

Abstract

If voluntary settlement in the western frontier of the U.S. during the 18th and 19th centuries bolstered independence, an elevated ethos of independence in the contemporary American West may still exist. By comparing college students from four U.S. regions (total N = 578), we predicted and found that regions vary in explicitly held values of independence (i.e., individualism and anti-power). The values of independence were more strongly endorsed in the Mountain West than in the East, with the Midwest falling in-between. Paradoxically, however, the regions were, in large part, no different in implicit psychological tendencies linked to independence. Moreover, on one measure, implicit independence was higher in the North East than in Western regions. These results are consistent with the idea that the early settlers, who had explicit values of independence, produced and bolstered a number of practices of independence, which were then imitated heavily by the rest of population and eventually incorporated into the national culture of the U.S. today.