

Executive Summary: What Americans Think

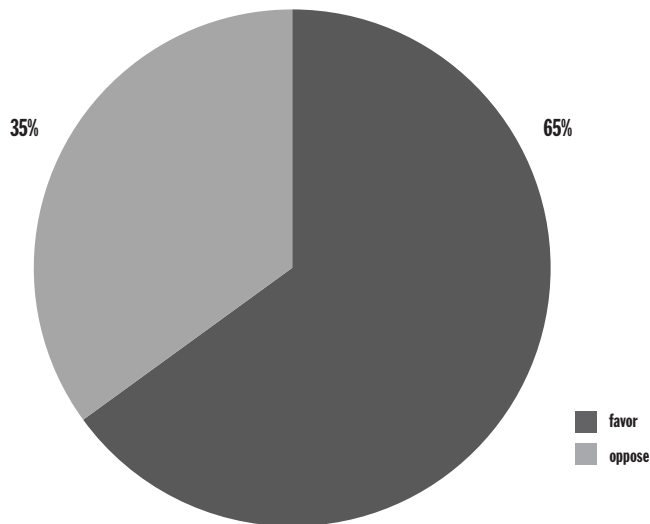
Although Americans disagree about some things, they find common ground on many important issues. These common attitudes and values define the American people. But knowing the issues on which we agree can hinder as much as further an understanding of the American psyche. That is because many of our attitudes are contradictory, causing confusion for those who try to explain the American perspective.

How can we be so optimistic about our lives but so cynical about our leaders? How can we so avidly want to cut government spending but support an increase in spending on so many government programs? How can we be so enthusiastic about science yet pray every day, think the Bible is the word of God, and believe in life after death? Here is a look at what Americans think about some of the most important issues of the day, revealing our many contradictions.

Chapter 1: Public Arena

The death penalty is supported...

“Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?”



Public Arena: 2014 Profiles

Table 1.1 Confidence in Executive Branch of Federal Government, 2014

“As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them: the executive branch of the federal government?”

(percent of people aged 18 or older responding by selected characteristics, 2014)

	total	a great deal	only some	hardly any
Total people	100.0%	11.3%	44.2%	44.5%
Men	100.0	11.8	40.5	47.7
Women	100.0	10.9	47.2	41.9
Millennials	100.0	11.3	51.6	37.1
Generation Xers	100.0	7.8	46.6	45.7
Baby Boomers	100.0	13.3	37.3	49.4
Older Americans	100.0	11.4	39.1	49.5
Black	100.0	21.1	52.5	26.4
Hispanic	100.0	16.1	48.2	35.7
Non-Hispanic White	100.0	8.2	40.1	51.7
Northeast	100.0	10.0	49.2	40.8
Midwest	100.0	11.4	43.7	44.9
South	100.0	11.5	41.7	46.8
West	100.0	11.8	44.8	43.4
Not a college graduate	100.0	9.6	43.8	46.6
Bachelor's degree or more	100.0	15.4	45.0	39.5

Note: Millennials are aged 20 to 37; Generation Xers are aged 38 to 49; Baby Boomers are aged 50 to 68; Older Americans are aged 69 or older.

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcgsda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Table 2.34 Spending on Social Security, 2014

“We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. Are we spending too much, too little money, or about the right amount on Social Security?”

(percent of people aged 18 or older responding by selected characteristics, 2014)

	total	too little	about right	too much
Total people	100.0%	55.4%	38.1%	6.5%
Men	100.0	48.7	43.2	8.2
Women	100.0	61.1	33.8	5.1
Millennials	100.0	53.0	38.5	8.6
Generation Xers	100.0	61.5	32.3	6.1
Baby Boomers	100.0	57.6	37.5	5.0
Older Americans	100.0	48.9	44.9	6.2
Black	100.0	71.4	23.3	5.4
Hispanic	100.0	52.7	39.2	8.0
Non-Hispanic White	100.0	53.1	40.6	6.3
Northeast	100.0	51.5	41.5	7.0
Midwest	100.0	52.0	41.7	6.3
South	100.0	62.3	30.5	7.2
West	100.0	50.9	43.8	5.3
Not a college graduate	100.0	60.1	34.1	5.8
Bachelor's degree or more	100.0	43.7	48.0	8.2

Note: Millennials are aged 20 to 37; Generation Xers are aged 38 to 49; Baby Boomers are aged 50 to 68; Older Americans are aged 69 or older.

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcstda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Table 2.35 Spending on Parks and Recreation, 2014

“We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. Are we spending too much, too little money, or about the right amount on parks and recreation?”

