

# Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape



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## ABOUT MORE IN COMMON

The report was conducted by More in Common, a new international initiative to build societies and communities that are stronger, more united, and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarization and social division. We work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media and government to connect people across the lines of division.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The execution and analysis of this project was conducted in close partnership with Purpose and YouGov. More in Common appreciates the valuable input and advice relating to this study received from them and from a wide range of academic experts, civil society groups and philanthropic foundations. Special thanks to:

Angela Baggetta, Emily Bronkesh-Buchbinder, Suzette Brooks-Masters, Bobby Clark, Marshall Fitz, Elena Hale, Laurence Heijbroek, Jeremy Heimans, Christopher Jennings, Lucretia Keenan, Jee Kim, Arisa Kimaram, Gregory Maniatis, Anya McMurray, Binita Mehta-Parmar, Rich Mintz, Yascha Mounk, Mohammed Naeem, Ali Noorani, Maria Teresa Rojas, Robbie Ross, Frank Sharry, Jonathan Smucker, Jim Wallis, Ted Wang, and the YouGov research team: Ashley Grosse, Yifei Liu, Samantha Luks, Rebecca Phillips, Marissa Shih and Steffen Weiss.

The Hidden Tribes logo, report, data visualizations and other aesthetic considerations were designed and created by Accurat: [www.accurat.it](http://www.accurat.it)

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# Foreword

## **This report is about polarization in America today: what is driving us apart, and what can bring us back together.**

Political polls and years of knife-edge elections have convinced many that our country has become a 50:50 society, divided into two opposing political tribes and trapped in a spiral of conflict and division.

Our research uncovered a different story, one that probes underneath the issues that polarize Americans, and finds seven groups that are defined by their core beliefs, rather than by their political opinions, race, class or gender.

In talking to everyday Americans, we have found a large segment of the population whose voices are rarely heard above the shouts of the partisan tribes. These are people who believe that Americans have more in common than that which divides them. While they differ on important issues, they feel exhausted by the division in the United States. They believe that compromise is necessary in politics, as in other parts of life, and want to see the country come together and solve its problems.

In the era of social media and partisan news outlets, America's differences have become dangerously tribal, fueled by a culture of outrage and taking offense. For the combatants, the other side can no longer be tolerated, and no price is too high to defeat them.

These tensions are poisoning personal relationships, consuming our politics and putting our democracy in peril.

Once a country has become tribalized, debates about contested issues from immigration and trade to economic management, climate change and national security, become shaped by larger tribal identities. Policy debate gives way to tribal conflicts.

Polarization and tribalism are self-reinforcing and will likely continue to accelerate. The work of rebuilding our fragmented society needs to start now. It extends from re-connecting people across the lines of division in local communities all the way to building a renewed sense of national identity: a bigger story of us.

Our polarization is not simple, but nor is it insoluble. We need to understand it, so we can fix it. More in Common hopes that this report can help inform and inspire this urgent work.

# Executive Summary

**This report lays out the findings of a large-scale national survey of Americans about the current state of civic life in the United States. It provides substantial evidence of deep polarization and growing tribalism. It shows that this polarization is rooted in something deeper than political opinions and disagreements over policy. But it also provides some evidence for optimism, showing that 77 percent of Americans believe our differences are not so great that we cannot come together.**

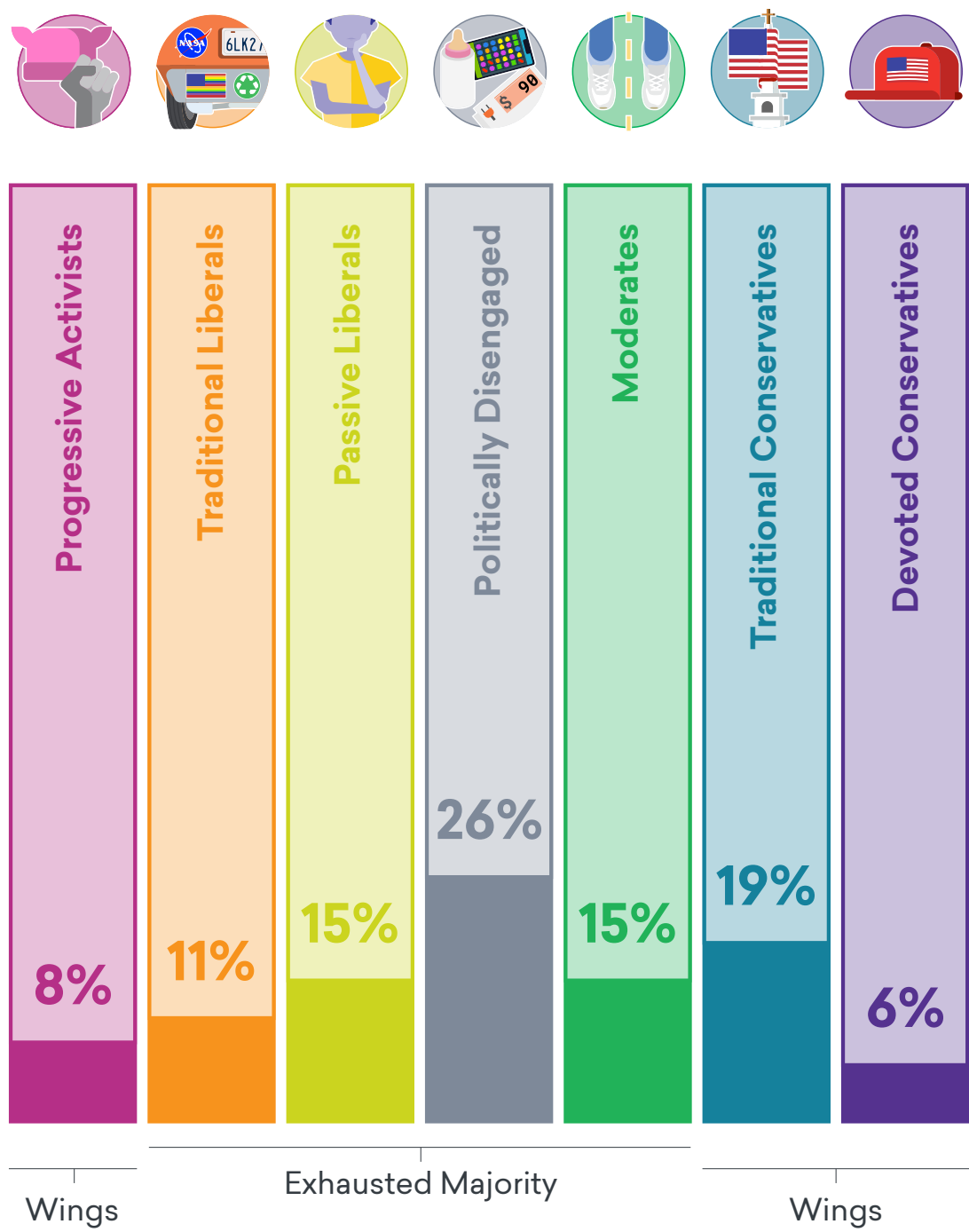
At the root of America's polarization are divergent sets of values and worldviews, or "core beliefs." These core beliefs shape the ways that individuals interpret the world around them at the most fundamental level. Our study shows how political opinions stem from these deeply held core beliefs. This study examines five dimensions of individuals' core beliefs:

- Tribalism and group identification
- Fear and perception of threat
- Parenting style and authoritarian disposition
- Moral foundations
- Personal agency and responsibility

The study finds that this hidden architecture of beliefs, worldview and group attachments can predict an individual's views on social and political issues with greater accuracy than demographic factors like race, gender, or income.

**The research undertaken for this report identifies seven segments of Americans (or "tribes") who are distinguished by differences in their underlying beliefs and attitudes.** Membership in these tribes was determined by each individual's answers to a subset of 58 core belief and behavioral questions that were asked together with the rest of the survey. None of the questions used to create the segmentation related to current political issues or demographic indicators such as race, gender, age or income, yet the responses that each segment gives to questions on current political issues are remarkably predictable and show a very clear pattern.

Figure 0.1 The Hidden Tribes of America



The segments have distinctive sets of characteristics; here listed in order from left to right on the ideological spectrum:

- **Progressive Activists:** younger, highly engaged, secular, cosmopolitan, angry.
- **Traditional Liberals:** older, retired, open to compromise, rational, cautious.
- **Passive Liberals:** unhappy, insecure, distrustful, disillusioned.
- **Politically Disengaged:** young, low income, distrustful, detached, patriotic, conspiratorial.
- **Moderates:** engaged, civic-minded, middle-of-the-road, pessimistic, Protestant.
- **Traditional Conservatives:** religious, middle class, patriotic, moralistic.
- **Devoted Conservatives:** white, retired, highly engaged, uncompromising, patriotic.

The relevance of the segmentation is evident on a wide array of subjects, from issues of race and prejudice to gender and sexuality. Progressive Activists, the most liberal group, and Devoted Conservatives, the most conservative, show strong degrees of consistency within their ranks, while being almost perfectly at odds with each other. Middle tribes, by contrast, orient themselves incrementally on the ideological spectrum.

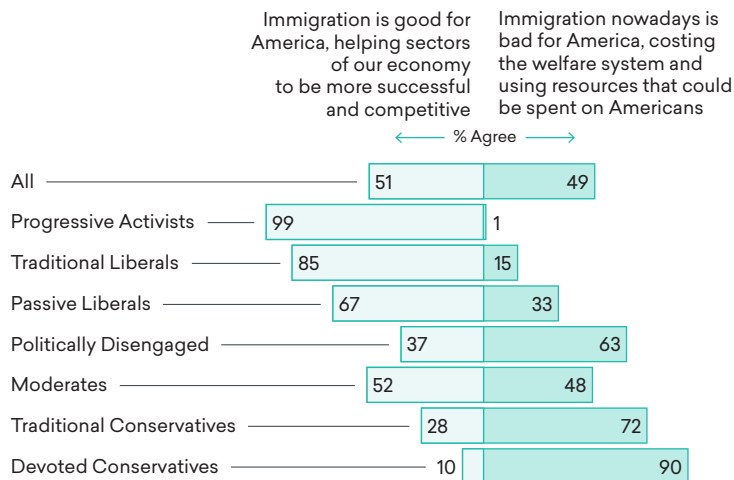
Further evidence of the relevance of core beliefs and their associated tribal identities is that **tribal membership predicts differences in Americans' views on various political issues better than demographic, ideological, and partisan groupings.** This can be seen on subjects such as approval of President Trump, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and approval of the modern feminist agenda. On these questions and many others, the differences between the most ideological segments are greater than the differences between, for instance, self-described “strong Republicans” and “strong Democrats.”

## Figure 0.2

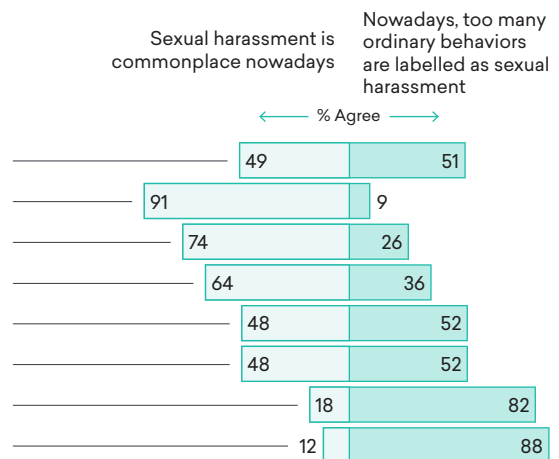
# Consistency Across Issues

Tribe membership shows strong reliability in predicting views across different political topics

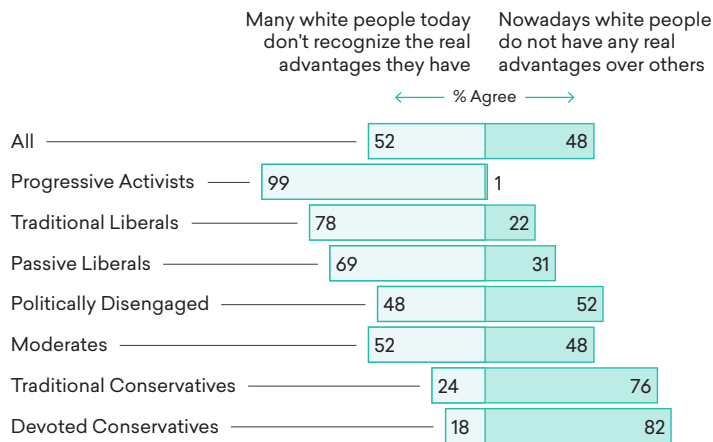
### Immigration impact



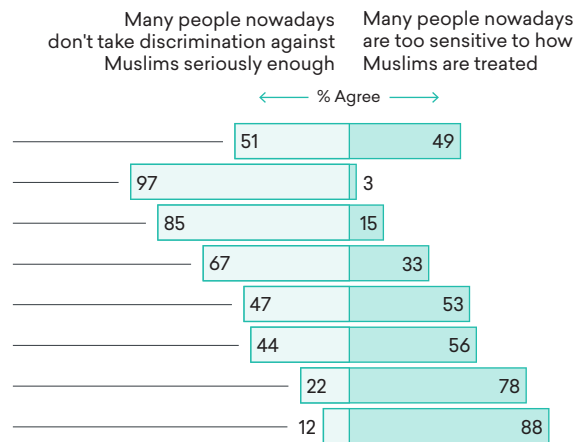
### Sexual harassment



### White privilege



### Islamophobia



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## Figure 0.3

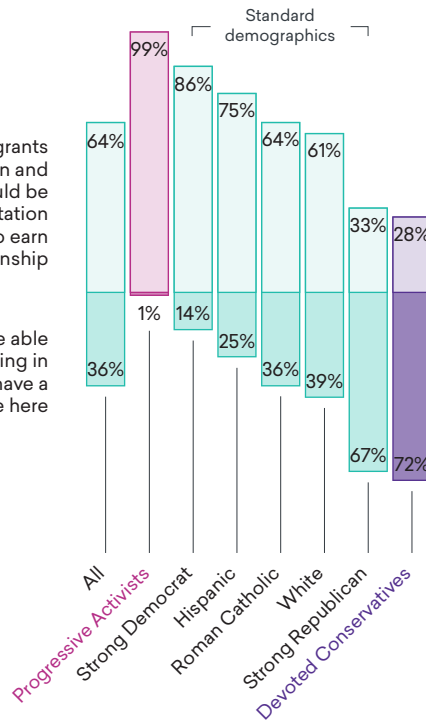
# Core Beliefs and Demographics

Tribe membership (pictured here: Progressive Activists and Devoted Conservatives) predicts how people think about political issues better than standard categories (such as “Liberal” or “Republican”)

### DACA

Undocumented immigrants who arrived as children and grown up here should be protected from deportation and given the chance to earn citizenship

The government should be able to deport anyone living in America who doesn't have a legal right to be here

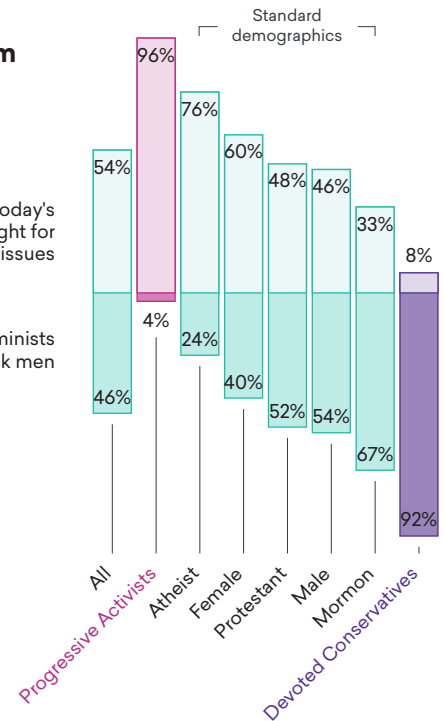


Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

### Feminism

Today's feminists fight for important issues

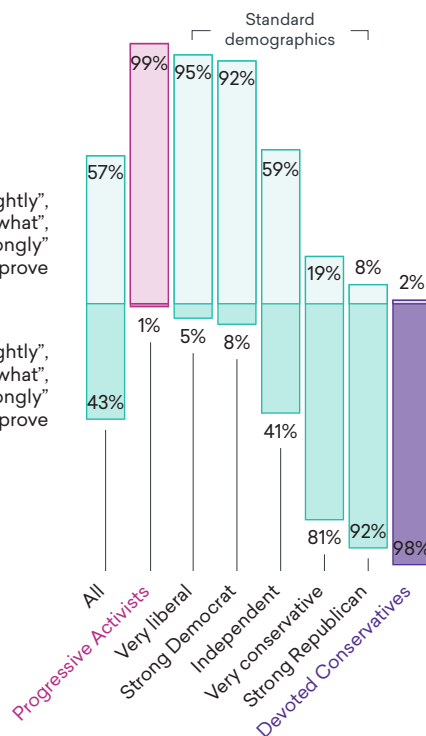
Today's feminists just attack men



### Approve Donald Trump

“Slightly”, “somewhat”, or “strongly” disapprove

“Slightly”, “somewhat”, or “strongly” approve

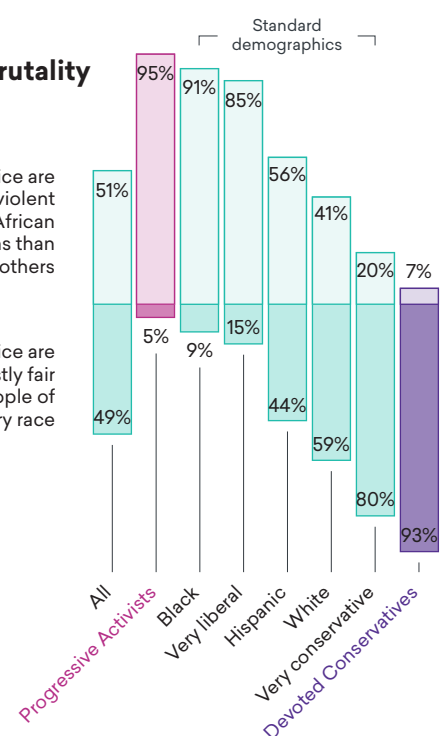


Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Donald Trump is doing his job?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

### Police Brutality

The police are often more violent towards African Americans than others

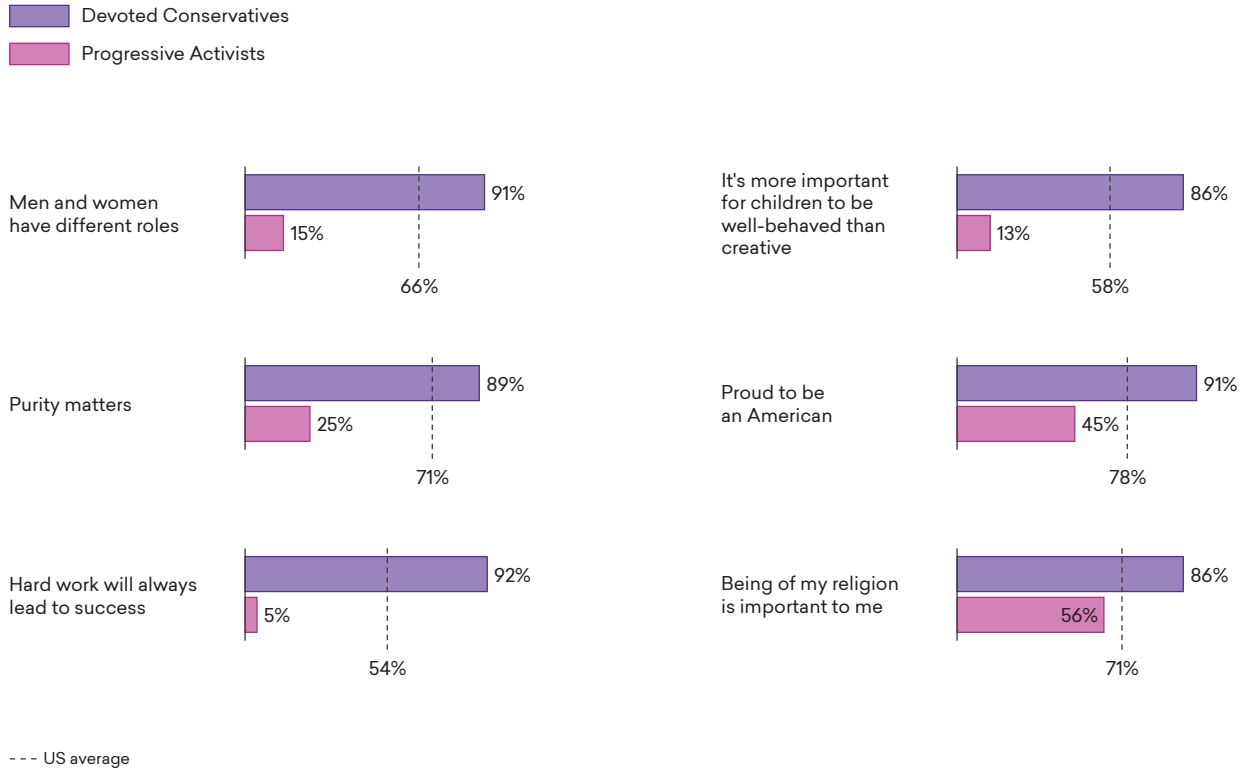
The police are mostly fair towards people of every race



## Figure 0.4

### Beliefs of the Devoted Conservatives

A selection of key core beliefs among Devoted Conservatives shows an emphasis on shaping the individual through traditional values



Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

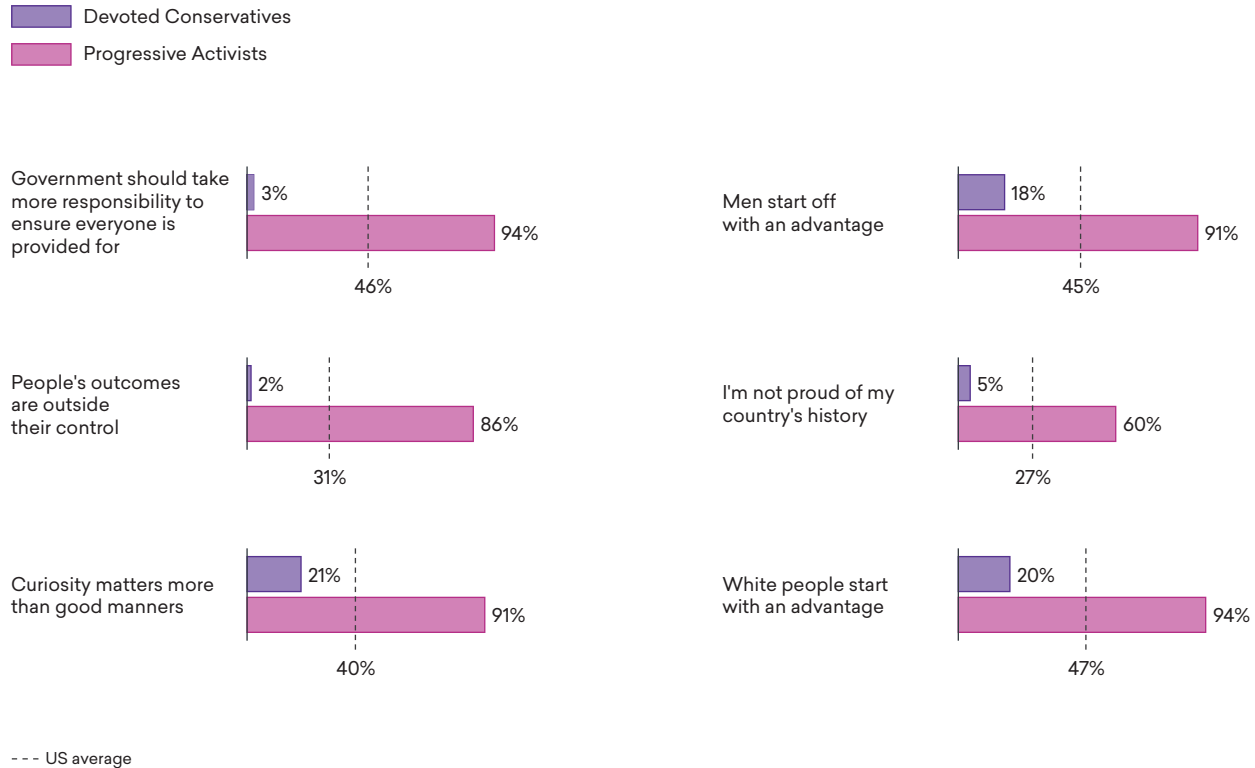
The most dramatic difference between the tribes is that which arises between the Progressive Activists and the Devoted Conservatives. Devoted Conservatives believe that individuals need to be raised to be obedient, well behaved and hard-working. They take pride in the Judeo-Christian faith and American culture. They believe that their traditional values can transform flawed individuals into people of self-discipline, character and responsibility.

Progressive Activists, who are at the opposite end of the spectrum, are skeptical of traditional authority and norms. They see those values as being established by socially dominant groups such as straight white men, for their own benefit. Progressive Activists seek to correct the historic marginalization of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth and other forms of privilege.

## Figure 0.5

### Beliefs of the Progressive Activists

Progressive Activists reject traditional sources of authority and privilege and focus on rectifying historical injustices



Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

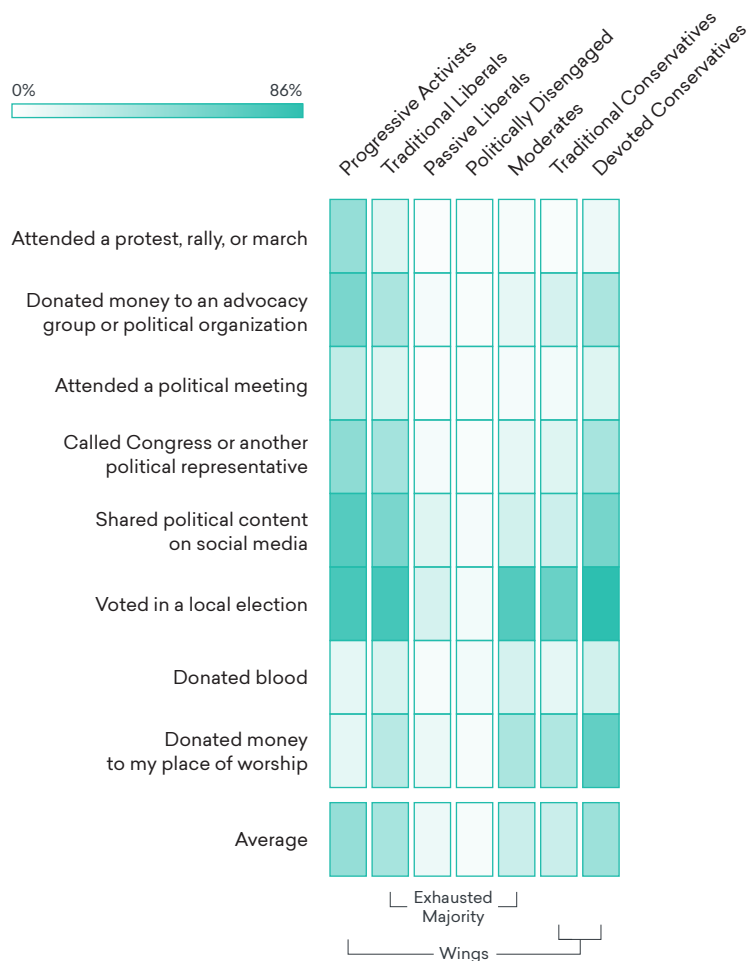
**But despite these stark differences, this study also finds reasons for hope. America's political landscape is much more complicated than the binary split between liberals and conservatives often depicted in the national conversation.** In particular, we find, among the seven tribes, an "Exhausted Majority," whose members do not conform to either partisan ideology. The Exhausted Majority contains distinct groups of people with varying degrees of political understanding and activism. But they share a sense of fatigue with our polarized national conversation, a willingness to be flexible in their political viewpoints, and a lack of voice in the national conversation.

Figure

0.6

The Exhausted Majority

Less politically active and partisan than the wing segments



Here is a list of activities that some people get a chance to participate in and others don't. Which of the following have you taken part in in the past year?

Source: More in Common (2018)

Members of the Exhausted Majority are considerably more ideologically flexible than members of other groups. While members of the “wing” groups (on both the left and the right) tend to hold strong and consistent views across a range of political issues, those in the Exhausted Majority tend to deviate significantly in their views from issue to issue.

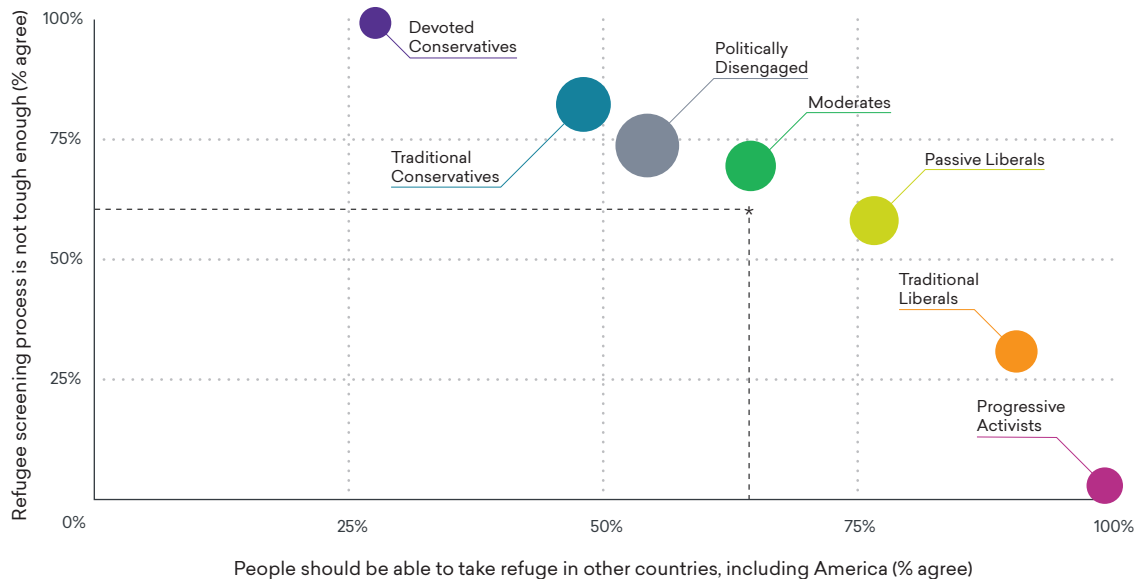
Furthermore, the wing groups, which often dominate the national conversation, are in fact in considerable isolation in their views on certain topics. For instance, 82 percent of Americans agree that hate speech is a problem in America today, but 80 percent also view political correctness as an issue. By contrast, only 30 percent of Progressive Activists believe political correctness is a problem.

Similarly, most Americans hold complex views on refugees. Sixty-three percent of Americans are concerned that the refugee screening process “is not tough enough to keep out possible terrorists”, but 64 percent simultaneously believe that “people should be able to take refuge in other countries, including America, to escape from war or persecution”. Just 27 percent of Devoted Conservatives agree in this principle of the US accepting refugees. This suggests that the Exhausted Majority is more practical and less ideological than its more extreme counterparts.

**Figure**  
**0.7**

## Devoted Conservatives Stand Out on Immigration

Devoted Conservatives are least likely to believe that people should be able to seek refuge in the US



○ size= % share of US population  
--- US average

Which do you agree with more?

People should be able to take refuge in other countries, including America, to escape from war or persecution;  
Refugees are not America's responsibility.

Which do you agree with more?

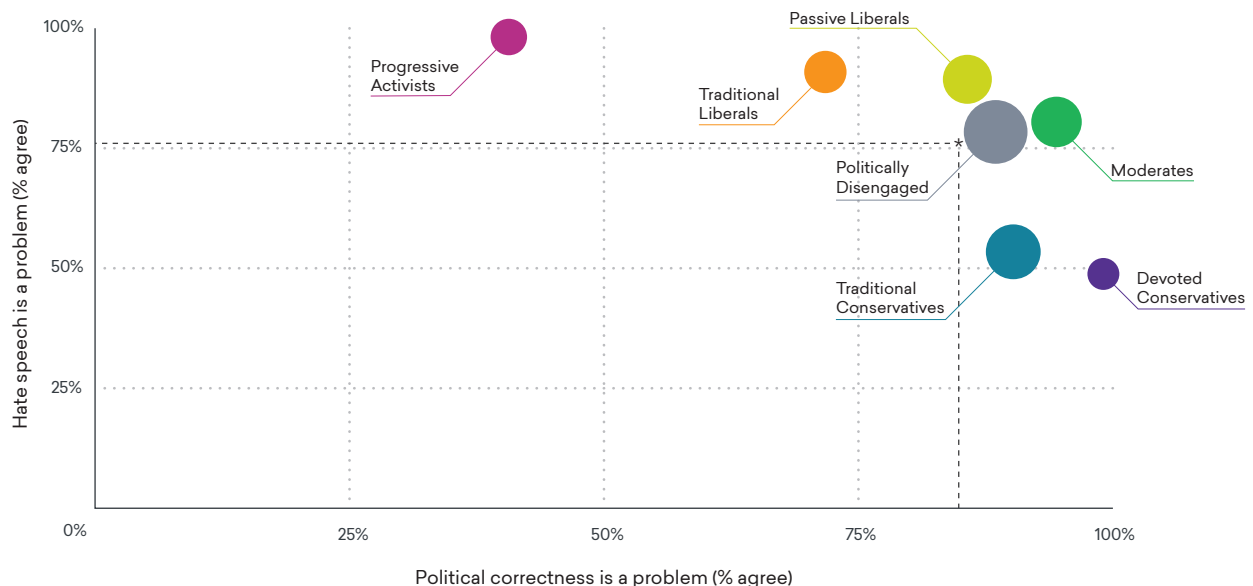
The government's refugee screening process is not tough enough to keep out possible terrorists;  
The government's refugee screening process works well to keep us safe.

