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# THE SOCIAL POWER OF PATRIOTISM:

*AMERICANS WHO ARE PROUD  
OF THEIR NATIONAL IDENTITY  
ARE MORE LIKELY TO TRUST  
THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS*

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## Key Findings:

- ✓ Most Americans (61%) agree that most of their fellow Americans can be trusted. This includes 63% of men and 58% of women.
- ✓ There are no differences in social trust between political groups. Around 60% of liberals, moderates, and conservatives agree that most Americans can be trusted.
- ✓ Social trust increases with age with 70% of adults 60 and over but only 48% of adults under 30 agreeing that most Americans can be trusted.
- ✓ Social trust differs across racial/ethnic groups. The majority of White (67%), Asian (61%), and Hispanic (52%) Americans but only a minority of Black (44%) Americans agree that most Americans can be trusted.
- ✓ There are no differences in social trust across regions of the country. Around 60% of Americans living in the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West agree that most Americans can be trusted.
- ✓ The majority of Americans across income groups agree that most Americans can be trusted, but social trust increases with household income.
- ✓ The majority of Americans with different levels of formal education who have at least a high school degree or equivalent agree that most American can be trusted, but social trust increases with level of formal education.
- ✓ National pride is positively associated with social trust; 66% of Americans who are proud of their national identity agree that most Americans can be trusted compared to 46% of Americans who are not proud of their national identity.
- ✓ National pride is positively associated with social trust for both men and women, across political groups, age groups, most racial/ethnic groups, regions of the country, and income groups. National pride is also positively associated with social trust at different levels of formal education for Americans who have at least a high school level education or equivalent.
- ✓ National pride is a stronger predictor of social trust than other variables (age, income, level of education, race/ethnicity, gender, and optimism about the future of the US) associated with social trust.

## INTRODUCTION

Previous research from the Archbridge Institute has found a link between patriotism and the type of optimistic mindset that supports human progress and flourishing. Specifically, Americans who are proud of their national identity, compared to Americans who are not proud of their national identity, are more optimistic about the future of their nation, the world, and that humans will make significant progress on major societal and global challenges. These findings suggest that patriotism advances progress and flourishing because optimism promotes goal motivation and success,<sup>1</sup> creative and cooperative problem-solving,<sup>2</sup> and innovation.<sup>3</sup>

Social trust also plays a vital role in human progress and flourishing by reducing a defensive mindset and encouraging a growth-oriented mindset. When people trust their fellow citizens, they are less likely to feel anxious and fearful because they are less inclined to view the social environment as threatening. They are thus more likely to engage in the type of explorative, creative, cooperative, collaborative, and entrepreneurial activities that make a society thrive. Indeed, social trust promotes social cohesion and people in socially cohesive societies enjoy greater psychological wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> Social trust is also positively associated with entrepreneurship and innovation,<sup>5</sup> and societies with higher social trust experience greater economic growth,<sup>6</sup> as well as greater democratic stability.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to advancing progress and flourishing by increasing optimism, patriotism may also advance progress and flourishing by enhancing social trust. Americans who have a positive national identity should be more likely to trust their fellow Americans because humans are a group-oriented species. We naturally tend to have a positive attitude towards individuals who we view as part of a group we identify with. In addition, a positive national identity helps unite smaller, even antagonistic, groups under a larger (superordinate) group identity.

The current report explores the potential for patriotism to promote social trust. To examine the relationship between patriotism and social trust, we asked just over 2,000 US adults questions about their political ideology, national pride, and social trust.

To measure political ideology, we asked participants to what extent they identify as liberal, moderate, or conservative. To measure national pride, we asked respondents to what extent they are proud to be American. To measure social trust, we asked respondents to indicate to what extent they agree that most Americans can be trusted.

