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The Changing Landscape of American Pride and Patriotism: *Long-Run Trends in National Attachment, 1981–2026*

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KEY FINDINGS

- **Americans' pride, patriotism, and attachment to the United States have declined over the past four decades.**
Combining 23 historical survey time series into a single Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), we find that national attachment has declined.
- **The decline is greatest among Democrats.** Democratic expressions of pride and patriotism have fallen across nearly every measure examined, while Republican levels have remained high.
- **The growing partisan divide cannot be explained by demographic change or by changes in a single survey series.**
Democratic declines appear across every age group and across multiple dimensions of national attachment—suggesting that the pattern reflects a broad shift in attitudes rather than changes in who makes up the Democratic Party.
- **These patterns cannot continue.**

INTRODUCTION

America's 250th anniversary invites us to examine national pride, patriotism, and identity over the past four decades. Have Americans become more or less patriotic? If so, have all Americans changed or just some Americans? And what do these changes mean for the future of the country?

To address these questions, we combine 23 historical survey time series from 1981–2026 into a single Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI).¹ We examine long-run trends, whether they differ by political party, whether they can be explained by demographic change, and whether they appear across multiple dimensions of national attachment. Finally, we examine whether they extend beyond attitudes to self-reported patriotic behavior.

AMERICANS' OVERALL SENSE OF NATIONAL PRIDE, PATRIOTISM, AND ATTACHMENT HAS DECLINED—BUT MOSTLY AMONG DEMOCRATS

Americans' expressions of pride, patriotism, and attachment to the United States have declined over the past four decades. Figure 1 shows the PPI for Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall.² Larger values indicate stronger expressions of pride, patriotism, and national attachment. The data reveal that Americans' overall sense of pride and patriotism has declined over time. The public index remained high throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s but gradually weakened during the 2000s before falling more sharply over the past decade. By 2026, the index reached its lowest level in the available data.

The decline, however, can be attributed largely to attitudinal changes among Democrats. As we discuss shortly, Democratic declines appear across age groups, multiple dimensions of national attachment, and even self-reported intentions to display the American flag on Independence Day.

Republican PPI levels remained high throughout 1981–2026, despite several notable fluctuations. The most pronounced shift came after the September 11 terrorist attacks, when Republican PPI scores jumped from 83 in 2000 to nearly 98 in 2002. These elevated levels gradually receded over the following decade. The sharpest decline occurred between 2019 and 2024, a period that largely overlapped the Biden presidency. Republican PPI levels then rebounded in 2025, at the beginning of the second Trump term. As of 2026, Republican levels of pride and patriotism are broadly similar to those observed during the 1980s and 1990s, though still below their post-9/11 peak.

¹ See Section A of the separate Supplemental Appendix for a list of all survey items, their question wording, and the surveys from which they originate. See Section B to download a dataset containing all individual survey items, metadata, and available covariates. See Section C for additional methodological details and a downloadable dataset containing the annual Stimson PPI estimates.

By contrast, Democratic PPI levels plummeted. During the 1980s and 1990s, Democrats and Republicans expressed similarly high levels of pride and patriotism, with scores for each group typically in the 80–90 range. Until the post-9/11 period, differences between the parties generally amounted to only a few points on the 0–100 scale. While both parties have shown declines since, Democratic PPI levels have declined more sharply. By 2026, Democrats (53) scored nearly 36 points lower on the PPI than Republicans (89)—a gap roughly six times larger than the six-point difference observed just four decades earlier.

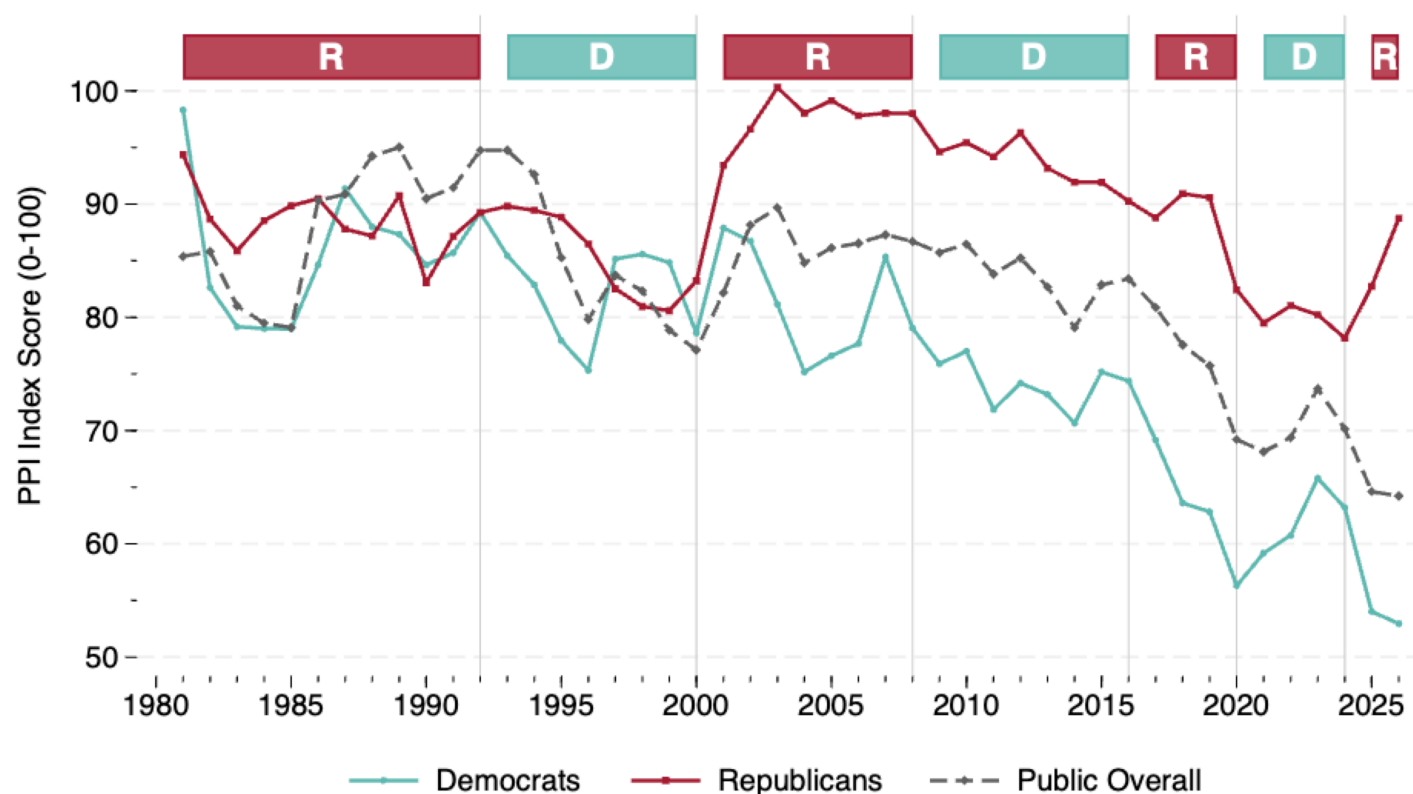


Figure 1. Trends in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), 1981–2026

Note: Lines show estimated trends in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI) for Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall. Estimates are derived from a Stimson dyadic ratios model combining 23 survey time series spanning 1981–2026 for the public series and 1981–2026 for the Democratic and Republican series. Higher values indicate higher levels of pride, patriotism, and national attachment across the available survey measures. Colored strips above the figure indicate the party holding the presidency during each period (blue = Democratic president; red = Republican president). Because some historical surveys reported only overall public results, the public series includes more observations than the Democratic and Republican series, even though all three indices are constructed from the same set of survey series. Accordingly, comparisons are most meaningful within each series over time rather than between the public and partisan series.

