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Selected Quotes by Theme

In addition to a web survey of 6,077 Americans, the Siena College Research Institute conducted open-ended follow-up interviews with 20 citizens, aged 18-82, from across the country.

America Is The Land Of Opportunity

I am [proud to be an American]. I immigrated to the United States regardless of the current situation so I think this is the best country out there. I was freedom – I'm a minority and I was a minority in another country so there's a big difference. You all have the opportunity to get somewhere here. 40, Male, Asian, Ind, CA

Everybody wants to come here. Whoever that hasn't been here, they all want to come here. [For] opportunity. They see their friends and family immigrate to the United States and they do well, better than what they did in their own countries. 40, Male, Asian, Ind, CA

I am proud to be an American. America, to begin with, is the land of opportunity. I came here as an immigrant and I am excited with my progress. 75, Female, Black, Ind, GA

America's full of opportunity, you can be anything you want to be with fewer restrictions than wherever the person that I'm speaking with is from. So, you have more flexibility, you have a greater opportunity if you work hard and pursue what you want to pursue. There are problems with America too, it's not just all rosy. There are social problems. There are problems with race, with class, all kinds of different things. Especially recently, so it's not an all-rosy picture, there are issues and there's some severe issues that we need to deal with, but again, as long as we operate under our political system the way it is, things can be hashed out and arrived at. The danger is if we don't subscribe to that political system anymore, then America's in trouble. 57, Male, Hisp, Rep, TX

We live in a great country full of scientific progress, lots of good businesses, we handled the pandemic, so I feel pretty good about being an American. 57, Male, Hisp, Rep, TX

It's opportunities to provide for your family. Opportunities for advancement as far as job opportunities. 49, M, Black, Dem, TX

I would say that America is a great place to live and a great place to raise a family, but there's also a lot of social issues in America as well. 49, Male, Black, Dem, TX

I guess maybe I wouldn't say proud. I don't know that I would be proud to be an American, but I'm fine with it. That we have freedom, and my son can go to public school, and that I was able to marry my wife who is not from America, which I would not have been able to do 65 years ago. 40, Male, Dem, IL



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Americans Are Not Perfect, But We Are Looking For The Same Thing

I think we all want the same thing. Basically we want the same thing. We want a decent job, a decent education for our kids, reasonable housing, and opportunity to go as far as we possibly can on our own abilities. 82, Female, Rep, KS

Well, I think that our belief in democracy, the founding fathers principles that get amended where we're working our way to a more perfect union. So I think most of us still believe in that, I still believe that people can still think of what they call the American dream, that they can better themselves, they can pursue their dreams and become whoever they want to be in life. And so I think most people still believe in that. 57, Male, Hisp, Rep, TX

America Is... Americans Are...

Well, in the past, I would say considerate, kind. Now, I would just say ignorant and entitled. 55, Female, White, Ind, DE

Someone who believes in personal freedom, somebody who believes – I would say believes in the law, believes in individual responsibility. 74, Female, Hisp, Ind, CA

Antisemitism is on the rise, anti-Asian. Anti-black, anti-white, it's anti, anti, anti. So unless we come to the point we realize that we are all human beings. We may not look alike, but we are the same. If you cut us, the blood is red. So I am still hopeful, because I'm a person of prayer. 75, Female, Black, Ind, GA

I would have to say we were pretty divided at this point. I don't think we are being held together right now. 80, Female, White, Dem, CO

Well, a lot of it is race. There's other issues, religion, it has some degree, with it. Not as much, but it is a factor. But I think predominantly, it is race and that's sad. I treat people the way I've always been treated. If somebody treats me poorly, they're going to get poorly treated by me. If someone treats me nicely, I will accommodate them as well. 75, Male, White, Dem, FL

Fractioned, divisive. That's primarily it. 74, Female, Hisp, Ind, CA

Mainly that I'm able to express that I am transgender and part of the LGBTQ community without fearing repercussions from at least government. 18, Trans, White, Ind, CA

I think what divides us is the overemphasis on the importance of the individual, which has caused – the pendulum's gone too far and that too many people have decided someone else should take care of all these collective things I'm talking about, like being part of your community beyond just your own self-interest and contributing to the greater good for its own sake. And so I think that that has shaped how people see issues. And for some, it's, "How does



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this help my community?" And for others, it's, "How does this help me?" And the separation is where people err on whether it's, "I'm number one," or, "Society is number one." 49, Female, White, Ind, MD

