

A Summit on News, Civic Participation, & Democracy



Civic Cynicism
in the United
States:
A Typology of
Americans



What we set to find out . . .

What factors influence people's confidence or cynicism about the future of America?

Looking within various domains . . .

- Civic and political engagement
- Social trust
- Political trust
- Attitudes toward the media
- Media behavior
- Attitudes about diversity

What we found ...

Americans registered deep cynicism about their country and pessimism about its future.

Many Americans have lost faith in the fundamental principles underlying their democracy.

In a sense, it is in the deep chords of distrust where Americans seem most united.

Five different groups of Americans ...

The five cohorts -- which do not divide neatly along party or ideological lines -- were identified based on a range of demographic characteristics and measures including:

- trust in democratic processes and political institutions
- connections to community
- faith in their fellow Americans
- outlook on the economy, politics, and the American Dream

The Typologies

The Ambivalent

Classically Liberal

Mostly MAGA

The Disillusioned

The Believers

29%

22%

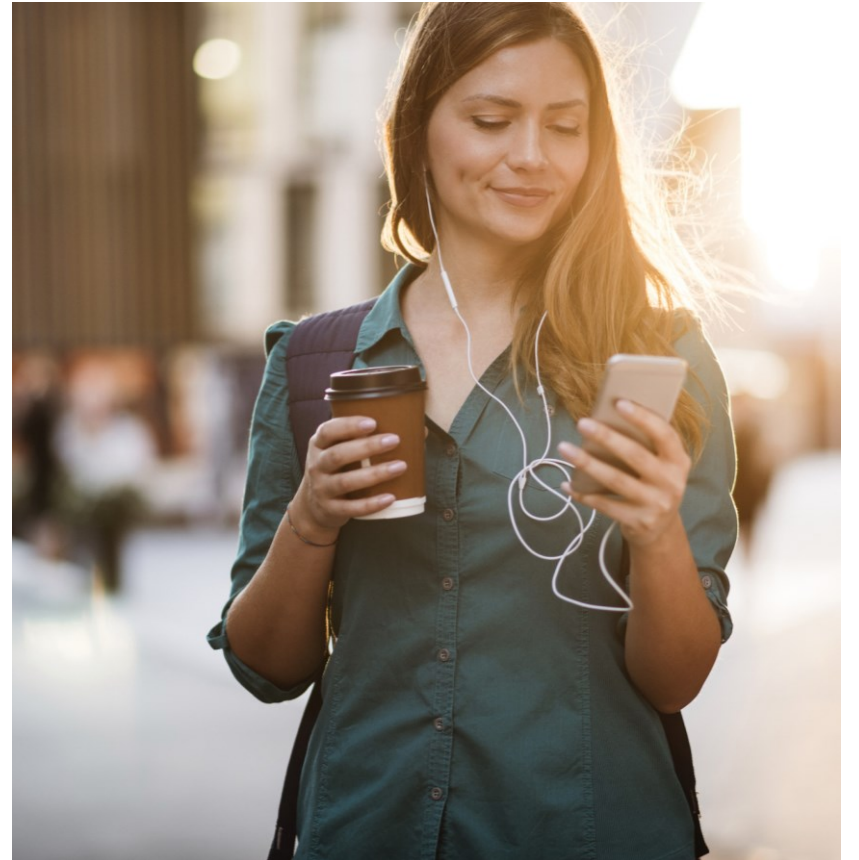
21%

15%

13%

The Ambivalent (29%)

- Demographics closely resemble general population, slightly more moderate
- Less concerned about current state of politics
- High trust in the military, scientific community, and local government and in other people
- Receive more news from social media and traditional broadcast networks



Classically Liberal (22%)

- Mostly white, college-educated, nonreligious
- Dissatisfied with state of politics
- Supportive of immigrants
- High trust in the military, the scientific community, and local government and in other people
- Receive more news from digital sources.



Mostly MAGA (21%)

- Mostly older, Christian, Republican, and white
- Negative national economic outlook and dissatisfied with state of politics
- High rates of racial resentment and highly distrustful of immigrants
- High trust in the military, the Supreme Court, local government, and organized religion and in other people
- Negative view of news media; receive more news from cable news



The Disillusioned (15%)

- Skew younger, lower income, less educated, and more moderate
- Less satisfied with their quality of life, financial situation, and economic mobility prospects
- Negative view of national economic outlook and the country's future
- Dissatisfied with state of politics and low trust in institutions and other people
- Negative view of news media; receive more news from social media



