

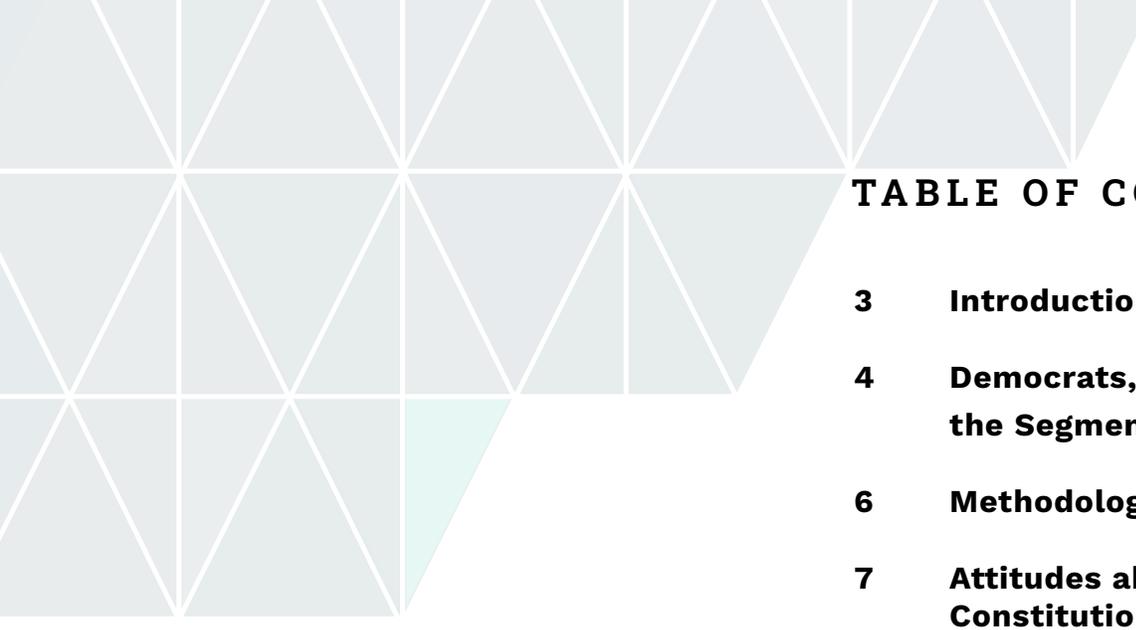
# Understanding Evolving Republican Attitudes Towards Democracy

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**November 2025**



 **Public Agenda**



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## Introduction

Public Agenda and the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University are working together to understand Americans' beliefs about democratic practices and principles. [Previous work](#) led by the SNF Agora Institute identified a distinct group of Republicans whose attitudes diverged from their fellow partisans on many issues related to political institutions and democratic norms. These Republicans were characterized by their shared belief that Joe Biden won the 2020 election. The research found that dividing Republicans into two groups—those who believed that Donald Trump was the rightful winner of the 2020 election, and those who did not or were unsure—provided a useful framework for understanding key divides among Republicans.

In recent years, responses to questions about the 2020 election are less predictive of a divide among Republicans. Now, in the second Trump administration, we explore whether other attitudes about democratic institutions can usefully sort Republicans and guide efforts to reduce polarization and restore trust in government and other institutions.

### **We seek to understand:**

- Are there new dividing lines in the Republican party? What are they? Are there differing views among Republicans about how the federal government should function? If so, do those attitudes differ depending on media exposure and broader attitudes about the rule of law?
- How are Republicans—and other Americans—wrestling with questions about constitutional authority, checks and balances, democratic norms, institutional trust, and President Trump himself?
- How do various categories of Republicans feel about their political opponents, and do these attitudes contribute to increasing political polarization in the United States?
- Do Republicans identify more closely with President Trump or with the Republican party?

From May through October 2025 we undertook a three-part qualitative and quantitative study to examine these questions. First, we explored variation in attitudes about democratic institutions among Republicans and whether these beliefs are related to other differences in behavior and opinion. We fielded five questions on topics related to presidential authority, the war in Ukraine, the grant of power to Elon Musk (a salient issue when the survey was administered), and attitudes about the opposite party in a national omnibus survey. Amongst other results, we found that approximately 34 percent of Republicans believe that the president should not overturn or ignore court decisions, even if he believes that doing so is in the nation's best interest. This single finding, which correlated with other beliefs about democratic norms, proved powerful in capturing broader growing divides among Republicans.

Next, we conducted three focus groups in July 2025 to further explore similarities and differences in beliefs among Republicans who agree, disagree, or are unsure whether the president can overturn or ignore court decisions. The focus groups explored participants' feelings about the president, the constitution, the media, and other aspects of life in the United States.

Finally, we developed a nationally representative survey, using insights from the focus groups. This 13-minute survey was administered in mid-August 2025 and included an oversample of Republicans or Independents who lean toward the Republican party.

(Please see the methodology for more information.)

# Democrats, Independents, and the Segmentation of Republicans

Republican responses to our question about following court decisions are also highly correlated with a host of attitudes and opinions about politics, social connectivity, and the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, while our research examines attitudes about democracy, the constitution, and connectivity among all Americans, we focus on three distinct segments of Republicans. To distinguish these groups, we have assigned descriptive (if imperfect) labels.

## 1. Trump-first Republicans

We define Trump-first Republicans as Republicans who believe the president can ignore court decisions if they believe doing so is in the nation's best interest. These Republicans are most likely to describe themselves as "Trump," "MAGA," or "America First" Republicans. They comprise 29 percent of Republicans, and 98 percent of them reported voting for Trump in 2024.

Trump-first Republicans:

- Believe Donald Trump should be allowed to run for a third term
- Believe Congress should impeach judges who rule against the president
- Are happy with the Trump agenda and think the Republican party is moving in the right direction
- Had their trust in government institutions significantly damaged by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Are more likely than other Republicans to talk only with Republicans about politics
- Do not believe Joe Biden won the 2020 election

## 2. Constitution-first Republicans

Constitution-first Republicans are Republicans who believe the president can not ignore court decisions if they believe doing so is in the nation's best interest. The largest group of these Republicans chose the word "moderate" to describe themselves (34 percent). Constitution-first Republicans are ideologically more moderate than the other two groups of Republicans we identify, but sit to the right of Democrats. Whereas 63 percent of Democrats identify as liberal or very liberal, only 2 percent of Constitution-first Republicans identify as liberal—the same proportion as among Trump-first or Party-first Republicans. Constitution-first Republicans account for 34 percent of Republicans and are overwhelmingly Trump voters, with 90 percent reporting having voted for Trump in 2024.

Constitution-first Republicans:

- Strongly believe that politicians are obligated to follow constitutional requirements, even if they are inconvenient
- Believe in checks and balances between the legislative and executive branches
- Are skeptical that Biden won the 2020 election but have generally higher levels of trust in all election outcomes than other Republicans
- Have more politically diverse social groups and are more likely than other Republicans to regularly talk to Democrats
- Feel less represented by Donald Trump, Republican-elected politicians, and other Republican voters

## Party-first Republicans

Party-first Republicans are unsure or uncertain about whether the president needs to follow court decisions. This uncertainty may be due to indifference, genuine uncertainty about the president's constitutional obligations, lack of knowledge, or ambivalence. Party-first Republicans use a variety of terms to refer to themselves, including Trump Republicans, MAGA Republicans, and moderate Republicans. They account for 36 percent of Republicans, and 97 percent of them reported voting for Trump in 2024. We call them Party-first as they consistently vote for the Republican party but have more ambivalent opinions about US institutions and politicians.

Party-first Republicans:

- Feel less represented by specific Republican politicians and thought leaders when compared to

the other two groups of Republicans

- Do not believe that Donald Trump should be allowed to run for a third term
- Do not regularly speak about politics with other people
- Are more likely than other Republican groups to hold “uncertain” or “unsure” beliefs about the rule of law, constitutional requirements, and the balance of power

### Differences between Democrats, Independents, and the three Republican subtypes

Large majorities of Democrats (91 percent) and Independents (60 percent) agree that the president should not ignore court rulings, even if he or she believes doing so is in the best interest of the United States. Republicans—as expected based on the results from the first omnibus national survey—are split on their answer to this question. Thirty-four percent of Republicans agree with the majority of Democrats and Independents, but 29 percent of Republicans believe that the president should be able to ignore court decisions if they believe doing so is in the nation’s best interest. Thirty-six percent of Republicans are unsure. Other than these noticeable differences by party, there are few differences across demographic groups.

All relevant demographic characteristics of survey participants are included in Table 1. The three groups of Republicans are similar across most demographic categories, although Party-first Republicans are more likely to be women, while Constitution-first Republicans are more likely to be men. Constitution-first Republicans are also more ideologically moderate than other Republicans.