Source: More in Common (2018)

## Figure 0.8

# Progressive Activists Stand Out on Speech

Progressive Activists are the least likely to believe that political correctness is a problem in society



○ size= % share of US population  
 --- US average

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 Political correctness is a problem in our country. [Showing total agreement]  
 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 Hate speech is problem is our country. [Showing total agreement]  
 Source: More in Common (2018)

Yet it would be a mistake to think of the Exhausted Majority merely as a group of political centrists, at least in the way that term is traditionally understood. They do not simply represent a midpoint between the warring tribes of the left and right. They are frustrated with the status quo and the conduct of American politics and public debate. They overwhelmingly believe that the American government is rigged to serve the rich and influential, and they want things to change.

With that said, there is nevertheless one segment within the Exhausted Majority that matches the traditional understanding of centrism: the Moderates, who comprise 15 percent of the population and whose views are consistently very close to the center of public opinion.

**The Exhausted Majority may be the key to countering polarization.** Traditional Liberals and Moderates instinctively support compromise. Their voices would be strengthened if the Passive Liberals develop greater confidence in the value of their participation. On the other hand, the Politically Disengaged are at risk of being drawn into polarizing us-versus-them narratives, especially given their comparatively high levels of distrust and suspicion.

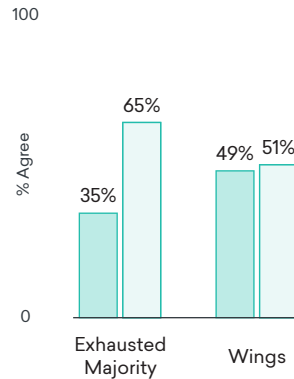
## Figure 0.9

# The Majority of Americans Want Compromise

Desire for compromise split by Wings and Exhausted Majority

People I agree with politically need to stick to their beliefs and fight

The people I agree with politically need to be willing to listen to others and compromise



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

Differences in people's underlying beliefs have always existed in healthy societies. Today, however, these differences are becoming more difficult to mediate. Liberals and conservatives are moving farther apart,<sup>1</sup> and tribal tensions are boiling over more regularly in politics and media as well as in daily life.

The forces driving polarization have a variety of sources including economic insecurity, growing inequality, cultural and demographic change, and the weakening of local communities. Many people are feeling a loss of identity and belonging. Populists and extremists are exploiting these vulnerabilities by advancing us-versus-them narratives, often focusing on immigrants and refugees. Social media is heightening conflict in public debate and bringing extreme narratives into the mainstream.<sup>2</sup>

**If we can better comprehend what lies behind our differences, we may prevent this polarization from spiraling out of control.** Many Americans today suffer from deep injustices related to their race, sex, religion, sexuality and other facets of their identities. But productive national dialogue about these and other critical issues has reached an impasse, in large part due to the widening gap between the major ideological and partisan perspectives.

The goal of this report is to improve our understanding of this polarization and its underlying causes. It highlights the need to unite Americans of conflicting beliefs and values. These connections create empathy and put people's opinions and beliefs into a more human context. This report tries to capture that human context by allowing Americans from every position on the political spectrum to speak for themselves.

**The structure of the report is as follows:**

- Chapter 1 describes the context in which this report was conceived and lays out the methodology of the survey.
- Chapter 2 provides a description of the seven tribes, including examples that demonstrate the characteristics of each segment.
- Chapter 3 demonstrates the extent to which the opinions of each segment follow a consistent pattern across a wide range of identity-related issues.
- Chapter 4 examines how a person's tribe is determined by the underlying architecture of his or her beliefs, worldview and group attachments.
- Chapter 5 examines the way in which tribalism overlays historic injustices and differences among Americans and intensifies polarization.
- Chapter 6 paints a more detailed picture of the Exhausted Majority.
- Chapter 7 examines how American national identity, which is sometimes used to divide, can be a force for unity.
- Chapter 8 examines the impact of tribalism and social media on the capacity of different groups to connect across divides.

# Chapter

1

## Context and Methodology

“

We are definitely divided... If you think of America as a rope, do you know a rope that is twisted and winded? I would say the ends of the rope are pretty frayed but the center of the rope is still pretty strong.

”

— 29-year-old man, North Carolina, Passive Liberal

## The purpose of this study is to better understand the forces driving political polarization and tribalism in the United States today. While this polarization is deeply rooted, it is not insoluble.

More Americans than ever perceive deep conflicts between Democrats and Republicans:<sup>3</sup> split-ticket voting is at its lowest on record;<sup>4</sup> political beliefs are increasingly divided along party lines; and growing numbers of Americans are expressing extreme distrust of members of other political groups and of governmental institutions.<sup>5</sup> Tribalism in politics has made it difficult to forge cross-party agreements on polarizing issues, even when large majorities of the public support reforms—such as a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients and background checks for gun ownership. This tribalism is contributing to deepening public frustration with the political system and a loss of faith in democracy.<sup>6</sup>

Polarization in the United States is being driven by a mix of economic, social, demographic and technological factors that are common to mature democracies around the world. These include:

- rapid demographic changes<sup>7</sup>
- increased economic inequality, stagnation in median wages and job insecurity<sup>8</sup>
- the persistent threat of terrorism<sup>9</sup>
- the ‘echo chamber’ effect of social media<sup>10</sup>
- the partisanship of cable television and other media<sup>11</sup>
- the US-specific trend of the erosion of confidence in the ‘American dream’<sup>12</sup>

A less recognized factor of polarization is how it is shaped by competing ways of perceiving and experiencing the world. Previous research in social psychology, behavioral economics, and neuroscience suggests that political behavior is strongly impacted by people’s core beliefs. **We use the term core beliefs to describe the system of beliefs, values and identities that reflect each individual’s experience and shape his or her interpretation of the world.**

More in Common conducted this research because we felt that existing studies did not adequately explain the landscape of American public opinion today, in particular, the connections between individuals’ beliefs across a wide range of issues. Understanding those connections is essential if we are to counter the efforts to divide Americans into groups of us-versus-them.

This report examines the landscape of American public opinion through the lens of seven population segments that emerged from a large-scale representative national survey of Americans concluded in early 2018. We call them America’s **hidden tribes**. They are hidden because what they have in common is a shared set of beliefs, values, and identities that shape the way they see the world, rather than visible external traits such as age, race or gender. We describe them as tribes because their behavior is often governed by a strong sense of shared identity and a collective adherence to core group principles.

What are the disagreements behind the deepening polarization of our society? Which members of society are most active in our political divisions and what are their central beliefs? How do those beliefs influence political opinion and voting behavior?

**The Hidden Tribes have  
a shared set of beliefs,  
values, and identities  
that shape the way they  
see the world.**

Most importantly, what can be done to establish common ground? By combining the results of our large-scale survey with qualitative research based on empirical approaches developed in the social sciences, this analysis provides fresh insights into the most pressing political divisions in the United States.

A key contribution of this study is the insight it provides into the different moral lenses that different segments of American society apply to a wide range of contentious issues, from DACA, to mass shootings, to transgender identity. Many Americans who are most engaged in public debate are influenced by tribal identities, either as conservatives or as progressives (or liberals).<sup>13</sup> Public debates around a diverse range of issues – including immigration, climate change, law enforcement, health care and education – are increasingly shaped by the tribal identities of the participants in those debates. At the same time, there are still some who resist these tribal pressures. Another large group remains largely disengaged from these conflicts and discouraged by the overall state of public discourse. Understanding these dynamics can inform efforts to engage people across tribes and help counter the advance of divisive narratives.

Prior to this report, More in Common undertook similar national studies in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Greece. While those studies were less extensive in both scale and the range of issues they addressed, they found many similar trends to those that emerge in this study. To varying degrees in each country, politics is increasingly dominated by issues of culture, identity and integration (such as national sovereignty, immigration, refugees and the role of Islam). The old left/right spectrum, based on the role of government and markets, is being supplanted by a new polarization between ‘open’ cosmopolitan values and ‘closed’ nationalist values. Insurgent populists, usually advancing a strident ‘closed’ agenda, are disrupting many political establishments. Yet we also find in each country that somewhere between 40-60 percent of people do not identify unambiguously with either the open or closed ends of the spectrum, and many are disturbed by the increasing sense of division in their country.

The ultimate aim of this research is to identify the most effective interventions that can be applied on the ground to counter division and help build a renewed and more expansive sense of American national identity.

# Previous Research

**This study builds on research from two distinct sources, each with unique strengths and weaknesses:**

## **LARGE SCALE POLLING**

Think tanks, news agencies and research firms use extensive data-collection tools to conduct large-scale surveys of the American electorate. These surveys tend to be more accurate and representative than smaller-scale studies, and are effective at gauging American attitudes toward a variety of issues. However, these surveys usually rely upon easily identified markers of age, gender, race or party identification. This sort of polling is seldom grounded in theoretical insights from the social sciences, focusing instead on explicit attitudes on contested issues such as immigration, gun control, gender issues, terrorism and government policy. One of the other unusual features of this study is that the quantitative findings are combined with qualitative research engaging around ninety Americans.

## **ACADEMIC RESEARCH**

Academics working in the social sciences conduct research on individuals' beliefs and political behavior. These studies tend to interrogate specific research hypotheses, such as the proposition that the best way to understand political behavior is to focus on the underlying narratives and modes of interpretation that people deploy to make sense of the world. For decades, scholars in such disparate fields as social psychology, political science, behavioral economics, neuroscience and philosophy have been methodically advancing an explanation of political division that is grounded in a rich theoretical understanding of the human mind. Such research is replicable, statistically rigorous, and empirically validated. Unfortunately, this research is often restricted to small population samples that are not representative of the American voting population. These studies are generally written for peer-reviewed academic journals and tend to have little influence on public debate and policy making. What's more, these academic studies often focus on different issues in isolation, making it difficult to build a comprehensive picture of the core beliefs driving political polarization.

Existing research on political division resembles an archipelago, with professional polling organizations performing large-scale surveys of political attitudes in shallower waters on one side and isolated groups of social scientists conducting studies of core beliefs in deeper waters on the other. This study is intended to build bridges between these differing methodologies and provide useful insights both for contemporary political analysis and longer-term academic research.

# Methodology

**By combining the large-scale sampling of professional polling with critical insights from social science, this study provides a deep look into American political behavior. The research is designed to identify clusters (also referred to as segments or tribes) within the American voting population that cohere in their core beliefs.**

Starting in December 2017 and concluding in January 2018, our research partner, YouGov, conducted 8,000 online survey interviews of US citizens using interlocking Census targets from the 2016 American Community Survey and propensity score weights to achieve a representative sample by gender, race, age, education and geographic region. For a full list of sample sizes and margins of error, please see the appendix. We posed questions on demographics, partisanship, ideology, cognition, moral values, group identity, political attitudes, and political and mediaconsumption behaviors. Each respondent completed a section on one of four thematic issue areas:

- immigration and American identity
- race and social justice
- gender and sexuality
- religion and extremism

In the qualitative phase of the research, we conducted thirty hour-long interviews with individuals distributed across the segments or “tribes” described below. In addition, six separate focus groups of 8-10 individuals each were conducted with a broadly representative distribution of respondents from each segment. Interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and analyzed in order to attain a description of the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the sample in their own words, and study emerging trends and patterns.\*

\* Where provided for respondents, names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

# Survey Content

## CORE BELIEFS

- **Group identity:** extent to which people identify with different groups based on nationality, gender, political party, ethnicity and other factors; and their views on who is mistreated in American society
- **Perceived threat:** extent to which people see the world as a dangerous place
- **Parenting style and authoritarian disposition:** basic philosophies regarding people's approach to parenting, which past research suggests may have important predictive power in explaining their attitudes towards more general public policies and authoritarianism
- **Moral foundations:** the extent to which people endorse certain moral values or "foundations," including fairness, care, purity, authority and loyalty
- **Personal agency:** extent to which people view personal success as the product of individual factors (such as hard work and discipline) versus societal factors (such as luck and circumstance)

## POLITICAL VIEWS

- Immigration, refugees, the border wall, DACA, sanctuary cities
- American identity, patriotism
- Shootings, terrorism, religion
- Race, racism, social justice, white privilege
- Gender, sexuality, sexism
- Media, political discourse
- Censorship, hate speech, political correctness and belief in conspiracy theories

# Statistical Approach: Cluster Analysis

**Race, ethnicity, age, gender, education and political party identification were not among the characteristics used to create the segments. Yet some of the groups have distinctive demographic profiles, demonstrating the connections between core beliefs and demographic characteristics such as age, race and class in America.**

Cluster analysis has several key advantages:

1. **Focus on core beliefs.** By avoiding the use of demographic information, ideological labels, or information on political attitudes, we were able to go beyond conventional categories and identify people's most basic psychological differences.
2. **Predictive power.** The segments proved better at predicting people's political views than conventional variables such as party identification or demographics. For example, knowing the segment to which someone belongs more accurately predicts their support for President Trump or their views on police brutality and sexual harassment than their party identity, race or gender. Put simply, understanding which segment an individual belongs to provides a better lens into their political views than traditional demographic categories. It also reveals the diversity of core beliefs within those traditional groupings.
3. **Reducing biases introduced by self-reporting.** People's definitions of ideological labels can differ widely. By identifying people's ideology from their responses to questions about their core beliefs rather than through self-reporting, we get a more accurate picture of where they stand in the landscape of public opinion.
4. **Targeted communication.** Past research suggests that persuasive messaging must resonate with people's core beliefs. By identifying population segments on the basis of these beliefs, subsequent research may better identify how to communicate effectively with people in each segment.



# Chapter

2

# The Hidden Tribes of America



“

**Our culture has become increasingly polarized, characterized by what I call an us-them political tribalism, where “them, they” are the bad guys and everything they believe is wrong...**

**...we have a lot of people on the edge, and not too many people that are working towards the middle.**

”

— Focus group participants, Storm Lake, Iowa, June 6 2018 <sup>14</sup>

**When describing social and political trends, pundits often divide the public by demographic characteristics such as age, race or ethnicity, income, and urban versus rural. These categories are useful for understanding broad differences between people. However, to understand what is driving polarization in the United States today, important insights can be missed when we only look through a demographic lens.**

We identified groups of people based not on demographic differences but rather on their core beliefs, sense of group belonging, and political behaviors. This approach allowed us to detect groups based on commonalities in aspects of their psychology, beliefs and behavior. Overall, the segmentation analysis identified seven distinct segments in the American population. Each is characterized by certain general traits and tendencies as revealed in response to a fixed set of survey questions:

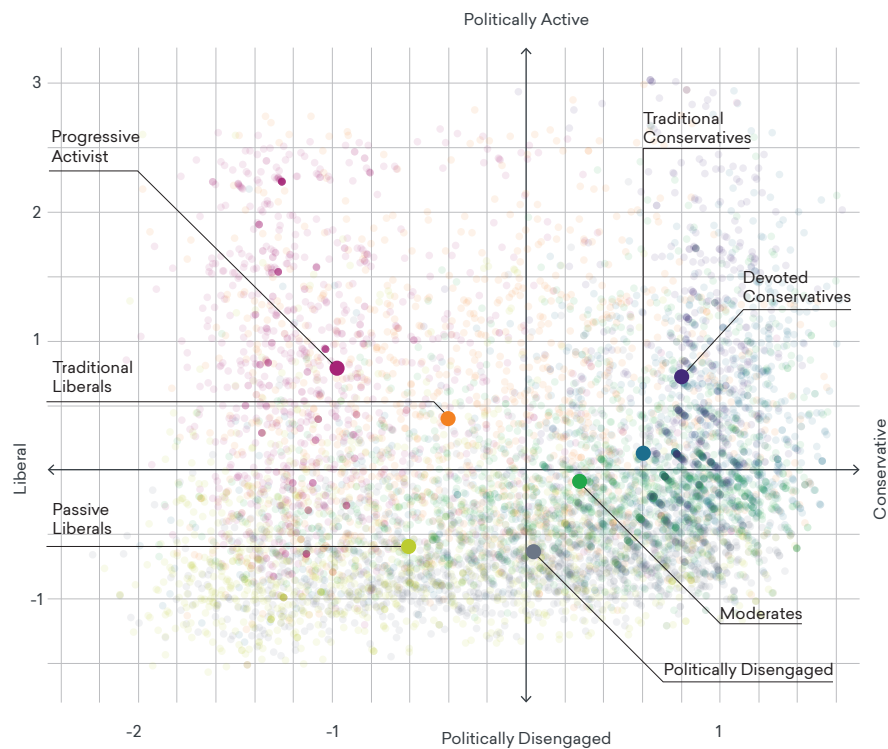
- **Progressive Activists:** highly engaged, secular, cosmopolitan, angry.
- **Traditional Liberals:** open to compromise, rational, cautious.
- **Passive Liberals:** unhappy, insecure, distrustful, disillusioned.
- **Politically Disengaged:** distrustful, detached, patriotic, conspiratorial.
- **Moderates:** engaged, civic-minded, middle-of-the-road, pessimistic.
- **Traditional Conservatives:** religious, patriotic, moralistic.
- **Devoted Conservatives:** highly engaged, uncompromising, patriotic.

The main characteristics for each segment are explained below, with a brief reference to distinctive demographic characteristics that were identified after conducting the segmentation analysis. Although voting information was included in the survey, we have generally not included it in this report in order to focus on the larger and more long-term issues of identity and core beliefs. A short profile of an individual from each segment is also provided, with names changed to preserve anonymity. Of course, the characteristics of those real-life individuals do not match all of the typical characteristics of the segments, as there is always variation within each segment. For more detail, the appendix contains the complete demographic information of all segments.

## Figure 2.1

# Activism and Ideology

Tribes differ not just in their views but also how involved they are in politics



Political activism was computed by aggregating across eight questions measuring people's engagement in their political communities. For full question texts see Appendix 2.1  
Source: More in Common (2018)



## Progressive Activists



8% of the total US population

“

The deck is stacked against people of color, against women, against people who don't have the advantages that others have. It's not an egalitarian society by any means.

”

— Progressive Activist, 60-year-old man, Indiana

## Overview

Progressive Activists have strong ideological views, high levels of engagement with political issues, and the highest levels of education and socioeconomic status. Their own circumstances are secure (they feel safer than any group), which perhaps frees them to devote more attention to larger issues of justice in society around them. They have an outsized role in political discourse, even though they comprise a small portion of the total population (about 1 in 12 Americans). They are highly sensitive to issues of fairness and equity in society, particularly with regards to race, gender and other minority group identities. Their emphasis on existing power structures leads them to be very pessimistic about fairness in America. They are uncomfortable with nationalism and ambivalent about America's role in the world.

## Main Concerns

**CLIMATE CHANGE, INEQUALITY, POVERTY**

### Compared to the average American:<sup>15</sup>

- More than twice as likely to list politics as a hobby - **73% V. 35%**
- Three times more likely to say that people's outcomes are the result of "luck and circumstance" - **75% V. 25%**
- Less likely to believe the world is becoming a "more and more dangerous place" - **19% V. 38%**
- More than twice as likely to say that they never pray - **50% V. 19%**
- Almost three times more likely to be "ashamed to be an American" - **69% V. 24%**
- More likely to say they are proud of their political ideology - **63% V. 46%**
- Eleven percent more likely to be white - **80% V. 69%**
- Seven percent more likely to be between ages 18 and 29 - **28% V. 21%**
- Twice as likely to have completed college - **59% V. 29%**

## Profile of a Progressive Activist

**Keane** is a late middle-aged attorney living in Indiana close to his family. His three most important roles in life are as a father (he has three boys), an attorney and a guitarist.

He describes himself as a liberal because he believes in the role of government in helping citizens. As a result of two divorces and changing jobs, he has had financial problems, which he believes has given him more empathy towards others. Despite his struggles, as a white male he sees how racism persists in America and people like him have a clear advantage, while women and people of color do not. To him, America “is not an egalitarian society by any means.”

Keane is worried about what is happening in America because he feels the Trump Administration has “taken on some characteristics of historical fascist regimes” and it is so ignorant of science, history, politics, art and culture. He believes that President Trump and his supporters often “stir up the emotions of the ignorant masses” but hopes that the Administration is “the last gasp of the old white man, and as they die off maybe we will have... a more compassionate view of what government should be and how our country should be.”

As a supporter of immigration, Keane perceives immigrants as hard-workers seeking better opportunities. He thinks about how his ancestors came to New York in the 1860s with hope, energy and drive, with no possessions but wanting to start a new life. He believes that one of the country’s biggest strengths is “that we have always been a beacon for people to come here and build something wonderful.”

He feels that America is “pretty divided” but finds it hard to get a feel for what most Americans are thinking, because crazy voices are amplified on the internet. He believes that compromise is important, but while we should compromise on issues such as taxes, there are some issues on which there should be no compromises such as slavery or racism.

Although he is embarrassed about the United States under its current political leadership, Keane still believes that America is a great country and is proud of the Constitution and democratic system. “We have the tools to make it better: Our freedom and pioneering spirit are two of our strengths.”





## Traditional Liberals



11% of the total US population

“

I think some people's situations are challenging and no matter how hard they work they can't get ahead. That's why I don't like the Republican Party, they don't want to help. I think some kinds of people need help and the government should help them.

”

— Traditional Liberal, 73-year-old woman, Texas

## Overview

Traditional Liberals reflect the liberal ideals of the Baby Boomer generation. They maintain idealistic attitudes about the potential for social justice in America, yet they are less ideological than Progressive Activists, and they are not as intolerant of conservatives. They have strong humanitarian values, and around half say that religion is important to them. Traditional Liberals are significantly more likely to say that people “need to be willing to listen to others and compromise.” They are the most likely group, along with Progressive Activists, to handle conflict by “getting to the heart of the disagreement.” Overall, Traditional Liberals respond best to rational arguments and are inclined to place more faith in the viability of American institutions, even if they are disillusioned with the country’s current direction.

## Main concerns

### LEADERSHIP; DIVISION IN SOCIETY

## Compared to the average American:

- Thirty-six percent more likely to disapprove of President Trump - **93% V. 57%**
- Eleven percent more likely to handle conflict by “getting to the heart of the disagreement” - **68% V. 57%**
- Twelve percent more likely to say that “the people I agree with politically need to be willing to listen to others and compromise” - **73% V. 61%**
- Seventeen percent more likely to say “we need to heal as a nation” - **77% V. 60%**
- Eight percent more likely to say that to be American it is very important to “believe in freedom and equality” - **75% V. 67%**
- Eight percent more likely to be over the age of 65 - **28% V. 20%**
- Seven percent more likely to be white - **76% V. 69%**
- Nineteen percent more likely to have graduated college - **48% V. 29%**

## Profile of a Traditional Liberal

**Elizabeth** is a retiree living in Arizona where her family lives as well. Her husband died four years ago. She moved to Arizona after retiring from the phone company where she was a union rep. She has done volunteer work for children with autism and now works with elderly people through her church. Elizabeth's Lutheran faith and church community are very important to her and she participates actively through a weekly Bible study and her volunteer work.

According to Elizabeth, the most important problem in America is "the division in Washington, the gridlock and not being able to get anything done, the lack of compassion for people, and the lack of understanding on both sides I think, Democrat and Republican." However, she feels that divisions in politics are deeper than the divisions in the country as a whole.

She believes that race still plays a role in America. Living in a border state, she often sees discrimination. She reflects on how nobody describes a white person from Canada as an immigrant, only when they look different such as a Mexican or a Syrian. She thinks the treatment of the Dreamers has been terrible and looks back fondly on growing up with Mexicans in a rural area of Minnesota, when children played together and felt they were all the same. She admits that some things are complicated. For example, she does not know whether an immigrant who commits a crime should be deported or face the same penalties that Americans face. She thinks it is absurd to say that immigrants drain resources that could be used on Americans because the reality is that there are no resources for anyone.

Elizabeth is worried about the tone of national debates and the impact of social media. She has had to cut contact with friends of many years because they have become so angry. To her, life is about compromise. "We are Americans. We will unite....I think it is going to take some people who are going to come in and make this a priority. To bring the two sides together, to compromise, to work it out."

Elizabeth still believes that it is possible to unite America and that Americans all share a love for their country. "It used to be our differences made us Americans. Now it seems that that is not the popular tone."





## Passive Liberals



15% of the total US population

“

I have liberal views but I think political correctness has gone too far, absolutely. We have gotten to a point where everybody is offended by the smallest thing.

”

— Passive Liberal, 28-year-old woman, North Carolina

## Overview

Passive Liberals are weakly engaged in social and political issues, but when pushed they have a modern outlook and tend to have liberal views on social issues such as immigration, DACA, sexism and LGBTQI+ issues. They are younger and have a higher proportion of females (59 percent) than any other segment. Unlike Progressive Activists and Traditional Liberals, they tend to feel isolated, even alienated, from their communities and the system at large. Passive Liberals are also the least satisfied of all the segments. They are among the most fatalistic, believing that circumstances are largely outside of their own control. They are quite uninformed, consume little news media, and generally avoid political debates, partly from a general aversion to argumentation and partly because they feel that they do not know much about social and political issues.

## Main concerns

### HEALTHCARE, RACISM AND POVERTY

## Compared to the average American:

- Fifteen percent less likely to say they have a “strong sense of home” - **36% V. 21%**
- Six percent more likely to say they feel like a “stranger in my own country” - **19% V. 13%**
- Twelve percent more likely to say the world is becoming a “more dangerous place” - **50% V. 38%**
- Twice as likely to say “things have gotten worse for me personally in the last year” - **32% V. 17%**
- Much less likely to be registered to vote - **51% V. 72%**
- Much more likely to be African American - **20% V. 12%**
- Seven percent more likely to be aged 18-29 - **28% V. 21%**
- Eight percent more likely to have not graduated from college - **68% V. 60%**
- Four percent more likely to “avoid arguments” - **86% V. 82%**

## Profile of a Passive Liberal

**Jamal** is 29 years old and lives in North Carolina. He is a career employee with the U.S. Postal Service and has worked there for six years. His parents wanted him to go to college, but he felt he would not be a good student and did not have a scholarship. Instead, he got a job and since then he has applied the lessons his parents taught him about budgeting carefully and staying focused.

Jamal is opinionated but also frustrated with politics and has given up on it. He believes that America has lots of problems, but the main one is the pervasive lack of accountability, of which politicians are the biggest offenders. They are never held to account when they fail to deliver on their promises.

Jamal worries that Americans are “tearing ourselves apart out of self-interest.” He dislikes the way that people get defined by labels and does not define himself as either Republican or Democrat or as either liberal or conservative. He sees himself as a moderate who leans liberal on some things and conservative on others. He does not describe himself as a race or gender either. “I am a person, who happens to live in the United States of America.... If you push me I would define myself as an American, who happens to be of African-American descent, even if that might be a misnomer as I have never been to Africa.”

Jamal sees the United States as a country made of immigrants. “I don’t have a problem with immigrants, I think diversity is your best weapon in changing times because you get diverse ideas, you get diverse cultures... Of course, not every culture is a gem but I do think exchange of ideas is beneficial to a society.” He believes America should accept more refugees, so long as they do not have a violent past.

Jamal feels pride as an American. He does not think there are many countries where a person can be as free. Despite the divisions, he thinks that it is possible to unite the country so long as people give up some of their self-interest. He says that everyone should come to the table with an open mind, have a healthy debate, and try their best to compromise. “I don’t think we are so divided that we cannot come to a solution on the basics.”





## Politically Disengaged



26% of the total US population

“

Well, no luck... it just didn't happen for me, you know. I've been part-time now for a couple of years. I ran into full-time positions but they didn't last long. I never did really play the lottery so I didn't hit it big [laughs]. I never did, what's it called, investment or anything like that, stocks and stuff.

”

— Politically Disengaged, 56-year-old man, Illinois

## Overview

The Politically Disengaged most resemble Passive Liberals in having lower levels of income and education and being less engaged in following current affairs. Fully 41 percent are making less than \$30,000 per year, and approximately one in four have gone without enough food or without medical treatment at least somewhat often. They are different from Passive Liberals in being more anxious about external threats and less open in their attitudes towards differences. For instance, they are the most likely to say that being white is necessary to be American and that people who hold other religious views are morally inferior. They are more concerned about the threat of terrorism and are quite closed to the view that Islamic and American values are compatible. They are practically invisible in local politics and community life, being one of the least likely groups to participate in political rallies or vote in local elections. They are also the least well informed group on all measures of political knowledge. They are the most pessimistic about the possibility of reconciling differences between political factions. Overall, this makes the Politically Disengaged a difficult segment to reach and mobilize.

## Main concerns

### GUN VIOLENCE, JOBS/ECONOMY AND TERRORISM

## Compared to the average American:

- Eight percent more likely to say that to fix America, we need a strong leader willing to break the rules - **57% V. 45%**
- Nine percent more likely to believe the “differences between Americans are too big for us to work together” - **32% V. 23%**
- Nine percent more likely to say that “being white” is important to being American - **20% V. 11%**
- Nine percent more likely to make under \$20,000 a year - **26% V. 17%**
- More than twice as likely to not be involved in any community activity - **78% V. 34%**
- Much less likely to share political content on social media - **5% V. 26%**
- Much less likely to be registered to vote - **52% V. 72%**
- Ten percent more likely to be black or Hispanic - **34% V. 24%**
- Six percent more likely to be aged 30-44 - **31% V. 25%**
- Sixteen percent more likely to have no college education - **53% V. 37%**

## Profile of a Politically Disengaged

**Karen** is a grandmother who lives in California with her husband. She retired three years ago due to a disability. She had previously worked as a caregiver, cook, and warehouse stockist. She does not leave the house very much. Her children do not live too far away but they are very busy and she does not see them very often. She also has a friend she speaks to on the phone every now and then.

Karen is not interested in politics. She distrusts politicians and keeps her opinions to herself, concerned that she does not know enough. She describes herself as an “in-between” and believes that there are “good things on both sides” of politics. She does not vote because political debate is complex and she suspects that voting systems are rigged.

While she recognizes that it is harder for some people to succeed, she believes that people ultimately have responsibility for their lives: “If they really want to work hard at it then they can be successful.” An experience in her own life, when she, as a white woman, was promoted over a more experienced Latina woman, also convinced her that people can be treated unfairly due to their race. Overall, however, she thinks that Americans are “given opportunities, no matter what race they are.”

Karen is conflicted on the issue of immigration. She thinks that immigrants take resources away from other Americans but acknowledges that they often do the jobs that Americans do not want to do. She believes in the importance of First Amendment rights and feels comfortable with immigration so long as incoming immigrants do not try to change American beliefs.

Karen is proud to be American: “It means I have more freedom to do things that other people may not [be able to], more opportunities than people in other countries have.” For her, being American is about pride and loyalty, and she emphasizes the importance of the Pledge of Allegiance and “the Commandments.”

Karen is anxious about America’s future. She believes America has become more disorganized than ever. She worries about her grandchildren’s generation and how changes in sexuality are undermining America’s traditional values: “it’s just too free and open now... people are more selfish, immoral.” To fix America’s problems, “we need people to try and work together, understand each other and get along,” but she admits that she does not think that will ever happen.





## Moderates



15% of the total US population

“

The entitlement, everybody feeling it's their way or no way. I know people say they are protesting to bring people together, but I believe that a lot of people are just selfish and are worrying about themselves. I just worry about society. I don't know what it's going to take to bring things back.”

”

— Moderate, 54-year-old woman, New Jersey

## Overview

Moderates reflect the middle of the road of public opinion in America. They tend to be engaged in their communities, often volunteer, and are interested in current affairs, but uncomfortable with the tribalism of politics. They tend to be socially conservative. Religion plays an important role in their lives, but they reject extremism and intolerance. They strongly disapprove of Donald Trump as president and overwhelmingly believe that the country is headed in the wrong direction. Among those planning to vote in the 2018 midterms, they favor Democrats over Republicans by a margin of 4-3. Yet they also think that political correctness has gone too far. They dislike the activism and what they see as extremism of both progressives and conservatives. While they think feminism has gone too far, they also recognize sexual harassment as an important issue. They support the notion of sanctuary cities and want undocumented immigrants to have better treatment. They reject extreme policies such as building a border wall and a 'Muslim travel ban.' They are worried about the state of America and feel that American identity is slipping away. They feel conflicted on certain social justice issues, including same sex marriage, and they are slower to embrace change. They tend to seek less radical solutions than Devoted or Traditional Conservatives.

## Main concerns

### DIVISION, FOREIGN TENSIONS AND HEALTHCARE

## Compared to the average American:

- More likely to follow current affairs some or most of the time - **80% V. 72%**
- Five percent more likely to agree that immigration is good for the country - **61% V. 56%**
- Four percent more likely to say police are more violent toward African Americans than others - **55% V. 51%**
- Nine percent more likely to believe that political correctness has gone too far - **89% V. 80%**
- Six percent more likely to be over 45 - **60% V. 54%**
- Four percent more likely to have "some college" - **27% V. 23%**

## Profile of a Moderate

**Gabriela** is a mother of four who lives in Texas and is married to an oil worker. She is devoted to her family and to helping others. She is now looking for a job as a pharmacy technician. She dislikes talking about politics and does not have strong opinions on most matters, but, if pressed, she would say she is conservative. She is frustrated by people who talk a lot about things they do not know about. She is also worried about the divisions in the United States, especially racial tensions.

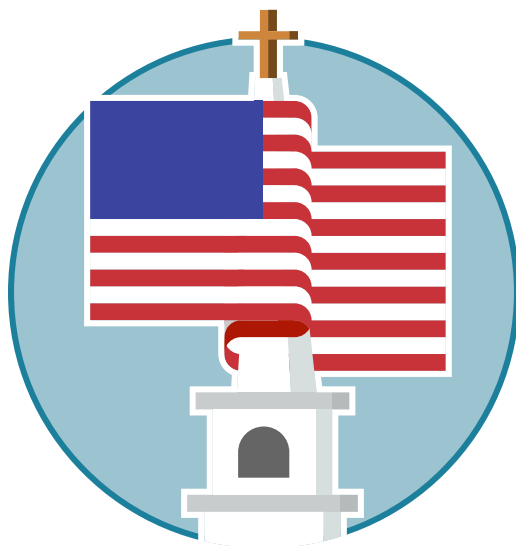
Family and religion are especially important to Gabriela, but she does not believe in imposing on or judging others. For her, nothing is more important than having the support of family and friends. She feels for those who do not have both parents in their lives as they grow up or who are taken out of their homes as children.

