

Should Schools Teach That America Is Good?

Polling finds that teachers, more than the general public, believe schools should

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MOST AMERICANS—including public school teachers—believe schools should teach that America is a fundamentally good country. This may surprise critics who claim schools are eroding faith in America and instilling civic cynicism. But at a time of growing disenchantment with American institutions and ideals, our nationally representative survey reveals that parents, the general public, and teachers largely agree that schools should teach about the Constitution and its core values, instill a sense of patriotism, and teach that America is, at its core, good.

Democracy Amid Extreme Polarization

It's clear America is experiencing a period of intense political polarization and national soul-searching. Public trust in democratic institutions, including the presidency, the executive branch, Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court have plummeted over the past decade. Trust in science, journalism, and higher education has similarly cratered. U.S. adults' sense of pride in being American has also hit a historic low point. In 2003, 90

percent of Americans were “extremely” or “very” proud to be American. This statistic dipped to a near-record low of 58 percent in 2025. Among adults of Generation Z (those born after 1996), only 41 percent say they are “extremely” or “very” proud to be American. Moreover, a 2025 Harvard youth poll found that 29 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds say they are “very” or “somewhat” embarrassed to be American.

For many Americans—especially young people—this disenchantment and loss of pride may not stem from disdain for America and its ideals but from frustration that our nation increasingly fails to live up to those ideals. Our political leaders and institutions have been at the forefront of this self-inflicted damage. They increasingly and shamelessly violate the norms and values necessary to sustain democracy and build trust. Today, due process, the rule of law, free speech and expression, and the defense of democracy at home and abroad are often treated as expendable obstacles to wielding political power.

Are Schools to Blame?

President Trump, during remarks delivered on the eve of the Fourth of July in 2020, stated that “our children are taught in school to hate their own country, and to believe that the men and women who built it were not heroes, but villains.” In January 2025, Trump signed an executive order aiming to, in part, “prioritize federal resources, consistent with applicable law, to promote patriotic education” in the nation’s schools. In September 2025, the U.S. Department of Education announced a commitment to “promote an education system that teaches future generations honestly about America’s founding principles, political institutions, and rich history,” with the goal of inspiring “informed patriotism and love of country.”

That students shouldn’t be taught to hate America is self-evident. A nation survives by passing its history and values to future generations, and the core principles that guide the American experiment rank among the world’s most exemplary and enduring ideas. Students should learn the full truth about America—its strengths, flaws, and unrealized aspirations—while embracing the core American principles of liberty, justice, the rule of law, and human dignity. Every generation bears the responsibility to sustain and advance the American experiment.

Yet the evidence does not indicate that an anti-American teacher workforce is responsible for the general malaise among youth toward America. Recent polling shows that teachers are largely moderate and generally hold less extreme partisan views than the public or politicians. While isolated incidents of teachers voicing inflammatory positions may make headlines, they do not reflect the views of the vast majority of educators.