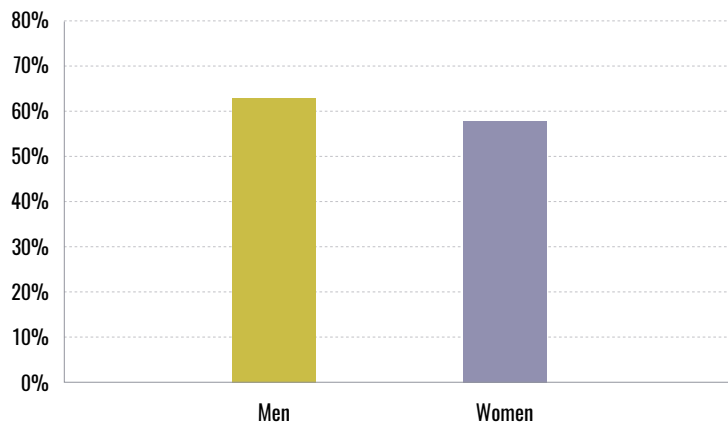
We also asked respondents to report their gender, age, region of residence, race/ethnicity, household income, and level of education. Further, since past research has found a relationship between national pride and optimism about the future of the US, and optimism is associated with social trust, we also asked participants to what extent they are optimistic about the future of the US. This allowed us to test if any observed effects of national pride on social trust remained statistically significant when controlling for optimism.

# RESULTS

## Gender and Social Trust

The majority of Americans (61%) somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted. This includes most men and women (**Figure 1**).

**Figure 1 | GENDER AND SOCIAL TRUST**

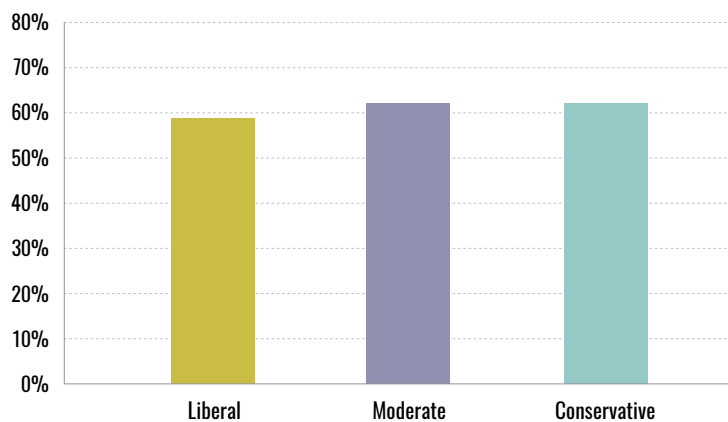


Note: Percent of American men and women who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

## Political Ideology and Social Trust

There is little difference across political groups on social trust (**Figure 2**).

**Figure 2 | POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL TRUST**

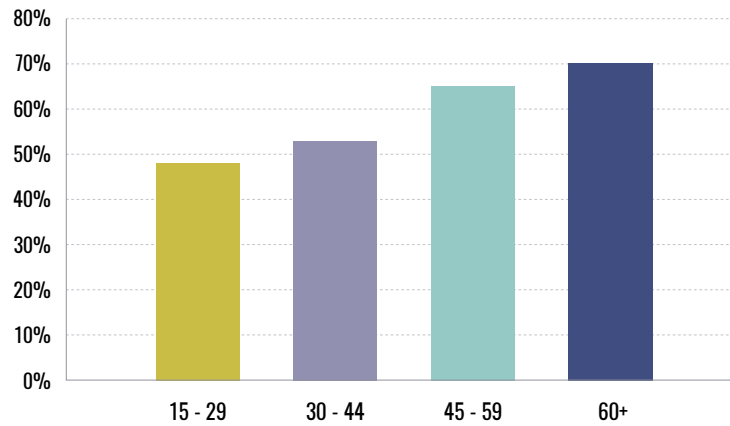


Note: Percent of Americans in different political groups who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

## Age and Social Trust

Social trust increases with age; 70% of adults 60 and over but only 48% of adults under 30 somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted (**Figure 3**).

