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# VOICES of VALUE

## Authoritarian Attitudes and Democratic Norms in America

June 2026 National Survey Report

## COMPILED BY

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## ABOUT THE PELL CENTER

[The Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy](#) at Salve Regina is a multidisciplinary research center focused at the intersection of politics, policies and ideas. Dedicated to honoring Sen. Claiborne Pell's legacy, the Pell Center promotes American engagement in the world, effective government at home and civic participation by all Americans.

Our programs are designed to generate new ideas, to expand public understanding of important issues and, ultimately, to help the public and its leaders make better decisions. Working with students and faculty, we don't just study the world, we try to change it.

The Pell Center is animated by Sen. Claiborne Pell's belief that politics is about translating ideas into action to help people. We work to supplement the education available to Salve Regina students by fostering civic participation to make the world a better place.

## ABOUT SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

Salve Regina University is a Catholic, coeducational institution of higher education founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1947. It offers rigorous, innovative academic programming in the liberal arts tradition that prepares students to be global citizens and lifelong learners. More than 2,700 students from around the world are enrolled in Salve's 60+ academic programs, which include bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees along with graduate certificates and combined bachelor's/master's programs. Every undergraduate student engages in [Salve Compass](#), a four-year experience that charts a personalized, values-based path connecting college to a successful, fulfilling career and life.



**SALVE REGINA**  
**UNIVERSITY**

## INTRODUCTION

The Pell Center's Voices of Value project seeks to better understand the forces shaping political attitudes and polarization in the United States. This survey examined Americans' perceptions of the health of U.S. democracy, support for democratic norm violations, and the role authoritarian attitudes play in shaping those views.

The Pell Center partnered with Embold Research to conduct a national survey of 2,034 registered voters between May 4 and May 12, 2026. Respondents were asked about their views on democracy, political institutions, media, and members of the opposing political party, as well as a series of questions used to measure authoritarian attitudes. Results were analyzed across demographic groups, political affiliations, and levels of authoritarianism.

Three key findings emerged.

First, while support for democratic norm violations is relatively low, substantial differences exist across partisan and ideological groups. **Respondents scoring highest on the authoritarian scale were more likely than any other demographic subgroup to support changing election rules or reducing polling locations to make it harder for the opposing party to win.**

Second, higher levels of authoritarianism are associated with conservative political identification. Of those who scored high on the authoritarian scale, 80% were Republican or leaned Republican, 37% identified as MAGA, and 48% as conservative.

Finally, Americans remain deeply divided along partisan lines in their assessments of democracy and major political issues. Over 9 in 10 Democrats believe the country is in a constitutional crisis and while nearly half of Republicans agree, over half believe the country has a strong system of checks and balances and that the economy is thriving.



## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The following is an analysis of a national survey conducted by the Pell Center at Salve Regina University. The survey, fielded by Embold Research between May 4-12, 2026 via the web and SMS messaging, gathered responses from 2,034 registered voters in the United States, with a modeled margin of error of 2.2%. Demographics of survey participants can be found at the end of the report.

Weighting parameters were based on the demographic composition of adults in registered voters, based on the voter file.

## AUTHORITARIAN SCALE

This report refers to an authoritarian scale, based on respondents' answers to eight questions about child-rearing values (developed by [Feldman and Stenner 1997](#); [Stenner 2005](#); [Hetherington and Weiler 2009](#) and updated by [Engelhardt, Feldman, and Hetherington 2021](#)). Respondents chose between two desirable traits for children (for example, independence vs. respect for others; disciplined vs. adaptable; loyal vs. open-minded). The scale measures authoritarianism attributes which can occur in both conservatives and progressives and because the questions are not about politics, they are partially exogenous to political preference.

Each respondent's answers to the eight questions were summed into an index and rescaled to a range from 0 to 1.

The range was then reclassified from 1 to 5, using the following criteria. 1 represents low authoritarianism and 5 represents high authoritarianism.

- 1: 0-0.2
- 2: 0.21-0.4
- 3: 0.41-0.6
- 4: 0.61-0.8
- 5: 0.81-1



# Perceptions of the health of U.S. democracy

Most Americans believe the United States is facing a constitutional crisis, but stark differences in opinion between Republicans and Democrats on the health of U.S. democracy exist. Over 9 in 10 Democrats agree the United States is in a constitutional crisis. Though nearly half of Republicans agree, over half believe the U.S. has a strong system of checks and balances (55%) and that the economy is thriving (65%).

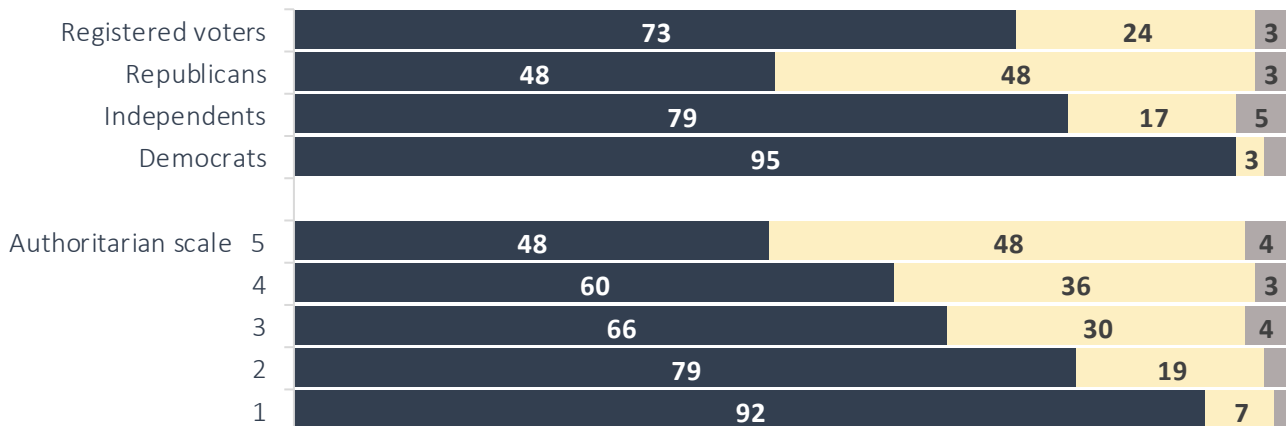
The authoritarian scale mirrors these party differences. Those who scored high on the authoritarian scale (5) are the least likely to agree that the country is facing a constitutional crisis and are the most likely to agree the country has a thriving economy and a strong system of checks and balances. In no instance does another subsection of the population (gender, age, race, education level, etc.) exceed the level of high authoritarian agreement.

## High authoritarians are the least likely to agree that the United States is a dictatorship or is in a constitutional crisis.

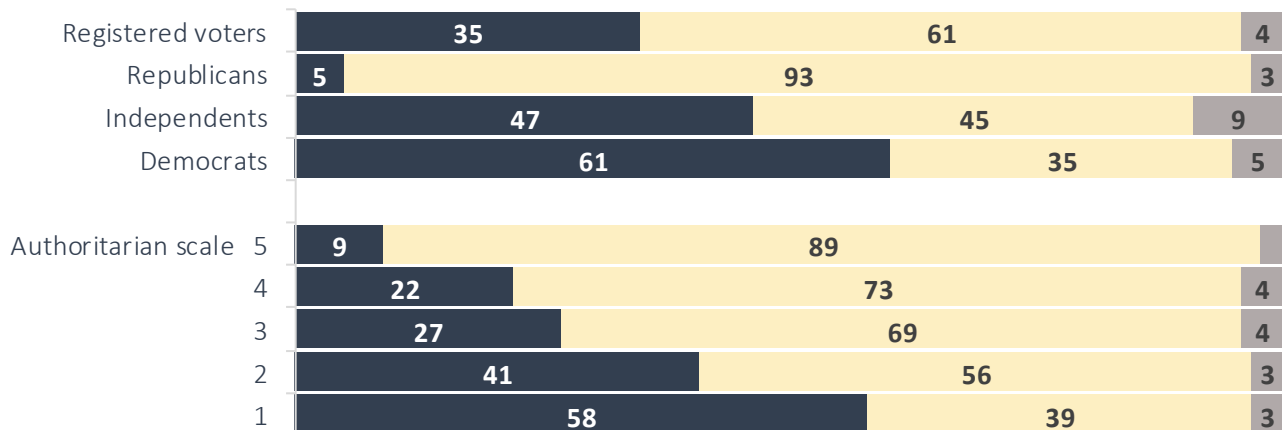
*% who agree or disagree with the following statements*