Appendix Figure A1 shows that declines in the PPI have been especially pronounced among younger Americans, particularly those under age 30. Because younger Americans are more likely than older Americans to identify as Democrats, one possible explanation for the widening partisan divide is generational replacement—that Democrats exhibit lower levels of pride and patriotism simply because the party now contains more young people.

² These indexes explain 63.5% of the variation across the 23 survey time series used to estimate the public PPI series, 72.9% of the variation across the Democratic series, and 64.3% of the variation across the Republican series.

To examine this possibility, Figure 2 pools more than 200,000 responses across all survey items included in the Pride and Patriotism Index and estimates the probability of expressing a pride- or patriotism-consistent response, separately by party, age group, and historical period. The models adjust for differences across survey questions, and because age is available only for surveys with individual-level data, the results are grouped into three broad periods (1981–2001, 2002–2017, and 2018–2024) to increase sample sizes and improve statistical precision.

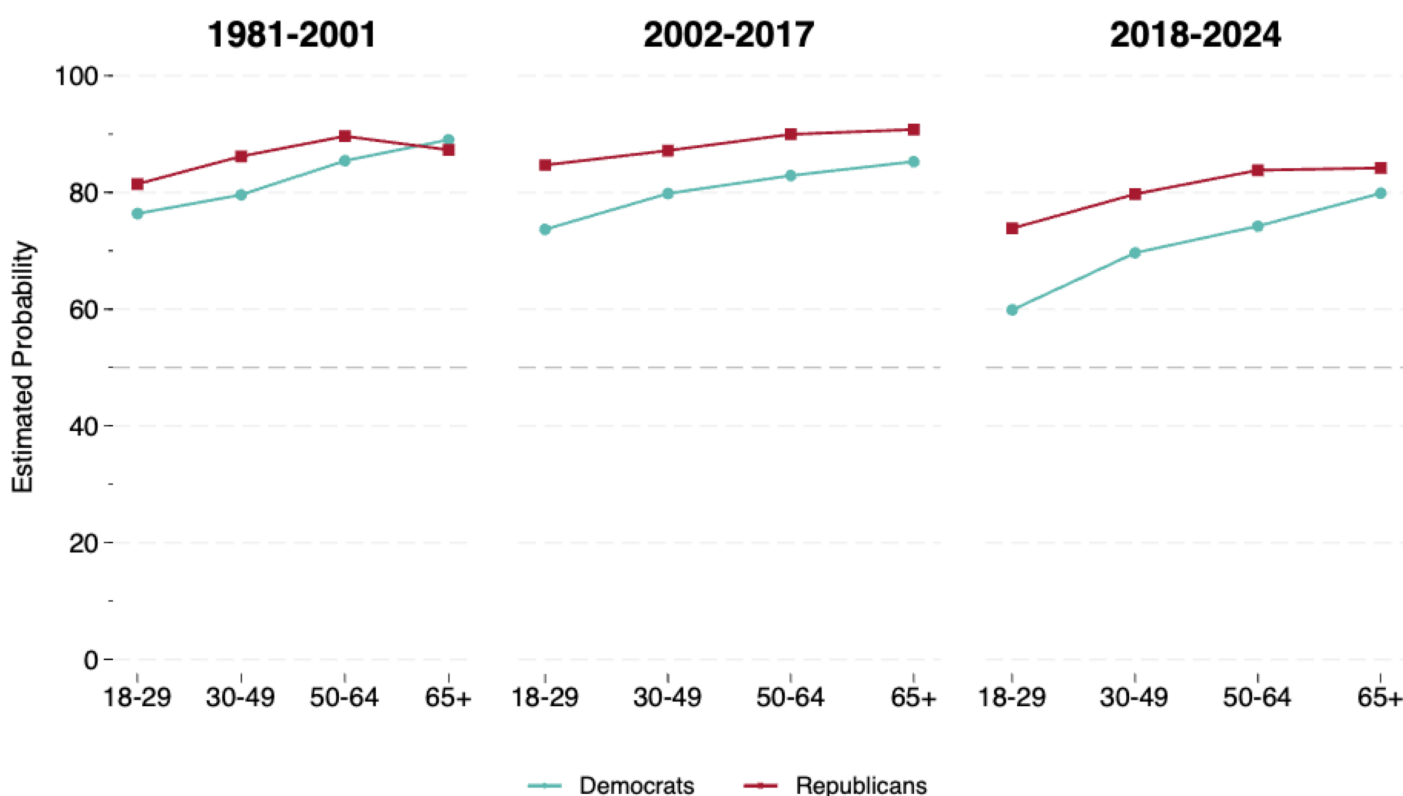


Figure 2. Estimated Probability of Pride- and Patriotism-Consistent Responses, by Party, Age Group, and Time Period

Note: Points show the estimated probability that respondents gave a pride- or patriotism-consistent response across all survey items included in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), separately by party identification, age group, and historical period. Estimates are derived from logistic regression models pooling more than 200,000 individual survey responses across all PPI items and adjusting for differences in question topic and wording. Because age information is unavailable for some historical surveys, estimates are grouped into three broad periods (1981–2001, 2002–2017, and 2018–2024) to improve statistical precision.

The results provide little evidence that the widening ‘pride and patriotism’ divide simply reflects generational replacements.³ Declines in levels of pride and patriotism are evident across age groups within both parties, though they tend to be larger among Democrats, particularly among adults aged 18–29. Indeed, among adults 18–29, the estimated probability of expressing a pride-

³ Appendix Figure A3 conducts a similar analysis by race. The conclusion is similar: declines occur among both white and nonwhite Democrats—and, if anything, are larger among the former—indicating that the trend is not solely attributable to changes in the party’s racial composition.

or patriotism-consistent response fell from 76% to 60% among Democrats, and 81% to 74% among Republicans. Among adults 30–49, the corresponding probabilities declined from 80% to 70% among Democrats and from 86% to 80% among Republicans. Comparable patterns appear among adults 50–64 (Democrats: 85% to 74%; Republicans: 90% to 84%) and those 65 and older (Democrats: 89% to 80%; Republicans: 91% to 84%).

In sum, while levels of pride and patriotism declined across age groups within both parties, the declines were consistently larger among Democrats, with the widest gap occurring among adults ages 18–29. These patterns suggest that the widening partisan divide is not simply the result of generational replacement.

THESE DECLINES ARE WIDESPREAD ACROSS ALL QUESTIONS IN THE PRIDE AND PATRIOTISM INDEX

One possibility is that the overall decline might reflect changes in only one aspect of national attachment rather than a broader shift. For example, Democrats may have become less likely to say they are proud to be American while continuing to express similar levels of patriotism, attachment to the United States, or belief in American exceptionalism. If so, the broad decline observed in the Pride and Patriotism Index might reflect changes in a single dimension rather than a more general transformation in national attitudes. (As we will see, the data suggest otherwise.)

