The Alliance
FOR DIPLOMACY AND JUSTICE

COMMON GROUND BENEATH THE DIVIDE

A National Poll on Human Rights, Democracy, and the United States' Role in the World

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About The Alliance for Diplomacy and Justice
The Alliance for Diplomacy and Justice is an organization of former senior diplomats, elected officials, and human rights experts striving to make human rights and global justice central to U.S. foreign policy. Founded by former U.S. envoys and ambassadors — Rina Amiri, Desirée Cormier Smith, Cindy Dyer, Kelly M. Fay Rodríguez, Abby Finkenauer, Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta, Dr. Beth Van Schaack, and Jessica Stern — The Alliance advances principled, values-based diplomacy that strengthens democracy, equality, and peace worldwide.

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Introduction

Executive Summary

The Alliance for Diplomacy and Justice survey, conducted by Change Research, reached 2,106 registered voters between June 28 and July 2, 2026, and finds that Americans agree on far more than the current political climate suggests. At a moment when Americans are often portrayed as deeply divided and increasingly skeptical of engagement with the world, the findings complicate both assumptions. Americans recognize this disconnect: 79% of those polled agree that Americans are more divided by how politics is discussed than by their actual values and priorities.

The survey reveals remarkable consensus around human rights, human dignity, and the values Americans believe should guide U.S. policy at home and abroad. Across nearly every measure tested—safety, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and basic needs—agreement reaches at least 88% across the political spectrum. That support extends across fundamental principles at the heart of human rights. Ninety-four percent agree that people should be free from violence and harassment, 90% believe everyone should be treated with basic dignity and respect, and 82% agree that people should not lose their jobs or housing because of who they are.

But that agreement on values does not always translate into agreement on policy, priorities, or terminology. Americans differ sharply on whether these principles are upheld in practice, and agreement diminishes when broad rights are applied to specific issues, identities, and circumstances.

Similar complexity emerges when the survey turns to the United States' role abroad. The data show that support for human rights extends beyond expectations for voters' own communities: Americans want the United States to reflect these principles in its engagement with the world. Ninety-two percent say leading by example on human rights is important to the United States' image abroad, including 75% who say it is very important. Seventy-nine percent agree that the U.S. government has a responsibility to set a good example for the rest of the world, while 82% believe America is strongest when it sets an example that other countries want to follow.

Americans also see value in working with other countries to address humanitarian and global challenges. Eighty-nine percent say it is important for the United States to work with other countries to provide humanitarian assistance to people in crisis, and 76% agree that helping people abroad is consistent with American values. Eighty-eight percent recognize that problems originating abroad can affect Americans at home, and 81% agree that the United States needs to work with other countries to address them.

While these findings challenge the idea that Americans want to retreat from the world, they also reveal an important disconnect between reactions to “international engagement” as an abstract concept and support for the concrete actions that engagement entails. Even as 35% say the United States should eliminate international engagement when asked broadly, 91% to 95% support specific forms of international partnership, such as combating terrorism and cybercrime, holding war criminals accountable, and responding to global health threats. This contrast suggests that skepticism toward international engagement should not necessarily be interpreted as opposition to international cooperation. It may instead reflect different understandings of, and attitudes toward, different kinds of international engagement—including potential associations with political and military intervention abroad. This survey did not establish what drives the difference, but future iterations of this project could explore that.

Taken together, these findings question the framing of a country too divided to find common ground and increasingly uninterested in the world beyond its borders. Americans may disagree sharply about political parties, policies, priorities, and terminology, but underneath those divisions lies broad agreement on many of the values that should form the basis of how the United States engages with the world. Americans believe people deserve dignity and safety, want the United States to lead by example, and overwhelmingly support cooperation with other countries when it is connected to concrete problems that affect American concerns and priorities.

The results suggest that the challenge is not simply to persuade Americans to care about human rights at home or abroad, because much of the underlying foundation already exists. The findings instead point to an opportunity to connect the values Americans already hold to a clearer understanding of the concrete ways that human rights and principled international cooperation affect people’s lives, advance American interests, and improve the United States' standing in the world.

The study also shows that language, context, and specificity are critical to engaging Americans on policy choices. Americans may share principles while using different words to describe them or reconsider a policy choice when given additional factual context. More broadly, for policymakers and advocates, this means looking beyond conventional partisan divisions to understand what drives disagreement and to better understand the values, language, information, and priorities of different constituencies. Building a broader and more durable constituency for human rights and international engagement will require meeting different constituencies where they are, listening to them, and turning that understanding into a more tailored and effective engagement strategy.

Introduction

Why This Research, Why Now

Americans are deeply divided on many questions of politics and policy, but far less is known about what undergirds those divisions: shared values about human rights, what role they want the United States to play in the world, and how to translate shared values into U.S. foreign policy. Many polls provide substantial information about partisan preferences on U.S. foreign policy and global engagement—including on support for foreign aid and backing for international organizations—but they typically measure where people land without probing why. There is little testing of what a phrase like “human rights” means to the respondent, and little understanding about the values, assumptions, and understandings that underlie those preferences.

This survey was designed to close that gap in three specific ways. It included open-ended questions asking voters, in their own words, what values they believe Americans still hold in common and what comes to mind when they hear the phrase "human rights"—producing a picture of shared vocabulary and where that vocabulary splits in a way a closed-ended question cannot. It embedded framing experiments directly in the questionnaire, such as testing whether a single fact about the federal budget shifts support for foreign aid, to distinguish genuine opposition from opposition rooted in a factual misunderstanding. And rather than assuming party is the right variable for explaining the divide over the United States' role abroad, it built an independent, values-based segmentation—grouping voters by patterns across eight underlying value indices, with no reference to party, vote history, or international engagement itself—specifically to test whether that divide is really partisan, or whether it cuts across party lines. The sections that follow lay out what that approach found: where Americans' values converge domestically and abroad, where consensus fractures, where the real disagreement sits beneath the partisan surface, and what lessons can be drawn about framing and language.

Previous research has also raised questions about whether conventional measures of public opinion capture the full picture. For example, research by Beth Van Schaack, an Alliance co-founder, and Claudia Sung identified bipartisan support for several forms of international engagement, including humanitarian assistance, participation in international institutions, and a U.S. role as a moral leader globally. Other research suggests that public attitudes toward humanitarian and human rights issues are shaped not only by underlying political orientations, but also by how an issue is framed and understood. In a 2024 study in the International Journal of Press/Politics, Qihao Ji and Juris Pupcenoks found that different framings of humanitarian crises elicited different levels of support for intervention among Americans. More recent research by Ryan Yu-lin Liou published in International Studies Quarterly, found that Americans’ support for human rights sanctions varied depending on the type of human rights violation presented and the source communicating information about the abuse. Taken together, these findings raise important questions: When Americans disagree about broad

concepts such as human rights or international engagement, how much of that how much of that disagreement reflects differences in underlying values, and how much may reflect different priorities, interpretations, or associations with the framing and language being used? How can the answers to those questions help grow support among American voters for a human rights-based U.S. foreign policy?

This project was designed to further explore such questions by examining how Americans understand and speak about human rights, how those views vary across partisan and demographic groups, and how they relate to attitudes toward diplomacy and the United States' role abroad.

Introduction

What We Heard From Americans

Five key takeaways on human rights, shared values, and the United States' role in the world.

1. **Human rights values have overwhelming support among Americans**. Across the core values tested, at least 88% of Americans agree with principles centered on safety, freedom of expression, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and basic needs. Ninety-seven percent agree people should be safe from violence in their homes and communities, while 95% agree people should be able to express their opinions without fear of punishment. Americans also overwhelmingly agree that people should be free from violence and harassment, treated with basic dignity, and protected from losing their job or housing because of who they are.

2. **Americans want the United States to lead by example on human rights**. Ninety-two percent say leading by example on human rights is important to the United States' image in the world, including 75% who say it is very important. Seventy-nine percent agree that the U.S. government has a responsibility to set a good example for the rest of the world, and 82% believe the United States is strongest when it sets a values-based example that other countries want to follow.

3. **Americans support working with other countries to address humanitarian and global challenges.** Eighty-nine percent say it is important for the United States to work with other countries to provide humanitarian assistance to people in crisis, and 76% agree that helping people abroad is consistent with American values. Eighty-eight percent also recognize that problems originating abroad can affect Americans at home, while 81% agree that the United States needs to work with other countries to address problems.

4. **Americans support international engagement when it gets specific**. While 35% say the United States should eliminate international engagement when asked about it in the abstract, support rises to 91% to 95% for specific forms of global cooperation, including combating terrorism and cybercrime, holding war criminals accountable, and addressing global health threats. The findings point to a significant gap between reactions to the term "international engagement" and support for many of the actions that engagement includes.

5. **Language, context, and framing matter.** Across the survey, responses showed that voters use varied language to describe similar values, attach different meanings to broad terms, and may shift their responses when abstract principles are applied to specific policies or actions and when provided with concrete information.

Introduction

Methodology Overview

To undertake this work, The Alliance commissioned Change Research to conduct the technical design, data collection, and statistical analysis. The Alliance designed the survey themes and collaborated on question formulation. From June 28 to July 2, 2026, Change Research conducted the survey, reaching 2,106 registered voters nationally, with a modeled margin of error of ±2.5%. Respondents were recruited through dynamic online sampling and weighted through post-stratification on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and 2024 presidential vote, using voter file data as the weighting benchmark.

The weighted sample splits nearly evenly by 2024 vote: 45% Trump and 44% Harris, with 5% third-party voters and 6% non-voters. The gender split is 52% women and 47% men. Sixty-four percent of respondents identify as white, 13% as Hispanic or Latino, 12% as Black or African-American, and 7% as Asian American or Pacific Islander. Each age group makes up roughly a quarter of the sample: 25% are 18–34, 24% are 35–49, 24% are 50–64, and 27% are 65 or older.

Throughout this report, findings are highlighted by race where sample sizes allow meaningful differences to be identified with sufficient confidence. The survey was not designed with sufficiently large samples across other identity groups, including gender, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, to consistently report comparable subgroup findings. Accordingly, do not interpret references to the experiences or views of specific racial groups as suggesting that other identity groups were not considered or that meaningful differences do not exist among them.

A more detailed discussion of the methodology is included in the appendix at the end of the report.

Findings: Part A

Where Americans Agree

Beneath Political Division Is Broad Support for the Fundamental Principles of Human Rights

One central question behind this research is whether the United States' deep political divisions extend to the fundamental values that shape how people believe they and others should be treated, and whether human rights remain meaningful to Americans amid growing debate over the country's priorities and role in the world. The findings suggest an important distinction: Americans may be deeply divided over politics, policy, and the application of particular rights, but not over the underlying principles themselves. Those principles at the heart of human rights retain overwhelming public support.

Across the survey, Americans broadly agree on the importance of equal treatment under the law, equal opportunity, safety from violence, freedom of expression, dignity, and protection from discrimination and mistreatment. The significance is not simply that individual values poll well. It is the consistency and breadth of support across a range of principles that together form the foundation of human rights and counter prevailing myths.

For policymakers and advocates, this matters because it challenges pundits' common assertions that Americans do not care about human rights abroad and that the country's political divisions leave little common ground to build on. The findings point to a different starting place. Americans may use different language to describe these principles and disagree about how to apply them. Still, policymakers and advocates don't necessarily need to start by convincing people that dignity, equality, safety, and freedom matter. On many of these fundamental values, Americans are already there.

That creates an important opportunity for public engagement: start with the values Americans already overwhelmingly support, strengthen the connection between those values and human rights, and show how protecting those rights relates to people's lives at home and the United States' actions in the world. At the same time, common ground should not be mistaken for consensus on everything.

