

Cultural Research Center



America's Values Study: Report #5 **A Different Take on the Midterm Election**

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Release Date: November 17, 2022

Try to imagine a nationwide event that involves more than 100 million active participants and boasts in excess of \$18 billion spent by the featured performers—and is widely considered to be a disappointment (if not a failure) based on the performance of the featured players and their organizations.

That's one take on the 2022 midterm election. It was a much anticipated and historic event that left most people underwhelmed and frustrated.

Research from the Cultural Research Center of Arizona Christian University and AmericasOne, however, offers a bold perspective on why that high-participation, high-profile, non-violent, top-of-the-news event left many people feeling empty—or even angry (as 73% admit to being). The explanation hinges on a simple but critical realization: The election failed to address the real needs and hopes of voters in favor of the self-interest of parties, politicians, and ideologues.

Voter Mindset

George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center, provides an unusual post-election analysis. He notes that even though two out of three adults (65%) say they are “very proud to be an American,” the mindset of Americans entering the November 8 contest for political supremacy was dark and tense. That mindset was exemplified in various ways:

- The major political parties and party leaders are out of touch with the core values of the people.¹
- Neither major political party, and only a handful of candidates, highlighted a comprehensive and compelling vision for America as the centerpiece of their campaign for voter support.²
- Candidates seeking to represent the public were heavily influenced—often to their detriment—by private, special interests.³
- More than seven out of 10 adults (71%) believe in both democracy and the American political system. They contend that the system itself is not broken, but is being abused by bad actors for personal gain.⁴
- The public maintains a deep and wide distrust of political officials, with a mere 7% expressing high levels of trust in Congress, and less than one out of four possessing high trust in the presidency or in the U.S. Supreme Court.⁵ Only one out of five adults (20%) trust the government to usually do the right thing.⁶
- Enormous numbers of citizens believe that many (if not most) of our public officials are corrupt and incompetent. Small proportions believe that high ethical standards are maintained by members of Congress (9%), state officeholders (12%), and local officeholders (22%). Close to six out of 10 adults (56%) claim that the government is corrupt.⁷

- The voting public is not immune to blame for the letdown. On the whole, voters were ill-informed and minimally motivated. Just 5% are enthusiastic about the way things are going in the United States. Only 21% said that candidates running for office this cycle did a good job of explaining their plans. And less than two out of every five adults (38%) said they had given a lot of thought to the election.⁸
- A minority (38%) are excited about America's future, and even fewer believe we are leaving our children a better nation than we inherited.⁹ In fact, six out of 10 adults (58%) expect the United States to be worse off five years from now unless we change tracks.¹⁰
- Only 3% said they are very satisfied with the way things are going in the United States today.¹¹ Despite a huge majority of Americans holding the belief that America is moving in the wrong direction for more than decade, the voting base did little to demand significant changes in the substance of political discussions and the selection of political leaders.

Rather than targeting their energy toward reforming the process, voters allowed themselves to be manipulated into one of three states of mind—indifference (the one-third of the voting public who simply accepted the situation); antagonism (some two-thirds of voters who held onto negative feelings or took negative actions against people of different political perspectives); or disconnection (the estimated 53% of the voting-eligible public who chose to sit out the election).¹²

Entering an undeniably significant election with a population mired in such a mindset requires leaders who reject business as usual in favor of a serious effort to address the maladies responsible for such public distress. Instead, the nation received an expensive, emotional, and intensive effort that mostly mirrored past elections in tone and objectives. Regardless of who was elected, the results were bound to leave Americans dissatisfied, perplexed, irritated, or even outraged. And they did.

With the 2024 primary elections scheduled to begin barely more than one year from now, the United States is poised to repeat the same mistakes—and to experience the same unfulfilling outcomes. Business leaders have long known that it is much easier to make tiny reforms in the system than to re-examine the entire enterprise and introduce radical reforms or to start over. Yet, casting a new eye toward our political conversation is imperative for the nation to experience more gratifying, serviceable, and productive governance.

A Different Approach

Working with colleagues at both the Cultural Research Center and AmericasOne, Barna developed a vast body of research that explored the worldview, the core values, and the political applications of those elements. The conclusion the team reached is that ***our political process has been sidetracked by self-interests, resulting in election cycles that divert everyone's attention from our national identity and from establishing a governance process that remains true to who we are.***

Americans have historically been a trusting and forgiving people. But when it comes to their own governance, perhaps they've trusted their political leaders too much and for too long. That trust has certainly been violated, and the result has been the incremental encroachment of a political class that has waged war against individuals and families. Powerful and well-resourced private parties—political, economic, informational, and educational organizations—have increasingly disrupted the political process in order to serve their self-interest at the nation's expense. They have redirected the public's attention and activity to foster their own advancement.

