

THE 2020 IASC SURVEY OF AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE™

Democracy in Dark Times

James Davison Hunter Carl Desportes Bowman

with Kyle Puetz



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The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture is an interdisciplinary research center and intellectual community at the University of Virginia committed to understanding contemporary cultural change and its individual and social consequences, training young scholars, and providing intellectual leadership in service to the public good.

The Advanced Studies in Culture Foundation
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Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture
at the University of Virginia.

Finstock & Tew Publishers, New York, NY 10017
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The 2020 IASC Survey of American Political Culture™

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PREFACE

Politics in the Age of Trump

In the months leading up to the 2016 presidential election, there was a disturbing sense that fundamental change was beginning to unfold in our political system. Most commentators found the political vulnerability of establishment party figures, such as Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton, combined with the formidable challenge of political outliers, such as Bernie Sanders on the social democratic Left and Ted Cruz and Donald Trump on the nationalist and populist Right, startling to say the least. But the real shock occurred when Trump won the Republican nomination in August and then beat Clinton by a whisker in November. Even in the wave of incredulity that followed, many had the sense that Trump's victory was a one-off, and that once in office, the institution of the executive branch would elevate his demeanor and behavior into something that resembled "presidential."

Four years later, it was clear that Trump had remade the Republican Party in his own image. In the 2016 Survey of American Political Culture conducted by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (IASC), 72 percent of the American citizenry agreed that "we need a President who will completely change the direction of this country." Four years later, some might say that Americans got more than they bargained for.

But for all of the contentiousness and histrionics of the 2016 presidential race, 2020 was yet a different moment altogether. A global pandemic; massive

volatility in the financial markets; an economic contraction; and racial strife, protest, and civic violence following the video killing of George Floyd—all worked together to magnify the catastrophic dysfunctions of our governing institutions, as well as the fragmentation and polarization of the general population.

By the end of the summer of 2020, the establishment Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, had won the Democratic nomination. Yet no one had any doubt that the energy of the Democratic Party was now found within its activist Left wing. Even so, there was the general sense shared by many moderates and liberals that if Biden won the national election, then everything would go “back to normal.” The uncertainties and the indignities associated with Trump’s presidency would fade into the past.

The End of the Trump Era

The 2020 Election is now over. For all of the reasons just noted, it was hotly contested; so much so that more people voted than ever before in US history; a higher percentage of the voting public participated than at any time during the past century. In the end, Trump was defeated by a substantial margin in the popular vote and, in a state-by-state nail-biter, finally lost the electoral college. Though recounts and legal challenges contesting the outcome in different states followed as day follows night, the outcome remains secure. The Trump era, *formally* at least, is over.

An Election as a Window

Elections are important civic rituals in a liberal democracy. They are also windows into a political culture because they reveal how the public understands the challenges for which voting is seen as a solution. Given the multiple overlapping crises taking shape in America and the world, what can we see through the window provided by the 2020 election?

Peering out the window, to stay briefly with the metaphor, our attention is primarily drawn toward understanding the “climatological” changes of our political culture, rather than the transitory “weather” of political action. That is, we at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture are interested in the cultural context in which political contests takes place. This context includes

the ideals, beliefs, values, fears, symbols, stories, and public rituals that either bind or separate people, but always direct them in political action. Political culture defines the boundaries of political legitimacy and the horizons of political possibility. Political activity, in large part, emanates from political culture, reflecting that culture's deepest values and beliefs. To this end, we come to understand the relatively stable features of our political landscape; features that will remain irrespective of the outcome of the presidential election in any given November.

By taking this tack, we focus on the collective political psychology that is relatively stable—collective sentiment that precedes any given election and certainly survives it, animating people's political passions, fears, and hopes in relatively enduring ways.

The 2020 IASC Survey of American Political Culture™

The typical election-year public opinion survey is oriented toward understanding the “horse-race” between two candidates and the demographic groups supporting one or the other candidate. Such surveys are fielded and reported quickly, often with samples of less than 1,000 respondents. Some are even “opt-in” polls with no basis in scientific sampling.

By contrast, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture's survey series the IASC Survey of American Political Culture™, fielded by the Gallup Organization, is always designed to go beyond these limitations—to understand, as noted above, the larger cultural context of the election. To this end, this 2020 IASC survey sampled 2,205 adults ages 18 and over from the nationally representative Gallup Panel of over 100,000 active members, which itself is generated through probability sampling methods, including random-digit dialing and address-based sampling, from the larger US population. Our sample of 2,205 includes completed responses from 320 Hispanics (48 of whom completed a Spanish language version of the questionnaire) and 336 non-Hispanic Blacks, as well as an oversample of 504 adults with at least some postgraduate education. The margin of sampling error for the sample of 2,205 adults is ± 2.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

The Gallup Organization fielded the survey initially from July 28 through August 16 and returned to the field from August 25 through August 27 to expand the education-based oversample. The typical length of the interview was over 27 minutes. More than 110 questions on a wide range of topics were used to probe the nuances of American political culture at a pivotal juncture in our nation's history.

Among other things, respondents were asked what they perceived to be the greatest threats to America, how they viewed supporters and opponents of President Trump, how much confidence they had in a variety of public institutions, and how the coronavirus had impacted their thinking. Additionally, data were collected on their religious views, their views regarding racism, their political identification and voting preferences, and their primary source of information on political matters. Both the size of the sample and length of the interview—as well as the oversamples—were designed to permit the exploration of cultural and political contours and subgroup differences that often remain unexamined. This was equally true of our 1996, 2000, 2003, and 2016 Surveys of American Political Culture.

In all of our survey work—whether the focus was political disunion, politics and character, group differences and boundaries, political disaffection, or dark times for democracy itself—we approached political culture broadly in an effort to discern the cultural uniqueness of the moment. The data make it clear that American democracy continues to face dark times.¹ Our objective in all is to see clearly the challenges facing liberal democracy in America today and, in so doing, provide insight for all who hold as precious this experiment in ordered liberty and who seek to act wisely to sustain it.

What follows are the preliminary results of our 2020 survey.

1 The title of this report is a hat tip to Jeffrey Isaac's important book *Democracy in Dark Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

I

THE 2020 ELECTION

An Election Like No Other (in recent memory)

A once-in-a-century public health crisis, an economic and financial crisis, a crisis of governance, and a crisis of racial justice all converged in the election of 2020. And as if this weren't enough, the passing of the iconic Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on September 18, 2020, and the bid to replace her meant that a partisan conflict would escalate even further in the lead-up to the 2020 election. Add to this the fact that President Trump and the First Lady both tested positive for the coronavirus with only a month remaining until the election, and it was clear that the 2020 presidential election would be extraordinary—indeed, historic. Ordinary citizens felt it in their bones. This was evident even on the surface of public opinion.

A corrupt election?

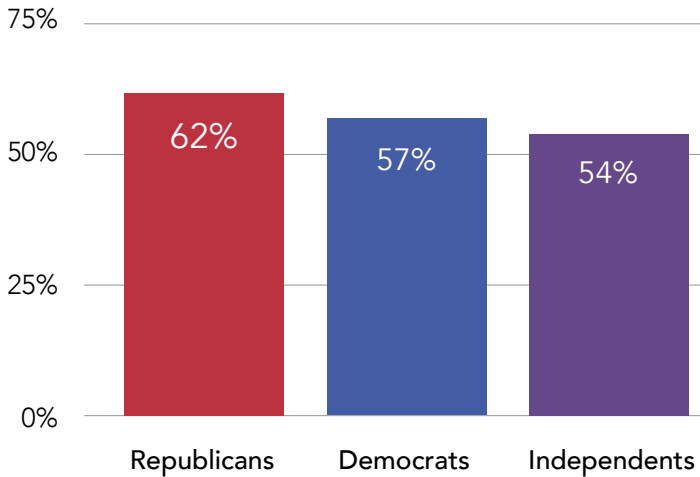
At a Students for Trump event at the Dream City Church in Phoenix on Tuesday, June 23, President Trump asserted boldly that “*this will be the most*

corrupt election in the history of our country.” There was no evidence to indicate that it would be corrupt at all, but was that the way Americans were coming to perceive it?

Leading up to the election, over half of Americans (56%) believed that this would indeed be the case. Who were they?

Interestingly, the anticipation of corruption in the 2020 election was a view held almost as much by Biden supporters (54%) as by Trump supporters (60%), and by Independents (54%) and Democrats (57%) as by Republicans (62%).

Figure 1: Percent Who Agree “This Will Be the Most Corrupt Election in the History of Our Country”



And yet women are a bit more inclined to think this (63%) than men (50%); more African Americans (65%) than White Americans (55%); and more Evangelicals (65%) than religious “nones” (49%).² Where we find the most significant difference in the electorate is in the education gap: 65 percent of

² Our religious “nones” combine two different groups: those who claim no religious affiliation and those who say they are not religious.

those with a high school diploma or less believe this to be true, compared to 47 percent of college grads and 42 percent of those with postgraduate degrees.

What is at stake?

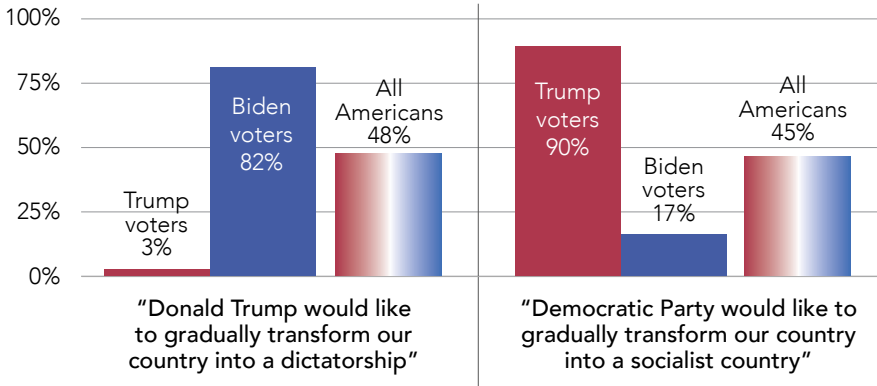
What divides Americans at this moment strikes at the heart of what each side perceived to be at stake in this election. It was not about personality, as outlandish as Trump's may be. Nor was it about competence, as questionable as that may be—for Biden, given his age, as well as for Trump. Rather, it was about our greatest fears about the direction each candidate and each party would take the country. One side believed that Trump and his supporters were gradually transforming the country into a dictatorship that leaned toward fascism; the other side believed that the Democrats under Biden would gradually transform America into a socialist country. Each side believed that the other was leading America away from its democratic traditions and therefore viewed the other as enemies of our modern liberal democratic order. Fear was driving the passions of this election.

Trump as dictator: toward a fascist America?

Nearly half (48%) of all Americans believe that Donald Trump would like to gradually transform our country into a dictatorship. What this means becomes clearer when looking at the supporters of each candidate: 82 percent of Biden voters think that Trump wants to turn America in a dictatorial direction; 96 percent of Trump supporters disagree.

- Nearly 4 of 10 Americans (39%) say that “fascist” describes most supporters of Donald Trump “well” or “very well,” but again, among Biden supporters, nearly two-thirds (63%) characterize Trump this way. This compares to 6 percent of Trump supporters.
- African Americans are especially inclined to see Trump as leading the country toward a dictatorship and toward fascism: 68 percent believe that “fascist” describes most Trump supporters “well” or “very well,” and 79 percent believe Trump will gradually transform our country into a dictatorship.

Figure 2: Percent with Concerns About How Partisan Parties Might Transform Our Country



Democrats and a socialist America?

- Against this, 47 percent of all Americans say that “socialist” described Trump’s opponents “well” or “very well”; and almost the same number (45%) believe that Democrats would like to gradually transform the US into a socialist country.
- Yet 90 percent of all Trump supporters believe that the Democratic Party wants to transform America into a socialist country, and 72 percent describe Biden supporters as “socialist.” Biden supporters take exception to this: 82 percent of those voting for Biden say that socialism is *not* the direction the Democratic Party is taking America.
- Seven of every 10 White Evangelicals believe that “socialist” fittingly describes most opponents of President Trump. What is more, nearly 9 out of 10 White Evangelicals³ (87%) believe the

³ In this report, we are using the phrase “White Evangelicals” to mean “White Evangelical Protestants”—i.e., non-Hispanic White Protestants who self-identify as “Evangelical” and do not consider themselves theologically liberal.

Democratic Party would like to gradually transform our country into a socialist nation.

There are other fears that cluster around those mentioned here, as we will see.

We're All Trump Voters Now

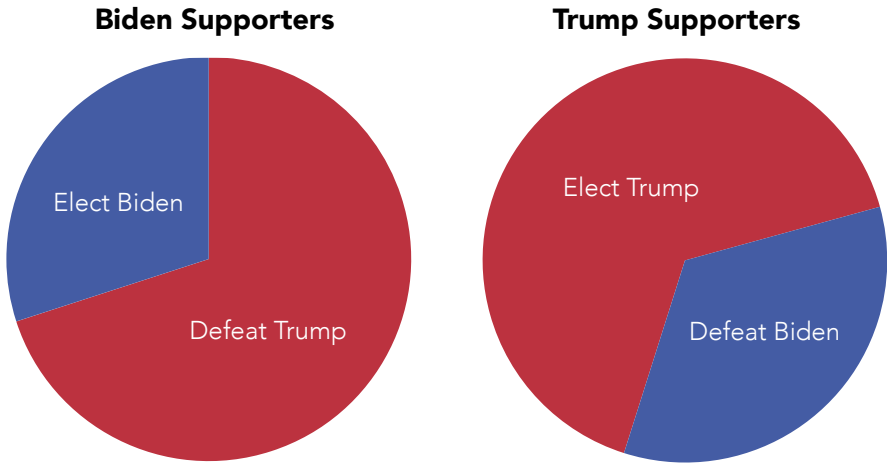
Party politics has always been contentious, as have the ideological conflicts between liberal and conservative. Nothing new here. And yet Trump—the man himself and his presidency over the last four years—galvanized voters in ways independent of the normal party and ideological dynamics.

After respondents identified themselves as Trump or Biden voters “if the presidential election were being held today,” we asked, “What would you say is the main purpose of your vote?” To those who identified themselves as Trump voters, we asked, “Is it primarily to elect Donald Trump or to defeat Joe Biden?” Of those who identified themselves as Biden voters, we asked, “Is it to elect Joe Biden or to defeat Donald Trump?”

The responses were remarkable in a way, but given how polarizing Trump has been as a candidate and as a president, they were hardly surprising.

Two-thirds (66%) of all Trump voters said that their main purpose in casting their ballot for Trump was to *re-elect Donald Trump*; the remaining third (34%) said their motive was to defeat Joe Biden. On the other hand, 70 percent of Biden voters said that their main purpose in casting their ballot for Biden was to *defeat Donald Trump*; the remaining 30 percent, to elect Joe Biden. On this point, there was no difference between men and women. In short, this election was all about Trump, and the vast majority of all voters—Democrat or Republican—defined their vote in light of the man and his presidency. In that one sense, they were all Trump voters.

Figure 3: Are You Voting to Elect Your Candidate or to Defeat the Other Candidate?



Even here, though, we can find differences in the level of passion behind the votes.

The most uniform support for Trump was decidedly found among the least well-educated and the lowest levels of socioeconomic status; among men more than women; and among Evangelicals, whether Protestant or Catholic.

On the other hand, the most consistent hostility toward Trump was found among the youngest voters, 18 to 29; among the more highly educated and higher socioeconomic groups; and among African Americans.

II

AT THE END OF AMERICA'S LEGITIMATION CRISIS

Political Climate Change Takes a Turn for the Worse

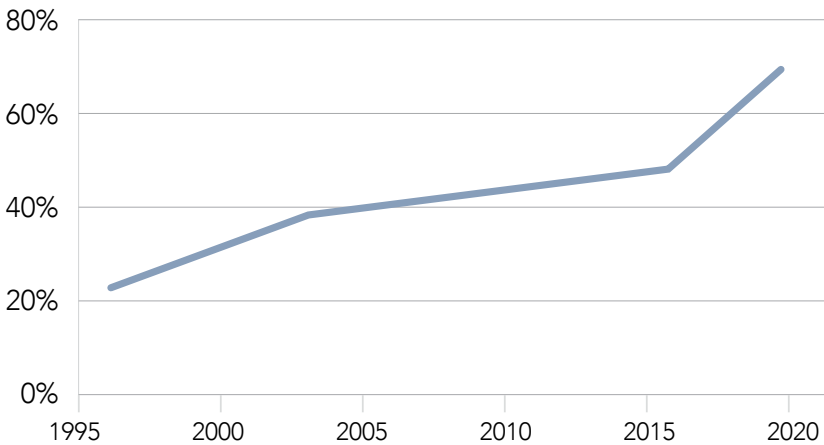
The backdrop of this election is a slowly evolving crisis of credibility for all of America's governing institutions. This is the climatological change that hollows the day-to-day work of governance. Without the legitimacy conferred to those who claim the authority to lead, the actions of leaders and their institutions can only be viewed as incompetent, ethically suspect, or perhaps even unprincipled, fraudulent, or corrupt.

This perception of American governing institutions—this legitimation crisis—has been deepening for a long time. The Gallup Organization, along with other well-known polling firms, has been tracking the public's trust in the leading institutions of American life, and especially American institutions of government, since the 1960s. The overall pattern is one that shows undulating decline. The Institute's surveys reinforce this picture of growing disaffection, cynicism, and alienation from the system itself. It begins, however, with *pessimism*.

In 1996, when this survey series was launched, 22 percent of all Americans viewed their country as being in decline. By 2000, that number had risen to

31 percent and by 2003, to 39 percent. In 2016, the number seeing a national decline had climbed to about half of the population (48%). Now, four years later, the number has jumped to two-thirds (66%) of the citizenry, an increase of 18 percentage points (see chart below).⁴ Most others saw America as just holding steady; very few—about 4 percent—viewed America as strongly improving.

Figure 4: Percentage of Americans Seeing a National Decline



The decline that Americans see in the nation is mirrored in the lives they lead and imagine for the future. The number of Americans who see the next generation as worse off grew from 36 percent in 2016 to 46 percent in 2020. The general pessimism, though, is qualified by a near-term optimism in how they view the economy in the coming year. After the crash of the stock market in March 2020, the closing of many businesses, and the rapid increase in unemployment, only about a third (32%) of Americans believe the country's economy will be worse off this time next year; a slightly larger number (39%) believe it will be better.

⁴ All data in charts representing change over time are from separate, nationally representative IASC Surveys of American Political Culture™ conducted in 1996, 2000, 2003, 2016, and 2020.