■ Strongly/somewhat agree    ■ Strongly/somewhat disagree    ■ Not sure

### The United States is in a constitutional crisis.



### The United States is a dictatorship.

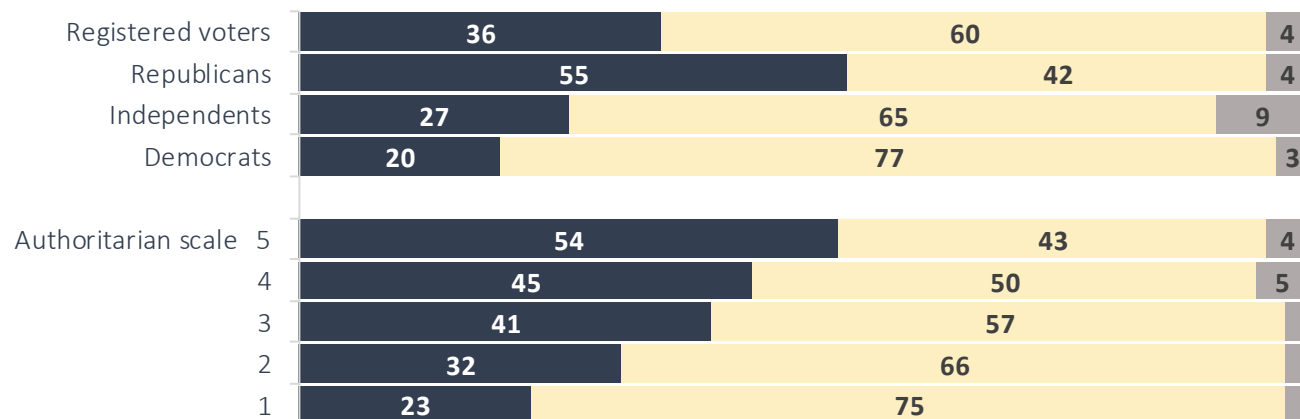


## 66% of high authoritarians say the United States economy is thriving, compared to only 32% of registered voters.

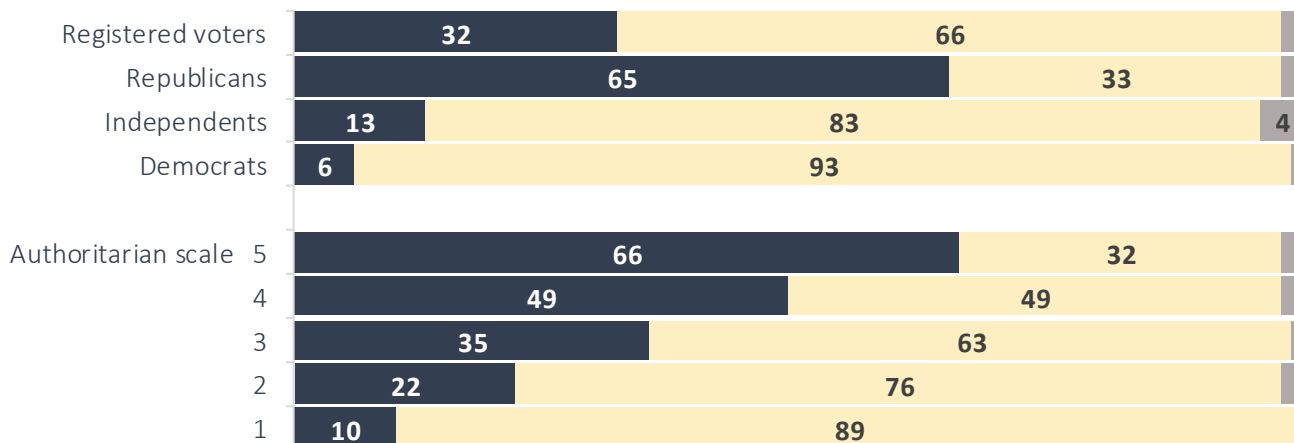
% who agree or disagree with the following statements

■ Strongly/somewhat agree    ■ Strongly/somewhat disagree    ■ Not sure

### The U.S. government has a strong system of checks and balances.



### The U.S. economy is thriving.



# Support for democratic norms and violations

The majority of Americans generally do not support democratic norm violations. More than half of registered voters are opposed to government actions like elected officials ignoring court decisions, censoring media sources, and reducing polling stations or changing election rules to make it harder for the opposition.

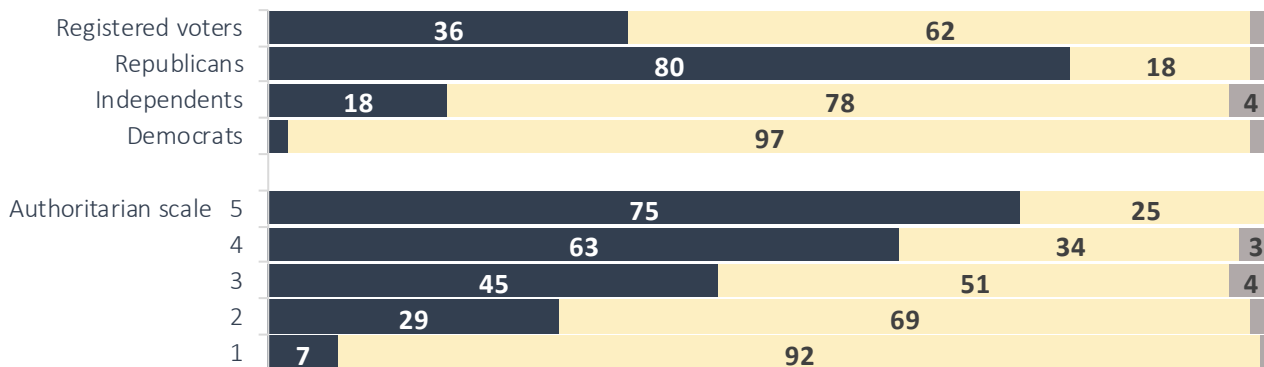
**While Americans do not support election interference, high authoritarians are more likely than any other subsection to support changing election rules and reducing polling stations to make it harder for the other party to win.**

There are stark differences in party support as well. Over three quarters of Republicans support their party’s president issuing executive orders when they can’t get cooperation from Congress, compared to 11% of Democrats, for example. Republicans and Democrats are deeply divided on support for ICE operations: 80% of Republicans and only 2% of Democrats support ICE officers regularly conducting surveillance and arrests at sensitive locations like schools, hospitals, places of worship, and social service locations. Three-quarters of Republicans support stripping U.S. citizens of their citizenship and deporting them if they are determined to be a threat to the country (compared to 12% of Democrats).

