

How race, gun ownership, and Black Lives Matter shape Americans' views of the January 6 Capitol attack

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A new survey shows Americans' view of the January 6 Capitol attack can be predicted by their opinions on social movements, such as Black Lives

Matter, but not as much by someone's race or whether they own a gun except when the two are looked at together.

The new study, based on a long-running survey of child development and life outcomes later in life, was published Friday in the journal *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*. It asked participants to label people who stormed the Capitol as "extremists," "protestors," or "patriots." The responses were then broken down by race and analyzed to examine how they were affected by someone's support for BLM or if they owned a gun.

"We wanted to understand how people's sentiments about recent [social movements](#)—in this case Black Lives Matter—and the interaction of race and [gun ownership](#) predict views on January 6th," said Harvard sociologist Robert J. Sampson, one of the three co-authors on the study. "It's really the intersection of these different things that matters in our data."

Overall, the researchers found that views on the insurrection did not vary by race. In fact, the clear majority—over 70 percent—of white, Black, and Hispanic people surveyed condemned the act by labeling the rioters as extremists. Only about 20 percent labeled them as protestors while an even smaller percentage labeled them as patriots, showing a shared view of the attack with very little variation.

The researchers, however, started seeing more nuance when associating support for Black Lives Matter and gun ownership with the likelihood of seeing the rioters as extremists.

BLM supporters were 1.5 times more likely to label the people who stormed the Capitol as extremists than non-supporters.

The pattern persisted across all [racial groups](#) but was especially evident

among white and Hispanic respondents. Among [white respondents](#), for example, about 75 percent of BLM supporters saw those who attacked the Capitol as extremists while only about 41 percent of non-supporters did. Among Hispanics, it was 82 percent of BLM supporters compared with almost 58 percent of non-supporters labeling them extremists. A similar pattern emerged among Black respondents, with most viewing the rioters as extremists, but there was no significant difference between BLM supporters and non-supporters labeling the rioters extremists.

Since the attack, several [media outlets](#) and scholarly accounts have linked support of January 6 to a passion for guns and the Second Amendment. When looking at gun ownership alone the researchers found no relation between the two. It was only when they linked guns to race that they found a connection, with White gun owners an outlier in viewing the political uprising most favorably.

Over 70 percent of Hispanic gun owners and non-gun owners labeled January 6 participants extremists while over 90 percent of Black gun owners and nearly 75 percent of non-gun owners did the same. White gun owners were significantly less likely to label January 6 participants as extremists than white respondents who did not own a firearm—about 42 percent compared to 66 percent.

"Until you're breaking it down by race, you're really not telling the whole story or the accurate story," said Rebecca Bucci, a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard working with Sampson.

Survey participants were enrolled in the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, a longitudinal study of multiple birth cohorts that started in the mid-1990s.

Nearly 700 participants responded comprising individuals born in 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1995. One hundred forty-three of respondents were

white, 220 were Black, and 288 were Hispanic. Respondents who identified as any other race were dropped from the study. The researchers controlled for age, sex, current education, growing up in poverty, and parental education.

The study pointed out potential caveats, such as the study being limited to people originally from Chicago and being a relatively small sample size.

The study marks the authors first attempt to provide a descriptive portrait of views on January 6 and to probe common assumptions about how [race](#), views on [racial issues](#), and gun ownership are related to support for the attack. The researchers say more study is needed to assess additional sources of views on the Capitol assault and how early-life factors contribute to the development of these views overall.

"Ultimately, what we want to try to understand is how, in some sense, do different groups arrive at their sentiments about the government and the law," said David S. Kirk, a sociologist from the University of Oxford and the third co-author on the study. "How do these views develop over time This is a first stage of us trying to unpack that."

More information: Rebecca Bucci et al, Visualizing How Race, Support for Black Lives Matter, and Gun Ownership Shape Views of the U.S. Capitol Insurrection of January 6, 2021, *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/23780231221110124](https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221110124)

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