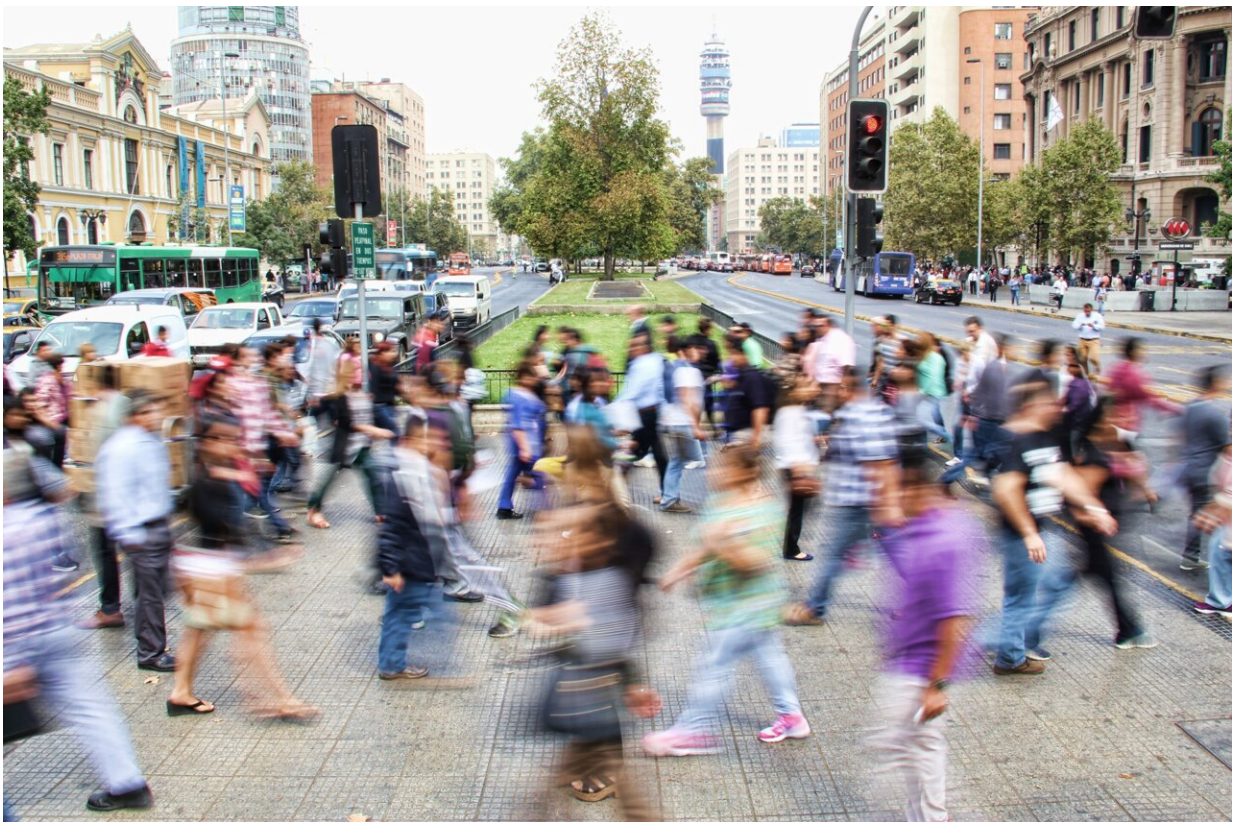


Surprise findings: American voters largely agree on issues including abortion, immigration and wealth inequality

July 10 2024, by Dante Chinni and Ari Pinkus



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

As the presidential election campaign heats up, media coverage suggests Americans are hopelessly divided and headed for a difficult

fall—perhaps also a tense January.

But that isn't the whole story, according to reporting and [poll results](#) from the [American Communities Project](#), a journalism and research effort we lead that is based at Michigan State University that analyzes the country by looking at 15 different community types.

In fact, on issues and policies where government has a serious role—such matters as taxes, immigration, the state of the economy and even abortion—a 2023 survey from the American Communities Project, or the ACP, found a great deal of agreement in the 15 community types we examine.

But when the topic turned to "culture war" issues (religion, gender identity, guns, [family values](#)), the differences were deep.

That divide between talking about "policy" and talking about "culture"—between arguing about "what we want" versus "who we are"—is having a hugely divisive impact on the nation. And if politics and governing are going to get more productive, Americans need to find a way to move past the issues around [cultural identity](#).

Broad agreement on policy

We saw the policy/culture difference in our 2023 survey.

