

The American Dream or Nightmare?

Understanding the Change in Perspectives of the American Dream Today

Research Question : How do Americans view the American Dream today and what factors influence their beliefs?

Hypotheses:

Americans view the American Dream with passion and emotion today, but there is a clear increase in pessimism regarding the dream.

The variables age, party identification, and how someone views the news will have the greatest impact on how Americans view the American Dream in society today.

“48% of millenials think the Amerian Dream is dead” (Bump 2015).

Literature Review:

The Epic of America by James Truslow Adams
Origin of the American Dream in mid-1600s; coined term “the American Dream” in 1931

The Undeserving Rich by Leslie McCall
“Americans beliefs are multidimensional, with a bedrock foundation of individualism overlaid with a layer of skepticism about whether the playing field is level in practice” (McCall 153-154).

Beliefs About Inequality: Americans’ Views of What Is and What Ought to Be by James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith
“Everyone who works hard can get ahead” (Kluegel 44).
In 1952, 88% of respondents in National Election Survey agreed with statement
In 1966, 78% of respondents in Muskegon, Michigan survey agreed with statement
In 1986, 70% of respondents in Kluegel and Smith’s survey agreed with statement

“Class Consciousness and the American Dream” by Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba
Results from survey conducted in 1980s show doubt among young Americans that everyone can succeed regardless of birth or position

Research Design:

- Survey conducted through Boston University with respondents across the United States
- 972 respondents
- Eight background questions including independent variables

Independent Variables:

- *Age
- *Party Identification
- *View of News (Pessimistic/Optimistic)
- Race
- Gender
- Education
- Political Ideology
- Vote in 2016 election
- Income
- How often someone watches news

Dependent Variables:

Answer to these two questions:

- Is there more economic opportunity for an 18-year-old today than there was for an 18-year-old 50 years ago?
 - Yes or No?
 - Please explain.
- Do you believe in the American Dream?
 - Yes or No?
 - Please explain.
 - How do you define the American Dream?

Qualitative Data:

Is there more economic opportunity for an 18-year-old today than there was for an 18-year-old 50 years ago?

- “Yes”
- ~ “The invention of social media and technology have opened numerous doors for young people to become more successful.”
 - ~ “An 18-year-old can be higher educated than an 18-year-old 50 years ago.”
 - ~ “The Me Too movement.”

- “No”
- ~ “Bad economy”
 - ~ “The idea that you have to have a college degree to get any job above working manual labor or in fast food is elitist.”

Do you believe in the American Dream?

- “Yes”
- ~ “It can happen if you are motivated.”