To test this explanation, we estimated separate indexes for each of the major components of the Pride and Patriotism Index: **general pride** (e.g., “How proud are you to be American?”), **facet-specific pride** (e.g., pride in America’s democracy, history, and scientific achievements), **patriotism** (e.g., “How patriotic do you consider yourself?”), **American identity importance** (e.g., “How important is being American to your identity?”), and **American exceptionalism** (e.g., agreement that “America is better than most other countries”).

Two broad findings emerge from this analysis (see Appendix B). First, every dimension shows evidence of long-run decline among the public overall, indicating that the patterns documented in Figure 1 are not driven by a single survey construct. Second, across every dimension, declines are substantially steeper among Democrats than among Republicans. Although the magnitude of change varies—with patriotism proving more resilient than the other dimensions and general pride showing especially large declines—the same pattern emerges across every dimension: Democratic expressions of national attachment have weakened across multiple measures, while Republican expressions of national attachment have remained comparatively stable or declined much more modestly.

DECLINES IN NATIONAL ATTACHMENT ARE ALSO REFLECTED IN PATRIOTIC BEHAVIOR

While fewer Americans report strong expressions of national attachment, an important question is whether those changing attitudes are also reflected in patriotic behavior.

One visible expression of patriotism is to fly the American flag, particularly on Independence Day.³ We focus on the most consistent and most substantively relevant behavioral series available for this report: whether respondents say they will display an American flag on the Fourth of July.

Figure 3 reveals the same dynamic as the earlier analyses.

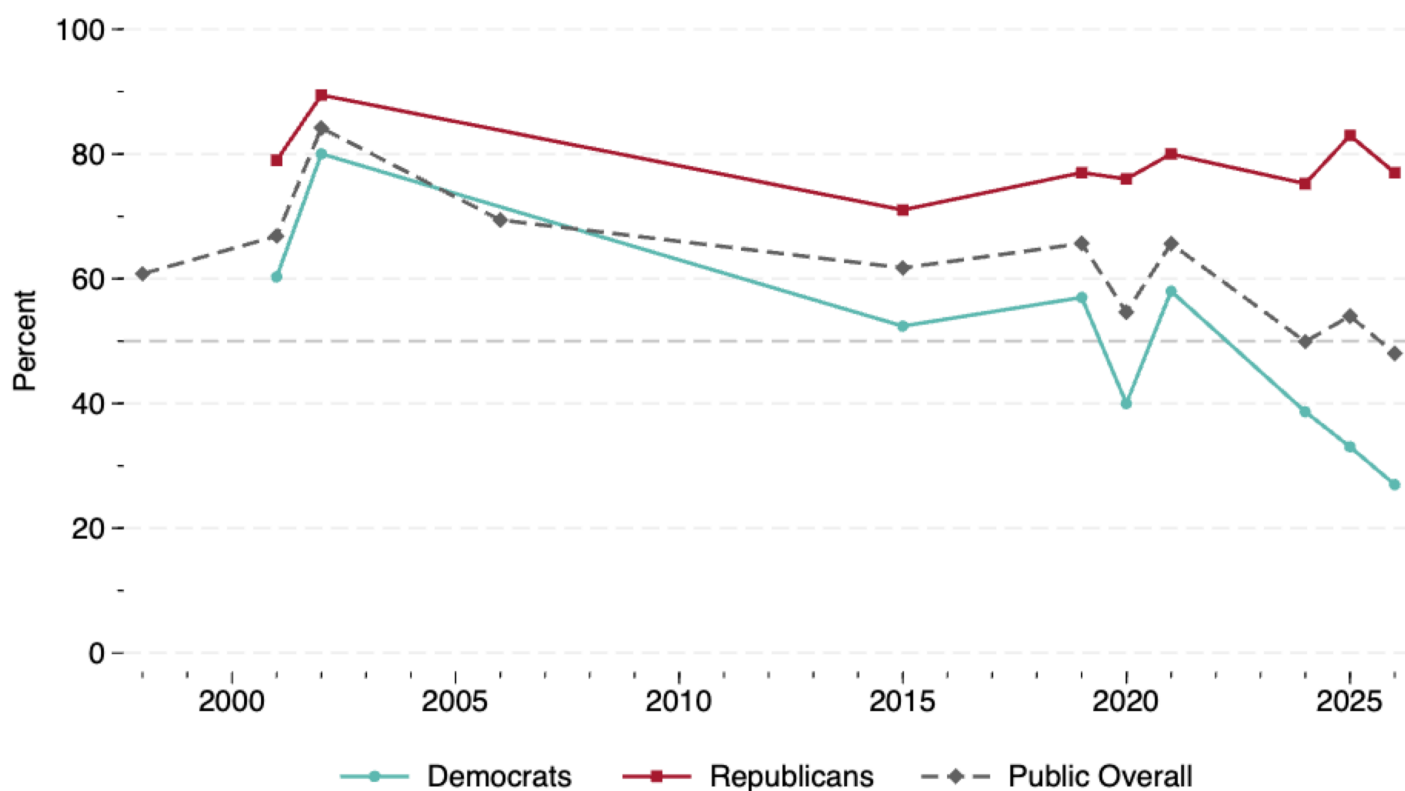


Figure 3. Reported Intentions to Display the American Flag on the Fourth of July (1998–2026), by Party

Note: Points represent the percentage of respondents who reported that they intended to display or fly an American flag on the Fourth of July. Estimates are drawn from nationally representative surveys conducted by Gallup, CBS News, The Economist/YouGov, Maritz Marketing Research, and other polling organizations between 1998 and 2026. Although question wording varies slightly across surveys (e.g., “display” versus “fly” the American flag), all items measure respondents’ stated intentions to display the American flag on Independence Day. Partisan estimates are shown only for years in which party-specific results were publicly available.



In 1998, 61% of Americans said they intended to display the flag. By June 2001, when the question was next asked, that share had risen modestly to 67%. One year later—roughly nine months after the September 11 terrorist attacks—it surged to 84%. Over the following two decades, reported intentions gradually returned roughly to their pre-9/11 levels before falling in the two most recent surveys. By 2024, 50% of Americans said they intended to display the flag. In 2026, just 48% would.

Again, the parties differ dramatically in who flies the flag. In 2001 and 2002, Democrats and Republicans reported high rates of intended flag display. In 2002, for example, 80% of Democrats and 89% of Republicans said they intended to display a flag.

Over the following two decades, the parties diverged sharply. Democratic intentions to display the flag fell from 80% in 2002 to 52% in 2015 and then to just 27% in 2026. Republican intentions also declined from their post-9/11 peak but still ranged from roughly 71% to 83% since 2015 (77% in the most recent survey). As a result, the partisan gap widened from roughly 9 percentage

CONCLUSION

Over the past four decades, Americans' stated pride, patriotism, and attachment to the United States have weakened. Although levels of these attitudes have declined within both major parties, the declines have been substantially larger among Democrats than among Republicans. Republicans continue to express high levels of pride and patriotism across a wide range of survey measures. These differences cannot be explained simply by generational replacement, nor do they reflect changes in only one aspect of national attachment. Instead, they appear across multiple dimensions—including general pride, patriotism, national identity importance, American exceptionalism, and even self-reported patriotic behavior.