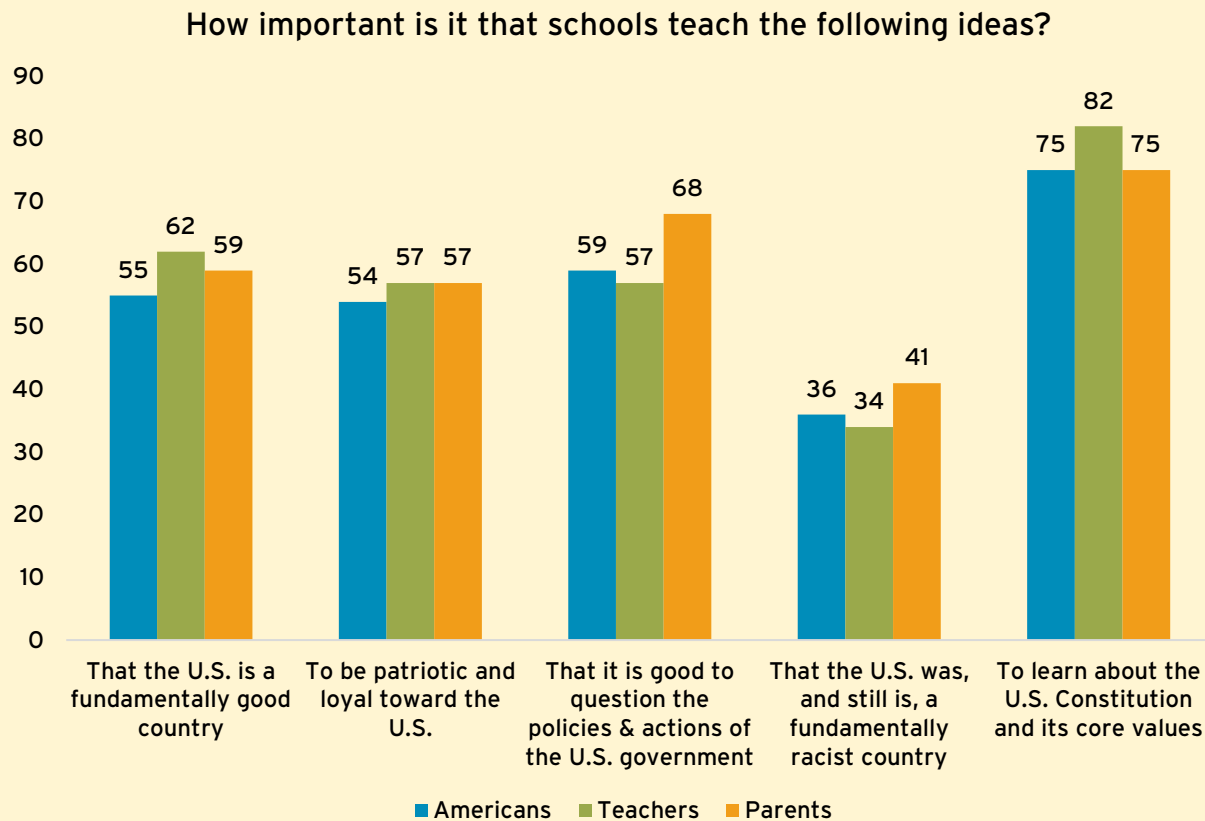
The Beliefs of Parents, the General Public, and Teachers

We recently fielded a set of surveys to a representative sample of American parents, the general public, and teachers about education’s role in teaching about America. In general, we find broad agreement among these three groups. Notably, teachers appear to be more optimistic than parents and the general public when it comes to portraying America in a positive light and imparting democratic values (see Figure 1).

For example, 62 percent of teachers express that it is “very” or “extremely” important for schools to teach that the United States is a fundamentally good country, more than the general public (55 percent)

Teachers More Pro-America Than Public *(Figure 1)*

Educators are more likely than parents and citizens generally to say it is important to portray the U.S. favorably.



NOTE: Percent of respondents answering “very” or “extremely” important

SOURCES: EdChoice and Morning Consult Public Opinion Tracker spring survey of K–12 teachers (conducted March 21–27, 2025) and spring survey of Americans and school parents (conducted April 10–13, 2025). Survey of teachers N = 1,032. Survey of Americans N = 2,251. Survey of school parents N = 1,280.

and parents (59 percent). It is also encouraging that most people appreciate nuance enough to recognize the difference between blind veneration and enlightened notions of democratic citizenship. A majority of each group believe it is “very” or “extremely” important that schools teach students to be patriotic and loyal to the United States, yet higher shares of all three groups believe it is “very” or “extremely” important to teach that it is good to question the policies and actions of the U.S. government. When it comes to issues of race and education that have received so much attention over the past decade, teachers are less likely to support teaching that the United States is a fundamentally racist nation than are members of the general public or parents. Finally, most Americans believe it is “very” or “extremely” important that students learn about the U.S. Constitution and its core values, with teachers believing this at a higher rate (82 percent) than parents or the general public (75 percent).

