

Survey Report:

WHO IS TRULY AN AMERICAN?

Americans Should Be Defined by Their Belief in America's Founding Ideals, Not by Ancestry or Religion, Says New Survey

Discovery Institute | June 10, 2026

Most Americans believe that “for someone to truly be an American” they should agree with the ideas expressed by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. They don’t need to share a similar ancestry or religion. That’s the key takeaway of a survey of 2,500 American adults released by Discovery Institute just in time for the nation’s 250th birthday.

“Americans overwhelmingly think that true Americans are defined by their embrace of America’s founding ideals, not by their ethnicity or religion,” says Dr. John West, author of the book *Endowed by Our Creator: The Bible, Science, and the Battle for American’s Soul*. West serves as Vice President of Discovery Institute and oversaw the survey.



Respondents to the nationwide poll were asked: “In your view, for someone to truly be an American, which attributes should they have?”

- 62.1% said “they should agree with the ideas expressed by the Declaration of Independence.”
- 64.3% said “they should agree with the form of government created by the Constitution.”
- 71.3% said “they should agree with the freedoms protected by the Bill of Rights.”

By contrast, only 3.2% of respondents said people “should be descended from an ancestor from Britain or Europe” to truly be an American; and only 16.8% thought that true Americans needed to “agree with Christianity.”

“With minor variations, the results are similar for all the major demographic

groups,” says West. “Regardless of age, gender, religion, ethnicity, or political ideology, most people in the United States think Americans should be defined by their support for the ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, not by their ancestry or religion.”

The survey has special relevance for the growing debate among conservative influencers about whether America is a “creedal” nation open to all who share a common set of foundational political beliefs, or if Americans should be defined more narrowly by their ancestry and religion.

“The results of this survey provide scant support for those who flatly deny that America is a ‘creedal’ nation,” says West. “The idea that to truly be an American you have to be of British or European descent or must agree with Christianity is rejected by the vast majority of Americans, including self-identified conservatives and Christian conservatives.”

According to the survey:

- More than 7 in 10 Christian conservatives think true Americans should agree with the ideas expressed by the Declaration of Independence and the form of government created by the Constitution.
- Nearly 8 in 10 Christian conservatives think true Americans should agree with the freedoms protected by the Bill of Rights.
- By contrast, only 3.4% of Christian conservatives believe that someone “should be descended from an ancestor from Britain or Europe” to truly be an American; and only 31.4% believe that true Americans need to “agree with Christianity.”

“Put another way, 97% of Christian conservatives in America reject British/European ancestry as a requirement to be a true American, and 69% of Christian conservatives reject the idea that someone needs to agree with Christianity in order to be a true American,” says West.

What about younger politically conservative Christians? It is sometimes claimed that there is a groundswell of support among younger Christian conservatives to redefine American identity according to ethnicity and religion. To test that claim, West conducted a follow-up survey of 1,000 self-identified Christian conservatives who were age 18-35.

“Although there were some modest differences, a clear majority of younger Christian conservatives agreed with the views of the rest of America,” says West.

- 67.4% of younger Christian conservatives believe that true Americans should agree with the ideas expressed by the Declaration of Independence.
- 57.9% say true Americans should agree with the form of government created by the Constitution.
- 63.8% say true Americans should agree with the freedoms protected by the Bill of Rights.
- Only 6.2% say that true Americans should be descended from an ancestor from Britain or Europe.
- Only 24.5% say that to truly be an American someone should agree with Christianity.

“The supposed repudiation of a creedal America by the next generation of Christian conservatives seems to be a myth,” concludes West.

Further results from both surveys, including crosstabs and additional questions previously released in the report *How Americans View the American Founding*, can be accessed at www.EndowedbyOurCreator.com/survey.

Survey Methodology

These surveys of American adults were conducted using the Pollfish platform. The first survey of 2,500 American adults took place on December 9, 2025 and had a completion rate of 68%. Its margin of error was +/- 2 percent (the margin of error on subsamples is higher). The second survey of 1,000 American adults took place on December 30, 2025 and had a completion rate of 96.3%. Its margin of error +/- 3 percent (the margin of error on subsamples is higher).

Post-stratification weighting was used to ensure that the final sample reflected the age and gender composition of the overall U.S. population, although the weighting usually did not materially change the results.

Pollfish uses a methodology called “Random Device Engagement” (RDE) for its surveys: “RDE is the natural successor to Random Digit Dialing [RDD]. By delivering your survey inside popular mobile apps, RDE utilizes the same neutral environment as RDD, and an audience who are not taking premeditated surveys, by reaching them inside mobile apps they were using anyway. Pollfish uses non-monetary incentives like an extra life in a game or access to premium content. With additional layers of survey fraud prevention including AI and machine learning, Pollfish removes potentially biased responses, improving data quality even

further.”¹ Pollfish reports extensive quality checking to prevent bogus or fraudulent responses.²

Pollfish has surveyed more than 100 million respondents through its platform, and its users have included Stanford, Harvard, Northwestern University, Walmart, Disney, Macy’s, and Hulu.³ A more detailed discussion of Pollfish’s Random Device Engagement methodology can be found in the white paper “Future of Surveys: Random Device Engagement (RDE) with Organic Samples” by researchers David Rothschild and Tobias Konitzer.⁴

¹ “How the Pollfish Methodology Works,” Pollfish, <https://wss.pollfish.com/resources/blog/pollfish-school/how-the-pollfish-methodology-works>.

² “How Pollfish Provides Quality Data and Prevents Survey Fraud,” Pollfish, <https://info.prodege.com/pollfish-help-center/how-pollfish-provides-quality-data-and-prevents-survey-fraud>.

³ See information provided at <https://www.pollfish.com/> and <https://www.pollfish.com/quality/>.

⁴ David Rothschild and Tobias Konitzer, “Future of Surveys: Random Device Engagement (RDE) with Organic Samples” Pollfish, August 17, 2018, <https://www.pollfish.com/lp/files/organic-sampling-survey-method.pdf>.