The 15 community types in the ACP are very different from one another demographically, geographically and politically. The deeply rural, largely white community type we call "[Aging Farmlands](#)"—small rural counties spread across the Great Plains—gave 79% of their vote to Donald Trump in 2020. The densely populated and diverse group we call "[Big Cities](#)"—counties home to most of the nation's 50 largest cities—gave 66% of their vote to Joe Biden.

And yet, on a range of questions concerning policy or the state of the nation, there was wide agreement.

For instance, in every one of the community types, more than 60% of those surveyed said they thought "the American economy is rigged to advantage the rich and the powerful." On the statement "The U.S. government should cut social programs in order to lower taxes," no more than 38% agreed in any community—[a question we dug into with voters in Florida in a voter roundtable discussion](#).

Even on the thorny issue of abortion there was agreement around the statement "Obtaining an abortion should be a decision made by a woman in consultation with her doctor, without the government's involvement." More than 50% in every community type agreed. Many polls show high levels of support for keeping abortion legal, but the agreement across the different ACP types was surprising to us.

To be clear, the areas of agreement didn't all favor Democratic positions. The statement "America would be better off if we let in more immigrants" didn't get to 30% support in any community type. And "Government should take a more active role in policing private-sector behavior" didn't get above 45% support anywhere.

Regardless, for a country that often feels hopelessly divided, that is a lot of agreement on statements that center on government action in one way or another.

Questions of culture

But when cultural issues were the focus of the poll, the well-known divisions appeared across our communities.

The widest chasm in the survey came on the statement "The right to own

a firearm is central to what it means to be an American." Overall, 49% of Americans agreed, but the divides by community type and landscape were stark.

In the rural "[Evangelical Hubs](#)," based in the South and Midwest, 71% agreed that owning a gun is central to what it means to be an American, while in the "[Aging Farmlands](#)," concentrated in the Central and Great Plains, 73% did. In the "[Big Cities](#)" and "[Urban Suburbs](#)," outside of cities, the centrality of this right dropped to 30% and 34%, respectively.

There were similar divides around gender identity.

Those surveyed were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "People should be free to express their [gender identity](#) however is best for them." Gender expression was much more accepted in diverse communities, such as "[Big Cities](#)" "[Urban Suburbs](#)" and rural "[Native American Lands](#)," at 61%, 60% and 60%, respectively. In rural blue-collar "[Working Class Country](#)" and "[Evangelical Hubs](#)," the numbers sat at 37% and 32%, respectively.

Faith and religion

At the national level, there was something of a coalescing on the importance of faith and religion.

Overall, 58% agreed that "Faith and religion are important parts of American life." But again, there were large differences by community type.

In the "[Aging Farmlands](#)," faith and religion's importance reached 77%, in the "[Native American Lands](#)," 73%, while in the "[Evangelical Hubs](#)," dominated by Christian evangelicals, it was 70%. Comparatively, in the "[Big Cities](#)" and "[Urban Suburbs](#)," it was 47%, a difference of more than

20 points from these rural communities.

And there were sharp splits on the statement "Traditional structures for families, with a wage-earning father and homemaking mother, best equips children to succeed." The percentages that agreed were highest in the "[Native American Lands](#)," at 59%, and in the rural communities of "Christian faith," "[LDS Enclaves](#)," at 55%, and "[Evangelical Hubs](#)," at 54%. The "[Big Cities](#)," "[Urban Suburbs](#)" and "[College Towns](#)" were at the other end of the spectrum, at 33%, 36% and 36%, respectively.

Political debate 'hijacked' by culture fights

These issues—guns, gender, faith and families—clearly matter deeply to many Americans. But how much do they have to do with politics?

People are going to hold the beliefs they hold on gender or live by their personal ideals about faith and family regardless of who is in the White House. The government realistically cannot police every bedroom and kitchen table in America. The question about guns can be discussed as a matter of the U.S. Supreme Court's constitutional interpretation as much as one's personal belief, but that issue, too, is very personal, as we learned [when we talked to people about it in Michigan](#).

In many ways, these culture fights have hijacked the [political debate](#) when there is broader agreement on issues in which government really does play an important role.

Of course, agreeing on the importance of key issues is not the same as agreeing on what should be done about them.

We know from our work talking to people in these different communities that their respective answers on how to handle a "rigged" system or taxation or abortion or immigration would likely be different.

But those conversations are about give-and-take and hashing out answers. That's the point of politics and different from the culture fights that dominate our discussions.

In a nation of 330 million people, there will never be easy answers to "who are we?" In fact, the country was designed to largely leave that question open within broad parameters.

But until politics moves on to the more relevant question of "What should we do?" the deadlock and tensions Americans feel in the 2024 election likely aren't going to change.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Surprise findings: American voters largely agree on issues including abortion, immigration and wealth inequality (2024, July 10) retrieved 10 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-07-american-voters-largely-issues-abortion.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.