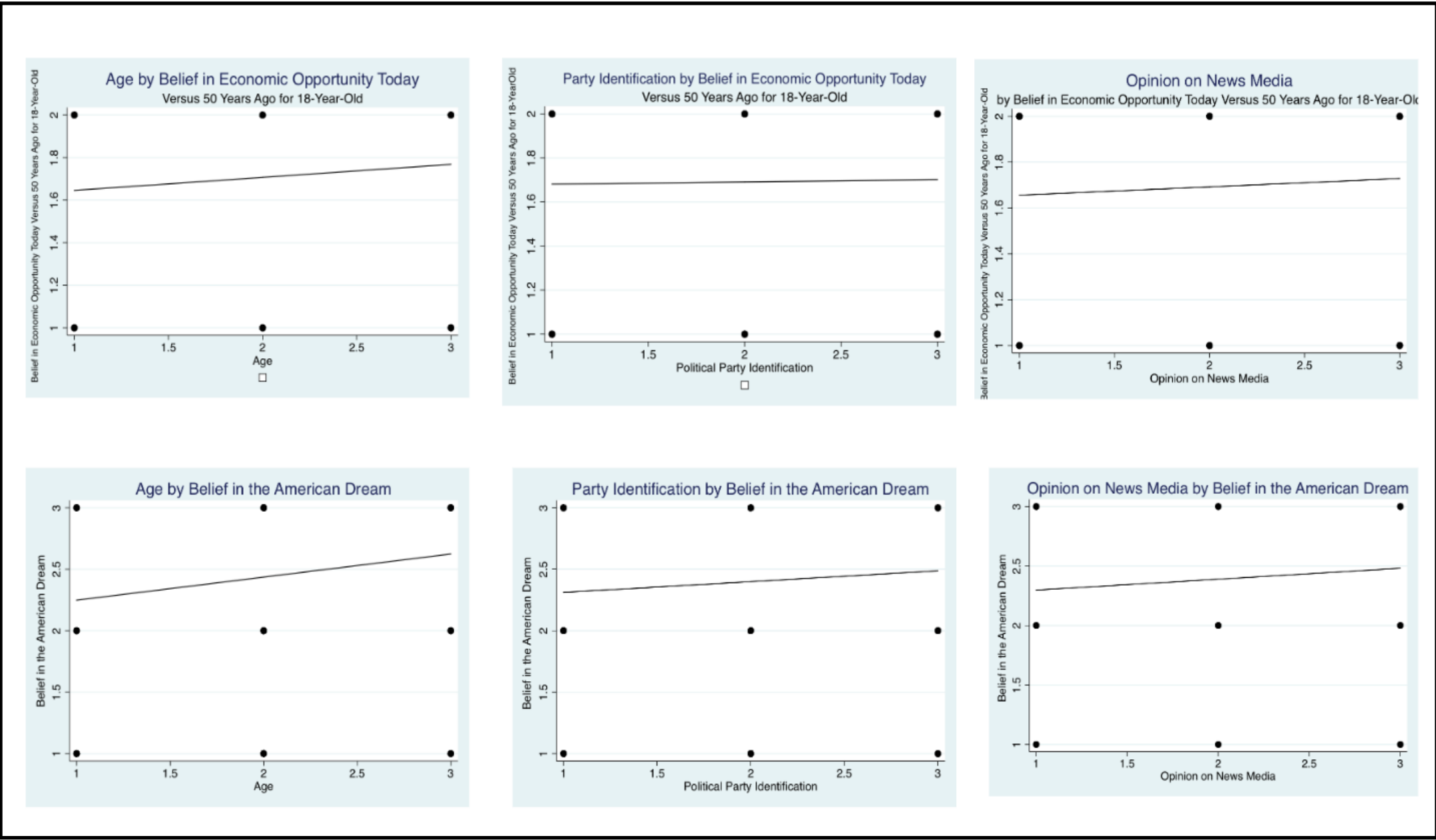
- “No”
- ~ “There’s so much struggle for so many immigrants and Americans. The system is not in the people’s favor.”
 - ~ “The American Dream, I feel only applies to whites, Asians and other foreigners, while black Americans and poor whites are living the American nightmare.”
 - ~ “I used to but no longer do because of Trump.”

Quantitative Data:

	American Dream	Economic Opportunity	Age	Party Identification	Opinion on News
American Dream	1.000				
Economic Opportunity	0.1731	1.000			
Age	0.1489	0.0918	1.000		
Party Identification	0.0834	0.0180	0.0746	1.000	
Opinion on News	0.0977	0.0732	-0.0690	-0.0604	1.000

Economic Opportunity Regression Analysis	Coefficient	Standard Error
American Dream	0.09134	0.01669
American Dream Regression Analysis	Coefficient	Standard Error
Economic Opportunity	0.32795	0.05997

Multivariate Regression Analysis of American Dream Using Economic Opportunity and Age	Coefficient	Standard Error
Age	0.16926	0.0397
Economic Opportunity	0.30462	0.0596
R-squared = 0.0478		
Multivariate Regression Analysis of American Dream Using Economic Opportunity and Party Identification	Coefficient	Standard Error
Party identification	0.08470	0.0333
Economic Opportunity	0.32522	0.0598
R-squared = 0.0364		
Multivariate Regression Analysis of American Dream Using Economic Opportunity and Opinions on News	Coefficient	Standard Error
Is news Pessimistic or Optimistic	0.0803	0.0297
Economic Opportunity	0.3161	0.0599
R-squared = 0.0372		



Conclusions:

- ~Survey supports hypothesis
- Age has strongest impact: the younger a person is, the more pessimistic they are about the American Dream
- ~Majority of Americans still believe in the American Dream