The prevailing sense of decline was confirmed, however, when we asked respondents if they thought the American way of life was disappearing. The numbers of Americans thinking that it was disappearing inched up from 58 percent in 2016 to 61 percent in 2020. There were some differences found along the continuum of political ideology—more conservatives felt this way than liberals—yet most of the variation was found by age and socioeconomic status: Younger and wealthier Americans were less inclined to think this than older and poorer Americans.

The Mounting Loss of Trust— Government, Capitalism, Media

Pessimism, in a word, is something that many Americans share, and while pessimism has increased overall, it accompanies, as we have noted, a darkening view of the governing institutions of American society and their leadership.

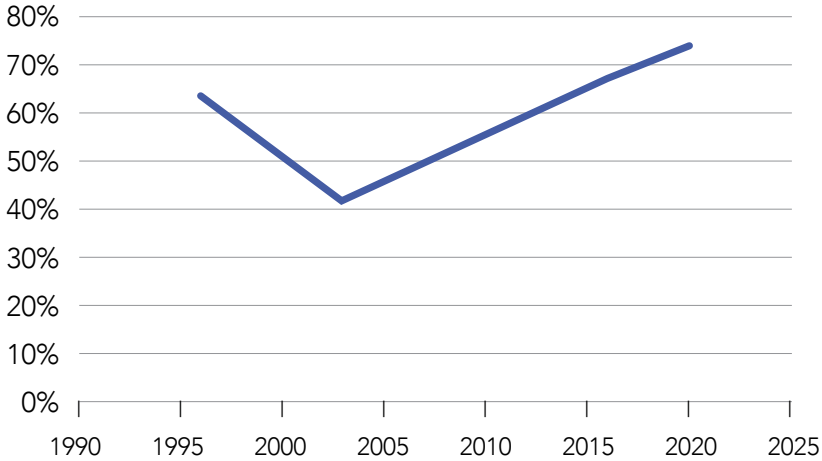
Government

For those who keep a watchful eye on how the American public regards its government, it will come as no surprise to find that this survey confirms the trends that our past surveys and other polls have long suggested: The public's confidence in the government's ability to solve problems continues to decline.

In 1996, 60 percent of the public had little to no confidence that “when the government in Washington decides to solve a problem,... the problem will actually be solved.” In 2016, this number grew to 64 percent, and in 2020, it was 70 percent.

In the same way, the American public has continued to lose confidence that the people who run our government will tell the public the truth. In 1996, 64 percent of the public had little to no confidence that they would. In 2016, that figure had grown to 67 percent, and in 2020, three out of four Americans (74%) had little to no trust that the leaders who run our government would tell them the truth.

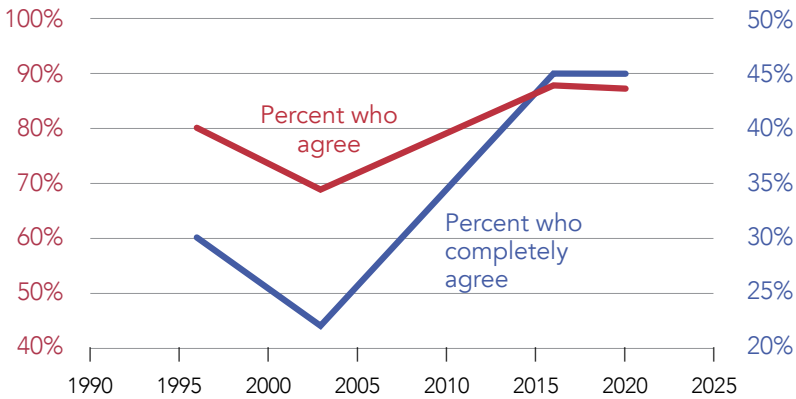
Figure 5: Percent of Americans with Little Confidence That Government Will Tell the Truth to the Public



Watching politicians pontificate, bluster, and rage over the years in a context where they get little if anything done creates a strange sense of surrealism about what goes on in the most powerful government in the world. Most Americans see it for what it is. In 1996, 80 percent of the American electorate strongly agreed or agreed that “political events these days seem more like theater or entertainment than like something to be taken seriously.” By 2020, the number had grown to 87 percent. What is most interesting, however, is the growth in the number of people who *strongly* agree (see chart below).⁵ In 1996, there were just 30 percent, but by 2016 and 2020, the number had grown to just under half the population (45%).

⁵ Note that there are two different vertical scales in Figure 6 below. The percent who “completely agree” with this statement about political events seeming like theater is represented in blue on the vertical scale to the right, while the percent who “mostly” or “completely agree” is given in red on the vertical scale on the left.

**Figure 6: Percent of Americans Who Agree That
“Political Events These Days Seem More Like Theater or
Entertainment Than Like Something to Be Taken Seriously”**



The distrust is also a source of fear: 67 percent of the public believe that the “growth of the government in Washington threatens the freedom of ordinary Americans.” This opinion holds irrespective of race or gender, though those who are lower in socioeconomic status are more likely to hold this view. Majorities in both parties also hold this opinion, though Republicans slightly more than Democrats.

Capitalism and the socialist alternative

The incredulity and cynicism the public has about the government and political institutions extends to America’s dominant economic institutions. Nearly three-fourths (71%) of the American public believe that “our economic system is rigged in favor of the wealthiest Americans.” This figure is about the same as it was in 2016, though the number of people who strongly agree with this statement has grown from 31 percent in 2016 to 40 percent in 2020.

It’s not surprising, then, that overall confidence in the financial institutions of modern capitalism—the Wall Street and the American banking system in general—is low. Within the American public, 72 percent have “just a little”

confidence or “none at all” in these institutions “to resolve our nation’s economic problems.”

It isn’t just lumbering incompetence that the public attributes to these institutions. Rather, Americans also overwhelmingly agree that these institutions are deliberately manipulative, self-interested, and exploitative. Nearly 8 of 10 Americans (79%) agree that “Wall Street and big business in our country often profit at the expense of ordinary Americans.”

In the end, the dismal view Americans have of capitalism as it operates in their everyday lives is shifting public opinion on capitalism and socialism as abstract systems. Modern market economics has been so central to American identity for such a long time that it is surprising that only about half (48%) of all Americans still have a positive view of capitalism, the same number as have a negative view of socialism. Stated another way, half of Americans (52%) now have a negative or neutral view of capitalism, while half (52%) also have a positive or neutral view of socialism.⁶

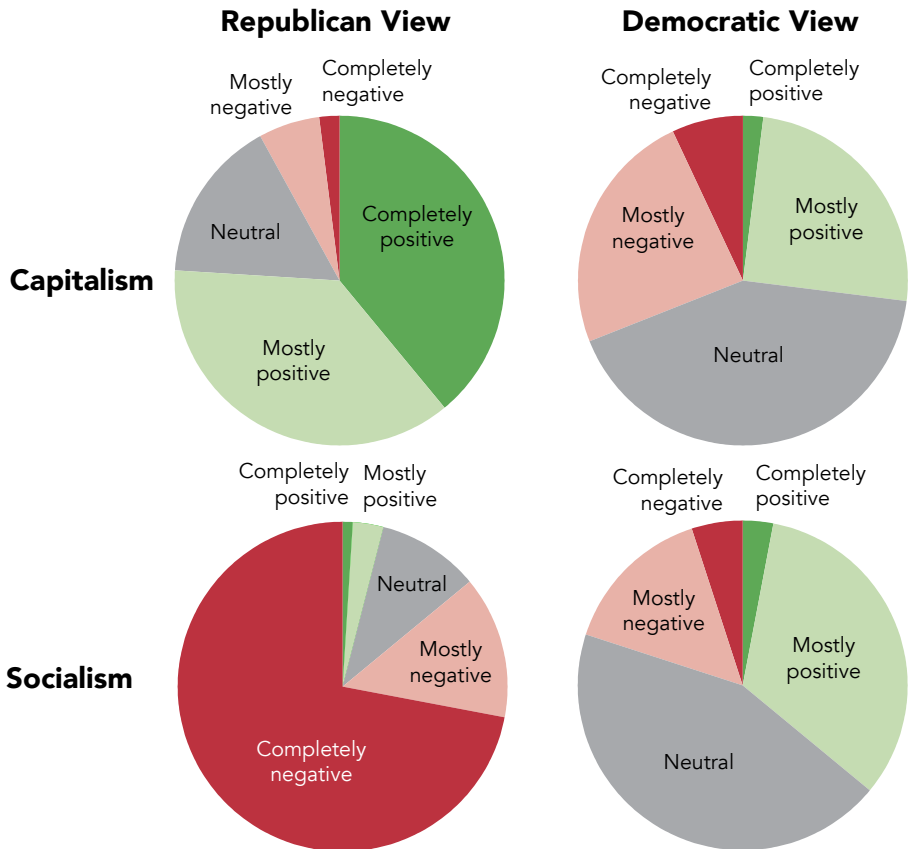
Underlying this broad division of public sentiment on questions of American capitalism lie deep, partisan differences between Republicans and Democrats. This is not surprising, but what is surprising is the size of the partisan gap. Republicans are nearly three times as likely to view capitalism favorably as Democrats—76 percent of Republicans, compared to 27 percent of Democrats. The gap between their views of socialism is even wider: 86 percent of Republicans hold a *negative* view compared to just 20 percent of the Democrats—Republicans are more than four times as likely to frown upon socialism. The reverse is equally illuminating: Democrats are nine times as likely as Republicans to hold a *positive* view of socialism; 36 percent of Democrats, compared to 4 percent of all Republicans.

All told, Republicans are fully eighteen times as likely to view capitalism favorably as to think the same about socialism. Democrats, however, think more positively about socialism (36%) than capitalism (27%), a striking

6 Just as there are different forms of capitalism even within American capitalism (e.g., corporate capitalism, finance capitalism, entrepreneurial capitalism, small town—mom and pop—capitalism), there are different forms of socialism, ranging from, say, what one would find in Venezuela to what one would find in Great Britain. The survey doesn’t indicate what kind of socialism the respondents have in mind.

divergence from Republican views of political economy. Another noteworthy conclusion is that Republicans are more absolute in their thinking about economic systems: Capitalism is good and socialism is bad. By contrast, Democrats remain more ambivalent: “Neutral” is their most common response to both systems.

Figure 7: Views of Capitalism and Socialism by Party



There are comparable gaps between Republicans (39%) and Democrats (93%) in viewing capitalism as “rigged in favor of the wealthiest Americans” and between Republicans (66%) and Democrats (95%) in viewing corporate capitalism (“Wall Street and big business”) as profiting “at the expense of ordinary Americans.”

The partisan patterns we see here hold when looking at their respective perceptions of what threatens America. Seventy-seven percent of all Republicans believe that socialism is a very or extremely serious threat to America, compared to 19 percent of Democrats. By the same token, 57 percent of all Democrats view “the very rich” as a very or extremely serious threat to America, compared to 19 percent of all Republicans.

Partisan differences aside, perhaps the most interesting aspect surrounding public opinion of capitalism and its large-scale institutions is the generational difference. The young are far more critical of capitalism than the elderly. Thus, while 61 percent of those 75 years of age or older and 53 percent of those between the ages of 60 and 74 view capitalism favorably, only an estimated 37 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds have the same view. Nearly a quarter (24%) of the younger age cohort view capitalism in a mostly or completely negative light, while the same number (25%) view socialism in a mostly or completely positive light.

The same dynamic plays out in the perception of the economy as being rigged—80 percent of the young, compared to 63 percent of the elderly; in the perception that Wall Street and big business profit at the expense of ordinary Americans—89 percent of the young, compared to 81 percent of the elderly; and in the number who have no confidence at all in the competence of Wall Street and the banking system—44 percent of the young, compared to 26 percent of the elderly. Moreover, half (50%) of the younger cohort see the very rich as a “very serious” or “extremely serious” threat to America, compared to 34 percent of elderly. A mirror-opposite 56 percent of the elderly see socialism as a very or extremely serious threat to America, compared to just 30 percent of the young.

The Media

The American public’s deep misgivings toward governmental and economic institutions extends to a suspicion of the media. Just over two-thirds (68%) of all Americans agree that “you can’t believe much of what you hear from the mainstream media,” and just under two-thirds (63%) believe that “media distortions and fake news” are a very or extremely serious threat to America. Moreover, most of those who think such distortions fall short of posing a “very

serious” threat still concede that they are at least a “somewhat serious” threat to “America and America’s future”; only 16 percent of Americans—fewer than one in six—dismiss media misrepresentations as not a serious threat. Importantly, most—75 percent—of those who expected the 2020 election to be the most corrupt in history also say that you can’t believe the mainstream media. Even the majority (58%) of those who *don’t* expect a highly corrupt election believe that the mainstream media lacks credibility. Clearly, media skepticism runs deep throughout American political culture.

Figure 8: How Serious of a Threat to America’s Future Are “Media Distortions and Fake News”?

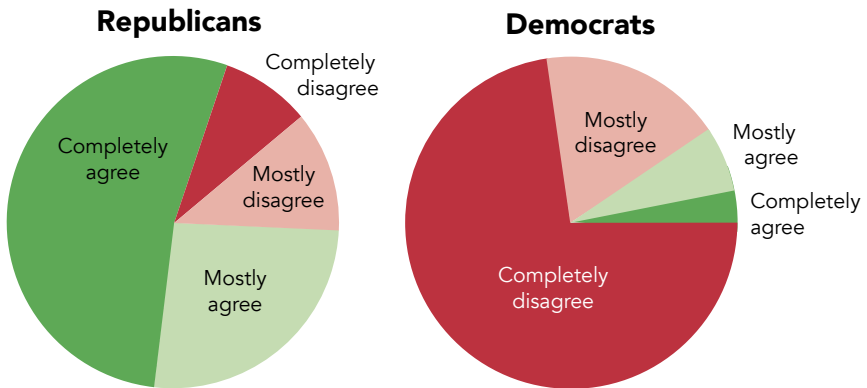


Yet again, important partisan dynamics underlie these figures. Consider the difference between self-identified Republicans and Democrats: Republicans are about twice as likely as Democrats to suspect the veracity of the media. Ninety-one percent of Republicans, for example, disbelieve the mainstream media, compared to 43 percent of Democrats. Likewise, media distortion is seen as a very serious threat by 83 percent of all Republicans and 45 percent of all Democrats.⁷ Perhaps this gap signals the alignment of the media’s mainstream with the vision and agenda of the Democratic Party; perhaps it signals the abandonment of the mainstream viewpoint by the Republican rank and file. It’s probably both. That possibility becomes credible when considering that eight of 10 Republicans (80%) agree (and most of them

⁷ Note that respondents who say “media distortions and fake news” are an “extremely serious” threat are effectively saying they find media distortions and fake news to be a very serious threat (and more); hence, they are included in the two percentages provided here. By contrast, when we state a percentage representing *only* those who gave that precise response, we indicate it by placing quotation remarks around the response, as in “very serious” threat. Similar merges and distinctions appear elsewhere in the report.

“completely”) that “the mainstream media exaggerated coronavirus in order to take down Donald Trump”; this, compared to only 9 percent of all Democrats—a difference of 71 percentage points. At least on this question, Republicans are almost nine times as likely as Democrats to suspect that public information is subservient to a political agenda!

Figure 9: Percent Who Say “The Mainstream Media Exaggerated Coronavirus in Order to Take Down Donald Trump”



A Crisis in the Leadership Class

The distinction between institutions and their leaders is, in reality, an analytical distinction. In reality, institutions are never better than their leaders. And so, it isn’t surprising to see a popular cynicism toward the leadership class that matches the lack of credibility broadly ascribed to the institutions they lead.

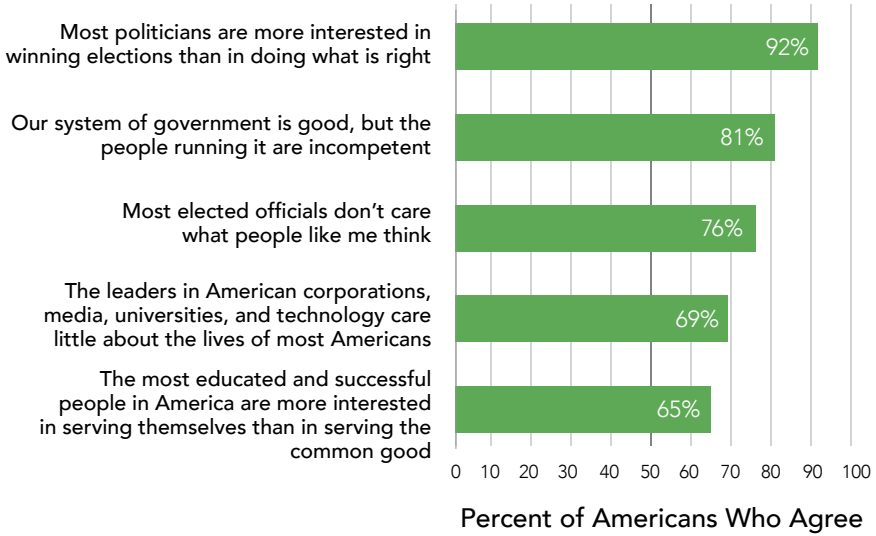
Thus, as a general rule, most Americans (65 percent, up from 62 percent in 2016) agree that “the most educated and successful people in America are more interested in serving themselves than in serving the common good.” This view is held across the board—across age, gender, race, political party, and ideology—with the obvious exception of the educationally and economically successful. Eight of 10 Americans of lower socioeconomic status (78%) agreed with this and agreed more strongly than the five of ten Americans (53%) of higher socioeconomic status.

The public is especially cynical about the self-interest of its political leaders. In stark contrast to the historic notion of politicians as “public servants,” more than nine out of 10 Americans (92%) in 2020 agree that “most politicians are more interested in winning elections than in doing what is right”—a figure that has increased from 79 percent in 1996 and 82 percent in 2000. Again, this view is held across the board, though the most intense cynicism comes from the young and the less well educated.

What makes matters darker still is that the public overwhelmingly regards politicians not only as self-serving, but as incompetent too. Eight of 10 Americans (81%) believe that “our system of government is good, but the people running it are incompetent.” It may be that the well-known clumsiness of the Trump administration has been a factor in increasing this belief within the American public, but already a majority of people (60%) held this view during the Clinton administration in 1996. The belief in government incompetence waned a bit to 57 percent by the end of the Clinton administration and dipped even more to 48 percent in 2003, in the wake of 9/11, but by the end of the Obama administration in 2016, seven of 10 Americans (71%) had come to believe their political leaders were incompetent. And under Trump, the belief has only grown.

Whether self-serving or incompetent, political leaders are seen as indifferent to the interests of the ordinary person. Three-fourths of the public (76%) today agree that “most elected officials don’t care what people like me think”—a number that has increased from 69 percent in 1996 and 74 percent in 2016.