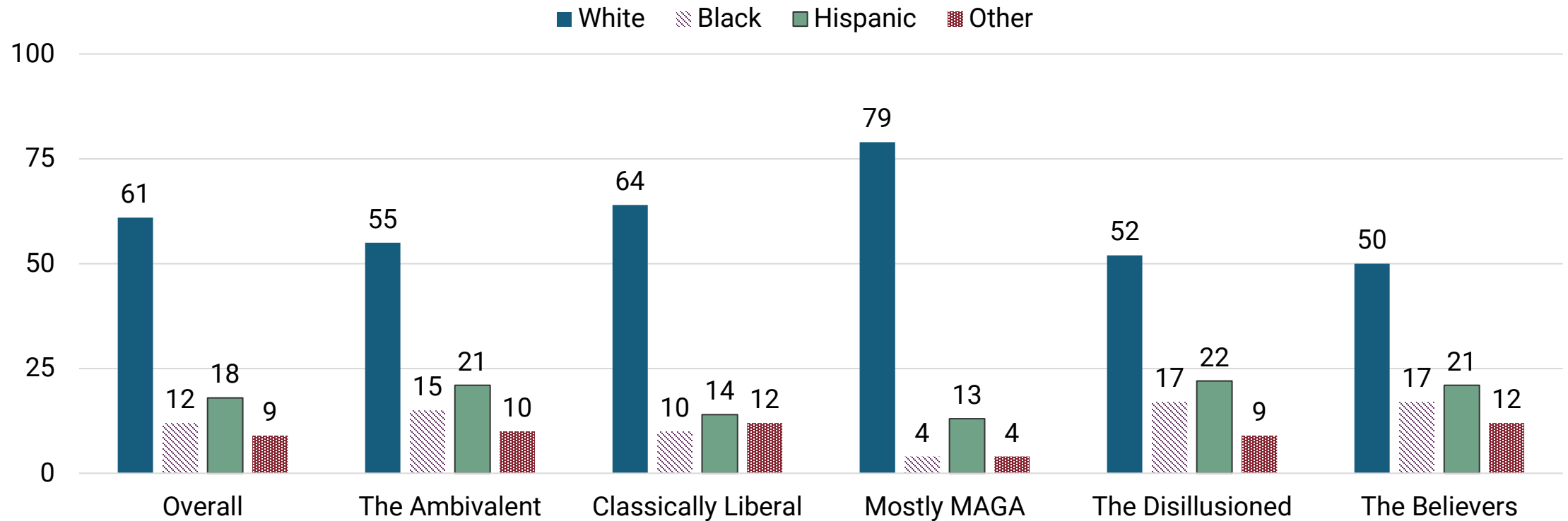
The Believers (13%)

- Skew older, religiously diverse, more Democratic
- More satisfied with their quality of life, financial situation, and economic mobility
- Positive view of democracy and the country's future
- Less concerned about current state of politics
- High trust in government and in other people
- Positive view of news media; receive more news from traditional broadcast networks



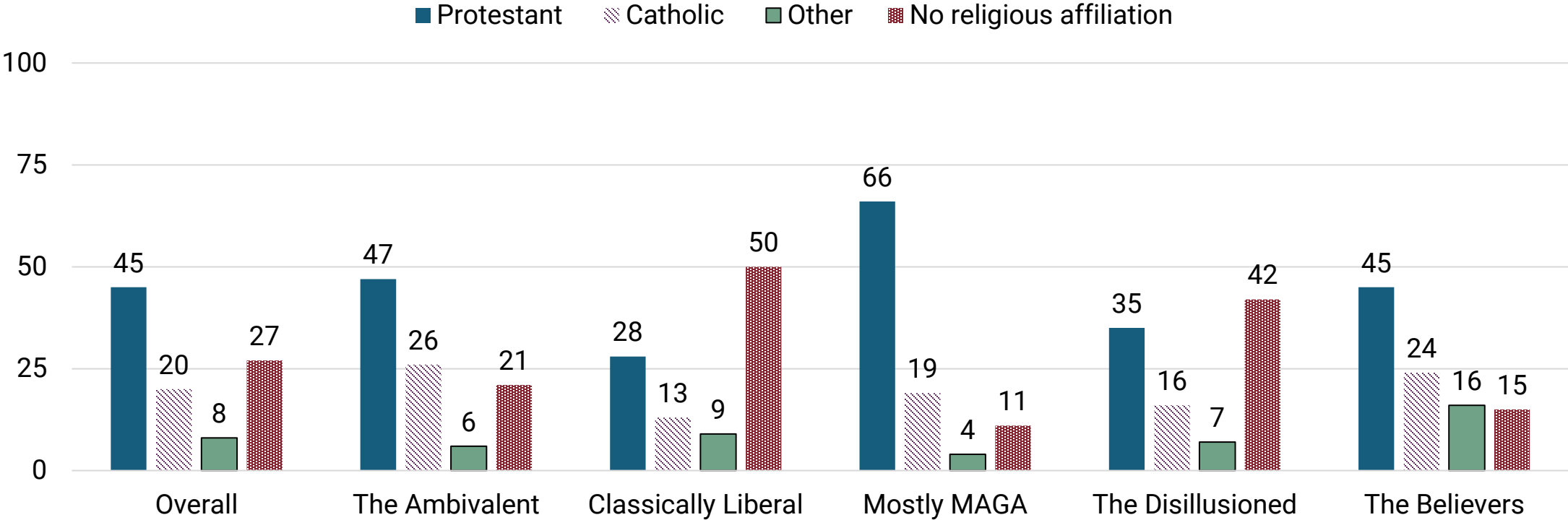
Race and Ethnic Demographics

The Disillusioned is the most diverse group.
Mostly MAGA and Classically Liberal are most likely to be white.



