Heterogeneity and Convergence in Cultural Logics of Americanness[*]

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Recent scholarship suggests that polarization has inflamed political conflict over the boundaries of U.S. national membership. Our study offers an important caveat to this narrative. Using a novel empirical strategy that applies latent class modeling to conjoint data, we find that different segments of the American population use different cultural logics to sketch the contours of nationhood. However, these logics are not systematically patterned by partisanship: most Democrats, Republicans, and Independents articulate a vision of Americanness that fuses ethnocultural criteria with civic-oriented expectations for membership in America's imagined community. Our findings complement and extend prior research by showing that different modes of measurement can yield credible evidence of both polarization and consensus. Whereas much of the existing literature relies on declarative measures of popular nationalism rooted in self-theorization, our design captures more intuitive judgments about national boundaries that are masked in traditional surveys. Consequently, our approach uncovers greater intraparty heterogeneity and interparty overlap than is often assumed, with two important implications. First, symbolic beliefs related to partisanship may be masking widely held ideas about nationhood embedded in public culture. Second, partisan debates may not only reflect competing nationalist logics, but contestation over who truly represents shared national values.

Keywords: Cultural Logics; Americanness; Partisanship; Conjoint Experiments; Latent Class Regressions.

1   Introduction

In the early 21st century, demographic and political transformations have reignited age-old contentions over the contours of American identity (cf. Myrdal 1962; Schildkraut 2014; Smith 1997; Tocqueville 2000). The growth of the Asian and Latino American population—as well as the secular decline of Christianity— are challenging longstanding perceptions of America as a White, Christian nation buttressed by a binary racial order (Abascal 2015, 2020; Abascal and Centeno 2017; Schachter 2016). Meanwhile, as affective polarization continues to rise and partisan politics permeates the formerly apolitical spheres of everyday

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life (DellaPosta 2020; Rawlings and Childress 2024), Democrats and Republicans are more likely than ever before to deride the other side as "un-American" for their position on virtually every social and political issue (cf. Iyengar et al. 2019).

How do ordinary Americans define the contours of national membership amid these social and political transformations? In classical work, scholars explored national belonging in the U.S. by juxtaposing two diverging, ideal-typical understandings of the American creed: an "ethnocultural" vision that set rigid, ascriptive limits on national membership based on traits including race and religion *vis-à-vis* a more permeable, "civic republican" model that emphasized elective criteria such as consecrating American democracy or engaging in hard work to achieve the American Dream (Devos and Banaji 2005; Kunovich 2009; Myrdal 1962; Theiss-Morse 2009; Tocqueville 2000). More recent scholarship has critiqued this binary contrast, uncovering cross-cutting nationalist belief systems that do not neatly map onto either ethnic or civic conceptions of America's imagined community (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Bonikowski, Feinstein, and Bock 2021). These studies emphasize the contested and multicreedal nature of nationalist beliefs in American society as well as variation in the endorsement of such beliefs along multiple axes of sociocultural difference, including race, religion, region, and political ideology (Asbury-Kimmel 2025; Bonikowski et al. 2021; Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Citrin and Wright 2009; Wong 2010).

We contribute to this burgeoning body of research in three important ways. Methodologically, we advance a novel empirical strategy that integrates two popular approaches to social survey analysis: conjoint experiments and latent class models. Our experimental survey design prompts respondents to evaluate the Americanness of hypothetical U.S. citizens along multiple randomized attributes. This design allows us to untangle correlations between attributes that hinder causal estimates, such as the effect of race on perceived Americanness *net of* nativity, religion, and English fluency (Adem and Ambriz 2023). Another benefit of the experimental design is that it prompts respondents to make *concrete judgments* of American profiles with varying attributes as opposed to articulating abstract and generalized statements of national identity (Arceneaux et al. 2025; Blumenau and Lauderdale 2024). We then analyze this conjoint data with latent class regressions (LCRs), a type of latent class model that clusters individuals into disjoint segments based on similarities in their responses to repeated measurements of a single dependent variable (Garia-Alvarez, Katz-Gerro, and Lopez-Sintas 2007; Valentino 2021b; Vermunt and Magidson 2016). Applied to our conjoint data, LCRs uncover cultural-cognitive heterogeneity in how Americans engage in national boundary-making (cf. Abascal 2020; Wimmer 2013).

Employing this two-fold methodological strategy, our study offers two key empirical contributions. First, building on canonical work, we find that Americans articulate diverse conceptions of national boundaries that are not reducible to "civic" or "ethnocultural" models of American identity. Specifically, we find that a majority of Americans define U.S. national membership by combining both ethnocultural criteria (e.g., being White or Black relative to Latino or Asian) and civic-oriented expectations (e.g., embracing July 4th rather than "ethnic" cultural celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo or Lunar New Year). The remaining survey respondents can be divided into three disjoint population segments bounded by more commonly

recognized, clashing cultural logics: (i) an *inclusive America* logic that broadly rejects most criteria, both ethnic and civic, to be considered American; (ii) an *exclusive (White) America* logic that is more exacting about membership requirements and uniquely emphasizes the significance of race by positioning Whites as more American than Blacks, Latinos and Asians; and (iii) an *assimilationist* logic that emphasizes inclusivity but one that is broadly conditional on civic-oriented, assimilationist expectations.

At the same time, we find that these cultural logics of Americanness are only modestly associated with respondents' partisan identities. Although there are some intuitive correlations—e.g., Democrats are more likely than Republicans to be *inclusive Americans*—each logic of U.S. national membership is articulated by similar proportions of Americans from both political parties. Indeed, a majority of Democrats, Republicans and Independents express an understanding of Americanness that mandates both civic and ethnic criteria for U.S. national membership. In other words, we find limited evidence of partisan sorting or ideological polarization whereby Democrats and Republicans gravitate towards unique, if not antithetical, conceptions of the American creed.

Taken together, our study offers important insights for scholars of nationalism and political culture in the United States. Our findings complement and extend prior research by highlighting how different modes of measurement can yield credible evidence of both polarization and consensus. Whereas much of the existing literature relies on declarative measures of popular nationalism that ask respondents to consciously reflect on abstract values related to the boundaries of nationhood, our design captures intuitive, automatic judgments—surfacing implicit assumptions about national boundaries that remain hidden in traditional surveys. This approach allows us to capture underlying assumptions about the American creed that may not be readily expressed in traditional survey formats.

Substantively, we find greater intraparty *heterogeneity* and interparty *overlap* in how Democrats and Republicans define national boundaries than is often assumed—with two important implications. First, our results suggest that *symbolic beliefs* related to partisanship (cf. Keskintürk 2024) may be masking widely held ideas about nationhood that are embedded in public culture[1] and highly prevalent, if not 'endemic' (Brubaker 1996), in social and cultural life (media representations, school curricula and so on). Second, partisan debates over Americanness may not simply be a function of Republicans and Democrats endorsing contradistinctive models of nationhood; rather, they may also reflect complex forms of contestation over who best represents putatively shared national values.

Beyond these substantive contributions, our study also demonstrates the utility of examining conjoint data with LCRs—especially when outcomes of theoretical interest are multivocal or open to interpretation (e.g., ideas about Americanness). As conjoints have rapidly gained traction in the social sciences as a popular method for studying multidimensional phenomena, we highlight the potential of analyzing such data with latent class techniques to find hidden cultural segments within a population of respondents. We encourage future research to embrace this novel two-pronged approach, integrating the strengths of conjoint designs

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[1] That is, publicly available knowledge, repertoires or meaning structures—narratives, codes, frames, classification schemes, frames, *inter alia*—that pervade the social world (Cerulo, Leschziner, and Shepherd 2021; Lizardo 2017).

and latent class analyses to reveal hidden patterns in how individuals perceive, categorize, and evaluate social and political reality.

2 Background

2.1 Conflicting Visions of American National Identity

Scholars theorizing the contours of American national identity have traditionally pointed to two diverging political traditions: civic and ethnic (Schildkraut 2014).[2] The former draws symbolic boundaries of American membership around civic, elective principles such as a commitment to democratic values and practices (e.g., voting), respecting collective rights and obligations, and striving to achieve the American Dream through hard work and perseverance (Levy and Wright 2020; Tocqueville 2000). This more "inclusive" understanding of American identity is challenged by an ethnocultural vision, which sets inflexible, ascriptive limits on national group membership (Theiss-Morse 2009). In the historical extreme, ethnocultural strains of American identity—best exemplified by the herrenvolk republicanism of the 19th century (Roediger 2007)—granted full national membership only to White, English-speaking Protestant men of northern European ancestry (Ignatiev 2008; Waters 1990). This ethnocultural definition of the nation has evolved over time, particularly through the rearticulation of categories like "White" and "Christian," but remains tethered to a nativist and exclusionary understanding of Americanness.