	Trump-first Republicans	Constitution-first Republicans	Party-first Republicans	Democrats	Independents
<b>Generation</b>					
Gen Z (18-29)	12%	18%	13%	22%	25%
Millennial (30-44)	18%	21%	19%	27%	30%
Gen X (45-64)	39%	33%	39%	29%	31%
Boomer (65+)	31%	28%	29%	22%	14%
<b>Gender</b>					
Women	49%	44%	56%	54%	52%
Men	51%	56%	44%	46%	48%
<b>Education</b>					
High School or Lower	42%	31%	40%	31%	44%
Some College	32%	29%	30%	30%	29%
College	17%	27%	21%	22%	17%
Post-Grad	9%	14%	9%	16%	10%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White	78%	79%	81%	57%	53%
Black	3%	3%	2%	19%	15%
Hispanic	12%	10%	9%	15%	18%
Other	7%	7%	8%	9%	15%
<b>Ideology</b>					
Very liberal/liberal	2%	2%	1%	63%	13%
Moderate	15%	26%	22%	30%	52%
Conservative/ Very Conservative	80%	71%	73%	3%	14%
Not sure	2%	2%	4%	4%	21%
<b>N</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>1000</b>

# Methodology

## Omnibus

- 2,000 participants.
- Survey fielded from May 1 through May 5, 2025 in both English and Spanish.
- Participants were asked five questions (see [Appendix](#)) as part of a longer omnibus survey administered by YouGov.
- The sampling frame is a politically representative "modeled frame" of U.S. adults, based on the American Community Survey public use microdata file, public voter file records, the 2020 Current Population Survey voting and registration supplements, the 2020 National Election Pool exit poll, and the 2020 Cooperative Election Study (CES) surveys, including demographics and 2020 presidential vote.

## Focus groups

- Three focus groups with Republican and Republican-leaning Independents; participants were selected to ensure diversity of gender, race, age, and income.
- Eight to ten participants in each group.
- Groups were divided based on their answer to the question, "Do you think that the president should be able to ignore court rulings if they believe doing so is in the nation's best interest?" Participants who said yes (Trump-first Republicans) were put in one group, participants who said no (Constitution-first Republicans) were put into another, and participants who said they didn't know (Party-first Republicans) were put into the third.
- The focus groups ran for two hours. Topics covered included attitudes about the U.S. Constitution, the media environment, and participants' experiences living as a conservative in the U.S.
- Focus group quotes are edited for grammar and clarity.

## Full national survey

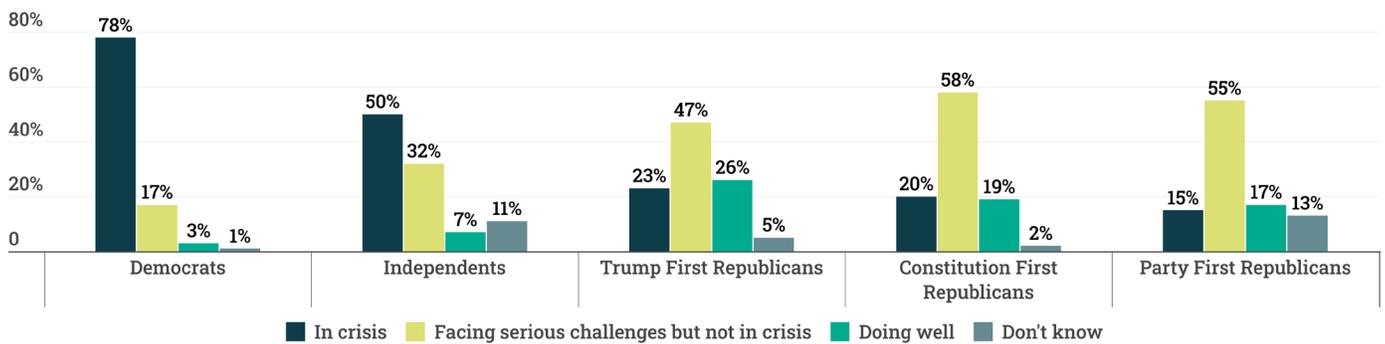
- 4,500 participants (2,500 Republicans [and Republican-leaning Independents], 1,000 Democrats [and Democrat-leaning Independents], and 1,000 Independents).
- Thirteen-minute survey length, fielded in both English and Spanish.
- Administered by YouGov from August 14 to August 29, 2025.
- Margin of error: +/- 1.76%
- Margins of error are larger for subgroups.
- Weighting was used to ensure the sample was broadly representative of the US population using the CES 2024 sampling frame.
- See [Appendix](#) for full survey.

# Attitudes About the US Constitution and the State of Democracy Among Americans

## Americans are deeply concerned about the state of democracy and democratic institutions.

Most Americans are concerned about the state of democracy in the United States, though the bases for those concerns are likely varied. Eight-four percent of Americans believe that U.S. democracy is either in crisis or facing serious challenges but not yet in crisis. Only 11 percent say U.S. constitutional democracy is “doing well.” Democrats (78 percent) and Independents (50 percent) are aligned in their beliefs that democracy is “in crisis.” Republicans are more likely to say that democracy is “facing serious challenges but is not yet in crisis.” Only 23 percent of Trump-first Republicans, 20 percent of Constitution-first Republicans, and 15 percent of Party-first Republicans think that democracy is in crisis.

The United States is meant to be a constitutional democracy, where citizens have a voice, rights are protected, and laws are fairly enforced. These days, would you say that our country's constitutional democracy is:

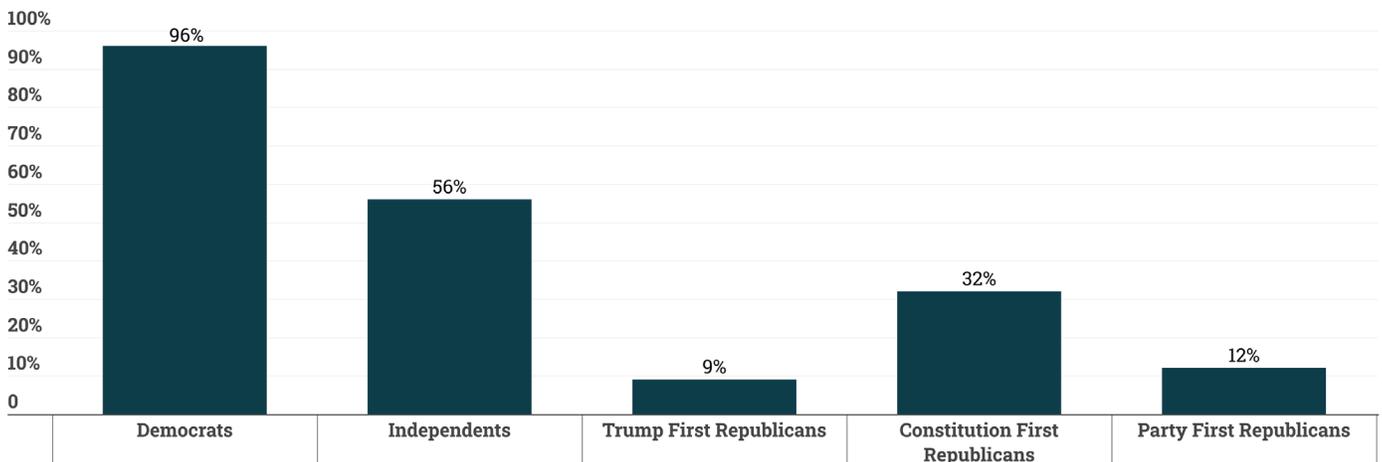


## Americans are distrustful of federal elections but attitudes vary by party and when looking at specific electoral outcomes.

Free and fair elections are at the heart of U.S. democracy, but Americans are concerned about the fairness of elections at both the local and national level. The majority of Republicans (82 percent) are not confident that Joe Biden was the legitimate winner of the 2020 election. This is in stark contrast to the 96 percent of Democrats and 56 percent of Independents who are confident or very confident that Biden won. Constitution-first Republicans are more confident that Biden won the 2020 election than other Republicans, but they still exhibit lower levels of confidence than Democrats and Independents.

How confident are you that Joe Biden was the lawful winner of the 2020 presidential election?

Percent saying they are confident or very confident



These divergent levels of confidence among Republicans stem from fundamental differences in their underlying concerns about the 2020 electoral process. Focus group participants pointed to concerns about vote counting or alleged illegal voting by non-citizens as evidence of fraud, using these claims to justify their belief that Trump was the rightful winner of the 2020 election.