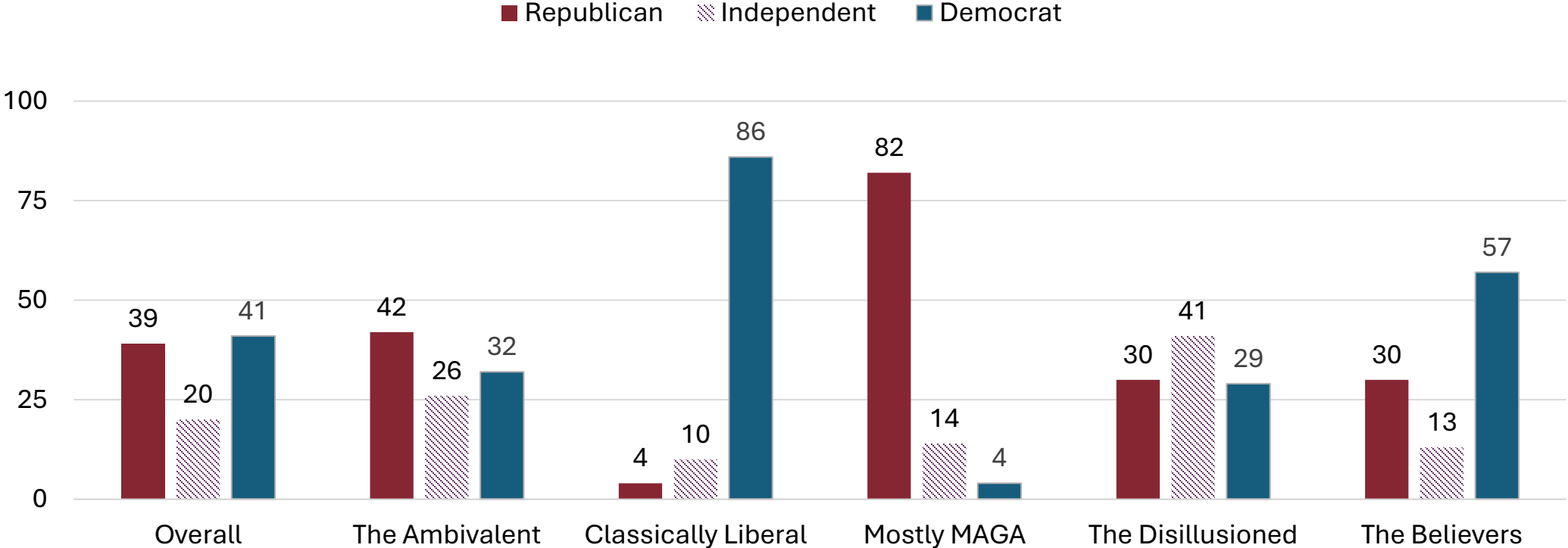
Religious Affiliation

The Believers are most religiously diverse, Mostly MAGA are most likely to be Protestant, and Classically Liberal are most likely to be secular.



Partisan Identification

Mostly MAGA and Classically Liberal are most partisan.
A plurality of The Disillusioned are independent.



Views of the Future

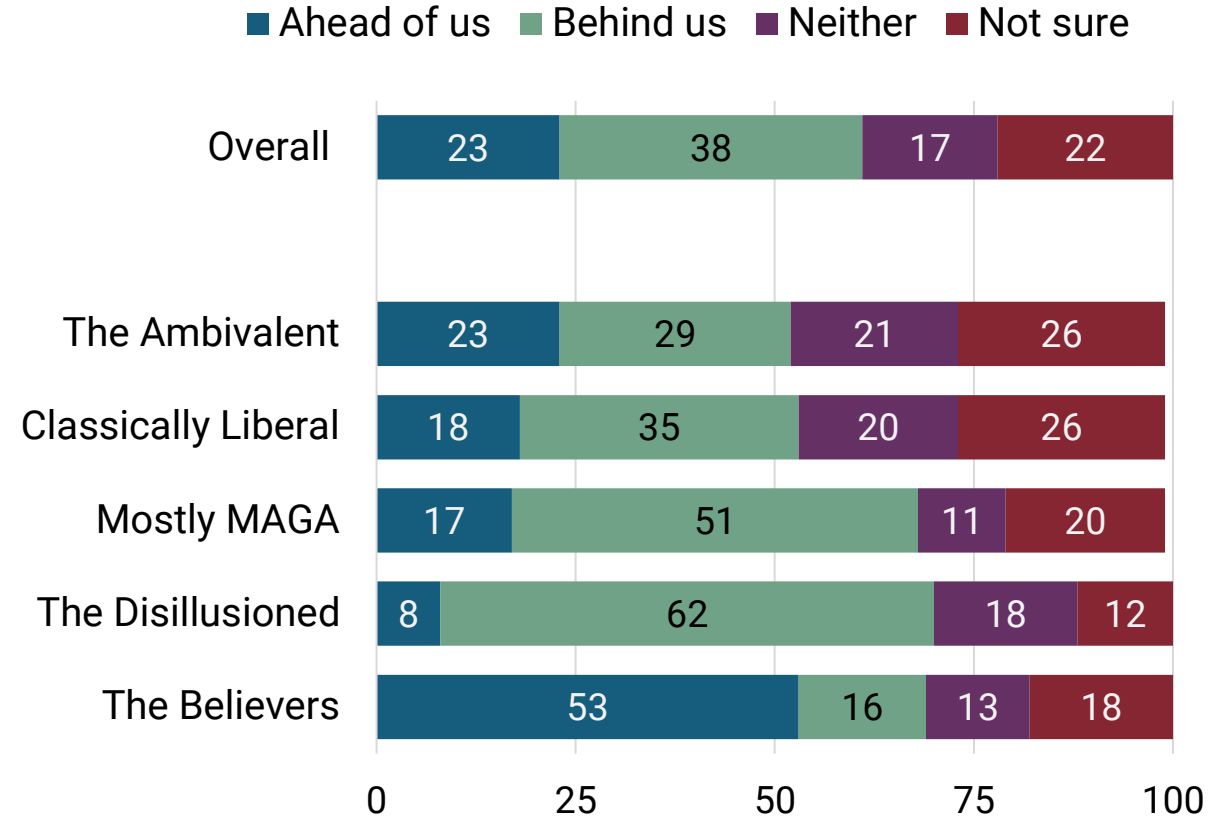
Less than a quarter of the public think America's best days are still ahead.

The Disillusioned are most pessimistic.

The Believers are most inclined to say the best yet to come.

In general, do you think America's best days are ahead of us, behind us, or neither ahead nor behind? If you're not sure, you can say that too.

Percent of adults



Source: LSU/NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

Is U.S. the greatest?

Only about a quarter of the believe in American exceptionalism.