She is not “big into politics” and describes herself as someone who follows her morals. She thinks immigration is a major concern in America right now. While she feels there are good and bad aspects of America’s immigration policies, she has positive associations with immigrants. (Part of her own family came from Mexico.) To her, immigrants are just like other Americans, trying to better themselves. She thinks they should be treated like all other Americans, and believes that most just want to get an education and improve the situation of their families.

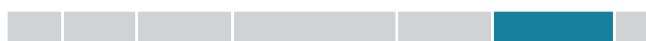
Gabriela believes it is important to help others who are in need. She puts this into practice with her husband, who is the coach of a boxing club that helps engage youth in a positive community activity. These values are also reflected in Gabriela’s view that Americans should welcome more refugees. Nonetheless, she is unsure when it comes to policies such as sanctuary cities, as she does not want cities to get into trouble.

Gabriela is proud of being an American. To her it means having freedom and being able to help others. She lives in a small community where everybody helps each other. She believes that it is through helping others that America’s divisions can be healed.





## Traditional Conservatives



19% of the total US population

“  
|  
”

The America that I grew up with is gone. And I miss that.

— Traditional Conservative, 57-year-old woman, Mississippi

## Overview

Traditional Conservatives value patriotism and America's Christian foundations. They feel that those foundations are under threat from a liberal political culture that emphasizes diversity and devalues America's achievements. They believe in values such as personal responsibility and self-reliance, and think that too much emphasis is given to issues of gay rights, sexual harassment and racism. They have a clear sense of identity as American, Christian and conservative, but they are not as strident in their beliefs as Devoted Conservatives. For example, they are open to dialogue or compromise on a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children, and they acknowledge that racist acts still persist in the United States. They are suspicious of the traditional media, yet they are more likely than any other group to feel that their voice is represented in American politics.

## Main concerns

### FOREIGN TENSIONS, JOBS AND TERRORISM

## Compared to the average American:

- Thirty-three percent less likely to say the country is rigged in favor of the rich and powerful - **47% V. 80%**
- Almost twice as likely to feel that people like them have a say in politics - **46% V. 24%**
- Eight percent more likely to say that "having two American parents" is a "very important" part of being American - **23% V. 15%**
- More than twice as likely to strongly approve of Donald Trump's job performance - **49% V. 19%**
- Twice as likely to watch Fox News - **41% V. 19%** - and listen to talk radio - **25% V. 11%**
- Ten percent more likely to be white - **79% V. 69%**
- Ten percent more likely to be older than 65 - **30% V. 20%**
- Similar education to average American

# Profile of a Traditional Conservative

**Gregory** is a 43-year-old IT consultant from New York. A husband and father of one, he has worked at the same company for the last 17 years. He is an active church member and his faith influences the decisions he makes from day to day.

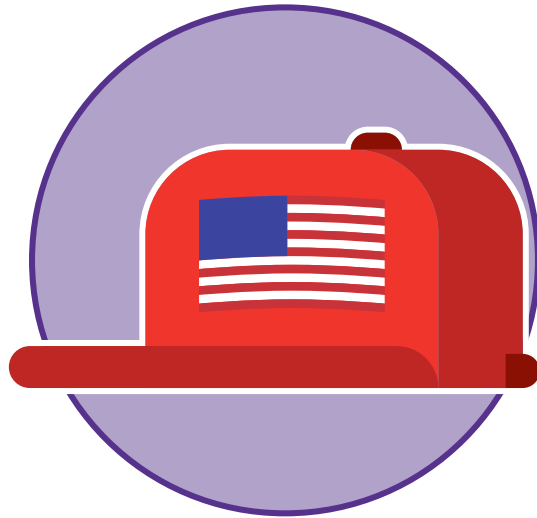
Politically, he describes himself as somewhere between conservative and very conservative, “a little bit pragmatic too.” He is conscious that many people are stuck in their own bubbles. Consequently, he tries to obtain his news from a variety of conservative sources, while actively checking the validity of content he finds on Twitter, where he gets much of his news. He also gathers news from the Drudge Report, Breitbart and local news. He used to watch Fox News but stopped watching after they fired Bill O’Reilly. He worries that there are “too many people that don’t understand what’s going on politically, they just go off what they see, but in my opinion they don’t think for themselves.”

Gregory is a firm believer in the value of hard work, which has gotten him where he is today. He believes that anyone can succeed if they have the will, although he does recognize that “some people have a tougher slog than others.” He thinks success is less about racial or class background and more about the people with whom you surround yourself.

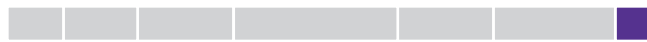
Gregory thinks that illegal immigration is a major problem and that immigrants are not being vetted adequately. Nevertheless, he does not think that immigration overall is necessarily bad for the country because “a lot of people coming in are fantastic people.” What is important to him is that people follow the rules. “Illegal is illegal in my opinion. I’ve always been a law-abiding citizen so when people aren’t, it’s a problem with me.”

Gregory believes that political correctness has stopped America from dealing with important issues relating to race, religion and terrorism. “I define it as lying. Not saying what you really think. It really hurts everybody. This is why I said I am a big fan of Trump, because he is not politically correct.” Gregory does not understand why others sometimes call him a racist. He also perceives Christianity to be under constant attack, whereas he believes Muslims are “a protected class.” He is thankful for his First Amendment right to free speech, because he has heard that in other countries such as the UK and western Europe, you “can’t say anything.”





## Devoted Conservatives



6% of the total US population

“

To me, being patriotic means taking care of your own first; and if the country is not doing economically well [enough] to take care of ourselves, how can we take care of everyone else?

”

— Devoted Conservative, 53-year old woman, New York

## Overview

The Devoted Conservatives are the counterpart to the Progressive Activists, but at the other end of the political spectrum. They are one of the highest income-earning groups, and feel happier and more secure than most other Americans. They are highly engaged in social and political issues and think that religious liberty, abortion and terrorism are especially important issues. They value patriotism and loyalty to the flag. They feel that traditional values are under assault and that Americans are being forced to accept liberal beliefs about issues such as immigration, racial inequality, Islam and the role of women. They believe that American values are being eroded rapidly and they see themselves as defenders of those values.

## Main concerns

### IMMIGRATION, TERRORISM AND JOBS/ECONOMY

## Compared to the average American:

- Almost twice as likely to list politics as a hobby - **63% V. 35%**
- Three times more likely to strongly support a US-Mexico border wall - **75% V. 24%**
- More than twice as likely to have donated to their place of worship - **64% V. 24%**
- Almost three times more likely to strongly support a 'Muslim travel ban' - **88% V. 31%**
- Twenty-four percent more likely to oppose compromise - **63% V. 39%**
- Nineteen percent more likely to be white - **88% V. 69%**
- Fourteen percent more likely to be older than 65 - **34% V. 20%** - and much less likely to be born between 1985 and 2000 - **11% V. 27%**
- More likely to come from the South - **45% V. 38%**

## Profile of a Devoted Conservative

**Kimberley** is an 80-year-old woman who lives in a small town in South Carolina, a town she loves for its community feeling. She was a homemaker throughout her whole life and is proud to have children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She is a devout Baptist who prays twice per day and attends church weekly. She says that she has become more religious as she has grown older and has become more involved with the church.

Kimberley is interested in politics and describes herself as a “conservative independent.” She is a registered independent and does not always vote a straight party ticket. Her husband is also an independent. Kimberley has voted Democrat in the past, but the last time was for President Clinton in the 1990s. She feels that she has grown more conservative because she believes that the Democratic party has become too liberal on issues such as abortion rights.

Kimberley is suspicious of liberal influences on American society. She thinks that schools and universities are brainwashing young people with liberal ideas. She dislikes protestors and suspects that they are often paid to protest. She feels that the anti-white supremacist protesters in Charlottesville in 2017 were in the wrong. She also distrusts what she regards as the bias of the liberal media such as CNN. She watches Fox News and likes Sean Hannity.

Kimberley is anxious that many people are coming to the United States illegally. She thinks that at least one in three immigrants is unwilling to work and they collect welfare and drain the resources of American society. She also believes “a lot of them commit crimes” and that the rate of illegal immigration has increased lately as “they are coming across the border.” Undocumented immigrants who commit a crime should definitely be deported, and she dislikes the fact that “taxpayers have to pay for the criminal justice system.”

To Kimberley, being an American means that one has freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the right to vote. It is important to her that people respect the American flag. She believes that the best way for Americans unite is to care for each other, especially the sick and the aged.



# Chapter

3

## The Issues that Polarize Us

“

It's a very real thing in America where people go to Thanksgiving dinner and you just cannot talk about politics because... it's going to end up in a huge blow up.

”

— 30-year-old woman, Indiana, Traditional Liberal

**Many of today's most contentious issues are framed as us-versus-them identity-based struggles, as battles pitting men against women, American citizens against immigrants, Muslims against Christians, and African Americans against the police. In fact, these conflicts often stem from individuals' core beliefs on issues such as fairness, justice, privilege and oppression. This chapter examines how the landscape of the seven tribes set out in Chapter 2 illuminates the public discourse around the country's most divisive issues.**

## **Priority Issues**

When asked to identify the three most important issues facing the United States today from a standard list of topical concerns regularly used in opinion surveys, Americans rank poor leadership as the country's greatest problem. The next highest ranked concerns are jobs/the economy and healthcare. Other key issues that feature prominently are immigration, terrorism, division and racism.

The fact that poor leadership ranks highest of any issue reflects the widespread perception of crisis surrounding the Trump presidency. Sixty-four percent of Traditional Liberals rank it as the single most important issue. It also ranks higher than any other issue for Progressive Activists, Passive Liberals and Moderates. In stark contrast to all other groups, the Conservative segments do not agree: only 7 percent of Traditional Conservatives and 4 percent of Devoted Conservatives rank poor leadership as a concern, reflecting the extent to which tribal loyalties shape political perceptions.

There are only two issues that all tribes rank highly: America's political divisions and healthcare, although perhaps for opposing reasons in the case of healthcare, with one end of the spectrum wanting to abolish the Affordable Care Act while the other is anxious to save it. Middle groups rank healthcare even more highly than those at both ends of the spectrum (36 percent of Passive Liberals and Moderates ranked it second to poor leadership). The problem of America's political divisions is ranked highly across the board, by both the middle groups and those at the ends of the spectrum, with the lowest concern among the Politically Disengaged and the highest among Traditional Liberals and Moderates. A 40-year-old male from Illinois in the Moderate segment feels that America is "very divided, divided across all those lines. Some of them socio-economic, some of them racial, some of them now with the transgenderism stuff coming in. I think it's very, very divided, very unhealthily divided. I think it's definitely been getting worse." A 21-year-old female Progressive Activist from Massachusetts likewise says, "Honestly, the biggest problem is how polarized everyone is. If we can't communicate with each other, we're not going to be able to solve any of the other numerous problems that we have."

One of the most striking findings from our conversations with Americans from all tribes is not only how often they speak of division as being the country's most pressing problem, but how profoundly it now affects them in their own lives.

**Americans from all tribes often speak of division as the country's most pressing problem, one that affects them in their own lives.**

These discussions provoke strong emotions and sometimes even a sense of despair. In the words of an Arizonan who is in the Politically Disengaged group (the group least conscious of polarization): "The main problem is the division of the citizens. We don't want to listen to each other. We just want to read something, form an opinion, and shove our opinion on each other. We don't want to acknowledge anybody else's point of view."

The polarization of opinion between the opposing ends of the spectrum is very clear from the issues that different groups prioritize:

- After the issue of poor leadership, Progressive Activists rank climate change (47%) and economic inequality (42%) next, both issues that rank high on the liberal agenda. These are both considerably higher than the average (18% and 12%, respectively).
- The Devoted Conservatives and Traditional Conservatives identify different concerns: immigration, terrorism (approximately 60% in both cases) and jobs (both around 55%).
- The Politically Disengaged group resemble the Conservatives in their focus on jobs (56%), immigration (60%) and terrorism (59%).

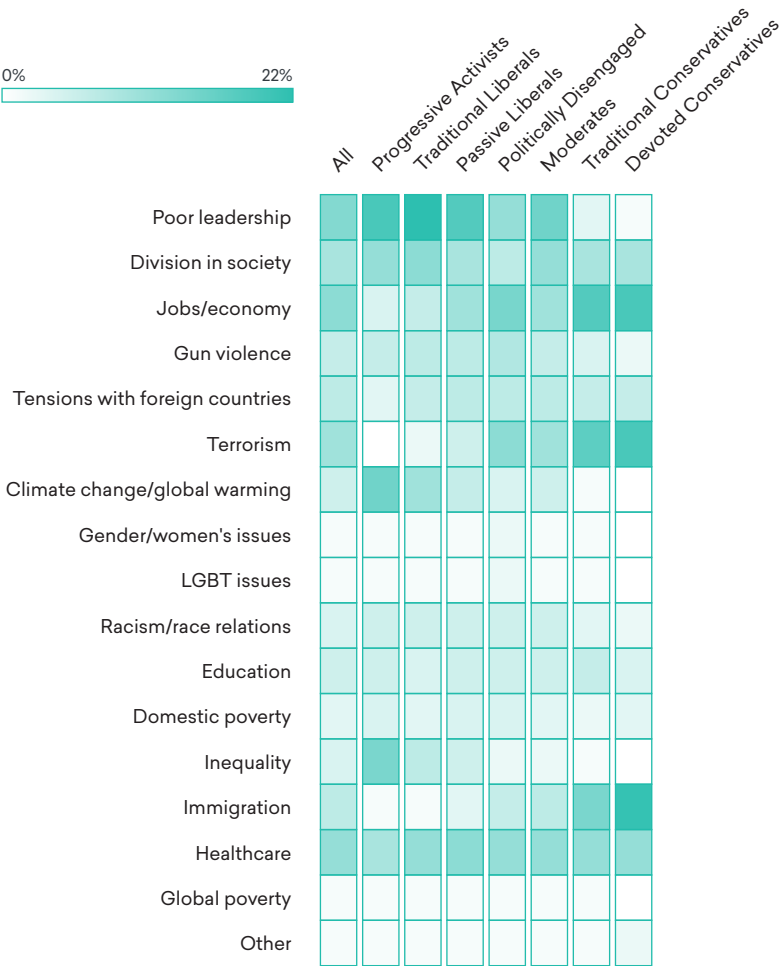
Below, we examine some key findings that highlight the differences between the seven segments on four of the most polarizing issues in the United States:

- Immigration
- Race, Violence and Social Justice
- Sex, Gender and Violence
- Religious Identity and Security

Figure 3.1

## Tribes: Central Issues

The tribes differ in which issues they deem most important in society



From the list, please rank the top three issues in order of importance.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## Immigration

Overall, Americans feel more positively towards immigration than the public in many European nations. Fifty-one percent of Americans believe that immigration is good for the country, compared to 18 percent in France, for example, and a similar proportion has a favorable view of the impact of undocumented workers on the job market, as 59 percent of Americans believe that undocumented immigrants do jobs that most Americans would not do, the other 41 percent believe that undocumented immigrants take jobs away from American citizens.

Yet opinion on immigration is divided. Most Americans believe in the principle of compassion and fairness towards immigrants, and they strongly support those who make efforts to integrate into American culture and those who are fleeing from danger.

**“A lot of people don’t want to admit that it is more of a race issue. I don’t think people would be as upset if the immigrants in question did not have the color skin that they have.”**

- 21-year-old woman, Illinois,  
Progressive Activist

An overwhelming 99 percent of Progressive Activists and 85 percent of Traditional Liberals think immigration is good for the country. The Progressive and Liberal tribes give priority to compassion and openness to other cultures. They regard immigration as an important part of America’s national story. Moderates and Passive Liberals also lean towards a positive view of the impact of immigration (61 and 72 percent, respectively).

On the other hand, many Americans also worry about the extent to which the United States remains in control of its borders. They oppose any measures that might put the safety of American citizens at risk. Traditional Conservatives and Devoted Conservatives believe that America’s immigrant population is a burden on the country (64 and 81 percent, respectively). These negative views are not held as uniformly among the conservative tribes as the positive views are held amongst the liberals at the other end of the spectrum.

One reason why immigration provokes such heated debates is that opposing groups frame the issue in such different ways. For the two Conservative tribes, immigration is often framed as an issue of immigrants defying laws, the government losing control of borders, and doubts about immigrants’ loyalty to America. Progressive Activists and Traditional Liberals frame the same immigration issues through the lens of racism, human rights, refugee protection and the positive value of a diverse society. The stance of middle groups differs according to the specific immigration issue, but the Politically Disengaged generally demonstrate a higher level of suspicion of immigrants and a higher level of support for extreme measures to control borders than other middle groups.

A majority of almost all segments believe that America should bear some of the burden of taking in refugees fleeing from war or persecution (64 percent on average), with the sole exception being Devoted Conservatives (27 percent agreement). There are especially strong majorities of Americans in favor of welcoming children and those fleeing violence.

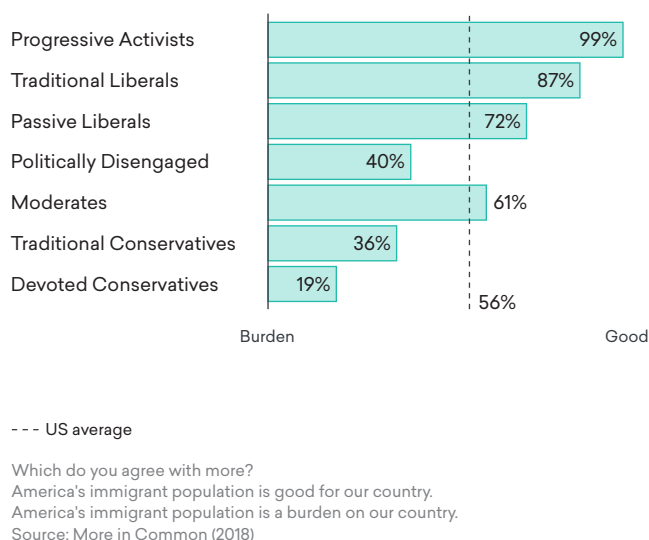
Beyond those statements of principle, there is strong support among Americans for specific policy initiatives that reflect a combination of liberal and conservative values. For example, 78 percent of Americans support a pathway to citizenship for young undocumented immigrants brought to the US as children who serve in the military or go to college. Indeed, even among Devoted Conservatives, 63 percent support a pathway to citizenship law for them. A majority of almost every group supports a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children (DACA). The only exception are the Devoted Conservatives, amongst whom support for this policy is 48 percent.

One explanation for the differences among the segments on questions of immigration is that along with the value of compassion, the two Conservative segments are also strongly influenced by other values: the importance of law and order, tradition, loyalty to America, national security and sovereignty. When those values are in conflict with the exercise of compassion, they are more likely to prioritize one of the former. For example, 82 percent of Devoted Conservatives and 75 percent of Traditional Conservatives believe that any undocumented immigrant who commits a crime should be deported. Eighty-eight percent of Devoted Conservatives and 64 percent of Traditional Conservatives support a ‘Muslim travel ban,’ which they view as an exercise of sovereignty that is consistent with prioritizing America’s national security. By contrast, it is supported by just 29 percent of Moderates and 25 percent of the

## Figure 3.2

### Immigration: Good or Bad?

Tribes differ in their views on the overall impact of immigration for the country



Politically Disengaged.

Devoted Conservatives are also influenced by a more tribal sense of loyalty to other Americans and a greater suspicion towards immigrants. They are more likely to believe that Americans have a stronger work ethic and better cultural values than people from other nations. For instance, a majority of this segment believes immigrants “contribute less” than other Americans to society (62 percent), and a vast majority also believe that refugees contribute less to society (79 percent).

The Conservative segments are also more sensitive to immigration issues than other groups. Seventy-four percent of Devoted Conservatives say they think about issues related to immigration at least once a week, more than twice the national average (36 percent) and significantly more than Traditional Conservatives (44 percent). Heightened concern about immigration is, therefore, a significant marker of the most Conservative tribe. Sixty percent of Devoted Conservatives say that issues of immigration “make me very frustrated,” nearly three times as much as the national average (22 percent).

The views of the Traditional and Devoted Conservative segments on these matters are diametrically opposed to the views of the Progressive Activists. This is shown in the differing levels of confidence in the government’s refugee screening process. While 97 percent of Progressive Activists believe that the screening process works well to keep Americans safe, 99 percent of Devoted Conservatives believe that the process is not tough enough to keep out potential terrorists. On this issue, a majority of people in the middle segments lean towards the Conservative side, with the “not tough enough” view shared by 73 percent of the Politically Disengaged, 69 percent of the Moderates, and 58 percent of the Passive Liberals.

# Racial Justice and Police Brutality

From kneeling athletes and police brutality to violence in cities, questions of racial justice are still dividing Americans fifty years after the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The survey probed Americans' opinions on a wide variety of racial

justice issues ranging from views on the Black Lives Matter movement to racial bias in the ways that the American media portrays crime.

**“What I would most want them to realize in general is that police brutality against people of color is a real problem. A lot of times they don’t seem to think it is, they seem to just brush it off. Also with the kneeling during anthems, they think it is just some disrespect against the flag and don’t seem to consider why it is being done. They don’t seem to be bothered by the reason they are doing it in the first place. That bothers me.”**

- 40-year-old woman, North Carolina,  
Progressive Activist

A majority of all segments agree that problems of racism are at least somewhat serious (82 percent overall), and 75 percent of the country believes that acts of racism are at least somewhat common. Furthermore, 60 percent of Americans believe that white supremacists are a growing threat in the United States, including 61 percent of the Moderates and 56 percent of the Politically Disengaged.

Nonetheless, despite recognizing the reality of racism and the threat posed by white extremists, Americans do not agree on whether or not this issue is taken seriously enough. Ninety-two percent of Progressive Activists and 66 percent of Traditional Liberals believe that many people do not take racism seriously enough, a view shared by only 40 percent of Americans overall. On the other hand, 69 percent of Americans say that many people are too sensitive about things to do with race, a view shared by 94 percent of Devoted Conservatives.

## WHITE PRIVILEGE

Americans are almost evenly divided on whether they think that white privilege exists. Progressive Activists have no doubts that many white people today do not recognize the real advantages that they have (99 percent), while at the other end of the spectrum, 82 percent of Devoted Conservatives believe that white people do not have any real advantages.

Recognition of white privilege does not necessarily amount to support for all efforts to address the legacy of segregation and discrimination. While the majority of Progressive Activists (60 percent) believe race should be considered in the college admissions process, the rest of the country does not hold this view. Indeed, there is only half as much agreement among the next most supportive group, the Traditional Liberals (28 percent agree, while 72 percent believe race should not be a factor). And only 15 percent of Americans hold this view, leaving Progressive Activists largely alone in this particular viewpoint.

# Police brutality and Black Lives Matter

America is sharply divided in its views on racial bias in policing. While a narrow majority of Americans believes that police are unfair towards black citizens, that does not necessarily translate into support for Black Lives Matter. Fifty-one percent of Americans believe that the police are often more violent towards African Americans than other groups, yet 56 percent of Americans also believe that the Black Lives Matter movement has made racial tensions worse. Only 44 percent of Americans say that Black Lives Matter has brought attention to important issues.

On the temperature test of Americans' attitudes towards different groups, the polarizing status of Black Lives Matter activism is highlighted by the fact that 70 percent of Devoted Conservatives hold 'very cold' views toward Black Lives Matter activists. This diverges radically even from the Politically Disengaged and the Moderates, of whom only about 20 percent have such feelings.

This number is partially mirrored by feelings about police officers, with colder feelings for law enforcement from the more liberal tribes, although the effect is not as extreme. The coldest feelings toward police officers are held by Passive Liberals, but only 12 percent have "very cold" feelings towards police officers (and 6 percent of Progressive Activists do). In other words, Conservatives are less tolerant and sympathetic toward activists than liberals are toward the police.

On the other hand, this does not translate into either of the Conservative tribes expressing hostility in general towards African Americans. Eighty-three percent of Traditional Conservatives and 79 percent of Devoted Conservatives say they have generally warm feelings toward African Americans, and 82 percent of Devoted Conservatives and 88 percent of Traditional Conservatives report warm feelings toward Hispanic Americans. More than three quarters of people in both of these segments believe that African Americans share some or all of their values. However, Americans in the conservative tribes express less racial hostility than common stereotypes might suggest.

Americans are also almost evenly split on the issue of athlete protests. Fifty-one percent believe that athletes should be required to stand during the national anthem at games, while 49 percent say that professional athletes should be able to kneel in an act of protest. Once again, however, the segmentation shows a more nuanced picture of differing opinions among the tribes.

# Sex, Gender and Morality

Issues related to gender and sexuality still polarize Americans, despite a substantial shift in public opinion over the past two generations about the role of women and the rights of LGBTQI+ people. As many as 49 percent of Americans believe that changing

**“A lot of women are also being held back and pigeonholed. [But] I see a danger. There are now people in all these matters that seem to not really want equality, they almost seem to want to reverse the tables.”**

- Moderate, 41-year-old man, Illinois

attitudes towards marriage and sex are “leading America to lose its moral foundation.” Fifty-five percent of Americans believe that changing views on marriage and sex are causing a decline in family values. Conversely, 51 percent of Americans say that those same changes are making America more accepting and tolerant. The #MeToo movement, transgender rights, same-sex marriage and abortion are all sources of deep conflict in American politics. Across a wide range of issues, the survey shows strong correlations between core beliefs and views on these issues.

While Americans are largely aligned in believing that racism is at least somewhat serious, there is less agreement about sexism. Sixty-nine percent of Americans believe that sexism in the United States is very serious or somewhat serious, yet less than half of Traditional Conservatives (49 percent) and even fewer Devoted Conservatives (35 percent) believe that acts of sexism are somewhat serious in the US today. Approximately the same number (57 percent and 46 percent, respectively) believe they are somewhat common. This is in contrast to 97

percent of Progressive Activists and 91 percent of Traditional Liberals. Overall, 59 percent of Americans believe that people are too sensitive about matters relating to sexism and gender. Twenty-one percent of Progressive Activists believe this while 90 percent of Devoted Conservatives do.

Public attitudes are far more divided on the issue of sexual harassment. Fifty-one percent of Americans believe that too many ordinary behaviors are labeled as sexual harassment, including half of the Politically Disengaged and Moderates. Fifty-eight percent of men believe that harassment is exaggerated, but so do 44 percent of American women.

## PAY AND EMPLOYMENT

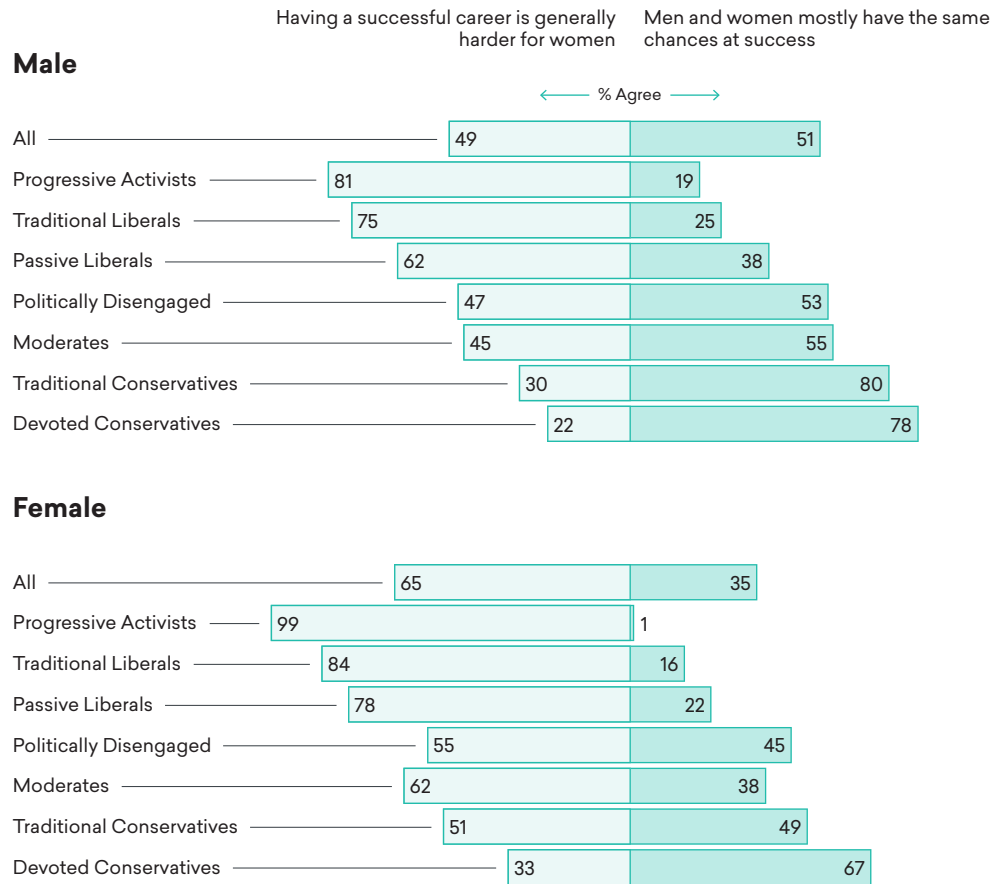
The belief that sexism is a problem is also reflected in Americans’ views of gender and the labor market. Fifty-seven percent of Americans (and the majority in all segments except the Traditional and Devoted Conservatives) believe that having a successful career is generally harder for women. Segments are similarly split on issues such as the gender pay gap, with 85 percent of Progressive Activists believing women get paid less because of their gender and only 23 percent of Devoted Conservatives believing this. The Politically Disengaged and Moderates tend to agree (60 percent), which is in line with the American average (61 percent).

Both conservative men and conservative women are skeptical that unequal salaries can be attributed to gender discrimination. While only 15 percent of Progressive Activists believe that women get paid less than men because they have made distinct choices in their careers, 77 percent of Devoted Conservatives and 60 percent of Traditional Conservatives endorse this view. Indeed, almost half of female Traditional Conservatives believe this, and a full 72 percent of female Devoted Conservatives believe this, suggesting that gender is a much smaller influence on people’s views on this issue than their core beliefs.

## Figure 3.3

# The Gender Gap

Tribes differ in societal advantages conferred to men



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## FEMINISM AND MALE PRIVILEGE

While 94 percent of Progressive Activists and 83 percent of Traditional Liberals believe that men do not recognize the advantages they have in society, only about one third of Traditional Conservatives and Devoted Conservatives do. Moderates are slightly more likely than the Disengaged to believe this (59 percent versus 51 percent).

Among Progressive Activists, a high proportion of women (40 percent) say that men are more protected in society, but very few men (1 percent) say that women are more protected. As the segments become more conservative, these patterns shift. Among Moderates, for instance, an equal proportion of men and women say that the opposite sex is more protected. Among Devoted Conservatives, 38 percent of men say that women are more protected, while only 8 percent of women say that men are more protected.

In the same way that a recognition of racism does not necessarily translate into support for the Black Lives Matter movement, not as many people who believe that sexism is pervasive believe that feminists are fighting for important issues. Nonetheless, the

majority of the country still holds that position, even though 46 percent would say that today's feminists just attack men. Nine-two percent of Devoted Conservatives and 73 percent of Traditional Conservatives hold this view, but so do 51 percent of Moderates.

## LGBTQI+ ISSUES

America is moving beyond the era where same-sex marriage polarizes public opinion. Over half the country (58 percent) now believes that same-sex marriage should be legal. Agreement includes the more socially conservative groups in the middle, the Moderates (50 percent) and the Politically Disengaged (53 percent). On the other hand, transgender rights are more of a flashpoint for division. Nevertheless, a clear majority of Americans (60 percent) believes that accepting transgender people is the moral thing to do, in preference to saying that "we have gone too far in accepting transgender people." Only the Traditional and Devoted Conservative segments believe that acceptance of transgender people has gone too far (69 and 72 percent agree, respectively).

## Religious Identity and Security

With 83 percent of Americans either fairly or absolutely certain of the existence of God,<sup>16</sup> religion plays an important role in shaping both identity and general attitudes about public policy in the United States, far more than in other Western nations. Particularly since 9/11 and the subsequent "war on terror," religion has been strongly connected to national security debates, because of the association between Islam and terrorism.

**"They're blowing us up, or trying to... I see some men with facial hair now and I'm immediately on edge. I would never have been that way as a child. I just don't feel trust anymore when I see people with facial hair."**

- 54-year-old woman, Oregon, Moderate

### RELIGION IN AMERICA

Religion is central to the personal identity of many Americans. Sixty-three percent say it is very important or somewhat important, while 16 percent say it is not too important and 21 percent would say that it is not important at all.