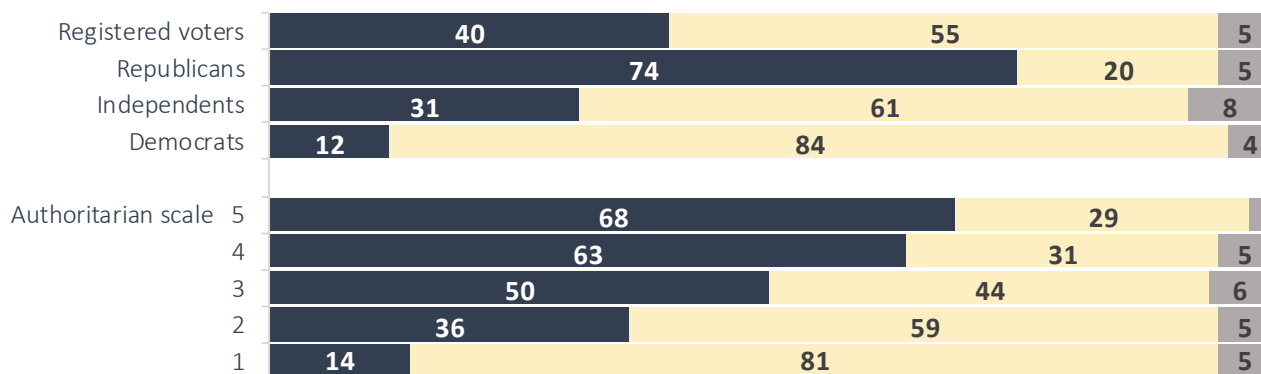
## % who agree or disagree with the following statements

■ Strongly/somewhat support    ■ Strongly/somewhat oppose    ■ Not sure

**ICE officers regularly conducting surveillance and arrests at sensitive locations like schools, hospitals, places of worship, and social service locations.**



**Stripping U.S. citizens of their citizenship and deporting them if they are determined to be a threat to the country.**

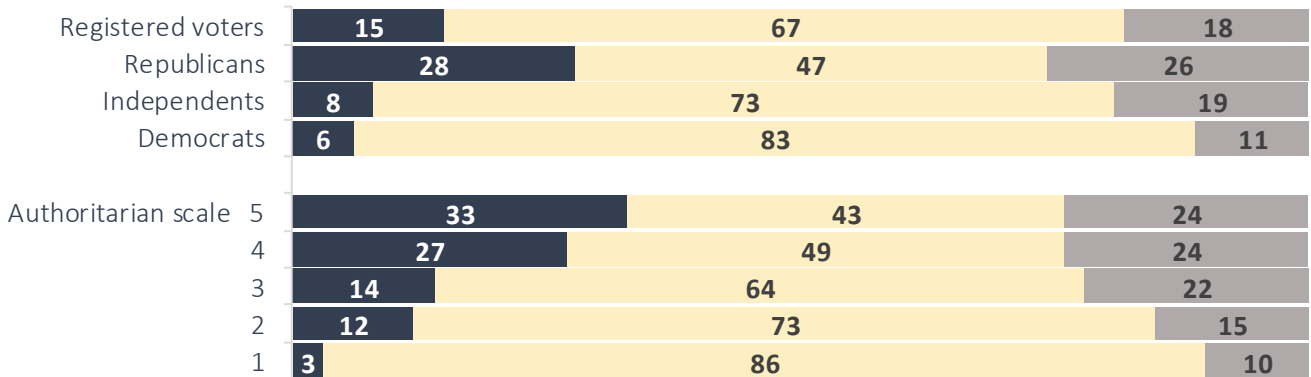


## Most Americans do not support election interference, but high authoritarians are more likely than any other subsection to support changing election rules and reducing polling stations to make it harder for the other party to win.

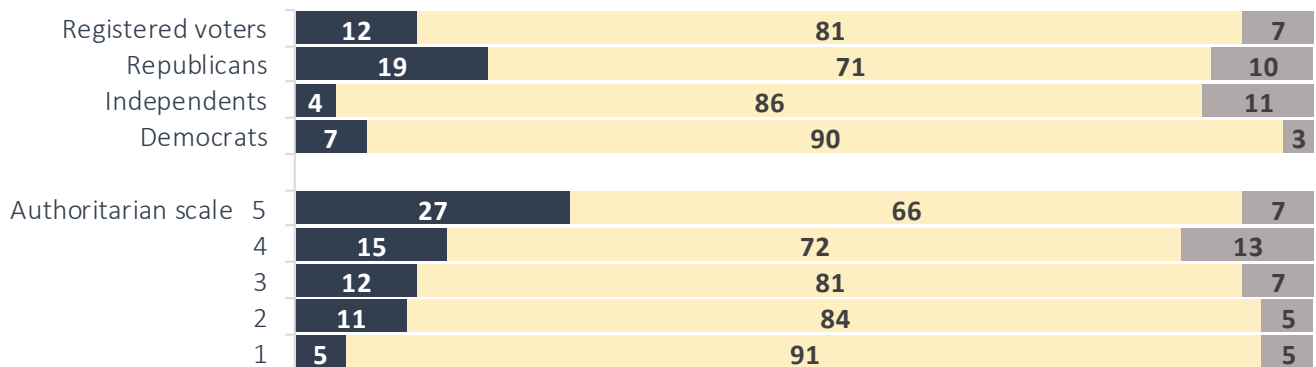
% who agree or disagree with the following statements

■ Strongly/somewhat support    ■ Strongly/somewhat oppose    ■ Not sure

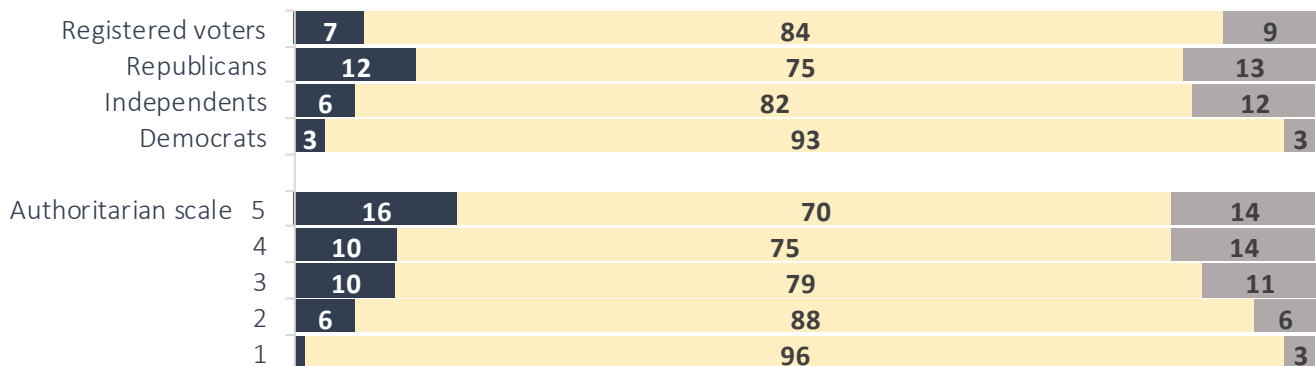
Your party's members being more loyal to the party than to election rules when the party's candidate questions an election outcome.



Your party changing election rules mainly to make it harder for the other party to win an election or a majority.



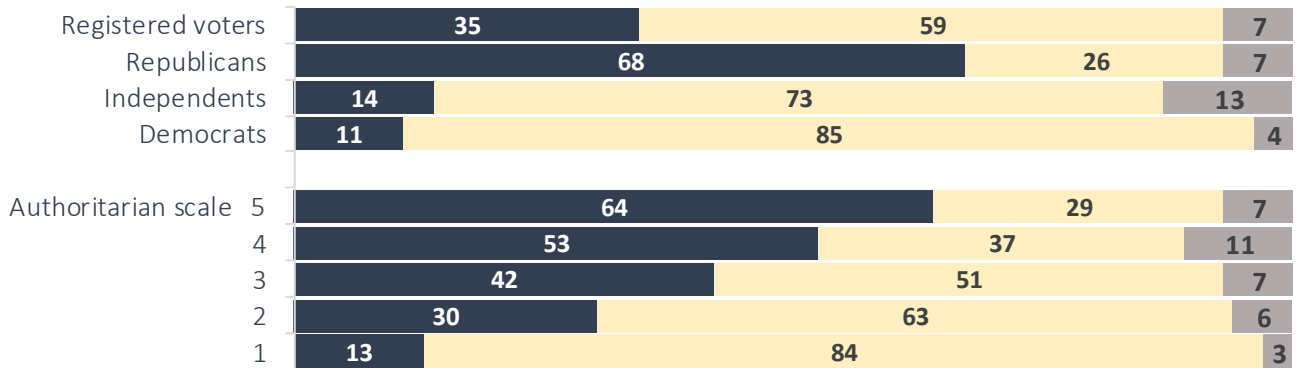
Your party reducing the number of polling stations in areas that typically support the other party.