**Figure 3 | SOCIAL TRUST ACROSS AGE GROUPS**

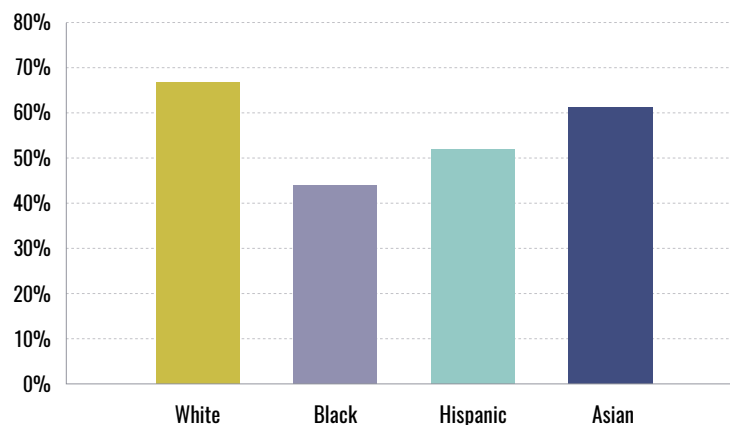


Note: Percent of Americans in different age groups who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

## Race/Ethnicity and Social Trust

Social trust differs across racial/ethnic groups. The majority of White (67%), Asian (61%), and Hispanic (52%) Americans but only a minority of Black (44%) Americans somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted (**Figure 4**).

**Figure 4 | SOCIAL TRUST ACROSS RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS**

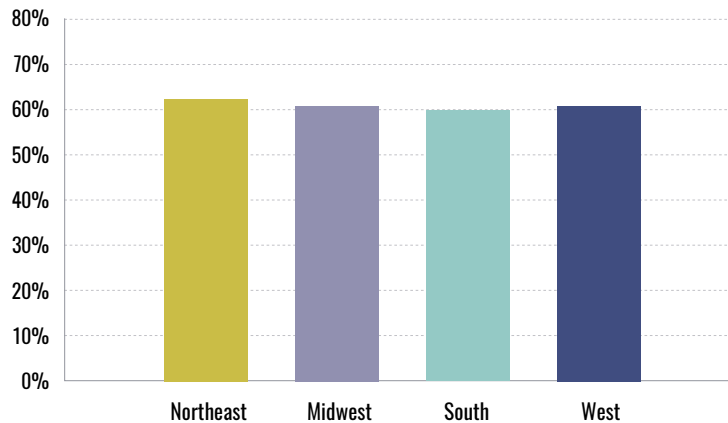


Note: Percent of Americans in different racial/ethnic groups who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

## Region of the Country and Social Trust

There are no regional differences in social trust among Americans (**Figure 5**).

**Figure 5 | SOCIAL TRUST BY REGION**

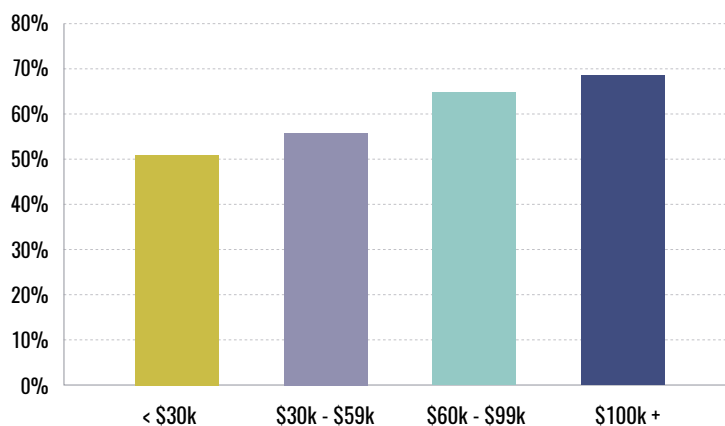


Note: Percent of Americans in different regions of the country who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

## Household Income and Social Trust

The majority of Americans across income groups somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted. However, social trust increases with household income (**Figure 6**).