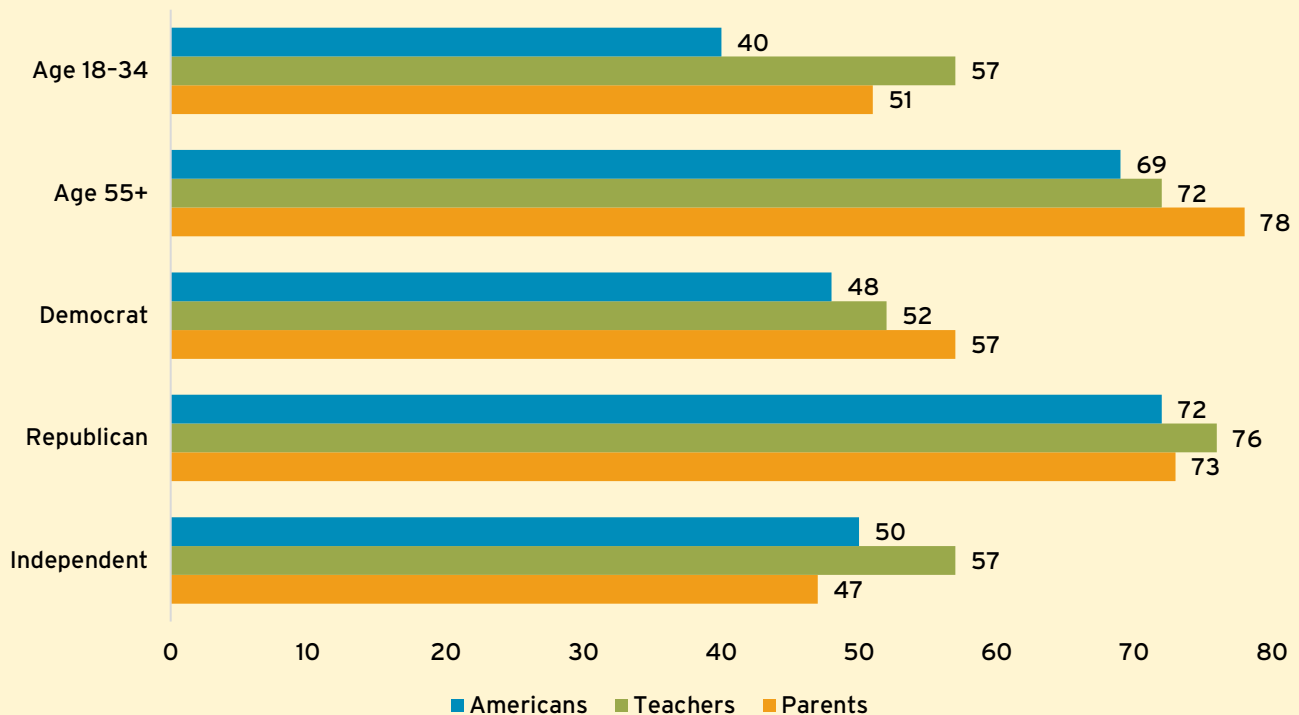
Partisan and Generational Divides

As numerous other surveys have shown, young people are less enthusiastic about America. Only 40 percent of Americans aged 18 to 34 believe it is “very” or “extremely” important for schools to teach that America is a fundamentally good country (see Figure 2). Responses also diverge along partisan lines. Across the board, roughly three out of four Republicans think it is “very” or “extremely” important for schools to teach that America is a fundamentally good country. Roughly half of all Democrats feel the same way, and among those who identify as independent, teachers are more supportive compared to parents and the general public.

Young People Less Supportive of Teaching America Is Good (Figure 2)

Generation Z (born 1997–2012) and younger Millennials are more cynical about the goodness of the country than those who are older or identify as Republican. Even so, more than half of young teachers think it’s important to teach that America is good.

How important is it that schools teach students that the United States is fundamentally a good country?



