



Pursuing Unity: Speaking about American Identity across Divisions

About More in Common

For more information please visit moreincommon.com or contact us at US@moreincommon.com

Established in 2017, More in Common's mission is to build societies that are **stronger, more united, and more resilient** to the increasing threats of **polarization and social division**.

We work with over **200 groups** in civil society, business, faith, education, philanthropy to connect people across lines of division.

As of 2023, More in Common has a team of **40** people working across teams in **France, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States**.



The Premise

In this divisive era for the United States, perhaps our competing identities could be transcended by appealing to our shared values and ideals as Americans.

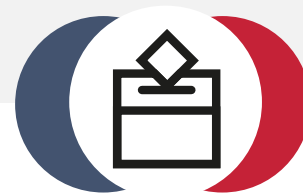
But how can we speak meaningfully about our shared American identity in a way that registers as true across racial groups and political perspectives?



American
History



Founding
Ideals



Being
Patriotic



Defining
Responsibilities

Goals & Methodology

Goals

As part of a two-year mixed-methods research project (2020-2022), we conducted focus groups, national surveys, and message and content testing on American identity, collective memory, attitudes towards historical figures and teaching American history.

We found that Americans share much common ground and most say that being American is an important part of their identity. However, there is a need for more thoughtful and strategic messaging to help foster belonging and activate a shared national identity.

This guide is a communications resource aimed at equipping institutions and civil society leaders committed to telling the “bigger story of us”. We hope this guide will provide strategic communications to disrupt divisive narratives and reach key audiences with more inclusive narratives of American identity.

Methodology

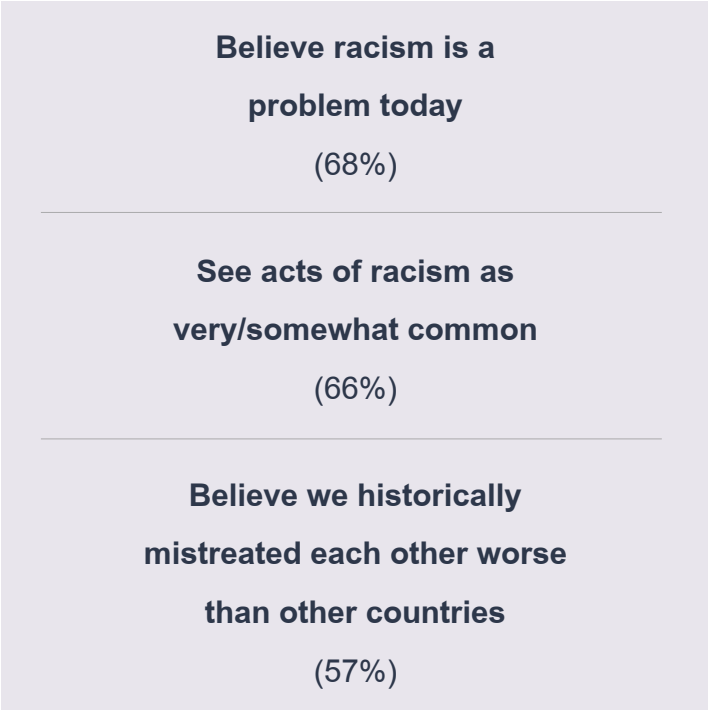
- I. **Message Development** – crafting of messaging based on underlying values and core beliefs

- II. **Message Testing** – first tested qualitatively, then refined, then tested quantitatively with N=2,000; fieldwork 11/12-26/20 via YouGov; messages were randomized and split sampled
 - Data shown here: respondents provided an agree/disagree score from 0 to 100 on balanced messages
 - Other data collected: credibility of message, emotional response, agree/disagree message highlighting; also tested progressive and conservative messages on similar themes

Most Americans hold nuanced and complex views of American identity, history, and values

Polarizing narratives of American identity, history, and values lock us into false binaries, but our research finds that most Americans hold more nuanced and complex views of American identity, values, and history that incorporate elements from both ideologies.

Most Americans...



