



Date: March 24, 2021

To: Interested Parties

From: Stanley Greenberg, Greenberg Research  
Dr. Christopher Parker, University of Washington  
Chad Arthur, Democracy Corps

## What will Trump loyalists' sensed powerlessness mean for politics?

Focus group report on  
Trump loyalists, Trump aligned and non-Trump conservatives and moderates

---

Donald Trump's influence on the Republican Party continues to shape America's politics, even as the Democrats have taken control of the federal government and Congress. When polls accurately reflect the proportion of the white working class voters and their support for Trump in 2020, Democrats have only a 2-point lead in party identification and 43 percent still approve of his behavior — unchanged after the insurrection. Fully 58 percent are *Trump Loyalists* who strongly approve of Trump and another 12 percent *Trump-aligned* who "somewhat approve" of him but are very conservative or Evangelical.<sup>1</sup>

Trump's base is angry about government restrictions on their freedom and believe they are fighting to save the "American way of life" from cancel culture and Black Lives Matter's violent attacks on police and white people.

We conducted focus groups in March with Trump Loyalists in Georgia and Wisconsin and Trump-aligned, non-Trump conservatives and moderates in suburban and rural Georgia, Ohio, and Wisconsin. It took a long time to recruit these groups because Trump voters seemed particularly distrustful of outsiders right now, wary of being victimized, and avoided revealing their true position until in a Zoom room with all Trump voters — then, they let it all out.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Trump loyalists** are 58 percent of the party (strongly approve of Trump); **Trump aligned** are 12 percent (somewhat approve and ideologically very conservative, or somewhat approve and conservative Evangelicals); **moderate Republicans** are 13 percent of the party (not strongly approve and ideologically moderate or liberal, as well as those who are religiously secular or mainline Protestant); **non-Trump conservatives** are now 17 percent (do not strongly approve and somewhat conservative, or are very conservative and disapprove).

See Appendix A for pie chart of these GOP factions.

These percentages are based on results from Democracy Corps' national phone poll of 1,000 registered voters conducted February 18-23, 2021. It is adjusted to ensure white working class are 46 percent of the sample and weighted to Trump's recalled 2020 vote.

And here are the conclusions that emerged from this new research:

- The Trump loyalists and Trump-aligned were angry, but also despondent, feeling powerless and uncertain they will become more involved in politics;
- Trump's base saw Biden, as a white man, as not threatening, controlled by others, unlike Obama who represented everything Tea Party-Republicans were determined to fight;
- Even Trump's base is curious about the extent to which they benefit from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Biden's signature program, compared to Obamacare that they viewed as a new entitlement for Blacks and immigrants that must be stopped;
- The Trump loyalists and the Trump aligned are animated about government taking away their freedom and a cancel culture that leaves no place for white Americans and the fear they're losing "their" country to non-whites;
- They were angered most of all by Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Antifa that were responsible for a full year of violence in Democratic cities that put white people on the defensive – and was ignored by the media;
- The Trump loyalists and those who are aligned rooted for the anti-lockdown protestors in Michigan and saw the violence and disruption of the legislature as justified. Some pulled back when the guns threatened innocent civilians, and more when their methods seemed to be losing support for the Trump movement;
- A handful of the Trump loyalists supported the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrectionists, but most quickly concluded it was really Antifa or an inside job to make Trump supporters look bad. They normalized the insurrection, suggesting it was no different than the violence carried out by BLM and Antifa;
- They worry now that it is the government that has taken the initiative on the use of force, increasing their sense of powerlessness;
- The non-Trump conservatives and moderates bloc is marginally smaller but vocal in opposition to Trump's direction and animated by his alienation of non-Republicans, the extremism, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment and guns, and role of government and more.

### **Trump loyalists: angry, but despondent and feeling powerless**

The Trump Loyalists and Trump-aligned voters were angry to be sure, but more striking was how despondent and powerless they seemed. They felt powerless to reverse these important national political decisions, and frustrated that their divided party failed to act with the same determination and unity as the Democrats. They believed Democrats were smarter, rigged the election, had a plan to grow their support, and stuck to their guns, unlike the fickle Republican

leaders who gave up on Trump. Democrats united around Nancy Pelosi who refuses to relinquish power easily.

Democrats employed the media, tech giants, schools and universities as powerful allies to cancel and marginalize conservatives. The respondents felt insecure and increasingly at risk if they revealed they were a Trump voter. They feared their own children might yield to the propaganda, too. That defensiveness was captured in one Trump voter's response to the screening question, "I was sort of afraid to answer the race leaning questions for this. I don't want to be judged based on the answer I give because everybody knows who you voted for. And they think I'm horrible. But I'm not." (OH Trump Aligned woman)

Respondents were not suspicious of Biden who was white and, therefore, not a threat. This reaction is a far cry from their reception of Obama, whom they believed personified everything they thought wrong with America. They were not mobilizing to stop the ARP that benefited them, as the Tea Party-dominated Republican Party in 2009 mobilized to fight Obamacare that they thought created a new entitlement for Blacks and immigrants. That revolt from 2008 to 2010 produced the 2010 Tea Party wave election, where the GOP added 63 seats in the House. Reactions to the ARP, however, appear very different. Even the Trump Loyalists are, for now, hoping the plan would cut their taxes and health insurance premiums.

