Without Flawed “Negative Framing,” Poll Finds A More Unified Nation

The landmark NCHE Heart of America Poll shows the public favors pride, unity, equality, and action to eliminate inequities.

By Dr. Gail C. Christopher

Earlier this month, in Milwaukee, as Republicans gathered to nominate Donald Trump for a third time, there was plenty of demonizing to be seen and heard on the convention floor. Signs that said “Mass Deportation Now” were passed out to and displayed by delegates. Many speakers targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and espoused divisive rhetoric.

Armed with polling data, Republican candidates and operatives believe angry buzzwords will energize their supporters and sway parts of the electorate. However, many polls pose questions with “negative framing,” which can subconsciously lead respondents to adverse answers. These misleading results are promulgated and then reverberate in the public discourse, lifting polarization profiteers, enabling echo chambers, and labeling individuals, groups, and communities in ways that do not reflect who they are and what they believe.

In other words, here’s a novel idea: Maybe these polls don’t take the country’s pulse, and Americans are not as divisive as often portrayed. A year ago, the National Collaborative for Health Equity (NCHE) set out to test this theory. NCHE-sponsored research concluded that the American public supports unity and racial healing while seeking a less divisive political environment. Americans also supported schools teaching an accurate portrayal of racism.

A small group of Americans fosters divisive, polarizing rhetoric with the platform and power to push their agendas. But our research shows their noise is far the norm for Americans. The desire to build relationships, create community, show compassion, and work together is strong.

Americans deserve better. They don’t deserve to be mentally or politically constrained by the manipulative rhetoric of a few. Throughout history, in this country and many places in the world, the majority of the population has literally been held hostage by directives, violence, and self-interest of those who profit from division. Furthermore, the stress-inducing and anxiety-causing consequences of division and animus are harmful to the physical and mental health of individuals and the broader society. The people deserve better. Taking the temperature of the body politic and revealing the heart of the majority is an important step in enabling democracy to be actualized.

What was different about our poll? BSG, a premier strategic market research firm, didn’t steer respondents towards divisive answers. By using a rigorous, unbiased methodology, it uncovered what we believe is a new silent majority in America: Democrats, Republicans, people of color, the LGBTQ community, families, and individuals who embrace unity and equality.

Fast forward to June 2024. BSG just conducted NCHE’s second annual Heart of America Survey on our behalf. In a different political environment—Democrats and Republicans locked in a fiery faceoff for the presidency—pollsters conducted 1306 online interviews June 5-11, 2024, among
adults nationwide. The margin of error at the 95 percent confidence level was ±2.71 percentage points.

Contrary to the rhetoric, researchers found a nation proud of its identity! Pride in being an American increased from 67 percent in 2023 to 72 percent in 2024. Without negative framing, the poll gives cause for a more hopeful, less divisive future, even as it found widespread agreement (85 percent) that America is more divided than ever.

“Our survey shows that Americans understand that our history, in all its complexity, is what makes us stronger,” said Shannon-Janean Currie, Vice President at BSG. “Denying any part of it will only keep us divided. As we approach this unprecedented presidential election, it’s clear that Americans are yearning for transformative leaders who can see beyond labels and political posturing. This desire for a more understanding and inclusive discourse is a testament to the resilience of the American spirit.”

The poll unearthed surprising sentiments, given our often coarse public discourse. It found that over 70 percent of Republicans support measures to ensure voter access, educate children on racial history, and promote workplace diversity as key to healing the harms caused by racism. When asked about the importance of these and other specific actions:

- 89 percent of Democrats/80 percent of Republicans chose ensuring that all eligible voters are able to vote
- 85 percent of Democrats/70 percent of Republicans chose educating our children on the history of race and racism in America
- 86 percent of Democrats/73 percent of Republicans chose promoting diversity in the workplace, so people of all different races are working together
- 89 percent of Democrats/63 percent of Republicans chose enacting policies that reduce segregation in housing so Americans have neighbors of different races
- 61 percent of Democrats/44 percent of Republicans chose reparations payments to the descendants of enslaved Americans

Conservatives’ attempts to weaponize Critical Race Theory were a misfire. This academic and legal framework, which examines how race and racism intersect with politics, culture, and law, is widely vilified. But the poll found that these attacks did not resonate with the electorate. Nearly three in five respondents—including almost two-thirds of independents and more than 60 percent of Republicans—remain unfamiliar with critical race theory.

