

AMERICA AT 250: A Gen-Z Perspective

by Clark Schrager (United Wisconsin Summer Fellow 2026)

The celebrations are over, the fireworks are done, and, unfortunately, everyone's Team USA jerseys have returned to the closet for another four years. But America's 250th birthday shouldn't have been just another opportunity to celebrate, it should have been the chance to answer an even bigger question: how does America define its next 250 years?

Right now, our country feels divided and the future may seem dim. Our politicians seem beholden to special interests and not the people, and social media shows us only the worst. The good news: America isn't new to division. 250 years ago, when the founders signed the Declaration of Independence, conflict was raging around them. The revolutionaries were outgunned and outnumbered and were scrambling to create a fighting force. Committing what they knew was an act of treason, the founders assumed they were signing their own death warrants. Yet even in the most dangerous situation, the founders had the courage to unite around a set of ideas they were willing to die for: certain inalienable rights, and a government of "We the People."

In a recent interview, Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch reflected on the founding, stating, "It's based on those ideas. We're a creedal nation." That's the creed we risk forgetting. The true threat to our democracy isn't rioters or armed police, those may be symptoms, but a deepening divide caused by a two-party system that structurally rewards extremes. Add in social media algorithms that profit from outrage, and you get a system engineered, not accidentally, but structurally, to pull us apart from the very ideas Gorsuch describes. To realize America's true potential, we must resist efforts to divide us and unite around our shared values.

Despite social media's portrayal, Americans agree on many issues. According to a 2025 poll from [Gallup](#), eight in ten Americans or more believe that our political leaders should compromise, the wealthy should be limited in how they influence elections, and political violence is never okay — issues that algorithms deem divisive but that, in reality, aren't. In fact, 2025 polls from the [Pew Research Center](#) show that the majority of Americans view both parties as too extreme in their policy positions, and a quarter say neither party represents their interests particularly well: Americans need better options. The consequence of this manufactured divide is a growing alienation from our own system: one that drives voters further apart and away from the polls.

This mission to define our next 250 years can begin right here in Wisconsin. In a purple state, there is seemingly plenty of division, but there are many issues that the vast majority of Wisconsinites agree on. For example, Knowles-Nelson, our state's flagship conservation program which expired just last month under our politicians' watch. In a 2025 [poll](#) conducted by the bipartisan research team of FM3 Research (Democratic) and New Bridge Strategy (Republican), Knowles-Nelson had a 93% approval rating. There is no good reason any program with 93% approval should fail to pass our state legislature. Its failure is proof of exactly the disconnect that's pulling us from our creed: a government answering to its parties before its people.

Knowles-Nelson is just one example of that failure of representation, but it also points toward an obvious fix. Our state needs organizations like United Wisconsin, who have pushed for reforms such as [fusion voting](#) — which lets minor parties cross-endorse major-party candidates. Fusion voting matters precisely because it attacks the mechanism, not just the symptom: it gives voters a way to register support for issues like conservation without being locked into a party's full platform, and it gives candidates a reason to build broader coalitions instead of catering to the extremes. With broader coalitions, we can actually push politicians to represent us instead of their special interests.

While hyper-partisanship poses a threat to our democracy, we have an opportunity to unite under our common values. If sensible Wisconsinites and Americans can come together and form a united coalition, it will become the foundation upon which our future will be built, and another 250 years of American history will be defined. It is our job, as citizens of a democracy, to never stop pushing to better our country. That starts with you: call your state legislator about reauthorizing Knowles-Nelson, or look into what United Wisconsin is doing on fusion voting. It is crucial that every Wisconsinite gets involved, because united we can strive to build a better Wisconsin.