Further, unlike Obama, Joe Biden is not a polarizing figure. Nor is he even someone they discuss very much — unless we ask about him. They think he is weak, old, probably with dementia, chosen by the Democratic establishment to be president. We asked the Trump loyalists at the end of the group to send an email to Biden and Trump. Here is what they wrote:

Mr. Biden, I feel sorry for you that you have to deal with your golden years of decline. You should resign and go to retirement and enjoy your last days. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

Dear Biden, you've not fooling anyone. We know you're not really in charge. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

To Biden: hope you have a good life. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

You do not belong in office. Please leave and take your VP with you. Also, take Pelosi with you. Thanks and good-bye. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Don't let the Jews control you. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Trump's narrative in the CPAC speech — portions of which they watched in the focus group — asserted his great landslide was stolen away because of feckless Republicans and conservatives being silenced, and it left participants believing strongly that Democrats are more ruthless, determined, united, and likely to win, leaving a huge mountain to climb.

The politicians, more at least on the Republican side, seem very weak. The Democrats have more power in the Senate and Congress because they broke the rules because our elected leaders don't know how to do it. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

As far as the election goes, we talk about- I wouldn't say stolen, I'd say the Democrats outmanaged the Republicans and continue to. They both juggle it and don't stop until you're under the ground buried. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

They're more reactionary than we are. The Democrats are in it for the long haul. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

The modern Republican party has a problem of uniting and rallying around someone. We have no power now. When we had the power, a few of them wanted to say bad things about the president to get good ratings on social media. We've lost our way. That's the best way to say it. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Donald Trump has always presented himself and supporters as victims: a politics borne of white grievance. This, in turn, spurred his supporters to register and turnout in record numbers in 2016 and even higher numbers in 2020 to keep Trump in power. But having lost, that very same narrative may now leave his supporters feeling powerless.

And now the Democrats have been joined by "the folks on Twitter or Facebook,"

And they're going street by street with an electronic guillotine. I'm scared for myself, my wife, my child to post on social media anything positive about Trump, about voting for Trump, doing anything for Trump. I think it's dangerous because a couple years down the road, they'll drag you out. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

The odds seem increasingly stacked against them.

And when at the very end of the focus group, we asked the Trump loyalists whether they will become more involved in politics now, they reacted viscerally, suggested the opposite; that they'll retreat:

They could read some Adam Smith and learn some economics. I work full-time and maybe if I could just give people ideas and stuff, but that's not how it works. Give them a reading list or something. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

I wouldn't get involved, but I'd be paying more attention to who is running, and if they're voted in. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

In the local, yeah. The way we can make a difference is starting at the local level where we can start working our way up. It doesn't mean- I don't know how much time I would spend, but if you find the right candidate, it doesn't take a lot. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

I'm kind of disillusioned. I think it's so polarized. I don't like the direction my party is going, and it pains me to see the party like this but until it becomes the Republican party I love, I'm very disillusioned. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Absolutely not. I'll sit back and watch and hope and pray to God daily things can turn around in a positive direction for the US. Maybe Trump will revitalize this country again somehow. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Will the Trump Loyalists join the battle to stop the Democratic governance, copying the Tea Party's response in 2010? It does not seem likely at this point, but Trump has sharply changed course as he did after the murder of George Floyd incited racial violence. He should not be underestimated.

### **The American Rescue Plan is NOT Obamacare**

The Tea Party revolt was a social movement that animated the Republican Party, and it brought some of the most racially resentful, anti-Obama voters into the electorate to reverse his bailout of the big banks, the near trillion-dollar American Recovery Act, and the new health care entitlement, Obamacare. The rest is history.

The narrative of this "social experiment" might appear more straightforward if the Affordable Care Act actually reduced health care costs for working people of all colors, but it did not. Thus, the battle for the Affordable Care Act became, for Republicans, a battle to stop the creation of a health care entitlement that they believed would mainly benefit Blacks and immigrants. Further, the fact that it was introduced by Obama didn't help.

Biden's signature America Rescue Plan to reshape American society was championed by a white president and, therefore, has failed to arouse the anxiety, among Republicans, that was associated with Obamacare ("death panels," etc.).

Further, opposition to Biden's plan was blunted because major elements of the ARP were in earlier bipartisan packages supported by Trump, including the child tax credits. Yes, they talked about the deficit and the fact that Democrats "have this idea you can just print up checks and it doesn't affect anything," "constantly bail these people out," and "reward bad decisions." Even so, they were not angry, and no one mentioned organizing to stop it— even in the Trump loyalist groups.

The child tax credit was flagged by nearly all those with children.