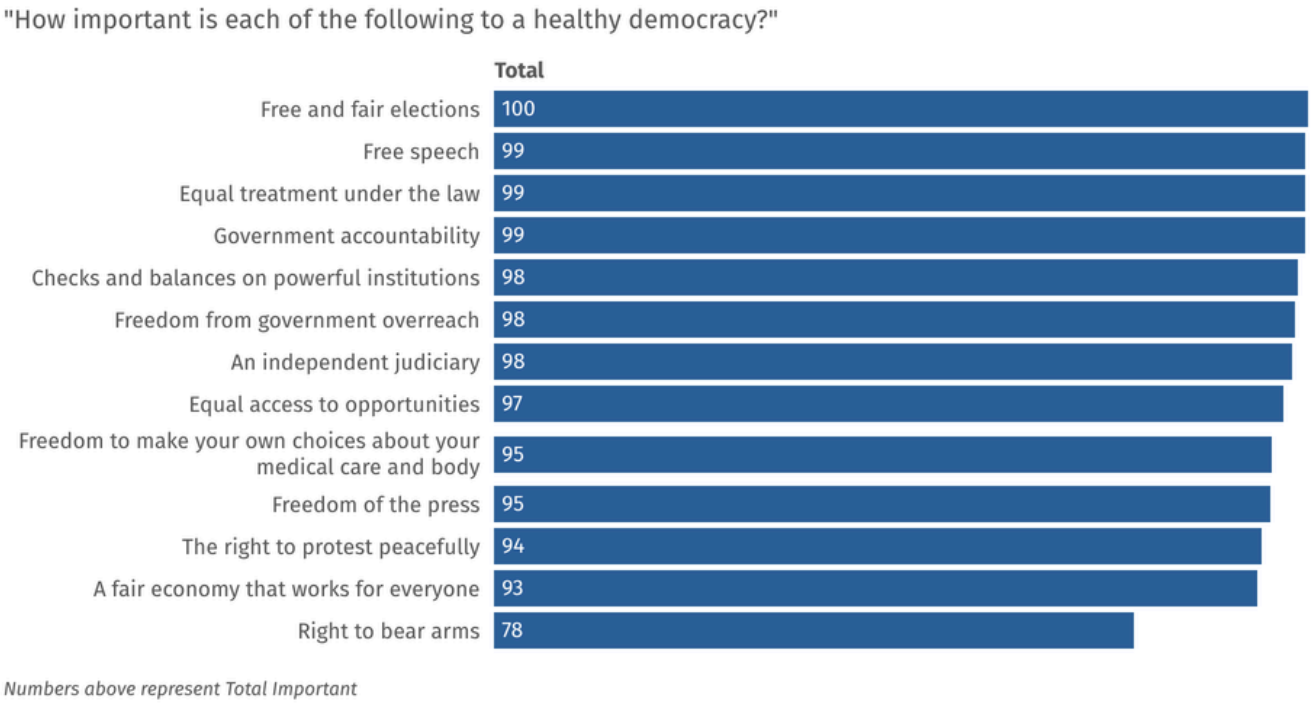
Findings: Part A

1. Americans Overwhelmingly Agree on the Rights a Healthy Democracy Should Protect

Americans show striking agreement about the fundamental rights and principles they believe are essential to a healthy democracy. Ninety-nine percent say equal treatment under the law is important, and 97% say the same about equal access to opportunities. These findings fit a broader pattern of overwhelming support for fundamental rights and democratic principles, showing that Americans largely agree on the basic protections a healthy democracy should provide.

The importance of these findings goes beyond any single near-unanimous number. Taken together, they show that equality, fairness, and opportunity are not values held by only one political constituency; they are part of a broadly shared understanding of what Americans expect from a healthy democracy. That common foundation is especially significant for human rights: Equal treatment and equal opportunity are not peripheral to a human rights framework but central to the idea that every person is entitled to rights and protections regardless of who they are.

The survey findings offer a clear starting point for human rights advocates and policymakers: rather than assuming the public must first be convinced to value fundamental rights, the data reveal that core democratic principles already enjoy overwhelming, widespread support. The primary opportunity is to explicitly link these widely held expectations for a healthy democracy to human rights and show what safeguarding those rights entails in practice. As noted in the overview, this foundation lets public engagement build directly on the values Americans already share.



Findings: Part A

2. Americans Agree on the Basic Rights Everyone Should Have

Americans overwhelmingly agree on a basic set of rights and protections everyone should be able to count on. Ninety-five percent of voters say people should be able to express their opinions without fear of punishment, 94% agree people should be free from violence and harassment no matter who they are, and 97% agree people should be safe from violence in their homes and communities. Ninety percent agree everyone deserves basic dignity and respect, while 82% say people should not lose their job or housing because of their identity.

What stands out is how consistently Americans affirm these protections across different dimensions of life. Safety, freedom of expression, dignity, freedom from mistreatment, and protection from discrimination are different kinds of rights, yet each commands broad public support. Together, they point to a shared understanding that everyone should have basic protections.

Policymakers and advocates can begin with these key findings. People may use different words for these principles, and as later findings show, they may disagree on how to apply them. Yet, the basic idea that everyone deserves basic rights and protections is not a fringe view. It is common ground that can serve as a basis when agreement begins to fracture.

"How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?"

	Total	White	Hispanic	Black	AAPI	Harris voter	Trump voter	Third Party voter
People should be safe from violence in their homes and communities.	97	98	96	96	99	98	97	97
People should be able to express their opinions without fear of punishment.	95	95	95	94	91	97	93	91
People, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other identity, should be able to pursue opportunities to improve their standard of living.	92	92	91	97	95	99	86	92
No one should be treated unfairly because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other identity.	91	89	91	98	94	99	83	92
Everyone should be able to meet their basic needs, regardless of where they live.	88	86	91	95	90	98	79	79

Numbers above represent Total Agree

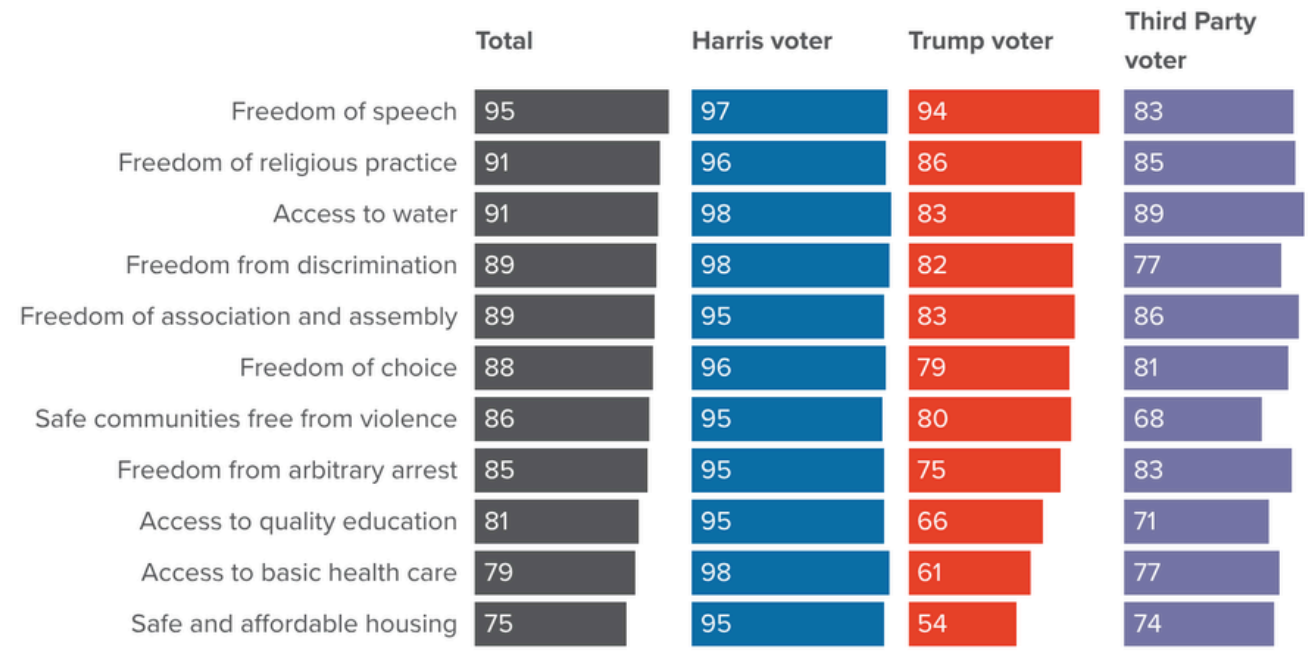
Findings: Part A

3. Americans Have a Broad View of What Counts as a Human Right

Americans see human rights as more than just political freedoms. They also include basic needs and protections. For example, 95% say freedom of speech is a human right, and 91% say the same about access to clean water, putting it on par with freedom of religious practice. More traditional civil and political rights poll highly across the political spectrum, while economic rights show more partisan support, especially for access to education, healthcare, and housing. This shows that Americans believe human rights cover both individual freedoms and many of the basic needs that help people live safely and with dignity.

For policymakers and advocates, that range of understanding creates multiple points of connection to people's everyday concerns. Human rights do not have to be discussed only through the language of international law, institutions, or abuses abroad. The findings suggest they can also be connected to tangible questions of safety, basic needs, freedom, and dignity. At the same time, later findings show that agreement with these broad principles does not guarantee agreement about who is being denied those rights or what the government should do in response. As Part B explores, Americans may agree on the right itself while disagreeing sharply over who is being denied that right and what to do about it.

"Do you consider each of the following to be a human right?"



Numbers above represent those who said "yes"

Findings: Part A

4. Perception that Our Shared Values Get Lost in a Focus on Division

Many Americans feel that political conversations in the country highlight our differences more than what we have in common. Eighty-seven percent say media and online discussions focus on divisions instead of shared values. Seventy-nine percent believe that the way politics is discussed creates more division than actual differences in values and priorities. Seventy-seven percent think that political commentators, social media, and online influencers often make the country seem more divided than it really is.

Americans also believe the people and platforms shaping the political conversation reinforce that focus on division. Ninety-two percent say political leaders, media personalities, and influencers often benefit from focusing on a divided America. At the same time, 81% say people are more likely to find common ground through personal conversations than through online forums. The contrast suggests that Americans see more possibility for agreement with one another than the national political conversation often reflects.

This gap is important for understanding public support for human rights. If we focus only on the loudest political debates, we might miss the many areas where Americans agree. The survey shows strong support for many basic rights and principles at the core of human rights, even when people disagree in other areas. For policymakers and advocates, this common ground is a good starting point. Human rights can connect to values Americans already share, rather than being seen as just another issue that divides people.

'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

	Total	White	Hispanic	Black	AAPI	Harris voter	Trump voter	Third Party voter
Political leaders, media personalities and influencers often benefit from focusing on a divided America.	92	93	91	84	92	92	93	82
Discussions about politics in online forums and in the media often emphasize what divides Americans more than what they have in common.	87	89	83	81	91	85	90	81
People are more likely to find common ground in personal conversations than through online forums.	81	82	79	81	75	82	82	80
Americans are more divided by how politics is discussed than by their actual values and priorities.	79	79	80	77	81	75	82	72
Political commentators, social media and online influences often make America seem more divided than they actually are.	77	78	74	68	82	69	87	62

Numbers above represent Total Agree

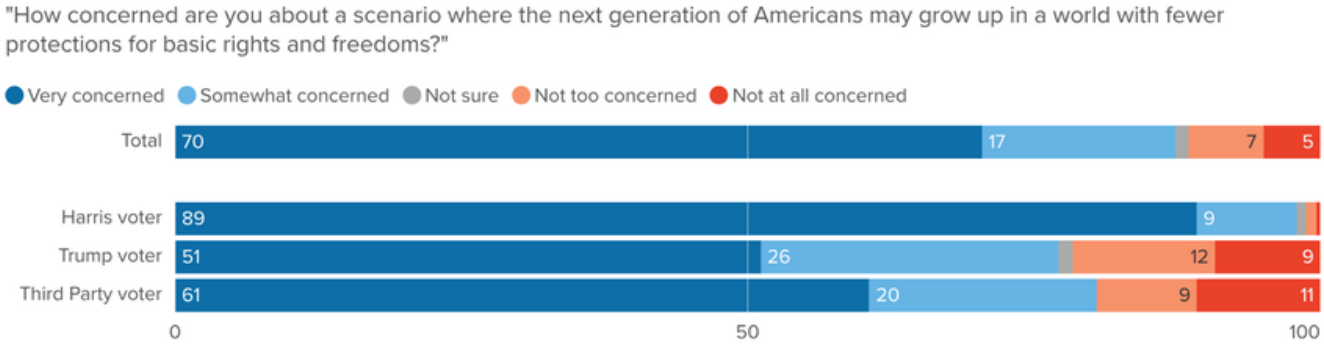
Findings: Part A

5. Concerns that the Next Generation Will Have Fewer Rights

Americans are united around the importance of basic rights and freedoms, but they are deeply concerned about whether those protections will endure. Eighty-seven percent are concerned that younger Americans will grow up with fewer protections for basic rights and freedoms than Americans have today, including 70% who are very concerned.

This concern adds another layer to the strong support for rights seen in the survey. Americans value these protections and do not assume they will always be there. Many worry that the next generation could have fewer rights, showing that protecting rights and freedoms is not just an idea but something people see as important for the country's future.

This finding affects how advocates and leaders should talk about human rights. They can connect Americans' strong belief in basic rights with their worries about losing them, and make the case for protecting these rights now and in the future. For policymakers and advocates, this is a key point, as it shows that Americans care about protecting rights and fear losing them.



