

ELON UNIVERSITY

POLL

For immediate release
June 2, 2026

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- [Special report on the America250 Poll \(PDF\)](#)
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Elon University Poll: A Proud but Deeply Uneasy Public as America Celebrates 250th Anniversary

Many respondents in a new national survey say the United States is not living up to its founding ideals, that political divisions will worsen, and the signers of the Declaration of Independence would be disappointed in modern democracy.

As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Americans remain proud of their country but pessimistic about the health and future of American democracy, according to a new national Elon University Poll.

Sixty-eight percent of American adults say they are proud to be American, and 79% agree the United States plays a uniquely important role in world history. At the same time, 69% believe the signers of the Declaration of Independence would feel more disappointment than pride about modern American democracy.

The survey of 1,000 adults in the United States, conducted April 30-May 4, 2026, explores how Americans view the nation's past, present and future as the country prepares to commemorate its semiquincentennial.

“As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Americans have complex and diverse feelings about America 250,” said Jason Husser, director of the Elon University Poll and a professor of political science and public policy. “We found several points of optimism among Americans, including pride in being American and belief that the United States has a uniquely important role to play in world history. At the same time, many Americans expressed significant concern about the health of American democracy today, and the country is split on its outlook over the next 50 years.”

More than half of Americans (52%) say the United States is unsuccessfully living up to its founding ideals, while only 30% say the nation is successfully living up to them. Nearly three-quarters of Americans (73%) rate the overall health of U.S. democracy as only “fair” or “poor.”

The survey also found widespread concern about political instability and civic division:

- 68% believe elected officials today are worse than leaders of the past
- 80% say they at least sometimes feel no political party or movement represents their views
- 70% say the country is more turbulent than average compared with other periods in U.S. history
- 64% say they have little or no confidence that U.S. political institutions will make mostly good decisions over the next 50 years
- 68% predict America will become more politically divided by 2076

Americans are also pessimistic about the country’s long-term future in several key areas. Majorities predict that by 2076 the nation will have less freedom, less economic equality, a lower standard of living, and more pollution. More Americans also believe technology will create more harm than benefit over the next 50 years.

Despite those concerns, the poll found Americans still hold strong connections to the nation’s democratic ideals and history.

When asked which event best represented American democracy at its highest ideals, respondents most frequently selected the Civil Rights Movement and World War II. Abraham Lincoln was named both the historical figure who best exemplified democratic ideals and the greatest president in U.S. history.

The survey also revealed broad bipartisan resonance for many historic presidential messages when respondents were not told who made the statements. More than three-quarters agreed with quotations from George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, while large majorities also agreed with statements from John F. Kennedy and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Looking toward the nation’s semiquincentennial celebrations, Americans expressed greater interest in reflection than pageantry. Nearly seven in 10 (68%) said America250 should focus more on reflecting on U.S. history and values than simply celebrating national achievements, and 71% said smaller local events would feel more authentic than large national celebrations.

The survey found Americans entering the anniversary with mixed emotions. The most common feeling was pride, cited by 38%, followed by gratitude at 17%. But 21% said

they have no strong feelings, 12% described themselves as conflicted, while others reported disappointment or frustration.

The margin of error for the Elon University Poll survey is +/- 3.95%.

Poll Methodology

Access the poll topline and methodology at: www.elon.edu/elonpoll. The survey was developed by the Elon University Poll and fielded by the international marketing and polling firm YouGov as an online, web-based survey, self-administered with online panels. Between April 30 and March 4, 2026, YouGov interviewed 1,077 U.S. adults aged 18 and older. These respondents were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce the final dataset.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and home ownership. The margin of error for this poll (adjusted for weights) is +/-3.95%.

About the Elon University Poll

Established in 2000, the Elon University Poll conducts national and North Carolina surveys on issues of importance to voters and residents. Information from these polls is shared with media, citizens and public officials to facilitate informed public policy making through the better understanding of citizens' opinions and attitudes. The poll is fully funded by Elon University and operates as the neutral, non-biased information resource.

The Elon University Poll is a charter member of the [Transparency Initiative](#), a program created by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) in 2014 to educate polling firms on ways to better share how they collect and interpret their information. The Elon Poll's voluntary participation in this initiative signifies a willingness to clearly state in its reports how questions were asked, in what order, who funded the poll and then conducted it, and a definition of the population under study, among other details.