Americans increasingly differ not only in their opinions about public policy, but also in how they relate to the nation itself. Questions that once elicited broad bipartisan agreement—such as expressing pride in being American or displaying the national flag on Independence Day—now produce substantial partisan differences. As national identity becomes increasingly polarized, symbols and expressions that historically united Americans may themselves become markers of political identity.

Just why Americans have become less patriotic is unclear. Perhaps the rise of social media is to blame. It appears that significant declines began during the early 2000s as social media blasted on to the scene. Social media has led to more unhappiness generally, and perhaps the effects also apply toward people's views toward America. Foreign adversaries seek to use social media to turn Americans against their country. It may be working.

Perhaps changes in education explain these declines in patriotism. Younger Americans are considerably more skeptical than older Americans. Have K12 and university curricula changed in ways that have led students to become less patriotic?

³ Historical survey data on flag display are considerably more fragmented than those on pride and patriotism. Polling organizations have asked about flag ownership, displaying a flag at home or work, displaying one during the past year, displaying one on holidays, and a variety of other flag-related behaviors. Most of these measures were asked only sporadically, use different wording, and lack party breakdowns, making them difficult to compare over time.



What is clear is that these patterns cannot stand.

When a sizable population of citizens are not proud of their country, that country cannot long endure. When citizens are only proud of their country when “their” party controls the presidency or Congress, that country cannot long endure. And when fewer and fewer young adults express national pride, that country cannot long endure.

In his Lyceum address, Abraham Lincoln asked his listeners what would be America’s undoing. It would not come at the hands of a foreign power, he argued, but from within:

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

That suicide may have begun.

Although pride, patriotism, and national attachment remain widespread, they no longer unite Democrats and Republicans as



APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURES

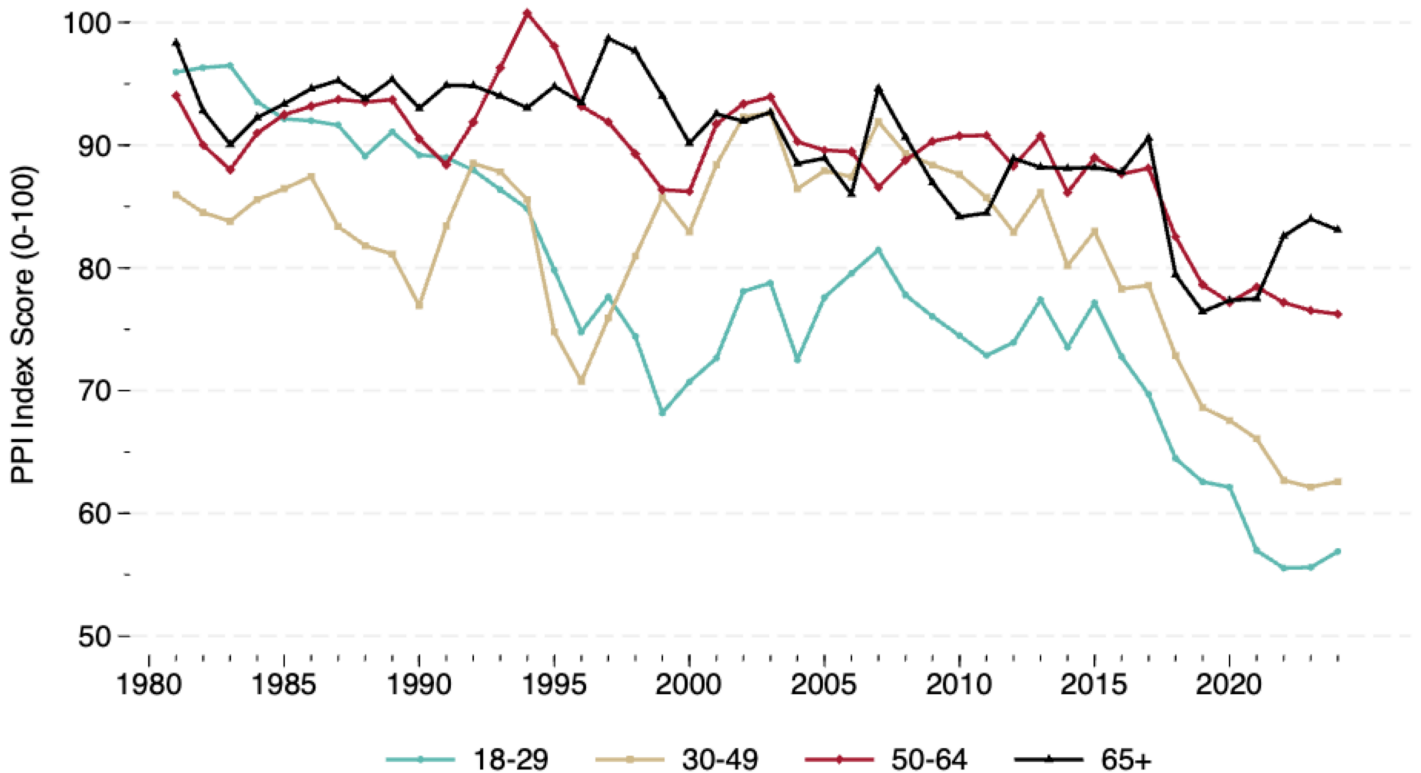


Figure A1. Trends in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), by Age Group

Note: Lines show estimated trends in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI) for four age groups (18–29, 30–49, 50–64, and 65+). Estimates are derived from separate Stimson dyadic ratios models combining 21 survey time series spanning 1981–2024. Higher values indicate stronger expressions of pride, patriotism, and national attachment across the available survey measures. Because age information is available only for surveys with individual-level data, these estimates are derived from 21 survey time series rather than the 23 series used to estimate the main PPI.