Figure 10: Widespread Cynicism toward the Leadership Class

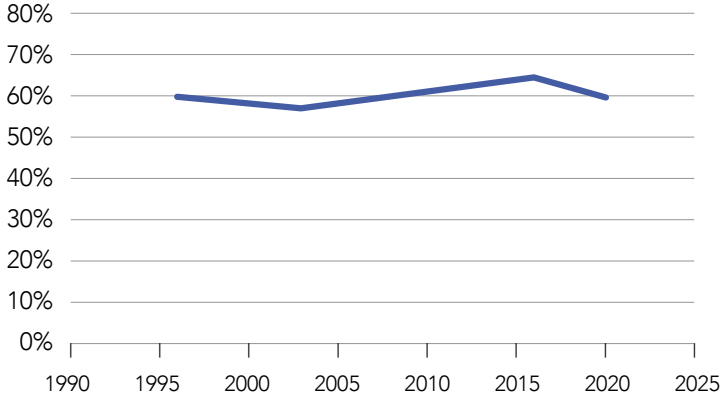


The alienation of average citizens from those who represent them is an alienation they also experience from the leadership class as a whole. Two-thirds of all Americans (69%) agree that “the leaders in American corporations, media, universities, and technology care little about the lives of most Americans.” This represents an increase from 62 percent in 2016.

The Alienation of the People

The sense of alienation Americans experience is fairly pervasive. Sixty percent of those surveyed completely or mostly agree that “people like me don’t have any say in what the government does.” This has been fairly constant since the inception of the Institute’s survey series. In 1996, 60 percent agreed; in 2003, 57 percent agreed; and in 2016, 64 percent agreed.

**Figure 11: Percent of Americans Who Agree
"People Like Me Don't Have Any Say in
What the Government Does"**



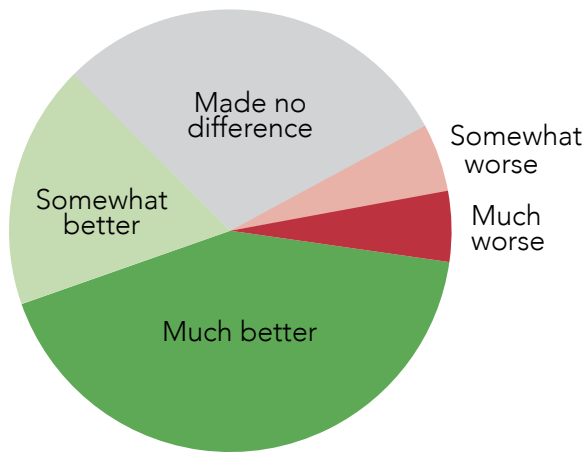
As revealing, four years ago, 38 percent of all Americans agreed that “these days I feel like a stranger in my own country.” In 2020, half of all Americans (51%) feel that way. There is no partisan division here. Republicans and Democrats divide in the same way. Even so, differences are found along racial lines: Blacks (61%) are more likely to agree with this statement of estrangement than Whites (49%). A bigger factor in accounting for difference is found along the lines of social class. The poor (62%) and less well-educated (57%) are substantially more likely to feel this estrangement than the wealthiest (48%) and the most educated (37%).

One Bright Spot

There are undoubtedly many bright spots in the public consciousness these days, bright spots that this survey did not touch upon. One of them, however, concerns the wearing of masks during the coronavirus pandemic. In the media, it would appear that the issue is highly politicized. The reality, however, is that the overwhelming majority of Americans indicated that it was not an issue for them. We asked the question: “During the peak of the coronavirus, many stores posted a sign requiring a face mask to enter. If you approached

such a store last April, how would the requirement to wear a mask have made you feel about entering the store?” Ninety percent of those surveyed said that they would have felt better (61%) or would have been indifferent (30%) to the requirement. Only 10 percent said it would have made them feel worse, with only 5 percent saying “much worse.”

Figure 12: A Store’s Requirement to Wear a Mask Made Me Feel...about Entering



The variation among the public on this matter plays out as expected along ideological lines. Democrats (85%) were more likely to feel positively about mask-wearing than Republicans (40%); the very liberal (86%), more likely than the very conservative (32%); and Biden supporters (80%), more likely than Trump supporters (34%). Apart from this, there was predictable variation along the lines of education and age. The most well-educated (75%) were more likely to respond positively toward the mask requirement than those who had a high school diploma or less (59%), and the elderly 75 years or older (76%) were more likely to respond favorably than the youngest adults 18- to 29-years-old (55%). Still, the number of those who seemed put off by the requirement of mask wearing was, on the whole, relatively small. Most of those whose response was not favorable said that it made no difference to them.

To say that negativity toward mask-wearing is negligible is not to suggest that it is nonexistent. Even 10 percent, if they feel strongly that a mask requirement violates their personal freedom, can sow discord and tension in a public setting. Yet the vast majority of American citizens view the wearing of masks by others as an expression of concern for others. A subset of 699 respondents to our survey were asked whether they thought that “wearing a face mask during the coronavirus was an important sign of concern for public health.” More than four out of five (86%) agreed that it was—six times the number who disagreed.⁸

In Sum...

Decade after decade, American political culture has become more pessimistic, distrustful, and cynical toward the institutions that govern our lives. Without doubt, it is a longstanding problem. During the Trump years, this debased political culture has only gotten worse. Whether it is the government, corporations, the media, or the leaders who oversee these institutions, the crisis of legitimation has only deepened. The idea that these institutions might see it as their interest or their democratic duty to seek to regenerate trust and instill confidence in the public does not appear to register at all. Certainly, on the political front, one rarely hears voices of bipartisan comity. Indeed, the political rhetoric of mutual suspicion and denigration has only served to intensify popular disaffection, distrust, cynicism, and alienation.

These problems will not fix themselves. Without strong and creative institutional leadership, these problems will continue to undermine the substance and process of democratic life, irrespective of who is elected. Winning certainly matters in a competitive political environment where important policies affecting millions of people are concerned, but winning is neither everything nor the only thing when it comes to sustaining a vital liberal democracy.

⁸ Because this question was asked of only a subsample, it is not included in our Appendix. The Appendix presents results for only those questions that were asked of the entire sample.

III

POLITICAL CULTURE

The Politics of Fear and Loathing

Uncertainty always accompanies times of upheaval and change. And behind uncertainty, one will always find fear following close behind.

The fears we explore in this survey are not the kind of personal fears that typically keep people awake at night; they are public fears, fears emerging from the threats people perceive to be facing our nation and our nation's future. What are these threats, and how serious do Americans perceive them to be?

We have already explored the meta-fear that ordinary Americans have about the future of the nation and how divided they are in either the fear of dictatorship under Trump and the Republican Party or the fear of socialism under Biden and the Democratic Party.

There are other fears as well that fall along partisan lines. We see this when we examine where the majority of respondents from different partisan camps line up around various threats and the seriousness with which they are perceived. These partisan perceptions of threat to America's future will be the focus of this chapter, as will the mutual loathing expressed by representatives of

partisan political camps. But first, let us consider the aggregate ranking of perceived threats to our nation's future.

Threats to America: a summary profile

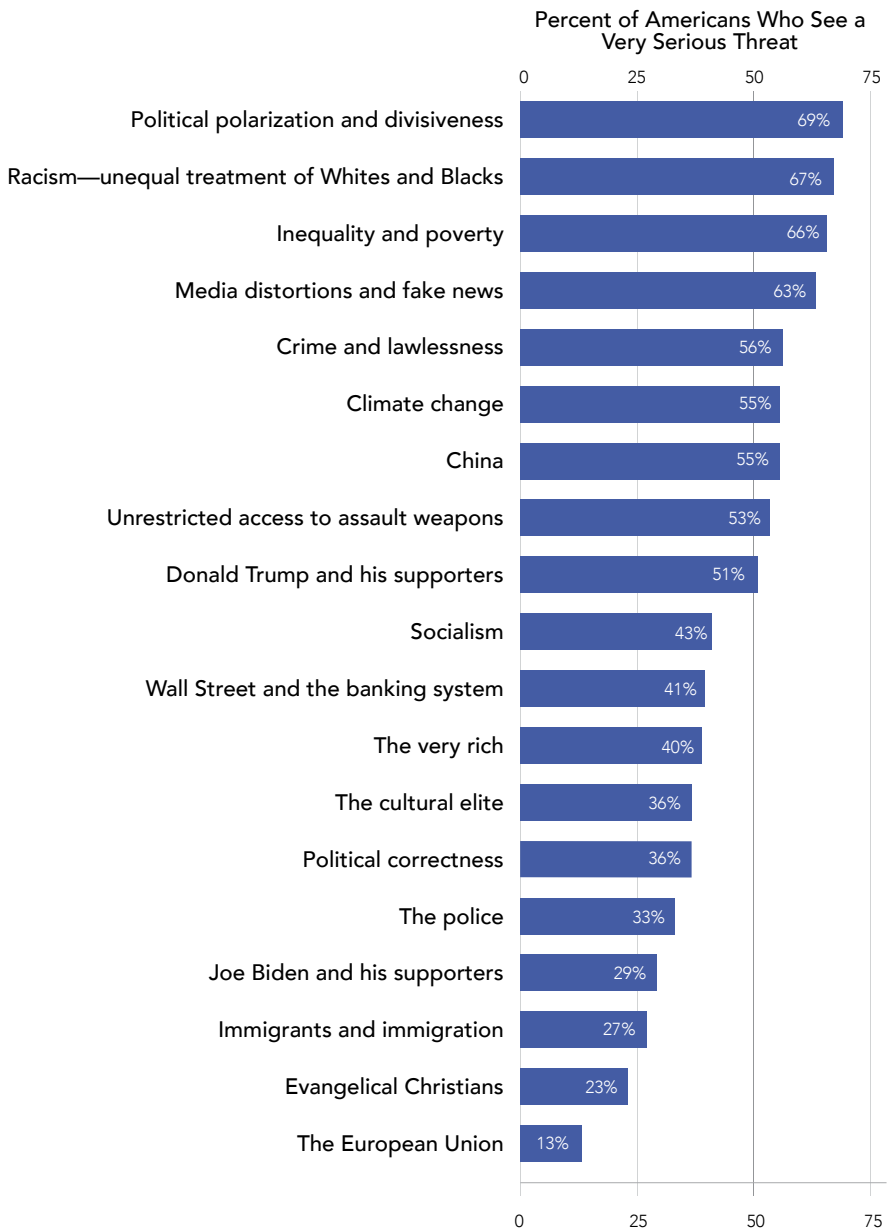
Comparatively speaking, few Americans see these things as very serious threats⁹ to the nation's future: the European Union (13%), Evangelical Christians (23%), immigrants and immigration (27%), Joe Biden and his supporters (29%), the police (33%), political correctness (36%), and the cultural elite (36%). They are considered "somewhat serious" threats by additional Americans, but most do not see them as very serious. More see the very rich (40%), Wall Street and the banking system (41%), and socialism (43%) as very serious threats, but here too, just a minority of Americans hold these views.

In our list of potential threats to America, "Donald Trump and his supporters" is the first that a majority of Americans (51%) push across the "very serious threat" threshold. In fact, a quarter of Americans (26%) go even further, calling Trump and his supporters "extremely serious" threats to America's future—more than twice the number who view Biden and his supporters similarly (12%). Other threats to America are considered very serious by slightly larger majorities, such as "unrestricted access to assault weapons" (53%), "China" (55%), "climate change" (55%), and "crime and lawlessness" (56%). The consequence of each of these for America's future is feared at about the same level as the threat from Donald Trump and his supporters.

There are even more fearful perceived threats to America, however. One of them, disinformation disseminated by "media distortions and fake news," is considered a very serious threat by more than six out of 10 Americans (63%). Two-thirds see "inequality and poverty" (66%) and "racism—unequal treatment of Whites and Blacks" (67%) as posing very serious threats. Of all the threats that our respondents considered, though, the single most concerning one during this election year was "political polarization and divisiveness." Nearly seven of every 10 Americans (69%) see America's divided and highly partisan political condition as a very serious threat to America's future.

9 "Very serious" here includes also those who went even further, classifying a threat as "extremely" serious.

Figure 13: Americans' Views of Perceived Threats to the Country's Future



The politics of fear

A few perceptions of threat—some considered serious and some soft-pedaled—are bipartisan, shared equally by Democrats and Republicans. Political polarization and divisiveness is a common concern, just as the European Union is nonthreatening to progressives and conservatives alike. The diagram below schematically depicts both the degree of seriousness that Americans see in each threat (from bottom to top)—and the degree to which it is a partisan concern: The farther to the left the red dot, the more the threat is a partisan concern of progressives; the farther to the right the red dot, the more the threat is a partisan concern of conservatives. Perceived threats like “the cultural elite” and “Wall Street and the banking system,” which are located toward the middle of the diagram, are rated as moderately serious by conservatives and progressives alike. However, “unrestricted access to assault weapons” and “political correctness,” while not considered more serious in the aggregate, are found threatening more selectively by partisan subgroups of Americans.¹⁰

10 Note that the distance between the circles in this figure are derived directly from the data. For any two survey questions that share the same response set (in this case ranging from “extremely serious” to “not at all serious”), one can compute the total dissimilarity in how they were answered. The computation of such pairwise dissimilarities across a range of questions yields what is known as a Euclidean distance matrix, analogous to the triangular mileage charts that used to accompany printed maps. After generating such a dissimilarity matrix for the set of questions on “threats to America’s future,” we used a statistical procedure called MDS—Multi-Dimensional Scaling—to plot the dissimilarities of response in two-dimensional space. The greater the distance between any two “threats” in the figure, the greater the difference in how those survey questions were answered. The labels “progressive” and “conservative” in the figure are added after the fact for interpretive purposes, to assist in understanding those differences.

Figure 14: Conservative and Progressive Perceptions of Threats to America



The threats that worry the majority of Biden voters and Democrats¹¹ (as very or extremely serious) but only a minority of Trump supporters are racism (86% to 39%), inequality and poverty (85% to 36%), climate change (84% to 13%), unrestricted access to assault weapons (75% to 25%), the very rich (54% to 20%), and Wall Street and the banking system (52% to 24%).

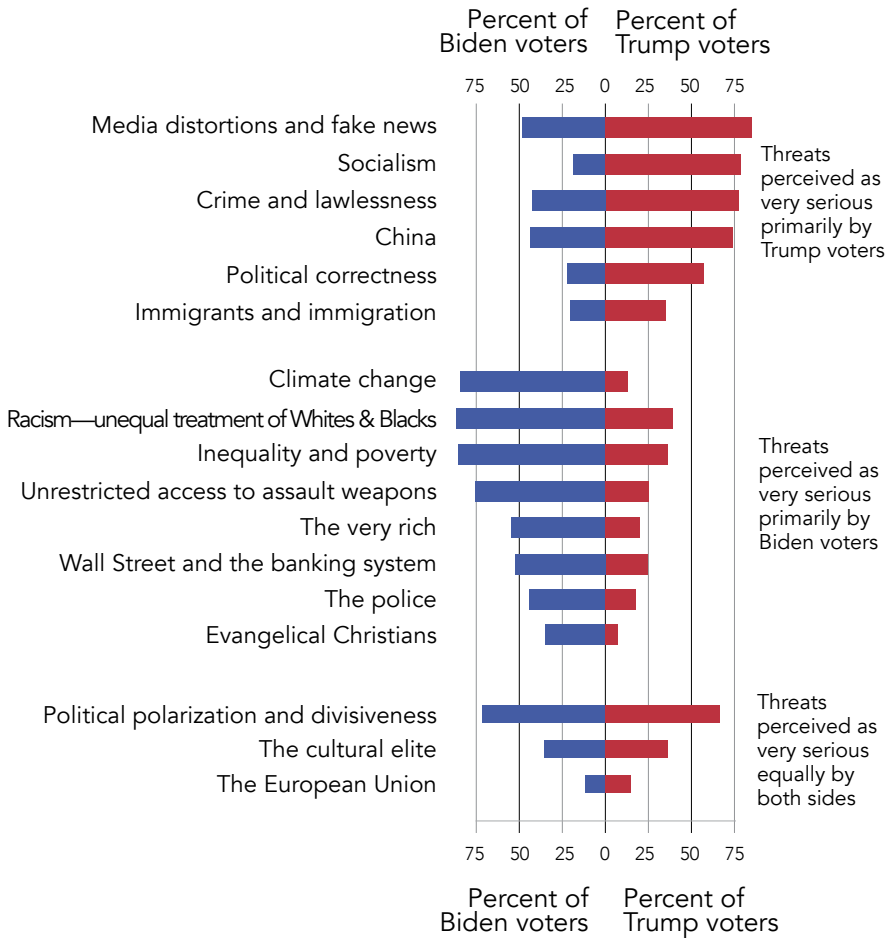
¹¹ We report here on the percentages of Biden voters and Trump voters because they are more inclusive than party data, but the comparison between Democrats and Republicans is identical or within a few percentage points of identical.

By contrast, the threats that worry the majority of Trump voters and Republicans (as very or extremely serious) but only a minority of Democrats are media distortions and fake news (84% to 48%), socialism (78% to 18%), crime and lawlessness (77% to 42%), China (73% to 43%), and political correctness (57% to 22%).

There are no majorities in either party worried about the possible threats of immigration, the police, the European Union, the cultural elite, or Evangelicals. Yet as depicted in the diagram below, many of them are polarizing, concerning one side of the political spectrum more than the other. Only the cultural elite and the European Union are neither highly polarizing nor widely seen as very serious threats.

Interestingly, the one threat to America's future that majorities from *both* parties perceive as very serious is *political polarization and divisiveness*, where 71 percent of the Democrats and 66 percent of the Republicans say it is either a "very" or "extremely serious" threat. Ironically, a substantial majority from each partisan side is concerned by the very thing they espouse and embody. In spite of their mutual worry about polarization and divisiveness, 81 percent of Biden voters see Donald Trump and his supporters as a very serious threat to America, and a majority of Trump voters (55%) view Biden and his supporters in the same way.

