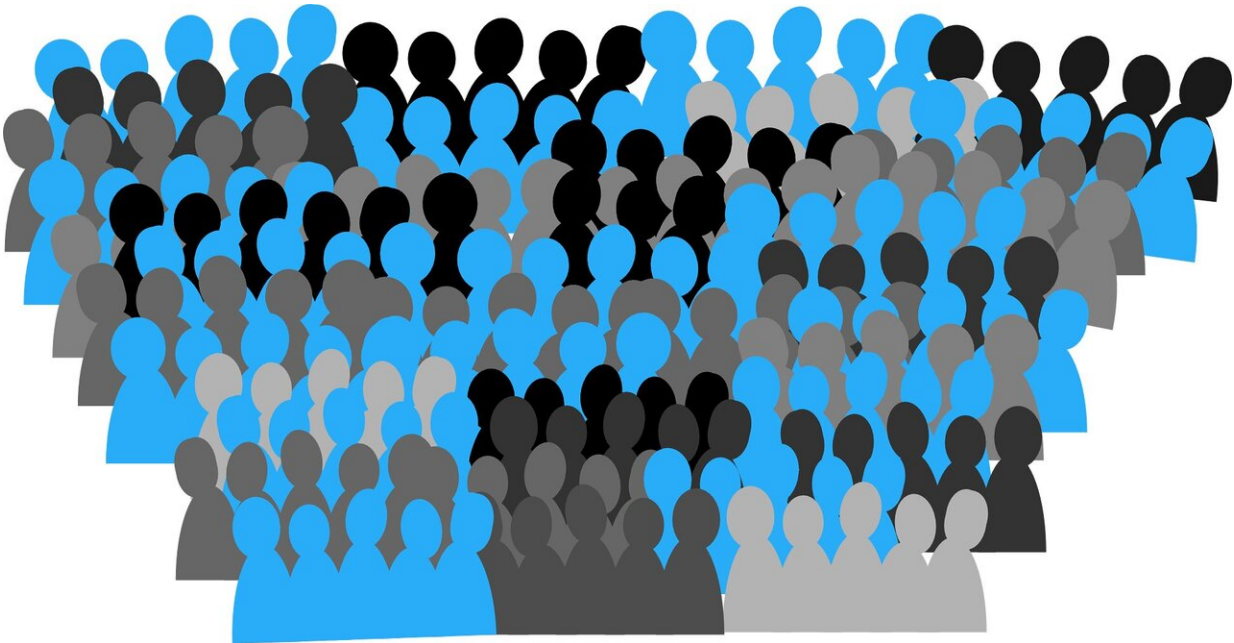


Data suggest holding Trump accountable will not threaten American democracy

August 1 2023



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With a Fulton County indictment of former President Donald Trump possible at any time, law enforcement in Atlanta is bracing for potential violence, with orange barricades restricting access to the entrance of the county courthouse.

With the anticipation of each new indictment has come threats of violence, decrease in trust in American justice and calls for retribution

against the government. Just how concerned should Americans be that we may face another January 6th-type incident?

[New data](#) from the Polarization Research Lab—a collaboration among researchers at Dartmouth College, the University of Pennsylvania, and Stanford University—has found that despite rhetoric from Trump and his allies, the public do not see the indictment of a former president as a reason to abandon democratic principles or as a call to support violent retribution.

During the study—conducted by lab Co-Directors Yphtach Lelkes, Associate Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania; Sean J. Westwood, Associate Professor of Government at Dartmouth College; and Derek Holliday, postdoctoral fellow with the lab, based at Stanford University—[the researchers tracked public attitudes](#) among Americans toward democratic norms, political violence, and general partisan hatred.

For nearly a year, they performed daily tracking polls with nearly 30,000 survey interviews.

What they found is that 97% of Americans—from both parties—oppose political violence, and the majority disapprove when politicians violate political norms.

Reacting to the June 12 indictments

Support for [political violence](#) remained stable before and after the June 12 federal indictment of Trump and co-defendant Walt Naruta, with most Americans rejecting even non-violent acts of protest.

Following the indictment, both Democrats and Republicans felt a surge of positive regard for their own parties, but this effect lasted only a

week, and each party's dislike of the other remained unchanged.

The indictments on June 12 did increase Republican appetites for violating political norms, but it was fleeting, and driven largely by a four percentage point rise in the desire to censor news networks that were, in their view, unfair to their party.

The effect vanished after seven days, and by the end of June, Republicans were less supportive of norm violations relative to the period before the indictment.

A fractured America

Trump's indictments did not permanently change American attitudes on democracy, but real threats remain.

"Trump rose to power in a fractured America and while he contributed to divides, they existed before his presidency and will continue in the years to come," Lelkes says.

The researchers' [data shows](#) that the majority of everyday Americans have no positive views of the opposing party, don't trust their politicians, don't feel their government is responsive to their needs, and nearly a [majority support](#) at least one democratic norm violation.

It remains possible that the short-lived trends observed in their data could trigger mob behavior similar to what happened on January 6th, they say.

But critically, the overwhelming majority of Americans would reject both [violence](#) and an attack on democratic norms.

"As much as American politics can be crude and juvenile, when it comes

to support for democracy itself, our data show that Americans are remarkably adult-like," Lelkes says.

More information: Holding Trump Accountable Has Not Threatened American Democracy, [polarizationresearchlab.org/20 ... -american-democracy/](https://polarizationresearchlab.org/2023/08/01/holding-trump-accountable-has-not-threatened-american-democracy/)

Provided by University of Pennsylvania

Citation: Data suggest holding Trump accountable will not threaten American democracy (2023, August 1) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-08-trump-accountable-threaten-american-democracy.html>

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