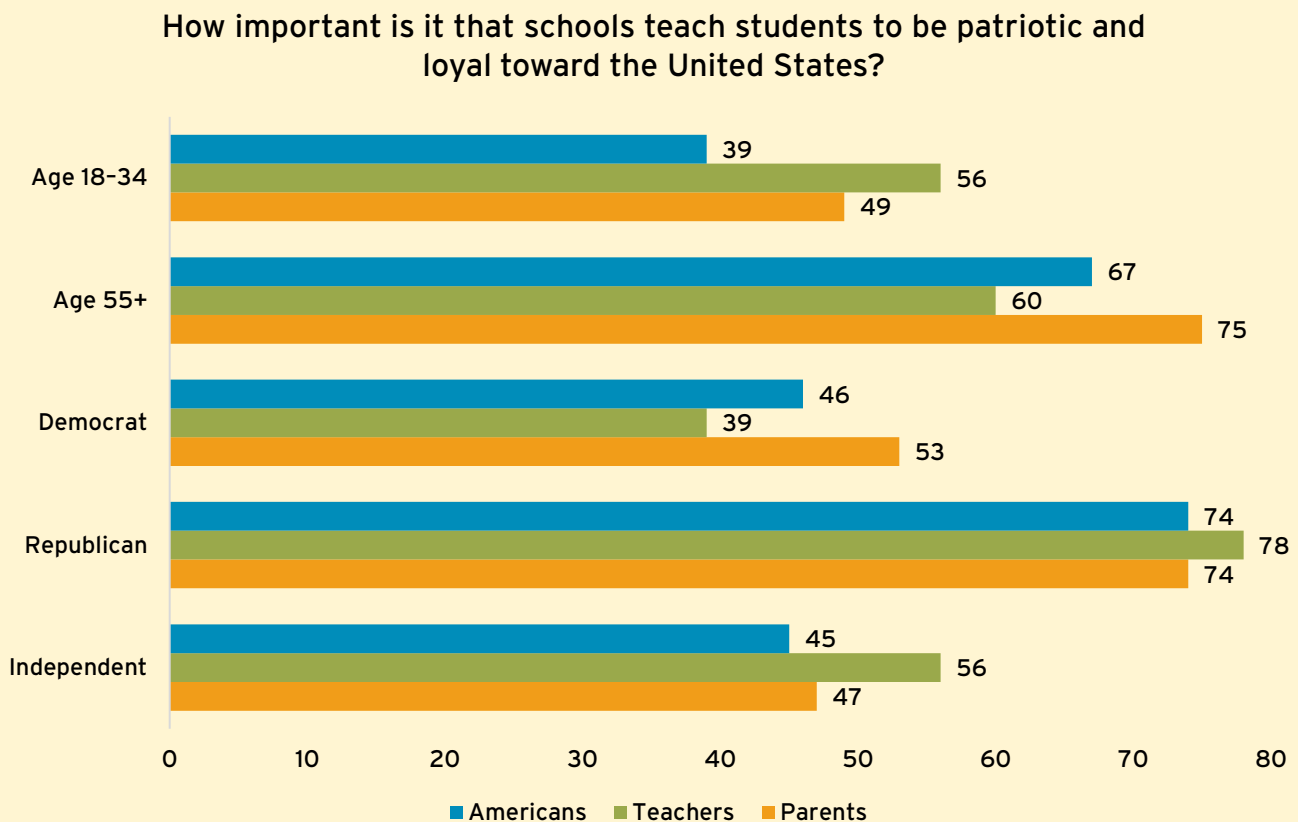
NOTE: Percent of respondents answering “very” or “extremely” important

SOURCE: EdChoice and Morning Consult Public Opinion Tracker spring survey of K–12 teachers (conducted March 21–27, 2025) and spring survey of Americans and school parents (conducted April 10–13, 2025).