**Figure 6 | HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND SOCIAL TRUST**

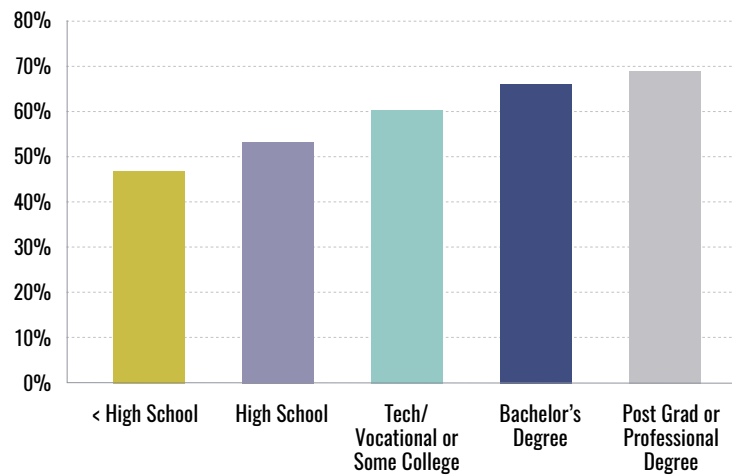


Note: Percent of Americans in different household income groups who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

## Level of Education and Social Trust

The majority of Americans with different levels of formal education who have at least a high school degree or equivalent somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted. However, social trust increases with level of formal education (**Figure 7**).

**Figure 7 | LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans with different levels of formal education who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.



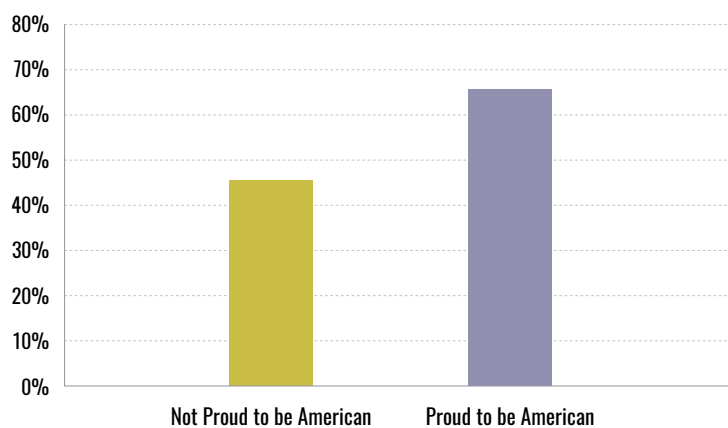


## Does National Pride Support Social Trust?

Our main goal in this survey was to test whether national pride supports social trust. As can be seen in Figure 8, 66% of Americans who are proud of their national identity somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted compared to 46% of Americans who are not proud of their national identity.

In a regression analysis, national pride was a statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) predictor of the extent to which respondents believe most Americans can be trusted. This effect remained when controlling for political ideology, optimism about the future of the US, household income, level of education, age, race/ethnicity, and gender. In addition, national pride was the strongest predictor of social trust in the analysis.

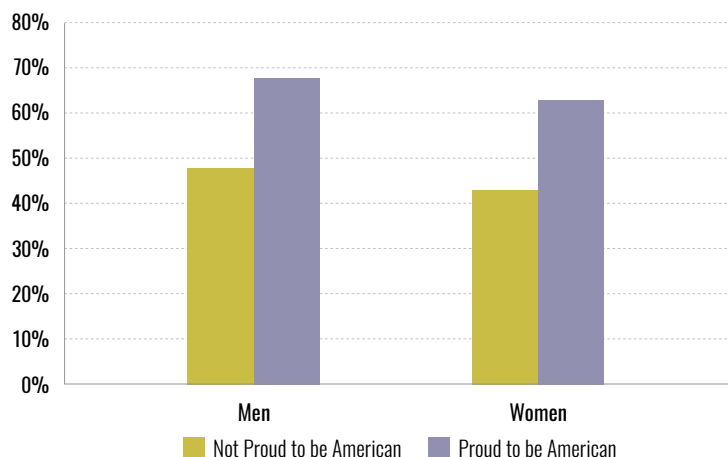
**Figure 8 | NATIONAL PRIDE AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

National pride is similarly associated with social trust for both men and women (**Figure 9**).