Empirical assessments of these competing traditions often involve drawing on public opinion datasets that ask respondents to indicate the importance of select variables in determining whether someone is viewed as a "true American." For instance, the *General Social Survey* (GSS) asks survey respondents: "Some people say the following things are important for being truly American. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?" Respondents are then presented with a list of characteristics, such as: "To have been born in America," "To be a Christian," and "To be able to speak English." Descriptive analyses of the GSS and other similar datasets typically report major fault-lines by political party and ideology: Republicans and conservatives are significantly more likely than Democrats and liberals to agree that being White, Christian, and speaking fluent English are fundamental aspects of being truly American (Citrin and Wright 2009; Dawkins and Hanson 2024).

Bonikowski and DiMaggio's (2016) influential study on the varieties of American nationalism also draws on GSS data but zeroes-in on clusters of respondents with similar attitudinal profiles in lieu of scrutinizing clusters of variables. They ultimately find four distinct genres of popular nationalism in the U.S. corresponding to four distinct types of American nationalists: (1) *ardent nationalists* who score high

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[2] Scholars sometimes articulate beyond the two foundational political traditions of American identity (Schildkraut 2007), but these additional categories can typically be collapsed into the civic or ethnic dichotomy (Schildkraut 2014).

on every aspect of nationalism under evaluation; (2) *the disengaged* who express the least nationalistic sentiments or evince aschematicity with respect to the nation; (3) *restrictive nationalists* who combine exclusionary national membership criteria with low-to-moderate levels of national pride; and (4) *creedal nationalists* who emphasize civic criteria for national membership and report high levels of national identification and pride. These genres of nationalism appear to be strongly associated with Americans' partisan identities: for instance, most *ardent nationalists* identify as Republicans, while a majority of *the disengaged* identify as Democrats (ibid). In a subsequent analysis, Bonikowski et al. (2021) document how the four aforementioned nationalist subtypes have, in recent elections, powerfully structured voting patterns in the United States. Taken together, extant work on the contours of U.S. national membership generally finds significant heterogeneity in both (i) the distribution of nationalist belief systems in America, and (ii) the *partisan signature* of these cultural-cognitive structures in American mass opinion.

2.2   Evaluating Americanness Through Conjoint Survey Data

The present study builds on this scholarship by drawing on a conjoint experiment. Our survey design offers several key advantages for the research question at hand. First, respondents are asked to evaluate hypothetical profiles of U.S. citizens who are randomized along nine theoretically relevant attributes: family origins and background (Alba and Nee 2003), religion (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006), language fluency (Schildkraut 2005), educational attainment (Flores-González 2017), political ideology (Clifford 2020), residential location (Abascal and Centeno 2017), and engagement with normative cultural behaviors such as voting and celebrating U.S. holidays (Bloemraad 2022). Although prior studies have acknowledged the multifaceted complexity of boundary-making in America, they are limited by an approach that tests one attribute after another, independently, and the limited scope of the variables examined. In contrast, a key feature of our experimental design is that participants are asked to consider multiple attributes associated with Americanness *at the same time* (cf. Flores and Schachter 2018; Schachter 2016; Schachter, Flores, and Maghbouleh 2021). This allows us to untangle the separate effects of traits that are highly correlated in real life, such as race, nativity, and religion. For instance, being White may be associated with greater levels of Americanness, but this pattern may be driven by correlations between Whiteness and Christianity, another feature that is positively associated with American identity. Overall, our study incorporates an ambitious set of characteristics theoretically associated with U.S. national membership. We examine 37 features across nine attributes, while prior work assessed seven or eight features (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Soehl and Karim 2021). Our findings thus provide a more multidimensional portrait of the logics undergirding the boundaries of American identity.

Second, we contend that asking Americans to provide judgments about U.S. citizen profiles is qualitatively different from prompting respondents to articulate generalized conceptualizations of American identity using a battery of indeterminate and disembodied concepts like *ancestry* or *supporting democracy.* In crafting this argument, we draw inspiration from recent studies on moral foundations theory

and the ideological asymmetry hypothesis that challenge the idea that liberals and conservatives possess fundamentally different moral orientations (Arceneaux et al. 2025). Crucially, this literature suggests that empirical patterns that seem to reveal deep-seated moral divisions along party lines may actually reflect a design effect—specifically, the fact that traditional survey methods require respondents to consciously theorize their beliefs, moral values, or cultural intuitions in response to abstract and decontextualized prompts. When moral attitudes are measured using research designs that capture automatic and intuitive judgments, researchers find that liberals' and conservatives' moral intuitions are broadly aligned (Blumenau and Lauderdale 2024). In a similar vein, we posit that traditional survey instruments like the GSS compel respondents to articulate or self-theorize visions of Americanness that share elective affinities with their partisan and social identities—i.e., declarative modes of cultural knowledge that may not reveal Americans' latent intuitions or implicit assumptions about national identity. Conversely, our conjoint design prompts respondents to make concrete judgments about stylized human profiles and thus better captures their intuitive conceptions of who belongs to the American creed.

A final corollary benefit of our experimental design is that it may substantively reduce social desirability bias (Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2022). This bias attenuation could occur because survey takers are unsure which of the many attributes introduced are norm-violating or of interest to scholars, while the presence of non-sensitive items also provides respondents plausible rationalizations to engage in social norm violations (for a similar argument, see Triguero Roura 2024). In the context of research exploring U.S. national boundaries, the possibility of social desirability bias has been of nontrivial concern. Psychological disquisitions on the "America = White" association have often reported statistically significant effects only when evaluating implicit, but not explicit, outcome measures (Devos and Banaji 2005; Devos and Mohamed 2014). Similarly, virtually all observational surveys that ask respondents to evaluate the importance of Whiteness as a condition for being "truly American" have found extremely low levels of support (Citrin and Wright 2009). For instance, the *21ˢᵗ Century Americanism Survey* (CAS) reveals that only 3.8 and 6.1 percent of respondents indicated that being White is a "very important" or "somewhat important" factor in making someone a true American (Schildkraut 2007). A conjoint survey design, however, may better capture how Americans truly think about socially sensitive topics such as race and Americanness. For example, while only a small fraction of respondents in traditional surveys openly express race-based criteria for national membership, our conjoint design reveals that racial cues—such as whether a profile signals Whiteness—can significantly influence perceptions of Americanness. This suggests that race continues to play a covert but consequential role in shaping judgments of national belonging, even when individuals are unwilling or unable to acknowledge such influences explicitly.

2.3   Cultural Logics of Americanness

Recent studies share similarities with our experimental approach to examining American identity (e.g., Adem and Ambriz 2023; Asbury-Kimmel 2025). However, our study relies on a fundamentally

different technique to analyze conjoint data. We examine heterogeneity in how respondents define Americanness not through standard subgroup analyses that average over within-group differences, but via latent class regressions (LCRs) that capture systematic variation in how individuals draw symbolic boundaries around American national membership. This approach allows us to inductively find empirical regularities in survey responses and reveal the organizing principles that guide individuals' internal decision-making, or what cultural sociologists call *cultural logics*: "shared, internalized, and evaluative cognitive structures" (Valentino 2021a: 6). Investigating cultural logics of Americanness is useful not simply as an exploratory exercise that uncovers hidden belief structures; after identifying these structures, it is possible to examine whether the cultural models extracted from response vectors can predict concrete policy views as well as behavioral outcomes (Keskintürk and Kuyucu 2024). In our forthcoming analysis, we regress respondents' positions on expanding immigration on their cultural logics of Americanness—a nominal variable derived from our LCR—to clarify the differences between the cultural segments we identify.

In recent years, latent class techniques have been applied to a wide range of attitudinal domains, from cultural identity among immigrants to normative beliefs about race and gender to popular attitudes towards science and religion (DiMaggio et al. 2018; Karim 2024; Knight and Brinton 2017; Scarborough et al. 2021). Bonikowski and DiMaggio's (2016) now classic study on popular nationalism in the U.S. is particularly germane to our investigation. The present study draws inspiration from their work but draws on a fundamentally different data source with its aforementioned advantages. Moreover, we offer greater conceptual precision and ecological relevance. For instance, we zoom-in on the contours of U.S. national membership, while Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016) focus on the higher-order concept of individual-level *nationalism*, a theoretical target quantity that provides considerable breadth at the expense of granular *precision* when tending to lower-order dimensions (e.g., national membership criteria in our case). Concretely, our conjoint experimental design, in contrast with public opinion surveys that anchor existing research on popular nationalism, is more useful for modeling the cultural-cognitive architecture underlying, or evaluative aspects of, national boundary-making (Valentino 2021a,b). In our design, survey respondents are tasked with adjudicating the Americanness of concrete (albeit hypothetical) profiles of U.S. citizens, and thus, engage in active decision-making about who is more or less an authentic member of the national community.

Beyond the affordances of the novel experiment data detailed above, our study is also tailored to the American context. Conversely, the GSS is harmonized with the International Social Survey Programme's (ISSP) national identity module to facilitate cross-national comparisons (Soehl and Karim 2021). As a result, GSS survey questions are purged of national boundary-making claims informed by the specificities of the American context and the vicissitudes of American history. Most concerningly, the GSS does not measure associations between race and being truly American — a striking omission given the longstanding legacy of Whiteness as a necessary condition for national membership in the United States (Devos and Banaji 2005; Du Bois 1897). In our study, we overcome these limitations by marshalling conjoint data that are sensitive to American-styled debates about membership in the nation. Empirically, we use latent class regressions to

find hidden structure in these input data and inductively locate disparate conceptions of the American creed. Below, we provide more details about our data and estimation framework.