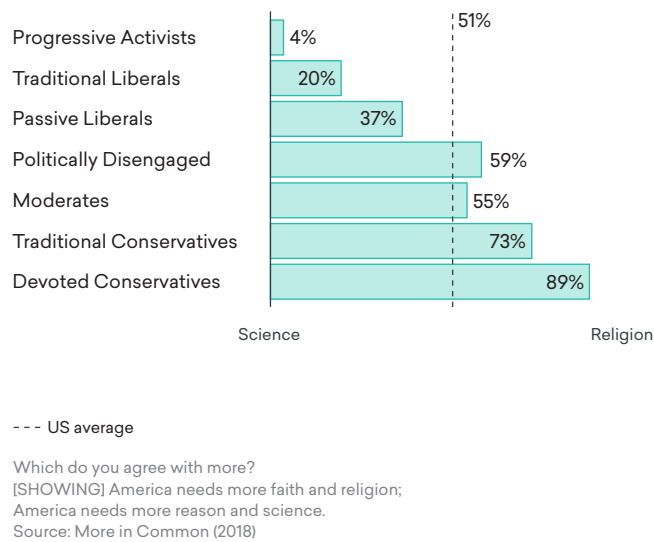
Nevertheless, most Americans do not want to impose their religion on others and they want their children to learn about different faiths. As many as 80 percent of Americans, including a majority of both Traditional Conservatives and Devoted Conservatives, believe that people who hold different religious beliefs are probably just as moral as members of their own

faith. Americans are evenly split on whether America needs more faith and religion (51 percent) or more reason and science (49 percent). Faith and religion are prioritized by 55 percent of Moderates, 59 percent of the Politically Disengaged, 73 percent of the Traditional Conservatives, and 89 percent of Devoted Conservatives.

## Figure 3.4

# Science versus Religion

Tribes differ in views on faith versus reason



## ISLAM IN AMERICA

The majority in all segments believe that Muslim Americans can be as loyal to America as anyone else (although the extent of this belief varies significantly by segment, ranging from 100 percent of Progressive Activists to just 52 percent of Devoted Conservatives.)

While 49 percent of Americans agree that Islam is a peaceful religion, a significant minority of the population (40 percent) regard Islam as the greatest threat to America. The public seem to be more comfortable with Muslims as individuals, but less comfortable with Islam as a set of ideas and teachings.

Conservative segments tend to be very distrustful of Muslims. The majority of both Devoted Conservatives (83 percent) and Traditional Conservatives (66 percent) generally agree that Islam is incompatible with American society. They also believe that most Muslims would rather live under Sharia law (79 percent and 70 percent, respectively) and see Islam as the greatest threat to America (71 percent and 64 percent).

While 62 percent of Progressive Activists and 37 percent of Traditional Liberals strongly agree that they would not mind if a mosque were built near their home, only 4 percent and 5 percent of Devoted and Traditional Conservatives feel this way.

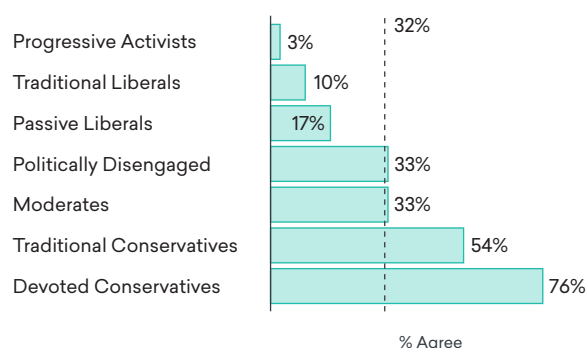
A full 70 percent of Devoted Conservatives and 54 percent of Traditional Conservatives believe that Muslims contribute less than other Americans to society. Only 13 percent of Traditional and Passive Liberals believe this.

While three out of four Devoted Conservatives believe that Islam is more violent than other religions, only 3 percent of Progressive Activists and 10 percent of Traditional Liberals believe this. The majority of Americans do not believe that Islam is more violent than other religions, although 32 percent do. Sixty-eight percent of Americans agree that there are extremists in every religion.

## Figure 3.5

### Violence in Islam

Tribes differ in their views on whether it is more violent than other religions



--- US average

Which do you agree with more?  
 [SHOWING] Islam is more violent than other religions;  
 There are extremists in every religion.  
 Source: More in Common (2018)

### TERRORISM

Americans' perceptions of the seriousness of the threat of terrorism reflects the country's polarization. On one hand, 86 percent of Progressive Activists think Americans are too worried about terrorism. On the other hand, 84 percent of Devoted Conservatives believe Americans do not take terrorism seriously enough.

In both instances, the wing segments are outliers. Only 17 percent of Americans overall believe that terrorism is not that serious or not at all serious, in contrast to 52 percent of Progressive Activists, the only segment in which a majority thinks that the threat of terrorism is not that serious.

Similarly, Devoted Conservatives are an outlier as the only group for whom a majority blames religious groups for terrorism rather than individuals. Only 32 percent of Americans attribute terrorism to the idea that "some religions teach violence and extremism" rather than that "violent people use religion as a justification for their actions." But 67 percent of Devoted Conservatives attribute terrorism to the religion rather than violent individuals, substantially higher than any other group (only 43 percent of Traditional Conservatives share this view, and only 5 percent of Progressive Activists). On another question, 97 percent of Progressive Activists and 91 percent of Traditional Liberals say that terrorists usually attack because they are angry or disturbed, rather than because their religion tells them to. Overall, 70 percent of Americans agree. The only group not in agreement is Devoted Conservatives (34 percent agreement).

# Key Takeaways

There is a consistent pattern in the way that America's hidden tribes think about a wide range of issues. There is a group of middle segments (the Exhausted Majority) and a group of "wing segments" (Progressive Activists, Devoted Conservatives and Traditional Conservatives; the latter are included as a wing segment because they are much closer in characteristics to the Devoted Conservatives than to the Exhausted Majority).

The wing segments consistently hold opposing views on divisive subjects, and have remarkable internal consistency. The middle groups, on the other hand, show far greater flexibility in their views and appear to recognize that there are many sides to these issues. The research repeatedly finds that a person's tribe predicts their views better than their membership to any demographic group based on visible traits.

Despite the way that public debates around polarizing issues are conducted, on each of these issues we find that there is often far more common ground than those debates suggest. America is not evenly polarized, even on the most controversial issues. There is, for example, widespread agreement on matters of principle, such as rejecting racism and discrimination, recognizing that racism remains a problem in America, taking responsibility for vulnerable children and those fleeing conflict, and ensuring that immigrants acquire the English language.

However, public debates are often dominated by voices that come from the furthest ends of the spectrum and who are the least interested in finding common ground. This makes it much harder to make progress on these issues, deepening the frustration felt by many in the middle.

In the next chapter, we will examine the differences in underlying beliefs and identities that help account for the patterns of opinion identified in this chapter.

# Chapter

4



## The Core Beliefs Driving Polarization

“

I think civil, rational debate is dying... people are so tribalized [...] People want to retreat to their corner and insist that their opinion is right and not have it contested at all.

”

— 34-year-old man, Missouri, Progressive Activist

**This chapter examines the psychological forces driving polarization among the hidden tribes. Key insights into the psychology of authoritarian populism are tested to illuminate the role of identity and belief systems in polarization.<sup>17</sup> Although the ways in which the hidden architecture of our minds shapes behavior are complex and not yet fully understood, there is compelling evidence to suggest that differences in core beliefs play a major role in the divisions in American society.**

Decades of research in the social sciences suggest that groups serve a variety of basic human needs. The need to affiliate with others who share one's worldview is rooted in thousands of years of evolutionary history. Because human beings evolved in small tribes, they developed a tendency to view others whom they regard as similar to them as belonging to the same group and as sources of information about their security. It should come as no surprise that, in the modern era, people affiliate with groups that provide them with important information about how to think about political issues. When people perceive an external threat, they draw closer to their group and establish clear lines separating themselves from perceived outsiders.

Alongside group identity, social scientists have identified some of the elements of belief systems, often described as core beliefs, that underlie human psychology and help to explain our political behavior. Core beliefs differ from person to person but they remain relatively constant across an individual's lifetime. They often serve as rallying cries for authoritarian leaders seeking to exploit people's deepest concerns and polarize society. In addition to tribalism, this chapter explores four dimensions of our core beliefs that help to shape the current political landscape:

- Fear and perception of threat
- Parenting style and authoritarianism
- Moral foundations
- Personal agency and responsibility

# Tribalism and Group Affiliation

## BACKGROUND

A person's sense of identity can come from a number of different sources, including their race, religion, gender, nationality, ideology, party and values. People are more likely to promote and defend those groups from which they derive the greatest sense of personal identity.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of group identity to public debate is reflected in frequent discussions about identity politics, although that term is not used in a consistent way. Understanding the group memberships that people consider important to their identities is essential to understanding the current political landscape.

In order to assess individuals' relationships to the groups to which they belong, we asked a variety of questions regarding identity:

- **Importance:** How important each group is to the person's identity.
- **Pride:** How proud the person is to be a member of that group.
- **Homogeneity:** How much in common the members of the group have with each other.
- **Centrality:** How often the person thinks about being a member of that group.
- **Privilege:** How much the members of that group start off at an advantage compared to others.
- **Pressure to conform:** How much the members of a certain group pressure each other to conform to certain beliefs or behaviors.

We focused our questions on the following identities:

- **Political ideology**
- **Race**
- **Gender**
- **Religion**
- **Nationality**

Because national pride (or a rejection of it) is so important to many Americans, we devote an entire chapter to this issue later in the report (Chapter 6).

## IDEOLOGY

At the core of the polarization in America today is the division between conservatives and liberals. This division is expressed in different ways, but in its purest form it is a difference in ideology. The survey confirms that identification with ideology is twice as strong in the wing segments as in the Exhausted Majority.

*Centrality.* Segments at the extremes identify more with their ideology than those at the center. For instance, 37 percent of Progressive Activists feel that their ideology is “very important” to them, while 37 percent of Devoted Conservatives feel the same way. By contrast, only 17 percent of the Politically Disengaged and 21 percent of Moderates believe this.

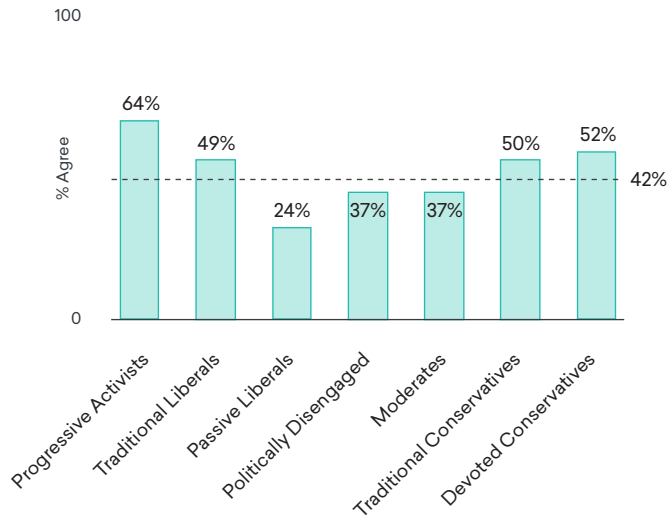
*Homogeneity.* There is less diversity of viewpoints within the segments at the opposing ends of the spectrum. These segments are more “tribal” in their behavior, emphasizing their group identity, ideology and the threat of the “other.” While 74 percent of both Progressive Activists and Traditional Conservatives generally agree that the people of their ideology have a lot in common with each other, only 43 percent of Passive Liberals and 50 percent of the Politically Disengaged feel this way.

## Figure 4.1

### Views on Ideology

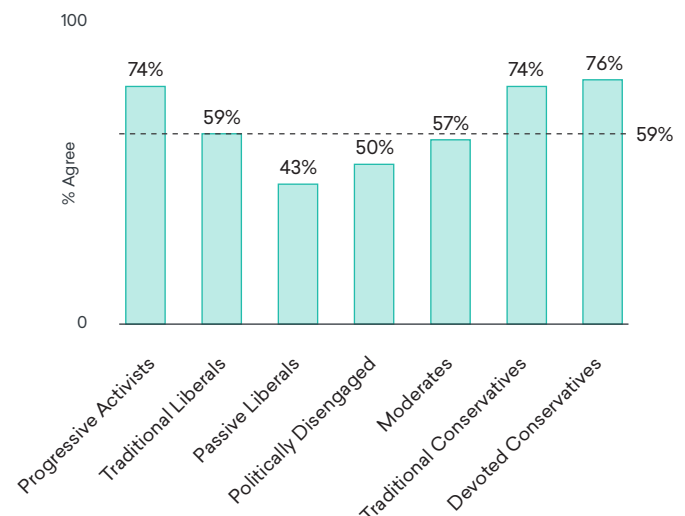
Tribes differ in how central their ideological views are to their identity

#### Centrality



I often think about the fact that I am [my ideology]  
Source: More in Common (2018)

#### Homogeneity



[Members of my ideology] have a lot in common with each other.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

*Pressure to conform.* The segment that reports feeling the most pressure from individuals of their own political ideology is the Progressive Activists, at 42 percent (compared to 29 percent average). Progressive Activists also feel more pressure from their party than others (41 percent v. 30 percent average). Sixty-one percent of Progressive Activists feel that Americans pressure each other to think and talk a certain way about issues, while only 37 percent of Devoted Conservatives felt the same way. Social media powerfully reinforces tribal identities,<sup>19</sup> and one factor explaining why Progressive Activists are more conscious of the pressure to conform is that they are more active on social media than any other tribe. As many as 81 percent report using social media as a news source in the previous 24 hours, compared to 62 percent of Americans overall.

## RACIAL IDENTITY AND PRIVILEGE

*Privilege.* Questions of racial privilege show a polarized response among the opposing segments. A majority of white Progressive Activists (59 percent) as well as many white Traditional Liberals (27 percent) agree strongly that they start off at an advantage compared to others. In contrast, among white Politically Disengaged, Moderates, and Devoted Conservatives, this number is less than 10 percent. Whites of different segments have different views about the privilege conferred by their race. Progressive Activists and Traditional Liberals point to race as a trait that can pose obstacles and be a burden, while Politically Disengaged, Moderates, and Conservatives place emphasis on wealth and income. For Traditional Liberals and Passive Liberals, health (both physical and mental) and socioeconomics are strongly connected to advantages and difficulties (see Chapter 7, *In Their Own Words*).

Devoted Conservatives strongly disagree that white people have an advantage over people of color. This is true largely regardless of the respondent's race: while 80 percent of white Devoted Conservatives believe that the "rights of black and brown people are more protected than the rights of white people," 62 percent of non-white Devoted Conservatives also believe this.

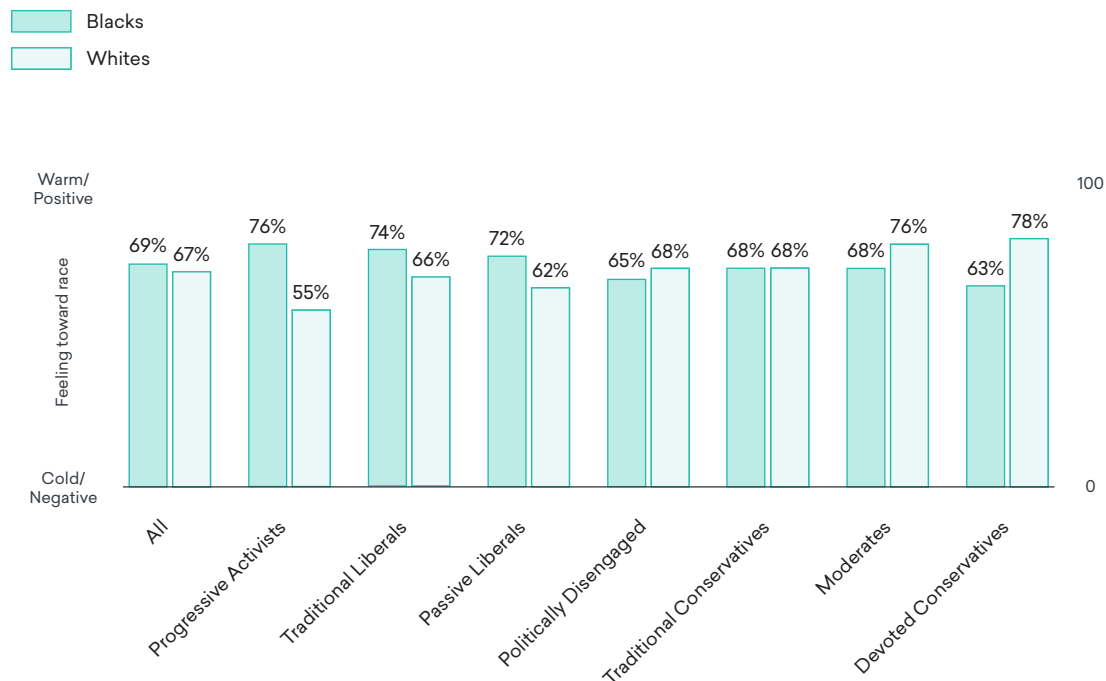
*Pressure to conform.* Differences also emerge in the context of how much pressure people feel to think and talk a certain way. Among Progressive Activists and Traditional Liberals, whites feel more pressure to think and talk a certain way. Forty-seven percent of white Progressives and 35 percent of Traditional Liberals generally feel this way. In the other segments, racial minorities are more likely to feel this way. For example, 38 percent of Politically Disengaged minorities generally feel pressured (compared to 23 percent of Disengaged whites); 48 percent of minority Moderates do (compared to 26 percent of white Moderates); and over 40 percent of both Traditional and Devoted Conservative minorities do (compared to under 20 percent of whites within both groups).

Why do whites in liberal-leaning groups feel more pressure to think and talk a certain way, while racial minorities in more right-leaning groups experience the same thing? These findings may be best understood in light of "temperature data," which indicates people's overall feeling toward members of different groups. Progressive Activists, Traditional Liberals, and Passive Liberals hold more positive feelings toward African Americans than they do towards white people. In contrast, Devoted Conservatives hold slightly more positive feelings toward white people than African Americans. The wing groups exhibit very cold feelings for groups identified as activists for their opposing tribe: for Devoted Conservatives, Black Lives Matter activists and feminists; for Progressive Activists, evangelical Christians and gun owners. In those segments where there is greater pressure to conform, there is a lower regard for groups that are most different. Another dimension of the study is its insight into how people think about their own racial identity. The results show stark differences according to both race and segment.

Figure  
4.2

# Feelings Toward Different Racial Groups

Tribes differ in their sentiment towards whites and blacks



Attitudes towards whites and blacks (via feeling thermometer) across segment.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

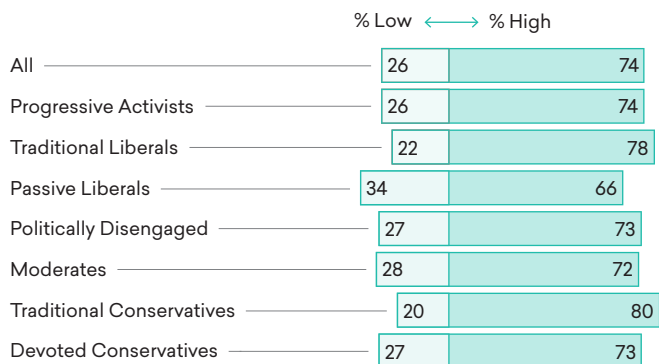
Overall, when it comes to the importance of identity to individuals, minorities across all ideologies suggest that their identity is quite important to them. For instance, between 30 percent and 50 percent of racial minorities across all segments say that their racial identity is “very important” to them. Similarly, more than 50 percent of minorities across all segments are very proud of their racial identity. By contrast, only 13 percent of white people say that their racial identity is important to them. These effects are somewhat moderated by education and income, particularly among whites. While only 9 percent of college-educated whites say that their racial identity is important to them, this rises to 24 percent among whites who did not complete high school.

## Figure 4.3

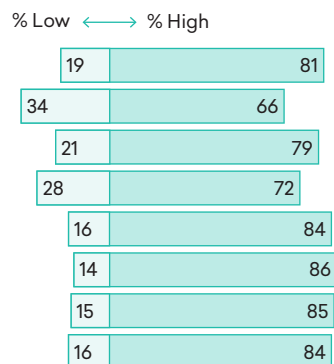
# Strength of Group Identities

Tribes differ in the strength of their identification with different group categories

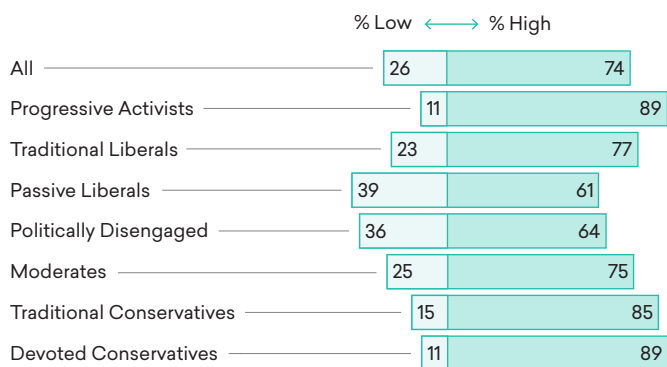
### Political Party



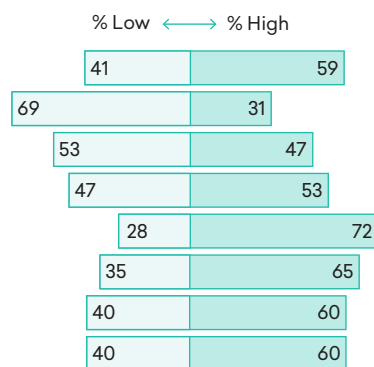
### Gender



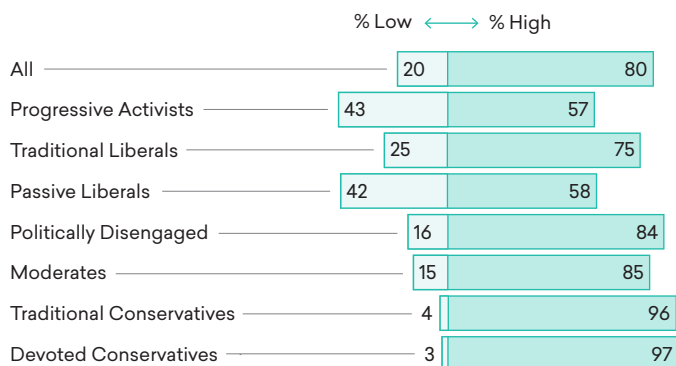
### Ideology



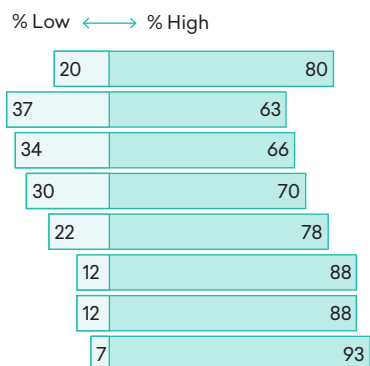
### Race



### Nationality



### Religion



Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF STRONGER RACIAL IDENTITY

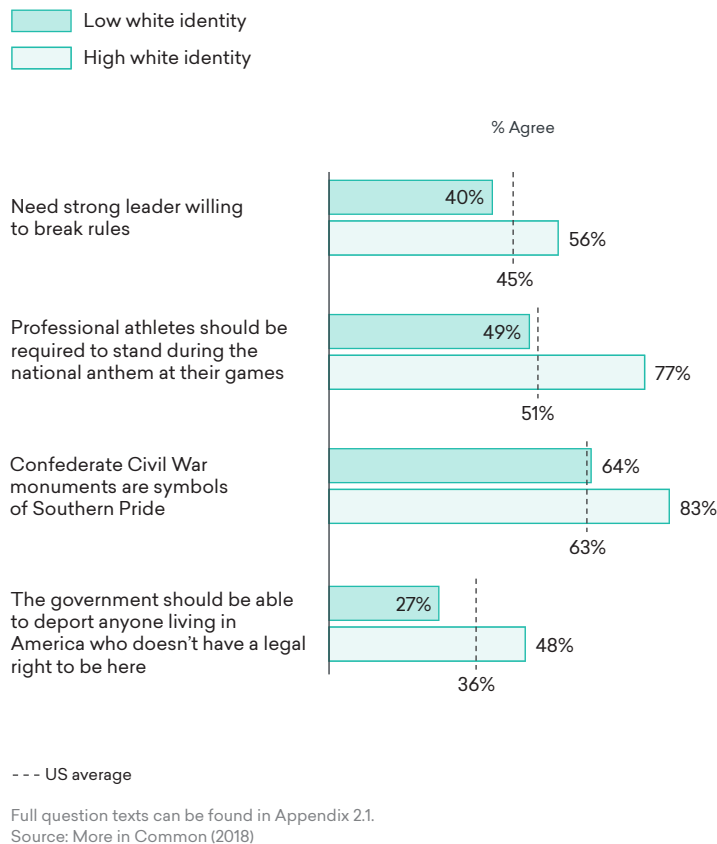
The degree to which people identify with their race is also associated with their support for public policies that draw hard lines separating “outsiders” from their group. For example, individuals who identify more strongly with their race are significantly more likely to support harsh immigration policies, including a border wall and a ‘Muslim travel ban.’ They are also more likely to have negative views of Muslims and to agree that America is a better country than most others.

These patterns are especially evident among white Americans. For instance, white people with a strong racial identity are significantly more likely to believe that America needs a strong leader who is willing to break the rules.<sup>20</sup> Those whites are also more likely to believe that Confederate Civil War monuments are symbols of Southern Pride (the reverse is true among high-identified African Americans), that athletes should be forced to stand during the national anthem, and to oppose DACA.

Figure  
4.4

### Racial Identity and Attitudes on Various Issues

Strength of white identity predicts political views



## GENDER IDENTITY

The results of the survey show that beliefs around gender and privilege differ significantly between the opposing wings.

*Centrality.* The patterns observed for racial privilege are similar to the patterns for gender. At least 40 percent of women across all segments say that being a woman is very important to their identity, and larger numbers (approximately 55 percent to 70 percent) say that they are very proud to be a woman. For men, however, there is stark variation among segments: whereas only 8 percent of Progressive Activists and 19 percent of Traditional Liberals believe being a man is “very important,” 38 percent of Moderates and 53 percent of Devoted Conservatives do. It is notable that the proportion of Devoted Conservatives who deem their gender important is actually higher among men than women (53 versus 41 percent).

These feelings of identification echo thermometer data towards different genders. Progressive Activists, for instance, feel substantially cooler (average 55 percent) towards men than Moderates (68 percent) or Devoted Conservatives (75 percent) do. Differences in feelings toward different genders may in part explain people’s sense of identification with and pride in those genders.

*Privilege.* Forty-eight percent of Progressive Activist men strongly agree that men in general start off at an advantage compared to others, but they are relatively isolated in holding this view, as even Traditional Liberals, the next closest group, have strong agreement of only 11 percent. Even lower levels of agreement are found in the other segments.

The study also asked whether people feel that the rights of the opposite gender are prioritized in America. Forty percent of female Progressive Activists agree, compared to 1 percent of male Progressive Activists. By contrast, 38 percent of male Devoted Conservatives are in strong agreement that the rights of women are prioritized over their own, while only 8 percent of female Devoted Conservatives believe that men’s rights are prioritized.

*Pressure to conform.* A significant crossover effect is evident across segments of different genders. As can be seen in the figure below, men feel significantly more pressured than women to think and talk a certain way among Progressive Activists and Traditional Liberals. By contrast, women feel more pressured to think and talk a certain way among Devoted Conservatives. There is almost no difference in pressure according to gender in the middle groups.

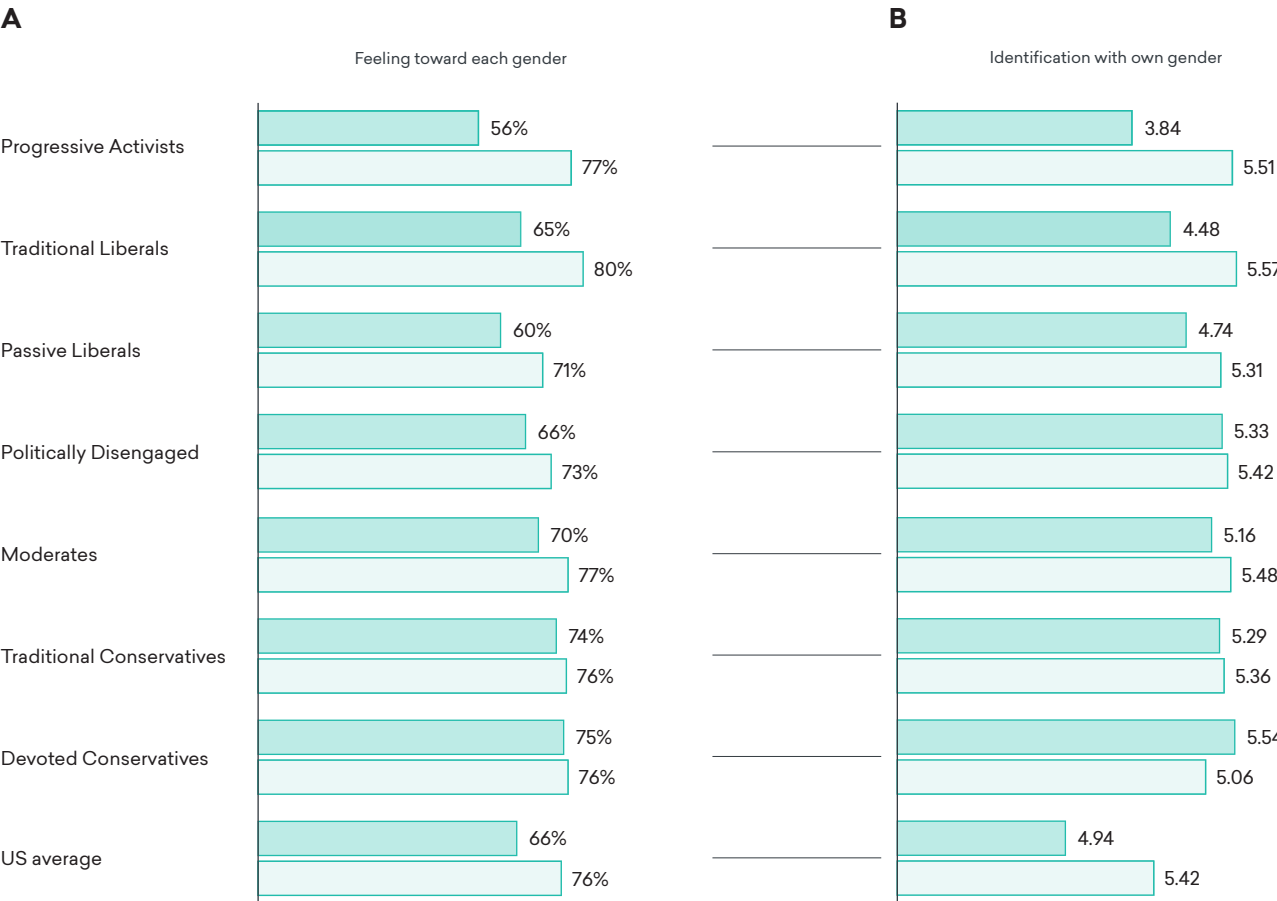
Figure  
4.5

Feelings and Identification with Gender

Tribes differ in their views on gender

Male

Female

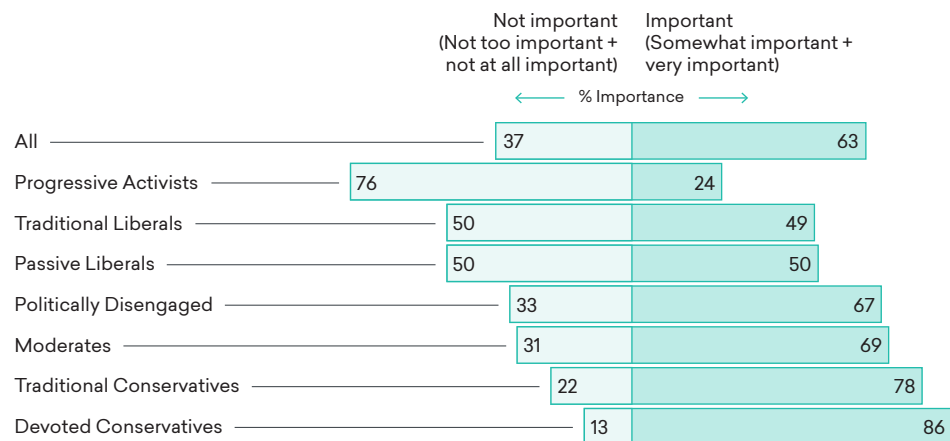


Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## Figure 4.6

# Religious Identity

Tribes differ in identification with their faith



How important is religion for you?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

*Centrality.* The importance of religion ranges from the lowest among Progressive Activists to highest among conservatives. While 86 percent of Devoted Conservatives and 78 percent of Traditional Conservatives rank religion as “important” or “very important” to them, the same is true for only 24 percent of Progressive Activists (compared to 49 percent of Traditional Liberals, and an overall average of 63 percent of Americans). Strong identification with religious belief appears to be a strong tribal marker for the Devoted and Traditional Conservatives, and an absence of religious belief appears to be a marker for Progressive Activists.

*Homogeneity.* Individuals’ sense of religious homogeneity increases with the degree of importance they ascribe to religious faith. Seven percent of Progressive Activists say that people of their religion have a lot in common, while 35 percent of Devoted Conservatives say so.

# Fear and Perception of Threat

An important element of the hidden architecture of human psychology is the extent to which we perceive external threats. A central message of insurgent populists around the world is that the citizens of their country are threatened by external groups, citing factors such as a loss of traditional national identity, differences in cultural values and loyalties, the threat of terrorism, higher rates of anti-social behavior and crime, and privileged treatment by authorities at the expense of traditional groups.