Again, I would say, rather than valuing family and hard work, I would say it's more of valuing things, valuing money, valuing performance, and valuing what people think of us rather than valuing actually working hard and doing because of a collective purpose. Not just for want of self. 22, Female, White, Ind, CO

Ignorance. People are perhaps too quick to jump to conclusions and don't do sufficient research. People will follow what sounds good without thinking about it. It's lack of education, lack of self education, lack of questioning. 74, Female, Hisp, Ind, CA

Being uneducated, I think that's the number one reason we get divided. Listening to others, people not being able to reason for themselves, everybody basically follows a trend. Whatever is popular, that's what they follow. They don't make their own decisions....It feels like the Middle East Lebanon. If you supported another politician, you have to be very careful not to talk about them in the wrong crowd otherwise, you might get killed. So, unfortunately, it kind of feels like that over here now. Not to that extent but it's getting there. Not being able to freely talk regardless of what your belief is. If your belief is not popular, you just get bashed. 40, Male, Asian, Ind, CA

It is race. It is class. The economic differences. The heart of man hatred versus love. Some of the politicians too. They foster divisions in the country instead of trying to unite everybody. Race, for example, people play on the differences instead of what unites us. The country is divided into conclaves and some people cater to the conclave rather than get people to unify I'm hopeful that people will get tired of it and move on to what is important. I thought that the COVID - the pandemic- would draw people together, but I think the main problem is politicians. They divide and conquer. 75, Female, Black, Ind, GA

Well, I think its critical race theory, is an absolute horror. And I think the 1619 project, is an absolute horror. 75, Male, White, Dem, FL

Well, they're trying to make me as a Caucasian, feel guilty that I'm white. I'm sorry. I'm not guilty. And I don't feel guilty and that bothers me. 75, Male, White, Dem, FL

It's not a popular opinion but I think that we're all supposed to be equal and treated equal, but I think some of the people, some of the different ethnic groups want to be more than equal. And if they don't get their way, then they're going to throw a hissy fit, but they're going to protest and loot and riot. That's not the way to do it. If you're going to try and make progress, you don't go out in the street. And you can carry a flag and do that, but you don't go into a United States Capitol building and destroy things. It's kind of scary out there right now. I just think its general disrespect of people. They've taken this term liberty too much. They take liberty as, I can do whatever I want. 66, Male, White, Ind, IA

No, and I'm not sexist, I'm not racist, I'm just keeping it real. 43, Male, White, Rep, CA

I think that we are divided to a point where some people that are somewhat like-minded have those common threads and I think that there's another different sects or groups of people that they are held together by their beliefs. But actually, don't really think there's one common thing or many common things that hold all Americans together anymore. But maybe there never was, but it just seems more prominent. I also have gotten older so maybe I'm more aware of those things. 40, Male, Dem, IL

I would say America is not as great as they think. I would say that a lot of people are really entitled. I would say that the American dream is not true. I would say it's a lot harder to live in America than they would think. I would say that it seems great on the outside, but from the inside it's actually not a very put together country mentally or emotionally. 22, Female, White, Ind, CO

Politicians, Government, Media

And I think most of the world saw Americans that way and I think politicians are making this really worse. I don't know. There's no middle. It's basically if you believe in conservative ideas and if you're conservative and you believe some progressive ideas, your own party or your own people will bash you because you express those feelings. The same from the left side, if you express some conservative ideologies, you want to be in the middle, we bash you. So, it's just that people have to choose to be all the way to the right or all the way to the left. That's the issue. 40, Male, Asian, Ind, CA

If you go to court, depending on the color of your skin, what type of job you have, how deep your pockets are, and who do you know, you get a different judgment. 66, Male, Hisp, Dem, CA

The government and the media [divide us]. I think honestly, I mean, it's the media and the politicians and, social media man. Social media, that's so dangerous. That's ripping us to shreds. 43, Male, White, Rep, CA

I feel like you vote Congressmen in and then they don't do what it is that you want. They are not doing work. Everything is about whether you are a republican or a democrat. They can't work together. Because of the division. Because the people that are in power have a mindset, and are close-minded to things. And are not willing to back down from whatever their opinion is. They are not willing to negotiate. They are not willing to work with other people, with the other person because they want to stay in power. Because they are greedy. 76, Female, Hisp, D, CO

