

American Aspirations is a program of Hattaway Communications. We bring together the art and science of motivation, persuasion, and narrative change to help visionary leaders and organizations communicate with maximum motivating power.

This handbook shares highlights from our American Aspirations 2020 survey, along with insights and ideas to help you connect your cause to aspirations that truly motivate people. Inside, you'll find:

- Data about aspirations that shape people's decisions and behaviors
- New narratives you can use to frame a wide variety of issues
- A framing tool to help you map out new narratives for your cause
- » Audience profiles describing people with different mindsets, to help you tailor communications

This information can equip you to frame issues in terms that resonate with Americans across the political spectrum—and to create new narratives about the kind of country America is and ought to be.

Introduction

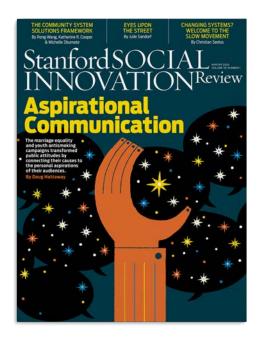
The Power of Aspiration

Our aspirations are our ideas about the kinds of people we want to be and the lives we want to live. They are powerful drivers of our decisions and behaviors. In our heart of hearts, we strive to become our best selves. Some social scientists have called this our "aspirational identity."

We also have aspirations for our communities and our country. Our social environment shapes our self-image and our lived experience. We need to live in a society that makes it possible to thrive and be our best selves.

Seeing our aspirations reflected in a persuasive communication motivates us to stop and think about the message. According to *Principles of Social Psychology*, "Thoughtful message processing occurs when we think about how the message relates to our own beliefs and goals." That's the first step in changing perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Aspirational Communication opens the door to what persuasion studies have called "durable" attitude change. That's why American Aspirations explores ways to connect all kinds of causes to aspirations that shape people's identities.



To learn more about Aspirational Communication and durable attitude change, see our cover story in **Stanford Social Innovation Review** or visit our website at www.hattaway.com.

The Power of Narrative

The stories we hear about the world we live in shape our perceptions of the way things are and our preferences for the way things should be. The lessons we take from stories about our society have been called "meta-narratives." As defined by Oxford Languages, meta-narratives offer an "interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences." These narratives give meaning to our public and private lives.

Narratives about this country—ideas about what America is and should be—shape our perceptions, opinions, and actions. They frame debates about public policy. They influence practices in the private sector. They can make people feel as though they belong, or to feel excluded. This is why "narrative change" is a growing field of study and action to drive social change in America.

If you work to create social change, chances are good you've come up against narratives about the country that stand in your way. For example, one powerful idea in our highly individualistic culture is the value of "individual responsibility," which says you're on your own and must "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." This narrative often stands in the way of policies and programs to address poverty and income inequality.

Cognitive science says it's difficult to dislodge a cultural narrative—which is common in the culture and sounds like common sense—by citing facts and figures that disprove it. Each of us tends to reject ideas and information that do not confirm our established worldview. To change the narrative on any topic, you must offer an alternative that is equally clear and meaningful.

Cultural narratives shape our identity, decisions, and behaviors.



Cultural narratives are ideas that are common in the culture and sound like common sense. Ideas about America play a role in shaping our personal identities, along with our perceptions of the world around us. As such, they are powerful drivers of our decision-making and behavior. If cultural narratives create obstacles to the change you seek to create in the world, you need to take them head-on—with new narratives about the way things are and the way things should be.

Exploring the Aspirations of Americans

For more than a decade the team at Hattaway Communications has explored the power of aspirations and narratives to build strong brands, mobilize social movements, change attitudes and behaviors, and win policy debates.

American Aspirations is a body of research based on simple but powerful questions, which we asked thousands of people from many different backgrounds and perspectives:

- What kind of person do you strive to be?
- What kind of life do you want to live?
- What kind of country do you want to live in?

Working with talented experts in social science and data science, we've explored these questions in ethnographic interviews, focus group conversations, and national surveys. We've built a database of more than 250,000 words spoken by people about their lives and their country. We've compared notes and shared learning with others in the growing field of narrative change. We've applied the learning in communications research and development to create motivating messages, content, and campaigns for all kinds of causes.

Our 2020 American Aspirations survey asked 2,095 people across the country about their personal values and goals, and their aspirations for the nation. Questions drew from original qualitative research, as well as a variety of psychological studies of motivations, morals, and personality traits. The survey's margin of error is +/- 2 percent.

