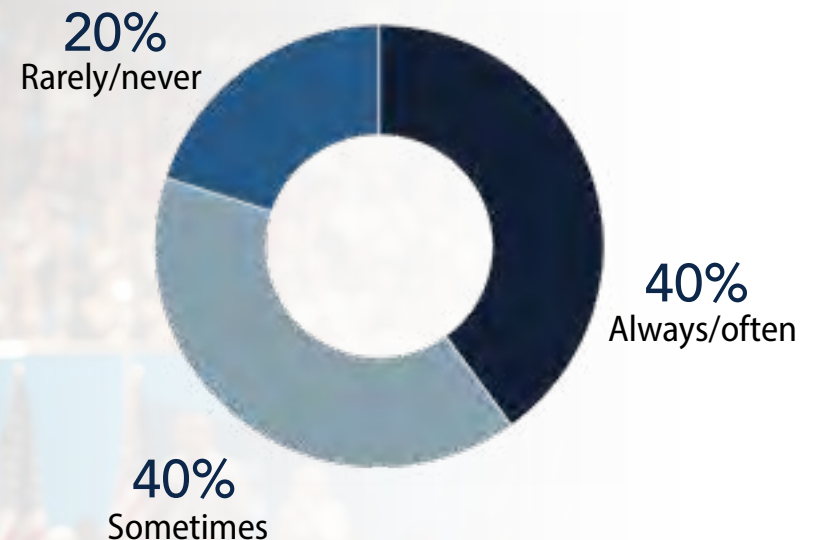
Negative views of leaders and parties

Today's elected officials get low marks compared with those in the past and a large majority say the major parties sometimes or often don't represent their views.

Comparing elected officials over the last 10 years with those in the past

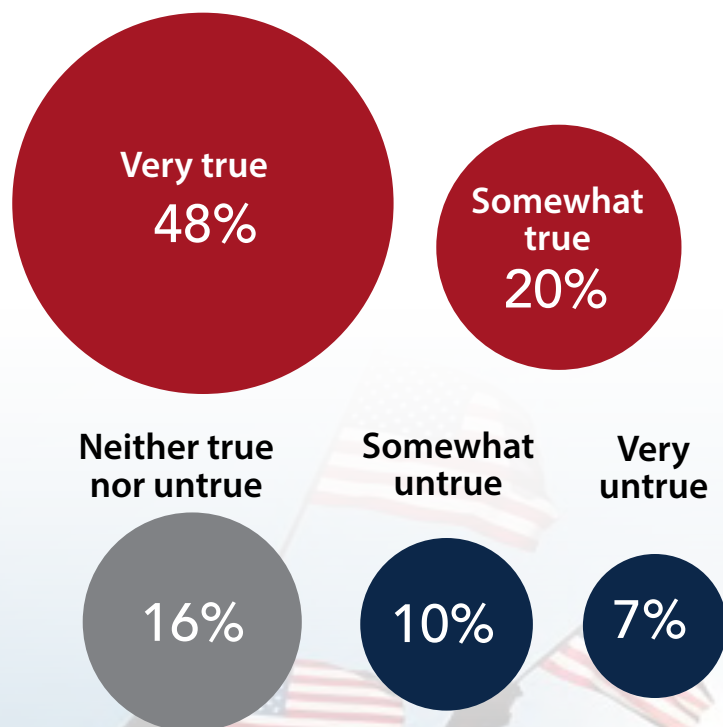


Feeling that no major political party or political movement represents your views