[The child tax credit] is confusing but when she explained it, it makes sense. It's expensive to raise children. (WI Non-Trump woman)

I think being the mother of four children, that would've helped but would've gotten absorbed. The government isn't responsible for our children as much as we are. (WI Non-Trump woman)

As a family of 6 and my husband working, me being at home, I appreciate having more of a child allowance for taxes, but I start to look at it and think wow, the government will give us all this money. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

We have four children; one is in college and my second is a senior. We pay a lot of taxes. So, when they took away the child tax credit, and when we got it back, it helped. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

I agree with others that selfishly the \$3,000 per month is amazing because we have six kids so I wouldn't have to worry about bills anymore. Responsibly that sounds awful. Where are we getting this money? What is it doing to our dollar? (OH Trump Aligned woman)

I was thinking on the allowance. I want to say, selfishly it feels wonderful to think I'll get this money and won't have to worry about diapers and groceries, but does this turn us into socialism because here's our dole and we can stay at home? (OH Trump Aligned woman)

It's definitely appealing. I think I'd get \$6,000. The other side is we're in serious debt as a country and it's just making bigger problems. Although I'd love the cash, I don't think it's a good idea in the bigger picture. (OH Trump Aligned man)

They noted the grants to restaurants, which showed Democrats were helping small businesses and their own communities.

We're loyal to our bars and restaurants and want to see them survive. They're the anchors of community. You lose that and the community dies with it. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

They can decide how to use it. When the government gives money sometimes they can decide how you use it. The restaurants are struggling. You have these governors violating everyone's rights and making it tough for restaurants. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

I agree with the ladies as far as this will hurt small businesses like the mom-and-pop places whether they can't afford and will end up shutting down. I know of plenty of people who have gone out of business during the pandemic or are hurting really bad and this would be the nail in the coffin. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

Potentially critical, according to them, are the new policies that promise to make health insurance affordable — something they believe Obamacare never did, and never will. In nearly every group of non-Trump conservatives, someone blurts out: "I'm in Obamacare and it saved my life. I had cancer and without that I never would've been able to afford to go to the doctor"; "the Democrats have me on health care"; "I'm kind of ok with it. I think everyone deserves affordable healthcare." (WI Non-Trump woman)

But when costs are considered, their hostility towards Obamacare is strong, and why they think it was not intended for white people like themselves. One Trump loyalist man in Wisconsin said, “the cost only got higher.” He went online every year to the exchange, and every year, never qualified for subsidies: “I wasted another hour.” So, when he read that the ARP included these provisions, regarding the reduced deductibles in the ARP, he said:

I don't believe it to tell you the truth. They said under the ACA it would go down. I make under \$50k and I can't get insurance for \$250 for a family. I pay almost double that. I don't believe it'll do what they're saying it'll do. (WI Trump Loyalist man).

We will see what happens when the ARP's dramatic cuts and subsidies become evident in the market.

When Trump loyalists were asked about their views on the Democrats after hearing the plan, they went to predictable explanations, like “trying to buy everyone off” spending “money we don't have,” and “continuing down the path that government is the solution.”

But when we asked the non-Trump groups, their comments were relatively sober:

I think right now, they're really focused on helping the people out. They know the country is hurting really bad and are trying to get everyone the help they need. (GA Non-Trump woman)

It's been a bit overzealous. But I like that they're trying to help us. When the airplane is going down, they say help yourself first and then your neighbor. So, this is putting on the mask first. (GA Non-Trump woman)

I think he is looking out for the lower class. The middle class is eliminated. It's upper and lower. There should be some of this finance going to big businesses. The politicians will give them tax breaks and the lower-class people are left out. The lower class need healthcare and these things. (WI Non-Trump woman)

The bottom line: the ARP is not Obamacare. Even the Trump loyalists are waiting to see if they will benefit or put in their retirement plan – but no one talked about going to disrupt a member of Congress' town hall.

### **What animates the Trump loyalists?**

The Trump loyalists are deeply angry with a government, the media, and social media companies that they believe are taking away their freedom, and are now trying to cancel Trump supporters themselves. According to them, cancel culture is destroying our history and the American way of life, making it very hard for white people to have a future. One man in Georgia complained

that “everything has become about race” and “the woke crowd is canceling everyone for something they did,” while another man in Ohio said, “our demographic is concerned about cancel culture” because “in the media we’re the victims more than not.”

They believe Black Lives Matter and Antifa have been given free rein in Democrat-run cities to sow chaos, attack police and white people, while the media turns a blind eye. The cancel culture, urban chaos and strife that typically accompanies BLM protests, leave most Republicans (our respondents) worried about what happens to white people in a changing America. To them, the BLM movement is commensurate with an anti-white crusade, a zero-sum affair, one where they fear losing “their” country. This is why MAGA and the Tea Party emphasize going backwards in time, i.e., “Make America Great Again,” and “Take our country back:” it’s about returning to a time during which WASP culture remained absent challengers.