Messages on American Identity that resonate across diverse audiences

Messages overview

Subject	Message Theme (see full messages on following slides)	Avg. Agreement Score (0 to 100 scale)
 American History	Self-Awareness, not Shame	74
 Founding Ideals	Fulfilling the American Promise	78
 Being Patriotic	Inclusive Patriotism	82
 Defining Responsibilities	Deal Between Individual and Society	72

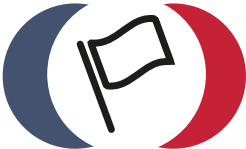
Core finding:

Acknowledging aspects of competing perspectives registers well with an overwhelming majority

We can view American history as a source of pride and learning, rather than shame

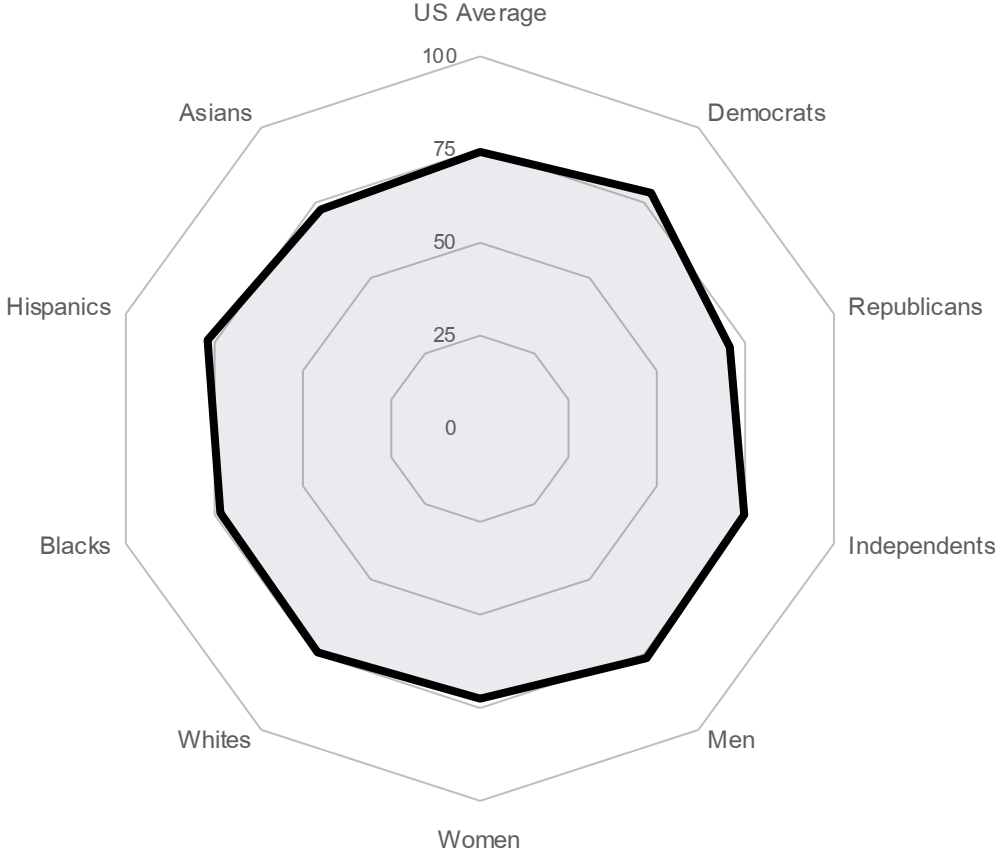
Self-awareness, not Shame:

“Throughout our history, Americans have made incredible contributions and ugly errors. We don’t need to be ashamed to be American, but we do have a responsibility to learn from our past and fix our mistakes. And as Americans we can be proud of what we do well: advancing freedom and opportunity, welcoming immigrants from around the world, and leading in technology and innovation.”



American History

% of Americans who agree with the statement:



Justice comes through the expanded delivery of founding ideals, rather than a departure from them

