



THE McCOURTNEY INSTITUTE Mood of the Nation Poll

There are many ways to be patriotic

The McCourtney Institute Mood of the Nation Poll asks Americans to explain what patriotism means to them

As the United States approaches its Independence Day, Americans are experiencing one of the most politically divisive periods in decades. The 4th of July is typically a time to focus on shared symbols and traditions, but with Americans more divided than ever, it is fair to wonder whether Independence Day still has the power to unify all Americans, even temporarily, regardless of political views.

The **McCourtney Institute Mood of the Nation Poll** included a special section on patriotism and asked 1,000 online respondents what being patriotic means to them.

The answers were wide-ranging and touched on many topics. Common themes include:

- Love of country and demonstrating respect for its symbols
- The Constitution
- Men and women who have served our country in uniform

The results show that many of our traditional symbols and ideals of patriotism are embraced enthusiastically by liberals and conservatives, Democrats, Republicans and Independents, people of all colors, young and old alike. However, it also showed that Americans have different views on what it means to be patriotic.

“I love and respect the values that this country was built on,” said a 72-year-old woman from California.

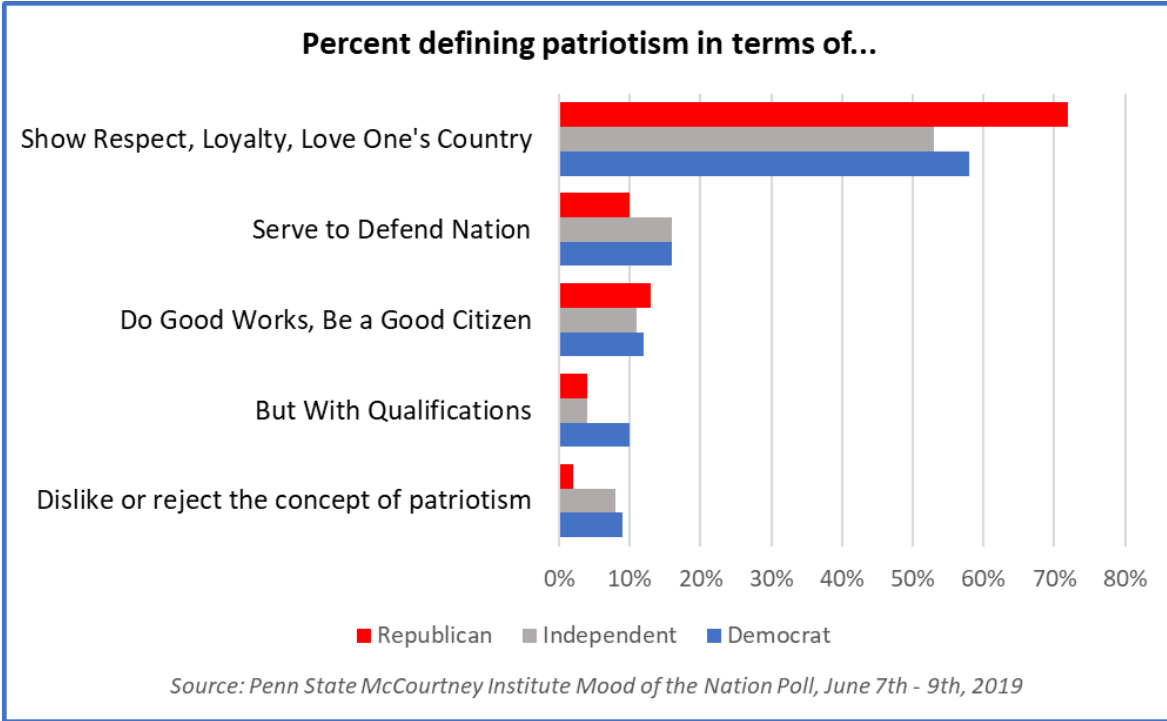
“Being proud of the country we are from and thank for the freedoms and the rights that our troops fight for us,” said a 40-year-old woman from Maryland.

Love of country, loyalty and respect

Many citizens went beyond personal feelings of pride and love, but also shared that patriotism also means the public display of loyalty.

According to a 20-year old Independent from Pennsylvania, patriotism means “standing when the National Anthem plays,” and A 41-year-old Texas Democrat describes patriotism as “saluting the American flag and celebrating the 4th of July.”