Narrative change is a new and growing field. We're eager to share learning. We welcome your questions and suggestions for American Aspirations. We'd love to work with you to put the power of aspiration and narrative to work for your cause.

Questions? Comments? Please email us at info@hattaway.com.

Top Aspirations of Americans

This section shows personal values and goals that reflect the aspirations of survey respondents. They address two related questions:

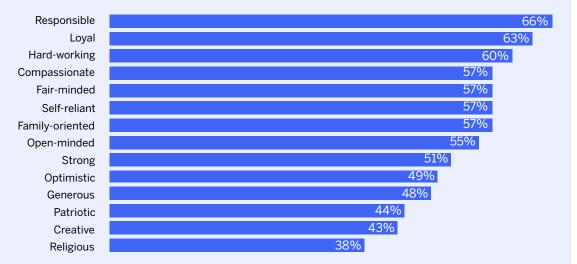
Values: What kind of person do you aspire to be?

Goals: What kind of life do you aspire to live?

Respondents were asked to rank more than two dozen examples of values and goals on a scale of 0 to 10.

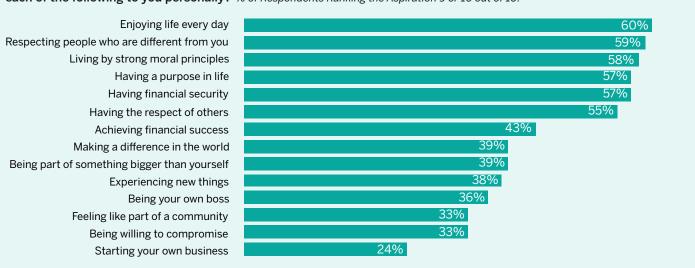
VALUES

Using the scale of 0-10, where 0 means "not important at all" and 10 means "extremely important," how important is each of the following to the way you want to be as a person? % of Respondents Ranking the Aspiration 9 or 10 out of 10:



GOALS

Using the scale of 0-10, where 0 means "not important at all" and 10 means "extremely important," how important are each of the following to you personally? % of Respondents Ranking the Aspiration 9 or 10 out of 10:



Reflecting ideas like these in your brand, programs, messaging, and storytelling helps people "see themselves" in your work.

These ideas can be defined in different ways, of course. You can define them in your own terms to create aspirational narratives that build support for your organization and your cause.

Narratives About America

American Aspirations also tested messages about the country that reflect people's personal aspirations and values. For example, being "responsible" was a top aspiration for many respondents. We applied this important personal value to create narratives about the responsibilities not only of individuals, but also business and government.

We tested these new narratives against old narratives that have dominated public discourse for decades, thereby shaping public opinion and framing policy debates. As shown below, survey respondents saw two messages and selected the one they agreed with more. The percent shown in gray represents those who chose "neither."

Which of these statements do you agree with more?

Businesses have responsibilities to their employees, customers, and communities—not just their bottom line.

The only responsibility of businesses is to maximize profits and shareholder returns.

74% 15% 11%

Here, 74% agreed more with the statement in blue. This common-sense idea can frame dozens of issues—and make room for a new narrative about the role of business in making America a better place to live. The **Framing Tool** below shows how you can use an idea like this to frame a policy issue. In this example, we use this narrative to frame the issue of paying a living wage. On the next two pages, you'll see more narratives about America.

EXAMPLE: LIVING WAGE

The idea that businesses have responsibilities to society is a **meta-narrative**. It provides a "moral" or "lesson" that gives meaning to stories people hear about different issues.

The **issue narrative** frames the topic—paying workers a living wage—in terms of the metanarrative, i.e. paying a living wage is one of the responsibilities of business.

From there, we show one example of a **key** message that might persuade a particular audience, such as policymakers.

Strategic stories about specific people and situations put a human face on the issue, while driving the ideas in the meta-narrative.

ISSUE META-**NARRATIVE NARRATIVE** Businesses have All businesses have a responsibilities to their responsibility to pay employees and workers a living wage, communities, not just so hardworking people the bottom line. their families. FRAMING TOOL STRATEGIC KEY **MESSAGE STORIES** Paying good wages drives Jane Doe is a responsible economic growth business leader. She pays her employees in our communities. living wages.

Narratives About America

UNITY

America can be united when we start listening to each other, respecting each other, and doing what's best for all.

America is hopelessly divided. It's hard to see this country ever coming together.

67% 12% 21%

DIVERSITY

America's diversity is our unique strength. When Americans respect one another and work together, it makes our country stronger. America's diversity has its upsides and downsides. Too many different groups in the same place creates conflict and division.