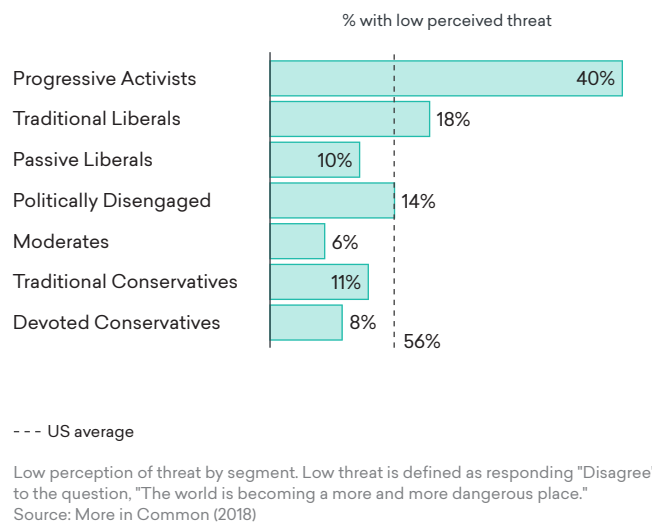
The study examines individuals' "perceived threats," which correspond to the degree of danger people see in the world. Some people see the world as a largely safe place with isolated pockets of violence. Others see the world as a largely dangerous place with isolated pockets of tranquility. This underlying belief can predict a wide range of other political attitudes on issues of crime, public order, immigration and terrorism. The study includes several questions that assess perceived threat, including agreement with the sentiment that "most people can be trusted," and also that, "the world is becoming a more and more dangerous place."

The segments differ in their perception of threat in the world. However, the differences are not incremental according to ideology, as they are on other areas of core beliefs. Instead, Progressive Activists are unique in seeing the world as a much less dangerous place than other Americans. For other tribes, the differences are much smaller. On average, 14 percent of Americans view the world as generally safe and nonthreatening, while among Progressive Activists almost three times as many people hold this view (40 percent). This figure is especially striking in light of Progressive Activists' deep pessimism about the direction of the country (98 percent say it is going in the wrong direction) and their emotions toward the country (45 percent say they currently feel "very" scared about the country's direction).

Figure  
4.7

## Perceived Threat

Tribes differ in how safe or dangerous they see the world

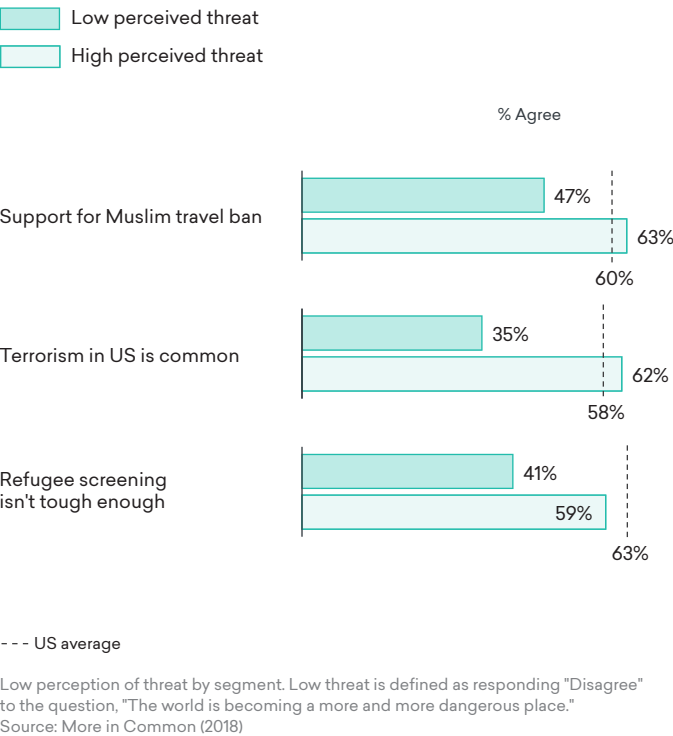


IMMIGRATION AND TERRORISM

The survey confirms that a heightened perception of external threat correlates to support for more restrictive immigration policies and a heightened perception of the prevalence and severity of terrorism in the world. Among people who strongly agree that the world is becoming a more dangerous place, 31 percent strongly favor banning Muslims from entering the United States, while only 10 percent of those who do not think the world is becoming more dangerous support a ‘Muslim travel ban.’ Similarly, individuals who perceive the world as threatening are three times more likely to believe that acts of terrorism are very common than those that do not. Those who perceive high levels of threat are far more likely to believe that the government’s refugee screening process is not tough enough to keep out possible terrorists.

Figure 4.8 Relationship Between Perceived Threat and Views on Immigration

The core belief is associated with political opinions



## THREAT AND AUTHORITARIANISM

The degree to which Americans see the world as a dangerous place strongly predicts their disposition to authoritarianism. For example, people who “strongly agree” that the world is becoming a dangerous place are more than three times more likely to believe that “we need a strong leader who is willing to break the rules” than those who moderately or strongly disagree with this statement. Similarly, these people are more than 20 percent more likely to believe that it is more important for a child to be well-behaved than creative. In the next section we will see that this belief is an important predictor of authoritarian tendencies.

## Authoritarian Disposition and Parenting Styles

The rise of authoritarian populism across the world has re-awakened interest in the psychological drivers of authoritarianism. A personal disposition to authoritarianism was posited as an important driver of ideology and behavior by Theodor Adorno in the 1950s.<sup>21</sup> Karen Stenner, a leading scholar on authoritarian tendencies, defines authoritarianism as “an individual predisposition concerned with the appropriate balance between group authority and uniformity, on the one hand, and individual autonomy, on the other.”<sup>22</sup>

One of the most valuable findings is that authoritarianism is strongly linked to people’s parenting philosophies. As cognitive psychologist and linguist George Lakoff has argued, the amount that people endorse a “Strong Father” model of the family is correlated with their authoritarian tendencies, as well as political conservatism. Conversely, those who favor a “Nurturant Mother” model tend to oppose authoritarianism.<sup>23</sup>

To better understand the way that authoritarianism (as identified through parenting styles) impacts political beliefs, participants answered several questions regarding their parenting philosophies.<sup>24</sup> For example, people were asked whether it is better for a child to be independent or have respect for elders, be well-behaved or creative, curious or have good manners, obedient or self-reliant. The responses to these four questions were then aggregated to create an index of parenting style ranging from “permissive” to “strict.”

The stricter an individual’s parenting style, the greater their willingness to endorse authoritarianism, such as the need for a strong leader who is willing to break rules. People with very strict parenting styles are 50 percent more likely to endorse this than those with very permissive parenting styles.

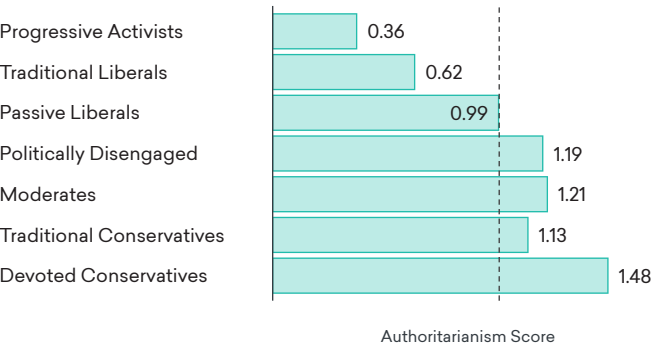
The segments reflect sharp differences on authoritarianism across the spectrum of responses, from Progressive Activists at the low end to Devoted Conservatives at the high end.

Strict parenting is associated with many other factors in addition to explicit authoritarianism. The variable most closely associated with parenting style is support for a ‘Muslim travel ban.’ People with strict parenting styles are twice as likely to support a ‘Muslim travel ban’ as those with permissive styles. Furthermore, people with strict parenting views are 50 percent more likely to oppose same-sex marriage and believe that changes in American views on marriage and sexuality are causing a decline in family values (as opposed to demonstrating progress). One of the most powerful explanations for these differences comes from the theory of moral foundations.

Figure  
4.9

## Authoritarianism

Differences between tribes



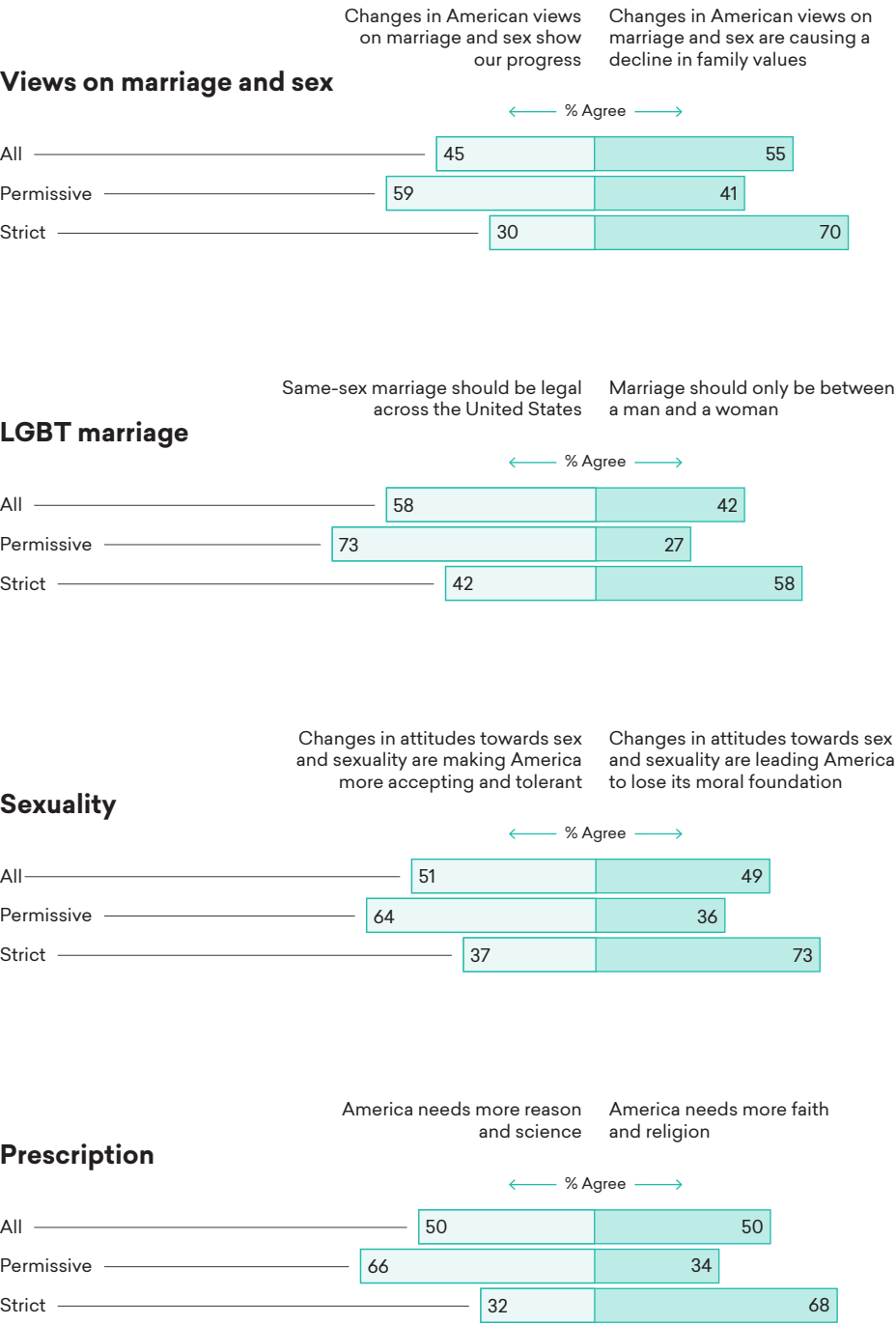
--- US average

Authoritarianism score created by aggregating across parenting questions.  
Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1  
Source: More in Common (2018)

Figure  
4.10

# Parenting and morality

Relationship between parenting style and views on moral issues



Which do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

# Moral Foundations

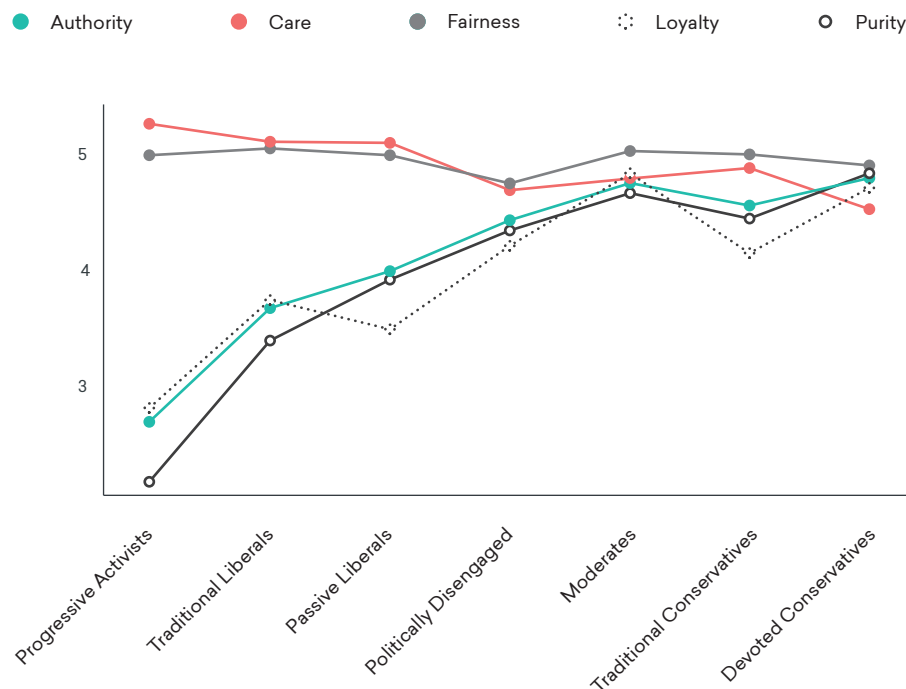
Perhaps even more important than the role of the authoritarian disposition in America's polarization, are Americans' beliefs about a much wider range of moral values. While desire for strong, authoritative leaders comprises one important dimension of people's moral compass, research in social psychology suggests there may be five or more "moral foundations" that underlie people's moral judgments.<sup>25</sup> The moral values are:

- **Fairness/Cheating:** relating to proportionality, equality, reciprocity, and rendering justice according to shared rules.
- **Care/Harm:** protecting the vulnerable and helping those in need.
- **Authority/Subversion:** submitting to tradition and legitimate authority.
- **Purity/Disgust:** abhorrence for things that evoke disgust.
- **Loyalty/Betrayal:** standing with one's group, family or nation.

Figure  
4.11

## Shifts in the moral bedrock

Tribes differ in their endorsement of the moral foundations



Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

The degree to which people prioritize each of these foundations is measured through the Moral Foundations Questionnaire. This questionnaire assesses people's reliance on each foundation separately. For instance, participants' prioritization of the "Harm" foundation is assessed by their agreement with propositions such as "One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal," and their prioritization of the Purity foundation is assessed by their agreement that "People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed." An abridged version of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire was used in this study.

The segments show substantial differences in their basic worldviews. For example, in the context of moral foundations, Progressive Activists are deeply concerned with issues of Harm and Fairness (and not any of the other foundations). Devoted Conservatives, on the other hand, highly value foundations of Authority, Loyalty, and Purity.

Moral foundations are an important part of the hidden architecture of human psychology associated with certain downstream political views, as shown by strong correlations between people's concern for each moral foundation and their agreement with different political propositions.

Emphasis on the Care foundation is based in part on the need to protect the weak and vulnerable, suggesting that this foundation is associated with support for causes that protect or elevate historically marginalized groups. Indeed, higher prioritization of Care is most strongly correlated with positive views towards feminists, with the belief that issues of racism in America are still severe, and with concern about hate speech in American society.

Similarly, the Fairness foundation rests on the need to ensure that people are treated equally and justly according to shared rules. Prioritizing the foundation of Fairness correlates most closely with concern about the gender pay gap. It is also closely associated with the belief that people should be protected from hate speech, perhaps because people believe hate speech disproportionately and unfairly affects certain demographic groups.

Prioritization of the Authority foundation is closely tied to respect for leadership and hierarchy, and helps to predict support for policies that emphasize the enforcement and protection of the law. Indeed, concern for Authority most strongly correlates with sympathy for the police (versus Black Lives Matter protesters), a sense of pride in the American flag, and support for a 'Muslim travel ban.'

Since Purity is based on issues of cleanliness and disgust in both physical and spiritual matters, it tracks people's views on issues of sexual behavior and religion, such as same-sex marriage. It also correlates with the belief that changing attitudes toward sexuality are causing a decline in American values and that America needs more faith and religion (as opposed to reason and science).

Finally, the Loyalty foundation is associated with a sense of duty or obligation towards one's country and community. Accordingly, concern for Loyalty strongly tracks people's belief that athletes should be required to stand for the national anthem, presumably because such displays are viewed as desirable acts of loyalty to the country. Similarly, Loyalty concern correlates with the belief that America is a better country than most others, and having American-ness as a central part of one's identity.

Overall, these findings underscore a critical conclusion of this report: core beliefs underlie political division in America. People's values, as embodied in Moral Foundations, are closely associated with their views on a wide range of other issues, ranging from immigration policy to sexual behavior. From the perspective of those trying to foster a better sense of understanding across political divides, it is imperative to recognize the moral foundations that may serve as drivers of political belief.

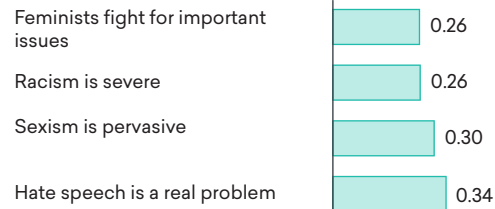
**Figure**  
**4.12**

## Moral Foundations and Politics

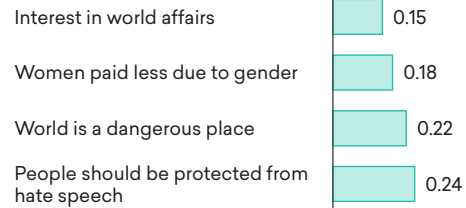
Relationship between moral foundations and views on various political issues

### Care

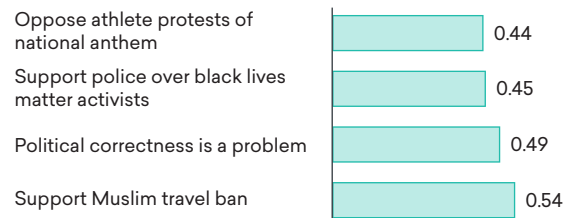
Strength of association (r)



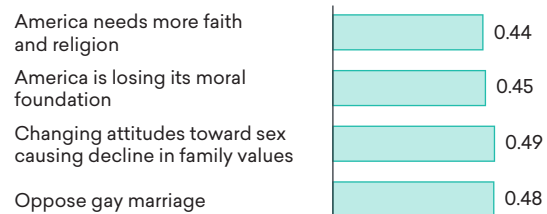
### Fairness



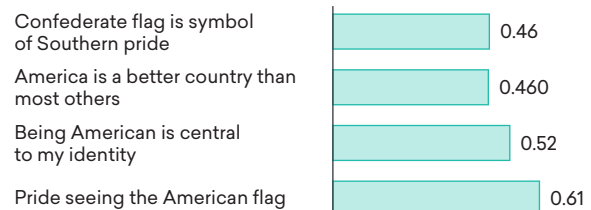
### Authority



### Purity



### Loyalty



Issues by Moral Foundation  
Source: More in Common (2018)

# Personal Agency and Responsibility

The study also asked Americans about the relative importance of personal agency versus social forces in shaping life outcomes. While some people emphasize independence, responsibility and self-reliance, others focus more on systemic injustices and collective responsibilities. Sociologist Robert Lane highlighted the importance of these notions of agency and causality many years ago: “At the roots of every ideology there are premises about the nature of causation [and] the appropriate ways for explaining complex events.”<sup>26</sup>

The importance of this area in understanding the role of core beliefs in America’s polarization is that when people understand and explain their own and others’ outcomes in life, they tend to attribute those outcomes either to personal responsibility or to luck and circumstance. Some people believe that individuals should get credit for their successes because they were caused by things that were within their control. Others believe that outcomes are mostly the result of external forces. These two competing worldviews have important implications for political opinions and behavior.

Participants in the survey responded to a series of binary-choice questions regarding the difference between individual versus situational causal attributions. Although this approach can oversimplify the degree to which people may believe that both individual and situational factors contribute to people’s outcomes in life, it is an effective way of understanding the emphasis that people place on one explanation or the other. For example, while 82 percent of people who identify as “very conservative” believe that people who work hard can find success no matter what situation they were born into, only 24 percent of people who identify as “very liberal” believe this.

A clear pattern emerges from the segmentation analysis of public views of responsibility. Progressive Activists place more emphasis on perceivable traits as factors that influence outcomes. For instance, 95 percent of Progressive Activists say that there are certain people for whom no amount of hard work will allow them to find success. Keane, a Progressive Activist from Indiana explains how “people have some control but the role of luck is completely unappreciated. It is pretty well established that wealthy people start off being wealthy or come from wealthy backgrounds and so the myth of working really hard and succeeding... a significant part is a myth.”

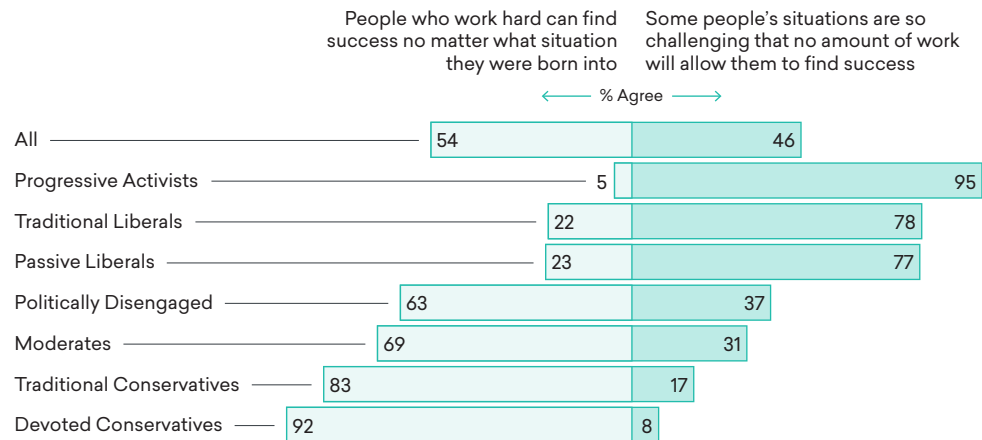
The other liberal segments tend to emphasize hard work but acknowledge that certain threshold conditions are relevant. Mental health, physical health, disabilities, or being brought up in a bad neighborhood plays a significant, sometimes insurmountable, role. They see circumstance and wealth as key factors of success. As Alexandra, a Passive Liberal from Virginia says, “socioeconomic level...impacts their education, their ability to have transportation, healthcare, all of those things that let somebody have good quality of life.”

The Devoted Conservatives are the least likely to say that luck and circumstance matter, and the most likely to say that America is a land of opportunity. “America is based on the principle of it doesn’t matter where you were born or what family you come from, we all have the opportunity to rise above.” Fully 92 percent of Devoted Conservatives and 83 percent of Traditional Conservatives believe that anyone who works hard can find success.

**Figure**  
**4.13**

## What Causes Success in Life?

Tribes differ in their views on the role of personal responsibility in life outcomes



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

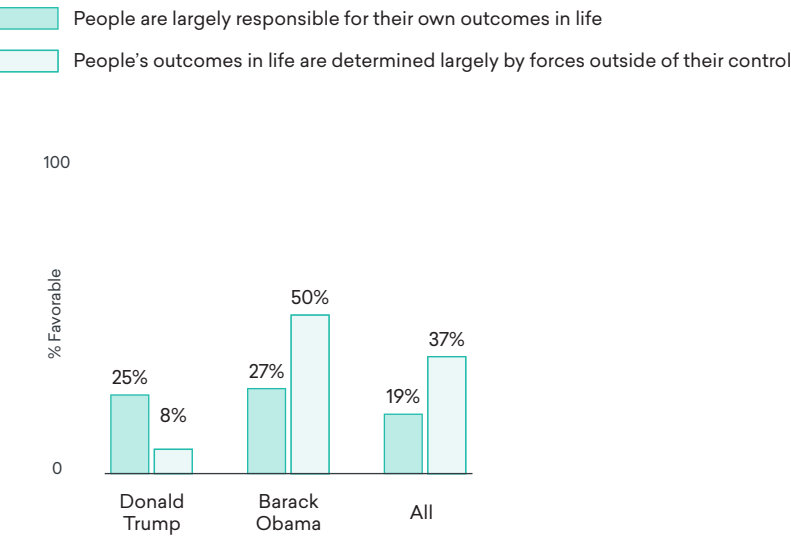
### INFLUENCE ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICAL LEADERS

Beliefs about causation are very powerful predictors of support for specific political leaders. For example, individuals who believe that people are responsible for themselves are six times more likely to strongly approve of Donald Trump than those who believe that the government should play a greater role. By contrast, the latter are three times more likely to hold very favorable views of Barack Obama.

Figure  
4.14

# Personal Responsibility and Political Favorability

Relationship between views on personal responsibility and approval of Presidents



Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

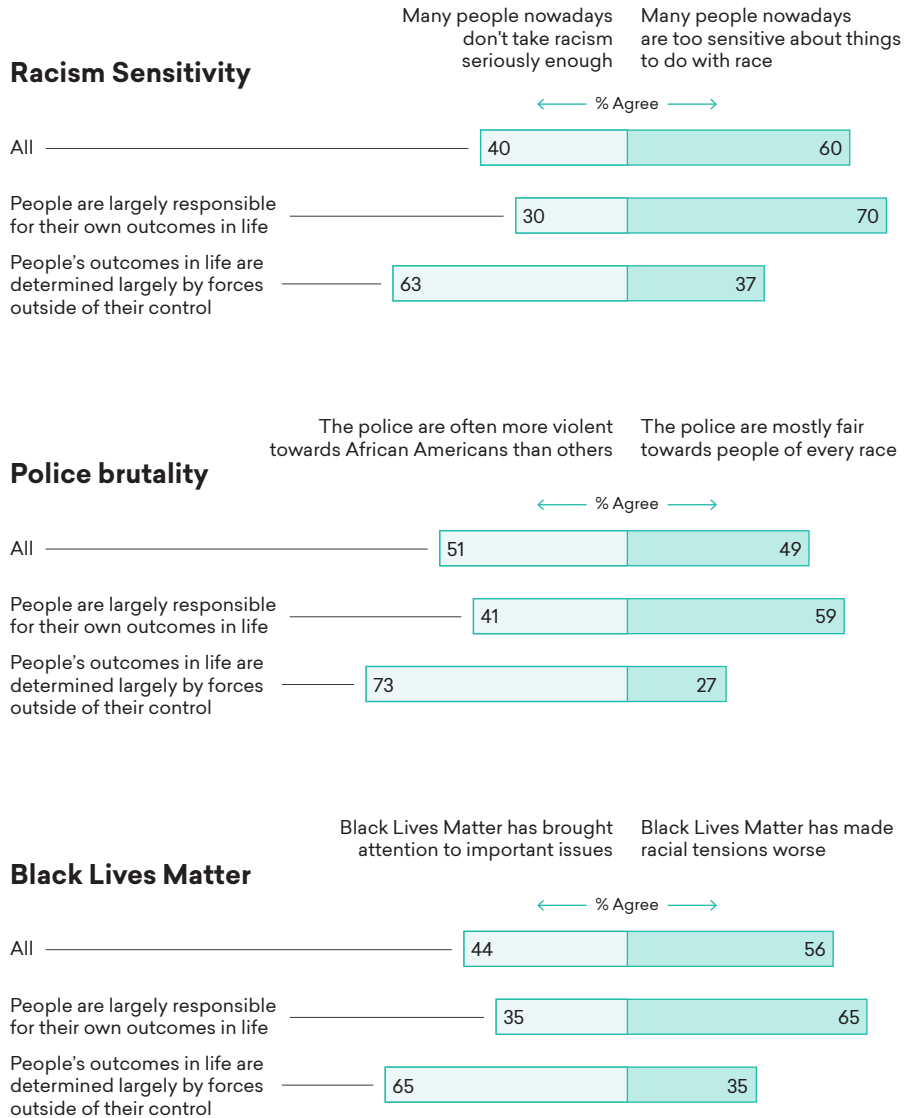
## RACE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Beliefs about personal agency affect a wide range of other attitudes on some of the most sensitive national debates. Believing that people’s lives are determined by forces outside of their control aligns with positive feelings toward Black Lives Matter protesters and the suspicion that police are more violent towards African Americans than members of other groups. Endorsing the general claim that people have responsibility for themselves correlates with fewer concerns about systemic racial injustice.

**Figure**  
**4.15**

## Race and Responsibility

Associations emerge between people's views on personal responsibility and their views on racially charged issues



Full question texts can be found in Appendix 2.1.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

# Key Takeaways

This study finds that the ways Americans think about political and social issues are deeply influenced by their core beliefs, notably their perceptions of threat, their parenting style, authoritarian tendencies, moral values, and beliefs about personal responsibility. While Americans may appear to be divided by race, gender and other demographic factors, there are other, less visible divisions beneath the surface that cut across the demographic factors.

Tribalism can be measured in many ways. Asking people to reflect on their own beliefs may provide less insight than observing their behavior, but, within the limitations of a large national survey, we find strong indicators of tribalism among the most polarized segments of the population and far weaker indicators within the Exhausted Majority.

This tribalism is reflected in the importance that individuals ascribe to their membership in a particular group, their sense of solidarity with others in their tribe, their hostility to members of an opposing group, their tendency to think in similar ways across a wide range of issues with people in their tribe, and their shared views and narratives about moral values with other members of their tribe.

Our data suggest that people view a variety of group identities, including gender, race, political ideology and religion, as integral sources of identity and belonging. As a lack of communication outside of one's tribe erodes mutual understanding and common values, tribal identities become increasingly polarized. In the next chapter we examine how tribalism is influencing Americans' perceptions of difference between these groups.

# Chapter

5



## Difference and Tribalism

“

I think it is well-established that people of color have trouble getting ahead and that's because of institutions and the opportunities that they are given from the very first day that they are born.

”

— 60-year-old man, Indiana, Progressive Activist

**Debates about racial equity, police brutality, white privilege, affirmative action, religious liberty, feminism, immigrant rights, and DACA are constant flashpoints for the polarization between Americans today. The us-versus-them dynamics of these debates have convinced many that Americans are divided on every front: by race, gender, class, religion, age, identity, political party and ideology.**

This chapter provides insights into these debates by examining the ways in which the tribalism discussed in Chapter 4 influences and overlays perceptions of difference among Americans, as reflected in the attitudes of the seven hidden tribes.

## **Perceived targets of discrimination**

All segments of the population agree that racism is a problem in America (as we saw in Chapter 3). However, a clear majority of Americans (60 percent) also believes that “many people nowadays are too sensitive about things to do with race.” Opinion is split evenly on whether Americans should be more concerned about intolerance towards people “of different races and ethnicities,” or whether the real problem is intolerance towards people “who have different religious and political beliefs.” Conservatives tend to be more concerned about perceived attacks upon their freedoms and religious liberty, while liberals, who are less religious and more ethnically diverse, are more concerned with prejudice towards different races and ethnicities.

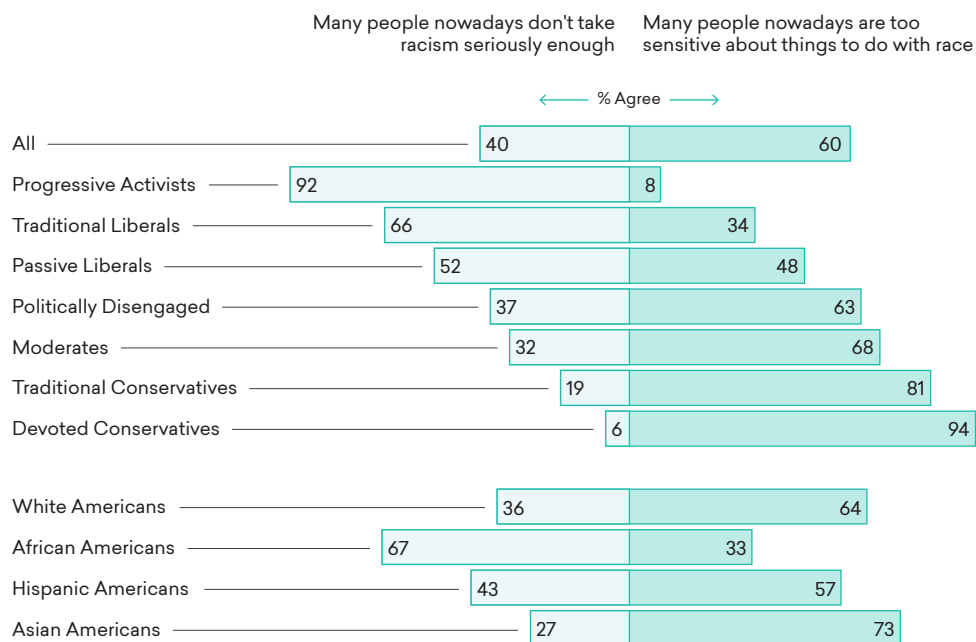
Racial groups differ significantly on questions of racial sensitivity. Majorities of Asian Americans (73 percent), white Americans (64 percent), and Hispanics (57 percent) agree that “many people nowadays are too sensitive about things to do with race.” Attitudes are different among African-Americans, the group most deeply affected by racial injustice in the United States. Only 33 percent of black Americans agree that people are overly sensitive about things to do with race.

