

## Cultural Research Center

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### *America's Values Study: Report #01*

## America's Values Identify Possible Means to National Unity

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Recent national surveys have reported that Americans no longer trust most politicians or either of the major political parties, and believe the media are fanning the flames of division. Americans also believe the country is moving in the wrong direction and fear for the future of the nation's democracy. Add the ravages of inflation and the threat of a recession to the political chaos, and what's left is a nation wondering if we will find our way back to solidarity and unity.

The latest national research from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University offers possible answers—identifying a number of core values widely shared by the vast majority of Americans that point to common ground within this context of cultural polarization.

A pair of nationwide surveys, commissioned by AmericasOne Founder Marc Nuttle to examine the national dilemma, may have identified a pathway for America's leaders to follow that will restore hope, trust, and unity.

The *America's Values Study* evaluated four dozen different values to determine what Americans say defines them and their life. The initial report shows substantial consensus, especially when it comes to the nation's primary core value of family, and the second highest-ranked value, happiness.

The remaining core values suggest Americans seek personal goodness (character, integrity, personal responsibility) and maturity (purpose, growth, hard work), and yearn for life experiences and conditions that revolve around freedom (justice, independence, property ownership) and reliability (stability, trustworthiness, and kindness).

Taken as a whole, the findings paint a very different portrait of Americans, one that shows considerable unity rather than division and polarization in the things we say matter most.

### **The Centrality of Values**

Every American possesses a collection of values that defines what is important, useful, and of worth to them—the things to which they are wholeheartedly committed and which they seek to have in their life. As such, values become standards and guiding ideals that influence our decisions and actions.

Values are constantly evident in everyday life. Social scientists assert that every culture is a reflection of the values that are most widely embraced by the people of that culture. It is further noted that each person adopts both "core" values, which are central to who you are, and "peripheral" values, which support the core values.

America is always a reflection of the core values of its population. Historical research<sup>1</sup> by David Barton and George Barna revealed that the core values of colonial Americans included civic duty, faith, family, frugality, hard work, humility, moderation, rule of law, and simplicity.

What are the core values of Americans these days? Have they changed in the last 250 years?

### Core Values Today

The surveys undertaken for AmericasOne found that Americans have embraced a number of values in common.

The primary value that emerged from the 48 unique values examined is family. Overall, 61% of adults said that family is a value they would be willing to fight or even die to protect or preserve. An additional 19% said they would be willing to sacrifice personal resources to retain family. In all, then, 80% would consider family to be a core value—something that defines them and their life.

The next most important core value of Americans is happiness. In total seven out of 10 (72%) held it as a core value: 35% were willing to fight or die to preserve their happiness, and a similar proportion (37%) are willing to sacrifice personal resources to maintain their happiness.

The only other values that at least six out of 10 adults are willing to die, fight, or sacrifice to preserve were justice (68%); personal independence (68%); character (65%); integrity (65%); kindness (65%); trustworthiness (64%); property ownership (64%); individual growth (64%); hard work (62%); purpose and meaning in life (62%); and stability (60%).

The Core Values of Americans in 2022					
	Fight for/ die for	Sacrifice resources	Argue in support	Do not feel strongly	Would not defend
Family	61%	19%	14%	4%	2%
Happiness	35	37	21	6	2
Justice	38	30	25	5	2
Personal independence	38	30	24	5	3
Integrity	34	31	27	5	3
Kindness	32	33	28	4	3
Character	31	34	26	6	2
Trustworthiness	32	32	28	6	3
Property ownership	32	32	25	8	4
Individual growth	29	35	28	7	2
Purpose/Meaning of life	33	29	29	8	2
Hard work	28	34	30	6	3
Stability	27	33	30	7	3

Source: *America's Values Study*, commissioned by AmericasOne, conducted by Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N=3,725 adults, July 2022.

### The Values Profile of America

These values, when combined, paint a very different portrait of Americans than political leaders and media pundits have pushed regarding the nation's citizenry.

First and foremost, recognizing the unrivaled importance of family offers a new way of perceiving the nation and its future. In a significant way, family is the lens through which tens of millions of Americans view the world and through which they make their choices. Whether it is a matter of public policies, personal preferences, lifestyle options, relationships, or other decisions, most Americans appear to evaluate those matters in terms of how it will affect their family.

With family as the perceptual framework for people's life choices and perspectives, the remaining core values suggest that they are also seeking personal goodness (character, integrity, personal responsibility) and maturity (purpose, growth, hard work). The type of life experiences and conditions they yearn for revolve around freedom (justice, independence, property ownership) and reliability (stability, trustworthiness, and kindness).