Key Takeaways and Look Ahead

Where Americans Agree

1. **Americans overwhelmingly express support for the principles at the heart of human rights; this support is broad and consistent**. Across the survey, overwhelming majorities support equal treatment, equal opportunity, safety, freedom of expression, dignity, and protection from violence and harassment. The pattern across multiple questions, rather than a single high-performing value, shows the strength of this foundation.

2. **Americans see more common ground than our political discourse suggests.** Eighty-seven percent say political discussion in the media and online emphasizes what divides Americans more than what they have in common, and 79% agree Americans are more divided by how politics is discussed than by their actual values and priorities.

3. **Americans are concerned that rights and protections will not endure**. Eighty-seven percent are concerned that younger Americans will grow up with fewer protections for basic rights and freedoms, including 70% who are very concerned. This shows that Americans care about protecting rights and freedoms, a finding with policy implications.

So far, the findings show that Americans largely agree on which rights matter and what a healthy democracy should protect, reinforcing the argument that real common ground exists. This premise leads to a deeper question: what happens when these shared principles meet real-life experiences, views, and political priorities? Part B considers this gap.

Findings: Part B

Shared Values, Different Priorities & Experiences

Americans Agree on Core Values, but Not Always on What They Mean in Practice

Part A found broad agreement on principle. Part B assesses how these principles hold up against lived experience: it looks at whether Americans believe people actually receive equal treatment and opportunity and how they view their own experiences with unfair treatment. It also assesses whether the broad agreement Americans express on basic rights holds when those principles are applied to specific issues, identities, or circumstances and whether Americans think the country is meeting that standard in its conduct today. The survey finds that common ground holds when assessing Americans' concerns—cost of living and housing affordability are overriding concerns for many. However, they diverge sharply when the questions become more concrete.

Americans are split on what they perceive as the biggest threat to themselves and their communities along immigration versus discrimination lines. They are divided on whether equal opportunity exists in America, and that gap widens once specific groups are considered. And while lived experience of unfair treatment is prevalent, it is distributed unevenly across race and party lines. (The poll did not consider other identity categories such as gender.) Support for rights falls sharpest when a group is identified by sexual orientation or gender identity, particularly among Trump and third-party voters.

Taken together, these findings show the potential and constraints of building on the common ground identified in Part A. Shared values can provide a foundation for broad support for human rights, but they do not necessarily resolve differences over what is seen as threatening those rights, which groups deserve protection, and what policies should be applied. For those seeking to build broader support for human rights, shared American values can serve as a common starting point. The next step is to understand how different constituencies interpret and apply those values—and to connect human rights principles to concrete concerns and experiences they recognize in their own lives and communities. For example, connecting human rights protection to housing security, fair wages, and protection from exploitative conditions taps a concern across parties and offers an opportunity to contextualize human rights and make them concrete. Contested territory—such as discrimination and immigration—should be treated as separate terrain needing its own targeted approach. Next steps in this research may include further analysis of effective messaging on these issues.

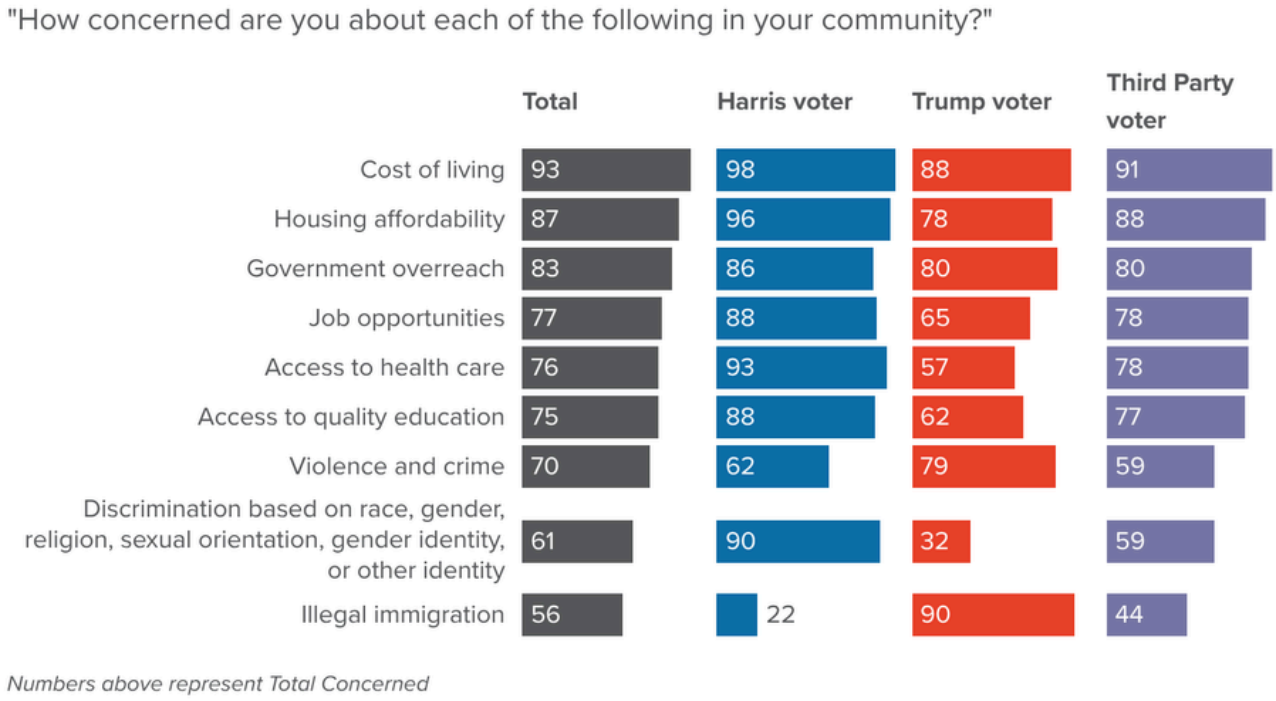
Findings: Part B

1. Americans Share Many Concerns But Divide Sharply on Immigration and Discrimination

Americans share many concerns about economic pressures, economic opportunities, and challenges facing their communities. Cost of living is a top concern among Harris, Trump, and third-party voters, and groups broadly worry about housing affordability and government overreach.

However, that common ground narrows considerably on politically charged issues. Ninety percent of Trump voters are concerned about illegal immigration, compared with 22% of Harris voters, while 90% of Harris voters are concerned about discrimination based on identity compared with 32% of Trump voters. The contrast reflects a recurring pattern in the survey: Americans can share broad priorities but differ sharply in their concerns.

This contrast matters because it suggests that division stems not from values themselves, but from what Americans perceive as threats to those values. Different constituencies identify different threats to their communities and, as a result, may apply shared values such as safety, fairness, and equal treatment to very different perceived problems. A message grounded in a shared value therefore may not be enough if audiences disagree about where that value is most at risk or what causes the risk. For policymakers and advocates, recognizing these differing perceptions is key to understanding where persuasion is possible and where more targeted engagement may be required.



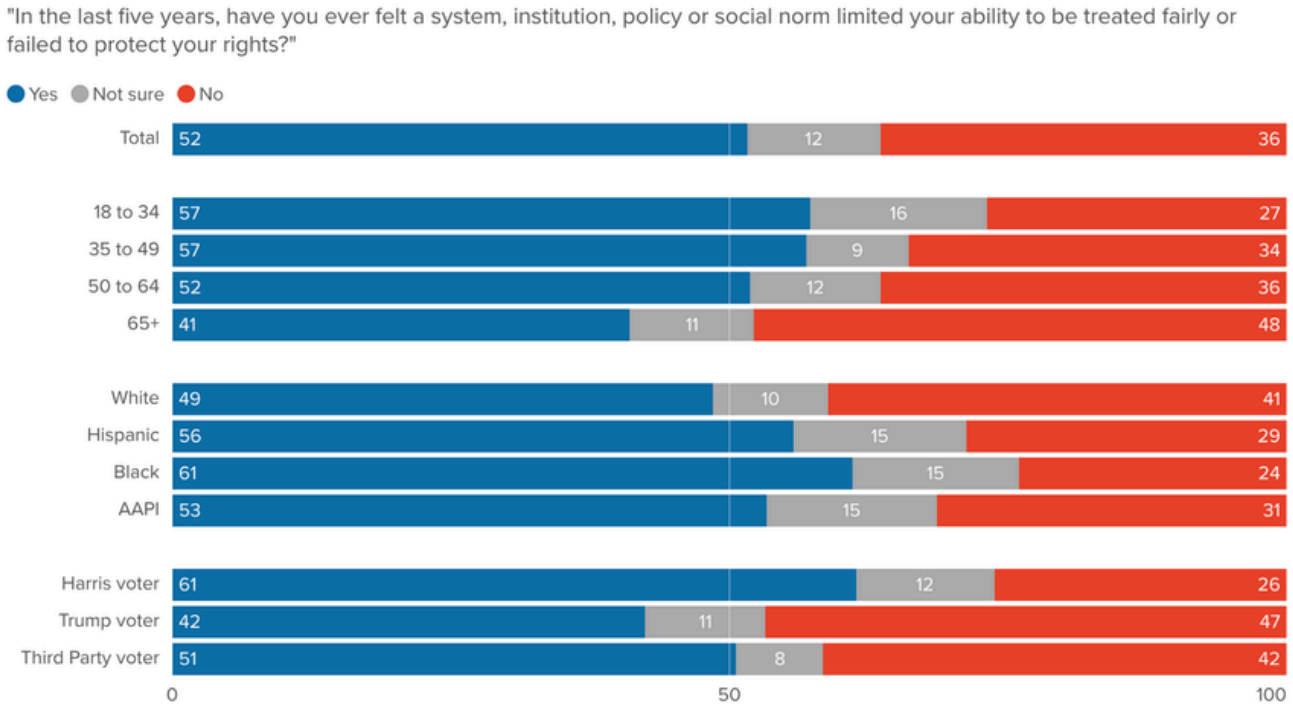
Findings: Part B

2. A Lived Experience of Unfair Treatment

About half of voters (52%) say that in the last five years they have personally felt that a system, institution, policy, or social norm limited their ability to be treated fairly or failed to protect their rights. Thirty-six percent say they have not had this experience, and 12% are not sure.

That overall figure of about half moves considerably across demographic lines. It runs meaningfully lower among voters 65 and older and Trump voters, and higher among Black and Harris voters, an unsurprising finding that lived experience of unfair treatment varies greatly depending on one's racial identity. The results reveal a pattern consistent with the broader finding that lived experience of unfair treatment is unevenly distributed, even where people agree on the underlying values that should guide policy. The poll did not disaggregate experiences of discrimination based on other identities such as gender, religion, or LGBTQI+ status.

The prevalence of personal experience of unfair treatment may provide a point of connection across those differences. For policymakers and advocates, that shared recognition that systems and institutions do not always treat people fairly could build a foundation for better conversations about how to protect rights and equal treatment for everyone. This is especially crucial when voters differ over which groups are treated unfairly and what to do about it.



Findings: Part B

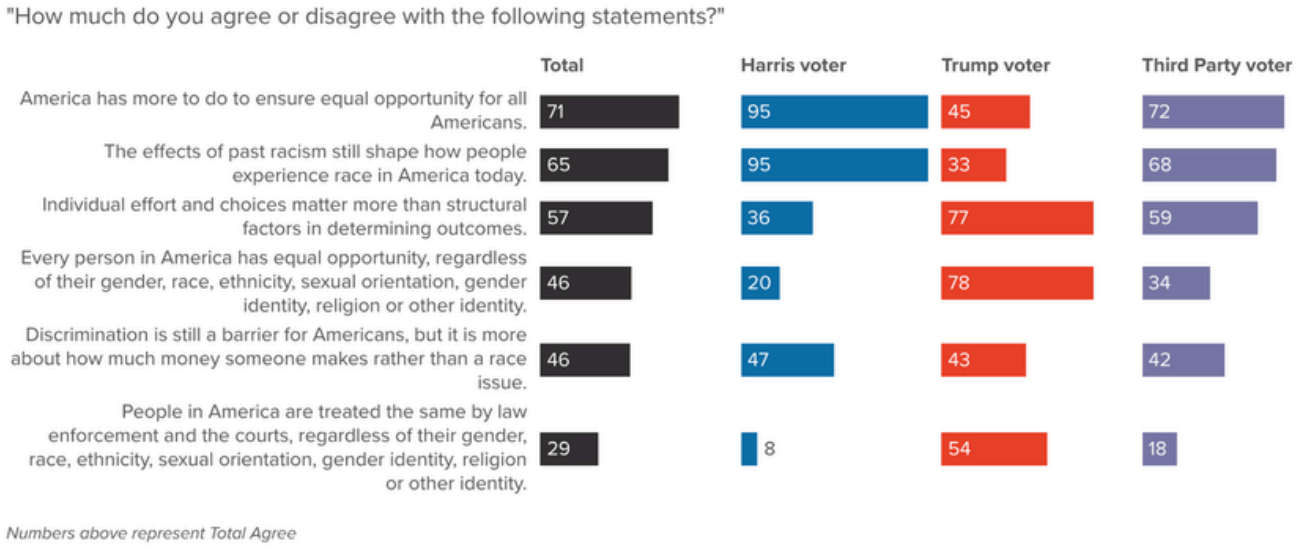
3. Harris and Trump Voters Agree on Equality as a Goal But Not Whether It Exists

Voters are sharply divided by party on whether equal opportunity already exists in America. Overall, 46% of voters agree that every person in the United States has equal opportunity regardless of identity, almost tied with those who disagree (47%). Just 29% agree that Americans are treated the same by law enforcement and the courts regardless of identity, while 61% disagree.