*“There was a lot of proven voter fraud during the 2020 election. It was so strange that Trump was winning by a landslide and then you go to bed and oh, golly gee, Biden got elected.”*  
 – Party-first Republican

*“Well, when you go to sleep the night before and he’s up 80 million votes but the next morning, he lost by a hundred million. Wait a second, how is that even possible?”*  
 – Trump-first Republican

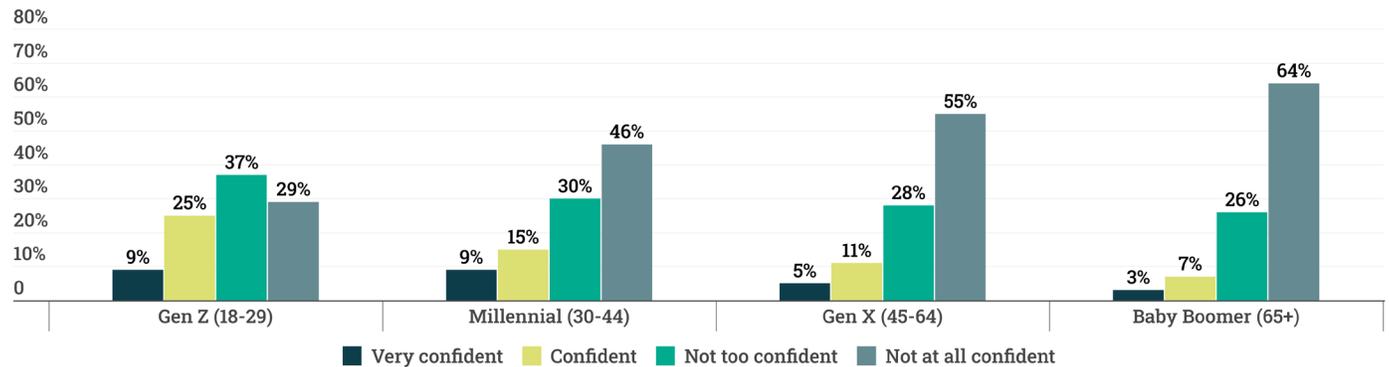
*“[Fraud happens because of people] not showing voter or legal ID either. In a lot of the states there could have been so many illegals voting, saying that they’re registered using somebody else’s name.”*  
 – Party-first Republican

Constitution-first Republicans—many of whom believe that Trump won the 2020 election—attributed their lack of confidence in elections less to the 2020 election itself, and more to generalized distrust of the election system as a whole.

*“I don’t think elections are unfair, but I do think it’s fair in the sense every vote is counted. I don’t think the election is stolen or anything like that, but I just think it’s just persuasion by the powerful. It’s skewed towards the people that have money, right?”*  
 – Constitution-first Republicans

Among Republicans, younger Americans are more likely to be confident that Biden won in 2020. Thirty-four percent of Gen Z Republicans are either confident or very confident that Biden was the rightful 2020 winner, compared to just 10 percent of Boomer Republicans.

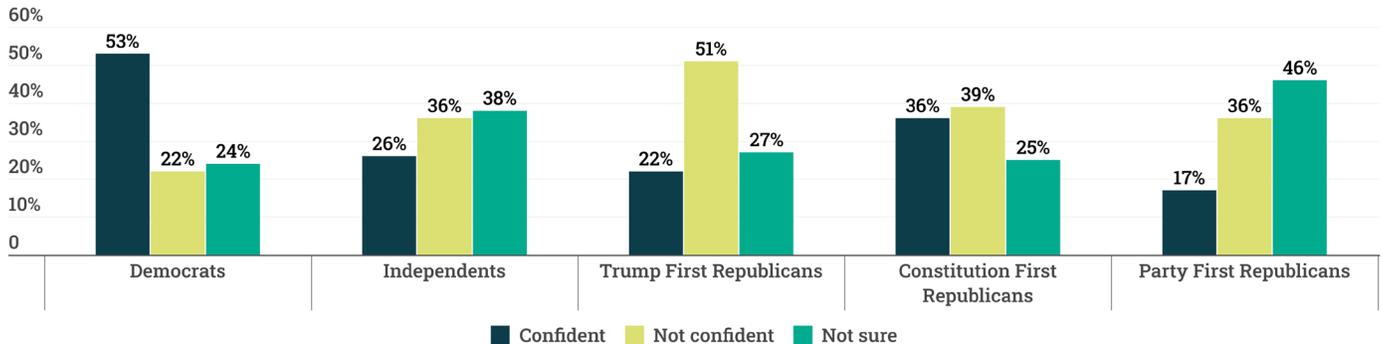
How confident are you that Joe Biden was the lawful winner of the 2020 presidential election?



Distrust in the federal election system is not uncommon among Americans; 33 percent believe that U.S. federal elections are not free and fair. However, the 2020 presidential election polarized sentiments about election integrity. Republicans express higher levels of confidence in federal elections overall than they do about the 2020 presidential election specifically. Among Trump-first Republicans, 22 percent are confident that federal elections are free and fair, compared to only 9 percent who are confident that Joe Biden won the 2020 election. Democrats, conversely, are far more confident that Joe Biden won the 2020 election than they are in their belief that federal elections are free and fair generally.

On the other hand, all groups of Americans have more confidence in their local elections, with 59 percent of Americans agreeing that they are free and fair.

**Do you believe that federal elections, like for the US president or your member of Congress, in the United States are free, fair, and secure?**



**Americans are very distrustful of politicians and government officials, and the COVID-19 pandemic decreased trust in institutions even more.**

Elections aren’t the only target of distrust. Americans have exceedingly low levels of trust in the government and politicians, as well. Seventy percent of all Americans agree that “politicians don't care what people like me think.” Democrats agree with the statement “politicians in Washington cannot be trusted to put the interests of the country ahead of the interests of their party” at higher levels than Republicans (77 percent to 67 percent), but all Americans exhibit high levels of agreement with this statement. Only 23 percent of Democrats and Republicans believe state politicians put the interests of Americans ahead of their own either most or all of the time.

Participants in our focus groups of Republicans also expressed low levels of trust, even though they continue to support President Trump.

*“Ten years ago I trusted the Republican party, and now I just don't think I trust the government at all.”  
– Trump-first Republican*

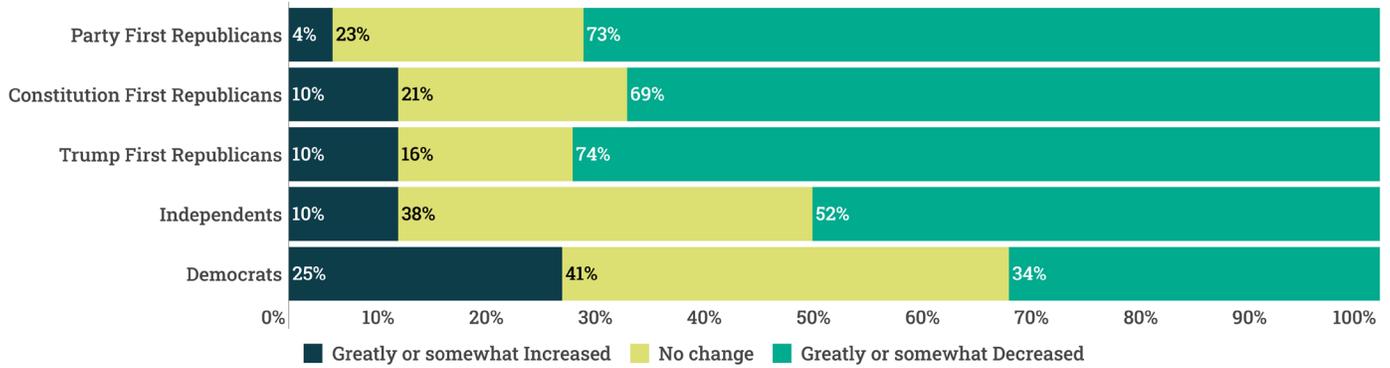
Among Trump-first Republicans, the COVID-19 pandemic was identified as dramatically affecting their trust in government. Several participants explained that the media and politicians were acting in ways that didn’t make sense to them.

*“Social media is completely censored, especially during COVID. You would hear nothing negative about the COVID vaccine, about masks. Everything that was the truth was censored.”  
– Trump-first Republican*

*“A lot of it is common sense. Especially with the masks and the plexiglass. You put a mask on when you walk into the restaurant, but you could take it off when you sit down. I didn't realize that an illness was that intelligent. A lot of it is common sense. Just think about what they're saying.”  
– Trump-first Republican*

While Trump-first Republicans were vocal about the impact of the pandemic on their trust in government, all Republicans, and a slight majority of Independents, noted the federal government’s handling of COVID as a reason for their decreased trust in government.

