Pessimism Is the One Thing Americans Can Agree On

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Are Americans cockeyed optimists or incorrigible pessimists? Do they think that American society has improved or gotten worse in various ways—and how accurate are their views? You might imagine that the answer would be nuanced, that it would depend on factors like people’s politics or news-consuming habits.

But the answer isn’t nuanced at all, according to a new study. In research published earlier this year in the journal *Clinical Psychological Science*, Gregory Mitchell at the University of Virginia and Philip Tetlock at the University of Pennsylvania looked at these questions empirically. Everybody they tested—young and old, conservative and liberal, news-addicted or not—showed the same pattern. Everybody thought that most things had gotten worse, even if they had actually gotten better. Pessimism reigned.

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