

How a divided America splits on QAnon, racism and armed patrols at polling places

November 7 2022, by Garen Wintemute

Fewer than half of Americans are Republicans

Less than 45% of Americans identify themselves as Republicans, whether **strong**, **not very strong** or **leaning** that way. The rest identify themselves as **leaning**, **not very strong** or **strong** Democrats.

But viewed another way, Republicans split based on their actions and beliefs. **Republicans who voted for Donald Trump in 2020 and believe Joe Biden stole the election** make up about one-third of all Republicans, and 15% of the overall population.

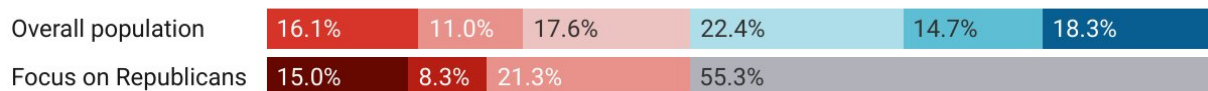


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: Wintemute, et al. • Created with Datawrapper

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There is much talk about political violence in America these days. [Garen Wintemute](#), a University of California, Davis, scholar who researches firearm violence, has recently led a nationwide survey research project on political violence. The Conversation U.S. asked him for a portrait of what Americans think about political violence as the midterm elections approach.

What's the landscape of political violence in the US today?

There have been [several studies](#) in recent years, with [different designs, methodologies](#) and measures of [violence](#). The [expert assessment](#) is that taking them as a whole, it's clear that [in general](#) Americans' support for [political violence has been increasing](#).

Some of that research has found that Republicans' support for political violence is [growing faster](#) than it is among Democrats.

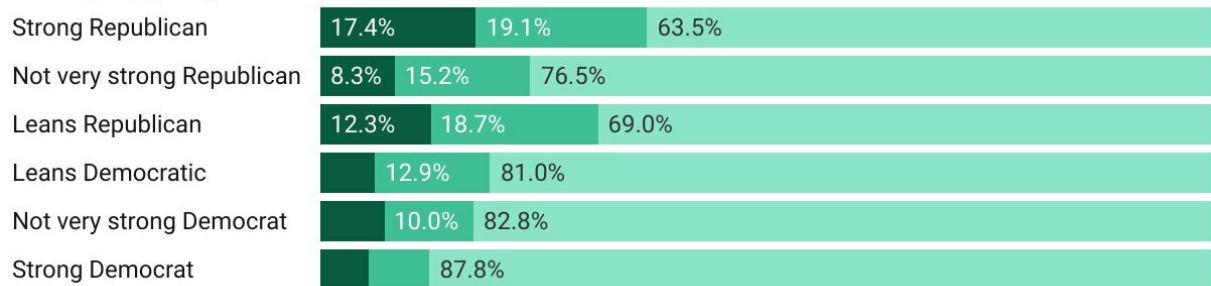
In recent years, [most political violence](#) has [emanated from the right](#). But many of those studies have not asked respondents whether they are personally willing to engage in violence.

In two studies in late 2022, we examined people's general thoughts about political violence and some aspects of their willingness to engage in it themselves. One of the studies looked at [Americans across the political spectrum](#). The other focused on Republicans, with specific attention on [people we classified as "MAGA Republicans,"](#) whom we defined as people who had voted for Donald Trump in 2020 and agreed either strongly or very strongly that the 2020 election had been stolen from him.

Republicans are more likely to hold extreme or racist views

When asked about several statements expressing extreme or racist views, Republicans were more likely to **strongly or very strongly agree** than Democrats, who were much more likely to **somewhat agree** or **disagree**.

Statement: "The government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation."



Statement: "Discrimination against whites is as big a problem as discrimination against Blacks and other minorities."



Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: Wintemute et al.

How are Americans divided politically?

In both of our studies, we asked respondents for their general party affiliation, offering them five initial options: "Republican," "Democrat," "Independent," "Another party" or "No preference."