64% 14% 22%

OPPORTUNITY

Opportunity is not equal in America, even for people who work hard. Many people still face barriers because of their race, gender or where they were born.

Everyone has equal opportunity in America, if they work hard.

50% 13% 38%

It takes more than our individual hard work to succeed. We all need tools like education, health care and a job that pays enough.

If you're willing to work hard, you can make it in America.

52% 12% 36%

EQUITY

Unfair policies, practices, and beliefs rooted in history still hold back Black, Hispanic, and Native American people today. We can make opportunity real by removing unfair barriers and making our systems work better for everyone.

Racial discrimination is mostly a thing of the past. Our country has made changes to ensure that there is equal opportunity for anyone in America—for example, we all receive the same quality of education or have access to basic financial tools.

50% 20% 30%

Narratives About America

CHANGE

As Americans, we can change the system—just like Americans won better wages, safer workplaces, and civil rights in the past.

The system is broken in America. We should throw it out and start over.

64% 19% 18%

RESPONSIBILITY

America would be better off if all of us did our part for the good of our communities and country. America would be better off if everyone just took responsibility for themselves.

56% 14% 29%

RESPONSIBILITIES OF BUSINESS

Businesses have responsibilities to their employees, customers, and communities—not just their bottom line.

The only responsibility of businesses is to maximize profits and shareholder returns.

74% 15% 11%

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNMENT

Government doesn't invest enough in public schools, health care, and other essentials that benefit all of us.

Government spends too much on programs like Medicare, Social Security, and public education.

56% 28% 16%

Government drives economic growth by investing in education, health, and other essentials that make the economy work for everyone, not just wealthy and powerful corporations.

Government drives economic growth by cutting taxes and regulations on business.

54% 21% 25%

Audience Profiles

This section presents Audience Profiles based on respondents' answers to dozens of questions about their personal values and aspirations (shown on page 4). Sophisticated data analysis produced seven audience profiles, each characterized by a unique set of aspirations and values that are shared by people in that segment and set them apart from the others.

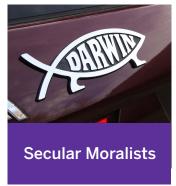
You can use these profiles to identify new audiences for your cause, and to tailor your communications to appeal to different people according to their unique mindsets and motivations.

Demographic data is provided to help you create content that reflects people from different backgrounds, as appropriate, and to target your content using platforms and channels that reach different demographic groups.

You'll see that each segment includes people from different demographic groups, because people from a diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives will often share similar aspirations for their lives.















How to Use the Profiles

The profiles show words and phrases respondents chose to express their aspirations for the kinds of people they strive to be and the lives they want to live.

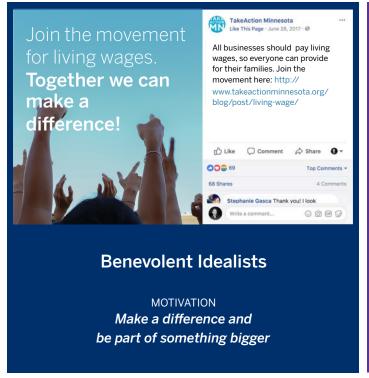
Think of ways you might connect your cause to these aspirations. Consider ways to communicate that reflect them: What messages, images, stories, and activities might appeal to people with these aspirations? The profiles include ideas to inspire your thinking.

EXAMPLE: LIVING WAGE

Below are examples of calls to action to people in two different segments. These messages are about paying a living wage, as shown on page 5. By framing calls to action in a way that speaks to the aspirations of your audience, you can increase their engagement in your cause.

The first example is a social media post that invites audiences to "join the movement for living wages." This type of community-focused content can appeal to the profile we call Benevolent Idealists, who are motivated to be part of something bigger than themselves and make a difference in the world.

The second example invites audiences to "stand up and speak out for living wages," This type of content can appeal to audiences like Secular Moralists, who want to live by strong moral values and respond to content that motivates them to stand up to something that's not right.