At the same time, 65% agree that the effects of past racism still shape how people experience race in the United States today, and 71% agree that America has more to do to ensure equal opportunity for all Americans. Fifty-seven percent also agree that individual effort and choices matter more than structural factors in determining outcomes, showing that these aren't simply mirror-image positions; many voters hold both beliefs at once. When asked whether equal opportunity is available based on specific markers of identity such as gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion, Trump voters strongly believe it is (78%). In comparison, only 20% of Harris voters agree. Harris voters are considerably more likely to see present-day inequality, and Trump voters are considerably more likely to see equality as already achieved.

The findings suggest that while emphasizing the importance of equality may be a good starting point, policymakers and advocates should recognize that perceptions of the extent and urgency of inequality can differ starkly by audience. The challenge is to connect the shared principle to its application. Building broader support will require providing credible evidence about where and how the promise of equal treatment is not being realized.

These attitudes can also coexist. Many Americans believe that people are largely responsible for their own outcomes, but they also recognize that unequal conditions remain. This overlap could offer a better starting point for discussion than seeing structural and individual explanations as completely separate.



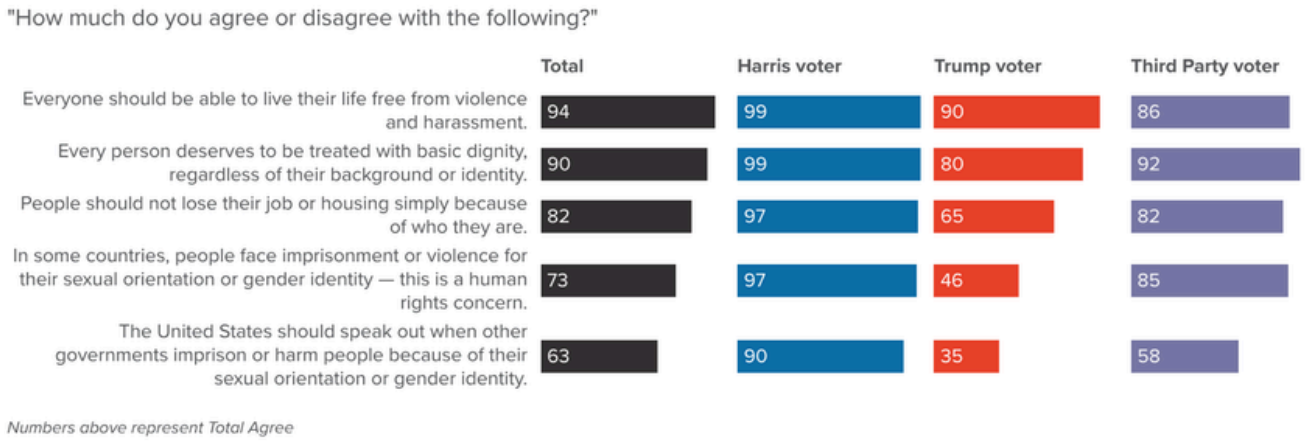
Findings: Part B

4. Agreement on Rights Fragments When Application Becomes Specific

A majority of voters believe in the principle of freedom from persecution: 94% agree everyone should be able to live free from violence and harassment, and 90% agree every person deserves basic dignity regardless of background or identity. Eighty-two percent agree people should not lose their job or housing simply because of who they are.

Seventy-three percent agree that imprisonment or violence over someone's sexual orientation or gender identity abroad is a human rights concern, and 63% agree the U.S. should speak out when other governments imprison or harm people for it. Yet, Trump voter support declines from 90% to 80% to 65% across the broader persecution items in this set and falls to 46% and 35% once sexual orientation and gender identity become the subject specifically—one of the sharpest partisan drop-offs measured anywhere in the survey. Notably, these are the only community-based questions in the poll about U.S. engagement on human rights abuses in other countries, so we cannot compare this information with levels of support for engagement on discrimination based on other grounds. This limits our ability to draw conclusions, but we can see that the broad principle of condemnation for persecution ruptures when applied to the safety of LGBTQI+ persons.

The survey does not yet establish what drives that drop—whether attitudes toward the LGBTQI+ community, reactions to specific framing, attitudes to international engagement, or some combination of these factors. Before choosing messaging, coalition-building, or policy strategies, advocates need to know which of these they're actually confronting.



Findings: Part B

The challenges identified here extend beyond this finding. Part B shows that voters who share many fundamental values can nevertheless reach different conclusions when those values are applied to particular problems, communities, or policy choices. Party affiliation helps describe some of these differences, but it does not necessarily explain what lies behind them or where opportunities may exist to build support.

As part of assessing attitudes toward international engagement, Part C applies segmentation analysis to understand these dynamics better. This approach looks beyond conventional partisan categories and identifies distinct voter groups based on underlying values and orientations. It provides a more nuanced picture of where support for international engagement exists, where resistance may lie, and where opportunities for broad support for a human rights-based agenda may exist.

Key Takeaways and Look Ahead

Shared Values, Different Priorities and Experiences

1. **Shared values do not mean shared perceptions of the problem.** Americans can agree strongly on fairness, safety, and equal treatment while identifying very different threats to those values. Economic concerns provide considerable common ground, while immigration and discrimination produce some of the sharpest partisan differences in the survey.

2. **Americans' experiences and perceptions of unequal treatment vary considerably.** About half of Americans report personally experiencing unfair treatment by a system, institution, policy, or social norm, but those experiences are distributed unevenly across demographic and political groups. Americans are similarly divided over whether equal opportunity has already been achieved.

3. **Agreement is most fragile when broad principles are applied to specific groups and circumstances.** Support for dignity, freedom from persecution, and protection from discrimination is overwhelming in the abstract, but can decline considerably when the question identifies a particular community or asks what the United States should do in response.

Part B complicates, rather than overturns, the common ground identified in Part A. Americans share many of the same underlying principles, but they do not always agree about where those principles are being violated, who is affected, or what action should follow. That distinction becomes especially important when the question moves beyond how Americans believe people should be treated at home to what those values should require of the United States abroad. Part C turns to that question: whether Americans want the United States engaged in the world, what they believe that engagement should accomplish, and what ultimately drives their support for it.

Findings: Part C

Americans and International Engagement

Americans Want the United States to Lead, Cooperate, and Engage

Parts A and B examined the values that provide common ground among Americans and how those values hold up when concrete questions are raised about people's experiences and perceptions, focusing largely on the domestic front. Part C turns outward to Americans' views of the United States in the world and assesses how these issues play out internationally.

The section considers what voters see as important in guiding the United States' role in the world and the importance of working with other countries to address global challenges. It also considers whether the United States should support other countries and whether it should be engaged abroad.

The findings offer a more complex picture than a choice between engagement and disengagement: Voters express broad cross-partisan support for several forms of international cooperation and assistance, even as they remain wary of the vague term "international engagement." They also differ over the circumstances, priorities, and values that should guide international engagement.

However, voters diverge on why the United States should engage. While 35% believe the United States should reduce international engagement, the remainder believe that the United States should engage internationally because it reflects American values and principles (22%), advances American interests (15%), or both (28%).

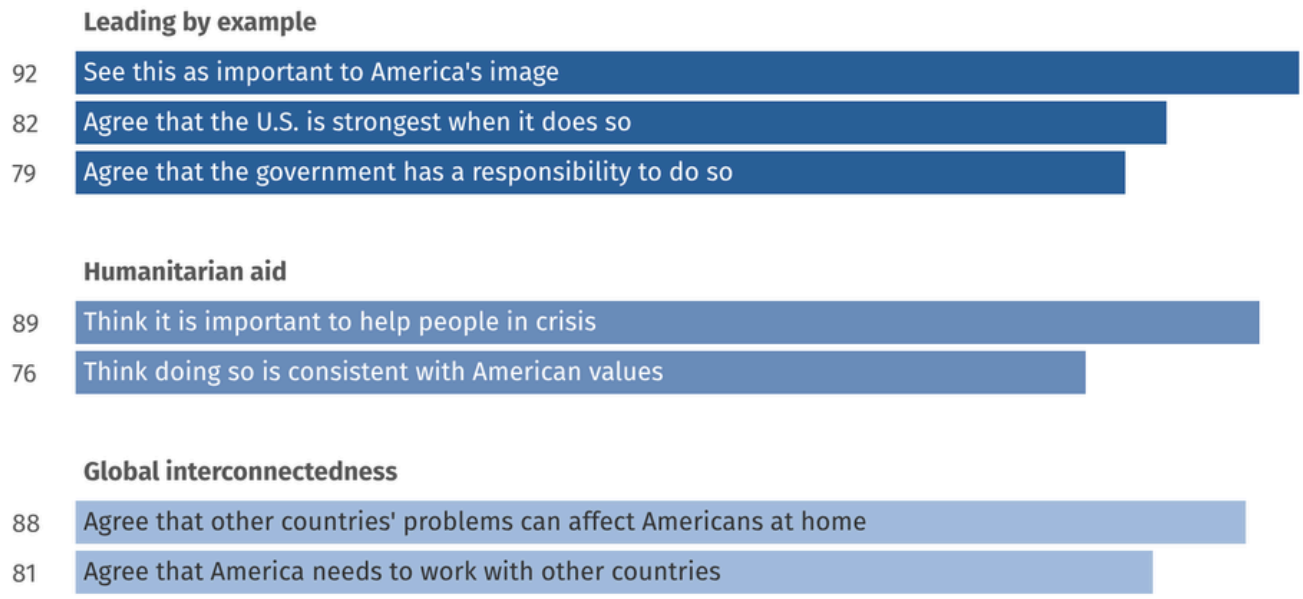
To better understand the underlying values behind those differences, and the opportunities they present for building a broader constituency for international engagement, the survey applies segmentation analysis in the latter part of this section.

Findings: Part C

1. Americans Still Believe U.S. Leadership Abroad Matters to Our Values, Our Interests, and Our Lives at Home

The strength of these findings is not simply that Americans support an active U.S. role in the world, but that support holds across very different reasons for engagement. Ninety-two percent say leading by example on human rights matters to the United States' image abroad, 82% believe America is strongest when it sets an example others want to follow, and 79% say the U.S. government has a responsibility to set a good example. At the same time, 88% recognize that problems abroad can affect Americans at home, 81% say the United States needs to work with other countries to address them, and 89% say working with other countries to provide humanitarian assistance to people in crisis is important. The consistency across these measures is as significant as any individual number.

This pattern matters because these rationales are often presented as competing choices in policy discussions. The debate over the United States' role in the world is frequently framed as a binary choice between values and interests, helping people abroad and addressing needs at home, or international cooperation and American strength. These findings suggest Americans do not necessarily experience those choices in such binary terms. Americans can prioritize their own communities while recognizing that events beyond U.S. borders affect them; they can believe in advancing American interests while also believing that American leadership carries responsibilities; and they can see cooperation with other countries as a tool for addressing both humanitarian needs and challenges that reach the United States.