**Figure 9 | NATIONAL PRIDE, GENDER, AND SOCIAL TRUST**

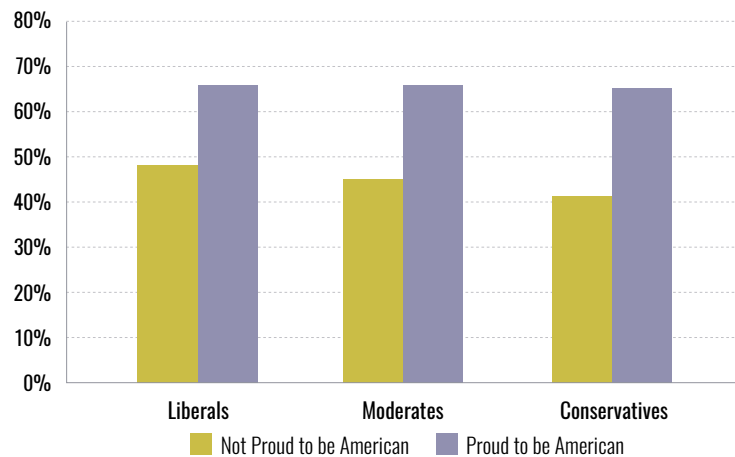


Note: Percent of American men and women who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.



National pride is similarly associated with social trust across political groups (**Figure 10**). Around 65% of liberals, moderates, and conservatives who are proud to be American somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted. However, for those who are not proud to be American, only 48% of liberals, 45% of moderates, and 41% of conservatives somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

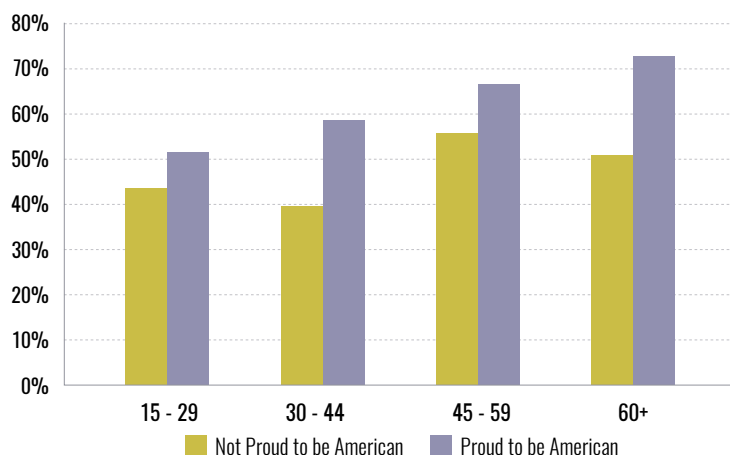
**Figure 10 | NATIONAL PRIDE, POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans in different political groups and who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

National pride is similarly associated with greater social trust across age groups (**Figure 11**). Most (around 60% or more) Americans in every age group who are proud of their national identity somewhat or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted. However, this number drops to around 50% or below for most age groups among those who are not proud of their national identity.

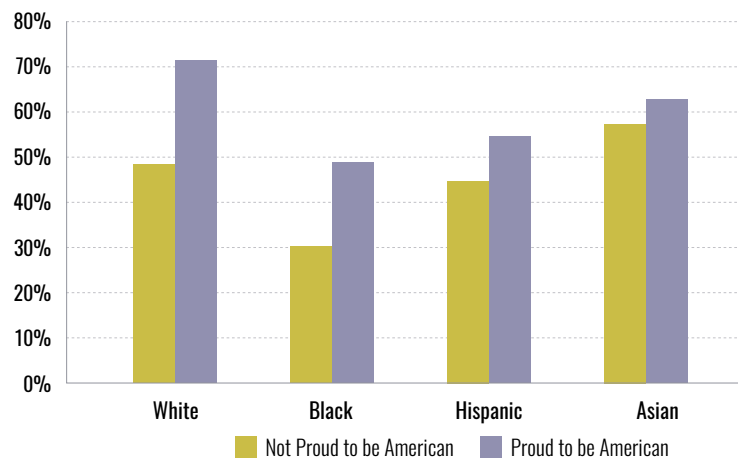
**Figure 11 | NATIONAL PRIDE, AGE GROUP, AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans in different age groups and who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

National pride is associated with greater social trust across most racial/ethnic groups (**Figure 12**). Among White, Black, and Hispanic Americans, those who are proud of their national identity are more likely to trust their fellow Americans than those who are not proud of their national identity. National pride does not appear to relate to social trust among Asian Americans.