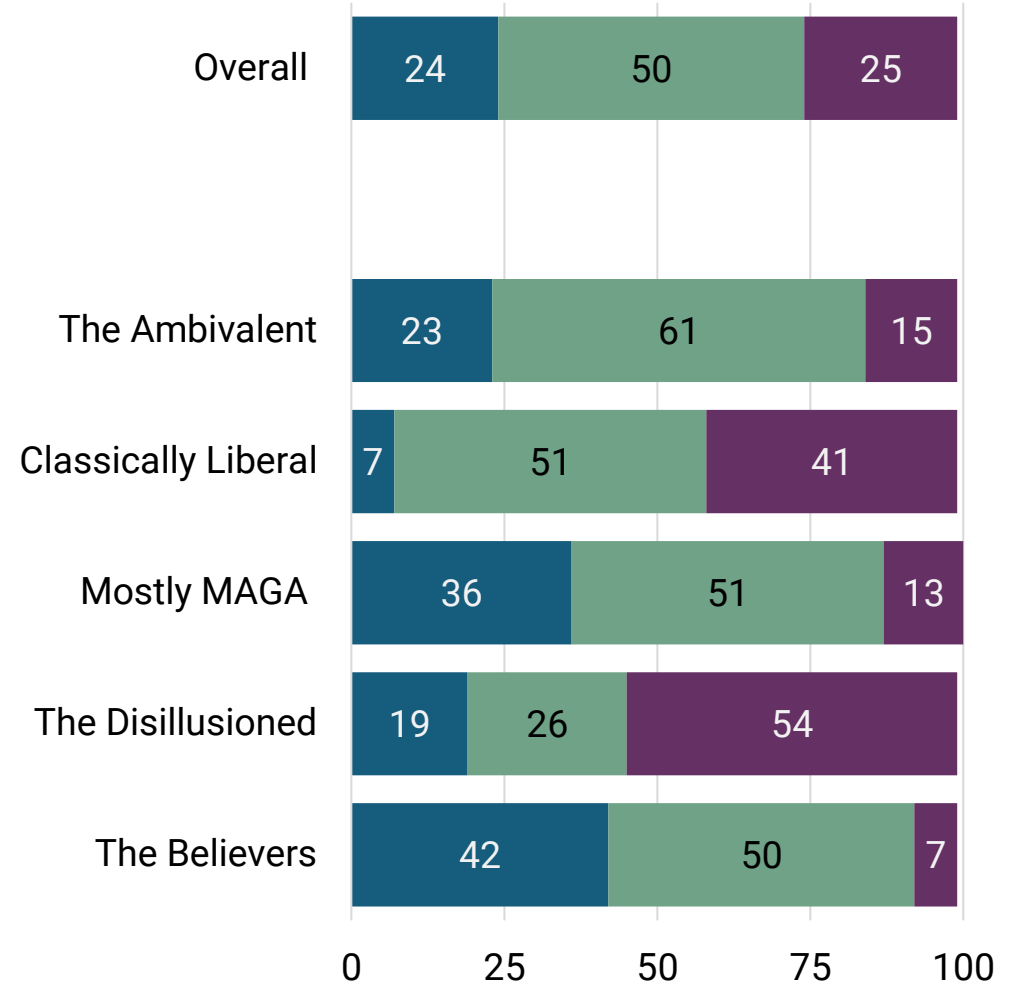
The Believers and Mostly MAGA are most likely to say the U.S. is the greatest country.

More than half of The Disillusioned think other countries are better.

Which of these statements best describes your opinion about the United States?

Percent of adults

- The U.S. stands above all other countries in the world
- The U.S. is one of the greatest countries in the world, along with some others
- There are other countries better than the U.S.



Source: LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

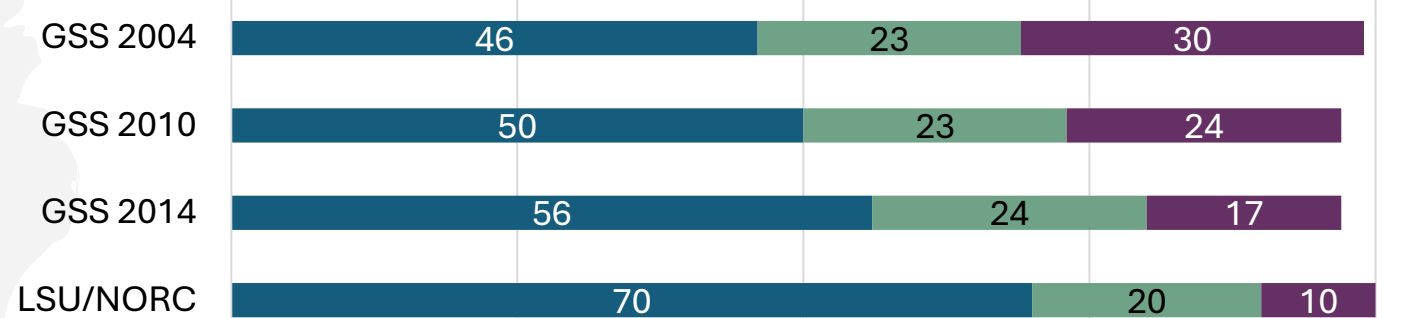
Do you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statements?