The lockdown (and the requirement to wear masks) and protests leaves them focused on a government taking away their freedoms that the Constitution gave them — and believing the politicians need to be a little more scared of the people.

For the Trump loyalists, Black Lives Matter and Antifa remain undifferentiated — and the principal cause of violence in so many cities for a good part of a year, chaos was just hidden by the mainstream media. They elided BLM and Antifa as Marxist or communist, “terrorists” that attacked public buildings and most of all, created chaos.

People were bringing up other stuff. The media was focusing on that peaceful protest, trying to bring it down and minimize it, yet when we had Antifa burning buildings, they were standing in front of buildings and saying it was a mostly peaceful protest. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

[Chaos] That’s pretty much what all these groups want in my mind. (GA Non-Trump woman)

I don’t know that much about what they stand for, but it seems like they’re mostly involved with trouble and violence. (GA Non-Trump woman)

They should all be characterized as terrorist groups. All lives matter, doesn’t matter about the color of your skin. Through the summer in Atlanta, Portland, Kenosha, they have the same mindset as all the terrorist organizations whether the BLM and all them, all the same. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

They’re a self-proclaimed socialist group. Trained Marxists. They’re not in it for Black lives at all. They’re in it for themselves to change this country. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

They’re there to disrupt and cause chaos. They’re probably paid by our government and by George Soros and the Deep State. This will cause chaos and won’t be needed anymore and will start going to jail, but until then, they’ll cause trouble and chaos. (GA Trump Loyalist man)



Don't care what they're about, they shouldn't be allowed to be out and about terrorizing.  
(WI Trump Loyalist man)

The Trump loyalists and Trump-aligned responded to Black Lives Matter with, "all lives matter" and "blue lives," too. The focus group became an organizing meeting as they shared stories on blue lights on their houses and sending letters to different police departments that needed their support against Black protests.

I think it comes back to race again. The white race, the Black race, the Hispanic race. That's causing a lot of issues. I support them [the police], we have blue lights on our house every night. That's something that needs to be addressed in this country. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

I have the blue lights, but a lady and I are sending thank you cards to the different police stations. We've done Arkansas, Nebraska, and Alaska. State by state, we're trying to find every single one and send thank you cards. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

"Black Lives Matters" turned out to be a Rorschach test for Trump's party where whites expressed discontent with how (or if) white people fit into the new America.

I don't want to say race war, but I feel like that's a big concern and certain things are being forced upon us. I love everyone and God loves everyone, and I would never treat someone differently. I feel that if we don't agree with something, we're racist and that's scary to me and my 19-year-old daughter. I'm scared for her. I know what's in my head, but I don't want to say it because I don't want to sound offensive. That's what worries me. We're all humans. Now it's so different. That's scary to me. (OH Trump Aligned man)

We raised our daughter to be colorblind and now she's considered racist because of that. It's sad. I think they are violent. Everything in Cleveland and Seattle. They flew people in. It's upsetting to me. Especially for our daughter. She has her whole life ahead of her. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

It upsets me when they say all lives don't matter until Black Lives Matter. That's not fair. That's not how we should be living. We shouldn't be having a Black national anthem before the American anthem. We're all Americans and I'm not racist. I have racists in my family. I love everybody and don't care what you look like. I look at your heart and your actions. If you're violent, I don't support that. I look at Seattle and there are good and bad. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

In the Trump loyalist groups this emerged as a raw racism.

Reparations, social justice, and in my opinion, they want to reverse racism. The agenda is to push the idea that white people are more inferior because we allowed slavery into this country. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

I have six grandkids; they don't have a future. With the race riots and Antifa, California passed a tax law and Californians are now getting taxed to give straight to the African American community. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Racist. All lives matter but that's what makes me racist. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment that protects all our freedoms**

For the Trump loyalists and those who are in alignment, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment has become nearly sacred and "a fundamental part of American life." And even though they are angry about government encroaching on their freedom, they believe protecting their right to bear arms trumps all others. It is the most important amendment and "protects all the other Amendments." All those critics do not appreciate the NRA, do not appreciate how the balance would shift if the citizens did not have arms.

I agree with it, but I believe it's the most decisive amendment. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

The amendment that protects all the other amendments. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Fundamental part of American life. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

We have to continue to fight for it. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

Security. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

Keeps our government in check knowing they have a populace that are carrying and all. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Misunderstood. People don't know it's at stake. (OH Trump Aligned man)

I think the 9 or 10 million new gun owners in the past year speaks for itself. It's important. (OH Trump Aligned man)

At a time when many of the Trump protestors are armed, there is little room for backsliding on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. That is why it's impressive the number of the non-Trump groups — most of whom were gun-owners — that said the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment is for a different time.