**Did the government's handling of COVID-19 increase or decrease your trust in federal institutions?**

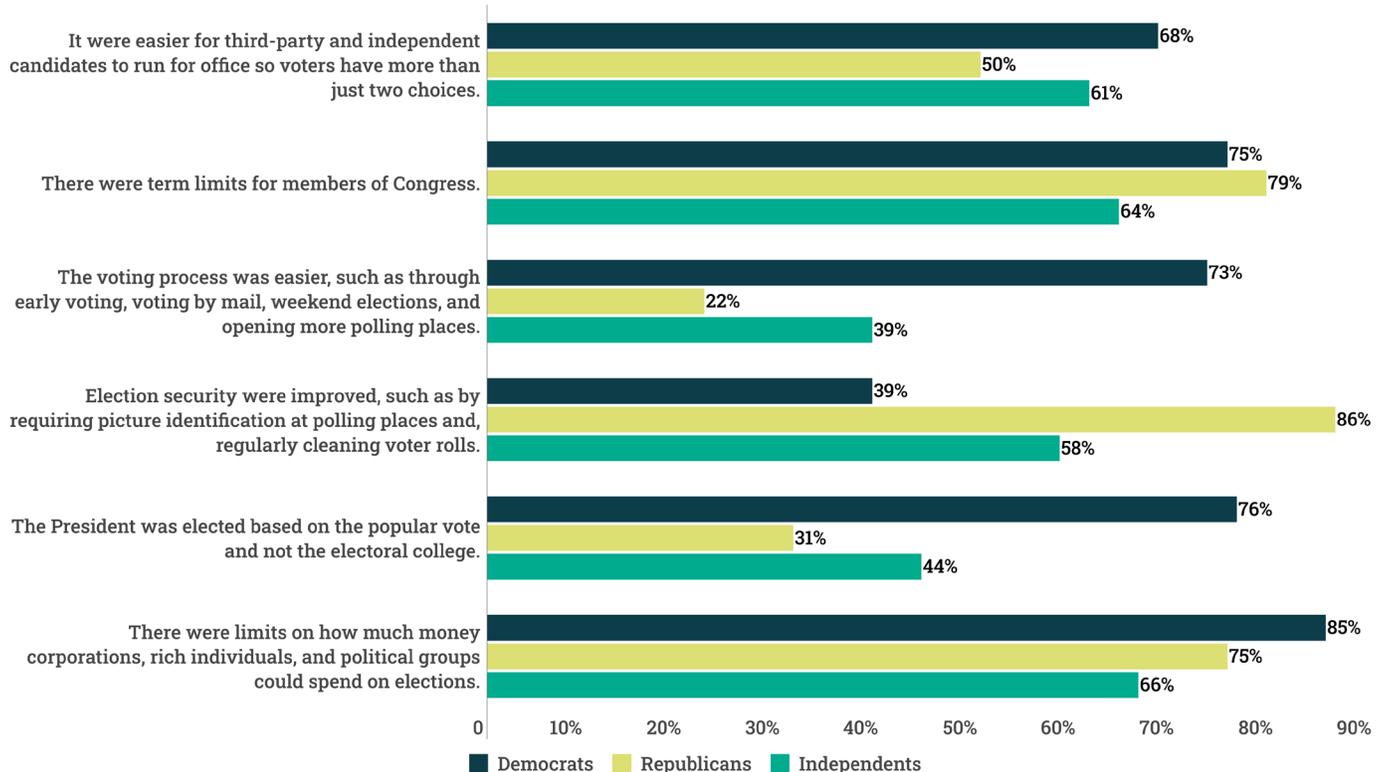


These data alone do not explain why Americans say the government’s handling of the pandemic caused them to lose trust. There were no substantive differences in responses to this item based on age. However, Americans with post-graduate degrees were slightly more likely to say that the pandemic led them to trust the government more (24 percent), compared to those with high school degrees or less (15 percent), or Americans who had completed some college (13 percent).

**Strategies for increasing trust in government vary in popularity, but several show cross-partisan approval.** Because trust in government institutions and elections is low, advocacy groups from across the ideological spectrum have proposed reforms intended to increase trust in democratic institutions. These reforms vary in the degree to which various groups of Americans believe they will increase trust in elections. Some, such as term limits and limiting money in politics, are popular among all groups, while others, including election security measures such as voter ID, are more polarizing. There are slight, but not substantive, differences among the three Republican camps.

**How would each of the following affect your trust in the political process?**

*Percent saying the reform would increase their trust greatly or a little*



Americans consider the constitution extremely important, but attitudes about elements of the constitution vary by party and among Republicans.

The constitution provides a foundational framework for government in the United States, outlining the principles that underpin political processes. Regardless of party, Americans express widespread support for the constitution, with 97 percent believing that it is “somewhat important” or “very important” for elected officials to follow. Despite this consensus, there is wide variation in views about how the U.S. Constitution should be interpreted and applied.

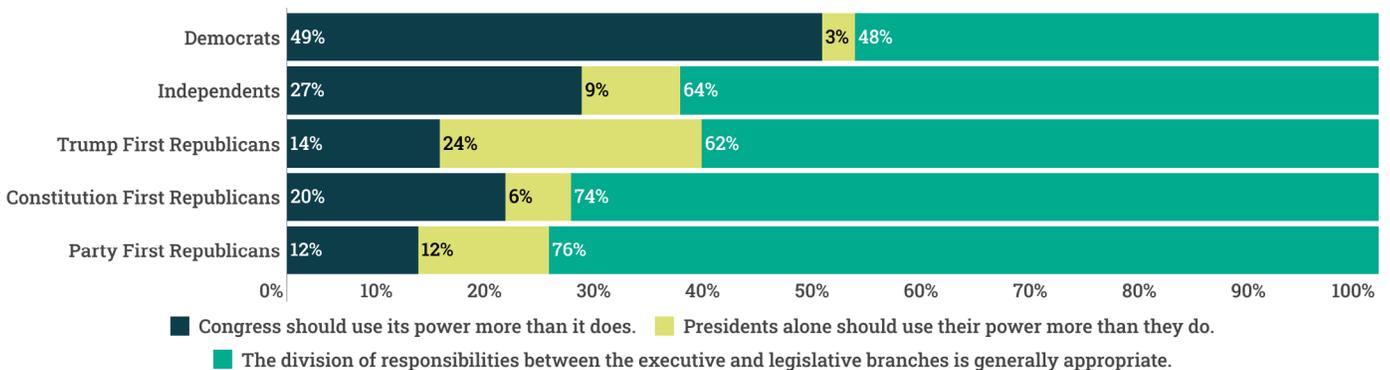
Forty percent of Americans believe that the constitution should be followed as originally written, a sentiment more strongly held by Republicans (60 percent). A far smaller percentage of Democrats (22 percent) and Independents (37 percent) hold this view. Sixty-seven percent of Democrats say the constitution is a living document that should evolve with the times. This is much greater than the proportion of Republicans (28 percent) and Independents (43 percent) who say the same.

While all groups of Republicans claim to be constitutional literalists, our results show differences in attitudes about elements of the constitution. Constitution-first Republicans are more likely than other Republicans to strongly believe that checks and balances are very important, even if they slow down policymaking (although both Party-first Republicans and Trump-first Republicans do believe that these checks and balances are at least somewhat important).

Republicans also differ in their assessment of who should ultimately be responsible for crafting the laws of the country. When asked to consider the next ten years, and reminded that each party is likely to control the legislative and executive branch at some point during that period but not necessarily at the same time, Constitution-first Republicans (52 percent) were more likely to say that the legislative branch should be responsible for lawmaking, compared to just 23 percent of Trump-first Republicans. Trump-first Republicans were much more likely to say that “it depends” in response to that question. Sixty-one percent of Democrats and 35 percent of Independents also agreed that the legislative branch should be responsible for lawmaking.

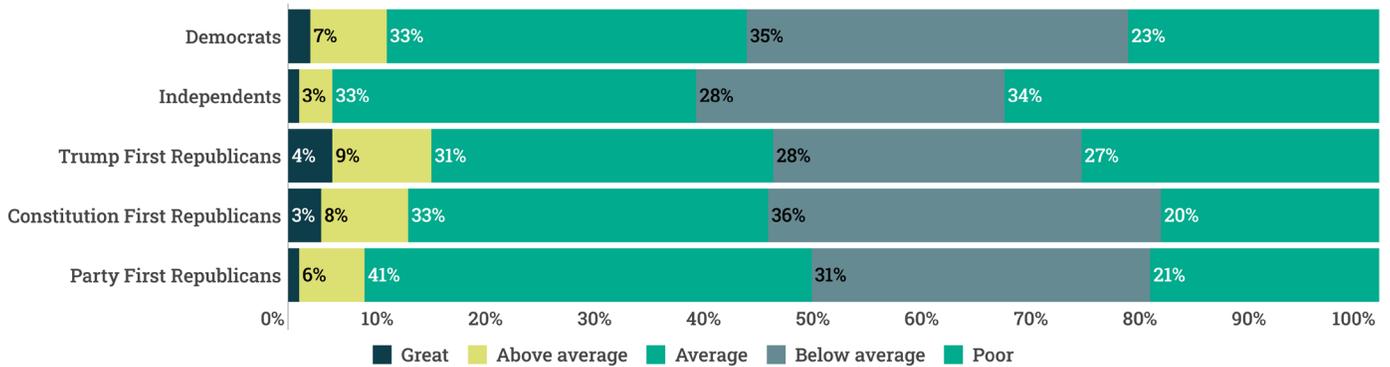
Constitution-first Republicans diverge sharply from other Republicans in how much power they believe the president should use. Only 6 percent believe that the president should use their power more than they currently do, compared to 24 percent of Trump-first Republicans and 12 percent of Party-first Republicans. However, unlike Democrats, Constitution-first Republicans do not believe that Congress should use their powers more, and instead believe the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches is appropriate.