Percent of adults

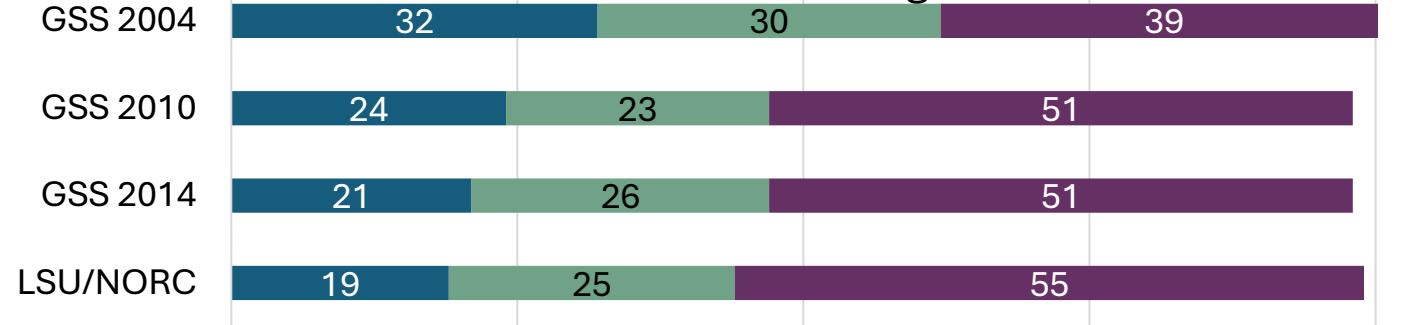
■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree

The views of politicians and people in government are becoming increasingly negative.

Most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally



Most of the time we can trust people in government to do what is right



0 25 50 75 100

Source: NORC General Social Surveys and LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

How much does the U.S. need to change?

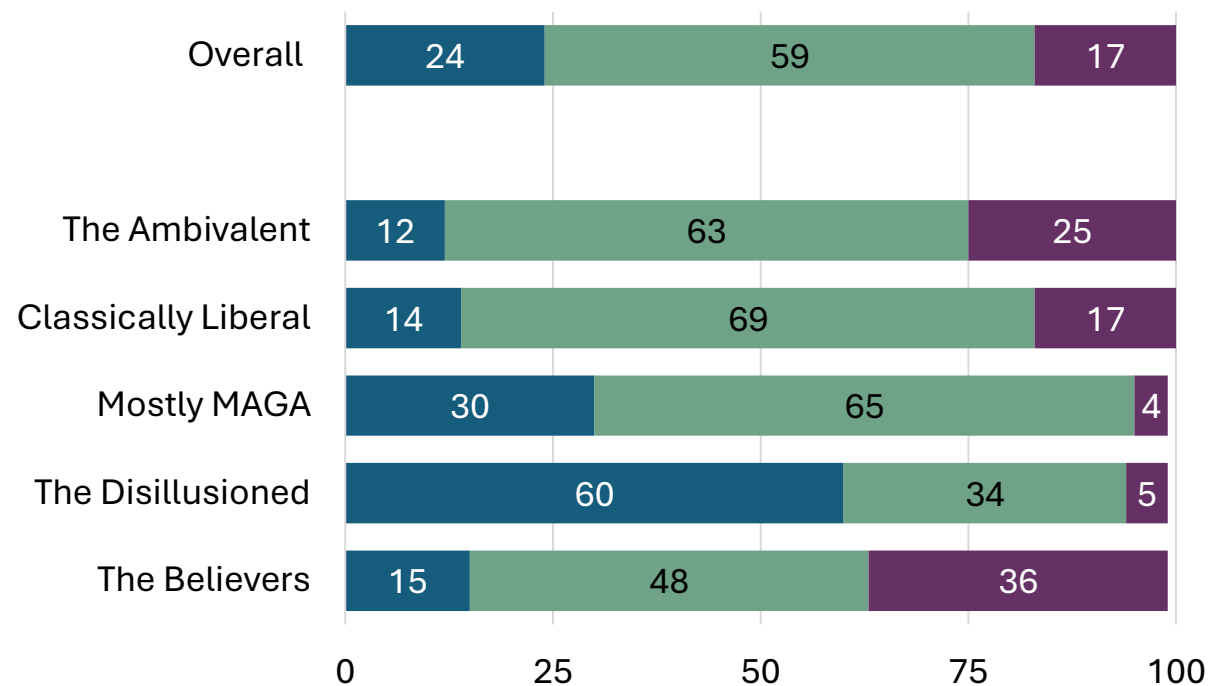
Most think the country needs to undergo substantial change.

Only one group - The Disillusioned - think it needs “complete and total upheaval.”

How much change would you like to see in how the country is run?