3   Data and Methods

Our study draws on an original survey experiment with 3,161 Americans conducted in the fall of 2022. The sample is composed of 1,280 White, 590 Black, 650 Latino, and 641 Asian Americans quota sampled to be nationally representative within each racial category by gender, age, educational attainment, and political party. Survey participants were provided by Bovitz, a company that maintains a large, proprietary online research panel of U.S. respondents. The panel is composed of Americans who have opted in to participate in online surveys and is regularly refreshed to ensure demographic and attitudinal diversity. Supplementary Appendix A provides further information regarding the sampling strategy, including quota targets.

Survey respondents evaluated eight independent profiles, described as legal U.S. citizens, on a 1-7 response scale from "low Americanness (1)" to "high Americanness (7)." The hypothetical profiles were randomized along nine attributes theoretically linked to perceptions of U.S. national membership: race, family background, religion, language fluency, political ideology, civic engagement, favorite holiday, educational attainment, and residential location. Supplementary Appendix B lists the set of attributes and their feature levels and details regarding the theoretical justifications for these features. We randomized the row order of each attribute across respondents in order to minimize ordering effects, but the attribute rows were held constant for any given respondent (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). The 25,288 rated profiles were otherwise fully randomized.

3.1   Analytic Strategy

Our analysis proceeds in three stages. First, we apply latent class regressions (LCR) to our conjoint data. Like all latent class models, LCRs are dimensionality reduction instruments that can be used to identify hidden subsamples embedded within a broader population of observations. These subsamples are extracted based on common response patterns in the input data matrix. More technically, LCRs—like other latent class models—assume that covariation among survey responses is driven by a discrete latent variable, X, with k levels. Unlike other latent class implementations, LCRs do not partition samples based on responses to a vector of observed indicators. Rather, respondents are clustered into disjoint population segments based on repeated measurements of a single outcome variable. Moreover, while the measurement parameters of traditional latent class analyses correspond to class-specific item-response probabilities, the parameters of interest in LCRs are class-specific regression coefficients or statistical quantities associated with a set of observed predictors (for an elaboration, see Vermunt and Magidson 2016).
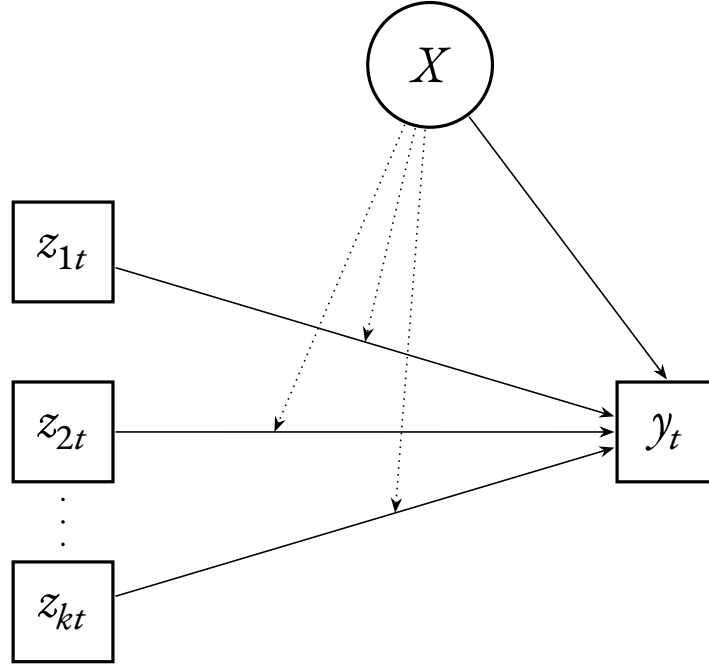
Figure 1: Structure of latent class regressions (adapted from Vermunt 2011). In the diagram, X represents a categorical latent variable. y_t represents a measurement of a dependent variable at replication or occasion t. $z_{1t} \dots z_{kt}$ represents a vector of predictor variables. Dotted arrows represent moderation effects.

The association between these predictors and the dependent variable is assumed to be *moderated* by the latent class a respondent belongs to (see Figure 1). In fitting our LCRs, we treat variation in responses to our Americanness scale as our outcome of substantive interest (y_{it}—with $T_i = 8$ measurements) and the nine aforementioned attributes (e.g., race, family background, civic engagement) as our vector of predictors (z_{it}). Analytically, our goal is to identify latent segments, k, defined by different patterns of associations linking z_{it} to y_{it} (based on both coefficients and predictive margins). Conceptually, we assume that these subpopulations are bounded by distinct cultural logics or models of Americanness (cf. Valentino 2021b).

We conduct two additional analyses. First, we assess the downstream or distal consequences of class membership. Specifically, we use a simple ordinal regression model to evaluate whether disparate conceptions of the American creed map onto disparate attitudes towards expansionist immigration policy. These analyses allow for a more substantive differentiation of how cluster differences correspond with tangible attitudes and behaviors, beyond the cultural logics (i.e., patterns of association linking z_{it} to y_{it}) that define them. Second, we assign respondents to distinct latent classes before exploring the partisan foundations of class membership. To this end, we fit a multinominal logistic regression model where class membership (or logic of Americanness) is regressed on respondent's political party affiliation. In both models, we include a large set of controls on the right-hand side: race, age (quadratic), generational status, religious affiliation, a binary indicator of news consumption, educational status (binary indicator of holding university degree), device used to complete survey, and region fixed effects. Moreover, since our input data

feature an overrepresentation of racial minorities, we weight all analyses to ensure that results reflect the racial distribution of the contemporary United States. Descriptive statistics for all variables featured in the standard regression analyses can be found in Supplementary Appendix D. Full, tabular model results can also be reviewed in Appendix D.

4   Results

4.1   Five Cultural Logics of Americanness

To determine the number of latent segments nested in our sample, we iteratively estimate a set of 10 LCRs using `Latent GOLD 6.1`. Based on fit statistics and interpretability (cf. Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2022), we settle on a five-class solution. We provide more details on the model selection process in Supplementary Appendix C. To aid the interpretation of the five classes, we label them as follows: (1) *Civic-Ethnic*, (2) *Ethno-Civic*; (3) *Inclusive America*, (4) *Exclusive (White) America*, and (5) *Assimilationist*. Table 1 presents the average marginal effects of the conjoint profile features on Americanness ratings, while Table 2 presents the profile rating probabilities across the five classes.

4.1.1   Civic-Ethnic

Nearly a third (32%) of survey respondents express a cultural logic of Americanness informed by both ascribed and elective criteria for authentic national membership. For instance, they factor in ethnocultural attributes such as a person's race and religion, positioning Whites, Blacks, and Christians as more American relative to Latinos, Asians, non-Christians, and atheists. At the same time, these participants' definition of Americanness implicates civic-oriented characteristics such as a person's commitment to democratic practices (e.g., voting in elections), adherence to cultural norms (e.g., embracing July 4$^{\text{th}}$), and efforts to work hard to improve their socioeconomic status (e.g., attaining more than the minimum level of education). In other words, survey respondents championing the *civic-ethnic* creed convey a cultural understanding of Americanness that is, at once, shaped by attributes that are largely fixed as well as those that are malleable.

Respondents following this cultural logic further associate urban residential living as more American than dwelling in rural areas. This finding is somewhat surprising given widespread stereotypes that venerate rural life as representing the true heartland of the country with authentic American roots, while denigrating urban cities as infested with crime and cultural depravity (Abascal and Centeno 2017; Boot 2022; Lichter and Brown 2011). One explanation for the unexpected urban advantage is that our data come from a factorial survey experiment designed to untangle highly correlated traits such as urbanicity with racial minorities and left-leaning politics. In other words, conventional imagery linking residential location with diverging degrees of Americanness may primarily be driven via its correlations with race and politics. Once these traits are