When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment was written, everything was different. You had to protect your country and your family, and the firearms were the only way to do it. But it's gone way over the top. (GA Non-Trump woman)

I think a lot of people make a lot of money making you think they'll take the gun away, but it won't happen. It's too deeply rooted in our culture. It's here to stay. (OH Trump Aligned man)

I think we need some common-sense rules. I don't think if you can't get on an airplane, you should be able to get a gun either. I think it should be one rule for everyone. Everybody should have to have a background check. (WI Non-Trump woman)

The right to bear arms, it was drafted hundreds of years ago, but I think it's been taken over the top. Road rage, for God's sake. (GA Non-Trump woman)

### **MI State Legislature**

We focused on the anti-lockdown protest at the Michigan State Legislature to explore Republican openness to violence to stop Democrats from governing — indeed, to stop lawful, democratic governance in the United States. While we will examine reactions to the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, nearly all the Trump loyalists thought coverage was distorted by the media, thought it was “an inside job” or orchestrated by “outside agitators” to make Trump and the MAGA movement look bad. On Michigan, the participants discussed how they reacted at the time and did not mention media distorting what they saw.

The non-Trump Republicans described the Michigan protest as “ridiculous,” made them “sick watching it,” and “terrifying.” That sharply contrasts with how the Trump loyalists reacted, but let us remember that the latter represent 70 percent of the party.

The Trump loyalists and many of the Trump-aligned cheered for the protestors. They spoke up for them, claiming that they were engaged in legitimate protests to demand our freedom. They did not see any violence. And critically, they saw it as “non-violent,” in contrast to what they watched with Black Lives Matter and Antifa.

This was some people were speaking and to me, it was how it was supposed to be. No matter your opinion, this is how it was supposed to be done. There was no violence involved at all. Even the police started standing down when some of the speakers spoke to them and said: hey, this is what we're here for, this is what it's about, we're no threat. And law enforcement saw that and stood down. There were no threats. We want to get our voice heard and it needs to be done and done in a nonviolent manner protected by our Constitution. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

There wasn't a single thing destroyed or litter thrown on the ground. The place was cleaner than they left it. Patriots are representing their 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment right to protest. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

As far as I know, no one got hurt. If that's true, I don't mind it. I don't have a problem with it. That's fine with me as long as you're not storming a building and drawing

weapons. If you want to protest with your 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, go ahead. (OH Trump Aligned man)

I knew from family and friends in Michigan that that went down. They voiced their opinion of the governor there that she thinks she knows it all. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

Some of the Trump-aligned agreed with protesting for the freedoms in our constitution, but disagreed on the tactics that violated other people's rights. They didn't want Trump supporters using the same methods as the summer protestors — that they decried.

I was supporting their right to be there to demonstrate and to have their weapons with them because those are the freedoms we were granted but I feel like when it crossed the line into taking over the building is where I stopped supporting that demonstration. That takes away the freedoms of other people. The people in that building are supposed to be at work and entitled to their safety. My freedoms shouldn't impede yours. (OH Trump Aligned woman)

I don't like lockdowns at all. But I don't like it when people who agree with me take on the tactics of people who disagree with me. There were a lot of protests over the summer and didn't lead to a lot of change, but led to a lot of broken hearts and buildings and it was in the same spirit the people marched on the courthouse in Michigan. (OH Trump Aligned man)

The non-Trump Republicans were eager to share their views, condemning what they saw in Michigan, even when they were in the same groups of Trump-aligned conservatives. They defended what they believed as the government "trying to save your life," and calling the protests "stupid," and "terrifying" when they bring "weapons in the Capitol." According to one woman, these "crazy people" are why we need gun control.

In all honesty, I just thought how stupid these people are. You're going to protest- they're trying to save your life and all you can think about is 'The government can't tell me what to do.' It's stupid. (GA Non-Trump woman)

I agree 100 percent with Tammy. If you go into a fancy restaurant, men have to wear a fancy jacket and don't protest. But to wear a face mask it's a huge thing just to save grandma's life. (GA Non-Trump woman)

The way people are acting about the mask is just ridiculous. Think of other people. It's to save other people. (GA Non-Trump woman)

I was confused. What the heck were they doing? I was angry because they shouldn't have weapons in the Capitol or around the Capitol. (WI Non-Trump woman)

I was sick watching it and thinking of what could have possibly happened had they gotten to the people they were protesting against. I'm sure it was terrifying. (WI Non-Trump woman)

They were the very people for why there should be gun control. The people who go and get their right to carry and do the safety stuff, these are the people who are too crazy to have guns. I don't want someone like that to have guns. They're nuts. (WI Non-Trump woman)

Trump loyalists and Trump-aligned voters identified with the protestors at the Michigan legislature who were trying to stop the government restrictions on their freedoms and intimidate the state legislature. They are the voters who are hegemonic in the base of the party and who will have their say on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

Nonetheless, they face outspoken opposition from the moderates and non-Trump conservatives who vociferously rejected the insurrection and much more.

Further, they have doubts about other things. For instance, they believe that the government (run by Democrats) is willing to make use of law enforcement and the military.