Percent of adults

■ Complete and total upheaval ■ Substantial change ■ Small/no change



Source: LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

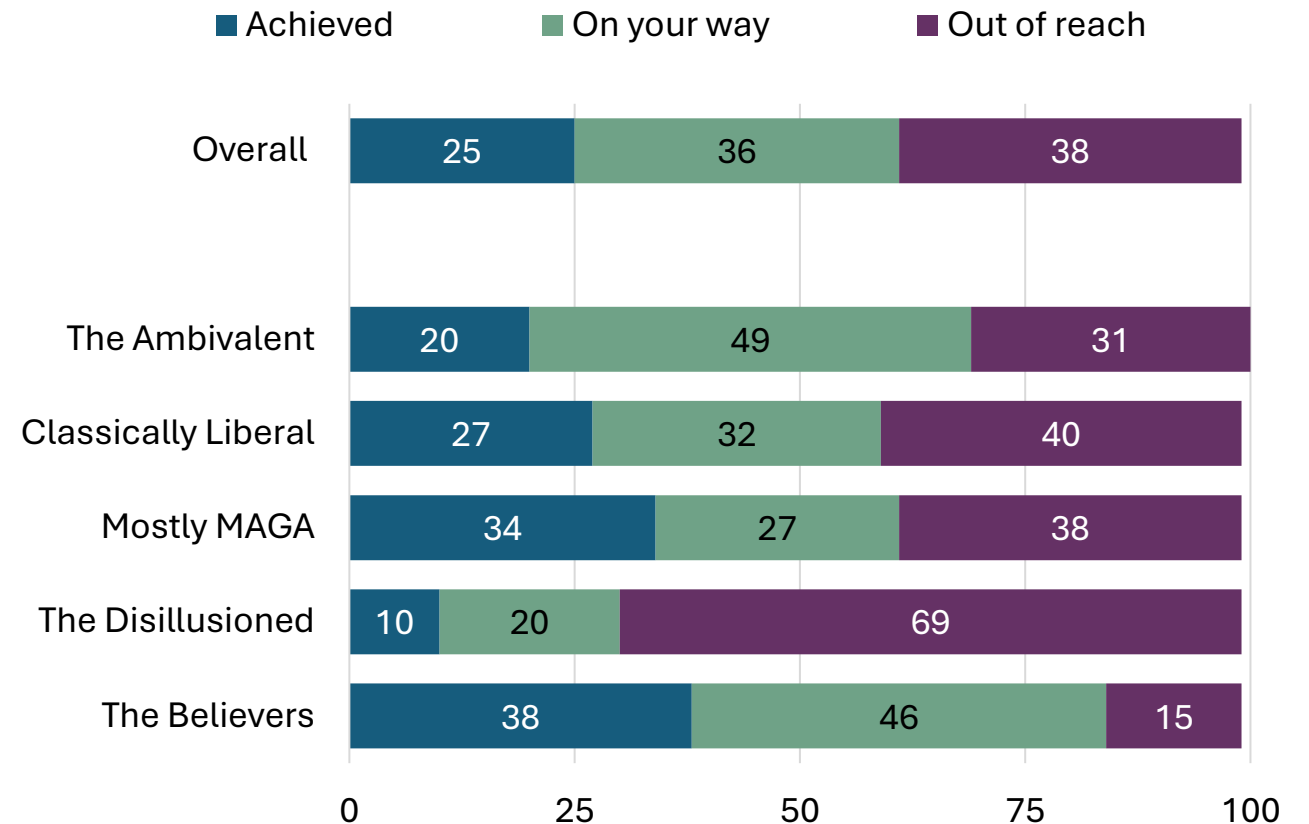
People feel better about their own lives than they do the country

61% believe they have either achieved the American Dream or are on their way.

The Disillusioned is the only group with a majority who think the American Dream is out of reach.

The term "American Dream" can mean different things to different people. However you define it, do you believe you have achieved the American Dream, you're on your way to achieving the American Dream, or the American Dream is out of reach for you?

Percent of adults



Source: LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

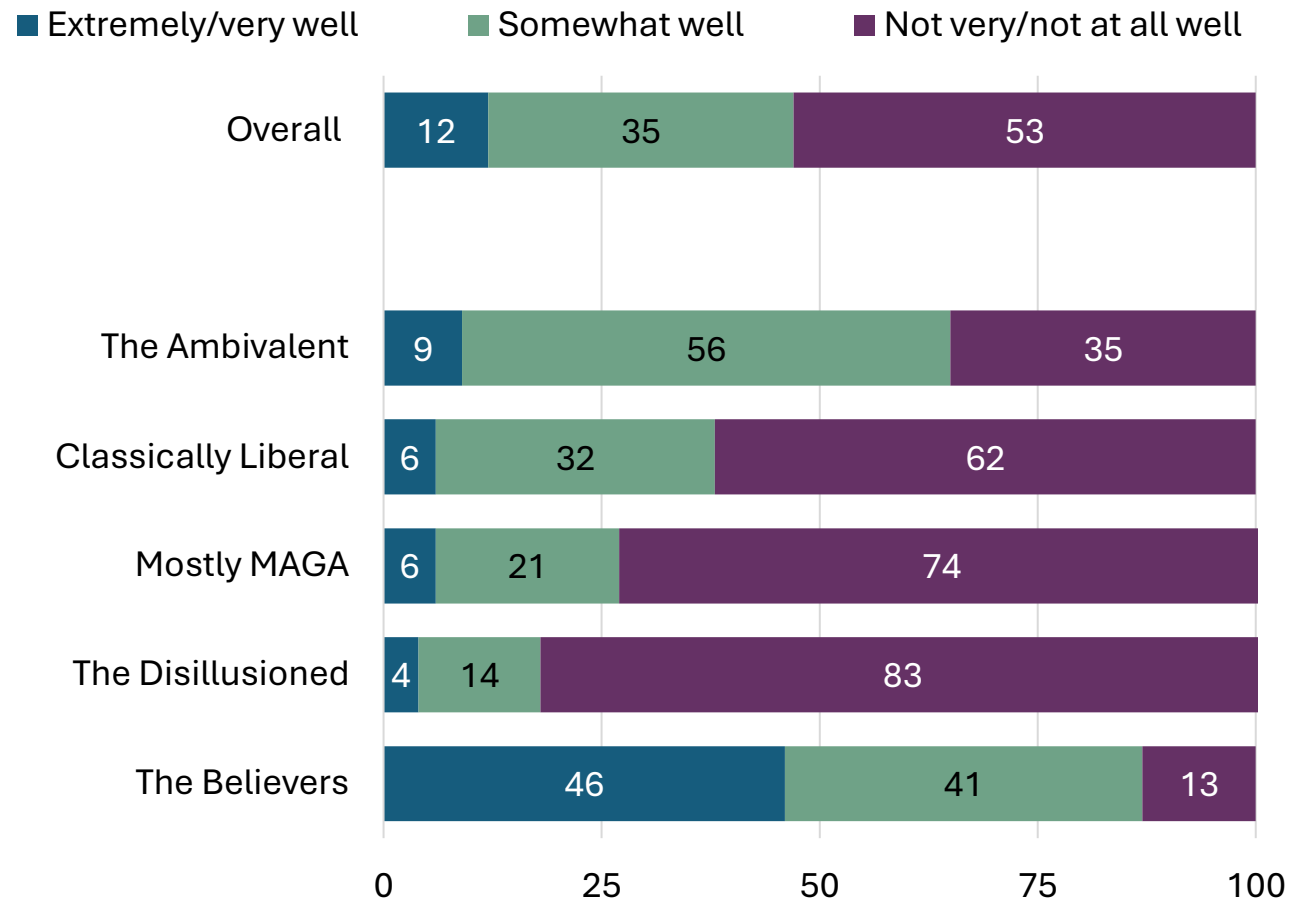
Is democracy working?