When those attributes are present and evolving, and the conditions facilitate their desired life, while nurturing and supporting the best interests of their family, the second most important core value, happiness, is achieved.

### **Support Values**

There is another class of values that may well serve as support values to those at the core. These more peripheral values are not as common among Americans, but exist to advance the importance and centrality of the core values.

The support values can be understood in relation to the life outcomes that our core values promote. For instance, the desire to experience freedom is supported by values such as opportunity, religious freedom, and patriotism. The pursuit of maturity is bolstered by secondary values such as self-control, thriftiness, and a simple lifestyle. People's interest in personal goodness is supported by values including humility, absolute moral truth, Christian faith, and non-discrimination.

### **Values of Limited Appeal**

The bottom portion of the values continuum included a dozen values that are of limited appeal or importance to Americans. Those least appealing values relate to either life experiences or life conditions.

The values representing the types of experiences that tested least positively included unconstrained sex, uncensored entertainment, universal empowerment, public recognition or fame, convenience, unrestrained choice, and winning.

The values associated with life conditions that rated poorly were strong government, limited government, eliminating hierarchies, private enterprise, and biblical morality.

Placed into a cultural profile, the picture that emerges is one of a nation in which people are seeking moderation rather than extremes. For instance, they are not interested in an extreme form of government (either too strong or too weak). They do not want all social structures or hierarchies eliminated. They typically reject biblical morality as it is perceived to be overly restrictive and inflexible. Americans want opportunities within reasonable boundaries.

The research also found that Americans are inclined to accept reasonable limitations on their lifestyle choices. In a society saturated with sexual imagery and messaging, most adults are not willing to fight for "unconstrained sex." Although our society is known for pushing the boundaries of entertainment, under the banners of free speech and freedom of expression, most Americans are not willing to fight or sacrifice for "uncensored entertainment." In a country where social media promises everyone the opportunity to achieve instant global notoriety, most adults are not interested in public recognition or fame as personal values.

Despite the nation's progressive elites constantly pushing for permissiveness, tolerance, indulgence, and pervasive equality, a minority of Americans place significant value on the likes of universal empowerment, cultural diversity, economic equality, and tolerance. Some political leaders champion the importance of constantly winning, but the most Americans are not beholden to the necessity of

always winning. Notwithstanding indications that the youngest adults feel entitled to an easy life, most Americans reject values such as “unrestrained choice” and “convenience.”

The Least Compelling Values of Americans in 2022					
	Fight for/ die for	Sacrifice resources	Argue in support	Do not feel strongly	Would not defend
Tolerance	22%	27%	35%	10%	5%
Economic equality	23	25	33	12	7
Cultural diversity	22	24	31	14	8
Belonging	22	23	33	16	6
Community	20	24	36	15	5
Convenience	18	25	36	17	5
Unrestrained choice	21	21	30	17	12
Biblical morality	24	17	23	18	18
Limited government	20	20	32	17	10
Private enterprise	19	20	32	20	9
Eliminating hierarchies	19	20	30	21	10
Winning	19	19	29	23	10
Strong government	19	18	34	19	11
Universal empowerment	18	19	32	21	11
Uncensored entertainment	17	18	27	20	18
Public recognition	15	16	25	28	16
Unconstrained sex	15	14	24	24	24

Source: *America's Values Study*, commissioned by AmericasOne, conducted by Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N=3,725 adults, July 2022.

### Wrong Narrative?

The pattern of preferred values Americans have adopted indicates that perhaps the prevailing narrative about who Americans are is inaccurate. Maybe we are, at our base, neither Democrat nor Republican, neither left nor right. Maybe we are not driven by desires for the grand life or expectations of an easy life. It may be that Americans are not the spiritually inclined individuals we are often portrayed as, but neither are we the morally decadent beings that some have posited. And it seems that perhaps we do not characterize each other by demographic labels as readily as do the media pundits.

The AmericasOne survey suggests that family is the dominant lens through which we understand life, but we want to define family on our own terms and are willing to fight and sacrifice to enjoy a robust family experience. The life that facilitates that journey includes the pursuit of personal goodness, consistency of character, seeking things that matter to us, and working hard in the process.

We are not as comfortable with extremist ideas as some cultural analysts have led us to believe. Our thirst for moderation leads us to appreciate some institutions but not others; therefore we are not predisposed to cancel them all, just those that are too disconnected from current reality and our views of what makes life desirable. We want to be appreciated for the value we add to our communities, but not necessarily to the point of seeking fame or widespread public recognition for our deeds.