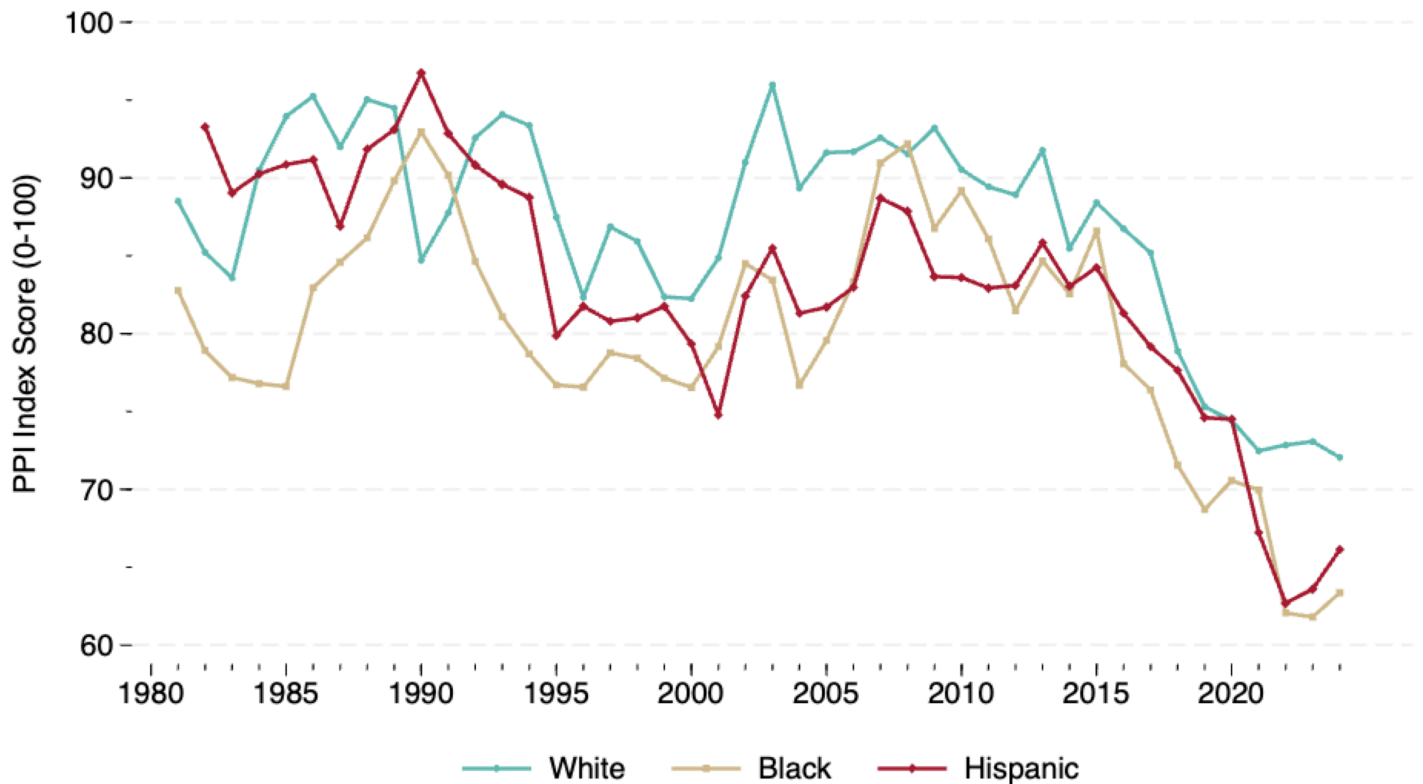


Figure A2. Trends in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), by Race/Ethnicity

Note: Lines show estimated trends in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI) for three racial/ethnic groups (White, Black, Hispanic). Estimates are derived from separate Stimson dyadic ratios models combining 21 survey time series spanning 1981–2024. Higher values indicate stronger expressions of pride, patriotism, and national attachment across the available survey measures. Because race/ethnicity information is available only for surveys with individual-level data, these estimates are derived from 21 survey time series rather than the 23 series used to estimate the main PPI.

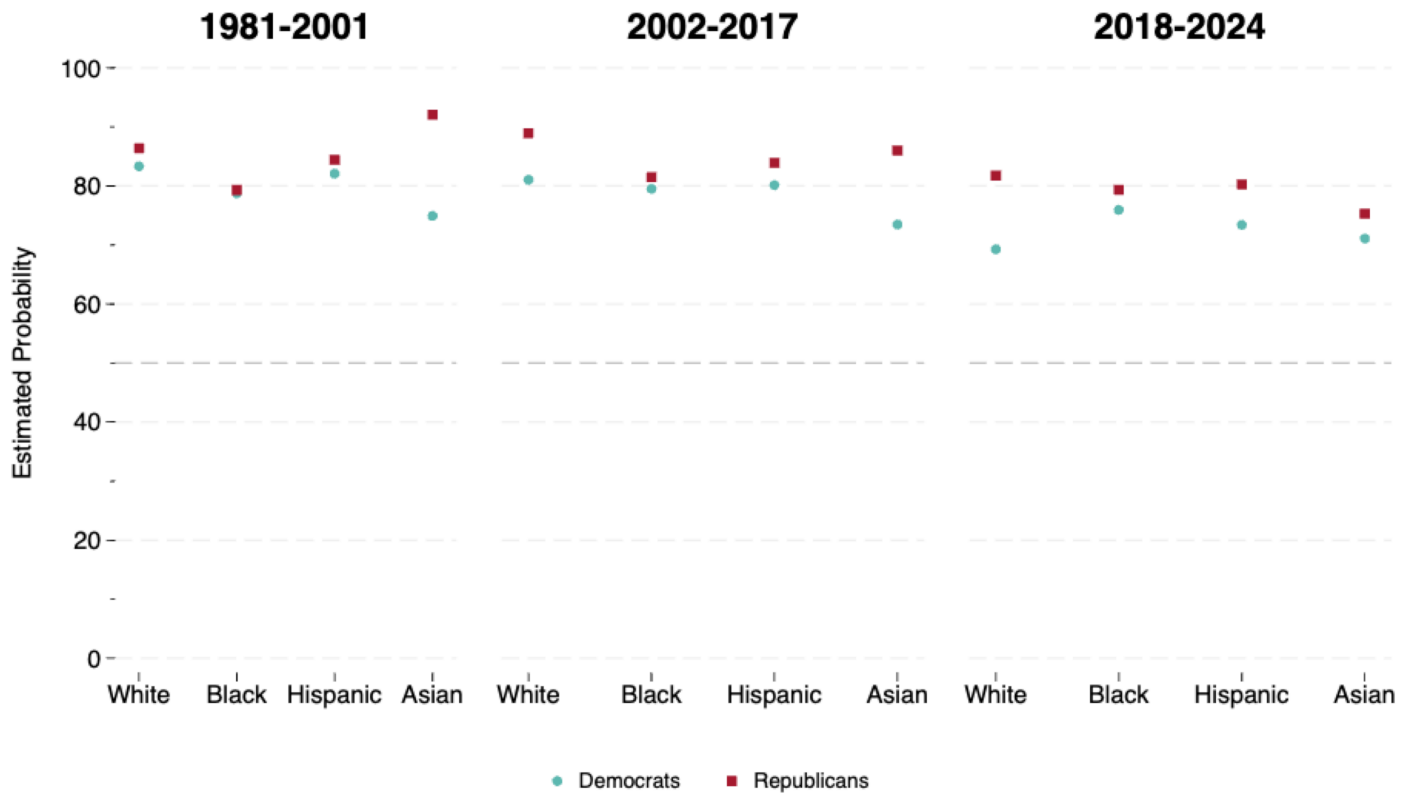


Figure A3. Estimated Probability of Pride- and Patriotism-Consistent Responses, by Party, Race/Ethnicity, and Time Period

Note: Points show the estimated probability that respondents gave a pride- or patriotism-consistent response across all survey items included in the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), separately by party identification, race/ethnicity, and historical period. Estimates are derived from logistic regression models pooling more than 200,000 individual survey responses across all PPI items and adjusting for differences in question topic and wording. Because race/ethnicity information is unavailable for some historical surveys, estimates are grouped into three broad periods (1981–2001, 2002–2017, and 2018–2024) to improve statistical precision.



APPENDIX B: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES

The Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI) combines several related dimensions of national attachment into a single long-run measure. An important question is whether the trends documented in the main text are driven primarily by changes in one component or instead reflect broader changes across multiple dimensions.