Findings: Part C

2. America's Global Image: Near Universal Agreement on Leading By Example, Divergence on Details

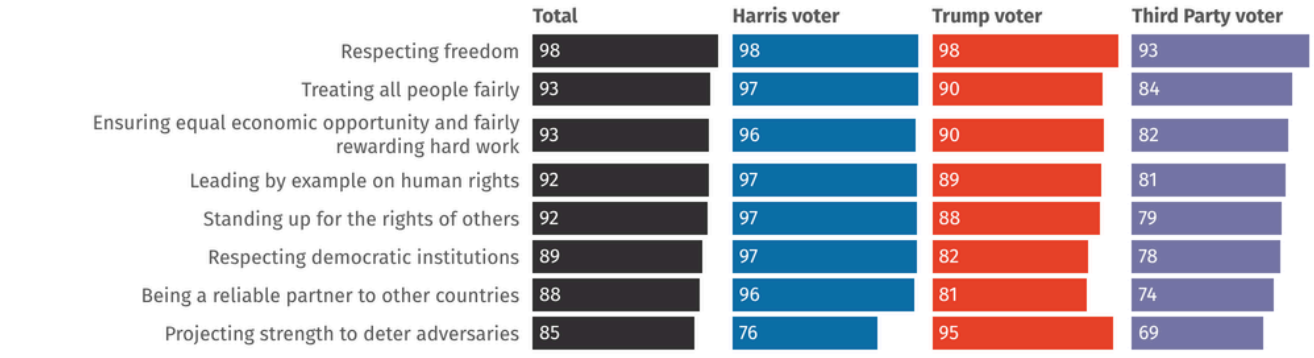
Leading by example on human rights and standing up for the rights of others both register at 92%, essentially tied with treating all people fairly and ensuring equal economic opportunity, at 93% each. These views also cross partisan lines. Eighty-nine percent of Trump voters say leading by example on human rights is important, compared with 97% of Harris voters. While 88% of Trump voters and 97% of Harris voters say the same about standing up for the rights of others. Seventy-five percent of Americans overall call leading by example on human rights very important, and a majority of Trump voters agree.

Related findings reinforce this broad agreement: 79% of voters agree that the U.S. government has a responsibility to set a good example for the rest of the world, and 82% agree that the United States is strongest when it sets an example the rest of the world wants to follow.

Overall, the findings suggest that Americans across the political spectrum see the values that the United States represents abroad, including freedom, fairness, and human rights, as important. They also indicate that values-based leadership and a strong America are not in contradiction, as evidenced by the high importance Trump voters place on both leading by example on human rights (89%) and projecting strength to deter adversaries (95%).

This finding also challenges the idea that leading on human rights is possibly seen as a weakness or less important than leading in national security. Americans appear to believe that the country can show strength and protect its interests while also setting an example in freedom, fairness, and human rights. For advocates and those looking to reshape the future of foreign policy, this suggests that a values-based, human rights-first case for American leadership does not need to be framed against strength or national interest. It does not need to be human rights or strength—human rights itself can be the strength and the interest.

"How important is each of the following to America's image in the world?"



Numbers above represent Total Important

Findings: Part C

3. Majorities Connect American Leadership Abroad with American Values and Domestic Interests

Ninety-three percent agree that a country that keeps its word is taken more seriously in the world; 82% agree that the United States is strongest when it sets an example the rest of the world wants to follow; 76% agree that helping people in crisis abroad is consistent with American values. At the same time, 74% agree that the United States is best served when it puts American interests first in its international engagement. Taken together, these views suggest voters expect engagement to reflect American values while benefiting the United States. This connection becomes clearest when the domestic consequences become tangible.

Agreement drops furthest on the direct economic case for global engagement: Only 63% agree that American workers and businesses benefit when the U.S. promotes minimum labor standards internationally, the lowest-scoring item in this set. This may be due to political associations with the term "labor standards." Partisan ideology cues appear to get triggered by an "American interests first" framing before almost anything else in this list of statements. Voters may also be less clear about the benefits of "domestic labor standards," as opposed to understanding the domestic impact of disease outbreaks or terrorism.

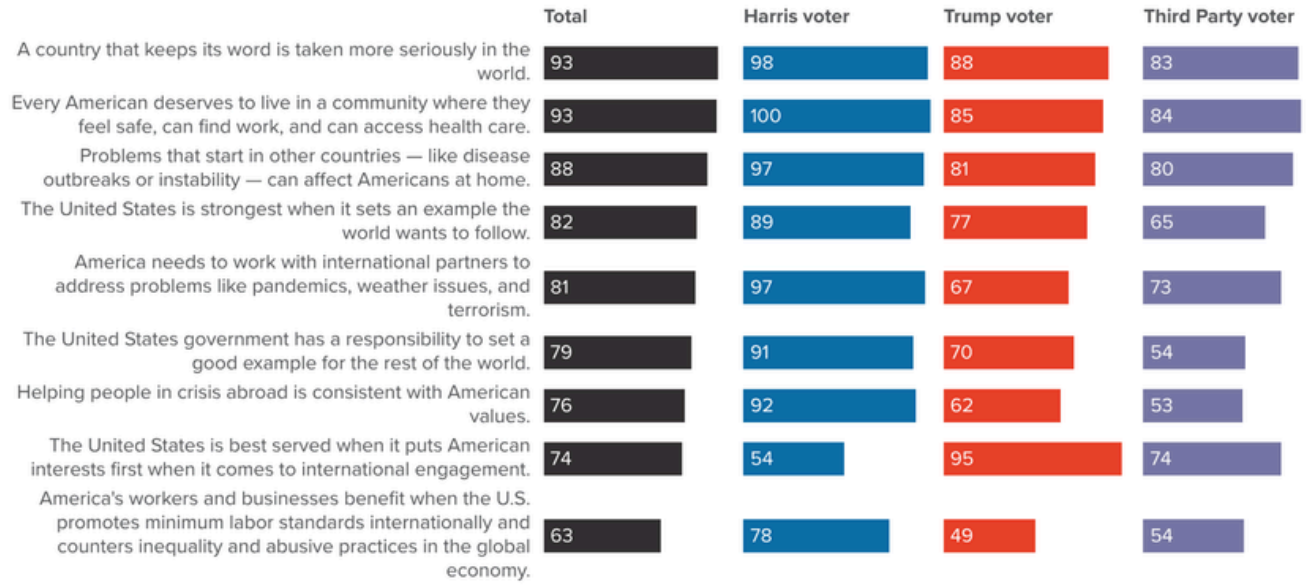
Taken together, these findings suggest that voters do not necessarily see American values, American interests, and international cooperation as competing approaches to foreign policy. Large majorities endorse elements of all three. The connection becomes particularly clear when consequences at home are tangible: 88% agree that global problems such as disease outbreaks or instability can affect Americans, while 81% agree that America needs to work with international partners to address problems such as pandemics, weather issues, and terrorism.

The partisan results are particularly striking. Trump voters overwhelmingly agree that American interests should come first (95%). Still, majorities also support working with international partners (67%), setting a good example for the world (70%), and the proposition that helping people in crisis abroad is consistent with American values (62%). Prioritizing American interests, in other words, does not necessarily mean opposing international cooperation or helping people abroad.

For policymakers and advocates, this offers an important consideration. The case for international engagement may not require appealing to American values versus its interests but showing how they reinforce each other.

Findings: Part C

"How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following?"

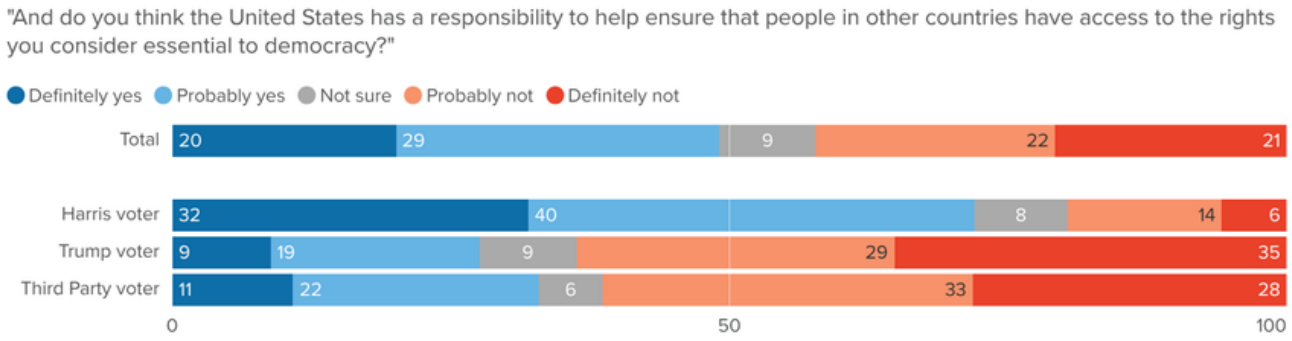


Numbers above represent Total Agree

Findings: Part C

4. Support for Helping People Abroad Diminishes with a Sense of Responsibility

The graph earlier showed that Americans support helping people in crisis abroad. Yet when asked whether the United States has a responsibility to help people in other countries gain access to the rights they consider essential to democracy, that support splinters. Forty-nine percent say yes (20% and 29% probably), while 43% say no (22% probably not and 21% definitely not), and 9% are not sure. A majority of Harris voters say yes, while a majority of Trump and third-party voters say no.



Voters may support a value and prefer a U.S. policy position, but as it progresses from preference to specific actions to obligation, support declines, particularly along partisan lines. This reading of the data aligns with the report's broader findings. The wording of the question may also elicit strong views about the United States' obligations to non-Americans, attitudes toward democracy promotion, sovereignty, and associations with U.S. military interventions justified by democracy and rights promotion.

The survey cannot make a conclusive statement as to which drives the decline in support, but it is important because it suggests that public attitudes toward international engagement may not fall into clean lines of support or opposition; they depend on what is proposed, how that proposal is framed, and what beliefs Americans hold as to what the actions will entail.

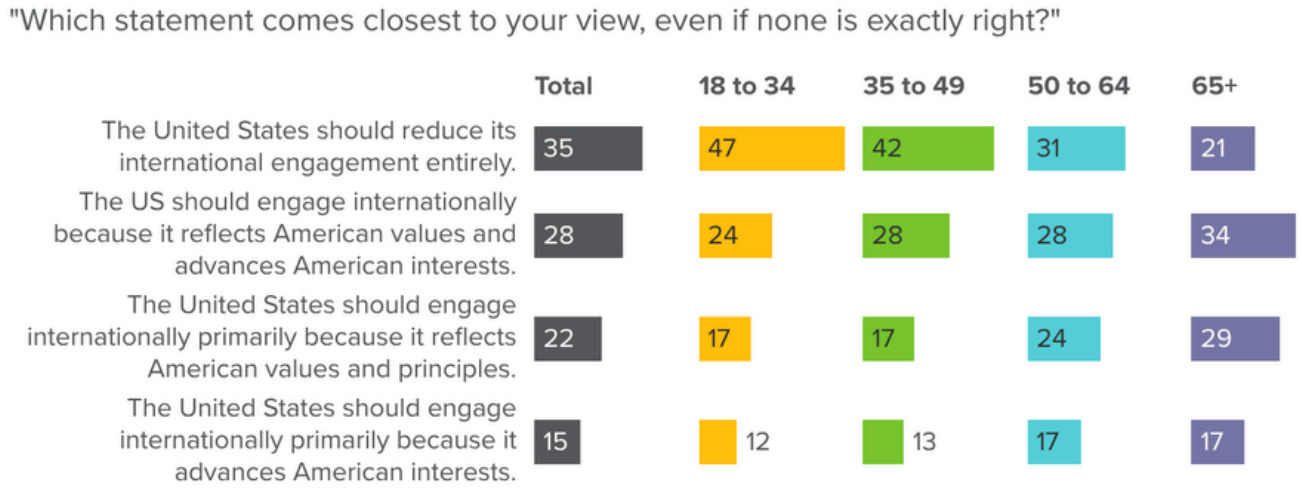
Findings: Part C

5. Younger Voters Are the Most Likely to Support Reducing International Engagement

Support for international engagement is not uniform. As the survey shows, support diminishes among younger age groups. Forty-seven percent of voters 18 to 34 say the United States should reduce international engagement entirely, compared with 42% of voters 35 to 49, 31% of voters 50 to 64, and just 21% of voters 65 and older, the lowest share of any age group.

This finding sits alongside data showing that younger voters support human rights language. Younger voters are the age group most likely to describe protecting safety, health, and equal treatment as "human rights," at 46%, compared with 25% among voters 65 and older. The pullback among younger voters does not necessarily suggest a rejection of the underlying values; it raises a broader question about what "international engagement" means to this age group and what they think it costs their generation.

This tension makes younger voters especially important for the next phase of research. Their skepticism should not be seen as a rejection of human rights or international cooperation, since this group also strongly supports human rights language. The key question is what they think "international engagement" means, including what it costs, what trade-offs it involves, and how it connects to their own economic and generational issues. Understanding this difference may be crucial for building lasting support for engagement in the future.