People who answered "Republican" or "Democrat" were asked whether they characterize themselves as "strong" or "not very strong" supporters of that party. People who answered "Independent," "Another party" or "No preference" were asked which major party they believe they are closer to, and we described those people as "leaning" to one party or the other.

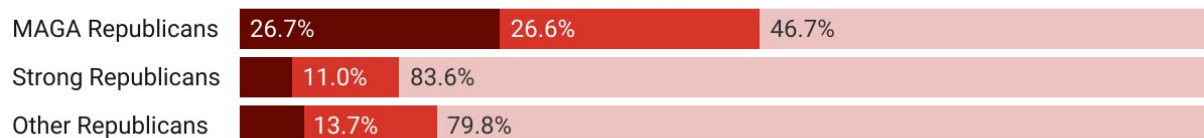
In our study focusing on Republicans, we pulled out those who voted for Trump in 2020 and believed the election was stolen into a separate group we called MAGA Republicans.

In general, we found that 55% of Americans do not identify with the Republican Party and 45% of them do. But we also found that 15% of Americans—about one-third of all Republicans—are MAGA Republicans.

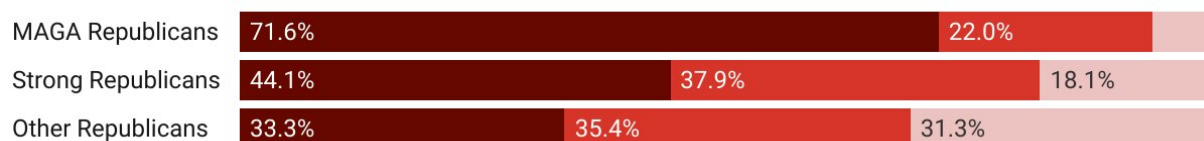
Among Republicans, MAGA believers are more likely to hold extreme or racist views

Republicans who voted for Donald Trump in 2020 and believe Joe Biden stole the election were more likely to **strongly or very strongly agree** with several statements expressing extreme or racist views than other subgroups of Republicans, who were more likely to **somewhat agree** or **disagree**.

Statement: "The government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation."



Statement: "Discrimination against whites is as big a problem as discrimination against Blacks and other minorities."



Statement: "In America, native-born white people are being replaced by immigrants."

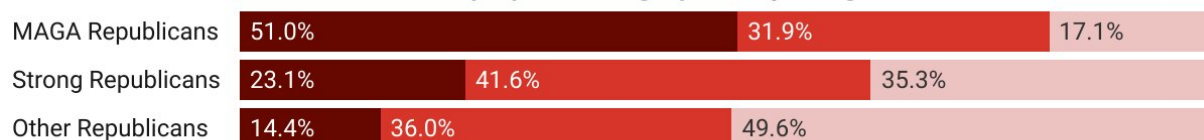


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What percentages of these groups hold extreme or racist beliefs?

We found that Republicans in general were more likely than Democrats to hold views seen as extreme or racist by experts. For instance, we asked about the widely debunked [QAnon mass delusion](#) that the U.S. is controlled by a group of [Satan-worshiping pedophiles](#).

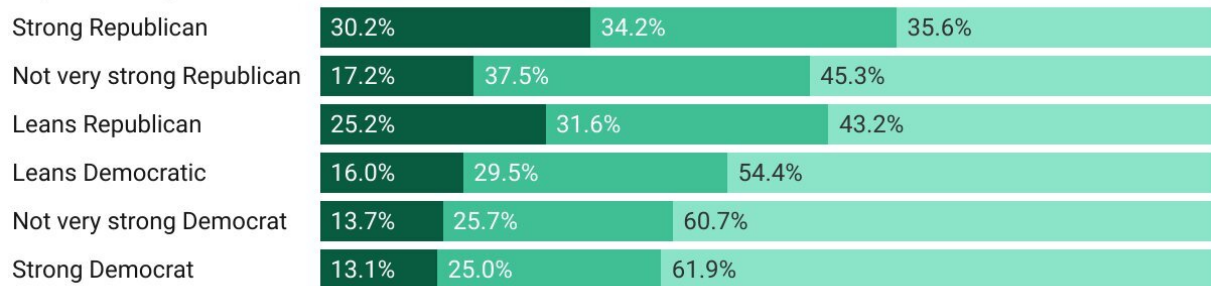
Just over a quarter of MAGA Republicans said they agreed strongly or very strongly with the QAnon beliefs. Another quarter of them said they somewhat agreed with those views. That was a significant departure even from other Republicans, even strong ones—among whom roughly 80% said they disagree with QAnon beliefs.