To examine this possibility, we separately analyze each major component of the PPI. Because sufficient historical data are available only for some dimensions, the analyses below combine index-based and item-specific time series. Together, they indicate that the broad patterns documented in the main text are evident across multiple measures rather than being driven by any single survey construct.

General pride exhibits the steepest long-run decline of any component included in the Pride and Patriotism Index (Figure B1). Public scores remained consistently high throughout the 1980s and 1990s before declining gradually during the 2000s and falling sharply after 2016, reaching their lowest observed level in 2026. This pattern was driven almost entirely by changes among Democrats. Republican general pride declined only slightly throughout the 1981–2026 period, generally remaining in the mid- to upper-90s despite modest fluctuations. Democratic general pride, by contrast, declined from levels comparable to Republicans' during the 1980s and 1990s to just 63 by 2026, producing a partisan gap of more than 30 points.

Whereas the General Pride component measures respondents' overall pride in being American, the facet-specific pride measures ask about pride in particular aspects of the United States, including its history, armed forces, democracy, economic achievements, scientific achievements, arts and literature, sports, global influence, and treatment of different groups. Figure B2 presents historical trends for each of these nine measures. Points on the lines represent the percent of respondents giving either a "Extremely proud" or "Very proud" response to each item.

Several common patterns emerge. First, public pride generally declined across most domains over time, although the magnitude of decline varied considerably. Second, Americans continued to express relatively high levels of pride in the armed forces and scientific achievements, whereas pride in democracy, economic achievements, global influence, and the equal treatment of different groups remained substantially lower. Finally, partisan differences widened across nearly every domain. By the most

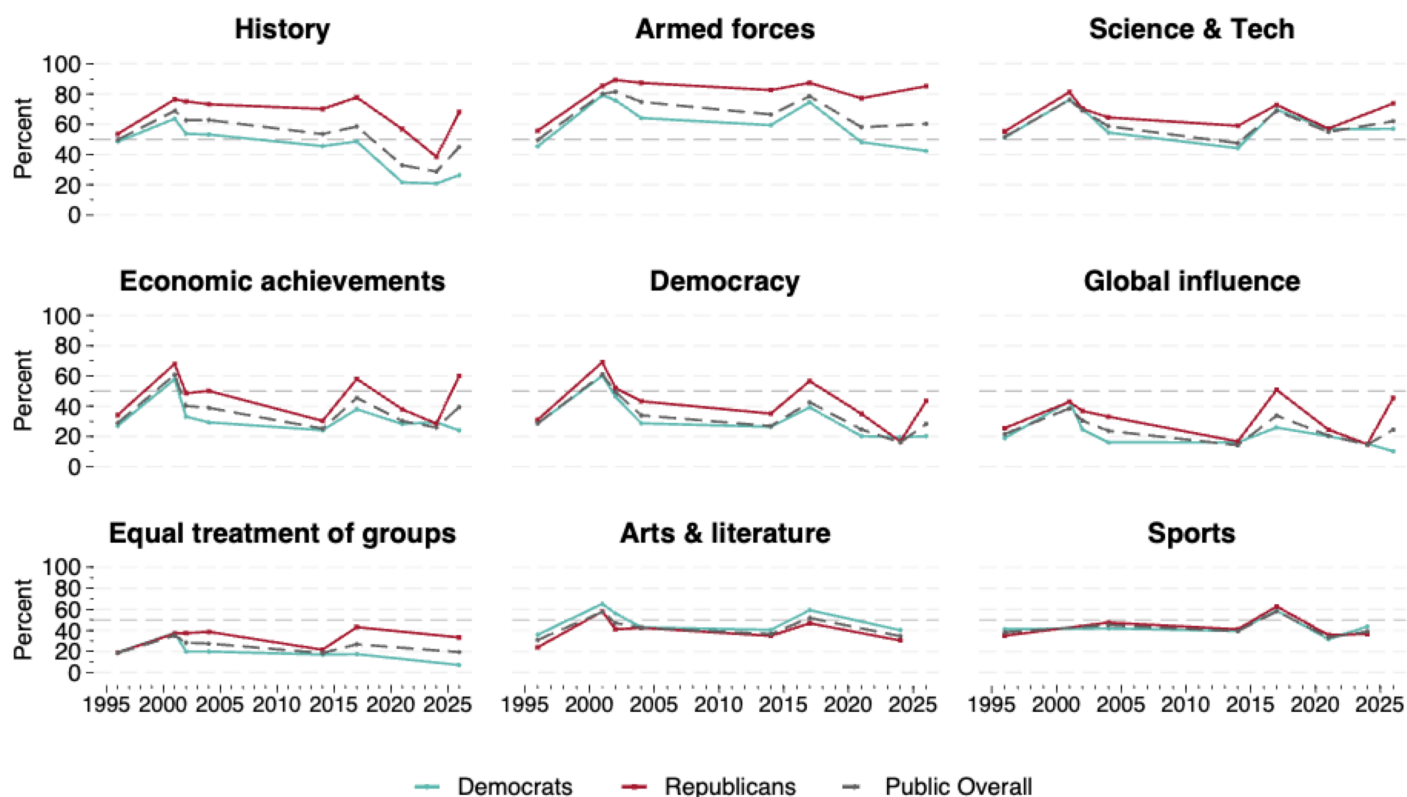


Figure B2. Trends in Nine Facet-Specific Pride Measures, by Party

Note: Panels display the percentage of Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall expressing high levels of pride in nine specific aspects of the United States: its armed forces, arts and literature, democracy, economic achievements, equal treatment of groups, global political influence, history, scientific and technological achievements, and sports. Estimates are based on harmonized historical survey series from the General Social Survey and AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Response categories were recoded to represent high pride (e.g., “very” or “extremely/very” proud), with wording harmonized where necessary to maximize comparability over time.

The Facet-Specific Pride Index summarizes respondents’ evaluations across the nine domains presented in Figure B2. Like the General Pride Index, it reveals a broad long-run decline in Americans’ pride, although the trajectory differs somewhat across dimensions (Figure B3). Public scores peaked in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks before declining over the following two decades. Democrats and Republicans followed broadly similar trajectories over this period, but the magnitude of the decline differed substantially between the parties. Republican scores declined from their post-9/11 peak, particularly during the mid-2000s and early 2020s, before rebounding sharply in 2026. Democratic scores also declined from their post-9/11 peak, but by a considerably larger amount. Although Democratic scores occasionally rebounded, those gains proved temporary, and the overall trajectory remained downward.

As a result, despite variation across individual domains, the composite Facet-Specific Pride Index closely mirrors the principal finding of the broader Pride and Patriotism Index: evaluations of specific aspects of the United States have weakened in both

parties over time, though substantially more among Democrats than Republicans.