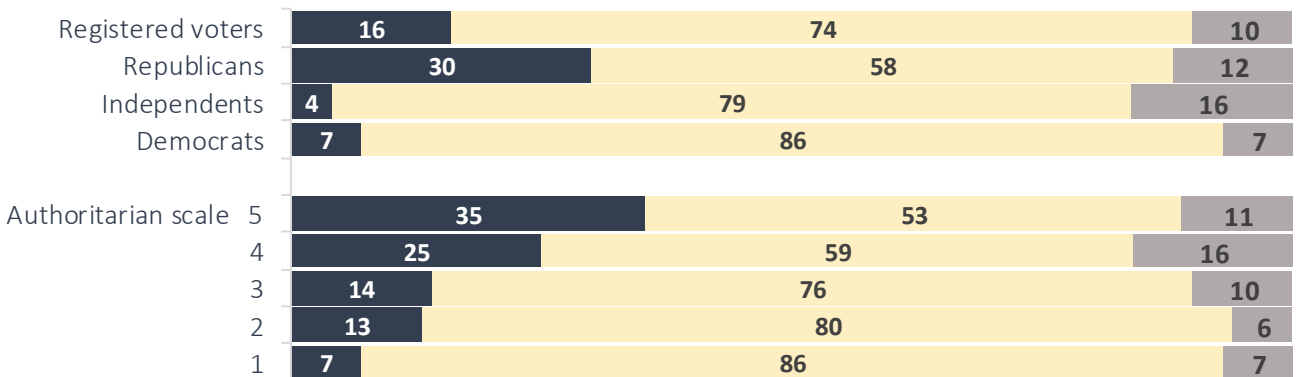
*% who agree or disagree with the following statements*

■ Strongly/somewhat support    ■ Strongly/somewhat oppose    ■ Not sure

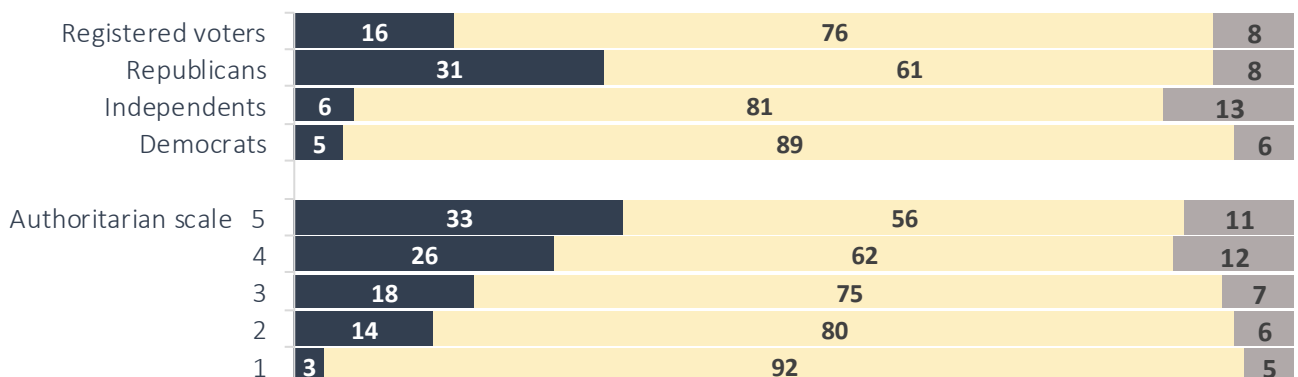
Your party's president issuing executive orders on their own when they can't get cooperation from Congress.



Your party's elected officials sometimes ignoring court decisions when the judges were appointed by a president from the other party.



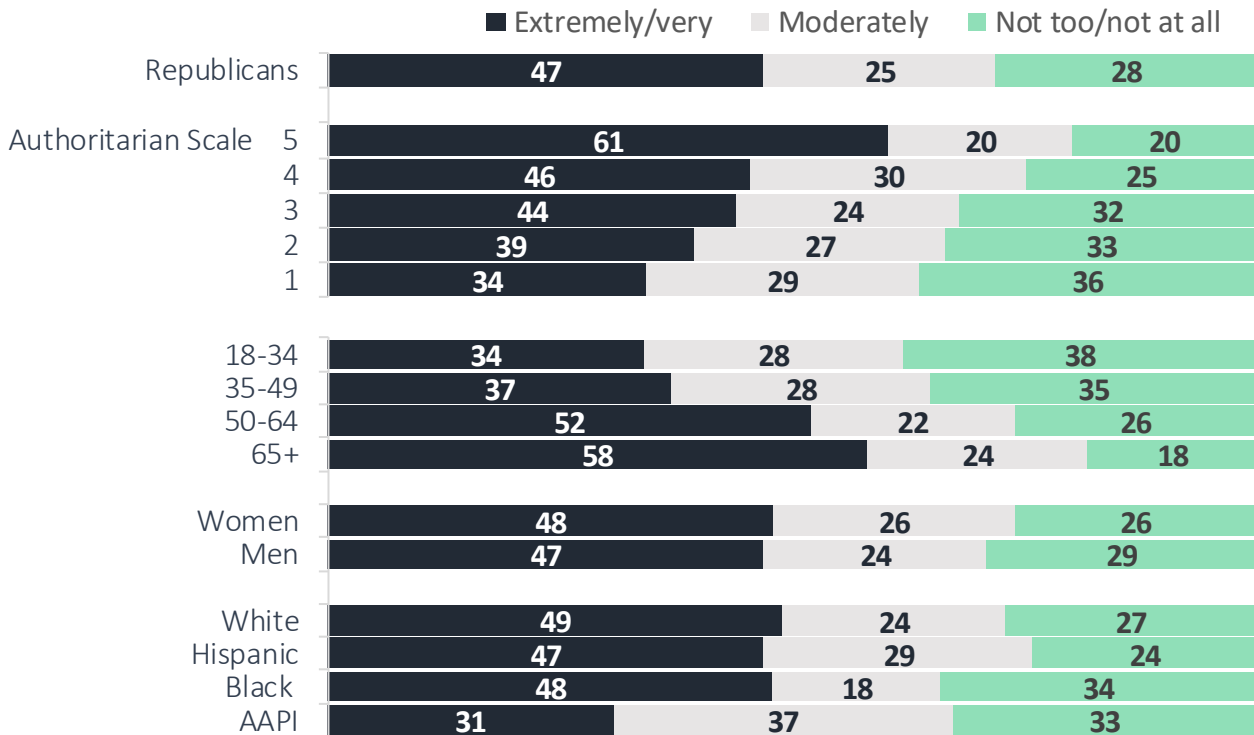
The government censoring media sources that spend more time attacking your party than the other party.