Overall, about **six in 10** Americans described their view of patriotism in these ways and this view represented the majority view regardless of party, but Republicans endorsed traditional measures of patriotism to much greater extent (72%) than Democrats (58%) and Independents (53%).



More than feelings, many feel patriotism requires action

While most Americans imagine patriotism in terms of feelings – such as loyalty, love and respect – and the public display of those feelings at commemorative events, about one in four felt that patriotism required more.

A 29-year-old Republican from Pennsylvania said, “I served in the infantry, to me, that's patriotic. It's patriotic to fight for what you believe in.” A 53-year-old Independent from Connecticut believes patriotism is “a willingness to sacrifice for the good of your country, and to oppose those who would threaten it, either foreign or domestic.”

Our poll shows that 16% of Democrats and Independents, and 10% of Republicans, associated patriotism not only with honoring U.S. troops, but also serving in uniform to defend the nation. An additional 13% shared that patriotism for them entails active engagement in the community and nation by being a good citizen and doing good works.

A 35-year-old Arizona Democrat said, “Being patriotic means being proud of who you are as an American. It means treating all Americans as equals. It means welcoming others who want to move to America with open arms. It means supporting our troops and veterans in more ways than just a post on social media.”

And a 37-year-old woman from Missouri who identifies as Asian and a Democrat said, “Treating others as you wish to be treated...total equality. Contributing positively to the community/nation in any way to which is possible to you no matter how big or how small that will become part of the collective benefits to all.”

Many simply said that patriotism entails “being a good citizen,” “public service,” “volunteering,” or “caring for our veterans.” Still, others felt that patriotism involved concrete actions that “put America first,” such as buying products made in the United States.

In describing how patriotism entails doing more than symbolic displays or respect and loyalty, these citizens reveal important differences across the political spectrum. While the idea of being willing to risk one’s life for the nation is bipartisan, Democrats and Republicans showed divisions on the other kinds of actions entailed by patriotism, with Democrats more likely to discuss caring across the community and even internationally, with Republicans more likely to take an America first position.

Patriotism, but only to a point

Perhaps the most interesting differences involved qualifying the limits of love for country and loyalty. These answers displayed a more critical perspective of citizenship and duty. The **greatest differences in this category** were political, where Democrats were more than twice as likely to reject blind forms of patriotism.

A 54-year Democrat from Maryland believed in “always supporting and defending your country, but not blindly supporting your government when it is doing bad things.”

Another 41-year-old Democrat from New York was more adamant, “LOVE OF COUNTRY. NOT BLIND LOVE BUT LOVE.”

Partisan differences become evident when respondents qualified their answers in ways that challenged traditional notions of patriotism.

A 70-year-old, retired Hispanic woman from Texas, who registers Independent, thought patriotism was “loving your country more than your ideology.”

Another Independent, 44-year-old woman from Florida said, “I love America, but the word ‘Patriotism’ suggests extreme conservatism to me. It suggests... values that are outdated. We may need to find another word to suggest a love of our country.”

Signs of alienation

Although large majorities of Americans have broadly shared views of patriotism, the poll found others who did not. Around 6% of Americans, primarily younger adults identifying as Independents or Democrats, expressed rejection of shared traditional patriotic values and love of country. Respondents included roughly equal percentages of Whites, African Americans and Hispanics.

