



Young Americans Value Core Freedoms but View Today's Nation as 'Fractured'

New poll from American University's Sine Institute reveals deep divide between national pride and current political reality

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 1, 2026) — Young Americans are proud of the nation's past on its 250th birthday, grim about its current state and firm in their belief in diversity and community values, according to a new national poll from American University's [Sine Institute of Policy and Politics](#). The fifth survey in the institute's annual polling series explores how young people—ages 18 to 34—define their generation, view political participation, express what being American means to them and assess the country's future.

"This research puts young Americans at the center of the conversation about our country's future," said Dave Marchick, Interim President of American University.

According to the poll, a majority of young people describe themselves as "patriotic" and 57% say they are "very proud" or "somewhat proud" to be an American. These responses vary widely across gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation and education level. Men are more likely to describe themselves as patriotic (66%) and proud (71%) compared to women (43% and 48%, respectively).

While 44% of respondents credit their generation with having a positive impact on the country, nearly half (48%) lack a strong sense of belonging while expressing a desire to build strong community ties. The poll also reveals that while most young Americans are proud of the country's past, sentiment shifts sharply regarding its present. A majority of respondents chose words such as "broken," "divided," "polarized" and "chaotic" to describe the state of the nation in 2026.

"Young people are not simply the leaders of tomorrow—they are shaping America today," **said Amy K. Dacey**, executive director of the Sine Institute of Policy and Politics. "Their voices, experiences and aspirations offer an essential perspective on where our country stands and where it is headed. This poll gives young Americans the opportunity to define

their own generation, share how they see the future of our country and speak to the ways they are already participating in civic life and caring for the people around them. By listening to young people on their own terms, we gain a fuller picture of the America they are experiencing and the America they want to build.”

The survey of 1,031 young Americans offers insight into how the rising generation views the challenges facing the country and its role in addressing them. The poll was conducted in late July 2026 in partnership with the [Close Up Foundation](#) and [Future Caucus](#).

Generation Lab, a data intelligence company that studies the views and behavior of young adults, conducted the interviews. An advisory group of 19 AU graduate and undergraduate students helped to design the poll, write questions and evaluate the methodology and findings.

“Young people are navigating a rapidly changing America while carrying responsibilities that often extend far beyond themselves,” said **Molly O’Rourke, Sine Institute senior advisor and executive in residence in the School of Communication**. “Their views on the state of our country, their hopes and concerns for the future and the ways they participate in civic life tell an important story about this generation. This research helps bring those perspectives to the forefront and reminds us that young Americans are not a monolith—they have distinct experiences, priorities and visions for what comes next.”

More information about the survey and the full topline results are available [here](#).

About American University

American University leverages the power and purpose of scholarship, learning, and community to impact our changing world. AU’s faculty, students, staff, and alumni are changemakers who shape the future from sustainability to social justice to the sciences. Building on our 133-year history of education and research in the public interest, American University creates transformative educational opportunities, advances research with impact, and works to build stronger communities.

About the Sine Institute of Policy and Politics

The Sine Institute of Policy and Politics at American University is one of the nation’s premier forums for the study and discussion of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. As an incubator for policy innovation, the Sine Institute is committed to bringing students together with national and global changemakers to search for common ground and cultivate solutions to today’s most pressing challenges.

About Future Caucus

The Future Caucus is an organization dedicated to renewing American democracy. The Future Caucus works directly with our nation’s leading young policymakers on both a national and state level to bridge the partisan divide and lead a new era of collaborative governance.

About Close Up Foundation

Founded in 1971, Close Up Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic education organization that believes a strong democracy requires active, informed participation by all citizens. Close Up seeks to serve young people from all communities and all backgrounds, regardless of race, religion, gender, socioeconomic level or academic standing.