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## FOCUS GROUP REPORT

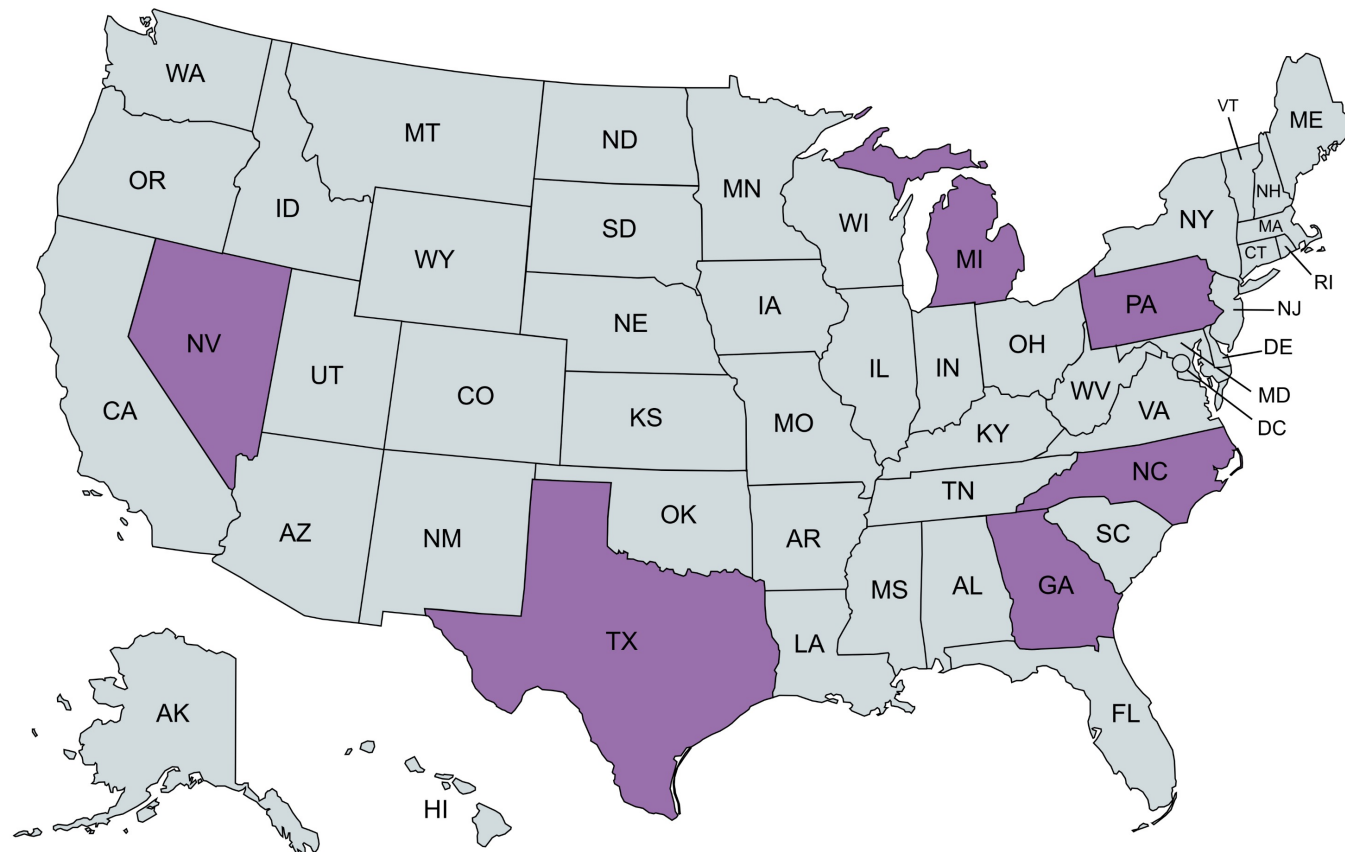
Thursday, June 25, 2026

First- and Second-Generation  
Americans on America at 250



# Methodology

On June 3, 2026, GBAO conducted one online focus group with first-<sup>\*\*</sup> and second-generation<sup>\*\*\*</sup> American independents and weak partisans in battleground presidential and Senate states\* as part of Navigator's exploration of America at 250.



<sup>\*\*</sup>American citizens who immigrated to the U.S. as teenagers or adults

\*GA, MI, NC, NV, PA, TX

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>At least one parent immigrated to the U.S. as an adult

# Key Takeaways

- Most see individual freedoms and a respect for laws as central to American values
- Economic opportunity drew immigrants to America, but many now see the country in decline and American Dream under threat
- Political divisiveness is seen as corrosive and entrenched
- Many are nonetheless grateful for the opportunity they or their parents had to come to America

# Being An American Means Having Personal Liberties, But Also Following American Laws

Moderator: What does it mean to be an American?