Large partisan gaps also emerge when it comes to teaching students to be patriotic and loyal to the United States (see Figure 3). While three-fourths of Republicans across all three groups believe such instruction is “very” or “extremely” important, younger Americans and Democrats are less supportive. Only 39 percent of Democratic teachers think it is “very” or “extremely” important for schools to inculcate patriotism, compared to 78 percent of Republican teachers.

A Partisan Divide over Loyalty and Patriotism (Figure 3)

By a nearly 40-point margin, Republican teachers think it is more important to teach students to be patriotic and loyal to the United States than their Democratic counterparts.



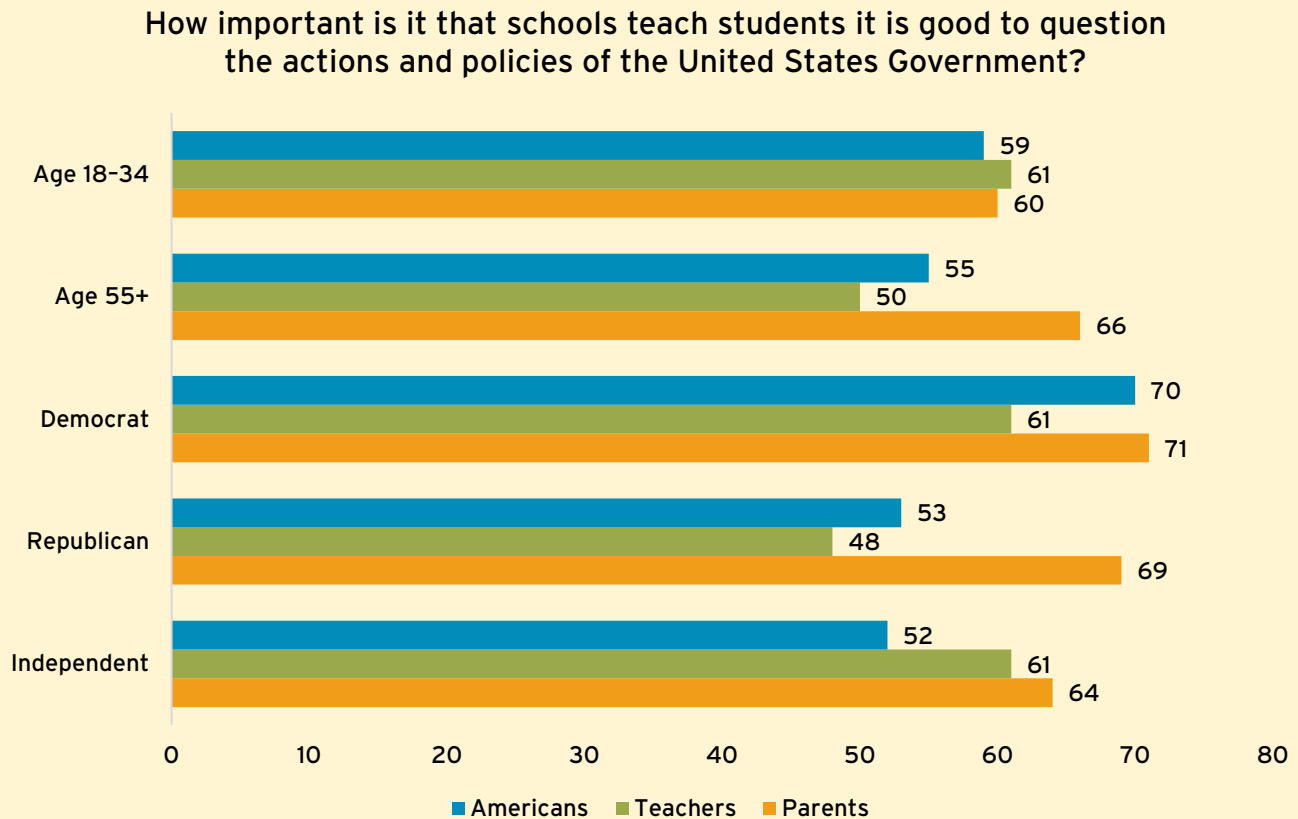
NOTE: Percent of respondents answering “very” or “extremely” important

SOURCE: EdChoice and Morning Consult Public Opinion Tracker spring survey of K–12 teachers (conducted March 21–27, 2025) and spring survey of Americans and school parents (conducted April 10–13, 2025).