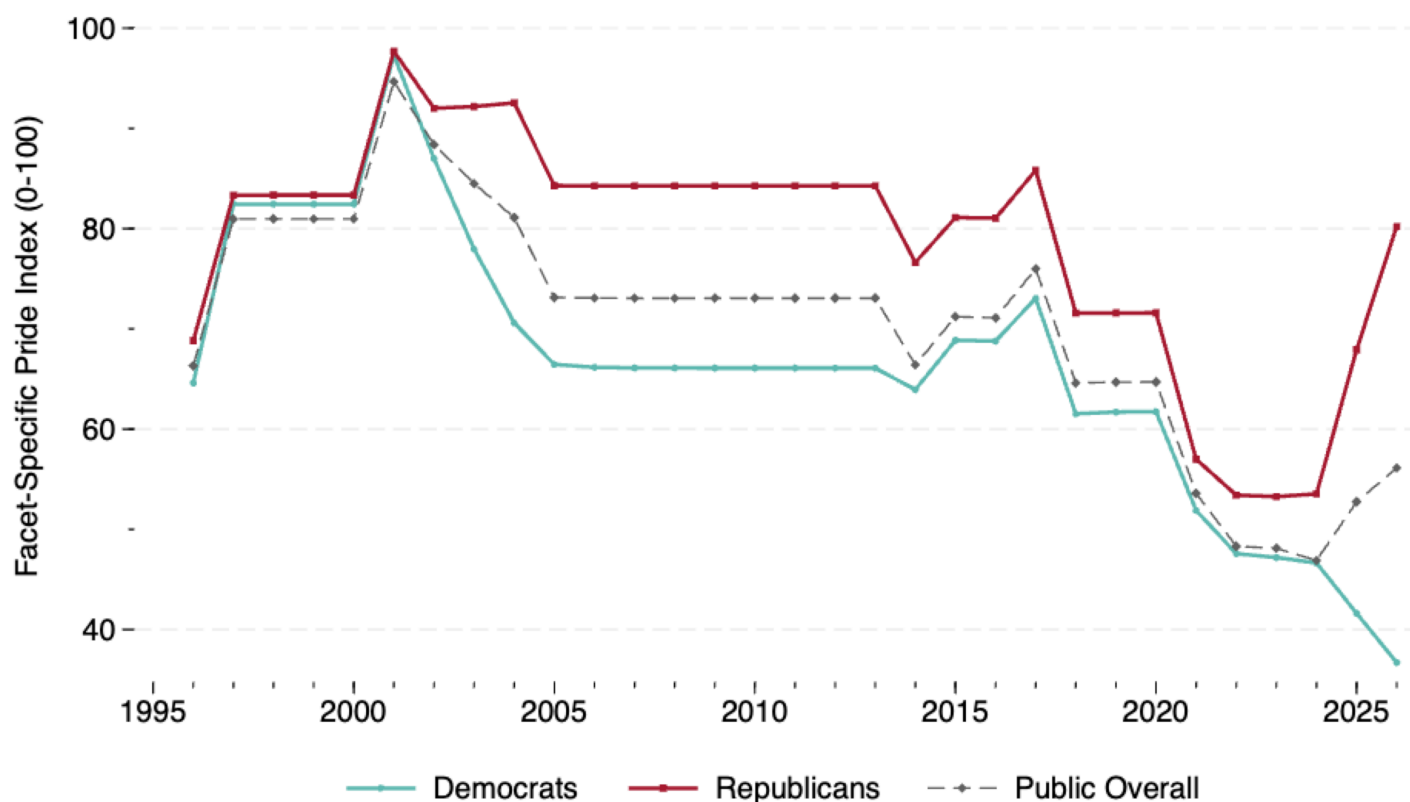


Figure B3. Trends in the Facet-Specific Pride Component of the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), by Party

Note: Lines show estimated trends in the Facet-Specific Pride component of the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI) for Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall. Estimates are derived from separate Stimson dyadic ratios models combining nine historical survey series spanning 1996–2026 that measure pride in specific aspects of the United States, including its history, armed forces, democracy, economic achievements, scientific and technological achievements, arts and literature, sports, global political influence, and treatment of different groups. Higher values indicate stronger expressions of facet-specific pride. The estimated latent dimension explains 87.7% of the variance in the public series, 83.5% in the Democratic series, and 83.9% in the Republican series.

The Patriotism component differs from the pride measures in that it captures respondents' willingness to describe themselves as patriotic rather than their evaluations of the United States or specific aspects of the country. This dimension proved more resilient than the other components of the PPI. As shown in Figure B4, public scores remained high throughout most of the period, though they declined from the post-9/11 peak and reached their lowest levels in the most recent data. The partisan pattern, however, remains clear. Republican patriotism stayed relatively stable, remaining above 90 throughout the full 1983–2026 period. Democratic patriotism declined more gradually, falling from the mid-80s in the 1980s and 1990s to 72 by 2026. Thus, even on the most stable component of the PPI, Democrats exhibit substantially larger long-run declines than Republicans.



Figure B4. Patriotism Component of the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI), by Party

Note: Lines show estimated trends in the Patriotism component of the Pride and Patriotism Index (PPI) for Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall. Estimates are derived from separate Stimson dyadic ratios models combining four historical survey series spanning 1983–2026 that ask respondents how patriotic they consider themselves or whether they agree that they are patriotic. Higher values indicate stronger expressions of patriotism. The estimated latent dimension explains 81.8% of the variance in the public series, 90.3% in the Democratic series, and 80.5% in the Republican series.

Unlike the previous figures, Figure B5 presents a single historical survey measure rather than a latent index. The importance Americans attach to being American has declined markedly over the past decade. Between 2012 and 2024, the share of Americans saying that being American is extremely or very important to their identity fell from 83% to 61%. As elsewhere in this report, however, the decline has been larger among Democrats. Democratic responses fell from 80% in 2012 to 49% in 2024, while Republican responses remained substantially higher throughout the period, declining from 90% to 75%. These findings suggest that the broader patterns documented by the Pride and Patriotism Index are also evident in direct measures of the importance individuals attach to their American identity.