Table 1: Five Cultural Logics of Americanness

	Civic-Ethnic (32%)		Ethno-Civic (24%)		Inclusive America (15%)		Exclusive (White) America (15%)		Assimilationist (14%)	
	AME	z	AME	z	AME	z	AME	z	AME	z
Race										
White	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Latino	-0.22	-4.42	-0.10	-1.89	-0.03	-0.50	-0.46	-3.79	-0.09	-1.69
Black	-0.08	-1.61	0.00	0.01	-0.01	-0.25	-0.32	-2.62	0.06	1.26
Asian	-0.19	-4.10	-0.18	-3.50	-0.07	-1.39	-0.47	-3.87	-0.04	-0.80
Generation										
1st Generation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2nd Generation	0.23	6.63	0.08	2.27	0.18	4.92	0.43	5.02	0.15	3.91
3rd+ Generation	0.47	12.85	0.24	6.01	0.25	7.17	0.66	7.59	0.35	9.72
Religion										
Christian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Non-Christian	-0.12	-3.64	-0.18	-5.09	-0.06	-1.95	-0.51	-5.89	-0.05	-1.56
Atheist	-0.23	-6.66	-0.23	-6.07	-0.10	-3.23	-0.55	-6.26	-0.07	-2.18
English										
Fluent English	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bilingual	-0.06	-1.90	-0.08	-2.20	0.01	0.16	0.13	1.52	-0.04	-1.29
Foreign Accent	-0.23	-7.04	-0.17	-4.88	-0.03	-1.06	-0.05	-0.59	-0.16	-4.68
Political Ideology										
Very Liberal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Liberal	0.10	1.89	-0.02	-0.40	-0.04	-0.76	-0.04	-0.32	-0.10	-1.97
Leans Liberal	0.06	1.21	-0.01	-0.13	-0.12	-2.34	-0.07	-0.52	-0.11	-2.30
Moderate	0.07	1.40	0.08	1.50	-0.03	-0.65	0.08	0.57	-0.11	-2.22
Leans Conservative	0.18	3.51	0.09	1.60	-0.01	-0.20	0.36	2.79	-0.08	-1.61
Conservative	0.10	2.01	0.13	2.31	-0.05	-0.96	0.22	1.66	-0.13	-2.63
Very Conservative	0.13	2.55	0.13	2.32	-0.03	-0.67	0.28	2.23	-0.08	-1.54
Civic Engagement										
Regularly Votes	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sometimes Votes	-0.29	-8.71	-0.13	-3.59	-0.06	-1.88	-0.34	-3.86	-0.08	-2.32
Rarely Votes	-0.46	-13.06	-0.30	-7.94	-0.06	-1.77	-0.56	-6.32	-0.31	-8.40
Favorite Holiday										
July 4th	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Saint Patrick's Day	-0.15	-2.40	-0.14	-2.24	-0.07	-1.01	-0.16	-1.06	-0.08	-1.25
Thanksgiving	-0.09	-2.68	-0.06	-1.61	0.01	0.19	-0.02	-0.28	-0.01	-0.30
Juneteenth	-0.17	-2.74	-0.12	-1.87	-0.09	-1.15	-0.01	-0.09	-0.20	-2.72
Cinco de Mayo	-0.19	-3.13	-0.23	-3.72	-0.06	-0.88	-0.02	-0.14	-0.19	-3.05
Lunar New Year	-0.32	-5.27	-0.17	-2.63	-0.06	-1.12	-0.37	-2.44	-0.13	-2.28
Education										
Less than HS	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
HS Degree	0.15	3.36	0.08	1.82	0.09	2.01	0.07	0.63	0.09	1.91
Some College	0.16	3.76	0.05	1.19	0.05	1.09	0.18	1.67	0.10	2.26
BA Degree	0.15	3.33	0.15	3.27	0.10	2.39	0.31	2.80	0.16	3.46
BA+ Degree	0.11	2.55	0.12	2.66	0.06	1.36	0.25	2.32	0.14	3.22
Residence										
Rural	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Urban	0.08	2.42	-0.01	-0.37	-0.06	-1.81	-0.06	-0.74	0.01	0.39
Suburban	0.04	1.18	0.04	1.04	-0.04	-1.28	-0.16	-1.88	-0.00	-0.14

Note: Table displays average marginal effects (AMEs) of attributes on Americanness ratings across five latent classes. Class shares are provided in parentheses. Highlighted cells signal that an AME is significant at an α of 0.05.

Table 2: Response Probabilities Across Five Cultural Segments

Americanness Scale Level	Civic-Ethnic	Ethno-Civic	Inclusive America	Exclusive (White) America	Assimilationist	Overall
1	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.04
2	0.02	0.05	0.00	0.15	0.00	0.04
3	0.06	0.19	0.00	0.17	0.00	0.09
4	0.18	0.52	0.03	0.14	0.02	0.21
5	0.44	0.17	0.03	0.11	0.16	0.23
6	0.23	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.61	0.19
7	0.08	0.01	0.88	0.13	0.21	0.21

accounted for, urban living appears to have a *positive* effect of national membership, perhaps due to its link with American innovation and dynamism. While respondents in the *civic-ethnic* cultural segment are unique in expressing this pro-urban view, it is notable that the remaining four cultural logics also reject the popular trope that rural life is in itself associated with greater levels of national authenticity, at least *ceteris paribus*.

4.1.2   Ethno-Civic

The second largest segment of survey respondents (24%) articulates a cultural logic of Americanness that may, *prima facie*, appear similar to the first cultural segment. Our label for the cluster acknowledges this overlap: notably, *ethno-civic* respondents express an understanding of U.S. national membership that also emphasizes a wide range of both ascribed, generally inflexible traits (e.g., being White, Christian, multigeneration, and speaking English fluently) as well as elective, achievable characteristics (e.g., always voting, embracing patriotic holidays, and working to attain higher education). To be sure, there are some differences between the two logics: respondents in the *ethno-civic* class perceive Latinos as similarly American as Whites, while those advancing the *civic-ethnic* perspective understand bilinguals to be as American as fluent English speakers. However, these null findings are only marginally nonsignificant: e.g., *ethno-civic* respondents rate Latino profiles 0.10 points lower than White profiles, and this effect is statistically significant at the $p < 0.10$ level. Meanwhile, *civic-ethnic* respondents penalize bilingual profiles by 0.06 points relative to profiles who speak English fluently, and this difference is also statistically significant at the $p < 0.10$ level.

In order to distinguish between the two logics, we underscore the latter's "ethnic" affinity and de-emphasize their "civic" orientation for two reasons. First, respondents in the *ethno-civic* class are relatively less exacting about elective criteria for membership recognition. For example, they do not perceive embracing Thanksgiving or Juneteenth as less American than July 4th, and they reject the premise that a person's residential location shapes their Americanness. Second, there is a meaningful divergence between the two cultural segments in their profile rating probabilities (see Table 2). Respondents endorsing the *civic-ethnic* logic are most likely to offer profile ratings of 5 or 6 out of the 7-point scale of Americanness, while the two most frequent profile evaluations among those in the *ethno-civic* condition are a 3 or 4. In other words, the *ethno-civic* understanding of Americanness is more exclusionary in drawing national boundaries relative to the *civic-ethnic* logic.

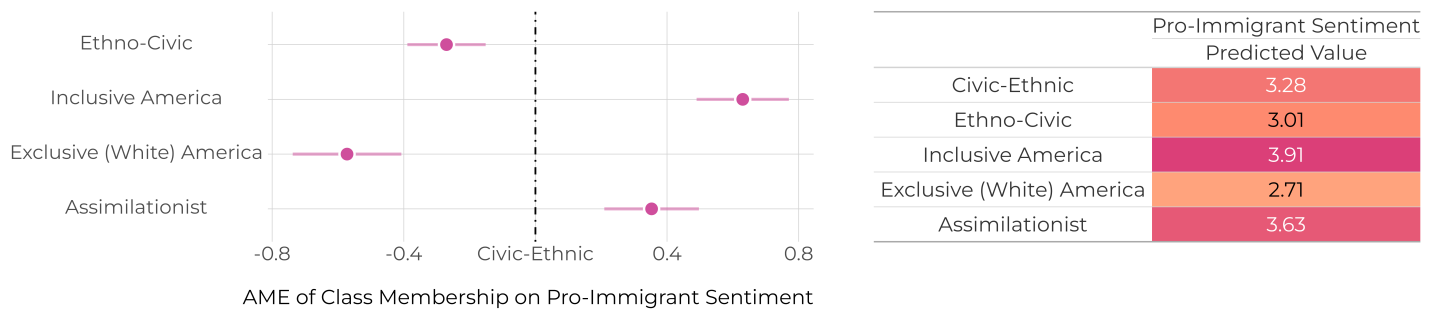|	Pro-Immigrant Sentiment Predicted Value
Civic-Ethnic	3.28
Ethno-Civic	3.01
Inclusive America	3.91
Exclusive (White) America	2.71
Assimilationist	3.63

Figure 2: The panel on the left displays average marginal effects of class membership on expansionist immigration to the United States from Latin America and Asia. 95% confidence intervals are provided. The panel on the right uses a table to display mean predictions of pro-immigrant sentiment on a 1-5 ordinal scale after accounting for different ordinal cut points.

This differentiation between the *civic-ethnic* and *ethno-civic* clusters also maps onto how class membership is linked to policy attitudes. To examine this link, we estimate an ordinal logistic regression that tests whether class membership is associated with attitudes towards immigration policy, as measured by a question tapping support for immigration to the United States from Asia and Latin America. We account for classification uncertainty using `Latent GOLD`'s bias-adjusted three-step procedure and maximum likelihood estimation.

Figure 2 presents the average marginal effects of class membership on pro-immigrant sentiment as well as marginal predicted values by cluster. Consistent with our interpretation, respondents who express the *ethno-civic* conception of national membership are less likely than respondents in the *civic-ethnic* class to support increasing immigration from Asia and Latin America (3.01 vs. 3.28, where the difference is statistically significant, $p < 0.05$).