(percent of people aged 18 or older responding by selected characteristics, 2014)

	total	too little	about right	too much
Total people	100.0%	30.9%	62.9%	6.3%
Men	100.0	31.7	61.5	6.8
Women	100.0	30.1	64.0	5.9
Millennials	100.0	36.2	59.9	3.9
Generation Xers	100.0	29.0	66.4	4.5
Baby Boomers	100.0	30.0	62.6	7.4
Older Americans	100.0	20.9	66.3	12.8
Black	100.0	37.8	54.3	7.9
Hispanic	100.0	32.8	63.0	4.2
Non-Hispanic White	100.0	28.8	64.5	6.7
Northeast	100.0	33.8	61.8	4.3
Midwest	100.0	22.0	70.5	7.5
South	100.0	32.1	60.3	7.6
West	100.0	34.8	60.5	4.7
Not a college graduate	100.0	31.9	60.8	7.2
Bachelor's degree or more	100.0	28.1	67.9	4.0

Note: Millennials are aged 20 to 37; Generation Xers are aged 38 to 49; Baby Boomers are aged 50 to 68; Older Americans are aged 69 or older.

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harsda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Table 2.47 Importance of Always Voting in Elections, 2004 and 2014

“There are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. As far as you are concerned personally on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is very important, how important is it to always vote in elections?”

(percent distribution of people aged 18 or older by response for selected years)

	total	1 not at all important	2	3	4	5	6	7 very important
2014	100.0%	4.3%	1.9%	3.6%	6.1%	9.6%	13.2%	61.4%
2004	100.0	2.6	1.4	2.4	5.7	9.8	10.8	67.3

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcgsda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Table 2.48 Politicians Are in Politics for Themselves, 2004 to 2014

“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally.”

(percent distribution of people aged 18 or older by response for selected years)

	total	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
2014	100.0%	16.5%	41.5%	24.3%	16.8%	0.8%
2010	100.0	15.1	36.2	23.4	24.1	1.3
2004	100.0	12.5	34.3	22.6	29.2	1.4

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcgsda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Patriotism

In three survey years the General Social Survey has included a battery of questions about patriotism and what it means to be American—the 1996, 2004, and 2014 surveys. In all three years, the responses show Americans to be very patriotic. The 2004 results were even more intense than usual, however. Because the 2004 survey took place only a few years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the effect of 9/11 on the patriotic feelings of Americans can be seen.

No Change

- **Americans are proud of their country.** The majority of Americans are cheerleaders for the United States, regardless of their demographics. When asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, “America is a better country than most other countries,” nearly three out of four agree. The majority of every demographic segment feels that way.

Some Change

- **Patriotic fervor peaked in 2004.** The public responded to the 2004 questions about what it means to be American with a heightened sense of patriotism, reflecting the turmoil in the years following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This intensity did not last, however. By 2014, responses to most questions had returned to the “norm”—they were similar to 1996. For example, the percentage of Americans who said they felt “very close” to America climbed from 34 percent in 1996 to 51 percent in 2004, then fell back to 43 percent in 2014. Similarly, the percentage who agree that, to be truly American, it is “very important” to have lived in America for most of one’s life grew from 44 percent in 1996 to the 58 percent majority in 2004, and then fell to 41 percent in 2014.

Table 5.7 Belief in Bible, 2014

“Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? a) The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; b) The Bible is the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word; c) The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.”

(percent of people aged 18 or older responding by selected characteristics, 2014)

	total	word of God	inspired word	book of fables	other
Total people	100.0%	32.2%	44.9%	21.9%	0.9%
Men	100.0	28.7	44.0	26.2	1.1
Women	100.0	35.2	45.7	18.4	0.7
Millennials	100.0	26.6	44.5	27.3	1.6
Generation Xers	100.0	34.4	47.2	17.8	0.7
Baby Boomers	100.0	35.3	43.6	20.4	0.7
Older Americans	100.0	37.2	44.3	18.2	0.3
Black	100.0	53.0	33.3	13.4	0.4
Hispanic	100.0	41.3	38.8	19.4	0.5
Non-Hispanic White	100.0	26.7	48.4	23.9	1.0
Northeast	100.0	18.6	48.0	33.1	0.3
Midwest	100.0	29.3	47.2	23.1	0.5
South	100.0	44.5	43.0	11.6	0.9
West	100.0	26.1	43.9	28.5	1.6
Not a college graduate	100.0	38.3	41.7	19.4	0.6
Bachelor's degree or more	100.0	17.5	52.8	28.2	1.5

Note: Millennials are aged 20 to 37; Generation Xers are aged 38 to 49; Baby Boomers are aged 50 to 68; Older Americans are aged 69 or older.

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsta+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Table 7.6 Born in the United States, 2014

“Were you born in this country?”

(percent of people aged 18 or older responding by selected characteristics, 2014)

	total	yes	no
Total people	100.0%	84.2%	15.8%
Men	100.0	84.3	15.7
Women	100.0	84.1	15.9
Millennials	100.0	83.3	16.7
Generation Xers	100.0	80.6	19.4
Baby Boomers	100.0	84.5	15.5
Older Americans	100.0	90.8	9.2
Black	100.0	88.3	11.7
Hispanic	100.0	49.7	50.3
Non-Hispanic White	100.0	95.6	4.4
Northeast	100.0	81.6	18.4
Midwest	100.0	90.8	9.2
South	100.0	85.2	14.8
West	100.0	78.6	21.4
Not a college graduate	100.0	84.2	15.8
Bachelor’s degree or more	100.0	84.1	15.9

Note: Millennials are aged 20 to 37; Generation Xers are aged 38 to 49; Baby Boomers are aged 50 to 68; Older Americans are aged 69 or older.