Figure 15: Partisan Perceptions of a Very Serious Threat to America's Future



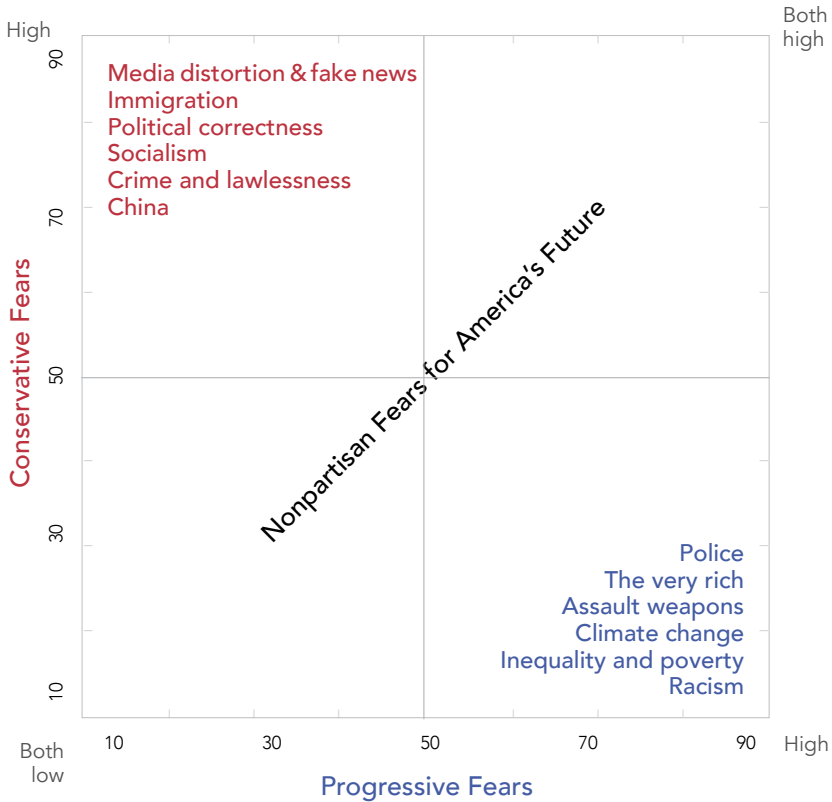
The cultural cartography of fear

The partisan nature of perceived fears and threats to America is clear, yet what remains unclear are the driving social and cultural forces underlying such perceptions. Our initial foray into such an analysis isolates “conservative fears” (of socialism, political correctness, crime and lawlessness, immigrants and immigration, media distortions and fake news, China, and lastly, the European Union) from “progressive fears” (of climate change, unrestricted

access to assault weapons, inequality and poverty, Evangelical Christians, racism, the police, and the very rich). Each set was used to construct an index of the partisan threats perceived by many Americans.¹² These partisan fears were then plotted as x-y plots, much like economists plot spending against income or savings against number of years employed. The result, in our case, is a series of plots with the basic structure outlined in the diagram below.

12 The Conservative Fears Index is a simple, seven-item additive index with a scale reliability coefficient (alpha) of 0.81. Note that even though the European Union is not a highly polarizing threat, Biden voters were more than twice as likely as Trump voters to say the European Union is “not at all” a threat to America’s future, which is why it scaled reliably as an item in our Conservative Fears Index. The Progressive Fears Index is a seven-item additive index with an alpha of 0.84. percentile rank transformations were performed on both indices to aid in interpretability; a score of fifty on each index is the 50th percentile or middle/median score for that index. Hence, the middle of each plot—a score of 50 on *both* variables—reflects a median or middle score for both types of fear. The farther a point is from the center in any direction, the more it departs on one variable, the other variable, or both variables from this middle (or “typical”) score.

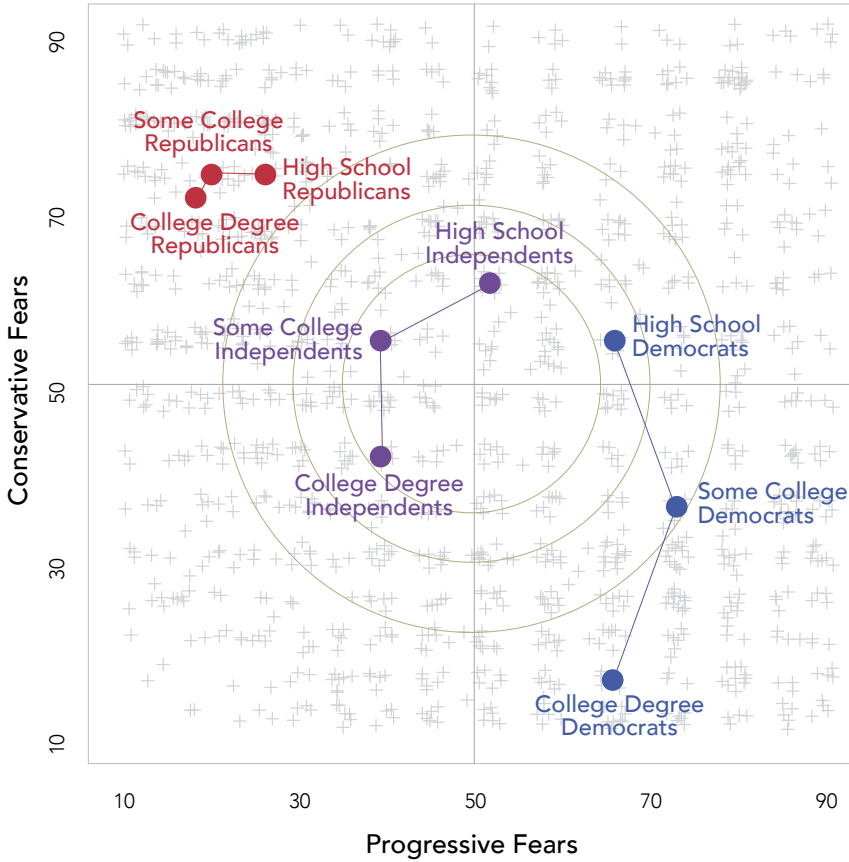
Figure 16: Conservative and Progressive Fears for America's Future



On each dimension of the plot, we were able to rank individual survey respondents. Some were low, moderate, or high on *both* dimensions of perceived threat, which we have labeled “conservative fears” and “progressive fears.” Such nonpartisan Americans fell near the diagonal running from the lower left to the upper right; their perceived threats did not tilt particularly toward conservative or progressive fears. Others, however, were located toward the plot’s upper-left or lower-right quadrant. Such respondents tilted clearly toward one set of concerns about America’s future or the other.

Consider, for illustrative purposes, how educational attainment and party preference are mapped onto this grid (see below).

Figure 17: Levels of Fear by Education and Party

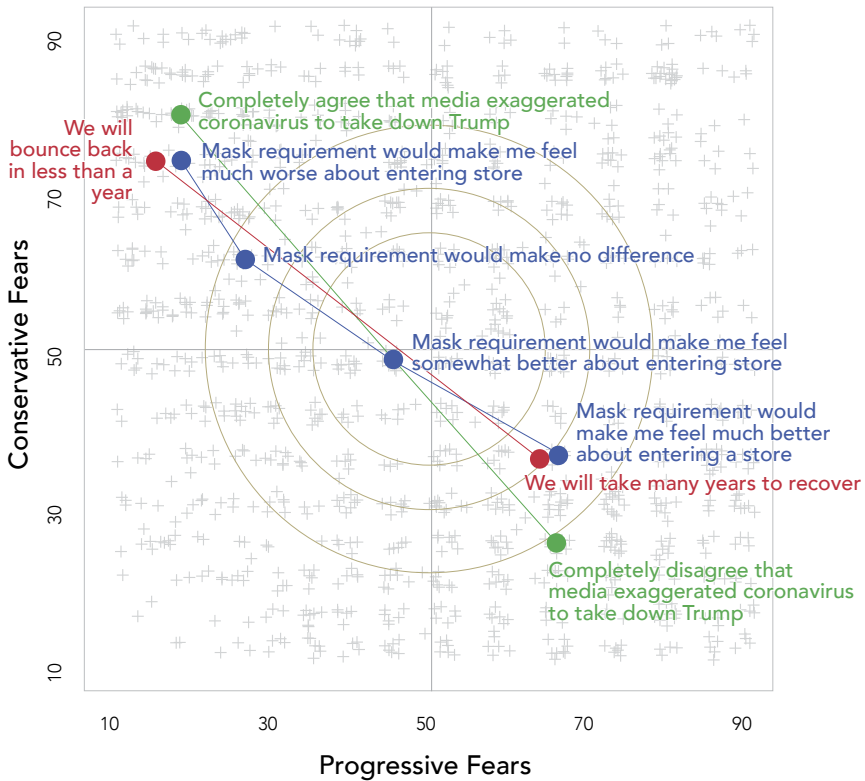


On the one hand, political party is closely aligned with the perception—high or low—of progressive threats to the nation’s future. At the same time, for most Americans, lower levels of education are associated with a heightened sense of conservative threats to nation. Thus, even though concern about progressive threats remains high for all Democrats, higher levels of education mitigate the fear of conservative threats much more for Democrats than Republicans. Interestingly, educational attainment has little bearing upon the fears of Republicans. Their fears are more consistently conservative, irrespective of their educational level. Put differently, the culture of fear that

Republicans inhabit is more narrowly defined and more homogeneous than what we find among Democrats.

Now consider how this cultural mapping of fears—understood as perceived threats to America—line up by Americans’ views of the coronavirus pandemic.

Figure 18: Levels of Fear by Views of Coronavirus



How Americans view the coronavirus is closely tied to partisan fears more broadly. For one, many of those who reject or recoil at mask-wearing do so not only as part of a constellation of conservative concerns for the nation, but as part of their rejection of other threats that progressives see as important.

In the same way, how Americans see the motives and reporting of the mainstream media on the pandemic are widely contradictory. Not surprisingly, these views are also interwoven with other attitudes and opinions about the coronavirus.

Americans who see inequality, racism, climate change, and unrestricted access to assault weapons and the like—the threats that progressives take seriously—generally see the coronavirus as a more serious health threat and greater long-term threat to the nation’s economy than do Americans for whom progressive threats are downplayed or discredited. To the extent that conservatives see the coronavirus, at least in part, as a left-wing exaggeration, they may actually enjoy showcasing their indifference or general lack of concern about the virus. Such an attitude is, for them, an expression of freedom from a set of manufactured “crises” that, like climate change, they tend to reject.

The politics of contempt

Partisans within contemporary American political struggle do see the world differently, but, ironically, they tend to see each other in similarly contemptuous ways.

Figure 19: Trump Voters' and Biden Voters' Views of Each Other

	Biden Voters Saying Trump's Supporters Are...**	Trump Voters Saying Trump's Opponents Are...**
	%	%
Closed-minded	89	71
Misguided and misinformed	89	72
Intolerant	86	67
Arrogant and pretentious	*	63
Politically correct	*	58
Racist	83	*
Religious hypocrites	80	*
Immoral	*	44
Authoritarian	77	55
Dangerous	77	55
Ignorant	78	43
Fascist	63	*
Socialist	*	72
Un-American	53	45
Un-Christian	59	46
Undereducated	63	*
Overeducated	*	25
Dishonest	58	50
Evil	40	31

* Question not asked of this group.

** Percentages indicate the number of Biden voters or Trump voters who say each characteristic describes the "supporters of President Trump" or "Trump's opponents" "well" or "very well."

The table speaks for itself. Majorities of each political tribe view each other in derisive terms. Overall, however, there are significantly more Democrats who regard Trump supporters negatively than there are Republicans who view Trump's opponents negatively.

Interestingly, a majority of Biden voters (55%) acknowledge that Trump's opponents are "politically correct." As with "deplorables" in 2016, labels that are intended negatively by one camp may be embraced positively by the other.

The cultural cartography of contempt

We see this dynamic in a cultural mapping of contempt (see chart below). "Hostility" toward Trump's supporters (on the x-axis) denotes increasing levels of the perception that they are "closed-minded," "misguided and misinformed," "intolerant," "racist," "religious hypocrites," "authoritarian," "ignorant," "fascist," "undereducated," "un-Christian," "un-American," "evil," and "dangerous." Hostility toward Trump's adversaries (on the y-axis), meanwhile, denotes increasing levels of the perception that they are "misguided and misinformed," "closed-minded," "socialist," "intolerant," "arrogant and pretentious," "authoritarian," "un-Christian," "un-American," "immoral," "ignorant," "evil," and "dangerous."¹³

Each subgroup in the mapping of contempt is placed according to its typical level of contempt for Trump supporters, on the one hand, and Trump

13 The Contempt for Trump Supporters index weights all of these characterizations equally: authoritarian, intolerant, closed-minded, dangerous, undereducated, evil, fascist, ignorant, misguided and misinformed, racist, religious hypocrites, un-American, and un-Christian. These were all combined in a straightforward additive index with a coefficient alpha of 0.964.

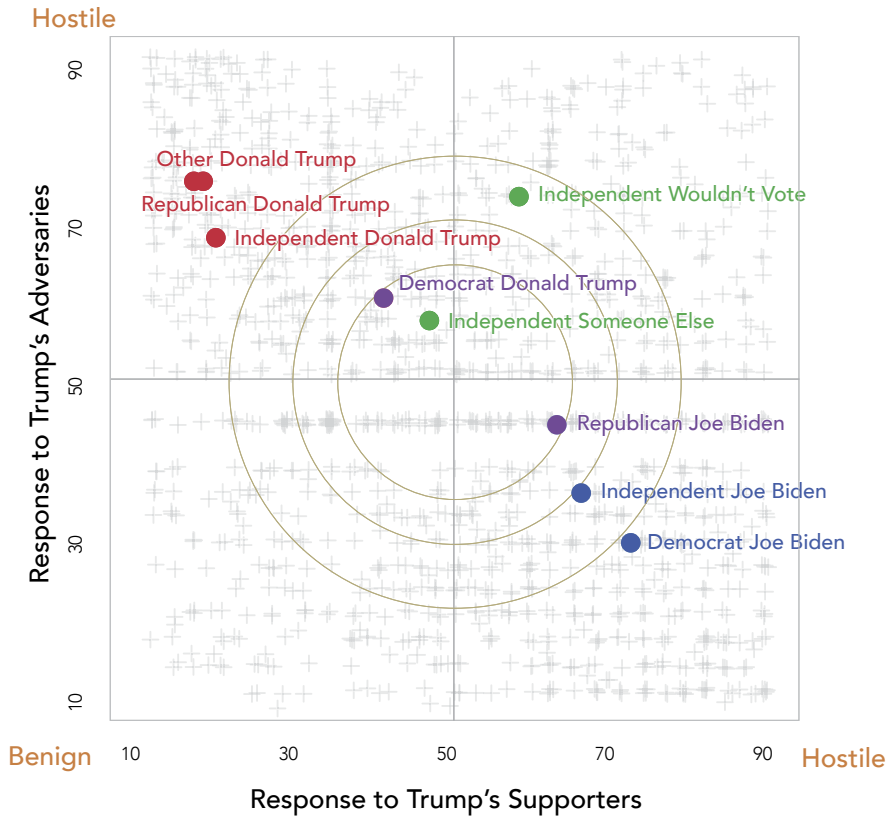
The plotted version of the index, labeled as "response to Trump's Supporters," is a percentile-rank transformation of the original additive index. This transformation spreads the respondents along the x-axis, which aids in the visualization. It is also more easily interpreted: Respondents who score 50 on the index are at the 50th percentile (or median) of all respondents. Respondents who score 25 are at the 25th percentile, meaning that 25 percent of respondents have lower scores than they do. The plotted dots in the graph are subgroup medians—i.e., the 50th percentile for each subgroup.

The Contempt for Trump's Adversaries index weights all of these characterizations equally: arrogant and pretentious, authoritarian, intolerant, closed-minded, dangerous, evil, socialist, ignorant, immoral, misguided and misinformed, un-American, and un-Christian. These were all combined in a straightforward additive index with a coefficient alpha of 0.953.

The plotted version of the index, labeled as "response to Trump's Adversaries," is a percentile-rank transformation of the original additive index. This transformation spreads the respondents along the y-axis, which aids in the visualization. It is also more easily interpreted: Respondents who score 50 on the index are at the 50th percentile (or median) of all respondents. Respondents who score 25 are at the 25th percentile, meaning that 25 percent of respondents have lower scores than they do. As with the Contempt for Trump Supporters index, the plotted dots in the graph are subgroup medians—i.e., the 50th percentile for each subgroup.

adversaries, on the other. The groups, represented by dots, are defined by a combination of political party identification and an expressed voter preference, with the party identification appearing first in the label. Subgroups who say they plan to vote for Trump are generally colored red, and those who express a preference for Biden are generally colored blue. The two exceptions in purple are for crossover voters: Republicans who say they will vote for Biden, and Democrats who plan to vote for Trump. The two exceptions in green are for Independents not voting for Trump or Biden.

Figure 20: Partisan Contempt by Party and Candidate Preference



Both Trump voters and Biden voters are where we would expect them to be: Trump voters typically display hostility (or contempt) towards Trump's

adversaries, just as Biden voters express contempt toward Trump’s supporters. An interesting difference is that Democrats and Independents who plan to vote for Biden typically display a less benign view of their own camp—Trump’s adversaries—than Trump voters do of Trump’s own supporters.

Republicans who plan to cross over and vote for Biden are ambivalent, falling around the aggregate median in their views of Trump’s adversaries. Their hostility toward Trump’s supporters, however, is higher than their distaste for Trump’s detractors.

The same is true for Democrats who plan to support Trump (the other purple dot). They are neither as positive toward Trump’s supporters nor as hostile toward his adversaries as Republicans and Independents who say they will vote for Trump, yet their hostility toward Trump’s adversaries exceeds their distaste for Trump’s supporters.

Information Silos and Partisan Politics

As we’ve seen, Americans may live within the geographic borders of a common nation, but they inhabit different political cultures. And these political cultures are both manufactured and reinforced by the machinery of different media organizations and sectors. Much has been said about the politicization of Fox News Channel, CNN, MSNBC, the *New York Times* and the like, but to understand these dynamics in a more empirically precise way, we asked respondents to this survey the open-ended question, “What is the name of the main source of news you use for information about politics and current events?” Their responses were recorded and coded into news categories.

Evidence from the survey shows how starkly different the Americans inhabiting these information silos are, and, as a result, how it is that people who tune in to these discrepant sources of information perceive completely different realities in the world around them.

For example, only a quarter (24%) of those who rely upon Fox as their primary information source for politics venture out into a nation whose “founding fathers were part of a racist and sexist culture that gave important roles to

White men while harming minorities and women.” Three-quarters (76%) do not live in such a world. By contrast, this racist and sexist heritage is perceived by 81 percent of those who tune to CNN, 84 percent of those who rely upon major national newspapers, 78 percent of those who tune to public television or national public radio, and about two-thirds (64%) of those who tune to the three major networks. The difference between Fox viewers and viewers of the other major networks could not be sharper.

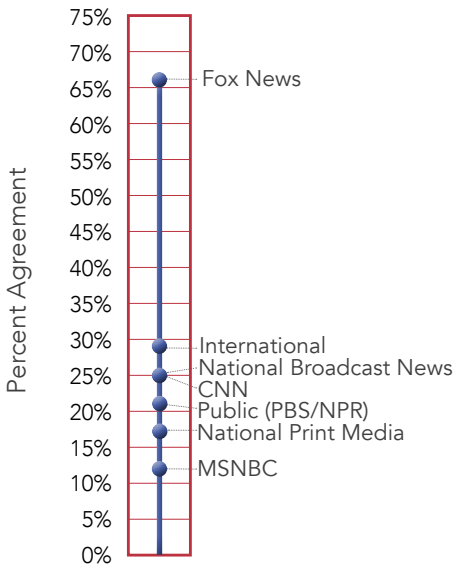
Similarly, four out of five Fox viewers (81%) reject the notion that police and law enforcement unfairly target racial and ethnic minorities, while four out of five CNN viewers (80%), readers of major papers (82%), consumers of public broadcasting (78 %), and two-thirds of the followers of the major networks (66%) confront a world where this is the regrettable reality that they face.