Few think it's working well.

The Disillusioned, Mostly MAGA, and Classically Liberal are most cynical.

How well would you say democracy is working in the United States these days?

Percent of adults



Source: LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

News Behavior

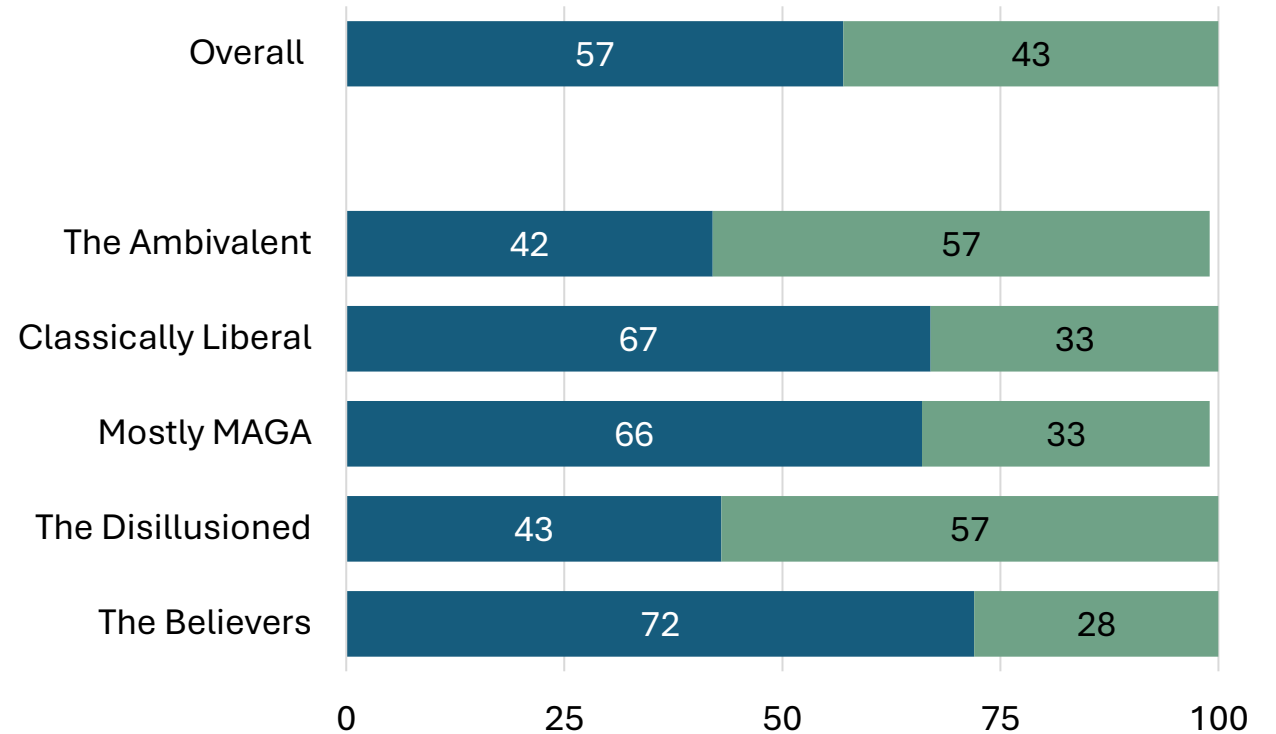
Most people actively seek out news.

The Ambivalent and The Disillusioned are most likely to just bump into it.

Which statement best describes you?

Percent of adults

- I actively seek out news and information
- I mostly bump into news and information as I do other things or hear about it from others



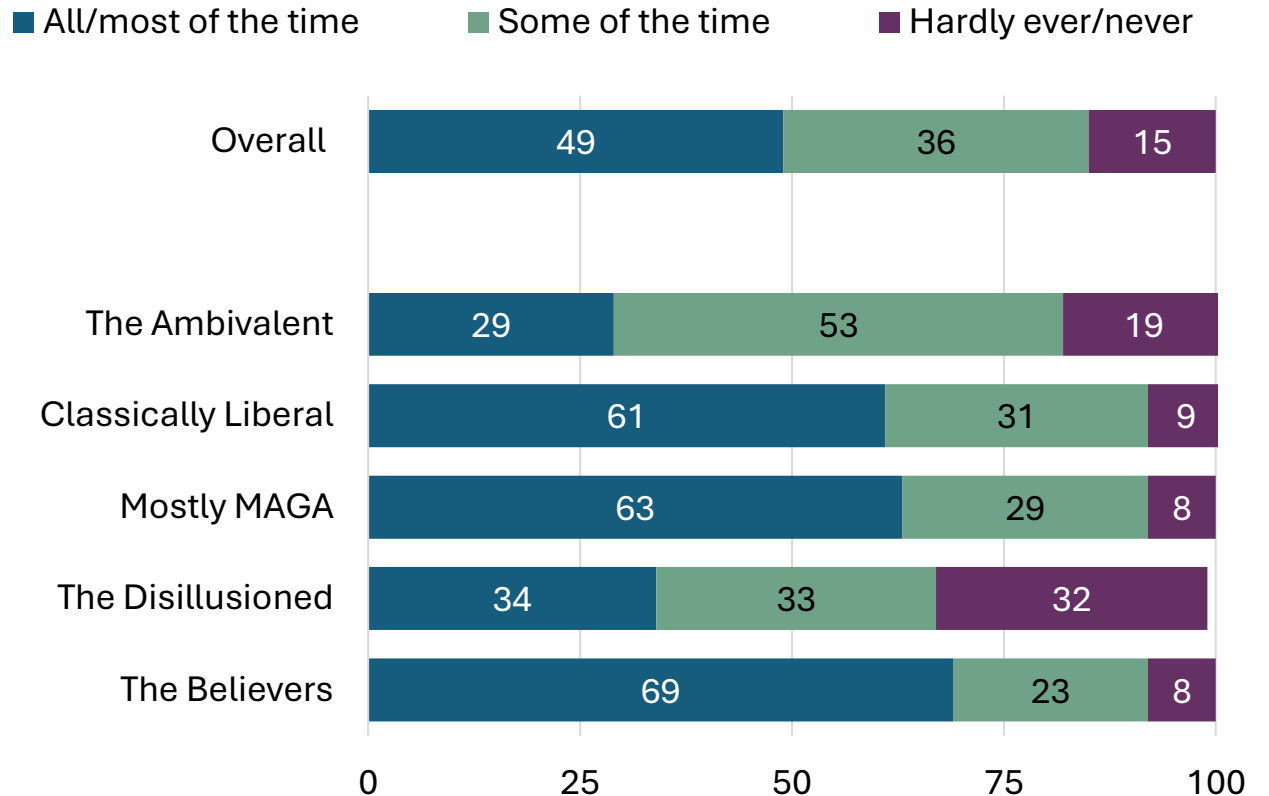
Source: LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