The result has been the gradual rise of dissatisfaction with government and the nation, and a lack of clarity regarding the future. Sadly, as educational institutions have ceased teaching young people about the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship, a sense of civic duty and knowledge about our governmental system have fallen by the wayside. Research regarding what Americans know about

fundamental documents such as the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the like, bear out this waning grasp of our rights, our heritage, and our future.

Barna and the team instead suggest that our chosen leaders should be held accountable by a voting public that operates with a different set of ideals and standards. Based on findings from the *America's Values Study*, he described some of those parameters:

- America's political system is based on selecting servant leaders. More than three out of four voters (76%) said they are seeking people who want to hold office not because it provides a means of self-advancement but rather provides a means of serving the public. Roughly as many (72%) said they want public leaders who will contribute value to people's lives. And a similar proportion expects leaders to anticipate the future and act accordingly, rather than to simply hold an office and maintain what currently exists (74%).
- If "we, the people" are the "owners" of the republic, then we must act like the boss. Most adults (76%) indicate they want more control over their life and less government interference in their personal decisions. To make that desire become a reality, the public will have to push back against the excessive exercise of authority.
- A servant needs someone to serve—and that's the public, not political royalty, institutions, or platforms. But for that relationship to work, citizens must be responsible and responsive. We call public officials "leaders," but their true role is that of serving the people. The public has become lazy and complacent, allowing the servants to rule. That role confusion has wrecked the system and is jeopardizing the future of our republic.
- Redefining the goal of elections is imperative. The emphasis on winning individual seats of authority and striving to establish party majorities is counterproductive. The only true "win" is when the people's vision and values are clarified, discussed, pursued, and achieved. The ultimate goal is to build communities in which their shared vision and values is implemented for the good of the people.
- A hallmark of great leaders is their ability to continually promote a clear and compelling vision of the future to which people are eager to commit themselves. Barna noted that in studying the political messaging in the most recent election cycles, most of the messages are devoid of vision, focusing instead upon personal, tactical, philosophical, and confrontational statements or promises—many of which contradict the expressed core values of Americans.
- We would benefit from demonstrating a practical commitment to governing in ways that respect and fulfill our national values. Those values, according to Barna, represent our national DNA. The failure to build a future around those values can only stimulate anxiety, confusion, disharmony, distrust, selfishness, and conflict. Instead, celebrating and pursuing relationships and opportunities that build on our shared vision, values, beliefs, and lifestyles will enable the United States to thrive as a nation because its people are empowered to flourish.
- Instituting transparent measurement of leadership performance in relationship to the fulfillment and protection of the vision and values is crucial. Barna often returns to a theme he promotes: "You get what you measure." Currently, we measure political dominance—e.g., which party has the most seats, which group has the most resources, who can sidestep the system to get things done—and so the process produces domination. More effective measures could be developed. Their value would be enhanced by becoming easily and widely accessible, and facilitating comprehensive performance accountability.

The Starting Point

The centerpiece of the *America's Values Study* from CRC was the identification of the nation's core values. Attention to those values in governance could not only facilitate unity in our country, but also keep government focused on what the people need rather than what self-serving entities desire.

The chief value driving Americans is family. Understanding how governance will affect one’s family is the primary lens through which political decisions are made. Current campaign practices obscure the capacity to understand how laws and policies will impact families. The result is surprising—and often disappointing—outcomes of those government actions.

In fact, recent reports from the Cultural Research Center suggest that governance by values would create a different political climate and divergent governance outcomes.

Large Majorities of Americans—Regardless of Party or Ideology— Agree on the Need for a New Approach to Governance							
Political Perspective	Political Ideology				Party Identification		
	All	Con	Mod	Lib	Dem	Rep	Ind
Individuals should have the rights and freedom to make legitimate choices rather than having the government make those choices for them.	76%	83%	73%	74%	77%	77%	79%
Political leaders cannot only focus on today. They must anticipate what’s coming and consider long-term possibilities in order to prepare us to successfully address future challenges.	74	78	69	80	79	76	71
We must find ways to continually monitor and assess the integrity of public leaders. Identifying foolproof ways of measuring integrity is crucial to restoring public trust in our system and its leaders.	72	78	67	76	72	76	73
Meaning in life comes from contributing value to the lives of others. A selfish society is doomed to fail. A generous and compassionate society requires every person to do their part in advancing the common good.	72	71	69	82	76	72	72
Our political system is not broken; it is being abused by people who are in politics for their own benefit or personal interests. The system still works but it requires officials who will protect our freedoms by applying constitutional principles rather than changing the system to satisfy personal preferences or ideological ideals.	71	80	67	71	70	79	71
The future success of the United States depends on restoring stability to our system, institutions, and ways of life. We need consistency and steadiness rather than changes that redefine the character and goals of America.	71	81	67	64	69	78	71
Many candidates say what you want to hear. To really know who they are and what kinds of decisions they will make on your behalf, you need evidence that their values are similar to yours, or that they will always consider and truly respect your values, even if they disagree with them.	70	76	65	74	71	73	72
Source: <i>America’s Values Study</i> , Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, conducted July 2022; N=1,500 adults 18 or older.							