We're not paying enough taxes to take care of our resources, our schools and our roads and our bridges and our water and our air. We're not paying enough taxes. And don't say the tax word to people, that'll really get them upset. Because a lot of people feel they're entitled all the goods but they're not entitled to any benefit paid by their taxes. They don't want to be the ones footing the bill. 66, Male, White, Ind, IA

Well, what people don't necessarily have to be in government, they just got to be influential. And there's a lot of people out there who are no longer in the government position or never were, but they're bias about something or is just a plain greed makes them – Make them feel very opinionated to say things so they can sell books, and their main objective is just money. And I can give you a couple examples. Rush Limbaugh, he doesn't – I don't believe he really believes in 90% of the stuff that he says, but he knows he's going to sell books and get people to listen to him. And be influenced to other people who listen to their program. Sean Hannity, another one. And then, oh, I can't think of this guy's name. We took them off the air, Fox did. Very opinionated, no facts, no proof. Oh, Bill O'Reilly. And he influenced people. To me, by the way I hate that speech. Hate is very powerful. 66, Male, Hisp, Dem, CA

Even though we claim to be a Christian nation, which I don't totally agree with that. Based on what I've seen, I don't believe that may be the case. I believe that we do hold certain values that we want to protect our country from foreign terrorists and all that, but the thing is that we also feel that there are also issues with I guess, systemic racism, that's we need to look at and address. I think that is the biggest things we need to address right now. 49, Male, Black, Dem, TX

The racism is going to get worse. The killing of the police killing an unarmed black man. Not only the police, but also we're passing laws that never should be passed. Even the State of Texas, the government just passed a law for people that can carry guns without a license. They don't have any background check. Well you're setting yourself up for disaster, and so that's the reason why I'm saying it's going to get worse before it gets any better. 49, Male, Black, Dem, TX

You've got a former president that wants to claim that he still won the election. The election has been over for over six months now and he's still lying about winning the election and confessing - that people still believe him and the big lie. That's what I mean by politics. You're going to hold onto something that's not true, based on someone else's lie, even though there is no proof. 49, Male, Black, Dem, TX

The new bills that go through to protect others that aren't exactly in positions of power, such as minorities and people of other religions. 18, Trans, White, Ind, CA

We Are Held Together, But Many Things Tear Us Apart

I think that the belief that as flawed as our nation may be, that we're the best approximation of that thing we're aspiring to. So, I think we all share this desire that we're not going to give up on the Great Experiment. 49, Female, White, Ind, MD

Well, I think that our belief in democracy, the founding fathers principles that get amended where we're working our way to a more perfect union. So I think most of us still believe in that, I still believe that people can still think of what they call the American dream, that they can better themselves, they can pursue their dreams and become whoever they want to be in life. And so I think most people still believe in that. 57, Male, Hisp, Rep, TX



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Yeah. I cherish the values and virtues that we aspire to be, and I think our – when we actively aspire to be those things, then that's something I'm proud to be part of. 49, Female, White, Ind, MD

I could sit here for hours and talk to you about the American way of life. It's, like I said before, believing in the Constitution, the rule of law, the rights of all people to live their life as they choose, and that's the American way of life. 80, Female, White, Dem, CO

I think fundamentally, from the very beginning of the Constitution, what should be holding us together, is not actually holding us together. I don't think we're being held together at all anymore. I think that things are pretty much falling apart. It's pretty clear that unless people are willing to change their opinions and their ways, which doesn't seem like that's going to happen. It doesn't really seem like that's going to - it seems like what fundamentally held our country together is being shaken and I don't think that it's going to stand. 22, Female, White, Ind, CO

I would say just in general this past election. People were so polarized and now you politically can't really speak what you believe without at least one person in the room deciding that they hate you just because you agree with this political candidate versus this one. 22, Female, White, Ind, CO

That's a good question I never really thought of (why are you proud to be American). It's not to just get my way whenever I want, which is what a lot of people think. But to know I have to live and to hopefully work and get a good paying job that takes care of me and my family, and everything that the Constitution says. You can worship what you want, where you want and stuff like that. That's fine. You can do whatever you want if you don't infringe on my rights. And it's as simple as that. People think they don't have to worry about anybody else's rights. They're just out for number one. I think Trump had a lot to do with it, but he can't be blamed for all of it. 66, Male, White, Ind, IA