An even stronger predictor of attitudes about racial sensitivity is the segment to which someone belongs. Ninety-two percent of Progressive Activists believe that people don’t take issues of racism seriously enough, while 94 percent of Devoted Conservatives believe the opposite. These findings indicate that perceptions of racial or gender-based discrimination are influenced by ideological perspective. **The more progressive people are, the more frequently they will attribute injustices to discrimination, regardless of their own demographic characteristics. Conversely, conservatives of every demographic are less likely to attribute injustices to demographic traits.**

**Figure**  
**5.1**

## Are we too sensitive?

Racial category and sensitivity to racism



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

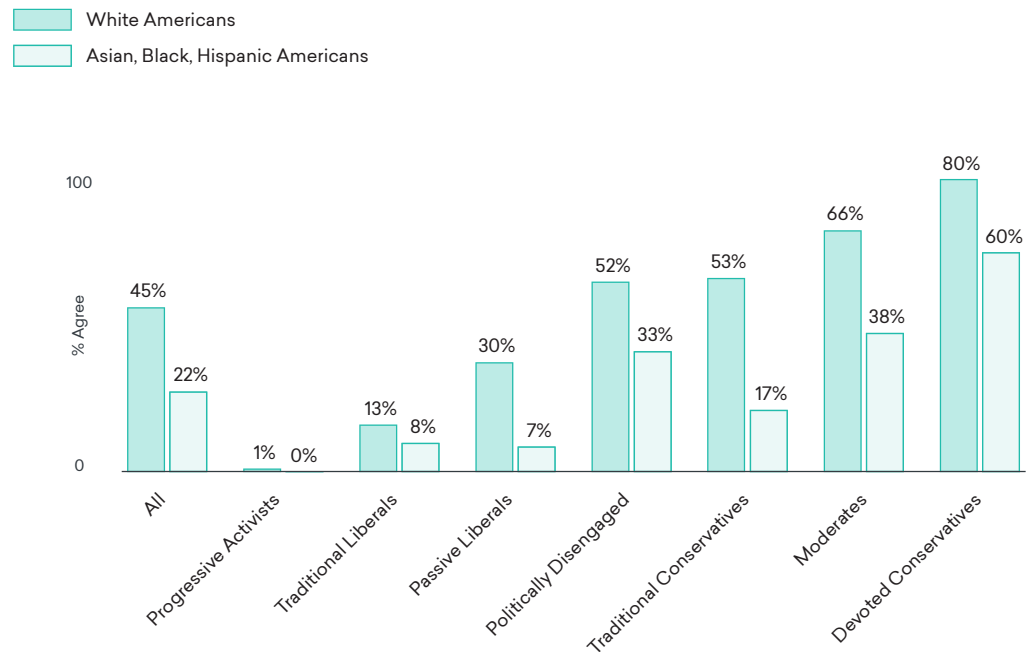
### RACE

Americans are also divided over the proposition that, “these days it seems the rights of black and brown people are more protected than the rights of white people.” Overall, 38 percent of Americans agree, and 41 percent disagree; 21 percent neither agree nor disagree. Within each non-white racial group there is a significant percentage who agree. Whites are most likely to agree that the rights of white people are less protected (45 percent), while African Americans are the least likely (14 percent). Meanwhile, Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans sit at the halfway point (30 percent and 29 percent, respectively). As Figure 5.2 shows, a person’s tribe (that is, their worldview and tribal identity) can influence their perceptions more than their racial identity, even on contested questions of race and privilege.

## Figure 5.2

# Perceptions of intolerance

Racial favoritism by tribe, split by race



These days it seems the rights of black and brown people are more protected than the rights of white people.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

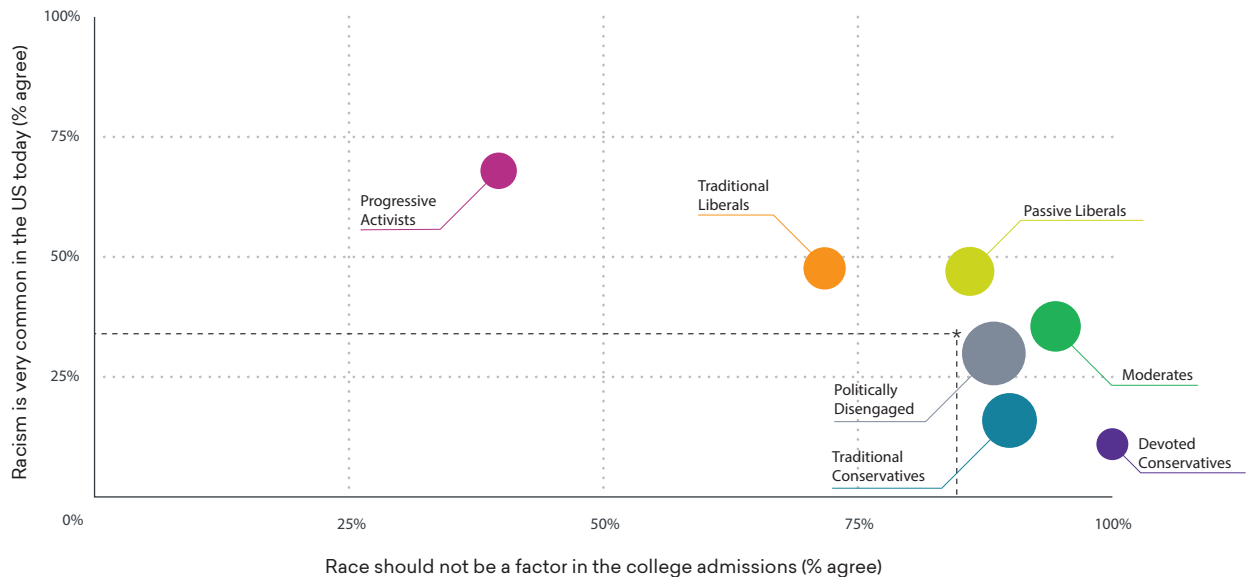
## SPLIT ON THE LEFT

On issues of race and speech, Progressive Activists hold certain viewpoints that deviate from the opinions of other Americans. For instance, 82 percent of Americans agree that hate speech is a problem in America today, but 80 percent also believe that political correctness has gone too far. By contrast, only 30 percent of Progressive Activists believe political correctness has gone too far (for graph, see Chapter 8: Communicating Across Divides). Similarly, 81 percent of Americans believe that there are serious problems of racism in the country today. Yet a full 85 percent also believe that race should not be considered in decisions on college admissions. By contrast, only 40 percent of Progressive Activists believe race should not be considered in college admissions decisions. This suggests that Progressive Activists differ in certain issues even from their closest ideological neighbor, the Traditional Liberals.

**Figure**  
**5.3**

## Perceptions of Race and Affirmative Action

Racism and affirmative action, by tribe



○ size= % share of US population  
-- US average

Which do you agree with more?

Race should not be a factor in the college admissions process; Race should be considered in the college admissions process

In your opinion, how common are acts of racism in the United States today? [Showing very + somewhat common]

Source: More in Common (2018)

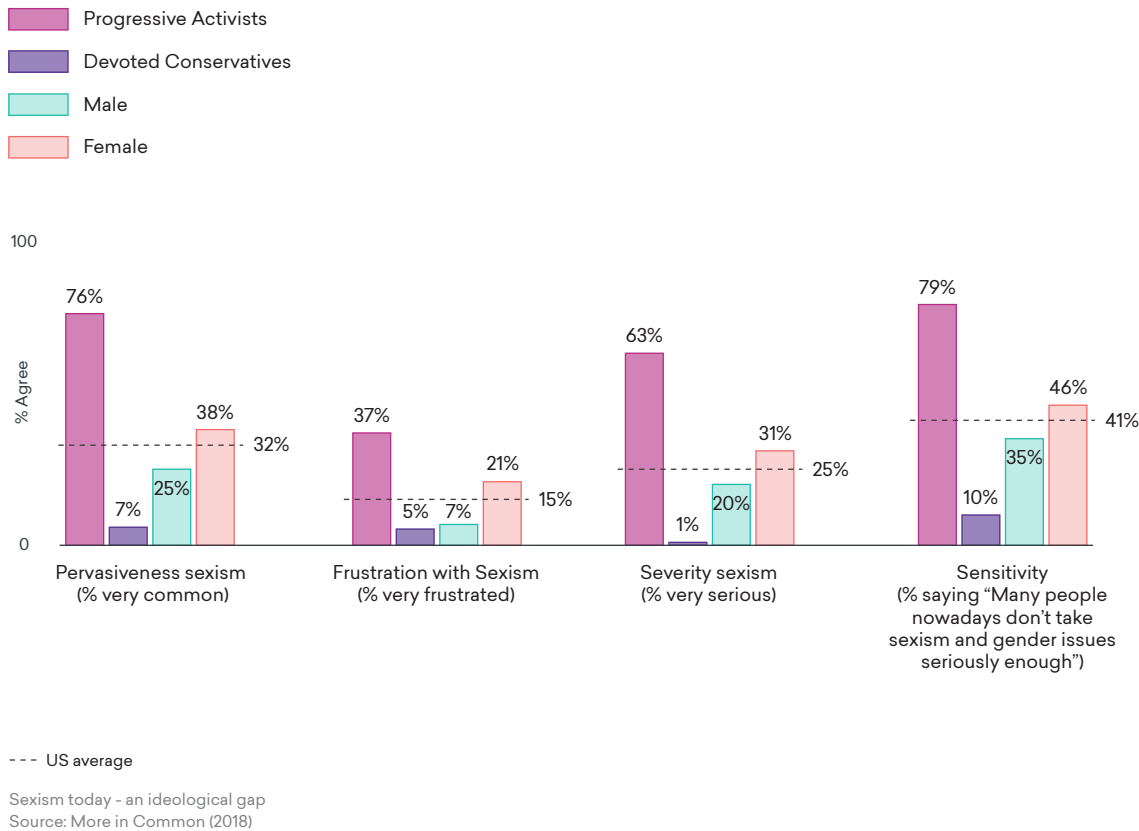
### GENDER AND SEXISM

A similar ideological dynamic exists around issues of sexism and gender. For instance, women and men differ over whether sexism problems are “very serious,” at 31 percent versus 20 percent, respectively. But this difference is dwarfed by the disagreement between Progressive Activists and Devoted Conservatives on the same question (63 percent versus 1 percent). Similarly, 76 percent of Progressive Activists versus just 7 percent of Devoted Conservatives say that acts of sexism are “very common.” The discrepancy between women and men on this issue was much smaller (38 percent versus 25 percent).

## Figure 5.4

# Frustration with Sexism

Views on sexism and gender by tribe

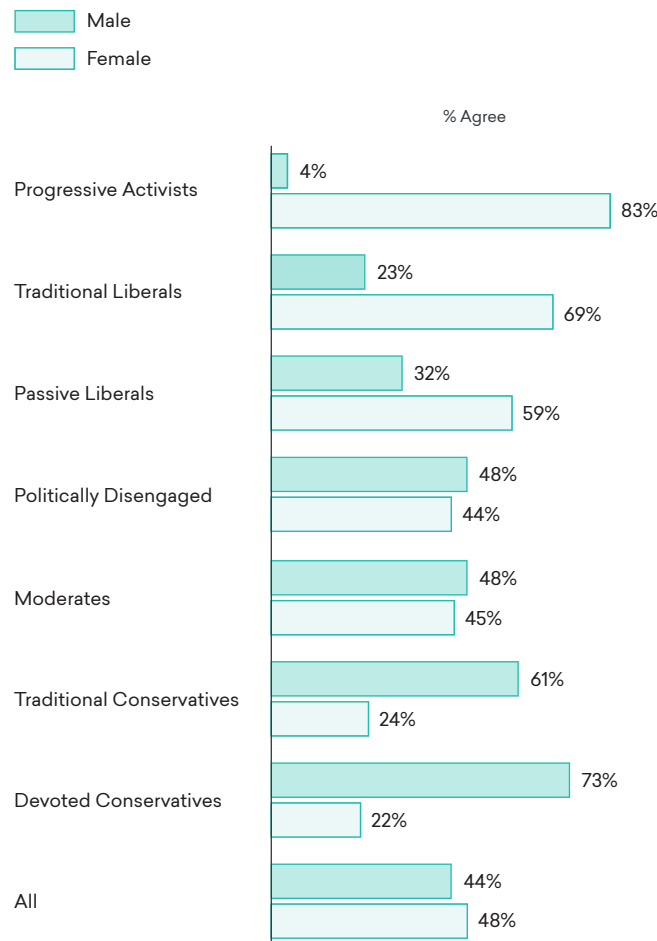


A similar pattern is evident when the segments are asked who is more protected in American society: men or women. In the Progressive Activist and Traditional Liberal segments in particular, the majority of men and women believe that men are more protected. Among Traditional Conservatives and Devoted Conservatives, the pattern is reversed: 61 percent and 73 percent of men believe the rights of women are more protected, respectively, while only 24 percent and 22 percent of women feel a sense of injustice associated with their gender. There is less consensus within the Exhausted Majority segments. Both the Politically Disengaged and the Moderates are divided on this question, with half of men and half of women claiming that their gender enjoys less protection.

**Figure**  
**5.5**

## Gender Protection in Society

Is the opposite gender more protected?



Are the rights of the opposite gender more protected than your own?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

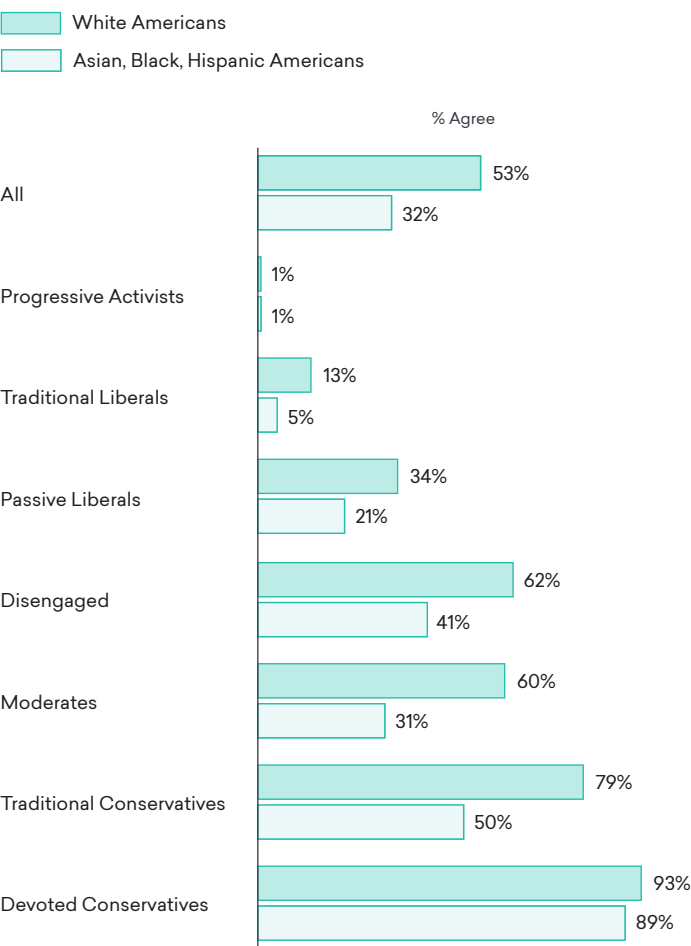
### IMMIGRANTS VERSUS AMERICAN CITIZENS

Nearly half of Americans (47 percent) believe that the rights of immigrants are “more protected than the rights of American citizens.” This includes a slight majority of whites (53 percent) and about one-third of Asian Americans (28 percent), African Americans (32 percent) and Hispanic Americans (35 percent). Notably, wider gaps exist between the white and non-white members of every Exhausted Majority segment, the groups that have less of a tribal identity and often just identify themselves as Americans. Most notably, white Moderates are almost twice as likely (60 percent) as Moderates of color (31 percent) to think that the rights of American citizens are less protected. This effect disappears at the two ends of the ideological spectrum. Among both Progressive Activists and Devoted Conservatives there is unanimity on this issue. Fully 95 percent of Progressive Activists believe that American citizens’ rights are prioritized, while 92 percent of Devoted Conservatives believe the opposite to be true.

Figure  
5.6

# Protection of Rights

Perceived prioritization of immigrants by tribe and gender



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? These days the rights of immigrants are more protected than the rights of American citizens.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## Tribalism and in-group/out-group dynamics

The previous chapter discussed the powerful effects of tribalism (or group attachments) on human psychology. **When individuals feel threatened, they retreat within narrow tribal identities that provide a sense of security and belonging.** These narrow tribal identities often clearly define who counts as “us” and who counts as “them”.

These dynamics can be observed in the way that Americans from each of the seven segments feel towards different groups. To explore these sentiments, we used a ‘feelings thermometer’ that allows respondents to provide a value from 0 to 100 to describe how ‘cold’ or ‘warm’ they felt towards a specific group. Cold to warm feelings are a proxy measure of in-group and out-group sentiments. In tribalized societies, people feel warm towards their tribe’s in-group and cold towards their tribe’s out-groups. In politics, demagogues often exploit these dynamics to play one group off another, framing complex issues through an us-versus-them lens. Those who are tribal insiders are portrayed as courageous, deserving, virtuous, innocent and put-upon. Outsiders are portrayed as being excessively privileged, powerful, exploitative, dishonest and lazy.

These perspectives are most strongly in evidence among Progressive Activists and Devoted Conservatives. Figure 5.7 shows their feelings towards different groups. Their clearly defined views of insiders and outsiders reflect strong tribal identities. Those tribal identities are also reflected in the high level of conformity of their views across a wide range of issues.

Devoted Conservatives have the warmest sentiments towards Trump supporters and NRA members, and the coldest sentiments towards Black Lives Matter activists and Hillary Clinton supporters. Progressive Activists have the warmest feelings towards LGBTQI+ people and refugees, and the coldest feelings towards Trump supporters and NRA members. The feelings of Progressive Activists towards Trump supporters were the coldest recorded for any group.

## RACIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL HOSTILITIES

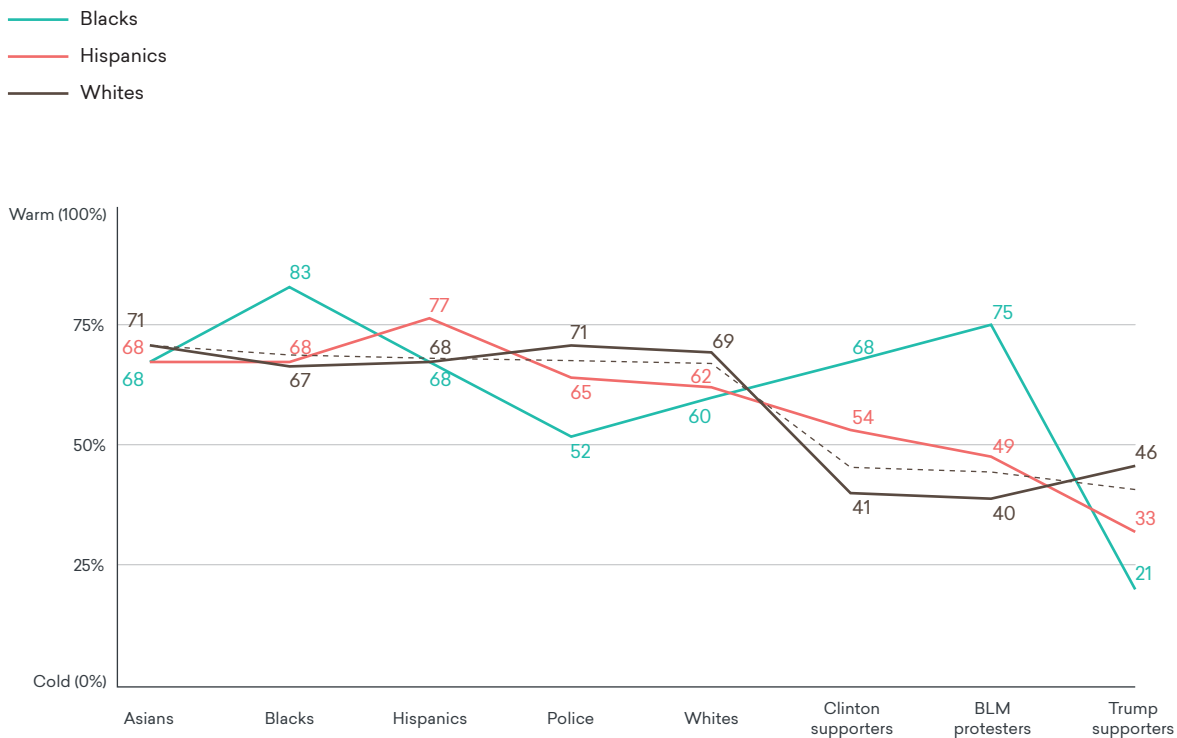
All racial groups report average warmth of above 60 for each race. African Americans generally feel warm towards both Black Lives Matter protesters (average of 75) and Clinton supporters (68), but are very cool towards Trump supporters (21). By contrast, white Americans feel more negative towards Black Lives Matter protesters (40), and about the same towards both Clinton supporters (41) and Trump supporters (46). Hispanics consistently hold feelings towards groups somewhere between the views of white and black Americans.

Cold to warm feelings on a 0 to 100 scale towards selected groups. Among white Americans, the lowest average is felt towards Black Lives Matter activists. Among Asian, Hispanic, and African Americans, the lowest score is felt towards Donald Trump supporters.

Figure  
5.7

### Racial Protection

Racial differences in feelings toward different groups



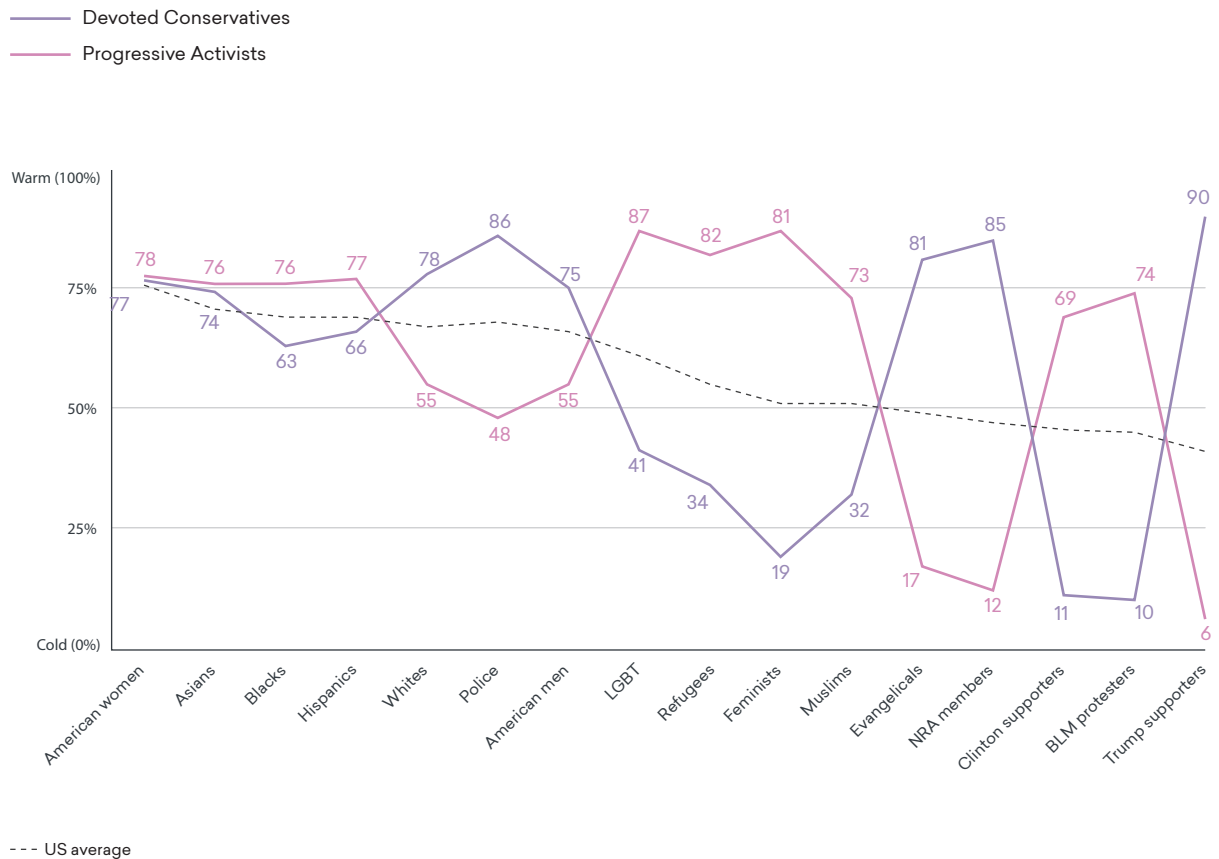
--- US average

Feeling 'temperature' towards racial and political groups by race.  
Numbers indicate how members of each race (lines) feel toward each group (x-axis).  
Source: More in Common (2018)

**Figure**  
**5.8**

## Divides Between the Wings

The wings and their feelings towards various groups



--- US average

Feeling 'temperature' towards racial and political groups by two wing segments.  
Numbers indicate how members of each tribe (lines) feel toward each group (x-axis).  
Source: More in Common (2018)

The feelings of Progressive Activists and Devoted Conservatives however, are deeply and diametrically out of sync with each other. While there is alignment on American women and Asians, nearly every group reveals a yawning disparity, diverging the most for Black Lives Matter protesters and Trump supporters. For these groups, and to a lesser degree for feminists and the LGBT community, they are among the most celebrated for one wing and the most scorned by the other wing.

The Progressive Activists and Devoted Conservatives are also more openly cold in their feelings than any other attitudinal, ideological, racial, religious, generational or gender groups. Devoted Conservatives give Black Lives Matter protesters an average score of 10, while Progressive Activists give Trump supporters an average of just 6- the lowest score in all of the study's temperature data findings.

“

#### IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“White people are definitely advantaged. I have personally seen other groups be discriminated against.”

— 31-year-old woman, Florida, Progressive Activist

“There's a lot of prejudice against people who are not white, they have a harder time getting accepted for things they have accomplished in their life. If there is a job, people will take the white person unless they are looking for people of color to keep up with the quotas. It applies to all non-white people.”

— 37-year old woman, Michigan, Traditional Liberal

“I can definitely see lower-working class African Americans having it worse but also latinos and undocumented people. Kids on DACA and stuff and people living here illegally. Disadvantages are pretty significant, specially for undocumented people, so many things you cannot do”

— 29-year-old woman, North Carolina, Passive Liberal

“You know, sometimes I see there's advantage. I think it's people who are already up there who have large amounts of money. [...] I could knock on doors and go search but I don't really think my family have a large amount of money. But, just enough to pay the bills and get a nice little home, you know.”

— 56 -year-old man, Illinois, Politically Disengaged

“I'd say there's definitely people who start out at an advantage. Those people are probably the heirs, the sons and daughters of some of the people who have the money and power. I believe there is an exclusivity to it too, where they try to keep it within a certain sphere of people. [...] Women are definitely people who are looked down upon and have a disadvantage when they start off.”

— 41-year-old man, Illinois, Moderate

“The kids, they have more of an advantage especially if they have a mother and a father. I grew up without a father.”

— 57-year-old woman, Mississippi, Traditional Conservative

“I don't want to come off sounding prejudiced or racist but...they seem to blame the white race for most of the problems that are going on in this country.”

— 57-year-old man, New Jersey, Devoted Conservative

”

# Key Takeaways

Perceptions of discrimination and the power relationships between individuals of different race, gender, sexuality or belief systems are deeply influenced by tribalism and the core beliefs of individuals. At the opposing ends of the spectrum, there is a clash between two narratives.

Progressive Activists emphasize how individuals belong to demographic groups associated with both historic and ongoing privilege or oppression. They are committed to activism on behalf of historically marginalized communities, such as the LGBTQI+ community, and they distrust groups they associate with oppression of those communities. Evangelicals are held in disfavor, for instance, for their opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, which are viewed as oppressive attitudes.

Devoted Conservatives emphasize how individuals are attached to belief systems that can either preserve or undermine virtues espoused by traditional Judeo-Christian and American culture. Conservatives celebrate those who maintain these values, such as Evangelicals, the military and the police. Meanwhile, they distrust those they view as threatening them, such as Black Lives Matter activists, feminists and Muslims.

These disparate narratives of oppression and victimhood are sustained by the differences in worldview between these two segments, especially the distinctions in their concepts of identity, their varying perceptions of individual responsibility and agency, and the significant gap in importance they place on religion. Tribalism makes conversations about these issues harder, because it robs individuals of their humanity and reduces them to members of in-groups and out-groups.

Yet Americans are fatigued with all the tribalism. When asked whether the differences between Americans are too big for us to work together anymore, or not so big that we cannot get together, 77 percent of Americans still say the latter. The next chapter examines America's Exhausted Majority, the which is looking for a change from the partisanship and polarization.



# Chapter

6



## The Exhausted Majority

“

I think most people, in reality, are in the middle. I just think it's easier now to be that loud person.

”

— 30-year-old woman, Arizona, Politically Disengaged

**A consistent finding of the study is the contrast between the more tribal beliefs and behavior of the 33 percent of Americans in the wing segments (Progressive Activists, Traditional Conservatives and Devoted Conservatives) and that of the 67 percent in the Exhausted Majority (the Traditional Liberals, Passive Liberals, Politically Disengaged and Moderates).**

The four segments in the Exhausted Majority have many differences, but they share four main attributes:

- They are more ideologically flexible
- They support finding political compromise
- They are fatigued by US politics today
- They feel forgotten in political debate

Importantly, the Traditional Conservatives do not belong to the Exhausted Majority, while the Traditional Liberals do. The key difference lies in their mood towards the country's politics. While the Exhausted Majority express disillusionment, frustration, and anger at the current state of US politics, Traditional Conservatives are far more likely to express confidence, excitement and optimism. As such, the Traditional Conservatives hold a meaningfully different emotional disposition towards the country that aligns them more with the Devoted Conservatives.

In this chapter we explore each of these qualities, and then examine the implications of the Exhausted Majority for addressing America's deepening polarization.

## **Ideological Flexibility**

The beliefs of the Exhausted Majority stand in marked contrast to those of the political extremes. **Those in the wing segments tend to hold views that conform to their tribe and do not deviate from the party line.** For example, when it comes to questions of race, Progressive Activists hold consistent and unambiguous views: 92 percent say that people don't take racism seriously enough, 99 percent support athlete protests, and 99 percent believe that white people don't recognize their own privilege.

Devoted Conservatives are similarly unambiguous in holding the opposite views: 94 percent believe people are too sensitive about race, 95 percent condemn athlete protests, and 95 percent say that the Black Lives Matter movement has worsened racial tensions.

The Exhausted Majority shows that a majority of Americans have more complex views on contested issues than our polarizing public debates would suggest. For example, on issues of racial injustice, the Exhausted Majority overwhelmingly agree that problems of racism are at least somewhat serious (ranging from 83 percent to 96 percent among the four Exhausted Majority tribes, and averaging 87 percent). This sets them apart

from the Conservative tribes. They also believe acts of racism are at least somewhat common in the US today (82 percent), and that white supremacists are a growing threat in the US (68 percent).

On the other hand, in contrast to Progressive Activists, the Exhausted Majority overwhelmingly oppose the use of race in college admissions decisions (87 percent) and are ambivalent in their support of Black Lives Matter protesters (48 percent). The Exhausted Majority also has a more nuanced view of Confederate monuments. A clear majority of Moderates and the Politically Disengaged view Confederate monuments more as symbols of Southern pride, while a majority of Traditional and Passive Liberals view them as symbols of racism. Overall, 59 percent of the Exhausted Majority view them more as symbols of Southern pride.

Similar patterns are evident on issues of gender and sexuality, where strong views mark out the tribal identities of the opposing wings. Progressive Activists are unified in their sensitivity to issues of sex-based discrimination, with 94 percent believing that men do not realize their privilege, 98 percent believing that sexual assault is a widespread problem in American society, and 96 percent believing that feminists fight for important issues. Traditional and Devoted Conservatives believe the opposite, with more than 80 percent of both groups believing that ordinary behaviors are now labeled as sexual harassment, that feminists just attack men, and that people are too sensitive about issues of sex and gender.

The views of the Exhausted Majority often do not represent a midpoint between the wings, but they differ from one issue to the next. For example, in stark contrast to Devoted Conservatives, about 75 percent of them believe that problems of sexism are somewhat serious in America today, and on the issue of abortion, around two thirds support a pro-choice over a pro-life stance. Similarly, they support same-sex marriage (64 percent) and believe that accepting transgender people is the moral thing to do (66 percent). On the other hand, in contrast to the Progressive Activists, around half of this group believes that people are overly sensitive about sex and gender issues, that changes in America's views on marriage and sex are causing a decline in family values, and that too many things are labelled as sexual harassment in the workplace.

Pundits sometimes characterize people who recognize complexity and see two sides of an issue as either indecisive or overly intellectual. Our conversations with everyday Americans in the Exhausted Majority suggest that this is a false characterization. Many in these segments do not engage deeply with these issues, but they recognize their complexity. Because their sense of personal identity is less attached to a group that has an unambiguous view on these issues, they tend to approach those issues with more flexibility and without the lens of tribalism.

“

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

**“If there is such a thing as a conservative liberal, I would fall in that category.**

I believe there should be less control on things like same-sex marriage and abortions and things like that, but I also believe in capital punishment and Second Amendment rights. I fall middle of the line when it comes to political issues.”

— Traditional Liberal, 30-year-old woman, Indiana

”

“I really don’t define myself by Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative... If you define yourself like that, you give people the ability to make assumptions about your political thoughts. I am really a moderate. Some things liberal, some things conservative, sometimes agrees with Republicans, sometimes by Democrats... **Always tried to find the common good of something.**”

— Passive Liberal, 29-year-old man, North Carolina

## Supporting Compromise

Just as they reject the tribal opinions of the political extremes, America’s Exhausted Majority disapproves of the hyper-partisan conflict that has overwhelmed political debate in the United States. Far more than those in the wing segments, members of the Exhausted Majority are willing to compromise and believe that “the people I agree with politically need to be willing to listen to others and compromise” (65 percent). Among Progressive Activists, this number is 56 percent; among Devoted Conservatives, only 37 percent. The Exhausted Majority is also more likely to believe that “we need to heal as a nation” (64 percent) than either of the Conservative groups (52 percent and 38 percent, respectively).