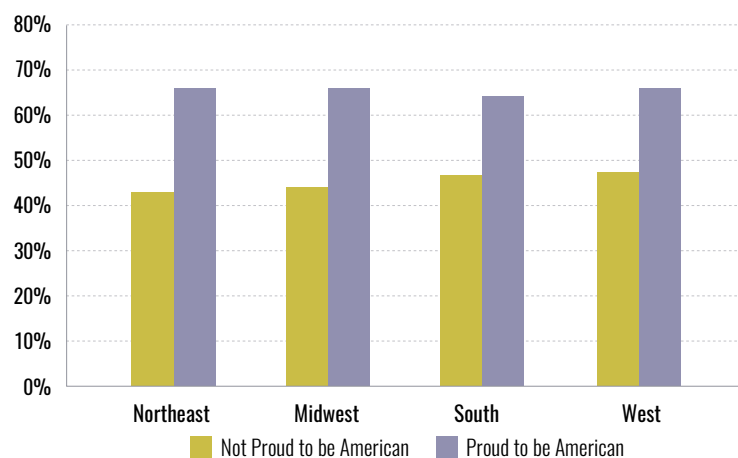
**Figure 12 | NATIONAL PRIDE, RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP, AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans in different racial/ethnic groups and who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

National pride is similarly associated with greater social trust across regions of the country (**Figure 13**).

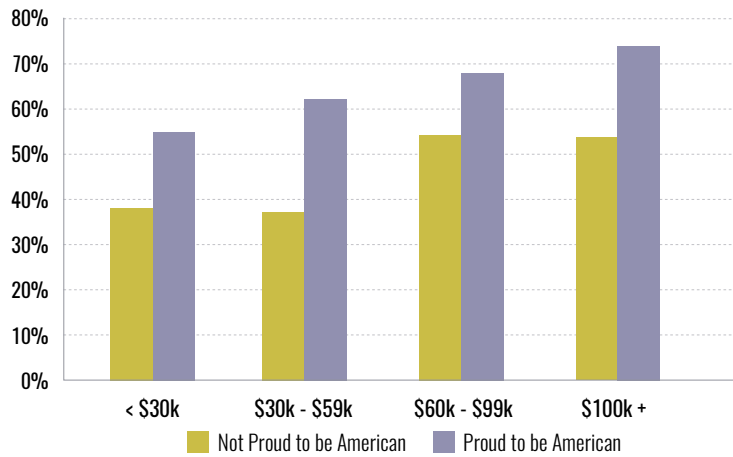
**Figure 13 | NATIONAL PRIDE, REGION, AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans in different regions of the country and who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

National pride is positively associated with social trust across different income groups (**Figure 14**).

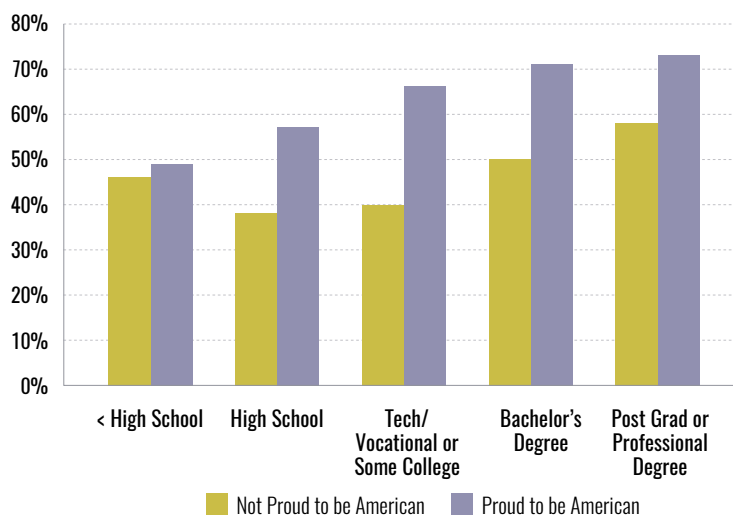
**Figure 14 | NATIONAL PRIDE, HOUSEHOLD INCOME, AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans with different household incomes and who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted.