You can earn money fairly easily, if you work your way up through a system, you can start at the lowest part of a company or workplace, and with work ethic and expansion of your knowledge base, you can become a manager, you can become a higher up, you can work your way up the chain and become something. You can amass money, you can actually buy land, you can eventually create your own business. And you can do it a lot of times, you can still do it on your own, it doesn't have to be like in other countries you have to know or something like that you can do things on your own merit. And so that's one of the ways that America is still different. That's why a lot of people still want to come here. They want to immigrate here and seek a better life. And a lot of them can still achieve that. And so people hear that from other countries and they want to come too, so there are success stories out there. 57, Male, Hisp, Rep, TX

The Future

The population will be more diverse, more ethnic minorities, it's going to be a minority majority country, but we're going to still have those shared values and shared things that make us Americans, we're just going to have more and different perspectives. And so, diversity is not



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something to be feared, so I think the way of life is going to be even better than it is now. So like I said, with academic and scientific achievements and the keeping of a good business environment, I think America is going to be just fine in the upcoming years. 57, Male, Hisp, Rep, TX

We have the ability; we're not stratified by a class system. We can be anything and go as far as we are willing to work for and have the innate ability. I am somewhat hopeful; I don't like the current trend. 82, Female, Rep, KS

We can do better. And we got to start by rebuilding the country. We're getting pretty old. 66, Male, White, Ind, IA

Because we have already survived so much. I think we have a resilience, I hope we have. I am very hopeful. I don't know how realistic that hope is but you ask how hopeful I was. I am very hopeful. 74, Female, Hisp, Ind, CA

Not understanding each other, judgment for the color of our skin, the shape of our eyes, or religion. Not seeing one as a human being. Until we start seeing people without color, or without judgment of their eyes, and just judge them for who they are, that's when we will be a lot better. And that's for all over the world, not just United States. 66, Male, Hisp, Dem, CA

I hate to say it, but I don't see it getting any better anytime soon. And that is sad to say. I see it getting worse before it gets better. What it's going to take, I'm not quite sure, but it's going to take a miracle. That is my opinion. 49, Male, Black, Dem, TX

Well, I'm a glass-half-full type person. And I'm very hopeful, provided that the current administration is swept away, enough said. 75, Male, White, Dem, FL

Oh, let's see. It depends on who is in control. The Bidenites prevail and get re-elected, then our country, a good amount of our population by design of the Bidenites, will be more dependent upon government. And if they don't prevail, then I think we will have a resurgence of individualism. 75, Male, White, Dem, FL

Education, not listening to opinions, not listening to false accusations, not believing everything that's sent over the internet, or what has no merit of proof or facts. Looking into things, finding out for yourself, read, study, go back in history and see what was going on in the beginning. Who was running this country? There's so many people that I can keep going on, who contributed to this country, but for one merit, and that's for money. So, I believe, like I said, without believing what they hear as facts, as soon as somebody puts it over the Internet, and they take it for gospel. 66, Male, Hispanic, Dem, CA

If we can get the Republicans in and get rid of Pelosi and AOC and the hate speakers. And get a unified or an equal justice system across the board, where because you're rich, you're not prosecuted. Because you're a congressman or congresswoman and you say something hateful and incite a riot, you're not arrested or not brought up on charges. That type of thing. If we can get



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back to that, where everybody was treated the same no matter what their money was, it wouldn't matter as far as the justice system is concerned. 55, Female, White, Ind, DE

Like I said, it's all going to depend on the elections. Right now, I do not like – I see our country going down the tubes. We're going to either have a civil war because of all the stuff that's going on. Or we're going to get invaded and we're going to end up being communists or socialists or something like that, and I don't see it. With all the cuts in defense and the cuts in the police, who are you going to call? 55, Female, White, Ind, DE

So, I am hoping that people will kind of start to 'walk the walk and talk the talk' as far as systemic racism. I think that is the single-most important thing that needs to change in our country right now. I think that needs to be a shift in powering government and I think that that's kind of where it starts because I think once you do that, then you think that lends itself to police reform to more diversity in politics that are representation for all types of people. So, I don't know if I think that's going to happen, but that's what I'm hopeful enough that I want to happen, and I think that that will make our country ultimately better. I think that the more people are represented in a democracy I think that democracy is probably going to work better, right? I think it's confusing that people don't see that. That not everyone is like, 'yeah, that's very obvious.' But, again, I think that we live in a scary, power-hungry political climate and I think there's a lot of scared people that change is very hard, transition is very hard. I think we saw that with COVID. I think that everyone got to experience that with COVID, not just folks that go through many changes and transitions. So, I think that probably that if we don't tackle that problem then I don't think anything is going to change for the better. 40, Male, Dem, IL