

Young Americans Cite Respect, Dignity, Tolerance as Core Values, New Poll Reveals

New Survey Offers Insights into Policy, Democracy, and Political Discourse

Washington, D.C. (September 28, 2022) – At a time of increasing political polarization and divisions, a [new poll](#) by [the Sine Institute for Policy & Politics at American University](#) offers a positive outlook for the future of American democracy, public policy, and political discourse. The survey of 3,144 young adults between the ages of 18 and 34, conducted by [YouGov](#) on behalf of the Sine Institute, revealed that young Americans place a premium on treating others with respect, dignity, and tolerance, and that they are confident that they and their peers have the power to sustain and improve the nation's institutions.

The Sine Institute worked with an advisory group of AU graduate and undergraduate students from across the university to help design the poll, formulate its questions, and provide feedback on the survey methodology and results. The Sine Institute Research Student Advisory Committee was comprised of six students majoring in Data Sciences for Political Science; Political Communication; Justice, Law, and Criminology; National Security; Foreign Policy; and International Relations. The student committee also offered suggestions for further research topics.

Respondents identified the pandemic (78%) and the increase in school and other mass shootings (76%) as the real-world events that have most uniquely shaped their lives and their perspective on politics. Nearly half (49%) said that they are “not very” or “not at all” satisfied with the state of U.S. democracy, while thirty-nine percent reported that they are “very” or “fairly satisfied.” Still, 76% remained optimistic about the possibility of dramatic change through collective action.

“The Sine Institute poll demonstrates two core values of American University—engaging our changemaking students in experiential learning and producing scholarship that impacts today’s greatest challenges,” said AU President Sylvia Burwell. “The findings help policymakers and institutions to better understand and address the concerns of today’s young people.”

“I’m optimistic when I see that the top values selected by young people across the political spectrum are so hopeful and positive,” said Amy Dacey, executive director of the Sine Institute for Policy & Politics. “The poll offers a silver lining to the hostility and political polarization that has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. This generation of young people could well be the one that will return civil discourse, respect, progress, and productivity to American politics and life.”

“The survey results provide authentic insights into the perspective of young Americans, in large part, because of the valuable input we got from our student advisors,” said Molly O’Rourke, executive-in-residence at the American University’s School of Communication and a senior advisor to the Sine Institute. “They helped shape the topics and questions we focused on to make this a uniquely meaningful study.”

Key findings:

- 1. Values and Life Experiences that Define a Generation:** When asked to choose their two most important core values, young Americans chose “treating all people with respect, dignity & tolerance” (37%), with “equality of opportunity for all” (33%) “individual freedom and the right to make your own decision” (32%), and “freedom of speech” (24%) following. *For more findings*

about young Americans' perspective on the role that social media plays in their lives and the way they get their news about policy and politics, click [here](#).

2. **The U.S. Political System:** According to the poll findings, young Americans are dissatisfied with the state of U.S. democracy. Nearly half (49%) of respondents said that they are “not very” or “not at all” satisfied with the state of U.S. democracy, while 39% report that they are “very” or “fairly satisfied.” Three-quarters (74%) agree that it is “hard to make progress given the way the system is set up.” *For more findings about young Americans' views of the political system, click [here](#).*
3. **The Midterm Elections & Political Participation:** While young Americans put forward a compelling list of issues that are personally important to them, including gun policy (34%), jobs and the economy (32%), climate change and the environment (31%), reproductive rights (29%), and racism and race relations (26%), only about one in three (35%) rate their enthusiasm for voting in the upcoming November midterm elections as eight or higher on a 10-point scale. *For more findings about young Americans' outlook on the midterm elections and policy issues that are priorities for them, click [here](#).*
4. **The Role of Social Media:** The survey findings suggest that young Americans are very cognizant of both the positive and negative effects of social media. Three in four young Americans simultaneously credit social media for allowing them to form communities of support (75%) and raise their awareness of other people's problems that they wouldn't otherwise know about (76%), while also acknowledging that misinformation is rife on social media (82% agree). *For more findings about young Americans' perspective on the role that social media plays in their lives and the way they get their news about policy and politics, click [here](#).*
5. **Trust and Forward-Looking Solutions:** Despite their frustration with the political status quo, young Americans put forth a clear agenda of needed reforms and trusted role models. A wide range of proposals garner overwhelming majority support from young Americans as a way to improve political participation, including term limits for elected officials (72%) and setting aside the Electoral College in favor of the popular vote (58%). The survey also analyzed trust in leadership at various levels. It revealed that, when it comes to trust, teachers (62%) and local elected leaders (38%) ranked higher than elected leaders who represent them in Congress (28%). *For more findings about the ideas and role models young Americans identify to help lead our country toward progress and improvement, click [here](#).*

“Young Americans have hope in the future and keep faith with democracy,” said Marcus Roberts, Chief of Public Data at YouGov. “They are confident that if their generation unites, they can overcome the challenges of the post-pandemic world and our nation's divided politics. YouGov was delighted to partner with Sine Institute in this creative and important research.”

This survey is based on interviews conducted by YouGov between July 30-August 18, 2022. The poll was weighted according to gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and U.S. Census region based on voter registration lists, the U.S. Census American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, as well as 2020 Presidential results.

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 128-year history of education and research in the public interest, we say '[Challenge Accepted](#)' to addressing the world's pressing issues. Our [Change Can't Wait](#) comprehensive campaign creates transformative educational opportunities, advances research with impact, and builds stronger communities.

About the Sine Institute for Policy & Politics

The Sine Institute of Policy & 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.

Since its inception in 2018, the Sine Institute of Policy & Politics has convened a wide range of discussions on women's empowerment, presidential elections, domestic and foreign policy, and the role of business in a civil society.

About YouGov

YouGov is an internationally-recognized market research firm specializing in online surveys. Founded in 2000, YouGov has pioneered producing accurate, high-quality research, and is trusted in both political polling and market research. YouGov's survey research experience, online survey tools, and digital environment allow us to provide a unique set of products to help our clients achieve their goals.