

Core values unite Americans, despite divisions

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Americans are united when it comes to many core values, according to a University of Michigan survey. But the nation is deeply divided about certain issues, including gay marriage, immigration, and universal healthcare.

Those are the some of the findings from a series of nationally representative surveys of approximately 500 Americans, conducted by the U-M Institute for Social Research (ISR) at three times over the past year. The surveys, funded by ISR and by the Carnegie Foundation, were conducted as part of the monthly U-M/Thomson Reuters Surveys of Consumers in June and December 2009, and in March 2010. A fourth survey will be conducted in September.

"More than 90 percent of those surveyed agreed that all people deserve equal opportunities in life," says [sociologist](#) Wayne Baker, the project's principal investigator. "Just about everyone also agreed that respect for people from different racial and ethnic groups, and for people of different faiths, is also important to them."

In fact, these values are so widely held that they can be said to be American universals , according to Baker, who is a faculty associate at ISR and a professor at the U-M Ross School of Business.

Baker is discussing the survey findings in his daily blog on American values and ethics at www.ourvalues.org.

Almost 60 percent of Americans polled in March said they support U.S. policies simply because they are the policies of this country. Just under half agreed that U.S. policies are morally correct.

Nine of ten Americans said that, if they oppose U.S. policies, it's because they want to improve the country. Over three of four Americans said that if they criticize the U.S., they do so out of love of country.

While most Americans said they valued freedom, Baker wanted to learn more about just what "freedom" meant to them, so he asked "To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements:"

"Freedom is being left alone to do what I want;" and

"Freedom is being able to express unpopular ideas without fearing for my safety."

Only about a third of Americans agreed that freedom is being left alone to do what they want. But over 90 percent of Americans agreed that freedom meant being able to express unpopular ideas without fearing for their safety. "There was no difference between liberals and conservatives. The vast majority on both sides agreed," Baker said.

Two-thirds of Americans in all three surveys agreed that "Providing healthcare to everyone would be a sign that people in this country value other people's lives." The poor, not surprisingly, were more likely to agree with this statement than the rich. And conservatives and liberals roundly disagreed about this statement. Almost all liberals (95 percent) agreed while fewer than half of conservatives (48 percent) said the same.

Generally, Americans were opposed to same-sex marriage. In all the surveys, fully two-thirds said that "marriage should be defined solely as between one man and one woman." But there was considerable variation

in opinion. Older Americans were much more likely to support the traditional definition of marriage than younger Americans were, and so were those with less formal education, conservative Christians, and Americans living in the South.

Attitudes about immigration also revealed some sharp divisions. A large majority (69 percent) of those polled in March said that immigrants - wherever they come from - should adopt American values. But older Americans were much more likely to say this than younger Americans. Formal education mattered as well, with over 80 percent of Americans with a high school education agreeing that immigrants should adopt our values, compared with only 50 percent of those with a graduate education. Eight of ten conservatives agreed that immigrants should adopt American values, but only four in ten liberals said the same.

Provided by University of Michigan

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