“On paper, I guess to be an American, I mean, you're a citizen and **you adhere to American laws**, I'd say you're an American.”  
– PA man, second-generation weak Republican

“Freedom of choice, freedom of speech, freedom of doing things that you would like to do. And obviously it means **law-abiding freedom**, in boundaries, but still there is freedom.” – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

“Being an American is this feeling of be[ing] free, equality. In some way, a **pursuit of happiness**, no matter of which way. But I believe everybody that we are here in this nation, we pursue that in either way, pursuit of happiness and freedom.” – GA woman, first-generation independent

“**God, capitalism, freedom, making money**. People coming from all over the world, living, have a family, raise kids without worrying about oppression like in other countries.” – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat



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# The American Dream Is Central To American Identity, And Described As Economic Freedom

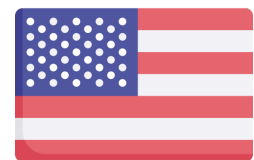
Moderator: What does the American Dream mean to you?

“People come to this country seeking a better life for themselves. I know for my own family, things happen and you find a way to be able to try to at least get ahead and give your children a chance to get ahead as well.” – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican



“The American Dream is **having your own house**. Basically that's where it goes, having your own freedom when you have your own house.” – TX man, first-generation weak Democrat

“My parents are the epitome of the American Dream. My dad and mom came with a suitcase and a couple hundred bucks, and then not even ten years later, they owned their own house, they had me, both got stable jobs, just working hard. And I feel like nowadays I don't think you can do that anymore.” – PA man, second-generation weak Republican



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# But Many See That Dream As Dead Or Dying

"I still think it is a land of opportunity. I just think **where we're heading as a nation is concerning**, and if we can turn the tides, I think we can still be that great nation that when everybody says that America is a great nation, I think it still can be there. It's not too late." – TX man, first-generation weak Democrat

"I think the **best days of America were back then**. It's hard to live the American Dream—home, car, family. It just seems impossible these days." – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat

"[The American Dream is] the opportunity or the chance to do what you need to do. Although I would say it has become difficult, but it's still there if the opportunity rises. **It's really a deck of cards and whatever's handed to you is what you get.**" – NV man, first-generation independent

"The quality of life of people, the middle class...[the] American middle class was the statement or the picture of perfection...**but that dream is slowly declining**....A person cannot even go and afford a house anymore on their beginning salary." – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

"I wish I can say that I own a home at my age, but I do not. I just feel like inflation in general has **made that impossible**....I have medical stuff that has happened along the way in my own personal life that has prevented that. But my dad, I will say, he's been able to have the American Dream." – NV woman, second-generation weak Republican

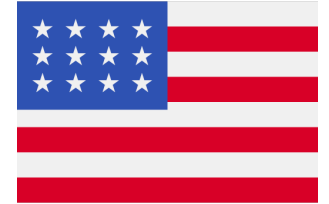


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# American Exceptionalism Used To Be Unquestionable—Which Makes The Country's Perceived Decline All The More Startling

Moderator: Do you think of America as the greatest country on earth?

"Everybody wanted to move here in the United States. So there was this big sense of pride....And I mean, they still do, people still come here, but I just feel like over time that sense of pride—or **people don't look at us or view us the same way they once used to**. And so that's why I feel like, as of now, the best days are behind, but hey, who knows?" – TX man, first-generation weak Democrat



"I definitely will tell you that up to **even 10 years ago, our values were so different from what they are now, and we're totally losing sight of who we're supposed to be as a nation**. That doesn't mean that the people who work on each day to keep that dream alive isn't doing what they're supposed to. I feel like our government is letting us down completely." – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

"I think **America still is the greatest country, but...it's definitely declining**, especially from an economic perspective....Starting off on your own, getting a house, starting a family, it's extremely hard nowadays." – PA man, second-generation weak Republican

"I think [America is the greatest country in the world] **only for the great outdoors of America**. The whole of America, it's so beautiful. There is so much to explore. But if someone was to ask me about the political environment, the sentiments of the people, I wouldn't think that that is right as of now....I've been here for 15 years, and I'm already seeing the **decline right in front of my eyes**." – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

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# The American Flag Communicates Power And Should Be Respected, Not Memeified

Moderator: Thinking about the American flag – what does it symbolize to you?