Studies have shown that Americans—especially men—feel that they would enjoy a greater quantity of sexual experiences, but our values indicate we are not opting for the Kinsey-esque, anything-goes approach to sexuality.

We are displeased with our leaders across the board, not because they represent government or restrictive laws, but because they do not reflect our core values and have instead made government a monster that blocks our ability to champion the values that define us. We want to be patriotic, but not if it distorts our values through its policies and priorities.

## **The Path to Unity**

According to George Barna, who directed the research through the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University for AmericasOne, these revelations about what Americans truly value in life could bring long-term benefits to the country.

“If leaders grasp the importance of people’s values and the identity of our core values, one of the immediate benefits could be placing us on the road to unity,” the researcher explained.

“Rather than feeling as if we are engaged in a daily battle against the world because it doesn’t hear or acknowledge what matters to us, leadership that acknowledges and facilitates the pursuit of our core values could begin to reduce the widespread fear, anxiety, and misunderstanding that has gripped the nation for the past several decades,” according to Barna.

“While the data also show that no two population groups in the United States have exactly the same values profile, the data do show a startling consistency in the ranking of the importance of core values across dozens of population subgroups,” Barna pointed out.

“Paying attention to what matters to the public can initiate the process of identifying common ground rather than emphasizing differences. The emphasis on what we share in common is what will break down barriers between groups and provide a sense of common cause. But it will take bold and honest leaders to set aside ideological distinctives in favor of points of agreement,” he said.

“When we consider the values on which America was built,” Barna continued, “it is encouraging to find that a handful of the values embraced by early Americans remains intact: family, financial cautiousness, hard work, humility, and moderation. That speaks to the foundational nature of those attributes in the continuity of our republic. Rather than deny the existence of those long-cherished, proven core values, wise leaders will seize those as foundation stones for the future of the nation that connects us with our history.”

AmericasOne Founder Marc Nuttle states, “The authority of the family as the essential foundational element that secures the stability of society in the United States is the essence of what defines us as Americans. Empowerment of the family unit should be the objective of every elected official.”

## **About the Research**

This report is based upon data from a pair of companion surveys commissioned by AmericasOne that were conducted in July 2022. The first of those surveys, among a nationally representative sample of 2,275 adults, was administered online and took respondents an average of 21 minutes to complete. The second survey, administered to an online sample of 1,500 respondents, took an average of 22 minutes to complete. The sample for both surveys employed geographic quotas to replicate the population incidence in each of the nine Census divisions.

Among the factors studied in the surveys were reactions to 48 values. Each respondent was asked which of five responses best described their attitude toward the value in question, whether they:

- were willing to fight for/die to protect/preserve that value in your life
- were willing to sacrifice personal resources to retain that value
- were willing to argue in support of that value
- did not feel strongly one way or the other about that value
- or were not willing to defend that value

Reports related to that survey are accessible at [www.CulturalResearchCenter.com](http://www.CulturalResearchCenter.com).

AmericasOne is a community of values-driven individuals who are seeking to grow their families and businesses and would like to share their ideas and challenges in a supportive and trusted environment. AmericasOne is committed to equipping and engaging individuals and families who want meaningful, thoughtful reform that puts principles, not politicians, first. Members get the resources needed to advance the cause of freedom, free economic choice, and the core values that make America exceptional.

AmericasOne is founded by Marc Nuttle a lawyer, author, consultant, and businessman. He's represented and advised Presidents of the United States, leaders of foreign countries, state officials, and corporations. He has worked on government policy and is an expert at understanding, analyzing, and predicting economic and cultural trends. For more information on AmericasOne and the America's Values Research project, visit [www.AmericasOne.com](http://www.AmericasOne.com) or visit the [AmericasOne Facebook page](#).

### **About the Cultural Research Center**

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory*, other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation, and worldview-related surveys among the ACU student population. The groundbreaking ACU Student Worldview Inventory is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration is undertaken among students just prior to their graduation, enabling the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. The Center works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Access to the results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center is accessible at [www.CulturalResearchCenter.com](http://www.CulturalResearchCenter.com). Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at [www.ArizonaChristian.edu](http://www.ArizonaChristian.edu).

### Endnotes

1. See: David Barton and George Barna, *U-Turn: Restoring America to the Strengths of its Roots* (Frontline; 2014).