



SINE INSTITUTE
of POLICY & POLITICS

Reimagining the American Dream: Views from Young Americans

Project Background

- 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 (released August 2022) centered on topics including democracy, American values and the role of social media in young Americans' lives.
- This latest iteration takes on the challenging and important topic of what the American Dream means for young people today and notably, what leaders need to know in order to support today's youth in making their dreams a reality.
- The Sine Institute partnered with the **Millennial Action Project**, the **Close Up Foundation** and a team of American University student advisors on the research. **Generation Lab** conducted the online interviews using its robust, proprietary panel.
- This research is an investment in understanding young Americans' goals for the future as well as the barriers and support they experience as they pursue those goals. It is essential reading for those involved in setting policy and shaping institutions that closely intersect with young Americans' lives.
- Our findings provide a roadmap for leaders — from national, state and local elected officials to community organizers and others — to know how to effectively engage, harness, and reflect the power of America's young voices.

Overview of Key Findings

As our country heads into another presidential election year, candidates are evoking the power of the American Dream in their communications. They are rendering their judgment about its viability, and how the pursuit of the American Dream would direct the way they would lead. No one is asking the important question of what the American Dream actually means for young Americans, who are trying to sort through the churning dynamics shaping their lives. These include: spiraling technological innovation and major economic transitions, changing attitudes about social justice, and what constitutes a “good” or “successful” life after a devastating global pandemic with profound impacts on their physical and mental health, the extent of which is still unknown.

These survey findings provide important insights into how young Americans are reimagining the American Dream to reflect their experiences, values and goals. Among the highlights:

- 1. The reimagined American Dream for today’s young Americans is one of both continuity and change.** The core elements include **feeling happy & fulfilled, having the freedom to make important life decisions, having meaningful personal relationships** and **being financially successful**. More traditional elements like owning a home, getting married and having a family are important, but not top tier priorities.
- 2. Young Americans remain optimistic that their lives will be better than their parents in many areas and that they have a good chance of achieving what they consider to be the American Dream.** Members of this generation recognize and affirm that the American Dream means different things to different people and that this vision can and should vary by generation and by individuals within the same generation.
- 3. Young Americans identify distinct barriers as they pursue their American Dream, including the overwhelming experience of stress, pressure and mental health struggles.** The unrelenting pace and standards that young Americans report as part of their daily lives and the ensuing anxiety and depression this causes are one of the most consistent themes emanating from this research.

Overview of Key Findings (continued)

4. Notably, young Americans also identify our current political structure and political climate as an obstacle to their efforts to achieve their goals; in fact, *“having a functional government that represents all Americans”* is the only one of more than a dozen traits where young Americans do not expect to be better off than their parents’ generation.

Fortunately, these survey findings also identify a range of solutions and attributes to help repair America’s broken system of leadership in the eyes of its youngest citizens, including demonstrating more compassion, a willingness to listen and consider different perspectives, and greater authenticity.

5. Young Americans also identify many sources of support and strength as they strive toward their vision of the American Dream: the encouragement of family and friends, the impact of education (and specifically teachers), and their own hard work and effort are hallmarks of the positive dynamics they describe. Social media is a dominant force but a double-edged sword that both helps young Americans connect and lift each other up, while also contributing to their stress and feelings of burnout.

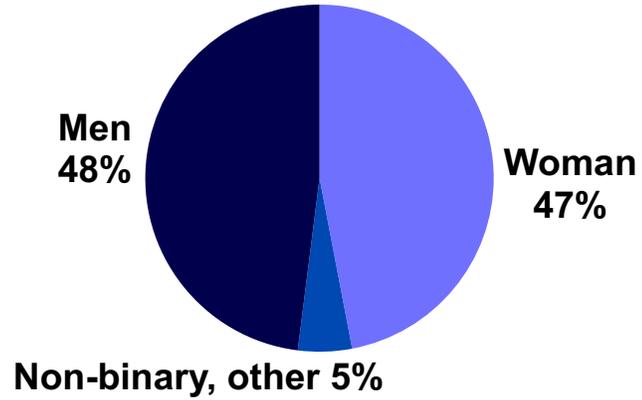
6. As they establish their political roots, young Americans value doing things that will be effective and have impact, directly serve others in real time, and create long-lasting change. In this regard, young Americans defy conventional wisdom that they are fragile and, instead, embrace high expectations: looking for ways that are easy, don’t require much effort or are convenient to engage in politics are their lowest priorities.

7. The 2024 presidential election is a long way off in the eyes of young Americans. Fully one in four say they’re undecided about how they’ll vote and the candidates and their campaigns have significant work to do to harness their energy and support. More than a year out from picking our next president, a large plurality don’t think the outcome of the election will matter significantly in their day-to-day lives and half admit they’re not yet especially motivated to vote.

Demographic Profile

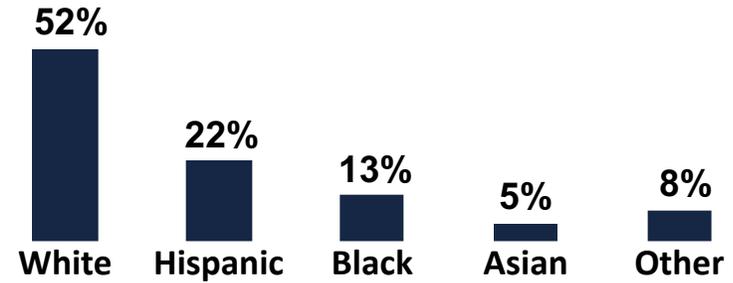
Methodology: 1,568 interviews of Americans age 18 to 34 (regardless of voter registration status), including oversamples with Black, Hispanic, and LGBTQI+ respondents; interviews conducted July 24 - August 11, 2023 using Generation Lab's proprietary panel.

GENDER



25% identify as LGBTQ+

RACE



AREA TYPE



Urban
39%



Suburban
42%



Small town/
rural area
19%

PARTY ID