What is endearing in one political culture is disgraceful, even reprehensible, in the other. Take Donald Trump’s unfiltered and direct style of speaking. Most Fox News viewers (66%) consider Donald Trump’s lack of political correctness to be one of “his most appealing qualities.” Only a quarter (25%) of those who follow the major networks and CNN would concur, and even fewer followers of public broadcasting (21%), readers of major national papers (17%), and consumers of MSNBC (12%) find such behavior appealing.

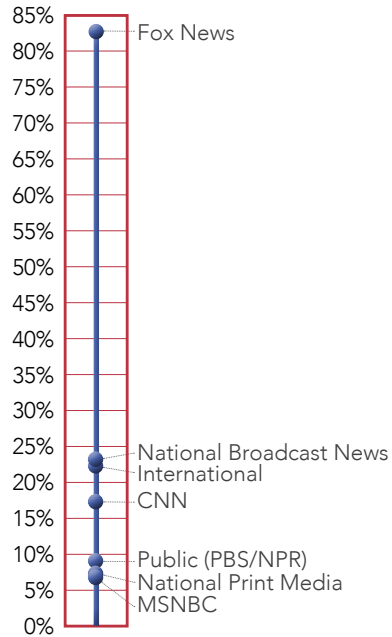
Suspensions about the tactics employed by American media in covering the coronavirus are similarly at odds. The vast majority of Fox News viewers (83%) believe that the mainstream media exaggerated coronavirus in order to take down Donald Trump, an idea that is explicitly rejected by inhabitants of the alternative media world—only 7 percent of Americans who turn to major national papers, 9 percent of those who turn to Public Broadcasting, 17 percent of CNN viewers, and 23 percent of followers of the major networks think the mainstream media has resorted to such tactics.

Figure 21: Partisan Perceptions by Primary Source of News

"Donald Trump's Lack of Political Correctness Is One of His Most Appealing Qualities"



"The Mainstream Media Exaggerated Coronavirus in Order to Take Down Donald Trump"



The alternate political cultures—siloed within alternate media worlds—are characterized by a host of opposing assumptions and perceptions, not least of which are the threats their inhabitants perceive to our nation's future. Is racism, for instance a "very" or "extremely serious" threat? Three-quarters (75%) of those who still turn to the three major networks for their news think it is. Eighty-four percent of those who tune in to CNN think the same—racism is a very serious threat to America. The same goes for followers of Public Broadcasting (86%), readers of major national papers (78%), and viewers of MSNBC (87%). The perception is so pervasive in these media worlds that it is not even a topic for debate—racism is a very serious threat. And yet most Fox

News viewers—the largest single group in our study—don’t think racism rises to the level of a “very serious” threat; only 41 percent of Fox viewers say that it does. Their most common position is that racism is “somewhat serious,” if that.

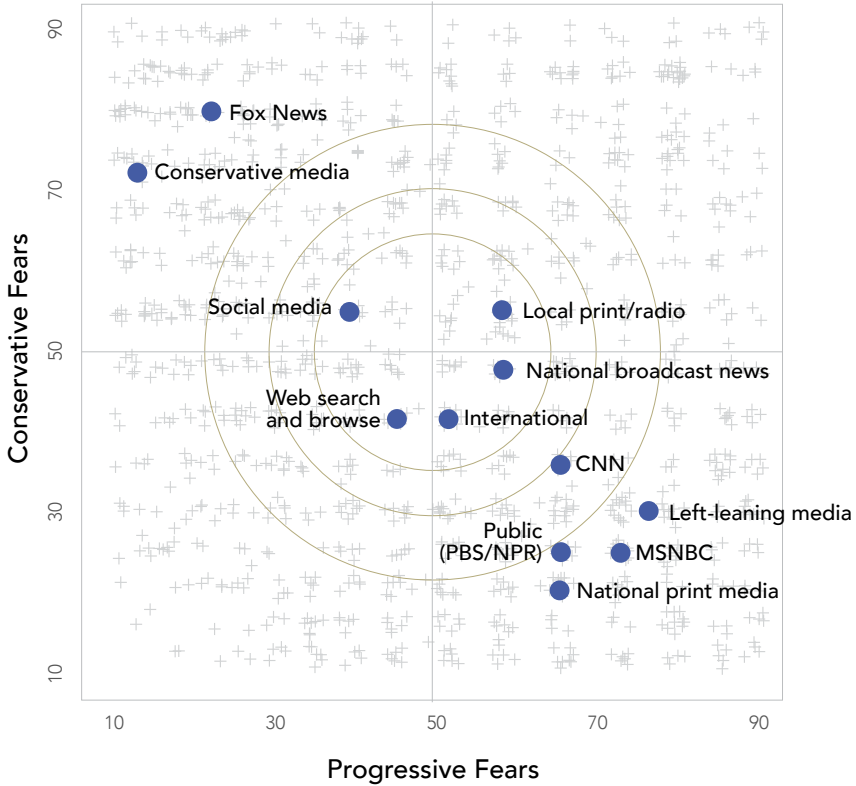
Given all of these differences, it is not surprising at all to see that American’s news service choices are reflected in their election preferences. Nine out of ten Fox viewers (89%) say that “if the presidential election were being held today,” they would be voting to reelect President Trump. The same is the case for our small sample of respondents who say they turn to various conservative media sources on the internet. Yet if they are talking to consumers of other media, they will encounter strikingly different preferences. Our data, most of which were collected just prior to the two conventions, reflect strong preferences for Biden by followers of MSNBC (97%), CNN (87%), and Public Broadcasting (84%), and somewhat smaller but still substantial majorities for Biden among readers of major national papers (79%) and viewers of the three traditional networks (76%).

Stoking fear

As we’ve seen, fear provides a central motivation in contemporary politics. Those fears are encouraged by the powerful cultural institutions of the news media industry. We see this as news sources are plotted against the background of our cultural cartography of fear.

The relationship between what Americans consider to be “news” and their partisan perceptions of threats to America could not be clearer. Followers of Fox News and conservative media outlets on the internet inhabit a distinct region of political culture—a region where fears of fake news, socialism, crime and lawlessness, China, and immigration abound, and where concerns about climate change, inequality and poverty, racism, and unrestricted access to assault weapons barely register. This cultural region is strikingly different from that associated with most other information sources. Indeed, with Fox News viewers’ concern about “fake news,” information about climate change, racism, assault weapons, and the like can be readily dismissed as distractions from the things such as socialism, lawlessness, fake news, and immigration—that truly threaten America.

Figure 22: Levels of Fear by Primary Information Source for News



The Perdurance of Collective Psychology

The mutual hostility of conservatives and progressives is multidimensional. It has, by now, also become a fixed feature of the collective psychology of our political culture. The problem, of course, is that contempt is not a promising starting point for the reciprocal understanding and empathy necessary for democratic compromise.

Yet it is made all the more entrenched by the power of media silos to confirm partisan prejudice. The vested interests of Fox News on the one side and of MSNBC or the New York Times on the other side are not likely to diminish,

and thus the insular partisanship of these media empires will not likely change either. For the foreseeable future, these powerful media structures will reinforce the binary nature of our political culture and the deep mutual scorn Americans seem to have for each other.

IV

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Class and Culture

In the 2016 IASC Survey of American Political Culture™, we found very clear evidence that the culture war of the last 40 years had begun to morph into a *class/culture war*—that is, a conflict defined not just by the beliefs and commitments of different moral communities, but by the beliefs and commitments of different communities *as they are embedded within different locations in the class structure*. Among White Americans, a lower level of education—less than a college degree—turned out to be the single most important factor in determining whether someone would vote for Trump. Conversely, those with a college degree or higher were much more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton.

In 2016, we focused on groups we called the “Credentialed” and “Non-Credentialed,” and their profile in 2020 looks very much like their profile in 2016. In each case, we restricted our analysis temporarily to non-Hispanic Whites, so the education gap among Whites could be examined separately from important issues of race and ethnicity (which we take up later). The Credentialed—Whites with at least a four-year college degree—are comparably wealthy; half (50%) have family incomes of \$100,000 per year or more, compared to 17 percent of the

Non-Credentialed.¹⁴ Two-thirds (67%) of the Non-Credentialed have family incomes of less than \$75,000, compared to a third (31%) of the Credentialed.

The Credentialed also tend to be younger: 55 percent are 44 years of age or younger, compared to 31 percent of the Non-Credentialed. As with the earlier survey, both groups are represented in all of the major faith traditions, but 57 percent of the Non-Credentialed say that religious faith is “very important” or “the most important thing” in their lives. This compares to 42 percent of the Credentialed. Moreover, the plurality of the Credentialed (47%) identify their theological convictions as liberal or very liberal compared to just a quarter of the Non-Credentialed (24%). Additionally, four of every 10 Non-Credentialed Christians (40%) call themselves “Evangelical,” compared to one of every four Credentialed Christians (24%).

Four years on, social class, defined by educational attainment, also continues to dispose people differently toward the current political environment. “Credentialed” and “Non-Credentialed” are admittedly broad categories, and we will extend and refine them shortly. But even these broad categorizations show, as a rule, the Non-Credentialed are more pessimistic, more cynical toward the leadership of American institutions, and more estranged from the institutions that govern their lives.

The case of political correctness

The competing political dispositions are reflected in the case of what is called “political correctness.” Political correctness is a speech code, a way of talking that is infused with ethical evaluation and judgment. Its function is social control—there is a right way of speaking and thus thinking, and there is a wrong way, and if you violate the speech codes, you can be punished through condescension, ostracism, decline in status, job loss, etc. Milder forms of political correctness have existed for decades if not centuries, running the gamut from definitions of “swear words” to the substance and style of polite conversation. Such speech codes have always involved cultural hierarchies, moral condescension, and

14 Throughout this chapter, references to the “Credentialed” and the “Non-Credentialed” always refer to the education gap among non-Hispanic Whites.

social control, as exemplified in many works of classic literature and film, such as the musical *My Fair Lady*. Examples of this are too many to number and, when they occur, they are recognizable to everyone. But recent insistence upon a politically correct way of speaking crosses the line from regulating public styles of expression to regulating public styles of thinking, particularly as pertains to identities associated with race, gender, sexual identity, and religious faith.

This way of speaking and thinking, then, is located in the social world in particular ways. Rooted in the fertile soils of higher education, it finds an agreeable habitat for inculcating young minds. College students not only learn specific skills and knowledge that will serve them as adults in a complex economy, they also pick up new ways of thinking and speaking. Even if they reject it, they learn what it is to be politically correct.

This would help to account for why three-fourths (74%) of the Non-Credentialed agree that “political correctness is a serious problem in our country,” compared to half (51%) of the Credentialed, and why 70 percent of the Non-Credentialed say it is at least a “somewhat serious” threat to America, compared to 51 percent of the Credentialed. (Forty-three percent of the former say it is a “very serious” or “extremely serious” threat, compared to 26 percent of the latter.)

It is interesting, then, that despite his manifest rudeness and his cringeworthy name-calling, ridicule, and denigration of others—rudeness and ridicule that even his supporters acknowledge—45 percent of the Non-Credentialed agree that “Trump’s lack of political correctness is one of his most appealing qualities.” This compares to 28 percent of the Credentialed. The response of White Evangelicals, given their historic concern with moral character, is perhaps most noteworthy of all: nearly seven out of every 10 White Evangelicals (68%) agree that Trump’s “lack of political correctness is one of his most appealing qualities.” Whatever one thinks of the presidency of Donald Trump on a policy level, few would claim that he represents, or even strives to represent, Christian virtue in his daily life. Indeed, our data suggest that conservative Christians consider his “bad-boy” persona attractive.

Trump’s opponents often accuse Trump of dividing the nation through, among other things, his manner and speech. We agree entirely. But we would add that among the ways that the lines of division in the culture war

have crystalized has been different speech codes that preceded Trump's election by decades. Ways of speaking are class-culture markers that delineate who is "in" and who is "not," and these speech codes are a key way in which cultural conflict is fought. Language, in short, can be a weapon. We doubt whether he is aware of it, but instinctively, Trump unifies and mobilizes his base and enrages his opponents through a tacit recognition of these linguistic dynamics.

Political payoff

How this plays out politically is no surprise at all. The Non-Credentialed are more conservative than the Credentialed—the plurality (46%) of the former describe themselves as conservative or very conservative, whereas the plurality (48%) of the latter describe themselves as liberal or very liberal. By a margin of 22 percent, the Non-Credentialed view Donald Trump more favorably than their better-educated peers, and 55 percent of the former say they will vote for Trump, compared to 61 percent of the latter who say they will vote for Biden.

Class and culture update: 2016 and 2020

This very rough bifurcation of class-cultures was illuminating, to be sure, but it was also clumsy. In 2016, we were sure that more could be said through a more careful parsing of the class-culture data. To this end, we divided the Non-Credentialed into two categories in the 2016 survey.

By virtue of the economic and political rewards attached to our knowledge-based economy, those who are without a college degree are certainly at a disadvantage. Within this category, however, one can draw a line between those who are religiously moderate, liberal, or even secular in their orientation and those who are religiously conservative Evangelicals. We called the first group—non-Hispanic Whites without a college degree who are religiously moderate, liberal, or secular in their orientation—the "Disadvantaged." Those without a college degree, but who self-identify as religiously conservative Evangelicals, on the other hand, we called the "Disinherited." This label captures the widely shared experience (often articulated by religiously conservative Whites themselves) that they have been pushed out of mainstream culture, that they are looked down upon, and that their viewpoints are ignored.

In our 2016 survey (as with the current survey), we oversampled for those with advanced degrees and those we have labeled “Social Elites.”¹⁵ Together, these groups represent important demographic and cultural bases in America’s vexed politics.

We followed the same methodology in this 2020 survey to see how the situation was playing out four years later.

Religion and class combined and hardening

Notwithstanding important tales of class and class culture, such as J. D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*, Arlie Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land*, and Charles Murray’s *Coming Apart*, our dive into the 2020 Survey of American Political Culture reveals that class by itself is not so neat a line of division. The real line of division becomes clear when combining class with conservative religion, most notably, White American Evangelicalism. We see this when looking at how the three groups related to the two nominees in 2016, but especially in their response to Hillary Clinton.

In 2016, both Clinton and Trump were not just the nominees of their own parties, but cultural flash points with considerable baggage. Even though the Disadvantaged had a low opinion of Clinton—58 percent had a mostly or very unfavorable opinion of her—still, half (52%) of them said they would vote for her anyway and did.¹⁶ Many of them had a historical legacy of, and family habits of, voting Democratic that extended back for decades, if not generations. Even so, another 11 percent of this group could not line up behind either Clinton or Trump and voted for a different candidate. As to Trump, three-fourths (77%) of the Disadvantaged viewed him unfavorably, and only 28 percent said they would actually vote for him. Class by itself was clearly a weak indicator that Americans were inclined to support Donald Trump if religious conservatism—the Disinherited—was omitted from consideration.

15 “Social Elites” are defined here as non-Hispanic Whites with a postgraduate degree who are not religiously conservative.

16 In the 2020 IASC Survey of American Political Culture™, 53 percent of the Disadvantaged said they did vote for Clinton.

At the same time, the more secular Social Elites also had mixed views of Clinton. Four out of 10 Elites (39%) had an *unfavorable* opinion of her, yet 74 percent said they would vote for her anyway. Another very significant 11 percent effectively said “neither” to the two parties’ nominees and indicated they would vote for a third-party or write-in candidate.¹⁷

Importantly, even the “Disinherited,” who were religiously conservative White Evangelicals by definition, had a mixed view of the slate of candidates. Forty percent of them had an unfavorable view of Trump in 2016, yet 74 percent claimed they would vote for him; an additional 6 percent said they would vote for a write-in or third-party candidate.

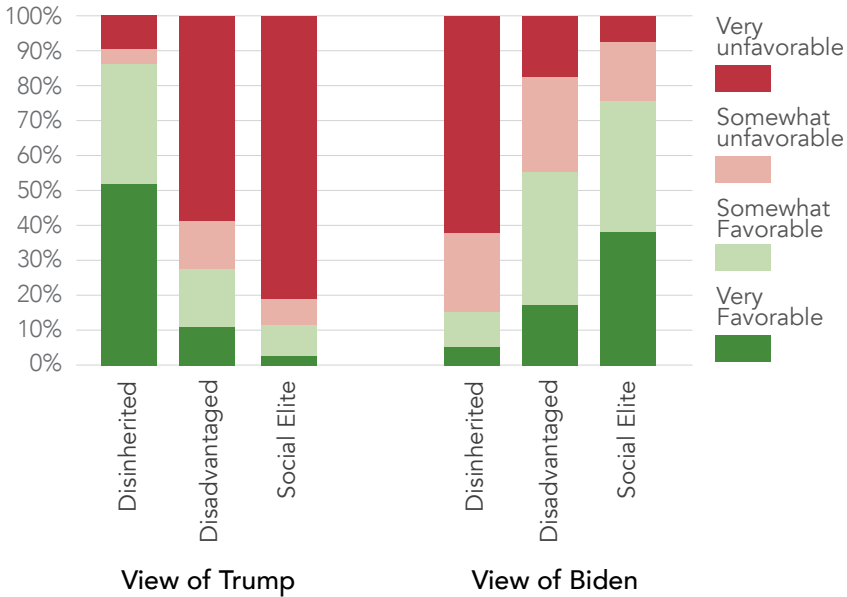
The ambivalence we saw in the 2016 favorability ratings and in the decision by a significant minority in all camps to vote outside of the party structure may have been a version of what is called the “Bradley Effect,” in which voters disguise their feelings to pollsters rather than admit to backing a “socially undesirable” candidate. This was clearly a factor in the 2016 election, but that reluctance or ambivalence appears to have vanished by 2020.¹⁸

It has disappeared among the opposing cultural demographic groups historically at the center of the culture war. The Disinherited (less-educated White Evangelicals) and the Social Elites each line up overwhelmingly behind their respective candidates. Eighty-six percent of the Disinherited have a positive view of Trump, and 85 percent have a negative view of Biden. Eighty-seven percent said that they would vote for Trump as well. None say they would vote for a third party or write-in candidate. By contrast, 89 percent of all Social Elites had an unfavorable view of Trump, and three-fourths (76%) had a positive opinion of Biden. In keeping with this view, 86 percent said they would vote for Biden, and only 2 percent said they would vote for a third party or write-in candidate.