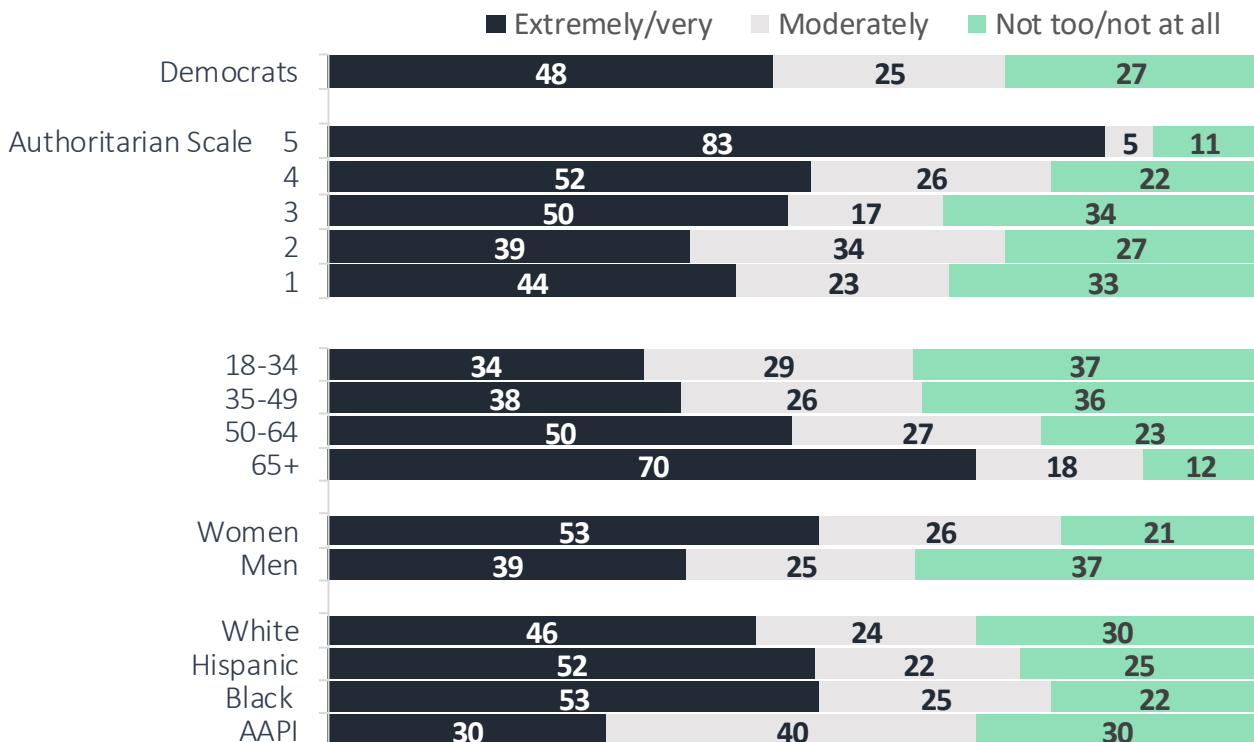
# Importance of party identity

Older Americans are more likely than younger Americans to consider their partisan identity as important. High authoritarians from both parties are twice as likely as low authoritarians to consider it extremely or very important to their identity.

*% who say their Republican identity is \_\_\_ important*



*% who say their Democratic identity is \_\_\_ important*

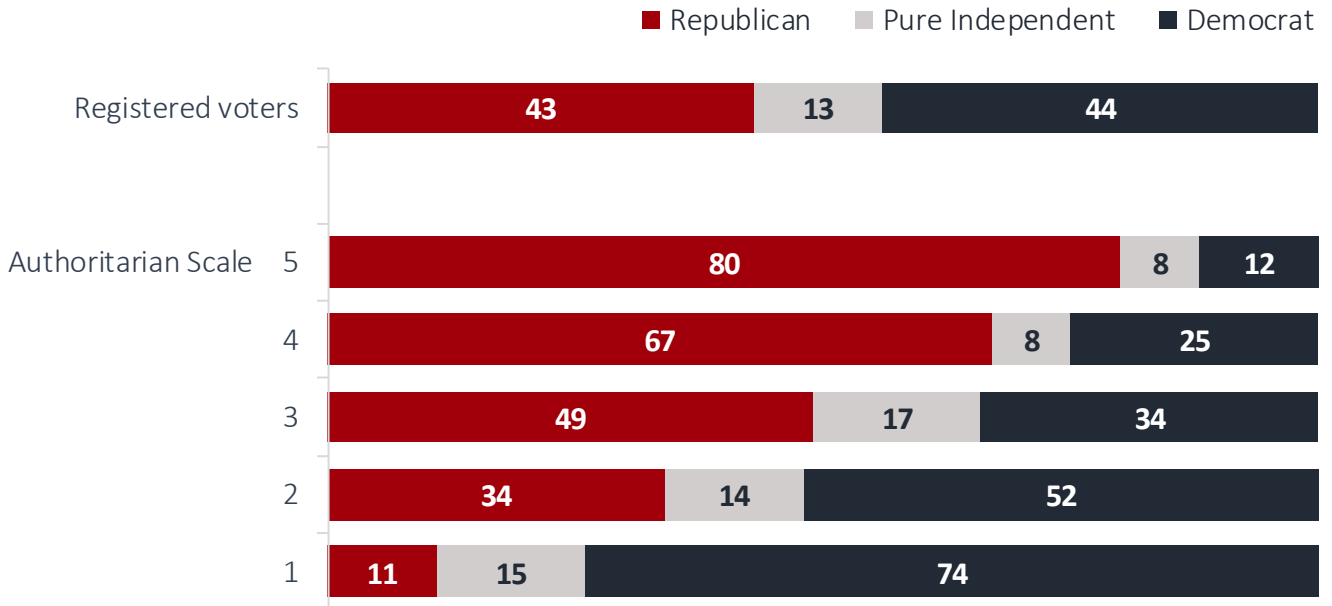


Note: totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

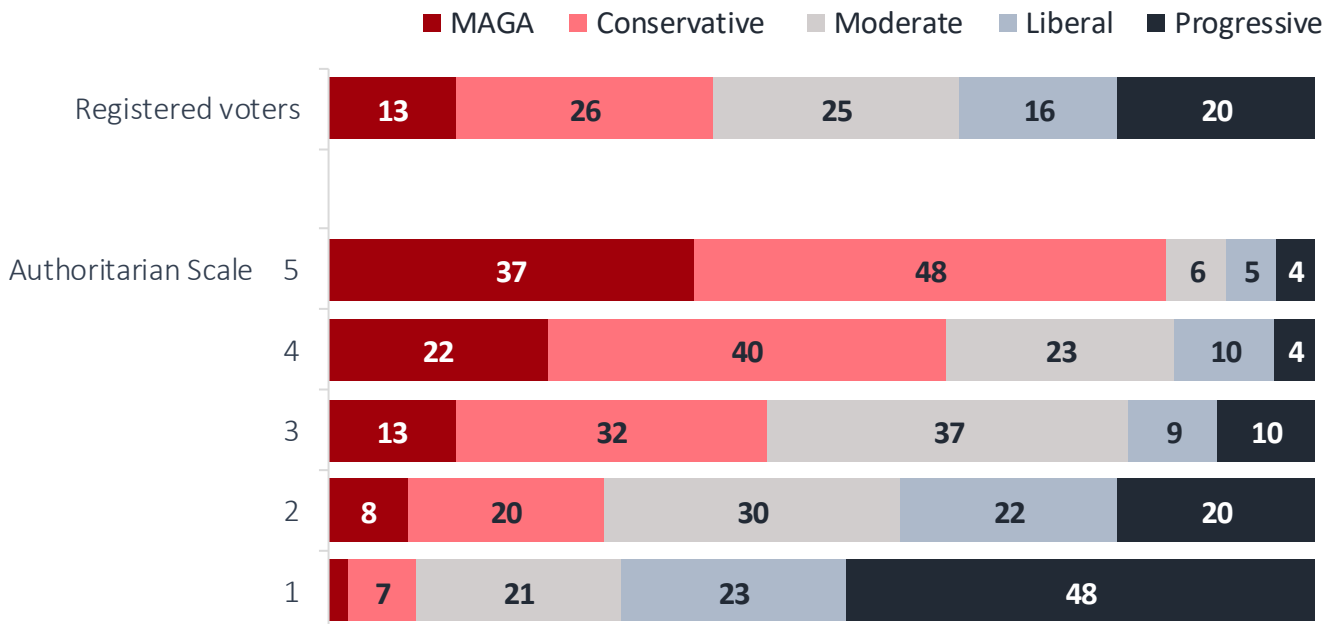
# Authoritarian scale and party identification

8 in 10 high authoritarians are Republican and 37% identify with MAGA. Nearly half of low authoritarians identify as Progressives.