In addition to the desire for compromise evident in the middle groups, those with more liberal values tend to be more willing to support compromise than those with conservative values. Compromise has greater resonance for groups on the left of the spectrum. For example, 66 percent of Progressive Activists express a strong desire for healing as a nation rather than defeating the evil within the nation. In contrast, 62 percent of Devoted Conservatives (and 48 percent of Traditional Conservatives) prioritize the latter.

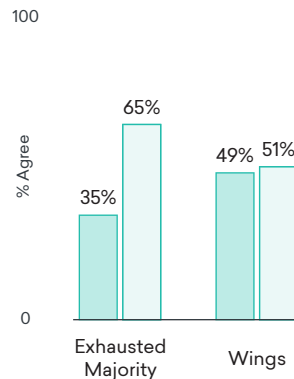
The Exhausted Majority is also more likely to want to avoid conflict when solving disagreements. When asked about their personal lives, they are more likely than either the Progressive Activists (75 percent) or Devoted Conservatives (75 percent) to say they would rather avoid having arguments (84 percent).

## Figure 6.1

# The Majority of Americans Want Compromise

Desire for compromise split by Wings and Exhausted Majority

- People I agree with politically need to stick to their beliefs and fight
- The people I agree with politically need to be willing to listen to others and compromise



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## Fatigue with Politics

This desire for compromise reflects the Exhausted Majority's sense of fatigue with the tribal conflict that plays out constantly on the airwaves and in social media. Members of the Exhausted Majority feel "pessimistic" about the state of America's politics (72 percent) and the inability to come together and bridge partisan divides. On this issue, there are significant differences within the Exhausted Majority segments. On the question of America's political divisions, 32 percent of the Politically Disengaged and 29 percent of Passive Liberals believe that the differences between Americans are too big for us to work together anymore, whereas only 13 percent of Traditional Liberals and 20 percent of Moderates share this view (compared to a nationwide average of 26 percent).

America's Exhausted Majority wants to see the opposing tribes move beyond constant conflict. Many who have disengaged from politics (especially in the Passive Liberal and Politically Disengaged groups) cite the tribal behavior of political combatants as a reason. The relentless back-and-forth arguments have left many in the Exhausted Majority wondering if America can move beyond division.



### IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Liberals aren’t completely right and conservatives are not completely right. **We gotta meet in the middle**, this entire country is based on compromise and we need to start moving forward as a country again.”

— Traditional Liberal, 63-year-old woman, Texas

“What would make me excited again is if people would just give somebody a chance. **People should realize that we are all Americans. We have to accept what we have been given and we have to come together rather than divide**, whether you are in agreement or not in agreement [with the choice of President or Congress]. In the past it’s never been this bad.”

— Moderate, 54-year-old woman, New Jersey

“I think it is possible to unite the country but people would have to give up their self-interest. Not all of their self-interest but some of it. **Come to the table with an open mind**. We have to come to the table, have a healthy debate, try our best to have a compromise...”

— Passive Liberal, 29-year-old man, North Carolina

“You’re not going to know my opinion because you’ve not been in my place. If you’re able to truly pay attention to where I’m coming from, you understand why I feel that way. **You have to let the differences come together and see why there are differences**. You have to get that holistic view.”

— Politically Disengaged, 19-year-old, California



## Forgotten by Tribal Politics

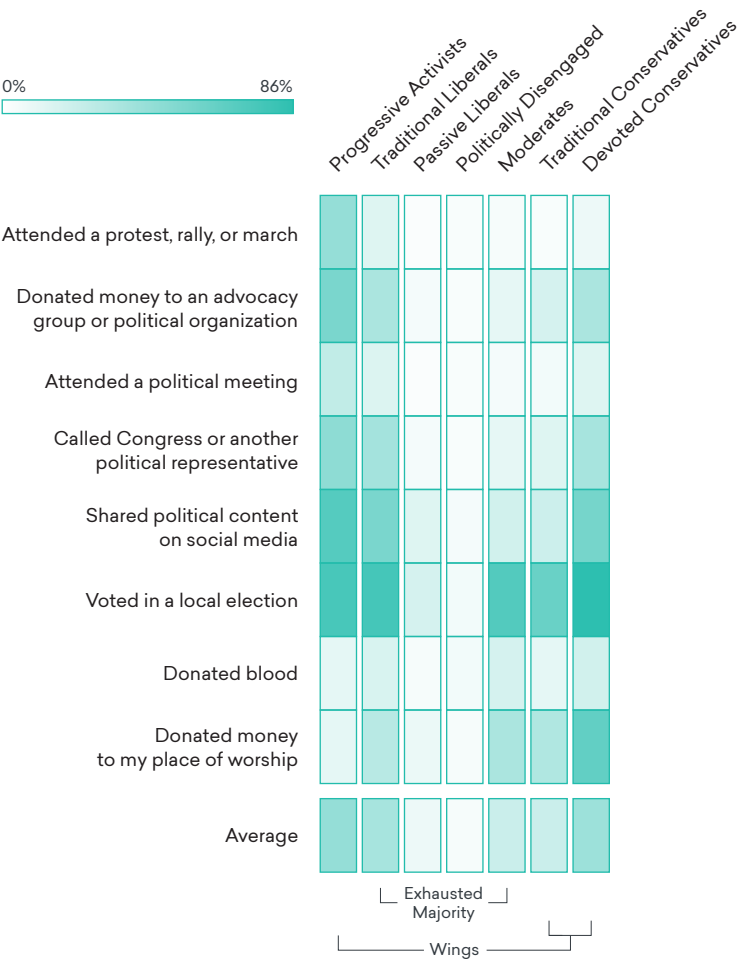
America’s Exhausted Majority is deeply frustrated by political tribalism and polarization and the inability of political actors to compromise and reconcile. However, their voices are rarely heard and many often feel forgotten amidst the public debate. When asked whether “people like me have a say in politics” or “politicians don’t care about people like me,” the four Exhausted Majority tribes ranked highest for believing that politicians don’t care about people like them, and the **three wing segments** ranked lowest. Besides their dislike of the tribal conflict, some of the reasons they give for being less engaged with political issues are that they feel they have enough challenges to deal with in their own lives; they do not feel their voice can make a difference; or they do not feel confident that they have something to say.

Members of the Exhausted Majority are less likely than people in any of the wing segments to have shared political content over social media in the past year (19 percent, versus 70 percent of Progressive Activists and 56 percent of Devoted Conservatives). Similarly, members of the Exhausted Majority are less than one third as likely as people in any of the wing segments to have donated money to a political organization, less than half as likely to have attended a political meeting, and less than half as likely to have voted in a local election. Indeed, almost half the members of the Exhausted Majority select “none” when asked the ways they have been active politically in the past year. In contrast only 1 percent of those in the wing groups select “none.” While there has always been differing levels of engagement in democracy and low levels among some, polarization does appear to be turning off some groups of Americans from political issues altogether.

Figure  
6.2

# The Exhausted Majority

Less politically active and partisan than the wing segments



Here is a list of activities that some people get a chance to participate in and others don't. Which of the following have you taken part in in the past year?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

“

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS...**

“I’m just afraid that **I don’t understand some of the questions**. Sometimes I’m just not sure of myself, so I just don’t vote... Sometimes I don’t think it matters... They’re always talking about somebody messing with the votes, about messing with the votes and the ballots anyway.”

— 62 year old woman, California, Politically Disengaged

”

“It feels like there is a lot of fighting, pushing and pulling in different directions, and **there aren’t people trying to work together, compromise and move forward** on different issues. To me, it feels like we are a little bit stagnant. We’re not making progress because everybody wants to have their own way. I think it’s gotten worse. I think it’s always been there to a certain extent. It seems less civil these days, since our last President came into office.”

— 58-year-old woman, Virginia, Passive Liberal

## Key Takeaways

America’s tribal politics, from social media trolling to debates in the halls of Congress, are repelling a majority of Americans. The Exhausted Majority is uncomfortable with the ideological conformity and the outrage culture that have taken hold in the most highly engaged tribes. Americans in the Exhausted Majority are often hesitant to weigh in for fear of saying the wrong thing. This contributes to the detachment of the 41 percent of Americans who belong to the Passive Liberal and Politically Disengaged tribes.

Public issues have always engaged some individuals more strongly than others. What is striking now is the widening gulf between those who are highly engaged in America’s polarized political debates and the Exhausted Majority of Americans, who find the relentless ideological conflict dispiriting. They feel unrepresented in today’s polarized politics.

The views of the Exhausted Majority are grounds for hope as well as concern. On the one hand, they reject ideological purity and recognize the necessity of compromise in politics as in all areas of life. On the other hand, their detachment (and the media’s preference for conflict) allows the opposing wings of the spectrum to dominate public debate. This contributes to the misperception that America is made up of just two groups who are hell-bent on defeating each other at all costs.

A new understanding of the American political landscape is needed, one that no longer airbrushes this Exhausted Majority out of the picture, but puts them in the center. This is essential to addressing polarization. To bring Americans back together, we need to focus first on those things that we share, and this starts with our identity as Americans. This can create the space for sometimes difficult but necessary conversations. The next chapter looks at attitudes towards American identity, highlighting the ways in which that identity can be a source of unity rather than a source of division.

# Chapter

7

## American Identity

“

I love the fact that I'm American. I love that we have the opportunities that we have. I love that we have the freedoms. I love the fact that we can talk when we want to. It is definitely a pride that I have. One of my sons is a US Marine, I am so happy that he has chosen to do that and represent our country.

”

— 54-year-old woman, New Jersey, Moderate

**American identity has long been a unifying force in the United States. Today, however, some of America’s most polarizing debates concern claims over national identity, from “America First” to the controversy over kneeling NFL players. These sprawling debates concern the line between proud patriotism and xenophobic nationalism, how grateful and loyal citizens should be, and what it means to be an American.**

Our study sought to understand Americans’ feelings towards their country through a range of related questions, including whether they feel the country is currently moving in the right or the wrong direction, their optimism about the future of the country, and their specific feelings toward America today (using terms such as hopeful, excited, angry, scared, frustrated and disillusioned). These issues were also discussed with members of the segments during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

We need to move beyond debates that characterize one group as patriots and the other as disloyal, or one as open-minded and the other bigoted. As others have often observed, the United States is unique in the way it allows diverse subgroups, in vastly different regions and from very different backgrounds, to thrive beneath an overarching national identity.

## **American Pride and Privilege**

To some, being American is a source of pride and a key piece of their identity; for others, it is little more than an accident of birth. Social psychology has developed multiple measures to describe attachment to group identity. This study measures centrality, importance, in-group homogeneity and satisfaction. Together, these provide a detailed picture of how American identity functions and varies in the United States today.

Americans differ substantially in the degree to which they are invested in their national identity:

- Ninety-one percent of Devoted Conservatives are “very proud” to be American, compared to 18 percent of Progressive Activists.
- Fifteen percent of Progressive Activists feel that being American is “very important” to their identity, while 78 percent of Devoted Conservatives say the same.

## Figure 7.1

### American Identity

#### Differences in American-ness by tribe

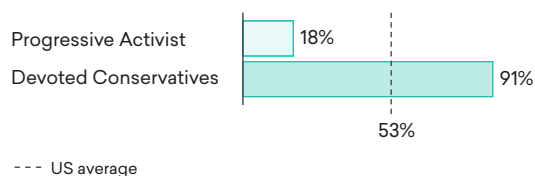
One belief that brings Americans together is a sense that the country is special. Fully 60 percent of Americans believe that they start off at an advantage compared to others, and all tribes are more likely to agree than disagree. On this question, Progressive Activists (81 percent) are most likely to agree, followed by Traditional Liberals (77 percent). Indeed, even the segment who feel least advantaged, the Politically Disengaged, are 51 percent in agreement with this statement. Compared to the 30 percentage point gap among the segments, there is a 19 percentage point gap between Americans of different racial backgrounds: African Americans are least likely to believe Americans start off at an advantage compared to others (52 percent), followed by whites (60 percent), Hispanics (66 percent) and Asian Americans (71 percent). Those with higher levels of education are also more likely to see an advantage in their citizenship.

Overall, 81 percent of Americans agree that “America is a better country than most others.” While Devoted Conservatives almost unanimously “strongly agree” (85 percent), most Americans do not show the same level of confidence (overall, only 44 percent of Americans strongly agree). Progressive Activists are also outliers on this question, with just 8 percent strongly agreeing that the United States is better than other countries.

#### Satisfaction

“I am **proud** to be American”

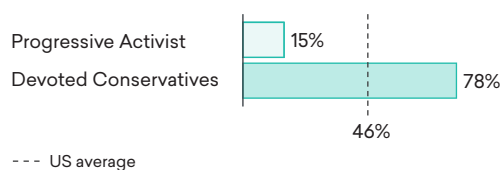
% Strongly agree



#### Importance

“Being American is **important** to me”

% Very important



#### Centrality

“I **often think about** the fact that I am American”

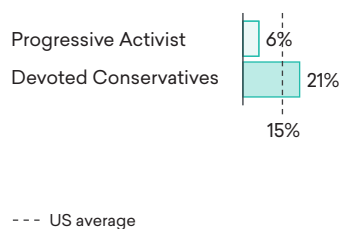
% Strongly agree



#### In-group homogeneity

“Americans have a **lot in common** with each other”

% Strongly agree

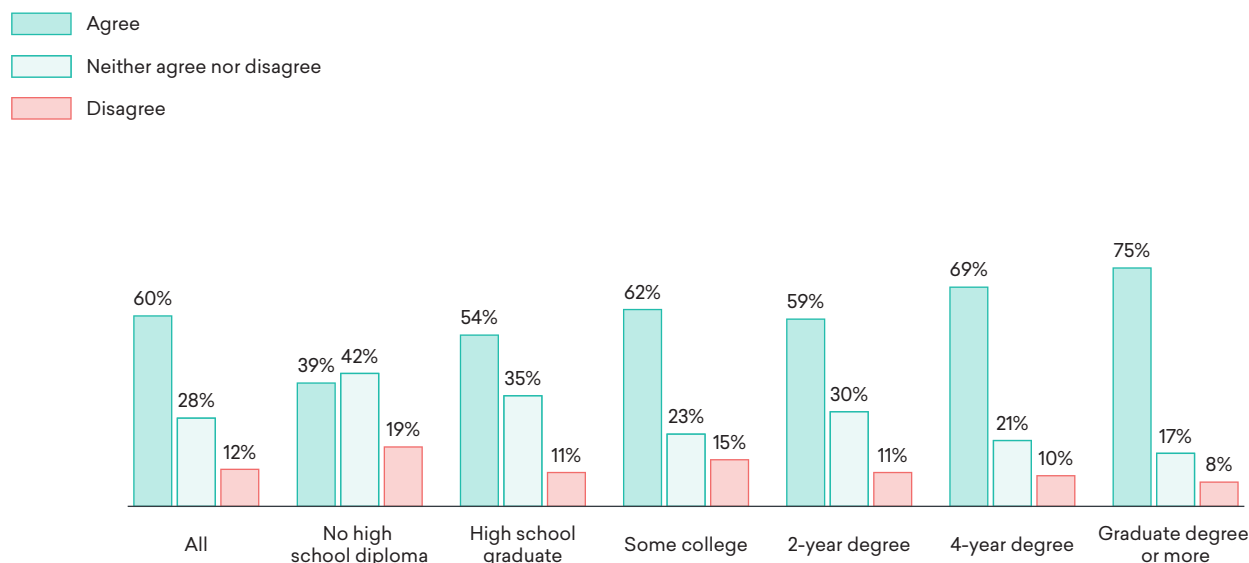


Source: More in Common (2018)

## Figure 7.2

# Educational Advantage

Perception of American advantage by educational attainment



Americans start off at an advantage compared to others.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

Americans are far more ambivalent about the superiority of the American people as a group. A slight majority (57 percent) at least somewhat agrees that “the world would be better off if more people from other countries were like Americans.” Again, the Progressive Activists differ, with 51 percent “strongly disagreeing” with this proposition, while the US average for strong disagreement is just 15 percent.

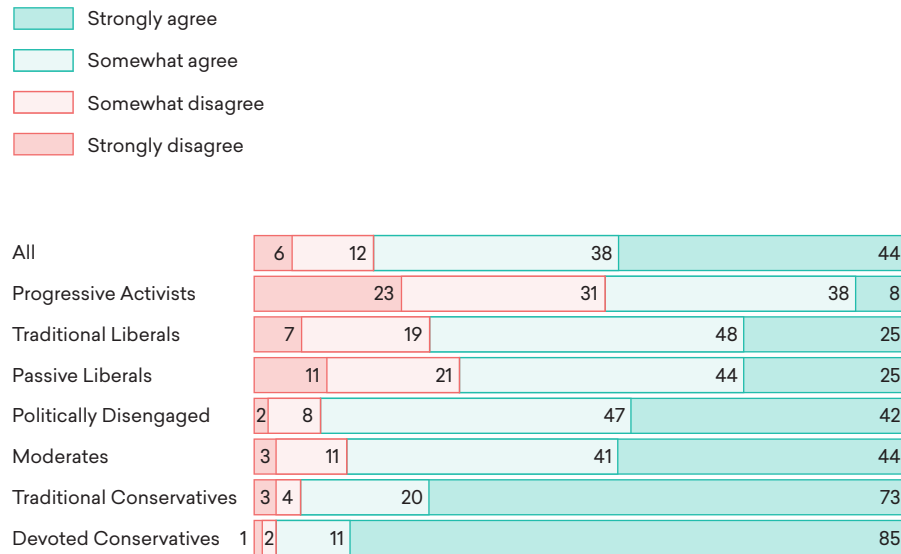
There is a strong correlation between having confidence in the American people and expressing loyalty to America’s leaders, which provides an insight into the dynamics of populism but may also reflect tribal support for the current president. Among those who do not believe that the world would be better if more people were like Americans, just 28 percent say that they “support my country’s leaders even if I disagree with their actions.” By contrast, 68 percent of those who believe that the world would be better if more people were like Americans also say that they would stand by their country’s leaders regardless of their actions.

Debates over American identity often attempt to characterize liberals as anti-American or ashamed of their country. This misses the larger point that, for most Americans, some aspects of America inspire pride, and some inspire shame. This is highlighted by the large majority of Americans who say that some things about the United States today make them ashamed to be American. Altogether, 67 percent of Americans feel some degree of shame, ranging from 41 percent of Devoted Conservatives to 96 percent of Progressive Activists. This question showed an unusually large distinction between Passive Liberals and the Politically Disengaged. Some 69 percent of Passive Liberals agreed moderately or strongly, compared to just 25 percent of the Politically Disengaged.

Figure  
7.3

## American Exceptionalism

Perception of America as a better country by tribe



Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
America is a better country than most others.  
Source: More in Common (2018)

“

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS..

Americans are energized by conversations around their identity and, although they express it in different ways, they share a sense of pride and gratitude in being American. Those at the conservative end of the spectrum more often put being American at the center of their personal identity and feel an instinctive pride and gratitude. Progressive Activists (and, to a lesser extent, others towards the liberal end of the spectrum) tend to emphasize aspects of American democracy and institutions. The Politically Disengaged often talk about national identity in relative terms, as it compares to other countries. They believe they are lucky, as they have more freedoms and opportunities than they might otherwise have, and they often frame their relationship with America as one of gratitude and good fortune.

**“I’m not going to say America is the best country** in the world because I don’t feel that way. It has got its good points and its bad points.”

— 40-year-old woman, North Carolina, Progressive Activist

**“I think America is a great country, or it used to be. I think we have some problems right now. But we are free, we can say and do whatever we want within reason. I am worried about the direction it is going in right now, but I’m proud to be an American.”**

— 73-year-old woman, Texas, Traditional Liberal

**“Not as proud of being American like I used to be.** I see the flag and I don’t feel the kind of pride I used to.”

— 49-year-old woman, North Carolina, Passive Liberal

”

“

**“Some people don’t know how blessed we really are...** We have a decent minimum wage, it could be higher... Education might be harder in places like Africa or Mexico. ‘Blessed’ is a better word [to describe how I feel toward America].”

— 20-year-old woman, Florida, Politically Disengaged

“You know what, **this is still one of the best countries in the world...** Immigrants coming to western countries shows how good we have it in the western world. Founding fathers and the Constitution. Still respect that. We’re drifting away from the original purposes. So much potential to be so much more. We just need to follow our own principles.”

— 41-year-old man, Illinois, Moderate

”

“Awesome, it’s great, **thumbs up.** I’ve never really had a minus.”

— 43-year-old man, New York, Traditional Conservative

## Becoming American

Americans hold a wide range of opinions on what makes someone an American. The broadest agreement is found in America’s founding ideals, but disagreements linger about the relevance of culture and religion.

**American identity is still most commonly defined by its ideals of freedom and opportunity.** Americans are united in believing that a commitment to freedom and equality are important for being American (an average of 91 percent across segments gave these issues a score of 5 or higher on a 7-point scale). Similarly, 73 percent value “pursuing the American dream.” (Notably, however, a full 24 percent of Progressive Activists say that such a quality is “not at all important.”)

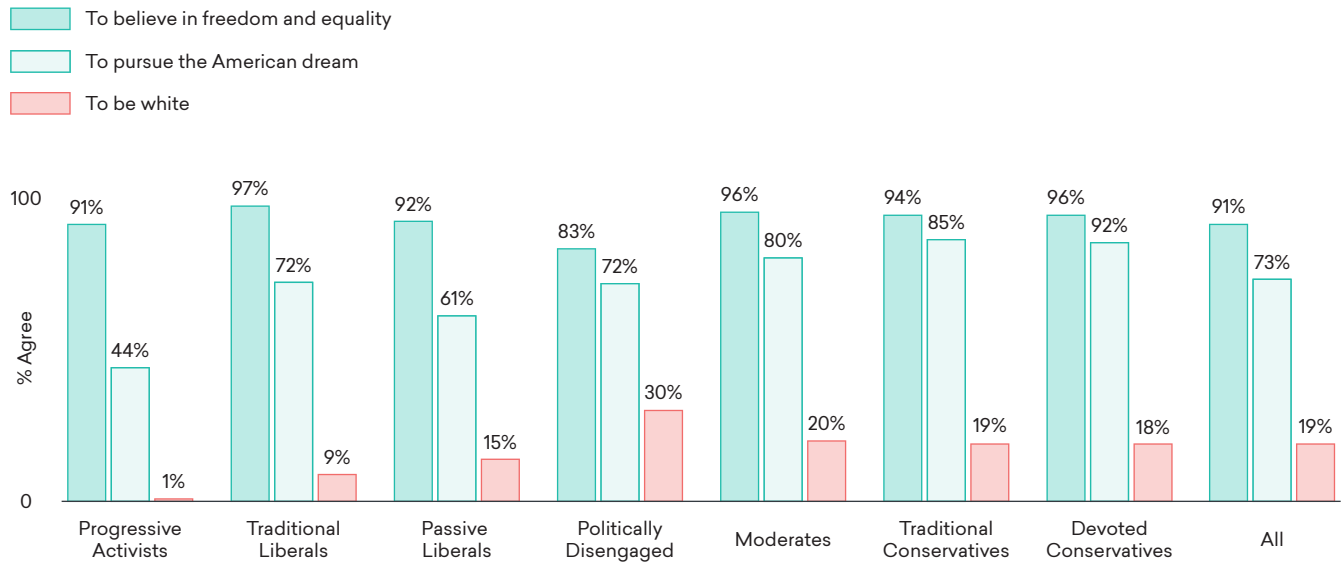
Significant agreement also exists on what is not important to being an American. Americans overwhelmingly reject the idea that to be American you must be white (average agreement of 18 percent). A proportion of the Conservative wings (around one in five) endorse this view, but the highest level of agreement is among the Politically Disengaged group (30 percent agreement, and only 43 percent say being white is not at all important to American identity).

On some other aspects of American identity there is evidence of polarization between those with a wider and those with a narrower conception of American identity. While about a third of the Politically Disengaged, Devoted Conservatives, and Moderates say that being born in America is very important to being an American, only 2 percent of Progressive Activists and 15 percent of Traditional Liberals agree. While 37 percent of the Politically Disengaged and Devoted Conservatives believe that “being Christian” is important to being an American, 0 percent of Progressive Activists and 8 percent of Traditional Liberals agree.

**Figure**  
**7.4**

## Composition of American identity

Shared views on American identity by tribe

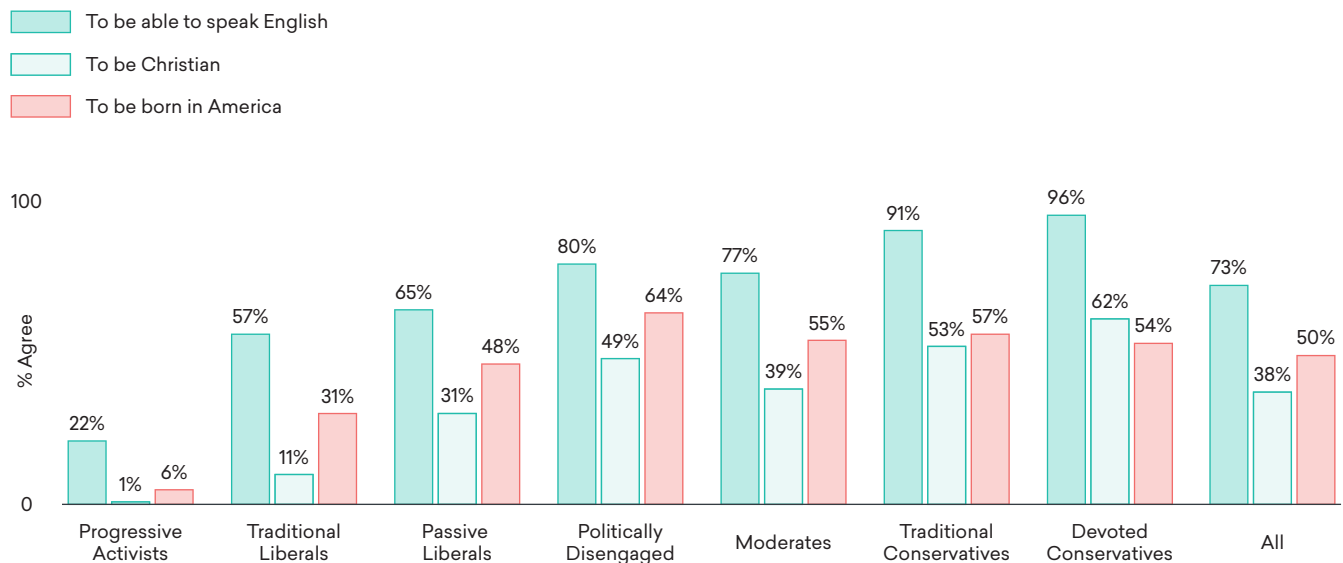


How important to you are the following items for being truly American?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

**Figure**  
**7.5**

## Disagreements on American identity

Disagreement on American identity by tribe



How important to you are the following items for being truly American?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

# Symbols of National Identity

Some of America's most polarizing debates are prompted by disagreements over symbols such as the flag and Confederate monuments. We find differences relating to age, ideology, religion and race when we ask Americans whether the flag makes them feel "extremely good," with larger gaps between:

- those over 65 (53 percent) versus those under 30 (18 percent)
- 'very conservative' people (69 percent) versus 'very liberal' people (11 percent)
- Protestants (47 percent) versus atheists (12 percent)
- white Americans (40 percent) versus African Americans (13 percent)

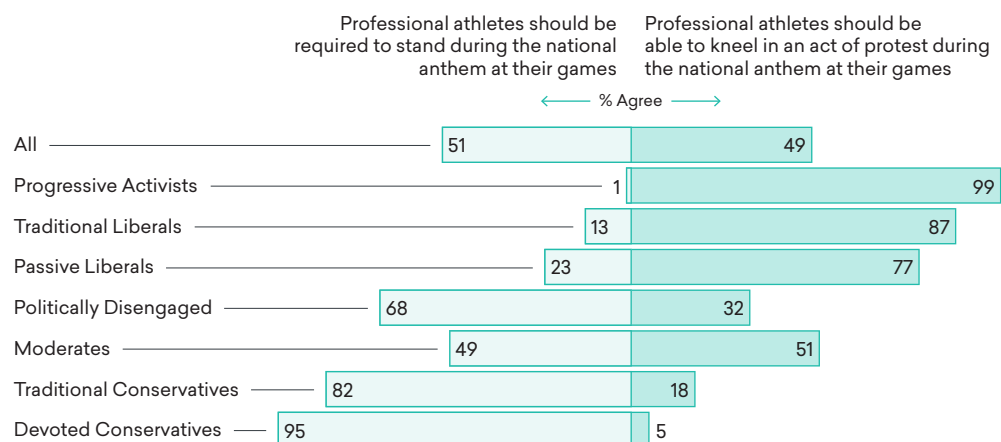
However, the Hidden Tribes segmentation finds the greatest difference of all between Devoted Conservatives (80 percent) and Progressive Activists (1 percent). This question also highlights a significant difference between Progressive Activists and Traditional Liberals reflected in several questions relating to American identity. Feeling "not good at all" about the flag is expressed by 32 percent of Progressive Activists in contrast to just 7 percent of Traditional Liberals.

Differences in attitudes towards American identity often come to light through debates on symbolism, and never more so than when symbolism is mixed with political protest. The stronger an individual's attachment to traditional symbols of national identity, the stronger their opposition to protests. While 99 percent of Progressive Activists believe athletes should have the right to kneel during the national anthem as an act of protest, 95 percent of Devoted Conservatives say they should be required to stand. Moderates and the Politically Disengaged are more ambivalent on this issue.

Figure  
7.6

## Athlete Protests

Views on protesting during national anthem by tribe



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

# Key Takeaways

In recent years, public debates on American identity have been used to play Americans against each other. In reality, as we often hear from members of the Exhausted Majority, most citizens hold nuanced views of their national identity and there is much common ground.

While there are differences in the degree of intensity, most Americans feel a strong sense of pride and gratitude that they are American. There are also things about the United States that sometimes make them ashamed. To be American, for most, does not require someone to be white or to be Christian. Rather, it is to believe in freedom and equality, and to pursue the American dream.

American national identity has the potential to bring Americans together, but it also has the potential to divide. Focusing on the larger things that Americans have in common, rather than always exaggerating their differences, can help make identity a more unifying force.

More specifically, we need new approaches to show that high-profile debates often misrepresent the views of most Americans, presenting the most extreme and polarizing positions as representative of all Americans. Americans who belong to the Conservative tribes need to hear more of the pride and patriotism of Progressive Activists and Traditional Liberals, just as those groups need to hear how a large majority of Conservatives agree that we are all fully American, regardless of race or religion. This will not remove the need to address real differences that exist over important issues, but by showing the common ground between Americans we might enable progress on those issues.

American identity has the potential to bind individuals together as Americans regardless of their race, gender, faith, partisanship or ideology. It can be a powerful source of unity rather than division. Finding ways to make this a reality could help transform the nature of public discourse in America, the focus of the next chapter.



# Chapter

8

## Communicating Across Divides

“

I think that the world is way too politically correct. Look, I'm 53-years-old and when I was younger we didn't have that kind of stuff. Everybody made fun of everybody and yet everybody got along. Being polite has nothing to do with it. There are too many different groups of people blaming groups of people. That's political correctness. You can't offend me, you have to do exactly what I want or I'm offended by you.”

”

— 53 year old man, Texas, Traditional Conservative

**Polarization has made it increasingly difficult for Americans to engage with each other on the most contested issues of the day. In this context, disagreements sometimes focus less on the substance of an issue, and more on the language used to discuss it. This creates a chilling effect, driving more and more Americans away from public debate and leaving the conversation to the loudest, most extreme voices.**

The polarization that was once seen mostly among talking heads on cable television has made its way into local communities, Facebook feeds, and to the Thanksgiving dinner table. For many Americans, this has made the tribalism discussed in this report increasingly personal. Shifting the tone of public debate so that citizens can freely communicate across the lines dividing them will be essential if Americans are going to address the immense issues confronting them.

## **Free Speech and Political Correctness**

Many Americans regard freedom of speech as a foundation stone of their democracy. This freedom, however, runs into constraints when it threatens important values such as public order and the prevention of hate speech. **The vast majority of Americans want to feel free to speak their mind, but they also recognize that there should be limits on speech that is dangerous or hateful.** Levels of conviction on both of these subjects are relatively similar among the liberal segments and the Politically Disengaged. However, among Moderates, Traditional Conservatives, and especially among Devoted Conservatives, there is a stronger recognition of the need to preserve free speech than of the need to protect against hate speech.

On each issue, there is a wide gap between the majority of Americans and the views of either the Devoted Conservatives or Progressive Activists. Devoted Conservatives value freedom above other concerns, and are almost three times as likely to disagree strongly with the need to protect people from dangerous and hateful speech than Americans on average (34 versus 13 percent). Progressive Activists, on the other hand, worry that free speech is often a cover for offensive and dangerous speech, and 36 percent of them strongly disagree with the claim that political correctness has gone too far, compared to an average of 7 percent of Americans generally who strongly disagree with that claim.