17 According to our 2020 survey, 86 percent of the Social Elites said, in the end, that they pulled the lever for Clinton. Only 7 percent voted for a third-party or write-in candidate.

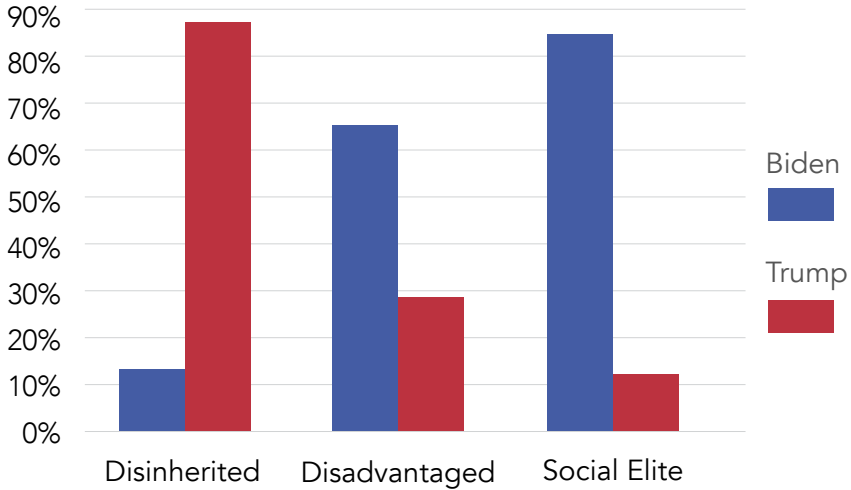
18 Like our examination of the Credentialed versus the Non-Credentialed, this discussion of the intersection between class and religious faith is restricted in this section to non-Hispanic Whites. White Evangelicals, culturally speaking, inhabit a quite different location than African American Evangelicals, so they must be considered separately if they are to be understood.

Figure 23: Cultural Class Views of Donald Trump and Joe Biden



More surprising are the Disadvantaged, those religious moderates, liberals, or secularists who have less than a college degree. A strictly class dynamic that discounted religious differences would predict that the majority of this group would vote for Trump, but this is not at all the case. As in 2016, three-fourths (72%) of this group had a negative view of Trump and, again, 28 percent said they would vote for him, but now, a full two-thirds (66%) said they would vote for Biden—14 percentage points *more* than voted for Clinton—with only 2 percent opting to vote for a write-in or third party candidate.

Figure 24: If the Election Were Held Today,
Whom Would You Vote For?



But the prominence of the class dynamic in presidential politics becomes even more muted when considering how the Disadvantaged *actually regard* the more religiously conservative members of their own educational class, the other “Non-Credentialeds.” The majority of the Disadvantaged view Trump supporters as “closed-minded” (73%), “misguided” (72%), “intolerant” (67%), “authoritarian” (62%), “ignorant” (61%), “religiously hypocritical” (61%), “racist” (61%) and “dangerous” (59%). Substantial minorities even regard them as “fascist” (43%), “un-Christian” (42%), and just plain “evil” (30%). This political distance among the less educated would not be an illustration of what Marx called “class solidarity” or “class-consciousness”!

This means that the largest group of people left who are firmly in the Trump camp are less well educated, religiously conservative believers, mainly constituted by the Evangelical and Catholic working class.

Mapping class culture, faith, and gender

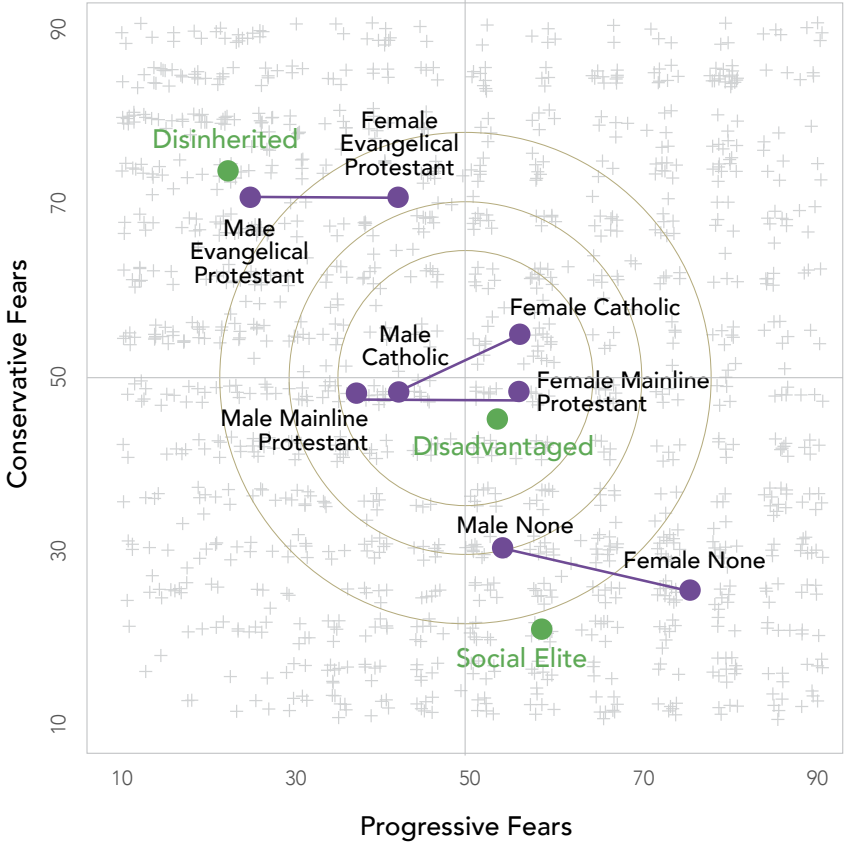
Drawing on the cultural cartography we developed in the last section, we examine class culture, faith commitment, and gender in the graph below.

First, the cultural mapping we deploy provides one picture of how far apart religiously conservative, less educated White Christians (the Disinherited) are from the others in their own social class—the Disadvantaged. Insofar as citizens worry about their nation, the White, less educated Disadvantaged represent the “center” of American public opinion, at least in terms of their fears for the future of America.

At the same time, we see just how far apart the Disinherited are from the Social Elite. Conservative warnings about China, socialism, political correctness, and fake news fall on deaf ears among the Social Elite, who generally believe the Disinherited have been sold a bill of goods by Republicans who exploit them for the purposes of political power, little more. Of course, conservatives generally think progressives have been sold a similar bill of goods about the climate, racism, assault weapons, and the like. For the Disinherited, these progressive fears are equally unwarranted. Social Elites and their less-educated, religiously conservative White neighbors are citizens of the same nation, to be sure, but they inhabit different moral universes, universes that imbibe different sources of information and see those who differ as, at best, “misguided and misinformed.”

Second, irrespective of faith commitment, women are more progressively oriented in their fears for America than men. Women are simply more concerned than men—even in the same religious demographic—about racial and economic disadvantage, as well as about protecting the nation from climate change and assault weapons. Evangelical women, for example, are as concerned as male Evangelicals about the menace of the various conservative threats to America and its future; it’s just that these women are *also* more concerned about the range of national perils identified by progressives.

Figure 25: Levels of Fear by Faith, Gender, and Cultural Class Fault Line



We see the same pattern when we examine gender differences in perceived national threats at different income or education levels, or different levels of religiosity. Other things being equal, women are typically no lower on “conservative fears”; they are simply higher on “progressive fears.”

V

RACE, RELIGION, AND POLITICS

America's Racial Divide—How Bad Is It?

Just on the face of it, there is a substantial racial divide in American public culture: Whites, Blacks and Hispanics inhabit different cultural worlds and perceive political institutions, events, and politicians from their own unique vantage points. The news media are constantly polling and playing up these differences, though the differences are not always what the media depicts, as we shall see.

In the broadest possible sense, Black and Hispanic Americans operate with a view of American society as a whole similar to that of most other Americans. They have very little to no confidence in the leading institutions of American life—not least governmental and economic institutions—to function as they should. With reason, they are highly cynical toward America's leadership, both for its perceived self-interestedness and low levels of competence. And they are just as estranged, if not *more* estranged, from the institutions that oversee their lives than any other demographic grouping in America.

At the same time, the political dispositions, preferences, and ideology of African Americans today generally align with the mainstream of the

Democratic Party. No surprise there. By contrast, while Hispanic Americans are often lumped together in political rhetoric with African Americans under the heading of “minorities,” they are ethnically very diverse—of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American heritages—and often politically divided among themselves.

Thus, for example, this survey reveals that 76 percent of all African Americans report having voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election; 5 percent, for Trump; and 19 percent, for a third party or write-in candidate. By contrast, only 39 percent of Hispanic Americans say they voted for Clinton; 34 percent, for Trump; and 26 percent, for a different, unnamed candidate. White voters in our survey split their vote 41 percent for Clinton to 45 percent for Trump, with 14 percent saying that they voted for a different candidate.

In the 2020 election, we see less ambiguity, as noted in the preceding section of the report, but a similar pattern overall. Nine of 10 Blacks (88%) indicate that “if the presidential election were being held today,” they would vote for Biden; 7 percent, for Trump; and 4 percent, for another candidate. This contrasts with Hispanic Americans, 57 percent of whom say they would vote for Biden; 33 percent, for Trump; and 9 percent, for a third-party candidate. White voters in our survey split their vote as follows: 49 percent for Biden, 47 percent for Trump, and 2 percent for someone else.

All of this, of course, is just illustrative. The aggregate distribution of voting behavior among these three racial and ethnic groups follows this overall pattern as it bears on many policy issues too. Eighty-four percent of Blacks, for example, favor “creating a national health care system, financed by taxes, that would provide free health care to all Americans,” compared to 71 percent of Hispanics and just over half of non-Hispanic Whites (55%). And 43 percent of Blacks “strongly favor” “banning the purchase of assault weapons by ordinary citizens,” compared to 29 percent of Whites and 26 percent of Hispanics. (More Hispanics, in fact, strongly oppose such a ban than strongly favor it.) And 78 percent of Blacks favor “reparations or financial compensation to African Americans for their historic mistreatment by White Americans,” compared to 41 percent of Hispanics and 29 percent of Whites. By the same token, Whites are nearly evenly split on the question of whether “the government is doing too many things that are better left to businesses and individuals” or “the government should do more to solve our country’s

problems”: 47 percent say the former, and 53% say the latter. Hispanics, by contrast, are twice as likely to call for more government action (67%) as to support less government action (33%), and Blacks are four times as likely to advocate more government activity (81%) as to advocate less (19%). Clearly, examples of racial divergence in political culture abound.

If we restrict our focus to White Americans who call themselves liberal, however, any distance between African Americans and those Whites in political world view and concerns largely disappears. It remains, of course, for certain particularly race-related issues like reparations, but otherwise, White liberals are, if anything, hardened liberals, embracing liberal political views more fully and enthusiastically than even African Americans. What this tells us is that the greatest and most intense divide in America is not between Whites and Blacks in the aggregate, but elsewhere.

The widest chasm

The widest divisions in America are, in fact, between White Evangelicals¹⁹ and the African American community as a whole. It is a racial chasm, to be sure, but one intensified and deepened by the particular character of conservative White Evangelicalism—a chasm not mirrored between Black Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. This division is seen most sharply on those issues that specifically bear on African Americans and Hispanics as well.

We begin with mutual understanding. To understand the experiences, the difficulties, frustrations, and hopes of anyone is an act of respect and care. It is significant that more than two-thirds (68%) of both White Evangelical and White, non-Evangelical respondents disagree with the statement, “People of other races can’t really understand how my race sees things.” By contrast, three-fourths (75%) of all African Americans and half (47%) of all Hispanics agree that people of other races can’t really understand them; just under a third (29%) of both groups agreed completely. This makes sense in the context of the scholarly literature on “cognitive marking.” According to

¹⁹ As noted earlier, we are using the phrase “White Evangelicals” to mean “White Evangelical Protestants,” where “Evangelical Protestants” are those Protestants who self-identify as “Evangelical” and do not consider themselves theologically liberal.

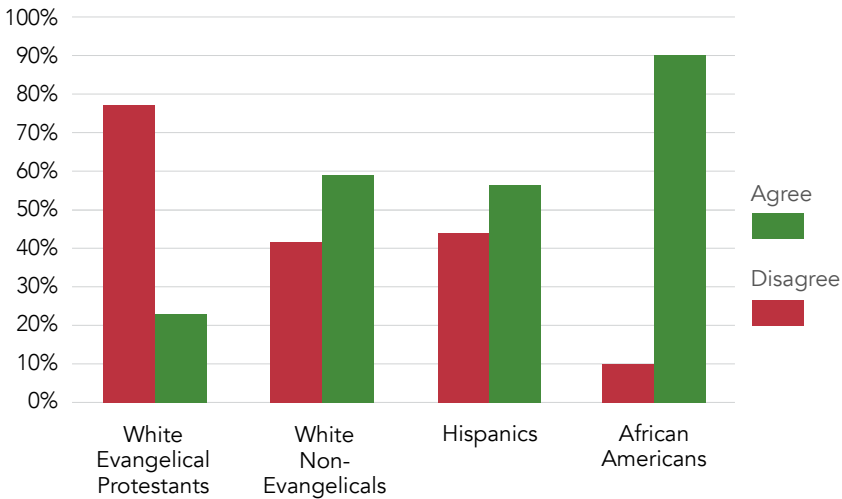
sociologist Wayne Brekhus, the experiences of members of “marked” groups tends to be constructed as different, exceptional, or at times even deviant, while members of “unmarked” social groups (White citizens, in this case) tend to see their experiences as generic or universal in nature.²⁰ Simply stated, White Americans implicitly assume that if it’s true for them or it works for them, then it’s true and works for everyone. These perceptions matter and pervade White political opinion. Yet the perceptions of Blacks and Hispanics matter equally, and the evidence overwhelmingly confirms the perception by African Americans that their experiences and challenges are not understood by the majority. Though not all, certainly the majority of White Americans take for granted that their experiences are well understood by others of other races. This dissonance is an essential element in the foundation of racial division in America.

Needless to say, history is critical to identity, individually and collectively. Where a person or a group comes from shapes, in large measure, who they are or who they become. Ninety percent of all African Americans agree that “our founding fathers were part of a racist and sexist culture that gave important roles to White men while harming minorities and women.” Just over half of Hispanic Americans (56%) also agree with this, as do 59 percent of non-Evangelical Whites. Yet around one-fourth (23%) of all White Evangelicals agree; 77 percent disagree, with 46 percent completely

20 Brekhus writes, “The basic properties of markedness and figure/ground can be translated from linguistics and visual perception to social contrasts. The attributes of social markedness would include the following: (1) the marked is heavily articulated while the unmarked remains unarticulated; (2) as a consequence, *the marking process exaggerates the importance and distinctiveness of the marked*; (3) the marked receives disproportionate attention relative to its size or frequency, while the unmarked is rarely attended to even though it is usually greater; (4) *distinctions within the marked tend to be ignored, making it appear more homogeneous than the unmarked*; and 5) *characteristics of a marked member are generalized to all members of the marked category but never beyond the category, while attributes of an unmarked member are either perceived as idiosyncratic to the individual or universal to the human condition.*” As these concepts relate to our data, we are seeing that Black respondents—as members of the marked category—are emphasizing the distinctiveness of their own experiences and perspective, while White respondents—as members of the unmarked category—tend to universalize their own experiences as relatable to aspects of the general human condition. See Wayne Brekhus, “Social Marking and the Mental Coloring of Identity: Sexual Identity Construction and Maintenance in the United States,” *Sociological Forum* 11, no. 3 (September 1996): 497-522, as well as his article “A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus,” *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 1 (March 1998): 34-51.

disagreeing. This gulf between White Evangelicals and Blacks is a remarkable 67 percentage points!

Figure 26: “Our Founding Fathers Were Part of a Racist and Sexist Culture That Gave Important Roles to White Men While Harming Minorities and Women”

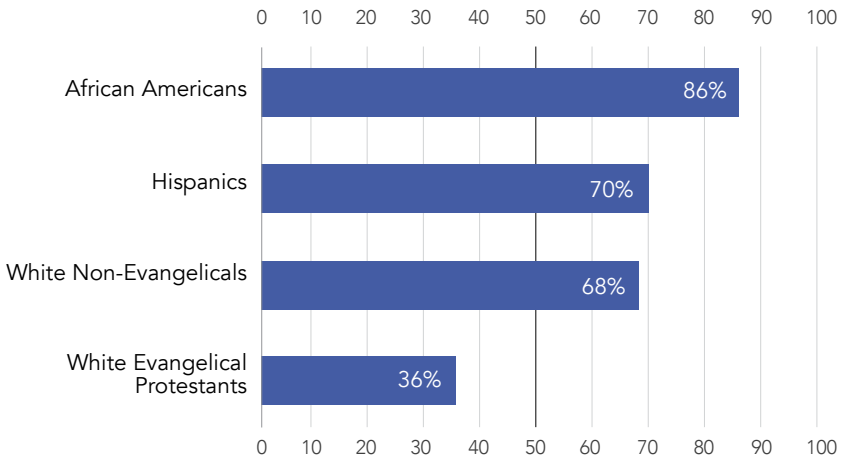


The effects of racism are many. Some are very direct and tangible, while others are more subtle or indirect. When asked in 2016 if they thought the overall quality of life for their racial or ethnic group in America over the last decade had gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed the same, about a third of all Blacks (35%) said that it had gotten worse, while another 40 percent claimed it was about the same. In 2020, the percent of Blacks saying it has gotten worse has grown to half (51%). This is twice the percentage of White Evangelicals (25%) and White non-Evangelicals (23%) who perceived a decline for their racial or ethnic group.

Even though racism persists in many forms, people disagree over how serious a threat it is to America today and America’s future. Eighty-six percent of all Blacks regard racism as a very or extremely serious threat. Seventy percent of all Hispanics view it similarly, as do 68 percent of Whites who are not Evangelical Protestants. Only one-third (36%) of all White Evangelical

Protestants share this view. Again, White Evangelicals are the outlier (see bar chart below).

Figure 27: Percent Seeing “Racism—Unequal Treatment of Whites and Blacks”—as a Very Serious Threat



But what about inequality? How serious a threat is it to America’s future? We see the same distribution of opinion on this: The overwhelming majority of African Americans (86%) see economic inequality and poverty as a very or extremely serious threat to America, compared to 68 percent of all Hispanics and 66 percent of all White non-Evangelicals. Here, too, just over one-third (37%) of all White Evangelicals think inequality is that much of a threat.

The disparities are even greater when getting down to specifics. African Americans (62%) are nearly four times as likely as White Evangelicals (16%) to see the police as a threat to America, though twice as likely as non-Evangelical Whites (30%) and Hispanics (32%).