News about the government

Most people follow news about the government and public affairs at least some of the time.

A third of The Disillusioned have little or no interest in the government and public affairs.

Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs: Percent of adults



Source: LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

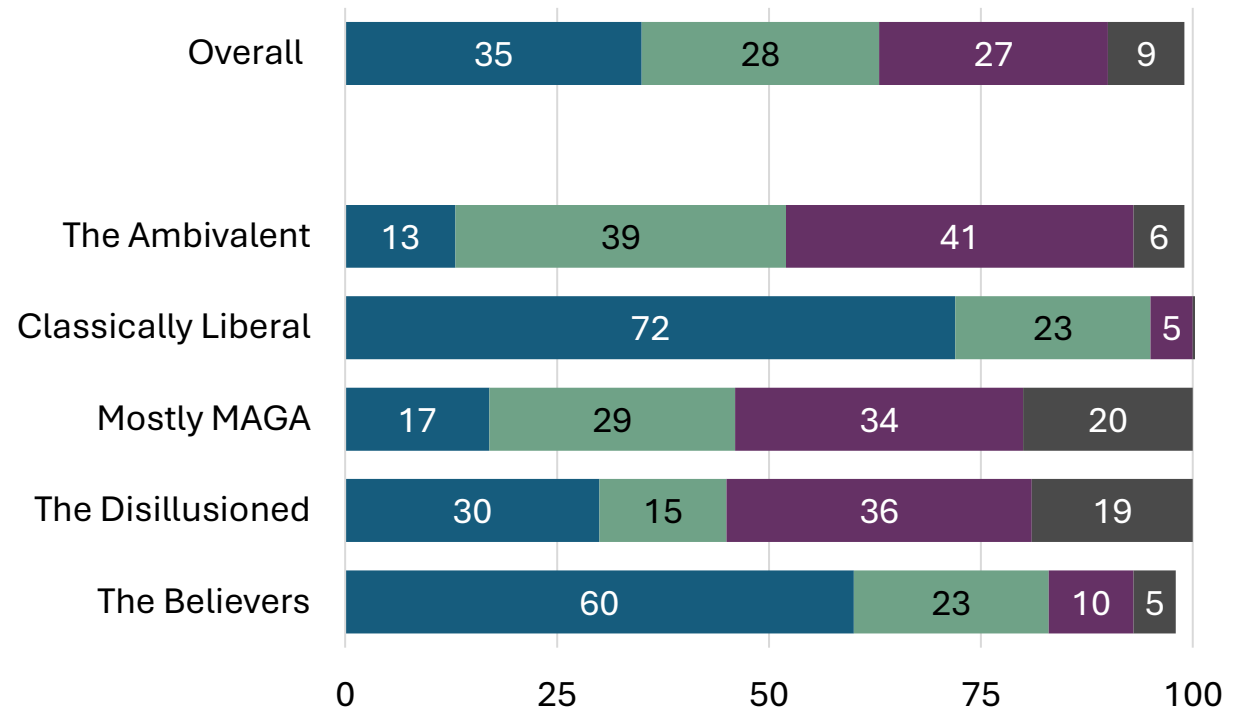
Views of American diversity

Classically Liberal and The Believers are most positive about the country's diversity.

Mostly MAGA and The Disillusioned are most negative.

Does the U.S. diverse population make the country: Percent of adults

■ Much stronger ■ Moderately stronger ■ Neither ■ Moderately/much weaker



Source: LSU-NORC Poll conducted June 26-July 17, 2024 with 3,031 adults nationwide.

Implications . . .

The findings not only reveal the strong headwinds that Kamala Harris faced as a de facto incumbent. They explain why her attempt to differentiate how she would reshape the country was not enough to defeat Trump's pessimism and anger that so deeply resonated with Americans across the political spectrum.

The deep, broad cross-ideological nature of this cynicism also suggests the problems will not be addressed by the solutions of only one party or in the near future.

Among the challenges for researchers and journalists . . .

- What new questions should be asked to understand Americans now that have not asked before?
- How to cover a president who challenges the press as the enemy of the people and all sides see bias?

More information is available at:

- NORC: <https://www.norc.org/research/projects/civic-cynicism-united-states.html>
- LSU: www.norcroundtable.squarespace.com

Thank you.

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