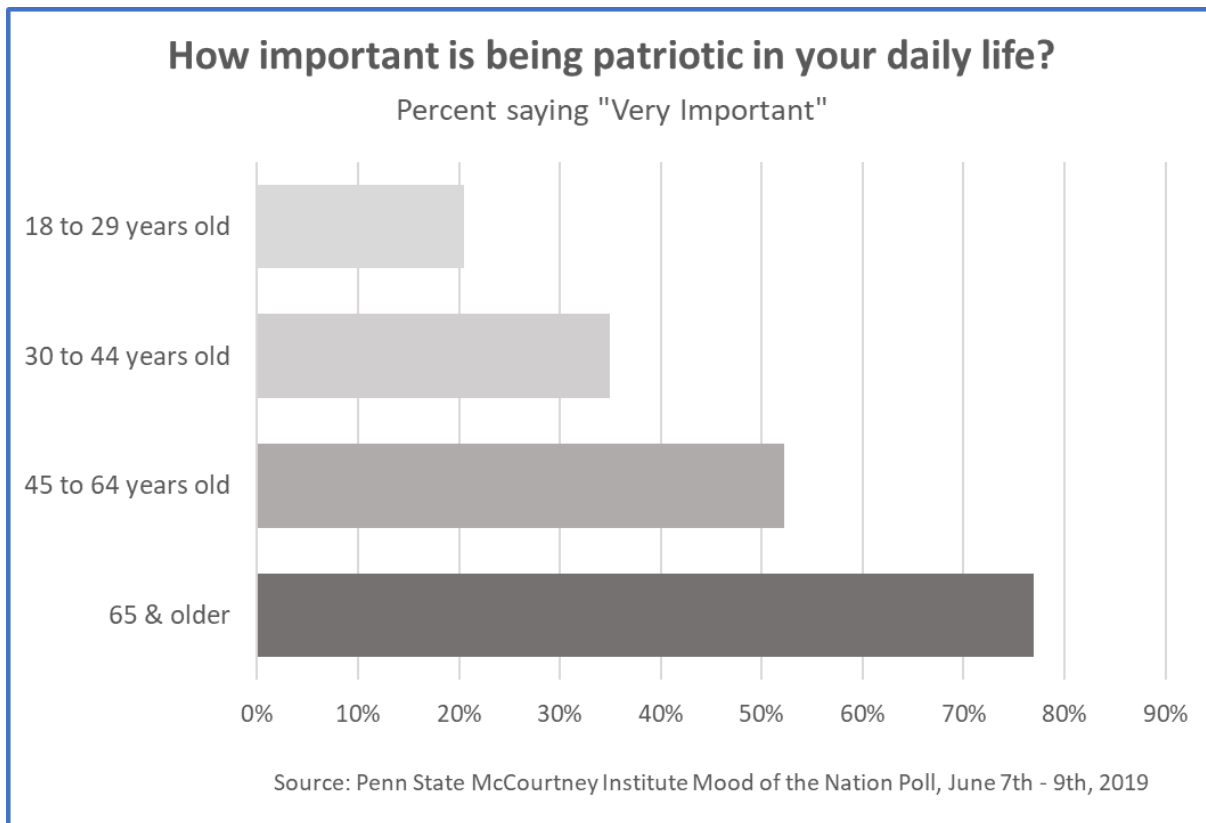
A 26-year-old man from California, who registered independent said, “To me, it is government propaganda manifested as a faux sense of pride in something intangible.”

Another 27-year-old Independent from Florida finds patriotism means “nothing. It’s an antiquated word. We’re a global species now and people should embrace that.”

While a 25-year-old woman from Pennsylvania, also an Independent shared, “I don’t really buy into the concept of patriotism. I think it is often just thinly veiled racism and over-zealous nationalism, which I view as damaging.”

This alienation is also reflected in the number of citizens who had trouble answering the question at all and in a follow-up question that asked how important being patriotic is in daily life.

More than three in four respondents 65 and older said that patriotism is “very important” in their daily lives, but that number dropped to 21% for those under 30. Four in 10 of these younger Americans felt that patriotism was unimportant in their daily lives.



While the starkest lines of division surrounded age, the poll also found that Whites and Republicans felt patriotism was very important, while Blacks, Hispanics, Independents and Democrats felt it was less important. Members of these groups seem to place priority on helping people as individuals, with loyalty, pride and love of country coming second.

About the Poll

The **McCourtney Institute Mood of the Nation Poll** is the only scientific poll based primarily on open-ended questions. Rather than add to the large number of “horse race” polls, citizens had the opportunity to share, in their own words, which issues and news events they are passionate about. Poll staff classify the answers using both modern machine learning methods, and traditional methods of content analysis whereby trained research assistants read and classify answers into broad categories. Answers to open ended questions provide a unique perspective on the Mood of the Nation. For each poll, the McCourtney Institute partners with YouGov to interview scientific sample of 1,000 Americans. The online poll is representative of the U.S. population in terms of geography, race, age, education and other key population characteristics.

How the Poll was Conducted

This poll was conducted between June 7 and June 9, 2019, by YouGov in partnership with the Penn State McCourtney Institute of Democracy.