If force is going to be used, it'll be the government on its own citizens. The government will just come and execute the people who don't agree with it. Whatever the government decides is right. The government will put you in jail or ruin your life or kill you. It won't be the people that stand up and do something. It'll be the government that becomes more authoritarian. If a person stands up, they'll be labeled as a domestic terrorist and thrown in Guantanamo Bay. That's what Kamala Harris and Joe Biden want. If you say in two years you only believe in two genders, you'll be in jail. Submit or be destroyed. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

We won't fire the first shot. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

I think it could get to that point, but it'll take people in the right position to put a stop to it. But there's no one in DC who would put a stop to it on either side. We need to vote people in there but it's getting harder to do it because of the games that are being played. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

## **QAnon**

In the Trump loyalist groups, we asked about QAnon and whether Democrats supported pedophiles. We presumed that was a step too far, but it was not. There was no push back.

Somebody brought up Jeffrey Epstein in each group. One person said it is "portrayed in negative light" by the media so he will need to do more research. Then, some began to talk.

They're against pedophilia, they can't be that bad. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

There is no QAnon group. It's Q. I'm a Q follower. There are anonymous people making comments. Q sends out information. What Q did is make people research things. The pedophile ring is true and just recently there have been a lot of arrests and resignations from different CEOs and Democratic politicians for child pornography. QAnon is not a thing. Q is a thing. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

One of the men in Wisconsin warned, however, "I think they're nutjobs. It gives the leftists a way to mock us."

In the case of QAnon, the moderates and non-Trump conservatives quickly spoke up and could not be more dismissive: "they think Democrats will kill babies." "It is so nuts. It's just to create chaos."

Other did not know about QAnon until they watched January 6<sup>th</sup> unfold. In the groups, they elaborated with considerable eloquence.

I think the internet allows people to connect with people who are likeminded who shouldn't be connecting and it spreads. It seems like a religion for people to storm the capitol. (OH Trump Aligned man)

Watching it, I was embarrassed. It's not like they stormed a Target, but they stormed the symbol of democracy. If these guys can do this, who will stop a bunch of "nutjobs" from Iran doing the same thing? They kind of wrote the playbook on this. I was ashamed and afraid of the ramifications of it all. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

It's just a right-wing conservative movement that they want to overthrow the government. They think liberals or Dems kill babies and drink their blood. It's so nuts, it's just to create chaos. (GA Non-Trump woman)

I didn't know a thing about QAnon until they stormed into the Capitol on the 6<sup>th</sup> and they just looked like they came straight out of a comic book. Just outrageous and over the top. Drinking some crazy Kool-Aid, I want nothing to do with. (GA Non-Trump woman)

I do know a few people who really follow that and believe the conspiracy thing. I try to have an open mind, but I've seen too much that isn't true that I can't really take it too seriously. (GA Non-Trump woman)

It's an extreme group with some weird beliefs about aliens. It's craziness. (WI Non-Trump woman)

The moderates and non-Trump conservatives are just 30 percent of their party, but it makes clear how divided the Republican Party is. They know they are a minority, but events since the 2020 election are forcing them to challenge Trump and his party.

**January 6<sup>th</sup>**

Only about 4 percent of Americans responded positively to the “January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection” in Democracy Corps’ poll in mid-February, but that does not capture how perceptions have been shaped by Trump, Republican officials, and conservative media.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the rewriting of history and new accounts, a handful of Trump loyalists in the groups said they supported the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, felt it was justified, and in fact, were cheering for them.

I was surprised but kind of cheering them on because I think we need to do that. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

I was rooting for them. I think they should- Trump didn't get a fair shake. There were more votes cast than registered voters. It should've been righted but it wasn't. Pelosi was after him since day one. She's still after him so he can't run again in 2024. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

Some betrayed how much they had succeeded in their mission, even as they concluded they went too far, as indicated by this Trump loyalist.

I'll be honest, I wish they'd gotten Nancy Pelosi. Just me. I think a lot of this country stuff would be fixed if they could get her out of the seat. I don't want to see anybody get hurt. Storming the Capitol, if that's your right, you can do it. They went overboard, breaking windows and doing all that. (OH Trump Aligned man)

But a majority of Trump loyalists decided this was not on the level. Some said it is exactly the kind of violence they saw with Antifa. Others talked about being on the inside with the Capitol police to make the MAGA movement look bad. The Deep State and the Democrats got the results they wanted.

I think it was all staged myself, personally. Initially that was my gut feeling that it was set up. And then videos started surfacing with the Capitol police escorting them in and the bear suit. It was set up to defame the MAGA movement. We knew it was a straight set-up. I still feel very strongly about this. It was just Democrats playing games. They played games the whole four years. (WI Trump Loyalist man)

In any riot, there are inside agitators. I questioned the whole thing. Why are they saying Trump supporters? Why aren't they questioning why the doors are wide open? Just Trump supporters trying to storm the government. (GA Trump Loyalist man)

---

<sup>2</sup> A national poll of 1,000 registered voters was conducted by phone February 18-23, 2021 from a voter-file sample. 67% of respondents were reached on cell phones in order to accurately reflect the American electorate.