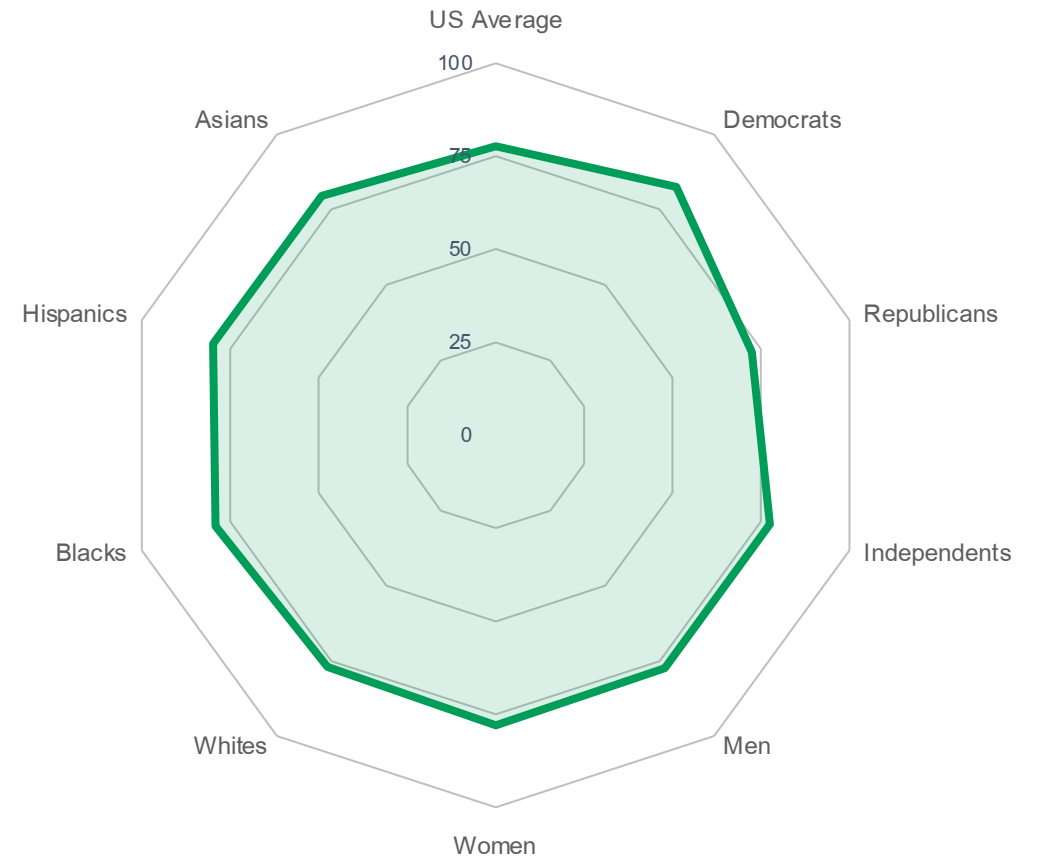
Fulfilling the American Promise:

“America is exceptional because of the ideals it was built on: freedom, opportunity, and equality. Over our history, we have often failed to live up to these ideals. We can’t change the past, but we can change the future by focusing on achieving these ideals and ensuring that everyone enjoys freedom, opportunity, and respect.”



Founding Ideals

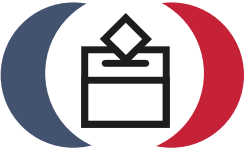
% of Americans who agree with the statement:



In being patriotic, sacrifice and tradition are compatible with humility and tolerance

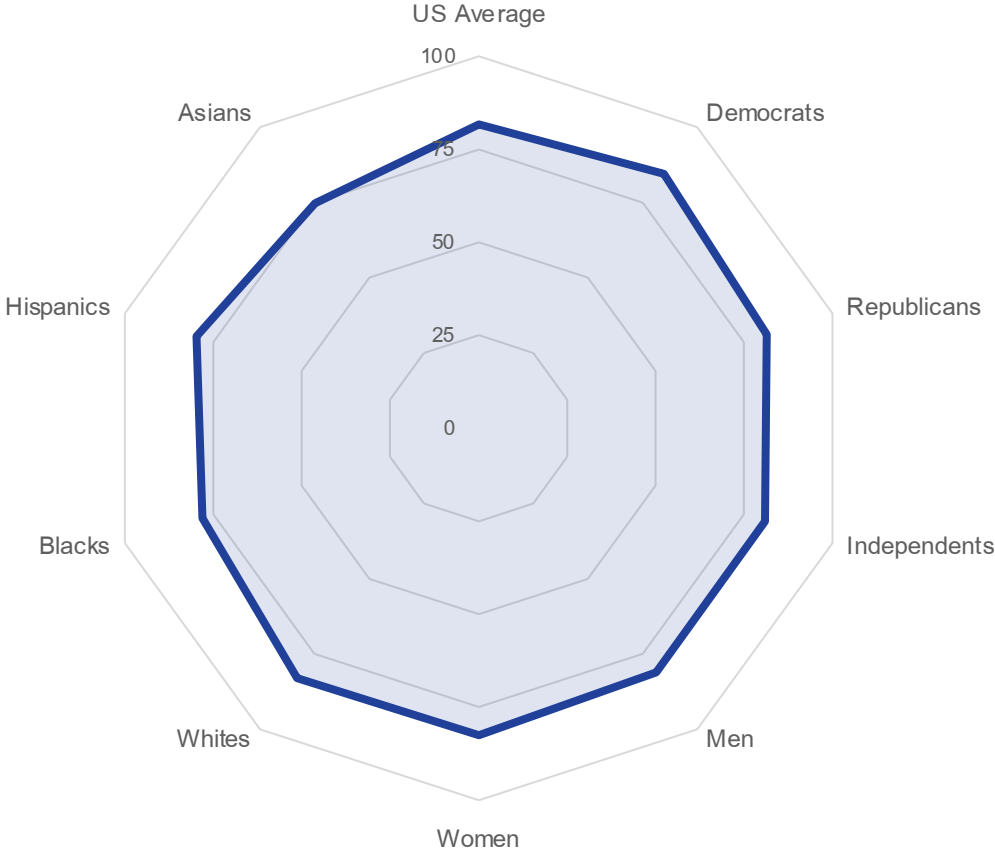
Inclusive Patriotism:

“Being patriotic is about more than the flag and the national anthem—it’s about our commitment to each other. Some choose to make exceptional sacrifices through military service, but all of us have a responsibility to follow politics and vote, to learn about our history—both the good and the bad, and to respect others’ cultures and beliefs.”



Being Patriotic

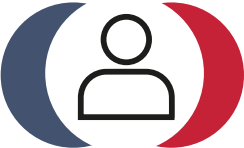
% of Americans who agree with the statement:



Society owes the individual opportunity, but the individual has a duty to pursue their potential

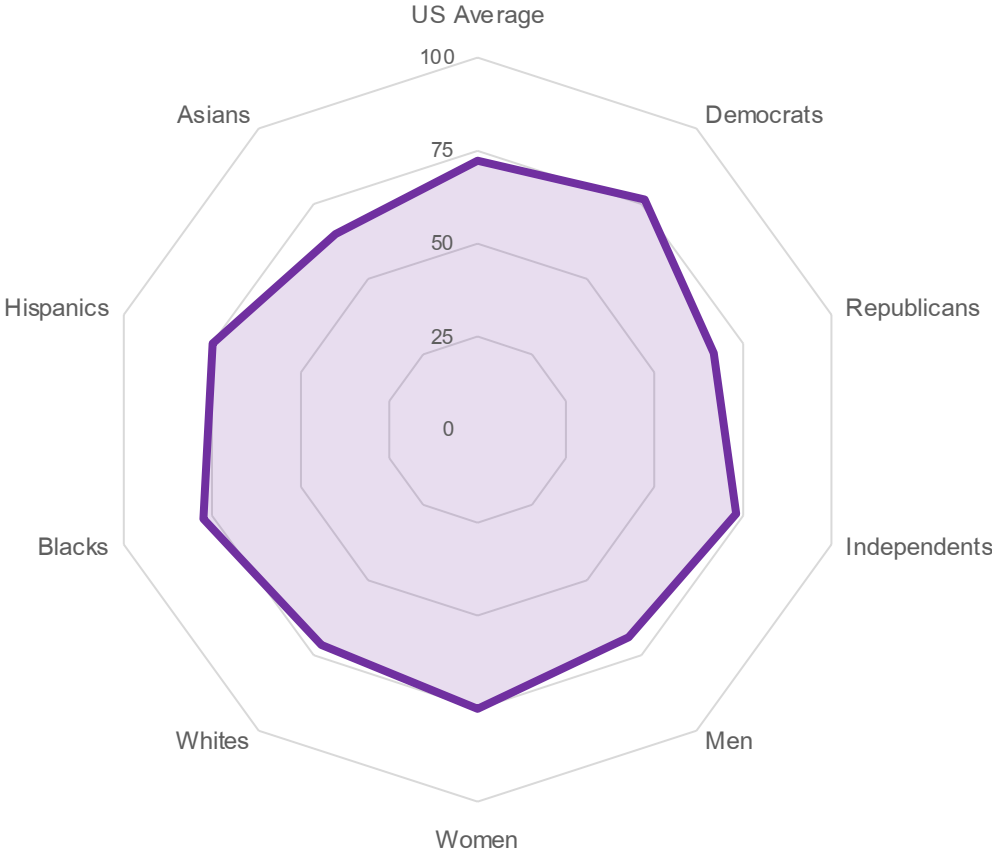
Deal between Individual and Society:

“America should be built on a deal of rights and responsibilities. The country should guarantee its citizens what they need to live up to their full potential: education, opportunity, and dignity. People in turn have a responsibility to use that potential to improve themselves and give back to their country and their community.”