4.1.3   Inclusive America

Unlike the *civic-ethnic* and *ethno-civic* cultural logics—which together account for over half (56%) of our sample—the remaining three classes do not implicate both ethnic and civic requirements to the same extent when defining Americanness. One class, which we call *inclusive America* (15% of respondents), is marked by the tendency to reject *both* ascribed and elective demands for national membership. Respondents in this cluster simultaneously refute the ethno-nationalist premise that Whites are more American than racial minorities and the civic notion that electoral participation in democracy is a necessary condition for U.S. national membership. Perhaps most strikingly, respondents associated with the *inclusive America* logic are predicted to give the highest profile ratings across all five clusters, with an estimated 88% probability of assigning the maximum rating of 7 (see Table 2). This finding also corresponds with their policy attitudes:

Figure 2 shows that respondents who express the *inclusive America* cultural logic are more supportive of expansionist immigration policy than their peers—even after regression adjustment.

It is also worth emphasizing that a civic notion of Americanness should not *necessarily* be understood as an *inclusive* definition of national membership (cf. Simonsen and Bonikowski 2020).[3] Respondents who advocate for civic tenets of Americanness stipulate a series of requirements about what individuals must do in order to be regarded as an authentic member of the imagined community. While such demands are perhaps "inclusive" in the sense that they are achievable (in contrast to ethnocultural demands, which are either immutable like racial status or in general inflexible like religion or language), those who fail to meet such expectations are ostracized from the national community. In contrast, respondents expressing the *inclusive America* logic are broadly accepting of virtually all Americans, regardless of who they are or what they do. While there is still an Americanness penalty against atheists and the foreign-born relative to Christians and multigeneration Americans, the predicted profile ratings shown in Supplementary Appendix C reveal that such differences are marginal and that nearly all evaluated profiles receive the maximum Americanness rating, signaling full inclusion in the nation.

4.1.4   Exclusive (White) America

The fourth cultural segment to emerge from our data maps onto the most exclusionary boundaries of U.S. national membership. Representing 15% of the sample, respondents endorsing the *exclusive* (*White*) *America* cultural logic offer the lowest Americanness ratings across all evaluated profiles. This can be seen both via their modal profile rating being a 1 out of 7 (see Table 2), and their anti-immigration views relative to respondents endorsing other nationalist logics (see Figure 2). Still, we emphasize that this cultural logic is not simply exclusionary but also one that is specifically linked to a perspective that America is White: i.e., respondents from this class are unique in penalizing *all* racial minorities, including Blacks, as less American relative to Whites.

While it may be tempting to portray this segment as the antithesis of *inclusive Americans*, closer examination reveals subtleties that defy such a Manichean characterization. What is particularly notable about *exclusive* (*White*) *Americans* is their indifference towards key attributes traditionally linked to Americanness. For instance, *exclusives* do not regard individuals who are bilingual or speak English with a foreign accent as any less American than native speakers. This unusual view is shared by none other than *inclusive Americans*. In fact, the two cultural segments similarly diverge from the *civic-ethnic* and the *ethno-civic* cultural logics in their de-emphasis of *both* ethnocultural (e.g., speaking English fluently) *and* civic-oriented diacritics (e.g., celebrating July 4th). Viewed from this lens, the *exclusive* (*White*) *America* logic appears most distinct in its emphasis on race as a criterion for exclusion from U.S. national boundaries.

[3] Indeed, Simonsen and Bonikowski (2020) argue that although national identities steeped in civic republicanism are often associated with inclusivity, these aggregate associations flatten context-specific patterns of conditional exclusion: in northwestern Europe, for instance, civic nationalism is associated with higher levels of anti-Muslim sentiment than ethnocultural alternatives.

4.1.5   Assimilationist

The final cultural segment, which we call *assimilationist* (14% of respondents), is characterized by two key propensities. First, respondents expressing this logic tend to give high Americanness scores, with the modal profile rating being a 6 out of 7 (see Table 2). They are also more pro-immigration than all other clusters except those expressing the *inclusive America* cultural logic. Second, there is a broad emphasis on elective over ascribed traits. Notably, the *assimilationist* logic rejects race as a criterion for national membership, and it expresses ambiguity in allowing traits like religion and language to affect perceptions of Americanness. While this tempered view regarding ethnocultural attributes overlaps with the *inclusve America* logic, *assimilationists* unequivocally emphasize the importance of civic-oriented engagement with American cultural norms and expectations. Moreover, they penalize individuals who are inconsistent voters and who partake in "ethnic" holidays, while rewarding those who pursue upward socioeconomic mobility through educational attainment.

4.1.6   Summary

The cultural logics we identify share significant parallels with the four classes of American nationalism identified in prior studies (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Bonikowski et al. 2021; Soehl and Karim 2021). Fundamentally, they affirm arguments that symbolic boundaries of U.S. national inclusion cannot be neatly mapped onto either ethnic or civic conceptions of the nation. However, our findings depart from the prior literature in important ways. Most notably, we observe a fifth distinct cultural segment—the *exclusive White America* logic—that is characterized by its emphasis on nonwhite racial status as a marker of exclusion from the symbolic boundaries of nationhood. This discrepancy can be easily explained: previous analyses draw on data from the GSS, which did not explore whether racial status (e.g., being White) is associated with being truly American. Our study indicates that this omission was consequential.

More fundamentally, we call attention to our finding that two clusters representing over half (56%) of the survey respondents expressed an understanding of Americanness that blended both ethnic and civic-oriented demands. While the remaining three clusters map onto highly divergent, conflicting visions of national membership, it is noteworthy that a majority of Americans broadly *agree* on the contours on U.S. national membership that can be neither characterized as simply inclusionary or exclusionary. The degree of consensus is all the more notable given that LCRs are a technique optimized to find cultural heterogeneity when applied to attitudinal data.

Our study also finds significant *homogeneity* in definitions of Americanness *across* different cultural segments. Specifically, there appears to be a universal recognition that nativity (longer family history in the U.S.) and religious affiliation (Christians relative to atheists) are uncontested features associated with Americanness. The latter finding diverges from Bonikowski and DiMaggio's (2016) observation that disagreement about Christianity as a criterion for national membership is a central axis of division in American mass opinion. As noted in our foregoing discussion, this likely stems from the fact that our

Table 3: Probabilities of Class Membership by Partisan Identity

	Partisan Identity		
	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Civic-Ethnic	0.32	0.30	0.33
Ethno-Civic	0.21	0.25	0.24
Inclusive America	0.16	0.12	0.19
Exclusive (White) America	0.13	0.20	0.12
Assimilationist	0.17	0.14	0.12

study taps into evaluative cognitive structures that implicate more implicit, nondeclarative modes of cultural knowledge (see Triguero Roura 2024).

4.2   Partisan Identities and Cultural Logics

Do Democrats and Republics gravitate towards cultural logics of Americanness that are either incongruent or diametrically opposed? To resolve this question, we explore the correspondence between latent class membership and survey respondents' political party affiliation. Given prior work, we might expect that a majority of Democrats embrace the *Inclusive America* logic, while a substantial number of Republicans invoke the *exclusive* (*White*) *America* logic. To subject these propositions to empirical investigation, we estimate a multinomial logistic regression model where cluster membership is our target variable. Once again, we account for classification uncertainty—i.e., the reality that respondents are not *perfectly* assigned to one of k latent clusters recovered through latent class analytic procedures—using `Latent GOLD`'s three-step module for bias-adjustment.

Table 3 displays the predicted probabilities of membership across the five clusters across respondents of diverging political party orientations. For instance, column 1 displays the distribution of Democratic respondents associated with the *civic-ethnic* (33%), *ethno-civic* (21%), *inclusive America* (16%), *exclusive White America* (14 percent), and *assimilation* (17%) cultural logics. Columns 2 and 3 repeats these analyses for Republicans and Independents. To simplify matters further, Figure 3 offers a visual summary of the average marginal effect of partisan identity on class membership across the five clusters (where Democrats are the reference category). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to articulate the *inclusive America* cultural logic (16 vs 12 percent, $p < 0.05$), while Republicans are more likely than Democrats to endorse an *exclusive White America* model of nationhood (19 vs. 14 percent, $p < 0.05$).