*% who identify as Republican, Pure Independent, or Democrat*



*% who identify with the following political descriptor*



# Affective polarization

Affective polarization is the dislike and distrust of those in the opposing political party absent major ideological shifts. Over the last few decades, Republicans and Democrats have increasingly viewed the political ‘other’ as hypocritical, immoral, and mean even as their policy opinions have not become more extreme.

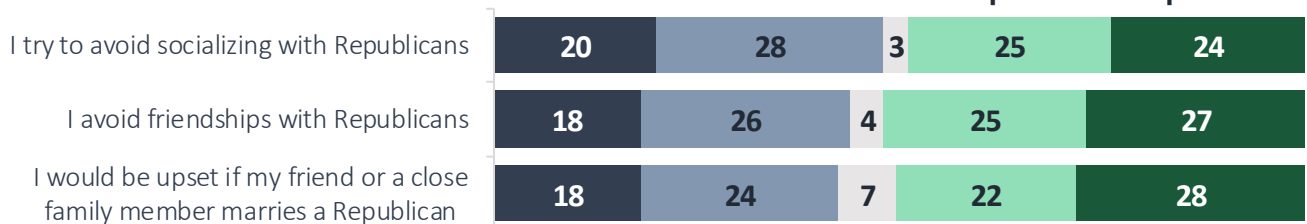
Democrats are more likely to avoid socializing with or befriending Republicans than Republicans are of Democrats. Democrats are more than twice as likely to agree that they would be upset if their friend or close family member married a member of the opposing party.

Republicans and Democrats report similar levels of animosity, however. Slightly over half from both parties strongly agree members of the opposing party are hypocritical. About one-third strongly agree those in the other party are dangerous, immoral, and mean.

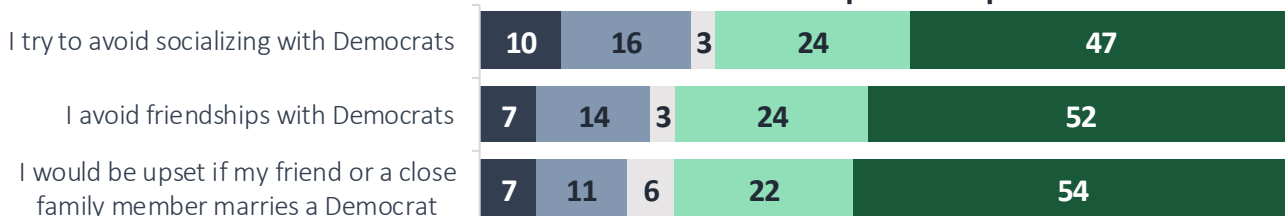
## % who agree or disagree with the following statements

■ Strongly agree 
 ■ Somewhat agree 
 ■ Not sure 
 ■ Somewhat disagree 
 ■ Strongly disagree