Benevolent Idealists

Benevolent Idealists are low-hanging fruit for organizations looking to mobilize people for good causes: They strive to be compassionate and to respect people who are different from them. They want to make a difference in the world. They're ready to engage with causes they care about.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- Responsible
- · Open-Minded
- Compassionate
- · Want to enjoy life every day

ASPIRATIONS THAT SET THEM APART

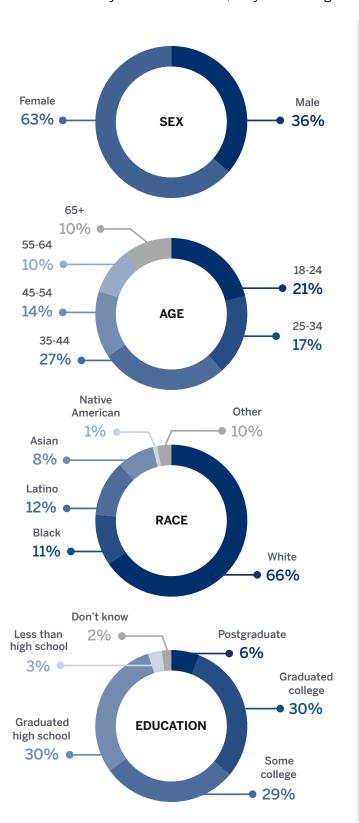
- Care the most of any segment about respecting people who are different from themselves
- Care the most of any segment about making a difference in the world
- Care the most of any segment about being willing to compromise
- Care less about being self-reliant
- · Care less about being religious

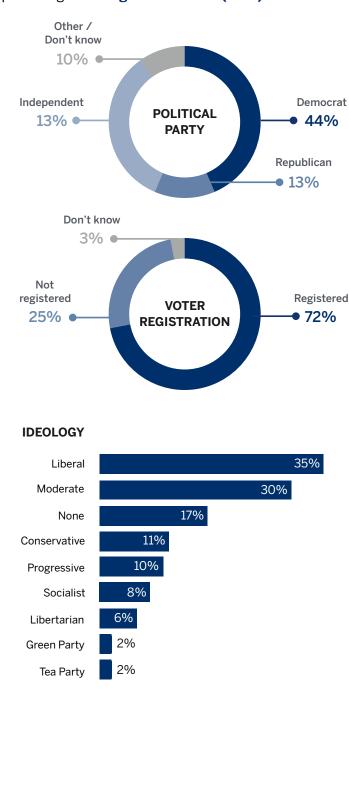
AUDIENCE SIZE

13% of U.S. adults—approximately 33 million people

- Mobilize them for campaigns and causes based on appeals to social responsibility, idealism, diversity, and compassion.
- Frame issues in terms of their impact on real people, rather than abstract values.
- Share stories about people whose lives are improved by your cause—and about Benevolent Idealists helping to make a difference.
- Offer experiences that Benevolent Idealists might find enjoyable, such as joining a diverse group of volunteers to help people in need.
- They're open-minded and willing to compromise, so they might not respond to messages or messengers they see as judgmental or strident.

Demographically, Benevolent Idealists are the youngest segment, with the highest proportion of women (63%), Democrats (44%), and Independents (34%). They are the least likely of any segment to have children. At the time of this survey in the fall of 2020, they had the highest percentage of unregistered voters (25%).







Live and Let Live

Live and Let Live Americans strive to be open-minded and respect people who are different from them. They want to enjoy life while seeking out new experiences. They score lower than others on wanting to be part of a community or make a difference in the world.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- Responsible
- · Self-reliant
- · Open-Minded
- Want to respect people who are different from them

ASPIRATIONS THAT SET THEM APART

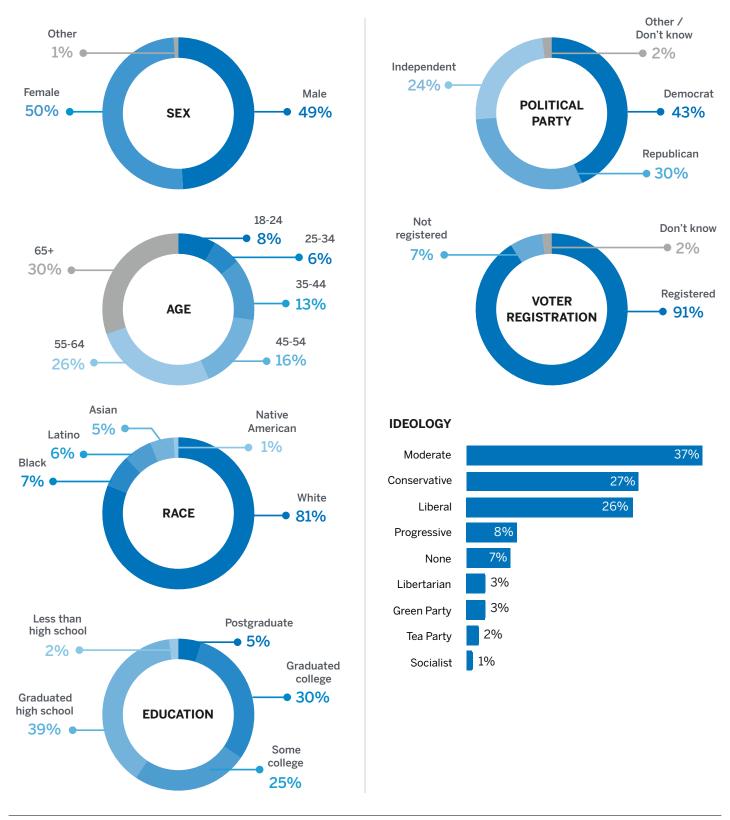
- Care the most of any segment about enjoying life every day
- · Experiencing new things
- · Achieving financial security
- · Care less about being their own boss
- Care less about starting their own business
- Care less about being religious