**The Constitution gives the legislative branch the responsibility of writing the laws, and the executive branch the responsibility of executing the laws. Which of these comes closest to your opinion of how the legislative and executive branches' responsibilities are shared?**



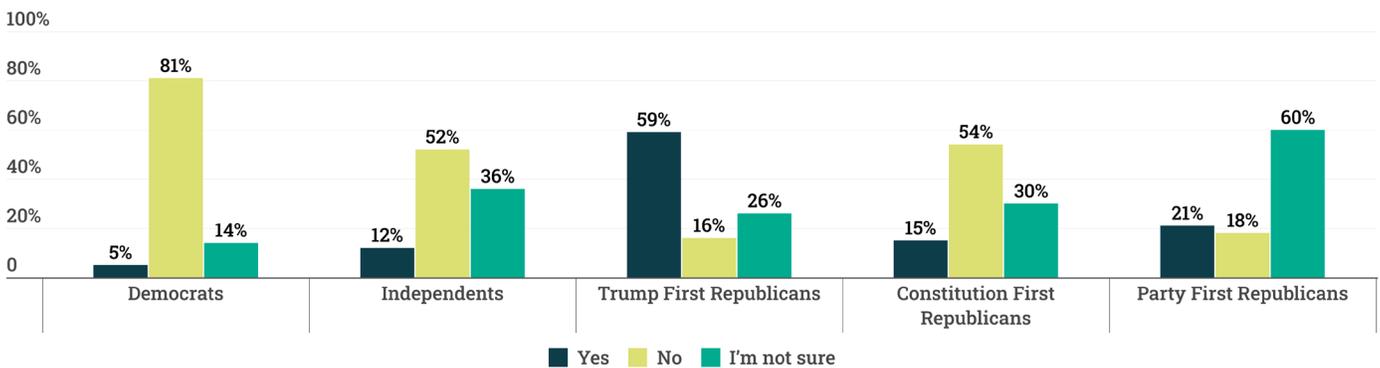
The reluctance among most Americans to give more power to Congress might also be due to dissatisfaction over its performance as a legislative body. Majorities of all Americans, regardless of party identification, believe that in the last ten years, Congress has done a poor or below average job of handling the “big issues.”

During the last two decades, each party has controlled both houses of Congress at the same time for at least six years each, meaning both parties have had their chance. Over that time, how would you rate Congress’s performance at taking on the big issues?



How the president should handle a Congress unwilling to promote or advance his policy agenda is another source of division within the Republican party. Democrats, Independents, and Constitution-first Republicans all agree that the president should not be able to bypass Congress to get things done faster. Trump-first Republicans diverge, believing that the President should be allowed to bypass Congress. Party-first Republicans are unsure. While this question was phrased with a general “president” as the actor, it is likely that if asked during a different presidency these responses would vary.

Do you think that the President should be able to bypass Congress to change policy or allocate funds if it will get things done faster?



Generally, these findings suggest that Constitution-first Republicans are wary of expanding presidential power, even though they generally support President Trump.

*“I think because Congress is ineffective these days, compared to prior terms, the executive has grown in power and scope so much that the administrative agencies are making all of the laws that bind all of us. That’s unconstitutional in the sense that it should come from Congress. A bunch of presidents recently have violated that, most recently Biden with the student loan forgiveness and then Trump with a bunch of things.”*  
 – Constitution-first Republican

Trump-first Republicans want a strong president, but only if that president is Trump. Constitution-first Republicans are consistent in their support for a balance of power regardless of who is in office.

The conflation of the presidency with the sitting president likely over represents how strongly Trump-first Republicans feel about a strong presidency. If President Biden or President Obama were in office, Trump-first Republicans might be more hesitant to say the president should have more power, and Democrats might be more inclined to say so. However, Constitution-first Republicans are consistent in their attitudes about the balance of power, despite their general support for Trump’s policies.

To illuminate how much Republican beliefs about the presidency are tied to the sitting president, we checked support for a third Trump term. When asked, “Should the constitution be changed to allow for presidents to run for a third term?” a minority of Republicans agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. But when asked, “Should the constitution be changed to allow for Donald Trump to run for a third term?” fifty-six percent of Trump-first Republicans agreed with that statement, an 18 percent increase compared to the previous phrasing. There is no substantive difference in the response to that question based on the phrasing among Constitution-first Republicans, Democrats, or Independents. Party-first Republicans are more likely to support President Trump’s seeking a third term than changing the constitution, but at lower levels than Trump-first Republicans in both cases.

	Democrats	Independents	Trump-first	Constitution-first	Party-first
<b>The constitution should be changed to allow presidents to run for a third term</b>					
Agree	3%	12%	38%	17%	19%
Neither agree nor disagree	6%	22%	27%	16%	32%
Disagree	91%	66%	35%	67%	48%

	Democrats	Independents	Trump-first	Constitution-first	Party-first
<b>Donald Trump should be allowed to run for a third term</b>					
Agree	2%	10%	56%	19%	36%
Neither agree nor disagree	3%	17%	15%	13%	21%
Disagree	95%	73%	29%	68%	43%

Constitution-first Republicans view the constitution as a rulebook and believe that no one is above those rules. This belief was shared in focus groups and is reflected in survey responses. Though 90 percent of Constitution-first Republicans voted for Trump, and many believe he was the rightful winner of the 2020 election, they do not think that he—or any politician—should be able to run for a third presidential term.

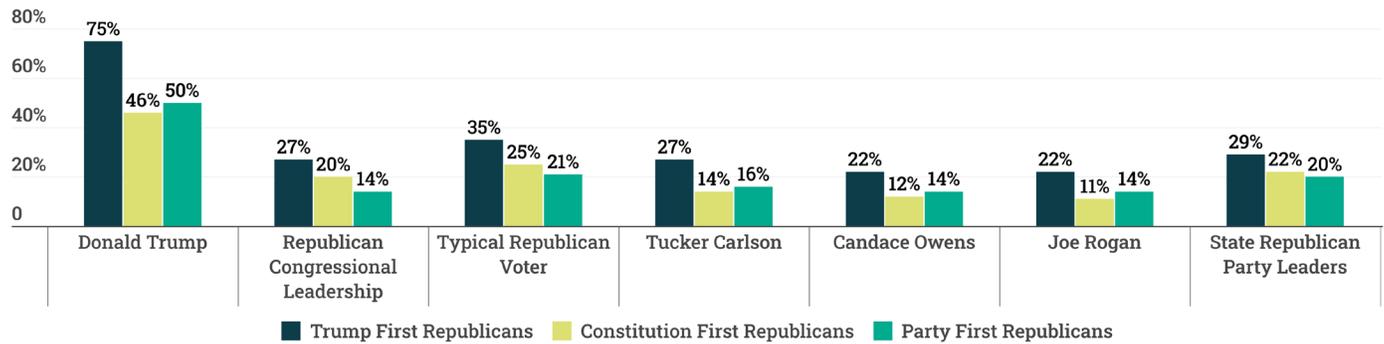
*“The rules are there for a reason. Why should you break them?  
It's like in traffic, you're gonna break a rule, run through the red light, there will be consequences.”  
– Constitution-first Republican*

**Republicans feel represented by President Trump, but some divisions emerge.**

Republicans were asked whether they felt strongly represented by a short list of Republicans and thought leaders, including Donald Trump, Republican congressional leaders, the typical Republican voter, Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, Joe Rogan, and state Republican Party leaders. All Republicans were more likely to identify with Donald Trump than with any other Republican politician or thought figure. Seventy-five percent of Trump-first Republicans feel very well represented by Trump, compared to 46 percent of Constitution-first Republicans and 50 percent of Party-first Republicans. While not as pronounced as gaps in sentiments towards Trump, similar divisions exist across prominent political figures. Trump-first Republicans feel more represented by these leaders than do other Republicans. Party-first Republicans are the most likely group to say that they don't know how well represented they feel by the groups or people.

**How well do you think your views are represented by:**

*Percent saying that they feel strongly represented*



Support for Trump is markedly greater than for any other Republican figure listed. This support extends beyond voters merely agreeing with his policy positions; focus group participants describe Trump as someone with whom they deeply identify. They report that he says things they agree with and says them without a filter, unlike other politicians. This was the case for all groups of Republicans.