This issue is even more dramatic when looking at perceptions of prejudice in police practices. Almost universally, Blacks (91%) believe that “the police and law enforcement unfairly target racial and ethnic minorities.” (This figure is up from 83 percent in 2016.) The majority of Hispanics (60%) and White non-Evangelicals (57%) today share this opinion. By contrast, the percentage of Blacks who hold this view is more than five times the percentage of

White Evangelicals (17%); 83 percent of the latter *disagree*, with 41 percent disagreeing strongly.

Finally, there is the question of what to do about the legacy of slavery and of racism in America. One proposal that has been debated for a number of years is the idea of reparations—some kind of “financial compensation to African Americans for their historic mistreatment by White Americans.” The racial divide over this issue is staggering. Nearly eight of 10 African Americans (78%) are in favor of reparations, compared to 41 percent of all Hispanics and 34 percent of all non-Evangelical Whites. White Evangelicals as a group, however, stand far outside of this consensus, with only 7 percent in favor of this idea.

In sum, yes, there is a racial divide in America. Whites, Hispanics, and African Americans do not share the same or even similar perspectives on the history, experiences, and issues surrounding race, and the consequence of this is misunderstanding, a lack of respect, and ultimately prejudice in the everyday experience of Blacks and other minorities. But these points of division are not equally or uniformly distributed across the population. The deepest and most consistent racial division is found between White Evangelicals and Blacks. Reconciliation begins with mutual understanding, and by these lights, it is a long way off.

The Racial Divide in American Evangelicalism

Though nowadays Evangelicalism is often spoken of as a White religio-cultural/political movement in America, the fact is that 26 percent of the African American community in the United States also identify themselves as Evangelical. There are large numbers of Asian American Evangelicals originating from China and Korea especially, as well Hispanic Evangelicals who sometimes go by the name “Pentecostal.” Though their numbers are small, Evangelicals can be found within the many Native American tribes too.

And even though the number of African American, Hispanic, and Asian Evangelicals in our sample is too small to analyze them separately, when taken

together, there are sufficient numbers to offer some tentative observations about the racial and ethnic tensions within Evangelicalism itself.²¹

A common faith, but a divided community

All of these non-White Evangelicals are religiously devout Christians: 97 percent of White Evangelicals and 95 percent of Evangelicals of color declare that their religious beliefs are “very important” or “the most important thing” in their lives.²²

A community of religiously committed Evangelicals holds a common faith that operates at the center of their lives and, as such, it provides a common culture that they share—one that, in principle, transcends politics, economics, and other matters of this world. Does this actually hold true? Not remotely.

As it bears on White versus Black, the answer is implied in the previous section of this report. The position of the Black community in America is so close to consistently harmonized on the issues we asked them about that it is safe to assume that Black Evangelicals are entirely aligned within their larger racial community. A reading of the data on Black Evangelicals within our sample supports this, though, once again, the number of Black Evangelicals is too small to speak conclusively. We are *confident*, however, of the aggregate pattern among Evangelicals of color, and it portends a significant departure from the prevailing patterns among White Evangelicals.

Divided by fear

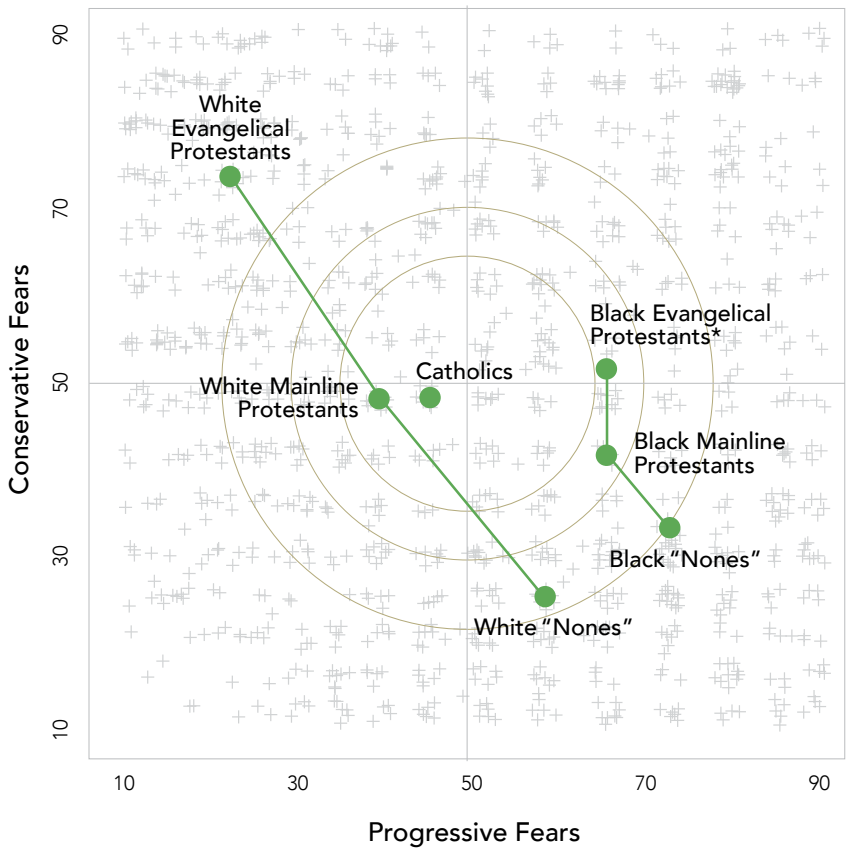
When we examine racial and religious factors against the background of the cultural cartography of fear that we discussed earlier in this report, we see that Blacks tend to share a progressive assortment of fears about America at a relatively highly level irrespective of their religiosity. Most Blacks, whether

21 Our sample contained 105 Blacks, 56 Hispanics, 23 Native Americans, and 6 Asians who self-identified as Evangelical Christians. The total number of non-White Evangelicals was 199.

22 Because American Evangelical Christianity is broadly understood as a conservative movement, our definition of Evangelical in this section is again restricted to persons who self-identify as Evangelical who do *not* self-identify as theological liberals.

secular or Evangelical, are concerned about inequality, racism, access to assault weapons, and the like. Yet our limited data tentatively suggest that Evangelical Blacks harbor more “conservative” fears about crime and lawlessness, immigration, socialism, and the like than do secular Blacks. Even so, the two groups in our sample are not that far apart, especially in comparison with the great cultural distance between White Evangelical Protestants and White secularists.

Figure 28: Levels of Fear by Race and Religion



* See footnote 19 regarding the sample size.

White Evangelicals land squarely in the Fox News zone of low progressive and high conservative fears. Another way to think about the chart is that secular Whites and secular Blacks are culturally very similar in their perceived threats to America, but Evangelical Whites and Evangelical Blacks inhabit very different political cultural landscapes.²³

Divided on social issues that bear on the life chances of minorities

A sense of history is one place to start. Evangelicals of color (66%) are nearly three times as likely as White Evangelicals (23%) to agree that “our founding fathers were part of a racist and sexist culture that gave important roles to White men while harming minorities and women.” They (70%) are also two times as likely as White Evangelicals (36%) to see racism as a very or extremely serious threat to America. And though large majorities of White and non-White Evangelicals—77 percent and 81 percent, respectively—see crime and lawlessness as a very or extremely serious threat to the country, Evangelicals of color (71%) are almost twice as likely as White Evangelicals (37%) to see the police as a threat to our nation. Moreover, non-White Evangelicals (62%) are three-and-a-half times as likely as White Evangelicals (17%) to agree that “the police and law enforcement unfairly target racial and ethnic minorities.”

Because economic inequalities disproportionately effect minorities, it is significant that Evangelicals of color (74%) are twice as likely as White Evangelicals (37%) to say that inequality and poverty are a very or extremely serious threat to the country. They (55%) are also twice as likely to see Wall Street and the banking system as a very or extremely serious threat to America and America’s future.

23 Even though our sample of Black Evangelicals is not large enough to speak conclusively, we found the pattern suggestive enough to present it with appropriate caveats. Recall that our definition of Evangelical is limited to those who do not think of themselves as theological liberals. Given this restriction, it is particularly interesting that our small sample of Black Evangelicals still scores higher on our index of progressive perceptions of threat to America’s future than on our index of conservative perceptions of the same.

Divided by politics

It only follows that there are substantial political differences as well. When taken in the aggregate, non-White Evangelicals are distributed across multiple party affiliations. Just over a third (35%) are Democrats, just over a third (37%) are Independents, and one-fifth (20%) are Republicans. White Evangelicals have a dramatically different profile. Just over half (53%) are Republicans and just over a third (35%) are Independents, but only 7 percent self-identify as Democrats.

And while their party affiliations may range across the political spectrum, the political ideology of White Evangelicals tends to load up on the conservative side. Forty-three percent say they are very conservative, and about the same number (39%) say they are somewhat conservative. Only 15 percent claim to be moderate in their ideology, and just 2 percent say they are even somewhat politically liberal. Non-White Evangelicals tilt toward a conservative political ideology: The plurality say they are either somewhat conservative (26%) or very conservative (19%). Yet their most common claim (42%) is that they are political moderates, and about a tenth (12%) say they are liberal or very liberal.

All of this cashes out in voting. In 2020, fully 87 percent of White Evangelicals—nearly nine out of 10—say they will be voting for Donald Trump, and only 9 percent say they will vote for Joe Biden. In contrast, 59 percent of non-White Evangelicals say they will vote for Biden, and 40 percent say they'll vote for Trump.

Divided by reputation

Given these political differences, it is worth noting that non-White Evangelicals are more likely than White Evangelicals to see Trump supporters as authoritarian (by a factor of 3.5), intolerant (by a factor of 3.5), closed-minded (by a factor of 3.5), misguided and misinformed (by a factor of 5.5), racist (by a factor of 5), and religiously hypocritical (by a factor of nearly 6). In each case, a majority of Evangelicals of color see these characterizations as describing Trump supporters “well” or “very well.” Non-White Evangelicals are also more likely than White Evangelicals to see Trump supporters as un-

Christian (by a factor of 3), fascist (by a factor of almost 7), dangerous (by a factor of 6), and evil (by a factor of 5).

Evangelicalism as 'Cultural Other'

Toward the end of the twentieth century, a concept emerged in the social sciences that has enjoyed some currency: the concept of the “cultural other.” In any society or group, there are those who are “in” and those who are “out”—that is, inside the shared agreements of understanding and social practice, or outside them. The cultural other is an individual or, more than likely, an entire group, whose beliefs and practices place them outside of “normal” or “acceptable” society. Their way of thinking and of life offends the sensibilities and ideals of the dominant group, and in this sense, they are stigmatized in the extreme. As such, the cultural other is regarded as not just outside of the in-group, but so far outside that their very presence represents a profound ethical violation that might even be experienced as repugnant to those who are not part of it. This would now seem to be how many people outside of Evangelicalism have come to think about the modern-day Evangelical movement and those who comprise it.

From the center and to the periphery

This signals a remarkable and important historical turn. Evangelicalism—or its theological and ecclesiastical forebears—once enjoyed the status of a mainstream institution. As just one well-known example, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and other great colleges and universities in the America all had their roots in the Calvinist traditions of the Protestant Reformation, a tradition that, in certain ways, modern-day Evangelicals can legitimately claim as their own.

The history of conservative Protestantism in America in its variety is complex, to be sure, but one thing that can be said with certainty is that since the American Civil War, the beliefs, practices, and institutions of conservative Protestantism have lost stature and authority, moving from the centers of cultural influence to the periphery. To a large extent, this process was nearing

completion by the 1960s. Indeed, a big part of the story of the contemporary culture war can be told as the effort by modern-day traditional Protestants to retain their place in shaping the culture as they once did, and to enjoy the privileges that accompanied that kind of influence.

One simple indication of how much things have changed is the recollection that Jimmy Carter ran for and won the presidency in 1976 as a Democrat and an Evangelical! But that was then, and this is now. Even by 1976, his piety and moralistic language had become a source of ridicule to persons outside of Evangelicalism.

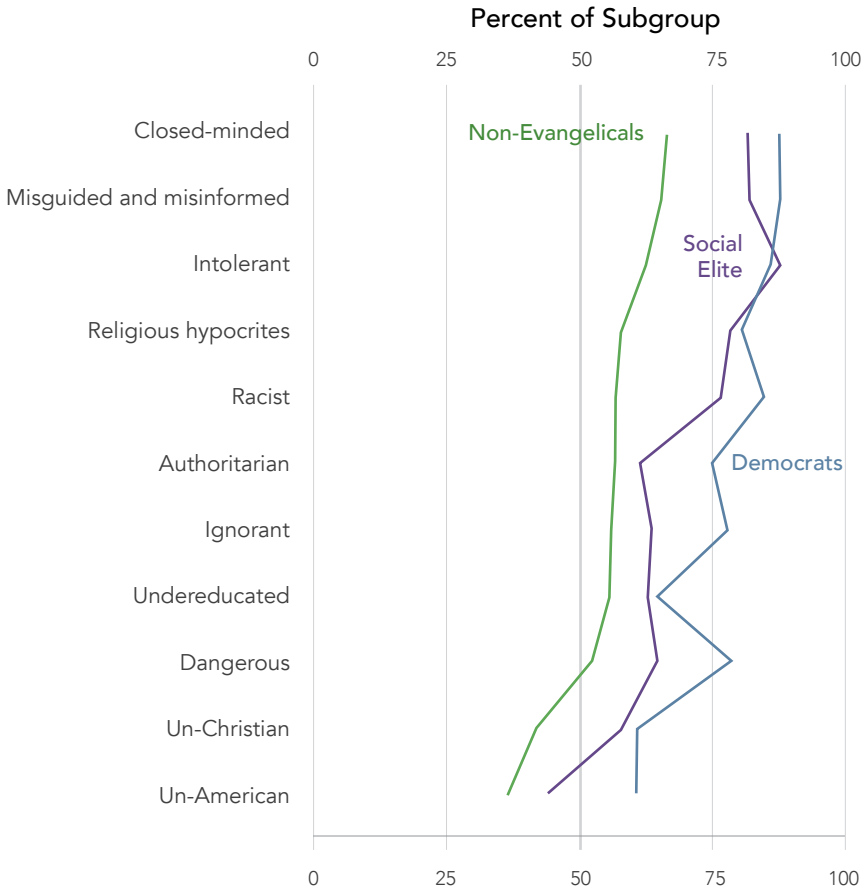
On theological and philosophical grounds alone, Evangelicalism today finds itself outside of the mainstream of the contemporary world. But the more political power the Evangelical movement has sought to wield, and the more the Evangelical movement has aligned itself with the politics and practices of the political Right, the more its reputation has been diminished.

This is hardly a surprise, considering the opinions of the rank and file of the Democratic Party or those of Social Elites whose educational background and general secularity differentiates them from average Americans. What is interesting and important is that this decline in status and regard has become more and more of a commonplace in the eyes of the general non-Evangelical public.

A slight majority of non-Evangelicals in America (53%) regard Evangelicals as at least somewhat of a threat to America's future—24 percent say they are a “very” or “extremely serious” threat. This is associated with broader perceptions that non-Evangelicals have of religious people. For example, six out of 10 non-Evangelicals—a clear majority—perceive “religious people” as “tend[ing] to be intolerant and judgmental about those who think differently than they do.”

It is well established that White Evangelicals are President Trump's main political base, a fact clearly confirmed by the evidence in this survey. It's therefore worth noting that the majority of the non-Evangelical population in America view Trump supporters as “closed-minded” (67%), “misguided and misinformed” (66%), “intolerant” (63%), “religious hypocrites” (58%), “racist” (57%), “authoritarian” (57%), “ignorant” (56%), “undereducated” (56%), and “dangerous” (53%). Large minorities go so far as to say they are “un-Christian” (42%) and “un-American” (37%).

Figure 29: View of Trump Supporters by Three “Outside” Groups



In a culture war, of course, each side has its own idea of the “cultural other.” To name an “other” that the group or movement finds repugnant or offensive serves the function of clarifying the identity of the in-group, shoring up the normative boundaries by which it lives, and reaffirming the authority of its leadership. These dynamics have now become a staple of cultural politics in America. This is why Evangelicals, in part, return the compliment. Slight majorities of Evangelicals describe Trump’s opponents as “misguided and misinformed” (62%), “closed-minded” (61%), “dangerous” (53%), and “arrogant and pretentious” (51%).

Yet it is significant that the majority of non-Evangelical Americans, and the majority of Social Elites in particular (the gatekeepers of our late-modern society), are so negatively disposed toward religious Evangelicals, directly or indirectly. These are the cultural conditions for the ultimate decline not only of Evangelical political influence, but because of its close association with Evangelicalism, of the Republican Party itself.

VI

CONCLUSION

The Common Culture No One Wants

Given how much conflict there is in the world, it may come as a surprise that most people, in fact, recoil from conflict. This would seem to be an anthropological given. Conflict disrupts everyday life and its routines. It creates uncertainty, stress, and the potential for danger. This is no doubt why sociologists have observed that the primary way people in everyday life deal with conflict is through withdrawal and avoidance. People find it unpleasant at the least and so, as a rule, ignore or run from it.

Nowadays, of course, social and political conflict is nearly impossible to avoid. Today, virtually all matters of public interest and concern are contested. And not just public life—private life as well is not spared from these conflicts, for public culture frames the personal relationships of people at work, at school, in families, in places of worship, and where people volunteer. Public and private intersect, often colliding—and how could they not? However much people just want to live their lives in peace, they are acutely aware that potential misunderstanding and disagreement—and with these, tension and conflict—are just below the surface of their lives.

It is against this backdrop of fragmentation and polarization in public and private life that many ordinary citizens lament the loss of a common life based upon trust and good will and speak longingly and perhaps nostalgically for its return. It is a point of contention, of course, whether such a world ever really existed, or for whom or how much it did and under what conditions. Maybe it always was a façade, but the sense of a relatively secure and stable world rooted in shared assumptions was certainly the experience of many Americans. And for them, the experience of trust and peace and the stability of a common life seems to have vanished.

There is, however, more that one can say.

The mid-twentieth century sociologist, Robert Merton, called our attention to an important distinction that bears on this question. He argued that there are two levels of reality sociologists should pay attention to: the “manifest” and the “latent.” As it bears on political life, what is *manifestly* apparent to most people, as we noted above, is that our common public culture has largely evaporated. For most Americans, there is a profound sense that the wheels have fallen off the cart, and things just aren’t working anymore. What William Butler Yeats famously wrote in his iconic poem “The Second Coming” a century ago is the reality most Americans wake up to when they see the news every morning. Paraphrasing Yeats, “Things have fallen apart; the center hasn’t held; mere anarchy has, indeed, been loosed upon the world.”

Yet underneath this disarray, following Merton, is a “latent” common culture for which this survey provides ample evidence. What is this latency?