Despite these intuitive associations, Table 3 and Figure 3 point to a broader pattern of *limited* partisan sorting across the five latent classes. For instance, a similar proportion of Democrats, Republicans and Independents are represented in the two largest clusters. Moreover, a majority of Democrats, Republicans and Independent respondents express a *civic-ethnic* or *ethno-civic* understanding of the nation that emphasizes both inclusionary and exclusionary criteria for national membership. In other words, our

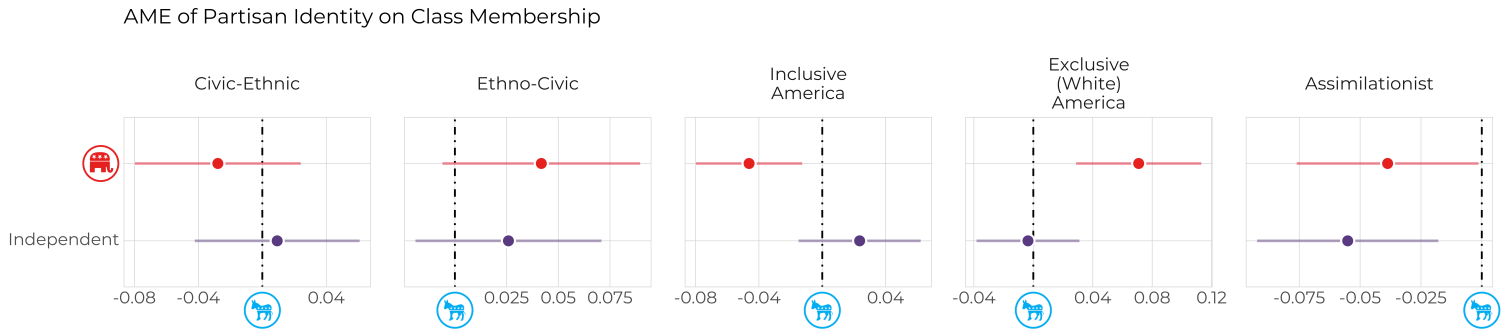AME of Partisan Identity on Class Membership

Figure 3: Average marginal effect of partisan identity on class membership. 95% confidence intervals are provided. For legibility, estimates associated with partisan identities that fall outside the conventional triumvirate (Democrat, Independent, Republican) are not displayed.

findings suggest a meaningful degree of *consensus* regarding the boundaries of the American creed—even across seemingly insurmountable partisan divides.

4.3   Robustness Checks

A key finding that emerges from our analysis is the limited extent of partisan sorting into the latent cultural segments we identified through our LCR procedure. That is, contrary to received wisdom, Democrats and Republicans do not appear to express highly divergent or conflicting models of national membership—at least when these models are captured via implicit, intuitive judgments rather than abstract and generalized articulations of national identity. Since latent class analyses are not "supervised" by observed target variables and require direct intervention from analysts, we also consider whether our results are artifacts of design choices. Specifically, we assess the sensitivity of our findings to two potential sources of variation: (1) the number of clusters in our solution, and (2) individual-level heterogeneity in how respondents use scale ratings.

We estimate two alternative models. First, we select a six-cluster solution using the same clustering approach detailed in our foregoing discussion to assess whether a more granular classification alters the observed patterns linking partisanship to class membership. Second, we estimate a three-cluster solution that incorporates random effects to account for individual-level variation in scale usage.[4] Table 4 presents the partisan correlates of cluster membership under these two alternative specifications. For instance, in the six-cluster solution, 28% and 24% of Democrats are assigned to clusters 1 and 2, respectively, compared to 32% and 22% of Republicans. These probabilities of membership are not statistically different ($p > 0.05$). While there are partisan differences in membership probabilities for other classes (e.g., clusters 4 and 6), they

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[4] The three-cluster solution is the best-fitting parameterization of our latent class regression with random intercepts.

Table 4: Class Probabilities by Partisan Identity—Two Alternative LCR Solutions

	Partisan Identity		
	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Six Latent Segments			
Class 1	0.28	0.32	0.24
Class 2	0.24	0.22	0.27
Class 3	0.19	0.15	0.13
Class 4	0.16	0.11	0.19
Class 5	0.08	0.10	0.12
Class 6	0.04	0.10	0.05
Three Latent Segments & Random Effects			
Class 1	0.59	0.56	0.56
Class 2	0.33	0.35	0.33
Class 3	0.08	0.08	0.11

represent a relatively small proportion of respondents. Meanwhile, the three-cluster solution with random effects reveals no significant partisan sorting into any cluster ($p > 0.05$).

These robustness checks reinforce a key finding: even under alternative model specifications, there is little evidence that cultural logics of the American creed are strongly structured by respondents' partisan identities. This strengthens our confidence that our results are not merely artifacts of initial design choices but instead reflect a broader empirical pattern of limited partisan sorting in conceptions of American national identity.

5   Discussion & Conclusions

What does it mean to be an American? Debates about who is included—or excluded—within America's national boundaries are fiercely contested in the face of rapid demographic changes and heightened political polarization. In the contemporary United States, political rivals are frequently denounced as "un-American" threats who are "destroying the nation" (Gage 2017). Recent studies have affirmed these underlying partisan and ideological divisions, suggesting that Democrats and Republicans often endorse contradistinctive conceptions of the American creed (Bonikowski et al. 2021; Dawkins and Hanson 2024).

The evidence presented in this paper both supports and complicates this conventional narrative. On the one hand, echoing recent work on popular nationalism in America, we identified multiple conceptions of U.S. national membership. Members of the two largest clusters, which are bounded by the *civic-ethnic* and *ethno-civic* logics respectively, prioritized both ethnocultural (ascribed) traits such as

being White and Christian as well as civic-oriented (elective) behaviors—including regular participation in elections, partaking in cultural celebrations, and attaining higher levels of education—when evaluating the Americanness of compatriots. In other words, these logics represent a patchworked understanding of authentic national membership characterized simultaneously by who one *is* as well as what one *does*. We also found three additional latent segments associated with three disjoint logics of U.S. national membership: (1) an *inclusive America* logic that broadly rejects most criteria, both ethnic and civic, to be considered American; (2) an *exclusive* (*White*) *America* logic that is particularly exacting about national membership and positions Whites as more American than Blacks, Latinos, or Asians; and (3) an *assimilationist* logic that emphasizes inclusivity but one that is conditional on civic-oriented, assimilationist expectations.

Against this backdrop of cultural heterogeneity, we found a substantial degree of partisan *consensus* over the contours of America's imagined community. While some associations aligned with expectations—for example, Democrats are significantly more likely than Republicans to be *inclusive Americans*—there was *limited* partisan sorting overall. A majority of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents articulated models of national membership that interlaced both ethnic and civic criteria. As robustness checks showed, our findings hold across alternative model specifications and different partitions of the sample space.

These findings were made possible due to an innovative research design that combined latent class modeling with data from a conjoint experiment—two powerful techniques in survey research. To our knowledge, this is the first study in the social sciences to pursue this form of methodological triangulation. Our conjoint design allowed us to sketch a multidimensional portrait of Americanness, one sensitive to the myriad cues simultaneously shaping evaluations of national membership (Adem and Ambriz 2023). Arguably, this design also captured respondents' intuitive judgments about who belongs in America's imagined community rather than tapping abstract, disembodied and generalized conceptions of national identity (cf. Arceneaux et al. 2025; Blumenau and Lauderdale 2024). In a second step, we employed LCRs to examine the organizing principles—or "cultural logics"—that guide Americans' understandings of national membership (Hainmueller et al. 2014; Valentino 2021b). Then, with bias-adjusted multinomial logistic regressions, we arrived at the substantive findings detailed in preceding paragraphs.

How might we make sense of these findings amid the volatilities of the current political moment and the rising tide of Trumpism—a time when partisan antipathies have intensified and questions about national identity have grown increasingly salient (Bonikowski et al. 2021; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018)? We propose two possibilities.

First, when confronted with traditional survey instruments, Americans may default to partisanship as a primary, orienting prism through which to make sense of abstract questions that they rarely encounter in the quotidian domains of everyday life[5]—or framed differently, as a heuristic framework through which to understand their core values and cultural commitments. In this sense, partisanship may function as a cultural anchor, exerting a centripetal force that powerfully constrains orientations toward other cultural

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[5] See Keskintürk, Kiley, and Vaisey (2025).

elements and responses to survey items (DellaPosta 2020; Miles 2014; Rawlings and Childress 2024).

Thus, in traditional surveys like the GSS and ANES, where questions are more direct and sensitive to declarative modes of self-theorization (cf. Blumenau and Lauderdale 2024), partisanship may systematically condition how respondents interpret and answer items. To the extent that this is true, polarized responses to questions about national identity may very well be endogenous—a consequence of partisanship guiding rival partisans, even those with similar intuitions about national membership, towards disparate item-response patterns. Nationalist orientations detected in prior work may therefore be less contingent on "*epistemic* beliefs, that is, beliefs aiming to represent the world in an 'accurate' fashion, and more on *symbolic* beliefs, that is, beliefs that orient people to certain groups and worldviews in affective ways" (Keskintürk 2024: 910).

Conversely, in a conjoint experiment on national membership, individuals depend less on overt partisan cues and draw more on automatic, implicit judgments. These intuitions likely have a nondeclarative character (cf. Boutyline and Soter 2021; Lizardo 2017) and emerge through repeated exposures to symbolic elements and cultural objects residing in social settings—popular textbooks, films, memes, rituals, frames, classification schemes, and so on—that build a deep reservoir of tacit knowledge about the boundaries of nationhood. In a conjoint context, these tacit assumptions rooted in public culture are more likely to surface, while partisanship's centripetal pull is more likely to be muted, yielding greater interparty consensus—a pattern consistent with our findings.