AUDIENCE SIZE

18% of U.S. adults—approximately 46 million people

- Educate them about causes with stimulating, interactive content that creates a learning experience. They might be difficult to mobilize as advocates or volunteers for a cause.
- Show how your organization or cause involves people from different backgrounds. Avoid using partisan language that could seem closedminded.
- Since they're striving for financial security, they might be attracted to organizations that help them develop valuable skills, advance their careers, or earn extra income.
- They might be likely to agree with or support issues related to financial security, such as expanding access to affordable health care and requiring businesses to pay living wages.

Demographically, Live and Live is the segment with the highest percentage of white people (81%), split evenly between males and females. They have a high proportion of older Americans, with more than 50% aged 55 and above. They include the second-highest proportion of registered voters, with 9 out of 10 saying they're registered. They're a mix of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.





Secular Moralists

Secular Moralists are defined by their desire to live by strong moral principles—along with the lack of importance they place on organized religion. Communicating your values and beliefs can connect with them, but they might tune out religious language and imagery.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- Living by strong moral principles
- Responsible
- Loyal

ASPIRATIONS THAT SET THEM APART

- Care the *least* of any segment about being *religious*
- Care the *least* of any segment about achieving financial success

AUDIENCE SIZE

9% of U.S. adults—approximately 23 million people

- Persuade them by framing issues in terms of "right and wrong." Remember that religious language or imagery might not resonate.
- Explain the values and beliefs that define your cause or organization. Explore how you might speak to their aspirations to be responsible and loyal.
- Mobilize them through opportunities to express their values and beliefs.

Along with Striving Individualists, Secular Moralists are the most male segment (55%). They have one of the highest proportions of older Americans, with 55% over the age of 55.

Democrat

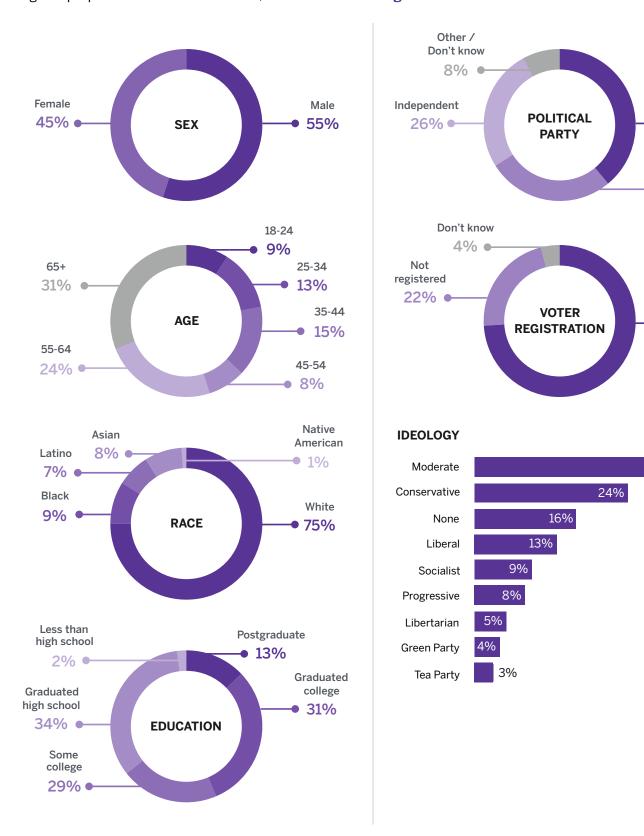
Republican 27%

Registered

74%

37%

• 39%





Striving Individualists

Striving Individualists are defined by their focus on themselves. They aspire to individual achievement and financial success, and do not prioritize being part of a community. They strive to be strong and self-reliant. They're the most entrepreneurial of the segments—they care more than any other group about starting their own business and being their own boss.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- Responsible
- Strong
- · Self-reliant
- · Open-Minded