We find stronger agreement on the issue of teaching that it is good to question the actions and policies of the U.S. government (see Figure 4). Democrats hold a slight edge on this question across all three groups. Notably, both Republican and Democratic teachers are less inclined to feel this way compared to parents or the general public.

General Agreement on Teaching It's Good to Question Government Actions *(Figure 4)*

In all but one demographic category, a majority of those surveyed believe it's important to teach students to question U.S. Government policies. However, teachers are less likely than the general public to hold that view, regardless of political affiliation.



NOTE: Percent of respondents answering “very” or “extremely” important

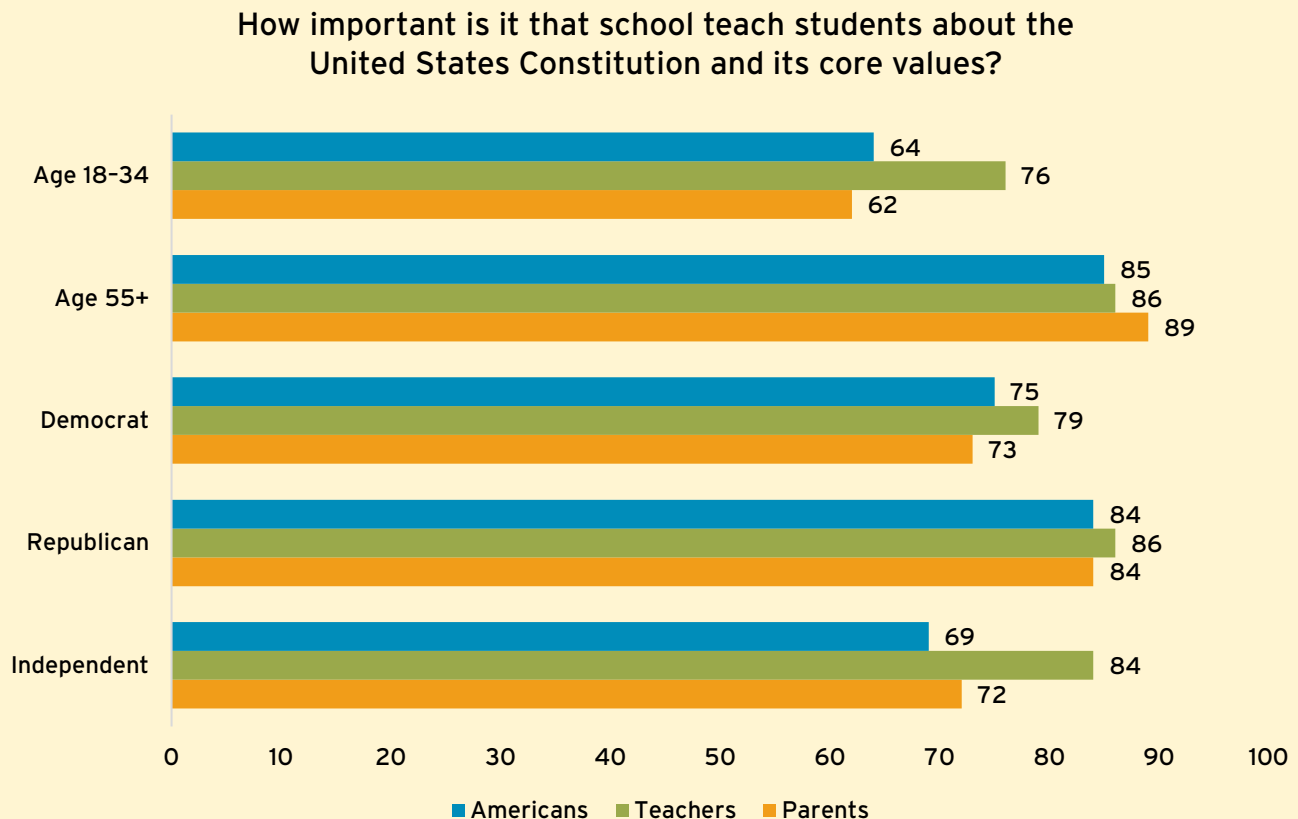
SOURCE: EdChoice and Morning Consult Public Opinion Tracker spring survey of K–12 teachers (conducted March 21–27, 2025) and spring survey of Americans and school parents (conducted April 10–13, 2025).