“It definitely means **sacrifice**. And you have to **respect...the symbol**, if not necessarily the people behind it.” – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

“When I was a kid, we were doing the Pledge of Allegiance every morning, God Bless America in the afternoon....So I **look at the flag, I see all respect, but I also see power**....There are people out there that have different views, but my view is respect at my age....I just grew up with that flag in my face.” – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat

“Everyone in the world knows the American flag. The only thing is I **do not like the use of [the] American flag in various objects**, especially on 4th of July people are wearing maybe swim trunks with [the] American flag or undergarments with [the] American flag and all that. **It kind of makes it a meme rather than a symbol of power** in one nation.” – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

“I think the flag represents **the blood that's been spilled** and lives that have been lost to protect that freedom that sometimes we take for granted.” – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

“I think it's a **symbol of pride**, of national pride. It's a symbol of patriotism. And I think it's a symbol of sacrifice of what it took to keep us free from other nations.” – PA man, second-generation weak Republican

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# To Some, America's Identity As A "Christian Nation" Is Critical, While Others Emphasize Separation Of Church And State

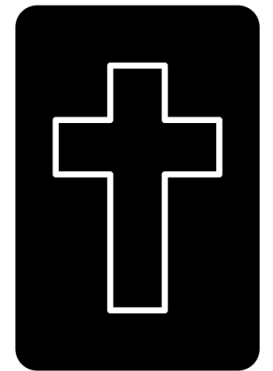
"I was raised Catholic, but...the flag and the Star of David or the Holy Bible, [I] never saw those together because **there's so many religions in this country, and that's what this country's about.** So, if you're going to have the Holy Bible, you might as well have everything else." – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat

"[America] was founded upon Christian values. So, America is influenced quite a bit by Christian values. I don't have a problem personally, but I still **think having a separation of church and state is an important aspect to keep...**because there's so many people [and] different walks of life....I don't think that should be a problem." – TX man, first-generation weak Democrat

"The Founding Fathers based our country on **Christian values**, and up until a couple of decades ago, that seemed to be the major thing, and it has switched....And I feel that's when we began to lose our way a bit." – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

"I'm Catholic...and I love the Holy Bible, but I **respect the difference and the freedom that every person living in this nation has.**" – GA woman, first-generation independent

"I still feel that America itself was built upon Christian values, and while anyone is free to practice their own religion...**we should try and stay close to Christian values** in the way we make our laws and conduct ourselves as a country." – PA man, second-generation weak Republican



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# Getting American Citizenship, Seeing The Statue Of Liberty, And Celebrating Holidays Bring Out Pride In America

Moderator: Tell me about times or a time you celebrated being American

“The day that I was an American citizen, I did my citizenship, I was very, really, really happy, and that was a great day for me and my family.” – GA woman, first-generation independent

“Well, when I was like 14 years old, I went to New York [and] saw the Statue of Liberty from a boat. That felt good. And for some reason, the Big Apple....That made me feel American.” – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat

“Every July 4th I celebrate. I just think when you see the fireworks, you just zoom out and think, ‘Okay, I’m an American. This is an American tradition. I’m proud to be an American.’ And that’s about all I really celebrate being American.” – PA man, second-generation weak Republican

“When I first saw the Statue of Liberty in person. That was kind of like, ‘okay, I have arrived’ kind of thing. So that was really the most American I felt, and it was really an overwhelming feeling of pride, of happiness, as well as, I don’t know, a connection.” – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican



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# The Actions Of The Trump Administration And Erosion Of Democratic Norms Make Some Less Proud Of Being American

Moderator: When did you feel less proud to be an American?

"I'm sure many of us has encountered some kind of racism [but] that is just stupidity of a few people. Most of the people that I have encountered are so welcoming and so kind that I don't even pay attention to those few ones that do those kind of things. But the most un-American thing that is going on is from the White House and nowhere else." – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

"I was a big supporter at one point of this administration, but now I think it is getting a bit out of hand. I think it's making me question if we're really doing things the American way....**We're engaged in war with no congressional approval** because of no interest of our own, crashing our gas prices....This is very dictatorial." – PA man, second-generation weak Republican

"When I think of being un-American, this country's made [of] people [who] come here to make a living, and it's freedom getting to make money, but I don't like greed, and **there's too much greed going on by corporations. And to me, that's un-American.**" – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat

"I think just the negative news that are coming in these days, you kind of feel ashamed to be a part of that. Like **the war, the threats**, or whatever's going on these days that would immediately presume to be an American thing." – NV man, first-generation independent

"I would say the embarrassment that we feel from calls back home when they talk about some of the stuff that is said in the news by the president...being at that level and talking and representing the great America, and then talking in circles. So I get calls, and **people are like, 'what's going on with your country?' And all that. So it's very embarrassing.**"  
– MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

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# Many Are Grateful For The Opportunity They Or Their Parents Had To Come To America, Even If The Journeys Weren't Easy

Moderator: Why/how did you/your family immigrate to this country?

"[Immigrating] was my mom's decision. It was more financial decision because she had some issues in our country over there, so that made her come with us, my brothers and I. And here, it's different, so she makes us live with school, with more opportunities. And she always said **that the most important is to have security**, something that we didn't find in our country." – GA woman, first-generation independent

"Thinking back to whether I stayed where I was versus being here, it really drills down to the opportunity. **The things that I've accomplished here, I would not have been able to do it there.** I now own a house, I have a proper job, and all those things. I just think America gave it to me."