Findings: Part C

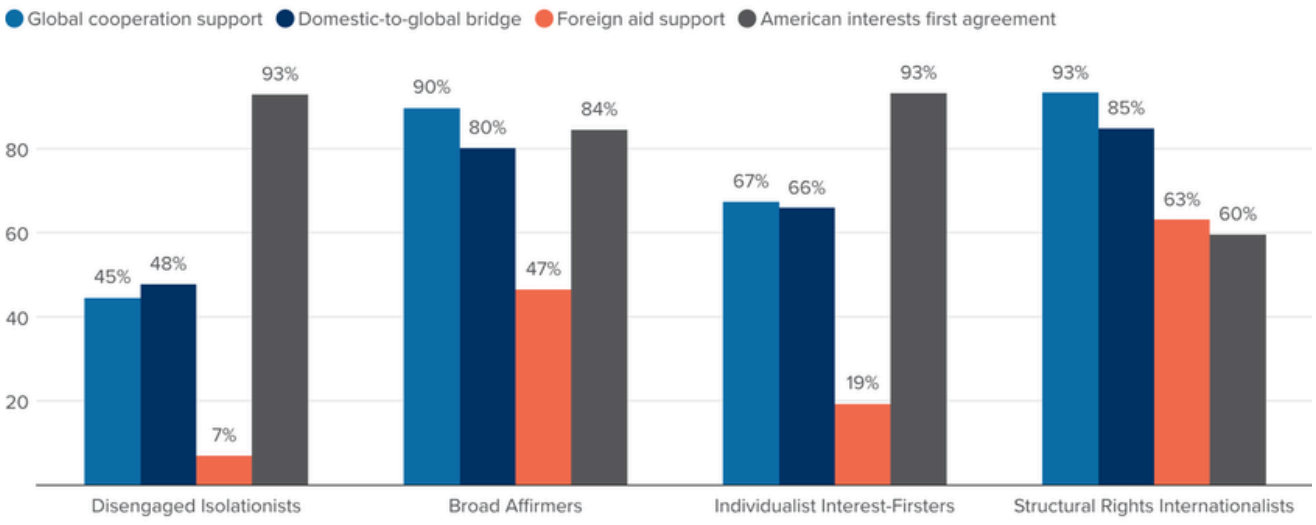
Another Way to Read the Data

Parts A and B showed that voters converged overwhelmingly on shared values, including dignity, safety, fair treatment, and freedom from persecution. But in Part C, voters landed in different places on what those values mean for the United States' actions abroad. Surprisingly, this divergence doesn't always follow conventional party patterns.

To explore these differences, this section applies segmentation analysis to consider what is driving the split, or whether the data can be approached from a different angle. Segmentation analysis groups voters according to patterns in their attitudes and values, rather than by party affiliation. Voters were grouped by patterns across eight underlying value indices. The analysis then checked whether this structure predicted engagement attitudes better than party affiliation. The analysis found that these value-based groupings help explain attitudes toward international engagement beyond party affiliation alone.

As noted in the table below, in practice that points to four distinct categories rather than two parties: Structural Rights Internationalists, who strongly support human rights and international engagement; Broad Affirmers, who support a wide range of values and are generally supportive of human rights; Individualist Interest Firsters, who prioritize individualist values and are movable on international engagement when framed around American interests; and Disengaged Isolationists, who are skeptical of the human rights values tested and international engagement. The most persuadable group, Broad Affirmers (28%), cuts across the 2024 vote entirely rather than sitting inside one party. This reframing of the data and its findings suggests that skepticism about international engagement doesn't sit with just one party. For advocates, the findings point to four distinct audiences, each requiring different considerations for messages on international engagement, as elaborated in the next section.

How Each Group Views Engagement



Findings: Part C

Segmentation Analysis Groups

Voter Segment	Demographics and Political Affiliation	Value Profiles	International Engagement Position
Structural Rights Internationalists (38.7%)	The largest group; younger and more diverse than the other segments. Average age 49 · 61% women · 58% white, 18% Black, 13% Hispanic · 41% urban, 39% suburban. 82% voted for Harris in 2024.	Strongest support for racial fairness and human rights. Most likely to see inequality and rights through a structural lens and strongly support freedom from persecution.	Most supportive of international engagement. 84% fall into the two most pro-engagement categories. Because most are already supportive, the principal opportunity is activation rather than persuasion.
Broad Affirmers (28.3%)	The clearest cross-partisan group. Average age 54 · 58% women · 56% white, 18% Hispanic, 12% Black · 39% suburban, 32% urban. 44% voted for Trump and 44% for Harris in 2024.	Broad agreement across nearly every value statement tested. They are receptive across a wide range of values rather than aligning strongly with only one values framework.	Generally supportive, but with meaningful room to move. Most accept either values- or interest-based cases for engagement, while roughly 28% remain skeptical. They represent the clearest persuadable audience.
Individualist Interest Firsters (26.1%)	Predominantly white and male and concentrated in suburban and rural areas. Average age 54 · 58% men · 81% white · 45% suburban, 32% rural. 87% voted for Trump in 2024.	Strongest alignment with individualist views. More likely to believe opportunity in America is already equal and more skeptical of structural framing around race and rights.	More receptive to engagement through an interests lens than a rights lens. Economic and security considerations show greater traction than arguments centered on dignity, fairness, or human rights.
Disengaged Isolationists (6.9%)	The smallest group; predominantly male and suburban/rural. Average age 51 · 70% men · 73% white, 14% Hispanic · 48% suburban, 30% rural. 83% voted for Trump in 2024.	Skeptical across many of the values statements tested. Their skepticism extends beyond human rights, suggesting broader disengagement rather than a targeted objection to rights alone.	Most opposed to international engagement. 81% fall into the most isolationist category, and no clear alternative frame shows meaningful traction. The analysis suggests limited persuadability.

Findings: Part C

What Really Drives Support for International Engagement?

Using this segmentation analysis, this study further considers what matters most when it comes to supporting international engagement: a person's values, their party affiliation, or demographics such as age or race. Because people's values often overlap with their party, this question is hard to address with ordinary statistical models. Our researchers used a method called Shapley decomposition, which accounts for values, party, and demographics together, then divides credit fairly across them.

This technique shows that support for protecting people from persecution (meaning dignity, safety from violence, and freedom from discrimination) is an equal or more reliable predictor of support for international engagement than party affiliation. This is meaningful because it shows the divide doesn't sort clearly by party; some Trump voters score high on this value, while some Harris voters score low

What's Really Driving This?



Overall, across every finding in this section, Americans strongly support the United States' role in the world when the question is framed in concrete terms. However, this broad support diminishes considerably when the questions are framed in broad terms of "international engagement." This represents a marked shift from the patterns in Parts A and B, where abstraction produced consensus and specificity fractured it. One possible explanation is that abstract principles strip away the issues that make domestic rights contentious, whereas abstraction in foreign policy may do the opposite. The practical implication is that a one-size-fits-all approach that leads with values and moves into specifics may work domestically, but for international engagement, leading with the abstract may be riskier. Specifics may offer a more unifying approach. Exceptions exist, particularly on climate issues.

Findings: Part C

Segmentation Analysis Overview

1. **Mobilize, don't persuade, the base.** Structural Rights Internationalists (38.7% of the sample) land almost entirely (84%) in the two most pro-engagement-based groups. The persuasion opportunity here is thin; the return on investment is in turnout, not conversion.

2. **Broad Affirmers are the real growth lane**. This cross-partisan group (28.3% of the sample) is already majority-pragmatist, and a combined values-plus-self-interest message is what's winning them. The roughly 28% who still land as skeptics are the most efficient next converts.

3. **Reach Individualist Interest Firsters with self-interest, not values.** Values-based framing barely registers with this group, just 2%. The only wedge that shows real traction is an economic or security case; lead with that, not rights language, for this group.

4. **Deprioritize Disengaged Isolationists.** The smallest segment, 6.9% of the sample, and 81% land in the most isolationist engagement camp. This is the lowest expected return on persuasion spending of any group.

Key Takeaways and Look Ahead

Americans and International Engagement

1. **Americans want the United States to lead, but they do not see values and interests as mutually exclusive.** Large majorities believe the United States' example matters to its standing in the world, while also expecting international engagement to advance American interests and address problems that affect people at home.

2. **Support for international engagement depends heavily on what voters believe the United States is being asked to do.** Americans broadly support cooperation on concrete humanitarian, security, and global challenges. In contrast, support becomes more divided when engagement is described broadly or framed as an American responsibility to secure rights for people in other countries.

3. **The constituency for international engagement cannot be understood through party affiliation alone.** Age produces an unexpected divide, and the segmentation analysis shows that underlying values help explain attitudes toward engagement beyond partisan affiliation. Broad Affirmers, in particular, represent a sizable cross-partisan audience with meaningful room for persuasion.

Overall, Part C shows a different pattern than earlier in the report. For domestic human rights issues, people agree more on broad ideas, but agreement drops when details are discussed. For international engagement, the broad idea gets more skepticism, but specific actions garner strong support. This difference raises a key question: Does disagreement come from different values, or from how the issue is framed? Part D looks at this question in detail.

Findings: Part D

Language, Specificity, and Context Matter

How an Issue Is Framed Can Shape How Americans Respond

Questions about language and framing have already surfaced throughout the report. This section addresses these matters directly. The findings show that the words used to describe an issue, the specificity of the question, and the information that voters have when considering it can all be associated with substantially different responses. As we will see further into this section, a single fact about the federal budget can shift opinion significantly on foreign aid. “Freedom” offers common ground where terms like “equality” carry different associations among groups. And even the term “human rights” can mean different things to different constituencies.

The data show that no single framing rule applies across these findings. Broad principles can offer common ground, but they can also carry associations that obscure agreement over specific policies or actions. The strategic takeaway for policymakers and advocates is therefore not to focus on the words that poll best, but to better understand what voters believe, what associations they carry with specific words, what assumptions they bring to them, and what they believe they are being asked to support.

These distinctions matter because public opinion is often treated as more fixed than these findings suggest. A topline showing support or opposition can appear to provide a clear answer about what Americans believe, while masking significant differences in what respondents understood the question to mean. Across this research, seemingly small changes—moving from an abstract concept to a specific action, using one familiar value instead of another, or providing a concrete piece of information—can reveal substantially different views. In some cases, what initially appears to be disagreement over a principle may instead reflect disagreement over language, assumptions, or what people believe a particular policy actually does.

For policymakers and advocates, this is more than a communications finding. It also affects how public support for human rights and international engagement is understood in the first place. If Americans attach different meanings to terms like “human rights,” “equality,” “foreign aid,” or “international engagement,” relying on those labels alone can obscure areas of agreement that become visible when people are asked about underlying values or specific actions. The findings in this section therefore offer both a challenge and an opportunity: language can create distance from ideas Americans otherwise support, but greater specificity, context, and a better understanding of the words people themselves use can also help uncover common ground that broad political terminology may hide.

Findings: Part D

1. Freedom Tops the List When Talking About Shared Values

When asked in their own words what values and principles most Americans still hold in common, 24% of voters named freedom, more often than any other value. Patriotism followed at 14%, faith and God at 12%, and family at 10%. Eight percent said there is nothing left in common.

The term freedom is particularly notable because respondents did not pick it from a list; they offered it across partisan lines. Some partisan distinctions emerged: Trump voters were more likely to identify faith and patriotism as shared values (21% and 20%, compared with 4% and 8% among Harris/other voters).

For policymakers and advocates, the finding suggests that freedom is a particularly resonant connective concept, as voters themselves used the language to describe what Americans share.

Open-ended responses to "In your own words, what are the values and principles that most Americans still hold in common?" (n=1,856); coded by theme.



Findings: Part D

2. Freedom Serves as a Bridge Between Values and Human Rights

Freedom carries similar weight when the question turns to human rights specifically. Asked what "human rights" brings to mind first, in their own words, 18% of voters used the words freedom or liberty, the most common association overall. Coupled with the earlier finding that voters used the term freedom most frequently as a value Americans still hold in common, these findings suggest that freedom could serve as an important bridge from values to human rights.

Beyond freedom, associations with human rights differ by political constituency. Harris voters are more likely than Trump voters to associate human rights with equality and fair treatment (20% versus 8%) and basic needs like food, housing, and healthcare (20% versus 6%). In contrast, Trump voters are more likely to describe human rights in government and political terms (8% versus 4%). Dignity and respect, cited by 6% of voters overall, do not show the same partisan pattern, making them the broadest unifying term after freedom.

For policymakers and advocates, the two key takeaways are that freedom is an important part of a shared national vocabulary and should be a starting point for discussions of human rights. At the same time, the concepts that voters associate with human rights may differ across groups, suggesting that the language used to discuss human rights may resonate differently, depending on the constituency.

Open-ended responses to "When you hear the phrase 'human rights,' what comes to mind first?" (n = 1,699); coded by theme.