ASPIRATIONS THAT SET THEM APART

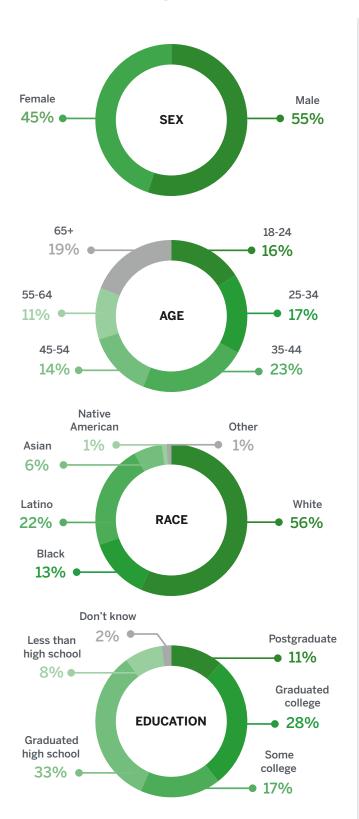
- Care the most of any segment about achieving financial success
- Care the most of any segment about being their own boss
- Care the most of any segment about starting their own business
- Care the most of any segment about experiencing new things
- Care less about feeling like part of a community

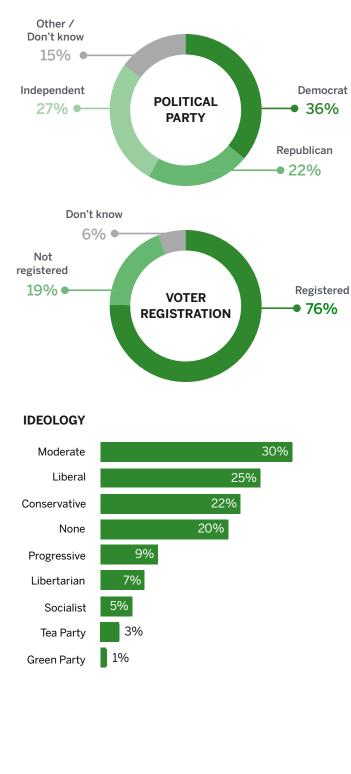
AUDIENCE SIZE

15% of U.S. adults—approximately 38 million people

- Since they're striving for financial success, they
 might be attracted to organizations that help
 them develop valuable skills, advance their
 careers, or earn extra income.
- They're likely to agree with policies or support organizations that promote small business and entrepreneurship.
- Because they value new experiences, educate them about causes with stimulating, interactive content that creates a learning experience.

Demographically, Striving Individualists skew younger, with **56% between the ages of 18 and 44**. They comprise **the most racially diverse segment** and have the highest proportion of **Latinos (22%)**. With Secular Moralists, they are also the most **male segment (55%)**, and the second-highest proportion of **independents (27%)**.







Salt of the Earth

In contrast to the Secular Moralists, people in our Salt of the Earth segment describe themselves as religious. They also see themselves as hard-working and responsible. They are set apart by their strong desire to feel like part of a community.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- · Religious
- Hard-working
- Responsible

ASPIRATIONS THAT SET THEM APART

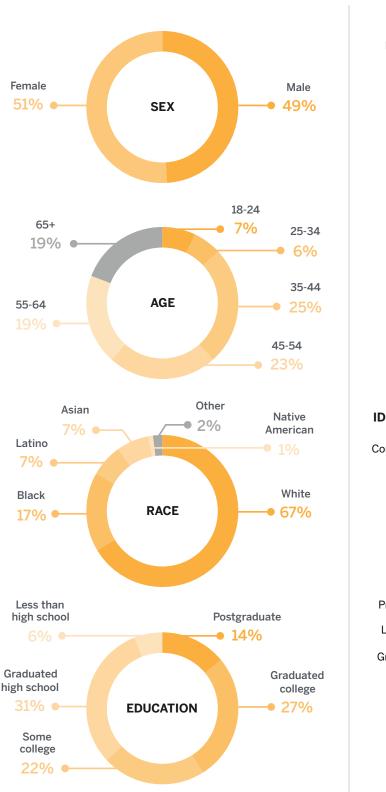
- Care the most of any segment about feeling like part of a community
- Care the second-most of any segment about being religious