*“I love Trump. I think he's doing an excellent job representing how I feel, how my family feels.”  
– Trump-first Republican*

*“I think that Trump is a businessman first and a politician second. He speaks the truth and he doesn't sugarcoat some of the things that he says, which can probably get him into trouble sometimes. But I think what some people are thinking is that they're tired of politics. They want to hear the truth. I do appreciate that he says what he means.”  
– Party-first Republican*

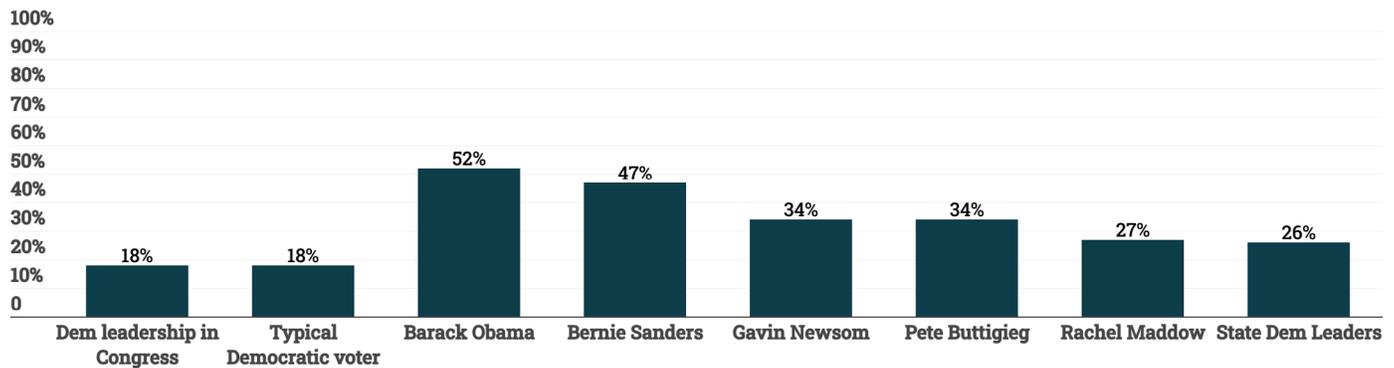
Beyond these generally positive feelings toward Trump, 85 percent of Republicans also believe their party is moving in the right direction and should continue to move in that direction when Trump leaves office. Constitution-first Republicans also agree that the party is moving in the right direction, but at lower rates: 73 percent agree that the party is headed down the right path, while 27 percent believe that after Trump leaves office the party needs to dramatically change.

While not the focus of this work, Democrats also show some differences in attitudes toward their party and thought leaders. Generally, Barack Obama is the politician by whom Democrats feel the most “strongly represented” (52 percent), but Kamala Harris (43 percent) and Bernie Sanders (47 percent) are also viewed by Democrats as good representatives of their beliefs.

Congressional party leadership is not viewed as strongly representative by members of either party. Only 18 percent of Democrats and 17 percent of Republicans say that they feel strongly represented by their congressional leaders.

**Asked of Democrats: How well do you think your views are represented by:**

*Percent saying that they feel strongly represented*



**Americans live in siloed social communities and rarely talk with people who hold different beliefs from their own.**

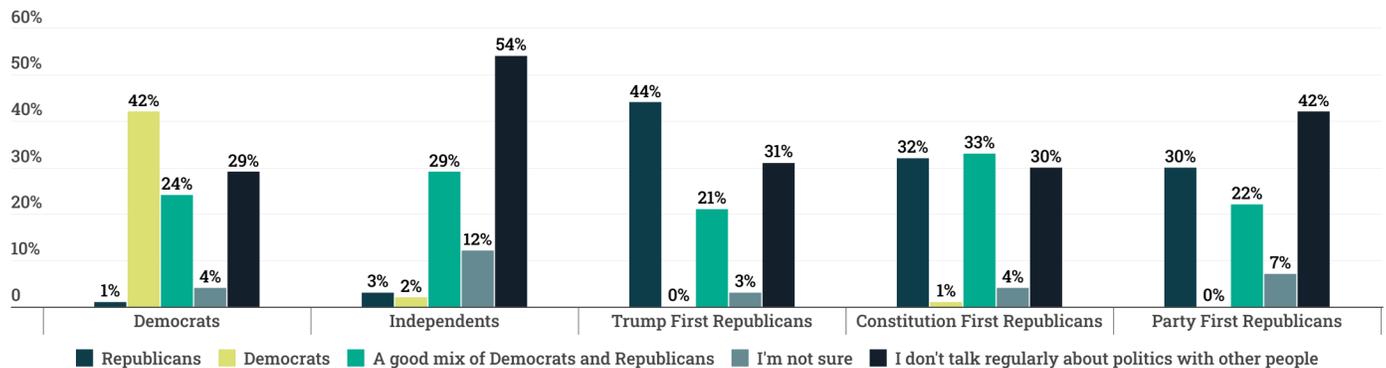
Recent research suggests that Americans are increasingly likely to see members of the other party as less than human. Simultaneously, levels of polarization and partisan segregation are increasing. Many Americans never interact across partisan lines. Focus group participants explained their reluctance to talk about politics with Democrats as stemming from a feeling that the conversations would be uncomfortable or unproductive.

*“It used to be fun to discuss stuff with people, and you can respect their views. They respect ours. Now, you don’t seem to be able to speak to a lot of people because they don’t want to hear it at all.”*  
 – Constitution-first Republican

*“Stop the whining. That’s all I gotta say. That’s all they do is whine.”*  
 – Constitution-first Republican

Fifty-two percent of Republicans and 59 percent of Democrats say they have avoided talking politics with someone whose political views are different from their own in the last six months. When asked with whom they talk about politics on a regular basis, about 30 percent of both Republicans and Democrats say they don’t regularly talk about politics at all. Party-first Republicans (42 percent) are more likely than other Republicans to say they don’t talk regularly about politics with other people. Constitution-first Republicans (33 percent) are the most likely group to talk with a mix of Democrats and Republicans. Fewer than 30 percent of Democrats, Independents, and other groups of Republicans talk to a good mix of Democrats and Republicans on a regular basis.

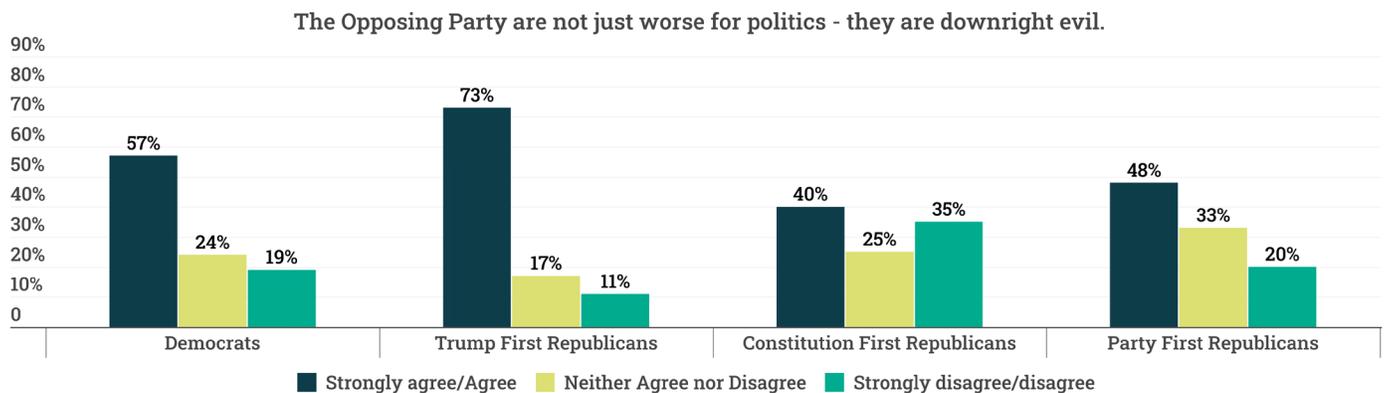
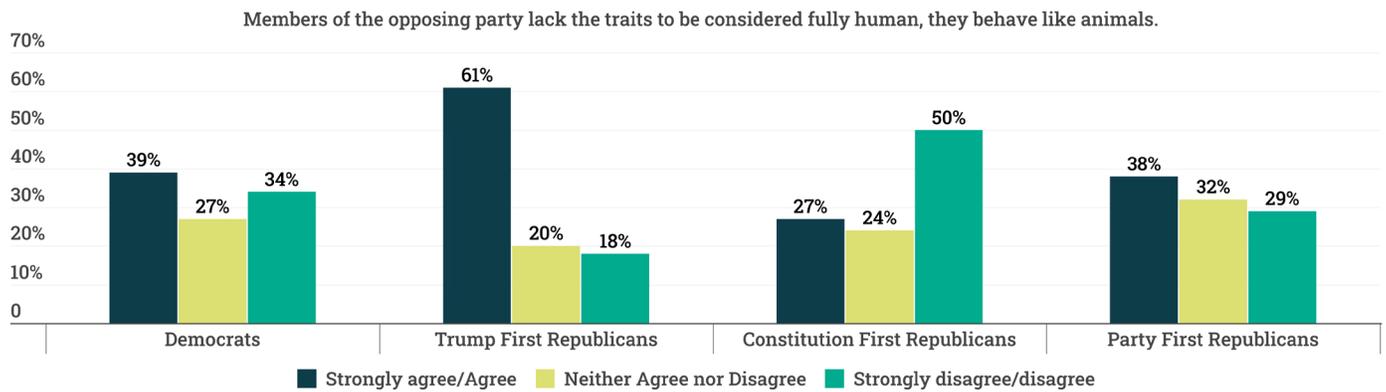
**Who do you talk to about politics on a regular basis?**



Roughly 40 percent of Democrats and Republicans say they have had constructive conversations about politics with someone whose political views are different from their own, and about 33 percent in each group have gotten to know someone whose political views are different from their own. Fewer Trump-first Republicans (21 percent) than Constitution-first Republicans (33 percent) speak to a good mix of Democrats and Republicans, while more Trump-first Republicans speak to fellow Republicans.