– NV man, first-generation independent

"[My mother] basically had a lot of appreciation for the US, and she, definitely, to me, was kind of almost a hyper-patriot, but that was okay. **She loved it here because it gave her and the family the chance to be able to do what they dreamed they had wanted to do.**" – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

"I was a teenager when I moved here, I was 14 at the time, so I always thought of America, this great nation...[as] a land of opportunity. That's the first thing that came in my mind. **When I moved here, I was like, 'I made it. I'm here. This is a land of opportunity that I used to hear about.'**" – TX man, first-generation weak Democrat

"My dad is from the Philippines. He didn't come here until he was, I believe, 19....I know that my dad came from the slums of the Philippines. They literally lived in a hut sitting over water. And my family over there still...it's still the same....I'm **glad that my dad was given the opportunity to come over here and be an American citizen.**" – NV woman, second-generation weak Republican

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# While Coming To America The “Right Way” Is Important, Some Acknowledge That Not Every Situation Is Black And White

Moderator: Sometimes people tell me their family came “the right way” compared to other immigrants – what do you think of that?

“My dad had a sham of a marriage, brought somebody illegally. I mean, married to bring a Filipino woman over to get her in the States. He was paid to do this [by] another family. And it's crazy because she had to be living in our home, and **obviously, what my dad was doing was illegal, but it ended up being...he actually fell in love with this woman, and they actually were together for many, many years.**” – NV woman, second-generation weak Republican

“I feel very strongly about coming the right way or the wrong way. So basically, someone who is crossing the borders illegally or those kind of things, that does not sit well with me because being an Indian for us now, the line for a green card is more than 17 or 20 years long....And another person who just has to cross a border to come here and be part of the community without contributing anything, that just does not sit well with me.” – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

“I’m on the stance that **there cannot be any wrong way entries.** I mean, what is a country with no border? I think it’s just a security thing, I have nothing against. I have actually friends whose parents have come illegally on a personal level. Each person’s different, and there’s great people that come in the wrong way. But I think just as a country, you can’t have people coming in, you have no idea who they are.” – PA man, second-generation weak Republican

“Back in 1970-probably-7, '78, my father snuck my cousin across the border in the trunk of a car. And it's terrible, I know, but he turned out to be a really good person....So I can't say too much about people doing right or wrong because we all have our stories and there's reasons why things take place. Doesn't make it right or wrong. It's just a fact.” – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

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# Many View Politics Today As Hopelessly Divisive And Both Parties As Part Of The Problem

"I'm not going to say that I think either [party] hates America....I just think we're so divided. It almost seems like as if that we hate America because of how divided we are." – NV woman, second-generation weak Republican

"I think that the last time these two parties were in agreement was when the 9/11 attacks had happened and then those two parties came together, and I think it was on the congressional steps, they were singing 'God Bless America.' That's the only time I've seen really unity in my lifetime with these two parties, but they have the complete exact opposite views of each other. And that's what's dividing this country." – TX man, first-generation weak Democrat

"I personally feel that [the two parties are] both just the two sides of the same coin....And when one pushes something that they want us to do or believe in or practice, the second party is there to push us in the wrong direction....And **they divide the people as a whole**, and that's why I feel that neither side have our interest at heart. They basically are there for themselves...they do not [love America]." – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

"**We as a nation right now are too divisive, like two opposite poles.** I think it's just in general, we're on the extreme sides." – NV man, first-generation independent

"**The polarization is by design.** The only way you can rule over people is by dividing them." – MI woman, first-generation independent lean Republican

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# Although Some Don't Feel In The Mood To Celebrate America 250, Others Feel It Is A Good Opportunity To Come Together

Moderator: What plans do you have to celebrate America's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday?

"We can't, as a nation, celebrate as one entity if it's on a national level. On a community level, sure, we can throw our 4th of July parties here and there, but I don't know. We're just on polar opposites right now." – NV man, first-generation independent

"We're being divided, perhaps, on purpose. Who knows? But the fact of the matter is it would be fun, it would really be nice to see people come together, but I don't think that's going to happen." – NC woman, second-generation independent lean Republican

"It's about celebrating our country. It's not about politics....Everybody wants to make it political. It's not about politics. It's about our country and our Founding Fathers." – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat

"It's about our country united as one....I'm going to be a rockstar that day. I'm going to wear an American flag, and I'm going to the Freedom Fest and watch Keith Urban and all the concerts and have a good time and watch the fireworks show." – TX man, second-generation independent lean Democrat



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## About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO.

## About the Study

On June 3, 2026, GBAO conducted one online focus group with first-\*\* and second-generation\*\*\* American independents and weak partisans in battleground presidential and Senate states\* as part of Navigator's exploration of America at 250.

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