CREATING A NEW CONVERSATION ABOUT
THE AMERICAN DREAM

NEW RESEARCH RELEASE
OCTOBER 1, 2012
WHY ARE WE HERE?

THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COULD COME DOWN TO A REFERENDUM ON THE AMERICAN DREAM, WHAT IT MEANS AND HOW PEOPLE ACHIEVE IT.

-- MARK HALPERIN, TIME MAGAZINE
THE AMERICAN DREAM, UNITED OR DIVIDED?
ABOUT THE RESEARCH

- Conducted focus groups across the country.
- Nationally representative survey study of 2041 adults.
- Conducted online interviews between August 15 and August 29, 2012.
- Data collected by Harris Interactive Service Bureau (HISB).
- HISB was responsible for data collection only.
- Public Agenda & the GALEWiLL Center designed survey and analyzed data.
WHICH IDEA BEST CAPTURES THE AMERICAN DREAM?

28%  
The American Dream is the opportunity for people from modest beginnings to live in a secure, middle class life

9%  
The American Dream is the opportunity for people from modest beginnings to achieve great wealth and fame

51%  
Both of these ideas

12%  
Neither of these ideas
WHAT ONE WORD DESCRIBES THE AMERICAN DREAM?

- FREEDOM: 24%
- HOME OWNERSHIP: 16%
- WORK: 18%
- WELL-BEING: 12%
- ADVANCEMENT: 10%
- MONEY: 6%
- MISC.: 4%
- POSSIBLE: 2%
- NOT POSSIBLE: 2%
- NO ANSWER or DON'T KNOW: 16%
- OTHER ABSTRACT IDEALS: 4%
DOES THE AMERICAN DREAM CHANGE OVER TIME?

Under 30s say their idea of the American Dream is different from the previous generation’s

Over 30s say their ideas about the Dream have changed since they were younger

The graphic shows that 52% of under 30s have changed, compared to 29% of over 30s who have not, with 24% of both generations unsure.
WHERE DO AMERICANS BELIEVE THEY ARE IN ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM?

24%: I have achieved the American Dream.

40%: I am making progress on achieving the American Dream, but I still have a way to go.

15%: I am unlikely to achieve the American Dream - to me it is mainly a dream.

21%: None of these - the American Dream is not something I think much about in my life.
WHAT IS ESSENTIAL TO ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM?

- Strong work ethic (86%)
- Parents or other adults who teach honesty, responsibility and persistence (80%)
- Good schools and teachers to ensure that every child has a fair chance to get a good education (77%)
- Access to basic health care and nutrition so that families and children can stay healthy and pursue their dreams (60%)
- A strong community where people look out for one another (57%)
- Good transportation and communication systems so businesses and people can work efficiently (52%)
- A government that creates opportunities for people to get ahead (46%)
- A free enterprise system that encourages people to take bold risks without too much regulation (41%)
- A government that helps people recover when they’re down on their luck (39%)
- Getting a lucky break and having the courage to take advantage of it (34%)
- Being well-connected to other successful people (27%)
WHICH CHILD IS MORE LIKELY TO ACHIEVE THE AMERICAN DREAM?

**AGE 5**

- **19%**
  - A 5-year-old with good health care but poor neighborhood schools.

- **81%**
  - A 5-year-old with great neighborhood schools but no health care.
WHICH CHILD IS MORE LIKELY TO ACHIEVE THE AMERICAN DREAM?

AGE 12

38%

GREAT FAMILY CONNECTIONS

BELOW AVERAGE STUDENT

62%

CAN’T AFFORD COLLEGE

HONOR ROLL STUDENT

A 12-year-old whose family has great connections, but is a below average student.

A 12-year-old who is an honor roll student, but whose family can’t afford college.
WHICH CHILD IS MORE LIKELY TO ACHIEVE THE AMERICAN DREAM?

**AGE 15**

- **30%**
  - StronG FaMiLy
  - LittLe AMBiTion

- **70%**
  - A 15-year-old with a strong work ethic, but who has abusive parents.

- A 15-year-old with a strong family, but who does not have a lot of ambition.
HOW IS THE AMERICAN DREAM ACHIEVED?

39% Aided by Society

42% Individual Effort

19% Neither of those statements reflect my views.

It’s crucial for the government and communities to take steps so every child has a fair chance at achieving the American Dream.

Achieving the American Dream is mainly something people do for themselves - what government and communities do doesn’t matter.
WHAT IS PLACING THE AMERICAN DREAM IN DANGER?

- 43% Hard Workers Shut Out
- 43% Decline of Work Ethic
- 14% Neither of those statements reflect my views.

Even people with a strong work ethic and good values are becoming increasingly shut out from achieving the American Dream.

One of the major dangers to the American Dream is the decline of the strong work ethic and values like honesty.
WHAT'S THE IMPACT OF THE ELECTION ON THE AMERICAN DREAM?

- Profound: 53%
- Very little: 24%
- Neither of those: 23%
WHAT ESSENTIALS FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM UNITE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS?

A strong work ethic

Parents, family members or other adults who teach values like honesty, responsibility and persistence

Good schools and teachers to insure that every child has a fair chance to get a good education
WHAT ESSENTIALS FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM DIVIDE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS?

Access to basic health care and nutrition so that families and children can stay healthy to pursue their dreams

- Democrats: 77%
- Republicans: 60%

A strong community where people look out for each other

- Democrats: 59%
- Republicans: 58%

A government that creates opportunities for people to get ahead

- Democrats: 58%
- Republicans: 49%

Good transportation and communication systems so businesses and people can work efficiently

- Democrats: 58%
- Republicans: 44%

A government that helps people recover when they're down on their luck

- Democrats: 55%
- Republicans: 39%

Getting a lucky break and having the courage to take advantage of it

- Democrats: 41%
- Republicans: 31%

Being well connected to other successful people

- Democrats: 31%
- Republicans: 26%

A free enterprise system that encourages people to take bold risks without too much regulation

- Democrats: 27%
- Republicans: 25%
HOW DO OTHER GROUPS COMPARE?

UNITED
GEOGRAPHY
EMPLOYMENT
EDUCATION
PARENTS

DIVIDED
GENDER
AGE
INCOME
WHAT’S NEXT?
LET’S MEET OUR PANEL

JUAN WILLIAMS, MODERATOR
FOX NEWS POLITICAL ANALYST AND CONTRIBUTOR TO THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ROBERT SAMUELSON
COLUMNIST FOR THE WASHINGTON POST,
AUTHOR OF THE GREAT INFLATION AND ITS AFTERMATH: THE PAST AND FUTURE
OF AMERICAN AFFLUENCE

ISABEL SAWHILL
THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, CO-AUTHOR OF CREATING AN OPPORTUNITY SOCIETY

HEDRICK SMITH
PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING FORMER NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER AND AUTHOR OF
WHO STOLE THE AMERICAN DREAM
QUESTIONS?
CREATING A NEW CONVERSATION ABOUT
THE AMERICAN DREAM

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