Question wording: “Now, I'd like you to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.”

Blown way out of proportion. Not a good look. I think it was an inside job. It was a bit of a black eye on the MAGA movement. But in four years, one window broken is not bad. Antifa burned down four buildings in one hour. I do question the whole thing. Other than the people that got rowdy, it was just people expressing their concerns with election integrity. (WI Trump Loyalist Man)

When things started to turn south, the people who were doing it, some of the behaviors that they exhibited were the same behaviors Antifa and BLM exhibits. For me, I feel as those folks, Trump supporters were there patriotically or not supporters. Then there were folks who integrated themselves to cause trouble and take it to another level. Some of those folks were plants by whoever- maybe the Deep State- to cause problems and it worked. To make Trump look bad and it worked. (GA Trump Loyalist Man)

One of the loyalists got right on the Antifa narrative, "I watched it and said, well, I don't think this is Donald Trump doing it and not the Republicans doing it. I think Antifa paid people in here to do it." And then got back to tactical things, they went too far, and it hurt Republicans: "I don't want to see anybody get hurt. Storming the Capitol, if that's your right, you can do it. They went overboard, breaking windows and doing all that. That set the Republicans back." (OH Trump Aligned man)

One Trump aligned woman said, "I was rooting for them to do it safely and not hurt anybody." But then the media took over and "said one-sided and cockamamie stories," so you couldn't know what is true. "I did feel they had every right to go in there. But to threaten people and harm, no. You can do things peacefully." (OH Trump Aligned woman)

Nearly all the Trump loyalists and those aligned came to believe the media blew this up, while utterly ignoring the violent BLM protests all summer and the violence in cities, like Portland and Atlanta. A Trump-aligned woman said, "I believe if you burn down a city, that's also breaking the law. One should not be better or worse than the other. Breaking the law is breaking the law." (OH Trump Aligned woman) Even for those who were critical of January 6<sup>th</sup>, they believed the media ignored the BLM and Antifa violence, while giving full coverage to the U.S. Capitol riots.

The moderates and non-Trump conservatives, not surprisingly, reacted with horror and clarity.

That was appalling, and people were seriously misguided but what freaked me out more than that was people in the real world who were agreeing with it. People I know who were supporting it and it was all based on really seriously misguided information. People thought the police would come and arrest Joe Biden. (WI Non-Trump woman)

I agree wholeheartedly, it was terrifying to watch. I was flipping between different news outlets. I really felt uncertain for the future. Is this going to stop? Are they going to beak in and if they get ahold of our leaders, what will happen? Is this the beginning of civil war? After the fact, looking and reading and researching all the claims that the president



incited it or George Soros sent people, there's so many conspiracy theories about it. It's hard to wrap your head around what the truth was. (WI Non-Trump woman)

I got home that day and turned the TV on to see Trump giving a speech saying: "we are going to walk down there." In that moment, I said, "Oh my god, he started a riot. (WI Non-Trump woman)

### **And what animates the non-Trump Republicans?**

About 30 percent of Republicans are non-Trump conservatives<sup>3</sup> and the ideologically and religiously moderate —with the latter forming half of this bloc that vocally opposes Trump. This bloc is marginally smaller than the bloc of McCain conservatives and moderates in 2020, but they are now much clearer where they differ with Trump and much more willing to express it, even in a room full of Trump loyalists. They reacted viscerally when seeing Trump's CPAC speech — "that's what I hate." They called out the "nut jobs" and conspiracy theorists. They don't understand their fellow Republican's opposition to masks and health measures. They don't think the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment is sacred, oppose the display of weapons in Michigan, and want to regulate guns. When others said they appreciated what the Proud Boys did, they called them out as "not patriots." They seemed open to a much more expansive role for government.

They do share with other Republicans an aversion to BLM and cancel culture; they too are looking for more law and order and seem uncomfortable with whites being on the defensive. They accepted that the elite media ignored the violence in the cities, but not the equivalence of Antifa and U.S. Capitol violence. They opposed the insurrection, as well as the anti-lockdown protest in Michigan.

That "game on" attitude was evident in every session, in statements like these:

I think we need some common-sense rules. I don't think if you can't get on an airplane, you shouldn't be able to get a gun either. (WI Non-Trump woman)

[January 6<sup>th</sup>] In that moment, I said, "Oh my god, he started a riot. (WI Non-Trump woman)

[Anti-lockdown protests in MI] What the heck were they doing? I was angry because they shouldn't have weapons in the Capitol or around the Capitol. (WI Non-Trump woman)

---

<sup>3</sup> **Moderates** are Republicans who do not "strongly approve" of Trump and are ideologically moderate or liberal, as well as those who are religiously secular or mainline Protestant. **Non-Trump conservatives** do not strongly approve of Trump and are ideologically somewhat conservative, or very conservative and disapprove of Trump.