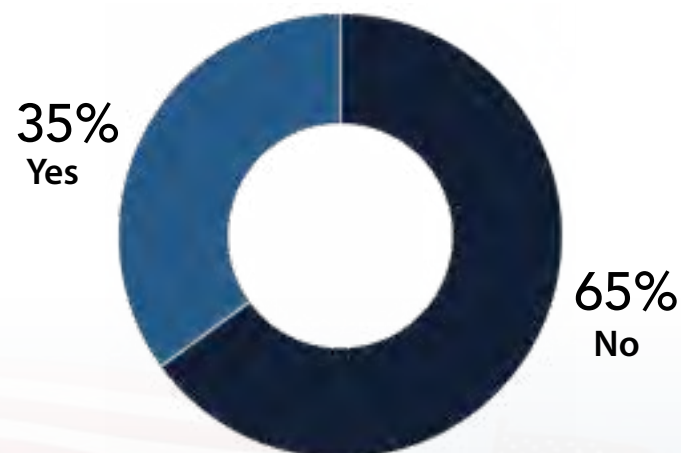


Americans are proud of their country

True or untrue? "I am proud to be an American."



Would you rather live in another country today?



If yes, which other country would you choose?

- 19% Canada
- 9% United Kingdom
- 5% Japan
- 5% Australia
- 4% Ireland
- 4% Switzerland
- 4% Norway

*Respondents provided top-of-mind responses to this open-ended question.