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsgda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Table 7.7 Were Parents Born in the United States, 2014

“Were both your parents born in this country?”

(percent of people aged 18 or older responding by selected characteristics, 2014)

	total	born in United States			neither born in United States	don't know
		both	mother only	father only		
Total people	100.0%	74.6%	2.8%	2.8%	19.3%	0.5%
Men	100.0	73.9	2.9	2.2	20.1	0.9
Women	100.0	75.3	2.6	3.2	18.7	0.2
Millennials	100.0	70.4	3.9	2.7	22.7	0.3
Generation Xers	100.0	72.9	1.2	3.0	22.6	0.3
Baby Boomers	100.0	78.2	1.7	2.7	16.7	0.7
Older Americans	100.0	80.0	5.4	1.4	12.4	0.8
Black	100.0	82.7	2.2	2.1	12.8	0.2
Hispanic	100.0	26.0	4.5	3.4	64.9	1.2
Non-Hispanic White	100.0	89.0	2.5	2.5	5.5	0.4
Northeast	100.0	65.0	5.6	3.5	25.0	0.9
Midwest	100.0	86.0	1.7	2.8	9.2	0.3
South	100.0	79.1	1.7	1.3	17.3	0.6
West	100.0	64.5	3.5	4.2	27.5	0.3
Not a college graduate	100.0	74.1	2.9	2.2	20.0	0.8
Bachelor's degree or more	100.0	75.9	2.5	4.0	17.5	0.0

Note: Millennials are aged 20 to 37; Generation Xers are aged 38 to 49; Baby Boomers are aged 50 to 68; Older Americans are aged 69 or older.

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harc_sda+gss14; calculations by New Strategist

Table 9.28 Is Life Exciting, 1973 to 2014

“In general, do you find life exciting, pretty routine, or dull?”

(percent distribution of people aged 18 or older by response for selected years)

	total	exciting	pretty routine	dull
2014	100.0%	51.4%	44.3%	4.3%
2012	100.0	52.7	42.6	4.7
2010	100.0	52.1	43.3	4.6
2008	100.0	47.6	48.5	3.8
2006	100.0	51.2	43.9	4.9
2004	100.0	49.6	47.0	3.4
2002	100.0	52.3	44.2	3.5
2000	100.0	46.6	49.1	4.3
1998	100.0	45.2	49.9	4.9
1996	100.0	50.9	45.3	3.8
1994	100.0	48.2	48.3	3.5
1993	100.0	47.3	47.3	5.4
1991	100.0	44.8	52.0	3.1
1990	100.0	45.1	50.8	4.1
1989	100.0	45.0	50.2	4.9
1988	100.0	46.4	49.2	4.4
1987	100.0	45.6	50.9	3.5
1985	100.0	46.1	47.9	5.9
1984	100.0	45.2	50.2	4.6
1982	100.0	45.4	49.7	4.9
1980	100.0	47.6	47.1	5.3
1977	100.0	44.4	49.2	6.4
1976	100.0	45.1	51.7	3.3
1974	100.0	43.5	52.0	4.5
1973	100.0	46.1	49.0	4.8

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley; General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcstda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist

Table 9.29 General Happiness, 1972 to 2014

“Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?”

(percent distribution of people aged 18 or older by response for selected years)

	total	very happy	pretty happy	not too happy
2014	100.0%	32.5%	55.3%	12.2%
2012	100.0	32.9	54.2	12.9
2010	100.0	28.8	57.0	14.2
2008	100.0	31.7	54.4	13.9
2006	100.0	32.4	55.9	11.7
2004	100.0	33.6	54.7	11.7
2002	100.0	32.9	55.8	11.3
2000	100.0	33.9	56.4	9.6
1998	100.0	33.3	55.9	10.9
1996	100.0	32.1	57.4	10.5
1994	100.0	30.5	58.2	11.3
1993	100.0	33.4	56.9	9.7
1991	100.0	32.5	58.0	9.5
1990	100.0	35.7	56.5	7.7
1989	100.0	34.5	56.7	8.8
1988	100.0	36.1	55.7	8.2
1987	100.0	33.6	55.2	11.2
1986	100.0	33.2	56.6	10.2
1985	100.0	29.4	60.3	10.3
1984	100.0	35.8	52.1	12.1
1983	100.0	31.7	55.8	12.5
1982	100.0	34.7	53.6	11.7
1980	100.0	36.0	52.0	12.0
1978	100.0	34.4	57.9	7.7
1977	100.0	35.7	53.2	11.0
1976	100.0	34.8	52.9	12.2
1975	100.0	33.4	53.6	13.0
1974	100.0	38.3	49.2	12.5
1973	100.0	36.8	50.9	12.3
1972	100.0	29.7	53.0	17.2

Source: Survey Documentation and Analysis, Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California, Berkeley, General Social Survey, 1972–2014 Cumulative Data Files, Internet site <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcstda+gss14>; calculations by New Strategist