But when it came to racist views, such as the idea that anti-white discrimination "is as big a problem as discrimination against Blacks and other minorities" and that "native-born white people are being replaced by immigrants" in the U.S., most Republicans agreed to some degree.

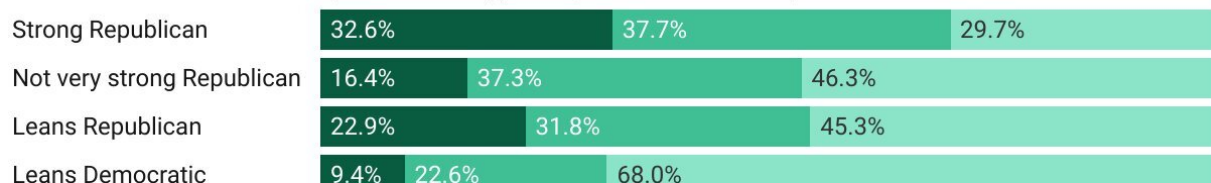
Republicans more likely to anticipate political violence

When asked about several statements regarding the potential for political violence in the U.S., Republicans were more likely to **strongly or very strongly agree** than Democrats, who were much more likely to **somewhat agree** or **disagree**.

Statement: "If elected leaders will not protect American democracy, the people must do it themselves, even if it requires taking violent actions."



Statement: "Our American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it."



Credit: Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: Wintemute et al.

What percentages of these groups see political violence as likely to occur?

On several fronts, Republicans tend to expect political violence more than Democrats, including anticipating "true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country," and even expecting that a civil war will erupt "in the next few years."

More MAGA Republicans hold these views than other Republicans.

What percentages of these groups endorse political

violence for at least some objectives?

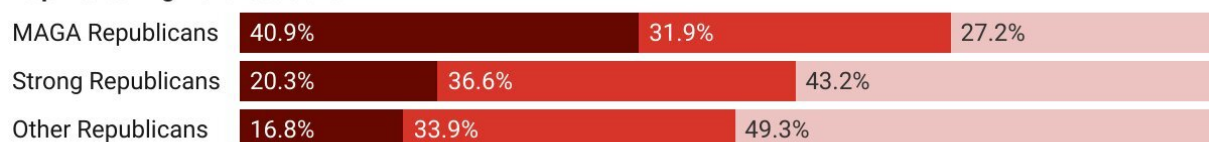
To more deeply understand people's views about potential political violence, we offered them 17 different political objectives and asked, in a series of questions, whether achieving each objective would justify violence.

Some of them were openly partisan objectives we would expect people on the political right to support, while others were politically neutral, or more generally supported by people on the political left.

Among Republicans, MAGA believers more likely to anticipate political violence

Republicans who voted for Donald Trump in 2020 and believe Joe Biden stole the election were more likely to **strongly or very strongly agree**, or even **somewhat agree**, with several statements about the potential for political violence than other subgroups of Republicans, who were more likely to **disagree**.

Statement: "If elected leaders will not protect American democracy, the people must do it themselves, even if it requires taking violent actions."



Statement: "Our American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it."



Statement: "Because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country"

Credit: Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: Wintemute et al.