Second, our results suggest that partisan debates over U.S. national boundaries may not only reflect competing definitions of Americanness but also contestation over who *truly* represents putatively shared national values. For instance, both Democrats and Republicans treat civic participation (e.g., voting in elections) as an American shibboleth. However, partisans regularly castigate the *other side* for undermining the electoral process. Republicans denounce Democrats for refusing to back "common sense" voter identification laws that have broad bipartisan support (Nadeem 2024),[6] while Democrats admonish Republicans as vote suppressors over their attempts to purge voter rolls and ban the provision of food and water at the polling line (McKay 2021). In other words, the fact that many Democrats and Republicans express similar cultural logics of Americanness is not *necessarily* at odds with the reality of rising affective polarization in America (cf. Iyengar et al. 2019). This paradoxical reality underscores the need for scholarly research to examine how putatively shared national understandings can nonetheless serve as sites for conflict.

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[6] It should be noted that these laws tend to impose heavier penalties on racialized people and communities (Kuk, Hajnal, and Lajevardi 2022).

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Supplementary Appendix

A   Sample Selection

Bovitz is an online research panel with nationally representative capabilities in America. Although Bovitz does not employ probability sampling, their recruitment was structured to approximate White, Black, Latino, and Asian Americans' U.S. population in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, and political party (i.e., within-race quota sampling). Prior studies have shown that opt-in samples in survey experiments perform similarly to population-based samples (Coppock and McClellan 2019; Mullinix et al. 2015). Moreover, samples obtained from Bovitz better approximate probability samples on demographics and attitudes than samples procured from virtually all other recruitment firms (Stagnaro et al. 2024).

Table A1: Sample Characteristics — `Target Quotas in Brackets`

	White	Black	Latino	Asian
Gender				
Men	48% [49%]	46% [48%]	51% [50%]	50% [48%]
Women	52% [51%]	54% [52%]	49% [50%]	50% [52%]
Age				
18–24	6% [10%]	11% [14%]	14% [16%]	24% [11%]
25–44	39% [30%]	45% [37%]	49% [43%]	36% [40%]
45–64	39% [33%]	34% [32%]	31% [30%]	26% [32%]
65+	16% [26%]	9% [17%]	7% [12%]	14% [17%]
Education				
High School or Less	31% [34%]	38% [43%]	45% [56%]	26% [26%]
Some College	35% [30%]	38% [32%]	32% [25%]	25% [17%]
College Degree or More	34% [37%]	24% [25%]	23% [20%]	49% [56%]
Political Party				
Democrat	30% [27%]	68% [67%]	48% [44%]	45% [45%]
Republican	40% [41%]	5% [5%]	21% [18%]	19% [22%]
Independent	28% [29%]	25% [24%]	30% [33%]	34% [31%]
Other	2% [3%]	2% [3%]	2% [5%]	2% [2%]
Sample Size (N)	1131	522	524	525

Note: Due to rounding, some columns may not add up to 100%.

The quota target estimates for gender, age, education, and party are derived from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) and 2020 American National Election Survey (ANES). Overall, 96% of our survey respondents identified as U.S. citizens or legal residents.

B Attribute Selection

Immigrant Generation

Despite the ostensible reputation of the United States as a "nation of immigrants," longer historical roots in the United States are generally associated with a stronger claim to American identity (Alba and Nee 2003). Nativity also represents one of the most obvious explanations for why Latino and Asian Americans are perceived to be foreign.

Religion

Much like race, religion—specifically Christianity—has played a foundational, albeit contested, role in the origins and development of U.S. society and remains intrinsically associated with Americanness (Gorski 2019). In contrast, atheist and non-Christian Americans maintain a fraught claim to national boundaries (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006). Religion may also help explain previously observed relationships between race and U.S. national boundaries to the extent that Asian Americans are less likely to be Christian than White or Black Americans.

Language Fluency

There is broad consensus that English fluency is a fundamental and necessary component of being American (Citrin and Wright 2009). Relatedly, the increasing visibility of Spanish first-language speakers has aggravated nationalist beliefs that English should be declared the official language of the United States (Schildkraut 2005). Bilingualism and accented English are therefore likely to be negatively associated with perceived Americanness.

Political Ideology

Liberals and conservatives today ruthlessly denounce individuals on the other side as "un-American" and "destroying America" (Gage 2017; Tavernise 2021). This characteristic is also important to account for because racial minorities are stereotypically assumed to be more liberal relative to White Americans.

Civic Engagement

Prior research has consistently shown that exercising civic duties is strongly linked to being perceived as truly American (Bloemraad 2022; Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990). Voting is arguably the quintessential and most visible form of American civic engagement.

Favorite Holiday

Many Americans associate their national identity with a range of normative cultural behaviors, such as watching the Super Bowl and liking Apple Pie (Hoffmann, Falk, and Manning 2013). In the same vein, we examine whether respondents associated greater levels of Americanness with those who celebrate July 4th or Thanksgiving in contrast to racial/ethnic holidays such as Saint Patrick's Day, Juneteenth, Cinco de Mayo, and Lunar New Years.

Educational Attainment

We invoke education for two reasons. First, education is a proxy for social class, and high socioeconomic status may be associated with more Americanness. Second, the American Dream is one of the hallmarks of the U.S. national ethos, and it espouses the idea that anyone in the United States can achieve upward social mobility through individual hard work and effort (Devos, Gavin, and Quintana 2010). In this survey, we invoke educational attainment as both a proxy for a person's socioeconomic status and one's commitment to the American Dream.

Residential Location

Prior research has explored how the rural-urban community split in the United States relates to perceptions of American identity (Lichter and Brown 2011). For instance, there is a popular belief that rural Americans are unique in retaining their "authentic" American roots (Boot 2022). Racial minorities are also often assumed to live in urban areas.

C   LCR Selection and Profile Ratings
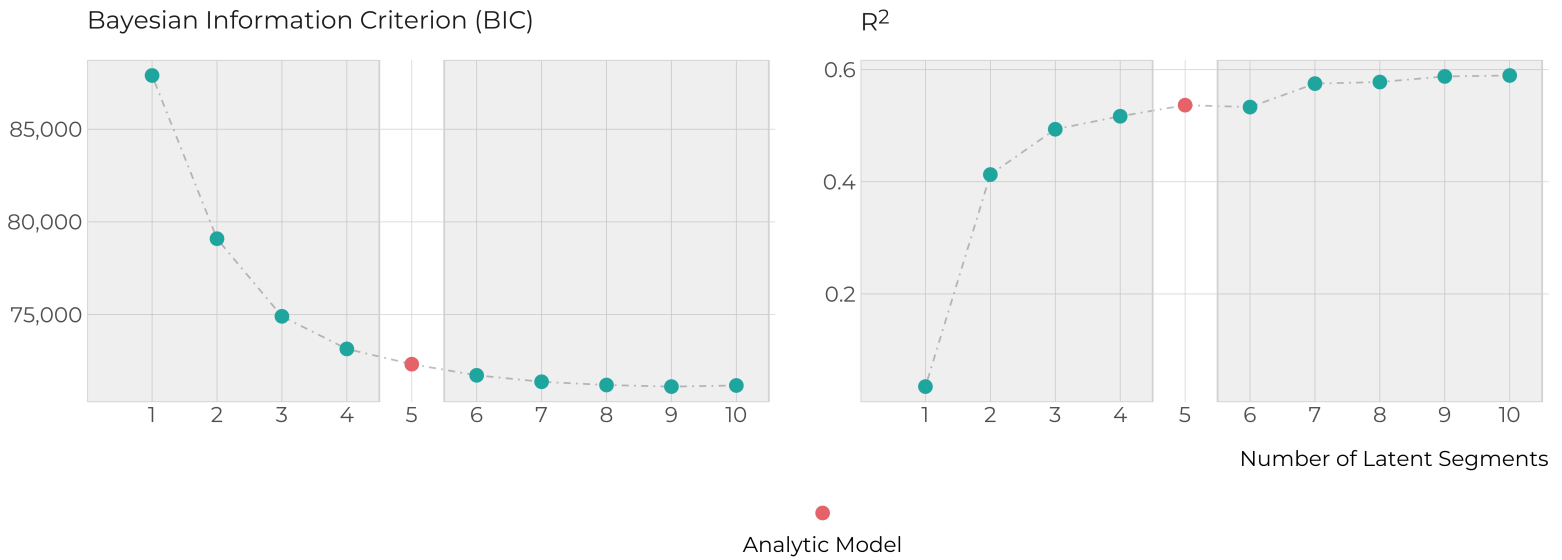
Figure C1: Bayesian information criteria and R^2 values associated with different cluster solutions (k_1 to k_{10}).

Following Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016; 2022), we use relative fit criteria to adjudicate between 10 different latent cluster solutions. A five-cluster solution fits the data well, corresponding to a partition of the sample space where each segment represents at least 14% of the target population. More granular cluster solutions provide only a modest improvement in model fit, and lead to smaller cultural segments that represent minor permutations of existing clusters. Still, to ensure that our analytic choices are not responsible for our main substantive finding—i.e., limited partisan sorting—we perform robustness checks which are summarized in Table 4 of the main text.