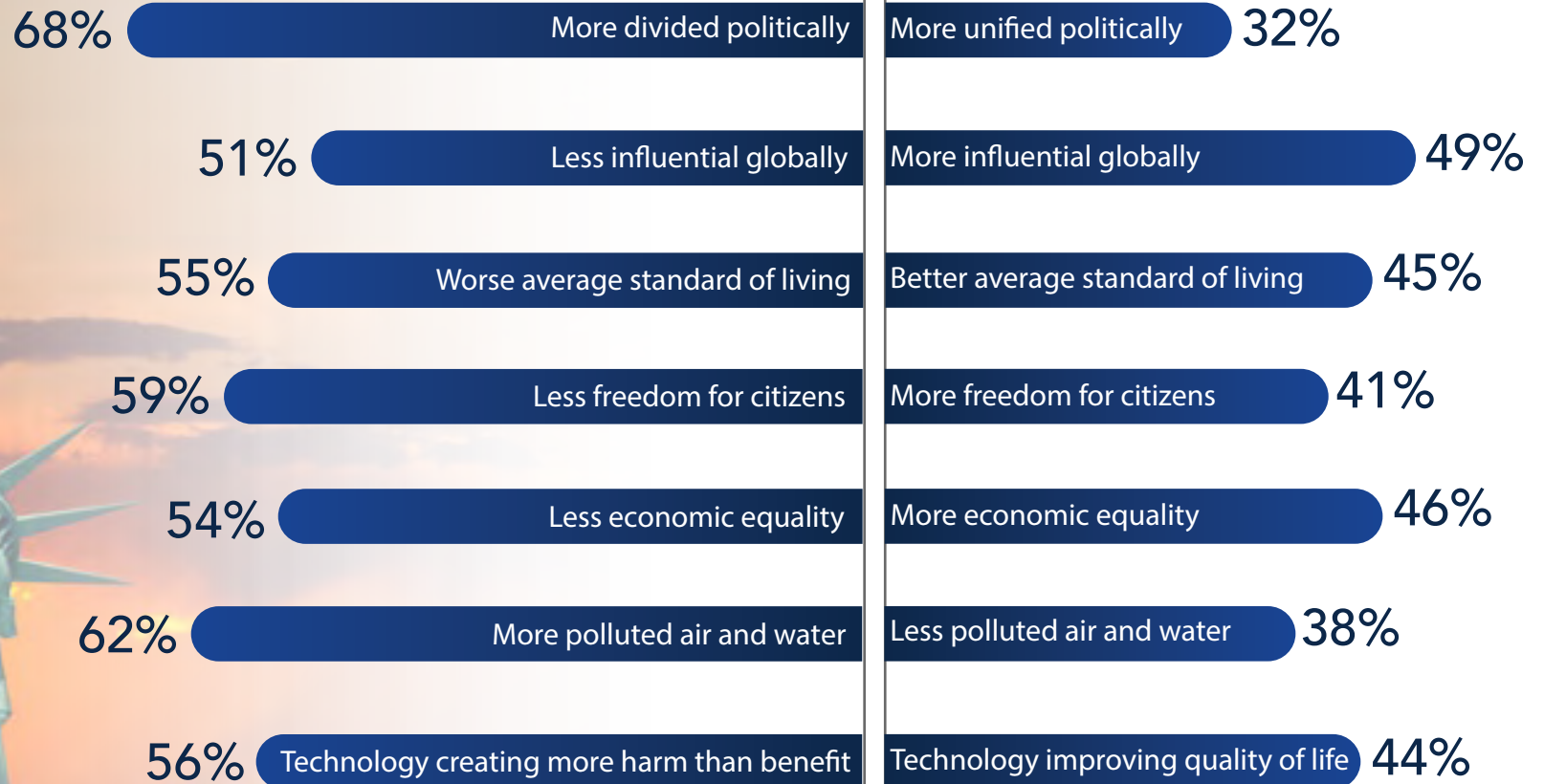


Outlook on America's Future

Expectations for the country's future reveal both optimism and concern. These questions explore whether Americans believe the nation's best days lie ahead or behind, what threats matter most, and how they envision the United States decades from now.

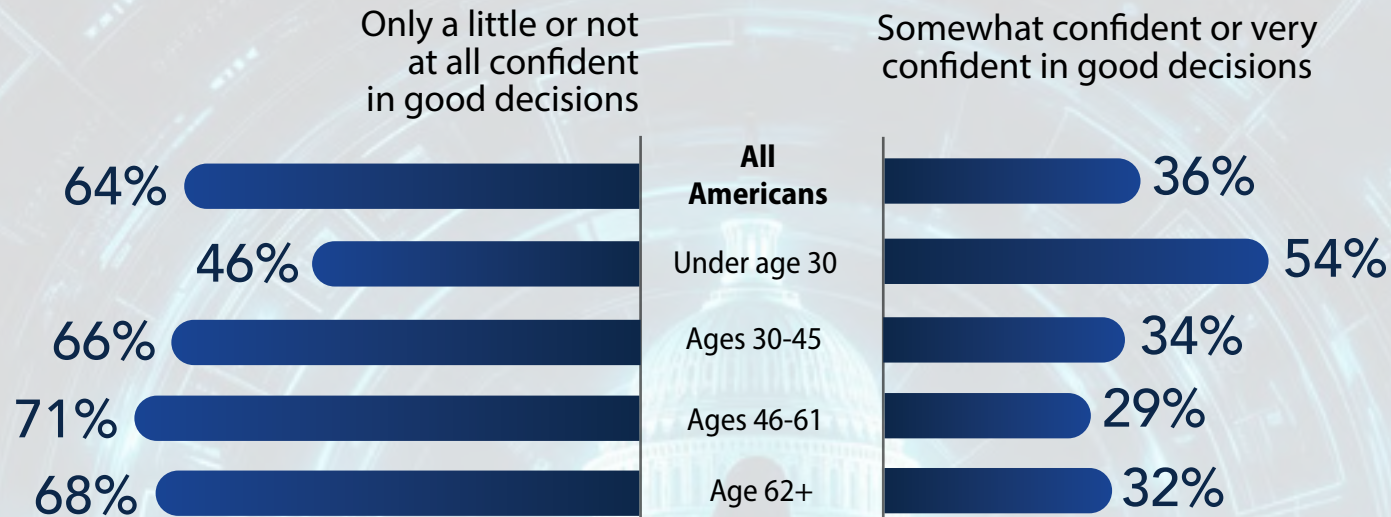
Expectations for America in 2076

Americans generally lean toward a more pessimistic outlook for the next 50 years.



Expectations for America in 2076

Only 36% are confident that U.S. political institutions will make mostly good decisions on major issues facing democracy, regardless of who holds office, over the next 50 years. Americans under age 30 tend to be the most confident in good future decisions.



64% say they will have little or no direct or indirect role in what America becomes over the next 50 years.

Will play little or no role in what America becomes

64%

Will play a great deal or some role in what America becomes

36%



Commemorating **America**250

The 250th anniversary provides a moment to assess both legacy and meaning. This section looks at how Americans feel about this milestone and how they believe it should be recognized.