[QAnon] It's just a right-wing conservative movement that they want to overthrow the government. They think liberals or Dems kill babies and drink their blood. It's so nuts, it's just to create chaos. (GA Non-Trump woman)

[the Proud Boys] I think they're uneducated thugs with a ridiculous cause. (GA Non-Trump woman)

[QAnon] just looked like they came straight out of a comic book. Just outrageous and over the top. Drinking some crazy Kool-Aid, I want nothing to do with. (GA Non-Trump woman)

Going forward, the non-Trump blocs are not going to keep their heads down as in the four years under Trump. Even then, many younger and college-educated voters defected from the Republicans and 14 percent describe themselves as former Republicans.<sup>4</sup> Whether they turn out to vote or become Biden Republicans will matter in elections that are decided by a few points.

Ultimately, it may well be the case that establishment Republicans become as frightened at the prospect of a continuing slide towards authoritarianism as Trump loyalists are afraid of losing "their" country. If this is the case, and with the right issue framing, it's possible that establishment Republicans may be open to forming a center-right coalition with independents who lean to the party and those who have abandoned the party in recent years.

And that process could be influenced by how the Trump loyalists and aligned react to their growing sense of powerlessness. Do major factions become involved in extra-legal, white nationalist, or conspiratorial groups, to stop the new American majority from governing? The findings from a recent [study](#) on the Make America Great Again movement (MAGA), a loose confederation of such groups, suggests this may well be the case. Indeed, those who identify with the MAGA movement tended to believe that the rioters [had good intentions](#), tend to be [racist](#), and subscribe to [conspiracy theories](#).

Forestalling the worst scenarios and empowering those intent on marginalizing a Trump-dominated Republican Party begins with understanding its new factions and what motivates them. These first focus groups provide rich insights into an angry, despondent, and divided party. And Democracy Corps hopes to use these groups and innovative survey methodologies to understand this Trump-dominated party and all its factions and provide its opponents with the tools they need to defeat it.

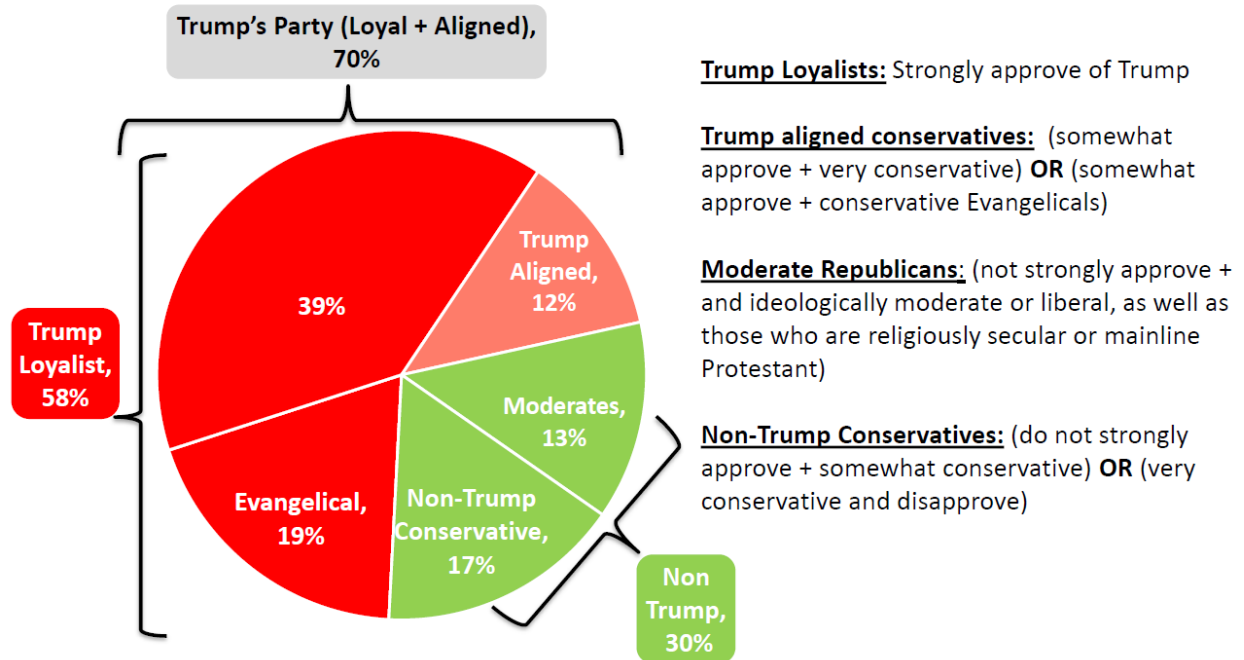
---

<sup>4</sup> Former Republicans include current Democrats and independents with no partisan lean who say they recently used to identify as a Republican. The definition also includes independents who lean Republican in a forced choice, and say they recently used to fully identify as a Republican.

## Appendix A: GOP Typology

GREENBERG RESEARCH

### Trump's Republican Party



\* These percentages are based on results from Democracy Corps' national phone poll of 1,000 registered voters conducted February 18-23, 2021.