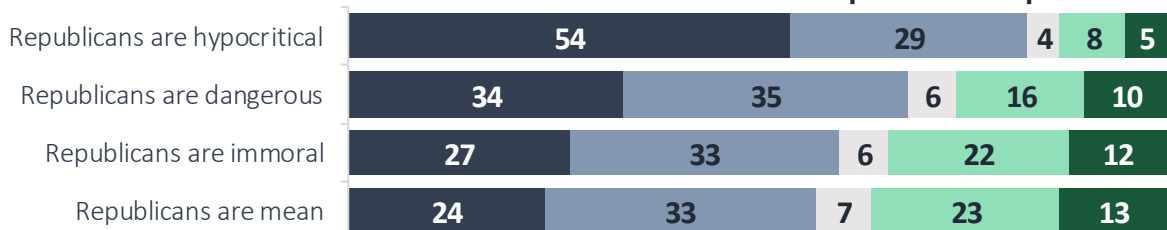
### Democrat opinions of Republicans



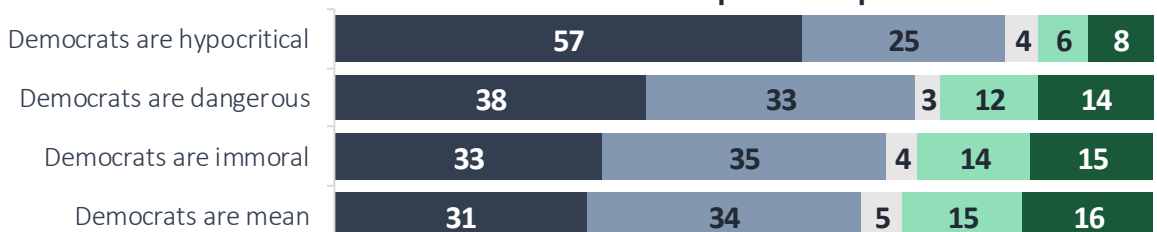
### Republican opinions of Democrats



### Democrat opinions of Republicans



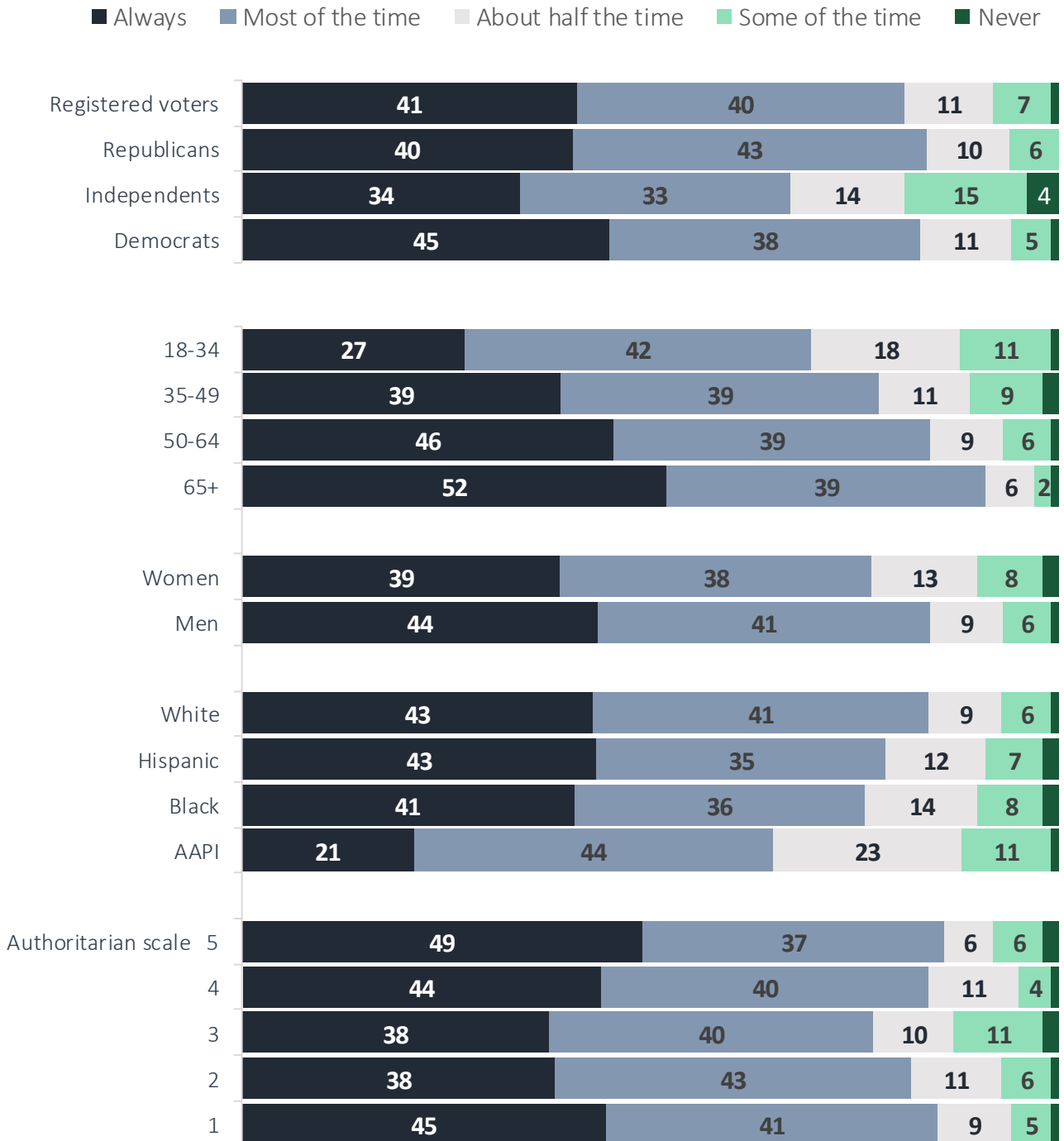
### Republican opinions of Democrats



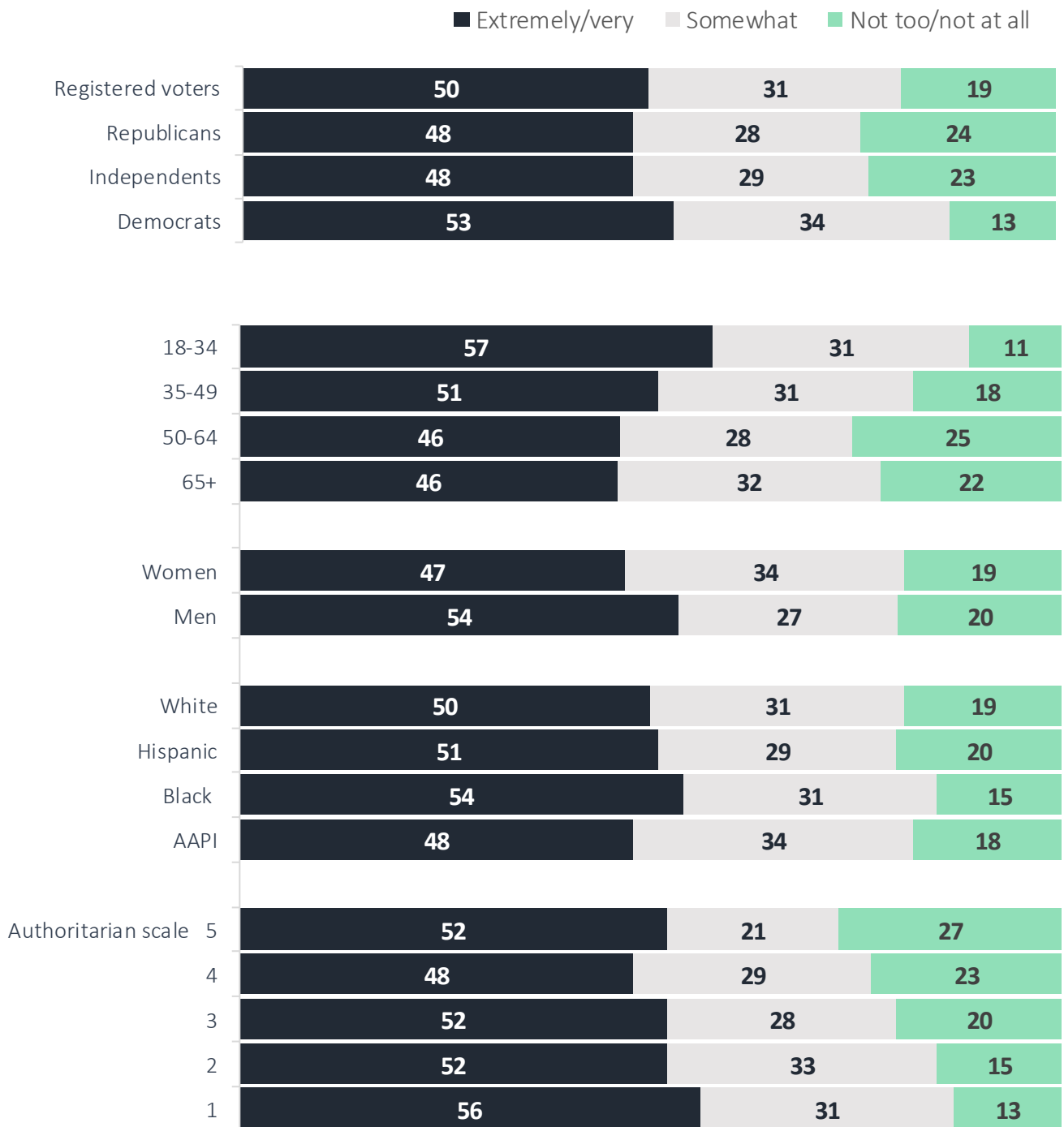
# Current affairs and news media

Older Americans are more likely than younger Americans to pay close attention to current events, but younger Americans are more confident in determining the validity of online news.

*% who pay attention to what's going on in government and politics*



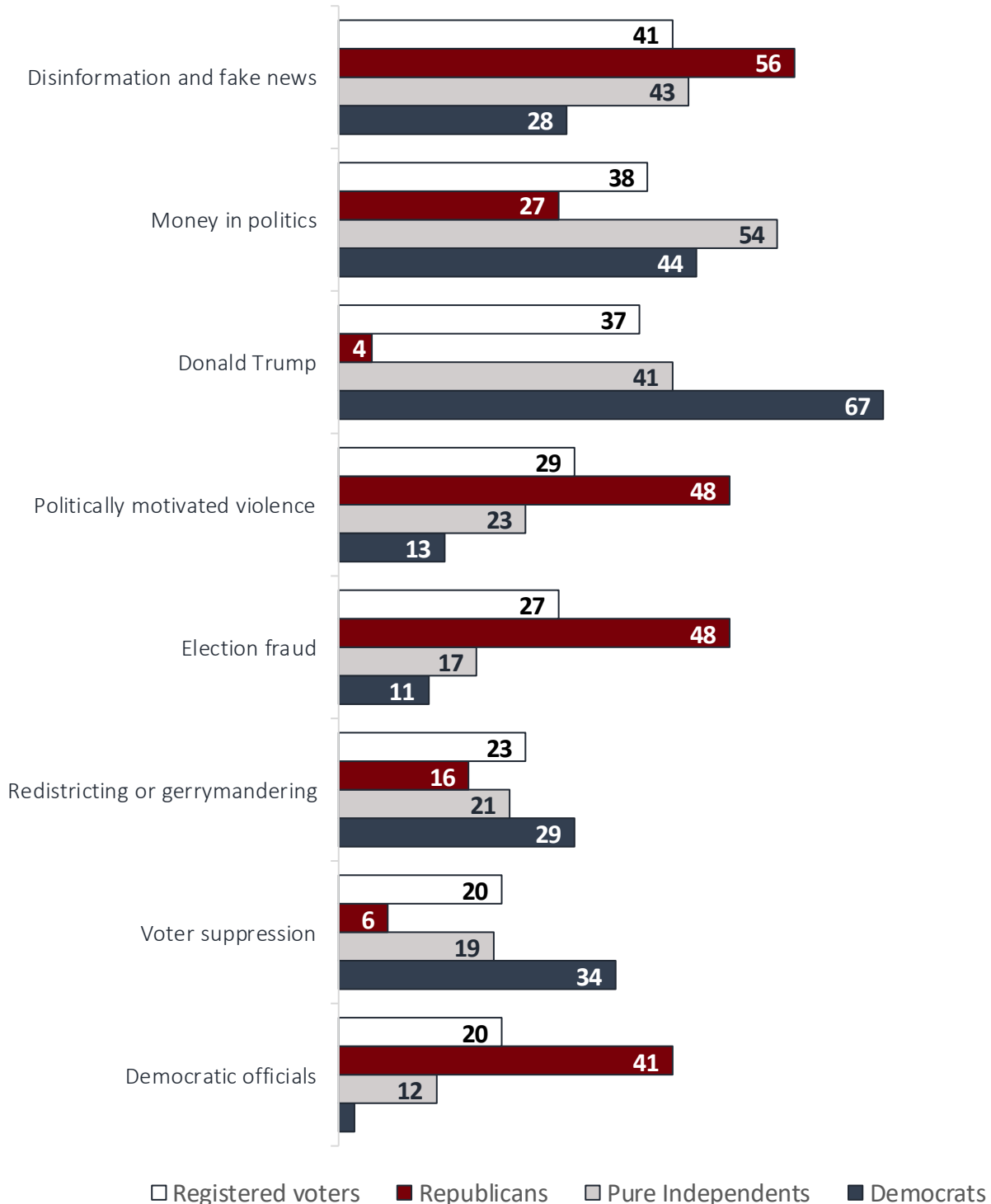
*% who are \_\_\_ confident in judging whether the news they see or read online is true or false*