These were the 17 objectives:

- To return Donald Trump to the presidency this year
- To stop an election from being stolen
- To stop people who do not share my beliefs from voting
- To prevent discrimination based on race or ethnicity
- To preserve an American way of life based on Western European traditions
- To preserve the American way of life I believe in
- To oppose Americans who do not share my beliefs
- To oppose the government when it does not share my beliefs
- To oppose the government when it tries to take [private land](#) for public purposes
- Stop voter fraud
- Stop voter intimidation
- Reinforce the police
- Stop police violence
- Stop illegal immigration
- Keep borders open
- Stop a protest
- Support a protest

Almost half of strong Republicans and more than one-third of less dedicated Republicans said violence would be justified to achieve at least one of those goals. By contrast, roughly a quarter of Democrats said so.

And 6 in 10 MAGA Republicans said at least one of those goals justified violence.

Nearly half of strong Republicans say political violence could be justified

When asked about achieving 17 different political objectives, including partisan goals like returning Donald Trump to the presidency and politically neutral goals like preventing racial or ethnic discrimination, 49.5% of strong Republicans said at least one of them would **usually or always justify political violence**. Smaller percentages of less fervent Republicans and Democrats felt that way. Most Americans still believe **political violence is not justified**.

Considers violence justified on at least 1 of 17 objectives

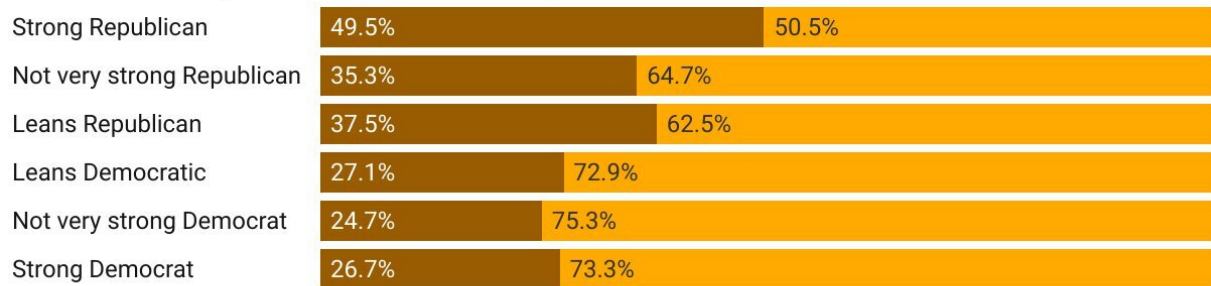


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6 in 10 MAGA Republicans support political violence

When asked about achieving 17 different political objectives, including partisan goals like returning Donald Trump to the presidency and politically neutral goals like preventing racial or ethnic discrimination, 58.2% of Republicans who voted for Donald Trump in 2020 and believe Joe Biden stole the election said at least one of them would **usually or always justify political violence**. Less fervent Republicans were more likely to believe that **political violence is not justified**.

Considers violence justified on at least 1 of 17 objectives

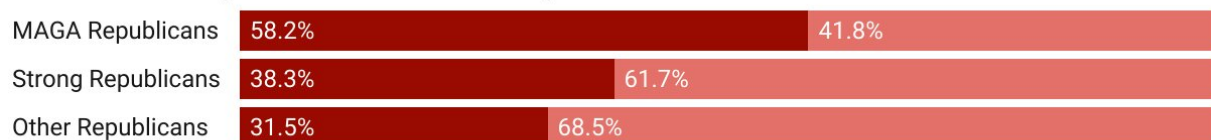


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What percentages of these groups predict they will be armed in circumstances where they view political violence as justified?

Large majorities of Americans of all political stripes say they do not expect to be armed with a gun, even in situations when they view [political violence](#) as justified. And almost none of them—even among MAGA Republicans—expect to threaten someone with a firearm.

What percentages of these groups believe there should be armed patrols at polling places?

The vast majority of Americans oppose the idea that armed citizens should patrol polling places on Election Day. The majority of MAGA Republicans object to it, but just under 40% of them say it either should happen or should be considered.

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