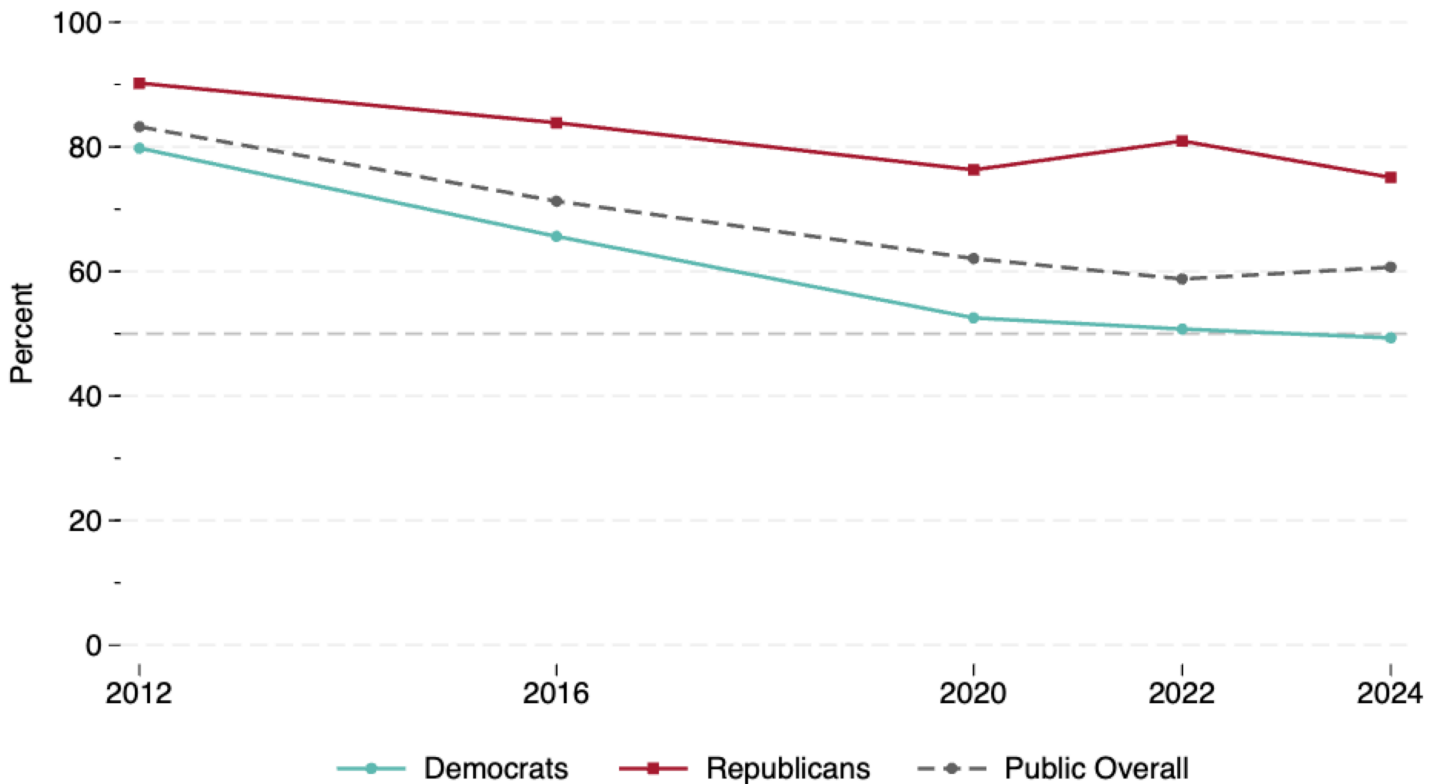


Figure B5. Importance of American Identity, by Party

Note: Lines show the percentage of Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall who reported that being American is extremely or very important to their identity. Estimates are based on harmonized survey items from the American National Election Studies and ANES pilot studies spanning 2012–2024. Response categories were harmonized where necessary to maximize comparability across surveys.

Figure B6 examines two closely related but conceptually distinct indicators of national attachment. The first measures American exceptionalism by asking whether respondents believe America is better than most other countries. The second measures respondents' personal attachment to the United States by asking whether they would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world.

Although conceptually distinct, both measures exhibit the same broad pattern documented throughout this report. Public agreement with each statement declined over time, although the declines were smaller among Republicans. Agreement that America is better than most other countries fell from 79% to 52% among Democrats between 1996 and 2024, while remaining higher among Republicans (87% to 78%). Likewise, the share of Democrats who said they would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country declined from 88% to 60%, compared with a smaller decline among Republicans (92% to 91%). These findings provide additional evidence that declines in national attachment extend beyond pride and patriotism to broader beliefs

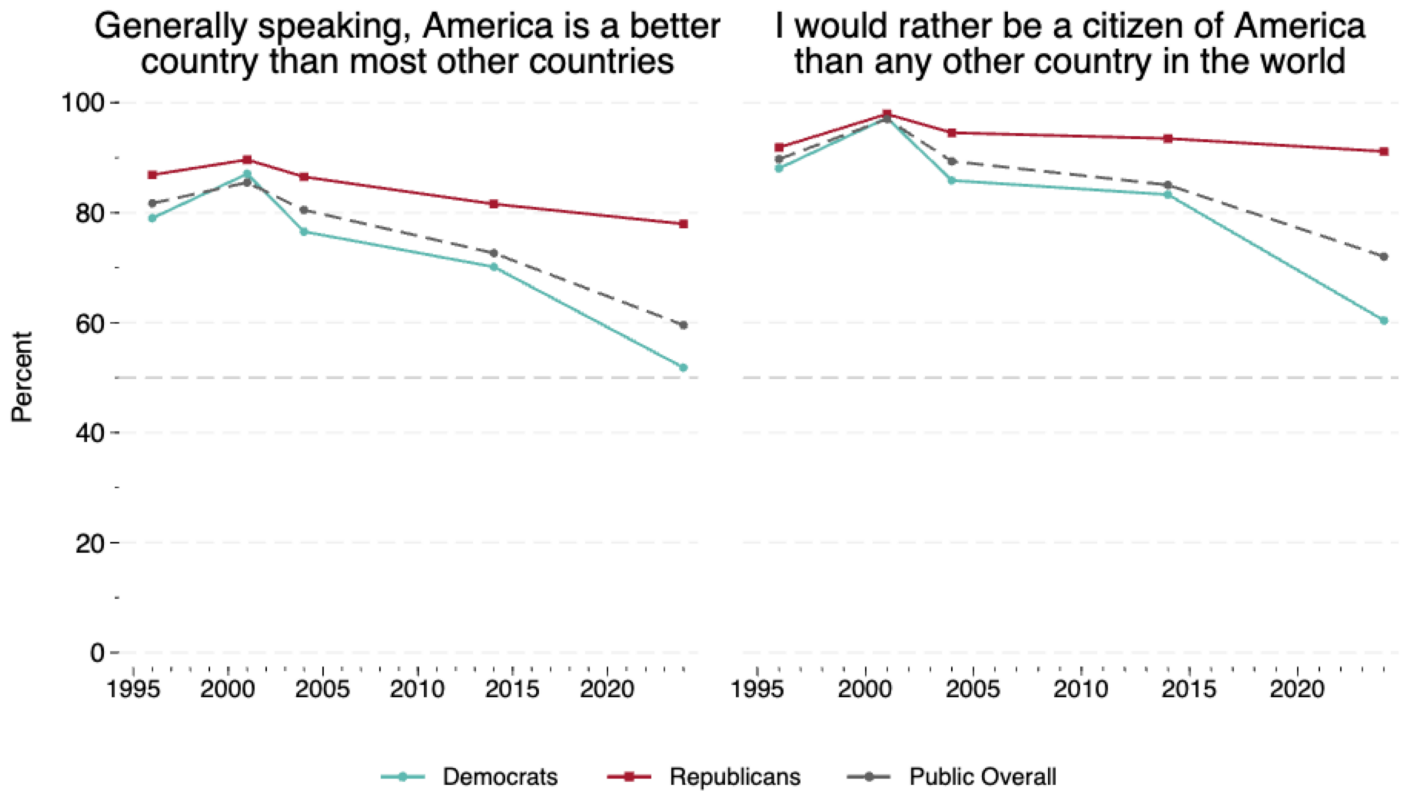


Figure B6. Trends in Two Measures of American Exceptionalism and National Preference

Note: Panels show the percentage of Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall who agreed with two historical survey statements: (A) "Generally speaking, America is a better country than most other countries," and (B) "I would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world." Estimates are based on harmonized survey items from the General Social Survey and National Opinion Research Center spanning 1996–2024. Percentages combine respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with each statement.