Underneath all of the fragmentation and polarization in our politics is an ambivalence. On the one hand, there is a longstanding and deep affection for America held by the vast majority of its citizens. Surveys of American public opinion continue to show that Americans, on the whole, love their country. In our 2016 survey, nine out of 10 Americans said that America was “the greatest country in the world” or “a great country,” along with others; and eight out of 10 agreed that America was “an exceptional nation” with special responsibilities to lead the world. Nearly everyone (93% of Americans) said they were “moderately” or “very patriotic.” Our 2003 survey inquired, on a 1 to 6 scale, whether Americans identified themselves more as “American citizens” (1) or as “citizens of the world” (6). Given this range of options, three-quarters (76%) landed squarely on the “American citizen” side of the

spectrum (a 1 or 2); in fact, 62% didn't equivocate at all—they were solidly “1,” an American citizen and nothing more. Beyond our own surveys of American political culture, most surveys tell us that the majority of Americans think of themselves as patriotic, too. This story isn't new, but neither is it nothing.

Yet alongside a common culture of belief in America and hope in its possibilities is a common culture of *fear*—the fear for where America is heading; of *distrust*—the distrust in our leading institutions to work well to solve problems and a distrust of their fellow citizens; of *cynicism* toward the leadership of our major institutions, a disbelief that they have any interest at all in the “common wealth” of our nation; and of *alienation* from the forces that affect the lives of ordinary people. Alongside this fear is a common culture of *contempt*, or at least antipathy, Americans today hold for those they see as political opponents. The most charitable thing that opponents say about each other is that they are “misguided or misinformed.” It quickly goes beyond that to the ways that each side sees the other as closed-minded, intolerant, hypocritical, and dangerous among other things.

These realities often remain unarticulated, even though increasingly, this is not the case. The ambivalence has been present for a long time. The question is, How long can belief in and hope for America last against the enduring toxicity of fear, distrust, cynicism, alienation and mutual contempt?

The latent common culture of public life in America is not the kind of culture that anyone would want, but it is perfectly suited to the kind of politics we have now.

The Trump Effect

As we noted at the start of this inquiry, back in 2016, 72 percent of the population agreed that “we need a president who will completely change the direction of this country.” Trump is surely not what everyone had in mind as the right agent of change, but we can say, after four years of his administration, that the Trump presidency has had profound and, likely, lasting effects.

At the least, it is fair to say that Trump has been an accelerant to the most corrosive aspects of our political culture. Those who claim that under Trump's

leadership, public discourse has become more vulgar, mutual trust has dissolved, and our national culture has become further fragmented are surely right. Whatever one may think of his administration's accomplishments, the health of our public culture is considerably worse. Of course, Trump didn't create a fragmented, polarized, and deeply skeptical public culture. It was present long before his election in 2016. But rather than addressing it in ways that would bring the country together, he undermined it further.

This plays out concretely. Trump—his destabilizing charisma—has transcended the Republican Party and conservative ideology and, in so doing, redefined both the party and its ideology into something dismissive of moderation and decorum. He has solidified his base within the conservative Christian demographic, to be sure, but in the same effort, as we have seen, he has also alienated parts of what could have been the Republican Party's base within the center right and the working class. By so doing, he may have handed the Democratic Party a gift of ambivalent voters in the center and, at the same time, radicalized its Left wing. In short, the things that Trump has done to galvanize his base have also alienated other parts of his potential base and radicalized parts of his opposition. We don't see a way for the Republican Party to recover from this any time soon.

And they may not seek to. Indeed, Trump and "Trumpism" may continue to dominate within Republican circles. In the wake of the election, there is already speculation that Trump will either anoint the next Republican standard bearer or possibly reserve that role for himself.

At the same time, because the vote for Biden as president was overwhelmingly about defeating Trump rather than electing Biden, the conditions are present for the fragmentation of the Democratic Party, perhaps especially now that Biden has won.

Democracy in Dark Times

Culture provides the frameworks of meaning for all human activity, not least politics. If our public culture is defined by the absence of shared understandings—or perhaps only by our shared sense that our institutions are

broken, that the leaders of our institutions are incompetent and self-serving, and that the people and institutions that have such influence over the lives of ordinary people don't really care about ordinary people—then the politics that come out of that culture will be broken, partisan, and ultimately care-less for the people that the political system was intended to represent and serve.

This is what the data from the 2020 IASC Survey of American Political Culture™ has revealed. And, empirically, this is where legitimation crises invariably lead: dysfunctional institutions, feckless leadership, and a permanently restive population.

Leadership can make a substantial difference—for good and for ill. Courageous, ethical, self-sacrificial leadership can draw out the best in people, generate solidarity, and inspire people to constructive collective ends. In the same way, corrupt and self-serving leadership can draw out the worst in people and fan the flames of disrespect, enmity, and division. Americans have seen both, but even the best leadership will not solve the cultural crises underlying democratic politics in the early decades of the twenty-first century. To “fix” such a political system, you have to attend to its culture and, in particular, the powerful cultural institutions that underwrite our politics. And that is a task that no single politician or party can do.

APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire with Percentage Distributions of Response

All numbers are weighted percentages of response for those who provided a valid response to the question, meaning that those who did not respond or said they “don’t know” are excluded from the percentage calculation. Figures do not always add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

1. When the government in Washington decides to solve a problem, how much confidence do you have that the problem will actually be solved—a lot, some, just a little, or none at all?
 - 5 A lot
 - 26 Some
 - 39 Just a little
 - 31 None at all

2. How much confidence do you have in the people who run our government to tell the truth to the public—a lot, some, just a little, or none at all?
 - 3 A lot
 - 23 Some
 - 37 Just a little
 - 37 None at all

3. In general, do you think the United States is in a decline as a nation, are we holding steady, or is the nation improving?
 - 38 Strong decline
 - 28 Moderate decline
 - 24 Holding steady
 - 7 Moderate improvement
 - 4 Strong improvement

4. Do you think the future of the next generation of Americans will be better, about the same, or worse than life today?
 - 28 Better
 - 25 About the same
 - 46 Worse

5. Thinking about your current financial situation, would you say you are currently in excellent financial shape, good shape, only fair shape, or poor shape?
 - 11 Excellent shape
 - 44 Good shape
 - 32 Only fair shape
 - 13 Poor shape

6. Looking back over the last ten years, do you think the quality of life for your racial or ethnic group in the US has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?
 - 15 Better
 - 56 About the same
 - 29 Worse

7. And a year from now, do you expect that economic conditions in our country will be better, about the same, or worse than they are currently?
 - 39 Better
 - 29 About the same
 - 32 Worse

8. How much confidence do you have in Wall Street and the American banking system to resolve our nation's economic problems—a lot, some, just a little, or none at all?
 - 4 A lot
 - 24 Some
 - 32 Just a little
 - 40 None at all

9. In general, is your view of capitalism completely positive, mostly positive, neutral, mostly negative, or completely negative?
 - 17 Completely positive
 - 32 Mostly positive
 - 33 Neutral
 - 14 Mostly negative
 - 5 Completely negative

10. In general, is your view of socialism completely positive, mostly positive, neutral, mostly negative, or completely negative?
 - 2 Completely positive
 - 17 Mostly positive
 - 33 Neutral
 - 17 Mostly negative
 - 31 Completely negative

11. When you think about the long-term impact of the coronavirus upon our national economy, which of the following do you think is most likely?
 - 44 We will take many years to recover
 - 43 We will recover within a year or two
 - 13 We will bounce back in less than a year

12. Would you say that the coronavirus has had a negative impact upon your job situation, a positive impact, or little impact at all?
 - 42 Negative impact
 - 44 Little impact at all
 - 6 Positive impact
 - 8 Does not apply

13. During the peak of the coronavirus, many stores posted a sign requiring a face mask to enter. If you approached such a store last April, how would the requirement to wear a mask have made you feel about entering the store—much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse, much worse, or would it have made no difference?

43 Much better
 18 Somewhat better
 30 Made no difference
 5 Somewhat worse
 5 Much worse

14. Americans have recently voiced a variety of objections about our economy, politics, and the government. For each of the following, please tell me whether you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree with the complaint.

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree
Most politicians are more interested in winning elections than in doing what is right.	51	42	6	2
Political events these days seem more like theater or entertainment than like something to be taken seriously.	45	42	10	3
Wall Street and big business in our country often profit at the expense of ordinary Americans.	48	35	12	4
Our system of government is good, but the people running it are incompetent.	34	47	15	4
Our economic system is rigged in favor of the wealthiest Americans.	40	31	18	11
You can't believe much of what you hear from the mainstream media.	39	29	22	10
The leaders in American corporations, media, universities, and technology care little about the lives of most Americans.	27	42	26	6
The most educated and successful people in America are more interested in serving themselves than in serving the common good.	21	44	27	8
These days I feel like a stranger in my own country.	19	33	30	19

15. Now, I want you to consider some additional things some people are saying about our country. For each one, please tell me whether you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree with the statement.

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree
Most elected officials don't care what people like me think.	28	47	20	4
Political correctness is a serious problem in our country, making it hard for people to say what they really think.	38	27	18	17
These days, growth of the government in Washington threatens the freedom of ordinary Americans.	29	38	23	11
America is a land where anyone can get ahead if they really want to.	30	33	25	12
The American way of life is rapidly disappearing.	25	36	29	10
Our founding fathers were part of a racist and sexist culture that gave important roles to White men while harming minorities and women.	32	27	21	21
People like me don't have any say in what the government does.	22	38	29	11
The police and law enforcement unfairly target racial and ethnic minorities.	28	29	23	20
This will be the most corrupt election in the history of our country.	25	31	27	16
Religious people tend to be intolerant and judgmental about those who think differently than they do.	21	33	28	18
America used to be a place where you could get ahead by working hard, but this is no longer true.	22	29	30	20
People of other races can't really understand how my race sees things.	14	27	39	20
The mainstream media exaggerated coronavirus in order to take down Donald Trump	22	16	19	43
Donald Trump's lack of political correctness is one of his most appealing qualities.	19	19	16	46

16. In your opinion, is the world of American values split between conservatives and liberals, or are most Americans toward the middle, with small groups of conservatives and liberals on the fringes?
- 36 American values are split between conservatives and liberals.
 - 64 The values of most Americans are toward the middle.
17. How often do you discuss political or social issues with people whom you know to have an opposing political viewpoint—never, very rarely, occasionally, often, or very often?
- 6 Never
 - 20 Very rarely
 - 37 Occasionally
 - 20 Often
 - 16 Very often

18. America has many challenges and people have very different views of the threats facing our nation. For each of the following, how serious of a threat do you think it poses to America and America's future—extremely serious, very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious?

	Extremely serious	Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not very serious	Not at all serious
Political polarization and divisiveness	27	42	24	5	2
Inequality and poverty	25	41	26	5	3
Racism—unequal treatment of Whites and Blacks	28	39	22	7	4
Media distortions and fake news	28	35	21	9	7
China	21	33	32	9	4
Crime and lawlessness	19	37	30	10	4
Climate change	27	28	19	12	14
Unrestricted access to assault weapons	24	30	21	13	12
Wall Street and the banking system	14	28	38	15	6
Donald Trump and his supporters	26	25	16	14	20
The very rich	15	24	32	16	12
The cultural elite	13	23	37	16	11
Socialism	19	23	20	20	17
Political correctness	13	22	29	18	18
The police	9	24	29	17	21
Joe Biden and his supporters	12	17	21	22	28
Immigrants and immigration	8	19	24	24	26
Evangelical Christians	8	14	26	23	28
The European Union	4	9	28	29	30

19. Do you believe that Donald Trump would like to gradually transform our country into a dictatorship, or not?

- 48 Yes
- 51 No
- 1 Probably yes
- 0 Probably no

20. Do you believe that the Democratic Party would like to gradually transform our country into a socialist country, or not?

- 47 Yes
- 51 No
- 1 Probably yes
- 0 Probably no

21. What is the name of the main source of news you use for information about politics and current events?

- 16 Fox News
- 12 National broadcast news
- 12 CNN
- 8 National print media
- 7 Miscellaneous/vague
- 7 Web search and browse
- 7 Public (PBS/NPR)
- 5 Local print/radio
- 5 Social media
- 5 Conservative media
- 5 MSNBC
- 4 International
- 2 Left-leaning media
- 2 YouTube
- 2 Do not follow news

22. Which of the following comes closer to your view? The government is doing too many things that are better left to businesses and individuals OR, the government should do more to solve our country's problems. Which comes closer to your own view?
- 40 Government is doing too many things that are better left to businesses and individuals.
 - 60 Government should do more to solve our country's problems.
23. Which of the following comes closer to your view? Business corporations in America make too much profit OR most corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit.
- 62 Business corporations in America make too much profit
 - 38 Most corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit
24. What type of Supreme Court justices would you like to see appointed?
- 28 Conservative justices
 - 26 Progressive justices
 - 46 Moderate justices

25. Now, I'm going to read you some proposals that are now being discussed nationally. Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose _____?

	Strongly favor	Favor	Oppose	Strongly oppose
Creating a national health care system, financed by taxes, that would provide free health care to all Americans	43	20	14	23
Banning the purchase of assault weapons by ordinary citizens	30	18	22	30
Providing government-financed vouchers to parents so they can send their children to private schools	19	22	32	27
Reparations or financial compensation to African Americans for their historic mistreatment by White Americans	15	24	27	35
Greatly reducing the number of immigrants entering the United States	14	18	37	30

26. Now we'd like your views on some political leaders. Would you say your overall opinion of them is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

	Very favorable	Mostly favorable	Mostly unfavorable	Very unfavorable
Barack Obama	37	28	16	19
Joe Biden	19	32	23	26
Donald Trump	18	20	14	48

27. Which of the following best describes your overall political beliefs?

- 14 Very conservative
- 21 Somewhat conservative
- 30 Moderate
- 20 Somewhat liberal
- 15 Very liberal

28. Did you vote in the last presidential election, in 2016?

87 Yes

13 No

(Asked only of those who said “Yes” in question 28.)

29. Who did you vote for? Was it Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, or someone else?

37 Donald Trump

46 Hillary Clinton

17 Someone else

30. Are you currently registered to vote?

93 Yes

7 No

31. How likely is it that you will vote in the 2020 election for president this November? Would you say you will definitely vote, probably vote, probably not vote, or definitely not vote?

85 Definitely vote

9 Probably vote

3 Probably not vote

4 Definitely not vote

32. If the presidential election were being held today between Joe Biden, the Democrat, and Donald Trump, the Republican, who would you vote for?

56 Joe Biden

39 Donald Trump

4 Someone else

2 Wouldn't vote

(Asked only of those who said “Joe Biden” in question 32.)

33. What would you say is the main purpose of your vote? Is it primarily to elect Joe Biden or to defeat Donald Trump?

30 Elect Joe Biden

70 Defeat Donald Trump

(Asked only of those who said “Donald Trump” in question 32.)

34. What would you say is the main purpose of your vote? Is it primarily to elect Donald Trump or to defeat Joe Biden?

66 Elect Donald Trump

34 Defeat Joe Biden

35. These days, some Americans are very critical of the supporters of President Trump. For each of the following, please tell me if it describes most supporters of President Trump very well, well, not very well, or not at all.

	Very well	Well	Not very well	Not at all
Misguided and misinformed	48	11	16	25
Closed-minded	41	18	16	24
Intolerant	40	17	19	24
Religious hypocrites	37	15	22	26
Authoritarian	31	20	22	26
Racist	32	19	21	27
Ignorant	31	19	21	29
Dangerous	29	18	21	32
Undereducated	22	19	29	30
Un-Christian	22	16	31	31
Fascist	22	17	25	35
Un-American	20	14	30	36
Evil	15	11	33	42

36. On the other hand, other Americans are very critical of President Trump's opponents. For each of the following, please tell me if it describes most people who oppose President Trump very well, well, not very well, or not at all.

	Very well	Well	Not very well	Not at all
Politically correct	29	27	27	18
Socialist	26	21	34	19
Arrogant and pretentious	25	19	35	22
Misguided and misinformed	27	17	31	25
Closed-minded	25	18	33	24
Intolerant	24	18	33	25
Un-Christian	16	14	39	31
Dangerous	20	12	34	35
Ignorant	16	12	41	31
Authoritarian	18	13	34	35
Immoral	15	10	39	36
Un-American	15	10	37	37
Overeducated	10	12	42	36
Evil	13	7	34	46

37. What is your religious preference, if any?

59 Christian
 2 Jewish
 1 Muslim
 12 Another religion
 26 None

(Asked only of those who said "Christian" in question 37.)

38. Are you Catholic, or not?

25 Yes, Catholic

74 No, not Catholic

0 Grew up Catholic, but no longer associated
with the Catholic church

(Asked only of those who said "Christian" in question 37.)

39. Some people think of themselves as Evangelical or born-again Christians. Do you ever think of yourself as an Evangelical or born-again Christian?

35 Yes

65 No

40. How important to you are your religious beliefs?

4 Not at all important

11 Not too important

19 Fairly important

35 Very important

17 The most important thing in your life

14 You have no religious beliefs

41. Which of the following best describes your religious beliefs or orientation?

12 Very conservative

21 Conservative

35 Moderate

14 Liberal

17 Very liberal

42. What is your own current marital status?

29 Never married

54 Now married

2 Separated

9 Divorced

6 Widowed

The percentages in the following demographic categories are unweighted.

43. Gender

- 55 Male
- 45 Female

44. Age

- 7 18–29 years
- 18 30–44 years
- 24 45–59 years
- 36 60–74 years
- 15 75 years or older

45. Race and Ethnicity

- 62 White (only)
- 15 Black, non-Hispanic
- 15 Hispanic
- 3 Asian
- 4 Native American
- 2 Other non-White

46. Education

- 36 High school diploma or less
- 26 Some post-high school studies
- 18 Four-year college degree or some postgraduate work
- 21 Postgraduate degree

47. Which of the following best describes your total annual household income before taxes?

- 16 Under \$25,000
- 21 \$25,000 to less than \$50,000
- 18 \$50,000 to less than \$75,000
- 15 \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
- 17 \$100,000 to less than \$150,000
- 14 \$150,000 or more

48. Do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- 23 Republican
- 35 Democrat
- 37 Independent
- 6 Other

49. Census Division

- 4 New England
- 14 Middle Atlantic
- 14 East North
- 6 West North
- 20 South Atlantic
- 5 East South
- 11 West South
- 7 Mountain
- 17 Pacific

50. Census Region

- 19 Northeast
- 20 Midwest
- 36 South
- 25 West



The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture is an interdisciplinary research center and intellectual community at the University of Virginia committed to understanding contemporary cultural change and its individual and social consequences, training young scholars, and providing intellectual leadership in service to the public good.

The Advanced Studies in Culture Foundation supports and amplifies the work of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia.

Finstock & Tew Publishers, New York, NY 10017
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