Table C1: Five Cultural Logics of Americanness—*Predicted Profile Ratings*

	Civic-Ethnic	Ethno-Civic	Inclusive America	Exclusive (White) America	Assimilationist
Race					
White	5.13	4.06	6.79	3.83	6.00
Latino	4.91	3.97	6.76	3.37	5.92
Black	5.05	4.06	6.78	3.51	6.07
Asian	4.94	3.88	6.72	3.37	5.96
Generation					
1st Generation	4.77	3.89	6.62	3.16	5.82
2nd Generation	5.01	3.97	6.80	3.60	5.97
3^{rd+} Generation	5.24	4.13	6.87	3.83	6.17
Religion					
Christian	5.12	4.13	6.82	3.87	6.03
Non-Christian	5.00	3.95	6.75	3.36	5.97
Atheist	4.90	3.90	6.71	3.32	5.95
English					
Fluent English	5.11	4.08	6.77	3.49	6.05
Bilingual	5.05	4.00	6.78	3.62	6.01
Foreign Accent	4.87	3.90	6.74	3.44	5.89
Political Ideology					
Very Liberal	4.91	3.94	6.80	3.40	6.07
Liberal	5.01	3.92	6.76	3.36	5.98
Leans Liberal	4.98	3.93	6.68	3.33	5.96
Moderate	4.99	4.02	6.77	3.48	5.96
Leans Conservative	5.09	4.02	6.79	3.77	5.99
Conservative	5.02	4.07	6.75	3.62	5.94
Very Conservative	5.05	4.07	6.77	3.68	6.00
Civic Engagement					
Regularly Votes	5.26	4.13	6.80	3.82	6.11
Sometimes Votes	4.97	4.00	6.74	3.48	6.03
Rarely Votes	4.80	3.84	6.74	3.26	5.80
Favorite Holiday					
July 4th	5.11	4.07	6.78	3.58	6.04
Saint Patrick's Day	4.96	3.93	6.71	3.42	5.96
Thanksgiving	5.02	4.01	6.79	3.55	6.03
Juneteenth	4.93	3.94	6.70	3.56	5.85
Cinco de Mayo	4.92	3.84	6.72	3.55	5.85
Lunar New Year	4.78	3.90	6.72	3.20	5.91
Education					
Less than HS	4.89	3.91	6.70	3.36	5.89
HS Degree	5.04	4.00	6.79	3.43	5.97
Some College	5.05	3.97	6.75	3.54	5.99
BA Degree	5.04	4.06	6.81	3.67	6.04
BA+ Degree	5.00	4.03	6.76	3.61	6.03
Residence					
Rural	4.97	3.99	6.79	3.60	5.98
Urban	5.05	3.97	6.74	3.53	6.00
Suburban	5.01	4.02	6.75	3.44	5.98

D   Descriptives, Bias-Adjusted Regressions

Table D1: Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Three-Step Regressions— *Weighted*

	Mean or Share
Attitudes Towards Immigration	
Pro-Immigrant Sentiment	3.31 ($\sigma = 1.28$)
Partisan Identity	
Democrat	38.98%
Republican	30.14%
Independent	28.95%
Other	1.93%
Race	
White	62.41%
Black	12.56%
Latino	18.95%
Asian	6.08%
Sex or Gender	
Man	48.98%
Woman	50.77%
Other	0.24%
Age in Years	
Age	44.41 ($\sigma = 15.37$)
Religious Affiliation	
Protestant	23.06%
Catholic	22.45%
Atheist/Agnostic	14.76%
Spiritual	17.04%
Other	22.68%
Generation	
1st Generation	10.06%
2nd Generation	14.84%
3rd Generation	16.13%
4th+ Generation	58.97%
University Status	
No University Degree	69.52%
University Degree	30.48%
News Consumption	
Not Daily	51.48%
Daily	48.52%
Device	
Laptop/Desktop	29.12%
Phone/Mobile	65.64%
Tablet	5.23%
Region	
Northeast	17.26%
Midwest	20.90%
South	43.06%
West	18.78%

Table D1: Three-Step Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Class Membership

	Civic-Ethnic		Ethno-Civic		Inclusive America		Exclusive (White) America		Assimilationist	
	AME	z	AME	z	AME	z	AME	z	AME	z
Partisan Identity										
Democrat	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Republican	-0.03	-1.05	0.04	1.71	-0.05	-2.70	0.07	3.30	-0.04	-2.03
Independent	0.01	0.35	0.03	1.13	0.02	1.20	0.00	-0.20	-0.06	-2.90
Other	0.12	1.46	-0.04	-0.74	-0.03	-0.65	-0.04	-0.89	-0.01	-0.10
Race										
White	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Black	0.00	0.13	0.00	-0.14	-0.02	-1.17	0.08	2.92	-0.06	-2.64
Latino	0.11	2.89	-0.01	-0.21	0.00	-0.02	-0.01	-0.64	-0.09	-4.10
Asian	0.09	1.32	0.03	0.54	-0.03	-0.78	-0.02	-0.44	-0.07	-1.99
Sex or Gender										
Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Woman	-0.01	-0.61	-0.03	-1.52	0.01	1.01	0.00	0.14	0.02	1.64
Other	0.07	0.29	-0.13	-0.59	0.05	0.29	-0.14	-12.81	0.16	1.12
Age										
Age in Years	-0.00	-0.52	-0.00	-0.93	0.00	0.35	-0.00	-1.77	0.00	3.40
Religious Affiliation										
Protestant	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Catholic	0.04	1.13	0.00	0.02	-0.04	-1.88	-0.01	-0.50	0.01	0.50
Atheist/Agnostic	-0.03	-0.90	-0.10	-3.29	0.11	4.10	-0.04	-1.61	0.06	2.09
Spiritual	-0.00	-0.13	-0.04	-1.45	0.04	1.55	-0.02	-0.92	0.03	1.27
Other	-0.06	-1.87	0.03	1.19	0.02	1.16	0.02	0.78	-0.02	-1.00
Generation										
1st Generation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2nd Generation	-0.01	-0.24	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.31	0.03	0.80	-0.01	-0.21
3rd Generation	0.08	1.64	-0.04	-0.83	0.01	0.37	0.00	0.01	-0.01	-1.34
4^{th+} Generation	0.03	0.75	-0.02	-0.37	0.02	0.78	0.02	0.53	-0.06	-1.56
University Status										
No University Degree	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University Degree	0.07	2.95	-0.06	-3.09	0.02	1.48	-0.07	-4.38	0.04	2.56
News Consumption										
Not Daily	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Daily	-0.05	-2.27	-0.07	-3.62	0.08	5.44	-0.01	-0.43	0.04	2.71
Device										
Laptop/Desktop	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Phone/Mobile	0.02	0.79	0.02	0.85	0.00	-0.25	0.01	0.60	-0.04	-2.56
Tablet	0.07	1.44	0.03	0.72	0.00	-0.05	-0.05	-1.38	-0.06	-1.77
Region										
Northeast	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Midwest	0.02	0.51	-0.05	-1.50	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.03	1.21
South	-0.03	-0.93	-0.05	-1.86	0.00	0.04	0.04	1.56	0.04	2.24
West	-0.04	-1.05	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.84	-0.03	-1.24	0.05	1.97

Note: Table displays average marginal effects (AMEs) of respondent characteristics on cluster membership. Highlighted cells signal that an AME is significant at an α of 0.05.

Table D1: Three-Step Ordinal Logistic Regression Predicting Pro-Immigrant Sentiment

	AME	z
Cultural Logic		
Civic-Ethnic	—	—
Ethno-Civic	-0.27	-4.45
Inclusive America	0.63	8.81
Exclusive (White) America	-0.57	-6.80
Assimilationist	0.35	4.82
Partisan Identity		
Democrat	—	—
Republican	-0.82	-14.49
Independent	-0.54	-9.88
Other	-0.24	-1.62
Race		
White	—	—
Black	0.09	1.33
Latino	0.11	1.51
Asian	0.15	1.05
Sex or Gender		
Man	—	—
Woman	0.04	0.88
Other	0.53	1.29
Age		
Age in Years	-0.01	-9.22
Religious Affiliation		
Protestant	—	—
Catholic	-0.21	-3.18
Atheist/Agnostic	0.13	1.73
Spiritual	0.17	2.43
Other	-0.08	-1.23
Generation		
1st Generation	—	—
2nd Generation	-0.04	-0.38
3rd Generation	-0.06	-0.56
4^{th+} Generation	-0.33	-3.57
University Status		
No University Degree	—	—
University Degree	0.11	2.28
News Consumption		
Not Daily	—	—
Daily	0.09	1.96
Device		
Laptop/Desktop	—	—
Phone/Mobile	0.05	0.94
Tablet	-0.03	-0.33
Region		
Northeast	—	—
Midwest	0.31	4.46
South	0.19	3.05
West	0.28	3.95

Note: Table displays average marginal effects (AMEs) of respondent attributes on supporting more immigration from Asia and Latin America. Highlighted cells signal that an AME is significant at an α of 0.05. As noted in the main text, Latent GOLD produces mean marginal effect estimates for ordinal logistic regressions that account for different ordinal cutpoints.

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