These conversations with members of the opposite party may help inoculate partisans from seeing other political groups as evil or “less than human.” Constitution-first Republicans are the most likely group to talk with a mix of Democrats and Republicans and are also the most likely group of Americans (50 percent) to disagree with the statement that “members of the opposing party lack the traits to be considered fully human, they behave like animals.” Thirty-four percent of Democrats, 18 percent of Trump-first Republicans, and 29 percent of Party-first Republicans disagree or strongly disagree with that statement. Similarly, Constitution-first Republicans are less likely than other groups to agree with the statement that “members of the opposite party are not just bad for politics, they are downright evil.” Forty percent of Constitution-first Republicans agree with that statement, compared to 73 percent of Trump-first Republicans, 57 percent of Democrats, and 48 percent of Party-first Republicans.

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:**



# Media Environments

Republicans and Democrats inhabit different media environments, and some differences emerge within the Republican subgroups.

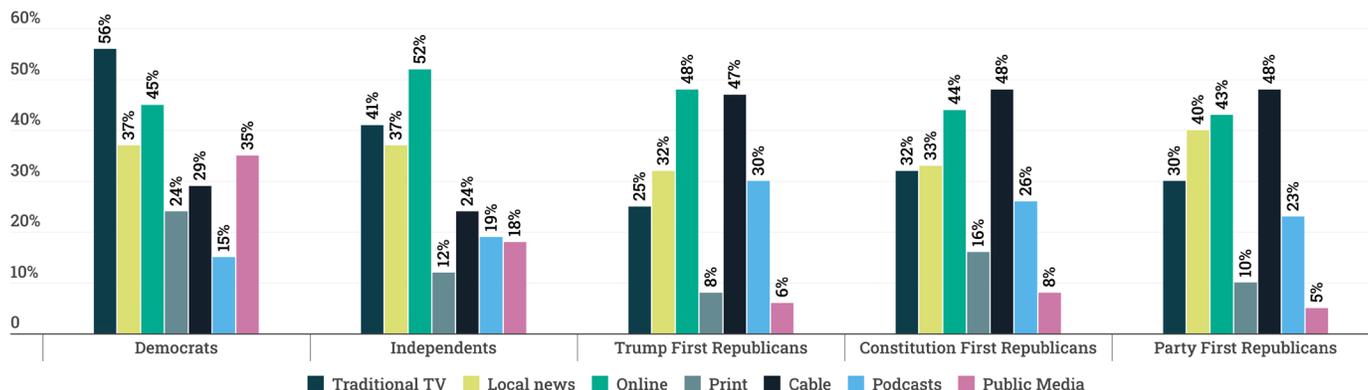
The rise of the internet has revolutionized how Americans consume media. The internet has emerged as a primary source of news, forcing traditional outlets—local newspapers, broadcast networks, established journalists—to compete with a rapidly changing array of online sources. Social media platforms in particular have become powerful news distributors, presenting users with an influx of information in which substantive reporting, partisan perspectives, and conspiracy theories intermingle in ways that make them indistinguishable for many. This shift has transformed not only how Americans consume news, but also how they interpret and judge whether to trust it.

Americans were asked to identify the top three media through which they receive information about politics and news. Options included cable television (Fox News, MSNBC), broadcast television (ABC, NBC, CBS), print media (Time, The New York Times), and other common sources of political content. For the most part, Americans, regardless of political orientation, access political content through the same media, with 46 percent indicating they receive news through online platforms, 42 percent through traditional television, 36 percent through cable television, and 36 percent through local news outlets.

While Americans as a whole tend to rely on similar sources for political information, notable partisan differences emerge upon closer examination. Democrats were more likely than Republicans to say that they consume political information from traditional television (56 percent versus 29 percent), print media (24 percent versus 11 percent), and public media (35 percent versus 6 percent). Republicans, on the other hand, were more likely than Democrats to listen to podcasts (27 percent versus 15 percent) and watch cable news (48 percent versus 29 percent). There were few meaningful differences in media consumption among the three groups of Republicans, with the exception that Constitution-first Republicans are more likely to read print media (16 percent compared to 8 percent for Trump-first Republicans and 10 percent for Party-first Republicans). Independent Americans were more likely to get their news from online sources than any other partisan group (52 percent versus 45 percent for both Republicans and Democrats).

*“I don't really trust the political information that I see on social media, especially when people are posting some sort of infographic on their Instagram story. Those things are overly simplistic and tailored to make it very easy to understand and to persuade you of something without including all the details. That's the major reason I just go to the newspaper.”*  
 – Constitution-first Republican

When it comes to getting news about current events and politics, which of the following do you rely on? Please select up to 3 sources you use most.



**Sources of information reflect distinct partisan information ecosystems.**

While the formats of information access remain relatively consistent across the population, content preferences within those media diverge sharply along partisan lines. Among Democrats, the most frequently cited news sources were CNN (19 percent), MSNBC (12 percent), and The New York Times (10 percent). In contrast, Republicans were far more uniform in their media consumption, with a third identifying Fox News (34 percent) as a primary source of news, followed by Newsmax (9 percent), and X/Twitter (7 percent).

Media source	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
ABC	9.5%	3.1%	5.1%
Associated Press	3.9%	0.8%	1.8%
BBC	6.6%	1.8%	3.1%
CBS	5.9%	2.9%	3.3%
CNN	18.8%	6.4%	8.8%
Facebook	3.3%	6.2%	5.2%
Fox News	4.9%	33.7%	9.1%
Google News	1.9%	1.6%	3%
Instagram	3.2%	1.8%	3.4%
Local News	5.6%	4.6%	4.1%
MSNBC	12.2%	0.9%	1.8%
NBC	7.7%	3.7%	3.9%
Newsmax	0.4%	9.1%	1.4%
NPR	8.2%	0.7%	3.2%
The New York Times	9.7%	1.1%	2%
Podcasts	3.1%	3.7%	2.7%
Social Media	2.7%	4.9%	6.1%
TikTok	3%	1.4%	1.9%
X/Twitter	3.2%	6.5%	5.4%
YouTube	4.4%	5.2%	5.8%

When comparing the specific political commentators and hosts of independent media outlets (such as podcasts and YouTube channels), Joe Rogan and Tucker Carlson were two of the top three individuals listed by each Republican camp. Thought leaders reaching the other top spot included Benny Johnson for Trump-first Republicans, Megyn Kelly for Constitution-first Republicans, and Tim Pool for Party-first Republicans.

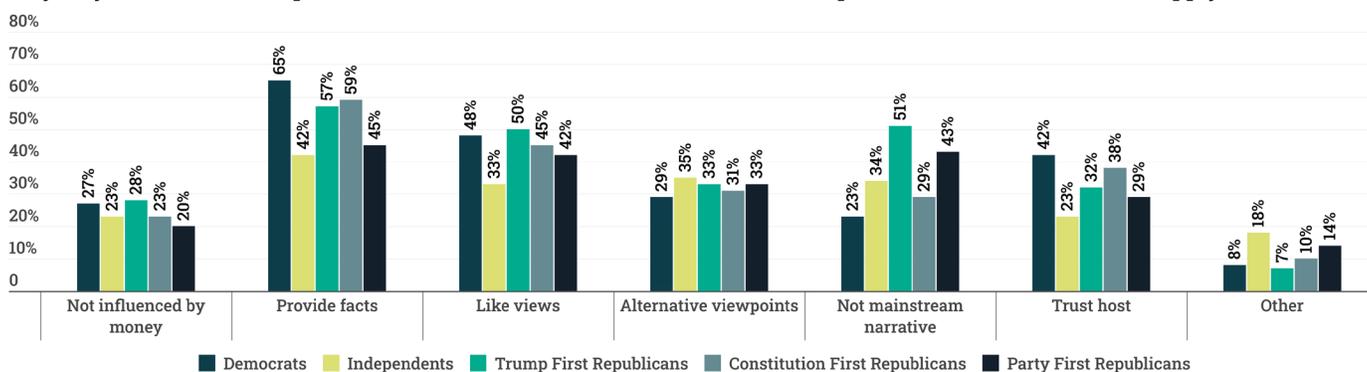
While the popularity of Rogan and Carlson demonstrates a potential propensity for anti-establishment narratives and independent thought, distinct differences among the other three commentators may reflect the ideological and stylistic differences that distinguish the Republican subgroups. Benny Johnson’s online presence mirrors the performative and identity-based populism that defines Trump’s political brand. His ideological positioning on the far right and partisan issue-coding amplify Trump’s messaging while reinforcing an us versus them binary against anyone who doesn’t subscribe to the broader MAGA movement. Megyn Kelly’s legal background and journalistic integrity frame her as a figure committed to principles. Her comparative right/center-right ideology balances her support for conservative values while preserving the principles that underpin them. Tim Pool also has a background in reporting but focuses more on debate while approaching topics through a right-leaning perspective.