Defining Responsibilities

% of Americans who agree with the statement:



Thank you

Contact:
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Appendix

Narratives of America Messages

The balanced message that underscore both the achievements and errors in America’s past receives support from 3 in 4 Americans, which holds across generation and gender.

% of Americans who agree with the statement:

Narrative Orientation	Message Text	Average	Men	Women	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Silent Generation
Conservative	America was founded as a beacon of individual liberty and freedom. We should honor our country’s founders and respect those who gave their lives to protect it. We should show our gratitude for being able to live here by honoring the American flag, standing for the national anthem, and celebrating Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July.	68	70	66	50	57	64	75	86
Progressive	This country was founded on slavery, greed and the genocide of Native peoples. However, America also has a strong tradition of protesting against injustice. Time and again American activists have fought to extend the reach of freedom. The best way to be American is to stand up against power and prejudice and fight for the advancement of marginalized groups and those less privileged than ourselves.	64	61	66	65	67	62	61	65
Balanced	Throughout our history, Americans have made incredible contributions and ugly errors. We don’t need to be ashamed to be American, but we do have a responsibility to learn from our past and fix our mistakes. And as Americans we can be proud of what we do well: advancing freedom and opportunity, welcoming immigrants from around the world, and leading in technology and innovation.	75	76	73	69	72	74	76	82

Balanced messaging highlighting the good and bad in America’s past outperforms more partisan narratives about our history. Over 70% of all racial groups and parties support this balanced perspective.

% of Americans who agree with the statement:

Narrative Orientation	Message Text	Average	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Conservative	America was founded as a beacon of individual liberty and freedom. We should honor our country’s founders and respect those who gave their lives to protect it. We should show our gratitude for being able to live here by honoring the American flag, standing for the national anthem, and celebrating Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July.	68	69	61	69	67	55	91	70
Progressive	This country was founded on slavery, greed and the genocide of Native peoples. However, America also has a strong tradition of protesting against injustice. Time and again American activists have fought to extend the reach of freedom. The best way to be American is to stand up against power and prejudice and fight for the advancement of marginalized groups and those less privileged than ourselves.	64	60	78	69	66	79	42	62
Balanced	Throughout our history, Americans have made incredible contributions and ugly errors. We don’t need to be ashamed to be American, but we do have a responsibility to learn from our past and fix our mistakes. And as Americans we can be proud of what we do well: advancing freedom and opportunity, welcoming immigrants from around the world, and leading in technology and innovation.	75	74	76	77	72	78	71	75

Perceptions of the Country Messages

Ideologically-driven messages receive low support overall, whereas balanced messaging about America’s ideals and ability to transform and live up to its creed receive the most support.

% of Americans who agree with the statement:

Narrative Orientation	Message Text	Average	Men	Women	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Silent Generation
Conservative	Respect isn't something you are owed, it's something you earn. In America, we don't worry or think about your skin color, your religion, or where you came from. America is unique because it provides a life of dignity to anyone of strong character, who works hard for their family and follows the law.	64	65	63	55	54	62	70	74
Progressive	Throughout its history, being American has meant being white, male and Christian. Americans who are women, Black, indigenous, Latino, Asian, Jewish, Muslim, gay, lesbian transgender, or who belong to other minority groups have felt disrespected and excluded. Today we need to intentionally make more space for people from these groups to hold leadership positions and reverse the damage done to their communities.	59	54	65	62	62	58	58	61
Balanced	America is exceptional because of the ideals it was built on: freedom, opportunity, and equality. Over our history, we have often failed to live up to these ideals. We can't change the past, but we can change the future by focusing on achieving these ideals and ensuring that everyone enjoys freedom, opportunity, and respect.	77	77	77	72	74	76	81	84
Balanced	America is exceptional because of the ideals it was built on: freedom, opportunity, and equality. But just believing in these ideals is not enough to achieve them. Americans need to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of their race, their religious beliefs, or who they voted for. When Americans are not made to feel ashamed of who they are or what they believe, our nation gets closer to achieving those founding ideals.	77	75	79	70	71	76	82	88