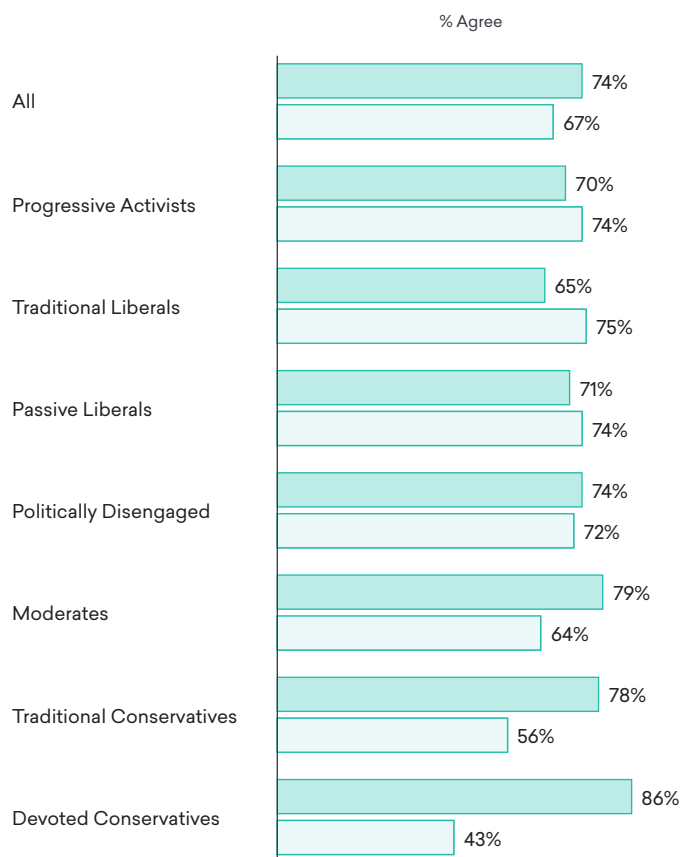
On both issues, we find a significant gap between the views of the highly ideological wing segments, who are most active in public conversation, and those in the Exhausted Majority. While there may be agreement about the problems with “political correctness,” this phrase is hard to define. On issues ranging from gender and Islam to race and immigration, at least 50 percent of Americans claim there is “pressure to think a certain way.” Even among liberal groups, a significant percentage feels constrained. This pressure is highest regarding Islam, about which fully 66 percent of Americans say they do not feel that it is “acceptable” to voice their opinions. Context matters, though: More than two-thirds of Americans say they feel less inhibited voicing their perspectives when they are among “people like me.”

Figure  
8.1

## Ambivalent America: Freedom or Protection?

Views on hate speech and freedom of speech by tribe

- People should be able to say what they really think, even when it offends people
- We need to protect people from dangerous and hateful speech

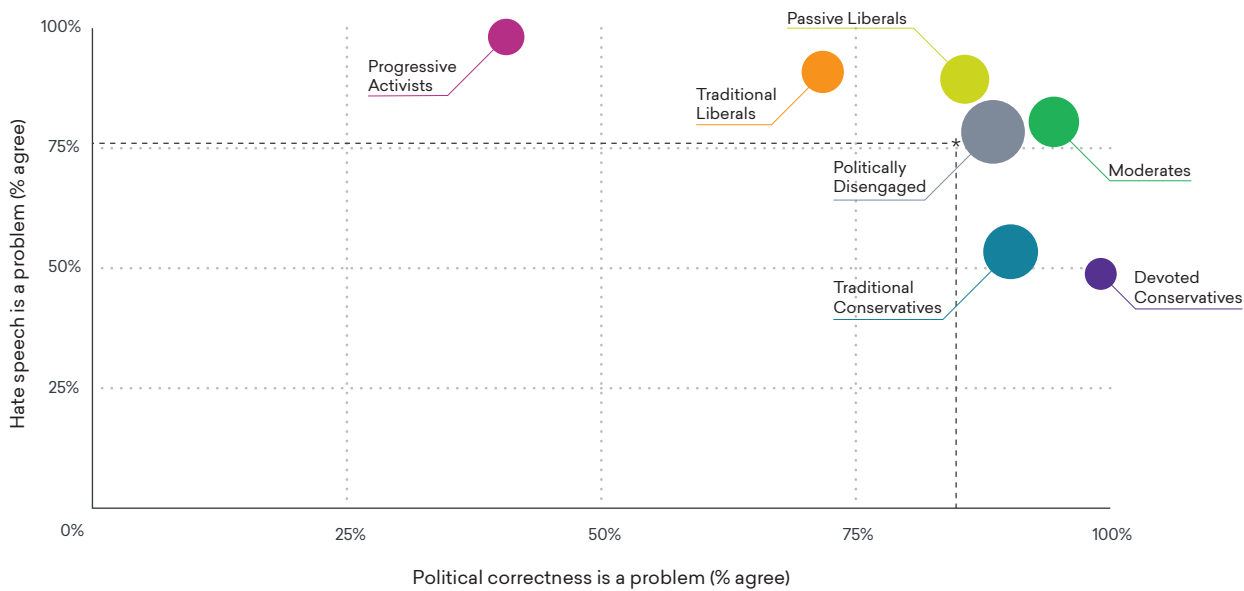


Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
Source: More in Common (2018)

Figure 8.2

Progressive Activists Stand Out on Speech

Progressive Activists are least likely to believe that political correctness is a problem in society



○ size= % share of US population  
--- US average

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
Political correctness is a problem in our country. [Showing total agreement]  
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
Hate speech is problem is our country. [Showing total agreement]  
Source: More in Common (2018)

## Figure 8.3

# Pressure and Expression

Self-censorship on different subjects and in varied contexts



Which of the following statements do you agree with more?  
Source: More in Common (2018)



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Across most segments, Americans are highly conscious of the risk of offending other people, and many express anxiety about doing so. Many recount being called out for an insensitive remark, and they have heard examples of far more extreme cases. They worry that these sensitivities stifle dialogue and intimidate people into silence. Americans are about evenly divided over whether this is the case regarding discussions of immigration, gender, and gay and lesbian issues. However, around two in three Americans feel that there is a pressure to think a certain way about Islam and Muslims, as well as about race and racism.

“I don’t think it is a problem. It’s **used by haters to kind of push back against new ideas and ideas** of equality and fairness.... There are terms that are abusive and you wouldn’t want anyone to use against you”

— 60-year-old man, Indiana, Progressive Activist

“I think that there are certain things that you can say or do that offend people, as far as being politically correct, but I also think that **we have become a society that is offended at everything**. There is a lot in today’s society that was never discussed before such as sexual orientation or gender fluidity that is kind of new and people don’t know how to handle that... and it is not so much that they are intentionally being disrespectful or offensive... It’s a **combination of lack of knowledge and maybe oversensitivity**.”

— 30-year-old woman, Indiana, Traditional Liberal.

“Why do we have this need in the US to call out people for appreciating a culture?... **It’s becoming ridiculous.**”

— 30-year-old woman, Arizona, Politically Disengaged

“I think it’s a quagmire. It’s so weird because... it’s a good thing to actually try and not offend anybody when you are speaking to them. **It’s a good idea to try to respect other religions, cultures, and orientations.** At the same time, I do feel like **sometimes we have pushed it down people’s throats to the point of nausea.** Shouldn’t your agenda be to further educate people? Wouldn’t that be the more proper way to spread that message?”

— 40-year-old man, Chicago, Moderate

“**I define it as lying.** Not saying what you really think. It really hurts everybody. This is why I said I am a big fan of Trump, because he is not politically correct. **I think political correctness is really damaging.** I think under the guise of being nice or friendly, you’re not really telling what you really think. That’s not helpful.”

— 43-year-old man, New York, Traditional Conservative



# News Outlets and Social Media

The same sense of frustration and distrust that is undermining Americans' ability to communicate with their fellow citizens is also reflected in their relationship to the news media. Approximately two-thirds of Americans believe that "most mainstream media are biased in their coverage." This includes media coverage of immigrants (64 percent), urban areas (67 percent), police shootings (65 percent), sexual assault (62 percent), sexism (66 percent), and Muslims (65 percent).

This perception of bias is consistently lowest among Traditional Liberals (about 1 in 3 sees bias across these issues) and highest among Devoted Conservatives (about 9 in 10 see bias across these issues). The subject on which people are most likely to perceive bias is the subject of immigration, where 97 percent of Devoted Conservatives claim inaccurate reporting from the mainstream media.

Americans are highly critical of the partisan cable networks, such as conservative Fox News and liberal MSNBC. Negative perceptions of those networks are more than twice as intense as positive ones. Fox News is perceived to be somewhat or very honest by 40 percent of the public, including 87 percent of Devoted Conservatives. In contrast, 98 percent of Progressive Activists believe Fox News is dishonest, and 88 percent say it is "very dishonest."

Similarly, MSNBC is rated as at least "somewhat honest" by 41 percent of the public, including 72 percent of Traditional Liberals and 67 percent of Progressive Activists. On the other hand, it is deemed "very dishonest" by 74 percent of Devoted Conservatives. These negative views align with the conviction of the wing segments that their political opponents' network will "report false stories if it benefits them." For example, 95 percent of Progressive Activists believe this about Fox News, while 87 percent of Devoted Conservatives believe this about MSNBC.

The environment of tribalism has been intensified by social media. Through the creation of filter bubbles and echo chambers, social media tends to polarize those who are most engaged in public debates.<sup>27</sup> Fringe or extreme perspectives can enter mainstream debate far more easily in the digital era since there are fewer information gatekeepers. Where trust in traditional media has declined, false information can spread widely and information can be micro-targeted to specific audiences.

The algorithms that give priority to certain types of content on social networks tend to foster expressions of moral outrage, thereby contributing to the polarization of debate. Social norms are being eroded by repeated exposure to behaviors and commentary that, in other settings, might be subject to social sanction or removal.

The high level of internal agreement among Progressive Activists and Devoted Conservatives may in part be explained by their online presence. In an increasingly tribalized social media environment, with far greater homogeneity within each individual's own network, those who express sympathy for the views of opposing groups may experience backlash from their own cohort. That backlash, in the form of negative feedback on social networking sites, is often expressed in much stronger terms than it would be in a face-to-face encounter. Those who witness this process learn not to deviate from group norms, especially on polarizing issues of identity and belonging, which are often highly charged.

In interviews, members of the Exhausted Majority often attributed the politicization of everyday life and erosion of personal relationships to the spread of social media. According to Stephanie, a Politically Disengaged from Arizona, social media allows people to have their say without the consequences that would arise in face-to-face

interactions. Elizabeth, a 69-year-old Traditional Liberal from the same state, explains how some of her old relationships have broken down because “we used to have our discussions about politics and then it was done and we talked about the kids or new recipes or what we are doing at work or whatever ... but with those three friends it has become a big wedge because they will not leave me alone and back off it.... They are not friends anymore because we cannot find common ground anymore. They want to bring politics into everything, politics shapes their lives.” As a Passive Liberal states: “The outcome of everything now seems to be solely based on who gets to the microphone first. And you have to live with it, and I think that is a problem. We don’t try to understand each other anymore.”

## Key Takeaways

The study suggests that tribalism has contributed to a loss of objectivity in reporting, as some news outlets have pursued a business model that fosters polarization, while others have increasingly substituted opinion writing for more expensive investigative journalism. This has contributed to a loss of faith in news outlets. Public awareness of disinformation efforts has further diminished trust online, such as those that occurred during the general election in 2016.

The dynamics of social media have also intensified partisanship and tribalism, especially among the most engaged population segments. The filter bubbles and echo chambers of social media restrict people’s exposure to alternative views and elevate the loudest and more extreme voices. This has helped to enforce similar ways of thinking and behaving within the most engaged wing groups, while discouraging others from engaging at all.

This environment of weak trust in sources of information is complicated by concerns over the culture of outrage and offense that many associate with tribalization and political correctness. These concerns are often expressed most strongly by those in the middle groups.

The ‘wing segments’ differ from the majority of Americans in either diminishing the seriousness of concerns about political correctness, or diminishing the seriousness of concerns about hate speech. In contrast, the Exhausted Majority of Americans is concerned about both.

Effective communication at both the national and the personal level requires an atmosphere of trust and objectivity. Tribalism destroys trust and objectivity, and replaces them with competing loyalties. The context of a low-trust news environment and a tribalized social media creates significant obstacles for communicating across the ideological divide.

These patterns of communication are becoming entrenched. However, the study suggests that many Americans want to move beyond division. This creates an opening for new initiatives that seek to create trust and connection across the lines of difference and bring Americans together around what unites them rather than what divides them.

# Conclusion

“

To work for the common good, stop judging each other. You'd be surprised even based on a political party how much people have in common. Just continue to work in an honest way and work for the common good, not just for yourself but for the good of the people.

”

— 46-year-old woman, California, Passive Liberal

**In perhaps the most famous of The Federalist Papers, No.10, James Madison argues that the American Constitution established a form of government capable of controlling the damage and violence caused by factions. Today, America is deeply factionalized, violent hate crimes are rising<sup>28</sup> and Washington is gripped by a sense of permanent crisis regularly compared to that of the Watergate era. This reflects America's profound polarization, in which any and every issue can be channelled into an us-versus-them conflict between warring factions, and where partisan ends justify any means.**

It is difficult to break this cycle of polarization. Tribal outrage works as a business model for social media, cable television and talk radio. It succeeds where redistricting has shifted the political contest from the center ground in general elections to the mobilized base in primary campaigns. It is metastasizing from national politics and online forums to campuses, workplaces and the dinner table at Thanksgiving.

The well-documented result is that growing numbers of Americans are segregated into echo chambers where they are exposed to fewer alternative ideas, and fed a constant stream of stories that reinforce their tribal narratives. Over time, this environment spawns increasing extremism, as start-up initiatives from political campaigns to new media outlets seek to out compete established players through ideological purity and aggression.

Over the past few years, scientists and researchers have made strides in their understanding of human nature and psychology. This knowledge, combined with the powerful platforms and tools of social media, can be used for good or for ill. We undertook this study in order to understand the core beliefs of Americans and explore how this understanding can be used, not to deepen polarization but to bring people together.

This report aims to inform and support efforts to counter the forces of polarization and tribalism by fostering an understanding of the differences in core beliefs that underpin Americans' affiliations. If we are to overcome the polarization between opposing groups, greater empathy for the other side is required.

This report is not intended as a comprehensive analysis, but rather a summary of key findings that provides new insight into the divisions in the United States today. The dataset prepared for this study is unusually large, and because its focus is not on current issues but underlying values, we anticipate it remaining relevant for several years. More work is needed to evaluate the correlations and interpret their significance. More in Common will be releasing more detailed reports from the study in the months to come, for example on the issue of immigration. We look forward to working with partner organizations to answer questions and further test the insights that arise from this study.

The report's co-authors conducted an intensive series of one-to-one interviews with Americans from across all seven tribes. The interviewers reflected afterwards that they found these conversations transformational. They began the interviews with some trepidation. Yet where they expected to find only difference and disagreement, they often found much common ground. They may have found reasons to disagree, but with the opportunity to hear about someone else's experiences and beliefs, the interviewers often gained new empathy for people different from themselves. They finished those interviews with a sense of hope that our differences are much smaller than what we have in common.

People have this experience consistently when they meet others with different views in an environment that fosters listening and respectful engagement.<sup>29</sup> Differences in core beliefs do not disappear, but these differences, which are constantly magnified on our screens, are placed into an entirely different perspective by person-to-person contact.

Today, millions of Americans are going about their lives with absurdly inaccurate perceptions of each other. Partisan media consistently elevates the most extreme representations of "them," whether they are liberals, conservatives, Hillary voters, Trump voters, immigrants, Evangelicals, Muslims, gun owners, gun control advocates or any other group central to America's deepening tribal conflicts. This creates a false impression that outliers are somehow representative of the majority.

We are long past the point where these differences are contributing to a healthy and robust democracy. The intolerance for the other is a grave threat to our democratic system, as political actors cast off the restraints of convention and even the rule of law, with a ruthless determination to crush the other side no matter the cost.

This report has shown that despite America's profound polarization, the middle is far larger than conventional wisdom suggests, and the strident wings of progressivism and conservatism are far smaller. Progressive Activists are not representative of most liberal Americans, Devoted Conservatives are not representative of most conservative Americans. Yet both sides have absorbed a caricature of the other.

Most Americans are appalled by our politics, but many are also conditioned by it. How then do we restore perspective and reconnect Americans across the dividing lines of difference? And how do we do this at scale? This is the question that we are asking ourselves every day at More in Common in the United States as well as in France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The forces that are driving polarization and social fracturing are profoundly powerful: from rising inequality and economic insecurity to the media echo chambers and the bewildering pace of social and demographic change. All this is happening against a backdrop of fears of crime and terrorism, which further heighten people's perception of threat and accelerate their retreat into their tribal identities. Authoritarian populists across the world see this as a moment ripe with opportunity to take power.<sup>30</sup> These forces are in play not just in the United States but across the world, and they are much greater than any individual president, prime minister, campaign or media organization. Unfortunately, there is every reason to expect that these forces will intensify in the foreseeable future.

Combating us-versus-them tribalism and polarization may be one of the greatest social and political challenges of the digital age. As much as building a just and democratic society requires thousands of initiatives large and small, so does defending one from these threats. It may well take a generation, but these efforts start with understanding how we can effectively counter this polarization.

This report is not intended to provide a blueprint for those efforts, but it shows how much such a blueprint is needed. We hope that by building on the insights in this report:

- Political candidates can speak to the values that unify the nation with a larger “we,” instead of mobilizing their base while polarizing the country.
- Activists and advocates can broaden their appeals to the underlying values of those they don’t usually reach.
- Philanthropists can invest creatively in the thousand points of light that can show us a way forward to counter polarization and develop robust evaluation measures to prove impact.
- Creative artists and media can spotlight the extraordinary ways in which Americans in local communities build bridges and not walls, every day.
- Technology companies can turn their vast resources and analytical tools to creating platforms and systems that help do the hard work of bringing people together, rather than the easy work of magnifying outrage in echo chambers and filter bubbles.
- Leaders in government, business and nonprofits can apply the lens of integration to every context where Americans are brought together - from schooling and town planning to office layouts and volunteer activities, creating spaces that connect people together across the lines of difference.

All these efforts, though small in their own way, are needed if we are to build stronger communities and a country more unified and more resilient to division. More in Common is one of many organizations that can help galvanize a much larger ecosystem of local and national solutions that can counter the forces of fragmentation and bring us together around all that we have in common.

In tackling this threat, America has one great asset unrivalled in the world: a powerful story of national identity that, at its core, is idealistic, hopeful and inclusive. It is a story that calls the nation and its people to act with virtue and against division; that speaks to the better angels of our nature.

America today needs a renewed sense of national identity, one that fosters a common vision for a future in which every American can feel that they belong and are respected. National identity can be the force that unifies people to overcome the polarization that has been the focus of this report.

Of course, much more is needed than just powerful words. Polarization and tribalism are the consequence of complex economic and social forces and enduring historical injustices. But vision and idealism have long played central roles in America’s national story. Most Americans still regard that story as a tale of progress.

## NOTES

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- <sup>29</sup> One of the best such examples is the 2015 episode of This American Life in 2015 involving a social media troll who is confronted with the effects of his vicious online attacks on a female writer: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/545/if-you-dont-have-something-nice-to-say-say-it-in-all-caps>
- <sup>30</sup> As Friedrich von Hayek (1944) wrote in *The Road To Serfdom*: "The contrast between the 'we' and the 'they,' the common fight against those outside the group, seems to be an essential ingredient in any creed which will solidly knit together a group for common action. It is consequently always employed by those who seek, not merely support of a policy, but the unreserved allegiance of huge masses. From their point of view it has the great advantage of leaving them greater freedom of action than almost any positive programme."

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

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## Appendix 2

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# Appendix 1.1 - Full demographic data for Hidden Tribes

## 1.1.1 GENDER, AGE, RACE

Segment	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
<b>GENDER</b>								
Male	48%	50%	48%	40%	45%	46%	57%	56%
Female	52%	50%	52%	60%	55%	54%	43%	44%
<b>AGE</b>								
18-29	21%	28%	17%	28%	27%	19%	15%	8%
30-44	25%	30%	20%	29%	31%	21%	18%	17%
45-64	34%	30%	35%	32%	30%	37%	38%	41%
65+	20%	13%	28%	11%	12%	23%	30%	34%
<b>RACE</b>								
White	69%	80%	76%	57%	60%	66%	79%	88%
Black	12%	3%	9%	20%	17%	16%	6%	4%
Hispanic	12%	10%	8%	12%	17%	11%	10%	5%
Asian	4%	3%	4%	7%	4%	4%	3%	2%
Native American	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Mixed	2%	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Other	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%

## 1.1.2 REGION, GEOGRAPHY

Segment	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
<b>REGION</b>								
Northeast	18%	22%	19%	19%	17%	18%	16%	15%
Midwest	22%	22%	25%	24%	22%	23%	21%	21%
South	38%	31%	30%	37%	40%	39%	40%	45%
West	22%	25%	25%	20%	21%	20%	23%	19%
<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>								
Urban	29%	37%	31%	33%	33%	26%	22%	17%
Suburban	48%	51%	48%	47%	43%	48%	50%	55%
Rural	23%	12%	21%	21%	24%	26%	28%	28%

## 1.1.3 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Segment	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
<b>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</b>								
Did not graduate from high school	18%	22%	19%	19%	17%	18%	16%	15%
High school graduate	22%	22%	25%	24%	22%	23%	21%	21%
Some college, but college degree (yet)	38%	31%	30%	37%	40%	39%	40%	45%
2-year college degree	22%	25%	25%	20%	21%	20%	23%	19%
4-year college degree	19%	32%	26%	17%	11%	18%	19%	21%
Post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)	10%	27%	22%	4%	4%	11%	10%	9%

### 1.1.4 ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Segment	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME								
Less than \$20K	17%	7%	10%	25%	26%	11%	14%	5%
\$20,000 - \$49,999	31%	23%	29%	33%	36%	30%	29%	24%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	26%	33%	27%	21%	23%	30%	28%	32%
\$100,000 or more	13%	25%	20%	7%	5%	13%	15%	21%
Prefer not to say	13%	13%	15%	14%	10%	15%	14%	18%

### 1.1.5 RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Segment	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
RELIGIOUS IDENTITY								
Protestant	35%	13%	28%	26%	32%	41%	45%	56%
Roman Catholic	20%	10%	19%	13%	20%	21%	26%	27%
Mormon	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	2%	2%
Jewish	2%	6%	4%	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Buddhist	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Atheist	5%	23%	8%	9%	2%	4%	1%	0%
Agnostic	6%	18%	12%	8%	2%	5%	2%	2%
Nothing in particular	23%	23%	21%	33%	30%	19%	13%	8%

## 1.1.6 PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Segment	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
PARTY IDENTIFICATION								
Strong Democrat	20%	56%	39%	24%	15%	21%	6%	1%
Not very strong Democrat	14%	12%	16%	21%	15%	15%	7%	2%
Strong Republican	13%	1%	1%	1%	10%	10%	32%	37%
Not very strong Republican	13%	0%	4%	4%	15%	17%	20%	20%
Lean Democrat	9%	23%	20%	13%	4%	9%	1%	0%
Lean Republican	8%	1%	3%	3%	6%	9%	16%	27%
Independent	19%	7%	14%	28%	26%	17%	16%	12%
Not sure	4%	0%	2%	5%	8%	2%	2%	0%

## 1.1.7 IDEOLOGY

Segment	All	Progressive Activists	Traditional Liberals	Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Moderates	Traditional Conservatives	Devoted Conservatives
IDEOLOGY								
Very liberal	7%	37%	8%	8%	3%	3%	2%	0%
Liberal	18%	44%	45%	28%	10%	13%	5%	1%
Moderate	34%	17%	38%	38%	39%	42%	27%	17%
Conservative	29%	1%	5%	10%	27%	33%	55%	67%
Very Conservative	4%	0%	0%	1%	4%	4%	9%	14%
Not sure	8%	1%	3%	15%	18%	5%	3%	0%

## Appendix 1.2 - Variables used for cluster analysis

The following categories of questions were used to construct the cluster analysis that yielded the 7 Hidden Tribes segments.

Political landscape [13 measures]

Political Activism and Civic Participation [10 measures]

Core Beliefs [27 measures]

- Ideology [6]
- Threat perception [1]
- Parenting style and authoritarianism [5]
- Moral Foundations Theory [10]
- Victimhood [5]

Lived experience [8 measures]

- Racial differences [1]
- Diversity of network [3]
- Adverse experiences [4]

## Appendix 1.3 - Sample sizes and Margins of Error (95% Confidence Interval)

	Core beliefs and Demographics (N)	Margin of error	Issue Area Specifics (N)	Margin of error
<b>GROUP</b>				
All	7955*	1%	1994	2%
Progressive Activists	983	3%	240	6%
Traditional Liberals	1,034	3%	249	6%
Passive Liberals	1,079	3%	294	6%
Politically Disengaged	1,612	1%	406	5%
Moderates	1,304	3%	327	5%
Traditional Conservatives	1,428	3%	344	5%
Devoted Conservatives	515	4%	134	8%

\*Note: 45 respondents from the 8,000 sample were excluded on the basis of response quality

## Appendix 2.1 - Full question texts

### 2.1.1 Figure 0.4 - Beliefs of the Devoted Conservatives

---

#### FIRST COLUMN

Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:

**Men and women each have different roles to play in society**

- Strongly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Strongly agree

**People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed**

- Strongly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Strongly agree

**How much control do you feel most people have over the way their life turns out?**

- People who work hard can find success no matter what situation they were born into
- Some people's situations are so challenging that no amount of work will allow them to find success

---

#### SECOND COLUMN

**For the following pair of traits, which one you think is more important for a child to have?**

- Well-behaved
- Creative

**I am proud to be [INSERT AMERICAN]**

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6
- 5
- 4 - Neither agree or disagree
- 3
- 2
- 1 - Strongly disagree

**How important to you are each of the following parts of your identity? [INSERT RELIGION]**

- 7 - Very important
- 6
- 5
- 4 - Neither important nor unimportant
- 3
- 2
- 1 - Not at all important

## 2.1.2 Figure 0.5 - Beliefs of the Progressive Activists

### --- FIRST COLUMN

**Which statement do you agree with more?**

- Government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for
- People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves

**Which statement do you agree with more?**

- People are largely responsible for their own outcomes in life
- People's outcomes in life are determined largely by forces outside of their control

**For the following pair of traits, which one you think is more important for a child to have?**

- Curiosity
- Good manners

---

## SECOND COLUMN

### Which do you agree with more?

- Nowadays men do not have any real advantages over women in America
- Many men today don't recognize the real advantages they have

**Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:  
I am proud of my country's history.**

- Strongly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Strongly agree

### Which do you agree with more?

- Nowadays white people do not have any real advantages over others
- Many white people today don't recognize the real advantages they have

## 2.1.3 Figure 2.1 - Activism and Ideology

**Here is a list of activities that some people get a chance to participate in and others don't. Which of the following have you taken part in in the past year?**

- Attended a protest, rally, or march
- Donated money to an advocacy group or political organization
- Attended a political meeting
- Called Congress or another political representative
- Shared political content on social media
- Voted in a local election
- Donated blood
- Donated money to my place of worship
- None of the above

**Ideology Index combining the following questions:  
Which statement do you agree with more?**

- Government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for
- People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves

**Which statement do you agree with more?**

- People are largely responsible for their own outcomes in life
- People's outcomes in life are determined largely by forces outside of their control

**How much control do you feel most people have over the way their life turns out?**

- People who work hard can find success no matter what situation they were born into
- Some people's situations are so challenging that no amount of work will allow them to find success

**When people commit crimes or acts of violence it is usually because...**

- they are hateful or ignorant
- they are in difficult or unfair circumstances

**Which of the following played a greater role in getting you where you are today?**

- Hard work and effort
- Luck and circumstance

## 2.1.4 Figure 4.3 - Strength of Group Identities

Questions from left to right

Index score combining the following questions:

**Identity satisfaction:**

1. I am proud to be [INSERT PARTY PARTY/ GENDER/ IDEOLOGY/ RACE/ NATIONAL IDENTITY/ RELIGION]

**Identity importance**

2. How important to you are each of the following parts of your identity? [INSERT PARTY PARTY/ GENDER/ IDEOLOGY/ RACE/ NATIONAL IDENTITY/ RELIGION]
  - 7 - Very important
  - 6
  - 5
  - 4 - Neither important nor unimportant
  - 3
  - 2
  - 1 - Not at all important

### Identity centrality

3. I often think about the fact that I am [INSERT PARTY PARTY/ GENDER/ IDEOLOGY/ RACE/ NATIONAL IDENTITY/ RELIGION]
- 7 - Strongly agree
  - 6
  - 5
  - 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
  - 3
  - 2
  - 1 - Strongly disagree

### Identity in-group homogeneity

4. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [INSERT PARTY PARTY/ GENDER/ IDEOLOGY/ RACE/ NATIONAL IDENTITY/ RELIGION] have a lot in common with each other.
- 7 - Strongly agree
  - 6
  - 5
  - 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
  - 3
  - 2
  - 1 - Strongly disagree

## 2.1.5 Figure 4.4 - Racial Identity and Attitudes on Various Issues

The racial identification index was created using the same variables as Figure 4.3

**Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? To fix America, we need a strong leader who is willing to break the rules**

- Strongly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Strongly agree

**Which do you agree with more?**

- Professional athletes should be required to stand during the national anthem at their games
- Professional athletes should be able to kneel in an act of protest during the national anthem at their games

**Which do you agree with more? Confederate Civil War monuments are...**

- symbols of Southern pride
- symbols of racism

**Which do you agree with more?**

- Undocumented immigrants who arrived as children and grown up here should be protected from deportation and given the chance to earn citizenship.
- The government should be able to deport anyone living in America who doesn't have a legal right to be here.

## 2.1.6 Figure 4.5 - Feelings and Identification with Gender

Questions from left to right

**For the following questions, we would like to get your feelings toward a number of groups on a 'feeling thermometer.' A rating of 0 means you feel completely cold and negative, while a 100 means you feel completely warm and positive. A score of 50 means you feel neither warm nor cold.**

Click on thermometer to give your rating.

- American men
- American women

**How much do each of the following groups share your values?**

- American men
- American women
  - Don't share my values at all
  - Mostly don't share my values
  - Share some of my values
  - Share nearly all of my values

The gender identification index was created using the same variables as Figure 4.3

## 2.1.7 Figure 4.8 - Perceived Threat

**Do you favor or oppose the following: Temporarily preventing people from some majority Muslim countries from entering the US**

- Strongly favor
- Moderately favor
- Slightly favor
- Slightly oppose
- Moderately oppose
- Strongly oppose

**In your opinion, how common are acts of terrorism in the United States today?**

- Very common
- Somewhat common
- Not that common
- Not at all common

**Which do you agree with more?**

- The government's refugee screening process works well to keep us safe.
- The government's refugee screening process is not tough enough to keep out possible terrorists.

## 2.1.8 Figure 4.9 - Differences in Authoritarianism

**For the following pair of traits, which one you think is more important for a child to have?**

- Independence
- Respect for elders

**For the following pair of traits, which one you think is more important for a child to have?**

- Obedience
- Self-reliance

**For the following pair of traits, which one you think is more important for a child to have?**

- Well-behaved
- Creative

**For the following pair of traits, which one you think is more important for a child to have?**

- Curiosity
- Good manners

## 2.1.8 Figure 4.10 - Differences in Authoritarianism

**Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? To fix America, we need a strong leader who is willing to break the rules**

- Strongly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Strongly agree

## 2.1.9 Figure 4.11 - Shifts in the moral bedrock

Index score of items drawn from Moral Foundations Theory

**Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:**

- Strongly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Strongly agree

### **[CARE]**

- Compassion for those who are suffering is the most important virtue in a person.
- One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.

### **[FAIRNESS]**

- When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.
- Justice is the most important requirement for a society.

### **[AUTHORITY]**

- Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.
- Men and women each have different roles to play in society.

### **[LOYALTY]**

- I am proud of my country's history.
- People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.

### [PURITY]

- People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.
- I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.

## 2.1.10 Figure 4.14 - Personal responsibility and Political Approval

Questions from top to bottom

### Which statement do you agree with more?

- People are largely responsible for their own outcomes in life
- People's outcomes in life are determined largely by forces outside of their control

### Please tell us whether you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of the following individuals or groups.

- Donald Trump
- Barack Obama
  - Very favourable
  - Somewhat favourable
  - Neither favourable or unfavourable
  - Somewhat unfavourable
  - Very unfavourable

## 2.1.11 Figure 4.15 - Race and Responsibility

Questions from top to bottom

### Which statement do you agree with more?

- People are largely responsible for their own outcomes in life
- People's outcomes in life are determined largely by forces outside of their control

### Which do you agree with more?

- Many people nowadays don't take racism seriously enough
- Many people nowadays are too sensitive about things to do with race

### Which do you agree with more?

- The police are often more violent towards African Americans than others
- The police are mostly fair towards people of every race

### Which do you agree with more?

- Black Lives Matter has brought attention to important issues
- Black Lives Matter has made racial tensions worse

## 2.1.12 Figure 5.8 - Divides Between the Wings

**For the following questions, we would like to get your feelings toward a number of groups on a 'feeling thermometer.' A rating of 0 means you feel completely cold and negative, while a 10 means you feel completely warm and positive. A score of 5 means you feel neither warm nor cold.**

Click on a thermometer to give your rating.

- |                                      |                        |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| - Supporters of Donald Trump         | - Mexicans             |
| - Black Lives Matter activists       | - American men         |
| - Supporters of Hillary Clinton      | - White Americans      |
| - National Rifle Association members | - Police officers      |
| - Evangelical Christians             | - Hispanic Americans   |
| - Muslim Americans                   | - African Americans    |
| - Feminists                          | - Asian Americans      |
| - Refugees                           | - Single mothers       |
| - Gun owners                         | - American women       |
| - Immigrants                         | - US military veterans |
| - Lesbian and gay people             |                        |

## 2.1.13 Figure 7.1 - American Identity

Questions from top to bottom

### SATISFACTION

**I am proud to be [INSERT 'AMERICAN']**

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6
- 5
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3
- 2
- 1 - Strongly disagree

## **IMPORTANCE**

**How important to you are each of the following parts of your identity? [INSERT 'AMERICAN']**

- 7 - Very important
- 6
- 5
- 4 - Neither important nor unimportant
- 3
- 2
- 1 - Not at all important

## **CENTRALITY**

**I often think about the fact that I am [INSERT 'AMERICAN']**

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6
- 5
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3
- 2
- 1 - Strongly disagree

## **IN-GROUP HOMOGENEITY**

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?[INSERT 'AMERICAN'] have a lot in common with each other**

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6
- 5
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3
- 2
- 1 - Strongly disagree