National pride is generally positively associated with social trust across different levels of formal education (**Figure 15**). However, among Americans with less than a high school education, national pride does not appear to be related to social trust.

**Figure 15 | NATIONAL PRIDE, LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL TRUST**



Note: Percent of Americans with different levels of formal education and who are proud or not proud to be American who agree or strongly agree that most Americans can be trusted

## CONCLUSION

Humans are a tribal species. Our group-oriented nature is often described as a weakness because it can lead to social conflict between groups. However, it also plays a central role in bringing humans together around shared goals. Being able to organize ourselves in groups and coordinate behavior in the pursuit of shared goals has led to amazing scientific, engineering, artistic, and humanitarian accomplishments.

Within a pluralistic society like the United States, one way to potentially reduce polarization and social conflict and promote social trust is to focus on building, maintaining, and privileging a superordinate group identity. This is a group identity that unites smaller, even antagonistic, groups under a larger group identity.

When individuals privilege the superordinate group identity over other smaller group identities, they are better able to value and connect with those whom they may otherwise distrust. This helps them work cooperatively in the pursuit of common goals. It also helps them improve their own thinking about complex issues by increasing their openness to diverse perspectives held by those within the superordinate group.

The results of the current report suggest that patriotism offers a path to a superordinate national identity. Proud Americans, compared to those who are not proud of their national identity, are more inclined to trust their fellow citizens. For the most part, the association between national pride and social trust exists across different groups of Americans. Moreover, national pride was a stronger predictor of social trust than other variables (age, income, level of education, race/ethnicity, gender, and optimism about the future of the US) that were found to be associated with social trust.

Given the correlational nature of the current analysis, it is also possible that social trust increases patriotism or that the relationship between patriotism and social trust is bidirectional. A positive national identity should strengthen social trust and social trust should encourage a positive national identity. Critically, patriotism and social trust appear to be strongly linked.

Given the challenge of political polarization in our society, it is important to appreciate the role that patriotism potentially plays in cultivating and sustaining social trust. Regardless of whether they identify as liberal, moderate, or conservative, most Americans who are proud of their national identity trust their fellow Americans. Helping Americans feel more connected to and proud of their national identity may be critical for not only reducing polarization but also for advancing human progress and flourishing.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

For this survey, we partnered again with NORC at the University of Chicago and its AmeriSpeak® panel. AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling with a known, nonzero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. The nationally representative sample consisted of 2,073 respondents. The survey was conducted May 26–31, 2022

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**DR. CLAY ROUTLEDGE** is the Vice President of Research and Director of the Human Flourishing Lab at the Archbridge Institute and the co-editor of *Profectus* (a periodic magazine on human progress and flourishing). He is also a visiting fellow with the Program on Pluralism and Civil Exchange at the Mercatus Center. Prior to joining the Archbridge Institute, Dr. Routledge was the Arden and Donna Hetland Distinguished Professor of Business at North Dakota State University and a faculty scholar at the Sheila and Robert Challey Institute for Global Innovation and Growth.

Dr. Routledge is a leading expert in existential psychology. His research examines how the human need for meaning in life influences and is influenced by different cognitive processes, self-regulation, momentous life experiences, personal and professional goals, creativity, social connections, cultural worldviews, spirituality and religiosity, entrepreneurship, and prosocial behavior. He has published over 100 scholarly papers, co-edited three books on existential psychology, and authored the books *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* and *Supernatural: Death, Meaning, and the Power of the Invisible World*.

His work has been featured by many media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Times*, *CBS News*, *ABC News*, *BBC News*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *NPR*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *HGTV*, *Men's Health*, *Wired*, *Forbes*, *BBC Worklife*, and many others. He has authored dozens of articles for popular outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *National Review*, *Entrepreneur*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Scientific American*. He also wrote the documentary short film *Why do We Feel Nostalgia?*



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