

Divided: Surveys find broad agreement on a range of topics

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All the splintering bared in the rhetoric of a presidential campaign belies another truth: Americans are remarkably united, too.

You see it in the banality of routine, in morning drives to work and evenings before the glow of a TV. You see it along parade routes, in blood donation lines after tragedies, and in the quiet prayers of the faithful. You see it in the flag.

Bouldin works on the opposite end of a sprawling sewing room floor from Ed Haney and political pollsters would see them in different worlds altogether. Haney is white and male, tends to side with Republicans and expects to vote for Donald Trump. Bouldin is black and female, always votes Democratic and will cast her ballot for Hillary Clinton. Yet they both speak of their Christian faith, the importance of family, their love of America.

"The United States is the freest and the best country on this earth and that flag represents that," said Haney, a 69-year-old maintenance mechanic at Annin. "The country was founded by men of different opinions who united on one thing: The freedom to have those opinions."

Broad agreement

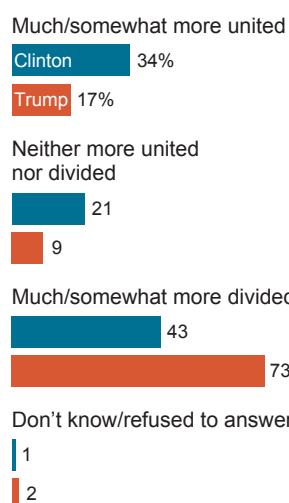
For all the divisions well-known across the U.S., surveys find broad agreement on a range of topics.

On foreign affairs, Americans hold resoundingly favorable views of Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany and Japan, and unfavorable ones of North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. Overwhelmingly, they see the Islamic State group as a major threat.

Domestically, there's near unanimity that veterans should be better cared for, and that more research into renewable energy should be supported. Medicare and Social Security are wildly popular, and most have a positive view of entrepreneurship and small busi-

To unite or divide

Poll takers were asked which candidate, if elected, would make the country more united or more divided:



NOTE: Poll of 1,008 adults; margin of error ±4.1 percentage points; conducted June 23-26.

SOURCE: The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

ness. Nearly all Americans believe in helping the less fortunate.

The gun debate may polarize Capitol Hill and statehouses, but there is wide consensus among Americans on mandating background checks for gun shows and private sales (85 percent agree, according to a Pew Research Center poll), and on keeping weapons from the mentally ill (79 percent agree).

Abortion remains acrimonious, but relatively few people call for totally legalizing or outlawing it in every case, with the majority of people somewhere in the middle. (Only 24 percent of Americans believe in blanket legalization, according to Pew, and 16 percent are for an outright ban.)

And though immigration remains a flashpoint, most Americans believe undocumented immigrants should be able to remain in the country if they meet certain conditions. (Another Pew poll found 74 percent of Americans held that view.)

"The average Democrat and the average Republican are not that far apart from each



AP Photo/Gerry Broome
Employees Lottie Penick, left, and Melissa Hodnett iron stars onto a United States flag at Annin Flagmakers in South Boston, Va. Ask the workers at the factory to name life's most important things and family, work and faith are repeated. Presented the chance to live in a foreign land, the idea is uniformly rejected, with each saying America can't be beat. And nudged to sum up what this country's people share, they invoke their handiwork and what it stands for — freedom, opportunity and pride.

other," said Patrick Miller, a political science professor at the University of Kansas.

Hard work

Unity also emerges in comparing the U.S. with other countries. Americans are more likely than those elsewhere to believe hard work is very important to get ahead in life and that individuals have control over their success. They stand out among rich countries for their optimism and their widespread belief in God, the importance of religion in their lives and the regularity in which they practice their faith. Some 89 percent of Americans express some level of belief in God, according to Pew.

Americans may not agree on whether to support Clinton or Trump, but they unite in their lack of confidence in Congress and the political system overall. They hold rabid allegiances to varying sports teams, but will chant "USA" together as Olympians compete. They love shopping; red meat, ice cream and cheese; and dogs over cats.

That unity is embodied in the flag. American children start

their school days, hand to heart, in a pledge, and it becomes as much a fixture in their lives as in their history books. The flag has been draped over athletes, launched into space and planted at the North Pole. After 9/11, it flew from porches from sea to sea.

Annin opened in 1847 and has seen spikes of patriotic fervor throughout its history. At the company's cavernous factory near the Virginia-North Carolina line, the air is thick with the smell of dye and glue and the din of jackhammering needles. The company added a third shift to accommodate demand but isn't entirely sure what's driving orders.

Buddy Wilborn isn't sure either. He's 59 and on a break from repairing sewing machines. When there are trying times — whether terrorism or natural disaster or a hardball political season that drives wedges between people — he sees the flag's resonance grow. He's not so sure who he'll vote for come November, but he sees hope.

"I think our country is starting to come back together," he said.

America in one word? 'Free,' 'great,' or 'divided,' 'broken'

By MATT SEDENSKY
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — Free and great, or divided and confused. Diverse and powerful, or troubled and broken. In search of a single word encapsulating their country at this moment, Americans offered pollsters a lexicon reflecting both hope and dissonance.

The most-uttered word from about 1,000 responses to the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey was "freedom," with "free" not far behind at No. 4. "Great" took second place — and "good," "powerful," "wonderful" and "awesome" also occupied the top tier. But crowding the list were entries mirroring national angst.

"Divided" ranked third, and "confused" and "troubled" tied for fifth, amassed alongside other words of distress: "broken," "lost," and more bluntly, "screwed."

Pollsters say grouping people's answers together with synonyms and related words is a better reflection of public sentiment. Viewed that way, "struggling," "declining" and their synonyms accounted for the biggest chunk of words, from about one-fifth of answers. Some 18 percent of respondents offered words related to American greatness, prosperity and power, which collectively ranked second, followed by those linked to freedom (15 percent), and "confused," "lost" and similar choices (10 percent).

Positive and negative words were almost evenly split.

"When you see words like 'freedom' and 'divided' together, you get a good little portrait of what people are thinking," said Peter Sokolowski, editor-at-large at Merriam-Webster, the dictionary publisher. "You can't get more balanced than that."

Republicans used "struggling," "declining" and similar terms more than Democrats (27 percent versus 15 percent). Those without college degrees were also likelier to do so.

Bobby Underwood, a 67-year-old retired carpet mill worker in Dalton, Georgia, chose "troubled" when challenged to describe his country. With killings of police officers, Islamic State group attacks, a divisive election and concerns about the economy and illegal immigration, Underwood said he was left with an unhappy word in his mind.

"Troubled," he said. "That pretty much sums it up for me."

More than 350 individual words flowed into the poll released this week — from "bossy," "boring," "bountiful" and "bigoted" to "eclectic," "enthusiastic" and "equal." Also: "paradise," "perplexing," and a few cases of profanity. They pointed to high ideals — "democracy," "opportunity," "liberty" — and dire assessments — "greedy," "racist," and "doomed." Some screamed in all capital letters: "UNITED" and "TERRIFIED." Others used punctuation for added effect — "disaster!!" and "great!"

Jack Blanton of Lexington, Kentucky, thought of his 81 years in weighing his answer. He grew up in a rural town in the Appalachian foothills, working on his grandparents' tobacco farm and later in a steel mill. He moved around the country and saw the world, earned a Ph.D., and rose to become a university vice president.

He wondered what other country could give a farm boy such a life, and concluded America's best days are ahead. He decided on "great."

"Who wouldn't be optimistic?" he asked. "My whole life has been blessed."

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