Across party and racial lines, balanced messaging about America’s ideals are the most supported regardless of one’s party affiliation or racial identity

% of Americans who agree with the statement:

Narrative Orientation	Message Text	Average	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Conservative	Respect isn't something you are owed, it's something you earn. In America, we don't worry or think about your skin color, your religion, or where you came from. America is unique because it provides a life of dignity to anyone of strong character, who works hard for their family and follows the law.	64	65	55	65	58	52	82	65
Progressive	Throughout its history, being American has meant being white, male and Christian. Americans who are women, Black, indigenous, Latino, Asian, Jewish, Muslim, gay, lesbian transgender, or who belong to other minority groups have felt disrespected and excluded. Today we need to intentionally make more space for people from these groups to hold leadership positions and reverse the damage done to their communities.	59	56	77	62	62	80	32	55
Balanced	America is exceptional because of the ideals it was built on: freedom, opportunity, and equality. Over our history, we have often failed to live up to these ideals. We can't change the past, but we can change the future by focusing on achieving these ideals and ensuring that everyone enjoys freedom, opportunity, and respect.	77	77	77	78	77	82	71	79
Balanced	America is exceptional because of the ideals it was built on: freedom, opportunity, and equality. But just believing in these ideals is not enough to achieve them. Americans need to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of their race, their religious beliefs, or who they voted for. When Americans are not made to feel ashamed of who they are or what they believe, our nation gets closer to achieving those founding ideals.	77	79	75	79	72	80	78	75

Shared Experience Messages

Across generations and genders, Americans show the highest support for balanced messaging about America’s racial past and civic duties.

% of Americans who agree with the statement:

Perspective	Message	Average	Men	Women	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Silent Generation
Conservative – personal responsibility	In today’s America, everyone has the opportunity to gain an education, to be treated fairly, and to succeed if they work hard—no matter their race. Poverty and prison are the consequences of poor decisions, not of skin color. While experiences of racism were a significant problem in our past, they simply are not today.	53	56	50	55	48	51	56	62
Progressive – systemic racism	America promises equality and opportunity for all but is not delivering on those promises. Being Black is an experience of feeling that you do not belong, of being afraid of the police, and of facing prejudice. This systemic racism is a threat to the very idea of America and we have to address this fully if we are to truly call ourselves the land of the free.	59	53	65	61	62	57	57	60
Balanced – equality for all	White Americans today are not directly responsible for the racism of the past. Yet many Black Americans and other minorities still suffer from the consequences of that racism and from ongoing racial injustice. Fulfilling America’s founding promise of equality means addressing this harm while also tackling the problems that face Americans of every color.	62	59	64	65	63	60	60	65
Inclusive patriotism	Being patriotic is about more than the flag and the national anthem—it’s about our commitment to each other. Some choose to make exceptional sacrifices through military service, but all of us have a responsibility to follow politics and vote, to learn about our history, both the good and the bad, and to respect others’ cultures and beliefs.	82	81	83	74	77	80	87	89

Balanced messaging about America’s racial past and civic duties receive high support across racial and party groups compared to more polarizing messaging about personal responsibility and systemic racism.

% of Americans who agree with the statement:

Perspective	Message	Average	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Conservative – personal responsibility	In today’s America, everyone has the opportunity to gain an education, to be treated fairly, and to succeed if they work hard—no matter their race. Poverty and prison are the consequences of poor decisions, not of skin color. While experiences of racism were a significant problem in our past, they simply are not today.	53	55	39	52	54	34	79	54
Progressive – systemic racism	America promises equality and opportunity for all but is not delivering on those promises. Being Black is an experience of feeling that you do not belong, of being afraid of the police, and of facing prejudice. This systemic racism is a threat to the very idea of America and we have to address this fully if we are to truly call ourselves the land of the free.	59	54	82	61	60	83	35	51
Balanced – equality for all	White Americans today are not directly responsible for the racism of the past. Yet many Black Americans and other minorities still suffer from the consequences of that racism and from ongoing racial injustice. Fulfilling America’s founding promise of equality means addressing this harm while also tackling the problems that face Americans of every color.	62	61	70	61	55	73	46	61
Inclusive patriotism	Being patriotic is about more than the flag and the national anthem—it’s about our commitment to each other. Some choose to make exceptional sacrifices through military service, but all of us have a responsibility to follow politics and vote, to learn about our history, both the good and the bad, and to respect others’ cultures and beliefs.	82	83	78	80	75	85	81	81