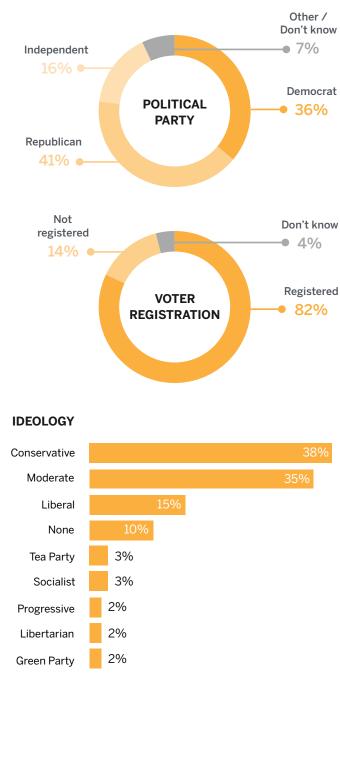
AUDIENCE SIZE

11% of U.S. adults—approximately 28 million people

- Mobilize them by connecting them with a community of like-minded people. Offer opportunities for them to contribute to the community. Share stories about members of your community doing things together.
- Articulate values and attributes that define your community. Communicating those values and attributes consistently will attract like-minded people to your community.
- Frame issues in terms of strengthening communities. Frame calls-to-action in terms of joining with others to do something for communities they care about.
- Frame causes in terms of advancing religious values. Include faith leaders as messengers.
 Remember that people who identify as religious will often respect and relate to people of different faiths.

Demographically, Salt of the Earth is the segment with the highest proportion of African Americans (17%), and is the second-most Republican segment (41%). They are the second-most likely segment to have children (65%).







God and Country

The God and Country segment is defined by their desire to live by strong moral principles, and by the importance they place on being religious and patriotic. Being responsible and family-oriented are also extremely important to them.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- Responsible
- Religious
- Loyal
- · Fair-minded

ASPIRATIONS THAT SET THEM APART

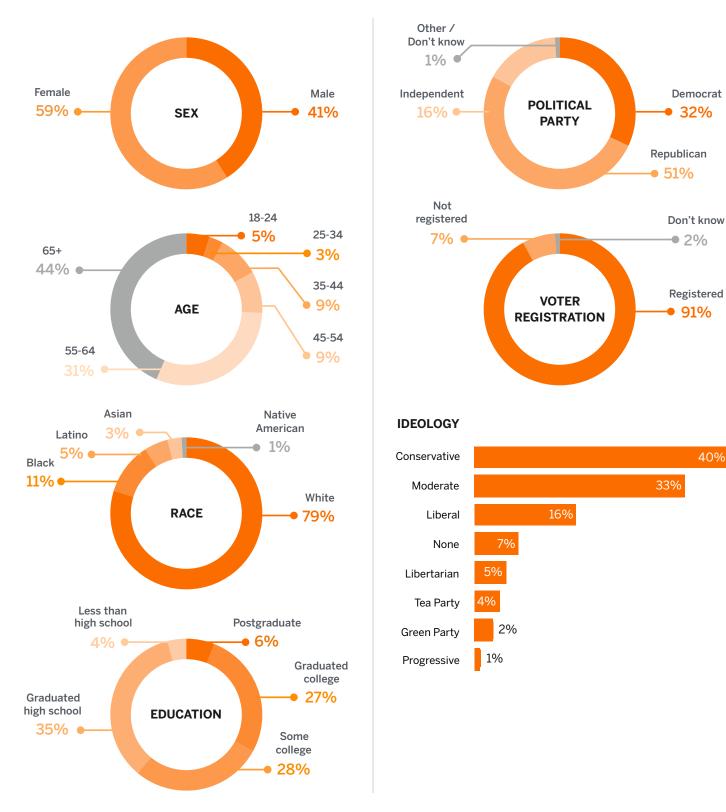
- More patriotic than any segment
- · More religious than any segment
- Care the most of any segment about living by strong moral principles
- Care the *least* of any segment about being *creative*

AUDIENCE SIZE

16% of U.S. adults—approximately 41 million people

- Catch their attention with symbols and scenes that evoke religion and patriotism.
- Connect with them by framing your cause in terms of advancing religious values. Include faith leaders as messengers. Remember that people who identify as religious will often respect and relate to people of different faiths.
- Use patriotic language to talk about your cause, such as describing how your work makes America stronger. Explore how to connect your cause to their sense of loyalty.
- Persuade them by framing issues in terms of supporting or protecting families. Share stories about families who are affected by your issue or benefit from your work.
- Mobilize them through opportunities to express their values and beliefs.