Americans favor smaller celebrations

Likely to participate in events or activities related to the 250th anniversary



America250 should be more about...

A celebration of U.S. achievements



Reflection on U.S. history and values



The most authentic events will be...

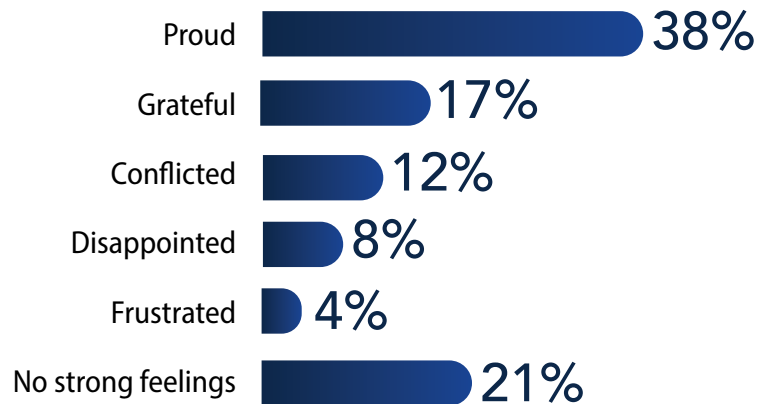
Smaller, local events



Larger, national events

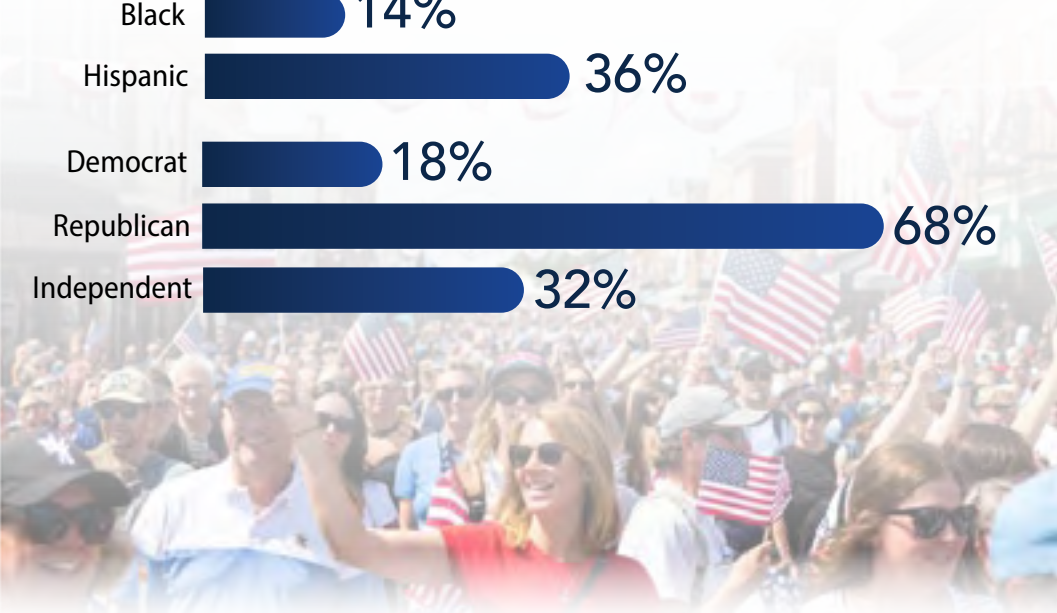
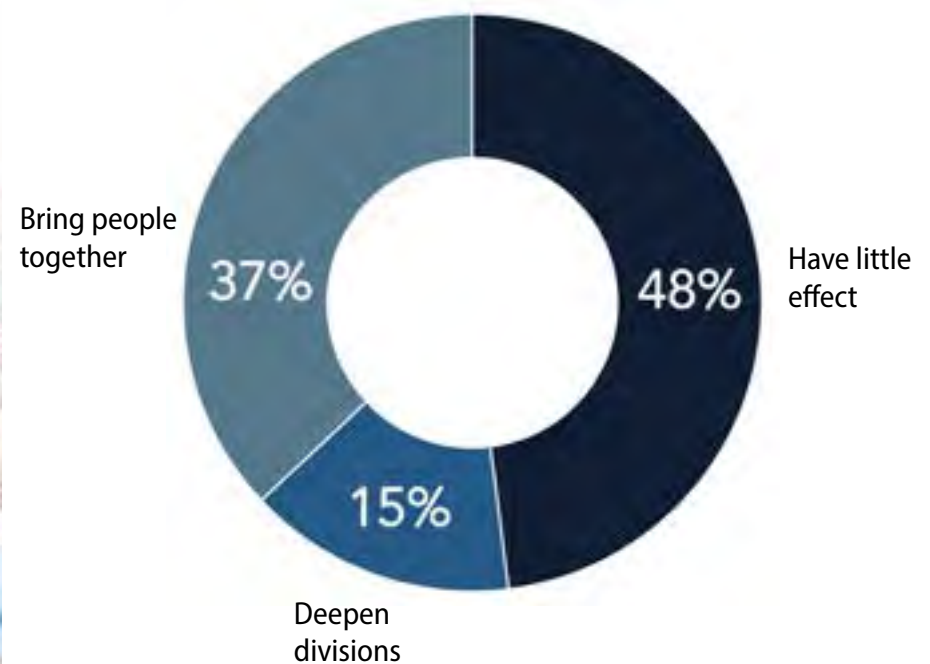
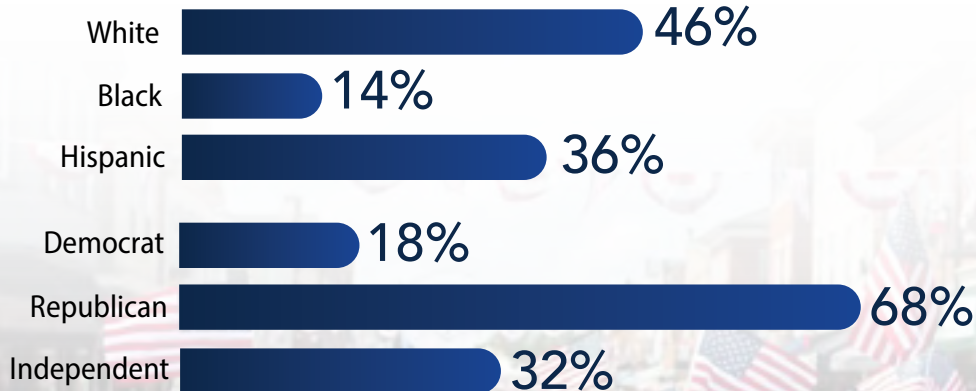


As the USA turns 250, Americans are feeling...



The 250th anniversary is more likely to...

Those choosing the word "proud"



America at 250: Proud, But Not Without Doubts



As the United States commemorates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Elon University Poll examined public opinion reflecting on America's past, present and future. In this representative national survey, we explored big questions about how America views itself.

Does America 250 evoke common feelings among Americans? Poll respondents had complex and diverse feelings about it. When we asked Americans to choose among five words—proud, grateful, conflicted, frustrated, or disappointed—no single option dominated. However, 55% of people chose positive options compared to only 12% who chose negative feelings. The more neutral options “conflicted” and “no strong feelings” were favored by 33%. Over two-thirds said America 250 should be more about reflection than celebration. Smaller, local events were preferred by most respondents over larger, national events.

Where are Americans most optimistic? We found several points of overwhelming optimism. Over two-thirds thought “I am proud to be an American” applied to them, and a similar number said there is no other country where they would rather live than the United States today. Nearly 80% at least somewhat agreed that “The United States has a uniquely important role to play in world history.” Most could point to an event in which American democracy best lived up to its ideals, with the civil rights

movement, the end of slavery and the country's role in World War II highlighted as common bright spots by members of both major parties.