# Threats to U.S. democracy

Survey respondents were asked to choose the top three threats to U.S. democracy. Disinformation and fake news are the largest concern, with 41% of registered voters and 56% of Republicans choosing it as a main threat. Republicans are also concerned with politically motivated violence and election fraud. Over two-thirds of Democrats chose Donald Trump as a leading threat.

*% who say the following are the biggest threats to democracy*



# SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Registered voters	
n = 2034; modeled margin of error 2.2%	
<b>Registered Party</b>	
Republican	44%
Pure Independent	13%
Democrat	43%
<b>Vote in 2024 elections</b>	
Kamala Harris, the Democrat	44%
Donald Trump, the Republican	44%
A minor third-party candidate	5%
Too young/ineligible	1%
Did not vote`	7%
<b>Age</b>	
18-34	26%
35-49	24%
50-64	23%
65+	27%
<b>Race</b>	
White	63%
Hispanic	13%
Black	12%
AAPI	8%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Other	3%
<b>Identity</b>	
Man	47%
Woman	52%
Other	2%
<b>Highest level of education completed</b>	
High school diploma or less	16%
Some college, no degree	27%
Associate's degree	14%
Bachelor's degree	25%
Graduate degree	17%

# SURVEY QUESTIONS

## Demographics

1. Are you:

A man

A woman

Another identity

2. In what year were you born?

3. In what ZIP code do you currently live?

4. What is your race?

White / Caucasian

Hispanic or Latino/a

Black or African American

Asian / Pacific Islander

American Indian or Alaska Native

Other (please specify)

4b. **[IF NOT HISPANIC]** Are you from a Hispanic, Latino/a or Spanish-speaking background?

Yes

No

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High school diploma or less

Some college, but no degree

Associate's degree, or two-year college degree

Bachelor's degree, or four-year college degree

Graduate degree

6. Are you registered to vote?

Yes

No **[TERMINATE]**

Not sure **[TERMINATE]**

7. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a:

Democrat

Republican

Independent/Other

\*7a. **[If 7 = Democrat/Republican]** Do you consider yourself a:

Strong Democrat/Republican

Not so strong Democrat/Republican

\*7b. **[If 7 = Ind/Other]** Do you consider yourself closer to:

The Democrats

The Republicans

Neither

8. How did you vote in the 2024 election for President, or for some reason were you unable to vote?

Kamala Harris, the Democrat

Donald Trump, the Republican

A third party candidate

Not registered/Too young/Ineligible

Did not vote

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

### Additional Political Affiliation and Alignment

9. [PIPE ANSWER FROM Q7] How important is being a [Republican/Democrat/Independent] to your identity?

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not important at all

10. Which of the following best describes how you identify politically?

- MAGA
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Progressive

### Political Beliefs, Behaviors, and Preferences

11. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Some of the time
- Never

12. How confident are you in judging whether the news you see or read online is true or false?

- Extremely confident
- Very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Not too confident
- Not at all confident

13. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [RANDOMIZE] [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree |

Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

The US is in a constitutional crisis.

The US is a democracy.

The US economy is in a recession.

The US government has a strong system of checks and balances.

The US is a dictatorship.

The US economy is thriving.

14. Which of the following statements do you agree with most?

The United States was built on the idea that everyone is born with rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The United States was built on the character of the Anglo-Saxon people, their distinct love of liberty and their sense of glory, destiny, and pride.

# SURVEY QUESTIONS

## Affective Polarization Measures

[SHOW Q15A-Q17A TO DEMOCRATS ONLY [from Q7]]

15a. [AP: Distance] Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

I would be upset if my friend or a close family member marries a **Republican**.

I avoid friendships with **Republicans**.

I try to avoid socializing with **Republicans**.

16a. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about **Republicans**? [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

Republicans are hypocritical.

Republicans are immoral.

Republicans are unfriendly.

Republicans are dangerous.

Republicans are mean.

17a. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

I am happy when negative things happen to **Republicans**.

It is appropriate to mock **Republicans**.

[SHOW Q15B-Q17B TO REPUBLICANS ONLY [from Q7]]

15b. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

I would be upset if my friend or a close family member marries a **Democrat**.

I avoid friendships with **Democrats**.

I try to avoid socializing with **Democrats**.

16b. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about **Democrats**? [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

Democrats are hypocritical.

Democrats are immoral.

Democrats are unfriendly.

Democrats are dangerous.

Democrats are mean.

17b. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

I am happy when negative things happen to **Democrats**.

It is appropriate to mock **Democrats**.

18. Do you support or oppose the following? [Strongly support | Somewhat support | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose | Not sure]

Your party's elected officials sometimes ignoring court decisions when the judges were appointed by a president from the other party

Your party's president issuing executive orders on their own when they can't get cooperation from Congress

The government censoring media sources that spend more time attacking your party than the other party

When your party's candidate questions an election outcome, other party members being more loyal to your party than to election rules

Your party reducing the number of polling stations in areas that typically support the other party

Your party changing election rules mainly to make it harder for the other party to win an election or a majority

19. Do you support or oppose the following? [Strongly support | Somewhat support | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose | Not sure]

ICE officers regularly conducting surveillance and arrests at sensitive locations like schools, hospitals, places of worship, and social service locations

Stripping U.S. citizens of their citizenship and deporting them if they are determined to be a threat to the country

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

20. What are the biggest threats to democracy in the United States today? Please select up to **three**.

Disinformation and fake news

Partisan media

Social media platforms

Lack of civic engagement

Lack of exposure to diverse perspectives

Income inequality

Racism and sexism

Politically motivated violence

Political polarization

Money in politics

Voter suppression

Redistricting or gerrymandering

Election fraud

Foreign interference in elections

Democratic officials

Republican officials

Federal judges and Supreme Court justices

Donald Trump

Other (please specify:) [textbox] [anchor]

There are no threats to democracy in the United States [anchor]

### Authoritarianism Measures

Although there are a number of qualities that people think children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. Although you may feel that both qualities are important, please tell me which one of each pair you think is more important for a child to have.

21-22. Would you say that it is more important for a child to be...

[OPTION A | OPTION B]

Option A: Independent **or** Option B: Respectful of their elders

Option A: Obedient **or** Option B: Self-reliant

Option A: Well-behaved **or** Option B: Considerate

Option A: Curious **or** Option B: Good mannered

Option A: Polite **or** Option B: Free spirited

Option A: Orderly **or** Option B: Imaginative

Option A: Disciplined **or** Option B: Adaptable

Option A: Loyal **or** Option B: Open-minded

23-24. Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? [Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Not sure]

Students at high schools and at university must be encouraged to challenge, criticize, and confront established authorities.

Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.

Nobody should stick to the "straight and narrow." Instead people should break loose and try out lots of different ideas and experiences.

Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else.

The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers, if we are going to preserve law and order.

The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get back to our traditional values, put some tough leaders in power, and silence the troublemakers spreading bad ideas.