Demographically, God and Country is the oldest segment, with **75% older than 55**. They're also the most **Republican segment (51%)**. They have the second-highest proportion of **women (59%)** and **white people (79%)**. They have the highest proportion of **people with children (71%)**. They are also the segment with the highest percentage of **registered voters (92%)**.





Bootstrap Pessimists

Bootstrap Pessimists are defined by their disdain for compromise, and their lack of concern for being open-minded or compassionate. They care the least of any segment about respecting people who are different from them. They are also the least optimistic.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- · Religious
- Hard-working
- Family-oriented
- · Want to have a purpose in life

ASPIRATIONS THAT SET THEM APART

- Care the *least* of any segment about *respecting* people who are different from them
- Care the *least* of any segment about being *compassionate*
- Care the *least* of any segment about being willing to compromise
- Care the *least* of any segment about being *open-minded*

AUDIENCE SIZE

19% of U.S. adults—approximately 48 million people

- Connect with them by framing your cause in terms of advancing religious values. Include faith leaders as messengers.
- Persuade them by framing issues in terms of supporting or protecting families. Share stories about families who are affected by your issue or benefit from your work.
- Explore how your cause might offer them a sense of purpose. A sense of purpose is often found in using one's talents in service of others.

Bootstrap Pessimists skew younger, with **57% between the ages of 18 to 44**. They also have the third-highest proportion of **Republicans (39%)**. Along with Salt of the Earth, they have the highest proportion of people **making less than \$20,000 a year (27%)**. They are also the segment with the second-highest proportion of **Latinos (18%)**.

Democrat

Registered

74%

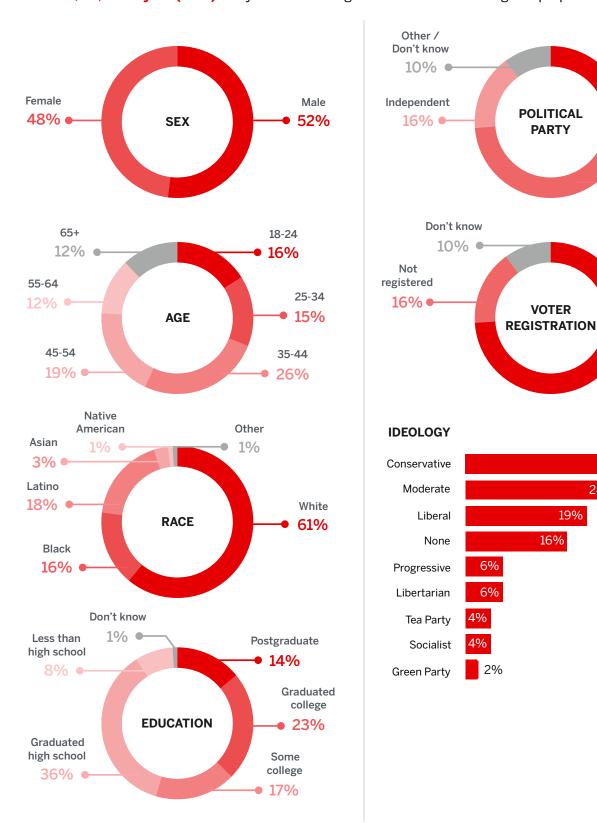
36%

24%

34%

Republican

39%



Inspiration

Here's a narrative about America inspired by American Aspirations research. These messages appeal to people from many different backgrounds and beliefs. They can help people express their own aspirations for their lives and their country.

What does it mean to be American?

It means we have *freedom*.

To be whoever we want to be.

To pursue our own version of happiness.

To find our unique purpose in life.

We have *responsibilities*.

To do our best for ourselves and our loved ones—and do our part for our communities, our country, and our planet.

We believe in real *opportunity* for everyone, no matter where you start out in life.

Everyone should have the tools to build a good life—like education, health care, and a place to call home.

We all *belong*.

It's not about where you come from, what you look like, who you love, or how you worship.

We *respect* one another.

We know we're all on the same team.

We're strongest when we work together.

We *strive* to make our country better:
With a government that works for the good of all,
not just the powerful and privileged.
And businesses that meet their responsibilities to their
employees, customers, and communities,
not just their bottom line.

We know it's up to us, the people.

We make our *voices* heard. We make our *votes* count.

We stand up for what it really means to be American.