That research revealed that 81% of American adults are willing to sacrifice for, fight for, or even die to protect their family and its ways of life. Other values clusters revolved around experiencing happiness; facilitating personal goodness (traits such as character, integrity and personal responsibility); individual maturity (e.g., clarifying one's life purpose, opportunities to grow as a human being, working hard to earn your way forward); experiencing freedom (as provided through constitutional parameters, decision-making independence, and the ability to own tangible property); and becoming a dependable person (by exhibiting stability, trustworthiness, and kindness).

Recalling that many of our current core values remain unchanged from colonial times, Barna cited these values as our enduring American DNA. They represent many of the qualities that stunned French political and cultural analyst Alexis de Tocqueville, who traveled to the United States to discover what made the republic so unique and durable. His reflections, recorded in the classic 1835 work, *Democracy in America*, point to many of these values as the foundation on which the strength of the nation relies.

As always, the challenge is in the application of the principles. The CRC and AmericasOne team propose that examining government policies and regulations in light of their impact upon families would develop a broader and deeper sense of understanding and community. Conflict would remain a factor in the discussions of what the future will become as competing interests fight for their vision. In the end, though, rather than a disconnected patchwork of national policies that create unfair and unpopular conditions, we would have a better chance of moving toward an equitable society based upon mutual understanding, respect, and compassion driven by our shared values.

In fact, developing an eye for the potential impact of how well a proposed government program or policy coincides with or advances our core values would be a valuable skill for all Americans, including servant leaders and voters.

Getting Started

Marc Nuttle, founder of AmericasOne, has managed political campaigns at all levels—from presidential campaigns to local efforts, both within and outside of the United States. His global experience, combined with his concerns about the direction and prevailing political practices in America, motivated AmericasOne to commission the research. In speaking about the research and its implications, Nuttle returned to the importance of the family unit in ensuring a viable future for the nation.

“Voters have lost confidence in national leaders, national parties, and national institutions,” Nuttle noted. “They have defaulted by instinct to the authority and structure of the nuclear family to determine positions on important and complicated issues. It is imperative they understand that not only is this okay, it is exactly what the Founding Fathers of our great republic intended.”

“Americans can unite as one in the mutual respect of each other's rights through their individual families to determine for themselves their course and particulars for their pursuit of happiness, Nuttle continued. “The re-emerging governing authority of the United States is American families, contributing to the collective national will for the definition of government policy. In this new ordained order, the acceptance of compromise at the ballot box can be realized through the exercise of democracy. And it is this new authority that elected officials and candidates for office must relate to and defer.”

Meanwhile, Nuttle's colleague, George Barna, the researcher whose studies have been a guiding light for this movement, was blunt in assessing the 2022 midterm debacle.

“We have reached the turning point, the moment when Americans must finally decide if they want government to rule their lives or if they will rule themselves,” Barna stated. “I believe 2024 may be the point of no return: either it will be government of, by, and for the people—exercised through the

nuclear family—or it will be a government of elites, not unlike the monarchy we left behind in England more than 200 years ago.”

Barna explained, “The choice facing Americans is really not about Democrat or Republican rule; that’s a distraction. It is about re-establishing the will, the vision, the rights, and the rule of the people. Right now we have the wrong people pushing the wrong actions for the wrong reasons. Matters will only get worse unless the people are willing to invest in restoring their authority in this republic.”

The only way to protect our freedom and restore reason to our culture, according to Barna, is by returning to America’s hallowed foundations.

“This will not happen overnight,” the veteran researcher continued. “People will have to grasp and then embrace the underlying concepts of family authority and the workings of a democratic republic. Even then, the transition will not be easy or smooth. But it will feature replacing career politicians with servant, citizen leaders.”

He continued, “We will have to discipline ourselves, as the owners of the republic, to reject those who pursue self-interest and personal gain in favor of those who are willing to sacrifice in order to serve, and to give of themselves selflessly for the benefit of the community. That puts the burden on the citizenry to demonstrate the wisdom and courage to deny opportunities to those seeking to indulge in the politics of power, perks, and privilege, and instead empower those committed to serving the public with humility and responsiveness.”

About the Research

This report is based upon data from *The America’s Values Study: A National Survey of Core Values in the United States 2022*, a pair of companion surveys commissioned by AmericasOne that were conducted in July 2022. The first of those surveys, which is the basis of this report, included the responses of a nationally representative sample of 2,275 adults. That survey 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.

Reports related to that survey are accessible at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com.

About AmericasOne

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 was founded by Marc Nuttle, a lawyer, author, consultant, and businessman. Nuttle has 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 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. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.

Endnotes

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11 "Concerns About Inflation Rise Heading Into the Midterms, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; Republicans Have Edge in Enthusiasm to Vote," Quinnipiac University Poll, Nov. 2, 2022. Accessed at: <https://poll.qu.edu/poll-release?releaseid=3861>

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