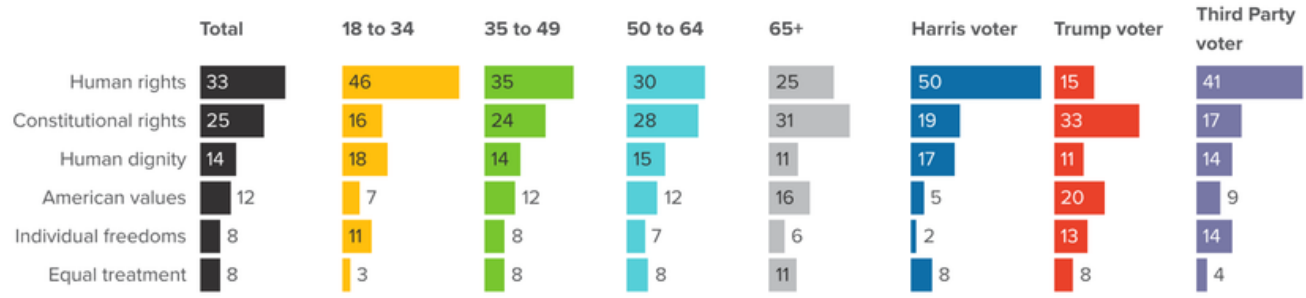


Findings: Part D

3. Ways to Talk About Protecting Basic Rights

When asked which phrase best captures concepts like safety, health, and equal treatment, 33% of voters chose “human rights,” followed by “constitutional rights” (25%), “human dignity” (14%), “American values” (12%), “individual freedoms (8%), and “equal treatment” (8%). While human rights clearly is the term that most resonates across groups, there is a split underneath: older voters and Trump voters lean toward “constitutional rights,” while younger, Harris and third-party voters lean toward “human rights.” The underlying concepts hold up across every group; only the preferred label shifts.

"How would you describe what it means to protect people's safety, health, and equal treatment?"



Across the survey, the framing, context, and language used appear to play a significant role in how Americans respond to issues. While they may agree on principles such as freedom, safety, dignity, and fair treatment, they may use different language and attach different associations to specific terms. Questions about international engagement, in particular, reveal that broad labels can elicit different responses than specific, concrete actions associated with the concept. The findings suggest that framing can obscure as much as it reveals: Understanding the values, meanings, contexts, and implied actions voters associate with specific terms is critical to how policy choices are framed and presented.

Findings: Part D

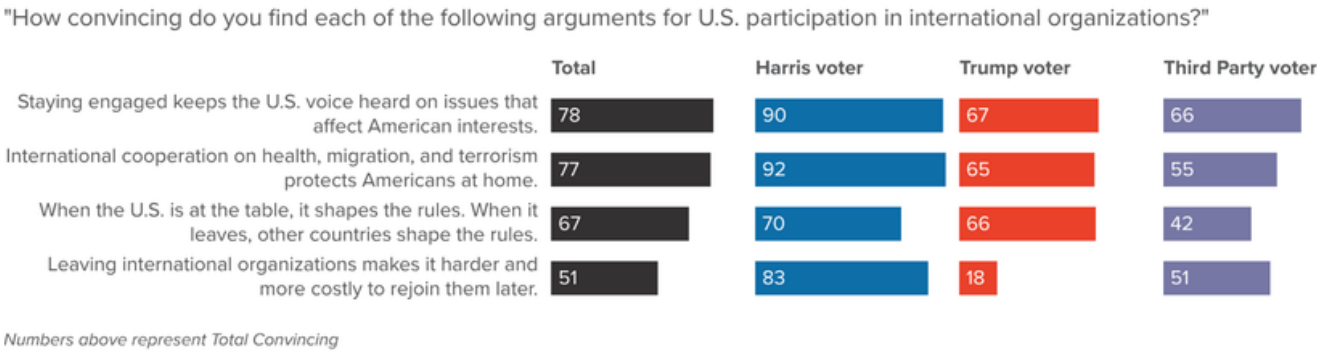
4. Self-Interest Is Key to Making the Case for International Engagement

A majority of voters find nearly every argument for U.S. participation in international organizations convincing, suggesting that support for international participation can be grounded in several different rationales. Seventy-eight percent of voters find the argument that staying engaged protects the United States' voice and interests convincing, followed closely by 77% who find the argument that international cooperation on issues protects Americans at home persuasive.

The findings suggest that simply asking voters to support engagement as an abstract good will not move voters. They also need to be convinced it serves U.S. interests and addresses problems at home. Other arguments resonate differently across constituencies—third-party voters are less convinced that staying at the table lets the United States shape the rules, and Trump voters are less convinced that leaving international organizations makes it harder to rejoin later.

The key takeaway is that voters want a clear rationale for international engagement, and simply asking them to support it for its own sake is no longer convincing. Americans want a clear understanding of what membership in international institutions accomplishes for Americans.

This finding does not mean voters reject values-based arguments. Earlier findings show that many people support leading by example and helping others abroad. Instead, the results suggest that when voters consider international institutions and engagement, linking participation to clear American interests gives them another reason to support it. The most convincing argument may explain how international cooperation can serve both values and interests.



Findings: Part D

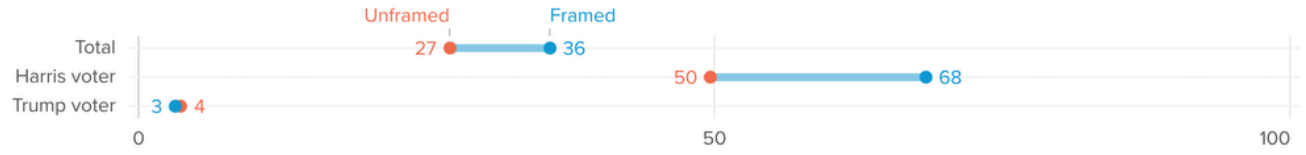
5. Numbers Move Numbers

The question below shows that by simply noting that the U.S. spends less than 1% of the federal budget on foreign aid, a smaller share than most other wealthy nations, support for increasing aid rises from 27% to 36% while support for decreasing aid falls from 50% to 35%.

Notably, the largest shift is not from opposition to support for increasing aid, but from wanting to decrease it. This is particularly true for Trump voters, and it shows that providing this type of specific data can substantially reduce the constituency pushing to cut aid. This data point further demonstrates that voters are paying attention to details such as the scale and cost of foreign aid. Correcting misperception is critical to shaping policy choice.

This distinction is important for strategy. Sharing factual information might not instantly convince skeptics, but it can lower resistance. In policy debates where public perceptions of cost may be much larger than the actual expenditure, correcting the scale of that expenditure may win over more people or the persuadable middle, even if it does not create a majority in favor of more spending.

"Do you think the United States should increase, maintain, or decrease its foreign aid spending?" vs "The United States spends less than 1% of the federal budget on foreign aid — a smaller share than most other wealthy nations. Knowing this, do you think the United States should increase, maintain, or decrease its foreign aid spending?"



Numbers above represent Total Increase

Key Takeaways and Look Ahead

Recommendations: The Playbook

The findings throughout this report show that language matters, but not in simple or uniform ways. Americans continue to share underlying principles even when they use different words to describe them, attach different meanings to the same word, or disagree about how to apply those principles in policy and practice.

The findings also show specificity can work in different directions. Broad principles can reveal substantial common ground on human rights, even when consensus diminishes in particular applications. However, discussing international engagement in broad terms can split support because it can encompass different assumptions about cost and obligations, and even draw associations with military intervention. In this case, being concrete about forms of cooperation, particularly when they are linked to American values and interests, is more likely to draw support. As the foreign-aid finding shows, providing factual context is critical to shaping policy choice.

For policymakers and advocates, the central lesson is not to treat every issue as an agreement or disagreement over values. The findings show that Americans do not hold fixed positions on human rights and international engagement. Policymakers and advocates need to understand better the language being used, the assumptions it may elicit, and the facts or context different constituencies may be missing. Reaching voters requires looking beyond traditional partisan lenses, not underestimating how closely they listen, and tailoring engagement.

Key Takeaways and Look Ahead

Recommendations: The Playbook

How To Talk About Human Rights

1. Start with the principles on which Americans agree: Equal treatment (99%), equal opportunity (97%), safety from violence (97%), and dignity (90%) are areas of deep agreement.

2. Use freedom as connective language. Freedom is both the most frequently named shared American value and the term that is most associated with human rights. Dignity also resonates across groups. When using terms such as "equality," which has different associations between groups, connect them to terms such as freedom, dignity, and fair treatment.

3. Tailor your language to your audience when talking about human rights. While human rights is the preferred overall term, constitutional rights is the preferred term among Trump and older voters. The underlying values hold, but the vocabulary may need to shift.

4. Treat the hardest cases as distinct strategic problems. Broad agreement on a principle does not necessarily imply agreement when it is applied to a particular issue, group, or circumstance**.** When the conversation is about charged issues and politically targeted groups, such as inequality, discrimination, and LGBTQI+-related matters, determine what is driving the disagreement—whether it concerns the underlying right, perception of the problem, the people affected, or the proposed response—and develop a targeted approach to address those concerns.

5. Connect today's rights with the next generation. Eighty-seven percent are concerned about the next generation's rights. Connect Americans' strong belief in basic rights with their worries about losing them, and make the case for protecting these rights now and in the future.

Key Takeaways and Look Ahead

Recommendations: The Playbook

How to Talk About the United States' Role Abroad

1. **Lead with where there is already common ground.** Freedom is named nearly twice as often as any other value (24%). And 97% agree everyone deserves safety from violence at home, regardless of party, the strongest agreement found on anything tested.

2. **Be specific.** When speaking about international engagement, focus on the nature of the engagement and its connection to domestic interests. Avoid starting with generalized discussions about "international engagement" as it may carry its own ideological baggage: cost, globalism, political entanglement, and open-ended wars and commitments.

3. **Point to the shared international ground.** Counterterrorism and cybercrime, holding war criminals accountable, humanitarian crises, and global health threats each clear 76% or more support from Harris, Trump, and third-party voters alike.

4. **Frame it around self-interest.** Seventy-eight percent are convinced that staying engaged protects the United States' voice and interests. Just 18% of Trump voters buy the more idealistic case for staying in organizations to avoid re-entry costs.

5. **Make the case about America keeping its word.** Ninety-three percent agree that a country that keeps its word is taken more seriously, including 88% of Trump voters. Reliability is one of the most unifying principles tested in this survey.

Conclusion

This report builds a more detailed picture of what Americans believe and where divisions actually lie. Part A establishes the foundation: Beneath deep political division is overwhelming agreement on many of the fundamental principles at the heart of human rights. Americans agree on equal treatment under the law, equal opportunity, safety, dignity, freedom of expression, and other basic protections. They also recognize that these rights cannot simply be taken for granted, and many worry that the next generation could have fewer rights and freedoms than people do today.

Part B notes the complexity that sits alongside the common ground. While Americans may share values, they do not always share the same experiences, priorities, or views on whether those values are protected. People can agree on a principle but disagree about where it is at risk, who is affected, or what action is needed. Political disagreements do not mean the core value is missing.

Part C looks at views on the United States' role in the world. The survey shows that Americans connect the values they want at home with the role they want their country to play globally. Many believe that how America handles human rights affects its reputation, and they see that problems in other countries can impact people here. Most support working with other countries on important issues. While some are skeptical about "international engagement" as a broad idea, they often support the specific actions it involves. This means Americans may be more open to global engagement than a single survey question might show.

Part D explains why some of these contradictions appear—the words people use, the details they have, and the context all matter. Americans might use different terms for the same values or interpret broad policy words differently. They may also respond differently when given more details or asked about a specific action instead of a general idea. These findings remind policymakers and advocates not to assume that everyone understands terms the same way or that first reactions tell the full story.

Taken together, the findings help us better understand what Americans think about human rights and the country's role in the world. The results do not show a simple split between supporters and opponents of human rights or global engagement. Instead, most people agree on basic human rights principles and support the United States working with other countries on real challenges. However, people still differ significantly in how they rank, interpret, and apply these ideas. The words used, the details given, and the information people have all affect how they show support.

This picture is more complex than simple support or opposition, but it shows common ground to build on. The divisions are real, especially when shared values are applied to specific policies or groups. But the basic agreement is also real. To build stronger and lasting public support for human rights and American engagement, it is important to understand both the differences and the common ground.

Conclusion

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings point to an opportunity that is bigger than any single policy debate. Americans are not indifferent to human rights or global engagement. They overwhelmingly believe people should be safe from violence, treated with dignity, protected from discrimination, and free to express themselves. They also believe that how the United States lives those values matters to our standing in the world, and large majorities believe the United States should work with other countries to address concrete humanitarian and global challenges.

The data suggest that Americans care about many of the values at the heart of human rights and principled international engagement. Still, they may use different language to describe them, prioritize them differently, or have different perspectives on what those values require in practice. The challenge is not simply to persuade people to care. It is to reach them, listen to them, understand what is driving their views, and make clearer connections between the values they already hold and the policy choices being made in their name.

