# Everyone Thinks Americans Are Selfish. They're Wrong.

June 02, 2021

The United States is notable for its individualism. The results of several large surveys assessing the values held by the people of various nations [consistently rank](#) the United States as the world's most individualist country. Individualism, as defined by behavioral scientists, means valuing autonomy, self-expression and the pursuit of personal goals rather than prioritizing the interests of the group — be it family, community or country.

Whether America's individualism is a source of pride or concern varies. Some people extol this mind-set as a source of our entrepreneurial spirit, self-reliance and geographic mobility. Others worry that our individualism is antithetical to a sense of social responsibility, whether that means refusing to wear masks and get vaccinated during the pandemic or disrupting the close family bonds and social ties seen in more traditional societies.

Everyone seems to agree that our individualism makes us self-centered or selfish, and to disagree only about how concerning that is.

But [new research](#) suggests the opposite: When comparing countries, my colleagues and I found that greater levels of individualism were linked to more generosity — not less — as we detail in a forthcoming article in the journal Psychological Science.

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