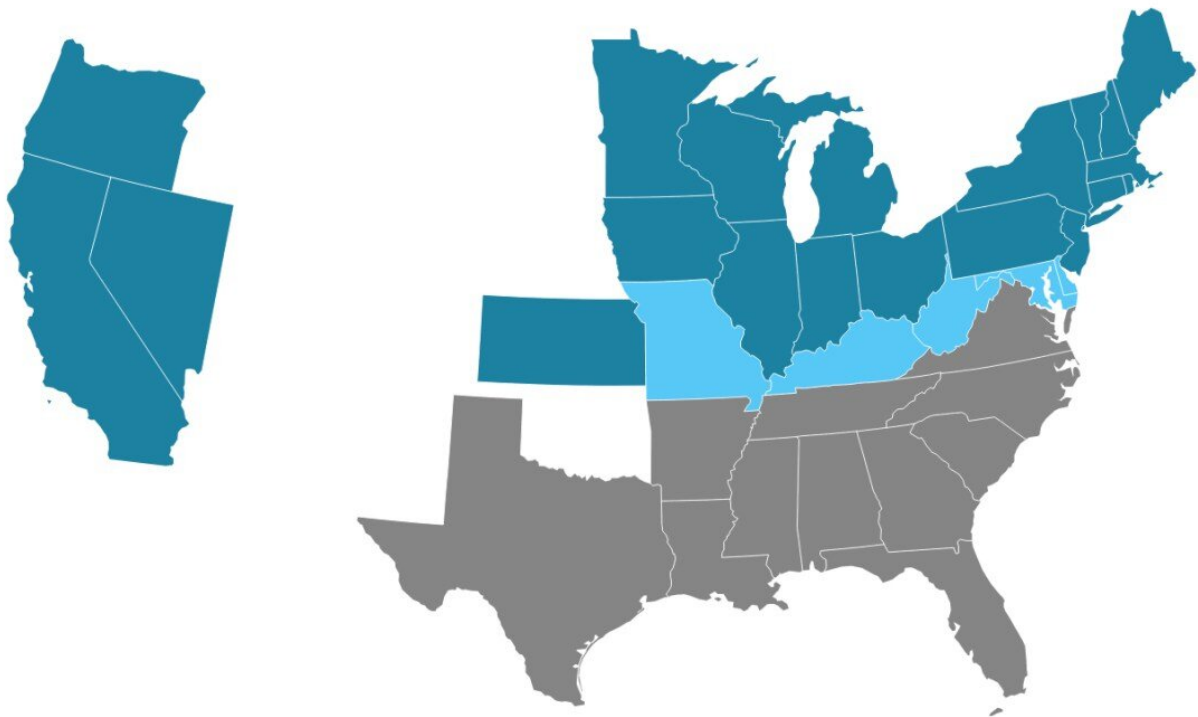


Political violence more acceptable in former Confederate states than Union and border states, research finds

July 24 2023, by Cyrus Moulton

State allegiances during the U.S. Civil War

 Union  Confederacy  Border States



Areas without labels were not yet states during the Civil War.

Map: Alauna Safarpour • Source: National Park Service • Created with Datawrapper

Credit: Alauna Safarpour

Roughly 160 years after the end of the Civil War, division among residents of the North and South lingers, according to researchers.

Alauna Safarpour, a postdoctoral fellow at Northeastern University and participant in the COVID States Project, found that people from former Confederate states are more likely to believe past political violence could be justified than residents of Union or [border](#) states.

The research also found that residents of Confederate states are also more likely to believe that it is justifiable to engage in violent [protest](#) right now than their counterparts in Union or border states.

"A shocking share of Americans seem to think that political violence could be justified and might be justified right now as well," Safarpour says.

Safarpour and colleagues at The COVID States Project, a multi-university effort polling people in all 50 states, surveyed more than 20,000 Americans between Dec. 22 and Jan. 17 about their support for violent protests against the U.S. government. The surveyors asked whether violent protests are ever justifiable and whether violent protests are justifiable right now.

The responses were then grouped by their state's allegiance in the Civil War—Union, Confederacy or border state. Border states are slave states that did not secede from the Union. Americans in states that did not exist during the Civil War were excluded from the analysis.

The research found that Confederate state residents are roughly 2 percentage points more likely than Union state residents to say it is "definitely" or "probably" justifiable to engage in violent protest against the government. Border state residents are about 3 points more likely than Union residents to say violence could be justified, according to the

research.

Asked whether it is justifiable to engage in violent protest against the government right now, 12% of Confederate state residents say "yes," the survey found. That is 2 percentage points higher than the share who say yes in border states (10%) and 3 points higher than those in Union states (9%).

The authors used a multiple-regression analysis to determine that the results did not reflect underlying social and demographic differences including partisanship, race, gender, education, age, income, ideology and attitudes toward Black individuals.

Safarpour says that although the overall number of residents who said violent protest against the government can be justifiable was relatively low—just about one in five respondents—that shouldn't discount the findings.

"What Jan. 6 reminded the country at large is that even a small proportion of Americans committed to violence against the government can do harm," Safarpour says. "We've also seen that with other political [violence](#), such as the attack on U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise and Nancy Pelosi's husband."

The research hits home for Safarpour.

She is an incoming assistant professor of political science at Gettysburg College, which was attacked by Confederate soldiers and served as a makeshift hospital during the Battle of Gettysburg. She also lives in the town of Gettysburg and has witnessed tourists visit the battle site wearing clothing with the Confederate flag.

"It's hard to live here and not think about what the impact of American

history might be on American politics today, so I wanted to look into that in this research," Safarpour says.

She added that the research is continuing.

"I think the attitudes towards [political violence](#) will be an ongoing theme because I think it's quite impactful for the health of our democracy," Safarpour says.

Provided by Northeastern University

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