The findings also carry an important message for policymakers, who should not treat engaging the American public on human rights and foreign policy as simply an effort to explain or sell policy after decisions have been made. Listening to Americans can reveal where genuine disagreement exists, where language or assumptions obscure shared values, and where further information changes how people understand a policy choice. If policymakers want public support for American leadership in the world to be durable, the public must be part of the conversation about what that leadership looks like and why it matters.

This is an opportunity for all stakeholders who support human rights. We do not have to start by convincing Americans to care about human rights or the world beyond the United States. The foundation is already stronger than many political stories suggest. The goal is to build on this by reaching out and listening to people across different groups, connecting their values to what human rights and American engagement mean in practice, and showing why these choices matter for their lives and the country.

That means speaking less in the language of institutions and more about people, relationships, security, dignity, freedom, fairness, and the concrete ways that principled American leadership can make a difference both abroad and at home. It also means recognizing that different constituencies may require different conversations, not because the underlying principles necessarily change, but because people bring different experiences, priorities, language, and assumptions.

Conclusion

Stronger American leadership on human rights requires stronger relationships in both directions. We need meaningful, sustained relationships with people and partners around the world, and we need meaningful engagement with Americans at home so they can see themselves, their values, and their interests reflected in that work. The opportunity is there to strengthen those connections, bring more Americans into the conversation, and build the wider, more durable public constituency needed for a future U.S. foreign policy that values and centers human rights at its core.

Appendix

Sample Questions for Future Research

This single wave of largely closed-ended polling can tell you where people land. It can't tell you how they got there or how they would make decisions, and based on several of the findings in this survey, that distinction matters more than usual.

This survey, using closed-ended questions, establishes where voters land on rights, values, and the United States' role abroad. The next phase of research aims to go a layer deeper: understanding the reasoning behind these numbers, in voters' own words, rather than measuring the numbers again. It could also explain how voters understand the language used and how it holds up with more context and detail. The following six questions could help define that next phase, ranked by how directly each one shapes what a messaging strategy built on this data should say.

1. **What does "international engagement" actually mean to Americans?** Thirty-five percent say reduce it entirely, yet support for specific actions runs 91% to 95%. The question never defined the term, so the gap may be about wording rather than belief.

2. **Does support for foreign assistance, given that it is less than 1% of the total U.S. yearly budget, hold up when people weigh it against other priorities?** Telling Americans that foreign assistance makes up less than 1% of the federal budget moved support for increasing aid from 27% to 36% on its own. But nothing in the survey tested whether that holds once something else has to give, or whether there's more to gain.

3. **What is driving the 18-34-year-olds' skepticism about international engagement?** They value protecting human rights but reject engagement. Forty-seven percent want to pull back entirely, against 21% of voters 65 and older. They are also the age group most likely to call protecting safety, health, and equal treatment "human rights" (46% for 18-34s versus 25% for 65 and older). What do they think engagement is, and what does it mean for their generation's opportunities?

4. **What happens when Americans confront a forced cost choice?** Cost of living is the top concern, at 93%, above every other issue. No survey item made voters trade engagement against anything.

5. **Can the connection between domestic economic concerns and global labor standards be clearer, and do jobs and state-building broaden the case?** Protecting workers' rights globally polls at 88%. Saying American workers benefit from it drops to 63%, and to 49% among Trump voters. The domestic-benefit claim is where the bridge breaks. Can economic concern be connected to a case for rebuilding the U.S. international sector?

6. **What drives lower support for LGBTQI+ rights abroad specifically, and what framing and language can better inoculate against it and increase support?** Trump voter support runs 90%, 80%, then 65% across the broader persecution items, and falls to 46% and 35% once sexual orientation and gender identity become the subject.

Appendix

Methodology

Sample Size	*Field Dates*	*Modeled Margin of Error*
n = 2,106	*June 28 - July 2, 2026*	±2.5%

Registered voters, nationally

Survey Design & Fielding

Change Research fielded this survey online from June 28 to July 2, 2026, surveying 2,106 registered voters nationwide. Respondents were recruited through dynamic online sampling, an approach designed to reach a broad, representative cross-section of the voting population rather than relying on a single panel source. The survey instrument covered community concerns, core values, democracy, foreign policy, and attitudes toward human rights, and included 17 substantive questions plus five standard demographic questions. Two items, the community-concern battery and the foreign-aid question, used randomized ordering or A/B version splits (Q13/Q13b) to guard against order effects; these were combined into single measures before analysis except where the framing comparison itself is the finding.

Weighting

The raw sample was weighted through post-stratification on five dimensions: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and 2024 presidential vote. We drew targets for each dimension from voter file data rather than Census estimates of the general population, a meaningful design choice that anchors the sample to the electorate that actually voted in 2024, not all adults. The modeled margin of error after weighting is ±2.5% at the full-sample level; margins for subgroups (by party, age, or race) are wider and are not stated individually in this report.

Sample Composition

Because the weighted sample size (2,105.96) is nearly identical to the unweighted count (2,106), weighting adjusted the respondent mix rather than the total number of interviews.

- **Gender.** 52% women (1,090.6 weighted), 47% men (981.5 weighted).
- **Age**. 25% ages 18-34 (518.3), 24% ages 35-49 (496.8), 24% ages 50-64 (499.9), 27% ages 65+ (570.0).
- **Race/ethnicity.** 64% white (1,335.6), 13% Hispanic or Latino (271.9), 12% Black or African American (246.1), 7% Asian American or Pacific Islander (140.4).
- **Education**. 57% non-college (1,206.0), 43% college graduates (894.2), a split roughly in line with the national electorate.
- **2024 presidential vote.** 45% Trump (940.2), 44% Harris (929.6), 5% third-party (102.0), and 6% who either did not vote or were not registered/eligible (123.5 classified as non-voters in the crosstabs).
- **Geography.** By the four Census regions, the sample breaks out to roughly 37% South, 22% West, 21% Midwest, and 17% Northeast, broadly proportional to the U.S. population's regional distribution. (Region was not one of the five post-stratification targets, so this distribution is descriptive rather than weighted to target.)

Appendix

A Note on Reading Subgroups

Findings broken out by 2024 vote, age, or race in this report reflect these weighted subgroup sizes. The third-party subgroup (about 100 weighted respondents) and the 65+ or 18-34 age bands (each roughly 500 weighted respondents) carry a wider margin of error than the topline figures and should be read as directional rather than precise.

On AI and Automated Responses

A common concern with online survey research right now is whether respondents are using AI tools to generate answers, or whether bot activity is inflating the sample. Change Research's panel does not pay respondents for completing surveys, so there is no financial incentive to game a survey with automated tools or bulk submissions—the incentive structure that drives most bot activity and AI-assisted survey farming elsewhere. Furthermore, Change Research employed various checks across the data that meet best practices in this regard.

Data Quality and Assurance

Every wave of data goes through the same cleaning process before analysis. Respondents who complete the survey implausibly quickly ("speeders") are flagged and removed. Respondents who select the same answer down an entire grid of questions regardless of what's being asked ("straightliners") are statistically analyzed and removed if suspicious. Duplicate respondent IDs and duplicate device or IP fingerprints are also screened out to prevent any single person, human or automated, from appearing in the data more than once. Only responses that clear all three checks are included in the final, weighted dataset.

Addressing Agreement Bias

A reasonable question to ask of any survey with such high-percentage agreement is whether respondents are simply agreeing with whatever they're shown, a pattern researchers call agreement bias or acquiescence bias. This survey's own data argues against that explanation. If respondents agreed reflexively rather than responding to the content, every item would cluster near the same high number regardless of subject. Instead, the data shows real, substantively meaningful splits exactly where you'd expect them, and near-unanimity where you'd expect that, too.

The clearest example is climate change: while every other global cooperation item tested clears 80% importance across the full sample, support for addressing climate change internationally sits at 69%, the one issue where support drops below half for a specific group (Trump voters). Respondents did not treat this item like the others, which is exactly what a respondent discriminating between statements, rather than rubber-stamping all of them, would do. The same pattern shows up on LGBTQI+ rights abroad, where agreement drops from the 90s into the 60s and, among Trump voters, into the 30s and 40s once the subject narrows from general persecution to sexual orientation and gender identity specifically. Respondents are differentiating between statements, not agreeing on autopilot.

Appendix

Segmental Design Methodology

The segmental analysis indices deliberately excluded anything about international engagement itself, so the segments were defined by underlying values rather than the outcome they later wanted to explain. This reduced a high-dimensional response set to a compact, interpretable feature space, a report card with eight subjects rather than hundreds of individual answers, suitable for measuring similarity between respondents.
Change Research then applied weighted k-means clustering to that eight-dimensional feature space, grouping voters by the pattern of similarity across their value indices rather than by party registration or vote history. The algorithm returned a four-cluster solution. To test whether that structure reflected something real rather than an artifact of the clustering method, they validated it against nine separate international-engagement outcome measures that were held out of the clustering step entirely, a standard external-validation check. The four clusters produced real, monotonic separation on those held-out measures, ranging from strongly opposed to strongly supportive of engagement, which signals that the underlying value dimensions were doing meaningful work rather than the clustering finding noise.

To move from description to explanation rather than simply describing the clusters, they built a weighted regression model that entered all eight value dimensions, 2024 vote, and demographics as joint predictors of engagement attitudes. They then used a Shapley (LMG) decomposition, refitting the model on every possible combination of those predictor blocks, to fairly divide credit for the model's explanatory power across them rather than relying on unstable individual coefficients, which become unreliable when predictors are correlated with one another, as values, party, and demographics often are. That decomposition found that the persecution/dignity value index carried predictive weight comparable to 2024 vote choice, evidence that the segmentation is not simply partisanship re-expressed through a different variable.

Finally, Change Research stress-tested the whole pipeline. They used bootstrap resampling to check how stable the clustering solution was under resampling, and ran a cross-algorithm comparison against hierarchical clustering to confirm the four-group structure wasn't an artifact of k-means specifically. For the driver analysis, Change Research ran variance-inflation checks to rule out multicollinearity problems and bootstrapped confidence intervals around each predictor block's share of credit. They then independently re-executed the entire analysis in a second, verified script to confirm that every reported number actually reproduces. The four-cluster structure and the relative ranking of drivers held up across all of these checks, though they'd note the caveat that any unsupervised clustering result reflects one reasonable partition of the data given the chosen algorithm and feature set, not a ground truth; a different algorithm or a different value-index construction would likely draw the boundaries somewhat differently.

Appendix

The sample was weighted before segmentation. Full item-level wording for every question used to build the value indices is available in the survey instrument. Two items, the community-concern battery and the foreign-aid question, had 2024-vote-order or A/B test variants that were combined into single measures before being used in the analysis.

Further Reading on Our Methodology

Change Research is a member of AAPOR's Transparency Initiative. Members disclose how they conduct their research so the public can evaluate and verify polling results rather than take them on faith. A full methodology statement for this survey, covering sampling frame, field procedures, and weighting in more technical detail, is available here. For a broader discussion of how Change Research's polling has performed historically, including accuracy against election outcomes, see Change Research's accuracy page.



About The Alliance For Diplomacy and Justice

Our Mission
The Alliance for Diplomacy and Justice strives to center human rights and global justice within U.S. foreign policy, reimagining American diplomacy through advocacy, public engagement, and global partnerships.

What We Do
The Alliance centers human rights in U.S. foreign policy through three programmatic pillars.

First, our congressional education pillar educates Congress about the damage to U.S. human rights infrastructure and builds bipartisan support for its renewal.

Second, our public engagement pillar informs the American public, through media placements and original research, about how foreign policy, human rights, and development affect their security and well-being.

Third, our domestic and global partnerships pillar strengthens ties between civil society, governments, multilateral partners, and movements advancing global justice. Together, these efforts will fill the gap left by the U.S. retreat from human rights leadership and advance a more just, accountable, and rights-centered approach to American diplomacy.

Who We Are
The Alliance for Diplomacy and Justice is an organization of former senior diplomats, elected officials, and human rights experts striving to make human rights and global justice central to U.S. foreign policy. Founded by former U.S. envoys and ambassadors — Rina Amiri, Desirée Cormier Smith, Cindy Dyer, Kelly M. Fay Rodríguez, Abby Finkenauer, Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta, Dr. Beth Van Schaack, and Jessica Stern — The Alliance advances principled, values-based diplomacy that strengthens democracy, equality, and peace worldwide.

About The Alliance For Diplomacy and Justice

Our team has spent decades fighting for human rights, combating trafficking, strengthening democracies, and supporting social justice across the globe. We have also shattered the glass ceiling at the highest levels of U.S. foreign policy.

When America retreats from the pursuit of justice globally, the world feels the consequences. We are working to restore a commitment to human rights in U.S. foreign policy.

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The Alliance
FOR DIPLOMACY AND JUSTICE