All Mood of the Nation questionnaires are designed by the McCourtney Institute polling team, with the fieldwork conducted by YouGov, an online polling organization. The YouGov panel includes over 1.8 million individuals who agree to complete occasional surveys. The 1,000 individuals who completed the McCourtney Institute Mood of the Nation Poll were matched to the joint distribution from the Census’s American Community Survey in terms of age, sex, race/ethnicity, and years of education. The frame was augmented by matching to the November 2010 Current Population Survey and the Pew Religious Life Survey in order to include voter registration, political interest and party identification in the selection model. The unweighted data are broadly representative of the U.S. population in terms of age, education, and region.

The data have been weighted to adjust for variation in the sample from the adult United States population with respect to demographic variables such as geographic region, gender, race/ethnicity, age, and education, and political variables such as voter registration status and political interest. Weighting details are described in a paper by Ansolabehere and Rivers.¹

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¹ Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Douglas Rivers. (2013) "Cooperative survey research." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 307-329.

APPENDIX

Supplemental questions reported in this report are as follows:

Patriotism means many things to many people.

How about you? Can you tell us in your own words what being patriotic means to you?

How important would you say being patriotic is in your daily life?

Very important

Somewhat important

Somewhat unimportant

Very unimportant

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Patriotism means many things to many people. How about you? Can you tell us in your own words what being patriotic means to you?

Percent* defining patriotism in terms of

	Show Respect, Loyalty, Love One's Country	Serve to Defend Nation	Do Good Works, Be a Good Citizen	Qualifications	Dislike or reject With the concept of patriotism
Sex					
Male (46%)	54%	14%	13%	6%	7%
Female (53%)	67%	12%	11%	6%	4%
Total (100%)	61%	13%	12%	6%	6%
Age					
18 to 29 (19%)	47%	9%	7%	5%	8%
30 to 44 (27%)	55%	11%	9%	5%	6%
45 to 64 (31%)	68%	16%	15%	7%	4%
65 & older (20%)	69%	14%	16%	6%	4%
Total (100%)	61%	13%	12%	6%	6%
Education					
High school or less (36%)	51%	13%	8%	2%	5%
Some college (31%)	69%	10%	15%	6%	5%
College degree or more (32%)	65%	16%	16%	12%	7%
Total (100%)	61%	13%	12%	6%	6%
Race / Ethnicity					
White (67%)	68%	14%	14%	8%	6%
Black/African American (10%)	41%	5%	8%	2%	5%
Hispanic (14%)	47%	11%	6%	1%	6%
Other (6%)	59%	23%	19%	6%	3%
Total (100%)	61%	13%	12%	6%	6%
Political Party					
Democrat (38%)	58%	16%	12%	10%	9%
Independent (16%)	53%	16%	11%	4%	8%
Republican (40%)	72%	10%	13%	4%	2%
Other (4%)	25%	3%	4%	1%	0%
Total (100%)	61%	13%	12%	6%	6%

* Percentages do not add up to 100% because some answers fall in multiple categories and because some respondents did not answer the question.

Source: Penn State McCourtney Institute **Mood of the Nation Poll**, June 7th - 9th, 2019.

How important would you say being patriotic is in your daily life?

		Percentage saying patriotism in daily life is				
		Very important	Somewhat important	Somewhat unimportant	Very unimportant	Total
Sex						
	Male (46%)	50	32	10	8	100 %
	Female (53%)	44	33	13	10	100 %
	Total (100%)	46	33	12	9	100 %
Age						
	18 to 29 (19%)	21	40	24	16	100 %
	30 to 44 (27%)	35	38	12	14	100 %
	45 to 64 (31%)	52	33	9	6	100 %
	65 & older (20%)	77	18	4	1	100 %
	Total (100%)	46	33	12	9	100 %
Education						
	High school or less (36%)	50	28	13	9	100 %
	Some college (31%)	49	36	10	6	100 %
	College degree or more (32%)	41	35	12	13	100 %
	Total (100%)	46	33	12	9	100 %
Race / Ethnicity						
	White (67%)	52	30	10	8	100 %
	Black/African American (10%)	38	33	18	11	100 %
	Hispanic (14%)	34	38	13	15	100 %
	Other (6%)	36	45	12	7	100 %
	Total (100%)	46	33	12	9	100 %
Political Party						
	Democrat (38%)	34	37	18	11	100 %
	Independent (16%)	36	36	10	18	100 %
	Republican (40%)	67	26	5	2	100 %
	Other (4%)	6	44	25	25	100 %
	Total (100%)	46	33	12	9	100 %

Source: Penn State McCourtney Institute **Mood of the Nation Poll**, June 7th - 9th, 2019.