Regardless of their political leanings, Americans share a yearning for leaders who prioritize unity and empathy and recognize the inherent worth of every individual. This collective desire for transformative leadership, which transcends political divides, signals a shared aspiration for a more compassionate and inclusive society. In fact, 83 percent of Americans agree: “I would support a leader who aims to unite everyone in our country, even if I disagree with some of their positions.” Further, 79 percent, up 2 percent from last year, agreed with the statement: “I don’t care about my neighbors’ political views as long as they are good people.” And 86 percent, a 1-point increase from last year, agreed, “We need to find new ways and new words to help Americans talk to each other, disagree respectfully, and develop care and empathy.”
Americans say they have a stronger sense of community from a year ago, likely referring to deepened relationships, mutual support, and shared identity within neighborhoods, cities, states, and the country. Regular interaction and collaborative efforts towards common goals foster a sense of connection. A year ago, 43 percent of respondents said they had a strong sense of community in their neighborhoods, which jumped to 51 percent this year. A stronger sense of community also increased from 31 percent to 43 percent regarding cities, 30 percent to 41 percent regarding states, and 36 percent to 44 percent regarding the country.

Some of the most encouraging results were related to how America perceives issues related to racism. In the polling, 58 percent of the respondents, including 56 percent of Whites, agreed with the statement: “Intentionally ignoring American history and systemic racism deprives all children the opportunity to learn from the past and perpetuates racism in America.”

When asked to rank the most important elements to achieving racial healing in America, 68 percent, including 71 percent of Whites, selected “Education about different races and cultures.” Sixty-two percent chose “Open dialogues about race.” Fifty-seven percent chose “Acknowledging historical injustices.” Fifty-six percent chose “Promoting diversity and inclusion.” And 55 percent chose “Policies addressing systemic racism.”

Moreover, there was broad support for teaching about racism in schools, with 61 percent, including 62 percent of Whites, agreeing with the statement: “Educating children on the role racism has played in American history is essential to building an America that can overcome racism.” The statement also received support from 57 percent of people of color, 65 percent of Democrats, 62 percent of Independents, and 54 percent of Republicans. Only 39 percent of respondents, including 38 percent of Whites, believe that teaching about “American History and systemic racism can lead to feelings of guilt about the past among white children and perpetuate racial divisions when we should be focused on moving forward as Americans regardless of race.”

A narrow majority, 51 percent of all respondents, including 51 percent of both Whites and people of color, believe “that all Americans have the same chance at a happy and comfortable life, and any inequality is the result of individual choices and merit.”

Interestingly, in this election year, when the rhetoric is elevated, fewer people say they are being judged by their political views. In 2023, 66 percent experienced being judged by their political views, but that was down to 59 percent in 2024. Meanwhile, those judged by their sexuality jumped to 37 in 2024 compared to 32 percent in 2023.

Americans want to turn to younger men and women for leadership. Millennials are viewed as the most important generation for overcoming divisions. Asked to pick which generation has the best chance to drive positive change and help America overcome its divisions and challenges, the responses were Millennials, 34 percent; Gen Z, 26 percent; Gen X, 21 percent; and Baby Boomers, 14 percent.

Currie, the BSG Vice President, noted that the poll found that a third of Americans often interact with people of other generations, and nearly 6 in 10 want more opportunities to do so. Pointing to the intergenerational dynamics, she said, “Our youth are not just our future, but our
present. Their commitment to building stronger communities and bridging generational gaps is a testament to their understanding that unity is our strength. Their efforts are reshaping our nation's narrative towards one of empathy, inclusivity, and mutual respect."

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