

## **New Poll Reveals Young Americans' Outlook on Future, Barriers to Success, and the American Dream**

**Washington, D.C. (September 14, 2023)** – Feeling happy and fulfilled and having the freedom to make important life decisions are at the core of the reimagined American Dream, according to a new survey of young Americans from the Sine Institute of Policy and Politics at American University.

“The Sine Institute’s latest poll helps policymakers and institutions to better understand how the American Dream is evolving and address the perspectives, hopes and needs of young Americans,” said AU President Sylvia Burwell. “As part of American University’s commitment to experiential learning, our students played an integral role in this effort – formulating and interpreting survey results that bring new understanding to a crucial issue for our nation and our world.”

Designed by the Sine Institute in partnership with the Millennial Action Project and Close Up Foundation, the survey of 1,568 Americans aged 18 to 34 was based on interviews conducted by Generation Lab between July 21, 2023, and August 11, 2023. Generation Lab is a data intelligence company that gathers and interprets the views and behavior of young adults.

“I was inspired by the optimism the poll revealed as well as the sincerity and dedication young people displayed in their commitment to engage politically,” said Amy Dacey, executive director of the Sine Institute for Policy & Politics. “I hope that these findings can help other generations and those in power to truly hear and understand what is important to young Americans who represent the future of our country and the world.”

When asked what the “Reimagined American Dream” meant to them, 87% of respondents reported being happy and fulfilled as “absolutely essential” (60%) or “very important” (27%). Those polled also prioritized freedom to make decisions (87%; 54% “absolutely essential,” 33% “very important”) and having close and meaningful personal relationships (82%; 47% absolutely essential, 35% very important).

In identifying factors that affect their ability to achieve the American Dream, respondents pointed to their own “hard work and effort” as the most determining factor (85% reported this as “very” or “fairly” important). Still, larger societal forces, such as the state of the U.S. “economy and job market” (83%) and “social conditions like inequality and racism” (68%) are notable.

The poll revealed that despite the challenges young Americans report experiencing, they remain optimistic about their own future. In fact, 62% predict that their lives will be better than parents’. And on 12 of 13 specific measures, including the “opportunity to get a great education,” having “healthy and loving relationships,” being “treated and valued fairly, without discrimination,” young Americans expect to have a better experience than their parents.

Notably, the only exception in that category was “having a functioning government that represents all.”

Politics played a comparatively minor role in young Americans’ priorities, with nearly half (45%) of young people saying that the outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential election would not matter significantly in their day-to-day lives. With the election a little more than a year away, 50% of respondents report that they were “only somewhat motivated” (20%) or “less or not motivated” (30%) to vote next November.

While financial success ranked highly, with 81% of those polled considering it “absolutely essential” (50%) or “very important (31%),” the traditional vision of marriage (51%; 27% “absolutely essential,” 24% “very important”), and having children (56%; 28% “absolutely essential,” 28% “very important”) were less significant for younger Americans.

“While young Americans are clear-eyed about the challenges they face in pursuing their vision of the American Dream, including systemic forces such as mental health challenges, inequality and racism, they also show real determination in their aspirations to build authentic and meaningful personal relationships and make a positive impact in their communities,” said Molly O’Rourke, executive in residence at American University’s School of Communication.

This is the second annual Sine Institute survey focused on understanding young Americans’ (ages 18-34) perspectives on politics, community engagement, and public service. The Sine Institute’s [inaugural survey](#) centered on topics including democracy, American values and the role of social media in young Americans’ lives.

The Sine Institute worked with an advisory group of nine AU graduate and undergraduate students from across the university to help design the poll, formulate its questions, and provide feedback on the survey methodology and results.

#### ***About American University***

*American University leverages the power and purpose of scholarship, learning, and community to impact our changing world. AU’s faculty, students, staff, and alumni are changemakers who shape the future from sustainability to social justice to the sciences. Building on our 128-year history of education and research in the public interest, we say ‘Challenge Accepted’ to addressing the world’s pressing issues. Our [Change Can’t Wait](#) comprehensive campaign creates transformative educational opportunities, advances research with impact, and builds stronger communities.*

#### ***About the Sine institute for Policy & Politics***

*The Sine Institute of Policy & Politics at American University is one of the nation’s premier forums for the study and discussion of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. As an incubator for policy innovation, the Sine Institute is committed to bringing students together with national and global changemakers to search for common ground and cultivate solutions to today’s most pressing challenges.*

#### ***About Millennial Action Project***

*The Millennial Action Project is an organization dedicated to renewing American democracy. In collaboration with dozens of Millennial leaders across the country, and with the generous support of visionary philanthropists, the Millennial Action Project was formed and officially launched in 2013. The Millennial Action Project works directly with our nation's leading young policymakers on both a national and state level to bridge the partisan divide and lead a new era of collaborative governance. As a national, nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to activating millennial and Gen Z policymakers, MAP gives our nation's young leaders the resources and support to develop and pass innovative policy solutions — and forge productive partnerships on the issues affecting the youngest generations of Americans.*

### **About Close Up Foundation**

*Founded in 1971, Close Up Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, civic education organization that believes a strong democracy requires active, informed participation by all citizens. Close Up seeks to serve young people from all communities and all backgrounds, regardless of race, religion, gender, socioeconomic level, or academic standing. For over 50 years, we have partnered with schools nationwide to serve more than one million students and educators through experiential programs in our nation's capital and in local communities, virtual programs, professional development, and curriculum and resource design. Close Up Washington DC's issue-centric, nonpartisan curriculum gives participants a deeper understanding of history, government institutions, current issues, and the role of citizens.*