Shared Ground in Constitutional Values

Finally, we find the most agreement when it comes to teaching students about the U.S. Constitution and its core values (see Figure 5). More than 8 in 10 Republican teachers, parents, and members of the general public think teaching these topics is “very” or “extremely” important, and more than 7 out of 10 Democrats across all three groups agree. Younger Americans and independents are less on board, but teachers in both categories are substantially more enthusiastic about teaching the Constitution and its core values.

Strong Majorities Endorse Teaching Constitutional Values (Figure 5)

Teachers across the board feel strongly about instilling America's core constitutional values in students. Younger teachers are slightly less enthusiastic, but three-quarters still think it's important.



NOTE: Percent of respondents answering "very" or "extremely" important

SOURCE: EdChoice and Morning Consult Public Opinion Tracker spring survey of K-12 teachers (conducted March 21-27, 2025) and spring survey of Americans and school parents (conducted April 10-13, 2025).

A Renewed Commitment to Civic Education Is Imperative

Most Americans—including the educators entrusted with preparing future generations—believe it is important that students learn that America is a fundamentally good country. Contrary to claims that teachers are widely indoctrinating students with anti-American sentiment, our survey suggests educators are more committed than the general public or parents when it comes to teaching students about American values and democracy. We suspect much of the partisan ire directed at teachers is misplaced and might more

appropriately be directed toward those who claim to speak on behalf of teachers—education school faculty, education professional associations, and teachers unions, who tend to be more left-leaning than the teacher workforce.

It is also encouraging that amid debates over how to cultivate patriotism, teaching the values enshrined in the U.S. Constitution commands the broadest consensus. Two additional recent surveys demonstrate this area of agreement. Polling from the University of Southern California found that while there is a 60-point gap between Republican (84 percent) and Democratic (24 percent) support for reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in schools, there is near-universal agreement on teaching the Constitution—supported by 93 percent of Democrats and 95 percent of Republicans. Similarly, a recent poll from the Institute for Governance and Civics at Florida State University found that more than 85 percent of voters support teaching students about the freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution. Most Americans understand that loving what is good about America does not require endorsing any particular government act or political party; it requires upholding the principles that define our democratic system.

Rebuilding trust in the government and sustaining our democratic values requires a commitment that transcends partisan loyalties and challenges the extreme views that have given rise to increasingly illiberal tendencies, much of which have come from our political class. This means, for example, rejecting recent right-wing assaults on the judiciary, the rule of law, and due process. It also means that the left, as U.S. Representative Ritchie Torres (D) recently put it, needs to become “more comfortable pushing back against moral relativism and speaking with moral clarity and defending America and defending Western civilization.”

Admittedly, it is no small task to ask young people to look past the dysfunction of modern politics and see the enduring promise of the American experiment. But history shows that many of America’s most inspiring chapters have emerged from our darkest hours. Though the belief that America is good remains strong among most Americans and educators, preserving our values and living up to them is a perpetual responsibility. Civic-education reforms that emphasize constitutional principles and the superiority of democratic values can help rebuild trust in democratic institutions and renew faith in the American experiment. America, while imperfect, is still worth defending if we believe in its promise and commit ourselves to its future. **E**

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