When respondents were asked why they engage with their preferred media sources, 56 percent of

all participants cited that these outlets provide facts, while 45 percent said they liked the views they espouse. While these responses are consistent across demographic divides such as gender, age, and race, they conceal notable partisan differences. A greater percentage of Democrats (65 percent) said they value their preferred media sources because they provide factual information, compared to 51 percent of Republicans and 42 percent of Independents. However, 58 percent of Trump-first Republicans noted they trust their preferred media sources because they provide facts, compared to 51 percent of Constitution-first Republicans and 44 percent of Party-first Republicans. Democrats (42 percent) were also more likely than Republicans (32 percent) and Independents (23 percent) to say they follow certain outlets because they trust the host.

Another stark contrast emerges in the appeal of non-mainstream narratives. Nearly half of Republicans (49 percent) said they engage with their chosen media platforms because they don't subscribe to a mainstream narrative—a view shared by only 23 percent of Democrats and 34 percent of Independents. Trump-first Republicans (53 percent) again cite this more than Constitution-first Republicans (45 percent) and Party-first Republicans (47 percent) as a reason they trust their preferred media sources. This preference for non-mainstream narratives also intersects with broader attitudes toward democratic norms: 51 percent of those who believe the president should be able to ignore court rulings cited non-mainstream narratives as a reason for engaging with their chosen media sources, compared to just 29 percent among those who believe the president should not ignore these rulings.

**Why do you turn to these specific sources for news about current events and politics? Please select all that apply.**



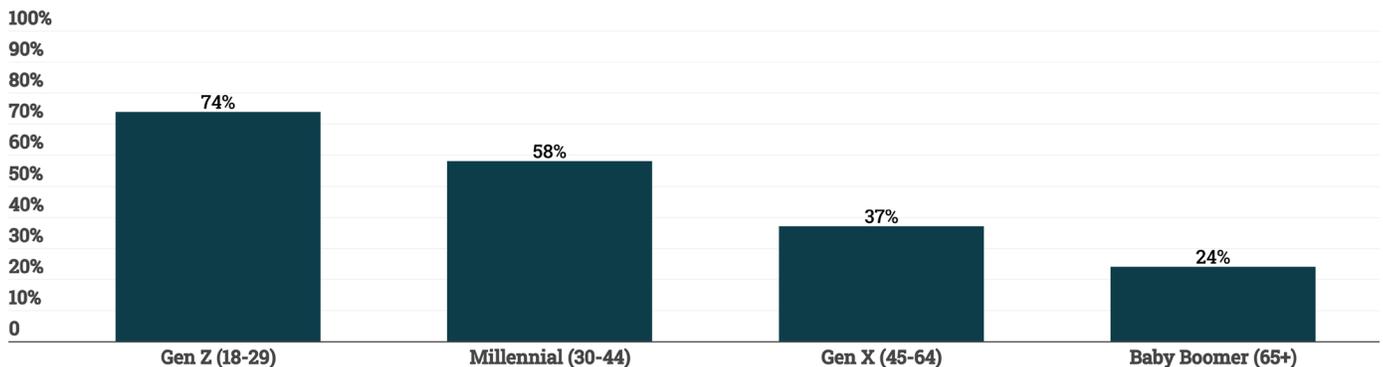
It is important to distinguish this reasoning from a general appreciation for alternative viewpoints, which was mentioned by roughly one-third of respondents across each party. Despite this interest in exposure to multiple perspectives, engagement rooted in ideological alignment was widespread across both parties: 48 percent of Democrats and 47 percent of Republicans reported following media sources because they liked the views expressed. Just 33 percent of Independents said the same. In contrast to this trend of polarization, 27 percent of Trump-first Republicans—and the same percent of Democrats—value media sources they believe are not influenced by money. This view is not shared by as many Constitution-first Republicans (14 percent) and Party-first Republicans (18 percent).

*“I try to just listen to independent journalists. I don't listen to any of the big major outlets. I think that once you get big, you're bought and paid for.”*  
 – Trump-first Republican

As previously mentioned, online sources (including social media) comprise the top medium through which Americans access news about current events and politics (46 percent). Large disparities arise when respondents are divided by age: Gen Z Americans (74 percent) and Millennials (58 percent) were both more likely than Gen X (37 percent) or Boomers (24 percent) to consume online political media.

When it comes to getting news about current events and politics, which of the following do you rely on?  
Please select up to 3 sources you use most.

Percent indicating that they consume news from online media



These results are not surprising. Younger generations have grown up in an era where social media has dominated entertainment, communication, and now the dissemination of news.

This disillusionment has far-reaching consequences with the potential to undermine faith in systems of government, drive political disengagement, or even amplify polarization as despondence kindles a desire for radical change.

Though perceptually small, these figures expose individuals' propensity to subscribe to media sources that align with their political ideologies, in turn reinforcing the existence of separate partisan-coded information ecosystems. Such divisions offer further insight into how partisan identity shapes perceptions of truth, credibility, and shared reality as perpetuated by media narratives.

The unprecedented accessibility afforded by social media has left those engaging with these platforms profoundly interconnected. These spaces have the potential to overwhelm users with an infinite stream of political viewpoints spanning the ideological spectrum. This exposure to differing ideologies can foster receptivity to open dialogue across party lines, encouraging communication and respect for differing perspectives—which could explain why younger Americans are more willing to engage across divides. Yet, while this diversification allows for greater access to information and a wider range of viewpoints, it also has the potential to deepen ideological silos. The expansion of digital platforms has allowed individuals to curate their own news environments, tailoring information to align with their interests, values, and pre-existing beliefs. Algorithms that prioritize engagement compound this confirmation-seeking, amplifying sensational or polarizing content that reinforces their existing beliefs.

*"I used to have TikTok. I got rid of it because it was addicting and it is easy just to doom scroll. I do remember that individuals will dive into issues on TikTok that are interesting because you don't hear about these things in mainstream media and they'll do research into it. It's interesting to see other people's perspectives on things."  
– Party-first Republican*

These distinctions may reflect broader differences in how each partisan group conceptualizes credibility and engagement within the media landscape. Democrats' greater reliance on broadcast television and public media aligns with trust in institutional authority and journalistic reporting, cementing their orientation toward legacy news sources. Republicans' preference for cable television and podcasts, by contrast, reflects a media environment that prioritizes commentary, direct engagement, and ideological commitment. Independents' gravitation toward online sources may be indicative of skepticism toward partisan-coded media ecosystems or a desire for self-directed information gathering.

## Concluding Thoughts

As the U.S. ends the first year of the second Trump administration, divisions within the Republican party are becoming more visible. While Republicans are generally aligned in their policy goals, their approaches to achieving those outcomes differ, revealing deeper cleavages rooted in attitudes toward concepts such as the rule of law. Divergent opinions about the appropriate balance of power between the Legislative and Executive branches suggest that disagreement over the scope and limits of presidential authority has become a prominent new fault line within the Republican party.

These internal divisions transcend policy, reflecting fundamental differences in approaches to governance. Many Republicans value the rule of law, Constitutional checks and balances, and the integrity of American democratic institutions and elections more than they value specific policy outcomes or individual leaders. But our research shows many more Republicans do not hold consistent views on these principles but do express the view that an unrestrained executive branch poses a threat to democracy. As U.S. institutions face stress-tests in the years to come, understanding these groups of Republicans may prove pivotal in maintaining, bolstering, and ultimately rebuilding American democracy.

The strain on democratic institutions is only one dimension of the pressures facing American democracy. Political polarization has been increasing for decades, but division in 2025 has reached unprecedented levels. Our findings show that Republicans rarely speak with Democrats, and vice versa. A plurality of both parties see members of the opposing party as evil or even less than human. This framing reveals a transformation of politics from a civic necessity into a moral battleground, sowing division that extends beyond partisanship to personal hostility.

These attitudes are compounded by the fact that Democrats and Republicans experience vastly different media environments. While the media platforms most people engage with remain consistent across parties, the specific content people consume varies widely depending on their party identification. Consumption of partisan media, in addition to the ability people have to deliberately engage with their preferred content online, suggests that Republicans, and Americans broadly, do exist in distinct political silos.

However, while partisan animosity is a reality, a majority of Americans are receptive to the idea of interacting across partisan lines. Compromise and cooperation retain significant rhetorical appeal, but political realities such as voter frustration with government institutions and messaging by political leaders that reinforce us-versus-them binaries may leave people feeling disparaged, disillusioned, and more divided than ever.

### **About SNF Agora at Johns Hopkins University**

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University is an academic and public forum dedicated to strengthening global democracy through research, teaching, and practice. Inspired by the ancient Athenian Agora, the institute works to bridge divides, expand civic engagement, and foster inclusive dialogue as a cornerstone of democracy. Its scholars and practitioners collaborate to address challenges to democratic life and build resilience through research, applied learning, and public engagement.

### **About Public Agenda**

Public Agenda is a national research-to-action organization that digs deep into the key challenges facing our democracy to uncover insights and solutions. Founded in 1975 by the social scientist and public opinion research pioneer Dan Yankelovich and former secretary of state Cyrus Vance, we engage with advocates, journalists, policymakers, and the philanthropic community to ensure public voice is heard in conversations that shape our shared future.