Where are Americans most concerned? Many Americans expressed concerns about the nation's democracy today, with only 6% rating its health as excellent. We found split outlooks for the next 50 years, with slight majorities indicating more pessimistic than optimistic views on the future economy, environment, political system and role of technology in life. Notably, the youngest generation of American adults, Generation Z, was consistently the most optimistic about the future.

These highlights, presented in detail in our full report, reveal that perspectives on the United States today follow a well-established pattern: pluralistic, democratic societies rarely generate true consensus about public affairs. Nonetheless, when we read the findings in their totality, especially considering the optimism of young Americans, we see an underlying theme of perseverance perhaps best reflected in three-quarters of Americans who agreed with President Lincoln, that: “Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Jason Husser

Director, Elon University Poll
Professor, Political Science and Public Policy



How we did this survey

This survey was developed by the Elon University Poll and fielded by the international marketing and polling firm YouGov as an online, web-based survey. Between April 30 and May 4, 2026, 1,077 U.S. adults aged 18 and older responded to the survey. These respondents were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce a final dataset that is statistically representative of the U.S. population. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.95%. Note: all survey research is subject to multiple unmeasurable [sources of error](#) such as sampling error, coverage error and measurement error. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

More information

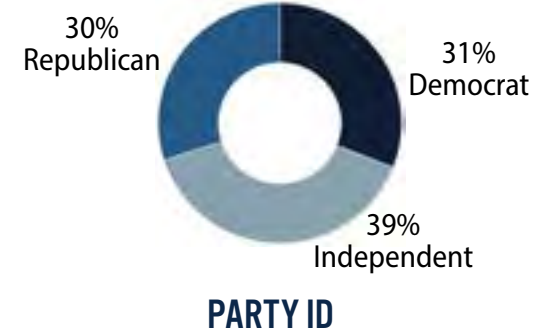
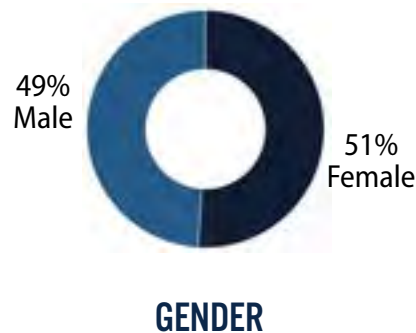
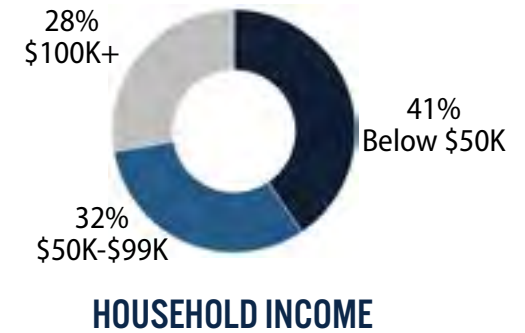
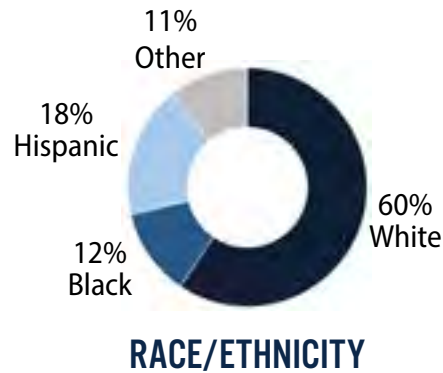
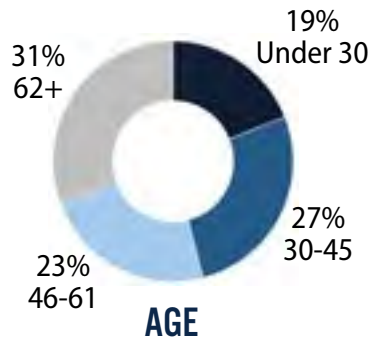
Poll topline and methodology: elon.edu/elonpoll

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Respondent demographics





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